



The 35-metre pool at Xana, located on Thailand's Bang Tao Bay

THE NEW IBIZA

NEW LEASE ON BEACH CLUB LIFE

Forget the bright lights of Patong and the dubious gentlemen's clubs, Phuket is reinventing its nightlife with hip new Beach Clubs popping up along the West Coast.

WORDS Rowena Carr-Allinson

Surin and Bang Tao especially are abuzz with new clubs and lounges and fast earning the reputation as 'Thailand's new Ibiza'.

One of the largest is Xana (xanabeachclub.com) run by the team behind Singapore's club Attica at the Laguna Angsana hotel. Set on a beautiful stretch of Bang Tao Bay, it's got it all: a 35-metre pool which sparkles, illuminated at night, private cabanas set on the sand, and romantic poolside day-beds for reclining. With some of the biggest DJs on the decks, from Paul Oakenfold to Tim Cullen and Dennis Ferrar – and most recently Black Eyed Peas Apl.de.ap – Xana is setting the example on the island. Its themed party nights and Ministry of Sound events have earned it a reputation as THE place to go for visiting party animals. Be warned, although it's not all about the money, the price tag on the daybeds is fairly steep. The good news is that the fee is redeemable in food and beverages, so it might set you back 1000 ThB (AU\$ 34) for a day's lounging, but

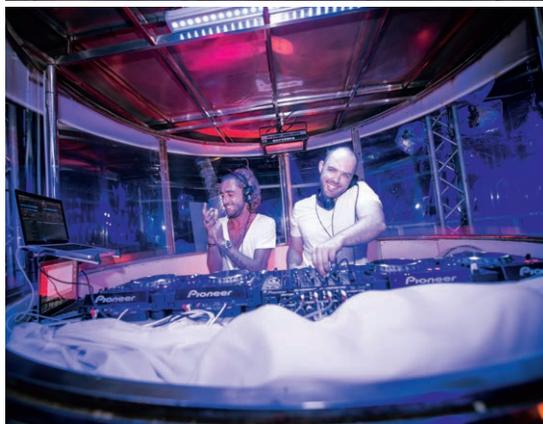
at least you'll have plenty to eat and drink! The menu includes such delights as Smoked Salmon Ravioli and Alaskan King Crab Tacos, but you can't go wrong with the fresh 'Fish'n'Chips' with Tartare...

There's more live DJ-ing at the very appropriately named Bliss in nearby Cherngtalay, (blissbeachclub.com) further along Bang Tao Bay. Giuseppe, the club's affable manager, runs regular parties like Aperitivo (for free nibbles with your sundowners) and Soundwave Sunday, Phuket's longest running beach party.

It's also worth knowing that at Bliss sun loungers are very affordable at 220 THB (AU\$8) and come with no strings attached – ideal for a day's relaxing before climbing up to the deck and collapsing in the giant loveseat-type pods. Order anything from the menu, the Aussie chef Alexander Oddys is a local star and produces some of the best food on the island, from 'basic but good, fresh ingredients'. The hamburger is well worth the trip, as is the Grilled Aubergine salad, handmade pasta, not to



From top: Phuket's twinkling coastline; Catch Beach Club's blue and white themed deck and international DJs starting the party at Catch



PHOTOS: ISTOCK, COURTESY OF CATCH BEACH CLUB

mention the fantastic Mac 'n Cheese... Also worth noting, the club is a wine lover's paradise, with over 100 labels from ten countries on offer.

The ambience most nights is very mellow and relaxed, and on big party nights Giuseppe confides that he sometimes takes the party indoors. Bliss has its own swanky indoor sound-proofed club, complete with dance floor, huge bay windows and a top-of-the-line sound system.

Further down the coast, the famous Surin Beach is where most of the beach clubs are concentrated. Set around the infamous Catch, smaller contenders have popped up, such as Bimi (stands for Bikinis & Martinis!) and Diamond, as well as the latest addition: Zazadas (zazadabeachclub.com). At the top tip of the promenade, it's situated on the perfect stretch of beach, offering privacy and a picture-perfect view framed by typical Phuket boulders and palm trees. It couldn't be a dreamier spot! The all-red decor blends nicely with dark woods, sun loungers and bean bags, and the staff's

Thai Fisherman pants give a nice quirky edge making the place both sultry and sleek. The food is fantastic. A menu offering a mix of Eastern and Western, it was a surprise to find such good carbonara in this neck of the woods! But the real attraction is the mixologist and his array of sexy cocktails – from the American-inspired Apple Pie to the delicious Mocha Martini...

Run by charismatic Brit, Jay Leshark, the club is without a doubt the new kid on the block and hopes to be more approachable than some others, pulling in a slightly less 'bling' crowd. The perfect solution for those who are not driving Ferraris to the beach!

There's no doubt Catch (catchbeachclub.com) is THE club on the island that's set the benchmark. The ice blue and white themed beach club is Phuket's must-do nightlife spot boasting international DJs such as Aussie Shane OB and Frenchmen Nicolas Vega or Joe Gradante. With one of those menus you can't put down, Catch is all about sleek sophistication, and a definite 'wow' factor.



Left: Sunset at Phuket's renowned Nikki Beach

Below: Serene waters and sunshine at Lamai Beach are replaced by a buzzing party scene come nightfall



Whether you settle for a Sushi Platter (fantastic!) on a cosy sofa, or the Wow Grilled Wagyu or Thai Rotisserie Chicken at one of the dining tables, the food, delivery and atmosphere is hip, sexy and stylish. The main attraction is the tented, oval neon-lit bar, set just off the boardwalk where a team of white-polo-shirt-clad lookers serve up the Champagne, mojitos or cosmos... or anything else your heart and lips may desire. The crowd is eclectic, from the hip youngsters, to the classy older generation, Catch is where Phuket's beautiful people mingle and party.

The next big thing? Nikki Beach (nikkibeach.com), the legendary, global brand famous for its White Nights and wild all-nighters, is joining the party in Phuket, near Layan Beach.

Pushing the beach club concept even further on the island of Koh Samui, Nikki Beach is an unbridled success story. With a worldwide reputation as THE place to dance the night away, beloved by celebrities and mere mortals alike, Nikki Beach is sure to enhance the island's status as the new party capital of Thailand, adding yet another reason to visit its beautiful sandy shores.

Koh Samui is also home to Beach Republic (beachrepublic.com) in Lamai Beach. Here you will find a restaurant where 'citizens' can feast on tapas and Thai, and an Asian-fusion spa.

Blending contemporary cosmopolitan and hip beach lifestyle, the beach club culture is all about the sea, the sun, the sand, and the late night sounds... What's not to love?