



PHUKET'S BIG BUDDHA



child's

PLAY



FAMILY TIME AT THE BEACH

FAMILY

— A fun holiday in Phuket can mean more than just lovely long days at the beach. Kerrin O'Sullivan rounds up the most offbeat and unexpected adventures you can get up to with the kids on this picturesque Thai island —



ZIP-LINING THROUGH THE JUNGLE



A GIBBON APE

ADVENTURE HQ

> Zip-lining through the lush rainforest area around the Kathu Waterfall guarantees beautiful views and an adrenaline rush for all ages. Flying Hanuman offers eco-sensitive flying fox adventures for the whole family – you can even opt to be filmed so you can re-live the experience back home. If that doesn't sound quite crazy enough, why not learn the high-flying art of trapeze on the sands of Micky Monkey Beach, Mai Khao? Flying Trapeze Phuket provide safety briefing, skills training and supervision in classes for both kids and adults. BYO sense of adventure.

flyinghanuman.com;
kidssole.com

SAVE THE GIBBONS

> With their big eyes and furry faces, gibbons are undeniably cute. Sadly, poachers keen to make quick tourist dollars often remove them from their rainforest homes, exploiting baby apes as photo props for tourists. Once mature, the adult apes are abandoned and replaced by more photogenic baby gibbons, leading to them becoming endangered. In Khao Phra Thaeo National Park, the Gibbon Rehabilitation Project rescues abused gibbons, nurses them back to health and releases them into the rainforest. The GRP sanctuary is not a petting zoo – so no cuddling, feeding or flash photography – but it is a great place for kids to learn about conservation and spend time in nature.

gibbonproject.org

TEMPLE TIME

> To add a dose of spirituality to your trip, seek out one of the 40 Buddhist temples on the island – some more than a century old. At Wat Chalong, set amongst manicured gardens about 10 kilometres south of Phuket city, the inspiring architecture, beautiful murals and sacred relics, such as a walking stick with healing powers and a splinter of bone from Buddha, will have the whole family intrigued. It's just as interesting to watch local worshippers make offerings of lotus flowers and pay their respects by sticking gold leaf on the idols.

wat-chalong-phuket.com

KOH YAO NOI



★ GOOD MANNERS

Don't forget Thai temple etiquette – cover your shoulders and knees, remove hats, leave shoes outside and speak in inside voices.

BALL TOSS

> If rolling down a hill in a giant plastic ball sounds like your kind of fun, then check out zorbing (aka rollerballing) at Kalim Beach, north of Patong Beach on the island's west coast. Two people – it can be a parent and child – climb into the three-metre-wide ball filled with 40 litres of water before turning and tumbling, sloshing and sliding along 190 metres of thrills, spills and laughs. Choose from the straight hill run or the more adventurous twister – and bring your togs, towel and trust. It's ideal for a rainy day, as you're going to get wet anyway.

rollerball.co



NINJA TURTLES

> Each year, sea turtles leave their Andaman Sea home to lay eggs on Mai Khao Beach, in Phuket's north-west. While habitat loss means their numbers are declining, turtles still return here during nesting season (October to March) to hatch their young. The Mai Khao Marine Turtle Foundation, located on the grounds of JW Marriott Phuket Resort, holds free information and feeding sessions (donations are appreciated).

maikhaomarineturtlefoundation.org;
marriott.com

576

SQUARE-KILOMETRES
IS PHUKET'S TOTAL SIZE,
MAKING IT THAILAND'S
BIGGEST ISLAND

LITTLE CHEFS

> There's a smorgasbord of cooking courses that offer hands-on tuition in Thai cuisine but an excellent option is the Phuket Thai Cooking Academy, which hosts children's classes. The day begins with a trip to Kathu Market to shop for fresh ingredients such as rice noodles, lemongrass and mangoes that will be used to cook up a wide range of dishes (think pad thai, massaman curry and mango with sticky rice). Chop, simmer and sizzle at your individual cooking stations while taking in stunning views, then share the meal you cooked together.

phuketthaicookingacademy.com

BIG BUDDHA SITS ATOP THE NAKKED HILLS



ISLAND VIEWS

> The gleaming marble Big Buddha, propped benevolently on the top of the Nakkerd Hills, impresses with its sheer size (it's a staggering 45 metres tall). With tinkling bells, fluttering prayer flags and the chanting of orange-robed monks, it's a serene place to enjoy 360-degree vistas of the island. To beat the crowds, it's best to get there early in the morning but it's also an idyllic spot to watch the sun setting over Chalong Bay. You can contribute to the statue's maintenance by buying a marble tile, on which you can write a message to be placed inside the Buddha.

mingmongkolphuket.com



THE KIDS WILL LOVE PHUKET'S BEACHES

GET BEACHED

No trip to Phuket is complete without beach time. These are the best family-friendly ones:

- > **Best shallow bay**
Kamala Beach
- > **Best shade**
Nai Harn Beach – under the casuarina trees
- > **Best for sandcastles**
Kata Beach – snow-white, super-fine sand
- > **Best surfing breaks**
Kalim Beach
- > **Best secret beach**
Banana Beach – reached only by longtail boat or a jungle path

SUNDOWNER SPOT

> Shake off the sand, scrub up and head out for a sunset cocktail at Phromthep Cape Restaurant. Located on Phuket's southernmost promontory, the open-air restaurant offers lovely views and balmy ocean breezes. Try the local prawns with an ice-cold beer while the kids tuck into a seafood basket with fresh coconut water. For anyone after a slightly more upscale experience, several resorts dot the coastline boasting to-die-for views.

phuketdir.com/phromthepcaperest

TAKE A BIKE TOUR OF KOH YAO NOI



RIDE ON

> A cycling tour of sleepy Koh Yao Noi (Little Long Island) will show you a different side of Thailand, pedalling through fishing villages, rubber plantations, lush rice paddies, mangrove forests and stretches of jungle. A mini-bus transfer to Phuket's pier for a one-hour boat ride across Phang Nga Bay is all it takes to be transported into the quiet rural haven. These full-day tours are available for children 10 years and over but shorter tours and simpler itineraries to other places can be tailored by Amazing Bike Tours.

amazingbiketoursthailand.asia

PHUKET ELEPHANT SANCTUARY CEO, MONTRI TODTANE



BORN TO BE WILD

> The island's only genuine shelter, the Phuket Elephant Sanctuary, rescues and rehabilitates sick, injured and old elephants that have been mistreated while working in Phuket's logging or tourism industries (while many operators still offer elephant rides, treks or shows, training these majestic creatures to "perform" or "work" is often harsh and cruel). The whole family can learn about elephants while watching the herd bathe and socialise – you can also feed the majestic creatures.

phuketelephantsanctuary.org



THE UPSIDE DOWN HOUSE

WHEN IT RAINS...

> Head to the quirky Upside Down House of Phuket located on the northern outskirts of Phuket Town. The inverted three-storey house rests on its roof, with furniture nailed to the ceiling. A wander through its rooms promises an illusory experience plus goofy photo opportunities. Fancy a family brainteaser? Also on-site is The Chamber of Secrets with two escape rooms – using teamwork to solve puzzles and break out of the room is a fun and challenging way for everyone to bond. When the rain stops, tackle the hedge maze outside or climb up to the teak tree house for a bird's-eye view over the grounds.

upside-downhouse-phuket.com

SURF HOUSE



SURF'S UP

> On days when the wind is whipping up the Andaman Sea with gnarly waves, you can head inland for a surf. Across the road from Kata Beach, Surf House Phuket offers gentle sloping artificial waves for both stand-up flowboarding and bodyboarding. Parents can surf or just chill poolside with a snack and a Singha beer from the Wipeout Bar while cheering on the kids as they hang ten, perform tricks or learn the basics. Surf sessions run hourly and it can get busy so book early.

surfhousephuket.com

60K

THE NUMBER OF
HOTEL ROOMS
IN PHUKET

AFTER DARK

> When dinnertime rolls around a feast for the senses awaits at the island's night markets. One of the newer options is the open-air Chillva Market in Phuket Town. Created from shipping containers, the market has a cool vibe with artisan clothing stalls, live music and the mouth-watering aromas of local delicacies wafting from the grill. Get a dragon fruit juice to wash down kai jeow (omelettes over rice) and klay tod (deep-fried finger bananas). Feeling adventurous? Try the fried grasshopper or red ants.

OLD SCHOOL

> Give the kids an old-fashioned paper map of Phuket's Old Town (find one at the tourist information centre on Thalang Road) and let them lead the way. Check out the Shrine of the Serene Light, note Thai Hua Museum's striking Sino-Portuguese architecture and learn about Phuket's tin-mining history. Walk Thalang Road which, at 4pm on Sundays, becomes Phuket Walking Street with Lard Yai market offering amazing food. Stop for a Thai coffee at UnforgetTablePhuket, then grab a pa thong ko (doughnut) from a street stall. When everyone's tired of walking, head back in a tuktuk.

thaihuamuseum.com;

fb.me/unforgettablephuket