

"Breeze of the monsoon in the Samui Archipelago"

written by Michel GÉRARD

In the flowing breeze of the monsoon one can board a Hobie Cat 16 for a maritime safari, an unusual way of exploring the Samui archipelago and the islets of the Ko Ang Thong National Park. A flotilla of catamarans used for the discovery of the verdant coastline, the white sand beaches, the crystalline waters and granite formations are a thrilling sight.



Overjoyed to leave the Capital, a small team of adventurers gets ready to leave for Ko Samui. After a flight of less than an hour, it finds itself in a completely different environment of the pretty airport of Ko Samui. It is necessary to take a boat then to reach the island of Ko Phan Ngan and finally appreciate a moment of leisure near the beach. But don't be mistaken, the purpose of this excursion is not to tan your skin but rather to participate in an adventure. In the evening, the person responsible for the catamaran safari meets the team for a briefing about navigation related to the Hobie Cat 16 in the Samui archipelago. Everybody is thrilled during dinner and wait for the following morning with impatience.

At dawn, it is time to prepare the catamarans for a first trip toward the archipelago of the Ang Thong National Park. At that time the beginners are given complementary explanations on how to sail these little sea race boats. The Hobie Cat Explorer enables them to get started quickly because the sailing boat is fast, steady, easy to direct and thanks to its modular sails, it is easy to control in all wind conditions. Moreover it is one of the most prestigious catamarans.

The bivouac is set on the island of Ko Sam Sao before continuing the navigation around the different islets. A speedboat keeps all the belongings, food and equipment in waterproof containers that saves the adventurers from carrying extra weight on board. This facilitates them to enjoy higher speeds. The picnic on the beach is very keenly awaited and the participants have already exchanged comments and their feelings in the morning at sea, which, for some of them, was the first time. The instructor doesn't hesitate to give more advice so that everybody can improve thereafter. The evening continues then with a dinner in the company of the guards of the National Park, followed by the night in igloo tents set on the beach.

The vast park of Ang Thong enables the team to discover the life style of the people living there with a different approach of the region during three complete days. Every safari is an expedition that gathers a flotilla of five Hobie Cats with an atmosphere of freedom and no constraint. The exploration of the creeks by sea transports you to places where the vegetation is unusual, beaches covered of white sand, cliffs of Basalt, and where some rocks emerge suddenly from the water and lets people approach and admire them. At some point during navigation it is also possible to see whales and "pink" dolphins.

The different stages of each day enables you to explore the islets. A little hike into the forest will find you among small arboreal monkeys. You can reach the top of a hill with view of the National Park or a sea water lake in the crater of a volcano in the middle of huge cliffs in Ko Laem Ko. The visit to another island named Ko Wua Talab is also an enjoyable moment. Another short trek in the forest will take you to immense caves. The direct contact with people of the region is very impressive, specially meeting with Thai fishermen's fleets at sea, or in the mountain with a visit to the squid and crab fishermen's villages.

After three days, it will be time to return on Ko Phan Ngan. Then, a stop in the bay of Ko Kai Nok calls for an easy excursion to the cascade in order to enjoy bathing with palms, mask and snorkel in a lagoon. The evening will be very enlivened with a dinner in a small local restaurant where every single dish is amazingly delicious. That night, the igloo tents are deserted for the comfort of a bed in one of the charming bungalows. The last day of navigation is then dedicated to the tour of the island to discover the different bays, and free time will offer an opportunity to explore the underwater floors and the tropical aquatic fauna.

It is with melancholy that the group takes the plane back to Bangkok carrying in memory not only superb landscapes but also a team spirit cherished with great moments of friendship and adventure.

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