

THAILAND

**PULLMAN
PHUKET
ARCADIA**


The feeling is surreal - of simultaneously floating above the Andaman Sea and levitating from the hillside.

It's an architectural illusion, but the effect is striking.

On entering the Pullman Phuket Arcadia, the open lobby draws me towards the sunshine, the water, the breeze.

On the west coast of Phuket, the Pullman is between Sirinat National Park and the kilometre-long Naithon Beach, regarded as one of the best beaches in Phuket. It is 15 minutes from the airport.

If you fly with Qantas and code-share partner Bangkok Airways, luggage can be checked from Australia direct to Phuket for a hassle-free journey. Decor is relaxed and unpretentious, like a sprawling beach house where you can literally put your feet up - in the enormous cocoon-backed day beds (though fake books supplementing



A natural high in Phuket

Encouraged by the enthusiastic Mr Danny,
Briar Jensen takes a leap of faith

'GOODBYE, good luck! Hope you come back," grins our greeter at Flying Hanuman as he escorts us to the equipment station.

The cheeky banter continues as we're strapped into our zip-line harnesses. "Don't worry, gear all good – all second-hand from Myanmar," cackles our guide, Mr Danny.

Instructions are slightly more serious. Don't hold the rope, "because we don't sell spare fingers".

And lift your legs on landing, "lest you break them".

We puff and sweat up the hill to the first treetop platform and wait nervously.

"You excited?" asks Mr Danny. Before anyone can answer he shouts, "Me too! It's my first day" before stumbling and falling off the platform with a scream, zip lining backwards in a tangle of flailing arms and legs.

Of course, he lands expertly at the other end, grinning madly, and waits for us to follow.

Flying Hanuman is a two-hour adventure through the jungle of Katu in Phuket. Built in, around and through the trees with minimum impact to the forest, it's a maze of zip lines, suspension bridges, tree-hugging spiral staircases and abseils. There are 28 platforms, starting with shorter, lower zip lines to build confidence, before gradually increasing in length and height.

Eager to get the initial line over with, and emboldened by Mr Danny's enthusiasm, I volunteer to go first and lunge off the platform with a pathetic squeal. It's over before I know it.

With each zip line,



GO2 PHUKET

GETTING THERE

Qantas flies from Melbourne to Bangkok via Sydney with connecting flights to Phuket provided by codeshare partner Bangkok Airways. Ph 13 13 13 or see qantas.com.au

STAYING THERE

Pullman Phuket Arcadia is at Naithon Beach, Saku Thalang, close to Phuket Airport.

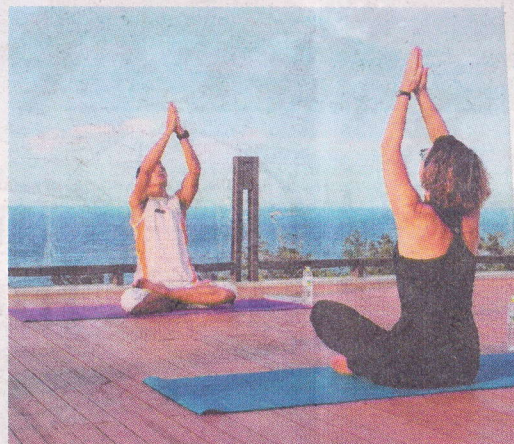
Prices vary during the year but deluxe rooms start at about \$150 and luxury ocean-view pool villas from \$850. accorhotels.com; pullmanphuketarcadia.com

ZIPPING ABOUT

flyinghanuman.com

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let go of the harness I've been gripping with both hands and zoom through the air with arms outstretched.

But I scream like a girl on the first abseil. The guides control the rate of descent and apparently there are two speeds – fast and extremely fast.

Having left my stomach behind and feeling a touch dizzy on landing, I definitely request a more sedate descent on the second 40m drop down a

and we regularly slug water from bottles tied to our harness. Mr Danny, who has only been working for a month, has already lost 3kg.

There are "honeymoon slings" for two people and a "tuktuk" ride – a wobbly wooden platform you stand on as it's jerkily winched between two trees.

The ultimate is a 400m long, 40m tall zip line above the treetops with views to Phuket

scarcely see the landing platform in the distance.

There's a gut-wrenching drop before we reach a speed of up to 60km/h whizzing through the branches.

It's about an hour's drive back to our hotel, the Pullman Phuket Arcadia at Naithon Beach and on the way, a detour is made for shopping at Patong Beach. I'm travelling with some bargain hunters who

the real ones are a disappointment). Seven accommodation categories include family rooms and luxury villas with private infinity pools. Dining options include Elements Restaurant, which offers lavish international buffet spreads, Vero for fine Italian dining and a deli for lighter meals.

JUNGLE GYM: (clockwise from main) Abseil beside an ancient tree at Flying Hanuman; zip lining through the trees; a swing bridge at Flying Hanuman; morning yoga; and Naithon Beach below Pullman Phuket Arcadia. Pictures: Briar Jensen

in secret back rooms for "better quality" goods.

As we catch a disco tuktuk – think flashing lights and pumping music – to meet our mini bus, we're loaded down with an eclectic array of bikinis, bags, chiffon tops and silk cushion covers.

Back at the Pullman, I'm grateful for a pre-dinner massage in Dhatri Spa. It's been a long day, starting with a yoga session atop the resort's Fit Lounge. Under the instructor's tutelage, I lunge deeper and suck my tummy in harder, spurred on by a fellow traveller.

Dinner is at Naiyang Park Restaurant, across the road from Naiyang Beach. Sitting outside on the deck under the trees to catch the see breeze, we share an inexpensive Thai feast of salads and seafood.

The writer was a guest of Accor