

JULY - AUGUST 2009

fab Thai



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ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

Why young creatives are drawn to Siem Reap

DOWN THE ISLE

From the Chiang Mai hills to the Andaman seabed, say "I do" to Thailand

Thai the Knot

AS FAR AS DREAM WEDDINGS GO, THAILAND CASTS AN ENCHANTING SPELL. NEWLYWED **ALEXANDRA KARPLUS** SCOPES OUT THE KINGDOM'S DIVERSE NUPTIAL OPTIONS



An elaborate wedding procession at Mandarin Oriental Hotel Dhara Dhevi, Chiang Mai

I HAVE ONLY ONE REGRET REGARDING my recent beachfront wedding – it wasn't in Thailand. Don't get me wrong, Miami was wonderful and romantic, but the variety and value-for-money a ceremony in Koh Samui, Krabi, Chiang Mai or Phuket can offer is hard to beat.

A grand entrance made on elephant back, a hot-air balloon getaway, or a nuptial blessing from a Buddhist monk make up just some of the easily arranged options available. Add to the mix the natural beauty, impeccable service and rich culture of this idiosyncratic country, and there's no need to wonder why Thailand has become an attractive wedding destination.

Oonagh Perceval and Mark Browne were living in Melbourne when they decided to get married. Perceval's father had the Dublin church where his little girl was to be married picked out from birth, but Browne's family and friends were scattered throughout Australia. Location was an issue that needed to be resolved. "It was either we have the wedding in Ireland and everyone in Australia misses it, or vice versa," Browne says, "so we decided to have it in-between, so everyone had an equal opportunity to attend."

After suggestions from friends, online research and a number of consultations with a wedding planner, the couple decided on Koh Samui as their wedding destination. "It had always been a fantasy of mine to go to a tropical island, I'd never done that before. And this place [Melati] is just gorgeous," Perceval adds.

BEACH BLISS

Unlike some rather over-the-top resorts, Melati Beach Resort & Spa in Koh Samui recognises that bare is beautiful. For the Perceval-Browne ceremony, a wedding gazebo was set up on the resort's private beach. Powdery white sand and crystal blue waters with bright-coloured orchids scattered on the sand made for an already-spectacular setting, but the additions of orange paper lanterns hanging from palm trees, tropical cocktails and award-winning Thai cuisine saw the couple live out their dream wedding.

Perceval said she was quick to realise she would not be able to have an Irish wedding. "You can't take everything from a cold country and plonk it on a beach. You'd have a bride in a full-length, frou-frou dress, and the groom in his trousers, vest and jacket, both sweating like mad." But she wasn't looking for a super casual affair either. "The other extreme would have the bride in a boring sun dress and the groom in a Hawaiian shirt. We didn't want either. We wanted it simple and elegant, and that's what we got."

The couple said they especially fell in love with the giant Thai paper lanterns called *khom loy*. These lanterns are traditionally lit and set off into the sky, like balloons, before a wish is granted to whoever lets one go. The ritual allows guests to be involved and is aptly poignant. "No one had seen anything like it before," Browne enthuses.



Above, Thai-inspired table gifts
Below & opposite, seaside "I do's": the Perceval-Browne wedding at Koh Samui's Melati Beach Resort & Spa



ความเลียดใจเพียงอย่างเดียวที่ผมมีเกี่ยวกับงานแต่งงานริมทะเลของผมคือทะเลแห่งนั้นไม่ได้อยู่ในประเทศไทย แม้ว่าฮาวายจะสวยและโรแมนติก ทว่าประเทศไทยชนะขาดด้วยความหลากหลายของสถานที่และความคุ้มค่าของตัวเงิน เมื่อคุณอนุชา เพอร์ซิวา และมาร์ค บราวน์ ตัดสินใจจะแต่งงานกัน พวกเขาเสาะหาสถานที่ที่ลงตัว จากคำแนะนำของเพื่อน การค้นคว้าในอินเทอร์เน็ตและคำแนะนำของนักจัดงานแต่งงาน เกาะสมุยคือสถานที่ที่ลงตัวที่สุด

เมลาดิ บีช รีสอร์ท แอนด์ สปา ต่างจากรีสอร์ทอื่นๆ ด้วยแนวคิดที่ความโปร่งสบายคือความงาม ระเบียบที่จัดงานแต่งงานตั้งอยู่บนชายหาดส่วนตัว งานแต่งงานของเพอร์ซิวัลและบราวน์โรยด้วยดอกกล้วยไม้สีสดบนหาดทรายขาวสะอาด ตัดกับน้ำทะเลสีฟ้าใส สิ่งพิเศษคือโคมกระดาษสีส้มที่แขวนตามต้นปาล์ม ดอกทะเลและอาหารไทยขึ้นชื่อ



Thai Wedding CHECKLIST

1 CHOOSE YOUR STYLE

Samui's wedding options fit every taste and budget. Resorts, agencies and luxury villas offer everything from a simple ceremony to a full-blown extravaganza



RESORT WEDDINGS For as little as US\$2,000, Samui's resorts will take care of the details. Most packages include a free night in the hotel, a Thai or Western ceremony on the beach, bouquets and corsages, a private dinner, wedding cake and champagne. Some resorts throw in spa treatments and special touches like planting a "Love Tree" in the garden.



AGENCY WEDDINGS More expensive but more comprehensive. All of the above but with a personal wedding planner for pre-arrival arrangements, a team of staff on the day, dinner parties, a choice of venues/ceremonies, plus pro photography and fireworks. These can cost anything from US\$3,000 to US\$20,000 depending on the event's size and scope.



VILLA WEDDINGS At the top end of the scale, getting married in a luxury villa can still be cheaper than a standard wedding at home. For US\$20,000 and up, you can enjoy exclusive services and absolute privacy, staying in a palatial beach or hillside retreat. Packages include everything from design consultancy to hair and make-up. — Jules Kay

2 CHOOSE A WEDDING PLANNER

No need to reinvent the wheel. Let these professionals help you realise your vision



TAKE US TO THAILAND After Natalie Doherty's Thai wedding — in which Anna Robinson was the bridesmaid — the friends-turned-wedding-planners were sold on the idea of recreating similar magical experiences for future couples. www.takeustothailand.com



FARAWAY WEDDINGS A group of 15 planners can organise the perfect gala at a villa located on a quiet beach in Koh Samui (about 35 minutes from Chaweng). Tropical gardens, views of the sea and impeccable service all create a stunning venue. www.weddingsinthailand.com



CREATIVE EVENTS ASIA Perfect for couples looking for something away from the mainstream. A five-star resort on a beach surrounded by other top-end resorts is not the only way to go. www.creativeeventsasia.com



SIGNATURE VILLA WEDDINGS The high-end choice for sophisticates with money to spend. Get married in a luxury private villa beside an infinity pool overlooking the Gulf of Thailand — bespoke bliss. www.thesignatureweddings.com — Jules Kay & Alexandra Karplus

3 PRE-NUP IN BANGKOK

For extra savings, go to the capital for the dress, the bling and the party



TAILORING Sukhumvit Road is the place to head for threads. The capital's famous shopping street is jammed with tailors offering unbelievable deals on everything from silk shirts to Kashmir coats. Shop around because prices depend on your bargaining skills. Be aware that the special deals on offer outside the shop won't necessarily apply within; they are just teasers to get you interested. But the deals are still real, and if you choose wisely you can deck the whole wedding party out for a snip.



RINGS As you approach the river and intersection with Charoen Krung Road, wholesale jewellery shops abound. Most are family businesses with their own factories that import stones from all over the world. Once again, shop around, and if possible take someone who knows a diamond from a cubic zirconia. With a good eye and a strong heart you are sure to find the ultimate symbol of your love.



HENS AND BUCKS NIGHTS The city of angels also boasts some of the coolest nightspots in Asia. For a classic Bucks night, British and Irish pubs, including Gulliver's and The Dubliner on Sukhumvit Road, provide a good starting point. Hens on the other hand may prefer one of the trendy cocktail bars or sky lounges atop hotels such as the Millennium Hilton or State Tower — these options are pricey but spectacular. When it's time to hit the dance floor, Bed Supperclub, Q Bar and the recently opened Twisted Republic offer top tunes from international DJs, mixologist bartenders and high-tech light shows. For first-timers, sleazy Patpong shows may be high on the list of adventures, but they're overrated and expensive. — Jules Kay

4 DON'T PANIC

Your wedding day should be fun and exciting, not stressful and tiring. Here are Take Us to Thailand wedding planners Anna Robinson and Natalie Doherty's do's and don'ts on how to keep the preparation process as smooth as possible:



DO:
Spoil yourselves A wedding should be a time for celebration and for couples to actually spoil themselves with an experience that is completely unique and personalised.



Get your guests involved Turn your wedding into a holiday for yourself and your guests; encourage them to take some time out to enjoy the incredible culture and cuisine Thailand has to offer.



Embrace local, seasonal produce We love using local Thai produce; there is no better way to capture the local essence than by using Thai food and flowers.



Get an elephant Nothing beats entering your beach reception and married life than on the back of the Thai's national symbol for good luck!



DON'T:
Try to be a supercouple Ask your friends and family members for help, and seriously consider employing the services of a professional wedding planner.



Settle for something you don't want Don't let the pressure of trying to organise a perfect wedding get in the way of making it exactly what you want.



Forget to enjoy the day Make sure you leave plenty of time to get ready on the day, and also take a few moments with your partner during the wedding to stop, breath and absorb your perfect wedding experience.



PICTURE: TAKE US TO THAILAND

