

Here's an idyllic tropical escape that promises security, luxury and privacy. Enter Buddha's garden with **Michelle Balmer** and be swept away by the untouched beauty of Koh Samui.



Spoil Yourself

With Miskawaan's Luxurious Beachfront Villas

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
Kirsten Holst



The heavy wooden doors open. I step onto hand-cut terra cotta tiles and walk slowly alongside a pool that reflects a crisp image of the whitewash and timber residence beside me. When I hit the wall of frangipani and salt infused air, I stop and take a deep breath.

I've entered Buddha's garden, my home for the next five days.

Miskawaan – which in Thai means Buddha's garden – is a luxury gated villa estate that lies on a peaceful bay off the Gulf of Thailand, on the island of Koh Samui.

Expatriates in Asia and guests from as far as the USA, Canada and the UK are lured to Miskawaan's unblocked views of Koh Phangan. But the main attraction is the boutique-style accommodation, which offers a refreshing alternative to the typical chain hotels and resorts found dotted around the island. Operations Manager Michael Fahey says, "Our guests come

to stay with us because they aren't satisfied holidaying in traditional hotel rooms," – a trend that Michael believes is becoming increasingly popular. "We provide personalised holiday accommodation that suits both families and groups of friends," Fahey says.

That is the soul of the Miskawaan. Casual and unpretentious, it evokes the feeling of a home. Each contemporary tropical residence is fully-staffed and guests can also request a personal Thai chef. Though this doesn't equate to a formal dining affair, unless you have a specific request. In keeping with a relaxed theme, chefs serve family-style meals around simple table settings that have been cleverly decorated using elements from your villa's garden.

The design and layout of each villa reflects both the owner's and architect's vision of their ideal beachside holiday home. Eight botanically-named villas – each one slightly different in layout, size and character – utilise a total of six acres of beachfront land.

Villa Champak's five bedrooms and living quarters form a U-shape around a lap-pool lined with dark turquoise tiles. Inside, exposed Laotian teak and pine ceilings integrate with marble and timber floors.

The highlight of three-bedroomed Villa Bougainvillea is its central tropical garden that's laden with palms and orchids, a few terra cotta sculptures and the occasional visiting amethyst butterfly.

Villa Waterlily has enviable water-views from all five bedrooms and living areas, which wrap around a large pool and garden area, creating an abode that's well-suited to families – or groups of friends who don't want to barter over who gets the room that overlooks the sea. At the entrance, a statue of Buddha sits over a pond in front of a slate wall trickling with water.

Despite their obvious architectural differences, each villa has its own beach frontage and is made with the same standard of high quality materials and incorporates the open-plan concept. Glass doors encased in varnished teak allow coconut palms and tranquil greenery to fuse with interior spaces. And each garden has its own pool and sala – or gazebo – with daybeds or soft furnishings so you can make the most of Samui's placid breeze.

Less than 35 steps from your garden gate – depending on the tide – your toes should be touching the clear waters of Maenam Beach. Voted as the ninth best beach in the Asian Top 10 beaches by news.com.au, this horseshoe-shaped beach is ideal for swimming, and water-sports including windsurfing, sailing and jet-skiing. Waves tend to lap, rather than break here, making it very safe for young children.

While a beach holiday revolves around the water, golfers won't want to miss a round at the world class Santiburi Samui Country Club golf course just a fifteen-minute drive away. Set high up in the hills amidst a natural jungle environment, the 18-hole par-72 course is touted as one of Asia's most memorable. Looking over the tops of coconut trees back towards Miskawaan, the course has



a wide-angle view of the entire bay that embraces Maenam Beach and Koh Phangan island.

If golf is a priority, your dedicated villa manager can arrange a tee-time, and transport if required. Your villa manager is your "go to" person during your holiday who can also cater to requests such as dinner on the beach or lunch in your garden.

Apart from imaginatively presented Thai food, the chefs of Miskawaan prepare international-style dishes and shop daily for the ingredients. Alternatively, if you prefer to self-cater and would like your kitchen stocked with European cheese, Tasmanian lobster or other delicacies, make a request and your chef will source the produce from one of Koh Samui's new gourmet food and wine shops. Fine dining venues also continue to open up on the island and there are now many acclaimed restaurants and trendy wine bars to choose from, especially if you have a reason to celebrate.

Private on-site events are another area in which Miskawaan specialise, with Villa Lotus being a popular choice for larger events. On my final day, a 40th birthday was being set up to include a live band and numerous guests from New Zealand. Weddings and reunions are also popular at Miskawaan as booking the entire estate guarantees

up to 100 of your friends and family can enjoy a party and have a holiday at the same time.

But if it's a special occasion you're interested in booking, get in early. In one year of operation Miskawaan already has bookings confirmed for Christmas and New Year in 2009 as "...many of our past guests want to ensure they secure their favourite villa," Fahey says.

"Small wonder," I think to myself as I recline on my daybed to watch the sun disappear. The views to Koh Phangan seem so perfect in the evening light – too perfect, like a backdrop on a movie set. ■

QUICK FACTS

- Minimum stay is three nights
- High speed WIFI in all villas
- 24-hour security
- Villas have wheelchair access
- A variety of boat charters and water sport activities can be arranged – pick up is from in front of your villa gate
- Miskawaan's ninth waterfront holiday residence Baan Tamarind, is located on Big Buddha beach and sleeps up to 12 adults

Flights to Koh Samui:

- Bangkok Airways flies from Singapore and Bangkok
- Thai Airways flies from Bangkok
- Berjaya Air flies from Kuala Lumpur

For more information, please visit: miskawaan.com