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DESTINATION THAILAND

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Villa views and city chic

Five accommodation favourites revisited

SUSAN KUROSAWA

Karma Samui, Koh Samui: On the east coast of the southern Thailand island of Koh Samui, the cliff-hugging Karma Samui resort offers all guests a roomy villa with a private pool on a sun terrace with lofty views to the sea. The 36 villas are contemporary in style, with sweeping Thai silk curtains and Asian ornamentation, in layouts

of one to four bedrooms. Resort staff whisk guests by electric cart up and down the terraced hillsides laced with bougainvillea to the Chakra Spa or Padma, the pretty beachside restaurant where flickering candles create a romantic atmosphere.

Tip: Ask reception to organise an in-villa cooking class or chef-

prepared barbecue on your pool terrace; karmaresorts.com.

Double Pool Villas, Banyan Tree Phuket: Arguably Phuket's most glamorous hideaways, these 22 house-sized villas with two swimming spaces are scattered through an estate on the resort's northern reaches. They are accessed via frangipani-filled gardens and arched bridges, the villas complement Banyan Tree Phuket proper but have their own entry and infrastructure.

Banyan Tree Phuket is beside Bang Tao Bay on the west coast of the island and within the Laguna Phuket enclave, an integration of

five resorts linked by tropical gardens and a saltwater lagoon. Other Banyan Tree accommodation categories here include deluxe villas with outdoor jet-

pools, one or two-bedroom villas with private plunge pools, and enormous spa pool villas that come with an aquatic playground of jet-pool, steam room, outdoor sunken bath and swimming pool. It's very private and exclusive, designed for settling in and hunkering down, dipping day and night, far from the holiday crowds.

Tip: Double Pool Villa tariff includes express airport clearance, 24-hour host service, afternoon coffee and evening cocktails, turn-down gifts, some spa treatments and traditional ceremonies; banyantree.com.

The Eugenia, Bangkok: The Eugenia is an absolute gem amid the chaos of Bangkok. In late 19th-century colonial style, the two-storey mansion features just 12 guestrooms, each with four-posters and an eclectic cargo of antiques. There's a fabulously stocked library, a garden pool, jewel-box of a dining room and vintage Jaguars and Mercedes for transfers and touring. It feels like staying at the private home of an avid collector of Asian furniture and antiques; shabby chic and full of raffish charm.

Tip: In the shadowy Zheng He Lounge, complete with opium bed and stuffed peacock, the snack menu includes excellent toasted sandwiches and soups, pasta and pad thai noodles; theeugenia.com.

The Sarojin, Khao Lak: This charming small-scale resort was preparing for its January 2005

grand opening when the Boxing Day tsunami struck; after extensive rebuilding, its 56 suites and garden and pool residences are now named for the original staff members who stayed on after the disaster and are firmly part of the Sarojin family. Spacious rooms, private pools, good seasonal deals, cooking classes and cruises on a private boat: no wonder the Sarojin is now a fabulous success story and the winner of multiple awards for its Pathways Spa and best boutique accommodation in Asia.

Tip: Look for regular special deals that offer extra nights and other good-value inclusions; sarojin.com.

The Metropolitan Bangkok: This was the Thai capital's first lifestyle hotel when it opened in 2003; now Bangkok is replete with chic hang-outs but the 11-storey Metropolitan, part of Christina Ong's Como group, still attracts funky A-listers who flock to the clubby Met Bar for a ginger martini or Met mix peach blossom (vodka, peach schnapps, Earl Grey tea and honey). From the minimalist lobby to the pared-down 171 guestrooms and suites, there is the feel of unadorned space at the Metropolitan, an emphasis on texture, line and finish, almost a calculated sense of what isn't there.

Tip: On the second floor, adjacent to the sanctuary-style spa, Glow bistro serves yummy juices (including zesty detox combos) and light and healthy fare; metropolitan.como.bz.



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Sleeping pavilion at a Banyan Tree Double Pool Villa



Cliff-hugging Karma Samui resort has lofty views to the sea



Lobby of the Metropolitan



The Eugenia, an absolute gem

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After surviving the Boxing Day tsunami, the Sarojin at Khao Lak has earned its reputation as one of the best boutique resorts in Asia