

In Village Guide: Explore Koh Surin with the Moken Sea Nomads

The following information has been developed in cooperation with the Moken Tourism Team.

By visiting the Moken village, joining in traditional ways of life, and exploring the local ecosystems, you help protect Southern Thailand's traditional culture and pristine nature.

Location

The Surin islands are about 10 kilometers south from the Thailand-Myanmar border and 60 kilometers west from Thailand's mainland. The area includes five islands, Surin Nua, Surin Tai, Stok, Torinla, and Mangkorn.

The Moken sea nomads use to navigate around the islands and stay in different bays, yet nowadays they are permanently located on Surin Tai, the big southern island.

The Moken community in Ao Bon Yai counts 64 households that are inhabited by 220 people. The village also hosts a health center, a school, and an information center.

The coordinates for Ao Bon Yai are 9.4055, 97.8625.

Moken Village: Ao Bon Yai

The Moken are sea nomads that traditionally lived and travelled the Andaman Sea between Thailand and Myanmar. In the 1990th Koh Surin became the permanent settlement for the Moken. Before the Tsunami in December 2004, two Moken villages were located in “Sai Ean” and “Ao Bon Lek”, counting about 20 households in each village. On Tsunami-Day, December 26, 2004, the Moken, as people of the sea, noticed the change in the water and fled up the hill. Unlike other places affected by the Tsunami, no person was harmed by the wave, but just like any other place, the village was destroyed. In 2005 the two villages were reconstructed as one in Ao Bon Yai.

Climate

Two seasons define the changes in the way of life on the Surin islands, monsoon and dry season. During the rains from May to October, Mu Koh Surin National Park is closed as the sea is too rough for tour boat transfer between the islands and the mainland. For the Moken, the monsoon is the time of staying home, fishing in the bays, and collecting shells for domestic use. The dry season from November to April allows moving around and is hence defined by work. Nowadays, as the national park is open during dry season, this time is dominated by tourism and work on the mainland.

Responsible Travel

Be aware that **your presence makes a difference**. In being interested in the Moken you empower them to be proud of their culture. Make sure to promote responsible behavior and only share the best parts of your culture. For example, being part of a kid's game is more respectful (and more fun) than showing your newest camera model and the amazing picture you took of the village elder.



Current Situation

Living surrounded by national park, the Moken have observed many tourists moving in and out, yet little possibility of direct interaction existed. In 2012 the Moken Tourism Team has developed guidelines and interaction possibilities in order to find a way of changing passive village tourism into a community based tourism. For the Moken, this allows the active participation in tourism, while the tourists can have the unique experience of sharing and learning from the Moken way of life.

To respect the values in the Moken community, guidelines for interacting in the village have been developed. Visitors are welcome and encouraged to participate in the cultural activities and explore Moken mythology. To promote intercultural understanding and respect, we ask that visitors adhere to the following:

... for your personal health:

- Bring plenty of water to drink, the salty environment speeds the process of dehydration.
- Cover up in the sun, wear a hat and protect your skin.
- Prepare for ants and mosquitoes in the forest behind the village.
- The sand will be hot, so feel free to bring your shoes.

... for the general good:

- Cover up when you enter the village by wearing at least a shirt and shorts – you will find the Moken much more welcoming if you follow this basic dress code.
- When invited into a house, please take off your shoes.
- For taking photographs, please make sure this happens in agreement with the people in front of your lenses.
- If you need to use a bathroom, please ask your guide
- Corals and shells belong to the surroundings; please leave them on the beach.
- Please leave only your recyclables in the village.
- Support the community by purchasing local crafts – beautiful woven baskets, mats, and more along with intricately carved boats.

Get Involved

To get involved with the Moken, their activities and programs, visit their webpage: www.moken-islands.com

or the N-ACT website: www.andamancommunitytourism.com under Destinations -> Koh Surin

