

TRAVEL INSIDER

QANTAS

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THAILAND'S MOST INDULGENT RESORTS



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INNOVATE**

TAKE A SEAT AT BRISBANE'S COOLEST RESTAURANTS
THE VICTORIAN WINE REGION TO PUT ON YOUR RADAR
WHY LEADING WITH EMPATHY IS NON-NEGOTIABLE





T H A I L A N D



P L
GO HERE IN
WINTER
GO HERE IN
A N

KOH SAMUI

Kimpton Kitalay Samui

← Mixing modernity with magic is the secret potion at

Koh Samui's cool Kimpton hotel (left; kimptonkitalay.samui.com). Somehow, this 21-villa resort manages to sit in one of Koh Samui's busiest districts (and only a few minutes from the island's airport) yet still makes you feel like you've disappeared into paradise. Every villa has its own pool and many have beach and ocean views. The pick is the two-bedroom Kitalay Villa with three separate structures that include two bedrooms, a separate dining and living area, plus a sky-blue V-shaped pool that sits almost on the sand.

Beyond the resort, Koh Samui packs a lot of action into its 228 square kilometres of land. Nightlife and markets? You'll want the buzz of Chaweng. Temples? You can't go past Wat Phra Yai or the Big Buddha, which sits on a smaller island connected by a causeway. Stunning marine life can be found a little away from Koh Samui itself so get on a dive boat to swim among turtles, reef fish and, if you're lucky, whale sharks. Then wind down at the resort's Lanai Bar & Lounge with a daiquiri made with Chalong Bay rum from nearby Phuket or a local craft beer such as the frothy, German-style Full Moon Bussaba Ex-Weisse.

**BEACHES, JUNGLE OR METROPOLIS?
THAILAND WEAVES TOGETHER ALL THREE, FROM ITS
MYSTERIOUS, MOUNTAINOUS NORTH TO ITS COASTAL
CONFETTI OF ISLANDS. HERE'S HOW TO NARROW DOWN
THE CHOICES, WRITES ALEXANDRA CARLTON.**



CHIANG RAI

Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp & Resort

↑ Thailand isn't all about beaches and islands. At the crossroads of three countries – Thailand, Laos and Myanmar – the northern province of Chiang Rai is one of the most mysterious and exotic regions on the Thai mainland. Once famous for poppy cultivation, it's now renowned for mist-cloaked mountains, dense jungle, ornate temples – and elephants.

One of the most unforgettable ways to take in its splendour is Anantara Golden Triangle resort's VIP Elephant Arrival experience (anantara.com). A private car will pick you up from Chiang Rai International Airport and take you to the riverside town of Chiang Saen. From there you'll board a traditional longtail boat that will sail you down the mighty

Mekong River and into the Ruak River where the fabled Golden Triangle begins.

At your destination you'll be met by a herd of rescued elephants (many of which have been saved from illegal logging businesses or circus shows) that will accompany you along jungle passageways to the resort's doorstep.

Book an overnight stay in one of the resort's translucent Jungle Bubbles (above), where you'll sleep surrounded by the elephants' habitat, or take a motorcycle tour of the region's unmissable sites, such as the Giant Golden Buddha of Chiang Saen and the Wat Phra That Doi Tung temple, which sits atop the tallest mountain in Chiang Rai and is believed to house Buddha's sacred left collarbone.