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THE INTERVIEW
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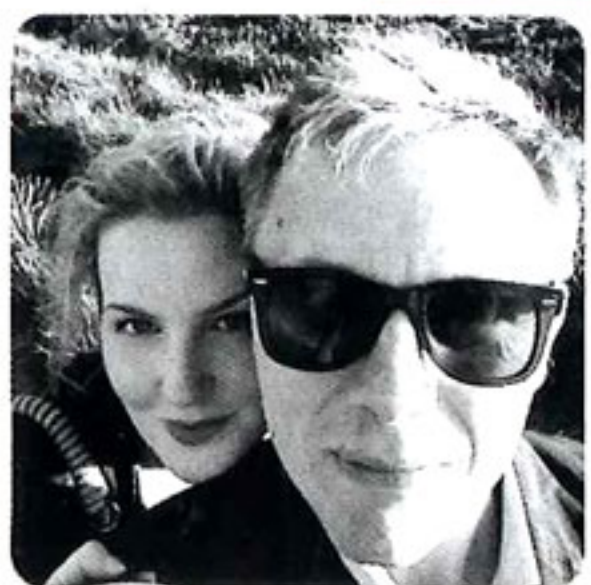
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Left inset:
Alice and Ian. Main
Image: Rayavadee
beach, Krabi

HONG KONG & THAILAND

The couple

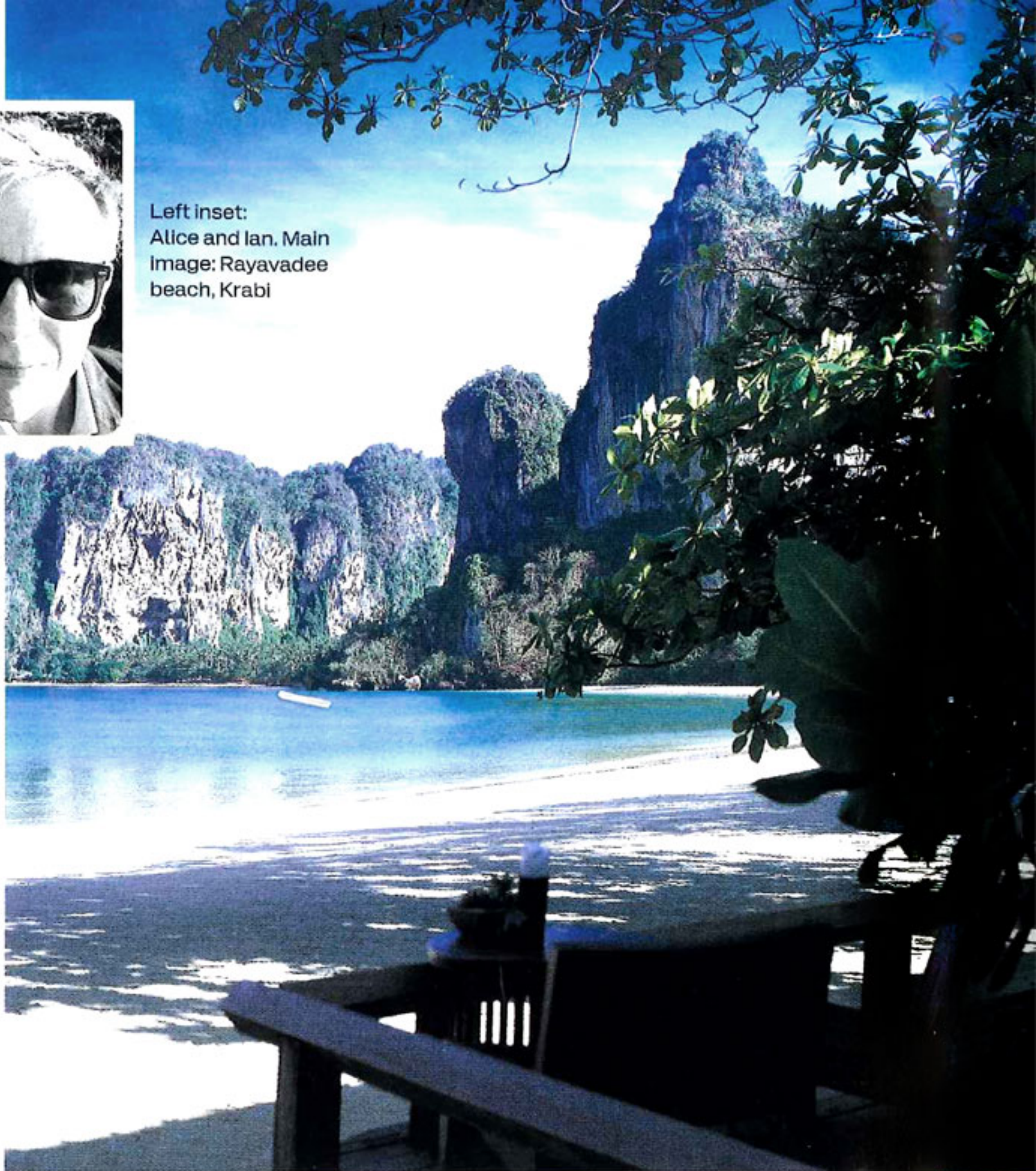
Alice Wignall, ELLE's Content Director, and Ian Leslie, author.

The brief

We had one word in mind when planning our honeymoon: Big. It had to be epic, luxurious, far-flung. We wanted a mix of city sophistication, cultural interest and tropical beach lounging, somewhere that felt exotic and a bit adventurous, but where air-con and poolside cocktails are still freely available. Oh, and somewhere a five-month pregnant woman could travel. (This is what happens when you delay your honeymoon for 18 months...) Having friends living in Hong Kong helped us decide on Asia as our destination; we'd visit them, then travel on to Thailand for world-famous beaches, amazing food and fantastic hotels.

The trip

We fly to Hong Kong, where it is a balmy 25°C in November, treating ourselves to Cathay Pacific business class and a great hotel. Between the flat beds, pillow menu (really) and limo service, which takes us direct to the Mandarin Oriental hotel on arrival, we decide that this is the kind of lifestyle we could get used to. In Hong

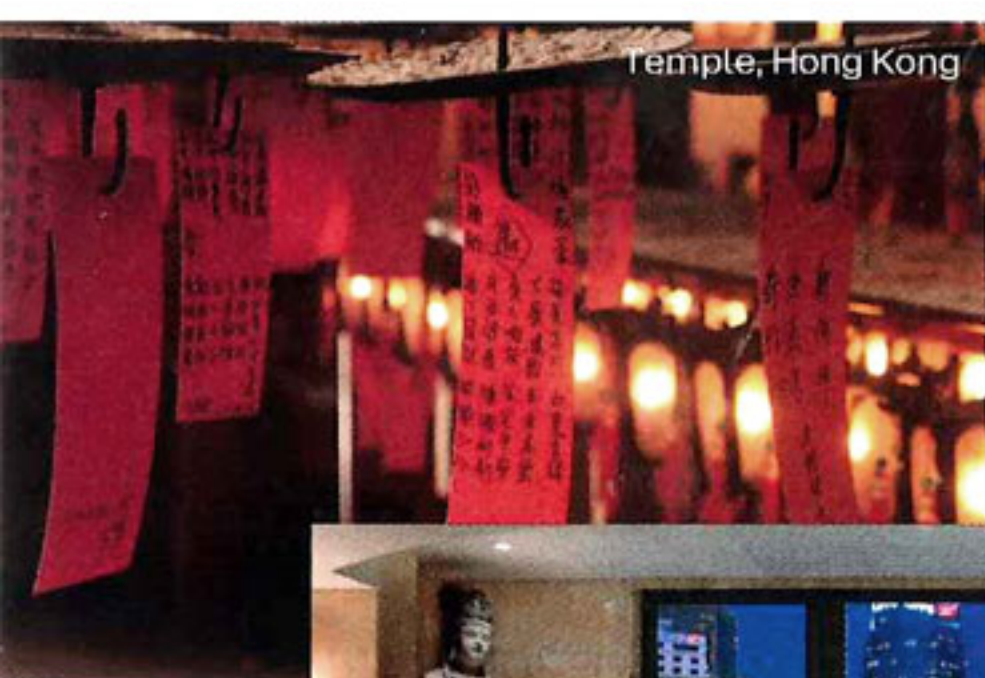


Kong, we have a whistle-stop few days of Chinese food - from skyscraper fine dining to backstreet canteens - tower blocks and temples and window shopping at the many designer stores. Then it's on to Bangkok, and the Thai capital's Mandarin Oriental. This hotel has played host to glamorous guests from every era, with a particular literary leaning. The Authors' Wing, part of the original 19th-century hotel, has suites named after former residents including Gore Vidal, Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham and Noël Coward. Sitting right beside the river, it's an elegant, cool sanctuary in the steamy heat of Bangkok.

We explore the palaces and temples by day, and track down delicious street food - super-fresh fish at heaving pavement cafes in Chinatown, and tasty cured pork at the massive daily food market at Or Tor Kor, as well as smart restaurants. We loved Bo.lan (bolan.co.th) - an up-market 'slow food' Thai restaurant started by two chefs from Nahm, the legendary Thai restaurant in London. The set menu is sophisticated, surprising and delicious.

After three days, we fly north to Sukhothai to see the remains of the 14th-century city, Thailand's first capital. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, it

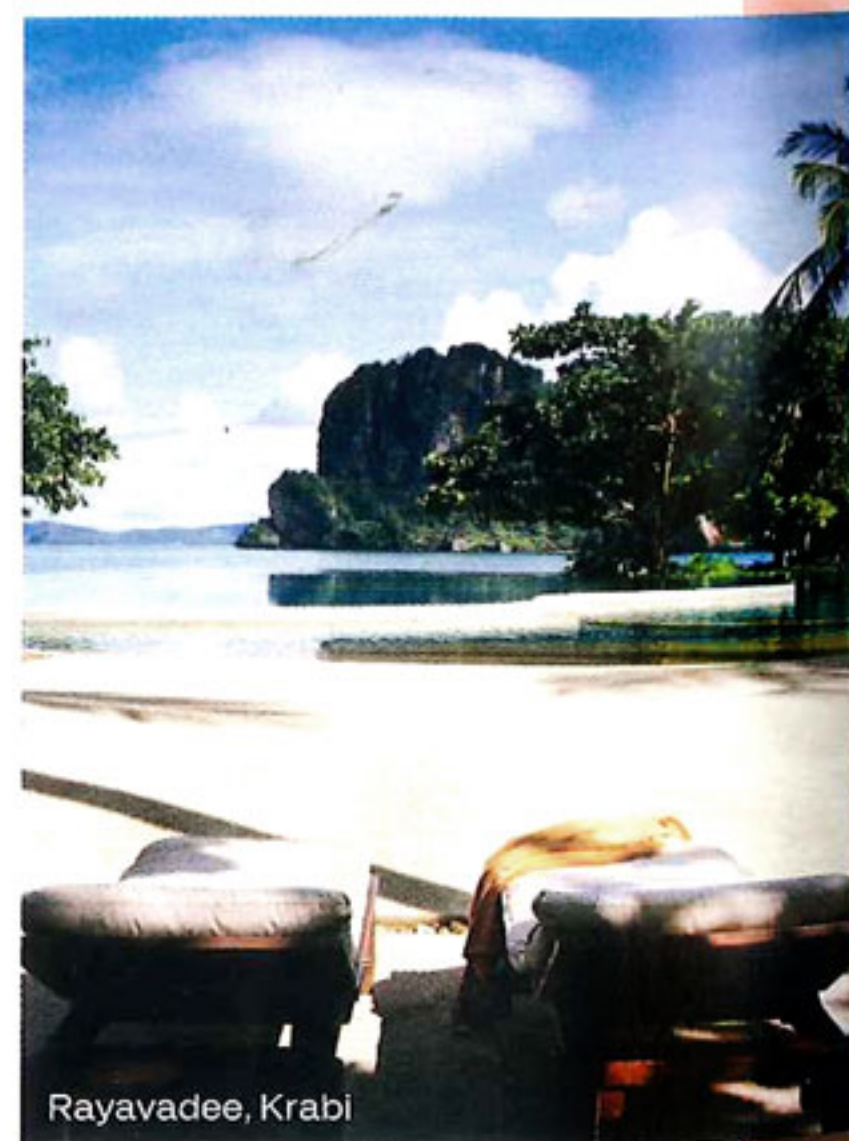
'Sitting right beside the river, the hotel is an elegant, cool sanctuary in the steamy heat of Bangkok'



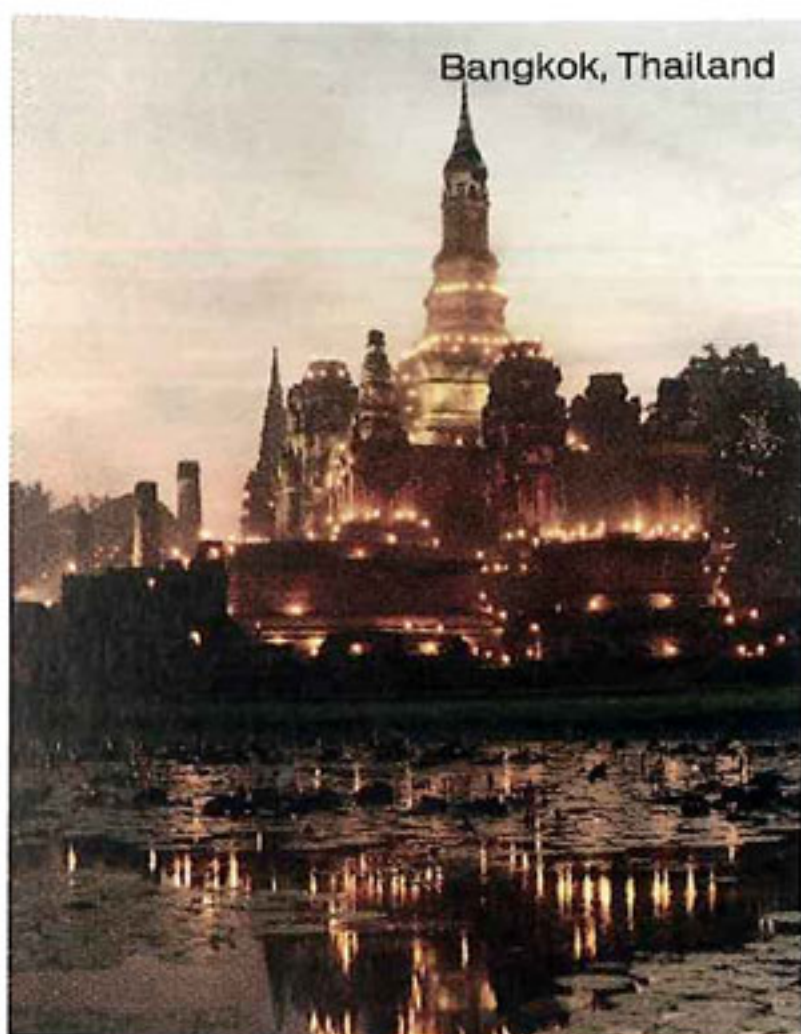
temple, Hong Kong



Mandarin Oriental suite bathroom, Hong Kong



Rayavadee, Krabi



Bangkok, Thailand



Rayavadee pool pavilion, Krabi

is huge - 70 sq km - so even with the crowds that come to admire the Buddha statues and lotus ponds, it's still a peaceful place to spend a day cycling or trekking from ruin to ruin.

Our final journey is south, to Krabi province and then, via boat from the tourist centre of Ao Nang to the beaches of Railay on the Phra Nang peninsular. Our resort, Rayavadee, is so huge that if you're heading for a restaurant, you're advised to call one of the hotel's golf buggy taxis. The grounds are like well tended jungle (complete with monkeys and lizards), and guests stay in their own separate two-storey luxury huts hidden among the trees.

Rayavadee has access to beaches on three sides, including Railay West, often described as one of the most beautiful in the world, with its sweeping sands and jagged limestone cliffs. Being able to gaze at it while pool boys bring you drinks and ice creams makes it even more attractive.

In fact, 'never again' became our catchphrase during our honeymoon - as in, never again are we likely to enjoy such a luxurious, indulgent trip - although if you can't go for broke (literally) on your honeymoon, when can you?

But for all the air-conditioned, five-star comfort, it was moments such as an elephant ride through the forest in Krabi, stumbling across the incense-filled Man Mo temple in Hong Kong, eating the best Thai curry we've ever tasted in a little one-room café (Poj Spa Kar) in Bangkok, as well as an epic tropical thunderstorm,

that stood out the most for us. While lounging by the pool/ambuling on the beach/drinking in the bar on repeat at Rayavadee was bliss for me, Railay is ultimately a beach resort, so options for eating and excursions, apart from the (excellent) offerings inside the hotel are limited. I think my husband preferred the endless possibilities of Bangkok. Still, marriage is all about the art of compromise, isn't it?

Getting there

Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong (mandarinoriental.com/hongkong) has doubles from £350, room only.

Mandarin Oriental Bangkok (mandarinoriental.com/bangkok) has doubles from £250, room only.

Rayavadee Krabi (rayavadee.com) has deluxe pavilions, with B&B and airport transfers included, from £260.

Cathay Pacific (cathaypacific.com) flies to Bangkok via Hong Kong from London Heathrow, from £670 return. *Bangkok Airways* (bangkokair.com) flies from Bangkok to Krabi, from £75 return, and Bangkok to Sukothai, from £105 return ●



Above: Rayavadee bedroom. Below: Railay beach, Thailand

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