ISSUE 15

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Phuket's Secret Sands

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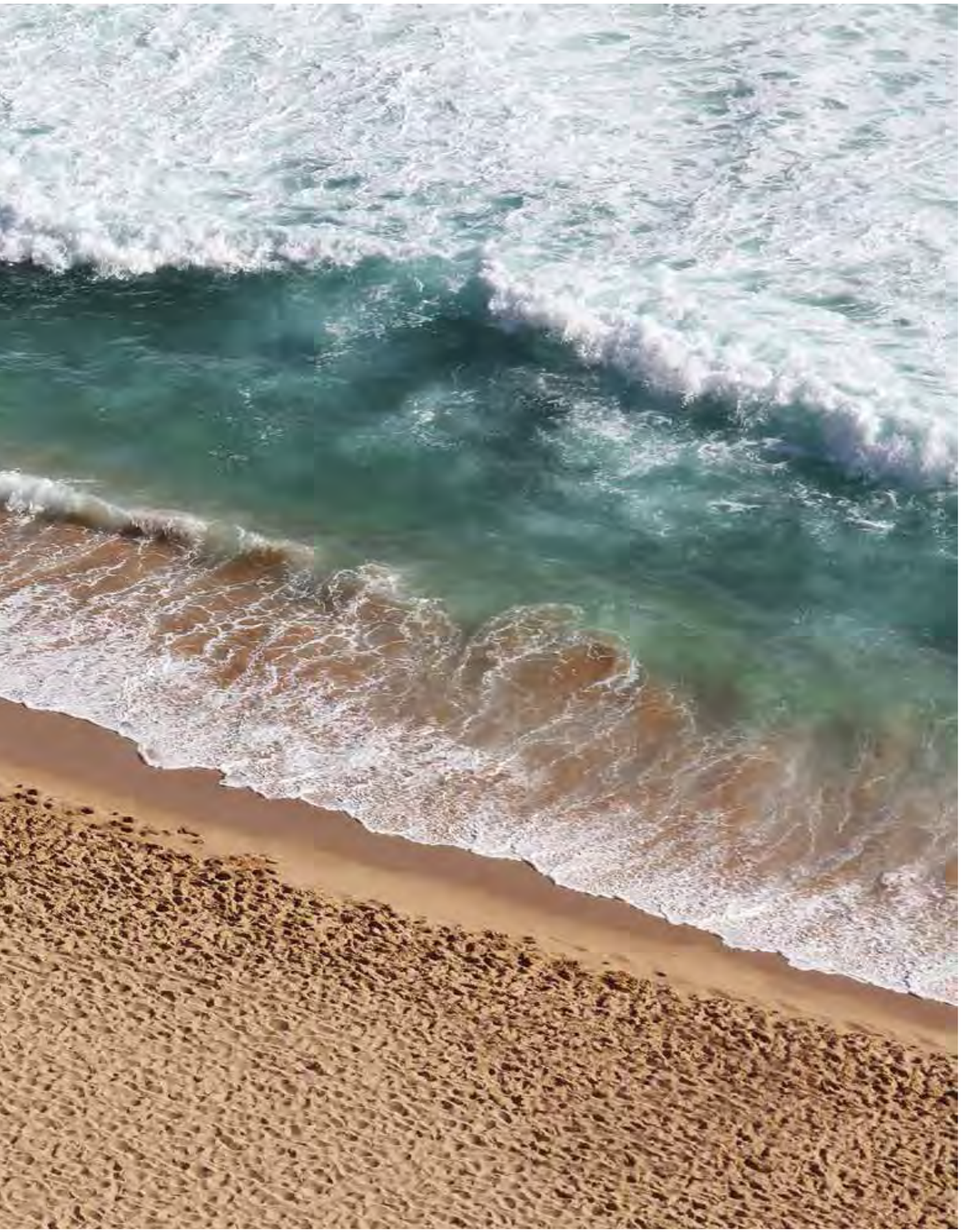
Photos: Kiri Heald

Though millions of tourists flock every year to the island's famous west coast beaches of Patong, Kata and Karon, it's still possible to find a secret cove to call your own. Here we discover four stretches of sand where you can get far away from the maddening crowds



Best beach for... snorkelling

Ao Sane, Naiharn

At the back of this isolated beach, which occupies a small sheltered bay on the south coast, there's an open-air restaurant serving Thai staples like khao pad gai (chicken fried rice) and pad see ew (fried flat noodles), which looks out onto waves crashing on the huge boulders that dot the sand. Just offshore — the sand drops away sharply — snorkellers gently swim over the colourful coral and tropical fish that continue to thrive here. Hugging the hillside around the beach, hidden away among the swaying palm trees, are a number of simple beach huts for rent. It's all so idyllic, you'd be forgiven for forgetting that just across the bay hundreds of tourists are fighting it out for space on busy Naiharn beach.

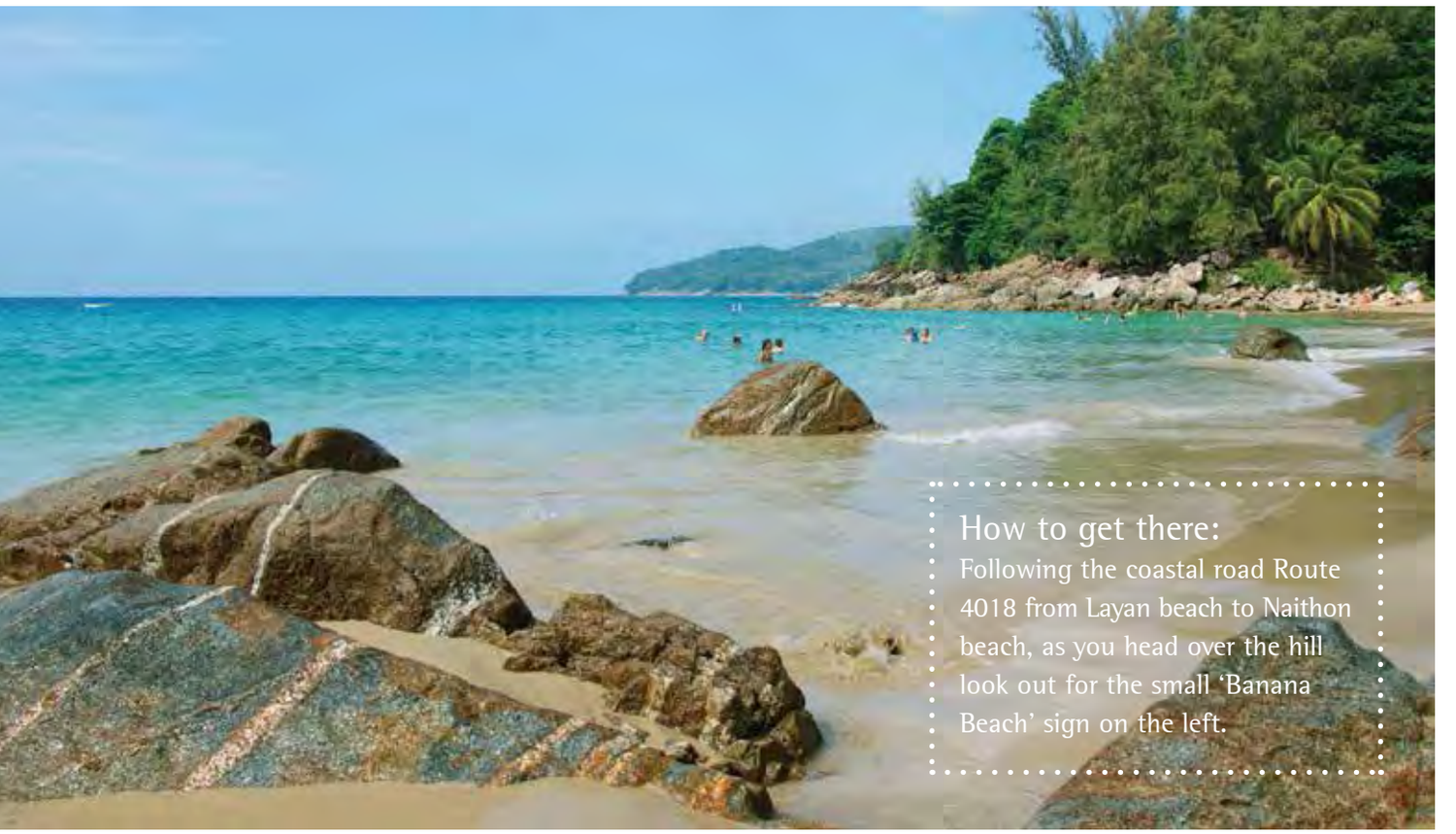
How to get there:

Head towards Naiharn beach, and at the northernmost end follow the road that hugs tightly to the coastline (ignore the signs saying that it's a private road, it's not). As the road dips down, take the small path on the left that leads down to the beach.

Best beach for... an adventure

Banana Rock Beach, Naithon

In the far northwest of Phuket, up a long, narrow and winding road, lies a secret beach that most locals don't even know about. In fact, the only indication it's actually there is a small wooden sign nailed to a tree that simply reads, 'Banana Beach'. Next to the sign, a section of barbed wire has been removed from between two concrete posts, and from here a path leads down to the beach. As you head down the hill, you'll be able to tantalisingly glimpse the sand and sea ahead of you. On any given day, you'll be one of just a handful of people here — some come by scooter, a few by car, and others by longtail boat, which can be hired to bring you here from Patong. Close to where the path enters the beach is a small seafood shack, whose owner rents out beach mats and umbrellas if you need them.



How to get there:

Following the coastal road Route 4018 from Layan beach to Naithon beach, as you head over the hill look out for the small 'Banana Beach' sign on the left.

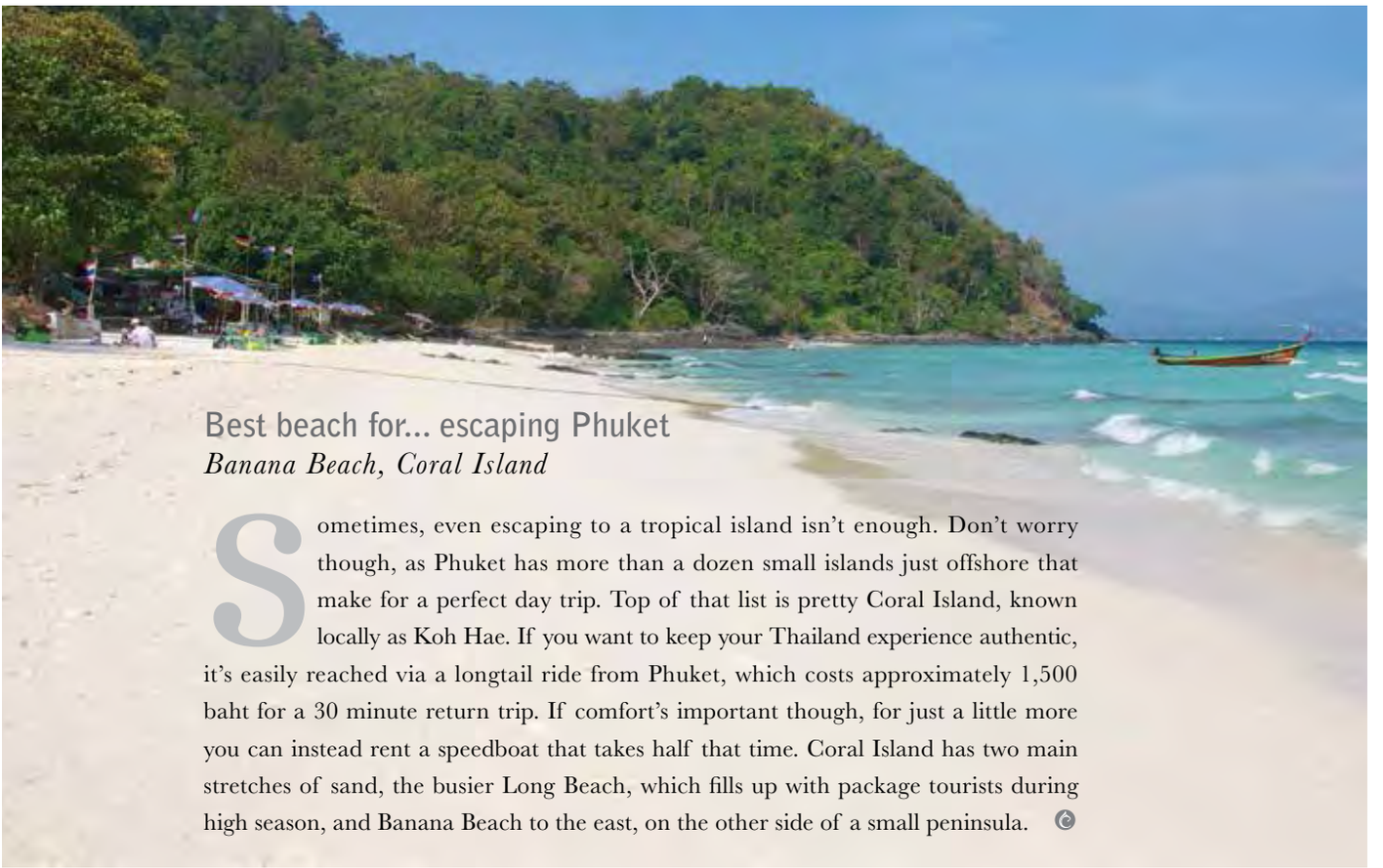
Best beach for... families

Tri Tra, Patong

While Patong offers the most accommodation available on the island — and admittedly much convenience in terms of bars, restaurants and shopping — its main beach can get quite busy. That's why you need to instead head to quieter Tri Tra beach, which lies just north of Patong bay. If you're not in a rush, and don't mind climbing the hill, you can walk here in 30 minutes, otherwise it's just a short tuk-tuk trip or ride on your rented scooter. Accessed down a steep though drivable path, there's plenty of shade for children, as well as a large — if a little more expensive than most — restaurant, as well as umbrellas. Last time we visited, we came across a baby elephant having fun in the surf with its trainer.

How to get there:

Take the beach road south out of Patong, cross the bridge and turn left at the corner. Follow the road, and then turn right down the steep access road to Tri Tra.



Best beach for... escaping Phuket

Banana Beach, Coral Island

Sometimes, even escaping to a tropical island isn't enough. Don't worry though, as Phuket has more than a dozen small islands just offshore that make for a perfect day trip. Top of that list is pretty Coral Island, known locally as Koh Hae. If you want to keep your Thailand experience authentic, it's easily reached via a longtail ride from Phuket, which costs approximately 1,500 baht for a 30 minute return trip. If comfort's important though, for just a little more you can instead rent a speedboat that takes half that time. Coral Island has two main stretches of sand, the busier Long Beach, which fills up with package tourists during high season, and Banana Beach to the east, on the other side of a small peninsula.

How to get there:

Longtails can be hired for the day from both Chalong Pier and Rawai Pier, though the trip is shorter from Rawai. Speedboats should be booked in advance.