

FOOTLOOSE murli menon

If the enigmatic waterworld holds your interest, jump into the pristine waters at Koh Lanta with a snorkel, and say hello to the immense marine bounty that considers it home

dive right in!

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A very quiet and natural destination with its own reticent charm, Koh Lanta Yai located off the south coast of Thailand, and part of the Krabi province, is one of the several islands that are part of the Koh Lanta Marine Park. To reach Koh Lanta, one needs to travel from Bangkok to Krabi by an overnight bus. The bus journey involves two ferry crossings where the bus and all its passengers are ferried across by a giant vessel. If Thailand means much more than parties and shopping to you, this is where you should head.

The boat ride from Krabi to Koh Lanta is dramatic. Several small uninhabited islands emerge out of the blue waters as you pick up speed. The green cover and limestone caves impart a wild beauty to all these islands. The waters become clearer as we near Koh Lanta. The ocean resembles a blue looking-glass as we put on our snorkeling masks, flippers and jump into the middle of the ocean, a hundred metres from this enchanting isle. What's gorgeous is that you can see yellow-coloured fish swimming right beneath the surface of the sea, without having to even put your head under the waters. Rainbow-coloured coral and undersea gardens appear as the water becomes more transparent. Every step of this underwater exploration is a beautiful discovery.

Float alongside a school of multi-coloured fish while enjoying the varied colours and shapes of the coral reefs that decorate the sea bottom. Go through your biology books to be able to spot staghorn coral, rubastrea corals, sponges, sea squirts and stinging hydroids. We thought of little Nemo as a school of tiny fish wound its way through the corals like shooting stars. We explored the hidden treasures of nature, tucked away under calm

seas, in the folds of limestone formations, millions of years old. Quite like the taxis in our city, yellow-coloured heart-shaped fishes sporting black stripes were everywhere around us. Innumerable microscopic fish emerge out of the coral belts, swimming in synchronicity. Sea anemones sway gently in the waves. Starfish are scattered in disarray all over. Sea urchins rest peacefully on the corals. No permits are needed for snorkeling. However, permits are needed for diving and one has to attend a diving course and get oneself certified before being permitted to dive.

If you can be tempted to rise from your watery abode, we suggest you scale one of the peaks around to get a spectacular bird's eye view of the ocean stretching from horizon to horizon. If you are already looking up a place to stay, starting your search with the gorgeous Pimalai Resort and Spa might be a good idea.

Pimalai resembles a green gem nestling in the palm of nature's hand. Here, you can indulge in activities like mountain-biking, sea kayaking, wind-surfing or simply island-hopping. Guided boat tours are available to the villages that are scattered around. Explorers who prefer solitude can meditate at several smaller, uninhabited islands which are a short boat ride away.

On this gorgeous island, you can choose to sunbathe, soak in the mellow sunlight, curl up with a book, climb a hill, drench yourself in the unexpected showers that are quite a regular feature here or simply swim around with the nonchalant fish.

Silvery beaches, pink sunsets, tropical rainforests, coral reefs, forest villas and emerald waters – nature has generously blessed the tiny, beautiful island of Koh Lanta which generation after generation must enjoy. ◀

