

Coconut Island – Koh Samui

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On Koh Samui in Thailand, I live amongst nature on the one hand and some very unusual creatures on the other. The house I rent is so covered in vegetation, it seems more like it is located in a jungle than by the sea. The nights are quiet and often accompanied by the cries of frightening insects and animals. However, sometimes I am woken by the sound of something heavy falling from the skies. The culprit is a coconut. The coconut shell is very hard and, because something the size of a soccer ball falls from a height of about 20 m, it causes a considerable shock. The blue seas and palm trees seen in postcards and so forth are extremely beautiful. At the same time, you put your life at risk if you do not look up first when choosing a spot on the beach. On windy days, shards from shattered coconuts riddle the road. I am always glad I was not standing beneath that one when it fell. There is no telling when the ripe, slightly aged and discolored coconuts will fall, but there is a limit on how high one can climb to remove them.

There is one critter, however, that works hard at removing dangerous coconuts. The monkey. To be more precise, operators that pick coconuts, train monkeys to climb trees and work. The monkeys dexterously knock down only the coconuts that are about to drop. The collected coconuts are then sold at market, eaten and used as fuel. For the last ten years or so, coconuts were rather cheap, but prices have risen because of the rise in oil prices. This is because the coconuts are being used as a biofuel, something that many people talk about recently, as well as for a variety of other demands. Therefore, when the price of oil goes up, the monkeys end up working more. In exchange for picking the coconuts around my house, it was decided long before by the landlord that the picker could keep the harvest. It is a win-win situation for both sides and resources are being wisely used. From an animal protection point of view, it is sad to see the monkeys working with a rope around their necks, but I am very grateful for them doing the job that only they can do.

The daily gardening and cleaning of the nearby road are done by migrant laborers from Laos. They are by no means wealthy and some children work with their families instead of going to school. They gather the fallen coconuts, remove the pulp from within and dry it in the sun. This preserves the meat and keeps it from rotting. Then, when the market price of coconuts is high, they sell the batch at market. This gives them a little income

on the side. On Koh Samui, there are people even today who make their living this way.



Photo 1: Skilled at climbing trees, a monkey at work.



Photo 2: Preparations to go home after a job well done.



Photo 3: Coconuts felled by monkeys stacked in a truck.