Recently, my daughter Anne Marie and I had the opportunity to visit Outrigger’s two properties in Thailand, and we thoroughly enjoyed every minute of our three-day stay.

Our first stop was at Koh Samui, a charming resort island located in the Gulf of Thailand just east of the Thai portion of the Malay Peninsula, about one hour’s flight south of Bangkok. When we arrived at Koh Samui’s airport, Darren Edmonstone, Senior Vice President of Outrigger’s Asia Pacific operations, and Leon Pink, General Manager of the Outrigger Koh Samui Resort & Spa, warmly greeted us. As we waited for our luggage, they pointed out a number of sandbags nearby and told us these were recently used in an unsuccessful attempt to hold back floodwaters that inundated the terminal during some unbelievably heavy rainfalls. The airport and many other facilities on the island were closed for up to five days for cleanup and repairs.

Outrigger Koh Samui is a pleasant collection of low-rise villas and buildings located on a palm-fringed, white sand beach and a small bay facing west. The villas have a private garden area and pool. Other buildings with multiple suites share a beautiful pool and patio with lounge chairs for relaxing and sunbathing. The Navasana Spa, located within the resort, is well equipped and staffed and has to be one of the island’s premier spa facilities.

We had some wonderful opportunities to meet many staff members individually or as a group. Everyone was warm, friendly, and glowed with true hospitality. Anne Marie and I were deeply honored when the staff presented us a magnificent silver plate featuring the raised image of an elephant, the Thai symbol of prosperity and good luck. That evening, as the sun set over the water, we had a marvelous dinner with the property’s Department Heads at a table set on the beach. After a concert of Thai music and dancing, fireworks filled the sky, bringing a dramatic close to an unbelievable day.

The next day, we flew about an hour across the Malay Peninsula to the island of Phuket. Located in the Andaman Sea just off the peninsula’s western shore, Phuket is a very popular destination for both Asian and European travelers. The airport was jammed with both locals and vacationers going to or coming from one of several internationally acclaimed resorts that have blossomed there in recent years.

Outrigger Laguna Phuket Resort and Villas is about 25

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minutes by car from the airport and far enough away from the shore that it was not damaged by the terrible tsunami that hit that area almost seven years ago, the morning after Christmas, December 26, 2004. It consists of a number of villas, many of which have their own private pool. A new seven-story tower building with 19 kitchenette suites and restaurant facilities is nearing completion. The grounds are beautiful with lush tropical foliage.

Again, we enjoyed the many opportunities we had to meet with members of our ‘ohana there. They have created their own brand of hospitality by blending Thai and Pacific cultures.

Much to our surprise, were greeted by “Lucky,” a young elephant, when we went to breakfast on our first morning there. Lucky was both talented and hungry and, after he showed us some of his tricks, we fed him some pineapple and bananas. He showed his gratitude by putting his trunk around Anne Marie’s shoulder and giving her a gentle hug.

Our visit to Phuket also coincided with the Songkran Festival, which marks the beginning of the Thai New Year. It is also called the “Water Festival,” as it is believed that water will help wash away all bad omens. The day traditionally begins with a gift of alms to Buddhist monks. Washing of hands with scented water is said to help bring health, happiness, and prosperity.

Our ‘ohana honored those traditions by giving alms to a group of monks from a nearby temple. We also wished each other good luck and happiness in the coming year by exchanging greetings, hand washing, face painting and some friendly extra splashes of water.

At our final dinner on the beach, we lit candles in large rice-paper lanterns and watched in wonder as the warm air inside lifted the lanterns high into the night sky over the ocean. What a wonderful way to end a magical visit to our properties in Thailand.

Many, many thanks to everyone in our Thai ‘ohana. You turned our visit into an unforgettable experience!
Darren Shaw and Dr. Kelley have their hands washed by Khun Jim (HR Trainer) for good luck in the Thai New Year.

Khun Oum (Personal Assistant) and Khun Tum (HR Officer, background) join Dr. Kelley in giving alms to monks during Thai New Year celebrations.

Khun Nu (Activities Manager) and Khun Rig (Chief Engineer) help Dr. Kelley and Anne Marie prepare a Good Luck Lantern for flight.