

HEAL THROUGH FOOD

Known as the “spa chef of Australia”, Samantha Gowing is a therapeutic chef, motivational mentor and an award-winning clinical nutritionist helping to spearhead the “food as medicine” philosophy at many of the world’s luxury spas



There seems to be so much more awareness about the importance of healing cuisine and nutrition as key to wellness – in your opinion, what is driving the trend?

The last few years have been marked by a near-hysterical obsession with the next superfood or diet trend. As Michael Pollan observed, what we eat has changed more in the last 40 years than it has in the previous 40,000. The trend-chasing, “I-saw-it-on-Instagram” eating needs to stop. We need to be restored to sane, nutritious, clean, local, personally intuitive foods – and to eating as pleasure: you can skip the kale if you want. Too many superfoods are on a collision course with sustainability. We’re wildly importing chia seeds, quinoa, goji berries, coconut, maca, agave (you name it) from all around the world, and it means our food-trendiness is disturbing global agricultural ecosystems.

Your wellness company crafts healing cuisine for luxury hotels, spas and health retreats – can you tell us some of the brands you have worked with and a little more about what you do?

Gowings Food Health Wealth was founded in 2000. My unique Surf Spa Food programme is handcrafted to service the niche in the global marketplace for a spa-cuisine specialist in the booming arena of luxury-lifestyle retreats, health spas and elegant beach resorts. Benefits to the industry include intensive one-on-one training in the healing cuisines, exclusive cooking demonstrations, conference presentations, staff training and induction, ready-to-go spa-food menus, management of financial systems and kitchen-service templates. As the founding head chef and clinical nutritionist for Cabarita Ocean Health Retreat, I put food as medicine on the spa-resort map in Australia. My signature cuisine was noted for being the best spa food in Australia.

In addition, I have had the great pleasure of consulting with leading wellness destinations and in-house spas including Grand Hyatt Melbourne; Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat, Australia; The Four Seasons, Bali; Kempinski Zamani Resort, Zanzibar, Tanzania; Kahanda Kanda, Sri Lanka; and in Canada at Grail Springs in Bancroft, Ontario.

Can you explain your concept of Surf Spa Food?

Not long after I moved to Byron Bay in 2008 I took up surfing. So inspired by this new-found love, I decided that it should become the backbone of my business. So in 2010 I launched Surf Spa Food – a signature for my cuisine that encapsulates my food-as-medicine teachings and is the essence of my wholefood teachings. I have always been inspired by chef Raymond Blanc whose spa cuisine has been celebrated for decades and helped to shape nouvelle cuisine and the rise of Californian cuisine. However, I found interpretations of this cuisine to be overly petite, pale and unsubstantial for my audience, hence Surf Spa Food was born. My food is robust, yet light, honest and reflects my love of the ocean and the healing properties individual sea creatures provide – from seaweed to deep-sea fish.

What are some of the interesting ways you have seen spas incorporate nutrition into their programmes, and have you noticed any emerging trends?

The line is becoming more and more blurred between spa ingredients and what’s on the menu – I love this! Seaweed-and-vanilla infused body scrubs for example, and turmeric tonics on arrival are just some of the ways food as medicine is creeping back into the clinic space. After all, it has been around for centuries. The natural cosmetic and nutraceutical companies are becoming hyper-aware that what resort guests are feeding their skin is just as important as their belly. We’ve seen so many dietary trends and fads come and go.

What is the most effective path for anyone hoping to heal through nutrition?

The future of health food is eating what you’re with – turning to our own backyards for fresh, naturally produced foods – because all clean foods have power and it’s the only regimen we need. The future means more proof of authenticity, nutritional claims and sustainability about what we eat and drink – and a welcome relaxing of our food histrionics.

WELLNESS GASTRONOMY

The growing awareness of nutrition has led to a global trend of spa cuisine at many of the world’s premier wellness destinations, where eating healthily is as sumptuous and satisfying as your spa treatment



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1. FIVELEMENTS

Luxuriously healing and holistic treatments are just one (ahem) element at Fivelements, one of Bali’s most gushed-about eco-retreats. Another is Sakti Dining Room™, the highly lauded fine-dining restaurant that serves up such scrumptiously healthy and ingenious raw-food cuisine, you may never be tempted by a slice of pizza again. Amid tranquil surroundings – the restaurant sits prettily between the Ayung River and tropical ponds and gardens – the chefs take a gastronomical approach to raw vegan cuisine that aims to nurture, heal and regenerate, and specialise in plant-based raw living food, presented à la carte or in three-, five- and seven-course menus containing regenerative, mind-clearing ingredients, such as raw cacao, coconut, cashew and exotic fruits. Fivelements also invites health foodies along to its dedicated culinary-training retreat, “Cuisine for Life™”, to learn the tricks of the trade from the award-winning culinary team, sending you on your way with all the know-how to get juicing, sprouting and fermenting at home.

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2. SONG SAA PRIVATE ISLAND

Whether you’re a vegan or vegetarian, want to stick to a paleo diet or simply want something aside from a salad to go with your wellness experience, Song Saa, the exclusive island resort in the Koh Rong archipelago in Cambodia strives to offer guests personally tailored spa gastronomy. Consulting with some of the world’s leading nutritionists, the resort’s kitchen and spa teams collaborate to devise Cambodian-inspired recipes and dishes for dedicated spa menus, and keeping in line with the resort’s sustainable and eco-friendly ethos, even the conservation team has a say – ensuring ingredients are sourced sustainably from local islands and waters, or from quality overseas purveyors with ethical practices in place, such as free-range and organic farmers. Wildlife-friendly Ibis rice, locally produced honey and cashew nuts, and Cambodia’s famous kampot pepper are just some of the naturally nourishing ingredients guests can sample in traditional Khmer and Western dishes, along with herbs and vegetables grown in the island’s organic garden.

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