

Shaken up in a spiritual blender

After lots of tears, Anna Pasterniak and her teenage daughter Daisy resolve their generational conflict and establish a renewed bond on a women-only retreat in Koh Samui



ANNA'S STORY:

Expectation is thoroughly over-rated. So excited was I to try out Kamalaya's women-only Radiant Bliss programme with my daughter Daisy that I was counting the hours until we left Heathrow. Billed as ideal for mothers and daughters, this promised to be a deep dive into our emotional, physical and hormonal health, as well as offering precious bonding

time. As Daisy, 19, had spent the year working at Hatchards, Piccadilly, and I had barely seen her, the timing seemed ideal.

Instead, it was catastrophic. As soon as we boarded the plane, she started crying and didn't stop for three hours. A sudden hacking cough worsened and by the time we arrived at Bangkok – almost missing our connection to Koh Samui – I feared she might be

having some sort of mental breakdown. Exhausted, weeping and completely unlike herself, she sank into bed in our penthouse suite at Kamalaya, where she remained crying for the next three days. The terrace with sweeping views and private pool went unused.

I, meanwhile, dragged myself around the steep, hilly resort, in the heat and humidity, feeling like an old, bloated crocodile. I

genuinely wished that we hadn't come. My weigh-in, body-analysis test and consultation with the naturopath depressed me further. I was 2.5kg over my normal weight, my muscle mass was low (a sign of old age and not eating enough protein), my digestive system had pretty much packed up, my tongue was pale because the 'chi in my spleen [was] sparse', yet my yang was 'elevated'. Apparently, all



EYE TO EYE
Photograph by Slim
Aaron of Tucson
author Anna Cataldi
and her daughter
Jovitranda Falck on the
terrace of their home
in Tucson, 1991

my energy was focused around my head like a demented wasp.

Daisy developed a chest infection – which by day three she said ‘no amount of acupuncture is ever going to fix’ – so she went onto antibiotics. Meanwhile, I had the worst ‘healing crisis’ headache of my life. It pounded for four days and nights. And during our second night, with Daisy coughing and then clunking around with

the air-conditioning remote, I’d felt the same shattered rage I had when she was a toddler: the constant sacrifice; extending yourself when your own tank is empty. I snapped, slamming out of the room to sleep on the sofa next door.

The next morning, we had a furious row. I stormed off to breakfast alone, full of loathing for Gen Z, their need to state their feelings all the time, their ‘mental health’

warning shots and their weeping. Yet who was I to talk? The minute the GM told me gently to ‘let go’ because Kamalaya would ‘catch me’, I burst into tears. Full-on snot and sobbing at breakfast.

For five days, I truly feared that Kamalaya – built on the site of an ancient monks’ cave, where a wild, elemental energy rages – could not help us. But thanks to the thoughtful kindness of the staff, we started to heal. (When Daisy ordered pad thai from her sick bed, she was brought chicken noodle soup with the sweetest smiles and the comment, ‘pad thai tomorrow’.) The gift of Kamalaya is how personalised its programme is. They take you as they find you, instead of forcing on you a prescribed one-size-fits-all model. Recognising that

resident ex-monks who blessed the land daily. They also offered mentoring sessions and in one, with coach Srinivas Bhat, I swear I cleared a decade’s worth of therapy. It felt like literal magic. By day six, I felt human again.

There is a purity about Kamalaya – no piped music, no mobile phones, no televisions in the room – which encourages your own authentic inner enquiry. It felt like Daisy and I were shaken up in some sort of spiritual blender. But thankfully, this was neither some chaotic annihilation nor a form of torture, but a necessary path to our individual healing. I knew we were back on track when I got the giggles during my final massage, remembering something funny that Daisy had said earlier.

Eventually, I was able to appreciate how the programme here could revolutionise any woman’s life

I was as burnt-out as my daughter, they took care of her, allowing me the nurture I needed.

With daily prescribed vitamins, two ‘stressless shakes’ per day to reduce cortisol levels, Bach flower remedies, Chinese herbs, intuitive Thai treatments, endless abdominal delving and Chi Nei Tsang massage to release energy blockages in my internal organs – plus the expertise of acupuncturist Bernie Schulte, whom I nicknamed ‘Bernie the body whisperer’ – I felt slowly renewed. Bernie put his hands on me and announced with hair-raising accuracy: ‘Your body is telling me that you have a mental dilemma’ – there was indeed a big career decision pending – ‘and it’s draining energy from your spine.’

The other gem was visiting the expert Dr Leonard McGill, who offered me an alchemical blend of craniosacral osteopathy and energy healing to realign the body. (I wafted from his session feeling reborn.) Then there were the four

From where we landed, to leaving lighter – in kilograms and in spirit – and laughing together, our journey seemed like a miracle. At Kamalaya, the lesson is to trust the process, however agonising, and keep the faith. The GM was right. They really do catch you.

DAISY’S STORY:

Unlike my friends backpacking around Thailand, staying in grotty hostels and raving at full-moon beach parties, I felt smug, flash-packing with my mother. London life had exhausted me. I naively thought that, just by arriving at Kamalaya, my chaotic mental state would simply slip away, and my mother and I would get along like TV’s *Gilmore Girls*. It turns out that there is no easy route to bliss (radiant or otherwise).

I cried non-stop for three days, developing a chest infection, which made me cry more. And that made apparent the dichotomy between Boomers and Gen Z, as my ▷

◁ mother could not understand my distress. I'm used to the emotional coddling of my peers, who endlessly reassure me. ('I cried this morning, too, and I don't know why!') One morning, my mother lost it with me for 'being pathetic', which didn't help.

Nor did the digital detox that she insisted upon. While I reassured her that I 'loved' the space, it was a struggle. I missed waking up and scrolling through TikTok, watching finance bros' 'day in my life' vlogs, to which I am addicted. And at first, I found it really boring working on my inner life and soothing my inner child, which Mummy kept banging on about.

But in this time of forced reflection, I realised that the heightened focus on mental health among my generation sometimes makes me fall into a state of hysteria in an attempt to fit in. And I was able to express this in my mentoring sessions with the monks. They were extremely helpful in giving me support and sharing their soothing Buddhist wisdom, and also gave me a place to vent about how my mother appeared to have left her maternal instincts at Heathrow.

Still, despite feeling better emotionally, I was still struggling with a chest infection. I grew up in a holistic household where earaches would be met with the questions 'What do you not want to hear?' or 'If your ear could talk, what would it say?' So I wasn't surprised that Mummy didn't ask Kamalaya to immediately call a doctor for antibiotics. I had vitamin IV drips, Reiki and intuitive acupuncture, and I was rattling with all the non-pharma pills that promised to restore me. But it became clear that no amount of herbal blends could salvage the state I was in. I resorted to antibiotics. I had food brought to my bed. (Room service is not common at Kamalaya but, if you cry loud enough, it becomes possible.) I sobbed into my tom yum goong from the safety of my refuge, while my mother stared at me in judgemental disbelief.

The staff were so kind: bringing me warm soups, teas and electrolyte drinks. Eventually, when the antibiotics kicked in, I was able to appreciate how the programme here truly could revolutionise any woman's life. Take their prescription for gynaecological health: a signature detoxifying herbal compress, which involves setting fire to herbs on your stomach. (The heat promotes blood circulation and stimulates the lymphatic system – which in turn warms the ovaries, preventing painful menstrual cramps.) I was also taught some useful ancient remedies. For example, in the week before your period, you should avoid cold or raw food. You should avoid walking barefoot, too, as the kidney acupressure point is in your feet – and if that gets cold, it aggravates the cramps. Meanwhile, ginger is a natural anti-inflammatory so, if the pains persist, having a bath mixed with some of the powdered root can soothe them.

The knowledge and care of the practitioners was outstanding, and with all the therapists trained in Reiki, the healing felt ramped-up. Chi Nei Tsang – one type of abdominal massage – became my favourite treatment; although it was uncomfortable, it was effective in combating my menstrual bloating. And this was essential: I could cope with battling a chest infection and my barmy mother, but not with feeling kilos heavier than normal.

It's true that I struggled with my 'journey' at Kamalaya. But the nourishing food and thoughtful treatments – plus a massive emotional letting-go – allowed me to have a total reset. When I left, I felt like new, with clearer skin and thinner thighs. And even better, Mummy and I regained our sense of humour. We headed back to Bangkok in a bubble of bliss, without a cross word or tear shed. □ *Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com) offers a seven-day Relax & Renew programme from £2,499, full board, including transfers.*

NURSERY TIMES: WHERE TO FIND SERENITY FOR ALL AGES

PARKLANE RESORT & SPA *Limassol, Cyprus*

An enclave within Park Lane's 3,000 square metres of sea-view real estate on the south coast of Cyprus, the Kalloni spa draws inspiration from the Mediterranean. Take its signature thalassotherapy programme, which guides you from a bubbling 34°C pool to a dip in water so salty you float on the surface, and then a rejuvenating cool plunge where underwater jets pummel muscles into submission. But why stop there? Kalloni has a menu of nourishing treatments, and with the children successfully entertained in the Explorers Kids Club – inside a purpose-built mini-castle – there's no excuse not to indulge in them all. *Scott Dunn (scottdunn.com) offers seven nights for a family of four from £7,000, half board, including flights and transfers.*

CONSTANCE BELLE MARE PLAGE *Pointe de Flacq, Mauritius*

Seamlessly blending the paradoxical delights of glamour and young children, this tropical resort offers an idyllic escape. Spanning two kilometres of white sandy beach, the beach club provides a vast array of watersports for all ages; and there are countless pools and tennis courts, as well as a golf course for active types. However, the sweet spot is the spa, where treatments blend ylang ylang and lemongrass with local Thai and Balinese techniques. Meanwhile, a thoughtfully curated children's spa menu means you can treat your small VIPs to a facial, massage or mani-pedi, too. *Doubles from £260, half board (constancehotels.com); Air Mauritius (airmauritius.com).*

FORTE VILLAGE *Sardinia, Italy*

This Sardinian sanctuary is renowned for its world-class spa: the endless thalassotherapy pools, the sought-after roster of wellness experts from around the globe and the Ayurvedic Park, whose Pilates, yoga and bodywork are all rooted in traditional techniques. And its offering for diminutive guests has put Forte Village on the map. At Children's Wonderland, smalls are schooled in healthy eating through tours of the vegetable garden, while theatrical productions enable mini-performers to flourish and otherwise grow in self-confidence. There's also a fully-staffed nursery catering to under-threes, so you can spend a little longer in the saltwater pools. *Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com) offers seven nights for a family of four from £1,799, half board, including transfers.*

MARBELLA CLUB *Marbella, Spain*

The Marbella Club is an institution: a former residence of Prince Alfonso of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, where Slim Aarons snapped and Spanish sybarites still descend each summer. The fabulous thalassotherapy spa is also a lure – the scene of expert scrubs using sea salt and essential oils – and the Holistic Studio (where meditation, aerial yoga and nutritional consultations all take place) is a botanical-garden respite. But the real reason families and large groups check into its Moorish villas is the children's club, which boasts a jam-packed roster of classes, including perfume-making, cookery, vegetable-patch planting and traditional Spanish dance. Not forgetting the presence of that glorious Mediterranean Sea, perfect for kayaking and paddleboarding. *Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com) offers seven nights for a family of four from £7,499, including breakfast and transfers.*