

# Eastern Gulf Coast



Thailand's eastern gulf coast is the ultimate smorgasbord of beach vacations. Not more than a few hours' hop from the Bangkok bustle, this diverse region offers a range of flavours that will surely suit the taste of every traveller.

Hot and spicy Pattaya sizzles under the neon lights long after the tropical sun plunges into the sea. There's a feast of sights, safaris and adrenaline-packed sports during the day, while the evenings feel like Patpong-by-the-sea, as thumping nightspots serve up a side order of sleaze.

For those short on time, try a seaside holiday to go on the powder-white sands of Ko Samet. This quieter spot is a great place to spend a weekend sampling Thailand's laid-back salt-sprayed beach life. Accommodation options run the gamut of the budget spectrum – you can get pampered at a luxury spa or play out your Robinson Crusoe fantasies in a lonely beachside shack.

For a hearty slice of rugged jungle, head further east to the Ko Chang Archipelago. Those who crave generous helpings of rustic solitude will be sated by the lonely tropical islands peppered across the churning sea. Divers and snorkellers will find fluorescent reefs and crystal waters that teem with every creature you would find at a sea food buffet. Although developers are gobbling up the large island of Ko Chang, the quieter Ko Kut and Ko Mak retain the naturalistic appeal of dining alfresco.

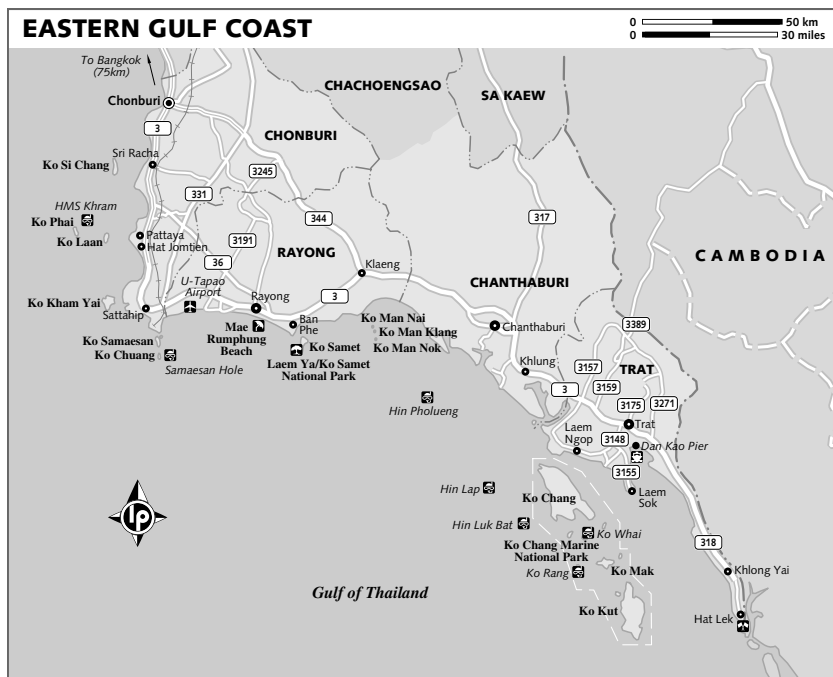
## HIGHLIGHTS

- Delving deep within the inland rainforest to find hidden waterfalls throughout **Ko Chang** (p140)
- Glimpsing your smile reflecting back at you from the emerald waters surrounding **Ko Kut** (p157)
- Escaping the naughty and finding the nice in **Pattaya** (p119)
- Snorkelling through schools of colourful fish in the reefs near **Ko Mak** (p159)
- Joining weekend Bangkokians for a couple of days of sand and partying on **Ko Samet** (p129)



■ DRY SEASON: NOVEMBER-APRIL

■ WET SEASON: MAY-OCTOBER



## Climate

The eastern gulf coast experiences three seasons, or rather, three variations of hot. November to February are milder months with little rain. The hottest months are March to May, while in mid-May, the temperatures drop a smidgen to welcome the monsoons that last till October. In the height of the monsoon season, the easternmost islands are usually not accessible due to choppy waves, while Ko Samet usually has very few days of rain in general.

## National Parks

Almost every island in the region is in a national park. Ko Samet (p129) and the surrounding islands belong to Laem Ya/Ko Samet National Park, and further east Ko Chang and its siblings, Ko Mak and Ko Kut, fall within Ko Chang Marine National Park (p138), which also includes many small areas.

## SRI RACHA

ศรีราชา  
pop 167,900

This bustling Thai town (also called Si Racha), two hours from Bangkok by bus, barely clings

to its fishing village roots. The waterfront centre of Sri Racha is a veritable floating city – a maze of piers and interconnected stilt buildings housing hotels, restaurants and markets. It's no Venice, but there's a certain charm hidden deep within the layers of smog and garish modern construction.

## Information

**Krung Thai Bank** (cnr Th Surasak 1 & Th Jermjompol) Has an ATM and exchange facilities.

**Post office** (Th Jermjompol) A few blocks north of the Krung Thai Bank.

## Sights & Activities

Other than the wobbly waterfront piers, Sri Racha's sole downtown attraction is **Ko Loi**, a small rocky island that is connected to the mainland by a long jetty. A **Thai-Chinese Buddhist temple** (☞ dawn-dusk) inhabits the island and is surrounded by ponds of lethargic sea turtles.

The popular **Sriracha Tiger Zoo** (☎ 0 3829 6556-8; www.tigerzoo.com; 341 Moo 3, Nongkham; adult/child 250/150฿; ☞ 8am-6pm) sits about 9km southeast of the city centre. The main attraction is the

compound of 250 tigers that are involved with the zoo's remarkable breeding program. Visitors can get up close and personal with the cubs. Many people also come for the colourful array of performances, which include the **Scorpion Queen**, who poses for photos while covered in scorpions, the **Amazing Circus**, which features a variety of creatures doing bizarre tricks, and recently, the **dancing hog show**, which is getting tons of press.

Most of the zoo's visitors prefer to stay in nearby Pattaya and make the short 20km journey on a day trip.

## Sleeping & Eating

In general, sleepovers in Sri Racha are uncommon and unnecessary since Pattaya, the uber-resort town, is only 27km down the road. If you decide to spend the night in this glorified transport interchange, you'll have a choice of rambling waterfront guesthouses or fancier spots that cater to local businesspeople.

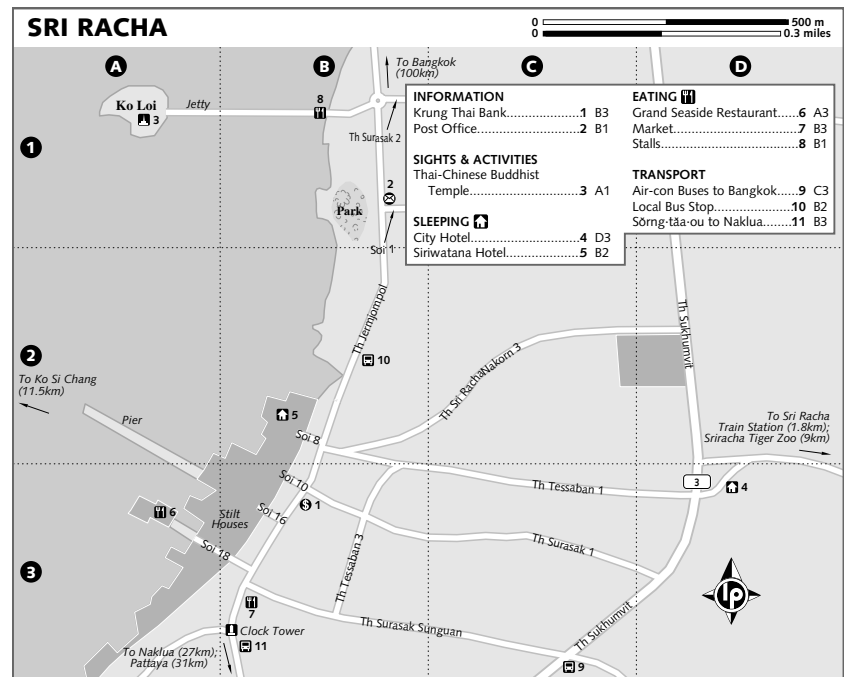
Like most coastal towns in Thailand, Sri Racha specialises in seafood. Visitors have their pick of several memorable options

tucked within the maze of dangling sea shacks. Cheap eats are available at the colourful market near the town's clock tower, and at stalls along the Ko Loi jetty.

**Siriwatana Hotel** (☎ 0 3831 1037; 35 Th Jermjompol; r 160-200฿) If you can avoid looking through the floorboards at the debris washed up by the tide, then you'll probably be smitten with Siriwatana's ramshackle charm. The innkeepers move as slowly as their motley gang of dogs, but smiles are plentiful and basic rooms are dirt-cheap and come with private bathrooms.

**City Hotel** (☎ 0 3832 2700; www.citysiracha.com; 6/126 Th Sukhumvit; r 3700-15,000฿; ☞ ☎ ☎) At the other end of the sleeping spectrum, the immaculate City Hotel is set back from Sri Racha's dockside clutter. The rooms are slightly Asian in theme, but the oriental austerity could be interpreted as being a bit sparse.

**Grand Seaside Restaurant** (☎ 0 3831 2537, 0 3832 3851; Soi 18; dishes 80-200฿; ☞ lunch & dinner) This creaky, colonial-style restaurant leans over the curling sea with polished wooden floors that glisten in the sunset.



## Getting There & Away

Buses bound for Sri Racha (ordinary/air-con 74/94B, two hours) leave every half hour from Ekamai in Bangkok. Ordinary direct buses stop near the pier for Ko Si Chang, while through buses and air-con buses stop along Th Sukhumvit (Hwy 3). Tùk-tùk (pronounced dūk dūk) can take you to the pier for 30B to 40B.

White sǒrng-tāa-ou (also spelt sǎwngthāew; small pickup trucks) bound for Naklua (north Pattaya; 30B, 30 minutes) leave from near the clock tower in Sri Racha throughout the day. Once you're in Naklua, you can easily catch another sǒrng-tāa-ou to central Pattaya for 10B.

## KO SI CHANG

เกาะสีชัง  
pop 5038

A hop, skip and jump from Bangkok, this green islet swimming in the Bight of Bangkok is a pleasant getaway from the big smoke. The scrubby little bump in the ocean isn't a white-sand paradise – Ko Si Chang attracts those who are charmed by hidden temples, fishing shanties, turquoise vistas and quiet evenings.

The island's sole settlement faces the mainland and doubles as the ferry terminus. Bumpy roads link the village with all the other sights.

**Kasikornbank** (99/12 Th Atsadang) Has an ATM and currency-exchange facilities.

**Tourist Services Centre** (☎ 0 3821 6201; Th Atsadang; ☞ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Opposite Sichang Palace hotel. Ask for the *Island Welcome* brochure.

## Sights & Activities

A Buddhist meditation hermitage, **Tham Yai Phrik Vipassana Centre** (☎ 0 3821 6104; ☞ dawn-

dusk) surrounds a series of meditation caves filled with Buddha images and swooping bats. These caves first came to the attention of monks when they discovered that some of the formations contained the natural likeness of Buddha. Today, monks from all over Thailand come here to take advantage of the peaceful environment for meditation. Faràng (foreigners of European descent) who are interested in studying here are also welcome; just be sure to phone ahead and be aware that you will need to follow the monastery's sober codes of conduct. Whether you visit for an hour or a month, please leave an appropriate donation with the monk who shows you around.

The ornate **San Jao Phaw Khao Yai** (Shrine of the Father Spirit of the Great Hill; ☞ dawn-dusk) is a stunning Chinese Temple believed to date back as far as China's Ming dynasty. Explore multiple shrine-caves and climb the several levels for splendid views of the sea.

**Hat Tha Wang Palace** (admission free; ☞ 9am-5pm) was used as a summer retreat by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), but was abandoned when the French briefly occupied the island in 1893. Today, locals and visitors enjoy picnics on the perfectly manicured grounds.

## Sleeping & Eating

Most places to stay have food available for guests and nonguests.

**Rim Talay** (☎ 0 3821 6237; 38/3 Mu 2, Th Devavongse; r 500-800B, 'houseboats' 1500B; ☞) Behind the Pan & David Restaurant, this waterside spot has simple but clean air-con rooms, and a selection of colourful Thai fishing boats that have been transformed into mini-apartments for up to five people. The bow of each 'houseboat' is a chill-out area with comfy couches.

## GULF GOLF

Golfing has been a local pastime for over a century, but its popularity rose dramatically after Bangkok hosted the World Cup in 1975. Today, the warm climate and lush foliage have made the Land of Smiles one of the best places in the world to tee up. Most of the top-notch facilities lie within a three-hour drive from Bangkok, making it easy to escape the city for a relaxing weekend on the green. The best season for golfing along the eastern seaboard is generally November to March, when it's cooler and drier, but even during the wet season, the rainfall usually just comes in very short (but strong) bursts.

For more information on Thailand's many courses, or for details about package deals that include accommodation, check out [www.golfinthailand.com](http://www.golfinthailand.com). Apart from green fees (between 600B and 3000B), expect to pay about 200B for a caddy (although some of them only speak Thai). Equipment rental costs around 300B per day and cart hire is usually about 500B per day.

**Sichang Palace** (☎ 0 3821 6276; Th Atsadang 81; r 1050-1300B; ☞) This central resort-style hotel starts with a gaudy golden lobby and ends with comfy sleeping options with all the mod cons. The better rooms come with balconies overlooking the island's bays and busy piers. Ask for a discount in the low season. Nonguests can use the pool for 50B.

**Pan & David Restaurant** (☎ 0 3821 6629; 167 Moo 3, Th Makhaam Thaew; dishes 40-280B; ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Friendly David and his wife Pan dish out the island's best eats. Nosh on top-notch Thai, European and vegetarian favourites. Wash it all down with a glass of wine, but make sure to leave room for the homemade ice cream.

## Getting There & Around

Boats between Ko Si Chang (40B, 40 minutes) and Sri Racha depart hourly between 7am and 8pm. The last ferry costs 10B extra. Once you are on the island, motorcycle taxis can take you anywhere for 30B to 40B. Island tours are available for around 250B; be prepared to haggle. Motorbikes are available to rent from Tiewpai-Park Resort for 250B per day.

## PATTAYA

พัทยา  
pop 104,318

Oh Pattaya, land of the three 'S's: sun, sea and sex. PR pundits are working overtime to erase the city's sordid history of slow boats and fast women, but the saucy reputation still looms large. Once a lonely fishing village, Pattaya started to morph into its present state during the Vietnam War, when American GIs were looking for love on their break from war. Since then, this tourist metropolis has become a living testament to unchecked development.

It's the total lack of subtlety that sets Pattaya apart from other 'red light' areas around the world. Yes, Amsterdam has scantily clad women who dance in red-tinted windows, but Pattaya's sexual innuendos are much harsher and more terse – nothing is left to the imagination. The streets in Pattaya have names such as Soi BJ, and there are nightclubs called Cockswell and Shagfest. Even Hooters, the popular American food chain, pretends to have a double meaning; no such luck in ol' Pattaya.

Holiday purists may scoff at the name, but this beachside Bangkok is truly starting to change. Today, there's a new, fourth 'S' – 'sights' – that is very much a part of the

Pattaya experience. Fantastic temples, wild zoos, live shows and quirky museums fan out across the cobble sands and beyond. With a dash of gumption and a pinch of adventure, a trip to Pattaya might just turn out to be the most memorable part of your vacation.

If you're after a smidgen more tranquillity, head to Hat Jomtien, a 6km stretch of attractive beach just 2km south of Hat Pattaya. Hat Naklua, a smaller beach 1km north of Pattaya, is also quiet and quite tastefully developed. The small headland separating Pattaya and Hat Jomtien is a beautiful enclave with the region's top resorts.

## Orientation

Pattaya proper is about four McDonalds' long and five Starbucks' wide. The heart of the city is a commercial jungle straddling a blonde stretch of scenic sand. Th Hat Pattaya (Pattaya Beach Rd) follows the perfect curvature of the bay, and turns into Walking St, a pedestrian mall chock-a-block with restaurants and nightclubs. Heading inland, you'll come across lanes thick with lodgings, restaurants, bars and travel agencies that snake their way towards the town's main traffic artery, Th Pattaya 2.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

**Book Corner** (Map p120; Soi Post Office; ☞ 10am-10pm) Decent selection of English-language fiction and travel guides.

**Bookazine** (Map p120; 1st fl, Royal Garden Plaza, Th Hat Pattaya; ☞ 11am-11pm) Has loads of travel books, literature and magazines. There's also a branch at Hat Jomtien (Map p122).

### EMERGENCY

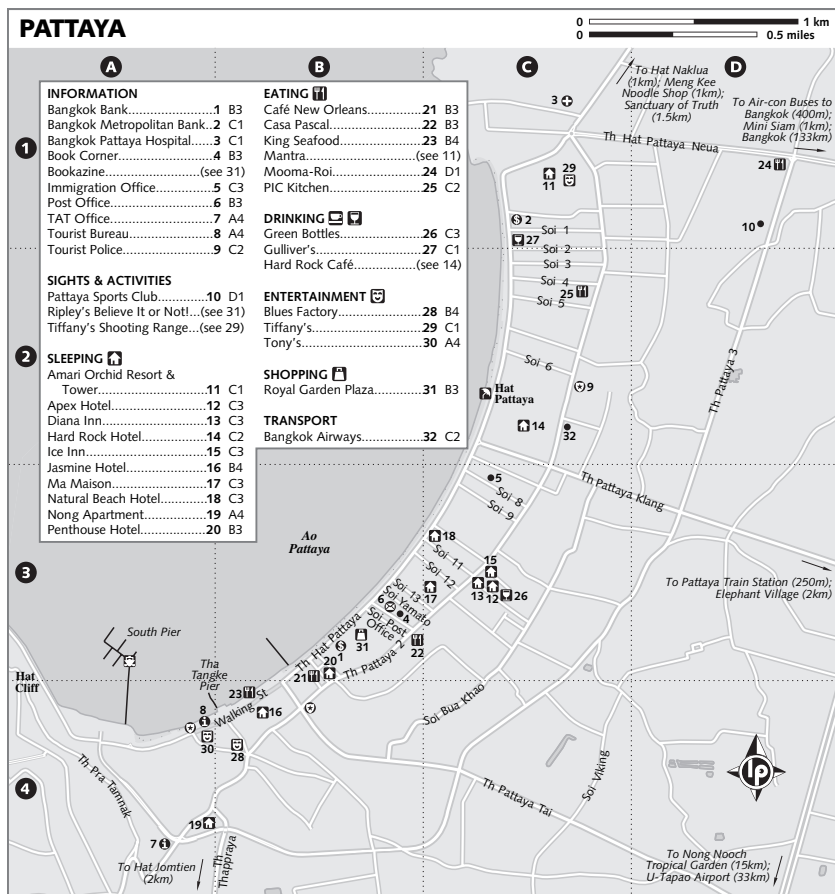
**Tourist Police** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 9371, emergency 1155; [tourist@police.go.th](mailto:tourist@police.go.th); Th Pattaya 2) The head office is on Pattaya's busy main artery. There are also police boxes along the Pattaya and Jomtien beaches.

### IMMIGRATION

**Immigration office** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3825 2751; Soi 8, Th Pattaya Klang) Handles visa extensions.

### INTERNET ACCESS

There are several internet options around Soi Praisani (aka Soi Post Office), at the Royal Garden Plaza and along Th Pattaya 2. At Hat Jomtien, they pop up every couple of blocks or so along Th Hat Jomtien.

**INTERNET RESOURCES**

**Pattaya At Night** ([www.pattaya-at-night.com](http://www.pattaya-at-night.com))

**MEDIA**

The weekly *Pattaya Mail* ([www.pattayamail.com](http://www.pattayamail.com)) publishes articles on political, economic and environmental developments in the area.

**MEDICAL SERVICES**

**Bangkok Pattaya Hospital** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3825 9911, emergency 1719; 301 Moo 6, Th Sukhumvit, Naklua; ☎ 24hr) Pattaya's premier health-care provider.

**MONEY**

There are banks all over Pattaya and Hat Jomtien; all have ATMs and most also have

foreign exchange booths that stay open late (usually to 8pm).

**Bangkok Bank** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3822 2370; Th Hat Pattaya; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Fri)

**Bangkok Metropolitan Bank** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 8418; Th Hat Pattaya; ☎ 8.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri)

**POST**

**Post office** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 9341; Soi Post Office)

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

Almost every establishment in Pattaya and Hat Jomtien has a variety of tourist rags and pamphlets, packed with ads and info. The bi-monthly *What's On Pattaya* is a good resource with several maps, articles and a crossword to do while you relax at the beach. In addition to

the TAT office, there is a small tourist bureau near the police booth on Walking St.

**Pattaya Call Centre** (☎ 1337, 0 3841 0393) Provides vital information regarding accommodation, attractions, restaurants and shopping.

**Tourism Authority of Thailand** (TAT; Map p120; ☎ 1672, 0 3842 8750; tatchon@tat.or.th; 609 Moo 10, Th Pra Tamnak; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm) Located at the northwestern edge of Rama IX Park. Offers mountains of brochures.

**Danger & Annoyances**

If you are arriving by bus, there will be several sörng-täa-ou waiting to cart you off to your hotel. Many of these drivers are unscrupulous and will try to scam you by taking you to the wrong part of the city, and then forcing you to pay extra to bring you to the correct location.

(We'll refrain from stating the obvious warnings about the booming skin trade in Pattaya.)

**Sights**

Pattaya probably has the most sights and activities of any resort destination in Thailand. There's so much to do, you might not have time to catch some rays on the beach.

If you're only going to visit one temple in Thailand, make it the **Sanctuary of Truth** (off Map p120; ☎ 0 3836 7229; [www.sanctuaryoftruth.com](http://www.sanctuaryoftruth.com); 206/2 Moo 5, Naklua; admission 500B; ☎ 8am-5pm). Although not technically a temple, this stunning teak-wood palace details the pan-Eastern school of thought regarding the order of the universe. It's like the Thai version of Barcelona's Sagrada Familia (minus the crowds) – the structure is not yet complete, but visitors will undoubtedly be awestruck when they glimpse this incredible rambling fortress.

The **Nong Nooch Tropical Garden** (off Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 9321; 163 Th Sukhumvit, Sattahip; admission 400B; ☎ 9am-sunset) is a popular attraction located south of Pattaya. The perfectly manicured grounds feature four daily elephant and Thai dancing shows (between 9am and 3.45pm). The dancing shows demonstrate different movement styles from around the kingdom, and the elephant spectacles display the gentle giants' hidden talents, such as picture painting, bike riding and basketball.

Just 2.5km out of town, **Pattaya Elephant Village** (off Map p120; ☎ 0 3824 9818; [www.elephant-village-pattaya.com](http://www.elephant-village-pattaya.com); ☎ according to show & trek times) is a nonprofit sanctuary for former working

elephants. There's a 2.30pm elephant show (adult/child 500/400B) that demonstrates training techniques, and daily elephant treks (adult/child 2000/1300B).

Many tourists also visit the **Tiger Zoo** in nearby Sri Racha (see p116).

Located at the Royal Garden Plaza mall, **Ripley's Believe It or Not!** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3871 0294; admission 580B; ☎ 11am-11pm) provides fun for the whole family. This museum of oddities has bizarre artefacts and body parts from all over the world. There's also a 4-D simulator, a tricky maze and a haunted house adventure.

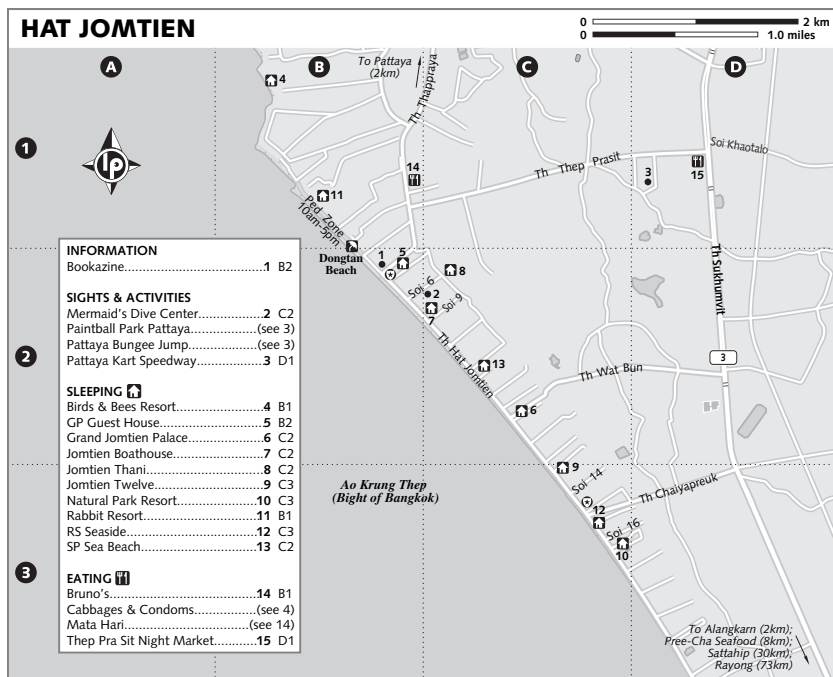
**Mini Siam** (off Map p120; ☎ 0 3872 7333; 387 Moo 6, Th Sukhumvit; adult/child 250/120B; ☎ 7am-10pm) is – you guessed it – a scaled-down set of replicas of Thailand's ancient and famous sights. It's about 1.5km east of town.

**Activities**

Pattaya has a huge range of outdoor activities, including but by no means limited to **bowling, snooker, archery, target-shooting, softball, horse-riding and tennis**. Many of these activities are available at the **Pattaya Sports Club** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3836 1167; [www.pattayasports.org](http://www.pattayasports.org); 3/197 Th Pattaya 3) or can be organised by most hotels.

You can take target practice at **Tiffany's Shooting Range** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 9642; ground fl, Tiffany's, Th Pattaya 2; admission 250B plus ammunition; ☎ 9am-10pm), or at Hat Jomtien you can visit an enclave of businesses offering adrenaline junkies their fix. There's a 56m bungee jump at **Pattaya Bungee Jump** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3830 1209; Soi 9, Th Thep Prasit; jumps 1500B; ☎ 9am-6pm) and the nearby **Paintball Park Pattaya** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3830 0608; [www.paintballpark-pattaya.com](http://www.paintballpark-pattaya.com); 248/10 Moo 12, Th Thep Prasit; 50 bullets starting at 500B; ☎ 10am-6pm) lets you run around and take your anger out on your friends with paint-filled bullets. To gratify your need for speed, drop into the **Pattaya Kart Speedway** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3842 2044; 248/2 Soi 9, Th Thep Prasit; admission from 250B; ☎ 9am-6pm), where you can race go-karts around an impressive 1km loop.

There are several islands off the coast of Pattaya that are worth the short boat trip if you need an afternoon away from the city. **Ko Laan**, about 45 minutes away, is a popular choice – many visitors go on glass-bottom boat tours for views of the coral reef. **Ko Sak** and **Ko Phai** have powder sand beaches, and **Ko Krok** is a hot spot for divers. Ferry tickets can be booked at the large pier in South Pattaya. Tickets are around 20B to 85B.



## DIVING & SNORKELLING

With 20 dive sites orbiting the coast, Pattaya is a good spot for scuba if you can't make it down the coast to the southern part of Thailand. Diving in the region is split up into three sections: the Near Islands, the Far Islands and Samesan.

The **Near Islands** have experienced overfishing and heavy boat traffic, so these sites can be barren with poor visibility. Nearby Ko Laan, Ko Sak and Ko Krok are fine for beginners. In most places expect 3m to 9m of visibility under good conditions, or, at more remote sites, 5m to 12m.

The **Far Islands**, located about 90 minutes from town, feature bright coral reefs including the popular artificial reef created by the shipwrecked HMS *Khram*.

**Samesan** is a small fishing village south of Pattaya with some of the best diving in the region. The shipwrecked *Petchburi Bremen* and *Hardeep* have created artificial reefs and are interesting dive sites. One of the best dive sites around is an old US Navy ammunition dump called Samesan Hole. This advanced dive goes down to 87m and

has a gentle slope covered thickly with coral where you can see barracuda and large rays. The visibility here is pretty good, up to 20m on a good day.

A two-dive excursion costs between 2500B and 3500B, including the boat, equipment, underwater guide and lunch. Snorkellers may join these day trips for around 1000B. PADI Open Water certification, which takes three to four days, can cost anywhere between 11,000B and 15,000B, including all instruction and equipment. Certification costs are considerably less on Ko Tao (see p230).

There are several dive operators in town, including the following. It's best to organise these by phone, or through your hotel.

**Adventure Divers** (☎ 0 3836 4453; www.pattaya divers.com; 391/77-78 Th Thappraya)

**Aquanuts Dive Centre** (☎ 0 3836 1724; www.aquanutsdive.com; Soi 6, Th Pattaya 1) Operates separate snorkelling and boat tours as well (1000B).

**Mermaid's Dive Center** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3823 2219; www.mermaiddive.com; Soi White House, Hat Jomtien)

**Pattaya Dive Centre** (☎ 0 3871 0918; www.dive centrepattaya.com; 219/3 Moo 10, Soi 6, Th Pattaya 1)

## OTHER WATER SPORTS

Pattaya and Hat Jomtien have some of the best water sports facilities in Thailand and operators line the main beach roads competing for your custom. **Water-skiing** costs around 1000B per hour including equipment, boat and driver. **Parasailing** is 300B to 400B a shot (about 10 to 15 minutes). **Game-fishing** is also possible; rental rates for boats, fishing guides and tackle are reasonable. Hat Jomtien is the best spot for **windsurfing** (500B to 600B per hour), not least because you're a little less likely to run into people parasailing or jet-skiing.

The four main islands off the coast of Pattaya also provide countless hours of fun in the water (see p121).

## Sleeping

There's no shortage of fantastic accommodation in Pattaya, however, most of it falls into the top-end category. Almost every international chain has set up shop along the sand, pushing lower-end options away from the beach. The proximity to Bangkok means that weekends tend to be quite crowded and prices usually rise accordingly.

Know the rooming rules at your hotel should you decide to bring an 'extra sleeper' back to your room. Hotel staff members are completely desensitised to such situations, so it's best to be frank, especially at small establishments, where unannounced guests could lead to prompt expulsion.

## PATTAYA

### Budget

**Apex Hotel** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 8281; www.apex hotelpattaya.com; 216/2 Soi 11; r 450-500B; ☎) Rome wasn't built in a day, but Apex probably was – its prefabricated façade looks like a stack of grey Lego bricks. The cheapest rooms are doled out on a first-come basis, although forking out an extra 50B isn't that big a hassle considering the tidy rooms come with faux-marble flooring, air-con and cable TV. There's a swimming pool and private car park on the ground level.

**Ice Inn** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3872 0671; www.iceinnpattaya.com; 528/2-3 Th Pattaya 2; r 450-715B; ☎) Tucked behind a shop stuffed with sundry Asian collectibles (and an oddly placed internet kiosk), this smaller setup offers midrange rooms with a budget price tag. The whole place is pathologically clean, yet the staff are remarkably laid-back.

**Jasmine Hotel** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 4590; www.jasminehotel-pattaya.com; 547/34 Moo 10; r 650-800B; ☎) If you're seeking accommodation in the thick of things, look no further. Jasmine's low tariffs are an undeniable bargain for lodging on Walking St. Behind the orange façade, guests will enjoy prim tiled rooms with large kitchenettes, free internet and new cabinetry. Accessible to people in wheelchairs.

### Midrange

**Ma Maison** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3871 0433; www.mamaison-hotel.com; 386 Moo 10, Soi 13; r 900-1400B; ☎) Ma Maison feels a bit more personal than most of the other lodging options around town – the décor is rife with rows of potted flowers and hanging collectables, such as splayed fans and antique farming equipment. Rooms wind around the central pool, which acts like an oasis attracting weary guests after a long night among buzzing lights. Reservations recommended.

**Natural Beach Hotel** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 9239; www.naturalbeach.com; 216 Moo 10, Soi 11; r 950-1550B; ☎) This is as close as you'll get to the beach without dropping some serious cash (not that the beach in Pattaya is by any means idyllic). A low-key spot with a cosy garden and pool patio, Natural Beach has dated furnishings lending an accidental '80s feel to the otherwise standard sleeping setup.

**Diana Inn** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 9675; www.diana pattaya.co.th; btwn Soi 11-12, 216/6-20 Th Pattaya 2; r 990-1500B, ste 3500; ☎) This self-aggrandising hotel is popular with Thai tourists and offers the hook up for golfers. The better rooms have sparkling hardwood floors and overlook the swimming pool with its big cursive 'D' carved in white tiles at the bottom. Complimentary buffet breakfasts are served in the lobby's coffee shop, and don't forget to grab your welcome drink when you check in.

**Penthouse Hotel** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 9639; www.penthousehotel.com; Soi Pattaya Funland; r incl breakfast 1000-5000B; ☎) The Penthouse Hotel will definitely get you into the Pattaya spirit. The lobby is awash with every garish *objet d'art* tossed away during a Parisian *vide grenier*. Upstairs, rooms retain the French flea market theme and include additional amenities such as disco lighting, Jacuzzis, a dance area and a 'health swing' (?). Ignore the in-house TV channel where you can browse 'nightly companions' to be delivered to your room (which other places do too). It sounds pretty

extreme, but we did see a couple of British grannies checking in...

**Nong Apartment** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3871 3371; www.pattayavacation.com; 373/5-6 Moo 10, Soi Yensabai; ste 1200-2200B; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) Nong is a fantastic deal for small groups, families and those who are looking to stick around town for a while. Apartment-style units are arranged around a long rectangular courtyard stuffed with a vivid assortment of enormous potted plants. Guests can retreat to their private patios, or lounge in the common areas covered with portraits of US naval cruisers.

### Top End

Almost every international hotel chain has an outpost in Pattaya, which means that most of the accommodation around town falls into the top-end category. Count on paying a 10% service charge and a 7% value-added tax (VAT) for these places.

**Amari Orchid Resort & Tower** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3841 8418; www.amari.com/orchid; Th Hat Pattaya Neua; r/ste from US\$89/200; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) Amari has over 500 rooms spread between a low-rise garden complex and the brand spankin' new 'Ocean Tower'. There is a noticeable difference between the two buildings since the garden rooms are considered 'four star' (according to some unknown standard), while the tower units are 'five star'. Don't miss Mantra – this on-site restaurant is the hippest spot in town (see p126).

**our pick Hard Rock Hotel** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 8755; www.hardrockhotels.net/pattaya; 429 Moo 9, Th Hat Pattaya; r US\$125-175; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) Hard Rock is a fun, friendly way to spend a vacation in Pattaya. The excellent staff offer unparalleled smiles and service amid funky design details, including dangling guitars, giant music-related murals and awesome headboards featuring a Warhol-esque image of a rock legend. In the evening, the towering façade blinks with hundreds of multicoloured lights as though a lighthouse was hosting a disco party. Drop the kids off at the Lil' Rock childcare program, a fantastic service that takes the tykes to the on-site climbing wall, swimming pool (with floating trampoline), and arts and crafts centre. If you're staying on one of the top floors, you'll have access to the King Club, a private lounge serving up unlimited pre-dinner drinks in the early evening – not a bad way to kick off the night around town.

### HAT JOMTIEN

Quieter Jomtien is only about a 15-minute sörng-tāa-ou ride from the throng and bustle of Pattaya.

### Budget

**RS Seaside** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3823 1867; fax 0 3823 1882; 125/19 Moo 10, Th Hat Jomtien; r 460-2300B; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) The best budget option on Jomtien beach, RS has a vast selection of room types, from closet-like spaces that look out at an adobe wall, to spacious digs sporting balconies and sea views. But it doesn't matter if you're booked into the cheapest room, since everyone benefits from the swimming pool, Jacuzzi and caffeine at the espresso bar.

**GP Guest House** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3875 6072; fax 0 3875 6245; 144/126-128 Moo 12, Th Hat Jomtien; r 500-600B; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) Off the main drag and set among a colourful sandwich of narrow tenements, GP offers generic crash pads linked through a maze of weaving concrete hallways. Monthly rentals are also negotiable.

### Midrange

**Jomtien Boathouse** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3875 6143; www.jomtien-boathouse.com; 380/5-6 Th Hat Jomtien; r 900-1250B; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) The lobby at Jomtien Boathouse looks like the beachside abode of a crusty sea captain, with schools of taxidermic fish, scrolls of lambskin maps and models of wooden frigates. On deck, you'll find a terrace for tan-lovers and a cosy pub that serves hearty fare fit for a sailor. The simple rooms upstairs do not retain the nautical theme, but they're clean and cosy. Go for the beachside rooms – the 'Garden View' accommodation has extremely tiny windows.

**SP Sea Beach** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3823 6101; www.spvillagepattaya.com/spseabeach/index.html; Th Hat Jomtien; r 1000-1800B; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) This white, cube-shaped inn is a great choice along Jomtien's main drag. The lobby looks like a futuristic ice cream parlour – everything's crisp white with pompous lime-green touches, such as bucket-seat bar stools. The sun-drenched rooms are slightly more demure, but still proffer traces of quirkiness in the Warhol-like pop art. Monthly rates are also available.

**Jomtien Twelve** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3875 6865; jomtien.twelve@gmail.com; 240/13 Moo 12, Th Hat Jomtien; r 1100-1550B; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) Jomtien Twelve is trying to pull off 'boutique chic': the exterior incorporates teak slatting into a contemporary design scheme, and the lobby is dripping with trendy good-

ness. After that, however, it seems like the designer got a tad lazy – the rooms are well kept (especially the bathrooms), but they're noticeably devoid of that yuppie sensibility set loose downstairs.

**Natural Park Resort** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3823 1561; www.naturalparkresort.com; 412 Th Hat Jomtien; r 1500B; ste 2200-7500B; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) Natural Park changes things up along Jomtien's beach boulevard with its lush jungley property punctuated by mini hotel blocks. The lagoonlike swimming pool has an adorable island smack in the middle with two frizzy palms. Rooms are bedecked in a charming blend of teak beams, wicker lounge chairs and Japanese sliding screens.

**Grand Jomtien Palace** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3823 1405; www.grandjomtienpalace.com; 356 Th Hat Jomtien; r/ste 1600/3800B; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) Remember when hotels used to make their drapes and bed comforters from the same patterned material? Even though the rooms at Grand Jomtien Palace are in need of a designer's eye, they offer sweeping views of the area, and some have fresh hardwood floors. The 14-storey hotel isn't quite a 'palace', as the name suggests, but there's loads of professional service and hoards of amenities.

**Jomtien Thani** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3823 2990; www.jomtienthanihotel.com; 75/261 Moo 12, Th Hat Jomtien; r 1870-2675B, ste 5900B; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) The lobby here looks like a Siamese railway station from a vintage Bond flick. The rooms are a bit less showy, and could benefit with a framed picture, or maybe by changing the wall colours so that they're not identical to the floor tiles. Don't be bashful about requesting to see several different options – some rooms have excellent sea views and plasma TVs. Jomtien Thani's major perk is its cache of facilities and services: a gym, billiards, massage parlours, convention rooms, fine dining and the list goes on.

### Top End

**Birds & Bees Resort** (Cabbages & Condoms; Map p122; ☎ 0 3825 0035; www.cabbagesandcondoms.co.th; 366/11 Moo 12, Th Phratamnak 4; r 4000-7000B, ste 6000-12,000B; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) It's hard to believe that a tranquil tangle of jungle lies between the bustle of Pattaya and Jomtien. There are two garden paths here – the Communist Walk and the Capitalist Walk – that lead guests towards the beach and the hidden pods of multistorey rooming units. Most of the resort's proceeds go to the **Population & Community Development Association** (www.pda.or.th), an important not-

for-profit organisation that contributes to Thailand's HIV/AIDS education and rural development, among many other endeavours. PDA, as it's often known, was the recipient of the Gates Award for Global Health in 2007.

**Rabbit Resort** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3830 3303; www.rabbitresort.com; Th Hat Dongtan 4; r 4200-5200B; 🏠 🚶 🚲 🚿) Situated on a prime slice of Pattaya property, Rabbit Resort is a refreshing change from the clunky chain hotels nearby. This family-run operation offers forested cottages featuring Thai-style furnishings and hand-made, rustic textiles. The separate kids' pool and private beach area are added perks.

### Eating

Western food rules the culinary roost, with several noteworthy establishments that have been around for decades. Pattaya's also the perfect place to step off the beaten path and explore some local haunts. There are some fantastic night markets and seafood joints that serve up excellent dishes for less baht than the usual tourist magnets.

### PATTAYA

**Meng Kee Noodle Shop** (off Map p120; ☎ 0 3822 5262; Th Naklua, opposite Baan Suan Rung Roi; dishes 30-100B; 🕒 9am-3pm) Leave the neon lights behind and venture north into Naklua for some authentic Chinese noodles and roasted duck. This open-air mom-and-pop stop also dishes out unusual finds such as salty-sweet bamboo soup. It'll be one of your cheapest meals in Pattaya, even with the 10B sörng-tāa-ou ride.

**Mooma-Roi** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3841 4801; 15/15 Moo 6, Th Pattaya 3; dishes 50-150B; 🕒 dinner) The name says it all: Mooma-Roi is Thai for 'delicious corner'. With nary a farang in sight, this outdoor bistro teams with locals who gather within the spacious cloister to savour classic Thai dishes around an ornamental pond.

**King Seafood** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 9459; king\_seafood@hotmail.com; 94 Walking St; dishes 80-300B; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Yes, the prices are higher than at the hidden local fish markets, but this seafood mothership is a classic Walking St establishment. The tome-like menu is a veritable almanac of edible marine life.

**PIC Kitchen** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 8374; 10 Soi 5, Th Pattaya 2; dishes 110-290B; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This teak-lined place has an intimate atmosphere with open-sided rooms, fluffy cushions and low wooden tables. Sample the Thai menu

and sneak upstairs to the Jazz Pit for some post-repast tunes.

**Café New Orleans** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3871 0805; www.cafeneworleans.info; Soi Pattaya Funland; dishes 150-750B; ☎ 3pm-midnight) Café New Orleans has perfectly synthesized the unique Bourbon St atmosphere that mixes baroque and bayou charm. A lengthy menu echoes the ambience with juicy steaks and Creole onion soups. It's hard to believe that this romantic setup is just seconds away from Pattaya's other articulations of 'love'.

**our pick** **Mantra** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 9591; www.mantra-pattaya.com; Th Hat Pattaya Neua; dishes 240-800B; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat, brunch & dinner Sun; ☎) Undoubtedly the coolest address in town, this two-storey behemoth oozes chic from every intricately arranged design detail. The interior combines Arabian and oriental elements in steady bursts of jet black and slick, lipstick red. The terrific restaurant has seven kitchens, each one dedicated to a specific cuisine; there's a sushi counter, Indian ovens and a homemade pasta station, to name just a few. It's always nice when the food lives up to the remarkable décor.

**Casa Pascal** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3872 3660; www.restaurant-pattaya.com; 485/4 Moo 10, Th Pattaya 2; mains 270-490B; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Owned and operated by the former executive chef of Pattaya's Dusit Resort, Casa Pascal is an elegant dining experience set under a colonnade of large wooden pillars. Loosen your belt for the never-ending Sunday brunch buffet (799B), complete with a fanfare of napkin sculptures, cooking stations and delicious samplers, such as rock lobster and beef Tatar. The regularly changing menu features gourmet French, Italian and Thai dishes.

## HAT JOMTIEN

**Thep-Pra-Sit Night Market** (Map p122; Th Sukhumvit; dishes from 20B; ☎ 6-10pm) Low prices and small portions make this popular night market the perfect spot to sample some local faves – just choose your 'delicacies' wisely. While nibbling on your street cuisine, browse stalls of knockoff clothes, shoes, accessories and CDs. To get here, grab a taxi or sǒrng-tǎa-ou.

**Pree-Cha Seafood** (off Map p122; ☎ 0 3870 9439; Ban Amphur; dishes 30-200B, lobster 650B/kg; ☎ dinner) Make the pilgrimage to Pree-Cha for some of the cheapest (and tastiest) seafood around, in an area sans tourists. Take a taxi or hire a sǒrng-tǎa-ou and head south of Jomtien for

about 20 minutes, turn right at the first intersection after the Ambassador Hotel, keep left and you'll happen upon an ungodly number of cars in front of the restaurant on the right-hand side of the road.

**Cabbages & Condoms** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3825 0035; www.cabbagesandcondoms.co.th; 366/11 Moo 12, Th Phratamak 4; snacks from 50B, set menu 600-900B; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This saucily named restaurant hides along the secluded beach at the Birds & Bees Resort. Charming lamps, crafted from fish traps and coconuts, cast a romantic hue over sated diners. If that gets you in the mood, you'll be happy to know that the standard bin of farewell breath mints has been appropriately replaced with a bucket of prophylactics.

**Bruno's** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3836 4600; 306/63 Chateau Dale Plaza, Th Thapraya; lunch mains 100-200B, dinner mains 360-390B, pasta dishes 210-280B; ☎ lunch & dinner) The walk-in wine cellar makes Bruno's the go-to place for those seeking vino with their victuals. Lunchtime is a bargain – the team of gourmet chefs prepares scrumptious steaks and seafood courses for less than 200B.

**Mata Hari** (Map p122; ☎ 0 3825 9799; 482/57 Moo 12, Th Thapraya; mains 200-600B; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) Mata Hari has been a Pattaya staple for over 40 years, serving *haute cuisine* to visitors and faithful expat patrons. The menu largely focuses on European fare, with a couple of exotic flavours tossed in to tempt the palate.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Nightlife in Pattaya is an ever-evolving creature. While the southern part of town is chock-a-block with go-go bars, new venues are popping up all over the place, offering tourists and locals a more PG-13 experience. Nowadays there are ice bars, blues lounges, live-music venues and thumping discos. Walking St is the heart of Pattaya's nightlife, and it overloads the senses with trance music, gyrating bodies and buzzing neon signs advertising every fetish imaginable. Down the street, the convoluted Soi 1, 2 and 3 are collectively known as 'Pattayaland', and consist of wall-to-wall bars blaring the latest pop tunes. Most of the establishments in the area cater to the skin trade, especially along Soi BJ (duh). Soi 3 calls itself 'Boyztown' and is the centre of gay nightlife in Pattaya. At Jomtien, there's a growing gay beach scene along the northern end of the sand called Dongtan (pun actually not intended).

## LADYBOYS

In most busy nightlife districts in Thailand, you're likely to come across Thailand's third sex, the ladyboy. Known in slang as a *gǎ-teu-i*, men who identify as women are surprisingly common throughout the Land of Smiles, though no-one is sure why. Although tolerance is widespread in Buddhist Thailand, concealed homophobia prevails; for *gǎ-teu-i*, this can be a challenging life, with the entertainment and sex industries the only lucrative career avenues open.

Female hormones are typically taken by *gǎ-teu-i* in early puberty to restrain the growth of masculine traits. Later on, many will have breast implants and some will complete their transformation by undergoing sex-reassignment surgery. Experience with this type of surgery means that Thailand now has some of the most advanced transgender clinics in the world – so much so that patients fly in from all over the globe for operations. After undergoing surgery, the transformation can be very convincing; there are even operations available to remove the telltale Adam's apple.

**Hard Rock Café** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 8755; www.hardrockhotels.net/pattaya; 429 Moo 9, Th Hat Pattaya) Hard Rock's beachside restaurant is a great place to chill out with a glass of wine and listen to some of the best cover bands in town.

**Green Bottles** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 9675; 216/6-20 Th Pattaya 2) Charming cosy and retro (you can even request your favourite songs from the band), Green Bottles has been on the scene since 1988 and is one of Pattaya's more traditional pubs.

**Blues Factory** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3830 0180; www.thebluesfactorypattaya.com; Soi Lucky Star) Off Walking St, Pattaya's best venue for no-nonsense live music features at least two bands every night and a hassle-free atmosphere just metres from the heavier hype of Walking St.

**Gulliver's** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3871 0641; Th Hat Pattaya; ☎ 11.30am-2am) At the northern end of Pattaya, Gulliver's has pool tables, free wi-fi and a big international drinks menu. Before 7pm, take advantage of happy hour with discounted beer and cocktails.

**our pick** **Tiffany's** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 1700-5; www.tiffany-show.co.th; 464 Moo 9, Th Pattaya 2; VIP seat 800B, standard seat 700B; ☎ shows 6pm, 7.30pm & 9pm, plus 10.30pm on holidays) Coming to Pattaya and missing a transvestite cabaret would be like going to Paris and not visiting the Louvre. OK, not really, but these spectacles really are a work of art. The costumes are the definition of glitz and glam, and every feminine nuance has been practised and perfected. Stick around after the show to take photographs with the lovely 'ladies'.

**Tony's** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3842 5795; www.tonydisco.com; 139/15 Walking St; admission free; ☎ 8.30pm-2.30am) Run by Tony, a well-to-do Bangkok type, this club-conglomerate has it all: a deafeningly loud, neon-lit disco, pool tables and an in-house

Thai boxer. Tony also runs a spa, gym, brewery and dog shelter.

**Alangkarn** (off Map p122; ☎ 0 3826 6000; www.alangkarnthailand.com; admission 1000B; ☎ by performance) Located a couple of kilometres south-east of Pattaya, this large theatre features a variety of flashy performances involving elaborate costumes, dancing elephants and pyrotechnics.

## Getting There & Away

It's important to note that buses heading between Bangkok and the eastern provinces do not swing through Pattaya, as it is not on the main eastbound highway. If you plan on travelling between Pattaya and Trat (500B), for example, you will have to use a minivan service (easily bookable at any agency or your hotel). There are trains that run between Bangkok and Pattaya, but the frequent buses are much more convenient.

There are air-con buses to Pattaya (113B, two hours, every 40 minutes from 4.45am to 9pm) from Bangkok's Ekamai station. Dozens of private minivans also ply this route for 150B. In Pattaya the air-con bus stop is on Th Hat Pattaya Neua, near the intersection with Th Sukhumvit. Cramped minivans from Th Khao San typically cost 200B per person. Once you reach the main Pattaya bus terminal, waiting red sǒrng-tǎa-ou will take you to the main beach road for 20B per person.

Flights with **Bangkok Airways** (Map p120; ☎ 0 3841 2382; www.bangkokair.com; 75/8 Moo 9, Th Pattaya 2) from U-Tapao airport (about 33km south of Pattaya) head to Phuket four times weekly, and to Samui every day. The fare is around 3000B each way to Ko Samui and 3500B to Phuket.

**DETOUR: KHAO CHAMAO/KHAO WONG NATIONAL PARK**

อุทยานแห่งชาติเขาชะเมา-เขาวง

Although less than 85 sq km, **Khao Chamao/Khao Wong National Park** (☎ 0 3889 4378; reserve@dnf.go.th; admission 400B; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm) is famous for limestone mountains, high cliffs, caves, dense forest and waterfalls. Secreted in the rugged landscape are wild elephants, bears, gaur, gibbons and deer. The park features a few waterfalls and over 80 limestone caves and is a good spot for hiking – there are several trails that wind through it. The park is inland from Ban Phe, 17km north of the Km 274 marker off Hwy 3. To get to here, take a sörng-tää-ou (40B) from Ban Phe to the marker, and another sörng-tää-ou (20B) to the park.

You can stay at a camp site (per person 50B) or rent a two-person bungalow (600B to 800B). To book, email reserve@dnf.go.th, or phone ☎ 0 2562 0760.

**Getting Around****CAR, JEEP & MOTORCYCLE**

Jeeps can be hired for around 2500B per day, and car hire generally starts at 1500B, though you can pay as little as 1000B for a 4WD Suzuki in the low season. Motorcycle rentals usually cost between 200B and 300B per day. There are motorcycle rental places along Th Hat Pattaya and Th Pattaya 2.

**SÖRNG-TÄA-OU**

Sörng-tää-ou cruise up and down Th Hat Pattaya and Th Pattaya 2 – just hop on and when you get out pay 10B anywhere between Naklua and South Pattaya, or 20B if you take the truck from Pattaya to Jomtien (or vice versa). A chartered sörng-tää-ou to Jomtien should be no more than 40B.

Many readers have complained about riding the 10B sörng-tää-ou with local passengers and then being charged a higher ‘charter’ price of 20B to 50B or more when they get off. In some instances drivers have threatened to beat farang passengers when they wouldn’t pay the exorbitant fares. It’s little use complaining to the tourist police unless you can give them the licence plate number of the offending driver’s vehicle. See p121 for more information.

**RAYONG & AROUND**0.เมืองระยอง  
pop 522,133

Almost every visitor to Rayong Province, 200km southeast of Bangkok, comes for a beach getaway on sunny Ko Samet (opposite). Travellers will rarely have to stop in the region’s capital, as there is a regular bus service from Bangkok to Ban Phe, the ferry port to Ko Samet. We don’t want to discourage you from contributing to Rayong town’s tourism industry, but besides the bus station and a few

barking dogs, your precious vacation time is better spent elsewhere.

The quaint fishing village of **Ban Phe** has managed to remain small despite its ferry monopoly. Should you decide to blaze your own tourist trail, this seaside shantytown is also the jumping-off point to several lesser-known beach destinations in the area. The province actually has over 100km of coastline, but the lack of tourist development and transport infrastructure means that most of these beaches have slipped under the tourism radar. From Ban Phe, sörng-tää-ou can take you along the coast to the ‘resort towns’ (and we use that term lightly) of **Laem Charoen**, **Laem Mae Phim**, **Hat Sai Thong** and **Hat Mae Rampeung**. Ferries from near Ban Phe go to private resorts on the secluded islands of **Ko Man Klang** and **Ko Man Nok** (see the boxed text, p132); advance bookings are highly recommended.

**Information**

Rayong’s **TAT office** (☎ 0 3865 5420; 153/4 Th Sukhumvit) is inconveniently positioned 7km east of Rayong town on Hwy 3. A sörng-tää-ou can take you there for about 20B, but we recommend stopping by Ban Phe’s police bureau instead. Located just east of Nuan Thip Pier in a pistachio-coloured building, the station has many brochures about the region, although the officers only speak Thai.

There are several banks scattered along Rayong’s main drag (Th Sukhumvit) and Ban Phe has a few ATMs attached to convenience stores.

**Sleeping & Eating****RAYONG**

Should you somehow get stuck in Rayong town, there are a couple of lodging choices within eyesight of the bus station, but most of

the quality options are a short cab ride away. The bus terminal is set within a large market, so there are plenty of food options nearby.

**Rayong President Hotel** (☎ 0 3862 2771; www.rayongpresident.com; 16/8 Th Phochanakon; r incl breakfast 500-600B; 🍽) Located halfway between the bus station and Wat Khod Thimtaram, this large, white hotel is a quiet place to catch a couple of ‘Z’s.

**BAN PHE**

It’s officially impossible to miss the boat to Ko Samet; the ferries run through the evening, and water taxis are available in the middle of the night (of course it’ll be quite pricy if you’re chartering a boat at 3am in the morning). Should you decide to stay in this little port village, there are a couple of options around town and one fully fledged resort a few kilometres down the road.

**Christie’s Guesthouse** (☎ 0 3865 1975; fax 0 3865 2103; 280/92 Soi 1; d/tr 500/700B; 🍽) Crash at Christie’s if you want to break up the journey to Ko Samet. Try the hearty Western breakfast, or take your lunch to go for a nibble on the ferry ride. In the evening, the restaurant becomes a popular hang-out for local expat English teachers.

**Rayong Resort** (☎ 0 3865 1000; www.rayongresort.com; 186 Moo 1, Th Ban Phe; r 3800-12,000B; 🍽 📺 📶) Located along the coast between Rayong town and Ban Phe, Rayong Resort is a popular option with Thai tourists seeking a more subdued beach holiday. There’s a huge pool, green grounds and boats to Ko Samet – which you can ride for free if you stay for at least three nights.

**Getting There & Around**

See p135 for information regarding ferries from Ban Phe to Ko Samet. If you are heading straight to Ko Samet from Bangkok, take a direct bus to Ban Phe (157B, three hours, hourly), which depart from Bangkok’s Ekamai Station between 5am and 8pm. Aircon buses to Rayong (146B, 2½ hours, every 30 minutes) leave from Ekamai between 4am and 10pm. Sörng-tää-ou between Rayong bus station and Ban Phe shouldn’t cost more than 25B. Rayong has comprehensive bus services to destinations further east, such as Chanthaburi and Trat.

Minivan services connect the pier in Ban Phe to a variety of popular holiday destinations such as Pattaya (250B) and Ko Chang (300B), with a stop at the ferry pier in Laem

Ngop. These can be booked at many resorts and travel agencies along the east coast.

**KO SAMET**

เกาะเสม็ด

If Goldilocks were a Bangkokian socialite, she’d probably spend her weekends here – Pattaya’s too close and noisy, Ko Chang’s too far and rugged, but Ko Samet is just right. This dagger-shaped island off the coast of quiet Rayong Province features a sun-bleached coastline scalloped by beige dunes. Statistically, this little isle boasts the most days of sunshine out of any beach retreat in the kingdom, which gives tourists and locals the green light almost every day of the year.

Lately, farang visitors are becoming increasingly irked by the mandatory 400B entry fee (Ko Samet is technically a national park). This required donation is supposed to protect the island’s natural virtues. However, there is no proper infrastructure for collecting rubbish on Ko Samet, which means that several areas are becoming rather unsightly. Please do your part in helping the overtaxed ecosystem by conserving valuable water and being mindful of your refuse.

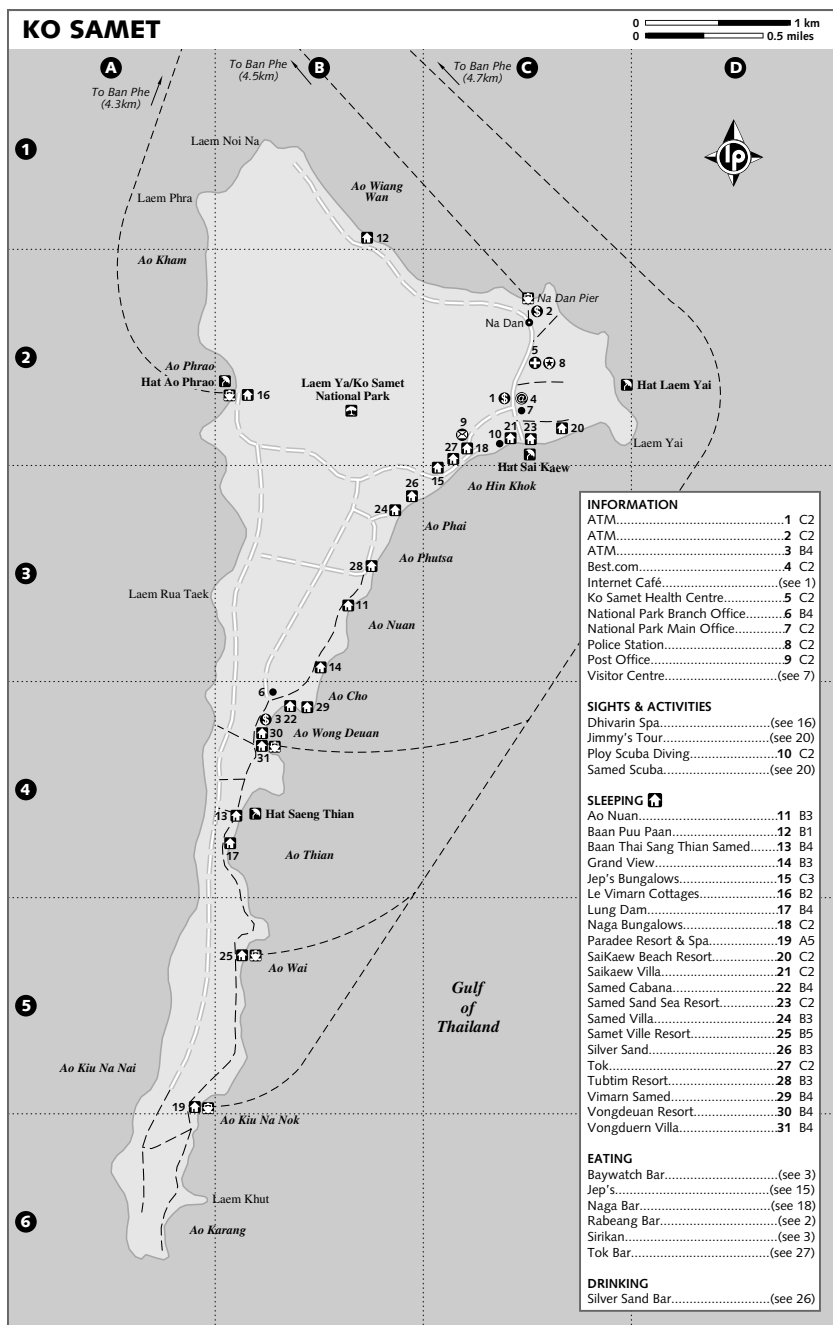
Even though many of the beaches (particularly in the northeast) have been beaten silly with the ‘development stick’, pristine coves are still in abundance. For those seeking a more sociable vacation, the busier tracts of sand host weekend parties that rage on through the night.

**Orientation**

Most of the action on the 8km-long island takes place along the northern half of the eastern shore. Boats arrive at Na Dan, the island’s only village, which is linked to the east coast by a built-up ribbon of road replete with 7-Elevens, internet cafés, noodle stalls and bars. A large gate (think the entrance to Jurassic Park) lies at the end of the street – this is where farang pay their 400B entrance fee. Passengers arriving at other piers usually dodge the park tax.

Ko Samet’s small size makes it a great place to explore on foot. A network of difficult dirt roads connects the western beach and most of the southern bays, while walking trails snake over the boulders and headlands that separate beaches.





## Information

Ko Samet is part of a national park and there is an entry fee of 400B for adults, and 200B for children aged three to 14 (keep your ticket for proof of payment – you should only have to pay for admission once).

## EMERGENCY

**Police Station** (☎ 0 3864 1111, emergency 1155) Next to Ko Samet Health Centre. There's also a smaller station at Ao Wong Deuan.

## INTERNET ACCESS

All of the internet access on Ko Samet costs a whopping 2B per minute with a 20B minimum. There are several choices between Na Dan and Hat Sai Kaew. Opening hours are completely dependant on staff availability.

**Best.com** (per min 2B; 📶) Across from the internet café listed following. Has wi-fi access.

**Internet café** (per min 2B; 📶) Opposite the National Park Office, providing air-con/high-speed/flat-screen surfing bliss.

## MEDICAL SERVICES

**Ko Samet Health Centre** (☎ 0 3861 2999;

🕒 8.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sat & Sun) Small public clinic midway between the village harbour and Hat Sai Kaew. English-speaking doctors are on hand to help with problems such as heat rash or bites from snakes or poisonous sea creatures. The doctors use native vegetation to cure jellyfish stings.

## MONEY

There are three ATMs on Ko Samet; two are attached to 7-Elevens. You'll find one of the 7-Eleven ones at the pier and the other opposite the National Park Office. The third is connected to a convenience store called '108' on Ao Wong Deuan.

## POST

**Post office** (Ao Hin Khok) Small office next to Naga Bungalows; offers a poste restante service and internet access. It also buys/sells second-hand books.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

The national park offices are located near Hat Sai Kaew and Ao Wong Deuan. The 'tourist office' (which deserves its quotation marks as it's really a visitors centre) is an empty room with a couple of photos of the different bays. There's a smiley man who works at the booth.

## Dangers & Annoyances

The roads on Ko Samet are poorly paved and are easily flooded after monsoon rains. The island also has heaps of stray dogs. These mangy beasts can be quite annoying when they park themselves nearby and stare longingly at your food.

## Sights & Activities

In addition to Ko Samet, there are several other islands that belong to Laem Ya/Ko Samet National Park. They include **Ko Man Klang**, **Ko Man Nok** and **Ko Man Nai**. Like on Ko Samet, this official park status hasn't deterred development. Ko Man Nai is home to the **Rayong Turtle Conservation Centre** (☎ 0 3861 6096; 🕒 9am-4pm), which is a breeding place for endangered sea turtles. Ask at Christie's Bar & Restaurant (attached to Christie's Guesthouse; p129) about visiting from Ban Phe, or join one of the many boat tours departing from Ko Samet.

You can also volunteer to work at the centre by contacting **Starfish Ventures** ([www.starfishventures.co.uk](http://www.starfishventures.co.uk)). Activities include monitoring the progress of the turtles, releasing young turtles into the ocean and explaining the project to day-tripping tourists. You'll be expected to work two to three hours per day for four days a week; in your downtime there are good beaches nearby to explore.

There are plenty of **water sports** off Samet's silky sands, but if you're looking for a hard-core diving and snorkelling scene, head further east to the Ko Chang Archipelago (or better yet, Ko Tao and the Similan Islands further south). The best diving around Ko Samet is at **Hin Pholeung**, about halfway between the island and Ko Chang. This isolated spot is well away from destructive boat traffic and has two towering underwater rock pinnacles with excellent visibility (up to 30m) and a great assortment of marine life, such as manta rays, barracuda, sharks and, if you brought your four-leaf clover, whale sharks. A two-dive day trip generally costs 2500B, while an Open Water course will set you back 14,500B.

The following are two of the more reputable dive operations on the island:

**Ploy Scuba Diving** (☎ 0 3864 4212/3; [www.ployscuba.com](http://www.ployscuba.com); 🕒 9am-5pm) Found at Ploy Talay in Hat Sai Kaew. Ploy also has branches in the Ko Chang Archipelago.

**Samed Scuba** (☎ 0 3864 4100-3; [aproadivers@hotmail.com](mailto:aproadivers@hotmail.com)) Based at both the Ao Prao and SaiKaew Beach resorts.

## KO HABITATION

If you're looking for peace and quiet, and Ko Samet doesn't quite cut it, check out some of the smaller islands nearby. The secluded **Ko Man Klang** and **Ko Man Nok** offer upmarket accommodation packages that include boat transport and meals. These vacations should be arranged by phone in advance through the Bangkok reservation numbers.

Public transport to the pier departure points for Ko Man Klang and Ko Man Nok can be arranged in Ban Phe. On weekends and holidays there may be sǒng-tǎa-ou out to the piers; otherwise charter a vehicle from the market for around 100B one way, and arrange a pickup for your return.

**Ko Nok Island Resort** (☎ in Bangkok 0 2860 3025; www.munnorkislandresort.com; packages per person 3500-4500B; 🏠) On Ko Man Nok, this classy resort has one-night, two-day packages in a variety of villas. The island is 15km off Pak Nam Prasae (53km east of Ban Phe).

**Raya Island Resort** (☎ in Bangkok 0 2316 6717; 1-night, 2-day packages per person 1400B; 🏠 🚗) This comfortable getaway has 15 bungalows and plenty of hush. It is 8km off Laem Mae Phim (27km east of Ban Phe), on Ko Man Klang.

## Tours

There are tons of low-key tour operators around the island with giggle-worthy names such as 'Happy Fun Safe Tour'. Most excursions are for three hours, and they usually involve snorkelling, eating, some beach-bumming and a visit to the nearby Turtle Conservation Centre (p131). If you're a serious snorkeller, consider heading further east to the Ko Chang Archipelago (p138). Head to Ao Phai for some other options.

**Jimmy's Tours** (☎ 08 9832 1617/27) runs a variety of trips around Ko Samet and the neighbouring islands. A six-hour boat tour (10am to 4pm) of the neighbouring islets, including the Turtle Conservation Centre on Ko Man Nai, costs 1000B per person (with a minimum group size of 12 people), while a one-hour quad-bike trip around the island costs 1200B per person. Jimmy's Tours has booking offices at both the Ao Prao and SaiKaew Beach resorts.

## Sleeping

Ko Samet's status as the 'it' weekend getaway spot means that prices skyrocket on Fridays and Saturdays (and go even higher on long weekends). It's also common to find rising prices as different places start to fill up – one bungalow could go from 500B on Friday morning to 800B by the end of the day. Most bungalow operations have an attached restaurant and/or bar. They can also help you arrange boats to the mainland or many of the activities that are available on the island.

## HAT SAI KAEW

The most crowded strip of sand, Hat Sai Kaew (Diamond Beach) is set on a lovely 800m stretch of sand. Each night the whole seafloor lights up like a Christmas tree, with beachside restaurants and bars.

**Saikaew Villa** (☎ 0 3864 4139-48; www.saikaew.com; bungalows 700-2500B; 🏠 🚗) This sprawling campus of bungalows near the nicest part of the beach is popular with large groups. The bungalows differ little from the rest of Sai Kaew's standard offerings, but breakfast is included in the price.

**Samed Sand Sea Resort** (☎ 0 3865 1126, 08 7508 3250; www.samedsandsea.com; r 2400-4000B; 🏠) The last new place on Hat Sai Kaew (since there's now officially no more room to build), Samed Sand Sea has beautiful wooden bungalows with refreshing air-con that's borderline cryogenic.

**Saikaew Beach Resort** (☎ 0 2438 9771/2; www.samedresorts.com; r 3600-4800B, bungalows 4800-14,500B; 🏠) One of many links in the 'Samed Resort' chain, this woodsy retreat has a chipper summer camp vibe with bright blue shutters and teeny picket fences. The ever-grinning staff troll around in golf buggies helping guests move around the massive garden complex.

## AO HIN KHOK

The island's backpacker ghetto, Hin Khok is a pleasant stretch of beach just south of the Sai Kaew bustle. These sleeping spots are pretty much the same: all have decent beachside restaurants and bars that vie for your attention with fire shows and drink specials.

**Naga Bungalows** (☎ 0 3864 4034; bungalows 300-400B; 🏠 🚗) A giant snake-shaped banister

leads beach-aholics up the hill to the simple huts. Naga draws in swarms of backpackers like moths to a really cheap flame. There's one-stop shopping near the reception area, featuring a pool table, a bookshop and the island's only post office.

**Tok** (☎ 0 3864 4072; bungalows 300-800B; 🏠) Same same, but different (Tok has air-con rooms). These basic bungalows are flung up a jungle hillside. The cheaper huts have shared bathrooms and could use a face-lift.

**Jep's Bungalows** (☎ 0 3864 4112; www.jepbungalow.com; r 300-1200B; 🏠 🚗) Jep's is hard to miss – there are giant banners strung up around the jungle announcing the 50% discounts on weekdays. The bungalows are a cheery mix of mahogany and magenta, although there are better options around if you're going to fork out more than 600B. Guests staying in the pricier pads get free breakfast. Mosquito repellent is a must.

## AO PHAI

Accommodation here is slightly more upmarket than at Ao Hin Khok.

**Silver Sand** (☎ 08 6530 2417; www.silversandresort.com; bungalows 300-1800B; 🏠) Silver Sand's bungalows are a mix of smooth whites and soft greens – kinda like they've been covered with pistachio ice cream. The verdant property is perfectly manicured, while the evening bar action throws a little chaos into the mix.

**Samed Villa** (☎ 0 3864 4094; www.samedvilla.com; r incl breakfast 1800-2800B; 🏠) Top of the heap in the comfort stakes, the bungalows here are spotless, snug and fitted with frilly touches. There's oodles of shade around the restaurant and a welcome feeling of seclusion. Some of the better bungalows have great sea views and include breakfast.

## AO PHUTSA & AO NUAN

At Ao Phutsa, you start to feel the seclusion of the island since the bustle of the pier is several coves away. Amble through a convoluted path from the road, or hike over a rocky crag to reach the teeny cove of Ao Nuan.

**Ao Nuan** (bungalows 600-1000B) Hidden among thick foliage, the simple wooden bungalows have the whole beach to themselves. The funky restaurant is packed with colourful books and board games, while dishing out delicious home-cooked faves. There's no phone and it doesn't take reservations.

**Tubtim Resort** (☎ 0 3864 4025; www.tubtimresort.com; Ao Phutsa; r 600-2000B; 🏠) Tubtim has five rows of bungalows climbing a rugged hill from the beach up into the jungle. Spend the extra 200B and go for an upgraded fan bungalow – they have sparkling bathrooms and varnished fixtures, and are noticeably better than the rickety cheapies. The restaurant serves up some fantastic dishes within 3m of the crashing tide.

## AO CHO (AO LUNGWANG)

A five-minute walk across the next headland from Ao Nuan, this bay can also be reached by road from Hat Sai Kaew, or you can take a boat directly from Ban Phe to Ao Wong Deuan and walk.

**Grand View** (☎ 0 3864 4219, 0 3864 4220; www.grandviewgroup.net; bungalows incl breakfast from 1800B; 🏠 🚗) A solid choice for the midrange traveller, Grand View's name is a bit of a false moniker, but the villa-style pads are fastidiously clean and stocked with handsome furnishings and modern amenities.

## AO WONG DEUAN

Wong Deuan is the island's southern hub with a fat dock jutting out from the powdery sand. The beach is lined with rows of bars and restaurants.

**Vongduern Villa** (☎ 0 3865 2300; www.vongduernvilla.com; bungalows 1000-3500B; 🏠) Sprawling along the bay's southern edge are bungalows, either near the beach or higher on the clifftop for better views. The Beach Front Bar is a sociable spot for sundowner cocktails, but romantic couples may prefer the subdued ambience of the Rock Front Restaurant.

**Vimarn Samed** (☎ 08 6330 4002; www.vimarnsamed.com; r 1800-2200B; 🏠) Hugging the rocky northern headland, Vimarn Samed looks like a rambling Thai temple with curving, skyscraping roofs and loads of teak accents.

**Vongdeuan Resort** (☎ 0 3865 1777; www.vongdeuan.com; r 2000-3500B; 🏠) Setting a refined midrange scene, this rather extravagant spread has teak Thai-style houses decked out with beautiful bits of furniture. The resort has a front-and-centre beach property and also offers slightly cheaper and less attractive concrete cottages out the back.

**Samed Cabana** (☎ 0 3864 4320; www.samedcabana.com; r 2400B) At the quieter northern end of the beach, Samed Cabana has chic Asian styling and swish concrete floors. Private porches

provide seclusion from the nearby bar scene across the bay.

#### AO THIAN (CANDLELIGHT BEACH)

**Lung Dam** (☎ 08 1659 8056; bungalows 600-1200B; 🍷) Lung Dam looks like a forgotten settlement of castaways marooned on a deserted island. The quirky huts have been scraped together using sundry bits and bobs.

**Baan Thai Sang Thian Samed** (☎ 08 1305 9408; r 1800-2500B; 🍷) This newer address, featuring traditional Thai architecture, represents the evolution of quiet Candlelight Beach away from its backpacker origins.

#### AO WAI & AO KIU NA NOK

These bays are right near the tip of the dagger-shaped island.

**Samet Ville Resort** (☎ 0 3865 1682; www.sametvilleresort.com; r 980-3780B; 🍷) Hidden under a thick emerald canopy, Samet Ville is a private getaway where guests can enjoy upscale accommodation and isolation. The shaded restaurant is a lovely spot for a romantic dinner. Staff can arrange speedboat transfers from Ban Phe.

**Paradee Resort & Spa** (☎ 0 2438 9771; www.samedresorts.com; villas 15,000B; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The price tag is high, but you do get your own self-contained, beachfront villa on what is probably Ko Samet's best beach. There's gorgeous Thai furniture, a personal plunge pool, DVD player, espresso maker – even your own butler. Speedboats from Ban Phe are arranged – you'll be way too busy getting pampered to have time to plan a ferry connection.

#### WEST COAST (HAT AO PHRAO)

**Le Vimarn Cottages** (☎ 0 2438 9771/2, Dhivarin Spa 0 3864 4104-7; www.samedresorts.com; r 8000-10,500B; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Vying for top luxury hotel laurels with Paradee Resort (even though it's owned by the same people), Le Vimarn sits on perfectly manicured grounds punctuated by the occasional water feature. The rooms and villas are adorned with a blend of elegant Thai and modern conveniences and an absolutely stunning pool. There are loads of facilities, including the lavish Dhivarin Spa. The name Dhivarin means 'sun and water'; the spa features a wide array of intensive massage and treatments.

#### NORTH COAST (AO WIANG WAN)

This beach won't make any postcards, but the solitude is refreshing.

**Baan Puu Paan** (Lizzy's; ☎ 0 3864 4095; bungalows 500-1000B; 🍷) This Scottish-run place is a great choice for some R&R away from the east coast hustle. The pod of charming bungalows is scattered along the sand – a few even jut out into the sea. Delicious Indian food is served in the quaint on-site restaurant.

#### Eating & Drinking

Most accommodation has attached restaurants and bars. Typical Thai favourites go for around 30B to 100B. European flavours range from 60B to 300B. It's worth looking out for the nightly beach barbecues, particularly along Ao Hin Khok and Ao Phai. There are several food stalls along the main drag between Na Dan pier and Sai Kaew Beach. Most places toss around noodles in a wok for 40B.

Hat Sai Kaew offers the biggest range of places to down some cold ones, or check out **Naga Bar** (dishes 50-160B; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) and **Tok Bar** (dishes 40-150B; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner), both on Ao Hin Khok, for some post-dinner shenanigans. Ao Wong Deuan is so packed with wall-to-wall bars, it's difficult to know where one ends and the next begins – but does it really matter?

**Rabeang Bar** (Na Dan; dishes 40-120B; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Opposite Na Dan's main pier, this nondescript joint is a bit overpriced, but it's a decent place to grab a bite while killing time between ferries.

#### BYOB

As you haul around your ever-expanding luggage, you'll probably become jealous of the weekendening Bangkokians toting one skimpy Louis Vuitton bag containing all the necessities for their quick two-day beach escape. You may notice, however, that certain Thai nationals have way more luggage than you. These savvy visitors are taking advantage of Thailand's unspoken BYOB rule: on Ko Samet (as well as many other destinations in the kingdom), you're allowed to bring your own booze to the table as long as you purchase something from the establishment. So for those who are tight on baht but big on luggage space, consider purchasing your beverage of choice before being subjected to the inflated island prices.

**Jep's** (Ao Hin Khok; dishes 60-400B; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) If you're going to leave your bungalow in search of other restaurants, try Jep's. It's on the pricier side, but the almanac-sized menu offers everything from Thai staples to Indian and French faves. Tables are strewn along the sand, and there's plenty of covered outdoor seating just in case it rains. Later on, cocktail specials prevail and the music escalates as diners transform into drinkers who later morph into beachside dancers.

**Baywatch Bar** (☎ 08 1826 7834; Ao Wong Deuan; kebabs 190-290B; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Sorry fellas, Pam Anderson is nowhere to be found, but the delicious cocktails and international dishes are good consolation prizes.

**Sirikan** (☎ 08 1782 0274; Ao Wong Deuan; dishes 200-300B; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Tucked deep within the jumble of seaside restaurants, little Sirikan has an excellent assortment of fresh seafood – you even get to pick your prey.

**Silver Sand Bar** (☎ 0 6530 2417; Ao Phai; 🍷 1pm-2am) As the clock ticks towards the witching hour, the island's night owls congregate here under trippy spherical lights to watch the fire twirlers, grind to cheesy dance music and knock back over 35 types of cocktails (all served in buckets, of course).

#### Getting There & Away

Many Th Khao Sam agencies in Bangkok offer transport to Ko Samet, including the boat trip, for around 250B to 300B. This is more expensive than doing it on your own, but it's convenient for travellers who don't plan to go anywhere else on the east coast.

**Nuan Thip Pier** (☎ 0 3865 1508, 0 3865 1514) in Ban Phe is the pier behind the 7-Eleven where the direct bus from Bangkok drops you off. Purchase your ticket from the counter and wait until there are 20 other passengers wanting to go. The rustic ferries travel to five different stops along the Ko Samet coast, but most (one hourly) stop at Tha Na Dan (100B round trip), and five scheduled departures (every other hour between 8.30am and 4.30pm) arrive at Ao Wong Deuan (120B round trip). Boats will stop at other piers on the island if there is a quorum of passengers.

Alternatively, you can charter a speedboat to any of the island's beaches. They are quite expensive (1200B to Na Dan or 1600B to Ao Wai), but they take up to 10 passengers for this price, so it's worthwhile if you're travelling in a group. If you book ahead at one of

Ko Samet's ritzier resorts, speedboat transfers may be included in the price.

#### Getting Around

Ko Samet's small size makes it a great place to explore on foot. It's only a 15-minute walk from Na Dan to Hat Sai Kaew, but if you are carting luggage or want to go further, sǒng-tǎa-ou meet arriving boats at the pier and provide drop-offs all along the length of the island. Set fares for transport around the island from Na Dan are posted on a tree in the middle of a square in front of Na Dan harbour, but nobody pays them any attention; still, you shouldn't have to pay much more than 20B to get to Hat Sai Kaew, 30B to go halfway down the island, or 40B to reach the southern beaches. If drivers don't have enough people to fill the vehicle, they either won't go, or they will charge passengers 200B to 500B to charter the whole vehicle.

Motorcycles and mountain bikes can be rented from almost every bungalow operation on the island. Expect to pay about 300B per day or an hourly rate of 100B. The dirt roads are very rough – you may want to walk or rent a mountain bike (100B per hour) instead.

#### CHANTHABURI & AROUND

จังหวัด  
pop 500,000

The virgin coastline between Ko Samet and the Ko Chang Archipelago belongs to the quiet province of Chanthaburi. Tourists often overlook these hushed coral sands and sleepy fishing villages as they beeline for livelier beach holidays. Chanthaburi town has earned a global reputation as the centre for gem trading in Southeast Asia. Gem dealers line the streets during the weekend. Great deals can be clinched by the savvy, but amateurs are likely to go home with a bagful of worthless rocks. If you grab a taxi or local bus from Chanthaburi town, you can reach the quiet provincial villages along the water. The **Tha Mai** district has the area's nicest beaches, the most charming being **Hat Chao Lao**, which is stocked with delicious seafood restaurants. Our readers have also enjoyed the laid-back ambience in the lagoonside town of **Khlung**. The jagged peninsula of Laem Singh is a picturesque beach option and home to the region's most popular tourist destination, **Oasis Sea World** (☎ 0 3936 3238; Laem Singh; admission 400B). Dolphins are the main attraction and the

price of admission includes the opportunity to get in the water with the lovable creatures and assist the trainers with tricks and feeding. Visits can be arranged by most tour operators between Pattaya and Ko Chang.

## Sleeping

**River Guest House** (☎ 0 3932 8211; Th Si Chan 3/5-8, Chanthaburi; r 150-350B; 🍴 📺 📺) Chanthaburi town's real gem is the friendly team that runs this relaxed place beside the river. The rooms with air-con at the front are a bit noisy, so if you're happy with a fan ask for a room at the back. Downstairs is a good restaurant that does its best to overcome its proximity to the town's busiest bridge.

**Le Village de Napoleon** (☎ 0 3944 4575; www.napoleonvillage.net; Laem Singh; r from 1500B; 🍴 📺 📺) Situated on the quiet cape of Laem Singh, about 30km from Chanthaburi town, Le Village de Napoleon is a small, five-room hotel with all the conveniences of a luxury resort. Spend the day poolside with a delicious cocktail, savour delicious international cuisine for dinner, and relax in the evening while watching cult classics in the cinema room.

## Getting There & Away

Buses operate between Chanthaburi town (187B, 4½ hours) and Bangkok's Eastern bus terminal every half hour throughout the day and less frequently at night. Buses also travel to Rayong (90B, 2½ hours, five daily) and Trat (70B, 1½ hours, hourly). Taxis from Bangkok cost around 2300B.

## TRAT & AROUND

เมืองตราด  
pop 219,345

Trat town, the provincial capital, is a major transfer hub for anyone heading to or from Cambodia or the Ko Chang Archipelago. Unlike many of the other transport junctions, Trat has slightly more to offer than buses and barking dogs. The town's main road, Th Sukhumvit, is a roaring drag-way of honking sörng-tää-ou, but you just have to step into a side street to appreciate the gentle pace of everyday life along the slithering canal. The city's architecture is a striking cornucopia of styles: hidden pedestrian alleys are lined with century-old teak houses, while loud colours are splashed across the boxy department stores nearby. If you have an afternoon to kill, try exploring the area's

thriving markets, and if you decide to stay the night, you'll find some of the cheapest lodging in all of Thailand. The port villages of Laem Ngop and Laem Sok are purely devoted to moving tourists between the archipelago and aren't worth an extra look.

## Information

**Bangkok Trat Hospital** (☎ 0 3953 2735; Th Sukhumvit; 🏥 24hr)

**Immigration Office** (☎ 0 3959 7261; Laem Ngop; 🕒 8.30am-noon & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Can handle visa extensions and immigration issues. It's a short walk from Laem Ngop pier.

**Krung Thai Bank** (Th Sukhumvit, Trat) Has an ATM and currency exchange.

**Police Station** (☎ 1155, 0 3959 7033; Laem Ngop) Near the pier.

**Police Station** (☎ 1155, 0 3951 1035; cr Th Santisuk & Th Wiwatthana, Trat) Located a short walk from Trat's centre.

**Post Office** (Th Tha Reua Jang) East of Trat's commercial centre. The telephone office is nearby.

**TAT Office** (☎ 0 3959 7255) Near the pier in Laem Ngop.

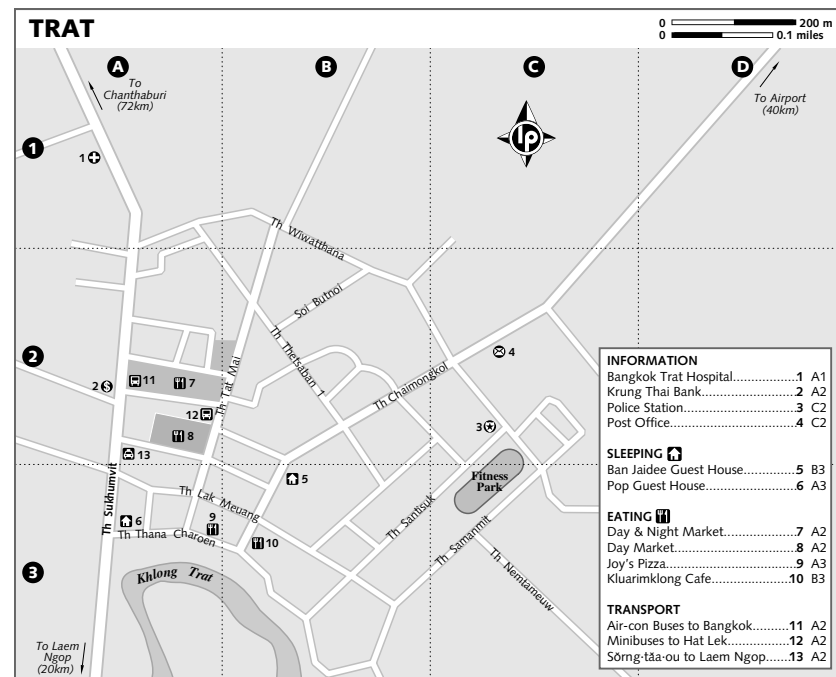
## Sleeping

Trat has a small and charming super-budget guesthouse scene; just take a stroll through the quiet lanes lining Lak Meuung and pick one that tickles your fancy. There are only a few midrange options in town, most along or just off busy Th Sukhumvit.

There are also bungalows at the piers in Laem Ngop and Laem Sok, although it's impossible to get stuck in these places since ferries run during the day and Trat is only 20km away.

**Ban Jaidee Guest House** (☎ 0 3952 0678; 6 Th Chaimongkol; r 120-150B) Meaning 'good heart', this lovely Thai-style home is easily one of the best deals this side of Bangkok. The simple rooms share a bathroom and the whole place abounds with leafy greens and beautiful wooden objects (handmade by one of the artsy owners).

**Pop Guest House** (☎ 0 3951 2392; popson1958@hotmail.com; 1/1 Th Thana Charoen; r 120-600B; 🍴 📺 📺) Over the last few years, Pop has transformed into a veritable village – there are now over 40 comfy rooms spread around four tidy properties. The owner is part businessperson, part mother figure: she wheels and deals with one hand and pampers you with the other. Check out her handy hand-drawn map of Trat.



## Eating

Trat's surplus of vibrant day and night markets means that you're just steps away from a tasty (and *cheap*) meal. Both Laem Ngop and Laem Sok have an unremarkable restaurant at their pier, just in case you didn't have time to stock up on tasty noodles in Trat.

**Kluarimklong Cafe** (☎ 0 3952 4919; Soi Rimklong; dishes 70-100B; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This café has been around in some form for over 20 years. Its latest incarnation is as a smooth, lounge-style, atmospheric place that serves up some of the top Thai dishes in Trat.

**Joy's Pizza** (☎ 0 3952 2551; 49-51 Th Thana Charoen; pizzas 110-150B; 🍴 lunch & dinner) When he's not making pizzas, the expat owner dishes out essential tourist info and maintains an unfathomably large collection of MP3s. The restaurant doubles as an art gallery for the quirky installations created by Joy, his wife.

## Getting There & Around

To reach the islands in the Ko Chang Archipelago, travellers will have to transfer to one of the piers along the coast. Most tourists will end up around Laem Ngop. Sähm-lór

(also spelt as säamláw; three-wheeled pedicabs) around Trat cost between 10B and 15B per person.

## TRAT

**Bangkok Airways** (☎ in Bangkok 0 2265 5555, Trat Airport 0 3952 5767; www.bangkokair.com) flies three times a day to/from Trat and Bangkok (2550B). The airport is 40km from town; minibuses and taxis meet all flights.

Air-conditioned buses from Bangkok to Trat (200B to 300B, five to six hours) leave hourly from the Eastern bus terminal between 8.30am and 10.30pm and stop along Th Sukhumvit; the price and frequency for the return trip to Bangkok are the same.

Direct minibuses from Trat to Hat Lek (115B, one hour) leave every 45 minutes from the bus station. Sörng-tää-ou (around 50B) also trundle from the bus station to Hat Lek, but you will have to wait for enough people to show up.

## LAEM NGOP

Sörng-tää-ou for Laem Ngop and Centrepier Pier (30B to 55B) leave Trat from a stand on

Th Sukhumvit next to the municipal shopping centre market. They depart regularly throughout the day, but after dark you will have to charter your own (200B). There are travel agents in Laem Ngop that can book you on direct bus links to other major destinations on the eastern coast (for a reasonable price).

## KO CHANG ARCHIPELAGO

### อุทยานแห่งชาติเกาะช้าง

If you're tired of hearing people say 'ya shoulda been here 10 years ago', then head to the Ko Chang Archipelago. Unlike the rest of Thailand's booming beach resorts, most of the islets here remain relatively untouched; scalloped with peach-coloured beaches, they feature coral reefs, marine life and tropical rainforests perfect for some Tarzan-esque vine-swinging.

Named after the largest island in the area, this stunning archipelago comprises nearly 50 islands. It's actually made up of several marine parks and governmental subdistricts. The Ko Chang marine park covers the region around the largest island, Ko Chang. Further along, there's the Mu Ko Rung park that guards the area's best coral reefs. A lack of freshwater on these smaller islands means that there is no commercial development. The quasi-autonomous government body called the Ko Kut Subdistrict controls most of the islands further away from the coast. There are only about 2500 inhabitants spread across these furry specks of jungle.

Ko Chang is the darling of southeast Thailand and has a one-two punch of beach and forest that will knock the socks off most visitors. Other islands have recently begun throwing their hats into the tourist ring and are quickly becoming idyllic tropical destina-

#### KEEPING YOU ABREAST

Topless sunbathing is not just considered to be offensive to Thais – it is forbidden by law in all of Thailand's national parks. This includes Ko Chang Marine National Park and all beaches on Ko Chang, Ko Kut, Ko Mak, Ko Whai etc.

tions themselves. Ko Mak and Ko Kut have dozens of places to stay and feel particularly remote since each resort usually sits alone on one of the myriad bays. Smaller islands such as Ko Whai, Ko Rayang, Ko Kham and Ko Kradat also have a sprinkling of resorts along their flaxen sands.

Now is the perfect time to plan a trip to the Ko Chang Archipelago. A vacation here in the near future will allow you to glimpse Thailand's undeveloped past, making it the perfect present on your Thailand holiday.

### Diving & Snorkelling

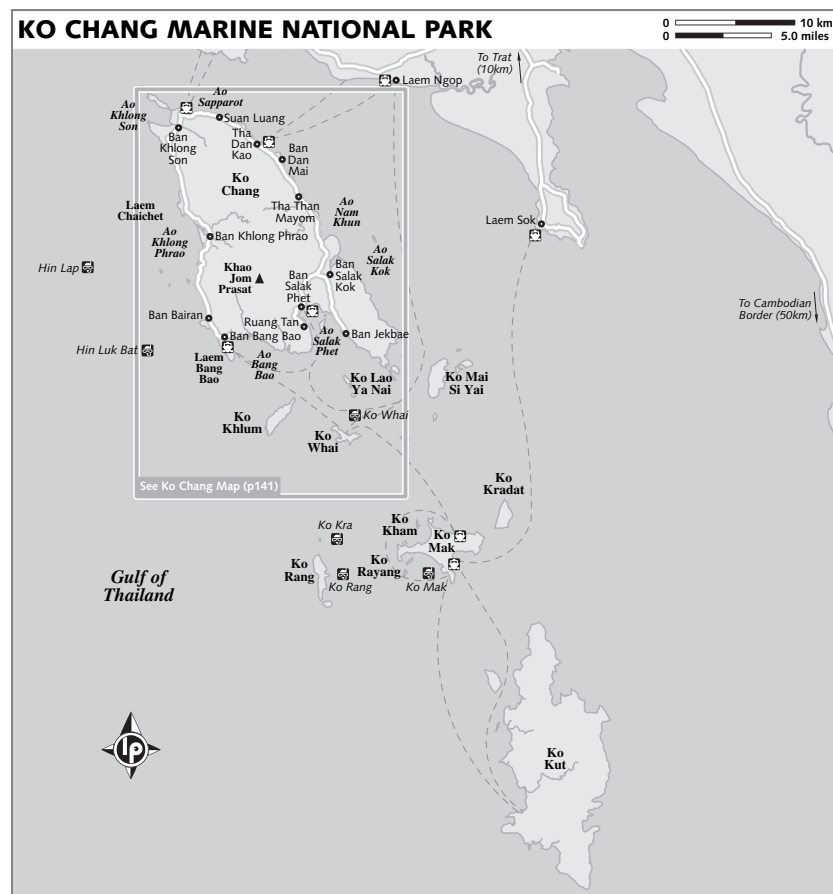
The seamounts off the southern tip of Ko Chang stretch over 32km to Ko Kut, offering a new frontier of diving opportunities in Thailand. **Hin Luk Bat** and **Hin Lap** are rocky, coral-encrusted seamounts with depths of around 18m to 20m that act as a haven for schooling fish. Both **Hin Phrai Nam** and **Hin Gadeng** (between Ko Whai and Ko Rang) are formed by spectacular rock pinnacles and have coral visible to around 28m. Southwest of Ko Chang's Ao Salak Phet, reef-fringed **Ko Whai** features a good variety of colourful hard and soft corals at depths of 6m to 15m.

The region's best diving is around **Ko Rang**. Protected from fishing by its marine park status, this mini archipelago has some of the most pristine coral in Thailand. Visibility here is much better than near Ko Chang and averages between 10m and 20m. In the area, **Ko Yak** and **Ko Laun** are shallow dives perfect for beginners. These two small rocky islands can be circumnavigated and have lots of coral, schooling fish, puffer fish, morays, barracuda, rays and the occasional turtle. **Hin Kuak Maa** (also known as Three Finger Reef) is probably the top dive and is home to a coral-encrusted wall sloping from 2m to 14m and attracting swarms of marine life.

Most dive operators are based on Ko Chang, the largest island in the archipelago (see p142).

### Tours

The best way to explore this quiet realm is by joining a live-aboard tour. Although there are very few operators at the moment, one company stands out for its off-the-beaten-path approach to holiday travel. The **JYSK Sea Safari** (☎ 0 2630 9371; www.jysk-rejsebureau.dk; 4-day trip 10,600B) takes passengers on an authentic fishing vessel for a four-day adventure



around the archipelago with sea kayaks and snorkelling equipment. This isn't a holiday cruise – there's one teeny bathroom and everyone sleeps on thin mattresses on the roof deck, but it's a fantastic way to experience life at sea and to take in the majestic vistas. You can decide where you prefer to end your voyage. Prices include transport from Bangkok, and these can be renegotiated for those who only want to do the boat portion of the trip.

### Getting There & Around

Boat services to Ko Chang are year-round; between May and October, ferries to the smaller islands become irregular and often nonexistent.

In the high season, **Bang Bao Boat** (☎ 08 7054 4300; Bang Bao) and **Interisland Hopper** (☎ 08 1865 0610; Bang Bao) run a fleet of ferries linking many different islands in the archipelago. Boats leave Ko Chang every morning at 9am, stopping at 10am on Ko Whai (300B), 10.30am on Ko Kham (400B), 10.45am on Ko Rayang (400B) and 11am on Ko Mak (400B). The boat pauses until 1.30pm and continues on to Ko Kut (700B), arriving at 2pm. The return journey is as follows: a 10am departure from Ko Kut, alighting at 10.30am on Ko Mak; after a break, the boat stops at 12.05pm on Ko Rayang, 12.10pm on Ko Kham, 1pm on Ko Whai and 2pm on Ko Chang.

Speedboat services depart daily from Bang Bao at noon, stopping at 12.25pm on Ko

Whai (400B), 12.35pm on Ko Kham (550B), 12.45pm on Ko Rayang (550B), 1pm on Ko Mak (550B) and 2pm on Ko Kut (900B). Return services leave Ko Kut at 10am, stopping at 10.30am on Ko Mak, 10.35am on Ko Rayang, 10.45am on Ko Kham, 10.55am on Ko Whai and 11.20am at Ko Chang's Bang Bao pier. Prices from Ko Mak are as follows: to Ko Rayang (200B), Ko Kham (300B), Ko Whai (350B) and Ko Kut (400B).

See p137 for information concerning moving between the mainland piers and other parts of Thailand. Each island section that follows has detailed transportation information.

**KO CHANG**

เกาะช้าง

From certain angles, Ko Chang looks like a mammoth green elephant cooling off in the clear coastal waters. The locals seem to agree – they named the island *chang*, which is Thai for elephant. As Thailand's second-biggest island, Ko Chang has relatively little development when compared with Phuket and Ko Samui, which are Thailand's largest and third-largest islands respectively. This lush jungle, with postcard-perfect bays and fiery sunsets, was protected for many years by governmental decrees, but lately the construction ban has been lifted.

Ko Chang's rugged landscape conceals some of Southeast Asia's best-preserved wilderness. The island's craggy mountainous interior is home to a veritable Jurassic Park of flora and fauna. The abounding biodiversity includes exotic reptiles, technicolour birds and even some friendly elephants.

Recently, the mega-island has found itself firmly in the sights of developers and its coasts are quickly turning into a holiday habitat. Regardless, the impenetrable rainforests and wild coastal mangroves manage to hold their own and provide a counterbalance to the small beachside metropolis that fringes the island's western shore. Each holiday season brings new development, but rest assured, many years remain before Ko Chang will no longer be synonymous with 'paradise'.

**Orientation**

Most of Ko Chang's development straddles the western coastline, while the majority of the rest of the island remains a dripping rainforest. Hat Sai Khao (White Sands Beach),

the northernmost beach on the west coast, is the longest beach strip around and packs in the most bungalows, bars and restaurants per kilometre on Ko Chang. Ao Khlong Phrao sits around a rocky headland from White Sands and focuses on more upmarket digs, while Hat Kaibae, further south, is lost in transition between the up-and-coming Khlong Phrao and the uber-chill Lonely Beach, which is home to the island's burgeoning backpacker scene. Bang Bao is a small fishing settlement in the far south with several charming places to stay, good seafood restaurants and a pier hosting several dive shops and ferries to the region's smaller islands.

If you plan to venture off the main road into the island's interior, you will need to pay the 400B park entry fee at one of the four park offices. Keep your receipt so you don't have to pay twice.

**Information**

**EMERGENCY**

**Police Station** (☎ 0 3958 6191, 0 3952 1657) Based at Ban Dan Mai.

**Tourist Police Office** (☎ 0 3965 1351, emergency 1155) Based in Ban Khlong Phrao. There are also smaller police boxes at the northern end of Hat Sai Khao and between Khlong Phrao and Hat Kaibae on the west side of the road.

**INTERNET ACCESS**

Internet facilities run the length of the western coast, charging between 1B and 2B per minute, or around 50B per hour.

**MEDICAL SERVICES**

**Ko Chang International Clinic** (☎ 0 3955 1555, emergency 1719; Hat Sai Khao; 🕒 24hr during high season) Related to the Bangkok Hospital Group and can handle most minor emergencies and arrange for emergency evacuations.

**MONEY**

There's a continuous chain of banks and ATMs between Hat Sai Khao and Lonely Beach.

**POST**

**Ko Chang post office** (☎ 0 3955 1240; 🕒 8.30am-3.30pm) At the south end of Hat Sai Khao.

**TELEPHONE**

Mobile phones work along the coasts, although you may lose reception on treks into the centre of the island.

**EATING**

- Buddha View.....(see 57)
- Chang Spirit Club.....(see 13)
- Chow Lay Seafood.....(see 57)
- Funky Hut.....(see 29)
- Invite.....46 A2
- Iyara Seafood.....47 A3
- KATI Culinary.....48 B3
- Magic Garden.....49 A4
- Oddie's Place.....50 A2
- Paddy's Palms.....51 A2
- Ruan Thai Restaurant.....(see 57)
- Salakphet Seafood.....52 C4
- Thor's Palace.....53 A2
- Treehouse.....(see 44)

**DRINKING**

- Nature Beach.....(see 22)
- Sabay Bar.....54 A2
- Sky Bay.....55 A2
- Sunset Hut.....(see 22)

**TRANSPORT**

- Ao Sapparat Ferry Terminal.....56 A1
- Bang Bao Boat.....57 B4
- Ferry Terminal.....58 C4
- Interisland Hopper.....(see 57)
- Tha Dan Kao Ferry Terminal.....59 B1

**INFORMATION**

- Ko Chang International Clinic.....1 A2
- Ko Chang Post Office.....2 A2
- National Marine Park Headquarters.....3 A1
- Police Box.....4 A3
- Police Box.....5 A1
- Police Station.....6 C2
- Tourist Police Office.....7 A2
- Evolution Tour.....15 A2
- KATI Culinary.....(see 48)
- Koh Chang Thai Cooking School.....(see 24)
- Nam Tok Khlong Phlu.....16 B3
- Nam Tok Than Mayom.....17 C2
- Ploy Scuba Diving.....(see 57)
- San Chao Po Ko Chang.....18 A1
- Tree Top Adventure Park.....19 B4
- Funky Hut Resort.....29 B2
- Kachapura.....30 A4
- KB Resort.....31 A3
- KC Grande Resort.....32 A1
- Keereeta.....33 A2
- Koh Chang Kacha Resort.....34 A2
- Logan's Place.....35 A2
- Mac Resort Hotel.....36 A2
- Manee Guest House.....37 A1
- Nirvana.....38 B4
- Orchid Resort.....39 B4
- Paradise Bang Bao.....(see 57)
- Paradise Cottage.....40 A3
- Porn Bungalow.....41 A3
- Princess Resort.....42 B4
- Remark Cottages.....43 A2
- Saffron on the Sea.....(see 43)
- Treehouse.....44 A3
- Treehouse Lodge.....45 D4

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

- Baan Chang Thai.....8 B3
- Baan Zen.....9 B3
- Bailan Herbal Sauna.....10 B4
- BB Divers.....(see 57)
- Ban Kwan Elephant Camp.....11 A1
- Chang Chutiman.....12 B3
- Chang Spirit Club.....13 C3
- Dive Adventure.....(see 57)
- Delphin Divers.....(see 21)
- Eco-Divers.....14 B3
- Aiyapura Resort.....20 A1
- Amari Emerald Cove.....21 A3
- Bai Lan Bay Resort.....22 A4
- Banpu Ko Chang Hut.....(see 57)
- Bang Bao Sea Hut.....23 A2
- Blue Lagoon Resort.....24 A3
- Chang Park Resort & Spa.....25 A3
- Chok Dee Resort.....26 A3
- Cookies Hotel.....27 A2
- Dewa.....28 A3

**SLEEPING**

- .....20 A1
- .....21 A3
- .....22 A4
- .....23 A2
- .....24 A3
- .....25 A3
- .....26 A3
- .....27 A2
- .....28 A3

**TO**

- To Ko Whai (10km)
- To Ko Mak (18km)
- To Ko Kut (32km)

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

**National Marine Park Headquarters** (☎ 0 3955 5080; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) On the main road between Khlong Son and Hat Sai Khao. Friendly staff try their best, despite the language barrier, to offer as much info as they can. Campers can book a site in the brush beyond the office at Nam Tok Than Mayom or on the isolated isle of Ko Rang (p163). The park entrance fee is 400B, payable at one of these offices.

**Dangers & Annoyances**

Perhaps the biggest annoyance on Ko Chang is the unfinished 'ring road', which comes oh-so close to being a full circle. There's always chatter about finishing the loop – most maps even feature a completed circle in anticipation of the road's completion. The street itself can be a danger to inexperienced motorbike drivers, especially on the extremely steep hill between Hat Sai Khao and Khlong Son, further north. There's another rough patch near Bang Bao in the south. Both of these areas should be avoided in the evening or after rain (even light rain). In general, the 'ring road' is poorly lit at night and the many sharp turns can be especially difficult to navigate.

During monsoon season, the beaches along the western side of the island are often posted with warnings about dangerous riptides and undercurrents. It's best to heed the advice of these signs as several fatalities have been reported over the last few years.

Ko Chang's chilled-out vibe may inspire you to take a toke of the local herb – this will not go over well with the local police, who have been known to conduct random raids at various bungalow establishments. Penalties can include heavy fines and imprisonment.

**Sights & Activities**

Although the west coast is mostly dedicated to thriving bungalow establishments, there's still much to explore on Ko Chang's east side. While passing over the steep mountain between Khlong Son and Hat Sai Khao, you may notice that drivers will honk their horns. They are paying respect to Ko Chang's guardian spirit who lives at **San Chao Po Ko Chang** – a vibrant Chinese spirit temple. A long staircase, adorned with stone elephant statues, leads visitors up to the entrance, although a small Thai sign explains that women who are menstruating are barred from entering.

The east coast is mostly made up of mangrove forests and plantations. Inland, there

are several stunning **waterfalls** to explore, such as Than Mayom (see opposite). The stretch of shoreline south of Than Mayom is locally known as **Ghost Bay**, as it's commonly believed that a spirit of a woman roams the beach at night and looks out at the sea.

Further along, the rustic shanties of **Ban Salak Kok** lie hidden within a dense forest of mangroves. Visit the rickety docks and explore the serpentine river by kayak (see p144). Nearby, locals cultivate rubber trees, durians, mangosteens, pineapples and coconuts. You'll see several **shrimp farms** along the road as well.

There's another fishing village and pier at **Ao Salak Phet**. Climb the imposing **lighthouse** for panoramic views, and stop by the **fish farm** at Salakphet Seafood (p156) to watch the chaos during feeding time.

**DIVING & SNORKELLING**

While the best sites in Thailand are undoubtedly along the Andaman and southern Gulf coasts, divers around Ko Chang will have the benefit of exploring reefs that are still quite pristine. Some local enthusiasts claim that there's diving throughout the year, but most operations function with a skeleton crew during monsoon season as the visibility is lousy and the seas can be incredibly rough and often impassable. The best time to strap on your gear is between December and March. See p138 for detailed information about diving around the Ko Chang Archipelago.

Diving prices are somewhat standardised across Ko Chang so there's no need to spend your time hunting around for the best deal. You can, however, ask your operator of choice about discounted accommodation – several companies often hook their clients up with great lodging rates as an added incentive. Additional price cuts are given if you bring your own equipment. A typical fun-dive excursion usually includes two guided dives, transport, equipment and food, and will set you back about 2200B to 2500B. PADI Open Water certification costs 12,500B to 13,500B per person, and is available in several different languages. Be wary of dive centres that offer too many price cuts – safety is paramount, and a shop giving out unusually good deals is probably cutting too many corners.

The following dive operations also offer snorkelling tours around Ko Chang (500B to 550B) and Ko Rang (650B to 700B), especially

during the low season when the visibility and sea conditions are often poor. Prices include snorkel gear and lunch. Evolution Tour (right) also offers full-day snorkelling trips.

**BB Divers** (☎ 0 3955 8040, 08 6129 2305; www.bbdivers.com) Based in Bang Bao, with a swimming pool at the south end of Lonely Beach.

**Dive Adventure** (☎ 08 1762 6482; www.thedivekochang.com) Also based in Bang Bao. Offers captained boat rentals from 8000B per day.

**Dolphin Divers** (☎ 08 7028 1627; www.scubadivingkohchang.com) Based in Khlong Phrao and also has a small booking office at the Amari Resort. Offers a variety of other water sports including surfing, kayaking and wake boarding.

**Eco-Divers** (☎ 0 3955 7296; www.ecodivers.fr) Main office also located at Khlong Phrao, with additional locations on most of the other west coast beaches.

**Ploy Scuba Diving** (☎ 0 3955 8033; www.ployscuba.com) Has a shop on nearly every beach in Ko Chang; the main office is in Bang Bao.

**ELEPHANT TREKKING**

*Chang* means elephant, so it's not surprising that there are three operations on the island offering travellers the opportunity to play with these gentle giants.

**Ban Kwan Elephant Camp** (☎ 08 9815 9566, 08 1919 3995; changtone@yahoo.com; 40-/90-min adventure 500/900B; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm), about 2km inland from Ban Khlong Son, takes in older pachyderms that were once used for labour and helps them live out their days close to nature. The informative 1½ hour 'experience' involves feeding, bathing, an elephant ride and the chance to learn about the creatures' lives in a wild setting.

**Chang Chutiman** (☎ 08 9939 6676, 08 7135 7424; 1-1/2-hr ride 500/900B; 🕒 8am-5pm) and **Baan Chang Thai** (☎ 0 3955 1474; 1-1/2-hr ride 500/900B) are both based in Khlong Phrao and offer similar programs to Ban Kwan in a less dramatic setting.

Transfers are included in these prices, but make sure you book in advance. Most accommodation can arrange these adventures within a day's notice.

**HIKING**

If your muscles are starting to shrivel after one too many days of beach bumming, try stretching your legs in Ko Chang's breathtaking inland jungle of soaring mountain vistas, lush vegetation and gushing waterfalls.

Many consider **Nam Tok Khlong Phlu** (park admission 400B; 🕒 8am-5pm) to be Ko Chang's most impressive waterfall. It's easily accessible from

the resorts at Khlong Phrao on the western coast. Set amid striking jungle scenery, the chute is quickly reached by walking 600m along a well-marked jungle path. Khlong Phlu dumps out into a cool pool; it's the perfect place to dunk your body after a sweaty day's adventure.

Another stunning cascade, **Nam Tok Than Mayom** (park admission 400B; 🕒 8am-5pm) can be reached via Tha Than Mayom or Ban Dan Mai on the east coast. The view from the top is marvellous and there are inscribed stones bearing the initials of Rama V, Rama VI and Rama VII nearby.

There are many freelance guides on the island who charge reasonable prices for a rewarding day hike. Should you decide to set off on your own adventure (which is not particularly advisable), steer clear of the mountainous area between Bang Bao and Ao Salak Phet, unless you are an experienced tropical hiker with moderate orienteering skills. If you don't get lost, this rewarding hike will take four to six hours and you may find the isolated **Hat Wai Chek**. If you do get lost, try to find a stream and follow the current – it will usually take you either to the sea or a village, then you can either follow the coast or ask for directions.

If you plan to do several hikes, make sure you hold on to your park fee receipt, as you only have to pay once to access the park. The following operations offer all-inclusive tour packages. Your hotel can probably book you on similar trips as well.

**Evolution Tour** (☎ 0 3955 1058; www.evolutiontour.com; Khlong Phrao) Offers a huge assortment of hiking and boating trips. Snorkelling tours are also available.

**Jungle Way** (☎ 08 9223 4795; www.jungleway.com) Runs one- and two-day excursions (800B to 1000B) through the island's interior, including an intense hike through the Chang Noi peninsula; book through your hotel.

**Trekkers of Koh Chang** (☎ 08 1578 7513) Offers ornithological day trips (1200B to 1400B); book through your hotel.

**OTHER SPORTS**

The newly opened **Tree Top Adventure Park** (☎ 08 4310 7600; www.treetopadventurepark.com; admission 900B; 🕒 9am-5pm), near Ao Bai Lan, is an exciting obstacle course suspended high in the trees. The price includes a couple of hours of jungle fun and complimentary hotel transfers. Last entry at 3pm.

A unique kayaking experience awaits visitors at the small fishing community of Salak

Kok. The **Chang Spirit Club** (☎ 08 1919 3995; 🕒 8am-5pm) hires out kayaks by the hour (100B) for exploring a dense forest of mangroves along the inner river. Charming wooden crafts are also available (200B), and dinner cruises are another enchanting option (see p156).

Some of the bungalows between Hat Sai Khao and Hat Kaibae rent out **kayaks, sailboards and boogie boards**. Dolphin Divers (p143) can set you up with virtually every type of nautical craft. Several operations at Bang Bao, including Buddha View (p156) and Dive Adventure (p143) lease captained boats (8000B to 16,000B) for those who want to plan their own marine adventure.

### SPA & YOGA

The proliferation of top-end resorts has meant a similar increase in the number of spas. Today there are places to get pampered on every beach on the west coast.

If you're into yoga, reiki, bamboo massage and/or meditation, look no further than **Baan Zen** (☎ 08 6530 9354; www.baanzen.com) in Khlong Phrao. Run by a friendly French couple, this serene teak retreat sits on a quiet lagoon near the ocean. It's a relaxing place where clients can indulge in an intimate holiday led by an experienced Sivananda yoga instructor.

When the natural humidity isn't enough to cleanse your pores, try a sauna treatment at **Bailan Herbal Sauna** (☎ 0 6252 4744; www.bailan-kohchang.com; admission 200B; 🕒 3-9pm). Sweat to a variety of herbs including kaffir lime, lemon grass and *prai*. Mud masks and salt scrubs are also on offer in a lush garden setting.

### Courses

Thai cooking classes are available at **KATI Culinary** (☎ 0 3955 7252, 08 9028 9969; kati\_culinary@hotmail.com; lunch courses 1000B; 🕒 10.30am-3pm) and **Koh Chang Thai Cooking School** (☎ 08 1940 0649; info.cookingschool@yahoo.com; Blue Lagoon Resort; afternoon courses 1000B). Both are fun and friendly options that include transportation, a cookbook and, of course, your meal.

### Sleeping

Accommodation on Ko Chang continues to multiply with every season, but it still has a long way to go before approaching the grandeur of Phuket or Ko Samui. Recently, the west coast bungalows have started to swap bamboo huts for newer, sleeker cottages. Prices have been climbing as well, and even though sev-

eral cheapies remain, the island's prices are more inflated than similar island destinations such as Ko Tao and Ko Pha-Ngan.

Most development has been limited to the west coast, as the east coast has mangroves instead of beaches. Hat Sai Khao is the busiest strip of sand on the island, and development continues in a steady string down to the end of the coastline. There's a great backpacker scene at Lonely Beach (although the beach is far from lonely), and further south there are a few unique lodging choices that sit over the water on Bang Bao pier.

During the low season, the ferries usually stop servicing all of the piers on Ko Chang except Ao Sapparot, Tha Dan Kao and several remote resorts close their doors.

### KHLONG SON

At the northern tip of the island is the largest village, Ban Khlong Son, which has a network of piers, a wát, a school and several noodle shops.

**Manee Guest House** (☎ 08 1863 2108, 08 1843 0977; puk\_35@yahoo.com.hk; huts 150-600B) Now that 'Lonely Beach' has become a false moniker, budget backpackers are spreading out in search of quieter retreats. Some have found a second home at friendly Manee, where rustic wooden huts sit on stilts over a snaking river. Month-long stays are also available starting at 4000B.

**Aiyapura Resort** (☎ 0 3955 5111; www.aiyapura.com; bungalows 4000-14,000B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) If you want to be treated like a king or queen, then Aiyapura is the perfect place to drop your luggage. The unbelievably friendly staff don perfectly pressed uniforms and ear-to-ear smiles. This rambling resort sits alone on a hilly promontory and fashionable bungalows are nestled in-between shivering coconut palms and fruit-bearing trees. Amenities include a long jogging track, state-of-the-art spa, gargantuan pool and beachside restaurant.

### HAT SAI KHAO (WHITE SANDS BEACH)

If you're arriving on Ko Chang from Trat, busy White Sands will be your first stop after coming over the steep northern headland. This long sandy strip isn't one of Ko Chang's best, but it's convenient to a plethora of dining and nightlife options. The southern end of the beach is known as Hat Kai Muk (Pearl Beach).

(Continued on page 153)

(Continued from page 144)

**Remark Cottages** (☎ 0 3955 1261; www.remarkcottage.com; bungalows 2000-3300B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) A wonderfully overgrown garden conceals 15 Balinese-style bungalows that may look simple at first, but are actually accented with intricate design details. Relax in the wooden spa pool or treat yourself with a course of shower spray therapy.

**Mac Resort Hotel** (☎ 0 3955 1124; www.mac-resorthotel.com; r & bungalows 2000-3500B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) Ponder the intended meaning of Mac's motto – 'the natural lover's stay' – while soaking up the sun in the large infinity pool. The resort feels noticeably modern compared with some of the other choices on Hat Sai Khao; ritzier rooms have faux marble tiles and large porthole windows over the tub.

**Cookies Hotel** (☎ 0 3955 1107; www.kohchangcookieshotel.com; r 2000-4000B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) Cookies occupies two horseshoe-shaped buildings: a two-storey structure along the beach, and a three-floor building bordering the jungle across the road. Most of the action goes down at the bustling pool area in the 'U' of the beach-facing unit. It's worth dropping the extra 500B to 1000B to grab a breezy room near the pool.

**Keereeta** (☎ 0 3955 1304; www.keereeta.com; r 2500B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) Even though little Keereeta sits away from the beach, it's one of our favourite hideaways on Hat Sai Khao. The charming rooms are arranged around a Mediterranean-inspired cloister, and each unit has a secret rooftop balcony offering views of the distant turquoise waves.

**KC Grande Resort** (☎ 0 3955 1199; www.kdcohchang.com; r & bungalows 2500-6500B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) The first place you'll see as you tumble down the mountain into Sai Khao, KC is 'grande' indeed. It seems that this metropolis adds new accommodation every season – when we visited, it was completing a fancy-schmancy hotel with 60 units.

Other notable accommodation options include the following:

**Koh Chang Kacha Resort** (☎ 0 3955 1224; www.kohchangkacha.com; r 1400-1600B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) A charming mix of wood and brick overlooking the sea.

**Banpu Ko Chang Resort** (☎ 0 2580 3596; www.banpuresort.com; bungalows incl breakfast 1500-1800B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) Situated in a shady garden that slopes down to the beach.

**Saffron on the Sea** (☎ 0 3955 1253; r 1500-1800B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) Nestled in the pebbled cove. Saffron strives for boutique beauty.

**Logan's Place** (☎ 0 3955 1451; r 1600B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) Efficient service and oh-so-Scandinavian Ikea styling.

### KHLONG PHRAO

About 4km south of Hat Sai Khao is Ao Khlong Phrao (Coconut Bay). It stretches south of Laem Chaiket and features the growing village of Ban Khlong Phrao.

**Chok Dee Resort** (☎ 0 3955 7064, 08 1910 9052; bungalows 400-1000B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) The bungalows at Chok Dee may remind you of the little house on a cuckoo clock where the bird hides between hours. It's a good budget choice on Khlong Phrao; just make sure you pick a hut without a squat toilet (unless you're looking for an authentic Thai experience).

**Blue Lagoon Resort** (☎ 08 1940 0649; r 600-1200B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) There's no false advertising at Blue Lagoon – the bungalows actually sit along a small lagoon that draws its blue water from the nearby sea. To find the beach, tug yourself across the ravine with an adorable pulley contraption. The smiley owners also run a small culinary school (see p144).

**The Dewa** (☎ 0 3955 7339; www.thedewakohchang.com; r & bungalows 4500-14,500B) The pitched roofs of The Dewa's beachside villas have piles of tan thatch, yet they look like the metal helmets of medieval chevaliers. This unique dual style permeates the interiors as well – rooms are adorned with velvet day beds and dark teak panelling.

**Amari Emerald Cove** (☎ 0 3955 2000; www.amari.com; r incl breakfast from 6000B; 🕒 ☑ ☒ ☓) Stunning gardens and eye-catching architecture make Amari feel like a secret paradise, even though this hotel is one of the largest operations on the island. The enormous lap pool, trimmed in white sandstone, frames the fiery tropical sunsets. Rates include a scrumptious breakfast feast that will easily fuel you until dinner.

### KAIBAE

As Hat Kaibae becomes quite developed, most of the bungalow operations have gone upscale.

**Porn Bungalow** (☎ 08 9251 9233; huts 500-800B) Huts here range from beat-up shacks to comfortable wooden options and almost everything is covered in thatch. There's a multilevel chill space where idlers watch the sun bleed red as it dips behind four jagged islands. (It took an incredible amount of self-restraint to tell you about Porn without tossing in an obvious joke.)



**KB Resort** (☎ 0 3955 7125, 08 1862 8103; www.kbresort.com; bungalows 1150-5000B; 🏠) KB jettisoned the backpacker crowd when it added 'resort' to its name and popped an extra '0' on the bill. Nowadays, the new fleet of wooden bungalows caters mostly to families, although everything is blatantly overpriced.

**Chang Park Resort & Spa** (☎ 0 3955 7100; www.changpark.co.th; bungalows from 2500B, r from 3300B; 🏠 🍷 📺) We wouldn't exactly describe Chang Park as 'ritzzy', but it's one of the nicest options on this stretch of sand. There's a variety of accommodation including motel units and bungalows, and the *pièce de résistance* is a small collection of beachside homes that look like gingerbread houses. The seafood restaurant proudly proclaims 'if it swims, we have it'.

### LONELY BEACH (HAT THA NAM)

For those who want to stay up all night and sleep all day, head straight to this relaxed oasis of backpackers. Although the beach is by no means lonely, it's still considerably quieter than the buzz on White Sands.

**Treehouse** (☎ 08 1847 8215; bungalows 220-500B) We heard unconfirmed rumours that the HQ of hippydom was closing down and moving its entire operation to its second property on the east coast. It's worth stopping by to see if the original Treehouse is alive and kicking – there's a great vibe here, even though the bungalows are crude and the communal shower looks a bit like a Chinese water torture chamber.

**Paradise Cottage** (☎ 0 3955 8122, 08 1773 9337; bungalows 300B) The reception area here is a modern combustion of polished concrete and bamboo thatch. The pale green bungalows are a bit more basic and sit along a shaded path where ripe bananas droop like idle fingers. Laze the day away in a private gazebo and listen to relaxing, smooth jazz as gushing water overflows from overturned urns.

**Kachapura** (☎ 0 3955 8020; bungalows 500-2800B; 🏠) If you're digging the Lonely Beach mojo but can't live without hot showers and air-con, then Kachapura's a dream come true.

### BAI LAN BAY

Little Bai Lan is just south of Lonely Beach and considerably quieter.

**Orchid Resort** (☎ 0 3955 8137; www.kohchangorchid.com; bungalows 400-1000B; 🏠 🍷 📺) True to its name, this wooded retreat is thick with wild

orchids – even the towels in the deluxe cabins are folded in the shape of a flower. The older bungalows are smothered with stripes of yellow and black paint – it's like sleeping inside a giant bee.

**Bai Lan Bay Resort** (☎ 0 3955 8022, 08 1782 1710; bungalows 600B) Padlocks on the doors make the cabins feel more like a shed, but the interiors are surprisingly fresh and tidy for a rustic bamboo hut. The 20-odd bungalows mingle with a patch of gnarled mangroves along the shore, and there's a little snack shack further up the hill along the road.

**Princess Resort** (☎ 0 3955 8055; www.royalprincess.com; r 6000-8000B, bungalows 9000B; 🏠 🍷 📺) Dusit's done it again: the well-respected hotel chain has spawned another opulent resort. Spirals of jade stones line the white walkways as they snake by a luxuriant free-form swimming pool and several sunken Jacuzzis. The rooms are accented with similar swirling mosaics that offset the clean 90-degree angles.

### BANG BAO

Bang Bao is a picturesque village floating on stilts above the sea. It may feel like the edge of the world, but the delightful pier accommodation is worth the trek.

**Paradise Bang Bao** (☎ 0 9934 8044; r with shared bathroom 250-400B) A bewitching alternative to the standard A-frame huts, this wooden complex teeters above the tide water on chiselled tree trunks. You'll feel like a Thai fisherman while taking an afternoon snooze in your tiny sea shack.

**Bang Bao Sea Hut** (☎ 0 3955 8098, 08 9759 7550; www.bangbaoseahut.com; bungalows incl breakfast 1600-2200B; 🏠) These 'shanty-chic' bungalows look like bobbing octagonal buoys connected by an intricate network of thin planks. The ebbing ocean curls under your cabin floor and fresh ocean breezes float through wooden shutters.

**Nirvana** (☎ 0 3955 8061; www.nirvanakohchang.com; r 4620-9240B; 🏠 🍷 📺) Find your inner bliss at this charming resort hidden on a quiet peninsula of rambling vegetation. 'Balinese' was the initial design concept, but each bungalow is furnished in muted earth tones with subtle Asian accents. Make sure you bring along your airline's phone number – there's a good chance you'll be calling them to catch a later flight.

### EAST COAST

This part of the island is less developed than the west coast, mostly due to the lack of beaches.

**Treehouse Lodge** (☎ 08 1847 8215; Hat Yao; huts 100-300B) You may as well drop your watch in the ocean, 'cause this rustic enclave is a bohemian booby trap for backpackers. The offspring of Lonely Beach's legendary hang-out of the same name, this village of simple huts is popular with those who seek something that's actually 'lonely'. Most taxis avoid the treacherous path down to this secluded beach, so it's best to grab the shuttle that links the sister properties, or you can take Laem Ngop's afternoon ferry to Ko Whai (which stops nearby along the way).

**Funky Hut Resort** (☎ 0 3958 6177; www.funkyhut-thailand.com; Ao Dan Kao; r 1750-2250B; 🏠 🍷 📺) Staying at Funky Hut is as close as you'll get to time travel – this secluded east coast fave lets visitors experience life on Ko Chang before it became a giant construction site. Choose from an assortment of charming cream-coloured huts, and don't worry about bringing along the noisy kids – there's plenty of hushed jungle to go around. The resort is a couple of kilometres south of Tha Dan Kao.

### Eating & Drinking

Virtually every place to stay has a place to eat. Independent restaurants are quickly becoming popular, and there are several special options throughout the island. After dinner, things start to pick up along White Sands and Lonely Beach.

### WHITE SANDS BEACH (HAT SAI KHAO)

**Thor's Palace** (mains 70-170B; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Only on Ko Chang is Thor the name of a camp *gà-teu-i* (also spelt *kàthoey*; ladyboy) instead of a burly Scandinavian lumberjack. Savour excellent dishes in an upbeat atmosphere of pumping tunes and colourful knick-knacks. Sadly, this beachside haunt is only open in the high season.

**Paddy's Palms** (☎ 08 4930 3240; mains 150-300B; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Well, it finally happened. The Irish have landed on Ko Chang and they've brought with them a whole bunch of goodies with them: draft Guinness and Kilkenny, lamb stew, beef marinated in beer and shepherd's pie. Yum. Too bad they left the angioplasty equipment back home.

**Oodie's Place** (☎ 0 3955 1193; pizzas 170-260B; 🍷 dinner) It's almost as though chunks of wood, brick, rattan, kitschy trinkets and metal sheeting all rolled together and somehow formed this special place. After the nightly movie, Mr Oodie straps on the guitar and plays to the crowd as they sling back French and Thai dishes, or Mongolian barbecue with a couple of beers.

**our pick Invito** (☎ 0 3955 1326; mains 320-490B; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Warning: conversation may be limited to expressions of gustatory delight. Set in a charming teak house, Invito offers wood-fired pizzas, handmade pasta, braised beef dishes and mouth-watering desserts. It's everyone's favourite *ristorante* on the island, and they'll even deliver to your bungalow.

Bustling Sai Khao has a lively night scene relative to the rest of the island. **Sabay Bar** (☎ 0 3955 1098) has a great night-time vibe and a daily onslaught of talented Filipino bands. **Sky Bay** (☎ 0 3955 1319), towards Khlong Phrao, is a popular pub choice with a plastic cartoon elephant that greets patrons out the front.

### KHLONG PHRAO

**KATI Culinary** (☎ 0 3955 7252, 08 9028 9969; mains 40-120B; 🍷 dinner) This charming twig hut is swathed in warm rosy lighting as the gruff serenades of Serge Gainsbourg drift through the thick jungle air. Dishes burst with fresh ingredients, and essential side orders of rice are served in an adorable variety of shapes – we got a heart. If you enjoy your meal (and we're pretty sure you will), enrol in KATI's Thai cooking course.

**Iyara Seafood** (☎ 0 3955 1353, 08 1751 0058; mains from 100B; 🍷 10am-10pm) Iyara isn't your standard island seafood warehouse: after dining in the lovely bamboo *sāh-lah* (often spelt *sala*; open-sided room), guests are invited to kayak along the adjacent lagoon to watch the flickers of wild fireflies.

### LONELY BEACH (HAT THA NAM)

**Treehouse** (☎ 08 1847 8215; mains 30-80B; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) We can't think of a better name for this awesome wooden hang-out. Actually, 'Blackhole' might be more apropos, as once you hunker down on a bed-sized cushion, you'll never want to leave. After negotiating the sea of colourful flip-flops left at the entrance, make sure you watch your step while finding a place to relax: the planks of wood

are weathered and uneven after years of wear and tear.

**Magic Garden** (☎ 0 3955 8027; mains 60-120B; ☺ dinner) If you're not up for a night of thumping tribal beats and jungle pyrotechnics, Magic Garden's stop-sign-shaped pagoda is probably the best place on Ko Chang to chill out and watch a movie. The open-air pavilion has six enormous beds arranged around the large projection screen. You have to get up to grab some grub – most people get seduced by the squishy pillows and fall asleep.

For some post-dinner partying, check out the DJ-ed beats at **Sunset Hut** (☎ 08 1377 5545) or the funky discotheque at **Nature Beach** (☎ 0 3955 8027).

## BANG BAO

**Buddha View** (☎ 08 9936 1848; www.thebuddhaviu.com; mains 80-250B; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A newer venture at the end of the pier, Buddha View is a great place to relax with a cocktail, play some pool and watch the waves roll in at sunset. Potted jungle flowers abound and the furniture is made from various incarnations of tubular bamboo.

**Chow Lay Seafood** (☎ 0 3955 5081, 08 1917 9084; www.chowlayseafood.com; mains 100-300B; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) When the fishing boats pull into Bang Bao, they unload their seafood by the bucketful at Chow Lay. This bustling wooden shanty, halfway down the pier, is very popular with visitors, but it's hardly a tourist trap – its vast assortment of fresh seafood is delish. Fishing trips and boat rentals are also on tap.

**Ruan Thai Restaurant** (☎ 08 9833 5117; mains 100-300B; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Another option on Bang Bao's rickety pier, Ruan Thai is Chow Lay's neighbour and clone.

## EAST COAST

**Salakphet Seafood** (☎ 0 3955 3099, 08 1429 9983; www.kochangsalakphet.com; Ao Salak Phet; mains 40-200B; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This lonely restaurant hit it big when Thailand's prime minister rolled up, strapped on a bib and declared the food 'delicious'. Since then, other celebrities have stopped by to sample the seafood and pose for an obligatory photograph to go on the 'wall of fame'. Salakphet also has a large fish farm with submerged nets full of humungous critters – feeding time is a memorable frenzy.

**Funky Hut** (☎ 0 3958 6177, 08 9936 7750; www.funkyhut-thailand.com; Ao Dan Kao; mains 120-350B; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A lazy lunch at Funky Hut is a good choice for those who want a taste of the pace on Ko Chang's quieter east coast. Take your pick from Thai floor seating or Western tables, order a juicy 'Funky Hut Burger' and watch the fishing boats idle by under the midday sun. It's 1km east of the Centrepoint ferry pier.

**Chang Spirit Club** (☎ 08 1919 3995; set menu 1200B; ☺ dinner) Based at the rustic fishing village of Salak Kok, this unique dining experience is a romantic sunset adventure aboard a wooden catamaran. Fresh seafood is served as the quiet craft meanders through gnarled mangroves.

## Getting There & Away

There is year-round service between the mainland and Ko Chang. During the high season, Tha Laem Ngop is the main pier to many of the Ko Chang Marine Park islands. There is a passenger (backpacker) ferry that runs hourly to Tha Dan Kho in Ko Chang (80B, one hour), but this rusty fishing boat often gets overcrowded and it's not the safest option.

From Tha Ko Chang Centrepoint, 4km from Laem Ngop, there are hourly ferries to and from Ko Chang's Tha Dan Kao (90B to 120B, 45 minutes) from 7am until 7pm daily. This is also a vehicle ferry – cars and motorbikes can ride this ferry free with every paying passenger. This is a faster, cheaper and safer option than the backpacker ferry and will drop you off closer to the main beaches. A sǒrng-tǎa-ou from Trat to Tha Ko Chang Centrepoint costs around 60B per person.

Another way to get to Ko Chang is via the hourly vehicle ferry from Tha Thammachat. This ferry arrives at Ao Sapparot pier (per person/car 100/150B, 30 minutes) and may be the only boat running during rough seas.

For transport information to the smaller islands in the archipelago, consult the section of your desired destination.

## Getting Around

There are loads of places along the west coast that rent out motorbikes for 200B to 250B per day. Jeeps can be hired for around 2000B per day in the high season. See p142 for important safety protocols.

The sǒrng-tǎa-ou meeting the boats at Tha Dan Kao and Ao Sapparot charge from 40B to 100B per person, depending on how far

## LOCAL VOICE: PRESERVING KO KUT

Louis Thompson is the Deputy Project Manager of Ko Kut's up-and-coming Soneva Kiri Resort. His primary focus is to limit the environmental impact of new tourism on the island.

**What were your initial thoughts about Ko Kut when you arrived?** Well, it was almost the low season, so there was a big storm and kick-ass waves – I thought I was in *Deadliest Catch 3* on *National Geographic*.

**How do you feel about the island now?** It's paradise. Ko Kut is the last remaining authentic tropical island in Thailand. I love the place and the people.

**What are your thoughts about tourism development on Ko Kut?** I hope that the island develops slowly and intelligently and I really hope that there's no infusion of Pattaya sleaziness. The island needs to insure that a car ferry doesn't come here from the mainland. If we can limit the number of cars, or only use electric vehicles and motorbikes, the island will maintain much of its pristine environment. A reservoir will also be required in the future, and a waste management strategy will need to be conceived. I sincerely hope that much of the island will be granted national park status, so that we can keep much of Ko Kut pristine.

**How are the island's residents reacting to tourism development?** Pretty well, in general; everyone is excited about the new influx of jobs, which will boost the economy and encourage environmental endeavours.

**Any special tips for travellers?** Visitors should definitely bring a phrasebook, as English is pretty scarce around certain parts. Have a look at the villages in Ao Yai – it's an authentic fishing cove and was a favourite destination for pirates. My favourite place to visit is the dense forest in Khao Din Daeng. Bikes and long-tail boats are the best ways to get around the island.

*As told to Brendon Presser*

down the west coast you want to go. Expect to pay between 50B and 80B for east coast deliveries.

## KO KUT

โกกูด

Ko Kut is Thailand's last large island frontier and a veritable blank canvas for developers. Numerous operations are already up and running, but there are some big plans in store for this rugged speck of jungle. The topography of this quiet islet is quite similar to Ko Chang, with rainforest and waterfalls hidden deep within its interior; however, its location at the edge of the archipelago means that the coastal waters have a unique emerald tint.

## Orientation

Almost all of the resorts are located along Ko Kut's western beaches. A dirt road runs through the west side, connecting the villages of Ban Khlong Hin Dam and Ban Khlong Chao, and then turns northeast before ending in Ao Salat on the other side of the island.

## Information

### EMERGENCY

**Police Station** (☎ 0 3952 3125, 08 1861 1677; Ban Khlong (Chao) Near the hospital.

## INTERNET ACCESS

If you're addicted to checking your email, then Ko Kut might not be the place for you. Access is very limited – there are no internet cafés and resorts with a computer generally have poor satellite-enabled connections.

## MEDICAL SERVICES

**Koh Kood Hospital** (☎ 0 3952 1852; Ban Khlong (Chao) Near the police station. A masseur affiliated with the hospital can visit your resort for a reasonable price.

## MONEY

There are no banks or ATMs on the island, and credit cards are not accepted due to the lack of fixed telephone lines. Some bungalow operators can exchange small amounts of foreign currency, but it's best to withdraw plenty of cash beforehand. There are many banks and ATMs in Trat, Laem Ngop and Ko Chang.

## POST

Ko Kut does not have an official post office, however, most resorts can organise mail.

## TELEPHONE

Despite the dearth of working land lines, mobile phones work surprisingly well throughout the island.

## Sights

If you have your sights set on finding a secluded strip of sand, you can pretty much choose from any beach on the island. The main attraction on Ko Kut is **Nam Tok Khlong Chao**. It's considerably more impressive during the rainy season when tourists aren't around, but there's always more than just a trickle to be seen. Ask the manager of your bungalow about getting to the falls – they'll probably take you there for a small fee and lead you around on a mini jungle trek. **Ao Salat** and **Ao Yai**, two east coast bays, both have small shanty-filled fishing villages. Most of the residents are Cambodians who earn their living by catching an assortment of crabs, prawns and fish. In the early evening, visitors can purchase freshly caught seafood as it's coming off the boat.

## Activities

Play Scuba Diving, next to Away Resort, runs programs from Ao Salat and Ban Khlong Chao. For detailed information about **diving** around Ko Kut and the other islands of the Ko Chang Archipelago, see p138. The crystalline waters just off the coast are the perfect place to pop on a mask and frolic with fish. Most bungalow operations have rentable **snorkelling** equipment for around 100B to 200B.

## Sleeping & Eating

Prepaid all-inclusive vacations tend to dominate Ko Kut's tourism, although an independent visit is definitely doable. It should be noted, however, that while a majority of places warmly welcome walk-in bookings (when they aren't stuffed with package tourists), Ko Kut isn't suited for spontaneity. The island is vast and the 20-odd resorts have the luxury of being spread far apart from one another. Advance reservations are also advantageous because speedboat operators will usually drop you off at your accommodation.

Besides the lone Thai restaurant near the police station in Ban Khlong Chao, dining on Ko Kut is limited to resorts. The food will probably be tasty, but the island is by no means a destination for foodies. You can, however, ask your resort staff about ordering freshly caught seafood from one of the fishing villages, or you can retrieve it yourself (see above).

**Siam Beach** (☎ 08 1945 5789, 08 1899 6200; sb\_kohkood@yahoo.com; Ao Bang Bao; r 500-1200B; 🏠) An appealing blend of fan and air-con bungalows

lies beneath curving palm trees. Dangle your legs on the rickety dock and then jump into the crystal sea to play with quixotic sardines. Most of the staff speak only Thai.

**The Beach Natural Resort** (☎ 08 6009 9420, in Bangkok 0 2222 9969; www.thebeachkohkood.com; Ao Bang Bao; bungalows incl breakfast 1200-1900B; 🏠 📺) Balinese-style bungalows sit among loads of vegetation on a private beach that's great for kayaking. The thatched massage *sāh-lah* along the ocean are a great place to unwind in the shade and watch small fish dance through the perfectly clear waters. Thais pack this place for karaoke-fuelled fun on the weekend, so try and come on a weekday if you're after some hush.

**Away Resort** (Bai Kood Shambala; ☎ 08 1835 4517, 08 7147 7055, in Bangkok 0 2696 8239; www.awayresorts.com; Ban Klong Chao; bungalows incl breakfast 1500-4350B; 🏠 📺) Hidden within a jungle of shivering palms, Away's elegant wooden cottages are just steps away from the curling sea. A philosophy of tranquility pervades the resort, as guests swing slowly in their hammocks and listen to the waves roll in. The staff organises a variety of activities and programs including scuba outings.

**our pick Koh Kood Beach Bungalows** (☎ in Bangkok 0 2630 9371; www.kohkoodbeachbungalows.com; Ao Bang Bao; r 1500-3000B; 🏠 📺) This stunning, sloping resort has perfectly maintained grounds that rest beneath a canopy of skyscraping palms. There are two types of bungalows: the Balinese cottages have slanted roofs with plenty of thatch, and the Thai-style units have private outdoor whirlpools. It's the only resort on the island with a swimming pool (although with continuous construction, this may no longer be true). Free snorkelling gear and delicious food are extra bonuses. Reserve in advance.

**Shantaa** (☎ 08 1817 9648, 08 1826 4077; www.shantaa.kohkood.com; Ao Yai Kee; bungalows incl breakfast 3700B; 🏠) One of the more elegant options on Ko Kut, Shantaa has stylish bungalows with sea-view balconies and polished wood throughout. This hillside retreat is owned and operated by a local family, and they speak remarkably good English.

Other quality options available include the following:

**Ngamkho Resort** (☎ 08 1825 7076, 08 4653 4644; www.kohkood-ngamkho.com; Ao Ngam Kho; tents 200B, bungalows 300-650B) A great budget option with simple huts or flashier fan bungalows. Campers can pitch a tent for 200B. Guaranteed sea views from every hammock.

## THE 7-ELEVEN GAME

According to the 7-Eleven website (www.7eleven.co.th), there are almost 5000 franchised convenience stores throughout Thailand, and this astonishing total continues to grow. In Bangkok you'll often be given directions such as 'take a right at the 7-Eleven, and then turn left at the corner that has a 7-Eleven on either side of the street', but as you venture further afield, these palpable markers of globalisation start to disappear – it's like an off-the-beaten-path-o-meter.

If you're stuck on a long bus ride with nothing to do, play the 7-Eleven Game: try to recall the number of superettes seen in each place you visited. We counted five on Ko Chang, four on Ko Tao and three on Ko Samet. You'll be happy to know that there are zero on Ko Mak and Ko Kut (for now).

**Sai Dang Beach Paradise** (☎ 0 2511 3313; r & bungalows 400-600B) Bamboo bungalows on a rolling lawn with swaying palms. There's also a large wooden house containing a few additional rooms.

**Khlong Chao Resort** (☎ 08 1403 6174; bungalows 400-800B; 🏠) A pretty good deal since it's located along a lazy river rather than the beach. Near Nam Tok Khlong Chao.

**S-Beach Resort** (☎ 08 1949 6093; www.s-beach.net; bungalows 500-1000B; 🏠) The tin-roofed bungalows are a tad drab from the exterior, but the insides are comfy and clean.

**Dusita** (☎ 0 3951 2902; bungalows 700-2000B; 🏠) Pleasant fan and air-con bungalows near the sandy beach. An all-inclusive vacation fave.

**Captain Hook** (☎ 0 2966 1800, 08 1826 1188; www.captainhookresort.com; 2- or 3-night packages 3000-6000B; 🏠) A popular pick for an all-in-one vacation. Has a fantastic on-site restaurant.

## Getting There & Away

The best way to access Ko Kut is from either Laem Sok or Ko Chang's Tha Bang Bao. As a general rule, all boats stop on Ko Mak as they make their journey (a trip from Ko Mak to Ko Kut is 400B). During the high season, daily ferries depart Ko Chang at 9am, arriving on Ko Kut (700B) at 2pm. The daily return trip leaves Ko Kut at 10am and arrives back on Ko Chang around 2pm. Speedboats (900B) from Ko Chang depart at noon and arrive at 2pm. The reverse trip begins at 10am on Ko Kut, alighting at Ko Chang at 11.20am.

Passenger ferries (350B) from the small pier at Laem Sok make the two-hour trek to Ko Kut at 8am. The one-hour speedboat (550B) departs daily at 1pm. Leaving from Ko Kut, the ferry takes off at 11am, while the speedy service jets away at 10am.

If you are taking a speedboat, there's a good chance that the driver will take you to the beach near your resort, so it's a good idea to book ahead.

See p139 for more information about moving around the archipelago.

## Getting Around

Most visitors tend to stay close to their accommodation since there is no transportation infrastructure on the island. Resorts usually offer tours of the various natural attractions, and transportation is always included in the price. You can rent a motorbike for 400B, although good luck finding a petrol station.

## KO MAK

เกาะหมาก

This cross-shaped island makes up the third-largest landmass in the Ko Chang Archipelago, measuring 16 sq km. Ko Mak can trace its history back to the late 1800s during the reign of Rama V. The Thai king briefly ceded the island to French Indochina and many of today's locals can trace their lineage back to the original Chinese ambassadors. Although Ko Mak is smaller and less populated than Ko Kut, its flat topography has made it easier for resorts to flourish. The island now has over two dozen resorts, most with 24-hour electricity, although much of the island's other modern infrastructure is still in development. Most of Ko Mak remains covered with coconut and rubber plantations, leaving many cobble beaches untouched.

Looking for even more seclusion? Try one of the resorts on Ko Rayang or Ko Kham – the two furry isles orbiting Ko Mak. The larger Ko Kradat, slightly further afield, is also easily reachable from Ko Mak by ferry or boat taxi. See p162 for additional info about vacationing on these smaller satellites.

## Orientation

Ko Mak is shaped like a plus sign, and most of the tourist development has evolved along

the western arm. The eastern part of the island has a small town with around 50 families, but remains rather quiet despite the main passenger pier at Ao Nid.

## Information

Serious medical emergencies must be handled in Trat or Ko Chang, as Ko Mak does not have a hospital. There is, however, a small clinic (☎ 08 9093 4629, 08 9403 5986) on the main road to Tha Ao Nid, which is operated by three health officials during normal business hours. A police station (☎ 08 1663 2410) is located in the exact centre of the island (just up the street from the clinic) – hours are known to vary, as crime is rather uncommon on the island, and the station is often empty during random boat checks.

There is a small post office at KohMak Resort along Ao Suan Yai, with one postie who delivers mail throughout the island. The hours of operation tend to fluctuate – your resort manager can also collect your outgoing mail and hand it to the postman when he passes through.

A network of land lines has been installed on the island, however, due to maintenance problems and frequent monsoon winds, there are currently no functioning public telephones and the network is too fragile to support high-speed internet. Most people use mobile phones, which get very good reception throughout the island. Email is starting to become more widely accessible and can be checked at KohMak Resort, Koh Mak Villa, Monkey Island and at a couple of eating establishments around Tha Maka Thane and Tha Ao Nid. Expect to pay the usual 1B or 2B per minute.

There are no banks or ATMs on the island, so it's best to plan in advance and withdraw extra baht before arriving. The occurrence of theft is extremely low on Ko Mak, although caution should always be taken with liquid assets. Only a few resorts accept credit cards.

## Sights

Ko Mak's two longest beaches, **Ao Suan Yai** and **Ao Kao**, are scenic stretches of beige sand on the western portion of the island. They are great spots for a leisurely stroll or swim, and offer excellent sunset vistas (watch out for sandflies!). The pier at **Ao Nid** is worth a visit in the early morning if you can muster the energy to wake up for a tropical sunrise. A

small wát, **Wat Samakkeetham**, sits right near the dock. **Coconut and rubber plantations** occupy most of the island's flat terrain. Informal visits can usually be organised at your resort for a nominal fee.

## Activities

Diving has become a popular pastime on the island, and the locally run **Koh Mak Divers** (☎ 08 3297 7724) is a reputable choice. Divers can also suit up with Ploy Scuba Diving at its satellite locations at Monkey Island or Panorama Resort on the island's southern leg (it's based out of Ko Chang). For detailed information about diving around Ko Mak and the other islands of the Ko Chang Archipelago, see p138. Most resorts have rentable **snorkelling** equipment (100B to 200B) for an impromptu afternoon of blowing bubbles.

On land, visitors can explore the island with **bicycles** or **motorbikes**. Several resorts offer bike rentals – it's usually between 100B and 200B for a bicycle (per day) and around 250B to 400B for a motorbike. Scooters can also be rented near the pier at Ao Nid.

## Tours

**Tripmaker** (☎ 08 9804 2595; khunrano@yahoo.com) is a friendly local company offering a glimpse at life on Ko Mak. Walking, biking and car tours (200B) explore the island's history, fishing culture, rubber plantations and coconut farms. Snorkelling boat trips (550B) stop at two smaller islands and three separate sites. Rates include snorkel equipment, lunch and a guide.

## Sleeping & Eating

Although Ko Mak once garnered a reputation as a 'package destination', recent resort expansion has made it easy for tourists of every ilk to scout out their own lodging. There are now over two dozen places to stay ranging from A-frame hovels to chic incarnations of adobe, teak and thatch. Most of the accommodation is located on the western half of the island, where the beaches tend to be that quintessential mixture of beige cobble sand and emerald water.

Walk-in bookings are definitely doable; however, if you're eyeing a particular resort, it's best to book in advance, especially during the high season. If you make a reservation, an employee from the resort will most likely pick you up when you arrive at the pier. Low

season sees a dramatic decrease in tourism as the waves are quite choppy and the skies are often overcast. Several bungalows close down during these months, and the ones that stay open often offer hefty discounts.

Restaurants on Ko Mak are largely affiliated with bungalows; however, there are a few stand-alone options that are slightly cheaper than resort fare. A few chow shacks gather near Tha Maka Thane, where a mixed bag of locals and tourists feasts on an assortment of cheap noodles and barbecued seafood. **Ball Café** (☎ 08 1925 6591) has a dainty assortment of light nibbles, and the owner can help you out with local accommodation and transportation to other islands.

**Island Hut Resort** (☎ 08 7139 5537; huts 350-500B) Twig-and-thatch huts, over-water swings and lazy hammocks give this simple spot a funky feel. The friendly owners have been on the island for many generations and they'll make you feel like part of the family.

**Monkey Island** (☎ 08 9501 6030; www.monkeyislandkohmak.com; bungalows 400-3000B; 📶) Monkey's funky bungalows are a popular choice for vacationing Thais, and range from simple bamboo affairs with shared bathrooms to deluxe wooden villas with bay windows and outdoor lounge settings.

**Koh Mak Cococape Resort** (☎ 08 1937 9024; www.kohmakcococape.com; r 500-4500B; 📶) Cococape's whitewashed cottages have coolie-hat-like roofs lavished with thick thatch. Scraps of sun-bleached fronds dangle like a visor over the 2nd-storey balconies of the more opulent villas. The 500B bungalows have shared bathrooms and are noticeably more rustic. The abounding hammocks are made from pearls of smooth rope.

**KohMak Resort** (☎ 0 3950 1013; www.geocities.com/kohmak; bungalows 600-4000B) On the northwestern bay amid a coconut and rubber plantation, friendly KohMak has some pricier, large, two-room sleeping options. A windsurfing school on the beach offers courses and rents out equipment.

**Baan Koh Mak** (☎ 0 3952 4028; www.baan-koh-mak.com; bungalows 1400B; 📶) These spacious and sun-drenched bungalows feel a bit like Wisteria Lane (of *Desperate Housewives* fame) – each of the 18 cottages is enclosed by a white picket fence. Snorkel gear, beach volleyball and bicycles are on offer.

**Good Time Resort** (☎ 08 3118 0011; www.goodtime-resort.com; villas 2500-3000B; 📶 📶) Fifteen gor-

geous two- and three-bedroom Thai-style villas are nestled in an expansive tropical garden. Relax by the pool, enjoy the spa services or journey to the owner's other resort on teeny Ko Rayang.

Other worthy options to check out include the following:

**Holiday Beach Resort** (☎ 08 1937 9024, 0 2319 6714; info@kohmakholiday.com; bungalows 100-1500B) Good smattering of room types; the pricier picks have ocean views.

**TK Huts** (☎ 08 7134 8435; www.tk-hut.com; bungalows 400-800B) A sociable setting with spartan huts set amid shady trees.

**Ko Mak Buri Hut** (☎ 08 9888 8355; bungalows 1200-3800B) Variety of air-con bungalows scattered along a general stretch of sand.

**Koh Mak Villa** (☎ 08 1925 6591; bungalows 1500-2500B) Spacious villas with hilltop views of the sandy beaches below.

**Makathanee** (☎ 08 7600 0374; www.makathanee.com; bungalows 2500B) A newer retreat with deservedly popular Thai-style bungalows.

## Getting There & Away

In the high season, there are daily departures to Ko Mak from Laem Ngop and Tha Bang Bao on Ko Chang. The ferry (300B) leaves Laem Ngop at 3pm and arrives on Ko Mak around 6pm. Speedboat services (450B) leave Laem Ngop at 1.30pm and 4pm, arriving on the island at 2.30pm and 5pm respectively. To reach Laem Ngop from Ko Mak, take the daily three-hour ferry at 8am, or try the one-hour speedboat at 8am and 10am. Also, all of the boats from Laem Sok to Ko Kut stop at Ko Mak halfway through the journey (see p159).

From Ko Chang's Tha Bang Bao, there are daily ferries (400B) departing at 9am and noon, arriving around 11am and 2pm respectively. A speedboat (550B) leaves at noon daily and alights on Ko Mak at 1pm. Boats going in the opposite direction take off at noon and 3pm, and land on Ko Chang at 3pm and 6pm. The one-hour speedboat service leaves Ko Mak at 10.30am. All boats can stop at Ko Kham and Ko Rayang if you let the captain know in advance. These teeny islands are a 15-minute hop from Ko Mak.

See p139 for more information about moving around the archipelago.

## Getting Around

The terrain on Ko Mak is quite flat, making it relatively easy to get around by motorbike,

bicycle or foot. A few vans troll the island in search of passengers – no specific schedules or prices have been established. See p160 for bike and motorbike rental info.

## OTHER ISLANDS

If you thought there was nothing to do on Ko Kut and Ko Mak, then you'll really feel like a castaway on the smaller islands of the Ko Chang Archipelago. Between June and October, boats stop running and most bungalow operations close down. In addition to the following islands, there is also accommodation on the wee islets of **Ko Kradat** (☎ 08 9099 7917, in Bangkok 0 2368 2675), **Ko Lao Ya Nai** (☎ 0 3951 2818), **Ko Mai Si Yai** (☎ 08 7077 2018) and **Ko Sai Kao** (☎ 08 1929 8669). See p139 for transport queries not addressed in the following sections.

### Ko Whai

This 'L'-shaped isle has two sandy coves and a few places to spend the night. An attractive palm-fringed sand bar holds the two arms of the island together, creating captivating lagoons on either side – the perfect place to park your boat for the night. A vast network of shallow coral reefs radiates around Ko Whai, making it a good choice for avid snorkellers. BB Divers (p143) has an on-site outpost and can hook you up with scuba equipment.

Friendly staff and tasty food come with simple wooden bungalows on the beach at **Ko Wai Paradise** (☎ 08 1762 2548; bungalows from 250B; 🚻). **Kla Thom Yai Ma** (☎ 08 1841 3011; bungalows from 250B) is another option on little Ko Whai –

it's the usual facsimile of white sand, tall palms and rustic huts. The fan bungalows at **Ko Wai Pakarang** (☎ 08 4113 8945; www.kohwaipakarang.com; bungalows 600-2000B) are as flash as it gets on Ko Whai. Nightly movies offset the ennui of island life.

One-hour ferries to Ko Whai (300B) depart from Ko Chang's Tha Bang Bao at 9am and noon. Speedboats (400B) depart Ko Chang at noon. Return trips leave at 1pm, 4pm and at 10.55am for speedboats. Ferries from Laem Ngop (250B) depart at 3pm and arrive at 5pm, while speedboats (450B) take one hour and depart at 1.30pm and 4pm. All return trips depart at 8.30am and 10am.

### Ko Kham & Ko Rayang

Little Ko Kham and Ko Rayang bob like brilliant green apples just 1km off the coast of Ko Mak. Braids of hardened lava suggest the presence of ancient volcanic activity, but today these islands boast shimmering turquoise vistas, swimmable beaches and vibrant coral reefs. These quiet spots are easily accessible by speedboat from Ko Mak, and during the high season there are daily passenger ferries that stop through.

**Ko Kham Resort** (☎ 08 1303 1229; bungalows from 800B) is so close to Ko Mak, you could kayak across from Ao Suan Yai. Enjoy quiet starlit evenings, although there tend to be a lot of day-tripping snorkellers in the afternoon.

**Rayang Island Resort** (☎ 08 3118 0011, 0 3955 5082; www.rayang-island.com; bungalows from 1600B) is a serene place with 15 refurbished one- and

two-bedroom bungalows. There are no day trippers, so it's wonderfully quiet. It's owned by the same family that runs the Good Time Resort on Ko Mak.

Boats leave from Ko Chang's Tha Bang Bao at 9am and noon, alighting on Ko Kham at 10.30am and 2pm respectively, and arriving 15 minutes later at Ko Rayang. These trips cost 400B. Speedboat services depart at noon (also from Bang Bao) and costs 550B. Ferries back to Ko Chang leave just after noon on both islands, and speedboats return around 10.30am. Contact the two resorts for additional information about transport, including water taxis.

### Ko Rang

Dazzling Ko Rang is the largest landmass of an island chain called Mu Ko Rang (Ko Rang Archipelago). This area boasts one of the best strings of coral in the region and a long stretch of sand called **Hat San Chao**. Although there are no resorts on the island, campers are allowed to pitch a tent as long as they register with the **national park office** (☎ 0 3955 5080; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) on Ko Chang. There is a 400B fee per person to access the marine park. Crude washrooms and running water have been set up; however, visitors must bring their own consumables.

## TRAT TO CAMBODIA

A thin necklace of sandy beaches lines the skinny scrap of land between Trat town and the Cambodian border. **Hat Sai Si Ngoen** (Silver Sand Beach) lies just north of the 41km marker off Hwy 3. Nearby, at the 42km marker, is **Hat Sai Kaew** (Crystal Sand Beach), while at the 48km marker you'll find **Hat Thap Thim** (Sapphire Beach); neither one quite lives up to its whimsical name. The most promising



beach is **Hat Ban Cheun**, a long stretch of clean sand near the 63km marker.

In the little town of Khlong Yai, travellers can stop by the **immigration office** (☎ 0 3958 8108) to have their passport stamped upon re-entry from Cambodia. The small border outpost of **Hat Lek** is the departure point for boats to Koh Kong in Cambodia. There's a popular casino in the vicinity, and loads of touts to guide you through the visa process. For information on crossing to Cambodia, see the boxed text, opposite.

## CAMBODIAN BORDER CROSSING

The border at Hat Lek between Cambodia and Thailand is open between 7am and 8pm daily. Motorcycles and minivans are available from Hat Lek to the border for 50B. There is accommodation on Koh Kong in Cambodia, but little to keep you there. If you plan to continue further, there is one boat to Sihanoukville per day (US\$25, four hours) leaving at 8am; if you don't get across the border early enough you may have to spend a night on Koh Kong (the best bet is to leave Hat Lek at 6am). There are also minibuses to Sihanoukville (600B) and Phnom Penh (700B) that usually depart before 9.30am.

Before arriving at the border, check in at the Cambodian Embassy in Bangkok – prices and rules are always changing. A visa is usually available at the border for 1200B (US dollars are no longer preferred). It's cheaper to get a Cambodian visa in Bangkok as many of the border guards impose extra 'mystery' charges. Thailand grants most nationalities a one-month visa on entry (or re-entry) to Thailand. If your nationality is not on the instant-visa list, or if you've exhausted your entry-exit allowance, you will find yourself stuck in Cambodia (see p401 for more information on Thai visas).

If this all sounds a little tricky, and you don't want to risk a visa mess-up, there are plenty of travel agencies in Trat and Ko Chang that can arrange the trip for a few hundred extra baht.

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