

Hold the fat duck, I'm vegging out in Bali...

AFTER working flat out for a long period, I was desperate for a holiday. When a friend suggested going to Bali, I jumped at the chance. I had stopped off there for two days a year ago on my way back to Britain from a tour of Australia and New Zealand and fell in love with the place.

This time I could look forward to 12 days of sun, sea and exercise. Staying fit is really important to me - it helps me cope with stress and also with my weight. As a chef and owner of restaurants such as The Fat Duck, I obviously spend the greater part of my life with food, mostly tasting it, so extra pounds can easily creep on.

Our first stop was Como Shambhala, a wellness retreat hidden away in the hills outside the town of Ubud. The setting is incredibly beautiful - parts of it are like something out of The Lord Of The Rings, with huge mossy banks underneath soaring trees where you relax, sleep or read.

For the first time in my life, I tried a juice detox. It was amazing. After the initial shock, I never felt hungry. I had vegetable juice five times a day and vegetable broth in the evening - and lost 8lb in four days.

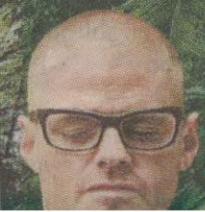
The juices were all freshly made and so imaginative. The various concoctions were sharp, with just a hint of sweetness.

I did my exercises in the gym every day, had some great massages and also started meditating once again.

I had tried meditation before a couple of times, but wasn't quite sure how to find time in the day for it or whether I really had the patience needed. But this was more mindful meditation, which you can do wherever you are. I liked practising it down the



Heston Blumenthal swaps his famous snail porridge for a juice detox and yoga sessions at a luxurious jungle retreat



AT PEACE: Heston practises his yoga



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river and the birds singing. It was about being in the moment and I really loved it.

After four days there, we moved on to the Alila Uluwatu, an amazing clifftop resort on Bali's south coast. The views were spectacular.

The Alila Uluwatu has a really good gym which I used every day, and I did yoga every morning as well as enjoying the occasional massage.

After my juice detox at Como Shambhala, now it was time to tuck into some Balinese specialties, such as a delicious roast suckling pig.

Balinese food is spicy but delicate, and I loved the combination of fragrance and heat you get in the dishes, especially in sambals and salads, where chefs combined ingredients including lemongrass, chilli and mango.

By now I was seriously into relaxation mode as we had our own villa with a pool... and a butler called Ruri. Most of the time Ruri was marvellously inconspicuous, but I only had to think I'd like a beer or a juice, and suddenly there he was.

We also found time for sightseeing. One thing that shouldn't be missed is Pura Luhur Uluwatu, a temple built in the 11th Century to keep evil spirits away from Bali.

We then moved up the coast to another villa, this time on the beach at Alila Soori. We arrived in the evening – by the way, in Bali it always seems to take two hours to reach your destination – and staff presented us with garlands which they then

hung around our necks. The garlands were made from tuberose – and I have never smelled anything so beautiful. These plants grow everywhere in Bali.

As I'm like a baby in that I have to taste everything, I immediately bit into the petals to see what they were like. There was absolutely no bitterness at all, so I'm determined to use them in a dish soon.

To maintain my fitness regime, I ran on the black volcanic sand at Alila Soori. In a certain light it looked as if diamonds were sparkling in it.

One day I headed to the beach for a different mission – to cook some chicken. The hotel chef joined me and first we made a fire pit with coconut tiles (these are used in



FIRED UP: Heston and a chef at Alila Soori cook on the volcanic sand. Above: The dramatic surroundings of Como Shambhala

the local village for roofs and can get very hot but retain the heat), then cooked the chicken which had been marinated and wrapped in banana leaves.

When it was ready, we ate it on the beach. It was one of the most memorable things I tasted there. Best of all, another of the chefs gave me his grandmother's recipe for a sambal which I will use in Britain.

This was one of the best and most relaxing holidays I've ever had.

Would I go back? In a flash.

● *Heston Blumenthal was talking to Jo Foley.*

GETTING THERE

Healing Holidays (healingholidays.co.uk, 020 7843 3597) offers seven nights at Como Shambhala from £2,599pp. This includes return flights, transfers, accommodation on a full-board basis, and treatments from either the Be Active, Cleanse or Rejuvenation programmes.

Cleveland Collection (clevelandcollection.co.uk, 020 7843 3531) offers three nights at Alila Villas Soori and three nights at Alila Villas Uluwatu from £2,196pp.

This includes return British Airways flights, transfers and B&B accommodation with an upgrade to a beach pool villa at Alila Villas Soori and \$150 resort credit per couple in each hotel.



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