

Eastern Gulf Coast



EASTERN GULF COAST

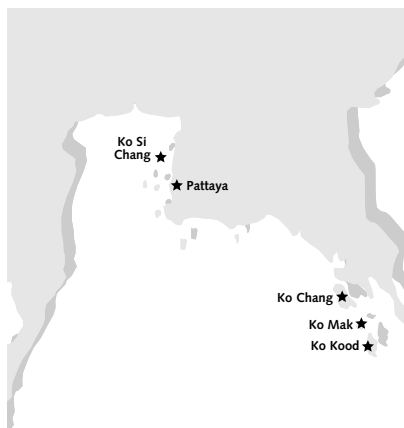
This is Thailand's wild coast, from its labyrinthine rainforests and uncrowded beaches to infamous Pattaya's high-octane debauchery. If you want glamour and daydreams, head to the Andaman or southern gulf coasts; the eastern gulf is for travellers who want a peek at the real world and to experience some action alongside their beach.

Start in little-visited Ko Si Chang, the closest island to Bangkok, for a lazy stay in a Thai fishing village bobbing in a sea of supertankers. Only a few hours down the road is Pattaya, Ko Si Chang's antitheses, where any hint of wholesome Thailand has been overrun by concrete, tour buses and teetering high heels. There's a feast of sights, safaris and adrenaline-packed sports during the day, while nights offer every variation of neon-lit kinky fantasy. When you want to relax again head to the powder-white sands of ex-pat favourite Ko Samet to party all night at a techno-thumping beach shack or catch up on your reading on a secluded beach.

But the undisputed jewel in the eastern gulf's crown is the Ko Chang Archipelago, where jungle and beach compete for your attention. Trek through the vast rainforests on Ko Chang then island-hop to the friendly sands of Ko Mak or the decadent isolated coves of Ko Kood. For even more isolation, a handful of other spectacular islands quietly wait to be explored. From here you can continue east along pristine coastline to the Cambodian border.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Trekking through buzzing rainforest to find hidden waterfalls and giant spiders in the mountains of **Ko Chang** (p150)
- Gazing across dazzling sands and emerald waters with nary a tourist in sight from your bungalow on **Ko Kood** (p160)
- Watching a transvestite cabaret before hitting the streets of ludicrously wild **Pattaya** (p120) at night
- Beach-hopping by bike on low-lying **Ko Mak** (p162) then popping on a mask and snorkel to cool off
- Not feeling like a tourist while eating roadside noodles in an authentic fishing village on **Ko Si Chang** (p119)



■ DRY SEASON: NOVEMBER-APRIL

■ WET SEASON: MAY-OCTOBER



Climate

The eastern gulf coast experiences three seasons, or rather, three variations of hot. November to February are milder months with little rain. The hottest months are March to May, while in mid-May, the temperatures drop a smidgen to welcome the monsoons that last till October. In the height of the monsoon season, the easternmost islands are usually not accessible due to choppy waves.

National Parks

Almost every island in the region is in a national park. Ko Samet (p139) and the surrounding islands belong to Laem Ya/Ko Samet National Park, and further east Ko Chang and its siblings, Ko Mak and Ko Kood, fall within Ko Chang Marine National Park (p148), which also includes many small areas.

SRI RACHA

ศรีราชา
pop 141,400

Sri Racha (also called Si Racha) is easy to pass through without a glance but lingering an hour or so is recommended. Two hours

from Bangkok by bus (or 40 minutes from Suvarnabhumi International Airport), most of the town is dull and modern but behind the concrete hides a veritable floating city on the waterfront – a maze of wooden piers and interconnected stilt buildings housing hotels, restaurants and markets. Though ships waiting to dock at nearby Laem Chabang port stud the horizon, they're far enough away not to spoil the illusion of days gone by.

Information

Ice Net (Th Jermjompol; internet per hr 20B; ☎ 24hr) A short walk from the pier.

Krung Thai Bank (cnr Th Surasak 1 & Th Jermjompol)

Post office (Th Jermjompol)

Samitivej Siracha Hospital (☎ 0 3832 4111; Th Jermjompol soi 8)

Sights & Activities

Weeknights at around 6pm a massive group of local aerobiscisers gather at the **Health Park** near the jetty to work out as one giant colour-coordinated unit – it's surreal. Other than this and the wobbly waterfront piers, Sri Racha's only other downtown attraction is **Ko Loi**, a