



ABOVE
Tide Resort managing director Narongchai Khunpleum is determined to get Bangsaen on the tourist map.



RIGHT
Tide Resort, the latest addition to the growing fraternity of hotels and spas in Bangsaen.

Turning the tide Bangsaen's way

154-room property owners hope to liven up beach resort's image

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The beach resort of Bangsaen in the eastern province of Chon Buri has been finally blessed with a high-quality hotel.

The Tide Resort, a recently-opened 154-room property owned and managed by the Khunpleum family, is the latest addition to the Bangsaen landscape that has for most part played second fiddle to the more bustling and internationally acclaimed Pattaya. But its owners are out to set the record straight. Whether the new property can catch up with the high tide of competition in the hotel business remains to be seen, but its owners are determined to take Bangsaen into the same league as its more prominent neighbour.

Bangsaen's proximity to Bangkok should work in its favour but on the flip side it is for the very same reason that people travelling from Bangkok don't usually stay there for the night, preferring the comforts of their homes and returning the same day.

"Well, that may be true," said Narongchai Khunpleum, who runs Tide Resort. "But things are changing now."

Bangsaen is developing fast and expanding. Signs of modernisation are evident everywhere. There have been considerable improvements in infrastructure and tourism facilities: its shopping malls and cinemas match Bangkok's; compared to Pattaya it's relatively peaceful good for family vacation; there are more hotels and the beaches have been landscaped.

The 28-year-old Tide Resort boss Narongchai with a master's in hospitality

for a long time, until Tide Resort came into being, Bangsaen lacked a decent venue to attract high-profile functions such as weddings, conventions, corporate meetings, as clients invariably went for Pattaya, and it's precisely these markets that he wants to tap by offering Tide Resort as a viable alternative to anchor Bangsaen firmly on the MICE and tourism maps.

He plans to offer special promotional packages to induce clients, in particular those who live in Bangkok, to hold meetings and spend nights at the resort. At the same time he is also taking aim at the local people whose increasing spending power is a good omen for Bangsaen and his hotel business.

Speaking to *Horizons*, the young executive said that Tide Resort was already reporting 50-60% occupancy on Fridays, while some Saturdays it was booked out. And to those who haven't been to Bangsaen in a long time, he dared them to come and find out for themselves how much the place had changed.

Once he has the local set up organised and in place he is going to train his focus on international clients and travellers. There have been enquiries from Russian, Korean and German tourists on the look for a peaceful hangout, and Narongchai knows only too well that Tide Resort perfectly fits the bill.

Built at a cost of over 300 million baht, the resort lies on a sprawling 12-rai plot by the sea. It has eight suites, 70 deluxe rooms. The rest are superior rooms. It has meeting facilities to take in 50-100 people on international food

the authentic Thai taste."

His family operates the famous Pakarang restaurant chain and you can expect the food at Tide Resort to be of matching taste and quality.

The resort is designed in modern Balinese style accentuated with dark brown wood as the main component. The interior is minimalist and trendy.

Samutra Spa will be introduced in December and it will have something different to what is usually on offer elsewhere, a new refreshing outlook that matches with his style of thinking.

"The spa will have a completely different environment. Having visited several outlets I know that most offer the same atmosphere — Thai or Balinese style. I'd like to introduce something that I find exciting that our customers would appreciate.

"The spa at Tide Resort will have American country-setting. It will combine beauty and relaxation. Thai people are more inclined toward beauty, but foreign tourists prefer relaxation," he said.

Will it be difficult to convince Bangsaen residents when the mainstream traffic is heading for Pattaya?

"It takes a while to change people's attitude. Let them come and see it for themselves. People will choose what they like. Bangsaen is ideal for family vacation," he replied.

Although Bangsaen does not have as many diversions as Pattaya, it still has Khao Khieo National Park, Khao Sam Mook, Tiger Park and three golf courses, all within convenient driving distance from the resort.