

BEACHES

THE BEST TOUR OF THAILAND FOR 2018

Koh Samui, Thailand
CREDIT: LUCAS ALLEN

Are there any truly untouched corners of this country left? On a grown-up tour of her favourite childhood holiday haunts in the Gulf of Thailand, Michelle Jana Chan seeks out the best places to stay, and is delighted to discover not all is lost



by MICHELLE JANA CHAN
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Sweeping around in a loop from the skinny isthmus leading to [Malaysia](#), across to the east and the ancient temples on the Cambodian border, the Gulf of [Thailand](#) has the best of the country's islands and beaches. But it also holds some of our most sun-kissed, life-in-a-backpack, live-forever memories. More than a holiday, more than a destination, it is a pocket of nostalgia, a flashback to a more innocent, more exuberant time. Here are some of my highlights.

FURTHER SOUTH: KUI BURI AND KHANOM

From Hua Hin, there is one right direction and one wrong one. East is Pattaya, probably the most horrible part of Thailand. Don't go. But set out in the opposite way, travelling indirectly towards Malaysia, and you'll find something else entirely: sheltered sandy beaches and a sprinkling of historic sights; forested mountains rising abruptly behind the coastal strip with quintessential karstic headlands and islands. From the potholed road, the railway track meanders to and fro. I pass banana trees, coconut palms and pampas.

WHERE TO STAY IN KUI BURI

After an hour's drive is a little hotel called X2, designed by Duangrit Bunnag, one of South-East Asia's most celebrated architects. It is a modern design hotspot using wood, stone and glass. The crowd is young and Thai; they seem to know they've found something very *au courant*.