Phang Nga Surf Guide

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Photo by Lakkana
The 216 kilometer Phang Nga coastline is the longest of Thailand’s six Andaman provinces. Phang Nga has numerous surf spots, which are mainly clustered around the Na Tai Pier area (just north of Phuket) and the prominent beach resorts of Khao Lak.

Other areas for surfing include the islands just off the north end of the province, namely Koh Ra, Koh Phra Thong, and Koh Kho Khao. There is also potential for discovery in the Surin Islands and other areas, with surreptitious rumors of secret reefs. However, most of these areas are difficult to access, especially during the blustery monsoon season.

As with Phuket, Phang Nga’s surf is predominantly driven by the southwest monsoon (May to October) along with the exclusive Indian Ocean groundswells that can hit any time of year. Although Phang Nga has a larger south-southwest swell window than Phuket, it also has a shallow and wider continental shelf which negates much or all of the advantages gained by the increased swell exposure, resulting in waves with generally less power and punch than similar breaks on Phuket.

In addition, breaks in Phang Nga are more sensitive to wind and swell types. For example, in the Khao Lak area, Nang Thong Beach is best during short-period southwest windswell, while Laem Pakarang (not far to the north) is highly susceptible to westerly winds and tends to break better during clean, long-period groundswells.

All in all, Phang Nga is well-worth going out of your way to visit. With beautiful national parks, long sandy beaches, and a well developed, yet laid back atmosphere reminiscent of Phuket in the early 90’s, you can’t go wrong. The surf may not be pumping every day, but visitors will be thoroughly pleased by the unique natural and cultural experiences Phang Nga has to offer.

And, as is always the case with surfing in Thailand, those with a bit of time, patience, and a dose of good luck, just might be rewarded with some pretty decent surf!
Surfing Areas in Phang Nga

Northern Islands Area

Lying just off the northern end of Phang Nga province are the relatively large islands of Phra Thong and Koh Kho Khao, along with the somewhat smaller island of Koh Ra. These islands are accessible by ferry or longtail boat from the mainland. As they are not surfed regularly, they are not really on the surfers map, and there is still some room for exploration. These islands tend to be very exposed to south through west winds, so calmer days and groundswells are the best bet for finding good surf.

**Koh Ra** – the least developed of the 3 islands. Accommodation is limited to rudimentary bungalows and eco-tour type establishments. Pickup from Kuraburi Pier can be arranged through one of these operations. Expect beach breaks with potential for decent surf in appropriate conditions, such as a solid groundswell with light or offshore winds.

**Koh Phra Thong** – better developed than Koh Ra and about a 1 hour longtail boat ride from Kuraburi Pier. The beaches are long and straight, resulting in mostly shorebreak, although a few small inlets and land features may provide for a surfable wave on the right day. A fairly wide range of accommodations are available.

**Koh Kho Khao** – the best developed of the three islands with a full range of accommodation and accessible by car ferry from Nam Khem pier. Look for reasonably fun beach breaks and waves that form on an outer sand-spit at the far northwest end of the island.
Khao Lak Area

Being the most developed coastal area in Phang Nga, Khao Lak has rapidly become the antidote to Phuket’s increasingly jet set atmosphere. Just an hour north of Phuket International Airport, Khao Lak is characterized by lush tropical hillsides bordering long, sandy beaches. Accommodations range from 5 star resorts to reasonably priced bungalows. The surf scene here has grown over recent years, but you’ll still usually find yourself surfing alone or with just a few other friends out in the water.

Laem Pakarang (Cape Coral) - a prominent headland in the north part of Khao Lak surrounded by rocky-reef, exposed at low tide and covered at high tide. It is very susceptible to onshore wind and best during groundswells. The area has 4 distinct breaks (from north to south), named by journalist Matt Blauer who founded the Pakarang Surf Shop:

- **The Corner** – a left-hander wrapping-in over coral deposits. Lengthy walk over loose coral at low tide from the parking area at the end of the paved road. A small surf shop and board rentals can be found here.

- **The Tree** – a short, relatively crappy left-hand reef break. However, it picks up a lot of swell and can be surfable when nowhere else is.

- **Taxi Dave’s** – named in honor of the benevolent foreign resident surfer David Taxi Dave’s Samman (a former taxi business owner from Kauai in Hawaii) who died while building his surfer-retirement home during the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. A nice right-hand point break. It’s a long distance from shore - but arguably the best wave on the headland.

- **The Beach** – a fun beach break with left and right peaks on the inside of the headland.

Khuk Khak Beach – beach break with right and left peaks breaking in front of a small klong. Tends to have a bit more punch than its immediate neighbors.

Bang Niang Beach (‘Coconuts’) – another fun beach break, but can get dirty after rain from water draining out of the large klong located to the north of the break. We named this spot coconuts’ after the fantastic grove of coconut trees in front of the surfing area—and because on a big groundswell, you may feel as nutty as a Thai coconut!

Nang Thong Beach – the most consistently surfable and usually the best and punchiest spot in Khao Lak. A group of rock formations (the main one is a small island with its own miniature lighthouse) just offshore provides for fun peaks on either side. Can handle the on-shores and is best on short period windswell, but doesn’t seem to pick up groundswell properly. On bigger days, a mushy, yet spooky cloudbreak forms outside of the lighthouse - a longboard wave that tends to form and re-form on its way to shore. If you’re lucky, this wave can prove rather entertaining to connect through to the inside.

Mystos – accessed through the Khao Lak Merlin Hotel. A right hander generated by an off-shore outcrop of rock-reef. Needs a bigger swell to work and can be dangerous to the faint-hearted with patches of exposed, jagged rock-reef scattered near the lineup.
Thai Muang Area

Located between Khao Lak and Na Tai, Thai Muang is a long, very straight sandy beach with a steep drop-off. It’s generally not considered surfable but it can produce some of the biggest, heaviest, hollow, double-up shore break around. Definitely dangerous for bodysurfers, body boarders, and surfers alike when there’s a macking swell. It may, however, be interesting for someone with a boogie board and some balls. Send us the pics if you decide to go for it!
Na Tai Area

What was not that long ago a sleepy fishing village, Na Tai Beach (Khao Pilai Beach) is now an up and coming area for flashy upscale hotels and affluent foreigners who build million-dollar seafront homes. Just a stone’s-throw north of Phuket, Khao Pilai Beach is an economical getaway for a surfing day trip to somewhere different from the island. Being relatively close to Phuket, expect conditions to be much the same as the average beach break in Phuket on any given day.

North Na Tai – usually not the best area for surf (the pier area is typically better), the coastal area to the north of Na Tai Beach (but well south of the Hot Springs Hotel) does offer some potentially good waves when the conditions come together. Check out the several rock features in the area to see if anything good is cooking.

Na Tai Pier – A post-tsunami concrete pier stretching roughly 100 meters out to sea helps to build up sandbanks on either side creating fun, peaky beach break waves. While both sides can be good, the south side usually seems to work best.

Na Tai Reef – a patch of rock-reef well offshore and south of the pier. A short left and right peak forms here on bigger swells. Shallow and fairly dangerous!