

THE TRAVEL GUIDE TO THAILAND, CAMBODIA, LAOS, HONG KONG & SINGAPORE

FARANG

January 2005

Free Inside!

16-page Dive Mag!

UNTAMED TRAVEL

BANGLADESH

NO TOURIST'S LAND

BKK FILM FEST

SCREEN SAVERS

DARKEST AFRICA

VOODOO CAPITAL

SINGAPORE

DANCE DANCE REVOLT

PHILIPPINES

SLEEPING WITH THE DEAD

MADAGASCAR:
FORBIDDING ISLAND

MUAY THAI:
PLAYMATES IN THE RING

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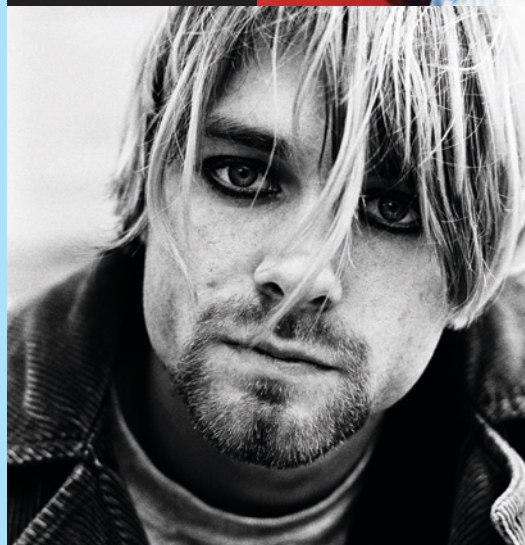
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AD

Main Events

January

FILM FEATS

The European Film Academy recently announced its top films for 2004. The Spanish movie *The Sea Inside*, based on the true story of a quadriplegic who fights for the right to terminate his life, scooped the awards for best director and best actor. In the best actress category, England's Imelda Staunton won for her portrayal of a crusading abortionist from the 50s in *Vera Drake*. And the best non-European film award went to *2046*, a sumptuous, ingenious sci-fi flick from Hong Kong starring Faye Wong and Gong Li. All of these films will be shown at this year's Bangkok International Film Festival from Jan 13-24. Plus, there's a special competition for ASEAN movies, a host of documentaries, the SE Asian premiere of Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Phantom of the Opera* (much touted as an Oscar contender) and films from the artier echelons of cinema. Grab a sneak preview of the fest on Page 12. See schedule on the back cover.



ELECTRO-SHOCK THERAPY

Who would've thought that Marilyn Manson would come across as the most reasonable and articulate interviewee in Michael Moore's documentary *Bowling for Columbine*? His cameo proved that there's a lot more to the man, and his music, than mere shock value. America's favourite musical scapegoat is coming to Bangkok, along with his freakish revue of hard-hitting compatriots, for what promises to be an electrifying show on Tuesday, Jan 25 at the Activ Square at the IMPACT Arena, in support of the group's new album *Lest We Forget: The Best of* (replete with a bonus DVD of grotesqueries). Tickets price and times are yet to be announced.



HOOKED ON HINDUISM

For religious zealotry, and startling natural scenery, it's hard to beat the one-two punch of Thaïpusam. Hindu supplicants, wearing metal frames weighing 80-100 kilos, attached to their flesh with steel hooks parade up to the Batu Caves outside Kuala Lumpur, while others have their faces pierced with skewers, in tribute to Shiva's youngest son, Lord Subramaniam. The caves themselves are like Mother Nature's cathedrals, with three main ones (decked with Hindu iconography) and hundreds of smaller caverns. The festival on January 25th – also celebrated on a smaller scale in other Malay cities like Penang, and in Singapore, though it's banned in India – draws around one million people to the Batu Caves.

Thailand, Malaysia, Benin



DARK GODS

The tiny West African nation of Benin is home to the continent's grandmaster of voodoo. Every year they celebrate National Voodoo Day on January 10 with frenetic dancing, drumming, and ritual sacrifices of a goat. Join us on a travelogue through the darkest heart of Africa, and an exclusive interview with the grandmaster, who offers to protect our writer against road accidents for 10 quid, on Page 34-35.



ALL OVER THE ASIAN MAP

Arrivals



KING CONCERNED FOR KIDS

In his annual birthday speech, His Majesty The King expressed concern that young people are damaging their hearing in noisy discotheques and by smoking. "If children cannot hear well, they cannot understand well and so they cannot be creative," HM The King said. His Majesty also asked Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to help teenagers "say no to drugs, drinks and dance." The King turned 77 on December 5th.

SOUTHERN GROPE FOR Bt20

Nightspots on Thailand's southern border, popular with Malaysian tourists, are enticing visitors scared away by separatist violence with the offer of a cheap grope. For Bt20, around US\$0.51, patrons may touch any part of their young companion's body for 10 minutes. One working girl in Songkhla claims to make Bt1,600 a night, half of which is taken by the club's owner. "Twenty baht may seem like nothing, but it's all men have to pay to touch me here and there," she said. Many of the girls wear shorts under skirts to protect their genitals.



GROPING RIFE IN JAPAN

Japan's largest circulation newspaper, the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, recently published a report stating that up to 64 percent of Japanese women say they have been groped on trains, subways or at transit stations. And many say they have been inappropriately touched on several occasions in the last year. Although groping can be punished by up to seven years imprisonment and large fines, few crimes are reported due to embarrassment and lack of confidence in the police.



BUDDHISM EXPLOITED

As the curtains closed on the fourth World Buddhism Summit in Rangoon last month, many commentators criticised the ruling military junta's hijacking of the event for PR purposes. The generals with their hands on the handles of power in ex-British colony Burma mugged for the cameras, even prostrating themselves before revered monks. However, a different story emerges in the countryside, which is deeply religious. Monks are typically muzzled: "They are given gifts to encourage them to remain calm and not get involved in politics: money and cars," says one analyst. If monks do speak out they are defrocked and imprisoned for up to 20 years. According to some reports, between 350 and 400 monks currently languish in jail. Many monks participated with students in demonstrations against the regime in 1988 which were crushed by the military.



GHOST HAUNTS STUDENTS

Students at a statistical college in New Delhi have been haunted by the smells of aftershave and cigarette smoke emanating from the ghost of a first-year student who died last year of a rare heart condition. *The Times of India* reports that the spectre has knocked on doors, jostled people on the stairs and left vapour trails of aftershave in the halls. "A fear of psychosis had gripped some of the students. We thought it best to let them go home if they wanted to," said Rajeev Karandikar, head of the institute.



NURSING A SEX SCANDAL

The Philippine Nurse's Association is revolted by the antics of a group of soft-porn actresses who have been steaming up the screens on televisions all over the nation. The group, called "The Bodies", have aroused the derision of medical professionals by appearing on TV shows dressed in skimpy white uniforms and, even more scandalous, nurses' caps. "Our cap signifies respect, purity, integrity and dignity," says Ruth Padilla, president of the Philippine Nurses Association. "We wear it with pride like a crown. So don't use it to titillate an audience at our expense." There are 354,000 registered nurses in the Philippines, 82,000 of whom work overseas.



ROLL DEM BONES

Along with wailing, banging of gongs and amplified music, Chinese funerals are traditionally accompanied by gambling, and are the only legal venue for gambling in Singapore. However, *The Straits Times* reports that crime syndicates have been scanning the obituary pages, looking for funerals and obtaining permission to gamble in exchange for cash. Bereaved families are offered S\$300 per day to allow gamblers to operate at their funerals, which can run for as long as 10 days.



VILLA BALI RESORT

A small, peaceful Balinese style beach resort located in the heart of the fruit capital of Thailand (Klaeng, Rayong). With some of the best diving close to Bangkok, along with other activities and with trips to visit the queens sea turtle breeding facilities. (this area yet unexplored by foreigners)

e-mail: seaside@villa-bali.net
website: <http://villa-bali.net>

phone: (66)0-38638080
mobile: (66)0-19408634

Screen Savers

For almost two weeks the silver screens of cinematically impaired Bangkok are saved (mostly) from mainstream mediocrity.

Seen enough martial arts battles on-screen this year? How about gunfights, car chases, MTV-style editing, Kleenex-thin characters, and sappy endings with couples kissing?

If the answer is a groaning yes, then you'll be thrilled to know that the Bangkok International Film Festival is giving us a reprieve from the artistic death-sentence of clichés that is killing off mainstream cinema.

From Jan 13-24, some 150 intercontinental films will open portals into different worlds beyond our experience, or even our universe, thanks to the head honchos and the rank and file down at the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the government-backed Federation of Thai Film Associations.

To try and enumerate the countless highlights would require as many finger digits as the Hindu Goddess Kali, but here's a few: Pedro Almodovar's *Bad Education*, unlikely to get a wide release in SE Asia. You could say the same thing for *The Motorcycle Diaries*, a South American motorcycle road-trip about the youthful hell-raising days of the future revolutionary Che Guevara (quite possibly the only man to ever look cool in a beret).

And then, four years in the making, comes a Hong Kong sci-fi flick called *2046*, directed by the Cannes-winning Wong Kar-wai, and starring a stellar cast of Tony Leung, Faye Wong, and Gong Li.

But half the fun of such film fetes is gambling on 'dark horses' such as the promisingly titled Russian movie, *My Step-Brother Frankenstein*.

Don't miss the International Competition with 10 to 15 international and Thai films vying for Golden Kinnaree awards in four categories: Best Picture; Best Actor; Best Actress and Best Director. And the highly regarded director Joel Schumacher (*Veronica Guerin*, *Phone Booth*, *The Lost Boys*) will receive a Golden Kinnaree Lifetime Achievement Award. Many of Schumacher's previous films will be shown, including the regional premiere of his latest, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* on Jan 20.

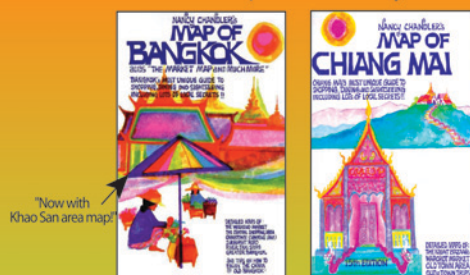
But there's plenty of more reasons to keep your eyes propped open with toothpicks; like the ASEAN Competition, with a programme of regional films; like the "New Voices" programme for young visionaries; like a dozen slots devoted to documentaries under the banner "Reel World." And for local cinephiles, "Thai Panorama" is like a Top 10 for 2004 of both mainstream and offbeat fare.

In the meantime, if you'll please excuse us, we have to go to Blockbuster and try to avoid seeing some eye-bore like *Rocky V* again.

All the latest updates about the festival can be gleaned from a stopover at www.bangkokfilm.org/



Nancy Chandler's Maps of Bangkok and Chiang Mai
"Oft imitated, never equalled" ~ Lonely Planet Thailand



Packed with essential information (pub crawl tips, vegetarian cafes, detailed market maps, secret little shops, river travel, cinemas & more).
Available at www.nancychandler.net



Land of Giles

How can London have smoother flowing traffic than Bangkok? The answer is quite simple: England's anti-traffic-congestion charge of Bt370 (GBP5) to get into the city.

Cruising into the city centre, London is really friendly on the eyes. Ugly billboards announcing consumer products are quite rare; instead I got a clear view of beautiful buildings, some in good condition and some run down, interspersed with green parks.

Here, you encounter almost every nationality on this planet: an African working in the Bank, an Indian in the post office, a Jamaican in the supermarket. But where are the English people? Almost every job is done by someone from somewhere else. But the real English turn up every Friday and Saturday night in Piccadilly, Soho, Trafalgar Square, and anywhere there's a fish and chip shop.

I went to the trendy Metro Club, next to Tottenham Court Road Station, where noisy rock 'n' roll bands play in a dark room with a low ceiling. The club was packed with an English audience. I had fun and deaf ears after about an hour. Later, I lost myself inside the Trocadero, a giant leisure centre on Piccadilly, watching rich Arab girls drive dodgems. Amongst the slot machines and hustlers, I could easily forget the world outside, but after a while I realised that I couldn't handle it any longer: the Trocadero is like Bangkok's Nana Plaza without the go-go girls. So what's the point?

After the noise and lights, I dropped by Harry Ramsay's, the world famous fish and chip franchise off Piccadilly. Following this giant plate of greasy food, I couldn't walk any longer and had to take a bus back home.

After many long nights in the metropolis, I welcomed a chance to go to Oxford, and visit the magnificent Pitt Rivers Anthropological Museum. The extensive collection of artifacts from around the world includes: tattoo models, entombment samples, musical instruments, indigenous weapons, as well as several display cases with the sign "Treatment of Dead Enemies," meaning skulls and shrunken heads. Perhaps they will soon add a couple of Iraqi skulls to the collection and make Tony Blair proud.

Having another day to kill, I moved on to the very 'civilised' town of Avebury, where megalithic stones are standing in a circle once populated by shamans. I followed a group of English people along the line of magic stones, listening to them talk of witches and wizards. Yes, grown up people. The past and present are connected here. The stones are surrounded by rolling hills planted with wheat, but a farm truck is spraying pesticides near our trail. Do not mention the environment in England; this green and pleasant land has long given way to industrial-scale farming and the countryside is ruined.

The biggest problem with England is that it's unaffordable to live in this attractive country. You pay more than for what you get. Every time. English houses are in terrible condition, the plumbing is a crap joke, and the rent is astronomical: GBP500-700 a month for just a small flat in London. Within two weeks of arriving in Britain, I had met three people who had the ceiling fall onto their bed or living room.

Such are the fortunes of a crumbling empire.

Next month the mouthy bitch, uh, sorry, we mean Aroon, will go visit one of the Empire's former colonies, India.

**Aroon
Thaewchatturat
goes on a
magical mystery
tour of England:
home of witches,
warlocks,
underground
rock, Jamaican
grocers, mushy
peas and rich
dodgem-driving
Arab bitches.**



Break out the tissues, or the band-aids, as **Joe Cummings** gets visually KO'd by some foxy boxers from America, like the *2004 Playboy Book of Lingerie Models of the Year*. **Brent Madison** shoots but doesn't score.

Master Toddy, dressed in a shiny blue and white track suit, his name emblazoned across the back, strokes his pencil moustache like a Thai Robert Goulet as he ushers his star kickboxer to the brightly lit boxing ring in front of Tha Phae Gate. A dense crowd of Loy Krathong celebrants push in closer towards the ropes, vying for scraps of shelter beneath the huge tarp that keeps the cold drizzle off the muay thai contestants, while bobbing their heads to catch a better glimpse of Master Toddy's protégé between the thick ropes.

Eyes widen and elbows nudge ribs as Latasha Marzolla launches her pre-fight dance ritual. A ceremonial Thai headdress encircles platinum blond locks woven into tight corn-rows, one thick braid bouncing on the back of a pale neck. In place of the traditional baggy boxing shorts, Marzolla sports a gold





“As the cleavage from her 36 double Ds spill from the U-neck, the announcer barks out – in Thai – ‘Look everyone, you can see her tits! Hey take a look at that, will ya!’ and the crowd applauds.”

lame mini-skirt, cut to resemble a Roman gladiator's kilt, with a fitted top to match.

Over booming speakers, the Thai fight announcer snarls a few words of appreciation for Latasha's *ram muay* (fight dance) technique, conceding that this farang-Thai match might be a real fight after all.

Marzolla comes to the end of the ritual, and performs a picture-perfect five-point prostration aimed directly towards the judges' platform. As the cleavage from her 36 double Ds spill from the U-neck, the announcer barks out – in Thai – “Look everyone, you can see her tits! Hey take a look at that, will ya!” and the crowd applauds.

Oblivious to the clamour, the 127-lb Marzolla charges her Thai opponent, Euangneua Worwara, with a ferocity not often seen even in Bangkok stadium fights. Making use of the full muay thai arsenal of elbows, knees, jabs and push kicks, she maintains a lead through every round before felling Euangneua with a knockout punch in the third round.

Not bad for a 24-year-old blonde bombshell voted the 2004 Playboy Book of Lingerie Model of the Year. Back in 2003, she was on the *Howard Stern Show* to promote the book. He asked his usual assortment of penetrating questions, like how often she masturbates (not when she's in training, apparently), how she lost her virginity at the age of 13 and the allegations about her having lesbian sex during a Playboy photo shoot; after much badgering she finally admitted that the sex came after a photo shoot and much drinking.

Sensitive rogue that he is, Howard asked if her breast implants would explode if she got kicked in the chest during a match. Latasha didn't think that would be a problem, and went on to say that these kickboxing events are the real thing – they're not scripted like the WWE, though Latasha was signed and sent to Ohio Valley Wrestling earlier in 2004, but left after being injured.

Another of Master Toddy's lovely chick-boxers, Gina Carrano, eyes rimmed with mascara, proceeds to obliterate her Thai opponent in short order, displaying perhaps the most muay thai finesse of any fighter, male or female, of the evening. At 22, Carrano is already a Muay Thai International Association champion. (To see some more images of her and

“Another of Master Toddy's lovely chick-boxers, Gina Carrano, eyes rimmed with mascara, proceeds to obliterate her Thai opponent in short order, displaying perhaps the most muay thai finesse of any fighter, male or female, of the evening.”



read a brief bio take a look at www.mastertoddy.com/, which also has info about courses and an MTV Reality Show about bare-knuckled boxing on the Thai-Burma border.)

On this night, only one of Master Toddy's four female contestants loses, and two of his male charges likewise kick butt. The evening finishes with six wins for the Farang boxers, and only two for the Thais. The male Thai win is spectacularly gory, as Yodkeng Sithja-Jo ends the match with an *Ong Bak*-style flying elbow to the crown of the head of his challenger, a huge, tattooed Turkish fighter named Vagen Zahim. Zahim curses everyone around him while blood spews from the top of his head like a fountain, as if his second-round TKO were somehow the audience's fault.

In front of a crowd satiated with blood and sex, and flanked by his chick-boxing champs (the male boxers having retreated to a closed tent, knowing full well what the crowd wants to see), Master Toddy takes centre stage to receive the gleaming Loy Krathong International Muay Thai trophy from the Chiang Mai mayor. Ignoring the rain, they grin and pose with clenched fists for local photographers.

Master Toddy, a Thai national and former movie stuntman who now runs a 6,000-square-foot *muay thai* training facility in Las Vegas, has been called everything from an “evil genius” to a “pimp” for his flashy presentation of chick-boxing exhibitions around America and the world. Yet there is no denying that his fighters are well trained (in fact better trained than many regional fighters in Thailand, with a select few on a par with Bangkok stadium boxers) and his trainees are chalking up impressive win-loss records internationally.

Still, his success does raise some troubling questions about the future of muay thai. Which will win out, tits or technique? And if you look at the banner of his website, with Master Toddy juxtaposed against an image of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, you have to wonder if he isn't trying to become the Wayne Newton of *muay thai*. But more importantly, is it possible that Farang fighters will eventually outbox Thai athletes?

STARE MASTERS OF BANGLADESH

While thoughts of Paris turn to *La Tour Eiffel*, artists or decadent nightlife, our fantasies of Bangladesh conjure up, well, Muslims, floods, and overbearing hospitality, writes Adam Hunt.

Okay, so as fantasy holidays go, it's about as popular as an early summer colostomy. But the friendly Bangladeshi people recently treated me to some colourful culture, lots of mucky curries and relentless, ominous staring. It was particularly generous of them considering two-thirds of their country was underwater at the time.

Thai Airways recently started offering direct Chiang Mai-Chittagong flights. As you can imagine the route is sort of the lima bean of air routes – it lands on your travel plate only if someone else puts it there. I went for work.

Bangladesh is the most crowded country in the world with 140 million citizens huddled around a soppy landmass the size of Wisconsin. Once part of the newly minted nation of India, it was cast off to become East Pakistan, the picked-on runt of the Pakistan family. After a bloody war with its big brother in the 70's, Bangladesh declared sovereignty. Finally,

Bangladeshis could enjoy famine, floods, strikes, coups and riots in peace.

I started in Chittagong, where I stayed at the always-cosy Al Faisal Hotel. Here they dazzle you with four or five bill miscalculations before deciding on the rate. As in most Bangladeshi hotels, the management encourage staff to interrupt guests as often as possible. They knocked on my door roughly eleven times in my first 24 hours – having me sign documents, spritzing a haze of noxious disinfectant onto my belongings or shouting broken English queries toward my air-conditioner.

My hosts in Chittagong were Jamil and his band of Rohingya “journalists” for whom I was to deliver a media workshop. Rohingyans are a small Moslem ethnic group straddling Burma and Bangladesh – many have fled human rights abuses in Burma to take refuge in Bangladesh. They were about the most helpful people I've ever encountered. But there is a time when helpfulness strays into maniacal oppression. That point arrived early with my Rohingya hosts.

As in most South Asian cultures, they ensure your comfort by removing all self-determination from your experience: forcing you to sit in spots you'd rather avoid, pressing close against your body as you tramp through crowded streets, and tossing mysterious lumps of meat onto your plate. During our first meal, I kept my dish fully loaded, assiduously avoiding the hunk that resembled an infant's hand, only to have Jamil put it on the middle of my rice heap. We exchanged smiles and I poked at the sides with my spoon, waiting for attention to shift elsewhere. I was finally able to safely bury it under the refuse on the





“There is nary a tourist, so foreigners need to acclimatise themselves to the relentless, creepy staring.”

bone disposal plate.

After our final day of unwavering companionship, I was ready to retreat to my room and forgo any further helpful hosting. Our workshop ended at 4pm and Mohammed popped out to run a quick errand for me. Three chillingly long hours of forced small talk later, he returned and I was allowed back to my hotel. Once out of their clutches, I changed into my standard tropical wardrobe of underpants and eyeglasses, only to have my peace shattered by a knock; three Rohingyans wanted a seat on my sofa. I let them in, saying, “Hi... uh... good to see you... how have you all been for the last TWO WHOLE HOURS?”

They elbowed their way across the room, hurled me into the lumpy chair I had avoided for most of my stay, and sat primly on my bed and sofa. We talked of refugees, democracy, etc. and they made threats about coming the next morning to help me get my 7am train. I tried to laugh them off with “No, really. You wouldn’t like me in the morning... bad mood, heh, heh.” They nodded in accord and finally made their exit. The next morning my hotel wakeup call came half an hour early. Good thing because there was Jamil at 6:15am to help me cap my toothpaste and collect my socks. We rode a rickshaw to the station and he even boarded the train, sitting with me until my seatmate scowled him into leaving.

The seven-hour ride from Chittagong to Dhaka was unsettling. Bangladesh was suffering its worst floods in decades, with two-thirds of its land mass under rainwater. I was startled by the newspaper warning: “Tracks in Danger of Snapping on Dhaka-Chittagong Rail.” We did indeed have to plough through the swell, but we remained dry, unlike the soggy villagers huddled on hilltop shelters.

People and draught animals near the rail tracks were forced onto skinny mounds of grass poking out of the waters where villages and rice fields had flourished only weeks ago. Thousands died from diarrhea and waterborne diseases as the country tried to drain itself. The floods destroyed millions of homes.

Perhaps it gives us some perspective on our next foundation leak or mildew crisis.

Luckily, the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Kaleda Zia sprung into action after only three weeks of disaster. Her Mercedes limo delivered her to the banks of the Dhaka swamp where she bestowed baggies of rice on the unwashed-overwashed masses. She spent several nose-curling minutes sprinkling sustenance on her people, managing to keep her delicately gloved fingers from actually touching any of her dirty, dark citizens. Flashbulbs popped and videotapes churned. Then she

returned to her estate for a purging cucumber facial.

Bangladesh is a great place to make lots of new, really aggressive friends. If you enjoy a good face-shout from a stranger or settling disputes with a blow to your challenger’s skull, Bangladesh is for you. As sedate as the Thais are, the Bangladeshi are hostile.

This aggression is manifest in their traffic culture. In Thailand I can veer into wrong lanes, drive on the sidewalk, or collide with market stalls. The only punishment I receive from Thai drivers is a gentle giggle and polite docility. But in Bangladesh, the traffic is rife with relentless honking, irate threats and purposeful collisions. Drivers will not relent when blocking each other’s paths. Stare-downs and shouting matches persist for several minutes before the driver with the more pressing errand surrenders.

Some foreigners on a bus were treated to a lesson in Bengali conflict resolution after a stubborn truck held up their bus at a highway curve. After several minutes of fruitless shouting, passengers emptied out of the bus to beat and kick the offending truck driver. He was spared just enough life to drag his bloody body into the cab and remove his truck from the bus’ path. The passengers returned with satisfied smiles and handshakes, as if they had just helped an elderly woman start her Mazda.

Dhaka is a spastic city of 10 million with the murky ventilation of a 1950’s teachers’ lounge. Convoys of dented vehicles cough out fumes as burqa-clad women, angry imams, colourfully festooned rickshaws, prim businessmen and naked children mill about the mucky streets in search of ways to make a living. There is nary a tourist, so foreigners need to acclimatise themselves to the relentless, creepy staring. There is a different sense of privacy (i.e., you don’t get any) that allows locals to get involved with your business. Several times I started street conversations only to lure crowds at the rate of about seven new onlookers per minute. One request for directions peaked with approximately 40 men surrounding my rickshaw, staring at my camera.

Five days in Dhaka and I was ready to return to comparatively tame Thailand and embarked on my long return journey. Stuck in the Chittagong airport for five hours is not a gift for the vigorous traveller. There is nothing to do, few comfy surfaces and little respite from the oppressive heat and staring outside. Facing hunger, I was forced to purchase something called a “mutton burger”. Normally I don’t eat cows or pigs, so I wasn’t sure about my policy on mutton. Mutton comes from something called a “lamb”, which I believe is in the chicken family, so I gave it a try. It was a spicy little deal, made creepy by the occasional crunchy bit. Lamb teeth, maybe?

So Bangladesh will probably remain one of the least-visited nations on earth. With the chronic floods, cyclones, general strikes and bombings, there are myriad reasons to stay away. But if one does make it there, they will find a certain charm in the chaos. At least that’s what you tell yourself anyway.



Foodie's Diary

Raising the Steaks

Due to the unexpected arrival of the comely daughter of a Dutch Baroness he refuses to name, Andre Lepine has decided to take this month off to dry out with a papaya juice fast and a series of Mocha Java colonic irrigations in an undisclosed location. Standing in for Andre is **Cameron Cooper**, who recently had his palate readjusted at a journalist barbeque.

Call me a pig. Go on, I deserve it. But I couldn't believe anything could taste this good. Rolling around languorously in my mouth was a chunk of Wagyu beef fresh off the barbeque, red on the inside and slightly blackened on the outside. I looked around at the other journo freeloaders and even the most hardened and cynical of them wore facial expressions like the rapture of the Virgin Mary or as if they were just crossing the threshold of a truly spectacular orgasm. That mixed with a dose of stunned disbelief.

A primal urge took hold of my senses, and as fast as Jay Coombes, the man responsible for the joy descending upon us, could pull the steaks off the grill and slice them, I was stuffing them into my mouth, unthinkingly using the fullness of my height and girth to block the way for anyone else. About half a kilo into the feast, a friend tugged my arm, and upon rolling my eyes down out of my head and seeing who it was, I just managed not to bite his hand off. It would have spoiled the taste anyway. "Cameron, let someone else have a turn." "Oh yes, sorry." I sheepishly cleared a space at the barbeque to permit the ingress of the eager journos behind me and slowed my consumption as Jay filled me in on the origins of these slices of heaven.

Wagyu beef, Jay explained, is basically the same thing as the legendary Kobe beef that only the highest-ranking Japanese executives on expenses can afford to eat (it costs more than two dozen pairs of pre-soiled schoolgirl panties if you can imagine that). These Wagyu bulls are treated like gods while they are on the hoof and this care results in the finely marbled fat that gives beef its flavour, and a tenderness that requires absolute minimal use of your teeth. This beef is as flavourful, tender and juicy as beef can get, and something you must eat at least once before you die. For those of us in Bangkok, the land of pork, chicken and more pork, it is now possible to fulfil this ambition, as long as you've got a few bob to plunk down.

The Wagyu is (at least for me) the crowning glory of a range of meats and other epicurean delights that Jay is selling in his newly-opened shop DELlcurious inside the Emporium supermarket.

"People needed a choice here. There is a serious shortage of top-quality meats and butchering," said the enthusiastic Australian, his



friendly face as red as a freshly-spanked bum, due to the Hadean heat of the coals. "Take lamb for example. It generally arrives here in sealed vacuum packs straight from the slaughterhouse in Aus or New Zealand or wherever, and the supermarkets here just put it out as is. It hasn't been properly trimmed because they don't know how and because it's just easier and more economical for them to drop it right into the freezer case."

Earlier on, we'd been nibbling away at the appetisers of speciality salads and White Rocks veal carpaccio, soaked in lemon juice and olive oil. It took me about five strips of the stuff to notice that it was raw, giving it a fresh subtle taste and the texture of fine sushi. As well as the Wagyu, Jay served up salt bush lamb, a breed that is fed on special bushes used to desalinate land, leaving the lamb with a pre-salted flavour – also lovely and tender, full tasting but not too gamey. And gallons of wine. This is a man who knows how to treat the members of the press corps – those poor bastards who get paid next to nothing but often get to live like (and hang out with) rich people, sampling delights that they know they can never afford in real life. It is both a privilege and a form of torture. These are people who know all too well what they are missing.

MEATY MATTERS

DELlcurious offers a wide range of meats and salads for home consumption, including roasts, briskets, French lamb racks, sausages, preserved meats and heaps more, all of the best possible quality. While the Wagyu might seem on the extreme end of the price scale at Bt7,500/kg, you can pick up some excellent Angus beef for Bt1,350/kg, or salt bush lamb leg roast for Bt790/kg. A small price to pay for a rapturous evening at home.

Jay and his well-trained staff are on hand seven days a week and are happy to provide instruction on cooking methods to get the most from your purchase. Written instructions and tips are also included. You can find the shop in the Emporium Gourmet Market on the 5th floor of the Emporium shopping mall, Sukhumvit Soi 24, at the Phrom Pong Skytrain stop.

HEALTH

HANGOVER HELPER



Hopefully you've picked up this copy of Farang Untamed Travel in time for this column to do the most possible good (ie: before New Year's Eve).

During the holiday season even semi-teetotallers take to the bottle with great festive enthusiasm and pay for it with pounding hangovers that lay ruin to the following day.

Hangovers have been a curse on the human race since before the beginning of recorded history. But modern science, along with building nuclear bombs and MP3 players, has dedicated some serious research time to the subject.

Hangovers: The Cause – For light to moderate drinkers, it takes about five to seven drinks over about five hours to bring on a hangover. Hangovers can be made worse by drinking on an empty stomach, dancing, not having had enough sleep, being dehydrated, and so on.

The science of hangovers is myriad. One of the big things is the diuretic effect of alcohol. Once you start drinking, you urinate more than you consume. To make it worse, you also pee away salts like potassium, plus vitamins B and C, which work together to help the liver.

Alcohol also breaks down the liver's store of glycogen, an important energy source. This is one of the reasons you feel so worn out and clumsy the next day.

Cogeners, a toxin in alcohol, cause several of the more severe hangover symptoms, are present in varying concentrations, depending on the type of booze. Generally, the darker the liquor the more of it, so lean towards clear liquors like vodka, white wine and gin.

The alcohol metabolism process also creates a toxin called acetaldehyde, chemically similar to vinegar. This is attacked by the enzyme acetaldehyde dehydrogenase and a substance named glutathione, which are only effective for the first few drinks, explaining why six or seven drinks are no big deal, but 10 drinks multiply the hangover intensity by five times.

So that's the basic science. Let's move on to the FARANG hangover reduction program.

Before – Eat dinner. This slows down alcohol absorption. Fatty foods are good for this. Food also decreases stomach irritation, reducing the likelihood of throwing up. Drink water. Make sure you're hydrated before the diuretic effect kicks in. Take multivitamins. Concentrate on water soluble vitamins B and C for your liver.

During – Sip, don't gulp. A drink per hour is about as much as the body can process. Drink a glass of water with every drink, and throw in some rehydration salts as well to boost the salt and sugar you're losing. Don't mix. Different types of alcohol force the body to readjust the chemistry to cope, ultimately increasing hangover severity. Try not to drink cheap stuff. Higher-priced alcohol is brewed and distilled more carefully to reduce the nastier by-products. Many of the big name distilleries and breweries have hundreds of years of experience and know what keeps the punters coming back.

After – Before bed take two aspirin (NOT Paracetamol), which inhibit prostaglandin, another hangover toxin. Knock back a couple of glasses of water with some vitamin B and C tablets.

In the morning – Take two more aspirin, and toss in a few more vitamins to keep up the toxin purge. Eat breakfast. Eggs contain cysteine, which works against the chemical skinheads, have a banana and/or rehydration salts for the potassium, and fruit juice for the fructose. Skip the coffee and tea if you can. They are diuretics and only exacerbate water loss. Drink water. Keep knocking it back and sit around and watch TV. By



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Road Reads

Out in Bangkok

Review by Daniel Cooper

Years ago, and maybe still today, Thailand's most popular coffee-table book was *The Girls of Thailand* by Dean Barrett. Thankfully, Bangkok's writers have grown up some since then and developed the inclination to observe elements of the country that are outside of go-go bars and cheap hotels. So *Bangkok Inside Out* by Daniel Ziv and Guy Sharett takes a welcome look at what some people call the City of Angels, in 60 parts.

The book is a series of one-page observations, covering subjects like fortune-tellers, the lottery, MBK, amulets, soi dogs, durians, and pharmacies. The articles are well-researched, well-written and even the most jaded expatriate will learn something from them (even if it's only the musical score to 7-11's 'ding-dong').

For the visually inclined, however, the real value of this book is the brilliant full-page photographs that accompany each piece, mostly taken by Sasa Kralj, a Croatia-born photojournalist. His images are extremely well shot and in the 'crash-zoom' style that has fallen out of favour these days.

In all, there's a few hour's worth of good reading in this book and I'd recommend it as a present for its wide-ranging appeal, plus it may give the folks back home some idea of what you see in the place.



Snappy Pictures

Review by Daniel Cooper

Lonely Planet's latest offering *Travel Photography* by Richard I'Anson tutors the reader on how to take better photographs. Divided into five sections, dealing with preparation, technique, travel and finally what to do with your photos when you get home, the book follows a structure similar to its contemporaries, interspersed with rich, full colour photographs.

In comparison with other photographic guides this book stacks up well, with clear language and covering enough technical aspects, ensuring both beginners and experienced photographers have plenty to learn, while simultaneously avoiding over-specialisation or becoming overly complex. The book also covers digital photography well, marrying digital and film practices in the text.

Finally, the travel advice is very informative, drawing on the author's years of experience lugging cameras all over the world. The only trouble is that, being a travel photography book there are many topics not covered that an amateur photographer may find useful, such as studio work.

That quibble aside, *Travel Photography* is an excellent book for the beginner photographer heading off on the big trip, or for anyone who wants to improve their pictures.



Land of Wiles

Review by Ian Cole

Spirit House, originally published in 1992, is an early book by Christopher Moore, the so-called 'Hemingway of Bangkok'. This run-of-the-mill private-eye thriller drags the reader through every single cliché ever associated with Bangkok – corrupt cops, bar-girls with hearts of gold, greedy, crooked Farangs, nasty Chonburi godfathers and thuggish young glue-sniffers from Klong Toey (this was written before methamphetamines became big), all busy fucking each other over against a gritty backdrop of life in the City of Angels.

The plot plods along at a fair pace with reasonably predictable cliff-hangers, but the writing is several steps ahead of the current deluge of self-published pap that numerous resident Farang writers are forcing onto bookshelves in the region.

That said, the novel lacks any of the darkness, vision and emotional depth of the genre's old guard – Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Jim Thompson, et al. Chandler's Los Angeles was a place far more destitute and perverse than Moore's Bangkok, something that some readers might not find entirely believable.

In this sense the book is very Thai – the social malaise and what Moore calls 'feudalism' in Thailand are well captured, and yet no one is really held accountable, no one is going to lose face. *Spirit House* hangs together fine – it's an accomplished, throwaway pot-boiler, suitable for all those visitors and newcomers too scared to go to a go-go bar, or even those who haven't left Patpong since 1992.

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Letters to the Editor

Guinea Pigs

Hello,

Great mag you've got. I'm reading it from Byron Bay in Australia, my friend bought back a few copies. We love it. There is a quite a few old crusty Bangkok/Pa Ngan crew here and we are all getting a laff out of your content. Good to see something real happening in tourist world. Two of us were wondering if you had found any guinea pigs for your offer of free body modification in the July issue. My friend would do a tit job or whatever, and I'd be up for a dick stretch or a new head. I don't know what the logistics would be as we are here and youse are there, but if you can get us there, we will play guinea pig. Sick mayte!!!!

Regards,

Pete & Melissa
Australia

Farang Replies:

Thanks for the kind words. We did have several volunteers for the plastic surgery offer, but sadly, the interest we had from a handful of Bangkok clinics dried up rather suddenly for some reason when the project looked like going from theory to reality. We think they may have had a little chat with their lawyers and decided to err on the side of caution. So it looks like you and your girlfriend will have to be satisfied with the bits you have for now.

The Last Word

To Jeremy in Bangkok, (he loves your magazine). Hello mate, I'm on my way to China now, as I said in my email, and

now that we're a safe distance apart, I'll admit that yeah, maybe I did get conned out of a few thousand baht by Lek, but at least she didn't have a willie.

Regards,

Karl
Hanoi

Story Proposals of the Month

Here at Farang Untamed Travel we get a lot of email. Most are from writers, would-be writers, nutbars, and other people who just want to see their words in print. To publish them all, this magazine would have to be about 1200 pages with a price of about Bt2,000 and to be bluntly honest, it wouldn't be very good. If you are trying to get published by the way, your opening salvo shouldn't be: "Hi, how much will you pay me for my story?" Straight in the bin with those ones, but Christ, we get heaps of them. The following are two of our favourites from the last month's proposals. The spelling errors are theirs.

A Man and His Laptop

Dear Editor,
My name is LES from the UK. I'm here in Bkk. I would like to put a story into the mag FARANG can you tell me the best way to start. I can put onto CD or A4. The story is how I came from Israel with my computer,

Yours hopefully,

Les

Barbarian Slaughter

Dear Editor,

In order to save the unborn generation from a group of barbarians, a man, Mr. Chukwumezie Obed Igwe had jeopardized his life and led a team of Policemen to a horror shrine located at Okija in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria where the policemen discovered 20 human skulls and 50 decomposing corpses, with a mind boggling discovery that the victims may have been sacrificed by the barbarians to satisfy the cravings of ghouls. When the policemen stormed the shrine on Wednesday August 4, it was bestrewn with human bodies in various stages of decomposition and skeletons scattered around the shrine. While parading carcasses and 32 suspects apprehended in connection with the barbaric acts, the Anambra State Police Commissioner, Mr. Felix Ogbaidu who shed tears at the sight of the corpses, lamented, "I never believed that such a thing could happen in this country." During interrogation, one of the suspects, who is a son of the Chief Priest of the shrine, Osita Ndukwu said, "What we do is that if anybody reports to us that someone has wronged him or her, our chief priest will send for the person in writing to appear at the shrine. If he fails to turn up, the chief priest will command the deity to go after the person. As soon as we are told by anybody that the deity had killed their person, they'll be told what and what to bring to the deity including the corpse of the dead person. But Mr. Chukwumezie, who exposed the barbarians, cried foul to that claim and said, "The 'deity' has no power and does not kill anyone. The shrine priests were the ones killing victims with some diabolic means. I'm happy I've been able to expose them to

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save further victims though I may be killed for it".

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Sincerely,

Aaron Haruna
Via email

Critic's Corner

How come Edward Scissorhands can turn a five-foot-tall privet hedge into a topiary tyrannosaurus at least 12 feet tall? ...And why we're at it, where did he get hold of that two-ton block of ice for his sculpture? I know this question has come a little late in the day, but I've only just seen it on a DVD copy and missed it at the cinema the first time round.

Thanks,

Scott,
Surrey, UK

Crime and Punishment

Last month's dive story "Search and Deploy" was incorrectly credited. It was actually written by Tim Lawrence of Davy Jones' locker and not Stuart Singleton. However, to avoid causing further confusion, Stuart is credited this month with having written the dive story, and this is in fact true – or at least Stuart assures us it is. But fear not, readers. In our quest for editorial perfection, we don't allow these mistakes to go unpunished. The editor responsible, who shall remain nameless because he has suffered enough, was tied to a chair, force fed a mixture of prune juice, mashed chillies and gin, and under medical supervision, had his anus stapled shut. Even though things didn't turn out quite the way we planned, we're pretty sure he'll be checking the bylines more closely in the future.

A Walk in the Park

Hi,

Last Wednesday I walked through Lumpini park in Bangkok at about 11am and there, sitting on a bench was a guy with his cock out groaning and playing with it. I was really scared. I thought he was gonna run after me. Then yesterday I walked through again at the same time, and guess what? He was there again, with his cock out, grunting and groaning. Has anyone else seen him?

I love the magazine,

Tash
Bangkok

Farang Responds:

Hi Tash,

Yes we have seen him before. That's Farang's Managing Editor taking his morning exercise. If you are planning on going there a third time, do be sure to say hello, because not only is he harmless, he's actually very friendly. You never know, it could be the start of something beautiful.

Website of the Month

A first (and perhaps last) time feature on the letters page, the website this month is www.akhira.co.uk, which is dedicated to the photography of English lensman Roderick Johnson, who has contributed to Farang Untamed Travel on many occasions, and sometimes mistakes our office for a free Internet café. Here's a quote from Rod on the home page: "The commonalities that bind the human condition far outweigh the differences of culture, race, creed and religion that our leaders use to divide and ultimately conquer the human spirit. It is fear, alienation and poverty that ultimately separate us... at birth and death we are all one. Akhira... rebirth for the human spirit." Sounds like the kind of guy who would wear a loincloth as evening wear and avoid showering, right? In fact, Rod is quite a well-groomed snappy dresser,

and we happen to know that he has a well-used tongue scraper in his bathroom. The akhira.co.uk was built by Farang's Managing editor Daniel Cooper and his techie sidekick Michael Lepain. If you want to check out Rod's work a bit more closely, or even buy some of it, an exhibition of his is on display into the middle of January at Khaosan Road's Sunset Street photo gallery (look for the big neon sign).



Heaven's Devils

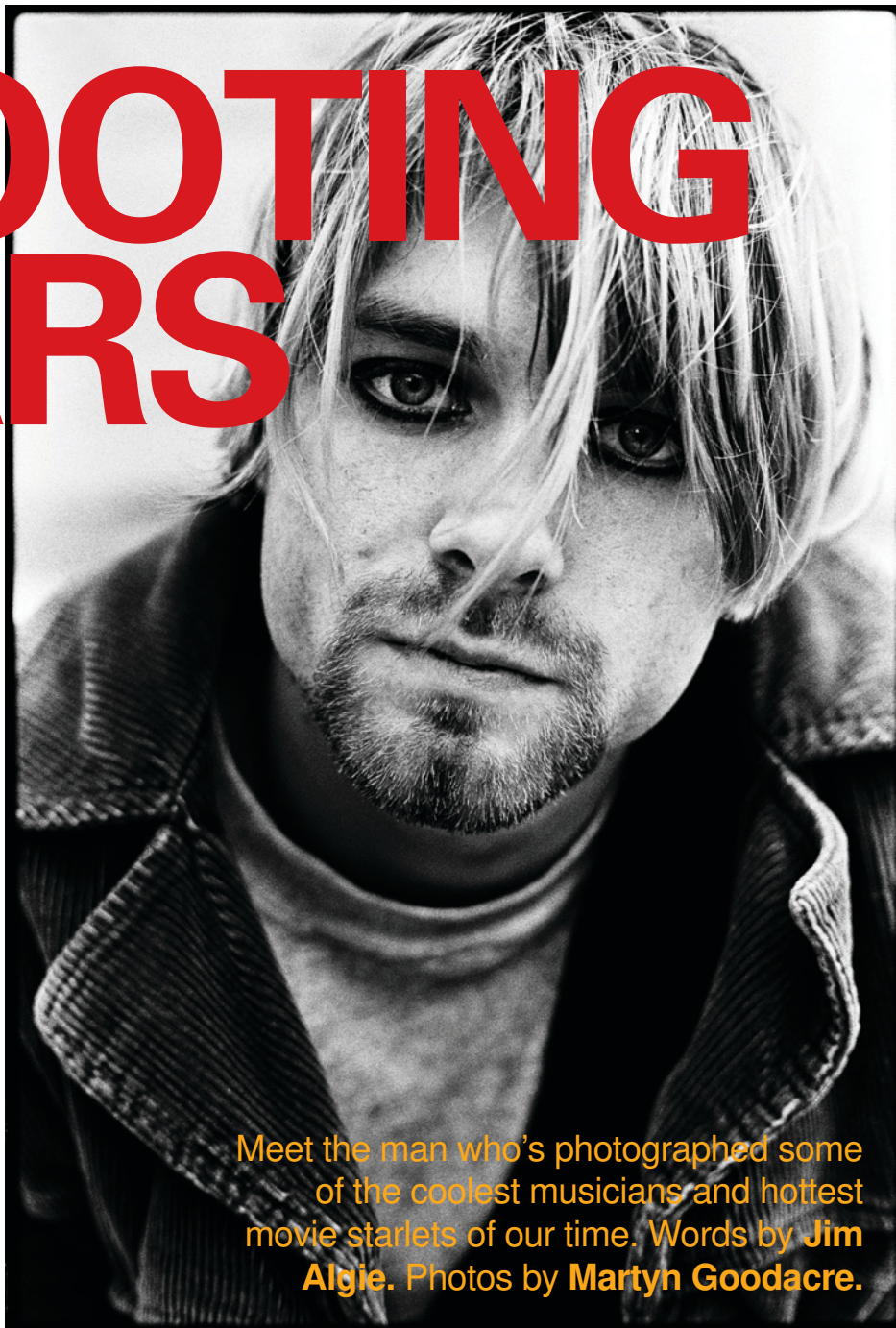
We had a bit of space left over, so we thought we'd run this picture of this guy one of our roaming photographers met on his travels in the islands of Thailand.



SHOOTING STARS

**Kurt Cobain,
London, 1990**

"They weren't famous yet, but their first album had come out and more recently, the single 'Sliver' so they were touring with Tad and staying in a basement bed and breakfast. Kurt was a tiny little guy who seemed quite miserable and hardly spoke two words. Actually, I remember taking this photo quite clearly because in all the others, his eyes were a bit squinty, but then he opened them up completely."
"I haven't made a tenth of the money I should've from this photo. They've used it for photos and posters and T-shirts all over the world."



Meet the man who's photographed some of the coolest musicians and hottest movie starlets of our time. Words by **Jim Algie**. Photos by **Martyn Goodacre**.

As the biggest typhoon in 15 years was bearing down on Koh Samui, I sent an email to our correspondent down there, telling him to batten down the hatches.

Martyn Goodacre's reply read: "The typhoon is just starting so we're not sure if to stay in the beach house which may flood or get crushed by a falling tree. It's only a heavy storm at the moment. We still have electric. People are a bit worried and are leaving the beach areas. I'm having a BBQ as it is my birthday."

After an ominous one-day silence, my next email from Martyn read: "I've farted bigger storms than that."

In a way, you can't blame the guy for being a bit jaded. After all, Martyn's done photography assignments where he's snorted coke with Michael Hutchence, and driven around with the late INXS frontman in his Ferrari. He's gotten pissed with Shane MacGowan in London and Joey Ramone in New York. He's also met and shot celluloid celebs like Liv Tyler, David Cronenberg,

Keanu Reeves and Ken Russell.

But in the late 80s, before his rise, Martyn was taking photos of bands playing at the University of London Union, and publishing them in the university newspaper. "I was around 27 then and thought I should finally find a career after eight years of squatting in London. So I got a portfolio together to show *SOUNDS*. They told me to shoot more gigs and come back and see them. So I went to a gig every day for a week, printed them all up, and the editor didn't remember me, and said he meant come back in three months. They told me to piss off," says Martyn, who hails from the central English town of Malvern (pop. 30,000).

"Then I went to see *Melody Maker* with some photos of the Screaming Trees I'd just taken and they were doing a story on them, so they bought a photo then and there, and two months later I had three photos in one issue of the *NME*, of Happy

Mondays, the comedian Emo Philips, and The Family Cat. Then I didn't get any work for two months."

Back then, the bigger music mags in the UK were paying 23 pounds per photo and double that for a colour image. But the perks for the higher-echelon music-biz shooters were luxuriantly decadent: being sent abroad, sometimes twice a week, wined, dined, and enshrined in five-star hotels. By the mid-90s, however, "the record companies said we've got a recession on, which was bullshit, and they cut all that back. But I think it's come back a bit in recent years."

All the while Martyn was playing rhythm guitar with bands like Fabulous, who released three singles in the 90s.

Pop-punk kinda stuff like the Buzzcocks and the Ramones? I ask him on the phone. "But less tuneful," he replies. Yeah? Like Sonic Youth kinda atonal guitar? "Only by accident," Martyn says. "I was quite tone deaf and had trouble tuning my guitar."

For all their musical failings, the group's manager, James Brown, who had been the features editor at the *NME*, turned their shagging, snorting and strumming lifestyle into a template for a magazine called *Loaded* that revolutionised the publishing industry and spawned a legion of asinine impersonators.

Martyn became one of the mag's original photographers.

"Before *Loaded*, all the men's magazines like *GQ* told you what kind of suit to buy, how to tone your biceps, and do stuff you couldn't afford to do. 'Loaded' said, 'We're men, but we've lost the plot, women have gotten the upper hand, and we're just gonna have fun.' Though people came to think of it as a tits magazine, James brought in some of the best writers around, people like Howard Marks.

"I have great memories of James dancing drunkenly on the table in the office and telling everyone they had to buy another bottle of champagne or they'd be sacked," says Martyn, going on to say that staffers could be seen snorting coke from morning til night in the office.

For one of their early issues, he was sent to Koh Pangan to shoot the Full Moon Party, and ended up coming back to Koh Samui every year since. Two years ago, he met his Japanese girlfriend there when she was opening a restaurant on Bohput Beach called Two Tigers. Ever since, he's been helping to run the restaurant, and doing the occasional assignment or update for *FARANG*.

So why did he quit shooting stars?

"I just got a bit bored of it really. It's good fun seeing yourself in print, but you're doing the same thing again and again. I didn't like the bands so much, I got sick of going to gigs, and you just get too old for that."

In retrospect, who were the biggest dickheads he had to photograph?

"Adam Ant was very rude to me, but we all know he has mental problems, and he apologised to me later. Beck's road manager was a complete asshole. Luscious Jackson were no fun and Henry Rollins was a bit stupid. But most people were fine."

Anything Martyn misses about show business?

"I miss all the free records."

Visit his website at www.martyngoodacre.com or you can purchase a small selection of Martyn's prints at Rock Archive www.rockarchive.com.

Shane MacGowan, Filthy McNastys Whiskey Bar, London, 1997

"During this photo shoot we ended up in a restaurant in Soho with Shane's long-time girlfriend, Victoria, who wrote a book about him. Shane saw Harvey Keitel eating in there, and he went over to his table and was doing all these drunken gangster impressions. I don't know if Harvey knew who he was. Shane was a mess, saliva running down his chin. But if you can open him up he's one of the most interesting people around. In my opinion, he's just super shy. That's why he drinks a lot."



Road Warriors



Michael Hutchence, Sydney, 1996

"He was a pure gentleman. I was more upset about him dying than anyone else [I've ever photographed]. It was just about a year before his death, and you could tell he was under a lot of pressure. It was near Christmas time, and Paula and the kids couldn't come over and meet him because of Bob Geldof. Altogether we spent three days with Michael, and everywhere he went in Sydney people would shake his hand and say hello. It was amazing how much respect he commanded."

Joey Ramone and Martyn Goodacre, New York, '98

"I was there to shoot Skunk Anansie, and I was with this writer in a club in the East Village called Coney Island Baby, and the writer spotted Joey Ramone. I wouldn't have recognised him, because he was wearing a purple anorak with his grey hair and a pony tail tied up. He was producing a London all-girl punk band called Fluffy, and all the girls were slagging me off because I worked for the NME, but Joey defended me and told them to back off, maybe because I was telling him how much The Ramones had inspired me. I wish I could remember more about what we talked about after all those Long Island Ice Teas, but for the next two hours we mostly just reminisced about punk rock. I've been disappointed by meeting so many of my heroes, like Jonathan Richman, but not Joey Ramone. He was a very humble guy."





Liv Tyler, London, '96

"I have to admit I didn't even know who she was at the time, but the 'NME' was doing a story about her film 'Stealing Beauty'. She's stunningly beautiful but, like a lot of models, she looks quite gawky in the flesh. Liv was quite chatty and I probably could've gotten a date with her if it wasn't for this moody PR woman."

Beck, Amsterdam, 1999

"The first time I photographed him I'd been flown to Amsterdam and his manager told me I had seven minutes to do the shoot. The second time was also in Amsterdam for a Japanese magazine called 'Rocking On'. Their editor came up with the idea for the background and the idea of him [Beck] with a toy guitar and then he smashes it up at the end. Much different from working for the 'NME' over a decade, because they never told me what to do – it was always spontaneous, even most of the covers. Beck is just kind of a professional guy who's a bit nervous and twitchy."



Tupperware Party

In this day and age of theme parks and virtual reality, the traditional Thai temple fair is at best an amusing anachronism, or just a cheap, mostly crap, night out, attests Ian McNamara. Photo by Daniel Cooper.

Anticipation of fun, with a lower case “f”, had been mounting for days in our household as signs had been posted announcing the presence of a Thai “superstar” at the annual Klong Prao Temple Fair on Koh Chang. My initial question “Who is the superstar?” couldn’t be answered as the sign didn’t actually mention any names. My follow-up queries, “Has the temple got a big enough draw for a recognisable celeb to make the trek out here from Bangkok?” and “Is the star from the world of music, game shows or print commercials for karaoke lounges in provincial newspapers?” was met with a chorus of disapproving “tuts”.

So I went back to painting the bathroom.

Having parked our car next to the official car park and not in it, thus saving Bt10, we walked through the fake gilded temple gates to be greeted by a veritable mobile emporium of purveyors of lime-green plastic tableware and second-hand T-shirts. Deciding we’d leave the best till last, we moved on and stood enraptured as a group of local girls, accompanied by distorted Thai pop, jiggled around on stage wearing cycling shorts and “Just Say No” T-shirts. Just what they were saying no to wasn’t clear. Could have been drugs. Could have been strange men with big wallets. Could have been dancing lessons.

Time to move on and my missus spotted the “Pay 10 baht, scoop a small plastic container out of a tub of water, open it, check the number and see if you’ve won crap worth a couple of baht or crap worth a couple of hundred baht” stall. After wasting Bt40 and ending up with three sachets of Coffeemix and a small bottle of saccharine-sweet lychee drink I said a little prayer to the bingo gods who took heed and rewarded us with a desk top fan. We then blew a further Bt150 baht in failed attempts to win a desk on which to

put it.

By now things at the bingo corner were beginning to heat up. Bingo is to Thais as feces is to flies and a large crowd, wowed by the promise of winning either a rice cooker or a bottle of John Lager Whisky had gathered. We took our places, waited 15 minutes for the organisers to sell enough number boards to make running this little diversion from the futility of life profitable, and it was game on. Five called numbers later and it was over. We hadn’t won.

For the next game the rice cooker was replaced by a flower-spattered duvet; a builder friend appeared out of nowhere, plunked himself down next to us and let it be known he was feeling lucky. Five minutes later he walked away with the duvet, much to the delight of his wife.

Food stalls were everywhere, including one with the simple motto, “The best noodles on Koh Chang”. We had to give it a go and true to their word they were indeed excellent. The stallholder, who runs the nearby vegetable shop, only ever cooks noodles at the temple fair and so she draws long queues. If Michelin awarded stars for noodle stalls she’d be up there with Raymond Blanc. (I’m presuming he could turn his hand to *kwai-teeow sen lek tom yam moo* should he so desire.)

Having downed a couple of bowls each, I spotted my favourite game from last year; the “bet which hole the mouse will run into when we lift up the metal box” stand. Slapping down Bt10 on hole number 13 and another Bt10 on 24, the mouse promptly ran into number 1 and, like so many good things in life, my enjoyment was over in a matter of

seconds.

The final highlight was the *likay* show. Being a helpful soul I took it upon myself to help educate a tourist couple who were wondering what was going on and whether it was supposed to be like this or not.

“What’s this?” they enquired.

“Likay.”

“Reggae?”

“No, likay. It’s Thai.”

“Thai reggae?”

“Yes, that’s right. The over made-up guy in the spangled outfit mincing around is Thailand’s answer to Bob Marley. The ostensibly uncoordinated screeching, plinking and banging on wooden instruments are coming from the aptly named ‘Wailers’.”

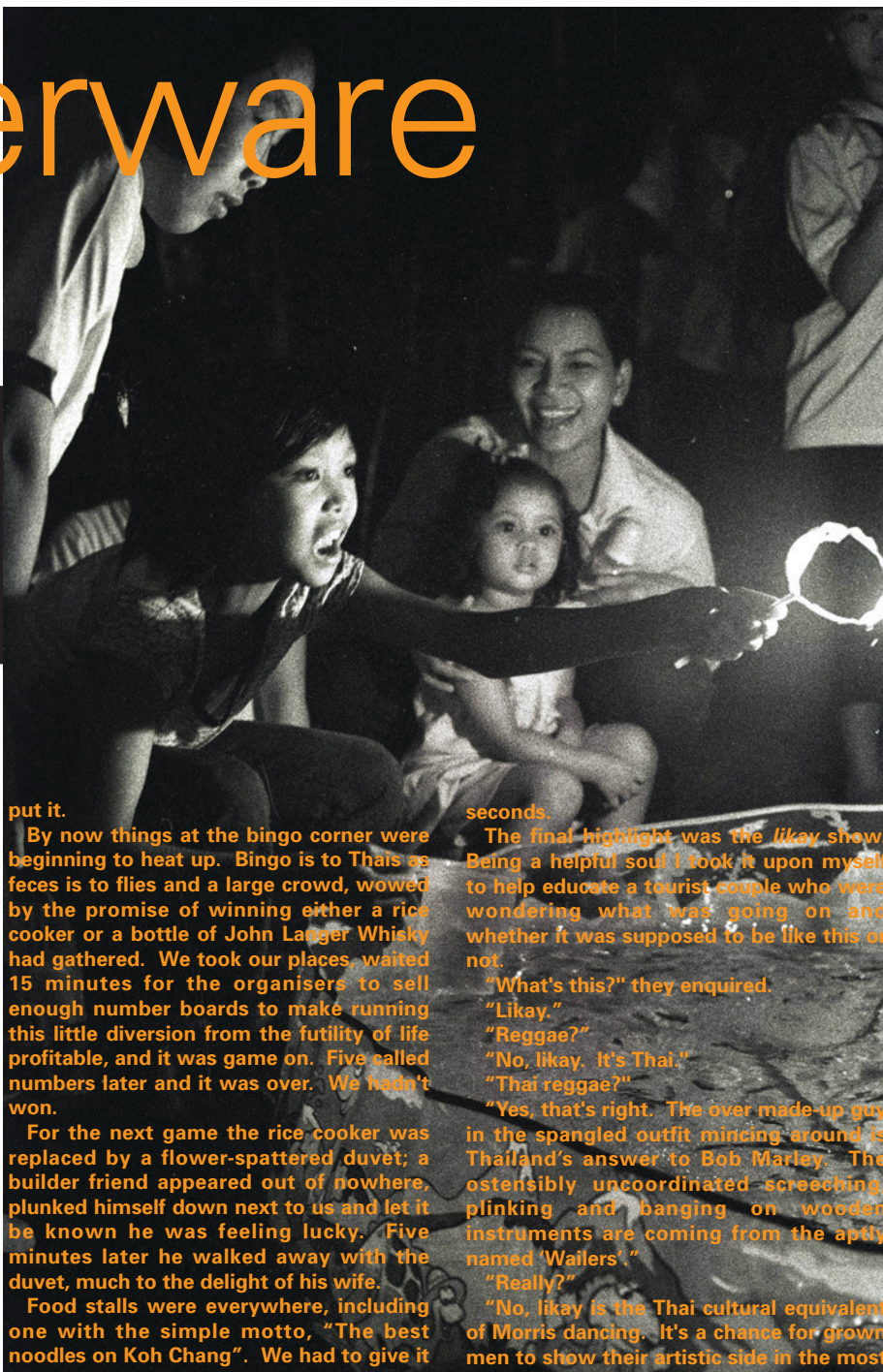
“Really?”

“No, likay is the Thai cultural equivalent of Morris dancing. It’s a chance for grown men to show their artistic side in the most embarrassing way possible.”

And on that culturally ignorant note, we departed to pick out a Tupperware chilli-powder holder that had caught my significant other’s eye for a bargain.

After the big build up, the mystery celeb remained a mystery; we never saw her. But apparently she was some young TV soap actress. I’ve just asked my missus and our builder and neither of them can remember her name.

But who needs soap stars when you can gamble on mice running into holes, and ridicule tourists? And did I mention the Tupperware chilli-powder holder that had caught my significant other’s eye for a bargain?





Stuart Singleton explores the underwater world; a place of hidden depths and undiscovered treasures.

With the majority of the world's surface covered with water, and more known about the moon's surface than the ocean's bottom, and man's tireless efforts to explore it all, the sport of scuba diving allows anyone of average fitness to experience the briny blue and its watery wonders.

A relatively new sport born from research by the US Navy, scuba diving is an increasingly popular recreational activity for holiday-makers and the adventure hungry. Southeast Asia, and in particular Thailand, offers world-class training and diving with some of the region's best dive sites accessible from its shores.

Although a relatively safe recreational sport, it is necessary to become a certified diver before venturing below. There are several certification bodies (BSAC, SSI, PADI, CMAS) which offer entry-level certification and train would-be Cousteaus in dive safety and academic and practical skills. The PADI open-water course takes three to four days and successful completion of four open-water dives, confined sessions and academics to become certified.

All courses require a reasonable degree of fitness and health as a basic prerequisite before embarking on the practical training, as well as a sound knowledge of dive theory and physics gained through training videos, manuals and written tests. Diving isn't for everyone and those who suffer from claustrophobia, a fear of heights, or panic-attacks may find it more challenging than others.

After an introductory training video and equipment review the first underwater breath is in confined water, i.e. a swimming pool or similar area used to complete underwater skill sets with your instructor. This is designed to introduce a person to the unnatural feeling of breathing underwater in a safe and controlled environment and complete skills necessary for safe diving such as communication, regulator recovery, mask flooding and development of safe dive habits. After the confined sessions

you are ready to practise your skills in an open-water environment and experience the adventure of scuba diving.

The initial thrill of breathing underwater is soon replaced with a feeling of freedom and wonder at the prospect of exploring the marine environment. Your senses are challenged with the feeling of weightlessness, the adrenaline and the unique sights and sounds. The sensations experienced are due to the physical differences of being underwater and their effect on the body and senses. Most notable is the pressure which can be felt as you descend to greater depths, as well as changes in sight and sound which make for a truly otherworldly experience.

In addition to the practical and academic aspects of diving, it is also important to appreciate the limits imposed by the underwater environment, and to respect marine ecology. Diving is fun, and once you become comfortable in your abilities the marine world offers a realm of discovery. Thailand's seas contain an amazing array of marine life from sea snakes to whale sharks. Your instructor will teach you good diving practises which limit interaction and damage to marine life, yet ensure the experience is both complete and unforgettable.

After completion of the entry level PADI open-water scuba diver course you are now qualified to dive independently and plan, conduct, and log no-decompression dives when accompanied by a buddy, to a maximum depth of 18 meters.

The adventure does not stop there, and a sea of possibilities opens up for those wishing to continue their diving education. For some scuba diving provides such a rewarding experience they make it a career, and progress up the training ladder to become divemasters, instructors, or technical-diving specialists. For others the pure joy and satisfaction of being a certified diver is enough to keep the imagination alive and the dive holidays regular, whether you're into sharks or ship wrecks or simply enjoy blowing bubbles.



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Dive Sites of Thailand

THE SIMILANS

The reputation of these nine islands has made international waves, as they are one of the earth's greatest living treasures for the amphibiously inclined. Situated around 100km northwest of Phuket, you'll most likely have to book a liveaboard to navigate these pristine waters. Some of the more legendary sites here are Elephant Head, off Island #8, which is renowned for its scenic swim-throughs and plethora of lionfish, coral trout, yellow goatfish, and on occasion, the hawksbill or Ridley's Turtle. Off the same island is Fantasy Reef, home to an array of clown and trigger fish and great swooping rays. But these sites are just rippling the surface – another 15-plus are waiting for you – varying in difficulty from intermediate to advanced.

PHUKET

If you're coming down here to dive, chances are you'll end up water-logging some time at the two most popular sites for daytripping divers: Shark Point and Anemone Reef. The former reef earned the moniker for its largesse of leopard sharks. Only two-metres long, they laze around on the sand, and are used to divers approaching them; but you should resist the urge to pet them, for fear they might be injured or infected. Also sure to spellbind is the slew of soft corals in pink and purple. Nearby is Anemone Reef, which teems with marine life. Alas, neither of these sites should be attempted by rookies: the currents can be swift and unpredictable, and visibility is often not that good.

KOHTAO

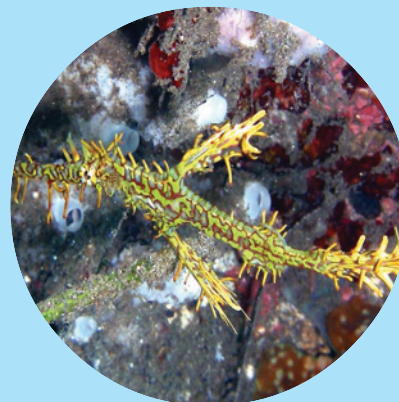
Within 45 minutes of Turtle Island are about 20 decent dive sites, ranging from sandy-bottomed beaches, to swim-throughs, soft coral gardens, and deep-water pinnacles. Sightings of pelagics, like whale sharks (the world's biggest fish), are a common marvel. Many of the boats from Samui and Pangan visit the same places. Thanks to the ease of diving these reefs, washed by gentle currents, this is the premiere place in SE Asia for neophytes to get their fins wet.

PATTAYA

Reputed to be the two best dive destinations in the area are a pair of shipwrecks: the *Hardeep* and the *Bremen*. But the *Hardeep* is numero uno. It sunk in 1942. This 40-metre-long freighter from Indonesia now rusts in peace some 25 metres below the surface, between the isles of Samaesan and Chuang. For divers who enjoy a heady dose of fear along with adrenaline, you can go explore inside the hulk. Best of all, wrecks attract an abundance of fish and coral. The two aforementioned islands are also wealthy in hard and soft corals. For beginners, Koh Kruk is the prime spot, and for middleweights it's Koh Rin, replete with boulder-strewn swim-throughs.

PHI PHI ISLANDS

There's a sea of possibilities for aquanauts in this area of towering limestone crags. Koh Bida Nok, a sliver of an island, sees an awful lot of divers, enraptured by her plethora of staghorn corals and anemone fish, green moray eels and octopi. Also scoring high-water marks for marine diversity is Laem Tong, or Golden Point, near Koh Yoong. Trips here may include a plunge down to explore the pinnacle of Hin Jom – home to innocuous leopard sharks and stingrays. Schools of fusiliers, barracuda and jacks are repeat visitors, too.



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BLACK MAGIC

Writer and photographer **Dan White** journeys to the West African nation of Benin for National Voodoo Day on January 10, where he meets the religion's grandmaster.



Two terrified Nigerian men running for their lives were chased through the streets of Cotonou, Benin by a mob of hundreds bent on vengeance. For the locals, the Nigerians were sorcerers who, with a touch of the hand and a murmured spell, could make a man's genitals disappear or cause a woman to be infertile. Once caught, the men were beaten with stones and, still conscious, set ablaze with a necklace of burning tires. Their screams were met with curses and laughter.

I am on my way from Continou to the voodoo centre of Ouidah. I want to find out what it is that would make men wreak such terrible atrocities on their fellow man. Sitting between four large women and a goat in a battered old Peugeot 504 I am disturbed by the fact that the car is going at about 120 miles an hour and my nervousness is not helped by the fact that there are wrecked and crashed cars piled by the side of the road at alarmingly frequent intervals. The other passengers

seem oblivious. Maybe they feel immune in ways that I don't understand to the consequences of driving without due care and attention.

Here in Benin Voodoo is not a suspect cult of curses and zombies. Here, Voodoo is the national religion and the battle between good and evil is a constant struggle of the spirits. Fetishists and witchdoctors can save you from the curses of evil juju men or do you great harm. Ouidah is at the heart of all Voodoo. At the heart of Ouidah is the "Grand Daagbaa Hounoun" – the chief Voodoo priest in all of Africa. His powers outmatch all others and his protection is sought by those suffering the curses of sorcerers and evil juju.

Entering the dusty streets of Ouidah we make our way up an unpaved track to a compound with dirty white walls and flaking paint. This is the Vatican of Voodoo and the place where the Grand Daagbaa Hounoun holds court. We are ushered into the courtyard by an unsmiling thug in a dirty vest who turns out to be one of the family. Inside the gate, surrounded by some of his wives and a few of his children, he sits. My companions from the Peugeot throw themselves to the ground at his feet. I hang back. After blessings and prayers for the faithful he calls me forward. I hand him a bottle of gin – the necessary 'gift' from inquisitive foreigners who disturb his afternoon.

Ushered into a darkened room decorated with murals of his predecessors I am seated on an uncomfortable wooden stool. The Grand Hounoun sits rather more comfortably in a dirty white, plastic garden chair. On the dirt floor are little piles of what look like scrap metal and badly made wooden sculptures; they resemble the first efforts of an infant school art class. But these are powerful fetishes in which reside spirits to be feared, placated, and revered.

One of the old man's children, a solemn teenager, whispers to me in French to talk only through him and to be quick. "My father is weak. He is made weak by the curses of his rivals."

"Tell me about the real Voodoo," I say.

The Grand Hounoun whispers his answers into the ear of his son, who tells me, "Voodoo is an old practice and it exists for doing good, for the good of our society. It is a religion of life. Voodoo is not the evil some think it is. There are many bad things said by those who do not understand the spirits and the Gods."

The son adds, "My father makes good Voodoo. He makes Voodoo of the right hand. He protects people from those who do Voodoo of the left hand."

I ask him about the murders of the Nigerians a month before in Cotonou. The Grand Hounoun is looking at me with an ever more hostile gaze. It is unnerving. Again, his son translates his words:

"All people are afraid of the evil spirits. Those men were sorcerers of the left hand. You should be afraid too. For 100,000 francs my father says he can protect you with prayer."

I don't have the equivalent of a 100 English pounds on me. I smile and ask if he can say a prayer anyway. Neither the Grand Hounoun, nor his son smiles back. I am beginning to feel unwelcome and ill at ease. He brings the price down to 50 quid, but I am beginning to think this smells like a protection racket. I think back to the car wrecks and ask if he can protect me against the traffic.

"For 10 pounds my father will protect you against the traffic. For 10 pounds more he will protect you against smallpox."

Since small pox was eradicated in 1981. I think the pope of all voodoo is pushing the envelope on this one. I give the 10,000 African francs to the son on the off chance that further road journeys may be a little less terrifying. As I leave this bargain basement of blessings and curses the son calls after me, "You will be at the beach tomorrow? It is our National Voodoo Day and my Father will make sacrifices for the good of the people."

Early next morning the sound of drums and the shrieks of the hysterical grow ever louder as I approach the beach. A crowd of thousands has gathered to celebrate Voodoo. Ranks of women dressed in white take turns dancing ever more frenetically as the drummers push the rhythms to greater heights. As the ceremonies reach their pinnacle the procession of the Grand Hounoun comes into view. A tatty-looking minivan is flanked by wild horsemen from the northern desert wastes of the Sahel. The Grand Hounoun is helped out of the van. He is in his finest ceremonial clothes. The sequined top hat sits on a head swathed in a lurid black and white spotted scarf. His huge hooped earrings are offset by the virulent lime green of his gown. He

looks as if he has borrowed his outfit from a 1970s suburban housewife. At his side is the equally psychedelically attired King of Allada. It's difficult to see the King's face because his crown is decorated with a curtain of beads obscuring the whole of his head. As the pair make their way through the crowd the bodyguard horsemen ride down those who get too close. The hooves of their horses only narrowly miss skulls and limbs.

The Grand Hounoun takes his throne and the King of Allada shouts to the crowd. "Voodoo is life! Long live His Excellency the Grand Hounoun! Voodoo is life!"

The crowd goes into a frenzy. The man standing next to me shouts in my ear. "Last year the Grand Hounoun cooked a goat in sea water. He took the uncooked flesh into the sea and when he came back the flesh was cooked!"

This year the old man looks too weak to boil an egg let alone poach a goat in brine. The crowd falls to an expectant hush as this year's ill-fated goat is led to a stone altar in front of the throne. As the goat is lifted onto the dais the people push forward in a crush that threatens to smother those at the front. The Grand Hounoun is helped to the altar and with an effortless strength that seems strange in someone so sick he lifts the goat to the height of his own face. Looking directly into the eyes of the animal he murmurs messages to be passed on to the spirits in the parallel world of the dead. They are pleas for the protection of the living. The goat is then laid on the stone, its throat pressed against the altar. The knife is stabbed into its jugular and the blood starts to pour. The Grand Hounoun looks ready to collapse and he is carried back to his throne while the King of Allada flings out lemons to the crowd from a sack. This puzzles me. I ask the man beside me what is the significance of the lemons? He looks at me as if I am an idiot.

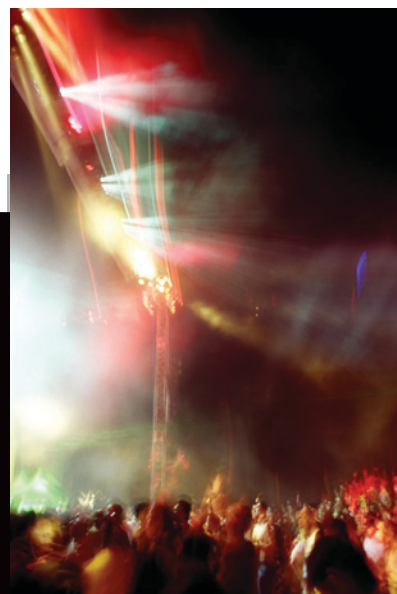
"We like them. They are very refreshing."

I leave the crowds to the dancing and their gin and their lemons I make my way back up the Route d'Esclaves – the Road of Slaves. The sound of the drums growing ever more distant mingles with the sound of the surf from the Atlantic breakers. Now this one-mile road is just a dusty track but for 400 years millions of men, women and children were led down here in shackles and chains. The men beaten, the women often raped, 20 million souls from this part of West Africa were packed into slave ships and transported to the Americas under conditions of inhuman brutality. They were sold by their fellow Africans to European traders who took full advantage of the warlords' brutality; it is estimated that half of the slaves died en route because of overcrowding, disease and brutality. Those that did survive the horrors of the journey were sold into generations of further misery as slaves in the plantations of the new world.

The road is lined with fetishes to remember those who were taken from their homes forever. One of the few things they brought with them was Voodoo.



Singapore's Big Night Out



Thirsty for a few echoes and atmospherics of Singapore's biggest outdoor dance festival, writer & shooter **Daniel Cooper** gets sand in his skivvies at "Zoukout."





>>>>>>



They came from all corners of East Asia, Jakarta, Hong Kong, Bangkok and, of course, Singapore. It was Saturday, December 4th at 7pm when they gathered at Tanjong Beach on Singapore's Sentosa Island, to whip up a sandstorm with frenzied stomping and cool grooves. The occasion? "Zoukout," Singapore's annual outdoor dance-music festival and FARANG was there.

This was the fourth festival and the organisers, Singapore's mega-club Zouk, have really hit their stride, with a great line-up of DJ's and the 15,000-strong crowd who adored them, 35 percent of whom were tourists. The organisation was slick and efficient (leave it to the Singaporeans) from the Valueair charter flights which brought planeloads of guests from around the region, right down to the portable toilets, which were the cleanest I've ever seen at an outdoor festival.

The event commenced at 7pm with a mini-film fest and was wrapped up at 7am by Zouk resident DJ Aldrin. In between was 12 hours of non-stop foot-tapping action. The stars of the show, on the main stage, were Paul Van Dyk and Timo Maas.

But also on the main stage were Satoshi Tomiie and Seb Fontane. Visiting Asia once more was American House pioneer Miguel Migs, spinning on the Velvet Underground stage, plus fellow citizens Joe Claussell and Jazzy Jeff, Ibiza's DJ Pippi and Germany's Rainer Truby. The third stage was a mixture of local and regional DJs: Andrew Chow, Brendon P, DJ B, Sonny and Tony Tay.

On the sideshow front, there were futuristic gladiators taping angle-grinders to their groins, a belly-dancer and angelically attired masseuses.

Thankfully, there were plenty of bars serving up cold beers and electric Vodka-Red Bull. But the real stars were the crowd, a fine mix of Singaporeans and Farangs, dancing in harmony and in beachwear and getting along like the devil and a drunk man. There were even a few folks slumbering on the sand, perhaps a nod to Thailand's Full Moon Party.

The climax to this fine night was probably Paul Van Dyk's set from 4am until sunup; judging by the number of men with their shirts off, the sounds were enthusiastically received. I must admit, however, I was heartened when I found the Thai contingent, because on a poor journalist's salary I had to make the S\$6 beers last as long as possible. Luckily, some enterprising Thai had smuggled in a bottle of whiskey.

HOW We Make FARANG

Here at Farang Untamed Travel, we work very hard each month to bring you, the reader, the finest in travel journalism and entertainment. We're often asked exactly what goes into each issue – how many people are involved? What are the costs of printing a magazine?

And what kinds of characters are involved? Well, to answer these and many other questions once and for all, we've put together this informational article. Words by **Daniel Cooper**, toons by **Ben Hopkins**.

The Stories

Obviously there's not much of a magazine without something to read (in spite of what the editors of most women's magazines appear to believe), so over the years we have assembled a crack team of journalists and correspondents in every corner of Asia. Each of the major travel destinations has a FARANG agent, usually a shadowy figure with his own squad of stringers, snitches and spies who often have to trek for days through dense jungle or patronise the filthiest opium dens and saloons of the Orient to get the facts on a story.

Each correspondent files his report monthly, some using the traditional telegraph or portable wireless while others resort to more primitive yet reliable means such as carrier pigeon or native runner. These reports are assembled with submissions from freelance journalists and sent to the editorial department.

Editorial

At the front line of editorial are a team of Russian dwarves who inspect each submission. Every document is scrupulously checked for legibility, accuracy, secret ciphers, taste and toxicity. Then all stories are placed into a huge cauldron and around 15 are picked at random. These stories will be printed in the next issue while the rest will be immediately torched and their authors reprimanded. The selected stories are then locked into a strongbox and transported under guard across the office to the typing pool.

In the pool, dozens upon dozens of young women in grey uniforms are employed to transcribe, often up to 18 hours a day, the crude scratchings of the raw submissions into Esperanto. Yes, we're all-Esperanto here at FARANG, to better facilitate communication between the multitudes of nationalities in our employ. Typographical errors are dealt with by electric shock. Once "in the system" the stories are forwarded to the subs.

The Sub-editorial floor bears a greater resemblance to a production line than a house of literature, but a very special job is performed here. A great conveyor belt snakes through the room between the tightly-packed subs, who draw papers from the belt, edit them, roll them up, place them into plastic tubes and feed them into the pneumatic messaging system. The subs are idiot savants, genetically altered in the womb to become the acme of correct usage. Although incapable of surviving in conventional society, it is fortunate for them that Farang Global Headquarters is in Bangkok.

The pneumatic messages are fired 10 floors up to the layout department.

Layout

The complicated process of laying out the collection of stories, photographs and advertisements is carried out by a team of highly trained, annoying French designers. These individuals are given a wide latitude to encourage their creativity and the whole department (nicknamed "La Belle Plage") is decorated in a beach theme. The floor is sand and most of the designers work shirtless under sunlamps, serenaded by a Hawaiian guitar performer. These talented individuals work mostly with paste, scissors and finger-paint.





To Press!

Once the final layout has been designed and approved by the Grand Vizier, the proofs are taken by express elevator beneath the surface of Bangkok to the bomb-proof basement where we keep the presses. These massive machines stand 50-feet tall and weigh hundreds of tons. Each is powered by steam from boilers in the adjacent room, which are stoked by black-faced migrants who work in shifts and rarely see the light of day.

The great plates for the presses are lovingly carved from great blocks of teak by up to 100 typesetters at a time. Each block is approximately 20-yards square and each is good for 100 impressions. As you can imagine, mounting each plate takes a Herculean effort, involving ropes, pulleys and hauling teams of ponies. This is the most dangerous part of the production process, except when the presses are started.

When a head of steam has been gathered and the great presses begin to roll, the entire neighbourhood shakes well into the midnight hours. After each thunderous crash of an impression, a team of workers must drag the sheet of paper to the cutting room while another is maneuvered into position and boys on trapeze smear new ink upon the plate. As expected, accidents are common, resulting in botched copies and increased costs.

Finally, each copy is hand-stitched and inspected and bundled for distribution, to you, the consumer.

Advertising Sales

While the printing department is dangerous, the sales department is deadly. Each month sees a new crop of eager recruits ushered onto the sales-floor, a landscape of tiny desks and telephones that stretch as far as they eye can see. Each salesman must make telephone calls all over the world in two 12-hour shifts and hector, beg or trick potential clients into advertising while their managers scream and occasionally whip them into to a fever pitch of sales baloney. The rules are simple. Each month the top sellers get a bonus, a Cadillac and a new mistress. The middle group get to keep their jobs but earn no commission. Anyone who does not sell an advertisement after seven days is taken outside and shot.



Materials

The paper used by FARANG is by no means your usual information carrying medium. Only the very finest of wood pulp is transported by bullock carts from Burma, hand crushed into pulp by hundreds of tribal virgins. The pulp is bleached, rolled and dried out at a mill in Buriram and then spun into immense rolls for transport via muddy road to Bangkok. The ink is produced from the petals of opium poppies that are smuggled across the border by mule train. This operation is carried out by armed bandits and private armies in the north, where secret labs hidden in the jungle convert the raw product into the vibrant inks that you are enjoying now. Approximately 20 pounds of petals must be crushed to produce a thimbleful of ink, which is diluted with angels' tears.



Dancing on Graves

Richard S. Ehrlich visits a cemetery in Manila where a thousand live folks exist right alongside legions of the dead. Toon by **Nigel Price**.



Hundreds of men, women and children live among these tombstones, inside mausoleums and on top of graves in Manila's sprawling public cemetery, enjoying the free rent and electricity which this morbid site provides.

Despite the deathly ambiance, residents try to get on with life. Kids sit next to graves and poke at bleeping, hand-held computer games. Other urchins munch on papayas and popsicles, ignoring the buried corpses. Children also skateboard along the cemetery's lanes, standing aside only when a hearse – usually a Cadillac – arrives carrying a new coffin, followed by other vehicles with grim friends and relatives in mourning. A few adult residents whiz by the mausoleums on small motorcycles. Others stroll along the tree-lined lanes through the cemetery, walking through this surprisingly lively village.

Popular music pulsates from tape recorders and radios plugged into electricity sockets that are scattered near most graves. At night, the cemetery's electric lampposts dispel some of the ghoulish darkness. Some families alleviate the dead surroundings by installing humble, comfortable furniture and tending tropical gardens. The wealthiest among the cemetery's residents boast colour TVs set atop indoor concrete crypts. Poorer families make do with a straw mat laid on the flat cement of raised graves.

Food is available at little shops wedged into the empty spaces of larger tombs. Snacks are also on sale from pushcarts strategically placed along the paved lanes used by funeral processions. The pushcarts also offer flowers, candles and small Catholic icons which visitors purchase to adorn the burial sites of loved ones.

Inside one domesticated mausoleum, the Ravago family watches television amid items found in any normal living room: an aquarium with fish, an electric fan, comfortable chairs and a clock.

“Food is available at little shops wedged into the empty spaces of larger tombs. Snacks are also on sale from pushcarts strategically placed along the paved lanes used by funeral processions.”

The TV, however, is on top of a raised, unmarked crypt reserved for use by the Geneta family who own the mausoleum and already have several

relatives entombed in the spacious, well-lit chamber. The Genetas and others who own mausoleums actually want people to live inside their tombs, to protect the crypts from vandals and provide upkeep.

“They are interested in someone to live here,” Rosemary R. Ravago said, while sitting next to her father, mother and younger brother inside the cozy mausoleum. “It is an accepted practice. Everything is free. Most people who have a crypt this size - like some kind of a house - want people to live inside, otherwise they would lock the mausoleum,” Miss Ravago added.

“All four of us sleep here at night on plywood and cardboard. You have to put a blanket underneath you,” she added, pointing at the orange tiled floor.

“Our number one problem is water. We don't have a direct water system. We have to buy it. My mother does it. We have a cart with about 10 containers which we fill when we buy water nearby. Everybody living in the cemetery knows one another, so I don't think there is any problem like crime. Actually, I feel safer when I'm inside the main gate because everyone knows my father.”

Her father, Romeo Ravago, pushed a remote control to turn down the TV and said, “Generally, the people who live in this cemetery are working here. There are 1,000 people living here.”

His grinning daughter, chimed in, “This is some kind of a village. We have a mini-store next door,” which sells food and other household goods stacked in an alcove.

“The Genetas and others who own mausoleums actually want people to live inside their tombs, to protect the crypts from vandals and provide upkeep.”

Despite the furnishings, it is easy to see the mausoleum's rectangular cement crypts which surround the Ravago family, and the names of the dead. The biggest tomb inside this mausoleum is embellished with the name, “Antonio H. Geneta” and the dates, “1/17/13 - 12/22/97”. Other crypts inside the Ravagos' home are dated 1907, 1934, 1937, 1958 and 1997.

Mr. Ravago said the mausoleum was built in 1972, and members of the Geneta family who died earlier were transferred here at that time by the mausoleum's owners. “A mausoleum this size might cost them about 500,000 pesos for the land and the building,” he said, proud of the mausoleum's five-metres-by-five-metres floor space which opens into a tiny garden. A large, outdoor statue of an angel guards the front door. This mausoleum is of average size, compared to the cemetery's gaudier two-story tombs or smaller sheltered sites.

“I've been working here for 30 years, since I was 14 years old,” Ravago said. “I'm an undertaker and caretaker.”

At the cemetery's administrative office, meanwhile, Joseph Reparejo issues permits whenever a new grave needs to be dug or if a corpse is to be exhumed for forensic reasons or transfer elsewhere.

“This cemetery is 54 hectares in size, and approximately 150 to 200 people are buried in a week,” Mr. Reparejo said in an interview at his barren office. Sitting amid stacks of permit papers held down by telephone books, Mr. Reparejo said, “This is Manila North Cemetery. There is also a Manila South Cemetery but that is only 25 hectares. Both are owned by the city of Manila.

“This cemetery is public, open to all. Past presidents are buried here, including President Magsaysay, President Osmena and President Roxas. Some American teachers who came here to the Philippines are buried here because they don't want to go back. The Jews are buried here,” he added, pointing to a map of the cemetery which shows sections for VIPs - including “the American Lodge” and “the Philippines Army” - and zones for lesser mortals.

Mr. Reparejo displayed a list of fees, which included a burial permit for 250 pesos, and an exhumation permit for the same price.

Other fees listed cremations, autopsies after burial, the “rental of chapel for vigil” and the long-term rental of “VIP,” “wall niche,” “single grave” and “bones crypt” sites for burials.

Meanwhile, outside among the tombs, a cluster of children continue taking turns dancing on the dead. Some of them leap onto a stately grave's smooth, raised, rectangular stone slab and perform an impromptu tap-dance macabre of life, while giggling.

Richard S. Ehrlich, a freelance journalist who has reported news from Asia for the past 26 years, is co-author of the non-fiction book, HELLO MY BIG BIG HONEY! - Love Letters to Bangkok Bar Girls and Their Revealing Interviews. His web page is www.geocities.com/glossograph

HERE & NOW

The Latest Deals on
Accommodation,
Sights, Eating
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PHUKET'S BLOSSOMING FLOWER

Andre LePine takes to Thailand's south in search of luxury and the pampering his rotund physique demands

Yes, I know we reviewed a boutique resort in Patong last month. But I like the place, and never being one to look a gift horse in the mouth I jumped at the chance to leave my humble Bangkok dwellings for luxury and fancy swimming pools once again. A jolly fancy pool it was too.

The most overused buzz-word of the moment, boutique, far too often translates into "rip off", in my opinion. Too many resorts seem to be created with the coffee-table book in mind, rather than the guest. I'm happy to say that Burasari isn't one of these and certainly does offer more than glossy travel magazine (current company excluded) photo opportunities.

Located on Ruamjai Rd., the resort is 30m from the beach and five minute's walk to the nightlife epicentre of Bangla Rd. A sterling design job has been done in giving Burasari that cozy, secluded feel, with an abundance of tropical plants and watery motifs lining and overhanging the walkways and courtyard area. Very apt as a burasari is apparently a small flowering plant. The beautifully appointed pool is the centrepiece of the resort, with guest rooms at either side and crowned at the far end by a cascading waterfall. Of the 90 rooms, 56 are deluxe (including single, with king-size bed or twin-bed units), five deluxe with private pool access and 29 junior suites with seating area and views overlooking the central courtyard, gardens and pool. All the usuals are available in the rooms: satellite TV, bathtub and shower, aircon, safety deposit box etc. Not huge rooms, but nicely designed in modern Thai style and plenty luxurious enough to give you the 'lord on holiday' feeling.

Chez Serge is the on-site French-fusion restaurant, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. My usual breakfast observations and eavesdropping on fellow guests revealed a mixed international crowd of Asians and Europeans, and no one doing the Patong 'walk of shame' in all six mornings I was there – maybe a sign that Patong is attracting a more sophisticated crowd than yesteryear? Reasonably priced in comparison to many of the other boutique resorts around and achieving a genuinely homey, personalised atmosphere others claim but often lack. Well worth checking out for Bangkok expats and tourists alike as Phuket's jammed full at the moment and appearing to be hip again – Sphinx from Silom Soi 4 has already opened an outlet in Patong and Q Bar looks set to be next with a funky lounge bar at Burasari's new property Jung Seylong.



Burasari Resort
32/1 Ruamjai Rd. Patong
Tel. (66 76) 292 929 Fax (66 76) 292930, 294 451
Website: www.burasari.com

Hanging Your Hat:

Places to sleep in Bangkok



There are hotels everywhere in Bangkok, but the main traveller hubs, especially for independent travel, are the Sukhumvit and Silom areas (the closest thing Bangkok has to a 'downtown', featuring much of the city's entertainment and shopping for foreigners and locals), and the famous (or infamous) Khaosan Road. Khaosan, known as the 'backpacker ghetto,' does still offer some very cheap accommodation, but has gone far more upscale in recent years, with rooms that are up there with the city's nicer hotels. If you're a planning sort of person, note that many of these places will give you a cheaper rate than listed if you book in advance online or by phone.

Top End:

Bangkok has heaps of five-star hotels and resorts, including the world-famous **Oriental Hotel, Shangri-La, Peninsula, Conrad, Sheraton Grande, Amari, Novotel, Hilton**, and the rest. You can walk in if you like, but the rate will be a lot higher than if you book in advance, as those who stay in these hotels generally do – except for British royalty, who can drive their Aston Martin through the front window of the Ritz at 3am and still get a discount room – if not a freebie. So if you're a commoner, go to your travel agent, book online, or if you don't give a damn about money, walk in the door. The listings below cover a handful of the midrange down to the cheapest accommodation available in Bangkok, that are independent and a little harder to find.

Pratunam/Siam Square Area

Holiday Mansion Hotel

Bt2000 (including breakfast), 53 Withayu (Wireless) Rd, Ploenchit Skytrain, Tel: 02-255-0099. Good-sized rooms, clean, decent mid-range value, full range of room amenities.

Pathumwan House

Bt1000-1400, 22 Soi Kasem San 1, Rama I Road, National Stadium Skytrain, Tel: 02-612-3580. Big rooms with TV and bar and all that. Caged birds form the cornerstone of the décor.

Silom Area

Anna's Café & Bed

Bt950 (large room), 44/16 Convent Road, Sala Daeng Skytrain, 02-632-1323. A bargain for this part of town. Not particularly fancy, but does the job well enough.

Bangkok Christian Guest House

Bt1100-1500, 123 Sala Daeng Soi 2, Convent Road, Sala Daeng Skytrain, 02-233-6303, www.bcgh.org. An old-style boarding house with some Christian principles still intact. Not the best choice for heavy drinking party animals. Fine for gentler folk.

La Résidence Hotel

Bt1000-2700, 173/8-9 Surawong Road, Chong Nonsi Skytrain, 02-233-3301. A cool boutique hotel, every room is different. The suites are very full-on with the décor.

Intown Residence

Bt600-700, 1086/6 Charoen Krung Road, near Si Phraya pier, 02-639-0960. Set in the winding sois of an Indian neighbourhood – a different Bangkok experience. Friendly staff, okay rooms.

Niagara Hotel

Bt680, 26 Soi 9/Suksavithaya, Silom Road, Chong Nonsi Skytrain, 02-233-5783. Clean rooms, TV, a real bargain for this area.

Soi Ngam Duphli

Malaysia Hotel

Bt700-800, 54 Soi Ngam Duphli, Rama IV Road, Lumpini Subway, 02-286-3582. This somewhat tacky area has alleyways full of cheap accommodation if you wander around, (it predated Khaosan Road as the independent traveller base). The Malaysia Hotel is the legendary grandpappy of them all. Decent rooms for the price, though the scene is on the seedy side.

Sukhumvit

The Atlanta

Bt485-665, 78 Sukhumvit Soi 2, Ploenchit Skytrain, 02-252-1650. This throwback hotel with the classic décor has been open for several decades. Some love it, some hate it (read the rule book), but there's nowhere else like it.

Suk 11

Bt250-500, Sukhumvit soi 11, Nana Skytrain, 02-253-5927, www.suk11.com. Budget accommodation on Sukhumvit even has dorms. A pleasant place to hang out.

Federal Hotel

Bt900 and up, 27 Sukhumvit Soi 11, Nana Skytrain, 02-253-0175, federalhotel@hotmail.com. A former GI hangout from the Vietnam days, 'Club Fed' has been upgraded now, but is still classic enough. Comfortable rooms.

Manhattan

Bt1400/1600 (with breakfast), 13 Sukhumvit Soi 15, Asoke Skytrain, 02-255-0166, www.hotelmanhattan.com. A standard-issue hotel in the heart of Sukhumvit. Nothing special, but okay value.

Sam's Lodge

Bt700-900, 28-28/1 Sukhumvit Soi 19, Asoke Skytrain, 02-253-2993. A new-ish guesthouse with shared baths. Make sure your room has a window before checking in.

Banglamphu

There are guesthouses everywhere in this area, so just start at Khaosan and wander around. They are often full, so you may have to hoof around if you want a bargain. Here are a few of the more upmarket places.

Sawasdee Group has several places dotted around the Banglamphu area (and expanding throughout the country). All of them have cool Thai-style hangout areas and clean rooms. See www.sawasdee-hotels.com. Prices range from Bt140-800. Some of the group include: **Sawasdee Bangkok Inn** 02-280-1251, **Sawasdee Krungthep Inn** 02-629-0079, **Welcome Sawasdee Inn** 02-629-2321, **Sawasdee Smile Inn** 02-629-2340-1, **Sawasdee Khaosan Inn** 02-629-4798-9.

Buddy Lodge

Bt1800-2200, 265 Khaosan Road, Phra Athit boat pier, 02-629-4477, www.buddylodge.com. Looks like the Khaosan town hall from the outside, with very nice upscale modern Thai-style rooms.

Nana Plaza Inn

Bt400-600, 202 Khaosan Road, 02-281-6402. A hotel-style high-rise more civilised and comfortable than the usual backpacker haunt.

D&D Inn

Bt450-900, 68-70 Khaosan Road, 02-629-0526-8. Another hotel style place with TV and fridge and all the proper stuff. Good value.

Thai Cozy House

Bt650-1,000 (including breakfast), 111/1-3 Taneer Road Khaosan Road, 02-629-5870-4. Boutique sort of place that is in fact cozy and away from the big noise of Khaosan.



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DAYTRIPPING

DAWN TO DUSK



BANGLAMPHU

CORRECTIONS MUSEUM

Where: Mahachai Road, across from Thanon Luang

When: Mon-Fri; 8:30pm-4pm

Cost: Free

Way to Go: Ten minute walk south of Golden Mount.

Some of the guard towers and rows of prison cells are all that's left of the hellish Mahachai Prison, where Warren Fellows (*The Damage Done*) was first incarcerated, in what is now the grounds of Romanee Lart Park. For a bowel-loosening display of barbaric torture instruments once used in Siamese prisons and wax tableaux of prisoners being beheaded and shot, visit the park's museum on the Golden Mount side.

NATIONAL GALLERY

Where: Chao Fah Road, near Pra Pinklao

When: Wed-Sun, 9am-4pm

Cost: Bt30

Way to go: Walk from Khaosan Road

Brush up on Thai art history with a visit to this gallery near Sanam Luang (five minutes walk SW of Khaosan). The permanent exhibition is not spectacular, but the monthly exhibitions in the annex can blaze with brilliance.

NATIONAL MUSEUM

Where: West side of Sanam Luang

When: Wed-Sun, 9am-4pm

Cost: Bt40

Way to go: Ten-minute walk from Khaosan

This storehouse of priceless artifacts and funerary chariots also has a number of exhibition rooms with themes like "Gallery of Thai History," "Gold Treasures," "Shadow Players and Entertainment," plus a fine selection of Buddha images and pottery from the Sukothai, Ayuthaya, and Lop Buri periods, as well as ancient weapons. Free guided tours in different languages each week, as well as occasional lectures on Buddhism and Thai history in English. Call 02-224 1404 or 02-224 1333 for more info.

THAMMASAT LIBRARY

Where: Beside the National Museum on Na Phra That Road

When: Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm, and Sat-Sun, 9am-3pm

Cost: Bt20 per day

Way to go: Enter the university through the front gate near the National Museum and walk past the sports field on your left, take the last right, and walk about 15 metres.

Plenty of brain food on offer in this intellectual smorgasbord with more than 300,000 books in English, French, Japanese and other non-native tongues, 2,000 different kinds of periodicals and 27



newspapers. Large selection of English videos – from classics to cool trash – that you can watch on the VCRs.

VIPASSANA MEDITATION CENTRE

Where: Wat Mahadatu, Na Phra Lan Road

When: Daily, 9am-4pm

Cost: Free

Way to go: Near Grand Palace; use the southernmost entrance to the temple complex on Maharat Road

Fine purveyors of calm for more than four decades now, the centre offers three study sessions a day, in both Thai and English, with real live monks: 7-10am; 1-4pm; 6-8pm. The centre is near the southernmost entrance to the temple complex on Maharat Road.

WAT PHO MASSAGE CENTRE

Where: Thai Wang and Sanachai Roads

When: Daily, 8am-8pm

Cost: Bt120 for 30 minutes; Bt200 for an hour; herbal massage Bt300 per hour

Way to go: Bt30 tuk tuk, River taxi to Tha Thien pier or walk just past the Grand Palace

Get bent into shape with a painful yet invigorating massage at the city's oldest temple and largest repository of Thai information about traditional medicine.

NATURAL HEALING COMPANY

Where: 4th Floor, Bayon Building, Khaosan Rd

When: 7 days, 10am-10pm

Cost: Varies

Way to go: Use your shoes, dude

Provides courses and healing using reiki, pranic healing plus meditation, yoga chigong, self-defence classes, massage and even serves health drinks to knock back on the terrace after a hard day's healing.

THONBURI

SHED OF THE ROYAL BARGES

Where: Khlong Bangkok Noi, near the Thonburi side of the Pinklao Bridge

When: Daily, 9am-5pm

Cost: Bt30 for foreign adults, free for children; Bt100 more to take photos; Bt200 for video camera

Way to go: A little difficult to find, most people charter a long-tail boat from the pier by the Temple of the Emerald Buddha for a tour of Thonburi's canals and have a stopover here.

On display are eight of the Royal barges that are part of a 700-year regal tradition. The most awe-inspiring barge in this flotilla is the Subanahongsas, ridden by His Majesty the King back in 1999 during celebrations to mark the Sovereign's 72nd birthday. Adorned with a figurehead of a mythical swan known as *hamsa* (the mount of the Hindu god Brahma) it is 46-metres long and hewn from a single trunk of teak.

SONGKRAN MIYOMSANE FORENSIC



MEDICINE MUSEUM

Where: 2nd floor, Adulaydejvigrom Building, behind Siriraj Hospital, Phrannok Road

When: Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm

Cost: Free

Way to go: Take the cross-river ferry (Bt2) from Maharaj Pier (near Sanam Luang) to Phrannok Pier

What is quite possibly the most macabre museum (or is it a crypt?) in the world contains the preserved corpses of several killers, like Thailand's most famous mass murderer, the Chinese cannibal, See-Uey. Also on display are exhibits of murder weapons, stillborn children swimming in formaldehyde and a chilling, gut-churning exhibition of autopsy and crime-scene photos. Nearby are several other museums of anatomy, parasitology, medical history, and anthropology.

DUSIT

DUSIT PARK

Where: Ratchawithi Road

When: Daily, 9am-4pm

Cost: If you pay the Bt200 admission for the Grand Palace, you get a ticket for all of these museums. Otherwise it's Bt75

Way to go: Bt40 tuk tuk or taxi from Khaosan

On the lush grounds of this park is the golden teak Vimanmek Mansion (well worth the trip), where King Rama V once lived and held court, along with museums containing HM the King's photos, Thai arts and handicrafts, sacred white elephants, Royal carriages and memorabilia.

DUSIT ZOO

Where: Ratchawithi Road

When: Daily, 8am-6pm

Cost: Bt30 for adults; Bt5 for kids

Way to go: Bt40 tuk tuk or taxi from Khaosan

Probably the cheapest zoo in the world, this is a great spot to while away an afternoon in the company of rare Asian cattle, hornbills and shudder-inducing snakes and water dragons. The monkey cages are by far the liveliest area. Decent food, a lake and paddle-boats, too. On weekends it's crowded with Thai families.

SUKHUMVIT

THE SNAKE FARM

Where: Rama IV Road, near Henri Dunant Avenue, on the grounds of the Thai Red Cross Institute.

When: Weekdays, 8.30am-4.30pm; weekends, 8.30am-noon. Shows at 11am and 2.30pm on weekdays, and at 11am on weekends.

Cost: Bt70

Thrill to snake-handling demonstrations, watch cobras being milked of their venom and have your photo taken with a firehose-thick python. Before the demonstrations of daredevilry, there's also a slide show about the serpents of Thailand and what to do if



one bites you when Crocodile Dundee isn't in the vicinity. Also on display are some living and dead snakes at what's officially called the Queen Saowapha Memorial Institute, which was set up nearly 80 years ago to produce anti-venom serum for the snake-bitten.

JIM THOMPSON HOUSE

Where: Soi Kasemsan 2, opposite the National Stadium on Rama I Rd.

Way to go: National Stadium station on the Skytrain

When: 9am to 5pm everyday with the last Guided Tour at 16:30

Cost: Adult Bt100, Students Bt50

The Jim Thompson House museum is the former residence of the American Thai silk magnate of the same name. Before his mysterious disappearance in the Malaysian jungle, he collected art and artifacts from around the region and filled this traditional house with the stuff. A fantastic collection set in lush gardens and an insight into the elegant lifestyle of the Bangkok wealthy before rampant industrialisation. A cool place to spend a few hours, it also has a reasonably priced restaurant on the grounds. The newly opened two-floor museum hosts regular exhibitions.

WAT MAHABUT

Where: Sukhumvit Soi 77, Soi 7

When: Free

Way to go: Skytrain to On Nut, then a 15-minute walk

Thailand's most notorious ghost Nang Nak (supposedly born more than a century ago in this district), is said to malingering at the temple. After dying in childbirth, her spirit returned to join her unsuspecting husband. Some believe that she killed several people in the area to keep her secret from him. At the back is a shrine dedicated to her. Hundreds of people come here daily to pray to her spirit to help them win the lottery or find a husband, attaching gold leaves to her face or pouring candle wax on the tree outside the shrine.

LUMPINI

LUMPINI PARK

Where: Rama IV Road

When: Daily, 6am-8pm

Cost: Free

Way to go: #15 bus from Wat Bowen Niwet, Saladaeng skytrain station, Silom and Lumpini subway stations

A refreshing green lung in the midst of pestilent Bangkok. In the mornings and evenings, old people perform tai chi, joggers stop for a medicinal shot of snake's bile and buff chaps work out at the outdoor gym. In between, picnickers loaf and horny young couples coo. On weekends expect diverse musical and theatrical performances. But the

best spectacle is the 6pm public aerobics attended by hundreds.

PRATUNAM

HILTON HOTEL FERTILITY SHRINE

Where: 2 Wittayu (Wireless) Road, near the British Embassy

When: Early morning to early evening.

How Much: Dik all

Way to Go: Cannal taxi World Trade Center stop, Chitlom Skytrain Station

Devoted to the Fertility Goddess Tubtim, this shrine, in the far north corner behind the hotel, is a sanctuary for the limp, the lovelorn, and prospective parents. It is studded with wooden phalluses (some are wrapped with colourful sashes) in all shapes, sizes, and hues; they are offerings made to the goddess for wishes to be fulfilled. Sitting pretty beside a canal, the main spirit house is surrounded by foliage and a sacred ficus tree.

SAMUT PRAKAN ERAWAN MUSEUM

Where: Near the Crocodile Farm and Ancient City on Old Sukhumvit Road

When: Daily, 9am-6pm

Way to Go: See the Ancient City listing.

The three-headed copper elephant measures some 40 metres in height and weighs 250 tonnes. In the base is a museum devoted to Thai and Chinese antiques. Up above is an incredible array of statuary, a stained glass ceiling, and a stairway leading up the elephant god Erawan's right hind leg into a vision of Buddhist heaven in his belly.

THE ANCIENT CITY (MUANG BORAN)

Where: Kilometre 33, Sukhumvit Highway

When: 8.30am-5pm.

Cost: Bt50 adults; Bt25 children

Way to go: Catch the #11 air-con bus on the north side of Democracy Monument or on Sukhumvit Road and get off at the Pak Nam bus terminal. Then hop on the No. 36 mini-bus for a few baht or a motorcycle taxi for Bt40.

Shaped like a gigantic map of Thailand, this 320-acre park has monuments, traditional houses and temples from all over the country, many almost as big as the originals. Attractions include royal barges, a sculpture garden with mythical characters from the Indian epic *Ramayana*, and the Old Market Town. Rent a bicycle – you won't regret it.

THE CROCODILE FARM

Where: Kilometre 30 on Sukhumvit Highway

When: 7am-6pm.

Cost: Bt300 adults; Bt150

Way to go: Same as Ancient City but ask the motorbike to take you to the farm

Watch Thai men wrestle with crocodiles, or just check out the exotic collection of Indian peafowl, Malaya sun bears, golden Thai pythons and about 50,000 other crocodiles. The politically suspect among you can even buy crocodile-skin handbags, shoes and belts, but watch out at customs.

ASIAN FIXATION

Having relentlessly plundered every other culture on earth, the West has now bid adios to the likes of Ricky Martin, and the Latin set, and is welcoming all things Asian. Shopping at the Asian Nouveau website makes a pleasant alternative to elbowing your way through the consuming hordes at Chatuchak, or negotiating with the rapacious vendors at the Patpong Night Bazaar for assembly-line arts and shoddy crafts; and you won't end up with any sweat dripping down the crevasse of your bum either. On the website are four different sections: Asian Décor, Home Accents, Asian Art, and Unique Gifts. So there's ceramic bowls and rattan trays, odd sculptures, coconut shell boxes, silk scarves and Buddhist-style paintings – all designed by Thais – along with oodles more reasons to max out your credit card. All the prices include Fed Ex shipping.

Check it out at www.asiannouveau.com



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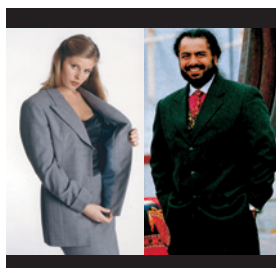
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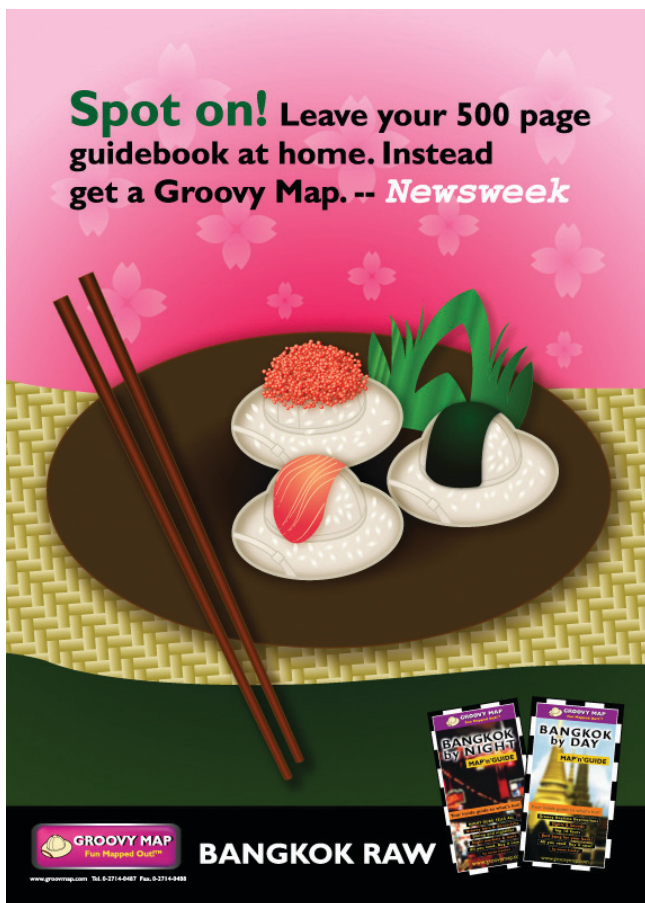
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WAY TO GO

TAXIS

Meter taxis are safe, cool, plentiful and cheap. They are required by law to turn their meters on, so if the driver refuses, find another one. A tip is nice though – these guys don't earn much.

BUSES

Buses vary in price and comfort: blue aircon buses cost from Bt8-20, depending on distance. The big red and blue buses go all over town for Bt4 and Bt5, respectively. Bus maps are available at all bookshops – the Nelles Bangkok map is the best of the lot.

TUK-TUKS

Kind of dangerous, but has to be done once anyway. All Bt10 tuk-tuk rides are scams. Unless you know the language and the city, a meter taxi is usually cheaper and cooler.

MOTORCYCLE TAXIS

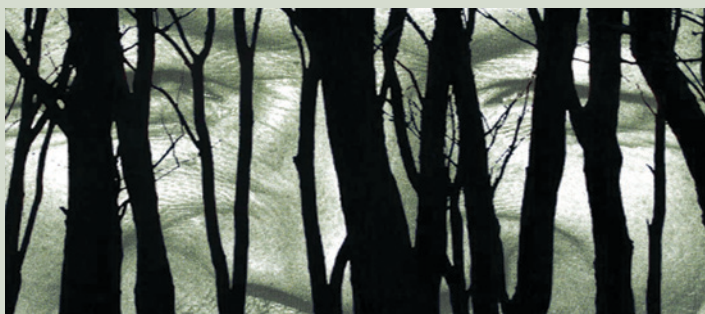
Motorcycle taxis are the only way to get anywhere quickly during the day. Most drivers are fairly sensible, but the bikes are dangerous – keep your knees in. Fares are about the same as meter taxis.

SKYTRAIN

The Skytrain is comfortable and fast and great for getting you around the centre of town, but needs to cover a much bigger area to be truly effective.

SUBWAY

At long last the metro, or MRTA, is open. There are interchange stations with the Skytrain at Mo Chit, Asok and Saladaeng. It's a commuter system, so tourists tend to find the Skytrain more useful. Fares are Bt14-35 with a 15% discount until 2005.



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FEEDING TIME

Places to Eat: Around Bangkok



any visitors to Bangkok are happy to shovel discount *pad thai* into their gullets and adventurous types may even order the amusingly named *khao pat*, all the while praising the subtle interplay of flavours that can only be achieved by skillfully heaping your plate with chilli, sugar and fish-sauce. But Bangkok offers delights to even the most jaded palate, whether your thing is river dining, scrounging the lanes of Chinatown for the perfect shark-fin soup, or even just a quiet place to take Miss or Mr Perfect.

SILOM AREA

SOI CONVENT (EVENINGS)

Silom area (Saladaeng Skytrain)

Don't be put off by the name, this is an ideal place to fill the belly before a night out in Silom. A number of good quality street stalls dish up a variety of staples like *khao man gai* (chicken with rice) and steaming noodle soups to slurp on whilst watching the street life. If Northeastern style Thai food's your bag it's well worth trying the *jim jum*, Northeastern-style hot pot for communal troughing between friends, or Hai restaurant for *som tam* (spicy green papaya salad). For an international touch La Boulange has excellent French breads and pastries and there's a number of good restaurants like Café Swiss (Swiss!), Zen (Japanese) and Khao Gub Kaeng (Thai) to choose from.

BLUE ELEPHANT

(CLASSIC AND FRESH, FUNKY THAI)

233 Sathorn Rd., (Skytrain Surasak), Tel: 02-673 9353, 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30pm-midnight, www.blueelephant.com, visa, amex & diners cards Set in a restored old colonial-style house and part of the internationally renowned chain of Thai restaurants, this outlet serves as both cooking school and restaurant. The relaxed atmosphere and wooden interior make for a more informal alternative to hotel restaurants and it's one of the few eateries in town to successfully create new, inventive Thai dishes without sacrificing real Thai tastes. Animal haters should try the shameful foie gras with tamarind sauce (Bt480), whilst mains like their popular bamboo fish (Bt280) go for around Bt180-440.

SIROCCO

(CONTEMPORARY MEDITERRANEAN)

63rd Floor, State Tower, Silom Rd (Skytrain Saphan Taksin), 6pm-11pm, Tel: 02-624 9555, www.thedome.com, major cards The only place in Bangkok equally suitable for a romantic dinner and a suicide attempt. Open air and located on the 63th floor, Sirocco is the highest outdoor restaurant in the world and offers fantastic views across Bangkok (it looks much nicer from up there, believe us), live jazz and contemporary Mediterranean cuisine. Starters will set you back around Bt200-600, whilst mains go for Bt500-2,400. Very busy at present, so reservations are recommended.

INDIAN HUT (NORTHERN INDIAN)

311/2-5 Suriwongse Rd, opposite Manora School (Skytrain Sala Daeng), 11am-11pm, Tel: 02-635 7876-7, major cards

You have to admire any restaurant that rips off the Pizza Hut logo. Excellent and very fresh fodder, without the "fast food" variety of Indian cuisine so common outside its home country. A wide variety of lesser known Indian dishes especially from the tandoor and all are reasonably priced, with most main courses going for under Bt200. Also has a good vegetarian selection for around Bt100 a dish, a variety of breads and, according to the management, the finest Indian rice in Bangkok.

JESTERS (PACIFIC RIM)

Peninsula Hotel, Charoen Nakorn Rd, Klongsan, Tel: 02-861 2888, 6:30pm-10:30pm snack food after 10:30pm, major cards

Very cool, very stylish restaurant with real attention to detail. Jesters has river views, impeccable service and soulful, chilled-out music to accompany the culinary delights. Choose from set menus for around Bt1,000++ per head, or from the varied a-la-carte menu. One of the few restaurants in town to blend flavours from around the world and produce tasty, modern Pacific rim cuisine.

TONGUE THAI (THAI)

18-20 Charoen Krung Rd (same Soi as Oriental Hotel), 10:30am-2pm, 5pm-11pm, Tel: 02-630 9918-9, major cards except Diners, JCB

Intimate and tastefully decorated eatery tucked away amongst the antique galleries of Charoen Krung road, and a good place to fill empty bellies after a day spending your life savings on fake Buddha sculpture and Chinese furniture. Traditional Thai fare like soft shell crab curry, mussels in a clay pot, and crispy morning glory go for around Bt100-400.

PATARA (THAI)

2 Sathorn 11, South Sathorn Rd, 11.30am-2.30pm, 6pm-10.30pm, Tel: 02-212 6420-1, www.patarathailand.com, major cards

Elegant Thai restaurant on Sathorn with some excellent Thai adaptations like raw tuna in a lime and lemongrass vinaigrette, and lemongrass marinated New Zealand rack of lamb with a spicy chilli sauce, green papaya and sweet rice rolls (Bt160-380 a dish). A good place for parties as they have ongoing group discounts and promotions.

ANNA'S CAFÉ

(THAI/INTERNATIONAL)

118 Soi Saladaeng, Silom Rd (Skytrain Saladaeng), Tel: 02-632 0620-1, 11am-11pm.

Extremely popular with a lively, almost raucous atmosphere at times – more choruses of happy birthday than any other restaurant in Bangkok. Very reasonably priced, tasty Thai dishes (Bt750-150), and European/fusion menu. Also has some pretty good Western desserts. There are also branches in Wireless Road and Sukhumvit (next to the Landmark hotel, Nana BTS).

O'REILLY'S (IRISH/CONTINENTAL)

Silom Road, corner Soi Thaniya, (Skytrain Saladaeng), 11am – 2am, 02-632 7515, major cards

A busy Irish pub attracting a mix of expats, locals and tourists and well placed for hitting the bars/clubs of Soi 4 or Patpong after a few pints. Traditional Irish pub grub (Bt250-300), continental dishes and steaks, and a Thai menu. Good value all-you-can-eat BBQ for Bt520 and set lunch for Bt195. They also have a wide selection of Belgian beers (around Bt250) – drink at your peril, these make beer Chang look like orange juice. Live music every night except Friday. Happy-hour from 4-7pm.

MEZZALUNA (ITALIAN)

65th Fl., The Dome, State Tower, Silom Rd. Tel: 02-624 9555, 12-2.30pm and 6pm-11pm, major cards.

Housed inside the dome crowning State Tower, Mezzaluna is the refined interior to Sirocco's exuberant outdoors. The chandeliers, polished wood and comfy seating add to the feeling of all-out, classical, Italian opulence and as you'd expect there's superb views of the city from the window seating. Cuisine comes from all over Italy and the management stress the use of only the freshest imported ingredients. Appetizers from Bt310-Bt910 and mains from Bt850 up.

THE BARBICAN

9/4-5 Soi Thaniya, Silom Rd, (Skytrain Sala Daeng), 11:30am-1am, major cards, www.greatbritishpub.com, Tel: 02-234 3590

A split-level contemporary drinker that is smack in the middle of the Japanese Patpong. This is a great place to hang out with a few mates, sink beers and solve the





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problems of the world. Upstairs has big windows that affords a view of the comings and goings of Japanese gentlemen and their new friends. Happy hour is 3-7pm. Finally, The Barbican keeps the punters coming back with its pub-grub and a few other more nouveau items that has kept many an expat on his hardship posting fat and happy.

ANGELINI (ITALIAN)

Shangrila Hotel, New Road, 11:30am-2:30pm-6pm (light dining), dinner 6pm-10:45pm, Tel: 02-236 7777

Super-chic restaurant and bar with a beautiful setting overlooking the Chao Phraya River, this is a perfect place to impress a date. The open kitchen enables diners to watch the chefs at work, cooking up some fabulous Italian dishes. Regularly changing promotions and menu. As you'd expect, it's not cheap but you can still have a great feed for under Bt1,000, and there's a band on after 8pm. Other eateries on site include Salathip (Thai), Shang Palace

(Chinese) and Edogin (Japanese)

CHINATOWN

As you'd imagine, Chinatown's the best place in the city for Chinese food with far too many eateries to list here – menus aren't in English anyway. Take a stroll and browse what's on offer before making your choice – the busiest places are usually the best.

SUKHUMVIT

CREPES & CO

(FRENCH/MEDITERRANEAN)

18/1 Sukhumvit Soi 12 (Skytrain Asoke), Tel: 02-653 3990-4, 02-251 2895, www.crepes.co.th, 9am-midnight, major cards
One of FARANG's favourites, tucked away from the Sukhumvit traffic at the end of Soi 12, C&Co. is now somewhat of a Bangkok institution after eight years of feeding the hungry a superb range of crepes and Mediterranean dishes. Sweet and savoury crepes come brimming with traditional fillings like the Chasseur (Bt160) or supreme

as well as more inventive options like Casablanca (Bt200). There's also great appetisers, salads, pasta and other mains and ever changing promotions. Moroccan Fantasia promotion until the end of January.

THE COURTYARD RESTAURANT (CAJUN CREOLE, INTERNATIONAL AND THAI)

Somerset Building, 9 Soi Tonson, Ploenchit Rd, 6am-11pm, Tel. 02-658 5678, major cards

A finer-dining US-style eatery from the same owner as Bourbon Street. Chef David whips a varied menu of his own Cajun/Creole inspired dishes together with the more traditional staples such as crawfish bisque, gumbo and jambalaya. A variety of US-certified steaks, salads and seafood such as fresh New Zealand oysters and Pecan crusted grouper with gumbo. Special brunch buffet on Sundays, happy hour from 2pm-7pm daily.

BOURBON ST BAR & RESTAURANT

29/4-6 Sukhumvit Rd Soi 22 (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 7am-1am, Tel: 02-259 0328-9, www.bourbonstbkk.com, major cards

Popular US style muncher and tavern a stone's throw from the Emporium shopping center. A great place to stuff yourself senseless on the likes of jambalaya, blackened redfish and BBQ ribs (Bt200-400 per head). If you're skint and hungry don't miss the all you can eat Mexican buffet every Tuesday night (Bt250 ++).

DA GIOVANNI (ITALIAN)

71/1 Sukhumvit, Soi 3 (behind Bamboo Pub) Tel. 02-253 2462.

Tucked away in an unlikely location behind the Bamboo Pub and Restaurant, this cosy Italian trattoria is a surprisingly pleasant place to dine. Reliable pasta favourites such as lasagna with beef, and vongole for (Bt180-290), and a selection of pizzas for Bt200-280. Grilled mains like Pollo al limone (chicken in lemon sauce, Bt250) and traditional starters like mozzarella with fresh tomatoes and basil (Bt90). Thai menu also available.

THE BULL'S HEAD

Sukhumvit Soi 33/1, (Skytrain Phrom Phong) 11:30am-1am, www.greatbritishpub.com, Tel: 02-259 4444, major cards

This is a British pub full of mostly expat Brits looking for a little taste of home. Comfort food for the needy. Thursday nights are Accumulator – win up to Bt18,000, Saturday and Sunday feature First Half Happy Hour, half price pints for the first half of every football game and Sunday nights are Toss the Boss until 7pm.

SAN REMO (ITALIAN PIZZERIA)

253/2 Sukhumvit Soi 31 (Skytrain Phrom Pong) Mon-Fri, 6pm-11pm, Sat-Sun, midday-11pm, www.dininginthailand.com/sanremo.asp, Tel: 02-258 6919, major cards

A really authentic Italian pizzeria in the heart of the 'Kok, boasting a wood-fired pizza oven and imported mosaics to boot. San Remo has a curious Mediterranean al fresco feel without actually being al fresco.

Around 40 different pizza toppings (Bt235-285) such as good old heart-stopper, four seasons, and Gioiosa (mozzarella, small prawns, green peas, smoked salmon and Italian parsley) and a wide selection of pastas (Bt175-195) like Penne Treviso (penne pasta in cream sauce, Speck, raddicchio salad, parmesan cheese). Also worth trying is the anti-pasti selection which includes some delicious roast vegetables and prosciutto. Pick 'n' mix and sharing between mates is the best option.

NOVOTEL SIAM SQUARE

Siam Square Soi 6 (Skytrain Siam), 6am-10am, 11:30am-3pm, 6:30pm-10:30pm, major cards, www.novotelbkk.com, Tel: 02 225 6888

Right in the heart of Thai teenybopper land and housing three restaurants under one roof – Lok Hin Wah (Chinese), Focaccia (Italian) and Chistera (international). The latter is the perfect place to stuff your face at the lunch-time buffets, only Bt430++, Mon-Sat. Sunday brunch (Bt519) is highly recommended. Or get Dim Sum-ed at Lok Hin Wah's all you can eat lunch for Bt388 until 2:30pm.

NABE YA (JAPANESE)

2nd Fl., Pathumwan Princess Hotel, 444 Phayathai Rd, 11am-10:30pm, Sat-Sun buffet 11:30am-2:30pm, Tel: 02-216 3700 ext. 20226, www.pprincess.com, major cards

Well placed for a Nipponese nosh up after braving the hoards of teenage girls at MBK, and realizing you've bought armfuls of crap you don't really want. All the usual Japanese fare such as sushi, sashimi and tempura dishes as well as their speciality, hotpots, so it's a good idea to come with friends. Decent buffets available here and at neighbouring Korean restaurant Kongju.

AMARANTH (ORGANIC FUSION)

545 Sukhumvit Soi 31 (Skytrain Phrom Phong) 11:30-2:30pm, 6:00-10:00pm, www.health-at-ease.co.th, Tel. 02-662 0795, major cards

Organic and stylish, with not a dirty hippy in sight. The menu is a health-giving cocktail of Asian and western tastes which means interesting, inventive dishes (minus the unwanted chemicals), such as 'Amaranth salad with roasted polenta' or 'poached fillet of beef with wasabi mash.' Main courses range from Bt220-480. These can be washed down with a range of fresh fruit and veggie juices, organic coffees and herbal teas, or a selection of wines including some organic varieties.

TAMARIND CAFÉ

(VEGETARIAN FUSION)

27 Sukhumvit Soi 20, Tel. 02-66 7421, Fax. 02-663 4261

One of the few decent veggie restaurants in this town of carnivorous beasts. Some extremely tasty and innovative vegetarian dishes with a fusion of international flavours and foodstuffs. They're also known for their variety of fruit shakes, smoothies and wide selection of teas. Rooftop dining area for romantics and photographic gallery, F-stop on site.

DA GIOVANNI

ITALIAN TRATTORIA
Homemade Pasta
and Pizza House
Italian Chef

(Behind Bamboo bar)

71/1 Sukhumvit Rd., Soi 3, Nana Nua, Bangkok 10110 Thailand



HIMALI CHA CHA (INDIAN VEGETARIAN)

Three outlets: Silom Soi Convent (Skytrain Sala Daeng); New Road, Bang Rak; and Sukhumvit 35 (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 11am-3:30pm 6pm-10:30pm, major cards

First established in 1979 by Cha Cha, chef to the rich and famous. Now in the hands of his son Kovit, who has another outlet in Silom. Specialising in North Indian, Mughlai Muslim and vegetarian food. Try the specials from the tandoor, at Bt140 for half a chicken you'll still have cash to knock a few back in one of the nearby pubs.

TSUNAMI (JAPANESE)

Lower Lobby, JW Marriott, 4 Sukhumvit Rd, 11:30am-2:30pm 6pm-10:30pm, Sake bar until 1am Fri & Sat, www.tsunamibangkok.com, Tel: 02-656 7700, major cards

Making waves on the Bangkok dining scene (excuse the pun) with its distinctive style and no-expense-spared design. Set in the newly refurbished lower lobby of the Marriott on Sukhumvit road, Tsunami (meaning 'giant wave') is actually two restaurants in one—Tsu and Nami. Tsu specialise in more classical Japanese grub served by kimono clad staff whilst Nami is less formal, offering a large selection of more innovative, fun dishes.

WITCH'S OYSTER BAR & RESTAURANT (OYSTER BAR, SEAFOOD & GRILL)

20/20-21 Ruamrudee Village, Ploenchit Road (Skytrain Ploenchit), 11am-2pm 5pm-10pm, www.witch-tavern.com, Tel: 02-255 5354, major cards (except Diner's)

If you want to get your date in the mood without the use of Rohipnol, this is the place. The only oyster bar we're aware of in Bangkok, it has an international range of the slippery aphrodisiacs imported from Australia and other Euro-style seafood. They also serve up some delicious British dishes such as roast rib of beef, stilton soup and lobster with orange and port sauce. Plenty of wines and malt whiskies for quality quaffing. Happy hour 5pm-8pm

NIGHT FOOD MARKET (THAI/CHINESE)

Soi 38 (Skytrain Thonglor)

This comes from far and wide to eat at this collection of gourmet street vendors. A cut above the usual but still dirt cheap, you can pick up dishes from different stalls and sit wherever you want. Must tries are the *ba mii keow naam* (wheat noodle soup with red, marinated pork and wontons), the super-tender braised pork leg (*khao ka moo*), and chicken satay. Stuff yourself senseless for under Bt100 before moving on to one of the nearby bars or clubs.

LA GRITTA (ITALIAN)

Sukhumvit Soi 19, (Skytrain Asoke), 6pm-11pm, Tel: 02-255 7350, major cards

This well-known, welcoming restaurant delivers imaginative dishes with an emphasis on authentic Italian flavours and fresh ingredients. A great value lunch buffet (Bt250 per head) for salad and pizza or pasta, as well as monthly and weekly promotions and set menus. The a-la-carte

menu covers all bases with classic and creative Italian dishes and vegetarian options; Bt600/head is enough for a good feed (excluding wine). Happy hour 6-7pm.

LARRY'S DIVE (AMERICAN/MEXICAN)

8 Sukhumvit Soi 22 (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 10am-1am, www.larrysdive.com, Tel: 02-663 4563, Visa, Master cards

A beach-styled bar and restaurant complete with tropical fish murals and even a dive shop on premises. Popular with expats, Larry's is a great place for beer drinking, pool shooting, catching up on the latest gossip and stuffing down some of the excellent BBQ ribs, nachos, burritos and such (Bt75-250). Happy hour 4-8pm.

AUBERGE DAB (FRENCH)

Ground Fl. Mercury Tower (Skytrain Chidlom) 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30pm-10:30pm, Tel: 02-658 6222-3, major cards

Fine French dining with fine prices to match. In true Parisian style, Auberge has built up a reputation for excellent food and service. Entrees include such delights as Atlantic salmon marinated in Chablis with a lemon and orange *jus* (Bt280), while mains like pan-seared red grouper with fennel and potato confits, white wine and salmon egg sauce go for Bt420 up. Also has an extensive wine list and some classic French desserts such as crepes suzette and profiteroles.

MALAYSIAN AUNTIE (MALAYSIAN/INDIAN)

Sukhumvit Soi 8 (first alleyway on the left) (Skytrain Nana), 10am-11pm

A hidden gem off Sukhumvit Soi 8 with fantastic and cheap Indian/Malaysian grub. Wonderfully spiced creamy curries for around Bt100, an ample selection of breads (rotis, nans and chapathis only Bt15) and rice, washed down with homemade lassis. Judging by the frantic work going on in the kitchen, everything is pretty much made to order, a rarity amongst Indian restaurants. A good choice for vegetarians and meat lovers alike. A Thai menu also available.

ATHENA (GREEK)

594 Ekamai Rd, Sukhumvit Soi 63. (Skytrain Ekkamai), Mon-Fri, 3pm-midnight Sat 11am-midnight, www.athenabangkok.com, Tel: 02-392 7644, major cards except JCB

To our knowledge the only Greek restaurant in Bangkok, with a real Greek chef to boot. Mediterranean decor, real olive oil, Greek wine and plate smashing on Friday and Saturday nights. Plenty of parking space on site.

BANGLAMPHU SHOSHANA

86 Chakraphong Road, next to the petrol-station, 10am-midnight, Tel: 02-282 9948, no cards

The best in Banglaphu for cheap Israeli/Middle-Eastern food. Generous portions of humous, falafel, red rice, hazilim, cucumber and tomato salad, schnitzel, pita, and lovely chips for Bt35-60. Aircon, and friendly. Great for vegetarians.

TAKETEI

Nana Plaza Inn, about 10 metres off Khaosan, 11:30am-1am, major credit cards.

With a Thai chef who has more than 30 years experience in preparing Japanese cuisine, fresh seafood brought in every afternoon, and a special section in the back with tatami mats, Taketei offers an authentic taste of Japan at a fraction of the usual price. Especially popular is the "Sushi Set" (Bt160), which comes with seven different kinds of sushi and three cucumber rolls. They have also created their own version of vegetarian rolls, serve up juicy steaks, green tea ice cream, and have 12 set menus on offer all day.

JOK POCHANA RESTAURANT

Samsen Soi 2, 6pm-4am (and beyond), Tel: 02-282 9396, no cards

This Thai-style seafood place has been feeding the faithful excellent food and late-night beers for well over a decade. Jok Pochana offers big prawns, crab sausage, steamed mussels, and decent prices — try the Bt60 *tom yum kung*, nature's tastiest hangover cure. More importantly for some, once the doors have closed on the bars of Khaosan, you can still sit on the street here eating and drinking until the wee, wee hours of the morning. A large Heineken is only Bt70 — only a couple of baht more than the shop.

HEMLOCK

56 Phra Athit Road, near Peachy guesthouse, 4pm to midnight, closed Sunday, Tel: 02-282 7507, no cards

Hemlock was the first of the "arts cafes" on Phra Athit Road and is still the most successful, because the food is excellent and cheap — in spite of its swanky appearance when you peer in longingly from outside. An unusual feature of the extensive menu is a selection of "Ancient" dishes like the "Grand Lotus Rice" (Bt80), with spiced rice cooked with prawn, pork, egg and Chinese sausage wrapped in a lotus leaf and served with a sweetish mint sauce.

Lovely stuff. They have some pretty inexpensive wines as well.

NA PHRA LAN

18 Na Phra Lan Road, 10am-10pm, closed on Sundays

"It's An Art Café" read the name cards for this restaurant, which is across the street from the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Housed in a beautiful old wooden building, the restaurant serves up plenty of dishes in the range of Bt40-60, such as "Rice with fried fish, garlic and pepper", and "Spicy, fluffy catfish salad." They also host regular exhibitions by apprenticing artists of nearby Silapakorn University, who tend to hang out upstairs in the smoking section. If you just want to stop in for a jolt of caffeine, they've got Brazilian coffee for Bt45.

LA CASA RISTORANTE (ITALIAN)

210 Khaosan Road, noon-midnight, Tel: 02-629 1627-8, major cards

La Casa's success is proof that Khaosan has gone upscale. Fastidiously decorated, it's a great place for backpacker couples on their anniversary. A bargain for the quality — a plate of pasta runs about Bt125. Menu includes pizza, pasta, calzone, steaks, a wine list and desserts. All the waiters are named Luigi.

RICKY'S COFFEE SHOP

22 Phra Arthit Road, 8am-Midnight daily, no cards

Probably the best baguettes in Banglaphu, for around Bt80 they include olives, salad, and olive oil. Even better for the cheese lovers among you with a choice of Danish blue, Dutch edam and regular cheddar cheeses plus ham, pastrami, salami, and more. A range of all-day breakfasts, good coffee, Thai and vegetarian dishes, too. To complete the picture, there's a rustic wooden interior with atmospheric photos of Peking from the '20s.



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NIGHTTRIPPING

Bangkok is rightly famous for its nightlife, offering all types and flavors of establishment, from old men selling beer from a wheelbarrow to mega-clubs, to the infamous sex-shows down at the 'Pong, and everything in between. Things are changing though, many punters are shocked by the 1-2am closing time (and that's if you're lucky). That's right and the only after-hours place is the street, but we like it down there. Also shocking is the no-ID no-entry policy, even if you're 80, so be sure to carry that PADI certificate or library card.

DRINKS LIST

SUKHUMVIT & AROUND

87
Conrad Bangkok, All Seasons Place, 87 Wireless Road, Tel: 02 690 9999, www.conradhotels.com, major cards
Slick and sumptuous club/bar/restaurant with a 'World Food/Global grooves' theme. Stuff yourself stupid, lounge on the sofas or dance all night to funky disco, reggae and hip-hop.

MYSTIQUE

Sukhumvit Soi 31 (Skytrain Phrom Phong), Tel: 02-662 2374, www.mystiquebangkok.com, amex visa & master cards

A truly sumptuous palace of a club based on a New York venue of the same name from back in the day (we were there of course). This three storied Bangkok version comes complete with five (yes FIVE) VIP areas overlooking the main dancefloor, a tank that used to have jellyfish but now has baby sharks, the very purple 'Purple Room' and a Moroccan rooftop area for chilling and sucking on sheisha pipes. Musical flavors vary from room to room and night to night including hip hop, funky house, drum 'n bass and eclectic world grooves. Bt650 on Friday and Saturday gets you in with two drinks, Sunday to Thursday no cover. Closed Monday.

TOKYO JOE'S

9-11 Sivaporn Plaza, Sukhumvit Soi 24 Opposite Ariston Hotel, Open 17.30 - 01.30 Tel: 02-661 0359, www.tokyojoesbkk.com, visa, master cards

Live music seven nights a week with the top blues, groove and soul bands in BKK on a rotating schedule. These include The Soi Dog Blues Band, Cannonball, Savannah on the weekends, Adam on Acoustic Blues every Monday, and TAB with traditional blues on Tues & Thurs. Small beers are Bt90, Bt150 for large beers. Mixed drinks go from Bt100-150. Mon-Sat and Sunday Blues jam special prices are Bt55 small beers and Bt100 large beers, with selected mixed drinks at Bt80.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELER'S TAVERN

Sukhumvit Soi 5, by Foodland, (Skytrain Nana) The upmarket sister to the pub we all know from Khaosan. And she's a bloody big sister at that. There's a big bar, a big screen, a big car rotating overhead and loads of pool tables. You're looking at a more American theme here rather than

Banglamphu's faux-London drinker and the place is more popular with middle-aged expats and teachers rather than young hipsters, but reasonably priced drinks and free Internet makes it worth a stop.

CONCEPT CM²

Basement, Novotel Siam Square (Skytrain Siam), Tel: 02-255 6888, www.cm2bkk.com, major cards

Hugely popular Novotel disco. Big and glitzy main room chock full of girls following whiskey bottles like moths to a light bulb. The resident DJ spins dance hits in between sets from cover band 'Too Close' (Friday to Wednesday). Get tanked early with the whiskey buffet from 9-10.30pm (Bt444 all you can drink). There's also Sensations karaoke for those who like the sound of their own voice. Pastel Lounge is the place to escape from the beats and relax. Free entry before midnight and a free drink for girls every Monday and guys every Tuesday. Spinning Hip Hop and R&B every night in the main room and The Boom Room are DJs Sit and Lek. December 15th the lobby lounge sees a charity night featuring six of Thailand's top jazz singers and carolers. All monies raised will be donated to foundations to assist Thailand's underprivileged children. Tickets Bt500 inc. two cocktails, performance starts 7pm. DJ Russel J hosts a Christmas Eve all nighter of '80s music at CM². Tickets Bt799 inc. two free drinks. New Year's Eve Glow Rave features special light shows and dance music and live music from band AFRIFORCE, Bt799 net inc. one free drink before 2 am, Bt550 and one drink thereafter.

Q BAR

34 Sukhumvit Soi 11. Take quick left at end of the soi. (Skytrain Nana) major cards, Tel: 02-252 3274, www.qbarbangkok.com, major cards except Diners

A stylish venue with black, padded walls reminiscent of a nuthouse for vampires. Consistently plays quality, butt-wiggling music and regularly features international DJs. Vodka lovers will enjoy the wide selection of brands, all kept chilled to perfect quaffing temperature or served at Bt100 in jelly form. Downstairs is for mingling while the upstairs lounge is for romancing, and loners can sulk on the open-air terrace. Bt500 cover after 10pm with two drinks. There's Globe Trippin' Monday (International Electric), Sugar & Spice Tuesday, Wednesday is Ghetto Fabulous, uniting Hip Hop and House, Meltdown Thursday, Frisky Friday (Freestyle), Saturday Night Fever (House) and finally, Beat Therapy



Alpha-male of the pool table for five games now...

Sunday (Hip Hop).

WITCH'S TAVERN

306/1 Sukhumvit 55, Soi Thonglor (between Soi 8 & 9), 11am-2.00am, Tel: 02-391 9791, visa, amex, www.witchstavern.com

Equally good for lounging or partying, the Tavern is pub style with matching menu (Bt85-700) items such as fish and chips, pies and steaks as well as Thai dishes. Regular and varied live bands playing everything from jazz to hip hop. Ladies night on Wednesday with free girl's drinks from 6pm to 10pm and bingo with cash prizes. Happy hour from 5-9pm.

RCA

Royal City Avenue (RCA), just off New Petchburi Road,

The place to be if you are young, Thai and out on the pull. RCA is a strip of clubs, pubs and bars. The crowd is very young and the music is generally appalling by anyone's standards. Most places have outside seating and indoor dancing such as the massive and massively popular Route 66. The big, booming Lucille club offers a more mature music policy with a variety of DJs and styles. Nearby discos Hollywood and Dance Fever (off Rachadapisek Rd) are gargantuan, whisky-soaked dance halls. Worth a look for those seeking a cultural experience.

FAITH CLUB

Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain Asoke), Tel: 02-261 3007 / 02-261 4446, faithclub@clubbers.net, major cards

Ultra-chic night spot resembling a Goth hero's hideout playing funk and chill out during the week and house and trance on the weekends. Very cool core residents hang-out. Upstairs is an intriguing glow-in-the-dark pool table. The week starts with

Chillout on Sunday, then Laid Back Mondays. Things pick up with Hip-Hop on Tuesday, Reggae on Wednesday then Techno Groove Thursday. The weekend sarts with Bigbeat Friday and climaxes with Party Uplifting Saturday. Happy hour all Tuesday and Thursday.

NARCISSUS

Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain Asoke) just behind Pegasus Club, Tel: 02-258 4805, major cards

Gaudy and glitzy to the point of being ostentatious. Monster mirror balls and chandeliers have you thinking Dirk Diggler and his crew will enter the massive, rhythmically pumping dance floor at any time. Great trance techno vibes will send you panting upstairs to one of the best chill-out lounges in Bangkok. Mega amounts of beautiful people on patrol. Bt500 cover gets you three drinks.

TAWANDANG

462/61 Rama 3 Rd, Tel: 02-678 1114-6, www.tawandang1999.com, major cards

Microbrewery and mega beer-hall, Tawandang was one of Bangkok's first pubs to brew their booze on-site. And what lovely booze it is. One can choose from weizen, lager, or dunken beers, all brewed to strict German purity standards by a real German brewmaster who pumps out up to 700,000 litres a year, by the half-litre for Bt100. The vast hall is also home to performers, ranging from Thai classical music, to popular indi bands and the good-old "sexy girl singing to a backing track" gig. To round it off, their menu of Thai food is delicious and reasonably priced. Not an easy place to get music from some fine musicians. The late nightly jazz session, beginning at around 11.00pm is worth going out of your way for.



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Free Heimlich maneuver demonstration

BROWN SUGAR

Soi Sarasin, Lumpini, Tel. 02-250-1826, major cards

A fabled jazz gig that's known around the world in the music business. In need of a little care and attention but serves up excellent jazz music from some fine musicians. The late nightly jazz session, beginning around 11pm, is worth going out of your way for. Small and intimate, it has hosted a number of international artists. Food and service, however, can be slow, so a dinner of local specialties at Ma Mout Ma Mao, two shops down, is in order. Happy hour 5-9:30pm.

AD MAKERS

51/1 Soi Lang Suan (Skytrain Chitlom + short walk), 5pm-1am, 02-652 1069

This is a very popular locals' hang out that also attracts a good following of expats. The outside suggests a more elegant venue than the beer hall-style operation within. There is a good bar, but that seems to be ignored in favor of the many bare wooden tables around the various areas. The food comes from an extensive menu which is predominantly Thai, although there are a few Farang dishes, including a pig hock, on offer. Ad Makers is clearly a place to chill-out and there are plenty of private bottles of JW Black behind the bar as testament to the regulars' preferences. The music is normally provided by one of the better Bangkok bands playing good covers with a strong rock bias.

HUNTSMAN PUB

Landmark Hotel Basement

(Skytrain Nana), Tel: 02-254 0404, major cards

Hunting may no longer be PC, but this pub in the basement of the Landmark Hotel is always correct. House bands are always a tight unit who perform well-arranged covers of contemporary music with great harmonies and, although, it's all a bit Radio 2, it goes well with the surroundings. When the band isn't playing, the central bar makes a good focal point and if you're a bit peckish you'll find a good menu of mostly pub grub. The Sunday brunch, featuring all the pub favorites is popular with residents and visitors alike. Happy hour 3-8pm

SAXOPHONE

3/8 Victory Monument on Phayathai Road (Skytrain Victory Monument), Tel. 02-246 5472, major cards, www.saxophonepub.com

Live blues, R&B, Jazz, Rock, Reggae and even Ska house bands enclosed in a woody, cozy wrapper seven nights a week, from around 8 or 9pm. Mostly a friendly Thai crowd with a few Farangs thrown in, it has long been a hang out for American Peace Corps volunteers when they take time out from saving the world to come to the big city. Arguably the best live music in town. Small beer for Bt120, no cover. Good Thai food.

BED SUPPERCLUB

End of Sukhumvit Soi 11 (Skytrain Nana) Tel. 02-651 3537, major cards, www.bedsupperclub.com

Classy, all-white nightclub that looks somewhat like a spaceship. At Bt500 (Tue, Fri, Sat) and Bt400 other days, it's not the cheapest place in town, but that gets you two drinks and keeps the riff-raff out. Opposite the dancing bit is the eating bit (hence the 'supper' in Supperclub) with set meals served at 8pm sharp. There's a full schedule of music, with Mondays being Breakbeat. Hip Hop is spun on Tuesday with Latin Percussive House



Wednesday, now rebranded 'model's night'. There is Hip Hop, Bangra and 2-Step on Thursday. The weekend starts with Deep Sexy or Pumping House on Friday, Soulful and Funky Tech-House for Saturday and Hip Hop 'vs' House Sunday nights.

IRISH EXCHANGE

1/5-6 Covent Road, just off of Silom (Skytrain Sala Daeng), Tel. 02-266 7160-11, major cards

Irish Pub, sports bar and restaurant catering to mixed crowd of expats, tourists and locals who've developed a taste for pub life. For the keeneow (stingy), alcoholic, footie fans or all of the above, Saturday is the official Tiger beer Premier League day with pitchers of Tiger Bt100 from 2pm-2am! Live music on Mondays and Thursdays with Lee Shamrock, and Friday night is party night with Celtic Colours. Good Sunday sessions can be had with live jazz and traditional roasts and the daily happy hour runs from 4-7pm.

THE DUBLINER IRISH PUB

440 Sukhumvit Road, between Soi 22 and 24, (Skytrain Phrom Pong), Tel. 02-204 1841, major cards, www.dublinerasia.com

A handsome, three-story structure with a regular pub on the ground floor and a lounge on the second floor, while upstairs are pool tables and a dart board. Always a crowd here, so the vibe is great. Standard draught beer is around Bt110 a pint. Excellent pub food with big portions. Women eat and drink for half price on Wednesdays.

CHEAP CHARLIE'S

Sukhumvit Soi 11, first soi on your left. (Skytrain Nana), no cards

Less a bar than a ramshackle lean-to surrounded by stools and a couple of outdoor tables. The place is a booze bonanza for budget drinkers. Buffalo skulls, phallic fetishes, fish mobiles, '60s hits and white fairy lights complete the decor.

SILOM

As home to the infamous Patpong and gay central Soi 4, one could say that Bangkok's CBD is a pretty sexy place. Fear not, however, there's plenty of room for normal people too and plenty of bars worth checking out.

RADIO CITY

Patpong Soi 1

Downstairs from Lucifer's, Radio City offers live music with plenty of seating and plenty of cold beer. But what people really come to see is Thai Elvis or Thai Tom Jones. If you're bummed out by all the touts inviting you to play ping-pong, this place is a welcome respite.

MUZZIK CAFÉ

Patpong Soi 1

The crossroads of Patpong 1 and Patpong 2 is a great place to sit, swirl and people/freak watch. It's been there forever and is a top spot for starting off the evening or finishing yourself off.

LUCIFERS

Patpong Soi 1, Tel: 02-2346902

Fight your way past "You see fucking show!" and "Hello, t-shirt!" and up the stairs to where the prince of darkness shakes his booty. This club is a stayer on the Bangkok carousel and has kept people dancing to House and



BAR BANGKOK

Wednesday 12th January
Ghetto Fabulous Presents




Kutmasa Kurt at Q Bar
Linkin Park, Beastie Boys, Red Hot Chili Peppers: Kutmasa Kurt has remixed toured or appeared with them all and many more. If Kurt's stock was measured by the number of remix request he gets it would make just about any fortune 500 co blush. His new album Redneck James has just dropped in the USA to big critical acclaim and he hits Q Bar Bangkok fresh off tour with the Chili Peppers. Don't miss the Funky Redneck, live and exclusive!

Wednesday 19th January
Ghetto Fabulous Presents



Two of London's top female DJs hit Bangkok to spin a range of funk, soul, house and hip-hop. These girls have rocked Ministry of Sound, Fabric, Egg, and Crash among others and their diverse style promises to be another Ghetto Fabulous classic.

Thursday 27th January



Bakery Music Showcase : The Remix Sessions
Top Bakery DJ's Kolar One (hip hop), Nalens Valens (house) & Dragon (drum & bass) serve up their remixed versions of Bakery Music classics, with some very special guest!

weekly resident dj schedule:
frisky fridays
dj joeki & guests - freestyle
saturday night fever
dj billy v. & guests - house
beat therapy sundays
dj's tul & buddy q. - r&b, hip hop
massive mondays
dj's tul, cayo - international
eclectic beats
sugar & spice tuesdays
dj's billy v. & joeki
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Trance and everything in between for years. It has a post-grunge feel and Bt120 drinks sets it apart from the slick sterility offered by most Bangkok clubs.

NORIEGA'S

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-233 2813, major cards

Small, modern two-level bar run by Frank, aka 'Frank Superstar' from his long-time involvement with the Superstar a-gogo in Patpong many moons ago. The small food menu is headed 'nfood menu' which just about sums up the mix of Thai, tex mex and international favourites. Downstairs the bar features prominently in this clean white space. Live music is currently provided seven days a week and this venue is one of the few in Bangkok to feature live blues every weekend from the city's premier blues outfits. Other nights feature jazz, latin and a range of bands catering to every taste.

TAPAS

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-234 4737, 02-632 0920, no cards

The leader in original funky House in Silom Soi 4, playing soulful House. Bt100 entry on weekends and Bt200 on Wednesday. Very crowded on weekends, the upstairs dance floor is intimate and sweaty. Outside seating lets you pose and see all the young, beautiful people as they pose right back at you. DJ Neng, DJ Wut are residents, with DJs Tee and Mike taking the spotlight on Fridays and Saturdays.

THE BALCONY

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-235 5891, www.balconypub.com, major cards

The best Happy Hour in Soi 4 offers cut-rate specials (Bt49) on cocktails and brewskies from 7pm-9pm. Sister bar of Telephone, the gay club across the road – with a phone on each table so you can court the girl or boy of your choice. This is also a good place to be served by boys in shorts or make new friends. Happy hour 6-8pm, house drinks Bt59.

TELEPHONE PUB & RESTAURANT

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-234 3279, www.telephonepub.com

Gay as Christmas, camp as a row of tents. Telephone has been a gay icon since 1987 and set the character for Soi 4 for the following decade. These days most of the soi has lost its pinkness, but Telephone remains fiercely homosexual. The pub also has food which can be consumed at tables out the front—perfect for watching peoples of the night flit from club to club.

SPHINX

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-234 7249, www.sphinxthai.com, major cards

Hidden at the shadowy end of Soi 4, this is the place to refuel. The menu maximizes on excellent Thai and Farang food. Broad cocktail menu along with ancient Egyptian-Godfather ambience is good for winning, dining and 69ing.

DISTIL

64th Fl., The Dome, State Tower, Silom Rd. Tel. 02 624 9555, 12pm-1.00am, major cards

Claiming to be Bangkok's only specialty bar, Distil encompasses an authentic malt whiskey bar, oyster bar, wine bar, cigar bar and outdoor terrace. Truly a bar to wallow in luxurious excess, one can stuff oneself on fine de claire oysters from France and beluga caviar from Iran, washed down by 42 Below vodka or one of a huge selection of single malt whiskeys, then finish off with a Cuban cigar on the outdoor terrace.

BANGLAMPHU

SILK BAR

Opposite Krung Thai Bank, Khaosan Rd, Tel. 02-629 4447, www.silkbars.com, major cards

Khaosan is definitely going upscale—any fool can see that—and the Silk Bar isn't even the newest trendy bar on the street. That said, the design gives a nod to the traditional style of bar featuring a large street-front drinkery for watching the parade of nations walking up and down the road. Beers aren't cheap, but you're definitely with a better class of people.

DONG DEA MOON BAR & RESTAURANT

54/1 Rambutri Rd (behind the Wat)

Otherwise know as "The Korean Bar" this place is popular with teachers and other expats on Fridays and Saturdays. Remarkable because it has stayed the same when so much around it has changed. The upstairs bar features free pool and an open-air balcony offering a view of the road and temple below. Excellent Korean food, grilled seafood and cool beers.

Café Democ

Corner of Ratchadamnoen Road beside Democracy Monument, Tel. 02-622 2571, no cards

Everything from Trance to Hip-Hop to the latest dance beats are on the musical menu, plus requests, in this good-looking, Euro-style venue. Menu has Thai dishes and small Thai beers for Bt80.

PRANAKORN

Just off Ratchadamnoen Klang Road, first Soi west of Thanon Tanoo, 58/2 Soi Damnoen Klang Tai, Tel. 02-522 0282, no cards

This bar is like four different venues in one: on the ground floor, replete with posters for old Marlon Brando and Elvis movies, the DJ plays retro rock and Jazz and there's often live Thai acoustic music. The second floor is an art and photography gallery that sometimes features live music and even theatre. On the third floor, there's more dancey and alternative tunes, along with a pool table and couches. Up top is the roof, with a great view of the illuminated Golden Mount, lots of tables, chilled-out tunes and classic tracks. One of the best things about this venue is the big menu of splendid and affordable Thai dishes. Booze is also

cheap. Considering the bar is close to Khaosan and Café Democ, it attracts a surprisingly low quota of white backpacking trash. The majority of the clientele are Thai Bohemians.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELLER'S TAVERN

Across from police station, Tel. 02-629 1988-9, major cards, www.gulliverbangkok.com

The pub with the tuk-tuk over the door on the corner of Khaosan. If you're aching for English football, Farang food or a shot of pool, this is your place. Generous happy-hours mean this place is usually packed with punters. The place has become popular with young Thais looking for close encounters, (careful, some of the women are men) but whatever your fancy, this place has the best air-con in Banglamphu. Now open upstairs as well with several tables for the serious pool player. Happy hour 3-9pm.

AD HERE THE 13TH

13 Samsen Road. Walk up Chakrapong Road from the Police Station end of Khaosan about 400 metres, cross the bridge over the canal and it's on your left. Can't miss it.

The great little blues bar with the strange name. The band, led by guitarist Pong and husky-voiced belting singer Georgia is better than ever now, even if the local constabulary are making the rounds with decibel meters they don't really know how to use. The people are friendly and mostly intelligent, and beers are Bt50-70.

LAVA CLUB

Downstairs at the Bayon building at the Buddy Lodge end of Khaosan Road, Tel. 02-281 6565, no cards

Every night 8pm until 2am. Just the place for the lounge too lazy or frightened to explore greater Bangkok. This comfy black and red replication of Hades plays mostly

hip hop through an excellent state-of-the-art sound system to a crowd of Thai and International get down and boogyers.

SUNSET STREET

Bang in the middle of Khaosan Rd

The stylish looking Sunset Street is unmissable under its big neon sign, with the front bar being set over two levels for maximum street gawking. Stroll inside though, and you'll find this place goes on, and on, and on. Past the shiny white lounging area in the front you'll find a nightclub, restaurant, another bar and a fountain, set in front of a beautifully restored, century-old building housing a Starbucks and an art gallery. In all, the design is stylish, the prices are decent and it's a nice place to hang out. No wonder the place has its own street sign.

IMMORTAL BAR

First floor in Bayon Building on Khaosan, no cards

The Immortal's fortunes have waxed and waned over the years but is currently in favour as a Hip-Hop club. The DJ tends to play similar sets each night but look out for visiting performers. Despite its underground vibe, the place is packed out every night with backpackers and Khaosan's crazier denizens, bumping and pitching in a seething, sweaty mass.

THE CLUB

Under the huge neon sign, about halfway up Khaosan on the north side, Tel. 02-629 1010, visa cards

This cavernous, Euro-style architectural wonder is a hit with the young Thais who populate Khaosan at night – especially on weekends. Few Farangs in sight here. Features an extensive Thai and Western menu, including hefty steaks at relatively reasonable prices. Live bands from 9pm.

EAT IT LIVE

January's a good month for Bangkok and a fine month for Bangkok music. Things start off with a bang on Samui with the **Samui Island Blues and World Music Festival** that runs from December 28th to January 6th. Speaking of the blues, this is a good chance to plug Bangkok's blues scene, which takes place nightly at **Ad Here the 13th** in Banglamphu, **Noriega's** in Silom Soi 4 and **Tokyo Joe's** in Sukhumvit. Fine fun for all. For Indie music this month, do check out the **Asoke Bar** on Saturday the 7th to see **Factor 2 Grace** from Japan, **Custom Daisy**, lately of Malaysia, fellow Malaysians **Elisabelle Tears** and locals **From the Makers of Casablanca** and **Analyne**. On the following Sunday, you can listen to Pack of Switzerland, **SOL** from Germany and **Piss Christ** from Australia at the good old Rock Pub. But of course the big news is that shock-rock **Marilyn Manson** is coming to Bangkok to shock and rock at Impact Arena on the 25th.



T. 02 234 4737, 02 632 7883 / www.tapasroom.com "Best Bar in Bangkok" Metro High Five Awards 2003

SUZIE PUB

108/5-9 Khaosan Road. Down the Soi from Nat Guesthouse, Tel. 02-282 4459, no cards.

Once a rock and dance club shared by tourists and Thais alike, today you'll be lucky to squeeze through the crush of Thai students, clustering around whiskey bottles and wriggling to Hip-Hop. The bar out the front is a fine place to drink a beer and ogle the queue.

THE BANGKOK BAR

149 Soi Rambutree, just off Chakrapong Road, Tel. 02-629 4443, visa, master cards

Cool juxtaposition between Thai wood carvings, murals, paintings and contemporary grooves, Hip-Hop and D&B. Come midnight on the weekends, the place is usually so full you'd almost need an electric cattle-prod to belly up to the bar. Lady's night on Tuesday from 5-10pm.

BAGHDAD CAFÉ

On Samsen Road next to Ad Here the 13th

Great little sheesha bar. If you've never smoked sheesha (a traditional Arabic bong) before, you haven't really lived. The pipe is loaded with fruit-flavoured tobacco and you and your mates take turns pulling smoke through the hose. Since it's small, the bar is always crowded and Roachie, the affable Australian host, is always on for a chat and has an encyclopaedic knowledge of all things Middle-Eastern. Bt120 buys you a charged and lit bong which will last you and your mates for an hour or more. But leave the wacky-weed at home, kids.

BRICK BAR

Back of Buddy Lodge on Khaosan Rd, Tel. 02-629 4747, 02-629 4848, www.buddylodge.com, major cards except amex

Huge bar hidden in the bowels of Buddy Lodge. The Brick Bar is notable as one of the few venues on Khaosan to feature live bands on a regular basis (Jazz, Blues, Ska from 8pm). Get a seat on the upstairs balcony to check out the crowd, below.



Acoustic rocker and former colosomy bag user, Speedy Crackhead

Q BAR'S BUSY JANUARY

Following their fifth birthday party last month, they're saying 'thanks for the presents' in January. Things start out with a bang on **Ghetto Fabulous** night, Wednesday the 12th, with trucker **DJ Kutmasta Kurt**. "Hip Hop's current state is mass consumerism. Everyone eats at Mc Donald's. It's like buying a Jay Z record. But real taste is found in finer restaurants, which is like buying a Kutmasta Kurt album. Tired of the stale hamburgers in Rap, step up to a fillet mignon," says wildman Kurt. Next week, on Wednesday the 19th, Radio One's femme fatales **Kinky D** and **Philly** spinning tidy grooves. Thursday the 20th sees the official

Bangkok Film Festival

after party, a good chance to rub shoulders with the stars. Next Thursday on the 27th Qbar hosts the second **Bakery Records'** showcase with **DJs Kolor One, Nolens Volens** and **Dragon** and the month finishes up with Radio One's **Bobby Friction** going head to head with **DJ Cavo** of DDP on Wednesday the 29th.



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NEAR BANGKOK

IN KANCHANABURI

AU NATUREL



retty much the last town before the Burmese border, Kanchanaburi boasts pristine, untouched jungle teeming with wildlife, and hosts the world's smallest mammal – the pug-nosed bat – as well as the world's largest cave column.

PLACES TO CRASH:

On arrival at the main bus station, negotiate for a samlor or motorcycle taxi to take you to the river area (Mae Nam Kai Road) for Bt30-50. Here you'll find the best in budget accommodation and amongst them is the **Apple Guesthouse** next to the intersection of Mae Nam Kwae and Nam Hip Oi Road. Built under a huge mango tree, this friendly guesthouse offers clean and airy single bungalows with fan and bath for Bt150 a night and doubles for Bt200. The guesthouse restaurant is excellent and offers cooking courses for those who can't get enough. Too bad it's usually full. A couple of hundred metres north along the same road is the larger and busier **Jolly Frog Guesthouse** at 28 Soi China. There are 50 rooms in this bamboo motel, along with a good tourist information service and a popular restaurant. Rooms range from singles with shared bath (Bt70) to doubles with A/C and bath Bt290.

A hundred metres or so along the same road is the quieter and smaller **Sugar Cane One guesthouse** (Soi Pakistan, Mae Nam Road). Raft rooms with private bath and veranda go for Bt200-400. A pleasant restaurant with friendly staff overlooks the river. Nearby and set off the road on the banks of the River Kwai is the **C & C River Kwai Guesthouse** (Soi Angrit). Here you'll find singles with shared bath for Bt60 and doubles with bath for Bt120. The grounds are green and spacious and it's a fine spot for taking a dip in the famous River Kwai. There are lots more choice places to stay along this strip, like **Sam's Guesthouse** – fan rooms have screen windows so they can

be noisy; air-con bungalows on the river go for Bt350.

DAYTRIPPING:

Mountain biking, hilltribe treks, cookery courses, elephant camps, standing around scratching your balls, or war-casualty-memorialising, there should be something for every journey-man or woman from the Rhodes scholar to the lowbrow cretin. There are numerous daytrips (Bt400-900) to choose from and most guesthouses have their own tour operators. A typical daytrip includes a visit to the **Death Railway** and **Hellfire Pass** (80km's northwest) along with elephant rides, bamboo rafting and a dip beneath the **Soi Yak Waterfall**. Many tour operators, including Apple and Jolly Frog, now offer over-night treks that supposedly "penetrate the heart of the jungle to find refuge in a traditional Karen village," where, no doubt, all the tourists' needs will be catered for. Alternatively, hire a motorcycle or bicycle for Bt150-250, pick up a map from the tourist information centre around the corner from the bus station on Saengchuto Street and make up your own tour.

A worthwhile afternoon trip is the **Tiger Temple**. Most tour operators can sort out a pick-up truck taxi (Bt150, leaves around 3pm) to take you 50km west to the temple, where tigers roam free under the watchful eye of the temple's abbot, who keeps them calm while a pack of tourists tentatively stroke and photograph the fearsome creatures. The tigers were born in captivity, abandoned or rescued by the monk as cubs. Though they may appear docile and friendly don't step on their tails or wear red. A sign at the entrance informs



Helga takes her retarded cousin out for his birthday

visitors that the authorities bear no responsibility for injury or death.

The **JEATH War Museum** on Pak Phraek Road contains replicas of the long bamboo huts used to house allied POW's during the occupation and within the bamboo huts are crude but effectively crafted life-size models of starved and emaciated POW's struggling to survive. Open from 8:30am till 6pm daily, the admission is Bt30.

Just south of the famous bridge on the river is the newer **WWII Museum** containing such relics as 106 skeletons unearthed from a mass grave of Asian labourers and placed in a glass cage.

A museum called the **Thailand Burma Railway Center** opened last year in Kanchanaburi, with elaborate displays telling the horrific story of how the railway was built. The centre, located on the western side of the war cemetery, is open from 9am till 5pm and admission is Bt60. For more information see www.tbrconline.com

NIGHTRIPPING:

There are still floating discos and karaoke bars on the river, but

they're now limited to weekends and have an 11pm curfew imposed upon them by locals who need to sleep. However, there are a number of new bars sprouting up in the spaces between the tour operators and guesthouses on Mae Nam Kwai Road. Amongst them is the **Pecko Bar** where the beer flows till the early hours.

Another popular bar on this road is the **Snooker Bar** where you can watch Hollywood films while drinking and eating good-value food. The **Beer Barrel**, further up the road, is a beer garden with a rustic atmosphere and good prices. If you're looking for something flashier, along with a game of Connect Four and some bar-girls, go to **Pen Bar**.

WAY TO GO:

Public Bus: Bt79 from the southern bus terminal, leaving every 20 minutes.

Train: Trains leave the Thonburi Station. Bt24 in hard class; leaves at 10:55am and 4:35pm; takes about three hours.

HIT THE NORTH

CHIANG MAI

It's getting cool. Thais start wearing balaclavas to bed. Aircon becomes superfluous. Days are sunny and dry and not too roasting, so take a walk down the winding sois of the "old city" inside the the quadrangle of moats and centuries-old brick walls, to see how the locals live. The more you lose your way, the more liable you are to find the 'real' Chiang Mai. Everyone who lives here, both Thai and foreigner moans about the traffic being so bad, but they get no sympathy from anyone who has been to Bangkok recently. Ten minutes on a motorbike or twenty in a car and you're hitting countryside. Chiang Mai combines the advantages of a good-sized city with plenty of jungle and babbling brooks nearby.

PLACES TO CRASH:

Offerings range from cheap dorms at Bt50 a night to plushly furnished aircon rooms for Bt1,000-2,000 – it's not an expensive town. Guesthouses are all over the place with most around Tha Phae Gate. Don't sign up for a trek until you shop around.

INSIDE THE OLD CITY

Cheap: The city's cheapest crash pads huddle along Moon Muang Soi 9, inside the northeast quadrant of the moat. **Supreme GH**, 44/1 Moon Muang Soi 9, has a loyal following - Bt150-250. Sois nearby yield bargains as well. **Blue Diamond**, 35/1 Moon Muang Soi 7, is exceptionally well run and has a good veg restaurant downstairs - Bt150. Other sois stacked with guesthouses include Moon Muang Soi 2 (**Top North** is popular, mainly for its tiny swimming pool – Bt400) and Ratchadamnoen Soi 5.

Comfort and Style: Head for **Gap's House**, 3 Soi 4, Ratchadamnoen Rd, a cluster of old Lanna-style houses, plus a more modern longhouse, furnished with local antiques, all aircon, Bt250-400 including breakfast. The nightly Bt80 Thai veg buffet is legendary. At the higher end, join the celebs who gather at the **Tamarind Village**, 50/1 Ratchadamnoen Rd, a quiet oasis in the heart of the old city, Bt6,000

and up. Rooms in the five-star hotels (and there are a bunch of them) range from Bt1,000 upwards.

OFF THA PHAE ROAD

Daret's House, 4/5 Chaiyaphum Rd, is ordinary but fine. Service is efficient and it's big, a good bet when others are full – Bt100-140. **Roong Ruang Hotel**, perfectly positioned to take in festival parades at the end of Tha Phae Rd, has large rooms with verandas around a courtyard, Bt250-400B, some with air-con.

NEAR THE NIGHT BAZAAR

Baan Kaew Guest House, on Charoen Prathet Rd next door to the Alliance Francaise, does just about everything right: fans and aircon in the same room, fresh mossie coils outside the door every night, and friendly front desk, Bt350-450.

DAYTRIPPING:

TEMPLES:

Chiang Mai reputedly has 400 of these, mainly in the old city quadrangle. Most notable are **Wat Chiang Man**, the oldest in town, **Wat Chedi Luang**, with its 60 metre chedi, and **Wat Phra Singh** with murals of life in ye olde days.

MARKETS:

Near Chinatown, **Warorot Market**



(*kaat luang* in local parlance, off Chang Moi [sic] Road) has hawked silks, housewares and foodstuffs since the 19th century. **San Pa Khoi Market** (off Charoen Muang Road on the way to the railway station) has food and cheap secondhand clothes; excellent for green curry after midnight. The **Night Bazaar** lines both sides of Chang Khlan Road every night selling baubles and trinkets for tourists. Head to **Crazy Horse Buttress**, an eye-popping limestone cliff-and-cave complex east of town, and scale one of nearly 70 bolted routes. Or call **Chiang Mai Rock Climbing Adventures** (tel: 06-911 1470) for guided trips or instruction. The **Chiang Mai Museum** on the Superhighway displays lots of religious artifacts from the area. Prep for your trek at the **Tribal Museum** in nearby Ratchamangla park. In the modern western suburbs of Chiang Mai, **Gongde Gallery** off Nimmanhem Rd hosts exhibitions of Thailand's top artists, as does Chiang Mai University's **Art and Culture Museum** at the corner of Nimmanhem and Suthep roads. Everyone heads up Doi Suthep to **Wat Phra Thai Doi Suthep**. Sunset is the best time; the crowds are gone and the monks are out chanting. If you're curious about Buddhism, attend the meditation and dhamma talk session with western monks on Sunday afternoons at 3pm at **Wat U Mong**. Or travel further down the same road to **Wat Ram Poeng**, and spend 26 days practising meditation

with an English-speaking teacher. Countless companies offer treks out of Chiang Mai, and most of them offer similar itineraries and prices. Treks booked at guesthouses tend to skimp on important things like blankets and food. One reliable standalone agency is **Trekking Collective**, Ratchawithi Road.

FEEDING TIME

Ratana's Kitchen (tel: 06-320 322 Tha Phae Rd) does inexpensive Thai dishes geared to Farang palates, plus comfort foods like sandwiches, steaks and pancakes. **Art Cafe** (corner of Tha Phae & Kotchasan, opposite Tha Phae Gate) is the spot to camp, in air-conditioned comfort, when your group can't agree on what to nosh, as the menu covers Thai, American, Italian and Mexican.

The city's claim to noodle fame is *khao soi*, a bowl of squiggly egg noodles doused with a mild Shan-Yunnanese curry. *Khao soi* comes in many styles in Chiang Mai, but for the original head to **Khao Soi Fuang Fah** (Soi 1, Charoen Prathet Rd, near the Ban Haw Mosque); the *khao mok kai* (chicken biriyani) here is cheap and filling, too. For the fanciest version in the city, try the huge platter of khao soi and associated condiments served at **Just Khao Soi**, Charoen Prathet Rd. At **Heuan Soonthari** enjoy the atmospheric wooden house with a river view, decent Thai grub from the North and Northeast and live Northern Thai music by its greatest living proponent, owner Soonthari Wetchaynon. Carrot-

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heads can choose from 35 vegetarian restaurants. The best and also the cheapest is the **Vegetarian Centre** of Chiang Mai at 14 Mahidon Road, on the way to the airport, open Sun-Thurs, 6am-2pm. Veggie Thai doesn't come any better or any cheaper than this. We know you're missing spicy curries from the deep south (Thailand, that is), so give your tongue another thrashing at **Khrua Phuket Laikhram** (1/10 Suthep Rd, opposite the south side of CMU). Try the *khao phat po taek*, 'broken fishtrap fried rice,' made with mixed seafood and slivered kaffir lime leaves. Farang food is no problem at all – and much cheaper than Bangkok. Build your own sandwich or baguette at the **Amazing Sandwich** (252/3 Phra Pokklao Rd), a minute's walk from the THAI city office. **Da Stefano** (2/1-2 Chiang Moi Kao Rd), just 'round the corner from Tha Phae Gate, is a popular Italian restaurant, with rustic-chic ambience, efficient service, and delicious pastas and pizza. If you're on a strict budget, head for the much cheaper, Thai-owned **Italian Lang Mo** (the name means "Italian Behind the University"), down a tiny alley on the south side of Suthep Rd. Skip the pizza and go for some of the best pastas you'll find in Chiang Mai. **Jerusalem Falafel** (35/3 Moon Muang Rd) does Jewish mother-style home-cooked falafels, chicken-liver sandwiches, salads and home-made pastries.

NIGHTRIPPING:

While there's a clutch of seedy hostess bars bordering the east moat and especially along Loi Kroh Road, and a few gay bars around town, Chiang Mai's nightlife can't compete with Bangkok's for debauchery. Nevertheless, the city is lively after dark. Expect closing times to be 1am (or sometimes earlier these days) despite national entertainment laws allowing bars in 'tourist centres' to stay open 'till 2am. Chiang Mai police are notoriously corrupt. Tourists and Chiang Mai University students shimmy the night away to live Farang pop at **Riverside Bar**



BOOK BONANZA

When George first moved to Chiang Mai a decade or so back, there was only one used bookstore and the selection was largely limited to airport novels by trash-maestros like Tom Clancy and Danielle Steele. An omnivorous reader and fan of authors like Kurt Vonnegut Jr. and Russell Banks, Tom Robbins and Charles Bukowski, he opened Gecko Books.

From these humble origins the shop has grown, and recently doubled its size and selection, to become one of the best-stocked second-hands book shops in all of SE Asia. Not only are the prices as cheap, or cheaper than anywhere else, but they offer decent prices and trade-ins, too. Recently, George started a second store called Thapae Gate Books, in front of the city's main landmark. Though it's smaller than Gecko, it stocks some different titles, and is becoming just as popular. Both stores have tons of general fiction, New Age and Buddhist titles, as well as books about SE Asian history, biographies, true crime, and books in different languages.

& Restaurant (9-11 Charoenrat Rd) where you can also dine on Western and Thai food on candlelit terraces by the water. In the same 'hood, local blues-rock guitar hero Took burns it up at **Le Brasserie** (37 Charoenrat Rd) from 11pm onwards, but the warm-up bands aren't bad either. **UN Irish Pub** (Ratwitahi Rd) is developing a reputation amongst the city's literati for their twice monthly open mic poetry readings, usually on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month beginning at 8pm (all readers get a free beer). Contact *spokenwordcm@hotmail.com* for info. You don't have to sport dreads to enjoy open-air, fairy-lit **Rasta Cafe** (off Ratchaphakhinai Rd), where travellers trade yarns around the ever-burning campfire whilst cruising the musical hippie trail from Marley to Manu Chao. Across from the Rasta Cafe, long-term visitors drown their visa woes in buckets-of-joy **Heaven Beach**, which does live music on weekends. At the **Drunken Flower** (Mao Dok Mai, Soi 1, Nimanhem Rd near Kad Suan Kaew) NGOers and young, socially mobile Thais mix at the tables outside, while regular drunks prop up the bar or lounge on tattered sofas inside. Owner Dai has a good CD archive of R&B and classic rock. Ask him to crank it up, it's never loud enough. The tiny **Pinte Blues Pub** (Moon Muang Rd) is one of the city's longest-standing watering holes, and an ideal spot for a chat over cheap drinks with a backdrop of

possibly the best recorded blues collection anywhere in Thailand.

PAI

Shan-and-hilltribe mountain town, add a live music scene, a sprinkling of new-age hippies who think this is some sort of 'power spot' and Pai pops out of the ground. Drawn by fresh air, endless forest walks, real whitewater rafting and idyllic hot springs, Pai's original close-knit community of back-to-nature Thais and O-puffing expats have transformed themselves into entrepreneurs to serve the backpacking troops – and it is starting to move upscale.

PLACES TO CRASH:

Pai River Lodge, Bt100 and **Baan Tawan GH**, Bt200-300, both on the river towards the east side of town are choice cheapies. Across the river towards the hot springs, **Sun Hut** scatters thatched huts around a garden, and adds a treehouse – Bt200-450. **Mr Jan's Bungalows**, Soi Wanchaloem 18, is favoured by the healing set for Jan's massage teachings and the herbal baths on heavily-foliaged grounds; Bt80-200. **Rim Pai Cottage**, Chaisongkhram Rd, offers more upmarket room and

A-frame cottages, Bt500-800 including breakfast.

DAYTRIPPING:

The tie-dyed squad tends to sleep all day and play all night, but if you do manage to get up while the sun's out, you'll find mom-and-pop shops offering treks, elephant rides and river rafting at practically every corner. For massage aficionados, one of the best places to get pummelled in the kingdom is **Pai Traditional Massage**, Sukhapiban 1 Rd, Bt150/hr.

NIGHTRIPPING:

Everything centres around **Bebop Cafe** (Rangsiyanon Rd, opposite the Tourist Police), where Chart's house R&B band gets a buzz on nightly. Or rack out on the floor cushions at **Edible Jazz**, opposite Wat Pa Kham, sip tea and work your way through Kung's tasty jazz archives. When all the bars have closed, insomniacs head for **Bamboo**, a rickety open-air restaurant next to the Pai River where everyone does exactly what they would do in any bar, except the owners have a restaurant license so they can stay open all night.

FEEDING TIME:

Most of the restaurants in Pai are hard to get excited about. Reliable choices include the ages-old **Nong Beer**

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W e've all had those dreams, the ones about swinging in a hammock watching the palm trees waving over a white sand beach while you sip a tequila or enjoy a massage from a beautiful man or woman. Well dream no more because January is the best time to visit Thailand's beaches as we're blessed with sunny days and cool breezes. Of course, most of the beach masseuses are old men or ladies so you'll have to bring your own beautiful one with you.

This really is the best time to visit any of the seaside spots so it's difficult to give a particular recommendation, although you may find some of the smaller places somewhat crowded. Places like Koh Phi Phi, which is constrained by the amount of land available, may be full-up so, unlike the rest of the year, it's recommended that you book ahead. Of course the larger resort centres such as Phuket or Pattaya always have rooms.

On a more sober note, it's at this time that visitors to Thailand have the nasty habit of hiring motorcycles and riding them about like dickheads before crashing into a ditch. On average one tourist a day goes home from Thailand in a box and traffic is the leading slayer, usually as a result of drunkenness and inexperience. So please be careful on island roads. Men please keep your shirts on while riding as well.

KOH CHANG

The name in Thai means "Elephant" and contrary to popular myth, this island is not named after a popular alcoholic beverage. Koh Chang is a relative newcomer to mainstream tourism and the addition of an airport on the mainland opposite is bringing heaps of sun hedonists. That said, much of the island remains less developed than many other popular islands, and to be frank, it ain't party central – which many see as a good thing. Excellent white sand, and the little sea critters on the beaches can provide excellent nighttime entertainment. It's only a few hours by road from Bangkok so on a weekend accommodation becomes tight and prices go up.

KOH TAO

Tao is probably best known as the diving Mecca for divers. Generations of young and keen Cousteaus have ventured below the briny blue, pursuing their PADI Open Water certificate. There are some more challenging dive sites in Thailand, though not nearly so convenient – and because of gentle currents, a solid infrastructure, and reasonable prices, this is one of the best places in the region to get started. Most of the shop owners have formed a dive association that is now working with some success to preserve the sites and open a few new ones, halt coral damage and such. Tao is a great place for whale sharks and the island itself is beautiful, with great food and a surprisingly lively party scene.

KOH SAMET

Ah, Koh Samet! A beautiful sand island and national park just a short motor from Bangkok. Don't worry about those malaria and rabies warnings; as a visitor you're pretty unlikely to pick up anything more than a tan. As the closest beach to Bangkok worth going to, Samet is popular with weekenders Thais, so rooms can be a bit short Saturday night and whenever there's a public holiday. But if you go midweek, you can enjoy empty beaches and cheap prices without the hassle of an overnight bus trip down south. Not much jungle interior to explore – it's really just a strip of white sand with sun, bungalows and bars on it, so it's perfect for quaffing, stuffing your face and relaxing – and little else.

KOH PHI PHI

Actually, the island where everyone stays is Phi Phi Don, the larger one, on a small stretch of flat land between two mountains in the sea. Why come to Phi Phi? Why not ask Roger Moore or Leonardo DiCaprio? Two films that have made the island group famous are *The Man with the Golden Gun* and *The Beach*, which were both shot here for the beautiful scenery. They're not the only ones though, as thousands of others like yourself come every year. An intimate sort of place, perfect for the latent hedonist in you. One thing though, is that sometimes in high season (from November to April), the fresh water supply runs a bit low, and the showers can be a bit brown. [In order to conserve water, FARANG magazine recommends defecating in a plastic bag and carefully packing it in your suitcase for later disposal.]



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KOH SAMUI

Once, years ago, Samui was a hippie traveller's playground. Back then there was only one bar on Chaweng, nobody shaved and the only thing anyone wanted was peace and love. Yup, 1999 was quite a year. But most of the 60's backpackers have grown up, put on shorts, socks and sandals, had a few kids and are back on Samui – now looking for peace and quiet. You can find that, but you can also find pizza places, nightclubs, Starbucks, tailor shops and all the other trappings of modern life. Some may hanker for the old days, but the beaches are still great and if you're honest with yourself, air-con room beats bamboo shack every time.

KOH PANGAN

"Hand me another mushie shake before these pills kick in, would you? And stop Bogarting that joint. Is that Harry lying in a puddle of sick over there? Oh my god! I think my face is melting!" Yup, Koh Pangan sure is a wild, drug-crazed, hedonistic pleasure boat for hippies, slackers and other layabouts. Home of the Full Moon Party and all, and you've heard what happens there!

Well, if that's your bag, man, you may be headed for disappointment. Things sure aren't like they used to be, and for most people it's good riddance. Sure, you can drink and dance all night at Had Rin on the full moon, but if the local coppers catch a whiff of draw or you're a little too artificially loved up, you're looking at an extended tour of Thailand's legal system.

The island boasts stunning beaches, good value rooms and a certain dreamy, isolated quality that has people staying for weeks at a time doing... absolutely nothing. Around full-moon time (check the Koh Pangan for the date of the next party) the island fills up and rooms are hard to get. There are also plenty of supporting parties to the full moon that are often better than the main event.

KRABI

Krabi province gives you three main places to hang out. Firstly there's Krabi town, which is the main hub and provider of cheap-and-crappy rooms for those on a budget, alongside a few swankier hotels. There's great Southern Thai food to be had here too. Ao Nang, a little up the coast, caters to the family on holiday. It's a nice strip of beachfront crammed with restaurants and tailor shops, while the resorts are a bit further back from the beach. Ao Nang is also a departure point for longtail boats taking punters to Railay, famous for its mighty limestone karsts and edifices – just begging to be scaled by the climbers who flock there.

KOH LANTA

As one of Thailand's larger islands there's a lot to see. Lanta used to be an 'undiscovered paradise' but is developing quickly. These days one can expect better roads and more taxis, songthaews etc, than last year. Hopefully this means an end to driving motorbikes in choking dust. Most other islands have their own particular type of character; people are familiar with what Samui, Phuket or Phi Phi are like but Lanta has a little bit of everything. You can stay in a cheap bungalow but have dinner and five-star resorts. For those in the know, Lanta is one of Thailand's 'hippest' islands.

PHUKET

Thailand's largest island is connected to the mainland by an umbilical causeway so it sort of isn't an island at all. Phuket is the tourist location that every other island wants to be. Stuffed full of package-tourist types who can't tell the difference between a Bt100 and a Bt500 note and don't really care. Nonetheless, at nighttime loads of youngish people surface from nowhere and do their bit to



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pack out the bars and clubs. Ground zero is probably Patong's well-developed main strip by the beach or the girly-bar road just off it, which some love and some hate. It's up to you. However, if you stray off the strip, there are other vibes to be had – it's a bloody big island with spectacular beaches surrounding a jungled interior to explore, along with all the usual outdoor and water activities. The island is also the launching point for liveabords to the Similan and Surin archipelago, as well as being probably the biggest centre for diving in Thailand.

HUA HIN

The first beach resort in Thailand, this is a more traditional-style resort town that is undergoing a bit of a renaissance these days. Only a few hours south of Bangkok, it is convenient, inexpensive (if you want it to be), surrounded by golf courses, and one of the few places in the country where you can ride horses on the beach. No beach bungalows here – you have to walk to the beach from the cheaper places, but accommodations cover the whole gamut from wooden cells to lavish five-star hotels.

PATTAYA

A couple of hours to the east of Bangkok, Pattaya is a lively town that caters to every whim. Notorious for its naughty nightlife, there is much more at this resort than its reputation would lead you to believe. Name a sporting activity or indulgent pastime (paintball, chopper riding, deep sea fishing, go-karting, drinking and eating sausages, to name a few) and they have it here. The beach is not

spectacular in the town – you have to head to Jomtien for that, or out to sea, but it isn't the sort of place where you come to tan – unless your hotel has a pool.

CHA-AM

Like its big brother up the coast, Hua Hin, Cha-Am is most popular with Thai holiday makers who want to get out of Bangkok for a weekend. The difference between the two is that Hua Hin is somewhat Royal, has many five-star hotels and people walk around in polo-shirts. Cha-Am is more popular with students and young Thais who go there to swim, float around on inner-tubes and spend the night drinking and dancing, leaving the place deserted on weekdays. The township fronts onto the wide, white beach which is quite developed. No grass huts here. Certainly a cultural experience, just not the temple kind.

KHAO LAK

An up-and-coming location on the Andaman coast, Khao Lak is undergoing rapid development. Situated north of Phuket, the place is almost directly opposite the Similan and Surin islands making it a common departure point for liveabords, although there is great diving closer to shore as well. One of Khao Lak's main claims to fame, though, is that it is cleaner and quieter than the main beaches of Phuket, making it popular with holidaying families and not with party folk. Still, there has been a development boom here in recent years, and where the baht goes, vice, pollution, and arseholes follow in its wake.



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KOH SAMUI CASTING AWAY

Samui is a commonwealth of diversity: from five-star opulence to beach shack grunge, from Starbucks to street food, and from family central to hedonist's haven. You can come to Samui on a package tour, or you can just turn up and choose your own location. You can stay in the neon razzmatazz of nightlife areas in Chaweng or Lamai, or you can find your own mile of mostly deserted beach in Lipa Noi or Taling Ngam – with superlative views of the Anghong National Marine Park, beauty incarnate.

CHAWENG PLACES TO CRASH:

Lamai and Chaweng have the best beaches on the island. The largest village on Samui, most of Chaweng's accommodation is on the beach. A long-time favourite, **Ark Bar** (07-741 3798) has rooms from Bt2,000-2,500. Family Bungalows start at Bt1,000. A little luxury can be found at the **Montien House** (07-742 2145) for Bt2,200-3,000. North Chaweng is home to **Charlie's Huts**, (07-742 2343) recently refurbished into Bt700 aircon bungalows.

FEEDING TIME:

Try **The Deck** for laidback eating with a huge menu. **Blue Samui** offers top-notch seafood at decent prices. **Zico's**, a newly built homage to Brasilia has an all-you-can-eat feast for Bt630, with the super-sexy Queen Samba dancers to make your hormones salsa. One of the best Italian eateries in town is **Vecchia Napoli** and **Prego** is also good, boasting a soothing-on-the-senses design and an endless supply of free,

tasty bread with balsamic vinegar and olive oil. Jeff Lord's **Betelnut** has some fantastic treats, like chili ice cream. If you want to watch the world pass by in the day while munching on a panini, take a street-side chair at **Cafe Uno**.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

Right on the Chaweng Beach Road, there's a great filling station for booze, Cajun and Creole food, and live blues called the **Coco Blues Company**. Opposite McDonald's is **Tropical Murphy's** with draught Guinness and Kilkenny, and Filippino cover band **Ovada**. Try **POD** for aircon and cool cocktails or **Christy's** for their ladyboy revue, which is funny and free. The big clubs in Chaweng are still the **Reggae Pub**, for Euro-beat and drinking games, and the **Green Mango**, for hard house and classic party tunes. Newcomer London-style **Mint Bar** has brought island nightlife up to par with cool tunes and celebrity DJs most months. **Bar Solo** plays US club sounds and half the club is outdoors. The latest club to open in north Chaweng is **Pandora**. It's a

touch of al fresco Mediterranean and is the only club that has a sauna, Jacuzzi and a pool with fibre optic lights which changes the colour of the water seven times every 30 seconds.

LAMAI PLACES TO CRASH:

Smaller than Chaweng, but it's just as vibrant. Rest your head at **Lamai Inn 99**, (07-742 4211) with fan rooms from Bt600-1600. The bargain huts must be **No Name** (07-742 4666) from Bt300-800 with fan. Or try **Rose Garden** (07-745 8116) for comfort in heavenly floral surroundings at Bt400-950. **Spa** (07-723 0855) has new rooms for Bt800, or Bt3,000 with a sea view and an upstairs private deck. Spa also has one of the finest restaurants on the island, with a huge menu which must be annoying to all the fasting crew that hang out there. **Wanta** (07-742 4550) has fantastically equipped bungalows for Bt1,200-2,000 with wide-screen TV's and triple-wide beds.

FEEDING TIME:

The Oasis on the way out of Lamai on the ring road boasts Euro toilets, Bt70 breakfasts and Sunday roasts. The all-you-can-eat BBQ is a welcome weekly event at **El Dorado**, every Friday. Meanwhile, the biggest fried breakfast award goes to **Harry's Bar**. **The Cliff** sells Portuguese *piri-piri* chicken, and has fantastic views over the sea with a bar that will make you think you're in an old Duran Duran video. Newly opened **Juice Dude** at Red Bicycles now offers power drinks, sports nutrition and organic juice. **The Red Fox** at Lamai beach just down a small street opposite McDonald's has Sunday dinners and pop quiz nights.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

Lamai also has a healthy club scene with **Supersub** boasting the only club to stay open past 2am, **Bauhaus** for all your foam-party needs, and plenty of beer bars where you can cheat Cupid by mingling with ladies of the evening.

BIG BUDDHA AND BAN RAK PLACES TO CRASH:

Known for its massive Buddha image at one end of the island, this is a tranquil area to get away from the nightlife and hooligans. While the beaches are nice enough, the swimming ain't so hot but the sunsets are great. **Shambala** offer rooms

from Bt400-800 and has a good menu of Thai and Western dishes. **Shabash** (07-724 5035) has beach huts from Bt1,400-1,800 depending how close you want to be to the sea. They also serve up a unique menu of Middle Eastern, Indonesian, Indian curries and Thai specialties that are well worth sampling. **Samui Mermaid** (07-742 7547) offers great value for Bt500 with cable. If you want to spend a little more, the brand new **Saboe** (07-743 0450-8) resort will spoil you rotten with its luxury beach houses and so it should with bungalows beginning at Bt3,000-7,000.

FEEDING TIME:

For a great Western-style stuffing try **Elephant and Castle** – maybe the best Sunday roast on the island – or **Aux Amis** for some refined French grub. Every Sunday **Secret Garden Bungalows** has live music with a bar and BBQ, which attracts many expats. If you're looking for a great area for sunset gazing, this is definitely the island's most technicolour spot.

BOPHUT VILLAGE PLACES TO CRASH:

A peaceful oasis, this quaint old fishing village is the perfect middle ground between Chaweng and Maenam. The best deal is **Rasta Bay** for Bt250. **Papa Joes** has a dorm for Bt150, but if you want to splash out for a little more try **Eden Bungalows** situated in a lush garden with a pool for Bt800-Bt1600. In Bophut, most shops and cafes have now converted the rooms above to luxury apartment/rooms. One of the best bargains is **The Ayuthaya Garden Bar** offering air-con, fridge, cable and hot water with views: Bt800-1200. Also worth checking out is **The Red House**, which has balconies facing the beach to watch the boats come in. It also has a wonderful roof garden with 360-degree views for Bt1,650, with cable and air-con. The beach area has many other bungalow complexes. Further along, try the **Gecko** home of the mellow house groove "Sunday session" which starts in the afternoon and goes until late; rooms start at Bt1,000. Other operations worth checking out further up the beach are **Freehouse**, **Cactus** and **Za Zen**.

FEEDING TIME:

This is the best place to eat on Samui and, apart from catching ferries to Koh Phangan, eating and relaxing is

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all you can do. There is a plethora of fantastic restaurants, from traditional Thai through French and Italian, to Middle Eastern. The **Happy Elephant** boasts the best in sea food, **La Baya** and **Juzza's** for pizza. Other must tries are **Two Tigers** for real home-cooked cakes tasty cookies, fresh juice and acoustic music and **La Siren** for a great French fodder. For something totally different there's **Healthy and Fun**, which is part vegetarian restaurant, part yoga and healing centre. They also show art films on occasion. Hit **Billabong** if you want a taste of down under.

NIGHTRIPPING:

Some of the popular haunts are **Billabong** for sports and live blues, and **The Starfish and Coffee Bar** for laidback sounds in a relaxing ambience. **The Frog and Gecko** has good beer and a popular Wednesday pub quiz with top prizes.

MAENAM

PLACES TO CRASH:

Maenam Resort (07-7425 116) has bungalows starting at Bt1200-1800; **Cleopatra's Palace** (07-7425 486) is Bt400 or Bt800 with aircon. The **Fah Hotel** is like a slice of the Florida Keys with a Thai twist and loads of charm. It has luxury rooms starting at Bt1,500, or for a real romantic treat and love inn, book yourself into the "Honeymoon Suite" for Bt2,000.

FEEDING TIME:

For grub, **Gallery Pizza** has freshly-cooked cakes, breads and pizzas and at **About Cafe** you can watch the passers-by whilst enjoying a fresh juice or homemade yogurt. Also, check out **The Lucky Monkey's** fine UK-style Indian curries. **Angela's Cafe** is an old favourite offering choice and value. There's an Italian restaurant called **La Trattoria** that serves home made ice cream and great lasagne.

DAYTRIPPING:

The latest craze is the **Canopy Adventure** (07-741 4150) where you slide along ropes to various tree houses above the coconut trees and a waterfall for Bt1,400 per head. They offer a free shuttle service to the site. For those who like to take it a little easier you could spend the afternoon at the **Butterfly Garden** (07-742 4020) at Ntien Beach. They have spiders as well. A great way to see

the island is to take a **Samui Safari** (07-741 5123-5). You can choose half or whole-day trips. They take you snorkelling, elephant trekking, 4x4 offroading, and to watch Thai cooking and even coconut milk-making. There is now a world-class golf course on the island, the **Santiburi Golf and Country Club** (07-741 8557) and **Samui Golf** (07-724 5384) can teach you how to swing and choose the right bat. For those who think golf is a great way to ruin a good walk, try **Yogi Bear Ha Ha** (01-787 9148). Situated on a back road between Bohput and Chaweng, **Red Bicycles** (07-726 7202) can rent you a mountain bike and take you on a tour through the jungle and more. A less strenuous way to see the island is from the sea. **Kia Ora** (07-745 2264) Catamaran will take you out to sea with a fully stocked bar. **Samui Quads and Paintball** (01-371 0744) has quads and paintball. If big-game fishing is a lure for you, then talk to **Mr Ung's** (07-723 0114). At **Samui Crocodile Farm**, located near the airport, you can watch a brave fool stick his head in the jaws of a prehistoric monster. Cold-blooded, reptilian capers and human dering-do are also on the cards at the **Samui Snake Farm** (07- 741 8680-1). For the morbid soul, **Luang Pho Daeng** was a monk whose undecomposed body is in a glass case for viewing at the Khunaram Temple near the Namuang Waterfall. Most travel agents do daily trips to **Koh Tao**, probably one of the most beautiful places on earth. **Sea Breeze** (07-742 5607) tours and **Aquademia** (01-091 0107) can help. Bring a copy of **Farang** to **Aquademia** and get 10% off your booking.

ROADTRIPPING

The two main taxis are green and yellow aircon saloons and songthaews (shared pickups). A saloon costs about Bt300 anywhere on the island for two people, and more if you've other friends tagging along. For short trips expect to pay Bt150/200. Make sure you haggle over the price first, or have the meter running. Songthaews are Bt50-100 for the longer journeys and Bt20 for short trips. You can also hire one for a round-the-island trip for around Bt1,000. Motorbike taxis, however, can work out as the cheapest form of travel. Renting a motorbike is Bt150 per day, but remember that road accidents are the number-one cause of death in Thailand. With an average

of four deaths on Samui and 200 serious accidents a month you are risking your life to ride one. There's no green cross code, or crosswalks on the roads of Samui. And to add insult to injury, if you get knocked off by a drunken local because he is jabbering on his mobile phone while driving an overpowered SUV, you will pay for the privilege – as much as the local bullies in brown think they can get out of you. Renting a Jeep is a much safer option. **Budget** is insured so is your best bet, if you don't want to end your visit in tears.



WAY TO GO

FERRY: Seatram boats to Samui from Don Sak and Surrattani start at 7am, and **The Raja ferry** starts at 5am and goes every hour until 7pm. The boats to Koh Pangan leave from **Big Buddha** and **Bo Phut**. The **Lompraya** catamaran (Bt550) will pick you up from your bungalow and deliver you to Phangan or Tao with frills like aircon and movies. Ferries to Surat Thani leave from **Nathon**.

PLANE: Bangkok Airways still has the monopoly on flights from Bangkok for now, leaving almost every hour until 9pm Bt3,500/6,500 OW/return. There are sometimes flights for Bt2000 usually the first and last of the day. Ring for details 02-265 555. There are direct flights to **Singapore, Phuket** and now **Krabi**. Don't forget the Bt400 departure tax and be wary of taxi drivers overcharging at the airport.

TRAIN: A sleeper ticket is Bt900 to BKK-Surat Thani for an aircon, lower bunk, second-class berth and Bt1,339 for 1st class. Prices vary for all sorts of odd reasons. Add Bt180 for bus and ferry transfers. Booking in advance is recommended as it is often fully booked.

BUS: Bt450 from Samui to Bangkok, or vice-versa, takes 14 hours in total.



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KOH PANGAN SWAY WITH THE PALMS

January is one of Pangan's biggest months with high-season well underway and the weather at its best. Clear blue skies and emerald green seas welcome visitors and there is plenty going on to keep them occupied. Along with all the parties that will be going off, there are also loads of activities, day trips and courses.

Each region of the island has its own special character and there is enough to keep even the most energetic traveller occupied with amazing snorkelling and diving and everything from kiteboarding to cookery courses. But seriously, people come to this island as it is the home of the debauched Full Moon Party, a mad night of dance, drink and more drink. Luckily it's only once a month.

CHOOSING YOUR BED:

Koh Pangan has a great variety of accommodation options ranging from budget beach huts to aircon palaces. Most of the old-school Bt80-100 huts have been replaced with Bt200-300 fan rooms and newer more luxurious Bt400-800 fan rooms with hot water and posh finishings; aircon rooms go for Bt650-5000 depending on how flash they are and a lot of places have swimming pools, saunas and spas. Many resorts on KPN still rely on you using their restaurant at least twice a day to keep the room prices low. Try to respect this, or come to an arrangement before they kick you out for a better earner

BAN TAI

Near the FMP – but out of hearing distance, Ban Kai and Ban Tai have some great resorts on never-ending white sand beaches.

PLACES TO CRASH:

Near the full-moon party – but out of hearing distance, **Ban Kai** and **Ban Tai** have some great resorts on never-ending white sand beaches. Try **Harmony** on a secluded **Ban Kai** beach with aircon bungalows, swimming pool and sauna or **Hansa Resort** in **Ban Tai** Village for aircon beachfront rooms with minibars, baths and TVs. **Milky Bay** and **Morning Star** are great new places and **Dewshore** is another favourite.

HAD RIN

There are untold places to rest your weary head in the island's nightlife capital but it does get full a week before the party. The Had Rin Peninsula has two main accommodation areas, either on the busy east-side (sunrise) or the quieter bohemian sunset side of Had Rin Nai.

PLACES TO CRASH:

There's untold places to rest your weary head in the island's nightlife capital but it does get full a week before the party. The Had Rin peninsula has two main accommodation areas, either on the busy east-side (sunrise) or the quieter bohemian sunset side of Had Rin Nai. Best to book ahead if you can. **On Sunrise:** There is loads to choose from, though **Paradise Bungalows** has a good variety of rooms and **Sea Garden** and **Jonathan** are classy joints. **Drop Inn** also has a new hotel with spa and penthouse rockstar sweets.

On Sunset: **Ya Ya's Guest House** is a great find and **Neptune's Villa**, **Phangan Buri** and **Vimarn Samut** are well run with great aircon rooms. Further around the peninsula, there are a few new resorts and some old-school bargains, **Sari Kantang** is an excellent find on Leela Beach.

WEST SIDE

The west coast of Koh Pangan is a string of beautiful, white sandy coves; it has the best coral reef, great sunset views, loads of decent beach bars, and a giant freshwater lake.

PLACES TO CRASH:

In Woktum Bay, goodies include: **Porn Sawan**, **Cookies** and **Tranquil**; in Sri Thanu Village, **Chai Country** is a really cool place. Had Chao Phao is home to **See Thanu**, **Phangan Cabana** and the bohemian **Sea Flower**, all well-run resorts on a cracking beach. **The Village Green** is a great restaurant serving fantastic Euro – Asian cuisine. **Had Son Resort** is set on its own beach with a swimming pool and great service. Had Yao is a lively beach with everything from the **Eagle Pub** for a cracking night out, to **Over the Bay** for peaceful hillside vistas and great seafood. Sandy Bay is an all-time favourite. **Had Yao** and **Bay View Resorts** are also popular. Had Salad, is a beautiful deserted beach with good value **Salad Huts** and the luxurious **Had Lad** and **Green Papaya Resorts**. Near Ko Ma, Mae Had has the best diving and snorkelling on Koh Phangan; **Island View Cabana** and **Wang Sai** are good-uns.

CHALOKLAM

Chaloklam has some well-established resorts, a few cool bars and like many villages around KPN, there are some nice houses to rent.

PLACES TO CRASH:

Chaloklam has some well-established resorts, a few cool bars and like many villages around the island, there are some nice houses to rent. **Fanta** has nice beach gaffs and **Chaloklum Bay** is well run, has some great aircon rooms and is clean. **Had Khom** and **Coral Bay** are on their own secluded beach.

NORTHEAST

On the more remote side of the island there are three very popular beaches; Bottle Beach is Old Skool Pangan, Than Sadet is home to the island's biggest waterfall, and Thong Nai Pan has all the trappings of Bohemian beach life. Further round, it becomes more rugged; here **Hat Tien** and **Hat Yao East** provide real castaway dreams. Bottle Beach is only accessible by boat from Chaloklum and there's sometimes a waiting list for good rooms.

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rustic bungalows and some more luxurious resorts like **Mai Pan Rai**. **Had Yao East** has just two resorts, and **Had Tien** is home to the infamous **Sanctuary**, with a real traveller vibe.

ROADTRIPPING:

If you take a songthaew solo, you'll pay about Bt250 to go anywhere on the island. Normal prices from Thong Sala (the main port and town) are: Bt20 for Ban Tai and Woktum; Bt50 for Had Rin, Chaloklam, Had Yao, Had Chao Phao, Sri Thanu; Bt80 for Thong Nai Pan, Mae Had and Had Salad.

Motorbike rentals start at Bt150 per day and dirt bikes start at Bt200 for a clapped out 125 to Bt400 and up for a 250. Suzuki Jeeps cost around Bt1,000/day. Only experienced riders should attempt the hills – and do it sober!

Boat taxis are available from Thong Sala, Chaloklam, Ban Tai and Had Rin. Costs are similar to songthaew prices.

DAYTRIPPING:

Rich coral reefs run along the north-west coast of the island, supporting a vibrant underwater world making it an excellent place to snorkel and one of the cheapest and least-crowded places to dive in Thailand. There are fishing trips, around the island boat trips and loads of watersports on offer including **catamarans**, **kiteboarding** and **cayaks** and **sunset horse rides** along the beach. There is also the **Jungle Gym** in Had Rin and Thong Sala, for fitness sessions and Thai Boxing tuition. Koh Phangan has acres of undisturbed tropical rainforest and a wild jungle interior. There are overnight mountain treks to the top of Khao Ra and coastline walks making it possible to beach hop round the whole island. There are loads of temples to visit, spa and meditation retreats to sort your head out and it's also a pretty good place to do bugger all.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

The Full Moon Party is far more than a party; it is Had Rin's dance music festival, with everything from drum and bass to full-on psy-trance. **Paradise Bungalows**, the original FMP site, puts on the biggest show with inspired d cor and superb resident and guest international DJs. Resident DJ A also plays at **The Backyard**, starting at 11am as Had Rin shuts down and licks its wounds; they also put on three cracking nights per week. **The Vinyl Club** with its enormous sound system bangs out hardhouse-techno-psy-trance during the FMP, and all month long. **The Orchid** plays fresh drum and bass and **Harmony** plays underground progressive trance.

The **Cactus** and the **Drop Inn** squeeze in a few classics amongst a more commercial music policy. Breaking the psy-trance mould, **The Big Boom Bar** is busy day and night, especially with their volleyball contest a few days before the FMP. The music policy is progressive to tech/hard house. Those seeking a refuge should go to the **Floating Bar** or the **Outback Bar**.

There are loads of other great bars and places to go out around the island with Thong Sala a big favourite. There are also several cracking outdoor party venues, just look out for the banners to find out when the next big one is!

WAY TO GO:

Bus: Bt350 including ferry. Buses leave Bangkok about 7pm and get you to Suratthani the next morning. Thefts on the bus are common.

Train: 1st class sleeper Bt1150 and 2nd class sleeper Bt650. Trains leave from Hualumpung station at 5 to 7pm and get you to Suratthani the next morning.

For a fast comfortable crossing, get the **Seatran** ferry to Koh Phangan, its half the time of the others for Bt370. The others are usually sold with a joint ticket, which are OK but not as luxurious.

From Koh Samui (Mae Nam) take the **Lompaha Catermaran** for the quickest and most comfortable crossing or the **Had Rin Queen** for the most frequent crossings and a reliable service.

THE PARTY CONTINUES – JANUARY 25TH

Party season is well underway and Phangan is brimming with thousands of revellers—book ahead. There will be outdoor events throughout January starting with the **Half Moon Festival** on **January 4th** in brilliantly decked out **Ban Tai** jungle; it's their 3rd anniversary party with **DJ Sabai Sabai** and **Thujon**; expect hard progressive and quality trance from the **Harmony** team. Next up is **Black Moon Culture** on **Dec 9th** where the **Black Moon Posse** host possibly the best outdoor party on the island on **Ban Tai Beach**; with amazing decor, a super sandy venue, driving progressive beats, underground trance with **DJs Bang, Leung** and **Jonny**. Then a week later the Harmony team put on their second **Half Moon Festival** of the month on the **17th Jan**.

The **Moon Set Party** at the **Pirates Bar, Chao Phao Beach** on the west coast goes off around three days before each FMP in a secluded private cove and is reminiscent of the old skool Phangan parties; and the **AmStarDam Bar** puts on one or two cracking events each month.

The **FMP** is on the **25th January** and is sure to be massive with all the punters on the island at the moment. **DJ Simon Solo (Mint Bar)** will be rocking the **Big Boom Bar** with quality house and old school classics. **DJ Leung** will be at **Tommy's** and **DJ A** will be at **Paradise** for progressive trance; go to **Zoom** or **Vinyl** for banging psychedelic trance; and if you still have the power, head to the **Backyard** for its infamous recovery party that goes on all day the day after the moon.



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KOH TAO TURTLE TOWN

With high season underway and rooms filling up, the diving and partying is in full swing. An increase in room numbers and an improving infrastructure sees Koh Tao keeping pace with visitor numbers, whilst retaining its inimitable atmosphere and small island charm. Please respect the environment. Dispose of rubbish properly and use water wisely.

PLACES TO CRASH:

Accommodation caters for all tastes and budgets. Choices start from traditional Thai wooden huts to the more luxurious pads with all mod cons and prices to match. Although many resorts have their own dive centres most are happy to cater for non-divers except during the peak of high season. A typical Thai hut costs roughly Bt400 a night, double if you want aircon. Some places only have 12 hours of electricity at night, so check first to avoid the early morning sweats.

MAE HAAD

The main port of arrival for visitors has everything you would expect to find: shops, restaurants, travel agents, banks, health centres, post office and the recently opened and much needed veterinary clinic. There is a small range of budget

and luxury accommodation to be found here. **Sensi Paradise** is a beautifully designed Thai style beach resort set in a tropical garden. **Beach Club** and **Blue Diamond** are also good choices, as is the **Mae Haad Beach Club**.

WEST COAST

Sairee is the most popular area of the Island, with the largest beach, and a full range of accommodation. Starting from King Rama V Rock moving north, **Intouch Resort** is a traditional Thai style resort with established huts and a relaxed atmosphere. **AC Resort** offers a choice of fan or aircon bungalows and a swimming pool. **SB Cabana** and **Sairee Huts** have good value centrally located wooden bungalows. **Silver Sands** offers old and new wooden bungalows set in a tropical garden. **Simple Life**

Villas, and island institution with a loyal following, offers a choice of big concrete bungalows and smaller huts with a regular crowd and a great atmosphere. **Sunset Buri Resort** with a Mediterranean feel provides aircon or fan accommodation and a swimming pool over looking the beach. **Blue Wind**, a quiet haven with daily yoga, has a choice of old and new style huts. For classic old style beach huts try **Mama O Chais** slightly further north.

If you want to be away from the beach and the oily tanners and still view the sea try **OK View** or **Moonlight Bungalows** inland from the beach on the mountain. Towards the north end of Sairee and the island there is a fair choice of rooms to be found. **Sun Sea** and **Silver Cliff** bungalows have basic cheap huts on the rocks. More upmarket is **Thipwimarn** resort with a choice of aircon or fan and outstanding views from its terrace restaurant. **CFT Bungalows** a quiet retreat offers meditation and massage.

EAST COAST

The northeast coast is much quieter and more secluded with only a few places to stay. Worth checking out are **Hing Wong Bungalows**, **Green Tree** or **View Rock** resorts. Moving south Tanote Bay has a small selection of rooms available. **Tanote View** resort and **Poseidon Bungalows** are good choices as is **Blacktip Resort** and water sports centre. The southeast has a several small bays dotted along it. Try **Ao Leuk Resort** in Leuk Bay or **Coral View Resort** and **New Heaven Huts** in Sai Daeng. Transport to the more secluded places can be arranged from the pier by either taxi car or long tail boat.

THE SOUTH

The main area here is Chalok Baan Kao, quieter than Sairee, set between San Jao beach and Taa Toh Lagoon. Easily accessible by road with a similar choice of accommodation and all the amenities you would expect to find being the third largest beach. **Sunshine Resort**, **Koh Tao Tropicana**, **Taa Toh Lagoon** and **Koh Tao Resort** are all fine places to stay.

DAYTRIPPING:

As a major diving-certification centre, blessed with an abundance of marine life and easily accessible dive sites, many would-be Cousteaus choose to start their dive careers here. A full range of courses can be completed, with either SSI or PADI being the major certification standards. Tech Diving courses are also available for the less faint hearted. Most dive operations are members of the Koh Tao Dive Operators Club which is responsible for setting professional standards and monitoring and improving the marine ecology through on-going projects aimed at promoting environmental awareness. With price competition all but levelled by the KT-DOC your choice of dive school depends on reputation, service, and quality. Fair play we say. Snorkelling also provides a good opportunity to see the abundance of marine life here. There are many secluded bays and beaches where you can wile away the days snorkelling and swimming. A good day out can be had by long tail boat cruising round the island visiting the more secluded bays and beaches as well as the uniquely beautiful Koh Nangyuan,



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three islands joined together by sandbars – seen no where else in the world. the Island has its own resort and an Easy Divers dive Centre. If you're still keen for some water-based activities check out **MV Sports** or **Blacktip Resort**, both offer wakeboarding and water skiing. For those who prefer *terra firma* there is plenty to keep you occupied. When the dive boats are out you can relax on peaceful beaches and sleep your hangover off in peace. If you're an active type, trekking trails are plentiful and the most arduous routes reward the survivors with secluded bays and crystal clear waters or mountain top views and postcard photo opportunities. Alternatively hire mountain bikes and cycle your way to fitness taking in the scenery. **Zen Gecko**, on the road to Tanote Bay, offers rock climbing and bouldering.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

With dozens, if not hundreds of divers completing courses daily and a regular party crowd, there is always an air of celebration and vibrant scene on the rock. A regular mix of home-grown talent and visiting DJ's play a variety of musical styles with the freshest sounds guaranteed. Most venues are open every night although the party night changes, keeping the atmosphere alive and the energy flowing—non stop. The party scene is one of late nights, great people and good spirits. Check out the many fliers for latest events, special

party nights, and music policy. The main party spots are **AC Bar**, open nightly, with party nights on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays serving housey breaks and beats with bundles of booze. **Intouch** Wednesday and Saturday, always popular with a tireless crowd keeps the place pumping till the small hours with a blend of upbeat funky tunes. **Maya Bar** takes Mondays and Fridays playing progressive tech and house. All are on Sairee beach. **Whitening** in Mae Haad holds parties every Friday with a regular crew keeping the spirits alive and flowing. For bar butterflies there are plenty of places to choose from. In Sairee, the forever popular **Dry Bar**, ideal for sunset, serves great drinks. Relax and chill out at **Lotus Beach Bar** with a regular crowd and varied music policy. Thursdays are open-mic nights. Stylish **Dragon Bar** serves up oriental mystique and seductive beats with an extensive cocktail list. Also check out **Sea Monkeys**, Mae Haad, a small upstairs bar with good tunes and happy people.

FEEDING TIME:

The choice of eateries on Koh Tao is impressive whether you're after tasty Thai tucker or your favourite Farang fodder. **Puk's Kitchen** and **Yang's**, Mae Haad, offer a wide choice of cheap tasty Thai food as does **Tongs** in Sairee. **Safety Stop** has excellent Western pub grub and Sunday Roasts. **Caf Del Sol** provides a good choice of

world cuisine with a French touch. **La Matta** has a wide selection of authentic Italian cuisine using traditional recipes. **Farango Pizzeria** also offers a selection of classic Italian dishes. All are in Mae Haad. In Sairee, **Suthep** on the beach offers a wide choice of quality Thai and Western grub. Mash balls or massaman it's all good, as is the service and wit of the humorous host. **El Toro** dishes up a selection of Western food and pizza with big screen movies. **Choppers Bar and Grill**, now bigger and better, serves an impressive choice of Western and Thai-style home cooking, draught and imported beers, and all live sports events on a wide screen projector – ripper mate! Check out **Tattoo Bar** for funky tunes and fiery curries. **Aquamarine Beach Grill** at Mae Haad serves a tasty buffet lunch and dinner from the charcoal grill. For after-hours munchies, most party spots have the usual choice of hawker food and street fare.

ROADTRIPPING:

The improving infrastructure does not mean that the roads retain rubber especially after rain. Beware there are many twisty sandy roads with lots of pot holes so keep your eyes open, especially at night, unless you prefer a trip to the clinic to get stitched up physically and financially with a Koh Tao tattoo as the reward. No helmets, no insurance, keep your key with you at all times. Motor bike rental is Bt150+ a day for a basic bike, Bt350+ for a dirt bike. Quad

bikes are also available at a few rental places Bt600+. If you're staying for a longer time some places will give you good monthly discounts.

WAY TO GO:

From Bangkok trains leave Hualumphong Station nightly, arriving in Chumphon at the ungodly hour of 4am. Slumber at the station for a while before you transfer to the pier for the ferry which arrives at around 10am. There are various travel companies in Bangkok offering joint bus-and-boat tickets. Several ferries of various speeds leave from Koh Pangan and Koh Samui, mainly in the morning. Times and boats change depending on demand and the weather. Check travel agents for latest times and prices.

RECORD BREAKER

With the monsoon rains a mere storm in a tea cup, Koh Tao welcomes in a new year and a new season which looks set to be bigger and better than the last. The diving season officially kicks off on February 12th and 13th with the second Koh Tao Underwater World festival marking the occasion and hosting an array of activities and entertainment. The main event will be an attempt to break the world record for the most number of divers underwater simultaneously. They need numbers to achieve this so all divers are welcome to come and help break the current record of 592. The evening promises top Thai entertainment, stage shows, and the ever popular beauty pageant. With more than 5,000 people expected to attend this two-day festival book accommodation early and come and join the fun in what is surely a unique and unrivalled event for Thailand.




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PHUKET DECK CHAIR CITY



Beautiful white-sand beaches, blue water, green jungle and a red-hot nightlife make Phuket Thailand's most popular tourist destination, to the tune of four million each year and growing. It's the nation's largest island, connected to the mainland by a causeway, and has been welcoming holiday-makers for many years now. The island is also setting itself up as a home for the IT industry and general expat hang-out, which must be working because home are selling like hotcakes. Ground zero for visitors is Patong beach, which is an excellent beach, with the usual deckchairs, fruit shakes and souvenir shops. If you're after something more rustic there are plenty of secluded beaches all over the island.

PATONG

Party beach. While it's much-maligned for being sleazy, Patong's a fine place to hang out in the low season since it's a hub of activity – shopping, spas, bowling lanes and bungee jumps, to name a few. And, of course, bars – lots and lots of bars.

PLACES TO CRASH

Decent, well-maintained rooms under Bt1,000 are **Sweet Apartment** (Bt500; 076-341-359), **Le Vele** (Bt600; 076-340-336) and **Smile Inn** (Bt900; 076-340-455). In the Bt1,000-2,000 range try **Banthal Beach Resort** (Bt1,500; 076-340-850-4), **Club Bamboo** (Bt1,100; Tel: 076-345-345) or **Icon Phuket** (Bt1,800; 076-296-735). At the top end, few spots are more beautiful than the **Burasari** (Bt2,500; 076-292-929) or **The Avantika** (Bt4,600; 076-292-801).

FEEDING TIME

Many Patong dining spots are disappointingly overpriced and bland, but there are a few bright stars. Try **Sea Hag**, **Pan Yaah**, **Lim's** or **Pum**, or **Sphinx Restaurant & Theatre**, which also puts on Broadway-style shows in its intimate upstairs theatre.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Bangla Rd is the most hectic zone with beer bars galore and the tawdry **Soi Katoey** drawing in the curious and depraved. **Soi Paradise** is a friendly, flamboyant area with gay

bars and discos. **Dragon**, **Tiger**, **Crocodile**, **Banana** and **Safari** are the disco flavours of the month, while some refined places to lounge about in include **La Diva** and **Corsicana**. Wackier spots are the glitzy **Phuket Simon Cabaret** and the tiny **Rasta Pub**, incongruously tucked down the end of the pussy-show-zone, **Soi Seadragon**. Rousing live music at **Molly Malone's**, **Scruffy Murphy's** and **2 Black Sheep**.

KATA-KARON

Paradise paved over. Kata and Karon are unfortunate victims of uncontrolled development, with the sidewalk-less Kata centre a pedestrian's nightmare and the main area of Karon a sad collection of gloomy yet loud bars and tailor shops. On a bright note, however, the powder-sand beaches remain stunning and Kata is a fine bay for surfing from June to November.

PLACES TO CRASH

Budget: In Kata, **Lucky Guesthouse** (Bt300-450; 076-330-572), **Kata Country House** (Bt600-900; 076-333-210) and **Friendship Bungalow** (Bt500; 076-330-499). In Karon, **Bazoom Hostel** (Bt80-490; 076-396-914) and **On The Hill** (Bt800; 076-286-469) – recommended for its views. More upmarket spots: the fetching **Kata Mintu** (Bt1,500; 076-333-283) and **Sawasdee Village**, featuring a gorgeous tropical swimming pool (Bt2,800; 076-330979), both in Kata.

FEEDING TIME

Every second shop in Kata-Karon is a restaurant, so you're not going to starve here. These have stood the test of time: **Las Margaritas**, **Karon Caf**, **Red Onion** (Karon); **Bluefin Tavern**, **Gung Cafe**, **Coffee Pot** (Kata).

NIGHTTRIPPING

There are few nightspots to recommend aside from the chill-out bars **Dan Kwain** and **Cafe Del Mar**, and the hard-rockin' **Easyriders**, along Taina Rd, Kata. For late-night adventure, get thee to Patong.

SOUTH-Chalong, Rawai, Nai Harn, Ao Sane

Sailing, slacking off. The beaches of Chalong and Rawai are nothing to write home about but they're both fine places to relax, chat with sailors, catch an island-hopping trip and gorge on seafood. Nai Harn is a stunning white beach favoured by locals, while Ao Sane is a pleasant little cove with good snorkelling.

PLACES TO CRASH

From cheap and cheerful to super-luxurious. Chalong: **International Youth Hostel** (Bt180-450; 076-281-325), **Shanti Lodge** (from Bt350,

076-280-233). Rawai: **Friendship Beach** (from Bt1,000, 076-288-996). Nai Harn/Ao Sane: **Baan Krating Jungle Beach Resort** (Bt2,000; 076-288-264), **Sunny's Nai Harn Beach Resort** (Bt950; 076-388-058), **The Mangosteen** (Bt4,500; 076-289-399).

FEEDING TIME

Thai/seafood: **Kan Eang 1&2**, Chalong, plus many **fresh seafood shops** along the Rawai beachfront. Western: **Bagels & Beyond**, **Sunshine Bakery** and **The Lighthouse** in Chalong; **Don's Cafe** in Nai Harn.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Yoonique Music Cafe in Nai Harn is attracting a hip, young crowd with its Tuesday jam sessions, Friday Mexican food nights, and beach volleyball court. Other favourite hangouts are the **Freedom Bar**, **Nikita's** and **Islander Beer Garden** in Rawai, and the **Tamarind** and **Green Man Pub** in Chalong.

NORTH – Kamala, Laem Singh, Surin, Bang Tao, Nai Thon, Nai Yang, Mai Khao

Lush and lavish. A drive up the coast north of Patong reveals the strange

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mix of high-end developments – including the “Millionaire’s Mile” along the Kamala headland – and windswept, untouched beauty that will fascinate anyone with pre-conceived notions of Phuket being a “Patpong with a beach.”

PLACES TO CRASH

Aside from **Maikhao Bungalows/Campground** (01-8951233) or **Sirinath National Park bungalows/tents** at Nai Yang, most accommodation is firmly in the mid-to-insanely-expensive range. Some of the better spots: **Bangtao Beach Cottages** (from Bt2,200; 076-325-418), **Surin Beach Resort** (Bt1,400; 076-325-000), **Surin Bay Inn** (Bt1,000; 076-271-601).

FEEDING TIME & NIGHTTRIPPING

Some exceptional class-act restaurants/lounges in Bang Tao/Surin with prices to match include **Tatonka**, **Red Room** and **Supper Club** – well worth splashing out for. More low-key are **Pepper’s Pub**, **Farang Paradise** (Bt50 steaks!), **Black Cat** and **Diver’s Bar**.

PHUKET CITY

It’s official, the island’s main centre is no longer a town, having been recently upgraded to city status. Plenty of funky shops/art galleries and historical Sino-Portuguese buildings to see on an afternoon stroll. Gluttons take note – the range and quality of restaurants in Phuket City far surpass any of the resort areas.

PLACES TO CRASH

Pengman (Bt120; 076-211-186), **Thalang Guesthouse** (Bt320-550; 076-214-225), **Imperial Hotel** (Bt650; 076-212311), **Royal Phuket City** (Bt1900, 076-233-333).

FEEDING TIME

Just a sampling, Thai: **Tung Kha Cafe**, **Phuket View**, **Thammachart**, **Lemongrass**, **Nai Yao**, **Ka Jok Sii**, **Kota Khao Mun Kai**, **mii phat** (yellow noodle) shop near **Metropole Hotel** circle, **vegetarian shops** along Ranong Rd, **roti shops** along Phang Nga Rd. Italian: **La Gaetana**, **Salvatore’s**. Indian: **Khanasutra**.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Trendy spots: **Seua Saming**, **XVI**, **Kor Tor Mor**. Beer drinkin’ spots: **Timber Hut**, **O’Malley’s**, **Michael’s Bar**, **Dorn’s Place**.

DAYTRIPPING

Some of the best things to see in Phuket are not in Phuket at all, including the smaller islands of **Coral**, **Raya** and **Yao Noi**; the forests of **Khao Lak** and **Khao Sok**; and the cool karsts of **Phang Nga Bay**, best seen on a **sea canoe** tour (Sea Canoe Thailand, 076-212-252; John Gray’s Sea Canoe, 076-254-505). Inland, there’s **ATV** or **bicycle tours**, **elephant trekking**, **bungee jumping**, **Bang Pae** and **Tonsai waterfalls**, and the **Gibbon Rehabilitation Centre** in **Khao Phra Thaew National Park**, and **Kathu waterfall**. For wannabe or experienced sailors, the **Ao Chalong Yacht Club** welcomes anyone to join their regular Sunday sailing races (clubhouse near Chalong Pier, 01-892 4992).

ROADTRIPPING

Phuket’s transport situation is improving with an island-wide effort to convert freewheeling taxis to metered services, and the threat of meter-taxi drivers getting clubbed to death by tuk-tuk thugs is on the decline. Still no beach-hopping bus service though. **Metered taxis**, 076-250-333, 076-270-477 or 076-328-274. **Tuk-tuks**, island-wide services,



jaw-dropping prices. **Songthaew buses**, between the main beaches and Phuket City (Ranong Rd), daytime hours, Bt15-25. **Aircon micro-bus** service, around Phuket City, Bt10. **Motorbike rental**, Bt150/day. **Car/Jeep rental**, Bt900/day. Note that driving in Phuket is an extremely dangerous undertaking not recommended for the faint of heart.

DIVING

As a launching point for many of the region’s top dive sites, Phuket is truly a diver’s mecca, with several PADI courses and trips for novice to professional-level divers. Destinations include Racha Island, Shark Point and the King Cruiser wreck, plus liveaboards to the Similans, Surin Islands, Burma Banks and Mergui Archipelago. Among the many dozens of dive shops on the island

are: Dive Asia (076-330 598), Fantasea Divers (076-281 387), Scuba Cat (076-293 120) and Santana (076-294 220).



WAY TO GO:

Plane: Bt2,730/5,460 ow/return (inc tax) from Bangkok with Thai Airways or Bt1,820/3,640 from Samui with Bangkok Airways
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IN KRABI HANGING OUT



How short photographers boost their egos

AO NANG

Putting Ao Nang on the global tourist map has by no means been a difficult task given its breathtaking beauty which commands one's attention instantly. With its rise to stardom being rapid and the dramatic increase in tourist arrivals looking more 'promising' each year, it's no wonder low season is longed for, particularly if you enjoy being engulfed in the torrid steaminess of the monsoon. You can be guaranteed beach vendors or katoys won't stalk you. Even at Ao Nang, still the most popular and developed of Krabi's beaches, you will be left alone to work on your tan. These are the reasons why the same faces can be seen back in the province year after year. Other benefits at this time are the cheap hotel rates on offer. Try Krabi Seaview Resort from Bt625, the beautifully situated Somkiet Buri Resort 300m from the beach for Bt1,200, or Wanna's Place, directly across from the beach from Bt900. Great for those travelling on a tighter budget, as you don't have to dive so deep into the purse to get great accommodation.

NIGHTRIPPING

The **Irish Rover Bar & Grill** is one of the few consistently busy bars in town with a friendly, laid back atmosphere, draught beer and great fry-ups and roasts. **Encore Cafe** is the best place in town for live music. The old stayer, **Full Moon Bar**, smack bang in the middle of Ao Nang is where you just can't miss a minute of the action. Nearby is the new **JJ Sports Bar**, a cosy cafe-style bar screening football day and night and inside Ao Nang Centre is **Pickles**, an Australian pub, fully equipped with BBQ, swimming pool, pool table and Aussie beer for Bt60; some good parties are to be had here. The **Last Fisherman Bar** is by far the most ambient beach location for sunset drinks that tend to stretch on into the night and the other old stayer **Luna Beach Bar**, famous for their 'any excuse' parties with great cocktail deals. For independent travellers, **Lost Pirate** is the place for the latest low-down.

KRABI TOWN

This once slow-motion town has grown in fame due to its tranquillity, beauty and what some call 'real Thai-ness', the principal reason why it so entices. The capital of Krabi province is managing to preserve its small-town charm even though it's morphing into a busy hub. A flurry of new hotels now provide alternatives for travellers who have had enough of dank guesthouse rooms but don't want to splash out. They're all pretty much the same 2-3 star standard providing average service, the most central being **Green House Hotel**, a stone's throw from the department store. Another is **Krabi Loma Hotel** on Chao Fah Rd with twin rooms at Bt650 with aircon, bath, satellite TV, mini-bar, Internet and pool. An oldie but a goody is **Grand Tower Hotel**, conveniently located on the corner of Chao Fah Rd, near the favourite bars, from Bt250. If you don't want to dive into your purse so deeply then there's always the guesthouses of which Krabi has plenty. 'Old school' **Cha Guesthouse** offers the cheapest huts in town from Bt100. The charming **Dukes Cottage** has fan doubles for Bt280, a funky restaurant downstairs, a guitar for anyone wanting to strum a tune and a jovial proprietor.

FEEDING TIME

When it comes to food in Krabi be assured to find anything your heart desires, if you look hard enough! For home-cooked meals **Popeye's** dishes up the heartiest grub, the chips are enough to write home about; here you'll find some savoury characters to chat to, or grab a traditional Danish hot dog at **Cafe Europa**. Popular with locals are the **Korean Suki BBQs**: simply seize a hut and eat all you can for Bt79, the one with the most ambience is near the Boonsiam Hotel. For a slice of pasta paradise visit **Viva Pizzeria** or **Da Franco**, the latter serving up the best tiramisu this side of Venice. For oyster lovers, the atmospheric **Chow Seau** has to be sampled, having a reputation for serving the freshest seafood in town; this place is teeming with locals at the weekend. The oysters are so big you may need to dig in with a knife and fork. Besides great value, **Ruen Mai** is the most enchanting Thai restaurant.

NIGHTRIPPING

Krabi definitely avoids the excesses of Bangkok and is not exactly the liveliest city in Thailand but that's not to say it lacks buzz. Celebrated hideaways can be passed over if you're not in the know. One is the unassuming **Asia Road** on Chao Far Rd comprising a music collection not often found in this neck of the woods. Moreover, its claim to fame is its Bt90 frozen margaritas which are bound to stir the Latino in you. For those who can't get enough of Bangkok, there's the fashionable newcomer **Crazy Pub** on Maharaj Road. A big city contemporary-style bar in the middle of town clamouring with locals at weekends and for techno freaks **Mixer Pub** is the best on offer.



Okay, which one of you peed in the sea?

RAILAY



t the tip of Phra Nang peninsula are East Railay, West Railay and Phra Nang, the most popular stretch of Krabi's coastline described as one of the most beautiful capes in the world, and rightly so. The powder white beach that is Ao Phra Nang with the sacred Phra Nang cave at its mouth now attracts the wealthiest visitors where the only place to stay is the exclusive **Rayavadee**. But for those who don't perspire money the more middle-class crowd hangout is at West beach, sometimes referred to as Sunset Beach. Here big bungalow operations offer the same deals. **Railay Bay Resort and Spa** starts at Bt1200. **Railay Sand and Sea** from Bt900 with fan and breakfast and **Railay Village Hotel** at Bt500 are some options. The budget crowd tends to hug the mangrove-choked east beach, where the greatest concentration of less expensive bungalows, bars and restaurants are located. **Seafood** is the best restaurant and **Ya Ya Bungalows** have rooms from Bt150.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Why fix something if it isn't broken? This is the philosophy behind Railay nightlife. Sunset entertainment generally begins with drinks on West beach while admiring the more energetic volleyballers and witnessing the magnificent colours of sunset, while the drink-til-u-drop party scene shifts over to east beach where all night parties and fire shows draw crowds. Favourites are **Gecko** and **The Cliff Bar**.

TONSAI



udget travellers or those with unconstrained spirits tend to gather at the small beach just a walk through the adjoining cave from Railay. There are several inexpensive bungalow operations starting from Bt150 with standard restaurant fare. The main attraction is the rave party that goes off every night at **Freedom Bar** with super huge parties around full moon when longtail boats operate around the clock.

KHLONG MUANG



he latest addition to this spectacular coastal region is Khlong Muang. This unspoiled beach is just a stone's throw from Ao Nang and yet, the peace and serenity is a million miles from the tourist traps and big brash resorts just down the road. Places to stay in the area are located directly on the beach. Luxury rooms and bungalows look out over the waters of the Andaman Sea, giving you the perfect view of a spectacular sunset. By far the cheapest place to stay is **Khlong Muang Inn** with fan rooms from Bt300. **Krabi Sands Resort** from Bt1,400 incl. breakfast. All lay in an area of hectic five-star resorts including the **Sheraton**, **Nakamanda**, **Pulay**, and **Taabkeak**.

WAY TO GO:

Bus: Bt350 for a VIP Bus via Surat Thani or Bt650 for a government bus from the Southern Bus Terminal. Government bus costs more but are generally safer

Fly: Bt2,560/5,120 one-way/return. Expect to pay Bt200 to extortionate taxi drivers for a lift into town.

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KOH PHI PHI SEA JEWEL



here yesterday there was a shrub, today there's a trinket-shop." This was the lament of a long-time resident of Phi Phi Don, which pretty much sums up the progress of the tiny island. The two islands of Phi Phi – Phi Phi Don and the smaller Phi Phi Leh, part of Haad Noppharat Thara/Koh Phi Phi National Marine Park – are ground zero in the mass tourism experiment of Thailand. Despite all its pressures, Phi Phi Don remains one of the most stunning islands in Southeast Asia, and there's some glorious diving, snorkelling, hiking and plain old beach relaxin' to be had here. And by night, it boasts a helluva good, hedonistic party scene.

PLACES TO CRASH:

Accommodation on Phi Phi Don's more remote northern beaches tends to lean towards the package-tour variety. Independent travellers will find that the resorts and bungalows that crowd the bays of Tonsai and Lo Dalum offer the best value, while the cheapest spots (less than Bt500) are on Hat Yao. The **Andaman Beach Resort** at the east end of Tonsai has spacious bungalows and a small communal pool for Bt1,200-1,900 (075-621-427, 618-060). At the other end of the bay is the **Tonsai Village Resort**, with sturdy air-conditioned bungalows for Bt 2,800 set amid trees below a dramatic, towering cliff. In Lo Dalum, **Phi Phi Pavilion** (075-611-295) has thatch-roof bungalows in a large coconut grove for Bt1,200-Bt1,800. Just down the beach is the popular **PP Charlie Beach Resort** (076-356-032, 369-156). Following its recent upgrade, all rooms and bungalows have aircon and satellite TV, with rates starting from Bt1,190 if booked on-line. **The Phi Phi Viewpoint Resort's** (075-622-351, 618-111/2) aircon and fan-cooled bungalows have seen better days but the view across the bay from the large

balconies is superb. Prices from Bt1,800. For a more posh shelter, try the **PP Princess** (076-210-928, www.ppprincess.com) resort and spa, with room rates from Bt2,300-Bt13,500, and join the smug-looking people lounging at the waterfall cascading from its fabulous infinity pool. Cheaper places may be found inland between Tonsai and Lo Dalum. The colourful **Marine Inn** (01-894-1246) has rooms with hot water showers for Bt500-700 while the **Phi Phi Inn** (075-618-069) offers spacious aircon rooms with cable TV and hot water for Bt1,500. During low season you can expect prices on the island to drop by about 30 percent.

DAYTRIPPING:

With some 30 dive sites in close proximity and decent diving year round, Phi Phi has become a centre for diving in the Andaman. Booking a trip is easy, as several dive shops populate Tonsai village. **Viking Divers** (01-970-3644) and **Moskito Diving** (075-612-092) are both 5-star IDC centres and have good reputations. Moskito also arranges liveaboard cruises to the Similans. **Snorkelling** is the other main draw of Phi Phi, with every



Oddjob on holiday

tour agent offering a daytrip for a reasonable Bt250-Bt300. For a less crowded tour, the half-day **Shark Aware trip** offered by **The Adventure Club** (01-895-1334) for Bt600 is recommended – it allows a maximum of six people and gives a money-back guarantee if snorkelers fail to sight a black-tip reef shark. The company also arranges night snorkelling, hiking and "cliff jumping" trips.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

When night falls on Tonsai Bay, the place turns into a thumping, alcohol-soaked funzone with roving partiers moving en masse in a pattern determined by the timing of the drink specials and fire shows. The longstanding **Reggae Bar** is currently undergoing renovations and is scheduled to reopen in time for high season. In the mean time, **Rolling Stoned** (Thai cover bands and DJs on the late night) has moved next door now that the area of the village where it used to stand has been razed to make way for a new hotel. Hotspots along the beach are **Hippee Bar**, **Carlito's** and **Apache**, all competing for the punter's baht with sexy staff, great DJ music, and the ubiquitous Bt200 "bucket" drinks. For a less mad scene, try the friendly **JJ Pub** or the curious little place called **Malaria Bar**.

FEEDING TIME:

Sizzling seafood is what most diners go for on Phi Phi, but there are a remarkable variety of restaurants to choose from. Fresh baked goods and sandwiches are on offer at **Pee Pee Bakery 1 & 2**, which also feature blaring TVs and movies in the evening. **Pum** is a favourite for its fresh Thai fare (cooking classes also available) while good spots to load up on Italian pasta are **Sale & Pepe** and **Ciao Bella**. **Garlic** and **HC Andersen** are known to offer consistently good Thai and Western dishes. If you're a lover of sweet delights, don't miss the gelato stalls.

WAY TO GO:

From Bangkok

Public Bus: Bt750 direct to Phuket or Krabi. Leaves from the Southern Bus Terminal.

From Phuket/Krabi:

Ferry service twice daily, and a once-daily Phi Phi-Lanta run with prices starting at Bt250 one way. Otherwise, book a speedboat from Phuket, a 50-minute trip for Bt1,500 (Island Hopper 076-252-606-8), or arrive in style on the new seaplane operated by Blue Water Air. Flies between Phuket International Airport and Phi Phi daily for Bt2,500 (076-354-899, 076-352-088/9).



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KOH LANTA THE BIG EASY

Lanta is back in business. After closing for low season while the west coast is battered and bashed by the monsoon, business owners have repaired their buildings and are ready to receive another year's worth of tourists. This island is more popular than ever, especially amongst Northern Europeans for some reason. It's not surprising that tourist numbers are increasing as Phuket, Krabi and Phi Phi are reaching saturation point. Luckily Lanta is a big island. Most development (i.e. resorts) is concentrated in the north with Saladaeng, the main town and ferry pier. The further south you go the cheaper rooms become and the rougher the road gets, although the sealed road has been creeping down over the last few years. It's a strange kind of place, with long beaches, backpacking places next to five-star resorts beside traditional Muslim fishing villages. Samui is known for its nightlife, Pangan for it's cheap and cheerful atmosphere and Phi Phi for its natural beauty, whereas Lanta isn't really known for anything other than being a nice place, although it has all three features mentioned. Since it's more recently developed and is pretty spread out, Lanta remains one of Thailand's 'hipper' beach destinations.

PLACES TO CRASH

Bungalows include: In Pra Ae/ Klong Dao, **Lanta Palm Beach** and **Lanta Long Beach**. In Klong Nin beach, most of the bungalow operations are open including **Atcha Hut**. For a Goa-style warm and friendly atmosphere try **Lanta Paradise** (with swimming pool), **Lanta Nice Beach** and **Nature Beach**. There are also home stays available at **Blue Moon Bar and Restaurant**. In the deep south of the island there are several cheap and picturesque bungalows although access can be difficult. This is a particularly beautiful part of Lanta but is an extreme journey to navigate

by motorbike. Luckily, bungalow operators in these parts do have their own 4WD vehicles to take you to and fro. Bungalows in the south include **Kangtiang Bay Resort**, **Marine Park View**, **Waterfall Bay** and **Bamboo Bay** resorts. Prices vary from Bt100-400. Lanta plays host to a number of boutique resorts, check out **Relax Bay** on Phra-Ae for relaxed European vibes and an excellent bar, rooms Bt700-3,000.

DAY TRIPPING

If drinking beer and watching the waves lap gets boring, there's other stuff to do. Lanta's size makes it a

great place to motorbike if you don't mind a few dirt roads and pot holes. Visit the **National Marine Park** in the far south for a good road adventure. On your way, make a stop at the **Phru Bon Waterfalls**. Follow the meandering river up to the falls for an easy 45 minutes. It ain't Niagra, but with the steady rain fall that now occurs on Lanta they are bound to be in high flow. The **Mai Kao Caves** are also worth a visit, on the way to the old town. On your way over to the old town also check out the view from the top of **View Point Hill**. It looks over a cluster of islands to the east side of the island that head towards Trang. You also can't leave the island without visiting the ubiquitous **seagypsies** over in Ban sang Ga U.

NIGHTTRIPPING & FEEDING TIME

If it is variety that you are after, there are several independent restaurants still operating on the island. These include Thai restaurants in the Saladan and Klong Dao area, including **Lanta Seafood**, **Sea View** and **Sea Side**. In the main part of the town there is **Local Bar** which serves great coffee and Thai food in a cosmopolitan atmosphere. In Klong Nin there's **Otto Bar & Grill**, serving great Thai food, German food and the famous Otto chip (massive thick chips). **Kook Gai** serves delicious contemporary Thai cuisine, and **Cafetero** serves the best coffee on the island while boasting an extensive Thai menu at very reasonable prices. You can also have a good flick through the cable channels. **Blue Moon**, apart from offering home stays, serves up fantastic food in a blissful warm family atmosphere. There are also two nice restaurants in the old town worth a visit. These are **Fresh Restaurant** and **Krue Yai Restaurant** serving well priced authentic Thai cuisine. In terms of night-life, there are a number of independent bars and clubs operating along the west coast. Up near Saladan there's a clutch of bars with names like **Ozone**, **Funky Fish** or **Deep Forest**. On Klong Nin try out **Mofo's Clubhouse** or **Miami**. There's also a cool bar on top of **Viewpoint Hill**. Look out for flyers for parties that regularly occur.

WAY TO GO:

Over low season the usual passenger ferries from Krabi don't run until November so you'll have to take a mini-van—around Bt200 from Krabi or Trang

Train: (to Trang) Bt931 second class aircon, lower bunk, Bt1,480 for first class.

Fly: (to Krabi) Bt1,300 one way at the moment with special promotion from Bangkok Airways.

Bus: Many tour agents run buses to Lanta. Costs around Bt400 for 15 hours of discomfort interspersed with white-knuckle terror.

Relax Bay Resort Koh Lanta (Long Beach)



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HUA HIN REGAL RETREAT



ua Hin's century-old status as a retreat for the Royal Family is one of the major lures for Thai visitors to this quaint seaside resort. In fact, Royal-watching is kind of a pastime here. The Royal Family's jaunts around town cause the odd gridlock, and near His Majesty the King's Palace, there's a

supermarket called **Golden Place**. Thais queue up here to buy fruit and produce from some of the special agricultural projects initiated by HM the King. Thanks to His Majesty's not-so-secret service, Hua Hin is also the safest place in Thailand, both for touring or owning a business. One expat summed it up thusly: "Here the police actually look like real police."

Hua Hin is also known for its spacious beaches, which rank somewhere between Samui and Pattaya on the attractiveness and cleanliness scale, although the air is remarkably fresh and bracing. Besides laying on the beach doing pretty much jack-shit, trotting along the sand on a horse or pony is another welcome way to idle away some spare hours. If these options don't float your boat, then embark on an outing with **Sea Dragon Cruises**; they offer everything from daytrips to week-long jaunts in the Gulf of Thailand. Their latest pleasure trip is a sunset cocktail cruise – the only one on offer here. Call Martin at 9-0122302 for the low down.

For most of us, driving a go-kart is about as close as we'll ever come to being a Formula One racer. And Hua Hin's own miniature speedway – **B.T. Charlie Banana's Karting** – for frustrated racers has the only high-speed bank turn in Thailand. The 13-horsepower karts (Bt500 for 15 laps) get up to about 70km an hour. When you're flying along with your butt about 10cm off the track, the sense of speed is increased ten-fold.

Not far from here, on Petchkasem Road, is **Nino's Italian Restaurant & Pizzeria**. Easily the best deal on Italian chow going in these parts, Nino's has the "only stone-baked pizza" in town, heaping portions of *lasagna al forno* for only Bt160, and – a big favourite with local expats – an enormous roast dinner every Sunday afternoon for Bt440. As Nino, the affable owner of this alfresco diner says, "Why would you trust an Italian restaurant which isn't run by Italians?"

With the **Oriental** now building a new hotel out by the airport, and **Best Western** and the **Sheraton** group poised to get in on the ground floor of a new construction boom, Hua Hin will soon have more 5-star hotels than even Phuket. For excellent value mid-range rooms (Bt2,000-2,500) check out the **Pavilion Villa**, replete with Thai-style décor and furnishings. (It's right across from the **Sofitel**, where some of the most suspenseful scenes in *The Killing Fields* were executed.) For cheaper digs in the Bt250 neighbourhood, head for **Soi Bintaht** (or **Alms Bowl Lane**, so named because there's a temple at the end of it) where you can bed down in a couple of guesthouses.



Meet me under the big beach umbrella

Soi Bintaht is also awash with beer bars and women with come-hither glances – like a slice of Phuket's Patong Beach, though some Farangs call it "Soi Disappointment" – but that's a pretty short walk on the wild side. Since Hua Hin tends to appeal to a slightly older crowd, the nightlife, in general, is pretty subdued. But it's by no means comatose. Consistent crowd-pullers are the city's two night markets. In that typically Thai, helter-skelter way, they are jumbles of bric-a-brac, beach wear in screaming suntan shades, seafood restaurants, arts 'n' crafts, just plain junk, and exotica.

Of the two nocturnal bazaars, more votes go to the one by **Central Plaza**, which has a revolving series of different items on different nights. However it's closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.

For a quiet drink in a friendly locale, make tracks for **Naresdamri Road**. There's a little enclave with **Adrenaline**, and next to that the brand new **Koala Blue Steakhouse**, where you can have a DIY Aussie-style barbecue. Across from there is **Papa John**, with a whopping selection of international dishes at local prices.

Probably the best place for a nightcap is right on the beach, which is where a lot of locals go, booze in hand, brain in the cosmos, for whitecap watching and star gawking.

WAY TO GO:

Bus: Buses leave regularly from the Southern Bus Terminal (get there on the #11 bus from Democracy Monument). Costs are about Bt200 for a 1st class bus and Bt140 for 2nd class. The bus trip takes around three hours. No matter what locals may tell you, the last bus back on Sunday leaves at 8pm, but it's usually booked solid by 7pm. If you get stranded, ask the motorcycle taxi drivers out in front of the station about the mini-bus. It's only about three minute's away by motorcycle, costs a bit less, and gets there faster. The last one also departs around 8pm.

Train: Trains leave Hualamphong all day, take under four hours and cost between Bt120 and Bt50 depending on whether the train is an express and hard or soft class.

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PATTAYA FAT OF THE LAND

If you pick up a tourist brochure, or look at a website, or even talk to one of the expatriates who live there, you'll keep stumbling on the phrase "paradise" used to describe Pattaya. On arrival, the casual observer may be a little mystified by this. The beach is rubbish, the whole town is concrete and there's sleaze on a truly dumbfounding scale. Koh Phi Phi this ain't. Yet the town has the highest concentration of expatriates outside Bangkok and sees two million visitors every year (second only to Phuket). So what draws people to this seaside resort town, just to the southeast of Bangkok?

Pattaya got its start during the Vietnam War when the US used a naval base there and designated the town as an approved R&R destination. Hotels and tourist operators quickly followed and the rest is history. Indeed, the Royal Thai Navy continues to operate the base and sailors can sometimes be seen around the town. Basically, it's the tourist infrastructure that pulls in the visitors and the centre of town abounds with hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, bars, phone or internet cafes, massage places and just about every other vacation convenience conceivable. Further down the coast there are many resorts for those who are on sun-and-seafood holidays, along with wildlife parks and dozens of other activities.

Pattaya is divided into two halves, covering two beaches. Pattaya beach is where the action is, the main night-district being Walking Street. Jomtien is further south and is a nicer beach with more accommodation, and it's popular with Thai weekenders.

So is Pattaya paradise? It's a party town for sure. No matter who you are there's something to occupy you, be it paintball, bungee jumping, kayaking or just loafing around getting drunk all day; Pattaya accepts all comers.

PLACES TO CRASH:

There are far too many places to list here. Pattaya's room prices start at about Bt300 and go up from there. There are the usual luxury hotels such as the **Amari**, the **Ambassador** or the **Dusit**. Odder exceptions are **Hard Rock Hotel**, featuring rock star-themed rooms and the **Cabbages & Condoms Resort**. The popular budget-traveller chain **Sawasdee** has five hotels in Pattaya town. Generally, the standards are high with even the cheapest rooms featuring TV, mini-bar and aircon, although some of the older buildings can be a little rundown. For a good night's sleep, avoid hotels next to one of the ubiquitous construction sites, or hotels that offer hourly rates.

DAYTRIPPING:

During daylight hours activities can be divided into two types: on land and on the water. Life is better out where it's wetter and apart from the usual beachside fun of banana boats and paragliding there's plenty of people to take you diving or on a day-trip to the offshore islands. For

the livelier there's water and cable-skiing, windsurfing or yachting.

On land, you could take in the **Sri Racha Tiger Zoo** (actually around 30km out of town), **Underwater World Pattaya** (an aquarium in South Pattaya), the **Snake Farm** or the **Orchid Farm** (both actually in Chonburi), the local branch of **Ripley's Believe it or Not Museum** (in Royal Garden Plaza), or shopping, shopping, shopping. If you're the sporty type there's Thailand's biggest bungee jump, which is just near the go-cart speedway (South Pattaya). Plus there's paintball, horseback riding, skydiving and shuffleboard. Needless to say, the landscape around Pattaya is littered with quality golf courses.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

The main nighttime activity in Pattaya City quickly becomes obvious on arrival. If you happen to be a white male in town, a quick stroll around dusk will illicit several invitations for a drink or other offers that may make you blush or tremble.



Beer-bars sprout from every bit of available space in town and there seems to be another acre of them around every corner – plenty of go-go bars around the downtown as well. Two of the more famous clubs and hunting grounds for happy hookers, and the men who lust after them, are **Walking Street's Marine Disco** and the Bangkok-based **Lucifer's**. If that's your gig, then you're not alone: Pattaya seems to have the world's largest concentration of overweight middle-aged men and you may feel out of place not wearing a mullet or moustache. There tend to be a lot of katoeys, or ladyboys, around town as well. Luckily they're not all picking pockets and you can go to **Alcazar**, **Simon** or **Tiffany's** cabaret shows for a gender-bending evening. In need of live music? Check out **Blues Factory** or **Climax Bar**, both on Walking Street. To stay away from the sleaze, hang out with a member of the opposite sex or try one of the better hotel bars.

FEEDING TIME:

If every second business in Pattaya is a bar then every third one is a restaurant. If you're aching for a taste of home, Pattaya provides some of the best Farang food at far less than Bangkok prices. English-style pubs can be expected to provide excellent post-hangover fry-ups and there are several

outstanding Japanese and Korean restaurants. For those Americans among us who long for Mexican food, the **Blue Parrot** on Soi 13/4 is a godsend – great tacos and margaritas, and generous portions of home-made salsa.

WIND IN YOUR FACE:

You'll see *songtaews* all over town, offering short lifts for Bt5-10, depending on the distance and your gullibility. Motorcycle taxis are ubiquitous and about the same as Bangkok prices, around Bt20 for a couple of kilometers. You can hire scooters and big bikes but unless you're an experienced rider the traffic will eat you alive. Even so, you can take heart because Pattaya's medical facilities are the best in the region. Hiring a car usually means a minimum of three days or more, and costs about Bt1,000 per day.

WAY TO GO:

Bus: Normal and aircon buses leave from Mor Chit and the Eastern Bus Terminal on Sukhumvit Soi 63 regularly. Fares range from Bt70-90.

Taxi: Impress your mates by hailing a cab and taking it to Pattaya, a bargain at Bt1,500 with beers and singsongs along the way. You can often bargain for Bt900 on the way back.

KOH CHANG SPLASH DOWN



oh Chang's reputation as an island of un-commercialised beaches ended in 2002 when the Thaksin government announced it plans to magically transform the Koh Chang archipelago into the "Maldives of Thailand". Developers took this nonsensical notion as the trigger to call in the bulldozers in anticipation of an influx of middle class, eco-friendly adventurers. Growth came rapidly, and accommodation now ranges from five-star resorts to the ever popular Bt100/night flophouses which leave you marvelling at the versatility of chipboard. The island could never be described as a hedonistic, triptastic party zone but there's a lot to be said for taking in the scenery before enjoying an evening's seaside stroll that doesn't require you to evade fire jugglers at every turn.

WHITESANDS

The welcoming sight of a 7-11 greets visitors as the road winds down into the most developed of the island's beaches. If it's comfort and convenience you're after then Whitesands is for you.

PLACES TO CRASH

At the northern end of the beach you'll find the budget **Star Bungalows** and a nomad vibe. **KC Grande Resort** offers something for everyone from Bt150-6,000 and in the centre of the beach **Cookie** and **Tantawan** adequately cater for the surfside dwelling crowd who look to pay Bt600-1,000. South of Whitesands, on Pearl Beach, a boutique resort ambience can be found at the tropical **Remark**

Cottages, the Mediterranean-styled **Keereeta** and the Balinese-influenced **Saffron on the Sea**, all in the Bt1,500-2,500 bracket.

KLONG PRAO

This long curving beach is tipped to become the island's Chaweng in the coming years. Accommodation amongst the mangrove-clad river estuaries provides a serene alternative to beach life.

PLACES TO CRASH

At the northern end, Koh Chang, **Paradise** is the pick of the package tour resorts, at around Bt2,500. Genuine travellers will love **Thalé Bungalows**, as laid back and chilled as the Dalai Lama on ice. On the bank of the southern

estuary the compact and bijou Blue Lagoon budget bungalows provide batik and cookery courses to while away the days. Longstanding backpacker haunt, **KP Huts** is still going strong, leaving **Barali** and **Tropicana** to vie for the wallets of luxury seekers.

KAI BAE

A good choice of bars, restaurants and decent accommodation make this an ideal base camp for anyone who's progressed beyond 'drink till you puke' travelling.

PLACES TO CRASH

Family-friendly comfort and privacy can had for a price at **Seaview Resort & Spa** at the very south of the beach. Sun-seekers watching their bank balance should head for the family run **KB Bungalows**. **Coral Beach** and **Porn Bungalows** also offer adequate places to lay your head should KB be full.

LONELY BEACH

The key to Lonely Beach's success lies in its name, but Lonely is one thing this mish-mash of chipboard accommodation isn't nowadays.

PLACES TO CRASH

Beach boys & girls should make a beeline for **Nature Beach's** Bt200 digs. **Bhumiya Resort** offers 3-star comforts a stone's throw from the unwashed masses. South, on the rocky shore, **Paradise Cottages** offer good low season deals for under Bt300. Moving on, the back-to-nature hideaway **The Mangrove**. Bailan is value at under Bt1,000. Down a notch in quality and price you'll find **Bailan Hut** and **Happy Hut** provide havens for world-weary voyagers.

BANGBAO

This lazy fishing village, comprising one 'street' of wooden houses built on stilts into the sea, is now home to more dive schools, seafood restaurants and boat tour operators than fishermen.

PLACES TO CRASH

Bang Bao Sea Hut, at Bt2,000, is a must if you have the cash. More economical panoramic sea and

mountain views can be had at **Cliff Cottages**, whilst **Dragon House** provides no-frills beachfront digs for backpackers.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Let your hair down and experience modern Thai culture at **Sky Bay Pub**, Pearl Beach. On Whitesands, **Oodies** is an old fave for good steaks and music whilst **Sabuy** bar is everything you expect a Thai beach bar to be. If you're in need of a feed the excellent **Cookie Restaurant** is right next door. In Kai Bae, **Rasta Baby** and **Lek Bar** provide a site for sound systems, pool and live footy. For cocktails in a bucket stop by **Bad Monkey Bar**, Lonely Beach.

DAYTRIPPING

A couple of days can be well-filled touring the island on a Bt200 (daily) motorbike. Suzuki 'jeeps' can also be had for around Bt1,200. Make time to visit **Baan Kwan Chang elephant camp**, they provide a free pick-up service. On the scuba scene, try **Dolphin Divers** for PADI courses with a personal touch, **Dive Adventure** for liveaboard trips to Cambodian waters or **Ploy Scuba** for a dogs bollocks diveboat. Snorkelling is a deservedly popular alternative with **Captain Toom**, Bangbao guaranteeing a good day out.



BANGKOK HOSPITAL GROUP

WAY TO GO

By Air: Bangkok Airways fly twice daily. Low season deals from Bt3,000(ret)

By Bus: Bt170 -200 for the 6 hours trip from Morchit Terminal to Trat, from where a songtaew will whisk you to the ferry pier at Laem Ngop.

By minivan: A 4-hour drive from Khao San Road for Bt270-300, including cost of ferry crossing.



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KOH SAMET TIDAL HIDEAWAY

Samet is one multi-faceted diamond in the rough. For Bangkok-incarcerated Thais and expats, it's a very welcome, weekend parole. For family folks, it's got some luxurious resorts and wholesome fun. And for younger travelers the island has got it going on party-wise, and offers some decent, lower-range accommodation. In other ways, however, the beach experience in Koh Samet is getting more and more generic, what with all the same banana boats, jet-skis and sarong vendors.

HAT SAI KAEW

The aptly named White Sand Beach is located around the hatchet head of the axe-shaped island. It's got some of the glitz but none of the vices of Samui or Phuket. In general, it is pricier and more family-oriented than the other beaches. That said, the nightlife has been picking up a bit, thanks to venues like the **Beach Bar** and, right next door, the **Reggae Pub** where, as all you psychics have predicted by now, Bob Marley's Most Overplayed Hits are in eternal rotation. There's sand like an angel's dandruff on this beach, and in case you don't believe the diving is better on Koh Tao than an outing with **Ploy Diving** should convince you.

AO HIN KHOK

For parties, food and affordable accommodation **Naga** reigns supreme on the next beach southward. But with bungalows for Bt200 it can get pretty full. Some of the best parties on Samet are in their elevated bar which has coconut palms (festooned with fairy lights) growing right through the floor. Good selection of dance tracks, a pool table, and a special "Flip a Coin" promotion on drinks every night from 10pm-midnight. **Tok's** and **Jep's** are two of the other mainstays for global nomads, and also serve up their own extremely edible food, with the cuisine at Jep's topping Samed's charts. But we should remind you of this ruby of wisdom from the eminent Australian gourmand John McDonald. "Like most beach resorts in Thailand, the seafood is magnificent, the Thai food is competent, and the Western food is crap – order with caution." Yes, words to dine by, except for at the aforementioned Jep's, which does everything splendidly.

AO PHAI

At the north end of this beach is **Ao Phai Huts** where bungalows begin at Bt600. Next along is party central at **Silversand**. It's a sliver of Koh Pangan – without the Class A's or the blaring trance – and has mats on the beach, fire-juggling from 10pm, and it's open very late sometimes. They even teach fire-juggling here, and watching Farangs set their T-shirts aflame is a favourite pastime after midnight. Speaking of flames, check out Rayong's only sheesha cafe at Sheesha Cafe. One of the signs you'll see all over Samet advertises a fishing and snorkeling tour; it includes stops at nearby islands, lunch, and turtle and shark farms. "All this and a smile for only Bt400," the sign says. The tours run from 11am-4pm daily. Silversand also rents kayaks for Bt100 per hour or Bt400 for the day. And



if you're gagging for a Sheesha pipe, drop in to Sheesha Cafe at Seabreeze bungalows.

AO PUDSA

Sometimes known as Ao Phudsa, this stretch of blinding white sand has a sign hanging from a tree that says it's a "Rabies Free Zone." Yes, the sand dogs can be a nuisance when you're eating, but they're not Cujo by any means. The best thing about this small and popular beach is that it's faraway enough from Ao Phai to be quiet but close enough to walk and party there. For Bt500 the bungalows at **Ao Phudsa** are a touch dirty and dilapidated. A better deal is **Tubtim**, right beside it, which has fan-cooled bungalows for the same price, or air-con jobbies for Bt1,200. And their restaurant is one of the best on the island. Period.

AO NUAN

To really get away from it all – even your irksome doppelganger Ernie – make a beeline for this small, secluded beach. It's just around from the boulder-strewn headland at the end of Tubtim. There's only one bungalow operation here – **Ao Nuan** – which has nine charming old-fashioned bungalows in the Bt300-600 price range. Even if you don't stay over here, it's a great place for swimming and rarely gets crowded.

BEST OF THE REST

Ao Vongduean is the longest beach. It attracts a lot of Thais with money and families because of some outstanding mid-range digs like the **Malibu Resort** with aircon bungalows for Bt1,200. One of the island's better bars and restaurants **Bay Watch** is conveniently located on Vongduean for your partying pleasure. In general, the further south you go, the more Thai and isolated the island becomes. If you're into camping and marine biology make footprints for Ao Kiu. Here you can rent tents and camp near the beach. On the other side of the island is Ao Prao, which boasts a very fancy resort and is otherwise a cool place to venture for a sunset.

WAY TO GO:

Public Bus: Departures every hour from Eastern Bus Terminal on Sukhumvit Soi 63, off the Ekkamai skytrain station. Tickets Bt125-150. Bear in mind that the last ferry (Bt50; takes 45 minutes) leaves Ban Phe at 6pm. In order to catch it you need to get the 2pm bus, because the journey takes around three-and-a-half hours. If you do miss the boat, then you can rent a speedboat for a minimum of Bt1,000 for four or five people.

Motorcycle Rentals: Bt350-400 per day. Drive easy, because the roads are both sandy and will leave you with a serious case of hemorrhoids.

HONGKONG

HONGKONG

OUT

Everyone knows about Hong Kong's skyscrapers but you want to get a proper look at them in context. Set against hillsides and islands and a bustling harbour, HK is a visual treat. It has everything that busy cities do but most of the territory is actually rural, and there are plenty of other views and options available. The famous get-up-and-go (read: ravenous avarice) attitude of HK makes it a place where pretty much anything gets up and goes. It's a money town and wealth is the main topic of small talk. If you're not already wealthy, it's perfectly acceptable – and even a good idea – to pretend you are. The territory breaks down roughly along old treaty lines into HK island (business district, upper residential and nightlife); Kowloon on the mainland (much more populous and diverse); merging into the New Territories (NT) (largely countryside leading to the border with the People's Republic).

Island ferry piers, Central). **Shek O** (bus 6 from Shau Kei Wan MTR) is the last remaining village on HK island, with a good beach popular with surfers who also frequent the nearby **Big Wave Bay**, but don't expect too much in the way of water sports.

Lantau island (ferry from Star Ferry Pier 5) is also worth a look for its **Big Buddha** and the views from the **Lantau Peak** (a do-able 1,000ft climb). **Lamma** island (Pier 4) is smaller and more chilled, with a sizeable expat community.

MACAU

An hour's ferry away (from Shun Tak Centre, Sheung Wan MTR), Macau is well worth a day or an overnighter. HK-ers go for the gambling, shopping and whoring,

Words by **Hugh Whitby**

GETTING AROUND:

It's all about the MTR, Hong Kong's underground, which services most of the major districts on the mainland and Hong Kong Island. Then there are the ferries that zip you back and forth across the beautiful bay and beyond for a pittance, and finally, an extensive and comfortable bus network servicing the rest of the territory. There's a tram on the island but it's kind of slow – good for a laugh, though. The Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR) runs between Tsim Sha Tusi and Lo Yw on the border with Shenzhen with about a dozen stops in between.

DAYTRIPPING

THE PEAK

Peak Tram from Garden Rd, Admiralty MTR / Bus 15 from Central / 15C from Star Ferry
The hill where the first colonials repaired from the heat now offers spectacular city night views obligatory for all visitors. There are pricey shops and restaurants there, but a picnic and a camera is all you need. Take the Peak Tram up and aim to get there for sunset on a clear day. The walk down through the gardens is pleasant but best done during the day, take the bus at night.

MUSEUMS

HK Art Museum, Museum of Science & Technology and the **Cultural Centre** are all at Star Ferry Terminal Tsim Sha Tusi. There is a large open waterfront area outside with occasional outdoor entertainment at weekends. The more recently opened **Heritage Museum**

The exotic far east



(ShaTin KCR) gives a great insight into HK and the **HK History Museum** is at Hung Hom KCR.

CITY PARKS

Great for escaping the crush, but teeming with Filipino maids on Sundays, **HK Park** (Admiralty MTR) is landscaped and small. Catch earnest newlyweds posing in front of flower beds or check out the aviary or **Tai Chi Garden**. The **HK Zoological & Botanical Gardens** are just over the road. **Victoria Park** (Causeway Bay MTR) and **Kowloon Park** (Tsim Sha Tusi MTR) are both bigger and better for watching people and the world go by.

COUNTRY PARKS

There are 23 country parks with walks and nature trails to suit all tastes and energies. Since only about a quarter of HK is actually built up, you may be surprised by the diversity of wildlife, vegetation and scenery. Ask at your hotel or hostel for recommendations but you don't really need a tour.

BEACHES / OUTLYING ISLANDS

The beaches are unlikely to impress you if you just blew in from other Asian sands but HK does have them, particularly at **Sai Kung** (minibuses from Choi Hung MTR) or on the outlying islands (ferries from Outlying

but it's nice just to go for the colonial architecture, relaxed pace and the spectacle of Chinese people speaking Portuguese.

BUYING STUFF

HK revels in its self-proclaimed status as a Shopping Paradise, so whatever you're looking for, you can assume it will be available somewhere. Even if you're not hunting down souvenirs or consumer durables, it is worth taking a look as this is a big part of local culture.

ELECTRONICS AND GIZMOS

Sure, HK is still a duty-free port, but that doesn't mean much these



Come on baby, Paris Hilton did it...

days. Still, it is one of the best shopping hubs in East Asia. In Chinese style, each product has its own street, one for consumer electronics, one for cameras and one for ripping off tourists (Nathan Road – never buy anything from a flashy shop there). There's also the **Temple Street** night market, the **Ladies' Market** and the **Flower Market**, plus numerous fresh markets. Most maps have these well marked.

FEEDING TIME

There is a Chinese saying: "We eat anything with four legs except the table and anything with wings except the aeroplane," and the Cantonese eat things that even other Chinese won't touch. You can get your fill of guts and offal on just about any street. That said, other regions of China are well represented (in particular Shanghai, Sichuan and various Peking specialities). Don't let Chinese menus in the window deter you, as there will be an English version inside and/or staff who are more than happy to talk you through what's on offer. Hong Kong is rightly proud of its eating scene, and you can find cuisines from all over Asia and beyond, but if you're on a budget, McDonald's is the cheapest – shoestrapping tourists often survive on little else. The seafood is great and best found by the sea. Favourite locations are **Sai Kung** and **Sok Kwu Wan** (Outlying Island Ferry Pier 4 to Sok Kwu Wan). Talk to the staff about quantities and prices of fresh seafood rather than relying on the menu. Food stalls selling dim sum and snacks are ubiquitous, though more common in the side streets of Kowloon than the shopping/business districts of Central. Bakeries are everywhere, selling cheap breads and pastries. In most areas, sandwich

bars and coffee shops are easy to find though you'll pay more for this kind of home comfort.

NIGHTTRIPPING

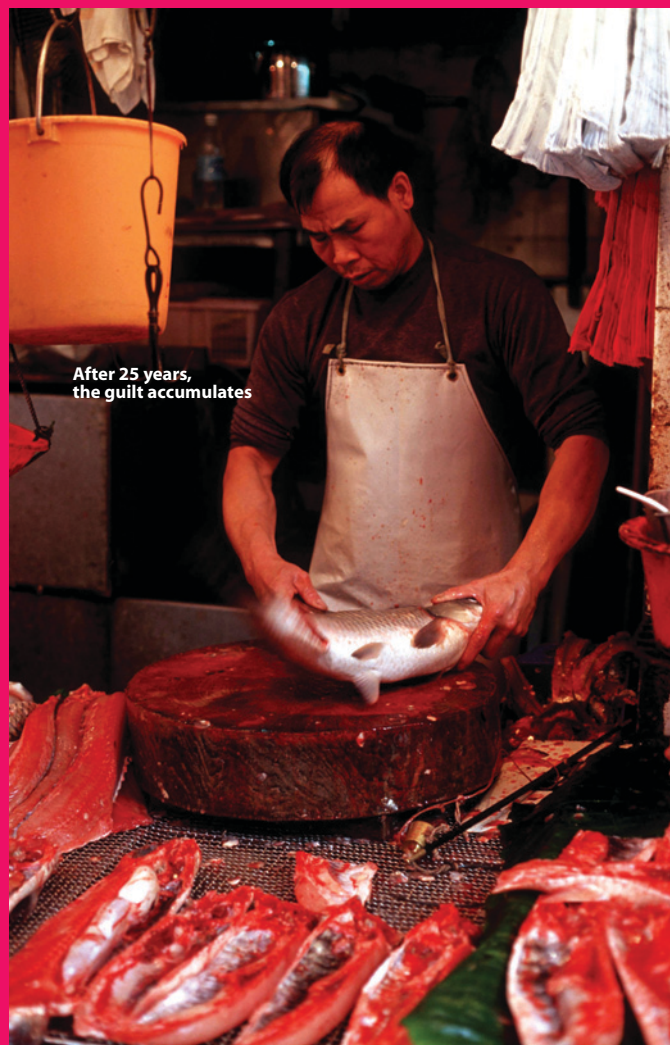
Accept the fact early on that you'll never get used to the price of drinks while you're here, and if you do, it's too late since you're already broke. However, happy hours are absolutely standard and varied, running as late as 10pm, while some places offer a second late happy hour around midnight or after. So with a little planning, a night out needn't be too financially punishing. Ask around for all-you-can-drink deals. More good news is that there are effectively no licensing restrictions (time-wise that is) and any bar will serve you as long as they are reasonably busy. Areas to head for are: **Lan Kwai Fong** (Central MTR) – a small pedestrianised block or two traditionally favoured by expats; nowadays it's more of a mixed crowd with a wine bar feel to it. Named after Tiannemen, **Club 64** is a bit different. **Le Jardin** next door is similarly down to earth and there's a popular outdoor eating area here serving various Asian food. A small hike up the hill towards **Hollywood Road** brings you to Soho. Here you'll find brasseries, eateries and night clubs, and a generally more "beautiful class" of people. Prices have hiked up the hill with you too, but you can also catch some of HK's best jazz musicians in intimate surroundings. Check out the **Blue Door**, **The Gecko**, and **The Bohemian Lounge**. For dancing try **Nu**, **Home Base**, **Amnesia**, among other more exclusive options. **Wanchai** (MTR) enjoys a more down-at-heel reputation. Here there are Irish bars and sports bars and girlie bars, as well as straight-up bars vying for your attention.

There's also live music at **The Wanch** and **Carnegies** and dancing on the tables at the **Groovy Mule**. This is where to head for late nights – try **Dusk Till Dawn**, **Neptunes 2** or **The Dock**. If you're based in **Tsim Sha Tusi** you'll still find pubs and bars, though they're more dispersed. There's live music most nights at **48th St Chicago Blues** and trad-jazz at **Ned Kelly's**. Between Nelson Road and Hung Hom station is the old opium district which is now peppered with Chinese bars, which means Karaoke, Bluff-Dice (a drinking game and well worth learning) and football on TV. If you can find it, **Nutbush Terrace** is a strip of pricy but nice bars with the obligatory Filipino cover bands. As for clubbing, pack your credit card in a fireproof cover and develop a taste for Canto-pop.

ACCOMMODATION

It ain't cheap. Most tourists stay

on 'The Golden Mile' of Nathan Road, in Tsim Sha Tusi (around the corner from **The Peninsula**). There you find a **Holiday Inn** and the horrible **Chungking Mansions** – a wretched tower of tiny guesthouses overflooding with semi-legal immigrants, but good Indian restaurants. Chungking is the cheapest, as long as you don't mind risking hepatitis or casual assault. Far better to head to **Mirador Mansions** a block down, which is the same deal but far cleaner. **The Garden Hostel** on the third floor is the best bet and is favoured by long-termers. Everywhere costs around HK\$50 for a dorm bed and HK\$100 for a shoebox crash-pad. Either way, you'll be touted as soon as you step off the bus. For the big-budgeted or expense-accounted Hong Kong's hotels are a delight. Many of the mid-range luxury places are in Wanchai, which is also the expat red-light district, but kind of tame by Thai standards.



After 25 years, the guilt accumulates

SINGAPORE PARTY TIME

For some travelers in Asia, part of the appeal is feeling richer than the local population. Well, in Singapore forget it. It's a wealthy place and has the prices to match. It is clean, modern, organised, and efficient. It is, in other words, a comfort zone where there is almost zero chance of getting food poisoning, pickpocketed, or even bitten by a mosquito. And yet it retains the variety and flavour of Asia, from its ethnic neighbourhoods to its funky food stalls, temples, markets and colonial architecture. It's also easy to get around, thanks to a three-line rapid transit system (called the MRT, it closes at 1am), and an efficient bus network. Taxis are cheap, with most journeys costing only a few dollars, and a ride from the airport to downtown is just over \$10. (Note: All prices are in Singapore dollars. Where two prices are shown, the second one is for children.) So be prepared to spend some money here, and to sample much of Asia's best minus the worst.

Cost: \$8.50, \$3.90

One of Singapore's best museums. Five galleries explore connections between Asian cultures.

ESPLANADE

Way to Go: City Hall MRT

Looks like a gigantic pair of fly's eyes and sometimes called the "durian buildings." A 1,600-seat concert hall and 2,000-seat theatre, along with smaller studios, galleries, performance spaces, restaurants, bars and boutiques.

SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Way to Go: City Hall/Dhoby Ghaut MRT

When: Mon-Sun 10am-7pm, Fri 10am-9pm

Cost: \$3, \$1.50

Housed in a classical baroque building. Focuses on Singaporean and regional artists, with a strong emphasis on electronic arts.

DAYTRIPPING

RAFFLES HOTEL

Way to go: City Hall MRT

One of the most hyped hotels in the world, Raffles is officially classified as part of Singapore's heritage. Opened in 1887, Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham and Rudyard Kipling stayed and wrote here. The **Singapore Sling** was invented here in 1915, and even at \$14 a pop, stopping by the Long Bar to sample this gin/cherry-brand/fruit-juice cocktail is a must for many visitors.

ORCHARD ROAD

Way to Go: Orchard MRT

A shopper's paradise lined with mega-malls and five-star hotels. On Sundays the strip teems with crowds of Filipina maids come to socialise on their day off.

ZOO & NIGHT SAFARI

Way to Go: Ang Mo Kio MRT, then bus 138

When: Zoo, daily, 8:30am-6pm

Night Safari, 7:30pm-midnight

Cost: Zoo, \$12.25, \$5.10. Night Safari, \$15.75, \$10.50

More than 3,600 mammals, birds and reptiles make their home at the Singapore Zoological Gardens. You can even have tea with an orangutan. On the Night Safari, more than 1,200 animals lurk in a moonlit forest.

FORT CANNING PARK

Way to Go: Dhoby Ghaut MRT

When: Daily, 10am-6pm

Cost: \$8, \$5.

A green oasis in the city centre, with a Malay shrine atop the hill, and underneath, the Battle Box museum, where life-sized models reenact the British military's decision to surrender to the Japanese in 1942.

JURONG BIRD PARK

Way to Go: Boon Lay MRT

When: Daily, 9am-5pm

Cost: \$12.25, \$5.10

More than 8,000 birds including a flamingo-filled lake.

SENTOSA ISLAND

Way to Go: Harbour Front MRT

A theme park-like island off the southern tip of Singapore, full of attractions from the absurd to the marvelous. The Musical Fountain projects love messages onto a water screen. Other attractions/activities include a beach, nature walk, horseback riding, golf, kayaking.

MT. FABER

Way to Go: Habor Front MRT

When: Cable car operates daily, 8:30am-9pm

Cost: \$8.50, \$3.90

Across from Sentosa, Mt Faber offers one of the best views in Singapore. Take the cable to the peak to glimpse old colonial houses, the bustling port and skyscrapers.

BUKIT TIMAH

NATURE RESERVE

Way to Go: Bus No. 171 or 182 from Orchard Rd

When: 8:30am-6pm

Eighty-one hectares of forests. More plant species than all of North America. Trails for walkers and mountain bikers.

SINGAPORE RIVER

Way to Go: Raffles Place /Clarke Quay MRT

Formerly the heart of Singapore, now a district of restaurants, bars, and renovated warehouses. Singapore's symbol of tourism, the Merlion, a half-lion, half-fish, water-spouting statue, is at the mouth of the river. Along the south bank is Boat Quay, a lively strip of restaurants and bars. On the other side and upriver is Clarke Quay, a more laid-back area. Market on Read Bridge on Sunday afternoons.

LITTLE INDIA

Way to Go: Little India MRT

All the sights, sounds and smells of big India clustered in one neighbourhood



along Serangoon Road. Visit Sunday evening (or don't) when 10,000 Indian men celebrate their day off.

CHINATOWN

Way to Go: Outram Park MRT

Historic home of the Chinese. Many traditional shophouses restored to their original specs. Souvenirs, knick knacks, antiques along Pagoda and Trengganu Streets.

ARAB STREET

Way to Go: Bugis MRT

The centre of Muslim culture. Good deals on textiles, batik, silk and more. Home of Sultan Mosque.

GEYLAND SERAI

Way to Go: Paya Lebar MRT

Traditional district of indigenous Malays. Market bubbles with cuisine, costumes and crafts.

ARTY STUFF

ASIAN CIVILIZATIONS MUSEUM

Way to Go: Raffles Place MRT

When: Mon 12-6pm, Tues-Sun 9am-6pm, Fri 9am-9pm

NIGHTTRIPPING

Drinking is not cheap in Singapore. To keep it cheap, have your beers at the open-air food centres and stalls you find everywhere. Most young Singaporeans do not drink much, so many places cater to the large community of highly paid expats working in the financial sector. (You remember the Barings Bank-buster Nick Leeson, right?). Irish pubs charge around \$13-\$14 a pint.

ALLEY BAR

2 Emerald Hill Rd. Sun-Thu 5pm-2am, Fri-Sat 5pm-3am
High-ceilinged, L-shaped bar opens into an alley. Dim-sum snacks.

BALACLAVA

#01-01B Suntec City, 1 Raffles Blvd. Mon-Thu 3pm-1am, Fri-Sat 3pm-2am.

Elegant atmosphere, designer armchairs and sofas. Live jazz. TVs at individual tables.

BAR NONE

Marriot Hotel, 320 Orchard Rd. Mon 7-2, Tues-Sun 7-3.

Adult contemporary music with a rock edge provided by house band.

BREWERKZ

#01-05 Riverside Point, 30 Merchant Rd. Mon-Thu noon-midnight, Fri-Sat noon-1am, Sunday 11am-midnight.

Popular riverside microbrewery with California menu.

THE DUBLINER

165 Perang Road #01-00 Winsland House II, 11:30am-1am (Sun-Thu), 1:30pm-2am (Fri-Sat), Somerset MRT.

Rustic Irish pub with authentic Irish fare. Leather sofas, oak furniture, brick walls.

HARRY'S BAR

28 Boat Quay, Sun-Thu 11am-1 am, Fri-Sat 11am-2am

High-volume house band downstairs, laidback retreat upstairs. Nick Leeson's favourite.

JAZZ@SOUTH BRIDGE

82B Boat Quay, Sun-Thu, 5:30 pm-1 am, Fri-Sat 5:30pm-2am.

Cozy mainstream jazz. Comfy sofas.

NO. 5 EMERALD HILL COCKTAIL BAR

5 Emerald Hill, Mon-Thu noon-2am, Fri-Sat noon-3am, Sun 5pm-2am

Traditional shophouse-turned-European-style pub. Pool room upstairs.

ORCHARD TOWERS

400 Orchard Rd, open 24 hours
Nicknamed "Four Floors of Whores," this is a four-story complex that conjures the image of a tamer version of Bangkok's Nana Plaza. Neon-lit bars, thumping music, transvestites and Western men prowling for Asian women.

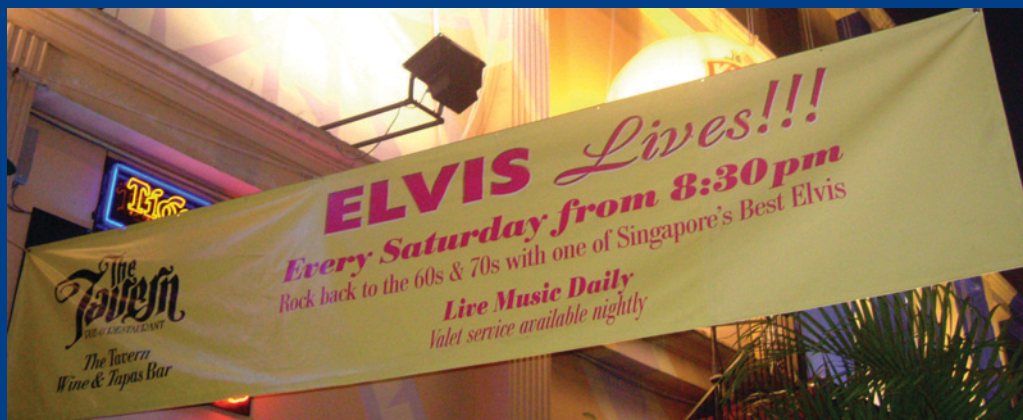
PRINCE OF WALES

101 Dunlop St, open 4:30pm-1am
An Aussie-style pub and beer garden in Little India that has a good line of draft beer staffed by Australians. Card carrying backpackers get a whopping 50% discount.

CLUBS

Singapore's hottest dance clubs are concentrated along Mohamed Sultan Road off River Valley Road. Most have cover charges and dress codes. Don't show up in shorts or flip-flops. A lot of the clubs are open late, and there are other after-hours venues, too.

CENTRO



#02-02 One Fullerton, 1 Fullerton Rd. Wed-Thu 10 pm-3. Fri-Sun 10pm-4am

Massive dance floor. House, garage and techno beats. Some of the best DJs from around the world.

THE LIQUID ROOM

#01-05 the Gallery Hotel, 76 Robertson Quay, Wed-Sat 10pm-3am

Classy atmosphere, beautiful people, huge dance floor.

LOLA

#02-02 One Fullerton, 1 Fullerton Rd. Tues-Sat 10pm-3am

Intimate and eclectic. Wall murals and crystal chandelier. Latin beats.

ZOUK

17 Jiak Kim St. Wed-Sat 7:30pm-3am

The original Singapore club and still one of the hottest. DJs from around the world. Same complex as Phuture and Velvet Underground.

FEEDING TIME

The variety of places to chow down is one of the best things about Singapore, from yummy inexpensive street food, to fine international cuisine. Singaporeans munch gleefully away at all hours of the day or night in locations all over the city. For budget travelers, hawker stalls and food centres offer great grub, a relaxed atmosphere and clean surroundings for a few dollars a plate. But don't eat all your meals there, since there are so many superb restaurants and eateries to try. Simply choose a district and

stroll through until you find something that strikes your fancy. Not surprisingly, you will find great Chinese food in **Chinatown**, and great Indian food in **Little India**, and many other locations around the city. Stroll along **Boat Quay**, and touts will jump out at you from every restaurant to show you a menu. It's rather touristy and not cheap, but the riverside atmosphere should be experienced. **Holland Village** at the other end of the city is a gathering place for Westerners and has good Italian and Lebanese food. Near Raffles Hotel, **Chijmes** is a collection of Western and non-Western restaurants in a former convent. For a more authentic local experience, try **Lau Pa Sat**, a sprawling open-air food centre in the stomach of the business district.

PLACES TO CRASH

The main strip of budget hotels is along Bencoolen St, near the city centre, though some have closed in recent years as the area gentrifies with larger hotels and offices. Still, there are a dozen or so cheap hotels and guesthouses with prices around \$15-\$50, and backpackers walk up and down the street at all hours. The area is easy walking distance of Little India and Orchard Road. Some favorite haunts include: **The Hawaii Hostel**, 171-B Bencoolen St., 6338-4187; **Green Curtains**, 131-A Bencoolen St. 6334-8697; **Waterloo Hostel**, 55

Waterloo St, Catholic Centre Bldg. 4th Fl, 6336-6555. For more culture and character, try Chinatown or Little India; both offer good, small hotels. In Chinatown, those in the \$100-\$150 range include: **Damenlou Hotel**, 12 Ann Siang Rd, 6221-1900; **Dragon Inn Chinatown**, 18 Mosque St, 6222-7227; **Royal Peacock** 55 Keong Saik Rd, 6223-3522; **The Inn on Temple St**, 36 Temple St, 6221-5333. In Little India, decent, boutique-style hotels are found for under \$100, including: **Perak Lodge**, 12 Perak Rd, 6299-7733; **Mayo Inn** 9A Jalan Besar, 6295-6631; **Broadway Hotel**, 195 Serangoon Rd, 6292-4661; **Dickson Court Hotel**, 3 Dickson Rd. 6297-7811; **Fortuna Hotel**, 2 Owen Rd., 6295-3577; **Tai Hoe Hotel**, 163 Kitchener Rd. 6293-9122. If you're hankering for your own kind, crash at the Prince of Wales Backpacker Pub at 101 Dunlop St, \$12 a night in a four bed dorm and a free beer every night.

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PHNOM PENH



Not nearly as dangerous as it once was, the city can still be risky at night. Sure, it's not Bangkok or Singapore, but Phnom Penh has come a long way in the past five years. The city retains its faded French grandeur but has added a great drinking strip of bars by the river and an environment where drinking is still a 24-hour sport.

PLACES TO CRASH:

Guesthouses in Phnom Penh are pretty consistent, ranging from \$3-5 for shared bath and fan to \$10-12 for aircon and private bath, hot water, and TV. The young traveller ghettos are around Boeung Kak Lake (Street 93), and the noisy centre of town. Around the lake they're all much the same; in town **The Capitol** has a satellite of guesthouses around the intersection of streets 107 and 182. And **Narin's** have their own little kingdoms on streets 111 and streets 125. A small step up, the **Dara Reang Sey Hotel** (streets 13 & 118) has a loyal following (\$8 fan, \$12 aircon). **California 2** along the river is popular with the older independent set. If living in squalor isn't your style, the only internationally-accredited 4-star in Cambodia is the **Sunway Hotel**, near Wat Phnom with rooms starting at \$80.

DAYTRIPPING:

Khmer Rouge horrors are documented at the **Tuol Sleng Museum** in town and the **Killing Fields Memorial** at Choeung Ek. On the way to the Killing Fields, check out the present-day horrors, at the Phnom Penh garbage dump in Stung Meanchey district, a hundred-acre cesspool where a few hundred children scavenge through toxic muck for recyclables. West of the airport, there are two shooting ranges where you can fire off 30 rounds from

an AK for about \$20 – same price for a grenade. A grenade launcher will set you back \$200. Back in town, the cultural attractions include **Wat Phnom**. According to legend, it's the site of the historic founding of the city in 1372. Near the river are the **Silver Pagoda** and **Royal Palace**. Make sure you pay the camera fee if you plan to take photos – they enforce it. Nearby, the **National Museum** has lots of carvings and stuff, much of it lifted from Angkor.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

If you go out in search of revelry after dark, take a car taxi or use a moto – do not walk anywhere. Phnom Penh has a reputation for street muggings, although these are relatively rare today. If you are mugged, don't resist. Along the river there are notable holes-in-the wall such as the **The Pink Elephant** and **The Cantina** as well as larger corner establishments like the **Foreign Correspondent's Club (FCC)** and **The Riverside**. A whole line-up of bars on Street 51 between streets 136 and 178 include the long-running and now expanded **Heart of Darkness** (note: there have been some violent incidents there in the past year, but the problem seems to have been, at least temporarily, solved). Also on Street 51 are the **Walkabout** (open 24 hours), **Howie's** (another late-night joint), and **Shanghai Bar** (a single guy's



Welcome to the digital age, mate

kind of place). Elsewhere around town is **Sharky Bar** (street 130) which is a big bar with lots of pool tables. Popular with expat men and Vietnamese 'taxi girls.' The girls will leave you alone if you just want to drink and play pool.

FEEDING TIME:

Along Sisowath Quay by the river is a plethora of restaurants with a wide array of international cuisines,

including the famous **FCC**, **Happy Herb's Pizza**, **Frizz**, and around the corner on street 178 is the **Rising Sun**. Almost any street corner offers a noodle stall or a Khmer-style hole-in-the-wall rice and noodle shop. There are a few local fast-food joints (but no McDonald's yet). Street 240 offers a number of eating options though many of these cater more to the NGO crowd.

WAY TO GO:

From Thailand:

Plane: Bt5,420/10,335 one-way/return from Bangkok (\$25 departure tax, \$6 Domestic)

Road: The road from Koh Kong is a seven- to eight-hour ride. A shared taxi costs about Bt400 for a small seat or the front seat for Bt700-800.

A car is about Bt2,400. There are daily tourist vans from **Mealy Chenda** (Bt600) and **Local Adventures Cambodia** (Bt550). The latter usually provides the better service.

Boat: From **Koh Kong** to **Sihanoukville**, morning departure, \$15.

From Siem Reap:

Plane: Siem Reap Airways and President Air, \$55-60 one-way, several flights a day.

Road: Road is much improved. Bus

\$4, six-seven hours. Taxi \$45, five hours.

Boat: \$20-25, five to seven hours, daily a.m. departure.

VISAS & BORDER CROSSINGS:

To/from Thailand: Use Poipet if heading to Siem Reap from Bangkok. Use either Poipet or Koh Kong if heading to Phnom Penh. If coming from the north (Isaan, Vientiane) use Anlong Veng or O'Smach. Visa-on-arrival costs Bt1,000 but beware of scams.

To/from Laos: The border above Stung Treng is usually open. Lao and Cambodia visas are unavailable here. Expect a \$3 'stamp fee'. A boat from Stung Treng to the border should be about \$25 for a boat or \$5 a person.



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SIEM REAP CLIMB THE STEPS

Siem Reap means “Siam Vanquished” and was the administrative and spiritual centre of the bloodthirsty Khmer Empire, which rivaled the Roman in size before it, somewhat mysteriously, crumbled. The ruins are what remain of a large city. Angkor Wat is the big centerpiece here, and is a tribute to what unopposed facism can achieve with the benefit of slave labour. This is one of the few tourist attractions that is not overrated. Six km from the temples, the town is pretty quiet and quaint.

PLACES TO CRASH:

\$3-5 rooms are scattered all over town. Along Highway 6 **Apsara Angkor Guesthouse**, **Chreuk Loeung**, **Jasmine**, **Hello**, and western-owned **Earthwalkers** are all good choices. On the same road on the other side of town take a look at **Skyway** or **Peace of Angkor Villa**, the latter is British-run and great place for photographers to pick up some local tips. Wat Bo Road offers some old stand-bys in **Mahogany** and **Mom's**. The Old Market area is the center of nightlife. The guesthouses here tend to be mid-range but if that's in your budget take a look at the new **Ivy** guesthouse, **Bakong**, or **Red Piano**. A short walk from the Old Market, the **Ivy 2** guesthouse has budget fan rooms as does the **Garden Village** and **Red Lodge** guesthouses.

Hint: The kickback system for moto and taxi drivers is well established – don't bother fighting it, 'cause you won't change a damn thing.

DAYTRIPPING:

Okay, at \$20 for a day, \$40 for three and \$60 for the week, the temples may seem expensive, but a week of living it up in Siem Reap and Angkor is cheaper than Bangkok, and the temples are worth it. You can hire a motodop to take you around Angkor for \$6-8 per day. Other options include a car with driver (about \$20 a day) or a motorcycle-drawn rickshaw for

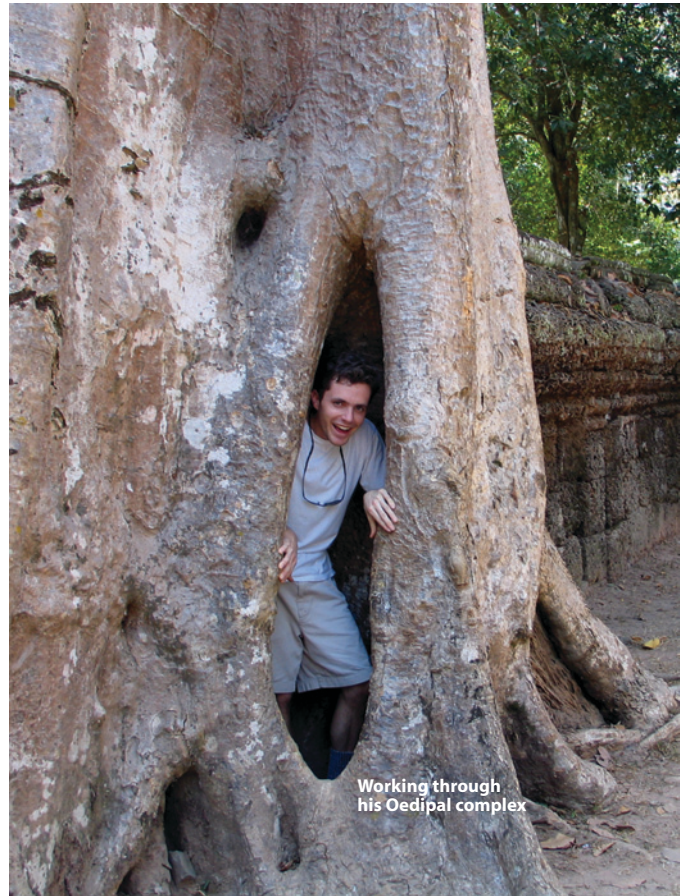
about \$10/day. Guides can set you back another \$20 to 25 a day. They can be arranged through a tour agency, your guesthouse, or stop by the **Angkor Tour Guide Association** opposite the Grand Hotel.

DAYTRIPPING BEYOND THE TEMPLES:

Go see the river carvings and take a jungle walk at **Kbal Spean**, the sacred **Phnom Kulen** with the, less than sacred, \$20 foreigner admission fee. Or visit the floating village of **Chong Khneas** on the Tonle Sap Lake — gorgeous. The more adventurous can visit temples further afield such as **Beng Mealea**. Trips any further away become overnight and get expensive. The Ministry of Defense recently opened a **War Museum** near the airport. It costs \$3 to view rusty military hardware on nicely landscaped grounds in no context whatsoever.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

Most of the visiors go to “Pub Street” which includes the **Angkor What? Bar**, **Soup Dragon**, **Le Papier de Tiger**, **Easy Speaking**, **Temple**, **Golden Shamrock**, **Red Piano**, and the **Paris Sete**. Elsewhere is the newly relocated **Ivy Bar** (popular with expats). Then there's the **Laundry Music Bar** with a couple of DJ parties each month. A few blocks away on Sivatha, across from the **E-cafe** is



Working through his Oedipal complex

the **Dead Fish Tower**, a large relaxing place.

FEEDING TIME:

If you want to go “authentic, man” try the street stalls along **Sivatha Street** or the east side of the river just south of Highway 6. There are also numerous hole-in-the-wall Khmer rice and noodle shops all over town. Most have some sort of English-language menu. The bulk of restaurants are clustered in the **Psah Chas** (Old Market) area. Options include the **Ivy** (Western), **Soup Dragon** (Asian), **Easy Speaking** (Asian, Western), **Brodie's** (Thai, Khmer), **Taj Mahal** (Indian-Punjab), **New Delhi** (Indian), and **Le Gecko Mayonnaise** (Western, Asian). Along Sivatha Street are scores of restaurants including the **Dead Fish Tower** (Thai) and **Tell Restaurant** (Western, Asian).

WAY TO GO:

Plane: Bt6,040/10,200 one-way/return

Boat: There is a US\$25, 6-hour boat ride from Phnom Penh, a nice scenic trip.

Khaosan Bus: Bt550 advertised but in reality more. Add costs for: getting overcharged for your visa (should be Bt1,000), and arriving after nightfall, when you pull into

their guesthouse, making it hard to find a place to stay. Sixteen hours, not cheap, and painful.

Phnom Penh Bus: US\$4-6, six hours.

Enter the Two Dragons

Long time FARANG Magazine correspondent Gordon Sharpless has in one year managed to get married and fulfil his life's-dream of opening his own guesthouse in his adopted home of Siem Reap. The **Two Dragons Guesthouse** in Wat Bo Village promises to raise the bar of the crowded Siem Reap budget accommodation scene with the nicest rooms at the cheapest prices, along with cable-TV, free tea and coffee, curtains, beds, even pillows! The real gold is in photographer Gordon's encyclopaedic knowledge of the area, advice on avoiding scams and his wife's Thai cooking. There's even a pickup service from the Poipet border (a shithole, somewhere you'll want to leave right away) so call ahead on +855-12-868-551 or 012-868-551 inside Cambodia or twodragons@talesofasia.com from cyberspace. Prices start at \$7 and end at \$20 for the air-con presidential suite, but Gordon says he'll give a 10% discount to folks totting this copy of FARANG Untamed Travel.



VIENTIANE

More of a big town than a small city, Vientiane follows the tradition of amalgamating a lot of small villages together, much like London, except that's where they stopped. The view from the top of the Victory Monument is one of palm trees swaying, crumbling French colonial buildings, golden temples and lots of wooden houses. There isn't a great deal to do in this town other than drink the excellent and cheap beer and gaze across the Mekong – not that there's anything wrong with that. In the morning there's croissants and other pastries with coffee and in the evening, sumptuous French cuisine for a handfull of dollars.

PLACES TO CRASH:

There actually are luxury hotels in Laos; the **Lao Plaza** claims to be five-star and rooms start at US\$100, and the **Novotel**, near the airport has rooms for around US\$70. For the more budget-minded, pretty much all your accommodation needs are concentrated in the area of Samsenthai, Setthathirath and Thanon Fa Ngum – and all roads in between. Down on the river road, the **Phet Phim Guest House** is the best budget crash in town charging US\$3-5. If you're willing to spend a bit more, the runaway winner is the fairly new **Dragon Lodge** on Samsenthai, which has sparkling rooms for US\$12-15. **Orchid Guest House** on Fa Ngum Road is US\$12, and the rooftop lounge has stirring views over the Mekong. The cheapest rooms in town are at the **Mixac Guest House** on Setthathirath Road, where skanky

dorm beds cost less than US\$2 and hideous rooms go for US\$3-5. Around the corner from the Santisouk, on the road behind Samsenthai, the **Thawee Guest House** is a lot newer and better value at US\$6-12.

DAYTRIPPING:

Get your mitts on a bicycle (\$1/day) or motorbike (\$8/day), or even ride around in the slowest tuk-tuks on earth. There are about two day's worth of attractions worth visiting and that's allowing for hangover recovery time.

At the end of That Luang Road is **Pha That Luang**, the nation's spiritual centre with a 400-year-old stupa allegedly containing Buddha relics. Heading back to the centre of town is the country's tallest building, the **Victory Monument**. This Asian Arc de Triomphe was built in 1969 by the Imperial Government using US-supplied

cement intended for a runway to better facilitate America's secret war in the north. Carrying on south, there's **Talaat Sao** (Morning Market), the town's main shopping centre, selling everything, including some of the best hand-woven fabrics in Southeast Asia. From there, turn right onto Samsenthai Road and head for the **Lao Revolutionary Museum**. This large and thoroughly pompous building is great for a few discreet laughs at the ruling party's expense. The museum is devoted to commemorating the glorious people's struggle to rise out of poverty, imperialism and oppression and achieve liberation, poverty and oppression instead. Next, head down to Setthathirath Road, past the President's Palace to **Wat Si Saket**, which was built in 1818 and the oldest temple in Vientiane. When Siam was raping and pillaging the city in 1828 (before taking the population as slaves), they spared this Siamese-style one. Finish off at **Wat Sok Pa Luang**, with a herbal sauna and massage for about \$3. The tuk-tuk drivers know the place.

FEEDING TIME

You're a fool if you don't try a Lao baguette (you might still be a fool if you do, of course). Stuffed with veggies and a suspiciously spiced pate and washed down with the supremely strong Lao coffee, they'll keep you going for hours. For a nice sit-down coffee and pastry or croissant, the **Liang Xiang Bakery House** and **Sweet Home Bakery**, both on Chao Anou are not bad. There are a quite ridiculous number of French restaurants in Vientiane – and they're all good. Check out the

Le Nadao near Victory Monument next to Le Parasol Blanc Hotel, **Le Provençal** at the fountain for southern French food, **Le Cote d'Azur** on Fa Ngum for hearty rustic fare or **La Terrasse** on Nokeo Khumman, which serves up a bargain three-course lunch on Fridays for US\$4.

A few of those groovy cafes where people like to use the word 'eclectic' have sprung up in Vientiane in recent years. Among the best, in descending order of food quality and ascending order of popularity, are the **Xang Cafe** on Khun Bulom or **Sticky Fingers** on Francois Ngin.

NIGHTRIPPING:

All nightspots start closing around the official 10:30pm and it's lights out by 11:30pm. The main focus for expats and tourists is the **Kop Chai Deu Food Garden**, a lovingly restored French colonial house near the fountain. The **Chess Cafe** is a, frankly, hilarious vista of expat drunks and taxi-girls, dancing to Lao-accented Beatles' covers. It's open sometimes, closed sometimes. For lovers of raucous nightclubs, there's **D'Tech**, at the back of the Novotel and the **Future Bar** next door. **Deja Vu**, on the Nam Phu circle, is a snazzy spot that seems more Vienna than Vientiane. There are a couple of places in Vientiane that cater to the non-narcoleptic after closing time. **Samlor Pub**, a few minutes up the road from Kop Chai Deu, is usually kicking past the witching hour. But if you're up for a round of beer and 10-pins, hit the **Lao Bowling Center** near the National Stadium, open all night.

VANG VIENG

The Khaosan Road of Laos it may be, but at least it's surrounded by some of the most wonderful countryside you're likely to see. And like Khaosan it's going increasingly upscale with loads of snazzy accommodation along the riverside for US\$35. But on the main drag you can't spit without hitting either a backpacker restaurant or a guesthouse. They're all pretty similar, really, but some notably good ones are **Malany Guest House**, where you'll get a large room with polished wooden floors for US\$5 and **Thavisouk**, run by a group of happy women, rooms for US\$4, and they'll sort you out with good seats for the bus trip to Luang Prabang. The **Ngeunpanith** is a bit pricier at US\$8. If you're after a more rural experience, try working for a week at the **Suanmone Phoudindaeng Organic Farm** north of town. You can work there, sleep in a dorm and get fed for US\$1.50 a day, after the first three days of training. The owner likes you to stay for at least a week.

LUANG PRABANG

This town, at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers, is usually a few day's stop for travellers going south. The town has World Heritage status since it's loaded with history. Ancient Buddha-bedecked caves and colonial shopfronts, all dropped in the middle of beautiful, dirt-poor hills give the place a gallery-like feel. High marks go to the waterfall, the coffee and the abundance of good and cheap French and Lao food.

PLACES TO CRASH

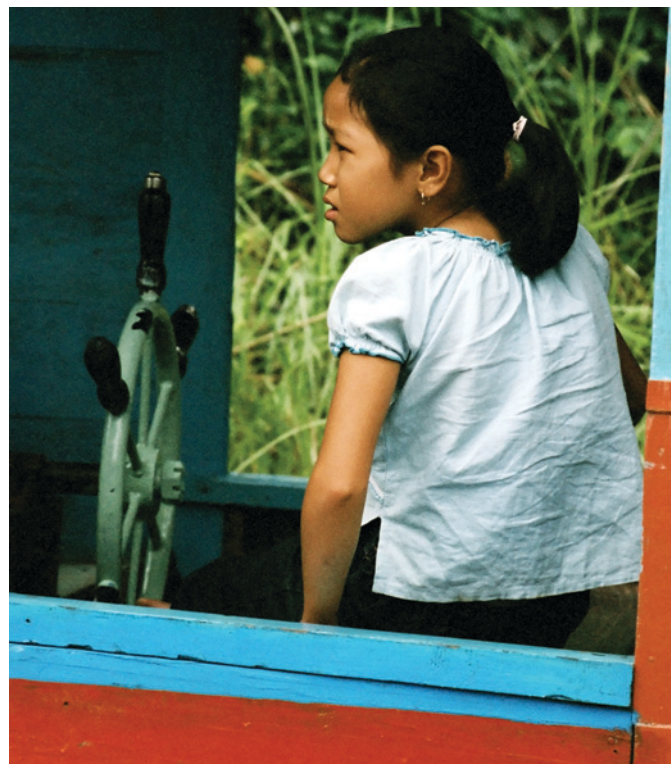
In Ban Wat That area, the best guest house is **Vanvisa**, a family-run house with a traditional Lao-style building out the back for US\$6-10. Not far behind is the **Hoxieng**, which is the same price. Nearby, the **Tanoy** is run by a nice lady and her eccentric, rather flirtatious daughter. Rooms for US\$4-7. Along the Mekong there are a clutch of guesthouses north of the palace, **Chaliny** on Souvannabanlang Rd has shiny wooden floors and views over the river for US\$5-8. Along Khem Khong Rd, the **View Khem Khong** (US\$6), **Boungnasouk** (US\$8) and **Bounthieng** (US\$4-8) are all worth a look, as is the **Mekong GH**. To find the **Phonethavy GH**, turn right just after Phousy Hotel and the school and walk 100m, excellent budget rooms, and it's followed by **Kounsavan GH**, with small but clean rooms. Further on the right is **Chaleunsouk GH**, where they speak French. On

Wisunalat Rd is the best guest house in all Luang Prabang - the **Mano**, with three-star rooms for less than US\$10. A bit of a walk from town, but worth it for the luxury.

NIGHTRIPPING:

The New York-style **Mayleak Pub** is a funky retro-esque nightclub where Luang Prabang's hip and happening - cashed-up relief workers and general posers - come to swill. Music is great considering there is nowhere to hear jazzy blues or hip-hop and funk within 500 kilometres of the place. Drinks are about 20% more expensive than elsewhere in the town, which still calculates to cheap. A competitor called the **Hive Bar** has also opened up on the quiet side of Phou Si Hill. The music is just as good and the drinks a little cheaper.

For a more traditional night on the town, the **Muang Khua Hotel** on Thanon Phu Wao has the best



Lao-style disco, with excellent Lao pop (there is such a thing, really!) and the rest.

FEEDING TIME:

Xiang Thong Road is one of the town's great food streets and **Khao Biak Sen** is one of the best noodle shops in town. Round rice noodles cooked over an open fire outside a decaying French house - very tasty. The night market in front of the palace is the best spot in town to pick up cheap Luang Prabang specialities. The **Luang Prabang Bakery** is run by a Hmong woman who studied pastry in Bangkok and makes excellent sandwiches. The **Scandinavian Bakery** serves wholesome breakfast fare in an air-con setting. The **Cafe de Arts** is an exceptional eatery with a great mix of French and Lao dishes at very reasonable prices. Nearby is the **Yonkhoun**, where you can slice into a deer steak that is as tender as an angel's bum. Also

good is **Le Potiron**, a cheap French/Euro joint with decent pizza and exceptional desserts - the best place in town for a budget binge of non-Lao grub. **Villa Santi** is in Luang Prabang's classiest hotel. The restaurant is excellent but not prohibitively expensive. Lao food is the best choice. **Duang Champa**, on Kingkitsalat Rd, has Lao and French cuisine in stylish surroundings. Colonial splendour with a generous bar, **Han Sontam Khaem Khong** is around Wat Nong on Manthatoul Rd. Look for the green doors. It serves LP's most deadly spicy papaya salad. **Nazim's** Indian/Halal restaurant, a long-time hit in Vientiane, now has a branch in Luang Prabang.



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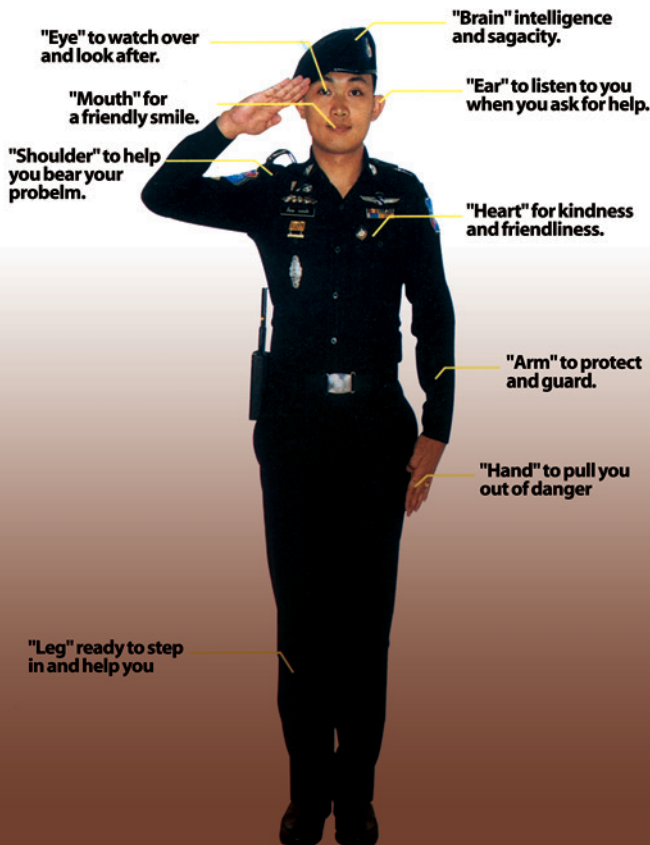


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Making calls in Thailand is not fun. There are blue phones, red phones, yellow and green ones. Some take coins, some take cards and some won't work no matter what you do. Plus, Bangkok is one of the noisiest cities on earth to make a curbside calls from. Payphones work by putting in around Bt5 and dialing. If you want to call International, Lenso Yellow phones are easy but not really cheap. Of course, the best thing is to bring your own. You can pick up a phone here for as little as Bt2000 or bring your own from home. You can even use your own GSM SIM cards here. To check out the local providers, go to www.ais.co.th, www.dtac.co.th, or www.orange.co.th, and they'll tell you how to switch your phone to their network. If you're going to be in Thailand for a bit longer, shop around for a local SIM card - around Bt400., depending on the number. When you dial you must always dial the area code first (02 for Bangkok, 053 for Chiang Mai) and the IDD code to call out of the country is 001.

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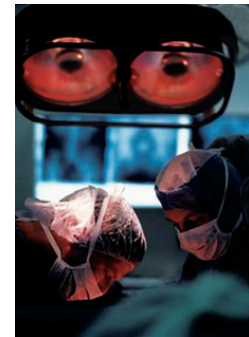
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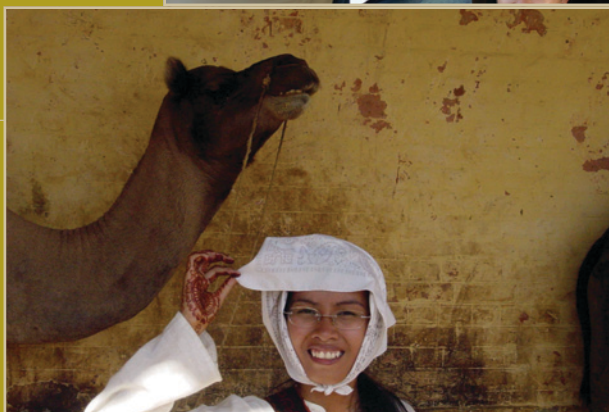
Jeffrey Bergman travels through the deserts of Rajasthan on a camel trek with his Thai girlfriend riding the hump, and then onwards to the holy city of Varanasi, the madhouse of Delhi, and the famous 15th century Karni Mata Temple, which is overrun with rats who are revered as the reincarnations of famous storytellers.

MALAY UNI BENDER

For expats studying in Malaysia like **Jay Lamey**, academic 'life' consisted of being told by their professors not to study or discuss politics, talking with locals about love spells, living in a dorm called The Village of Peace and Hope, and desperately trying to break the campus law about "close proximity to female".



We've also got a scatological tale of one man's travels with his colostomy bag in England; cycling around the Golden Triangle; an expat's take on how he finally came to appreciate living in Ho Chi Minh City, and loads more.



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