

HAUTE LIVING

7 Extreme Experiences To Enjoy In Thailand

TRAVEL December 21, 2019 by Laura Schreffler



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You've all seen the magical pictures of hundreds, sometimes *thousands*, of lanterns floating in the air. This happens for a very specific reason: Every year, the country celebrates its **Yee Peng Festival** on the full moon of the twelfth lunar month, which typically happens every November. This is when the moon is meant to be the brightest, and wishes for good fortune are allegedly the most likely to come true. For a country steeped in superstition, this is everything. And the very best place—the most fabled place, in fact—to enjoy the Yee Peng/Loy Krathong Festival is in Chiang Mai.

Lanterns and floating kratong (flower offerings) are sold everywhere, and cheaply. You can celebrate literally anywhere in Chiang Mai. But the most VIP event is held at Lanna Dhutanka in Mae Cho in the San Sai district of Chiang Mai. Not only will you take the blessed circular walk around monks, but you'll enjoy the ultimate VIP seating with important figures from Thailand's government, a specially crafted inner box and Lanna and Thai cultural performances before letting your own lantern float sky high. Yee Peng is so beautiful it takes your breath away.

During this popular, mystical time period, hotels book up fast and needless to say, **Anantara Chiang Mai Resort** will be one of the first to go (so book this well in advance!). Reason being: it offers a self-contained, supremely serene oasis smack dab in the middle of the city, just 15 minutes from Chiang Mai International Airport, but most importantly, a two-minute walk from the riverside. The river view, in fact, will be *your* view during breakfast, as well as during your stay. And this means you'll be in a prime position for double wishes—you can release your kratong even after attending the VIP Yee Peng Festival *and* hit up the nearby Night Bazaar. Winning!

Location aside, the resort is a stunner. 84 sleekly designed rooms and suites are housed in an elegant modern building of wood and expansive glass. Private balconies and terraces feature a double daybed overlooking manicured grounds, the colonial house or river. Inside, sunlight streams through floor-to-ceiling windows, illuminating contemporary décor, stylish furnishings and local artifacts. The 32 Kasara Suites (our preference) boast 1130 square feet of space, including a lounge and dining area, a large open-plan bathroom and amenities such as Bose entertainment, an iPod dock and JURA Swiss brand coffee machine. Those in the Kasara suites get all the extras: A private check-in and check-out service, a complimentary laundry service (seven pieces per day), a private indoor/outdoor lounge with a dedicated concierge, WiFi and a laptop computer, as well as evolving culinary temptations.

Chiang Mai is an ideal destination for travelers eager to explore. There almost too *much* to do. After long days of exploring the city's quirky café, art and boutique scene, to countless temples, Lanna Kingdom ruins and bustling markets, verdant mountains and rice paddies, lakes, waterfalls and national parks, elephant experiences, bamboo river rafting, the nearby Hill tribes and handicraft village, jungle zip lining, a sunset river cruise and golf by the Himalayan foothill, you'll definitely need an oasis of relaxation, and Anantara Chiang Mai is the very place to kick back. Guests can sunbathe in quiet seclusion and swim in the 366-square foot riverside pool. Energy is renewed with a workout in the river view gym, restorative yoga or tai chi, or with a Muay Thai boxing class. Culture and wellness go hand in hand at Anantara Spa, where holistic pampering includes unique northern Thai rituals, such as the Lanna ritual: a full-body massage combining healing plai massage oil with Thai, Burmese and Chinese techniques to enhance energy flow and overall wellbeing, ending with a mini pressure point facial, complete with a singing bowl, a clearing of energy and wish-making with a golden heart Bodhi leaf.

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One of the coolest dining experiences you'll have anywhere in the world is located in the heart of Chiang Mai, and with the 25th **James Bond** film, "No Time to Die," set for an April release, we dare say that it's the perfect time to spy-themed **The Service 1921**. What once served as the British Consulate now serves as Anantara Chiang Mai's heritage, serving up contemporary cocktails and Thai, Sichuanese and Vietnamese cuisines, all with a British intelligence service twist. What now serves as the restaurant's private dining room was actually a secret spy/war room for British forces that's accessible through a secret bookshelf door.

The Service 1921 has been respectful of the venue's storied past, keeping portraits of former British intelligence offers on the walls, and vintage artifacts scattered throughout the restaurant. It also plays up its theme in a fun way: The menus come in top secret envelopes stamped with 'For your eyes only'. Though it might sound like a concept restaurant, the restaurant has been recognized by the Michelin Guide, and its interiors are posh, not kitschy, with an elegant bar and lounge, al fresco seating on the wrap-around lower and upper verandas, a wine cellar, a cigar area featuring hand-picked Cubans and an exclusive whisky room.

Menu highlights here include the Mala seafood hot pot with mussels, squid, prawns, fresh ginger, scallion, sesame and dry chili; Szechuan black-bone chicken marinated with draught beer, then stir-fried with fresh chili, ginger, garlic, red onion and mushroom; and Bashu long spareribs—Szechuan pork spare rib stir-fried with dry chili, sesame and garlic. Now more than ever, we recommend trying at least one if not all of the cocktails on the Bond-themed Secret Services menu: a classic Vesper martini; 'Diamonds are Forever'—secret cold-infused vodka with fresh pineapple juice, vanilla syrup, grenadine, and lime juice; and 'You Only Live Twice'—secret cold-infused vodka, apricot brandy, fresh lime and honey caviar—are the standouts.