Rumbles in the Jungle

A Thai resort spoils its guests, big and small

John Borthwick

At last, a travel bubble that’s not just a thought bubble. And I’m sleeping in it, literally a plastic bubble, in a northern Thailand jungle clearing. My only neighbours, a couple, speak no English and keep a polite distance, content to spend most of their time eating.

Last year when the world seemed covered in Covid, tourism honchos everywhere hustled to create so-called travel bubbles, attempting to pair-off “safe” destinations such as Singapore with Australia, NSW with whoever, and Western Australia with, well, itself. Most of these wildly optimistic bubbles burst without even inflating. When actual travel resumed, those who could flew the coop to wherever possible. Which brings me to this valley in the Golden Triangle and to the large, inflatable dome, known as a Jungle Bubble, that I temporarily occupy. Totally transparent and very comfortable, my see-through igloo has not only headroom but a通过 a single airlock entrance. The bells evoked wooden deck and are accessed through igloo has not only headroom but a

The self-supporting bubble domes, designed by Spanish company SkyBubble, are made of clear polyester fabric. The new lodge cost $270,000 to build and launched last late year. Sitting on an 80sq m platform, it looks down a narrow valley with walls that form a natural enclosure for the roaming elephants. At one end of the deck a heated plunge pool burbles quietly, while at the other a dining table is set for a meal to be served.

“It’s time for your snack,” announces the butler. Khong, delivering a cold beer – not the usual local Chang or Singha suds, but a new local brew, Chiang Mai Blossom Weizen. A parade of delicate canapes follows – fish, tiny pork pies and money bags – all of which I enjoy too eagerly as I realise when the resort’s executive chef Gino Pong unveils an expansively
dinner.

After entrees of salads, sea bass and fresh-water prawns, plus an excellent main course of crispy khoa soi gai noodles, followed by khao neeo mamuang (sweet sticky rice with mango), I’ll never again joke about Jathong and Jammoon and their afternoon snacks of 50kg of sugar cane.

Khong disappears the dinner things to some mystery space below decks and then, bidding goodnight, disappears himself back to his own mystery space below decks and then, bidding goodnight, disappears himself back to

“I turn away from the dubious glow and into the jungle music. Out there in the dark I simmer in it, listening to the jungle rumble and more. The next night munchings in a bamboo grove.

And then something truly odd. On the far horizon I notice an array of bright neons burning. This being the Golden Triangle, we’re at the Mekong River intersection of Thailand, Myanmar and Laos. I realise I’m looking across to where China has established a de facto colony, the so-called Golden Tri-angle Special Economic Zone, on 3000ha of Lao territory. The neon are from its garish “entertainment” zone for FIFA Chinese gam-bers.

I turn away from the dubious glow and into the jungle music. Out there in the dark I can hear the elephants, the susurration of their breathing, the deep bass belly rumbles, the occasional trumpeting blast and late-night munchings in a bamboo grove.

And so to sleep. Lights-out finds me looking skywards from the bed. A little condensation mist on the transparent ceiling means I can’t clearly see the stars, but I’m soon fast asleep anyhow.

Some time after midnight I wake and wander on to the deck to star gaze. Jathong and Jammoon are grazing companionably on the grass in front of the Lodge, the heavens

The central living room bubble has doors that open on either side to a spacious bed-room and its own bathroom. The three middle bubbles – living room and bedrooms — are fully transparent, while the end bathroom includes airconditioning, hot showers, king beds and a de facto colony, the so-called Golden Tri-angle Special Economic Zone, on 3000ha of Lao territory. The neon are from its garish “entertainment” zone for FIFA Chinese gam-bers.

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