

THAILAND · BEACHES · ISLANDS · DIVING · NIGHTLIFE · FOOD



Koh Samui & the Gulf islands

Koh Samui, Koh Phangan and Koh Tao sit in the Gulf of Thailand on a different weather cycle from Phuket: driest from February to August and wettest from October to December. That makes them the Thai beach choice for UK summer holidays, from Samui's resort hotels to Phangan's party beaches and Tao's dive schools.



The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all but essential travel to parts of Thailand.

Check whether Koh Samui & the Gulf islands is affected in the latest FCDO travel advice.

 COUNTRY Thailand	 BEST TIME Feb–Aug	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 16h 30m via Bangkok ~£750–£1,300 return	 DAILY BUDGET £45–£270 ££ Moderate
 WARMEST MONTH May (33°C)	 SEA TEMPERATURE 27–30°C coolest–warmest	 TIME ZONE Bangkok +6h vs UK now	 CURRENCY Thai baht £1 ≈ THB 44.94

Koh Samui is the gateway and the most developed island, with an airport, international hotels and beaches ranging from lively Chaweng to quieter Bophut, Choeng Mon and Lipa Noi. Ferries continue north to Koh Phangan, famous for Haad Rin's monthly Full Moon Party but mostly made up of quiet coves and yoga retreats, and to little Koh Tao, one of the world's busiest places to learn to dive. Many visitors combine Samui with a few nights on one of the others. The weather is driest from February to August, while October to December brings the north-east monsoon's heavy rain and choppy crossings.

Highlights

- 1

NATURE

Ang Thong Marine National Park

A scattering of 42 limestone islands west of Samui, visited on day trips by speedboat or slower boat. Kayak between the karsts, snorkel, and climb to the viewpoint above the Emerald Lake on Koh Mae Ko.
- 2

WILDLIFE

Sail Rock and Koh Tao diving

Koh Tao certifies more new divers than almost anywhere, with shallow, sheltered reefs ideal for open-water courses. Sail Rock, a pinnacle between Tao and Phangan, is the area's top site, where whale sharks pass occasionally.
- 3

SACRED SITE

Big Buddha and Wat Plai Laem

A 12-metre golden Buddha sits on a causeway-linked islet at Samui's north-east tip, with the colourful Wat Plai Laem and its 18-armed statue of Guanyin nearby. Cover shoulders and knees, and remove shoes.
- 4

BEACH

Haad Rin and the Full Moon Party

Sunrise Beach on Koh Phangan hosts thousands for the monthly all-night party, with bucket drinks and fire shows. Book rooms well ahead, watch your drink and keep clear of the flaming skipping ropes.

5

FOOD

Fisherman's Village, Bophut

Bophut's old wooden shophouses now hold restaurants and boutiques. On Friday evenings the walking-street night market fills the lane with grilled seafood, mango sticky rice and craft stalls.

Where to stay

WHERE TO STAY

Chaweng

Samui's longest, liveliest beach, with the most hotels, bars and restaurants; suits groups and couples who want nightlife on the doorstep, less so families.

WHERE TO STAY

Bophut

Calmer water, Fisherman's Village dining and boutique hotels on the north coast; a good all-round base for families and couples, close to the airport.

WHERE TO STAY

Koh Phangan

Away from Haad Rin, quiet bays such as Thong Nai Pan and Srithanu suit couples, yoga retreats and anyone after a simpler, cheaper island.

WHERE TO STAY

Lamai

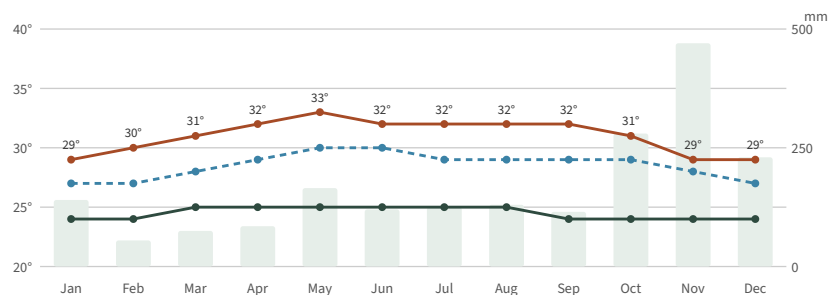
Samui's second beach, with mid-priced hotels, the Hin Ta and Hin Yai rocks and a more relaxed evening scene than Chaweng; suits couples and families on a budget.

When to go to Koh Samui & the Gulf islands

Best time: **Feb–Aug**.

**Average climate in Koh Samui**

— High °C — Low °C — Sea °C — Rain (mm)

**How much does Koh Samui & the Gulf islands cost?**

SHOESTRING

£45

per person / day
≈ THB 2,022

MID-RANGE

£115

per person / day
≈ THB 5,168

COMFORTABLE

£270

per person / day
≈ THB 12,133

Per person per day excluding flights. Return flights from London typically cost £750 off-peak and £1,300 in school holidays.

Visas & entry for Koh Samui & the Gulf islands

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

From 15 September 2026, if you enter Thailand under the visa exemption scheme, you can stay for up to 30 days for tourism only. Visa-exempt entry does not cover business travel, including attending conferences, meetings or other business activities. If you are travelling for business purposes, you should obtain the appropriate visa before you travel.

Visa-exempt entry for tourism through land-border immigration checkpoints is normally limited to 2 entries per calendar year. This restriction does not generally apply to arrivals by air. If you frequently enter Thailand as a tourist, immigration officials may ask for evidence of your onward travel, accommodation, or sufficient funds, and may refuse entry if they believe you are not a genuine visitor.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya Dengue Hepatitis B Japanese encephalitis Measles Rabies Tuberculosis Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

- There is no risk of malaria in the cities of Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Koh Phangan, Koh Samui, and Pattaya: bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Thailand

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 23 Oct 2026	HM King Chulalongkorn Memorial Day
Sat 5 Dec 2026	HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great's Birthday · National Day · National Father's Day
Mon 7 Dec 2026	HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great's Birthday (in lieu) · National Day (in lieu) · National Father's Day (in lieu)
Thu 10 Dec 2026	Constitution Day

Thu 31 Dec 2026	New Year's Eve
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Sat 9 Jan 2027	National Children's Day
Sun 21 Feb 2027	Makha Bucha
Mon 22 Feb 2027	Makha Bucha (in lieu)
Tue 6 Apr 2027	Chakri Memorial Day
Tue 13 Apr 2027	Songkran Festival
Wed 14 Apr 2027	Songkran Festival
Thu 15 Apr 2027	Songkran Festival
Sat 1 May 2027	National Labour Day
Mon 3 May 2027	National Labour Day (in lieu)
Tue 4 May 2027	Coronation Day
Thu 20 May 2027	Visakha Bucha
Thu 3 Jun 2027	HM Queen Suthida's Birthday
Sun 18 Jul 2027	Asarnha Bucha
Mon 19 Jul 2027	Buddhist Lent Day
Tue 20 Jul 2027	Asarnha Bucha (in lieu)
Wed 28 Jul 2027	HM King Maha Vajiralongkorn's Birthday
Thu 12 Aug 2027	HM Queen Sirikit The Queen Mother's Birthday · National Mother's Day
Wed 13 Oct 2027	HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej Memorial Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Know before you go

Flights into Samui's privately owned airport are pricey; a cheaper route is flying Bangkok to Surat Thani, then a combined bus and ferry ticket to the islands, taking about four hours.

Samui's roads are steep and scooter accidents are common. Most travel insurance won't pay out without a full motorbike licence, so use taxis, songthaews or Grab instead.

Plugs, money, phrases, emergency numbers and more: see our Thailand guide.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.