

# Blissful seclusion

Self-contained getaway havens Samujana Retreats and Residences in Koh Samui and Point Yamu in Phuket offer visitors an atmosphere akin to the privacy of their homes, except with butler service and stunning ocean views. **By Jaime Ee**

**N**OT everybody who heads out to the resort islands of Phuket or Koh Samui do so because they subscribe to the sun-sand-drink-party-drink-again travel manifesto put out by the beach bars of Patong and Chaweng. They go to get away from it all, in an environment so secluded and self-contained that they do not have to bump into another fellow tourist for the duration of their stay.

Being this anti-social, of course, requires a fair amount of funds. Depending on the size of your stock portfolio or privately-owned conglomerate, your holiday decisions are likely to swing between "rent" or "buy" – not "non-smoking room with king bed and why can't breakfast be included in the room rate" minutiae.

Such is the premise of the private villas at luxury resorts such as Samujana Retreats and Residences in Koh Samui or Point Yamu in Phuket. Whether you book them for the night, the month or buy the entire villa as a holiday home, what you get is the privacy of your own home, with butler service. In the case of Point Yamu, there are full-service hotel facilities available including a spa and fitness centre. But in Samujana, it's like being in your own home – save for that stunning ocean view beyond your infinity pool – with your own domestic staff to clean and cook all your three meals a day.

There is no sense that the developers of Samujana were scrimping on space when they built their sprawling villas carved out of a hillside overlooking the sea off the north-eastern coast of Koh Samui. Just a 10-minute or so ride from the airport, the entire complex feels like a private estate, with each of the 33 villas only partially visible to passing cars. Instead of being influenced by Thai architecture, the buildings are thoroughly modern, with a heavy use of concrete and stone, and exotic features are limited to fabrics and little touches here and there.

Because it's an all-villa complex with no common facilities like a restaurant or spa, it really feels like you're staying in your own home, with a small team of staff appointed to look after your needs.

They're there from 8am to 6pm and are literally at your beck and call. If you want to cook your own meals, they will do the shopping for you or accompany you to the local market to haggle with the vendors on your behalf. When you're back, everything is washed and prepped so you just do the actual cooking yourself. If you get too lazy, they'll cook for you – simple but delicious, authentic Thai home cooking. Otherwise there's a "take-out" menu that you can pick from – the food is ordered and served at the dining table.

It's so self-contained you don't have to leave your villa at all. If you want a massage, a therapist can be arranged to iron out your twisted muscles as you lie on the full length sofas lining the huge covered patio/lounge area that looks out into the pool and the sea beyond. If you want to explore Koh Samui, a rental car can be arranged. Understandably, this costs a premium compared to what you might pay in Koh Samui itself, but the key here is convenience.

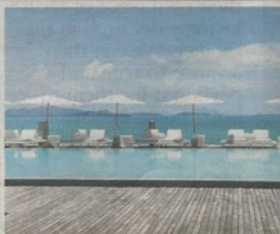
Alternatively, just stay in and practise doing nothing – whether it's reading in the lounge, watching TV in a separate entertainment room, going upstairs and enjoying the view from one of two bedrooms or exploring the other two bedrooms downstairs. There is no direct access to the beach from your own villa, though. But as always, if you need to touch some sand, there's someone to arrange that for you. The only decision that you have to make by yourself is this: rent or buy – that is the question.

You can ponder it at your next stop in Point Yamu, where the suffix "By COMO" is already a clear indication of what you're going to get: hotelier Christina Ong's signature clean lines and effortless chic from the all-white staff outfits to the distinctive Thai motifs – from Buddha Hand coat hooks to colourful tribal "tapestries" and ancient artefacts – scattered tastefully throughout the property.

While this is part of the main hotel (where you can still book a regular room), the real luxury is in the private villas spread out across the vast complex in two or three bedroom configurations. All-white interiors, nautical striped lounge furniture, dazzling turquoise infinity pool and the ubiquitous view of Phang Nga Bay capture the essence of COMO's minimalist and Italian designer Paola Navone's



**EFFORTLESS CHIC** (Right, above) From Buddha Hand coat hooks to colourful tribal 'tapestries' and ancient artefacts, distinctive, Thai motifs are scattered tastefully throughout Point Yamu; (below) there are ample opportunities to clean out your toxic lifestyle with a clean diet and detoxing spa treatments. **PHOTOS: JAIME EE**





#### LIKE A PRIVATE ESTATE

The buildings in Samujana are thoroughly modern, with a heavy use of concrete and stone, and exotic features are limited to fabrics and little touches here and there: (left) stunning ocean view beyond infinity pool; (top) bedroom; (below) outdoor living area.

PHOTOS: SAMUJANA



#### REAL LUXURY

(Left, above) Nautical striped lounge furniture, dazzling turquoise infinity pool and the ubiquitous view of Phang Nga Bay capture the essence of COMO's minimalism and Italian designer Paola Navone's aesthetic at Point Yamu. PHOTOS: JAIMIE E

aesthetique. Think glossy magazine photos of chic white sofas, glossy dining table tops and stainless steel kitchen fixtures, and imagine walking right into one.

The place is around two years old but you can still see the finishing touches being added to some of the other newly-built villas so it feels like you're stepping into a freshly minted resort. As there isn't much cover from trees where the buildings are, the sun is blindingly bright should you decide to step out after swimming in your own pool and polishing off all the snacks provided for you in the kitchen. (If you're looking for a private beach here as the only way to loll on the sand is if you join one of the speedboat tours to the surrounding islands).

As it is with COMO resorts, there are ample opportunities to clean out your toxic lifestyle with a clean diet and detoxing spa treatments. The in-house restaurant La Sirena is Italian by name but COMO Shambhala in spirit with an amazing spa-influenced breakfast spread of healthy fruit, smoothies and green options. It's big on raw cuisine although you can satisfy your pizza cravings with some very decent wood-fired versions. The Thai eatery Nahmyaa isn't to be sniffed at either, with authentic curries and salads on offer.

The spa is where you'll discover the Thai abdominal *chi* massage which purports to knead your internal organs out of their complacency. It's not the most comfortable of massages when your therapist pulls your stomach as if she's trying to pull your intestines out through your belly button. But the odd warming sensation in your body and post-massage lightness makes you an instant fan of this luxurious torture.

The beauty of Point Yamu is that it caters to each stage of your travel needs. If you're an occasional getaway seeker with no need for a sea view 24/7, a room in the main hotel is the perfect solution. If you're a family or a fan of the COMO philosophy, trying resisting the temptation to make more permanent arrangements in this designer home away from home.

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For more information, go to: [www.samujana.com](http://www.samujana.com) or <http://www.comohotels.com/pointyamu/>  
The writer was a guest of both resorts



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