## Thailand – A month of adventures

Time of travel – February. After giving it some thought, we chose Thailand. Brazil and Vietnam came a close second. As usual, we organized the whole trip ourselves. Here we’ll give you some useful information before you travel to this country.

We decided to visit five islands and Bangkok. These are the places we visited (in order of arrival):

* Phuket (4 days)
* Koh Lanta (4 days)
* Krabi (4 days)
* Koh Samui (5 days)
* Koh Phangan (5 days)
* Bangkok (5 days)

The best time to visit Thailand is from November till February. At that time, the temperatures are not extremely high, and the precipitation is low. This goes for most of the popular destinations. You can find more details about the climate on this page.

The currency in Thailand is BAHT. At the time of our visit, we got 34 BAHT for 1€. You can check the current exchange rate here.

You may need a visa to visit Thailand. Make sure to check visa requirements with an embassy in your respective country. In our case, it took one visit to the consulate and cost us 40€ for a single entrance.

## **"It’s best to reserve accommodation in advance (we recommend**[*Booking*](https://www.booking.com/)**)."**

The usual flights to Thailand are via Moscow (Aeroflot), Istanbul (Turkish Airlines), Doha (Qatar Airways) or Dubai (Emirates). The fare is around 450€ in season or 400€ out of season.

## **"*The locals in Thailand manage English very well.”***

For traveling around Thailand, it’s a good idea to book a transfer through a local travel agency. They all work the same way: You give them your hotel’s address and they let you know the interval in which to expect a pick up. A van takes you to a ship or a bus, depending on your itinerary.

## **"Cars are driven on the left side of the road"**

Food in Thailand is perfect! The most popular dishes are:

* Pad Thai. National dish of Thailand. It’s made of rice noodles with pork/chicken/beef/seafood/tofu, peanuts, sprouts, mushrooms, eggs and various spices.
* Fried rice. Rice fried with all the same ingredients as Pad Thai.

Photo caption: Fried rice with seafood

* Tom Kha Gai, Tom Yum Goong and Green Curry. Variations of broth, with different ingredients. They are all spicy. If you ask for less spice – they will be hot. If you don’t say anything – they will be very hot!

Usually consumed with a portion of rice, meant to balance the spiciness.

* Make sure to say how spicy you want each meal to be. If you don’t say anything, usually it will be mildly hot. The portions are somewhat small.
* The favorite restaurant desert is fried banana/pineapple with honey
* Mango sticky rice. Another popular and very tasty Thai desert. Sticky rice served with mango slices and condensed milk
* Eat in night markets! Choose the crowded strands. Skewers are a very popular market dish (chicken, pork, seafood)

photo caption: Crocodile or ray for dinner?

* Only bottled water is consumed
* Freshly squeezed juices are now our first buzzword for Thailand. Favorite combo – mango and passion fruit. Their price is between 40 and 60 BAHT.
* Make sure to try Thai ice cream, as well as Roti, a kind of greasy pancake usually served with banana and chocolate

Photo caption: Thai ice cream is delicious

* 7-eleven stores are everywhere. They’re not big but offer everything you need.

## **"Laundry service is commonly used. The price of washing and ironing is around 50 BAHT per kg "**

A couple of things you should pay special attention to:

* Traffic in Thailand is horrible. Be especially careful if you’re a pedestrian because sidewalks are scarce in smaller towns. Around 22 500 people are killed in traffic each year.
* The sea is very warm, occasionally dirty and full of jellyfish (mostly harmless, but not always). For the brave ones, try to google BOX JELLYFISH THAILAND.

Photo caption: Jellyfish are everywhere

* Snakes. If you meet one, chances are it’s venomous. Watch your step, especially if going into the jungle.
* Lots of corals in the shallows. Be careful not to step on one.

Photo caption: We didn’t pay attention to corals

* Palms. Perfect on the beach to provide the best shade but watch for coconuts falling on your head! Lots of injuries each year are caused by this.

## **"Don’t be too lazy to bargain. You’ll always be able to drop the price at least 10% (even around 200-300% with taxi drivers – cheeky as ever)"**

On December 26th 2004, a great tsunami hit Thailand. Around 220 00 people lost their lives. Thailand’s west coast suffered great losses. That’s why you’ll often see signs on the beach advising about evacuation protocols in case of a tsunami.

Photo caption: Instructions in case of a tsunami

Water Monitor. These large lizards can be found all around Thailand. We saw them in rainforests, hotel gardens and city parks in Bangkok. You shouldn’t be afraid of them. They’re harmless, we had the impression we were a burden because of all the photoshoots :)

photo caption: They can grow up to 2 meters

* Watch how you behave next to a photo of the king (these photos are all over the streets)
* Never turn your feet towards Buddha
* Take your shoes off when entering a temple, even if you’re not explicitly asked to
* Be kind to people and smile, they’ll return the favor

## **"Thai massage** is a kind of relax massage, so it’s not too intense. If intensity is what you’re looking for – ask for sports massage.**"**

Do not ride elephants! If you like them and wish to spend time with them, you can volunteer for a day in one of the sanctuaries. If this feels like too much for you, simply join one of the guided tours, give them a bath and feed them.

## **"Last, but not least: *KHOB KHUN KA*!"**

If you have questions we didn’t cover here, hit us on Instagram @BUDUĆEIMENALOGANAENGLESKOM:) or drop us an email. We’ll be happy to reply as soon as possible :)))

## Phuket

When someone mentions the islands of Thailand, people usually think of Phuket. For us, it was the first stop on our journey. The temperature shock from our continental 0 °C in January to the 35 °C in Thailand is often a subject, but we did not feel it upon arriving to the airport. On the contrary, it felt good :)

There are a couple of towns on Phuket than stand out as good accommodation spots. Patong, the main center and the biggest one, Karon, which is smaller, more peaceful and just outside Patong, and Kata, recommended for those seeking peace and quiet.

## **"The Russians, more Russians, and yet again Russians."**

The main characteristic of Phuket are the Russians. In all shapes and sizes, in all of the mentioned towns. It’s gone so far that you can often hear Thai people talking and catch a few very familiar words if you’re from a Slavic country :) The Russians are known as good tourists, they don’t ask for the price and because of that, most of the things are more expensive here than in other parts of Thailand where a lot less Russians are found.

## **"Karon** is a good spot for sightseeing **Phuket*.*"**

Our choice as base during the five days of our stay was Karon. We chose an accommodation in the main street. It’s the center of all activity and takes you to the promenade next to the beach. Karon is usually the choice for families and younger couples who chose this location so they can see other parts of the island. It’s in between Patong and Kata, so it takes about the equal time to get to both.

The main street is full of restaurants with various cuisines, from Thai, international, to Chinese. There’s something for everyone. The temple of Wat Suwan Khirikhet is also located in this street and two times a week, there’s a night market right next to it. There’s also a good night market some 200 meters up north from the roundabout where the main road and the road parallel to the beach meet. On both of these markets, you can have a nice dinner for 50 to 100 BAHT. Phad Thai, skews with seafood, roti or a fruit smoothie, are all good choices. We had the best Thai ice cream in Karon, just outside the shopping mall called Karon Avenue. The first thing that bothered us is that there´s barely any sidewalk on the main road, so you have to be vigilant at all times. This is very common on Thailand and it´s very irritating. It takes a couple of days to get used to it. The fun on the main road ends very early, around 10 PM.  
photo caption: The best ice cream and the greasy Roti pancakes

The city beach in Karon is alright, it´s wide, clean, but just as the other parts of the island, it´s full of jellyfish. They´re usually harmless and don´t sting, but it will not be pleasant for those who are afraid of something 20-30 centimeter in diameter floating next to them. There are bars and coffee shops on the beach so you can rent a sunbed there, or a parasol from one of the renting points.  
photo caption: The beach in Karon and jellyfish as a disturbance

Kata is a peaceful small town, just outside of Karon, down south. You can get there by taxi, but you can also walk there (30-40 minutes), following the promenade along the sea. It can be exhausting during the warmest part of the day. The beach in Kata is nicer that the beach in Karon. It’s known as the ideal location for a vacation with kids. It has its main street (the second street parallel to the beach) which is the center of all the action. Here you will find numerous restaurants, shops, car rentals. The main spots for accommodation are located right next to the beach and these are a small piece of heaven with their huge gardens and palm trees. You should know that from these accommodation units, there are only two exits from the beach to the main road and the rest of the town.  
photo caption: The Kata beach and a must have – a coconut

The Kata Noi beach is just south of Kata. There are a couple of hotels here, but also some private accommodation (although a lot less than Kata). You can walk to here from the center of Kata. The Kata Noi beach is the second prettiest we visited on Phuket and we recommend you visit at least once during your stay.  
photo caption: The Kata Noi beach is one of the prettiest on the island

## "You **must** **see** Patong in the **evening**"

Patong is the main attraction on the island because of its size and popularity. Young people looking for parties and fun usually stay here. Accommodation is abundant and much cheaper than Karon or Kata. The place to be in Patong is the Thanon Bangla street. A wide, low-profile road during the day turns into a pedestrian zone in the evening. It’s full of clubs and flashing lights, and the music is too loud to hear your own thoughts. You’ll have the impression you’re in a metropolis somewhere. This is the kind of atmosphere you hear stories about when Thailand is mentioned.  
photo caption: The street food of Thailand and fruits on Patong market

The city beach in Patong is long and wide, but not the best choice for swimming. If you’re an early bird, you’ll often find young people hungover on the beach, after a turbulent night out. Definitely not our first choice.

## "We **recommend** the **Surin** **beach**. "

The beach we liked most is Surin, some twenty kilometers up north from Karon. Sandy, perfect seas, no jellyfish (a rarity those days) but with little amenities nearby. It was also the most crowded one, but that didn’t ruin the enjoyment. Just above the beach, there’s a sandy road on which tents are set up at midday. These are improvized restaurants, so here you can have cheap lunch in an interesting ambiance.  
photo caption: Our favorites – Surin beach and the beach meal

The last beach we visited was Bang Tao. It’s known as a hippie place so if that’s your thing, you’ll like it here. It’s not such a good option for a swim, but it offers lots of natural shade. If you wish to daydream or read a good book surrounded by peace and quiet, this can be the corner of inspiration.  
photo caption: The Bang Tao beach

The most common mean of transportation is the tuk-tuk. Here it’s quite an advanced model, they’re equipped with speakers and neon lights so in the evening, each of them is a party on wheels. We used the less popular Phuket Smart Bus, operating hourly along the west coast of the island (from the airport to the Rawai beach). You can buy a multi-day ticket. Just follow the timetable, the stops are clearly marked, it’s quite punctual, air conditioned and not crowded at all, since it’s not that popular. It’s the best and cheapest option from the Phuket airport to all the main towns on the west coast.

## **Conclusion: At some point, Phuket might remind you of the Adriatic coast and the Montenegrin cities of Budva or Sutomore. When all your impressions settle, you’ll realize it’s not that bad, even though it’s so commercialized. It’s big enough and offers variety, so anyone can find a place of interest. Of all the islands we visited, it might just be the only one suited for a longer stay. We often had the impression there are more Russians here than in Moscow. It’s tailored for tourists so you will have the impression of being in a European city.**

## Koh Lanta

We visited the island of Koh Lanta by pure chance. For our tour through Thailand, we had four spare days we needed to spend on something, so we had to choose between a few locations and our favorite was Koh Lanta. Looking back, it was a hit!

We arrived to Koh Lanta on a ferry from Phuket (with a connection on the island of Koh Phi Phi). Ferries on this route look like they’re from the ‘60s (and they probably are). Still, during the couple hours of our trip, they didn’t feel unsafe for a second. The seats are so small that the two of us occupied four seats in a row. The ferries arrive to an improvized pier in the biggest town, Saladan. Upon arrival, you need to pay an eco-fee of 20 BAHT.

## **"Transport on the island: tuk-tuk or renting a motorcycle."**

We chose the Long Beach (Pra – Ae beach) and “Cozy” apartments as our base on the island. The drive from the docks to our accommodation lasted about 15 minutes and cost a 100 BAHT per person (distance of 6 kilometers). The accommodation was great, just a couple of minutes from the Long Beach, near good restaurants and supermarkets, at walking distance from four other beaches (Relax Bay, Gintare, Beautiful and New Lanta). The owners are a couple from Sweden, very welcoming and kind, a true example of how a family business should be ran.

photo caption: Sunset on Pra – Ae beach (Long Beach)

The whole island is very environmentally aware, they insist on recycling, educate the locals and the guests about how toxic plastic is to the nature and the ocean. This part of the ocean has big problems with plastic. It happens that in the evening, the beaches are perfect, whereas in the morning they wake up with tons of plastic brought overnight by the current or a storm. Luckily, we did not witness this :)

## **"*Koh Lanta* is the island of hipsters"**

Living on Koh Lanta is organized in settlements gravitating towards the main road which goes along the west coast for 25 kilometers. It’s quite peaceful and empty compared to the rest of the tourist destinations we visited in Thailand. Even traffic is moderate for their standard (almost none existing in the evening).

In the evening, people can only be seen in restaurants as there is no space for walking – there are no sidewalks. This bothered us the most on Koh Lanta, but also on Thailand in general. Everything is mainly about the tuk-tuk, even if it’s a 2 minutes and 500 meters drive.

## **"Peacefulness throughout the island"**

The Long Beach (Pra – Ae Beach) was the nearest to us. Long, sandy and wide. When tide is low, it’s almost twice as wide. It’s nice in the morning, whereas there are too many jellyfish in the afternoon and its colors are not nearly as beautiful as when the sun is high. The sunset however is one of the prettiest in Thailand. Perfect for afternoon playing on the beach while waiting for the sunset. Main impression: the number of corals on the shore and the tide variations.  
photo caption: Crabs can often be found on Pra – Ae Beach

Relax Bay is a nice cove with a resort of the same name. No crowd, interesting atmosphere, but not the best choice for swimming due to the corals in the water.  
photo caption: Relax Bay – If you wish to be alone on the beach

Beautiful Beach is the prettiest beach on the island. Nice atmosphere, no crowd, perfect waters, palms for natural shade. You should beware of coconuts falling on your head :) Every year, a significant number of injuries due to coconut is registered on Thailand (even death cases). We recommend the Beautiful Beach.  
photo caption: Perfect any time of day – Beautiful Beach

The Island of Koh Lanta is (unfairly) unpopular among tourists and therefore not crowded. The guests are mainly from Scandinavia and Italy. A popular destination for digital nomads. We met a couple people who left their everyday jobs and lives in America and Europe after spending their vacation on Koh Lanta and so moved here with their partners. They work in tourism and seem genuinely happy.

## **"Top class food on Koh Lanta."**

Another thing we will remember from Koh Lanta is the food. Mays Kitchen and Malina’s Kitchen could be one of the reasons for us to travel half way across the globe again. Just to be clear, after a month in Thailand, we ate in dozens of restaurants and night markets, but these two places were our all-time favorites. We recommend having lunch in Malina’s Kitchen and dinner in Mays Kitchen.  
photo caption: Pad Thai and Mango sticky rice

## **"It was interesting to visit the local farmer’s market, where the locals and the restaurants buy their goods."**

Someone might find it interesting that there’s a national park of the same name, Koh Lanta, in the southern part of the island. We didn’t have time to visit as it requires a whole day, but some trustworthy locals recommend it. You can drop by the beaches on the way to the national park. These beaches are said to be the best on the island. You can only get to the park by bus or a bicycle.

## **Conclusion: Peace, hipsters and food! Koh Lanta is not the island to travel across the globe for, but it gives a totally new shade to tourism in Thailand. If you have time, spare a couple of days for this unexplored and undeveloped island. Some of you will like it for sure :)**

## Krabi

Krabi is a region south of the western coast of Thailand. We arrived to Krabi from Koh Lanta, after a 3 hour taxi drive. We chose the town of Ao Nang as the base of our 4 days stay. Ao Nang had the best connections to the places we were planning to visit (the island of Koh Hong, the Railay beach and the Phra Nang beach). The city of Krabi is a common and cheap option for accommodation, whereas the Railay beach is more expensive.

photo caption: Krabi is famous for its monkeys walking freely around the streets

Ao Nang is a tourist attraction above all. Its long main street and large beach are located at the foot of the hill, typical for this area. Such scenery gives it a special kind of atmosphere. The main steet is wide, with decent sidewalks (at last) and plenty of good quality spots along the street. Here you will find lots of accommodation, tourist agencies, restaurants, shops and a mosque that might just be the central event here, even though it’s a bit farther from the main zone. In Thailand, the main religion is budism (95%) but a small portion of the population (4%) practices Islam. In Ao Nang (and the province of Krabi in total), the percentage of Muslims is higher than the average.

photo caption: Ao Nang has nice promenades

Ao Nang is a very lively town and it’s recommended for all ages as its ifrastructure is well developed compared to the rest of Thailand. The food selection is diverse and the restaurants are generally cheaper than in other locations. You can have a buffet dinner for 450 BAHT per person and have seafood, fish, steaks, drinks and deserts as much as you like. There are also a couple of night markets offering different specialties for a couple dozen BAHT. Restaurants are numerous, and their offer very diverse and tailored for different tastes and budgets.

photo caption: Mango sticky rice, a portion to go

We liked the food in the “Family Thaifood & seafood“ restaurant. The restaurant itself may not be pretty but it’s always full and you have to wait for a seat to become free. The food is always fresh and the prices are acceptable. Another good choice for an evening meal is the night market held each night next to the mosque. Here you can have some of the thai, vietnamese or indian cuisine specialties. We tasted some dishes we didn’t find in other locations.

photo caption: The atmosphere around town

There is a beach in Ao Nang, it’s big but forget about it! It’s not nice for a swim, it’s dirty and seems to serve only as a starting point for the excursion boats. One morning it was only ten meters wide, whereas one afternoon it was over a hundred meters. The tide effect is especially visible here. When the tide is low, you can see all that lies on the seabed and you lose the will to go in even more.  
photo caption: Ao Nang beach is not for swimming

As we said before, it’s easy to organize a transfer from Ao Nang to all the main sightseeings within the region. The most famous ones that are visited as a one day excursion are Bamboo Island, Koh Phi Phi and Maya Bay, Khao Tapu (James Bond Island, where the move was filmed) or the island of Koh Hong. You can arrange all the excursions with the travel agencies. Make sure to bargain as they will intially ask for as much as triple of the real value.

## **"If you can, visit Bamboo Island."**

There are two locations you don’t need a tourist agency for: the Railay beach and the Phra Nang beach. You can buy the tickets from the newsstand located just at the intersection of the main street and the street going along the beach. The boats leave from the beach as soon as they are full (about every ten minutes). A round trip to Railay beach costs 200 BAHT. Have in mind it’s enough to buy a ticket to this beach and from there, you can visit the East Railay beach (big disappointment) and Phra Nang beach (interesting road to get there) within walking distance.  
photo caption: The Phra Nang beach and the cave on the way

Railay beach is one of the most famous beaches in Thailand. It’s often full with tourists and tide has a high effect here. Same as other beaches in this region, it’s not recommended for swimming. What makes it worthwhile is its photogenic look in the afternoon and its interesting surroundings that gives it a special kind of beauty. There’s a small village with restaurants and other amenties. You can also find accommodation here, often twice as expensive as Ao Nang or Krabi town, but same in quality. Overall we can say it’s all cute and it would’ve been nice to spend one night here.

photo caption: Railay beach

The Phra Nang beach is, in our opinion, prettier than the nearby Railay beach. The atmosphere on this beach makes an impression, but we didn’t like it for swimming either (maybe a short dip). It’s surrounded by rocky formations and you can get to one of these by walking through water when the tide is low. Pay special attention as the seabed is covered with sharp stones and corals so it’s easy to get hurt.

photo caption: Phra Nang beach

Since we didn’t have a lot of time for this area, we could choose a single one day excurstion. The James Bond island is quite far, we saw Koh Phi Phi earlier, so our selection was between the Bamboo island and Koh Hong national park. The Bamboo island is definitely the nicest place for swimming in this part of Thailand, but we decided to visit the Koh Hong island as it had more to offer.

photo caption: The trip to the Koh Hong island and seaworld

The trip was nice and the sea was calm. We visited a couple of nice beaches on smaller islands and went snorkeling for an hour. Lunch was served on one of the islands. Drinks, fruits and sweets were offered on the boat constantly. We were most impressed by the Koh Hong lagoon, right in the middle of the island, filled with perfect waters :)

photo caption: The breathtaking lagoon

During this trip, you’ll spend around 8 hours in the midday Sun so make sure to apply sunscreen constantly, otherwise you’ll be burnt but the end of day. We made sure to swim as much as we could as we barely went into water in the last couple of days.

## **Conclusion**: **Krabi is authentic because of its nature and scenery. The beaches are nice, but not the best choice for swimming. You get everywhere by boat, food and accommodation are great. The optimal stay is four to five days, with organized excursions every day.**

## Koh Samui

Along with Koh Phagan and Kao Tao, Koh Samui is the most visited island in the Gulf of Thailand. We were very eager to visit it and we had great expectations. You can get there by plane (it´s the only island in the gulf with an airport) but because of a dispute with the authorities, the ticket is very pricy due to high aiport fee. Tourists mostly arrive to this island by ferry from the Surat Thani region (not the city, but rather the harbor a few dozen kilometers east – Don Saki). There´s also the option of arriving to Surat Than by plane (there´s also an airport there) and then taking a ferry to Koh Samui, but this option just seems more tiring to us than for example a bus + a ferry from Bangkok. We came from the west (Krabi) by bus to the pier in Don Saki, and then we took a ferry to the island. A good option, we barely felt it.

The most popular accommodation places on the island of Koh Samui are Lamai Beach and Chaweng. The beaches are exquisite in both places! Lamai is a common option for people looking to have a peaceful vacation or have small kids, whereas Chaweng is for the active ones and people looking to party in the evening. We chose Chaweng as our base.

## **"*Chaweng* is recommended for younger people."**

From the pier (Nathon) on the west coast to Chaweng on the east coast, you can get by taxi in about an hour (20 kilometers). The price is 150 BAHT per person, but drivers will often ask for up to 500 BAHT if they see you’re not informed :)

## **"*Lamai* is recommended for the elderly and people with kids."**

Photo caption: The perfect beach in Chaweng

## **"Most of the options for a massage are in Chaweng.”**

Chaweng was a small fishermen town up until some 30 years ago, when it quickly developed into a lively tourist attraction. Today it’s the center of tourism in this area. In our opinion, the town itself is not especially pretty and apart from the downtown area with a semi-covered shopping mall and a night market, the rest of the town looks like any suburbia in an underdeveloped European city. But then again, the main street which goes on for a couple of kilometers, does have a special note. You can have a taste of the real Thailand there.

## **"The night market next to the shopping mall – Recommended for diner."**

The beach in Chaweng is beautiful! White sand, turquoise and warm water, palm trees here and there, are the real reason why Koh Samui is such a popular destination. An occasional jellyfish can spoil the fun if you’re afraid :) During our five days stay, air temperature was at 32-33 °C constantly and water temperature was at 29-30 °C.

photo caption: The beach in Chaweng

There was a very strong SE wind one day causing huge waves (red flag was raised) so we decided to go five kilometers further to the town of Bophut as we heard the beach there was great. In Bophut, no sign of the wind! And a sea with no waves. The town itself, very pretty and different than the rest on the island. It’s known as an elite place and accommodation here is quite expensive. Its beach was not as good as we expected, so we went our way to the next to the next place called Maenam Beach.

photo caption: The beach in Bophut is OK, but there are better ones

After the waves in Chaweng and the beach in Bophut, the Maenam Beach was a thrill! We stayed the entire day, in the shade of a palm tree :) This beach has a really nice atmosphere, probably because it’s narrow and different than the others.  
photo caption: Maenam Beach

Bophut did not seem too interesting during the day, but we decided to give it a go one evening. The town is a different story, calm and organized, with a pedestrian street, for a moment you’ll think you’re in the Mediterranean. If you wish to take a break from the typical hustle and bustle in Thailand, it can be a good choice. A taxi between Chaweng and Bophut should be around 50-60 BAHT. Be careful, you can be deceived and charged up to four times more.

## **"We have a great option for lunch. Write us to learn more! "**

Photo caption: The Big Buddha Temple just outside Bophut

We dedicated one afternoon to visiting the complex of temples, Big Buddha and Wat Laem Suwannaram. The entrance is free, and you should visit both (they’re very close to each other) even if this sort of thing is not your cup of tea.  
photo caption: Temple complex Wat Laem Suwannaram

## **Conclusion: Koh Samui was our favorite before starting this journey and we expected the most out of it. It didn’t fully deliver, mostly because of the occasional rain and the red flag on the main and most beautiful beach. One of the most developed places we visited on Thailand.**

## Koh Phangan

Among the tourists visiting Thailand, the island of Koh Phangan is widely known for its Full Moon and Half Moon parties. It’s intended mainly for a younger audience. People come from all the surrounding regions for a two-night party. It’s cheap fun, but this island has so much more to offer.

photo caption: Taxi and buses on Koh Phangan

We arrived at Koh Phangan from the island of Koh Samui, after 20 days of travel around Thailand, having visited 5 locations and crossed over a thousand kilometers. Since we try to stay active, we tend to go everywhere by foot. Until this moment, we walked for 15 to 25 kilometers daily. That’s why we decided to take it slow on Koh Phangan.

photo caption: Entrance to Haad Yao

We chose the town of Haad Yao as our base. The place is small, but has everything you need, including one of the most beautiful beaches on the island. You can get here from the harbor by taxi. The price is 150 BAHT per person and it takes about 20 minutes.

photo caption: The accommodation was perfect

We chose a beach bungalow for accommodation. This turned out to be a good decision :) Just 10 steps from the sea, in an organized jungle, makes you feel like in the depth of a rainforest but nicely trimmed and cultivated. It was different than all our previous accommodations. We definitely recommend it (contact us for more details).  
photo caption: Haad Yao beach and the bungalows in the background

The main road goes through Haad Yao. It’s actually a country road, barely enough for two vehicles to pass by, that continues to the west coast. Everything you need for a nice stay gravitates towards this road. You’ll find a couple of restaurants, a tourist agency for you to arrange transfer and rent a car, an ATM and a 7-Eleven. Accommodation is scarce (just a few dozen bungalows and houses) so you must book in advance. The surrounding nature wraps this place in a special kind of atmosphere. Tucked in a cove between the hills and the sea, there’s little space between the beach and the steeps covered in rainforest. It feels kind of claustrophobic at times :) This is the only location in Thailand on which we felt that so often mentioned high humidity level.

photo caption: The “main road” passing through Haad Yao

## **"*Koh Phangan* was the only island on which we had issues with mosquitos."**

We had our meals in two taverns with decent menus and great food. The “Fatmen” bar is located just at the exit, going towards the Salad beach. The owner is very welcoming and friendly, he treated us with homegrown fruit every time.

photo caption: a great Pad Thai

Our second best was the “9 Million” tavern. It’s located at the entrance to Haad Yao, coming from the capital. It sits on a hill with wonderful seaview. We ate good burgers here (the only non-Thai food we had the entire time).

photo caption: perfect view and a good burger in “9 Million“ tavern

The Haad Yao beach is very nice, one of the nicest on the island. It’s long, not too wide, with perfect sand. You should pay attention as there are corals in some parts of this beach, they can be a danger to your feet :) There are bars along the beach, playing relaxing music. There’s also one improvised beach volleyball spot.

photo caption: TheHaad Yao beach and its sand

Since there is no pedestrian zone, the beach turns into a promenade in the evening and the bars become your happy place! Soothing music, torches, couple of light bulbs hanging from the palms, and stars. Lots of stars! With no light pollution, the stars are more visible than what we’re used to.

photo caption: Perfect evenings in beach bars

## **"We saw Koh Lanta as the place for hipsters, whereas Haad Yao can be characterized as the place for hippies :)."**

Photo caption: Longtail boat is an important mean of transporation here too

Secret beach is the first beach south of Haad Yao. It’s within walking distance of about 20 minutes. Can be a decent variation if you’re bored of the same beach every day.

photo caption: Secret beach

Salad beach is the first beach up north. You’ll need to walk arount 40 minutes to get there. If you take a small detour through the forest, you can pick bananas and have a taste :) The surroundings on the beach are nice and the shallow is long. With amenities near by, you can plan to have a meal here or stay the entire day. The water is so warm you can hardly notice the difference between water and air temperature.

photo caption: Salad beach

We’re fans of active vacations and we try to see as many things as we can, but on Koh Phangan we spent five days in one spot. It’s not that we were lazy or tired, it’s just that everything was perfect where we were, just the way it was.

Conclusion: We tend not to repeat our destinations, but Haad Yao and Koh Phangan are probably the only places in Thailand we will revisit some time for sure.

## Bangkok

Bangkok was a big enigma for us. We arrived with the preconception about it being a city of non-stop fun, prostitutes, large crowds and dirty streets. After only a few days, we realized it’s all just exaggeration, or maybe it’s just that we come from a similar environment so it didn´t come as much as a shock to us as it does to someone coming from a well-developed country.

Fun is indeed available all around and you can easily find it, whether it´s a bar with drunk British tourists dancing on chairs in the middle of the day, a drink in a relax bar with chill music or a cocktail on the 70th floor of a skyscraper. Have in mind this last option is intended for their upper class and rich tourists and the price of one drink is usually 20-30 EUR.

Prostitution does exist and it´s presented in the most primitive and vulgar way. They say there´s a drop in this trend and lately women (and men) are marrying tourists to escape this poverty. Most of the population are ashamed of this “industry”.

Traffic – business as usual, it´s there but for a city this size it´s not unusual, nor worse than the rush hour in any large city. Public transportation is well organized, and people are disciplined – everyone waits in line to get on. The behavior of the drivers is an unpleasant surprise (primarily motorcycle drivers). Traffic lights are purely suggestions. When crossing the street on a zebra on a green light, you must be very cautious and look around because it´s the same as running across the highway – motorcycles fly by and will let you cross only if you´re faster than them, they will rarely stop to let you walk first.

photo caption: Traffic in Bangkok

It´s curious that the city only wakes up around 10AM, it´s the time when smaller shops and stands open. Employees from large companies usually have flexible working hours so they also come in later. After hours, it´s common to visit a night market for a quick bite and a fresh juice. After 8PM, only tourists can be found throughout a couple of main streets, but even there the fun ends before midnight. The rest of the city seems ghostly empty in the evening, though not unsafe.

## **"For us, Bangkok is the city of temples, shopping malls, markets and skyscrapers."**

The new part of Bangkok is modern, clean and maintained, with wide boulevards, subway and many high-rise buildings. Bangkok is the 11th town in the world by the number of skyscrapers (buildings over 150 meters high). The central part of the old town is also well maintained and clean. If you wander through the smaller streets, you´ll see that not everything is that shiny and magnificent. You´ll have the impression of being in an abandoned province. This does have its charm as here you´ll wind some things you cannot find elsewhere, such as an authentic atmosphere, interesting local food, nice people…

## **"The best time to visit Bangkok is from December till February."**

When organizing your daily activities, have in mind the daytime temperature in Bangkok is often around 40 °C so plan for a getaway in your hotel, a shopping mall or a restaurant during the warmest part of the day. There aren´t as many coffee shops as we´re used to, so finding a spot can be an issue. During the monsoon season, expect heavy rains and short storms with lots of rain every afternoon.

The Grand Palace complex was the emperor´s family base for centuries. It´s all monumental, peaceful and cloaked in history. It´s open for visits. Because of the crowds, it´s recommended to visit as early as possible, preferably upon opening. It´s also very important to mention the dress code required for visiting the complex. More details about the palace, information and rules can be found on the official webpage.

Temples are in our opinion what defines Bangkok best. The Wat Phra and Wat Arun are a cultural gem you must visit. Make sure to dedicate around two hours to each of them. Detailed information can be found on the official Wat Phra and Wat Arun webpages.

photo caption: The Wat Arun and Wat Phra temples

If you wish to see more temples during your time in Bangkok, try some of the following: Wat Saket, Wat Sutat, Wat Traimit and Wat Ratchanatdaram.

On a hot day, you can find shade in some of the city parks (Lumphini, Rommaniant, Saranrom, Benjakitti…) The parks are a popular gathering place among the locals. During the day, you’ll find school kids in uniforms having a class outdoors, whereas in the afternoon lots of athletes and runners occupy any available spot for training. Our recommendation is the Lumphini park in the new part of town.

photo caption: Lumphini and Benjakitti park

Night markets are temporary market places, where people mostly come to enjoy street food. They are part of Thai folklore and way of life, and for us they are one of the main features of Thailand. Usually they open around 6 PM, but there are some that are open all day. They can be found all over town. Some of the most famous are: Patpong Night Market, Sukhumvit Street Market, Yaowarat Road Night Market…

## **"Wherever you’re buying – bargain is a must!"**

There’s another attraction worth your time while in Bangkok, something you don’t get to see very often in Europe – sky bars. Restaurants and bars on the 70th or 80th floor of the most modern skyscrapers. These bars can be very expensive ~~for our standard~~ so if you’re on a budget, choose carefully. For us, the architecture of Mahankhon skyscraper was interesting. You can have a drink here too, but also enjoy its impressive skywalk.

photo caption: View of the new part of Bangkok from the skywalk

As the central street in the Chinatown of Bangkok, Yaowarat is a must see in the evening. Neon signs, rush, street food, the smell of spices, will boost your impression of one of the biggest Chinatowns in the world!

Khaosan Road is the main street in the old town. It’s the epicenter of nightlife madness and here you can find and see just about anything. There are clubs everywhere, it’s very crowded, the music is too loud, there’s street food all around, you get pulled by your sleeve for all kinds of silly stuff… it’s nice to check out, but nothing more :)

Not far from there, you’ll find the Rambuttri Alley, a much calmer and in our opinion much prettier street, also with lots of bars and a nice atmosphere. We recommend Rambuttri for a night out.

## **"Optimal duration of your stay in Bangkok – 5 days"**

The Chatuchak market is probably the biggest market we’ve ever seen! It has an open and covered (conditioned) space and you can find literally everything here. What we found interesting is the part where pets are sold. If you’re a shopaholic, count on spending half of the day here. It’s a bit outside of the city center, you get there by metro and it opens on weekends only. We recommend Chatuchak and good food options within the open part of the market.

photo caption: The cutest detail on the Chatuchak market

There are entire districts with shopping malls and sometimes there are as much as a dozen next to each other! We recommend Central World as the most modern and a high quality one. The MBK center is right next to it and looks like a covered market with lots of small shops where you can find anything. There are a couple of stores on the top floors that sell electronics, for example digital cameras, for a very good price. If they’re on sale, you get a sales discount and tax return, which turns out even 50% cheaper than back home. The Old Siam is somewhere in between a shopping mall and an open market, and you’ll probably be the only foreigner here. We had good quality meals here a couple times because it was on our way, but we should mention the Central World and the MBK are in different parts of town, so maybe the road will take you to here at some point.

Metro is not too developed, but the existing lines cover everything a tourist needs to see in Bangkok. The trains are clean, and the tickets are sold on vending machines at the entrance. The price depends on the number of stations. Metro is expensive for the standard in Thailand (40-120 BAHT) so it’s not too crowded. There are two Skytrain lines within metro lines, but these are nothing more than a train going above terrain. But the name does have a nice ring to it, so tickets are a bit more expensive.

Transportation by boat! There’s a channel that crosses the town, originally created to collect rainwater. Today it’s cleverly used as regular transportation line by ferry/boat (or whatever they’d call it) which can take up to 300 people during rush hour! They arrive very often, they’re mainly used by the locals, and the fare is up to 20 BAHT for some of the longest lines, up to 20 kilometers! Along the Chao Phraya river, there’s also a regular transportation line by boat, much more developed than the channel ones, mainly because it’s intended for tourists. it goes regularly, it’s very used, cheap, gives you a nice view of the city and depending on where you’re staying, the temples can be easily reached this way. Our recommendation is to use the line on the Chao Phraya river, but also to try out the channel ride, as an interesting experience.

photo caption: Transportation by boat is well developed

The bus lines are well organized. It’s crowded during rush hour only, buses are old and scarcely air conditioned, and the fair is low. Depending on how long the line is and if the bus is conditioned, you can pay as little as 7 BAHT. There are lines a few dozen kilometers long, these drives last up to 2 and a half hours.

We believe there’s no need for you to take a bus in Bangkok (unless your accommodation gravitates towards one of the lines) because metro or boat will do the work just as efficiently, along with being much more pleasant on a hot day.

The most common mean of transportation in Bangkok for shorter distances is the tuk-tuk. Make sure to agree on the price before jumping in, as you can be charged up do 10x the real price (for example, from Chinatown to Khaosan Road, the price is 150 BAHT for two people). Bargain and be pushy. The drive in a tuk-tuk is an adventure, especially in the evening or during afternoon rush hour.

photo caption: City bus and tuk-tuk

Transfer to/from the airport. Firstly, there are two airports in Bangkok. The first one is the most common one for international flights – Suvarnabhumi, while the other one is for domestic flights – Don Mueang. Double check which one is yours, as you wouldn’t be the first nor last to go to the wrong one :) You can use the bus, metro or taxi to get to the airport from the city. We used the bus as the station was in front of our hotel. The price was around 50 BAHT, we arrived at the airport in less than an hour (evening hours) and the bus was half empty – a jackpot :) The price for a taxi is usually 350-400 BAHT.

All the necessary information about transport in Bangkok can be found on this page.

## **Conclusion: Bangkok** did **not fulfill our expectations but did not disappoint either** – it’s simply different than it’s usually represented. It’s worth a visit, though we’re sure we will not come back unless the road takes us there while in transit. But, speaking of charm, it DOES have some!