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## Secret places

### Enchanted Gateways

One2Go Magazine recently visited the 44 island archipelago of Koh Yao and was entranced by this mystical dreamscape in southern Thailand.



**One2Go Magazine** recently visited the 44 island archipelago of Koh Yao and was entranced by this mystical dreamscape in southern Thailand. So board your flying carpets and get ready to experience these exotic, sometimes muddy underfoot but, always interesting little islands out in Phang Nga Bay – just an hour's boat ride from Phuket or Krabi.

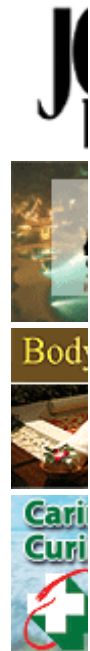
Few places in the world can boast such a myriad of treasures: out-of-this-world views, top wildlife and bird spotting, superb accommodations and the chance for genuinely 'alone' moments – and even fewer can offer all this in the space of just a couple of square kilometres.

Take your swimwear, by all means - there are good beaches at the local resorts- but also pack strong shorts or long cotton trousers and a pair of walking boots. And leave all your stresses and strains behind as you enter a world that essentially hasn't changed for 100 years.

Koh Yao Noi - the second largest island, with the best infrastructure, is a recommended base for this southern adventure. Beware, though, if you are coming straight from Phuket or Bangkok you may be shocked at how little in the way of modernity there actually is here. The population lives very much as they would have done decades ago. There has been electricity for just three years, a small hospital, around 10 bungalow resorts (of varying star status) and several small schools. But the visitor really gets a feeling of how it must have been ... way back then.

On a slow tour around Koh Yao Noi, by motorbike or bicycle, one passes monitor lizards at their bath, sea eagles catching lunch for the little ones and goats trying to trip you up. By the roadside, elderly residents shower from the wells - that their fathers dug by hand - and old men weigh rubber sheets as the produce comes in from plantations.

On this island with approx. 18 kms of roads, you are never far from the coast to witness the centuries old fishing traditions. Be it squid, crabs, prawns or snapper, the local men will take great pride in showing you their wares and, if you ask nicely, they may even take you out in their boats so that you can try your own hand at a catch.





The sea water is also used for curing Koh Yao's 'salted fish' (pla khem in Thai) which you can buy in the market. The market, as there is really only one, is a great place to buy fresh produce but your resort provides all that so you can concentrate on the few small shops selling Malay-style clothing and shoes (inexpensive compared to the commercial areas of Phuket).



Take a drive down to the pier (Tha Manoh) and just sit and observe local life for an hour or two. Apart from the market, the pier is the hub of island society and offers a great insight into what makes people tick here. If it's too hot out there, buy a 10 baht sweet drink from the mobile stalls or, for the braver among you, take a leap off the end of the pier with the local lads.



There really is no end to the sights on Koh Yao Noi if you are the sort of person who is prepared to look further than silver sands and moonlit dinners. You don't even need binoculars to view the many bird species, just take a walk down any side road and enjoy the beauty of hornbills, Braminy kites and countless smaller birds. The butterflies are enormous here and the insect population is fascinating. A night walk may see you encounter the stunningly beautiful 'flying foxes' – a species of bat which gorge on the fruit of the trees under cover of darkness. Sometimes, one can barely see the leaves of the tree for bats.



In the market, food is based on a southern Thai/Malay style – very hot and pungent curries of fish or buffalo simmered in coconut milk, slices of salted fish, fried and served on plain rice, and piles of raw vegetables that come with a dip called nam choup – a heady mix of tamarind paste, fermented prawns, lime, salt, sugar and chili. Not for the faint-hearted.



When and if you tire slightly of the wonders of this little known paradise, take to the seas and explore the surrounding islands. Forget James Bond (yes that one is not far away) and all that tourist stuff; grab a snorkel and ask your driver to show you some of the most magical spots in the almost unique Phang Nga Bay – a similar landscape can be seen in Hanlon Bay, Vietnam.



Out there amongst the limestone karsts, centuries of old coral and shell, and calm green seas, it is possible to transport the mind to other dimensions. Check out the underwater life, do a bit of rock climbing or just float past the majestic rock cliffs and practice your 'echo' voice. These are the gateways to heaven, the doors to your dreams and the ultimate in romance. To read more about the area and the legendary dragon, see [www.koyao.com](http://www.koyao.com)

#### Getting there:

Koh Yao Noi is mid-way (one hour by boat) between Phuket and Krabi. One-Two-GO flies daily from Bangkok to Phuket and Krabi international airports. See: [www.fly12go.com](http://www.fly12go.com) for domestic schedules. Ferry and speedboats depart Phuket from Bangrong Pier & Krabi from Tha Len Pier; or contact your resort for transfers from the airport.

By Seonai Gordon, Photos by James Welch



#### With thanks:

Photographer James Welch was kindly hosted on Koh Yao Noi by:

#### Ko Yao Island Resort & Spa

Ko Yao Island Resort is located on a spectacular beach facing some of the most amazing scenery in the world. The 15 luxury beachfront villas (1-2 bed, deluxe & family), designed in traditional Thai architectural style, blend peacefully into a coconut palm plantation setting. [www.koyao.com](http://www.koyao.com); email: [info@koyao.com](mailto:info@koyao.com); tel +66 (0)76 597 474/6; 24/2 Moo 5, T. Koh Yao Noi. A. Koh Yao, Phang Nga 82160, Thailand.

#### The Paradise Resort & Spa

A stunning boutique resort and spa, The Paradise offers a collection of private villas and studios nestled adjacent to 400 metres of private untouched beach, beside lush national park forest - offering a unique and tranquil eco-experience. [www.theparadise.biz](http://www.theparadise.biz); email: [res@theparadise.biz](mailto:res@theparadise.biz) / [gm@theparadise.biz](mailto:gm@theparadise.biz) tel. +66 (01) 892 48 78/9 24 Moo 4, T. Koh Yao Noi, A. Koh Yao, Phang Nga 82160, Thailand.



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