



Border Mail (Albury Wodonga)

Saturday 22/03/2014

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CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip

A TIME TO IMAGINE

At this luxurious resort named after a mythical being, **SUE WALLACE** discovers that the adventures and experiences on offer really are large as life.

THE leathery hide of Thio the elephant is being scrubbed and massaged in a jungle lake on the edge of Thailand's Khao Sok National Park, and it trumpets its approval.

The agile mahout, based at the Sairung Elephant Camp, later shows us how to care for this gentle giant, which responds to kindness and Thai commands.

It is just one of the many adventures offered at The Sarojin resort, which is tucked away on a secluded 11 kilometre stretch of white sandy beach at Khao Lak near Phuket.

The new Elephant Owner for A Day adventure provides an insight into caring for an elephant, an animal that's shown great respect in Thai culture.

Unlike the elephant population of India and Africa, 95 per cent of Thailand's elephants are domesticated, working and privately owned.

Our mahout, who has a lifelong affinity and bond with his elephant, shares his knowledge about the welfare of healthy and contented elephants and looking after them in a caring and responsible manner befitting their importance.

Later we help feed Thio and also learn about the five key signs that indicate a healthy elephant — flapping tail and ears, moisture between the toes, markings on the bodies to indicate a good sleep pattern, volume of elephant waste and moisture in their manure.

Once out of the water, we ride bareback perched on his neck as he weaves his way through the green jungle. We become more confident with each step.

Bathing and offerings of good elephant food certainly helps us bond with Thio, who we are told will always remember us.

Later we see several elephants lumbering along the roadside after a day's work.

Back at the resort, all talk is about elephants, their gentle disposition and what an experience it has been.

The resort takes its name from the mythical Lady Sarojin, who is regarded as the perfect hostess to welcome travellers from near and far.

Reflecting her legacy, the Sarojin concept is centred on providing an experience reminiscent of staying at a friend's private estate.

Completed days just before the

2004 tsunami, the 56 luxurious rooms have been named after loyal staff — and it's the number of people always employed to create a special experience for guests.

Today the resort is a vibrant retreat with an emphasis on excellent service, great dining and unique experiences.

Guests can talk to an "imagineer" about what they would like to do whether it's a romantic dinner on a remote beach or dining beside a waterfall — nothing is too much trouble.

The imagineer says he loves helping make dreams come true and guests' imagination is the only limit when it comes to making a "cherry on the top" type of day.

Many of the adventures involve the Lady Sarojin, a luxury boat that takes guests to remote beaches or mangrove forests, as well as secret places where tables are set with candlelight.

"We try to find places where people feel like they are shipwrecked and alone but with a wonder-

ful ambience and all the trimmings," says David Koegelenberg, resort manager.

Guests can kayak to Cape Pakarang where a personal waiter will greet them and escort them to a front row seat for the spectacular sunset followed by an amazing seafood dinner of lobster, prawns, oysters and crab. As the sun fades, the fire lights of the surrounds glow in the dark and you become immersed in the stunning scenery. A trip to the stunning Similan Islands is recommended to enjoy its beaches of white sands and turquoise waters that are perfect for snorkelling and diving.

The resort is set in spectacular scenery around Khao Lak, which means mountain by the sea.

Legend has it a wizard once resided in the mountains and the nearby small shrine of Chao Pho KHao Lak is dedicated to the wizard of the mountain.

Phang Nga Bay is stunning with its unique seascape of towering limestone islands jutting dramatically from the waters. Their reflections are mirrored in the glassy sea below.

The area is home to James Bond Island and guests can order a vodka martini, shaken not stirred of course as a tribute to Mr Bond.

The area is a paradise for adventurers and photographers alike and well-protected from winds making it ideal for swimming and water sports.

Wherever you dine at The Sarojin it is memorable with a menu that features the best of Thai cuisine and an impressive wine list that has been much awarded over the years.

Resort manager David Koegelenberg has lectured for the Wine and Spirit Education Trust and The London Wine Academy and can arrange private wine tastings anywhere from the beach to a jungle river bank or waterfall, pool pavilion or the wine cellar.

Some of the menu standouts include marinated prawns wrapped in rice noodles with sweet and sour chilli dip, wild pepper leaf filled with roasted

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peanut, snailots, ginger, coconut crunch and tamarind, truffle tuna tartar, lemongrass seared salmon and celeriac with chilli beef and coriander lentils and garden greens, as well as pomelo salad and rice with a finale of seasonal fruits from a neighbouring farm.

The spa is also impressive with a four hands massage perhaps the most indulgent and luxurious. Scrubs and treatments such as coconut, cucumber and even chocolate are offered in the extensive spa menu as well as facials and other indulgent treatments.

The resort design is contemporary Asian-style with the giant ficus tree set among lush and spacious tropical gardens taking centre stage as well as a huge lotus reflective pond. It all blends harmoniously with the environment.

There are seven two-storey buildings with a variety of residences that include baths for two and a rainfall shower with an outdoor garden feel.

Each residence has a private entrance reached by crossing a stream and a walk through a private garden terrace that is a botanical haven of wild fruit, herb gardens and local species of trees.

Some residences have plunge pools or you can take a dip in the blue seas or the huge pool with three shaded pool island pavilions.

Thai and Mediterranean cooking classes are available and the "catch, cook and dine" experience is popular. The resort also gives back to the community and guests can visit a nearby orphanage supported by the resort.

The children are keen to show their drawings and craft work and accept our donation of pens, books and snacks.

As you sit beside the waterfall, candles flickering, it's obvious this is much more than just a resort and you can't help feeling Lady Sarojin would be smiling.



Guests can kayak to Cape Pakarang where a personal waiter will greet them and escort them to a front row seat for the spectacular sunset followed by an amazing seafood dinner ...

Travel notes

WHERE:

The Sarojin is set on an 11km stretch of white sandy beach at Khao Lak, Thailand.

It is a 55-minute drive north of Phuket International Airport, surrounded by five spectacular national parks and the world-famous dive sites of the Similan and Surinam islands.

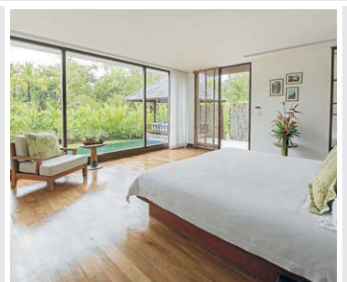
The Sarojin is 7km north of the Khao Lak town centre.

The five-star resort features 56 deluxe residences that are nestled within beautiful grounds that lead to the beachfront.

Facilities and services include extraordinary dining experiences, tailor made private excursions and award-winning spa.

For bookings phone The Unique Tourism Collection on (02) 9211 6590 or visit uniquetourism.com.

For more information on Thailand visit Tourism Authority of Thailand, tourismthailand.org.





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ABOVE: The resort takes its name from the mythical Lady Sarojin, regarded as the perfect hostess to welcome travellers.

ABOVE LEFT: Guests can even enjoy wine tastings on the beach.

LEFT: Life goes swimmingly at the resort, where the pool features island pavilions for guests.

FAR LEFT: Go with the flow - guests can dine by candlelight beside a waterfall.