



THE INDESTRUCTIBLE BEAT OF SOWETO

music strains (including the explosive harmonic Zulu sound out of Durban) in Jo'burg nightspots like the Roxy Rhythm Bar, Tandoor and a range of Hillbrow boltholes. Surging music is omnipresent across black South Africa, at events ranging from funerals to picket lines. An adventurous spirit and an element of care will access some extraordinary experiences.

#### Ulaanbaatar

The first surprise is the Mongolian city itself – a busy burg of shopping malls, supermarkets, yellow cabs and mini-skirts. The next is the unbelievable spectrum of sound. At one end you find the grand, sweeping classical orchestras, thoroughly Mongolian in their use of local compositions and traditional performers playing the Horse Head fiddle and other Mongol-designed instruments. At the other end lurks a range of powerful rock bands – Jargalsaikhan, Chinggis Khan, The Hurd and Haranga – whose CDs are stacked in Tokyo-type record shops alongside the offerings of local hip hop, rap, dance and new age entities. And straddling them both are acclaimed and ethereal Throat Singers such as Booyoo, who somehow simultaneously bring forth from their voicebox high and low notes in spell-binding manner.

#### Reykjavik

She may reside in New York these days, flying the Icelandic flag

from afar, but Bjork is a constant presence in the city of her birth. It's not just the posters and racks of CDs and books that greet you wherever you wander in the world's most northerly capital – a clean green city housing a tough and independent society full of casually self-confident, cosmopolitan and intriguing people – it's also the young citizenry that has taken its fashion lead from the enigmatic singer, who began recording at 11 and effectively alerted a generation to this city of nefarious nightlife on edge of the Atlantic. Hip new Icelandic musicians and composers, like the group Sigur Rós, have established Reykjavik as one of Europe's most culturally vital cities.

#### Kingston

The Caribbean is awash with sound, as the world found back in the fifties when infectious Trinidad calypso exploded. A decade on, Jamaica flexed its musical muscles, with such styles as raggamuffin, ska, bluebeat reggae and dub interacting with western rock'n'roll and elevating such stars as Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff and Peter Tosh. Toasting, when brought to New York City, became rapping, one of the four elements of hip-hop culture. In the sun-drenched Jamaican capital of Kingston, where dreadlocked Rastas lope around the ghetto streets of Trenchtown with modes of mobile sound clutched to their ears, the languid fluid reggae beat is inescapable, as is the Marley legacy. Like Abbey Road or Sun, the artist's Tuff Gong Studio draws a steady stream of pilgrims.

#### ULAANBAATAR



**Kempinski Hotel Khan Palace**  
East Cross Road, Peace Avenue  
[www.kempinski.com/en/ulaanbaatar/hotel-khan-palace](http://www.kempinski.com/en/ulaanbaatar/hotel-khan-palace)



**Monet**  
2 Sukhbatar Square,  
Central Tower, 17th Floor,  
[www.monetrestaurant.mn](http://www.monetrestaurant.mn)

#### REYKJAVIK



**Hotel Borg**  
Posthusstraeti 11-101 Reykjavik  
[www.en.hotelborg.is](http://www.en.hotelborg.is)



**Gallery Restaurant (Hotel Holt)**  
Bergstaðrstræti, 37-101 Reykjavik  
[www.holt.is](http://www.holt.is)

#### KINGSTON



**Strawberry Hill Resort**  
New Castle Road B1, St. Andrew  
[www.strawberryhillhotel.com](http://www.strawberryhillhotel.com)



**689 by Brian Lumley**  
20-22 Trinidad Terrace  
[www.chefbrianlumley.com](http://www.chefbrianlumley.com)

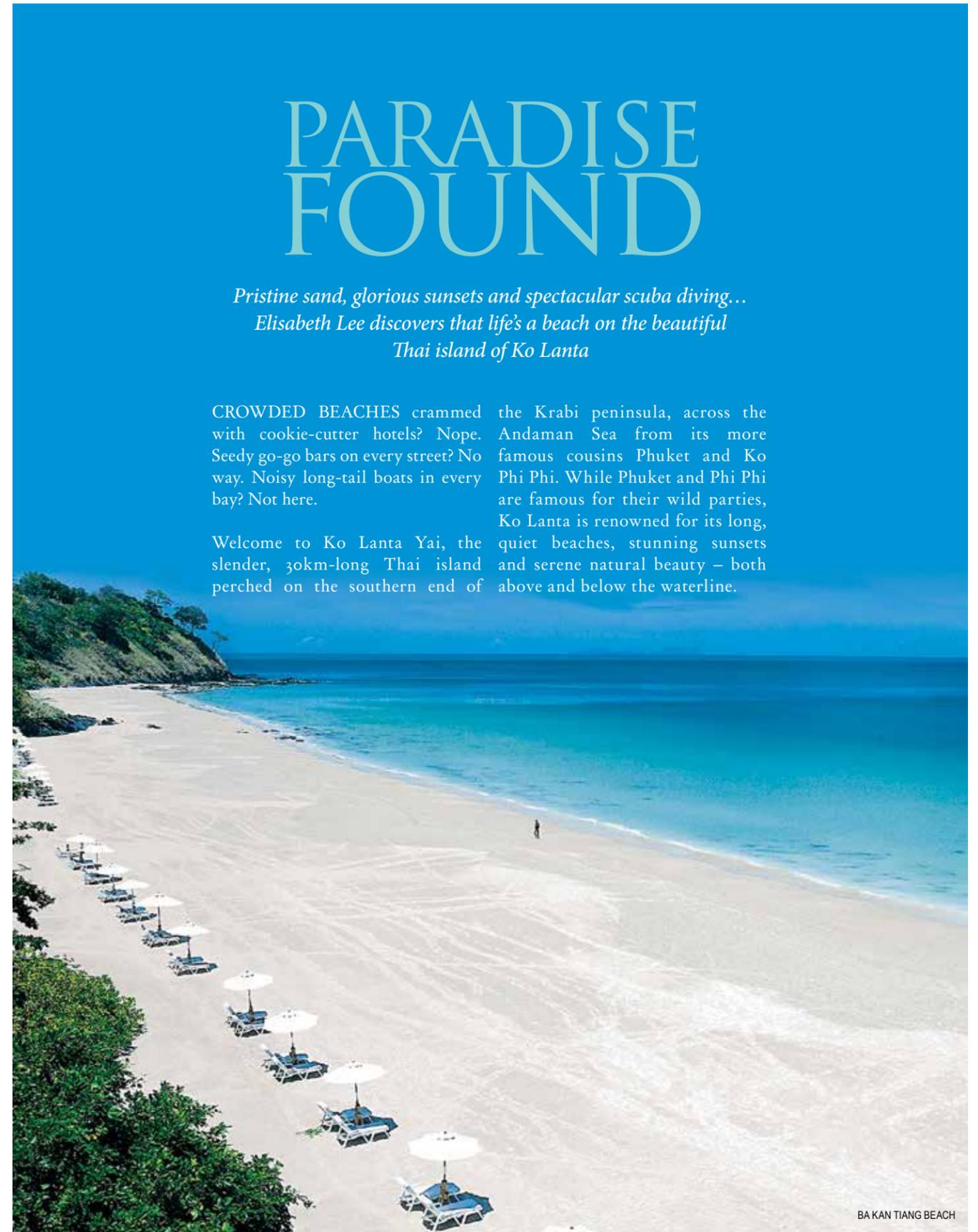
# PARADISE FOUND

*Pristine sand, glorious sunsets and spectacular scuba diving...  
Elisabeth Lee discovers that life's a beach on the beautiful  
Thai island of Ko Lanta*

CROWDED BEACHES crammed with cookie-cutter hotels? Nope. Seedy go-go bars on every street? No way. Noisy long-tail boats in every bay? Not here.

Welcome to Ko Lanta Yai, the slender, 30km-long Thai island perched on the southern end of

the Krabi peninsula, across the Andaman Sea from its more famous cousins Phuket and Ko Phi Phi. While Phuket and Phi Phi are famous for their wild parties, Ko Lanta is renowned for its long, quiet beaches, stunning sunsets and serene natural beauty – both above and below the waterline.



BA KAN TIANG BEACH



On a visit last November (high season), we were amazed to find Klong Nin beach an oasis of calm. We spent the morning paddling in the gentle surf with our toddler, and encountered only a handful of other people.

No wonder then that Ko Lanta was recently named Asia's best island by International Living magazine, which cited its "wild jungle and uncrowded beaches" to explain its position as one of the world's "most spectacular islands".

Settled by a mix of Thai Chinese, Muslims and sea gypsies (Chao Le), Ko Lanta is a unique melting pot of three cultures – and this interesting mix is experienced by the visitor in many different ways. For one, finding halal eating options is a breeze.

#### Jewels in the Andaman's crown

While Ko Lanta's topside charms are obvious, its underwater

#### HOW TO GET THERE

Unspoilt islands are usually remote and hard to get to – which is precisely why they remain unspoilt. But getting to Ko Lanta is easy, thanks to the plethora of low-cost airlines that fly to Krabi, the closest international airport.

Fly from Bandar Seri Begawan to Bangkok on Royal Brunei Airlines or Thai Airways, then on to Krabi on Thai Airways, Bangkok Airways, Nok Air or Air Asia.

Getting to Ko Lanta from Krabi is straightforward – your hotel or villa will arrange an airport transfer. If you prefer to make your own arrangements, a private speedboat transfer (2,000 baht per person) can be booked ahead online. The trip takes 90 minutes or longer, depending on your destination on Ko Lanta.



1. THE PIMALAI RESORT AND SPA  
2. SWIMMING WITH A MANTA RAY

beauty is perhaps a better-kept secret. From a boat, Hin Daeng looks like a small cluster of rocky outcroppings in the middle of Mu Koh Lanta National Marine Park, but those rocks hide a huge underwater formation extravagantly swathed in marine life. During the diving high season, which runs from November to April, you might see giant whale sharks, manta rays and reef sharks in the clear, blue water.

Another highlight for divers is Ko Haa, with its stunning caves and chambers. A collapsed volcanic island, Ko Haa is home to turtles, octopus, sea snakes and more. Snorkellers love the untouched coral reefs of Ko Rok Nok and Ko Rok Nai, while shark aficionados head to Ko Bida Nai and Ko Bida Nok to admire the many leopard sharks that call the two islets home.

None of these dive sites are more than a couple of hours from Ko Lanta by speedboat, which means you'll be back on the main island by the middle of the afternoon latest, giving you plenty of time to explore here too.

#### Mangroves and mopeds

Even if diving is not your thing, Ko Lanta has plenty to offer...

- Foodies will enjoy a day spent learning the finer points of Thai cuisine at Roi Thai Cooking School ([www.myroithai.com](http://www.myroithai.com)). Classes are hands-on and best of all, each lesson ends with a sit-down three-course meal featuring your creations.

- Check out the local fauna and flora on a mangrove eco-tour. The north-east of the island is fringed with peaceful mangrove bays sheltering a plethora of interesting marine life, such as crabs and mudskippers. Head to Tung Yee Peng mangrove forest, a project operated by the United Nations Development Programme, for a walk along the boardwalks and lunch on a traditional floating restaurant.

- If you're feeling adventurous, hop on a jungle tour – on the back of an elephant – and visit one of Ko Lanta's pristine waterfalls for a refreshing mid-day swim.

- If you're keen to explore but not on the back of a super-sized mammal, rent a moped for a tour of the island. A 45-minute drive will take you to the east side of the island, where you can explore the quirky shops of the island's Old Town. It's a great place to find a unique souvenir for that special someone back home.

Be sure to leave yourself plenty of time to relax on the beach – after all, it's why you came here in the first place, right?

#### WHERE TO STAY

##### For luxury

#### PIMALAI RESORT AND SPA, KAN TIANG BAY BEACH

With its own private beach, the Pimalai Resort and Spa cannot be beaten. The 100-acre estate is tucked away at the lush, hilly southern end of the island, and it features gorgeous cliff-top views from luxurious villas fitted out with everything you need for a relaxing retreat – infinity pool included.

[www.pimalai.com](http://www.pimalai.com)

##### For romance

#### LAYANA RESORT AND SPA, PHRA AE BEACH

Phra Ae beach, also known as Long Beach to the locals, is a seemingly-endless stretch of golden sand with some of the best sunset views on the island. Layana Resort, located right in the middle of the beach, features simple yet elegant rooms, and a quiet adults-only atmosphere – great if romance is top of your holiday agenda.

[www.lantalayana.com](http://www.lantalayana.com)

##### For families

#### RAWI WARIN RESORT AND SPA, KLONG NIN BEACH

Situated mid-island within easy reach of many attractions, the sprawling Rawi Warin Resort is packed with family-friendly amenities, including a children's pool with water slides, movie room and indoor kids' play area. It has won the World Luxury Hotel Awards in the best family hotel category several times, and for good reason.

[www.rawiwarin.com](http://www.rawiwarin.com)