

# "Sailing in a postcard panorama"

written by Michel GÉRARD

**The time: A weekend. A cruise on board a sailing boat to explore the Ko Chang Marine National Park that consists of more than forty islands, is an ideal escape for all those who wish to enjoy the climate and the beauty of a postcard panorama...**



**Before departure from Silom very early in the morning, our small group meets for an adventurous weekend in the archipelago of Ko Chang, literally "the elephant island". Seated in the mini van that drives us to Trat, a small city situated close to the Cambodian border, we introduce ourselves and engage in a conversation. Only one person has already sailed on a sailing boat before and for the rest of us it will be a new experience. During the journey that lasts 5 hours, the Thai style wooden houses as well as the typical countryside shops of the places we pass through remind us that we are already far from the capital.**

When we arrive on the pier, which is twenty minutes from Trat, the weather looks auspicious for a good day of leisure on board the Thida, a comfortable luxurious sailing boat. The Captain of the boat awaits and gently invites everyone to get on board. Some minutes later the motorized boat moves away from the port, giving us a general view of the bay. While our smiling Captain offers us his home made ice tea, it is difficult not to take a photo of the first postcard panorama to where we are heading: a turquoise blue ocean limited by the horizon and the verdant vegetation of the islands.

Lost in dreams of journeys around the world, the sound of the veils opened by the Captain calls us back to reality. The tea break is then over; I find myself behind the wooden steering wheel while my friends are taking care of the ropes and knots to secure the veils to the boat. We are now at the command posts of the sailing boat on a mission to sail toward the islands, at the same time as the Captain disappears into the kitchen. The odour from the cooking doesn't take long to emanate and remind us that it is time to have lunch and to enjoy an excellent Thai meal in the breeze of the sailing boat, in the middle of the magnificent marine park of Ko Chang!

Forty-seven islands of the Trat coastline belong to this national park that covers 492 km<sup>2</sup>, Ko Chang being the second biggest island of Thailand. The whole park officially consists of 192 km<sup>2</sup> of earth surface and 458 km<sup>2</sup> of sea, and its population earns a living by fishing and the cultivation of coconut and rubber trees. Ko Chang is composed of 70% of virgin tropical forest populated by boars, monkeys and snakes, and the mountain tops are often covered by clouds.

It is late afternoon when we moor on the beach of Ko Khum, a small island situated at the south of Ko Chang, our destination for the evening. There, snorkelling is in the programme and will be very appreciated by all the participants. The shallow reefs scattered around the park provide shelter to a variety of corals and fish among which are Parrot fish, Sea urchins and Giant clams but also turtles, whale sharks and pink dolphins that we can observe. Dinner is waiting and is in a small local restaurant on the island from where we admire the sunset while eating delicious seafood. On a phosphorescent sea, we spend the night after a last swim in the light of the moon.

The second day is just as pleasant as the first. This park contains some of the unique islands in Thailand that have remained untouched by tourism. Here, it is amazing to be able to walk on beaches where only our own footprints mark the sand and to practice scuba diving along magnificent marine floors. It is hardly believable that a coastal region located at such proximity to Bangkok has escaped development. But for how long more will these places remain postcard panoramas?

All the crew who participated in this ecological weekend will be a little saddened on the road back to Bangkok, not to have had a third day that would have permitted a visit to the islands of Ko Mak and Ko Kut that are situated more to the south, maybe next time...

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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>*