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# Just let your imagination run wild

An eye-opening trip to Thailand offers the sumptuous experience that dreams are made of, writes **Lucie van den Berg**

“TRUST the Thai ivy,” my guide says. The root of the plant, no thicker than a cat’s tail dangles in front of me. I am attempting to lift my leg, laden with lactic acid, and squeeze my sopping wet sneaker into a crevice.

The archaic rope is my lifeline along the rock walls, lubricated in lime and water, which flank each side of the riverbank. I am so focused on the dangers in front of me, plunging into the river below or cracking my shin on a rocky cantilever that I fail to realise I am moving closer to the king cobra.

I can’t help wonder how I ended up here.

Ever heard of an imagineer?

Imagine this. Dawd is an engineer, of the imagination.

He’s a real life Doctor Parnassus who creates an imaginerium for guests at a 5-star resort in Koh Lak, less than two hours’ drive from Phuket.

The Sarojin, a 56-room resort set on 4.5ha of land and bordered by a white sand beach, is designed to be like staying at your best friend’s private estate. Provided that your best friend is a multimillionaire who has exquisite

taste in design, food and wine and countless helpers.

Dawd is 1.82m tall with a honey tan and blond tresses. He is dressed in a safari suit. He explains that his job is not just to cater for guest’s requests but to create them, perfect them.

“Your imagination is the limit for the grand or understated and it is my great pleasure to create a ‘dream come true’ experience personally tailored just for you.”

For those without the time to open their minds, a personal Thai cooking class on a sandbank, followed by a sunset cruise, cocktails and canapes is suggested. Or perhaps a spa treatment for two set deep in the jungle?

Dawd also happens to hold one of the highest qualifications for wine tasting in the world; he knows his vignerons from the vinegars.

Together with Dan, the resort’s English activities manager, they certainly know how to help four Australians unwind.

The first night involves drinks delivered in quick succession. The resort’s luxury boat, the *Lady Sarojin*,

awaits us. As the boat picks up speed we face a 5-star dilemma. How do you sip from a champagne flute while the speedboat is rising and falling on the crests of the waves?

The staff, with their seemingly sixth sense, begin handing out individually wrapped straws. Sucking up luxury has never been so easy.

We pull up beside a sandbank, plonk ourselves into water and lap up the unfolding sunset. Back on board, the table is laden with canapes.

All this seems tame enough, but Dawd has a way of easing us into our extreme adventure request.

Next morning, we’re up early and bundled into a van. The trek starts sedately, but after two hours of moving between land and water I have evolved into an amphibian. Fortunately, several guides are shadowing my every move. They anticipate the slipperiest rocks, standing in wait with outstretched arms to usher me across.

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A herd of mountain goats make it all look so bleating easy. For a while we follow in their footsteps. Our main guide, who uttered not a word of English in five hours, is navigating on the fly. He strides ahead in blue gumboots to determine if we should travel by land or water.

It would be a waterway that was our undoing. A small pool of deep water separates us from the edge of the jungle. I swim ahead, keen to put the rocky path and Tarzan ropes behind me. The current is so strong I'm swimming close to the riverbank using the rocks to help me along.

Suddenly, a black snake with a yellow belly and diamond-shaped head is towering above me. A quarter of its 3m body rises above the water. Its forked black tongue licks the air between us; sensing the size of its prey.

Shock sets in. I can't remember what I say, but my companion lets out a high-pitched expletive.

Instinctively, we both kicked our legs out towards the snake and begin swimming backwards like a turtle flailing on its back.

I feel as if we are moving in slow motion, weighed down by wet shoes and tired legs.

The snake shoots off, moving along the top of the water at an incredible speed. Our intrepid guides instantly swing into action.

Once our path is king cobra free, we return to the water and adrenalin propels us the rest of the way through the jungle.

Almost five hours have passed since we set off. Unfortunately, the snake served only as a distraction from the leeches that had taken up residence down my top and pants. Fortunately, this is when the 5-star side of this rather extreme activity re-emerges.

Back at the van, staff fuss over us. We all get a good de-leeching, chilled towels and refreshments.

It's then a short drive to Si Phang Nga National Park where the resort has prepared a spread of Thai food and champagne. It's laid out on a white linen cloth draped over a table in the rain forest, beside a river riddled with carp.

Back at the Sarojin, a 90-minute Thai massage and a bath soothe our

aching limbs.

It's finally pina colada o'clock; I'm exhausted, but slightly exhilarated.

The Sarojin has all the trimmings normally associated with 5-star luxury: a spectacular setting, an infinity pool, private jacuzzis, outdoor plunge pools, a spa and staff waiting on you hand and foot.

But if you want to go beyond the banana lounge, it offers additional, and, if desired, extreme extras.

Just ask.

**The writer was a guest of The Sarojin, Tourism Authority of Thailand and Air Australia.**

## Go2 THAILAND Getting there

Several airlines including Qantas, Thai, Jetstar and Singapore fly from Sydney to Phuket.

## Staying there

Prices at the Sarojin start from about \$3233 for two people and include six nights in a garden residence, all package inclusions, all-day a la carte breakfast daily and private transfers to and from Phuket Airport. Includes all taxes but not international flights. See [sarojin.com](http://sarojin.com)

## Doing there

Extreme Adventure at The Sarojin about \$190 a person, Lady Sarojin Sunset Cruise, \$110 a person or \$548 for private charter for up to four, Royal Oriental Treatment at Pathways Spa, \$94 for 90 minutes a person.

More: [tourismthailand.org](http://tourismthailand.org)

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**TEST OF IMAGINATION:**  
The start of the extreme trek organised by the Sarojin resort.  
Pictures: Lucie van den Berg



**TIME TO RELAX:** The lounge at Sarojin resort (left) and nearby beach (above)