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**POCKET**

# **KO SAMUI**

TOP SIGHTS • LOCAL EXPERIENCES

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**DAMIAN HARPER**



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# Welcome to Ko Samui

The largest of a family of three spectacular islands luring millions of tourists every year with powder-soft sands and emerald waters, Ko Samui is the oldest sibling who made it big. Here high-class resorts operate with Swiss efficiency as uniformed butlers cater to every whim, but there's plenty of hammock-lazing and bungalow beach life too.





Hat Lamai (p63), Ko Samui  
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# Top Experiences

## Wat Plai Laem

The best-looking temple on Ko Samui. **p35**





## Fisherman's Village

Ko Samui's most fascinating village.  
**p36**



## Mae Nam Beach

Sedate beach life, vibrant settlement.  
**p83**



## Ko Pha-Ngan's Hidden Beaches

The island's quietest moments.  
**p106**

## Full Moon Party

All-night, alcohol-fuelled rave. **p108**



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## Diving off Ko Tao

Top dive sites in Thailand. **p128**



FAR LEFT: VLADISLAV SHUTTERSTOCK © LEFT: INGRAM PUBLISHING/GETTY IMAGES ©

## Ao Tanot

Beautiful bay, fab snorkelling, seclusion. **p130**



## West Coast Sunsets

Ko Tao at its best. **p126**



## Na Muang Waterfalls

Ko Samui's most famous falls. **p64**



## Ang Thong Marine National Park

Primordial, idyllic island landscape. **p102**

# Eating

Many visitors are lured to Ko Samui by the promise of a gastronomic adventure and the island's restaurants step up to the plate. Indeed, it may matter little if you hunt out the snazziest resort restaurant or the cheapest shack on the beach: dishes are waiting that will simply blow your taste buds away.



## Ko Samui Flavours

The island makes the most of its ample supply of fresh seafood as well as the various culinary influences of southern Thai cuisine. Cloves, cinnamon and cardamom are some of the spices from Indonesia and India that are fed into the aromatic makeup of local dishes such as *gang mát-sà-mân* (Muslim curry) and *kôw mòk gàì* (chicken biryani).

## The Kôw Gaang Gang

Influenced by the mainland, Samui is peppered with *kôw gaang* (rice and curry) shops, usually just wooden shacks displaying large metal pots of southern Thai-style curries. They are one of the handiest pit stops for lunch or a snack while on the road. *Kôw gaang* shops are easily found along the Ring Rd (Rte 4169) and sell out of the good stuff by 1pm.

## Nut for Coconuts

It's no surprise that Samui's most famous natural produce finds its way into a medley of dishes. There's sweet coconut jam to spread on your croissants in the morning. *Wai kôo-a* is a spicy and sour coconut-based curry featuring octopus. *Tom kha* is a flavoursome chicken soup made with coconut milk, lemongrass, lime juice, ginger, fish sauce and chilli paste.



AS FOOD STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

## Best Restaurants

**Barracuda** Exquisite Mediterranean dishes in a romantic setting. (p41)

**Hemingway's on the Beach** First-rate Thai dishes, beachfront. (p74)

**Fisherman's Restaurant** Gorgeous Thai menu and Ko Pha-Ngan beach-side perspective. (p120)

**Pepenero** Stand-out Italian menu, welcoming staff. (p86)

**Dining on the Rocks** Invigorating menu and a peerless setting. (p42)

## Best for Views

**Dining on the Rocks** The ultimate star-gazing experience. (p42)

**Five Islands** One of Ko Samui's most memorable dinners. (p98)

**Fisherman's Restaurant** Very romantic dinners. (p120)

**Hemingway's on the Beach** Sunsets and sea (p74)

## Best International Fare

**Farmer** Choice inland setting with views of the hills

and fine food to match. (p87)

**Barracuda** Supreme Mediterranean menu in a seductive night-time environment. (p41)

**Radiance** Wholesome, healthy food with lovely sea views. (p74)

**Barracuda Restaurant & Bar** Ko Tao's finest fusion dishes. (p137)

**Zazen** Romantic bliss, on a plate. (p41)

## Top Tips



- Open-air markets and food stalls are among the most popular places for Thais to eat.

- The phrase 'I'm vegetarian' in Thai is *pǒm gin jair* (for men) or *di-chǎn gin jair* (for women).

# Drinking & Nightlife

*Samui's biggest party spot is brash and noisy Hat Chaweng. Lamai and Bo Phut come in second and third respectively, while the rest of the island is generally quiet, with drinking usually focused on resort bars. For sunset cocktails, hit the west coast, or parts of the north coast.*



## Party Island?

Ko Samui aspires to a thumping Ibiza party scene, but most nights it's pretty tame and boozy, with a touch of port town seediness thrown in. Most party-goers wait for the full moon before making the journey to Ko Pha-Ngan for the monthly beach shindigs, with boat operators shuttling party-goers to Hat Rin and back.

## Bar Zones & Beer

On Ko Samui, Chaweng is the

undisputed hub of the action. Lamai and Bo Phut have a few bars and clubs but are more in the slow lane, while things are pretty quiet in Mae Nam. Depressing hostess bars cluster in Chaweng.

Thai beers include Singha (pronounced 'sing') and Chang. Imported beers are widely available and the enterprising Bees Knees Brewpub (p58) brews its own fabulous beer. Wines, mainly from Europe and Australia, are widely available at upmarket restaurants.

## Annoyances, Dangers & Restrictions

When the army is on Ko Samui, bars island-wide may be forced to close at 1am, instead of later. During certain Buddhist festivals, you may find alcohol difficult to obtain for a few days. Watch out for fake alcohol on Ko Pha-Ngan, especially during the full moon. Despite the temptation, never drink and drive: on a motorbike or scooter, it's a lethal combination.



KATJA KREDER/GETTY IMAGES ©

## Best Bars

**Coco Tam's** The ultimate beach bar. (p43)

**Air Bar** Make it a date at sunset. (p99)

**Fizz** Ko Tao's winning sunset bar. (p127)

**Woobar** Supreme chill-out zone. (p44)

**Belgian Beer Bar** Best beer on Ko Pha-Ngan. (p122)

## Best Beach Bars

**Coco Tam's** The perfect finish to the day. (p43)

**Fizz** Hop into a beanbag and let the sunset and cocktails work their magic. (p127)

**Ark Bar** Party crowd, great sounds. (p59)

**Secret Beach Bar** Head here as the sun goes down. (p121)

## Best for Views

**Air Bar** The best choice for a cocktail when the sun goes down. (p99)

**Woobar** Very good-looking and ultra-hip. (p44)

**Jungle Club** Getting up here is half the fun, but take it easy. (p56)

**Coco Tam's** Order up a cocktail and stare out on the waves. (p43)

**Beryl Bar** Simple, rough and ready, but delicious sunsets. (p88)

**Secret Beach Bar** Gorgeous and romantic, especially at sunset. (p121)

## Best for Beer

**Belgian Beer Bar** Terrific selection on the west coast of Ko Pha-Ngan. (p122)

## Tropical Murphy's Irish

A much-loved mainstay of the Chaweng beer scene. (p59)

## Bees Knees Brewpub

Fantastic own-brewed beer. (p58)

**Legends** Pretty much the cheapest beer in Chaweng. (p58)

## Best for Cocktails

**Air Bar** Fabulous setting matched by a winning cocktail menu. (p99)

**Woobar** Superb cocktail list and ravishing décor. (p44)

**Fizz** Superb drinks to go with killer views. (p127)

**Coco Tam's** Sink into a beanbag and lift your cocktail high. (p43)



# Shopping

*Ko Samui's upward mobility and mushrooming influx of visitors from mainland China have been a shopping bonanza for the island. Chaweng is still shopping central and you'll find all you need there if you want to sew up your buying duties in one go, but you'll find quality shopping enclaves and better prices if you shop around the island.*



## Togs & Threads

Clothing boutiques along Chaweng Beach Rd and in Fisherman's Village spill forth with not just rayon *faràng* sarongs, Chang beer T-shirts or tailor-made suits, but also an eye-catching range of cute and flirty dresses, perfect for a tropical setting and humid temperatures. Several boutiques in Chaweng also sell togs with designer labels, club-worthy outfits and silk shirts and tops. You'll find

the top end at Central Festival and its environs. Fisherman's Village's boutiques are more artsy, easygoing and ethnic-chic, with natural cotton outfits and a slower pace.

## Coconuts

Also keep an eye out for Samui's most famous export, the coconut, and the many health and beauty products made from it. Pharmacies and sundry shops across the island sell coconut oil, a natural skin

moisturiser. Virgin coconut oil is also a hot superfood, often touted as a better cooking oil than olive or vegetable oils.



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## Best Shopping

**Fisherman's Village Walking Street** Fun and colourful time to explore Fisherman's Village. (p46)

**Baan Ngurn** Very attractive and reasonably priced silver jewellery. (p46)

**Hammock Cafe Plaeyuan** Stop off for a coffee, buy a colourful hammock. (p138)

**Central Festival** Colourful mall at the heart of Chaweng. (p61)

**Lamai Walking Street Night Market** Full-on and vibrant night market. (p75)

## Best Walking Streets & Night Markets

**Fisherman's Village Walking Street** The most vibrant Ko Samui walking street. (p46)

**Mae Nam Walking Street** On Thursday evenings on Ko Samui's north coast. (p83)

**Thong Sala Walking Street** Terrific Ko Pha-Ngan street market. (p123)

**Lamai Walking Street Night Market** Lamai at its busiest and most colourful. (p75)

## Best for Handicrafts

**Hammock Cafe Plaeyuan** For all your Mlabri hand-woven colourful hammock needs. (p138)

**Baan Ngurn** Choice selection of silver jewellery in Fisherman's Village. (p46)

**Nature Art Gallery** Eye-catching range of jewellery in Chaweng. (p61)

**The Wharf** New open-air mall in Fisherman's Village. (p46)

## Top Tip



◦ Don't go shopping in the company of touts, tour guides or friendly strangers as they will inevitably take a commission on anything you buy.