

...and there are amazing holidays in Thailand

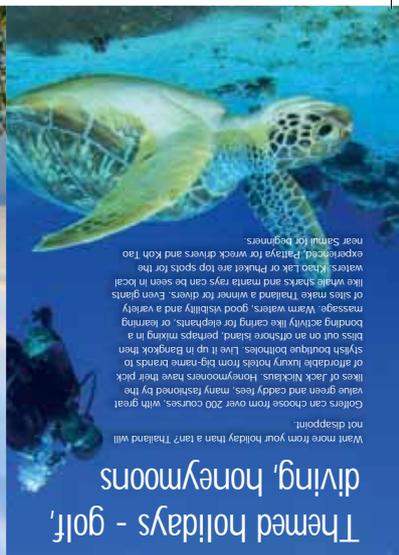
There are holidays...



and Ko Tao



Andaman Sea, the Small



Themed holidays - golf, diving, honeymoons

Bangkok

Bangkok is one of the greatest cities of the world to party, shop and be wowed by buildings old and new. The glittering gold of the Grand Palace includes a famous temple housing an emerald Buddha. The enormous reclining Buddha at Wat Pho is just next-door, with its pearl-inlaid feet. Get your own feet kneaded at the massage school in the same grounds. A river trip by long-tail boat will take you past pottery temple Wat Arun and the Royal Barges Museum. By night, take a romantic dinner cruise on a converted rice barge.

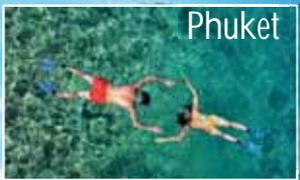
Act all A-list in skyscraper-top cocktail bars and restaurants, or hit the mega malls clustered around Siam Square. Other shopping highlights: night-time Asiatique beside the river and weekend Chatuchak market.



Kanchanaburi is most famous as the location of the Bridge over the River Kwai, built by the Japanese army in World War II using prisoners and local conscripts. The great loss of life at the site is honoured with cemeteries, memorials and museums featuring POW artefacts. Walk on the remaining sections of the 'death railway' and visit the cutting known as Hellfire Pass.

Other nearby attractions include temples and the heritage buildings of the old town centre. Kanchanaburi is a day's visit from Bangkok but slow things down with a mini river cruise taking in the mountain scenery. Combine Kanchanaburi with the phlogenic Damnoen Saduak floating market, where fruit and vegetables are sold daily from hundreds of boats.

Kanchanaburi



Phuket

Thailand's most popular island Phuket has a beach for every taste from the lively Patong to the family friendly Bang Tao. Kata and Karon beaches are popular with families due to their choice of quieter beaches and hotels with kids clubs and waterparks. Its setting is spectacular, facing into Phang Nga Bay with its pretty vertical limestone islands known as karsts. You can get amongst them on snorkelling or kayaking trips. The resort is also a great base for diving and sailing. There are family attractions too including famous circus-style cultural show Fantasea. The West coast is the most developed but if you're after a sleeper vibe look to the North, or the East, which has gained some stylish hotels in recent years. You can also twin Phuket easily with some offshore islands including Phi Phi and Koh Yao Noi.



Krabi

Krabi shares gorgeous Phang Nga Bay with Phuket but retains a laid-back feel. It's a great option for a holiday with older children, with a great choice of excursions. Ao Nang is the main beach, from where a throng of long-tail boats whisks tourists to cute little outlying islands with nice sand. Join the popular live-island hop, stopping to snorkel and sunbathe, or simply make a five-minute long-tail boat ride to nearby Raiay, where gorgeous limestone cliffs frame the beach.

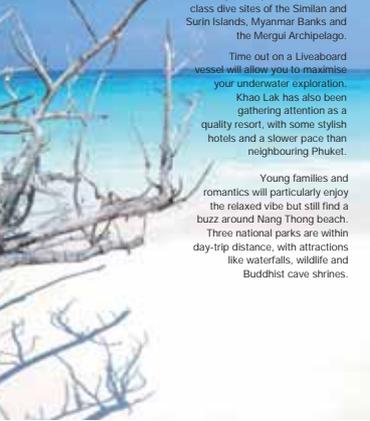
Krabi is also the gateway to honeymoon favourite Koh Lanta. Inland, there are mangroves to kayak and the Tiger Cave Temple to visit, where monkeys scamper as you climb to an impressive view. If rock climbing is your thing, rugged cliffs at Raiay will give you a world-class challenge.

Khao Lak

If you are an experienced diver, then look no further than Khao Lak. On the mainland just above Phuket, it's the nearest departure point to the world-class dive sites of the Similan and Surin Islands, Myanmar Banks and the Mergui Archipelago.

Time out on a Liveaboard vessel will allow you to maximise your underwater exploration. Khao Lak has also been gathering attention as a quality resort, with some stylish hotels and a slower pace than neighbouring Phuket.

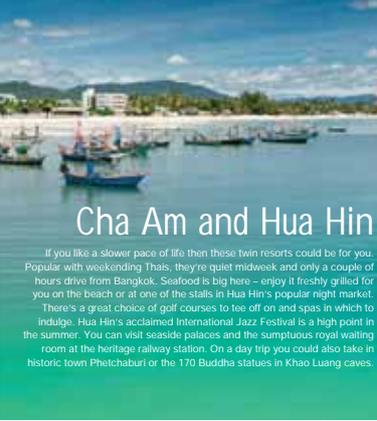
Young families and romantics will particularly enjoy the relaxed vibe but still find a buzz around Nang Thong beach. Three national parks are within day-trip distance, with attractions like waterfalls, wildlife and Buddhist shade shrines.



Cha Am and Hua Hin

If you like a slower pace of life then these twin resorts could be for you. Popular with weekenders Thais, they're quiet midweek and only a couple of hours drive from Bangkok. Seafood is big here - enjoy it freshly grilled for you on the beach or at one of the stalls in Hua Hin's popular night market.

There's a great choice of golf courses to tee off on and spas in which to indulge. Hua Hin's acclaimed International Jazz Festival is a high point in the summer. You can visit seaside palaces and the sumptuous royal waiting room at the heritage railway station. On a day trip you could also take in historic town Phetchaburi or the 170 Buddha statues in Khao Luang caves.



Isaan



If you've seen Thailand's headline sights and want to dig a little deeper, Isaan, Thailand's undiscovered North East, is a great place to head. The region covers six provinces where you can relax in riverside towns, experience Lao and Vietnamese-influenced-cuisine and explore fine Khmer ruins.

Arguably the best Khmer site in Thailand is Phanom Rung in Buriram province, featuring the remains of a religious sanctuary built between the 9th and 12th centuries. There are more Khmer ruins at the town of Phimai, once linked by road to Cambodia's Angkor Wat. Head to Khao Yai, Thailand's most popular national park with exotic birdlife and if you're lucky you may catch sight of a gibbon.



Mae Hong Son

Take a side trip to mountainous Mae Hong Son province and you'll find yourself quickly immersed in nature. Follow the 600km Mae Hong Son Loop road through the countryside from Chiang Mai and soak in the scenery, visit caves and stay overnight in towns and villages.

The increasingly mainstream backpacker hub is the town of Pai. Situated in a valley, it's a popular spot for tubing, trekking and white-water rafting, or, you can just soak in natural hot springs. Though lively, Pai still has a relatively laid-back spirit with a Western New Age influence. Bangkok weekenders boost the throng during the South's warmest months and you'll find a strong music scene there.

Chiang Mai

Thailand's second city, gateway to soft adventure in the lush North and jumping off point for biking, rafting, hiking to hill tribe villages and more. It's home to many elephant camps - choose an ethically accredited one and become a mahout for the day! They say Chiang Mai has a temple for every day of the year. Tour them on a cyclo ride or get up with the sun and give alms to the saffron-clad Buddhist monks streaming from the famous hilltop Doi Suthep. The city also has one of the best night markets in Thailand. You can buy quality handicrafts here, or in outlying villages that specialise in pottery, painted parasols and more. Fancy learning a new skill? Try cooking, massage and meditation classes.



Chiang Rai

It's a slower pace in Chiang Rai. The top of this leafy province forms part of the Golden Triangle where Thailand meets Laos and Myanmar around the mighty Mekong river. See the limestone karst scenery as you take a leisurely riverboat ride. Visit Chiang Rai city's Sunday market for crafts, food straight from the wok, and even the chance to try the local speciality of deep fried crickets. A more palatable must is sampling the regional khao-toke food that includes sticky rice. Trek to see hilltribes around Chiang Rai, or see the transforming work done by the Royal Project's agricultural schemes that have replaced opium crops. Find out more about the region's past as a world drugs centre in the Hall of Opium museum.

