

# PHUKET GUIDE

YOUR FREE PHUKET GUIDE  
FROM THE ASIA TRAVEL SPECIALISTS

**ASIAWEB**  
DIRECT

[www.asiawebdirect.com](http://www.asiawebdirect.com)



## WEATHER



Phuket has a tropical monsoon climate and, located close to the equator; it is both hot and humid in equal measure and doesn't cool significantly at night.

The period between April and May is the steamiest (avg. 25-35° C). The Southwest monsoons arrive between May and October, and with them pouring rain and thunderstorms - for many, though, this is a welcome respite.

<http://www.phuket.com/island/weather.htm>

## CURRENCY

Thai baht (THB). US\$1 = approximately THB 30.00  
You'll find the current conversion rate at the top of the Phuket.com web site.



## TIME ZONE

GMT+7 (the same as Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam).



## ELECTRICITY

Voltage is 220 Volts with either two flat blades (NEMA 1-15 or JIS C 8303) or round two pin plugs (Europlug CEE 7/16).



## IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS



- Police	191
- Tourist Police	1155
- Ambulance	1554
- Fire	199
- Bangkok Phuket Hospital	076 254 421-20
- Phuket International Hospital	076 212 853
- Mission Hospital	076 237 220-9
- Operator-assisted overseas calls	100
- Directory Assistance	1133, 13
- Phuket Airport	076 327 230
- Immigration	076 221 905

## SIM CARDS AND DIALING PREFIXES



Pre-paid SIM cards are available for purchase at most convenience stores (you will find 7-Elevens everywhere) as well as at the service operators' shops - DTAC, AIS and TRUE - located inside shopping malls. To make a call to a landline within Phuket, dial 076 then the six-digit number. Making a call outside Phuket requires a three-digit area code (with the exception of Bangkok 02), starting with 0, the area code, then the six-digit number. Calls between mobile phones require a three-digit prefix (08x), followed by the seven-digit subscriber number.

## GETTING AROUND



Phuket's public transport consists of the airport shuttle bus to and from Phuket Town, and colourful 'song-teows' - converted pickup trucks than run in daylight hours between Phuket Town and the island's beaches. After dark there is no public transport on the island. The island's tuk-tuks at present are a lot more expensive than Bangkok's three-wheeled icons and are not inclined to bargain flexibly. Travellers arriving at Phuket Airport have a choice between the airport bus, metered taxis, minivans or tuk-tuks.

Once settled in to their hotels, many visitors find it cheaper and more convenient to rent their own vehicle. Motorbikes start at 150-200 baht a day for the basic models while car rentals start at around 800 baht a day.

[http://www.phuket.com/info/travel\\_around.htm](http://www.phuket.com/info/travel_around.htm)

## AIRPORT TRANSFERS



There is an hourly and inexpensive bus service to Phuket Town from 06:30 to 21:30 but none to the west coast. You can buy tickets at a counter on the ground floor and the grey-red-and-black buses marked AIRPORT BUS are to be found outside in the parking lot. Tickets for minivans are for sale at two counters on the ground floor. Minivans take longer than a taxi to deliver you to your hotel as they drop off other passengers at hotels along the way. A well-signed taxi stand is located just outside, to the right of the main building. The taxis are red and yellow and are supposed to use their meters but you will probably have to insist that the driver turns his meter on instead of bargaining and haggling for a price. There are also two car rental counters where you can hire cars from Avis, Alamo, National and Hertz. Please make sure to take along your passport and driving license. Many more companies are located just outside the airport.

If cost is not your main concern, then why not save the trouble and use the airport limousine service (24 hours)? You can book one in advance through the phuket.com website.

<http://www.phuket.com/info/phuket-airport.htm>

## PHUKET AREA GUIDES



With beautiful beaches and wild and hilly countryside separating them, Phuket Island is picturesque and full of character. Phuket is best expressed and appreciated through its beaches and the diversity is rewarding to visitors but let's not forget the island's rich history which is best seen through the prism of the provincial capital, Phuket Town.

### 1. Patong Beach

Wild, exciting, unpredictable and sexy: Just a few words that describe the maelstrom that is Patong. With a carnival-like atmosphere by night, the central drag of Bangla Road and its many bars and clubs is an explosion of colours, sounds (some would say noise) and movement as hawkers and touts work the passing crowds. Sexily dressed bar girls entice single males into their lairs while brassy transgender 'katoeys' display their assets for a price – all in the name of fun.



© AsiaWebDirect

### 2. Kata Beach

The best part of Kata is its lush crescent of white-sand beach. Nodding palms, gin-clear sea and balmy tropical breezes all conspire to create the welcome cliché that is Kata Beach. More family orientated than its bawdy neighbour Patong, Kata at nighttime is a quieter affair with shopping and dining figuring large on visitors' agendas and the beer bars and their girls nowadays marginalized to a small area near the Club Med.



© AsiaWebDirect

### 3. Karon Beach

Much more spread out than compact Kata, Karon is a three-kilometre-long beach free from hotels on its absolute beachfront. Karon is divided into its southern end that is adjacent to Kata Beach and its northern part where most of the bars and restaurants are. In between stand several large hotels and resorts. Because of its length the beach is rarely crowded and if you're looking for a quiet destination in which to relax and take life easy, it's Karon Beach.



© AsiaWebDirect

### 4. Kamala Beach

Kamala Beach from November to April is a calm and pretty quiet spot. However from May to October the northernmost beach is a good surfing spot. Kamala is also home to the extravaganza Phuket FantaSea, a zany and spectacular show taking in Thai culture and fantasy in equal measure. If you decide to relax on the beach here, lunch will come to you in the form of food hawkers selling fruit, tasty satays and cooling drinks.



© AsiaWebDirect

### 5. Bangtao Beach

Home to several five-star resorts and award-winning restaurants, Bangtao has a decidedly up-market feel to it. In this area you can shop for antiques, works of art, fine textiles and fashionable clothes in one-off, trend setting boutiques as well as choose from an extensive array of restaurants ranging from five-star hotel establishments to simple beach restaurants serving spanking fresh seafood and classic Thai specials. The beach itself is classic: rolling waves, shady casuarina trees and sun beds.



© AsiaWebDirect

### 6. Phuket Town

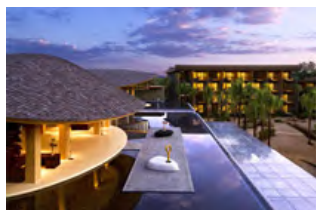
Bursting with recent history, the number-one place to explore in Phuket Town is its old quarter. The area's predominantly Sino-Colonial architecture adds a charming touch to the streets and lanes of this provincial capital and the quarter has enjoyed a recent facelift. A wander through this part of Phuket Town is an immersion in history but Phuket Town's quirky charms don't end there, though; with several award-winning restaurants and unusual markets to shop at it has tangible character.



© AsiaWebDirect

More at <http://www.phuket.com/island/beaches.htm>

## BEST LUXURY HOTELS



### 1. Renaissance Phuket, Mai Khao ★★★★★

Located in the north of Phuket on iconic Mai Khao Beach, Renaissance offers 180 luxurious guestrooms, stylish one-bedroom villas plus 25 sumptuous pool villas with whirlpools, floor-to-ceiling windows, cable TV, DVD players and the very best in amenities. Those looking for a five-star secluded, tranquil beach holiday will not be disappointed with Mai Khao beach as it is quietest beach on the island and the resort's Quan Spa is the place to enjoy its holistic and well thought out treatments.

<http://www.phuket.com/renaissance-phuket-resort/>



### 2. La Flora Resort, Patong Beach ★★★★★

Even though La Flora is located in the heart of Patong you're right on the beach when you stay here. Choose from seven accommodation types at this compact beachside boutique resort where the best of both worlds is at your fingertips and get the best out of your stay in Patong. With two parallel lap pools, a fitness centre, a business centre and two spectacular restaurants – one on the rooftop with sunset views – there's a lot to make of La Flora.

<http://www.phuket.com/laflorapatong/>



### 3. Andara Resort & Villas, Kamala Beach ★★★★★

Renowned for exquisite taste and service that goes far beyond the call of duty, expect beautifully styled interiors with rare artifacts, reams of exotic silk covering windows, and lily ponds that have featured as backdrops for fashion shoots. And that's just a small tease! Enter the guestrooms and you'll be bowled over by the sheer elegance of this good-taste experience.

<http://www.phuket.com/andara-villas/>

## BEST BOUTIQUE HOTELS



### 1. Twinpalms Phuket, Surin Beach ★★★★★

Located at trendy Surin Beach, Twinpalms excels in offering high-quality accommodation, dining, amenities and facilities. This chic resort is highly innovative and is constantly evolving with new ideas and concepts. Twinpalms has Penthouses, Suites, Grand Deluxe Rooms and Deluxe Rooms ranging in size from 51sqm to a whopping 488sqm – every centimetre carefully designed to give guests maximum luxury and comfort. A world-class spa complemented by top-notch beauty and health products is accompanied by the ground-breaking Sun Spa Esthederm.

<http://www.phuket.com/twinpalms-phuket/>



### 2. Mom Tri's Villa Royale, Kata Beach ★★★★★

Mom Tri's Villa Royale is a luxury boutique resort and spa set on the headland between two of the most beautiful sandy beaches on Phuket, Kata Noi and Kata Yai. The resort comprises 27 deluxe Villa Suites with Thai-style décor and fabulous sea views. Mom Tri's Kitchen, an award-winning restaurant also features fabulous sea views and one of the best wine cellars in southern Thailand and Mom Tri's Spa Royale, a nominee of the World Luxury Spa Awards.

<http://www.phuket.com/villaroyale/>



### 3. The Pavilions Phuket, Bangtao ★★★★★

On a hillside with ocean and landscape panoramas, Pavilions consists of 48 Private Pool Villas comprising Tropical Pool Villas, Spa & Pool Pavilions, Ocean View Pool Villas, Spa & Pool Penthouse and a Three-Bedroom Pool Villa. Exclusively private, there are no bikini lines at Pavilions and guests can wallow in their confidentiality yet as well as private dining the resort features a fashionable hilltop restaurant with stunning views and vistas.

<http://www.phuket.com/phuketpavilions/>

More at <http://www.phuket.com/toptenhôtels.htm>

## BEST BEACHSIDE HOTELS



### 1. Dusit Thani Laguna, Bangtao ★★★★★

With acres of sweeping and majestic grounds leading down to absolute beachfront on Phuket's epic Bangtao Beach, Dusit Thani Phuket is the last word in beachside hotels. Here, you'll find no less than eight different accommodation categories ranging from Ocean Front luxury to Pool Villa opulence. The award-winning La Trattoria Italian restaurant is located here and is a must-do when it comes to culinary excellence.

<http://www.phuket.com/dusitlaguna/>



### 2. SALA Phuket, Mai Khao ★★★★★

Stylish, innovative, refreshing and unique in its field, Sala Phuket is total beachfront privacy. Sala features private swimming pools in 63 out of its 79 Rooms, Villas, and Suites. The Villas are 100% private and are designed to incorporate Phuket's colonial architecture and up-to-date opulence. Located right on west coast Mai Khao Beach, Sala sits in splendid sandy isolation surrounded by casuarina trees and features three large beachfront swimming pools, a world-class beachfront restaurant, in-room Wi-Fi, a gym and a spa.

<http://www.phuket.com/salaphuket/>



### 3. Katathani Phuket Beach Resort, Kata Beach ★★★★★

Dominating the greater part of Kata Noi Beach, Katathani has 479 low-rise guestrooms and suites, all with private balconies or terraces facing onto the ocean, pools or tropical gardens and being absolute beachfront the sound of the surf is the first thing guests hear when they wake up. There are no less than six swimming pools at Katathani as well as three Jacuzzis and the azure beachfront gardens are where guests can enjoy al fresco Thai massages.

<http://www.phuket.com/katathani/>

## BEST BUDGET HOTELS



### 1. Deevana Patong Resort & Spa, Patong Beach ★★★

Deevana offers 232 functionally designed rooms, equipped with all the amenities to ensure an unforgettable and relaxing stay. Choose between the Garden Wing's 152 rooms or in the Spa Wing with its 80 rooms. There's even a long-term guest arrangement at Deevana and with its three swimming pools with two outdoors kids' pools, Dalah and Salathai restaurants, spa and steam room, room and babysitting services and much more you get your bang for your buck at Deevana.

<http://www.phuket.com/deevana/>



### 2. Safari Beach Hotel, Patong Beach ★★★

An on-the-beach hotel where you can dine right by the sand. Be sure to book a room overlooking Patong Beach itself and you're on for a holiday of a lifetime, especially with Bangla Road (Patong's Party central) and its electrifying nightlife mere steps away. Get the best of both worlds at Safari Beach Hotel and enjoy both the beach and all the pleasures that Patong has to offer.

<http://www.phuket.com/safaribeachhotel/>



### 3. Patong Premier Resort, Patong Beach ★★★

Patong Premier Resort is centrally located in the heart of Patong Beach only a short stroll away from the town's fantastic nightlife and shopping. Just a five-minute walk to the beach, the resort has a superb combination and a fine balance of location, price and service that guests cannot help but appreciate. Amenities and facilities are standard while the compact swimming pool is shaded by trees.

<http://www.phuket.com/patongpremier/>

More at <http://www.phuket.com/toptenhotels.htm>

## WHAT TO SEE IN PHUKET



If Phuket shines in only one particular area (which is happily not the case) it would have to be in the 'What to See' category. The island is teeming with fascinating sights, attractions and curiosities that may seem perfectly normal to locals but are riveting to the western mindset. Some, like Phang Nga Bay are wonders of Nature while others, such as Phuket FantaSea are most definitely contrived by man. Either way, they're out there waiting for you.

### 1. Phang Nga Bay

The first impression airplane passengers have of the island when they look down during the descent to Phuket Airport is that it is a wonderland. Yet, strictly speaking what they're seeing isn't Phuket: It's the fantastic world of Phang Nga Bay. With limestone karsts rising vertically out of the waters of the bay like petrified cathedrals and a plethora of wildlife it's no wonder that visitors are wowed by Mother Nature. Day tours operate from Phuket allowing visitors to kayak in and out of the caves. [Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 2. Phuket FantaSea

An intoxicating blend of legend, myth, imagination and pure show business with a twist of history thrown in to make the final result even spicier, Phuket FantaSea is a heady brew that fascinates visitors to Phuket. Flying elephants wisecracking Siamese twins, jaw-dropping airborne spectacles performed by acrobats and mock battles are just a few elements of this extravaganza. FantaSea is also a theme park and contains a bazaar, one of the largest buffets in Asia and a 'Palace of Elephants'. Wheelchair friendly.

**Open:** 17:30 – 23:30 Closed Thursday - **Location:** Kamala Beach - [Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 3. Bangla Road Nightlife

To some, it's depraved, others claim they can take it or leave it, but to others Bangla Road's nightlife is the height of sensual pleasure. Every night starting about nine o'clock, someone takes a figurative firework, lights it and steps quickly away as the whole place 'burns' fast and bright with sexy girls beckoning passersby into their 'bar beers' while music – live or otherwise – pounds out of doorways and mingles with other sounds of the night creating a chaotic and exhilarating atmosphere in which anything goes.

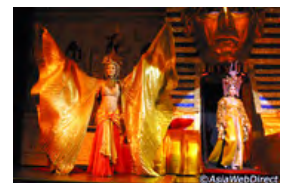
**Open:** Daily 21:00 Drunk - **Location:** Patong Beach



### 4. Simon Cabaret

This is a spectacular display of originality and fun by an all-transvestite cast. Patong's Simon Cabaret is one of Southeast Asia's outstanding entertainment attractions. A single show runs the entire range of musical theatre from cultures around the world. Okay, so it's not Las Vegas but for many it's the first time they've been up close and personal with a 'ladyboy' or katoey as they're known locally. Please note that performers are renowned for collaring members of the audience after the show, posing for a photo with them and demanding money for it.

**Open:** Daily 19:00 and 21:00 - **Location:** Sirirat Road, Patong - [Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 5. Big Buddha

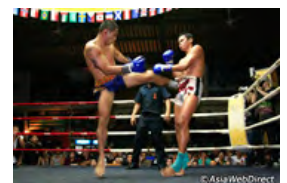
Phuket's Big Buddha is one of the island's most important and revered landmarks. The huge image sits on top of the Nakkerd Hills between Chalong and Kata and at 45 metres high it is easily seen from far away. The lofty site offers the best 360-degree views of the island (think sweeping vistas of Phuket Town, Kata, Karon beaches, Chalong Bay, and more.) Easily reachable via a six-kilometre road leading from Phuket's main artery, it's a must-visit island destination.

**Open:** Daily - **Location:** Nakkerd Hills



### 6. Thai Boxing

Often exhilarating and always riveting, Muay Thai - or Thai Boxing - is the most intensive body contact sport in the world, Muay Thai has taken on a new twist in that a number of foreign fighters have come to train and compete in Thailand. Patong has two Thai boxing venues, one on Soi Sai Namyen that has shows every Monday and Thursday - showtime 21:00 to 23:30 and at Bangla Boxing Stadium behind the Millennium Hotel at Jungceylon on Sai Kor Road which features fights on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday from 21:00 - 23:00 [Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 7. Wat Chalong

Wat Chalong has been extending a warm welcome to visitors for over a century. Locals come to pray and Westerners come to learn something about Buddhism. The most revered and impressive of Phuket's 29 temples, it is dedicated to two highly venerated monks, Luang Pho Chaem and Luang Pho Chuang who helped heal many miners with their knowledge of herbal medicine during a tin miners' rebellion in 1876. When visiting please dress respectfully with no revealing garments.

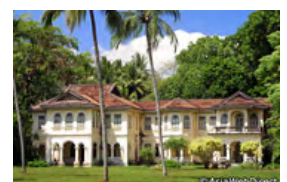
**Open:** 07:00 - 17:00 - **Location:** Chao Fa West Road



### 8. Old Phuket Town

Once the hub of island life, nowadays visiting the old quarter of Phuket Town is akin to touring a real-life museum. With its distinctive Sino-Colonial architecture, the quarter displays what life was like over 100 years ago when tin was king in Phuket and immigrant Chinese families threw their all into the tin mining industry. Slowly but surely old Phuket Town is being restored and a stroll down Thalang, Phang Nga and Dibuk roads as well as Soi Romani is time well spent if you are interested in history.

**Open:** Best to go late afternoon when the heat of day has subsided.



## WHAT TO DO IN PHUKET



There's a lot to do in Phuket. Whether you are an active person or prefer to relax on your holiday there's something for everyone here. From gently gliding along on the back of an elephant to gently gliding on the waters of astonishing Phang Nga Bay or simply succumbing to the utter relaxation of a professional massage, choices are all exotic and the stuff that epic holidays are made of.

### 1. Elephant Trekking

There are few things quite as surprising in life than to get on the back of a 3,500-kilo elephant and discover just how delicately and daintily this creature walks. Elephant trekking is hugely popular in Phuket and is often incorporated with another activity or two such as learning how to feed them or even whitewater rafting in Phang Nga Province elephant trekking tours. Other tours even teach visitors how to prepare 'jungle curry'.

[Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 2. Explore Phang Nga Bay by Kayak

A very popular activity, Phang Nga Bay in neighbouring Phang Nga Province is an hour's boat ride away and is a veritable wonderland of limestone islands rising vertically out of the bay. The centre of some of these islands or 'karsts' has collapsed in on itself due to continuous erosion and is therefore a perfect natural conservation ground for the wildlife of the area. Boats carrying kayakers make their way to these islands and enter them through caves at opportune times when the tide level is right. It's all a fascinating glimpse of Mother Nature at her best.

[Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 3. Dino Park Mini-Golf

An unusual but fun concept, Dino Park Mini-Golf is an 18-hole mini course with a dinosaur theme an exploding 'volcano', authentic-looking replicas of dinosaurs with some pretty good burgers thrown in for good measure. It's really best to play this course at night before or after enjoying the good food here. Fun for all the family, Dino Park is one of Phuket's longest-established attractions.

**Location:** Kata Beach



### 4. Spas in Phuket

There's nothing quite like the feeling of being utterly and hopelessly spoiled under the capable attentions of a highly skilled masseur or masseuse. Getting wrapped up all smeared in papaya is actually more fun than it sounds and a hot stone massage leaves you delightfully light headed. Phuket has a plethora of professional centres of pampering both in resorts and in stand-alone establishments. Of course prices are extremely reasonable when compared to enjoying the equivalent treatments in the west so this is an extremely attractive way to spend a rainy day when on Phuket.

[Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 5. One-Day Tour to Koh Phi Phi

Phi Phi Don, Phi Phi Leh, and Maya Bay, are quite simply paradisiacal locations that will remain etched on visitors' memories. The turquoise sea counterpointed by the verdant hills along with the powder-blue skies lends the place a magical quality that renders it unique among tropical island destinations. A one-day tour will leave Phuket at 08:00 and cruise through Maya Bay and past Phi Phi Leh, docking at Phi Phi Don around midday. Enjoy a buffet lunch then explore the island before heading back to Phuket. It sounds simple but it's pure magic.

[Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 6. Four-in-One Half-Day Safari

Phuket Island has a range of hills that form its backbone and this is where this particularly busy tour starts off – above the hills in Chalong. Learn about buffalos, see how rubber trees are 'bled' of latex, learn how to make jungle curry and go elephant trekking. All fascinating subjects, for all age groups, and typical of the exotic tropics.

[Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 7. ATV

An ATV tour not only allows you to release your inner child but also leaves you much better informed about the eco system on Phuket and more learned about its exotic and fabulous flora. Explore the mango swamps, ride along the beaches and generally ham it up on these exciting machines. A full safety lesson is included and good supervision is the order of the day. Fun and exciting, ATVs are the best way to get over rough and challenging terrain.

[Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 8. Phuket Island & City Tour

Get to know Phuket better through this half-day tour that takes you up the beautiful west coast, stopping at the outstanding 'Three Beaches' viewpoint then taking in a gem factory, a herbal centre, Wat Chalong, the Sea Gypsy village in Rawai and a cashew nut factory. You'll also get to see Phuket's legendary Promthep Cape viewing point.

[Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



## WHAT TO EAT

While Thai food needs little introduction, these popular dishes are must-try while you visit Thailand. The below list spans everything from staple backpacker favourites to Thai classics. Although some of them may sound familiar, don't be surprised if they taste nothing like what you usually find back home.

### 1. Tom Yum Goong (Spicy Shrimp Soup)

A bold, refreshing blend of fragrant lemongrass, chilli, galangal, lime leaves, shallots, lime juice and fish sauce. Tom Yam is a versatile dish that can fit within virtually any meal – its invigorating sour-spicy-hot taste just screams 'Thailand'!



### 2. Pad Thai (Thai style Fried Noodles)

From Cape Town to Khao San Road, the default international Thai dish. Dropped in a searing hot wok, fistfuls of small, thin noodles do a steamy minute-long dance alongside crunchy bean sprouts, spring onions and egg, before disembarking for the nearest plate.



### 3. Gaeng Daeng (Red Curry)

Made with morsels of meat, red curry paste, smooth coconut milk and topped off with a sprinkling of finely sliced kaffir lime leaves, this rich, aromatic curry always gets those taste buds tingling.



### 4. Som Tam – (Spicy Green Papaya Salad)

Hailing from the Northeast (Isan), this outlandish dish is both great divider - some can't get enough of its bite, some can't handle it – and greatly distinctive. Garlic, chilies, green beans, cherry tomatoes and shredded raw papaya get dramatically pulverized in a pestle and mortar, so releasing a rounded sweet-sour-spicy flavour that's not easily forgotten.



### 5. Tom Kha Kai (Chicken in Coconut Soup)

A mild, tamer twist on Tom Yam, this iconic soup infuses fiery chilies, thinly sliced young galangal, crushed shallots, stalks of lemongrass and tender strips of chicken. Topped off with fresh lime leaves, it's a sweet-smelling concoction, both creamy and compelling.



### 6. Pak Boong Fai Daeng (Stir-fried Morning Glory)

The leafy plant with hollow green stems and thin fragile leaves forms the main component of this super easy favourite. Cloves of garlic and birds eye chilies join it in a wok alongside oyster sauce, fish sauce and fermented bean. A few lazy stirs, and it's done!



### 7. Gaeng Keow Wan Kai (Green Chicken Curry)

Another all-time favourite dish, served alongside a bowl of fragrant rice. Green curry paste and coconut milk form the creamy base. Morsels of fresh chicken, cherry-sized eggplants, bamboo shoots, sprigs of coriander and generous handfuls of sweet basil add body to this seminal curry.



### 8. Yam Nua (Spicy Beef Salad)

If there was such a thing as a 'Salad Hall of Fame', Yam Nua would surely take pride of place. The fresh, fiery thrill of Yam Nua – with its sprightly mix of onion, coriander, spearmint, lime, dried chili and tender strips of beef – perfectly embodies the invigorating in-the-mouth-thrill of all Thai salads, the yummy-ness of yam.



## BEST DINING EXPERIENCES

Phuket may have some of the most striking beaches in Asia, world-class entertainment draws, excellent spas and some of the friendliest people around but it is also a first-class culinary destination. Surprised? You really shouldn't be, as the island has some extremely innovative and talented chefs. From fine dining to Thai cooking classes to eating on a floating restaurant the range of dining options here is almost infinite.

### 1. Best Thai Experience: Blue Elephant

Set in a beautiful and enormous ex-governor's mansion in the heart of Phuket's Old Town, Blue Elephant features old Thai recipes on its menu to great effect and dining out here is nothing if not impressive. Beautiful crockery, cutlery and décor with tip-top service and tasteful music all add up to an extraordinary experience.

**Open:** Daily - 11:30 - 14:30, 18:30 - 22:30 - **Location:** Krabi Road, Phuket Town - **Tel:** +66 (0)76 354 355



### 2. Best Local Experience: Raya House

Raya House is a legend in Phuket. Set in a simple, converted old-fashioned Thai house, its cuisine is so sought after that Raya even flies dishes up to Bangkok clients on order. The owner gives classes to local chefs so dining here is somewhat of an educational experience when it comes to trying out genuine Thai food. Special mention should be made of the crabmeat curry; it's a must-try dish.

**Open:** Daily 11:30 - 22:30 - **Location:** New Dibuk Road Phuket Town. - **Tel:** +66 (0)76 218 155



### 3. Most Romantic Restaurant: La Gritta

Award-winning La Gritta not only has great culinary chops, but it also enjoys fantastic views out over the entire Patong Bay. When the lights of Patong begin to twinkle and sparkle, the magic-ometer of La Gritta goes off the scale. Essentially an Italian restaurant La Gritta plays host to international chefs. Fine dining.

**Open:** Daily 11:00 - 24:00 **Location:** In Amari Coral Beach Resort, South Patong - **Tel:** +66 (0)76 340 106-14



### 4. Most Unusual: Floating Restaurants

Along Phuket's sheltered east coast near Phuket Town there are several floating restaurants that are reachable by shuttle 'long-tail' boats. The restaurants are essentially wooden islets/rafts with plastic tables and chairs, fish cages and a rudimentary kitchen set up but as rough as it all sounds the food, spanking fresh fish and seafood, is superb. Great for sunset dining and balmy nights, the whole experience of dining on a floating restaurant is... different.

**Location:** Phuket's East Coast



### 5. Sunday Brunch: Oriental Spoon at Twinpalms Phuket Resort

Every Sunday from 12:00 to 15:00 Twinpalms serves up a sumptuous feast of cheeses, oysters, cold cuts, roasts, fresh bread, smoked salmon and much, much more, including a chocolate fountain. Set in the trendy Oriental Spoon restaurant the atmosphere is see-and-be-seen chic, there are three price levels, the most expensive including a bottle of champagne, the middle level is inclusive of a bottle of wine and finally the bottom rate is without alcohol.

**Open:** Sundays 12:00 - 15:00 - **Location:** Surin Beach **Tel:** +66 (0)76 316 557



### 6. Best Seafood: Kan Eang @ Pier

Choose between al fresco dining with views of Chalong Bay or air-conditioned comfort at Kan Eang @ Pier. It's a fairly large restaurant with an army of chefs and cooks that are used to handling a lot of orders per night so intimacy is not its strongest point but the décor and setup are attractive and those sea breezes as delicious as the fresh fish served here. Wheelchair friendly.

**Open:** 10:30 - 23:00 - **Location:** Next to Chalong Pier - **Tel:** +66 (0)76 381 212



### 7. Best Restaurant with a View: Tungka Café

Tung Ka Café offers vistas of Phuket Town by night as well as 180-degree vistas stretching all the way along the island's 'backbone' of hills. It's all pretty spectacular and in reality Tung Ka's dishes play second fiddle to the views but nevertheless there's some good Thai food to be had here with a colourful choice of unusual Thai desserts.

**Open:** 10:30 - 22:30 - **Location:** Rang Hill in Phuket Town - **Tel:** +66 (0)76 211 500



### 8. Best Italian: Capannina

Capannina has the winning combination of serving up genuine Italian food at reasonable prices. Not only that, but the portions are generous here. This means that the place is popular and gets pretty busy so you're better off if you go there a little earlier than usual. It's also worth mentioning that if you order the 'large' pizza you'll have enough to feed the family – it's that big. Capannina also has a decent wine list.

**Open:** 11:30 - 23:00 - **Location:** 30/9 Moo 2. Kata Rd on Soi Option 1 - **Tel:** +66 (0)76 284 318



## WHERE TO GO FOR NIGHTLIFE



Patong is the undisputed nightlife centre of Phuket. From nine o'clock onwards nightly the town is buzzing and doesn't stop until the wee hours (and longer depending where you look). Bangla Road in Patong is the epicentre of the action and where you will find the biggest clubs, the craziest 'bar beers' and the fruitiest shows. However other areas such as Rat-U-Thit Road and Beach Road have lively night venues with good bands.

### 1. Soi Bangla

Stroll along Bangla Road at round midnight and you'll wonder if you're an extra in a phantasmagorical movie or not. Anything goes along Bangla and that includes boys that love girls who love girls who are boys, ping pong shows without a table-tennis paddle, hawkers selling fake merchandise, Irish pubs with Filipina singers, clubs with pounding beats and lots of girls you wouldn't take home to meet mother. Taken with a sense of humour it's a barrel of laughs, take it too seriously and you'd be better off with a cup of cocoa at home.

**Location:** Central Patong



### 2. Clubs

The biggest clubbing names in Patong are Famous, Seduction, The Factory and Beach Road's Banana. Big-name DJs occasionally drop by such as David Morales, DJ Bert Bevans, Judge Jools and Thailand's very own Nakadia to rock these places but at the end of the day (literally) many clubs in Patong are glorified pickup joints. Pick and choose at will; by western standards entry prices (that generally include a drink) are laughably low. Things get going late in Patong clubs so check out a bar or two before heading to a club.

**Open:** 21:00 - Late - **Location:** Soi Bangla and Beach Road



### 3. Live Music

Again, Patong is the centre of live music on the island with Rock City hosting heavy metal tribute bands, Tai Pan, cover bands and Margarita's mixing sports coverage with live music. You're not going to come across innovative live music in Phuket but there are some hot acts out there such as at The Port in Banthai Resort along the Beach Road. Molly Malone's on Bangla Road has good acoustic folk stuff and over in Phuket Town the places to head to are Rockin'Angels and Timber Hut – both along Yaowarat Road.



### 4. Simon Cabaret

If you're into sequins, heavy makeup and boys who look more like girls than girls do, Simon Cabaret is the place for you. A Phuket institution, it started out in a single shop-house and has grown exponentially over the years into its present-day form as a transvestite/transgender extravaganza. Neatly choreographed and mimed, the show's impressive enough, but also keep an eye on the audience's faces. Please note that cast members expect payment for photos taken of them after the show.

**Open:** Daily 19:00 and 21:00 - **Location:** Sirirat Road, Patong - [Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 5. Phuket FantaSea

An intoxicating blend of legend, myth, imagination and pure show business with a twist of history thrown in to make the final result even spicier, Phuket FantaSea is a heady brew that fascinates visitors to Phuket. Flying elephants, wisecracking Siamese twins, jaw-dropping airborne spectacles performed by acrobats and mock battles are just a few elements that make up this extravaganza. FantaSea is also a theme park and has one of the largest buffets in Asia. Wheelchair friendly.

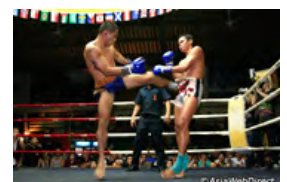
**Open:** 17:30 - 23:30 Closed Thursday - **Location:** Kamala - [Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 6. Thai Boxing

Often exhilarating and always riveting, Muay Thai - or Thai Boxing - is the most intensive body contact sport in the world. Muay Thai has taken on a new twist in that a number of foreign fighters have come to train and compete in Thailand. Patong has two Thai boxing venues, one on Soi Sai Namyen that has shows every Monday and Thursday - showtime 21:00 to 23:30 and at Bangla Boxing Stadium behind Jungceylon on Sai Kor Road which features fights on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday from 21:00 - 23:00

[Book now](#), call +66 (0)76 335 200



### 7. Gay Phuket

The streets leading to Royal Paradise Phuket are almost all taken over by gay bars, restaurants, a-Go-Gos, massage parlours and businesses. Some of the leading gay bars are The Flying Handbag, Boat Bar, Kar and Dempsey's has an A-Go-Go show. This is very much a night venue; by day the area is just plain sleepy. Connect Guesthouse is a good place to check out if you're seeking information on the gay scene in Phuket.

**Location:** Along the two streets leading to Royal Paradise Phuket



### 8. After Beach / Beach Bars

High on Kata Hill overlooking Kata Noi Beach you'll find three very similar bars called After Beach, Small Viewpoint and Baan Chom. They all play Bob Marley music and they all have fantastic sunset views. Starting out many years ago as a one-room, one-table bar, After Beach has greatly expanded and now serves decent food and cocktails as well as bottled beer. At the southern end of Kata Beach stands the Ska Bar - a lovely place to spend a starry night sipping on a cool one and listening to the sound of breaking waves and reggae music.

**Open:** 12:00 - Late - **Location:** Kata Hill between Kata and Nai Harn



## WHERE TO SHOP

A few years back when the first shopping mall opened in Phuket, locals asked "Where is it all leading to?" Nowadays, with Phuket more developed, malls are ubiquitous but happily have not smothered the Thai traditional market life on the island. Thai people like to 'group' their shops so that if you are looking for a particular item there will be several shops selling on the same street.

### 1. Central Festival Phuket

Located just outside the western perimeter of Phuket Town, Central Festival Phuket with its 120,000sqm is a state-of-the-art shopping mall with hundreds of outlets, a multi-screen SFX cinema, franchise restaurants and of course the eponymous Central Department Stall. If you take the time to compare prices here with western ones you'll see that there are bargains to be had in name-brand goods plus you can claim 7% VAT back at the airport if you request for and fill out the correct papers.

**Open:** 10:00 - 22:00 - **Location:** Just outside Phuket Town, Bypass Road



### 2. Jungceylon

Jungceylon in Patong has more than 300 shops in it and uses 200,000 sqm of space. At its core is the two-storey Carrefour with household, food and fashion items. Carrefour also features many massage and beauty centres with reasonable prices as well as a Robinson's department store with a good range of beauty and scented products as well as a colourful children's section. Jungceylon often features fashion shows and has daily fountain displays.

**Open:** 11:00 - 22:00 - **Location:** Rat-U-Thit Road



### 3. Jim Thompson

Jim Thompson was an American businessman who, in the 1950s and 60s helped revitalise the Thai silk industry. He mysteriously disappeared from Malaysia's Cameron Highlands in 1967 but his business momentum has carried on and nowadays the name Jim Thompson is synonymous with high-quality silk items as diverse as shirts to bed sheets to toys. There are currently six Jim Thompson outlets in Phuket: Canal Village Laguna, Katathani Beach Resort, Central Festival Phuket, Le Meridien Phuket, Turtle Village (Mai Khao Beach) and at Phuket Airport.



### 4. Phuket Indy Market

The Indy Phuket Market is on a small lane off Dibuk Road, just next to the well-known Lemongrass Restaurant, down what locals call Limelight Avenue. Items for sale here include handcrafted fashion jewelry, flowers, and customised towels as well as key rings and figurines. It's all very creative and is undeniably a lot of fun, with live music and a laid-back feel to it.

**Open:** Thursdays and Fridays 16:00 - 22:00 - **Location:** Phuket Old Town



### 5. Phuket Old Town Handicraft Shops

Phuket's Old Town is not only a picturesque and fascinating place to explore; it also features atmospheric handicraft stores as well as textile shops where bargains are to be had. Locally made handicrafts alongside Tibetan items are found along these streets and along Phang Nga and Yaowarat roads several artists have set up studios that sell classic as well as more modern-themed works.

**Open:** 11:00 - 21:00 - **Location:** Phuket Old Town



### 6. Weekend Market (Talad Tairod)

'Talad Tairod' translates as 'car boot sale' but nowadays this busy market has moved on from cars lined up selling dodgy goods. Thai markets are as much a social event as a commercial one so be prepared for lots of smiles and bartering. For sale are jeans, T-shirts, custom jewelry, artificial flowers, DVDs, sports shoes and a lot of secondhand goods. And of course a Thai market would not be complete without lots of delicious snacks.

**Open:** Saturday, Sunday 16:00 - 21:00 - **Location:** Wirat Hong Yok Road (south of Central Festival Phuket)



### 7. Tailors

Yes, tailors on Phuket can be pesky and persistently trying to get you into their shop when all you want to do is get to the beach but if you are specifically interested in bespoke clothes and know what you want they actually perform a useful function. You'll need to plan at least two fittings and do not insist on getting your tailored items in a big hurry for obvious reasons. Remember to barter and do gently remind the tailor that it is a buyer's market as if the prices are unreasonable in one shop there are many others to choose from.

**Open:** 10:00 - Late - **Location:** Everywhere



### 8. Antiques

Thai, Chinese, Burmese and Khmer antiques are excellent buys in Phuket. Statues, fabrics, woodcarvings and furniture are just some of the items available. Also, excellent reproductions of antiques can also be found but you'll need to make sure you're not paying antique prices for a reproduction. There is an export ban on certain pieces, particularly Buddha images. Other pieces may require an export license, but any reputable dealer will be able to advise you on restrictions and any necessary documentation. **Location:** Fine Orient 51/20 Chaofa West Road, Chan's Antique House Bypass Road, 2.5 km north of Tesco-Lotus and many more locations



TIPS AND GOOD TO KNOW **Carry small change**

Thailand is relatively inexpensive, unless you plan to enjoy all your shopping, dining and nightlife inside a hotel or upscale shopping malls. Taxi drivers, food vendors and shop keepers usually don't carry change for big bills. So, make sure that you break the 1,000 baht notes into a few 100s and small coins upon arrival at the airport. The 5 and 10 baht coins usually come in handy when taking a taxi or public transportation.

**Barter, but nicely**

The first rule of shopping in Thailand: if there's no barcode or set price, get haggling. It's expected. However, instead of adopting a confrontational "give me it for this price, now!" attitude, try the gracious, smiley "what's your best price, my friend?" approach. Why? Because a smile here goes further than a sneer. Aim to chip anything from 10-40% off the quoted price. And by all means, walk away if the price is disagreeable – more often than not you'll be called back for last ditch negotiations!

**Beware scammers**

To be Aware of Even though most tuk-tuk drivers are not flexible on fare prices it is still very important to agree (or agree to disagree) on a price before stepping in the vehicle to avoid extra 'expenses'. Also, please be aware that most jet-skis are not insured and you will have to cover the (sometimes astronomical) cost of repairs and lost working time in the event of an accident.

**Drink lots of water**

This tip, of course, applies even to the Antarctic. But packing a supply of the wet stuff in Thailand's sticky, stifling heat is even more crucial to your well-being. Our unscientific rule of thumb: drink more than you sweat. Fortunately you are never more than a few paving stones from a drinks vendor. Always make sure bottled water is sealed. For a change, take your chosen tittle modern Thai-style, in a small plastic bag with handle and straw. Its quirky but, as you'll find when rummaging around overheated markets, also convenient.

**Carry a photocopy of your passport**

Whether it be an impromptu demand from a local policeman or a request from security at one of the city's swanky nightspots, carrying ID is a must in Thailand. The fact that you are 25 but look like you're pushing 40 doesn't matter – proving who you are is a day-to-day formality, something the Thais are finicky about. Instead of dragging your passport around with you, and with it the constant fear of losing it, take a photocopy.

**Carry a hotel card with Thai directions**

It's simple. It isn't rocket science. But this ingenious device, little more than a piece of card with your hotel's address written on it in Thai, will save endless how-do-we-get-home headaches. Flash it beneath the eyes of your chosen driver and watch how his shrugs of utter incomprehension instantly change to reassuring nods.

EASY THAI PHRASES 

**Krab / Ka** = Words added at the end of a sentence/phrase to add politeness. Krab for male. Ka for female

**Phom / Chan** = I (male / female)

**Khun** = You (polite)

**Sawad Dee (krab / ka)** = Hello (male / female)

**Khob Khun (krab / ka)** = Thank you (male / female)

**Phom / Chan Pood Thai mai pen** = I (male / female) don't speak Thai

**Hong nam yuu nai?** = Where are the restrooms?

**Tao rai (krab / ka)?** = How much does it cost (male / female)?

**Lod dai maak sood tao rai?** = What's your best price?

**Pood len rue plao** = Are you kidding?

**Nii khong jing rue khong plom** = Is this real or fake?

**Ao ped ped** = I want my food very spicy

**Mai ped** = Not spicy

**Check bin / Kheb tang** = Can I have the bill please?

**Khun lor / suay maak** = You are very handsome / beautiful