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The idyllic tranquillity of the coast belies the region's complex social and political issues.

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Thailand's Islands & Beaches Today

These are troubled times for Thailand. With the military in charge again and no prospect of elections before 2017, the country remains divided politically between the rural poor and the traditional elite and the urban middle classes. A slowing economy and a poor human rights record have also tarnished Thailand's image as an oasis of relative stability in South-east Asia. But visitors, especially from China, are still coming in droves.

Best in Print

Very Thai (Philip Cornwell-Smith)
Colourful photos and essays on Thailand's quirks.

A Kingdom in Crisis: Thailand's Struggle for Democracy in the Twenty-First Century (Andrew MacGregor Marshall) Banned in Thailand, so read it before you go.

King Bhumibol Adulyadej: A Life's Work (Nicholas Grossman et al)
Official biography of the king.

Best on Film

Tom-Yum-Goong (Prachya Pinkaew; 2005) Successful martial arts movie starring Tony Jaa, the Jackie Chan of Thailand.

Paradoxocracy (Pen-ek Ratanaruang; 2013) Traces the country's political history from the 1932 revolution on.

OK Baytong (2003) A drama about Buddhist-Muslim relations in the Deep South.

Top News Analysis Sites

The Diplomat (thediplomat.com)
Current affairs magazine covering Asia Pacific.

New Mandala (asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala) Commentary on news, society and culture in South-east Asia.

Asia Times Online (atimes.com)
Solid Southeast Asia reporting.

Another Day, Another Coup

On 22 May 2014, the Thai military under General Prayuth Chan-o-cha overthrew the elected Puea Thai government led by Yingluck Shinawatra. It was the 13th coup in Thailand since 1932 and brought to an end months of political crisis that saw parts of central Bangkok occupied by anti-government protestors. Prayuth said the coup was necessary to restore stability and end the risk of violence between the supporters of Yingluck and her exiled elder brother (also the former prime minister) Thaksin Shinawatra, and their opponents who regard Thaksin as the Lord Voldemort of Thailand. But while the coup was hailed by the urban middle classes and traditional elite, who accuse the Shinawatras of massive corruption, they are far outnumbered by the legions of rural poor who regard Thaksin as the only politician to have ever done anything for them.

Prayuth is now the head of the Orwellian-sounding National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), the name the junta have given to their government. Since taking power the NCPO has repealed the 2007 constitution and ordered a new one to be drafted, muzzled the media and detained and imprisoned political opponents. Despite assurances that the NCPO would run the country only temporarily, there has been no announcement on when elections are likely to be held. What is certain is that they will not happen until the new constitution is finalised. With the first draft of the new version rejected in September 2015, few political commentators believe there will be an election until 2017 at the earliest. Even fewer are confident the revised constitution will end Thailand's bitter political divisions.

The NCPO is now under pressure for its failure to address Thailand's slumping economy. With foreign investment down since the coup and a deadly bomb attack in central Bangkok in August 2015 seemingly