

A Bevy of Boutique

words : PERCY ROXAS



TOP: The lobby of Vie Hotel Bangkok mirrors the elegance of the entire property. **BELOW:** dualD2 baraquda Pattaya's cool, chic appeal is omnipresent in its rooms and facilities such as clockwise: the reception lobby, the pool area, and the sunset bar.

It's been a little less than 10 years since the boutique hotel trend in Thailand took off, and there has been no letting up. More and more boutique hotels – for a lack of a better term yet – are sprouting everywhere in the kingdom, with the common denominator of all being the relatively small size (nothing more than 200 rooms; some less than 20 rooms), intimate atmosphere, unique theme, and an obvious effort to stand-out apart from the rest.

What really is a boutique hotel? Put simply, it is a hotel that makes guests happy to be there, makes them feel special, makes them want to return soon, and makes them want to tell others. But as with many intangibles in the hotel industry, "boutique-ness," like "beauty" may be in the eye of the beholder. Below are some of the hottest and "hautest" boutique hotels in the country, each distinct in character but all giving guests a singular experience while in Thailand. Take your pick!

The Original Boutique: Swiss Lodge
Long before the term "boutique hotels" became vogue, there was Swiss Lodge on Convent Road, Silom. A family-business owned by Andre "Andy" Saint Ponnaz, it was first opened in 1952 as The Swiss Guest House by Andy's father, George, on the land belonging to his mother, Jamsie. To this day, many of the original guesthouse customers still use the Swiss Lodge when they are in town. The present building was constructed in 1989, and after its completion, Andy re-christened it as The Swiss Lodge.

The European-style boutique hotel is situated right in the heart of the bustling Silom business area, a Bangkok district noted for its many restaurants, nightlife, and shopping. It is noted also for its personalized service and attention to detail, as well as for its reasonable room rates.

More than just another whimsy boutique which is a product of a current fad, The Swiss Lodge has always been operated by a management team that uses the administrative technologies and procedures developed by L. Ron Hubbard, an American philosopher and philanthropist. It has been recognized as a "model of administrative know-how" by many business organizations and continues to maintain one of the highest levels of occupancy in any Bangkok hotel.

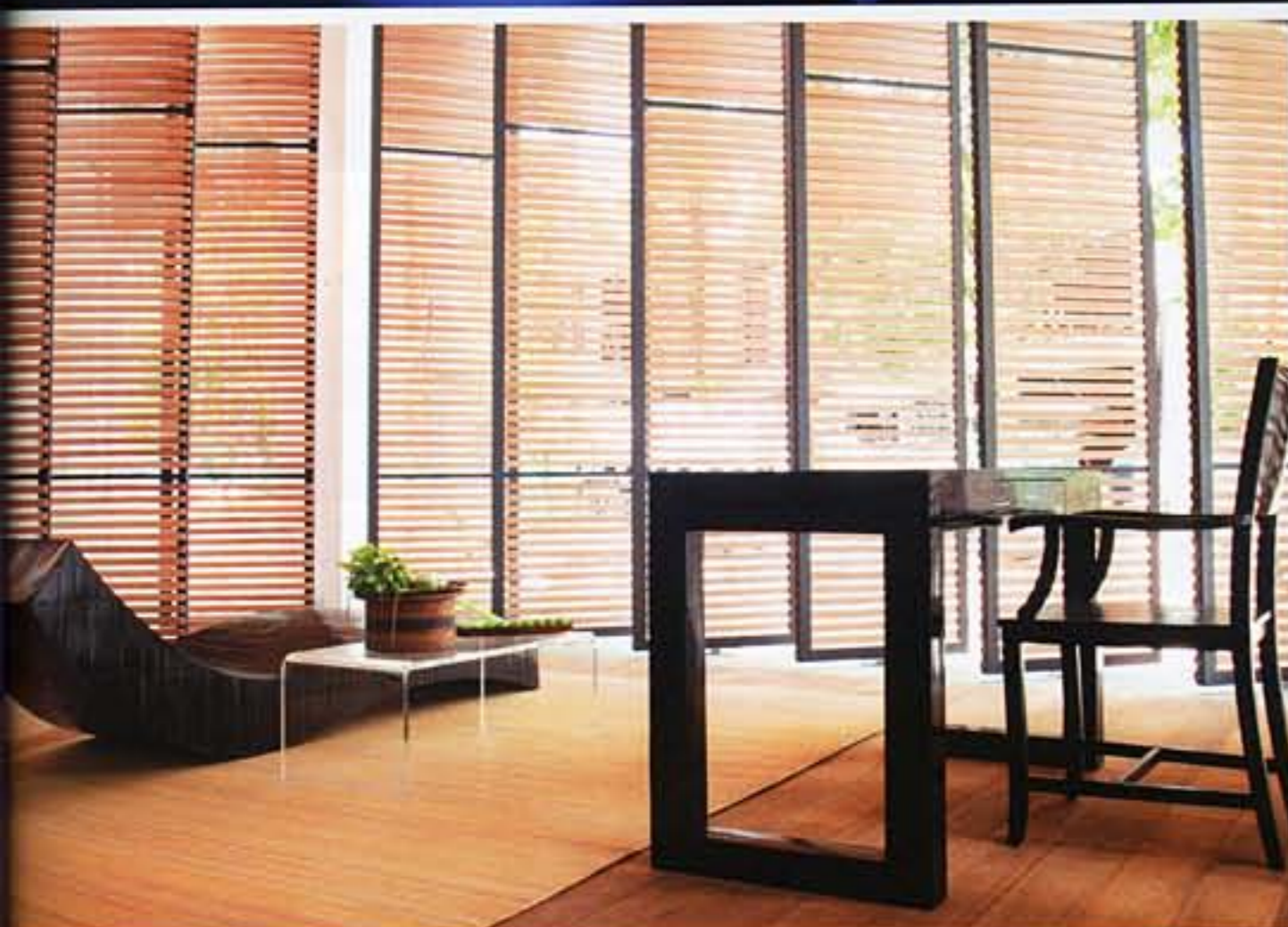
Because the hotel has been here for a while, don't expect the hip and sleek – as most boutiques are known for – in your rooms and suites. In fact, those used to rooms with high ceilings, en suite bathrooms, high art, plasma TV, and all, will be a bit disappointed

'Haute' hotels in Thailand that promise singular experiences to guests

Feature



ADULT-ORIENTED: Bhundari Resort & Spa, A Centara resort on Koh Samui, is a tropical celebration of privacy and unabashed luxury. **INSET:** The romantic bathroom opens to a breathtaking seaview.



here. But all the accommodations, designed for comfort and privacy, are elegant in a subtle way. They are clean, well-maintained, and well, reasonably priced.

Suite 802, where we stayed was quite cozy. As expected, it includes a separate sitting and entertainment area, a private bar and work space. Complimentary internet is available in every room. The queen-size bed on the separate bedroom is quite comfy. There's a spacious wardrobe, a second TV, and a bathroom that includes a bathtub and separate shower to wash the jetlag away. There are four categories of accommodation: Superior Rooms, Deluxe Rooms, Suites, and a single VIP Room, which you have to book in advance to make sure you get it.

One of the hotel's best advantages is its location. Silom area boasts excellent daytime shopping, night-markets, restaurants, pubs, bookshops, fitness centers as well as international medical services. Patpong and Silom 4 is close by, and Lumpini Park is just jogs away. If that's not enough, the hotel is just a short walking distance from the Sky Train and subway stations, thus all of metropolitan Bangkok is within easy reach.

Oh, and you must not miss the in-house restaurant on the ground floor, Three on Convent, which serves full-flavored, California-inspired cuisine. **The Swiss Lodge, 3 Convent Road, Silom (BTS: Saladaeng Station); www.swisslodge.com**

Timeless: **Rachamankha, Chiang Mai**

Within the 700-year-old city walls of Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand is a boutique hotel that can take your breath away. Rachamankha, voted one of the world's best hotels by Conde Nast Traveler in 2005, is more like a work of art than a hotel.

Designed by one of Thailand's most renowned architects, Ong-ard Satrabhandu, and with interior and landscaping by an equally renowned designer, it consists of only 18 superior rooms, four deluxe rooms, and two two-bedroom suites set around two enclosed courtyards. There is a wonderful timeless quality to this hotel as if it has been here for centuries.

But in fact, the totally new hotel just opened in 2004, although it was patterned after the viharn (chapel) of the most revered temple in Lampang, the Wat Phrathat Lampang Luang. The hotel abounds with wonderfully serene and relaxing spaces that induce calm and quiet, enhanced by the extensive use of Asian antiques and objets d'art.

The architectural theme runs like a thread throughout the property,

completing and harmonizing the experience of cuisine, design, and hospitality. But there has been no compromise in the name of design with either guest convenience or comfort -- all the luxury facilities and amenities guests expect are present -- and privacy and serenity are guaranteed. **Rachamankha Hotel, 6 Rachamankha 9, Phra Singh, Chiang Mai; www.rachamankha.com**

Dazzling: **Dream Hotel, Bangkok**

Dream Hotel Bangkok blends the drama of the exotic East with the whimsy of the West. Perfectly located between the public transportation hubs and the clubbing capital, Sukhumvit 11, this ultra-modern boutique hotel offers 200 sleek rooms spread out over two locations.

As can be expected in hip hotels, the rooms feature 42-inch plasma TVs, pre-loaded iPods, CD+DVD players, mini bar, free Wi-Fi/LAN Internet -- the works. The beds are made with 300-count Egyptian cotton sheets and appear suspended in air due to the ethereal lighting seeping out from underneath -- creating an illusion of floating on a cloud.

The hotel is cool and chic and fun-loving, like its guests. So expect the unexpected, and the playful and the exciting, such as the hot nightlife activities at its Flava Restaurant and Bar. Since its creation, the bar has hosted parties for Maxim, a Black Eyed Peas private party, and a Tata Young music video, among many others.

Those who love glam and glitz parties will surely love Dream. It's very haute, and it dazzles. **Dream Hotel Bangkok, 10 Sukhumvit Soi 15 (BTS: Asoke Station); www.dreambkk.com**

Adult-Oriented: **Bhundhari Resort & Spa, Samui**

We know of some hotels that do not accept kids below 12. But the Bhundhari Spa Resort & Villas Samui, A Centara Resort -- a just-opened premium new four-star resort on Samui -- is the first, as we know of, to be marketed as an adult exclusive resort.

No, silly, it's not the triple X kind; the resort is being geared for the adult sector: honeymooners, couples, and individuals who are supposed to be on Samui for a quiet celebration and vacation -- without children.

"This is, we believe, one of the first resort hotels in Thailand to be aiming exclusively at this sector of the market," says Centara Group senior vice-president for sales and marketing, Chris Bailey. Thus, while the staff will pamper you with service, you will still have that peace and privacy all to yourself. "The idea is for complete,

TOP: Dream Hotel Bangkok's bedroom is well, "dreamy."
CENTER: Shapes, lines, and colors are everywhere at the designer boutique hotel on Samui, The Library. **BOTTOM:** Bangkok's LUX Hotel boasts an exclusive, intimate feel.

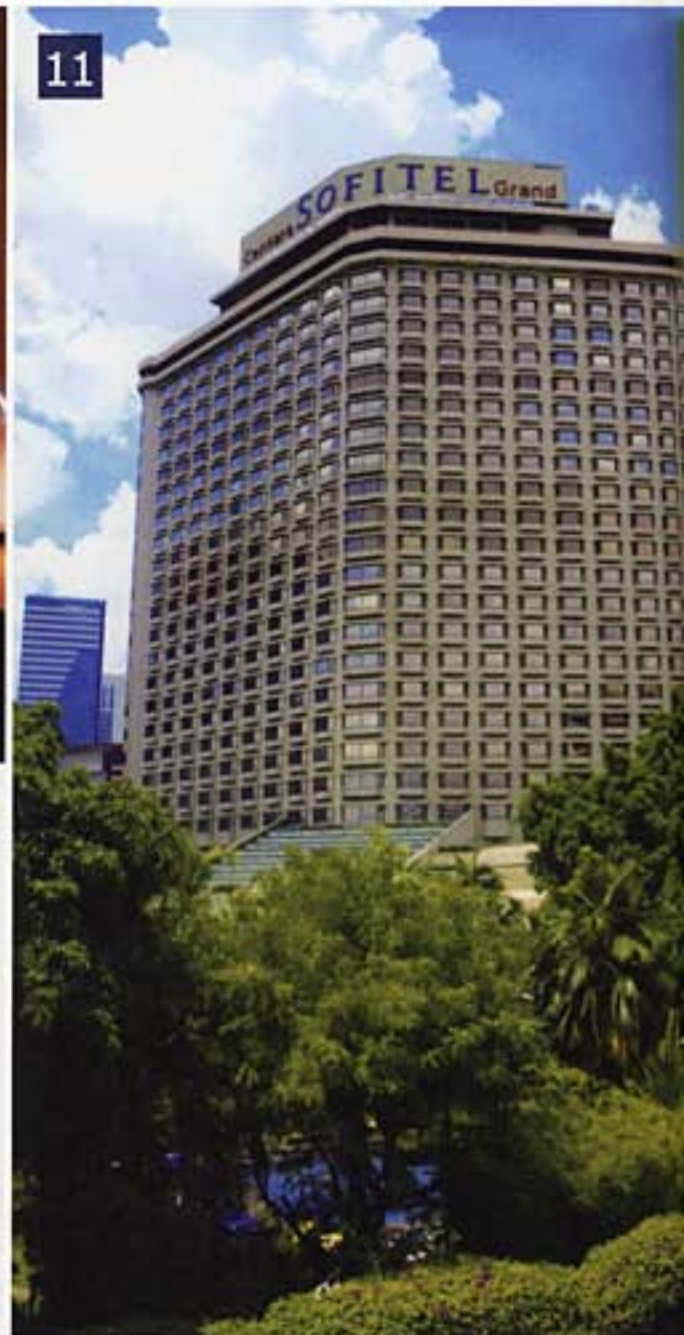


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{Bangkok}

8. Shangri-La Dream Deals

Shangri-La Hotel Bangkok has a "Dream Deals" package valid until Aug. 31 only. The package, for a minimum of two nights' stay, includes overnight accommodation (single or double occupancy), buffet breakfast, and limousine transfer upon arrival. Prices start at Bt5,850 per night (Deluxe Room) or Bt6,350 per night (Executive Riverview Room or Deluxe Balcony Room). Guests who prefer extra conveniences and services can opt to stay at a Horizon Club room at Bt7,650 per night; Bt8,450 per night in a Horizon Premiere room. **For more information and reservations, TEL: 02 206-8788 or FAX: 02 236-8566 or visit www.shangri-la.com**

9. VIE Spa Package

Those staying at Deluxe or Deluxe Suite rooms (price starts at Bt5,900 net) of Vie Hotel Bangkok can avail of the "Spa Package" at the VIE Spa until Oct. 31. The package involves a 60-minute signature treatment, the VIE balancing massage, for two persons. Conditions apply. **For more details and booking, TEL: 02 309-3939; www.viehotelbangkok.com**

10. Thai Resident Offer

Grand Sukhumvit Hotel Bangkok offers an exclusive "Thai Resident" package for Thai nationals and expatriates in Thailand. Valid from now until Sept 30, the package includes Silver deluxe accommodation, daily buffet breakfast at Cafe De Nimes for two persons, welcome drinks and a fruit plate upon arrival, late check-out until 4 p.m. (subject to availability), 20 percent discount at Bulakorn Spa, and 20 percent off on Food & Beverage at hotel outlet. **For more information and reservations, TEL: 02 207-9999, ext. 5213 or E-MAIL: reservation@grandsukhumvit.com**

11. Super Shopping

Sofitel Centara Grand Bangkok is introducing "Super Shopping Package" for residents of Thailand. The package prices start at Bt2,950 for a Superior Room

and Bt4,450 for a Deluxe-Dynasty Club Room. The package privileges include accommodation, complimentary daily breakfast at Chatuchak Cafe, coffee making facility in every room, complimentary daily fruits and flowers in every room, complimentary daily newspaper, free access to fitness center and sauna, 10 percent off at Spa Cenvaree, complimentary daily shuttle services to Chatuchak Market, Chidlom, Silom, Patpong area and BTS Skytrain (Morchit Station) and five percent discount card at Central Department Store. This package is valid until Dec 22. **For more information and reservations, TEL: 02 541-1234, ext. 4116-9 or visit www.centarahotelsresorts.com**

12. Land of Smiles Therapy

Spa Botanica offers the "Land of Smiles Therapy." The treatment is a traditional Thai healing massage without oil that releases energy blockages and unknots cramped muscles. This is followed by a hot Thai herbal compress suffused with camphor, kaffir lime, lemongrass, plai and tumeric to detox and nourish the skin and improve circulation. The therapy is 90 minutes long and costs Bt3,300++ per person for single or Bt2,900++ per person for couple and inclusive of fruit juice or herbal refreshments. **For more information or reservation, TEL: 02 344-8900, or E-MAIL: spabotanica@sukhothai.com**

13. Imperial Spa Package

The Imperial Spa of The Imperial Queen's Park Hotel is introducing the "Imperial Spa Package" to its guests. The package includes imperial foot ritual, choice of body envelopment (scrub and wrap), choice of massage and choice of facial treatment by Jurlique. The procedure takes two hours-and-forty five minutes long, and is valid until December. Price is Bt2,200 net. **For more information and reservations, TEL: 02 261-9000, ext. 5058, 5059**