

Metropolitan is an oasis of cool in Bangkok



ROCHELLE LASH

CHECKING IN

The Metropolitan by COMO, Bangkok, is the perfect antidote to the heat and cacophony of a big, busy Asian city.

It is a calm sanctuary of light-filled spaces and sleek décor wrapped around a tranquil, Zen-inspired swimming pool. Set back from the street, the Metropolitan is on a cul-de-sac in Bangkok's upscale Silom district of shops and embassies, including the Canadian.

Simple and superior

The Metropolitan is special because it is casually chic and modest in scope — about 170 rooms and suites — but it produces top-notch, progressive cuisine and wellness, all with superb service. You will experience the best of everything at the hotel's COMO Shambhala Urban Spa Escape; as well as nahm, its award-winning gourmet Thai restaurant; and glow, the all-purpose café. Both restaurants use lowercase for simplicity.

The Metropolitan is cool in many ways. It is totally bling-free, unlike larger, glittering five-star hotels.

The minimalist interiors use a discreet palette of teak, coconut and cream, sparsely accented with Thai touches such as silk pillows, a state-ly throne chair, an ornate carved screen or a precious porcelain vase.

The accommodations are contemporary; white beds on dark floors, large windows, modern limestone bathrooms with walk-in showers (and some with baths) and flat-screen televisions. They range in size from compact queens perfect for a solo traveller up to suites with separate living rooms and lots of floor space.

The hotel also is cool because it has a boutique-style spirit. And the staff members wear relaxed, beige cotton suits by Comme des Garçons and shoes by Calvin Klein.

Gastronomy & mixology

Well-heeled gastronomes flock to nahm, where executive chef David Thompson has garnered accolades from critics on several continents. Thompson's nahm at The



PHOTOS: COMO HOTELS AND RESORTS/ METROPOLITAN BANGKOK

The Metropolitan by COMO, Bangkok, is a calm sanctuary of light-filled spaces and sleek décor in a stressful city.



Thai massage is a specialty at COMO Shambhala Urban Escape and is a great way to re-energize.

Halkin Hotel by COMO in London was the first Thai restaurant to be awarded a Michelin star. Now he is creating authentic Thai cuisine in Bangkok, epicurean-style, right down to homemade kanom jeen, fermented rice noodles that take three days to craft.

Among nahm's spicy spe-

cialties, many with rare ingredients, are: curry of salted beef with ginger; green chicken curry with basil and eggplant, jungle curry with rare fish, blue crab with peanuts and pickled garlic, prawn wafers, kingfish salad, seafood and coconut cream. Thompson does piquant wonders with Thai's flavourful

accents: lime, chilies, garlic, ginger, lemon grass and coriander.

The bright, white café called glow is the Metropolitan's go-to restaurant for breakfast, lunch and supper. Mornings are outstanding with French-inspired baked goods, eggs served over Thai noodles and a buffet of tropical fruits and juices freshly squeezed from mango, guava, dragonfruit and papaya. American and Thai dishes

are served all day — wagyu beef, lentil burgers, club sandwiches, prawn cakes and restorative soups such as the Healing Chicken, with mushrooms, rice and bok choy.

Everything at glow is so fresh — the servers snip wheat grass shoots from a tiny linear garden for Shambhala cuisine that focuses on dishes that are low in fat, salt and sugar; and high in enzymes and vitamins. Shambhala is a trademark of

all 12 COMO hotels, including Parrot Cay in Turks and Caicos and two new-in-2014 places: Metropolitan by COMO, Miami Beach, and Point Yamu by COMO in Phuket, Thailand.

At the after-dark end of the liquid spectrum, mixologists at the sexy Met Bar blend cocktails of passion fruit, lychee and berries. Martinis include the Thai sabai with basil and lime. Tapas, Thai beer and wines of the world are on the menu, as well as Mediterranean-inspired suppers: jamon and figs, chorizo pizza, seafood stew and linguine with crab.

World of wellness

You can have an engaging, satisfying wellness experience at COMO Shambhala Urban Escape, a full-scale spa, at no extra charge. All guests may use the fitness room and the inner sanctum of the sauna, steam and whirlpool. From there, sun and water are steps away. The swimming pool is an exceptionally large and peaceful oasis with a Zen waterfall, and it's staffed by attendants who deliver towels and chilled lemon water.

Also free are the fitness classes — yoga, core work, mat Pilates or tai chi — held almost every day at 7 a.m., 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. The sessions are 30 to 60 minutes and sometimes attract only one or two people, so they're almost meditative. I was delighted by the globalism. Here we are, halfway around the world, practising the same moves as we do in Montreal.

"Take the tabletop position," our instructor said softly, backed by the tinkle of new-age Thai music. "Tighten your pelvic floor muscles, lift... and breathe."

Spa life is paramount at COMO hotels, so I recommend a Thai massage to get limber and energized after a long flight or a day of touring. You'll be dressed in white cotton pyjamas, kneaded and stretched in a private canopied mat room. Follow through with a Thai herbal poultice treatment for the skin.

May is wellness month and Shambhala Urban Escape will present visiting therapists who are experts in remedial massage and biomedical techniques. That's a serious, healing side to spa life, but very therapeutic.

IF YOU GO

The hotel is a 45-minute drive from the Bangkok airport; private pickup, \$ 75; taxi, approx., \$15.

Metropolitan by COMO, Bangkok: 27 South Sathorn Rd., Silom district; www.comohotels.com/metropolitanbangkok and www.comoshambhala.com

Price: Rooms vary and currency fluctuates. A third night is free until Dec. 31; advance-purchase rooms cost approximately \$130-\$240 Can., per

night (suites cost more), including Wi-Fi, swimming pool, steam-sauna-whirlpool, fitness room and classes. Prices increase slightly after Oct. 31.

Packages: Idyllic island getaway at Point Yamu, Phuket, a 1.5-hour flight. And, Taste of Metropolitan (until Oct. 31) includes cocktails, tapas, breakfast, a \$30 spa voucher and shuttle to shopping and Skytrain.

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