

There's something brewing in the Old Town area of Phuket Town. Tucked into the southeast corner of Thailand's largest island, this 150-year-old settlement was once a thriving center of culture and cuisine, but fell into quiet disrepair in the late 20th century. Now, a new wave of restaurateurs are breathing fresh life into the area, restoring its historic Sino-Portuguese shophouses and giving visitors reason to leave the beach behind.

Start your tour on Yaowarat Road with a flat white or single espresso at **House** (66/88-241-1116; [fb.com/house542](https://www.facebook.com/house542)), a minimalist, Japanese-influenced café whose owner, a pilot, uses his frequent travels to source beans like the award-winning Blackburn Estate Natural from Tanzania. Just up the street is **Flavor** (66/84-843-1613; [flavorphuket.com](https://www.facebook.com/flavorphuket.com)), where Belgian owner Erik Vranckx's emphasis on using fresh organic produce sees him shop at the nearby traditional market and make his own bread, sauces, and pastas. Although he changes the menu daily, you can always order his signature gazpacho and slow-cooked lamb stew.

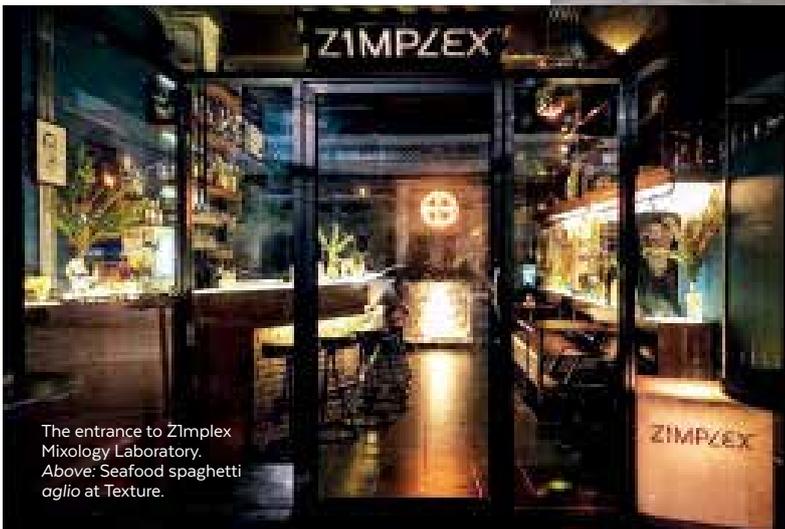
Phuket's craft beer scene has exploded in recent months, with a slew of importers bringing in a range of fine brews like Oregon-based Rogue's Dead Guy Ale and Blanc from Tagua in Japan. Leading the way is **Crafts & Co.** (66/96-404-9722; [fb.com/craftsnco](https://www.facebook.com/craftsnco)), a tall-ceilinged shophouse that's been given a hipster-friendly makeover with concrete floors, exposed-brick walls, and one of the largest collections of craft beer on the island. Alternatively, sample from the 100-plus beers available at the **Pint Factory** (66/84-691-2713; [fb.com/pintfactory](https://www.facebook.com/pintfactory)), especially the popular BrewDog Punk IPA.

Another Phuket Town venue is pushing

GOING TO TOWN

For cuisine and cocktails, what's old is new again along the historic streets of Phuket's compact capital.

BY SIMON N. OSTHEIMER



The entrance to Zimplex Mixology Laboratory. Above: Seafood spaghetti at Texture.

boundaries with its innovative cocktails. At the **Zimplex Mixology Laboratory** (66/84-003-6664; [fb.com/zimplex](https://www.facebook.com/zimplex)) on Phang Nga Road, owner Tom Auttayamavittaya—a.k.a. Tom Funk—jumped from a successful career in advertising to opening up his own bar as a place for him and his friends to hang out. Thankfully, the invite has since been extended to everyone, meaning we're all welcome to try the self-styled mad scientist's shot creations with names like Parallel Universe and Master of Density—though the exact ingredients are kept



a secret. Next door at **Smokin' Fish** (66/83-520-7968; fb.com/smokinfish.phuket), chef Sakulyot “Playim” Phongpheng takes a similarly inventive approach to his food, with an ever-evolving menu of southern Thai flavors like grilled Andaman prawn pasta and spicy soft-shell crab salad. While you're waiting for your meal, add a doodle to the restaurant's chalkboard walls.

If you're hungry but in a hurry, two newcomers to the area have you covered. Having started life as a simple street stall, **Ooy Street Kitchen** (66/84-642-2797; fb.com/ooystreetkitchen) is now a sit-down venue complete with air-con and graffiti murals, but it has retained the tasty, wallet-friendly dishes that made its name. Must-try items are the Darth Vader beef burger—so named for its charcoal-black bun—and pulled-pork tacos. Nearby, tucked away behind the Old Town's famous clock tower, is **Chicka-boom** (66/62-061-5538; fb.com/chickaboom.th), which serves amazing Korean-style fried chicken from a food truck parked in a covered lot. The cheese fries are also worth the stop.

Back on Phang Nga Road, the up-and-coming **Surf & Turf by Soul Kitchen** (66/89-104-7432; fb.com/surfandturf.soulkitchen) serves a range of Western fusion in surrounds stylish enough for

Above, from left: Surf & Turf by Soul Kitchen is a stylish addition to the Old Town's dining scene; the flavors at Torry's Ice Cream range from traditional favorites to Thai-inspired creations like mango sticky rice.



date night. Exquisitely presented daily specials are posted every morning on their Facebook page, tempting you to exchange one feed for another—recent highlights have included beef massaman curry served with sticky rice and grilled sea bass with Thai basil risotto.

Things are a little more relaxed at **Texture** (66/81-916-1430; texturecafe Phuket.com), a modish café that occupies a century-old home on Dibuk Road, a street of beautifully restored terraced shophouses. Each of these is painted in a different pastel shade—Texture is blue—and garnished with decorative carvings. At lunch you'll want to tuck into Texture's menu of wraps (try the open-faced rock lobster with garlic aioli), pastas, and salads; for dinner, order from the extensive list of steaks and ribs.

With so much to eat and drink, there's only one thing that, until recently, the Old Town was missing: a high-end dessert place. That gap has now been filled with the opening of **Torry's Ice Cream** (66/94-995-9496; torrysicecream.com), a boutique gelato shop that sits along Phuket's prettiest street, Soi Rommanee. Many decades ago this small lane was once the island's most infamous red-light district, but it's now home to a range of hip businesses, boutique hotels, and cool eateries. Torry's decor draws on its traditional surroundings, with patterned-tile floors, locally sourced antiques, and teahouse-style furnishings. But it's the range of amazing homemade ice creams that pulls in the crowds, including Thai-inspired flavors as roast banana, mango sticky rice, lychee sorbet, and—for the die-hards among you—durian. ☉