



Hua Hin & the Southern Gulf

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Best Places to Eat

- » Rang Yen Garden, Cha-am (p511)
- » Night Market, Hua Hin (p511)
- » Sang Thai Restaurant, Hua Hin (p519)
- » Rim Lom, Prachuap Khiri Khan (p529)

Best Places to Stay

- » Baan Bayan, Hua Hin (p519)
- » Away Hua Hin, Pranburi (p523)
- » Brassiere Beach, Pranburi (p523)
- » Aow Noi Sea View, Prachuap Khiri Khan (p528)
- » Proud Thai Beach Resort, Ban Krut (p530)

Why Go?

Known as the 'royal' coast, the upper southern gulf has long been the favoured retreat of the Bangkok monarchy and elite. Each Thai king, dating from Rama IV, has found an agreeable spot to build a royal getaway. Today domestic tourists flock to this coast in the same pursuit of leisure as well as to pay homage to the revered kings whose palaces-away-from-palace are now open to the public. Rarely does culture and coast meet with such proximity and collaboration.

Indeed this is the country's surf-and-turf destination offering historic sites, pleasant provincial life, jungle-filled parks and long sandy beaches all within an easy commute from Bangkok. That most backpackers suffer a gruelling trip further south to the built-up Samui islands is a great mystery to anyone who has walked for kilometres along Hua Hin's powdery white sands. The one blemish is that there are few reefs (so little to no diving and snorkelling) and as a result the water takes more of an Atlantic greyish hue than a tropical azure.

When to Go

The best time to visit is during the hot and dry season (February to June). From July to October (southwest monsoon) and October to January (northeast monsoon) there is occasional rain and strong winds; but the region tends to stay drier than the rest of the country during the monsoon period because of a geographic anomaly.

During stormy periods, stinging jellyfish are often carried close to shore making swimming hazardous. Thais get around this by swimming fully clothed.

Hua Hin & the Southern Gulf Highlights

- 1 Exploring the hilltop palace and underground caves of **Phetchaburi** (p505)
- 2 Strolling the long blonde coastline of **Hua Hin** (p512) dotted with wave-jumping kiteboarders.
- 3 Eating and shopping (and eating some more) at Hua Hin's **Night Market** (p519)
- 4 Escaping into the wild depths of **Kaeng Krachan National Park** (p509) and spotting gibbons and wild elephants.
- 5 Letting the kids run around all day in their bathing suits at **Dolphin Bay** (p523)
- 6 Making the popular pilgrimage to **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park** (p524) to see the illuminated cave shrine of Tham Phraya Nakhon.
- 7 Motorcycling between curvaceous bays and limestone peaks in **Prachuap Khiri Khan** (p526)
- 8 Being a beach bum on kicked-back **Hat Bang Saphan Yai** (p530)

