

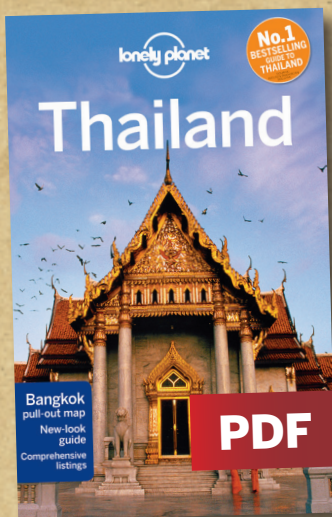
Thailand

Ko Chang & Eastern Seaboard (Chapter)

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Coverage includes: Si Racha, Ko Si Chang, Pattaya, Rayong & Ban Phe, Ko Samet, Chanthaburi, Ko Wai, Ko Mak, and Ko Kut.

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Ko Chang & Eastern Seaboard

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Why Go?

Bangkok Thais have long escaped the urban grind with weekend escapes to the eastern seaboard. Some of the country's first beach resorts sprang up here, starting a trend that has been duplicated wherever sand meets sea. As the country became industrialised, only a few, like Ko Samet beaches, remain spectacular specimens within reach of the capital. Further afield, Ko Chang and its sister islands offer the best 'tropical' ambience in the region but expect crowds.

Just beyond the foothills and the curving coastline is Cambodia, and the east coast provides a convenient, cultural link between the two countries. Many of the mainland Thai towns were at some point occupied by the French during the shifting border days of the colonial era. Migrating travellers who take the time to explore these lesser-known spots will find remnants of Old Siam, tasty market meals and an easygoing prosperity that defines ordinary Thai life.

When to Go

The best time to visit is at the end of the rainy season (usually around November) but before the start of high season (December to March). The weather is cool, the landscape is green and rates are reasonable. Peak season on Ko Chang is during the Christmas and New Year holiday period. Crowds thin in March but this is the start of the hot season.

The rainy season runs from May to October. Some businesses on Ko Chang close for the season and the nearby islands of Ko Wai, Ko Mak and Ko Kut shut completely. Your best monsoon bet is Ko Samet, which is relatively drier.

Ko Chang & Eastern Seaboard Highlights

- 1 Beachcombing and jungle trekking on **Ko Chang** (p218)
- 2 Floating the day away on the crystalline waters of **Ko Kut** (p230)
- 3 Swimming with the fishes in the gin-clear coves of **Ko Wai** (p228)
- 4 Cove-hopping on pretty **Ko Samet** (p205), so close to Bangkok but so far away
- 5 Strolling the old city and watching the gem traders in **Chanthaburi** (p210)
- 6 Running errands with the Thai housewives in the day markets of **Trat** (p213)
- 7 Avoiding Bangkok's hustle and bustle with an alternative layover in **Si Racha** (p194) and a day trip to **Ko Si Chang** (p196)
- 8 Admiring the modern masterpiece of Pattaya's **Sanctuary of Truth** (p198), an elaborately carved testament to the artistry of Buddhism and Hinduism
- 9 Dining on seafood beside the sea everywhere, the primary reason Thais travel to the beach





CAMBODIA

CAMBODIA

CHANTHABURI

TRAT

Sa Kaew

Wathana Nakhon

Ang Sila

Non Mak Mun

Sai Yoi

Huay Jot

Aranya Prathet

Poipet

Khao Chakan

Sai Diaw

Non Sao-Eh

Sisophon

Khao Takrup
(660m)

Khlong Hat

Wang Mai

Khao Daeng

Thun Khanan

Tamun

Khao Soi
Dao Nua
(1566m)

Pung Ngon

Ban Pakard

Pong Nam Ron

Takra

Psar Pruham

Nong Chek Soi
Khao Chamao/
Khao Wong
National Park

Khao Khitchakut
National Park

Si Yaek
Kong Din

Pailin

Nong Khla

Makham

Ban Pa-Ah

Chang Thuu

Laem Sadet

Tha Mai

Ta Chalap

Chak Yai

Khlung

Nong Sil

Pong

Dan Chumpon

Laem Singh

Laem Ko Proet

Tha Chot

Trat

Bang Kradan

Laem Muang

Ban Noen

Sung

Laem Ngop

Tha Sen

Ko Chang

Laem Sok

Ko Wai

Mu Ko Chang
National Marine
Park

Mai Rut

Ko Rayang

Ko Kradat

Ko Mak

Ko Mai Si

Ko Kut

Khlong Yai

Hat Lek

Krong Koh Kong

Si Racha

POP 68,292

ศรีราชา

A subdued seaside town, Si Racha is a mix of fishing-village roots and modern industry. Waterfront condo towers eclipse a labyrinth of rickety piers and the cargo ships docking at the Laem Chabang port share the shipping channels with simple, multicoloured fishing boats.

Thai towns, especially those with a modern veneer, are adept at disguising themselves to look like every other Thai town. In Si Racha's case, you need a bit of backstory to know that the many Japanese restaurants in town are catering to the international workforce of the nearby Japanese car manufacturers, and the BMWs that are cruising the streets indicate that those too are being produced nearby. In fact, surrounding the Laem Chabang port, Thailand's busiest deep-water port, is a host of industrial factories, petrochemical facilities and chemical plants – the muscle of the Thai manufacturing economy. As a result there's money in this town: the new municipal building is landscaped like a resort and the health park is impeccably maintained.

From a tourism perspective, Si Racha is attractive for what it doesn't have; there are

no guest houses, girlie bars or traffic jams. It is also an easy commute to Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi airport if you're looking for a quiet and untouristed place to layover.

Sights

Si Racha's attractions are limited, but the town makes for a pleasant stroll.

Ko Loi

ISLAND

This small rocky island is connected to the mainland by a long jetty at the northern end of Si Racha's waterfront and lauded as a local highlight. It has a festival atmosphere centred around a **Thai-Chinese temple** (☀daylight hrs), decorated by a couple of giant ponds with turtles of every size, from tiny hatchlings to seen-it-all-before seniors. This is also where you can catch the boat to off-shore Ko Si Chang.

Health Park

GARDEN

The town's waterfront Health Park is possibly one of the best-maintained municipal parks in the country. There are sea breezes, a playground, shady coffee shop with wi-fi, a jogging track and a lot of evening activity.

Sleeping

The most authentic (read: basic) places to stay are the wooden hotels on the piers.

COCK SAUCE BY ANY OTHER NAME

Judging by the phenomenal popularity of Sriracha Hot Chili sauce in the USA, you'd expect the eponymous town to be a veritable sauce temple. But no one in the town of Si Racha seems to know much about the sauce, much less that US haute chefs are using it on everything from cocktails to marinades and that food magazines, like *Bon Appetit*, are profiling it alongside truffle oil as a must-have condiment. (Curiously the culinary world also mispronounces the name of the sauce: Sriracha, an alternative spelling of 'Si Racha', is pronounced 'see-rach-ah' not 'sir-rach-ah'.)

There's a good explanation for all this: the stuff sold in the US was actually invented on home soil. A Vietnamese immigrant living in a suburb of Los Angeles concocted a chilli sauce to accompany noodles based on his memory of Vietnamese hot sauces. His first batches were sold out of his car but eventually his business grew into the Huy Fong Foods company.

Today the company's distinctive rooster logo bottles are distributed in the US and Australia, but not in any Asian countries, according to a company spokesperson. But every now and then you might spot it at a Thai noodle shop. How it is this US-born, Thai-named, Vietnamese-inspired sauce got here, the Huy Fong Foods company does not know.

But that doesn't mean Thailand doesn't have its own version of a vinegar-based chilli sauce (*nâm prik sêe rah-chah*). In fact, many believe that the condiment must have originated in Si Racha and then migrated across Asia to undergo various permutations. In Thailand, Si Racha-style sauces, including such popular brands as Golden Mountain or Sriraja Panich, are used with *kài jee-o* (omelette) and *hõy tõrt* (fried mussel omelette) and tend to be more homogenous and of a thinner consistency than the rooster brand.

Siriwatana Hotel

HOTEL \$

(☑) 0 3831 1037; Soi Siriwatana, Th Jermjompol; r 200B) This wooden stilt hotel sits above the sea – in fact, you can look straight through the squat toilet's hole to the ocean. It's simple, but the basic rooms are cheap.

Samchai

HOTEL \$

(☑) 0 3831 1800; Soi 10, Th Jermjompol; r 300B) Look for the sign that says 'Hotel' and you'll find another wooden pier hotel that creeps up the comfort scale. It feels a bit like a port: cement floors with yellow lines wind through the large complex.

Seaview Sriracha Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☑) 0 3831 9000; 50-54 Th Jermjompol; r 900-1200B; (☑) (☑) Rooms are large and comfortable, and some have views of the sea and piers. Rooms facing the street can be a tad noisy, but Si Racha is not Times Square, and a gentle hush settles relatively early.

Eating & Drinking

Si Racha is famous for seafood.

Moom Aroy

SEAFOOD \$\$

(no roman-script sign; dishes 100-350B; ☺lunch & dinner) Moom Aroy delivers on its name, meaning 'delicious corner'. This is *the* place to enjoy a Si Racha seafood meal with views of the pier and squid rigs. It is north of town; turn left at Samitivet Sriracha Hospital and look for the tank with the 2m fish out front.

Bang Saen

SEAFOOD \$\$

(dishes 100-250B; ☺lunch & dinner) Do as the Thais do and judge your beach by its seafood restaurants. This beach resort, 18km north of town, isn't good for swimming but week-ending Bangkokians and local university students love it for its food and views. You'll need private transport to reach it.

Ko Loi Seafood Stalls

SEAFOOD \$

(dishes 40-160B; ☺lunch & dinner) Perched on the Ko Loi jetty, these humble spots specialise in fresh seafood. There is no English menu but it's all good.

Night Square

MARKET \$

(Th Jermjompol & Th Si Racha Nakorn; dishes from 50B; ☺5pm) This evening market is a bit small but big enough to feed a street-stall appetite.

Picha Cake Garden

BAKERY \$

(cnr Th Jermjompol & Th Surasak 1; coffee 40B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) Baked goodies, coffee and spotless air-con surroundings make

Si Racha**Si Racha****Sights**

- 1 Thai-Chinese TempleA2

Sleeping

- 2 SamchaiA2
3 Seaview Sriracha HotelA2
4 Siriwatana HotelA2

Eating

- 5 Asami SrirachaB2
6 Ko Loi Seafood StallsA2
7 Moom AroyB1
8 Picha Cake GardenB3

Drinking

- 9 Pop PubB2

this a convenient haven from Si Racha's busy streets. Plus there's wi-fi.

Asami Sriracha

JAPANESE \$\$

(Th Jermjompol; dishes 150-250B; ☺lunch & dinner) Catering to the local Japanese community, this sit-down restaurant does sushi, udon noodle dishes and katsu sets.

Pop Pub

BAR

(Th Jermjompol; dishes 60-220B; ☺5-11pm) More like 'Rock', this waterfront beer-hall-meets-

music-club boasts a menu ranging from salty snacks to full meals and plenty of liquid sustenance.

i Information

Krung Thai Bank (cnr Th Surasak 1 & Th Jermjompol)

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

Samitvet Sriracha Hospital (☎0 3832 4111; Soi 8, Th Jermjompol) Regarded as Si Racha's best.

i Getting There & Around

Si Racha doesn't have a consolidated bus station but most companies operate near each other on Th Sukhumvit (Hwy 3). Government buses serve Bangkok's Eastern (Ekamai) station (88B to 155B, two hours), Northern (Mo Chit) station (100B, 1½ hours) and Suvannabhumi (airport) station (100B, one hour) with hourly arrivals and departures from an office beside IT Mall (Tuk Com) on Th Sukhumvit.

Bangkok-bound minivans stop in front of Robinson department store on Th Sukhumvit and have frequent services to Bangkok's various bus stations (100B to 120B) and Victory Monument (100B).

All the arriving Bangkok buses continue on to Pattaya (50B) and points east. White *sǎng-tǎa-ou* (small pick-up trucks) leave from Si Racha's clock tower to near Pattaya's Naklua market (25B, 30 minutes).

Private bus companies have offices on Th Sukhumvit south of the intersection with Th Surasak and serve the following long-distance destinations: Nong Khai (506B, 12 hours, one evening departure), Khorat (380B, five hours, two evening departures) and Phuket (848B to 1138B, one evening departure).

There is one daily train from Bangkok to Pattaya that stops at Si Racha. It leaves Hua Lamphong station at 6.55am and returns from Si Racha at 2.50pm (3rd class 100B, three hours). Si Racha's train station is 3km east of the waterfront.

Túk-túks (motorised three-wheeled pedicab) go to points around town for 30B to 40B.

Ko Si Chang

POP 5012

Once a royal beach retreat, Ko Si Chang has a fishing-village atmosphere and enough attractions to fill a day's excursion from Si Racha. Bangkok Thais come on weekends to eat seafood, pose in front of the sea and make merit at the local temples.

Sights

FREE Phra Chudadhut

Palace

HISTORICAL SITE

(☉9am-5pm Tue-Sun) This former royal palace was used by Rama V (King Chulalongkorn) over the summer months, but was abandoned when the French briefly occupied the island in 1893. The main throne hall – a magnificent golden teak structure known as Vimanmek Teak Mansion – was moved to Bangkok in 1910 (see p89).

What remains today are fairly subdued Victorian-style buildings indicative of the king's architectural preferences. **Ruen Vad-hana** and **Ruen Mai Rim Talay** contain historical displays about the king's visits to the island and his public works programs, including a lecture to the local people on Western tea parties. Up the hill is **Wat Asadang Khanimit**, a temple containing a small, consecrated chamber where Rama V used to meditate. The unique Buddha image inside was fashioned more than 50 years ago by a local monk. Nearby is a stone outcrop wrapped in holy cloth, called Bell Rock because it rings like a bell when struck.

Because this is royal property, proper attire (legs and arms should be covered) is technically required but this place doesn't have an administrative presence so the rules aren't enforced. Sadly, the grounds have fallen into disrepair, which is surprising considering the site's proximity to Bangkok and the reverence usually afforded this revered king.

Cholatassathan Museum

AQUARIUM

(admission by donation; ☉9am-5pm Tue-Sun) Just before you reach the palace, this aquatic museum has a few marine exhibits and a dash of English-language signage. The touch tank is interesting because Thais stand around remarking about which animals are delicious to eat. The Aquatic Resources Research Institute conducts coral research here.

San Jao Phaw Khao Yai

TEMPLE

(☉daylight hrs) The most imposing sight on the island is the ornate Chinese temple, dating back to the days when Chinese traders anchored in the sheltered waters. During Chinese New Year in February, the island is overrun with visitors from the Chinese mainland. There are also shrine caves, multiple platforms and a good view of the ocean. It's east of the town, overlooking the modern-day barges waiting silently in the sea.

เกาะสีชัง

Wat Tham Yai Phrik

TEMPLE

(วัดถ้ำยายะพริก; donation appreciated; ☀️dawn-dusk) This Buddhist monastery is built around several meditation caves running into the island's central limestone ridge and offers fine views from its hilltop *chedi* (stupa). Monks and *māa chee* (nuns) from across Thailand come to take advantage of the caves' peaceful environment. Someone is usually around to give informal tours and talk about Buddhism; you can also arrange multi-day meditation retreats.

Hat Tham Phang

BEACH

On the southwest side of the island, Hat Tham Phang (Fallen Cave Beach) has simple facilities with deckchair and umbrella rental. Swimming isn't recommended but you can soak up all the sun you desire.



Activities

Several locals run **snorkelling** trips to nearby Koh Khang Khao (Bat Island). Ask at Pan & David Restaurant for details.

Sea kayaks are available for rent (150B per hour) on Hat Tham Phang. A nice paddle is down the coast to Koh Khang Khao, which is also a good spot for snorkelling.

Si Chang Healing House

MESSAGE

(☎️ 0 3821 6467; 167 Mu 3 Th Makham Thaeuw; ☀️8am-6pm Thu-Tue) Offers massage and beauty treatments (400B to 800B) in a garden labyrinth opposite Pan & David Restaurant.



Eating

The town has several small restaurants, with simply prepared seafood being your best bet.



Pan & David

Restaurant

INTERNATIONAL \$\$

(☎️ 0 3821 6629; 167 Mu 3 Th Makham Thaeuw; dishes 50-260B; ☀️breakfast, lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) With free-range chicken, homemade ice cream, French-pressed coffee and excellent Thai dishes, the menu can't go wrong. Phoning ahead for a booking is recommended. The restaurant is 200m from the palace.

Lek Tha Wang

SEAFOOD \$

(dishes 60-150B; ☀️lunch & dinner) Near the entrance to the palace, this famous restaurant is where Thais go to eat conch and other shellfish. For the rest of us, there's always *dôm yam gûng* (spicy and sour prawn soup) and fried fish.



Information

The island's one small settlement faces the mainland and is the terminus for the ferry. A bumpy road network links the village with all the other sights.

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

Post office (Th Atsadang) Near the pier.

www.koh-sichang.com An excellent source of local information.



Getting There & Around

Boats to Ko Si Chang leave hourly from 7am to 8pm from the Ko Loi jetty in Si Racha (one way 40B). From Ko Si Chang boats shuttle back hourly from 6am to 6pm. Boats leave promptly.

Ko Si Chang's tûk-tûks will take you anywhere for 40B to 60B. Island tours are available for 250B to 300B; you might need to haggle.

Motorbikes are available to rent on the pier.

Pattaya

พัทยา

POP 215,888

Synonymous with prostitution, Pattaya is unapologetic about its bread-and-butter industry. Go-go clubs, massage parlours and girlie bars occupy block after block of the central city, making Bangkok's red-light districts look small and provincial. The city is slightly less seedy in the daylight hours, when families from Russia and Eastern Europe, fresh off a charter flight, might outnumber stiletto-wearing drag queens. More recently, Bangkok Thais have adopted Pattaya as an affordable weekend getaway. They dine beside the sea from a dry location, remarking how much cheaper it is and how much clearer the water is here than in Hua Hin. Does this mean that Sin City is becoming Something-For-Everybody City? Hardly, but there are a few pockets of wholesomeness amid the vice (though it is doubtful that anyone but a missionary would be lured by such a claim).

The city is built around **Ao Pattaya**, a wide crescent-shaped bay that was one of Thailand's first beach resorts in the 1960s. The surrounding area is now Thailand's manufacturing base, transforming the bay from fishing and swimming pool into an industrial port. Some provincial Thais still swim here but we don't think you should as the water is dirty. The oceanfront promenade does, however, provide a scenic stroll under shady trees and a lovely coastal view.

Pattaya & Naklua



Sights & Activities

Sanctuary of Truth

MONUMENT

(ปราสาทศิวธรรม; ☎ 0 3836 7229; www.sanctuaryoftruth.com; 206/2 Th Naklua; admission 500B; ☀ 8am-6pm) Made entirely of wood (no metal nails) and commanding a celestial view of the ocean, the Sanctuary of Truth is best described as a visionary environment: part art installation, religious shrine and cultural monument. The ornate temple-like complex was conceived by Lek Viriyaphant, a Thai millionaire who spent his fortune on this and other heritage projects (such as Ancient City near Bangkok) that revived and

Optimists claim that Hat Jomtien, south of the centre, is a family-friendly scene. True, there are fewer girlie bars, but minus that Jomtien is about two decades away from being retro and in the meantime is decidedly dated with a lot of mediocre tour-group hotels and restaurants. North Pattaya (Pattaya Neua) is fashioning itself as a mini-Bangkok with modern condo towers and respectable corporate hotels. North of the city is **Naklua**, which is a little glossier than Jomtien and a little more promising for Pattaya's alternative tourists.

Pattaya & Naklua

📍 Sights

- 1 Fairtex Sports Club.....C1
- 2 Khao Phra Tamnak.....A5

🚗 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 3 Thais 4 Life.....B4

🏠 Sleeping

- 4 Garden Lodge Hotel.....C1
- 5 Woodlands Resort.....C1

🍴 Eating

- 6 Central Festival Food Hall & Park.....C2
- La Baguette.....(see 5)
- 7 Leng Kee.....C3

- 8 Mae Sai Tong.....C3
- 9 Mantra.....C2
- 10 Nang Nual.....B4

🍷 Drinking

- 11 Green Bottle.....C3
- 12 Gulliver's.....C2
- 13 Hopf Brew House.....B3

🎭 Entertainment

- 14 Blues Factory.....B4
- 15 Differ.....C2
- 16 Lima Lima.....A4
- 17 Tiffany's.....C2

preserved ancient building techniques and architecture in danger of extinction. In this case, the building will continue to support hand-hewn woodworking skills because it has been under construction for 30 years and still isn't finished.

The sanctuary is constructed in four wings dedicated to Thai, Khmer, Chinese and Indian religious iconography. Every inch of the 20-storey-tall building is covered with wood carvings of Hindu and Buddhist gods and goddesses – an artistic consolidation of centuries of religious myths under one unifying roof for greater spiritual enlightenment. For non-Buddhists the experience will be more educational than transcendent as much of the symbolism will be unfamiliar. Regardless, the building and setting are beautiful and the architecture is impressive.

Compulsory tours are led through the building every half hour from 8.30am to 5pm. Thai dancing is on display at 11.30am and 3.30pm. Motorcycle taxis can be hired from Pattaya for 50B to 70B.

Anek Kusala Sala (Viharn Sien) MUSEUM

(อนุสาวรีย์ศาลา (วิหารเซียน); ☎0 3823 5250; off Th Sukhumvit; admission 50B; ☀9am-5pm) A popular stop for tour groups, this museum contains more than 300 pieces of Chinese artwork, mainly bronze and brass statues depicting historical figures as well as Buddhist, Confucian and Taoist deities. Founded by Sa-nga Kulkobkiat, a Thai national who grew up in China, the museum was founded as a friendship-building project between the two countries, but its greatest success is an impressive collection of art with an unusu-

ally high degree of English-language signage (supplemented by a helpful bilingual guidebook available at the ticket office).

The 1st floor is a crowded pavilion of Chinese immortals, from Pangu, the cosmic giant, to Guan Yin, the goddess of mercy. The 2nd-floor terrace is the museum's most dramatic, with larger-than-life-sized statues of Shaolin monks depicting different martial arts poses. Nearby is a touching collection of daily life statues (a fortune teller, dress maker, liquor seller) that visitors place one baht coins on.

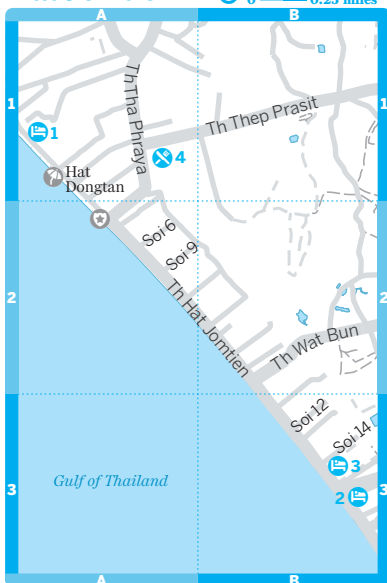
The museum is 16km south of central Pattaya; take Th Sukhumvit to the turn-off for Wat Yan Sangwararam. There is a Pattaya-Sattahip *sōrng-tāa-ou* (25B) that will take you to the turn-off; from there you can hire a motorcycle the remaining 3km to the museum (50B) but finding a ride back to the main road is difficult. You can either negotiate with the driver to wait or come with your own transport.

Ko Lan

BEACH

(เกาะลัน) Day trippers flock to this small island, 7km offshore of central Pattaya, for sun and sand. On weekends, Bangkok's visiting party people bake off hangers in beach chairs, and the aquamarine sea is sliced and diced by jet-skis, banana boats and other marine merriment. There are about five beaches on the island, easily accessible by motorcycle, but don't expect to find complete seclusion. Boats leave Pattaya's Bali Hai pier (30B, five daily departures) at the southern end of Walking St. The last boat back from Ko Lan is at 6pm.

Hat Jomtien



Hat Jomtien

Sleeping

- 1 Rabbit Resort A1
- 2 RS Seaside B3
- 3 Summer Beach Inn B3

Eating

- 4 Sam's Mexican & American Grill A1

Khao Phra Tamnak

VIEWPOINT

(เขาพระตำหนัก; Map p198; ☀ daylight hrs) A giant golden Buddha sits on top of this forested hill between Jomtien and South Pattaya (Pattaya Tai) as a reminder that religion has not forsaken this modern-day Gomorrah. The serene Buddha figure of Wat Phra Yai dates back to the days when Pattaya was a small fishing village and from this lofty position you can almost imagine a time before mini-skirts and Beer Chang happy hours. You can walk to the top of the hill from the southern end of Walking St, passing a small Chinese shrine en route.

Fairtex Sports Club

FITNESS, MOO-AYTAI

(Map p198; ☎ 0 3825 3888; www.fairtex-muaythai.com; 179/185-212 Th Pattaya Neua; per session 800B) Burned-out professionals, martial

arts fans and adventurous athletes flock to this resort-style sports camp for *moo-ay tai* (Thai boxing; also spelt *muay thai*) training and a sweat-inducing vacation. Daily sessions include pad work, sparring and clinching, exercise drills and body sculpting work. There are also occasional brushes with fame: domestically famous *moo-ay tai* champions and international mixed martial arts fighters also train here.

Fairtex has been training *moo-ay tai* fighters for 40 years. In 2005, the company opened this sports club to provide Western-style comfort for international visitors interested in fighting and fitness courses. Accommodation packages are available and use of the club's pool and other sports facilities are included.

Flight of the Gibbon

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

(☎ 08 9970 5511; www.treetopasia.com; tours from 3000B) This zip-line course extends 3km with 26 platforms through the forest canopy of Khao Kheo Open Safari in Chonburi, 50 minutes from Pattaya. It is an all-day tour with additional add-on activities, like a jungle obstacle course and a visit to the neighbouring animal zoo. Children 1m tall can do the zip-line independently while younger, shorter kids can ride tandem with an adult.

Festivals

Pattaya International Music Festival

MUSIC

In mid-March, Pattaya's oceanfront esplanade is transformed into an outdoor concert venue running for three days of live music. In 2011, bands from Korea, Japan, Malaysia and Laos topped the billing along with Thai favourites such as Modern Dog and Tattoo Colour.

Sleeping

If you're an 'alternative' Pattaya tourist (meaning you aren't a sex tourist or a package tourist), then you should avoid staying in central Pattaya and opt instead for Naklua, Jomtien or parts of Pattaya Neua. Even if you have no desire to visit Pattaya, you might consider an overnight here if you're transiting to Suvarnabhumi International Airport, 110km away, and don't want to lay-over in Bangkok.

RS Seaside

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p200; ☎ 0 3823 1867; www.rs-seaside.com; Th Hat Jomtien; r from 650B; 🚶 🚰) With small rooms and nice desk staff, RS is a good-value

spot in the package-tour part of town. Two breakfasts are included in the room rate.

Summer Beach Inn

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p200; ☎ 0 3823 1777; Th Hat Jomtien; r 650-1500B; 🍷🍷) Clean, comfortable rooms come with most of the modern conveniences in a high-rise hotel far from Pattaya's vice.

Rabbit Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p200; ☎ 0 3825 1730; www.rabbitresort.com; Hat Dongtan; r from 4000B; 🍷🍷🍷) Rabbit Resort has stunning bungalows and villas set in beachfront forest hidden between Jomtien and Pattaya Tai. Furnishings showcase Thai design and art and bathrooms are especially stylish with accents of river stone and granite. It is a lovely escape from Pattaya.



Birds & Bees Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0 3825 0556; www.cabbagesandcondoms.co.th; Soi 4, Th Phra Tamnak; r from 4500B; 🍷🍷🍷) Retreat into a tropical garden resort bisected by meandering paths and decorated with tongue-in-cheek artwork. Resident rabbits crouch behind the shrubs and kids splash in the pool until they wrinkle like prunes. There's a semi-private beach and an incongruous wholesomeness for a resort affiliated with PDA, the Thai NGO responsible for the country's successful adoption of condom-use and family-planning services.

Garden Lodge Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p198; ☎ 0 3842 9109; cnr Soi 20 & Th Naklua; r 950-1450B; 🍷🍷) Quality rooms with balconies occupy a landscaped garden and shady swimming pool.

Woodlands Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p198; ☎ 0 3842 1707; www.woodland-resort.com; cnr Soi 22, 164/1 Th Naklua; r from 3700B; 🍷🍷🍷) A surprisingly affordable resort, Woodlands Resort is low-key and professional with a tropical garden and two swimming pools, one with a 'beach' entry for young swimmers. The rooms are light and airy with teak furniture.



Eating

It is a tourist town and there are a lot of overpriced, mediocre restaurants so lower your standards. Most menus are bilingual (usually English and Russian).



Mum Aroi

THAI \$\$\$

(☎ 0 3822 3252; 83/4 Soi 4, Th Naklua; dishes 180-240B; ☺dinner) 'Delicious corner' is a contemporary glass-and-concrete restaurant perched beside the sea in the fishing village end of Naklua. Old fishing boats sit marooned offshore and crisp ocean breezes envelope diners as they greedily devour fantastic Thai food. Try *sôm-dam Boo* (spicy papaya salad with crab) and *Blah mèuk nèung ma-now* (squid steamed in lime juice). You'll need to charter a baht bus to get here (one way 100B).

Central Festival Food Hall & Park

INTERNATIONAL \$

(Map p198; Th Pattaya Sai 2; dishes from 60B; ☺lunch & dinner) The glitziest place to eat a plate of *pàt tai* is in this new Bangkok-style shopping mall.

MOO-AY TAI CHAMPION: YODSAENKLAI FAIRTEX

Khun Yod is a famous *moo-ay tai* (*muay thai*) fighter but you'd never know it. He is humble and as he is passing into the sunset of his career he is a little stockier than the sinewy kids that can high-kick their opponents in the head. Yod started fighting at eight years old, partly to help his struggling farming family. His first fight was at a temple fair in his home province of Nong Banglamphu and he lost. But since then he earned the nickname 'Computer Wizard' for his technical and methodical fighting style, was a three-time Lumpini champion and has now expanded into the international circuit, winning the super welterweight WBC Muay Thai championship. In the last two years, he has fought in 12 countries and always travels with a supply of Mama noodles and a rice cooker, preferring something akin to Thai food than the local delicacies.

While in Pattaya, Yod recommends an early morning run along the beach road and up Khao Phra Tamnak or a dish of *sôm-dam lao* (Lao-style spicy green papaya salad) from the stand opposite the municipal building. As is customary, Yod adopted the last name of the gym he trains with (Fairtex) where he can be found preparing for a match.

CHARITY SQUAD

A natural counterpoint to the city's prominent debauchery is the city's solid network of charitable organisations. Among the many benevolent servants in Pattaya, Father Ray Brennan, an American priest with the Redemptorist Order who died in 2003, established a lasting and inspiring legacy that today includes six charitable programs under the umbrella of the Redemptorist Foundation. He also founded the Pattaya Orphanage and School for the Deaf, both of which are now operated by the Catholic diocese. All of them succeed thanks to the generosity of benefactors and volunteers.

Pattaya Orphanage (☎0 3842 3468; www.thepattayaorphanage.org; Th Sukhumvit, North Pattaya) was founded in the 1970s when Father Ray was given a baby by a parishioner who could not care for the child. This first child led to many more as word spread that the priest could care for the unintended consequences of the US military presence in the area during the Vietnam War. Today the orphanage cares for children orphaned by modern misfortunes (poverty, drug abuse, HIV/AIDS) and helps find adoptive parents. Those interested in helping the orphanage can sponsor a meal, donate useful items and volunteer for an extended period of time.

Redemptorist Foundation (volunteer@fr-ray.org) operates schools for the blind and disabled and a home and drop-in centre for street children, many of whom may be involved in Pattaya's child-sex industry. The foundation also runs a day-care centre for children of labourers who would otherwise accompany their parents to dangerous work sites. Volunteers rotate through the different centres, teaching English, playing with the children and leading art projects. A six-month commitment is required; contact the foundation for a volunteer handbook that outlines the application process.

If you don't have the time to commit to volunteering, at least stop by **Thais 4 Life** (www.thais4life.com; Soi Yen Sabai Condotel, Th Phra Tamnak; ☀noon-6pm Mon-Sat), a charity bookstore whose proceeds go to medical treatments for destitute patients, orphanages and school uniform scholarships.

Sam's Mexican & American

Grill

MEXICAN-AMERICAN \$\$

(Map p200; ☎08 6142 8408; 472/9 Th Tha Phraya, Jomtien Plaza; dishes 80-200B; ☀closed Sun) When it comes to expat cuisine, Thailand does not excel in Mexican food even though there is a common love of chillies and limes. But Sam's gets the formula right and comes recommended by a displaced Los Angeleno.

Nang Nual

THAI \$\$

(Map p198; ☎0 3842 8478; Walking St; dishes 100-200B; ☀lunch & dinner) Pattaya's most famous seafood restaurant could be a major tourist trap but it keeps its prices affordable and the dishes are pleasant if not spectacular. The outdoor deck gulps in a big view of the bay and you don't have to use sign language to talk to your waiter.

Mae Sai Tong

THAI \$

(Map p198; Th Pattaya Klang; dishes 50B) Next to the day market, this stand is famous for selling *kôw nêe-o mâ-môo-ang* (ripe mango with sticky rice) all year round. Everyone else has to wait for the hot-dry season to compete.

Leng Kee

THAI-CHINESE \$

(Map p198; Th Pattaya Klang; dishes 50-80B; ☀lunch & dinner) Like Bangkok and other coastal Thai towns, Pattaya has a thriving Chinatown operated by second- and third-generation families who expertly balance their Thai and Chinese heritage. This basic restaurant is a popular lunch stop for duck over rice, but is city-renowned during Chinese New Year when the menu goes vegetarian and includes the festival's golden good-luck noodles.

La Baguette

BAKERY \$

(Map p198; ☎0 3842 1707; 164/1 Th Naklua; dishes from 120B; ☀breakfast, lunch & dinner) Part of the Woodlands Resort, this sleek cafe has yummy pastries, espresso, and even better crepes. You can also link into its wi-fi network.

Mantra

INTERNATIONAL \$\$\$

(Map p198; ☎0 3842 9591; Th Hat Pattaya; dishes 240-800B; ☀dinner Mon-Sat, brunch & dinner Sun) Industrial cool, Mantra is fun even if you can only afford a classy cocktail. The bar is swathed in raw silk and the expansive dining room is cloaked in dark wood. The

menu combines Japanese, Thai and Indian flavours, and everyone comes here for Sunday brunch.

Ban Amphur

THAI \$

(dishes from 100B; ☺lunch & dinner) This fishing village 15km south of Pattaya is a dinner destination for Thais. A half-dozen seafood restaurants line the beach road and some are so large the waiters use walkie-talkies. Pick one that doesn't seem lonely or overwhelmed and order all the seafood specialities. You'll have to hire transport to get here.



Drinking

Despite the profusion of noisy, identikit beer bars, there are still some good places for a no-strings-attached drink.

Hopf Brew House

BAR

(Map p198; ☎0 3871 0650; Th Hat Pattaya) Moodily authentic in dark wood, the Hopf Brew House is a haven for middle-aged beer aficionados. Beers and pizza are brewed and wood-fired on-site.

Gulliver's

BAR

(Map p198; ☎0 3871 0641; Th Hat Pattaya) The neo-colonial facade belies the laid-back sports-bar inside.

Green Bottle

BAR

(Map p198; ☎0 3842 9675; 216/6-20 Th Pattaya 2) Cheap beer and lots of cheer can be found at dressed-down Green Bottle, which has been filling glasses since 1988.



Entertainment

Aside from the sex scene, Pattaya does have a youthful club scene centred on Walking St, a semi-pedestrian area with bars and clubs for every predilection.

Lima Lima

NIGHTCLUB

(Map p198; Walking St) International DJ scene and a mix of Russian and Western tourists, locals and expats.

Differ

NIGHTCLUB

(Map p198; Soi Phettrakun) Popular with week-ending Bangkokians, this dance club's slogan is 'feel fun, feel differ'. It's across from Big C.

Blues Factory

LIVE MUSIC

(Map p198; ☎0 3830 0180; www.thebluesfactorypattaya.com; Soi Lucky Star, Walking St) This is Pattaya's best venue for no-nonsense live music.

Tiffany's

THEATRE

(Map p198; ☎08 4362 8257; www.tiffany-show.co.th; 464 Th Pattaya 2; admission 500-800B; ☺6pm, 7.30pm & 9pm) Established in 1974, Pattaya probably invented the transvestite cabaret, a show tune-style spectacle of sequins, satin and sentimental songs.

i Information

Dangers & Annoyances

So many people are so drunk in this town that all sorts of mayhem ensues (fighting, pickpocketing and reckless driving) after dark. Try to have your wits about you and exit any volatile situation as quickly as possible.

Emergency

Tourist police (☎emergency 1155) The head office is beside the Tourism Authority of Thailand office on Th Phra Tamnak with police boxes along Pattaya and Jomtien beaches.

Internet Access

There are internet places throughout the city and most hotels offer wi-fi or internet terminals.

Media

Explore Pattaya, a free fortnightly magazine, contains information on events, attractions and hotel and restaurant listings. *What's On Pattaya* is a similar monthly publication. *Pattaya Mail* (www.pattayamail.com) is the city's English-language weekly. *Pattaya 24 Seven* (www.pattaya24seven.com) is an online guide to the city.

Medical Services

Bangkok Pattaya Hospital (☎0 3842 9999; www.bph.co.th; 301 Th Sukhumvit, Naklua; ☺24hr) For first-class health care.

Money

There are banks and ATMs conveniently located throughout the city.

Post

Post office (Map p198; Soi 13/2, Th Pattaya Sai 2)

Tourist Information

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT; Map p198; ☎0 3842 8750; 609 Th Phra Tamnak; ☺8.30am-4.30pm) Located at the northwestern edge of Rama IX Park. The helpful staff have brochures and maps.

i Getting There & Away

Air

Pattaya's airport is U-Taphao International Airport, located 33km south of town; it is an old military base that now receives some commercial flights, especially charters. **Bangkok**

**BYPASSING BANGKOK**

An expanding network of bus and mini-van services now connect the eastern seaboard with Suvarnabhumi airport, meaning that you don't have to transit through Bangkok upon a flight arrival or departure. This is especially alluring to winter-weary visitors or newlyweds eager for a beach retreat. With a little advance planning, Ko Samet is the closest prettiest beach to the airport and its southeastern beaches are serene enough for honeymooners. From the airport bus terminal, check the schedule for Rayong-bound buses and then catch a *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* to reach the ferry pier to Ko Samet.

Airways (☎0 3841 2382; www.bangkokair.com; 179/85-212 Th Pattaya Sai 2) flies from here to Phuket (from 3000B) and Ko Samui (3600B).

Boat

A new high-speed ferry service links Pattaya to Hua Hin (adult/child 1500/900B, 3½ hours). Ferries leave Pattaya at 8.30am three times a week in high season (two times in low season) and leave Hua Hin at 12.30pm on the same days. Contact **Thai Living Ferry** (☎0 3836 4515; www.thailivingferry.com) for bookings and info.

Bus

Pattaya's main bus station is on Th Pattaya Neua. Buses serve the following destinations:
Bangkok's Eastern (Ekamai) station (91B, 1½ hours, frequently from 6am to 9pm)
Bangkok's Northern (Mo Chit) station (105B, two hours, frequently from 6am to 9pm)
Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi (airport) station (124B, 1½ hour, hourly 7am to 3pm)

Many 2nd-class provincial buses make stops along Th Sukhumvit (not the bus station); from here you can flag down buses heading to Rayong (83B, 1½ hours) and Si Racha (65B, 30 minutes). You can also catch a white *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* from the Naklua market to Si Racha (25B, 30 minutes).

Minibuses go to Ko Chang and Ko Samet for about 250B; travel agencies sell tickets and arrange pick-ups.

Train

One train per day travels between Pattaya and Bangkok's Hualamphong station (3rd class 31B, 3¾ hours). It leaves Bangkok at 6.55am and returns at 2.20pm. Schedules for this service can change, so it's wise to check with the **Pat-**

taya train station (☎0 3842 9285), off Th Sukhumvit just north of Th Hat Pattaya Neua, before travelling.

i Getting Around

Locally known as 'baht buses', *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* do a loop along the major roads; just hop on and pay 10B when you get off. If you're going all the way from Jomtien to Naklua you might have to change vehicles at the dolphin roundabout in Pattaya Neua. You can also take a baht bus to the bus station from the dolphin roundabout as well. If you're going further afield, you can charter a baht bus; establish the price beforehand.

Rayong & Ban Phe ระยอง/บ้านแพ้ว

POP 106,737/16,717

You're most likely to be in either of these towns as a transit link en route to Ko Samet. Rayong has frequent bus connections to elsewhere and the little port of Ban Phe has ferry services to Ko Samet. Blue *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* link the two towns (25B, 45 minutes, frequent departures).

 Sleeping

Rayong President Hotel GUEST HOUSE \$
 (☎0 3861 1307; Th Sukhumvit, Rayong; r from 550B; ☎) From the bus station, cross to the other side of Th Sukhumvit. The hotel is down a side street that starts next to the Siam Commercial Bank; look for the sign.

Christie's Guesthouse GUEST HOUSE \$
 (☎0 3865 1976; fax 0 3865 2103; 280/92 Soi 1, Ban Phe; r from 500B; ☎) Christie's is a comfortable place near the pier if you need a room, meal or a book.

i Getting There & Away

Buses from Rayong go to/from the following:

Bangkok's Eastern (Ekamai) station (127B to 146B, three hours, hourly 6am to 9.30pm)

Bangkok's Northern (Mo Chit) station (146B, four hours, hourly 6am to 7pm)

Bangkok's Southern (Sai Tai Mai) station (150B, five hours, five daily departures)

Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi (airport) station (165B, 2½ hours, eight daily departures)

Chanthaburi (80B, 2½ hours, frequent)

Buses from Ban Phe's bus station (near Tha Thetsaban) go to/from Bangkok's Eastern (Ekamai) station (157B, four hours, hourly 6am to 6pm). Ban Phe also has frequent minivan services to the following destinations:

Pattaya (250B, two hours, three daily departures)

Bangkok's Victory Monument (250B, four hours, hourly 7am to 6pm)

Laem Ngop (350B, four to five hours, two daily departures) For boats to Ko Chang.

For information about boats to/from Ko Samet see p209.

Ko Samet

เกาะเสม็ด

An island idyll, Ko Samet bobs in the sea with a whole lot of scenery: small sandy coves bathed by clear aquamarine water. You'll have to share all this prettiness with other beach lovers as it's an easy weekend escape from Bangkok as well as a major package-tour destination.

But considering its proximity and popularity, Ko Samet is surprisingly underdeveloped with a thick jungle interior crouching beside the low-rise hotels. Most beachfront buildings adhere to the government setback regulations and are discreetly tucked behind the tree line. There are no high-rises or traffic jams (the interior road still isn't paved) and most beach-hopping is done the old-fashioned way, by foot along wooded trails skirting the coastline.

Sights & Activities

On some islands, you beach-hop while on Ko Samet you cove-hop. The coastal footpath traverses rocky headlands, cicada-serenaded forests and one stunning cove after another where the mood becomes successively more mellow the further south you go.

Hat Sai Kaew

BEACH

Starting in the island's northeastern corner, Hat Sai Kaew, or 'Diamond Sand', is the island's widest and whitest stretch of sand and has all the hubbub you'd expect of a top-notch beach resort. With sunbathers, sarong-sellers, anchored speedboats loading day-trippers, and restaurants galore – the people-watching here is part of the appeal. At night the scene is equally rambunctious with late-night parties and karaoke sessions.

At the southern end of Hat Sai Kaew are the **prince and mermaid statues** that memorialise Samet's literary role in *Phra Aphaimani*, the great Thai epic by Sunthorn Phu. The story follows the travails of a prince exiled to an undersea kingdom ruled by a lovesick female giant (who has her own lonely statue in Hat Puak Tian in Phetchaburi). A mermaid aids the prince in

his escape to Ko Samet, where he defeats the giant by playing a magic flute.

Ao Hin Khok & Ao Phai

BEACHES

More subdued than their northern neighbour, Ao Hin Khok and Ao Phai are two gorgeous bays separated by rocky headlands. The crowd here tends to be younger and more stylish than the down-to-earth crew in Hat Sai Kaew and the parties are late-nighters. These two beaches are the traditional backpacker party centres of the island.

Ao Phutsa (Ao Tub Tim)

BEACH

Further still is wide and sandy Ao Phutsa (Ao Tub Tim), a favourite for solitude seekers, families and couples who need access to 'civilisation' but not a lot of other stimulation.

Ao Wong Deuan

BEACH

A smaller sister to Hat Sai Kaew, **Ao Wong Deuan** is a long, crescent-shaped bay packed with people, mainly package tourists.

Ao Thian

BEACH

Ao Thian (Candlelight Beach) is punctuated by big boulders that shelter small sandy spots creating a castaway ambience. It is one of Samet's most casual, easygoing beaches and is deliciously lonely on weekdays. On weekends, Bangkok university students serenade the stars with all-night guitar sessions.

Ao Wai

BEACH

The cove 'caboose' is Ao Wai, a lovely beach far removed from everything else (in reality it is 1km from Ao Thian).

Ao Prao

BEACH

On the west coast, Ao Prao is worth a visit for a sundowner cocktail but the small beach is outsized by the high-end resorts that promise (but don't deliver) solitude.

BEACH ADMISSION FEE

Ko Samet is part of a national park and charges all visitors an entrance fee (adult/child 200/100B) upon arrival. The fee is collected at the National Parks office in Hat Sai Kaew; *sǎrng-tǎa-ou* from the pier will stop at the gates for payment. Hold on to your ticket for later inspections.

Ko Samet

0 1 km
0 0.5 miles



Ko Samet

Sights

- 1 Prince & Mermaid Statues C3

Sleeping

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 10 Pudsá Bungalow C3
 11 Saikaew Villa C2
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 21 Baywatch Bar B4
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- 25 National Parks Main
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- 27 Ferry Terminal C2
 28 Sörng-täa-ou Stop B4
 Sörng-täa-ou Stop (see 27)

Tours

Ko Samet, along with nine neighbouring islands, is part of the Khao Laem Ya/Mu Ko Samet National Park. While there is some development on the other islands, most visitors come for day trips. **Ko Kudée** has a small, pretty sandy stretch, clear water for decent snorkelling and a nice little hiking trail. Ko Man Nai is home to the **Rayong Turtle Conservation Centre**, which is a breeding place for endangered sea turtles and has a small visitor centre.

Agents for boat tours camp out on the popular beaches and have a couple of different boat trips on offer (from 1500B).

Sleeping

Though resorts are replacing bungalows, Ko Samet's accommodation is still surprisingly simple and old-fashioned compared to Thailand's other beach resorts. Weekday rates don't rank well on the value scale (fan rooms start at 800B), but look incredibly attractive considering that weekend and holiday rates increase by as much as 100%.

A word of caution to early risers: Hat Sai Kaew, Ao Hin Khok, Ao Phai and Ao Wong Deuan are the most popular beaches and host well-amplified night-time parties.

HAT SAI KAEW

Laem Yai Hut Resort

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎ 0 3864 4282; Hat Sai Kaew; r 800-1000B; ☹) A colourful collection of weather-worn huts are camped out in a shady garden on the north end of the beach. The laid-back vibe creates an alternative backpacker universe in a firmly rooted package-tour beach.

Saikaew Villa

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0 3864 4144; Hat Sai Kaew; r 800-2000B; ☹) The closest option to the pier, Saikaew Villa has big rooms or small rooms, fan or air-con and conjures up a holiday-camp atmosphere. Quality and privacy varies with each room.

AO HIN KHOK & AO PHAI

Tok's

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0 3864 4072; Ao Hin Khok; r 1500B; ☹) Snazzy villas climb up a landscaped hillside with plenty of shade and flowering plants, making Tok's a respectable midranger.

Jep's Bungalows

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(☎ 0 3864 4112; www.jepbungalow.com; Ao Hin Khok; r 500-1600B; ☹@) Good old Jep's still has cheapie fan huts spread across a forested hillside, just like the old days (a mere five years ago). Air-conditioned rooms are the same, just with cooler interior temps.

A WORKING HOLIDAY

You can volunteer to work at Rayong's Turtle Conservation Centre through **Starfish Ventures** (www.starfishventures.co.uk; 4 weeks incl accommodation £800). Activities include monitoring the progress of the turtles, releasing young turtles into the ocean and explaining the project to tourists on day trips from Ko Samet. Accommodation is in a fishing village, and every day you'll go to work in a speedboat across to Ko Man Mai. It's pretty leisurely – you'll be expected to work from 8am to 3pm or 4pm, four days a week – and in your downtime there are good beaches nearby to explore.

Ao Pai Hut GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎ 3864 4075; Ao Hin Khok; r 600-1000B; ☹) Same, same as Jep's, this guest house has basic wooden bungalows perched amid the trees.

Silver Sand HOTEL \$\$
(☎ 3864 4300; www.silversandsamed.com; Ao Phai; r 1500-2200B; ☹@) Contemporary villas with luscious beds and sleek bathrooms provide a needed slice of sophistication to simple Ko Samet. The after-hours action in the Silver Sands bar can be disorderly and is popular with gay travellers.

Samed Villa HOTEL \$\$
(☎ 3864 4094; www.samedvilla.com; Ao Phai; r 1800-2500B; ☹) Handsome bungalows gaze at the ocean or at a manicured garden and boast a lot of comfort without a lot of hassles.

AO PHUTSA & AONUAN

TOP CHOICE **Tubtim Resort** HOTEL \$\$
(☎ 3864 4025; www.tubtimresort.com; Ao Phutsa; r 800-2500B; ☹@) Ranging from fan to fab, Tubtim has a little of everything. More expensive bungalows are pretty and polished, while the cheapies are spare but still within walking distance to the same dreamy beach.

Pudsa Bungalow GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(☎ 3864 4030; Ao Phutsa; r 700-1500B; ☹) The nicer bungalows near the beach are trimmed with driftwood, but sit beside the main footpath within earshot of late-night

blathering. A good option if you are doing the blathering.

Ao Nuan GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(r 700-2000B) The inventor of chillaxin' on Ko Samet, quirky Ao Nuan has simple wooden bungalows hidden among vegetation. Everyone cool enough to score a room here hangs out in the relaxed restaurant. No phone means no reservations, so just walk on over; it is the only place to stay on a supremely secluded beach.

AO WONG DEUAN & AO THIAN (CANDLELIGHT BEACH)

Ferries run between Ao Wong Deuan and Ban Phe (50B each way), with increased services at the weekend.

To get to Ao Thian, catch a ferry to Ao Wong Deuan and walk south over the headland. It's also a quick walk from here to the west side of the island – look for the marked trail near Tonhard Bungalow.

Blue Sky GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎ 08 1509 0547; r 600-1200B; ☹) A rare budget spot on Ao Wong Deuan, Blue Sky has simple bungalows set on a rocky headland. Though we love cheapies in all their simplicity, budgeters will get better value on other beaches.

Candlelight Beach GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎ 08 1762 9387; r 700-1200B; ☹) On the beach, these fan and air-con bungalows with sea-facing porches have a natural, woody ambience.

Lung Dam Apache GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎ 08 1452 9472; r 800-1200B; ☹) Air-con bungalows sit right smack on the sand and the whole basic collection favours the Thai-country aesthetic of recycled materials.

Tonhard Bungalow GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(☎ 08 1435 8900; r 700-1500B; ☹) On a wooded part of the beach, this place has bungalows that vary from basic to less basic. But in return you get a friendly and relaxing setting.

Viking Holiday Resort HOTEL \$\$
(☎ 3864 4353; www.sametvikingresort.com; r 1200-2000B; ☹@) Ao Thian's most 'upscale' spot with large and comfortable rooms; there's only nine of them so book ahead.

AO WAI

Ao Wai is about 1km from Ao Thian but can be reached from Ban Phe by chartered speedboat.

Samet Ville Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎0 3865 1682; www.sametvilleresort.com; r incl breakfast 2000-5300B; 🍷) Under a forest canopy, it's a case of 'spot the sky' at the only resort on this secluded beach. It is an unpretentious sort of place and a tad shabby for resort aficionados. But there is a huge range for all budgets and a great beach.

AO NOINA**Baan Puu Paan**

GUEST HOUSE \$\$\$

(☎0 3864 4095; r 700-1200B; 🍷🍷) This English-run spot has a breezy setting between the main road and the sea, northwest of the Na Dan pier. If the rates were higher, this would be boutique with its cute cottage colours and a few stand-alone huts squatting above the ocean. Bring a fat book – it's a good place to get away. You'll need private transport to come and go.

**Eating & Drinking**

Most hotels and guest houses have restaurants that moonlight as bars after sunset. The food and the service won't blow you away, but there aren't many alternatives. Nightly beach barbecues are an island favourite but try to pick one that looks professionally run – meaning that there is a steady stream of dishes being served and people eating rather than looking bored.

On weekends Ko Samet is a boisterous night-owl with provincial tour groups crooning away on karaoke machines or the young ones slurping down beer and buckets to a techno beat. The bar scene changes depending on who is around but there is usually a crowd on Hat Sai Khao, Ao Hin Khok, Ao Phai and Ao Wong Deuan.

Jep's Restaurant

INTERNATIONAL \$\$

(Ao Hin Khok; dishes 60-150B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) Canopied by the branches of an arching tree decorated with pendant lights, this pretty place does a little of everything right on the beach.

Summer Restaurant

INTERNATIONAL \$\$\$

(Baan Puu Paan, Ao Noi Na; dishes 250-400B; ☺dinner) In a crisp setting overlooking the harbour, Summer savours a globetrotters' culinary scrapbook, from Indian-style chicken tikka to Cajun chicken breasts.

Ban Ploy Samed

THAI \$\$\$

(☎0 3864 4188; Ao Noi Na; dishes 300-600B; ☺dinner) Better than having to haul in your meal, you are hauled to this floating restaurant by a boat-and-pulley system. Fresh

seafood dishes, especially the whole steamed fish variety, await.

Rabeang Bar

THAI \$

(Na Dan; dishes 50-100B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) Right by the ferry terminal, this over-the-water spot has good enough food to make you forget you have to leave the island.

Naga Bar

BAR

(Ao Hin Khok; drinks from 60B) The beachfront bar specialises in drinking games: coin tosses, *moo-ay tai* bouts and whisky buckets to give you courage.

Silver Sand Bar

BAR

(Ao Phai; drinks from 60B) Silver Sands progresses (regresses?) from dinner to cocktail buckets and dance floor gyrations and is a popular gay spot.

Baywatch Bar

BAR

(Ao Wong Deuan; drinks from 80B) There are a number of chill-out spaces for after-dark beach-gazing. The cocktails are strong and it's a fun evening crowd.

Ao Prao Resort

BAR

(Ao Prao; drinks from 80B) On the sunset-side of the island, this resort has a lovely sea-view restaurant perfect for an evening sundowner. You'll need to take private transport here.

i Information

There are several ATMs on Ko Samet, including near the Na Dan pier and Ao Wong Deuan.

Internet terminals or wi-fi are available at hotels on most beaches.

Ko Samet Health Centre (☎0 3861 1123;

☺8.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun) On the main road between Na Dan and Hat Sai Kaew. On-call mobile numbers are posted for after-hours emergencies.

National Parks main office (btwn Na Dan & Hat Sai Kaew) Has another office on Ao Wong Deuan.

Police station (☎1155) On the main road between Na Dan and Hat Sai Kaew. There's a substation on Ao Wong Deuan.

i Getting There & Away

Ko Samet is accessible from the mainland piers in Ban Phe. There are dozens of piers in Ban Phe, each used by different ferry companies, but they all charge the same fares (one way/return 50/100B, 40 minutes, hourly 8am to 4pm) and dock at Na Dan, the main pier on Ko Samet. Boats return to the mainland with the same frequency.

If you're staying at Ao Wong Deuan or further south, catch a ferry from the mainland directly to the beach (one way 50B, one hour, two daily departures).

When you buy your ticket on the mainland, you'll get the hard sell for a speedboat trip (2500B for the boat). The boat can hold 10 passengers (250B each) but it is never clear how long you have to wait for that price. But it is always an option if you're in a hurry; the boats go directly to your beach of choice.

Ticket agents on the mainland will also pressure you into pre-booking accommodation with a hefty commission tacked on. You'll be fine if you just show up on the island and start hunting for a room.

i Getting Around

Ko Samet's small size makes it a great place to explore on foot. A network of dirt roads connects most of the western side of the island.

Green *sǒng-tǎa-ou* meet arriving boats at the pier and provide drop-offs at the various beaches (20B to 80B, depending on the beach). If drivers don't have enough people to fill the vehicle, they either won't go or they will charge passengers 200B to 500B to charter the whole vehicle.

You can rent motorcycles nearly everywhere along the northern half of the island. Expect to pay about 300B per day. The dirt roads are rough and hazardous, and larger vehicles can leave behind blinding dust clouds. At any rate,

make sure to test the brakes before you decide, and drive slowly around curves.

Chanthaburi

จันทบุรี

POP 99,819

Chanthaburi is proof that all that glitters is not gold. Here, gemstones do the sparkling, attracting international traders, including Southeast Asians and Africans, dealing in sapphires, rubies, jade and other coloured stones. Thanks to the gem trade and its multicultural history (French, Vietnamese and Chinese), the so-called 'City of the Moon' is surprisingly diverse for a typical Thai town and worth visiting for an appreciation of the economic and religious sanctuary Thailand has long provided in the region.

The old city (also known as the Chantaboon Waterfront community) is the best place to chart the course of immigration and international involvement in the city. The Vietnamese began arriving in the 19th century when Christian refugees escaped religious and political persecution in Cochinchina (southern Vietnam). A second wave of Vietnamese refugees followed in the 1920s and 1940s, fleeing French rule, and a third arrived after the 1975 communist takeover of southern Vietnam. The French occupied Chanthaburi from 1893 to 1905, while disputing with Siam over the borders of Indochina.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

LIVING WITH HISTORY

Pratapan Chatmalai is the community leader of the Chantaboon Waterfront Community Association. She grew up here and fondly remembers the tight-knit community of culturally diverse people. Today she works to save the stories and the character of the community.

What does your organisation do?

Now this community is a 'grandma' city. The old city is losing life and the young people have moved away. I want to keep the culture for the next generation to learn about and I'm trying to help the people in the area have a good life. We run the Learning House so that people can come look at the daily life of the past.

What do you recommend tourists see or do in the old city?

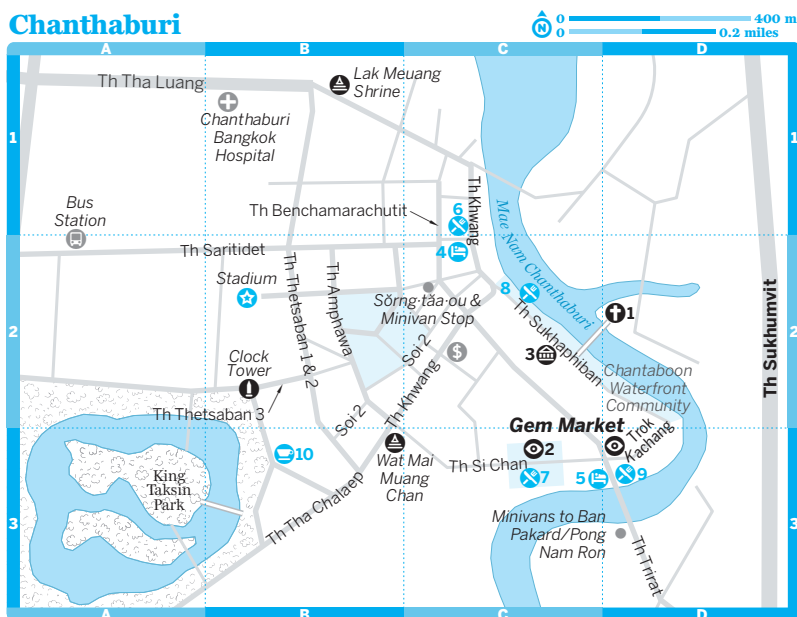
There is unique history and lifestyle of the past here. Come look at the cathedral, Chinese shrines and old houses. Each house is different and mixes Thai, Chinese and Western styles. Eat at the local restaurants. There are seafood noodles, old-style ice cream and dim sum. If you get tired, you can have a massage in an old Thai-style house.

What is your favourite part of the old city?

I love the whole place because it is a living museum and I can walk along and talk to the people about the past and make them happy.

As told to China Williams

Chanthaburi



Chanthaburi

📍 Top Sights

Gem Market D3

📍 Sights

- 1 Cathedral D2
 2 Gem Shops C3
 3 Learning House C2

🏠 Sleeping

4 Kasemsarn Hotel C2

5 River Guest House C3

🍴 Eating

- 6 Chanthorn Phochana C1
 7 Muslim Restaurant C3
 8 Seafood Noodle Shop C2
 9 Sony Yadaw D3

🍷 Drinking

10 Coffee Room B3

👁️ Sights & Activities

TOP CHOICE Gem Market

MARKET

(ตลาดพลอย; Th Si Chan & Trok Kachang; ☺Fri, Sat & Sun) On weekends, the streets and side streets near Th Si Chan (or 'Gem Rd') are overflowing with the banter and intrigue of the hard sell. It has the feel of an average Thai market, incongruously humble considering the preciousness of the commodity. People cluster around makeshift tables or even a trader's outstretched palm, examining small piles of unset stones. In the formal shops, hardnosed inspectors examine the gemstones under magnifying glasses looking for quality and authenticity. This is strictly a spectator sport and not recom-

mended for the uninitiated, but it is a fascinating glimpse at a relatively private trade.

In the hills surrounding Chanthaburi, several sapphire and ruby mines once supplied the palace with fine ornaments prior to the mid-19th century when the mines were developed into commercial operations by Shan (Burmese) traders. These days, locally mined gems are of inferior international quality but the resourceful Chanthaburi traders roam the globe acquiring precious and semi-precious stones, which are in turn traded here to other globetrotters.

The last remaining mine in the area is **Khao Phloi Waen**, 6km from town, which is famous locally for its 'Mekong Whiskey' yellow-coloured sapphire.



BORDER CROSSING: BAN PAKARD TO PSAR PRUHM

From this coastal corner of Thailand, there is a faster way to reach Cambodia's Angkor Wat than hustling north-east to the busy border crossing of Aranya Prathet.

Minivans (☎08 1949 0455) leave from a stop across the river from River Guest House in Chanthaburi to Ban Pakard/Pong Nam Ron (150B, 1½ hours, three times daily). From there you can cross the border with the usual formalities (a passport photo and US\$20 visa fee), and catch a ride to Pailin, which has transport to scenic Battambang; the next day catch the boat to Siem Reap.

Chantaboon Waterfront Community

HISTORICAL SITE

(Th Sukhaphiban) Along the banks of Mae Nam Chanthaburi is 1km stretch of old wooden shophouses that are valiantly being promoted and preserved as a living history museum. It is an atmospheric stroll through time and place with a uniquely Thai twist: food features more prominently than facts and figures.

Stop by the **Learning House** (☎08 1945 5761; ☀9am-5pm) for an educational introduction to the community. The 2nd floor displays historic photographs of daily life as well as architectural drawings of the homes' beautifully carved ventilation panels. Much of the community's immigrant past is revealed in these unique panels: there are carvings of Chinese characters and even French fleurs-de-lis.

Farmers and merchants first settled on the fertile river banks some 300 years ago, establishing the area as an agricultural trading post. Chinese traders and economic migrants sought refuge here, thus diversifying the local population. Vietnamese Catholics fled from religious persecution in their home country. And before long the different groups had intermarried until everyone claimed a little bit of each.

Today, the older generation remains in the rickety old houses but through Khun Pratapan's efforts, many domestic tourists are coming for weekend outings to eat Chi-

nese, Thai and Vietnamese specialties and listen to all the old stories.

Cathedral

CHURCH

(east bank of Mae Nam Chanthaburi; ☀daylight hrs) This French-style cathedral, across a footbridge from Th Sukhaphiban, is the town's architectural highlight. A small missionary chapel was built here in 1711, when Vietnamese Catholics and a French priest arrived. The original has undergone four reconstructions between 1712 and 1906 and is now the largest building of its kind in Thailand.

King Taksin Park

PARK

(สวนสาธารณะสมเด็จพระเจ้าตากสิน; Th Tha Chalaep; ☀daylight hrs) The town's main oasis is filled with picnicking families and joggers. It's a pleasant spot for an evening stroll.

*** Festivals

Fruit Festival

FOOD

In the first week of June each year, Chanthaburi's annual fruit festival is a good opportunity to sample the region's superb produce, especially rambutans, mangos and the ever-pungent durian.

🏠 Sleeping

Accommodation can get very busy. Try to book ahead, especially from Friday to Sunday when the gem traders are in town.

River Guest House

HOTEL \$

(☎0 3932 8211; 3/5-8 Th Si Chan; r 150-400B; 📞) Standard hotel boxes aren't much to get excited about, but this is as good as it gets in the budget range. The relaxed sitting area and friendly staff are a plus. Try to score a room away from the highway.

Kasemsarn Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎0 3931 1100; www.kasemsarnhotel.net; Th Benchamarachutit 98/1; r 1200-1500B; 📞) Good enough for visiting Bangkokians, Kasemsarn has large modern rooms with generous weekday discounts.

🍴 Eating & Drinking

Seafood Noodle Shop

THAI \$

(Th Sukhaphiban; dishes 25-50B; ☀lunch & dinner) The old city, along Mae Nam Chanthaburi, is where you'll find most sightseeing Thais eating this Chanthaburi variation of the basic rice-noodle theme; nearby are other home-made snacks.

Sony Yadav

INDIAN \$

(Th Si Chan; dishes 30-100B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner; 🍴) Many South Asian gem dealers stop into this hole-in-the-wall vegetarian restaurant for a home-away-from-home meal.

Chanthorn Phochana

THAI-CHINESE \$

(☎0 3931 2339; 102/5-8 Th Benchamarachutit; dishes 30-120B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) A dazzling array of Thai-Chinese meals includes such specialities as stir-fried papaya and local mangosteen wine. Try the Vietnamese spring rolls, and buy a bag of local durian chips (tastier than you think) for your next bus ride. It is totally packed on weekends.

Muslim Restaurant

MUSLIM THAI \$

(☎08 1353 5174; cnr Soi 4, Th Si Chan; dishes 25-50B; ☺9.30am-9pm) This tiny place has excellent paratha, *biryani*, curries and chai tea.

Coffee Room

CAFE \$

(Th Tha Chalaep; drinks from 50B; ☺breakfast & lunch) Across from King Taksin Park, this urban-style coffee shop is where upscale traders and visitors from Bangkok come to feel a little less provincial.

i Information

Banks with change facilities and ATMs can be found across town.

Bank of Ayudhya (Th Khwang)

Chanthaburi Bangkok Hospital (☎0 3935 1467; Th Tha Luang; ☺6am-9pm) Part of the Bangkok group; handles emergencies.

i Getting There & Around

Buses operate from Chanthaburi's bus station to the following destinations:

Bangkok's Eastern (Ekamai) station (187B, 3½ hours, hourly 6am to 11.30pm)

Bangkok's Northern (Mo Chit) station (187B, four hours, two daily departures)

Trat (70B, 1½ hours, every 1½ hours 6.30am to 11.30pm)

Khorat (266B, hourly 6am to 6pm) Gateway to the northeast.

Sa Kaew (106B to 137B, hourly 6am to 10pm) Transfer point for buses to Aranya Prathet border crossing.

Minivans leave from a stop near the market and go to Trat (80B) and Rayong (100B). For Ko Samet-bound travellers, take the minivan directly to Ban Phe (120B).

Motorbike taxis around town cost 20B to 30B.

Trat

ตราด

POP 21,590

A major mainland transit point for Ko Chang and coastal Cambodia, Trat is underappreciated for its provincial charms. The guest-house neighbourhood occupies an atmospheric wooden shophouse district bisected by winding sois and filled with typical Thai street life: kids riding bikes, housewives running errands, small businesses selling trinkets and necessities. Since your destination is still so far away, why not stay a little longer and enjoy all the things you can't get on the islands: fresh, affordable fruit; tasty noodles; and tonnes of people-watching.

NATIONAL PARKS NEAR CHANTHABURI

Two small national parks are easily reached from Chanthaburi, and make good day trips. Both are malarial, so take the usual precautions.

Khao Khitchakut National Park (อุทยานแห่งชาติเขาคิชฌกูฏ; ☎0 3945 2074; admission 200B; ☺8.30am-4.30pm) is 28km northeast of town. The cascade of **Nam Tok Krathing** is the main attraction; though it is only worth a visit just after the rainy season.

To get to Khao Khitchakut, take a *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* from next to the post office, near the northern side of the market in Chanthaburi (35B, 45 minutes). The *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* stops 1km from the park headquarters on Rte 3249, from which point you'll have to walk. Returning transport is a bit thin so expect to wait or hitch.

Nam Tok Phlio National Park (อุทยานแห่งชาติน้ำตกพลิว; ☎0 3943 4528; admission 200B; ☺8.30am-4.30pm), off Hwy 3, is 14km to the southeast of Chanthaburi and is much more popular. A pleasant, 1km nature trail loops around the waterfalls, which writhe with soro brook carp. To get to the park, catch a *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* from the northern side of the market in Chanthaburi to the park entrance (40B, 30 minutes). You'll get dropped off about 1km from the entrance.

Accommodation is available at both parks; book with the **park reservation system** (☎0 2562 0760; www.dnp.go.th).

Sights

Trat's signature product is a **medicinal herbal oil** (known in Thai as *nám-man lěu-ang*), touted as a remedy for everything from arthritis to bug bites and available at local pharmacies. It's produced by resident Mae Ang-Ki (Somthawin Pasananon), using a secret pharmaceutical recipe that has been handed down through her Chinese-Thai family for generations. It's said if you leave Trat without a couple of bottles of *nám-man lěu-ang*, then you really haven't been to Trat.

Another booming business in the city is **swiftlet farming**. Walk down Th Lak Meuang and you'll soon figure out that the top floors of a shophouse have been purposefully converted into a nesting site for a flock of birds who produce the edible nests considered a delicacy among Chinese populations. Swiftlets' nests were quite rare (and expensive) because they were only harvested from precipitous sea caves by trained, daring climbers. But in the 1990s, entrepreneurs figured out how to replicate the cave atmosphere in multi-storey shophouses and the business has been a turn-key operation throughout Southeast Asia and here in Trat. Now many municipalities are dealing with the noise pollution of these moneymakers; have a listen for yourself.

Indoor Market

MARKET

The indoor market sprawls east from Th Sukhumvit to Th Tat Mai and has a little bit of everything, especially all the things that you forgot to pack. Without really noticing the difference you will stumble upon the **day market**, selling fresh fruit, vegetables and takeaway food.

Sleeping

Trat has many budget hotels housed in traditional wooden houses on and around Th Thana Charoen. You'll find it hard to spend more even if you want to.

Ban Jaidee Guest

GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎0 3952 0678; 6 Th Chaimongkol; r 200B; 🏠) In a charming neighbourhood, this relaxed traditional wooden house has simple rooms with shared bathrooms (hot-water showers). Paintings and objets d'art made by the artistically inclined owners decorate the common spaces. It's very popular and booking ahead is essential.

Residang Guest House **GUEST HOUSE \$**
(☎0 3953 0103; www.trat-guesthouse.com; 87/1-2 Th Thana Charoen; r 260-600B; 🏠📶) Thick mattresses, hot-water showers, wi-fi – what more do you need? Fan rooms come with breezes and balconies. The owners keep an extensive list of transport information.

Garden Guest House **GUEST HOUSE \$**
(☎0 3952 1018; 87/1 Th Sukhumvit; r 120-200B) A lovely grandmotherly type runs this guest house festooned with flowers and the flotsam of Thai life. Of the eight rooms, only one has a private bathroom.

Rimklong **HOTEL \$\$**
(☎08 1861 7181; 194 Th Lak Meuang; r 800B; 🏠) Trat's first boutique hotel was under construction when we visited; but everything looked promising for the espresso-sipping crowd.

Sawadee **GUEST HOUSE \$**
(☎0 3951 2392; sawadee_trat@yahoo.com; 90 Th Lak Meuang; r 100-300B) In a converted shophouse, this simple family-run place has fan rooms with shared bathroom.

Pop Guest House **GUEST HOUSE \$**
(☎0 3951 2392; 1/1 Th Thana Charoen; r 150-500B; 🏠📶) You'll probably end up at Pop without intending to since the owners are generous with their taxi commissions and aggressive

Trat Province

0 20 km
0 12 miles



in procuring guests. The rooms are clean and cheap, but if you're an idealistic consumer, promote competition.

Eating & Drinking

Trat is all about market eating: head to the day market on Th Tat Mai for *gah:faa boh-rah*n (ancient coffee), the indoor market for lunchtime noodles and the night market for a stir-fried dinner.

TOP CHOICE Cool Corner

CAFE \$

(☎08 4159 2030; 49-51 Th Thana Charoen; dishes 50-150B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) Run by Khun Morn, a modern Renaissance woman (writer, artist and traveller) from Bangkok, Cool Corner is an anchor of Trat's creative expats (both domestic and international) who moved to the city because of its small size, proximity to Bangkok and easygoing way of life. The cafe has a degree of sophistication that you don't usually find in provincial towns and serves up a great vibe. *phat* (cool) beats and darn good mango lassies.

Kluarimklong Cafe

THAI \$

(☎0 3952 4919; cnr Soi Rimklong & Th Thana Charoen; dishes 70-90B; ☺lunch & dinner) The winning combination here is delicious Thai food served in modern air-conditioned surroundings. The dishes are surprisingly affordable given the slick decor.

Oscar Bar

BAR

(Th Thana Charoen) Trat's artist and expat business owners can be found at this corner bar welcoming the end of the work day.

Shopping

Tratosphere Books

BOOKSHOP

(23 Soi Rimklong; ☺8am-10pm) A good place to browse for secondhand titles and Thai handicrafts. Owner Serge is a fan and promoter of Trat and can point you to some unexplored corners.

Information

Th Sukhumvit runs through town, though it's often referred to as Th Ratanuson.

Bangkok Trat Hospital (☎0 3953 2735; Th Sukhumvit; ☺24hr) Best health care in the region. It's 400m north of the town centre.

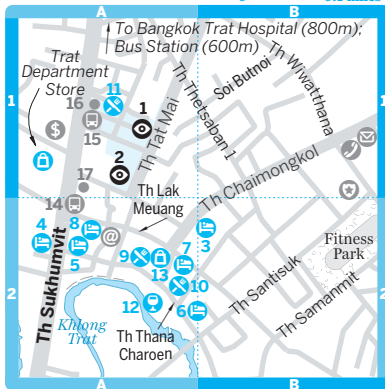
Krung Thai Bank (Th Sukhumvit) Has an ATM and currency-exchange facilities.

Police station (☎1155; cnr Th Santisuk & Th Wiwatthana) A short walk from Trat's centre.

Post office (Th Tha Reua Jang) East of Trat's commercial centre.

Trat

0 200 m
0 0.1 miles



Trat

Sights

- 1 Day Market A1
- 2 Indoor Market A1

Sleeping

- 3 Ban Jaidee Guest House B2
- 4 Garden Guest House A2
- 5 Pop Guest House A2
- 6 Residang Guest House A2
- 7 Rimklong A2
- 8 Sawadee A2

Eating

- 9 Cool Corner A2
- Day Market (see 1)
- 10 Kluarimklong Cafe A2
- 11 Night Market A1

Drinking

- 12 Oscar Bar A2

Shopping

- 13 Tratosphere Books A2

Transport

- 14 Family Tour (Minivans to Bangkok) A2
- 15 Minivans to Chanthaburi A1
- 16 Sörng-täa-ou to bus station, Laem Ngop A1
- 17 Sörng-täa-ou to Tha Centrepoint (Laem Ngop) A1

Sawadee@Cafe Net (☎0 3952 0075; Th Lak Meuang; per min 1B; ☺10am-10pm) Internet and Skype are both available.

Telephone office (Th Tha Reua Jang) Near the post office.

SCRATCHING THE BEACH ITCH

If you're going through coastal withdrawal, the sliver of Trat Province that extends southeast towards Cambodia is fringed by sandy beaches. One of the easiest beaches to reach is **Hat Mai Rut**, roughly halfway between Trat and the border crossing of Hat Lek. Nearby is a traditional fishing village filled with colourful wooden boats and the sights and smells of a small-scale industry carried on by generations of families. **Mairood Resort** (☎08 414858; www.mairood-resort.com; Km 53; r 500-1000B; 🍷🍺🍻) is a lovely spot to stay overnight and is run by an English-speaking Thai who lived for many years in the US. After being abroad for so long, he is able to explain the unique aspects of this area to foreigners. The resort has simple huts by the sea and in the mangroves.

You can get to Hat Mai Rut from the Trat bus station via Hat Lek-bound *sǒrng-tǎa-ou*. The resort is 3km from the Km 53 highway marker.

Trat Map (www.Tratmap.com) An online directory of businesses and attractions in Trat.

i Getting There & Around

Air

The airport is 40km from town; a taxi to the airport from Trat town costs a ridiculous 500B.

Bangkok Airways (☎Trat airport 0 3955 1654-5, in Bangkok 0 2265 5555; www.bangkokair.com) flies to the following destinations:

Bangkok (one way from 2090B, three times daily)

Ko Samui (one way from 3390B, three times weekly) Via Bangkok.

Phuket (one way from 4090B, three times weekly) Via Bangkok.

Bus & Minivans

Trat's bus station is outside of town and serves the following destinations:

Bangkok's Eastern (Ekamai) station (248B, 4½ hours, hourly 6am to 11.30pm)

Bangkok's Northern (Mo Chit) station (248B, 5½ hours, two morning departures)

Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi (airport) station (248B, four to 4½ hours, five daily departures)

Chanthaburi (70B, 1½ hours, every 1½ hours 6.30am to 11.30pm)

Hat Lek (120B to 150B, one hour) Minivans depart when full; morning departures are more frequent.

There are also many in-town options. Minivans to Chanthaburi (80B) leave when full from a stop on Th Sukhumvit north of the indoor market.

Family Tour (☎08 1996 2216; Th Sukhumvit cnr Th Lak Meuang) runs minivans to Bangkok's Victory Monument (300B, five hours, hourly 8am to 5pm) and continues on to Th Khao San (350B).

Local *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* leave from Th Sukhumvit near the market for the bus station (20B to 60B, depending on number of passengers).

Boat

The piers that handle boat traffic to/from Ko Chang are located in Laem Ngop, about 30km southwest of Trat.

There are three piers in Laem Ngop each used by different boat companies, but the most convenient services are through Koh Chang Ferry (from Tha Thammachat) and Centrepoint Ferry (from Tha Centrepoint). See p227 for price and departure details on these ferry services.

From Trat town, shared *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* leave from a stop on Th Sukhumvit to Laem Ngop's Tha Centrepoint (50B per person for six passengers, 45 minutes). To reach Tha Thammachat, inquire about pier transfers when you buy your ticket or charter a *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* (60B per person for six people or 300B for the vehicle). It should be the same charter price if you want to go directly from Trat's bus station to the pier.

From Bangkok, you can catch a bus from Bangkok's Eastern (Ekamai) station all the way to Tha Centrepoint (250B, five hours, three morning departures). This route includes a stop at Suvarnabhumi (airport) bus station as well as Trat's bus station. In the reverse direction, buses have two afternoon departures from Laem Ngop.

If you want to skip Ko Chang and head straight to the neighbouring islands (Ko Wai, Ko Mak and Ko Kut), see those sections for mainland transport options.

Ko Chang

เกาะช้าง

POP 7033

With steep, jungle-covered peaks erupting from the sea, picturesque Ko Chang (Elephant Island) retains its remote and rugged spirit despite its current status as a package-tour resort akin to Phuket. The island's swathes of sand are girl-next-door pretty but not beauty-queen gorgeous. What it lacks in sand, it makes up for in an unlikely combination: accessible wilderness with a thriving

party scene. Convenient forays into a verdant jungle or underwater coral gardens can be enthusiastically toasted at one of Lonely Beach's many beer and bucket parties.

A little more than a decade ago, Ko Chang didn't have 24-hour electricity, was still considered malarial, had few paved roads and fewer motorised vehicles. Today it is still a slog to get here, but there is a constant migration of visitors: Russian package tourists, Cambodia-bound backpackers and beach-hopping couples funnelling through to more remote islands in the Mu Ko Chang National Marine Park. Along the populous west coast are virtual mini-cities with a standard of living that has noticeably outpaced the island's infrastructure, a common problem on many Thai islands: Ko Chang struggles to provide decent sanitation and alternative means of transport to an ever-expanding nonresident population.

Sights

Though Thailand's second-largest island has accelerated into modernity with some understandable growing pains, Ko Chang still has tropically hued seas, critter-filled jungles and a variety of water sports for athletic beach bums.

WEST COAST

The west coast has the island's widest and sandiest beaches and the greatest amount of development. Frequent public *sörnng-tāa-ou* make beach-hopping easy and affordable. It is a good idea to bring swim shoes, especially for children, as many of the beaches are rocky in spots. These shallow, gentle seas are great for inexperienced swimmers, but do be

careful of riptides during the storms and the rainy season (May to September).

Hat Sai Khao (White Sand Beach)

BEACH

(หาดทรายขาว) The longest, most luxurious stole of sand on the island is packed with package-tour hotels and serious sunbathers. Finding a blanket's-worth of sand can be tough during the high season, unless you wait until the hot hours of the afternoon or hike past KC Grande Resort towards the remarkably low-key backpacker area in the far northern section of the beach. Along the main road, the village is busy, loud and brash – but the extremities provide a convenient break.

Hat Kai Mook (Pearl Beach)

BEACH

(หาดไข่มุก) The pearls here are large pebbles that pack the shore and culminate in fish-friendly headlands. Swimming and sunbathing are out but there's good snorkelling. The stylish restaurant Saffron by the Sea is a scenic perch should you prefer to wet your palette instead.

Ao Khlong Prao

BEACH

(อ่าวคลองพร้าว) A relaxed counterpoint to Hat Sai Khao's energy, Khlong Prao's beach is a pretty sweep of sand pinned between hulking mountainous headlands and bisected by two estuaries. At low tide, beachcombers stroll the rippled sand eyeing the critters left naked by the receding water. Sprawling luxury resorts dominate Khlong Prao and the primary pastime is sunbathing at seaside pools since high tide tends to gobble up most of the beach.

BORDER CROSSING: HAT LEK TO KRONG KOH KONG

For coastal border crossers, the closest Thai-Cambodian crossing is at the Thai town of Hat Lek into the Cambodian town of Krong Koh Kong. This crossing poses you for transit to Sihanoukville (via Krong Koh Kong) or Ko Chang (via Trat).

If you're leaving Thailand, catch a minivan from Trat's bus station to Hat Lek (120B to 150B) and continue on to Cambodian immigration.

Cambodian tourist visas are available at the border for 1200B (though other borders charge only US\$20); payment is only accepted in baht at this border. If you try to debate the issue, be prepared for an argument. Be sure to bring a passport photo and try to avoid some of the runner boys who want to issue a health certificate or other 'medical' paperwork.

From the Cambodian border, take a private taxi (US\$10) or moto (US\$3) to Koh Kong where you can catch onward transport to Sihanoukville (four hours, one or two departures per day) and Phonm Penh (five hours, two or three departures till 11.30am). You can also use this border to renew your Thai visa, but do note that visas at land borders have been shortened to 15 days. This border crossing closes at 8pm.

Ko Chang



With hired transport, you can depart the beach for some waterfall-spotting. The island's biggest is **Nam Tok Khlong Plu** (park fee 200B; ☀8am-5pm), a three-tiered cascade with a swimmable pool. It is reached via a 600m jungle path and is most stunning just after the rainy season months and in the morning before the crowds arrive.

Hat Kaibae

BEACH
(หาดไคแบ่) A companion beach to Khlong Prao, Hat Kaibae is a great spot for families and thirty-something couples. A slim strip of sand unfurls around an island-dotted bay far enough removed from the package tour scene that you'll feel self-righteously independent. There's kayaking to the outlying island and low tide provides hours of beachcombing.

Lonely Beach

BEACH
The island's backpacker hang-out is the five-o'clock shadow of beaches, a bit scruffy but

ready for fun. During the day, most sunbathers are baking off a hangover earned the night before when Lonely Beach becomes the most social place on the island. The music is loud, the drinks are strong and the crowd is youthful and carefree.

Ban Bang Bao

VILLAGE
(บ้านบางบ่อ) Nearly at the end of the west coast road, Bang Bao is a former fishing community built in the traditional fashion of interconnected piers. The villagers have swapped their nets for the tourist trade by renting out portions of their homes to souvenir shops and restaurants. Though it isn't a traditional experience, the resulting commercialism is extremely Thai, much like a mainland market with every possible space dedicated to selling something. Follow the pier all the way to the end and you'll find a big blue ocean and boats waiting to take you past the horizon. Most visitors come for a seafood meal and some decide to stay

overnight. Wrap up your visit before sunset as taxis become scarcer and more expensive after dark.

Khlong Kloi

BEACH

At the eastern end of Ao Bang Bao, Khlong Kloi is a sandy beach that feels a lot like a secret though there are other people here and all the requisite amenities (beer, fruit, food, massage) and a few guest houses if you want the place to yourself. You'll need private transport to get out here.

NORTHERN INTERIOR

Ko Chang's mountainous interior is predominantly protected as a national park. The forest is lush and alive with wildlife and threaded by silver-hued waterfalls. For information about hiking tours, see p220).

Ban Kwan Chang

ELEPHANT CAMP

(บ้านควานช้าง; ☎08 1919 3995; changtone@yahoo.com; ☉8.30am-5pm) In a beautiful forested setting, this camp offers a quiet and intimate experience with its nine resident elephants. A one-hour visit (900B) involves feeding, bathing and riding an elephant and hotel transfer is included. Be sure to wear mozzie spray.

Pittaya Homkrais is the camp owner and a well-regarded conservation enthusiast who works to preserve a humane relationship between the elephant and mahout. His interest in environmental and community issues also includes efforts to preserve the southeastern mangroves in Ao Salak Kok on the island's east coast.

EAST COAST

The east coast is still peaceful and undeveloped, mainly undulating hills of coconut and palm trees and low-key fishing villages that have resisted the resort rush of the west coast. You'll need private transport to ex-

plore this lost coast of scenic bays and mangrove forests.

Nam Tok Than Mayom

WATERFALL

(น้ำตกธารมะยม; park fee 200B; ☉8am-5pm) A series of three falls along the stream of Khlong Mayom can be reached via the park office near Tha Than Mayom. The view from the top is superb and nearby there are inscribed stones bearing the initials of Rama V, Rama VI and Rama VII.

Ao Salak Kok

MANGROVE BAY

(อ่าวสลักคอก) From a hotel developers' perspective, this thick tangle of mangroves is an unprofitable wasteland. But the local population of fisherfolk recognises that its beauty and profit is in its environmental fertility. Mangroves are the ocean's nurseries, fostering the next generation of marine species as well as resident birds and crustaceans.

Thanks to its natural state, the bay is now Ko Chang's leading example of ecotourism. Villagers, working in conjunction with Khun Pittaya, of Ban Kwan Chang elephant park, operate an award-winning program to preserve the environment and the traditional way of life. They rent kayaks through the Salak Kok Kayak Station and run an affiliated restaurant.

Ban Salak Phet

VILLAGE

(บ้านสลักเพชร) In the southeast pocket of the island is Ban Salak Phet, a surprisingly bustling Thai community of fisherfolk and merchants plus lots of bike-riding kids and yawning dogs. This is what most of Ko Chang looked like less than a generation ago. Just beyond the commercial heart of the village is **Ao Salak Phet**, a beautiful blue bay serenely guarded by humpbacked islands. Most visitors come for the seafood



ECO VS FUN: DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

On many of the around-the-island boat tours, operators amaze their guests with a stop at a rocky cliff to feed the wild monkeys. It seems innocent enough and even entertaining but there's an unfortunate consequence. The animals become dependent on this food source and when the boats don't come as often during the low season the young and vulnerable ones are ill-equipped to forage in the forest.

The same goes for the dive or boat trips that feed the fish leftover lunches or bread bought on the pier specifically for this purpose. It is a fantastic way to show young children a school of brilliantly coloured fish but the downside is that the fish forsake the coral reefs for an easier meal. Without the fishes' daily grooming efforts the coral is soon overgrown with algae and will eventually suffocate. Sorry to ruin the fun.

KO CHANG IN...

Four Days

Lay on the beach, roll over to the other side and repeat. Do this until you get sunburned or bored and then rouse yourself out of the sun-induced stupor to explore the island. Do a **day hike** through the jungle or view the island from aboard a **kayak**. Catch a *sǎng-tǎa-ou* to **Bang Bao** for lunch or an early dinner and work off your meal with some souvenir shopping. The next day rent a motorbike and explore the **east coast**.

One Week

Devote a few days to giving back to the island by volunteering at **Koh Chang Animal Project** or **Koh Chang Pony Rehabilitation Project**. Migrate to the nearby islands of **Ko Wai** or **Ko Kut** for a little island sightseeing.

restaurants or to cruise the lonely byways for a secluded beach.

Nam Tok Khiri Phet

WATERFALL

(น้ำตกคีรีเพชร) This small waterfall, 2km from Ban Salak Phet, is a 15-minute walk from the road and rewards you with a small, deep plunge pool. It's usually quieter than many of the larger falls and is easily reached if you're in the neighbourhood of Ao Salak Phet.



Activities

Kayaking

Ko Chang cuts an impressive and heroic profile when viewed from the sea aboard a kayak. The water is generally calm and off-shore islands provide a paddling destination that is closer than the horizon. Most hotels rent open-top kayaks (from 300B per day) that are convenient for near-shore outings and noncommittal kayakers.

KayakChang

KAYAKING

(☎08 7673 1923; www.kayakchang.com; Amari Emerald Cove Resort, Khlong Prao) For more serious paddlers, KayakChang rents high-end, closed-top kayaks (from 1000B per day) that handle better and travel faster. They also lead one- and multi-day trips to other islands in the archipelago.

Salak Kok Kayak Station

KAYAKING

(☎08 1919 3995; kayak rentals per hr 100B) On the east side of the island, explore the island's mangrove swamps of Ao Salak Kok while supporting an award-winning eco-tour program. Salak Kok Kayak Station rents self-guided kayaks and is a village-work project designed to promote tourism without deteriorating the traditional way of

life. The kayak station can also help arrange village homestays and hiking tours.

Hiking

Ko Chang is unusual in Thailand for having a well-developed trekking scene. The island is blessed with lush forests filled with birds, monkeys, lizards and beautiful flowers. Best of all there are a handful of guides who speak English that know and love the forest so that it can be shared with tourists.

Mr Tan from **Evolution Tour** (☎0 3955 7078; www.evolutiontour.com) or Lek from **Jungle Way** (☎08 9247 3161; www.jungleway.com) lead one-day treks (800B to 1400B) through Khlong Son Valley. The trip works up a sweat and then rewards the work with a waterfall swim and a stop at the Ban Kwan Chang elephant camp. Multi-day trips can be arranged through both. Mr Tan also has family-friendly treks and a hike that heads west from Khlong Son to Hat Sai Khao.

Koh Chang Trekking

HIKING, BIRD-WATCHING

(☎08 1588 3324; www.kohchangtrekking.info) Bird-watchers should contact Koh Chang Trekking which runs one- and two-day trips (1000B to 2000B) into the national park and hikes to the top of Khao Chom Prasat, two nearby rocky tipped peaks.

Salak Phet Kayak Station

HIKING

(☎08 7834 9489; from 1500B) Guides overnight treks on Khao Salak Phet, Ko Chang's highest peak, which rises 744km into the heavens and provides a sunrise and sunset view. Though the altitude might be modest, this is one of the few places in Thailand where you can combine such serious exertion with a coastal landscape; you can choose to sleep in a tent or under the stars.

Volunteering

Koh Chang Animal Project VOLUNTEERING

(☎08 9042 2347; www.kohchanganimalproject.org; Ban Khlong Son) Abused, injured or abandoned animals receive medical care and refuge at this nonprofit centre, established in 2002 by American Lisa McAlonie. The centre also works with local people on spaying, neutering and general veterinarian services, and Lisa is well-known on the island by concerned pet owners and flea-ridden dogs. Volunteers, especially travelling vets and vet nurses, are welcome to donate a bit of TLC and elbow grease for the cause. Call to make an appointment. Most *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* drivers know how to get here; tell them you're going to 'Ban Lisa' (Lisa's House) in Khlong Son.

Koh Chang Pony Rehabilitation Project VOLUNTEERING

(☎08 9723 4278; ponyproject.org; Ban Khlong Son) On the same street as Ban Lisa, this centre works to rescue and rehabilitate abused and neglected equines. Volunteers can help feed, clean and exercise the ponies and horses that are recovering from injuries or awaiting adoption in caring environments.

Courses

Break up your lazy days with classes designed to enhance mind and body. Khlong Prao hosts two well-regarded culinary schools. Cooking classes at both are typically four to five hours, include a market tour and cost 1200B per person; book ahead.

Koh Chang Thai Cookery School COOKING

(☎0 3955 7243; Blue Lagoon Bungalows, Khlong Prao) Slices, dices and sautés in a shady open-air kitchen beside the estuary.

KaTi COOKING

(☎0 3955 7252; main road, Khlong Prao) Across from Tropicana Resort, is run by a mother and daughter team teaching family recipes.

Baan Zen YOGA, MEDITATION

(☎08 6530 9354; www.baanzen.com; Khlong Prao; classes from 5500B) Hidden down an unpaved road between Noren Resort and Coco Massage in Khlong Prao. It is a peaceful and relaxing setting for classes in yoga, reiki and meditation.

Sima Massage MASSAGE

(☎08 1489 5171; main road, Khlong Prao; massage per hr 250B; ☀8am-10pm) Across from Tropicana Resort, and regarded by locals as the best massage on the island – quite an accom-

modation in a place where a massage is easier to find than a 7-Eleven.

Bailan Herbal Sauna

SAUNA

(☎08 6252 4744; Ban Bailan, across from Bailan Inn; ☀4-9pm) Sweating on purpose might seem like a free and unintended consequence of tropical living but, just south of Lonely Beach, Bailan continues an old-fashioned Southeast Asian tradition of the village sauna. Set amid lush greenery, the earthen huts are heated with a health-promoting stew of herbs. There's also massage, facial treatments and a post-steam juice bar.

Sleeping

Ko Chang's package-tour industry has distorted accommodation pricing. In general rates have risen while quality has not, partly because hotels catering to group tours are guaranteed occupancy and don't have to maintain standards to woo repeat visitors or walk-ins. There is also a lot of copy-cat pricing giving value-oriented visitors little to choose from.

A few places close down during the wet season (April to October) and rates drop precipitously. Consider booking ahead and shopping for online discounts during peak season (November to March), weekends and holidays.

WEST COAST

On the west coast, Lonely Beach is still the best budget option, Hat Kai Bae is the



NATIONAL PARK STATUS

Parts of Ko Chang are protected and maintained as a national park. Though their conservation efforts are a bit amorphous, you will be required to pay a 200B park entrance fee when visiting some of the waterfalls (entrance fees are stated in the reviews and payable at the site). **National Park headquarters** (☎0 3955 5080; Ban Than Mayom; ☀8am-5pm) is on the eastern side of the island near Nam Tok Than Mayom.

Do also be aware that nudity and topless sunbathing are forbidden by law in Mu Ko Chang National Marine Park; this includes all beaches on Ko Chang, Ko Kut, Ko Mak etc.

DIVING & SNORKELLING

The dive sites near Ko Chang offer a variety of coral, fish and beginner-friendly shallow waters on par with other Gulf of Thailand dive sites.

The seamounts off the southern tip of the island within the Ko Chang marine park are reached within a 30-minute cruise. Popular spots include **Hin Luk Bat** and **Hin Rap**, rocky, coral-encrusted seamounts with depths of around 18m to 20m. These are havens for schooling fish and some turtles.

By far the most pristine diving in the area is around **Ko Rang**, an uninhabited island protected from fishing by its marine park status. Visibility here is much better than near Ko Chang and averages between 10m and 20m. Everyone's favourite dive is **Hin Gadeng**, spectacular rock pinnacles with coral visible to around 28m. On the eastern side of Ko Rang, **Hin Kuak Maa** (also known as Three Finger Reef) is another top dive and is home to a coral-encrusted wall sloping from 2m to 14m and attracting swarms of marine life.

Ko Yak, **Ko Tong Lang** and **Ko Laun** are shallow dives perfect for both beginners and advanced divers. These small rocky islands can be circumnavigated and have lots of coral, schooling fish, puffer fish, morays, barracuda, rays and the occasional turtle.

Reef-fringed **Ko Wai** features a good variety of colourful hard and soft corals and is great for snorkelling. It is a popular day-tripping island but has simple overnight accommodation for more alone time with the reef.

Dive operators estimate that about 30% of the area's coral reefs were destroyed during the global bleaching phenomenon of 2010. In response park officials closed some areas of the Ko Rang marine park; ask the dive operators which sites are open.

Diving trips typically cost around 2800B to 3500B. PADI Open Water certification costs 14,500B per person. Recently dive shops remain open during the rainy season (June to September) but visibility and sea conditions can be poor. The following are recommend dive operators:

» **BB Divers**

(☎0 3955 8040; www.bbdivers.com) Based at Bang Bao with branches in Lonely Beach, Khlong Prao and Hat Sai Khao.

» **Scuba Zone**

(☎0 3961 9035; www.scuba-kohchang.com) Based at Hat Sai Khao; the instructors come highly recommended.

best-value option and Hat Sai Khao is the most overpriced.

HAT SAI KHAO

The island's prettiest beach is also its most expensive. The northern and southern extremities have some budget and midrange options worth considering if you need proximity to the finest sand. There's a groovy backpacker enclave north of KC Grande Resort accessible only via the beach. We've listed two here but there are more further north.

At the southern end, you can find some good value budget and midrangers but this end of the beach is rocky and lacking sand during high tide.

If you want to splash out, don't do it on Hat Sai Khao where good money will be wasted.

Independent Bo's

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 5283 5581; r 350-550B) A colourful place on the jungle hillside exuding a creative, hippie vibe that Ko Chang used to be famous for. All bungalows are funky and different. The cheapest rooms are 'way, way' up in the jungle. First come, first served.

Rock Sand Beach Resort

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(☎08 4781 0550; www.rocksand-resort.com; r 550-2000B; ☎) Just past Bo's, Rock Sand takes budget accommodation up a notch. Simple fan bungalows share bathrooms, while the highest-priced air-con rooms look out over the sea. The restaurant is popular and hovers over the clear blue water.

Koh Chang Hut Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎08 1865 8123; r 600-1500B; ☎☎) Next to Plaloma Cliff Resort at the southern end of the beach, this cliff-side hotel puts you

within walking distance of the beach without spending a lot of baht. More expensive oceanfront rooms drink in the view, while cheaper streetside rooms are noisier.

Keereeeelé

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 3955 1285; www.keereeele.com; r 2000B; 🍷🍷) An excess of 'e's in the name doesn't detract from the merits of this new multi-storey hotel on the interior side of the road. The rooms are modern and comfortable and some have views of the verdant mountains behind. Beach access is 300m via sidewalks so you don't have to play chicken with traffic.

Sai Khao Inn

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(☎ 3955 1584; www.saikhaoinn.com; r 800-1800B; 🍷) A garden setting on the interior side of the road, Sai Khao Inn has a little bit of everything – bungalows, concrete bunkers, big rooms, even rooms for taxi drivers (according to the brochure).

AO KHLONG PRAO

Ao Khlung Prao is dominated by high-end resorts and just a few budget spots peppered in between. There is a handful of cheapies on the main road that are within walking distance to the beach, though traffic can be treacherous and noisy.

Blue Lagoon Bungalows

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎ 08 6330 0094; r 600-1000B; 🍷) An exceedingly friendly garden spot, Blue Lagoon has simple wooden bungalows with private decks beside a peaceful estuary. A wooden walkway leads to the beach.

Tiger Huts

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎ 08 1762 3710; r 600B) The only thing that separates these wooden huts from labourer shanties is indoor plumbing. They are low on comfort and hospitality, but high on location claiming the widest and prettiest part of the beach. The neighbouring resorts must be very jealous.

Aana

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 3955 1539; www.aanaresort.com; r from 7000B; 🍷🍷🍷) Private villas perch prettily above the forest and Khlung Prao, kayaking distance from the beach. The rooms are effortlessly romantic and have verandahs and views.

Lin Bungalows

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(☎ 08 4120 1483; r 800-1200B; 🍷) Opposite Blue Lagoon, a variety of sealed concrete bungalows facing the beach.

Baan Rim Nam

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(☎ 08 7005 8575; www.iamkohchang.com; r from 1100B; 🍷🍷) Converted fisherman's house-turned-guest house teeters over a mangrove-lined river; kayaks and dialled-in advice free of charge.

Sofia Resort

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(☎ 3955 7314; www.jussinhotel.net; r 900-1200B; 🍷🍷🍷) Great price for the comfort factor but the trade-off is the location on the main road without direct beach access.

Boonya Resort

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎ 3955 7361; r from 800B; 🍷🍷🍷) Another main road option that would be a fab find if the beds weren't bare springs.

HAT KAIBAE

Hat Kaibae has some of the island's best variety of accommodation, from boutique hotels to budget huts and midrange bungalows. It is a great beach for families and flashpackers.



KB Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 08 1862 8103; www.kbresort.com; r 2000-3500B; 🍷🍷🍷) Lemon yellow bungalows have cheery bathrooms and pose peacefully beside the sea. Listen to the gentle lapping surf while the kids construct mega-cities in the sand. Skip the overpriced fan bungalows, though.

Buzza's Bungalows

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎ 08 7823 6674; r from 400B; 🍷🍷) Solid concrete bungalows with porches face each other creating a laid-back travellers ambience. It is a short and hassle-free stroll to the beach.

Kaibae Hut Resort

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 3955 7142; r 700-2500B; 🍷) Sprawling across a scenic stretch of beach, Kaibae Hut has sane prices and a variety of lodging options – slightly worn fan huts, fancier concrete bungalows and modern hotel-style rooms. A large open-air restaurant fires up nightly barbecues and there's plenty of room for free-range kids.

Garden Resort

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 3955 7260; www.gardenresortkohchang.com; r from 2500B; 🍷🍷🍷) On the interior side of the main road, Garden Resort has picture-window bungalows blossoming in a shady garden with a salt-water swimming pool. The owners are friendly and kid-oriented, thanks to their own child.

GajaPuri Resort & Spa

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎0 2713 7689; www.gajapuri.com; r from 6900B; 🍷🍷🍷) Polished wooden cottages gleam with quintessential Thai touches so that you have a sense of place and pampering. Oversized beds with crisp linens, sun-drenched reading decks and a pretty beach are even more luxurious if you score an online discount.

Porn's Bungalows

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 9251 9233; www.pornsbungalows-kohchang.com; r 800-900B) Kaibae's resident rasta scene hangs out in a shady coconut grove beside the beach; wooden fan bungalows with hot-water showers. First come, first served.

Siam Cottage

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 9153 6664; www.siamcottagekohchang.com; r 500-800B; 🍷) Ricketty wooden bungalows packed perpendicular to the beach don't afford much privacy but a nice slice of sand is right at your feet.

LONELY BEACH

A backpacker party fave, Lonely Beach is one of the cheapest places to sleep on the island, though oceanfront living has mostly moved upmarket, pushing the penny-pinchers into the interior village. If you've been flashpackerised, there are several creative midrangers that will save you from carbon-copy resorts. This end of the island is less developed and the jungle broods just over the squatty commercial strip.

**Paradise Cottages**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎08 5831 4228; www.paradisecottagekohchang.com; r 700-1200B; 🍷🍷) A whole lot of chillin'-out happens at this mellow flashpacker spot. Dining hammocks hang over the water for guests to savour a meal with a view. The usual concrete huts are dressed up with style and function. Though it is oceanfront, the beach is too muddy and rocky for swimming.

Oasis Bungalows

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 1721 2547; www.oasis-khochang.com; r from 350B; 🍷) Sitting at the end of an interior soi, Oasis has basic wooden bungalows in a pretty fruit and flower garden. The hillside restaurant peeks at the ocean above the tree tops and is a pleasant place for traveller camaraderie. You'll have to walk through the village and down the main road to get to the beach. If Oasis is full, this soi is filled with comparable options.

Warapura Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎08 3987 4777; www.warapuraaresort.com; r 2000-3500B; 🍷🍷🍷) Chic for relatively cheap, Warapura has a collection of adorable cottages tucked in between the village and a mangrove beach. The oceanfront pool is perfect for people who would rather gaze at the ocean than frolic in it.

Kachapura

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 60500754; www.kachapura.com; r 500-1800B; 🍷🍷) Warapura's modest sister, Kachapura does budget with care. Wooden walkways navigate a shady garden to clean and tidy bungalows that are basic but not busted up. It sits right in the middle of the village; no direct beach access.

**Mangrove**

HOTEL \$

(☎08 1949 7888; r 1000B) South of Lonely Beach is the real deal when it comes to an eco-lodge committed to a smaller footprint. Cascading down a forested hill to a private beach, Mangrove has beautiful yet simple bungalows purposefully designed with accordion-style doors that open to the views and the breezes (a natural air-con). The ambience is a pleasing combo of private rustic-chic.

BAN BANG BAO

Despite its touristy veneer, Ban Bang Bao is still a charming place to stay for folks who prefer scenery to swimming. Accommodation is mainly converted pier houses overlooking the sea with easy access to departing inter-island ferries. Daytime transport to a swimmable beach is regular thanks to the steady arrival and departure of day trippers. Night owls should either hire a motorbike or stay elsewhere as *sörng-tāa-ou* become rare and expensive after dinnertime.

**Bang Bao Sea Hut**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎08 1285 0570; r 2500B; 🍷) With individual bungalows built on the edge of Bang Bao's pier, this is one of Ko Chang's most unusual places to stay. Each 'hut' (actually much flashier than it sounds) is surrounded by a private deck where breakfast is served, with wooden shutters opening to the sea breeze.

Bang Bao Cliff Cottage

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 5904 6706; www.cliff-cottage.com; r 350-700B) Partially hidden on a verdant hillside west of the pier are a few dozen simple thatch huts overlooking a rocky cove. Most have sea views and a couple offer spectacular vistas. There's easy-access snorkelling down below.

Ocean Blue

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 1889 2348; www.oceanbluethailand.com; r 800B) Simple fan rooms line a long, polished-wood hallway at this traditional pier house. Toilets are the bucket variety, and showers are cold, but the rooms are clean and you can hear the ocean slosh beneath you. The crew running the place are quirky and funny.

Nirvana

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎0 3955 8061; www.nirvanakohchang.com; r 3500-7000B; 🏠📶🚰) Ko Chang's premium resort is its own private universe hidden away on a rocky, jungle-filled peninsula. Come to get away from it all, including everything else on the island, and to enjoy the stunning sea views from the comfort of the individually decorated Balinese-style bungalows. The adjacent beach is scenic but not swimmable.

NORTHERN INTERIOR & EAST COAST

The northern and eastern part of the island is less developed than the west coast and feels more isolated. You'll need your own transport and maybe even a posse not to feel lonely out here, but you'll be rewarded with a quieter, calmer experience.

Jungle Way

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 9247 3161; www.jungleway.com; Khlong Son Valley; r 200-400B) Ko Chang's un-sung attribute is its jungle interior and the English-speaking guides who grew up playing in it. Lek, a local guide, and his family run this friendly guest house, deep in the woods and beside a babbling brook. Bungalows are simple but adequate and the on-site restaurant will keep you well fed. Free pier pick-up.

Amber Sands

HOTEL \$\$

(☎0 3958 6177; www.ambersandsbeachresort.com; Ao Dan Kao; r 2000-2700B; 🏠📶🚰) Sandwiched between mangroves and a quiet red sand beach, Amber Sands has eight comfortable bungalows with picture windows facing a high-definition sea view. South Africans Cheryl and Julian run the place with a professional and family touch. The location feels a world away but it is only 15 minutes from the pier.

The Souk

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 1553 3194; Ao Dan Kao; r 700B; 🍷) Next door to Amber Sands, this funky spot has seven pop-art cool (fan only) bungalows at a pleasant price. There are lots of chill-out spaces and an urban vibe in the open-deck restaurant and cocktail bar. Young couples

and long-stay visitors rave about this low-key find. Easy access to the ferry pier.

Salak Phet Homestay

HOMESTAY \$

(☎08 1294 1650; Ban Salak Phet; r incl meals 300B) Part of a village ecotour program, accommodation is provided in one of several pier homes in the fishing village of Salak Phet. Expect simple lodgings: a bedroll on the floor of a small room, and shared, basic bathrooms. You'll dine with the family and knowing some Thai is helpful. The **Salak Phet Kayak Station** (☎08 7834 9489) can help arrange the stay for you.

Treehouse Lodge

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 1847 8215; Hat Yao; r 300B) The original Treehouse Lodge on Lonely Beach created the initial buzz about Ko Chang as a laid-back paradise. But civilisation arrived and the original owners defected to Ko Pha Ngan in 2009. Adopting the name and the ambience, the new Treehouse moved to remote Hat Yao (Long Beach), on the far southeastern peninsula. Basic huts (with basic bathrooms) chill along a hillside, looking down to a softly sanded slice of beach. The road to Hat Yao is well-sealed to the lookout point but poorly maintained past that, so plan on staying awhile. Inquire in Trat about a taxi service that goes all the way to Long Beach.

The Spa Koh Chang Resort

HOTEL \$\$

(☎0 3955 3091; www.thespakohchang.com; Ao Salak Kok; r 1200-3000B; 🏠📶🚰) In a lush garden setting embraced by the bay's mangrove forests, this spa resort specialises in all the popular health treatments (yoga, meditation, fasting etc) that burned-out professionals need. Elegantly decorated bungalows scramble up a flower-filled hillside providing a peaceful getaway for some quality 'me' time. No beach access.

**Eating & Drinking**

Virtually all of the island's accommodation has attached restaurants with adequate but not outstanding fare. Parties abound on the beaches and range from the older and surlier scene on Hat Sai Khao to the younger and sloppier on Lonely Beach.

WEST COAST**Oodie's Place**

INTERNATIONAL \$\$

(☎0 3955 1193; Hat Sai Khao; dishes 150-280B; 🍷lunch & dinner) Local musician Oodie runs a nicely diverse operation with excellent French food, tasty Thai specialities and live

music from 10pm. After all these years, it is still beloved by expats.

Norng Bua THAI \$\$
(Hat Sai Khao; dishes 80-200B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) This popular stir-fry hut makes everything fast and fresh and with chillies and fish sauce (praise the culinary gods).

Invito Ai Cibo ITALIAN \$\$\$
(☎0 3955 1326; Koh Chang Hut, Hat Sai Khao; dishes 250-550B; ☺lunch & dinner) Upscale Invito is no more but the executive chef has migrated to this start-up with a lovely sea view.

Saffron on the Sea THAI \$\$
(☎0 3955 1253; Hat Kai Mook; dishes 150-350B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) Owned by an arty escapee from Bangkok, this friendly boutique hotel has a generous portion of oceanfront dining and a relaxed, romantic atmosphere. All the Thai dishes are prepared in the island-style, more sweet than spicy.

KaTi Culinary THAI \$
(☎08 1903 0408; Khlong Prao; dishes 80-150B; ☺lunch & dinner) This popular Thai cooking school is equally popular for its attached restaurant. Apart from Thai dishes, on the menu are also creative smoothies, such as lychee, lemon and peppermint.

Iyara Seafood SEAFOOD \$\$
(☎0 3955 1353; Khlong Prao; dishes 150-300B; ☺lunch & dinner) Iyara isn't your standard island seafood warehouse: after dining in the lovely bamboo pavilion, guests are invited to kayak along the nearby estuary.

Nid's Kitchen THAI \$
(Hat Kaibae; dishes 30-80B; ☺lunch & dinner) A sweet little restaurant north of GajaPuri Resort, Auntie Nid's does all the Thai standards like a wok wizard. Plus the beers are cold.

Porn's Bungalows Restaurant THAI \$
(Hat Kaibae; dishes 40-150B; ☺lunch & dinner) This wooden tree-house restaurant affiliated with a Rasta-style guest house is the quintessential beachside lounge. Feel free to have your drinks outsize your meal and don't worry about dressing for dinner.

TOP CHOICE **Barrio Bonito** MEXICAN \$\$
(☎08 0092 8208; Lonely Beach; dishes 150-250B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) This breezy, hip place has all the island raving about its seriously good Mexican fare. A French-Mexican couple runs the place with flair

and there's a plunge pool should the salsa induce sweating.

Magic Garden THAI \$
(☎0 3955 8027; Lonely Beach; dishes 60-120B; ☺dinner) Magic Garden is a pagoda to Lonely Beach's special variety of chill-laxin'. Grab some grub, polish off some Beer Changs, watch a movie and then wander down to the beach for some DJ beats.

Bailan Bay Resort Restaurant THAI \$\$
(Ao Bailan; dishes 150-250B; ☺lunch & dinner) Our taxi driver recommended this hilltop restaurant south of Lonely Beach that serves spicy *sôm-dam* with a view.

Ruan Thai SEAFOOD \$\$
(Ban Bang Bao; dishes 100-300B; ☺lunch & dinner) It's about as fresh as it gets (note your future dinner greeting you in tanks as you enter) and the portions are large. The dotting service is beyond excellent – they'll even help you crack your crabs.

Buddha View Restaurant INTERNATIONAL \$\$
(☎0 3955 8157; Ban Bang Bao; dishes 250-350B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) Dangle your toes within teasing distance from the nibbling fish at the creative pier-side seating of this new addition to Bang Bao's restaurant scene. The view is nearly panoramic and the fare is mainly steak and pastas with Thai seafood as well.

NORTHERN INTERIOR & EAST COAST
Blues Blues Restaurant THAI \$
(☎08 5839 3524; Ban Khlong Son; dishes 50-100B; ☺lunch & dinner) Through the green screen of tropical plants is an arty stir-fry hut that is beloved for expertise, efficiency and economy. The owner's delicate watercolour paintings are on display too. The restaurant is about 600m from the turn-off to Ban Kwan Chang.

Jungle Way Restaurant THAI \$
(☎08 9247 3161; Ban Khlong Son; dishes 60-70B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎) Enjoy the natural setting and home-style cooking of this guest house restaurant. Meal preparation takes a leisurely pace so climb up to the elevated wildlife-viewing platform to spot some jungle creatures while the wok is sizzling.

Paradise Behind the Sea Restaurant THAI \$\$
(☎08 1900 2388; Ban Hat Sai Daeng; dishes 110-280B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) If you're cruising the east coast for scenery, stop in for a

view and a meal at this cliffside restaurant. Vietnamese and Thai dishes crowd the tables and cool breezes provide refreshment. In Thai, this is called 'Lang Talay'.

i Information

Dangers & Annoyances

It is not recommended to drive between Ban Khlong Son south to Hat Sai Khao as the road is steep and treacherous with several hairpin turns. There are mudslides and poor conditions during storms. If you do rent a motorbike, stick to the west coast beaches and take care when travelling between Hat Kaibae and Lonely Beach. Wear protective clothing when riding or driving a motorcycle to reduce injury if you do have an accident.

The police conduct regular drug raids on the island's accommodation. If you get caught with narcotics, you could face heavy fines or imprisonment.

Be aware of the cheap minibus tickets from Siem Reap to Ko Chang; these usually involve some sort of time- and money-wasting commission scam.

Ko Chang is considered a low-risk malarial zone, meaning that liberal use of mosquito repellent is probably an adequate precaution.

Emergency

Police station (☎0 3958 6191; Ban Dan Mai)

Tourist police office (☎1155) Based north of Ban Khlong Prao. Also has smaller police boxes in Hat Sai Khao and Hat Kaibae.

Internet Access

Internet access is easy to find all the way down the west coast and most guest houses have free wi-fi.

Medical Services

Bang Bao Health Centre (☎0 3955 8088; Ban Bang Bao; ☀8.30am-6pm) For the basics.

Ko Chang Hospital (☎0 3952 1657; Ban Dan Mai) Public hospital with a good reputation and affordably priced care; south of the ferry terminal.

Ko Chang International Clinic (☎0 3955 1151; Hat Sai Khao; ☀24hr) Related to the Bangkok Hospital Group; accepts most health insurances and has expensive rates.

Money

There are banks with ATMs and exchange facilities along all the west coast beaches.

Post

Ko Chang post office (☎0 3955 1240; Hat Sai Khao) At the far southern end of Hat Sai Khao.

Tourist Information

The free magazine *Koh Chang Guide* (www.white-sandsthailand.com) is widely available on the island and has handy beach maps.

The comprehensive website I Am Koh Chang (www.iamkohchang.com) is a labour of love from an irreverent Brit living on the island. His 'KC Essentials A-Z' section is jam-packed with opinion and information.

i Getting There & Away

Whether originating from Bangkok or Cambodia, it is an all-day haul to reach Ko Chang.

TO/FROM MAINLAND: Ko Chang-bound boats depart from the mainland piers collectively referred to as Laem Ngop (see p216 for more information), southwest of Trat. You'll arrive in Ko Chang at either Tha Sapparot or Tha Centrepoint, depending on which pier and boat company you used on the mainland.

Tha Sapparot is the closest to the west coast beaches and receives vehicle ferries from the mainland pier of Tha Thammachat. **Koh Chang Ferry** (☎0 3955 5188) runs this service (one way 80B, 30 minutes, hourly 6.30am to 7pm).

At the time of writing, the car ferry associated with Tha Centrepoint was competing aggressively for business by offering cheaper prices, more commissions and a Bangkok-Laem Ngop bus service. You cut out some of the land transfers with the new bus service but Tha Centrepoint (on Ko Chang) is further from the west coast beaches, so the time-saving is negligible. **Centrepoint Ferry** (☎0 3953 8196) runs this service (one way/round-trip 80/100B, 45 minutes, hourly 6am to 7.30pm). Weekend service in high season runs until 9pm.

There is also a new bus route directly from Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi (airport) station to Ko Chang (308B, six hours) via the car ferry with stops on the mainland at Trat and Chanthaburi. The bus leaves Suvarnabhumi at 7.30am and departs Ko Chang at 1.30pm. On Ko Chang, the bus arrives and departs from Khlong Son. Another option is a minivan service from Bangkok's Victory Monument that goes all the way to Ko Chang's Tha Sapparot (one way 300B, four hours, hourly departures).

TO/FROM NEIGHBOURING ISLANDS: Tha Bang Bao in the southern part of the island is the pier used for boat trips to neighbouring islands. There is a daily inter-island ferry (known conflictly as 'express' or 'slow' boat) operated by **Bang Bao Boats** (www.bangbaoboat.com) that does a loop to Ko Wai, Ko Mak, Ko Kut and back. Faster and more frequent speedboat departures do the same circuit. The slow boat is the smartest option when seas are rough and for ocean sightseeing as the speedboat ride is like a James Bond martini: shaken not stirred.

See the respective islands for getting there and away information.

i Getting Around

Shared *sǒng-tǎa-ou* meet arriving boats to shuttle passengers to the various beaches (Hat Sai Khao 50B, Khlong Prao 60B and Lonely Beach 100B). Compared to other islands, *sǒng-tǎa-ou* drivers are almost invariably honest and reliable in their pricing, especially during the day when demand is high. Most hops between neighbouring west coast beaches should cost around 40B to 50B.

Businesses along the west coast charge 150B to 200B per day for motorbike hire. Ko Chang's hilly and winding roads are quite dangerous (see p227 for road safety considerations); make sure the bike is in good working order.

Ko Wai

เกาะหวาย

Stunning Ko Wai is teensy and primitive, but endowed with gin-clear waters, excellent coral reefs for snorkelling and a handsome view across to Ko Chang. Expect to share the bulk of your afternoons with day trippers but have the remainder of your time in peace.

Most bungalows close during the May-to-September low season when seas are rough and flooding is common.

Sleeping

Ko Wai Paradise GUEST HOUSE \$
(r 300-500B) Simple wooden bungalows (some with shared bathroom) on a postcard-perfect beach. You'll share the coral out front with day trippers.

Good Feeling GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎08 8503 3410; r 300-500B) Wooden huts (some with shared bathroom) spread out along a rocky headland interspersed with private sandy coves.

Grandma Hut GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎08 1841 3011; r 250-500B) On the rocky northeastern tip of the island is this simple and remote place; speedboat operators know it by the nearby bay of Ao Yai Ma.

Ko Wai Pakarang GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(☎08 4113 8946; www.kohwaipakarang.com; r 600-2500B; 📶📶) The closest Ko Wai comes to modernity with concrete air-con bungalows and lots of day trippers milling about.

i Getting There & Around

Boats will drop you off at the nearest pier to your guest house; otherwise you'll have to walk 15 to 30 minutes along a narrow forest trail.

Bang Bao Boat (www.bangbaoboat.com) is the archipelago's inter-island ferry running a daily loop from Ko Chang to Ko Kut. Boats depart Ko Chang at 9am and arrive at Ko Wai (one way 300B, one hour) and continue on to Ko Mak (one way 300B, one hour) and Ko Kut (500B, three hours). You can return to Ko Chang at 1pm.

Several speedboat companies run from Ko Wai to the following destinations:

Ko Chang (one way 400B, 15 minutes, two daily departures)

Ko Mak (one way 350B, 30 minutes, two daily departures)

Ko Kut (one way 700B, one hour, two daily departures)

Laem Ngop (450B, two to three hours, one daily departure)

Ko Mak

เกาะหมาก

Little Ko Mak is only 16 sq km and doesn't have speeding traffic, wall-to-wall development, noisy beer bars or crowded beaches. The palm-fringed bays are bathed by gently lapping water and there's an overall relaxed island vibe. But Ko Mak is not destined for island super-stardom as the interior is a utilitarian landscape of coconut and rubber plantations and reports of sand flies make visitors a little nervous.

Visiting the island is easier in the high season; during the low season (May to September) many boats stop running and bungalow operations wind down. Storms also deposit uninvited litter on the exposed southern beaches.

Activities

Swimming and beach strolling are best on the northwestern bay of **Ao Suan Yai**, which is a wide arc of sand and looking-glass clear water; it is easily accessible by bicycle or motorbike if you stay elsewhere on the island. Offshore is **Ko Kham**, a private island that sold in 2008 for a reported 200 million baht. It used to be a popular day-trippers' beach but is currently under construction for its next incarnation as a super-luxury resort.

Koh Mak Divers (☎08 3297 7723; www.kohmakdivers.com; dive trips 2200-3000B) runs dive trips to the Mu Ko Chang National Marine Park, about 45 minutes away.

Sleeping & Eating

Most budget guest houses are located on Ao Khao, a decent strip of sand on the south-western side of the island, while the resorts sprawl on the more scenic northwestern bay of Ao Suan Yai.

There is a handful of homey stir-fry shacks on the main road between Monkey Island and Makathanee Resort. And if you feel like a journey, use a meal or a sundowner as an excuse to explore different bays.

Monkey Island GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(☎08 9501 6030; www.monkeyislandkohmak.com; Ao Khao; r 350-3000B; 🍷🍷) The troop leader of guest houses, Monkey Island has earthen or wooden bungalows in three creatively named models – Baboon, Chimpanzee and Gorilla – with various amenities (shared or private bathroom or private deck). All have fun design touches and the hip restaurant does respectable Thai cuisine in a leisurely fashion. In true Thai beach style, the affiliated bar rouses the dead with its nightly parties.

Baan Koh Mak GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(☎08 9895 7592; www.baan-koh-mak.com; Ao Khao; r from 1200B; 🍷) Bright and funky, Baan Koh Mak provides a respectable flashpacker abode with colourful paint jobs and soft mattresses.

Island Huts GUEST HOUSE \$
(☎08 7139 5537; Ao Khao; r 350-450B) Rickety shacks camp out on the beach with all the bare necessities: beach, bathroom and mattress.

Ao Kao Resort GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(☎08 3152 6564; www.aokaoresort.com; r 1200-2500; 🍷) In a pretty crook of the bay, Ao Kao has an assortment of stylish and basic bungalows. Opt for a traditional Thai-style house complete with carved wood flourishes and handsome balconies. Families congregate here as there is front-yard swimming and the rocky headland harbours sea creatures.

Lazy Day Resort GUEST HOUSE \$\$
(☎08 1882 4002; www.kohmaklazyday.com; r 2250-2700B; 🍷) Next door to Ao Kao Resort this professionally run operation has picture-window bungalows posing in a grassy garden; rates include breakfast.

Koh Mak Resort HOTEL \$\$
(☎0 3950 1013; www.kohmakresort.com; Ao Suan Yai; r 1700-5400B; 🍷🍷) Though it isn't the island's best value, you can cut out your com-

SEARCHING FOR MR(S) RIGHT?

Still can't seem to find your island idyll? Give Ko Rayang a try. It is a private island with one tiny resort. **Rayang Island Resort** (☎0 3950 1000; www.rayang-island.com; r 2500-3800B) has 15 simple one- and two-bedroom bungalows (no air-con, no hot-water showers) with limited electricity and snorkelling outside your door. You can catch a speedboat shuttle (170B) from Ko Mak's Tha Makathanee and check it out if you're commitment shy.

mute to the prettiest beach without much financial sacrifice.

Information

There are no banks or ATMs on the island, so stock up on cash before visiting. Speedboats arrive at Koh Mak Resort pier on Ao Suan Yai. The main cargo pier is at Ao Nid, on the eastern side of the island.

Ball's Cafe (☎08 1925 6591; Ao Nid Pier; ☺9am-6pm) Has internet access, travel agent and coffee shop. Khun Ball is an active island promoter and runs www.kohmak.com as well as environmental initiatives.

Ko Mak Health Centre (☎08 9403 5986; ☺8.30am-4.30pm) Can handle basic first-aid emergencies and illnesses. It's on the cross-island road near Ao Nid Pier.

Police (☎0 3952 5741) Near the health centre.

Getting There & Around

There are different piers used by different companies on the island but you don't have to worry about sorting it out; pier transfers are usually handled by guest houses and hotels free-of-charge.

A slow ferry leaves Ko Mak for Laem Ngop (mainland pier; one way 200B, three hours, one morning departure on certain days); on alternate days it departs from the mainland. Check with an agent about departure days and times, which are subject to change.

Ao Thai Marine Express (☎08 1863 3525; www.kohkoodspeedboat.com) runs speedboats from the mainland pier of Tha Dan Kao, 5km east of Trat, to Ko Mak (450B). Departure times are dependent upon demand.

Bang Bao Boat (www.bangbaoboat.com) is the archipelago's inter-island ferry running a daily loop from Ko Chang to Ko Kut. Boats depart Ko Chang at 9am and arrive at Ko Mak (one way

400B, 1½ to two hours) and continue on to Ko Kut (one way 300B, one to two hours, departs 1pm). In the opposite direction, you can catch it to Ko Wai (one way 300B, 45 minutes) and Ko Chang (400B, 2½ hours).

Several speedboat companies run from Ko Mak to the following destinations:

Ko Chang (one way 550B, 45 minutes, three daily departures)

Ko Kut (one way 400B, 45 minutes, two daily departures)

Laem Ngop (mainland pier; one way 450B, one hour, four daily departures)

Ko Wai (one way 350B, 30 minutes, two daily departures)

Once on the island, you can pedal (40B per hour) or motorbike (200B per day) your way around.

Ko Kut

เกาะกูด

All the paradise descriptions apply to Ko Kut: the beaches are graceful arcs of sand, the water is gin clear, coconut palms outnumber buildings, and a secluded, unhurried atmosphere embraces you upon arrival. There's nothing in the form of nightlife or even dining, really, but those are the reasons for visiting.

Half as big as Ko Chang and the fourth-largest island in Thailand, Ko Kut has long been the domain of package-tour resorts and a seclusion-seeking elite. The most recent news on the island was that the Beckhams had bought a vacation home here. Even more noteworthy is Six Senses' new Soneva Kiri resort, which is accessible by private plane and has base rates starting at US\$2000 per night. But the island is becoming more egalitarian and independent travellers, especially families and couples, will find home sweet home here.

Sights & Activities

Beaches

BEACHES

Blonde beaches with gorgeous aquamarine water are along the western side of the island. **Hat Khlong Chao** is one of the island's best and could easily compete with Samui's Hat Chaweng in a beach beauty contest; the clear water is shallow and bathtub smooth. **Ao Noi** is a pretty boulder-strewn beach with a steep drop-off and steady waves for strong swimmers. **Ao Prao** is another lovely sweep of sand. There is no public transport on Ko Kut but you can rent motorbikes for exploring the west coast beaches as traffic is mini-

mal and the road is paved from Khlong Hin in the southwest to Ao Noi in the northeast.

With its quiet rocky coves and mangrove estuaries, Ko Kut is great for **snorkelling** and **kayaking**. Most resorts have equipment on offer.

Nam Tok Khlong Chao

WATERFALL

Two waterfalls on the island make good short hiking destinations. The larger and more popular Nam Tok Khlong Chao is wide and pretty with a massive plunge pool. Expect to share it with dozens of other visitors, especially on weekends. It's a quick jungle walk to the base, or you can kayak up Khlong Chao. Further north is **Nam Tok Khlong Yai Ki**, which is smaller but also has a large pool to cool off in.

Sleeping

During low season (May to September) many boats stop running and bungalow operations wind down. On weekends and holidays during the high season, vacationing Thais fill the resorts. Call ahead during busy periods so you can be dropped off at the appropriate pier by the speedboat operators.

You can scrimp your way into the neighbourhood of beautiful Hat Khlong Chao by staying at one of the village guest houses, which are a five- to 15-minute walk to the beach. Families might like the midrange and budget options on Ao Ngam Kho, which has a small sandy section in the far northern corner of the bay, though the rest is an old coral reef and very rocky. Bring swim shoes.

Ao Bang Bao is another popular spot for independent travellers though the beach is mediocre and so is the accommodation.

If you're itching to splurge, Ko Kut is the place to do it.

Bann Makok

HOTEL \$\$

(☎08 1934 5713; Khlong Yai Ki; r 2500-3000B;

☎@) Be the envy of the speedboat patrons when you get dropped off at this boutique hotel tucked into the mangroves. Recycled timbers painted in vintage colours have been constructed into a maze of eight rooms designed to look like a traditional pier fishing village. Common decks and reading nooks provide a peaceful space to listen to birdsong or get lost in a book.

Tinkerbell Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎08 1813 0058; www.tinkerbellresort.com; Hat Khlong Chao; r incl meals from 7900B; ☎@☎) Natural materials, like towering bamboo

privacy fences and thatched roof villas, sew this resort seamlessly into the landscape. The rooms are bright and airy and smack dab on the prettiest beach you've ever seen.

Mangrove Bungalows

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(☎08 5279 0278; Ban Khlong Chao; r 600-1200B; ☼) Lounging pleasantly along mangrove-forested Khlong Chao, this place has large bungalows sporting polished wood floors and hot-water showers. A restaurant hangs above the lazy canal, and it is a 10-minute walk to the beach.

Mark House Bungalows

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(☎08 6133 0402; www.markhousebungalow.com; Ban Khlong Chao; r 800-1200B; ☼) Right behind the beachside resorts, Mark House is the closest cheapie to the beach. The bungalows sit beside the canal and the ambience feels like you're halfway through a nap.

Koh Kood Ngamkho Resort

GUEST HOUSE \$

(☎08 1825 7076; www.kohkood-ngamkho.com; Ao Ngam Kho; r 650B; @) Uncle Joe along with his niece and nephew run one the best budget options around. Rustic huts outfitted with new linens, creatively decorated bathrooms and accordion-style front doors perch on a forested hillside. The restaurant is fabulous (fresh coconut milk curries, spicy stir-fries). At the time of writing, Uncle Joe was looking to sell the land, and we selfishly hope that he reconsiders.

Dusita

HOTEL \$\$

(☎08 1523 7369; Ao Ngam Kho; r 700-1200B; ☼) Solid bungalows spaciouly occupy a shady oceanfront garden ideally suited for families who need running space for young ones.

Ao Noi Resort

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(☎08 3952 4979; www.kohkoodaonoi.com; Ao Noi; r 1200-2000B; ☼) This village of thatched-roof huts is adequate yet unremarkable. In return for lacklustre lodging you get a semi-private palm-fringed beach with vigorous surf. Skip the overpriced fan ones, though.

The Beach Natural Resort

HOTEL \$\$

(☎08 6009 9420; www.thebeachkohkood.com; Ao Bang Bao; r incl breakfast 1200-2600B; ☼@) Bun-

galows sit among a shady garden on a rocky stretch of beach. The customer service is beyond Thai-friendly. Thais pack this place for karaoke-fuelled fun at the weekend, so opt for a weekday.

Siam Beach

GUEST HOUSE \$\$

(☎08 4332 0788; Ao Bang Bao; r incl breakfast 1200-2000B; ☼@) With a monopoly on the sandiest part of the beach, Siam Beach hasn't put much effort into its bungalows. But location is what you get.

i Information

There are no banks or ATMs, though major resorts can exchange money. A small **hospital** (☎0 3952 5748; ☼8.30am-4.30pm) can handle minor emergencies and is located inland at Ban Khlong Hin Dam. The **police station** (☎0 3952 5741) is nearby. Internet access is still a bit spotty, though many resorts have at least a common terminal.

i Getting There & Around

Ko Kut is accessible from the mainland pier of Laem Sok, 22km southeast of Trat, the nearest bus transfer point.

Ninmoungkorn Boat (☎08 6126 7860) runs an air-con boat (one way 350B, two hours, one daily departure) that docks at Ao Salad, in the northeastern corner of the island; free land transfer (about 45 minutes each way) is available on each side of the journey.

Speedboats also make the crossing to/from Laem Sok (one way 450B to 600B, 1½ hours, three daily departures), and will drop you off at your hotel's pier.

Bang Bao Boat (www.bangbaoboat.com) is the archipelago's inter-island ferry running a daily loop from Ko Chang, departing at 9am, to Ko Kut (one way 700B, five to six hours). In the opposite direction, you can catch it to Ko Mak (one way 300B, one to two hours) and Ko Wai (one way 400B, 2½ hours).

Several speedboat companies run from Ko Kut to Ko Chang (one way 900B, 45 minutes, three daily departures) with stops in Ko Mak and Ko Wai.

To get around, you should rent a motorbike (300B per day) or mountain bike (100B to 150B per day).

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