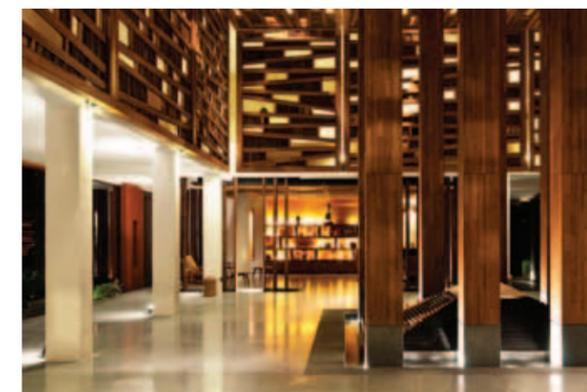


# SEASIDE BOUTIQUE

A new addition to Koh Samui's luxury resort scene is Hansar, a small but cleverly conceived property providing fine food, sea views and personal service. *Lucy Valdon* finds a happy place.



Lobby (above) and the resort grounds at night (left)

**Location** Hansar Samui is only a 15-minute ride from the island's holiday-vibe airport. Its beachfront position on Bophut Bay – where touristy Fisherman's Village morphs into a serene stretch of five-star resorts – offers quiet luxury, yet with vibrant nightlife and inexpensive shopping just a few yards away.

**Philosophy** Hansar, which means happiness and joy in ancient Sanskrit, is a new upmarket Thai-owned hotel group with a laid-back approach to luxury. Properties are boutique, and here small is certainly beautiful. Hansar Samui, which debuted late last year, has just 74 rooms; the newly opened Hansar Bangkok is a chic 93-suite high rise. At Samui, relaxing is key, from the spacious sea-view rooms and super-size balconies – with daybeds and rocking chairs – to the smiling, never-stiff but ever-efficient service. Even on the shortest of trips you are engulfed by that rare but delightful feeling of living here rather than just staying.

**Accommodation** We occupied the largest of three room types, all of which have marvellous views that sweep from green (palm trees fringing the balcony and lawn below) to blue (a massive swimming pool) to blue again (the sea). The highlight of the open-plan XL rooms, with floor laid in equal measures of cool stone and warm teak, is a freestanding terrazzo bathtub set majestically within a ring of pebbles. The king-size four-poster bed, supremely comfortable and definitely romantic if I'd come with my husband rather than my eight-year-old daughter, is a close second.

Other plus points: the airy walk-in rain shower with stone bench seating and floor-to-ceiling glass on one side to proffer sea views, and the attractive reddy-brown tones of the generously-sized balcony for reading, lounging and dining. Wifi is complimentary and a 50-inch flat television screen offers myriad viewing, albeit not a great picture, via Indonesian satellite. Other fine-tuning promised as the resort progresses past its opening phase will be the addition of a DVD player and iPod dock in each room, and the upgrading of the standard fridge into a bar with a selection of gourmet teas.

**Activities** Laid flush with the sea, the pool for serious swimming and water games dominates the small oasis of landscaped garden that lies between the beach and the resort buildings. Jacuzzi jets along its nearside length provide a lazy option to doing laps. Next to it is a beach bar (a chic gathering place for drinks at sundown) with paddling pool at the rear. A small library-cum-lounge, fitness centre and spa are on site, while the concierge can arrange the likes of golf, diving and yachting.

**Dining** Aside from providing all-day dining for Hansar guests, the resort's restaurant, H Bistro, has quickly gained a reputation on the island for its adventurous nouvelle cuisine. At the helm in the open kitchen is innovative executive chef Stephen Jean Dion, who also oversees the catering at Hansar Bangkok. The well-travelled Canadian native, who is



The Hansar beach bar makes a cool evening hangout

no stranger to Thailand, once worked as private chef to the Jordanian royal family. French Mediterranean fare, with Thai favourites, are fastidiously prepared and invitingly presented here. On the set menu on the evening we dined were Dion signatures of peach caramelised foie gras with jerez jus and grilled Maine lobster with garlic butter and rocket lettuce. Dessert was a mouthwatering choice between warmed melted chocolate cake and pineapple ravioli. Wines from the old and new world are selected to complement the dishes, and menus can be tailor-made.

Breakfast at H Bistro is buffet style but with the welcome addition of an individually cooked and served main dish. True to its name, the Chill Lounge, above the restaurant, offers oversized opium beds for chilling, and the sensory thrill of sipping wine or cocktails before a fabulous vista.

**Pampering** Wind down at Luxsa Spa with treatments that soothe and stimulate amid a spacious, serene interior of warm wood and organic materials. After a consultation in the enormous spa reception area, I was led to one of six suites to enjoy an Eastern Blend massage (medium to strong inspired by the traditional Thai style) using the 'earth' elements (judged to suit my disposition following a quick quiz) of coconut and sesame oil. It was an experience that would easily be habit-forming had I had more days of idle pleasure at the resort.

**Service** One of Hansar's strengths is its staff, from general manager Indra Budiman, a jolly Indonesian, down. Their warmth and sincerity made us feel immediately at home. Personal service is possible in a small resort and here it is exceptional. Special requests and

peculiarities – such as decaffeinated coffee at breakfast – are noted and remembered so you don't have to ask twice.

**Verdict** Hansar Samui's convenient location, striking XL rooms and friendly service make it a top choice for a weekend in the sun. If you want a homey atmosphere and fine food, come here. The drawback of its proximity to the local colour of Fisherman's Village, though, is at times a less than pristine expanse of beach.



Freestanding terrazzo bathtub

#### HANSAR SAMUI

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Spacious balconies with sea views

