



W Retreat Koh Samui



Kamalaya



The Library Hotel Samui

ISLAND FEVER

A veteran voyageur on Koh Samui, Ellen Boonstra shares her favourite hotspots

Only an hour's flight from Bangkok, many international visitors bypass the capital and head straight for the white sandy beaches of Koh Samui. And who could blame them? Once a backpackers' secret, this 250-square-kilometre chunk of paradise in the Gulf of Thailand has gone remarkably upscale in recent years, with ample opportunity to vacation, dine or even detox in style.

1 THE WOW FACTOR

Last November, the much-anticipated W Retreat Koh Samui opened its doors on a secluded stretch of beach along the island's northern shore, marking the chic hotel brand's first foray into Southeast Asia. Famed for its innovative mix of fashion, music and entertainment, the all-villa beachfront resort has quickly established itself as the place to glimpse

and be glimpsed. Its gem in the tiara is the Woobar which, perched atop a hillside and open on three sides, offers island-goers stunning views of the Gulf of Thailand and the surrounding hillside while they party the night away.

2 HEALTHY RETREAT

Say 'detox' or 'diet' and many would-be guests think hardship and food deprivation. Not so at Kamalaya Koh Samui where diehard caffeine addicts can happily coexist alongside hardcore health nuts and compare notes on their activities at the restaurant's communal dining table. This upscale wellness sanctuary offers everything from traditional Asian healing therapies, naturopathy and weight-loss regimens, to yoga, tai chi and pampering spa treatments. Augmented with the retreat's private beachside setting in lush tropical gardens, it makes for the perfect place to de-stress and embrace a healthier lifestyle.

3 CLASSY CUISINE

If there's one place that's single-handedly transforming Koh Samui into a foodie destination, then the honors go to H Bistro at Hansar Samui resort. Executive chef Stephen Jean Dion, whose claim to fame includes two years as the private chef to the Jordanian Royal Family, serves up a mouthwatering mix of French-Mediterranean and Thai dishes. Dine inside the resort's classy restaurant, beachfront on the terrace overlooking neighbouring Koh Pha-Ngan island or lounge-style at The Chill Lounge upstairs.

4 ECO & ZEN

Established 25 years ago by a Chinese fisherman, the ecologically friendly Zazen Boutique Resort & Spa believes in 'leaving only footprints behind' by reducing, reusing and recycling wherever possible. Using all-natural materials, each room has been

designed to look like a charming Thai house. The resort is also home to what is arguably the island's most exclusive restaurant, Le Salon de Ti, which has a chef's table upstairs for 12. The restaurant is decorated with Louis XVI-style furniture and elegant white Murano chandeliers.

5 HIDDEN TREASURE

Tucked away on the secluded northwestern tip of the island, the Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui has become a trusted favorite among regulars and for good reason. Conceived by Bill Bensley, the architect who also designed the famous Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle in Chiang Rai, guests can luxuriate in gorgeous hillside villas set amidst tropical gardens and coconut groves. Rooms have a large plunge pool and shaded daybeds from which panoramic views of the Gulf of Thailand can be enjoyed.

6 MINIMALIST CHIC

The Library Hotel Samui is a super-trendy establishment in the heart of bustling Chaweng town popular among local socialites for a weekend getaway. People-watching here is as much fun as admiring the hotel's minimalist stark

white architecture, beautiful red-tiled swimming pool or inspired art installations. Accommodation is divided into 26 duplex suite and studio cabins scattered discretely among some beautifully lush vegetation.

7 HIGH SPIRITS

The newest star on Koh Samui's horizon is Spirit House Spa Resort & Restaurant. Although walking around the resort's compound with its fragrant spice garden, lotus pond, Thai monuments and beautiful murals depicting ancient deities, you'd never guess it used to be a collection of old temple ruins. The restoration work on this miniature village-cum-resort was meticulously done by artisans brought down from Chiang Mai, who used natural materials to stunning effect.

8 BEACH CLUB

Firmly entrenched on the international jetset roster, the Nikki Beach club knows how to throw a party. Located along the palm-lined shores of Lipa Noi Beach, the club attracts a steady following of revelers from around the globe who spend languid afternoons sipping cocktails to loungey tunes. Aptly named the 'Sexiest Place on Earth' by

the London Observer, the Nikki Beach concept has flourished as a lifestyle brand, which can be found in other holiday hotspots such as Miami Beach, Marbella and Marrakech, among others.

9 SUNSET DJS

A popular choice for a boozy brunch by the sea is Beach Republic, whose weekly Sunday Sessions with a live DJ keeps its customers entertained until well after sunset. The club - part of a self-contained resort on Lamai - takes its inspiration from beach clubs in the Mediterranean with a revolutionary twist. The republic flies its own red flag, waiters wear funky military-style uniforms and chilling out is an order.

10 TO THE NINES

9Gems is a Michelin-worthy restaurant and lounge bar in an exotic hilltop location overlooking Chaweng Beach and Chaweng Lake. Specializing in Asian fusion and tapas, the restaurant was conceived by Samui native Sathit Muangprom, whose love for food shines through in every homemade dish. With its white marble tabletops, transparent designer chairs and silk hanging lanterns, the venue exudes sophistication and style.



Zazen



Four Seasons Resort



9Gems

SMOOTH AS SILK

THAI operates daily flights to Samui. For more information, please visit www.thaiairways.com