

How Thailand's Kamalaya Koh Samui resort uses food as medicine

By Jackie Cooperman

March 26, 2021 | 11:49am | Updated



A nourishing and immune-boosting meal from the beachfront Kamalaya Koh Samui wellness sanctuary in Thailand, which focuses on healing through food.
Kamalaya Koh Samui

“My philosophy is to seduce people into better health through food. You don’t have to starve yourself — you can really nourish yourself and feel amazing, if you know what you’re doing,” says Karina Stewart, the founder and chief wellness director of [Kamalaya Koh Samui](#), a luxury resort in Thailand.

A Princeton graduate with a master’s degree in Chinese medicine, Stewart and her husband launched the retreat in 2005 with a focus on spirituality and healing.

We asked her to share some practices she says will lower inflammation and help fight ailments such as arthritis, asthma, Crohn’s disease, eczema and Type 2 diabetes.

What does ‘food as medicine’ mean?

It means using food to re-establish optimum levels of health and to prevent long-term illnesses.

We prepare all food from scratch, organic as much as possible, nothing fried, lots and lots of fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices, and very little dairy.

People experience health benefits from this very solid, healthy foundation cuisine.

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You also offer a 'detox' option at your resort. Tell us about this approach.

Our detox cuisine is still a gastronomic experience, but it's 100 percent plant-based and much more restrictive. It's meant to have a very strong impact on our guests' health in a short period of time.

It's based on rebalancing blood-sugar levels and dramatically and rapidly reducing inflammation — which we know are linked to chronic degenerative diseases. At the same time, we're flooding the body with antioxidants and phytonutrients.

How long do you recommend staying on a detox diet?

I'm a big believer in cleansing at least once — and ideally, twice — a year, but under the circumstances we're all experiencing, I'm more in favor of nurturing ourselves into health rather than eliminating too much.

Rather than stay on a detox diet all year, eliminate obvious things like coffee, sugar and alcohol. Eat mostly plant-based, and less dairy.



Pacific salmon and enoki roulade, red rice and sweet peas pilaf, sea buckthorn sauce.

Kamalaya Koh Samui

How do you boost immunity?

I focus on nourishing the microbiome through fermented foods like miso, tempeh, kimchi and sauerkraut and fermented beverages like kombucha, if it's lower in sugar.

I'm not averse to taking probiotics, but my preference is to feed the microbiome through food. Root vegetables are really fabulous for the microbiome.

Their fibers are particularly beneficial for generating healthy bacteria. In the northern hemisphere, we have to use supplements for vitamin D. Zinc you can get from pumpkin seeds, which are great to add as a topping.



Scrambled tofu and courgette, mélange of sweet potato and puy lentil, in a mushroom broth.

Kamalaya Koh Samui

What myths would you like to dispel about detoxing and wellness?

The myth that calorie counting leads to better health and ideal weight. It's not sustainable. What we're encouraging is learning to eat in a natural way. If you're eating high nutrient-dense foods that are not heavy on sugar or fats, the body will re-establish itself so beautifully.

There's another myth about fasting — a lot of people use a full-on week of fasting to lose weight. Ultimately, it's not sustainable. You will have to start eating again, and you'll be faced with your old habits.

Unless you learn a new way of eating, fasting has limited benefits. Having said that, there's wonderful science on the benefits of intermittent or even long-term fasting to help jump-start the metabolism and immune system.

What are your must-have kitchen devices?

My all-time favorite cooking tool is my Instant Pot. I can cook a stew, a congee, a soup, all my pulses [the edible seeds of various leguminous plants, such as chickpeas, lentils, and beans] and grains. It makes them more digestible and cause less inflammation.

 Mediterranean chicken salad with tahini.

Mediterranean chicken salad with tahini.

Kamalaya Koh Samui

My second favorite is my Römertopf Classic Series Clay Baker, which I've had since university. It suffuses food with flavor. And my Vitamix is the ultimate kitchen tool. I'll sauté garlic and spices with a little oil, steam vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, mushrooms, [and] blend it all in the Vitamix, and it's an incredible soup. If I want it creamier, I add raw olive oil.

When is a good time to detox?

Spring is a natural time to cleanse and release. All the leafy greens are fantastic for the liver, for alkalinizing, and full of phytonutrients. I'd go in the direction of light, and focus on the foods that enhance the metabolism.

It's good to have some raw food when it's hot, but your diet shouldn't be primarily raw food, as it depletes our metabolism.

Recipes

Carrot-Shitake Soup

Ingredients:

- ¾ cup carrots
- ½ cup shitake mushrooms
- 3.4 ozs. homemade pumpkin-seed milk (see instructions)
- 8.5 ozs. vegetable kombu stock
- ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
- 2.5 tsp. shallot
- 1/3 tbsp. virgin coconut oil

For pumpkin seed milk: Soak ¾ cup pumpkin seeds in one liter of water for an hour, blend and strain. Heat a saucepan over medium heat, add all the vegetables, and sauté 10 seconds before adding the vegetable stock and pumpkin-seed milk. Simmer for about 15 minutes, until carrots are soft. Blend the soup, return to saucepan and reduce until consistency is creamy.

Cocoloco Smoothie

Ingredients:

- 5 ozs. coconut water
- 1 cup banana
- ½ cup coconut flesh
- 1.25 tsp. tahini paste
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon powder

Blend all ingredients with two ice cubes, and garnish with an orchid and a watermelon slice.

Karina's Gluten-Free Chocolate Chip Cookies

Ingredients:

- 11 tbsp. coconut oil
- 14 tbsp. cashew butter
- 11 tbsp. honey
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 dash of vanilla
- 4 tbsp. ground flax seed
- 2.5 cups almond powder
- ½ cup tapioca starch
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 dash sea salt
- 2 cups chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 340 degrees. Mix flax seeds with 10 tablespoons of water, set aside for 15 minutes. Blend all dry ingredients together. Mix cashew butter, coconut oil, honey, brown sugar and vanilla together well. Add dry ingredients to wet mixture, and stir well. Stir in chocolate chips and chill for 20 minutes. Shape tablespoon-sized balls into cookies on baking sheet. Bake for 14 minutes.

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