



The optional day trip to Ang Thong Marine Park was another absolute must-do



I'm A Celeb... alum Tegan and beau Blake loved the beach life

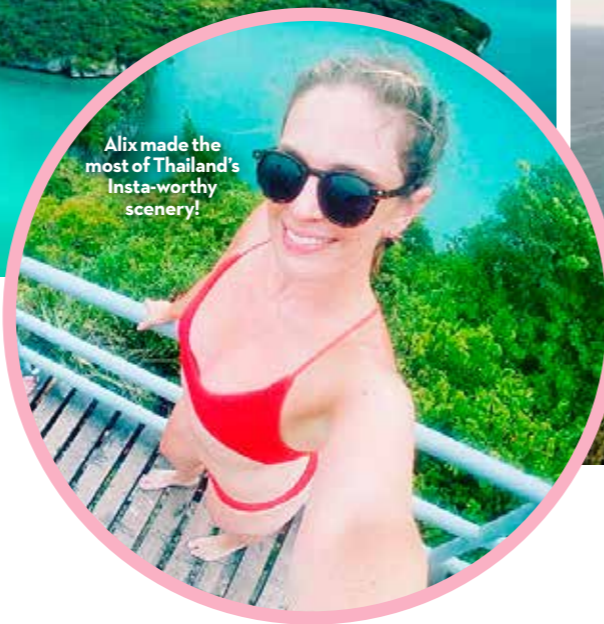
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Swim with fish at the tiny but beautiful Jansom Bay



Four-wheel driving through the jungle will definitely bring you closer!



Alix made the most of Thailand's Insta-worthy scenery!



If snorkelling's your jam, say yes to a boat trip to Koh Nang Yuan

THAILAND tripping

Get your group holiday on for the most idyllic island hop ever!



Laughter, adventure and lifelong friendships are all guaranteed

Picture this: you're sitting on top of a Jeep as it winds its way down a mountain through the lush tropical jungle, on your way to sip pina colodas on a secluded beach at sunset with a group of your best mates. Who you've literally known for less than a day...

If you're sceptical about the whole group travel thing, I get it. I was, too. Can you really, truly connect with people you've never met before in just a few days? The answer is a definite yes, if the Contiki Thai Island Hopper East trip is anything to go by.

Far from the party-hard stereotype so many have stuck in their heads, Contiki's trip to three of Thailand's most beautiful islands can be as fun-fuelled or Zenned out as you want it to be. Our tour kicked off in Koh Samui, Thailand's second largest island, where we met our tour manager Shannon. You know that friend who always has a plan, and knows everything (in a helpful-not-annoying way)? That was Shan. From culture and a bit of basic language to where to find the best cocktail buckets in town, and 736 different ways with Tiger Balm, she had us sorted.

The first optional extra of the holiday (there were three), the Jeep adventure, set the tone for the next week. Aside from doing everything you didn't know you needed to do on Samui – visiting the Wat Khunaram temple and the Big Buddha, swimming in idyllic pools at the base of a waterfall, indulging in a traditional lunch

overlooking the jungle and eating coconut ice-cream at beautiful sightseeing spot Grandfather and Grandmother Rock, then finishing the day with a sunset bevvie at the world's most Instagrammable palm tree – the all-day adventure turned out to be an epic bonding experience for the group. By the time we were tucking into our pad Thai that night, we were all certified mates.

The next few days were a flurry of ferries, fun and fast-growing friendships (side note: I've already caught up with the gang several times since we've been back in Australia). From a Muay Thai boxing class (you'll never sweat so much in your life!) and more massages than you could imagine in Koh Samui, to incredible scenery and snorkelling during an island cruise off the shores of the tiny diving mecca Koh Tao, and an insane trek into the jungle for one of Koh Phangan's famous half-moon parties, we packed an unbelievable amount into those nine days.

This particular trip was hosted by health coach and former Miss Universe Australia Tegan Martin and her beau Blake Worrall-Thompson, who's a personal trainer-turned-mindset coach – which meant we had some

bonus wellness elements thrown in, too. Hello, balance! Think morning workouts on the beach, positive mindset workshops and meditation sessions at sunrise – and just like every other part of the vacay, we could join as many or as few activities as we liked. As long as we didn't miss the ferries/taxis/plane, there was no pressure to do anything. This was *our* trip, to do *our* way.

Best holiday ever? Could just be...

FOUR REASONS TO DO THE GROUP THING

- 1 It's EASY. Everything is organised for you. You just show up and enjoy!
- 2 You're not locked into anything (bar the obvious transport schedules), so you still have as much freedom and flexibility as you like. And your trip manager knows what's what, so they can help you if you want to do something not on the itinerary.
- 3 Your guide's insider knowledge of the area means you'll see and do so much more than you would as an independent traveller.
- 4 You can legitimately form strong, authentic connections with like-minded people (reunion trip, anyone?).

Koh Tao: paradise for divers and sun-seekers alike!

