



**N**o matter what kind of couple you are when you travel—adventurous, laid-back, or culture vultures—Thailand offers unique experiences to suit your style. Its majestic landscape is geographically diverse, with paradise at your fingertips whether you’re paddling on the emerald-green sea, on an excursion in the mountains or exploring the city. There are many things that make Thailand so alluring, from braving the Southern region’s intensely spiced seafood to trekking through rogue limestone isles by boat or indulging in holistic spa treatments for the body, mind and spirit. Three first-class romantic accommodations in Krabi, Hua Hin and Chiang Mai showcase the best of what makes Thailand such a dynamic destination.

BY KARINA TIMMEL

### *The Adventure Honeymoon*

THE BREATHTAKING LANDSCAPE AT LUSH, “SECRET” PARADISE KRABI IN SOUTHERN THAILAND IS SEEPED IN ACTIVE PURSUITS

**STAY:** What a VIP entrance! After whisking you away from the tiny Krabi Town airport (it’s an hour-and-twenty-minute flight from Bangkok), **Rayavadee’s** transportation team escorts you onto a private yacht for the picturesque arrival to the secluded resort. It’s exactly what you envision when you think of Thailand: pristine white-sand beaches looking out on a piercing turquoise sea with striking limestone cliffs and scattered little islands that beg exploration. Located on a peninsula with 26 acres of

lush, verdant landscape, Rayavadee is bordered by three beaches and inclusive of two pools, a spa, three restaurants and a rustic beach-hut bar. Here there are 98 luxurious two-story pavilions and four beachfront villas, each decorated with dark polished wood, richly colored textiles and hand-crafted details. Each is also positioned among tropical gardens for utmost privacy—with the exception of playful rooftop visitors (monkeys!). *Room rates start at \$630 a night and include breakfast and airport transfers.*

**EAT:** If you like spicy—gasp—for-air spicy—you'll devour Southern Thailand's flavorful dishes. And if you really want to impress the locals, and you think you can handle it, ask for a side of prik nam pla, a tongue-tantalizing mixture of garlic, chili peppers and fish sauce. Don't miss the fresh seafood (or the brilliant sunset) at Rayavadee's **Krua Phranang**, where the twinkling lights of local fishermen's boats decorate the darkening Andaman Sea. Dine on dishes like Pla Thod Kha Min, a fried whole seabass prepared with turmeric, giving a light curry kick, and Pla Seafood, a spicy salad mix of squid, prawns and crispy-coated fish tossed in lime-chili dressing and served with lemongrass, coriander, spring onions and cucumber.

**DO:** The quieter, lesser-known sister of tourist-laden **Phuket** (two hours away by boat or car), Krabi offers seemingly endless islands and beach inlets to explore (including James Bond Island, named for

the movie that was shot there). Chartering a boat, which comes with a private-beach picnic lunch for traveling lovebirds, is a must. Ask your guide to take you on a kayaking excursion in the mangrove forest at **Ta Lane Nature Reserve**, where you'll paddle through gorgeous lagoons and towering limestone structures. Snap photos of the monkeys, but beware—those little guys snatch cameras! Stop to snorkel with rainbow-colored fish off of Phi Phi Island. Back at the resort's Railay Beach, join backpackers who've migrated there to climb the 90-degree rock faces, or go for a hike into the Bat Cave to see stalagmite and stalactite formations and yes, sleeping bats. There are plenty of adventures to be had, but simply floating in the sea and popping some Singha beers is also encouraged.



Rayavadee

## The Cultural Honeymoon

GET LOST IN HISTORY AND SHOPPING (AND SAY "HEY" TO A GENTLE GIANT) IN NORTHERN THAILAND'S CULTURAL EPICENTER, CHIANG MAI

**STAY:** Once the capital of Thailand, the ancient city of Chiang Mai sits in a rich valley engulfed by a mountainous region known for its teak forests, a few hours from the Burmese border. Now the country's second-largest city, it has maintained its 700-year-old historic center—a square plot that's still surrounded by a moat and wall (crumbling in some areas). Nestled in Chiang Mai's Old City, **Tamarind Village** is a sanctuary-like compound removed from the hustle and bustle, dotted with ancient temples and quaint shopping streets. The

boutique property, with 42 guest rooms and three suites, takes its name from a magnificent 200-year-old tamarind tree that shelters the hotel. The resort houses a quaint spa, top-notch Northern Thai restaurant (keep reading) and small pool that offers a cool dip or shaded reading area after a day of cultural excursions. *Room rates start at \$125 a night and include breakfast and airport transfers.*

**EAT:** The region's dishes are noticeably less spicy and pack on more vegetables than their southern counterparts. Go to nondescript local joint **Aroon Rai** for khao soi, a bowl of deliciously soupy Burmese curry (coconut milk, coriander, cumin and several other spices) with chicken over egg noodles. You can take home some of the chef's prepackaged spices and recipes (on display next to the fried insect and frog selection). Also try lively lunch spot **Huen Phen** and order Chiang Mai sliced sausages and beef ribs with a side of star-shaped steamed rice. If you'd prefer more "refined" cuisine, head back to the hotel to **Ruen Tamarind** and sample the Larb Ped, piquant minced duck breast salad laced with chili oil, fried shallots and fresh herbs with slivers of kaffir lime leaf.

**DO:** Get out the map and plot your trek through the historic town's temples (wats)—which are pretty much on every block—including **Wat Phra Singh**, built in 1345 and now also a school to more than 700 monks. Tip: Knees and shoulders must be covered, and shoes are not allowed inside the temples. For tchotchke souvenirs, wallet-friendly pashminas and gorgeous hand-woven crafts like tablecloths and throws from Hmong village tribes, stroll through **Warowot Market** and the Night Bazaar

## Know before You Fly

### Go when it's chilly here

The period from November to April traditionally has the best weather conditions, with blue skies, warm sunshine, breezes and little rain. Expect a brief afternoon shower each day, though!

### Visit your doc

Unless you're planning on backpacking in some of the more rural areas, you won't need malaria pills. You will want sleeping pills for the long flights.

### Pack light

Everything is super casual,

and high heels are a waste of luggage space (trust this heel-loving writer). Some domestic flights charge extra depending on bag weight, so spare yourself the expense.

### Bring mosquito repellent

You can buy it there, but most likely you'll need it before you get a chance to.

### Don't hug the locals

Thais are not a touchy-feely culture. Hugging or touching their heads (a sacred part of the body) is a big no-no.

just outside of the Old City. Also seek out the city's gem of a shopping strip, consisting of art galleries and local craftsman stores, just north of Narawat Bridge on the Ping River. Grab a happy-hour beer at **Good View** while you're over there and people-watch the local hipsters. Plus, don't miss a heartwarming elephant encounter. Choose an ethical camp like Maesa Elephant Camp in Chiang Dao, about 45 minutes outside of the city, where you'll feed the friendly giants and ride one together through the jungle in a howdah (chair). After a day of sightseeing on your feet, book the uber-relaxing foot reflexology at Tamarind Village's spa, which starts off with a soothing lemongrass footbath and scrub (all treatments do).

## The Spa Honeymoon

HEAD TO HUA HIN IN THE GULF OF THAILAND FOR THE ULTIMATE RELAXATION AT ONE OF THE WORLD'S TOP HEALTH AND WELLNESS RETREATS

**STAY:** Founded as a weekend getaway by the royal family centuries ago, Hua Hin is the Hamptons-esque beachside location of **Chiva-Som Health Resort**, whose name means "Haven of Life." Each guest who arrives at the lush, seven-acre property that sits on the Gulf of Siam receives a personalized program focused on revitalizing mind, body and spirit. Practitioners blend Eastern philosophies with Western diagnostic skills; you name the treatment (from healing acupuncture to body scrubs with local ingredients like coconut), program (from relaxation to detoxifying) or fitness class (from tai chi to kickboxing), and they'll have it. Choose to stay in a luxurious teak Thai pavilion or suite (the only places you're allowed to use laptops and cell phones on-property), and spend days being pampered and rejuvenated—the staff-to-guest ratio is four to one. *Room rates are \$2,148 to \$4,555 for two for a three-night retreat, which includes a daily massage for each person, three meals and up to eight fitness classes per day, and airport transfers.*

**EAT:** Order miang kana poolside from one of the two healthy restaurants—the snack captures the distinctive sweet, salty, sour and spicy flavors of Thai cuisine in individual, bite-sized morsels. To enjoy, place a small amount of each ingredient (chilies, ginger, dried prawns, lime, shallots and peanuts) into a Chinese kale leaf, roll up and munch. To live like a local, head to Baan Isara, a laid-back spot by the water that is crowded with local Thais and serves up killer seafood. Order the black pepper chili crab, shrimp fried rice (which tastes fluffy and light—worlds away from the Americanized greasy-spoon fare) and sizzling hot plates with glass noodles, vegetables and protein of choice. Afterward, head to the rooftop bar at **Hua Hin Marriott Hotel & Spa** for a trendy vibe with a DJ spinning dancey tunes, and breathtaking views of the city.

**DO:** Really, you never have to actually leave Chiva-Som's premises. With a 74-treatment-room spa and more than 150 choices, hourly fitness classes, a beautiful pool overlooking the beach, and healthy eats, everything you need is right at your fingertips. Try the indulgent three-therapist South Indian body massage (yes, three!), Ayurveda massage with targeted methods to treat common ailments like headaches and sinusitis, and Thai massage, a mixture of stretching and kneading that will work out all the kinks. Guests can also enjoy the indoor bathing pavilion and hydrotherapy facilities, featuring water-therapy suites, Jacuzzis, saunas, multilevel steam rooms, cool plunge pools and a Kniepp Therapy reflexology path. If you're amped up enough, attempt the cardio-intense Thai boxing class to get your heart pumping and release some of that built-up tension from wedding planning. Have an itch to leave the property? Hua Hin is a mecca for golf lovers with myriad nearby courses that stay open into the night, and strolling through the beach town's little shops and markets is a delightful excursion.



Hydro Pool Pavilion at Rayavadee



Chiang Mai



Tamarind Village



Chiva-Som Health Resort

## Getting There

There are several airlines that fly into Bangkok (Thailand's hub international airport) from Atlanta. Your best bet for the shortest amount of air time is on Delta, which has direct flights from Atlanta to Tokyo, then Tokyo to Bangkok. The journey is approximately 22 hours long (don't worry—it's worth it!); you'll lose a day going there, but gain a day coming back home. You'll need to hop a domestic flight to Chiang Mai and Krabi (both just over an hour), but Hua Hin is a three-hour drive south of Bangkok.