

Thailand

Hua Hin & Southern Gulf (Chapter)

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Pages 32

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Coverage includes: Phetchaburi (Phetburi), Cha-Am, Hua Hin, Hua Hin To Pranburi, Pranburi & Around, Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Ban Krut & Bang Saphan Yai, and Chumphon.

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Hua Hin & the Southern Gulf

Includes »

Phetchaburi (Phetburi)	505
Cha-am	510
Hua Hin	512
Pranburi & Around	522
Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park	524
Prachuap Khiri Khan ...	526
Ban Krut & Bang Saphan Yai	530
Chumphon	531

Best Places to Eat

- » Rang Yen Garden, Cha-am (p511)
- » Night Market, Hua Hin (p511)
- » Sang Thai Restaurant, Hua Hin (p519)
- » Rim Lom, Prachuap Khiri Khan (p529)

Best Places to Stay

- » Baan Bayan, Hua Hin (p519)
- » Away Hua Hin, Pranburi (p523)
- » Brassiere Beach, Pranburi (p523)
- » Aow Noi Sea View, Prachuap Khiri Khan (p528)
- » Proud Thai Beach Resort, Ban Krut (p530)

Why Go?

Known as the 'royal' coast, the upper southern gulf has long been the favoured retreat of the Bangkok monarchy and elite. Each Thai king, dating from Rama IV, has found an agreeable spot to build a royal getaway. Today domestic tourists flock to this coast in the same pursuit of leisure as well as to pay homage to the revered kings whose palaces-away-from-palace are now open to the public. Rarely does culture and coast meet with such proximity and collaboration.

Indeed this is the country's surf-and-turf destination offering historic sites, pleasant provincial life, jungle-filled parks and long sandy beaches all within an easy commute from Bangkok. That most backpackers suffer a gruelling trip further south to the built-up Samui islands is a great mystery to anyone who has walked for kilometres along Hua Hin's powdery white sands. The one blemish is that there are few reefs (so little to no diving and snorkelling) and as a result the water takes more of an Atlantic greyish hue than a tropical azure.

When to Go

The best time to visit is during the hot and dry season (February to June). From July to October (southwest monsoon) and October to January (northeast monsoon) there is occasional rain and strong winds; but the region tends to stay drier than the rest of the country during the monsoon period because of a geographic anomaly.

During stormy periods, stinging jellyfish are often carried close to shore making swimming hazardous. Thais get around this by swimming fully clothed.

Hua Hin & the Southern Gulf Highlights

- 1 Exploring the hilltop palace and underground caves of **Phetchaburi** (p505)
- 2 Strolling the long blonde coastline of **Hua Hin** (p512) dotted with wave-jumping kiteboarders.
- 3 Eating and shopping (and eating some more) at Hua Hin's **Night Market** (p519)
- 4 Escaping into the wild depths of **Kaeng Krachan National Park** (p509) and spotting gibbons and wild elephants.
- 5 Letting the kids run around all day in their bathing suits at **Dolphin Bay** (p523)
- 6 Making the popular pilgrimage to **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park** (p524) to see the illuminated cave shrine of Tham Phraya Nakhon.
- 7 Motorcycling between curvaceous bays and limestone peaks in **Prachuap Khiri Khan** (p526)
- 8 Being a beach bum on kicked-back **Hat Bang Saphan Yai** (p530)



Phetchaburi (Phetburi)

เพชรบุรี

POP 46,600

An easy escape from Bangkok, Phetchaburi should be on every cultural traveller's itinerary. It has temples and palaces like Ayutthaya, outlying jungles and cave shrines like Kanchanaburi and access to the coast (unlike either of the two). The town offers a delightful slice of provincial life with busy markets, old teak shophouses and visiting groups of Thai students who work up the courage to say 'hello' to the few foreigners in town.

Historically Phetchaburi is a visible timeline of kingdoms that have migrated across Southeast Asia. During the 11th century, the Khmer empire settled in, though their control was relatively short-lived. As Khmer power diminished, Phetchaburi became a strategic royal fort during the Thai-based Sukhothai and Ayutthaya kingdoms. During the stability of the Ayutthaya kingdom, the upper peninsula flourished and Phetchaburi thrived as a 17th-century trading post between Burma and Ayutthaya. The town is often referred to as a 'Living Ayutthaya', since the equivalent of the many relics that were destroyed in the former kingdom's capital are still intact here.

👁 Sights & Activities

For such a small town, Phetchaburi has a number of historic temples that keep Thai tourists busy for the day. The most noteworthy are included below.

Phra Nakhon Khiri Historical Park

HISTORIC SITE

(อุทยานประวัติศาสตร์พระนครคีรี; ☑️ 0 3240 1006; admission 150B; ☀️ 8.30am-5pm) This national historical park sits regally atop Khao Wang (Palace Hill) surveying the city with subdued opulence. Rama IV (King Mongkut) built the palace and surrounding temples in 1859 to be used as a retreat from Bangkok. The hill-top location allowed the king to pursue his interest in astronomy and stargazing.

The palace was built in a mix of European and Chinese styles and each breezy hall is furnished with royal belongings. Cobblestone paths lead from the palace through the forested hill to three summits, each topped by a chedi. The white spire of **Phra That Chom Phet** skewers the sky and can be spotted from the city below.

There are two entrances to the site. The front entrance is across from Th Ratwithi and involves a strenuous footpath that passes a troop of unpredictable monkeys. The back entrance is on the opposite side of the hill and has a **tram** (one way adult/child 40B/free; ☀️ 8.30am-5.30pm) that glides up and down the summit. This place is a popular school-group outing and you'll be as much of a photo-op as the historic buildings.

A **Monday night market** lines the street in front of Khao Wang with the usual food and clothing stalls.

Wat Mahathat Worawihan

TEMPLE

(วัดมหาธาตุวรวิหาร; Th Damnoen Krasem) Centrally located, gleaming white Wat Mahathat is a lovely example of an everyday temple with as much hustle and bustle as the busy commercial district around it. The showpiece is a five-tiered Khmer-style *prang* (Khmer-style stupa) decorated in stucco relief, a speciality of Phetchaburi's local artisans. Inside the main *wi-hahn* (shrine hall or sanctuary) are contemporary murals, another example of the province's thriving temple craftsmanship. The tempo of the temple is further heightened with the steady beat from traditional musicians and dancers who perform for merit-making services.

After visiting the temple, follow Th Suwanmune through the old teak house district filled with the smells of incense from religious paraphernalia shops.

Wat Kamphaeng Laeng

TEMPLE

(วัดกันเพงแลง; Th Phokarang) Back before Siam had defined itself as an independent entity, the Angkor (Khmer) kingdom stretched from present-day Cambodia all the way to the Malay peninsula. To mark their frontier conquests, the Khmers built ornate temples in a signature style that has been copied throughout Thai history. This Khmer remnant is believed to date back to the 12th century and was originally Hindu before the region's conversion to Buddhism. There is one intact sanctuary flanked by two smaller shrines and deteriorating sandstone walls. Though it isn't the most remarkable example of Khmer architecture, it is a peaceful place to snap a few arty pictures.

Tham Khao Luang

CAVE

(ถ้ำเขาหลวง; ☀️ 8am-6pm) About 4km north of town is Tham Khao Luang, a dramatic stalactite-filled chamber that is one of Thailand's most impressive cave shrines and a favourite of Rama IV. The cave is accessed

Phetchaburi (Phetburi)

📍 Top Sights

Phra Nakhon Khiri Historical Park..... A2

👁️ Sights

- 1 Phra That Chom Phet..... A3
Rabieng Rim Nam..... (see 9)
- 2 Wat Mahathat Worawihan..... C3

🛏️ Sleeping

- 3 Jomklow Hotel..... C2
- 4 Sun Hotel..... A2

🍴 Eating

- 5 Day Market..... D3

- 6 Jek Meng..... B2
Khon Toy Restaurant..... (see 4)
- 7 Na & Nan..... C2
- 8 Night Market..... C2
- 9 Rabieng Rim Nam..... C3

🚗 Transport

- 10 Air-con Buses to Bangkok..... C2
- 11 Minivans to Bangkok..... C2
- 12 Ordinary Buses to Cha-am &
Hua Hin..... D3
- 13 Sörng•täa•ou to Ban Kaeng
Krachan..... D3

Tham Khao Bandai-It

CAVE

(ถ้ำเขาน้ำใส; donation appreciated; ☞9am-4pm) This hillside monastery, 2km west of town, sprawls through several large caverns converted into simple Buddha shrines and hermit meditation rooms. English-speaking guides (tip appreciated) lead tours through the caves, mainly as a safety precaution from the monkeys. One cavern contains a significant population of bats, and guides will instruct you not to look up with your mouth open (a good rule for everyday life).

Phra Ram Ratchaniwet

HISTORIC SITE

(พระรามราชนิเวศน์; Ban Peun Palace; ☞0 3242 8083; admission 50B; ☞8am-4pm Mon-Fri) An incredible art deco creation 1km south of town, construction of this royal summer palace began in 1910 at the behest of Rama V (who died just after the project was started). It was designed by German architects, who used the opportunity to showcase contemporary innovations in construction and interior design. The structure is typical of the early 20th century, a period that saw a Thai passion for erecting European-style buildings in an effort to keep up with the 'modern' architecture of its colonised neighbours.

The outside of the two-storey palace is not too exciting, but inside there are spacious sun-drenched rooms decorated with exquisite glazed tiles, stained glass, parquet floors and plenty of wrought-iron details. The double-spiral staircase provides a debutante's debut and the king's personal bathroom was state-of-the-art.

Hat Puak Tian

BEACH

(หาดปึกเตียน) Locals come to this dark-sands beach, 20km southeast of Phetchaburi, on

weekends to eat seafood and frolic in the surf. Another modest attraction is the literary role this beach played in the Thai epic poem *Phra Aphaimani*, written by Sunthorn Phu. A partially submerged statue of a giant woman standing offshore with an outstretched hand and a forlorn expression depicts a character from the poem who disguised herself as a beautiful temptress to win the love of the hero and imprison him on this beach. But he discovers her treachery (and her true ugliness) and with the help of a mermaid escapes to Ko Samet (a nicer beach so maybe he was on to something).

You'll need private transport to reach this beach.

🌟 Festivals & Events

Phra Nakhon Khiri Fair

CULTURAL

Centred on Khao Wang, this provincial-style celebration takes place in early April and lasts nine days. Phra Nakhon Khiri is festooned with lights, there are traditional dance performances, craft and food displays and a beauty contest.

🛏️ Sleeping

Phetchaburi is seriously lacking in accommodation, especially in the budget range, since most people visit as a daytrip from Hua Hin or Cha-am. Pity that there isn't more of a guest-house scene here since it is an ideal place for cultural tourists overwhelmed by Bangkok.

Sun Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☞0 3240 0000; www.sunhotelthailand.com; 43/33 Soi Phetkasem; r 800-1500B; 📞@☺) The best of an uninspiring bunch, the Sun Hotel



PHETCHABURI SIGHTSEEING

Some of the city's best sights are outside of town but don't let the distance deter you. Hire a *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* (passenger pick-up truck) for the day (usually around 400B) to hit all the highlights. **Rabieng Rim Nam** (☎0 3242 5707; 1 Th Chisa-In; 950B per person for 4 people), a guest house and restaurant, also runs day tours with an English-speaking guide.

sits opposite the back entrance to Phra Nakhon Khiri. It has large, comfortable rooms with functional bathrooms and professional staff. There's a pleasant cafe downstairs; internet and wi-fi are available for a fee.

Jomklow Hotel HOTEL \$
(☎0 3242 5398; 1 Th Te Wiat; r 180B) A multi-story hotel in need of a serious makeover has very, very basic jail-cell style rooms.

Phetkasem Hotel HOTEL \$
(☎0 3242 5581; 86/1 Th Phetkasem; r 200-400B; ☹) Another candidate for an extreme makeover, the Phetkasem has rundown rooms with broken down furniture but at least there is a roof over your head.

Eating

Surrounded by palm sugar plantations, Phetchaburi is famous for Thai sweets, including *kà-nǒm mǒr gaang* (egg custard) and the various 'golden' desserts made from egg yolks to portend good fortune. Nearby fruit orchards produce refreshingly aromatic *chom-pǒo Phet* (Phetchaburi rose apple), pineapples and golden bananas.

Day Market MARKET \$
A good spot for people-watching and local noshing, the day market, north of the clock tower, has food stalls on the perimeter serving the usual noodle dishes as well as specialities such as *kà-nǒm jeen tǒrt man* (thin noodles with fried spicy fishcake) and the hot-season favourite *kǒw chǎa pèt-bù-ree* (moist chilled rice served with sweetmeats).

Rabieng Rim Nam INTERNATIONAL \$
(☎0 3242 5707; 1 Th Chisa-In; dishes 40-180B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) This riverside restaurant serves up terrific food and a lot of tourist information in English – a rarity in this town – and organises tours. Sadly the

affiliated guest house is just too decrepit to recommend.

Khon Toy Restaurant THAI \$
(soi behind Sun Hotel; dishes from 35B; ☺lunch & dinner) This open-air restaurant is shielded from the street by a screen of greenery. Inside is a simple but busy kitchen that does a brisk business in evening takeaway meals. Everything is stir-fried and tasty.

Jek Meng THAI \$
(85 Th Ratwithi; dishes 50-80B; ☺lunch & dinner) Dishes up big, piping-hot bowls of noodles and fried rice. Look for the black-and-white chequered tablecloths.

Na & Nan THAI \$
(Th Damnoen Kasem; dishes 40-60B; ☺lunch & dinner) Another friendly noodle place along a strip of casual restaurants in the centre of town. Their *gǒo-ay dǎe-o gài* (chicken noodles) comes southern style with a whole chicken drumstick.

Information

There's no formal information source in town, but Rabieng Rim Nam is a great resource for both Phetchaburi and Kaeng Krachan National Park. The Sun Hotel has wi-fi and one terminal (per hr 100B).

Main post office (cnr Th Ratwithi & Th Damnoen Kasem)

Police station (☎0 3242 5500; Th Ratwithi) Near the intersection of Th Ratchadamnoen.

Siam Commercial Bank (2 Th Damnoen Kasem) Other nearby banks also offer foreign exchange and ATMs.

Telephone office (cnr Th Ratwithi & Th Damnoen Kasem; ☺7am-10pm) Upstairs at the post office.

Getting There & Away

The stop for buses to Bangkok is beside the night market. There are services to/from Bangkok's Southern (Sai Tai Mai) station (120B, two hours; hourly morning departures). Across the street is a minivan stop with services to Bangkok's Victory Monument (80B) and Southern station (100B).

Ordinary buses to Cha-am (40B) and Hua Hin (50B) stop in town near Th Matayawong.

Most southbound air-conditioned buses and minivans stop out of town on Th Phetkasem in front of the Big C department store. Destinations include Cha-am (50B, 40 minutes, frequent departures) and Hua Hin (50B, two hours). Motorcycle taxis await and can take you into town for around 50B.

KAENG KRACHAN NATIONAL PARK

อุทยานแห่งชาติแก่งกระจาน

Wake to the eerie symphony of gibbon calls as the early morning mist hangs limply above the forest canopy. Hike through lush forests to spot elephant herds and other wildlife at the communal watering holes. Or sweat through your clothes as you summit the park's highest peak. At 3000 sq km, Thailand's largest **national park** (☎0 3245 9293; www.dnp.go.th; admission 200B; 🕒visitors centre 8.30am-4.30pm) is surprisingly close to civilization but shelters an intense tangle of wilderness that sees few tourists. Two rivers (Mae Nam Phetchaburi and Mae Nam Pranburi), a large lake and abundant rainfall keep the place green year-round. Animal life is abundant and includes wild elephants, deer, gibbons, boars, dusky langurs and wild cattle.

This park also occupies an interesting overlapping biozone for birds as the southernmost spot for the northern species and the northernmost for the southern species. There are about 400 species of birds, including hornbills as well as pheasants and other ground-dwellers.

Activities

Hiking is the best way to explore the park. Most of the trails are signed and branch off of the main road. The **Nam Tok Tho Thip** trail starts at the Km36 marker and continues for 4km to an 18-tiered waterfall. **Phanoen Thung** is the park's highest point and can be summited via a 6km hike that starts at the Km27 marker. Note that some trails, including the one to Phanoen Thung, are closed during the rainy season (August to October).

The twin waterfalls of **Pa La-U Yai** and **Pa La-U Noi** in the southern section of the park are popular for daytrippers on minivan tours from Hua Hin. It's also possible to organise mountain biking in the park from Hua Hin.

Tourist infrastructure in Kaeng Krachan is somewhat limited and the roads can be rough. The park rangers can help arrange camping-gear rental, food and transport. There are crowds on weekends and holidays but weekdays should be people free. The best months to visit are between November and April. **Rabieng Rim Nam** (☎0 3242 5707; 1 Th Chisa-In, Phetchaburi; from 1950B per person for 4 people) arranges trekking and birding tours that range from one day to multiple days if you don't want to figure out the logistics yourself.

Sleeping & Eating

There are various **bungalows** (☎0 2562 0760; www.dnp.go.th/parkreserve; bungalows from 1200B) within the park, mainly near the reservoir. These sleep from four to six people and are simple affairs with fans and fridges. There are also **camp sites** (per person 60-90B), including a pleasant grassy one near the reservoir at the visitors centre and a modest restaurant. Tents can be rented at the visitors centre.

On the road leading to the park entrance are several simple resorts and bungalows. About 3.5km before reaching the visitors centre, **A&B Bungalows** (☎08 9891 2328; r from 700B) is scenic and popular with bird-watching groups. There is a good restaurant here that can provide you with a packed lunch.

Getting There & Away

Kaeng Krachan is 52km southwest of Phetchaburi, with the southern edge of the park 35km from Hua Hin. If you have your own vehicle, drive 20km south from Phetchaburi on Hwy 4 to the town of Tha Yang. Turn right (west) and after 38km, you'll reach the visitors centre. You use the same access road from Tha Yang if coming south from Hua Hin.

You can also reach the park by **minivan** (☎08 9231 5810; one-way 100B) from Phetchaburi; they don't travel to a fixed schedule so have your hotel call to make arrangements. Alternatively you can catch a *sǒng-tǎa-ou* (pick-up trucks; 80B, 1½ hours, 6am to 2pm) from Phetchaburi (near the clock tower) to the village of Ban Kaeng Krachan, 4km before the park. From the village, you can charter transport to the park. You can also charter your own *sǒng-tǎa-ou* all the way to the park but you'll need to haggle.

Minivan tours also operate from Hua Hin.

Frequent rail services run to/from Bangkok's Hua Lamphong station. Fares vary depending on the train and class (3rd class 84B to 144B, 2nd class 188B to 358B, three hours).

i Getting Around

Motorcycle taxis go anywhere in the town centre for 40B to 50B. *Sörng-tăa-ou* cost about the same. It's a 20-minute walk (1km) from the train station to the town centre.

Rabieng Rim Nam (p508) hires out bicycles (120B per day) and motorbikes (250B per day).

Cha-am

POP 72,341

๒๖๓

At weekends and on public holidays, Cha-am is a beach getaway for working-class families and Bangkok students. Neon-painted buses (called '*chor ching cha*') deliver young holidaymakers, firmly in party mode, fuelled by thumping techno music. It is a 100% Thai-style beach party with eating and drinking marathons held around umbrella-shaded beach chairs and tables. Entertainment is provided by the banana boats that zip back and forth eventually making a final jack-knife turn that throws the passengers into the sea. Applause and giggles usually follow from the beachside audience.

Cha-am sees only a few foreigners, usually older Europeans who winter here instead of more expensive Hua Hin. And the beach sees even fewer bathing suits since most Thais frolic in the ocean fully clothed. This isn't the spot to meet a lot of young travelers or even a good option for families of young children who might be overwhelmed by paparazzi-like Thais in holiday mode. But for everyone else, Cha-am's beach is wide and sandy, the grey-blue water is clean and calm, the people-watching is superb and the prices are some of the most affordable anywhere on the coast.

Festivals & Events

Crab Festival

FOOD

In February, Cha-am celebrates one of its local marine delicacies: blue crabs. Food stalls, concerts, and lots of neon turn the beachfront into a pedestrian party.

Gin Hoy, Do Nok, Tuk Meuk

FOOD

You really can do it all at this annual festival held in September. The English translation means 'Eat Shellfish, Watch Birds, Catch Squid' and is a catchy slogan for all of Cha-am's local attractions and fishing traditions. Mainly it is a food festival showcasing a variety of shellfish but there are also bird-watching events at nearby sanctuaries and squid-fishing demonstrations.

ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

Modern sensibilities have turned away from circus-like animal attractions but many well-intentioned animal lovers curious to see Thailand's iconic creatures (such as elephants, monkeys and tigers) unwittingly contribute to an industry that is poorly regulated and exploitative. Animals are often illegally captured from the wild and disfigured to be less dangerous (tigers often have their claws and teeth removed), they are acquired as pets and then neglected or inhumanely confined, or they are abandoned when they are too sick or infirm to work.

Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand runs a **wildlife rescue centre** ([☎0 3245 8135](tel:032458135); www.wfft.org; Wat Khao Luk Chang, 35km northwest of Cha-am) that adopts and cares for abused and abandoned animals. Most of these animals are wild creatures that can't re-treat to the wild due to injuries or lack of survival skills. The centre cares for 400 animals, including bears, tigers, gibbons, macaques, lorises and birds. There is also an affiliated elephant rescue program that buys and shelters animals being used as street beggars.

The centre offers a **full access tour** (5000B for six people) that introduces the animals and discusses their rescue histories. The tour includes a visit with the elephants (but no rides are offered) and hotel transfer from Hua Hin or Cha-am.

Those looking for a more intimate connection with the animals can volunteer to help at the centre. An average day could involve chopping fruits and vegetables to feed sun bears, cleaning enclosures and rowing out to the gibbon islands with a daily meal. Volunteers are required to stay a minimum of two weeks and work a full (usually 6.30am to 6.30pm) six days a week. Contact the centre or visit the **volunteer website** (www.wildlifevolunteer.org) for prices and details.

Sleeping

Cha-am has two basic types of accommodation: apartment-style hotels along the beach road (Th Ruamjit) and more expensive 'condotel' developments (condominiums with a kitchen and operating under a rental program). Expect a discount on posted rates for weekday stays.

The northern end of the beach (known as Long Beach) has a wider, blonder strip of sand and sees more foreign tourists, while the southern end is more Thai. Th Narathip divides the beach into north and south and the beach road (Th Ruamjit) soi are numbered in ascending order in both directions from this intersection.

Charlie House GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(☎0 3243 3799; 241/60-61, Soi 1 North, Th Ruamjit; r 650-800B; 🍷🍷) This cheery place boasts a lime-green lobby and colourful rooms that are fun to return to after a day of people-watching. Don't confuse it with institutional Charlie Place or Charlie TV on the same soi.

Cha-am Mathong Guesthouse GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(☎08 1550 2947; www.chaammathong.com; cnr Th Ruamjit & Soi 3 South; r 600-800B; 🍷) Clean and convenient with all the mod cons, Mathong won't win any awards for hand-holding but you get a lot of bang for your baht.

Dee Lek GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(☎0 3247 0396; www.deelek.com; 225/30-33 Soi Long Beach, Th Ruamjit; r 1200-1500B; 🍷🍷) Popular with Scandinavians, Dee Lek has roomy rooms with spacious bathrooms and upholstered European-style furniture.

Casa Papaya HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎0 3247 0678; www.casapapayathai.com; 810/4 Th Phetkasem; r 3000-5000B; 🍷🍷) This quirky spot is right on the beach in between Cha-am and Hua Hin and garners fans with its homely and hospitable atmosphere. The beachfront and sea-view bungalows have rooftop decks to enjoy the sunlight (or the moonlight), and inside there are king-size beds and bathrooms in wonderfully brave colours.

Eating

From your beach chair you can wave down the itinerant vendors selling barbecued and fried seafood or order from a menu of near-by beachfront restaurants. At the far north-

ern end of the beach, seafood restaurants with reasonable prices can be found at the fishing pier.

TOP CHOICE **Rang Yen Garden** THAI \$
(☎0 3247 1267; 259/40 Th Ruamjit; dishes 60-180B; 🍷lunch & dinner Nov-Apr) This lush garden restaurant is a cosy and friendly spot to feel at home after a day of feeling like a foreigner. It serves up Thai favourites and is only open in the high season.

Bella Pizza ITALIAN \$\$
(Soi Bus Station, Th Ruamjit; dishes 150-200B; 🍷lunch & dinner) There are enough foreigners in town to warrant a pizza restaurant and this pie shop makes everyone happy. Plus there's a curious international pedigree: the Thai owner worked in Sweden at a pizza restaurant.

Poom Restaurant SEAFOOD \$\$
(☎0 3247 1036; 274/1 Th Ruamjit; dishes 120-250B; 🍷lunch & dinner) Slightly more expensive than other nearby beach restaurants, but worth it for the fresh seafood served under tall sugar palms. It appears to be the restaurant of choice for weekenders Thais - always a good sign.

Pla Too Restaurant SEAFOOD \$\$
(☎032 508175; dishes 150-250B; 🍷lunch & dinner) Thanks to the smells from the kitchen, you'll be hungry just walking from the car park to the sprawling beachfront restaurant, beloved by Thais and foreigners alike. It is near the Courtyard Marriott in between Cha-am and Hua Hin.

Information

Phetkasem Hwy runs through Cha-am's busy town centre, which is about 1km away from the beach. The town centre is where you'll find the main bus stop, banks, the main post office, an outdoor market and the train station.

You'll find plenty of banks along Th Ruamjit with ATMs and exchange services.

Only Chaam (www.onlychaam.com) is an online blog and website about visiting Cha-am.

Communications Authority of Thailand (CAT; Th Narathip) For international phone calls.

Post office (Th Ruamjit) On the main beach strip.

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT; ☎0 3247 1005; tatphet@tat.or.th; 500/51 Th Phetkasem; 🕒8.30am-4.30pm) On Phetkasem Hwy, 500m south of town. The staff speak good English.

i Getting There & Away

Buses stop on Phetkasem Hwy near the 7-Eleven store at the intersection of Th Narathip. Frequent bus services operating to/from Cha-am include the following:

- Bangkok's Southern (Sai Tai Mai) station** (150B, three hours)
- Phetchaburi** (50B, 40 minutes)
- Hua Hin** (50B, 30 minutes).

Minivans to Bangkok's Victory Monument (160B, 2½ hours, hourly 7am to 5.30pm) leave from Soi Bus Station, in between Th Ruamjit and Th Chao Lay. Other minivan destinations include Hua Hin (120B) and Phetchaburi (100B). A private taxi to Hua Hin will cost 500B.

The **train station** (Th Narathip) is west of Phetkasem Hwy. From Bangkok's Hua Lam-phong station five daily trains go to Cha-am (40B to 150B, four hours) and continue on to Hua Hin. Cha-am is listed in the timetable only in Thai as 'Ban Cha-am'.

i Getting Around

From the city centre to the beach it's a quick motorcycle (30B) or *sǎrng-tǎa-ou* (40B) ride. Some drivers will try to take you to hotels that offer commissions instead of the one you requested.

You can hire motorcycles for 300B per day all along Th Ruamjit. Cruisy bicycles are available everywhere for 20B per hour or 100B per day, and are a good way to get around.

Hua Hin

หัวหิน

POP 98,896

Thailand's original beach resort is no palm-fringed castaway island and arguably it is all the better for it. Instead it is a delightful mix of city and sea with a cosmopolitan ambience, lively markets, tasty street eats, long wide beaches and fully functional city services (meaning no septic streams bisect the beach like those *other* places).

Hua Hin traces its aristocratic roots to the 1920s when Rama VI (King Vajiravudh) and Rama VII (King Prajadhipok) built summer residences here to escape Bangkok's stifling climate. The most famous of the two is **Phra Ratchawang Klai Kangwon** (Far from Worries Palace), 3km north of town and which is still a royal residence today and so poetically named that Thais often invoke it as a city slogan. Rama VII's endorsement of Hua Hin and the construction of the southern railway made the town *the* place to be for Thai nobility who built their own summer residences beside the sea.

In the 1980s the luxury-hotel group Sofitel renovated the town's grand dame hotel that in turn sparked overseas tourism. Today all the international hotel chains have properties in Hua Hin, and a growing number of wealthy expats retire to the nearby housing estates and condominiums. Middle-class and high-society Thais from Bangkok swoop into town on weekends, making parts of the city look a lot like upper Sukhumvit.

There's a lot of money swirling around, which unnecessarily scares off baht-minded backpackers. Because this is a bustling Thai town, seafood is plentiful and affordable, there's cheap public transport for beach hopping and it takes a lot less time and effort (and money) to get here from Bangkok than to the southern islands. So quit wasting your time everywhere else and hurry up to Hua Hin beach.

i Sights

The city's beaches are numerous, wide and long; swimming is safe, and Hua Hin continues to enjoy some of the peninsula's driest weather. During stormy weather, watch out for jellyfish.

HUA HIN TOWN

เมืองหัวหิน

A former fishing village, Hua Hin town retains its roots with an old teak shophouse district bisected by narrow soi, pier houses that have been converted into restaurants or guest houses and a busy fishing pier still in use today. South of the harbour is a rocky headland that inspired the name 'Hua Hin', meaning 'Stone Head'. In the commercial heart are busy markets and all the modern conveniences you forgot to pack.

Hat Hua Hin

BEACH

(หาดหัวหิน; public access via eastern end of Th Damnoen Kasem) When viewed from the main public entrance, Hua Hin's beach might seem like a lot of hype. Initially you meet a pleasant but not stunning stretch of sand punctuated by round, smooth boulders and bordered here by the Sofitel resort, which nearly kisses the high tide mark. Don't be dismayed; this is the people-watching spot. Visiting Thais come here to photograph their friends wading ankle-deep in the sea and pony rides are offered to anyone standing still.

But if you're after swimming and sunbathing continue south to where the 5km-long beach stretches into a Buddha-adorned headland (Khao Takiab). The sand is a fine

white powder that is wide and long and the sea is a calm grey-green. Instead of coconut trees, resort towers line the interior of the beach but this is a minor distraction for long uninterrupted walks. Access roads lead to Th Phetkasem, where you can catch a green *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* back to town.

Hua Hin Train Station

HISTORIC SITE

(สถานีรถไฟหัวหิน; Th Liab Tang Rot Fai) An iconic piece of local architecture, the red-and-white pavilion that sits beside Hua Hin's train station once served as the royal waiting room during the reign of Rama VI. It was the railway that made Hua Hin's emergence as a tourist destination possible for the Bangkok-based monarchy and the city's elite. In the early 20th century, the four-hour journey between Hua Hin and Bangkok was a transportation revolution. That was before the emergence of speeding minivan drivers fuelled by energy drinks.

NORTH HUA HIN

The summer residences of the royal family and minor nobility dot the coast northward from Hua Hin's fishing pier toward Cha-am.

Hat Hua Hin Neua

BEACH

(หาดหัวหินเหนือ; North Hua Hin Beach; public access paths off of Th Naebkehardt) Genteel but modest Thai-Victorian garden estates bestowed with ocean-inspired names, such as 'Listening to the Sea House,' line this end of the coast. The current monarchy's palace lies about 3km north of town but visitors are only allowed on the **grounds** (☎5.30-7.30am & 4-7pm; ID required). On weekends, Th Naebkehardt is the preferred getaway for Bangkok Thais, some of whom still summer in the old-fashioned residences while others come to supper in the houses that have been converted into restaurants.

FREE Plearn Wan

NOTABLE BUILDING

(เพลินวาน; ☎0 3252 0311; www.plearnwan.com; Th Phetkasem btw Soi 38 & 40) More of an art installation than a commercial enterprise, Plearn Wan is a vintage village containing stylized versions of old-fashioned shop-houses that once occupied the Thai-Chinese districts of Bangkok and Hua Hin. There's a pharmacy selling (well actually displaying) roots, powders and other concoctions that Thai grandmothers once used; a music store specialising in the crooner era of the 1950s and 1960s; and other bygone shops and attractions that pre-date the arrival of 7-Eleven. It would be a tourist trap if it

South of Hua Hin



charged an admission fee but most visitors just wander the grounds snapping photos without making any impulse purchases. If you want to support this bit of nostalgia, there are retro souvenirs and snack shops.

Phra Ratchaniwet Mrigadayavan

HISTORIC SITE

(พระราชวังมฤคทายวัน; ☎0 3250 8443; admission 30B; ☎9am-4.30pm) With a breezy seaside location 10km north of Hua Hin, this summer palace was built during the reign of Rama VI (King Vajiravudh) in 1923 as a health-promoting retreat for the king who suffered from rheumatoid arthritis. The court's Italian architect built the palace to maximise air circulation and admire the sea. The result is a series of interlinked teak houses with tall shuttered windows and patterned fretwork built upon stilts forming a shaded ground-level boardwalk. It is functional and elegant without excessive opulence. Surrounding the palace is a beautiful

Hua Hin

📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 1 Buchabun Art & Crafts Collection..... C2
- 2 Hua Hin Adventure Tour..... B3
- 3 Hua Hin Golf Centre..... C3

🛏 Sleeping

- 4 All Nations Guest House..... C2
- 5 Araya Residence..... C2
- 6 Baan Chalelarn Hotel..... C2
- 7 Baan Laksasubha..... C4
Baan Oum-or Hotel..... (see 9)
- 8 Baan Tawee Suk..... C2
- 9 Ban Somboon..... C4
- 10 Euro-Hua Hin City Hotel (YHA)..... B3
- 11 Fat Cat Guesthouse..... C2
- 12 Fulay Guesthouse..... C2
- 13 Green Gallery Bed and Breakfast..... C1
- 14 My Place Hua Hin..... B3
- 15 Pattana Guest House..... C2
- 16 Sirima..... D2
- 17 Sofitel Centara Grand Resort and Villas..... D4
- 18 Supasuda Guest House..... C2
- 19 Tong-Mee House..... B2

🍴 Eating

- 20 Chatchai Market..... B2
- 21 Hua Hin Koti..... B3
- 22 Jek Pia Coffeeshop..... C3
- 23 Night Market..... B3
- 24 Sang Thai Restaurant..... C2
Sofitel Cafe & Tea Corner..... (see 17)
- 25 Th Chomsin Food Stalls..... B2
- 26 World News Coffee..... C3

🍷 Drinking

- 27 el Murphy's Mexican Grill & Steakhouse..... C3
- 28 Hua Hin Brewing Company..... C3
- 29 Mai Tai Cocktail & Beer Garden..... C3
- 30 No Name Bar..... D3
- 31 O'Neill's Irish Pub..... C3

🚗 Transport

- 32 Air-con Buses to Bangkok..... B3
- 33 Lomphraya Office..... C3
- 34 Minivans to Bangkok..... B2
- 35 Minivans to Bangkok's Victory Monument..... B2
- 36 Ordinary Buses to Phetchaburi & Cha-am..... B2
- 37 Sǒrng-tǎa-ou to Khao Takiab; bus to Pranburi..... B3

tasting (290B for 3 samples) or eating at the picturesque **Sala Wine Bar & Bistro** (dishes 200-500B). There is also a pétanque course, mountain-biking trails and elephant riding.

A vineyard shuttle leaves the affiliated **Hua Hin Hills Wine Cellar store** (☎0 3252 6 351, Market Village, Th Phetkasem, South Hua Hin) at 10.30am and 3pm and returns at 1.30pm and 6pm; return ticket is 200B.

KHAO TAKIAB

เขาตะเกียบ

About 7km south of Hua Hin, Monumental Chopstick Mountain guards the southern end of Hua Hin beach and is adorned with a giant standing Buddha. Atop the 272m mountain is a Thai-Chinese temple (**Wat Khao Lat**) and many resident monkeys who are not to be trusted - but the views are great. On the southern side of Khao Takiab is **Suan Son Pradipath** (Sea Pine Garden), a muddy beach maintained by the army and popular with weekend Thai. Green *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* go all the way from Hua Hin to Khao Takiab village, where you'll find loads of simple Thai eateries.

The new and stylish **Cicada Market** (Th Phetkasem; ☀4-11pm Fri & Sat, 4-10pm Sun) is an outdoor market still moulting in the food and shopping category, but it has found its niche on Friday nights when live bands hit the stage and the vibe is mellow and arty. You can catch a green *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* (20B; from 6am to 9pm) from Hua Hin Night Market; a hired *túk-túk* will cost 150B one-way.



Activities

There are many travel agencies in town offering day trips to nearby national parks. Unless you're in a group, you may have to wait until enough people sign up for the trip of your choice.

Hua Hin Adventure Tour (☎0 3253 0314; www.huahinadventuretour.com; Th Naebkehardt) offers more somewhat active excursions including kayaking trips in the Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park and mountain biking in Kaeng Krachan National Park.

NEW ATTITUDES TOWARDS WINE

Common wisdom would tell you that tasty wine grapes don't grow alongside coconut trees. But advances in plant sciences and a global palette for wines has changed all of that and ushered in the geographic experiment dubbed New Latitude Wines, produced from grapes grown outside the traditional 30- to 50-degree parallels.

The New Latitudes' main challenge is to replicate the wine-producing grapes preferred climate as best as possible. That means introducing a false dormancy or winter period through pruning, regulated irrigation and companion planting of grasses to prevent soil loss during the rainy season. If you're familiar with viticulture in the Old World, you'll be shocked to see all the cultivation rules Thai vineyards successfully break.

Wine experts have yet to crown a New Latitude that surpasses the grand dames but they do fill a local niche. Siam Winery, the parent company of Hua Hin Hills Vineyard (see p514), aims to produce wines that pair with the complex flavours of Thai food. The vineyard grows columbard, chenin blanc, muscat, shiraz and sangiovese grapes, among others, and typically the citrus-leaning whites are a refreshing complement to the fireworks of most Thai dishes.

Because of the hot climate, a wine drinker's palette is often altered. The thinner wines produced in Thailand tend to have a more satisfying effect than the bold chewy reds that pair well with a chilly spring day. Drinking red wine in Thailand has always been a challenge because the heat turns otherwise leathery notes straight into vinegar. To counteract the tropical factor, break yet another wine rule and chill reds in the refrigerator to replicate 'cellar' temperature as close as possible.

Kiteboarding

Adding to the beauty of Hua Hin beach are the airborne kites (attached to a wave board) that seem to sail among the puffy clouds. Hua Hin is an ideal kiteboarding spot: it has a long, consistent windy season. Winds blow from the northeast from October to December and from the southeast from January to March. In 2010 Hua Hin hosted the Kiteboarding World Cup.

Kiteboarding Asia

KITEBOARDING

(☎08 8230 0016; www.kiteboardingasia.com; South Hua Hin; beginner courses 11,000B) This 10-year old company operates four beachside shops that rent equipment and teach lessons. The three-day introductory course teaches beginners the physical mechanics of the sport, and the instructor recommends newbies come when the winds are blowing from the southeast (January to March) and the sea is less choppy.

Golf

Home to the country's first golf course, Hua Hin continues to be an international and domestic golfing destination.

Hua Hin Golf Centre

GOLF

(☎0 3253 0476; www.huahingolf.com; Th Selakam; ☉noon-10pm) The friendly staff at this pro shop can steer you to the most affordable, well-maintained courses where the mon-

keys won't try to run off with your balls. The company also organises golf tours and rents equipment.

Black Mountain Golf Course

GOLF

(☎0 3261 8666; www.bmghuahin.com; green fees 2500B) The city's newest course is currently everyone's favourite. About 10km west of Hua Hin, the 18-hole course was carved out of jungle and an old pineapple plantation and it retains some natural creeks used as water hazards. The 2009 and 2010 Asian PGA tour was held here.

Cycling

Cycling is a scenic and affordable option for touring Hua Hin's outlying attractions, especially since hiring a taxi to cover the same ground is ridiculously expensive. Don't be spooked by the busy thoroughfares; there are plenty of quiet byways where you can enjoy the scenery.

Hua Hin Bike Tours

CYCLING

(☎08 1173 4469; www.huahinbiketours.com; 4/34 Soi Hua Hin 96/1, Th Phetkasem, South Hua Hin; tours 1500-2500B) A husband-and-wife team (see the boxed text, p518) operates this cycling company that leads half-, full-, and multiday tours to a variety of attractions in and around Hua Hin. Pedal to the **Hua Hin Hills Vineyard** (p514) for some well-earned refreshment, tour the coastal byways south

of Hua Hin, or ride among the limestone mountains of **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park** (p524). They also rent premium bicycles (500B per day) for independent cyclists and can recommend routes. The same couple also leads long-distance charity and corporate bike tours across Thailand; visit the parent company **Tour de Asia** (www.tourdeasia.org) for more information.

Courses

Buchabun Art & Crafts Collection COOKING
(☎08 1572 3805; www.thai-cookingcourse.com; 22 Th Dechanuchit; courses 1500B) Aspiring chefs should sign up for a half-day Thai cooking class that includes a market visit and recipe book. They only run it if several people are interested.

Festivals & Events

King's Cup Elephant Polo Tournament ELEPHANT RACING
Polo with a Thai twist, this annual tournament involving elephant mounts instead of horses takes place on the scenic grounds of the Anantara Hua Hin resort in September. It might not be as fast-paced as its British cousin but it is a charitable event that raises money for elephant-welfare issues.

Hua Hin Jazz Fest JAZZ
In honour of the king's personal interest in the genre, the city that hosts royal getaways also hosts an annual jazz festival featuring Thai and international performers. All events are free and usually occur in June.

Fringe Festival THEATRE
Organised by the Patravadi Theatre, a renowned avant-garde performance space in Bangkok, this modern arts festival is held at its sister location, **Vic Hua Hin** (☎0 3282 7814; www.vichuahin.com; 62/70 Soi Hua Na Nong Khae, South Hua Hin). Running from January to March, there are a host of dance, music and comedy performances from local and international artists as well as multinational collaborations.

Sleeping

Most budget and midrange options are in town occupying multistorey buildings in the old shophouse district. It is an atmospheric setting with cheap tasty food nearby but you'll have to 'commute' to the beach, either by walking to north Hua Hin beach (best at low tide) or catching a *sörnng-tāa-ou* to the southern end of Hua Hin beach.

The top-end options are beachfront resorts sprawling south from the Sofitel. All the international brands have a presence in Hua Hin but we've only listed unique and local options for a more intimate experience.

Hua Hin Town

Pattana Guest House GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎0 3251 3393; 52 Th Naresdamri; r 350-550B; ☹) Tucked away down a soi, this simple teak house has a lovely garden filled with little reading nooks. The rooms are small and basic but adequate and the family who runs it is friendly and artistic.

Tong-Mee House GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎0 3253 0725; 1 Soi Raumpow, Th Naebkehardt; r 450-550B; ☹) Hidden away in a quiet residential soi, this smart guest house is the best value in town. The rooms are small but well kept and have balconies.

Supasuda Guest House GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎0 3251 3618; www.spghouse.com; 1/8 Th Chornsin; r 800-1000B; ☹) Large rooms come with mermaid murals and hot showers. The more expensive ones have verandahs and a bit of road noise. Guests have access to the common terrace.

Ban Somboon GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎0 3251 1538; 13/4 Soi Hua Hin 63, Th Phetkasem; r 950-1200B; ☹) With family photos decorating the walls and a compact garden, this place is like staying at your favourite Thai auntie's house. This is a very quiet, centrally located soi with several other good-value guest houses.

Baan Tawee Suk GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎0 89459 2618; 43/8 Th Poonsuk; r 800B; ☹) This new multistorey guest house is fresh and clean with all the mod cons. Rooms are a little cramped so leave the super-sized luggage at home.

Sirima GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎0 3251 1060; Th Naresdamri; r 550B; ☹) The best of the old-style pier guest houses, Sirima has a pretty exterior with stained glass and polished wood. A long hallway leads to a common deck overlooking the water. Rooms come in various degrees of quality but the tile-floored ones are better.

My Place Hua Hin HOTEL \$\$
(☎0 32514 1112; www.myplacehuahin.com; 17 Th Amnuaysin, Th Phetkasem; r 1850-2200B; ☹) A small well-maintained hotel in the heart of the city – it might sound commonplace but

My Place actually delivers on what turns out to be a tall order.

Euro-Hua Hin City Hotel YHA HOSTEL \$
(☎0 3251 3130; 5/15 Th Sasong; r 250-800B; 🏠)
Just like any large hostel back home, this place feels both comfortable and institutional. All rooms have air-con, even the somewhat cramped dorms. There are also single and double private rooms and all accommodation includes breakfast. Add 50B to these prices if you don't belong to HI.

Baan Chalelarn Hotel HOTEL \$\$
(☎0 3253 1288; www.chalelarnhuahin.com; 11 Th Chomsin; r 1200-1300B; 🏠🍷) Chalelarn has a beautiful lobby with wooden floors, while the big rooms are equipped with king-size beds. Verandahs and breakfast are all part of the perks.

Araya Residence HOTEL \$\$
(☎0 3253 1130; www.araya-residence.com; 15/1 Th Chomsin; r 1500-2000B; 🏠🍷) Wood and concrete are combined to create a rustic

yet modern feel at this pseudo-stylish hotel. The rooms are spacious and comfortable though the hotel is a little tatty around the edges.

Also recommended:
Fat Cat Guesthouse GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎08 6206 2455; 8/3 Th Naresdamri; r 300-900B; 🏠) The rooms with fan occupy a separate building down a residential soi and some have fantastic views of the city.

Fulay Guesthouse GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎0 3251 3145; www.fulayhuahin.net; 110/1 Th Naresdamri; r 430-980B; 🏠🍷) An old-style pier guest house, with good beds, newish bathrooms and flowering plants in the common area.

Baan Oum-or Hotel HOTEL \$\$
(☎0 3251 5151; 77/18-19 Soi 63, Th Phetkasem; r 1000-1500B; 🏠) The rooms are big and bright and there are only seven of them so book ahead.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

SIRANEE (GAE) MEESITH, CO-OWNER HUA HIN BIKE TOURS

I am from a very small village surrounded by rice farms, water buffalos and such. It is a bit boring sometimes but Bangkok, where I went to university, is extreme. Hua Hin is in between. It is a relaxing little town but still has places to go: peaceful beaches, mountains, caves and activities (biking, kiteboarding or swimming in the ocean). There are also shopping, bakeries, cafes and loads of good seafood restaurants.

BEST BEACH

Hua Hin beach is beautiful with white sand from the Hilton Hotel, south all the way to Khao Takiap.

BEST BIKE RIDE

I enjoy cycling outside of the centre of Hua Hin where there are so many small roads and dirt trails with beaches to visit, mountain viewpoints, clean air and plenty of sunshine. You can't see all this by car and cycling is also good exercise and environmentally friendly to help keep Hua Hin beautiful and clean.

FAVOURITE OUTING FOR OUT-OF-TOWNERS

Tham Phraya Nakhon is an amazing cave in Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park that has a Thai-style pavilion inside with a statue of Rama V. Three of Thailand's kings have visited this cave and two have signed the wall of the cave. Getting to the cave is also part of the attraction because it is inside a mountain that requires trekking up a 430m jungle trail reached by taking a boat from a nearby beach or hiking over another small mountain. Plus there are nearby inexpensive and excellent Thai seafood restaurants too.

SECRET SPOT

Eighteen Below Ice Cream (Th Naebkehardt, North Hua Hin) is owned by a young couple: the wife used to be a Thai actress and the husband is a Belgian pastry chef who makes amazing ice cream and pastries. They started out just selling to the finer hotels in Hua Hin but later decided to turn their home into a lovely garden cafe. Many Thai people from Bangkok go there on weekends but most foreigners have no idea the place exists.

All Nations Guest House GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎0 3251 2747; 10-10/1 Th Dechanuchit; r 500-800B; ☹) Has slightly dingy rooms but at a decent price with enough noise protection.

Hua Hin Beaches

TOP CHOICE Baan Bayan HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎0 3253 3540; www.baanbayan.com; 119 Th Phetkasem, South Hua Hin; r 4000-11,000B; ☹☹) A colonial beach house built in the early 20th century, Baan Bayan is perfect for travellers seeking a luxury experience without the overkill of a big resort. The airy, high-ceilinged rooms are painted a relaxing buttery yellow, the staff are attentive and the location is absolute beachfront.

Green Gallery Bed & Breakfast HOTEL \$\$
(☎0 3253 0487; www.greenhuahin.com; 3/1 Soi Hua Hin 51, Th Naebkehardt, North Hua Hin; r 1200B; ☹☹) Just as cute as candy, this small hotel occupies a converted colonial-style beach house. Individually decorated rooms reflect a hip artiness that defines urban Thai style. You're also a short walk to north Hua Hin beach.

Rahmahyah Hotel GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(☎0 3253 2106; 113/10 Soi Hua Hin 67, Th Phetkasem, South Hua Hin; r from 1000B; ☹☹☹) Across the street from Market Village, about 1km south of town, is a small guest house enclave tucked between the high-end resorts, with beach access. The Rahmahyah is the best of the bunch with professional staff and clean functional rooms. The front rooms get a lot of highway noise.

Baan Laksasubha HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎032514525; www.baanlaksasubha.com; Th 53/7 Naresdamri; r 4200-7900B; ☹☹☹) Next door to the Sofitel, this petite resort, owned by a Bangkok aristocrat, specialises in family-friendly cottages. The decor is so crisp and subdued that it is almost plain, meandering garden paths lead past the pool to the beach and there's a dedicated kid's room with toys and books. The taxi drivers will understand you better if you say 'baan lak-su-pah'.

Veranda Lodge HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎032533678; 113 Soi Hua Hin 67, Th Phetkasem, South Hua Hin; www.verandalodge.com; r 3000-5000B; ☹☹☹) Beachfront without the whopping price tag, this top-end hotel has a variety of options, from modern hotel rooms to luxurious garden bungalows.

Sofitel Centara Grand Resort and Villas HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎0 3251 2021; www.sofitel.com; 1 Th Damnoen Kasem; r from 5500B; ☹☹☹) The historic Railway Hotel, Hua Hin's first seaside hotel, was restored to suit modern beachgoers with expansive grounds, a spa and sporting facilities and colonial or new world rooms.

Anantara Resort & Spa HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎0 3252 0205; www.huahin.anantara.com; r from 7500B; Th Phetkasem; ☹☹☹) Anantara's self-contained resort, 4.5km north of Hua Hin, is designed to invoke a traditional Thai village with a low-key but luxurious ambience. An experiential resort, there are spa facilities, water sports and cultural activities.

Chiva-Som International Health Resort HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎0 3253 6536; www.chivasom.com; 74/4 Th Phetkasem, South Hua Hin; 3-night packages from 68,310B; ☹☹) When a getaway isn't enough, there's Chiva-Som, for overworked, overstressed (and just maybe overpaid) business folk and celebrities. Health and wellness services include nutrition consultation, yoga and fitness classes, massage of every variety as well as detox programs.

✂ Eating

Night Market SEAFOOD \$
(Th Dechanuchit btw Th Phetkasem & Th Sasong; dishes from 60B; ☺5pm-midnight) An attraction that rivals the beach, Hua Hin's night market tops locals' lists of favourite spots to eat. Ice-packed displays of spiny lobsters and king prawns appeal to the big-spenders but the simple stir-fry stalls are just as tasty. Try *pàt pông gà-rèe* 'Boo (crab curry), *gùng tởrt* (fried shrimp) and *hõy tởrt* (fried mussel omelette). In between, souvenir stalls cater to Thai's favourite digestive activity: shopping.

Sang Thai Restaurant THAI \$
(Th Naresdamri; dishes 120-350B; ☺lunch & dinner) One of many beloved pier-side restaurants, Sang Thai soaks in the view and specialises in whole steamed fish that arrives still sizzling to your table.

Jek Pia Coffeeshop SEAFOOD \$
(51/6 Th Dechanuchit; dishes 80-160B; ☺lunch & dinner) More than just a coffee shop, this 50-year-old restaurant is another culinary destination specialising in an extensive array of stir-fried seafood dishes. If it is too full to get a seat, you can order from the same

menu at the sukiyaki restaurant further south on Th Naebkehardt.

Hua Hin Koti

SEAFOOD \$\$

(☎0 3251 1252; 16/1 Th Dechanuchit; dishes 80-250B; ☺lunch & dinner) Across from the Night Market, this Thai-Chinese restaurant is a national culinary luminary. Thais adore the fried crab balls, while foreigners swoon over *dôm yam găng* (shrimp soup with lemongrass). And everyone loves the spicy seafood salad (*yam tá-lair*) and deep-fried fish with ginger.

Th Chomsin Food Stalls

THAI \$

(cnr Th Chomsin & Th Naebkhardt; dishes from 30B; ☺lunch & dinner) If you're after 100% authentic eats, check out the food stalls that congregate at this popular lunch corner. Though the setting is humble, Thais are fastidious eaters and use a fork (or their fingers with a pinch of *kôw nêe-o*) to remove the meat from the bones of *gài tởt* (fried chicken) rather than putting teeth directly to flesh.

Sofitel Cafe & Tea Corner

CAFE \$\$

(1 Th Damnoen Kasem; dishes 80-150B; ☺breakfast & lunch) It is customary to pay homage to a city's grand dame hotel with a spot of tea and the Sofitel obliges with this refined tea room occupying the grounds of the former Railway Hotel. The cafe is serenaded by classical music and cooled by sea breezes, perfect for thumbing the newspaper and sipping your stimulants with an aristocratic air. There are also a few historic photos and memorabilia earning it the unlikely designation of 'museum'. The real draw, though, is the hotel's topiary garden filled with gigantic clipped shrubs depicting elephants, giraffes and geese.

Chatchai Market

THAI \$

(Th Phetkasem; ☺daylight hours; dishes from 30B) The city's day market resides in an historic building built in 1926 with a distinctive seven-eaved roof in honour of Rama VII. There are the usual market refreshments: morning vendors selling *Bah-tởng-gỏh* (Chinese-style doughnuts) and *gah-faa boh-rahn* (ancient-style coffee spiked with sweetened condensed milk); as well as all-day noodles with freshly made wontons; and the full assortment of fresh tropical fruit.

World News Coffee

CAFE \$

(130/2 Th Naresdamri; dishes 70-150B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner; @) This Starbucks-esque cafe serves baked goods and lots of different cof-

fees. You can surf the web for 50B per hour and there are magazines and newspapers to complement your first cup of the day.



Drinking & Entertainment

Drinking in Hua Hin is still stuck in the '90s: sports bars or hostess bars – and sometimes you can't tell the difference. But the onslaught of weekend Bangkok Thais has kicked up the sophistication factor. Apart from these, also consider Cicada Market in Khao Takiab (see p515).

No Name Bar

BAR

(Th Naresdamri) Past the Chinese shrine that sits on the rocky headland is this cliffside restaurant and bar that drinks in the ocean along with all the alcoholic adult beverages.

Hua Hin Brewing Company

BAR

(33 Th Naresdamri) Though there's no longer any beer brewed here, the spacious outdoor deck is a mature spot to watch the passing parade on Th Naresdamri.

Mai Tai Cocktail & Beer Garden

BAR

(33/12 Th Naresdamri) Recession-era prices are on tap at this convivial outdoor terrace made for people-watching and beer-drinking.

O'Neill's Irish Pub

IRISH BAR

(5 Th Phunsuk) Pretty authentic for being so far from the Blarney Stone, O'Neill's does cheap draught specials and live sports on several tellies.

El Murphy's Mexican Grill & Steakhouse

BAR

(25 Soi Selakam, Th Phunsuk) Every sports bar has an international gimmick and this comfy spot marries Mexico and Ireland. Come in to enjoy a tall one, the live band and an unlikely assortment of tourists and expats.

Music Room

LIVE MUSIC

(Soi Hua Hin 32, Th Phetkasem, North Hua Hin) The place to be for weekend Thais, the Music Room features live bands of every imaginable genre as well as theme parties and a local collection of celebrities.



Information

Emergency

Tourist police (☎0 3251 5995; Th Damnoen Kasem)

Internet Access

Internet access is available all over Hua Hin, in guest houses and cafes.

KEEPING UP WITH THE BANGKOK THAIS

On weekends, a different kind of tidal system occurs in Hua Hin. Bangkok professionals flow in, filling up hotels and restaurants on Th Naebkehardt, washing over the night market or crowding into nightclubs. And then come Sunday they clog the roadways heading north, obeying the pull of the upcoming work week.

Their presence is so pronounced that there is an irresistible urge to join them. And because of restaurant features on Thai TV or food magazines, everyone goes to the same places. So don your designer sunglasses and elbow your way to a table at one of these popular spots in North Hua Hin:

Sôm-dam Stand

FOOD STALL

(Th Naebkehardt; dishes 50-80B; ☺lunch) Across from Iammeuang Hotel is a *sôm-dam* stand that easily wipes out the country's supply of green papayas in one weekend. We couldn't even elbow our way to a seat before they packed up for the day.

Eighteen Below Ice Cream

ICE CREAM

(Th Naebkehardt; dishes 160B; closed Wed) At the end of the road behind Baan Talay Chine Hotel, this gourmet ice cream shop is run by a trained chef and specialises in rich and creamy flavours.

Baan Itsara

SEAFOOD

(Th Naebkehardt; dishes from 160B; ☺lunch & dinner) Overpriced in our opinion, Baan Itsara is a must-be-seen spot that does 'inter' versions of Thai seafood dishes. Squid with basil comes with pine nuts so it is more like a pesto than the traditionally spicy Thai version.

Jae Siam

NOODLES

(Th Naebkehardt; dishes 30-50B; ☺lunch & dinner) If you've lost track of the days of the week, cruise by this open-air noodle shop, next to Evergreen Hotel, where Hua Hin civil servants pack in on weekdays and Bangkok Thais come on weekends. The shop is famous for *gǎo-ay dǎe-o mǎo dǔn* (stewed pork noodles) and *gǎo-ay dǎe-o gài dǔn* (stewed chicken noodles).

Internet Resources

Tourism Hua Hin (www.tourismhuahin.com) A cursory intro to the site with a good run-down on the outlying area.

Hua Hin Observer (www.observergroup.net) An expat-published magazine available online.

Medical Services

Hospital San Paolo (☎0 3253 2576; 222 Th Phetkasem) Just south of town with emergency facilities.

Bangkok Hospital Hua Hin (☎0 3261 6800; www.bangkokhospital.com/luahin; Th Phetkasem btw Soi Hua Hin 94 & 106;) The latest outpost of the luxury hospital chain; it's in South Hua Hin.

Money

There are exchange booths and ATMs on Th Naresdamri and banks on Th Phetkasem.

Post & Telephone

Main post office (Th Damnoen Kasem) Includes the CAT office for international phone calls.

Tourist Information

TAT office (☎0 3251 3885; 39/4 Th Phetkasem; ☺8.30am-4.30pm) Staff here speak English and are quite helpful; the office is north of town near Soi Hua Hin 70.

Municipal Tourist Information Office (☎0 3251 1047; cnr Th Phetkasem & Th Damnoen Kasem; ☺8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Provides maps and information about Hua Hin. There's another branch (☎0 3252 2797; Th Naebkehardt; 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat & Sun) near the clock tower.

Travel Agencies

Tuk Tours (☎0 3251 4281; www.tuktours.com; 33/5 Th Phunsuk) Helpful, no-pressure place that can book activities and transport all around Thailand.

Getting There & Away

Air

The **airport** (www.huahinairport.com) is 6km north of town but only has charter services through **Nok Mini** (☎0 2641 4190; www.nokmini.com).

Bus

Hua Hin's long-distance **bus station** (Th Phetkasem btw Soi Hua Hin 94 & 98) is south of town and serves the following destinations:

Chiang Mai (785B, 12 hours, three daily departures)

Prachuap Khiri Khan (65B, 1½ hours)

Phuket (856B, nine hours, one nightly departure)

Surat Thani (480B, seven hours, two daily departures)

Ubon Ratchathani (1200B, 13 hours, one daily departure)

Buses to Bangkok (160B, three hours, every two hours from 8am to 9pm) also leave from a bus company's in-town **office** (Th Sasong), near the Night Market.

Ordinary buses depart from a **station** (cnr Th Phetkasem & Th Chomsin), north of the market, and destinations include **Cha-am** (50B, 30 minutes) and **Phetchaburi** (50B, 1½ hours).

Lomprayah (☎ 0 3253 3739; Th Narasdamri) offers a bus-boat combination from Hua Hin to Ko Tao (1000B, 8½ hours; one morning and one night departure).

Minivans

Minivans to Bangkok's Sai Tai Mai (Southern) bus station and Victory Monument (180B, three hours, every 30 minutes from 4am to 8pm) leave from an office on Th Naebkehardt. A direct service to Victory Monument leaves from an office on the corner of Th Phetkasem and Th Chomsin.

Train

There are frequent trains running to/from Bangkok's Hualamphong station (2nd class 212-302B, 3rd class 94-154B, four hours) and other stations on the southern railway line.

i Getting Around

Green *sǎrng-tǎa-ou* depart from the corner of Th Sasong & Th Dechanuchit, near the Night Market and travel south on Th Phetkasem to Khao Takiab (20B). Pranburi-bound buses depart from the same stop.

Túk-túk fares in Hua Hin are outrageous and start at a whopping 100B and barely budge from there. Motorcycle taxis are much more reasonable (40B to 50B) for short hops.

Motorcycles (250B to 500B per day) can be hired from shops on Th Damnoen Kasem. **Thai Rent A Car** (☎ 0 2737 8888; www.thairentacar.com) is a professional car-rental agency with competitive prices, a well-maintained fleet and hotel drop-offs.

Hua Hin to Pranburi

South of Hua Hin are a series of beaches framed by dramatic headlands that make great daytrips when Hua Hin beach feels too urban.

HAT KHAO TAO

หาดเขาเต่า

About 13km south of Hua Hin, a barely inhabited beach stretches several kilometres south from Khao Takiab to Khao Tao (Turtle Mountain). It is blissfully free of civilization: there are no high rises, no beach chairs, no sausage sellers and no horseback riders.

The mountain has a sprawling temple dedicated to almost every imaginable deity: Buddha, Khuun Yin (Chinese goddess of Mercy), Vishnu and even the Thai kings. Follow the trail toward the oceanfront to hike up to the Buddha on the hill.

To get here take a Pranburi bus from Hua Hin and ask to be dropped off at the turn-off for Khao Tao (20B); a motorcycle taxi can take you to the temple (20B). Getting back to the highway might be tricky as return transport is rare; you can always walk or flag down a ride as people are usually coming and going from the temple.

HAT SAI NOI

หาดทรายน้อย

About 20km south of Hua Hin, a scenic cove, Hat Sai Noi, drops off quickly into the sea providing a rare opportunity for deep-water swimming. Nearby are all the amenities: simple seafood restaurants and even small guest houses. For ideal seclusion, come on a weekday. The beach is south of Khao Tao on a lovely road that passes a reservoir and is lined with bougainvillea and limestone cliffs. To get here follow the same directions for Khao Tao but instruct the motorcycle taxi to take you to Hat Sai Noi (60B); getting back to the highway will be difficult but inquire at one of the restaurants for assistance.

Pranburi & Around

POP 75,571

Continuing along the highway south from Hua Hin leads to the country 'suburb' of Pranburi district, which has become the *in-the-know* coastal alternative for Bangkok Thais. Some even go so far as to call it the 'Thai Riviera'. Yet locally the fishing village and nearby beaches are known by a more humble name: **Pak Nam Pran** (mouth of the Pranburi River), designating only its geographic location.

A coastal road separates a string of small villa-style resorts from the beach and with each successive rainy season the ocean claims more sand than its fair share requiring the installation of a bulkhead along parts of the long coastline. Since the primary clientele are Thai, the disappearing beach is of minor consequence. Instead most domestic tourists come for sea views and the village's primary product: dried squid. In the mornings the squid boats dock in the river, unloading their catch and beginning the process of sun-drying. It is a pungent but interesting affair with large drying racks spread out across town.

Bordering the river is an extensive mangrove forest, protected by the **Pranburi Forest Park** (☎ 0 3262 1608; admission free). Within the park is a wooden walkway that explores the mangroves from the perspective of a mud-dweller, a sea-pine lined beach and accommodation facilities. The park also offers boat trips along the river and small canals.

The coastal road provides a pleasant trip to **Khao Kalok** (Skull Mountain), a mammoth headland that shelters a beautiful bay on the southern side. This southern beach is wide and sandy and far removed from the hubbub of Hua Hin and even from Pak Nam Pran for that matter, though it does get busy on weekends. Lazing along this stretch are several secluded boutique resorts that would be ideal for honeymooners or folks looking to 'get away from it all' without having to go too far.

The next southern bay is often called **Dolphin Bay**, because of the seasonal visit from bottlenose dolphins and finless porpoise from February to May. Sculpted, jungle-covered islands sit scenically off-shore and the beach is wide and unhindered. This area is a family favourite because the resorts are value-oriented, traffic is minimal and nightlife is non-existent. You're also a few kilometres from the northern entrance to Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park (see p524 for more information).

Sleeping & Eating

It is mainly high, high-end here but not all of the beach resorts sufficiently earn the price tag so be discerning when making online reservations for places not listed here. That said, this area has some of the best seaside boutiques in Thailand that wholeheartedly deserve a splash-out occasion.

TOP CHOICE **Away Hua Hin**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0891446833; www.away-huahin.com; south of Khao Kalok; r from 5000B; 🏠📶) A boutique resort without pretence, Away has reconstructed seven antique teak houses, many from northern Thailand, to this coastal patch of paradise and outfitted them with large cosy beds and stylish bathrooms. The affable owners, a Thai-Australian family, set a homey mood where breakfast is enjoyed at a common table in the 'big' house providing instant camaraderie with worldly friends. Some villas provide extreme privacy while others accommodate families.

La a natu Bed & Bakery

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0 3268 9941; www.laanatu.com; south of Khao Kalok; r from 5000B; 🏠📶) Turning the humble Thai rice village into a luxury experience is all the rage in the boutique hotel world but La a natu does it with a little more panache than most. The thatched roof villas growing on stilts from cultivated rice paddies have rounded modern corners and a Flintstonesque playfulness to their design. Each villa is extremely private but evocative of traditional rustic lifestyles with living quarters on the ground floor and often steep, ladder-like stairs leading to the sleeping area. And then there's the semiprivate beach right at your doorstep.

Dolphin Bay Resort

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0 3255 9333; www.dolphinbayresort.com; Dolphin Bay; r from 1500B; 🏠📶) The resort that defined Dolphin Bay as a family-friendly retreat offers a low-key holiday camp ambience with a variety of standard issue, value-oriented bungalows and apartments. The grounds are large enough for kids to roam safely, there are two large pools and the nice sandy beach is just across the street. The gang will love it.

Brassiere Beach

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0 3263 0555; www.brassierebeach.com; Dolphin Bay; r from 5000B; 🏠) A delicious combination of privacy and personality, these nine stucco villas abut the mountains of Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park and face a secluded beach, 100m from the nearest paved road. The rooms have an uncluttered Mexican-villa style, some with roof decks and most with open-air showers. Though the prude in you might mispronounce it, Brassiere Beach deserves your support.

Khao Kalok Restaurant THAI \$
(dishes 60-150B; ☺lunch & dinner) At the southern base of the mountain, this open-air restaurant provides a front-row view of the moored fishing boats. Tasty dishes, like *gaang kĕe-o wāhn* (green curry), *Blah mĕuk gà-prow* (squid stir-fried with basil) and even the standard *pàt pàk roo-am* (stir-fried vegetables) arrive at a leisurely pace.

Also recommended:

Pranburi Forest Park CAMPING GROUND \$
(☎0 32621608; Pak Nam Pran; tent site & gear rental 300B) A popular spot for 'freshy' (university freshmen) parties, the forest park has a shaded oceanfront camping ground, basic bungalows (1000/2000B for 6/12 people) and a restaurant. No fires allowed.

Pineapple Resort GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎0 81933 9930; Pak Nam Pran; r 500-600B; ☹) A little dishevelled, Pineapple's basic concrete bungalows sit about 50m from the beach but provides a cheap retreat in the land of luxury.

Palm Beach Pranburi HOTEL \$\$
(☎0 3263 1966; www.palmbeachpranburi.com; Pak Nam Pran; r from 1500B; ☹☹) A solid midranger surrounded by neighbours who think they're boutique.

The Beach House GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎08 7164 6307; Pak Nam Pran; r 500-800B; ☹☹) One of the cheapest options around, this guest house caters to young kite-boarders who allot their funds toward the sport instead of lodging.

i Getting There & Around

Pranburi is about 35km south of Hua Hin and accessible by ordinary bus from Hua Hin's Night Market (20B). You'll be dropped off on the highway where you can catch a *sŏrng-tĕa-ou* to Pak Nam Pran. There is also a minivan service from Bangkok's Victory Monument to Pranburi (180B); if you're going to Dolphin Bay (sometimes referred to as Khao Sam Roi Yot Beach), you'll have to negotiate an additional fare with the driver (usually 100B).

If you want to explore the area, you'll need to rent a motorbike as public transport isn't an option.

Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park

อุทยานแห่งชาติเขาสามร้อยยอด

Towering limestone outcrops form a rocky jigsaw-puzzled landscape at this 98-sq-km park (☎0 3282 1568; adult/child 200/100B), which means Three Hundred Mountain Peaks. There are also caves, beaches and coastal marshlands to explore for outdoor enthusiast and bird-watchers. With its proximity to Hua Hin, the park is well travelled by daytrippers and contains a mix of public conservation land and private shrimp farms, so don't come expecting remote virgin territory.

Rama IV and a large entourage of Thai and European guests came here on 18 August 1868 to see a total solar eclipse (apparently predicted by the monarch himself) and to enjoy a feast prepared by a French chef. Two months later the king died from malaria, contracted from mosquito bites inflicted here. Today the risk of malaria in the park is low, but the mosquitoes can be pesky.

The **Khao Daeng Visitors Centre** in the southern end of the park has the largest collection of tourist information and English-speaking rangers. Maps are handed out at the entrance gates.

Travel agencies in Hua Hin run daytrips. **Hua Hin Bike Tours** (☎08 1173 4469; www.huahinbiketours.com; tours 1500-2500B) offers cycling and hiking tours.

👁 Sights & Activities

The following are listed in geographic order north to south because the maps provided at the park checkpoints are often in Thai.

Tham Kaew CAVE
(ถ้ำแก้ว) Not a popular daytrippers' stop, Tham Kaew is a series of underground chambers and narrow passageways accessed by a steep scramble 128m up the mountain. Stalactites and limestone formations here glitter with calcite crystals (hence the cave's name, 'Jewel Cave') are plentiful. You can hire lamps from the booth at the footpath's entrance, and exercise caution as the path can be slippery and dangerous.

Tham Phraya Nakhon & Hat Laem Sala CAVE
(ถ้ำพระยานคร/หาดแหลมศาลา) The park's most popular attraction is this revered cave sheltering a royal *sāh-lah* (often spelt *sala*; meeting hall) built for Rama V in 1890 that is often bathed in streams of light.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Because the park is at the intersection of the East Asian and Australian migration routes, as many as 300 migratory and resident bird species have been recorded at Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, including yellow bitterns, cinnamon bitterns, purple swampheens, water rails, ruddy-breasted crakes, bronze-winged jacanas, grey herons, painted storks, whistling ducks, spotted eagles and black-headed ibises. Thung Sam Roi Yot is one of only two places in the country where the purple heron breeds.

Waterfowl are most commonly seen in the cool season. November to March are the best waterfowl-watching months. The birds come from as far as Siberia, China and northern Europe to winter here. Common places for bird-watchers are the Mangrove Centre, Khlong Khao Daeng and even some of the beaches.

Thai Birding (www.thaibirding.com) provides more in-depth information about the park's bird species and where to spot them.

The cave is accessed by a walking trail from picturesque **Hat Laem Sala**, a sandy beach flanked on three sides by limestone hills and casuarinas. The beach hosts a small visitors centre, restaurant, bungalows and camp sites. The cave trail is 450m long and is steep, rocky and at times slick so don't wear your ballet flats. Once there you'll find two large caverns with sinkholes – the meeting hall is the second of the two.

Reaching Laem Sala requires alternative travel since there is no road connection. It is reached by boat from Bang Pu (300B return), which sits beachfront from the turn-off from Tham Kaew. Alternatively you can follow the steep footpath from Bang Pu for a 20-minute hike to the beach.

Tham Sai

CAVE

(ถ้ำไทร) This cave sits at the end of a 280m hillside trail and features a large single cavern filled with stalactites and stalagmites. Be careful of steep drop-offs inside and slippery footings. Usually only the more adventurous types undertake this one. Villagers rent out lamps near the cave mouth. It is just north of Hat Sam Phraya.

Hat Sam Phraya

BEACH

(หาดสามพระยา) This shady casuarina-lined beach is about 1km long and is a pleasant stop for a swim after a sweaty hike. There is a restaurant and toilets.

Khao Daeng

HIKING

(เขาแดง) The turn-off to the trail winds through towering mountains promising a rewarding hike. The 30-minute step trail that leads to the top of Khao Daeng delivers spectacular views of limestone cliffs against a jagged coastline.

Khlong Khao Daeng

BIRDING

(คลองเขาแดง) You can hire a boat at Wat Khao Daeng for a cruise (400B, 45 minutes) along the canal in the morning or afternoon. Before heading out, chat with your prospective guide to see how well they speak English. Better guides will know the English names of common waterfowl and point them out to you.

Mangrove Walk

NATURE TRAIL

Located behind the visitors centre in the southern end of the park is a wooden boardwalk that circumnavigates a mangrove swamp popular for bird-watching and crab spotting. There are guides available for hire from the centre depending on availability and English-language ability.

Thung Sam Roi Yot

BIRDING

(ทุ่งสามร้อยยอด) The country's largest freshwater marsh is recognized as a natural treasure and provides an important habitat for songbirds and water birds, amphibians and other wetland species. It sits in the western corner of the park accessible from Hwy 4 (Th Phetkasem) at the Km275.6 marker; hold on to your entrance fee ticket to avoid having to pay again.

Sleeping & Eating

The **National parks department** (☎0 2562 0760; www.dnp.go.th/parkreserve; tent site 60-90B, bungalows 1200-1400B) hires out bungalows (sleeping up to six people) at Hat Laem Sala and at the visitors centre; advance reservations required. You can pitch a tent at campsites near the Khao Daeng viewpoint, Hat Laem Sala or Hat Sam Phraya. There are basic restaurants at all these locations.

WHERE THE ELEPHANTS ARE

Want to see herds of wild elephants enjoying an evening bath surrounded by the sounds of the jungle? Though urbanised Thailand seems hundreds of kilometres away from such a natural state, **Kuiburi National Park** (☎0 3264 6292; Hwy 3217; adult/child 200/100B), southwest of Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, shelters one of the country's largest herds of wild elephants (estimated at over 140 animals). The park provides an important habitat link between the rugged Myanmar (Burma) border and Kaeng Krachan National Park, forming one of the largest intact forest tracts in Southeast Asia. The herds can frequently be found bathing at the watering ponds near the Pa Yang substation, which is equipped with wildlife-viewing platforms.

Trekking and elephant-spotting tours include English-speaking guides and transport and can be arranged through the park headquarters.

Bungalow **accommodation** (www.dnp.th.go/parkreserve; bungalows 1800B) is available for overnight stays with advance reservations.

There are also private resorts within 4km of the park at Dolphin Bay; see Pranburi & Around (p528) for more information.

i Getting There & Away

The park is about 40km south of Hua Hin, and best visited by vehicle. There are two main entrances into the park. The turn-off for the northern entrance is at Km256 marker on Hwy 4 (Th Phetkasem). The southern entrance is off the Km286.5 marker.

If you don't have your own wheels and don't want to take a tour from Hua Hin, you can get a minivan from Bangkok's Victory Monument to Pranburi (180B) and then hire a motorcycle to tour the park independently. You can also negotiate with the minivan driver to drop you off at the entrance to the park but then you won't have transport into the park.

Prachuap Khiri Khan

ประจวบคีรีขันธ์

POP 86,870

A sleepy seaside town, Prachuap Khiri Khan feels like you've finally arrived in southern Thailand. The pace is supremely relaxed, Muslim headscarves are common and the broad bay is a tropical blue punctuated by bobbing fishing boats. Usually you have to travel to the southern Andaman to find the honeycombed limestone mountains that saddle Prachuap's scenic bays. All in all it is a slice of everything nice – pretty coastal scenery and laid-back provincial-style living.

In recent years, more and more expats have been defecting to Prachuap from the overbuilt Samui archipelago bringing with them the travellers' amenities that the town was lacking. Now it is a lot less lonely but

just as enjoyable. Attractions, with a small 'a', include climbing to a hill-top temple, taking a leisurely motorbike ride to the excellent beaches north and south of town, or just enjoying some of Thailand's freshest (and cheapest) seafood.

Prachuap Khiri Khan, and specifically Ao Manao, was one of seven points on the gulf coast where Japanese troops landed on 8 December 1941 during their invasion of Thailand. Several street names around town commemorate the skirmish that ensued afterwards: Phithak Chat (Defend Country), Salachip (Sacrifice Life) and Suseuk (Fight Battle).

o Sights & Activities

Khao Chong Krajok

VIEWPOINT

(เขาช่องกระจอก) At the northern end of town, Khao Chong Krajok ('Mirror Tunnel Mountain', so named for the mountain-side hole that seemingly reflects the sky) provides a beloved Prachuap tradition: climbing to the top, dodging ill-behaved monkeys and enjoying a cascading view of a curlicue coastline. A long flight of stairs soiled by the partly wild monkeys leads to a mountain-top **temple** established by Rama VI. From here there are perfect views of the town and the bay and even the border with Myanmar, just 11km away. Don't bring food, drink or plastic bags with you as the monkeys will assume it is a prize worth nipping.

Ao Prachuap

BAY

(อ่าวประจวบ) The town's crowning feature is Ao Prachuap (Prachuap Bay), a gracefully curving bay outlined by an oceanfront esplanade. In the cool hours of the morning and evening, locals run, shuffle or promenade

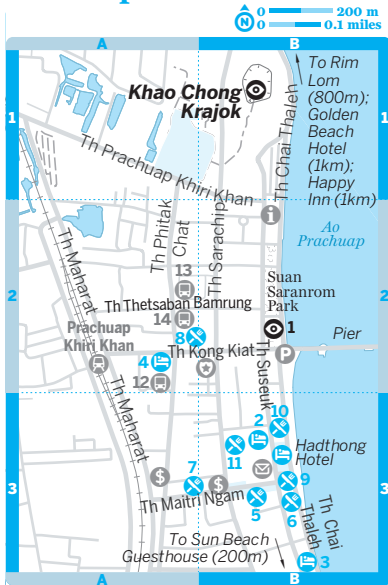
along this route enjoying the ocean breezes and sea music. On Friday and Saturday evenings, the esplanade hosts a **Walking Street market** (Th Chai Thaleh; ☞from 5pm), selling food, souvenirs and clothes.

North of Khao Chong Krajok, just over the bridge, the bay stretches peacefully to a toothy mountain scraper with less commercial activity than its in-town counterpart. There is a nice sandy beach here though it does lack in privacy due to its proximity to passing motorists. Nonetheless, weekenders Thais often visit because there is no bulkhead and it is a pleasant beachcombing spot. At the far northern end is a traditional fishing village decorated with colourful wooden trawlers and a visible sense of hard work and a hand-made life.

Wat Aq Noi

TEMPLE
(วัดอานอย) From Ao Prachuap, follow the coastal road 8km north as it skirts through the fishing village and flower-filled lanes to reach this beautiful teak **temple** that straddles two bays (Ao Noi and Ao Khan Kradai). Limestone mountains pose photogenically in the background, while a dramatic nine-headed naga protects the temple's exterior. Inside are unique bas-relief murals depicting the *jataka* stories (Buddha's previous lives).

Prachuap Khiri Khan



The temple grounds are forested with a variety of fruit trees (jackfruit, pomegranate, mango and rose apple) and a lotus pond filled with ravenous fish, eager to be feed by merit-makers. You'll catch an unpleasant odour nearby indicating that the temple is in the business of raising swiftlets for the profitable edible bird's nest industry; don't try to steal any nests or eggs as the fine and punishment (five years' imprisonment and 500,000B) are severe.

A craggy limestone mountain (Khao Khan Kradai) shelters the temple from the coast and contains a locally famous cave temple, known as **Tham Phra Nawn** (Sleeping Buddha Cave). The cave is accessible via a concrete trail that leads up and around the side of the hill providing scenic views of Ao Khan Kradai and the foothills beyond. It is blissfully quiet and the forested hill is dotted with blooming cactus clinging to the craggy rocks. Inside the cave is a small cavern leading to a larger one that contains the eponymous reclining Buddha. If you have a torch (flashlight) you can proceed to a larger second chamber also containing Buddha images.

Prachuap Khiri Khan

☉ Top Sights

Khao Chong Krajok..... B1

☉ Sights

1 Weekend Walking
Street/Market..... B2

🏠 Sleeping

2 Maggie's Homestay..... B3
3 Prachuap Beach Hotel..... B3
4 Yuttichai Hotel..... A2

🍴 Eating

5 Day Market..... B3
6 Ma Prow..... B3
7 Muslim Chicken Stall..... A3
8 Night Market..... A2
9 Ning's Guesthouse Restaurant..... B3
10 Phloen Samut..... B3
11 Suan Krua..... B3

🚗 Transport

12 Air-con Buses to Hua Hin,
Cha-am, Phetchaburi &
Bangkok..... A2
13 Minivans to Ban Krut, Bang
Saphan Yai & Chumphon..... A2
14 Minivans to Hua Hin &
Bangkok..... A2

Ao Manao

(อำเภอมาโนการ) On weekends, locals head to Ao Manao, 4km south of town, an island-dotted bay ringed by a clean sandy beach. It is within Wing 5 of a Thai air-force base and each and every week the beach is given a military-grade clean up. There are the usual beach amenities: a restaurant and rentable beach chairs, umbrellas and inner tubes. En route to the beach you'll pass Thailand's Top Guns relaxing on a nearby golf course and driving range. You enter the base through a checkpoint on Th Suseuk from town; you may need to show your passport. The beach closes at 8pm.

 Sleeping

You can always find a cosy place to stay near the sea as many of the oceanfront residences rent out rooms. Just cruise down Th Chai Thaleh and see who has a vacancy sign out. In recent years, Prachuap has even gained a few full-fledged guest houses.

IN TOWN**Maggie's Homestay**

GUEST HOUSE \$

(๖08 7597 9720; 5 Soi Tampramuk; r 150-600B; ๙@) In the old-fashioned backpacker tradition, lovely owner Maggie oversees an eclectic collection of travellers who call her house home. Simple rooms occupy a converted house with a shady garden and shared kitchen facilities.

Yuttichai Hotel

GUEST HOUSE \$

(๖0 3261 1055; 115 Th Kong Kiat; r 160-400B; ๙@) One of Prachuap's original guest houses, Yuttichai has simple budget rooms (with cold water showers) close to the train station. The cheapest rooms share bathrooms. If you

SWIMMING

don't stay here, at least stop by their old-style Thai-Chinese cafe popular with the 'men in brown' (police).

Sun Beach Guesthouse

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(๖0 3260 4770; www.sunbeach-guesthouse.com; 160 Th Chai Thaleh; r 700-1000B; ๙๙) With hotel amenities and guest-house hospitality, Sun Beach is a superb midranger. Its neoclassical styling and bright-yellow paint liven things up, while the rooms are super-clean and come with large verandahs.

Prachuap Beach Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(๖0 3260 1288; 123 Th Suseuk; r 650-1100B; ๙๙) Crisp white linens and splashy accent walls add a bit of flair to this multistorey number. One side has fabulous sea views, while the other has decent, though not exciting, mountain views.

OUT OF TOWN**TOP CHOICE** **Aow Noi Sea View**

HOTEL \$\$

(๖0 3260 4440; www.aownoiseaview.com; Ao Noi; r 600-800B; ๙) North of town, this three-storey hotel is Prachuap's best beachfront option. With pretty Ao Noi beach at your doorstep, you'll enjoy sea breezes, rooms with large bathrooms and a homey ambience complete with linen drying on the line outside.

Happy Inn

GUEST HOUSE \$

(๖0 3260 2082; 149-151 Th Suanon; r 250-500B) About 1km north of town, these simple bungalows (with cold-water showers) face each other along a brick drive that ends next to a pleasant forested canal. You are right across the road from Ao Prachuap's beach and the staff are sweet and soft-spoken.

DETOUR: DAN SINGKHON BORDER MARKET

A mere 12km southwest of Prachuap Khiri Khan is the Burmese border town of Dan Singkhon. Once a strategic military point, Dan Singkhon now hosts a lively border market beloved by locals for its many bargains.

Beginning at dawn on Saturday mornings, Burmese appear from a bend in the road just beyond the checkpoint, pushing handcarts piled high with the usual trinkets, market goods and plants. Short-term tourists might be befuddled as to what will fit in a suitcase but locals and expats make frequent buying trips here for orchids, the market's speciality, and hardwood furniture. Even if you come to window-shop, the market has a festive vibe, with music blaring, colourful umbrellas lining the road and thatched 'sales booths' hidden under palms. You'll need to arrive well before noon to enjoy it, as the market closes at midday.

To get to Dan Singkhon from Prachuap Khiri Khan with your own vehicle, head south on Hwy 4. After several kilometres you'll see a sign for Dan Singkhon; from here you'll head west about 15km before reaching the border.

Golden Beach Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎0 3260 1626; www.goldenbeachprachuap.com; 113-115 Th Suanson; r 500-1200B; 🏠📶) Near Happy Inn, Golden Beach is a comfortable midrange option across from Ao Prachuap's beach. Some rooms have generous picture windows providing a marine sleeping companion.

Eating

Restaurants in Prachuap are cheap and tasty and Western food is popping up at little restaurants on Th Chai Thaleh. The **day market** (Th Maitri Ngam; ☀️daylight hours) is the place to get pineapples fresh from the orchards; ask the vendor to cut it for you. Across the street is a **Muslim chicken stall** (Th Maitri Ngam; dishes 40-60B; 🍴dinner) that does some of the crispiest fried chicken in the country. The **night market** (Th Kong Kiat; 🕒5-9pm) is small and has the usual stir-fry stalls.

TOP CHOICE Rim Lom

SEAFOOD \$\$

(5 Th Suanson; dishes 120-220B; 🍴lunch & dinner) We still dream about this meal on a bright sunny day surrounded by lunching civil servants. The *pàt pǒng gà-rèe Boo* (crab curry) comes with big chunks of sweet crab meat and the *yam ta-lair* (seafood salad) is spicy, zesty and festooned with seafood.

Phloen Samut

SEAFOOD \$\$

(44 Th Chai Thaleh; dishes 80-200B; 🍴lunch & dinner) One of a few seafood restaurants along the promenade, Phloen Samut is conveniently located in town though locals complain that the food needs improvement.

Ma Prow

INTERNATIONAL \$\$

(48 Th Chai Thaleh; dishes 80-200B; 🍴lunch & dinner) An airy wooden pavilion across from the beach, Ma Prow cooks up excellent *Blah sǎm-lee dàat dee-o* (a local specialty of whole sun-dried cotton fish that is fried and served with mango salad). The tamarind fish dish is another favourite with foreigners and locals.

Ning's Guesthouse Restaurant

INTERNATIONAL \$

(Th Chai Thaleh; dishes 40-120B; 🍴breakfast, lunch & dinner) Decorated in a playful Rasta-style mood, Ning is an early riser serving Western breakfasts before anyone else is awake. She continues cooking through the day too.

Suan Krua

VEGETARIAN \$

(Soi Tampramuk; dishes 30-60B; 🍴lunch) Next door to Maggie's Homestay, this vegetar-

ian restaurant cooks fast and furiously for a limited time only and then it closes until the next day. Be here promptly and hungrily.

Information

Bangkok Bank (cnr Th Maitri Ngam & Th Sarachip)

Police station (Th Kong Kiat) Just west of Th Sarachip.

Post office (cnr Th Maitri Ngam & Th Suseuk)

Thai Farmers Bank (Th Phitak Chat) Just north of Th Maitri Ngam.

Tourist office (☎0 3261 1491; Th Chai Thaleh; 🕒8.30am-4.30pm) At the northern end of town. The staff speak English and are very helpful.

Getting There & Away

There are hourly air-conditioned buses that leave from Th Phitak Chat to the following destinations:

Bangkok (170B, five hours)

Cha-am (100B, two hours)

Hua Hin (100B, 1½ hours)

Phetchaburi (140B, three hours)

Minivans leave from the corner of Th Thetsaban Bamrung and Th Phitak Chat to the following destinations:

Bangkok (250B)

Ban Krut (70B, one hour)

Bang Saphan Yai (80B, 1½ hours)

Chumphon (180B, 3½ hours)

Hua Hin (80B)

Long-distance buses to southern destinations (such as Phuket and Krabi) stop at the new bus station, 2km northwest of town on the main highway; motorcycle taxis will take you for 40B to 50B.

The train station is on Th Maharat; there are frequent services to/from Bangkok (1st class 768B, 2nd class 210-425B, 3rd class 168B; six hours).

Getting Around

Prachuap is small enough to get around on foot, but you can hop on a motorcycle taxi around town for 20B to 30B. To reach outlying destinations, Ao Noi and Ao Manao it is 100B to 150B.

You can hire motorbikes for 250B per day. The roads in the area are very good and it's a great way to see the surrounding beaches.

Ban Krut & Bang Saphan Yai

POP 4275/ 68,344

What a nice surprise to find these lovely low-key beaches (80km to 100km south of Prachuap Khiri Khan, respectively) so close to civilization but so bucolic. Dusk falls softly through the coconut trees and the sea is a crystalline blue lapping at a long sandy coastline. No high-rises, no late-night discos, and no speeding traffic to distract you from a serious regimen of reading, swimming, eating and biking.

Though both beaches are pleasantly subdued, they are also well known by Thais and Ban Krut, in particular, hosts bus tours as well as weekend families. During the week you'll have the beaches largely to yourself and a few long-tail boats.

Check out the websites [Ban Krut Info](http://www.bankrutinfo.com) (www.bankrutinfo.com) and [Bang Saphan Guide](http://www.bangsaphanguide.com) (www.bangsaphanguide.com) for local information on the area.

Ban Krut is a divided into two beaches by a temple-topped headland. To the north is **Hat Sai Kaew**, which is remote and private with only a few resorts in between a lot of jungle. To the south is **Hat Ban Krut**, with a beachfront road and a string of bungalow-style resorts and restaurants on the interior side of the road. Both are golden-sand beaches with clear, calm water but Hat Ban Krut is slightly more social and easier to get around without private transport.

Bang Saphan Yai, 20km south of Ban Krut, fits that most famous beach cliché: It is Thailand 15 years ago before pool villas and package tourists pushed out all the beach bums. Once you settle into a simple beachfront hut, you probably won't need shoes and the days will just melt away. Islands off the coast, including **Ko Thalu** and **Ko Sing**, offer good snorkelling and diving from the end of January to mid-May.

Sleeping & Eating

Ban Krut

You'll struggle to find true budget options here, but if you visit on a weekday you should secure a discount. In Hat Ban Krut, bicycles (100B per day) and motorcycles (300B per day) can be hired to run errands in town, and most accommodation options arrange snorkelling trips to nearby islands. If you stay in Hat Sai Kaew you'll need private transport.



Proud Thai Beach

Resort

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(☎08 9682 4484; www.proudthairesort.com; Hat Ban Krut; r 700-1200B; ☹) Well-maintained bungalows in a flower-filled garden come with porches and morning coffee delivered by the affable owner.

NaNa Chart Baan Kruit

HOTEL \$\$

(☎0 3269 5525; www.thailandbeach.com; Hat Sai Kaew; dm 490B, r 800-2600B; ☹☹) Technically it is a hostel, but NaNa Chart easily qualifies as a resort with a variety of bungalows on a barely inhabited beach. The cheapest are wooden huts with shared bathroom, and the ritzy beachfront ones have most of the mod-cons. The resort caters to large groups so expect some company. Hostel members (200B for three-year membership) receive discounted rates.

Bayview Beach Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎0 3269 5566; www.bayviewbeachresort.com; Hat Sai Kaew; r 1700-4800B; ☹☹) A great choice for families, Bayview has handsome bungalows with large verandahs amid shady grounds. There's a beachside pool and a kid-friendly wading pool as well as a small playground. The resort also has meeting facilities for groups and conventions.

Kasama's Pizza

PIZZERIA \$\$

(Hat Ban Krut; dishes from 150B; ☺lunch & dinner) An expats' favourite, this open-air spot near the main road to town does praiseworthy New York-style pizzas in coconut territory.

Bang Saphan Yai

The beach is 6km south of the town of Bang Saphan Yai. Accommodation is a mix of high-end pool villas on the south side of Why Not Bar and basic beach huts to the north.

Roytawan

GUEST HOUSE \$

(r from 300B, ☺) Smack dab on the beach, this bare-bones operation is run by a sweet local family. The bungalows provide basic shelter and the resident roosters kindly sleep until daybreak. The restaurant is fab too. If you continue north from here you'll find similar set-ups.

Patty Hut

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 6171 1907; r 300-700B; ☹) This funky spot behind the Coral Hotel is 300m from the beach. It is a collection of wooden bungalows ranging from simple to simpler.

Suan Luang Resort

GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎ 0 3281 7031; www.suanluang.com; bungalows 480-680B; 📍) The most professional of the guest houses, Suan Luang is run by a friendly family and has wooden bungalows around an interior garden. You're 700m from the beach, though. The excellent restaurant serves Thai and French food, and there are day trips to waterfalls and parks on offer.

Coral Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎ 0 3281 7121; www.coral-hotel.com; r 1525-5580B; 📍@📍) This upmarket hotel is right on the beach and has all the resort amenities, including organised diving and snorkelling tours. The rooms probably don't deserve to be priced this high but competition in this category is low.

Getting There & Around

Because public transport around here is either nonexistent or limited; be sure to take a bus that stops in town instead of on the highway, an inconvenient and expensive distance from the beaches. When booking transport, don't confuse Bang Saphan Yai with Bang Saphan Noi, which is a fisherman's village 15km further south.

From Bangkok's Southern (Sai Tai Mai) station buses go to Ban Krut (275B, departs 12.30pm, six hours) and Bang Saphan Yai (275B, hourly, six hours); in Bangkok, use **Bangsaphan Tour** (☎ 08 7829 7752).

Frequent minivans run from Prachuap Khiri Khan to Ban Krut (70B) and Bang Saphan Yai (80B).

Many seasoned visitors prefer to take the train for closer proximity to the beaches. There are several daily options but the sprinter train (special express No 43) is one of the fastest. It leaves Bangkok's Hua Lamphong station at 8am and arrives in Ban Krut (445B) at 12.45pm and Bang Saphan Yai (450B) at 1pm. You can also hop on an afternoon train to Chumphon with plenty of time to spare before the ferry to Ko Tao.

A motorcycle taxi from town to the beaches should cost 40B to 70B. Talk to your hotel or guest house about arranging transport back to town for your onward travel.

Chumphon

ชุมพร

POP 55,835

Chumphon is a transit town funnelling travellers to and from Ko Tao or westward to Ranong or Phuket.

While there's not a lot to do while you wait, the surrounding beaches are good places to step off the backpacker bandwagon for a few days. **Hat Thung Wua Laen** (15km

north of town) is a pretty beach with easy public transport to Chumphon and plenty of traveller amenities.

For a transit hub, Chumphon is surprisingly unconsolidated. You'll need to rely on the travel agencies (p533) to book tickets, provide timetables and point you to the right bus stop; fortunately agents in Chumphon are a dedicated lot.

Festivals & Events

Chumphon Marine Festival

CULTURAL

From mid-March to the end of April, Hat Thung Wua Laen hosts a variety of events including folk-art exhibits, shadow-puppet performances and a food display.

Chumphon Traditional Boat Race

CULTURAL

To mark the end of Buddhist Lent in October (Ork Phansaa), traditional long-tail boats race each other on the Mae Nam Lang Suan (Lang Suan River), about 60km south of Chumphon. Other merit-making activities coincide with the festival.

Sleeping

Since most people overnighting in Chumphon are backpackers, accommodation is priced accordingly.

In Town

TOP CHOICE Suda Guest House

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎ 0 7750 4366; 8 Soi Bangkok Bank; r 230-500B; 📍) Suda, the friendly English-speaking owner, maintains her impeccable standards in six rooms with wooden floors and a few nice touches that you wouldn't expect for the price. It's very popular so phone ahead.

San Tavee New Rest House

GUEST HOUSE \$

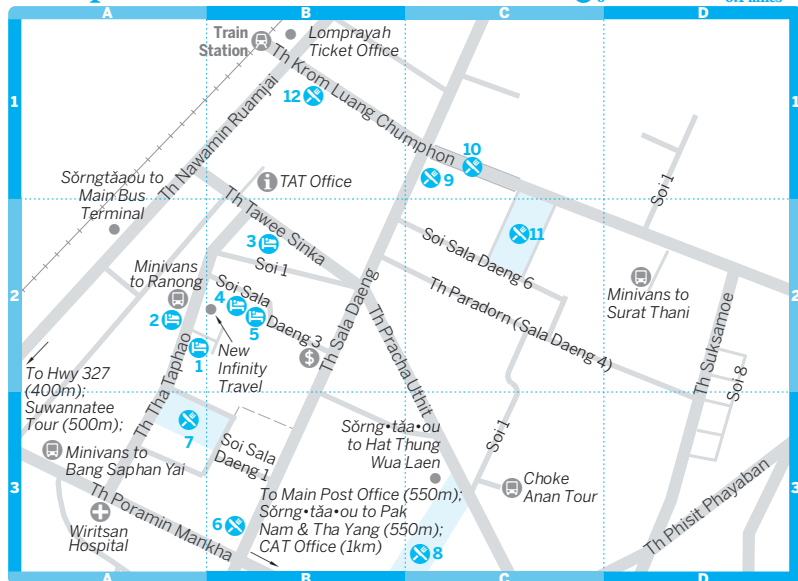
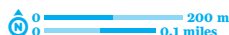
(☎ 0 7750 2147; 4 Soi Bangkok Bank; r 200-300B) If Suda's, two doors down is full, check the four rooms here. They're small but clean, and have fans and shared bathroom.

Farang Bar

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎ 0 7750 1003; 69/36 Th Tha Taphao; r 150-300B; @) A backpacker dive, Farang Bar has ramshackle rooms next door to its bar (naturally) catering mainly to travellers who get deposited here by buses from Bangkok's Th Khao San. Day-use showers (20B) decorated in round pebbles give an unexpected (and unintentional, we're sure) spa-like feel. The restaurant isn't worth bothering about, though.

Chumphon



Chumphon

Sleeping

- 1 Chumphon Gardens Hotel..... A2
 2 Farang Bar A2
 3 Morakot Hotel B2
 4 San Tavee New Rest House B2
 5 Suda Guest House B2

Eating

- 6 Ban Yang Na B3

- 7 Day Market A3
 8 Day Market C3
 9 Fame Restaurant C1
 Khanom Jeen Restaurant (see 9)
 10 Night Market C1
 11 Ocean Shopping Mall C2
 12 Papa Seafood B1

Morakot Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 07750 2999; 102-112 Th Tawee Sinka; r 800-950B; ♿) The multistorey lime-green building has recently received a fresh upgrade making it a solid midrange choice for provincial VIPs.

Chumphon Gardens Hotel

HOTEL \$

(☎ 07750 6888; 66/1 Th Tha Taphao; r 500B; ♿) Spacious rooms including cable TV are a great distraction while you hang around and wait.

Out of Town
**Chumphon Cabana Resort
 & Diving Centre**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 07756 0245; www.cabana.co.th; Hat Thung Wua Laen; r 1800-2700B; ♿) Though the rooms

are in need of an upgrade, Chumphon Cabana has done a great job upgrading its environmental profile. Inspired by the King's environmental sustainability speech, the owner reconfigured the resort to look to the past for instructions on how to be green. The grounds are devoted to raising the resort's own food with rice fields, hydroponic vegetable gardens and a chicken farm. Waste water is recycled through water-hyacinth ponds. And their efforts are used to instruct others.

If you don't stay here, at least enjoy some homegrown food at **Rabieng Talay**, the resort's affiliated restaurant.

View Resort

(Hat Thung Wua Laen, r 650-1000B; ☎) The nicest of a few simple bungalow operations on Hat Thung Wua Laen.

BUNGALOWS

MT Resort

(☎0 7755 8153; www.mtresort-chumphon.com; Hat Tummakam Noi; r 950-1500B; ☎) This friendly spot on a quiet beach beside the Lomprayah ferry pier is a good place to break your journey before or after Ko Tao. Free kayaks are provided to explore offshore islands and the mangroves of the nearby Mu Ko Chumphon National Park. Call to organise a transfer from Chumphon.

HOTEL \$\$

**Eating & Drinking**

Chumphon's **night market** (Th Krom Luang Chumphon) is excellent, with a huge variety of food options and good people-watching. There are two **day markets** (Th Tha Taphao & Th Pracha Uthit).

Khanom Jeen Restaurant

(Th Sala Daeng; dishes 60B; ☺breakfast & lunch) Next to Fame Restaurant, this hole-in-the-wall eatery is locally famous for its spicy bowls of *kà-nòm jeen* (rice noodles served with a spicy fish sauce). Add your own touch with condiments of holy basil, sliced cucumber and pickled vegetables.

THAI \$

Ban Yang Na

(Th Sala Daeng; dishes from 40B; ☺breakfast & lunch; ☎) This air-conditioned cafe provides a nice retreat from the heat plus the usual caffeine and bakery treats.

CAFE \$

Papa Seafood

(2-2/1 Th Krom Luang Chumphon; dishes 80-200B; ☺lunch & dinner) The food (mainly seafood, obviously) is good, without being exceptional, but it's a popular local hang-out. Next door is Papa 2000 where you can dance off dinner.

SEAFOOD \$\$

Fame Restaurant

(188/20 Th Sala Daeng; dishes 80-220B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) A farang (foreigner) depot, Fame does a little bit of everything; cooks up Western breakfasts and Thai stir-fries, books ferry tickets and rents out day-use showers. It's open from before the crack of dawn until late at night.

INTERNATIONAL \$

Ocean Shopping Mall

(off of Th Sala Daeng; dishes 150-250B; ☺lunch & dinner) It isn't a culinary destination but Chumphon's shopping mall has air-con and

INTERNATIONAL \$\$

chain restaurants for cool and convenient layover noshing.

i Information

There are banks along Th Sala Daeng with exchange facilities and ATMs.

Bangkok Bank (Th Sala Daeng) Has an ATM.

CAT office (Th Poramin Mankha) About 1km east of the post office.

Main post office (Th Poramin Mankha) In the southeastern part of town.

New Infinity Travel (☎0 7757 0176; 68/2 Th Tha Taphao; ☺8am-10pm; @) A great travel agency with knowledgeable and friendly staff; they'll also sell you paperbacks and rent you one of four rooms.

TAT (☎0 7750 1831; 111/11-12 Th Tawee Sinkha; ☺9am-4.30pm) Hands-out maps and brochures but not always up-to-date on transport information.

Wiratsin Hospital (☎0 7750 3238; Th Poramin Mankha) Privately owned; handles emergencies.

i Getting There & Away**Air**

Solar Air (☎0 7755 8212; www.solarair.co.th) flies to Bangkok (once daily, one hour, 2900B).

Boat

You have many boat options for getting to Ko Tao (p571), though departure times are limited to mainly morning and night. Most ticket prices include pier transfer. If you buy a combination ticket, make sure you have a ticket for both the bus and the boat.

Slow boat (250B, six hours, midnight) – the cheapest, slowest and most scenic option as everyone stretches out on the open deck of the fishing boat with the stars twinkling overhead. This boat doesn't run in rough seas or inclement weather.

Car ferry (350B, six hours, 11pm Mon-Sun) – a more comfortable ride with bunk or mattress options available on board.

Songserm express boat (450B, three hours, 7am) – faster, morning option leaving from Tha Talaysub, about 10km from town.

Lomprayah catamaran (600B, 1¼ hours, 7am & 1pm) – a popular bus-boat combination that leaves from Tha Tummakam, 25km from town; the ticket office is beside Chumphon train station.

Bus

The main bus terminal is on the highway, an inconvenient 16km from Chumphon. To get there you can catch a *sǎrng-tǎa-ou* (50B) from Th Nawamin Ruamjai. You'll have to haggle with the

opportunistic taxi drivers for night transit to/from the station; no matter what they tell you, it shouldn't cost more than 200B.

There are several in-town bus stops to save you a trip out to the main bus station. **Choke Anan Tour** (☎0 7751 1757; soi off of Th Pracha Uthit), in the centre of town, has daily departures to the following destinations:

Bangkok's Southern (Sai Tai Mai) station (375B to 550B, eight hours, five departures)

Hat Yai (370B; seven hours; four departures)

Phuket (320B; 3½ hours; four departures)

Ranong (320B; two hours; four departures)

Suwannee Tour (☎0 7750 4901), 700m southeast of train station road, serves the following destinations:

Bangkok's Southern (Sai Tai Mai) station (270B to 405B 2nd class-VIP buses, three departures)

Cha-am (175B)

Hua Hin (170B)

Phetchaburi (205B)

Prachuap Khiri Khan (120B)

Minivan companies are numerous and depart from individual offices throughout town (see the Chumphon map):

Surat Thani (170B, three hours, every hour) Departs from an unnamed soi on Th Krom Luang Chumphon; the soi is east of an optical shop.

Bang Saphan Yai (120B, two hours, two afternoon departures) Leaves from Th Poramin Mankha, near the hospital.

Ranong (120B, 2½ hours, every hour 7am to 3pm) Departs from Th Tha Taphao; arrives at Ranong bus station (not in the town).

Train

There are frequent services to/from Bangkok (2nd class 292B to 382B, 3rd class 235B, 7½ hours). Overnight sleepers range from 440B to 770B.

Southbound rapid and express trains – the only trains with 1st and 2nd class – are less frequent and can be difficult to book out of Chumphon from November to February.

i Getting Around

Sǎrng-tǎa-ou and motorcycle taxis around town cost 40B and 20B respectively per trip. *Sǎrng-tǎa-ou* to Hat Thung Wua Laen cost 30B.

Motorcycles can be rented at travel agencies and guest houses for 200B to 250B per day. Car hire costs around 1500B per day from travel agencies.

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