



CENTURION
Magazine

SPRING 2023

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Inside an Ocean villa: left: a palm-framed view to the sea

A World of its Own

I soar down tracks of burnished earth, cycling past houses painted spearmint blue, cascades of orchids hanging from wooden eaves and smallholding stalls piled high with fragrant galangal, tamarind and holy basil. A call to prayer echoes through thickets of banana palms and two courting hornbills swoop towards a treetop sanctuary to continue their avian flirtation.

This is the penultimate day of a weeklong trip to Àni, a private island estate situated on the eastern coast of 87sq km island Koh Yao Noi. The journey is an adventure in itself – a flight to Bangkok, another hop to Phuket, a drive across the island followed by an

An ethereal private-island resort in Thailand's Phang Nga Bay is a wellspring for indulgence, inspiration and enchantment.

By Jemima Sissons

hour's boat ride – nourished by snacks of Tom Yam-flavoured cashews and dried yarrow. Then it is a chug through jungle in an open-back jeep to what we will call home for a week.

Designed in the northern Thai Lanna style with steeply pitched multitiered roofs, the calm beachside estate comprises eight suites including two with two bedrooms, all allowing for complete privacy, a 43m infinity swimming pool, two massage suites, a gym, rooftop meditation area, yoga room and *sala* – a living temple where we are treated to gong baths and batik painting classes, in-pool chess and backgammon and even a water slide.

Àni is a company set up 13 years ago by Tim Reynolds, a founder of Jane Street Capital, alongside employees who cut their teeth together at the Aman

group. There are now four properties spanning Anguilla, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Dominican Republic, with more to open next year. It is one of the new wave of luxe all-inclusives; here your £11,484 a night (the starting price for the entire resort) includes all meals, ten spa treatments a day, eight hours a day of childcare, plus all-day beach and pool butler service.

For those seeking a private, restorative break, but with a sense of place, you'd be hard-pressed to find a more seductive spot. Rooms overlook the lapis bay and semi-private 300m beach (there are no private beaches, but we rarely see another soul on ours). Dusk is heralded with the throaty chirrup of tree frogs. Although it is predominantly a Muslim island, many religions coexist peacefully side by side, and our chef Yao's Buddhist fruit-filled shrines dot the property, alongside antique stone foo dragons.

Many days are spent lounging, even though excursions are part of the all-inclusive experience. On one memorable day, we are taken by sidecar and motorbike to paddy fields (comedy goggles included) where we feast on sticky black-rice coconut cakes overlooking lolling water buffalo and snoozy cranes. On another, a traditional longtail fishing boat spirits us to a private island, where chefs prepare a beachside barbecue of seared black sesame crusted tuna alongside generous goblets of Whispering Angel ("all inclusive" here means premium wines, too).



The temple-like dining hall juts into the pool

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I seek solace in the undulating paths, my body slowing to the rhythm of the island

Food is exquisite in its execution. On the first night, we are treated to a market feast, where melons have been shaped into swans (a 40-minute undertaking), honey and papaya chicken salad is heaped high and the island's most talented roti maker has been drafted in to craft pillowy discs. We dine surrounded by bowls of white orchids and rattan lights, with young dance students performing traditional Thai dances between courses. Keen to show off his multinational culinary skills, on another day Chef Yao serves mountains of exquisite sushi in a Japanese feast.

Rooms are simply but elegantly furnished – teak floors ice-rink smooth, scented gels in big bottles (an eco-tick) in the bathrooms, and clothes returned daily (all laundry is included too), beautifully folded in muslin. Treats appear daily, such as *kum chup*, sweet meats in the shape of fruits, crafted from mung beans and coconut milk. The staff-to-guest ratio of more than 2:1 means constant caretaking, overseen by the wonderful GM Andrew.

I choose to make this an active holiday. The gym offers a decent enough workout with Technogym equipment, there are paddleboards, kayaks and group yoga classes. One morning, I brave a Muay Thai lesson. By 7:01 am, beads of sweat are cascading down my brow as my legs are contorted into another impossible pose. I will leave this one to the experts, but I have earned my mound of mango and passion fruit at the generous breakfast spread.

I seek solace in the undulating paths, my body slowing to the rhythm of the island. I enjoy my daily sorties on foot or bike past food stalls, past gossiping ladies drinking papaya juice at beachside stands. I sup milk tea and watch morning market seekers buying furry brown salak fruit, piles of morning glory, winged beans and hibiscus leaves. I buy bags of potent chilli paste to smuggle back home. The glorious memories of my warm Thai nights fill my home at my weekly Southeast Asian cookouts, conjuring up Àni's warm embrace.