



## Cocooned

Review and pictures by Victor Paul Borg

At Avatar Spa Mountain Suites rebirth is often sought, and often possible.

Located in Ban Rai, the most isolated corner of Uthai Thani, the southernmost of Thailand's northern provinces, Avatar Spa Mountain Suites has tapped into something of a tourist frontier in a dense confluence of karst mountains, old growth jungle and farming villages. It is within striking distance of some excellent attractions: Huay Ka Kaeng, Thailand's largest and wildest national park, and Khao Pla Ra, a mountain-top cave in which prehistoric cave paintings lurk.

But Avatar is more than a base; it is an exclusive sanctuary situated in a mountain-girdled valley with a private access road. In terms of location, habitat and facilities, Avatar is something of a fantasy escape.

The design is deviant and artistic: the 44 rooms, superficially inspired by the nearby caves, have no straight surfaces, just lumpy and wavy ceilings, curvilinear corners and scratched, imperfect walls on which are scrawled imitations of the nearby prehistoric cave paintings. There's no furniture as such; all table-tops are constructed of concrete, and the sink, mini-bar and wardrobe are set in wall recesses. Bathtubs are concrete too; some have waterfalls, others open roofs. Throughout the resort, living reeds sprouting out of water troughs substitute for banisters, like some kind of organic embroidery.

*This spread, clockwise from top left: The stark concrete exterior of Avatar, its three wings forming a footprint like a three-blade fan, entirely surrounded by lagoons; concrete takes on beautiful hues in the bathrooms of the Deluxe Suites, the bath-tubs in which are set in an open-roofed yard; and the bar lounge at the lobby.*



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The design creates an environment so aesthetically challenging that Avatar immediately draws you out of a normal routine and mindset. Forget work, and instead dabble in everything Avatar has to offer. Start with breakfast on the terrace, a body scrub at the spa, a splash-about in the pool, a walk around the valley, and finish with dinner at the skylight restaurant. For a last drink, head to the lobby for its fixed concrete chairs with feather pillows, pebbly walls and antique German hooded lamps - breezy, intimate, and impossibly romantic. 🌿

*Facilities at Avatar Spa Mountain Suites include a library, gym, multi-treatment spa center, and many activities, courses and guided excursions. Prices start at USD 250 for a double room, and are based on a package that includes full board, mini-bar, selected drinks and free use of gym and other facilities, plus a two-hour spa treatment and free transfer for a minimum of four persons.*



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