

"Poetry and leisure on Ko Samet Island"

written by Michel GÉRARD

Once, not only a shelter for pirates but also a source of inspiration for most of the famous Thai poets, Ko Samet island with its micro climate and its proximity to Bangkok is one of the favourite places of those in search of tranquillity and relaxation.



After nearly three hours our vehicle arrives at the port of Ban Phe situated in the region of Rayong. It is pleasant to feel the breeze of the sea while enjoying an early cup of coffee. Before taking the boat for a half an hour trip, our group of friends buy some last minute requisites from the local shops.

The island has been a part of the National Park of Samet since 1981. It receives very little rain and so is a destination appreciated all round the year. The name of Samet comes from the Cajeput trees that abound on the island and once provided for the construction of boats and also as firewood.

It is important for one to choose his destination before taking the boat because several alternatives are offered to us as arrival spots: the port of Na Dam at the north, the beach of Ao Phrao in the west, or Ao Wong Deuan more to the south. The crossing is very pleasant on small shuttle boats that sail between the island and the mainland. Upon arrival at the port of Na Dam, it is possible to take a Songteaw to the National Park and then to continue southwards. Good walkers with light bags could choose to wander along the different beaches. This will allow them to choose the place where they want to stay.

Poets-with-promise will be happy to see the landscapes from where Sunthorn Phu, the most famous and talented poet of the XIX century, drew his inspiration. The thirty thousand lines of his work "Phra Aphaimani" tell the story of an exiled prince that lived an odyssey filled with love and war before returning victorious to his kingdom. The statues of the author and some of his characters, like the prince and the siren, are still visible as evidence on a rock in Ao Hin Khok. As for the pirates of the past, those captured on the island used to be executed in Na Dan.

The island of Samet is for our group as for all visitors a little paradise. Hat Sai Keow, the longest beach of the island that offers one of the whitest sands of Thailand, becomes our head quarters. There, we enjoy nautical activities, body massages, hair plaiting, manicures and tattooing... just to confirm that we are on vacation.

For those in search of tranquillity, other beaches more to the south, which are accessible only via the rocks or the trails, offer a very nice atmosphere. The TV screen or loud music lovers would be very disappointed, but all others would appreciate being woken up by the sound of the waves and having their breakfast on the balcony of a small wooden bungalow with a view of the turquoise sea.

We leave for a one day trip out at sea to visit a group of islands situated East of Ko Samet of which are Ko Kruai, Ko Kudi, Ko Kang Khao, and Ko Thalu. These are the best sites to practise scuba diving and to observe the sea floor. We also take the opportunity to tour the island and to discover the different creeks. The beach of Ao Cho with a pontoon made of patched wood allows us to stop and enjoy some cool drinks and a bath followed by a massage.

Ko Samet Island presents a huge range of landscapes, lodgings and activities for all purses. Those who prefer animation to serenity would like the bay of Ao Wong Deuan that has been developed much lately. Whereas, "five star" travellers would be able to admire the sunsets from one of the most luxurious hotels of the island on the bay of Ao Phrao situated on the West coast.

Some days later, it is with peace of mind and ready again to face the trepidations of the capital that we take the boat toward the mainland...

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Michel Gerard is a Travel author based in Asia. Visit the *Reperages Thailand Travel* website for information and ideas of original excursions. Download your *free* ebook: "Stories of Authentic Eco-adventure Destinations for Travellers in Thailand" => <http://www.travel.reperages-thailand.com>