



Monsoon Magic

Top: The Boathouse from the beach

From the frenetic island of Singapore to another, very different island - a 6.30pm flight on Tiger Airways takes us swiftly and efficiently to Phuket International Airport. There is a beaming chauffeur from Mom Tri's Boathouse and Villa Royale, waiting to whisk us away in air-conditioned comfort. But that's how it always is in Thailand - particularly in Phuket - and why we can't stay away from the place.

by Verne Maree

After a bracing cocktail at Mom Tri's Boathouse bar, a distinct reggae beat pulsing across the water draws us to the other end of Kata Bay – just a short beachstroll from the hotel. Soon, we're curling our toes in the sand at the Ska Bar, which is complete with appropriately dread-locked barman.

It's the time of the south-west monsoon, so there are waves. I grew up in Durban, South Africa, where the Indian Ocean waves crash so beautifully and rhythmically on long, golden shores that stretch for miles, so I like sea that moves, dances and makes a noise. As we sip our ice-cold beer and look out at the silver-tipped, curling indigo waves of the Andaman Sea, we marvel again at how lucky we are. Having done a full Friday's work in Singapore, it's only mid-evening

Should you go to Phuket during monsoon season

and already we're in Paradise - booked in, unpacked, and already as chilled as the frosty Singhas in front of us.

If what you want is a flat, calm ocean, and a guarantee that the children can swim safely every day, then the answer is - regrettably - no. We, however, don't

care about the season. In or out of season, the Phuket weather has invariably been good to us. Anyway, I enjoy the odd storm. There's something almost physically satisfying in watching a squall skimming in over the sea, changing it from azure blue to green and then to grey; then witnessing a fierce but short-lived tropical downfall, followed by a brief period of refreshing coolness until the blazing sun re-emerges again.

Accommodation

We spent our first night at The Boathouse, right

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on Kata Beach, and the next two at its sister-hotel, Villa Royale, up on the hillside just 300 metres away. They are both beautiful hotels with outstanding service, but they feel very different. The Boathouse is cosy, intimate and elegant - and it couldn't be in a better position. The gorgeous accommodation at Villa Royale, on the other hand, is almost palatial.

A shuttle is continuously available to take guests between the two hotels. There are a number of lovely pools at Villa Royale, which also has access to Kata Noi beach, but we used the shuttle to enjoy The Boathouse's pool, which is perfectly positioned right above the sand.

Food, Glorious Food!

Having already enjoyed splendid meals at The Boathouse Wine and Grill during previous visits, we looked forward this time to trying the deservedly celebrated Mom Tri's Kitchen at Villa Royale. Like the Wine and Grill, it overlooks the beautiful Andaman Sea. The wine list is phenomenal; with its 420 excellent vintages, it would be the envy of some of the world's top restaurants.

The lunch we had there was exquisite - made with light, fresh ingredients that left us with energy to enjoy the rest of the day and still look forward to dinner when the time came. I had perfectly chilled *gazpacho* and a plate of crispy herbed deep-fried calamari with Béarnaise, piquantly topped with deep-fried young lime-leaves. Roy had a hamburger of freshly minced seafood. Lunch dishes ranged from about S\$7 for soups to about \$18 for fresh grilled seabass.

We had to go back to Mom Tri's Kitchen for dinner the next night. The menu, a marvel of Thai-French fusion, is extensive and varied. If I'd known how huge the delicious *antipasto misto* would be, I would have either shared it or had it as a main course. Roy was too entranced by his delectable hot crab soufflé to help me out. My pan-grilled lamb chops with a mustard-seed crust, served with roasted vegetables, sautéed potatoes and a thyme *jus* were excellent. Other salivatory options included: salad of pan-grilled tiger prawns drizzled with a spicy lemongrass and mint dressing, and stir-fried rock lobster with onion, red pepper and black peppercorns.



Spa

And what do you do at the end of a weekend of blissful over-indulgence in wine and food? You have a spa experience, of course - and there is none better than Mom Tri's Spa Royale. We were treated to the Royale Treatment - three hours of sybaritic deep-cleansing and pampering - steam, bubbles, scrub wrap, soak and massage. Heavenly.

Pillars of Strength

The owner of the hotel, Mom Tri Devakul, is a well-known Thai architect. A man of enormous energy and vision, he must take credit for the fact that The Boathouse was not washed away by the tsunami. When the entire ground floor with all its contents was ripped out and smashed through the back of the hotel into the street, not one of its concrete pillars was knocked down. What's more, no-one was hurt.

Instead of just rebuilding what had been lost, Mom Tri took the opportunity to redesign and rejuvenate the hotel, by opening it up to the light and creating more expansive sea views over gorgeous Kata Beach, with its incredible sunsets.



The Boathouse is at 182 Koptanod Road, Kata Beach, and Villa Royale is at 12 Kata Noi Road, Kata Noi Beach. Visit www.boathousephuket.com and www.villaroyalephuket.com to find out more.