

Forget All Thai Islands You've Heard of Before – Explore This Deserted Mini Paradise



Still hunting for beaches that you don't have to share with any other foreigner?

I know, the ticket touts promise you the moon. They show you leaflets with picture-postcard islands. White sands, abandoned shores, happy customers.

They cajole you into going on a tour. You discuss it with your travel partner, eager to find Eden. And eventually, your urge to go on an adventure gets the better of you – you book the trip.

The next day, the driver collects many day-trippers, and by the time you're heading for the pier, the minivan is crammed full.

Just as packed as the small bus is the speedboat, revving and rumbling like a Hayabusa, splitting your ears.

The first beach, though dazzling white, is littered with holiday-makers.

Bloody hell, tours suck!

I feel you. Scores of tourists are a nuisance.

It doesn't have to be like that. Read on to find one of those so-called 'gems' that lots of travel writers are talking about.

Koh Lung Ga Jiew



Let's get this right off the bat: you'll never wind up on an empty beach if you book a tour. Instead, support a local fisherman by paying him for an independent trip.

You're right, many Thai fishers barely speak English. That's where Magic House comes into the picture, a hotel within walking distance of *Chumphon's* pier. Speak to the receptionists, they're able to help you get a private tour, even if you're not staying there.

Chumphon is a city in southern Thailand, about 380kms north of Phuket, and *Koh Lung Ga Jiew* lies just 8 kilometres off *Chumphon's* coast in the Gulf of Thailand.

My dad shelled out 3,500 baht (112 USD) for the 3-hour tour with a fisherman, 500 baht more than the package trip would've cost.

'Can we go to *Ao Thung Sang* and *Ao Bo Mao*?' I asked the heavily tanned and tattooed guy who had a spare tyre. *Thung Sang Bay* and *Bo Mao Bay* were worth visiting if you're a beach bum, I'd read.

‘Moment,’ he answered and went inside his cabin to start the engine.

I’d showed him the Thai name in English letters, which, judging from his awkward answer, he couldn’t read. The ‘moment’ was just an opportunity to avoid the question. Little did I know that he was making for an almost flawless paradise.

Further out on the ocean, the waves were about 1 metre high and the sea was getting choppier even though it was only slightly windy. The rickety boat really met the highest safety standards. Aren’t adventures fun?

Chumphon’s seascape is dotted with little specks of land reminiscent of the *Similan* islands, an archipelago in Thailand’s Andaman Sea. As we approached the ‘gem’, I couldn’t believe my eyes: an islet with three white beaches – devoid of people in the peak season – surrounded by transparent, turquoise waters. Leaves of coconut trees were swaying in the wind, and a handful of dilapidated bamboo shacks looked abandoned. One of which was snuggled into a rock, peeping down the cliff. How could such an idyllic place have remained undiscovered in this age of mass tourism?

The boat’s owner dropped the anchor and showed us some photos of colourful fishes swimming through white, aquatic plants. He pointed to the rock in front of the island and offered us snorkelling gear.

Hell, yeah! He didn’t need to ask twice.

Taking the plunge, I was rewarded with the sight of Staghorn corals that looked like brown sets of deer antlers, and massive brown, arched stones that seemed to have adjusted their shape to the sea’s surf.

A school of bright yellow fish encircled me, curiously checking if I’d brought any food.

I’d intended to snorkel around the rock standing defensively in front of the isle, but as the water got deeper, I chickened out. Moving towards the beach, I was greeted by a shoal of silvery trumpet fish. And before long, I spotted the unmistakable movement of a shark’s fin a couple of metres away from me. The 1-metre reef shark was unfazed by the appearance of a human, ignoring me.

Lots of sea urchins residing on boulders and the seafloor stared at me as if keen to pierce my body. Carefully coming closer to the beach, I stepped on the pebbles and set out to explore the island.

Even wet, the white sands were exceptionally soft, too innocent for the copious amounts of stray shoes, lighters, plastic bottles, polystyrene and whatnot. Lined up about 1 metre from the water's edge, the rubbish had been washed ashore to this heavenly place.

I'd barely picked up a coconut from the beach when somebody exclaimed, 'Hey!'

I pretended not to have heard it and walked on. But since the brown coconut reeked pungently of fish, I dropped it shortly afterwards and swapped it for a more appealing one without small white shells grown onto it.

Skulking around the bamboo huts, I came across three locals. They were lounging in hammocks, smoking, and didn't understand a single word in English. A friend of theirs wearing only shorts, a tanned skinny Thai in his mid-forties, came to help.

'Coconut,' he said hoarsely, implying he wasn't happy.

'I took it from the beach.'

'Ah okay,' he responded, visibly calming down.

'Do you live here?'

'Yes,' he said and pointed to another island, adding, 'homestay.'

'You don't sleep here?'

He shook his head.

‘How long have you been staying here?’

‘10 years.’

Their loafing left me wondering what the point of staying here for ages was. But the conversation soon dried out as I’d failed to make myself understood.

With the coconut that served as a float, I swam back.

Why look further than the *Chumphon* area? Sit down here and sink your toes into the warm, powdery grains. Listen to the waves rolling gently up the sand, lapping your feet. Take in the fresh, salty breeze, and let the sun kiss your skin.

