

## Cool and satisfied in Koh Samui

The Thai island was once a backpacker haven but now is home to some of the best resorts, plus funky eateries with amazing food and a lively party life, **Eugene Yiga writes**

There's something special about the food in Thailand. This became clear on the first night of our trip, when we experienced what it means to eat "Thai-style" in Yaowarat, Bangkok's 200-year-old Chinatown and one of the most renowned street-food destinations in the world.

We found a corner restaurant, sat down at an outdoor table that was practically in the middle of a bustling street and ordered a dozen different dishes, all of which were spread out before us in a mix of colours, smells and tastes.

It was much the same in Koh Samui, an island in the gulf of Thailand, a 45-minute flight from Bangkok.

Given its location, it's not surprising that there was fresh seafood aplenty. And tropical fruits were everywhere we went.

A top recommendation for lunch is the new We Green, which is only a short distance from the popular Lamai Beach on the southeast coast. It's half vegetable farm, half restaurant and 100% perfect for a healthy meal.

And for dinner there's the nearby Sabianglae Restaurant.

As far as I could understand, "Sa Bieng" means "full of food" and "Lae" is a short word for "sea".

That sounds about right given that it was here we enjoyed another night of sharing way too much to eat, with the sound of the gentle waves right at our feet.

On the north coast of the island another delicious experience was waiting for us at Café 69, where chef-owner Vivien Bella has spent the past 10 years giving indigenous Thai cuisine a modern twist by revamping his grandmother's recipes.

The restaurant is near the



Koh Samui, an island in the gulf of Thailand, a 45-minute flight from Bangkok, offers delights both in scenery and the delicious Thai cuisine on offer. /123RF/SIRAPHOL



Seafood is a staple on the island. / MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

**There was fresh seafood and tropical fruits everywhere**

Fisherman's Village, which is located in the historical part of Bophut and described as "a bustling outdoor shopping and eating complex offering locally made art, souvenirs, and street food".

The area comes to life every Friday for a walking street market which attracts locals and tourists from all over the island.

Sadly for us, heavy rains prevented us from visiting it that evening.

Instead, we took a drive to Chaweng, popular for its beach during the day and its clubs at night. The beach town is indeed a party city after sunset with plenty of lively bars and cabaret venues.

That meant a stop at Starz Cabaret, which has drag shows three times a night and featured one of the best Whitney Houston impersonators I've ever seen (not that I've seen that many at all).

From there it was a taxi home through the bright and booming streets, which got darker and quieter as we approached the hotel, whispering on the way to our rooms so as not to disturb the peace.

Indeed, there was something serene about staying at Renaissance Koh Samui Resort & Spa, a luxury property that's part of the Marriott International group.

The private villa felt like a home away from everything and everyone else.

It even has your own private plunge pool so that you don't have to walk to the main ones – there are two, including a 50m lap pool – for a swim.

The hotel often hosts themed-dinner nights (think lobster night, prawn night, blue-crab night, Italian night, beachfront barbecue and more).

In our case, things were even more special because the meal took place in the library,



A room at the Renaissance Koh Samui Resort & Spa. / MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

which usually hosts movie nights with free popcorn and a selection of Thai, Spanish and Arabic tapas.

Once again it was a feast of epic Thai proportions, starting with colourful additions to our rice, plenty of seafood (including a delicious octopus in coconut milk), and cocktails.

And while the hotel does offer cooking courses that teach you how to prepare a tradition-

al meal from scratch, we didn't have to do anything besides sit back and enjoy, right up to the mojito ice-cream for dessert.

Apparently a meal isn't complete without that sweet ending because it's a reflection of your class.

Clearly this was as high class as it gets!

■ Eugene Yiga was a guest of the Tourism Authority of Thailand.