

Koh Samui house builders guide

Building a private house on Samui a popular and rewarding option for both Thai and foreign investors. The construction and materials costs are relatively low compared with other countries and there are enough experienced companies to guarantee a quality result, as long as you find the right builder.

Acquiring or leasing land and building your own house rather than living in a gated development or buying an existing house provides the kind of freedom and choice that's rare in modern property sector. In addition, the luxury of a garden attracts many foreigners, who buy one or more rai to keep a distance between them and their neighbours. For Thai homebuilders, however, such privacy is less of an issue and it's not uncommon to use around 90% of the land for buildings, which explains some of the densely developed areas emerging around the island.

Finding a reliable, quality builder is the first major challenge. Several companies advertise their services in the English language media, but its still essential to check up on credentials and view previous projects and properties. Even with foreign firms, the actual building process is often less than sophisticated by Western standards, using large numbers of labourers with basic tools. But the advantage of this is good value for money and with the right team; the outcome can be very satisfactory. Spending more doesn't necessary guarantee quality, as many builders feel able to charge more when working for foreigners, even if they cannot live up to expectations.

Word of mouth is another popular way to find a good builder on Samui. Architects can also recommend builders, although there is often a 'gratuity' motive in their choices. It's often an advantage to work with a builders and architects who are familiar with each other and it's definitely worth checking other examples of their work and also comparing prices with a number of firms. The actual cost of construction can vary wildly depending on the materials used, as well as the designs and overall finish quality. It's advisable to aim for the higher end of the scale as quality is often measured well below institutionalized, western standards.

When building a house on Samui, there are a number of hazards to be aware of. Shortcuts occur if you've bargain too hard on the price and regular inspection of the work is a must. Furthermore, companies that favour using cheap Burmese migrant labour often employ workers illegally and underpay their staff, which de-motivates and can cause legal problems. The property owner can be liable for a fine, and there are also obvious moral concerns. Delays to completion are another frequent complaint when building a house on Samui as initial development often takes place occurs rapidly but the installations take time due to poor co-ordination with sub-contractors.

Attention to detail is another problem facing Samui house builders. Thai builders are used to concentrating on the general appearance of a building, but fine details can be lacking, such as quality wood finishing, spirit level use, and placement of fixtures and fittings, which are often ponderously located if direction is not given by the house owner. Typically, the builder will not consider the clean up as part of their job so you'll be left to remove rubble and leftovers, as well as cleaning up paint speckles (sheets and taping are seldom used in the paint job), and wiping everything down.

If everything goes according to plan, which it rarely does, you can make significant gains in the value of your property when building yourself. The construction costs are certainly low, but the headaches and potential loss through mistakes adds a higher risk than many foreign investors anticipate. Without professional foreign input, most houses will be built with Thai preferences in mind, often typified by small dark rooms, grand entrances, exterior kitchens and several bathrooms. It's therefore advisable to bring in a western perspective if you wish to build something more suited to your own tastes. If you succeed, you should end up with a property that is valued at more than three times its development cost.

From a personal perspective, building a house on Samui can certainly be fun and rewarding. There's an abundant supply of materials and fittings available at numerous specialist home suppliers throughout the island. In fact, a small island there's an astonishing range of local and imported tiles, flooring, built in kitchens, bathroom fixtures, lighting, garden accessories and more.

Finally when it comes to gardening and landscaping, there are numerous locally run garden centres and several mature tree specialists located around the main island ring road. There are also two or three professional landscaping companies that can help you design your garden, as well providing plants, building in features and adding accessories.

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