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SIX SENSES YAO NOI, PHOTOGRAPHY BY BASIL CHILDERS

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Six Senses Yao Noi

BECCA HENSLEY

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I might be dancing in a sultry speakeasy. A saxophone riff ripples through the air, and my body sways on demand. **But the music doesn't play for me. Instead, it wafts in** Louis Armstrong-filled bellows and coos for a free-range coterie of Rubenesque hens, who seem veritably to swoon before my eyes—like groupies at a Gatsby party.

Six Senses Yao Noi
Ko Yao Noi, Thailand
+66 7641 8500
[SIXSENSES.COM/RESORTS/YAO-NOI](https://www.sixsenses.com/resorts/yao-noi)

With the tease of Mona Lisa smiles on their beaks, they peck around their commodious pen at Six Senses Yao Noi, then take turns laying organic eggs in the henhouse—as grand as a villa. Between activities, they socialize, their home part of a luxurious resort on a remote island in southern Thailand, 45 minutes from frenetic Phuket.

“These chickens even heal themselves here,” says Khun Pim, a sustainability expert at the resort, and an advocate of this tropic-sited laboratory of sustainable repose. Indeed, as she speaks, one hen sits amid a garden of indigenous herbs, nibbling on an abundant mint plant, nature’s medication. “She’ll be better in no time,” says Pim, who goes on to explain that chickens here receive no antibiotics or other unnatural substances. And the jazz? **Studies have shown that hens feel sexier when they listen to music—especially jazz.** That leads to happier hens and more nutritious eggs, marked by larger sizes and mustard yellow yolks.

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A guest at the Eden-like Six Senses Yao Noi, I’ve joined an informal tour at the organic chicken farm, which is just one of the many green and eco-conscious efforts of this Thai-born resort brand. After perusing the impressive set up, encircled by native rubber trees, crowned by a cobalt sky, and home to friendly, non-malodorous hens, I gather some eggs in a basket. Momentarily, I’ll pass them on to the chef, who’ll poach them for my breakfast.

No farm girl, I've never done this in my life—and it feels good, seeing this connection between food's provenance and the table.

Thus, enthralled, I spend the day behind the scenes at Yao Noi, something any hotel guest can do if they're willing to forgo the individual plunge pools that beckon or the allure of sugary, sandy beaches for a spell. Curious about the fact that the hotel supplies its own water, I visit the resort's water plant next. An unassuming shed on the property's edge, it holds several immense vats of collected rainwater, enough to supply the entire resort's consumption—from drinking to bathing to cooking to pools.

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"We don't allow the use of plastic bottles at any Six Senses hotel," says Khun Pim, who explains that the water here is filtered and revitalized with added minerals to ensure that its quality surpasses basic bottled water standards. But, what's that I hear? Opera? Correct. A vibrato buzzing in Italian energizes the space. Could that be Luciano Pavarotti I hear? Indeed, I can nearly feel the quivering inside me. Khun Pim clarifies. "We choose classical tunes set at a certain vibration—the same one found when monks hum in meditation," she says. Proved to ameliorate the molecular makeup of H₂O, classical music, especially at the OM vibration, greatly enhances the water. My conclusion: classical music is good. Heavy metal? Not so much.

While an eco-nerd could have a heyday watching everybody do green-inspired good deeds at Six Senses Yao Noi, the 57-villa resort isn't only about saving the planet. Oh, sure there's an organic vegetable garden and a mushroom hut; and, certainly they produce their own all-natural soaps, shampoos, and body-care products for the villas and spa. The resort maintains a natural mangrove trail—complete with botanical signage and explanation—and each villa comprises architecture designed to take advantage of passive cooling, such as the shade that stems from overhanging, thatched roofs. Of course, a portion of all revenue is contributed to various social and environmental initiatives (Their Clean Water Fund, for example provides water filters for thousands of families in Cambodia.) And eco-tourism, most often led by villagers-cum-employees prevails. Trips to the village on bicycles and kayaking the mangrove lined canals come to mind.

But most vacationers won't really notice the emerald touch, because they'll be too busy being coddled by the stellar service, spacious villas, and first class amenities. Still, it would be hard to turn a blind eye to the footprint-light pleasures presented by a hotel with such an earthy, ethical Modus operandi. There's the daily complimentary yoga, offered atop a bird-nest-like yoga platform, which looks out over the Andaman Sea and Phanga Bay's heart-stopping karsts. Tooth-like and mysterious, they protrude from the jade-colored waves like bits of bone from a misshapen jaw.

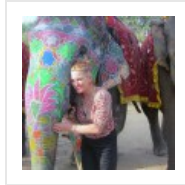
A spicy herbal bath blends lemongrass, palmarosa, lavender, and a hint of clove. Housemade massage oils, aimed at distinctive doshas, uplift with rosemary, calm with ylang ylang and bring focus with lavender.

Taking advantage of the horizon, Dorelal, the head yoga instructor, leads practice each day at dawn. Having studied at India's top schools, in the yoga meccas of northern Rishikesh and southern Kerala, he focuses on the ancient mind, body, and spirit precepts of traditional hatha yoga, individualizing the practice according to the abilities of the each participant. At the spa, helmed by Dr. Ranjan Kapoor, a man with diplomas aplenty (including Ayurveda and reflexology masters degrees), the mood tends toward the dreamlike. A thatched-room haven, kitted out in the style of a typical Thai longhouse, this tranquil arena evokes living in a tree. Individual treatment bungalows dot a pathway composed of tree trunks, each cottage boasting floor to ceiling windows that bring the jungle indoors.

Well researched treatments borrow from Ayurveda, but utilize Thai herbs. The herbal

compresses used for one signature treatment, for example, include farm-harvested ginger (for circulation), turmeric (an analgesic), lemongrass (to calm muscle cramps), kaffir lime (an antiseptic), tamarind (an astringent and exfoliate), acacia (to heal bruises) and myrtle (as a respiratory decongestant). A spicy herbal bath blends lemongrass, palmarosa, lavender, and a hint of clove. Housemade massage oils, aimed at distinctive doshas, uplift with rosemary, calm with ylang ylang and bring focus with lavender.

“Our goal”, says Dr. Ranjan, “is to introduce you to yourself.” And that’s what happens. That part inside you that cares about humanity starts to speak up. In a gentle voice, it reminds you that you and an ethical world exist in harmony. You listen. You care. And for the efforts of Six Senses Yao Noi, you find a better person within.



BECCA HENSLEY

Based in Austin, Becca Hensley writes regularly about travel and spas. She believes a good story draws you in like laughter in a crowded room, and challenges you to do it justice. Her work appears regularly in Austin Monthly, Travel Channel, Toronto Star and National Geographic Traveler.

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“A Celebration of Spa Culture”

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