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PORT EXPLORER



KO SAMUI

THAILAND



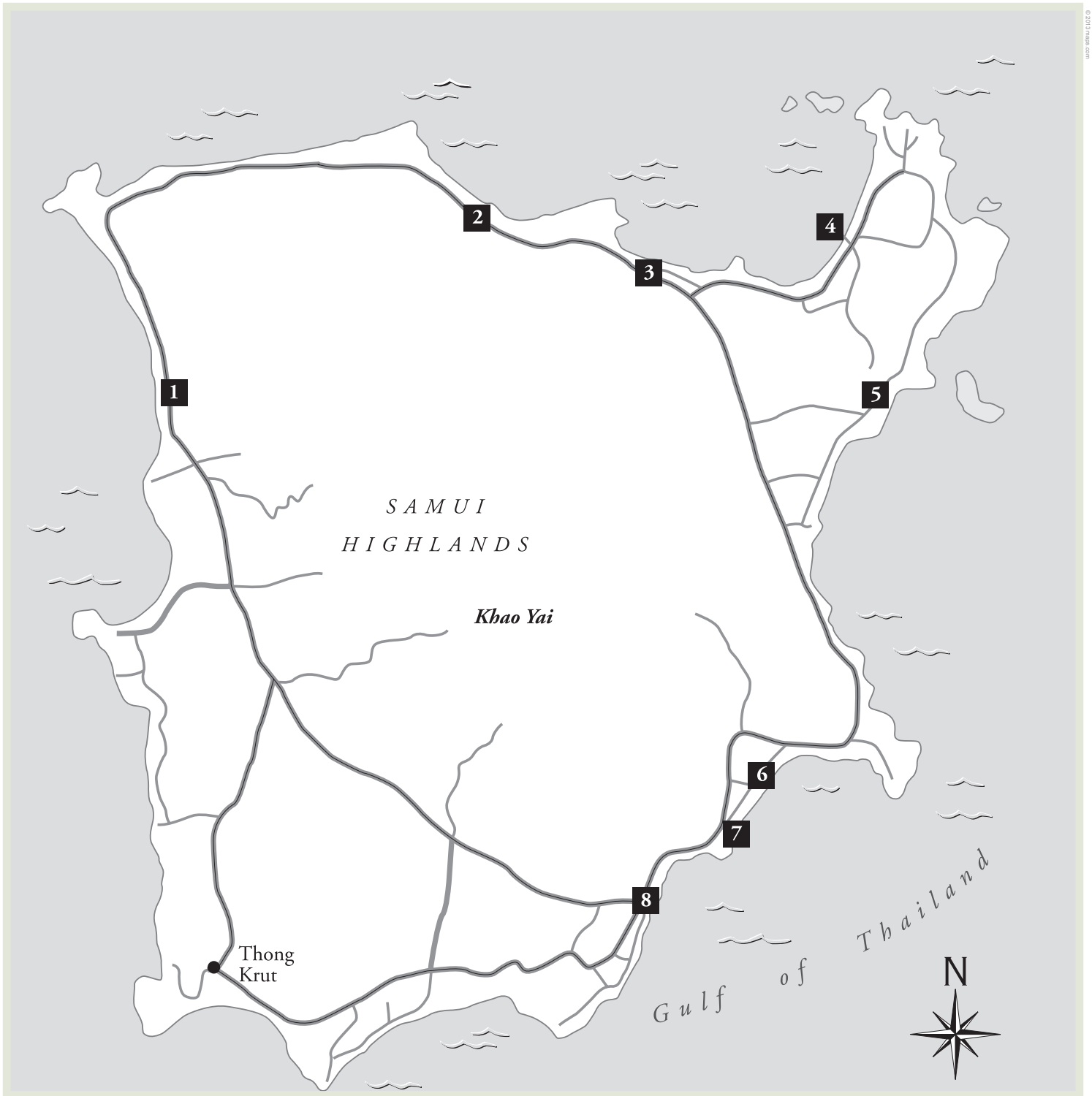
The island of Ko Samui is 310 miles (500 km) south of Bangkok and lies in the Gulf of Thailand. It began to emerge a few years ago as a tourist destination which lacked the crowds and faster pace of Phuket Island which is approximately twice the size. As a result, it was highly favored by backpackers, however today it is being challenged by the construction of modern hotels and resorts. Though Ko Samui lacks a major airport, it does provide a small, fairly new airport to which several flights from the mainland arrive daily. There is a consistent ferry service to Surat Thani on the mainland as well.

Chaweng Beach is the longest on the island and provides excellent swimming as well as accommodations, shops, discos and restaurants. Attractions other than the beaches include the Phra Yai (Big Buddha Monument), Samui Highland Park and beautiful coastal drives.

HISTORY

Archaeologists believe that there has been continuous human occupation of Thailand for the last 20,000 years. In the 10th century AD the first recorded accounts show a migration of people to Thailand from southwest China. By 970 AD the two established Thai states unified to form the Kingdom of Ayuthaya. Their most powerful rivals were the Burmese who defeated the Ayuthaya Kingdom in 1569. The Burmese ruled for 15 years, only to be driven out in 1584. In 1767, the Burmese returned and again occupied the Thai capital, ending Ayuthaya's rule. Within two years, the Burmese were expelled from Thailand and a new dynasty was founded by Chao Phraya Chakkri, known as Rama I. It was he who placed the capital at Krung Thep (Bangkok) in 1782. King Mongkut (Rama IV) ruled from 1851 to 1868 and began to modernize the country by introducing Western ideas. He is the King featured in the book and film, "The King and I." Rama IV was also the King who officially used the word Siam for the first time. The popular name then, and sometimes used today, was Muan Thai, meaning "Land of the Free." His son, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), implemented a policy of internal Western reform from 1886 to 1910 and in 1917 the Thai Kingdom joined the allies during World War I.

A coup d'etat in 1935 ended the absolute monarchy and a constitutional regime was established with the King's support. In 1939 the country was officially renamed Thailand. From 1932 until 1980 there was considerable political unrest with a series of governments, mostly military. However, since 1768 Thailand has remained independent. It has good relations with neighboring countries and is the only Southeast Asia country never to have come under Western colonial rule.



KOH SAMUI PLACES OF INTEREST

1 Na Thon is located on the upper west side of the island and is one of the major villages of Ko Samui. Passenger ferries to the mainland leave from here. This is the location of the pier the ship's tenders will use. It is basically a tourist town, but still contains a few old teak Chinese shop houses and cafés.

2 Mae Nam can be found northeast of Na Thon and is a major tourist area. It has a long curved sandy beach with waters considered excellent for swimming.

3 Bophut or “**Big Buddha Bay**” has a fishing village that is popular for backpackers. The sand is not as fine as Mae Nam and the beach can get muddy during the rainy season. Bophut is known for its wonderful sunset views.

4 Ko Fan is a little island off the north coast and is noted for the Big Buddha Statue (Phra Yai). The monument is 49.5 feet (14.7 meters) tall, 36 feet (10.8 meters) wide and rests on a pink lotus leaf base. Built in 1972, this monument harbors Buddhism, Brahminism and Animism in the design, ornamentation and rituals connected to it. There is a bazaar nearby that offers both secular and religious souvenirs.

5 Chaweng Beach, located on the east coast, is considered to have the finest white sand beach. It is also the most congested of the 11 beach areas on Ko Samui. Chaweng is divided into several parts with the most noted being Chaweng Yai (yai means large) and Chaweng Noi (noi means little). Chaweng Noi is the least developed and the quietest of the two.

6 Lamai Beach is Ko Samui's second most popular beach area and is separated from Chaweng by a rocky headland. Although the beach sand is not as nice as in other areas, the clear water and rocky pools make up for it. This area was one of the first to be developed on the island.

7 Hin Yai and Hin Ta, also known as "Grandmother Rock" and "Grandfather Rock," are located at the southern end of Lamai Beach. These rocks have been eroded by wind and water and have taken on a unique shape.

8 Ban Hua Thanon is another beach resort area and is the closest village to the Coral Buddha, a unique formation which has been formed by years of erosion.

Beyond Ko Samui

Ang Thong National Marine Park located 19 miles (31 km) northwest of Na Thon, contains 40 islets and covers some 155 square miles (401 sq km). The multicolored coral, underwater sea life and clear waters are superb.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Ko Samui and surrounding areas, we suggest you take one of the organized Shore Excursions. For information concerning tour content and pricing, consult your Shore Excursion Brochure or contact the Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, guests are advised to take with them only the items they need and to secure any valuables.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: Smaller shops will negotiate prices. Bargaining, brought to Thailand many years ago by Arab and Indian traders, is useful in dealing in Bazaars and with street vendors.

Tipping: Tipping is not a normal practice within Thailand, but has become standard in up market hotels and restaurants. If no service charge is included, 10% would be acceptable.

Dress Code: The Thai people are very aware of neatness and style. Within Ko Samui, T-Shirts, shorts, jeans and casual clothes will get you through most any occasion. Men should keep their shirts on at all times, except at the beach. Topless sun bathing and "thong" swimsuits are frowned upon.

Avoiding Offence: Pointing the soles of the feet at a person or touching his head is considered rude in all Thailand. Never mutilate or step on a currency note as it contains a portrait of the revered King. Nudity (or partial nudity) is frowned upon at the beaches.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

Thai food is heavily influenced by the Chinese with elements from the Portuguese, Dutch and French. It is a blend of five distinct tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter and hot. Generally spicy, various dishes are in abundance as Thai's love to eat. The National dish is Khao Phat, fried rice and egg, cucumber and chilies. A good introduction to Thai food is Tum Yum Goong soup, a clear soup with prawns, chilies and lemon grass; or Tum Yum Gai, with chicken substituted for the prawns) Dishes such as Phat Thai Kai, fried noodles, peanuts, bean sprouts, eggs, chilies and chicken are very popular. Ko Samui boasts many Western food establishments including American, English and Australian foods. Pizza, burgers, and sandwiches are easily found in Na Thon and surrounding areas.

Fresh fruit blends help to ease the heat of both the food and climate. Coconut milk products are common as this is one of the mainstays of the island. Mekong whiskey is about half the strength of scotch and quite popular, while Singha Beer is the best known local brew. Bottled water is recommended.

SHOPPING

The main shopping areas are found in Na Thon, Hat Mae Nam and Chaweng Beach. Shopping hours are generally 8:00 am – 8:00 pm daily in all outlets. The specialties of the area include carved wood, coconut products, lacquerware, Thai silk and Thai celadon (ceramics). Some tourist oriented stores and street merchants may accept U.S. Dollars. Most stores accept major credit cards.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Thailand is called the Baht (B), pronounced "bot." There are 100 Stang to the Baht. Notes are available in the following denominations: 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1,000.

