

**HOSPITALITY**

# Eco-resort draws crowds in Amphawa

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Experienced hoteliers are finding it tough in the popular tourist destination of Amphawa in Samut Songkhram province, but the district's first eco-resort is bucking the trend.

Asita Eco Resort offers a unique place to draw Bangkokians in a district that has more than 300 operators selling rooms on weekends.

After operating for two years, its average occupancy rate is 55% all year round compared with 30-40% at other hotels. The resort is confident of achieving occupancy of 70% this year.

Owner and managing director Asita Vimolchaichit has spent more than 100 million baht on her resort in a labour of love. She left her job at the Novotel Bangkok in Siam Square and returned to her home province last year to manage the resort on a full-time basis. It should break even within 10 years even though it has only 23 rooms.

With more than 20 years' experience in the hotel business, Ms Asita strongly believes her background and connections with the media will ensure the resort survives.

"Someone asked me which month was

Amphawa's low season. I smiled and replied that there were no low-season months here, just busy weekends and silent weekdays," she said.

Her eco-resort has differentiated itself as a wedding destination and event location.

Ms Asita found most accommodation in Amphawa was home stays with rates of 800 to 2,000 baht a night on weekends. She decided her resort must offer service and products on a par with four-star hotels. Her hotel experience allows her to be an event organiser and master of ceremonies.

At the end of last year, Asita was chosen as a wedding location by 20 couples who will tie the knot there this year. The cost of organising a wedding at Asita is only slightly cheaper than at hotels in Bangkok, but couples do not need to hire a wedding organiser, as it is included in the package. A morning ceremony package starts at 60,000 baht for 60 guests.

"I'm a dream-maker. You just give me a budget and bring the groom," Ms Asita said.

Only 72 kilometres from Bangkok, Amphawa is popular as a relaxing getaway for city people looking for good accommodation surrounded by nature and serenity — a big change from the concrete jungle.



Asita Eco Resort offers a relaxing atmosphere for Bangkokians fleeing the urban jungle, and it's proving popular for weddings too.