

fahthai

THE RIVER WHISPERERS

CAN AN ANCIENT FISHING TECHNIQUE SAVE MYANMAR'S LAST IRRAWADDY DOLPHINS?

+ MALDIVES STARGAZING / ART ON A PLATE IN SINGAPORE / THE LUXURIOUS NEW
FACE OF BOHEMIAN KOH PHA NGAN / A TASTE OF CHINA IN THAILAND'S FAR NORTH

■ CHIANG MAI

Under my umbrella

Colin Hinshelwood explores the history of Chiang Mai's traditional paper parasols

Chiang Mai's saa paper umbrellas are famed for their vivid colours and intricate patterns, but did you know that they were originally created as alms for Buddhist monks?

On a pilgrimage to Burma over a hundred years ago, abbot Phra Khru Intha was intrigued by the parasols that his fellow monks carried to protect themselves from the searing heat. Upon his return, he unveiled his discovery to craftsmen in his hometown of Borsang, a village abundant in mulberry trees (or saa as they are known in Thai). In those days, mulberry bark paper was used primarily for Buddhist scriptures or as a wrapping for silks and cottons, as it helped protect them against the humidity and kept the colours from running.

But the monk's parasols were a revelation, and several aspiring artisans took up the pursuit. Originally, the motifs were strictly religious, and only silver and gold religious symbols were painted

on the parasols before varnishing. But as the popularity of the Borsang umbrella spread, so did the number of artists and designs. Nowadays, serene scenes of local nature – rice paddies, mountains and waterfalls – compete with delicate paintings of flowers, butterflies and leaping dragons.

"It is an inherited art, passed down from father to son, mother to daughter," says Kannika Buacheen, managing director of the UNESCO award-winning Umbrella Making Centre.

Indeed, sales of saa paper, umbrellas and fans keep this tiny village running – some 200,000 umbrellas are sold annually. Each parasol is handmade, and everything is produced locally, from the mulberry bark to the bamboo frames to the persimmon fruit used as paste.

Delightful to the eye and friendly to nature, the umbrellas of Borsang make for wonderful souvenirs while telling a story of local wisdom.

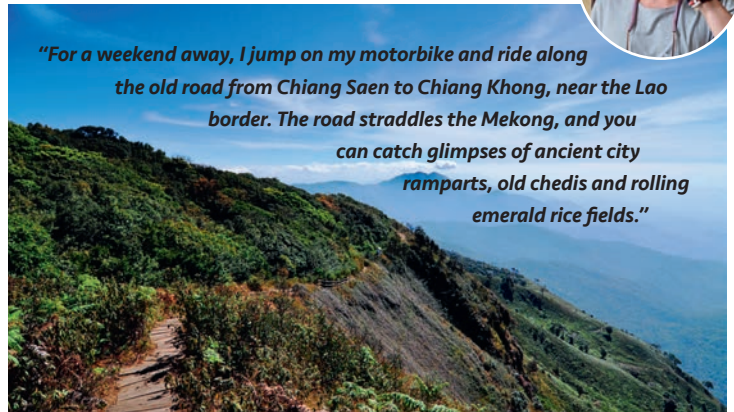


INSIDER TIP:

ANANDA EVERINGHAM, ACTOR



"For a weekend away, I jump on my motorbike and ride along the old road from Chiang Saen to Chiang Khong, near the Lao border. The road straddles the Mekong, and you can catch glimpses of ancient city ramparts, old chedis and rolling emerald rice fields."



■ PHUKET

Take two

Two new hotels by the beach that offer contrasting, though equally luxe, experiences

The Cove

Places like The Cove aren't supposed to still exist. With its prime beachfront location, pretty bungalows, cool outdoor bar and waterfront dining, it's the type of boutique lodging that disappeared as huge resorts snapped up coastline real estate. Everything about The Cove impresses, from its cool white colour palette to the inventive cocktails (try the Dark Stormy) and menu of seafood, grilled meat and pizzas. In fact, our only disappointment is that – once this review is published – the secret will be out. thecovephuket.com



The Nai Harn

In many ways, The Nai Harn, an ultra-luxurious 130-room hotel overlooking one of Phuket's most famous beaches, is the opposite of The Cove. For the last three decades, it's hosted royalty and celebrities from around the world, including Roger Moore and Prince Albert of Monaco, though it slowly fell out of favour and fortune. Now, following a complete remodelling, it's re-opened with a stylish new look and vibrant Mediterranean feel. Highlights are the amazing sea views, private terraces and four-poster daybeds in the rooms, the lounge with its sunken sofas and beachfront restaurant Rock Salt. thenaiharn.com



PHUKET

Phuket the rest

Superior scenes
From top: Seduction nightclub; setting sail on a luxury yacht at Hype Luxury Boat Club

Patong has a reputation for debauched nightlife, but here are three decidedly more sophisticated options



Party

Patong is a sprawling warren of backstreets that draws millions of annual visitors. And of course, there's the notorious nightlife, with its girlie bars and exotic shows. Since opening in 2006, Seduction Nightclub has been bringing a touch of class to proceedings, regularly attracting top global DJs including the likes of Goldie, Skrillex, David Morales and Calvin Harris. The four-floor complex has a VIP club, R&B lounge, rooftop restaurant and space for up to 3,000 clubbers. seductiondisco.com

Chill

While Phuket has no shortage of luxury vessels cruising its waters – the karst outcrops of Phang Nga Bay are known locally as a yachties' playground – the Hype Luxury Boat Club concept of a beach club on a boat is newer to these shores. You are waited on hand and foot on board the catamaran, which has a huge 200sqm of space. Guests start off their days lounging with

cocktails and canapés, and end it partying to music from the onboard DJ. hypeboatclub.com

Dine

La Gritta might just be the best restaurant on the whole island. Located in the Amari Phuket, this Italian fine-diner hugs the shores of Patong Bay, with glass walls that look down to the ocean directly below. While it's open from 10am, the venue really comes into its own at sunset when the lights of Patong turn on in the distance. Under the direction of Italian chef de cuisine Patrizia Battolu, the food is best experienced through the six-course Discovery Menu. lagritta.com



KOH SAMUI

Feeling brand new

We take an inside look into top-ranked Santiburi Beach Resort & Spa's recent revamp

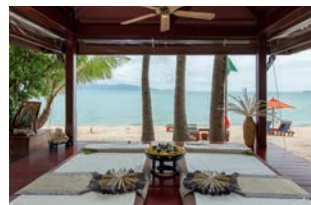
As the island's only member of the Leading Hotels of the World consortium, Santiburi Beach Resort & Spa flexed its credentials by recently celebrating its 25th anniversary with a US\$20 million facelift.

The makeover – of its Mae Nam Beach location on Samui's north shore – included upgrades to the resort's rooms, suites and brand new pool villas, a state-of-the-art spa and a new lease of life for its restaurants. "Those who know and love Santiburi will be blown away by the changes – it's almost like a new hotel," says general manager Cedric Bonvin.

Reminiscent of an ancient Sukhothai village, its 77 authentic Thai-designed villas and suites are scattered over 23 acres of palm tree sanctuary, giving its guests the perfect tropical garden hideaway.

"Guests will be pleasantly surprised by the extent of the renovations, and the exacting standards of tropical modern luxury and timeless style applied throughout," Bonvin says. "There's nothing showy or shouty about it – all our efforts have been geared toward creating sanctuaries of true relaxation and timeless style, with generous use of hardwood and beautiful timber throughout, and accents of Thai culture in just the right measure."

santiburisamui.com



Squeezy does it
Clockwise from right:
Chicken salad at Samui
Health Shop; Samui
Health Shop interiors;
Yogi Cafe; Juice Queen;
The Yogarden Cafe (x3)



■ KOH SAMUI

Fresh flavours

Samui's best cold-pressed juices, green smoothies and healthy eats

Samui Health Shop

Established in 2012, the Samui Health Shop by Lamphu has blossomed into three locations around the island from its original boutique store in Lamai. With a tasty selection of healthy fare from local organic farms, the food and juices here are not to be missed. samuihealthshop.com

Yogi Cafe

This vegan café and cold-pressed juice bar serves an eclectic mix of raw and cooked healthy options. Their Fisherman's Village and Central Festival locations offer creative variations of standard vegetarian dishes and drinks, along with home-made specialities and create-your-own burgers and salads. yogicafethailand.com

Soul Food Café

For the perfect sunset snack, find your inner peace at Marga Yoga's Soul Food Café in Ban Taling Ngam on Samui's scenic west coast. The eatery features scrumptious raw and cooked vegetarian dishes prepared in a rustic, beachside dwelling. Also available are a variety

of drinks, from "chakra" juices to Ayurvedic tea and organic coffees. marga-yoga-koh-samui.com/soul-food-cafe.html

The Yogarden Cafe

Located off a side street in the cosmopolitan area of Fisherman's Village, The Yogarden Cafe is in a traditional, 100-year-old Thai teak house set within a large garden. Part open-air yoga studio and part healthy café, it offers wholesome organic goodies, locally sourced super-food salads, smoothies, raw dishes and desserts. theyogardensamui.com

Juice Queen

Opened in 2014, this healthy drinks haven in Chaweng offers a great range of the finest fresh, organic cold-pressed fruit and vegetable juices plus super-food shots, nut milks and juice-cleanse programmes designed by an expert nutritionist. Using certified produce from Bangkok, it also offers a monthly membership service for health-conscious juice junkies. juice-queen.com

■ PHUKET

SPOTLIGHT

SIMON OSTHEIMER, PHUKET
CORRESPONDENT

Sweet child of mine

The lowdown on Kathu's annual celebration of its industrial roots

"Although it feels like it's been around for ages, the Kathu Street Culture Festival was only founded in 2009. Held this year on 1 and 2 July, the colourful event takes place in the small village of Kathu. Once known as 'Ket-Ho', the district used to be home to a thriving tin mining industry, and thousands of Chinese migrants seeking their fortune flocked there in the 19th century. Although the mines have long since closed, the miners' descendants still live there. They proudly celebrate their traditions at this annual festival, which features parades of Chinese opera performers, rickshaw rides, a huge variety of street food, music and a model tin mine."

