

Green/Eco

Castaway at Thailand's Soneva Kiri

Bangkok-based resort and spa company Six Senses has built a name for castaway-chic retreats in such places as Vietnam, Oman, Jordan and Thailand. The most sumptuous of its multiple lines is Soneva, a trio of stunning resorts that are the passion projects of the pioneering and devoted Six Senses founders Sonu and Eva Shivdasani. The first two Sonevas—Fushi and Gili—opened in the Maldives. The newest addition Soneva Kiri opened in Thailand a little more than a year ago on Koh Kood. Thailand's fourth-largest but lightly developed island, Koh Kood is located in the far southeast of the Gulf, near the Cambodian border. The resort occupies 1,200 acres of hilly, dense tropical forest and creamy beaches on its northwest side. Due to the timing of the opening, which coincided with the global recession and political unrest in Thailand, Kiri was off to a slow start, but that afforded the resort a chance to hone service to perfection. It's now ready for prime time.

Six Senses is known for a rustic-chic look and feel, and Soneva Kiri delivers beautifully on that front. The 28 sprawling resort villas and eight residences celebrate casual living.



The private compounds are built into the lush vegetation with loads of space between them (guests navigate the large resort in electric golf carts). The villas all feature enclosed, air-conditioned bedrooms with four-poster, mosquito-netted beds and velvety vegetable-leather desks. Flat-screen TVs are hidden in the topmost of a stack of antique-looking valises. Outside are multi-level wooden decks, covered dining areas and cool turquoise swimming pools. In every spot where one might consider stopping is an inviting daybed piled with cushions.

Great care has been taken to reduce Soneva Kiri's environmental footprint. The villas are stocked with reusable glass bottles of the resort's own purified mineral water. The teak floor is recycled wood. The resorts' massive pine decks and boardwalks are from reforestation projects, and there's liberal use of bamboo, which grows quickly and plentifully. The resort's unique Eco Villa—the first of its kind in this part of the world—lacks the ocean views of the Cliff and Beach suites, but makes up for in secluded jungle fantasy and romance, with the bonus of zero-carbon emissions. The

pool is a saltwater pond, and the bedroom's interior ceiling is a collage of teak leaves. Wild as it is, the villa can be fully closed and air-conditioned at night. Knowing the thoughtfulness behind the resort's conception just makes it all the more easy to relax.

There's also a serious focus on wellness; the spa occupies its own village with eleven treatment villas, a gym and yoga pavilion. When it comes to the culinary offerings, the Shivdasanis are huge advocates of all-things sustainable, local, organic and wholesome. Catalan



executive chef Jaume Esperalba, whose resume includes a stint at El Bulli, oversees three restaurants that rely as much as possible on local produce and serve an exceptional selection of Mediterranean and Thai dishes. For sweet-tooth travelers, a complimentary ice-cream parlor is stocked with some sixty fresh-made sorbets and ice creams. And a refrigerated chocolate room holds an almost daunting selection of house-made bonbons, drinks, and cakes that changes daily. Both of these operations are overseen by David Inglada, once voted Barcelona's best pastry chef, a wizard who manages to produce crisp-crusted breads and flaky pastries despite the tropical climate.

Playful, indulgent and unexpected, it's these kinds of details that best summarize the Soneva Kiri spirit. Even though visitors can engage in activities and pampering, the resort's biggest luxury is the sense of having truly escaped the stress and demands of daily life. www.sixsenses.com. ~LAUREL DELP

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