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Plan Your Trip

Itineraries

Consider this the itinerary for the uninitiated, and what a warm welcome you’ll receive. Flying directly to the islands either internationally or from Bangkok will save you about a day’s worth of travel at either end, so decide what’s more valuable to you: beach time or money.

Do not pass ‘Go’, do not collect $200, just head directly to **Phuket** and pick a beach from which to recover from jet lag for a day or two before starting your journey along one of the finest stretches of coastline in the world. Serious party-goers should base themselves in lively, if sleaze-tinged, Patong, while peace-seekers should consider the northern beaches, but there’s a perfect seaside ambience for everyone on this huge island. For variety, Phuket Town brims with gorgeous, heritage Sino-Portuguese architecture.

Once the first stages of relaxation have set in, hop on a boat over to **Ko Phi-Phi** and join the legions of whisky-bucket-wielding backpackers as they sit in the soft sands of the island’s signature hourglass bays, or take a boat to the quieter east side...
of the island. Soak in the beauty of this place for two days until taking another boat to **Ko Lanta**, with its flat vistas of tawny shoreline and lapping waves. Park yourself on the sand for a couple of days or rent a motorbike to tour the less touristed parts of this Muslim fishing island. Take a bus and boat combo to **Krabi** where you’ll enjoy the craggy spires of stone in **Railay**, a rock climber’s paradise with some of the most awesome beaches and sea views on the planet.

Then it’s time to switch coasts to choose one or two of the gulf’s triad of idyllic islands – dive-centric **Ko Tao**, lazy, lie-in-the-sun **Ko Pha-Ngan** and luxury-focused **Ko Samui** – for around five days before your flight out. If you’re up for some serious partying, try to arrange your visit to coincide with Ko Pha-Ngan’s notorious Full Moon Party, which comes roaring to life every month on the southeastern shore.
A month, you say? This is not just any old beach trip; it allows enough time to sample a full range of southern Thailand’s islands, beaches and jungle-clad parks.

Start your journey in Thailand’s capital city, Bangkok, before heading south. Your first stop is beach-laden Ko Samet, where Bangkokians and expats 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. Hike the interior of jungle-topped Ko Chang, the largest and most developed island in the region. Hop over to flat but beachy Ko Mak or rugged Ko Kut. Next, backtrack by making your way to Hua Hin, the king’s preferred holiday destination and home to a thriving local and expat scene with 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 via Chumphon. Strap on your tank and dive with the fish below before moving over to Ko Pha-Ngan for some subdued seaside relaxing. Ko Samui, next door, offers a bit more variety and has a magical stash of holiday fodder to suit every budget and desire.

From Ko Samui stop in at Khao Sok National Park (via Surat Thani), known to be one of the oldest stretches of jungle in the world. Depending on how much time you have, take either a day trip or live-aboard diving excursion in Khao Lak to explore the diving treasures of the Surin Islands and Similan Islands Marine National Parks. Travel down the coast to Phuket and sample Thailand’s finest iteration of luxury hospitality. Paddle around the majestic limestone islets of quiet Phang-Nga, then sleep beneath the ethereal crags of Ko Phi-Phi after a spirited 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 idyllic 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 stunning beaches with a fun, social vibe.
Andaman Sea & the Gulf

Buck the travel trends and blaze your own trail through some of the lesser-known beaches and islands of southern Thailand, switching from west to east and back again.

Kick off in the bustling frontier town of Ranong on the eastern bank of the Sompaen River, a 45-minute boat ride from the Myanmar border, before sinking your tanned tootsies into the warm white sands of a beach on the sleepy, sparsely populated island of Ko Phayam nearby. Take more time out on no-frills ‘Little’ Ko Chang (not to be confused with the ‘big’ Ko Chang in Trat Province near Cambodia), a rustic getaway with a laid-back, easy-going vibe. You can trade some serious diver tips in Khao Lak further south and hop aboard a day diving and snorkelling excursion to the Similan and Surin Islands or push the boat out on a live-aboard for three to five days.

Back on mainland terra firma, flip coasts and zip east, halting in Khao Sok National Park to immerse yourself in some of the oldest rainforest jungle on the planet and hunt out one of the world’s largest flowers, or go hiking, kayaking, rafting or boating. Don’t overlook Surat Thani – a traditional Thai town with a large Thai-Chinese population and a scattering of colourful Chinese temples – on your way east. You’ll find lazy beach days waiting once you reach the gulf’s Ao Khanom, minus the pockets of overdevelopment and crowds on Ko Samui, Ko Pha-Ngan and Ko Tao. Hopefully the local pink dolphins will make an appearance.

Travel south to explore the rich cultural centre of Nakhon Si Thammarat, a likeable and historic city that is home to one of Thailand’s most significant and sacred Buddhist temples. Head back to the Andaman coast to pick up where you left off, island-hopping. Take your pick from the lonely limestone specks of the Trang Islands – perhaps the allure of white sand-fringed Ko Kradan, sleepy Ko Sukorn or lush, wildlife-rich Ko Libong – then wander south for a camping excursion with the chow lair (sea gypsies) on whisper-quiet Ko Adang or Ko Rawi north of Ko Lipe.
Eastern Island-Hop

Thailand’s southern island strings are undoubtedly the kingdom’s major treasures, but if you’re pushed for time or Cambodia-bound, why not explore the eastern gulf?

This was once the lesser-visited island region of Thailand, but with their proximity to Bangkok, these islands, for the most part, are accessible and popular for beach-combing, diving, snorkelling, hiking and kayaking. The nearest stretch of sand to Bangkok, the beach and long promenade at Bang Saen, is a mere hour away from the capital (so gets busy at weekends), from where it’s a short journey to the the seaside town of Si Racha and the nearby rocky island retreat of Ko Si Chang; the island’s beaches aren’t its strength, but it’s great to explore.

Missing the supercharged beach scene and go-go bars of Pattaya is no loss – but consider taking your fill of its excellent international restaurant scene and admiring its astonishing temple-like Sanctuary of Truth. Join flashpackers on the gorgeous white-sand beaches and at the fire-juggling shows of slender and forested Ko Samet. Bangkokians let loose on big boisterous weekends but there’s more than enough room to escape, journeying from cove to cove along the lovely coastal footpath. Despite its fame, the island remains attractively under-developed, and many of its sleeping options are still rustic and old-school.

Follow the coast along the mainland to sleepy Trat with its traditional charms, then hop on a boat for one of the Ko Chang archipelago’s myriad islands. Hike the lush interior of rugged, jungle-topped Ko Chang, the largest and most developed island in the region, or pop yourself into a kayak to size up the island from the waves. Some excellent dive sites await the scuba inclined; choose between Ko Rang, Ko Yak, Ko Tong Lang and Ko Laun. Get further off the beaten track on secluded, pint-sized Ko Mak or go snorkelling in the crystal waters off reef-fringed Ko Wai. Hardcore Robinson Crusoes can go one step further on neighbouring, ultra-simple Ko Kham. Walk along the talcum-powder-soft sands of nightlife-free Ko Kut to round off your journey.
Fantastic beaches, great seafood, few tourists and no girly bars make this coastal town a delight. (p163)

Tiny and primitive with locally run beach bungalows. The beautiful sands and clear waters here get busy with day-trippers but the quiet starry nights are all yours. (p135)

A hippy outpost for yoga and hornbills, where folk return year after year. There's no diving or snorkelling and there are sand flies aplenty, but you'll find jungles to explore and a chilled out atmosphere. (p124)
KO PHRA THONG & KO RA
Ko Phra Thong has a friendly chow lair (sea gypsy) population and lovely beaches, while jungle-covered Ko Ra next door is perfect for hiking and wildlife viewing. (p35)

KO YAO ISLANDS
With towering karst islets and blue water, the incredibly scenic Ao Phang-Nga National Marine Park includes the wild jungles and beaches of Ko Yao Yin. (p267)

KO TARUTAO MARINE NATIONAL PARK
Caves to paddle, rugged hikes to tackle and roads to bike. There are no resorts here, just national park lodging, and that’s what keeps it serene. (p349)

LAEM SON NATIONAL PARK
The longest protected shore in the country is best for silent seekers of bird life and mangrove landscapes. Hop over to little-known isles and hidden beaches. (p252)

AO KHANOM
A gorgeous coastal beach with a variety of accommodation. Explore inland caves and waterfalls or search for the famous pink dolphins offshore. (p230)

KO JUM & KO SI BOYA
Hiding next to Ko Lanta, these rural, beachy dots are a fave with repeat visitors. (p325)

KO SUKORN & KO LIBONG
The Muslim fishing communities of Ko Sukorn (p345) and Ko Libong (p344) welcome you. Take snorkelling trips, explore by motorbike, look for dugong and birds, and gorge on amazing seafood.

PLAN YOUR TRIP OFF THE BEATEN TRACK
Map Legend

Sights
- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours
- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping
- Sleeping
- Camping

Eating
- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife
- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment
- Entertainment

Shopping
- Shopping

Information
- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic
- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population
- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport
- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro/MRT/MTR station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Skytrain/Subway station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book

Routes
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries
- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography
- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas
- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove
OUR WRITERS

Mark Beales
Need to Know, First Time, What’s New, Ko Chang & Eastern Seaboard  After working as a journalist for 13 years, Mark swapped the chilly shores of England for the sunnier coasts of Thailand. Since 2004 Mark has lived in Thailand, where he has contributed to around a dozen books for Lonely Planet, been a TV presenter and dragged his backpack to every country in Southeast Asia. Mark lives with his wife, Ann, and their son, Daniel. For more on Mark’s work, visit www.markbeales.com.

Austin Bush
Bangkok, Eat Like a Local, Food & Drink, Food Spotter’s Guide  Austin Bush came to Thailand in 1999 as part of a language study programme hosted by Chiang Mai University. The lure of city life, employment and spicy food eventually led Austin to Bangkok. City life, employment and spicy food have managed to keep him there since. He is 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.

David Eimer
Hua Hin & Upper Gulf, Deep South section of Ko Samui & Lower Gulf, Thai Massage, Responsible Travel, Directory, Transport, Health  A decade of visiting Thailand in search of beaches and fine food prompted David to relocate to Bangkok in 2012. Since then, his work as a journalist for a variety of newspapers and magazines has taken him from the far south of Thailand to its northernmost extremities, with many stops in between. He also contributed to Lonely Planet’s Thailand.

Damian Harper
Month by Month, Itineraries, Choose Your Beach, Diving & Snorkelling, Travel With Children, Ko Samui & Lower Gulf, People & Culture, Environment  Damian traded a career in bookselling for a four-year degree in Chinese, a decision that propelled him towards the Far East and a sharp change of tack into travel journalism and guidebook writing. Since the late 1990s, Damian has worked on Lonely Planet guides to places as diverse as China, Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhou, London and Ireland. You can find him at www.damianharper.com.

Isabella Noble
Welcome to Thailand’s Islands & Beaches, Top 15, If You Like, Regions at a Glance, Phuket & Andaman Coast  English-Australian-Spanish Isabella writes about Thailand, India, Spain and beyond for Lonely Planet, Telegraph Travel and others. A big fan of Phuket despite its touristic reputation (she also penned Lonely Planet’s Pocket Phuket), Isabella first fell for the Andaman on a 2008 backpacking extravaganza. She lives in London and blogs at www.isabellanoble.blogspot.com. Find her on Twitter and Instagram (@isabellamnoble).