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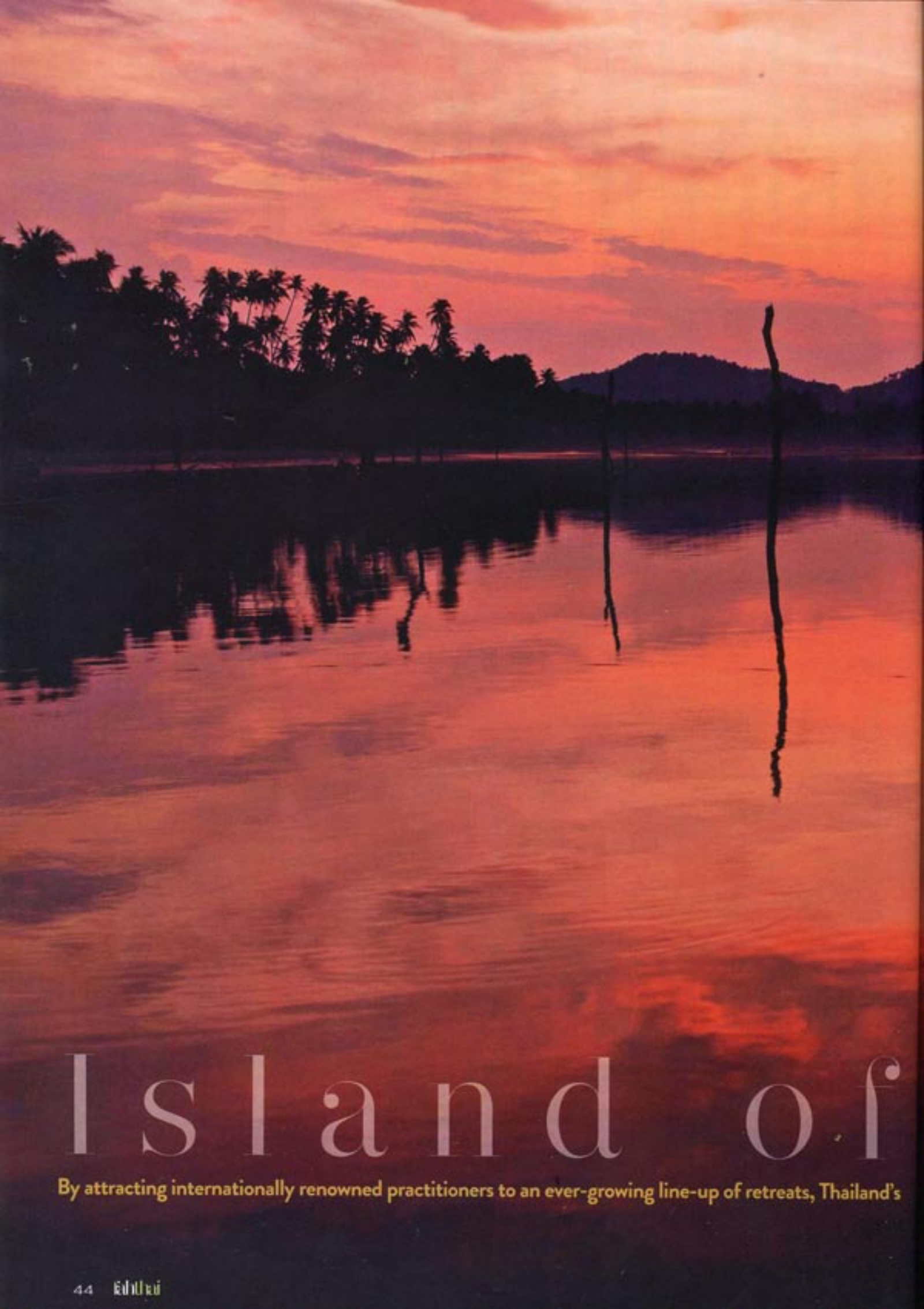
A fine balance

Samui's seductive yoga retreats

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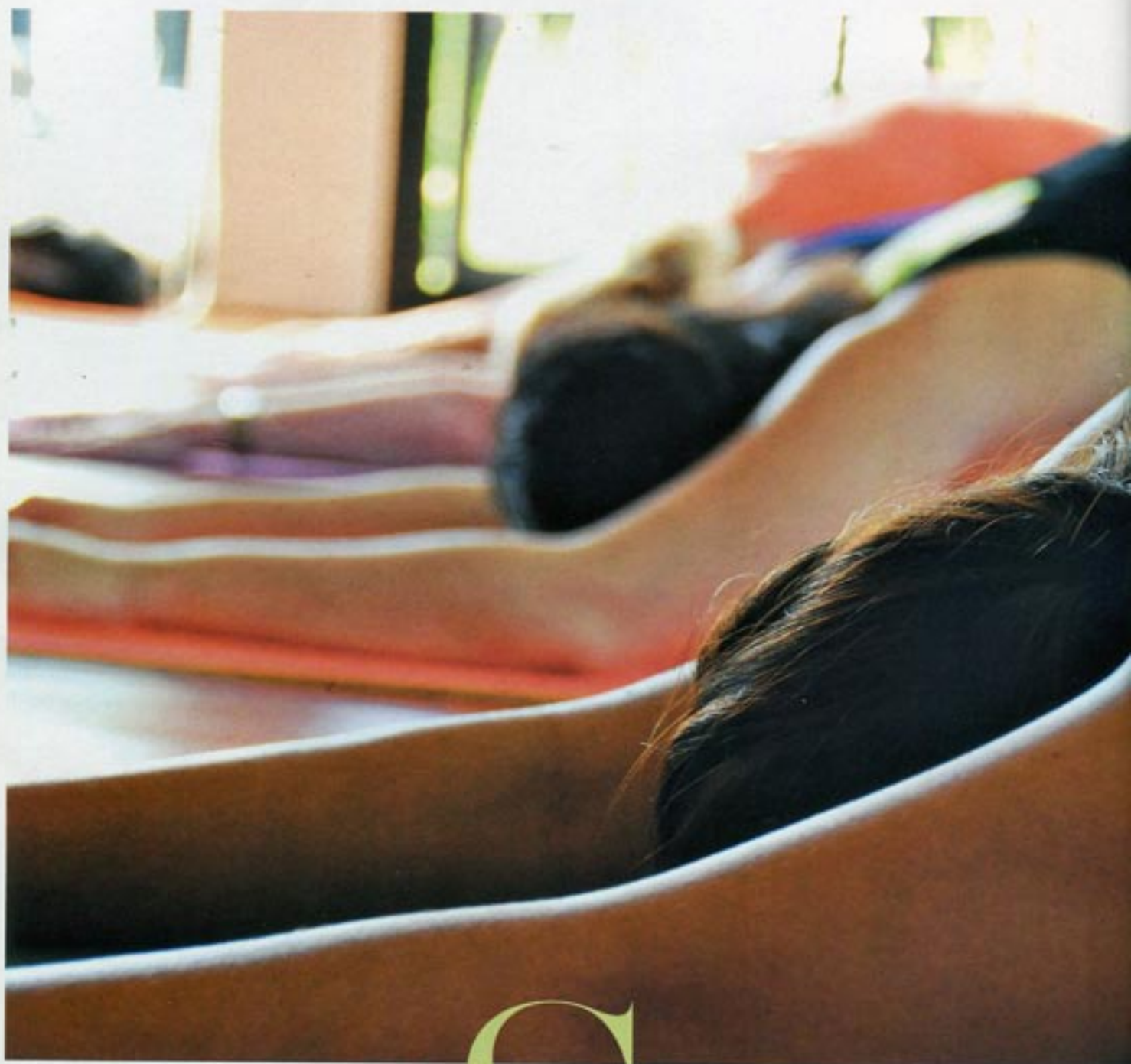
Island of

By attracting internationally renowned practitioners to an ever-growing line-up of retreats, Thailand's



r e p o s e

Koh Samui is fast becoming one of the world's epicentres of yoga, as Amy Sharpe reports



Samahita Retreat guest Louise came here to take a break and take stock of her life. "Like so many others, I had reached an age where I didn't know where I was going. I wanted to go somewhere where I could leave distractions behind and just take a moment for myself."

Thailand has long been a place where people come to make decisions while in between jobs and relationships, and in times of uncertainty. Viewed as a more comfortable alternative to practising yoga in India, the kingdom is home to many places where people can experience the kind of peace and tranquillity that can be comforting in times of transition. Like many visitors to the island, Louise had visited Samui many years ago as a backpacker and wanted to return and experience a different side of life here.

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"I did a lot of research on yoga retreat programmes and I wanted somewhere on the beach that was only a short flight from Bangkok." This was Louise's first yoga retreat and the first time she had ever been on holiday alone. "There are so many people coming by themselves that it's easy to make friends as well as have time to yourself."

But Samui is about more than retreats. Students of yoga come to Samui specifically to learn from some of the many experts that have taken up residence here. Simon Low is one of Europe's best-loved yoga teachers. Principal of The Yoga Academy and co-founder of Triyoga in London's Primrose Hill, he has been teaching yoga internationally for 20 years. "Koh Samui has some of the finest dedicated yoga-holiday and teacher-training venues in the East, if not the world."



Yoga class at Samahita Retreat; Right: Hilary Hitt; Below: Seafront yoga at Samahita

"Koh Samui has some of the finest dedicated yoga-holiday and teacher-training venues in the East, if not the world"



he says. "Samahita Retreat and Absolute Sanctuary are frequented by some of the world's top yoga teachers and attract students from all over the world, many of whom stay on Samui before or after their training to enjoy the island."

Students from across the globe join Low during his residency at the Absolute Sanctuary in Choeng Mon for a month of intensive learning. With 38 rooms set in a Moroccan-inspired resort, Absolute Sanctuary offers vinyasa, hatha, yin and hot classes, using the Absolute hot flow sequence. On-site facilities include a detox centre, a fully equipped gym as well as the Love Kitchen, a restaurant that serves up healthy, whole food. Wellness director and yoga teacher Jessica sums up the attraction: "The beaches are beautiful, the people are wonderful and the climate is

หลายต่อหลายคนเดินทางมายังประเทศไทยเพื่อใช้เวลาค้นหาตนเองในระหว่างว่างเว้นจากงานหรือความสัมพันธ์ด้วยประเทศไทยดูเป็นทางเลือกที่สะดวกสบายกว่าประเทศอินเดียในแง่ของการฝึกโยคะเช่นเดียวกับนักท่องเที่ยวอย่างคุณหลุยส์ที่เดินทางมายังเกาะสมุยหลายต่อหลายครั้ง และเลือกที่จะเข้าร่วมโปรแกรมการฝึกโยคะบนเกาะสมุย



perfect for practising." Samui residents are welcome to take advantage of Absolute Sanctuary's drop-in classes and many locals have signed up for monthly or yearly memberships.

Desiree Lopez is an art teacher at the International School of Samui and has called the island home for over 14 years. She now practises at The Yoga Center next to Big C, situated in the Thai dance studio. Here, Thai yoga teachers Bao and Sunya teach a range of hatha classes in English and Thai to an ever-growing number of students. "The classes are varied and the teachers are inspirational," Lopez says. "I've always practised yoga to help build strength, create peace of mind and to have some time just for myself."

Due to open on 12 November is Konstantin Miachin's Vikasa Yoga studio, with a line-up of international teachers, >

“We used to have to explain to Thai people what yoga was and what we did and they laughed. Now everyone wants a version of yoga in their place to attract guests”

workshops, retreats and daily drop-in classes along with an organic and raw food café. Miachin's all-inclusive evolution of yoga approach means the studio will offer a range of classes to suit all yogis.

In Chaweng, followers of Bikram Yoga have a smart studio dedicated to the style, which sees practitioners following a sequence of 26 postures and two breathing exercises in a heated room. Bikram teacher and owner Lola Lavaud is in awe of the island's wellness culture. “Koh Samui is getting more modern and more eco-friendly by the year. It wants to become the health island, with lots of spas, detox centres and yoga facilities available. Koh Samui's path and evolution add a special energy to its natural beauty.”

Hilary Hitt of Dharma Healing (dharmahealingint.com) was Samui's first yoga teacher. “Way back in the 1980s, people whispered that Samui was on an energy vortex – a



เกาะสมุยมีโปรแกรมการฝึกโยคะให้เลือกหลายต่อหลายโปรแกรม นัก เช่น ที่เดอะ โยคะ อะคาเดมี่ ที่มีคุณ ไชมอน โสว เป็นผู้ช่วยการของโรงเรียน และมีประสบการณ์สอนโยคะมากกว่า 20 ปี หรือที่ แอบโซลูท แซงซวีวี ที่มีคลาสสอนโยคะหลายรูปแบบ และมีผู้เชี่ยวชาญความสะตวงต่างๆ เช่น ศูนย์อังกพิษ ดีทีออกซ์ เจ้าของและครูสอนโยคะบีแตรมอย่าง สุดโลลา ลาวาลด์ กล่าวไว้ว่า เกาะสมุยทันสมัยขึ้นในทุกปี แต่ในขณะเดียวกันก็ใกล้ชิดกับธรรมชาติ มากขึ้นเช่นกัน เกาะสมุยกำลังพัฒนาตัวเองไปเป็น เกาะเพื่อสุขภาพที่ดี ที่มีสปา ศูนย์อังกพิษและ สถานฝึกโยคะมากมาย





power grid of vibrating light. It's very, very special here, without a doubt! And 30, 40 years ago, without much or any electricity, the electromagnetics were much more in alignment with the etheric-light body." Referring to the theory that the island's crystal content is the source of this energy, Hitt recalls, "We were driving by the new courthouse one day when we stood and watched buckets and buckets of the mountain being dumped down below the building site. We just stood looking at thousands of brilliant crystals of all shapes and sizes. It was magical."

Hitt studied Thai Buddhism under celebrated scholar Ajahn Buddhadasa Bikkhu at Suan Mokkh temple in Surat Thani province. She began her yoga journey in San Francisco in 1968 at the first Integral Yoga Center in the Bay area.

Clockwise from above: pool at Samahita Retreat; yogic blessings at Samahita; Konstantin Miachin strikes a pose

"When I first came to Samui there weren't any other people into alternative health or alternative health education. The foreigners who came were so hungry for tradition, Buddhist tradition, a slow pace, an easy life. Everyone then, as today, was seeking a way of life with meaning. The healing and health movement is bringing a progressive economy to the island, taking full advantage of the social and cultural need that the new international elite has toward liberation, self-realisation and enlightenment. Many people originally came here to get away, to be free, to be left alone."

The first centre dedicated purely to yoga on the island was Samahita Retreat, established by Paul Dallaghan and his wife Jutima in 2003. "Meditation was always a focus in temples. Yoga was often on the menu in detox places, but was never >



อิมทิตาโยคะ เป็นที่แรกซึ่งก่อตั้งขึ้นเพื่อการฝึกโยคะเท่านั้น โดยมีคุณพอล ดัลลัดแกน และภรรยาเป็นผู้ก่อตั้ง คุณพอลเป็นครูผู้เดียวที่ได้รับประกาศนียบัตรจากทั้ง โอ โท ทิวารี หนึ่งในผู้ชำนาญทางตั้งเพียงไม่กี่คนของปราวถายามะ และประกาศนียบัตรจากคุณภัททาพิ โจอิส แห่งโยคะอัลทันกา คุณพอลเล่าว่า แต่ก่อน ใครๆก็หัวเราะเยาะการฝึกโยคะ แต่ปัจจุบัน ใครๆก็อยากมียोगได้ไว้ดังตุลลูกค้ำบัง



Clockwise from top left: the Moorish dome at Absolute Sanctuary; yoga class at Absolute Sanctuary; Paul Dallaghan

the main focus. Since our background in the United States and India was in ashrams and retreats, we felt Koh Samui was the perfect place to grow this further." Dallaghan is the only teacher certified by both OP Tiwari, one of the few remaining authorities in pranayama and classical yoga, and the late Pattabhi Jois, an expert in ashtanga vinyasa yoga. His qualifications were earned during more than 15 years of study with these teachers. "We used to have to explain to Thai people what yoga was and what we did and they laughed. Now everyone wants a version of yoga in their place to attract guests. The thing they're missing is that this is not a business model that can be copied if it's not in your heart and soul."

Fortunately for Samui, it seems that the number of people for whom it is in their heart and soul is ever increasing. *

THE BEST OF SAMUI'S YOGA CENTRES

SAMAHITA RETREAT

Dedicated centre for classical yoga and holistic health offers a range of world-class yoga retreats and teacher-training courses alongside personalised ayurvedic detox and wellness programmes in a beachfront-resort setting.

Styles: classical yoga, ashtanga Mysore, pranayama, meditation, restorative yoga, yin, hatha, flow and more

Teacher Training: foundation and advanced-level courses

T: +66 (0)7 792 0090, yoga-thailand.com



ABSOLUTE SANCTUARY

At this hillside Moroccan resort, detox programmes and personal training complement a full range of yoga classes led by both resident and internationally renowned teachers.

Styles: hot yoga, flow, yin, hatha, detox pranayama, meditation and more

Teacher Training: foundation, advanced courses

T: +66 (0)7 760 1190, absolutesanctuary.com

VIKASA YOGA

Drawcards at this centre, slated to open on 12 November, include international teachers and an organic café, making it a dynamic hub for the yoga community in the heart of Koh Samui.

Drop-in rates available.

Style: evolution of yoga

T: +66 (0)8 3107 7397, evolutionofyoga.com/samui

BIKRAM YOGA KOH SAMUI

Get your sweat on at this Bikram studio, where radiant panels brought to Samui by the studio's owner and authorised teacher Lola Lavaud create the trademark heat made famous by Bikram Choudhury. Drop-in rates available.

T: +66 (0)7 796 0511, bikramyogakohsamui.com

THE YOGA CENTRE - THAI DANCE STUDIO

Join locals and visitors by participating in yoga classes held in the dance studio next to Big C. Drop-in classes available.

Styles: hatha-style classes taught in English and Thai

T: +66 (0)8 9727 2339 or +66 (0)8 1632 5177