

Khao Yai: A Peaceful Escape

In a bid to flee the urban hustle and bustle of her new home in Bangkok, if only for a moment, travel writer **Melissa Cheah** set her sights on the decidedly laid-back town of Khao Yai, and together with her canine companion, got a much-needed break in the action.



InterContinental Khao Yai Resort

Several months into a recent relocation from Kuala Lumpur to Bangkok, a need to escape the endless chaos of the city was becoming palpable, and Khao Yai emerged as a good choice, and so with bags packed, we embarked on the journey to what would hopefully be a peaceful reprieve.

The minute we took a turn out of the city and onto the highway, the difference was instantaneous and tangible: Skyscrapers dissolved from our view like a vignette in an old

movie, cars parted ways à la Moses and the Red Sea to welcome us for our first road trip in Thailand. Flynn, my nine-month-old toy poodle, shifted slightly in my lap and sighed contentedly. I sank deeper into the car seat and let the sun warm my face as I shut my eyes.

Three hours north of Bangkok, Khao Yai National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Thailand's oldest wildlife reserve, once served as a major transportation hub for the region. An especially popular route between the

capital city of Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima, it was where Thailand's first state railway operated. Inspired by the destination's history, **InterContinental Khao Yai Resort** was designed as a homage to the heydays of train travel.

Beyond its glamorous historic influences, the lush resort – spanning 19 hectares across Khao Yai National Park – is a reflection of the region's calm and an embodiment of its zen. Tranquil touches such as the Botanic Garden, Waterfall Edge, and Swan



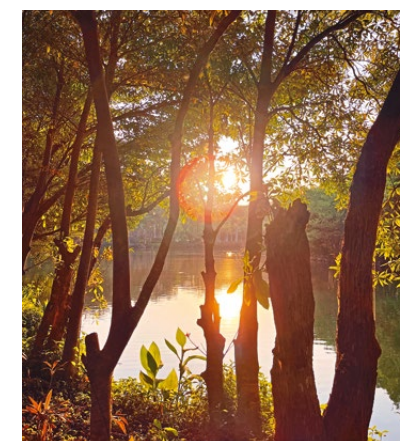
InterContinental Khao Yai Resort

Lake abounded, all teeming with local flora and fauna, natural light, and meticulously trimmed foliage. Our mornings and evenings were spent basking in the serenity of nature – walking through the trails and soaking up the sun. As we watched the swans glide over the water, effortlessly and gracefully, in that moment, little else mattered.

The rooms and suites are blessed with idyllic views of the resort's garden or lake. In-room amenities include Byredo products (a personal favourite), eco-driven climate controls, plush towels, a tailored pillow menu, and a well-stocked fridge. A pet-friendly resort, your 'furbids' can expect their very own bed, bowls, as well as treats upon arrival. Our railcar-inspired room boasted of elegance: warm wood, wall-mounted luggage racks, pleather-trimmed sofas to mimic a carriage, and marble-clad bathrooms. The rail transport inspiration extends through the rest of the resort, as well: a Tea Carriage for high tea overlooking one of the five lakes; Poirot, a French fine-dining restaurant, and Papillon Bar, a jazz bar, are each housed in restored train cars. From tomato gelée with granita as the amuse bouche, to French onion soup, and sea bass (the

carrot-coconut crust was delightful), Poirot offers a straightforward menu featuring high-quality local produce and a scenic view for a romantic dinner.

The brainchild of Bill Bensley, his eclectic design ethos is certainly evident throughout: monochrome flooring, one-of-a-kind trinkets, railway memorabilia, blast-from-the-past signs that once hung in train stations, vintage trunks of all shapes, sizes, and colours. Yet here, at the newly minted resort (InterContinental Khao Yai just



InterContinental Khao Yai Resort

opened its doors in Q4 2022), it somehow feels different. If I were to attempt to describe the *je ne sais quoi*, it would be the property's uncanny ability to create magnificence in the mundane. The resort gifts the discerning modern-day traveller with luxury and story – a nostalgic tale in a contemporary world – and the ability to experience it all in the company of (wo)man's best friend.

Approximately 15 minutes away, **Alcidini Winery** has been operating for the last 30 years. Located on the hillside within the vicinity of the national park, the vineyard is located in a village called 'the swamp of Alcedo,' a



The Mango House Farm



Alcidini Winery

sanctuary for kingfishers (scientific name: *Alcidinidae*). A titular ode to the birds' genus, Alcidini covers 20 acres for wine grape planting, and its Recioto has awarded as the 2014 Silver Award Winner by Cathay Pacific's Hong Kong International Wine & Spirit Competition. The owner, as gracious as she was informative, shared that her husband learned the art of winemaking in Australia, and her son thereafter in the famed region of Napa, California. A tribute to his time there, the scenic viewpoint is modelled after the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Sans entrance fee and coupled with an opportunity to try out award-winning wines, Alcidini is an easy-to-recommend place to visit when in Khao Yai.

Constructed by Secondfloor Architects, **Yellow Submarine Coffee Tank** is a sight to behold. An architectural stunner, the pet-friendly



Flynn posing for a snapshot at the Yellow Submarine Coffee Tank

café was developed to mirror the landscape of the area through a subtle palette of dark and neutral textures, allowing visitors to enjoy a cuppa in a minimalist yet tranquil environment. A highlight of the destination, **The Mango House Farm** cultivates over 8,000 Nam Dok Mai mango trees and ships them all over Thailand. Within the premises, visitors can find a variety of mango-related products, while its vast backyard is ringed with wooden tables and chairs. A classic that never goes out of style, the Mango Sticky Rice made for a pleasant afternoon treat – coconut-infused glutinous rice, glowing ripe mangoes, and luscious coconut cream sauce.

Rosebay Home Cooking & Café was highly recommended by our local friends in Bangkok and for good reason. Not only was their Khao Kaprao Minced Pork (topped with crackling pork and a perfectly done

fried egg) incredibly moreish, the hospitality was top-notch.

Covering over 2,000 sq km, Khao Yai incorporates one of the largest intact monsoon forests remaining in mainland Asia. A respite from the hustle and bustle of Bangkok, Khao Yai invites travellers to a commune with nature, thanks to its verdant hillscape, undulating plains, and patchworks of untouched farmland.

As with most getaways, our time in Khao Yai went by much too quickly, but it's certainly a place to which I could see myself returning. On the road back, as the concrete sprawl of Bangkok appeared and inexorably slid into late-afternoon focus, Flynn awoke from his nap and stretched and looked at me, content and at ease; the gentle warm sun turning the windows of our car into golden mirrors as it slipped ever lower in the sky. ■

TRAVEL FILE

InterContinental Khao Yai Resort | 262 Moo 6, Pong-Talong, Pak Chong, Nakhon Ratchasima, 30450 Thailand. For reservations, contact +66 (0) 44 082 039, or email the resort at intercontinental.khaoyai@ihg.com.

Alcidini Winery | 176 หมู่ 22 (หมู่บ้าน Wang Katha, Pak Chong District, Nakhon Ratchasima 30130

Yellow Submarine Coffee Tank | 149 หมู่ 5 อำเภอปากช่อง Nakhon Ratchasima 30130

The Mango House Farm | Nong Nam Daeng, Pak Chong District, Nakhon Ratchasima 30450

Rosebay Home Cooking & Café | 339 ม11 Nongnhamdeang, Pak Chong, Nakhon Ratchasima 30130