



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



Getting older in Koh Tao

by Amaru & Suzanne, Oct 2nd 2007

A few months ago when we were planning our trip we told ourselves that we wanted to finish up somewhere where we could relax and do nothing for a few days. Our decision fell on the island of Koh Tao.

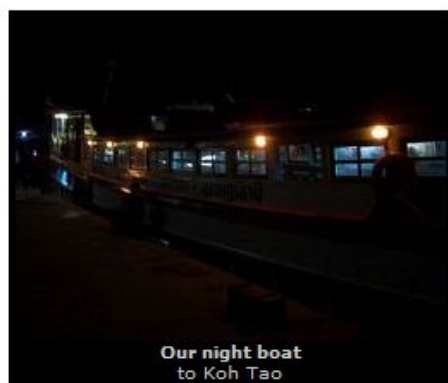
To get there from Khao Lak we first had to cross to the other side of the country and the best way to do it was to take a local bus to Takuapa and there catch another bus to Surat Thani. The trip from Khao Lak to Surat Thani took us around 4½ hours in total (we had to wait for a while in Takuapa).

When we were getting close to Surat the guys on the bus asked us where we were going, we told them to Koh Tao and they then knew where to drop us off. We got off the bus and Suz all of a sudden realizes that she had forgotten her daypack on the bus!

I could see the bus, it had stopped at a red light about 150-200m further up the street, I could also see the countdown to the green light and realized that I had around 70 seconds to get to the bus.



At the night market
in Surat Thani



Our night boat
to Koh Tao

I ran like a madman towards the bus, reached it and banged on the door. I was allowed to enter and made my way to the seats where we had been seated. There was another man there so I had to excuse myself while I looked under the seat. Luckily the bag was still there so I grabbed it, said thanks to the bus crew and walked back to Suz.

We didn't really have anything in the bag that we wouldn't have had survived without... nevertheless, we were glad to have the bag back!

We now made our way down to the harbour where we found our night ferry, bought tickets, stored luggage onboard and left to get something to eat. Luckily there is a night market right there so food is very easy to find!

After dinner we made it back to our boat and found our beds, which were just mattresses on the deck. Each double mattress is then given three numbers.... so it's nice and cozy =))

We had about 90min until we were scheduled to leave so we passed the time by watching some episodes on our Creative and by doing some reading. Once the boat got on the way the lights were turned off and we could go to sleep.

The boat left Surat Thani at 11pm and arrived in Koh Tao the following morning at around 7am and we had managed to get some sleep here and there, at least the ride was nice and smooth which was a bit surprising considering that we were travelling during the moonson period.



Not too many people on the boat
Still low season



It's not very roomy though
...but it's good enough

I had been to this island on a few occasions in the past so I knew where I wanted to stay. We jumped on the back of a 4x4 (a Koh Tao Taxi) and told them to drop us off on Sairee Beach, the longest and busiest beach on the island.

But, since we had arrived here in low season we managed to get some nice accommodation for a good price.... and the beach was pretty empty as well, it's a great time to visit the island during off season!

During the rest of the day we walked along the island, exploring the areas around Sairee Beach and Mae Haad (where the ferry had arrived). On our way there I pointed out a Koh Tao original to Suz, Mr J! This guy has among other things a bungalow resort, money changing business, travel agency and much more.

Mr J also has the funniest signs posted everywhere on the island and when you walk past his store he always says something like: "Come in and spend money, one book one chocolate!"

Koh Tao is famous for its diving, it's not that they have world class diving, it's just that they have turned the island into a "dive factory". If you don't have a certificate you can sign up with any of the 40 dive shops on the island and get reduced prices on accommodation while you're doing it.

Since it wasn't possible to dive the Similan Islands at this time of year, I had decided to do a few dives here anyway, if nothing else it's just nice to get back into the water!



Welcome
We have arrived in Koh Tao



Koh Tao Harbour
It's a small island

I managed to find a dive shop that were offering 4 dives for the price of 3 (like I said, it's good to travel in off season) so I jumped on the offer. I decided to do two dives the following day and two more the day after...

The only drawback with the dives was the early rise needed for a 7am dive... the things I do for my diving! Suz decided to stay behind and sleep while I was away.

Once on the dive boat we left for "Chumpon Pinnacle", supposedly the best dive site that Koh Tao has to offer. It was now also very clear to me that the sea must have been confused the previous day since it was now very, very choppy!

Well, the dive site actually exceeded my expectations. I knew that it was famous for sightings of Whale Sharks and even though we didn't see one it was still a good dive with lots of life everywhere...

After the first dive we moved closer to the island for the second, shallower dive. We came back to main land around noon and I made my way back to meet up with Suz who now had been up for a while relaxing in the very cool restaurant that our place had.

The rest of that day and the next day as well were fairly similar, we went down to the beach if the sun was out, if it was raining we just sat either in our bungalow or in the restaurant (which was located right by the sea). Our main purpose here was to relax and do as little as possible.... and we did a pretty good job at that!



Main street in Koh Tao
Down at Mae Haad Bay



Outside our Bungalow
We're staying at Sairee Cottages

The next morning I was diving again and so the cycle continued =))

Every afternoon when the sunset was approaching we sat down on the beach on one of the many beach bars, had a drink and watched the sunset. And even though they were not as impressive as the ones I've seen in the past, they were still beautiful!

And then finally, my 30th birthday arrived..... When we were planning our trip I intentionally decided to have it on Koh Tao. It's just the way that I wanted to celebrate it, relaxing on a tropical island, just the two of us! And since we had been living on the cheap for almost 3 months we decided that we deserved a bit of luxury, so we went to one of the spas on the island for some pampering!

Getting to the spa was quite an adventure in itself. The roads on Koh Tao are ok around the main area of Sairee and Mae Haad.... but venture a bit further inland and you will find some nasty dirt roads that require the full use of 4x4 trucks and people that know how to handle them.

Lots and lots of people come to Koh Tao, rent a motorcycle and try to tackle the hills. And many of them fall and get some nasty scrapes and cuts, you will always see people with bandages on this island, it's a phenomom and it goes under the name; "The Koh Tao Tattoo"!

Well, we made it to the spa, were given a towel and a key each and were told to undress and shower....



Mr J is a funny man
with some funny ads



Yup
He's a bit different!

Our treatment then started with an hour of Thai Massage which was followed by a full facial treatment. We felt very relaxed after the massage and now during the facial we were lying on our backs, eyes covered with some cotton buds and then an array of creams on our face.

I dozed off and snapped to attention by some snoring. Did I snore or was it Suz? I couldn't tell to be honest so Suz was helpful enough to tell me after the facial that I had been snoring for a minute or so....hehe, in other words, I was vey relaxed!

After some nice herbal tea we sat in a herbal steam bath for 15min to open up our pores, once we got out we were rubbed from head to toe in fresh Aloe Vera and then wrapped up like a springroll...

We both felt so relaxed afterwards, the whole experience had taken us around 2½-3 hours and ended up costing us a lot less than we would expect to pay for the same back home.

We finished that evening by having the biggest Squid we've ever seen for dinner and afterwards when we were sitting at a bar using the free WiFi Suz had a chat with one of the Thai girls working in the bar and managed to organize a cupcake as my birthday cake. We had saved the funky candles that Alex and Laura had gotten for Suz's birthday and used them on this occasion as well. So girls, if you are reading this.... Thanks again =))

Afterwards the bar girl asked if we wanted to keep the candles, it turned out that she loved them, we were glad to give them away to her to use on some other occasion!



Isn't this beautiful?
We chose a good place to relax



It's great to sit and watch the sunset while we're having a few drinks

The next day we chilled all day and in the evening made our way down to the harbour to take the boat back to main land, the time to leave had finally arrived.

And this time the boat ride wasn't as smooth as last time, it was rocking to say the least! Suz didn't manage to get much sleep but I slept better on this boat ride than the previous one. The main reason for that though was that we now had a lot more space and could stretch out...

Eventually we arrived in Surat Thani, got on a bus and after a bit of trouble (we had to change bus for some reason) we made it back to Khao Lak.

On our last evening in Khao Lak we had drinks with the gang and the next morning we left for Phuket airport. We flew to Bangkok and when we picked up our bags we noticed that the straps were undone.... weird, we always close everything nice and tight.

So we explored our luggage and found out that someone had been inside both of our backpacks. We have padlocks on them but it seems that they had managed to undo the zipper, looked around and then closed the bag again.

We're not sure who might have done it but since nothing was missing we decided not to think about it too much (we did report it to Air Asia just in case though).



After spending 6 hours in Bangkok airport (we thought we were leaving Bangkok earlier when we booked the Air Asia flight) we finally took off towards Sydney. After another 9 hours on a Thai Airways flight with no entertainment system at all we landed safely (although we did have some massive turbulence just before landing, the whole airplane was acting like a crazy rollercoaster for a while there so that was a bit exiting) at Sydney airport, we were home again!

The island of Koh Tao turned out to be the perfect way to finish up our trip. It's such a relaxed environment, specially now during off season! The dives were good, the spa was awesome and drinks on the beach watching the sunset is hard to be disappointed by.... sure we had a bit of rain during our stay, but that didn't stop us from having a great time!

We've had a great trip, seen and done so much that Hawaii seems like ages ago! The way we did the trip this time was a lot better than our previous one, it's a lot better to fly east all the time, that way we will end up in Asia before it's time to go back home, by then we know what our budget is and can splurge a bit more than we would if we would start our trip there!

Now that we are back home (i.e. the "Real World") there are a few things that we need to deal with, Suz needs to get a job, I need to make sure I can stay in the country by applying for my visa, and then we have a wedding to plan for next year... We are not likely to get bored any time soon ;))



Very pretty Can you see the Scorpion fish?



Hmmm.....am I upside down? Or is he?



Plenty of life
At dive site Chumpon Pinnacle



A good partnership...
Between the Gobi and the Prawn



Christmas Tree Worms
Pretty and fun to play with



A tiny Moray Eel
Very cute isn't it?



That's me
All is good!



"Under the sea, under the sea"
Love my diving!



A huge
Sea Cucumber



A small nudibranch
Tricky to find them...



Now what does that look like?
You've got a dirty, dirty mind!



The Beach
in Koh Tao



This is a good place
to work on the blog!



It's cloudy but still a nice sunset
...this is the rainy season



Suz and I
relaxing next to the sea



Beer and Sunset
Do you need anything else?



The torches are turned on
after sunset



It's gorgeous to walk along the beach
after sunset!



Yes, I got a little bit burned
as Suz is demonstrating



We have a bit of rain coming in
A bit of rain here and there, who cares?



Some of the basic accomodation
that can be found here



The roads here are shocking!!
Good thing we're riding a 4x4



Jamahkiri Spa Resort
Where we went to get pampered!



Now that's a nice pool!
Too bad we didn't stay here...



Feeling a bit hungry?
Let's have some pancakes



Nutella, Banana and Coconut pancake
YUM!



I like these pancake stands
Quick and Yummy!



That's a HUGE squid
I'm having that for my B-Day dinner



This is what it looked like later...
And it tasted amazing!!



Suz is enjoying
her food as well



I'm turning 30
Recognize the candles?



Need some DVDs?
You can find a few here...



The main street
at Sairee Village



It's time to go back to main land
On another night boat!

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