



REVIEW

# Thai Rendezvous

Test your culinary skills. Go for a swim. Or get a massage. The Amari Resorts of Phuket and Krabi offer umpteen unwinding options. **BY PALLAVI PASRICHA**

**T**HE KEY TO Thai cooking is to put in as many spices as you want, then add a pinch of palm sugar for that perfect flavouring.” Chef Jakkrit Traibun shared this little secret as I patiently grated the raw papaya. I then pounded a few ingredients in the mortar, but alas I was not as perfect as him, in fact not even close. He made up for my lack of skills, and within minutes *Thai Green Papaya Salad* was ready. Even though I barely helped, I was proud of the result. Cooking is not my forte, but I was thoroughly enjoying it. The next

couple of hours passed in a jiffy as I further experimented with my cooking skills and came up with *Coconut Milk Soup with Chicken*, *Green Curry with Chicken*, and finally *Sweet and Sour Fish*. I was in Krabi, a stunning town located in south, so how could I stay away from Thai food, my favourite! The setting for the cooking class was perfect—a small, enclosed area close to the swimming pool from where I could gaze at the calm Andaman Sea along a beautiful and sandy stretch of Tub Kaek beach. It was about 3.30 in the afternoon, and the sun had begun its journey to

come down west. After about two hours when the class was over Chef Traibun presented me with a certificate. I smiled, posed with him and couldn't help feeling I was back in school at a prize giving ceremony. That's the charm of Amari Vogue Krabi, it can leave you feeling completely pampered, almost child-like at times. After the class I quickly popped in to Sivara Spa to check if they could accommodate me. I was lucky. Within ten minutes I was on the massage table in a dimly lit room. I chose a Balinese massage, but it wasn't up to

the mark. The masseuse didn't know the pressure points and did not ask which oil to apply before starting. I couldn't help thinking I would rather have seen the sunset.

## A TOUCH OF THAI

One of the lasting impressions I have of this resort is that everything about it has an authentic Thai feel, with all the structures resembling Thai stilt houses. With just 57

rooms, it's a cosy place which is in sync with the tiny size of Krabi. The traditional Thai touches start from the elephant fountain at the entrance, elephant statues around the pool area, and go right into the rooms.

The Deluxe room where I checked in was decorated in contemporary yet rustic Lanna style which is traditional Thai décor. The floor was wooden and guests were advised to roam around in room slippers rather than their own footwear. And that was not the only thing that was wooden—the TV cabinet, table, the ceiling and even the fan were all made of wood. Each room had an original mural Thai painting and a traditional key for the door. Water is another constant motif at the resort. Wherever you go, you see either the sea or the swimming pool which was soothing.



DEEP PAHWA



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CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW A stunning sunset; all rooms have Thai paintings; Thai Green Papaya Salad; spa suite at Sivara Spa FACING PAGE View of the resort in Krabi



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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE View of the Jetty at Amari Coral Beach; a glimpse of the resort; the La Gritta restaurant

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## ITALY VS THAILAND

At night the resort was bathed in a golden light and looked even prettier. I ignored my craving for Thai which I had satiated during lunch at Lotus restaurant, and went for my second love—Italian—at Bellini, a lovely restaurant located close to the beach that also serves seafood. I opted for a pizza as a starter followed by a dish of handmade pasta. By the last bite, I was full to the hilt.

I barely managed to walk till the beach, and plonked on the sunbed. The next time I glanced at my watch, it was way past midnight. The breeze, moonlight and waves had lulled me to sleep. I went back to my room, but promised myself to spend the entire night at the beach the next day. But some things you plan just don't come true. It poured cats and dogs the next night, confining me to the room.

## A DATE WITH PHUKET

That night as I lay on my bed, I thought of the two days I spent in Phuket before coming to Krabi. Amari's resort in Phuket, Amari Coral Beach Phuket, was a complete contrast to the one in Krabi. It was bigger and located on the most happening beach in Phuket—Patong.

I particularly loved the Sivara Spa because for the first time ever, I actually slipped into slumber while being massaged. I remember I had closed my eyes, with nothing but the sound of waves and the giggles a few children playing on the beach reaching me. "Could you please turn around?" I was asked very politely. I looked up and had to remind myself where I was—at an open-air massage sala at the spa. I quietly did as she asked, then let the dreams continue. A cold shower outdoors refreshed

me. Later, as I sipped the strong ginger tea and bit into rice cakes I couldn't help think that the Body Balancing Massage I had chosen was rather rejuvenating. It was a deep tissue treatment combining the best of Thai and Indonesian massages.

## SIZE DOES MATTER

The main thing that strikes you about the resort is that it's massive and stylish, with more than 150 rooms, two pools or three restaurants. The lobby is done up in traditional Thai style, and it's sprawling. It actually took me a while before I could get familiar with the route to my room, it was a clear five-minute walk till the Deluxe room, which again had Thai touches to it. I alternated between the Thai restaurant, Kinaree, and Italian, La Gritta, for my meals here.

In between tucking into those delicious meals, I found my favourite spot—The Jetty—located at the end of the resort, which juts out into the sea. Patong beach and green hillocks surrounded me as I lay on the sun bed and watched the sun go down. Be it Krabi or Phuket, it is easy to unwind at these resorts and places with the sea to keep you company.

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CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Room with a splendid view; the only floating hotel in the city; sample of colonial cuisine

## THE FLOATEL

### Kolkata

Sitting with a cup of tea in your hand, you watch the sun set over the river. The buildings on the bank of the Hooghly River are a reminder of colonial Calcutta. That is life on The Floatel, India's first floating hotel. So carefully designed that when the tide turns it is rock steady, you could almost mistake the Floatel for a hotel on land, if it weren't for the river that you can see from almost every room. Moored at its own dock you check in at a reception area built on land, with nautical details on the walls. You then come out to a verandah and take the ramp down to the Floatel.

My cabin is snug and done up in wood, with rich maroon bed and decorative masks on the wall. Eco-friendliness is important to the Floatel management—the room slippers and files are made from jute, and the stationery from recycled paper.

Tea on the Bridge, the hotel's 24-hour coffee shop is a pleasant experience, though the coffee comes ready mixed with milk. During the weekend people jostle for corner tables, with a view of Vidyasagar Setu. The attraction: a lavish evening buffet that includes Indian, Continental, Chinese cuisines. Though the house speciality is colonial cuisine, so I stick to that and



tuck into *Patricia Memsab's Baked Fish* bedded on spinach with lemon butter and *Molly Malone Prawns*.

Exploring the hotel, I discover the Window on the River, The Floatel's Art Gallery, which is quite unique. There are Jogen Chowdhury works on show amongst football paintings left over from a World Cup exhibition.

Anchor, the new lounge bar on the ground floor, is an intimate place. There are anchors on the walls, reproductions of nautical paintings and the focus remains on the river with nothing, not even piped music to disturb that. Most requests are restricted to wine, beer and whisky—my demand for a margarita from their comprehensive menu causes enthusiastic scuttling to find the right glass and the drink is served with a

generous rimming of salt. The small eats menu is fairly comprehensive as well, including seafood and mezzes.

If you want to stay snuggled in bed and watch the river flow over breakfast, it's best to get it served in your room, like I did. But to start your day on a more healthy note, head to the newly opened health club which does business from 6.30a.m. Situated in the Floatel's grounds, it is stocked with treadmills, cycles and has a steam room and Jacuzzi.

What The Floatel offers is an experience on the riverside with friendly service and a view that no hotel in the city can match.

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—ANJANA BASU

