

SEDUCTIVE SAMUI ▶▶▶

Although still lacking a full service marina, Koh Samui's yacht friendly bays, stunning cruising grounds and myriad of onshore attractions make it an appealing destination for superyachts.

Relatively unknown for years, and still something of a novelty destination when it comes to larger vessels, Koh Samui in the Gulf of Thailand now boasts a range of world class facilities and services for visiting superyachts and offers some of the region's best coastal scenery and relaxed yachting experiences. Positioned at Latitude of 9° 30' N and Longitude of 100° 00' E and just 21 kilometers at its widest point and 25 at its longest, the island's hinterland consists of forest hills of limestone and granite with a shoreline made up of countless palm-fringed beaches and bays. Samui and its surrounding islands have earned a reputation for personalised services and beautiful natural scenery with a range of on- and off-shore activities guaranteeing sailors plenty to see and do.

Nautical attractions

The island's cruising area stretches to a group of 48 surrounding islets, while among Samui's own natural attractions are the coral beds at Laem Sed and Tong Takien, the Hin Lat and Na Muang waterfalls inland and the phallic

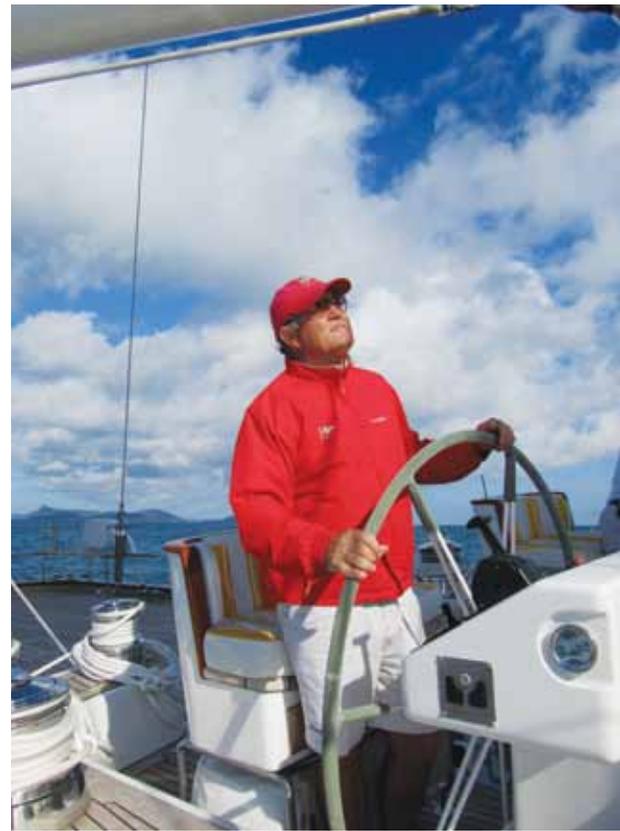
coastal rock formations at Hi Ta, Hin Yai south of Lamai beach. All these natural landmarks can be easily viewed and visited when cruising around the island while to the south, yachts can also sail up close to the famed Five Islands, home to rare birds' nests, cultivated and harvested by changing crews of wall scaling specialists sent over from China.

A nearby natural marine wonder and must visit location is the Anghong National Marine Park - an archipelago comprising some 40 uninhabited islands, a mere 22 nm northwest of Samui and covering some 250 square kilometres. Major park islands of towering, verdant rock masses include Mae Koh, with a beautiful beach from which you can hike up to an emerald saltwater lake. A compact archipelago of mostly uninhabited islands, it was the setting for Alex Garland's novel, *The Beach*. There is also good snorkeling, diving, hiking and kayaking on and around these islands, a popular day tripping spot from Samui.

Heading north, two larger islands within Samui's gravitational pull also boast a range of natural and man-made attractions. At



Features



neighbouring Koh Phangan you can anchor at Hat Rin Beach, famous worldwide for its monthly Full Moon parties or gently cruise the rugged coast, dropping anchor off unspoilt beaches to swim and snorkel, or heading ashore for some tasty Thai cuisine. A short hop into the Thai Gulf takes you to Koh Tao (Turtle Island), renowned as one of the best dive locations in Asia with a choice of excellent underwater sites offering the chance spot everything from giant clams to blue spotted sting rays and the impressive whale sharks that come to this part of the Thai Gulf in numbers to feed and breed in April and May.

Sailing seasons

Samui offers a relatively long cruising season with moderate seas from January to April and steady easterly winds providing the best conditions for relaxed cruising. From May to October the southwest monsoon brings calm seas and clear skies to the Thai Gulf while other sailing destinations in Thailand are being hit hard. Fair winds and occasional squalls mean the best sailing season begins in June as the sailing conditions become more lively. Early July is the chosen time for the Samui Regatta, the final competition in the Asian Yachting Grand Prix season that features both coastal races, a round the island course and closer contests sailing 'around the cans' directly off Chaweng Beach. Regular names on the AYG circuit include Neil Pryde and his

TP52 Team, Frank Pong with his Reichel Pugh 75 Jelik III and Ray Roberts, skipper of Transpac52 class Evolution Racing. During the day, spectators can enjoy the action from the comfort of their own boat, while in the evenings, the Samui Regatta parties are famous and take place at various venues around the island.

The cruising season ends in October with the onset of the northeastern monsoon and its rainy season, which can bring winds up to 25 knots or more. Outside the November monsoon, weather conditions remain pleasantly tropical around Koh Samui with temperatures averaging 30C in the daytime and 24C at night. Overall, this adds up to some of Thailand's best vacation sailing, with mildly challenging sailing conditions by day and tranquil anchorages by night.

Personal assistance

Captain Charles Dwyer of Asia Pacific Superyachts (APS) Samui is also the founder of Samui Yacht Services and holder of a 1600 ton USCG 3000 Ton International license. Captain Charlie has skippered various superyachts for more than 20 years and is a lifelong, ardent American sailor. He has captained some of the most prestigious yachts in the world, cruising and racing around the Mediterranean and Caribbean seas as well as in Asia. Skippering the SY Yanneke Too to Koh Samui for many years, Charlie and his wife now happily call Samui home and own

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Superyacht services

APS Samui is a member of the Association of Yacht Support Services (AYSS) and has been servicing Superyachts on Samui since 2002. An agent on Samui is highly recommended for any superyacht visits and APS can provide all the superyacht needs, including: airline ticketing (international & domestic); banking facilities (USD & local currencies) 3 chandlers, charters; crew placement agency, cruise guides, dive guides and equipment rental, flowers, freight forwarding, fuel and lube oil supply, helicopters/private aircraft charter/ landing permits, immigration, customs and harbor clearances, laundry / dry-cleaning, local Internet connections (land lines / GPRS / ADSL), provisioning - international and local brands, re-fit supplies, EPIRB & life raft servicing, vehicle hire.

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and manage Eden Rock Villa, a unique Bali-Thai Asian fusion style luxury villa overlooking the azure seas of the Gulf of Siam. "Koh Samui is a fantastic alternative for major yacht owners who want to get away from the Mediterranean and Caribbean crowds," he says. "It's a very safe voyage. I've been through the Malacca Straits 27 times and never had an incident. Most yachts come from Singapore and it is an easy cruise along the coast, perhaps stopping at Tioman Island for a few nights along the way."

Asia Pacific Superyachts (Samui) has many wonderful 7 and 14 day itineraries, and cruising routes to Samui can be custom built for each individual yacht. APS Samui normally takes care of customs and immigration needs on arrival for a small fee, depending on the size of the yacht. "Usually with correct paperwork in hand this process will only take a few hours," says Captain Dwyer. "Whilst most boating supplies are not readily available on the island yet, almost anything can be sourced in Bangkok or Phuket with same day delivery. Those yachts in need of minor refit and repairs can be taken care of locally, but for a big refit it is time to go the new facility in Bangkok. There are a couple of good refit companies that work out of these yards."

Luxury and good taste

There's no shortage of luxury bunkering options on Koh Samui, big brand hotels like Four Seasons, W Hotels, Banyan Tree, Six Senses and the soon to arrive Intercontinental Hotel are fast making high-end hospitality a Samui trademark, with equally impressive options like Santhiya Resort and Spa making their mark on Koh Phangan. Thailand's islands are also among the world's top destinations for private luxury villa rentals, with Koh Samui one of the most sought after locations in South East Asia, drawing plenty of private villa clients year round, including those with boats moored offshore. Infinity pools, landscaped tropical gardens and staggering sea views are standard at these luxury residences and with each designed to different specifications, guests can choose from an impressive selection of styles and configurations, with everything from expansive, family-style villas to party pads and more secluded romantic getaways available.

For quality provisioning, Koh Samui now boasts branch outlets of some of the best fresh food and wine importers in Thailand, so agents like APS can take care of almost every request, be it local or international supplies. Additional service staff can be easily sourced

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ALTHOUGH STILL CONSIDERED AN EMERGING DESTINATION WHEN IT COMES TO SUPERYACHT CRUISING, THE ISLANDS IN THE GULF OF THAILAND ARE EASY TO REACH, WELL SERVICED AND OFFER A DIVERSE RANGE OF FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

for onboard parties or events. Visiting sailors who prefer to dine ashore have a wide choice of options. The menus at the island's 5 Star hotels offer a range of world class cuisine, while several independent restaurants also serve a mouthwatering array of Thai and global dishes that have given the island something of a reputation as a foodies' paradise. Notable culinary highlights but a short tender ride from the island's preferred mooring bays include H Bistro at Hansar Resort in Bophut with a breezy oceanfront setting and exceptional cuisine courtesy of the resort's celebrated executive chef, Stephan Dion and the more modest but equally fine Ocean 11 restaurant, right on the beach in Bang Rak, with views out to the island's 12 m golden Big Buddha statue.

Healthy and active shore time

Along with a growing reputation for luxury accommodation and fine dining, Samui is also becoming well known as a top notch health retreat. The island's now legendary day spa, Tamarind Springs opened in 1998, and since then health and wellness seekers from around the globe have been arriving on Samui in search of a little pampering and rejuvenation. More

recent additions to the wellness scene include the internationally acclaimed Kamalaya Wellness Sanctuary, hidden away in Laem Set, which offers solutions for detox, yoga, stress and burnout, fitness and weight control. Yoga is also becoming a popular attraction with classes held in a variety of disciplines and locations island wide. Koh Phangan also boasts some popular health retreats, The Sanctuary being one of the most famous places to tune in and drop out. Those in search of more simple Thai massage can pay a visit to one of the smaller massage shops on both islands, or even arrange for a therapist to give treatments on board.

More active souls are well catered for on Koh Samui. Beyond vessel based water sports like snorkelling and diving, visiting superyacht owners and guests can also opt for land based adventures such as thrilling canopy rides through Samui's mountainside forest, trekking into the jungles of Koh Phangan, off-road motorbike trips and bouldering on Koh Tao, as well as beach based activities on all three islands, including kite and wake boarding and windsurfing. Koh Samui also boasts two spectacular mountain golf courses, the Santiburi Country Club being the most famous and challenging with stunning views from virtually every tee.

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Tropical revelry and romance

The party scene on Koh Samui has grown into a sophisticated calendar of regular events, with chic beach clubs like Beach Republic and Nikki Beach now hosting international DJs to entertain the jet setter crowds and more modest but equally popular gatherings organised by the island's more established event management specialists like The Agency Asia. Opportunities for fun and revelry are vast and lively parties attract a good mix of old and new faces almost every weekend.

Koh Samui has also become a popular place for destination weddings in recent years, with hotels and resorts offering a range of packages that include everything from a traditional Thai style ceremonies to an extravagant high society gathering on the beach. Once the vows have been exchanged, extravagant parties generally follow, with fine food and service, and the champagne flowing as fireworks fill the night sky. Private villas are also now popular wedding venues as

they guarantee the ultimate personalised event with live performances and late night revelry fuelled by the island's DJs. Wedding agencies will happily arrange a wedding on board a vessel, helping plan the event in advance and providing the necessary staff, catering and decorations on the day.

Although still considered an emerging destination when it comes to superyacht cruising, the islands in the Gulf of Thailand are easy to reach, well serviced and offer a diverse range of facilities and amenities to visitors in search of relaxed sailing in uncrowded waters with plenty of sophisticated and appealing onshore adventures and indulgences. A lack of marina facilities may deter some owners, but for those prepared to simply drop anchor and make the most of the services available, Koh Samui and its sister islands offer an enticing, independent alternative to the more conventional and established South East Asian superyacht destinations. ■

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