



Boutique resort The Slate's Prakaikaew Na-Ranong on the future of Phuket's tourism

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Phuket is a world-class destination with white sandy beaches, towering limestone cliffs and glistening turquoise waters. While it has established itself as a **tropical haven**, the island was initially put on the map for its tin mining industry. This evidently began as far back as 1528 A.D. during the reign of King Ega Thodsarot of Ayudhya.



Formerly called Indigo Pearl, the luxury hotel has gone through an overhaul and now focuses on an avant-garde approach to experiential travel. Its main aim? For guests to explore Phuket's rich heritage through excursions to authentic locations around the island.

"We take the resort deeper into the soul of the islands. While Indigo Pearl was a beautiful name, we believe The Slate has stronger ties to tin mining," said Prakaikaew Na-Ranong (better known as "Moo"), the co-founder of the hotel. "In the mining business when they discovered tin, the slate was the rock deposit which has always been there. It has a direct link. That's why we changed the name and brought in more local experiences for guests."



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Prakaikaew Na-Ranong, co-owner of The Slate.

Moo is no stranger to tourism in Phuket. After all, she is the daughter of world-renowned hotelier Wichit Na-Ranong, who has been hailed as the "father of tourism in Phuket." We ask her about the changing needs of today's travellers and how she sees Phuket evolving as a destination in the future.

Evolving travel landscape



beneath the Eiffel Tower or even hiking The Grand Canyon, for example, have been photographed and uploaded so many times on Instagram. This has resulted in an evolving travel landscape. Experiential travel, for one, is all the rage these days.

“Travellers of today search for transformational experiences, so they feel more fulfilled,” said Moo. “Instead of going to swanky restaurants, individuals now prefer dining with the locals. They’d like to be more involved with the community of the country they’re visiting so when they come back home, they’ll be like, ‘Oh yeah, I’ve been to that village and interacted with the locals. I’d like to do that more.’”



The Slate’s design and architecture seek inspiration from the history of Phuket island.

In keeping up with the changing needs of today’s travellers, Moo’s team at The Slate incorporates Thai elements into the resort’s offering, such as its food and beverage. One of its in-house restaurants, Black Ginger, boasts a menu inspired by Phuket street food. Set on an island in the middle of a lagoon, entering the restaurant is an experience in itself. Access to Black Ginger is by raft, which will take you across the waters and into the main venue.

“My great-grandfather came to Phuket from China. His first job was transferring people on the ferries, this was before he became a tin miner,” explained Moo, “It was this that inspired architect **Bill Bensley.**”



“At The Slate, we encourage guests to experience Phuket from a different angle and for them to learn about the history of the islands. Everything we do and stand for, it’s to highlight the legacy of Phuket. The interior design and architectural style itself is industrial-chic, reflecting the tin mine. It’s unique and experiential.”

“This translates well with our guests,” she added, “They appreciate enjoying the finer things about the destination such as cultural experiences. They have an eye for good design and fashion, as well as art.”

How to discover Phuket like a local

While Moo lives in Bangkok, Phuket is her second home. When she’s not at the gym or spending time on Nai Yang beach during her free time, she wanders about the small alleys in the old town and stumbles upon hidden gems.

“There’s no better way to discover Phuket than to walk. Whenever my friends visit, I like taking them to the old town. It’s intriguing even to me just admiring all these beautiful shophouses boasting Sino-Portuguese architecture,” she said, “When you spend time and walk in any city without an agenda, you’ll see a lot of interesting things — as well as street food.”

“It’s funny but apart from the Phuket local food, I frequent **Salvatore’s**, an award-winning Italian trattoria owned by my friend from Sicily. I love how the food here is authentic. My favourite dish is the *Spaghetti alla bottarga*, a traditional Sardinian style spaghetti with grey mullet eggs,” she told us.





Her favourite bar? “**Ka Jok See**,” she replied without hesitation, “It’s a restaurant and cabaret bar hidden away on Takua Pa Road, a small side street just half a block away from busy Ratsada Road. It’s an experience in itself. You start by having a quiet set dinner with your friends. As the night progresses, it starts getting a bit wild. Soon, the tables are gone and you see people dancing. It’s definitely a good place to entertain people.”

Ka Jok See has become the go-to hideaway for those in the know. In fact, it has become so secretly famous that it boasts a star-studded guest-list the likes of Naomi Campbell and Kate Moss, who celebrated her birthday there one year. The restaurant is so exclusive that it only accepts reservations, evident by the “private party” sign displayed at the entrance of the restaurant.

The future of tourism in Phuket

“Although Phuket is now one of the top destinations in the world, I believe this is just the beginning, especially for more sophisticated travellers. The island has a lot to offer as a destination. It’s a big island, with different areas each having their own distinctive vibe. If you want peace and quiet, Northern Phuket is your best bet,” Moo said, “For more nightlife or action, most will usually go to the infamous Patong. And then in the middle, you have the old town. It’s more cultured with temples at every corner.”

And as with any other destinations that are rapidly developing in the tourism sector, there are bound to be adverse effects on the local people. Moo, however, does not share the same sentiments.

“Actually, I think it’s quite the contrary. As long as new properties and developments respect the culture of the island, I don’t believe increasing development in Phuket will affect locals negatively. Having more tourists on the island will create more jobs in the tourism sector.” she said, “Thai people love sharing the beauty of their country with foreigners.”

“What the government should do is to maintain Phuket’s authentic architecture and culture — so as to preserve the charm of the island,” she said.

TAGS:

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