

Thailand is one of the world's most adored destinations for loved-up newlyweds. **Sigourney Cantelo** discovered why on her honeymoon to the picture perfect locale.



Postcards from Paradise



“Imagine toasting your future while cruising the Andaman Sea on a luxury boat at sunset.”

DARE TO DREAM

Imagine dining on the sand beneath a canopy of stars while your personal chef tantalises your tastebuds with the finest Thai cuisine. Imagine toasting your future while cruising the Andaman sea on a luxury boat at sunset. Imagine riding an elephant to a secluded picnic spot in a lush jungle...

Almost anything you dare to dream can be arranged by luxury boutique hotel The Sarojin's resident 'Imagineer', Jowell Philemond-Montout. A kind of a super-concierge come charismatic cupid, Jowell determines each guest's getaway fantasies at the start of their stay, then organises their ultimate holiday (or honeymoon) experience. These incredible adventures you'll share with your spouse will create everlasting memories.

Named Asia's leading Awards, The Sarojin was designed to make you feel as though you are staying on a friend's private estate. Set in a beautifully manicured garden, the 56 residences (some with private infinity pools) are decorated in a chic modern

Thai style and, like the resort, have been designed with couples in mind: think sundecks for two, roomy stone baths, silk bathrobes and even a 'Do not disturb' coconut (no cardboard signs here).

The Sarojin lies between the white sandy beaches and lush mountains of Khao Lak in the Phang Nga province, just an hour north of Phuket airport by one of the Sarojin's luxury 4WDs.

When my husband Damien and I first arrived, we chatted with Jowell to create our perfect action-packed six-day itinerary.

The elephant and jungle canoe safari through Khao Lak-Lam Ru National Park was our first activity. Sitting on the elephant's neck, the gentle giant's large leathery ears flapped against my legs as we swung lazily through rubber plantations and around heavily wooded mountains. In true Sarojin style, our personal chauffeur followed on foot with chilled lemongrass scented towels and drinks at the ready.

By the end of the first week of our honeymoon, we had completed a private Thai cooking course, snorkelled in the Andaman Sea, blissed out in the spa and eaten delicious food at every opportunity.

On our last night at The Sarojin, our final adventure was a lavish surprise I planned especially for Damien.

Ever since Damien had proposed to me (in a private marquee overlooking Sydney Harbour), I had wanted to repay him with a special extravagant surprise of my own. In secret, Jowell and I had devised the ultimate plan. Jowell had half-buried love notes I had penned for Damien in glass bottles along a beach path, ready for him to discover as we took a sunset walk together.

I walked with Damien as he collected each message, until eventually we arrived at a stunning table specially set up for us to dine. After sipping on flutes of French champagne, Jowell (who happens to be a former Moulin Rouge dancer) gave us our own private salsa lesson before we were served a mouth-watering, five course Thai meal beneath the stars. The night was more amazing than I could have dreamed and was a memorable ending to what was only the beginning of our honeymoon.

PRIVATE RETREAT

After the fast paced adventures of The Sarojin, Damien and I wanted to slow our honeymooning pace down and journeyed to a secluded villa at Pimalai Resort at stunning Koh Lanta, one of 52 islands in the Krabi province.

You can travel to the resort by car and then ferry (it takes four hours from Phuket airport), but if you're honeymooning, a sea plane and speed boat combo will make for a romantic and unforgettable trip.

The 30 minute flight gave us a brilliant birds-eye view of the famed Phi Phi Islands - where scenes from the film *The Beach* were shot

ABOVE LEFT Sigourney and Damien on the MV Lady Sarojin.
ABOVE MIDDLE Waterfall dinner, The Sarojin.
ABOVE RIGHT Private plunge pool, Pimalai.
BELOW LEFT The beach, Sarojin.

RIGHT Sigourney
poolside, The Sarojin.
FAR RIGHT Elephant trekking
through Khao Lak-Lam Ru
National Park.
BELOW Pool villa, Bunkarika.
BELOW RIGHT On the
beach, The Sarojin.

– and of its seemingly prehistoric landscape of mountainous jungle erupting out of the cerulean sea. Feeling terribly glamorous and Bond-like, we landed on the sea just off Koh Lanta and were then whisked to the shore by a zippy speedboat.

Koh Lanta itself is just 30 kilometres long and six kilometres wide and unlike Phuket and Khao Lak, was barely touched by the massive Boxing Day tsunami that swept through the region three years ago. The island is a mecca for tourists who explore its sights by motorbike, however, as soon as we opened the door to our villa, Damien and I knew we wouldn't be going anywhere.

Pimalai offers all of the ingredients fantasies are made of. Split into two parts, the resort offers beach front villas on Ba Kan Tiang Bay and secluded hillside residences nestled in a densely vegetated mountain – the latter of which we were lucky enough to be checking into.

When we entered our villa, we were left speechless. Stretching out to our left was dense jungle, no evidence of humanity in sight. Directly in front, a stunning private infinity pool drew the eye out to a hypnotic, milky blue coloured horizon.

No expense was spared when creating the villas. The bedroom has a dreamy princess-



style four poster bed (covered in rose petals for our arrival) and the bathroom, complete with a spa, has divine views stretching to the ocean. The villas even have a fully equipped kitchen so there's no need to leave – unless the views of the beach below prove too tempting to resist.

So private was our villa that we were able to spend the next three glorious days sans clothes, only dressing to dine in the resort's stylish restaurants or to visit their traditional Thai style spa. The 'Koo Rak' package (6200 baht for two hours) provided us with our own jacuzzi, steam and scrub, plus a deep wedding-stress relieving massage with two therapists working in tandem. When it came to leave, we were so relaxed we almost missed check out!

SECLUDED SANCTUARY

Bundarika Villa on secluded Layan Beach was our third honeymoon stop. Although just 40 minutes from the Phuket township, the picturesque bay is buffered from the local tourist industry explosion by a surrounding nature reserve.

With a strong emphasis on wellness, Bundarika (which translates to white lotus) offers a range of holistic services. Opened in 2006, its 20 bungalows all have private pools, separate living rooms, cavernous ceilings and sleek, richly-timbered interiors.

Our villa was a seashell's throw to the beach and looked out to a deserted Crusoe-esque island that you can wade across to during low tide.

We eased into our time at Bundarika reading on the sun lounge and dozing to a soundtrack of whispering pine trees and cicada songs.

Eager for a bit of nightlife, we took the free shuttle into Patong beach (40 minutes) for dinner and by chance, happened across Joe's Downstairs, the sister restaurant to the award-winning Baan Rim Pa.

Lychee martinis were a perfect precursor to the restaurant's exciting Asian-French-Mexican fare – must-order's are the lobster quesadillas and fois gras shumai (dumplings).

We also checked out Patong's famous Bang La Road strip. Dodging drunken tourists and scantily clad ladyboys, we haggled our way through the night stalls before retreating to our secluded villa.

On our last night, we walked across to the island with a picnic and a bottle of bubbles to watch the sunset. Curled up in a secluded spot we discussed our future and watched the silhouettes of a Thai fisherman and his family bringing in the trawl in the dying light.

SHOP TIL YOU SPA

Before we returned home, we thought it best to prepare ourselves to return to normality with two days in Bangkok. The Shangri-La, with its award-winning Chi spa, luxurious rooms and stunning views of the Chao Phraya River was just the salve.

Plastic at the ready, we jumped on the Skytrain (only minutes from the hotel) and ventured up to Sukhumvit to lose ourselves in

the Emporium – a mega-mall that showcases all the big designers alongside some edgy local fashion labels such as Jaspal and Greyhound.

Other great shopping can be found along Silom Road (for Thai silks and homewares) and Siam Square (for trendy boutiques).

By day two, weary and shopped-out, we were eagerly anticipating our Yin Yang Harmonising massage (5600 baht each for two hours 20 minutes) at the Chi Spa.

Decorated in calming tones of gold, orange and chocolate, Chi Spa was inspired by Tibetan temples and offers the largest and most luxurious private spa suites in Bangkok.

Wrapped in the fluffiest of bathrobes, Damien and I offered our feet to therapists who gently washed them in a bath of lotus petals and then applied essential oils and a salt scrub as we sipped Pandanus tea.

Experiencing a Thai foot massage so expertly done almost sent me off to dream land – and that was just the start! Laying on the treatment beds, the meditative hum of a Tibetan singing bell chimed and I fell under Wanrung's rhythmic spell, drifting into a deep sleep. Damien and I emerged zen-like and as we prepared for our flight home, we made a vow to each other to return again soon, perhaps to celebrate our one year anniversary.

Packages to The Sarojin, Pimalai and Bundarika Villa can be arranged through Honeymoon Worldwide Holidays, call 1300 650 965. For more info on honeymooning in Thailand visit www.tourismthailand.org/

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