



HISTORY



A Short History of Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a rest house for foreign seafarers was established on the banks of the Maenam River now known as Chao Phraya River. It was to become one of the world's greatest hotels: The Oriental. Built in 1876, The Oriental, now Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok was the first luxury hotel in the Kingdom of Siam.

John le Carré completed *The Honourable Schoolboy* during his stay at The Oriental, W Somerset Maugham wrote about his bout with malaria during his stay at The Oriental in *The Gentleman in the Parlour* and Barbara Cartland named one of the heroines in *Sapphires in Siam* after an Oriental employee. Joseph Conrad, the sea captain and writer, was a frequent visitor to the bar of The Oriental, Vaslav Nijinsky danced in the ballroom in 1916 and playwright and actor Noël Coward treasured the memories of his favourite cocktail venue. Jim Thompson, the silk king, owned it, Peter Ustinov loved it and Graham Greene has a suite named in his honour. The Prince of Wales, The Queen of Sweden, Audrey Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor, and Marlon Brando are a few of the individuals who have called Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok their 'home away from home'.



An early view of the Oriental Hotel from across the river

In 1865, the hotel's original structure was destroyed in a fire and was replaced by the current structure in 1876. It was a Danish-born sailor, H.N. Andersen – the only Dane outside the Thai Royal Family to have been decorated with the Order of the White Elephant by the King of Siam – who resolved to give the Siamese capital a new hotel, a new modern luxurious Oriental Hotel.



Boats on the Chao Phraya River



H N Andersen



HM King Chulalongkorn, Rama V

Anderson appointed Italian architect firm Messrs Cardu and Rossi to design the Oriental building, which was subsequently constructed and withstood the ravages of time, and is today one of the proudest landmarks of Bangkok, a beautiful building that is both in use but also serves as a memorial and a promise, linking together the years past and present as well as those still to come.

On 17 December 1890, His Majesty King Chulalongkorn paid a private visit to The Oriental to assess the ability of the hotel to host royal guests. The King was so impressed that he decided to accommodate Crown Prince Nicholas of Russia, who became Tsar in 1894, at The Oriental in April 1891. It was the beginning of a long lasting relationship between the legendary hotel and Thailand's Royal Palace.

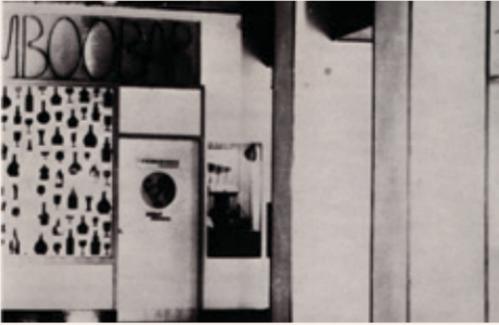
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'New Road', opened in 1864



Interior of the Authors' Wing



The Bamboo Bar exterior 1947



*Jim Thompson,
the future "Thai Silk King"*

A succession of owners followed, including Louis T. Leonowens, son of the famous Anna of 'Anna and the King of Siam'. During the Second World War, the hotel was leased to the Japanese Army, which used it as an officers' club under the management of the Imperial Hotel of Tokyo. At the end of the war it housed liberated Allied prisoners of war who, under the impression that it was a Japanese-owned property, ransacked the building and left it in urgent need of repair.

A partnership of six people each contributed US\$250 to buy the hotel, and immediately began restoration. The partnership included Germaine Krull, a characterful Polish-born photographer who had served in the Pacific as a war correspondent for Agence France Presse, His Royal Highness Prince Bhanubandhu Yugala, a prominent Thai lawyer Pote Sarasin and two Americans, John Webster and Jim Thompson, who had served in the Organization for Strategic Security and chosen to stay on in Thailand. The Oriental reopened for business in June 1947. Ms. Krull took the position of manager and restored the hotel to its position as the premier hotel in Thailand and established the Bamboo Bar, which swiftly evolved into a city legend that endures to this day.



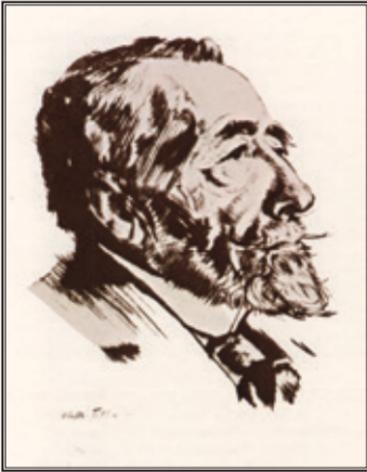
HM Queen Sirikit attended the Rotary Bazaar at the Oriental in 1966

In 1958, the ten-storey Garden Wing was added, home to Le Normandie, Bangkok's first fine dining restaurant, and featured the city's first elevator. In 1967, Krull sold her share to Italthai, which was founded in the mid-fifties by Italian-born Giorgio Berlingieri and Dr. Chaijudh Karnasuta, and at the time well on its way to becoming one of the country's most significant mercantile groups. Berlingieri appointed 30-year old Kurt Wachtveitl, at that time manager of a hotel in Pattaya owned by Italthai, as General Manager of The Oriental. Wachtveitl remained at The Oriental until his retirement in 2009.

In 1972, the hotel bought the adjacent land from Chartered Bank, where it built the 350-room River Wing to complete the main body of the hotel as we know it today. An estate was acquired across the river and the celebrated Sala Rim Naam restaurant opened in 1983, followed by The Oriental Thai Cooking School, the first cooking school in Bangkok, and the Fitness Centre. The world renowned The Oriental Spa, the first spa within a hotel property in Bangkok, opened here in 1993 in an exquisite teak mansion. In 1992, the first Oriental Shop opened in Isetan – today there are four Mandarin Oriental Shops across the city catering to Bangkok's discerning gourmands.



After construction of the River Wing, mid 1970s



Joseph Conrad in 1924



Noel Coward

In 1974, Mandarin International Hotels Limited, owner of The Mandarin in Hong Kong since 1963, was formed as a hotel management company and in expanding its interests in Asia, financed the building of the River Wing and therefore acquired a 45 percent stake in The Oriental. In 1985, the company rationalised its corporate structure by combining these two renowned properties under a common name, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group. In 2008, The Oriental formally changed its name to Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok.