



Dining by Design, Cooking with Creativity

At **Anantara Bophut Koh Samui Resort** not only can you dine in unique settings, but you can learn the nuances of Thai cuisine from a master chef.

Even if you're driving by Anantara, you can see that this resort is a hidden gem. An old-style drawbridge spans a lily-filled pond, with the road leading deep into a jungle garden. Definitely intriguing, and for those who venture up that drive there are many, many surprises that await even the most seasoned globetrotter. The atrium, sumptuous enough by anyone's standards, only leads the eye to a beautiful pond that stretches right down towards the restaurant, Full Moon Char Grill, and the sea beyond. The resort's a world apart from the rest of the island, a get-away destination all of its very own.

Eating at the restaurant is an intimate enough experience in itself, yet the management go to extraordinary lengths to make settings, if wished, still more secluded. They've come up with an

idea which is simply called 'Dining by Design'. This doesn't mean that you have to make up your very own menu from scratch, but refers instead to the way you can choose the setting and the décor, even before you get started on choosing one of the menus on offer.

For total seclusion, the amazing spa garden, which is entirely walled, guarantees the kind of privacy that usually only rock-stars and visiting dignitaries are used to. The setting is a small sala or pavilion at the far end of the garden. From your table you can look out onto old-growth trees, gently illuminated at night, and an exotic lawn.

Others may prefer the main garden with views out over the long pond, which is lit at night by

flaming torches. Seating is at either of two pavilions, and again privacy is de rigueur. The third choice is naturally the beach itself. Anantara, situated on the north coast in Bophut, faces out to Koh Pha-Ngan, and boasts one of the island's most romantic views. The beach, no matter what the season, is deserted at night, and a great setting for a memorable dinner.

When you book your table (you can do this via the website or by phone), you'll be put in touch with special staff who're responsible for private dinners, and they'll ask you what kind of occasion you wish to celebrate – people book these dinners for quite a variety of reasons. Some are on honeymoon, while others wish to propose to their beloved, while still others are coming as a group of friends or as a family. Staff can

quickly send information, such as photos, menus, decoration styles, and so on. For a romantic occasion, you might want, for example, candles laid out in a heart shape, or if it's a family dinner, a floral display, and if there are young children present, then lots of bright and colourful fabric, too. There are many possibilities, hence the 'by design' part of the dining experience. Staff are very agile at putting together just the right scenario, and can do so with 24 hours' notice, though if you ring on the morning of the same day, they can almost always accommodate you.

If you're having dinner in a secluded place, that means it's far away from the kitchen and therefore the food's going to be cold by the time it gets to your table, right? Normally, this would be the case, but in Anantara's case, they use a

kind of mobile kitchen which is just far enough away to preserve the feeling of seclusion. You'll also have your own private chef and private waitress. Neither will be hovering close by, but will be at a distance. If you'd like something, you'll have to wave – they will be ready – and then they'll come over. Unless you're using a megaphone, nobody's going to overhear any of your conversations.

The food is every bit as sumptuous as the settings. You can choose from three menu options: Italian, Thai or seafood barbecue – all abound with great dishes. Depending on the menu you choose, you might experience Roasted Angus Beef Tenderloin with porcini crust, fricassee of thyme vegetables topped with whipped Gorgonzola butter or Pla Nueng

Manow, a steamed dish featuring lemon grass fresh whole sea bass, enhanced with lime juice, chilli and coriander leaves. Or Chu Chi Pak Ruam Sia Tahoo, a fragrant red coconut curry with a medley of mixed garden vegetables and tofu. Not only can you eat well at Anantara, you can also learn to make some of their best-known dishes, too. The resort runs its own Thai cooking classes, called Spice Spoons. These are by demand only, but they're popular enough for the resort to be holding them some 20 times a month. As with Dining by Design, you'll need to reserve your place the day before, though usually you can phone on the day itself.

You can pick three different dishes to make from a special cooking class menu, which features Thai favourites such as spicy prawn soup, Chiang

Mai noodles, papaya salad or a truly authentic green curry. If so wished, you can learn extra dishes, at a little more cost.

Classes are kept deliberately small, with one to four participants. However, in the cases of groups, a different format is used and up to a hundred guests can be accommodated, as they can be split into teams. But unless you're specifically coming as a group, then the resort will hold to its maximum number of four.

You can opt to go to the market with the chef at 9:00 am and then return to the resort for the class, or just come to the class itself which starts around 11:00 or 11:30 am. Classes are held in either Full Moon or the resort's other restaurant, High Tide. Then you start cooking, with

instructions being given by an English-speaking chef who'll guide you through all the processes and demonstrate them at the same time. When each dish is cooked, you'll eat it before learning the next, and unless you've been to a cooking class like this before, you'll probably be wowed by how yummy it all tastes. Each participant gets a glass of wine and at the end of the class receives a chopping board, apron, certificate and, most importantly, a recipe book which includes the dishes just learned. That way the knowledge never gets lost.

Perfect for those who are seeking something special, the cuisine at Anantara offers an array of mouth-watering choices, whether you're eating in Full Moon or dining in tucked-away seclusion. On top of all this, their cooking classes are now

enabling many a non-chef to produce first class dishes. It's a further feather in Anantara's cap. Or should we say, toque?

Dimitri Waring

For reservations or further information, telephone 0 7742 8300. www.anantara.com