# Two British fugitives arrested on Koh Samui after decade evading robbery and fraud charges



Two British fugitives, Kieren Daniel Farrer Thornton and Ashton Kevin Saunders, were apprehended in Thailand's popular Koh Samui on May 24, marking a significant operation involving the Thai immigration bureau and the UK's National Crime Agency. Thornton, 38, and Saunders, 37, reportedly lived in Thailand for over a decade, eluding justice for serious charges including robbery and fraud. Their arrests are not only a reflection of international law enforcement collaboration but also highlight Thailand's ongoing challenges related to the presence of foreigners accused of serious crimes.

Thornton was previously arrested in the UK for a robbery that took place at a pier but fled before serving his sentence. He faces extradition back to England to confront the legal ramifications of his actions. Meanwhile, Saunders, who is also known as 'Ben Ash', had a history of fraudulent activities, having been convicted of a scam involving fake loans through a business he co-founded. According to reports, they operated numerous bars along Chaweng Beach, using local nominees to navigate Thai laws regarding foreign business ownership, an increasingly scrutinised area as Thailand continues to bolster regulations aimed at preventing misuse of its visa and business frameworks.

The issues surrounding foreign ownership in Thailand are governed by the Foreign Business Act of 1999, which stipulates that foreigners may only own a maximum of 49 per cent of a business. However, the persistent use of nominee arrangements has become a notable concern for authorities. In light of these recent arrests, Thai officials have indicated they will review the business licenses and ownership structures of the establishments run by the fugitives for any irregularities.

While the arrests themselves are significant, they fit into a broader narrative of a growing crackdown on transnational crime in Thailand. In recent months, there have been multiple instances of British nationals being arrested for a variety of criminal activities. For example, reports emerged of several British individuals apprehended for cannabis smuggling, highlighting an ongoing effort by Thai authorities to combat drug trafficking, a problem exacerbated by the popularity of Thai cannabis following its legalisation for medical use.

Additionally, high-profile arrests such as that of Richard Wakeling, a British organised crime figure, have underscored the extent to which individuals have been attempting to evade prosecution. Wakeling was captured in Bangkok after evading arrest for several years, emblematic of a growing trend of suspects fleeing to Thailand, which has historically been perceived as a safe haven for those seeking to avoid legal repercussions in their home countries.

As authorities continue their efforts to address the unlawful activities of expatriates, including reviewing the legal parameters of businesses heavily run by foreign nationals, discussions around international collaboration and stricter enforcement of immigration laws are expected to intensify. The "White Lotus Effect," spurred by the hit television series set against the backdrop of Koh Samui, has brought increased international attention to the island, further complicating the landscape for authorities aiming to ensure that tourism does not come at the cost of law and order.

In the end, the arrests of Thornton and Saunders serve not only as an example of successful international cooperation but also as a warning that Thailand is on alert, ready to tackle the challenges posed by those who believe they can elude justice in its idyllic locales.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14750203/Two-British-fugitives-arrested-Thailands-White-Lotus-island-running-hotel-bars-ten-years-fleeing-armed-robbery-fraud-charges.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14750203/Two-British-fugitives-arrested-Thailands-White-Lotus-island-running-hotel-bars-ten-years-fleeing-armed-robbery-fraud-charges.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.khaosodenglish.com/news/2025/03/16/cannabis-worth-millions-seized-as-four-more-britons-arrested-at-samui/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.khaosodenglish.com/news/2025/03/18/two-more-brits-caught-in-major-cannabis-smuggling-operation/), [[4]](https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2858652/two-brits-arrested-one-fugitive-and-an-illegal-cosmetician)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/11/british-organised-boss-arrested-in-thailand)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://thephuketexpress.com/2025/03/18/british-leader-of-international-cannabis-smuggling-gang-arrested-at-samui-pier/), [[7]](https://thephuketexpress.com/2025/03/17/four-british-men-arrested-in-koh-samui-for-attempting-to-illegally-export-cannabis-to-the-uk/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14750203/Two-British-fugitives-arrested-Thailands-White-Lotus-island-running-hotel-bars-ten-years-fleeing-armed-robbery-fraud-charges.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.khaosodenglish.com/news/2025/03/16/cannabis-worth-millions-seized-as-four-more-britons-arrested-at-samui/> - On March 16, 2025, Thai authorities apprehended four British nationals at Samui Island Airport for attempting to smuggle 131 kilograms of dried cannabis out of Thailand. The suspects, aged between 34 and 63, were found with eight suitcases containing vacuum-sealed packages of cannabis. They were charged with attempting to export goods without proper customs procedures and violating Thailand's cannabis control laws. The operation was a joint effort involving multiple Thai agencies, highlighting ongoing efforts to combat international drug smuggling.
3. <https://www.khaosodenglish.com/news/2025/03/18/two-more-brits-caught-in-major-cannabis-smuggling-operation/> - On March 18, 2025, two additional British nationals were arrested in Koh Samui as part of an international cannabis smuggling investigation. The suspects, identified as Mr. Azeem and Mr. Darryl, were found attempting to transport suitcases filled with dried cannabis flower buds from Koh Samui to Bangkok. The operation uncovered a larger smuggling network, with authorities seizing 165 kilograms of cannabis. The suspects faced charges related to possessing controlled herbal plants for sale or trade without authorization.
4. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2858652/two-brits-arrested-one-fugitive-and-an-illegal-cosmetician> - In September 2024, Thai police arrested two British nationals in separate incidents. Ben Ransom, 28, was detained in Phuket for drug trafficking charges after fleeing the UK in 2022. He had been living in Thailand and participating in boxing matches under the alias 'Billy'. In Koh Phangan, Thomas Foley, 42, was arrested for illegally operating a cosmetic clinic without proper permits. Both individuals faced legal actions in Thailand, with extradition proceedings for Ransom underway.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/11/british-organised-boss-arrested-in-thailand> - In February 2023, Richard Wakeling, a 55-year-old British organised crime boss, was arrested in Bangkok after being on the run for five years. Wakeling had fled the UK in 2018 before his trial for drug smuggling and was convicted in his absence. He was apprehended in possession of a passport under a different identity. Extradition proceedings were initiated to return him to the UK to serve his 11-year prison sentence.
6. <https://thephuketexpress.com/2025/03/18/british-leader-of-international-cannabis-smuggling-gang-arrested-at-samui-pier/> - On March 18, 2025, Thai authorities arrested a British national, identified as Mr. Darryl, at a ferry pier in Koh Samui for leading an international cannabis smuggling operation. The suspect was found supervising the loading of suitcases containing dried cannabis flowers onto a van. The operation aimed to export the drugs from Thailand to the UK. The arrest was part of a broader investigation into drug smuggling activities involving foreign nationals in Thailand.
7. <https://thephuketexpress.com/2025/03/17/four-british-men-arrested-in-koh-samui-for-attempting-to-illegally-export-cannabis-to-the-uk/> - On March 15, 2025, four British men were arrested at Koh Samui Airport for attempting to smuggle 131 kilograms of cannabis out of Thailand. The suspects, aged between 34 and 63, were found with eight suitcases containing vacuum-sealed packages of cannabis. They were charged with attempting to export goods without proper customs procedures and violating Thailand's cannabis control laws. The operation was a joint effort involving multiple Thai agencies, highlighting ongoing efforts to combat international drug smuggling.