

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2018

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TRAVEL

ALL THE HOLIDAY INSPIRATION AND INFORMATION YOU NEED

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TRAVEL

BEST PLACE TO TRY GOING THAI

ROB IRVINE LEARNS TO BE A MASTERCHEF IN THAILAND

DONALD Trump's least favourite cable news network CNN asked its global audience to vote for the world's top 50 dishes a few years back. Asia dominated the list, with four dishes from Thailand alone. The best Europe could do was 11th... lasagna.

The Donald no doubt called this fake news and declared New York hot dogs the winner. But I'm with the CNN viewers. I love Thai food, with that classic noodle dish Pad Thai a firm favourite.

And as a keen amateur in the kitchen, when the chance came to learn how to make Pad Thai from a Thai chef, with authentic Thai ingredients, and in Thailand... well, I packed my spatula and off we went.

Our destination was the Blue Fire Cooking School, at the Outrigger beach resort on the beautiful tropical island of Koh Samui. Let's come back to the cooking lesson later, as I acquaint you with this fantastic destination.

The Outrigger is just a few minutes' drive from the island's airport but well away from the noise of the flight path. In fact, peace and quiet is what this place is all about.

The resort is based around 52

individual villas and suites. Each has its own private garden area and plunge pool. Our home from home covered 80 square metres with a beautifully presented suite, the comfiest of beds and top class amenities. And so clean.

Head the few metres down to the edge of the sea and we come to the pool and restaurant. Sitting under a huge African almond tree looking out on the sparkling waters of the Gulf of Thailand with a glass of Singha beer on hand and a Thai salad on the way, this is the perfect antidote to work!

For the staff of the Outrigger, nothing is too much trouble. Customer service is brilliant in Thailand generally and here they take it to another level, with great charm and a gentle sense of humour and fun.

For a special occasion you can even have a romantic dinner under the stars on the beach.

Outrigger offers a complimentary twice daily minibus ride into Koh Samui's main town, Chaweng, where there are plenty of shops and restaurants and a long, beautiful white sand beach. An island tour is worth the while, with stop-offs at a fishing village and Buddhist temples. This can be booked from



Outrigger Koh Samui Beach Resort. Also right and below

the resort, with pick-up from reception. Do not miss the boat trip to the Anghong National Marine Park, a group of islands a few miles to the north of Koh Samui. Here was found the original inspiration for the book *The Beach* - the film was made elsewhere - and it is a paradise of golden sands, rain forest, hidden mountain lakes and breath-taking reef snorkelling.

Again, this is easily booked through the hotel and is very good value.

But I had to sing for my supper, or in my case, cook. The cookery school gives you a choice of dishes you might like to prepare. We went for a spicy beef salad and Pad Thai with prawns.

Many of the herbs and vegetables come from the Outrigger's own gardens. To keep it fun and not a chore, the chefs prep the veg then talk you through the many ingredients and how they combine to delight the senses.

Then it's on with the stove, with the chefs guiding us with excellent English on how to balance the flavours and bring the dishes together. Note well, "do you like spicy?" means "do you like it fire-breathingly hot?"

Somehow, well with a lot of assistance, the dishes come together, we receive our certificates, complimentary chef's aprons, and a very handy cook book, before our creations are carried through to the dining room for us to enjoy.

Since coming home, we have managed to track down most of the ingredients and been through the recipes. It has been great fun learning about a different cuisine.

Koh Samui is well worth the effort of the journey. There are various



HOW TO BOOK

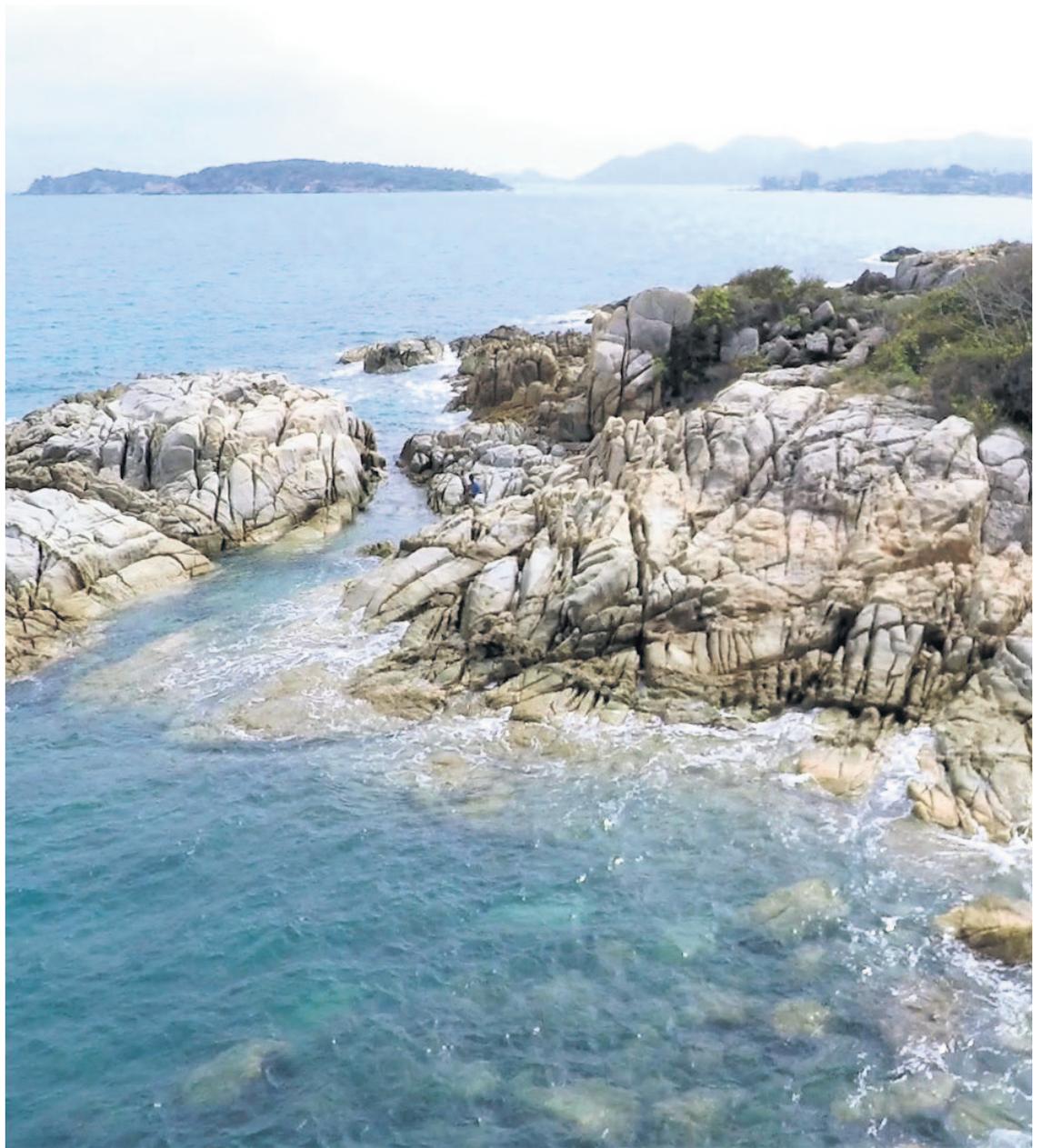
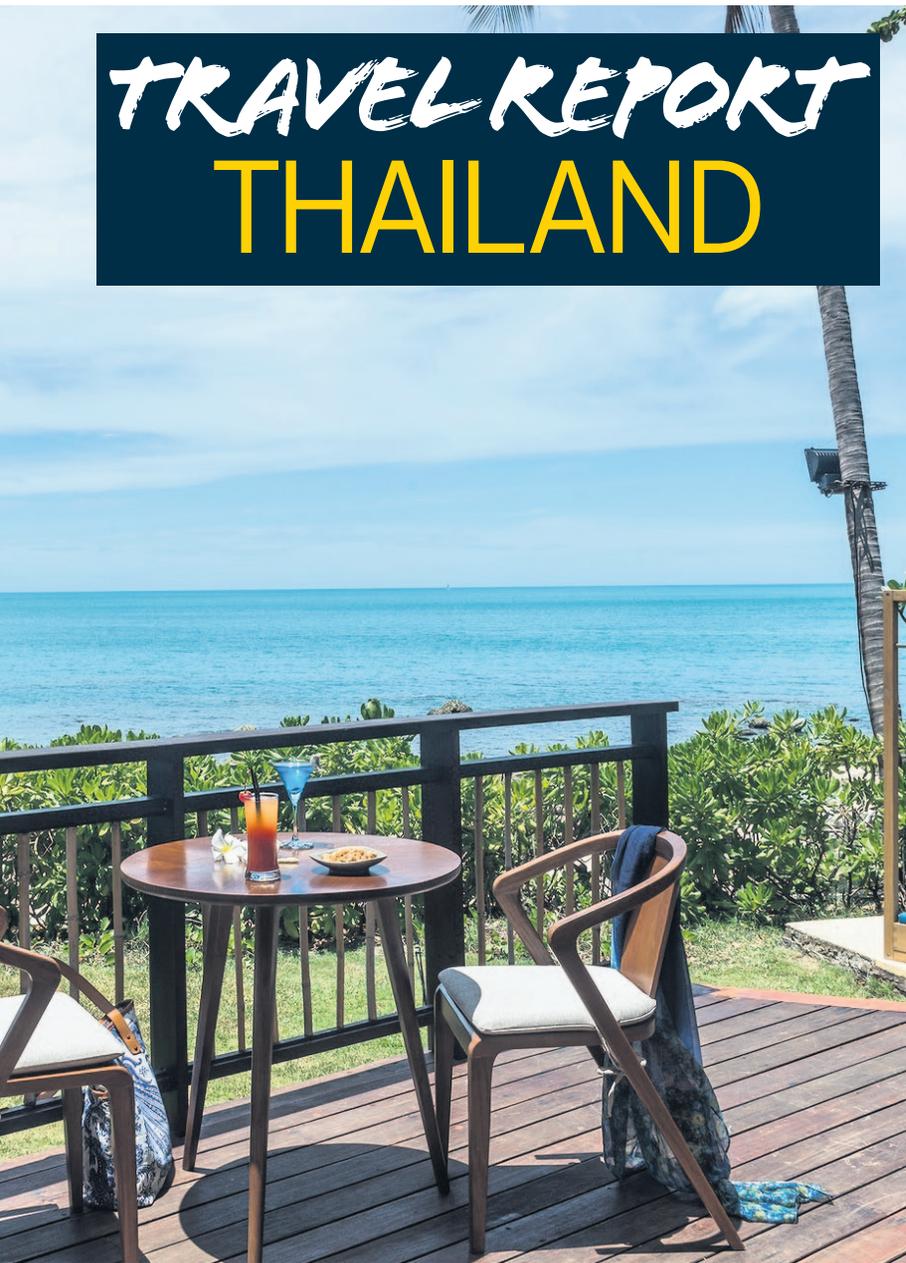
Outrigger Koh Samui Beach Resort, 63/182 Moo, 5 Bophud, Koh Samui, Suratthani, 84320 Thailand. Tel: +66 (0) 77 914-700; email: info.kohsamui@outrigger.co.th; website: www.outrigger.com. Travelbag is offering seven nights at the 5* Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort on a bed and breakfast board basis. Prices start at £969pp including flights (£469pp hotel only, no flights) from Manchester with Turkish Airlines. Based on selected June 2019 departure dates, book by October 15. (0207 001 4112, www.travelbag.co.uk). Subject to availability

ways to get there. We flew via Singapore with Singapore Airlines and their subsidiary Silk Air for the short hop to the island. They are both top class airlines.

An we made time for a day out in the dynamic downtown of Singapore on the way home, an experience not to be missed.



TRAVEL REPORT THAILAND



Food at the Outrigger, also below and below right



A room at the Outrigger

