

FINNAIR

BLUE WINGS

LUXURY ISSUE TRENDS, DESTINATIONS AND INSIGHTS FOR TRAVELLERS

DECEMBER 2016

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MEDITATING IN
THAILAND

MADRID'S MOST
CREATIVE COCKTAILS

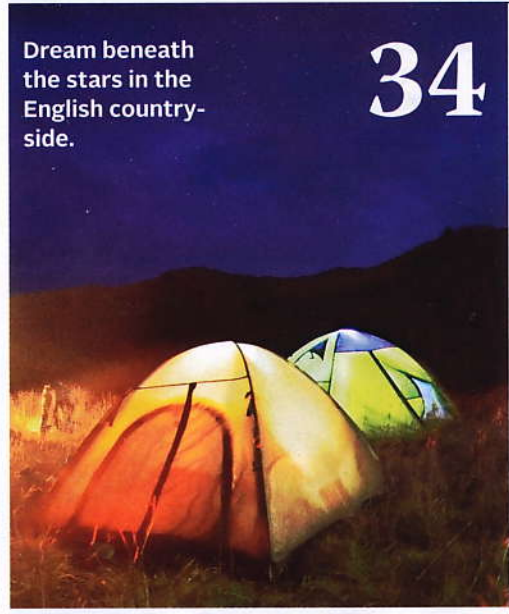
TESTING SOUTH KOREA'S
OLYMPIC SLOPES

Jump into the holiday season with an
active twist



LUXURY 2016

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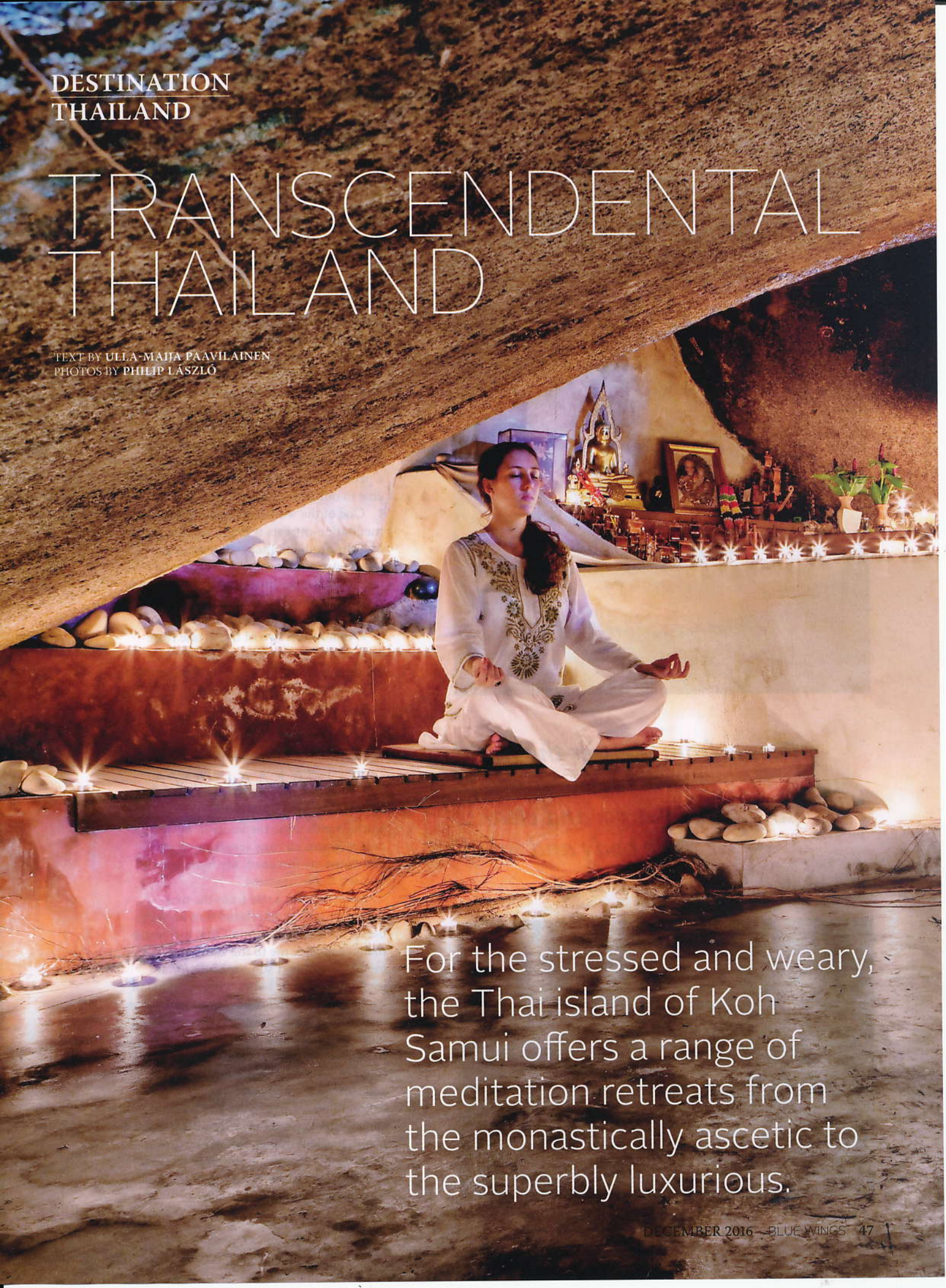
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DESTINATION
THAILAND

TRANSCENDENTAL THAILAND

TEXT BY ULLA-MAIJA PAAVILAINEN
PHOTOS BY PHILIP LASZLO

A woman with her eyes closed, wearing a white long-sleeved top and pants with intricate embroidery, sits in a meditative lotus position on a wooden mat. She is positioned in a cave-like interior with a textured, earthen ceiling. Behind her, a golden Buddha statue sits on a raised platform, surrounded by offerings and framed pictures. The space is illuminated by numerous small, warm-toned lights, some of which are placed in rows along the walls and floor, creating a serene and spiritual atmosphere. The floor is made of polished stone or concrete, reflecting the ambient light.

For the stressed and weary, the Thai island of Koh Samui offers a range of meditation retreats from the monastically ascetic to the superbly luxurious.



People from all over the world travel to Kamalaya to unplug, recharge, and cleanse the body and mind.



More than just a trend, meditation is widely recommended for people with stressful lifestyles. The ancient practice is a proven way to calm the mind, alleviate anxiety, and help us reconnect with our innermost core.

Studies show that meditation helps combat depression as efficiently as synthetic medicines. Small wonder, then, that health professionals have begun to actively recommend meditation as a defence against the onslaught of pressures in our hurried modern lifestyles. Ultimately, it is a practice that helps us feel more comfortable in our own skins.

One of the world's densest clusters of meditation retreats is found on the island of Koh Samui on Thailand's east coast, where visitors can explore a variety of meditation styles in settings ranging from the asceticism of a monastery to the opulence of a five-star luxury resort.

I went to test two of them, one from each end of the comfort spectrum: luxury health resort Kamalaya and the ascetic Dipabhāvan Meditation Centre.

DIGITAL DETOX AT KAMALAYA

Skilful hands untie the knots in my shoulders as warm oil runs across my scalp and down my forehead. My mind is fully focused in the moment.

An hour later, I rise from the massage table feeling so relaxed that my feet barely carry me. **Tangmo** (Thai for "watermelon") escorts me to the stairs and warns me to avoid direct sun exposure for at least the next four hours. I drink a glass of lemongrass tea, followed by coconut water from a large green coconut. I'm sticky as a pickled sardine, but satisfied.

Stressed people from all over the world travel to Kamalaya to unplug, recharge, and cleanse the body and mind. To help restore their sense of calm and balance, all guests are requested to switch their mobile phone to silent mode – or ideally turn it off altogether for the duration of their stay. "Digital detox is the cleansing of the soul," reads a sign pinned to the wall.



BKK
Finnair flies twice
daily to Bangkok.
finnair.com

LUXURY-LOVER'S CHECKLIST

- Everything is carefully planned for you. Every wish is fulfilled – some even before you request them.
- The landscapes, views, and amenities are superb.
- The expert instructors and therapists offer total relaxation and a 100 per cent stress-free experience.

kamalaya.com

The quiet reception area is a welcome respite from the noisy world.

The wish for no phones is mostly efficient and during my blissfully quiet three-day stay, I hear a smartphone buzzing only once.

Many arrive solo, sitting at breakfast or dinner immersed in a book. While hard copy books are welcome companions, special justification is needed when requesting wi-fi for your room.

Corporate CEOs and celebrities hide out at this exclusive wellness retreat to treat their bodies and minds to an intensive regimen of private meditation lessons, yoga, acupuncture, massages, and a detox diet of organic foods, and gourmet legumes. Hollywood director **Oliver Stone**, movie star **Kevin Spacey**, and Finnish singer and writer **Arja Saijonmaa** are among the regulars, but the resort also welcomes ordinary detoxers.

Guests are free to choose their own programme. Some like to share the day's experiences by mingling at a dinner table dedicated to socializing, but guests who prefer privacy will find their wishes respected.

DIRECT ROUTE TO THE HYPOTHALAMUS?

The next morning at 7:30 am, a group of silence-seekers seat themselves in the yoga hall located high up on a slope.

Sea and mountains offer a gorgeous backdrop behind the palm trees. Today we are here to master the art of Praynama meditation. As I am unable to sit in lotus position, I am handed a hard block of cork on which I am told I can sit comfortably. I am initially sceptical, but it turns out to be comfortable.

Meditation is followed by a one-hour yoga session and a detox breakfast: no fat, sugar, bread, or dairy products. Instead of my normal morning porridge, I enjoy a bowl of pumpkin soup. A personalised diet plan is prepared for each guest after a visit to one of the resort's many naturopaths.

Looking at the various foods on offer, I note that mango is not a detox fruit, but papaya is. The organic strawberry jam sounds and looks good, but without any sugar or honey it tastes more like tree bark.

At the start of their stay, guests can request a full programme of various therapies from cupping reiki, acupuncture, ayurveda treatment, or abdominal massage. There are various options to choose from, and the different treatments are



Sujit guides us through the basics of meditation.

selected at the start of the programme. Silence is expected and respected.

In the afternoon it is again time for a half an hour meditation session in the art gallery. This time our bottoms are not tested on a block of cork. Instead we sit in comfortable Fatboy bean bags.

We concentrate on the point between our eyebrows, the direct route to the hypothalamus. And then we focus on what we have to be grateful for. Someone has served us breakfast, someone else has brought us a cool, damp towel for our sweaty hands.

Our teacher **Sujit** has toured India teaching meditation. His clear, priestly voice resonates calmly as he chants "om." We join in with our eyes closed.

I feel royally spoiled during the individual meditation session that follows. My personal Indian guide **Smitha** starts me off with some basic exercises, beginning with concentrating on sounds in my surroundings. Next, he asks me to listen to my own body. At the end of the session, I lie limp on a bench, with a tape recorder chanting "Hare Krishna" in the background. Smitha takes my hand and guides me somewhere – suddenly I am disoriented, unsure of where I am as I rise from the bench.

Leafhoppers chirp. My mind wanders pleasantly as I enjoy a strawberry mojito – non-alcoholic, of course. How do I feel? Destressed, spoiled rotten, and divinely disconnected.