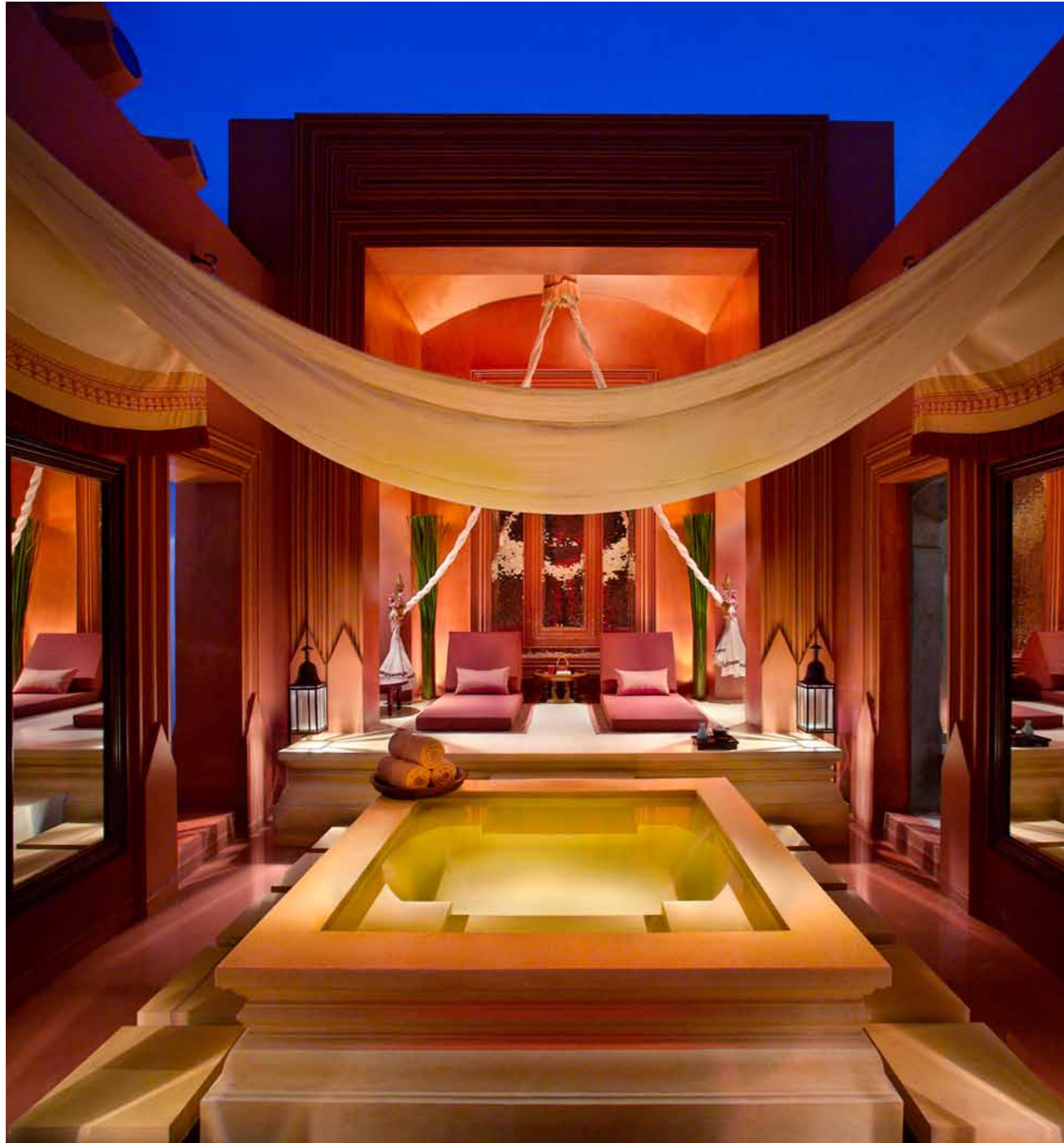


Escape
TO BARAI, HUA HIN

.....
Words by
JOSEPH
HKEIK



Love at First Sight

I trust you are familiar with the feeling of 'love at first sight'? If you are, it will make my job of telling you about this amazing journey at The Barai a lot easier! And if you are not, here is the first reason why you should put this destination at the top of your list.

Well this is how I felt by the time I reached the Salarai, a large man-made reservoir believed to be the source of serenity, healing, spirituality, peace and a life artery to its people.

But this is not where my journey started.

I had read that "The Barai is a journey where the art of architecture is your guide." The Barai was designed by renowned Thai architect and interior designer, Lek Bunnag. I had always appreciated good architecture and design, so I was intrigued. When I was told about the design philosophy behind the creation of The Barai, I couldn't wait to experience it.

Hyatt Regency Hua Hin, home to The Barai, is a two-hour drive from Bangkok. Not wanting to face another airport while on my busy schedule, this destination was especially appealing.

An integrated resort set in lush, landscaped gardens, the newly refurbished Regency Club rooms and facilities, and multiple award-winning Spa, were the best self-prescribed medicine I could imagine.

The Barai is located on 18 sq km of serene and tranquil property, including a 250-metre stretch of pristine white sandy beachfront. A premier luxury residential Destination Spa, it features eight exclusive residential Spa suites and 18 exotic treatment rooms. This truly is a unique spiritual sanctuary.

Upon arrival, I was very keen to make it to the Spa as I knew they were usually very busy at this time of year, so before I even unpacked, I asked to be shown to the arrival court. The softly spoken Spa manager welcomed me, asking me to suspend my expectation and

open up mentally, physically and spiritually in anticipation of the experiences to come.

The transition from the arrival court to the entrance gallery is smartly designed to help you leave the familiar behind. On a narrow path of stepping stones surrounded by pebbles and framed by tall green hedges, I was drawn by the sound of trickling water to an elegant fountain in the shape of a lotus flower at the entrance to the Spa. Dark and shadowy, with occasional beams of sunlight, I knew a delightful journey of discovery awaited. The glory of this passage helped me leave everything behind, including thinking, and I found myself mesmerised by the light and shadows draping this expansive earthy red colour from floor to ceiling. Cool air bathed my skin as I passed the wall of stars and it felt like my heart had almost stopped beating to minimise any interference with my journey.

I found myself taking the deepest breath I have taken in a long time as I reached the twin





passage to the Salarai. Although there is no right or wrong path to navigate, as I discovered much later, I was drawn to the light at the end of the first passage, leading to a sunny water court, the Salarai. As sunlight kissed the water and shadows danced on the ground, new colours were borne on the columns surrounding the Salarai. I felt inner peace and tranquillity and oneness within myself, like coming home after a long journey. I was given the time to be there in that moment to soak it up, before I was introduced to my Spa butler.

While sipping on a cool signature Rosella and Pineapple Tea, she helped choose my next journey. The treatments are based on the Thai belief of maintaining the vitality and balance of the four elements of water, earth, air and fire. Relaxing the body, soothing the mind and calming the spirit were my desired results, and a treatment based on the water element was designed for me to echo my needs.

I was guided under kaleidoscopically-coloured glass skylights, past intriguing glimpses of sculptures, sandy corridors and sunken gardens to my spacious and most elegant treatment wing.

My therapist combined ancient Thai health rituals with the best Western therapies to focus on balancing the element of water. I started my two-hour treatment with a Lavender Body Scrub with Vichy shower, followed by a Sweet Basil and Kaffir Lime Warm Compress Massage, combined with an oil massage, during which I drifted off into a meditative sleep.

After my treatment, I was shown to Tranquillity Court, a sandy courtyard where I enjoyed a snack of dry rose apple with signature tea. A narrow slot in the courtyard wall at the end of a 30m sunken lap pool brought glimpses of the sea and the sound of flirting waves. Although my journey was near its end, I was still enclosed in a sanctuary of serenity. I could have stayed there for hours.

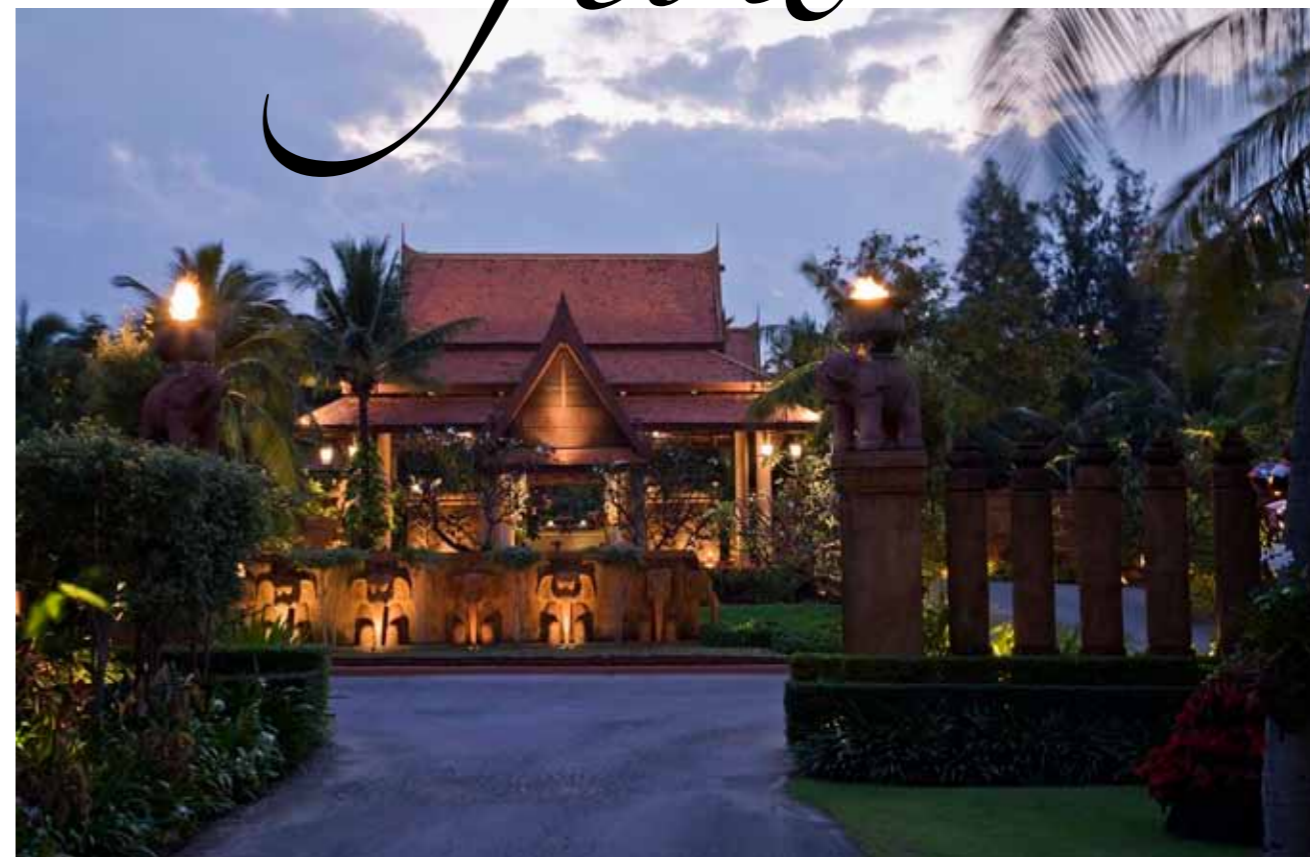
My journey ended at the historic McFarland House on the shores adjacent to The Barai. I was served a delightful and tasty 'water element' light meal to complement my Spa treatment. As I sat and gazed at the horizon, my mind roamed freely. The breeze on my face was like a rain of inner tranquillity.

Whether you are in love, recovering from a broken heart or looking for love, this place will enrich, heal and free your heart in readiness for your next journey in life. 🌿

Escape
TO ANANTARA, HUA HIN

.....
Words by
JOSEPH
HKEIK

*Go with the
flow*





Dining by Design at the beach is a magical way to end a day that started with yoga by the lagoon and a nourishing breakfast at the Sai Thong, followed by a few lazy hours lounging by the lagoon sipping on my newly discovered Taxi Meter drink.

A comfortable two-hour drive south-west of bustling Bangkok on a modern expressway, Anantara, Hua Hin, on the sunrise coast of the Gulf of Thailand, is the perfect destination to escape after a busy week at work.

Upon arrival, from the moment you step outside your air-conditioned car, friendliness surrounds you.

The sense of relaxation here is palpable.

As you meander through the 14 acres of this unique, village-style property, you feel warmth, luxury and comfort. This feeling of warmth continues throughout our personalised check-in to our Lagoon Room, where the design is a blend of local textures and modern luxuries.

'Anantara' translates roughly as 'the flow of water without borders', and with free-flowing lagoons, two centrepiece swimming pools and fresh sea breezes, this Anantara certainly lives up to its name.

THE SPA

Celebrating authentic Thai healing traditions with rich local ingredients, the Anantara Spa is the ideal sanctuary for both first-timers and discerning Spa-goers. Treatment rooms overlook private courtyard gardens with al fresco rain showers, adjoined by a lagoon filled with delicate lotus flowers. Associated with spiritual enlightenment, lotus flowers bloom out of the muddy water to rise above the surface in remarkable beauty.

The Spa staff are highly trained and help you choose your special journey according to your wellness needs. I embarked on the road to a more balanced lifestyle with a three-day recovery journey designed to boost physical, emotional and spiritual harmony. Infusions of herbs and plants expertly blended to achieve delicate flavours, luxurious aromas and powerful sensations highlighted the essence of my treatment.

I relaxed with an in-room Bath Ritual on Day 1, while on Day 2 awakened all my senses with a Floral Foot Ritual and traditional Thai massage. I completed my package on Day 3 with an Anantara Signature Facial, where delicate blends of jasmine oil, white orchid extract, green tea, pandan leaf and pink

lotus were gently massaged into my face to encourage cell renewal and oxygenation, while a herbal mask restored the natural balance of my skin. The treatments induced a deep state of relaxation and I nodded in and out of sleep, until finally my therapist gently awakened me to announce the completion of my facial, but not my journey.

As my therapist reinforced to me, the greatest journeys at the Anantara are felt, not told. Indeed I was amazed by how speechless I was about my experience. I felt so light and relaxed, having left behind all thought of personal material belongings, yet my heart and mind were full of inspiration and tranquillity.

THE ACTIVITIES

With a multitude of restaurants and cafes, the Anantara caters to all tastes and styles, and the quality of the food is exceptional. Our lunch in the cosy Wine Cellar, which caters for only four people, made us feel like celebrities. With privacy and a personal waiter, we enjoyed a scrumptious fresh BBQ grill platter matched with excellent local wine.

A highlight was our Dining by Design candlelit dinner on a secluded stretch of beach, which is a royal way to celebrate any special occasion, but for us was just a treat. You can choose from many other settings in the resort and create your own experience. The dedicated event organiser helped us design the evening and our personal butler anticipated our every need, yet maintained a discreet distance to allow us to enjoy this in peace. I can still taste the authentic flavours of the Oriental Spiced Tiger King Prawns and the incredible Coconut and Lemongrass Parfait with Mango Coulis. It was an unforgettable evening!

Hua Hin offers some of the best golf courses in Thailand and keen golfers will love the Anantara Hua Hin's Golf Discovery Package. You can tee off as the sun rises over a wide stretch of blue sea, then return to your luxurious seaside hideaway to join your loved one.

The Anantara is a very child-friendly environment. To instil tranquillity in your little treasures, you can sign them up for the morning children's art class, leaving you free to unwind, or perhaps even join the art



class yourself and get in touch with your creative side. With the help of internationally acclaimed artist Christopher Hogan, you can take home a lovely painting that will forever transport you to your relaxed Anantara state of mind. These classes are a big hit with corporate groups who use the experience for team building.

The Anantara cooking school also caters for kids, which means you need not feel guilty about taking advantage of the unique Spa journeys and beauty treatments on offer. While the magic fingers of your caring therapists transform you into your new you, your precious ones can love you back by preparing a delicious pizza meal that will be served hot and enjoyed by the whole family. You pinch yourself, but it's true: you feel welcomed, appreciated, valued, rejuvenated, pampered, ecstatic and proud. What else could you ask for?

The following morning, I rose early to capture a last glimpse of the tranquil lagoon as the lotus flowers gently open to the warmth of the sun. It has been said: "The heart of beings is like an unopened lotus. When the virtues of spirituality develop, therein the lotus blossoms." I meditated by the lagoon, snapping several photos of this serene place on the screen of my mind, hoping the spiritual enlightenment will last forever... or at least until I can again visit the Anantara. 🌸

Getting There

Thai Air flies from major Australian cities to Bangkok. The car journey from Bangkok to Hua Hin (2 hours) costs about \$75 AUD.

Staying There

Hyatt Regency offers a range of accommodation from rooms and suites to the Regency Club® and The Barai residential spa. www.huahin.regency.hyatt.com www.thebarai.com

The Anantara offers a range of rooms from premium gardens View, premium Seaview and deluxe garden view, superior lagoon, deluxe lagoon and suites. www.huahin.anantara.com

Hua Hin is noted for its many water activities, elephant trekking, Thai cooking classes and world class Spa treatments. For more information, visit www.tourismhuahin.com.

At Anantara Spa, the greatest journeys are felt, not told.