

## Amazing, unforgettable attractions of Thailand



PANORAMIC VIEWS: The Cape Panwa Hotel complex, Phuket, sits on top of a hill and is surrounded by the Andaman Sea.

Rama Gaind, puts in a nutshell, the highlights of a remarkably memorable tour of Thailand.

Thailand is a treasured hotspot for tourists and Indian filmmakers alike. This number one location destination for Bollywood films, is now also the venue for shooting Hindi television commercials.

Amazing Thailand was the backdrop for PepsiCo's mango drink, Slice, in which actress Katrina Kaif celebrates the thought of "Sabr Ka Phal Meetha Hota Hai" as the first chapter in Aamsutra.

Indian filmmakers are drawn to this kingdom for many reasons: exotic locales, sparking beaches, rich cultural heritage, attractive film production costs and incentives from the Thailand Film Office.

Some of the films shot in Thailand include the new Salman Khan film *Ready* directed by Anees Bazmee,

*Rascals* starring Sanjay Dutt, director Zoya Akhtar's *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* with Hrithik Roshan, Nikhil Advani's *Chandni Chowk to China* and Anthony D'Souza's directorial debut *Blue*.

According to statistics from the Thailand Ministry of Tourism and Sports, tourists numbered 15,841,683 in 2010, an increase of 11.96 per cent compared with 2009.

Estimates are that more than 60,000 people of Indian origin (notably from Punjab, Gujarat and a small Tamil community) live mainly in the cities. I met some of them on my recent visit to Bangkok, Phuket, Khao Lak, Khao Sok and Koh Samui.

The capital Bangkok is a chic, urban city with a remarkable skyline and much-needed seclusion at the Cape House Serviced Apartments. Spiritual comfort was free-for-all at the Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha, while Bangkok's 'Little India' flourishes at the Pahurat Market which is home to a thriving Indian community made up largely of Hindus and Sikhs who have been living there for generations.

The sojourn at Cape Panwa Hotel and Spa, in Phuket, was memorable especially dining under the stars at Panwa House (a splendid period mansion with a private beachfront), the lunch excursion to Racha and Coral Islands on the luxury Panwa Princess yacht and basking in the beauty of the Andaman Sea. Another highlight was partaking of some fine dining with royal Thai cuisine at the Blue Elephant Phuket which is housed in an architecturally stunning Chinpracha mansion.

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Just 20 minutes north of Phuket's international airport, Aleenta Phuket-Phang Nga is an intimate retreat with its own stretch of Natai Beach. Founder and managing director of Aleenta Resorts Anchalika Kijkanakorn has to be commended for spearheading a campaign to rebuild damaged reef ecosystems in Phuket's Phang Nga area.

### Ideal for families

Venturing further south, Kantary Beach Hotel Villas & Suites Khao Lak is the perfect spot for family holidays. Swim and snorkel with a school of fish on a trip to Similan Islands and be mesmerised by breathtaking panoramic views.

Become captivated by the brilliance of nature when you stay at the Elephant Hills Main Camp at Khao Sok and participate in an exhilarating canoe safari down the Sok River and feed, scrub and wash an elephant – the largest land animal in south-east Asia.

Explore Cheow Larn Lake in the heart of Khao Sok National Park in a long tail boat as you head to the 'Guilin' of Thailand. Luxury floating tents at the Elephant Hills Rainforest Camp are the platform from where you can swim in the emerald waters, self-paddle your canoe through the klongs and channels or go on a wildlife night safari. Spectacular.

Now what better way is there to further delight yourself except by crossing the Gulf of Thailand on a ferry to Koh Samui and unwinding at the sparkling Hansar Samui overlooking Bophut Bay. This is a haven of exceptional proportions. While here, you have to pamper yourself at the Luxsa Spa.

Indulgence doesn't come any better than this!

***Rama Gaiind was a guest of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, with accommodation in Bangkok, Phuket and Khao Lak hosted by Kasemkij Group; in Koh Samui by Hansar Samui;***

***and 3-Day Elephant Experience and Lake Safari hosted by Elephant Hills Luxury Tented Camp, Khao Sok.***

### DETAILS BOX

Contact the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Sydney, on (02) 9247 7549 or visit [www.tourismthailand.org](http://www.tourismthailand.org)

Thai Airways International flies from Australia to Bangkok, connecting with Bangkok Airlines services on national routes. Check out [www.thaiairways.com/](http://www.thaiairways.com/)

### Accommodation websites are:

Cape House Serviced Apartments, Bangkok – [www.capehouse.com/](http://www.capehouse.com/)

Aleenta Resort & Spa Phuket-Phang Nga on Natai Beach - <http://www.aleenta.com/>

Cape Panwa Hotel and Spa, Phuket – [www.capepanwa.com/](http://www.capepanwa.com/)

Kantary Beach Hotel Villas & Suites, Khao Lak – [www.kantarycollection.com](http://www.kantarycollection.com)

Elephant Hills is Thailand's first luxury tented camp – [www.elephant-hills.com](http://www.elephant-hills.com),

[www.elephant-hills.com/rainforest\\_camp.php](http://www.elephant-hills.com/rainforest_camp.php)

Visit Hansar Samui website at [www.hansarsamui.com/](http://www.hansarsamui.com/)

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INDULGENCE: The luxurious Hansar Samui with its infinity pool in the foreground and Bophut Bay at left.

**Short URL:** <http://www.theword.com.au/?p=9005>



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