



Mom Tri's Villa Royale

Phuket Celebration

by Verne Maree

Having spent two wonderful nights at Mom Tri's Boathouse for Roy's birthday (see our August 2010 issue for more), we check into Villa Royale, just 300 metres up the road on Kata Noi Beach. This equally beautiful resort is completely different in style and feel.

We're delighted to see we've been allocated Villa 28, one of two spacious suites that open onto a rectangular, Roman-style pool that's long enough to do laps in. There's also a bigger freshwater swimming pool farther down the hill and a seawater one to the right of that, on the edge of the property. Nearby is the fine-dining Mom Tri's Kitchen, below which the waves wash against the rocks.

Thai Style

Our spacious room is Royal Thai in style. Dark wood and general grandeur make for a rather dark effect, so we tend to keep the lights on. The bathroom has a lovely big bath and a separate shower. Out front is a patio with a table and a built-in lounger that begs to be curled up on with a book; but do call Housekeeping for a mosquito coil before the little varmints carry you off.

Villa Royale is ideal for couples and less so for families. Being built on a slope with lots of steps makes it unsuitable for anyone who is elderly or disabled.

Mom Tri's Kitchen

Since our last visit, the restaurant has been given a new deck that is even closer to the waves. This is **breakfast** in heaven: they'll make your carrot juice fresh for you, raw honey drips off the comb, and happy faces bring you your perfect omelette and your fragrant ginger and lemongrass tea.

But it's at night that this world-class fine-dining restaurant really comes into its own. Roy's big, light **hot crab soufflé** (THB370) is to die for; I plump for a **mango gazpacho** (THB190) that is a beautiful balance of fresh fruit and subtle spice. For mains, he has the succulent **veal cheek stew** (THB570) and I go local: **baked Phuket rock lobster** with red curry and crab paste (THB970) – sublime.

From the famously huge wine-list, we choose a bottle of very acceptable French house wine (THB1,600). The service is charming and impeccable, and a pianist tinkles away pleasantly on the baby grand. This is destination dining at its finest.

Villa Royale Spa

Another highlight of my stay at Villa Royale is a two-hour spa treat. I love this spa's glass-walled treatment rooms that look onto greenery and birdlife but can be instantly screened off with fine chick-blinds.

My treatment starts with sitting in a **steam-bath** for about ten minutes, then cooling off in the rocky **outdoor whirlpool**; you do this three times to relax the muscles, detoxify the system and stimulate circulation – *and* feel wonderful.

Then Bua gives me the best **traditional Thai massage** I've had, and that's saying something: when I'm in Thailand, I'm a massage junkie. What puts me in an even better mood is that it costs just THB1,000 after the 50-percent discount for being there between 10am and 1pm.





Out and About

You don't need a car on Phuket – tuk-tuks and taxis are everywhere – but it's nice to spend a day exploring at your own pace. Our Honda Jazz costs the equivalent of S\$100 through the hotel; you could pay less on the high street.

I'm struck by how beautiful the sea and the beaches are; they seem even lovelier than I remember them being a couple of years ago. Near the southern tip of the island, Mom Tri's Boathouse is on **Kata Beach**, which is good for walking and jogging; Villa Royale has steps down to the smaller **Kata Noi**, a favourite with locals when the surf is up.

Motoring up the western side of the island, we pass our old favourite, **Karon Beach**, and into the commercialised seafront of **Patong**. It's still an amazing beach – no wonder it spawned such a thriving if sleazy little town. From there, we pass through the unattractive **Kamala** (which may, admittedly, have a good beach), and north to the **Laguna** area.

Laguna has an upmarket tourist shopping precinct, where for old times' sake we have lunch at the little **Albatross Café**. I am rather nonplussed to be asked if I want my *tom yam gung* spicy – could this iconic Thai soup possibly be served any other way? Nevertheless, it is perfectly authentic and especially good washed down with an icy Singha. Stopping in at the **Jim Thompson** shop, I find some delightful clothes for our three-month-old granddaughter – and more reasonably priced than you might expect.

After dark, we drive back into Patong to revisit old haunts, mainly the **U2 bar** in seedy **Soi Bangla**. The cold I've picked up is not responding to my trusty remedy of Vitamin C, Panadol and caiparinhas, so we head back before they throw us out at 3am closing time (again).

Unless you're as super-confident as Roy is about negotiating the wobbly tourists and manic locals on bikes, underpowered tuk-tuks and other traffic hazards on Phuket's windy roads, I suggest you take a tuk-tuk and pay whatever they demand. (I'd suggest that we didn't drive, if I thought it would do any good.)

Getting There:

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

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