



# DOUBLE THE JOY

**The Cliff** not only boasts a wonderful location, but also has two top international chefs working for your dining pleasure!

Things on Samui are getting harder and harder! I mean, once upon a time, it was easy – simply because you didn't have much choice. I'm talking about eating, and dining out in the evening in particular. Twenty years ago, you just strolled about until you found a nice hut on the beach, and then sat down and ate their barbecue. And then, on your last night, you went out for posh meal in a top hotel. And of course, even that was easy, because there was only a handful to pick from. But today our little island has become a world-renowned mecca for gourmets. Five-star resorts abound on Samui, and each has a menu to match. Not to mention the plethora of super stand-alone eateries, many of them of world standard. And one of these, and a name of note, is The Cliff Bar & Grill on the very edge of Lamai.



Well, it's actually a little bit out of Lamai town itself, and just about the first viewpoint you'll come to on the steep rocky hillside (hence the name) as you head towards Chaweng. Inside, the design and décor are impressive in their simplicity. There's one long dining room with a wall of glass overlooking the bay, running onto a cosy and mellow adjoining bar area. At night, it's all dark solid wood and warm lighting. And in the daytime, it's cool and shady. Plus there's a dining terrace perched outside along the top of the cliff. This is where everyone wants to be, so a booking for here is a must.

The Cliff first opened its doors in 2004, and the aim from the word go was to engage a world-class chef and establish a menu of equal quality. This they did with the appointment of Executive Chef, Sergio Martelli. He's been here from the start, and over the years has honed and modified his original Mediterranean-based menu, expanding it and adding dishes and sections to make it one of the best you'll come across anywhere. Although it features dishes from all over the Mediterranean region, the bias is towards Italian specialities, as you may have guessed from Sergio's name! He's always believed in using the best quality ingredients, and every day gets a delivery of fresh organic vegetables flown-in from Bangkok, not to mention the imported Australian beef (never frozen merely chilled), and the speciality live lobster imported from Canada.

Yes, there is a focus on seafood here, right across the main menu and the tapas too (more of this in a moment). But Samui is an island. And what can't be found fresh each morning at the local market is specifically imported. The menu is expansive. But to simplify things, there are a selection of 'sets' available with combinations of seafood offerings, topping out with 'Zarzuela De Marisco' – a seafood extravaganza with risotto and salad for two people. And then there are also the 'Chef's Specials'; items which are not on the menu, changed every few days and worth looking out for.

But, just to make the point, The Cliff has been awarded the prestigious annual 'Thailand Tatler Best Restaurants' award eight times in the ten years that it's been running. And on top of that, in the last three years it's also picked up the 'Hospitality Asia Platinum Award' (HAPA) 'Best Ten in Asia' for the last three consecutive years, coming-in as the Restaurant of the Year in 2012. Unlike some restaurant awards, the HAPA scrutiny places weight on the quality of staff and service, as well as the cuisine.



The Cliff is an all-day restaurant, constantly seeing diners drop in as they tour around the island. It's all very well having an award-winning dinner menu to die for, but a large part of the clientele arrives in a more nibbly frame of mind. A few years back this led to the introduction of a tapas menu, which for some time sat alongside the main one. But, today, that's been revitalised, and has taken off like a rocket. And that's entirely been due to the appearance of Sous Chef Nicolas Vicens.

Another world-class chef, Nicolas just happened to be touring around Thailand on holiday last February, and, while on Samui, heard there was a vacancy. He turned up with all his paperwork and references, and four days later was offered the position. Thus two months later he was putting his new tapas menu into place at The Cliff. His offerings are anything but run-of-the mill. Using traditional ingredients and recipes, he'll give them a subtle twist that moves them from the simply subtle to the superbly sublime – what he likes to call 'complex contemporary tapas'.

Take the signature 'Lobster Tail Sandwich Asparagus and Mushrooms'. Once experienced, you'll demand it for breakfast every morning – never mind the cornflakes! It's a slender morsel, succulent and crunchy, with the bread being fried, and complementing the firm flesh of the lobster tail, setting off the asparagus and mushrooms to absolute perfection. There are just so many tapas here in the same class of gourmet delight that it's almost impossible to choose. Fortunately, there are also two multi-dish 'combos' on the menu, so you don't need to. And you can devour these delicacies any time you want as the tapas menu runs all day.

I could go on! The selection of wines here is outstanding, with more than 100 labels of classic and New World offerings, and the stock is continually being added to and refined. (Oh – and you can add another glittering prize; that of the Wine Spectator Award 2014, for 'restaurants with the best selection of wines in the world'). And then the cigar pairings: there's a fine range of hand-made cigars, each of which has a recommended match with a similarly super wine.

It's all very up-market and it's all totally top-notch. And now, with the addition of Nicolas and his tapas, it's true to say that at The Cliff Bar & Grill – there's double the joy all round!

## Rob De Wet

For reservations or further information, telephone 0 7744 8508.  
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