

Ko Chang

Trat





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Gulf of Thailand





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Hat Khlong Phrao

Ko Chang

Wealthy with greenery, wildlife, and marine creatures, its most scenic beaches are located along its western flank. Moving from north to south, the beaches are generally more secluded, less crowded and pricey...

This island's status on the world's tourism barometer has risen a few degrees in recent years because of its stunning natural beauty, and the fact that its once-rickety infrastructure has been solidified. More than 70 percent of the mountainous island is still covered in untouched rainforest, and there are many secluded beaches, complete with that vital tropical isle trinity of white sand, palm trees, and warm blue water, where you can really get away from it all and leave your troubles on the mainland.

Ko Chang, or Elephant Island, is part of the Mu Ko Chang National Park. This national park is comprised of an archipelago of 52 islands, of which Ko Chang is the largest. Some 429 square kilometres in size, Ko Chang is, after Phuket, the second biggest island in the Kingdom. Wealthy with greenery, wildlife, and marine creatures, its most scenic beaches are located along its western flank. Moving from north to south, the beaches are generally more secluded, less crowded and pricey, with the aforementioned Diamond Sand towards the northern tip, and Hat Khlong Phrao and Hat Kai Bae, in the middle. Further south is a lively backpacker's enclave at Lonely Beach, or Hat Tha Nam, where you can stay in a tree house.

Other than swimming and sunbathing, the island offers inland adventures such as rainforest trekking. Or you can ride a lumbering elephant into the primeval jungle, populated with wild boars, Javan mongoose, barking deer, and more than 60 different species of birds.

Many of the bungalow operations around Hat Sai Khao and Hat Kai Bae have kayaks, boogie boards and mountain bikes for *Hat Kai Bae*



rent. Booking a day trip, or an overnigher, to nearby islands is another attractive option.

Attractions

Ban Salak Phet and Ban Rong Than

These fishing villages are located on the southwest of Ko Chang. Secluded Salak Phet has long provided a shelter for storm-lashed fishing boats to batten down their hatches. Nowadays, the village is popular for its abundance of fresh seafood and home-stay accommodation, where visitors can get a real feel for living (and fishing) like a local. It's also possible to charter inexpensive boats to go out exploring or snorkelling.

Hat Sai Yao

This scenic spot is situated in the south, not far from Ao Salak Phet. Hat Sai Yao is a long sandy beach ideal for swimming. There's also a great vantage point which overlooks the Ko Chang Naval Battle and other islands such as Ko Laoya and Ko Wai, as well as the fishing hamlet of Ao Salak Phet.

Namtok Khiri Phet

Located 3 km. through a rubber plantation from the Salak Phet community, this single-tier waterfall is the centrepiece of a verdant tableau embroidered with wild orchids and Thai herbs.

Namtok Khlong Phlu

The entrance to this triple-tier waterfall is about 3 km. from Ao Khlong Phrao. From there it's a 500-metre jaunt through the forest. The most beautiful spot is up at the top, where there's a large pool for visitors to cool down by taking a dip.

Namtok Khlong Nonsi

Situated in the north of Ko Chang, you have to pass through

Ko Kut



Hat Khlong Phrao

Ban Dan Mai, rubber plantations and orchards to reach this small waterfall. Visiting this crystalline cascade is not recommended during the hot season when it dries up.

Namtok Than Mayom

Among the island's waterfalls, Than Mayom, which has three separate cascades, is particularly photogenic.

Hat Sai Khao

A long beach with powdery white sand and perfectly safe swimming conditions, the island's prime piece of real estate and relaxation boasts an incredible range of accommodation. You can have all the luxury and amenities you want, but still enjoy the idyllic, palm-fringed beaches, and serene water.

Hat Khlong Phrao and Laem Chaiyachet

This long beach connects with Hat Kai Bae and Hat Sai Khao and comes well equipped with many bungalows and resorts, and offers swimming and sunbathing opportunities galore. The north of Ao Khlong Phrao is connected to Ao Chaiyachet and Laem Chaiyachet, a rocky cape stretching into the sea, while Laem Chaiyachet is an ideal and romantic spot to watch the sunset, though swimmers should exercise caution.

Hat Kai Bae

Connected with Hat Khlong Phrao, it has a sloping beach



In front off Cliff Cottage, Ko Chang

suitable for swimming. Visitors should also take note that the cape has an excellent spectrum of bargain bungalows and more expensive resorts.

Ao Bai Lan

Next to Hat Kai Bae, about 1 km. if you take the bike trail winding along under cliffs and mountains, this bay offers some fantastic scenery. Ao Bai Lan is also an ideal place for getting some peace and tranquility. If you're looking for more affordable accommodation, this is the place for you.

Hat Tha Nam (Lonely Beach)

In recent years, the name of this beach has become a misnomer. It's now filled with younger travellers looking to party and stay in some strange accommodation like tree houses. During the rainy season, however, from May through October, it gets a lot more solitary.

Bang Bao Fishing Village

This is an atmospheric village built on wooden stilts jutting up out of the sea. All the houses are connected by wooden walkways. The fisher folks' lifestyle and all the succulent seafood are two lures for tourists. Nowadays, you can really wade in for some cultural immersion by booking a home-stay with the villagers. Another bonus is chartering a vessel to cruise around the archipelago.

Naval Battleground



Naval Commemoration

Situated on the south of Ko Chang near Ao Salak Phet is the Naval Battleground. On 17 January, 1941, the Thai and French navies battled over a border dispute. Even today, there are buoys showing the position of the sunken Royal Thai Navy's ships. Each year, during the festival to commemorate the Thai victory, government agencies make religious merit by floating garlands on the sea in honour of those who perished during the battle.

Diving Opportunities

For water sports, snorkelling and scuba-diving reign supreme. Some of the most popular dive sites in the area are off the island's southern tip. Between here and Ko Kut, the underwater explorer will find much of interest, like seamounts abounding with coral, and a Thai warship sunk by the French during a territorial dispute over these waters back in 1941. The ever-growing number of dive shops on the island can also tutor you in scuba-diving, and provide different PADI courses. To get certified as a diver takes around three to four days, and costs 10,000 baht. If you'd prefer not to splash out that kind of money and time, then try one of the all-day snorkelling trips to Ko Rang (renowned for its shallow reefs and diversity of fish); they range from 400 to 600 baht.

Several dive operators located at the island's famous beaches such as Hat Sai Khao, Hat Kai Bae, Hat Khlong Phrao, and Ban Bang Bao offer a variety of courses and day trips, as well as renting and selling equipment.

Other Islands of Interest



Snorkelling at Ko Kham

Ko Mak

The island may only be 16 square kilometres, but its natural attractions loom large in the eyes of visitors. Indeed, this sand-fringed island makes for a great, romantic hideaway. The majority of the resorts are located on the island's northwest and southwest bays, where the most breathtaking beaches are located. Since it does not have the mountainous topography of Ko Chang, the island also boasts many coconut and rubber plantations.

For accommodation, visitors must book a package tour, usually three days and two nights. Besides the more ritzy options, like Ko Mak Coco-Cape (Tel. 0 2711 2058) with bungalows in the 3,000-baht-a-night range, there are some places with basic, inexpensive huts and mid-range bungalows, such as TK Huts (Tel. 0 3952 1631) which has lodgings for 100 to 350 baht. These operations are more amenable to non-package tourists.

Ko Kut

This is similar to the former island in that it's mostly for upscale tourists who have already pre-booked a package deal, though several mid-range bungalow operations opened in 2004. Its geography, however, is much more like Ko Chang: humpbacked with hills covered in lush rainforest. The island also has its fair share of pleasant beaches, and the visually appealing Namtok Khlong Chao, the beautiful waterfall which has a pool at the bottom where you can swim in the midst of verdant jungle to the melodies of birdsong and insect chatter.

The accommodation on this island is largely devoted to package tourists, pre-booking several nights at a time, which also saves you about 30 to 40 percent on the normal walk-in rates. Most of the resorts offer similar facilities for similar rates, around 2,500 per night, if you book in advance. Try Peter Pan Resort and Captain Hook Resort, Tel. 0 2966 1800; Ko Kut Cabana Tel. 0 3 952 2955; Kut Island Resort Tel. 0 2 374 3004; or Khlong Jaew Resort Tel. 0 3952 0337.

Ko Wai

The island beckons for a more castaway kind of beach experience, offering two sun-splashed beaches and basic hut-like accommodation. Most beaches are full of stones. But there is some great snorkelling to be found on the shallow reefs off the beaches. The island is also the best source for fishing. And for sheer, easy-going, hassle-free contentment, this enchanting island is hard to beat.

Ko Kham

It takes two and a half hours to get to this small island beside Ko Mak. Its allure is based on the tropical trinity of greenery, white sand, and clear water. It also has a wonderful coral reef for fish-spotting. In addition, visitors can rent boats to go to Ko Mak.

Ko Ngam

The island is situated to the south of Ko Chang and consists of two floating land masses connected by a huge sand knoll. The little bay formed by the two arms of a mountain stretching into the sea is especially picturesque and protects the area from storms. By boat, it takes two hours to get here from Laem Ngop.

Ko Phrao

Off the southern flank of Ko Chang sits this pretty island, located some two hours from Laem Ngop. Ko Phrao is noteworthy for its calm atmosphere and serene seaside, not to mention it's lush with coconut groves. There is one resort, Long Beach Island Resort, and it only offers full-board packages.

Ko Kra and Ko Rang

Situated to the west of Ko Mak, these islands boast some deep coral reefs, and striking underwater rock formations. Many islanders also make money from concessions for swallows' nests, sea turtle eggs, and bat guano. A number of officers from the Mu Ko Chang National Park are stationed here.

Ko Kradat

Another green gem in the island's tiara, Kradat has a long beach

Ao Phrao



encircling the island, and water that has a wealth of sunken, sight-seeing pleasures in the form of coral reefs. Its name taken from a plant in the Araceae family, the island is only such one to have had a land title deed since the period of King Rama V, when the French were colonising Southeast Asia, and attempted to seize Kradat as well, but failed.

Ko Man Nok/Ko Man Nai

These small islands have no accommodation available, but are worth a stopover on a watery day trip. During low tide, beaches appear around the islands, the water is quite shallow, and there's plenty of golden seaweed. The two islands are located opposite Hat Kai Bae on Ko Chang's western coast.

Ko Chang Noi

To the north of Ko Chang is its tiny twin, which makes a splendid spot for snorkelling. There is no accommodation on the island as construction is forbidden, but you can still charter a boat to visit here.

Getting To Ko Chang

Take a share taxi for 20 baht from near Trat's Bus Station, or hire one on your own (120 baht) for the 20-minute drive to Laem Ngop. From the airport, it's about the same distance and the same price. During the dry season, from November through April, ferries depart from the main pier at Laem Ngop every hour, from 8.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. In the rainy season, however, the ferries run once every two hours. The hour-long journey to Ko Chang costs between 50-60 baht. Further up the coast, there

Ao Khao, Ko Mak



are three car ferry services, which also run hourly during the high season. Once you're on the island, there are share taxis running to all of the main beaches, with prices ranging from 30 baht for Hat Sai Khao up to 70 baht for Hat Tha Nam or Lonely Beach.

Getting To Nearby Islands

Package tourists heading to the islands will already have their travel arrangements sorted out for them. But if you're going independently, there is a daily ferry from Laem Ngop to Ko Mak, which departs at 3.00 p.m., and takes three hours. Inter Island Hopper also has a regular boat service from Ko Chang, Ko Mak and Ko Wai to Ko Kut, departing on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. And there's another boat from Laem Ngop that leaves on Monday, Thursday and Saturday. To get to Ko Wai catch a daily ferry from Laem Ngop, leaving at 3.00 p.m. and taking around 2.5 hours. Or Inter Island Hopper has a daily boat from Bang Bao on Ko Chang. Check for departure times, which tend to change during the monsoon season, when rough seas can mean trips are postponed.

Accommodation

Ko Chang offers accommodation in all price ranges, from luxury resorts to basic bungalows. Visitors stay in beautiful big bungalows in a coconut grove, wooden huts on a rocky outcrop surrounded by beach, some eye-catching bungalows with a sauna, Jacuzzi, and many healthy services, or at boutique resorts. A list of hotels and resorts can be obtained from the TAT Central Region Office: Region 5 Tel. 0 3959 7255, 0 3959 7259-60 or Website: www.tourismthailand.org.

Restaurants

You've never starved for eating choices on any of these islands. Almost every single resort has a restaurant attached to it, and the mixed menus of Thai and Western cuisine are usually pretty similar. In fact, these resorts usually make more money off the restaurants than the rooms. So expect to pay more than you would on the mainland, but all in all, the prices are on a par with other islands like Ko Samui and Ko Samet. For a change of diet, try the Invito Italian Restaurant on Hat Sai Khao, which has a wood-fired oven for making pizza. They also do deliveries within the area. Tel. 0 3955 1326. For delectable Indian dishes, try the first such restaurant on the island, Spices of India, also on Hat Sai Khao. Another classy choice is the Salakphet Seafood and Resort, which overlooks the bay of the same name.

Finally, if you'd like some hands-on practice at cooking up Thai staples and delicacies, book a class at the cooking school in the Blue Lagoon Khlong Phrao.

The island's nightlife is nowhere near as pulsating as it is on Ko Chang's more developed cousins like Ko Samui and Phuket, but it has picked up in recent years, mostly around the more popular beach areas, while younger travellers prefer the revelry down on Lonely Beach, or Hat Tha Nam. For live music, head over to Oodie's Place on Hat Sai Khao. Ko Chang also has a lot of superb seafood restaurants and a wide variety of eateries specialising in Western and Thai dishes, too.

Medical Service

Ko Chang International Clinic

The clinic offers hotel calls, medical evacuation, and an ambulance service. It is located on Hat Sai Khao, opposite the Ban Pu Resort, and open 24 hours. Tel: 0 3955 1151-2, or for emergencies Tel: 0 1863 3609.

Canoeing at Ao Khlong Phrao





Ko Lao Ya LaYaYa

The province's capital has a few things going for it, like some lively day and night markets, as well as a bevy of great, reasonably priced seafood restaurants.

The irresistible allure of this eastern province, bordering Cambodia and situated some 400 kilometres from Bangkok, has a lot to do with its archipelago of 52 (mostly uninhabited) islands in the Mu Ko Chang National Park.

The quiet provincial capital of Trat, on the other hand, is well known for its gem markets, both in and near the town, as well as boasting several off-the-beaten-path beach resorts nearby. Outside of the town, near the Laem Ngop Pier, where boats depart for Ko Chang, is an airport operated by Bangkok Airways.

The province's capital has a few things going for it, like some lively day and night markets, as well as a bevy of great, reasonably priced seafood restaurants. For a religious and historical experience, head for Wat Plai Khlong, some two kilometres west of the city's heart. More than 200 years old, the temple has a couple of old wooden buildings that date back to the early Ayutthaya period and a number of relics and Buddha images of a similar vintage.

In the early part of the 20th century, when the illustrious King Rama V was busy modernising the country and outlawing slavery, the Siamese government signed a treaty with France, ceding Trat province to the colonial power, so they would stop occupying the nearby province of Chanthaburi. In order to get the province back, the king gave away areas under Siamese control, like Siem Reap (now a part of Cambodia). This treaty was signed on 23 March, 1906, so locals have come to think of 23 March as their "Independence Day".

But the battle wasn't finished yet. In early 1941, a French armada of warships entered Thai waters, engaging the Royal Thai Navy in battle. Though Thailand lost three battleships,

Ko Chang





Wat Buppharam

the invaders were eventually driven out during the famous “Ko Chang Naval Battle”.

City Attractions

Wat Buppharam

Located on Plai Khlong Road, the temple dates from the mid-17th century and features the oldest wooden image hall in the country, while the surviving murals are of the early Rattanakosin period. The temple’s museum houses a number of ancient relics, Buddha images in different postures, and Chinese and European porcelain.

Wat Yothanimit

Wat Yothanimit or Wat Bot was the temple where King Taksin the Great’s followers pledged their loyalty by drinking holy water. This is also the only royal temple in Trat. The mural paintings inside the old ordination hall are an attractive display of Thai art during the Ayutthaya era.

City Pillar

This sacred site, where the city’s guardian spirit resides, is housed in a Chinese-style building erected by King Taksin the Great. It is greatly respected by the townspeople and located on Plai Khlong Road.

Wat Phailom

This temple is situated on the city’s Lak Mueang Road, and is renowned for its role in local education and community development. Other highlights are the garden for meditation, the highly revered Three Monks Museum Chedi, and the multitude of monks and novices known for sticking to a strict moral code.

Laem Sok

Here is the shrine to Krom Luang Chumphon, the father of the Royal Thai Navy. Nearby is Hat Sai Daeng and the fishing villages of Ban Laem Hin and Ban Ao Cho.

Wat Khiriwihan

Located on Trat-Khlong Yai-Hat Lek Road, Amphoe Mueang, the temple sits on a hilltop and provides a commanding view of both forest and sea. The temple, some 110 years old, has an outstanding mixture of traditional and modern architecture.

Wat Saphan Hin

The temple is supposedly around a century old, but there is no evidence saying exactly when it was constructed. In the middle of the pond is situated an old ordination hall, a kilometre from the temple. Some of the most significant parts of this temple are the temple hall, stupa, the royal pavilion of H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, the monks’ cells, and its wealth of Buddhist imagery.

Governor’s Residence

This old three-storey building on Lak Mueang Road was once the residence of the French governor when the town was occupied in 1904-1907.

Out-Of-City Attractions

Bo Rai

The Gem Market in Amphoe Bo Rai is famous for its Siamese rubies, which are world renowned for their clarity and pure red colour. Hua Thung and Song Yo are two of the major markets for the community. Other important ones are Ban Nong Bon, Ban Sa Yai and Ban Ta Ngam. They open very early in the morning and close at 10.00 a.m.

Namtok Khlong Kaeo National Park

The Park in Amphoe Bo Rai occupies 65,525 rai. The Park’s officers, who take care of it, can also help you with getting around and bedding down in affordable accommodation.

This protected area is rich in plant life. Khlong Kaeo also has a seven-tier waterfall with each segment boasting its own natu-

ral attractions. For instance, up near the fourth tier, visitors can take in a magnificent panorama of Amphoe Bo Rai.

Ao Tan Khu

Located in Tambon Bang Pit, some 2 km. from Amphoe Laem Ngop along Highway 3156, this beautiful beach area has good food for reasonable prices and some decent accommodation.

Ban Hat Lek

Near the border of Thailand and Cambodia in Amphoe Khlong Yai of Trat and Ko Kong of Cambodia on Highway 318, Hat Lek Village is the ideal place to purchase inexpensive goods from abroad. You can also cross into Cambodia here, and get a visa on arrival.

Special Events

Ko Chang Naval Battle Memorial Day

Late January

To experience some real local colour and get a few military history lessons into the bargain, check out the Ko Chang Naval Battle Day. The event pays tribute to the bravery of the sailors in the Royal Thai Navy, who battled the French on 17 January, 1941, during the Indochina War, when French warships trespassed on Thai territorial waters. Honouring the dead with religious ceremonies is on the agenda, as well as an exhibition by the Royal Thai Navy. The centrepiece of the festival is the monument to these waterborne warriors at Laem Ngop.

Trat Independence Day

23 March

Marks the day the province was returned to Thai sovereignty after the French occupation. Celebrations are held at the provincial town hall.

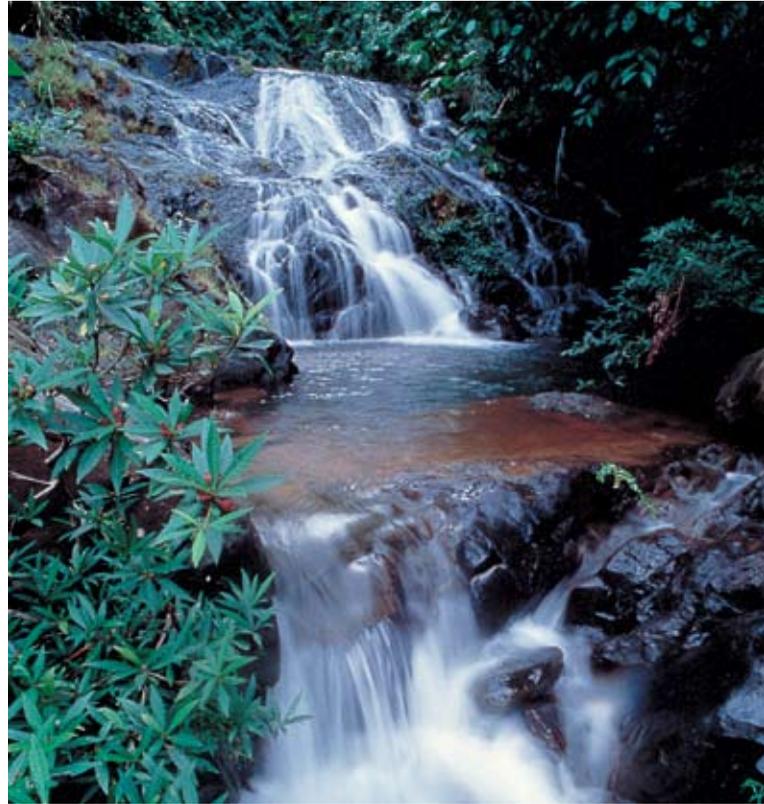
Trat Fruit Fair

Late May or early June

A few of the fun-filled festivities include displays of folkloric Thai entertainment, agricultural contests, and a beauty pageant, along with plenty of food stalls and much merry-making.

Getting There

Bangkok Airways operates daily flights from Bangkok, taking about 40 minutes. Tel. 0 2265 5555 Website: www.bangkokair.com Most travel agents in Bangkok can book you on a mini-bus, departing from Khao San Road and other major tourist areas. The buses leave between 7.00 a.m. - 8.00 a.m., the



Namtok Khlong Kaeo National Park

journey takes around 5-6 hours, and the cost is around 180-250 baht per person. In addition, there are also regular air-con buses departing from the Eastern Bus Terminal Tel. 0 2391 2504, and the Bangkok Bus Terminal on Kamphaeng Phet II Road Tel. 0 2936 2852-66 Website: www.transport.co.th

Accommodation

Accommodation consists of the hotels in the city with all facilities and nicely decorated wooden bungalows with all the amenities. A list of hotels and resorts can be obtained from the TAT Central Region Office: Region 5 Tel. 0 3959 7255, 0 3959 7259-60 or Website: www.tourismthailand.org.

Restaurants

The town's two night markets are excellent choices for cheap, Thai fare, but there are plenty of other choices. For starters, try Jiraporn Breakfast, which is one of the oldest Thai-Chinese

eateries in town. Not to be missed are the rice porridge known as *jok*, or the rice soup known as *khao tom*. It's just down the street from the Trat Hotel. For a real seafood feast par excellence, head for Suan Pu. It has a long-standing and well-earned reputation as the best seafood restaurant in the whole province. What's more, the way that the tables are arranged on wooden piers sitting atop the bay gives it a real maritime ambience. The restaurant is located about 20 minutes southeast of the city at Ban Laem Inn, and also boasts a hotel and crab farm on the premises.

Medical Service

Bangkok Trat Hospital

The hospital is located in the city centre of Trat. This well-equipped facility has English-speaking staff and a 24-hour emergency service. Tel. 0 3953 2735

Local Products

Trat and its provincial neighbours are part of Thailand's "fruit basket" and boast a cornucopia of succulent fruits, like rambutan, durian, pineapple, and sala. The latter product is a tropical plant belonging to the same species as palms, sugar palms and coconuts. When ripe, the fruit has a sweet tang. It is also used in certain Thai dishes instead of lemon and tamarind.

Trat also has a savoury reputation for producing some of the country's most succulent seafood. And it is home to many a fine

Resort in Ko Kut



Ko Mak

restaurant, serving up the freshest catches in a variety of Thai styles, for very affordable prices.

If you're a dog-lover, the province is a breeding ground for a canine species known as *lang an Thai*, which has a distinctive whorl of hair on its back, and is prized for its intelligence and loyalty.

Useful Websites

The free listings guide to "Ko Chang, Trat and the Eastern Islands" has a constantly updated homepage at www.whitesandsthailand.com

For a more irreverent, but equally valuable and also frequently updated website, try www.iamkohchang.com.



TOURISM AUTHORITY OF THAILAND

HEAD OFFICE

Tourism Authority of Thailand
1600 New Petchaburi Road, Makkasan,
Ratchathewi, Bangkok 10400 THAILAND
Tel : 66 2250 5500 (120 automatic lines)
Fax: 66 2250 5511
http://www.tourismthailand.org
E-mail Address : center@tat.or.th

OVERSEAS OFFICES

ASIA & PACIFIC KUALA LUMPUR

Tourism Authority of Thailand
Suite 22.01, Level 22nd Fl., Menara
Citibank, 165, Jalan Ampang, 50450
Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA
Tel : (60 3) 216 23480
Fax: (60 3) 216 23486
E-mail Address : sawatdi@po.jaring.my,
tatkul@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Malaysia and
Brunei Darussalam

SINGAPORE

Tourism Authority of Thailand
c/o Royal Thai Embassy
370 Orchard Rd., SINGAPORE 238870
Tel : (656) 235 7901
Fax: (656) 733 5653
E-mail Address : tatsin@singnet.com.sg,
tatsin@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Singapore, Indo-
nesia and The Philippines

HONG KONG

Tourism Authority of Thailand
Room 1901 Jardine House, 1 Connaught
Place, Central, HONG KONG
Tel : (852) 2868 0732, 2868 0854
Fax: (852) 2868 4585, 2868 0428
E-mail Address : tathkg@pacific.net.hk,
tathkg@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Hong Kong,
and Macau

BEIJING

Tourism Authority of Thailand
Room 902, Office Tower E1, Oriental
Plaza, No.1 East Chang An Avenue,
Dong Cheng District, Beijing, 100738
CHINA
Tel : (86 10) 8518 3526-29
Fax: (86 10) 8518 3530
E-mail Address : tatbjs@tat.or.th, tatbjs@
sohu.com
Areas of Responsibility : People's Republic
of China (except Hong Kong SAR, Macau
SAR and Taiwan) and Mongolia

TAIPEI

Thailand Tourism Division
13th Fl., Boss Tower, No 111 Sung Chiang
Rd. (Near Nanking East Road Junction)
Taipei 104, TAIWAN
Tel : (886 2) 2502 1600
Fax: (886 2) 2502 1603
E-mail Address : tatpte@ms3.hinet.net,

tatpe@tat.or.th
Area of Responsibility : Taiwan

TOKYO

Tourism Authority of Thailand
Yurakucho Denki Building, South Tower
3rd Fl., Room 259, 1-7-1 Yurakucho Chi-
yoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0006, JAPAN
Tel : (81 3) 3218 0337, 3218 0355
Fax: (81 3) 3218 0655
E-mail Address : tattky@tattky.com,
tattky@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Northern Area of
Honshu Island: Tohoku, Kanto and Hok-
kaido Island

OSAKA

Tourism Authority of Thailand
Technoble Yotsubashi Bldg., 3rd Fl., 1-6-8
Kitahorie, Nishi-ku, Osaka 550-0014
JAPAN
Tel : (81 6) 6543 6654, 6543 6655
Fax: (81 6) 6543 6660
E-mail Address : info@tatosa.com, tatosa@
tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Southern Area of
Honshu Island: Kinki, Chugoku and Chubu

FUKUOKA

Tourism Authority of Thailand
EL Gala Bldg. 6th Fl., 1-4-2, Tenjin,
Chuo-ku, Fukuoka 810-0001 JAPAN
Tel : (81 92) 725 8808
Fax: (81 92) 735 4434
E-mail Address : tاتفuk@tatfuk.com,
tatfuk@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Kyushu Island,
Shikoku Island and Okinawa

SEOUL

Tourism Authority of Thailand
Coryo Daeyungak Center Building
Rm. No.604, 6th Fl., 25-5, 1-Ka,
Chungmu-Ro, Chung-Ku,
Seoul 100-706, KOREA
Tel : (82 2) 779 5417, 779 5418, 771 9650
Fax: (82 2) 779 5419
E-mail Address : info@tatsel.or.kr, tatsel@
tat.or.th
Area of Responsibility : Republic of Korea

NEW DELHI

Tourism Authority of Thailand
Royal Thai Embassy
56-N, Nyaya Marg, Chanakyaपुरi,
New Delhi, INDIA 110021
Tel : (91 11) 2410 5408-9
Fax: (91 11) 5166 3570
E-mail Address : tat@thaiemb.org.in,
tatdel@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : India, Bangla-
desh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal

SYDNEY

Tourism Authority of Thailand
2nd Fl., 75 Pitt Street,
Sydney, NSW 2000 AUSTRALIA
Tel : (61 2) 9247 7549
Fax: (61 2) 9251 2465
E-mail Address : info@thailand.net.au,
tatsyd@tat.or.th

Areas of Responsibility : Australia,
New Zealand and the South Pacific

EUROPE LONDON

Tourism Authority of Thailand
3rd Fl., Brook House, 98-99 Jermyn Street,
London SW1Y 6EE, UK
Tel : (44 207) 925 2511
Fax: (44 207) 925 2512
E-mail Address : info@thaismile.co.uk,
tatuk@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : United Kingdom,
Ireland, South Africa, Iran, Iraq, Jordan,
Lebanon, Syria and the Middle East:
Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi
Arabia, U.A.E.

FRANKFURT

Thailändisches Fremdenverkehrsamt
Bethmann Str.58, D-60311 Frankfurt/M.,
GERMANY
Tel : (49 69) 138 139 0
Fax: (49 69) 138 139 50
E-mail Address : info@thailandtourismus.
de, tatfra@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Germany, Austria,
Slovenia, Croatia, Switzerland, Liech-
tenstein, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria,
Moldova, Macedonia, Albania, Czech
Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and
Bosnia-Herzegovina

PARIS

Office National du Tourisme de Thaïlande
90, Avenue des Champs-Elysees, 75008
Paris, FRANCE
Tel : (33 1) 5353 4700
Fax: (33 1) 4563 7888
E-mail Address : tatpar@wanadoo.fr,
tatpar@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : France, Belgium,
Luxembourg and The Netherlands

ROME

Ente Nazionale per il Turismo Thailandese
Via Barberini 68, 4th Fl.,
00187 Roma, ITALY
Tel : (39 06) 420 14422, 420 14426
Fax: (39 06) 487 3500
E-mail Address : tat.rome@iol.it, tatrome@
tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Italy, Spain,
Greece, Portugal, Israel, Egypt, Turkey
and Cyprus

STOCKHOLM

Tourism Authority of Thailand
Drottningatan 33 GF,
111 51 Stockholm, SWEDEN
Tel : (46 8) 700 56 90
Fax: (46 8) 700 56 99
E-mail Address : info@tourismthailand.se
Areas of Responsibility : Sweden, Norway,
Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Russia, Belar-
us, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan,
Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan,
Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Estonia, Latvia and
Lithuania

THE AMERICAS

LOS ANGELES

Tourism Authority of Thailand
611 North Larchmont Boulevard, 1st Fl.,
Los Angeles, CA 90004, U.S.A.
Tel : (1 323) 461 9814
Fax: (1 323) 461 9834
E-mail Address : tatla@ix.netcom.com,
tatla@tat.or.th

Areas of Responsibility : Alaska, Arizona,
California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Kan-
sas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada,
New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma,
Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wash-
ington, Wyoming, Guam Island
and all Central and South American
countries

NEW YORK

Tourism Authority of Thailand
61 Broadway, Suite 2830 New York,
NY 10006
Tel : (1 212) 432 0433
Fax: (1 212) 269 2588
E-mail Address : info@tatny.com, tatny@
tat.or.th

Areas of Responsibility: Alabama,
Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida,
Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky,
Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachu-
setts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi,
Missouri, New York, New Hampshire, New
Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania,
Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee,
Vermont, Virginia, Washington D.C., West
Virginia, Wisconsin, Puerto Rico and
the Bahamas and Canada (West Canada:
Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba,
Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan and
Yukon; East Canada: Ontario, Quebec,
New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and
New Foundland)

LOCAL OFFICES

North

TAT Northern Office: Region 1
105/1 Chiang Mai-Lamphun Rd., Amphoe
Mueang, Chiang Mai 50000
Tel : 66 5324 8604, 66 5324 8607,
66 5324 1466
Fax: 66 5324 8605
E-mail Address : tatchmai@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Chiang Mai,
Lamphun, Lampang and Mae Hong Son

TAT Northern Office: Region 2
448/16 Singkhakhlai Rd., Amphoe Mueang,
Chiang Rai 57000
Tel : 66 5371 7433, 66 5374 4674-5
Fax: 66 5371 7434
E-mail Address : tatchrai@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Chiang Rai,
Phayao, Phrae and Nan

TAT Northern Office: Region 3
209/7-8 Surasi Trade Centre., Boromtrailo-
kanat Rd., Amphoe Mueang, Phitsanulok
65000
Tel : 66 5525 2742-3, 66 5525 9907
Fax: 66 5523 1063
E-mail Address : tatphlok@tat.or.th

Areas of Responsibility : Phitsanulok,
Phetchabun, Sukhothai and Uttaradit

TAT Northern Office: Region 4
193 Taksin Rd., Tambon Nong Luang,
Amphoe Mueang, Tak 63000
Tel : 66 5551 4341-3
Fax: 66 5551 4344
E-mail Address : tattak@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Tak, Phichit and
Kamphaeng Phet

Central Region

TAT Central Region Office: Region 1
Saengchuto Rd., Tambon Ban Nuea,
Amphoe Mueang, Kanchanaburi 71000
Tel : 66 3451 1200, 66 3451 2500,
66 3462 3691
Fax: 66 3451 1200
E-mail Address : tatkan@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Kanchanaburi,
Nakhon Pathom, Samut Sakhon and Samut
Songkhram

TAT Central Region Office: Region 2
500/51 Phetchakasem Rd., Cha-am,
Phetchaburi 76120
Tel : 66 3247 1005-6
Fax: 66 3247 1502
E-mail Address : tatphet@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Phetchaburi
(Cha-am), Ratchaburi and
Prachuap Khiri Khan

TAT Central Region Office: Region 3
609 Mu 10 Tammak Rd., Bang Lamung,
Chon Buri 20260
Tel : 66 3842 8750, 66 3842 7667
Fax: 66 3842 9113
E-mail Address : tatchon@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Chon Buri (Pat-
taya) and Samut Prakan

TAT Central Region Office: Region 4
153/4 Sukhumvit Rd., Amphoe Mueang,
Rayong 21000
Tel : 66 3865 5420-1, 66 3866 4585
Fax: 66 3865 5422
E-mail Address : tatryoung@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Rayong and
Chanthaburi

TAT Central Region Office: Region 5
100 Mu 1 Trat-Laem Ngop Rd.,
Tambon Laem Ngop,
Amphoe Laem Ngop, Trat 23120
Tel : 66 3959 7259-60
Fax: 66 3959 7255
E-mail Address : tattrat@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Trat and its
islands

TAT Central Region Office: Region 6
108/22 Mu 4, Tambon Pratu Chai,
Amphoe Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya,
Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya 13000
Tel : 66 3524 6076-7
Fax: 66 3524 6078
E-mail Address : tatyutya@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Phra Nakhon Si
Ayutthaya, Saraburi, Ang Thong, Suphan

Buri, Pathum Thani and Nonthaburi

TAT Central Region Office: Region 7
Rop Wat Phrathat Rd., Amphoe Mueang,
Lop Buri 15000
Tel : 66 3642 2768-9
Fax: 66 3642 4089
E-mail Address : tatlobri@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Lop Buri, Nakhon
Sawan, Uthai Thani, Chai Nat and
Sing Buri

TAT Central Region Office: Region 8
182/88 Mu 1 Suwannason Rd., Amphoe
Mueang, Nakhon Nayok 26000
Tel : 66 3731 2282, 66 3731 2284
Fax: 66 3731 2286
E-mail Address : tatnayok@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Nakhon Nayok,
Sa Kaeo, Prachin Buri and Chachoengsao

Northeast

TAT Northeastern Office: Region 1
2102-2104 Mittraphap Rd., Amphoe
Mueang, Nakhon Ratchasima 30000
Tel : 66 4421 3666, 66 4421 3030
Fax: 66 4421 3667
E-mail Address : tatsima@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Nakhon Ratcha-
sima, Surin, Buri Ram and Chaiyaphum

TAT Northeastern Office: Region 2
264/1 Khuean Thani Rd., Amphoe
Mueang, Ubon Ratchathani 34000
Tel : 66 4524 3770, 66 4525 0714
Fax: 66 4524 3771
E-mail Address : tatubon@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Ubon Ratcha-
thani, Amnat Charoen, Si Sa Ket and
Yasothon

TAT Northeastern Office: Region 3
15/5 Pracha Samoson Rd., Amphoe
Mueang, Khon Kaen 40000
Tel : 66 4324 4498-9
Fax: 66 4324 4497
E-mail Address : tatkhn@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Khon Kaen, Roi
Et, Maha Sarakham and Kalasin

TAT Northeastern Office: Region 4
184/1 Sunthon Wichit Rd., Amphoe
Mueang, Nakhon Phanom 48000
Tel : 66 4251 3490-1
Fax: 66 4251 3492
E-mail Address : tatphnom@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Nakhon Phanom,
Sakon Nakhon and Mukdahan

TAT Northeastern Office: Region 5
16/5 Mukmontri Rd., Amphoe Mueang,
Udon Thani 41000
Tel : 66 4232 5406-7
Fax: 66 4232 5408
E-mail Address : tatudon@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Udon Thani,
Nong Khai, Nong Bua Lamphu and Loei

South

TAT Southern Office: Region 1
1/1 Soi 2 Niphat Uthit 3 Rd.,

Amphoe Hat Yai, Songkhla 90110
Tel : 66 7424 3747, 66 7423 8518,
66 7423 1055
Fax: 66 7424 5986
E-mail Address : tatskhl@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Songkhla (Hat
Yai) and Satun

TAT Southern Office: Region 2
Sanam Namueang, Ratchadamnon Rd.,
Amphoe Mueang, Nakhon Si Thammarat
80000
Tel : 66 7534 6515-6
Fax: 66 7534 6517
E-mail Address : tatsksri@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Nakhon Si Tham-
marat, Trang and Phatthalung

TAT Southern Office: Region 3
102/3 Mu 2 Narathiwat-Takbai Rd.,
Tambon Kaluwo Nuea, Amphoe Mueang,
Narathiwat 96000
Tel : 66 7352 2413, 66 7351 6144,
66 7352 2411
Fax: 66 7352 2412
E-mail Address : tatnara@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Narathiwat, Yala
and Pattani

TAT Southern Office: Region 4
73-75 Phuket Rd., Amphoe Mueang,
Phuket 83000
Tel : 66 7621 2213, 66 7621 1036,
66 7621 7138
Fax: 66 7621 3582
E-mail Address : tatphket@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Phuket, Phang-
nga and Krabi

TAT Southern Office: Region 5
75 Talat Mai Rd., Amphoe Mueang,
Surat Thani 84000
Tel : 66 7728 8817-9
Fax: 66 7728 2828
E-mail Address : tatsurat@tat.or.th
Areas of Responsibility : Surat Thani,
Chumphon and Ranong