

Reserve. Now.

The Ritz Carlton chain has launched their very first "Reserve" in Krabi, on Thailand's west coast. The new brand has an emphasis on low density, high style and unparalleled luxury. **Michael Franco** takes you on a tour.

Even if you arrive at the Phulay Bay Ritz-Carlton Reserve by sea, you'll want to accept a golf-cart ride around to the front of the resort so you can enter properly. Do so and you will step through curvy Moorish archways punched through soaring aubergine walls before emerging at the entry chamber. Here, you will walk across a series of flat, square stepping stones level with the surface of a large reflecting pool that makes it feel like you are walking on water. If the effect makes you uneasy, it was designed to do so; the idea is to shake you out of the ordinary into a truly extraordinary space.

Should your arrival take place at night, the walls surrounding the reflecting pool will be aglow with hundreds of candles that will light your way to the large "floating" Thai pavilion. There is no front desk here, no brass luggage carts or marble counters. Instead, you are welcomed in a serene way and invited to your room where the check-in formalities are handled—if you choose—over a relaxing flower-strewn footbath and a sampling of the Thai appetizer known as mien kham.



SUITE DREAMS

Your suite might include a private plunge pool set on its own tiny island in the middle of a pond, a sand garden where the pattern will change daily as if by magic, an outdoor private yoga platform, or a rooftop terrace overlooking the jade-green sea. One thing it will most certainly contain is the property's gigantic 4 x 2 metre bed—a billowy oasis of comfort that is emblematic of the grand scale to which this property was designed by Thai architect Lek Bunnag (who has also lent his vision to the Four Seasons on the Malay island of Langkawi, and the Barai residential spa in Hua Hin, Thailand).

In addition to having a penchant for things large and Moorish, Bunnag never forgets where he is designing, and so the soaring wooden doors that divide rooms in the guest suites are hand-painted with scenes of flirtation and romance in the traditional Thai Lanna style.

Other dashes of style and opulence you'll find in the 54 suites on the property include frangipani-shaped terrazzo tubs (sometimes both indoor and outdoor), colourful skylights carved in clover and star patterns, flat screen TVs and Bose sound systems. If something isn't in your room that you'd like to have arranged, your personal butler will do his or her



best to accommodate your request.

A RESERVE THAT PRESERVES

As for the grounds in which all this lavish luxury is set, Estelita Seбето, the resort's General Manager says: "We have worked to maintain a setting that evokes the very best of the natural environment of the hotel and sourced local and sustainable materials in its

construction and styling. We see the resort as an ambassador for the local environment and for the tradition of the land here in Phulay Bay." Indeed, a hallmark of the new Ritz-Carlton "Reserve" brand is not only low density of rooms, but low impact to the natural environment as well. This results in pathways hemmed in by tropical foliage, wooden bridges that lift you over small ponds, and an overall sense that you're in a national park rather than a resort.

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GOURMET GARDENS

But have no fear, there'll be no foraging for your food on these park grounds. Like individual gourmet gardens, six different eateries cater to a broad range of appetites; all of them sharing an emphasis on locally sourced ingredients, often from organic farms. The focus on all things local even extends to the tableware at signature restaurant Sri Trang, where the crockery is made from local celadon clay and painted by regional artists.

Particularly recommended is the Lae Lay Pavilion where you can dine on fresh seafood while sitting on the edge of an infinity pool that wraps around the alfresco dining deck. For something more intimate, you can head up to the rooftop here or venture over to Sri Trang by the Sea, an intimate pavilion where up to ten guests can dine at the end of a jetty overlooking the coastline.

Of course, romantic beach dinners or picnic lunches can be arranged, as can catered meals aboard your own yacht.

SAY SPAaaaaH

If lounging at the private cabanas beside the capacious infinity pool, swinging in a hammock beneath the palms, or relaxing with a cocktail on the loungers while listening to live traditional Thai



musicians isn't enough to relax you, then you'll also want to investigate the spa, managed by the renowned ESPA group. Hot and cold plunge pools, 11 treatment rooms for couples and solos, and lounge areas bathed in soothing cream colours ensure that your muscles won't stand a chance of holding on to any tension. It's a healing harbour in which you can reprovision your body and soul before heading off to your next port of call.

ARRIVAL DETAILS

There is no pier at the Reserve, however it is possible to dock just offshore where the resort can arrange transfers for you

via dinghy or traditional Thai longtail boats. It is important to check the tide tables because at low tide, the distance to the shore can be quite long.

Phulay Bay, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve

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Longitude: 98.74382972717285

