

Mom Tri's Boathouse

Phuket Celebration

by Verne Maree

What do you give a thoroughly spoilt husband for his birthday?

Unless he *really* needs another watch – and he probably doesn't – you take him to your favourite holiday spot. In our case, that's Phuket.

There's nothing like being right on the sea shore. As we walk across the open restaurant terrace to a table at the edge of Kata Beach, the last rays of a vermillion sunset light the waves curling lazily to shore. It's our second stay at **The Boathouse**, so we feel right at home. Over welcome drinks, we meet a fellow guest – Mike, from England, who tells us he's been coming here regularly for 16 years. It's that kind of place.

Kata Beach

I'd forgotten how beautiful Kata Beach is. A pool is all very well, but the appeal of sea and sand is irresistible. This idyllic curve of golden beach is nearly two kilometres from one rocky promontory to the other, good for an early morning jog or stroll – and so *clean*!

On our first day, I jeered at the red flag warning against



swimming. After all, I grew up braving the huge swells of the Indian Ocean, off the coast of KwaZulu-Natal. *This* water was perfect – clear and warm, rolling through in predictable sets, with hopeful surfers bobbing lazily around in-between catching the odd useful-but-sedate wave.

Day Two was another story entirely: monsoon winds transformed the sea into a turbulent mass awash with dangerous currents that would hurl you around and spit you out onto the beach (if you were lucky), every orifice full of sand. The tough surfers were still out there, but I stayed safely on the shore, no longer smirking.

Calm or turbulent, rain or shine, I love the unpredictability of monsoon seas – so much more interesting than a body of water like the Mediterranean that just lies there doing nothing, year in and year out.

Dolphin Pool Villa

From the website, you might not realise how close the two Dolphin Pool Villas are to the beach. Added to the property about two years ago, they're a real treat – perfect for a honeymoon or other special occasion.

For one thing, the villa comes with charming butler Dong, who gently ascertains each morning what you might be doing that day and then tries to make you as comfortable as possible while you're doing it. If, for example, you choose to bliss out on a private lounger on the hotel's raked-to-within-an-inch-of-its-life beach, he will bring you cool towels, cold water and even cubes of watermelon on kebab-sticks.

Our villa is massively spacious and completely wonderful. Two queen-sized beds together form a central oasis, flanked by his and hers wardrobes and desks. The en-suite bathroom is similarly divided into two identical primping areas. Aromatic oil-burners scent the air with lavender and luxury. No prizes for guessing who claims the big, gorgeous bath as her very own; luckily, the birthday boy is well pleased with his rain-shower.

A side door leads from the bathroom to another alfresco shower, and steps to a private and fairly big plunge pool where the rude can skinny-dip in reasonable privacy.





It's difficult for this water-baby to decide which body of water to immerse herself in: The Bulgari-fragrant bath? The infinity-edge plunge pool? The allure of the crystal hotel pool a few metres away, or the siren call of the Andaman Sea just beyond that?

Dining In

We've had some amazing meals in Phuket, most of them at either **Mom Tri's Boathouse Grill** or **Mom Tri's Kitchen** at Villa Royale, 300 metres up the road. Apart from these, there is also **Mom Tri's Boathouse Regatta** at Royal Phuket Marina, which opened in the early part of 2009. Chef Jean-Noel oversees the food in all the Mom Tri restaurants.

Over **breakfast** on the Boathouse's lovely verandah, which becomes the Boathouse Grill for lunch and dinner, you can munch marmalade toast and sip tea while surveying sea and sky and pondering how best to spend your day.

After a few lazy hours on the beach, we try **Oasis** for lunch. There's an entrance to it right next to our villa, though its proper entrance is from the road. It belongs to the Mom Tri's group and is headed by English chef Darren Wiper. His reputation for combining ingredients in interesting ways is borne out in our two main-course salads (THB280 each; about S\$12), mine featuring a medley of seafood and Roy's seared tuna with still-warm potato salad.

Something of a **cultural hub**, Mom Tri's two hotels are known for hosting events such as art exhibitions and literary nights. Neighbouring Villa Royale recently held a dinner theatre night – and you can imagine how popular that would be with expats on an island comparatively starved for culture.

Birthday Dinner

Flambéed cardboard would probably taste pretty good at a table with a view like this. As it is, the Boathouse Grill does dining as fine as anything you'll find in Singapore, and Roy's birthday dinner is as excellent as we expected.

Not competing with the sound of the sea, a three-piece band (Filipino, of course) plays wonderfully jazzy versions of old staples such as "Ain't Misbehaving" and "Girl from Ipanema" that we hum along to – quietly, at first.

From the chef's recommendations, we choose **seared scallops** (THB320) with mushroom and

basil *coulis* and **crab-meat ravioli** (THB360) with spinach and morel-shellfish sauce, followed by grilled Aussie **lamb chops** (THB850) with a ginger and port wine reduction for him and pan-fried **seabass fillet and tiger prawns** (THB720) for me.

Apart from the a la carte menu, you can also choose from two degustation menus – one French, one contemporary Thai – both of which look fantastic. They cost THB1,500 per head, or THB3,085 including wine-pairing, and that's really good value for world-class dining.

And, naturally, there was birthday cake!

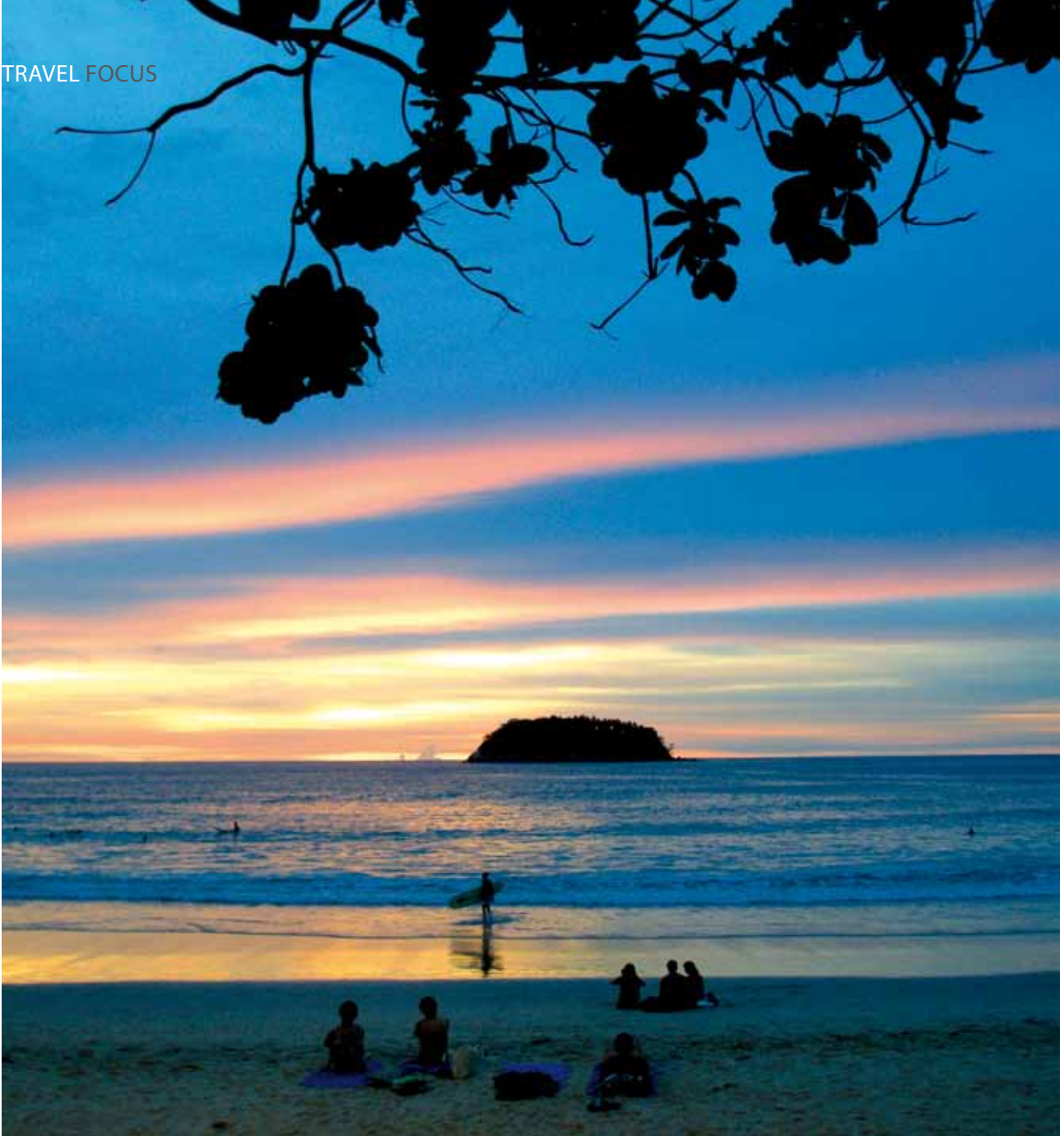


Out and About

We like the Boathouse because you don't feel confined, as can happen in a resort. Within a couple of minutes' walk you'll find umpteen coffee shops, bars, restaurants, convenience stores and massage salons; not to mention the ubiquitous Indian tailors, handy for when you need a new ball gown or dinner suit for a night out in Patong's red-lit Soi Bangla.

On our first night, we literally cross the road to **Two Chefs**, a Scandinavian eatery owned by a Norwegian and a Swede. It feels almost surreal to sit in the tropics nibbling on a mixed plate of pepper-smoked salmon, pickled herring and more (THB295) accompanied by shots of cold Aalborg at just THB100 apiece. (Good thing the hotel is just a short stagger away.) And the creamy lobster and asparagus thermidore (THB695) served in a length of bamboo is the best damn crustacean I've had since my 19th birthday dinner in a little restaurant in Cape Town, way, way back in the previous century.

If you want a full-on spa experience, you can catch a ride or stroll up the hill to **Mom Tri's Villa Royale Spa**. Otherwise, for excellent value and good service, I highly recommend the salubrious massage and beauty salon directly opposite Mom Tri's Boathouse: I think its name is **Justine's**. Only as we were leaving The Boathouse did I discover that you can arrange for the hotel's in-house masseuse to come to your room; that would be another good option.




Parting shot

I recently chatted to a Singapore expat who has been to Phuket a dozen times and more, every time to the same resort on Surin Beach. She says it's wonderful.

It's fun to scoff at the archetypal British family that treks to the same two-week package-holiday resort at Benidorm every year to scorch itself to a crisp in the Spanish sun; but it must be admitted that there's comfort in returning to a place that you already know you love. We humans are creatures of habit – and there's nothing wrong with that.



Getting There

Our 4.30pm Silkair flight on a Wednesday got us to Phuket airport, in the north of the island, by about 6pm and the hotel's efficient transfer service (about an hour in the private car) got us to our hotel in the south around 7.30pm. 



www.boathousephuket.com