



INTERVIEWS UK HOTELS

The Sarojin: How to build your dream hotel

TD speaks with Kate Kemp, owner and executive director at The Sarojin



By **Christian Tolentino**

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Andrew and Kate Kemp, owners of The Sarojin, Thailand

Kate and Andrew Kemp built their dream hotel in Thailand in 2005 after meeting at Loughborough University during their teens. After university, they both worked and saved like crazy to travel the world. They planned a route from Africa, India, Nepal, Hong Kong, China, and Asia to Australia, back across the States, and home. But they got as far as Hong Kong in 1992, and instead of staying a week they stayed ten years.

They married in 1994 and Kate enjoyed a successful career in international sales and marketing for top Hong Kong firms, while Andrew excelled in resort management. They had always shared a dream of setting up their own business and then, in September 1998, on their way back to Hong Kong via Cape Town, they “had far too many Guinneses in an Irish bar” and came up with the idea of building their dream hotel.

In this exclusive interview, we got in touch with Kate Kemp, owner and executive director, to find about their story, and how they built The Sarojin, Thailand.

TD: How does it feel that you have accomplished building your dream hotel?

KK: It is fantastic to have realised our dream of building our own luxury boutique hotel that really engages with the local community. Above all, I’m most proud of our team at The Sarojin and the wonderful team spirit and values we have developed and evolved together.

We strive to deliver a very personalised and heartfelt service to all our guests and this is reflected in the guest feedback. Holidays and breaks are very important “time outs” in our lives. Managing a hotel is very much about the service and the team.

“Anyone can build a hotel”

Anyone can build a hotel, after all, it’s just bricks and mortar, but to develop a hotel spirit, a soul, is what puts the heart into the service and makes it very special and unique. We developed The Sarojin around providing “relaxation, freedom, inspiration” for

our guests and we hope The Sarojin experience gives people an environment to relax, be free and to become inspired.



Do you have more dreams now you want to be realised?

Many – I have said several times I could wish to live my life four times over and take many different paths – sports, politics, adventurer, photographer, writer... But to actually realise a dream the key is that the dream must become a project with specific action steps, then the dream big or small really starts to live. And this was the case when the dream of running my own business and combining it with something I love (travel and holidays) eventually became The Sarojin.

“It’s fun to dream”

I have many dreams big and small and always will have, it's fun to dream and I love to continually explore a wide range of interests in my life. A small dream I realised just recently was to learn to church bell ring again and be able to ring with my father who has been ringing all his life.



What were the biggest challenges you had to face?

Securing a bank loan from a Thai Bank. This took us four years to secure a bank loan and much perseverance. We had no hotel background and Khao Lak was a new destination, which was relatively unknown as a tourist destination.

“Our perseverance was successful”

Our perseverance was successful though, and now, not only is The Sarojin an award-winning hotel, but tourism now helps provide a sustainable economy to Khao Lak, which is a fantastic destination for those looking to experience authentic Thailand.



Could you tell us more about the ‘community engagement’ and how you implement this at the property?

This really started as we wanted a way to share the beautiful area of Khao Lak with our guests, the national parks and local communities. We were mindful that our guests were on “holiday” and a holiday is more than a hotel. Many guests cherish the opportunity to explore the surrounding area outside of the hotel, to touch and feel the destination and meet and understand a little about the local communities.

Many guests have travelled a long way to stay at The Sarojin, maybe half way round the world. We are also in a unique position to be an interface between guests and the local community. Tourism has an ability to connect these two worlds and if done respectfully,

wonderful things can happen. This is very much the spirit and philosophy of The Sarojin and its community engagement.

“Local worthy causes”

We implement this in so many ways, from partnerships with local organisations and providing financial support to local worthy-causes via The Sarojin Khao Lak Community Fund to offering immersive experiences that contribute to a sustainable local economy and offering valuable work placements to children of the local orphanage.

We have also formed a sustainable tourism and ecological sensitivity/awareness committee within the resort. The committee aims to maintain the focus and awareness among staff of our key responsible and sustainable initiatives, both on a community and ecological basis, and help us ensure that the hotel remains on the cusp of global trends and awareness initiatives.



What would you advise to other 'dreamers' who want to have their own hotel?

Talk to people, do your research. Think about why you really want to build a hotel. It needs to be a passion, running your own business is hard work so you need to ensure it is something you enjoy. Make your dream a project. Just start. Take the first step and then the next. It's all about perseverance.

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Kate Kemp

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