

Indulged, pampered and charitable



Take a dip ... the swimming pool at the Sarojin.

Photo: Robert Muir/imageink

December 30, 2007

Carol West visits a Thai resort that has been instrumental in a community's post-tsunami recovery.

Just three years ago Khao Lak in Thailand made front-page news when the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami devastated the beach resort.

Today it is making news for a different reason, one that shows the resilience of the local people, determination of an ex-pat English couple and international recognition of a beautiful coastal area.

"Winning Asia's leading boutique hotel category at the 2007 World Travel Awards, making the cover of *Conde Nast Traveler* and being on its 'Hot List' as well as *The Sunday Times* travel magazine's list has really put the Sarojin and Khao Lak back on the map," says Kate Kemp, co-owner and executive director of the Sarojin, a modern spacious resort designed on contemporary Asian lines. Its owners say it was inspired by the notion of staying at a friend's private estate.

Opened in October 2005 and set on four hectares with 11 kilometres of beachfront, the story of the resort is interwoven with that of the nearby fishing village Bang Niang and Khao Lak town. Even though they sustained damage just one month before their scheduled opening in January 2005, owners Andrew and Kate Kemp never wavered from establishing the Sarojin and their commitment to Khao Lak.

"The best thing we could do for Khao Lak was to rebuild the Sarojin into a five-star resort and engender confidence in the region. We never let anyone go and our 56 guest residences are named after staff members in recognition of us sticking together as a family," Kemp says.

Guests consistently fall in love with the luxurious Sarojin just one hour north of Phuket International Airport. The Pathways spa is a particular favourite. Pathways was Kate Kemp's idea and she says its philosophical heart beats to the rhythm of "metta", a Sanskrit Buddhist term used for an act of loving kindness.

"You can choose to start any of your treatments with a relaxation, meditation or yoga session, while apres spa we encourage guests to relax for as long as they wish," Kemp says.

Stepping from the partitioned outdoor shower, the treatment space merges indoors with tropical gardens, simple matchstick bamboo blinds forming walls, the waves of the Andaman Sea frothing gently beyond. Lying on the massage bed, the light cotton cloth ripples gently across my skin from an oscillating fan above.

Over the next 90 minutes, quietly authoritative fingers establish an intimate relationship with my face as I embark on the Sarojin's nourishing and hydrating facial.

"We are privileged to have been able to preserve some of the traditions from the ancient kingdom of Thailand, which are known for their natural healing properties in our selection of natural body treatments," Kemp says.

A giant ficus tree with lotus reflection ponds form the centrepiece of Sarojin. Staff move quietly and confidently around the resort.

"When we were waiting to open after the tsunami, we only gave staff one rule to follow if they found themselves in sticky situations and didn't know what to do: do what you'd do for your mother," Kemp says.

Offered a range of land and marine adventures, we decide to go "off menu" and take a guide and one of the eight all-terrain vehicles for a customised experience.

We could have learned to cook a Thai jungle curry - in the jungle - or dive the world-famous Similan Islands. Instead we opt for a jungle walk in one of five nearby national parks and take a swimming safari, which includes a gourmet lunch set-up next to the Tam Nang waterfall, followed by a stroll up the beach to a boat yard just 700 metres from the resort.

"We established the Sarojin Khao Lak Community Fund to help tsunami-affected fishermen and, so far, the project has delivered more than 50 boats," says Kemp, acknowledging the generosity of many Sarojin guests who have contributed directly or purchased a replica long-tail boat from the resort lobby.

In this place, you can see how tourism is really helping community.

The writer was a guest of The Sarojin.

TRIP NOTES

Getting there: Thai Airways has three flights daily from Sydney to Phuket via Bangkok. See <http://www.thaiairways.com.au>. Jetstar has three direct flights from Sydney to Phuket each week. See <http://www.jetstar.com.au>.

Staying there: The Sarojin is at 60 Moo 2, Kukkak, Takuapa, Phang Nga 82190, Thailand.

Email info@sarojin.com or see <http://www.sarojin.com>. Make a contribution to the long-tail fishing boat project by buying a replica from The Sarojin. To do this, see <http://www.tsunamiboatproject.com> or <http://www.sarojin.com/whatsnew.html>.

Further information: For details about tourism in Thailand, see www.tourismthailand.org.

Source: The Sun-Herald

[Save 33% on home delivery of the Herald - Subscribe today!](#)

Advertisement

More Travel

Copyright © 2007. The Sydney Morning Herald.