

footloose

Life Is A Beach

Koh Lanta in southern Thailand offers several nature activities that includes diving courses, snorkelling, kayaking, island hopping, sea canoeing and trekking in the jungle.

By Murli Menon



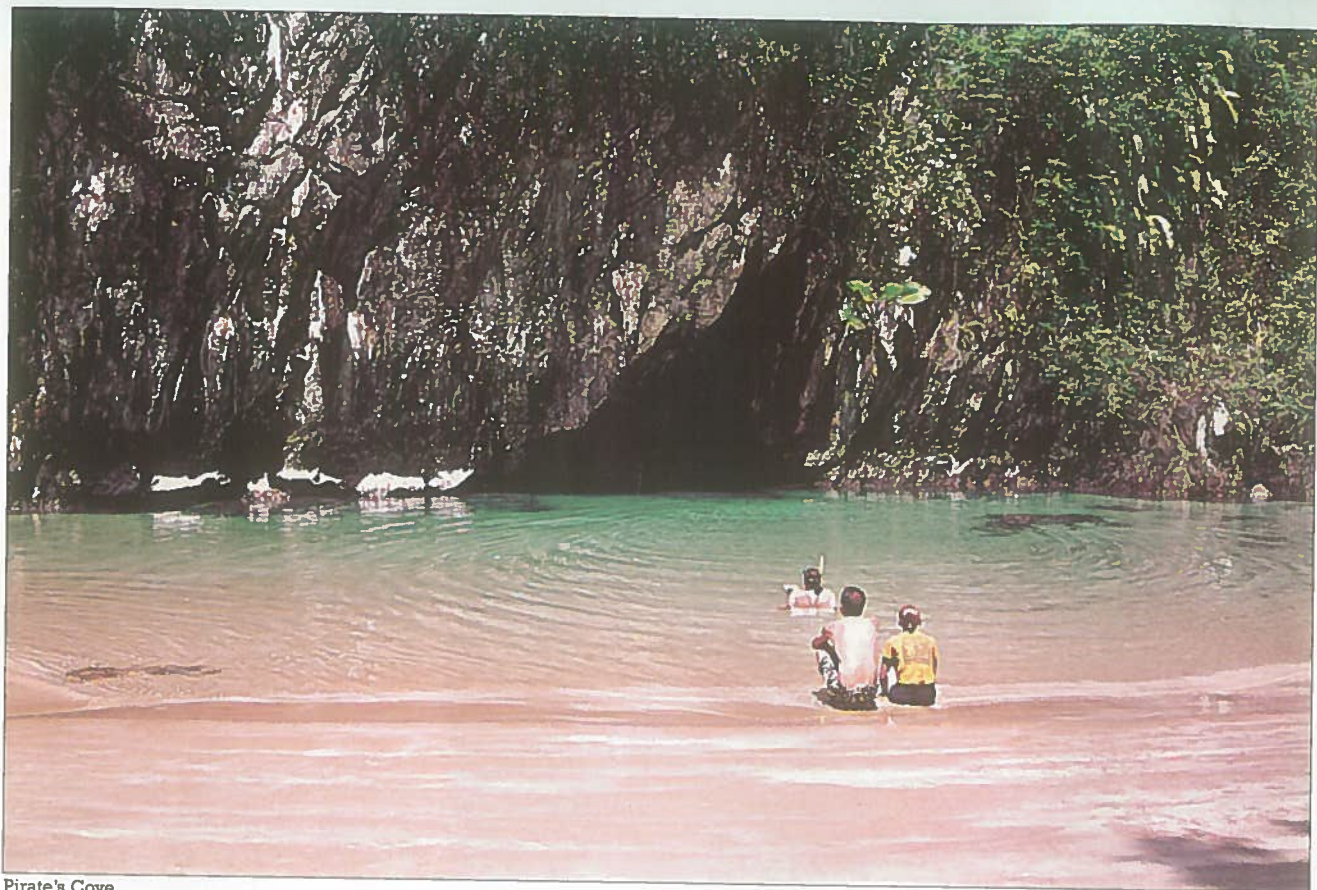


Sitting outside the sea-facing villa at the Pimalai Resort and Spa at Koh Lanta in southern Thailand is an out of the world experience. Koh Lanta is a picturesque island nestled in an inaccessible part of the Andaman Sea, cut off by giant hills on the north and the wide expanse of the Trang Sea in the south. It takes approximately 120 minutes to reach Pimalai Resort at Koh Lanta Yai from Krabi Airport. The first 60 minutes is the drive from Krabi to the private pier of Pimalai Resort; the other 60 minutes are for the speedboat ride to the resort. This ultra-modern resort is situated on an island surrounded by virgin rainforest. The Koh Lanta archipelago consists of 52 islands of which only 12 are inhabited.

The speedboat ride to Pimalai is itself an exploratory journey of several volcanic islands scattered across the Andaman Sea. You can sight these giant rocks placed in the middle of the sea like sculptures in an open art gallery and experience the magic of nature perfected after years of erosion of the rocks by the salty sea-water. Every now and then the boat passes close to one of these many uninhabited islands which have numerous underground caves and tunnels.

After being caressed by the sea breeze and cooled by the fine spray of sea water that wets your face as the boat speeds through the choppy waters you alight at the private pier and are whisked away to the modern comforts of a seaside cottage surrounded by thick rainforests. Pimalai offers several nature activities for its guests including diving courses, snorkelling, island hopping, sea canoeing, kayaking and trekking in the jungle.

An island-hopping day trip to Pirate's Cove or Emerald Cove is a must as its Morakot Cove is the most impressive point in the Trang Sea. On this island high and majestic limestone cliffs face south towards the sea. The cliffs conceal the magnificent emerald cove. You have to swim through the turquoise waters of the sea to enter this cove from an extremely narrow entrance



Pirate's Cove

through an 80-metre tunnel enveloped by total darkness and complete silence except the squeals of flying bats. After an endless swim, where minutes pass like hours, you gradually emerge from the darkness into an unbelievably picturesque scene - a brilliant lagoon fringed by the powdery white sand and enclosed by a majestically towering cliff and roofed by the clear blue skies above.

There is danger and excitement as you pass through the winding tunnel in pitch darkness. You must ensure to get out of the cove before the tide comes in or you will not be able to get out until the next day. As you reach the mouth of the cove, sunlight filters in through the entrance illuminating the emerald blue waters and bringing to light the effect of millions of years of erosion of the craggy rocks by the salty air and the corrosive waters of the ocean.

The edges of the rocks are jagged and razor sharp. You must carefully swim at the centre of the tunnel

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Getting There

- ❖ You can reach Koh Lanta by sea from Phuket, Koh Phi Phi and Krabi.
- ❖ It takes an hour to reach Karbi from Bangkok and approximately 12 hours by train and by bus. During the low season, the airlines tend to cancel Krabi flights. The schedules are very seasonal.
- ❖ Enjoy your two ferry rides all the way to Koh Lanta. It takes around 2 and half hours to reach the island by speedboat.
- ❖ Plan a trip around March to April as during the wet season, rain drenches Koh Lanta and the tide washes right up to the front of the resorts. Only a few resorts remain open at that time.
- ❖ The currency of Thailand is the baht. Banknotes are valued at 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, and 1000 baht. Approximately 37 baht = 1 US dollar

consciously avoiding being swept to the walls. You find yourself depending on intuition, as the stillness of the dark is broken by the waves gently slapping the

walls of the limestone cliff. The shapes, geometry and size of the sculpted rocks are unbelievable. Mother Nature has been carving these stones over the millennia, one day at a time. Stepping on the white sandy beach amidst crystal clear waters, you gaze at a wondrous sight before oneself. The gleaming water reflects the golden sunlight and reveals shoals of tiny fish swimming as one seamless whole.

The history of Morakot Cove is no less interesting. This cove was a favourite place for sea pirates to stash away their booty after plundering passing ships. That is the reason why Morakot Cove is also known as Pirate's Cove. In Thai, Morakot Cove is simply called Tam Nam. After an hour of meditation inside this hidden paradise, you reluctantly prepare to swim through the tunnel back to the speedboat which waits expectantly at the other end. On return to the safety of the boat you are ferried to Koh Noi, or coral island, for snorkelling. Life is indeed a beach in this part of the world. **btw**