

48 hours in PHUKET



Thailand's largest island has something for everyone: from the heritage charm of the Old Town to the beautiful beaches that line the west coast. However, as **Simon N. Ostheimer** reveals, beyond the tourist traps lies an exciting destination that's full of surprising secrets

Phuket has come a long way in a very short time. Historically an important regional trading post attracting merchants from Arabia, India and China, it became a centre of the global tin and rubber industries, before being discovered by travellers in the 1970s. Today, now firmly on the global tourism map, it combines pristine stretches of sand with amazing culinary experiences and exciting attractions. Here's how to make the most of Phuket in 48 hours. →

2pm ▶

After arriving and checking in to your hotel, make a beeline for the beach. With dozens to choose from, there's a perfect stretch of sand in Phuket for everyone, however we recommend Bang Tao on the west coast, where the coastline stretches for miles and the calm waters are perfect for swimming. If you're feeling a bit energetic, venture offshore for a leisurely stand-up paddle with the team at **Skyla's Surf & SUP Club** (surf-sup.asia).



5pm ▼

Once a thriving entrepôt of commerce, Phuket's historic Old Town has since simmered down into a quiet backwater. However, in the last few years it's been given a shot of life as the charming century-old Chinese shophouses have undergone a glamorous makeover. The narrow streets now house a hip mix of art galleries, cafés, restaurants, and bars, alongside more traditional occupants, such as a Chinese medicine store and temples. Take a stroll and soak up the culture.

FRIDAY



7pm ▼

Once you've finished strolling around the Old Town, making friends with the locals and picking up a souvenir or two, head to the **Blue Elephant** (blueelephant.com/phuket) on Krabi Road. This landmark mansion was formerly one of Phuket's grandest residences, home to a Chinese family who made their money from tin mining. Now, it's the perfect showcase for a menu of royal Thai cuisine, dishes once served in Bangkok's palaces.



9pm ▶

For a nightcap, head to **Crafts & Co.** (facebook.com/craftsnco) back in the Old Town on Yaowarat Road. A pioneer of the island's growing craft beer scene, this trendy bar inhabits an old shophouse that's been given an industrial-chic overhaul, with the original white wooden ceiling offset by black metal and light timber. Take a seat at the bar and order from their long list of imported beers. Our top pick? Rogue's Hazelnut Brown Nectar.



9am ▼

Since it opened, the **Phuket Elephant Sanctuary** (phuketelephantsanctuary.org) has been changing minds on how elephants should be treated in regards to tourism. Rather than being ridden, at the sanctuary, retired animals are given a safe home where they can just be themselves while visitors observe them. Watching the elephants splash in the lake, forage in the trees, bathe in mud and playfully trumpet to each other is a sheer joy.



3pm ▼

Instead of sharing the sand with the crowds on your second day, make your way over to **Catch** (catchbeachclub.com), the island's chicest beach club. Here, a DJ spins cool beats all day while a fashionable mix of locals and tourists enjoy Mediterranean-inspired bites and classy cocktails in a top-notch setting. Relax on one of the sun loungers or book a shaded sala by the pool, and soak up a little slice of St Tropez in the tropics.

SATURDAY



9pm ▼

To finish off the evening, enjoy a drink at classy lakeside restaurant and bar **Skye Lake Club** (skylakeclub.com). Accessed via an inviting curved wooden staircase, the venue enjoys incredible views from floor to ceiling glass walls on three sides, while an outdoor terrace floats over the water. Ease yourself into a seat and order one of their signature cocktails such as the Skye Spice – a fresh blend of rum, ginger and lime. →



6pm ▼

By now you've probably built up an appetite, so change into something a little more smart-casual and make the short taxi trip over to **Bampot** (bampot.co), set in a restored traditional residence. Chef Jamie Wakeford has been turning heads on the island with his inventive combination of local ingredients and contemporary European recipes – make sure you order the Thai-style fried cauliflower and divine slow-cooked wagyu beef cheeks.



SUNDAY



9am ▶

Lest you forget, Phuket is a tropical island filled with lush jungle. While most of it is impenetrable, at **Hanuman World** (hanumanworldphuket.com) you can soar through the trees with ease. Named after the Hindu monkey god, this attraction allows you to choose between an easy sky walk high above the rainforest, a more challenging zipline and abseil adventure, or a roller-coaster-style ride where you're hurled down an overhanging track.



12pm ▼

It's a ways off the beaten track, but you'll be well rewarded for making the trek out to **Breeze** at Cape Yamu (breezcapeyamu.com) for their famous Long Lazy Sunday brunch, where amazing shared dishes are served at one long table. This open-air space sits atop a promontory with incredible views of Phuket's east coast, as its French-Canadian chef serves up an ever-changing mix of fusion cuisine accompanied by one of the island's best wine lists. 🍷



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