



The First Resort

The Tong sai Bay was one of Samui's first five-star properties, but it is, as **Helen Connor** discovers, still as hot – and as green – as ever.

Spend any time chatting with guests around one of **The Tong sai Bay's** two pools (one infinity-style seawater, one crescent-moon freshwater) or two restaurants (famous, open-air Chef Chom's by the lobby, or Floyd's overlooking the beach) and it swiftly becomes clear that repeat visits are a common phenomenon.

Resident Manager Sorayuth Sutthipholpaiboon agrees, and explains that his property is famous for guest loyalty: "We hold twice-weekly cocktail parties and have a core group of guests that come back to us every year, mostly from the UK and mainly aged 30 plus. They love the peace and quiet, the secluded private beach with its unique, toe-tickling sand, and the one-big-family atmosphere among the staff and our guests."

Situated on the northeastern coast of Samui, the island's first ever luxury five-star resort is housed on 25-acres of land which was once a mine and then a simple backpacker retreat. In 1985, the late proprietor Akorn Hoontrakul saw the land, fell in love with it, and bought it a week later. An ardent nature lover, Akorn constructed the resort in complete harmony with nature. No trees were slain. Today, if any of the gardening staff were to harm any flora and fauna around the resort, they

would be given their notice. Harmful chemicals and plastic bags are avoided here, and a lemongrass-based product is used as mosquito repellent.

After a series of additions and renovations from the late 90s to the present day, the resort now boasts a diverse array of beachfront suites, cottage suites and family-size villas; the Grand Villa comes complete with open-air bathtub, gazebo and bar. Add a private plunge pool to the equation for the latest newcomers, the Tong sai Pool Villas. Even with 83 villas/cottages, this is a true garden resort; the splendid lawns covering the property lend an immense feeling of space.

In fact, from many angles, one could believe they were actually in a Swiss resort, so European is the landscaping and architecture; the odd monitor lizard popping out of the lush foliage a reminder that you are very much in the tropics. Another tropical hint comes in the Prana Spa, where two-person cottages offer the feeling of privacy and serenity compulsory for an effective, local herb-infused Thai spa session. 🍷



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