

footloose

# A Pattern of Islands

**Besides islands and beaches, there're several tourist attractions around Pattaya including Underwater World, Crocodile Farm and Mini Siam. By Murli Menon**





**P**attaya in southern Thailand is a paradise for all those who love the sun, the sea, the sand and the surf. The Siam

Bayshore Resort and Spa is located at Bali Hai pier, a short walk away from one of the many beaches that dot Pattaya. Walking Street is one of Pattaya's tourist attractions and is a cobblestone path that runs parallel to the beach for two to three kilometres.

You can find old wooden houses and narrow streets with antique shops and several traditional Thai restaurants overlooking Pattaya Bay. The walk along the cobblestone streets that lead to the beach has an air of an international village with tourists from all over the world shopping on Walking Street. You can find several shops selling handicrafts and sarongs along the street corners.

As you cross the Dolphin Point and head towards South Pattaya, you can walk along the edge of the sea beside a newly constructed promenade under the shade of the swaying coconut palms. Pattaya is dotted with several beautiful beaches and the colour of the sea is turquoise. Several coral islands are scattered around Pattaya and are easily accessible by boat. The beach at Jomtien is a relatively quiet beach full of tourists. The sea is calm and the greenery starts where the beach ends.

Naklua beach is the other beach at Pattaya. *Ko* means island in Thai and two coral islands - Ko Lan and Ko Sak - are a short boat ride away. The visit to Ko Lan is an extremely pleasant experience. You take the morning boat that leaves Bali Hai pier from South Pattaya at 6 a.m. Local boats go at one-hour intervals to and from Ko Lan and the round trip costs 40 Baht. If you take a private boat, the round trip costs 150 Baht. There are a group of three islands - Ko



Mini Siam known for the replicas of historical sites in Thailand

Lan, Ko Sak and Ko Korok - situated 17.7 km west of Pattaya Strait 45 minutes one way.

The boat gently rides the waves and one can get a magnificent view from the upper deck. The turquoise waters stretching from horizon to horizon with the clouds suspended above it. The light blue sky is in stark contrast to the waters. Soon two islands covered in a canopy of green appear at the far end and start becoming bigger as the boat inches closer. These islands have a wild look. Soon you land on a white sandy beach surrounded by crystal clear waters. You can see corals of every shape and size by looking into the water from the small boat that ferries you to the beach.

There are several beautiful beaches on Ko Lan island but the most beautiful is the Samae beach. This beach boasts of gentle waves, clear transparent blue waters and a magnificent view of the verdant hills that surround this oasis of

tranquility. The beach is no less beautiful - white sands stretch for kilometres on end. Enjoy soaking in the warm waters of the sea and feel the gentle waves lap your feet.

Once the novelty of the water wears off, you can explore the island which is largely uninhabited. A few stalls selling souvenirs, coconut water and boiled corn dot the beach. Climb the hill which is covered with a dense growth of trees to reach the top for the view from the top is out-of-the-world - silvery sands, the wide arced bay, the swaying palms and the green treetops.

The ocean breeze is cool and rejuvenating and meditating on the hill is a divine experience. With just the sky the sun, the beach and the roar of the ocean as your companions, you exist in the present and all worries, tensions and stress seems to dissolve into thin air. It is difficult to believe that a 30 minute







Sunset at Pattaya Bay

boat ride from Pattaya will bring one to an almost secluded cove surrounded by pristine pure waters, white sand and colourful corals.

In a region as lush as Pattaya's east coast one would expect to see a rain-cloud or two at certain times of the year. There is a rainy season. Though not the day-long torrential rain there a few isolated showers towards the evening. Pattaya is a year-round destination where beaches are open and safe for swimming regardless of the season. At six-monthly intervals there is a gentle swing in the winds from the south-west to the south-east. Thus if one island faces the wind and breakers, another is blessed by calm waters and soft breeze. Almost all afternoon drizzles are followed by strong cooling breezes from the ocean. Jomtien is the popular beach at Pattaya. Beach children love the banana boats that snake their way through the surf, twisting and turning till everyone falls off.

There're several other tourist attractions around Pattaya including Underwater World, Crocodile Farm and Mini Siam which contains replicas of 80 sacred sites and important historical sites around Thailand at a scale of 1:25. Tesco Lotus and Big C are two supermarkets at Pattaya selling everything from pins to washing machines. Local

## Fact File

### Getting There

❖ The nearest international airport to reach Pattaya is the Suvarnabhoomi International Airport at Bangkok. There are several options for Indian tourists to get to Pattaya from Bangkok.

❖ By bus: The easiest and most popular way to get to Pattaya from Bangkok is by bus. This 140 km. trip takes 2 hours. There are three bus terminals at Bangkok, namely Northern, Southern and Eastern. All buses are first class air-conditioned with pushback seats.

❖ By taxi: Direct taxis to Pattaya are available. It takes about 150 minutes for the non-stop drive from Bangkok airport to Pattaya and costs 1000 Baht one-way.

❖ By train: There is one train available on weekdays (from Monday to Friday). This train departs from Bangkok's Hualamphong Station at 6:55 a.m. and arrives Pattaya at 10:20 a.m.

### Stay Here

❖ Siam Bayshore Resort and Spa at Walking Street is a value for money proposition that offers four-star comfort at three-star rates and is extremely

affordable by Indian standards during May-August which is the low season. A standard double room costs approximately 2000 Baht inclusive of Indian breakfast. Budget conscious Indians, Pakistanis and Arabs frequent this eco-friendly property at this time of the year.

### Eating Out

❖ Few small restaurants serving Thai cuisine dot Pattaya. Freshly steamed vegetables in coconut milk, served in a ring of steamed jasmine rice is a local dish which melts in the mouth. Boiled spinach with mushroom, bamboo shoot and peppercorn are served with boiled white rice at 'Vegetarian Food', a quaint restaurant serving Thai vegetarian cuisine at Naklua, the traditional Thai village in North Pattaya. At 20 Baht this food platter is a steal. The food at the high profile hotels is only for the gastronomically adventurous who like greasy food. Fresh tropical fruits including durians, tender coconuts, santol, langsat and jack-fruits are available at the local market.

### Exchange Rate

❖ 100 Thai Baht = Rs 120 (apprx.)

handicrafts, silverware, pottery and traditional clothes are sold at night bazaars. The unique feature about Pattaya is the availability of motorbike

taxis and shared tuk-tuks (like auto-rickshaws) that make commuting in Pattaya easy and affordable as compared to metered cabs. **BTW**