

Bangkok P **HORIZONS** - Thursday 18 December 2003**DISCOVER THAILAND****A short cruise from Jomtien**

***A sight-seeing cruise to islands off Sattahip, especially Ao Noi, offers privacy, excellent view and a chance to admire large corals***

FUANGFA SIRIPORNNANTANA



Had Sai Kaew Beach was formally opened on January 22 this year by Adm Taweesak Somapha, ex-commander-in-chief, the Royal Thai.



A small slipway where we got on a coral sight-seeing boat.



A coral sight-seeing boat costs 2,000 baht/trip/20 passengers.



Shelters along the beach.

Ao Noi, a new tourist spot in Sattahip, was my inspiration for sailing this winter. My friends and I set off from Ocean Marina at 8 a.m. Luckily it was such a one fine day for yachting, the morning sky was clearer than that I ever seen before while the wind seemed voluntary to blow us to where we commanded.

We steadily crept our way on a catamaran along Jomtien coastline for an hour and a half. After passing through a small cape, which departed Kled Kaew Island, the island of monkeys, from the inland where stands the dignified buildings of Chumphon Navy Rating School and Navy Recruit Training Centre, the captain slowed the yacht down until we saw our destination ahead.

Unbelievably, I could not capture the whole beach in one glance, what a long beach it was!

Surprisingly, quite larger than its given name, Ao Noi (meaning a small bay in Thai) covers a total area of 116 rai or 46.5 acres, located in the boundary of Sattahip Royal Navy Base and managed by Chumphon Navy School. This lovely bay was previously reserved for training Thai marines until it was officially opened as a new tourist attraction on January 22 this year in a ceremony presided over by A.D.M. Taweesak Somapha, ex-Commander-In-Chief, the Royal Thai Navy.

The rapidly catching charm of this bay is a crescent white calm beach, spotlessly clean and known as Had Sai Kaew. Overall, it is 914 metres long, 450 metres of which is pure sand. We saw the beach surrounded by mountain scenery and green groves. There were some bungalows, a Thai food shop, a bar beer (but no beer for sale) and shelters spreading along the beach.

At first seizing the beach, we scattered, running and shouting in delight, bathed in glorious sunshine, taking in fresh air, and enjoying the turquoise clear water rolling up gently against the beach. What could I say...



**A splendid seascape viewed from a road on the mountain's top leading the way to the beach.**



**A lovely soft drink bar on the beach run by the Royal Thai Navy School.**

school looks after the coral colonies.

we were so lucky to choose the day that saw only few tourists.

Sitting on a deckchair and looking out to sea, on our right-hand side is Kled Kaew Island, which we passed earlier this morning while at the far left, as far as the eye could see, is Khram Noi Island and Khram Yai Island beyond. Some friends played around the beach but I preferred laying on a mat reading my favourite book until it was about 30 minutes to noon.

Before lunch, we decided to take a coral sight-seeing boat of the Chumphon Navy School to Kled Kaew Island to see a new skin-diving spot. As we neared the island, a navy officer told us that the island was rich in baby coral reefs, although not as colourful as those in the seas of south Thailand, but there were almost all types of corals and most of them quite large in size \_ Scleractinia, Madreporaria, Gorgonacea and Alcyonacea. The navy

school looks after the coral colonies.

At one point during the trip, the officer pointed to something jumping out at sea. It was a family of seven white dolphins. Suddenly, the air was abuzz with excitement. We took out our cameras and started clicking frantically trying to catch everything on film.

They often gathered to play the waves made by a boat, we were told. On the island we saw a small cave at the left beachfront where fishermen dropped anchor during big storms.

Did I tell you that it was the island of monkeys? Yes, they lived in the wood near that cave and when people came, those naughty primates would ask for food with no semblance of like others of their kind at other tourist places in Thailand. Who taught them to be like that?

The coral sightseeing trip took about 40 minutes and we went back to the bay to have lunch. Catering service from Ocean Marina Yacht Club had set European lunch boxes, fresh tropical fruits and soft drink. The hotel staff had prepared two picnic sets of table and chair and umbrella for eight persons. It seemed that we were a little bit spoiled but really more comfortable anyway.

After our meal, Ajarn Pratheep Thienthong, ex-navy, the captain of our yacht and the trip leader brought us to see inside the bungalows. They looked not too bad, simply facilitated yet comfortable for backpackers. The school provides tents, deckchairs, floating ring-boards, mountain bikes and barbecue ovens for rent at a reasonable price. Apart from couples and family tourists, the beach is suited for group outings, especially setting camp fires.

A trip to Ao Noi is not complete if you haven't witnessed the spectacular sunset right in front of the beach. To some, the sparkling stars at full-moon night is a better option. Unfortunately, we couldn't do any as we were not planning to stay overnight.

Ao Noi is relatively new hideaway with very few people aware of its existence. It is highly recommended to visit and enjoy its privacy.

## **Travel tips**

### **Getting there**

Start from Ocean Marina.

By boat: 15-30 minutes by motor yacht

60-90 minutes by sailing yacht

By car: 10 minutes to the entrance of the Chumphon Navy School.

A car is required to park at the entrance. Then take a transit pick-up, 15 minutes to the beach.

### **Fees**

Entry Fee \_ 20 baht/Thai and 50 baht/foreigner.

Bungalow \_ 300-700 baht/night (2-6 persons) ensuite bathroom and fan.

Tent \_ 200 baht/night (2 persons).

Deckchair \_ 10 baht/deckchair.

Floating device \_ 10-20 baht each.

Mountain Bike \_ 80 baht/day.

Canoe \_ 100 baht/canoe.

Coral-seeing boat \_ 2,000 baht/trip (20 persons, 2 hours)

Facilities \_ Thai food shop, soft drink bar (non-alcoholic), mini-mart, free restrooms and shelters.

### **Information Centre**

Yachting Trip & Catering \_ Tel: 02-661-6800 Ext. 301-7

Chumphon Navy Rating School \_ Tel: 038-436-187 Ext. 2070