

Q & A

Anne-Cristine Procope

Resort Manager, Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp & Resort

By Laura Gibbs

In the northeast of Thailand lies the infamous Golden Triangle area. Once an opium producing and trading area, today the Golden Triangle is a tranquil region, brimming over with nature, temples and hill tribes. Sitting at the very edge of Thailand is the Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp & Resort, a property with 61 rooms and 160 acres, some of which has been given over to the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation and houses around 20 rescued elephants.

The Anantara brand currently has over 35 properties across three continents and is owned by Minor Hotels, a hospitality leader in Southeast Asia. Known for its outstanding service, classic rooms and opulent spas, the Anantara Golden Triangle is one of the iconic properties in Minor's varied portfolio. Heading up the team at the Golden Triangle property is resort manager Anne-Christine Procope. Before joining Anantara, Anne-Christine spent over a decade in various management roles throughout Africa and the Middle East. In 2014 she moved to Anantara Medjumbe Island Resort in Mozambique as Resort Manager, and in 2016 moved continent and hemisphere to the Anantara Golden Triangle.





THE ANANTARA GOLDEN TRIANGLE ELEPHANT CAMP & RESORT IS A STUNNING PROPERTY IN A UNIQUE LOCATION. WHAT LED YOU TO THIS PROPERTY? AND WHAT HAVE BEEN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES AND/OR HIGHLIGHTS OF OVERSEEING A LUXURY RESORT ON THE BORDER OF MYANMAR AND LAOS?

Anantara Golden Triangle is one of the iconic properties in the brand's portfolio and one of the few hotels in the world with views of three countries. When the opportunity arose to relocate from Africa to Asia I jumped on it and, having lived in Africa, Asia's jungles and elephants were pleasantly familiar to me and I adjusted to my new home easily.

One of the highlights for me are still the opportunity to get up close and personal with these elephants in their natural habitat and the important work that the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation does.

In terms of challenges, Thailand's most northern area is still somewhat off the beaten track for travelers and therefore not necessarily their first choice destination, but in that lies the mystique and uniqueness of the Golden Triangle and it challenges my team and I to think out of the box when we promote and sell it.

YOU USED TO RUN THE ANANTARA MEDJUMBE ON A PRIVATE ISLAND OFF MOZAMBIQUE. CAN YOU WALK US THROUGH SOME OF THE LOGISTICAL ASPECTS OF OPERATING IN SUCH A REMOTE AREA? HOW WOULD YOU ENSURE ALL MENU ITEMS ARE IN STOCK?

All in all, it takes very good planning! Anantara Medjumbe is located on an island off the coast of the northern region of Mozambique that is less developed with infrastructure than

the Southern part, and logistics can be challenging. Dry supplies and drinking water are brought in on a dhow (traditional Arabian boat powered by wind) and, whereas the island has an airstrip, airlift is limited to guests' arrivals and departures. And with an average stay of seven nights, that was what we had to plan for.

Like in the Maldives and elsewhere, inhabited islands in the Quirimbas Archipelago are self-sustained in some ways with a generator, solar plant, and a desalination plant for the biggest logistical challenge – drinking water.

THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE IS HOME TO THE GOLDEN ELEPHANT ASIAN ELEPHANT FOUNDATION (GTAEF) WHICH CURRENTLY HAS OVER 20 FULL-TIME ELEPHANT RESIDENTS. DOES PART OF YOUR JOB DESCRIPTION INVOLVE OVERSEEING THE ELEPHANTS? YOU SHARE THE CAMP WITH THE NEIGHBOURING FOUR SEASONS RESORT. HOW DO YOU ENSURE ANANTARA GUESTS ARE ALWAYS SATISFIED?

The renowned Dara Elephant Camp is one of the highlights of Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp & Resort, which offers unforgettable adventures and unique experiences with a cast of gentle giants. Set up in 2003 as a traditional mahout village, Dara Camp works alongside Anantara's Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation to perform street rescues, provide ongoing employment, offer a comfortable lifestyle for the elephant and its whole mahout family, as well as participating in bigger picture projects that create better conditions for all of Thailand's elephants.

Whereas we do not own any elephants, the elephants and their mahout families are on our payroll, so to speak – today the Dara Camp supports 24 elephants and more than fifty people, and is proudly fully funded by our resort, as

well as donations from our guests and further afield.

All of the elephants are given ample food, shelter, twenty four hours veterinary support and the utmost care. The mahout and his family receive food, housing, medical insurance, schooling for their children, and one hundred percent of the profits from a traditional weaving business.

The wider community also benefits – groups of students and disadvantaged children enjoy memorable experiences; local farmers receive a monthly income for the sale of elephant fodder.

THE ANANTARA IS KNOWN FOR FRIENDLY AND WELCOMING STAFF. CAN YOU WALK US THROUGH THE STAFF HIRING POLICY AND TRAINING INITIATIVES?

For us, each and every guest is an individual with different expectations and we believe that the anticipation of these individual needs is the difference between a good and a great experience. As a team we nurture a culture of service excellence, heartfelt hospitality, and the aspiration to not only meet but indeed exceed our guests' needs.

Consistent service excellence is achieved by strict quality control and continuous reassessment and we must of course understand our guests' expectations as well as keep up with new trends and advances in the various disciplines of hospitality. For me, our guests' feedback and constructive criticism are our gauge to measure if we consistently meet the very high service delivery standards that we have set for ourselves.

To this end training is extremely important for us and we do so for fifteen minutes each and every day for all our associates, over and above our ongoing training schedule in specific disciplines and our continuous program of cross training and exposure both in hotel and at our properties in the greater Asia Pacific region.





AT THE START OF 2018, ALL ANANTARA HOTELS & RESORTS STOPPED USING PLASTIC STRAWS IN ASIA. IT'S ESTIMATED THAT THIS WILL REDUCE UP TO 2.5 MILLION PLASTIC STRAWS BEING THROWN AWAY EVERY YEAR. THIS IS AN IMPRESSIVE MOVE BUT HAS IT BEEN AN EASY SHIFT TO BIODEGRADABLE AND RECYCLABLE ALTERNATIVES? WHAT OTHER FUTURE SUSTAINABLE INITIATIVES DOES THE ANANTARA HAVE PLANNED?

We do not have a choice but to shift to biodegradables and recycling and our guests are definitely in approval of our efforts, whether replacing plastic straws and bottles or using reusable flasks as water vessels. For energy conservation, we've long used solar panels in our operations support

areas and hybrid air-conditioning units throughout the resort, and we are using heat pumps to produce hot water.

Thank you very much Anna-Christine

for your time and answers. For more information about the Golden Elephant Asian Elephant Foundation please visit www.helpingelephants.org, and for the Anantara Golden Triangle - www.goldentriangle.anantara.com

