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PHUKET GUIDE

wordtravels



In the Andaman Sea off Thailand's west coast, the holiday hub of Phuket, or the 'Pearl of the South' as it has become known, is connected to the mainland by the Sarasin Bridge. Thailand's largest island, Phuket is incredibly diverse with rocky and sandy beaches, tall cliffs, forests, waterfalls and temples.

Phuket caters to all, with a variety of holiday resorts offering accommodation from backpackers and simple guesthouses to modern luxury hotels, though the beachfront bungalows on unspoilt stretches of white sand are rarer now than they used to be. There are numerous activities in or near Phuket to enjoy on holiday, including mountain biking, bungee jumping and golf. It is even possible to go elephant trekking. A variety of tours offer day trips to the cliffs of nearby Phang Nga Bay, Koh Phi Phi, and the beaches and islands around Krabi. There is plenty to do on the island, whatever your budget, and several offshore islands are good for snorkelling and scuba diving.

Phuket has a huge variety of goods and shopping establishments, from markets and street stalls to department stores and specialist shops, and a range of restaurants from Thai seafood to Indian and Western cuisine. Phuket also has its own airport, making it easy to get to and from Bangkok, and although the island hosts thousands of tourists in peak season, its sheer size allows visitors to escape from the madding crowds. Patong Beach is the island's most famous and developed beach resort, offering a wide choice of holiday activities, dining options and nightlife. It is situated nine miles (15km) from Phuket City.

THE BASICS

TIME

GMT +7

ELECTRICITY

220 volts, 50Hz. Both flat and round two-pin plugs are used.

LANGUAGE

Thai is the official language, although English is widely spoken in tourist areas.

TRAVEL HEALTH

As a health precaution, travellers should take medical advice at least three weeks before travelling to Thailand. There is no malaria risk in major tourist resorts or in the cities of Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Pattaya, Ko Samui, and Ko Phangan. But in rural, forested areas that border Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, and Laos, preventions against malaria are recommended and immunisation against hepatitis A and typhoid fever is also advised. Yellow fever vaccination certificates are required for travellers from infected areas. There has been an increase in reported cases of dengue fever, particularly in the south, and vaccination against Japanese encephalitis is also recommended. Outbreaks of leptospirosis occur during the rainy season and after flooding. There have been outbreaks of waterborne diseases in the Provinces of Khon Kaen, Lop Buri, Phitsanulok and Prachin Buri. Outbreaks of cholera have also been reported. You should drink or use only boiled or bottled water and avoid ice in drinks. If you suffer from diarrhoea during your visit you should seek immediate medical attention. HIV/AIDS is prevalent in the major cities and resorts. Medical facilities are good in major cities, but good medical insurance is vital - without insurance, or cash/credit card, travellers will not be treated. Bangkok has excellent international hospitals.

TIPPING

Tipping is not expected, but is becoming more common in places frequented by tourists. Tipping 10 to 15 percent on a restaurant bill is usual, but ultimately this is left up to the customer to decide based on service performance. Sometimes a 10 percent service charge is added to the bill at hotels and restaurants, but this is not common. All help with carrying bags, tour guides etc. welcome small tips. Taxi drivers are not generally tipped.

SAFETY INFORMATION

Although the political situation in Thailand is currently more stable than before, there have been major political demonstrations in Bangkok in recent months accompanied by outbreaks of violence. Tourists have not been targeted during the protests, but travellers are advised to avoid all political gatherings and marches and to stay well-informed about the situation in the country. Travellers should check

out the official travel alerts for Thailand before visiting, and should be careful to abide by any curfews or other rules imposed by the Thai government.

There is a threat from terrorism throughout South East Asia and travellers should be particularly vigilant in public places, including tourist resorts. Avoid the border areas and don't camp in undesignated areas in national parks. The security situation in the southern provinces near the Malaysian border is unstable and travel to Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat and Songkhla is to be avoided. Violence near the Preah Vihear temple area has been recurrent and visitors are advised to avoid travel there.

Visitors to major cities are advised to secure their passports and credit cards and not carry too much money or jewellery. In Bangkok visitors should be aware of scams, often involving gems recommended by kind strangers. In tourist areas, particularly at the Full Moon Party on Ko Phan Ngan, be careful about accepting drinks from strangers as there have been reports of drinks being drugged. Incidents of sexual assault do occur and female travellers should be cautious.

The monsoon season in September and October (November to March on Koh Samui) brings about flooding in the north, northeast and central regions, causing mudslides and flash floods; visitors planning to trek in the jungle during this time should check conditions with licensed tour guides before leaving.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Public displays of affection are frowned upon. Dress is informal, although beachwear should be confined to the beach. Drugs are illegal and travellers should know that possession of even small quantities can lead to imprisonment, and that drug traffickers risk the death penalty. Avoid touching others hair or head (rubbing a child hair for example), as this is a disrespectful gesture. Taking off one's shoes when entering a home is customary, although most shops and restaurants do not always expect tourists to remove their footwear. Do not put your feet on table or chairs, as lifting a foot toward someone, especially the underside of the foot is considered a disrespectful gesture. Although haggling is common when buying items, especially at markets, Thais are generally very calm and soft spoken people. Arguing loudly or raising one's voice when haggling is deemed disrespectful in Thai culture.

BUSINESS

Business culture in Thailand is considerably more relaxed than other Asian countries within the region. However, Thailand shares its neighbours' work ethic and value systems, as well as emphasis on hierarchy and building relationships. Senior managers must be consulted on all matters and decisions. Appearance and age are important in Thai business culture as they illustrate social standing and status. Older individuals are generally afforded a great deal of regard in Thailand. Building relationships is central to business culture in Thailand. It is ill regarded for a businessman to start negotiating before being properly acquainted with his business associates.

The concept of 'face' and saving face is important in Thailand; so if you make a mistake, don't expect it to be pointed out to you. Also, if a business associate makes a mistake, it is impolite to draw attention to it or correct them. In 2010, Thailand was the fastest growing economy in SouthEast Asia. Despite this, Thais value family time and time to actually live life. Placing family in front of business priorities is the norm.

English is the language of business in Thailand, but translators are often needed. Business hours are from 8am to 5pm or 9am to 6pm with an hour for lunch. Dress styles tend to be quite formal, but due to the humid climate, heavy suits are rare. However, meetings with senior management tend to be slightly more formal and jackets are usually worn. Men generally wear shirts, slacks and a tie while women wear below-the-knee skirts and blouses. Pants-suits for women are quite rare.

Shaking hands is not a popular form of greeting and the wai (putting cupped hands in front of oneself and bowing slightly) is more acceptable. The higher the hands compared to the face when bowing, the more respect is meant by the wai. It is customary to wai first to those older than oneself. Thais use first names rather than surnames preceded by Kuhn for both men and women. As with many Asian nations, giving gifts to business associates is generally a good idea. When receiving gifts, don't open them in front of the giver. Wait to be introduced to others, as it is an indication of rank. Often the hierarchical structures favour the elders in a group and respect must be given accordingly.

COMMUNICATIONS

The international country dialling code for Thailand is +66. The outgoing code is 001, followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 00144 for the United Kingdom). City/area codes are in use. To dial a mobile in Thailand a 6, 8 or 9 must precede the city code. International direct dial facilities are available throughout most of the country. Mobile phone networks cover most towns, cities and holiday resorts; operators use GSM 900, 1800 and 1900 networks. Internet cafes are available in the main towns and resorts.

DUTY FREE

Travellers to Thailand do not have to pay duty on 200 cigarettes, 250g tobacco or equivalent amount of cigars, 1 litre of alcohol, 1 camera with 5 rolls of film or 1 movie camera with 3 rolls of 8 or 16 mm film. Goods to the value of THB 10,000 per person for non-residents with transit visas and THB 20,000 per person for holders of tourist visas are allowed. Family allowances are double the individual allowances. Prohibited items include firearms and ammunition without licenses, fireworks, and drugs. Trafficking in drugs carries the maximum penalty. Restrictions apply to meat imported from countries affected by BSE or mad cow and foot-and-mouth diseases. Antiques or objects of art and religious articles may not be exported without a license.

CLIMATE

Phuket has a tropical monsoon climate, with high temperatures and humidity all year round. March to May is the hottest time of year on the island, but even during the rest of the year average daily temperatures range from 75°F (24°C) to 89°F (32°C). During the summer monsoon season from May to October, the island experiences thundershowers in the late afternoons and early evenings. The best time to visit Phuket is from December to March, when temperatures are slightly cooler.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS

South African passports must be valid for six months beyond date of arrival. No visa is required for touristic stays of up to 30 days.

PASSPORT/VISA

Travellers entering Thailand are required to prove they have sufficient funds to cover the length of their stay, and are recommended to hold documentation for return/onward travel. As of February 2017, if visitors are using the 30 day visa exemption, they can only enter Thailand through a land border twice per calendar year. To cross more frequently, travellers must obtain a visa in advance of travelling. It is highly recommended that passports are valid for six months beyond travel.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Baht (THB), which is divided into 100 satang. Currency can be exchanged at the airport, banks, hotels and bureaux de change. Banks are open Monday to Friday. ATMs are available in most cities and tourist resorts, but there is a surcharge for each withdrawal. Most major credit cards are accepted at hotels and larger businesses.

TRANSPORT

Public transport is quite limited in Phuket. Local buses, in the form of converted pick-up trucks (*songthaews*), operate along set routes and are a convenient and cost-effective means of getting around. The destination of the *songthaew* should be written in English on the front of the vehicle. Tuk-tuks are popular on the island, but they are not metered and it's not uncommon for drivers to overcharge unsuspecting passengers. It's best to negotiate a fare before getting in the vehicle. Although not as common as *songthaews* and tuk-tuks, metered taxis are available in Phuket. Drivers are sometimes reluctant to use the meter, and it's best to agree on the fare before embarking on a journey in a taxi. Motorbike taxis are a cheaper means of getting around the island, but by no means the safest. Car and motorbike hire is available on Phuket and both offer a good means of getting around the island.

ATTRACTIONS

Many visitors come on holiday in Phuket simply for the beaches, but there are many things to see and do in Phuket out of the water. Phuket's long and fascinating history is detailed at the Thalang National Museum, while the island has 29 Buddhist temples, including the famous Wat Chalong. The 147-foot (45m) Big Buddha is also a popular attraction, visible from most of southern Phuket.

Phuket has rightly earned its reputation as a paradise for outdoor activities, and visitors will enjoy exploring some of the biggest waterfalls in Thailand, and other pastimes like fishing and hiking. Also interesting are the Muay Thai boxing matches staged in Saphan Hin Stadium.

Fun in the sun and sea is the main attraction of Phuket however, and there is no end of opportunities for snorkelling, scuba diving, cliff diving, sailing kayaking and jet-skiing.

PHUKET BEACHES



Few places in the world boast such an array of beautiful beaches with white sands and crystal clear waters as does Phuket. From the popular Patong Beach which daily draws hundreds of visitors to its shores, to the quieter Kata Noi hidden away from the crowds, Phuket has a strip of sand for everyone. For those who want to burn off some energy, activities such as parasailing, jet skiing and snorkeling can be found on many of the more popular beaches. The best beaches in Phuket for snorkeling would be Ao Sane and Paradise Beach. While for those who prefer to sit back and enjoy the atmosphere there are beachside massages, restaurants and cocktail bars around every corner of Phuket. In this regard, the best beaches in Phuket for relaxing, with a more secluded, hidden feeling would be Mai Khao, Had Sai or Freedom Beach. When the day is done, Phuket offers some of the most beautiful sunsets you will ever see, framed by sheer limestone cliffs and the lazy coconut palms which line the beaches.

THALANG NATIONAL MUSEUM



The best place to learn more about Phuket's past and present is the Thalang National Museum, which chronicle's the island's daily life as well as its long history. There are exhibits on tin mining, military history, the Sea Gypsy culture and artefacts of the ancient Sukothai kingdom, dating back to the 9th century. One of the most interesting exhibits is the Monument of the Two Heroines, sisters Thao Thep Krasattri and Thao Si Sunthorn, who helped to repel the Burmese invasion in the 18th century.

Address: Pa Khlok Rd, north of Phuket City;

WAT CHALONG BUDDHIST TEMPLE



Wat Chalong is the most famous of the 29 Buddhist temples in Phuket, welcoming thousands of visitors each year. The site is dedicated to two monks who used their knowledge of herbal medicine to assist in the tin miners' rebellion of 1876. The many buildings of the temple complex contain gilt statues, paintings, and relics, including a splinter of bone said to belong to the Buddha. A unique aspect of Wat Chalong is the regular sound of firecrackers, which are set off to show gratitude for answered prayers. Visitors to Buddhist temples should take care not to wear revealing clothing (with knees and shoulders covered), and be prepared to leave their shoes at the door.

Address: Bypass Road, 8km south of Phuket;

EXCURSIONS



KOH YAO ISLANDS

The Koh Yao Islands are located in Phang Nga Bay, halfway between Phuket and the Krabi mainland. The islands are known as quiet retreats from the bustle of Phuket, and are popular excursions for tourists in the Thai islands. In 2002, Koh Yao Noi received the World Legacy Award for Destination Stewardship from Conservation International and National Geographic Traveler Magazine for its innovative home stay programmes offered by locals. Maintaining their traditional way of life is important to the residents, as is preserving their environment; the top activities on the islands include hiking, kayaking, swimming and snorkelling. Though the islands are both small and have few facilities, Koh Yao Noi has recently added amenities like restaurants, shops, and internet service. The islands are a quiet and secluded refuge from the hordes of tourists in nearby resorts. Visitors need to bring cash with them, as there are no ATMs on the islands.



PHANG NGA BAY

The holiday spot of Phang Nga Bay is characterised by sheer limestone cliffs that jut vertically out of the emerald green water. The bay contains a fascinating collection of 3,500 islands, most of them uninhabited, which are unique in that they have central hollows or 'rooms', actually collapsed cave systems, containing hidden realms of unspoilt fauna and flora. Many of these can only be reached by inflatable kayak, which makes exploring the bay on the water an exciting way to enjoy the spectacular scenery. The largest and most popular Phang Nga Bay islands are James Bond Island and Koh Panniyi, the first named for having been where the movie *The Man with the Golden Gun* was filmed. Koh Panniyi or Sea Gypsy Island is where a village has been built on stilts in the water with a giant monolithic rock guarding its rear. Regular boat trips carry holiday tourists from Phuket to Phang Nga Bay, and it can be overcrowded during high season.



SIMILAN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

The Similan Islands have a reputation, even among the many Thai islands, as one of the world's top scuba diving sites. The intense blue waters are framed by white coral sand beaches, and are home to intricate coral reefs and rock formations. The most famous dive site in the Similan Islands is Richelieu Rock, where whale sharks are commonly spotted. The Similan archipelago consists of nine islands: Ko Bon, Ko Bayu, Ko Similan, Ko Payu, Ko Miang, Ko Payan, Ko Payang, and Ko Huyong. Not all are open to visitors, and all are virtually uninhabited. Many charters offer day trips to the Similan Islands from Phuket and Phang Nga, but there are limited accommodation opportunities as well. Note that the park is closed from May 1st to November 1st each year, and it is illegal to visit during this period; guests who do so put their lives at risk as there are no emergency support.

Website: www.similans.net;

SHOPPING

While not on the same level as the legendary shopping in Bangkok, Phuket is still a great place to find bargains in Thailand. The island has everything from air-conditioned shopping malls to noisy night bazaars and open-air village food markets.

The best place to find Thai silk and other traditional Thai souvenirs in Phuket is Kamala Beach. Cheap souvenirs like hats and scarves are available along the beach walkway in high season, and there are a number of shops near the beach restaurants selling sarongs, toys, and hand-carved items. There are even shops along Kamala's main road that will turn out copies of your favourite suit remarkably quickly.

One popular souvenir from Phuket is pearl jewellery, available locally from the Phuket Pearl Factory in Sapam.

There are two main shopping malls in Phuket: Central Festival Phuket and Jungceylon Shopping Center. Central Festival Phuket is dominated by a single Central Department Store selling everything from silk sarongs to designer watches, while Jungceylon Shopping Center has more than 200 stores offering everything you can think of, from pirate DVDs to perfume.

Most department stores and shops have fixed prices, however market stalls and street vendors are willing to bargain anywhere from 10-40 percent off the original price.

NIGHTLIFE

Phuket's nightlife is second only to Bangkok for sheer buzz. The liveliest resort area in Thailand, the larger towns on the island offer plenty of entertainment into the wee hours of 5 or 6am. Many restaurants and markets also stay open until 11pm, enhancing the festive atmosphere.

The epicenter of Phuket's nightlife is Patong Beach, and within the town, Bangla Road is the main concentration of bars and clubs, ranging from seriously dodgy beer bars to upscale cocktail lounges, as well as pumping nightclubs, rowdy karaoke bars, gay bars, jazz clubs, relaxed pubs and go-go bars. At the top end of Bangla Road are several side-by-side establishments to party into the early hours. Paradise Complex is Patong's gay area, with more than 50 bars, karaoke clubs, restaurants and discos.

Lady bars, or beer bars, are clustered together and staffed with beautiful women tasked with getting patrons to drink as much as possible through drinking games or sheer distraction. In Patong you'll find the famous 'ladyboys' (or katoeys) of Thailand, transvestites that are often more feminine, slimmer, and sexier than Thai women. While katoeys working in bars are notoriously friendly, remember that they are working and will expect drinks, gifts, and/or money for their time. If the seedy clubbing scene isn't what you're looking for, many hotels in Phuket stage Thai dance shows with elaborate drag cabaret shows staged nightly.

The bars and nightclubs in Phuket have gotten stricter in the last few years about carding patrons, especially in venues offering more than food and drink. Tourists should take care not to go out alone at night, and to keep an eye on their drinks at all times.

AIRPORTS

PHUKET INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (HKT)

LOCATION

The airport is situated 20 miles (32km) from Phuket city.

GETTING TO THE CITY

Many hotels also offer transport for arriving guests. Several companies provide limousine and minibus services at the airport to transport passengers to their required destination.

TIME

Local time is GMT +7.

CONTACTS

Tel: +66 (0)76 327 2307.

CAR RENTAL

Car rental companies represented at the airport include Avis, Budget and Sixt.

AIRPORT TAXIS

A taxi stand is located outside of the airport. Metered taxis have limited space for luggage; if travellers have large luggage and there are more than two passengers, they should consider a limousine taxi, which operates on a fixed fare, or minibus transfer.

TRANSFER BETWEEN TERMINALS

It is possible to reach the terminals on foot.

FACILITIES

Airport facilities include ATMs, shops (including duty-free shops), currency exchange services, an information counter, a sauna and spa, medical services, left luggage facilities, a restaurant and a bar.

DEPARTURE TAX

WEBSITE

www.phuketairportthai.com

THAI PHRASEBOOK

English	Thai
Hello	Sa-wa-dee
Goodbye	Laa gon
Please	Kaa-ru-naa
Thank you	Khawp khun
Yes	Chai
No	Mai
My name is...	Cheu...
How much is this?	Nee tao-rai?
Where is...?	...yoo nai?
Does anyone speak English?	Mee krai pood pasa ang-grit dai bang mai?
I don't understand	Mai kao chai
One, two, three, four, five	Ne-ung, song, saam, see, haa
I need a doctor	Tong-gahn maw rahk-saa

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