

Thai style



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bowing. They greet you with hands clasped, as if in prayer.

It took me a while to realise some subtle differences. When greeting an elderly gentleman, they have their hands at a slightly higher position, nearer their chin. I think I got that right. I did take quite a few snaps of them. Oh no, I hope they did not think I was looking for a Thai bride...

The food was amazing – very imaginative, not too hot or spicy and almost all of it organic, and much of it grown on their own

farm. I visited the farm, on a separate estate covering 200 acres, with seven little lakes, where the fruit and vegetables are grown. I didn't recognise many of the varieties. There were also chickens and ducks roaming free.

Posh hotels the world over are obsessed by using organic produce, promising that their food is sensitively sourced. It has taken over from state-of-the-art spas, which all luxury hotels for the past ten years became convinced they had to have. But by visiting their farm, the lack of chemicals or pesticides was clear. So, jolly well done.

And yes, of course, they do have a luxury spa. It was rather wasted on me, I'm afraid. I find all spas the same: soppy music and pointless pummelling, although you do smell nice afterwards.

I did an outing to Phuket Old Town filled with colonial-style houses, temples, shops and, yes, the odd massage parlour. I stuffed myself with street food from stalls beside the largest temple, which was crowded with children from a nearby school. They were all stuffing their faces, like children out of school anywhere in the world.

I also did an expedition by boat up the coast, travelling to an area called Phang Nga Bay, which is a series of dramatic limestone rocky islets jutting out of the emerald-green sea. One is known as James



PASTEL PRETTY: One of the streets in Phuket Old Town

GETTING THERE

ITC Luxury Travel (itcluxurytravel.co.uk) offers seven nights' B&B at Trisara from £3,399 per person, including return flights and private transfers.

Bond Island, as it featured in the 1974 movie *The Man With The Golden Gun*.

There were loads of tourists from other resorts on Phuket, mostly arriving in traditional Thai long-boats, which are highly decorated and very pretty. And when the tourists landed, to traipse around the sites and visit the national park, there was no alcohol available and decent clothing had to be worn. I should think so, too.

After all, I now know that Thailand should really be known worldwide for its good taste, charming manners, impeccable behaviour, and lovely people.

Swapping the Med for a lake in Finland? It's a real splash hit

By Alice Bianchi

MY SON Edward has learned how to row and it's his favourite thing already. This time, he has his favourite aunt for company. One minute, he's wielding his oar with a flourish, and the next he's standing up and waving at me on the shoreline.

What happens next is like a scene out of Kenneth Grahame's children's classic *The Wind In The Willows*. The boat goes wobble wobble before capsizing with an exuberant splash.

'It's OK, mummy,' Edward says, emerging from the lake with sodden clothes and squelching shoes. 'It was an accident.'

Sadly, Auntie Letty's phone is a write-off but Edward is only disappointed that we can't hang it on the washing line to dry.

We had swapped the Mediterranean for a summer trip to Lake Saimaa in south-eastern Finland – a three-hour drive from Helsinki.

The appeal of Finland lies in the vastness of the landscape. Confetti-blue skies wrap around us while the flat countryside stretches out for miles.

Dirt tracks lead to red farmhouses nestled among fields of potato, barley and yellow rapeseed.

Further ahead, fields turn into woods, and woods into forests, while road signs caution against moose straying into our path.

We're staying in a lakeside log cabin (mokka) in Anttolanhovi, with its own private wood-fired sauna, jetty and rowing boat. Here, Alvar Aalto furniture reigns among reindeer-skin rugs, Iittala glassware and Marimekko flowery linens. It's a contemporary twist on the traditional summer cottage.

Traditional mokki come with a sauna but no running water and no electricity, and they have outdoor toilets, where soil is dispensed by the scoopful

GETTING THERE

Lakeside villas in Anttolanhovi start at £1,780 per week. Visit anttolanhovi.fi/accommodation. British Airways (ba.com) flies daily to Helsinki from Heathrow. Fares start at £89.30 return.

instead of water. Hot saunas, followed by skinny-dipping in a moonlit lake, underpin the Finnish way of life.

The surrounding walking trails are enchanting. Buckets in hand, we set off in our wellies to pick *mustikka* – wild bilberries – to bake a pie. In our family, *mustikkapiirakka* is all the rage.

'Where are you going?' asks mummy, Edward's Finnish grandmother. 'We're going on a bear hunt,' Edward declares.

Silver-barked birch, pine and spruce trees grow like the woods in a fairytale illustration. This is where my husband Toby spent his childhood summers but he has yet to meet a bear, so Edward may be disappointed.

The boat excursion from Anttolanhovi to see rock paintings makes for a delightful afternoon. Edward is excited about the prospect of catching a glimpse of the endangered Saimaa ringed seal, native only to this lake, until the lull of the boat's engine puts him to sleep.

The prehistoric rock paintings may require a little imagination but their remote lakeside location make the scenic journey worthwhile.

'Cave Baby!' exclaims Edward, referring to Julia Donaldson's picture book of an artistic baby doodling on cave walls in prehistoric times.

'Mummy, enough writing,' shouts Edward. 'Come on, I'll take you rowing!'

I'm tempted to say I'm too busy, but then *The Wind In The Willows* springs to mind again.

After all, as Rat would say: 'There's nothing – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.'



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MESSING ABOUT IN BOATS: Edward, Alice and Toby on Lake Saimaa

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after lunch we would jump off the boat and splash about in the warm waters.

We never stayed out that long, though, as we had to be back to pick up the children, but that wasn't a problem; at no point did I wish we could go somewhere else. I think it was the busiest activity holiday I've ever done.

Normally when my husband, Jim and I go away, we travel with another couple and rent a villa, which is brilliant, but if you have young children they can get bored. They'll play in the pool for a few hours and then want to do something else.

At Vounaki Beachclub, it was fantastic knowing they were exhausted by the time you picked them up, thoroughly happy and covered in face-paint.

It was a proper holiday for the adults as well as the children – I'd say it was the perfect break.