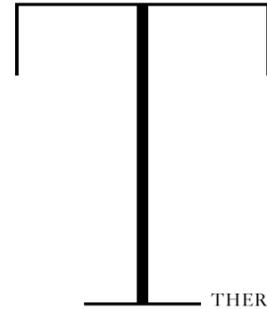


# KOH SAMUI FOR GROWN-UPS

SARAH ENGSTRAND *discovers Samujana in a corner of Thailand far away from the backpackers and full-moon parties*



THERE ARE TWO kinds of holidaymakers in this world: active ones and passive. The former pack their days like a perfectly organised Tetris game, barely pausing between a flurry of museums, hikes, fitness classes and the like. The latter is a more zen-like creature, usually found lazing on a beach, getting a massage or reading on the top deck. Historically, planning a holiday to accommodate both has been challenging, to say the least – but not anymore.

Samujana, a private luxury estate just 10 minutes from the quaint Koh Samui airport in Thailand, caters to holidaymakers of all temperaments. Unlike a hotel or a resort, you stay in your own private villa – ranging from one to eight bedrooms – and you can completely customise your stay.

Designed by architect Gary Fell, the villas are airy and relaxed, with a luxe-California vibe and natural materials at every turn. Each one is unique, with various amenities and different locally sourced art, but they all have a saltwater infinity pool, barbecue, full kitchen and, most notably, a villa manager. These are private butlers who help make your stay as easy as possible. In addition to cooking you breakfast each morning, they can help organise activities, special meals and day trips – they can even have the kitchen pre-stocked before you arrive or arrange for a private chef. Basically, it's your best life.

As we rumble up a long wooden path and pass through a little rickety gate, Samujana suddenly appears before us. Beautiful concrete villas built into the side of the mountain overlook the cyan water below; there's a quiet hum in the air as villa managers pass by on mopeds and a few stray guests meander by. This is not the Thailand of backpackers and full-moon parties, but a place to relax, regroup and recharge.

There are almost 30 villas scattered throughout the



Top and right: Samujana, a private luxury estate in Koh Samui, Thailand  
Left: Each Villa has its own distinctive features, Villa 12 has its own private cinema

estate, each offering something a bit different. The four-bed Villa 9 has a cosy cinema with red beanbag chairs and a massive games room, and the built-in wooden slide is a special attraction for visiting families. Just up the hill is Villa 12, a haven for fitness fanatics. The sprawling seven-bedroom villa has a dedicated spa sala, yoga pavilion and children's pool, plus a commercial-grade private gym, boxing ring, basketball court and trampoline. Of course, it has a few non-fitness indulgences too, like a Jacuzzi in each room and a 20-seat cinema. Villa 21 is an expansive labyrinth designed with corporate guests in mind. Like a self-contained hotel, the six-bedroom space has the largest gardens on the estate, spa rooms and a conference room that can seat up to 40 people.

It's this versatility that sets Samujana apart and allows it to adapt to a host of different guests, from reclusive Bitcoin moguls (who stayed for three months) to celebrities like Angelababy, who booked Villa 22 for her



## location



Villas are available in multiple configurations for varying needs



family. We stayed in Villa 27, a sprawling three-bedroom with sunken seating, a small fitness area and a multimedia room. It felt like home from the first plunge into the infinity pool.

We quickly fell into a comforting routine. I'd wake up before the sun to watch the sky light up over the water below, and then I'd read for an hour. Our villa manager, Cherry, arrived at 8am and brought out a double espresso with soy milk. (It's amazing how much better coffee is when you don't have to make it yourself!) Then, a quick 20 laps in the pool before breakfast. For a passive holidaymaker like myself, it was bliss.

Regrettably, there's only so much lying around by a pool one can do, so Samujana helped keep us busy during the afternoons. Within the estate itself, there's a private beach and an all-weather tennis court, but I wouldn't bother. The beach is pebbly and crowded from a nearby resort, and the incline is far too steep for a vacation –

all that sweating will ruin your holiday vibes. If you absolutely must leave the infinity pool behind, jump on the complimentary shuttle to the nearby beaches of Choeng Mon or Chaweng.

Samujana also has a fleet of boats available for charter, so you can spend the days snorkelling before watching the sun go down. The 13-metre-long luxury catamaran Kindred Spirit is especially tempting for large groups. The finest of its kind on the island, it's essentially a floating villa, complete with three staterooms, a full kitchen and a full crew. It can carry up to 15 guests, and you can explore the surrounding islands and snorkel in Koh Pha-Ngan. Don't worry about the kids, either; they can come aboard or stay in the villa with one of Thailand's top child-minders.

Our private chef kept us well-fed with a selection of Thai favourites such as grilled and steamed fish, tom yum goong and more. We also signed up for a private cooking

class and learned how to make a few of the basics, like Thai green curry, papaya salad and mango sticky rice. For something truly special, Samujana can even arrange a pop-up dinner party with one of the island's top restaurants or chefs.

While private chefs, villa managers and sunbathing are perfectly soul-fulfilling in my humble opinion, some people seem to seek a dose of wellness in their holidays. Samujana can cater to that, too. Thankfully, the resort seems to understand that a private in-villa massage can be just as healing as a rigorously structured meal plan. I, of course, opted for the former – and regret nothing. An hour-long oil massage right in the villa, with the waves lapping to our left and the calls of the blue Indian rollers on our right, was pure bliss. But of course, it's Koh Samui your way, so if juice fasts or slimming programmes are your thing, just speak with your villa manager. They can also arrange private fitness classes like Muay Thai, personal training, cross fit and yoga; try to schedule them for the

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early evening so you can watch the sunset from your Warrior Two.

It was hard to leave a place as tranquil as Samujana. In a world where privacy is the ultimate luxury, it delivers what so few can: the services of a five-star hotel in the comfort of home. After just a few nights, it becomes hard to imagine a real life outside of the concrete walls, outdoor shower and sunloungers – but reality beckons. As we check out, I'm reminded that the villas are available for purchase... but I think for now I'll have to be content to rent. #