

CHAWENG BEACH



Koh Samui, Thailand's second largest island, is a popular getaway with both backpackers and those seeking luxury resorts or villas. It is known for beaches, rainforests, spas, night life and a hub to get to smaller islands such as Koh Tao for cheap dive lessons or Koh Phangan for the full moon party. Khanom is quieter and off the beaten track, but has pink dolphins and a unique temple with millions of chicken statues.

POPULAR HIN TA

I spent a couple of days relaxing in Koh Samui strolling on the beach, people watching and eating great food such as tom yum kung and mango sticky rice. Chaweng Beach was my base, but I did make an excursion to Hin Ta or grandfather rock which is amusing and one of the most

photographed places in Samui.

I've been to Samui a few times so wanted to explore further afield. Good friends Alan and Helen live in Khanom so I took the ferry from Nathon Pier to Don Sak the nearest port to them.

SAMUI TO DON SAK FERRY

Seatrans Ferries are old ferries that have been converted to transport people and cars around

the Gulf of Thailand. They are basic, but the crossing from Nathon Pier to Don Sak only takes 90 minutes and the sea was calm! I was pleasantly surprised to see beautiful limestone hills as we approached Don Sak. The ferry operator was super-efficient reminding me of a budget airline as within minutes of our disembarkation cars and passengers were boarding for the return trip.

Alan and Helen picked me up and after a quick lunch at the Botanic Gardens we visited the Rock Fish Museum established in 1992 by Mr Kittu Sin-Udom, a retired fisherman. He has carved rocks to resemble more than 1,000 fish and sea creatures that can be found in the Gulf of Thailand. He proudly displays them on his property. He was delighted to show us round for a small donation.

Next stop was Wat Khao Suwan Pradit or Don Sak Temple which is rather simple, but has nice

THE UNIQUE & SINGULAR IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

MIKE SMITH TRAVELLED TO KOH SAMUI AND KHANOM IN SEARCH OF PHALLIC ROCKS, PINK DOLPHINS AND A MILLION CHICKEN STATUES. HE FOUND THEM ALL AND MORE.



HIN TA OR GRANDFATHER ROCK



FISH CARVINGS



ALAN AND MR KITTI
SIN-UDOM, ROCK
MUSEUM

views over the nearby fishing village. Incredibly, there was a large wasp nest totally enveloping the upper half of a large Buddha image.

KHANOM BEACH RESIDENCE

We arrived in Khanom 30 minutes later where I had been booked into a lovely apartment in Khanom Beach Residence. The complex comes with a swimming pool that leads to the beach and is occupied by a mix of expat owners and long and short-term renters. The beach is several kilometres long and great for exercise, chatting with the local fishermen or walking to food and beverage outlets.

Dinner was at CC Beach Bar and Restaurant where mine host Charlie is the font of all knowledge about the area and the source for booking trips and accommodation. They serve wholesome food and cold beer at very reasonable prices. Check if he is doing a BBQ buffet when you are in Khanom, it is highly recommended and is a very sociable event.

PINK DOLPHINS

Khanom's major attractions are the amazing 'pink dolphins' technically known as Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin *Sousa chinensis* which grow to almost three metres in length. There are 2,000



KHANOM
BEACH RESIDENCE



ALTO RESTAURANT





DON SAK TEMPLE
WASPS NEST



DOLPHIN BOAT



PINK DOLPHIN

in the world with a pod of about 150 in the coastal waters off Khanom.

After a two-minute walk along the beach for a very early breakfast at Alto Restaurant we drove 40 minutes to seek out a long-tailed boatman to take us dolphin spotting. Seeing four Caucasians with cameras the locals guessed what we wanted, and our boatman arrived five minutes later.

Our lookout man

kept his eyes peeled and suddenly pointed out our first dolphin which was grey rather than pink indicating a juvenile; the adrenaline on board shot off the scale as we encountered numerous further sightings. What an experience! The dolphins didn't jump out of the water, but put on a great display as they surfaced. These pink dolphins were definitely the number one highlight of my trip to Khanom.

PANCAKE ROCKS

On our way back to shore we stopped to look at Pancake Rocks which are only found at Khanom and Punakaiki on the west coast of New Zealand. The limestone formations resembling stacks of pancakes formed 30 million years ago when lime rich fragments of dead marine creatures were deposited on the seabed and overlaid by mud and clay.

Earthquakes raised the seabed and sea, wind



PANCAKE ROCKS

and rain etched out the soft mud and clay layers to create the formations that exist today.

TON TARN TROPICAL WATER PARK

Ton Tarn Water Park and Aviary wouldn't normally be on my list of places to go, but was fun because of the natural fish spa and aviary. Fish spas are common in Asia, but this is a fish spa with a difference! You sit dangling your feet in a river and dozens of larger fish (not the tiddlers you get at a wellness spa fish tank) attack your dead skin. I hated the tickling, mildly painful, uncomfortable experience, but I was assured "you get used to it after 5 minutes."

Maybe so, but I sat long enough to have my picture taken and escaped! The aviary is small but has some beautiful birds. Buy a tub of corn for a dollar and you will be surrounded by hungry birds. The cafe serves great coffee and homemade ice cream making the park a good spot to spend an hour or so.

CORAL PAGODA OF KHANOM

We had crammed a lot into our morning and the afternoon was busy too. The pagoda was built approximately 1,000 years ago of pure coral rocks, making it the only one of its type in the world. It was excavated in 2006, when a large

number of religious items were found dating back to the Yunan period, and restored 10 years ago. Of interest was a huge strange looking guardian made from recycled materials.

As we were getting hungry we headed for the coast at Laem Pratap where Dieter served us a late lunch at his Zum Gruenebaum German Restaurant. Later we saw a fisherman painting his boat, fish drying in the sun, a pristine beach and a lady pounding chilli.

Dinner was again at Charlie's CC Beach Bar and Restaurant as the food and drink is good and affordable, the company great. The walk back to Khanom Beach Residence was only two minutes.

NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!!!

Unique is an overused word, but Ai Kai Wat Chedi Temple is indeed, truly unique!! The drive was about 50 kilometres, but well worth it. You can't miss the temple as you simply follow the dozens of 3-metre tall roosters that are placed every 100 metres on the road from the Nakhon Si Thammarat Highway to the temple. Legend has it that novice monk Ai Kai was looking after Wat Chedi but died at a young age. His spirit took over his role and is still



TON TARN TROPICAL WATER PARK AND AVIARY - FISH SPA



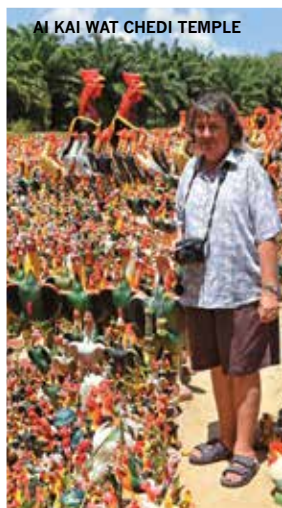
TON TARN PARK AVIARY



CORAL PAGODA KHANOM



AI KAI WAT CHEDI TEMPLE - TALC COVERED LOG



AI KAI WAT CHEDI TEMPLE

believed to stay there within a statue as guardian to frighten off intruders.

Hundreds of devotees go to the temple every day to worship Ai Kai and to pray for good luck in money or business. They promise to return with chickens (for food), military uniforms (so he can fight off invaders) and fire crackers (to scare off intruders) if their wish comes true. It must be a very powerful spirit because there are millions of chickens of all sizes, including two which are taller than the temple slightly away from the main area and easily missed.

TALC LUCK

Do look out for a tree trunk covered in talc as if you rub it you may be inspired to think of your luck lottery number. The firecrackers sound like machine guns and go off every few minutes in an isolated area. Definitely my second

favourite attraction of the area.

An added bonus was a small flock of open-billed storks that were feeding nearby.

My breakfast next morning was at Le Petit Saint Tropez, located on the beach about 2km from Khanom Beach Residence. It serves a full cooked breakfast plus local fruit and excellent coffee. A great way to end a short visit to an area off the main tourist area, but greatly appreciated by expats. Thanks to Alan and Helen for showing me around. ❖

Packet Guide



Hotel Koh Samui
Chaweng Garden Beach Resort
www.chawenggarden.com

CC Beach Bar & Restaurant Khanom
ccbeachbarthai.wordpress.com

ACCOMODATION
KHANOM
Khanom Residences
ccbeachbarthai.wordpress.com

AIRLINE
Silk Air
www.silkair.com

FERRY
Seatrans
www.seatrandiscovery.com