

Southern Andaman Coast



Island hoppers, this is your dreamland. The south is the quieter half of the Andaman coast; even the tourist star of Ko Phi-Phi can't rival the glam and crowds of Phuket. Instead, this region is the ideal choice for serious relaxation, outdoor fun and chummy nights at beachside bars. Just slowly putter from white-sand isle to white-sand isle.

Social seekers will love the developed beauties such as Ko Phi-Phi and Ko Lanta where you can party into the wee hours and meet plenty of people on the beach, yet still find a peaceful strip of sand. And roads less travelled are just next door: head down through the lightly developed Trang islands to the even less visited Satun Province to find powder-white romantic beaches, outrageous snorkelling and plenty of spicy southern Thai culture. The entire region is made up of a spectacular undulating coastline pierced by sheer limestone formations, speckled with islands and cloaked in a carpet of verdant greenery.

Besides the phenomenal diving and snorkelling, some of the best rock climbing in the world can be found in Krabi and Trang Provinces. All that limestone also means there are plenty of caves to explore; some house shrines while others require that you shimmy on your stomach to get through. You can also kayak to islands or through coastal mangroves.

Much of this region shuts down in the April to November low season but even at that time you can still get to most places with determined effort.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Zipping around in long-tail boats and oohing and aahing at monolithic rock formations and perfect beaches throughout the **Trang islands** (p362) or **Ko Tarutao Marine National Park** (p374)
- Scaling a limestone cliff then recuperating on the sparkling beaches and in the blissful jade waters of **Railay** (p338)
- Trying to decide if **Ko Phi-Phi** (p343) is more beautiful above or below water and giving it up for a tie
- Forgetting what day it is and realising that electricity is really just a frivolous modern convenience on **Ko Jum** (p358)
- Snorkelling over healthy coral reefs by day and chilling at low-key reggae bars by night on **Ko Lipe** (p377)



■ DRY SEASON: DECEMBER-MARCH

■ WET SEASON: MAY-OCTOBER

Climate

The weather can be a big concern for travellers in this region. The Andaman coast receives more rain than the southern gulf provinces, with May to October being the months of heaviest rainfall. During this time passenger boats to some islands, such as Ko Tarutao, are suspended. If you find the weather on the Andaman coast unpleasant, you can easily travel to the southwestern gulf coast, where you're more likely to find the sun shining.

Top daytime temperatures average 32°C year-round (it's always hot!), with high humidity during the wet season.

National Parks

The most popular park along the Southern Andaman coast is the Ko Phi-Phi Marine National Park (p343), with its spectacular lagoons, beaches, impenetrable sea cliffs and rock climbing. Mu Ko Lanta Marine National Park (p352) is found in the south of the increasingly popular island of Ko Lanta and includes pristine islands, fine coral reefs and long sandy beaches. In the far south, bordering Malaysia is the momentarily tranquil (but becoming more popular) Ko Tarutao Marine National Park (p374), which preserves a group of jungle-covered islands, coral reefs and immaculate tropical beaches.

Lesser known parks include tiny Hat Chao Mai National Park (p363) near Trang, which contains coral-fringed islands; mountainous Khao Phanom Bencha National Park (see boxed text, p330) near Krabi town, whose jungles are full of exotic animals and rare birds; Satun Province's Mu Ko Phetra Marine National Park (see boxed text, p374) featuring islands and mangrove wildlife including dugongs and rare birds; and Tharnbok Koranee National Park (p332), near the town of Ao Luk, which preserves sprawling areas of mangroves full of limestone caves and cave paintings.

KRABI PROVINCE

With mind-bogglingly beautiful karsts (limestone rock formations) jutting up through tangled jungles, lining the crystalline beaches and forming knobby islands floating in the green sea, it's easy to understand why Krabi Province is the most popular region of the Southern Andaman coast. There are over

150 islands here and many are lined with the sorts of beaches you thought existed only on postcards. Not far from Krabi town, the province's small capital, the towering cliffs cast their shadows on mainland beaches; some feel as lost as a remote isle while others have every modern amenity right at hand. There's really something for everyone in this province whether it's partying and decadently lounging on magnificent Ko Phi-Phi, living out your lost-on-a-desert-island fantasies on quiet Ko Jum, or scrambling up some of the world's top climbing routes at Railay.

It's not all islands and beaches, however. The region's interior features tracts of primary rainforest that are home to a plethora of tropical birds and animals, waterfalls, swimming holes and caves.

The mainland has excellent links to the rest of Thailand year-round, and in high season, the islands do too.

KRABI

กระบี่

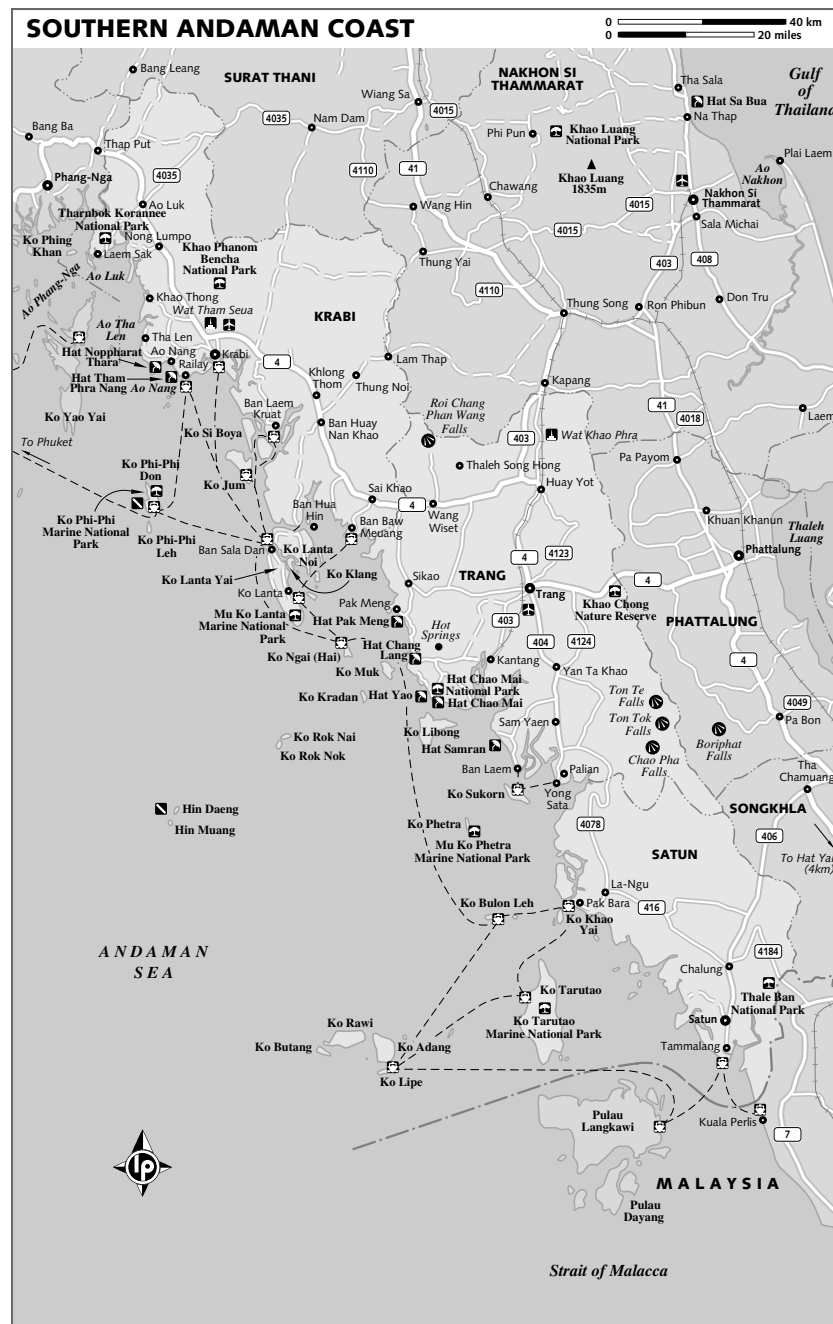
pop 29,300

When you arrive in Krabi you'll first notice that there are more guesthouses and travel agencies per square inch here than could possibly be practical. Western restaurants are ubiquitous, as are the gift shops that all sell the same 'ole woodcarvings, pashminas and trinkets. Yet if you hang out a while you'll see that there's a very local scene going on in between the cracks. The day market on Th Sukhon is filled with mysterious treats and few foreign faces as are several restaurants scattered, almost invisibly, throughout the tourist centre. It's a compact town that can win sceptics over with its quirks – and really, can anyone pass through town without doing a double take on the giant cavemen statues that hold up the traffic lights at the Th Maharat/Vogue crossroads?

Because a dozen island and beach destinations are serviced from this city, not many people linger here, although it's awfully cheap to do so. Boats can be organised to the islands of Ko Phi-Phi and Ko Lanta, and the beaches of Ao Nang and Railay. If you stay, travel agencies can help you arrange wildlife-spotting tours among the mangrove-dense riverside.

Orientation

Th Utarakit is the main road into and out of Krabi and most places of interest are on the



soi (laneways) that branch off it. Ferries to Ko Phi-Phi, Ko Lanta and other islands leave from Khlong Chilat (Krabi passenger pier) about 3km southwest of town, while long-tail boats to Railay depart from Khong Kha (Chao Fa) pier on Th Khong Kha. The Krabi bus terminal is north of the centre at Talat Kao, near the junction of Th Utarakit, while the airport is 17km northeast on Hwy 4.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Pakaran (☎ 0 7561 1164; 151 Th Utarakit; ☎ 9am-8pm) A good place to stock up on second-hand books before you head for the islands. It has a large selection in English and many European languages as well as some quality handicrafts and antiques.

IMMIGRATION

Immigration Office (☎ 0 7561 1350; Th Chamai Anuson; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) Just south of the post and telephone office; handles visa extensions.

INTERNET ACCESS

Almost all of Krabi's budget travel agencies and restaurants offer internet access for 40B to 60B per hour.

World Net (cnr Ths Utarakit & Issara; ☎ 8am-11pm) Has fast computers, switched-on staff and, sometimes, free bananas.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Krabi Directory (www.krabidir.com) Has lots of information on Krabi Province and links to most of the tourist-oriented businesses in the area.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Krabi Hospital (☎ 0 7561 1210; Th Utarakit) Located 1km north of the centre.

MONEY

Along Th Utarakit, Bangkok Bank, Krung Thai Bank, Siam City Bank and Siam Commercial Bank all exchange cash and travellers cheques and have ATMs.

POST

Post office (Th Utarakit) Just south of the turn-off to Khong Kha pier; there's a separate poste-restante entrance at the side.

TELEPHONE

Communications Authority of Thailand (CAT; Th Utarakit) About 500m north of Krabi Hospital, offering in-

ternational calls. Travel agencies in town provide overseas calls at comparable rates.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Krabi Tourist Association (☎ 0 7562 2163/4; tatkrabi@tat.or.th; Th Utarakit) Provides a free map of Krabi with a smile, but no English is spoken.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Many of Krabi's numerous travel agencies close monthly and reopen under different names. Recommended steadfast agencies:

Chen Phen Tour (☎ 0 7561 2004; Th Utarakit) Specialises in mangrove tours (see below).

Krabi You and I Travel (☎ 0 7883 6399; www.krabi-information.com; 181 Th Utarakit) Offers air, boat and bus tickets, tours and island accommodation booking.

Sights

There are not many must-see sights in Krabi itself. On the edge of town, **Wat Kaew** contains some interesting 19th- and early-20th-century buildings.

It's possible to climb one of the two limestone massifs of **Khao Khanap Nam**, just north of the town centre. A number of human skeletons were found in the caves here, thought to be the remains of people trapped during an ancient flood. To get here, charter a long-tail boat from Khong Kha pier for about 300B.

Activities

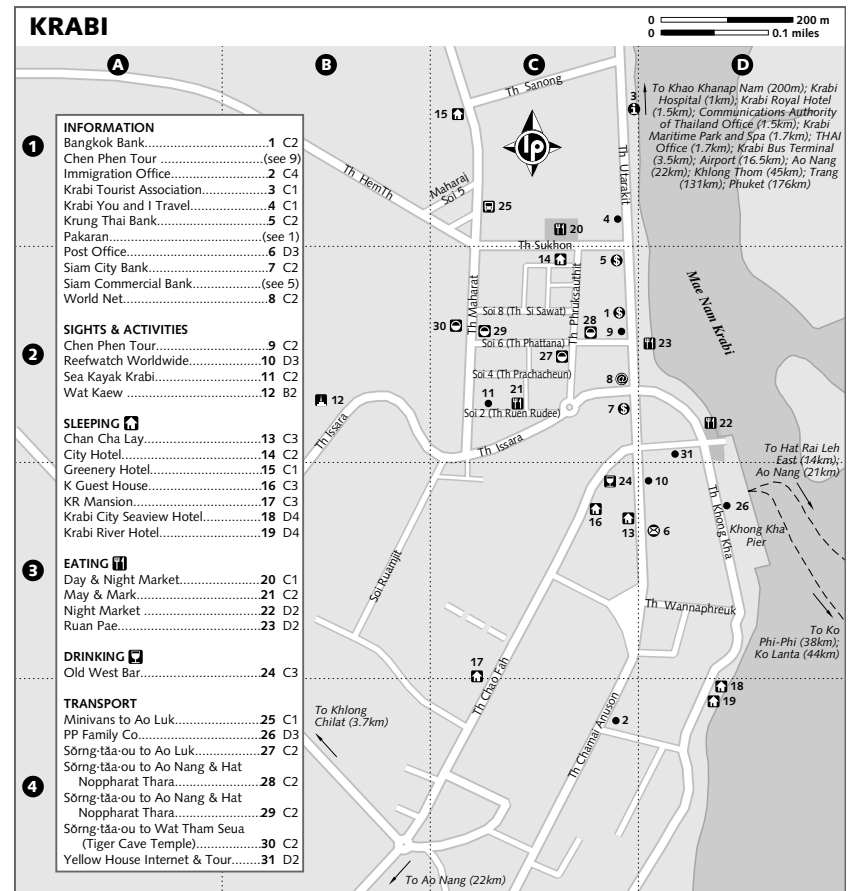
Sea Kayak Krabi (☎ 0 7563 0270; www.seakayak-krabi.com; 40 Th Ruen Rudee) offers a wide variety of sea-kayaking tours, including to Ao Thalane (half-/full day 800/1400B), which has looming sea cliffs; Ko Hong (full day 1500B), famed for its emerald lagoon; and Ban Bho Tho (full day 1700B), which has sea caves with 2000- to 3000-year-old cave paintings. All rates include guides, lunch, fruit and drinking water.

While many diving agencies have offices on the islands and beaches, **Reefwatch Worldwide** (☎ 0 1979 0535; www.reefwatchworldwide.com; Th Utarakit) is in town and has two-dive packages to local islands (2900B) and to Phi-Phi (3500B). It also runs PADI Open-Water courses (13,000B) and live-aboards (three nights from 15,000B).

For rock climbing, boats go from Krabi to Railay (see p339). For more activities in the area, see p333.

Tours

Any travel agency in town can book tours with an environmental focus from Krabi. **Chen Phen**



Tour (☎ 0 7561 2004; Th Utarakit) and others offer bird-watching tours in the mangroves around Krabi for about 650B per boat per hour (early morning is best); alternatively, you can hire a boat at Khong Kha pier for around 400B per hour. Keep an eye out for fiddler crabs and mudskippers on the exposed mud.

A number of companies offer day trips to **Khlong Thom**, about 45km southeast of Krabi on Hwy 4, taking in some nearby hot springs and freshwater pools. Expect to pay around 1050B, including transport, lunch and beverages; bring a swimsuit and good walking shoes. Various other 'jungle tour' itineraries are available.

Tours to surrounding islands (see boxed text, p335) are also deservedly popular.

Sleeping

New guesthouses (often named with a one or two letter initial) are appearing all over Krabi and most of them offer clean, tiled rooms with shared bathrooms. In low season, prices plummet to as low as 150B. Midrange quality options are available for under and around 1000B even during high season.

K Guest House (☎ 0 7562 3166; www.krabidir.com/kguesthouse; 15-25 Th Chao Fa; r 400-500B; ☎) This place has a Wild West feeling, with varnished wooden rooms, and all with verandas overlooking the street. Cow heads on the walls and easy socialising in the downstairs café add to the frontier appeal.

KR Mansion (☎ 0 7561 2761; krmansion@hotmail.com; 52/1 Th Chao Fa; r 300-600B; ☎) Pink is the name

DETOUR: KHAO PHANOM BENCHA NATIONAL PARK

This 50-sq-km **park** (adult/child under 14 yr 200/100B) protects a dramatic area of virgin rainforest along the spine of 1350m-high Khao Phanom Bencha, just 20km north of Krabi. The park is full of scenic waterfalls, including the 11-tiered **Huay To Falls**, just 500m from the park headquarters. Nearby and almost as dramatic are Huay Sadeh Falls and Khlong Haeng Falls. On the way into the park you can visit **Tham Pheung**, a dramatic cave with shimmering mineral stalactites and stalagmites. Numerous trails wind through the area, providing excellent opportunities for hiking.

The park is home to abundant wildlife – but only the monkeys are commonly seen. Many bird-spotters come here to see white-crowned and helmeted hornbills, argus pheasants and the extremely rare Gurney's pitta.

There is no public transport to the park, but it's easy to get here from Krabi by hired motorcycle; follow the signposted turn-off from Hwy 4. Park your motorcycle by the park headquarters and remember to apply the steering lock and chain. Alternatively, you can hire a *túk-túk* (pronounced *dúk dúk*; motorised three-wheeled pedicab) for around 600B round-trip.

of the game in this place. The building has a funky rooftop beer garden with panoramic views over Krabi – great for a sundowner cocktail – and a variety of good rooms.

our pick **Chan Cha Lay** (☎ 0 7562 0952; www.geo.cities.com/chan_cha_lay; 55 Th Utarakit; r 300-650B; 📶 🚶 🚲) More like a boutique hotel than a guesthouse, the en suite rooms at this exceptionally well-run place are decorated in Mediterranean blues and whites and have stylish, white pebble and polished concrete bathrooms. Shared-bathroom, fan-only rooms are plain, but are spotless and have good beds. The staff here are particularly helpful and honest with onward transport and information.

City Hotel (☎ 0 7562 1280-2; www.citykrabi.com; 15/2-3 Th Sukhon; r 400-750B; 📶 🚶 🚲) Easily the best-value midranger (at a budget price) in the town centre, top-end rooms have details like louvered wooden bathroom doors and Thai silk bed runners on the beds. Lower-end rooms are fan only and are without fanfare although they are clean and well-kept. There's a great market just across the road.

Greenery Hotel (☎ 0 7562 3648; http://krabidir.com/thegreeneryhotel/index.htm; 167/2 Th Maharat; r 600-800B; 📶 🚶 🚲) Rooms here are modern with bright-coloured bed boards, cable TV and mini-fridges in all the rooms. The semi-outdoor hallways look out over the namesake, lush little garden that lends a peaceful feel to the place. It's about a five- to 10-minute walk away from the town centre.

Krabi City Seaview Hotel (☎ 0 7562 2885-8; www.krabidir.com/krabicityseaview; 77/1 Th Khong Kha; r 700-1200B; 📶 🚶 🚲) This slick establishment is right on the river and offers excellent views of green mangroves from the balconies of its better

rooms. There's a small, chilled lounge downstairs facing the river and surrounded by green lawn. The quiet, riverside location is only a few minutes' walk from the centre.

Krabi River Hotel (☎ 0 7561 2321; krabiriver@hotmail.com; 73/1 Th Khong Kha; r 700-1200B; 📶 🚶 🚲) Just next door to the Krabi City Seaview, this place is the newer model with tidy, tiny rooms. You pay more for river views.

Krabi Maritim Park & Spa (☎ 0 7562 0028; Bangkok 0 2719 0034; www.maritimparkandspa.com; r from 4500B; 📶 🚶 🚲) On lovely riverside grounds, this swanky hotel is 2km from Krabi town proper. It sports a nightclub, stylish pool, fitness centre, spa and even a lake on which you can pedal swan-shaped boats. Rooms are classy and the balconies sport impressive views. Promotional rates of 1500B are often available. There are free shuttle buses to Krabi town and Ao Nang, and shuttle boats to Railay. It may actually be smart to stay here, instead of Railay or Ao Nang, in the high season as it's better value for money and you can easily make day trips to the other locations.

Eating & Drinking

Night markets (Th Khong Kha & Th Sukhon; meals 20-50B) The most popular and pleasant place for an evening meal is at the night market near the Khong Kha pier. The menus are in English but the food is authentic and excellent. Stalls here sell papaya salad, fried noodles, *đom yam gung* (prawn and lemon grass soup with mushrooms), fresh seafood and all manner of things on satay sticks, plus sweet milky Thai desserts. There's a similar market just north on Th Sukhon that's open day and night and caters to a more local crowd.

May & Mark (Maharat Soi 2; meals 40-80B; ☎ 6.30am-9pm) One of the first places in town to start serving Western food way back when, May & Mark still does it best thanks to recipes collected from helpful farang (foreigners of European descent) over the years. Specialities range from excellent fresh bread to bangers and mash and cordon bleu meals.

Ruan Pae (☎ 0 7561 1956; Th Utarakit; dishes 60-150B; 📶 🚶 🚲) This old-fashioned floating restaurant is a fine place to watch the evening mist gather around the mangroves, though the atmosphere is sometimes better than the food. Mosquitoes can be a problem in the evening.

Old West Bar (Th Chao Fah; ☎ 1pm-2am) Bamboo and wood inside and out, this Wild West-themed bar booms music nightly and is one popular place for a tippie. There's a lively scene most nights and the cocktail list is long enough to keep you sampling for a while.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

THAI Airways International (www.thaiairways.com), **Air Asia** (www.airasia.com), **Nok Air** (www.nokair.com), **Bangkok Air** (www.bangkokair.com) and **One 2 Go** (www.fly12go.com) all fly between Bangkok and Krabi (one-way around 3000B, 1¼ hours). Shop around – there are bargains to be had here.

Bangkok Air also has flights to Ko Samui (one-way 2110B) three to four times daily.

BOAT

Boats to Ko Lanta and Ko Phi-Phi leave from the passenger pier at Khlong Chilat, about 3km southwest of Krabi. Travel agencies will arrange free transfers when you buy a boat ticket with them.

The largest boat operator is **PP Family Co** (☎ 0 7562 0052; www.phiphifamily.com; Th Khong Kha), which has a ticket office right beside the pier in town. All year round there are boats to Ko Phi-Phi (350B, 1½ hours) at 10am and 2pm.

From November to May, there are boats to Ko Lanta (350B, two hours) leaving Krabi at 11am and 1.30pm. These can also stop at Ko Jum (one hour), where long-tails shuttle you to shore (though you'll pay the full 350B). During the off season, you can only get to Ko Lanta by frequent air-con vans (250B, 2½ hours) which also run throughout the high season.

If you want to get to Railay, long-tail boats leave from Krabi's Khong Kha pier to Hat Rai Leh East from 7.45am to 6pm (200B, 45 minutes). The boatmen will wait until they can

fill a boat with 10 people before they leave; if you're antsy to go before then you can charter the whole boat for 2000B.

BUS**Government Bus**

With fewer touts and guaranteed departure times, taking a government bus from the **Krabi bus terminal** (☎ 0 7561 1804; nr Th Utarakit & Hwy 4) in nearby Talat Kao, about 4km from Krabi, is an altogether more relaxing option than taking a private bus. Air-con government buses leave for Bangkok (700B, 12 hours) at 7am, 4pm and 5.30pm. There's a plush 24-seat VIP bus to Bangkok (1050B) departing at 5.30pm daily. From Bangkok's Southern Bus Terminal, buses leave at 7.30am and between 7pm and 8pm.

Other services for regular, air-con government buses are shown in the table below:

Destination	Price	Duration	Frequency
Hat Yai	169-203B	5hr	frequent
Nakhon Si Thammarat	89B	3hr	frequent
Phang-Nga	60-78B	2hr	hourly
Phuket	115B	3½hr	hourly
Ranong	190B	6hr	every 2hr
Surat Thani	130B	2½hr	frequent
Trang	90B	2hr	frequent

Private Bus

Travel agencies can book you onto private air-con buses to Bangkok (650B, 12 hours) departing 4pm, and to Surat Thani (280B, 3½ hours) departing 11am and 4pm. Most travel agencies also offer combined minibus and boat tickets direct to Ko Samui (450B, 5½ hours) and Ko Pha-Ngan (550B, 7½ hours).

MINIVAN

Dozens of travel agencies in Krabi run air-con minivans and VIP buses to popular tourist centres throughout southern Thailand, but staff tend to be very pushy and you may end up crammed cheek to jowl with other backpackers. Destinations from Krabi:

Destination	Price	Duration
Ao Luk	50B	1hr
Hat Yai	280B	3hr
Ko Lanta	250B	1½hr
Phuket	250B	2-3hr
Satun	400B	5hr
Trang	280B	2hr

SÖRNG-TĀA-OU

Sörng-tāa-ou (also spelt sāwngthāew) run from the bus station to central Krabi and on to Hat Noppharat Thara (40B), Ao Nang (40B) and the Shell Cemetery at Ao Nam Mao (50B; see p338). There are services from 6am to 6.30pm. In the high season there are less-frequent services until 10pm for 70B. For Ao Luk (50B, one hour) there are frequent sörng-tāa-ou from the corner of Th Phattana and Th Phruksauthit; the last service leaves at around 3pm. Occasional sörng-tāa-ou to Wat Tham Seua leave from opposite the 7-Eleven (on Th Maharat) and cost 15B.

Getting Around

Central Krabi is easy to explore on foot, but the bus terminal and airport are both a long way from the centre. A taxi from the airport to town will cost 500B. In the reverse direction, taxis or tük-tük (motorised three-wheeled pedicabs) cost 300B, while motorcycle taxis cost 250B. Agencies in town can also arrange minivans to the airport for 250B. Sörng-tāa-ou between the bus terminal and central Krabi cost 30B.

Hiring a vehicle is an excellent way to explore the countryside around Krabi. Most of the travel agencies and guesthouses in town can rent you a Honda Dream motorcycle for around 150B per day. **Yellow House Internet & Tour** (☎ 0 7562 2809; 5 Th Chao Fah) hires out reliable bikes and provides helmets. A few of the travel agencies along Th Utarakit rent out small 4WDs for 1000B to 1600B per day.

AROUND KRABI**Wat Tham Seua**

วัดถ้ำเสือ

Thailand has a lot of wát (temples), but **Wat Tham Seua** (Tiger Cave Temple), 8km northwest of Krabi, is unique. The main *wi-háhn* (hall) is built into a long, shallow limestone cave. On either side of the cave, dozens of *gù-dì* (monastic cells) are built into various cliffs and caves. You may see a troop of monkeys roaming the grounds.

The most shocking thing about Wat Tham Seua is found in the large main cave. Alongside large portraits of Ajan Jamnien Silasettho, the wát's abbot, are close-up pictures of human entrails and internal organs, which are meant to remind guests of the impermanence of the body. Skulls and skele-

tons scattered around the grounds are meant to serve the same educational purpose.

The best part of the temple grounds can be found in a little valley behind the ridge where the *bóht* (central sanctuary) is located. Walk beyond the main temple building, keeping the cliff on your left, and you'll come to a pair of steep stairways leading to a 600m karst peak. The fit and fearless will be rewarded with a Buddha statue, a gilded stupa and great views of the surrounding area; on a clear day you can see well out to sea.

The second stairway, next to a large statue of Kuan Yin (the Mahayana Buddhist Goddess of Mercy), leads over a gap in the ridge and into a valley of tall trees and limestone caves. Enter the caves on your left and look for light switches on the walls – walk chamber by chamber through the labyrinth until you rejoin the path on the other side.

If you go to the temple, please dress modestly: pants down to the ankles, shirts covering the shoulders and nothing too tight.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A motorcycle taxi or tük-tük to Wat Tham Seua costs 200B while private taxis cost 250B. By sörng-tāa-ou, get on at Krabi's Th Maharat to the Talat Kao junction for 20B, then change to any bus or sörng-tāa-ou heading east on Hwy 4 towards Trang and tell the driver 'Wat Tham Seua' – these can be rather infrequent, though. Get off at the road on the left just past the small police station. Motorcycle taxis hang out here and drivers charge 25B to the wát, or you can walk the 2km straight up the road.

Tharnbok Koranee National Park

อุทยานแห่งชาติธารโบกขรณี

Close to the small town of Ao Luk, about 46km northwest of Krabi, **Tharnbok Koranee National Park** (Than Bok; adult/child under 14 yr 200/100B) protects a large area of islands, mangroves and limestone caves. The most important cave here is **Tham Pee Hua Toe** (Big-Headed Ghost Cave), reached by long-tail boat or sea kayak from the pier at Ban Bho Tho, 7km south of Ao Luk. Legend has it that a huge human skull was found in the cave, but the ghost story probably has more to do with the 2000- to 3000-year-old cave paintings that adorn the cave walls. Nearby **Tham Lot** (Tube Cave) can also be navigated by boat. Both caves are popular destinations for sea-kayaking tours

from Krabi or Ao Nang, but you can also hire sea kayaks and guides at Bho Tho pier (900B); long-tails are available for 400B.

There are at least seven other caves in the park, including **Tham Sa Yuan Thong**, a few kilometres southeast of Ao Luk, which has a natural spring bubbling into a pool at its mouth. The national park also includes the uninhabited island of **Ko Hong**, with fine beaches, jungle-cloaked cliffs and a scenic hidden lagoon. Sea-kayak and long-tail tours come here from Ao Nang.

Just to the south of Ao Luk, the park headquarters is a popular picnic spot. It has a series of babbling brooks and emerald pools, shaded by small jungle trees and linked by little waterfalls. The usual vendors sell noodles, fried chicken, batter-fried squid and *sôm-dam* (spicy green papaya salad). There's also a small **visitors centre** (☎ 6am-6pm) that has displays in Thai and English.

Ao Luk has a few places to stay or you can camp (with permission from the park headquarters). Otherwise try the simple bamboo huts at **Ao Luk Bungalow** (☎ 0 7568 1369; bungalows 250-300B), just before the turn-off to the park headquarters.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The park headquarters is about 1.5km south of Ao Luk town along Rte 4039. Buses and sörng-tāa-ou from Krabi stop on Hwy 4. Catch a government bus to Pha-Ngan or Phuket and ask to be let off at Ao Luk (60B, one hour), from where you can walk down to the park headquarters or take a motorcycle taxi for 15B. The easiest way to get to Tham Pee Hua Toe and Tham Lot is on a sea-kayaking tour from Krabi or Ao Nang.

To get to Ban Bho Tho from Ao Luk under your own steam, take a motorcycle taxi (70B) or a Laem Sak sörng-tāa-ou (20B) to the Tham Pee Hua Toe turn-off on Rte 4039. From the junction it's about 2km to Ban Bho Tho along the first signposted road on the left.

AO NANG

อำเภอนาง

pop 12,400

It's bland tourist land and a little cheesy, but if you've been out in the islands and are hankering for plentiful shopping, fast internet and maybe a fast-food burger, this is your stop. The beach here is nothing compared

to those in Railay or on Ko Phi-Phi but it's white, clean and leads out to a gentle, emerald green sea. Accommodation standards are high, and although it's not cheap here compared with Krabi town or south towards Trang, this is a bargain basement in comparison to Phuket. With plenty to do (mangrove tours? snorkelling trips?) and only 40 minutes away from the Krabi airport, it's no wonder this beach is becoming increasingly popular.

This is the main jumping-off point for the nearby beaches of Railay, only a 20-minute long-tail boat ride away. If you're looking for a groovier beach scene, skip Ao Nang and get your pack to this next beach.

Information

All the information offices on the strip are private tour agencies, and most offer international calls and internet access for around 1B per minute. Several banks have ATMs and foreign exchange windows (open from 10am to 8pm) on the main drag.

Activities

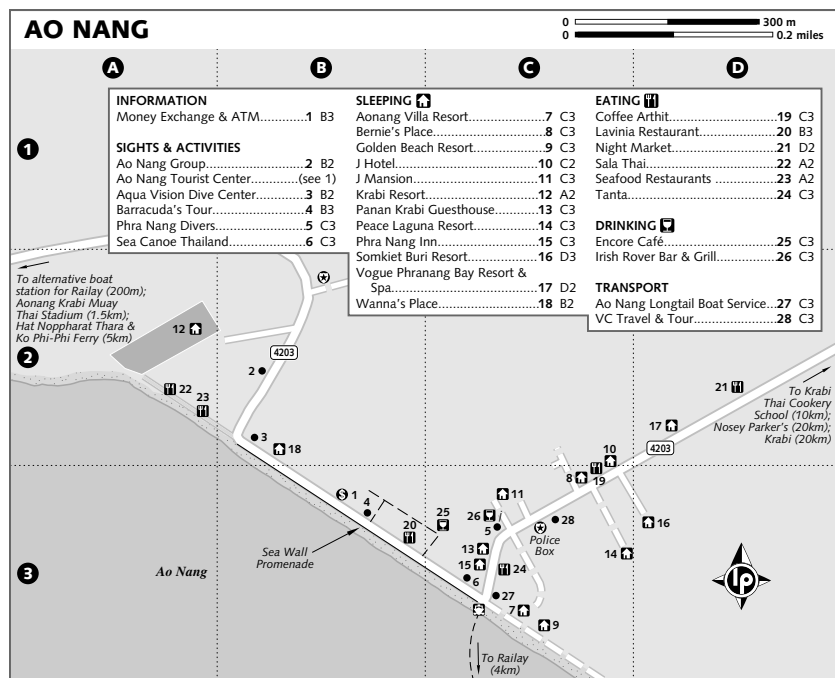
Loads of activities are possible at Ao Nang and children under 12 years typically get a 50% discount.

KAYAKING

At least seven companies offer kayaking tours to mangroves and islands around Ao Nang. Popular destinations include the scenic sea lagoon at Ko Hong (1500B to 1800B), where you get to paddle inside the island and view collection points for sea swallow nests (used in the Chinese delicacy bird's-nest soup). There are also trips to the lofty sea cliffs and wildlife-filled mangroves at Ao Thalane (half-/full day 900/1300B) and to the sea caves and 2000- to 3000-year-old paintings at Ban Bho Tho (1400B; see opposite) – the caves are also filled with layers of archaeological shell formations. These rates include lunch, fruit, drinking water, sea kayaks and guides. The better companies are **Sea Canoe Thailand** (☎ 0 7569 5387) and **Ao Nang Group** (☎ 0 7563 7660/1).

DIVING & SNORKELLING

Ao Nang has numerous dive schools offering trips to dive sites at nearby Railay's Laem Phra Nang. It costs about 3000B for two dives. Ko Mae Urai is one of the more unique local



dives, with two submarine tunnels lined with soft and hard corals. Other trips run further afield to sites around Ko Phi-Phi or Hin Daeng and Hin Muang, southwest of Ko Lanta (3600B for two dives). A PADI Open Water course will set you back 14,500B to 16,000B. Reliable dive schools include **Phra Nang Divers** (☎ 0 7563 7064; www.pndivers.com) and **Aqua Vision Dive Center** (☎ 0 7563 7415; www.aqua-vision.net). Most dive companies can also arrange snorkelling trips in the area. For snorkelling, also see boxed text, opposite.

ELEPHANT TREKKING

Several operators run elephant treks in the forest surrounding Ao Nang. **Nosey Parker's** (☎ 0 9291 0964; Rte 4202; adult/child 1hr trek 750/400B, half-day trek 1650/850B) is based about 7km from Ao Nang and offers treks along jungle streams where you have the chance to spot monkeys and exotic birds. You can also do elephant treks through the jungle to Tham Srakaew for 900B. This scenic cave with hanging stalactites was used as a location for the film *The Beach*.

ROCK CLIMBING

Most agencies can arrange rock-climbing courses in Railay, but these are just as easy to arrange yourself – just take a long-tail boat to Hat Rai Leh West (p337) first thing in the morning and approach any of the companies there.

CYCLING

Take a Tour de Krabi by hooking up with **Krabi Eco Cycle** (☎ 0 7563 7250; scubawut@yahoo.com; 41/2 Muu 5; half-/full day tour 700/1700B, half-day cycle & kayak tour 1000B). The recommended full-day 15.5km pedal takes you through rubber and oil plantations, small villages, hot springs and, finally, a cooler dip at the aptly named 'Emerald Pool'. Lunch is included on all tours except the half-day bike-only tour.

Courses

Krabi Thai Cookery School (☎ 0 7569 5133; www.thaicookeryschool.net; 269 Muu 2, Ao Nang, Rte 4204) is about 10km from Ao Nang between Wat Sai Thai and Ao Nam Mao and offers half-/one-day Thai-cooking courses for 1000/2200B; transfers are included in the price.

Tours

Any agency worth its salt can book you on one of the popular four-/five-island tours (see boxed text, below). Several tour agencies offer tours to Khlong Thom, including visits to freshwater pools, hot springs and the Wat Khlong Thom Museum; the price is 1200/900B per adult/child. So-called 'mystery tours' visit local snake farms, rural villages, crystal pools and rubber, pineapple, banana and papaya plantations and cost around 1300/600B. Tour agencies also offer trips to attractions around Ao Phang-Nga and to a number of dubious animal shows around Ao Nang.

You can also do day tours to Ko Phi-Phi on the **Ao Nang Princess** (per adult/child 1300/950B). The boat leaves from the Hat Noppharat Thara National Park headquarters at 9am and visits Bamboo Island, Phi-Phi Don and Phi-Phi Leh.

Reliable tour agencies include **Barracuda's Tour** (☎ 0 7563 7092) and the very helpful **Ao Nang Tourist Center** (☎ 0 7563 7551; www.aonangtouristcenter.com), both on the main beachfront strip.

Sleeping

Prices at all these places drop by 50% during the low season.

BUDGET

You'll find many guesthouses crammed together in a small alley. They are just up from the beach at the eastern end of the strip.

Bernie's Place (☎ 0 7563 7093; r 200-600B) Bernie's will excite the penniless in high season – rooms max out at just 600B. You'll have to share a bathroom and the mattresses are extremely soft, but rooms are big and bright with ceiling fans. The big bar and backpacker-priced buffets (all you can eat for 190B) mean it will likely have a travellers' vibe once word gets out.

Panan Krabi Guesthouse (☎ 0 7563 8105; r 600-800B; ☑) The dinky rooms have a touch of style with their cream-coloured walls and arty fuzzy-paper light shades. Each room has its own TV and there's a chic café on the ground floor.

our pick J Mansion (☎ 0 7569 5128/9; r 500-900B; ☑) One of the best-value abodes in town – the rooms are spotless and come decked out with TVs, air-con and minifridges. As a result, it's eternally booked up – call well ahead if you want to stay here. The rooftop is the best asset. Head up here with a few beers at sunset and check out the fabulous views across to Railay. J Mansion also runs an honest, fairly priced travel agency.

J Hotel (☎ 0 7563 7878; j_hotelo@hotmail.com; r 350-1800B; ☑) J Mansion's sister property (owned by the same friendly family), J Hotel is nearly as good as the original, is just up the street and might actually have a room available. Rooms are huge, bright and have satellite TV and terraces (angle for one with a sea/town view).

ISLAND HOP TILL YOU DROP

A must-do activity if you have the time is a half- or full-day island tour. You get to zoom around on a long-tail boat to several green isles that are fringed by luscious beaches, snorkel among vibrant coral and explore impressive caves and cliffs – it's the perfect day out.

Tours visit **Ko Hua Khwan** (Chicken Island), with excellent snorkelling reefs and a rock formation that looks surprisingly like poultry; **Ko Poda**, with a handsome stretch of white beach; and **Ko Taloo**, which is a tall rock formation that has an underwater swim-through. These trips also take in **Tham Phra Nang** (Princess Cave; p338), the location of a 'princess spirit house' that's revered by locals; **Ko Hong**, with a hidden lagoon surrounded by cliffs; **Ko Lading**, which is a major bird's-nest collection point and has sublime beaches; and **Ko Daeng**, where you'll find more great snorkelling. **Ko Rai** and **Ko Pakiba** are other island gems often tacked onto a tour.

From Ao Nang you can charter a long-tail from the **Ao Nang Longtail Boat Service** (☎ 0 7569 5474; www.aonanglongtailboatservice.com) to Ko Hong, Ko Lading and Ko Daeng (2500B) or to Ko Poda and Chicken Island with Tham Phra Nang (2000B). Prices are listed on the 'Boat Service' office window and are for a maximum of six people. You'll need your own gear. Otherwise pay more for a five-island all-inclusive tour at tour companies found all over Ao Nang, Railay and Krabi (around 850B per person). If you're willing to pay 200B to 400B extra you can even go by speedboat, which gives you more time to frolic at each destination.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Most accommodation in Ao Nang falls into this bracket. The following places are recommended, but there are dozens of other options.

Somkiet Buri Resort (☎ 0 7563 7320; www.somkietburi.com; r 2000-3000B; 🏠 🍷) This place just might inspire you to slip into a yoga pose. The lush jungle grounds are filled with ferns and orchids, while lagoons, streams and meandering wooden walkways guide you to the 26 large and creatively designed rooms. A great swimming pool is set amid it all – balconies either face this pool or a peaceful pond. The service is first-rate.

Phra Nang Inn (☎ 0 7563 7130; phranang@sun.phuket.ksc.co.th; r incl breakfast 2300-5500B; 🏠 🍷) An artistic explosion of rustic coconut wood, bright orange and purple paint and plenty of elaborate Thai tiles – Phra Nang is Boho and chic. There are two pools, and a second, similarly designed branch is across the road from the original.

Peace Laguna Resort (☎ 0 7563 7345; www.peace.lagunaresort.com; r 1300-2200B, bungalows 2500-6000B; 🏠 🍷) Sweet, modern cottages, some boasting polished ceramic floors, sit around a large lagoon on lush grounds while a limestone cliff basks in the background. The priciest rooms (deluxe and superior cottages) have open-air Balinese-style showers, in-room Jacuzzis and huge windows. You can score great deals in the off season.

Vogue Phranang Bay Resort & Spa (☎ 0 7563 7635; www.vogueresort.com; r 2100-6800B; 🏠 🍷) Rooms have big windows – ask for one facing the sea – and mix tiles and wooden floors in a Zen architectural collage. Bathrooms have separate showers (complete with doors – rare here). The grounds are peaceful with lots of jungle foliage and there's a big round swimming pool, with sea and sunset views.

Krabi Resort (☎ 0 7563 7030, Bangkok 0 2208 9165; www.krabi-resort.com; r & bungalows 4200-9000B; 🏠 🍷) The original Ao Nang luxury resort is ageing gracefully, maintaining quality rooms and luxury bungalows on peaceful, 7-hectare grounds, some right near the beach. There is an on-site dive school, a restaurant and a bar.

Golden Beach Resort (☎ 0 7563 7870-74; www.krabigoldenbeach.com; r 4500-6000B, bungalows 6000-10,000B; 🏠 🍷) This swanky modern resort is made up of large hotel blocks and stylish bungalows arranged in a tidy garden around a big pool. The outdoor restaurant is lit up like a Christmas tree at night and hosts slightly

cheesy live music (think electric keyboards and '80s covers).

Also recommended:

Wanna's Place (☎ 0 7563 7322; www.wannasplace.com; r 1875-1975B, bungalows 2290-2390B; 🏠 🍷) It's quite popular.

Aonang Villa Resort (☎ 0 7563 7270; www.aonangvilla-resort.com; r 3400-7500B; 🏠 🍷) A swank seaside joint.

Eating

At the western end of the beach is Soi Sunset, a narrow alley housing a number of seafood restaurants. They all have bamboo seating abutting the ocean, and model boats at the entrance showing off the day's catch. One of the best (and most popular) is **Sala Thai** (dishes 60-300B; 🍴 lunch & dinner).

Coffee Arthit (☎ 0 7563 7847; breakfast from 80B; 🍴 8am-midnight) Serves excellent all-day Western-style breakfasts, espresso and cocktails and is one of the only places in town with wi-fi.

Lavinia Restaurant (pizza & pasta 80-200B; 🍴 lunch & dinner) The best of several Italian places on the main drag, Lavinia does convincing pizza and pasta, served up at wooden bench tables.

Tanta (☎ 0 7563 7118; dishes 60-250B; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Tanta offers a great selection of Thai and international dishes and the thin-crust pizza is delicious and not too doughy. It's a popular modern place with a raised covered terrace and wood accents.

For meals if on a tight budget, an informal night market is set up along the road to Krabi (near the McDonald's), serving *gàitòrt* (fried chicken), *pàt tai* (thin rice noodles fried with tofu, vegetables, egg and peanuts) and the like.

Drinking & Entertainment

Irish Rover Bar & Grill (☎ 0 7563 7607) Readers like this typical Irish pub specialising in draught Guinness and Kilkenny. Sports fans will appreciate the TV broadcasting English footy matches and South African cricket. The place also features live music, tropical cocktails and pool tables.

Encore Café (🍴 4pm-2am Dec-Mar; 🏠) This modern air-con space has pool tables and live music five nights a week. It's mostly popular with holidaying Thais and has karaoke and sports on TV, depending on which night you go.

Aonang Krabi Muay Thai Stadium (☎ 0 7562 1042; admission 500B, ringside incl 1 beer 1000B) If you

get tired of the beach-bars and video movies on the strip, this place has boisterous *moo-ay tai* (often spelt *muay thai*; Thai boxing) bouts every Friday from 8.45pm. A free *sörnng-tâa-ou* runs along the strip at Ao Nang, collecting punters before the bouts.

Getting There & Around

Ao Nang is served by regular *sörnng-tâa-ou* from Krabi (40B, 20 minutes). These start at the Krabi bus terminal (add 10B to the fare) and then pass by the 7-Eleven on Th Maharat and the Khong Kha pier in Krabi, continuing on to Hat Noppharat Thara, Ao Nang and finally the Shell Cemetery. From Ao Nang to Hat Noppharat Thara or the Shell Cemetery it's 20B.

Dozens of places along the strip rent out small motorcycles for 150B to 200B. **VC Travel & Tour** (☎ 0 1737 8450), right in front of the police box, has imported 400cc motorcycles for 500B per day. Budget Car Hire has desks at most of the big resort hotels and charges around 1600B per day for a dinky Suzuki micro-4WD.

Boats to Railay's Hat Rai Leh West are run by **Ao Nang Longtail Boat Service** (☎ 0 7569 5474; www.aonanglongtailboatservice.com) and rates are fixed at 100B per person for the 15-minute journey – boats leave when full. During hours when the 'Boat Service' office is closed you'll have to haggle with long-tail captains directly, although the price should still be 100B if the boat is full (seven to eight people). During rough seas, boats leave from a sheltered cove about 200m west of Ao Nang – you can get here from Ao Nang by motorcycle taxi (30B), *sörnng-tâa-ou* (10B) or on foot.

There are also boats to Ko Phi-Phi from nearby Hat Noppharat Thara (see right).

**AROUND AO NANG
Hat Noppharat Thara**

หาดนพรัตน์ธารา

Ao Nang's growth spurt is quickly seeping over into once peaceful Hat Noppharat Thara and the effect is disheartening. The beach is currently in the phase of having too much in common with Ao Nang to have character, yet it's not developed enough to be much fun. Although technically 4km from Ao Nang, the two beaches have a commercial strip that links them together almost seamlessly. The further north you go along Hat Noppharat Thara (away from Ao Nang), the more peace you'll find.

This beach is the headquarters for Ko Phi-Phi Marine National Park and is a popular local picnic spot on weekends. There's a small visitors centre with displays on coral reefs and mangrove ecology, labelled in Thai and English.

SLEEPING & EATING

Midrange development dominates the main drag that runs along the beach from Ao Nang – budget digs are found inland towards the Ao Nang Krabi Muay Thai Boxing Stadium.

Government bungalows (☎ 0 7563 7200; 2-6-person tents 300B, 2-person bungalows 600B, 6-8-person bungalows 1200B or per person 200B) These bungalows at the park headquarters are well maintained with fans, bathrooms and mosquito nets on the windows. Tents are also available if you want the full primitive experience. A small canteen serves meals in the evenings.

Laughing Gecko (☎ 0 7569 5115; www.laughinggecko.thailand.com; dm 150B, bungalows 300-700B) Island-style bamboo-basic huts are a welcome addition to this town. There's a great travellers' vibe and an artistically decorated restaurant with all-you-can-eat Thai buffets for around 150B.

Srisuksant Resort (☎ 0 7563 8002; www.srisuksant-resort.com; r 1900-2100B; 🏠 🍷) At the Ao Nang end of the beach, this new, vaguely stylish, roadside resort is great value for this standard. It's both a short walk to the attractions of Ao Nang or the quieter strip of Hat Noppharat Thara.

Emerald Bungalows (☎ 0 1956 2566; http://der-workshop.de/emerald/emeraldhomepage.html; bungalows 1700-2800B; 🍴 Oct-Apr; 🏠 🍷) A comfy upmarket option with plain, clean bungalows in a large garden at the peaceful northern end of the beach.

Around the national park headquarters there are several restaurants serving the usual Thai snack meals such as fried chicken and papaya salad.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Sörnng-tâa-ou between Krabi and Ao Nang stop in Hat Noppharat Thara; the fare is 40B from Krabi or 10B from Ao Nang.

From November to May the *Ao Nang Princess* runs between Ko Phi-Phi Marine National Park headquarters and Ko Phi-Phi (350B, two hours). The boat leaves from the national park jetty at 9am, returning from Ko Phi-Phi at 3.30pm. It also stops at Railay's Hat Rai Leh West. This boat can also be used for day trips to Ko Phi-Phi (p343). During the same high-season months there's also a

direct boat to Phuket, leaving from the same pier at 3.30pm (450B) and to Ko Lanta at 10.30am (450B).

Shell Cemetery

สุสานหอย

About 9km east of Ao Nang at the western end of Ao Nam Mao is the **Shell Cemetery**, also known as Gastropod Fossil or Su-San Hoi. Here you can see giant slabs formed from millions of tiny 75-million-year-old fossil shells. There's a small **visitors centre** (admission 50B; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm) with geological displays and various stalls selling snacks. Sörng-tãa-ou from Ao Nang cost 20B.

RAILAY

ไร่เลย์

With Krabi Province's signature vertical limestone karsts framing pearl-white beaches and luscious aquamarine sea, Railay (also spelled Rai Leh) is the kind of place you wish you had to yourself – but unfortunately this is no secret spot. It's just around the corner from Ao Nang and Krabi town but is protected by impenetrable cliffs, which completely cuts the peninsula off from the mainland hubbub. The only way to get here is by boat and there are no cars or motorbikes, so you'll have to keep reminding yourself you're not on an island.

Despite the fact that every beach out here has been filled in with bungalows, development is neatly tucked away in the coconut palms and lush gardens so it doesn't feel cramped. The beaches do get crowded in high season but there is so much more to do here than cook on the beach: for many adventure seekers Railay is best known for the hundreds of excellent rock-climbing routes afforded by the surrounding cliffs. Loads of climbing shops cater to visitors wishing to scramble up the karsts, providing equipment rental and instruction for beginners and advanced climbers alike. If rocks aren't your thing, check out the local caves, try diving, a snorkelling trip or rent out a kayak for the day.

Hat Rai Leh East is the most developed beach and is where boats from Krabi arrive. The shallow, muddy beach lined with mangroves is the heart of the action and only a five-minute walk over the peninsula to the lounge-worthy sands of **Hat Rai Leh West**. This near-flawless, white wonder is the best place to watch the sun go down. Tastefully designed midrange resorts line the beach and dozens of

long-tail boats make pick-ups and drop-offs from here to nearby Ao Nang. At the tip of the headland, **Hat Phra Nang** is quite possibly one of the world's most beautiful beaches with squeaky white sand, overhanging karst cliffs, frolicking monkeys and views of limestone islets peeking out of the cerulean sea. Rayavadee, the peninsula's most exclusive resort, is the only one on this beach but anyone can go and throw down their beach towel. Hat Ton Sai is the grittier climbers' and backpackers' retreat and is reached by long-tail (either directly from Ao Nang or from Hat Rai Leh West) or by a sweaty 20-minute scramble over limestone rocks from the northern end of Hat Rai Leh West.

Information

The website www.railay.com has lots of information about Railay. There are two ATMs along Hat Rai Leh East and another at the Flame Tree restaurant (p341) on Hat Rai Leh West. On Hat Ton Sai there is one ATM near the Ton Sai Bay Resort but it only operates from November through May. Several of the bigger resorts can change cash and travellers cheques. Internet access is available throughout all the beaches for 2B per minute. For minor climbing injuries there's a small clinic at Railay Bay Resort (p341).

Sights

At the eastern end of Hat Phra Nang is **Tham Phra Nang** (Princess Cave), an important shrine for local fishermen. Legend has it that a royal barge carrying an Indian princess foundered in a storm here during the 3rd century BC. The spirit of the drowned princess came to inhabit the cave, granting favours to all who came to pay respect. Local fishermen – Muslim and Buddhist – place carved wooden phalluses in the cave as offerings in the hope that the spirit will provide plenty of fish.

About halfway along the path from Hat Rai Leh East to Hat Phra Nang, a crude path leads up the jungle-cloaked cliff wall to a hidden lagoon known as **Sa Phra Nang** (Holy Princess Pool). There's a dramatic viewpoint over the peninsula from the nearby cliff top, but be warned that this is a strenuous hike with some serious vertigo-inducing parts.

Above Hat Rai Leh East is another large cave called **Tham Phra Nang Nai** (Inner Princess Cave; adult/child 40/20B; ☎ 5am-8pm), also known as Diamond Cave. A wooden boardwalk leads

through a series of illuminated caverns full of beautiful limestone formations, including a splendid 'stone waterfall' of sparkling gold-coloured quartz.

Activities

ROCK CLIMBING

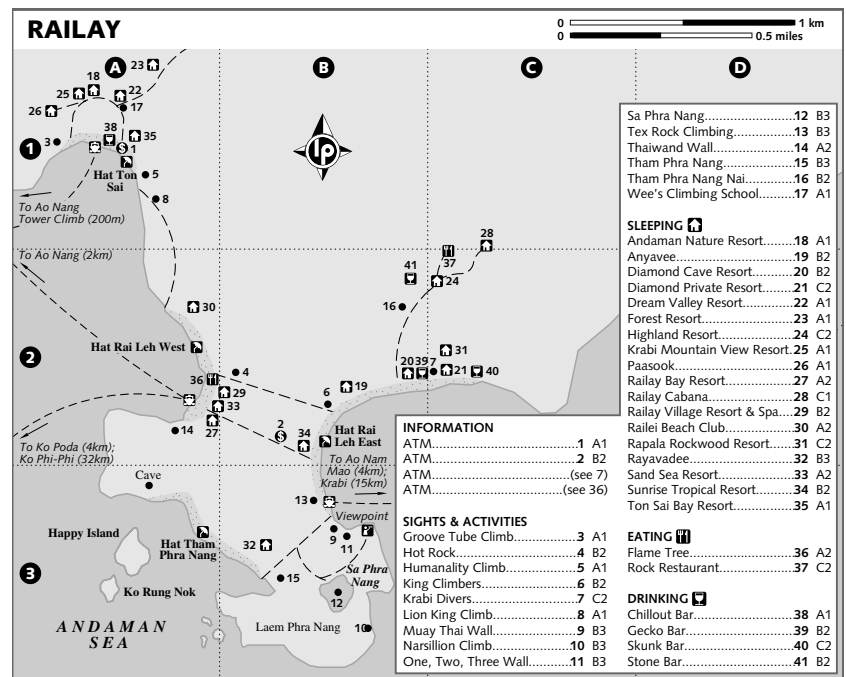
With nearly 500 bolted routes and unparalleled cliff-top vistas, it's no surprise that these dramatic rock faces lay claim to being among the top climbing spots in the world. There are so many climbing options, ranging from beginner routes to challenging advanced climbs, that you could spend months climbing and exploring – and many people do. The newest buzz is about deep water-soloing where climbers free-climb ledges over deep water – if you fall you will most likely just get wet so even daring beginners can give this a try.

Most climbers start off at **Muay Thai Wall** and **One, Two, Three Wall**, at the southern end of Hat Rai Leh East, which have at least 40 routes graded from 4b to 8b on the French system. The mighty **Thaiwand Wall** sits at the

southern end of Hat Rai Leh West and offers a sheer limestone cliff with some of the most challenging climbing routes.

Other top climbs include: **Groove Tube** (good for beginners and intermediate climbers), **Humanity** (an exceedingly popular multi-pitch climb), **Lion King** (for a challenge), **Narsillon** (also challenging and only accessible at low tide) and **Ao Nang Tower** (a three-pitch climbing wall reached only by long-tail – many people only do the first two pitches as the last is so challenging).

The going rate for climbing courses is 800B to 1000B for a half-day and 1500B to 2000B for a full day. Three-day courses (5000B to 6000B) will involve lead-climbing, where you clip into bolts on the rock face as you ascend. Experienced climbers can hire gear sets from any of the climbing schools for 600/1000B for a half-/full day – the standard set consists of a 60m rope, two climbing harnesses and climbing shoes. If you're planning to climb independently, you're best off bringing your own gear from home; be sure to bring plenty of slings and quickdraws, chalk (sweaty palms



LOCAL VOICE: ELKE SCHMITZ & WEE CHANGRUA

Elke Schmitz and Wee Changruea are the authors of *Rock Climbing in Thailand* and run Wee's Climbing School on Hat Ton Sai.

What are the most important things to look for when choosing a climbing school? Unlike diving, which has PADI, there is no independent organisation that certifies climbers and climbing schools so you'll have to judge a place on your own. For a half- or full-day introductory course everyone in Railay climbs in the same areas all together so it doesn't really matter which school you choose. If you want to take a longer course the quality will depend 100% on your instructor. Ask where the instructors were trained – also ask how long the instructor has been teaching. There should be a syllabus available that covers plenty of safety instruction and by the end of a three-day course you should know how to lead climb, belay another climber and be able to judge safety. For a five-day course there should be training in multi pitching. Make sure there are textbooks and theory, not just on-the-rock training. Your worst-case scenario is getting led around for three to five days with little instruction. Established shops should all have insurance – if you go climbing with some guy you meet on the beach, chances are you won't be insured or even get the best local support if you get hurt.

are inevitable in the tropics) and a small selection of nuts and cams as backup for thinly protected routes. If you forget anything, some climbing schools sell a small range of imported climbing gear but they might not have exactly what you need or the right size. A woven rat-tan mat (available locally for 100B to 150B) will help keep the sand out of your gear.

Several locally published books detail climbs in the area, but *Rock Climbing in Thailand* (1000B), by Elke Schmitz and Wee Changruea, is one of the more complete guides. There are climbing shops all over Railay – see boxed text, above, for details on how to pick the right one for you. Recommended shops include:

Hot Rock (☎ 0 7562 1771; www.railayadventure.com; Hat Rai Leh West) Has a very good reputation and is owned by Luang, one of the granddaddies of Railay climbing.

King Climbers (☎ 0 7563 7125; www.railay.com; Hat Rai Leh West) One of the biggest, oldest, most reputable and commercial schools.

Tex Rock Climbing (☎ 0 7563 1509; www.thaipro.com/z1032b/799_thailand.html; Hat Rai Leh East) A tiny, venerable school where the owner still climbs and runs the school direct from the shop.

Wee's Climbing School (www.geocities.com/wee_rocks/tonesai; Hat Ton Sai) The place to go if you're serious about learning to climb – this is arguably the most professional outfit in the area.

WATER SPORTS

Several **dive** operations in Railay run trips out to Ko Poda and other neighbouring dive sites. **Krabi Divers** (☎ 0 7562 1686/7; www.viewpoint

resort66.com; Hat Rai Leh East), at Railay Viewpoint Resort, charges 6100B for two dives at outlying islands. A three- or four-day PADI Open Water dive course is 14,800B.

Snorkelling trips to Ko Poda and Ko Hua Khwan (Chicken Island) can be arranged through any of the resorts for about 850B by long-tail or 1100B by speedboat. Longer multi-island trips cost 1100/1900B per half-/full day. If you just want to snorkel off Railay, most resorts can rent you a mask set and fins for 150B each.

The Flame Tree restaurant (see opposite) at Hat Rai Leh West rents out **sea kayaks** for 200B per hour. Overnight trips to deserted islands can be arranged with local boat owners but you'll need to bring your own camping gear and food.

Sleeping & Eating

HAT RAI LEH WEST

It's all pretty much midrange and top-end options on this beach (where sunsets are fabulous), but rates often drop by 30% in the low season. All the resorts have decent restaurants.

Sand Sea Resort (☎ 0 7562 2170; www.krabisandsea.com; bungalows 1950-5950B; ♿ ♻️) The lowest-priced resort on this beach offers everything from ageing fan-only bungalows to newly remodelled cottages with every amenity. The grounds aren't as swank as the neighbours, but rooms are comfy enough and there's a peaceful karst-view, foliage-enclosed pool – if you're able to tear yourself away from that sublime beach out front that is. The restaur-

ant here does a full buffet breakfast, which is included in the room rate.

Railei Beach Club (☎ 0 7562 2582; www.raileibeachclub.com; houses 3700-9000B) Hidden in forested grounds at the northern end of the beach, this is a collection of Thai-styled homes, each unique in size and design. The houses are rented out by their foreign owners while they are back home and come with patios, kitchens and amenities to make extended stays very comfortable. Some houses sleep up to eight people. Book well in advance for the high season.

Railay Village Resort & Spa (☎ 0 7562 2578-80; www.railayvillagekrabi.com; bungalows 5700-10,600B; ♿ ♻️) Very posh bungalows with private hot tubs are spread throughout gardens of lily ponds, tall palms and gurgling fountains. The open-air restaurant serves excellent green curry and particularly convincing Western-style pastas that are a boon if you're travelling with children.

our pick **Railay Bay Resort** (☎ 0 7562 2570-2; www.railaybayresort.com; bungalows 2900-11,500B; ♿) The amoeba-shaped blue pool here faces onto the best bit of the beach so you can switch between salt and fresh water. Elegant bungalows with big windows, white walls and rustic-chic timber terraces run right across the peninsula to Hat Rai Leh East via gorgeously planted grounds and a second pool. Bungalows on the east side are older with dark-tinted windows and are the least expensive. The spa, which also overlooks the sea, offers a host of treatments at very reasonable prices. We found the restaurant here to be a notch up in style, service, cuisine and, of course price, from everywhere else on this beach and Hat Rai Leh East.

Flame Tree (dishes around 150B) A hopping joint packed all day and into the night. We found the food overpriced and mediocre and the service terrible but it does have an extensive menu and a lively atmosphere. The bar/restaurant now extends east into its own minimal with art galleries, clothing stores and a bookshop.

HAT RAI LEH EAST

Often referred to as Sunrise Beach, the beach along here tends towards mud flats during low tide. The resorts on the hillside above the beach get sea breezes, but down on the beach it can feel like a sauna in the evenings. The following rates drop by half in the low season.

Railay Cabana (☎ 0 8695 78096; bungalows 150-300B) Superbly located deep in the jungle and high in the hills in a bowl of karst cliffs, this uber-rustic, Rasta-run place is the cheapest in Railay.

Highland Resort (☎ 0 7562 1732; bungalows 500B) In the middle of a natural basin above Hat Rai Leh East, you'll find spacious, bamboo, stilted bungalows with stylish, elongated glass windows, mosquito net and fan.

Rapala Rockwood Resort (☎ 0 7562 2586; rapala@loxinfo.co.th; bungalows 500-750B) Ramshackle bamboo bungalows have verandas, bathrooms, mosquito nets and fans. The delightful location atop a hill means breezes and views of the sea (as well as your neighbours). There's a cushion-lined restaurant that's perfect for chilling – it serves Thai as well as Indian food and is run by a charming Thai grandma.

Diamond Private Resort (☎ 0 7562 1729; www.diamondprivate-railay.com; r 1900-3500B; ♿ ♻️) This resort has a pool high up on the hilltop with a deck sporting great views of the bay below. The rooms and bungalows come with TVs, hot showers and minibars and are set in well-landscaped gardens.

Diamond Cave Resort (☎ 0 7562 2589; www.diamondcave-railay.com; r 1500-4000B; ♿ ♻️) It's pretty cheesy and the grounds are heavy on the concrete but these air-conditioned bungalows, up a hill and well off the beach, are OK if elsewhere is full. Fan-only rooms are flimsy but a good deal if you don't need air-con and don't like bamboo huts. There's a large restaurant right on the beach.

our pick **Sunrise Tropical Resort** (☎ 0 7562 2599; www.sunrisetropical.com; bungalows 3500-4500B; ♿ ♻️) Bungalows here rival the better ones on Hat Rai Leh West but are priced for Hat Rai Leh East – it's only a five-minute walk to the west beach and even easier access to Hat Tham Phra Nang (the best beach), so we think this is the best deal in Railay. Grand Thai-style villas smell like jasmine and have window nooks, satin settees and spa-like bathrooms with luminescent aqua green tiles. Everything is in a lush garden with an astounding variety of tropical plants; breakfast is included.

Anyavee (☎ 0 8153 75517; www.anyavee.com; bungalows 2500-7000B; ♿ ♻️) An awkward resort but one with more style than most on this beach, bungalows here have lots of windows making them bright but not private. Interiors are country-chic with cream and beige plaid duvets and plenty of hardwoods.

our pick **Rock Restaurant** (meals 80-120B; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Up past Highland Resort, amid dense jungle and karst cliffs, it's actually best to dine here during the day to appreciate the view. The food (Thai and Western) is great anytime – try to get one of the intimate shaded booths at the jungle's edge.

There's a very social cluster of reasonably priced restaurants serving Westernised Thai food and fresh(ish) seafood from 50B to 200B at the far eastern end of this beach. Some show movies and later in the night the area turns into a fun, low-key bar scene.

HAT THAM PHRA NANG

There's only one place to stay on this magnificent beach and it's a doozy.

Rayavadee (☎ 0 7562 0740-3; www.rayavadee.com; pavilions 26,090-33,110B, villas 40,900-112,300B) This exclusive colonial-style resort has sprawling, immaculate grounds navigated by golf buggies and dotted with meandering ponds. The two-storey, mushroom-domed rooms are filled with antique furniture and every mod con you need in a home away from home. Classical music wafts throughout the lounge areas and there are a first-rate spa and yoga classes for guests. Two restaurants grace Hat Tham Phra Nang and nonguests can stop in for a pricey but divine meal of Thai or Mediterranean fare.

HAT TON SAI

The beach here isn't much to look at but with so many good climbs all around, most people don't mind. A huge Bangkok company (Deva; www.devaproperty.com) owns most of the beachfront and, at the time of writing, most bars and bungalows had been forced to move off-beach and back into the jungle. Deva had plans to build an assisted living community for the elderly on the beach until it realised that there is no road access. It's a little unclear what will happen in future but development plans could take years. For now, in the low season, rates for bungalows plummet as low as 100B.

Andaman Nature Resort (☎ 0 7562 1667; bungalows 300-500B) A very shabby outfit back in the jungle but this place also manages the old bamboo Mambo bungalows, and these are the closest budget offerings to the beach.

our pick **Paasook** (☎ 0 8964 53013; bungalows 500B) Definitely the most stylish budget establishment on Ton Sai, wooden bungalows here are

huge, have elongated floor to ceiling windows and refreshingly nonsagging floors. This place is at the far western end of the beach, right beneath a karst cliff, so it can become very warm, but the gardens are lush, management is friendly and there's a rustic-chic outdoor restaurant, perfect for steamy evenings.

Forest Resort (☎ 0 8929 00262; bungalows 500-700B) A collection of large, basic thatched bungalows perched on a flowery hillside and run by a super smiley Thai family. A British-run, sari-clad Indian restaurant was just opening up when we passed.

Krabi Mountain View Resort (☎ 0 7562 2610-3; http://citykrabi.com/mountainview.html; bungalows 1200-1900B; ☎) Bright, cheery and immaculate with mint green walls, tiled floors and crisp sheets, this is where you'll find Ton Sai's best-value air-con rooms.

Ton Sai Bay Resort (☎ 0 7562 2584; www.tonsaiabayresort.com; bungalows 1000-2800B; ☎) The poshest option on Ton Sai is also the busiest and the only one fully established on the beach (although only the restaurant is beachfront). Big concrete bungalows with terraces are comfy although a little dated. There's also a clutch of standard bamboo huts further back. With a diving centre, climbing school, minimart and a huge seafood restaurant, everything you need is here.

Dream Valley Resort (☎ 0 7562 2583; www.dreamvalleyresortkrabi.com; r 350-3000B; ☎) Bamboo bungalows are as rustic as the rest around here, while wooden ones with terracotta tiled bathrooms are a step up in comfort. A new block of rather pricey air-con rooms was under construction when we visited. There's a minimart and an OK seafood restaurant on-site.

There are a few other bamboo hut-style resorts along the jungle path that have bungalows with bathrooms for around 500B.

Drinking

There's a bunch of places on the beaches where you can unwind and get nicely inebriated.

Chillout Bar (Hat Ton Sai) This place boldly flies the Rasta colours and caters to the chilling needs of climbers after a hard day's scrambling. When we passed it still held its place on the beach.

Stone Bar (Hat Rai Leh East) Up the hill towards the Highland Resort, Stone Bar has an awesome setting under a massive climbing wall, is enveloped by jungle and has a drinking gazebo perched atop a boulder.

Gecko Bar (Hat Rai Leh East) One of several bars scattered around this beach, Gecko Bar keeps you out late then offers you yoga (in high season) on its front deck in the morning.

Skunk Bar (Hat Rai Leh East) Plays excellent, scratchy roots reggae on a turntable and has one of the liveliest vibes around.

Getting There & Around

The only way to get to Railway is by long-tail boat, either from Khong Kha pier in Krabi or from the seafronts of Ao Nang and Ao Nam Mao. Boats between Krabi and Hat Rai Leh East leave every 1½ hours from 7.45am to 6pm when they have 10 people (150B, 45 minutes). Chartering a special trip will set you back 1500B.

Boats to Hat Rai Leh West or Hat Ton Sai leave from the eastern end of the promenade at Ao Nang. The fare is 100B (15 minutes). If seas are rough, boats leave from a sheltered cove just west of Krabi Resort in Ao Nang. You can be dropped at Hat Phra Nang or Hat Ton Sai for the same fare.

During exceptionally high seas the boats from Ao Nang and Krabi stop running, but you may still be able to get from Hat Rai Leh East to Ao Nam Mao (90B, 15 minutes), where you can pick up a sörng-tää-ou to Krabi or Ao Nang.

From October to May the *Ao Nang Princess* runs from Hat Nopparat Thara National Park headquarters to Ko Phi-Phi with a stop at Hat Rai Leh West. Long-tails run out to meet the boat at around 9.15am from in front of the Sand Sea Resort (p340). The fare to Ko Phi-Phi from Railway is 350B.

KO PHI-PHI DON

เกาะพีพีดอน

Oh, how beauty can be a burden. Like Marilyn Monroe, Phi-Phi Don's stunning looks have become its own demise. Everyone wants a piece of her. Though not exactly Hollywood, this is Thailand's Shangri-la: a hedonistic paradise where tourists cavort in radiant azure seas and snap pictures of long-tails puttering between craggy cliffs. With its flashy, curvy, blonde beaches, Technicolor corals and bodacious jungles it's no wonder that Phi-Phi has become the darling of the Andaman coast. And, like any good starlet, this island can party hard all night and still look like a million bucks the next morning. Unfortunately, nothing and nobody can withstand this glamorous

SHELL OUT

Numerous souvenir shops on Ko Phi-Phi Don sell seashells, but these are poached from the surrounding marine national parks. Shell species are becoming extinct here faster than you can say 'she sells seashells', so please don't buy souvenirs made from tropical shells.

pace and unless limits are set, Phi-Phi is in for an ecological crash.

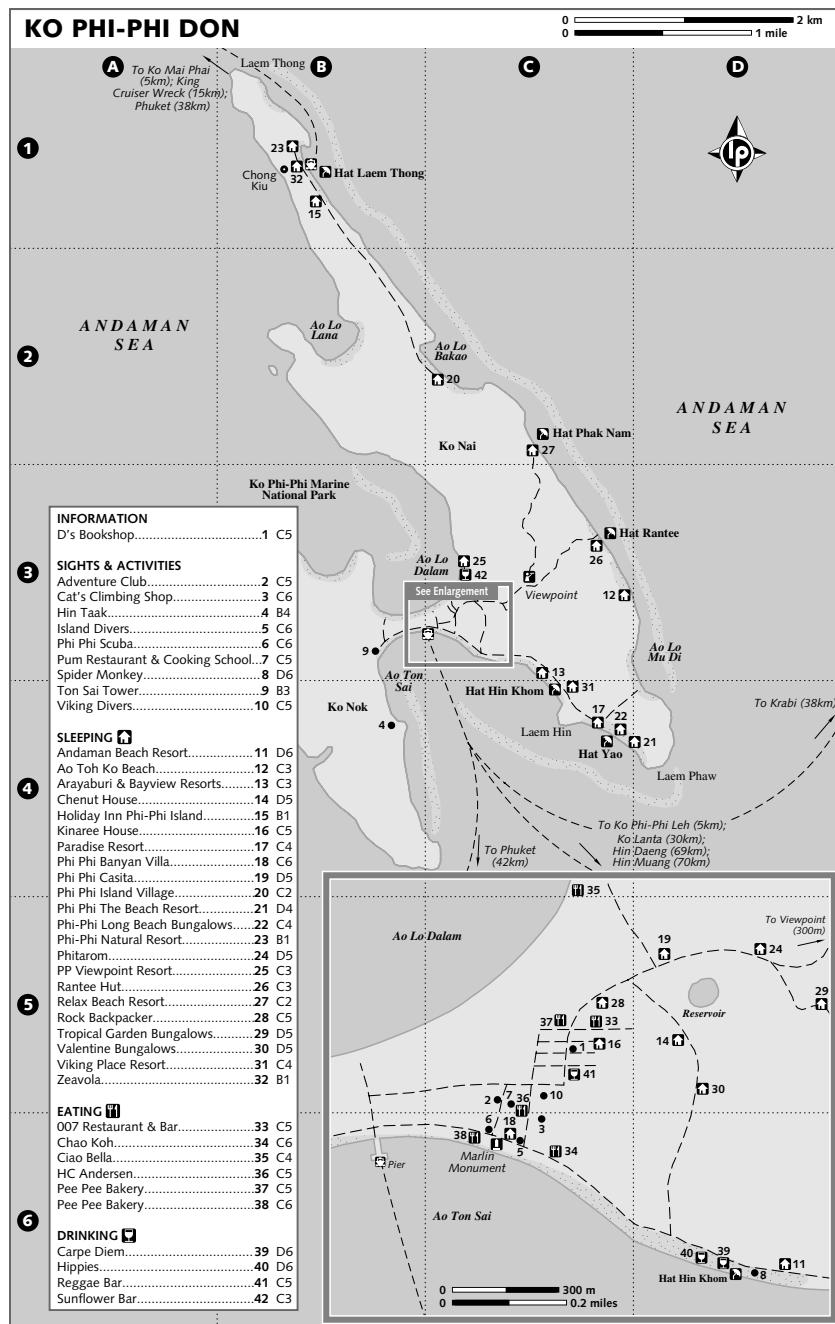
The exceedingly tragic Boxing Day tsunami of 2004 turned back the eco-damage meter when it wiped out nearly every standing structure on the densely populated twin bays of Ao Ton Sai and Ao Lo Dalam. In terms of loss of life and property, Ko Phi-Phi Don was second only to Khao Lak and Bang Niang in Phang-Nga Province. Following the tsunami it was hoped that lessons could be learned from past mistakes, but Ao Ton Sai today looks almost exactly as it did before 24 December 2004. The only differences are a water-treatment plant, opened in 2006, that has suspended water-supply issues and that trash is starting to head into rubbish bins. Do your part in recycling – look for the new rubbish bins and deposit as much garbage as you can find. On the other bays as well, it's business as usual.

Strong tsunami feelings still linger on Phi-Phi through pictures of the volunteers that helped rebuild restaurants and guesthouses, memorials to those who died and a palpable air of thanks, both for being alive and to the tourist industry that helped bring this island back into business – this appreciation extends to all visitors, old and new, and you can't help but feel touched by it.

Although Ko Phi-Phi will seem expensive compared to the rest of Thailand (aside from Phuket and Ko Samui), if you compare it to other pin-up islands around the planet, we think you'll discover this paradise comes pretty damn cheap.

Orientation & Information

Ko Phi-Phi Don (usually just referred to as Ko Phi-Phi) is part of the Ko Phi-Phi Marine National Park, which also includes uninhabited Ko Phi-Phi Leh. Development is forbidden on Phi-Phi Don's little sister, but it can be visited on immensely popular day trips.



Phi-Phi Don is actually two islands joined by a narrow isthmus separating the two prized beaches of Ao Ton Sai and Ao Lo Dalam. Boats dock at the large concrete pier at Ao Ton Sai and a sandy path, crammed full of rickety shacks housing tour operators, bungalows, restaurants, bars and souvenir shops, stretches along the beach towards Hat Hin Khom. The maze of small streets in the middle of this sand bar is equally packed, more slumlike and is euphemistically called 'tourist village'. Hat Yao (Long Beach) faces south and has some of Phi-Phi Don's best coral reefs and one of its most impressive swimming beaches. The beautifully languid and long eastern bays of Hat Laem Thong and Ao Lo Bakao are reserved for several top-end resorts while the smaller bays of Hat Phak Nam, Hat Rantee and Ao Toh Ko are spread thickly throughout the tourist village but aren't available on the more remote eastern beaches. Wi-fi is available at **D's Bookshop** (☎ 10am-10pm) in the heart of the tourist village.

ATMs and internet shops (2B per minute) are spread thickly throughout the tourist village but aren't available on the more remote eastern beaches. Wi-fi is available at **D's Bookshop** (☎ 10am-10pm) in the heart of the tourist village.

Activities

The strenuous climb to the **Phi Phi viewpoint** is a rewarding short hike. Follow the signs from the road heading east towards Ao Lo Dalam from the tourist village. The viewpoint is reached via a 300m vertical climb that includes hundreds of steep steps and narrow twisting paths. The views from the top are amazing – the marine park vistas stretch on forever in colours of aqua, emerald and jade. From here you can head over the hill through the jungle to the peaceful eastern beaches for a DIY snorkelling tour but don't walk there alone.

DIVING & SNORKELLING

The combination of perfectly clear Andaman waters and abundant coral means that Ko Phi-Phi is home to some world-class dive sites. Dozens upon dozens of dive shops compete for your business and tout dive trips and PADI Open Water courses.

The shipwrecked ferry *King Cruiser* lies only 12m below the surface and is visited by dive outfits from both Ko Phi-Phi and Phuket. Phi-Phi's dive shops all charge the same price – an Open Water certification course costs 12,500B, while the standard two-dive trips

cost 3200B, or 3900B if you want to visit the *King Cruiser* wreck. You can also dive out at **Hin Daeng** and **Hin Muang**, 60km off Ko Phi-Phi (5500B for two dives).

Phi Phi Scuba (☎ 0 7561 2665; www.ppscluba.com) and **Island Divers** (☎ 0 7560 1082; www.islanddiverspp.com) are the biggest operators. Both churn out dive certifications by the boatload, and some folks complain about the less-than-personalised service. On the plus side, Island Divers, in particular, pushes eco-friendly scuba – the company encourages wreck dives and doesn't allow clients to touch the coral. Both shops have access to a hyperbaric chamber. **Viking Divers** (☎ 0 1719 3375; www.vikingdivers-thailand.com) is a much smaller outfit that helped with the post-tsunami clean-up of the reefs and comes with good recommendations.

One popular destination for snorkelling is **Ko Mai Phai** (Bamboo Island), north of Phi-Phi Don. There's a shallow area here where you may see small sharks. Snorkelling trips cost between 600B and 2400B, depending on whether you want a long-tail or motorboat. There is also good snorkelling along the eastern coast of **Ko Nok**, near Ao Ton Sai, and along the eastern coast of **Ko Nai**. Many snorkelling tours on bigger boats include short **kayaking** side trips, but some of these tours use minicruise ships that carry up to 100 people at a time – peace and quiet on these behemoths may not be an option. If you're going on your own, most bungalows and resorts rent out a snorkel, mask and fins for 150B to 200B per day.

ROCK CLIMBING

Yes, there are good limestone cliffs to climb on Ko Phi-Phi, and the views from the tops are spectacular. The main climbing areas are **Ton Sai Tower**, at the western edge of Ao Ton Sai, and **Hin Taak**, a short long-tail boat ride around the bay. There are at least six good climbing shops on the island and most places charge around 900B for a half-day of climbing or 1600B for a full day, including instruction and gear. **Spider Monkey** (☎ 0 9728 1608) is a tiny climbing shop run by Soley, one of the most impressive climbers on Phi-Phi. One of the bigger outfits around is the French-run **Cat's Climbing Shop** (☎ 0 1787 5101; www.catsclimbingshop.com) in the tourist village. Cat's gets good reports for safety and service. For tips on choosing a school, see boxed text, p340.

KO PHI-PHI DIVE SITES

The dive sites around Ko Phi-Phi are some of the best in Thailand, and leopard sharks and hawksbill turtles are very common. Whale sharks sometimes make cameo appearances around Hin Bida (Phi-Phi Sub Shark Point) and Ko Bida Nok in February and March. The top five dives at Ko Phi-Phi:

Dive site	Depth	Features
Hin Bida (Phi-Phi Sub Shark Point)	15-30m	Submerged pinnacle with hard coral, turtles, leopard sharks and occasional whale sharks.
Ko Bida Nok	18-22m	Karst massif with gorgonians, leopard sharks, barracuda and occasional whale sharks.
Anemone Reef	17-26m	Hard coral reef with plentiful anemones and clownfish.
Hin Musang (Phuket Shark Point)	19-24m	Submerged pinnacle with a few leopard sharks, grouper, barracuda and moray eels.
Phi-Phi Leh	5-18m	The whole island rim is covered in coral and oysters where you can see moray eels and seahorses, and do lots of swim-throughs.

Courses

Thai-food fans can take cooking courses at the recommended **Pum Restaurant & Cooking School** (☎ 0 1521 8904; www.pumthaifoodchain.com; 4hr class 2500B) in the tourist village. You'll learn to make some of the excellent dishes that are served in its restaurant and go home with a great cookbook.

Tours

As well as the popular long-tail tours to Phi-Phi Leh and Ko Mai Phai (Bamboo Island), tour agencies can arrange sunset tours to Monkey Bay and the beach at Wang Long (600B). **Adventure Club** (☎ 0 1895 1334; www.phi-phi-adventures.com) is a green organisation that was instrumental in helping clean up Phi-Phi's underwater habitat after the tsunami. It runs educational, ecofocused tours and dive trips, including shark-watching snorkelling trips, reef restoration dive trips, cliff jumping (entirely at your own risk) and hiking.

Sleeping

Finding accommodation on this ever-popular island has never been easy and you can expect serious room shortages at peak holiday times. Masses of touts meet incoming boats and, while often annoying, can make your life easier.

Be sure you lock the door while you sleep and close all the windows when you go out as break-ins can be a problem.

AO TON SAI & AO LO DALAM

Accommodation in the centre of this area can be claustrophobic and noisy – the most peace-

ful options are found along Ao Lo Dalam beach and on the paths leading from the centre towards the viewpoint and other beaches.

Rock Backpacker (☎ 0 7561 2402; therockbackpacker@hotmail.com; dm 350B, r 800B) The funky restaurant, on a boat dry-docked on the hillside, is conducive to mingling and the 16-bed dorm room is a real rarity on Ko Phi-Phi. Digs are clean, if rather cramped and central.

Valentine Bungalows (☎ 0 1894 2842; r 500-700B) The cheaper wooden bungalows fill up fast here so book in advance. Otherwise pay a little more for more-comfy concrete and tile cottages. Everything is in a local-feeling part of the village near a mosque and the bungalows surround a big courtyard.

Tropical Garden Bungalows (☎ 0 9729 1436; r 800-1400B; 🏠) Backed against the mountain-side, the best part of this laid-back lodge is the jungle pool complete with ancient Thai-style fountains and a sundeck. Large en suite cabins are frontier-style log affairs, while a two-storey complex has cheaper shared-bathroom units.

Chenut House (☎ 0 8189 41026; bungalows 1000-1200B) On a quiet path away from the bazaar of the tourist village, this place is refreshingly tranquil. Spacious wooden and bamboo bungalows are dripping with naturalistic mobiles, planters and crafty touches, plus have clean tiled bathrooms. It's family run and set in a shady garden that oozes friendly smiles and encouragements to chill.

Phi Phi Casita (☎ 0 7560 1214; bungalows 1000-2000B; 🏠 🏠) A step back from Ao Lo Dalam beach, this place looks like a classy fishermen's village – tiny wooden bungalows hover on stilts over

flower-planted mud flats. There's not much privacy but the stylish infinity pool and proximity to the beach are major draws.

Kinaree House (☎ 0 8185 45187; www.geocities.com/kinnaree_house; r 1500-2100B; 🏠 🏠) It's got more style than anywhere else in central Ton Sai (walls in shocking hues of orange, turquoise and purples, contemporary Thai art and so on) and its location can be great if tranquility is an afterthought to shopping and partying. Rooms are small but reception is friendly.

PP Viewpoint Resort (☎ 0 7562 2351; www.phiviewpoint.com; bungalows 1500-8000B; 🏠 🏠) At the far end of Ao Lo Dalam, this place rests on a rise with marvellous views of the bay. Wooden bungalows sit high on stilts and share the views. There is a small swimming pool that practically drops into the ocean below and a glass-walled tower with 360-degree views where you can pamper yourself with a Thai massage.

Phi Phi Banyan Villa (☎ 0 7561 1233; www.phiphi-hotel.com; r 2500-2800B; 🏠 🏠) There are lots of rooms snaking inland from the beach here. The comfy quarters have all the mod cons and some have a balcony overlooking a garden-lined path. There's a seaside restaurant and the hotel's namesake, a large gnarled banyan tree, sits out front.

Phitarom (☎ 0 7560 1121; www.phiphiresortphitarom.com; bungalows 2400-3800B; 🏠 🏠) Designed to blend in with the hillside, these villas are connected by a series of steps and walkways and are fringed with bird-filled trees. Elegant rooms have polished wood floors, Zen-style furniture and good mattresses topped with neutral toned silk bed runners. Every room has its own terrace that looks out over sea or jungle but not all are that private – the higher up the hill you go the more serenity (and thigh workout) you'll get. Fresh flowers add a beautiful touch throughout and rates include breakfast.

HAT HIN KHOM

The beach here was never Phi-Phi's best, but there's a bunch of abodes and the area is a short walk from both the stunning Hat Yao and the Ao Ton Sai bustle.

Viking Place Resort (☎ 0 7581 9399; Tak_blonk@hotmail.com; bungalows 800-1600B) Wood, thatch and bamboo bungalows here are exceptionally creative and stylish with lots of driftwood, shell mobiles and art all around. All bunga-

lows have mosquito nets and balconies but unfortunately the cheaper rooms don't have their own bathrooms. That said, both shared and attached bathrooms are exquisite and are always stocked with plenty of soaps, shampoos and fresh flowers. At night candles add flickering light to the peace and quiet.

Andaman Beach Resort (☎ 0 7562 1427; www.andamanbeachresort.com; bungalows 1650-4350B; 🏠 🏠) A U-shape of neat, tiled huts sits around a large spartan lawn. The biggest attraction is the small pool at its epicentre – perfect for sleeping off nights spent at Hippies bar next door.

Arayaburi & Bayview Resorts (☎ 0 7628 1360; www.phiphibayview.com; bungalows 3400-5500B; 🏠 🏠) These twin resorts under common management offer a cornucopia of huts straddling the rocky headland of the coast. Most of the bungalows are modern in design, come stacked with amenities, have excellent ocean views from their front decks and breakfast is included.

HAT YAO

You can either walk here in about 20 minutes from Ton Sai via Hat Him Khom beach or take a long-tail (100B) from Ton Sai pier. This long, stunning stretch of pure-white beach is perfect for swimming and well worth the walk. A trail leads from here over to beautiful and secluded Ao Lo Mu Di.

Phi-Phi Long Beach Bungalows (☎ 0 6281 4349; bungalows 500-1000B) Basic cement-floor, wooden bungalows might not be luxe but they sure are cheap – plus the sheets are clean and the beach in front is simply sublime. In high season it's buzzing with backpackers.

Paradise Resort (☎ 0 7562 2100; www.paradiseresort.co.th; bungalows 1500-2500B; 🏠 🏠) Location is the

TOP FIVE PHI-PHI RESORTS

- **Viking Place Resort** (left) No horned helmets but plenty of driftwood chic.
- **Ao Toh Ko Beach** (p348) Groovy travellers scene on a near forgotten beach.
- **Phitarom** (left) Hillside elegance and a free thigh workout.
- **Phi-Phi Island Village** (p348) Vacation central for all, from families to romantic hipsters.
- **Zeavola** (p349) Indulgent and sleek Thai style.

key and families are the clientele at this average but very well-managed and laid-back place. There's a swathe of jungle behind for young lizard hunters.

PhiPhi The Beach Resort (☎ 0 7561 8267; phiphithebeachresort@hotmail.com; bungalows 3200-3500B; 🏠 🚿) An expanding class act with a good pool and chic bar, this place swarms with package tourists looking for (and finding) comfort. It's relatively new so good service can be off and on but management seems eager to iron out the kinks.

HAT RANTEE & AO TOH KO

Still fairly low-key, this series of small, remote bays is home to a few modest bungalow operations. The pretty beach here has rocky outcroppings and the snorkelling is excellent. You can either get here by long-tail from Ao Ton Sai pier (300B going but only 150B on the way back) or by making the strenuous 45-minute hike over the viewpoint.

Rantee Hut (☎ 0 8974 14846; bungalows 600B) You're in with a lovely Thai family when you stay at these basic bamboo huts (complete with in-room fans and on-deck hammocks) right on Hat Rantee. There's a tiny restaurant that serves inexpensive and relatively authentic Thai fare and you can play with the resident monkey while waiting for your food.

Ao Toh Ko Beach (☎ 0 8153 70528; tohkbeach@yahoo.com; bungalows 500-2000B) All alone on white, mel-low Ao Toh Ko, there's a summer camp camaraderie here with several long-term guests and plenty of new guests who wish they were long-term. A surprising variety of rooms are perched on a hill but none are anything more than basic. The most interesting are the ones south beyond the cliff-side bar that have stone-work bathrooms. There are also family rooms and a big, friendly restaurant right on the beach. We didn't ever, ever want to leave.

HAT PHAK NAM

This beach consists of one bay separated by a rocky outcrop, with a small fishing hamlet on one beach and a lonely resort on the other. To get here, you can either charter a long-tail from Ao Ton Sai for around 400B, or make the sweaty one-hour trek over the viewpoint (not recommended with roller luggage).

Relax Beach Resort (☎ 0 1083 0194; bungalows 1200-1800B) There are only 18 unpretentious

but attractive Thai-styled bungalows here, so it pays to call ahead to make sure rooms are available. The bungalows are bright yellow with tall pointy roofs and are rimmed by lush jungle – there's a good restaurant, cruisy bar and an all-round old-school Phi-Phi vibe.

AO LO BAKAO

On the northeastern coast on Ko Nai, this fine stretch of palm-backed sand is ringed by dramatic hills and is home to a single upmarket resort. From Ao Ton Sai, you will have to charter a long-tail to get here (500B). Phi Phi Island Village also arranges transfers for guests.

Phi Phi Island Village (☎ Phuket 0 7621 5014; www.ppisland.com; bungalows 6500-25,000B; 🏠 🚿) This place really is a village unto itself: its whopping 100 bungalows take up much of the beachfront with palms swaying between them. Facilities vary from the family-friendly and casual – there are lots of daily activities on offer – to romantic dining experiences and pampering spa treatments. The infinity pool blends seamlessly into the ocean, and fresh flowers are artfully arranged throughout the resort. It's popular with Japanese and Australian jet-setters.

HAT LAEM THONG

At the northern end of Ko Nai, the beach here is long and sandy, with several showy resorts. There's also a small *chow lair* (sea gypsy) settlement of corrugated metal shacks at the end of the beach. A long-tail charter from Ao Ton Sai costs 600B. Operators can also arrange transfers.

Holiday Inn Phi-Phi Island (☎ 0 7521 1334; www.phippi-palmbeach.com; bungalows 7850-9000B; 🏠 🚿) These handsome Thai-Malay-style stilt bungalows are set on lovely grounds awash with grass and palm tree action. Wandering the grounds you'll find tennis courts, beckoning hammocks, a spa and dive centre, as well as discreetly disguised receptacles that encourage recycling. The restaurant allows you to dine alfresco or inside, buffet or à la carte.

Phi-Phi Natural Resort (☎ 0 7561 3010; www.phippi-natural.com; bungalows 2950-11,150B; 🏠 🚿) While this place is a bargain for this beach, it's starting to blend a little too well into its overgrown environs. The atmosphere is casual – which spills over into housekeeping. Yet the setting, with a powder-white beach and water in all

directions, is worth suffering through some dust in the corners.

Zeavola (☎ 0 7562 7024; www.zeavola.com; bungalows 14,000-26,000B; 🏠 🚿) If you have money to burn, let this be your pyre. This is an outstanding top-end resort with gorgeous teak bungalows that incorporate a traditional Thai style with simple, sleek modern design. Each well-spaced bungalow comes with glass walls on three sides (with remote-controlled bamboo shutters for privacy), beautiful 1940s fixtures and antique furniture, a patio and impeccable service. Some villas come with a private pool and there's a fabulous couples-oriented spa.

Eating

Most of the resorts, hotels and bungalows around the island have their own restaurants. Ao Ton Sai is home to some reasonably priced restaurants that span the world's cuisines but don't expect *haute cuisine*.

Pee Pee Bakery (dishes 40-150B; 🍳; breakfast, lunch & dinner) It's best at breakfast, when you'll be lucky to find an open table. Also on tap are pizza, steak and Thai food. The atmosphere is modern and movies are shown on the tube. The bakery has two branches; one is on the main walkway east of the piers, while the other is further inland near 007 Restaurant & Bar.

007 Restaurant & Bar (dishes 100-200B; 🍳; breakfast, lunch & dinner) Owned by a talkative Scot named James, 007 features ultramodern chrome tables, red cushion booths and, of course, all the Bond paraphernalia you could want. There's a big selection of beer (including British favourites) on tap, and solid food cooked in a very clean kitchen. Sport is shown on the TV by day; the latest blockbuster are played at night.

HC Anderson (☎ 0 1894 5287; dishes 90-200B, steaks 320-280B; 🍳; lunch & dinner) A very reliable Scandinavian restaurant serving delicious imported New Zealand steaks, among other creative dishes. It's on the most easterly path from Ao Ton Sai to Ao Lo Dalam.

Chao Koh (☎ 0 7560 1083; dishes 80-300B; 🍳; lunch & dinner) Right on the beach, this is an open-air seafood place that displays its freshly caught critters on ice. It's popular and offers well-priced and tasty food. A self-service salad bar is included with most mains.

our pick **Ciao Bella** (dishes 150-300B; 🍳; breakfast, lunch & dinner) At night, twinkling candles and stars provide the atmosphere for alfresco dining, while lapping waves provides the soundtrack. Dine on authentic Italian or Thai fare

and be prepared to feel romantic. Ciao Bella is in Ao Lo Dalam.

Drinking

The rowdy nightlife scene on Phi-Phi is returning with a vengeance, with several old-timers reopened for business.

Carpe Diem (☎ 0 4840 1219; Hat Hin Khom) Sit on pillows in the upstairs lounge and watch the sun go down then rock into the night with fire shows, dance parties and live music on the beach. It's an easy spot for mingling if you're travelling alone.

Hippies (☎ 0 1970 5483; Hat Hin Khom) Hippies is a good place to end the evening. There are candlelit tables on the beach and chill-out tunes on the sound system. Moon parties are thrown throughout the month.

Reggae Bar (tourist village) This classic has three floors of Rasta colours, drinking competitions, a *moo-ay tai* boxing ring with regular show bouts (where you can fight for free booze) and the occasional *gà-teu-i* (also spelt *kàthoey*; ladyboy) cabaret – you either love it or you hate it but it's the wildest place in town.

Sunflower Bar (Ao Lo Dalam) A great place for a sundowner with chilled-out reggae and Gilligan's Island-esque architecture.

Getting There & Away

Ko Phi-Phi can be reached from Krabi, Phuket, Ao Nang and Ko Lanta. Most boats moor at Ao Ton Sai, though a few from Phuket use the isolated northern pier at Laem Thong. The Phuket and Krabi boats operate year-round while the Ko Lanta and Ao Nang boats only run in the October to April high season.

Boats depart from Krabi for Ko Phi-Phi (350B, 1½ hours) at 10am and 2pm. From Phuket, boats leave at 8.30am, 1.30pm and 2.30pm, and return from Ko Phi-Phi at 9am, 2.30pm and 3pm (400B, 1¾ to two hours). To Ko Lanta, boats leave Phi-Phi at 11.30am and 2pm and return from Ko Lanta at 8am and 1pm (350B, 1½ hours). A boat departs from Ko Phi-Phi Marine National Park headquarters jetty at 9am, returning from Ko Phi-Phi (via Railay) at 3.30pm (350B, two hours).

Getting Around

There are no roads on Phi-Phi Don so transport on the island is mostly by foot, although long-tail boats can be chartered at Ao Ton Sai for short hops around Ko Phi-Phi Don and Ko Phi-Phi Leh.

Lanta on the east coast. Internet cafés dot the beaches and there are several in Ban Sala Dan that charge 1B per minute.

Sights

Although Ko Lanta is primarily a beach destination, there are some worthwhile sights inland if you get tired of the sea and sand.

MU KO LANTA MARINE NATIONAL PARK

อุทยานแห่งชาติเกาะลันตา

Set up in 1990, this **marine national park** (adult/child 200/100B) protects 15 islands in the Ko Lanta group, including the southern tip of Ko Lanta Yai. However, the park is increasingly threatened by the runaway development on the western coast of Ko Lanta Yai. The other islands in the group have fared slightly better – **Ko Rok Nok** is still very beautiful, with a crescent-shaped bay backed by cliffs, fine coral reefs and a sparkling white-sand beach. Camping is permitted on Ko Rok Nok and nearby **Ko Ha**, with permission from the national park headquarters. On the eastern side of Ko Lanta Yai, **Ko Talabeng** has some dramatic limestone caves that you can visit on sea-kayaking tours. The national park fee applies if you visit any of these islands.

The national park headquarters is at Laem Tanod, on the southern tip of Ko Lanta Yai, reached by a steep and corrugated 7km dirt track from Ao Nui. There are some basic hiking trails and a **scenic lighthouse**, and you can hire long-tails here for island tours during the low season.

BAN KO LANTA

Halfway down the eastern coast, **Ban Ko Lanta** (Lanta Old Town) was the original port and commercial centre for the island and provided a safe harbour for Arabic and Chinese trading vessels sailing between the larger ports of Phuket, Penang and Singapore. Some of the gracious and well-kept wooden stilt houses and shopfronts here are over 100 years old and are a pleasure to stroll through. A few pier restaurants offer up fresh catches of the day and have prime views over the sea.

A few kilometres past the hospital lies the **Gypsy House** (Ban Ko Lanta), a bohemian driftwood creation replete with ponds and traditional music, where artisans sell handicrafts and jewellery. There are a few pamphlets here on the *chow lair* of Ko Lanta, but it's mainly just a pleasant waterside chill-out space.

THAM KHAO MAIKAE

ถ้ำเขาไม้แก้ว

Monsoon rains pounding away at limestone cracks and crevices for millions of years have created this complex of forest caverns and tunnels. There are chambers as large as cathedrals, dripping with stalactites and stalagmites, and tiny passages that you have to squeeze through on hands and knees. There's even a subterranean pool you can take a chilly, creepy swim in. This is '*Raiders of the Lost Ark*' kind of fun that involves few safety precautions and requires a certain level of fitness. Total coverage in mud is almost guaranteed. It's a blast.

Tham Khao Maikae is reached via a guided trek through the jungle. A local family offers guided treks to the caves (with torches) for around 200B. Elephant treks to the caves (adult/child 900/450B) are also possible in the high season but are only really fun if you're with kids. The best way to get here is by rented motorcycle, or most resorts can arrange transport.

Close by, but reached by a separate track from the dirt road leading to the marine national park headquarters, **Tham Seua** (Tiger Cave) also has interesting tunnels to explore; elephant treks run up here from Hat Nui.

Activities

DIVING & SNORKELLING

Several shops run two-dive trips to local sights for around 2300B, while PADI Open Water courses are 12,500B. There are also trips to Ko Phi-Phi and the undersea pinnacles at **Hin Muang** and **Hin Daeng**, about 45 minutes from Ban Sala Dan by speedboat. These world-class dive sites have lone coral outcrops in the middle of the sea that are important feeding stations for large pelagic fish such as sharks, tuna and occasionally whale sharks and manta rays. Dive trips out here cost 3500B for two dives. The sites around **Ko Ha** have consistently good diving conditions, depths of 18m to 34m, plenty of marine life and a cave known as 'The Cathedral'. Your best chance of spotting leopard sharks is at the three sites around **Ko Bida Nok**, where there are also lots of scorpion fish and lionfish. Reliable dive companies include Scandinavian-run **Lanta Diver** (☎ 0 7568 4208; www.lantadiver.com; Ban Sala Dan) and **Blue Planet Divers** (☎ 0 7568 4165; www.blueplanetdivers.net; Ban Sala Dan). November to April is the best time for diving at Ko Lanta; the rest of the year most dive shops close.

THE DEMISE OF THE CHOW LAIR

Seminomadic seafarers have plied the coastal waters of the Malay Peninsula since time immemorial, largely untouched by the coming and going of the kingdoms and dynasties of Southeast Asia. Until the 19th century, the *chow lair* (also spelt *chao leh*) migrated freely along the coast, fishing for reef fish and squid and establishing temporary camps on uninhabited islands along the shore. Even the arrival of Islam had little effect on their way of life – most incorporated their animist beliefs into the new faith and continued much as before.

The real change for the *chow lair* came with the arrival of European powers. New ideas about borders and boundaries were adopted throughout the region and the landless wanderers became an inconvenience – citizens who could not be taxed and might set sail at any minute for an enemy state. The *chow lair* were actively encouraged to adopt a more sedentary lifestyle, by force if necessary, settling on the islands between Phuket and Singapore.

Once settled, the *chow lair* were neglected but mostly ignored until their islands became valuable for tourism. Entrepreneurs bought up large tracts of beachfront land and the *chow lair* moved on to smaller, less valuable islands. With these pressures, it was perhaps inevitable that the *chow lair* culture would slowly disappear. Many sea gypsies now make a living ferrying tourists around the islands or harvesting fish for seafood buffets at tourist resorts. One vestige of traditional *chow lair* life you may see is the biannual 'boat floating' ceremony in May and November, in which an elaborate model boat is set adrift, carrying away bad luck.

Numerous tour agencies along the strip can organise snorkelling trips out to Ko Rok Nok, Ko Phi-Phi and other nearby islands. **Petpailin Co** (☎ 0 7568 4428), near the passenger jetty at Ban Sala Dan, offers day trips to Ko Phi-Phi for 800B and four-island tours to Ko Muk, Ko Kradan, Ko Ngai and Ko Cheuk in Hat Chao Mai National Park for 900B.

ELEPHANT TREKKING

There are elephant-trekking camps at Hat Phra Ae (p354), Hat Nui (p355) – from where you can visit Tham Seua – and Ao Khlong Jaak (Waterfall Bay; p356). All charge 900/450B per adult/child for a two-hour trek. If you have your own transport, you can just show up at any of these elephant-trekking camps, otherwise most travel agencies or bungalow operators can arrange treks and transfers. All outings are slow, uneventful lumberings that are best suited for families with children.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

There are several other activities available: **horse riding** (per hr adult/child 700/350B) along the beach at Southern Lanta Resort; **sea kayaking** (adult/child 1000/500B) around the mangroves near Ban Hua Hin and Ko Pang; and **deep-sea fishing** (by long-tail/speedboat 2000/6000B). All of these can be arranged through resort tour desks or tour agencies in Ban Sala Dan.

Courses

Time for Lime (☎ 0 7568 4590; www.timeforlime.net), at Hat Khlong Dao, has a huge, professional kitchen with plenty of room to run amok. It offers excellent cooking courses with a slightly more exciting selection of dishes than most cookery schools in Thailand; half-day courses cost from 1500B to 1800B. There are also good bungalows here (see p354).

Sleeping

Ko Lanta is home to many long stretches of good-looking beach packed with accommodation. Many resorts close down for the May to October low season and rates drop by 50% or even more during these times. Resorts usually have their own restaurants and tour-booking facilities that can arrange island snorkelling, massages, tours and motorcycle rental.

LAEM KAW KWANG

This secluded beach sits on the spit of land at the northern end of Hat Khlong Dao.

Kaw Kwang Beach Bungalows (☎ 0 7562 1373; www.lanta-kawkwangresort.com; bungalows 400-3400B; 📶) This is the oldest resort on Ko Lanta and is still owned by local people. There are roomy, recently remodelled, contemporary-style bungalows lined up neatly with plenty of shrubbery. There's also a satisfactory stretch of sand out the front and the feeling of seclusion so close to Ban Sala Dan

earns Kaw Kwang brownie points. The low-end rooms here are some of the cheapest on the island.

HAT KHLONG DAO

With perfect white sand stretching for over 2km, it's no wonder this was one of the first beaches to attract the eyes of tourists and developers. There are numerous small lanes snaking from the main road towards the beach, all chock-a-block with bungalows with prices hovering around midrange. The beach here is great for swimming but there's little here for folks on a budget.

Somewhere Else (☎ 0 8153 60858; bungalows 500-800B) Big octagonal bamboo huts grace a shady lawn right on a very social and lounge-worthy stretch of beach. Bathrooms are big and clean, as is the beachfront restaurant that serves Indian, Thai and European food. It's not private but is a lot of fun and is run by the folks of Where Else? on Hat Khlong Khong.

Time For Lime (☎ 0 7568 4590; www.timeforlime.net; bungalows 1000-1500B; ☑) An ideal spot if you're serious about Thai cooking (see p353). Plain but clean bungalows line up in a garden behind the beachfront cooking school and restaurant. The owner takes in stray dogs (with ideas to start a local animal centre) so you'll have plenty of friendly and furry company.

Golden Bay Cottages (☎ 0 7568 4161; www.goldenbaylanta.com; bungalows 1200-2800B; ☑) With trim-and-proper little cottages surrounding a leafy courtyard, Golden Bay is one of the better operations here. There's a lot of variety in the rooms – the beachfront air-con deals are the nicest, while the fan rooms are probably not worth the money. Breakfast is included at the very good on-site restaurant.

Southern Lanta Resort (☎ 0 7568 4174/7; www.southernlanta.com; bungalows incl breakfast 1800-5000B; ☑) There's loads of shade in the tropical garden and a good-sized beachfront. The pool has a water slide and the bungalows come kitted out with TVs, hot showers and minibars, and breakfast is included. The resort is family friendly and you can organise horseback riding from here for 650B per hour.

Costa Lanta (☎ 0 2662 3550; www.costalanta.com; r 6050-9460B; ☑) With a pool in a black block, spartan grounds and near-militant security, all the concrete and sharp edges might seem out of place on such a mel-low beach, but amazingly it comes off as intensely stylish. Guests rave about the

airy, uncluttered rooms and stellar service. If minimalist city chic is your thing, don't miss this place.

HAT PHRA AE

A large travellers' village has grown up at Hat Phra Ae, with loads of farang-oriented restaurants, beach-bars, internet cafés and tour offices.

Lanta Marina (☎ 0 1677 4522; www.lantamarina.com; bungalows 600-800B; ☑ Oct-Apr) For something really cool, try out these giant bungalows, which almost look like towering hay bales. It has a tribal feel: breezy sleeping options have bamboo cross-bars for windows and are linked by an elevated boardwalk.

Sanctuary (☎ 0 1891 3055; sanctuary_93@yahoo.com; bungalows 700-1200B) This is a delightful place to stay. There are artistically designed wood and thatch bungalows with lots of grass and a hippyish atmosphere that's low-key and friendly. The restaurant is one of the island's best and offers Indian and vegetarian eats among the Thai usuals. It also holds yoga classes and has a small art gallery displaying local talent.

ourpick Relax Bay Tropicana (☎ 0 7568 4194; www.relaxbay.com; bungalows 700-3700B; ☑ Oct-Apr; ☑) This gorgeous French-run place is spread out over a tree-covered headland by a small beach. Its wooden bungalows sit on stilts with large decks overlooking the bay and stunning sunsets, and there's a huge bar and restaurant. You can get a pummelling here of either the Thai- or Swedish-massage variety.

Lanta Palm Beach (☎ 0 1606 5433; www.lantapalmbeachresort.com; bungalows 1500-3500B; ☑) This large place has good facilities and strikes a nice balance between social and private. There are large, modern, concrete air-con bungalows with hot showers and old-fashioned bamboo bungalows with fans. The beach in front is truly lounge-worthy.

Sayang Beach Resort (☎ 0 7568 4156; bungalows 950-4400B; ☑) Here you'll find a relaxed atmosphere and neat wooden bungalows well spread out in plenty of scruffy greenery. There's a big restaurant and you're right at the rocky headland that marks the peaceful, northern end of this beach.

Layana Resort & Spa (☎ 0 7560 7100; www.layanaresort.com; r 10,000-15,720B; ☑) Not a hair is out of place at this very popular, Los Angeles-meets-Thailand condominium-style resort. Rooms are plush nests that completely remove you from the outside world and there's

a luscious pool that extends languidly past the formal restaurant to the beach. The atmosphere feels like a posh Hollywood beach party. Rates drop if you reserve a month or more in advance.

HAT KHLONG KHONG

Only the resorts at the northern end of this rather rocky beach are worth looking at. There's a travellers vibe here with plenty of mellow little beach-bars.

Lanta New Coconut (☎ 0 1537 7590; bungalows 500B) The Coconut has a small farm of simple huts surrounded by swaying palms. It's not much, but it's darn cheap.

Where Else? (☎ 0 1536 4870; www.lanta-where-else.com; bungalows 500-1500B) Make your way here for Ko Lanta's little slice of bohemia. The bungalows may be a bit shaky but there is great mojo here and the place swarms with backpackers. The restaurant is a growing piece of art in itself, but the bamboo and coconut knick-knacks are threatening to take over. The pricier bungalows are all unique, multilevel abodes sleeping up to four people.

Moonlight Bay Resort (☎ 0 7568 4401; bungalows 1750-6000B; ☑) A Scandinavian resort that plays up the ecoresort angle with natural materials, simple Nordic design and gorgeous bungalows either along a lush river, facing verdant greenery or right on the beach. It sits on a private rocky cove where most of the flora is labelled for your edification.

HAT KHLONG TOB

Just before the turn-off to Ban Khlong Nin, this beach is a bit rocky at low tide.

Lanta River Sand Resort (☎ 0 7566 2660; www.lantariversand.com; bungalows 1000B) It's all primitive bungalows here with environmentally sound construction and thatch and bamboo through and through. The basic lifestyle is all part of the attraction, and there's plenty of nature around with which to commune.

HAT KHLONG NIN

After Hat Khlong Tob, the main road heading south forks: head left for the inland road which runs to the east coast; go right and the country road hugs the coastline for 14km to the tip of Ko Lanta. The first beach here is lovely Hat Khlong Nin, which gets progressively nicer as you travel south.

Lanta Nature Beach Resort (☎ 0 1397 0785; bungalows 300-700B; ☑) The bungalows here look

like neat little pink ducks all lined up in a row. There are wooden bungalows with fans and comfortable concrete bungalows with little verandas, furniture and tiled bathrooms with bath tubs. Some of the huts sit on the beachfront, while others are on the opposite side of the road.

Lanta II Mare (☎ 0 1540 7257; www.lantariversand.com; bungalows 1200-1900B, f4500B; ☑) The bungalows here are fairly deluxe deals, albeit not very stylish, with verandas, greenery and a small, intimate feel that's often missing from larger places. The beach is one of the best swimming beaches on Hat Khlong Nin.

Sri Lanta (☎ 0 7569 7288; www.srilanta.com; villas 5400-24,000B; ☑) At the southern end of the beach, this sophisticated resort consists of minimalist, naturalistic wooden villas in lush and wild gardens set back from the shore. There's a very stylish beachside area with a restaurant, infinity pool and private drapery-swathed pavilions where you can get a traditional Thai massage or stretch like a cat at the daily yoga class. Breakfast is included.

You'll find good, clean bungalows similar in style and rates to Lanta Nature Beach Resort at **Clean Beach Resort** (☎ 0 7569 7112; ☑) and **Lanta Miami** (☎ 0 7569 7081; ☑).

HAT NUI

There are several small beaches here with upmarket places to stay.

ourpick Narima (☎ 0 7560 7700; www.narima-lanta.com; bungalows 2000-3500B; ☑) This resort calls itself 'eco-chic' and we have to agree. It's run by an exceptionally friendly Thai couple and the private, high-ceilinged huts are artistically created from natural materials – all have spotless indoor/outdoor bathrooms. Every bungalow has something of a sea view. The large, lantern-lit, all-wood restaurant has some massive gnarled wood furniture and the whole place is surrounded by near jungle.

AO KANTIANG

This bay's tip-top beach has a good sprinkling of sand, and several nearby tour offices provide internet access and rent out motorcycles.

Kantiang Bay View Resort (☎ 0 1787 5192; kantiangbayview@hotmail.com; bungalows 1200-2200B; ☑) Sharing the bay's fantastic beach, this resort has tidy, modern, concrete air-con bungalows with tiled roofs and a stand of old-fashioned wooden bungalows with bathrooms and fans.

It's popular even in the low season and has a great social buzz.

Baan Laanta Resort & Spa (☎ 0 7566 5091; www.baanlaanta.com; bungalows 3500-4500B; 🏠 📺 📶) Fragrant, green, landscaped grounds wind around stylish wooden bungalows and a pool that drops off to a stretch of white sandy beach. A futon-style bed on a raised wooden platform, under a gauzy veil of mosquito netting, is the room's centrepiece. White bed linen and cream-coloured curtains complement the natural woods in the rooms, while bamboo-lined bathrooms are clean and bright.

Pimalai Resort & Spa (☎ 0 7560 7999; www.pimalai.com; bungalows 12,000-85,000B; 🏠 📺 📶) The sprawling, manicured gardens are interspersed with calming water features and luxurious villas all have slick, modern Thai furnishings and sultry views of the bay below. There are several pools and restaurants on the grounds, a spa and small library. For something special, this class act is worth every baht.

AO KHLONG JAAK

There's a splendid beach here at Ao Khlong Jaak and the namesake waterfall is inland along Khlong Jaak.

Andalanta Resort (☎ 0 1836 4877; www.andalanta.com; bungalows 2300-6900B; 🏠 📺) You'll find beach-stylish, modern air-con bungalows (some with loft) and simple fan-cooled ones, facing the sea. The garden is a delight, there's an ambient restaurant and the waterfall is just a 30- to 40-minute walk away. An excellent choice for families.

AO MAI PAI

Bamboo Bay Resort (☎ 0 7561 8240; www.bamboobay.net; bungalows 500-1700B) Clinging to the hillside above Ao Mai Pai beach, this place has a variety of brick and concrete bungalows, with bathrooms, on stilts and a fine restaurant down by the beach. The better bungalows have balconies with grand sea views.

our pick Baan Phu Lae (☎ 0 1201 1704; www.baanphulae.com; bungalows 900-1300B; 🏠 📺) Awash in bamboo-chic, the easy vibe of this place keeps folks returning year after year. The restaurant and many of the bungalows sit right on a private beach and have perfect sunset views. Bungalows come with bamboo-framed beds and rustic, hammock-friendly porches. You can rent mountain bikes here or just loll around in the gazillion areas designed for chilling out.

LAEM TANOD

The road on to the marine national park headquarters fords the *klong* (canal), which can get quite deep in the wet season.

Mu Ko Lanta Marine National Park Headquarters (☎ Bangkok 0 2561 4292; camping with own tent per person 40B, camping with tent hire 300-400B) The secluded grounds of the national park headquarters are a wonderfully serene place to camp. The flat camping areas are covered in shade and sit in the wilds of the tropical jungle. Out the front lie craggy outcroppings, and the sounds of the ocean lapping up the rocks. There are toilets and running water, but you should bring your own food. You can also get permission for camping on Ko Rok Nok or Ko Ha here. National park entry fees apply (see p352).

Eating

The best places to grab a bite are the seafood restaurants along the lane at the northern end of Ban Sala Dan. With tables on verandas over the water, they offer fresh seafood sold by weight (which includes cooking costs). Expect to pay 700B per kilogram for prawns and 350B per kilogram for squid, fish and crabs. The best option is Rimnun Seafood, but come early if you want to get a table.

Swedish Restaurant (pizzas from 220B; 🍷 lunch & dinner) At the western end of the alley, this friendly place has the best pizzas around and quirky knick-knacks on the walls, plus a bar and pool table.

Around the tourist villages of Hat Phra Ae and Hat Khlong Dao, and at beaches further south, you can find interesting places catering to farang, but most close down in the low season.

Drunken Sailors (☎ 0 7011 0683; meals 40-90B; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This hip octagonal pad is decked out with beanbags and a laid-back attitude. It serves basic Thai and Western dishes and yummy, refreshing drinks like the banana-choc frappé – Starbucks, eat your heart out.

Thai Cuisine (mains 60-180B; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Some of the most authentic Thai food in the area can be found at this raised, wooden Thai-style place in central Ao Phra Ae.

Same Same But Different (☎ 0 1787 8670; meals 50-120B; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) In a perfect seaside setting on Ao Kantiang, with tables right on the beach, you can sample some of the tastiest Thai cuisine on the island. The ambience is hard to beat.

GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL: KO BU BU

If you really want to live out your castaway dreams, this private island, a few kilometres off Ko Lanta's east coast, is the place. There are a couple of gorgeous white-sand beaches, mangrove forests, and an interior thick with vegetation. There's some decent snorkelling just offshore.

For accommodation, there are about a dozen basic but creatively decorated bungalows simply called **Bu Bu Island** (☎ 0 1228 4510; bungalows 400-700B; 📅 Oct-Apr) where you can swing in your hammock till the buffalos come home. You should call ahead to confirm availability and to see about arranging a pick-up from Ko Lanta. To get here on your own, you can charter a long-tail from the pier at Ban Ko Lanta (200B).

Faim de Loup (Hat Phra Ae; mains 60-120B; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This little French bistro serves real filtered coffee and baguette sandwiches as well as Thai food.

Red Snapper (mains 90-200B; 🍷 dinner) A Dutch-run restaurant on the roadside in Ao Phra Ae, the garden setting here is romantic and the European-fusion cuisine food comes highly recommended.

Drinking & Entertainment

During the high season Ko Lanta has a positively buzzing nightlife. Driftwood-style reggae bars are dotted all the way down the west coast so, during high season, there's always something going on; in low season the scene pretty much fizzles out.

Reggae House (Hat Phra Ae) A perennial favourite, Reggae House is the most renowned of dozens of beach-bars pumping out boisterous reggae and dance anthems, particularly around Hat Phra Ae.

Opium (☎ 0 8128 67182; Hat Phra Ae; 🍷 from 6pm) This chic club has live music Thursday and Sunday nights, guest DJs other nights of the week and a big dance floor.

Getting There & Away

Most people come to Ko Lanta by boat or air-con minivan. If you're coming under your own steam, you'll need to use the frequent **ve-hide ferries** (motorcycle 20B, car/4WD 75/150B; 📅 7am-8pm) between Ban Hua Hin and Ban Khlong Mak (Ko Lanta Noi) and on to Ko Lanta Yai.

BOAT

There are two piers at Ban Sala Dan. The passenger jetty is about 300m from the main strip of shops; vehicle ferries leave from a second jetty that's several kilometres further east.

Passenger boats between Krabi's Khlong Chilat passenger pier and Ko Lanta run from

November through May and take 1½ hours. Boats depart from Ko Lanta at 8am and 1pm (350B). In the reverse direction boats leave at 11am and 1.30pm. These boats will also stop at Ko Jum (for the full 350B fare) although in the fringe months of November and May only the morning boat will stop.

Boats between Ko Lanta and Ko Phi-Phi technically run year-round although service can peter out in the off season if there are too few passengers. Ferries usually leave Ko Lanta at 8am and 1pm (350B, 1½ hours); in the opposite direction boats leave Ko Phi-Phi at 11.30am and 2pm.

From around 21 October through to May, four-island snorkelling tour boats also act as ferries to Ko Ngai (300B, two hours), Ko Muk (350B, three hours) and Ko Kradan (400B, four hours) in Trang Province (p359). You'll get to snorkel on the way if you go to Ko Muk or Ko Kradan so bring your gear. These boats leave Ban Sala Dan at 8.30am and return from the islands at around at 3pm.

There's a new high-speed ferry that runs every other day from Ban Sala Dan to Ko Lipe (p377; 1900B, three hours) stopping at Ko Ngai (600B, 30 minutes), Ko Muk (1200B, one hour) and Ko Bulon Leh (1600B, 2½ hours). The service leaves at 1pm. The next day the same boat makes the return trip from Ko Lipe departing at 9am and arriving in Ban Sala Dan at noon.

MINIVAN

This is the main way of getting to and from Ko Lanta: vans run year-round. Daily minivans to Krabi leave between 7am and 8am (350B, 1½ hours) and there are sometimes afternoon services at 1pm and 3.30pm. From Krabi, vans depart frequently from 8am till 4pm. **KK Tour & Travel** (☎ Trang 0 7521 1198) has several daily air-con vans between Trang and Ko Lanta (250B,

two hours). Note that all of these services tend to take much longer than the time they claim to take so give yourself a few extra hours if you have a flight to catch from Krabi or Trang.

Getting Around

Most resorts send vehicles to meet the ferries and you'll get a free ride to your resort. In the opposite direction expect to pay 80B to 150B. Alternatively, you can take a motorcycle taxi from opposite the 7-Eleven in Ban Sala Dan; fares vary from 50B to 200B depending on distance.

Motorcycles can be rented all over. Unfortunately, very few places provide helmets and none provide insurance, so take extra care on the bumpy roads. The going rate is 250B per day.

Several places rent out small 4WDs for around 1600B per day, including insurance.

KO JUM & KO SI BOYA

เกาะจำ(เกาะญี่ปุ่น)/เกาะศรีบอยา

Just north of Ko Lanta, Ko Jum and its neighbour Ko Si Boya have surprisingly little development; what's there is neatly tucked away in the trees making the islands look and feel nearly deserted. There's little to do here but laze on the beach and amble through the friendly Muslim villages, but that's what makes coming here such a treat: this is near total removal from the modern world. Although technically one island, the locals consider only the flatter southern part of Ko Jum to be Ko Jum; the northern hilly bit is called Ko Pu.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation on Ko Jum is still mostly basic – though things are developing – and lies spread out along the beaches along the west coast of the island. Some places rent out sea kayaks and most have a restaurant on the grounds. Public transport to Ko Jum and Ko Si Boya is very limited in the low season so most resorts close down between May and October.

New Bungalows (☎ 0 7567 8116; chanchalay@hotmail.com; bungalows 150-600B) Roomy huts in varying degrees of comfort are found here at the southern end of the beach. The cheapie tree houses get brownie points for charisma.

Siboya Bungalows (☎ 0 7561 8026; www.siboyabungalows.com; bungalows 200-1200B) The well-designed

huts sit on a lush lawn and are covered in heaps of shade by expansive palm and rubber trees. Verandas and hammocks come as standard and there are also a couple of self-contained houses that are ideal for long-term rentals. There's a restaurant here serving excellent Thai fare.

Woodland Lodge (☎ 0 1893 5330; www.woodland-koh-jum.tk; bungalows 300-1400B) Typical bamboo huts here come with shiny, polished wood verandas and mosquito netting as standard. The exceptionally friendly British-Thai owners can organise boat trips and fishing, have an excellent, sociable restaurant and run a cooking course in the high season. It also has larger family bungalows and stays open year-round.

Joy Bungalow (☎ 0 1464 6153; www.kohjum.com/joy; bungalows 600-3000B) On the southwestern coast of Ko Jum, Joy has thatch and wood stilt bungalows on grassy, palm-shaded grounds. The beach restaurant here has a good vibe but the popularity of this place has become a turn-off for some.

On Lee Bungalows (☎ 0 8720 0805; www.koh-jum-resort.com; bungalows 700-3800B) This Crusoe-chic Thai-French family-run resort is nestled on a deserted white beach on the Ko Pu part of Ko Jum. Wooden stilted bungalows are in a shady garden and plenty of activities, including some of the island's best trekking, are on offer. The fantastic fusion restaurant here is reason enough for a visit.

Ourpick Koh Jum Lodge (☎ 0 7561 8275; www.kohjumlodge.com; bungalows 4000-5000B; ☎ May-Mar; ♿) An ecolodge with style: imagine lots of hard woods and bamboo, gauzy mosquito netting, manicured grounds and a hammock-strewn curve of white sand out front. Bliss.

Ko Si Boya has one place to stay on the western coast just south of the main village, Ban Lang Ko.

Getting There & Away

From November to May, boats between Krabi and Ko Lanta can drop you at Ko Jum, but you'll pay full fare (350B, one hour) – see p331. In the fringe months of November and May only the early boat will drop you. There are also small boats to Ko Jum and Ko Si Boya a few times a day from Ban Laem Kruat, a village about 30km from Krabi, at the end of Rte 4036, off Hwy 4. The cost is 80B to Ko Si Boya and 100B to Ban Ko Jum.

TRANG PROVINCE

Lining the Andaman Sea south of Krabi Province, Trang Province has an impressive limestone-covered coast with several sublime islands. For the adventurous, there are also plenty of natural sites to explore in the province's lush interior, including dozens of scenic waterfalls and limestone caves.

Though nowhere near as popular as Krabi and parts of the gulf coast, this region is starting to make a name for itself. It has dozens of mellow islands offering good-value accommodation and an escape from peak-season multitudes. You're more likely to see tall rubber plantations here than rows of vendors selling the same 'same same but different' T-shirts. Transport links are improving every year and during the high season it's now possible to island-hop all the way to Malaysia.

TRANG

อ.เมืองตรัง

pop 77,200

Most visitors to Trang are in transit to nearby islands, but if you're an aficionado of culture, Thai food or markets, you really should plan to stay a day or more. It's an easy-to-manage town where you can get lost in wet markets by day and hawker markets and late-night Chinese coffee shops by night; at nearly any time of the year, there's likely to be some minor festival that oozes with local colour. Although there aren't any must-see attractions, there are lots of travel agencies in town dedicated to helping you hop to your island of choice as fast as possible. Many of the Trang islands resorts maintain satellite offices here that can assist with bookings and transfers to their island. Trang is also a popular place for Thais to get married before they head off for honeymoons in nearby Hat Chao Mai National Park.

Most of the tourist facilities lie along the main drag, Th Praram VI, between the clock tower and the train station.

Information

You'll find several internet cafés on Th Praram. Various banks have ATMs and foreign exchange booths.

Ani's (☎ 0 1397 4574; 285 Th Ratchadamnoen; ☎ 9am-10pm) For books in English and European

languages as well as information on the area and motorcycle rental.

Bangkok Bank (Th Praram VI)

Post office (cnr Th Praram VI & Th Kantang) Also sells CAT cards for international phone calls.

Thai Farmers Bank (Th Praram VI)

Tosit (285 Th Visetkul; internet per hr 20B) Fast computers, knowledgeable staff and a real café serving real coffee from around the world.

Sights

Trang is more of a business and market centre than a tourist town. **Wat Tantayaphirom** (Th Tha Klang) has a huge white *chedi* (stupa) enshrining a Buddha footprint, and the imposing Confucian **Kew Ong Yia Temple** is across the road. The Chinese **Meunram Temple**, between Soi 1 and Soi 3, sometimes sponsors performances of southern Thai shadow theatre. It's also recommended to stroll around the large **wet and dry markets** on Th Ratchadamnoen and Th Sathani.

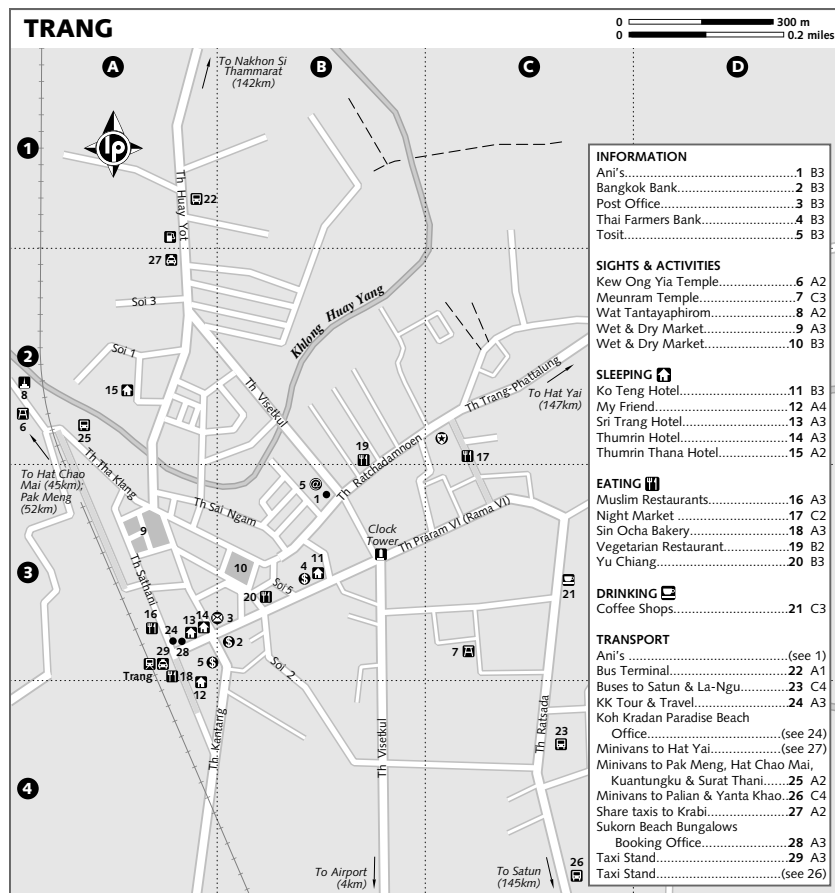
Activities

Tour agencies around the train station and along Th Praram VI offer various tours around Trang. **Boat trips** to Hat Chao Mai National Park start at 850B per person and take in Ko Muk, Ko Cheuk and Ko Kradan, with lunch and drinks thrown in. National park fees are extra. There are also **sea-kayaking** tours to Tham Chao Mai (850B), where you can explore mangrove forests and canoe under commanding stalactites. **Snorkelling** trips to Ko Rok (1400B) and **minivan trips** to local caves and waterfalls (950B) can also be arranged by most agencies. For a cultural fix you can spend a day **trekking** in the Khao Banthat Mountains to visit villages of the mountain Sa Kai people (1300B). This includes a visit to waterfalls, lunch and a knowledgeable local guide. Most of these trips need at least two to three people, otherwise you may have to pay extra.

Festivals & Events

Sailboat Regatta Over on the coast, Hat Chao Mai has an annual regatta for traditional wooden sailboats on the first weekend of May, accompanied by performances, including *li-gair bah* (folk dance-drama) and *nang da-lung* (shadow theatre).

Vegetarian Festival Trang's Chinese population celebrates this wonderful festival every October, coinciding with the similar festival in Phuket; for more about the latter festival, see boxed text, p302.



Sleeping

Trang has good budget options but mid-range and top-end places leave much to be desired.

Ko Teng Hotel (☎ 0 7521 8148; 77-79 Th Praram VI; r 180-380B; 🏠) The undisputed king of backpacker digs in Trang. If you're feeling optimistic, the huge, window-lit rooms here have an adventuresome kind of shabby charm to them; if not, the grunge factor might get you down. There's also a very good restaurant and helpful travel agent downstairs.

My Friend (☎ 0 7522 5447; 25/17-20 Th Sathani; r 450B; 🏠 📺) Very comfortable, modern rooms here have air-con and TV, but not all have windows – check first. There are some quirky decorative flourishes (Greek pillars,

hotel logos on everything, etc) and an on-site internet café.

Sri Trang Hotel (☎ 0 7521 8122; fax 0 7521 8451; 24 Th Praram VI; r 600-800B; 🏠 📺) This place was still under construction when we passed but it already looked like the hippest place in town with a large range of rooms. It's a renovated older hotel with some oversized teak windows, butter-coloured walls and a European flavour.

Thumrin Hotel (☎ 0 7521 1011-5; www.thumrin.co.th; 99 Th Sathani; r 450-3500B; 🏠 📺) This obvious white building near the train station has cheesy business-class rooms with TVs, ageing carpets and bathtubs.

Thumrin Thana Hotel (☎ 0 7521 1211; www.thumrin.co.th; 69/8 Th Huay Yot; r 1200-40,000B; 🏠 📺) The

poshest option in town. The rooms are new and have plenty of conveniences, and there's a gleaming marbled lobby, three restaurants, a bakery, a pool and a spa. Some rooms have great views of the city.

Eating

Trang is famous for its *mõo yáhn*g (crispy barbecued pork) and *ráhn goh-bée* (coffee shops). *Ráhn goh-bée* serve real filtered coffee (look for the charcoal-fired aluminium coffee boilers with stubby smokestacks) and you can find *mõo yáhn*g in the mornings at some coffee shops or by weight at the wet market (Old Market) on Th Ratchadamoen. To really get into the local scene stay out late at the coffee shops along Th Ratsada.

While you're waiting for a train or air-conditioned van, there are several Muslim restaurants on Th Sathani that serve cheap Malay dishes such as roti with curry. There are several OK Western bar-restaurants also opening up in this area.

Vegetarian restaurant (Pong's; Th Ratchadamoen; meals 20B; 🍴 breakfast & lunch) Coffee and pork not your thing? The colourful Thai buffet here often has brown rice and also sells veggie snacks and supplies. It's across from the police station.

ourpick Night market (meals around 20B) The best night market on the Andaman coast will have you salivating over an impressive selection of goodies from simple *pát tai* and rice dishes to fried grubs and Thai desserts. Go with an empty stomach and a sense of adventure.

Sin Ocha Bakery (☎ 0 7521 1191; Th Sathani; meals from 50B; 🍴 breakfast & lunch) Near the train station, this ambient, fan-cooled place has round marble tables and serves traditional Trang *goh-bée*, fresh cakes, light Thai meals and good Western breakfasts.

Yu Chiang (Th Praram VI; dishes from 50B; 🍴 breakfast & dinner) This funky place on the corner of Soi 1 and Th Praram VI (there's no Roman script sign) is the classic stop for filtered coffee and *mõo yáhn*g.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Nok Air (www.nokair.com) operates daily flights from Bangkok (Don Muang) to Trang (around 1000B one-way), but there have been problems landing at this airport during rain. The airport is 4km south of Trang;

minivans meet flights and charge 60B to town. In the reverse direction a taxi or tuktuk will cost 80B to 100B.

BUS

Public buses leave from the well-organised Trang **bus terminal** (Th Huay Yot). Air-con buses from Trang to Bangkok cost 600B to 650B (12 hours, morning and afternoon). More comfortable are the VIP 24-seater buses at 5pm and 5.30pm (1050B). From Bangkok, VIP/air-con buses leave between 6.30pm and 7pm. Buses to Satun and La-Ngu depart from the **Southern bus terminal** (Th Ratsada).

Other services are shown in the table below:

Destination	Price	Frequency	Duration
Hat Yai	110B	frequent	3hr
Krabi	133B	frequent	2hr
Phang-Nga	175B	hourly	3½hr
Phuket	241B	hourly	4hr
Satun	126B	frequent	3hr

MINIVAN & SHARE TAXI

There are share taxis to Krabi (180B, two hours) and air-con minivans to Hat Yai (160B, two hours) from offices just west of the Trang bus terminal. Hourly vans heading to Surat Thani (210B, 2½ hours) leave from a **depot** (Th Tha Klang), just before Th Tha Klang crosses the railway tracks. There are also departures directly to Ko Samui (485B) and Ko Pha-Ngan (685B) every day at 12.30pm and 3pm from the same depot. **KK Tour & Travel** (☎ 0 7521 1198; 40 Th Sathani), near the train station, has several daily air-con vans to Ko Lanta (250B, two hours).

Local share taxis can be hired for custom trips from depots; sample fares include 500B to Pak Meng, and 700B to Hat Yao or Hat Chang Lang.

Local transport is mainly by air-con minivan rather than *sõrng-táa-ou*. Vans leave regularly from the depot on Th Tha Klang for Pak Meng (60B, 45 minutes), Hat Chao Mai (80B, one hour) and Kuantungku pier (100B, one hour). To get to Ko Sukorn, *sõrng-táa-ou* carrying market-going, Sukorn fishermen's wives leave the wet market on Th Ratchadamoen at 11.30am to both the jet-ties at Palian (60B) and Ban Ta Seh (60B) – it's best to reserve this trip through **Sukorn Beach Bungalows booking office** (☎ 0 7521 1457; 22 Th Suthanee). See p368 for boat details.

TRAIN

Only two trains go all the way from Bangkok to Trang: the express 83, which leaves from Bangkok's Hualamphong station at 5.05pm and arrives in Trang at 7.35am the next day, and the rapid 167, which leaves from Hualamphong station at 6.20pm, arriving in Trang at 10.11am. From Trang, trains leave at 1.45pm and 5.30pm. Fares are 1280B/731B for a 1st-/2nd-class air-con sleeper and 521B for a 2nd-class (fan) sleeper.

Getting Around

Túk-túk hover around near the intersection of Th Praram VI and Th Kantang and charge 20B to 30B for local trips. Motorcycle taxis are around 15B around town. Motorcycles

can be rented at travel agencies or at **Ani's** (285 Th Ratchadamnoen) for about 200B per day. Most agencies can also help you arrange car rental for around 1400B per day.

TRANG BEACHES & ISLANDS

The Trang islands and beaches are like smaller models of those found in Krabi Province, are easy to get to and, for now, are most often visited on day trips. If you stay longer than a snorkelling tour they can feel delightfully off-the-beaten-track with opportunities to climb some of the karst formations. All this is changing of course, particularly on Ko Muk and Ko Ngai, which are easy stopover islands between Ko Lanta (p350) and Ko Lipe (p377). Some islands in the chain are protected by the Hat

Chao Mai National Park, including Ko Muk, Ko Kradan and Ko Cheuk. The beaches of Hat Pak Meng to Hat Chao Mai, which hosts an annual regatta in May for traditional wooden sailboats, also fall under its jurisdiction.

The Trang beaches are even more forgotten than the islands and are places to sample southern Thai village life. From north to south these are Hat Pak Meng, Hat Chang Lang, Hat San, Hat Yong Ling, Hat Yao, Hat Chao Mai and Hat Samran. The coast here gets some of Thailand's biggest surf, but it's really only worth investigating in March or after big storms during the rainy season.

Hat Pak Meng

หาดปากเมง

Thirty-nine kilometres from Trang in Sikao District, Hat Pak Meng has been developed as the main jumping-off point for the nearby island of Ko Ngai. There's a wild-looking stretch of coastline here, with a couple of so-so pockets of sand, but much of the beach is rather marred by a big concrete sea wall. The main pier is at the northern end of the beach and there are several fresh seafood restaurants with deck chairs under casuarinas where Rte 4162 meets the coast.

Tour agencies at the jetty and the Lay Trang Resort (below) organise one-day boat tours to Ko Muk, Tham Morakot (Emerald Cave, on Ko Muk), Ko Cheuk, Ko Ma and Ko Kradan for 950B per person (minimum three people), including lunch and beverages. There are also snorkelling day tours to Ko Ngai (750B) and Ko Rok (1200B to 1400B, plus national park fees). Mask and snorkel sets and fins can be rented by the pier for 50B each.

SLEEPING

Lay Trang Resort (☎ 0 7527 4027/8; www.laytrang.com; r 400-1500B, tents 200B; 🚽) There's a range of options here in smart bungalows, rooms or tents, all in a tidy garden. Staff can arrange all sorts of tours in the area and there's a very good beachfront restaurant.

Amari Beach Resort & Spa (☎ 0 7520 5888; www.amari.com/trangbeach; r 5000-8000B; 🚽 🚿) All the rooms at this secluded resort have sea-facing terraces, polished wood floors and a soothing olive, cream and brick-red colour scheme. The beach goes on for miles and there are views of the islands, only a short speedboat ride away – the resort also has a

day area set up on Ko Kradan. Guests rave about the quality of service here.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are several daily boats from Pak Meng to Ko Ngai at 10am, returning from Ko Ngai between 8am and 9am. You have a choice of a 30-minute ride by speedboat (350B) or a slower ride by 'big boat' (150B, one hour). A long-tail charter is 900B.

There are regular air-con minivans from Th Kha Klang in Trang to Hat Pak Meng (60B, 45 minutes). You may have to take a motorcycle taxi from the Rte 4162 junction to the pier.

Ko Ngai

เกาะไหง(ไห)

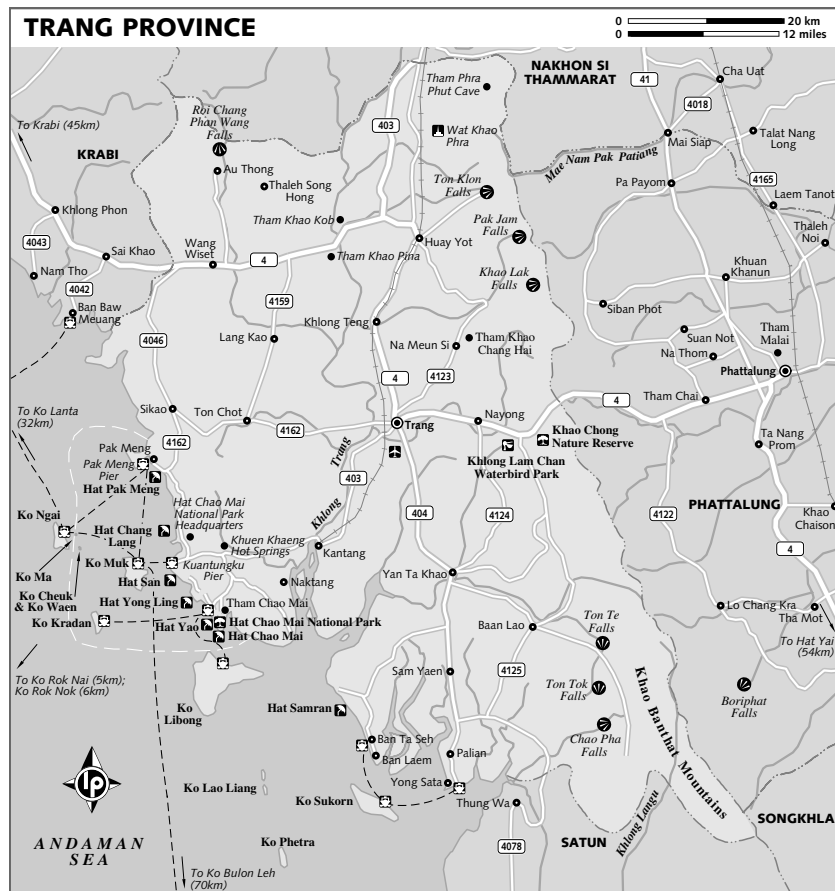
The squeaky white beach along the developed eastern coast of Ko Ngai (Ko Hai) extends into blue water with a sandy bottom (perfect for children) that ends at a reef drop-off with excellent snorkelling. Coral and clear waters encircle the entire densely forested island; it's a stunning place. With no indigenous population living here, the several spiffy resorts have the whole island to themselves. Mask and snorkel sets and fins can be rented from resorts for 60B each, sea kayaks for around 150B per hour, or you can take half-day snorkelling tours of nearby islands (850B per person). Trips to Ko Rok Nok, 29km southwest of Ko Ngai, cost 1500B by speedboat (plus the marine national park fee). Internet at the big resorts is slow and 100B per hour.

Even though it's technically a part of Krabi Province, the island's main land link is with Pak Meng.

SLEEPING

There's little here for budgetarians and most places are decidedly midrange, with their own restaurants and 24-hour electricity. The boat pier is at Koh Ngai Resort, but if you book ahead resorts on the other beaches will arrange transfers. Only the top-end rooms at most places have air-con.

Koh Hai Villa (☎ 0 7520 3263; bungalows 300-800B; 🚽) Budget huts of all description dot a large garden but don't expect more than a basic room with a hard bed and a mosquito net. The owner here can be disagreeable but fortunately it's the charming staff who take care of clients. Food at the beachside restaurant is reasonably priced and tasty.



our pick **Coco Cottages** (☎ 0 7521 2375/6; www.coco-cottage.com; bungalows 1600-4500B; 📶) The beach here is pretty skinny, but the quality of the coconut and bamboo ultra-stylish bungalows, artistically designed grounds and happy service more than make up for it. There are no manmade materials in sight, massage huts dot the beach, a groovy restaurant/bar saddles a river and it feels like heaven.

Thapwarin Resort (☎ 0 1894 3585; www.thapwarin.com; bungalows 1900-4500B; 📶) Small, intimate and with a bona fide lost-on-a-desert-island feel, thatched and polished wood bungalows here have luxurious touches like Thai cushions, luscious fabrics and oil lamp lighting at night. All rooms have chic bathrooms filled with rock and plant features.

Fantasy Resort & Spa (☎ Trang 0 7521 0317; www.kohhat.com; r 2000-8500B; 📶 📺 📶) Fantasy is a massive Angkor-Wat-meets-cheesy-cruise-ship-style place that extends from the beach and up the hillside. The bungalows are comfy but a little gaudy (floral wallpaper matched with red Chinese art), with nice wooden decks, all mod cons and breakfast included. There are also plainer hotel-style rooms up the hill. Service is tip-top and the restaurant serves excellent seafood.

Koh Ngai Resort (☎ 0 7520 6924; www.kohngairesort.com; bungalows 1500-15,000B; 📶 📺 📶) In a separate cove at the southern end of the island, this resort has its own private jetty and elegant wooden bungalows with huge verandas. The garden is immense and the resort has a small beach all to itself.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The resorts provide daily boats from Hat Pak Meng to Ko Ngai at 10am, returning from Ko Ngai between 8am and 9am. Speedboat transfers cost 350B (30 minutes), while the slower 'big boats' cost 150B (one hour). Unless you're staying at Koh Ngai Resort you'll have to take a long-tail for the ship-to-shore ride (40B) or arrange for one of the other resorts to provide transfers. You can also privately charter a long-tail from Pak Meng for 900B.

In the high season, high-speed boats running between Ban Sala Dan (600B, 30 minutes) on Ko Lanta and Ko Lipe (via Ko Muk and Ko Bulon Leh; 1600B, 2½ hours) stop at Koh Ngai Resort – see p379 and p357 for more details. Snorkelling tours from Ko Lanta (300B, two hours) also pick up from

Ko Ngai Resort in the high season at 3pm, returning from Ko Lanta at 8am.

Hat Chang Lang

หาดนางพิกัง

Hat Chang Lang is the next beach south from Hat Pak Meng and it continues the casuarina-backed sand motif. At the southern end of Hat Chang Lang, where the beachfront road turns inland, is the headquarters of **Hat Chao Mai National Park** (☎ 0 7521 3260; adult/child under 14 yr 200/100B; 📶 6am-6pm).

The 231-sq-km park covers the shoreline from Hat Pak Meng to Laem Chao Mai and encompasses the islands of Ko Muk, Ko Kradan and Ko Cheuk plus a host of small islets. In various parts of the park you may see endangered dugong and rare black-necked storks, as well as more common species such as sea otters, macaques, langurs, wild pigs, pangolins, little herons, Pacific reef-egrets, white-bellied sea eagles and monitor lizards.

You usually only need to pay the national park fees if you visit the park headquarters, Ko Kradan or Hat San and Hat Yong Ling (the next two beaches south of Hat Chang Lang).

National park headquarters (☎ 0 7521 3260; Bangkok 0 2562 0760; www.dnp.go.th/index_eng.asp; camping with own tent free, camping with tent hire 150B, r 800B, cabins 800-1500B) is the best place to stay. There are simple cabins that can be rented by the room – they sleep six to eight people and have fans. You can also camp under the casuarinas on the foreshore. There's a restaurant and a small shop near the accommodation.

Frequent minivans run from Th Kha Klang in Trang to Chao Mai (60B, one hour), or you can charter a taxi from Trang for 650B. The park headquarters is about 1km off this road, down a clearly signposted track.

Ko Muk

เกาะมุก

The beach-laden, *chow-lair* (sea-gypsy) island of Ko Muk is on the brink of going upscale. While Charlie Beach resort has thus far achieved near total domination of wide and white **Hat Faràng** (Hat Sai Yao) on the west coast, a Bangkok company has recently bought up the other handful of resorts on this beach with plans to go even bigger. A few lower-end accommodation places remain back in the bush. The interior of the island is filled with soaring rubber plantations and you are likely to see rubber collection going on all through-

REMARKABLE RUBBER TREES

If you ever wondered where the bounce in your rubber comes from, wonder no further: unlike money, it grows on trees. All over the Trang region, particularly on the islands floating off its coast, you are likely to come across tracts of these rubber-tree plantations.

Rubber trees produce the milky liquid known as latex in vessels that grow within the bark of the tree at a rakish 30-degree angle. It's a common misconception that latex is the actual sap of the tree. Once trees reach maturity after five to six years, collection begins. The trees are 'tapped' by making a thin incision into the bark at an angle parallel with the latex vessels. A small cup, usually made from a coconut shell, collects the latex as it drips down the tree. New scores are made every day – you can see these notched trees and collection cups throughout the region.

Latex from multiple trees is collected, poured into flat pans and mixed with formic acid, which serves as a coagulant. After a few hours the very wet sheets of rubber are wrung out by squishing them through a press. They're then hung out to dry. You'll see these large, yellowish pancakes drying on bamboo poles wherever rubber trees are grown. The gooey ovals are then shipped to processing plants where they are turned into rubber as we know it.

out the island (see boxed text, above). The east coast is home to the main village, a handful of quiet midrange options and the island's newest and most swanky resort. Note that much of Ko Muk shuts down in the low season.

Good snorkelling opportunities lie offshore and one of the island's star attractions, **Tham Morakot** (Emerald Cave), hides at the northern end of the island. This cave is a beautiful limestone tunnel that leads 80m to a sea lagoon. You have to swim through here at high tide, part of the way in pitch blackness, to a small concealed white-sand beach surrounded by lofty limestone, with a chimney that lets in a piercing shaft of light around midday. Boats can enter at low tide and the cave features on most tour itineraries so it can get pretty crowded in high season, and during the busiest months can reek of urine.

Between Ko Muk and Ko Ngai are the small karst islets of **Ko Cheuk** and **Ko Waen**, which have good snorkelling and small sandy beaches.

SLEEPING & EATING

The following places are a short walk from the pier on a shallow beach.

Ko Mook Resort (☎ Trang 0 7520 3303; 45 Th Praram VI; bungalows 500-1000B) These comfortable huts are excellent value and lie concealed in a thick garden covered with wild-looking ferns. The design here is unadorned and the tropical isolation is perfect for those searching for a romantic getaway. There's a free daily boat to Hat Faràng and snorkelling can be arranged for 350B.

Silavai (☎ 0 8945 95219; bungalows incl breakfast 5990-6880B; 📶) Straddling an arrow-shaped penin-

sula of white sand and surrounded by views of karst islands and the mainland, you can't beat this new resort's location. The grounds have yet to grow in so it looks a little sparse between the coconut palms but bungalows are large, stylish and made from hardwoods. For this price though, they aren't that private.

To stay on Hat Faràng on the west coast, you'll need to take a 10-minute, 80B motor-bike taxi from the pier. Don't let Charlie Beach Resort touts tell you they're the only place over here. A few little restaurants serving Thai and Western food are popping up inland behind Charlie Beach Resort.

Mookies (tents 200B) You'll find some scruffy tents backed into the rubber trees here, but it's comfy enough and there's a social atmosphere. The Australian owner Brian claims to sell the coldest beer in Thailand and checks his stock regularly to ensure he stays true to his claim. It's open year-round and is always a fun place to stop for a meal or a drink.

Rubber Tree Bungalow (☎ 0 7520 3284; bungalows 500-1000B) Inland from the beach, Rubber Tree Bungalow was remodelling when we passed and has spiffy pink concrete bungalows on stilts and a large wooden restaurant high up among rubber trees.

Charlie Beach Resort (☎ 0 7520 3281/3; www.kohmook.com; bungalows 1000-4000B; 📶 📺) There's a bunch of different bungalow options, ranging from basic clean shacks to swish air-con deals at this sprawling resort, which is currently the only one right on this beach. It is starting to get a little crowded, but the beach is lovely. Skip the restaurant. Staff, although not always helpful, can organise snorkelling tours to

Tham Morakot and other islands for around 1000B. Charlie's is open year-round.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Boats to Ko Muk leave from the pier at Kuantungku, a few kilometres south of the national park headquarters. There are several ferries to Ko Muk leaving around noon and returning at 8am (50B, 30 minutes). A chartered long-tail from Kuantungku to Ko Muk costs 700B and to either Pak Meng or Hat Yao it's around 1200B. Air-con vans run frequently from Trang to Kuantungku for 100B (one hour).

From November to May, high-speed boats running between Ko Lanta (via Ko Ngai; 1200B, one hour) and Ko Lipe (via Ko Bulon Leh; 1400B, two hours) stop at the pier on Ko Muk – see p379 and p357 for more details. Snorkelling tours from Ko Lanta (350B, two hours) also pick up at the pier in the high season at around 3pm, returning from Ko Lanta at 8am.

Hat Yao

หาดยาว

A rickety, scruffy fishing hamlet just south of Hat Yong Ling, Hat Yao is sandwiched between the sea and imposing limestone cliffs. A rocky headland at the southern end of Hat Yao is pockmarked with caves and there's good snorkelling around the island immediately offshore. The best beach in the area is the tiny **Hat Apo**, hidden away among the cliffs; you can get here by long-tail or wade around from the sandy spit in front of Sinchai's Chaomai Resort.

Tham Chao Mai is a vast cave full of crystal cascades and impressive stalactites and stalagmites that can be explored by boat. To visit it, you can charter a long-tail for 400B per hour from Yao pier. Haad Yao Nature Resort offers sea-kayaking trips to the cave, including lunch, for around 900B per person, including guide. You can also rent a kayak and self-explore the cave for 600B (map included).

Just south of the headland in Ban Chao Mai is the Yao pier, the main departure point for Ko Kradan and Ko Libong.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are just two accommodation options at Hat Yao and both offer plenty of tours and activities.

Haad Yao Nature Resort (☎ 0 1894 6936; www.trangsea.com; r 300-600B, bungalows 800B; 🏠 📺) Run by enthusiastic naturalists, this place offers a variety of environmental-focused tours in the Hat Yao area. Very orderly bungalows come with shared bathrooms, while the better self-contained bungalows have verandas. There's also a pier restaurant here where you can watch the fishermen ply their trade over tasty Thai victuals.

Sinchai's Chaomai Resort (☎ 0 7520 3034; bungalows 300-1500B; 🏠 📺) Self-sufficient, friendly Sinchai's has a handful of bungalows nestled under the rocky cliffs at the northern end of Hat Yao. The scenery here is reason enough to stay. The family can arrange kayaking tours (700B) and multi-day touring packages around Trang and the Andaman coast.

On the northern side of the headland is a collection of wooden seafood restaurants selling cheap Thai meals.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

From here, you can catch one of the regular long-tail boats to Ko Libong (50B, 20 minutes). You can also charter long-tail boats from here to Ko Libong for 300B or to Ko Muk for 1200B each way. Sörng-tää-ou to Trang (one hour, 100B) leave when full from the pier – your best bet is before 9am. To Kuantungku pier (10B, 15 minutes) for boats to Ko Kradan and Ko Ngai, sörng-tää-ou leave when full or it's 100B to charter a whole one.

You can rent motorcycles (250B per day) and mountain bikes (100B per day) at Sinchai's Chaomai Resort.

Ko Kradan

เกาะกระดาน

The main beach of Ko Kradan has sweeping views over aqua waters to the other islands scattered about the Andaman. There are great, untouched coral reefs just offshore, and rubber plantations fill large tracts of the island's core. Ko Kradan is part of Hat Chao Mai National Park and has so far been spared major developments. At the moment there are only two places to stay on the island, though the Hat Pak Meng-based Amari Trang Beach Resort (p363) has a day area here and plenty of day-trippers pour onto the shore during the high season. Camping is possible with permission from the national park staff.

Unfortunately, lodging options are not stellar. The new management will hopefully

save **Koh Kradan Paradise Beach** (☎ 0 7521 1391; www.kradanisland.com; bungalows 2000B, tents 1600-4500B; 🏠 📺), which when we passed was still less-than-charming, with several attached and free-standing wooden bungalows lined up behind the main beach; 'resort tents' were planned for the future. Inland and with easy access to the island's other two, more remote beaches is **Paradise Lost** (☎ 0 8958 72409; bungalows 500-1000B), which has large but grungy bungalows, a good vibe and an even better restaurant (meals around 120B). It's open year-round.

The Koh Kradan Paradise Beach resort provides transfers for guests from its **office** (☎ 0 7521 1391) opposite the train station in Trang – this is included in the room rate. A chartered long-tail from Kuantungku will cost around 800B one-way. Snorkelling tours from Ko Lanta (400B, four hours from Ko Lanta via Ko Ngai and Ko Muk, two hours to Ko Lanta) pick up on the main beach in the high season at around 2pm returning from Ko Lanta at 8am.

Ko Libong

เกาะลิบง

Trang's largest island is just 15 minutes by long-tail from Hat Yao. Less visited than neighbouring isles, Ko Libong is known for its flora and fauna as much as for its beaches. The island is home to a small Muslim fishing community and has a few resorts on the lovely isolated beaches of the western coast.

On the eastern coast of Ko Libong at **Laem Ju Hoi** is a large area of mangroves protected by the Botanical Department as the **Libong Archipelago Wildlife Reserve** (☎ 0 7525 1932). The sea channels here are one of the last habitats of the rare dugong, and around 40 of them graze on the sea grass that flourishes in the bay. The nature resorts in Hat Yao and Ko Libong offer dugong-spotting tours by sea kayak, led by trained naturalists, for 1000B. Sea kayaks can also be rented at most resorts for 150B per hour.

SLEEPING

Le Dugong Resort (☎ 0 7972 7228; www.libongresort.com; bungalows 350-800B) This neat little budget affair is positively dripping with thatch from its many charming, beachfront bamboo huts – each partly concealed by luxuriant greenery and palms. Indoor-outdoor bathrooms enhance the naturalistic flair. Motorbikes can be rented here for 300B per day.

NICE DAY FOR A WET WEDDING

Every Valentine's Day (14 February), Ko Kradan is the setting for a rather unusual wedding ceremony. Around 35 brides and grooms don scuba gear and descend to an altar among the coral reefs, exchanging their vows in front of the Trang District Officer. Quite how the couples manage to say 'I do' underwater has never been fully explained, but the ceremony has made it into *Guinness World Records* for the Most Couples Married Underwater. Before and after the scuba ceremony, the couples are paraded along the coast in a flotilla of motorboats. If you think this might be right for your special day, visit www.trangonline.com/underwaterwedding.

Libong Nature Beach Bungalow (☎ 0 1894 6936; www.trangsea.com; bungalows 600-1000B; 🏠 📺) Set on a grassy garden and surrounded by rubber plantations, this place is run by the same friendly, environmentally conscious people as the nature resort in Hat Yao but it was looking rather worn when we passed. There's a simple restaurant with tasty food and the owners run excellent sea-kayaking tours of the mangroves. The resort is closed in the low season.

our pick **Libong Beach Resort** (☎ 0 7522 5205; www.libongbeachresort.com; bungalows 700-2500B; 🏠 📺) Right next door to Le Dugong Resort, this is the only place on the island that's open year-round – rates drop considerably in the low season. There are several options from bland slap-up shacks backed behind a murky stream to beachfront and very comfortable wood and thatch chalets. We had our best meal on the Andaman coast here (fresh curry crab) and there are guests who come back year after year just for the food served at the basic-looking restaurant. There's also a dive centre (two dives 3500B) open during the high season.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Long-tail boats to Ban Ma Phrao on the eastern coast of Ko Libong leave regularly from Hat Yao (20 minutes) during daylight hours for 50B per person; the long-tail jetty at Hat Yao is just before the new Yao pier. On Ko Libong, motorcycle taxis run across to the resorts on the western coast for 80B. A chartered long-tail directly to the resorts will cost 600B each way.

Ko Lao Liang

Ko Lao Liang is actually two islands right next to each other: Ko Laoliang Nong, the smaller of the two where the only resort is found, and the larger Ko Laoliang Pi where there's a small fishermen's settlement. The islands are karst formations with small white sand beaches, clear water and plenty of coral close to shore.

The only place to stay is **Laoliang Island Resort** (☎ 08430 44077; www.laoliangresort.com; 3-day/2-night package per person 5000B) and, so far, this place is known better by Thais than Westerners. Lodging is in comfy luxury tents equipped with mattresses and fans, right on the beach, and there are plenty of activities on offer including diving, snorkelling, climbing the islands' karst cliffs and sea kayaking. At night there's a small bar and the restaurant sometimes puts together seafood barbecues. Only package rates including all meals, gear and a few activities are available. Transport to/from Krabi, Ao Nang, Trang or Ko Lipe is also included in the price.

Ko Sukorn

เกาะสุคอร์น

With about 2800 Muslim fisherfolk, only four cars, three dogs (locals don't like 'em) and hundreds of water buffalo, Ko Sukorn is a place to soak in local culture as well as a few rays. The beaches here are a deep golden colour and, although less flashy than those on more popular islands, are more intimate and good for swimming. Clean and friendly little villages are strewn between rubber plantations and rice paddies in the interior and watermelon fields and coconut palms near the coast.

The best way to see the island is by renting a mountain bike for the day (about 50B) – with few hills, stunning panoramas, lots of shade and plenty of opportunities to meet locals, this will get you right into the slower pace of life here. Covering up is an absolute must when you go off the beach because this is a strongly Muslim island.

SLEEPING

There's limited electricity on Sukorn so expect power only in the evenings. For serious backpackers, ask around at the Sukorn boat pier for homestay opportunities. **Pawadee Guesthouse** (☎ 0 8988 74756; r 100B) is recommended.

Sukorn Island Resort (☎ 0 7521 1460; fax 0 7521 5648; bungalows 800-1500B; ☹ Nov-Apr) The 49 concrete bungalows packed among the rubber

trees lack style and are overpriced but the beach here is particularly good. Bikes can be rented here.

Sukorn Cabana (☎ 0 1079 3412; www.sukorncabana.com; bungalows 800-1600B; ☹) Sloping grounds dotted with large and clean bungalows meet interesting conglomerate rock formations on the shore. There are lots of places for lounging in the flower-filled garden and a good restaurant.

our pick **Sukorn Beach Bungalows** (☎ 0 7520 7707, booking office 0 7521 1457; www.sukorn-island-trang.com; bungalows 850-1950B) Easily the most professionally run place on this island, the concrete and wood bungalows all have comfy verandas and a long beach out front from which you can watch the sun set over outlying islands. The friendly Dutch owner is chock-full of information and can arrange excellent tailor-made island-hopping tours throughout the region. The resort is open year-round (rates drop by 60% in the low season), and the booking office near the train station in Trang can arrange transfers to Sukorn as well as other islands.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The easiest way to get to Sukorn is by private transfers available with the resorts for 1850B per person. The more adventurous way is to catch one of the sörng-tāa-ou carrying market-going Sukorn villagers that leave the wet market on Th Ratchadamnoen in Trang at 11.30am to the jetties at Palian (transfer in Yan Ta Khao; 60B, two hours) and Ban Ta Seh (60B, 1½ hours). These trucks meet long-tails at the piers that take you onto Sukorn (15 minutes from Ban Ta Seh, 45 minutes from Palian) for 60B per person – it's best to reserve this trip through the **Sukorn Beach Bungalows booking office** (☎ 0 7521 1457; 22 Th Suthanee), which will arrange for the sörng-tāa-ou to pick you up.

Otherwise, air-con minivans run from Th Ratsada in Trang to Palian (transfer at Yan Ta Khao; 40B) or Ban Ta Seh (35B), where you can charter a long-tail to Ban Saimai (200B to 300B), the main village on Ko Sukorn. The resorts are a 20-minute walk or 40B motorcycle taxi ride from Ban Saimai.

From Ko Sukorn you can also charter long-tail boats to get to Ko Bulon Leh or Ko Libong (2500B) as well as to Ko Kradan, Ko Ngai or Ko Muk (3000B). Contact Sukorn Beach Bungalows (above) for more information.

AROUND TRANG PROVINCE

The eastern edge of Trang Province is lined with forested hills that are full of dramatic limestone caves and scenic waterfalls. Unfortunately, none of these can be reached by public transport, so you'll usually need to take a tour or rent a vehicle. If you want to explore the region under your own steam, travel agencies in Trang (see p359) can help you arrange either motorcycle rental (150B per day) or car rental (around 1400B per day). These agencies can also arrange tours around the province on your behalf.

Waterfalls

Trang Province is famous for its waterfalls, particularly in the southeast, where the Trang and Palian Rivers meet the Khao Banthat Mountains. A scenic paved road branches south from Hwy 4 near the Trang-Phattalung border, passing several cascades, including the towering **Ton Te Falls**. A hiking trail leads 1km from here to **Ton Tok Falls**, which offers grand views back over Ton Te Falls. In the Palian District near Laem Som, **Chao Pha Falls** has about 25 stepped falls of 5m to 10m each, with pools at every level.

There's another cluster of falls between Trang and Huay Yot off Rte 4123, including **Ton Klou, Pak Jam** and **Khao Lak**. Perhaps the most unusual waterfall in the province is **Roi Chang Phan Wang** (Hundred Levels, Thousand Palaces), about 70km northwest of Trang in Wang Wiset District, a little-explored corner of the region. Surrounded by rubber groves, dozens of thin cascades of water tumble down limestone rock formations into pools below.

You'll need your own transport to reach most of these falls, but Trang travel agencies (see p359) can arrange tours to Ton Te and surrounding falls for around 750/500B per adult/child.

Caves

Dramatic caves are another speciality of the Trang region. Close to the Trang River, near Wang Wiset in the north, **Tham Khao Kob** (Lay Cave) has scenic limestone formations and a 4km-long subterranean stream that you can explore by sea kayak. The local Tambon administration rents out boats for 50B per person. Nearby is **Tham Khao Pina**, off Hwy 4 at the 43km marker, which contains a large, multilevel Buddhist shrine that's popular with Thai tourists.

North of Huay Yot at the very top of the province is **Tham Phra Phut**, a cave temple with a large Ayuthaya-period reclining Buddha. Nearby **Wat Khao Phra** is housed in a cave-temple with mysterious red seals carved into the walls. About 15km north-east of Trang, near the weaving village of Na Meun Si on Rte 4123, is **Tham Khao Chang Hai**, another famous cavern with impressive limestone formations.

Travel agencies in Trang charge 800B per person for tours to Tham Khao Kob and 700B to Tham Khao Chang Hai, including a stop at Na Meun Si. You'll need private transport to visit the other caves.

SATUN PROVINCE

As the Andaman coast's southernmost region, Satun has never seen much tourist action. Yet nowadays, with the Malay border on the east coast off limits, more and more travellers are making their way to or from Malaysia via Ko Lipe in the otherwise undeveloped Ko Tarutao Marine National Park. This phenomenal park encompasses some of the most pristine untamed islands in the Andaman, all drenched in luxuriant greenery and edged by stereotypically splendid tropical beaches; fortunately much of it is well protected. Beyond Ko Lipe the province still hardly rates a blink of the eye as visitors rush north to Ko Lanta or south to Pulau Langkawi, Malaysia. Plucky explorers willing to go the extra distance to get here will not be disappointed.

Until 1813 Satun was a district of the Malay state of Kedah, but the region was ceded to Britain in 1909 under the Anglo-Siamese Treaty and became a province of Siam in 1925. Largely Muslim in make-up, Satun has seen little of the political turmoil that plagues the neighbouring regions of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat (see boxed text, p252). Around 60% of people here speak Yawi or Malay as a first language, and the few wát in the region are small, impoverished and vastly outnumbered by mosques.

SATUN

๐.เมืองสตูล
pop 33,400

Lying in a steamy jungle valley surrounded by limestone cliffs, and framed by a murky river, isolated Satun is a relaxing coastal settlement

DETOUR: THALE BAN NATIONAL PARK

Very few foreigners make it out to this park, which lies on the Malaysian border about 30km northeast of Satun. Its main feature is a freshwater lake that sits in the middle of the 196-sq-km park, a scenic area of upland rainforest with captivating wildlife, waterfalls and caverns. Next to the lake are 13 national park cottages, which can be rented for 500B to 1000B per night. Contact the **Royal Forest Department** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 0 2561 4292/3) in Bangkok for bookings.

There's no public transport to the park, but you can get here by hired taxi from Satun or Hat Yai. See below for more details.

can buy boat tickets for these trips in Satun at the **Thai Ferry Centre** (☎ 0 7473 0511; Th Sulakanukoon), near Wat Chanathipchaloem.

The boat that used to make the Ko Tarutao and Ko Lipe run from Tammalang pier was being used to make the Ko Lipe to Ko Lanta (see p379) crossing in the 2007 to 2008 season. Hopes were that another boat would become available for the Satun to Ko Tarutao crossing in following years – check with the Thai Ferry Centre before you arrive.

BUS

Buses to Bangkok leave from a small depot on Th Hatthakham Seuksa, just east of the centre. Air-con services (800B, 14 hours) leave at 7am and at 2pm and 3pm. A single VIP bus leaves at 4.30pm (1030B). Ordinary and air-con buses to Hat Yai (70B, two hours) and Trang (90B, 1½ hours) leave regularly from in front of the 7-Eleven on Th Satun Thanee.

Your best bet for getting to Thale Ban National Park by public transport is to catch a sǒrng-tǎa-ou to the Malaysian border from near the market and walk the 1km or so to the park entrance. These cost 50B if the sǒrng-tǎa-ou is full, but you may have to charter the whole thing if you don't want to wait all day (450B). **Andaman Trips & Services** (☎ 0 7472 2988; www.andamantrip.com; 74 Soi 6) can organise day trips.

MINIVAN & SHARE TAXI

There are regular vans to the train station in Hat Yai (150B, one hour) from a depot south of Wat Chanathipchaloem on Th Sulakanukoon.

Occasional minivans run to Trang, but buses are much more frequent. If you're arriving by boat at Tammalang pier, there are direct air-con vans to Hat Yai (170B), Hat Yai airport (220B) and Trang (220B).

Share taxis can be hired from next to the Masjid Mambang Satul to Pak Bara (400B, 45 minutes), La-Ngu (260B, 30 minutes) or Hat Yai (400B, one hour).

Getting Around

Small orange sǒrng-tǎa-ou to Tammalang pier (for boats to Malaysia) cost 40B and leave every 20 minutes or so between 8am and 5pm from a depot opposite the Thai Ferry Centre. A motorcycle taxi from the same area costs 60B.

AROUND SATUN Pak Bara

ปากบารา

The coast northeast of Satun has a few little towns that serve as jumping-off points for the islands in the Mu Ko Phetra and Ko Tarutao Marine National Parks, but the small fishing community of Pak Bara is the main transit point. Tourist facilities are slowly improving as Pak Bara becomes increasingly busy with tourists discovering these dazzling isles in the south Andaman. The peaceful town has some decent sleeping options and great seafood and is even turning into a popular place to hang out for a while.

The main road from La-Ngu terminates at the pier where there are several travel agencies, internet cafés, cheap restaurants and shops selling beach gear. There's a **visitors centre** (☎ 0 7478 3485) for Ko Tarutao Marine National Park just back from the pier, where you can book accommodation and obtain permission for camping. Travel agencies here can arrange tours to the islands in the national park.

TOURS

There are several travel agencies near the pier that will vie for your transport custom. **Adang Sea Tours** (☎ 0 1276 1930; adang_sea_tour@hotmail.com) and **Andrew Tour** (☎ 08 1897 8482) are two of the more reliable agencies. Shop around for day trips by kayak through the impressive caves at **Tham Chet Khok** (1800B per person including lunch) and two-day island-hopping and snorkelling tours around the region (from 2600B per person). You can arrange car hire here for 1200B per day.

During the high season, the **Satun Pakbara Speedboat Club** (☎ 0 7478 3643-5; www.tarutaolipeisland.com) runs speedboat tours to Ko Tarutao, Ko Bulon Leh and Ko Lipe – visit the website for the latest details.

SLEEPING & EATING

The following guesthouses are all on the main road leading to the pier.

Diamond Beach Bungalows (☎ 0 7478 3138; r 300-400B; ☺) On a good beach, 350m up from the pier, the bungalows at Diamond Beach are clean, have real showers, and sit in a little garden. There's a very popular restaurant right on the beach from which you can watch fishing village life go by.

Best House Resort (☎ 0 7578 3058; bungalows 590B; ☺) This place is the closest to the pier and has tidy concrete bungalows around a pond. The owner is super-friendly and there's a café serving mediocre Western and Thai fare.

Elephant Joe Bar & Restaurant (meals 60-150B; ☎ 7am-10pm) Stop here while waiting for your ferry for Western breakfasts, espresso drinks, cocktails or the house speciality, soft shell crab (150B).

There are several elementary restaurants and vendors near the Pak Bara pier that serve good Malay Muslim food for 20B to 50B. There's also a market on the main beach on Mondays and Thursdays where you can buy amazingly cheap seafood by the kilogram as well as second-hand clothing and fruit.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are hourly buses from Hat Yai to the pier at Pak Bara (90B, 2½ hours) between 7am and 4pm. Coming from Satun, you can take an ordinary bus towards Trang and get off at La-Ngu (40B, 30 minutes), continuing by sǒrng-tǎa-ou to Pak Bara (20B, 15 minutes). You can also charter a taxi to Pak Bara from Satun for 450B.

Air-con minivans leave hourly for Hat Yai (150B, two hours) from travel agencies near Pak Bara pier. There are also vans to Trang (200B, 1½ hours) which connect to numerous destinations like Krabi (450B, four hours) and Phuket (650B, six hours). It's cheaper, although more complicated, to get a minibus to Trang and then organise your own transport from there.

From 21 October to the end of May there are boats to Ao Pante Malacca on Ko Tarutao and on to Ko Lipe at 11.30am and 1.30pm

(550B to 650B, 1½ hours); in the reverse direction it's inexplicably cheaper (400B) and boats leave at 9am and 10am. From 16 November these boats also stop at Ko Adang for the same price. For Ko Bulon Leh, boats depart at 2pm, arriving in Ko Bulon Leh one hour later (300B round-trip). During the low season services to Ko Lipe and Ko Bulon Leh peter out to one per week (usually Friday with the return on Sunday) at best – it depends on the weather. Boats to Ko Tarutao and Ko Adang stop entirely.

Ko Bulon Leh

เกาะบุโหลนleh

This pretty island, 23km west of Pak Bara, is surrounded by the Andaman's signature clear waters and has its share of faultless white-sand beaches with swaying casuarinas. Gracious Ko Bulon Leh is in that perfect phase of being developed enough to offer comfortable facilities, yet not so popular that you have to book umbrella beach-time days in advance.

On the southern part of the island you'll find the alluring beaches of **Mango Bay**, while in the north sits a rocky bay that's home to small settlements of *chow lair*. The island is perfect for hiking – the interior is interlaced with tracks and trails. The tracks are lined with rubber plantations thick with birds, and you can reach most places on the island within half an hour. There are some bizarre rock formations along the coastline reminiscent of a Salvador Dali dream. A fine golden-sand beach runs along the eastern coast of the island with good coral reefs immediately offshore.

Resorts can arrange snorkelling trips to other islands in the Ko Bulon group for around 900B, and fishing trips for 300B per hour. You can also rent masks and snorkels (100B), fins (70B) and sea kayaks (150B per hour).

SLEEPING & EATING

Most places here shut down in the low season, though at this time caretakers at some of the resorts might rent out bungalows for discount rates.

Bulon Marina Resort (☎ 0 7568 4168; www.marina-kobulon.com; bungalows 600-1000B) Inland from Pansand Resort, this unique place is built from natural materials and has lovely thatched huts on stilts and a funky castaway-style restaurant with tables on a large bamboo veranda.

One of the first marine national parks in Thailand, the only accommodation in the park involves small, ecofriendly government-run cabins and longhouses, and great emphasis is placed on preserving natural resources in the area. Pressure from big developers to build resorts on the islands has so far been mercifully ignored, though concessions were made for the filming of the American reality-TV series *Survivor* in 2001. Unfortunately, rubbish on the islands can be a problem – removal of beach trash as well as that generated from visitors only happens sporadically. Do your part and tread lightly out here. Within the islands of the park you can spot dusky langurs, crab-eating macaques, mouse deer, wild pigs, sea otters, fishing cats, tree pythons, water monitors, Brahminy kites, sea eagles, hornbills and kingfishers.

Ko Tarutao is the biggest and most visited island in the group and is home to the park headquarters and government accommodation. Many travellers choose to stay on Ko Lipe, which has managed to evade the park's protection and is fast becoming a popular resort with tourist facilities and bungalows aplenty. Long-tail tours to other outlying islands can be arranged through travel agencies in Satun or Pak Bara, through the national park headquarters on Ko Tarutao or through resorts and long-tail boat operators on Ko Lipe. Note that there are no foreign-exchange facilities at Ko Tarutao – you can change cash and cheques at travel agencies in Pak Bara and there's an ATM at La-Ngu.

Ko Tarutao

เกาะตาวูเต๊ะ

Most of Ko Tarutao's whopping 152 sq km is covered in dense, old-growth jungle which rises sharply up to the park's 713m peak. Mangrove swamps and typically impressive limestone cliffs circle much of the island, and the western coast is lined with quiet white-sand beaches.

Tarutao's sordid history partly explains its great state of preservation today. Between 1938 and 1948, more than 3000 Thai criminals and political prisoners were incarcerated here, including interesting inmates such as So Setabutra, who compiled the first Thai-English dictionary while imprisoned on Tarutao, and Sittiporn Gridagon, son of Rama VII. During WWII, food and medical supplies from the mainland were severely depleted and

hundreds of prisoners died from malaria. The prisoners and guards mutinied, taking to piracy in the nearby Strait of Malacca until they were suppressed by British troops in 1944.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

You'll find the overgrown remains of the political prisoners' camp in the southeast of the island at **Ao Taloh Udang**, reached via a long overgrown track. The prison camp for civilian prisoners was on the eastern coast at **Ao Taloh Waw** where the boats from Tammalang pier now dock. A concrete road runs across the island from Ao Taloh Waw to **Ao Pante Malacca** on the western coast, where you'll find the park headquarters, bungalows and the main camp site. Boats leave between Ao Pante Malacca and Pak Bara on the mainland.

Next to the visitors centre at Ao Pante Malacca, a steep trail leads through the jungle to **Toe-Boo Cliff**, a dramatic rocky outcrop with fabulous views of Ko Adang and the surrounding islands.

Ao Pante Malacca has a lovely alabaster beach shaded by pandanus and casuarinas. If you follow the large stream flowing through here inland, you'll reach **Tham Jara-Khe** (Crocodile Cave), once home to deadly saltwater crocodiles. The cave is navigable for about 1km at low tide and can be visited on long-tail tours from the jetty at Ao Pante Malacca.

Immediately south of Ao Pante is **Ao Jak**, which has another fine sandy beach, and **Ao Molae**, which also has fine white sand and a ranger station with bungalows and a camp site. A 30-minute boat ride or 8km walk south of Ao Pante you'll find **Ao Son**, an isolated sandy bay where turtles nest between September and April. You can camp here but there are no facilities. Ao Son has decent snorkelling, as does **Ao Makhham**, further south. From the ranger station at Ao Son you can walk inland to **Lu Du Falls** (about 1½ hours) and **Lo Po Falls** (about 2½ hours).

On the far side of the island is **Ao Rusi** with a dramatic cave and good coral offshore, accessible by long-tail from Ao Pante Malacca. Nearby **Ko Le-Lah** is another good snorkelling spot. There are interesting sheer-sided rocky buttresses along the southeastern coast, including **Ko Rung Nok** (Bird-Nest Island), off Ao Taloh Udang, a treasure trove of valuable swallows' nests.

SLEEPING & EATING

All the formal park accommodation on Ko Tarutao is around the park headquarters at Ao Pante Malacca and at Ao Molae. The accommodation (open mid-November to mid-May) is far more sensitive to the environment than the average Thai resort. Water is rationed, rubbish is (sporadically) transported back to the mainland, lighting is provided by power-saving light bulbs and electricity is available between 6pm and 7am only.

There are large fan-cooled **cabins** (r600-1200B) with two or three rooms at the foot of Toe-Boo Cliff, while at Ao Molae you'll find 10 recently constructed deluxe **bungalows** (up to 4 people 1000-5000B). There are also simple **long-house rooms** (r500B) at Ao Pante Malacca, with four mattresses on the floor (you must take a whole room). All rooms have mosquito nets, but bring some repellent as backup. Accommodation can be booked at the **park office** (☎ 0 7478 3485) in Pak Bara, or through the **Royal Forest Department** (☎ 0 2561 4292/3) in Bangkok. National park entry fees can be paid at Ao Pante Malacca or Ao Taloh Waw.

Camping is permitted under casuarinas at Ao Pante Malacca, Ao Molae and Ao Taloh Waw, where there are toilet and shower blocks, and on the wild beaches of Ao Son, Ao Makhham and Ao Taloh Udang, where you will need to be absolutely self-sufficient. The cost is 50B per person with your own tent, or you can hire tents for 200B. Camping is also permitted on Ko Adang and other islands in the park, with permission.

The park authorities run an excellent **canteen** (dishes 40-120B) at Ao Pante Malacca. The food is satisfying and tasty and they even have cold beer. If you stay at Ao Taloh Waw you can eat at the small canteen by the jetty.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

From Pak Bara (p372), boats stop at Ao Pante Malacca at 11.30am and 1.30pm (400B, one hour) on their way to Ko Lipe (250B, one hour); in the reverse direction, boats arriving from Ko Lipe towards Pak Bara dock at 10am. The island officially closes from the end of May to 15 September. Regular boats run from 21 October to the end of May; when the boats aren't running, you'll have to charter a long-tail from Pak Bara for 1500B. During the high season you can also come here on speedboat day tours

from Pak Bara for 2000B, including national park fees, lunch, drinks and snorkelling.

Long-tails can be hired from the jetty at Ao Pante Malacca for trips to Tham Jara-Khe or Ao Son for around 600B. To Ao Taloh Udang you'll pay about 1500B round-trip.

Ko Khai & Ko Klang

เกาะไข่น้ำ/เกาะกล้าง

Between Ko Tarutao and Ko Adang there's a small cluster of three islands collectively known as **Muu Ko Klang** (Middle Island Group). Most interesting is **Ko Khai**, which has a neat white-sand beach and a scenic rock arch. The coral here has suffered a bit due to boat anchors, but both Ko Khai and **Ko Klang** have crystal-clear water for swimming. You can get here by chartered long-tail from either Ao Pante Malacca on Ko Tarutao, or Ko Lipe; a round-trip will cost around 1500B from either end.

Ko Lipe

เกาะหลีเป๊ะ

With more than its share of white beaches, mountainous woodland and flashy blue water housing extraordinarily healthy coral, Ko Lipe is the home of a 700-strong community of *chow lair* villagers and a growing legion of private developers. Falling outside the protection of the national park, partly because of the entrenched local population, this little isle is rapidly emerging as the tourist centre for the far-southern Andaman. For the moment there's a chummy, eco-minded feel, but we shed tears just thinking about the potential for overdevelopment on this rising star.

The densest development is along the wide curving beach of **Hat Pattaya** on the southern coast – this is the prettiest bay and there's a party vibe here during high season. **Sunlight Beach** is near the *chow lair* village on the eastern coast – all the bungalows are spread out between locals' houses and at the northern end a sand bar carves out a tranquil, translucent cove of emerald water. On **Sunset Beach**, which has fabulous views to Ko Adang, there's just one friendly resort – a footpath leads here from behind the village school. Luckily, the rest of Ko Lipe is still very mellow, with peaceful jungle trails and some delightful secluded beaches that have a romantic *Gilligan's Island* feel.

There are no banks or ATMs on the island, though several of the bigger resorts can change

travellers cheques, cash or give advances on credit cards – all for a hefty fee. It's also a good idea to stock up on necessities such as insect repellent before you arrive, as things can be quite pricey on the island. Internet is available mostly along the cross-island path for 3B per minute.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

There's good coral all along the southern coast and around **Ko Kra**, the little island opposite the *chow lair* village. Most resorts rent out mask and snorkel sets and fins for 50B each and can arrange long-tail trips to Ko Adang and other coral-fringed islands for around 1500B. On Sunlight and Pattaya Beaches, French-run **Forra Diving** (☎ 0 4633 6274; www.forradiving.com) offers PADI Open Water dive courses for 1200B, and day trips with two dives for 3000B.

SLEEPING & EATING

Nearly all resorts on Ko Lipe close from May to October, when the boats stop running. Many resorts offer water refills to ease rubbish problems – please, please take advantage of these services. If you tire of Westernised Thai food, try some of the rustic food shacks in the village.

Fisheries Department Bungalows (☎ 0 8747 87958; Sunset Beach; bungalows 250-500B) One of the few places open year-round and often one of the last places on the island to have a room available during peak times, this place is a great bargain.

Viewpoint (Sunlight Beach; bungalows 350-500B) Perched on a hill overlooking Ko Kra, this is a remote spot with rudimentary but big bamboo bungalows all with breezy terraces and jaw-dropping views.

Porn Resort (☎ 0 7472 8032; Sunset Beach; bungalows 500-800B) This popular old-fashioned bamboo place is the only privately owned resort on comely Sunset Beach. The restaurant is highly recommended – handy since serious bush tracking is required to leave the area at night.

Pooh's Bungalows (☎ 0 7472 8019; www.poohlpe.com; r 600-1200B; 📺) Everything you could possibly want – good food, a bar, dive shop, big-screen movies, internet, excellent tourist services, immaculate rooms and more – can be found at Pooh's, except the beach. It's OK though because five minutes in one direction you find Hat Pattaya, in the other there's Sunlight Beach. This is the only resort on the island that's open year-round.

Mountain Resort (☎ 0 7472 8131; www.mountainresortkohlipe.com; Sunlight Beach; bungalows 600-2200B; 📺 📺) This big resort has views from its hillside location out over Ko Adang and winding wooden walkways lead down to the sublime beach on Sunrise Beach's northern sand bar. The huts are intricately designed from thatch and wood and come with verandas. The restaurant has a huge menu as well as gargantuan views of the sea.

Da Ya Resort (☎ 0 7472 8030; Hat Pattaya; bungalows 800-2000B) A family-run place, the bungalows here are your standard slap-up wooden affairs but the beach is fantastic and the back garden is charming. The restaurant here is known for its fresh seafood.

Pattaya Song (☎ 0 7472 8034; www.pattayasongresort.com; Hat Pattaya; bungalows 1000-1500B) Above the rocks at the western end of the beach, this Italian-run pad has decent wood and concrete huts strung out either along the ocean or a little way up the hill. The Pattaya Seafood restaurant here serves excellent food and the resort can organise fishing and island-hopping trips around the area.

our pick Castaway Resort (☎ 0 8313 87472; www.castaway-resorts.com; Sunlight Beach; bungalows 2000-3000B; 📺) While not on the best stretch of beach, the roomy wood bungalows with hammock-laden terraces, pillows everywhere, overhead fans and fabulous, modern-meets-naturalistic outdoor bathrooms are the most chic on Lipe. It's also one of the most environmentally friendly – with solar water heaters and lights, and the owners are trying to convert their diesel generators to use palm oil. The candlelit restaurant here is pricey, but the food is excellent and the ambience divinely romantic.

Bundhaya Resort (☎ 0 7475 0248-9; www.bundhayaresort.com; Hat Pattaya; bungalows 1200-3700B; 📺 📺) Lipe's newest and most commercial resort doubles as the boat ticket and immigration office. Characterless wooden bungalows are overpriced but comfortable enough and rates include a decent buffet breakfast at the beachside restaurant.

DRINKING

There are lots of driftwood-clad Rasta bars along Hat Pattaya. A little bit inland, JJ's Jungle Bar is another good place for a tipple, as is **Karma Bar** (☎ 0 5199 3101), nestled against the base of a limestone cliff below Mountain Resort.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From 21 October to the end of May there are boats from Pak Bara (see p372) to Ko Lipe via Ao Pante Malacca on Ko Tarutao, at 11.30am and 1.30pm (550B to 650B, 1½ hours); in the reverse direction it's inexplicably cheaper (400B) and boats leave at 9am and 10am. Low-season transport depends on the weather but there is usually one boat per week (usually Friday with the return on Sunday). You always have the option of chartering a boat to Ko Lipe from Pak Bara for a hefty 4000B each way.

There's a new high-speed ferry run by the **Satun-Pak Bara Speedboat Club** (www.tarutaolipeisland.com) every other day from Ko Lipe at 9am to Ban Saladan on Ko Lanta (p350; 1900B, three hours) stopping at Ko Bulon Leh (600B, 30 minutes), Ko Muk (1400B, two hours) and Ko Ngai (1600B, 2½ hours). The next day the same boat makes the return trip from Ko Lanta departing at 1pm and arriving on Ko Lipe at 4pm.

Another ferry goes daily to Pulau Langkawi (1200B, one hour) in Malaysia from November to May. Departure is at 4pm but you need to be at the immigration office at the Bundhaya Resort by 2.30pm to get stamped out. In reverse, boats leave from Pulau Langkawi for Ko Lipe at 9.30am Malay time.

Ko Adang & Ko Rawi

เกาะอาดัง/เกาะราวี่

The island immediately north of Ko Lipe, **Ko Adang** has brooding, densely forested hills, white-sand beaches and healthy coral reefs.

Lots of snorkelling tours make a stop here but there are mooring buoys to prevent damage from anchors. Inland are jungle trails and tumbling waterfalls, including **Pirate's Falls**, which is rumoured to have been used as a freshwater source by pirates. There are great views from **Chado Cliff**, above the main beach, and green turtles lay their eggs here between September and December. The only accommodation is provided by the national park service, which maintains a ranger station at **Laem Son** in the southeast of the island.

Ko Rawi is 11km west of Ko Adang and has similar limestone hills and dense jungle, with first-rate beaches and large coral reefs offshore. Wild camping is allowed, with permission from the national park authorities. Excellent snorkelling spots include the northern side of **Ko Yang** and tiny **Ko Hin Ngam**, which is known for its unique stripy pebbles. Legend has it that the stones are cursed and anyone who takes any away will experience bad luck until the stones are returned to their source.

Park accommodation is provided near the ranger station at Laem Son. There are **bungalows** (3-9 people 800-1500B), **longhouses** (4-bed r 400B) and facilities for **camping** (with own tent per person 20B, with tent hire 200B). A small restaurant provides basic meals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

You can get to Ko Adang on any of the boats that run to Ko Lipe, and for the same fare (left); just tell the driver that you want to go to Ko Adang. Long-tails from Ko Lipe are 50B.

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