

## all-natural extremes in KAMU LODGE

Adventures need not be high-adrenaline all the time. They may be in the form of a retreat, where the adventurer gets to taste the life lived by locals in an untouched land. This is the kind of adventure Kamu Lodge visitors experience--an adventure into testing one's capacity to be cut off from the clutter of modernity, and discovering one's courage to go back to basics.

Going to Kamu Lodge is already an adventure in itself. It is accessible only by boat through a two-and-a-half-hour journey north on the Mekong River from Luang Prabang. Upon arrival, guests may choose from any one of the accommodations in the form of private canvas tents, each with a thatch roof, and solar-powered. Extra comfort is assured by the accommodations' stone bathrooms providing flushing toilets and hot water. Further, the all-natural lodgings are all furnished with bamboo and rattan furniture, with private balconies overlooking the Mekong River.

But Kamu Lodge's affinity with the Mekong River can be best experienced beyond looking at it from the balconies. Since 2011, Kamu Lodge has been offering its guests with boat journeys through the river using traditional Lao long boats. These two-day journeys start off with the boats embarking at 9 AM from Luang Prabang, then continue upstream to the secluded Dan Village. Next stop is Doun Khoun, the private shrine of the last king of Laos, King Sisavangvatana. There's also the visit to the Pak Ou Caves, home to thousands of Buddhist icons left by devotees over the years.

A traditional lunch follows at a local restaurant on the opposite bank of the river. Then two more villages, populated by the warm Hmong and Kamu people, are visited. The Hmong are Christians and believe in shamanism, while the Kamu practice animism and pray to the souls of the forests.

All these stops perfectly immerse the Kamu Lodge guests into the deep Buddhist traditions of the Lao culture. As explained by group general manager of Apple Tree Group Hospitality, Kurt Walter, "Buddhism is as much a part of Lao history and tradition as sticky rice and fish sauce. Seeing these shrines and holy places up close is as near as you can get to the soul of this country, to what makes the people tick. It's not just a religion, it's a whole way of life."

Back in Kamu Lodge, the guests can enjoy a peaceful rest undisturbed by distractions such as televi-



sion or internet. Consequently, by providing guests with only the meaningful essentials, Kamu Lodge is able to exist in harmony with nature.

"Kamu Lodge is fully committed to a low-impact experience, but that doesn't mean we skimp on comfort, whether with our excellent mattresses, fully stocked bar, or the fixtures we've added to the long boat to make sure you travel the Mekong in style," Walter pointed out.

Apart from sourcing electricity from solar panels and serving meals made with locally sourced ingredients, Kamu Lodge ensures its low impact on the environment by enjoining guests to do other eco-friendly activities like fishing, archery, rice planting and jungle trekking. All these efforts have been rewarded with the ASEAN Green Hotel Award at the 2012 ASEAN Tourism Forum, held recently in Manado, Indonesia. The award is given to outstanding properties in each of ASEAN's ten member states, particularly those who observe environmental standards in their operations, use green and locally made products, collaborate with the community, and practice energy and water efficiency and waste management.

"Enjoyable, sustainable living in unspoiled surroundings has always been the essence of the Kamu Lodge experience," Walter stressed. "The lodge owes a great deal to its stunning location, and we'll be working to keep this part of the world pristine for as long as possible."

Clockwise: the Mekong River cruise; stroll or plant rice on the fields near the Lodge; Buddhist icons found at the cave tour; the full mattresses and airy suites can tease guests to simply tuck into bed

