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# PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT

Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions to help you put together your perfect trip

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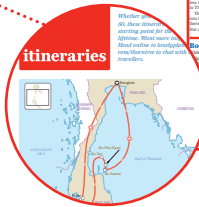


### first time

Everyone needs a helpful hand when they visit a country for the first time. There are places to know, customs to get used to. The following are suggestions to help you get the most out of your first trip to Thailand.

**Language**  
Thailand is a vast place and it's easy to get lost. It's best to have a map and a compass. It's also a good idea to have a local guide. The Thai language is very difficult to learn. It's best to have a local guide. The Thai language is very difficult to learn. It's best to have a local guide.

**What to Pack**  
A passport  
A visa  
A map  
A compass  
A local guide  
A local guide  
A local guide



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# UNDERSTAND THAILAND'S ISLANDS & BEACHES

GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP  
Learn about the big picture, so you can make sense of what you see

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### Ancient History

The ancient history of Thailand is a fascinating story. It's a story of a land that has been ruled by many different empires. The most famous of these is the Ayutthaya Empire, which lasted from 1350 to 1782. The Ayutthaya Empire was a powerful and wealthy empire. It was a major power in Southeast Asia. It was a major power in Southeast Asia.

**Early Empire**  
The early history of Thailand is a fascinating story. It's a story of a land that has been ruled by many different empires. The most famous of these is the Ayutthaya Empire, which lasted from 1350 to 1782. The Ayutthaya Empire was a powerful and wealthy empire. It was a major power in Southeast Asia. It was a major power in Southeast Asia.

**TIMELINE**

6000-2000 BC	13th century
13th century	13th century
13th century	13th century
13th century	13th century
13th century	13th century

### Environment

The land of Thailand is a beautiful and diverse landscape. It's a land of mountains, rivers, and beaches. The environment of Thailand is a beautiful and diverse landscape. It's a land of mountains, rivers, and beaches. The environment of Thailand is a beautiful and diverse landscape. It's a land of mountains, rivers, and beaches.

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THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

**Brandon Presser**  
**Celeste Brash, Austin Bush**



**Look out for these icons:**



Our author's  
recommendation



A green or  
sustainable option



No payment  
required

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# Thailand's Islands & Beaches

## Top Experiences >



**Ao Phang-Nga**  
Enchanting bay of towering rock spires (p294)

Surin Islands Marine National Park

Similan Islands Marine National Park

**Phuket**  
Paradigm of luxury along the Andaman (p239)

**Ko Phi-Phi**  
Inspiring views and raucous nightlife (p316)

**Ko Lanta**  
Low-slung beaches and low-key fun (p324)

**Trang Islands**  
Quiet islands and lonely beaches (p335)

**Ko Lipe**  
Bleached-white beaches and azure waters (p349)

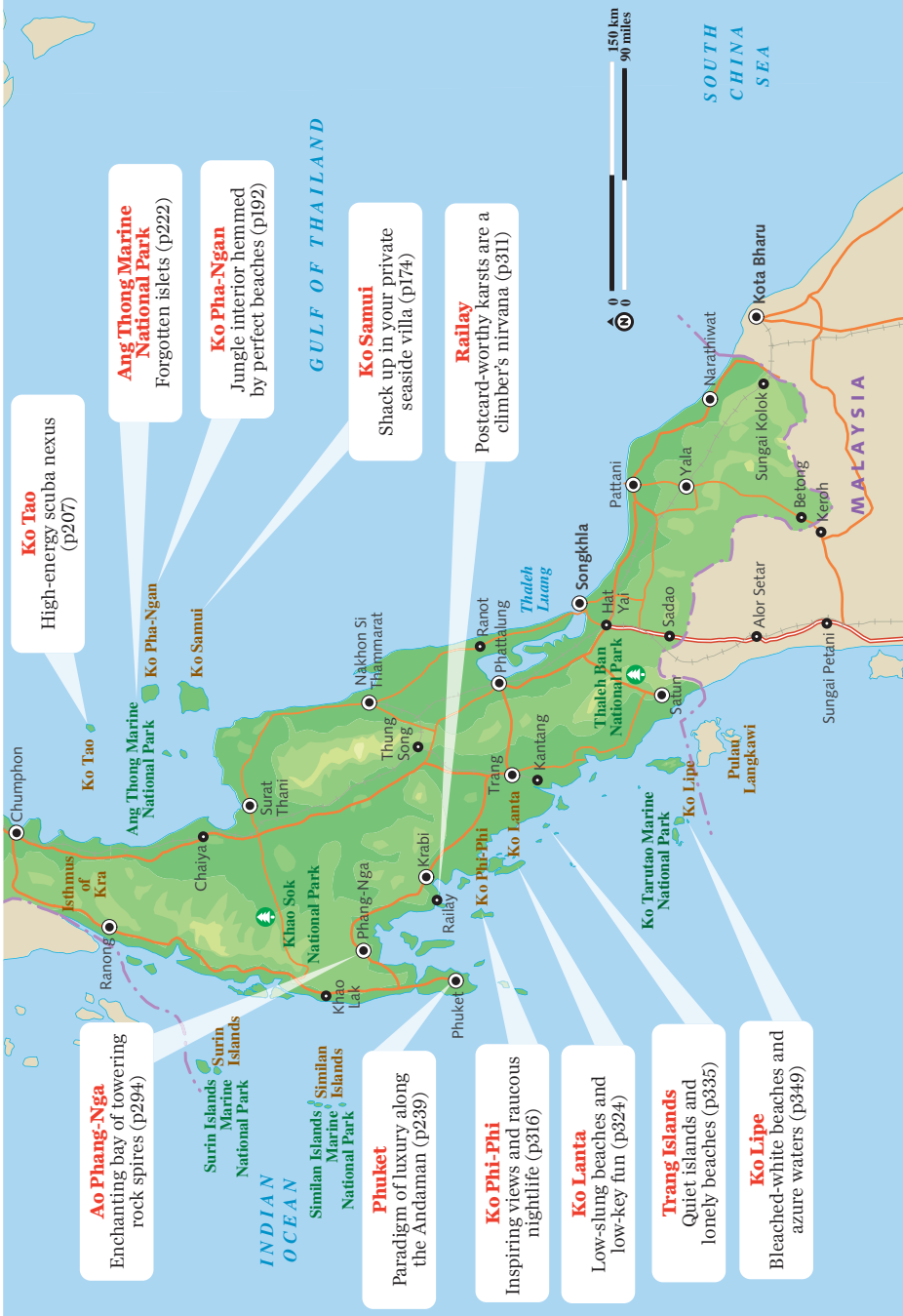
**Ko Tao**  
High-energy scuba nexus (p207)

**Ang Thong Marine National Park**  
Forgotten islets (p222)

**Ko Pha-Ngan**  
Jungle interior hemmed by perfect beaches (p192)

**Ko Samui**  
Shack up in your private seaside villa (p174)

**Railay**  
Postcard-worthy karsts are a climber's nirvana (p311)



150 km  
90 miles

SOUTH CHINA SEA

MALAYSIA

GULF OF THAILAND

INDIAN OCEAN



## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

## OUR WRITERS



### Brandon Presser

**Coordinating Author, Ko Samui & the Lower Gulf** Growing up in a land where bear hugs are taken literally, this wanderlust-y Canadian always craved swaying palms and golden sand. A trek across Southeast Asia as a teenager was the clincher – he was hooked, returning year after year to scuba dive, suntan and savour spoonfuls of spicy *sôm-dam* (papaya salad). After leaving his job at the Louvre, Brandon joined the glamorous ranks of eternal nomadism and became a full-time

freelance travel writer. He's since co-authored over 35 guidebooks for Lonely Planet, from Iceland to Thailand and many 'lands' in between. Visit [www.brandonpresser.com](http://www.brandonpresser.com) for more on Brandon.



### Celeste Brash

**Phuket & the Northern Andaman Coast, Ko Phi-Phi & the Southern Andaman Coast** Celeste first arrived in Thailand as a student of Thai language, history and culture at Chiang Mai University. She's come back many times since and has done the gamut from wild nights on Ko Phang-Ngan to weeks of silence at Wat Suanmok. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications from Travelers' Tales books to the *LA Times* and *Islands* magazine. She's contributed to around

30 Lonely Planet guides but her heart is irrevocably stuck on Southeast Asia. When not in exotic places, she and her family live in Portland, Oregon. Find her on the web at [www.celestebrash.com](http://www.celestebrash.com).



### Austin Bush

**Bangkok** Austin Bush came to Thailand in 1998 on a language scholarship at Chiang Mai University. The lure of city life and a need for employment and spicy food eventually led Austin to Bangkok. City life, employment and spicy food have managed to keep him there since. He's a native of Oregon and a writer and photographer who often focuses on food; samples of Austin's work can be seen at [www.austinbushphotography.com](http://www.austinbushphotography.com)

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# itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to [lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://lonelyplanet.com/thorntree) to chat with other travellers.



## Two Weeks Essential Islands & Beaches

Consider this the itinerary for the uninitiated, and what a warm welcome you'll receive. Flying down and back from the islands will save you about a day's worth of travel on either end, so save up those precious pennies to cash on more beach time. From **Bangkok**, fly down to **Krabi** where you'll enjoy the craggy spires of stone in **Railay**, a climber's paradise. Hop a boat over to **Ko Phi-Phi** and join the legions of bucket-wielding backpackers as they sit in the soft sands of the island's signature hourglass bays. A second boat ride will take you safely to the shores of **Ko Lanta**, with its flat vistas of peach-tinged shoreline and lapping azure waves. Travel overland to knock out the gulf's triad of idyllic islands – dive-centric **Ko Tao**, lazy, lie-in-the-sun **Ko Pha-Ngan** and luxury-focused **Ko Samui** – before flying back to **Bangkok**. If you can, try to arrange your visit to coincide with the notorious Full Moon Party, which comes roaring to life roughly once a month on Ko Pha-Ngan's southeastern shore.





## One Month The Full Monty

A month, you say? There are thousands of perfectly good itineraries to think up but, well, why not consider a hammock tour extraordinaire. Not just any old beach trip, this is enough time to really get to know southern Thailand's islands, beaches and jungle-clad parks. Start your journey in Thailand's capital, **Bangkok**, before following the coastline south. Your first stop is **Hua Hin**, the king's preferred holiday destination and home to a thriving local and expat scene that cavorts among seafood markets and charming shanty piers. Hike the craggy hills of quiet **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park** before making your way out to **Ko Tao**. Strap on your tank and dive with the fish below before moving over to **Ko Pha-Ngan** for some subdued beachside relaxing. **Ko Samui**, next door, offers a bit more variety and has a magical stash of holiday fodder to suit every budget and desire – don't miss the chance to do a day trip out of the wild islets of **Ang Thong Marine National Park** (which are said to have inspired Alex Garland's *The Beach*). Swap coasts with a stop in **Khao Sok National Park**, known to be one of the oldest stretches of jungle in the world. If time permits, hop on a live-aboard diving excursion in **Khao Lak** to explore the kingdom's finest diving treasures lurking in the **Surin** and **Similan Islands Marine National Parks** near the Burmese border. Travel down the coast to **Phuket** and sample Thailand's finest iteration of luxury hospitality; spend a night in Patong if you dare. Paddle around the limestone karsts of quiet **Phang-Nga** then sleep beneath the ethereal crags of **Ko Phi-Phi** after a spirit evening (no pun intended) of beach dancing and fire twirling. Scale the stone towers of **Railay**, next door, zoom around the flat tracts of land on mellowed-out **Ko Lanta**, then hop on a boat bound for the **Trang Islands** – paradise found. One last archipelago awaits those who travel further south towards the Malaysian border. **Ko Lipe** is the island of choice for those looking for something social, but let the local *chow lair* (sea gypsies; also spelt *chao leh*) lead you to silent **Ko Adang** or **Ko Rawi** next door if you're looking to get away from it all.



FEAROUS COONEY/LOVELY PLANET IMAGES®



FRANK CARTER/LOVELY PLANET IMAGES®

- » (above) Ko Kradan (p340)
- » (left) Bungalows on Ko Lipe (p349)

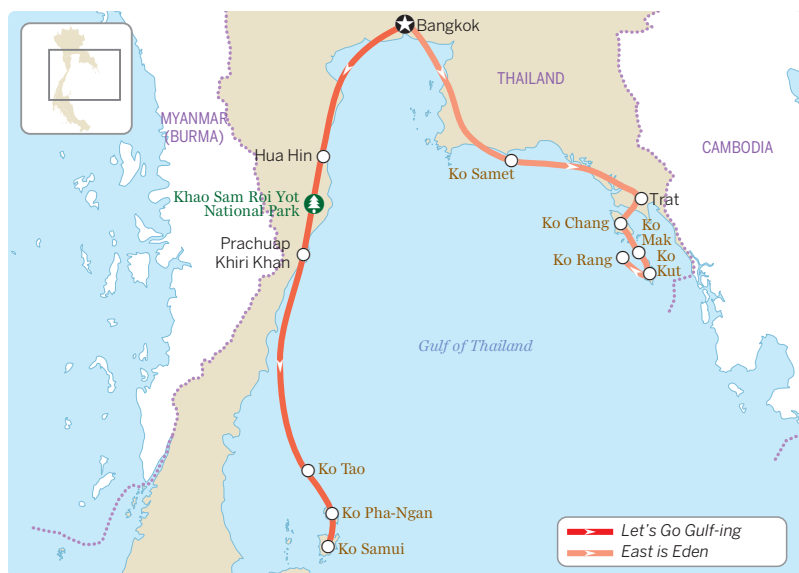


## Two Weeks Jewels of the Andaman

Dreams of perfect beaches, silky sands and emerald waters come true along the Andaman coast, where limestone crags soar skyward creating infinite moments for that perfect photopp. Do not pass ‘Go’, do not collect \$200, just head directly to **Phuket** to start your journey down one of the finest stretches of coastline in the world. Cruise through the limestone karsts of **Ao Phang-Nga National Park**, which give Halong Bay a run for its money. **Ko Phi-Phi’s** hourglass bays further south can’t be beat, especially when the sun sets behind the earthen crown of Ko Phi-Phi Leh just offshore. Let the towers of stone in **Railay** cast anthropomorphic shadows on the sands, then sail down to **Ko Lanta**, a flat island best explored by motorbike. Savour the secrets of the **Trang Islands**, like the hidden emerald lagoon or the untouched house reef of **Ko Kradan**, then make your way to the Malaysian border where you’ll find tiny **Ko Lipe** protected by its looming neighbour, **Ko Adang**.

## Three Weeks The Trailblazer Trip

Buck the travel trends and blaze your own trail through some of the lesser-known beaches and islands of southern Thailand. Start in **Ranong**, a rather inauspicious welcome mat to the region, then connect to the nearby island of **Ko Phayam** and ‘little’ **Ko Chang** (not to be confused with the ‘big’ Ko Chang near Cambodia). Trade diver tips in **Khao Lak** further south and join a live-aboard up to the Burmese border. Then switch coasts, stopping in **Khao Sok National Park** to enjoy a spot of submarine cave diving. Reward yourself with lazy beach days once you reach the gulf’s **Khanom**. Explore the rich, temple-filled, cultural centre of **Nakhon Si Thammarat** further south before returning to the Andaman coast for a few more days of island-hopping. Choose among the lonely stone specks of the **Trang Islands** – perhaps **Ko Kradan** or **Ko Sukorn** – then wander south for a camping excursion with the *chow lair* on whisper-quiet **Ko Adang** or **Ko Rawi**.



Two Weeks

## Let's Go Gulf-ing

With less dramatic weather than its Andaman counterpart, Thailand's gulf is solid choice for a beach holiday almost any time of year. Start in **Bangkok** and travel overland down to **Hua Hin**, home to the king's holiday palace. Gorge on fresh fish at the markets before heading for the hills of **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park**. Towering limestone, hidden temples and quiet beaches await those with the luxury of time. Roll through the sleepy seaside villages of **Prachuap Khiri Khan** then grab a boat from Chumphon and hit the cool gulf waters, stopping first in **Ko Tao** – where you can learn all the tricks of the diving trade – before moving on to **Ko Pha-Ngan** to live out your castaway fantasies on one of the island's quiet beaches. Fete the Full Moon before leaving, then set your sights on **Ko Samui**, the area's largest island and undoubted master of luxury dream holidays. Quainter lodging options and diverse restaurants also stretch as far as the eye can see.

Ten Days

## East is Eden

Thailand's southern treasures are undoubtedly the kingdom's major drawcards, but if you're pushed for time or heading into Cambodia, it's worth exploring the eastern gulf. From **Bangkok** head to rustic **Ko Samet**, where Bangkokians let loose on weekends. Follow the coast to sleepy **Trat** then hop on a boat for one of the Ko Chang archipelago's many islands. Ride elephants and hike the interior of jungle-topped **Ko Chang**, the largest and most developed island in the region. Get further off the beaten track on secluded **Ko Mak** or rugged **Ko Kut**. Hardcore Robinson Crusoes can go one step further on neighbouring, ultra-simple **Ko Kham** or **Ko Rayang** for some stunning coral. Alternatively, hit up to **Ko Rang** for a genuine *Survivor* experience, sans pesky host, cameramen and tribal councils.

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