

phuket

take your (island) time

Phuket is a holiday destination where you don't have to feel guilty about doing nothing at all...

WORDS: ANNE LOH

As the speedboat leaves Royal Phuket Marina and heads towards my home for the next three days, Zeavola Resort on Koh Phi Phi, the sky is a glorious blue and I feel the tension drain from my body with every bounce of the boat on the sea. A brief squall blows in and drenches us, making us all laugh and relax. We make a beach landing, and I'm immediately shown to my beachfront suite. After jumping under the refreshing outdoor rainshower, I set off to explore.

What first attracted me to Zeavola Resort was its strong nature conservation stance and after meeting general manager Florian Hallermann (and every guest does, as he takes a personal interest in every single one), you'll realise he's the unstoppable force infecting his employees with his passion for nature.

Conservationists will be glad to know that the resort is recycling waste water to use for irrigation and all fallen vegetation is turned into compost to keep its "green" look lush. Plans are afoot to bottle drinking water on the island to cut down on bringing in mineral water from Phuket by boat.

Zeavola Resort's PADI-certified dive centre and its location in the Koh Phi Phi Marine Park means that serious divers can just step off land (or a boat) and immediately find themselves ogling hawksbill turtles, blacktip reef sharks and ghost pipefish. Owing to the number of diving expeditions in the area, Zeavola spearheaded the initiative to install 50 anchor buoys so dive boat captains won't drag their anchor through beds of fragile coral. Visitors can help out with the coral nursery project that Zeavola dive masters and other dive volunteers

SERIOUS divers can just step off land (or a boat) into Koh Phi Phi MARINE park

Photo: ANNE LOH



Clockwise: Book a day trip at Zeavola's dive centre; jellyfish; the Zeavola pool; tuck into local cuisine

in the area have been undertaking since the coral bleaching of 2010. Even though I don't dive, it is nonetheless extremely interesting to sit through the Coral Awareness seminar given by Virginie from the centre (all resort guest are welcome). She admits that "saving coral is not as sexy as saving whales and dolphins", but points out that it is very important as coral forms the building blocks of the ocean.

Don't worry if you're not into all this saving the ocean stuff though; Zeavola doesn't push the conservation message down anyone's throat. It just likes to give guests opportunities to help out if they want to, such as serving a resort-cooked lunch every Friday at Baan Laem Tong School, which is its project to ensure the sea gypsy children get balanced nutrition.



The resort takes pride in its food. I love the Exotic Breakfast served in Braxil (barefoot entry only). You're greeted with a bag of Chinese-style fried fritters with dips, on which are printed the choice of hot dishes available. My picks of Big Ben (fried eggs, baked beans, toast, sausages, tomatoes, potato gratin) and Chao Praya (porridge with salted egg, morning glory, stir-fried chicken

and sausages) — on separate mornings, of course — are done well. You still get the regulation buffet spread.

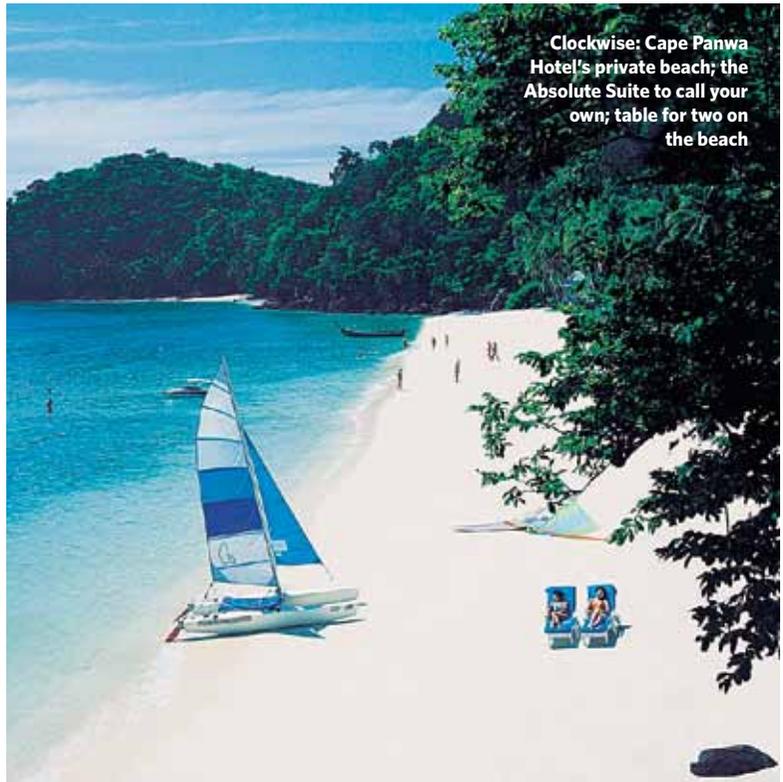


Zeavola wants to let guests HELP OUT if they want to



Dinner at the all-day Tacada on the beach when the fires have been lit slows the day down and switches on the romance. The menu has both Western and Thai dishes — the latter are really beautifully done. To keep things interesting, special themed dinners are sometimes put on, such as the seafood barbecue on the Sunday I'm there.

A small, more rustic-style resort is the Coral Island Resort on Koh Hae, to the south-west of Phuket and only 15 minutes by speedboat. Couples who want more of that Robinson Crusoe feeling will probably find



Clockwise: Cape Panwa Hotel's private beach; the Absolute Suite to call your own; table for two on the beach

in this friendly resort the rest and relaxation that they're looking for.

For the ultimate in seclusion and coddling, look no further than the Cape Absolute Suite at Cape Panwa Hotel. Built on top of a hill, it's got 360-degree views of the Andaman Sea. This new annexe is self-contained with a full kitchen, living room, two bedrooms, spa rooms, poolside dining area and, of course, a pool. You could whip up a meal, but why would you when you have your own butler to order your meals from the main hotel — or arrange to have a chef come in and cook your breakfast to order? You could have a buggy to take you for the blissful Full Moon Anti-Stress Body Massage — but could easily have a

spa therapist come to you instead.

To really get away from the day trippers that can throng the

take me there

ZEAVOLA RESORT



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CORAL ISLAND RESORT



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CAPE PANWA HOTEL



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ANGSANA LAGUNA PHUKET



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The CAPE ABSOLUTE SUITE has 360-degree views of the Andaman Sea



Clockwise from left: Playtime at the beach and the kids' club; the sprawling Angsana



islands, book the 25-foot *Panwa Princess*. I embark from Cape Panwa Hotel's atmospheric, whitewashed private pier, and as the yacht sets off for Coral Island, I'm served a glass of chilled champagne. While we don't make landfall on this trip, we can direct the yacht where we want to go. I'm happy just to enjoy the seascape on the top deck, sip champagne and enjoy a very tasty lunch when we dropped anchor for a while. If you like, the captain will pull in to a secluded beach so you can snorkel.

For a different private dining experience than at Absolute Suite, there's always the beach dining option, which sets up a table for two on the hotel's private beach. I take the cute beach tram down from the main hotel lobby and am greeted by a table spread with salads and fresh seafood such as salmon, crab and prawns ready to be grilled by a personal chef and served by my



ANGSANA LAGUNA PHUKET *has a baby elephant-in-residence*

personal waiter for the evening. What a great setting for a romantic dinner with a soft breeze blowing in from the sea and the stars twinkling overhead.

If you have children under the age of 12, one of the best places to have a fun, relaxing family holiday is the Angsana Laguna Phuket; it has

an amazing TreeHouse Kids Club and baby elephant-in-residence Namchok ("Lucky"). Namchok visits the kids' club, breakfast area and beach every day, delighting children and adults equally.

The three-storey, two-bedroom loft I stayed in has a rooftop terrace that's great for a winding-down drink at the end of the day. With a lounge, balcony and a kitchenette, it's ample space for a family to spread out. And you can hop onto the free lagoon shuttle and have a water tour of the entire Laguna Phuket development — or hop off to enjoy Sunday brunch at the Banyan Tree perhaps (foie gras and lobster, anyone?), and still return to the family-friendly Angsana where you and the little ones will be very well looked after. ◀

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