

The Ultimate Guide to Boat Trips from Phuket

The kingdom of Thailand contains an incredible 1430 islands, with amazing sandy beaches, vibrant snorkeling, and rare wildlife. If you're visiting Phuket, 32 of these islands are just a short boat ride away, each with something different to offer.

With so many to choose from, how are you meant to pick the best Thailand islands to visit? At Phuket Lovin, we're here to help. In this ultimate guide, we'll explore the most popular islands within reach of Phuket.

Read on if you're ready to plan some awesome island boat trips from Phuket!

Introducing the Islands Near Phuket

Before going further, there's one main thing you need to know. The Thai word for island is 'Koh' or 'Koh' - this means that during your research, you may see the name of the island with the pre-fix 'Ko/Koh' attached. You can choose whether or not to say Koh - it doesn't change the meaning.

Another hint is that 'Yai' means 'large' and 'Noi' means 'small.' Put it all together, and Koh Racha Yai - simply translates as 'Large Racha Island.'

One of the difficulties we found when we first got to Phuket was working out which islands to visit and what was worth our money. Tour operators you speak to usually have an agenda to sell the most expensive tour, and they won't tell you much about the experience other than 'very beautiful, best island!'

There are two main areas that you can explore from the coast of Phuket:

- The Andaman Sea (West, East, and South of Phuket)
- Phang Nga Bay (North East of Phuket)

Unfortunately, you won't be able to see all the islands on a short trip to Phuket; you need to prioritize what's most important to you. Many islands are close to each other, and if you look on Tripadvisor, you'll see many tours where you'll visit up to five different islands in one day.

However, in this article, we'll discuss each island's merits and pitfalls. That way, you can choose your favorites and then start planning how to fit them all into your itinerary!

If you're interested in one specific island, you can use this table of contents to jump straight to that section. Now, keep reading and note down the islands that are most appealing to you!

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If you're a TL;DR kind-of person, the following section is a brief summary of our recommendations for the ideal boat trip itinerary.

Our Recommendations

Before jumping straight into descriptions of each island, we've put together our recommendations for how to get the most out of these experiences. It takes skill and knowledge to see the best sights and get value for money. But, this should help.

Day Trip Tours and Overnight Stays

Day trip tours are generally extremely good value for money. You get to see more sights than you'd ever be able to by making separate bookings, and you'll have food included. These days are generally quite commercial, and there will be many other tourists around, but they're worth it.

1. Phi Phi Islands - we highly recommend you spend a few nights there, but if you don't have the time, make sure you do a day trip. There is so much to do and so many incredible sights to see.
2. Racha Islands - make sure you go to the Racha Islands for snorkeling or diving. These tours also usually include a stop at Coral Island.

3. Similan Islands - this day will be filled with snorkeling, sightseeing, and lunch. The Similans aren't very near the other popular islands, so it's good to dedicate an entire day to this.
4. Phang Nga Bay - this day trip around the Bay is non-negotiable. You'll see so many of the best nearby sights on this trip. Stops usually include Hong Island, James Bond Island, Kudu Island, Koh Panyee, and Koh Panak Cave.
5. Ko Yao and Khai Islands - this is an excellent trip if you like classic tourist locations with umbrellas, coconuts, and jet skis.
6. Koh Lanta - best for snorkeling and diving. A long way from Phuket, stay a few days here.

Nearby Islands to Visit

If you want to be independent and not have a set itinerary, you're best off hiring a longtail boat to take you to a nearby island. A return trip will usually cost between 1000 - 2000 baht.

1. Coral Island - very commercial, adventure activities, and a restaurant on the island. It can get a little crowded.
2. Koh Bon - not touristy, very quiet and peaceful. Good for snorkeling and relaxing.
3. Khai Islands - commercial and touristy, with post-card-worthy beaches.
4. Koh Rang Yai - secluded, beautiful, and tranquil. Great for swimming and relaxing.

How to Choose the Best Boat Trips

Having been on many boat trips from Phuket, we can promise you that the **type** of tour you book is sometimes even more important than the destination. It's not always clear what you'll get when you book tours, so we've outlined your options here.

The traditional option is booking a group tour through Tripadvisor or a local travel agent. You should do this two or three days in advance. These tours are great value for money, you get taken to all the best spots, and you usually have lunch included. The boats are large (and noisy), and there will be around 40 people. Insurance, lunch, equipment, and national park fees, are usually all included in the price.

Next, you have day trips with local businesses, usually diving schools. On these trips, they use smaller boats, and 10-15 others will join you. These trips are far less commercial and more about getting you to the best snorkeling or diving spots. These options are rarely on Tripadvisor;

you have to talk to the staff in diving shops to see what they offer. Bear in mind, most provide opportunities for snorkeling, swimming, and diving.

If you decide you want a private trip, you have two options: luxury or longtail. The luxury trips are very expensive. You'll charter a speed boat for a day and sail around on your own itinerary (or recommendations from the captain).

Longtail boats are a far more accessible option. If you head to Rawai beach, you'll see longtail boats everywhere. You can simply talk to one of the owners and agree on a plan for the day. They will take you to any of the nearby islands, and a return trip costs around 1000 -2000 baht.

Now you know your options for booking boat trips, let's get on to the exciting stuff - learning about the delights of the most popular islands near Phuket.

Large Islands and National Parks

First, we'll look at the larger islands and national parks worth visiting. Generally, there's lots to see and do here, so it's worth allocating 1-3 days at these sites.

Phi Phi Islands

The Phi Phi islands (pronounced pee-pee) are one of the most popular destinations to travel to from Phuket. Phi Phi became a major tourist destination after *The Beach*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, was filmed there.

This group of six islands lies around 40km from Phuket and is known as one of the most stunning locations in this part of the world.

Sailing around the islands, you'll see hundreds of tall rock structures jutting out of the sea, with incredible cliff-like faces and some inhabited with trees. The waters near Phi Phi are famous for their turquoise colors and crystal clarity.

You'll find amazing marine life, limestone mountains, caves, and white sandy beaches all over Phi Phi. Personally, Phi Phi was one of the first places I visited when I arrived in Phuket, and I was overwhelmed by the beauty I'd only ever observed in photoshopped travel brochures.

If you want to stay on Phi Phi, you can choose either Phi Phi Don or Phi Phi Le. Most people decide to stay on the larger island of Phi Phi Don and sail over to the smaller island when they like.

The other islands in the group are Koh Yung, Koh Bida Nok, Koh Bida Nai, and Koh Mai Phai (Bamboo island).

In our opinion, visiting the Phi Phi islands is an unmissable experience if you're in Phuket. They're easily accessible, home to beautiful nature, and fantastic for swimming, snorkeling, and diving.

The main thing you have to decide with Koh Phi Phi is how long to visit. There are hundreds of day trips. However, you can also book a ferry trip and stay on the islands.

First, we'll look at the day trips. Taking a day trip from Phuket to the Phi Phi islands is relatively inexpensive and an amazing way to see the best of Phi Phi with a knowledgeable tour guide. On most of these trips you'll sail around the islands, go snorkeling, sea kayaking, and have lunch on Phi Phi Don. Most will stop at Maya Bay (the location of the film, *The Beach*).

Maya Bay was closed to tourism for a few years to help preserve the environment, but it's re-opened in 2022 for visitors. Visits are staggered, and you have an allocated time slot to visit.

Overall, day trips to Phi Phi are incredible.

However, these trips stick to a tight schedule, and trying to see all the sights in so little time can feel rushed.

If you have time to spare, we recommend getting a ferry to Koh Phi Phi and staying a few nights. You have time to explore the islands in your own time, and the day trips offered from the island are far more in-depth because you don't have the long journey time to and from Phuket.

Once in Phi Phi, you can go on group tours or charter a private longtail for an affordable price. Hiring a private boat and driver is an incredible experience; they'll advise you on the best places for swimming, snorkeling, or just chilling on the beach. Then, you can stay there as long as you like.

Hiring sea kayaks is another popular activity in Phi Phi. You can flit from bay to bay, exploring on your own. Monkey island is particularly popular - but make sure you tie down all your belongings because the monkeys will steal anything they can!

Phi Phi Don is a small island (9.7km²), but it has plenty of hotels, hostels, restaurants, shops, and one small hospital for emergencies. Generally, you should be prepared to walk around - there aren't any taxis on the islands. There are several beautiful island hikes to viewpoints that you can do. Prices on Phi Phi are relatively expensive compared to Phuket, but the sights are incredible and unique.

Racha Islands

Two islets make up the Racha Islands: Koh Racha Yai and Koh Racha Noi. These islands are found about 20km south of Phuket and are a popular snorkeling and diving destination. Like most islands in the area, they're characterized by epic limestone cliffs, deep blue waters, and white sandy beaches.

However, the main attraction of the Racha Islands is the vibrant coral and colorful fishes. Snorkellers and divers can see marine life here, rarely found in other areas near Phuket.

If you want, you can stay on Koh Racha Yai. There is limited accommodation and a few bars and restaurants. This is a popular option for people on diving holidays as it means you can go out each day without the long journey from Phuket.

Similan Islands

The Similan Islands form an archipelago around 120km North West of Phuket in the Andaman Sea. There are eleven islands: Koh Hu Yong, Koh Payang, Koh Payan, Koh Miang, Koh Ha, Koh Payu, Koh Hin Pousar, Koh Similan, Koh Bangu, Kho Bon (Koh Talu), and Koh Tachai.

On a trip to the Similan Islands, you'll sail around all of them. However, the two main islands are Koh Miang and Koh Similan. These islands are renowned for their beauty and long stretches of white beaches. There is also a wide range of marine life, including turtles, baby sharks, and rays.

On day trips, you usually tour the islands by boat and then get dropped on the main island for lunch. You'll get to snorkel off the boat and shop on the island. On a day trip, there's usually only time to properly visit two or three of the islands; you can always hike to a viewpoint to see the best sights of the whole archipelago.

The Similans are great for snorkeling, diving, and relaxing on beaches. However, there's a long journey time from Phuket, and you don't always get to enjoy everything there is to offer. There is basic accommodation on the Similans. If you're not a fan of long boat rides, we recommend staying a few nights to break up the journey.

Because the Similan Islands are way out into the Andaman Sea, you won't find a tour that combines the Similan's with other islands.

Koh Yao Islands (Phang Nga Bay)

The Koh Yao islands are two large islands between Phuket and Krabi, Koh Yao Yai and Koh Yao Noi. These islands are within Phang Nga Bay, so you'll often see trips to these islands offered within day trips around other islands in the bay (Koh Hong, Koh Lao Lading, and Koh Pakbia).

Generally, it takes around 45 minutes from Phuket in a speedboat.

The larger island, Koh Yao Noi, is relatively quiet and undeveloped. Although you'll sail around it, there isn't much to do on this island. The slightly smaller island, Koh Yao Yai, is where the activities are.

Compared to the neighboring party islands such as Koh Phi Phi, the Koh Yao islands are peaceful paradise. However, there are a few great bars, restaurants, and hotels to keep you entertained. One of the main attractions is the fishing villages.

The island locals make their money through fishing, farming, and rubber. This shows how the Koh Yao Islands haven't been commercialized for tourism in the same way as many other Thai islands. You'll be able to get the things you need, but don't expect everything to be about you.

The beaches are gorgeous, the pace of life is slow and simple, and it's a great place to relax in an undisturbed tropical paradise. If you stay a few days, you'll be able to find Muay Thai, yoga classes, or meditation workshops to join on Koh Yao Noi. It's the perfect place for a healing detox.

On a day trip to these islands, you won't spend very much time here. The tour operators prefer to take you to places that are thriving with other tourists; we recommend booking one of the 'five island' tours so that you can make the most of Pang Nga Bay.

If you're craving undeveloped beauty and calm, this is one of the better places to stay for a few days.

Koh Lanta

Koh Lanta is a long, thin island (25km by 3km) just off the coast of Krabi. Although it makes more sense to access Koh Lanta straight from mainland Krabi, you can travel there by boat from Phuket.

It takes around three hours on the ferry, and because of the long journey, it's difficult to find day trips to the island. For this reason, we recommend going there for a few nights after your stay in Phuket.

Koh Lanta is beautiful, picturesque, tranquil, and world-renowned for snorkeling and diving. If you like observing marine life and have time at the end of your Phuket vacation, a visit to Koh Lanta is essential!

Smaller Islands

Now, you have the smaller islands. Many of these islands are likely to be included in the itinerary for day tours, so there's no need to make a special trip. However, some have untouched beauty and are perfect for charting a longtail boat and exploring.

If you, like us, love peaceful tranquility, Koh Bon should be your first stop!

Coral Island (Koh He)

Coral Island is perfect for a casual trip from Phuket, it's only about 15 minutes away by speedboat. Although many tours include Coral Island on the day's itinerary, you don't have to book a tour. Simply head down to the beach at Rawai and ask any of the boat drivers for a ride over there.

As the name suggests, the sights under the water are vibrant and abundant. Coral Island is pretty small, with two beaches. There are a few bars, restaurants, and lots of adventure activities for kids and adults.

Coral Island is quite touristy and can get busy during the day; it's worth walking down the beaches to find more secluded spots if you prefer a quieter beach.

Koh Bon

Despite being in plain sight, Koh Bon is a hidden gem off the coast of Rawai. If you look out to sea while on Rawai beach, Koh Bon is the island you can see directly in front of you.

It takes about ten minutes to get to by longtail, and you can ask any local boatmen to take you across. Make sure you note down what boat number they are and their contact details in case you need them to come back to pick you up earlier than expected.

This island had a single restaurant, which unfortunately had to close during the pandemic. Now, the island appears deserted, and the beaches are quiet.

There is some good snorkeling, although it's not as vibrant as on the islands further from shore.

The best thing about Koh Bon is that it's not a commercial island and has no tourist attractions. Therefore, you'll find very few tourists there. This is an excellent option if you want to spend the day on a white sandy beach without being crowded or hassled.

Bring everything you need; there aren't any shops on the island.

Unfortunately, there's no one maintaining the island, so some trash has washed up on the island since the pandemic, I try to collect a bag of trash to take back to the bins on the mainland each time I visit.

James Bond Island (Khao Phing Kan)

Known to tourists as James Bond Island and locals as Khao Phing Kan, this is another popular tourist destination in Phang Nga Bay. It was given this name after 'The Man with the Golden Gun' was filmed there in 1974.

It's right at the top of Phang Nga Bay, around 25km North East of Phuket. Despite being further away than most of the day trips from Phuket, it's one of the most popular. Any tour operator will be able to book it for you; we recommend getting a full-day trip that explores the whole bay, not just James Bond Island.

The main lure of the island (other than the link to the Bond films) is the breathtaking scenery. Aside from the gorgeous waters, the limestone mountains and cliffs make it an obvious choice for a film set.

Be prepared for crowds; it's a major tourist destination. It will be crowded, and you will be solicited to buy souvenirs. Even so, it's a lovely day trip and a positive experience.

Koh Panyi Village

Koh Panyi or Koh Panyee is found in Pang Nga Bay, near James Bond island.

It's a floating village, built on stilts, in the sea! This small village serves as both a fishing hub and a tourist attraction. The houses on stilts are a remarkable sight, making a fantastic photo.

We found this village very interesting; it seemed as commercial as it did private. The local population is almost entirely Muslim, and there's a mosque prominently centered on the island. It's one of the few islands we've visited where we felt like we were in someone's hometown, rather than a tourist trap.

However, almost contradictory to this experience, certain areas of the village are filled with souvenir stalls and seafood restaurants. The locals barely acknowledged us unless they thought we would buy something and continued with their day-to-day life.

Although it was an interesting place to visit, we felt like our presence was intrusive. We were unsure what impact tourism has had on this community; on the one hand, tourists spend money that can contribute to their economy. On the other hand, do they want or need that?

We were unsure, but didn't feel entirely comfortable here. If you book a day trip that includes a visit here, it's definitely worth seeing. But, we probably wouldn't visit it more than once.

Koh Rang Yai

Koh Rang Yai is only about 5km to the east of Phuket. This is one of our favorite spots near Phuket. It's easiest to get there from the Laem Hin pier, but you can also approach a longtail boat driver on Rawai beach to organize a trip. From the pier, the journey is about 20 minutes.

It's not exactly a 'secret,' as some tours include it on their itinerary, but it's certainly less well-known than most neighboring islands. Apparently, there is some basic accommodation on the island, but very few people choose to stay overnight. So, if you visit early in the morning, there's likely to be virtually no one else there.

On the island, there is a restaurant (in 2022, it was closed due to COVID-19 - [check here for updates](#)). As it was closed, we didn't get to eat - but we heard good reviews from friends about the food on the island.

There's also a pearl shop where you can learn more about the local industry and buy souvenirs.

Other than that, the island is pretty untouched. We love the natural beauty and tranquility.

Khai Islands

The Koh Khai islands are another popular activity from Phuket. There are three islands, around 15 minutes to the East of Phuket. They're called Koh Kai Nai, Koh Khai Nui, and Koh Khai Nok.

This small group of islands is famous for its postcard-worthy white sand beaches and crystal clear waters. There's no denying the beauty of these islands; however, we have mixed feelings about visiting the Khai Islands.

The Khai islands have been developed purely for tourism; from the moment you step off the boat, you're overwhelmed by offers of Jetski rental, massage, and kayak hire. We visited the Khai islands during the pandemic when Thailand was reeling from the lack of tourism; somehow, the Khai islands were still crowded! In Phuket, tourists were nowhere to be seen (maybe because they were all on Koh Khai).

Because the islands are so small, this contributes to the feeling of overcrowding. We found the prices of food and drink were wildly inflated, and there was minimal snorkeling nearby.

Sure, the islands are beautiful - but no more so than many other spots we've visited. It was nice to stop at Koh Khai for an hour on a day trip, but we wouldn't go there for a day.

Enjoy the Islands of Thailand from Phuket

Having written about all my favorite islands near Phuket, I'm ready to jump on a boat and see them all again. I hope that I've inspired you in the same way.

If you need any more convincing, just type the names of any of these islands into Google and browse through the images (somehow, the islands are even better in person than in the photos!)

We've enjoyed many boat trips around Phuket waters, on various types of trips. We loved the smaller trips with local diving companies. Let us know if you'd like more details about our favorite dive companies, and we'll happily share all our knowledge.

So, where do you think you'll go first? You're sure to enjoy yourself whatever you choose, but we hope this guide has helped give you some clarity on the best places to spend your time and money when in Phuket.

Do you have any other burning questions about Phuket? Drop a comment, and we'll find out the answer for you!