

The Shaping of Phuket

AD 100–600

Phuket believed to have been peopled by early Mon settlers from Burma. Speculation that *chao lae* or sea gypsies may also have lived in the region.

1279–98

King Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai extends Thai control to present-day peninsular Thailand, possibly including Phuket.

1351

Siamese power moves to the central plains with the founding of the Kingdom of Ayuthaya north of present-day Bangkok.

1772

Captain Francis Light seeks – unsuccessfully – to establish British control over Phuket.

1782

King Rama I establishes new capital at Bangkok.

1785

Burmese forces attack Thalang, then capital of Phuket. The governor's widow, Khun Chan, and her sister, Khun Muk, rally the island's forces and drive out the attacking Burmese.

1839

The poet Nai Mi visits Phuket and writes extensively in praise of the island's beauty.

1876

Uprising at Phuket by Chinese miners dissatisfied with their working conditions.

1890–1909

Rasada Korsimbi becomes governor of Phuket and oversees the modernisation of the island's infrastructure.

1905–6

Italian scholar G.E. Gerini writes a history of Phuket entitled *Historical Retrospect of Junkceylon Island*.

1907

Australian Edward Thomas Miles introduces the first tin dredger to Phuket.

1976–92

Thailand achieves major economic advances but remains essentially autocratic. Tourism begins to thrive, especially in and around Phuket.

2002

King Rama IX by now the longest-ruling monarch in the world; Thai economy seems well on the road to recovery, and democratic institutions are strengthening. Thaksin Shinawatra is Prime Minister.

A Chinese bride and groom in Phuket circa 1880.



Peace & Quiet

By any standards, Phuket is a great place to relax and get away from it all. Although Patong Beach has developed quite a busy nightlife scene over the past decade, the real ethos of Phuket is rest and relaxation in the original sense of the phrase.

To begin with, the island has no large towns or gridlocked traffic systems. Almost from the moment of landing at Phuket International Airport or crossing the Sarasin Road Bridge, you are conscious of being on an island, separated – however closely – from the mainland. Phuket

seems to exude peace and tranquillity. This is true in the interior of the island, where waterfalls rush down through verdant rain forest. It's true of the strand, where palm and casuarina trees whisper and rustle over some of the finest beaches in the world. It's true of the sea itself, most especially beneath the waves exploring the silent but startlingly colourful coral reefs. And finally it's true of the many groups of outer islands, seemingly a million miles from the noise, bustle and stress of everyday life in the big city back home.

Phuket is also peaceful because it is just that – at peace. Violent crime is most unusual (though you must keep an eye on your possessions, as you would anywhere else in the world). This means that it's safe to stroll or relax just about anywhere, at any time of the day or night.



Above: Rubber trees on a plantation near Krabi.

Below: Long-tailed boat moored at Ao Nang beach.



1

Khao Lak National Park

Bordering the Andaman Sea and surrounded by tropical forests, Khao Lak's main attraction is the beauty of its natural setting.

A perfect getaway within easy travelling distance of Phuket, Khao Lak has long stretches of sandy beach with a backdrop of the dense jungle-covered mountains of the national park.

Hat Khao Lak, fringed by casuarina trees, is divided into three separate beaches, Bang Niang in the north, Nang Thong in the centre, and Sunset Beach to the south. All have resorts and bungalows, but there is no crowding and there are some fine restaurants offering fresh seafood and magnificent views of the legendary Andaman Sea sunsets. Hat Khao Lak provides swimming and snorkelling – there is an offshore coral reef some 45 minutes distant by boat, while some of the resorts will arrange dive excursions to the Similan and Surin Islands.

Immediately to the south of Sunset Beach is the park headquarters for the 32,375ha Khao Lak-Lamru National Park. Wildlife inhabiting this beautiful region of sea cliffs, 1,000m-high hills, river estuaries and mangrove swamps includes hornbills, drongos, tapirs, gibbons, monkeys and Asiatic black bears. Park rangers guide treks along the coast or inland. These can be arranged at the visitor's centre. Other attractions include elephant trekking and white water rafting.

-  24A6
-  105km north of Phuket Town in Phang-nga Province
-  All year
-  Restaurant at park headquarters (£)
-  Bus from Phuket to Takua Pa will stop at park headquarters
-  None
-  Moderate

Opposite: *Giant Atlas Moth – pupae and final splendour*

Below: *Sunset Beach looking northward to Nang Thong Beach*



2

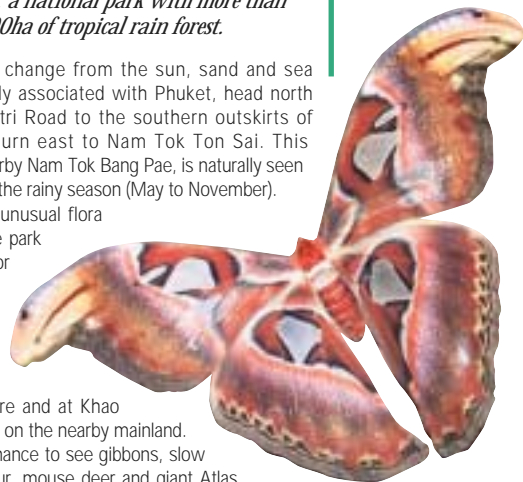
Khao Phra Taew Forest Reserve

The mountainous north of Phuket shelters Khao Phra Taew, a national park with more than 2,000ha of tropical rain forest.

For a complete change from the sun, sand and sea scenario normally associated with Phuket, head north along Thepkasatri Road to the southern outskirts of Thalang, then turn east to Nam Tok Ton Sai. This waterfall, like nearby Nam Tok Bang Pae, is naturally seen at its best during the rainy season (May to November).

Amongst the unusual flora to be seen in the park is the Langkow or white-backed palm, a fan-shaped tree standing 3m to 5m high which is only found here and at Khao Sok National Park on the nearby mainland. You may get a chance to see gibbons, slow loris, civets, langur, mouse deer and giant Atlas moths. Less welcome encounters might be venomous snakes and wild pigs, but these denizens of the park—especially the former—will try to steer clear of human company. Not so leeches, however, which are quite common in some parts of the park – wear closed shoes when hiking and apply copious insect repellent.

Various trails lead east from Ton Sai Falls towards the park's three highest peaks, Khao Prathiu (384m), Khao Bang Pae (388m) and Khao Phara, highest of all at 442m. A highlight of any visit to the park must be the Gibbon Rehabilitation Centre, close by Bang Pae Falls. Park rangers may act as guides for hikes in the park on request.



-  42B4
-  20km north of Phuket Town in Thalang District
-  Daily 6–6
-  Food and drinks at foodstalls near the Gibbon Rehab Centre (£)
-  Songthaew to Thalang, local taxi 3km to park
-  73–75 Phuket Road, Phuket Town
 0-7621 2213
-  None
-  Moderate
-  Gibbon Rehabilitation Centre (▶ 33)

Phuket Island

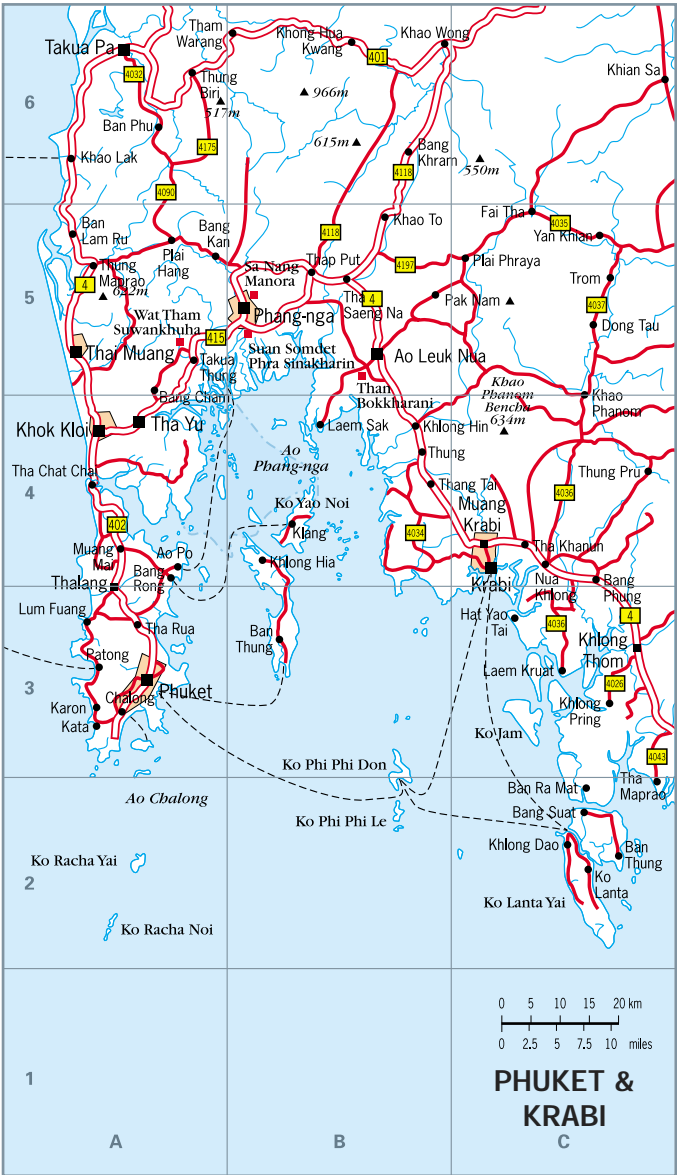


In centuries past Ko Phuket was an important trading post on the eastern shore of the Bay of Bengal, handling shipping and dealing with sailors from the Arab and Malay worlds, India, Burma (Myanmar), China and, of course, Siam. By the 16th century the island was also well known to Europeans, as first Portuguese and Dutch, then English and French sailed to its fabled shores.

It was not until around 1975 that Phuket's potential for tourism was finally realised. Quite simply, the island is idyllic. A sweep of warm, sandy beaches line the western, Andaman Coast. The skies are generally blue and sunny, the sea warm, the seafood plentiful and delicious. Phuket has developed into a truly great 'tropical paradise' destination. It is world class, and although more expensive than any other resort in Thailand, is still very reasonable by international standards, especially in view of the island's unparalleled beauty and excellent amenities.

‘Crabs, shrimps, prawns and dragons wander about wagging their tails amidst the waves.’

Thai Poet Nai Mi
on Phuket (c1840)



The Thalang Loop

Distance

50km

Time

3 hours

Start/end point

Phuket Town (▶ 42B2)

Lunch

Saffron (EE)

☒ Banyan Tree Resort,

Bang Tao Bay

☎ 0-7632 4374

Exploring the centre of the island, heading north from Phuket Town to Thalang before turning south to the Muslim centre of Bang Tao and back to town across the spine of the island.

Leave town on Highway 402 (Thepkasatri Road) and head north towards Thalang. Pass through the small village of Bang Khu where there are several good antique and silk stores, then continue north to the Heroines' Monument (▶ 33), now located in the middle of a sea of traffic.



A Muslim schoolgirl

Nearby is the excellent Phuket National Museum (▶ 34), a must for those interested in the history and culture of the island. Beyond the monument Highway 402 continues to Thalang town, which was capital of Phuket until the mid-19th century. Little of the old town remains, but Wat Phra Nang Sang (▶ 35), Phuket's oldest temple, is well worth a visit.

From Thalang head southwest along Highway 4030 to the village of Bang Tao.

This is home to one of Phuket's thriving Muslim communities and site of Masjid Surin, the island's largest mosque. Bang Tao is an excellent place to break for a snack or a cold drink from one of the many stalls around town.

From Bang Tao either continue southwest towards Surin, Laem Sing and Kamala beaches for a swim, or head directly back across the island via scenic Highway 4025.

What to See off the East Coast

KO HAE (CORAL ISLAND) ★ ★

About 4km southeast of Rawai Beach, but best reached by boat from the pier at nearby Ao Chalong, Ko Hae is close enough to the 'mainland' to make an easy day outing. During the day it's a fine location for fishing, scuba diving, snorkelling and other associated water sports – though swimmers should watch out for jet skis and other potentially dangerous craft in the waters between Ko Hae and the main island. By night Ko Hae is very quiet, with up-market accommodation available in the bungalows of the Coral Island Resort.

KO LON ★

Rather bigger than Ko Hae, and slightly closer inshore, Ko Lon is easily reached from the pier at Chalong by ferry which departs between 8 and 9AM daily; it's also possible to charter a long-tail boat to take you across privately. Ko Lon is a mountainous island, though there are low-lying areas between the beach and the interior where the predominantly Muslim inhabitants raise rubber and coconuts. The best beach lies on the northeast coast. It takes about 20 minutes to reach Ko Lon by boat. Accommodation is available on the island.

KO NAKHA NOI ★ ★

Farther to the north, about 6km off the small settlement at Po Bay and easily reached by boat from the landing point



at Ao Po Garden, Ko Nakha Noi is home to the Naga Pearl Farm, billed as 'the only South Sea pearl farm in the world open to the public the year round'. It's an attractive island, with good restaurants and a fine beach. While here you can inspect the pearl farm, learn about techniques of

pearl cultivation and – yes, you guessed it – buy genuine cultured pearls. Quality accommodation is available if you want to stay overnight.

- ✚ 42B1
- ✉ 10km south of Chalong Pier
- 🕒 Daily
- 👤 Vendors on the beaches (E)
- 🚢 Boats from Chalong Pier or Rawai Beach
- ♿ None
- 💰 Free

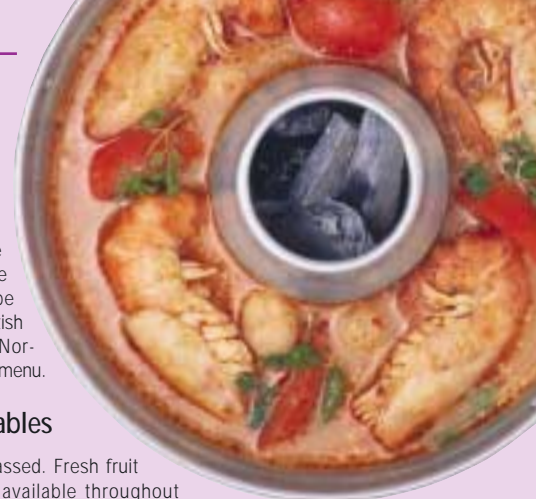
- ✚ 42B1
- ✉ 4km south of Chalong Pier
- 🕒 Daily
- 👤 Vendors and small restaurants around the island (E)
- 🚢 Boats from Chalong Pier or Rawai Beach
- ♿ None
- 💰 Free

- ✚ 42C4
- ✉ 6km east of Ao Po, Phuket
- ☎ 0-7621 9870 (Naga Pearl Farm)
- 🕒 Daily 9-5
- 👤 Small restaurants on the island (E)
- 🚢 Songthaew from Phuket Town to Ao Po
- 🚢 Boat from Ao Po
- ♿ Few
- 💰 Moderate

A boat decorated with the romanised pronunciation of 'sawasdee' – Thai for 'welcome' and 'hello'



Food & Drink



Popular in the west for the past 20 years, Thai cuisine now ranks beside French, Italian and Chinese as one of the most highly esteemed in the world.



An array of luk chub, a Thai confection shaped like fruit in miniature

Perhaps the essence of Thai food is the liberal use of chillies, garlic and lemongrass, with the emphasis definitely on the chillies. The good news is that Phuket is full of delicious Thai food and although it's not the cheapest place to eat in the kingdom, it's far more reasonably priced than back home.

Rice

Rice is central to most Thai meals, although the national fondness for noodles shows the strength of Chinese influence. Thais eat two kinds of rice, the slightly fluffy, long-grain rice familiar in the West and most popular in Phuket, which is eaten with a spoon and fork; and 'sticky rice', eaten with the fingers. Noodles are always eaten with chopsticks.

Meat

Meat is generally stir-fried or otherwise cooked in bite-sized pieces, which explains the absence of knives on Thai tables. Thai pork is among the best in the world, while chicken and duck are also excellent. Beef is widely

available, but can be a little tough. Consumption of lamb, mutton and goat is largely limited to Phuket's Muslim community.

Fish & Seafood

Again, this is among the best in the world. If you love freshwater and seawater fish, prawns, lobster, crab, clams, mussels, squid, octopus – you name it – it's available here. Naturally, the best place to enjoy fresh seafood is by the sea, so Phuket and Krabi are ideal locations. As Thailand has grown richer, so imported

varieties of fish have increasingly become available, so don't be surprised to find Scottish smoked salmon or Norwegian herring on the menu.

Fruit & Vegetables

Quite simply unsurpassed. Fresh fruit and vegetables are available throughout Phuket, Phang-nga and Krabi, from temperate crops such as asparagus and celery, apples and strawberries grown in the cool north of Thailand, to more exotic varieties such as rambutan, mangosteen, durian, pineapple, mango and tamarind which flourish in the warmer southern area. In recent years avocados have been introduced from Israel, and Kiwi fruit from New Zealand. Moreover, anything that doesn't grow here with ease – cherries, walnuts, nectarines, apricots, to name but a few – are flown in on a regular basis and available on supermarket shelves or in restaurants.

Drink

Bottled, purified water and a wide range of internationally recognised soft drinks are available everywhere – even in the remotest places. Thailand produces several good (but strong) local brews, including Singha (Lion) and Chang (Elephant) beers. International brands such as Amstel, Carlsberg and Heineken are manufactured locally under license. Local whiskies and rums include Mekong, Sang Thip and Similan, a Caribbean-style rum named after the islands to the northwest of Phuket. Everything which can be imported is imported, from the best Russian vodka to the top Scotch malt. The Thais have recently discovered a taste for wine, too, and import widely.

Mealtimes

Whatever, whenever. Thais eat when they are hungry, and don't understand Western obsessions with fixed mealtimes. They also tend to eat less than Westerners, but more frequently. That said, all Phuket restaurants catering to foreign visitors recognise that strange international habit of eating three fixed meals a day, and make allowances for it in their schedules.

Above: Tom Yam Kung, a spicy and sour shrimp soup favourite

Below: Durian is a strong-smelling local fruit that may not be to everyone's liking



DID YOU KNOW?

Khao yam, a Southern Thai breakfast, is a delicious mixture of cooked rice, grated coconut, bean sprouts, lemongrass and dried shrimp. Coupled with strong Thai coffee, there's no better way to start the day.

Entertainment & Nightlife

Safety

Phuket is generally safe at night, in fact safer than most beach resorts around the world, but do be discreet and don't carry too much cash about with you.

Katoeys

Thai transvestites or *katoeys* ('lady boys') are often very convincing – but despite their smooth skins and feminine attire, they often have a man's strength and a capacity for truculence. Watch for large hands and feet, Adam's apples and a precocious manner no Thai lady would ever exhibit.

Phuket and Beaches

Banana Discotheque

A dance club with an attached pub, popular with couples.

B96 Thawiwong Road, Patong Beach

☎ 0-7634 0301 🕒 Daily 9–3

Bluefin

One of the best bars on the island, with a good mix of visitors and residents.

☎ 111/17 Taina Road, Kata-Karon Headland 🕒 Daily 6PM–2AM

Crocodile Music Hall

Every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday there's a cabaret show at 1:30AM.

There is a 70 Baht cover charge.

☎ Soi Bangla, Patong Beach 🕒 Daily 10PM–2AM

Horror House

A frightening labyrinth of 16 rooms devoted to classic horror tales with live actors in each. They also have a restaurant serving such delights as 'Frankenstein's Brain'.

☎ 24 Prachanukroh Road, Patong Beach ☎ 0-7629 3123 🕒 Daily 5PM–12AM

Otawa

If you like jazz Ottawa is the place for you. The Raw Jazz Quartet entertain most nights and there's plenty of tasty Japanese food on offer.

☎ 100/7 Kalim Beach Road, Patong Beach ☎ 0-7634 4254 🕒 Daily 10:30PM–1:30AM. Closed Mon

Pearl Bowling

The island's only ten-pin bowling alley.

☎ Ocean Shopping Plaza, Montri and Phang-nga Roads, Phuket Town ☎ 0-7621 1148

🕒 Daily 11AM–12AM

Timber Hut

A fun night out in Phuket Town. Live music every night of the week accompanied by excellent food and a variety of draught beers.

☎ 118/1 Yaowarat Road, Phuket Town ☎ 0-77621 1839 🕒 Daily 8–3

Simon Cabaret

One of the best transvestite cabarets in the country. It may sound seedy but it's not. Some of the sets are magnificent and the productions are first-class.

☎ 100/6–8 Moo 4, Patong-Karon Road, Patong ☎ 0-7634 2114 🕒 Daily 7PM–12AM

Titanic Disco

A huge dance area with a large video screen for viewing the latest Thai and Western rock and pop videos.

☎ 89/17 Rat-uthit Road, Patong 🕒 Daily 9PM–3AM

Offshore Islands

Carlito's Bar

Beautifully situated right on the beach at Ton Sai Bay this bar and terrace is a fun place to relax. ☎ Main Street, Ton Sai Bay, Ko Phi Phi Don 🕒 Daily till late

Reggae Pub

With nightly Thai boxing bouts this is the biggest and liveliest bar on the island. The music is mostly reggae and rock.

☎ Main Street, Ton Sai Bay, Ko Phi Phi Don 🕒 Daily till late

Outdoor Activities

Phuket Town and Island

Andaman Hooker Sport Fishing Charter

Phuket is one of the best places in the world to go big-game fishing with an abundance of marlin, sailfish and tuna. Andaman Hooker offer day trips or charters up to five days.

☎ 6/6 Soi Suki Moo 9, Chalong Bay ☎ 0-7628 2036; fax: 0-7628 2036; e-mail: andamanhooker@phuket.com

Ao Chalong Yacht Club

The club holds monthly yacht races and visitors to Phuket are welcome to join in. The clubroom is situated upstairs in Jimmy's Lighthouse bar and restaurant.

☎ Chalong Bay ☎ 0-7638 1914; fax: 0-7638 1934

Fantasea Divers

One of the most experienced dive operators in the world, Fantasea offers a variety of boats and cruises. Top class instructors provide PADI certified diving courses.

☎ 43/20 Moo 5, Viset Road, Tambon Rawai ☎ 0-7628 1388; fax: 0-7628 1389; e-mail: info@fantasea.net

Phuket Country Club

A magnificent 27-hole golf course with a driving range and a pro shop. Rental clubs and shoes are available.

☎ 80/1 Vichitsongkram Road, Kathu ☎ 0-7632 1039; fax: 0-7632 1271; e-mail:

Scuba Cat Diving

Diving trips can be arranged by the day or longer. Scuba

Cat organise trips to the world renowned Similan and Surin islands where it's occasionally possible to glimpse the world's largest fish, the whale shark.

☎ Patong Beach Road, Patong or Kata Beach (Kata main road) ☎ 0-7629 3120/1; fax: 0-7629 3122; e-mail: fly@scubacat.com

Sunshine Tours

Over the last decade and a half Phuket has developed into one of Asia's finest golfing destinations with five excellent courses, including the world renowned Banyan Tree Club. Sunshine Tours can arrange all your golfing needs.

☎ 89/1 Phuket Road, Phuket Town ☎ 0-7621 2889; fax: 0-7621 4150

Krabi

Ao Nang Muay Thai

A chance to view Thailand's national sport at the beach. The quality of the fighters is not as high as in Bangkok, but nevertheless the boxing is worth seeing if only for the traditional ceremony that goes with each bout.

☎ Ao Nang Stadium, Ao Nang Beach 🕒 Sat 8PM–1AM

King Climbers Rock Climbing School

Krabi with its numerous limestone cliffs offers a great opportunity to rock climb and they are not all difficult. Obviously a certain fitness level is required to participate. King Climbers offer first-class tuition and boast an excellent safety record.

☎ Ya Ya Resort, Hat Rai Leh ☎ 0-7562 2581; fax: 0-7561 2914 e-mail: kingclimbers@iname.co

Muay Thai

Thai boxing, or *muay thai*, also known as 'kick boxing', is an enduringly popular sport in Thailand. It's a tough sport where, in addition to gloved fists, elbows, knees, feet and indeed any part of the body except the head can be used to strike one's opponent. It's skilled, fast moving and can be very entertaining.