

LUXURY OUT OF THE LIMELIGHT

SAMANTHA JOSEPH EXPERIENCES SIAM KEMPINSKI



Stepping into the white marble lobby of Siam Kempinski is to step into an entirely different world from the bustle of Thailand's capital city. The oasis of peace that they have achieved here is doubly impressive considering the luxury hotel's location – it's right in the middle of the shopping district, with direct access to the Siam Paragon Shopping Mall and a walkable distance to the BTS Skytrain. There's an immediate comforting hush when you're in the premises, and the illusion of being at a resort rather than the middle of the city is continued by the magnificent pool encircled by the hotel building.

The setup of the Siam Kempinski may seem outright modern, as the building is more about clean lines leading to the central heart that holds the ample greenery and swimming pool rather than any direct reference to Thai architecture. But the stamp of Kempinski's country of location is everywhere. Lotus flowers sprout from door handles, and *nagas* dance their way through paintings from washrooms to luxury suites. Each room displays custom Thai prints on the walls, and the custom-made Harn toiletries scent your hair with soothing lemongrass and herbs. This isn't a typical luxury resort that you wander in and can't tell whether you're in Germany, Taiwan or Thailand – you're encased in a pleasant cocoon of peace and accommodation, but the Thai influences are a clear and necessary part of Siam Kempinski's identity.

There are two wings, Garden and Royal, housing 303 rooms and 98 residences. The terrace of the Cabana Rooms lead directly into the swimming pool if you want that extra resort feel. The Deluxe Room that we stayed in is a space of muted creams and browns, and a desk for working and a comfy sofa in front of a table with a welcome chocolate *tuk-tuk* and fruit basket. The window offers an aerial view of the saltwater swimming pools and landscaped gardens that recall a tropical getaway by the seaside. The bathroom with stand-alone bathtub is glass-walled, but there are a set of blinds for those who prefer privacy, and each section of the bathroom – the toilet, shower and bathtub – is separated off or fan out from the entrance doors and sink area, giving you ample maneuvering area and the clever illusion of a much greater space.

Nothing seems spectacular in the room, but everything manages to exceed your expectations just enough. The firm white bed and airy pillows

may seem like neckache central, but I promise you'll sleep like a baby on a cloud; the towels are straightforward gigantic white slabs of cloth, not particularly fluffy, yet they embrace and dry you with immediate attentiveness.

WHERE TO EAT

The hotel has five culinary options – there's the Hanuman Bar off to one side of the lobby. Niche with its witty Asian/non-Asian options of an ingredient, the Rotunda for sun lovers, Brasserie Europa for more sedate buffets and, finally, Sra Bua by Kiin Kiin. While we can't fault the food at either Niche or Brasserie Europa – hearty, filling, fresh and accompanied by considerate service – Sra Bua is in a league of its own.

Upon walking in, you'll find yourself in a soothing area of multilevel wood, high ceilings and pools of white lotus flowers. To one side is a Thai pavilion draped with a traditionally-patterned roof with enough space to fit a large family. Although the tables are a handspan away from each other, they each maintain a feeling of privacy thanks to the cleverly placed wooden dividers and split levels throughout the restaurant.

What Sra Bua offers via Kiin Kiin's Morten Neilson is a unique interpretation of molecular gastronomy by way of Thai food. Prepare yourself for an exhaustive journey, beginning with little snacks including cashews in an edible plastic bag and crisp chicken skin with peanut sauce to set the tone for the meal. The main courses are also the main events, as presentation is just as much part

of the molecular gastronomy experience as flavour is. In our case, the dinner started with an impressive display of sea-inspired elements that brought to mind a rich seafood dish. Forget bowls, the moreish broth was hidden within a bowl of beach sand and seashells, followed by fresh grilled seafood and a crunchy cone with crab filling – spelling out both familiar memories of spicy tom yam and a day at the beach.

The rest of the dishes offered differing levels of spectacle, always with an interesting combination of flavours. The lobster with red curry spheres, for example, is a signature dish – recognisably Thai yet modern. Some, like the tom ka with baby corn and chantrelle mushrooms, may have been overshadowed by the snazzy delivery – the men at the table were served a steaming bowl of the thick spicy coconut soup, while the women were presented with the frozen version in a hollowed wooden dish, replete with a demonstration of freezing the tom ka into white fragments that were then served with lightly toasted vegetables.

Dessert is no less captivating – the rather whimsically named Flower Shop gave us a bouquet of flavours fresh from a garden wedding in the form of ice cream, combining the flavours of elderflower, lavender and perhaps a tinge of honey. Meanwhile, Sra Bua's interpretation of mango with sticky rice saw the sticky rice, rolls of gelato thickly flavoured with mango, and a cloud of coconut cotton candy in a glass, waiting for hot coconut milk to combine them all into one delicious dish. Eating here is a rewarding combination of satisfaction and an experience.



1 Kempinski's iconic lobby is not always ready to help
2 Sra Bua by Kiin Kiin
3 The Cabana Room
4 Kempinski The Spa

KEMPINSKI THE SPA

When they describe the treatments on the spa menu as sensational, they aren't exaggerating. I tried the Winter Warmer, one of The Spa's Seasonal Massages that also includes Spring In Your Step (detoxing), Summer Bliss (balancing), and Autumn Sleep (relaxing). Winter Warmer promises to be an energising treatment involving deep tissue massage and a delicious-sounding butter foot balm massage. At 90 minutes, it might be a little longer than the usual hotel spa massages, but it's well worth it. For one thing, the service is impeccable. Before you begin your session, you're asked what level of massage pressure you would prefer, but don't worry if partway through you change your mind. Your assigned masseuse has the demeanour of your favourite loving aunt, who only wants the best for you. You already feel at ease before you start the massage, and that makes it so much easier to relax once the very thorough deep tissue massage is underway.

Despite going with the choice of greatest pressure for the massage, I was never in pain. The masseuse had hands akin to steel coated in lambskin, coaxing every tension and worry out of each limb in a calm and persistent manner. You can't see what's going on, so you exist in a sensory limbo of smell and touch as you're slowly and surely tenderised by able hands. The Spa uses Harn and Novallis products. The scents, a soothing mix of eucalyptus and lemongrass, lingers in the air but doesn't overpower and the texture doesn't leave behind feelings of oiliness once the massage is over.

I was seen to in the Angelica room, a single-bed massage room. There are eight treatment rooms, and you can choose the couple rooms or the single rooms. Each room is bigger than your living room, and comes with a separate washroom, and bath and steam room. My masseuse apologised when she let out a minuscule cough or had to leave the room to fetch some other aromatic product, as if any perceived inconvenience to me was not to be borne. Massages aren't the only option at Kempinski The Spa – they also have facials, body treatments and royal treatments – the Royal Siam Experience is a luxurious-sounding whole-body experience involving a soothing herbal soak, papaya exfoliation, lavender body massage followed by hot herbal compresses, and ending with a refreshing facial treatment.