

International property news

THE REAL BEACH

Renting a house on the tropical island of Koh Samui will reveal a genuine paradise that has little to do with Hollywood myths, writes **Holly Kirkwood**

KOH SAMUI, Thailand: the very words conjure up images of wild tropical forests, rustic huts on deserted beaches and the Hollywood film *The Beach*. But the reality is rather different: the island is saying *adios* to the backpacking community and fast becoming the latest destination for those looking for year-round sunshine and five-star accommodation.

Set off the coast of mainland Thailand, Koh Samui is a 15-hour direct flight from the UK, but it is worth the journey. A magical island populated by friendly people and seemingly endless coconut palms, it offers privacy, fantastic beaches, excellent food and drink, and stunning landscapes. It also has character. During a drive, you could easily bump into an extended family paying a visit to their buffalo in the jungle *en masse*, or merely enjoy spotting how many locals can fit onto one of the ubiquitous scooters that fill the streets.

The sun shines every day, barring a couple of months in the monsoon season (September to November), which means there are effectively nine months of summer. The island's lush greenery owes much to the fact that it rains almost every day, but only for a short time, and the sun returns almost as soon as it departed.

Pretty little bars and restaurants pepper Koh Samui's north and west coasts. Bophut is particularly good in the evenings as it's lively in a refreshingly simple way, and provides a string of good places to eat, drink and socialise.

Fans of Thai food can look forward to eating green curries, fresh fish, and plates of fresh fruit—for as little as £5.

Property is not quite as cheap, but it is still reasonable. You can buy a good-sized family house with a large garden and beach frontage for a third of the price of the Caribbean

'You could bump into a family paying a visit to their buffalo in the jungle'

(see p84 for further details on homes for sale in Koh Samui).

Renting a property here is also an easy option: a five-bedroom villa, which sleeps at least 10, costs around US\$1,000

(about £495) per night, including breakfast and dedicated live-in staff (Dhevatara Properties, 00 66 7 742 3279; www.dhevatara.com; email: villarentals@dhevatara.com).

And as you lie by the pool after supper in the warm night air, watching an army of lit paper lanterns float into the heavens, you might just start to understand why Thailand is such a soothing destination. A big Buddha statue winks at you across the bay, and suddenly whatever stress awaits back at home disappears—isn't that the point of getting away from it all?



Beautiful villas by the beach are available to rent or buy in upmarket Koh Samui