

Crocodile in Paradise: Thailand hunts reptile in resort town

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Rawai beach, where a crocodile has made an unwelcome appearance

Thailand is in hot pursuit of a cagey crocodile that has made unwelcome appearances off the beaches of resort island Phuket only to slip through the clutches of local authorities.

The evasive reptile was first seen near Rawai [beach](#) about a week ago but has resurfaced in multiple locations near the beaches on the Andaman Sea.

A group of hunters has joined an expanding team trying to track it down.

Thawee Thongcha, the mayor of Karon town on the west coast of Phuket, told AFP Monday they had come very close to success.

"We almost caught it when it was seen near the beach in Karon, (we were) metres away but it moved quickly back to the sea," Thawee said.

"We do not yet know where it comes from."

Thailand's pristine beaches draw millions of tourists a year and Phuket in the southwest is one of the most popular destinations.

Thawee said choppy monsoon seas had prevented fishing boats from using nets to capture the creature, which is almost two metres in length.

The Siamese crocodile was once ubiquitous across Southeast Asia but is currently listed as critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list.

Thon Thamrongnawasawat, a marine biologist and lecturer at Kasetsart University, said the presence of a crocodile in Phuket meant it was likely a hybrid saltwater version of the species bred on a farm, and it was not the first such sighting.

"Normally the open sea is not a place where a crocodile would live," he said.

Crocodile numbers in Thailand and Southeast Asia generally have been

decimated by habitat loss, commercial hunting for the skin trade and the capture of live reptiles to stock crocodile farms, according to the IUCN.

In Thailand there are just a handful of wild populations in central and western national parks.

A French tourist was bitten on the leg by a crocodile inside a Thai national park in January last year when she tried to get close to take a selfie.

In 2014 a Thai woman committed suicide by leaping into a pond of [crocodiles](#) at a farm popular with tourists on Bangkok's outskirts.

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