

SUBLIME SAMUI

Koh Samui has reinvented itself with the addition of some of Thailand's most luxurious resorts, setting new standards in private villa accommodation

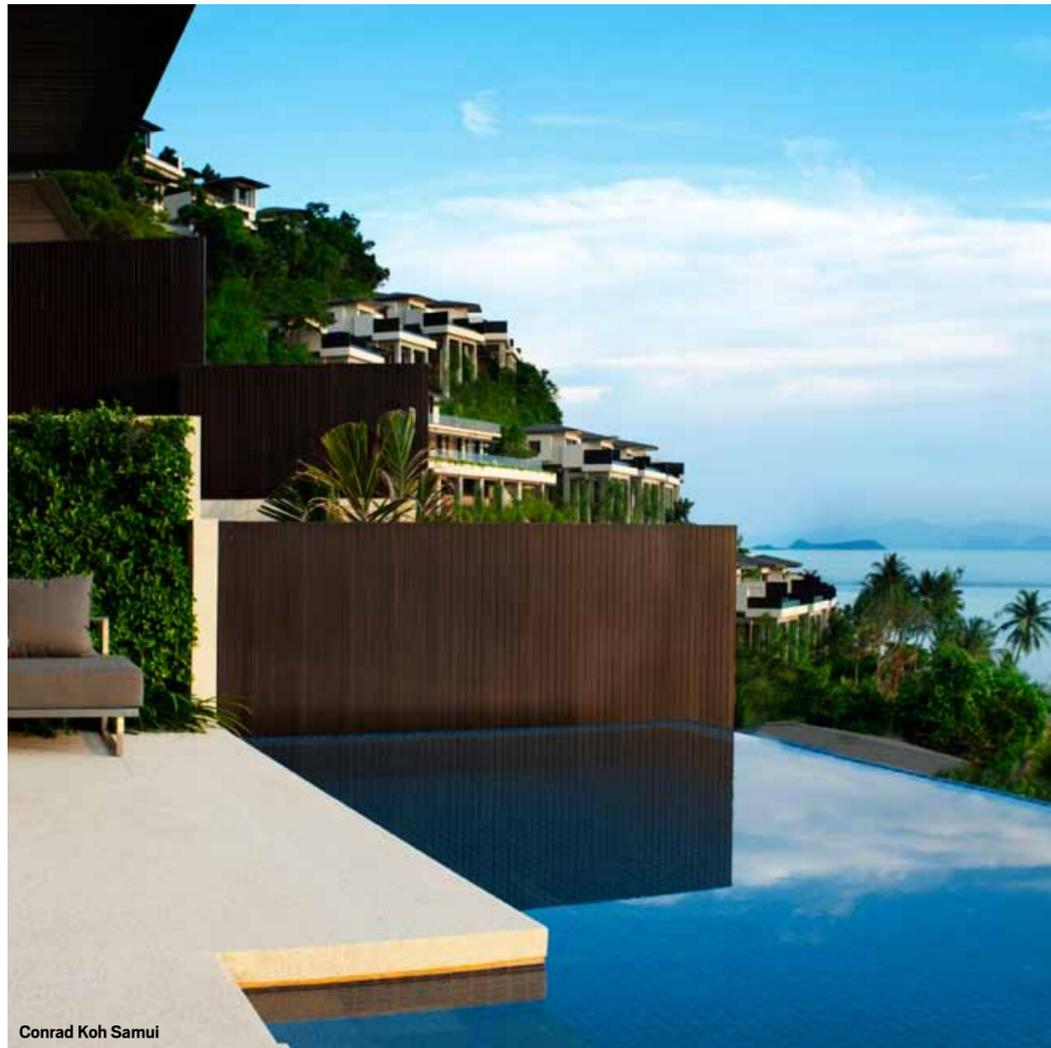
WORDS: Nick Walton

Four Seasons Koh Samui
Beach Villas are tucked away amid lush vegetation in the island's northeast

Thailand remains one of the most popular choices for those in search of idyllic scenery and postcard perfect beaches, and nowhere is capturing the attention of jet-setters looking for seclusion more than Koh Samui, where a wave of new luxury resorts is raising the bar in premium villa accommodation. We scoured the island for the very best, from the new Conrad and Akatsuki resorts to other recent arrivals including Banyan Tree and W Samui.

Conrad Koh Samui The newest resort to open on the island of 'safe haven', Conrad offers a twist on contemporary five-star service and luxury. Located at Phang Ka at the island's southwest tip, the resort offers access to a secluded private beach and 80 freestanding pool villas in one- and two-bedroom configurations.

Villas include modern Thai décor – think tropical hardwood floors and Thai silk furnishings, local artworks and unique artefacts – as well as spa-style bathrooms, infinity pools, private balconies and dramatic hillside views across the 'five islands' and Anghthong National Park. Rooms also come fully equipped with LCD televisions, high-speed wireless, iPod docking stations and secure virtual private networks. +66 77 915 888, conradkohsamui.com



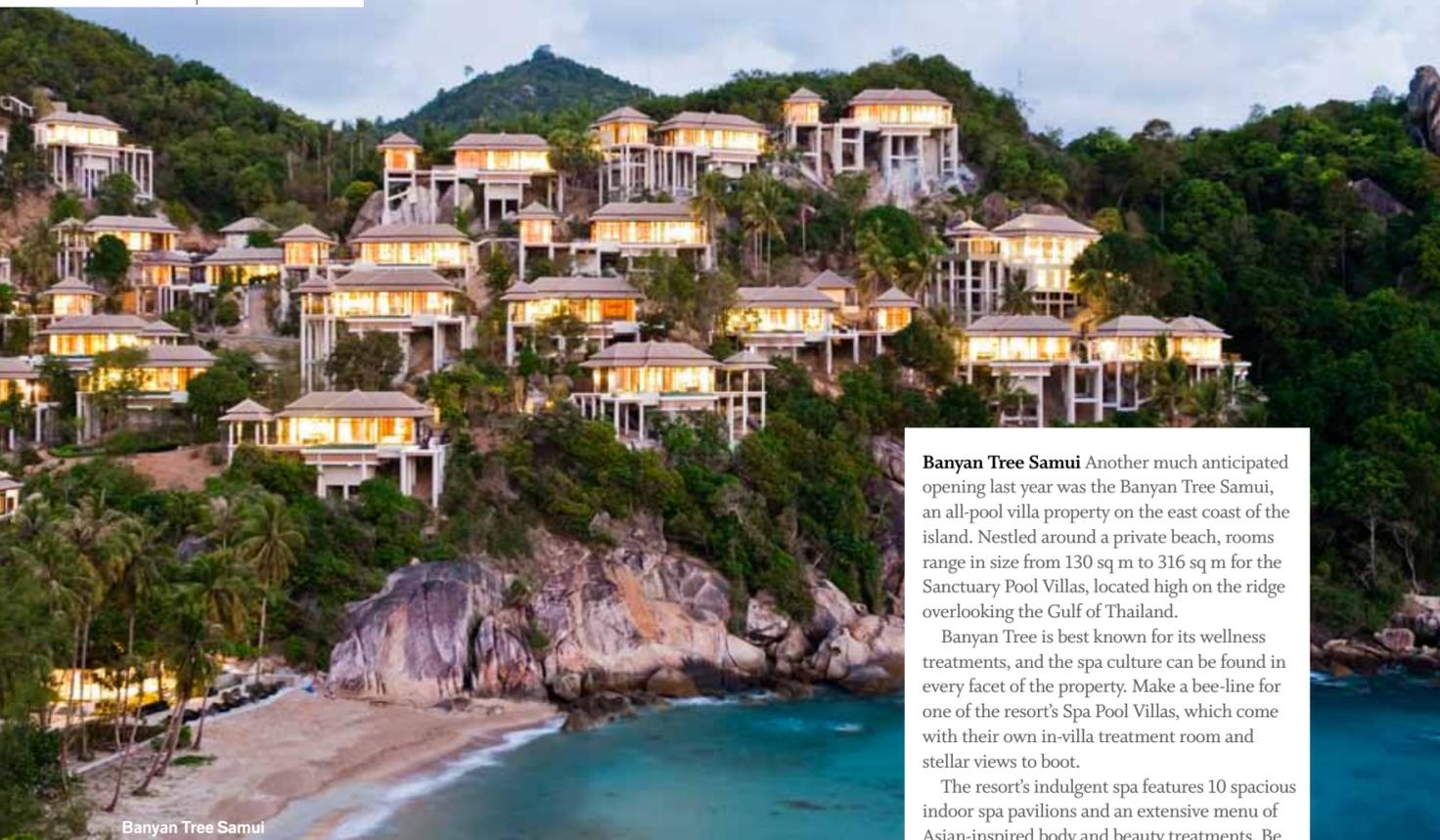
Conrad Koh Samui



Akatsuki Resort

Akatsuki Resort Another newbie on Koh Samui is the Japanese-inspired Akatsuki, the latest luxury property to open on Samui's idyllic west coast. Tucked away on Lipa Noi Beach, the Riccardo Tossani-designed Akatsuki takes only one booking per day, meaning you have a luxurious tropical home away from home for a group of up to 15 guests.

Built entirely from recycled wood and utilising natural ventilation design, the villa is as green as it is luxurious. Even with a big group, you'll find plenty of little corners in which to hide away, including three swimming pools, an on-site spa and a near-deserted beach complete with a private salas. Accommodation is in five individually-styled suites, while dining – with dishes created by a personal chef – takes place in one of three secluded pavilions. +667 748 5704, www.akatsuki-resort.com



Banyan Tree Samui

“Nowhere is capturing the attention of those in search of lavish seclusion more than Koh Samui, where a wave of new luxury resorts is raising the bar in premium villa accommodation”

Banyan Tree Samui Another much anticipated opening last year was the Banyan Tree Samui, an all-pool villa property on the east coast of the island. Nestled around a private beach, rooms range in size from 130 sq m to 316 sq m for the Sanctuary Pool Villas, located high on the ridge overlooking the Gulf of Thailand.

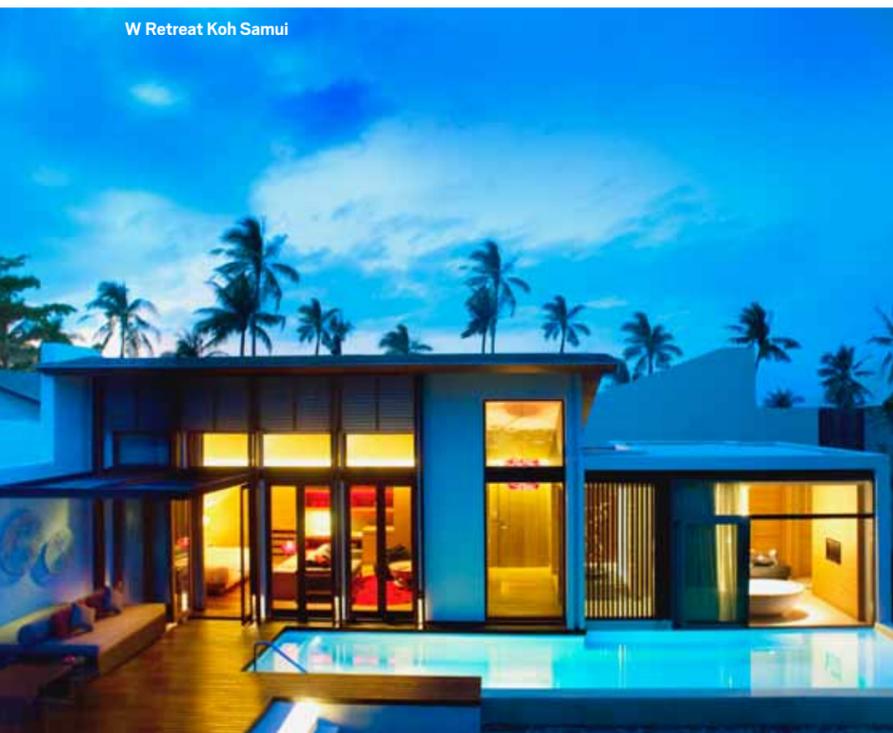
Banyan Tree is best known for its wellness treatments, and the spa culture can be found in every facet of the property. Make a bee-line for one of the resort's Spa Pool Villas, which come with their own in-villa treatment room and stellar views to boot.

The resort's indulgent spa features 10 spacious indoor spa pavilions and an extensive menu of Asian-inspired body and beauty treatments. Be sure to make time for the Rainforest, Samui's only hydrotherapy spa. Here, a hydrothermal circuit comprising of alternating hot and cold thermal treatments, including the rain walk, bucket drench and vitality pool, complements the main spa's massages and facials. Dining also plays an important role at Banyan Tree Samui. You can enjoy authentic Thai cuisine at Saffron, opt for a beachside char-grill or, for something a bit more special, try the destination dining options, including dining on a solitary rocky outcrop, or on a deserted beach. +66 77 915 333, banyantree.com

W Retreat Koh Samui Located in Samui's north, W Samui was another much-anticipated opening of last year, when Starwood brought its chic, distinctly urban brand to the white sandy beaches of Thailand. The resort's 75 private pool villas offer a design-savvy retreat, combined with world-class dining and one of the island's best beaches.

All villas boast custom-designed furniture, private patios and spa-style bathrooms. Created by Carl Almeida of P49 studios, the villas feature clean lines, earthy elements and a distinctly modern W persona throughout.

The W innovation extends to the resort's restaurants and bars. You can try contemporary Japanese with a cosmopolitan twist at Namu and enjoy leisurely breakfasts at the Kitchen Table, watch spectacular sunsets from the terrace at the W Lounge, dance the night away with international DJs at the WooBar, and then detox in the morning with Tonic's selection of shakes and fresh juices. +66 77 915999, starwoodhotels.com



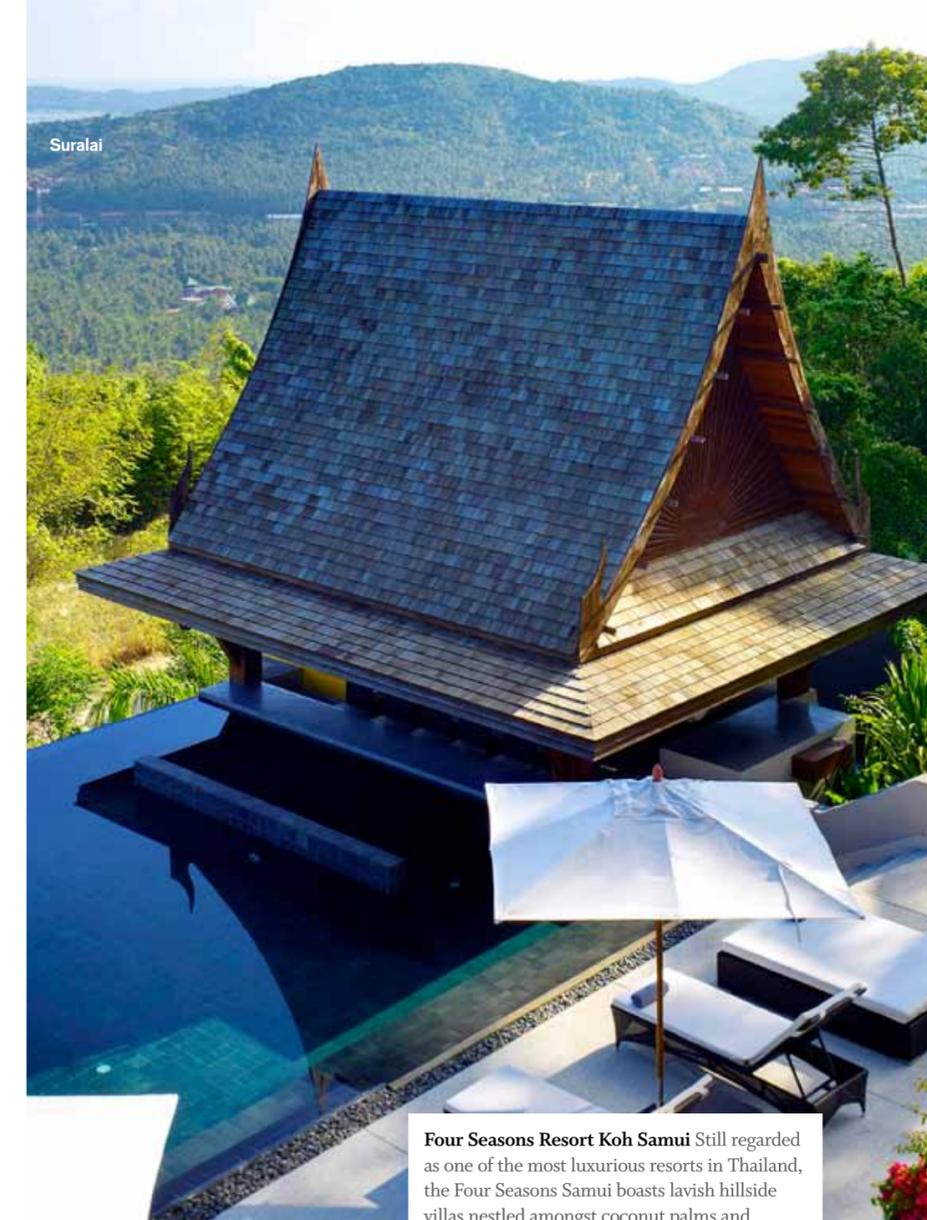
W Retreat Koh Samui

“Located at the end of a winding path, Suralai is a unique retreat that, once found, is incredibly hard to leave”

Suralai In the hills above Bhoput is one of the island's best-kept secrets. Located at the end of a winding path, Suralai is a unique retreat that, once found, is incredibly hard to leave. The villa may be suitable for children, but in our books it's best described as an adult Disneyland, a citadel of serenity where the wine flows and the music plays. Boasting a 20-metre infinity pool wreathed by three villa wings and an open-air sala – perfect for homemade mojitos – *Suralai* translates as 'Home of the Angels', and in this instance those heavenly vessels definitely have great taste.

Interiors are modern and refined, without the shiver you get from minimalism in the tropics. The expansive living spaces of the main building feature floor-to-ceiling glass which opens to cool mountain breezes in the afternoon, and Bose speakers located throughout the property make it easy to create whatever ambiance you're looking for in your villa.

Each of the six spacious guest rooms features ensuite bathrooms and private balconies, while two master suites and a twin room also boast lavish terrazzo soak tubs. suralai.com



Suralai

Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui Still regarded as one of the most luxurious resorts in Thailand, the Four Seasons Samui boasts lavish hillside villas nestled amongst coconut palms and manicured gardens, and a discrete location in the island's northwest. Situated in a natural amphitheatre-shaped bay, the resort boasts its own private beach, offering perfect seclusion for the amour-inclined.

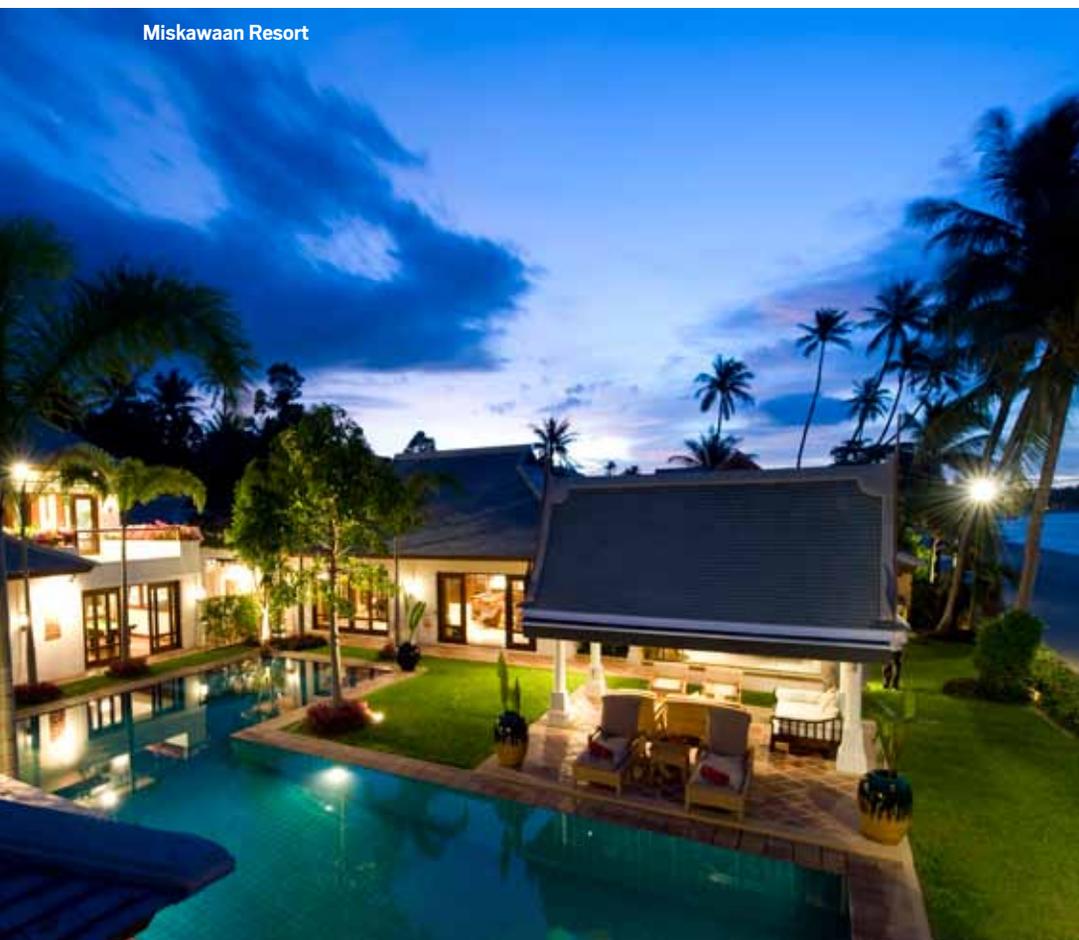
The Four Seasons Samui consists of 60 one-bedroom villas as well as 14 lavish residences, ranging from two to five bedrooms each. All accommodation is contemporary with a distinctive Thai influence in the design and décor. Make for one of the resort's Premier One-Bedroom Villas, which offer stunning views across Laem Yai Bay and the Gulf of Thailand, as well as private 29 sq m infinity plunge pools, spacious sun decks and opulent bathrooms, complete with terrazzo shell-shaped bathtubs and rain showers.

The beauty of the Four Seasons is that there's little reason to leave; Lan Tania offers modern all-day dining, both indoors and al fresco, while Pla Pla, located on the cusp of the private beach and dressed in white Thai sandstone, serves up the freshest catch of the day, cooked to guests' specific requests. During the day, lounge at the Beach Bar, with tropical themed cocktails, or join one of the intimate yoga sessions at The Spa, with its five individual treatment salas and a host of holistic remedies. +66 77 243 000, fourseasons.com/kohsamui



Four Seasons Koh Samui

Miskawaan Resort



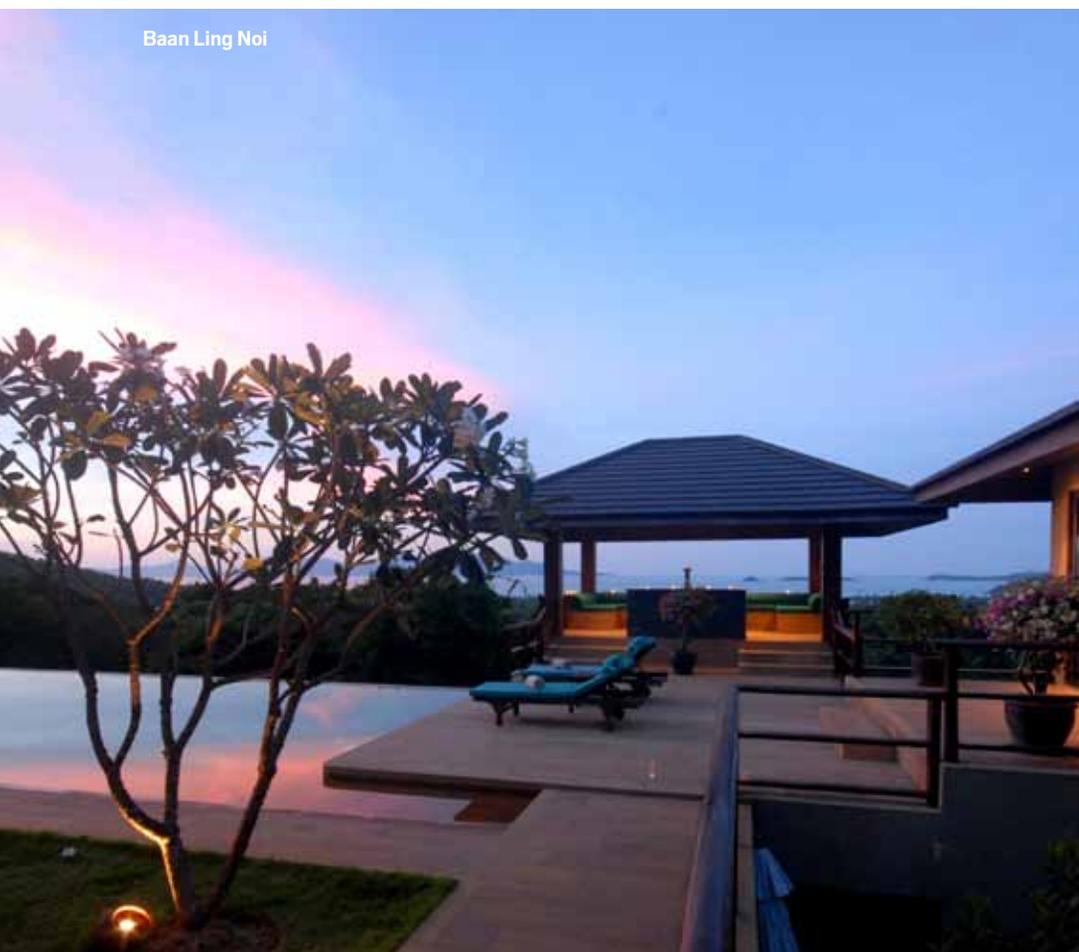
Miskawaan Resort One of Samui's best kept secrets, Miskawaan is a series of nine lavish, individually-designed beach-front villas located in the island's north. Perfectly suited for families looking to travel together and stay in their own home away from home, the resort's villas are spacious and contemporary, ranging in size from three to six luxurious bedrooms.

While some villas offer different amenities – including pool tables, swimming pools and outdoor pavilions, all come with modern décor, state-of-the-art kitchens and direct beach access.

You'll want for nothing here; private chefs cater to your every whim, and the vibrant restaurants and markets of Fisherman's Wharf are only minutes away. All bookings include continental breakfast and round-trip airport transfers, and with the private nature of these beautiful villa properties, Miskawaan is especially popular with wedding and honeymoon groups. You'll have your own slice of Samui all to yourself. +66 7733 2271, miskawaan.com

“Miskawaan is a series of nine lavish, individually designed beach-front villas located in the island's north”

Baan Ling Noi



Baan Ling Noi Just down the road and with an equally lofty outlook, Baan Ling Noi is a stunning villa that marries traditional Thai design and contemporary living. With four suites nestled around an expansive infinity swimming pool, guests can choose to while away the day poolside on sunloungers or on a spacious balcony, or curl up with a good book in the shaded sala.

The villa boasts a modern kitchen in black granite where you can whip up a light lunch or a cocktail party with ease, especially with the help of two dedicated villa hosts, as well as a generous entertainment space. There is a subtle intelligence to the layout – everything has been well thought through.

Head for the master bedroom, which is set in a pavilion off to one side and features timber floors and a large terrazzo bathtub hidden behind a king-sized bed. Walls feature locally sourced art, while Thai artefacts, including wooden carvings and hand-beaten brass bowls, are scattered throughout this home away from home, complementing the villa's modern, clean design. +66 77 427 648, baan-ling-noi.com