

Same, same, but very different

You're spoilt for hotel choice in Thailand. JOHN BORTHWICK reviews a few that stand out from the crowd.

Thailand has half a million hotel rooms, probably more. Like snowflakes, no two are identical but just to be sure, here are eight places to lay your head that absolutely defy sameness.

WAVE, PATTAYA

Posed in flash aqua garb and with a cherry red mock-rod Cadillac parked out front, newest-kid-on-the-block the Wave hotel is like nothing that Pattaya Beach Road has seen before — and that's saying something. The luxury Art Deco boutique hotel samples Miami of the 1940s, serves scrumptious grub and has just 21 rooms, each with a sea view. Enough said.

■ wavepattaya.com

ATLANTA HOTEL, BANGKOK

Its glory days might be over but go and taste history here at the Atlanta. This eccentric dowager, off Sukhumvit, has a superb Bauhaus-Deco lobby, unchanged from the 1950s when it was the place to be. The rooms might be tired but the pool and public areas are fine. The impeccable, LA-style diner has a Fawlty-esque menu that cheekily declares, "Typically, the Atlanta is not moving with the times".

■ theatlantahotelbangkok.com



The Wave Hotel in Pattaya is a novel addition to Pattaya Beach Road. Picture: John Borthwick

AAVA, KHANOM, SURAT THANI

The little-known Gulf fishing port of Khanom has kilometres of white-sand beach, rare pink dolphins and, now, the luxurious, 28-room, Aava Resort and Spa. Voted by Tatler Travel Guide as one of its 101 Best Hotels in the World, Aava lives up to its Finnish name, meaning "open, spacious, calm". There are zero obligations here — except to take a dip, read a book, siphon a cocktail and check out the dolphins.

■ aavaresort.com

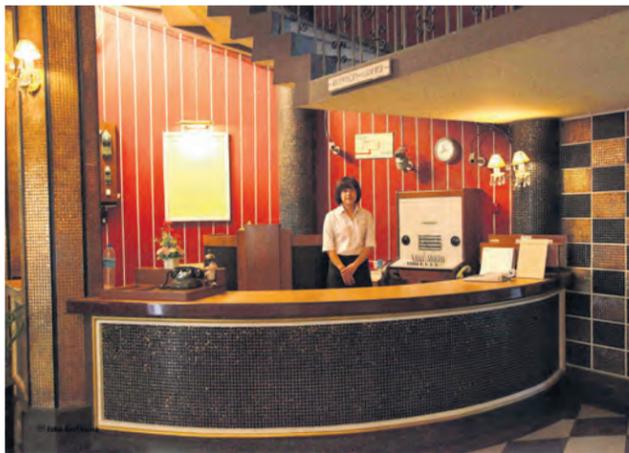
KOH YAO YAI VILLAGE, PHANG NGA BAY

Koh Yao Yai — "Big Long Island" — slumbers midway between Phuket and Krabi in magical Phang Nga Bay. It's a place of rubber plantations, easy kayaking, massages, village visits, home to the low-key, quality resort, Koh Yao Yai Village. Just what a Thailand island holiday used to be.

■ kohyaoyaiyavillage.com



Sample some luxury at the Aava in the little-known fishing port of Khanom.



The Atlanta Hotel lobby. Picture: John Borthwick

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Elephant Hills Rainforest Camp is an ideal base for wildlife spotting.

REMBRANDT HOTEL, BANGKOK
The Rembrandt is an oil painting, so to speak, as far as mid-city retreats go. Calm and stylish (without being hip and sniffy), it is conveniently placed on Sukhumvit Soi 18. Good rooftop pool and smart service, and the higher you go the better things get, especially in the Executive Club floors and the Rang Mahal fine Indian dining restaurant.
■ rembrandtbkk.com

FOUR SEASONS KOH SAMUI
Best to be feeling flush, flash or romantic — or all of the above — for this one. The exclusive Four Seasons delivers you a drop-dead/come-alive view from the

northwest tip of Samui Island. Front-stalls beachfront position, genius Bill Bensley design, your own private pool, top spa (of course), exceptional restaurant and service to match.
■ fourseasons.com/kohsamui

ELEPHANT HILLS RAINFOREST CAMP, PHANG NGA
Khao Sok National Park on the mainland north of Phuket is one of South East Asia's biggest and finest wildernesses. At Elephant Hills Rainforest Camp you are stabled — in a very refined sense of the word — in a floating, tented camp on the vast waters of Cheow Larn Lake, from where you can range out in kayak, truck or on

foot to spot langurs, gibbon and perhaps hornbills. Canapes and sundowners sighted daily.
■ elephant-hills.com

THE SAROJIN, KHAO LAK
The Sarojin sits on an endless shore with not a sun-lounger or speedboat in sight. As we breakfast at the 56-room resort the manager says, in passing, "Think of here as though you're in a friend's estate". Which I surely will do, once I gather some friends with an Andaman seafront estate. Meanwhile, The Sarojin's spa and cellar (awarded "Thailand's Best Wine List" in 2012) and fine table compensate perfectly.
■ thesarojin.com



A Rainforest Camp bedroom.

Here are eight places to lay your head that absolutely defy sameness.



Dining by the sea at The Sarojin.






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