

The Green Island Project

A collaborative, long-term programme of projects and events for the sustainable protection of Koh Samui's natural environment.

Samui as it used to be

Samui, Thailand's third-largest island is endowed with remarkable natural beauty. The gorgeous beaches that surround the entire island were once home to local people who made their living as fishermen and coconut farmers. Unspoiled nature, a beautiful indigenous culture, and the friendliness of the island's inhabitants proved to be a powerful attraction for tourists, who have been visiting the island in increasing numbers since the 1970s.

Samui as it is now

In 2007, 1,059,642 tourists visited Samui
429,917 came by air
175,604 came by train
221,803 traveled by tour bus
212,772 came in private vehicles

These visitors brought 15 billion baht in foreign exchange into the country

(Thai Tourism Authority data for the year 2007)

More than 400 hotels have now been built on the island offering a total of more than 16,000 rooms.

Water consumption is currently between 18,000 and 22,000 cubic meters per day, with 5,754 cubic meters of waste water entering purification processors daily. The rest of the waste water is released into rivers and canals like Khlong Chaweng, Khlong Lamai, and Khlong Maenam.

120 tons of trash are generated daily on the island. Samui's current refuse facilities can deal with a maximum of 130 tons a day.

The development and growth of Samui as a tourism destination has not included any planning to compensate for increased use of public utilities, and forcing the island's limited natural resources to accommodate the greatly increased number of visiting tourists has caused problems. These include:

- the deterioration of the natural environment
 - the accumulation of garbage, chemical contaminants, and other pollutants than cannot be eliminated
 - insufficient water resources and the deterioration of existing

ones

- damage to the ecology of the beaches and the sea

Samui's indigenous art and culture have also suffered a severe, negative impact. The traditional lifestyle has been swallowed up by a ruthlessly self-serving commercial culture, often both irresponsible and unethical, that has largely come from beyond the island's shores.

Why a “Green Island Project, Koh Samui”?

The meaning of the term Green Island touches on every aspect of Koh Samui

Green is the color of unspoiled nature, filled with the luxurious vegetation that provides Koh Samui with much of its beauty and fresh, clean air.

Green means harmony between things that have been constructed and the natural environment that surrounds them. These structures combine beauty with systems that protect the environment with a full sense of responsibility toward society.

Green refers to a state of awareness that will allow local people, tourists, and government offices to cooperate to fulfil their duties related to Koh Samui and its society with good intentions and a sense of responsibility.

The Green Island Project, Koh Samui aims to find a means of cooperation between the government sector, business people, tourists, and the local Samui community to restore the island's beautiful natural environment and its traditional ways of life. The effort will also include finding ways to develop and improve the quality of the tourism business, so that Samui remains an attractive tourism destination for many years to come.

Here are some of the things that we can do:

Refuse

Each day, Samui generates 120 tons of garbage. It includes the following components:

Paper:	6.59%
Scraps of cloth:	5.90%
Food:	28.15%
Pieces of wood:	3.18%
Plastic:	31.55%
Rubber, film:	3.23%
Refuse that cannot be burned:	20.14%
Other burnable types:	1.26%

Even though Koh Samui is currently able to dispose of all this refuse, the quantity of garbage that doesn't degrade is greater than that of other types. There is also the problem of refuse that is disposed of improperly by burning or dumping in rivers or canals - even into the sea. Fluid from heaped-up garbage flows into the sea and the water table, causing toxins to spread through the environment.

Finding a durable solution to Koh Samui's refuse problem requires planning and finding ways to provide information to business people and the community on the importance of sorting their garbage. To meet this need, a "Reuse, Recycle, Reduce, Rethink" project is proposed, whereby the municipality and the garbage disposal personnel cooperate to establish a system of collecting and sorting rubbish efficiently.

Traffic

Over the past few years, statistics have shown a rapid rise in the number of traffic accidents occurring on Koh Samui's roads.

There are also related problems of traffic congestion, a lack of respect for traffic laws, overloading of vehicles, and increased noise and air pollution. These have combined to make the island a less pleasant place to be.

Widening the roads would be one approach to solving the traffic problem, but it would require a huge amount of money and might have undesirable effects in the long term. If the island had a properly organized public transportation system with passenger vehicles running on a regular schedule, this would reduce the number of cars on the road. This approach could also cut down on the amount of pollution and energy consumption, because the island could choose to invest in public transport vehicles that ran on bio diesel fuel or LPG. It would also be possible to set schedules and establish speed limits for these vehicles.

If speed limits could be set and strictly implemented with schedules made for public vehicles operating on Koh Samui, drivers could also be made to respect traffic regulations. The Transport Department could then add special bicycle lanes and promote the use of bicycles as another tourism option.

The use of natural resources: water/forests/beaches/the sea

It is very hard to force irresponsible people operating hotels, restaurants, or other businesses to obey laws or other regulations concerned with protecting the environment. Even more difficult to create an awareness on their part of the importance of a process that will have to take place continuously, over a significant period time.

To apply the pressure needed to bring about such cooperation, Samui will have to rely on social mechanisms, with assistance through marketing.

Approaches to generating participation include:

Incentives to encourage business owners to cooperate, such as rewarding those who conduct their business without causing any harm to the environment with promotion in the media and by the TAT.

Tourists can be given information about "Samui as a tourism destination - now and in the future". Literature can also be distributed to create and sustain trends in production and consumption that have no adverse effect on the natural environment.

One type of information could be "*The Green Island Handbook*", which would include environment-friendly advice to tourists, encouraging people to use fewer plastic bags, refrain from buying fireworks or firecrackers, refuse to support the abuse of wild animals and only to patronize hotels (named on a checklist) that have policies aimed at conserving the environment

The traditions, culture, and life style of the local people

We must ask ourselves why so many people come to Koh Samui, if not to enjoy the various aspects that combine to create its unique character: nature, culture, and comfort.

Nature has endowed the island with forests, coral, the sea, and beaches.

The local culture is expressed in the lifestyle of the island's inhabitants and cultural heritage – shrines, temples, and buildings that reflect indigenous traditions and identity. It also includes the professions that have been passed down to the people of Koh Samui by their ancestors.

Samui's comforts and conveniences include easy travel to and from the island, a range of accommodation, food and services, and the island's relative safety and security.

But today, Samui is experiencing problems connected with the preservation of its customs, culture, traditions and way of life. Fishermen are abandoning their traditional jobs to hire themselves out as construction workers, and farmers are turning into real estate brokers. These changes make it an urgent priority to promote ways that allow tourism to play a part in maintaining and ensuring the strength and survival of the local culture, customs, and traditional jobs of Samui's inhabitants.

The local community can be trained in traditional professions and local products, developed to a high standard that would make them genuinely useful and marketable. Tourists could then be encouraged to buy locally-made products to support the artisans who produced them.

Who will take part in the Green Island Project?

Government offices must define approaches for the development and promotion of the tourism industry on Samui to ensure that it does not make excessive demands on available local resources.

The local business community should also understand the need to promote services and manufacturing methods that do not upset the ecological balance or cause destructive changes in the behaviour of local society. This will help Koh Samui remain a permanently attractive tourist destination.

Public service organizations will be a force behind various aspects of the project. This includes sourcing and raising funds, establishing operational mechanisms, and identifying projects that help and sustain the natural environment.

Community members can help to combine traditional folk knowledge with new technology to combat environmental problems and preserve Koh Samui's cultural heritage.

The island's media will disseminate public relations material from each work unit involved with helping the environment, cooperating with them in a system of shared support.

Tourists can support the kind of tourism that does not harm the environment. By being aware of the value of the island's indigenous culture, they can also play an important part in enabling the local people to live well.

Goals and Timeframe

The goal of the Green Island Project is to measure and monitor the results of different activities in terms of their positive influence on the island's environment. The project will require time and will have to be implemented in a measured, continuous way to achieve success. In formulating policies and approaches, consideration will have to be given to all the stakeholders and their associated roles over a period of 10 years.

The 10-year overall project duration will be divided into three segments: the initial period, a follow-up period, and a period for control and development.

The **short-term plan** involves projects that will be completed within 3 years.

The **medium-term plan** involves projects that will be completed within 5 years.

The **long-term plan** involves projects that it will require 10 years to complete.

Each of these plans will consist of the initial definition of objectives, monitoring of results, and evaluation of results.

Examples of the activities that will be incorporated into the project

It is essential that the project receives ongoing support and cooperation from the public service organizations already established on Koh Samui, to coordinate and perform tasks as part of a network.

These organizations will conduct environmental work, liaising with government and private sector participants, other public service organizations, the media, and the community in general.

Financial support from the above-mentioned government and private-sector parties will be essential to proceed with the work.

Government units

Relevant departments at each level of government should be assigned the following tasks.

Units working on educational activities

- To promote the establishment of environmental conservation groups
 - To set up conservationist youth camps.
 - To initiate detective work to keep watch on beaches and waterways.
 - To organize activities to conserve wetlands and to release crabs to help in conserving these areas.
 - To organize activities to protect sea turtles together with the Navy Center for the Protection of Sea Turtles.
 - To implement the Little Guides Project.

Regional administrative bodies

- To establish a public advisory board for the preservation of natural resources and the environment which would have representatives from the private sector, the private business community, the public, educational institutions, the media and qualified persons from the public and the government.
 - To define policy and approaches for protecting the quality of the natural environment in the long term (10 years), from 2008 – 2017.
 - To define restrictions on the tourism industry that respect the limits and work within boundaries that respect protection of the natural environment.
 - To organize training to produce regional leaders who know, understand, and have the ability to look after and protect the natural environment.
 - To establish training programs to give the public the

knowledge and ability needed to conserve the natural environment, promoting the use of local folk knowledge, mixed with modern technology when appropriate – for example, the use of biodegradable food containers (KU GREEN) as exhibited at the Samui Food Fair 2008.

At the national level

The Ministry of Tourism and Sports could push Koh Samui as a special location, a tourism venue that will serve as a model of enlightened administration and management, aware of the need to protect the natural environment and natural resources.

At the international level

When Koh Samui has achieved its goal of becoming a tourism destination that is aware of the impact of tourism on the natural environment, it will be able to join various international networks and be considered for international citations like the World Travel & Tourism Council's Tourism of Tomorrow Award.

Koh Samui could become an official centre for various educational programs and seminars like the World Ecotourism Conference.

If Koh Samui were to succeed in achieving such approval by internationally recognized organizations. It would be held up as an admirable example, which would enhance Thailand's reputation worldwide.

Businesses

The following commercial concerns should implement environmental safeguards.

Department stores and convenience stores

All such businesses should cooperate in a campaign to get people to stop using plastic bags.

A Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rethink policy should be introduced and promoted.

A deposit and return system for glass bottles should be put into effect.

There should be special disposal points for hazardous waste, from which it could be taken to the mainland.

Hotels, resorts, and guest houses

All hotels should take part in the Green Leaf Foundation's project

A Koh Samui Tourism Awards project should be initiated for hotels and resorts.

Transport businesses

These companies should support an improvement in the quality of services provided by public transportation vehicles.

They should work together with government offices connected with the implementation of the Green Transport Project.

They should provide language training for transportation personnel and improve their service approach and customer care.

They should implement a Green Transport Card system for Thai passengers who use transport services daily, allowing them to prepay by the month. The income could be used to pay the salaries of public transport drivers or to create a welfare fund for them.

Restaurants and food stores

Restaurants can prepare a Green Cuisine book, listing restaurants that take part in the effort to protect the environment through helpful activities like sorting refuse or using systems to process or separating waste and fat. The books could be presented to tourists.

The media could urge tourists to patronize restaurants that participate in the Green Cuisine Project.

A project could organize training sessions for restaurants and food shops that includes monitoring of results through questionnaires and tests by government officials.

The Island Community

Green Island will promote tourism activities that benefit the community as well as individuals.

Individuals should learn about how locally-produced items can be made to appeal to the tourist market.

Local people can share information and provide instruction on how technology can be used to design and develop products.

The project will encourage the community to improve the quality of their hand crafted products.

The project will encourage businesses to use local products: local fruits and vegetables that are in season can be featured on restaurant menus, locally-made handicrafts can be sold in gift shops, and coconut oil from groves on Koh Samui can be used in spas.

Activities can be organized for the public in cooperation with officers from the army, the police and village volunteers.

The project will train the public to be able to guard their own safety and that of tourists at times when there are not enough police officers to take full responsibility for their protection.

The Media

Island publications, television stations and radio can take several roles.

To generate enthusiasm for green initiatives

To promote and cover events to mark the launch of new projects.

To promote and sponsor walks, marathons, and biking events.
To promote, cover and help organize a parade of Green Island participants with the mayor and governor taking part and planting trees beside the route.
To provide information via television, the Green Island Handbook, and radio broadcasts.
To design a website.
To report positive actions by participants to protect the environment of Koh Samui.
To Produce a Green Island publication and report to present to H.M. the King on 5 December.
To generate advertising and handle public relations
To prepare a booklet, *Koh Samui, The Green Island*, to be sent to TAT offices in every country.
To launch a campaign to reduce the amount of garbage on Koh Samui by publishing statistics that allow people to follow progress on a weekly basis on local television and radio.
To release information via various media promoting the concept of living in a “sustainable economy”. Directed at people in different sectors and occupations.

Project Duration

10 years, from 2008 until 2017

Schedule of work for the first year

January – June 2008:

Meetings to establish policies and approaches to promote and protect the quality of the environment in the long term over 10 years

Establish a network and mechanism to allow the government, private sector, public service organizations, media, community, and general public to work cooperatively to aid the environment.

June– July 2008:

Selecting projects and assigning them to the work units that will be responsible for them

July-August 2008:

Work towards achieving initial goals and reaching different stages within the various projects.

August-September 2008:

First assessment of results

September – October 2008:

Analysis of problems and difficulties encountered during work on various projects and formulation of planning to find approaches for further development (requesting advice and assistance from national organizations).

November 2008:
Second assessment of results, continuation of work

December 2008:
Various participating organizations confirm their cooperative work to achieve the goal of producing a Green Island report to present to H. M. the King on 5 December.