



INSIDER INTEL

Leading Man

Thai superstar and boutique hotelier Ananda Everingham shares his favorite excursions in and around Chiang Mai. BY DIANA HUBBELL

DRAMA RUNS IN THE FAMILY for Ananda Everingham. The Bangkok-born heartthrob has starred in some of Thailand's biggest blockbusters, like *Me... Myself, Eternity* and *Shutter*, and while he's played the leading man in many a rom-com, it might be hard to trump the suspense and intrigue of his own backstory. Everingham's mother is Laotian, his father is an Australian photojournalist, and the 1983 NBC television movie, *Love Is Forever*, about a photojournalist who scuba dives the Mekong to rescue his lover from communist-ruled Laos is based loosely on their true tale. In addition to a flair for the theatrics, hospitality is also an Everingham trademark. Before he was discovered at age 14, Everingham worked part-time in his parents' Indian restaurant, Himali Cha Cha, a Bangkok institution. So in a satisfying second act, Everingham returns to hospitality with the opening of **Hotel Yayee** (17/5 Nimmanhemin Soi 17; 66-99/269-5885; fb.com/hotelyayee; doubles from

Bt1,900), a 14-room boutique hotel in Chiang Mai. "The inspiration and design came from the idea of building something for someone I was in love with," the ever-romantic Everingham says. "That is the reason the hotel is called Yayee, which means sweetheart."

The love interest in this particular tale may very well be the city itself. "I moved to Chiang Mai in 2009 and figured that it would be important to invest in the town that I was now living," Everingham says. "I spent so much time designing and working on the project that the only way to do the space justice was to turn it into a hotel." Die-hard fans will quickly recognize Everingham's obsession with photography, which he inherited from his father and showcases through the stunning black-and-white images hung in every guest room. His Lao heritage is also woven throughout, with fetching touches like throw pillows imported from his mother's hometown. The local design motif extends to the rooftop

COURTESY OF HOTEL YAYEE

terrace, which sports mountain views as swoon-inducing as the star himself—not to mention potent cocktails. Even the breakfast, which ranges from Thai *khao tom* (rice soup) to eggs and sausages, exhibits close attention to detail and cross-cultural sensibilities.

Everingham is still lighting up the big screen, but his latest movie *Love HzO* opened at the end of August and there are no other releases slated for this year, so for now Everingham fans can get their fix by following his footsteps and tire tracks through the sleepy downtown and lush surrounding hillsides on some of his favorite expeditions in Thailand's northern hub.

+ For local products like candles and trippy trinkets, Everingham heads to the city's hippest strip, **Nimmanhemin Soi 1** (nimmansoi1.com), home to stylish restaurants, art galleries and the annual **Nimmanhemin Art & Design Promenade** (December 5-10).

+ A pleasant walk with a culture edge "starts at the base of Khualek [Iron Bridge], where the local *dek waen* [street motorcycle racers] like to hang out, and leads to **Chareon rat Road** up past

Nawarat Bridge, where there are many cool boutiques and local restaurants with great organic food, handwoven products and crafts."

+ Everingham's ideal day trip is spent astride his motorbike. "I like to ride around the Mae Rim loop into Samoeng. On the route, there are many places to stop such as **Pong Yaeng Ang Doi** [*Mae Rim-Samoeng Road, Mae Rim District; lunch for two Bt500*] for lunch. The food there is good, and the ingredients are locally grown. On the way down to Samoeng, you'll see a sign that reads FORTUNE TELLING AND BEER, run by a cool old couple. Go there for a bite to eat, or to have a cold beer while having your fortune read."

+ Also on the Mae Rim, **Baan Mon Muan** (*Pong Yaeng, Mae Rim District; 66-83/318-6444; baanmonmuan.com; dinner for two Bt450*) is one of Everingham's top picks for "amazing local food made from the ingredients grown in the hotel's backyard." And as Everingham will tell you, when searching for Chiang Mai's hidden charms, you often need look no further than the backyard. 📍



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF HOTEL YAYEE; SAKON CHAOPHRAEKNOI; COURTESY OF BAAN MON MUAN

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A cross-cultural breakfast spread at Hotel Yayee; people-watching at Chan-Neung Café on Nimmanhemin Soi 1; stop for a garden-fresh lunch at Baan Mon Muan. OPPOSITE: Ananda Everingham.