



A 35-minute speedboat ride from Sihanoukville on Cambodia's west coast, **Song Saa** lies in the pristine Koh Rong archipelago. Its name means "The Sweethearts" in Khmer, a reference to the paired islets, Koh Ouen and Koh Bong, that comprise the resort. The exquisite beauty of the natural setting inspired an Australian couple who were sailing through the islands to construct the hotel. Rory and Melita Hunter were ideally suited to the task: he with a background in property development; she in interior design. Their brainchild, with its 27 villas, opened in early 2012.

Greeting us, manager Bradlie Goian, dressed in long shorts and white shirt, set the prevailing tone of casual elegance. A member of staff escorted us along a sand pathway to our 2,475-square-foot Ocean View Villa. With soaring ceilings, its main room displayed a skillful combination of woods and fabrics. Local art helped to create an air of authenticity. My favorite example was a framed aggregation of faded planks salvaged from area fishing boats. A few steps beyond the large four-poster bed, a sunken seating area opened onto a wooden deck and a private infinity pool.



There are two other villa categories at Song Saa: 11 Jungle Villas nestled on the central hill afford views of the surrounding islands and waters, while eight Overwater Villas enable guests to step directly into the ocean from private balconies. Two two-bedroom Overwater Villas (3,240 square feet) come with indoor dining areas with seating for 12, and private chefs. Although in-villa dining is an attractive option, we loved going to the resort's two restaurants. At *Vista*, set just off the shoreline, we enjoyed dishes such as spring rolls with local crab and fresh vegetables, and marinated chicken breast with a mint-cream sauce and couscous. The culinary highlight of our stay, however, was a Khmer feast, which included **superb beef lok lak**, stir-fried chicken with ginger and spring onion, and prawns with Kampot pepper. At lunch, we invariably found our way to the casual *Driftwood Bar*, which offers a tapas-style menu as well as pizzas.

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Spa cuisine is also available at Song Saa in conjunction with the resort's extensive wellness programs. Although there is no centralized spa facility, outdoor salas and treatment villas are scattered through the rain forest and along the ocean shore. Individual treatment schedules combine traditional Khmer techniques with Ayurvedic principles. Yoga and meditation are also available.

Activities include kayaking in the surrounding archipelago, rain forest tours guided by a member of the resort's Conservation Team and snorkeling trips through nearby coral gardens led by a marine biologist. It is impossible not to be impressed by the Hunters' commitment to the local community, as well as to environmental conservation. Their Song Saa Foundation now supports marine sustainability, reforestation and mangrove restoration, an organic gardening and plant propagation center, and an educational outreach program.

I loved everything I saw and experienced at Song Saa. The atmosphere is blissfully relaxing and otherworldly. This is a truly exceptional hideaway.

By Andrew Harper  
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