



Thailand's Islands & Beaches

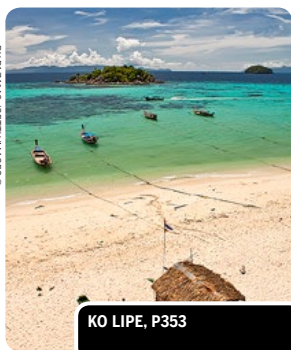


THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

**Mark Beales, Austin Bush,
David Eimer, Damian Harper, Isabella Noble**

PLAN YOUR TRIP

| | |
|---|----|
| Welcome to Thailand's Islands & Beaches | 4 |
| Thailand's Islands & Beaches Map | 6 |
| Thailand's Islands & Beaches Top 15 | 8 |
| Need to Know | 16 |
| First Time | 18 |
| What's New | 20 |
| If You Like..... | 21 |
| Month by Month | 23 |
| Itineraries | 26 |
| Choose Your Beach ... | 34 |
| Diving & Snorkelling ... | 41 |
| Eat Like a Local | 45 |
| Travel with Children ... | 49 |
| Regions at a Glance | 51 |



KO LIPE, P353



PHUKET TOWN, P274

ON THE ROAD

BANGKOK 54

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| Sights | 56 |
| Activities | 69 |
| Courses | 69 |
| Tours | 72 |
| Festivals & Events | 74 |
| Sleeping | 74 |
| Eating | 83 |
| Drinking & Nightlife | 87 |
| Entertainment | 89 |
| Shopping | 91 |

KO CHANG & EASTERN SEABOARD 100

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Bang Saen | 101 |
| Si Racha | 104 |
| Ko Si Chang | 106 |
| Pattaya | 107 |
| Rayong & Ban Phe | 112 |
| Ko Samet | 113 |
| Chanthaburi | 118 |
| Trat | 121 |
| Ko Chang | 124 |
| Ko Wai | 135 |
| Ko Mak | 136 |
| Ko Kut | 138 |

HUA HIN & THE UPPER GULF... 140

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Phetchaburi (Phetburi) ... | 142 |
| Kaeng Krachan National Park | 146 |
| Cha-am | 147 |
| Hua Hin | 149 |
| Hua Hin to Pranburi | 159 |
| Hat Khao Tao | 159 |
| Hat Sai Noi | 159 |
| Pranburi & Around | 160 |
| Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park | 161 |
| Prachuap Khiri Khan | 163 |

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Ban Krut & Bang Saphan Yai | 167 |
| Chumphon | 169 |

KO SAMUI & THE LOWER GULF... 173

| | |
|---|------------|
| Gulf Islands | 176 |
| Ko Samui | 176 |
| Ko Pha-Ngan | 194 |
| Ko Tao | 211 |
| Ang Thong Marine National Park | 226 |
| Surat Thani Province... 227 | |
| Surat Thani | 227 |
| Nakhon Si Thammarat Province | 230 |
| Ao Khanom | 230 |
| Nakhon Si Thammarat .. | 232 |
| Songkhla Province ... 234 | |
| Songkhla & Around | 234 |
| Hat Yai | 235 |
| Deep South | 237 |
| Yala | 237 |
| Pattani | 238 |
| Narathiwat | 239 |
| Sungai Kolok | 241 |

PHUKET & THE ANDAMAN COAST.. 243

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Ranong Province..... 246 | |
| Ranong | 246 |
| Ko Chang | 249 |
| Ko Phayam | 250 |
| Laem Son National Park .. | 252 |
| Phang-Nga Province... 253 | |
| Khuraburi | 253 |
| Surin Islands Marine National Park .. | 254 |
| Ko Phra Thong & Ko Ra | 255 |
| Khao Sok National Park | 256 |

Contents

UNDERSTAND

| | | | | | |
|---|------------|---|------------|---|------------|
| Khao Lak & Around | 258 | Ko Kradan | 343 | Thailand's Islands & Beaches Today | 360 |
| Similan Islands Marine National Park | 262 | Ko Libong | 344 | History & Politics | 362 |
| Natai | 264 | Ko Sukorn | 345 | People & Culture | 376 |
| Ao Phang-Nga | 265 | Satun Province | 345 | The Sex Industry in Thailand | 384 |
| Phang-Nga | 265 | Satun | 345 | Food & Drink | 386 |
| Ao Phang-Nga National Park | 266 | Pak Bara | 348 | Food Spotter's Guide | 392 |
| Ko Yao | 267 | Ko Bulon Leh | 348 | Environment | 396 |
| Phuket Province | 269 | Ko Tarutao Marine National Park | 349 | Thai Massage | 403 |
| Phuket Town | 274 | Ko Tarutao | 351 | | |
| Ko Sireh | 281 | Ko Lipe | 353 | | |
| Laem Phanwa | 281 | Ko Adang & Ko Rawi | 357 | | |
| Rawai | 281 | | | | |
| Hat Kata | 284 | | | | |
| Hat Karon | 289 | | | | |
| Hat Patong | 291 | | | | |
| Hat Kamala | 295 | | | | |
| Hat Surin | 296 | | | | |
| Ao Bang Thao | 298 | | | | |
| Sirinat National Park | 300 | | | | |
| Khao Phra Thaeu Royal Wildlife & Forest Reserve | 302 | | | | |
| Thalang District | 302 | | | | |
| Krabi Province | 303 | | | | |
| Krabi Town | 303 | | | | |
| Ao Nang | 307 | | | | |
| Hat Nopparat Thara | 310 | | | | |
| Railay | 311 | | | | |
| Ko Phi-Phi Don | 316 | | | | |
| Ko Phi-Phi Leh | 324 | | | | |
| Ko Jum & Ko Si Boya | 325 | | | | |
| Ko Lanta | 326 | | | | |
| Trang Province | 336 | | | | |
| Trang | 336 | | | | |
| Trang Beaches | 339 | | | | |
| Trang Islands | 340 | | | | |
| Ko Ngai | 340 | | | | |
| Ko Muk | 341 | | | | |

SURVIVAL GUIDE

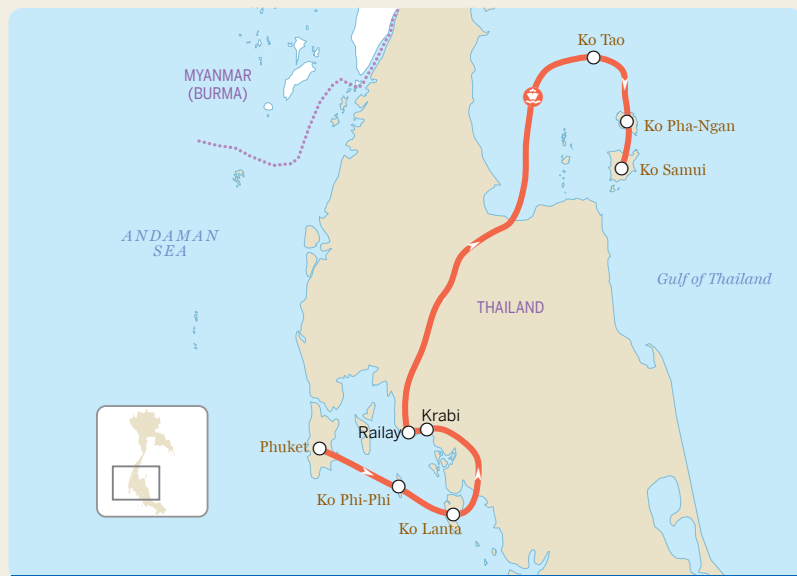
| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Responsible Travel | 408 |
| Directory A–Z | 411 |
| Transport | 422 |
| Health | 428 |
| Language | 434 |
| Index | 442 |
| Map Legend | 447 |

SPECIAL FEATURES

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Off the Beaten Track | 32 |
| Choose Your Own Beach Adventure | 36 |
| Wat Phra Kaew & Grand Palace 3D Illustration | 58 |
| Wat Pho 3D Illustration | 64 |

Plan Your Trip

Itineraries



2
WEEKS

Essential Islands & Beaches

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

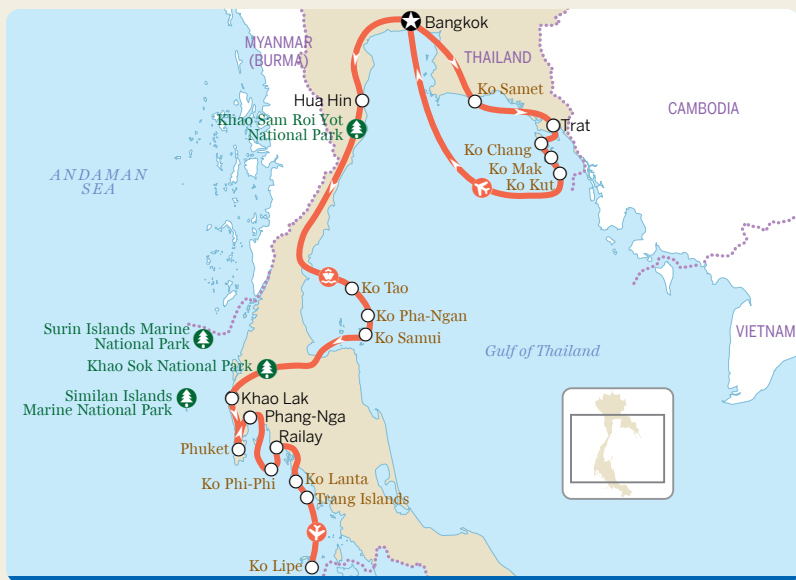




Long-tail boats at Ko Phi-Phi (p316)

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 toured 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.



4
WEEKS

The Full Monty

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 beachside 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.



PREMIUM/UNG / GETTY IMAGES ©



TRAVEL/OND / GETTY IMAGES ©

Top: Karst formations in Chiaw Lan Lake (p256),
Khao Sok National Park
Bottom: Street food on display in Hua Hin (p149)



2 WEEKS

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 Sompae 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.



10 DAYS Eastern Island-Hop

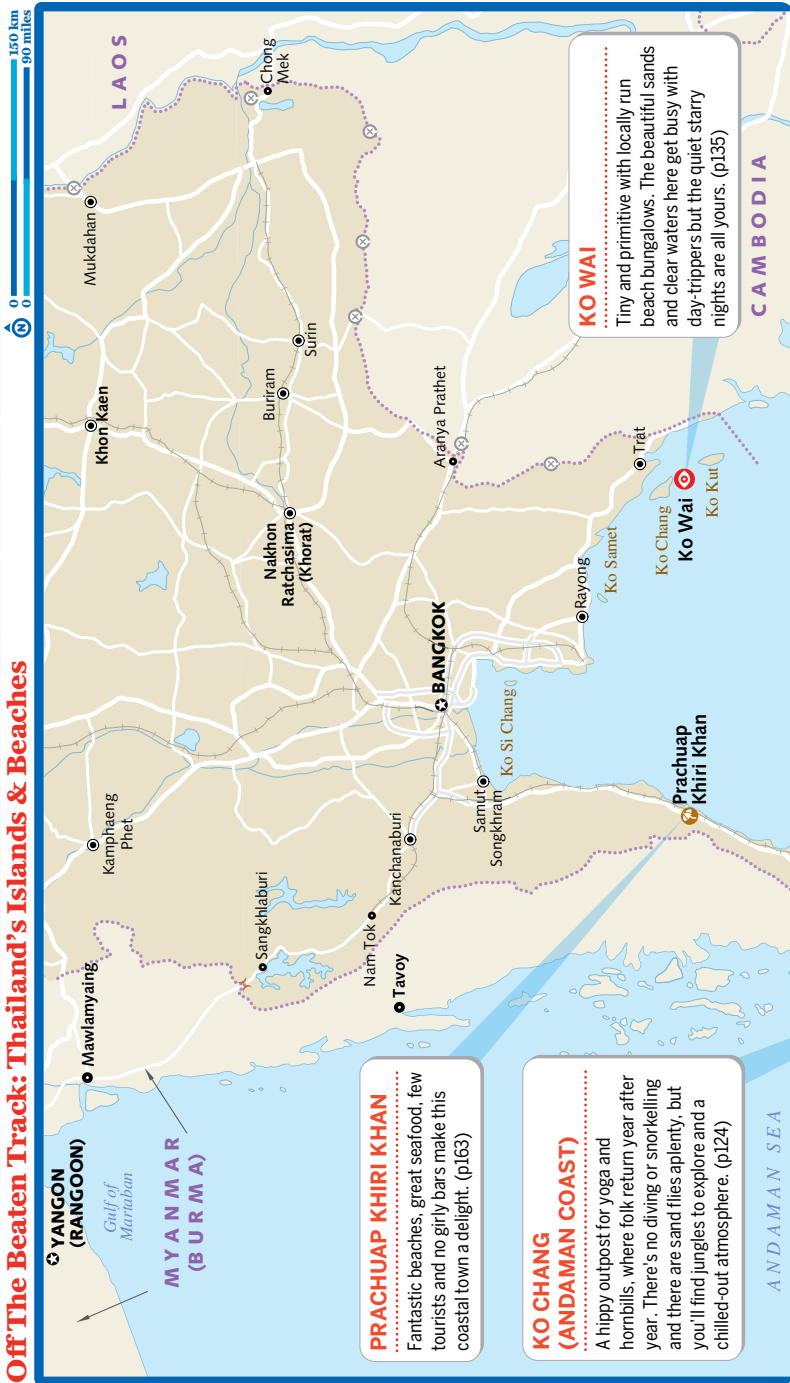
Thailand's southern island strings are undoubtedly the kingdom's major treasures, but if you're pushed for time or Cambodia-bound, why not explore the eastern gulf?

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 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.

Off The Beaten Track: Thailand's Islands & Beaches



PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN

Fantastic beaches, great seafood, few tourists and no girly bars make this coastal town a delight. (p.163)

KO CHANG (ANDAMAN COAST)

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. (p.124)

KO WAI

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. (p.135)

ANDAMAN SEA

CAMBODIA

LAOS

YANGON (RANGOON)

Gulf of Martaban

MYANMAR (BURMA)

Mawlamyaing

Kampaeng Phet

Sangkhaburi

Nam Tok

Tavoy

Kanchanaburi

Samut Songkhram

Ko Si Chang

BANGKOK

Aranya Prathet

Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat)

Surin

Chong Mek

Khon Kaen

Mukdahan

Rayong

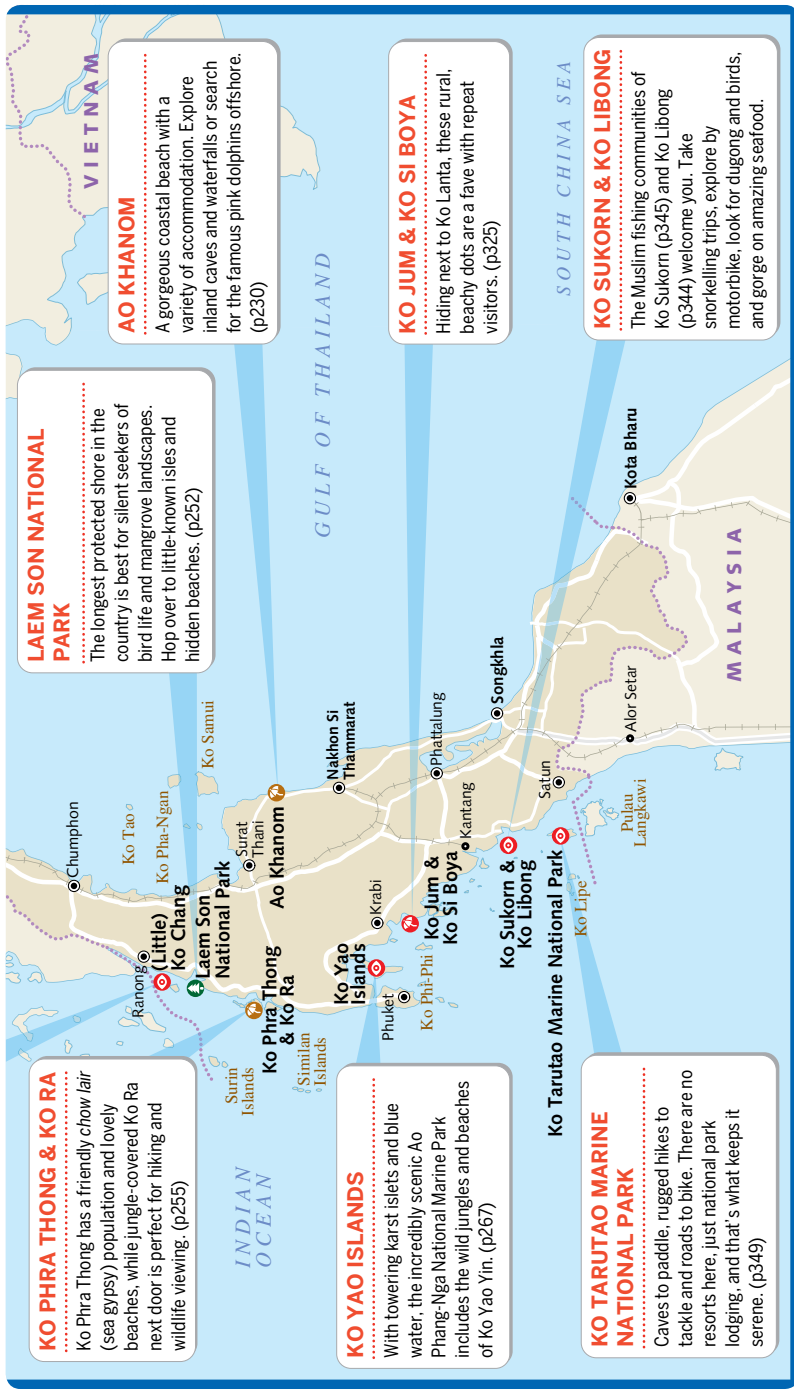
Ko Chang

Ko Wai

Ko Kut

Trät

Prachuap Khiri Khan



KO PHRA THONG & KO RA

Ko Phra Thong has a friendly *chow lai* (sea gypsy) population and lovely beaches, while jungle-covered Ko Ra next door is perfect for hiking and wildlife viewing. (p255)

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 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 JUM & KO SI BOYA

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

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)

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.

SOUTH CHINA SEA

GULF OF THAILAND

INDIAN OCEAN

VIETNAM

MALAYSIA

Ko Tarutao Marine National Park

Ko Sukorn & Ko Libong

Ko Jum & Ko Si Boya

Ko Yao Islands

Ko Phra Thong & Ko Ra

Laem Son National Park

Ko Chang

(Little) Ko Chang

Chumphon

Ko Tao

Ko Pha-Ngan

Surat Thani

Ko Samui

Surin Islands

Stimilan Islands

Ao Khanom

Krabi

Phuket

Ko Phi-Phi

Kantang

Phattalung

Songkhla

Satun

Ko Lipe

Pujau Langkawi

Alor Setar

Kota Bharu

Map Legend

Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- 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

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

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



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

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 touristy 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 (@isabellannoble).

Published by Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd

ABN 36 005 607 983

10th edition – July 2016

ISBN 978 1 74321 873 0

© Lonely Planet 2016 Photographs © as indicated 2016

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in China

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be copied, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, except brief extracts for the purpose of review, and no part of this publication may be sold or hired, without the written permission of the publisher. Lonely Planet and the Lonely Planet logo are trademarks of Lonely Planet and are registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Lonely Planet does not allow its name or logo to be appropriated by commercial establishments, such as retailers, restaurants or hotels. Please let us know of any misuses: lonelyplanet.com/ip.

Although the authors and Lonely Planet have taken all reasonable care in preparing this book, we make no warranty about the accuracy or completeness of its content and, to the maximum extent permitted, disclaim all liability arising from its use.

© Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'