

## Hiding away in the Andamans

### *Trang and Krabi have a few secrets to share*

#### PEERAWAT JARIYASOMBAT

Off the coast of Andaman Sea, the archipelago between Trang and Krabi is a nice place to hideaway and enjoy the sea.

The long-tailed motor boat rode the waves elegantly, the roar of its engine breaking the silence that enveloped the vast expanse of the sea. Making a turn behind a towering rock cliff rising from the azure sea, the boat came to a stop. The captain tied the boat to an orange-coloured buoy and gave me a life vest. Then we swam slowly into the darkness of a cave on Ko Muk island off Trang province.



Ko Rok island and its crystal clear water.

The sound of waves reverberated through the cave. I grabbed the captain's vest tightly as he led me through the dark winding tunnel. After a while we saw some light filtering in at the far end of the cave. The captain followed the light which was the cave's exit. And then we saw the beach hidden behind a huge cliff.

The Emerald Cave is an amazing place to be. Its nice sandy beach is nestled in the hug of rocks. You can only enter the cave when the tide is low. On the way back visitors will find themselves swimming in emerald-coloured water. That is how the cave got its name.

The hidden beach was once the abode of pirates. These days its existence is a secret no more as it, together with the cave, attracts visitors all year round, weather permitting.

"It is good to visit the cave on weekdays when the number of visitors is relatively few. If you come here during high season from January onward, you will waste time waiting in long queues. It is like a floating market on weekends," said Orawan Pattanapuapant, a Trang native.

Apart from the Emerald Cave and the isolated beach, Trang has several other attractions to offer tourists. They can go island hopping, diving and snorkeling and admire colourful coral reef.

For starters, Orawan recommended Ko Chuak or Rope Island as a dive site.

"Do you know why they call it Rope Island? The divers are constantly swept away by the strong current, so the crew are always telling divers to grab the rope tightly," she explained.

The colourful underwater world around Ko Chuak is worth admiring. The captain anchored the boat behind the island, shielding us from the strong wind and waves that rocked the boat all the time. It was time to view Trang from a different angle.

I dived into the crystal clear water and saw a big school of damselfish and colourful wrasses swimming in a coral reef.



The Emerald Cave was once inhabited by pirates.

Ko Chuak is surrounded by various forms of hard coral such as foliose pore coral, smooth lesser star coral and large colonies of staghorn coral. Coral fish add colour to the reef such as the blue-blotched butterfly fish, moorish idol, families of clownfish and sea anemones.

Another good dive site is a corner of Ko Ma where colonies of brightly coloured soft finger coral occupy submerged cliff, sharing the depths with purple sea anemones.

From Ko Ma, you can see coconut trees dotting the shoreline of Ko Ngai island. Under their shade small bungalows have been built.

"We will be staying there," Orawan said.

Unlike most islands in the vicinity, Ko Ngai was uninhabited until very recently. All it had was coconut plantations. Only in the last decade or so resorts began rising there. Coco Cottage is the latest addition. Each unit has thatched roof and is built from material available locally such as coconut wood and bamboo mats. Big windows allow guests excellent view of the sea. The beds have lovely cone-shaped mosquito netting.

"We are actually in Krabi but facing the islands of Trang. Ko Ngai is part of Krabi province, but it is easier to get there from Trang," said Orawan.

She is living out the dream of her father who bought the property two decades ago with the aim of turning it into a resort. He and his partners broke up shortly after buying the property with the result that part of the land was sold to outsiders. But Orawan and her brothers decided to finish off what their father had set out to do in the first place.

They began by renting out tents to visitors. Although budget travellers and students were content with the service, most guests preferred better accommodation. Ko Ngai offered great view of the sea around Trang and thus evolved the idea to build cottages under the shade of palm and coconut trees.

Ko Ngai is a nice place for beach lovers. The white sandy beach is sandwiched between blue sea and lush forest. It is part of Mu Ko Lanta National Park.

Fishermen regularly visit the resort bartering their catch with foodstuff and liquor which ensures that guests can enjoy fresh seafood.

The next morning I woke up to the chirping of birds and for a while I felt as if I was staying in a jungle.

"They are hornbills. There are a lot of them in the bushes here," Orawan said.

Mu Ko Lanta National Park also extends to Ko Rok, an island that is quite a distance from Ko Ngai but it's worth a visit. It took us two hours to get there in a long-tailed boat. The sea around Ko Rok was so clear that we could see its underwater treasures from the boat. The captain handed me the life vest, which I refused, and instead settled for the fin and took the plunge. It was calm and beautiful underneath.

#### TRAVELTips

Trains leave for Trang daily, check the timetable at [www.thailandrailway.com](http://www.thailandrailway.com). Bookings can be made at any railway station.

Buses and air-conditioned coaches leave Bangkok's Southern Bus Terminal every day. Call 435-1199 to 200 for more information.

Coco Cottage offers bungalow from 1,400 baht for Garden House, up to 2,700 baht for air-conditioned Beach Front Cottage. The resort provides also transportation service.

**Vi kan snart boka detta...**