TALES by the RIVER

Shangri-La Hotel, Bangkok

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SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, BANGKOK

THERE'S NO GREATER ACT OF HOSPITALITY THAN TO EMBRACE A STRANGER AS ONE'S OWN.



OUR LONG-TAIL BOAT MEANDERED DOWN THE Chao Phraya River like a forlorn serpent as the late afternoon sun painted long silhouettes of palace spires and bell-shaped stupas over the glistening water.

With a balmy breeze in my face, I closed my eyes and let the memories of the day float through my mind. Flashbacks of shiny malls, open-air markets, tuk-tuks and saffron-robed monks all danced inside my head and then dissolved into each other as we pulled into the hotel's private jetty.

A porter greeted us with a disarming smile and took our bags gracefully into his care. Inside, the elegance of the hotel was beautifully paired with an aura of welcome that was palpable. Colourful silk tapestries dotted the lobby and beyond, and elegant Thai day beds beckoned bewitchingly. As we soaked in our surroundings, a deep sense of contentment filled our hearts as we realised this was to be our haven for the days to come.



THAT AFTERNOON, THE WARM TROPICAL SUN

shone endearingly like an old friend and we found ourselves dining in the company of the glistening river at NEXT2 Cafe. It was a somewhat surreal dining experience, as chefs performed their culinary magic right before our eyes and we were practically eating straight out of the pan, off the grill and out of the wok.

After lunch, and with our stomachs rather full, we took a stroll through the hotel, where we discovered The Chocolate Boutique: a quaint little treasure trove for chocolate connoisseurs that delighted us with the most divinely light hazelnut pralines.

As night fell, we said hello to the river again and this time it sparkled a reply through the August moon's reflection. At Salathip, we were whisked away into a delightful maze of exotic spices and flavours, beginning with an exquisitely piquant bowl of tom yum goong, whilst not too far away, traditional Thai dancers and musicians click-clacked to a mesmerising symphony of gongs, cymbals and drums.









WHEN WE RETURNED FROM DINNER,

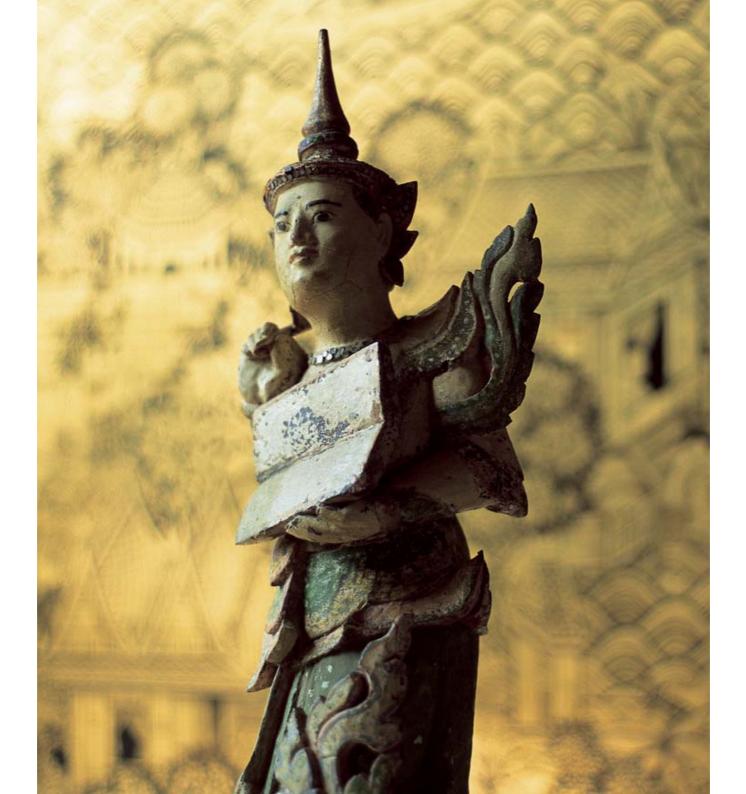
it appeared our butler had just left, as the room was immaculately clean and on the coffee table, there were two perfectly peeled mangoes and a fresh pot of chamomile tea still piping hot.

From the window, the city was glamorous with its glittering lights dancing to a silent beat, and on the river, little boats chugged slowly and rhythmically, eventually disappearing into the night.

I melted into the plush embrace of the cool cotton sheets and with the lights off, I looked out for one last time to see the half-moon like a sleepy eyelid resembling mine. I sunk deeper into the bed and hardly a moment passed before I was back on the river, relishing pralines and watching dancers run on the water beside our boat as musicians braided my hair.











SERENITY GREETED US AT THE DOOR AS THE

warm stone walls of the spa silenced the pulsating city outside. Worry and anxiety dissolved into the essence of oolong, and the soft chimes of Tibetan singing bowls lingered almost unnoticeably in the air. Exotic wooden art and artefacts spoke softly of ancient Himalayan tales, and together, all the elements ushered us into another world, another time, before boardrooms and before emails.

Deep sweeping strokes over my back and my neck transported me to a state of sheer bliss. Scattered memories of the week skipped in and out of my mind, and I had trouble remembering if it was Wednesday or Friday, so decided it was Thursday. And as the ambrosial scents of jasmine and juniper wafted around my head, I drifted blissfully into a dreamy existence somewhere between wakefulness and sleep.

Outside, the mystical Chao Phraya was already setting the stage for more enchanting moments.







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