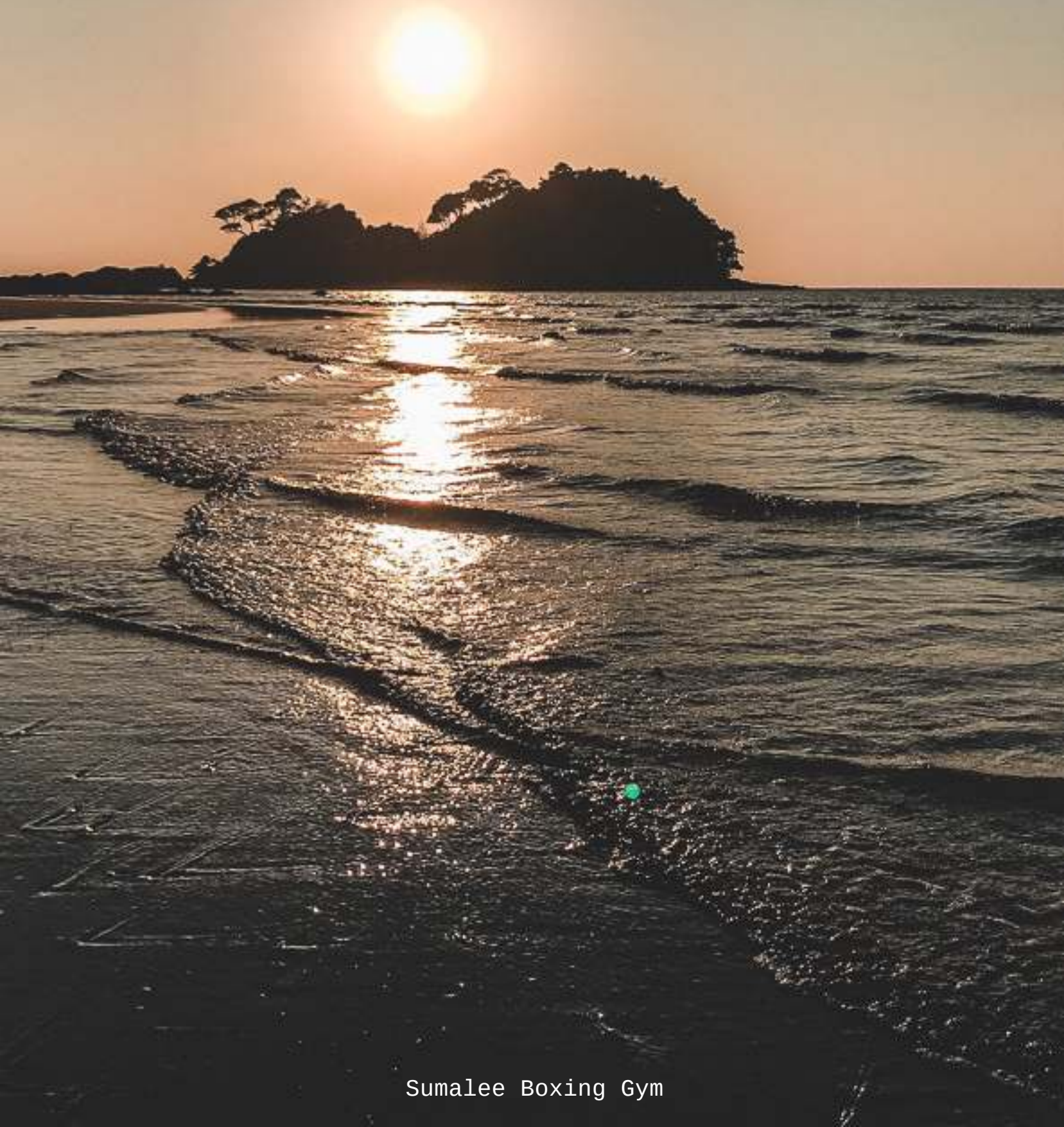


Thailand Guide: Unspoilt Koh Phra Thong



Unspoilt Koh Phra Thong

When some friends of mine asked me if I would like to join them on a trip to the Koh Phra Thong, I thought they were getting confused with overdeveloped Patong in Phuket! I couldn't have been further off the mark.

Koh Prathong is one of a group of three islands in the Andaman Sea off the west coast of Thailand, adjacent to Phang Nga Province. To the north is Koh Ra and to the south, Koh Kho Khao (Island of the white mountain). The island has very few full-time inhabitants (around 300) and has not been touched by mass tourism.



It is a flat island about 200 kms north of Phuket with a savannah landscape which is very rare in South East Asia. This type of landscape bears more resemblance to that found in Africa than in Thailand.

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The unique landscape is home to flora and fauna unique to Thailand. As well as being a paradise generally, it is particularly wondrous to birdwatchers. If you rise with the dawn it is one of the last places in the world where you may encounter the Lesser Adjutant Stork. It is believed that the storks continue to exist there because it is still relatively undisturbed.

If you want to experience this island in its natural state, you will need to visit very soon. When I was there in March 2019 they were already laying pylons for electricity. I am not sure what the current status of the installation is.

Koh Phra Thong is still reminiscent of how Thailand was in the early days of tourism in the 60s and 70s. The only way to get there is by chartering a long tail fishing boat from Mangrove Pier near the town of Khuraburi in Phang Nga Province. It is about a 4 hour drive from Sumalee Boxing Gym in Phuket. The boat journey approximately 1 hour through scenic mangrove swamps with the beautiful hills of Ranong forming a scenic backdrop.

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There are still very few resorts on the island. I stayed in the MoKen Eco Village. It sits right on the beach, consists of individual beach bungalows and is fuelled by solar power.



Apart from the Golden Buddha Resort, most of the places to stay on this off the beaten track island are basic with a focus on environmental sustainability.

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The highlight of the trip for me was the dawn birdwatching tour. The experience of seeing so many rare birds in their natural habitat was truly breathtaking, as was the beauty of the savannah landscape at dawn. Not realising what they are missing, these early morning bird watching tours are not so popular amongst the majority of visitors to the island who tend to be more interested in the 15 kms of deserted and unspoilt beaches. We were a small group and we did not encounter anyone else during the dawn tour. Our guide, from the MoKen Eco Village, was extremely knowledgeable. Through years of research he knew exactly where to look to find all the birds of interest.

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Koh Phra Thong is listed as an Important Bird Area by Bird Life International. It has at least 137 species of eagles, kites, kingfishers, woodpeckers, owls, bluebirds, stalks, parrots, pigeons, dove, drongos, egretta, sunbirds, quails and hornbills. I cannot pretend to have seen even a small proportion of the variety but what I did see was enough keep me fascinated and alert. I certainly saw eagles, owls, hornbills and parrots (These incredible photos were taken by David McEvoy, who works for the Guardian newspaper, and who accompanied our group on the tour). It's difficult to describe the amount of excitement engendered from actually seeing a species of bird you've only ever seen beforehand on film or in photographs.

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If you are looking for a unique Thailand experience, Koh Phra Thong comes with our strongest recommendation.