

“SAWASDEE to,” the familiar Thai greeting is uttered as Jirapatorn Jantarakul hands the malachite hand udders me to the lobby lounge of the Siam Kempinski Bangkok Hotel. The malis is a souvenir hand bouquet made of jasmine buds and flowers in season. It’s similar to that of the boyfriend in the Hawaiian culture, where it’s used as an offering, a gift or a souvenir.

With the malis around my wrist, I enter the hotel’s vast lobby and am immediately directed to the sitting area to the left of the entrance. A waiter hands me a cold towel and a refreshing welcome drink, a wonderful respite from the sweltering 35-degree Bangkok heat outside.

It’s been three hours since I left Kuala Lumpur International Airport for Don Mueang Airport. I was met on arrival at the airport by the hotel’s representative and transported via the Mercedes Vito Grand Tourer to the hotel. It took slightly more than an hour to get through the Bangkok traffic to reach Rama 1 Road, where the hotel is located.

The grounds on which the hotel is standing today used to be part of the Lotus Pond Palace (Sra Pithum Palace) commissioned by King Mongkut or King Rama IV (made famous to Westerners by the story *The King and I*) as a retreat palace outside the city. The palace is now the royal residence of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.

With a smile, Jirapatorn asks for my passport to facilitate checking-in. I see a few others in the red uniforms attending to several other guests. A few minutes later she gives me a clipboard with a form for me to sign. The WiFi and the mini bar in the room are complimentary, she tells me, before handing me the room key. “Let me show you to your room. Your bags will be sent to you shortly.”

I’m about to experience a luxurious Kempinski stay.

HEIGHT OF LUXURY
The envelope on the table reads “Mo Bini Ismail Fauziah,” a common mistake on Malaysian Malay names whenever we find ourselves in a foreign country. Inside is a card with a handwritten welcoming note from Samir R. Wildemann, the hotel’s general manager and Kempinski senior vice president (operational) for Southeast Asia.

Also on the table is a replica of the tak-kak made of chocolate and a bowl of local fruits.

From the sixth floor room window, I can see the pool and the garden. In fact, all the rooms at the Siam Kempinski have this awesome view.

Friends who found out through my Instagram and Facebook postings that I’ll be staying at a Kempinski property raved favourably about the other Kempinskis they’d stayed in, with many gushing about its impeccable service.

When I was having lunch at the hotel’s



VISION IN RED

A stay at the Siam Kempinski Bangkok Hotel presents Fauziah Ismail with the opportunity to acquaint herself with the famous Lady in Red, the iconic brand ambassador of Kempinski Hotels worldwide



The iconic Lady in Red

Niche Restaurant, KSK Land head of corporate communications. Alice Lim accidentally dropped his napkin to the floor. He picked it up. A waitress, already busy taking orders at our table, took the napkin off him and offered to have it replaced. The smile on Lim’s face says it all. That’s attentiveness for you right there. And I thought she wouldn’t

have noticed,” he says, beaming. KSK Land managing director Joanne Kus remembers well her stay at a Kempinski. Sharing her experience while staying at the Siam Kempinski, she recalls: “I normally read before I go to sleep. One time, I slept and the book fell. The next day after my room had been cleaned, I saw a book marker in the book and at the page I was reading it. They didn’t have to do it but they did it anyway. That was nice.”

Another time, she recalls receiving a photograph of the Lady in Red team from Kempinski Jakarta on her birthday. They know you by name, they know your habits. That’s a little scary but that’s guest data

intelligence,” she adds. This is one of the reasons why Kus will be bringing in the Kempinski brand for the KSK Land maiden mixed commercial development project, S Conlay, in Kuala Lumpur in 2024. She’s also had memorable experiences at Kempinski hotels in Turkey, Germany, Thailand, Indonesia, China and Italy.

Kempinski Hotel and Residences will take up one of the three high-rise buildings at S Conlay, offering 240 rooms and 300 apartments. The other two towers will be luxury apartments.

General manager of Siam Kempinski Hotel Bangkok and senior vice president of operations in Southeast Asia for Kempinski



All guest rooms at the hotel face the swimming pool and garden.

Being a Lady in Red means to take care of guests in the same way as I would look after any member of my family.
Jirapatorn Jantarakul



Welcoming touches



Luxuriously spacious deluxe room.

being in Cuba. The 120-year-old brand was started by wine merchant Barthold Kempinski but it was his son-in-law Richard Unger who, after taking over the business after Barthold’s death, grew the business to include property.

In 1918, Unger opened the first hotel with the Kempinski name in Berlin at the same site where Barthold had opened a restaurant and a few rooms to stay in. The hotel at 27 Kurfurstendamm is where the Kempinski Hotel Bristol now stands. For 103 years, the modern, progressive five-star hotel enjoyed the undisputed status of the sole luxury hotel in Berlin.

The brand remains European but it’s now majority-owned by a Bahraini royalty while the Thailand Crown Property Bureau has a minority stake in the company.

LADY IN RED
Kempinski, which is Europe’s oldest luxury hotel group, also look guest relations to an entirely new level when it introduced its “Lady in Red” concept in 2009. They’ve been described as the extended arm of the hotel’s general manager, having the authority to make immediate decisions when it comes to guest well-being, where applicable.

Dressed in “classroom” red and present at each of the Kempinski hotels worldwide, they’re essentially the go-to person for any guest’s needs. Meanwhile, Jirapatorn is the head of Siam Kempinski’s Lady in Red team.

Sharing her story on the hotel’s Facebook, she wrote: “Being a Lady in Red means to take care of guests in the same way as I would look after any member of my family.”

With a smile, she shares: “What I’ll never forget is this one time when I met a mother and her new-born baby who had to go through complicated medical treatments. It was an emotional and difficult time for the mother and I was happy to offer my support by escorting her to the hospital. The treatment was successful and her baby boy is now 1.5 years old. I’m so happy for her and we’re in regular contact. Whenever she comes to Bangkok, Siam Kempinski Hotel Bangkok is what she calls home.”

Adding, Jirapatorn shares that her working hours are flexible. “Sometimes, we have to come in very early in the morning and leave for home very late.”

She handles the VIPs at the hotel, namely heads of government and state, and royalty, and meets the needs of large groups of guests checking into the hotel. “Joanne and Samir are tight-lipped about how the Malaysian Lady in Red will look like. Would we be seeing the Malaysian Lady in Red in a kebaya, sarong or a cheongsam or a blend of all three elements in one?”

Well, we’ll just have to wait and see. Fauziah@thedepartments.com.my

The trip was sponsored by KSK Land, which will be bringing the Kempinski brand to Kuala Lumpur in 2024.