

Koh Phi Phi



Once upon a time there was a book written about a beach, not very far from Surat Thani, an adventurer's tale that mentions the places you will learn and love (including our beloved home, Surat.) However, then came an evil film industry that decided to film the movie at a different beach at a location farther from Surat Thani, near the island of Phi Phi (yes, it's pronounced Pee Pee.)

Okay, they weren't evil, but I had to set the tone.

Koh Phi Phi is the stuff dreams are made of—Leonardo Dicaprio pictures posted on every travel agency...

But no, truly. Phi Phi is beautiful. It is so tiny, that you can walk the entire island in no time, and it's a place where it really is mai pen rai. No shirt, no shoes, no problem. I once stayed for five days and never put on a pair of shoes. You will start recognizing the bar staff, the dive shop staff, and they will start to recognize you. It's the perfect blend of hidden beaches that are quiet to tourist trap Maya Bay, which you won't want to miss. Furthermore, you can party on the beach, without the claustrophobia that Koh Phagnan guarantees.

From Surat Thani, you catch a bus to the town of Krabi. It's as simple as buying a ticket at the bus station on Talad Mai (Phantip). Whenever your departure time is, catch a tuktuk to Phantip, hop on the bus, and you are on your way. What you will soon discover, is that this bus isn't very nice. It stops a lot. The air isn't that strong. It seems like a city bus. When leaving from Surat, the buses seem about twenty years older. You are likely to be the only Farang. This is true for almost every destination. No worries. A bus ticket should cost about 200 baht, and the ride will be around three hours.

When you get to Krabi, you might wonder where on Earth they are taking you— the bus station is down a dirt road in the middle of nowhere. It looks like a scene

from a bad western. The toilets are terrible, and there is truly nothing else in sight. They will ask where you are going, and you say Phi Phi. Their English is great, so that should calm any fears. You will pay them to drive you to the pier as well as for the ferry. Then, you'll hop into the back of a tuktuk like truck, and head to the pier. It's really not that far, and once you get there, you will feel like you are back in the real world. Farang will be swarming; just go to the desk, show them your receipt from the bus station, and they will give you a sticker for the ferry. Once you board the ferry, you have nearly two hours until you reach Phi Phi.

I don't suggest trying to do Phi Phi on a two-day weekend—there is near six hours of travel time from here to there, so you would have to depart on Saturday to make it all the way there and will be lucky for twenty four hours of Phi Phi bliss. An option, if you just must get to Phi Phi, is going to Krabi on Friday night, staying the night there, and heading to Phi Phi on Saturday morning. It's still a time crunch, though. I believe it is best to visit here on a long weekend or during one of your two amazing breaks that Super gives.

When you arrive at the island of Phi Phi, they will immediately charge a keep the beach clean tax. It's only twenty baht, and it's supposed to be used toward keeping Phi Phi beautiful, but this just isn't necessarily so. You will see them let every Thai person through the velvet rope as though they are rock stars—they do not pay. (Note: I say it isn't necessarily used to keep Phi Phi clean, because some of the beaches are really dirty. I once spent an hour picking up one beach, and I did not even put a dent in it.) Regardless, it's twenty baht, and you will already be excited by the beauty this island has to offer. As you walk down the pier, there will be tons of men and women with hotel posters. You can choose to go with them, or walk around Phi Phi on your own. Usually on our budget, the latter is the best option. Besides, save your buck, stay out of the room as much as possible, and buy a drink.



Long tail boats at Maya Bay

The rooms in Phi Phi run a little bit pricier than most other destinations. I think much of this can be attributed to the fact that it is so small. There isn't space to build, which means, there is less competition. The roads are tiny and crowded, and if you see a car or a motorbike, I would be surprised. Everyone is walking or bicycling. And for some odd reason, no one seems to have a working bell on his or her bike here. They will shout, "Ding, ding, ding," and you better move. It is refreshing to not have to worry about motorbikes, though. There are a few, but you do not really see them around.

A room can cost anywhere from five hundred baht to one thousand for semi-descent. Last time I was in Phi Phi, I found a place right next to the Muay Thai bar, not far from Dojo bar, and I spent five hundred baht a night. The room had no air, cockroaches, a broken showerhead, and is by far the worst place I have ever stayed. It was cheap, and they let three of us stay in there, though, so we were happy to save a buck. If that is not your cup of tea, there are a plethora of nicer places for a pinch more of money.



Tonsai Beach

Ton Sai Beach offers some nicer accommodations, as well as a nice beach. The views here are out of this world. However, everything is pricier, from dinner to a bottle of water. But again, it is easy to walk everywhere, so if you decide to stay here, you can walk for a meal, etc. The area that is more affordable is Ao Lo Dalam. You are not likely to be on the water, but you can find a descent place in the town for no more than eight hundred baht. There are several beaches to venture around to, and while you walk, you can check out all of the souvenirs Phi Phi has to offer. Even

though it is expensive, it is one of my favorite places to shop. I never encountered anyone overly pushy, and there are a plethora of options and stalls.

Whilst in Phi Phi, either dive or do a snorkeling tour. The diving costs more than it does in Koh Tao, but it's beautiful here. If you are lucky enough, they will take you to Shark Point. You can swim here yourself with just a snorkel, because it is pretty near to one of the beaches; however, I wouldn't recommend it. The waters are full of black tip reef sharks. They are completely harmless, but when you see them, panic might ensue, so it is probably best to have a buddy or be on a tour. Two dives in Phi Phi will run you nearly three thousand baht.



Mama & Baby Monkey on the tour

However, there are tons of snorkeling trips that are just as great. I recommend booking over on Ton Sai, because this side of the island is less crowded, and since it is nicer, you are less likely to end up on a long tail. We were on a nice boat with two decks, chairs with backs, and a kitchen with coffee and water. The tour we booked was six hundred baht a person, included lunch, and went from the early morning to sunset. We saw the bird caves, snorkeled at Mosquito Island, Bamboo Island, Maya Bay, Shark Point, Monkey Island, and got to go cliff jumping. The snorkeling is top notch, and we definitely got to see sharks! Such a rush, even though you know they are harmless. There is time to hang out on the beach at Maya Bay as well as on Bamboo Island, which is relatively unaffected by tourism. No other groups were there, and the only way to stay on the island is in one of a few tents set up.



Bird Cave

Another great experience I had on Phi Phi, though also pricey, was sailing with Bob. If you ask about sailing with Bob, you will find him. He is famous in travel books, and in his own mind. He sailed to Phi Phi all the way from Canada, and started up a snorkeling/kayaking/booze sailboat trip. You get to go to Maya Bay (almost every tour will include this), snorkel a few other locations, jump into kayaks, see the bird caves, fish if you so choose, and have all you can drink beer. If you are a female, for the same price as a man, you also get whiskey to sweeten the deal. The trip starts at about lunchtime, which they feed you, and goes until after the sun has set. We watched all the other tours return, while we swam in the ocean as the sun set. It was absolutely beautiful, and one of the best days of my life. Corny, yes. But Bob is my homeboy.



Sunset with Bob

All the beach bars on Phi Phi are a blast. There is Kinkys and Stones Bar (where the fire show is amazing). You can dance late into the night while looking at the ocean. The tide goes out, and you will see people walking far out onto sandbars. The music is usually pretty good, and there are enough people for a fun atmosphere, but not too many people to where you feel like you've been transported back to a Frat party in America. A bar that I became quite fond of was Dojo Bar, and it is in the middle of town. Frequently, men stop by so that you can pay to take pictures with some cute little monkeys. I lucked out, because they loved that I spoke Thai, so I got to take some pictures free of charge. (So brush up on your Thai! Monkey is lingling.) Another big hit is the bar/restaurant Banana Bar. Downstairs you can eat some Mexican food, and then you can walk up a few flights of stairs to an outdoor bar that plays movies at night, has tables set up for beer pong, and an all around more relaxed atmosphere.

The food in Phi Phi is amazing. Almost everywhere offers wifi and a great selection of western food. Nothing is overly cheap, unless you plan on getting Mama's Noodles at seven eleven. It's similar in pricing to food on Koh Tao. Or truly, it is similar to the price of western food anywhere in Thailand. Thai food is, of course, an option, but it is more expensive than it is here in Surat.

So, whether you feel like bumming around on the beach, doing some clean up efforts, visiting where The Beach was filmed, seeing a fire show, or staring at Leo's face everywhere you turn, Phi Phi is a can't miss. It's worth the extra baht you spend. Furthermore, it isn't far from Railay, which is another phenomenal beach.



Kayaks at Ao Lo Dalam