

# EXPRESSION

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# Touch of Riviera

*Design driven Kata Rocks is unashamedly luxurious, a delightful stay in all its minimalist splendour. Expression checks it out*

of Ibiza



**K**ata Rocks makes no excuses for itself. It doesn't try to blend in, it doesn't make the obligatory overtures to Thai design traditions, it makes no effort to accommodate stereotypical notions of what a luxury resort on a tropical island should look like. Instead it makes a bold statement of what it is: a design driven, luxury boutique resort and residence, that is unashamedly minimalist and fearlessly contemporary. The over all vibe is modern – it echoes the laid-back glamour and sophistication of the Riviera.

Sitting squarely on a rocky cliff, in perfectly aligned and plotted terraces, behind what was at one time Kata village, the resort with its blinding white exterior is intended to stand out. The approach to it, contrarily, is subtle – up a narrow winding road that takes you to the reception – a functional space for the formalities. Outside a white Buddha statue gazes serenely at the proceedings; resort staff make brief stops to offer a quick prayer or floral offerings before starting the day. A buggy ride then takes you through a short, dark 'tunnel' lined with statues to a portal – the entry point to the resort. The tunnel is technically just a cleverly disguised part of the vast underground parking that serves the resort.

Beyond the portal are 34 Sky Villas of one to four bedrooms, each kitted in white, each with its own private infinity pool, living and dining area and well appointed bedrooms and bathrooms. Plus beautifully equipped kitchens; the best that I have encountered. Over all, the minimalist vibe is very stylish.

My one bedroom villa is, like all the others, ocean-front with views of the Andaman Sea. But unlike most of the others it is on the same level as the only public area in the resort: restaurant, bar, main pool and of on one side, the fitness centre and spa. The vibe, here too, is white on white.

Inside the space is bright, well-lit and white with pops of colour – as these villas are also privately owned – the owners get to add their signatures. Hence mine has a bold red Buddha painting on the wall facing the front door. Next to it a pared down, floating, staircase (without a baluster) takes you to the bedroom. As you climb up, the lack of risers give you a view into the kitchenette area. Nothing is allowed to obscure the design line. Downstairs the floor-



to-ceiling sliding glass doors open onto a seven-metre long private infinity pool with views of the sea beyond. Upstairs a three-foot high perspex barrier defines one end of the mezzanine bedroom space. The bathtub gets a picture window to itself too. The furnishings over all are sleek and Italian-made; through the hotel I spot works of well-known Italian designers, including Giorgetti Progetti armchairs.

Outside, the cantilever that shades the front deck takes design inspiration from a luxury yacht. A nod to the company's foray into the world of super yachts. In fact 2016 saw the resort host its highly successful, inaugural, invitation only Kata Rocks Superyacht Rendezvous. Over 15 sailing and motor superyachts converged on the resort for a three-day extravaganza.

Yachts aside, I am more focussed on what each villa has to offer. And the icing on the cake is the technology – each villa is equipped with latest interactive iPad technology allowing guests to control the world of the Sky Villa at the touch or swipe of a button. Turn the lights on or off, lower or raise the shades without moving from your spot. Wherever that may be in the villa. You could also control it from your television screen. Speaking of which, there are two in the villa: one in the living area and the other suspended from the bedroom ceiling, comfortably angled for easy viewing.

Owned by the Phuket lifestyle design company Infinite Luxury, the resort is a recent entrant: 2014, and has made its presence felt.



However it is not just a resort, it is also about investing in a luxury property ownership experience. An investment in your lifestyle, promises the company.

Says CEO Richard Pope whose background is that of a property developer and construction business, "We want to take the brand - Infinite Luxury - beyond Kata Rocks to five or six great locations. We want to do more in Thailand and then branch out to, say in, South of France. We are going to expand Kata Rocks too – we are buying the land next door."

What does luxury mean today? "Over the last few years luxury has become more accessible to many more people. But today luxury is about experiences and when it comes to hotels it's about great experiences, prime locations and great service. You have got to have that level of service and that's often lost in Europe, here you can have it: we have 180 staff in the resort. People don't just buy a holiday home now, they buy a luxury lifestyle. So we make it very accessible to people with quarter share fractions, three hundred thousand dollars to buy in. And they get quite a lot: access to super yachts, owners dinners where they can network and a lot more. We offer fractional ownership as opposed to time share."

Pope firmly believes that 'if your customers are like you, you are far more likely to succeed'. His business model thus targets people like him: those who view luxury through the prism of great experiences, great service and excellent location. "You end up



Clockwise from left: Villa living room; poolside with sundowners; the restaurant; the hotel speed boat; Villa exterior; breakfast at the restaurant; Inside the spa.

attracting people like yourself... people who like nice food, nice wine, nice service, nice experiences. It's all about details."

And the attention to detail is phenomenal whether in the villas or in the public areas. The restaurant besides the amazing views offers an excellent mix of Mediterranean and Thai cuisine. The white on white continues to the poolside with its sleek white sunbeds and umbrellas. The bar adds to the vibe with its extensive drink list. Try the specially distilled gin for the resort – Kata Rocks Gin. Hand crafted in Chiang Mai, it features 17 botanicals including Peruvian Juniper berries, lemon grass and Thai basil. The bar is also a great place to watch the daily drama the sun puts on at sundown.

If wellness is on the agenda, the Infinite Spa and its eight treatment rooms have it covered with energy pods, light-emitting treatment beds and a massage menu that bristles with traditional Thai wellness treatments.

The Phuket that Kata Rocks offers is very different, more Monaco-esque. That's the direction the island needs to take Pope firmly believes with more high end events like his Kata Rocks Superyacht Rendezvous, to give the island the vibe of Monaco. He adds, "If you attract the wealthy, then the aspirational purchaser follows."

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