





savour the good life

The Sarojin, a luxury couples-only resort near Phuket, is the perfect spot for golfers visiting Thailand to chill out – and take in a game or two at one of several nearby courses.

By **Tricia Welsh.**

Situated near Khao Lak in Phang Nga province, The Sarojin may be only 70 kilometres from all that Phuket has to offer, but in reality it is worlds away.

From the moment we are met at the airport and whisked away in the resort's comfortable leather-trimmed transfer vehicle, offered moist hand towels, cool drinks and a choice of background music for the hour-long drive north, we know this experience is going to be special. Welcoming staff greet our arrival in the main pavilion as we are offered tropical cocktails and checked into our spacious suites where, we discover, luggage has already been delivered.

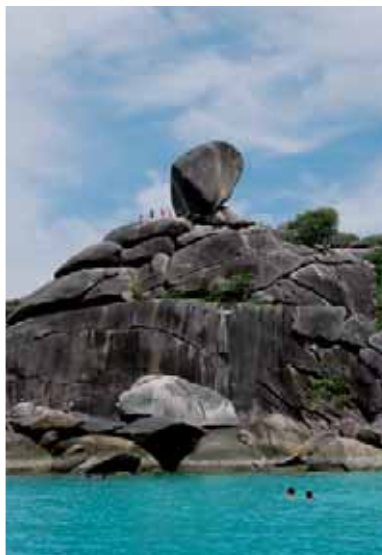
Opened less than five years ago, the resort operates like a well-oiled machine with everything happening discreetly and always with an engaging smile. Accommodation is in 56 suites that sit among natural coastal foliage around the perimeter of the 4-hectare lagoon-filled property that spills onto a section of an 11km long white sandy beach edging the pristine waters of the Andaman Sea.

English owners Andrew and Kate Kemp bought the land in 1999, having spent 10 years in Hong Kong, before settling on Thailand to find their dream property. The resort was due to open two weeks after the devastating 2004 tsunami which swamped the locale, causing the opening to be put back almost a year. "When we opened on October 7, 2005, we had 53 of our original 101 staff," explains Andrew, "so we named the suites after those loyal staff who remained."

Mine is the upstairs Palaphan Suite to honour Palaphan Klinpeatkij, the resort's pre-opening purchasing manager. It features a vast entry lounge with furnished verandah and outdoor plunge bath, spacious bedroom with king-size bed and possibly one of the largest bathrooms in Thailand with an oval couples bath-tub set in an indoor/outdoor pebble garden and two showers including a tropical rainfall-style with huge shower rose. The bath is already partly-filled, the water scattered with fresh floating blossoms.

Throughout the grounds, the only sounds are birds singing in the palms and lush foliage, the trickling of fountains in the water gardens, and the occasional overflow of the aqua-tiled infinity pool when a guest might slink in to cool off from the tropical heat.

The days are long and languid at The Sarojin, beginning with a-la-carte



breakfast at Ficus under the canopy of a 160-year-old ficus tree – the spiritual centre of the resort – overlooking a large central lotus pond. Start with freshly squeezed tropical juices followed by still-warm pastries and perhaps Eggs Benedict or a terrific spicy Thai omelet.

Lunch and dinner also can be taken here, in-villa or at the beachside Thai restaurant, The Edge, where the classic pad thai dish is exemplary. With more than 200 vintages, The Sarojin boasts one of the best wine cellars in Asia.

Opening spread: A hammock on the beach typifies the relaxed atmosphere at The Sarojin. This page, clockwise from top: A couples spa bath; unusual rock formations on the Similan islands; the aqua-tile and child-free pool; the Naval Tap Lamu golf course is just 20 minutes away; a diving or snorkelling trip on the *Lady Sarojin* is a highlight; treatments at Pathways Spa often begin with a foot bath; the Andaman Sea is a perfect backdrop for golfers at Tap Lamu.

A favourite with honeymooners, the no-children under 12 years policy is a hit with all guests who appreciate the sense of total relaxation this inevitably means. All activities are designed with just two people in mind – making each experience so much more exclusive and memorable. Even most treatment rooms at Pathways Spa are for couples, with an indulgent four-hour Nature's Midday Haven treatment specifically for two that includes a spa cuisine lunch with sparkling wine.

Colourful former Moulin Rouge performer Jowell Philemond is the resort's on-site 'imagineer' or dream-maker who choreographs romantic scenarios for couples upon request. Guests can also take a 'pleat' boat-ride on the narrow Little Amazon with tropical birds (and snakes) in the trees above, and then speed up along the wider Takuapa River to take in the local produce and wet market at Yan Yao.

Perhaps visit the old town of Takuapa with its interesting colonial architecture mostly in decorous decay, or indulge in a private cooking class on the banks of the river with one of the resort's chefs who will create such dishes as Thai beef salad, tom yum goong soup or green chicken curry – flavours



and dishes that will remind you of your stay long after you've returned home.

Golfers have the choice of three courses nearby: a nine-hole course surrounded by jungle within Khao Sok National Park, the 18-hole Thai Muang course (that is temporarily closed and due to re-open later this year), and the picturesque Tap Lamu Navy Golf Course which is just 20 minutes away and boasts several holes abutting the gentle local beach of the Andaman Sea. Considered one of Thailand's most beautiful courses, it also took the brunt of the tsunami and was closed for a year. After re-opening it is considered better than ever. There are 50 caddies to assist players – after that, naval officers help out! The resort can also make bookings at the Blue Canyon and Mission Hills golf courses a little further away.

But the real highlight has to be a day on the *Lady Sarojin*, the resort's private boat that takes guests out to the acclaimed Similan Islands about an hour and a half away. Go early to snorkel in the sparkling turquoise waters, swim at private beaches and then enjoy a delicious lunch on board – perhaps platters of seafood and fruit – with chilled wines and juices. 🌸

at a glance

Getting there: V Australia flies twice weekly direct from Brisbane to Phuket (Fri and Sun), with weekly direct flights from Melbourne (Thur). This new premium international, boutique-style carrier operates a fleet of new Boeing 777-300ER aircraft offering business, premium economy and economy classes with fares from \$A399 one way, incl. taxes. Connecting flights between Sydney and Phuket from \$A405. Airport transfers from Phuket to The Sarojin can be pre-arranged through the resort.

www.vaustralia.com.au

Accommodation: Suites at The Sarojin start from \$A450/night including breakfast. Between Apr 20-Oct 31, stay min. two nights in any guest residence – Sarojin Suite, Pool Residence or Garden Residence and receive same number of nights free with a-la-carte breakfast with sparkling wine. Six night golf package for two incl. breakfasts, transfers, spa massage each, four rounds of golf at Tap Lamu, Mission Hills and Blue Canyon (two rounds) with caddies and transfers, from \$A3320.

www.sarojin.com

Tourism Authority of Thailand, phone (02) 9247 7549 **www.thailand.net.au**

Tricia Welsh travelled as a guest of V Australia and The Sarojin.

