

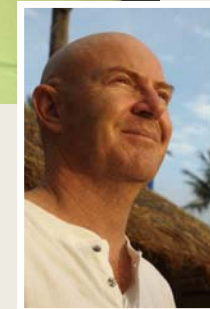


Atmanjai Fast Lane

Did it work? Yes. To our skeptical correspondent's surprise. Would he do it again? Yes. But next time, he'd take Atmanjai's advice and relax.

I'm exploring my introductory goodies bag, and my programme director at Atmanjai Wellness Center, Michael Massey, is explaining the large blue-and-white braided plastic object on a rope. At first I fear this item is a giant pull-through of the sort used to clean rifles. But no, it's merely a loofah — a skin-scrubber to invigorate and optimize the eliminatory function of the skin. I'm told I can expect all my organs and orifices to be working overtime, dumping the accumulated bodily wastes of a lifetime. And the skin is both the largest organ in the human body and an important eliminator of wastes.

The bag also contains light cotton fisherman's pants in a shade of purple designed. I can only assume, to convert me into a full-blooded New Ager. There's



Captions...
Thai

Atmanjai's marketing manager Michael Massey (right, and above right) provides guidance and, where needed, counselling. Morning yoga and meditation sessions (opposite and pp. 15, 17) provide a nicely energizing boost at the start of the day.

an Atmanjai T-shirt, and a plastic beaker with a snap-on top. This and that. Another bag contains my first day's four plastic tubs of herbal "Master Supplements" (eight capsules and four tablets apiece). Further investigation reveals larger containers of psyllium-seed husks and bentonite clay, as well as bottles of organic wheat germ oil, specially purified cod-liver oil, and liquid chlorophyll, with its load of vitamins, minerals and enzymes. Oh, boy, I'm thinking. *Yummy*.

I'm warned the niacin supplements can cause skin flushes, even rashes, but I shouldn't expect any other side effects. The extract of kelp stimulates the thyroid; vitamin C is one of several nutritional and body-function supports. The milk thistle extract cleanses the liver. A twice-daily dose of calcium and magnesium

provides minerals and stimulates the metabolism of some of the other supplements. Cold-pressed golden flaxseed oil serves as a bowel lubricant.

The four-times-daily psyllium-bentonite clay chugalug, on the other hand, performs the function I first feared the big braided plastic loofah/pull-through would — it swells with the addition of water to provide your intestines with a good scrubbing. The psyllium, I'm told, helps to clear the accumulated gunk, while the clay ostensibly absorbs toxins, including heavy metals. According to Atmanjai's *Guide*, "the organic herbal supplements, cleansers, and bulking agents ensure that you do not experience physical hunger during the cleanse." Right, I tell myself. This should be a dawdle.

A few fast fragments

Day 1. I don't care how much psyllium is swelling up inside my gut. I'm hungry.

And now for my induction into the global brotherhood of colema veterans. Colemas, I'm informed, are not enemas, which generally involve only a couple of litres; and they aren't colonics, which use a

repeating this process twice a day for the next 10 days.

Day 2. Every evening I'm provided with 500ml of hot "vegetable broth" in a thermos. I sip at it as though it were nectar, even though I reckon the chef does no more than wave a small celery stick in the general vicinity of the water.

The psyllium-bentonite clay chugalug performs the function I first feared the big braided plastic pull-through would.

machine to pressurize the water. "Smile for the webcam, okay?" Massey's parting remark, as he leaves me to my first colema, doesn't haunt me overly much, as I prepare to savour the experience of flushing my innards with 20 litres of gravity-fed, triple-filtered water mixed with coffee and apple cider. I also try to look forward to

I feel the onset of a massive head and chest cold, which promises to complicate matters.

Day 3. Massey says the digestive system switches to detox mode after about three days, and today I'd expected to feel poisoned, sickened by a flood of my own bodily toxins. But it hasn't happened.



Captions... Thai

Fasters chug one of their twice-daily mixtures of psyllium and bentonite clay with water. This reduces the appetite and helps scour one's innards.



And this morning's hour of hatha yoga followed by meditation practice was magic, leaving me nicely invigorated.

Sometime around the middle of the day I remember the massive cold that was coming on last night. There isn't a sign of it. Nary a scratchy throat.

Now it's evening, and I sit in the fine restaurant at Friendship Beach doing my impression of a spaniel at the dinner table. I watch people eat, listen to them rave on about how good the damned salmon is and how glorious the delights of cleansing fasts past. I wonder whether the coffee in the colema doesn't tend to give some people a massive caffeine high.

Day 5. During yoga practice, Areti, the instructor, has us squat way down on our heels, and I notice that the pain in my left knee that has plagued me for years has disappeared, and the joint enjoys a full range of movement. Strange.

Another thing I've noticed: my wristwatch has become annoyingly loose. Plus I've decided to quit my job and enter a monastery.

Day 7. After yoga, in the restaurant, I take a ridiculous amount of satisfaction from a cup of hot water flavoured with a few molecules of honey and lime juice. I watch Areti tuck into a heaping plate of lovely fried rice while Massey ostentatiously enjoys a big bowl of muesli with fruit. But I feel no hunger. Not really. My body is giving up.



Atmanjai Wellness Center is based at Friendship Beach, in Rawai, a seaside boutique resort with a broad range of accommodation, an excellent restaurant and a peaceful, exceptionally social atmosphere. The tissue-cleansing programme includes daily yoga, massage, and meditation classes. Atmanjai also offers a wide range of practitioner services including counselling and coaching services and keeps a nutritionist on call.

Atmanjai offers three standard programmes: the Raw Food, the Power Cleanse (minimum seven days) and the Master Cleanse (minimum 7 days). The Master Cleanse runs 35,000 baht plus accommodation. Customized programmes are available upon request.

Programmes are designed so that visitors can also enjoy other attractions around Phuket. Atmanjai also caters for Phuket residents, who can do the course while living at home. And the growing number of people who travel to Phuket for low-cost quality medical services will benefit from tissue cleansing either pre- or post-medical procedure.

In line with its policy of providing one-on-one personalized support, Atmanjai admits limited numbers of clients. By October 2008, the centre will have doubled capacity and be catering for 24 people at a time. In the works: a takeaway home cleansing kit, including dietary supplements and coleslaw boards.

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Day 10. I'm offered a strainer — a kitchen collander — on the way to the coleslaw room, just in case I want to mount a search for fossilized evidence of a lifetime's gustatory misdeeds. Massey tries to inspire me with the case of one woman who developed abdominal pains part way through the programme, and who went on, after a massage and an extra coleslaw, to pass a hard black lump. Her husband whacked this *objet* on a table edge, breaking it open to reveal a rainbow cross-section that triggered a flashback to early childhood and his wife's erstwhile habit of eating crayons.

My wristwatch has become annoyingly loose. And I've decided to quit my job and enter a monastery.

I discover no conversation pieces in my collander. Probably 20 times 20 litres over the past 10 days just hasn't been enough. "It may take 3 or 4 detox programmes to recover these objects," Massey tells me later, although, he says, a number of his clients have been surprised to have coins, marbles, even toy soldiers appear in their collander during their very first programme.



Captions...
Thai

Atmanjai Wellness Center is ideally located at Friendship Beach, a tranquil yet sociable resort on Phuket's southern coast.



Two or three more cleansing sessions? Whoa.

Day 11. It's over. The thing is, I feel none of the huge relief I'd expected. I merely find myself relaxed, at once calm and alert. Not hungry, even though my mind is coming around to the realization that I can have breakfast today. So maybe something has happened after all. Consider the cold that disappeared overnight, not to mention the knee problem that isn't anymore. Patches of psoriasis on my scalp that resisted special shampoos for years have disappeared. Even my innate skepticism appears threatened.

This is all the more surprising to me since, against Atmanjai's better advice — which was to spend my days in meditation, reading, massage and herbal steam therapy — I've kept working at every opportunity for the whole 10 days. So I've cleansed the body, but probably left mind and soul a mess, no matter how pretty good I think I feel.

According to Massey, lots of people are somewhat skeptical to start. "But most are surprised at the results." It's difficult to say, however, what proportion of the "graduate glow" is due to specifically physical, mental or spiritual enhancement. In any case, everybody at Friendship Beach says how fresh I look, how clear of eye. This is standard, Massey claims. "We have clients who go back home, and their friends say, 'What's this? Did you get a facelift?'"

Later, I have a lunch meeting, and when I show up — eight kilos lighter and no doubt glowing with some inner radiance and a stomach full of fruit — my associate says, "Hey, man. You look kind of wasted."

