

A new luxury naturist resort opens in Thailand this month. **Paul Rouse** talks to co-owner Patty Sankhaow...

Travelling

light



Excited:
Peace Blue
Naiharn
owners Golf
and Patty
Sankhaow

THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF MANY NATURIST TRAVELLERS IS THAT THEY ARE PRIMARILY HIPPIES, CONTENT TO SETTLE FOR CHEAP AND CHEERFUL ACCOMMODATION THAT RARELY EXTENDS BEYOND BASIC OR BOHO. The public perception of many travellers to Thailand, meanwhile, is that they are only going for one thing: and we don't mean the temples.

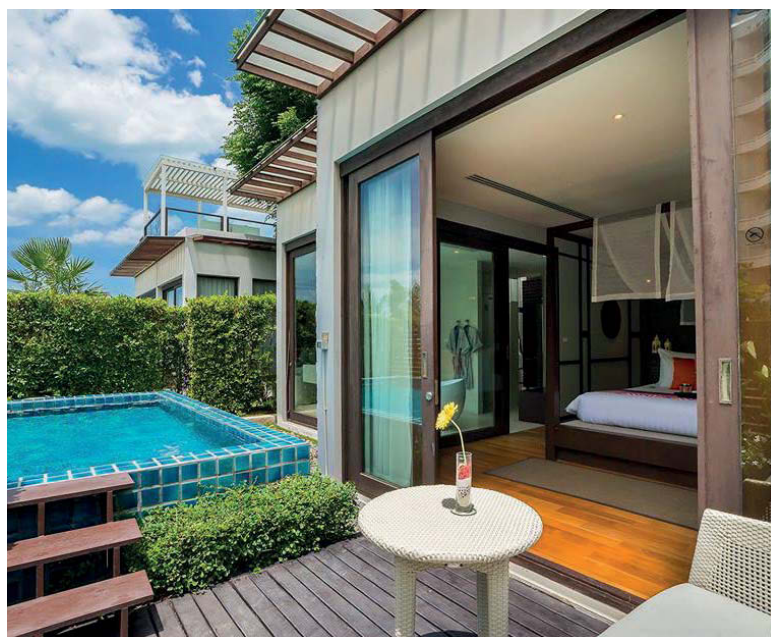
The owners of Peace Blue Naiharn, which is due to open in Phuket this month, are determined to change some of those perceptions, building a stylish and sophisticated upmarket resort with a firm message of "no sex please, we're naturists".

With an Open House and Soft Opening Party scheduled for October 19, and bookings being taken from November onwards, owners Pattama Sankhaow (known as Patty) and her husband Golf are justifiably excited about their new project.

Not that they are new to the naturist scene in Thailand, having managed the successful Lemon Tree Resort in Phuket for the past two years. However, with the contract up for renewal and the property's owners wanting it to revert to its former status as a mainstream (i.e. textile) tourist resort, Patty and Golf decided it was time to move on and start afresh. "Lemon Tree isn't our brand," she explains, "and we couldn't take the name with us to the new location. But we would like to think that we have a good reputation as hosts, and that our

naturist customers will follow us to Peace Blue, where we have an opportunity to establish our own place, exactly as we want it." As for the new name, she explains, "it was quite simple. Naturists are looking for peace, and blue represents the sky and the sea here."

Here, in case you're not overly familiar with Phuket, is Naiharn, which is away from the tourist sprawl and the less salubrious areas of what has become one of Thailand's most popular holiday destinations. Thailand's traditional



and conservative culture means the country has no naturist beaches as such, but within the grounds of Peace Blue, and on several of the smaller, remote nearby islands and bays that Patty and her team know well, being naked is the norm.

“Phuket’s weather is perfect for naturism,” says Patty. “We have three seasons here – hot, wet and cool – but the latter is relative, as the temperature rarely falls below 27°C, and even when it rains, it’s warm rain. We’re also well connected, as the international airport has direct flights to destinations such as Moscow, Dubai, Melbourne and Sydney, and connecting flights to most of Asia’s major cities, including Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and of course Bangkok.”

Decision

Patty’s background is in Phuket’s hospitality industry, and she worked as a training manager for one of the island’s large four-star hotels before taking over the running of Lemon Tree in July 2016. She clearly enjoys the naturist side of the industry, and maintains that “naturist guests are open-minded, friendly, easy-going and easier to take care of than most textile guests. We also realise that naturism is a niche, and not nearly as



competitive as the textile tourism market. When it came to planning our future, it wasn’t a hard decision. We can see that the naturist market is growing, but at the moment, there are a limited number of naturist-friendly resorts and hotels in Asia. We’re hoping we can set the standards.”

Peace Blue certainly looks as if it is going to do that, with a range of top-quality services and facilities combined with a blend of contemporary and traditional Thai interior design. It comprises a complex of seven suite villas, four of which have their own plunge pools, plus a further 15 superior rooms in the main building. There are currently 13 full-time staff, and at capacity, the resort can accommodate 66 guests, and can be booked exclusively by groups or associations if required. Guests can enjoy the outdoor pool with pool bar, all-day dining restaurant, gardens, fitness facilities, sauna and massage.

The latter often has connotations of course, especially when used in conjunction with the word Thailand, but Patty is adamant on this issue. “Our resort is for genuine naturists only. We have clear communication regarding house rules for our guests to follow, both before their arrival and during their stay, so there is no room for misunderstandings. We also have rules on the same lines for our staff. If they wish, guests can go naked everywhere inside the resort during their entire stay, and although we don’t have any official naturist beaches, we still organise trips to secluded islands where they can also go naked



in comfort. But we are not a swingers’ resort, and public sexual activity and drugs are not allowed. Moreover, non-naturist guests aren’t welcome.”

As for attracting those guests in the first place, Peace Blue is obviously ahead of the game compared to many other “new” resorts. “We have carried over our membership of the Thailand Naturist Association and the Australian Naturist Federation from our time at Lemon Tree,” explains Patty. “We are also featured on several naturist websites including the International Naturist Federation and Naturist Travel, and work closely with specialist naturist tour operators such as Euronature, Oboena and TourExcel.”

For the foreseeable future, Patty expects Peace Blue’s clientele to be similar to Lemon Tree’s “predominantly mature couples from Europe and Australasia, many of whom book long stays during the high season, which runs from December to April”. She adds: “During the low season, from May to November, the stays are shorter, and we see more visitors from other Asian countries.”

There are, of course, some factors that are beyond Patty and Golf’s sphere of influence – Thailand has had its share of political instability in recent years, and the shadow of the tsunami in 2004, which destroyed large parts of Phuket, still hangs heavy over the region. But with characteristic optimism, the couple are confident about the future. “Some things won’t change,” concludes Patty. “Naturists come here to relax and enjoy a peaceful vacation, and the surroundings are conducive to what most naturists love to do: sunbathing, swimming, reading and socialising with others. It’s our aim to create the best naturist resort in Thailand, and offer great service that makes our home their home.”

Not a bad mission statement with which to start a new venture. 🏡

