



BANGKOK WITHOUT THE BANG

Caroline Phillips on a peaceful haven hidden in the heart of one of the world's most hectic cities

I'm not ordinarily a fan of Bangkok — too much heat, too many knock-offs — but then there's the Sukhothai hotel. Yes it's surrounded by high-rise buildings in one of the noisiest and most traffic-choked cities in the world. But stop a while — inside, it's pure orchid-filled *Zen and the Art of Hotel Living*. Plus it offers something that's as rare as a paragliding saffron-robed monk: it's a resort hotel set calmly in the centre of the city.

It sits in six acres of landscaped gardens full of Eastern promise — including a golden Spirit House for celestial beings, water features, bougainvillea and an enormous swimming pool. Cross the threshold and you'll find Jim Thompson sage and copper silks, warm teak, antique urns and jasmine-garlanded statues of Buddha. One guest called it the Power of Calm.

Ask for a bedroom overlooking the courtyard, with its decorative pond. There you can relax like a divinity but still enjoy details that are more Silicon Valley than Siam, such as ten adaptor sockets to fit iAnything. Even the Celadon restaurant offers iPads with food slideshows alongside printed menus. Its dishes, with rice paddy herbs, pandanus leaves and garden chillies, hold more promise on the iPad than in the mouth, but the European restaurant, La Scala, has a visiting roster of Michelin chefs.

Everywhere attentive staff glide by with massive smiles and hands clasped in gestures of *sawasdee ka* greeting, serving guests in Bermudas or Chanel and besuited Singaporean businessmen. When you sip your fresh coconut water straight from the coconut and breathe in air that's heady with the



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scent of orchids, it's hard not to feel like a lotus-eater.

Go afterwards into Bangkok and you'll see brilliantly white temples, royal palaces and an emerald Buddha, plus a floating flower market and long tail boats. There's even an air-conditioned sky train that's more Zurich than Bangkok. Suddenly the air will be full of haunting *luk thung* music, beeping tuk-tuks and pungent spices. *f*

Rooms at the Sukhothai start at £148 per night: reservations@sukhothai.com; +66 (0) 2344 8888; sukhothai.com

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