

THAI THE KNOT

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BRIDE TO BE - YOUR DAY YEARBOOK

The chanting of monks and the blessing of friends and family set the scene for our sunset wedding on a beach in Thailand. A private villa at the southern end of Phuket was our home for the week long celebration leading up to the special day. Having enjoyed the sun and sea that Phuket is famous for, and the attentive care of friends and family, it was going to be difficult to make the honeymoon even more special. A new resort in Thailand's north proved the perfect place to enjoy our own time together and unwind after the social excesses in Phuket.

Thailand has held a special place in our relationship since first we met. Our first travel together was an overland adventure from Singapore to Bangkok, beginning with birthday drinks at Raffles Hotel. Returning to Thailand was like seeing an old friend. There's something special about a country that has almost as many statues of the Buddha than it does people.

The responsibility for the wedding planning was accepted by my soon-to-be wife, Victoria, and so we agreed that the honeymoon would fall onto my shoulders. The first thing I did was to contact Raffles in Singapore and arrange for two nights of honeymoon accommodation. Three years ago we drank Singapore Slings on the balcony of the Writers Bar, this time we would enjoy our final night as honeymooners by dining inside.

To add a touch of sentimental value, Victoria's parents gave us the two nights at Raffles as a gift and we all agreed to keep it a secret from her until the limousine driver met us at the airport. My philosophy on romantic surprises is simple; making your wife cry with joy is one of life's rare pleasures that no man should deny himself.

So the honeymoon now had a beginning and an end with Phuket and Singapore. I just had to fill-in the four nights in between. It was clear that the beautiful surrounds of a privately rented villa in Phuket would make it difficult if not impossible to take a step-up by checking into a coastal resort. That's when I remembered a particular Buddhist temple in the northern Thailand city of Chiang Mai, and discovered a most remarkable resort that caters perfectly for honeymooners and the need for privacy and solitude.

Dhara Dhevi is something out of a fairytale, a cultural resort modelled on ancient cities of the Lanna and Burmese people, complete with rice-fields, local market and temples. Driving up the cobbled stone avenue the various buildings of the resort open out like a lost city, peaked with gold and timber spires. Bell-shaped wind chimes are lifted into the breeze by the seven-layers of each spire – in Thai culture each level represents a different stage of enlightenment.

For newly weds the meaning is doubled; two lives brought together are at the end of one stage and the beginning of another.

From the balcony of our Colonial Suite we stepped out to the main pool and enjoyed the first of many long and slow swims under a peaceful blue sky. Within minutes the attentive staff had laid out our sun-chairs with towels, bottled water and tall glasses filled with ice.

That night we ordered dinner served in our room and selected some DVD's to watch together. The combination of too much food, an exhausting wedding and the indulgently comfortable suite ensured that we feel asleep during the first movie.

In the following days we did manage to enjoy a massage and spa together, the experienced team at Dheva Spa worthy of the King of Thailand himself, but the chance to not do anything was really more appealing than anything else. Replacing the intense excitement of the wedding with the time and space to enjoy the company of each other was ideal.

While it's hard to imagine wanting to leave the resort, we did take advantage of the scheduled shuttle service that connects with the night market in Chiang Mai. This infamous boulevard comes to life in the evenings as vendors fill every inch of footpath with local crafts, silks, candles and Buddha images.

The glittering jewel of Chiang Mai is found a few miles out of town in the cool air of the surrounding hills. The temple at Doi Suthep is unlike any other in the world, sitting high above the city this is a living temple where monks train and study. The inner core of the complex is a square lined by prayer halls, all facing into the middle where a magnificent golden chedi rises to Doi Suthep's highest point.

Gold images of Buddha, big and small, fill the square. The brink of dusk signalled the monks to chant their prayers and we stayed just long enough to hear their harmonious voices chanting. Not since our wedding day had we listened so intently to their song.

Turning to head back down the hill I knew this would be the furthest point of our journey as honeymooners. Once we leave Doi Suthep we'll head south to the resort, then further south to Singapore, and finally home to begin the journey of marriage.

Victoria squeezed my hand gently and off we went.

BUDDHIST CONNECTIONS

If you plan to get married in Thailand then a Buddhist ceremony will be a feature of the event you will treasure for a lifetime. Chanting monks, water blessings and Buddhist prayers are just the beginning. For advice and support on planning such an event, and logistical solutions to make the wedding legal, contact Creative Events Asia - www.creativeeventsasia.com

VILLAS AND SUITES

There are two distinct flavours for guests at Dhara Dhevi. The colonial suites evoke a sense of Indochine history with tall ceilings, refined interiors and the highest possible standard of comfort. The villas suites are equally indulgent and well appointed, but are more like individual homes with separate gates and elegantly styled interiors that reflect the skills of local artisans. Larger villas have their own pool, and all outdoor entertaining areas merge gently into the rice-fields - www.mandarinoriental.com/chiangmai

COME FLY WITH ME

Bangkok Airways connect Chiang Mai to many parts of Thailand and South-East Asia. They are a boutique airline offering excellent value, and their private airport lounges are open to all passengers. Bangkok Airways have far more generous luggage restrictions than the discount airlines, so you needn't feel guilty about going home with a bronze buddha in your suitcase - www.bangkokair.com

