



THE SIAM

A Hidden Gem along the Chao Phraya

Text and photos by Dr Jeremy Lim, Editorial Board Member





Think of Bangkok and the image of a bustling metropolis springs to mind. Quiet, lazy afternoons sunbathing by the pool watching the world go by? Not really. At least that's what I thought. Until The Siam.

The Siam is a new boutique hotel by the Chao Phraya River. A member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World™ (SLH), it truly lives up to its branding. SLH is a portfolio group of over 520 of the world's finest small independent hotels, spread across 70 countries. How small is The Siam? It has only 39 rooms and is hence very cosy. Luxurious? Well, the smallest room is 860 square feet, and the common areas look and feel like a very well-maintained mansion. Oh, and I have never had a personal "room butler" before. It is no surprise to me that The Siam was described by the Luxury Travel Bible website as "the most exciting new hotel in Bangkok for 2012".

Finding the place by road was a little tricky. Our taxi driver missed the small, discreetly placed sign. Later, we discovered that many guests arrived by river taxi, and hotel staff would line up by the pier to welcome these guests arriving by water with garlands, refreshing citrus drinks and the traditional warmth of the Thai people. Thankfully, the initial stress of arriving was quickly forgotten when we started our tour of the hotel and its facilities.

The children loved the swimming pool that overlooked the river; my wife and daughter signed up for a cooking class; and I was completely taken by the impressive collection of books, posters and newspaper articles dating back to the turn of the last century. In fact, I spent quite some time just walking around the hotel, enjoying the architecture and memorabilia from a bygone era.

The hotel is owned by the Sukosol family, who are dubbed the "musical hoteliers" of Thailand. As the Sukosols include prominent musicians, artistes and actors among their ranks, The Siam's fine collection of vintage cameras, classic books and well-preserved invitations to a variety of concerts and performances were perhaps not surprising.

We stayed at The Siam for three nights, and started each day with breakfast in Chon Thai Restaurant (*chon* is Thai for "spoon"), which is made up of three century-old Thai teakwood houses. As the dishes were very authentically Thai, I was surprised to learn that the chef was a New Zealander. In fact, chef Blair Mathieson has been in Asia since 2006, including a two-year stint in Chiang Mai before he settled in Bangkok.

After breakfast, the children and I would enjoy our morning dip in the pool while the missus caught up with her reading in the room. We would



Cooking class at The Siam

The class began with a ride on a tuk-tuk to the local market. Chef Blair was talking to Mummy most of the time, explaining the different vegetables, fruits and meats that we saw. I was bored, though it was interesting to see the buckets of live fish and eels. Chef Blair said some of the fish and eels were for eating, but others were for releasing back into the river. Something about "karma".

Anyway, we made it back to the hotel in one piece. The tuk-tuk ride was fun but really bumpy. I was afraid our ingredients would fall out of the bags and ruin our cooking class. Cooking was really fun. We even wore aprons that we got to keep. Chef Blair explained to us (actually mainly Mummy) his philosophy of using very little seasoning or sauce, in order to let the "natural flavours come out". Seemed like we kept having to put more sauce though. He would tell us to put two spoons of sauce but after tasting, Chef Blair would say to add two more spoons! We cooked pad thai, papaya salad, a minced chicken dish and fried eggs. I liked the pad thai best as it wasn't spicy. Daddy must have liked our cooking as he ate everything up.

– Marianne Lim, aged 9





then head out to town by river boat, bypassing the traffic to get to Saphan Taksin station. From there, it was an easy train journey to Siam Paragon or wherever we decided to go. We spent a day at Kidzania, an edutainment park where children can role play various jobs and professions. Of course, our children had to “play doctor” although I think they had the most fun “fighting fire”. Wait till they grow up and join the workforce...

If a river trip and train journey sound like too much effort, just walking distance from the hotel is the Dusit Zoo, Vimanmek Teak Mansion and Grand Palace.

If one is feeling lazy and unenthusiastic about fighting the crowds in the malls and tourist traps, then just chillin’ in the hotel is a very reasonable option. There is a good collection of books, newspapers and magazines, reasonably new movies – like *Les Miserables* – can be called up and watched in one’s room or the movie theater, and the pool is always inviting. We spent one afternoon enjoying high tea at Cafe Cha, which overlooks the gorgeous courtyard. Wonderfully quaint experience: the sound of birds

chirping in the background, the gentle lilt of flowing water from the fountain... Heavenly! Elephant dung coffee (the Thai version of *kopi luwak*, or civet cat coffee) was offered, but I passed.

Sounds idyllic? Yes, but it comes with a pretty hefty price tag. Still, the few days away from the grind and toil of work were priceless. I must say I enjoyed Bangkok the most this time round, and looking back, it was

because I knew that no matter how busy or frenetic the city was, there was the tranquillity and beauty of The Siam to retreat to at the end of the day. **SMA**



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Dr Lim and his family's stay at The Siam was made possible by Small Luxury Hotels of the World™. SMA has partnered Small Luxury Hotels of the World™ to offer a special rate exclusive to all SMA members. Visit <http://slh.com/sma> to find out how you can indulge in an unforgettable experience.

Photos

1. A lush courtyard at The Siam
2. A luxurious yet cosy bedroom at The Siam
3. Dr Lim's daughter, Marianne whipping up a storm at her cooking class
4. The Siam's private pier
5. Bangkok's Grand Palace
6. Playing TV producer at Kidzania
7. Feeding a giraffe at Dusit Zoo
8. The unique elephant dung coffee
9. Old Time magazines (with covers featuring the Thai royal family) and vintage cameras on display at The Siam