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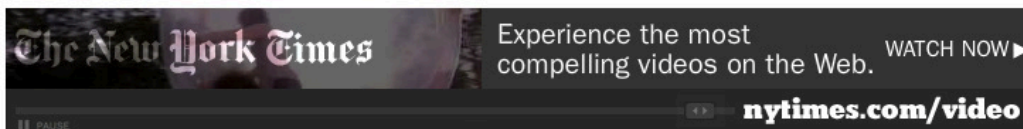
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## The 41 Places to Go in 2011

### 3. Koh Samui, Thailand

*A toned-down version of Phuket, heavy on wellness and food.*

As Thailand's third-largest island, Koh Samui isn't exactly off the radar. But the 95-square-mile tropical gem in the southern Gulf of Thailand, whose white sand [beaches](#), abundant coral reefs and seas of palm trees were once a backpackers' secret, has emerged as the stylish luxury alternative to crowded Phuket. Last month's much-anticipated opening of the [W Retreat Koh Samui](#) on a private beach along the island's northern shore was the chic hotel brand's premiere in Southeast Asia. July saw the arrival of the 78 pool-villas at the [Banyan Tree Samui](#) and its bay-facing [spa](#), which includes the island's first hydrotherapy facility. It is burnishing Koh Samui's reputation as one of Thailand's top wellness destinations, along with the [yoga](#) and detox center at the Moroccan-inspired boutique resort [Absolute Sanctuary](#), which turns three in April.

Local restaurants have kept pace, luring international chefs who are transforming Koh Samui into an eating destination as well. Newcomers include [H-Bistro at the Hansar Samui](#) resort, where the French-Mediterranean and Thai menu was conceived by a former private chef to the Jordanian royal family, and [Orgasmic](#) by Chef Wally, which serves innovative cocktails and dishes like cocoa butter Hokkaido scallops and freshly caught white snapper with pecan-celery mash. The local scene goes into full swing at the weekly Sunday Sessions under the soaring thatched roofs at loungey [Beach Republic](#), whose brunch, seafood barbecue and sunset D.J.'s are quickly becoming famous.

— NAOMI LINDT

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