



Handsomely at Hansar

There are endless special treats on offer this month, and one of the most exciting **of these is at Hansar.**



Samui is a gourmet's playground. Just about everywhere you look, tucked away around corners and in the big resorts, there's another great restaurant. There are just so many 5-star eateries here now that folks are mumbling about 6-star restaurants, just to distinguish between the best of the best! Plus, of course, there's everything in-between, right down to the little local places with plastic tables and chairs. During the festive season, what could be better than a series of fantastic meals? And that's where Fisherman's Village and Hansar come into the picture.

It's a given that you'll head off to Fisherman's Village at least once during your stay. There's no doubt this is one of Samui's foremost attractions. This long, narrow beach strip began with a boat and ferry pier plus a few shops to support it. But it's now yet another foodie paradise, with theme restaurants, seafood diners, international cuisine, pubs, bars and stalls, all dotted in amongst the gift and craft shops. And, right down at the end, sits the unmissable 5-star elegance of Hansar Samui, with its enticing beach bar and restaurant.

Hansar's coming up to its fifth anniversary in the not too distant future. And although it started splendidly, it's just got better over the years, particularly when it comes to H Bistro, its excellent fine-dining signature restaurant. This is split into two open-sided levels, with the upper

and very laid-back Chill Lounge above, and the deceptively simple décor of H Bistro at sea-level. The man running the show here is Executive Chef Stephen Dion. And although he's engagingly sly and unassuming, he has a pedigree that raises eyebrows. He previously not only managed such exalted eateries as the five-star Lebua State Tower Hotel in Bangkok, but he was also the personal chef for His Majesty the King of Jordan for several years.

The usual à la carte menu at H Bistro is impressive in its own right, and offers dishes with or without wine pairing – more about this aspect in just a moment. Stephen's cuisine has evolved from a French-Mediterranean-Italian bias, but with the fillip of some very subtle gourmet variations on the usual 'fresh ingredients' slogan that seems to be in fashion. He'll deliberate for days as to the balance of, say, the combinations of flavour and texture of the creamier American corn-fed beef compared to a marbled Japanese wagyu. And then balance each of these against white truffles or the honeycombed morel mushrooms, with or without a parmesan infusion. And that's before he even considers the light reductions or the harmony of sauces to go with it.

"When I'm working on a new dish," he told me, "I'm tasting it all the time as I go. I'm adjusting

and balancing the weights and dynamics of tastes and aftertastes, balancing mouthfeel and texture, tweaking up undertones or overtones – even when I feel I've got it all worked out and it's on the menu, I'll be continually tasting each time and making small adjustments. This is all about enjoyment, it's so much more than merely eating food."

So my first point is this: you're probably here for around ten days. That's more than time enough to visit Hansar and immerse yourself in Chef Stephen's tastebud bliss – his current menu will be running throughout the length of your stay. And if you don't fancy such a full-on boogie after your trawl through Fisherman's Village, then drop in at Hansar's dinky little beach bar for snacks and drinks. There's only a couple of bars on the beach up this way, and this one comes with the touch of class that's conferred by deep bean bags and loungers at the fringe of the sea.

And my second point is that Stephen's spent the last two months putting together one of the most spectacular culinary presentations imaginable to celebrate New Year's Eve. It's tempting to simply reproduce the menu for you here – it's that impressive. But I'm more interested in the mind of the man who's created this, and his way of thinking: it's more revealing than any list of dishes could ever be.

"Light and enticing to start," Stephen mused. "Seafood-based, featuring the luxury Spéciale Tarbouriech pink oyster. Followed by fish - turbot and crab complemented by squash spaghetti. But then the next dish needs to shout. My foie gras is a little heavier, but it's pan-fried to be crisp outside and moist in the middle, with a touch of citrus to cut the oils; in this case white balsamic with apple brandy. Next I've gone for lobster playing against Alaskan king crab – a lighter dish between two heavier ones."

"And then a risotto. I make each one from scratch with no pre-cooking. The imported Maine lobster has been slow cooked to retain the juices and flavour, and the morel mushrooms offset the earthy tang of the white truffles. Then it's followed by the main dish of a Stockyard Prime corn-fed USA beef steak – the flavour is creamy and the texture consistent and delicate."

"Chocolate is always tricky," Stephen continued. "The cocoa content needs to be just right, or it gets bitter. So the mousse is set with a selected Valrhona chocolate to balance sweet and bitter, airy and crisp, for a desert that floats on the tongue."

wine distributor, Fin Wines. The wines selected to go with each course are the result of many hours tasting permutations of both Stephen's food and the wine together, comparing small-quantity offerings from all over the world, with his collaborator at Fin Wines, Jan Ganser.

There are two sittings planned for the evening of the 31st at H Bistro, the first at 6:30 pm and the next at 8:30 pm. Stephen's reputation is well established so you'll need to book. And then, when the lights go down at around 11:00 pm, you can stroll over to the beach bar to tipple, and later to watch the entire bay (Hansar took) lit by fireworks at midnight. There's no two ways about it – you'll be treated handsomely at Hansar!

Rob De Wet

For reservations or further information, telephone 0 7724 5511. www.hansarsamui.com



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