

# Phuket: Tropical Island Living in the Andaman Sea for \$2,200 a Month

By Kirsten Raccuia

**T**urquoise waters lap the white-sand beach fringed with casuarina trees. There are no jet skis or banana boats here—just a few stand-up paddle boarders and a kayak or two. A few ubiquitous long-tail motor boats that sound like loud lawn mowers are scattered in the water, but you can still hear the birds singing away in the trees. Not a beach lounger in sight, just a few mats and towels strewn in the shade. Get a massage while listening to the waves and melt away into the idyllic surroundings.

I am on Nai Yang beach. This is a secret part of Thailand's biggest island, Phuket, which is just off the southeast coast, in the Andaman Sea.

On Phuket you'll find everything a tropical island is supposed to offer—diving, fishing, glorious white-sand beaches. It's also big enough to boast five hospitals, dozens of seaside towns, and over 25 beaches, ranging from the secluded to those packed with tourists. Phuket has all the amenities that you're used to. It's exotic island living with all the familiar conveniences of home—which makes for an easy transition if you decide to retire here.

Roaring waterfalls that tumble down jagged rocks...national parks that are a nature lover's paradise...Taoist and Buddhist temples and Buddha statues dotting the island...colorful local markets...award-winning golf courses (only \$74 for 18 holes)... postcard-worthy lookout points...this paradise is everything a dream retirement is made of. You'll never be bored here.

The best part is that everything is ridiculously affordable. Food is cheap, delicious, and there are plenty of international options. Rents are affordable even if you're on a small budget—\$580 a month will get you a two-bedroom townhouse in a quiet neighborhood. Couples report living well on around \$2,200 a month, all in.

Phuket has something of a party reputation, and you can certainly find that here. But this is a pretty big place—220 square miles. Getting away from it all is easy; pull off the road toward the ocean, and you can explore some small deserted cove. Rent a scooter and find a narrow dirt path to ride down, and you'll find a hidden temple, in all its gilded glory, at the end of it. At any given time, follow your nose in the direction of the incense and you'll find a local praying. When you are tired of Thai green curry and Pad



Despite its reputation as a party island, Phuket offers plenty of secluded beaches for you to enjoy. The island has all the amenities you'll need for an easy retirement.

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Thai, or if you just want a steak, some French cuisine, or a cold beer with fellow English speakers, options are plentiful all over the island. There are fresh seafood markets scattered about, where you can pick the local daily catch and have them grill it right there, with the most piquant ginger and lemongrass sauce.

Most expats live on the western and southern portions of the island, where the infrastructure is just like that of any Western country. This part of the island is home to Phuket's best retirement havens...each offering something different.

### **Bangtao: Phuket's Best Beach Town**

Smack in the middle of the west coast and 30 minutes south of the international airport is my top pick for a place to call home on Phuket.

Bangtao is the kind of town where you can play golf all day, have sundown cocktails on the beach, and then eat dinner with the locals at a food market. It's perfect if you want the comforts of home, at a fraction of the cost, mixed with the allure and exoticism of Thailand.

This little town is known for its four-mile stretch of uninterrupted beach. This beach is perfect for a long stroll or for just sipping a \$4 cocktail and watching the sunset at Red Sun Bar with Nestie, the owner, who makes you feel like you've been best friends for a lifetime.

It's a little village in its own right, so you won't have to go far.

The main drag runs perpendicular to the beach and is sprinkled with restaurants and apartments. But it still feels rural in some ways; across from the modern seafood places are rows of date palms being munched by cows and goats.

If you're a golfer, the award-winning Laguna Golf Course is at your doorstep: \$2,600 for a one-year membership, \$10,400 for five years, and \$13,900 for 10 years. If you prefer something more action-packed, a nearby Muay Thai Boxing ring has weekly fights.

For just \$700 a month you can get a two-bedroom apartment, with a shared pool and gym, which is within a 10-minute walk to the beach. A five-minute walk away and you'll have your choice of the swank Siam Supper Club or Big Boss seafood for tasty eats. Or choose a fully furnished, two-bedroom bungalow with two ensuite bathrooms, a garden, and a terrace for \$780. This home is only a five-minute drive from Bangtao beach and the Laguna Golf Course. See: [IPropertyPhuket.com](#) and [Phuketrenthouse.com](#).

### **Chalong: Safe and Convenient**

Chalong is not a beachside town; it's more like a little city smack bang in the southern part of the island. Drive 20 minutes out and you can have your choice of five nearby beaches. Living here makes exploring the southern half of the island simple. You can set up home in a quiet neighborhood with expats and locals who live here year-round.

"Living away from the beach gives you more of the real Thai flavor," says expat Dan Skitch, who moved to Chalong with his family two years ago. "It has a less transient feel than some of the beach towns nearby, so you can actually get to know your neighbors, which is helpful when moving to a new country and not speaking the language."

Chalong has everything you need, from great restaurants to grocery stores and a nearby hospital. It's a little more spread out than Bangtao, so having a car is helpful, although taxis are plentiful.

There is good international food available here. The Wine Connection has pork chops (\$8) and steaks (\$10) that can be paired with various wines, which it also sells to take away. Go to Bellini's for authentic homemade Italian pizza (\$6.70) and pasta (\$5), or even Tandoori Nights for Indian, where you can get a half Tandoori chicken dinner for \$5.

At the We Café, right in the heart of Chalong, the first thing you notice is the wall of windows overlooking its hydroponic garden, where the food is grown in mineral-rich water without soil. I ordered the most delightful salad and saw someone go out there and cut my lettuce from its watery home. As the restaurant offers over 30 veggie and meat options, it wasn't an easy choice. But I settled for all my favorites: edamame, beetroot, goat cheese, steamed broccoli, sautéed mushrooms, and tender grilled beef. The grand total came to \$4.50.

Real estate is affordable here, too. I found a modern, three-bedroom house in a gated community called Land and Houses. It's a large modern development with a pool, gym, tennis court, club house, restaurant, and even a day-care center for \$725 a month. See: [Phuketrenthouse.com](#).

### **Patong: A Very Livable Party Town**

Patong gets a bad rap, but in my opinion, it isn't very accurate. Yes, there is an area of Dionysian nightlife, but that is a small

portion of the neighborhood. The rest of Patong has all the First-World amenities you could want. And don't forget the spas and beaches. Patong feels less like traditional Thailand than other areas because of its level of tourism—but that is exactly why all the best amenities on the island are here.

Patong is nice when you want to party. It's a place to bring visitors that like the weird and wonderful, the down and dirty, but who aren't easily offended.

What is great about this area is the ease of having all the conveniences at your doorstep; a hospital, grocery stores, shopping malls, beaches, movie theaters, you name it, it's in Patong. Rents in Patong start at around \$745 for a two-bedroom apartment. But, as with anywhere in Thailand, negotiate, negotiate, negotiate. Or better yet, take a drive 15 minutes in any direction and settle in an entirely different world.

Patong is located along the island's southwest coast, about one hour south of the airport. Fifteen minutes farther south down the coast are the neighboring towns of Karon and Kata. They are Patong's slightly less touristy neighbors and there is no red light district, so this might be a good place to live if you want all of Patong's conveniences but without all the mayhem.

### **Nai Yang: Secret Paradise...But Not for Long**

This place is a little slice of paradise that just happens to be a hidden secret. It's only 10 minutes from the international airport, yet somehow most tourists miss it. There isn't much to do here

other than lie under a pandan tree, get a massage, and listen to the waves. Even the small beach bars only play music loud enough for the patrons inside to hear. It seems as if everyone wants to pay homage to the ocean and doesn't want to disturb its natural presence. If you are the read-a-book-and-listen-to-the-waves kind of person, you'll love it here.

You won't find all the amenities of Chalong, Bangtao, or Patong, but they are only a 30-minute drive away, so you aren't isolated. Nai Yang is quite small, so having a scooter here is ideal.

Sirinath National Park, which is part marine and part land, runs along the coast here. Its presence ensures that there will be no development to the north of Nai Yang. From November to February, sea turtles nest and lay eggs on the area's beaches.

Nai Yang is a little cheaper than elsewhere on the island. A green curry in a café in Patong usually costs around \$5; the same in Nai Yang is around \$3.40. It's a traditional fishing village, so expats can wait for the local fishermen to come in from their daily expedition and buy directly from them, instead of at the market.

Wat's Bar is a local bar with sandy floors and a pool table. It attracts a varied, changing crowd, from young party types passing through to older expats who live in the area. The owner, Wat (which also means "temple" in Thai), is welcoming and makes sure that your glass is always full of libations and that the pool table is always being used.

A brand new, fully furnished, two-story, two-bedroom townhouse a 10-minute drive from the beach can be found for as little as \$575 a month. Or you can find a Thai-style house in a gated community, with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a patio, fully furnished, only a five-minute drive from the beach and town center, for only \$480. See: [Phuketrenthouse.com](#). ■

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