

KOH LANTA

Budget travelers discovered Koh Lanta a while ago; the island is still in the early stages of development. Whereas simple huts and bungalows attracted travelers in the past, resorts catering for the mainstream market have opened up, along with restaurants and pubs. Such development could be witnessed in Koh Samui years ago; the rapid expansion is a sign that Koh Lanta is following in Samui's footsteps.

Lanta is a very quiet and natural destination with its own charm. The tropical island is still largely unspoilt and offers some beautiful beaches. Lovers of shopping and entertainment will most likely be disappointed, as shopping possibilities are limited to the purchase of beach wear, foods and necessities; there's no department store. There are also no girlie bars, discos-although, there are now a few pubs/bars featuring live music, entertainment on this predominantly Muslim island which has so far not gone the same directions as Phuket.

LOCATION/HISTORY

Close to the mainland in the southeast corner of Krabi Province, Koh Lanta is a group of 52 islands, 15 of which belong to Koh Lanta National Marine Park. The tiny port of Ban Saladan is the gateway to Koh Lanta Yai, where tourism is mostly concentrated. Here are a few travel agencies, a police station, general stores, dive centers, a branch of Siam City Bank and restaurants. And since phone lines were installed on the island, a number of Internet cafes have been popping up. Ban Saladan is also the point where boats from/to Phi Phi and Krabi depart. The pier is about 200 meters east of the settlement.

Where does the name Lanta come from? To some it seems to be a fact that it had been given by the Sea Gypsies that still inhabit parts of the island. Other sources claim that the name was given in the early 20th Century: before the road system in the South became sophisticated (i.e. the construction of Highway No. 4 that connects most major cities/areas in the South including Krabi, Trang and Hatyai), a lot of goods had to be transferred by boat. The Lanta Islands were one of the popular islands for the trade ships between Kantang and Phuket to stop. Fishes and other sea creatures were caught in abundance and grilled on tools called "Lantan". This may have finally given the islands their name, Koh Lanta. In 1917 the name was changed to today's Koh Lanta and the two main islands (Yai and Noi) together with 50 smaller isles became a district of Krabi province.

Yet another historical explanation for the meaning of “Lanta” is that the island was once known as Pulau Satak which is Malay language for “long beach island”. Over time, many Thais-both Muslim and Buddhist-came to live on the island and to some it seemed to be a million islanders, which made some people think that ‘lanta” means “too many to judge by the eyes” in Thai...

GEOGRAPHY

Lanta Yai is approx. 26 kilometers long and five kilometers wide at its widest point. Most development has taken place on the West Coast, but the nicest beaches are to be found further down, on the South West part of Lanta Yai. There is still virgin rain forest on Koh Lanta Yai. Since a good section of the island is owned by the Sea Gypsies, the island could only partially become part of the Koh Lanta marine National Park which was declared Thailand’s 62nd National Park in 1990. This park covers 134 square kilometers and includes 15 islands of the Lanta Group.

Wildlife is well represented with small mammals, like squirrels, monkeys, a variety of snakes and more than 100 bird species. Dolphins are also regularly spotted offshore.

WHAT TO DO ?

- Lanta Orchid Nursery at Long Beach, close to Long Beach Bungalows and Lanta resotel. This is an interesting exhibition of Thailand’s native orchids. This is not just an exhibition of various Orchid types; visitors are introduced to the various stages of life of these wonderful plants and learn why they can’t buy seed to grow them at home abroad.
- Koh Lanta Canoeing offers a daily self-paddle trip by canoe through the exciting world of the mangrove forest. Participants get insight into this unusual biosphere which is unique to the tropics and which is a nursery on one side while permanent living area for numerous animals on the other.
- Trekking. A 2 hours’ walk from Khlong Jak Bay along a stream through grasslands and rain forest to a small waterfall. The waterfall usually dries up between February and March.

- Trekking. Half a century ago, more than half of Thailand was covered with virgin tropical rainforest. It takes a trip to the mainland – the Khao Nor Chuchi Lowland rainforest to experience some of last areas of virgin rainforest that is left in Southern Thailand. Located in Khlong Thom district, it is home to a bird species “Pattagurney” which can only be found here. A 2.7 km. Nature trail leads visitors through this exciting natural sanctuary to the clean and clear waters of the “Emerald Cave”
- A local attraction are the Mai Kaeo caves, situated above Khlong Nin Village. They were discovered only recently when burning the forest in this area. Some sections of the caverns are as large as church halls, other require visitors to squeeze through on hands and knees. Nothing for the claustrophobic but very much rewarding for those who can overcome their fears, for wonderful stalactites and stalagmites, bats and finally – a cavern pool, are worth a few deep breaths.. However, it is highly recommended to have experienced local guides.
- For some snorkeling action you could take a trip in one of the Typically open fishing boats that leave every morning to Koh Ngai, Koh Chuak and Koh Waen. Full and half day excursions visit quiet, pristine snorkeling areas and beautiful, secluded islands. These trips are perfect for couples, families or small groups as the day or half day can be customized to suit everybody’s needs. Tourists can really enjoy the refreshing crystal clear waters of these magnificent Islands as they marvel at the marine ecology of the area. The beautiful islands located southwest of Lanta are renowned for their crystal; clear waters and variety of marine life.
- Scuba Diving is a must in this part of Southern Thailand. Dive Operators based in Koh Lanta have the best access to the great Southern Dive Sites of Koh Ha, Koh Rok, Hin Daeng and Hin Muang. Any divers that wants to spend quality time visiting Southern Thailand greatest dive sites should base themselves in Koh Lanta.
- A full day speedboat trip brings you to the twin islands of Rok Nok and Rok Nai. After arrival here there will be time for snorkeling and/or exploration of the islands that belong to Mu Koh Lanta National Park. Koh Rok, about 15 minutes South of Koh Ha, is two sister-islands separated by narrow channel about 15 meters deep. These islands, Nok and Nai (outside and inside) have some of the prettiest beaches in Thailand and are completely devoid of inhabitants. The islands are name after a small, furry mammal called Rok in Thai; this animal, along with small Lizards, can be observed on-shore with a little patience and a bit of luck.
- Laanta, Laanta festival at Old Town, held every March.