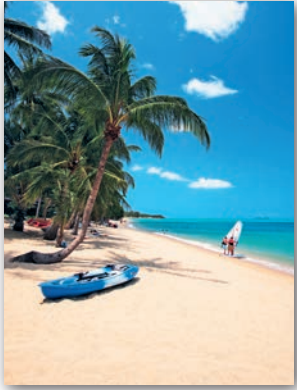


Ko Samui

• Surat Thani • Chumphon • Ranong



Hat Maenam



Printed in Thailand by Promotional Material Production Division,
Marketing Services Department,
Tourism Authority of Thailand for free distribution.
www.tourismthailand.org E/NOV 2015
The contents of this publication are subject to change without notice.

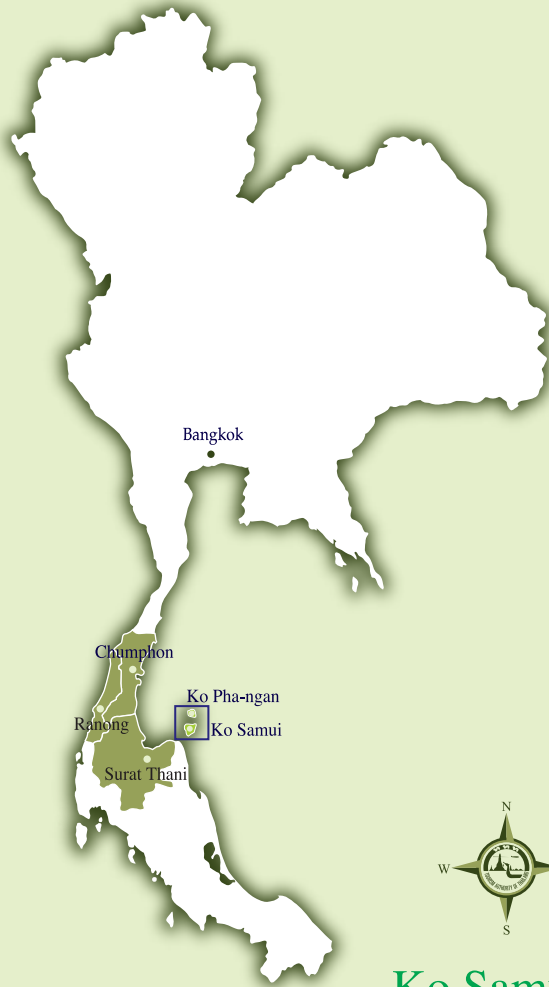




Hat Thong Sai

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Bangkok

Chumphon

Ko Pha-ngan

Ranong

Ko Samui

Surat Thani



Ko Samui

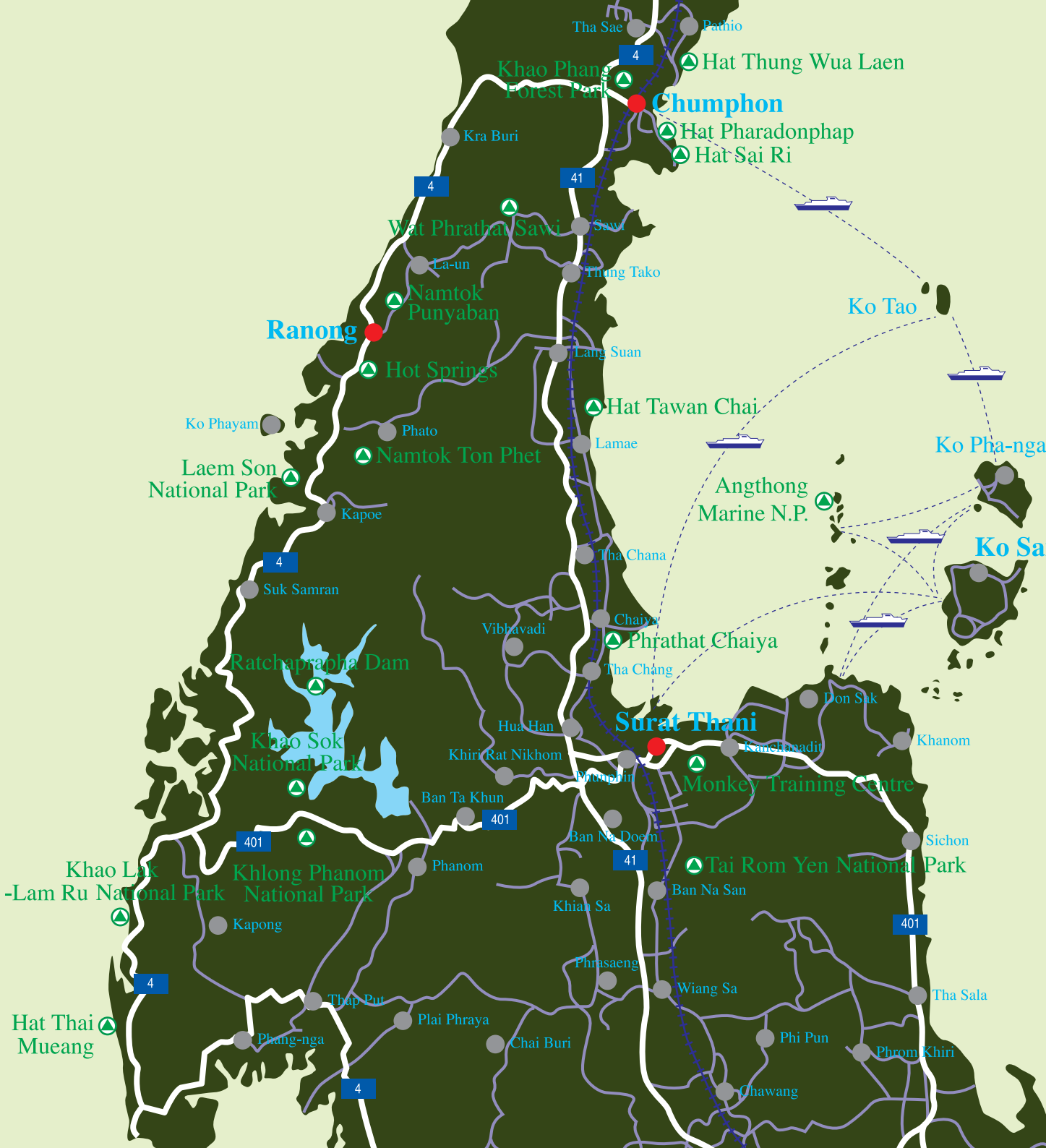
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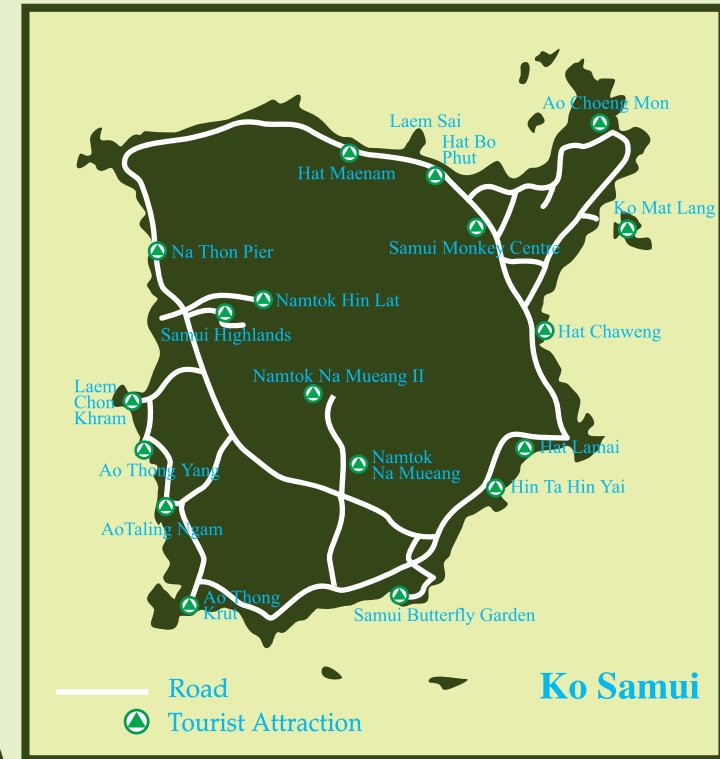
Ranong

-  Main Highway
-  Provincial Highway
-  Railway
-  Changwat (Province)
-  Amphoe (District)
-  Tourist Attraction





Gulf of Thailand





Hat Chaweng

KO SAMUI

At 247 sq. kms., Ko Samui is Thailand's third largest island, which has become one of Southeast Asia's premier tourist destinations in just a decade.

Samui sits snugly in the Gulf of Thailand, surrounded by other gem islands like Ko Pha-ngan and Ko Tao, and is located 84 kms. east of Surat Thani, the provincial capital on the mainland. Many visitors are content to laze their days away on the beach, soaking up the sun and cooling off in the turquoise waters, but for action enthusiasts there are plenty of choices like diving and snorkelling, windsurfing and paragliding, beach volleyball, off-road driving, and other soft adventure activities.

One of the island's most appealing features is the loop road, which makes a 50-km. circuit around the island, giving a glimpse of superb beaches on the north, east and west coasts. It runs past sleepy fishing villages and through seas of coconut palms, passing Ko Samui's most impressive waterfall and tempting turn-offs into the highlands along the way. Other attractions on or near the road include a butterfly garden, a snake show, a monkey training centre, and health spas dedicated to pampering the body.

There is plenty on Ko Samui to keep even the most jaded traveller happy for a week or two, but for anyone spending even a few days here, an opportunity not to be missed is a trip to the emerald islands of the Muko Angthong National Marine Park, which offers another perspective of a tropical paradise.

BEACHES

Hat Chaweng

Situated on Ko Samui's east coast, Hat Chaweng is the island's longest and most beautiful beach.

It is a 6 kms. strip of powder-soft sand beach fronted by crystal-clear water. There is plenty of accommodation, ranging from five-star resorts to simple bamboo bungalows, available on this beach. In the day time, Hat Chaweng is the centre for water sports; such as, windsurfing and jet-skiing and also a great social scene at night, when the dance clubs pulsate to the latest rhythms.

Hat Lamai

Also on the east coast, just south of Hat Chaweng, the playful waters of Hat Lamai always attracts surfers, as they run a little deeper than any other beaches in Ko Samui. Behind the beach are several spas where visitors can treat themselves to an herbal sauna, a relaxing Thai massage, or even a mud facial.



Hat Choengmon



Hat Lamai

Hat Maenam and Hat Bang Rak

These are all located along the north coast, and are ideal places for those who want to get away from it all. Hat Bang Rak is often called “Big Buddha Beach” because of the huge Buddha image at the eastern end of the beach, which is particularly stunning during sunset.

Hat Bo Phut

If you love eating out by the sea, Hat Bo Phut is the place. This former fishing village has been modified as a famous cluster of eateries on Ko Samui. The beachfront road is lined with an array of restaurants, including pubs and bars, mostly with breezy outdoor corners along the beach.

South and West Coast Beaches

On the south and west coasts are very isolated beaches not linked by the island’s ring road,

yet access is easy enough for those in search of tranquility. At Laem Set in the south, the sea is too shallow for swimming but it is compensated by the huge smooth boulders on the beach and the coconut palms leaning over at impossible angles. On the island’s southwest, Hat Taling Ngam may not be quite as perfect as Hat Chaweng, but the long strip of sand that is often deserted makes it an ideal spot for a beach ramble.

SPORTS

With such clear waters and an abundance of marine life, water sports are very popular on Ko Samui, and the hottest one is diving. Around a dozen diving companies based on the island offer a chance for experienced divers to enjoy themselves and for beginners to learn how to dive, which can be arranged through the hotels and bungalows.



Hin Ta Hin Yai

If diving sounds too challenging, then snorkelling is your second choice. Join a trip to one of the nearby coral reefs, put on a mask, a snorkel and fins, then go floating above the reefs and discover colourful fish. For those who would rather keep their head above water, then maybe sea kayaking is the sport for them. Once they have mastered how to propel this small light craft, they can explore the shoreline in perfect peace. Other thrilling activities include windsurfing, jet-skiing or paragliding. Those who are not a water sports lover can enjoy relaxing at the beach or join in one of the spontaneous games of beach volleyball, or even *Takro*, a traditional Thai ball game, using feet, elbows and shoulders. If exploring the island’s interior sounds like fun, hire a 4WD vehicle and try off-road driving on the bumpy trails leading to the highlands. Moreover, there are standard golf courses with sea view for you to enjoy golfing

while taking in the seascape at the same time.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Hin Ta and Hin Yai

Meaning “Grandfather and Grandmother Rocks”, these unusual rock formations were named after their similarity to male and female sexual organs. Located at the south end of Hat Lamai, this site is one of Ko Samui’s most photographed features.

Namtok Na Mueang

There are two levels to this attractive waterfall, which tumbles down steep cliffs. The nearest one to the road is about 20 metres high with a refreshing pool for relaxing. A steep side road leads to the higher level, which is even more impressive. Trekking on an elephant’s back is also available here.



Sunset at Na Thon

Na Thon

Situated on the west coast, Na Thon is the island's main town and port and is constantly bustling with visitors arriving and departing. This is the place to go shopping for beach gear, extending visas or just watch the goings-on at the port from a street cafe.

Samui Butterfly Garden

Set on a gentle slope at the southeast corner of the island, the garden contains a wide range of bright and unusual flowers. Many species of butterflies, insects, moths and some beehives create captivating scenery amidst the breathtaking view of the coast.

Snake Shows

For anyone fascinated by snakes, a visit to one of the island's snake shows is a must. The fearless handlers play with deadly species, and offer visitors the chance to get up close and touch

the reptiles' slithery skin.

Monkey Shows

The abundance of coconut tree makes it the main source of Ko Samui's economy and monkey plays an important role in working in the coconut plantations. During the performance, all their skills are shown to ludicrous effect.

SHOPPING

There are plenty of shops behind Hat Chaweng where visitors can buy beachwear, as well as a suit or a dress in which the tailors will get the measurement and make them while the customers are relaxing on the beach. For those looking for souvenirs, the option ranges from colourful carved soaps to chopsticks and coasters made from local coconut wood. There are also several art shops selling reproductions of famous works of art at very reasonable prices.



NEARBY ISLANDS

Muko Ang Thong National Park

Situated about 35 kms. west of Ko Samui, this archipelago of 42 islands fits everyone's image of a tropical paradise, with huge limestone rocks covered in virgin rainforest rising out of the aquamarine waters. There is a fantastic viewpoint on Ko Wua Talap, just above the park headquarters, looking out over the uninhabited, pristine islands. A day trip from Ko Samui to this national park is available, and trips around the park usually include a visit to a delightful concealed lagoon on Ko Mae Ko, as well as the opportunity to paddle a sea kayak around the strange limestone formations. For more information, contact the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant

Conservation at Tel. 0 2562 0760 or Muko Ang-thong National Park at Tel. 0 7728 6025, 0 7728 0222 Fax. 0 7728 6588 Website: www.dnp.go.th

Ko Pha-ngan

Situated 20 kms. north of Ko Samui and a short boat trip away, Ko Pha-ngan is a mountainous island ringed by secluded bays that offer ideal getaways. The town centre of the island, Thong Sala has a bank, a post office, a supermarket and shops selling beach equipment and souvenirs. Many of its beautiful beaches are accessible only by boat, though pick-up trucks and motorbikes also ply the island's rough roads. The famous beach of this island is Hat Rin, located to the southeast corner of the island. It is the location of the world-famous full moon parties that attract thousands of visitors each month to dance the night away on the beach. The island's most picturesque beach is Thong Nai Pan, a double bay in the northeast of the island, which has good swimming and snorkelling sports, as well as the island's most comfortable accommodation. A little south of Thong Nai Pan is Than Sadet or the "Royal Stream", the island's most impressive waterfall, which is a frequently visited site by many Kings of Thailand, and was once King Chulalongkorn's favourite place.

Ko Tao

"Tao" means turtle, and the island is named for its shape when seen from a cruise in the waters of the Gulf. Smaller than Ko Samui and Ko Pha-ngan, Ko Tao lies about 40 kms. northwest of Ko Pha-ngan, and is also easily accessible from Chumphon. The island is particularly popular among divers, and has a reputation for some of the most exciting underwater excursions in



Moko Ang Thong National Park



Ko Tao



Hat Rin, Ko Pha-ngan



Ko Nang Yuan

the entire Gulf. Several dive companies based at Mae Hat, the island's only town, can arrange underwater excursions for beginners and experienced divers. There are many peaceful and idyllic beaches on the island; such as, Hat Sai Ri, the island's longest beach on the west coast, Hat Chalok Ban Kao and Hat Sai Daeng on the south coast. There is also a unique geological phenomenon at Ko Nang Yuan, a tiny cluster of islets just off the northwest coast of Ko Tao, where stunning causeways of sand join the islands, offering visitors the choice of two seas to swim in.

Ko Nang Yuan

Lying next to Ko Tao, this tiny island offers a unique panoramic view of sparkling white sand beach stringing three small islands together. There is only one resort on Ko Nang Yuan, which opens for tourists on a day-trip to the island to get the impressive view of the outcrops free of charge. Here you can enjoy diving in shallow water, trekking to the look-out point from where the fascination of the Southern coastline on the east is revealed, or just relaxing by the magnificent beach.

HOW TO GET THERE

By Air

Bangkok Airways operates daily Bangkok – Ko Samui flights, contact Bangkok office Tel. 0 2270 6699 or Samui Airport office Tel. 0 7742 8500 or visit www.bangkokair.com for more information.

Bangkok Airways also operates Phuket – Ko Samui flights four times a week.

Direct flight from Bangkok to Ko Samui by Thai Airways International, Tel. 02 356 1111 www.thaiairways.co.th

Nok Air also flies to Ko Samui (via Nakhon Si Thammarat Airport) Tel. 1318 www.nokair.com

By Rail

Trains leave from Hua Lamphong Railway Station in Bangkok to Surat Thani, from where it is necessary to take a bus to Don Sak Pier and then a ferry across to the islands. Railway Station Hotline: 1690 Surat Thani Railway Station Tel. 0 7731 1213 Website: www.railway.co.th

By Bus

Buses from Bangkok leave the Southern Bus Terminal three times a day for Ko Samui, but the fare does not include the ticket for the ferry. The bus takes around 14 hours. Bangkok Southern Bus Terminal Tel. 0 2894 6122 Surat Thani Bus Terminal Tel. 0 7720 0032 www.transport.co.th Also, Lomprayah High Speed Ferries Co. Ltd. operates VIP buses from Bangkok, with transfer services to Ko Samui, Ko Pha-ngan, Ko Tao and Ko Nang Yuan by Lomprayah high speed catamaran and local boat. For more information, contact Lomprayah High Speed Ferries Co. Ltd. Bangkok Office on Tanao Road, Tel. 0 2629 2569-70, 0 2629 2641, 08 6308 7462, or visit www.lomprayah.com

By Boat

To Ko Samui

The ferries for passengers and cars from Don Sak Pier to Ko Samui depart from 6.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m., taking about one and a half hours. Some ferry company's fare may include a ticket for an air-conditioned bus. If one loves travelling at night to get a great view of stars and sky, there is also an overnight boat to Ko Samui which departs at 11.00 p.m. and arrives at 5.00 a.m.



Ao Thong Son

To Ko Pha-ngan

There are three alternative piers to catch a boat to Ko Pha-ngan; namely, Don Sak Pier (Surat Thani), Na Thon (Ko Samui), and Ban Don Pier (overnight boat).

To Ko Tao

To travel to this island, alternative departures are at Ko Pha-ngan, Ko Samui and Tha Yang Pier in Chumphon Province. For more information, contact Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Samui Tourism Coordination Centre Tel. 0 7742 0504 or 0 7742 0722 or visit www.tourismthailand.org

Several companies operate ferries to Ko Tao from Surat Thani, Ko Samui and Ko Pha-ngan. Information can be obtained from the piers.

ACCOMMODATION

Ko Samui, Ko Pha-ngan and Ko Tao offer a variety of hotels and guesthouses to suit all budgets, ranging from luxurious five-star hotels to simple bamboo bungalows on the beach. For further information, contact the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Samui Tourism Coordination Centre Tel. 0 7742 0504 or 0 7742 0722.

Website: www.tourismthailand.org



Ko Samui



Wat Phra Borommathat Chaiya

SURAT THANI

Surat Thani is southern Thailand's largest province, covering almost 13,000 sq. kms., including the region of the Gulf of Thailand that contains its most famous beach resorts, on the islands of Ko Samui, Ko Pha-ngan and Ko Tao. This province lies 644 kms. south of Bangkok, and most visitors arriving by bus or train head on to the islands by ferry from here or the nearby Don Sak Pier.

The provincial capital of Surat Thani rose to importance during the Srivijaya period (7th-13th centuries) because of its strategic position at the mouth of the Tapi and Phum Duang Rivers. These days its port is important for the trade in rubber and coconuts.

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS

Chaiya

Located 54 kms. north of Surat Thani, just a few kilometres east of Highway No. 41, Chaiya is one of southern Thailand's oldest towns. It is believed to have been a centre of the Srivijayan Empire, which was a Mahayana Buddhist sect based in Sumatra, with strong Indian influences. In fact, it is likely that the town's name comes from the second part of the word "Srivijaya." A great number of artefacts dating back a thousand years or more have been uncovered here, including a bronze statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, an acclaimed masterpiece now on display in the National Museum in Bangkok. Chaiya's two main sights are Wat Phra Borommathat and the Chaiya National Museum, located next to each other on the west side of town. The main feature of the temple is its Chedi, which dates back to the ninth century and is one of the few remaining examples of Srivijayan architecture.



Chaiya National Museum

Phumriang Village and Laem Pho

Located at Tambon Phumriang, Amphoe Chaiya, about 7 kilometres from the district office, this Muslim-dominated community is well known for its silk weaving skill. The high quality Phumriang silk, a famous local product of Surat Thani, is silk which embossed with silver and gold brocade in delicate patterns that is unique to residents of Phumriang. Two kilometres from the Village on the beach road, is Laem Pho, a seaside destination of Tambon Phumriang, with



Ratchaprapha Dam



Khao Sok National Park

fresh seafood on offer, especially the Venus Shell, a specialty of Laem Pho.

Khlong Roi Sai

A community nearby to the city area of Surat Thani in the Tapi River basin, Khlong Roi Sai or “a hundred canals” community is where the river-based way of life of the people has been kept. Activities for visitors include visiting riverside orchards, coastal fishery and traditional Thai houses, observing fireflies and mangrove forest on a river cruise, and experience the local lifestyle by trying the art of handicraft with coconut hard shells and water hyacinth stems, batik painting. Here visitors can also pay homage to the highly revered Luangpho Khao Suk at Wat Bang Bai Mai. Moreover, homestay accommodations are available. Those interested in daytime or evening cruises along the canal can obtain further information at the Tapi River’s

Khlong Roi Sai Tour Promotion Club at Tel. 08 6267 6695 and 0 7720 5323

Khao Sok National Park

Covering an area of over 700 sq. kms. to the west of Surat Thani, Khao Sok National Park consists of tropical rainforest draped over limestone outcrops and rugged high cliffs, which form hundreds of islands in Ratchaprapha Dam, resulting in some of the country’s most dramatic landscapes.

The Park is home to over 180 bird species as well as other rare wildlife; such as, wild elephants, bears, leopards, serow, tigers and banteng. Khao Sok also has the world’s largest flower, the Rafflesia Kerrii, which can grow up to 70 centimetres wide when it blooms for a few days in December or January.

There are several hiking trails within the park that are suitable for everyone, though for



Wat Suan Mokkh

steep routes hikers must be in good physical condition. A less strenuous, but equally pleasurable activity is to take a canoe trip around the towering rocks that protrude from the dam. Situated approximately 4 kilometres from the park office are Namtok Mae Yai and Namtok Sip Et Chan (eleven-tiered waterfall), which are the magnificent waterfalls and caves that are the popular sites to visit in this national park.

Khao Sok is best visited between January and April, when skies are usually clear. There are plenty of places to stay near the visitor centre. Contact the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation at Tel. 0 2562 0760 Khao Sok National Park Tel. 0 7739 5139 www.dnp.go.th

SPECIAL INTEREST

Wat Suan Mokkh

This forest temple, located 6 kms. south of Chaiya on Highway No. 41, means "Garden of Liberation" and was home to the late Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, one of Thailand's most revered monks, famous for his "back-to-basics" approach to Buddhism. Both Thais and foreigners flock here to study meditation courses, which begin on the first day of every month and last for ten days. The technique used is called "mindfulness with breathing" by which participants keep their attention on their breathing, and return to it whenever the mind wanders. Foreigners study in the International Dharma Heritage building just a kilometre from Wat Suan Mokkh, and

visitors are welcome to drop by any time. For more information, contact Tel. 0 7743 1661-2, 0 7743 1596-7, 0 7743 1552 Website: www.suanmokkh.org

SPECIAL EVENT

Chak Phra Festival

October

"Chak Phra" literally means "pulling the Buddha", which takes place at the end of the Buddhist Lent in October when Buddha images from all the town's temples are paraded along the streets, with the most important one floated with pride on the river. During this annual event, the local people offer new robes and daily necessities to the monks, while Tapi River becomes the scene of some exciting longboat racing.

HOW TO GET THERE

By Air

Thai Airways operates flights between Bangkok and Surat Thani daily. (1 hour 15 minutes.) Bangkok office Tel. 0 2356 1111 www.thaairways.com

Nok Air operates 2 flights a day from Bangkok to Surat Thani, contact Tel 1318 or visit www.nokair.com for more information.

By Rail

Trains from Hua Lamphong Railway Station in Bangkok to Surat Thani leave many times a day and take 12 hours. The Surat Thani Railway Station is 12 km. from town and there is a shuttle bus between the station and the town. Railway Station Hotline: 1690 Surat Thani Railway Station Tel. 0 7731 1213 www.railway.co.th

By Bus

Several buses leave the Southern Bus Terminal in Bangkok for Surat Thani daily. Bangkok Southern Bus Terminal Tel. 0 2894 6122 Surat Thani Bus Terminal Tel. 0 7720 0032 www.transport.co.th

By Car

Take Highway No. 4 via Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan and finally Highway No. 41 to reach Surat Thani.

ACCOMMODATION

Ask for recommendations on where to stay in Surat Thani at the TAT Surat Thani Office at Tel. 0 7728 8817-9. www.tourismthailand.org



Krom Luang Chumphon Memorial

CHUMPHON

Chumphon is situated almost 500 kms. south of Bangkok and nearly 200 kms. north of Surat Thani with the southbound road splitting into two, one following the south Gulf coast and the other branching over to the Andaman coast. Chumphon's port at Pak Nam is a convenient place to take a boat to Ko Tao, which is in Surat Thani but it is more convenient to depart from here. Yet visitors should not be too hasty to leave Chumphon's pretty coastline, as there are fine beaches and coral-ringed offshore islands both north and south of town.

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS

Hat Thung Wua Laen

Easy to reach and situated 16 kms. north of town, this sandy beach is backed by lush hills and is a

good place for relaxing or setting off on diving and snorkelling trips to nearby coral reefs. There are several resorts and bungalows right on the beach, making this a tempting place to stay. The Chumphon Cabana Resort rents out diving equipment, offers instruction and arranges boat trips to dive sites. For more information, contact Chumphon Cabana Resort Bangkok office at Tel. 0 2427 1825 or Chumphon office Tel. 0 7756 0245-7 Website: www.cabana.co.th

Hat Sai Ri

It is also possible to go diving or snorkelling around the islands of Muko Chumphon National Park near Hat Sai Ri, which is 20 kms. south of Chumphon. The beach is another long stretch of enticing sand with lodgings.



Hat Sai Ri



Ko Thong Lang

Muko Chumphon National Park

This small park, covering 317 sq. kms., has its headquarters 21 kms. south of town near Hat Sai Ri. Visitors may camp here and walk along trails that lead off from the Tourist Information Centre. The park includes beaches like Thung Makham and Arunothai, as well as over 40 small offshore islands. Several of them, like Ko Chorakhae and Ko Ngam, are surrounded by beautiful coral reefs, while Ko Thong Lang has a long white sand beach. Boat can be hired to travel around the surrounding islands and tent camping at the national park can also be done. Contact TAT Chumphon Office at Tel. 0 7750 1831-2, 0 7750 2775-6 for more information.

Chumphon National Museum

Chumphon National Museum is the depository of significant historical and archaeological evidence of the province. Built in 1995, the

ground floor serves as the service section, with a library. The second floor is the exhibition area presented in movies, light and sound, detailed narrative boards, models and life-size mock up venues. The displays are on province's history with titles; such as, Chomphon Today, Chumphon during World War II, and Nature and Cultural Heritage of Chumphon. The light and sound "Typhoon Gay" is presented twice a day, at 10.00 and 14.00 hrs. The museum is located in the Chumphon Governmental Centre, Khao Sam Kaeo, Tambon Nacha-ang, Amphoe Mueang on Phetkasem Road at the Km. 484 marker before approaching Pathomphon junction. The museum is open Wednesdays through Sundays, except on public holidays, from 9.00 to 16.00 hrs. Contact Tel. 0 7750 4105, 0 7750 4246 for more information.



Chumphon Warship, Prince of Chumphon's Shrine

Chumphon Night Market

After dark, stalls are set up along Krom Luang Chumphon Road near the train station, creating a lively night market. Try a new Thai snack, pick up a pizza or enjoy a coffee at one of the many shops and street outlets.

Wat Thep Charoen (Rapro Cave)

Situated at Mu 4, Tambon Tha Kham, Wat Thep Charoen has been registered as a national archaeological site on 27 September 1936. The temple is set on the slope of Rapro Hill, the site of the ancient town of Uthumphon, a strategic port at the crossing to the Malay Peninsula in the past. The principal Buddha image named Luangpu Lak Mueang was built in the cave, with 577 Buddha images in the Subduing Mara posture and in full royal costume. The cave system includes the Ai Tae Cave, the interior of which was modified as a medita-

tion site with an unfinished color painting of a reclining Buddha on the cave wall, and Sai Cave, formerly

used as a shelter for high-ranking royals and senior officials supervising the construction of the Shrine of the City Pillar. The caves are resplendent with stalagmite and stalactite. The Rat Samakkhi Pavilion houses the non-decomposed corpse of a revered Lord Abbot, Luangpu Sai, with a Lord Buddha's footprint in sandstone carved in 108 auspices and stories of minorities' settlements featured on the frame. Moreover, there is a local museum with the display of artefacts discovered in the area and fine shadow play figures carved by Uncle Wen Chitthara.



Sand Dune in Pathio District

SPECIAL EVENT

Chumphon Marine Festival

March or April

The festival features cultural and folk art exhibits, a fishing competition, and seafood festival, as well as a mini-marathon and a windsurfing competition at Hat Sai Ri.

HOW TO GET THERE

By Rail

Chumphon is on the rail line from Bangkok to the south (about 8-9 hours). Visitors can take a train from either Hua Lamphong Railway Station or Thon Buri Railway Station (in Bangkok). Railway Station Hotline: 1690 Hua Lamphong Railway Station Tel. 0 2220 4567 Thon Buri Railway Station Tel. 0 2411 3102 Chumphon Railway Station Tel. 0 7751 1103 Website: www.railway.co.th

By Bus

Visitors can take either a regular or an air-conditioned Bangkok-Chumphon bus. Bangkok Southern Bus Terminal Tel. 0 2894 6122 Chumphon Bus Terminal Tel. 0 7757 6796 Website: www.transport.co.th

By Car

From Bangkok, take Highway No. 4 (Phetkasem Road) via Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, then turn left at Pathomphon junction and drive 8 kilometres to the town. The total trip takes around 6-8 hours.

ACCOMMODATION

Ask for recommendations on where to stay in Chumphon at the TAT Chumphon Tel. 0 7750 1831-2, 0 7750 2775-6. Website: www.tourismthailand.org.



Scuba Diving



Ko Phayam

RANONG

Covering an area of 3,298 sq. kms., Ranong is located 568 kms. from Bangkok and about 300 kms. north of Phuket. It is bordered to the west by the Andaman Sea, to the north by Myanmar, to the east by Chumphon and to the south by Surat Thani. In the northeast of the province, the Kra Isthmus is the narrowest point of the peninsula, where just 44 kms. of land separates the Andaman Sea from the Gulf of Thailand.

Ranong is the wettest province in Thailand, with over 4,000 mms. of rain per year, and also the country's least populous province. The extended rainy period, which lasts for around 8 months each year, makes the period between December and April to be the best time to give Ranong a visit.

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS

Ranong Hot Springs and Raksawarin Arboretum

Just 1 km. to the east of town, on the grounds of Wat Tapotharam, are some hot springs, which bubble out of the ground at a scalding 65-70 degrees Celsius. This is too hot to bathe in, but the rustic public baths are a much cooler at 42 degrees Celsius, while the nearby Jansom Thara Hotel has a large public spa that uses the same waters. The hot springs are surrounded by the Raksawarin Arboretum, where there are benches for relaxing in the shade, and from where it is possible to take elephant rides.

Rattana Rangsan Palace

The structure was appointed by a royal command as one of the 19 palaces of the country, and one of the six such palaces built in the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Rama V. The original palace was later demolished and Ranong Administration had constructed

a replica of the Rattana Rangsan Palace on the slope of the Niwet Khiri Hill, in the same area of the original building. The three-storey building is made of rare Hopeadorata wood on a concrete structure. The first floor is open, supporting the second floor in octagonal shape which houses a leather-covered writing table and chair like that seen in the Wimanmek Royal Mansion, Dusit Palace in Bangkok, complete with a reclining royal chair carved in rose pattern in accordance with that used by King Chulalongkorn during his overnight sojourn in Ranong. The roof is in modified form without a gable, decorated with fine woodworks.

Victoria Point

Ranong has long been popular among Thais as a place where they can get a glimpse into Myanmar at Victoria Point, known as Ko Thuang to the Burmese and Ko Song to the Thais. Boats leave from Saphan Pla, Ranong's port and harbour about 5 kms. southwest of the town centre. For a small fee, foreigners can also take the short boat ride across the Kra Buri River to this bustling island, which is mostly dedicated to fishing, but also produces a high number of champion kick-boxers. Among the many shops in Victoria Point are some intricately made baskets, lacquer ware and gems. For more information, contact Immigration Checkpoint Office at Tel. 0 7782 1216

Phloen Phrai Si Nakha Community

Awarded Outstanding Ecotourism Attraction by Tourism Authority of Thailand, this is the destination for watchers of the rare "Criminum thaianum- water onion" in existence only at Khlong Nakha. Local residents have efficiently managed the ecotourism program known as "Rafting and Watching the Water Onion Flow-



Ranong Hot Springs



Victoria Point



Kra Isthmus

ers". Rafters can opt for an open bamboo raft or a dinghy for a cruise of about 2 to 4 hours along the peaceful natural waterway under the shade, while watching birds and wild flowers, as well as legumes; such as, the delectable oak ferns. Contact Tel. 086 120 9700.

Khlong Nakha Wildlife Sanctuary

From Kapoe district, travel along Highway No.4 (heading towards Phang-Nga) for about 2 kilometres, and turn left at the sign pointing to Khlong Nakha Wildlife Sanctuary Headquarters. The sanctuary covers an area of 31,456 rai of one of the most fertile natural forests in the South. Here you can find the water onions, in bloom during September to November each year. The sanctuary is linked to the Khlong Saeng Wildlife Sanctuary of Surat Thani and the National Park of Si Phang-Nga, with lofty hills and various watersheds such as

Langkha Tuek Mountains, Nakha Mountains, Pho Ta Luang Kaeo Mountains and Mueang Ron Mountains. For more detail, contact the Khlong Nakha Wildlife Sanctuary Tel. 0 7782 8174.

Kra Isthmus

The narrowest part of the peninsula that connects Thailand with Myanmar is Ban Thap Li, 545 kms. from Bangkok and 66 kms. northeast of Ranong town. A small monument just off Highway No. 4 marks the spot where the peninsula's waist measures a slender 44 kms., while just 22 kms. separate the Gulf of Thailand from Kra Buri River, which flows south into the Andaman, and forms the border between Thailand and Myanmar.

Namtok Ngao

Located within sight of Highway No. 4, about 12 kms. south of Ranong, this waterfall tumbles down from a great height, and is par-



Laem Son National Park

ticularly impressive during the wet season. For more information, contact Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Tel. 0 2562 0760 or Namtok Ngao National Park Tel. 0 7784 8181 Website: www.dnp.go.th

Ko Chang

Not to be confused with Thailand's second largest island with the same name over on the eastern gulf, this 18 sq. kms. island has four beaches strung along its west coast, and also bungalows to rent. Though there is a small village here, there are no cars as yet, giving this location an untouched, tranquil ambience.

Ko Phayam

Similar in size and just south of Ko Chang, Ko Phayam thrives on its cashew orchards, tended by a handful of local residents, including "Chao Le" or sea gypsies. The island also has some

great beaches, and accommodation on Ao Yai and Ao Khao Khwai. To avoid the monsoon rain, both islands are best visited between November and May. Long-tail boats to Ko Chang and Ko Phayam leave from Saphan Pla port near Ranong.

Laem Son National Park

Situated 45 kms. south of Ranong on the coast of the Andaman Sea and occupying 315 sq. kms., including over 60 kms. of coastline, two archipelagoes and 8 islands, Laem Son National Park offers a chance to enjoy unspoiled nature, as few people live in this region. The Park's headquarters is at Hat Bang Ben, a broad spread of sand, backed by shady casuarina. Four kilometres further on from the park's headquarter is Hat Laemson, a memorably peaceful spot, which is good for birdwatching. Boat trips can be arranged out to other islands; such as, Ko

Khangkhao and Ko KamYai, the latter of which has some fabulous beaches and is an hour and a half off the coast. The Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation at Tel. 0 2562 0760 Laem Son National Park Tel. 0 7786 1431-2 Website: www.dnp.go.th

HOW TO GET THERE

By Air

Ranong Air operates Bangkok – Ranong and Phuket – Ranong flights 3 times a week. Contact Tel. 0 7783 2222 and 0 2216 5151 or visit www.ranongair.com for more information.

By Bus

Both air-conditioned and regular buses in Bangkok depart from the Southern Bus Terminal to Ranong every day (8 hours). Bangkok Southern Bus Terminal Tel. 0 2894 6122 Ranong Bus Terminal Tel. 0 7781 1548 Website: www.transport.co.th

By Car

From Bangkok, take Highway No. 4 via Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan and Chumphon, a total distance of 568 kms.

ACCOMMODATION

Ask for recommendations on where to stay in Ranong at the TAT Chumphon Tel. 0 7750 1831-2, 0 7750 2775-6.



Hot Spring



Paknam Ranong Pier