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My husband and I settled in for a 12-hour flight to Thailand, eager to leave behind winter in Germany. The plane soared above cloudy Frankfurt, and I saw the sun for the first time in months. As the plane engines hummed, I grew drowsy but never drifted off to sleep. I had been anticipating this trip, our third to Asia and first to Thailand, for months.

A second flight and hour-long car-ride later, we boarded a speedboat from Ao Nang, a town in the Krabi Province. Soon I glimpsed a cluster of pointed green roofs nestled between steep cliffs that looked just like photos on the booking website — we had found paradise.

Resort life

Centara Grand Beach Resort and Spa is accessible only by boat or footpath, exclusive but still close to Ao Nang. We were drawn to towering palm trees, large waterfront swimming pools, open-air restaurants, spa, fitness center, PADI dive shop

and ocean-view suites.

Every morning, we headed straight for an outdoor table at the main dining facility for an American-style breakfast buffet of eggs Benedict, French toast, pastries, omelets and tropical fruit. We dined on the terrace overlooking the pond, and watched the koi and resident three-foot-long lizard. Unfortunately, we also had to watch the time. Every day was booked between our PADI scuba certification and other activities.

To wind down after our adventures, we rushed to the room to sip cocktails and soak in the Jacuzzi on our balcony before the sun disappeared below the Andaman Sea. Most nights we had dinner at one of the resort restaurants, had a nightcap in the club lounge and went to bed early.

One evening, we hiked the “monkey trail” to Ao Nang. It proved to be a lengthy endeavor that seemed to drag on as I grew increasingly anxious

MY PARADISE



A romantic retreat in Krabi

Story and photos by
GENEVIEVE NORTHUP





that a curious monkey might jump on me (it didn't happen). We arrived at Lae Lay Grill, sweaty, thirsty and starving. The 3-kilometer trek was forgotten when our waiter brought out lobster, grilled fish and crab fried rice.

Diving Krabi

We completed classroom training in advance and dove right in to hands-on learning. For several hours, we completed scuba checklists in the resort pool.

The next two days we were immersed in the scuba culture. During our long, pleasant boat rides, we met enthusiastic divers, some experts, others recently certified. My husband and I prepped our gear together before submerging to demonstrate skills and explore with the instructor. Following each dive, we excitedly recounted the marine life we'd seen: blacktip reef sharks, giant moray eels, masked porcupine fish, lionfish and titan triggerfish.

The final descent on the second day was our first as certified divers. For once, we didn't have to worry about passing tests. We navigated Ao Nui's underwater terrain of giant rocks and narrow archways at a relaxed pace. Back on shore, ecstatic but exhausted, we ordered room service and toasted to our success.



Snorkeling the Phi Phi Islands

A trip highlight was snorkeling the Phi Phi

Islands. The owner and chef of Krabi Castaway tours, "Big," spent the day escorting us in a traditional wooden longtail boat. For hours we snorkeled in clear 85°F coves, spotting juvenile blacktip reef sharks, cuttlefish and even a large jellyfish, at least 15 inches in diameter, floating away.

We finished our swim at Losama Bay, and Big served a romantic lunch on a table he had positioned at the edge of the secluded beach. He disappeared to the boat while we ate Tom Yam soup, stir-fried vegetables and chicken, and curried crabs. Afterward, we went to Maya Bay, the most photographed destination in the Phi Phi Islands and the setting of the Leonardo DiCaprio film, *The Beach*. In late afternoon, we could enjoy the beauty without hordes of tourists.

Temples, jungles and hot springs

We bid a reluctant farewell to Centara, but we had one more excursion before leaving Krabi. It was above 90°F and muggy, but we were determined to climb 1,200 steps to the golden Buddha atop the Tiger Cave Temple. During the ascent, we avoided the mischievous monkeys playing with water bottles they had stolen from fellow hikers. We paused for photos with friendly Thai families and cheered on fellow foreigners who sat breathless on the steps. The panoramic view at the summit was stunning, and we got a few days' worth of exercise in the process.

We had an inexpensive, delicious meal of Pad



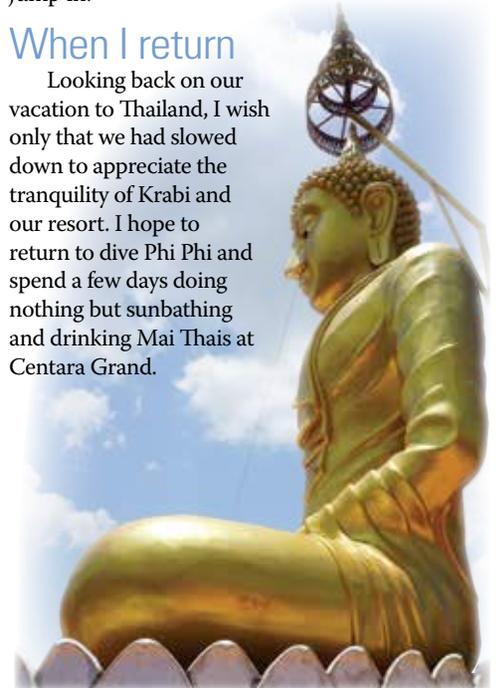
Thai, fresh fruit and smoothies at the market by the Emerald Pool, and walked through the forest to the crowded mineral baths. We pressed on to the more peaceful Blue Pool, where we clapped our hands and watched in amazement as water bubbled up and rippled across the placid azure surface.

Our tour ended at the Hot Springs.

My husband soaked in the cascading tubs formed by waterfalls and tree roots. I was too busy taking photos and missed my chance to jump in.

When I return

Looking back on our vacation to Thailand, I wish only that we had slowed down to appreciate the tranquility of Krabi and our resort. I hope to return to dive Phi Phi and spend a few days doing nothing but sunbathing and drinking Mai Thais at Centara Grand.



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