

# Upper Southern Gulf



Here's an interesting question. What percentage of foreign tourists that traverse this coastline en route to Thailand's southern islands actually stop here? The answer? Definitely not enough.

Long popular with local tourists, Thailand's upper southern gulf region showcases beach resorts that run from relaxed to raucous, two stunning national parks, and plenty of historical intrigue just waiting to be explored. And if your Thai experience sometimes resembles a roll-call of other travellers, you'll find it easy to detour off the *faràng* (Westerner) trail for a few days.

On weekends, sleepy Cha-am is jolted into action by bus loads of Bangkok types, keen to shake off the big city's cobwebs at nicely noisy beach parties. On the secluded beaches of Ban Krut and Bang Saphan Yai, the ambience is more subdued, but no less Thai. And the seafood is just as fresh and just as affordable. Hua Hin's sandy, boulder-strewn beaches come with a royal seal of approval (the Thai king lives here for part of the year), and a buzzy cosmopolitan vibe.

Wilderness and wildlife junkies can escape to the Khao Sam Roi Yot and Kaeng Krachan National Parks, but if you like your fauna slightly more domesticated, the curious monkeys of Phetchaburi's caves and Prachuap Khiri Khan's hilltop temple will gladly trade a banana for a photo.

Getting between the major cities is a breeze, but travel around the rest of the area requires an infusion of travellers' ingenuity, curiosity and initiative. Trust us, it'll be well worth it.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Experiencing a moment of quiet contemplation in Phetchaburi's **cave temples** (p550) amid sun-dappled Buddhas
- Appreciating the culinary choices in **Hua Hin** (p562) – the bustling night market one night followed by excellent European food the next
- Feeling elated and loving the views after completing the climb to Khao Krachom in **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park** (p564)
- Returning the curious stares of troops of monkeys as you negotiate the 418 steps to **Wat Thammikaram** (p567) in Prachuap Khiri Khan
- Relaxing in your deckchair on **Cha-am beach** (p555) while you put together an alfresco Thai dinner party with the help of friendly seafood vendors



## FAST FACTS

- **Best Time to Visit** February to June
- **Population** 1.4 million

## Climate

The best time to visit is during the hot and dry season (February to June). From July to October (southwest monsoon) and from October to January (northeast monsoon) there is occasional rain and strong winds. However, because this region is between the three-monsoon season that rules northern, northeastern and central Thailand, and the two-monsoon season in the country's south, it remains drier than elsewhere in the country, even during the rainy months. During the monsoon season, beach resorts such as Hua Hin and Cha-am may be cloudy, but are not as wet as destinations further south like Ko Samui or Phuket.

## National Parks

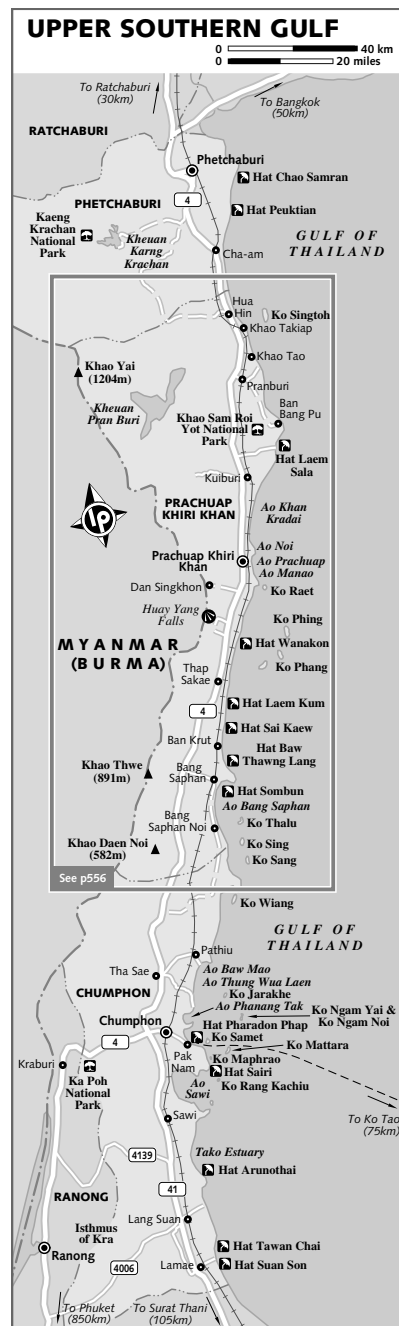
Kaeng Krachan (p553), the largest national park in Thailand, covers nearly half of Phetchaburi Province and is known for its waterfalls and bird-watching. From the tall peaks of Khao Sam Roi Yot (p564) there are views of the gulf, the coast and limestone cliffs.

## Getting There & Away

Frequent air-con buses from Bangkok's southern bus station travel to all major cities in the region including Phetchaburi, Hua Hin and Chumphon. Air-con services also connect to smaller destinations such as Prachuap Khiri Khan, Hat Ban Krut and Bang Saphan Yai on at least a daily basis. Thai Railways' southern line from Bangkok conveniently stops at most points of interest for the independent traveller. Chumphon is the major departure point for boats to Ko Tao, and there are three flights per day to/from Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi airport and Hua Hin.

## Getting Around

Public transport is not as prolific or well organised as further south, but it's still relatively easy to get to most places. Buses and trains connect the region's major cities, and motorcycle taxis and *sǎwngthǎew* (small pick-up trucks) cater for shorter trips. The exception is reaching the two national parks where you'll



either need your own wheels, or will have to charter a taxi or *sǎwnghǎew*.

## PHETCHABURI PROVINCE

### PHETCHABURI (PHETBURI)

เพชรบุรี  
pop 47,000

Most travellers see Phetchaburi (commonly known as Phetburi) as a rushed day trip from Bangkok or from the window of a south-bound bus or train, but a more leisurely approach allows you to peel back the intriguing layers of Thai history. Originally settled by the Khmer empire in the 11th century, the town was a 17th-century trading post on the way from Burma to Ayuthaya. Trading brought wealth, still evident in the commanding array of crumbling wat (temples) lining Phetchaburi's waterfront. Traditional Siam can still be glimpsed in century-old teak houses and by sampling Phetchaburi's culinary heritage. When you've had your fill of the town's tasty desserts, climb to hill-top royal palaces or contemplate the Buddhist shrine in the cave sanctuary of Khao Luang.

### Orientation

Arriving by train, follow the road southeast of the tracks until you come to Th Ratchadamnoen, then turn right. Follow Th Ratchadamnoen south to the second major intersection and turn left towards central Phetchaburi. A *sǎamlǎw* (three-wheeled pedicab) from the train station to Saphan Chomrut (Chomrut Bridge) is 20B. If you've come by air-con bus, you'll stop near the night market on the northern edge of the centre.

### Information

**3 Girls Internet** (Th Damnoen Kasem; per hr 20B; ☎ 7am-9pm)

**Main post office** (cnr Th Ratwathi & Th Damnoen Kasem)  
**Police station** (☎ 0 3242 5500; Th Ratwathi) Near the intersection of Th Ratchadamnoen.

**Siam Commercial Bank** (2 Th Damnoen Kasem) Other nearby banks also offer foreign exchange and ATMs.

**Telephone office** (cnr Th Ratwathi & Th Damnoen Kasem; ☎ 7am-10pm) Upstairs at the post office.

**Tourism Authority of Thailand Office (TAT)**; ☎ 0 3242 5987; Th Ratwathi; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm) Directly

opposite Khao Wang. Ask staff for the informative 'Variety in One – Phetchaburi' booklet.

### Sights & Activities

There are scores of wats in town, so take a wander if this interests you. In the 'Variety in One' brochure from the TAT office there is detailed coverage and walking instructions for exploring the town's many wats.

### KHAO LUANG & KHAO BANDAI-IT CAVES

ถ้ำเขาหลวง

The main cavern in the cave sanctuary of **Khao Luang** (donation appreciated; ☎ 8am-6pm) is lined with impressive stalactites and old Buddha statues (including a large reclining Buddha), many of which were put in place by Rama IV. Sunlight from a hole in the chamber ceiling illuminates the images and makes for great photos. To the rear of the main cavern is an entrance to a third, smaller chamber. On the right of the entrance is Wat Bunthawi, with a *sǎalaa* (meeting hall) designed by the abbot of the wat himself and a *bòt* (central sanctuary) with impressively carved wooden door panels. Around the cave you'll meet brazen monkeys looking for hand-outs. The cave is 5km north of town.

An even more magical cave sanctuary is **Khao Bandai-It** (donation appreciated; ☎ 9am-4pm), 2km west of town. English-speaking guides lead tours through the caves. From Phetchaburi catch a *sǎamlǎw* (60B) or motorcycle taxi (40B) to the sanctuaries.

### KHAO WANG & PHRA NAKHON KHIRI HISTORICAL PARK

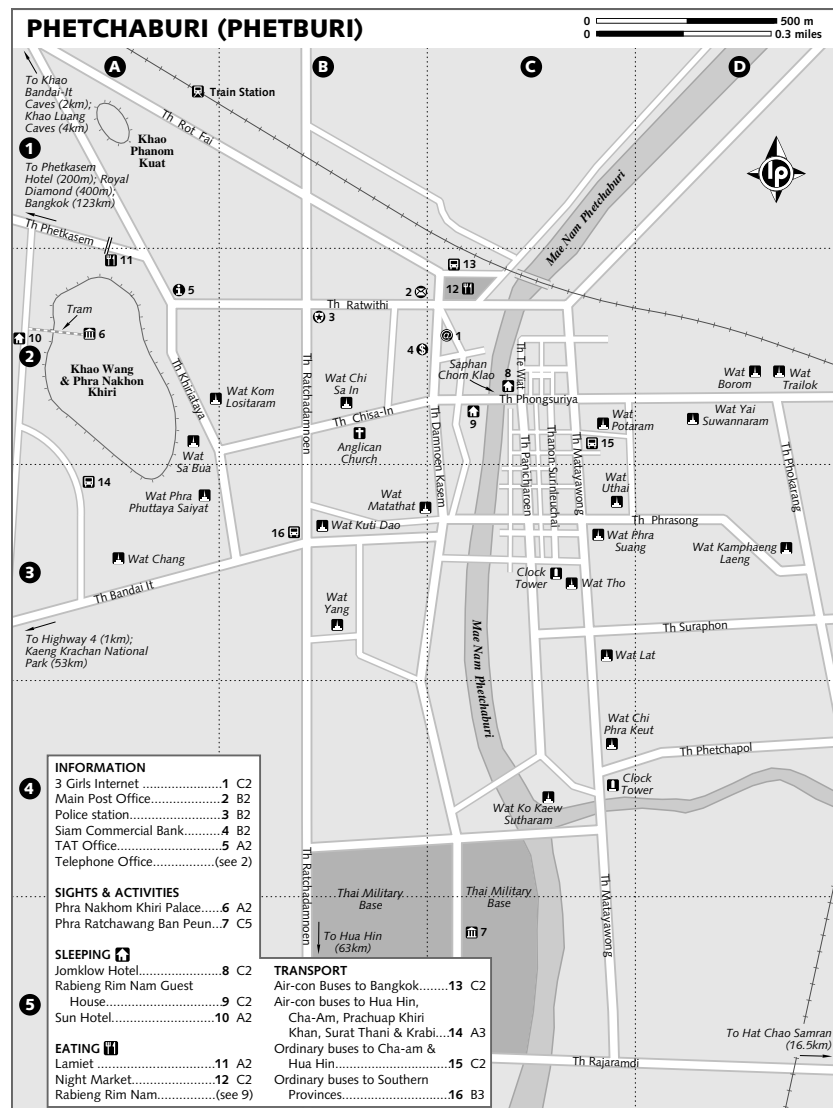
เขาวังอุทยานประวัติศาสตร์พระนครคีรี

Cobblestone paths lead up and around Khao Wang, which is studded with wat and crowned with King Mongkut's palace. **Phra Nakhon Khiri** (Holy City Hill; ☎ 0 3240 1006; admission 40B; ☎ 9am-4pm), the palace area on the top, is a national historical park and a good spot to take in views of the town while curious monkeys look at you. The walk up looks easy, but is fairly strenuous. A tram (adult/child 30/10B one way) is the easier way.

### PHRA RATCHAWANG BAN PEUN

พระราชวังบ้านปืน

Just over 1km south of the city centre, and inside a Thai military base, is **Phra Ratchawang Ban Peun** (Ban Peun Palace; ☎ 0 3242 8083; admission 50B; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri). Construction began in 1910 at the behest of Rama V (who died just after



the project was started) and was completed in 1916. The German architects used the opportunity to showcase contemporary German innovations in construction and interior design. The structure is typical of the early-20th century, a period that saw a Thai passion for erecting European-style buildings in an effort to keep up with the 'modern' architecture of

its colonised neighbours. The outside of the two-storey palace is not that exciting, but it's worth visiting to see the exquisite glazed tiles in the interior.

### Festivals & Events

The **Phra Nakhon Khiri Fair** takes place in early February and lasts about eight days. Centred

on Khao Wang and Phetchaburi's historic temples, the festivities include a sound-and-light show at the Phra Nakhon Khiri Palace, temples festooned with lights, and performances of *lakhon chaatrii* (Thai classical dance-drama), *li-keh* (Thai folk dance-drama) and modern-style historical dramas. A twist on the usual beauty contest showcases Phetchaburi widows.

### Sleeping

**Jomklow Hotel** (☎ 0 3242 5398; 1 Th Te Wiat; r 130-170B) A welcoming Chinese hotel on the river, with friendly dogs but cramped and basic rooms.

**Rabieng Rim Nam Guest House** (☎ 08 9919 7446; fax 0 3240 1983; 1 Th Chisa-In; s/d 120/240B) This place caters to backpackers and offers bare-bones services in a riverside teak house. Laundry service, bicycle and motorcycle rental, and tours to Kaeng Krachan National Park are also on offer.

**Phetkasem Hotel** (☎ 0 3242 5581; 86/1 Th Phetkasem; r 250-350B; 🍷) Middle-aged dogs lol in reception at this slightly industrial place tucked under an overpass. Cheaper rooms don't have air-con and the furniture is decidedly retro, but it's clean and airy.

**Sun Hotel** (☎ 0 3240 0100; www.sunhotelthailand.com; 43/33 Soi Phetkasem; r 800-1500B; 🍷) Opposite the entrance to Phra Nakhon Khiri, this has huge rooms with very good bathrooms. The staff are eager to please and there's a colourful café. Have a coffee but steer clear of breakfast which is poor value at 100B.

**Royal Diamond** (☎ 0 3241 1061; www.royaldiamondhotel.com; Mu 1, Th Phetkasem; r 1200-1800B; 🍷) A comfortable place with midrange goodies including cable TV and fridges, but quite a walk from the town centre.

### Eating

Local dishes include *khànom jiin thàwt man* (thin noodles with fried spicy fish cake), a hot-season speciality *khào chài phétburi* (moist chilled rice served with sweetmeats) and *khànom mào kaeng* (egg custard). You'll find these, along with a range of standard Thai and Chinese dishes, at several good restaurants in the Khao Wang area. Lots of cheap eats are available at the **night market**, near the northern end of the centre of town.

Other good eating spots are along the main street leading to the clock tower. North of Khao Wang, **Lamiet** (no roman-script sign) sells good *khànom mào kaeng* and *fawy thawng* (sweet shredded egg yolk).

**Rabieng Rim Nam** (☎ 0 3242 5707; 1 Th Chisa-In; dishes 40-180B) In a teak riverside house, this restaurant serves up terrific food and cruises 1960s music with a surprising degree of sophistication. The menu is enticingly long, so take your time and discover our favourite – the delicate banana blossom salad.

### Getting There & Away

There are frequent services to/from Bangkok's Southern bus station (1st/2nd class 115/90B, 2½ hours). The bus terminal for air-con buses to/from Bangkok is near the

night market. Other air-conditioned bus destinations to/from Phetchaburi include: Cha-am (35B, 40 minutes), Hua Hin (50B, 1½ hours), Prachuap Khiri Khan (105B, three hours), Surat Thani (300B, eight hours) and Krabi (385B, 10 hours). These destinations are served from the bus station just east of Khao Wang.

Ordinary buses to the southern provinces leave from the corner of Th Banda-It and Th Ratchadamnoen. Local buses to Hua Hin and Cha-am depart in the town centre, on Th Matayawong.

Frequent services run to/from Bangkok's Hualamphong train station. Fares vary depending on the train and class (3rd class 74B to 115B, 2nd class 143B to 210B, three hours).

### Getting Around

Sàmlaw and motorcycle taxis go anywhere in the town centre for 40B, or charter them for the whole day from 300B. Sàwngthàew cost 10B around town. It's a 20-minute walk (1km) from the train station to the town centre.

Rabieng Rim Nam Guest House rents out bicycles (120B per day) and motorbikes (250B per day). It also offers a one-day tour visiting Phetchaburi's wats and palaces (400B to 600B per person).

## KAENG KRACHAN NATIONAL PARK

อุทยานแห่งชาติแก่งกระจาน

At 3000 sq km, Thailand's largest park (☎ 0 3245 9291; www.dnp.go.th; admission 400B; visitors centre ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm) is home to the stunning Pa La-U waterfalls, and includes long-distance hiking trails that snake through forests and savannah-like grasslands, and past cliffs, caves and mountains. Two rivers, Mae Nam Phetchaburi and Mae Nam Pranburi, a large lake, and abundant rainfall keep the place green year round. Animal life includes wild elephants, deer, tigers, bears, gibbons, boars, hornbills, dusky langurs, gaurs and wild cattle. To explore Kaeng Krachan you really need your own transport, but it's worth the effort as this majestic place sees few tourists. The best months to visit are between November and April.

### Sights

Hiking is the best way to explore the park. Try the 4km (three hours) walk from the Km 36 marker on the park road to the 18-

tiered **Nam Tok Tho Thip** waterfall. A longer 6km hike ascends the summit of **Phanoen Thung**, the park's highest point. From the top, there are lush forest views in all directions. It can be particularly spectacular in late autumn, when surrounding valleys are shrouded in early morning mist. The hiking trail starts at the 'Km 27' marker on the park road. Note that some trails, including the one to Phanoen Thung, are closed during the rainy season (August to October).

To the south, near La-U Reservoir, are the spectacular twin waterfalls of **Pa La-U Yai** and **Pa La-U Noi**. Water flows over their 15 tiers year round. The waterfalls can be reached by 4WD from the south (closer to Hua Hin) along Hwy 3219.

Near the visitors centre is a reservoir where boats can be hired for 400B per hour.

### Sleeping & Eating

There are various **bungalows** (☎ 0 3245 9291; reserve@dnp.go.th; from 1200B) within the park, mainly near the reservoir. These sleep from four to six people and are simple affairs with fans and fridges. There are also **camp sites** (per person 50B), including a pleasant one near the reservoir at the visitors centre (where there's also a modest restaurant). Tents (150B to 300B) can be rented at the visitors centre.

On the road leading to the park entrance are several simple resorts and bungalows. About 3.5km before reaching the visitors centre, **A&B Bungalows** (☎ 08 9891 2328; r 650B, bungalow 1300B) is scenic, and popular with bird-watching groups. There is a good restaurant here that can provide you with a packed lunch.

### Getting There & Away

Kaeng Krachan is 53km southwest of Phetchaburi, with the southern edge of the park 35km from Hua Hin. From Phetchaburi, drive 20km south on Hwy 4 to the city of Tha Yang. Turn right (west) and after 40km you'll reach the visitors centre (follow the 'Special Forces Training Camp' signs). You'll need a 4WD vehicle if you want to explore the dirt roads within the park.

There is no direct public transport all the way to the park, but you can get a sàwngthàew (50B, 1½ hours) from Phetchaburi (near the clock tower) to the village of Ban Kaeng Krachan, 4km before the park. Go early as the last sàwngthàew leaves at 2pm. Motorcycle

### WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE UPPER SOUTHERN GULF

We list high-season rates (February to June). Expect good weekday discounts in the beach resorts of Hua Hin and Cha-am, and if you're coming out of season you should be able to secure a bargain at weekends as well.

- Budget (less than 700B) – In Hua Hin, this will normally only secure a stuffy fan room, but in most other places look forward to air-con if you're willing to stretch to the higher end of this budget category. In towns off the tourist trail like Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan and Chumphon, you'll actually find it hard to spend much more.
- Midrange (700B to 1700B) – Most travellers will be perfectly comfortable in the midrange category. In good-value Cha-am, and even more expensive Hua Hin, newly opened hotels with spacious rooms, air-con, swimming pools and cable TV are readily available at the upper end of this category.
- Top End (over 1700B) – How much do you want to spend? Luxury resorts like the Anantara and the Chiva-Som near Hua Hin quote their rates in US dollars, but if you're willing to spend just a little over the 1700B mark there are some very comfortable places to stay which would be considerably more expensive in other countries.

taxis (40B) run from Ban Kaeng Krachan to the visitors centre. An alternative is to join a trip from Phetchaburi, Hua Hin or Cha-Am. In Phetchaburi, the Rabieng Rim Nam Guesthouse (p552) runs one- and two-day trips (2600B to 3950B) that include bird- and animal-watching, and trekking. Most travel agencies in Hua Hin and Cha-am offer daytrips (1200B to 1850B).

## CHA-AM

อำเภอชะอำ  
pop 65,000

If you've come to Thailand to experience modern Thai culture then look no further. At weekends and on public holidays, Cha-am is a getaway spot for provincial families and Bangkok students. Buses deliver holidaymakers firmly in party mode, fuelled by cheesy pop music and ready to kick back for a couple of days. Mix in beach parties under shady casuarina trees, fresh seafood and cold beers delivered to your deck chair, and rip-snorting banana boats up and down the beach and you begin to see the attraction. Subtle it's not, but hey, there's nothing wrong with a bit of raucous Thai fun.

If you're looking for something quieter, then come during the week when Cha-am returns to being a relaxed resort town and you'll get an even better deal at the good-value guesthouses and midrange hotels. Chances are it will be just you and the ladies selling deep fried shrimps and grilled squid. Bliss...

## Orientation

Phetkasem Hwy runs through Cha-am's busy centre, and includes the main stop, banks, the main post office, an outdoor market and the train station. About 1km east, via the main connecting road, Th Narathip, is the long beach strip where you'll be headed. The road along the beach (and where beach accommodation and services are located) is Th Ruamjit. Air-con buses from Bangkok stop one block from the beach on Th Chao Lai.

## Festivals & Events

The **Cha-am Feast-Fish-Flock Seafood Festival** is a riot of Thai food stalls and kitschy pop music. It's all set in a beachfront beer garden at the eastern end of Th Narathip and not to be missed if you're around while it's on in late September/early October.

## Information

For internet access, see **C.V.Net** (Th Ruamjit; pr hr 30B; ☎ 8am-8pm) on the beach road just before Soi North 7. The **post office** (Th Ruamjit) is also on the main beach strip. For international phone calls go to the CAT office on Th Narathip.

The **Tourism Authority of Thailand** (TAT; ☎ 0 3247 1005; tatphet@tat.or.th; 500/51 Th Phetkasem; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm) is located on Phetkasem Hwy, 500m south of town. The staff speak good English. Along Th Ruamjit, you'll find banks with ATMs and exchange services.

## Sleeping

Cha-am has two basic types of accommodation: low-grade apartment-style hotels along the beach road (Th Ruamjit) and more expensive 'condotel' developments (condominiums with a kitchen and operating under a rental programme). True bungalow operations are quite rare. Expect a 20% to 40% discount on posted rates for weekday stays. Compared to flashier Hua Hin, your money will go further in Cha-am.

## BUDGET

**Charlie House** (☎ 0 3243 3799; Soi 1 North, 241/60-61 Th Ruamjit; r 650B; ☎) Downstairs, the reception is funky; upstairs the rooms are crisp and modern with sleek wooden floors. Calling it budget is almost a misnomer, but the rates don't lie.

**Memory Guest House** (☎ 0 3247 2100; 241/29 Th Ruamjit; r 450-650B; ☎) The décor here is nicely beachy if you wake up and forget where you are. With air-con rooms this friendly guesthouse is excellent value.

**Nirundorn Resort** (☎ 0 3247 1038; www.nirundorn.com; 26/171 Th Ruamjit; r 500-700B; ☎) This beachside spot's been around for a while, but it's got a brand new lease of life with coolly minimalist white interiors and bathrooms transplanted from somewhere much flashier. A two-room bungalow is also available for 2200B.

**Baan Thai** (☎ 0 3247 0596; www.ban-thai.net; 222/14-16 Th Ruamjit; r 600-800B; ☎) There's a family atmosphere at this Thai-Norwegian owned guesthouse with five older rooms and a couple of new ones being completed at the time we visited.

## MIDRANGE

**Cha-Am Villa Beach** (☎ 0 3247 1079; www.chaamvilahotel.com; 241/2 Th Ruamjit; r 800-1000B; ☎) With a pool, air-con and wi-fi, the Villa Beach

knows exactly what travellers want. At the time of writing, some snazzy two-storey bungalows were being built.

**Dee Lek** (☎ 0 3247 0145; www.deelek.com; 225/30-33 Th Ruamjit; r 800-1200B; ☎) Spotless rooms with crisp bed linen, spacious bathrooms, and terracotta tiles sit above a good restaurant (below). Mind your head on the arty lampshade when you're coming downstairs.

**Sweet Home** (☎ 0 3241 1039; 279/1 Ruamjit; bungalows 1500B; ☎) Sweet Home's traditional wooden bungalows sit in a tropical garden. Inside things are a little cramped, but there is no denying their rustic charm at the right price.

**Rungaran de Challet** (☎ 0 3247 1226; www.rungaran-chaam.com; 279/1 Th Ruamjit, 263/26 Soi Cha Am 4; r 1200-1500B; ☎) Cha-am's best value midranger is at the beach's southern end. An Asian vibe highlights chic bathrooms and secluded gardens, with hidden alcoves purpose built for relaxation.

**Kaenchan Beach Hotel** (☎ 0 3247 0777; www.kaenchanbeach.com; 241/4 ☎ Ruamjit; r 2150-3300B, bungalows 1350-3260B; ☎) Cherry-coloured wooden buildings glow under soft lighting at this well-designed place that's recommended for serial romantics. Ferns and shrubs bubble from a collage of terracotta and timber, and whisper 'take...it...easy'.

## TOP END

**Casa Papaya** (☎ 0 3247 0678; www.casapapayathailand.com; 810/4 Phetkasem; r 2500-4500B; ☎) Designer Mexican chic runs riot at this terrific spot right on the beach 6km towards Hua Hin. The beachfront and seaview bungalows have rooftop decks to enjoy the sunlight (or the moonlight), but with king-size beds and bathrooms in wonderfully brave colours, some days you may not make it that far.

**Dusit Resort & Polo Club** (☎ 0 3252 0009; www.dusit.com; 193 Th Phetkasem; r from 6500B; ☎) The leader in Thailand's luxury chains, the Dusit has 300 rooms, all with private balcony, overlooking either the sea or lush gardens. Included is a fitness centre, minigolf course, horse riding, tennis and squash courts, as well as, of course, polo. After all that we recommend a drink in the Polo Bar.

## Eating

Beach vendors sell barbecued and fried seafood, and at the far northern end of the beach reasonably priced **seafood restaurants** can be

found at the fishing pier. Along the beach road are simple Thai restaurants, all similar in ambience and price. The following are a bit different.

**Rang Yen Garden** (☎ 0 3247 1267; 259/40 Th Ruamjit; dishes 50-180B; ☎) lunch & dinner Nov-Apr) This lovely patio-style restaurant serves up Thai favourites under the stars. It's only open in the high season.

**Da Vinci's** (☎ 0 3247 1871; 274/5 Th Ruamjit; pizza 120-210B, pasta 180-210B; ☎) lunch & dinner) Trimmed with a Euro-Asian mix of old-style lamps and shady palms, Da Vinci's chic patio is easily the classiest spot to dine in Cha-am.

**Poom Restaurant** (☎ 0 3247 1036; 274/1 Th Ruamjit; dishes 90-220B; ☎) lunch & dinner) Slightly more expensive than other nearby beach restaurants, but worth it for the fresh seafood served under tall sugar palms – the restaurant of choice for weekend Thai.

**Crawfords** (☎ 0 3247 1774; 252/6 Th Chao Lai; dishes 80-400B; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎) Irish owner John (formerly a chef) and his friendly cat (always a cat) are great hosts at this garden restaurant/bar with Guinness and Kilkenny on tap. Saturdays feature American barbecues and on Sundays cross the Atlantic for traditional roast dinners. There's live music every night and special parties for everything from St Patrick's Day to Halloween. It's one block from the beach near the stop for air-con buses to Bangkok. Bookings are recommended on Friday and Saturday nights. Say giddyay to the cat for us.

**Dee-Lek** (☎ 0 3247 0145; 225/33 Th Ruamjit; dishes 80-400B; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Run by a Thai-English couple, Dee-Lek serves up good Thai and Euro dishes in modern surroundings. The servings are generous.

## Getting There & Away

Most hotels have shuttles to Hua Hin for 150/300B one-way/return.

Ordinary and air-con buses stop in the town centre, on Phetkasem Hwy. Some air-con buses to/from Bangkok go to the beach, stopping on Th Chao Lai a few hundred metres south of the Th Narathip intersection.

Frequent bus services operating to/from Cha-am include Bangkok (air-con/ordinary 140/105B, three hours), Phetchaburi (35B, 40 minutes) and Hua Hin (25B, 30 minutes).

The train station is inland on Th Narathip, west of Phetkasem Hwy, and a 30B motorcycle ride to/from the beach. From Bangkok three

train stations have daily services to Cha-am; Hualamphong (3.50pm), Sam Sen (9.27am) and Thonburi (7.15am, 1.30pm and 7.05pm). Tickets cost from 60B to 150B and the journey is around four hours. Cha-am isn't listed on the English-language train schedule.

## Getting Around

From the city centre to the beach it's a quick motorcycle (30B) or *sǎwnghǎew* (10B) ride. Motorcycle taxis around town cost 30B. Some drivers will try and take you to another hotel that offers them a commission. Be firm.

You can rent motorcycles for 300B per day all along Th Ruamjit. Bicycle rentals are available everywhere for 20B per hour, or 100B per day, and are a good way to get around. Travel agencies hire cars or jeeps for 1500B to 2000B per day.

## AROUND CHA-AM

Midway between Cha-am and Hua Hin is **Phra Ratchaniwet Marukhathayawan** (☎ 0 3247 2482; admission 90B; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), a summer palace built during the reign of Rama VI. The one- and two-storey buildings are constructed of teak and interlinked by covered boardwalks, all high above the ground on stilts. Incorporating high tiled roofs and tall shuttered windows, the design maximises air circulation.

Unlike the current summer palace situated further south at Hua Hin, this palace is open to the public. Camp Rama VI, a military post, surrounds the palace grounds, and you need to check in at the gate. If you catch a Cha-am-Hua Hin bus to get here, ask to be dropped at the road to this place. There are often motorcycle taxis waiting, or you can walk 2km the rest of the way.

# PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN PROVINCE

## HUA HIN

อำเภอหัวหิน  
pop 48,700

Hua Hin's inevitable rise to become Thailand's first glamorous getaway began in 1922 when King Rama VII instructed his Italian architect to construct Phra Ratchawang Klai Kangwon ('Far from Worries' Palace) in what was then just a humble fishing village. To-

day's royal family still commutes regularly to the palace to unwind from the pressures of keeping the army and politicians in line in Bangkok. Rama VII's endorsement made the town the place for be for Thai society, and Hua Hin, (like Cha-am), settled into a low-key role as a favourite spot for holidaying Thais.

In the 1980s the renovation of the Hua Hin Railway Hotel by the luxury hotel group Sofitel sparked overseas interest and ignited development geared towards foreigners. Today all the big hotel chains have properties in Hua Hin, and in recent years a growing number of expats have chosen to live in the seaside town that's fast-forwarding to become one of Thailand's most cosmopolitan cities. High-rise

condominiums and planned housing subdivisions are creeping across the surrounding hinterland, and French, Italian, German and Scandinavian restaurants create a little slice of home for sun-kissed escapees from the European winter.

With rapid development comes challenges, and Hua Hin has witnessed the growth of a small sex industry, and the fishing-village ambience of the old piers is largely masked by hotels, restaurants and tailor shops. Development has encroached onto government land, and trying to spot the sea is a frustrating exercise along many parts of the beach road.

Despite the development Hua Hin is bravely clinging to the beachside atmosphere that kicked things off back in 1922. Compared to Pattaya, the other main beach destination near Bangkok, Hua Hin is (relatively) serene, and is a favourite with families and older travellers. Don't come looking for a party-at-all-costs backpacker scene. Instead you can fill your time with 18 holes at the Royal Hua Hin Golf Course or go horseback riding on the beach. After dark there's a cosmopolitan restaurant scene to explore, rustic seafood restaurants on the pier to visit, or the simple culinary charms of one of Thailand's best night markets to sample. The city's 5km of beaches are the cleanest they've been for many years, swimming is safe, and Hua Hin continues to enjoy some of the peninsula's driest weather.

And the following day when you're relaxing on a deckchair drinking cold beer and steamed crab, you might think not much has changed in Hua Hin after all.

## Orientation

Thanon Naresdamri is the tourist backbone and home to restaurants, souvenir stalls, and persistent tailors trying to tempt passers-by into an 'original' Armani suit. Guesthouses and outdoor restaurants line the waterfront area, and small *soi* (lanes) veer off concealing more guesthouses, lively bars and travel agencies. Hua Hin is gradually moving upmarket, and every year more midrange hotels, Western restaurants and designer eyewear shops open. It's a lively place and if you want some quiet time it may be best to stay elsewhere.

The best beach is in front and south of the Sofitel resort. This pleasant stretch of sandy beach is broken up by round, smooth boulders (Hua Hin means 'stone head') and is ideal

for year-round swimming. The train station lies at the western end of town and features a beautifully restored royal waiting room. The airport ([www.huahinairport.com](http://www.huahinairport.com)) is 6km north of town.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

**Bookazine** (☎ 0 3253 2071; 166 Th Naresdamri; ☎ 9am-10pm) Has maps, books and magazines in English, and travel books – including Lonely Planet guides.

### EMERGENCY

**Tourist police** (☎ 0 3251 5995, emergency 1155; Th Damnoen Kasem) At the eastern end of the street.

### INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is available all over Hua Hin.

**Buffalo Bill's Steak & Grill** (8 Th Naresdamri; ☎ 8am-midnight) Has a wi-fi network.

**Sunshine Internet** (Th Amnuaysion; per 150 min 40B, per 350 min 100B; ☎ 8.30am-midnight) Its wi-fi hotspot, your laptop.

**World News Coffee** (Th Naresdamri; per hr 40B; ☎ 8am-11pm) Has fast internet connection in air-con comfort.

### INTERNET RESOURCES

**www.huahinafterdark.com** A good resource for night-time shenanigans.

### MEDIA

Free maps, pamphlets and brochures can be found in restaurants and hotels.

**Hua Hin Observer** ([www.observergroup.net](http://www.observergroup.net))

A free, home-grown, expat-published magazine with features in English & German. Available at most hotels around town, it contains info on dining, culture and entertainment.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Hospital San Paolo** (☎ 0 3253 2576; 222 Th Phetkasem) Just south of town with emergency facilities.

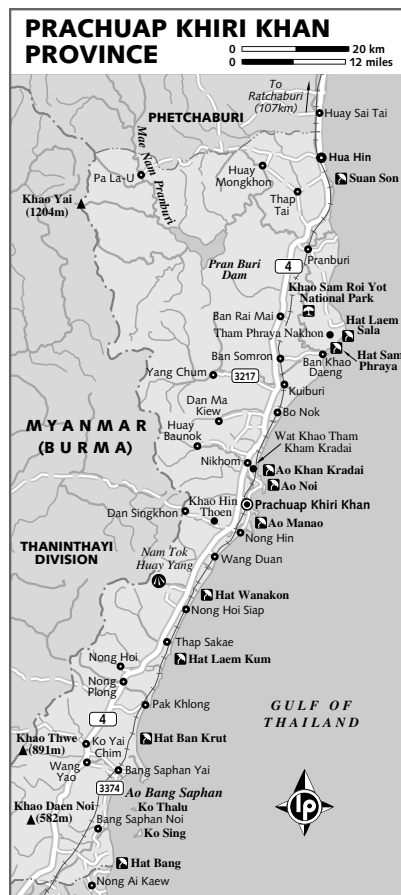
### MONEY

There are exchange booths and ATMs up and down Th Naresdamri. Near the bus stations, there are banks on Th Phetkasem.

**Bank of Ayudhya** (Th Naresdamri) Most convenient to the beach; near the corner of Th Damnoen Kasem.

### POST & TELEPHONE

**Main post office** (Th Damnoen Kasem) Includes the CAT for international phone calls. Most internet cafés have Skype.



**HUA HIN**

0 500 m  
0 0.3 miles

<b>INFORMATION</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
Bank of Ayudhya.....1 C5	All Seasons Guesthouse.....(see 20)	Chatchai Market.....38 B3		
Bookazine.....2 C5	Ananlara.....18 C3	Coffee Beach.....39 C4		
Buffalo Bill's Steak & Grill.....(see 37)	Ban Pak Hua Hin.....19 C4	Food stalls.....40 B3		
CAT Office.....(see 6)	Ban Sornboon.....20 C5	Green Leaf.....41 D4		
Hospital San Paolo.....3 B5	Bird Guest House.....21 C4	MaHa Raja.....42 C4		
Hua Hin Adventure Tour.....4 B4	Cha-ba Chalet.....22 B4	Moonsoon.....43 C3		
Ken Diamond.....5 C5	ChalLarn.....23 C3	Moo Seafood.....44 B4		
Main Post Office.....6 B5	Chomsin.....24 C3	Moon Smile.....45 C4		
Sunshine Internet.....7 B4	Euro-Hua Hin City Hotel (YHA).....25 B5	Platoo.....(see 45)		
Tourist Information.....8 B4	Fresh Inn Hotel.....26 C4	Seafood Restaurants.....46 C3		
Tourist Information Office.....9 B5	Jed Pee Nong.....27 C5	Sunshine Bakery.....47 C4		
Tourist Police.....10 D5	K Place Guest House.....28 C4	World News Coffee.....48 C4		
Tuk Tours.....11 C3	Mod.....(see 32)			
World News Coffee.....(see 48)	Pattana Guest House.....29 C3			
	Rajana Garden House.....30 B4			
	Sand Inn.....31 C4			
	Sirima.....32 C4			
	Sofitel Central Hua Hin Resort.....33 D5			
	Tong Mee House.....34 B3			
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>EATING</b>	<b>DRINKING</b>		
Buchabun Art & Crafts Collection.....12 C3	Pizza Corner.....35 C5	Bernie's.....49 C5		
Horseback riding.....13 D5	Brasserie de Paris.....36 C3	Crawford's.....50 C4		
Hua Hin Golf Centre.....14 C4	Buffalo Bill's Steak & Grill.....37 C3	Hua Hin Brewing Company.....51 C4		
Muay Thai.....15 C4	Chao Lay.....(see 46)	Hua Hin Meeting Point.....(see 50)		
Royal Hua Hin Golf Course.....16 A5				
<b>SLEEPING</b>		<b>TRANSPORT</b>		
All Nations Guest House.....17 C3		Air-con Buses to Bangkok.....52 B4		
		Main Government Bus Station.....53 A3		
		Non-Air-con Buses to Phetchaburi & Cha-am.....54 B3		
		Sawngthaew to Ao Takiap.....55 B4		

To Kaeng Krachan National Park (40km); Wildlife Friends of Thailand Rescue Centre (35km)

To Anantara Resort & Spa (4.5km); Phra Ratchaniwet Palace (15km)

To Phra Ratchawang Klai Kangwon (4km)

Tha Thiap Reua Pramong (Fishing Pier)

GULF OF THAILAND

Hat Hua Hin

To Muay Thai & Gym (50m); Jinning Beach (750m); Royal Beach (750m); Thiprur (750m); Baan Bayan (800m); Hua Hin Market Village (800m); Chiva-Som International Health Resort (3.5km); Ao Takiap (4.5km); Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park (40km); Prachuap Khiri Khan (87km)

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourist Information Office** (☎ 0 3251 1047; cnr Th Phetkasem & Th Damnoen Kasem; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm) Provides advice about Hua Hin and its surrounding area, and sells bus tickets. There's another branch under the clock tower on the cnr of Th Phetkasem & Th Naep Khehat (☎ 8.30am-4.30pm).

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

There are many travel agencies, most offering day trips to nearby places such as Khao Sam Roi Yot (p564) and Kaeng Krachan National Park (p553). Unless you're in a group, you may have to wait a day or two until enough people sign up for the trip of your choice so keep that in mind when you make a booking.

Alternatively, try forming a group with fellow tourists you've meet on the trip to ensure a prompt trip.

**Hua Hin Adventure Tour** (☎ 0 3253 0314; www.huahinadventuretour.com; Th Naep Khehat; ☎ 8.30am-7pm) Runs kayaking trips in the Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park (1900B). Offers more active excursions than other travel agencies.

**Ken Diamond** (☎ 0 3251 3863; 162/6 Th Naresdamri; ☎ 8.30am-7pm) Offers dozens of trips to nearby destinations, including waterfalls and national parks, and organises diving and snorkelling packages. Also rents cars.

**Tuk Tours** (☎ 0 3251 4281; www.tuktours.com; 33/5 Th Phunsuk; ☎ 8.30am-7pm) Can book activities and transport all around Thailand.

## Activities

A long-time favourite golf-holiday destination for Thais, Hua Hin has recently begun receiving attention from international golfers. **Hua Hin Golf Centre** (☎ 0 3253 1096; www.huahingolf.com; Th Naresdamri; ☎ noon-10pm) rents

golfing equipment and organises golfing tours.

The **Royal Hua Hin Golf Course** (☎ 0 3251 2475; green fee weekend/weekday 1500/1200B), near the train station, offers ocean and temple views on an elegant course.

Head to Bernie's (p563) and ask the British owner for the lowdown on the local golfing scene.

**Horseback riding** (per hr 450B) is on offer on the beach at the end of Th Damnoen Kasem. Prices are reasonable and the lessons are conducted in a safe fashion.

**Muay Thai matches** (☎ 0 3251 5269; 8/1 Th Phunsuk; Tue & Sat 350B, Wed & Fri 400B) take place every Tuesday and Saturday at 9pm. On Wednesday and Friday at 9pm the action moves to the Grand Plaza on Th Phetkasem. The **gym** (☎ 08 9754 7801; www.grandsportthuahin.com; admission 180B; muay thai lessons 300B; ☎ 9am-9pm) is a good place to burn off last night's Singha beers in authentic Thai style. See the gym's website for information on sporting activities in and around Hua Hin.

## GAME OF ELEPHANT POLO, ANYONE?

In early September for the past few years, the ancient Indian sport of elephant polo has been a highlight of the Hua Hin social scene. The game was revived in 1982 by Englishman Jim Edwards and Scotsman James Mann-Clark, who popularised it in Sri Lanka and Nepal. Christopher Stafford, general manager of Anantara Resort and a keen polo fan and player, brought the game to Thailand in 2001. From 2001 to 2005, the Anantara Resort & Spa was the setting for the King's Cup Elephant Polo Tournament. In September 2006 the tournament was moved to the Antantara Resort & Spa in Chiang Rai in Northern Thailand to widen the appeal of this unique sport, and at the time of writing it was envisaged that future tournaments would be held in Hua Hin or Chiang Rai on alternate years.

Elephant polo is much like horse polo in the sense of the rules, but the differences are striking. The game is obviously slower paced, but if you tire of watching the lumbering jumbos, you can focus on the spirited pooper-scoopers who flit around the field, harvesting the animals' grassy dumps. In a royal game rife with etiquette, the audience members usually aren't too keen to be regaled with flying elephant shit.

Each elephant bears a player, who hits the ball, and a mahout, who directs the animal using voice and body. The equipment of course is much different, too: the polo sticks are 2m to 2.5m in length, depending on the size of the elephant. The umpire takes it all in from the back of the largest pachyderm.

Because the sport is still so new, the players are usually trained horse-polo players, who still have much to learn and old habits to break. For example, flapping your legs on an elephant doesn't make it go any faster.

Elephants for the tournament are treated well, seem to enjoy the game, and are provided by the Thai Elephant Conservation Centre, in whose aid the event is held.

If you're in Hua Hin or Chiang Rai in early September, it's certainly worth checking out a unique spectacle. For more information visit www.anantara.com.

Aspiring chefs should visit **Buchabun Art & Crafts Collection** (☎ 08 1572 3805; www.siambeing.com/restaurant/cookingcourse; 22 Th Dechanuchit) where you can sign up for a half-day Thai cooking class. Classes cost 1000B and include a market visit and recipe book. They only run if several people are interested.

## Volunteering

If you love animals and aren't afraid of a bit of hard work, then a stint at the **Wildlife Friends of Thailand Rescue Centre** (☎ 0 3245 8135; rescue centre www.wfft.org, volunteering www.wildlifevolunteer.org) could be a good, fun and unique way to break up your travels. Based 35km northwest of Cha-am, the centre cares for an entire menagerie of animals that have been rescued from animal shows and exploitative owners. An average day could involve feeding sun bears, building enclosures for macaques and establishing island refuges for gibbons. Volunteering costs US\$140 per week, including all accommodation and meals. Volunteers are expected to stay for two to three months, although one-month stays are also considered. Travel agencies in Cha-am and Hua Hin can organise daytrips (1200B) to the centre or you can phone the centre directly, and staff can arrange return transport from Hua Hin (600B) or Cha-am (900B).

## Sleeping

All budgets are catered for in Hua Hin. Expect discounts of 20% to 40% off these rates in the low season. Prices may be hiked up on weekends and at holidays.

## BUDGET

**Euro-Hua Hin City Hotel YHA** (☎ 0 3251 3130; www.tyha.org; 15/15 Th Sasong; r incl breakfast 200-1000B; 🏠) Is a barbecue and beer garden mandatory for a good youth hostel? If so, this friendly spot delivers. All rooms have air-con, even the eight-person dormitories (200B). If you're a snorer we recommend a single room (1000B). You'll need to be a YHA member to get these room rates.

**All Nations Guest House** (☎ 0 3251 2747; www.gocities.com/allnationsguesthouse; 10-10/1 Th Dechanuchit; r 175-500B; 🏠) Feed the backpacker within at this friendly spot with loads of information, cheap 50B beers and homemade pies. The cheaper rooms have shared bathrooms, and there is a bar with televisions tuned to an all-day diet of sport.

**Pattana Guest House** (☎ 0 3251 3393; huahin.pattana@hotmail.com; 52 Th Naresdamri; r 250-450B) The rooms are small and there's no air-con, but the real highlight is the lusciously verdant bar and courtyard area in this restored fisherman's house. Book ahead as it's very popular.

**Ban Pak Hua Hin** (☎ 0 3251 1653; fax 0 3253 3649; Th Phunsuk, 5/1 Soi Bintaban; r 350-550B; 🏠) 'Ezy-kleen' tiles and modern styling make this an acceptable budget choice in a street that's a tad noisy after dark. The cheapest rooms only have fans.

## Pier Guesthouses

There are several pier guesthouses lining Th Naresdamri with simple rooms overlooking the sea. You're paying more for the location, and the shared areas can be noisy, but the first three places listed all have an echo of old Siam.

**Mod** (☎ 0 3251 2296; cnr Th Naresdamri & Th Naresdamri; r 200-450B; 🏠) Next to Sirima, this two-storey place has fading wooden charm. The upstairs rooms cost more, but are airy and have better views. The cheapest rooms just have fans.

**Bird Guest House** (☎ 0 3251 1630; birdguesthouse.huahin@hotmail.com; 31/2 Th Naresdamri; r 400-600B; 🏠) Bird is smaller, quieter and nicer than the other pier guesthouses, with a homely family atmosphere and a more-relaxed clientele. There's a secluded pier-end deck.

**Sirima** (☎ 0 3251 1060; Th Naresdamri; r 250-650B; 🏠) Sirima is decked out in pastel tones, with a long hallway leading to its only highlight: a common deck overlooking the water. The rooms are small and gloomy so hang out on the deck instead.

**Tong Mee House** (☎ 0 3253 0725; tongmeehuahin@hotmail.com; 1 Soi Raumpown; r 450-550B; 🏠) Hidden away in a quiet residential soi, this boutique hotel could be the best value in town. The rooms are small but very well-kept, and most have balconies to gaze down on the everyday goings-on of families on the lane below.

**Cha-ba Chalet** (☎ 0 3252 1181; www.chabachalet.com; 1/18 Th Sasong; r 700B; 🏠) The exterior's designer promise is not quite fulfilled with the functional rooms. Still, at only 700B and very close to the bustling night market, it's a good choice.

**Ban Somboon** (☎ 0 3251 1538; 13/4 Soi Damnoen Kasem; r 600-900B; 🏠) With family photos, a com-

part garden and a tiny Buddhist shrine, this place is like staying at your favourite Thai auntie's house.

In the same soi there are a couple of other good value guesthouses.

## MIDRANGE

Hua Hin's midrange places are small, sedate, modern hotels with air-con, fridges and cable TV. A handful of new openings are making everyone lift their game.

**Rajana Garden House** (☎ 0 3251 1729; www.rajana-house.com; 3/9 Th Sasong; r 900B; 🏠) The rooms may lack the designer touches of other midrangers in town, but it's a little cheaper and the air-con bus from Bangkok stops nearby. Ask for a room at the back to counter road noise from busy Th Sasong.

**K Place Guest House** (☎ 0 3251 1396; kplaceus@yahoo.com; 116 Th Naresdamri; r 800-1000B; 🏠) Right in the heart of things on Th Naresdamri, but tucked away behind a minimart. The spacious rooms are good value, but not all have natural light.

**All Seasons Guesthouse** (☎ 0 3251 5151; www.hotelthailand.co.uk; 77/18-19 Th Phetkasem, Soi 63; r 1000-1300B; 🏠) The rooms are big and bright (and the bathrooms even brighter) in this popular spot run by Richard the friendly Brit. He'll even rent you a DVD player so you can watch your pirated purchases from the nearby night market. There are only seven rooms so book ahead.

**Sand Inn** (☎ 0 3253 2060; www.ourweb.info/sandinn\_hotel; 38/1-4 Th Phunsuk; r 1000-1600B; 🏠) The contemporary lobby is adorned with Thai artefacts, and upstairs the classy rooms come with balconies and trendy minimalist design. Good bars await you outside on Th Phunsuk.

**Jed Pee Nong** (☎ 0 3251 2381; www.jedpeenonghotel-huahin.com; 17 Th Damnoen Kasem; r 1500-1800B; 🏠) This place is great for families. It has a small kid-friendly pool (they'll love the waterslides) and larger three-bed family rooms to squeeze the whole clan into. It's centrally located and is walking distance to the beach.

**Fresh Inn Hotel** (☎ 0 3251 1389; freshinnhuahin@yahoo.com; 132 Th Naresdamri; r 1500-1800B; 🏠) New rooms with sea-views and a pool have boosted this long-standing place in the comfort stakes. Downstairs is Lo Stivale Italian restaurant, and if you're travelling with the whole mob, book one of the family rooms (2600B).

On Th Chomsin, three excellent new guesthouses have opened, all a short stroll from some of Hua Hin's best restaurants.

**Ananthara** (☎ 0 3251 6650; ananthara@hotmail.com; 1/8 Th Chomsin; r 1200B; 🏠) It's a fine mix but this sparkling place delivers the perfect mix of old style Thai charm (courtesy of the antiques in reception) and subtle 21st-century style, (courtesy of the chic bathrooms and wi-fi internet access in the lobby).

**Chomsin** (☎ 0 3251 5348; www.chomsinhuahin.com; 130/4 Th Chomsin; r 1200B; 🏠) Another new opening, the Chomsin has super comfortable rooms with chic wooden floors, sparkling bathrooms, and cable TV channels to burn. It's close to the beach and night market.

**ChaLeLarn** (☎ 0 3253 2889; www.chalelarn.com; 11 Th Chomsin; r 1000-1200B; 🏠) Just up the road from Ananthara, ChaLeLarn has a beautiful lobby with wooden floors and 'lazy-days-in-the-tropics' cane furniture. Upstairs is a plant-filled rooftop, and the spacious rooms are classily decorated in a subtle collage of Asian and Western styles.

About 1km south of Hua Hin is a small traveller's enclave of midrange guesthouses. Prices (rooms from 600B to 900B July to September, from 1000B to 1350B October to June) and facilities (clean, comfortable, modern) are the same at almost every one. We recommend the following, all with pools, but the beach is just a short walk away.

**Jinning Beach** (☎ 0 3251 3950; www.jinningbeachguesthouse.com; r 1000B; 🏠) 🏠

**Royal Beach** (☎ 0 3253 2210; royalbeach@hotmail.com; r 1000B; 🏠) 🏠

**Thipurai** (☎ 0 3251 2210; www.thipurai.com; r 1350B; 🏠) 🏠

## TOP END

Hua Hin has an impressive selection of luxury hotels. You'll also find other top-end places just north or south of the town centre.

**Sofitel Central Hua Hin Resort** (Hua Hin Railway Hotel; ☎ 0 3251 2021, Bangkok office 0 2541 1125; www.acorhotels-asia.com; 1 Th Damnoen Kasem; r from 7000B; 🏠) 🏠) A magnificent, two-storey colonial-style place with three pools, expansive grounds along the beach, a spa and sporting facilities. Rooms, either in the original colonial wing or in the new modern wing, are luxurious with old-world touches. Discounts of up to 40% may be possible during the week and in the low season, or if you book through the office in Bangkok. Also worth visiting is

the lobby café, which doubles as a museum of the hotel's fascinating history.

**Anantara Resort & Spa** (☎ 0 3252 0800; www.anantara.com; r from 7350B; ♿ ♿) Located about 4km from town, and featuring exquisite Thai-style villas and suites on 14 landscaped acres, this place is romantic with a capital 'R', and pulls off the effortless trick of being low key and luxury at the same time. Gorgeous teak bungalows conceal pampering spa facilities, and the more active traveller can choose between tennis, golf and a whole raft of water sports.

**Baan Bayan** (☎ 0 3253 3544; www.baanbayan.com; 119 Th Phetkasem; r 6000-11,000B; ♿ ♿) Housed in a colonial beach house built in the early 20th century, Baan Bayan is perfect for travellers seeking a luxury experience without the overkill of a big resort. The airy, high-ceilinged rooms feature a delicious mix of Asian antiques and modern facilities, and the location is absolute beachfront, just a few minutes from central Hua Hin.

**Chiva-Som International Health Resort** (☎ 0 3253 6536; www.chivasom.com; 74/4 Th Phetkasem; 3 nights from US\$1530; ♿ ♿) Set on a private lake 3.5km south of town, Chiva-Som is the ultimate hideaway for over-worked, over-stressed (and just maybe over-paid) high-flying business folk and celebrities. The name means Haven of Life in Thai-Sanskrit, and the staff of 200 fuse Eastern and Western approaches to health with planned nutrition, step and aqua aerobics, and Thai, Swedish or underwater massage. Rates include three meals per day along with health and fitness consultations, massage and all other activities. One-week, 10-day and two-week packages are also available, including specialist detox and fitness programmes.

## Eating

One of Hua Hin's major attractions is the inexpensive Chatchai Market in the centre of town, where vendors gather nightly to cook fresh seafood for hordes of hungry Thais. It's also excellent for Thai breakfasts – there's very good *jóhk* and *khào tòm* (both rice soups). Fresh-fried *paa-thâwng-koh* (Chinese doughnuts in the Hua Hin-style – small and crispy, not oily) cost 3B for three. A few vendors also serve hot soy milk in bowls (5B) – break a few *paa-thâwng-koh* into the soy milk for an authentic local breakfast. Starting at 5pm there is a bustling night market along Th

Dechanuchit. Gradually the food stalls are being outnumbered by DVD stalls and T-shirt vendors, but it's still a buzzy scene. Moo Seafood on the corner of Th Dechanuchit and Th Sasong has busy alfresco tables. If you're after 100% authentic eats, check out the food stalls that set up around 5pm in the soi on the northern side of Th Chomsin.

The best seafood in Hua Hin is *plaa sam-lii* (cotton fish or kingfish), *plaa kràphong* (perch), *plaa mèuk* (squid), *hawy málaeng phûu* (mussels) and *puu* (crab). Fresh seafood is all over town, but the concentration of wharfside outdoor seafood restaurants is on Th Naresdamri, at the intersection with Th Dechanuchit. On the beach you can order a cold Singha and cracked crab without leaving your deckchair.

**Coffee Beach** (98 Th Naresdamri; snacks 40-80B; ♿) breakfast & lunch) Fruit shakes, fair-trade coffee and tasty sandwiches make this a great spot for an energising breakfast or a relaxing lunch.

**Hua Hin Market Village** (Th Phetkasem; dishes 70-120B; ♿) 10.30am-10pm) It's OK. Once in a while you're allowed to visit a big shopping centre with a good value and diverse foodcourt. But only once OK?

**World News Coffee** (☎ 0 3253 2475; 130/2 Th Naresdamri; dishes 70-130B; ♿) breakfast, lunch & dinner) This Starbucks-esque café serves Western breakfasts, including bagels, croissants and lots of different coffees. You can surf the web for 40B per hour and there are magazines and newspapers to complement your first cup of the day. Just like being at home really.

**Sunshine Bakery** (130/5 Th Naresdamri; breakfast 100-130B; ♿) breakfast, lunch & dinner) This German-Thai bakery whips up good value breakfasts in a variety of accents – German, English, American – you choose.

**Green Leaf** (Th Naresdamri; meals 100-190B; ♿) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Excellent coffee, fruit lassis (50B to 60B) and a good selection of veggie delights are the go at this New-Agey café looking out onto a small cove. There's an attached shop selling ethnic prints and world music CDs.

**Maha Raja** (☎ 0 3253 0347; 25 Th Naresdamri; dishes 90-200B; ♿) lunch & dinner) Indian cuisine usually travels well and this reasonably priced shrine to Bollywood bling is no exception. When you arrive you'll be offered a welcome drink, and when you leave you might be offered a great deal at the tailors next door.

**Moon Smile** (Th Phunsuk; meals 80-200B; ♿) lunch & dinner) On Th Phunsuk opposite Soi Binta-ban there is an enclave of well-priced Thai restaurants that will respect your request for 'Thai spicy, please'. Moon Smile is the best of them – try the grilled beef and eggplant salad. A few doors up, Platoo is another good choice.

**Pizza Corner** (☎ 0 3235 2084; cnr Th Naresdamri & Th Damnoen Kasem; pizza 120-200B; ♿) breakfast, lunch & dinner) People-watching, pizza eating or pasta twirling – this bustling corner spot is good for all three.

**Monsoon** (☎ 0 3253 1062; 62 Th Naresdamri; dishes 120-300B, afternoon tea 100B; ♿) 2pm to midnight) An excellent wine list and mood lighting makes this Vietnamese restaurant, located in a lovingly restored two-storey teak house, Hua Hin's most romantic spot. There's also Thai and European food, and your can surprise your loved one with a purchase from the attached homeware shop, or treat them to afternoon tea from 3pm.

**Buffalo Bill's Steak & Grill** (☎ 0 3253 0082; 8 Th Naresdamri; dishes 100-380B; ♿) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Heaven for carnivores is this expat-friendly spot with Aussie and Kiwi steaks, and huge Brit-style fry-ups for brekkie. The burgers are only so-so – you're better off to go the whole hog (or cow) and have a steak. Most nights Bill himself will provide you with a recommendation for wine. Laptop toters can feast on its wi-fi network.

**Chao Lay** (☎ 0 3251 3436; 15 Th Naresdamri; dishes 60-400B; ♿) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Downstairs there's enough different marine species in tanks to keep *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau* in syndication for decades. Upstairs this very popular teak-wood restaurant has two levels which are often packed full of fans of excellent seafood.

**Brasserie de Paris** (☎ 0 3253 0637; 3 Th Naresdamri; dishes 350-500B) France comes to town with a real French chef cooking up authentic French flavours in a light and airy space with good views of *la mer* upstairs. Local crab is the standout dish. Reassuringly expensive.

## Drinking

There are several *faràng* bars under European management in the Hua Hin Bazaar. Some offer the familiar Thai-hostess atmosphere, but a few bill themselves as 'sports bars' and have wide-screen TVs. Soi Binta-ban is lined with girlie bars doing their best to attract cli-

ente. It's not a dangerous place per se, just a glimpse into the seedier side of tourism. Nearby Th Phunsuk is a bit more salubrious with a couple of classier drinking holes.

**Hua Hin Brewing Company** (☎ 0 3251 2888; 33 Th Naresdamri; beer 180B; ♿) open 5pm) Operated by the Hilton, the HHBC serves three micro-brews in a faux fishing village atmosphere. Try the Sabai Sabai Wheat Beer with a slice of lime or the hoppy Dancing Monkey Lager. Most nights there's a live band, followed by a relatively clued-up DJ. Inside is as dark as the belly of Jonah's whale, so park yourself outside on the spacious decks and watch the passing parade on Th Naresdamri.

**Crawford's** (☎ 0 3251 1517; 5 Th Phunsuk; ♿) 8.30am-midnight) Pretty authentic for so far from the Blarney Stone, Crawford's offers good *craic* amid two levels of moody wood, with lots of hideaway nooks and crannies. Live sport is on offer on several tellies, and there's a robust menu including fish and chips. Draught beers are cheaper Monday to Thursday. *Slainte!*

**Hua Hin Meeting Point** (☎ 0 3253 1132; 3 Th Phunsuk; ♿) 8.30am-midnight) This versatile place is good for a quick bite to eat any time of the day, and is a popular...er...meeting point for a few drinks. Inside the décor is slick and modern, and outside is a rustic garden bar. Somehow it all hangs together nicely.

**Bernie's** (Hua Hin Bazaar, Th Damnoen Kasem) The owner is a big golf nut with loads of info on swinging a club in the area. Wall-to-wall TVs show wall-to-wall sport – especially golf.

## Getting There & Away

There are air-con buses to/from Bangkok's Southern bus station (171B, 3½ hours, every half hour). These leave Hua Hin 70m north of Rajana Garden House on Th Sasong (outside the Siripetchkasem Hotel).

The main government bus station, on Th Liap Thang Rot Fai, has air-con buses to many destinations throughout the country. Be sure to ignore the touts here and go to the window for assistance and ticket purchase. There is at least one air-con bus per day to each destination: Phetchaburi (80B, 1½ hours), Cha-am (40B, 30 minutes), Prachuap Khiri Khan (80B, 1½ hours), Chumphon (160B, four hours), Phuket (378B, eight hours), Krabi (389B, eight hours), Koh Samui (320B, nine hours) and Songkhla (457B, 11 hours). Frequent non-air-con buses to Phetchaburi (50B, 1½ hours)



and Cha-am (25B, 30 minutes) leave from near the intersection of Th Chomsin and Th Phetkasem.

There are frequent trains running to/from Bangkok's Hualamphong train station (2nd class 292B to 382B, 3rd class 234B to 294B, four hours) and other stations on the southern railway line.

**SGA** (Hua Hin office ☎ 0 3252 2300, Bangkok Office 0 2134 3233; www.sga.aero) flies a 12-seat shuttle three times a day (one way 3100B, 40 minutes, 11.45am, 3pm and 6.30pm) from Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi airport to Hua Hin.

### Getting Around

Local buses (10B) and *sāwngthāew* (12B) to Ao Takiap leave from the corner of Th Sasong and Th Dechanuchit.

Even though *sāamlāw* fares in Hua Hin have been set by the municipal authorities, haggling is usually required. Some sample fares: from the train station to the beach 30B; from the air-con bus terminal to Th Naresdamri 40B to 50B (depending on size of your bags). Most drivers will push for at least twice this much.

Motorcycles (250B to 500B per day) and bicycles (100B per day) can be rented from a couple of places on Th Damnoen Kasem near the Jed Pee Nong Hotel. Car and 4WD drive rental can be arranged at most travel agencies including Ken Diamond (p558). Expect to pay around 1500B per day for a Suzuki 4WD and around 2000B per day for a small sedan.

### KHAO SAM ROI YOT NATIONAL PARK

อุทยานแห่งชาติเขาสามหรือยอด

Towering limestone cliffs, caves and beaches produce a dramatic landscape at this 98-sq-km **park** (☎ 0 3261 9078; adult/child 400/200B), which means Three Hundred Mountain Peaks in English. The park's lagoons and coastal marshlands are excellent for bird-watching, and with a little exercise you'll be rewarded with magnificent views of the gulf coastline.

Bring your mosquito repellent, especially during the rainy season (June to November). Rama IV and a large entourage of Thai and European guests came here on 18 August 1868 to see a total solar eclipse (apparently predicted by the monarch himself) and to enjoy a feast prepared by a French chef. Two months later the king died from malaria, contracted

from mosquito bites inflicted here. Today the risk of malaria in the park is low, but the mosquitoes can be pesky.

### Orientation & Information

There are three park headquarter locations: Hat Laem Sala, Ban Rong Jai and Ban Khao Daeng; and three visitors centres at Hat Laem Sala, Hat Sam Phraya and Ban Khao Daeng. A nature studies centre lies at the end of a 1km road leading north from Ban Rong Jai. There are a couple of checkpoints – on the road south from Pranburi and on the road east of Hwy 4. You'll need to pay admission or show proof that you already have.

### Sights & Activities

#### BEACHES

Both of the park's beaches have plenty of facilities – from food stalls to picnic areas and bathrooms.

**Hat Laem Sala** is a sandy beach flanked on three sides by dry limestone hills and casuarinas. It has a small visitors centre, restaurant, bungalows and camp sites. Boats, taking up to 10 people, can be hired from Bang Pu to the beach (250B return, 15 minutes). The beach is about a 20-minute hike from Bang Pu, via a steep trail.

**Hat Sam Phraya**, 5km south of Hat Laem Sala, is a 1km-long beach with a restaurant and bathrooms.

#### CAVES

Khao Sam Roi Yot has three caves, all well worth visiting. **Tham Phraya Nakhon** is the most popular and can be reached by boat (250B return) or on foot. By foot, hike along a steep and rocky trail from Hat Laem Sala for 430m. Once there you'll find two large caverns with sinkholes allowing light in. In one cave is a royal *sāalaa* (meeting hall) built for Rama V, who would stop here when travelling between Bangkok and Nakhon Si Thammarat.

**Tham Kaew**, 2km from the Bang Pu turn-off, features a series of chambers connected by narrow passageways; you enter the first cavern by means of a ladder. Stalactites and limestone formations glittering with calcite crystals (hence the cave's name, 'Jewel Cave') are plentiful. Lamps can be rented, but Tham Kaew is best visited with a park guide because of the dangerous footing.

**Tham Sai** is in a hill near Ban Khung Tanot, 2.5km from the main road between Laem Sala

and Sam Phraya beaches. Villagers rent out lamps (40B) at a shelter near the cave mouth. A 280m trail leads up the hillside to the cave, which features a large single cavern. Be careful of steep drop-offs in the cave.

#### HIKING

For spectacular views of limestone cliffs against a jagged coastline, take the 30-minute step trail from the park headquarters at Ban Khao Daeng to the top of **Khao Daeng**. At sunset you might see a serow (Asian goat-antelope). If you have more time and energy, climb the 605m to the top of **Khao Krachom** for even better views.

#### KAYAKING

In the fishing village of Ban Khao Daeng, **Horizon Adventure** (☎ 08 1820 9091) rents out kayaks for 400B per day, allowing you to explore the wildlife-filled mangroves of the area at your leisure.

#### WILDLIFE-WATCHING

Wildlife includes barking deer, crab-eating macaques, slow lorises, Malayan pangolins, fishing cats, palm civets, otters, serows, Javan mongooses, monitor lizards and dusky langurs. Possibly due to the rise in tourism, it can be difficult to actually spot any wild animals.

Because the park is at the intersection of the East Asian and Australian flyways, as many as 300 migratory and resident bird species have been recorded here, including yellow bitterns, cinnamon bitterns, purple swamphens, water rails, ruddy-breasted crakes, bronze-winged jacanas, grey herons, painted storks, whistling ducks, spotted eagles and black-headed ibises. The park contains Thailand's largest freshwater marsh (along with mangroves and mudflats), and is one of only three places in the country where the purple heron breeds.

Waterfowl are most commonly seen in the cool season. Encroachment by shrimp farmers in the vicinity has sadly destroyed substantial portions of mangroves and other wetlands, thus depriving the birds of an important habitat. November to March are the best waterfowl-watching months. The birds come from as far as Siberia, China and northern Europe to winter here. You can hire a boat in the village of Khao Daeng for a cruise (400B, 45 minutes) along the canal

in the morning or afternoon to spot them. Before heading out, chat with your prospective guide to see how well they speak English. Better guides will know the English names of common waterfowl and point them out to you.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Forestry Department** (☎ Bangkok 0 2562 0760; campsites per person 30B, bungalow 5-6 people 1200-1400B, 6-9 people 1600-2200B) The forestry department hires out bungalows at Hat Laem Sala and at the visitors centre near the Khao Daeng viewpoint. Two-person tents are available for rent at these spots for 150B per night. You can pitch your own tent at camp sites near the Khao Daeng Viewpoint, Hat Laem Sala or Hat Sam Phraya. There are basic restaurants at all these locations.

There are also a few private resort-style accommodation options.

**Dolphin Bay Resort** (☎ 0 3255 9333; www.dolphinbayresort.com; 227 Mu 4, Phu Noi; r & bungalows from 1290B; ♿ ♿) Choose between hotel-style rooms or well-appointed bungalows at this family-friendly place, with an excellent restaurant that understands the true meaning of spicy. A wide range of trips is on offer to nearby islands and the national park. From February to May pink dolphins are sometimes seen off the beach.

**Long Beach Inn** (☎ 0 3255 9068; www.longbeach-thailand.com; 223/4 Mu 4, Phu Noi; r 1800B; ♿ ♿) A short walk from the eponymous Long Beach, but comfortable with air-con rooms in new villas around a pretty pool.

**Brassiere Beach** (☎ 08 1734 4343; www.brassierebeach.com; 210 Mu 5, Cosy Beach; villas 4200-8200B; ♿) Nine stunning Mexican-style villas have (white)washed ashore at a private cove, and the funky owners have equipped them with retro furniture, CD players and playful names like La Perla, Victoria's and Secret. Brassiere Beach's uniqueness deserves your support.

### Getting There & Away

The park is about 40km south of Hua Hin, and best visited by car. From Hua Hin, take Hwy 4 (Th Phetkasem) to Pranburi. In Pranburi, turn left at the main intersection, drive 2km, stay right at the fork in the road, and go another 2km. At the police substation, turn right. From there, it's 19km to the park's entrance and then another 4km to the headquarters

at Hat Laem Sala. If you're trying to reach the park from the south, there's an entrance off Hwy 4 – turn right at highway marker 286.5, where there's a sign for the park, then drive another 13km to the headquarters at Ban Khao Daeng.

If you don't have your own wheels, catch a bus or train to Pranburi and then a *sǎwngthǎew* (50B, every half hour between 8am and 4pm) to Bang Pu, the small village inside the park. From Bang Pu you can walk to Hat Laem Sala.

You can also hire a *sǎwngthǎew* (400B) or a motorcycle taxi (250B) from Pranburi all the way to the park. Be sure to mention you want to go to the *útháyaan hàeng cháat* (national park) rather than Ban Khao Sam Roi Yot. Transport can also be arranged at travel agencies in Hua Hin (p558), most of which also run tours. Hua Hin Adventure Tour has the best selection of more intrepid activities.

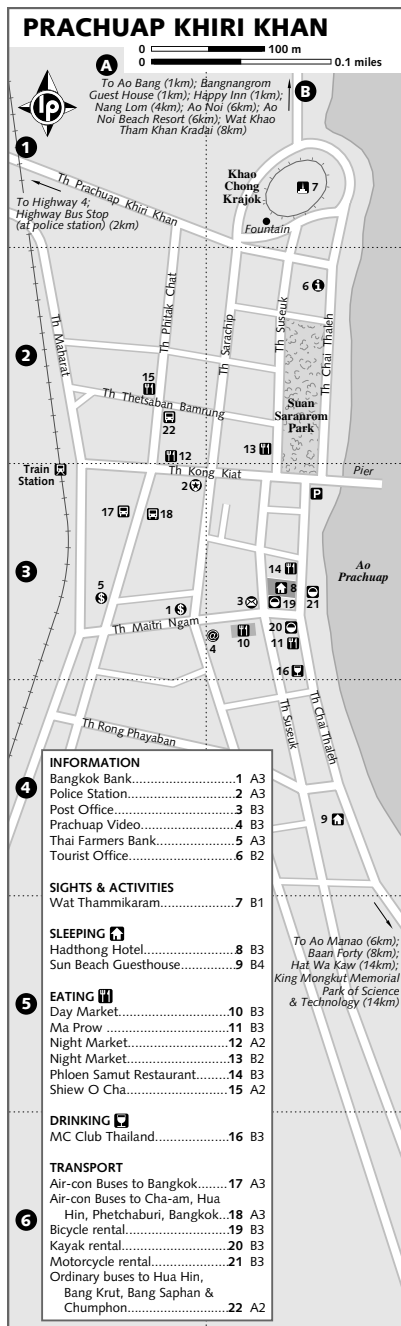
## PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN

ประจวบคีรีขันธ์  
pop 27,700

Framed by limestone cliffs and islands, and studded with colourful fishing boats, the sleepy seaside town of Prachuap Khiri Khan is a charming place to get off the *faràng* trail for a while. The town is actually the provincial capital, but the ambience is nicely small-town relaxed. Attractions, with a small 'a', include climbing to a hill-top wat while being shadowed by a troop of monkeys, taking a leisurely motorbike ride to the excellent beaches north and south of town, or just enjoying some of Thailand's freshest (and cheapest) seafood.

Development is coming slowly to Prachuap, and a few recent guesthouse openings have improved the level of accommodation. The local council has even splashed out on a ritzy new *corniche* (beachfront walkway). Blur your eyes just a bit (well, maybe a bit more), and you could almost be in the south of France.

Prachuap, specifically Ao Manao, was one of seven points on the gulf coast where Japanese troops landed on 8 December 1941 during their invasion of Thailand. Several street names around town commemorate the ensuing skirmish: Phithak Chat (Defend Country), Salachip (Sacrifice Life) and Suseuk (Fight Battle).



## Information

**Bangkok Bank** (cnr Th Maitri Ngam & Th Sarachip)

**Police station** (Th Kong Kiat) Just west of Th Sarachip.

**Post office** (cnr Th Maitri Ngam & Suseuk) By the telephone office.

**Prachuap Video** (Th Sarachip; per hr 30B;

9am-9pm) For internet access; near Th Maitri Ngam.

**Thai Farmers Bank** (Th Phitak Chat) Just north of Th Maitri Ngam.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0 3261 1491; Th Chai Thaleh;

8.30am-4.30pm) At the northern end of town. The staff speak English.

## Sights & Activities

Visible from almost anywhere in Prachuap Khiri Khan is **Khao Chong Krajok** (Mirror Tunnel Mountain – named after the hole in the mountain that appears to reflect the sky). At the top of a long flight of stairs up the small mountain is **Wat Thammikaram**, established by Rama VI. From here, there are perfect views of the town and the bay – even the border with Myanmar, just 11km away. Along the way you'll be entertained by hordes of monkeys. At the base of the mountain, the more fastidious monkeys bathe in a small pool.

Continue 4km north along the beach road and you'll come to a small village on **Ao Bang Nang Lom**, where wooden fishing vessels are still made using traditional Thai methods. The industrious folk here also catch a fish called *plaa ching chang*, which they dry and store for Sri Lankan traders. A couple of kilometres north of Ao Bang Nang Lom is another bay, **Ao Noi**, with a small fishing village and the comfortable Ao Noi Beach Resort (right).

Six kilometres south of the city is island-dotted **Ao Manao**, a scenic bay ringed by a clean white-sand beach. A Thai air-force base guards access to the bay and every week the beach is given a military-grade clean up. There are several *sáalaa* (rest stops) here, along with a hotel and restaurant. You can rent chairs, umbrellas and inner tubes, and buy food and drink, while Thailand's Top Guns relax on a golf course and driving range. The beach itself is 2km to 3km past the base entrance, where you may need to show your passport. The beach closes at 8pm.

Nine kilometres south of Ao Manao, **Hat Wa Kaw** is a pleasant, casuarina-lined beach that's even quieter and cleaner than Ao Manao. Here you'll find the **King Mongkut Memorial Park of**

**Science & Technology** (☎ 0 3266 1098; admission free; 8.30am-4.30pm) which commemorates the 1868 solar eclipse that the king and his 15-year-old son Prince Chulalongkorn came south to witness. Unfortunately not much is translated into English, but there is a good aquarium.

## Sleeping

Accommodation hasn't been Prachuap's biggest asset, but a few new places are lifting standards. Head north and south for a few interesting places to stay on quieter beaches.

**Sun Beach Guesthouse** (☎ 0 3260 4770; www.sun-beach-guesthouse.com; 160 Th Chai Thaleh; r 1000B; ☎) The neo-classical styling is a bit OTT, but the rooms at this new place are discreet and trimmed in blue to match the pool and Jacuzzi out front. There's a real family atmosphere brought to life by the energetic kids of the Thai-German owners.

**Hadthong Hotel** (☎ 0 3260 1050; www.hadthong.com; 21 Th Suseuk; r 675-1060B; ☎) The beachfront five-storey Hadthong is PKK's only 'real' hotel. The rooms are looking a bit tired, but friendly staff and good value 100B buffet breakfasts easily compensate. It's worth shelling out a bit more for a room facing the sea.

One kilometre north of town (just across the bridge) is a quiet beach which gets lots of Thai visitors at the weekend.

**Happy Inn** (☎ 0 3260 2082; 149-151 Th Suansong; bungalows 500B) There's no English spoken at this spot, and the slightly charmless bungalows are down a driveway, but the beach is just over the road, and shy smiles come as standard.

**Bangnangrom Guest House** (☎ 0 3260 4841; 137 Th Suansong; r 700-1000B; ☎) The owner was cleaning his car when we dropped by, and it looked like he'd given the spotless rooms a makeover as well. All rooms have air-con and cable TV, and there's a good-value triple room.

## AO NOI BEACH

Heading 5km north from town, you reach Ao Noi Beach.

**Ao Noi Beach Resort** (☎ 0 3260 1350; 206 Tambon Ao Noi; r 650-800B; ☎) Set in pleasant, leafy grounds next to a secluded beach, this laid-back place is miles away from anything or anywhere touristy. Fan rooms face the sea, but unfortunately air-con rooms face a wall.

**AO KHLONG WAN**

To the south of town is Ao Khlong Wan.

**Baan Forty** (☎ 0 3266 1437; 555 Th Prachuap-Khlong Wan; bungalows 1000-1200B; 🍴 🚽) It's a simple recipe. Spend your nights in simple concrete bungalows on a private beach, and spend your days relaxing on the sand or in the shady garden waiting for another huge meal. With not much else to do, bring loads of books. Weekends are busy with holidaying Thais.

**Eating & Drinking**

Because of its reputation for fine seafood, Prachuap Khiri Khan has many restaurants. A local speciality is *plaa samlii daet diaw* – whole cottonfish that's sliced lengthways and left to dry in the sun for half a day. It's then fried quickly and served with mango salad. It may sound awful, but the taste is sublime. An all-day market lines the street on Th Maitri Ngam, starting early in the morning. There are two excellent night markets; the more atmospheric is opposite the pier, but both are good with lots of different stalls.

**Shiew O Cha** (☎ 0 3260 1732; cnr Ths Phitak Chat & Thetsaban Bamrung; meals 50-90B; 🍴 🚽) breakfast, lunch & dinner) A friendly Saint Bernard holds fort at this cavernous Chinese-Thai restaurant that occasionally has live music and always has good seafood. Look for the big cream-and-green building on the corner.

**Phloen Samut Restaurant** (☎ 0 3261 1115; 44 Th Chai Thaleh; dishes 50-120B; 🍴 🚽) breakfast, lunch & dinner) With sea views and loads of seafood, this is another good option. The service would be better if the staff stopped watching Thai soap operas on the telly.

**Ma Prow** (☎ 08 5293 7278; 48 Th Chai Thaleh; dishes 80-160B; 🍴 🚽) lunch & dinner) The Thai flavours are spicily authentic at this airy wooden pavilion across from the beach. The music is an intriguing mix of Western and Thai – kind of like the clientele you'll see here on a busy weekend.

**MC Club Thailand** (Th Chai Thaleh; 🍴 🚽) noon-late) Decorated with motorcycle memorabilia, this bar is a good place to kick start a big night in PKK. During the high season, the club sets up across the road beside the beach.

**Getting There & Away**

There are frequent air-con buses to/from Bangkok (230B, five hours), Hua Hin (80B, 1½ hours), Cha-am (90B, 2½ hours) and Phetchaburi (105B, three hours) leaving from Th

Phitak Chat near the centre. For southern destinations such as Phuket or Krabi, hike 2km northwest out to the police station on the highway to catch passing buses (motorcycle taxis will take you for 40B). Ordinary buses to Hua Hin (65B), Bang Krut (55B), Bang Saphan (65B) and Chumphon (160B, 3½ hours) leave from the southeast corner of Ths Thetsaban Bamrung and Phitak Chat.

There are frequent train services to/from Bangkok (2nd class 220B to 357B, 3rd class 128B, six hours). Trains also run to Ban Krut (one hour) and Bang Saphan Yai (1½ hours).

**Getting Around**

Prachuap is small enough to get around on foot, but you can hop on a motorcycle taxi around town for 30B. Other destinations include Ao Noi (50B) and Ao Manao (40B). At Ao Manao motorcycles aren't permitted past the gate unless both driver and passenger are wearing helmets.

You can rent motorbikes in front of the Hadthong Hotel for 200B per day. The roads in the area are very good and it's a great way to see the surrounding beaches.

Kayaks are available to rent at a pet supplies store beside the Hadthong Hotel. A two-person kayak is 100B per hour, and a trip to the nearby islands should take around three hours. Opposite the post office, bicycles can be rented for 100B per day.

**AROUND PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN****Wat Khao Tham Khan Kradai**

วัดเขาถ้ำกานกระได

About 8km north of town, following the road beyond Ao Noi, is this small cave wat at one end of **Ao Khan Kradai** (also known as Ao Khan Bandai) – a long, beautiful bay. A trail at the base of the limestone hill leads up and around the side to a small cavern and then to a larger one that contains a reclining Buddha. If you have a torch you can proceed to a larger second chamber also containing Buddha images. From this trail you get a good view of Ao Khan Kradai. The beach here is suitable for swimming and is usually deserted. A motorcycle ride here costs 50B.

**Dan Singkhon**

ด่านสิงขร

Just south of Prachuap Khiri Khan is a road leading west to Dan Singkhon, on the My-

anmar border. This is the narrowest point in Thailand between the Gulf of Thailand and Myanmar – only 12km across. The border is open to Thai-Burmese citizens only.

**HAT BAN KRUT & BANG SAPHAN YAI**

หาดบ้านกรูด/บางสะพานใหญ่

These two low-key destinations lie about 80km and 100km south of Prachuap Khiri Khan, respectively, and are a popular weekend and holiday destination for Thai tourists. During the week you'll have the beaches largely to yourself and a few long-tail boats.

The main beach of **Hat Ban Krut** is right beside a road, making the 10km beach handy to cars and services, but detracting from a 100% peaceful beach experience. North of the headland topped by the Disneyland-like spires of **Wat Tan Sai**, you'll find **Hat Sai Kaew**, which is quieter but slightly out of the way, making it a better beach experience.

**Bang Saphan Yai**, 20km south of the town, is nothing special, but its coastline is now experiencing development. Islands off the coast to the south, including **Ko Thalu** and **Ko Sing**, offer good **snorkelling** and **diving** from the end of January to mid-May. Coral Hotel and Suan Luang Resort in Bang Saphan Yai can arrange half-day diving excursions to these islands.

When booking transport, don't confuse Bang Saphan Yai with Bang Saphan Noi, which is 15km further south.

**Sleeping****HAT BAN KRUT**

You'll struggle to find true budget options here, but if you visit on a weekday you should secure a discount of 20% to 30%. Bicycles (100B per day) and motorcycles (300B per day) can be rented to see the surrounding area, and most accommodation places arrange snorkelling trips (350B to 450B) to nearby islands.

The following are on the beach road south of the wat-topped headland.

**Ban Rim Haad Resort** (☎ 0 3269 5205; www.banrimhaad.com; bungalows 600-1500B; 🍴 🚽) Near a few bars and restaurants, this friendly family-run accommodation has a veritable village of different sized bungalows. Most travellers will be happy with the standard bungalows, but there are 10-person bungalows (2500B to 3000B) if you're a member of a volleyball team or have a large family.

**Ban Klang Aow Beach Resort** (☎ 0 3269 5086; www.baanklangaowresort.com; bungalows incl breakfast 2000-3500B; 🍴 🚽) Further south on the same beach, the one- and two-bedroom bungalows have large verandas, and are hidden in leafy glades. Bicycles, kayaks and two swimming pools will get you hungry for your next meal at the resort's restaurant.

The following places are on **Hat Sai Kaew**, north of the headland. Count on running up a substantial tab on motorcycle taxis if you want to frequent the wider range of restaurants on the main beach. An alternative is to rent your own two wheels.

**Ban Kruit Youth Hostel** (☎ 0 3269 5525; www.thailandbeach.com; dm 300-400B, bungalows 600-2600B; 🍴 🚽) More like a resort than a hostel, this place has bungalows in a wide range of sizes. The cheapest are wooden huts with shared bathroom, and the ritzy beachfront ones have TV, air-con and hot water. Cheaper dorm rooms are available in the main building. There's lots of greenery beside the long empty beach, and a postage stamp-sized tiny pool. Breakfast is included and YHA cardholders get a discount.

**Bayview Beach Resort** (☎ 0 3269 5566; www.bayviewbeachresort.com; bungalows 1300-4000B; 🍴 🚽) Sharing the same beach as the youth hostel, Bayview has fine bungalows amid shady grounds with a beachside pool. The spick-and-span bungalows range from small wooden numbers to large, concrete ones with huge bay windows.

**BANG SAPHAN YAI**

There is accommodation on the beaches north and south of town. To the north are mainly midrange places, while to the south there is one flash resort, and a few budget-priced bungalows. A good source of local information is www.bangsaphanguide.com; it's worth checking out before your trip.

The following are north of the town.

**Van Veena Hotel** (☎ 0 3269 1251; www.vanveena.com; r 400-800B; 🍴 🚽) The rooms are unexciting, but undeniably spacious, and downstairs there is a well-stocked minimart with all the essentials for beach life. Across the road is a beachfront restaurant.

**Sailom Resort** (☎ 0 3269 1003; www.sailomresortbangsaphan.com; r 1900B; 🍴 🚽) Manicured grounds, a huge swimming pool, Asian chic décor – this new spot has certainly shaken things up in sleepy Bang Saphan.

The following are about 5km south of town. There is more budget accommodation here than on the northern beach, or at Hat Ban Krut.

**Lola Bungalows** (☎ 0 3269 1963; bungalows 300B) Beachfront location – check. Lazydays hammocks – check. Corrugated iron roof...mmm. OK, they don't get things 100% right at this chilled spot near Coral Hotel, but after a few days' beachside, you won't care what the roof is made of.

**Suan Luang Resort** (☎ 0 3269 1663; www.suanluang.com; bungalows 400-600B; 🏠) You're 700m from the beach here, but the friendly welcome from the young Thai-French owners more than makes up for that. Located in a coconut grove, simple wooden bungalows with fans blend with air-con concrete ones with TV and hot water. The restaurant's menu speaks Thai and French, and there are daytrips to waterfalls and islands to give you something to talk about over dinner.

**Coral Hotel** (☎ 0 3269 1667; www.coral-hotel.com; 171 Mu 9; r 1525B, bungalows 2730-3525B; 🏠 🚿) Set amid a coconut grove, this upmarket French-managed hotel is right on the beach. There's a huge pool, a very good restaurant and all rooms have TV, fridge and hot water. Fill your days with water-sports, or exploring the area on an organised tour. Four-person bungalows are also available for families.

## Getting There & Around

Buses depart at least once daily from Bangkok's Southern bus terminal to Ban Krut (255B, five hours) and Bang Saphan Yai (290B, six hours). Get a direct bus, otherwise you may be left on Hwy 4 (Th Phetkasem) and will need to get a motorbike taxi to the beaches (60B). Frequent buses run from Prachuap Khiri Khan to Ban Krut (55B) and Bang Saphan Yai (65B), and a local bus (15B) trundles from Ban Krut to Bang Saphan Yai.

Ban Krut and Bang Saphan Yai are both on Thailand's southern railway line and there are at least daily departures to/from Chumphon, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Hua Hin and Bangkok. Ban Krut's train station is 4km from the beach and in Bang Saphan Yai you'll be dropped off in town. In both places you'll need to hire a motorcycle taxi (around 60B) to get to the beach.

Getting around can be a problem, as there's not much public transport between

the beaches. Once you get to the beaches, most resorts rent out motorcycles for around 300B per day.

# CHUMPHON PROVINCE

## CHUMPHON

ชุมพอง  
pop 81,000

Chumphon features on many travellers' itinerary as they flit in and out of the busy transport hub en route to Ko Tao, or head west for Ranong and Phuket. Around 500km south of Bangkok, Chumphon is where Southern Thailand begins and you'll begin to see mosques and start to hear different dialects.

While there's not a lot in town to keep you amused, the surrounding beaches are good places to step off the treadmill of travel for a few days. **Hat Tha Wua Laen** (12km north of town) is renowned for windsurfing and kiteboarding, and has a developing travellers' scene with some good bungalows and beachside bars. Pretty **Hat Sairi** (22km east of town) is a more traditional Thai beach resort, and the best spot to arrange day trips to off-shore islands.

When you're ready to move on again, Chumphon's array of enterprising travel agencies can help you book transport to Ko Tao, as well as bus and train connections further south to Krabi and Surat Thani.

## Information

There are banks along Th Sala Daeng with exchange facilities and ATMs.

**Communications Authority of Thailand office** (CAT; Th Poramin Mankha) About 1km east of the post office; has international call facilities.

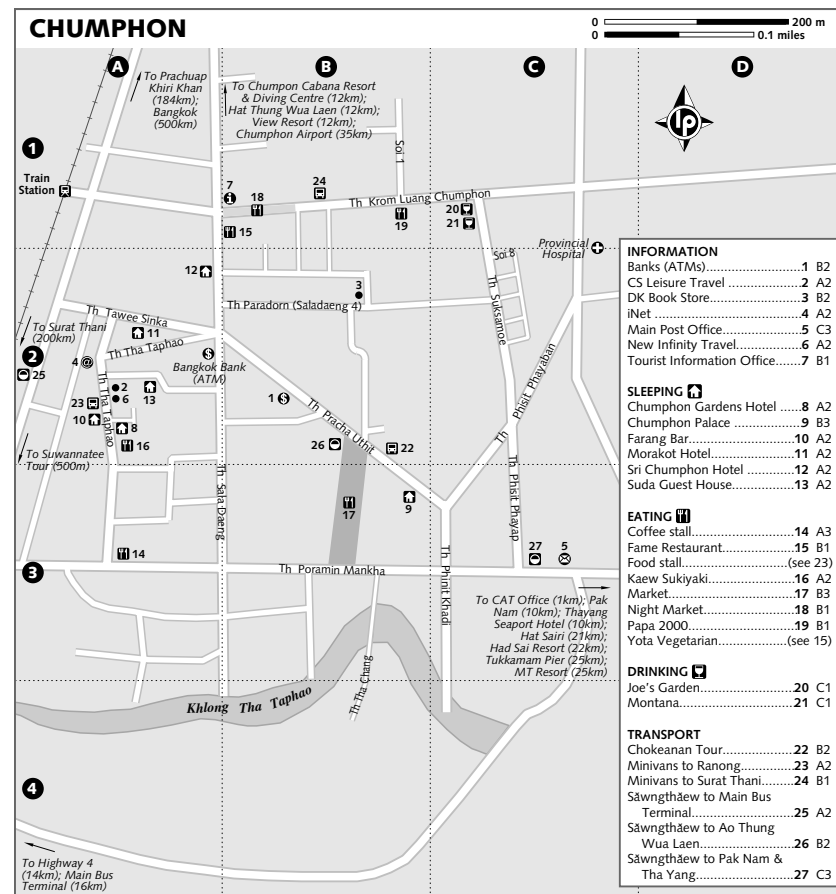
**CS Leisure Travel** (☎ 7750 3001; www.geocities.com/cs\_leisure; 68/10 Th Tha Taphao; 🕒 8am-10pm) Food and drink, travel information and internet. Its website is an excellent resource for information on Chumphon and the surrounding area.

**DK Book Store** (☎ 0 7750 3876; Soi Sala Daeng; 🕒 8am-9pm) Opposite the Janson Chumphon Hotel. Carries a few titles in English.

**iNet** (Th Tha Taphao; 30B per hr; 🕒 9am-9pm) Internet access near most guesthouses.

**Main post office** (Th Poramin Mankha) In the south-eastern part of town.

**New Infinity Travel** (☎ 0 7750 1937; new\_infinity@hotmail.com; 68/2 Th Tha Taphao;



🕒 8am-10pm) Has a good selection of secondhand paperback.

**Tourist Information Office** (cnr Th Sala Daeng & Th Krom Luang Chumphon; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) Speaks English and supplies good information, especially about transport to/from Chumphon.

## Festivals & Events

From mid-March to the end of April the **Chumphon Marine Festival** features folk-art exhibits, a windsurfing competition at Hat Thung Wua Laen and a marathon. In October, the five-day **Lang Suan Buddha Image Parade & Boat Race Festival** includes a procession of temple boats and a boat race on Mae Nam Lang Suan (Lang Suan River), about 60km south of Chumphon.

## Sleeping

Most people overnighing in Chumphon are backpackers on the way to Ko Tao, so accommodation is budget priced. Instead of jumping on the next boat to Ko Tao or the overnight train back to Bangkok, consider breaking your journey on the beaches at Hat Thung Wua Laen or Hat Sairi.

## BUDGET

**Farang Bar** (☎ 0 7750 1003; fangbar@yahoo.com; 69/36 Th Tha Taphao; r 150-300B) Everything for the independent traveller is under one funky roof, including car and motorbike rental, a pool table and cheap beer. Rooms are a bit ramshackle but cheap and clean. Have a shower before catching the boat for 20B.

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## THE THAI CANAL

Egypt has the Suez Canal, the Panama Canal joins the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and a waterway linking the Gulf of Thailand with the Andaman Sea has been discussed for more than 350 years.

At its narrowest point just south of Chumphon, the Isthmus of Kra (the land bridge joining mainland Asia and the Malay Peninsula) is only 44km wide. In 1677 and 1793, Thai kings championed the idea, but the technology of the times was not up to scratch. When Burma (now Myanmar) became a British colony in 1863, the idea was floated again and Ferdinand de Lesseps, the successful engineer behind the Suez Canal visited the area in 1882. By 1897, Singapore was an important regional trading hub, and Thailand and Britain agreed to shelve any canal plans.

During the 20th century the idea surfaced again, but the preferred site was moved south to join Nakhon Si Thammarat and Trang. In 1985 a Japanese design planned to use more than 20 nuclear devices to complete the excavation work, and most recently China has planned a US\$25 billion Thai canal to secure a regional strategic and commercial advantage. The United States is apparently watching very closely.

**Chumphon Palace** (☎ 0 7757 1715-22; 328/15 Th Pracha Uthit; r 450B; 🏠) The budget-priced rooms here masquerade as midrangers, and include TV and fridge. Its pretty-in-pink exterior is a bit girly, but business travellers seem to lap it up.

**Sri Chumphon Hotel** (☎ 0 7751 1280; Th Sala Daeng; r 260-450B; 🏠) The dark hallways feel like lights out at Alcatraz, but the promise of the contemporary exterior is fulfilled with airy and clean rooms with big windows.

**Chumphon Gardens Hotel** (☎ 0 7750 6888; 66/1Th Tha Taphao; r 490B; 🏠) This newly refurbished place with spacious rooms including cable TV is excellent value – as is the 60B breakfast. Just try not to lose your breakfast voucher like a certain guidebook author.

**Suda Guest House** (☎ 0 7750 4366; 8 Soi Bangkok Bank; r 200-500B; 🏠) Suda, the friendly English-speaking owner, proudly advertises 'Probably the best guesthouse in town' from an earlier edition of Lonely Planet. We're happy to report she's maintaining her impeccable standards at this cosy spot with wooden floors, and a few elegant touches you wouldn't expect for the price. It's very popular so phone ahead.

**Morakot Hotel** (☎ 0 7750 3629; fax 0 7757 0196; 102-112 Th Tawee Sinka; r 310-590B; 🏠) Despite a strange location behind a motorcycle dealership, the young, friendly staff make this a welcoming place. The rooms were undergoing a facelift when we visited, and the budget priced bathrooms should really come with a midrange price tag.

**The View Resort** (Hat Thung Wua Laen, r 500-700B; 🏠) The nicest of a few simple bungalow operations on Hat Thung Wua Laen, The View has a good selection of fan and air-con rooms and a good restaurant.

## MIDRANGE

**Had Sai Resort** (☎ 0 7755 8028; www.hadsairesort.com; Hat Sai; bungalows 800-1500B; 🏠) The green-and-white décor is a bit twee, but this spot at the quieter end of Hat Sai is a good jumping off point for daytrips to nearby islands.

**MT Resort** (☎ 0 7755 8153; www.mtresort-chumphon.com; Hat Tummakam Noi; bungalows incl breakfast 1500B; 🏠) This friendly spot on a quiet beach beside the Lomprayah ferry pier is a good place to break your journey before or after Ko Tao. Free kayaks are provided to explore offshore islands and the mangroves of the nearby Mu Ko Chumphon National Park. There's no public transport and a taxi from Chumphon will cost around 300B. Call to organise transport.

**Chumphon Cabana Resort & Diving Center** (☎ 0 7756 0245; www.cabana.co.th; 1; Hat Thung Wua Laen; r 1350-1540B, bungalows 1650B; 🏠 🌊) This is Hat Thung Wua Laen's flashiest spot. It's big with 110 rooms and 18 bungalows, and also showing its age a little, but it's great for PADI dive tuition. Instructors are experienced. The beach is blissfully unspoiled by deckchairs and motorised watersports, so there's no rampaging jet skis or banana boats. Breakfast is included. A regular shuttle bus (120B) runs to/from Chumphon.

## Eating & Drinking

Chumphon's **night market** (Th Krom Luang Chumphon) is excellent, with a huge variety and good street light. Come for the delicious food and linger for good photographs. A day market runs between Th Pracha Uthit and Th Poramin Mankha.

Beside Farang Bar on Th Tha Taphao, there is an unnamed **food stall** which sets up nightly at 4pm. Look for the white plastic furniture. A couple of curries with rice costs 30B. On the corner of Th Tha Taphao and Th Poramin Mankha, a **coffee stall** selling Chinese doughnuts (10B) opens at dawn.

**Fame Restaurant** (☎ 0 7757 1077; 188/20 Th Sala Daeng; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Also known as the Khao San Restaurant, (gee, I wonder who they're targeting), Fame has tasty sandwiches using freshly baked bread, and real-deal cheeses like mozzarella and gorgonzola. Mmmm. A travel agency is attached, so you might get the hard sell mid-sandwich. Get takeaway or say no if you're not interested.

**Yota Vegetarian** (Th Sala Daeng; 🍳 7am-5pm) Located beside Fame, this hole-in-the-wall eatery has delicious self-serve vegetarian dishes. Add your own touch with overflowing plates of Vietnamese mint, holy basil and sliced cucumber.

**Kaew Sukiyaki** (☎ 0 7750 6366; Th Tha Taphao; dishes 40-110B; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Sukiyaki noodles of all kinds (cooked at your table) are the speciality here, but the huge menu also has everything from sashimi to macaroni. There's a good bar that's popular with locals and travellers.

**Papa 2000** (☎ 0 7751 1972; 188/181 Th Krom Luang Chumphon; dishes 70-150B; 🍳 lunch & dinner) The food (mainly seafood) is good, without being exceptional, but it's a great local hangout. Retro tunes are delivered nightly and after a few drinks you'll be singing along to songs you're ashamed to know the words to. Don't worry as everyone else will be doing the same.

**Montana** (☎ 7750 2864; 116 Th Suksamoe; 🍳 6pm-1am) This bar has relatively authentic Western décor including stuffed animal heads (don't worry, they're fake), Budweiser neon and nightly gigs with the Big Boss Blues Band from 9.30pm. In the kitchen there are no concessions to the West with a zingy Thai menu.

Around the corner **Joe's Garden** (Th Krom Luang Chumphon; 🍳 4pm-late) is good for a few quiet ones after the night market.

## Getting There & Away

### BOAT

The small island of Ko Tao (p616) can be reached by boat from one of three piers south of town.

The Lomprayah express catamaran (www.lomprayah.com; 550B, 1½ hours) leaves Tummakam pier (25km from town) at 7am and 1pm. Transfers between Chumphon and Tummakam pier are included in the ticket price. The Songsrem Express (450B, 2½ hours) leaves Tha Yang pier (7km from town) at 7am. Most travel agencies provide free transfers to this pier as well.

There is a midnight boat that leaves from Pak Nam pier (10km from town) arriving at Ko Tao at 6am (200B). If you fancy sleeping on the deck of a slow boat, this could be a memorable trip. However, if it's raining or the seas are rough, it could be a long and uncomfortable night. A shared taxi to Pak Nam pier costs 50B. Săwngthăew to Pak Nam pier or Tha Yang pier are 20B.

If you get stuck at Tha Yang pier and don't want to return to Chumphon, try the **Thayang Seaport Hotel** (☎ 0 7755 3052; r 200-300B; 🏠).

### BUS

The main bus terminal is on the main highway, 16km from Chumphon. To get there you can catch a local bus or săwngthăew (25B) from Th Nawaminruamjai.

Much more convenient is **Chokeanan Tour** (☎ 0 7751 1757; Th Pracha Uthit), in the centre of town, with six buses a day to Bangkok (air-con 373B, VIP 435B) or **Suwannateer Tour** (☎ 0 7750 4901), 700m southeast of the train station, with 12 departures per day (2nd class 290B, air-con 373B, VIP 435B). Most Bangkok buses stop in town so get off there and save yourself the săwngthăew fare from the bus station. Ask the driver or local passengers to tell you where to disembark.

Other destinations from Chumphon include Hua Hin (230B, five hours), Bang Saphan (100B, two hours), Prachuap Khiri Khan (160B, 3½ hours), Ranong (130B, three hours), Surat Thani (170B, 3½ hours), Krabi (270B, eight hours), Phuket (320B, eight hours) and Hat Yai (310B, 10 hours). Tickets can be bought at travel agencies.

### TRAIN

There are frequent services to/from Bangkok (2nd class 292B to 382B, 3rd class 234B, 7½

hours). Overnight sleepers range from 440B to 770B.

Other destinations from Chumphon (all in 3rd-class berths) include Prachuap Khiri Khan (56B, three hours), Surat Thani (58B, three hours) and Hat Yai (110B, six to seven hours). Southbound rapid and express trains – the only trains with 1st and 2nd class – are less frequent and can be difficult to book out of Chumphon from November to February.

### Getting Around

Săwngthăew and motorcycle taxis around town cost a flat 20B per trip. Săwngthăew to Hat Sairi and Hat Thung Wua Laen cost 30B.

Motorcycles can be rented at travel agencies and guesthouses for 200B to 250B per day. Car rental costs around 1500B per day from travel agencies or from Suda Guesthouse (p571).