

TRAVEL Escape

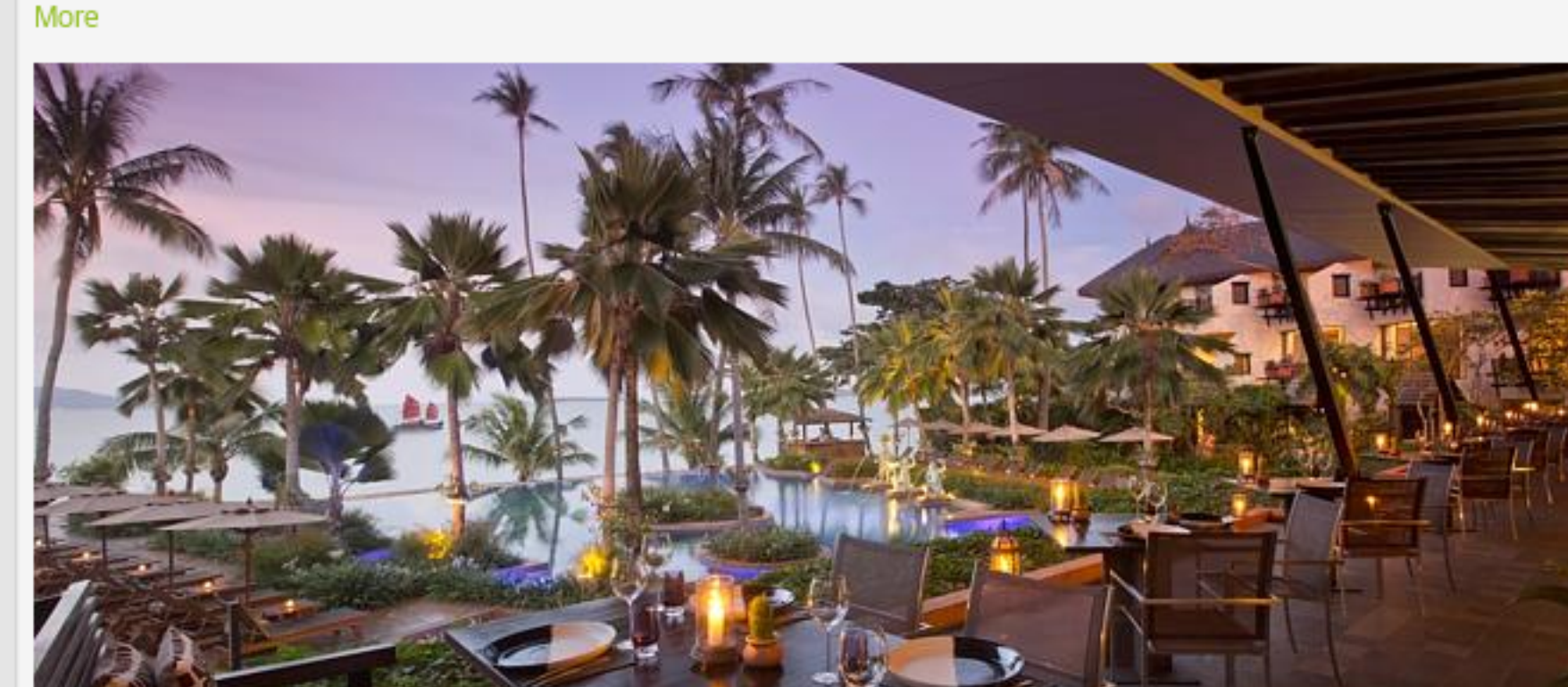
Find peace at Anantara Bophut Resort and Spa on Koh Samui, Thailand

ALISON CRISP ESCAPE JULY 13, 2014 12:00AM



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Enjoy wonderful views of the pool and bay at Full Moon restaurant.

IT'S late by the time I arrive at the Anantara Bophut Resort and Spa on the island of Koh Samui. My driver manoeuvres the car down a narrow driveway of ancient timber sleepers.

The lane is lined with lush vegetation and what seems like hundreds of burning oil lamps, which lead us to the reception where we are greeted by three smiling monkey statues.

My driver tells me that the monkey is the official mascot of Koh Samui, just as elephants are in Chang Mai.

I'm checked in promptly and offered a cool, soft-scented hand towel, welcome drink and a delicious square of coconut jelly to nibble on before being led away down stone steps lit by oil lamps, into a Thai garden filled with water lilies.

I feel my thoughts slip to the back of my mind and a wonderful sense of peace sweeps over my weary shoulders.



Eclipse Bar and restaurant.

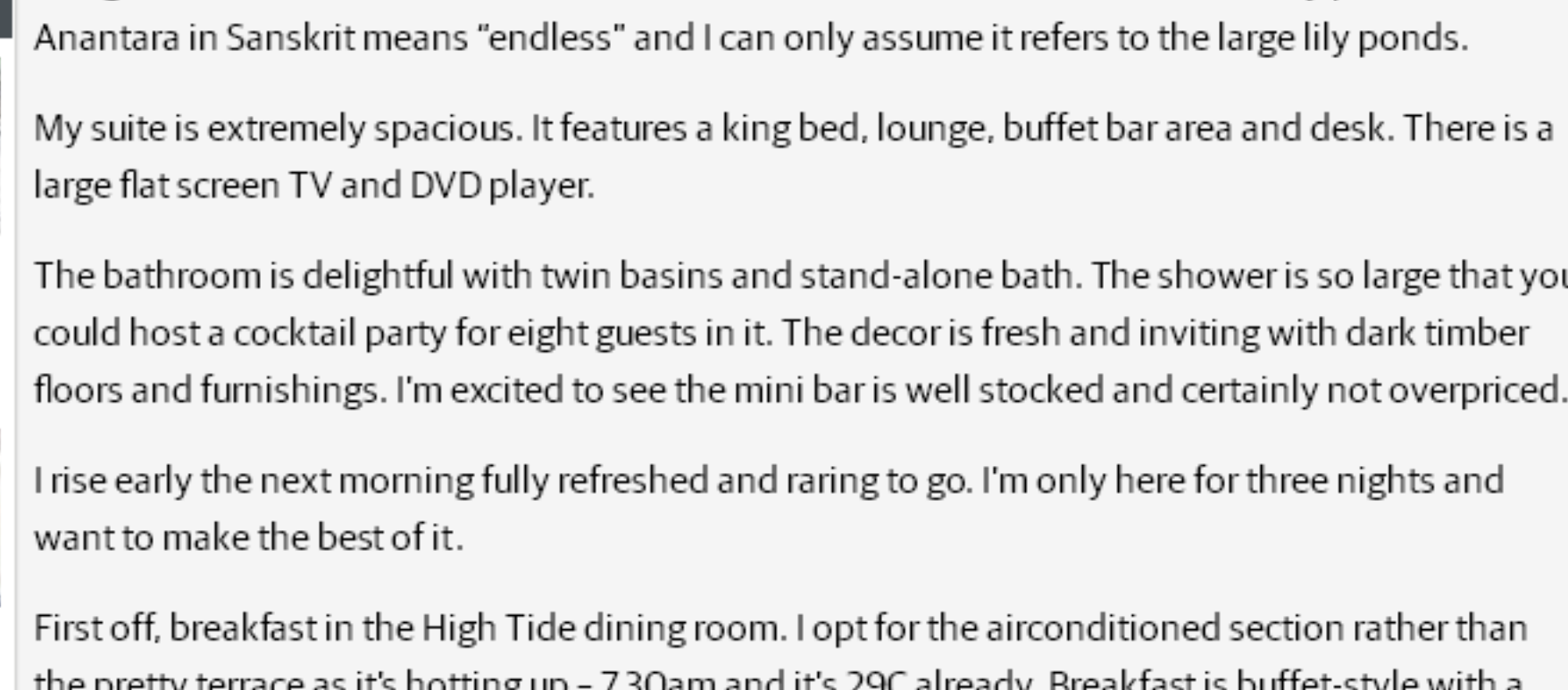
I'm staying in a lovely light-filled junior garden suite that looks on to the stunning Thai garden. The garden is the heart of the resort and has what seems like an endless water lily pool. The name Anantara in Sanskrit means "endless" and I can only assume it refers to the large lily ponds.

My suite is extremely spacious. It features a king bed, lounge, buffet bar area and desk. There is a large flat screen TV and DVD player.

The bathroom is delightful with twin basins and stand-alone bath. The shower is so large that you could host a cocktail party for eight guests in it. The decor is fresh and inviting with dark timber floors and furnishings. I'm excited to see the mini bar is well stocked and certainly not overpriced.

I rise early the next morning fully refreshed and raring to go. I'm only here for three nights and want to make the best of it.

First off, breakfast in the High Tide dining room. I opt for the airconditioned section rather than the pretty terrace as it's hotting up - 7.30am and it's 29C already. Breakfast is buffet-style with a mix of Western and Eastern cuisine.



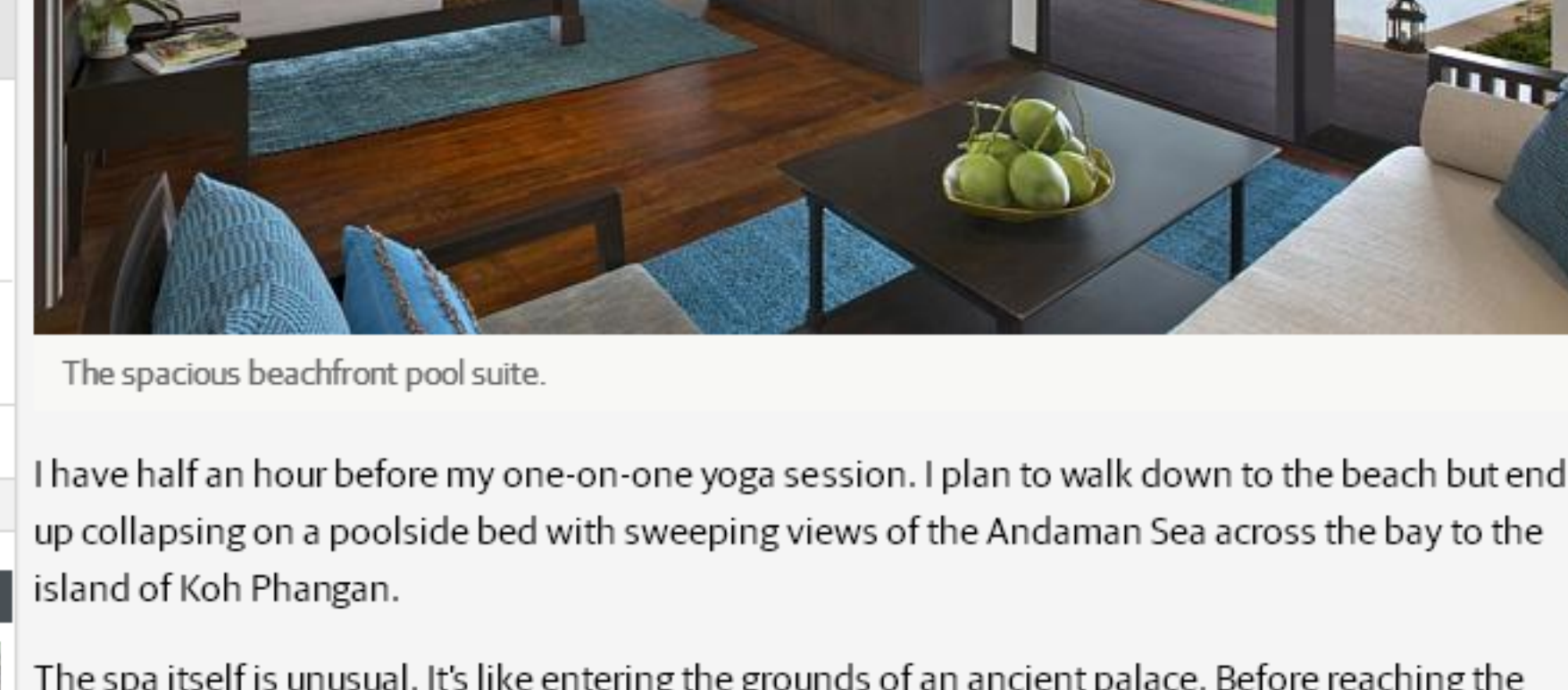
The spacious beachfront pool suite.

I have half an hour before my one-on-one yoga session. I plan to walk down to the beach but end up collapsing on a poolside bed with sweeping views of the Andaman Sea across the bay to the island of Koh Phangan.

The spa itself is unusual. It's like entering the grounds of an ancient palace. Before reaching the aged timber doors, you have to circumnavigate another water-lily-filled pond.

On stepping through the tall doors you realise you are on a wooden walkway in yet another large pond. The pond, which is contained within aged walls, houses the thatched roof reception area in the centre.

I'm escorted across another and through a maze of ancient walls until we come to a large walled garden with a pavilion at the end with my yoga teacher waiting patiently. As I make my way towards him along my path to enlightenment, I can't help thinking I should have worn my yoga pants and not my gaping shorts - should have had the Brazilian (wax that is, not the pool boy).



High Tide restaurant is open for all-day dining.

It's 12.45pm and I'm back at the spa for my Anantara Signature massage. The spa has six treatment rooms that look like Thai pavilions.

The rooms are spacious and a wall of glass looks on to a lush garden with sunken bath strewn with petals.

A quick change and I'm into a black disposable G-string and robe. I step into the garden and enjoy a ritual foot bath before heading back into the treatment room for a wonderfully firm 90-minute massage. Definitely worth the 4000 baht (about \$A132).

There are five dining options on offer for dinner. High Tide restaurant, where breakfast is served; while the resort's signature restaurant, Full Moon, is an open-air space which overlooks the pool with views of the bay. The Eclipse Bar and Ocean's Edge are a more casual affair or you can opt for a bit of romance and request a Dining by Design dinner. These can be set up anywhere around the resort but a favourite spot for these is the pavilions in the Thai garden.

With the memory of the sea view in mind, I opt for Full Moon and am keen to enjoy the lights of Koh Phangan across the bay. I kick off the evening with a cocktail and a complimentary smoked salmon hors d'oeuvre, a delicious clay pot with freshly baked bread arrives with oil, balsamic and pesto - heaven.

For the entree, the chef recommends the ragout of slow-braised lamb shank with mushroom risotto and shaved pates - it's a winner. The dish is rich, robust and almost dissolves on my tongue.

For my main, I opt for "The Ultimate" Wagyu beef, kurobuta pork, and veal, which emerge on a spear straight from the tandoor oven - very nice.

Although the dessert menu looks delicious - it's not an option tonight. Happily, I waddle back to my room to collapse on my giant bed.

On my second day I book myself in for a 4½-hour Thai Culinary Journey cooking class. The class is 3100 baht a person (\$A102) and includes a guided tour of the local market, herb garden tour, three-course cooking class, a Spice Spoons tote bag, cutting board, apron, recipes, photo and certificate.

Best of all, you get to sit down and enjoy the meal you cooked with a glass of wine.

Having done the cooking class you may want to try your hand at fruit and vegetable carving - it's not as easy as it looks, but it's fun.



The Royal Sea View suite.

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Getting there

Ethad Airways and Bangkok Airways offer daily one-stop connections from Brisbane to Koh Samui. The airlines offer the fastest travel option from Brisbane to Koh Samui, Thailand. Fly with Ethad Airways from Brisbane to Singapore and with Bangkok Airways from Singapore to Koh Samui.

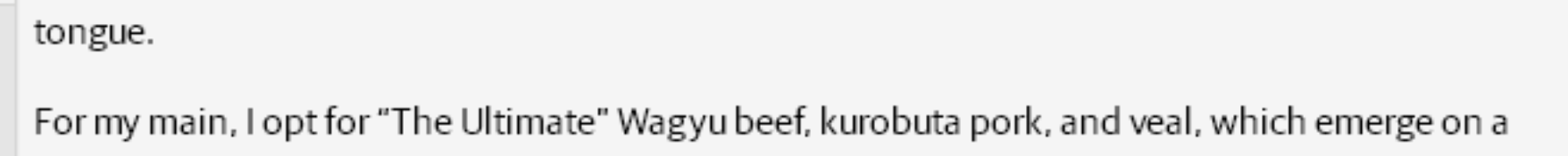
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