



Making overseas visitors welcome

A gracious hostess has made the Thai hospitality industry a model for the rest of the world, writes **Suchat Sritama**

In the Thai hotel industry, Thanpuying Chanut Piyaoui is a larger-than-life figure. She has introduced many firsts to the Thai hotel industry. Chief among them, she is lauded as the Thai hotelier who made Thai hospitality known to the outside world.

Wichit na Ranong, president of the Tourism Council of Thailand, said: "She was the pioneer, the first hotelier to fly the Thai flag in the Western world, making our hospitality known internationally."

"The Dusit Group's expansion into overseas markets brought about a new chapter in the tourism industry," Wichit added.

Chanut began her career as a hotelier in 1946 in a small hotel in Bangkok after her return from study in the United States.

The Princess Hotel on Oriental Lane, New Road, was a fad among the affluent, being

the first Thai hotel with its own swimming pool.

She travelled to some of the world's best hotels. "I was the most impressed with Japanese hotels. In Tokyo, I stayed at Hotel Okura, where the staff were pleasant and hospitable. They made me realise the true meaning of five-star hotel service," Chanut recalled.

Yet the clean, efficient, comfortable and friendly hotels in the US brought about a new perception. "I thought it would be a good idea to combine the two things in one hotel, and wouldn't it be nice if I built that hotel?" she said.

In her determination to build a five-star hotel in Thailand, she made several visits to the Hotel Okura. She established contact with its founder, who introduced her to Yozo Shibata, the hotel's designer, who helped her design the Dusit Thani, "Town in Heaven", supposedly a model city for a happy, democratic society.

"I wanted a hotel like the ones in the US but still distinctly Thai," she said. "A place where visitors would experience a truly Thai welcome but with modern amenities in the heart of Bangkok."

The 510-room Dusit Thani was the tallest building in Bangkok for several years, and it became the flagship business of the Dusit Group, which was founded in 1949. Over 57 years, the group acquired several deluxe hotels, building upon Thai culture and tradition to create a personalised welcome for all guests, made distinctive under its ongoing theme "Dusit, the Thai way of life".

The Dusit Thani was one of the Thai hotels that attracted foreign visitors and helped tourism overtake rice exports as the leading source of income in 1983.

At that time, the Dusit looked beyond Bangkok, and new hotels have sprung up in the provinces and overseas.

The group now operates 19 hotels and resorts under three brands: eight under Dusit Hotels, with properties in Rangoon, the United Arab Emirates, and Manila, one under D2 Hotels and 10 under Royal Princess Hotels.

"We made a big step with the opening of the Dusit Dubai, which brought a distinctive touch of Thailand to the Middle Eastern market," she said. Most of the staff are Thai, to guarantee the distinct character of the hospitality.

For her great achievement Chanut received the highest royal decoration and became a Thanpuying.

At 84, she still helps keep the Dusit Group running, although her son Chanin has now taken over the title of manager.

This year the legendary hotelier is celebrating 60 years in the business and the 36th anniversary of the flagship Dusit Thani Bangkok. ■