

## A cleanser in a tropical paradise

Some people choose to celebrate their milestone birthdays with hedonistic pursuits, others prefer to detox, writes **Toni Krasicki**

MY FAMILY and friends can't quite understand why I would prefer to spend my big "Four 0" drinking spirulina mocktails to red wine and chocolate.

Nonetheless, after six dusty weeks on the road I have found paradise on Malapacao Island, and I know I am going to love it.

Tranquil and laid-back, the private island retreat nestles unassumingly in a bay of towering karst peaks off the coast of Palawan. It is here, surrounded by the ethereal beauty of the Bacuit Archipelago in The Philippines, I have chosen to purge away half a lifetime of gastronomic sins and to enter the new year with a clean internal system.

The bangka (local outrigger boat), which takes about 40 minutes from El Nido, cruises towards Malapacao Island. The extraordinary vista is enough to rival Vietnam's Halong Bay and Thailand's Krabi.

It is difficult not to ponder whether the retreat is really a disguise for a crazy backpacker hang-out. Will there be trekking through cannabis fields and leaping into waterfalls en route?

Instead, a handful of chilled-out guests who are mostly beyond backpacker age, the island dogs Monty and Joshua and the eccentric Australian owner, Leeann, greet me.

Unlike the other guests who are on a 21-day or longer detoxification program, I decide on the seven-day

option. Surprisingly, the program is not a starvation regime. Initially I drink my way through a crate of juiced apples, then later that day I am given enough Epsom salts to internally cleanse every man, woman, and child in every neighbouring village.

The next six days follow a similar routine. At my beachside chair arrive a selection of liquids and supplements taken at 90-minute intervals.

Black concoctions of bentonite clay, charcoal, psyllium husks, apple cider vinegar, calamansi juice (local citrus fruit) and buko juice (coconut water) are staggered with thick green drinks consisting of spirulina, niacin and virgin coconut cream. Supplements of turmeric, cayenne pepper, acidophilus, ginger, clove, and garlic are taken once a day. All, I am assured, are integral in the removal of parasites.

My favourite daily treat has become a serving of the parasite blend. A concoction of fermented vegetables, predominantly sauerkraut, blended in coconut cream and olive oil served in



an edible leaf. We also have a lesson in its preparation with Leeann and staff. In the evening we sip watery vegetable broth served in coconut shells, with a side of lightly steamed garlic bulbs. I am singled out one morning

because of the hue of my tongue. "One of four of the blackest tongues I have seen," Leeann announces. "It's a sure sign of intestinal candida." Guests come here to cure far more than candida. The most common motives are weight loss and overall

wellbeing, but some come because of thyroid problems, HIV and lethargy. Every other day bundles of firewood arrive with a local fisherman, and the furnace is fired up. The spa is steaming hot and we sizzle among herbs and secret potions under the stars, ridding

the body of toxins. Living arrangements are simple. I am allotted a cottage named "Life", at the far end of the beach. The view over to Inabayatan Island either from the deckchair, hammock or mosquito-netted bed is superb. The cottage is



**LIFESTYLE AND LEISURE:** Detox Retreat, Malapacao Island (left), Malapacao Island, Bacuit Archipelago (above right), daily diet of cleansing fluids (above left). Pictures: Toni Krasicki.



Wish you were here

### Getting there

Flight Centre has return airfares to Puerto Princessa International Airport in Palawan starting from \$1395 a person ex-Sydney, including taxes. Valid for sale until March 31, 2010 and valid for travel from October 16 to November 12, 2010 and January 25 to March 22, 2010.

### Resort details

Seven-night detox packages start from \$827. See [www.malapacao.com/detox](http://www.malapacao.com/detox) for details



Swiss Family Robinson style – open timber structures, where the ocean breeze can blow in from all directions. There is the option of two self-administered colemas a day that are undertaken in the privacy of your bathroom. I am well rehearsed in the

art of intestinal flushing, having undergone a similar regime at a retreat in Thailand. Included in the program are two Tchi Nei Tshung abdominal massages a day pre colema. I try the lymphatic drainage. It's excellent but expensive

by Filipino standards. Best to pre-buy a package as it gives you two daily treatments and is much more cost-effective.

There is an option to do an early morning yoga and tai chi session, or to kayak around the island. Leeann admits that she is self-taught, so don't expect a class like the one in a professional studio. Instead swim and snorkel with the resident sea life or take a walk on one of the island trails.

As a special bedtime treat try a delightful fresh ginger poultice. It is wrapped tightly around the torso over the kidneys. Enjoy the warm tingling sensation. If your liver needs a boost, there is one made from turmeric.

It takes a few days for my body to adjust to the rhythm of island life. The generator winds down by 9.30pm, and I am lulled to sleep by the lapping of the ocean.

It's my final day. I have survived and managed not to eat my backpack. My first meal in eight days arrives and it looks like coleslaw without the dressing.

To say I am disappointed is an understatement, but once I tuck in, it tastes like heaven.

Vowing to give up sugar and take ginger baths on my return home, I reluctantly board the bangka. I remember hearing a personal trainer's lecture onboard a cruise ship once when he said "Do you know that when John Wayne died of stomach cancer they found 28kg of toxins in his colon?"

Rest assured that's one thing I don't have to worry about.