



Ko Samui & the Lower Gulf

Includes ➔

Ko Samui	176
Ko Pha-Ngan	194
Ko Tao	211
Ang Thong Marine National Park	226
Surat Thani	227
Ao Khanom	230
Nakhon Si Thammarat	232
Songkhla & Around	234
Hat Yai	235
Pattani	238
Narathiwat	239

Why Go?

The Lower Gulf features Thailand's ultimate island trifecta: Ko Samui, Ko Pha-Ngan and Ko Tao. This family of spectacular islands lures millions of tourists every year with their powder-soft sands and emerald waters. Ko Samui is the oldest sibling, who has made it big. Here, high-class resorts operate with Swiss efficiency as uniformed butlers cater to every whim. Ko Pha-Ngan is the slacker middle child with tangled dreadlocks and a penchant for hammock-lazing and all-night parties. Meanwhile Ko Tao is the outdoorsy, fun-loving kid with plenty of spirit and spunk – the island specialises in high-adrenalin activities, including world-class diving and snorkelling.

The mainland coast beyond the islands sees few foreign visitors, but is more authentic Thailand and in many ways more culturally enjoyable for that. From the pink dolphins and waterfalls of sleepy Ao Khanom to the Thai Muslim flavours of beach strolling Songkhla, this region will convince any naysayer that Thailand still holds a bevy of off-the-beaten-track wonders.

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Dining On The Rocks (p190)
- ➔ Chez François (p190)
- ➔ Pepenero (p188)
- ➔ Fisherman's Restaurant (p207)
- ➔ Baraccuda (p222)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Six Senses Samui (p184)
- ➔ Divine Comedie (p202)
- ➔ View Point Resort (p220)
- ➔ Place (p217)
- ➔ Sanctuary (p206)

When to Go

- ➔ February to April celebrates endless sunshine after the monsoon rains have cleared.
- ➔ June to August, conveniently coinciding with the northern hemisphere's summer holidays, are among the most inviting months, with relatively short drizzle spells.
- ➔ October to December is when torrential monsoon rains rattle hot-tin roofs, and room rates drop significantly to lure optimistic beach goers.

Ko Samui & the Lower Gulf Highlights

1 Finding Nemo in the technicolour kingdom off **Ko Tao** (p211).

2 Paddling to the hidden bleach-blonde beaches of

Ang Thong Marine National Park (p226).

3 Stringing up a cotton hammock and toeing the curling tide along a secluded beach on **Ko Pha-Ngan** (p194).

4 Enjoying five-star international cuisine and sipping fancy sunset cocktails on **Ko Samui** (p176).

5 Joining the masses of party pilgrims and trancing the night away at the **Full Moon Party** (p199) at Hat Rin on Ko Pha-Ngan.

