

KO SAMUI

ENCOUNTER

CHINA WILLIAMS

Ko Samui Encounter

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ABN 36 005 607 983

Australia Head Office, Locked Bag 1, Footscray,
Vic 3011
☎ 03 8379 8000 fax 03 8379 8111
talk2us@lonelyplanet.com.au
USA 150 Linden St, Oakland, CA 94607
☎ 510 250 6400
toll free 800 275 8555
fax 510 893 8572
info@lonelyplanet.com
UK 2nd fl, 186 City Rd
London EC1V 2NT
☎ 020 7106 2100 fax 020 7106 2101
go@lonelyplanet.co.uk

This title was commissioned in Lonely Planet's Melbourne office and produced by: **Commissioning Editor** Carolyn Boicos **Coordinating Editor** Victoria Harrison **Coordinating Cartographer** Barbara Benson **Layout Designer** Carol Jackson **Managing Editors** Sasha Baskett, Helen Christinis, Melanie Dankel **Managing Cartographer** David Connolly **Cover Designer** Pepi Bluck **Series Designers** Mik Ruff, Wendy Wright **Project Managers** Rachel Imeson, Glenn van der Knijff **Managing Layout Designer** Celia Wood **Thanks to** Glenn Beanland, Stefanie Di Trocchio, Bruce Evans, Ryan Evans, Justin Flynn, Quentin Frayne, Jim Hsu, Paul Iacono, Laura Jane, Charity Mackinnon, Adam McCrow, Naomi Parker, Gerard Walker

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Prices

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CHINAW ILLIAMS

China thought her commuting days to Thailand were over after she had a baby, but Samui proved to be the perfect merging of work and family. She dusted off her backpack, got a passport for her one-year old son and introduced him to Thailand, the family's distant 'backyard'. He took his first steps in a Mae Nam guesthouse and learned to wave at every vendor.

China first came to Thailand nearly 10 years ago to teach English in Isan and started returning years later to write Lonely Planet books mainly to Bangkok. This was her second, but most charmed, visit to Samui where she discovered that good food can occur on the islands. She lives with her husband, Matt, and son, Felix, in the leafy suburb of Takoma Park, Maryland (US).



CHINA'ST HANKS

Thanks to super nanny and research assistant Stacey McCarthy. Mama's pride to Felix for loving Thailand as much as I do. Additional thanks to Somchai, Pariya, Nittiphong, Saithip, Shelley, Nong and the staff at Bhundari. More thanks to Carolyn Boicos and the production team at Lonely Planet. And to my husband, Matt, for surviving without us and being our airport chauffeur. More thanks to my domestic super nannies: Mary, Mandy and Kathleen.

THEPHO TOGRAPHER

After working several years at a stable job, Austin Bush made the questionable decision to pursue a career as a freelance photographer. This choice has since taken him as far as Pakistan's Karakoram Hwy and as near as Bangkok's Or Tor Kor Market. For samples of his work, see www.austinbushphotography.com.

Our readers Many thanks to the travellers who wrote to us with helpful hints, useful advice and interesting anecdotes. Bianca Barbaro, Kathy Belpaeme, Jason Brown, Pablo Contestabile, Bryan Cronk, Brent Kendall, Tracey Seslen, Melanie Simunovic, Mark Westerfield.



Souvenir dolls

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Our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies, so you can rely on their advice being well researched and impartial. They travel widely visiting thousands of places, taking great pride in getting all the details right and telling it how it is.



THIS IS KO SAMUI

Synonymous with sun and fun, Samui is a bouillon cube of tropical paradise and modern convenience. Even though it's a small city by the sea, the island wears a soft stole of white sand beaches, which are some of Thailand's leggiest and most legendary.

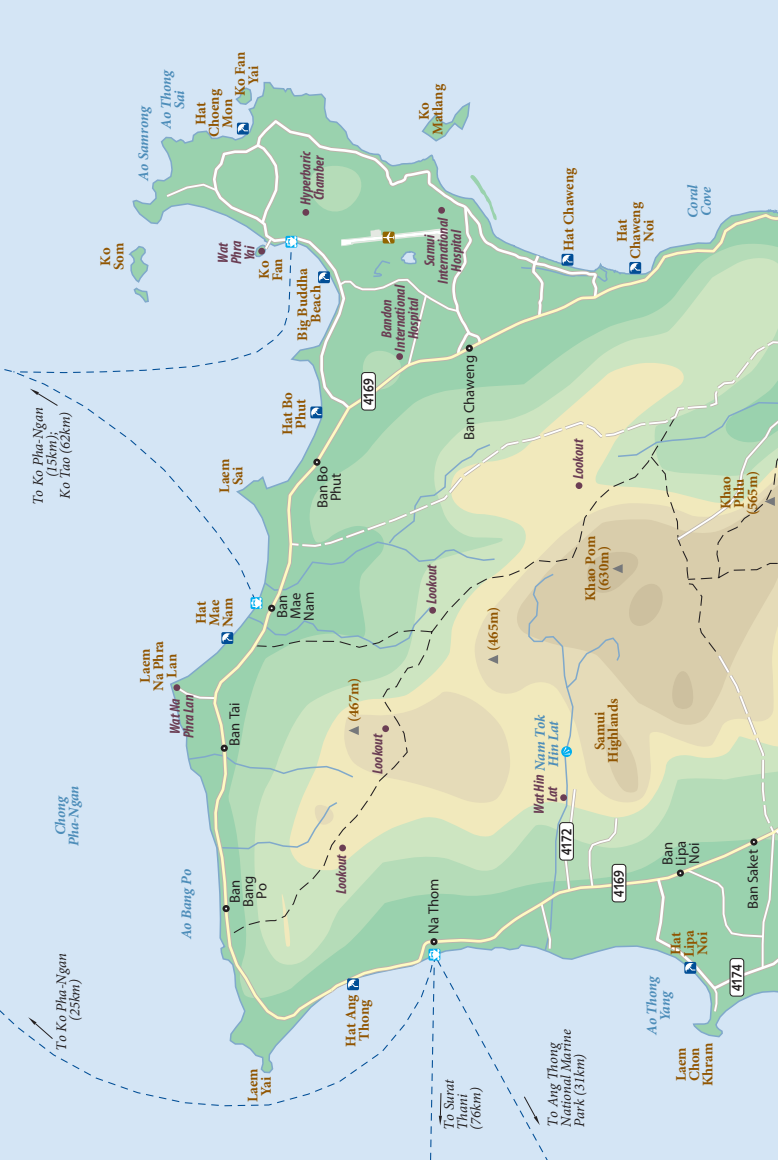
The blue topaz waters heave and retreat in a rhythmic sequence and the coconut palms bow in agreement that you have indeed arrived in paradise. The path to such an idyll is antithetically easy; the flight from Bangkok hardly imposes on the day's itinerary. And the sun shines bright, eager to polish its worshippers into the colour of burnished gold.

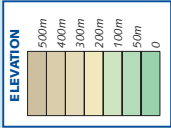
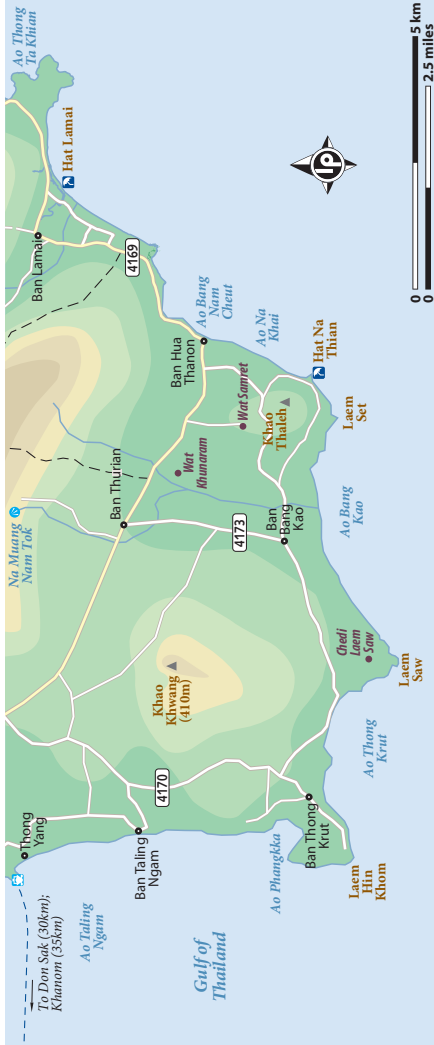
Despite its long slumber through history, Samui has wholly embraced the present and packages all the mod cons for its parade of visitors. City distractions, like shopping, eating and partying, are right on the doorstep to the beach. International-style resorts have more comforts and better housekeepers than at home. And the camaraderie of holiday crowds infuses Chaweng, Samui's busiest beach, with a celebratory mood. Left-overs from the backwater backpacker days might sniff that Samui is overly commercial, others are pleased to find it so civilised.

The beaches are so diverse you'd have to island-hop for months to find equivalents. Yet here on Phuket's younger sister are the matches to each traveller's personal beach ideal. Bo Phut and the commercial area of Fisherman's Village are urbane and mannered. Mae Nam satisfies the Thailand-philes with morning markets, shanty food shacks and Thai life powered by a motorcycle. And the south coast is still asleep under a coconut tree, hardly aware that the 21st century has moved in next door.

Samui is so adaptable that its fans span the travelling categories: fortnighters, honeymooners and families, united in their love of sand and sea. The newest arrivals are health tourists lured by wellness centres that concoct rejuvenating tonics of fasting, yoga and ocean breezes.

Top Ko Samui's spirit houses (p120) are an animistic tradition, built on pedestals. **Bottom** Chaweng Noi (p41) is one of the most peaceful beaches on the island.





Gulf of Thailand

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