

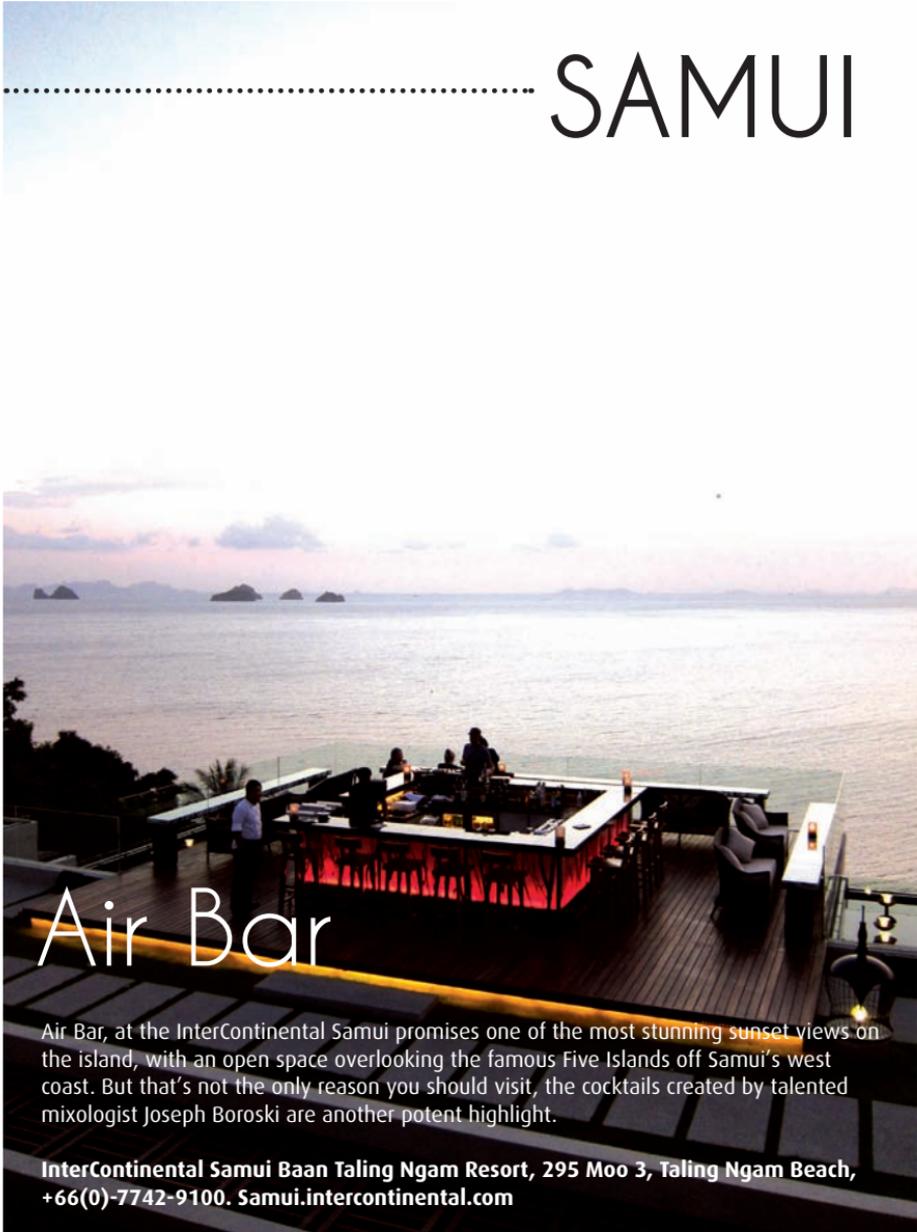
I-S 2012/13

THAILAND Hot Spots

Bangkok • Chiang Mai • Phuket • Samui



SAMUI



Air Bar

Air Bar, at the InterContinental Samui promises one of the most stunning sunset views on the island, with an open space overlooking the famous Five Islands off Samui's west coast. But that's not the only reason you should visit, the cocktails created by talented mixologist Joseph Boroski are another potent highlight.

**InterContinental Samui Baan Taling Ngam Resort, 295 Moo 3, Taling Ngam Beach,
+66(0)-7742-9100. Samui.intercontinental.com**



Angthong National Park

DO

ISLAND HOPPING

Only 20 km northwest of Samui is **Angthong Marine National Park**, which covers 102 sq kilometers and contains 40 beautiful islands, only some of which you can set foot on, though. Programs vary depending on tour operators but most will take you to the two main highlights: **Koh Mae Koh** (Mother Island) where you can see the Inner Sea, a lagoon entirely enclosed by cliffs; and **Koh Wua Ta Lub** (Sleeping Cow Island), where you can choose between chilling on the beach or trekking to the hill-top for a superb panorama of the entire national park. Note the park is closed annually between Nov 1-30.

TWO DAY ISLAND TRIPS

Another option for castaways, **Koh Tao** and **Koh Nangyuan** lie a little further north of Samui. Tour operators offer a three-day-two-night diving package taking you to both

islands for sunbathing and snorkeling. (Don't forget to catch views of the beach that connects three small islands at Koh Nang Yuan.) A package is around B3,000 per person, inclusive of a roundtrip transfer, accommodation, soft drinks and most meals. Recommended tour operators are Samui Leisure (www.samui leisure.com), Lomprayah (www.lomprayah.com), Seatran Discovery (www.seatrandiscovery.com), Thai Tour Group (www.thaitourgroup.com) and Magic Samui (www.magicsamui.net).

WALKING STREETS

Samui is now obsessed with walking street markets, and that means there's one almost every day of the week. If you have limited time, **Bophut Walking Street** is the must try, stretching along the entire Fisherman's Village Street where wooden shophouses are home to cool restaurants, cafes, shops and guesthouses. On Fridays, street vendors descend to sell everything from food and cooking ingredients to souvenirs made from coconut shells. At the mid-point of the street there is a



Bophut Walking Street



Private Museum

space where local artists present traditional music and dance performances. At Maenam intersection, **Maenam Walking Street** is great for cheap eats and takes place every Thursday from 5-10pm while every Saturday between 5-10pm, **Nathon Walking Street** on Angthong Road is known for food and clothes.

PRIVATE MUSEUM

This pretty low-key cultural gem sits on the banks of Pru Chaweng lagoon and belongs to ML Arachawa Worawan, a veteran artist who designed one of Thailand's first boutique hotels, Muang Kulaypan. The museum houses a vast collection of prehistoric items, ranging from Ban Chiang Thai ceramics and pottery to historical artifacts including stone knives, axes, pots and jewelry dating back from 3,000BC to 1,900AD. Open by appointment only. Contact 088-249-3901 or privatemuseum@hotmail.com

EAT

SABEINGLAE

438/82 Moo 1, Maret, +66(0)-7723-3082, +66(0)8-1538-7045.

One of the best venues on the island for seafood, Sabeinglae offers a long list of authentic local dishes like *gang kua hed lhoob* (mushroom curry), *wai kua* (squid simmered in coconut milk) and *gang som pla grabog yod mapraw* (sour curry with fish and young coconut). Also try the fresh oysters with deep-fried garlic and the *pla krapong tod nampla* (deep-fried seabass). The bill is very affordable and the sea view is a real plus.

JANHOM

7/3 Bang Por Beach, +66(0)-7723-6458. Open daily 10am-10pm.

Sat right on the beach, Janhom is the place to go if you want authentic Southern-style dishes along with fresh seafood. Get a table on the sand and order its signature dishes like the *nam prik goong sod* (vegetables with shrimp relish) and wipe your hot tears away with the *kua gling moo* (stir fried pork with spicy herbs).

PA MAITREE

217/2, Maenam Beach Soi 4, +66(0)-7724-7075. Open daily 8:30am-3:30pm.

Even though there are several *kanomjeen* (rice vermicelli) joints on the island, Pa Maitree is probably the best. The owner happily greets her customers with a variety of soups like *nam ya* (coconut soups), green curry, or *gaeng tai pla* (a spicy Southern soup) to eat with their delicate rice noodles and all at super cheap prices.

NAMU

W Retreat Koh Samui, 4/1 Moo 1, Tambol Maenam, +66(0)-7791-5999, www.whotels.com/kohsamui

The W Hotels are known for their cutting-edge, category-defying restaurants, and Namu is no exception. The menu is essentially a creative take on Japanese food with influences from other Asian cuisines: *hamachi* sashimi with leeks and chili mint dressing, sushi roll with soft-shell crab tempura, avocado and fish roe or twice-cooked pork belly. An open kitchen and the chefs' nimble hands make for an impressive floor show, while the cocktails and desserts are equally notable.

H BISTRO

Hansar Samui, 101/28 Moo 1, Bophut, +66(0)-77 24-5511.

H Bistro is worth a visit even if you're not staying at the Hansar (p.33). Chef Stephen Dion combines his experience in French cuisine with Southeast Asian touches to create surprising combinations such as foie gras and peach, wagyu beef and oxtail, or lobster and smoked paprika. The setting is more relaxed than fancy, though, with an expansive terrace overlooking a quiet section of Bo Phut beach.



Namu



Sabeinglae



H Bistro



Janhom



Pa Maitree

24 HOURS

One day on Koh Samui



10am

Try the local's favorite rice noodles and a selection of soups at **Pa Maitree** (p31)



3pm

Take a refreshing dip at **Namuang Waterfall**



7pm

Enjoy sunset cocktails and a killer view at **W Retreat Koh Samui**



11pm

Rock your night at **Sweet Soul in Soi Green Mango**



Drink Gallery



9 Gems

PO-LAD BISTRO

The Tong sai Bay, 84 Moo 5, Tong sai Beach Bo Phut, +66(0)-7724-5480. Open daily 11am-10pm.

Long-time favorite, beach resort The Tong sai Bay unveiled its new beach bistro late last year. Po-Lad Bistro is set on the beach, and features a no-frills, modern tropical decor paired with international cuisine and a decent wine selection.

PLAY

9 GEMS

141/190 Moo 6, Bophut, +66(0)-7725-6125, +66(0)8-0692-0520. Open Tue-Thu 4pm-midnight, Fri-Sun 4pm-2am. www.9gemssamui.com

Hidden high up on a hilltop overlooking Pru Chaweng lagoon, 9 Gems combines a lounging ambience with stiff drinks and a slightly pop decor that's all about whites and transparencies. The menu offers fusion food, tapas, desserts and cocktails. Seat yourself by the pool and order a glass (or a bottle) of prosecco or Moët & Chandon and enjoy the picturesque sunset.

DRINK GALLERY

The Library Koh Samui, Chaweng Beach Rd., +66(0)-7742-2767/8. Open daily 9pm-midnight. www.thelibrary.co.th

Chaweng's hottest new bar belongs to the island's hip design hotel The Library and is decked out in pop art, chandeliers and raw-wood furniture. The drinks list focuses on wine and cocktails, while the music is soft chill-out tunes. The place closes (relatively) early but makes for a nice warm-up option before you explore the nearby Soi Green Mango, the beating heart of Samui's nightlife.



Conrad



Hansar



Akira

STAY

AKYRA CHURA

North Chaweng Beach. Reservations only at +66(0)-2514-8112, www.theakira.com

Akya Chura boasts a Japanese seaside town theme—two-story traditional-style wooden houses outside, raw cement and generous use of blonde wood inside—but the result is more *Memoirs of a Geisha* than modern Zen à la Tadao Ando. There are 61 rooms and suites while the Japanese restaurant does all-day dining and the much-highlighted Sake Bar, serves up Samui's largest selection of rice wine. A prime location at the north end of Chaweng means Akya is blessed with the island's whitest sand, clearest waters, and least tourists.

CONRAD KOH SAMUI

49/8-9 Moo 4, Hillcrest Rd., +66(0)-7791-5888. www.conradkohsamui.com

Perched on a rocky cliff on the remote southwest tip of Koh Samui this is one of the island's latest luxury resorts offering unparalleled sea views. So whether you're at one of their 80 luxurious villas, the restaurants, spa, bar or lobby, you'll have a panorama of the blue sea and sky no other hotel on the island can match. Also, look out for the signature eatery, Jahn, which does upscale Thai fare.

HANSAR

101/28 Moo 1, Bophut Beach, +66(0)-7724-5511, www.hansarsamui.com

This u-shaped, brick-red building sits on the beachfront at the end of Bophut's Fisherman's Village. All 74 rooms follow open floor plans, with nothing blocking your view from the door to the terrace—perfect for honeymooners. Chef Stephen Jean Dion is a transfer from Bangkok's Nai Lert Park, while the Luxsa Spa gives treatments based on the four elements.

INTERCONTINENTAL SAMUI BAAN TALING NGAM

295 Moo 3, Taling Ngam Beach, +66(0)-7742-9100. www.samui.intercontinental.com

After a head-to-toe revamp, InterContinental Samui Baan Taling Ngam now sports a Thai décor with a twist, blending warm colors and Southern-style bird cages with mineral materials: stone, marble and glass. The 79 rooms, suites and villas feature a more classic European influence. Amber, decked with dark wood and marble, offers all-day dining, while seafood and meat are flame-grilled right on the beach at Flames. Yet the real highlight is Air Bar (p.29).

LE MÉRIDIEN KOH SAMUI RESORT & SPA

146/24 Moo 4, Lamai Beach (next to Beach Republic), +66(0)-7796-0888. www.lemeridien.com/kohsamui

Not really new, but the unique, slow-

AN EASY WEEKEND IN HUA HIN

Only a short 2.5-hour drive from the capital, the relaxed beachside atmosphere and good choice of seafood restaurants mean the century-old resort town of Hua Hin has never lost its popularity as a weekend retreat for Bangkok's urbanites.



PICK A COOL ROOM

Hua Hin is home to a huge choice of hotels and resorts offering something for every taste and pocket. If you want to enjoy a classic Hua Hin vibe then try to get a room at the wonderful colonial-style **Centara Grand Hua Hin** (www.centarahotelsresorts.com): the first hotel in town, it is now over a hundred years old. For a more low-key yet still classy feel then **Baan Laksasubha** (www.baanlaksasubha.com), **The Hen** (www.thehenhuahin.com) and **Green Gallery** (www.greenhuahin.com), are all based in former homes of members of the royal family. Fans of modern and contemporary designs might prefer the fashionable **Let's Sea** (www.letusseas.com), **Dune** (www.dunehuahin.com) and **Putahracs** (www.putahracs.com), which offer minimal designs with tropical touches.

EAT LOCAL CUISINES

Hua Hin is a great destination for foodies, with a dining scene dominated by local eateries serving fresh seafood and cute cafes offering sweet treats.

Youyen (Naeb Kehat Rd., +66(0)-3253-1191, www.youyen.com), **Baan Issara** (Naeb Khehat Rd., +66(0)-3251-1673) and **Goti** (Petchakasem Rd., opposite Hua Hin Night Market) are long-time favorites for seafood, from grilled crabs to fresh oysters. Sweet lovers shouldn't miss the chocolate lava cake at **Baan Klaiwang** (Naeb Kehat Rd.), the sorbet ice cream at **18 Below** (Naeb Khehat Rd., +66(0)-3251-2208.), the **lordchong** (green noodles) with coconut milk at **Nai Dum** (Hua Hin 55, opposite Family Mart) and the mango with sweetened sticky rice at **Pa Jeua** (opposite Hilton Hua Hin Resort).

EXPLORE THE NIGHT MARKETS

As there's no serious nightlife scene in Hua Hin, when the sun drops people head to the night markets instead. The **daily Hua Hin Night Market** at Hua Hin town center is the original, though it's really limited to a small street lined with stalls selling snacks, sweets, clothes, souvenirs and DVDs. Much more eclectic and interesting is the weekend **Cicada Market** (front of Hyatt Regency Resort, www.cicadamarket.net) where artists exhibit their works and local vendors sell a diverse range of cute and retro handmade crafts, like t-shirts, notebooks and postcards.

paced ancient Chinese village atmosphere, complete with cute stone bridges, demands a revisit. The architectural theme was inspired by the story of a self-made Chinese tycoon to create five types of rooms ranging from rustic to opulent colonial-style suites. Latest Recipe serves contemporary Thai with a view of Lamai Beach. If you can afford it, opt for a pool villa and you'll never want to leave.

W RETREAT KOH SAMUI

4/1 Moo 1, Maenam Beach, +66(0)-7791-5999, www.whotels.com/kohsamui

Thailand's first W property, this fashionable resort also happens to boast one of the best views of the island. Situated where Maenam and Bophu beaches meet, you get a 180-degree panorama of the two beaches and Pha-Ngan Island from the signature WOO Bar next to the lobby. All 75 villas are identical—white and grey with natural wood and boldly colored accents and an 11-meter pool. The Kitchen Table prepares all-day dining while the real highlight is Namu, a small beachfront eatery offering fusion Japanese fare. The sauna at Away Spa is also a must-try.



Le Meridien