

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

# FARANG

February 2005

**UNTAMED TRAVEL**

## **FAT FEST**

ROCKERS FIGHT THE LAW

## **BEACHES**

ALL-NEW LISTINGS

## **ROAD WARRIOR**

JEWELS OF INDIA

## **THE STALKER**

LOVE AND DEATH

## **PISSED IN MALAYSIA**

STUDIES IN SLACKNESS

## **HARAJUKU GIRLS**

TOKYO GLAMOUR PUSSES

**THE TSUNAMI  
RESURGENCE:  
IN-DEPTH THAI REPORT**

**GUATEMALA  
DRUNK HORSEMEN**

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## WHAT'S THE STORY?

### 10. Main Events

Thailand, Germany & Hollywood

### 13. A Thai Woman Abroad

Aroon goes Indo

### 14. Divas & Noisemakers

Fat Fest Fought the Law (and guess who won)

### 18. Dawn of the Drunks

Ride of the Hammered Horsemen

### 21. Foodie's Dairy

High Altitude Gluttony

### 20. Health

Eat Like a Thai

### 22. The Stalker

When Grief Meets Desire

### 23. Road Reads

Junkie Police in Burma and Bangkok Walking Tours

### 24. Letters

Writings of Reverence and Revulsion

### 26. The Diving News

Thailand: the Okay Coral

### 28. Japanese Masquerade

Harajuku Fashion Rebellion

### 30. Island Tunes

Samui Blues Festival Wrap-up

### 33. After the Wave

Going Beyond the Hype

### 38. The Moken

Rescuers Deserted

### 42. Mighty Helpers

Elephants Tackle a Grisly Job

### 44. Pissed Up Malaysia

Masters of Intoxicology

### 46. Road Warriors

A Jewel Hound Hits India

## HERE & NOW

### 54. Daytripping

Dawn to Dusk in Bangkok

### 57. Feeding Time

Nosebag Bangkok

### 60. Nightripping

Being a Devil in the City of Angles

# CONTENTS

## 14. FAR OUT FAT FEST



## 18. FLYING INTO A DRUNKEN RACE



## 46. JEFFERY'S INDIA





AD



## 64.The North

Chiang Mai & Pai

## 67.Suns & Beaches

Tan Your Hide

## 86.Hong Kong

Shopping & Supping

## 88.Singapore

The Lion City

## 90.Cambodia

Phnom Penh & Siem Riep

## 92.Laos

Vientiane & Luang Prabang

## 94.Traveller's Bargains

De-Classified Information

## 97.Shit Hits the Fan

Hotlines to Help

## 98.Departure Gate

What's up Next Month

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"If life was fair Elvis would be alive and all the impersonators would be dead." -- Johnny Carson



## 38.PHUKET RESURFACES



## 42.THE MOKEN AND THE WAVE



## 46. ELEPHANTS TO THE RESCUE





# Main Events

## February

### YEAR OF THE ROOSTER

There's nothing quite as death-defying as Chinese acrobats. And they're a big part of Chinatown's allure during the Chinese New Year festivities and frivolities on February 9 and 10, around Yaowarat Road. Top off the acrobats with some lion and dragon dances, a multimedia tribute to the area's guardian spirit, the Golden Dragon, along with fireworks, an abundance of food, drink, and shopping possibilities, and it's a raucous way to ring in the New Year. Culture vultures, meanwhile, can gorge their eyes and senses on Chinese paintings and calligraphy, silk embroidering, and the art of making paper lanterns. For a full schedule of times and events try out the TAT's News Room website: [www.tatnews.org/events/events/feb/2334.asp](http://www.tatnews.org/events/events/feb/2334.asp)



### SPIN DOCTORS

As one of the world's best-known and most award-winning DJs, Ca\$h Money has the gold turntables to prove it. He's also done remixes for classic hip-hop songs by Public Enemy and Run DMC, produced many other acts, and appeared on the The Tonight Show with Jay Leno. The Philadelphia DJ is showing off his Midas touch on the decks at Koh Samui's Mint Bar on Monday, Feb 21st. Earlier in the month, another spin-maestro, Leeroy Thornhill, formerly of Prodigy, is appearing at the same venue on Feb 3, 7, and 10. Currently pursuing a solo career under the moniker Flightcrank, Leeroy has been winning some rave reviews for his recent DJ tour of England, Ireland, and Europe. His spin cycles are a cool mish-mash of tuff breaks, old-skool samples and electro known as "Miami Bass" that always rocks the house and fills the dance floor.



### ARSE SLEDDING

Hundreds of years ago, silver miners up in the mountains of southeastern Germany used to don special leather britches, and slide into the pits on top of tree trunks. Back in 1998, the town of Little Ore brought back this anachronism, without the tree trunks, and decided to turn it into the strangest of spectator sports. Every year, on February 6, locals and tourists alike queue up to make complete asses of themselves by speeding down the snowy hills on their leather-clad backsides, in the hope of winning the title of "Arschleder-Wettruscheln," for "Competitive Arse Sledding". Expect to see this on a future episode of some Reality TV show like Fear Factor.

## Thailand, Germany, Hollywood



### ROLLING BONES

When a certain Farang staffer goes into our regular bar, he does not wai the King Rama V like the Thais do, but the photo of Keith Richards, an Exile on Main Street-era image of Keith sitting in a chair with his guitar, a cigarette dangling from his lips, and looking totally off his rocker. Since Keith has always been one of our patron saints, we just had to tell you that Johnny Depp has talked him into appearing in the two sequels to Pirates of the Caribbean. The character of Johnny's piratical rogue, he said, was based on Keef. The actor recently said he "thought that pirates would be the rock 'n' roll stars of the 18th century, and the greatest rock 'n' roll star of all time is Keith Richards hands down."

So it seems fitting that the Rolling Stone will play his father in both of the sequels. Shooting begins this month. Let's just hope that he has more on-screen magnetism than Mick did – an actor so wooden you expected him to be infested with termites by the second scene.





# ALL OVER THE ASIAN MAP

Arrivals



## DIPLOMAT DODGES TIME FOR PORN

Former Australian

diplomat Robert Scoble has received a fine and a seven-month suspended sentence after appearing in court charged with distributing pornography. Scoble was arrested in March, along with American John Gross, his partner in a gay and lesbian travel agency in Bangkok. The two were charged with distributing pornography after copies of the Pattaya-based *Thai Guys* magazine were found in their office, and deemed to be for distribution. The two were under surveillance before being charged after complaints were made to the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

## AMNESTY CANS DEATH-ROW WEBCAST

A controversial plan by the Corrections Department to install webcams on death-row, showing life in 'the cooler' in real-time has been condemned by human-rights group Amnesty International. Corrections Department director-general, Nathee Chitsawang, said that showing what life was like 'inside' is intended to deter potential offenders. A statement from Amnesty challenges the claim that it would be effective. "We believe most lawbreakers are poor and don't have access to the internet," says one section, which is only partly right. Only poor lawbreakers end up in prison. Widespread opposition to the webcams has forced the Corrections Department to drop the plan.



## SAME SEX PENGUIN PAIRS

The disparity between the number of male

and female penguins in Japanese aquariums is suspected as the cause of a high number of same-sex unions. The Kyoto news agency reported that out of 16 aquariums, some 20 same-sex couples were discovered, with most of the gay couples, trying to mount each other.



## WIFE HELPS HUSBAND RAPE MINOR

A Cambodian couple have been sentenced in absentia for the rape of a minor in Battambang last month. Lee Pov and Vim Vanna were sentenced to 17 and 15 years, respectively. Vim Vanna was charged with abetting the rape by restraining the girl while her husband raped her. "This is truly rare. I have never seen anything like this – a wife assisted her husband in a rape," said the prosecutor, adding that the couple were asked to care for the victim while her widowed mother worked on a distant farm. Vim Vanna is now a fugitive but claims that her husband threatened to beat her if she did not assist.



## SPIDERMAN CONQUERS TAIPEI 101

French climbing daredevil Alain

Robert ascended the world's tallest building, Taipei 101 last month. Alain, nicknamed the "French Spiderman", is famous for climbing tall structures, usually without safety gear and always without permission, as on this Christmas day climb. Clad in red pants, jacket and shoes Alain started his climb of the 508-metre, 101-storey building at 10am local time in light rain, reaching the top some four hours later. Taipei 101 became the world's tallest buildings on October 17th last year, surpassing Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Twin Towers, and they are expected to open in the first quarter of this year.



## NAKED IN HONG KONG

A nudist's representative association has

applied to the government to open Asia's first nude beach. Simon Cheung, president of the Body Arts Association, has asked the government to let the group rent a remote beach for nude use, since laws currently prohibit nudity. If the proposal is accepted it will not only be a breakthrough in a traditionally conservative society but also an excellent stimulus to the telescopic and binocular optics market.



## POLICE STRIP CLUB SHOOTOUT

In a testament to the seductive charms of

Filipina women, a police officer was killed and three others wounded in a shootout between police arguing over the best table from which to ogle the nude dancers. Policeman John Vite was shot dead and his fireman friend was wounded when they started trading shots with three plainclothes agents from the National Bureau of Investigation last month in a strip club in the country's north.



# For Love and Money

## Waves of Sorrow

Farang Untamed Travel, in affiliation with the Sawasdee & Woraburi Hotel Group and other sponsors will be holding an exhibition of photos taken by the region's top award-winning photographers in the tsunami-hit regions of Thailand, starting on February 9th and continuing throughout the month at the Kraichitti Gallery in Sunset Street on Khaosan Road.

Since the images are not the sort most people would want to hang on their walls, they will not be for sale. Money raised will be from direct contributions and donated to the The Royal Rajaparchanukroh Foundation, a charitable organisation under the patronage of HM The King, that is providing education and shelter for children orphaned by the disaster. For more details, see [www.farangonline.com](http://www.farangonline.com)

## Tranquil Sounds

A couple of years back, Dean Bragonier and Sally Taylor visited Cambodia and encountered the many amputees there, victims of the more than four million landmines that blight the landscape. Disturbed by their plight, Sally and Dean formed The Tranquility Project in 2002, a non-profit organisation dedicated to unearthing the mines and providing prosthetic limbs and rehabilitation for the victims.

Sally, who happens to be the daughter of Carly Simon and James Taylor and an excellent musician in her own right, will be leading her band of killer musicians on a fund – and awareness – raising tour of Thailand and Cambodia throughout the month of February, playing shows in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pai, Koh Samui, Koh Pangan and Siem Reap. For details on the show times see their website: [www.tranquilityproject.org](http://www.tranquilityproject.org)



**Mango ad.**





# Sumatra's Big Lake

**M**y husband I decided to spend the holiday season at Lake Toba, in central Sumatra. We took the ferry from Penang into Belawan, the port closest to Medan. Belawan is one giant scam; everyone is on the make there. Then we hopped a bus south on the strange Trans-Sumatran Highway. For a 100km, two communities live side by side, separated only by this thin and crowded strip of tarmac. On one side there is a mosque every 200 metres, on the other there's a church. An additional five hours got us to Parapat, on the shores of Lake Toba. I can't really recommend this trip to anyone.

Volcanic Lake Toba is inhabited by the Batak people, formerly proud head-hunters, now mostly devout Protestants. The most remarkable aspect about Batak culture is the community's architecture. The houses have ship-shaped roofs, extraordinary carvings are attached to the front of the houses beneath the gable, not so different from Maori wood carvings and paintings in New Zealand. The beautiful carvings made me think of the time before the Batak had adopted Christianity, when they still hunted for human heads. They probably painted their faces too and would have looked really scary.

Well, the Batak are not scary anymore. Nowadays they are similar to Thai people and refused to believe I was not Indonesian and that all I know in Bahasa is "hello" and "thank you". In the Batak tongue I learned that *horas* means "hello". This really helped to break the ice and stopped people from looking scared.

Lake Toba is a paradise of peacefulness with clean and clear, green water. It feels a million miles away from Medan, the chaos on the highway, and the other severe problems Indonesia is facing. In winter, the temperature really fluctuates – it's hot during the day, gets cold before sunset and it's freezing at night. The hills around the lake are covered in patches of pine trees and rice terraces have been carved into some of the slopes.

In the centre of Lake Toba, Samosir Island (the size of Singapore) is also populated by Batak people and stacked with churches. At Sidihoni, a plateau on Samosir Island, we stopped at a small crater lake. The local Batak took me to their farm and offered me a cup of homemade coffee – great taste but the sediment at the bottom of the cup is deeper than the lake in front of

us. The women and kids sat around me and we had a great time even though we don't speak the same language.

The Batak are a very musical people and their songs can be heard on the island every night. Our landlord, Rio, of the Merlyn Guest House, plays guitar and sang some songs one night – incredible, they reminded me of flamenco or some kind of European folk music. My husband recorded the songs for the British Library International Music Collection and made a copy for Rio who has played them non-stop on his stereo ever since.

There is not much to do at Lake Toba other than swimming, reading or talking to the local hippy kids who are hoping to catch a Farang girl and escape to the West.

Despite the fact that Lake Toba is perfectly safe from the political hassles Indonesia currently experiences, only a handful of other foreigners are around. So we get bored.

Then the tsunami hit but we both slept through it. On Lake Toba there was barely a ripple. The Batak did not talk about the earthquake at all and we eventually got the news off the Internet. It was very unreal. Nothing had changed on Lake Toba, but just to the north west of us, all hell had broken loose.

We slowly realised that thousands of people in Asia were going to have a catastrophic start to their year. I felt confused – head back to Thailand or go up to Aceh? We decided on Thailand and left Lake Toba. Medan seemed unchanged except for some commotion and chaos at the airport as cargo planes from all over the world were rolling in to help in Aceh.

I'm glad to be able to continue this column. Thanks to all our friends and family who were worried about us and the FARANG gang for e-mailing us immediately after the quake.



**Columnist and  
photographer  
Aroon  
Thaewchatturat  
ended up  
holidaying in the  
middle of  
Sumatra as the  
tsunami struck.**





# The Skinny

Amid exaggerated reports of violence and alcohol abuse, Thailand's biggest and coolest alternative music festival was closed down early by the authorities this past year, and unjustly criticised in the local press, writes **Tom Vater**. Photos by Tom too.

**A**ltamont Speedway, 1969. The summer of love reverberates round the dying days of the swinging 60s and the Rolling Stones are doing a free show for their fans, because they didn't make it to Woodstock. The Hell's Angels are hired to provide security. Bad move. The audience of a hundred thousand fans all drop bad acid, the atmosphere tilts from hippy love into rock 'n' roll violence and a guy is stabbed to death in front of the stage while the Stones hack through "Sympathy for the Devil". And that pretty much sounded the death knell for the Summer of Love.

Phitsanulok Race Course, Bangkok, November 2004. The summer of love is but a faint memory. Iraq has replaced Vietnam and consumerism has replaced the counter culture. Americans are still loud stupid brutes who export some of the best and worst culture our planet has to offer, and most of the worst has infected Thailand. But here's the good news. The Heineken Fat Fest is billed as the greatest free rock festival Thailand has ever seen. It is great, it

is free, but it ain't the 60s. No one drops acid and not a whiff of a joint can be detected in the huge crowd.

The cops are checking most punters for weapons and getting through the gates of the horse-racing stadium is excruciatingly slow. There are not nearly enough police to regulate the crowds. Out on Phitsanulok Road a couple of thousand teenagers are hanging around, drinking beer, immobilising the traffic. The tiers of the racecourse loom out of the darkness like some creepy prison block – white concrete, covered by ants. Several outdoor stages pour a cacophony of sound across the entire area – the PAs are powerful and the stages are too close together. The first impression of the festival is utter chaos.

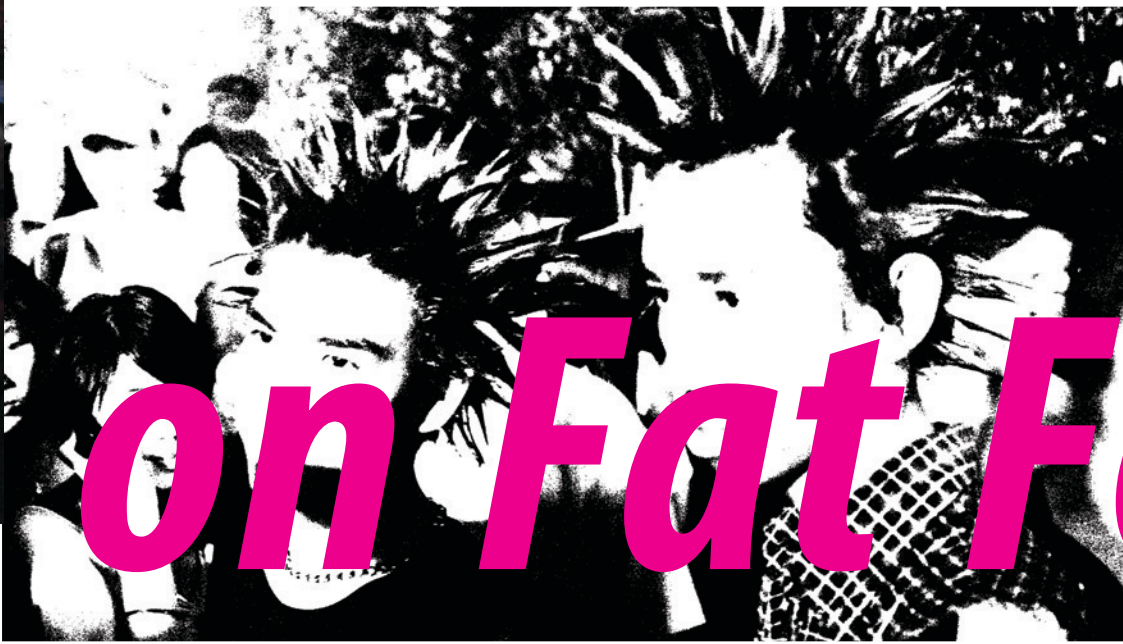
The fourth Fat Festival, organised by Fat Radio 104.5 FM, and sponsored by Heineken, features a two-day programme crammed with 140 bands, and countless tents, stalls, movies, and, according to the organisers, about 100,000 teenagers, or, according to some local papers, around 400,000 people.

Either way, this is a great, almost historical occasion in Thailand – the country's best pop cultural talent served on a plate and an entire generation of adolescents has turned up to sample some sound-bites.

The variety of musical consumables is so overwhelming that much of the audience just drifts from stage to stage, nursing drinks and looking good. Heineken are present with banners and logos but beer sales are low-key. Throughout the festival I don't see any of the hordes of coma-surfers, fuck-ups and inebriated corpses that usually litter any respectable rock festival in the West. Few were

here for substance abuse. No one is throwing cans of piss at the bands. No one's having sex in the toilets, or shooting up behind the bins, and Thai girls don't flash their tits for the main act.

Nonsensical T-shirts and wild-coloured contact lenses flash through the crowd. The average age seems to be about 19 and the kids are post-everything – post-metal, post-goth, post-punk, post-modern. Dolled-up punks make the most spectacular audience members: safety pins and Warhol queens, tartan pants and big boots. Punk's not dead. The atmosphere is carefree, almost like a funfair. Independent record company stalls are besieged by swarms of teenagers, clutching, blagging or buying posters, badges, and CDs. Small-time record execs with funny-coloured lap-tops,



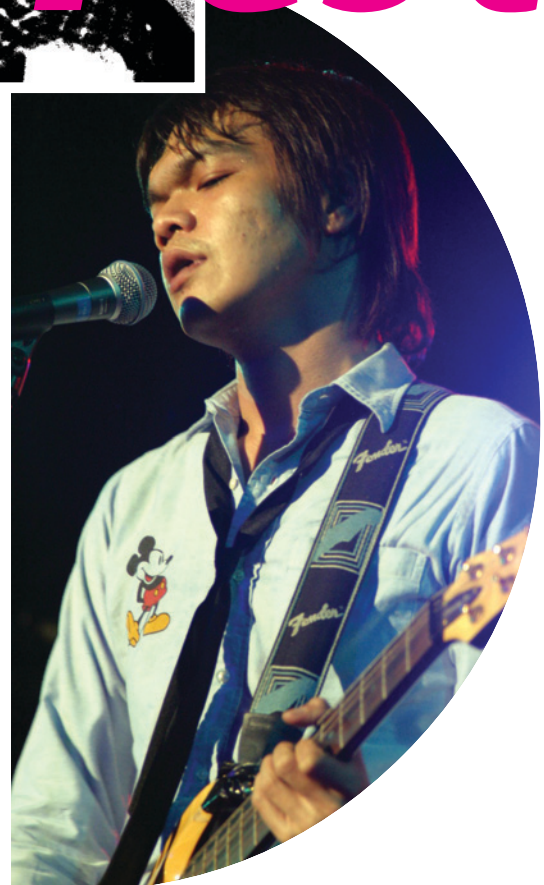
# on Fat Fest

Wasit strips off his shirt, so he's just wearing a skinny tie, and written on his chest with a marker pen is "Tarty", while lead guitarist Tuan does a Hendrix-style solo with his guitar behind his head.

most in their early 20s, compliment each other on artwork, acts, stall presentation; it's a thriving cottage industry, bordering on originality. The kids have stopped watching TV and are getting their act together.

A huge crowd surges around all sides of the hip-hop stage, deep in the bowels of the racecourse buildings. From one of the tiers above it looks like Arafat's funeral. But there is no shooting and no fighting and all the dancing and bopping and pushing to the sounds of Thailand's most happening hip-hop outfit Titanium is a positive surge of energy.

For me, however, the musical highlight on the first day is Day Tripper, who have just released their first major-label album, *The Day Tripper*, after three indie efforts. Leader singer Wasit "Ooh" Mukdavajitr, who also fronted Crub, the first Thai alternative act to release an indie album, way back in '94, is all pockmarked, good-looking corpse cool and the crowd of about 10,000 in front of the main stage is up on their feet and singing along after a few bars.





## Thailand Rocks

They sound like a home-grown version of Supergrass or Mega City 4. Remember them? They rocked.

The audience reception is particularly rapturous when they play the two singles off the recent Showroom compilation of seven Thai indie acts on the Genie label, like Saturday Seiko and Sweet Mullet, also included on Day Tripper's new album.

For the set's finale, a Top 10 hit on Fat Radio called "Ooh Ooh," Wasit strips off his shirt, so he's just wearing a skinny tie, and written on his chest with a marker pen is "Tarty", while lead guitarist Tuan does a Hendrix-style solo with his guitar behind his head.

Wasit, who compares the festival to Thailand's version of Glastonbury or Australia's the Big Day Out, says it was one of the "easiest crowds to please because they're all old fans, and most of the audiences were very friendly. I took off my shirt so I looked a bit more punk rock. Actually, it was a tribute to The Ramones and Joe Stummer, and John Peel, for all the dead punks."

The Nation newspaper devoted a half page to the festival, under the blurb, "Overcrowding, poor security and the sheer lack of planning made last week's Fat Festival a pure disaster." Perhaps the writer was too busy to attend, or didn't bother talking to the organisers. While running four pictures of ecstatic crowds and main acts, the article alleges that the festival fell apart on the second day due to poor organisation and excessive alcohol consumption.

**"A fine freak show of deviants, the band features a Mexican wrestler who lights his own farts; a bass player who is half man, half woman, down the middle; and a fat gimp with a Hannibal mask, covered in chains and bleeding profusely."**



No alcohol was sold on the second day at all. The festival fell apart because it was stopped by the Thai police. Heineken must have been delighted.

DJ Yuttana, the festival's coordinator, says, "On the first day, access was very slow and in the evening there was a scuffle amongst no more than four teenagers at the gate. The police decided that the festival was too close to the Royal Palace and that Royal security might be compromised and asked us to not sell alcohol on the second day and close the festival by 8pm. We complied with these directives. There were no further fights."

DJ Yuttana, clearly disappointed, sees deeper reasons behind the closure of the festival: "There are plenty of people in this country who think all popular music is evil. What they don't realise is that the Fat Festival is part of the birth of a major Thai industry. Whatever more conservative sources may think, this is Thai culture and small record companies generate jobs, income and culture."

The Nation article begs to differ again and quotes unnamed sources about the lack of independent traders. At the same time, the article complains about the overcrowding of shops and booths. That's because thousands of people were keen to get a look at hundreds of different stalls. Many of the booths were run by bands performing at the Fat Fest and, along with selling albums, T-shirts, and indie magazines, offered their fans a rare opportunity to rub shoulders with Thailand's premier alternative stars. The crowds were no more dense than at any European rock festival.

Unnamed sources have claimed even more sinister reasons for the police crackdown – the officers had no way to make any money from the event. And several musicians suggested that a politician's golf game had been upset by the noise coming off the racecourse.

Moderndog, Thailand's greatest rock band, hits the stage on Sunday afternoon, before an ecstatic crowd. Pod, the group's singer, puts on a passionate show, and the band's four-albums-in-one-decade career, has given them all the chops and stage savvy to drive the group's fans into a frenzy, much to the consternation of the police officers backstage.

Then things get even more frenetic. Futon, Bangkok's electro-punk queens, whip up a fervour with their hit cover of "I Wanna Be Your Dog," originals like "I Wanna Be a Gay Boy," and some hard-hitting tracks off their soon-to-be-released second album.





Bee, who is the group's programmer, sometimes guitarist and deadpan rapper, says that the festival "is the highlight of the year for Thailand's music scene. Many local bands time their album releases to coincide with the fest. And the organisers do such an amazing job on such a low budget. It's fun, but it's telling the kids that they can do it, too."

The real audience-pleaser of the festival is Paradox. They play grungy punk and dirge metal, full of grunting vocals, but the music is almost irrelevant. A fine freak show of deviants, the band features a Mexican wrestler who lights his own farts; a bass player who is half man, half woman, down the middle; a fat gimp with a Hannibal mask, covered in chains and bleeding profusely; and most outrageous of all, a young man in a police uniform, playing rhythm guitar, who is on the cover of this magazine.

Wasit from Day Tripper says, "I like their spirit and dark sense of humour. One of Paradox's hits they played, 'Nong Pun' [Little Sister Apple] is actually about a stalker following a woman home."

(If you're interested in checking the band out, look around for a double CD live album called, appropriately enough, *Fatlive4 the Paradox Circus*; there's also a VCD release of the gig, recorded in Bangkok back in 2003.)

For a moment, as the crowd surges, revolution seems possible, rock 'n' roll has meaning and the world is a wonderful place of young people with bright futures and wicked dreams. But after the last chord, the last scream and the last fart, the crowd quietly and timidly files for the exits, perhaps dreaming of a festival that won't be suppressed by the authorities, and a media that gets its stories straight.

Bee Futon is surprised there weren't any outbreaks of violence, or any wanton destruction of public property, when the festival was closed down early. "If this happened in the UK, there would've been riots and blood on the streets, but the kids were so well-behaved. It proves that they weren't like the local media had portrayed them."

DJ Yuttana also refutes the allegations in the local press that there were widespread scuffles, and he's confident the show will go on next year.

"The crowd was very peaceful. There was no tension; it was a great day. But obviously opposition to the festival is very strong amongst some authorities. Fat Fest might have to move outside of Bangkok in the future."

In the end it all comes down to one thing – youth want to have fun and older people want to stop them. It's the same the world over.

*Tom Vater's Book Beyond the Pancake Trench: Road Tales from the Wild East (Orchid Press, 2004) is on sale at all fine bookshops.*

**"Few were here for substance abuse. No one is throwing cans of piss at the bands. No one's having sex in the toilets, or shooting up behind the bins, and Thai girls don't flash their tits for the main act."**







# THE DAWN OF DRUNKS

If the idea of racing horses at breakneck speeds up and down a narrow track, knocking back shots after each lap and flogging your horse with a live chicken sounds sensible to you, then you obviously aren't drunk enough, writes **Dave Arthurs**, about a bizarre festival in Guatemala.

**I**f you think what I've just described sounds like the bizarre hazing ritual of some obscure fraternity, you'd be wrong. If you think this sounds more like an established, ritualistic tradition associated with the tribal people of Guatemala's highlands, you'd be bang on. Welcome to Todos Santos and *El Día de los Muertos*, or the *Day of the Dead*.

I reached this small town in the Chuchamantenes Mountains of Northern Guatemala, after a nerve-racking ride in a one-time American school bus that had groaned upwards for some four hours from the town of Huehuetenango. It had been a stressful ride in a bus where three adults shared seats a sign told us were adequate for "two children only".

Before departure I watched whilst a completely bald and flat tire was replaced with an equally bald but slightly less flat one. So I put all my faith in the driver, who wore a T-shirt claiming, "*Jesús es mi mejor amigo*" (Jesus is my best friend); but I still braced for every jolt and bump on the long winding road. By the time we arrived, I was a nervous wreck and I felt like I had arthritis in my knees. I thanked the driver and his best friend as I climbed off the bus, then I found myself a room and slept.

The festival I'd gone to see were the twin festivities of *Todos Santos* ("All Saints Day") and *El Día de los Muertos*, both of which are celebrated all across Central America in various guises, around November 1. Whereas in Mexico they celebrate with masks, parades and sugar skulls, Todos Santos is famous for its ritualised horse races. That's why I came.

The small, one-church town sits at the nape of a valley, where pine trees punctuate the fields along the slopes and moss seems to line everything. Below us were low-hanging clouds while more clouds capped the mountains above; it was like being in a pocket in the sky and, combined with the effects of high altitude, breathtaking.

The next thing that struck me was the distinct similarity in what the locals wore that day – an indication of how self-confidently the people of Todos Santos still wear their traditional clothes or "*traje*". The women were clad in beautiful dresses and shawls of dark blue and purple, but it's the men who are the real peacocks, wearing bright red trousers, with white pinstripes, white shirts with woven pink collars and cuffs, all topped off by a straw boater, with a band of coloured cloth. It is an outfit that would look ridiculous on anybody else (as was proven by several fellow tourists) but with their cocky swagger the men here looked as self-assured as any cowboy.

But I soon realised that the confident swagger and the slow pace were actually a result of the fact that every male in town, except me, was utterly wasted. As I walked down the main street, I saw numerous men lying unconscious in the mud. Fists and vomit were flying everywhere, and it was only 10am.

In the town square, I found the drunken fiesta atmosphere was surreally accompanied by five competing marimba bands, all playing different songs that were a cross between ice-cream van and jack-in-the-box music. It seemed like as good a time as any for me to start drinking.

I bought a beer and as I sat wondering how I was going to find out more about the famous horse-races, I felt an arm being wrapped around my shoulder; it was a local man, reeking of booze. Tentatively, I offered him some of my beer and he gratefully sank the remaining third of the litre bottle. Spilling a fair quantity down his top, he wiped off the dribbles with the intricate weavings on his shirt-cuffs and handed me back the empty bottle.

I was a little wary about beginning a conversation: Not only was the man drooling but I had also heard that the locals could be quite hostile to outsiders. A few years ago, a Japanese



tourist, whilst photographing children, was killed by an angry mob who believed he was a Satanic child-stealer. So I was apprehensive when my new friend reached inside his tunic, and relieved when he bought out a bottle. My relief was misplaced because as it turned out, the contents of the bottle was probably some of the most venomous liquor I have ever tasted; as I winced, my new friend laughed, beat his chest and downed enough of the bottle to lay a bouncer out cold.

Not speaking any of the ancient Mam language that the people of Todos Santos speak, I tried a bit of Spanish and found my friend could slur a few words. The first thing he told me was that I was drinking something called "*Quetzaltecca*" and that it would make me strong. The second thing was that his name was Raphael, he was from here, and he was a *caballero*, or horse-rider. From his gestures and chest-beating he seemed to think he was pretty good as well. I tried to find out a bit more but Raphael finished his bottle and disappeared in search of more. Standing up to go and investigate the horse races for myself, I found that Quetzaltecca had made the ground lose some of its solidity.



"The jockeys (and I use that term loosely) tear up and down the track, knocking back beers and shots of the dreaded Quetzaltecca at either end."

So I was anxious to see how someone in Raphael's state was going to cope on a horse. The idea of horse races conjures images of a pint-sized jockey atop thoroughbred stallions, galloping around a well-prepared track, to the delight of a wealthy crowd, gambling and enjoying a Sunday afternoon. The races of Todos Santos couldn't be more different. The course is a 100-metre dash along a stony track; the horses are more like pit-ponies and all the jockeys are shit-faced.

It was no less of a spectacle though, and as the sun broke through the clouds, illuminating the brilliantly coloured clothes of the spectators, the scene was as colourful as any Grand National crowd. The jockeys (and I use that term loosely) tear up and down the track, knocking back beers and shots of the dreaded Quetzaltecca at either end. They ride with one hand holding a loose bridle and one hand, holding a live chicken, which they use to thrash their horse. It is not a live chicken for very long.

From my uphill vantage point, I watched three men perform exactly the same dramatic tumble. I went to Todos Santos because I thought it would be a bit of drunken fun, but the dangerousness of it all disturbed me – especially when I saw my friend Raphael struggling to climb onto the back of a horse. Once he'd mounted it, some one passed him a bottle of beer, which he opened with his teeth, before emptying the contents into his mouth and down his top. Then he was off. My fears for his safety soon vanished because, as he was steadier on the back of a horse than on his feet and looked almost graceful as he shot back and forth on the stony course below me.

After about 15 passes, he un-heroically slipped off the side of his stationary horse, whilst necking a beer. I went to congratulate him on his fine equestrian skills but by the time I had picked my way through the crowd, he had fallen asleep on the side of the track and his wife and daughter were attempting to lug him to his feet.

His big day at the races was over and so was mine.

Later that night, a Peace Corp worker told me that one of the crashes had been, as I'd feared, fatal. He also told me that villagers considered it to be bad luck if no one died during the races. Since he seemed like the perfect person to ask the question that had been bothering me all day, I asked why?

And the answer? "Proving your masculinity. Isn't that what all drinking games are about?"





# HEALTH

## A DIFFERENT WAY OF EATING



Before



After

**F**eeling a bit obese? Want to shed a few kilos of unsightly baggage? Forget the diet pills, forget the Atkins diet (remember that when he died he looked like a pumpkin on stilts), forget the cabbage soup diet. Yes, they will shift a few kilos in the short term and you'll feel good about yourself for about two weeks, after which you gain it all back and feel rotten and guilty, thereby negating the positive effects of the agony you went through in the first place. But there is a better way.

There is a good chance you are in Thailand right now. If so, look up from this magazine and take a good look at the local people around you. Not nearly as many obese people as back home are they? Downright svelte and sexy, many of them. Go on, compare backsides if you dare. Is there some inscrutable Siamese secret at work here? There is, sort of. They know how to eat.

Whereas most Westerners habitually eat three square meals a day, regardless of when they are hungry (and are advised not to snack between meals), Thais eat what they feel like when they feel like it.

Starting in primary school, Westerners are lectured about food groups to ensure they eat enough fresh vegetables, meat, fruit, carbohydrates and such – as if nature intended humans to rigidly structure their food intake. So they sit down to a big plate of food three times a day and munch it down, usually finishing before the brain twigs on that they've eaten more than they need to. This diet is out of step with modern times. It was designed for cold climates for labourers and farmers, who worked it off during their tough day. In this millennium, we drive the car everywhere, mostly sit behind desks, and still adhere to an outdated dietary regimen. This, plus the added burden of the fast food,

that has been rammed down Western throats for the last 50 years.

If you hang out with Thais for awhile, you'll notice that their relationship with food borders on the obsessive. You'd be surprised how many conversations on the Skytrain revolve around what they ate that day and what they plan to eat next. At work, they munch away throughout the day on green mangoes, tamarind, pumpkin seeds, bits of dried squid – all healthy low calorie stuff. Then, on a silent but well-understood cue, a group of four to 20 people will stand up and head out to eat something more substantial.

But even so, the portions aren't huge, and rice, considering its bulk-to-calorie ratio, is very filling. In a typical Thai multi-diner shared meal, there is always a variety of dishes – covering the major food groups we learned about in school – and while meat is present, it is not the central feature. Fat may appear conspicuously in dishes like crunchy pork (*moo krob*), but it is a treat, not hidden away as it is in fast food burgers.

Thai diners don't rush. Food is meant to be enjoyed, with plenty of conversation in between bites (though admittedly, mostly about the food). And perhaps most importantly, there is no ethic that you must clean your plate, since the plates are communal anyway. If you've had enough, you stop eating and kick back, as satisfied as you'd be after – with the bonus that you wake up in the morning slim.

This is the key. You have to listen to your body. It's not too late. Start now. Hang out with Thais and try eating the way they eat for a week or two.



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# Foodie's Diary

**A**ndre Lepine escorts his duodenum and a mysterious unnamed presumably female companion up the giddy heights of the State Tower for yet another lavish repast at someone else's expense.

Taking the elevator up to The Dome at State Tower is rather like landing in an airliner – your ears pop and you can be pretty sure your next meal won't be microwaved lasagna with a plastic cup of instant coffee. Since the opening of the al fresco extravaganza of a restaurant, Sirocco, with adjacent vertigo-inducing Sky Bar on the 63rd floor, State Tower's summit has become one the hippest hangouts in town.

The view and setting are pretty damn impressive I must admit, and would certainly make a more salubrious location to top oneself than the Preston viaduct. The 64th floor, inside the dome itself, now houses Distil – part DJ bar, part smoking lounge, part restaurant where the well-heeled can munch on French oysters and champagne then spark up a Cuban cigar on the outdoor terrace. Still too lowly for me however, my destination tonight was Mezzaluna on the 65th floor.

Opened in September 2004, Mezzaluna is touted by the management as 'an Italian restaurant like no other.' They claim that the menu is based on authentic Italian cuisine from all regions of Italy and emphasises the use of the freshest, seasonal ingredients imported from around the world. The restaurant itself is decidedly different from the airy, vibrant Sirocco, offering a far more classical, refined ambiance. Views from the curving windows are equally impressive and add to that Italian feeling of theatrical opulence and Gucci-esque luxury brought on by the polished wood, upholstered furniture and string quartet.

My companion and I were shown to a window seat and told that the chef had prepared a menu for us already. Being ravenous as a starved hog, as usual, this was fine by me, since ordering takes up valuable eating time. I threw down one of the special Mezzaluna Champagne cocktails as an aperitif. It definitely hit the spot, and strangely enough contained rhubarb of all things (something I thought was only stewed by senile old ladies in rural England) but which proved delicious and added a welcome tartness to the kind of drink that I often find leaves an unwanted, sticky ring of sugar on



the lips. For starters we shared sautéed duck foie gras with caramelized pears, balsamic radicchio and a warm blueberry compote (Bt890) and Spaghetti chitarra with hand-picked crab meat, lobster and sauce Americaine (Bt910). Both excellent, but the unanimous decision went to the foie gras, deliciously soft and rich, and unbeatable with sweet caramelised fruit.

Next up, sautéed tiger prawn tails with mint oil, green peppercorn and a spicy cream of chickpeas (Bt990), very fresh prawns and perfectly cooked – an unusual but not unsatisfying dish. Along with this was pan roasted breast of moulard duck with a red cabbage prunes risotto and a black pepper honey jus (Bt1,250). Definitely my favourite of the night, a real heavyweight contender of a dish. The succulent, gamey red meat went down a treat with sweet red cabbage, prune and honey flavours, all given a final black pepper kick for good measure.

Being a fan of the simple, uncomplicated sweets like bitter chocolate tart or crème brule, the desserts were a tad multi-coloured and theatrical for me, but certainly went down a storm with my Thai companion. She managed to polish off a whole strawberry parfait with lemon essence, pistachio sauce and balsamic ice cream (Bt300) as well as a healthy chunk of zucotto with warm berry compote (Bt300) – a cool, creamy tower of three kinds of ice cream. Think twice though before you gorge yourself too disgracefully on such delicacies – there are 65 floors to descend in a swift elevator afterwards.

## Mezzaluna

65th Fl., The Dome, State Tower, 1055 Silom Rd.

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# The Stalker

## CONFESSSION TIME

**Karen Findlay** returns after a month's hiatus during which she made some new discoveries about the strange relationship between sex and death.

**I** have a confession to make: From behind my tears and through the fingers of the hands I had covering my face in horror as I watched the footage of the tsunami and its immediate aftermath on the news, I found myself, horror of horrors, checking out a survivor helping carry a stretcher on Phi Phi and thinking, "I'd do him".

I mean no offence here. I was as ashamed by my reaction to the sight of him as you may now be appalled by my public confession. I am guilty. I apologise. I am not a pervert. I did not spend the next few weeks scanning images of the devastation for other hot young men helping out. I was as moved as you by events, reeling from the shock of what had happened and wondering what I could do to make a difference.

Admittedly, I was sure I was not the only one who had such an inappropriate thought. (Whoever that one tall young survivor was, he was indeed a fine specimen of man.) Little did I realise at the time how many others harboured similar deep, dark, shameful thoughts.

I have since met women who volunteered at a shelter for foreign survivors and guiltily conceded it had crossed their minds that they might meet someone interesting there, to whom they could then offer a room for the night and maybe some physical comfort too.

While they buried those thoughts deep in their subconscious as I had buried my own scandalous thought, I know an Italian woman who went out, found a friendly face in the crowd of boys at the bar, chatted him up and then fessed up.

"Please come home and hold me tonight. This tragedy has made me feel so lonely. I need to feel close to someone," she said. She really meant it. And hold her, he did (among other things).

I later met an American woman working search and rescue missions who gave her phone number to several Thai army men as if she could provide them with some relief from the trauma. None took her up on the offer. Elsewhere, the men proved more amenable to such offers.

A Swiss woman vacationing on a beach unaffected by the tsunami went through a string of hot one-night stands and remarked how unusually intense those post-tsunami nights were, as if those who had suddenly

realised how short life can be were on a mission to make sex truly special.

I then recalled stories I had heard after the September 11th terrorist attack about New Yorkers having mad, frantic sex with people they had turned down in the past, as well as evil exes, unkempt colleagues, ugly strangers, anyone willing to share a few hours of intimacy. Online I found their tales of shame. Online I also found sound therapy offered to them, and in turn, myself, my friends and possibly some of you who have questioned your own thoughts and actions since December 26, 2004.

From the Very Private Moments Radio Show on Dating, Love & Relationships of October 10, 2001, with Jacqui ([www.veryprivate.com](http://www.veryprivate.com)), I

quote: "Seeking sex is clearly one of the means people choose when they are terrified or feel bereft after experiencing loss... Making love is an elemental, primal act connected to the deepest feelings of wanting to be alive and connected to another human being ...

"In New York they coined a term for it. They call it end-of-the world or terror sex. I like to think of it differently. I believe that when tragedies happen they make us stop in our tract (sic) and re-evaluate our lives. And sometimes we rediscover the meaning of loving and being loved."

And sometimes, we simply have inappropriate thoughts. While my subliminal reaction to seeing the strapping young shirtless survivor flexing his muscles as he carried a stretcher was crude, rude and too socially unacceptable to ever

admit at the time, perhaps it was my own natural and healthy way of dealing with the tragedy.

What's happened since has not been healthy however. Horror of horrors, (regular readers, sit down) I have another confession: I have since gone off sex. Perhaps it's my way of punishing myself for what I deemed such a scandalous thought at the time. Perhaps it's my way of mourning. Perhaps it's a subliminal defence mechanism preventing me from lowering standards a la New York. Perhaps, I'm subconsciously ready for something more meaningful. Whatever the reason, I hereby acknowledge I need to walk the talk and celebrate life. Life is a gift. As is good sex. The mourning may not be over, but watch out Bangkok, here I come. (Note: some standards do still apply.)



# Road Reads

## High in Burma

Review by Daniel Cooper

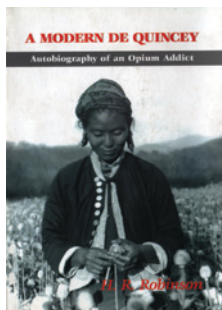
"The banana is great, but the skin is greater." So writes H R Robinson in *A Modern De Quincy* (Orchid Press, 2004), his autobiographical account of his time in the Burma Military Police and descent into opium addiction. This slim volume has an interesting story itself, being first published in 1942, and previously only being available second hand at extortionate rates. Indeed, Gerry Abbott, who published the second edition, was offered one copy for £900 (Bt65,350). The other interesting aspect of the book is that it may, or may not, feature George Orwell, back when he was called Eric Blair and working as a military policeman in Burma. Robinson was certainly serving at the same time, refers to a friend only called "The Poet", and Orwell reviewed the book.

The book begins with Robinson's commission in the Indian Army although the war ends before he sees active duty. He is seconded to the Burma Military Police and posted to a remote corner of the empire in north Burma, where he acts as magistrate and His Majesty George VI's representative. His adventures in this distant outpost form the first part of the book where we get to know Robinson as a humorous, gentle and just administrator of the provence, four day's walk from the nearest remnants of British civilisation. It is after his discharge, probably due to a scandalous relationship with a woman guilty of murdering her elderly husband, that he moves to Mandalay in 1923.

While walking the streets with two friends one night he stumbles upon an opium den. After one night's smoking he acquires a fascination for opium and fellow lotus-eater Maung Ba Ohn. Robinson writes, "Occasionally I had met men upon whom it was good to look. At school there had been boys whose faces had been a source of perpetual disquiet to me, but never had I met a man whose fascination could compare with that of Ba Ohn. Nevertheless it was the fascination of the orchid, the fascination of the painted lady, the fascination of something too good to be true".

Ba Ohn accompanies Robinson for the rest of book, to the opium den, through cancelled journeys home and down the slippery slope of addiction. Eventually, Robinson discovers he is hooked and makes several efforts to give up, becoming a Buddhist monk at one point. However, his decline is too advanced and other historical accounts identify him as the scoundrel of Mandalay and by the end of the book he is a broken man.

Orwell describes the book as "a small but not valueless contribution to the literature of opium. It is amateurishly written, but its facts are truthful". The story is well-crafted and ends on an appropriately dramatic climax. Although it may be hubris for Robinson to compare himself to De Quincy, he shares the great writer's smoking habits, and is definitely a romantic.



# Walking the Walk

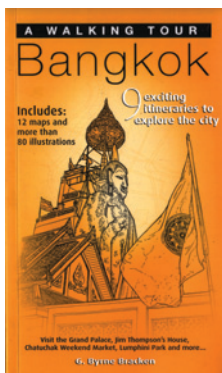
Review by Daniel Cooper

Singapore-based architect G Byrne Bracken's *A Walking Tour: Bangkok* builds on his collection of walking guidebooks for Asian cities. The slim volume contains descriptions of many of the city's best-known buildings along with architectural sketches, all laid out for the reader as a walking tour.

Bracken has certainly done his homework and the book can tell even the longest-serving expat a lot about the history of Bangkok. There are nine walks described, with clear and easy to follow directions, covering Prathunam, Wireless Road, Silom Road, Charoen Krung Road, Chinatown, Rattanakosin Island, Banglamphu and Dusit. There is also an illustrated essay on Thai architectural styles, a glossary of Thai architectural terms, plus a few Thai words to use on your walk.

For the first-time visitor to Bangkok, this book is best used in combination with a fully-fledged guidebook (or a copy of FARANG Untamed Travel). However, it is a charming read and an inspiration to get out of the house/hotel/apartment/bar and beat the streets for an afternoon, at least until hot season arrives.

Both of these titles are available at Bookazine.



## QUOTABLE NOTATIONS

In tribute to the late Johnny Carson, when he had the buxom, sex-bomb Raquel Welch on his show, she had a cat sitting on her lap. Raquel asked Johnny if he "wanted to pet her pussy?" With his trademark droll delivery, Carson said, "Sure, but first you'll have to move the cat."

"The first 40 years of life give us the text; the next 30 supply the commentary on it."

- Arthur Schopenhauer, philosopher (1788-1860)

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# Letters to the Editor

## A Charitable Man

In The October issue of Farang Untamed Travel, we held a subscription drive, offering cool prizes in a lucky draw. The third prize was a night out with our very own nightrippers Dan and Andy, with free booze, the scintillating company of two of Bangkok's most astute beerhounds and a guest appearance in the next Dan and Andy column. The prize, valued at 3,000 baht, was won by the fortuitous Mr. Lye, who decided to eschew the spotlight and alcohol in favour of more noble pursuits. The cash value of the prize has been donated to the Thai Red Cross. It seemed fitting since both Dan and Andy had their filthy blood refused at the donor centre.

Dear Farang,

It's a real tragedy just right after Xmas and the break of a New Year, just thought that we should do our bit for the victims by forgoing my prize. Thanks a lot for allowing this to happen. There is always be another chance for us to meet in the future. Happy New Year to you guys in Farang Magazine and keep up the good job!

Warmest regards,  
Lye

## Trainspotter's Holiday

Hi and good day editor and team of Farang!

There is a little mistake in your Way To Go section in your Kanchanaburi listings: The trains from Bangkok actually leave Thonburi station at 7:35am and 1:45pm (3rd Class). The departure times mentioned in your report are similar to the ones from Kanchanaburi to Nam Tok: 10:51am and 4:37pm (3rd Class) The Trip is great fun for all who like to travel by train – like me! One thing you are absolutely right is that Kanchanaburi is a great place to go, with plenty to see and to do!!!

Most friendly greetings:  
Fredy Lauener  
Conductor, JUNGFRÄU-Railways,  
Switzerland World Traveller

**Farang Untamed Travel** Replies: Good God Fredy, we checked the timetables and you're right – but then you would be, because you're a Swiss train conductor. We're so ashamed of our error, we've removed the Kanchanaburi page entirely from this issue and sent it to the listings repair shop. They have promised to tweak the bogeys and return it to us next month in perfect running order, ready to pull out of Farang station right on deadline. As a reward for your diligence, we will be sending you a free Farang Untamed Travel wrist-cuckoo clock, even though you are probably the sort of guy who always knows what time it is anyway.

## Everybody into the Poole

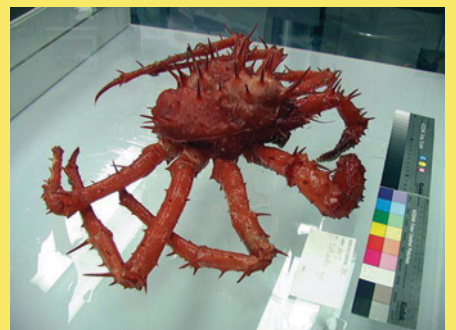
After a long absence, during which he has masqueraded as a restaurant manager, hotel manager, midway carnie, and loving boyfriend, Cameron Poole makes a triumphant return with "Travel Tips".

1. **Budget Travellers:** A condom tied to an old toothbrush makes an ideal wind sock for mosquitoes in fan rooms.
2. **Thai Chefs:** The Farang food we call 'toast', is actually *cooked* bread, which means more than ten seconds in the toaster.
3. **Heavy Drinkers:** When going to the toilet, always remember to remove both your shorts and underwear before sitting down.
4. **Beauty Aficionados:** A bar of soap rolled in sand makes an ideal pumice stone for removing dead skin whilst taking a shower.
5. **Ning:** Piss off your boyfriend by acting like a moody teenager 85% of the time, being relentlessly inconsistent with your views, ideas and plans, testing my reactions to everything from pregnancy to jealousy, never indulging in foreplay, showing me your bogies, farting on my head, squeezing my spots when all I want is my back scratched, being late picking me up from work because your Thai soap opera hasn't finished, sitting in my apartment all day doing fuck all

except making it a mess, and being generally selfish, lazy and difficult.

## Strange Fruit

The following photos were forwarded to us by our design guru and conscience-for-hire Richard Wilson, so he takes responsibility for their veracity. They are said to be deep sea fish that have washed up on the beaches of the Andaman after the tsunami, which is probably rubbish. In any case, they are further evidence that we really have no idea what the hell is going on down there.



# THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UNTRUE

In a tornado of inaccurate news and contradictory reports about coral in tsunami-hit parts of Thailand, **Daniel Cooper** dives deep to get to the bottom of the story.

**W**e've all seen the footage of the big wave hitting the shorelines of the Indian Ocean. Cars rammed into shop windows, flattened houses and crying children. Makes you wonder what happened to the poor divers who were in the water when the wave hit. Surely they were all lost and the underwater coral gardens and shipwrecks must be smashed to bits. That was certainly the impression given by the world media in the days following the tsunami, even though none had been underwater to check. After all, look at the coast, how could it be otherwise?

It's reporting like this that has had dive operators foaming at the mouth over the past month as they struggle to attract customers back to Thailand. One ignoble case that has attracted world-wide attention is the report aired on January 3rd by American Television network CBS. As footage, filmed aboard the Phuket-based *Ocean Rover*, of healthy coral rolls across the screen, the announcer says, "This is what one group of divers saw before the wave. Nature's creations and creatures. Coral reefs and the fish who make the reefs their home. Then the tsunami rushed through the deep waters. After the wave this is what they found [cue footage of ruined coral]. All of that beauty and serenity, gone."

Aside from the hyperbole, the report is pretty grim. They quote *Ocean Rover's* Cruise Director, Hans Tibboel, saying, "It's like a huge whirlwind or sandblaster has just wiped it all away". Dive operators are furious because the report is vastly misleading. For instance, the 'before and after' footage was all filmed on the same day, by one of the divers and donated, gratis, to the CBS team.

"I was quoted in the CBS story as saying that the diving looked like a bomb had gone off. I want to let everyone out there know that this was on ONE dive that I went on during the entire 11-day trip. The rest of the diving, both before and after the tsunami, was some of the most pristine, beautiful diving that I have ever done", says American Dustin Silvester on *Ocean Rover's* website.

The big wave travelled deep, so most people out to sea barely noticed its passing, maybe interpreting it as a big swell. Even divers close to shore, in

shallow water where the wave was near or on the surface, didn't get hurt too bad, although plenty have stories such as 'it was like being in a big washing machine'. But the real story is that, for the most part, Thailand's dive sites are OK.

In fact, it was the degradation of coral reefs and mangrove forests which usually cushion the impact of big waves that helped make the tsunami as destructive as it was. So again, you'd expect the coral to be all smashed up and scattered. However, a recent survey of Andaman dive sites shows that this is not the case.

This not to say that the coral gardens which have made Thailand a world-class diving destination have not suffered damage. In the days following the tsunami, beachside reefs near Phuket were flooded with debris of all kinds, even whole palm trees. Coral is a living animal, but lives symbiotically with algae, which needs light to photosynthesise, light that is blocked by debris. Luckily most of the litter was quickly removed but some of these shallow reefs may take a few years to recover. Further out to sea, sand deposited on the coral can cause the same problems.

So what's the deal? If you want to go diving around Phuket, most of the sites there are in good shape. The Surin and Similan Islands got hit pretty bad with 14 of the 47 sites already surveyed suffering heavy damage. On the other hand, Richelieu Rock and Koh Bon are virtually untouched. Sites local to Phuket and Krabi have maybe five percent damage and no loss of marine life. Dive and snorkelling sites around Phi Phi are being visited at the moment, although only by vessels operating from the mainland and Phuket.

Indeed, it seems Mother Nature has a taste for the ironic because since the post-tsunami underwater visibility has been remarkable and the dive sites are still teeming with fish.

Perhaps the greatest irony is that the damage caused to coral reefs on the Andaman coast by the tsunami pales in contrast to the damage that is caused by overfishing, ignorant divers, agricultural runoff, dynamite fishing, boat anchors and untreated sewage.



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## Dive Sites of Thailand

### PHUKET

While Phuket's dive sites did suffer damage in January's tsunami, reports of their demise are greatly exaggerated. 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

While Phi Phi was badly hit by the tsunami, most of the dive sites are intact and boats are operating in the area. 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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# Harajuku Girls

Every Sunday, dozens of imaginatively dressed youths religiously congregate by the train station of Tokyo's trendy Harajuku district. **Rick McEwen** reports on the real-life costume dramas that are taking place on the streets of Japan. Photos by Rick.

**T**imes are changing in Japan. A struggling economy has forced the country into a period of introspection and many of the long-standing traditions that the Japanese once prided themselves on are now showing signs of losing their age-old grip. In a country where conformity has always been regarded as a social imperative, the Cosplay movement, with its public display of flamboyance and attitude, serves as a testament to a changing environment that has brought about more freedom for the young.

Cosplay (pronounced *Kosupure* in Japanese), a combination of the words 'costume' and 'play', describes the hobby of having fun by dressing up as one's favourite characters and originated in the 1970s when fans dressed up at Tokyo comic conventions.

Clad in a variety of weird and wonderful costumes – from gothic drag, punk and bondage to 19th-century French maids outfits, nurse's uniforms (complete with fake splattered blood and bandages) and superheroes – each youngster cuts an arresting image amongst the swathes of shoppers and tourists crowding the streets of Harajuku. Through borrowing and cross-fusing styles from a wide range of fashion genres, these youngsters have created radical, postmodern hybrids that have caused a cultural clothing revolution, subsequently inspiring a whole new breed of designers worldwide.

With their heavily made-up faces and dyed hair, each one strikes a self-styled pose that you can imagine was perfected through hours of staring at the bathroom mirror. What's more,



most usually do it with an air of confidence that is extremely rare in Japan. It is during these moments, watching the Cosplay girls as they tirelessly masquerade for the throngs of curious bystanders, that you can't help probing for some deeper psychological meaning to all of this. Are they merely 'having fun' or is there a meaningful social statement hidden beneath the layers of make-up and clothes?

Haya, a 19-year-old student who travels over two hours from Sendai each Sunday just to be in attendance – something that is not uncommon among these Harajuku Cosplayers – became interested in it through the "Visual Kei" bands that she follows. Visual Kei is a Japanese rock and pop music phenomenon that places as much emphasis on a band's appearance as it does their music. Striking make-up, hair dye and elaborate costumes all contribute greatly to perfecting the band's look. Although the band members are usually male, their fan bases are almost exclusively made up of teenage girls like Haya, who seek to emulate the costumes worn by their favourite groups. Haya's choice of dress is that of an elegant Gothic Lolita, a look that is hugely favoured on the Visual Kei scene. She acknowledges that in a society where 'the group' takes precedence over the individual, people like herself are widely misunderstood. "People often look at me as if I'm some kind of weirdo. I think that many are afraid of us."

Mayumi, a 29-year-old woman who works in a nearby hotel, rejects such a claim. She believes that Cosplay is nothing more than an extreme form of attention seeking. "I don't think people are afraid of them, after all, it's just a facade. Many of these youngsters find themselves ignored during the week, whether it is at school or work. I guess Cosplay allows them to find release from their normal lives."



#### GWEN'S TRIBUTE

On her first solo album vacation from No Doubt – the massive-selling *Love. Angel. Baby.* – singer Gwen Stefani notes how the Cosplay women have influenced her on the song "Harajuku Girls". Considering how Gwen's been looking and dressing recently, like Madonna during her Marilyn Monroe/"Material Girl" phase, she could use a few original fashion pointers.

**Chorus:** *Harajuku Girls you got the wicked style/I like the way that you are/I am your biggest fan*

**Excerpt from last verse:** *You're looking so distinctive like D.N.A./Like nothing I've ever seen in the U.S.A./Your underground culture visual grammar/The language of your clothing is something to encounter/A ping-pong match between eastern and western/Did you see your inspiration in my latest collection?*

#### REBEL CAUSES

At first glance, there is perhaps nothing new or particularly remarkable about these suburban Tokyo teenagers. After all, they are merely illustrating the same show of nonconformity and contempt for mainstream culture that youths the world over have been doing throughout history, although I am sure never in costumes quite as bizarre as these. From mods and beatniks to hippies and punks, each generation of youth has produced its own particular breed of reactionary adolescents.

According to the Tokyo-based writer Dan Grunebaum, however, "as rebellious and individualistic as *kosupure* people might seem to be and think of themselves as being, the bottom line is that, like other subcultures, they all dress alike and follow the same norms. In other words: even rebellion is conformist in Japan. □

What makes this phenomenon extraordinary, nevertheless, is the backdrop against which they're playing out their rebellious youth. In a country where the expression goes, "the nail that sticks out gets hammered down" here you have a group of youths seemingly only too happy to publicly shun such principles. If nothing else, it's proof that there is some sense of individualism emerging from within the young Japanese psyche.

Hisa, a Tokyo bisexual who has been part of the Cosplay scene for the past five years, believes that it's the very notion of not 'fitting in' that joins each one of them together.

"Cosplay is a meeting of like-minded people, all seeking a common desire to be different. Deep down, everybody longs to be noticed and Cosplay allows people to fulfill such a desire." It's not just about making a visual impact either. "Coming to these weekly gatherings has enabled me to meet and talk to people with similar interests and sexual preferences as myself... it helps to know that you are not alone."

Whatever one's view is regarding Cosplay, there can be no doubt that it provides a fascinating insight into the lives of a group of young Japanese who are simply expressing their individuality and fixations through clothing. In Hisa's own words, "It's about getting the message across that being an individual in Japan is okay."

It's just very difficult to do when you're alone.

Thanks to Ray Yakuda for providing translations.







# SAMUI'S SOUND JAMBOREE

Thailand has never seen such a musical potpourri as the **Samui Blues and World Music Festival**, with 42 bands over 10 days, in nine different venues. **Stuart Singleton** listens in while **Daniel Reid** shows some flashes of brilliance.

**T**he live music seen is alive and well on Koh Samui, even though it's living mostly in bluesville and cover land, playing exactly what the audiences want. Expat players mix with Thais musos creating a blend of music that is accessible and fun to watch. But for this festival, world, folk, soul, funk and jazz were imported from around the world to form a mighty combination of world-renowned musicians and local talent. The acts ranged from solo performers like the gorgeous, silky voiced Leena to Chips, the happy Delta-blues player, while the world music of Landscape, Aussie Yindi, along with Khun Inn and others, brought a vibrant organic dimension to the festival. Seeing veteran local acts from Flow and Cannonball to Soi Dogs and the Caravan of All Stars perform and also jam together, was amazing; and so was Todd Lavelle performing with ladyboy dancers.

The disaster that befell the Andaman area happened two days before the festival began. This enabled the organisers to raise funds through the sale of T-shirts and programmes, and to place collection boxes around many venues and bars. Every group I saw mentioned the plight of the victims and encouraged donations. From what I've heard, nearly half a million baht was raised this way. As the festival continued it felt strange that no more than 150 kilometres away, desperation and pandemonium were in the air.



Coco Blues in Chaweng was the headquarters of the festival, with a free buffet upstairs every day for the crew and performers to meet, discuss and bond. The venue was packed every night and all the gigs at the fest were free.

In Bophut, the Billabong rocked with small acts like Dr. Blues and Emma & Jackson, while the main stage had an array of musicians playing to a mixed Thai and Farang audience. Also not to be missed, the Randy Cannon Trio added some classy jazz. Randy has an amazing list of credits to his name, having performed with the likes of Bob Hope and George Benson, and producing music for film and TV including *The Love Boat* and *Falcon Crest*.

I met Zakiya Hooker (the headliner and the late John Lee Hooker's daughter) several times over the festival. Although she's petite, her presence on and off stage is awesome; she is a down-to-earth, no-nonsense honey with a smooth voice. She even had a temperature of 102 degrees at one point but still carried on performing. Her husband Ollan worked with soul legend Curtis Mayfield for five years, and they played off each other brilliantly. The band sharing the stage was Bluz4U, quality entertainment from seasoned professionals who have played with the likes of Stanley Clarke and Martha Reeves, to name just a few musical greats.

Let's also not forget that without the "back room" team (engineers, drivers, equipment menders, organisers, et al), the festival would not have been possible. The long days they worked – up to 16 hours – helped to provide a smooth-running festival which was very successful and also raised money for the victims of the tsunami.

I'm no Nostradamus, but I predict this will become the largest annual blues and world music fest in Asia, if it isn't already, and I highly recommend you go and check it out later this year, August to be exact.







# RESURFACING

**Amidst all the lurid, tabloid-style stories and newscasts about death and destruction, outbreaks of disease, ruined reefs, torn-up infrastructures, and sex tourists returning en-masse, Jim Algie ventures forth to Phuket and Krabi to try and separate the sensationalism from the real story. Photos by Jim too.**

**O**n January 21<sup>st</sup> I received an email from an editor for a large Australian publication, accepting a story I'd written on the world's first monkey hospital, but asking me, "Is the hospital still operating? What is its status given that Lopburi suffered so badly in the tsunami?"

I had to explain to her that, as I'd mentioned in the article, the hospital is located a few hours north of Bangkok. But the tsunami only affected six southern provinces, even if most of them, like Krabi, Trang, Satun, and much of Phuket, were largely untouched.

The editor never replied.

If the region's journalists don't know the situation in Thailand, then how are tourists supposed to surf the waves of misinformation and hyperbole in print, on the Net, and on TV?

Andrew Vecchio, who has worked in Phuket's dive industry for 12 years, said that in the days following the tsunami he received phone calls from relatives worried that the island's infrastructure was in shambles. "They told me, 'Come home, we have food and electricity. I told them, 'So do I,'" he laughed.





Media reports claiming that the Andaman's coral-rich reefs were obliterated also don't hold much water. Surveys undertaken by Thai marine biologists, working in tandem with Farang-owned dive shops and volunteer divers, have estimated that about five to 10 percent of the reefs, mostly in the shallows, have been spoiled by the tsunami – an estimate that Andrew agrees with – and enormous clean-up operations are underway to control the damage done.

"There wasn't a huge wave at the dive sites, just a surging of water, and some strong currents throwing debris around, but I would be surprised if much of the damage is recognisable within a couple of weeks. So people who haven't been to that area before wouldn't be disappointed," said Andrew, who works at All 4 Diving, one of some 60 dive centres around Patong Beach, all of which have experienced a sharp drop-off in customers.

"The diversity won't change that much, but there may be less fish on the reef. We're still coming up to whale shark and manta season, so quite soon we could have a great deal of pelagics coming back into the area. And hopefully that will encourage divers to come back," he explained, adding that they did not lose any underwater explorers during the disaster. Nor did any of the other scuba centres he knows of on Phuket. (See The Diving News on page 26 for more information.)

Yet another of the mass media's scare tactics was alleging that outbreaks of disease were imminent. This has not happened in Thailand, says Peter Davison, the manager of international services at Phuket International Hospital, and is not likely to either.

"The Public Health Ministry has done a great job in controlling any

potential epidemics. Certainly with incidents like these, there's always a risk, but we're talking about places like Indonesia and Sri Lanka," said the 41-year-old Australian.

Many of the beaches, like Surin, actually look cleaner, the water more lucid, than ever. And you'll see the same kinds of sights: swimmers, sunbathers soaking up the UV rays, deck chairs, jet-skiers, kids playing boisterously along the shoreline, sunshine and palm trees, nomadic Thai vendors hawking sarongs, handicrafts and soft drinks.

But where are all the people?

Normally, at this time of the year, most hotels on the islands have occupancy rates of around 90 percent. Now they've plummeted to around 10 percent.

Still, there are signs of the local tourism business resurfacing from this abysmal low.

"The Association of French Tour Operators decided about three days ago to resume travel to Phuket on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January. That was followed today by the French government lifting its travel advisory on Phuket and Krabi, everywhere except Khao Lak and Phi Phi," said Grenville Fordham, the managing director of Image Asia, which has its own fleet of flagship

**"Many of the beaches, like Surin, actually look cleaner, the water more lucid, than ever."**







the Thai staff, and the management like me and my colleagues, who earn more, we cut our wages by 30 percent."

Many of the locals I spoke with, like my Thai taxi driver, Niran, who took me around all of the main beaches on Phuket to do an inspection tour, have retained their usual smiling, laughing, joking around personas ("Hey Jim, can you send us some rich Farang female tourists?"). In that resiliently Thai way, Niran Surirawong, 43, tried to look at the bright side during these dark days, saying he agrees with the Tourism Authority of Thailand's plan to rezone and regulate Patong Beach, laying the groundwork for bicycle lanes while limiting the number of deck chairs and beach vendors.

"The area was a bit of a mess before, but the crisis has given us a chance to clean up the situation," says Niran, who works in sales and marketing for Suthincarrent and Tour, but now has to daylight as a taxi driver.

publications devoted to dining, real estate and boating on and around Phuket.

"One of the big tourism operators in Scandinavia, My Travel has said they are bringing in around 800 or 900 people in the first week of February," he noted.

Grenville's rough estimate is that some 10,000 Scandinavians will visit the island in February, which is about one-quarter of the average. Like many of the locals and expats involved in the travel trade, he believes that they may be able to salvage the last two months of the high season, in March and April.

If the tides don't turn, however, that means another tragedy is looming: massive layoffs.

"The ratio that hotels use is 1.6 workers per hotel room. At Khao Lak they lost 6,000 rooms, so they reckon about 10,000 jobs lost there," said Grenville. "There has been an initiative to try and absorb some of those on Phuket, but if there aren't any tourists..."

Government estimates of the number of jobs that may be lost on the country's Andaman coast range from 50,000 to 200,000. With stories circulating that sound like urban legends – marine creatures nibbling on corpses, a shark found swimming around in the pool of a luxury hotel just after the tsunami – fishermen in the area have found their net profits plunging to an all-time low, too.

But any of the dishes I tried at the island's splendid seafood restaurants haven't resulted in a case of "Mad Lobster Disease".

As is the norm in such natural disasters, those with the least to lose are hit the hardest. So it was heartening to hear people like Stan Smeets, the young Dutch marketing manager of Warm Water Divers, who are currently reconstructing one of their offices near Patong's beach road, say, "We decided to keep all

He also pointed out that their company is still operating its tours of Phangnga Bay, where visitors can sea-canoe through caves that give way into lagoons with water like melted down emeralds, surrounded by towering ramparts of limestone, craggy as the Rolling Stones.

Over in the city of Krabi, in the Cafe Europa Scandinavian Restaurant and Guesthouse, the mayor, Keratesuk Phukaoluan, told me he received a phone call early on the morning of Dec. 26, so he raced over to a resort on Ao Nang. From the roof, they watched the waves roll in from a distance of eight km's away. The early warning gave them a chance to evacuate much of the area, and the sea wall behind the beach absorbed the brunt of the water's wrath.

Most of the area's top attractions, like Railay, Koh Poda, Ao Nang, and Koh Lanta, were largely spared by the tsunami, and are as beautiful as ever, said the Democrat Party member, who has been the municipality's mayor for 19 years.

Government plans are afloat to rebuild the province's most catastrophically lashed island of Koh Phi Phi Don: "It is possible that the government will buy back the land and try to redevelop it in a more sensible way that is also kinder to the

**"Most of the area's top attractions, like Railay, Koh Poda, Ao Nang, and Koh Lanta, were largely spared by the tsunami, and are as beautiful as ever."**

## Tsunami Report

environment,” said Keratesuk, though rebuilding the island may take a minimum of eight months.

On the restaurant’s wall is a photo of its most famous customer, Leonard Di Caprio, who came here when he was filming *The Beach* near Phi Phi’s Maya Bay (still intact and already being visited again by a trickle of tourists). Henrik Ennevoldsen, the co-owner, said with a laugh, “Leonardo is welcome back to visit ‘The Beach’ and eat our meatballs any time he wants.”

In spite of the fact that most hotels in the province were only 10 percent full, the Dane was encouraged by governments altering their travel advisories, and the reports he had read in the Scandinavian press.

“The Norwegian government has lifted their travel warning, and they’re trying to change the Danish and Swedish ones as well [they have since done so]. Some of the biggest tour operators in Scandinavia are resuming flights to Krabi, which are fully booked. And people have been told through the media that the best way they can support Thailand now is to come here and travel,” he said, adding that business is expected to be back to 50 percent by February.

Earlier, on Phuket, I hadn’t been sure what to make of Niran’s claim that the disaster had inspired a new spirit of solidarity amongst many Thais. But that’s a good description of what was happening over at Nopparat Thara Bay, near Ao Nang. This area did take a bashing, especially the long-tail boats. Around 60 of them were lined up along the shoreline, being repaired by groups of men and women – nailing, sawing, and sanding – working alongside teenaged volunteers from vocational colleges in nearby provinces. Two young men trudged down the beach, carrying a long-tail engine on bamboo shoulder poles, and groaning under the weight.

The TV news producer’s first commandment is, “If it bleeds, it leads.” So after the horror angle has been bled dry, what comes next but sex?

I the articles I read in foreign newspapers about sex tourists descending in droves on Patong’s neon-splashed nightlife strip of Bang-la Road seemed overblown when I was doing interviews around there. Most of the beer bars were empty,

save for a smattering of working girls. A waitress I interviewed briefly in the Rock Hard A Go Go told me that around 70 percent of the women working there had returned to their rural homes, or moved elsewhere, because of the lack of customers.

Since the government’s Social Order policy went into effect in 2001, the nightlife here is positively prim, at least compared to the way it used to be. Most of the go-go bars have closed down, and the ones that remain feature dancers wearing mini-skirts, and the bars and discos are shut by 1-2am. Yeah sure, there were still some burly, beer-bellied Western “snakeheads” (in Thai slang) walking around with much younger local gals. But they’re easy enough to avoid, and they do provide some comic relief (“Look at the mullet and the garish Hawaiian shirt on that guy! Is he colour blind or what?”) and some excellent warnings, “Man, I hope never age that disgracefully.”

By the time I was waiting to fly out of the Phuket International Airport, filling the time by reading over some newspapers and watching some TV news networks, the horror-mongers of the mass media were already chasing down other corpses in bush fires, landslides, storms in Europe, and bus crashes.

In the airport, there were some grim reminders of the tsunami, though. All over the pillars near the check-in counters were posters of the missing. The one that haunted me the most was for a middle-aged German lady who’d gone missing from Khao Lak. Beside her badly photocopied picture was a brief physical description along with a few distinguishing scars from an appendix operation, not likely to be visible if they ever found her at all. At the bottom of the poster was the heart-rending plea, “I love this woman! Please help!” So you pray for a miracle and hope she turns up alive. What else can you do?

Without intending any disrespect whatsoever to the dead, the missing, the injured, and the grieving, like that lovelorn German guy, I honestly didn’t see any corpses on Phuket or Krabi, or much ruin, or any of the ghosts my Thai friends had warned me about. But I did get to hang out with a lot of cool and congenial locals and expats; met the gentlemanly mayor of Krabi province, as well as a traveling snowplow driver, who invited me to stay at his home up in the ski resort of Jasper in the Rocky Mountains of Canada; enjoyed some sun and snoozing on the lovely and languid Surin Beach; was awestruck once again by Krabi’s limestone-heavy topography; ate some good seafood (the tell-tale claws of “Mad Lobster Disease” have yet to sink in); and felt inspired by the Farang philanthropists volunteering in the Krabi hospital, and setting up relief agencies for Thai survivors (see interviews on next page), not to mention their equally inspiring supply of red wine.

Though none of my friends actually believe the shark-in-the-swimming-pool story and I’m kind of wondering myself, but all things considered, it was easily the best, and certainly the strangest, working holiday I’ve ever had in Phuket and Krabi.

### INFO WAVE SURFING

To keep up with the rapidly fluctuating situation along Thailand’s Andaman coastline, check out Image Asia’s website at [www.image-asia.com](http://www.image-asia.com). Another frequently updated website is the Tourism Authority of Thailand’s News Room at [www.tatnews.org](http://www.tatnews.org).





# ALTRUISM IN ACTION

Over red wine, **Jim Algie** speaks with **Di**, our correspondent in Krabi, and her musician husband **Klaus**, two of the first Farangs to volunteer at the city's main hospital, where thousands of injured people were brought. The couple stayed there for the better part of three days and night. During one 48-hour stretch Klaus went without any sleep at all.

## *How did the Thais at the hospital deal with the situation?*

**Klaus:** "I was really impressed with the job they did, and all the volunteer Thai nurses and doctors who came from all over the area to lend a hand. They saved lives."

**Di:** "Everyone was on auto-pilot. No smiling and no laughing."

**Klaus:** "I'd have to disagree there because I got a lot of smiles from these Thai guys laying there all fucked up, and I'd ask, 'Sabai dee mai?' [How are you?] and they'd give me this big smile and say, 'No problem.' This is the way I was approaching the people, trying to make them laugh, and there was this guy all banged up, and he had a Yugoslavian name, so I said in Serbian, 'I am Donald Duck,' and he couldn't believe it, uh?"

**Di:** "I was getting people's names mixed up, ringing their parents on my mobile, and I didn't know whether I was calling England or South Africa, or wherever."

**Klaus:** "I was just going up to people and telling them they were going to be fine. That was my mission, and doing it with a smile. People needed that, uh? I was just going from bed to and talking to the injured. People were really nice. I had a good time doing it."

*What were some of the worst horrendous cases you saw?*

**Klaus:** "This one guy comes in and he looks like Freddy Fucking Krueger, but I peeled four bananas for him, and he was okay in no time. The staff were trying to dress the wounds of this screaming, young English woman, and I said, 'Don't look at that hole in your leg. You're still gonna be a beautiful woman,' and she smiled."

*One of the people you aided was a French lady, who was out in a long-tail boat that capsized. I remember you saying before that her baby was strapped into a stroller that immediately sank, and she couldn't find her husband. Then, with a fractured collarbone she swam several kilometres to shore, in a churning sea, with a fractured collarbone. How did you meet her?*

**Di:** "She was on a bed in the hospital's reception, just lying there in shock. She needed a cigarette and someone to spend time with her. I'm not a joker like Klaus is. Most patients, doctors, nurses were in shock. She sat there all night, not knowing what to do or say. We brought her home, and she just wanted to take a shower and I made her a cup of tea, but she wouldn't eat. The next day she called the French embassy to register, but she didn't want to call her family, or do anything else. I made her eat a piece of toast with honey, gave her some clothes to wear, and she asked me to take her to the morgue

they'd set up, where the bodies were lying on the floor in the operating theatre. There was a dead baby on the bench and that's where she went first and I thought, 'What if it's hers? What am I gonna do?' But it wasn't hers. When she identified the body of her husband, she cried for about 30 seconds. There were no words to say. But I was so happy when she found her French friends at the hospital. Many of them survived."

## HELPING HANDS

*Words by Jim Algie*



Millionaire actor of sorts, Michael Douglas recently met with the Thai prime minister to present him with a check for 26,000 bucks, which is about the equivalent of me chipping in five or six baht. Ricky Martin has also paid a visit to Thailand on behalf of his own charity organization; the publicity is not likely to hurt his album sales. All the international aid organisations have been pouring money and staff into the region. There have been benefit concerts, photo exhibitions, donation boxes popping up everywhere.

So how can the average person help?

In the aftermath of the disaster, the two Danish owners of the Cafe Europa Scandinavian Restaurant and Guesthouse in the city of Krabi, raised Bt11,000 in four hours from their customers for a foundation they're setting up to help poor Thais.

"Right now the Thai government has got so many donations from all over the world, they don't know how to spend the money. I think we will wait two, three, or four months, then find the people who got nothing," says Henrik Envoldsen.

Are there any other relief efforts he would recommend?

"UNICEF is doing okay here. They know where to go, what to do. The foundations of the Thai Royal Family are reliable, but the very local groups, no, not really. I've met expats here who have some money, and they're looking for individuals to sponsor like we do."

Already the Danes have amassed around Bt150,000 for their foundation and began sponsoring a 24-year-old Thai guy named Man. He lost his house, belongings, and entire family at Khao Lak, the most wiped-out part of Thailand, where the majority of the more than 5,000 confirmed casualties in the country met their end. They are also hoping to provide scholarships for some of the 30 known orphans in the city.

"The best way you can help is donate some money to us, and I will make sure we spend it the right way," Henrik solemnly promises. "I will follow up on the people we want to sponsor, and send emails to all the people who send money. I will show them from day one what we do, what we plan to do, and send photos to them, from the start to the happy end."

Email Henrik at [helpkrabi@yahoo.com](mailto:helpkrabi@yahoo.com)



# The Moken and the Wave

**The Moken sea gypsies of Thailand's Andaman saved the lives of locals and tourists amidst the waves of devastation of the Asian tsunami. Despite surviving one of the biggest natural disasters in living memory, their unique centuries old culture is threatened with extinction at hands of Thailand's political powermongers, writes Tom Vater. Photos by Aroon Thaewchatturat.**

**I** was taking 12 tourists to a coral reef in the morning. Suddenly, the water level dropped. I shouted for everyone to get on board. Then the water rose and rose and I knew something was really wrong. I raced across the bay, when suddenly, the water dropped again, dropped to nothing, spinning the boat wildly, until it was stuck in the sand of the sea floor – but there was no sea. I told the tourists to run, and then the water came back. It came too fast to take the boat to shore.” Sarang lights a banana leaf cigarette and smiles.

“I managed to keep the boat upright and drove out to sea. The great wave moved past below me and I could see it crashing into the shore. But the tourists ran and in late afternoon, I finally got the [national park] boat in,” he says.

Sarang is a Moken. The Moken sea gypsies, animist nomadic boat dwellers, have been sailing the Andaman Sea for centuries. In recent years, the Moken have been under intense pressure from authorities and NGOs to abandon their transient culture and assimilate into mainstream Thai society, a development the community has been quietly resisting.



Koh Surin, a popular marine park, is one of the kingdom's prime diving grounds, visited by liveaboards from Phuket and tourists from all over the world. It has also been the home of the Moken for many years, a refuge from the bustle of mainland Thailand and the surrounding tourist islands.

Far from the coast and close to the Burmese border, Koh Surin has been affording the nomadic boat dwellers some degree of protection against the vagaries of modern life.

The Moken know the Indian Ocean well. In December, the sea, their cultural, spiritual and geographical home, turned against them. The tsunami that devastated much of Thailand's western coastline, hit their island with devastating force.

Preecha Tuitaisong is a dive master on Koh Surin. "There were three hundred tourists in the park, ninety of them foreigners. In the morning, eleven boats went out to different reefs around the islands to take visitors snorkeling. Some were swimming in front of the park headquarters when the tide suddenly went out very quickly. I had never seen anything like it before so I shouted to the swimmers to leave the water. Then we got on the walkie-talkies and tried to contact the longtails."

The young man feels profoundly happy to be alive, "We just had time to get the tourists and ourselves up the hill. I was one of the last ones to leave the headquarters, and as I turned towards the bay, I could see the wave, 15 metres high, rushing towards us. It left nothing."

The park headquarters are flattened. The visitor centre is in ruins, the restaurant gone altogether, the park bungalows in tatters. The area is littered with debris – dive equipment, kitchen utensils, books, rattan furniture, ripped tents and plastic – lots of plastic.

Preecha surveys the sad remains of a marine life exhibition, which scientists from Chulalongkorn University have been painstakingly assembling for many years – now scattered across a 20 metre area of sand and concrete foundations.

"We asked the tourists to stay in the forest. In the afternoon I went down and scavenged for water and some dried food. We slept in the jungle that night. I was happy we had saved almost everyone. I know of just a couple of tourists who died."

Nathan Oman, a Thai pop star, and his friends were spending their New Year's holidays on Koh Surin. "On the morning of the Tsunami, the Moken were watching the black birds, which seemed to have gone mad. Then the water suddenly retreated, almost a kilometre. The Moken shouted to us to head for the hills. I carried one sick Moken man, Nok Yum, up the mountain and then watched the wave destroy every single Moken house on the beach. Half an hour later I went back down with a few of the park staff. It was terrible. The village was gone. I had no idea whether we were safe. In the afternoon, the Moken put all the tourists on a boat and we returned to the Park Headquarters."

"We just had time to get the tourists and ourselves up the hill. I was one of the last ones to leave the headquarters, and as I turned towards the bay, I could see the wave, 15 metres high, rushing towards us. It left nothing." - *Preecha Tuitaisong, Divemaster.*





*"The Moken have a sixth sense and knew what to do. They saved my life."  
- Nathan Oman,  
Thai pop star.*

Nathan is eternally grateful to his saviors. "The Moken have a sixth sense and knew what to do. They saved my life."

Dunung, the Moken chief, confirms the strange behavior of the ocean before the wave hit, "When the water drained from under our houses and fish began flapping on the sand, we knew something was wrong. We called to each other, collected our children and those tourists we could see and ran for the hill. We survived."

The following day, the coast guard reached the park and Koh Surin was evacuated. Most of the tourists were shipped to Phuket on visiting liveaboards.

A Ranong police boat picked up the Moken. Sarang, Dunung and the other two hundred members of their community have taken refuge in a Buddhist temple on the mainland, 200 km north of Phuket. Nok Yum, the injured Moken, refused to leave his mountain refuge and stayed behind. While the Moken are fearful of returning to the islands, they fret over their friend's fate.

The Moken villages, park headquarters and bungalows are gone. The Kabang, Moken boats, the cornerstone of their way of life have gone.

Without money or income, boats or homes, the immediate future looks bleak, while the long-term prospects are uncertain. A drive to Ah Bon Lek, the main Moken village, confirms the worst. The village is no longer there. The rows of traditional stilt houses, usually stretching from the surf up across the beach, have all gone. Short stumps and the torn and broken belongings of an entire clan of sea gypsies lie scattered along the softly curving bay. A dog runs amongst the rubbish, the only sign of life. A little up the hill behind the village, the missing Moken Nok Yum lies dead in the forest.

And now, community factions, aid organisations, local powerbrokers and politicians on the mainland are hatching plans for the future of the sea gypsies.

Dr Narumon Hinshiranan, a Social Studies lecturer at Chulalongkorn University, originator of the UNESCO Andaman Pilot Project – aimed at helping sea gypsies to help themselves – and long-term supporter of the Moken, thinks the islands are healthy enough to welcome them back.

"The Moken should be able to return to Koh Surin if they want. They lived there before the park existed and establishing a new village on a different beach is perfectly feasible."

Others disagree. The powerful abbot of at Wat Samakitham, the pagoda where the Moken have found temporary shelter, would like the sea gypsies to remain on or close to the mainland and assimilate. Nun Walairat explains, "We don't want to destroy their culture but we want them to be Thai. They should learn how to speak Thai fluently and go to a government school."

The National Park authorities on the other hand, would like the Moken to return to Koh Surin, where the sea gypsies have become part of the park's working infrastructure in recent years. However, many, including Nun Walairat, argue that the low wages the park pays amount to slave labor.

At the refugee camp, Dunung is shocked about the death of their fellow Moken. The sea gypsies are just beginning to grasp the magnitude of the tsunami: "I heard that people died in Malaysia and Indonesia. The Moken were lucky. We want to go back to Surin. But we have nothing – no boats, no kitchenware, fishing gear or money."

If the sea gypsies remain on the mainland, they will be assimilated and are likely to become alcoholism-prone second-class citizens, as experience has shown elsewhere. They are a unique and fragile community in danger of collapse. The 'sixth sense' that singer Nathan Oman mentioned was their and the tourists' salvation when the tsunami hit. The Moken's instinctive reaction to the tsunami is part of their intimate relationship with the sea – one of their cultural characteristics



that make them unique amongst Thais and one that will be lost if they remain on the mainland.

Koh Surin National Park will open again in March, with or without the Moken. In the park, in their world, the Moken have a chance for cultural survival and can make a contribution to preserving one of the last truly unspoiled corners of Thailand.

Sarang describes the mood of his people, "Most of us want to go back to Surin. There is no work here on the mainland. At least on Surin we can build our own houses and live the way we want. We just need tools and boats to start again."

## Postscript

As Farang Magazine was going to press, 170 Moken had returned to Koh Surin, and are engaged in rebuilding their village. So far donations have bought one boat and an engine but boats are extremely hard to purchase at the moment and prices are high. The returnees have survived the refugee camp relatively well, although one child became ill and died. Last month, the Moken were visited by two *kabang* (Moken houseboats) from Burma. The Burmese Moken survived the tsunami OK but are once again being used as forced labour by the Burmese Army.



## Helping Hands

If you would like to contribute to helping the Moken recover and rebuild, please visit the following website: [www.cusri.chula.ac.th/andaman/en/](http://www.cusri.chula.ac.th/andaman/en/)



"The Moken should be able to return to Koh Surin if they want. They lived there before the park existed and establishing a new village on a different beach is perfectly feasible."  
- Dr Narumon Hinshiranan, Academic and founder of the Andaman Pilot Project.



# Elephantine Tasks



Four elephants from the recent Oliver Stone epic *Alexander* supplied moral and physical support for relief workers in the devastated beach resort of Khao Lak, reports writer and photographer **Steve Sandford.**

**I**n the wake of the tsunami, the gloom that overshadowed the scene of this natural disaster was increasing as the body count rose quickly. But in a time of crisis, people reach out to a positive symbol to identify with and at this moment it seemed that Thailand's revered beast of burden was the one.

In fact, news agencies had already reported that a group of Thai elephants actually sensed the tsunami as it plowed towards shore on that fateful morning. The mighty jumbos scrambled to higher ground, taking backloads of tourists and their mahouts with them in the first "rescues" of the catastrophe.

One week after it struck, I heard reports that four "enormous stars" from the recent Oliver Stone epic *Alexander* had been trucked down to a rescue/recovery camp in Khao Lak district, home to many of Thailand's biggest foreign beachside resorts, which had also been hit the hardest by the waves.

Parts of Khao Lak looked like a scene from a war movie: concrete buildings completely smashed, beach-front condos obliterated and palm trees uprooted. Many of the bodies had been swept inland for kilometres before being trapped beneath the rubble. A new tourist attraction had sprouted up in Khao Lak district for the many media crews and curious Thais alike, in the form of a large Thai navy vessel that had been swept







inland – across several resorts – and ended up at the base of a hill. It served as an indicator of the power and size of the wave, and will be left there as a memorial to the dead.

Arriving in the area, it wasn't too hard for me to find the crew at work. Walking tall above the traffic, Plai Wang ("Jungle Palace") a 30-year-old male elephant tromped down the roadway with a handful of volunteers perched on his back. Road-side volunteers stacking bodies and unloading coffins cheered them on as they veered off the road into the thick brush scattered with smashed furniture, bashed-in cars and other debris that was caught up in the wave.

The 5.5 tonne pachyderm, its ivory tusks jutting out, had been chosen for the role of the Indian King's warrior elephant that battled with Colin Farrell's army during the filming of *Alexander* last year. Now, the lumbering movie star, along with three fellow elephants and trainers from the Ayuttaya Elephant Palace & Royal Kraal were busy struggling to clear tree trunks, automobiles and giant slabs of concrete to make way for the team of body collectors. They also helped to carry some of the corpses, which were strapped to their tusks.

Owner Lad Thongreun, who trained the elephants for the Oliver Stone production last year, explained his reason for taking on the grisly task. "We want to use the elephants to help the families and workers find the bodies. It was my way of showing my gratitude for the contributions that so many tourists have made to my elephant camp over the years."

Indeed, the elephants were gaining access to areas unattainable by modern machinery. But their biggest contribution seemed to come in the form of the moral support they gave the aid workers, who were burdened with such elephantine tasks.





**Jay Lamey** ditched journalism school in Australia to do a year-long stint at *Universiti Sains Malaysia*, where life on campus, unhindered by studying, was a great learning experience in cultural clashes, how to sneak women into your room, and to never discuss politics. Photos by Jay as well.

**S**tudying in Malaysia was great, once I adapted to a few key differences. The classes were so lax they were almost pointless. Lecturers would frequently not show up, and those who did advised us to miss as many lessons as we liked because we'd learn more travelling around the country.

My favourite, our Societies and Cultures teacher, suggested we do no work at all because he would be giving everyone an A anyway. Two weeks later he fronted the class with an apologetic look on his face and said the faculty had informed him we had to do some work. "Just write something," he said. "Any length, any topic, and I'll give you an A." And he did.

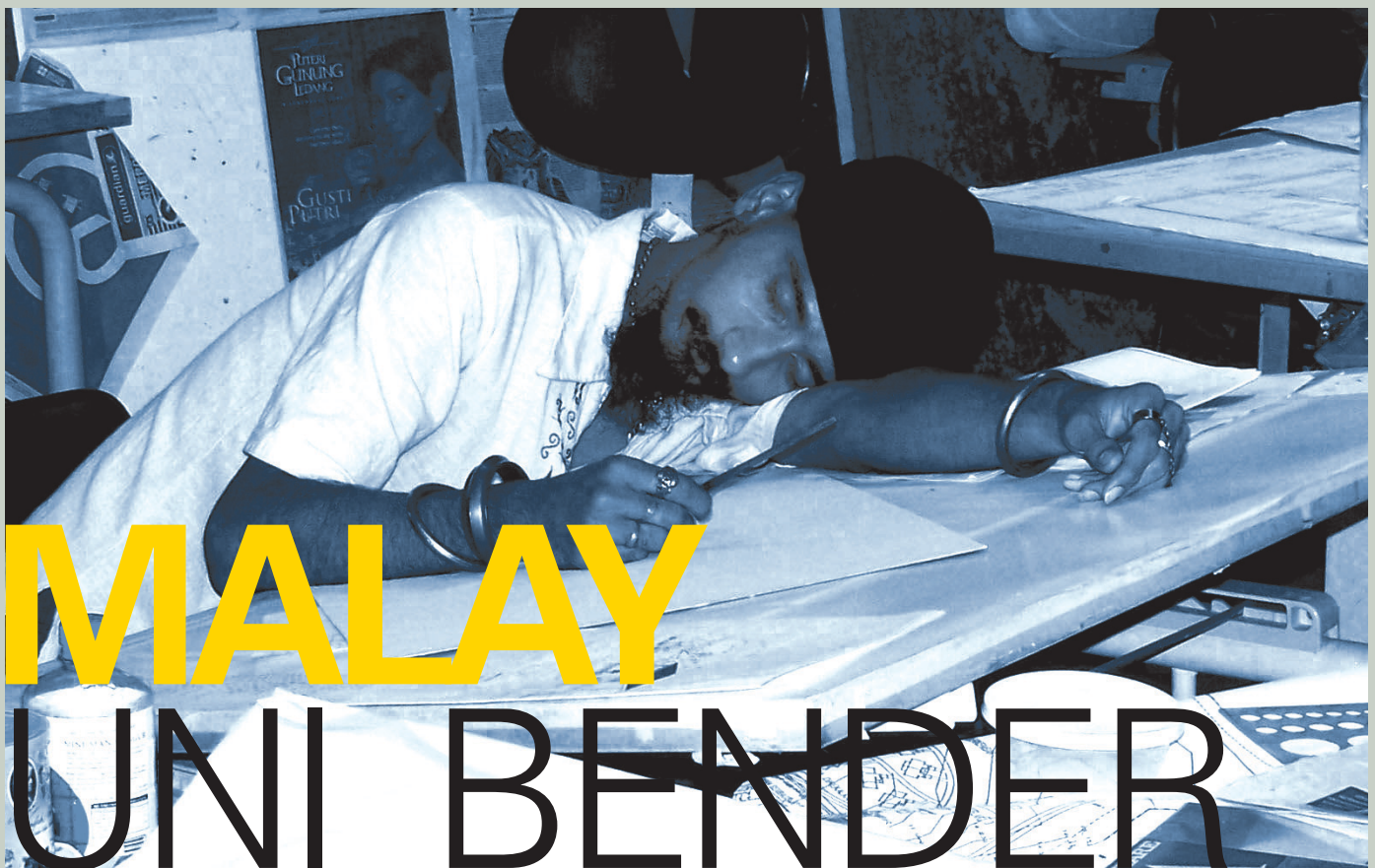
Despite the less than determined teachers I learned more in that year than any other. Entire nights were dedicated to quizzing Malays about the best love spells to use, Japanese girls on the 'sex friend' phenomena and playing crazy

Hong Kong-style UNO (not for the feint-hearted). Weekends were a parade of festivals and holidays to Malacca, Southern Thailand, Sumatra, Kuala Lumpur or Langkawi.

Two years later, I'm back. Malaysian left me addicted to the Southeast Asian lifestyle, so it was an easy decision to throw in a gig on Australian radio and try life in Bangkok. And the first chance I got, I flew back to Penang to visit the old stomping grounds.

The taxi deposits me outside the campus mosque and I cruise into the sprawling hilly campus. When I arrive at my old dorm – the inspiringly named Village of Peace and Hope – I'm shocked to see they've upgraded the communal bathroom. It used to be a great example of Southeast Asian interior design: showerheads flying off the cold showers, mud caking the flushless squat toilets, and cockroaches fleeing up the walls. Now the tiles gleam and, like very few bathrooms in the region, it has been remodeled for wheelchair access.

I laugh out loud as I look down at the floor – the scene of two of the greatest displays of cultural insensitivity I've ever known. The first when an Aussie named Leigh passed out here after a heavy night. Like many grand evenings, this one ended with beers at the local bus-stop. The only problem was Leigh didn't quite make it back to his room. Instead, he stretched out and slept on the filthy bathroom floor, fully clothed and stinking of beer. This was the scene that greeted the bleary-eyed Malays as they wandered into the bathroom at 6am (the Koran dictates a wash and a purge before every prayer). To make matters worse they







"I often secretly hoped we'd be caught, because if there is one conviction I would value higher than my teenage write-up for shop-break, larceny and property damage, it would be a bust for 'close proximity to female'."

had to step over him to get to the special-purpose washing tubs, where they run water over their arms and legs. When awoken by the angry dorm head four hours later, Leigh told him to fuck off and went back to sleep. Marvellous.

When I related this story to another sensitive Aussie named Patrick, he chuckled, "Yeah, I was pissing in those washing things for about a month." For weeks on end he would whip it out and have a nice long tropical piss into these religious vessels. The locals noticed, but no one had the guts to tell him he was pissing on their religion.

As it turns out, I'm back in Penang just in time for the post-exam exchange student party. I'm disappointed to see not one local student there, and shocked to discover the cost of a beer is now US\$2 for a tiny can, inspiring the headline, "The Price of Sin to Rise" in the *New Straits Times*. Local alcoholics still drink the cheap whiskies available everywhere in Asia – flavoured ethanol. The government's party line behind the "sin tax" is that it's a "sin deterrent". It works too – during my year in Malaysia I was forced into detox. Wholesome activities abandoned since childhood returned to fill the listless evenings that sobriety provides.

Alongside movies, cards, and bowling, this visit yields another fun group activity – my first evening of karaoke. I progress from stupefied beginner to rank amateur in one night of Dire Straits, Sting, Eminem and Westlife.

The next day, Minnesota Mark arrives in Penang to visit his Malaysian girlfriend. Like many of the exchange students he was seduced by the modern ease of the Chinese chicks. However, we all agreed on the ultimate goal: a Malay girl. The shy, shuffling Malay girls are subtle exhibits of beauty: long colourful dresses cling to the body and their faces are smooth with bright eyes. But the *tudung* headscarf is always there to remind you that these girls are

playing in a different league. And if you do lure an adventurous Malay into a dark corner you're running afoul of the law: It's illegal to be alone with an unmarried Muslim of the opposite sex. Of course, the whiff of illegality just makes the attraction stronger. Now, as I exit my friend's apartment through the car park, a cutie in a headscarf whistles to me with a suggestive wave. Perhaps she's dizzy from her Ramadan fast, or just friendly, but I'm frozen by shock and sudden lust. A moment later she is up the stairs and gone forever, pleased with herself, I hope.

While the law of 'proximity' only covers Muslims, the university, in its conservative glory, chose to extend the rule to everyone on campus. Thus, my more personal moments with my Japanese lover were gratifying bylaw violations. I often secretly hoped we'd be caught, because if there is one conviction I would value more than my teenage write-up for shop-break, larceny and property damage, it would be a bust for 'close proximity to female'.

While exchange students could avoid the full severity of the university authorities, some brave local students took massive risks for a little privacy. Minnesota Mark received frequent visits from his local lass, who faced expulsion (and severe lacerations) by clambering in his window late at night.

The rules governing inter-sex relations are just a fraction of the rules and regulations governing life at a Malaysian university. But one rule towers above the others and reflects the state of the nation: no politics! When our group of exchange students was greeted by the creepy, silver-haired, deputy vice-chancellor, he was keen to impress on us free-thinking Westerners that political organisations, discussions and activities were strictly forbidden. He didn't need to worry. My Malaysian friends became uncomfortable when political matters were raised and would not be drawn into conversation, no matter how hard we tried to provoke them. And they had good reason to be afraid. As I write, a USM student is facing expulsion for simply campaigning in the recent general election.

The number-one unspoken political issue in Malaysia is the vexatious 'Malay Privileges' that were introduced in 1970 to correct the national wealth imbalance. These provide better access to education, welfare and public service jobs for ethnic Malays and are an integral part of the national structure. This programme of 'positive discrimination' offends Western sensibilities. "Institutional racism," declared one Canadian. He'd better watch out – it's a constitutional crime to question the policy. You can be locked up without charge as a "threat to national security".

Malaysia's racial mix is certainly one of the country's most interesting features and also one of the most fun. On my final night in Penang, I clock up eight hours at the local Tandoori restaurant with my Sikh friend Sarvinder, hearing about his family's adventures at the local temple, which landed nine male relatives in jail. As we discuss the finer points of Punjabi pride, I realise that moments like these are the best of times in Malaysia. The clash of East and West, the post-colonial malaise of races and the delicate national structure all make it the perfect place to practice one of life's more subtle skills: the art of conversation.



# THE MULTIFACETED MAN



Meet Jeffery Bergman, whose life as a gem dealer, amateur photographer, clandestine activist and writer, has taken him through jungles, deserts and cities and thrust him in the company of millionaires, murderers, soldiers, spies, tinkers and even tailors.

Story by **Cameron Cooper** Photos and captions by **Jeffery Bergman**

**V**isit the main Tourist Police office in Bangkok at any time of day and there are always a few tourists filing a complaint that they got ripped off by a gem shop. All were promised excellent profits when they resold their stones back home, and discovered later that they had just spent a fortune on rubies and sapphires of negligible value.

One person you won't see in the queue of unfortunate suckers here is road warrior Jeffery Bergman. Thirty years as a gem dealer has taken him to scores of countries, and seen him doing business with the whole spectrum of both dodgy and legitimate characters in every continent but Antarctica. "Travel itself has been my best education, though it has transformed me into an international misfit of sorts," he says.

Sadhus were everywhere. Train stations, bus stations, temples, in the streets; you could hardly get away from the colourfully dressed, frequently face-painted and often bizarre-looking holy men with their hands out, looking for a few rupees. The common mantra was "chapatti, chapatti, chapatti," a plea for their daily bread. A well-placed rupee virtually guaranteed an excellent photo-op.

As a long-time pro in the trade, he shakes his head in wonder at the tourist amateurs who get ripped off: "What are they thinking? I've done small-scale mining, cut stones, designed and manufactured jewellery, run a high-end jewellery store in Las Vegas, made thousands of deals as a trader, and I still get burned sometimes. You need a lot of knowledge and experience just to scratch a living. I do alright, but it's something you do as much for the lifestyle as the money. Very few dealers get rich."

Born in Baltimore, Jeffery's first travel revelation occurred at the age of 13, en route to the Australian outback, where his father had taken on a contract position at a spy satellite base in Woomera, funneling photos to the NSA and CIA. The family





Varanasi and the obligatory dawn boat tour of the Ganges, the filthiest river in the world, ogling faithful Hindu pilgrims bathing next to cremation fires. Raw sewage from millions, countless animals and charred human body parts (the poorer people can't afford enough wood to finish the job) all contribute to the infectious gumbo. Our 14-year-old oarsman remained as detached as a wizened old Buddhist monk, with the boat fare and tip going to his father.

made a stop in French Polynesia where he encountered a completely different culture for the first time. "I have a vivid memory of our Tahitian tour guide dropping her sarong-like dress to her waist and tying it off. With gloriously bared breasts, she explained Polynesian culture and history to us as we cruised from Papeete to Morea Island. This was a significant graduation from the glances I had stolen while my mother's friends nursed their babies and definitely a coming-of-age experience for me."

Dropped in the middle of Australia, a prepubescent Jeffery struggled to adjust to the tiny desert town and "the multicultural soup I was thrown into. I got things sorted out

Our astute guide suggested the Taj Mahal sunset view from the back side since the Taj was closed (every Friday). Brilliant. There we encountered this contemplative mutt, who obviously knew the scene well. This was the very spot where Shah Jahan planned his own never-realised black marble tomb. I fleetingly entertained the concept of human reincarnation as other animal species. Could it be?







My Thai wife Natalie, a road warrior in the making with 11 countries so far, has had a long fascination with camels. After our Rajasthan desert camel trek, involving several days of tolerating the snorting, regurgitating, bellowing, farting and generally disgusting beasts, Natalie insisted on visiting the world's largest camel farm in Bikaner, west Rajasthan.



Carved sandstone portals serve as windows, giving enclosed Haveli residents a view of life on the streets. Wandering the narrow alleys of the fairytale-like Jaisalmer Fort in southwest Rajasthan, I encountered this cockeyed local lass. She requested I take her photo; I politely obliged.





A tasty, cheap and filling street meal was rarely far from reach. I had dhal fry with chapatti for 15 rupees and vegetarian thalis for 25 rupees. My favorite was vegetarian samosa. Five, plus a cup of the ever-present chai (sweet Indian tea with milk and spices) made a satisfying meal for a total of only 12 rupees. The locals derived immense delight from watching foreigners consume their own common street-side fare.

after a few bloody noses and blackened eyes.” Bored to death, he took an interest in the opals from the nearby mines, cutting and polishing his first sparkling stone at age 14 and making a \$35 profit, beginning, “a hopeless addiction that has spanned four decades.” Three years later, he headed off around the world with a pocket full of money and opals and has never looked back, making the most of his living trading and brokering opals, sapphires, rubies and just about any other stone you could name, including the world’s largest sapphire from Madagascar (which is still up for sale, if anyone out there is interested).

Countless adventures (and a few close calls) later, including sneaking medical teams into jungle clinics in Burma, performing surgery and other medical treatment for the beleaguered Karen rebels fighting the illegal Burmese junta, Jeffery decided to call Thailand home. “Business was my excuse, but personal reasons were closer to the truth. In Asia, I am a misfit, but almost always a respected misfit, especially in Thailand. My well spoken Thai and general presentation place me on the upper end of the regional hierarchy of respect. Living in Thailand keeps me on somewhat of a continual ego trip.”

Asked for a bit of armchair philosophy that would sum up his approach to life, Jeffery says: “My guiding self-quote, which balances me when meeting new people, from slaves to senators, paupers to presidents, rubes to royalty, is: ‘At the end of the day, we are all just winging it.’”

Business and pleasure still take him all over the world and most recently around India, with his wife and traveling partner Natalie. The photos here are from that trip.



## Road Warriors



In the far west of Rajasthan, in the town of Deshnok near the city of Bikaner lies the famous Karnimata rat temple. Now sporting their own website – [www.karnimata.com](http://www.karnimata.com) – this Discovery Channel and National Geographic documented cultural anomaly features rats as the locally worshipped god. Several thousand rodents inhabit the sanctuary, and trays of milk, rice, sweets and other mouthwatering morsels are offered at regular intervals.



After the holy rats have munched, salivated, urinated and defecated on the worshippers' offerings, the remaining food is gathered and distributed to the faithful. Devotees of this sect make their pilgrimage from all over India; Hindu legend says the revered deity "Ganesh" traveled on the back of a rat. This young adherent is participating in a ritual repeated hundreds of times a day.





# HERE & NOW

The Latest Deals on  
Accommodation,  
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and Partying

Thailand: Page 53  
Hong Kong: Page 86  
Singapore: Page 88  
Cambodia: Page 90  
Laos: Page 92



# 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](http://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](http://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 Tanee 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, Ayutthaya, 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 Subanahongsa, ridden by His Majesty the King back in 1999 during celebrations to mark the Sovereign's 72<sup>nd</sup> 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: 2<sup>nd</sup> 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: Dick 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.

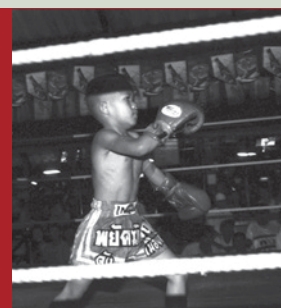


### FLOATS LIKE A BUTTERFLY, FALLS LIKE A TREE

If a free night of physical combat, *mano a mano*, takes your fancy, don't miss your chance to watch Bangkok's foremost up-and-coming amateur Muay Thai/boxing event being held at SMAC Boxing Club, on February 19. At press time, fights had been organised, including FARANG UNTAMED TRAVEL contributor and pedantic part-time deadline sub-editor Greg Lowe. Come and see him get battered for charity. The event starts at 6:30pm.

For more information, contact SMAC Boxing Club, 9

Floor, Panjit Tower, Sukhumvit Rd 55, Soi Thonglor (between sub soi 5-7), Tel: 02-712 8810, [www.smacboxingclub.com](http://www.smacboxingclub.com), [info@smacboxingclub.com](mailto:info@smacboxingclub.com)



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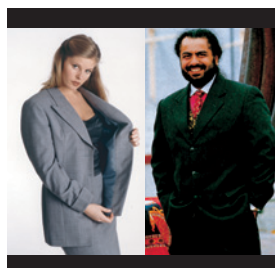
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### THE MANY FACES OF PASSION

In one startling image, a Thai man with an ecstatic expression on his face is caught up in the throes of being possessed by an animal spirit. He looks as though he's roaring like a tiger, a common enough sight at the Wat Bang Phra Tattoo Festival, held every February just outside Bangkok.

In another image, an African mother holds her child in the midst of a bleak and arid dirt-scape.

Passion is the focal point, and the title, of this exhibition of images (26 in all) by Alex Constantine at the Gallery F-stop in Bangkok – definitely not the kind of mindless titillation masquerading as passion that we usually see on racy billboards, or the haughty mannequins stalking the catwalks of the fashion world, nor the racy magazine spreads of cleavage-baring starlets, or even in the bloody, sado-masochism of *The Passion of the Christ*.



Travelling around Thailand, Africa, and England, Alex has managed to depict the passion, frequently religious, sometimes familial, in the most mundane and extraordinarily extreme of situations.

*The exhibition runs from Feb 1-21, with an opening party from 6-8pm on the first day. Gallery F-Stop is in the Tamarind Café, some 250 meters inside Sukhumvit Soi 20, a short walk from BTS Asoke or the Sukhumvit Subway Station and it's open from Mon-Fri, 11am-11pm, and Sat-Sun from 9am to 11pm.*



## 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](http://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](http://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.

#### TRADER VIC'S (POLYNESIAN)

Bangkok Marriot Resort & Spa, 257 Charoen Nakorn Rd. (on the Chaophraya), Tel 02-476 0022 ext1416, major cards

Although a worldwide chain, one that's succeeded in giving each outlet its own character. The Bangkok branch at the Marriot Resort and Spa has established itself as a dead cert for great food and a great dining experience in Bangkok. The immensely civilized riverside setting with outdoor terrace is a great place to enjoy the much talked about Sunday jazz brunch.

#### PATARA (THAI)

2 Sathorn 11, South Sathorn Rd, 11.30am-2.30pm, 6pm-10.30pm, Tel: 02-212 6420-1, [www.patarathailand.com](http://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





*french & mediterranean café - restaurant*

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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 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.

## 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.

## DA GIOVANNI ITALIAN TRATTORIA

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(Behind Bamboo bar)

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





### 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.

### HIMALI CHA CHA (INDIAN VEGETARIAN)

Three outlets: Silom Soi 11 (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.

### 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 Rohipol, 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)

Thais come 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 Banglamphu 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 Banglamphu, 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

**B**angkok 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](http://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](http://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.tokyoesbkk.com](http://www.tokyoesbkk.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. Happy hour is 6-9pm with Bt80 beers and jugs of Asahi for Bt300. Tuesday is two for one beers after 9pm, with Georgia singing. Check the website for weekly lineups and their infamous vodka orange end of the month parties.

### 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 CM<sup>2</sup>

Basement, Novotel Siam Square (Skytrain Siam), Tel. 02-255 6888, [www.cm2bkk.com](http://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.

### 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](http://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 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](http://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.



In the end, she wasn't worth it.

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](mailto: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



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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.

# 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.

# BAMBOO BEER BAR

Sukhumvit Soi 3, Tel. 02-253 2462, music from 9pm,  
www.bambooberbar.com, major cards

Primarily a spacious pool room but also has live music from The Fox, as well as performances from visiting guests. The Fox, led by Chor On, have been around forever and there probably isn't a song out there that they don't know, and with seven people in the band diversity is their strength. Good simple food and plenty of girls to talk to. A popular starter before heading off to less sleazebourish Nana Plaza. Sixth anniversary on Valentine's day, free buffet.

# 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 Funky House and Breakbeat. Hip Hop is spun on Tuesday with Model's Night on Wednesday, dancing to Precussive Latin House. There is Hip Hop, Dancehall and old-skool on Thursday. The weekend starts with Heavy Pumping Vocals on Friday, Hard and Funky Tech-House for Saturday. The week ends with Think Pink, Bed Bar's gay Sunday night.

# 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 publife. 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, swill 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 Trance and everything in between for years. It has a post-grunge feel and Bt150 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 'nuffod 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



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- saturday night fever
- dj billy v. & guests - house
- beat therapy sundays
- dj's tul & buddie q. - r&b, hip hop
- massive mondays
- dj's tul & cayo - international
- eclectic beats
- sugar & spice tuesday
- dj's billy v. & Joeki
- ghetto fabulous wednesdays
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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 wining, 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—and 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 known 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 Monumen, 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 Tanao, 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 boogers.

## 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.

## 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.

## EAT IT LIVE

Things get off to a great start in February for Bangkok, when it plays host to the MTV Asia Awards, now renamed MTV Asia Aid as funds will be donated to UNICEF. Awards go off on the 3rd at Impact Arena. Coming up this month, on Friday the 4th, there's **Ingrowing** from Czech Republic with **December** playing at Rock Pub, while over at Beat House (Suk Soi 39) on the same night, Singapore's Favorite Artists nominee, **Electrico**, rocking the room along with **Apartmentkhunpa**, **From the Makers of Casablanca**, **Lucy Suicide** and **Stylish Nonsense** for the MTV after-party, free admission. Ingrowing plays another set at Rock Pub on Wednesday the 9th with **Death Guy** and **Lacerate**. On Saturday the 19th, check out **iHear 3**, with Australians **My Disco**, **Goose**, **Brand New Sunset** and **The Eastbound Downers** at Asoke Bar (Suk Soi 21). Finally **My Disco** play again at **Noriega's** on Tuesday the 22nd with **From the Makers of Casablanca** who head off for their KL & SG tour the next day.



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### 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.

## DAN & ANDY'S GUIDE TO FAKING WINE APPRECIATION

Greetings sophisticates, from Dan & Andy, FARANG's resident experts on all things entertaining and alcoholic. In today's busy and multicultural world, it is all too easy to commit social faux pas at the dinner table or in the lounge. If you're moving in the high-powered circles we do, it's important to keep the upper hand in conversation and not be shown up as a lowly-born heathen. As we all know, there's no better way to show you're a posh bastard than driving a Mercedes. If you can't afford that or you're barred from driving, the next best thing is knowing a thing or two about wine.

All the best wines come from grapes; banana wine tastes great and gets you leathered, but isn't going to win you any points at the dinner party. The next thing to know is that wine comes in white and red. White wine is for womenfolk and homosexuals, whereas red is far more macho – for instance, nobody in a white shirt will pick on you when you're holding a glass of claret. Wine can come in bottles, cardboard boxes or in powder form, but nobody will mistake you for an aristocrat if you turn up with anything but a bottle, a glass one with a real cork. Fizzy wine is called champagne, except you can't call it that or a French *gendarme* will leap from behind the sofa and arrest you, so now we say "sparkling". Sparkling Burgundy, or any red, is exclusively drunk by under-age high-school students and is to be shunned.

When you've opened your fancy, blue-glass bottle, pour a little into a glass (never drink from the neck), swirl and smell it. Upon smelling it, you should put on a frown of concentration and mutter about fruity aroma and noses. Then knock back the wine, swish it around in your mouth (if you're feeling lively you may gargle), swallow and declare it *bonus vino!* before pouring yourself another and getting stuck into the bottle.

Finally, never tell anyone how much you paid for a bottle and don't pull it out until everyone is half-leathered. Then you may boast all you wish about the quality and subtlety of your drop, only detectable to the trained palate, and bask in the awe of your peers.



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# HIT THE NORTH

## CHIANG MAI

**I**t'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 Ratchamangkla park. In the modern western suburbs of Chiang Mai, **Gongde Gallery** off Nimanhemim Rd hosts exhibitions of Thailand's top artists, as does Chiang Mai University's **Art and Culture**

**Museum** at the corner of Nimanhemim 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

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pancakes. **Art Cafe** (corner of Tha Phae & Kotchasarn, 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-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 & 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](mailto: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.



Bridge over the river Pai

## PAI

**S**han-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.

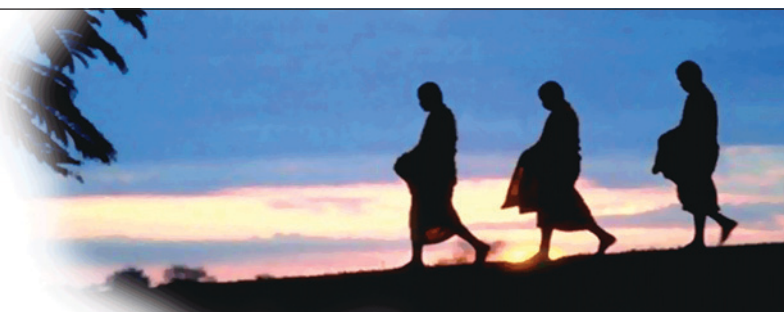
### FEEDING TIME:

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

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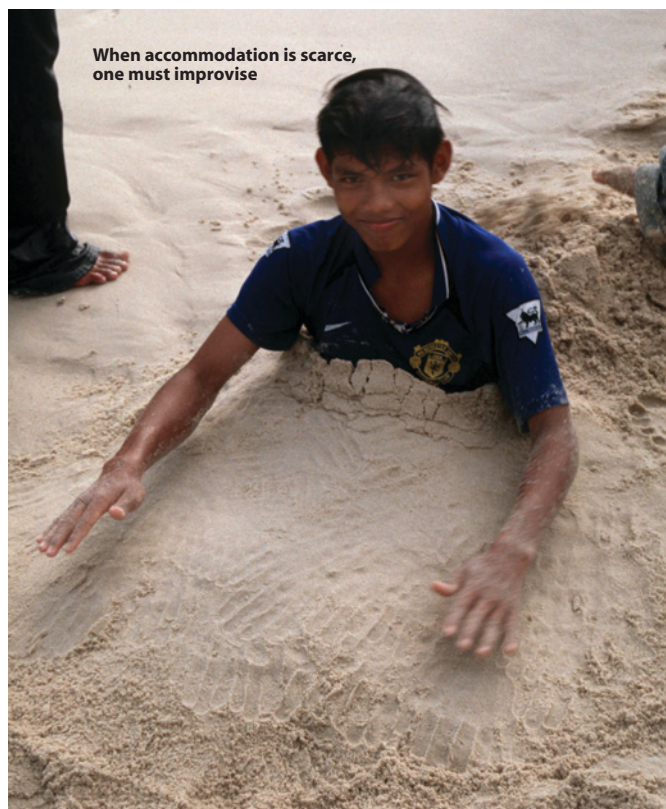


# BEACH ROUNDUP

## SUNBLOCK SEASON

**A**s everyone in the world now knows, Thailand's western beaches and bays took a hit last month from a huge Tsunami. Images of Bangla Road in Phuket awash and debris-choked were on heavy rotation all over the world media. The stories that didn't get so much attention were that only the Andaman coast was hit, the Gulf of Thailand and the rest are fine, and that within a week Phuket was up and operating at near full capacity. Not to belittle the terrible loss of life and livelihood, but Thailand was fortunate to escape with less damage than Indonesia or Sri Lanka. The resort spots Khao Lak and Koh Phi Phi were worst hit and it was in these places that most lives were lost.

Ironically, the wave actually cleaned the beaches, cleared the water and caused only minor damage to scuba diving sites. As Phuket, Koh Lanta, and Krabi swiftly get back on their feet and rest of the world comes to realise that it is safe and pleasant to visit again, there are excellent bargains to be had and great weather expected for the rest of this month. On the other hand, due to travellers changing destinations, places like Koh Samui and other gulf islands have already been even more busy than usual for this time of year. Donations are great, and good on those of you who have hoed in with much needed funds, but the best way to give the folks on the west coast some real help is by giving them your business.



When accommodation is scarce, one must improvise

### 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 a 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 operators 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.



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### 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

Possibly one of the world's most beautiful places, the area around Phi Phi was used in both *The Man with the Golden Gun* and backpacking odyssey *The Beach*. Phi Phi actually consists of two islands, both steep limestone formations with a small section of flat land between them, on which Phi Phi village was nestled before the wave hit. Sadly, the low-lying village was badly struck and many structures were destroyed, including the pier. At the time of writing, this part of the island was not recommended for tourists, although they are hard at work and things will improve. Check [www.farangonline.com](http://www.farangonline.com) for updates. The northeast section of the island, where there are a handful of resorts was relatively undamaged and is operating normally.

### 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 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 page 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

When people talk about Krabi (it's actually the name of the whole province) they're usually talking about one of three places. Firstly, there's Krabi Town, which is a charming seaport that serves as a ferry hub on the mainland and is famous for bargain accommodation and great food. There's Ao Nang, not far away, which is a tourist town centred on the beachfront road with plenty of resorts, restaurants and tailor shops. Up the beach and accessible only by boat are Tonsai and world-famous Railay. Famous primarily among rock-climbers, that is, who scale the spectacular limestone edifices that encircle the beach. Although the great wave did wash up on Krabi's shores, damage was minimal on Railay beach (despite the dramatic photos) and virtually non-existent in Ao Nang and Krabi Town.

### KOH LANTA

Although only 'discovered' by tourists relatively recently and often picks up the overspill when Phuket and Krabi are full, Koh Lanta is a large and lush island offering a variety of accommodation and activities. The tourist infrastructure starts in the north with luxury resorts and gets more and more rustic as one heads down the main north-south road. Since the island basically shuts down during low season, when storms batter the seaward coast, Lanta remains thankfully 'unsaturated' with tourist development. Although the island did get hit by the tsunami, there was little damage and few deaths. Some of the resorts in the north were damaged but are expected to be operating normally by the time you pick up this magazine.

### PHUKET

As Thailand's largest island with a long and prosperous history, Phuket can seem like its own world. Connected to the mainland by a causeway, the north-south oriented island has a jungle heart surrounded by white-sand beaches. The most popular area for tourism is Patong Beach, where you'll find bars, restaurants, hotels and shops all jammed together by what is actually a very nice beach. All the comforts of home are here, but if you're after something more rustic there's Phuket Town, an old Chinese-style



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town, and plenty of other more secluded spots inland. Phuket has been on everyone's lips since Boxing Day, but by the time you read this – with the exception of the area immediately behind Patong's beach road and most of Kamala – you'd be pretty unlikely to see any sign of a serious disaster on this island.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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

What was once an up and coming resort town on the Andaman coast came to a grim end on Boxing Day last year. While most of Thailand suffered relatively little damage and repairs have progressed quickly, Khao Lak, with its narrow bay and shallow beach focused the wave onto the land which flattened the place, taking many lives with it. It is difficult to say when things will get back to normal, but as an example, Le Meridian resort have announced that they will reopen in November. For now, travel here is not recommended.



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# KOH SAMUI CASTING AWAY

**S**amui 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**.

## NIGHTRIPPING:

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. **Penny Lane**, situated in the heart of town plays classic rock tracks and serves tasty food. Also on the blues and food kick,

**Springer Pub** is in south Chaweng. **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.

## NIGHTRIPPING:

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**.

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## FEEDING TIME:

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

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

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 Nattien 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 Phangan 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.



## Soi Reggae Koh Samui



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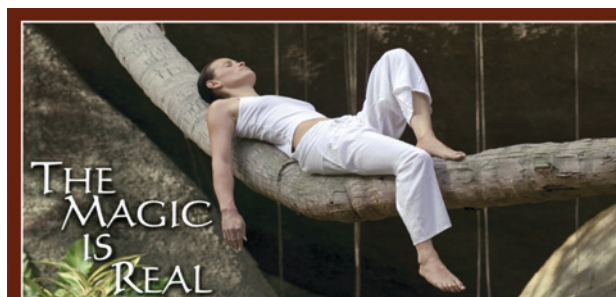
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# KOH PANGAN SWAY WITH THE PALMS



February 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 Phangan 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. Check out [www.phangan.info](http://www.phangan.info) for online booking.

## 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 Phangan 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.

### PLACES TO CRASH:

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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 DJA 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:** 1<sup>st</sup> class sleeper Bt1150 and 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 **Lompراها 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 – FEBRUARY 23rd

*Words by Tom Green*

Party season is in full swing on Pangan this month starting with the **Half Moon Festival** on **February 1st** in brilliantly decked out **Ban Tai** jungle with resident **DJs Jao, Psy-Frog** and **Note**; expect hard progressive and quality trance from the **Harmony** team. Next up is **Black Moon Culture** on **Feb 8th** where the **Black Moon Posse** host possibly the best outdoor party on the island on **Ban Tai Beach**; with amazing d cor, a super sandy venue, driving progressive beats, underground trance and **DJs Bang, Leung** and **Jonny**. Then a week later the Harmony Team put on their second **Half Moon Festival** of the month on the **16th Feb**.

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

The **FMP** is on the **23rd Feb** 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** and **DJ T** 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 moony.



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# KOH TAO TURTLE TOWN

**T**his month's big event is the Koh Tao under Water World Festival on the 12th and 13th. The objective of the event is to promote Koh Tao and Thailand as a premier diving destination while increasing environmental awareness and marine education. The main event for the 12th will be an attempt to break the current world record for the most number of divers underwater simultaneously. Also planned are a photography competition, stage shows and a beauty pageant as well as environmental and animal education booths and exhibitions. The island has seen a huge increase in visitors this year and with over 5000 people expected to attend book boats and bungalows early and come and join in the fun in what surely is a unique and unparalleled event for Thailand.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

AAccommodation 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. Don't despair there are many places happy to house and feed you any time of the year, diver or not. 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 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, a 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.



## WEST COAST

Sairee is the most popular area of the Island, with the largest beach, where a full range of accommodation can be found. 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**, an 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 provide 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.

## THE EAST

The northeast coast is much quieter and more secluded with



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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 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 good choices.

## DAYTRIPPING

As a major diving certification centre blessed with an abundance of marine life and easily accessible dive sites many would be Cousteau's 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. Check out easily accessible Rocky Bay,

Chalok Baan Kao, where you can snorkel with sharks and glimpse moray eels and if you're lucky, turtles too. 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, three islands joined together by sand bars – seen no where else in the world. If you're still keen for some water based activities checkout **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 party 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. Enon stop. The party scene is one of late nights, great people and good spirits. Check out the fliers for latest events, 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 up beat 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 forever popular **Dry Bar**, ideal for sunset, serves great drinks and music in a continuously creative beach lounge setting. 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. **Puks 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 Matia** 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. If you're after a monster breakfast to cure the hangover try **Greasy Spoon** breakfast bar and chip shop. 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. **New Heaven Restaurant**, Chalok Baan Kao, has beautiful views from its open air restaurant serving fresh seafood.



## WAY TO GO:

From Bangkok trains leave Hualhumphong 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 10.00am. There are various travel companies offering joint bus and boat tickets from Bangkok. Several ferries of various speeds leave from Koh Phang Nan 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.

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# PHUKET ON THE REBOUND



**M**ost of the beaches off the island's western flank were unaffected by the tsunami, and the ones that were, with the exception of Kamala, are quickly being repaired. The shops and hotels along Patong's beach road did sustain some damage, however, but the rest of the area's attractions, and its vibrant nightlife, are still intact. Kata and Karon, likewise, were not hit too badly. Otherwise, the island's infrastructure is functioning normally, and the beaches and water are more beautiful than ever. Tourist numbers are way down, though, which means there are a lot of good deals on flights and rooms, and other holiday packages.

## PATONG

What was once party beach got hit pretty hard by the big wave, but Patong remains Phuket's most popular beach with holiday makers and it's here that you'll find all your water activities and tailor shops. Businesses opposite the beach may be closed for some time but the town is doing fine.

## 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 **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 **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 **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** 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 **Scruffy Murphy's** and **2 Black Sheep**.

## KATA-KARON

The second most popular beaches suffered only minor damage and continue to draw crowds. Although quieter than Patong these two beaches support an active bar-scene and have plenty of international nosh on offer. It's to here that surfers flock from June to November to ride the ocean swells.

## 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 Mintz** (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' **Easysiders**, 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

What was once the playground of the wealthy and well-known, Kamala and southern Bang Tao caught the brunt of the big wave and is undergoing reconstruction. That said, the other

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beaches are in fine shape and is still a beautiful area to visit.

### 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 **Tatanka**, **Red Room**, **JJ's Irish Pub** 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 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**, **bungy 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. Contrary to popular myth, there are plenty of excellent dives sites that escaped damage. 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  
**Private Bus:** From Bangkok, Bt480 (with stopover in Surat Thani) dep. 6pm arrives at noon  
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# IN KRABI BEAUTIFUL AS EVER



One of the country's most gorgeous provinces was, by and large, spared a lashing by the tsunami. Over at Ao Nang, the sea wall behind the beach helped to save the area from any serious devastation. Many of the long-tail boats on the nearby Hat Nopparathara did get hit by the waves, however, and some beachside resorts and restaurants were also affected. Tonsai bay and Khlong Muang suffered minimal damage. The other main beaches on the Phra Nang Peninsula, namely the east and west sides of Railay, are as enchanting as ever, and the city of Krabi was not hit at all.

## 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.





## 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 LANTA CHILLING TIME

Words by Steven Bussey

**C**ontrary to statements by a number of people within the media and travel industry who took heed of other people's inaccurate information rather than checking it out for themselves, Koh Lanta has most certainly not been decimated or wiped off the map. It's in very good shape and somewhat reminiscent of the destination that countless numbers of visitors fell in love with just a few years ago; a quiet, slow and blissfully beautiful island with a moderate number of visitors. By now almost all of bungalows, resorts, restaurants, bars and dive shops are fully operational, most at drastically discounted prices. Road infrastructure and the ferries linking the island to the mainland are running. Krabi airport, buses to and from everywhere and the trains running from Trang to Bangkok are all fully functional. Put very simply, the mood is good and the people of Koh Lanta are poised and ready to welcome tourists with open arms and in the aftermath of such a tragedy are now desperate to avoid the addition of an economical tidal wave.

## PLACES TO CRASH

Bungalows include: In Pra Ae/ Klong Dao, **Lanta Palm Beach** and **Lanta Long Beach**. In Klong Nin beach, all 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**. 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 Kaeo 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:

**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.

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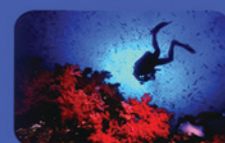
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# HUA HIN REGAL RETREAT



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.



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 Bt150 depending on whether the train is an express and hard or soft class.

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# PATTAYA FAT OF THE LAND

**I**f 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.



Undercover agents, who, ironically, did their worst work under covers

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 National Park, a green-cloaked mountain poking out of the sea has long been admired for its natural beauty and easy pace. For a long time it was ignored by tourists, mostly due to its proximity to war-torn Cambodia, but its discovery by backpackers years ago and the new airport on the mainland opposite have put Koh Chang on the development path with new hotels popping up, seeking the luxury tourist market. Being close to Bangkok, the island can be busy on weekends, and while it ain't party central, few have a bad word to say about the place.



## 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 Independent Bo's, **Star Bungalows** and a back-to-basics beach nomad vibe while **KC Grande Resort** covers all the bases with Bt150-6,000 bungalows. Nearby, **15 Palms** will do you a good deal on an all mod cons bungalow. **Cookie** and **Tantawan** adequately cater for the surfside dwelling crowd with a Bt600-1,000 budget. South of Whitesands, on Pearl Beach, a

boutique resort ambience can be found at the tropical **Remark Cottages**, the excellent **Keereeta** and the Balinese influenced **Saffron on the Sea**, all in the Bt1,500-3,000 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 dwelling.

### PLACES TO CRASH

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



Nearby, the quiet estuary is home to Bt2,000 **Baan Rim Nam Holiday Home**. Further south, **Tropicana** is top banana in the 4-star bunch.

## KAI BAE

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

### PLACES TO CRASH

Family friendly comfort and privacy can had for a price at the large **Seaview Resort & Spa** and **Chang Park Resorts**. Sun worshippers watching their bank balance should head for the family run **KB Bungalows** or **Kai Bae Beach Bungalows**.

## LONELY BEACH

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

### PLACES TO CRASH

The often packed **Nature Beach's** Bt200 digs are smack on the beach. **Bhumiyama Resort** offers 3-star comforts a stone's throw from the unwashed masses. South, on the rocky shore, **Paradise Cottages** offer new huts for Bt200-300. Moving on, the back-to-nature hideaway, **The Mangrove** provides hi-so hut living for 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 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 you get what you pay for at the Bt150 **Homestay Beach**.

### NIGHTTRIPPING

Experience modern Thai culture at **Sky Bay Pub**, Pearl Beach. On Whitesands, **Oodies** is an old fave for steaks and music and **Sabuy Bar** is the still lithe granddaddy of beach bars. If you're in need of a feed the excellent **Cookie Restaurant** is right next door. In Kai Bae, **Non Name** and **Rasta Baby** are the best of a motley bar crew. **Backsound**, Lonely Beach, is cocktail-in-a-bucket heaven for the Khao San crowd.

### DAYTRIPPING

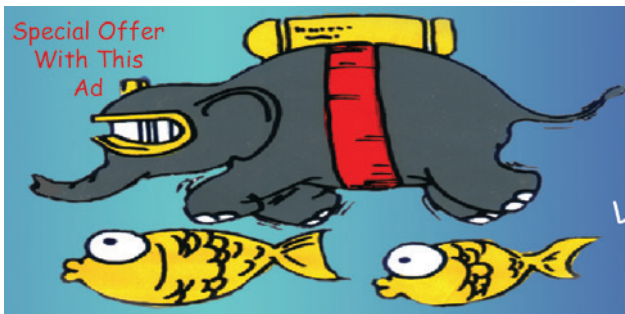
Make time to visit **Baan Kwan Chang** elephant camp, they provide a free pick-up service. **Koh Chang Trekkers** will take you into the island's interior and bring you out in one, insect bitten, piece. On the scuba scene, try **Koh Chang Divers**, White Sand Beach or **Dolphin Divers** for PADI courses or fun diving, or **Waterworld** for a dogs bollocks dive boat. Snorkelling is a deservedly popular alternative with **Sea Bird**, Bangbao guaranteeing a good day out.

### WAY TO GO

**By Air:** Bt4,000 return on Bangkok Airways twice daily flight.

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

**By Minivan:** A cramped four-hour drive from Bangkok for Bt270-300, including cost of ferry crossing.



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# KOH SAMET TOUR OF BEAUTY

**S**amet 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 bobbies 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

**E**veryone 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 overnigher. HK-ers go for the gambling, shopping and whoring, but it's nice just to go for the colonial architecture, relaxed

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**



(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

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 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 specialties). 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 – shoestring 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 Tsi** 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 Tsi (around the corner from **The Peninsula**). There you find a **Holiday Inn** and the horrible **Chungking Mansions** – a wretched tower of tiny guesthouses overflowing 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.

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# SINGAPORE

## PARTY TIME

**F**or 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.

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

**Cost:** \$8.50, \$3.90

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

Words by Paul Baylis

## 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:** Harbor 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



Due to budget cuts, the gods had to share a janitor

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

### 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.

## 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.

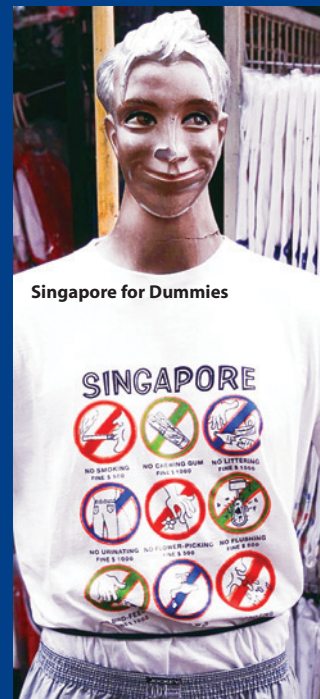
## FEEDING TIME

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**



Singapore for Dummies

**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 Meacock 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



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

**S**iem 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



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

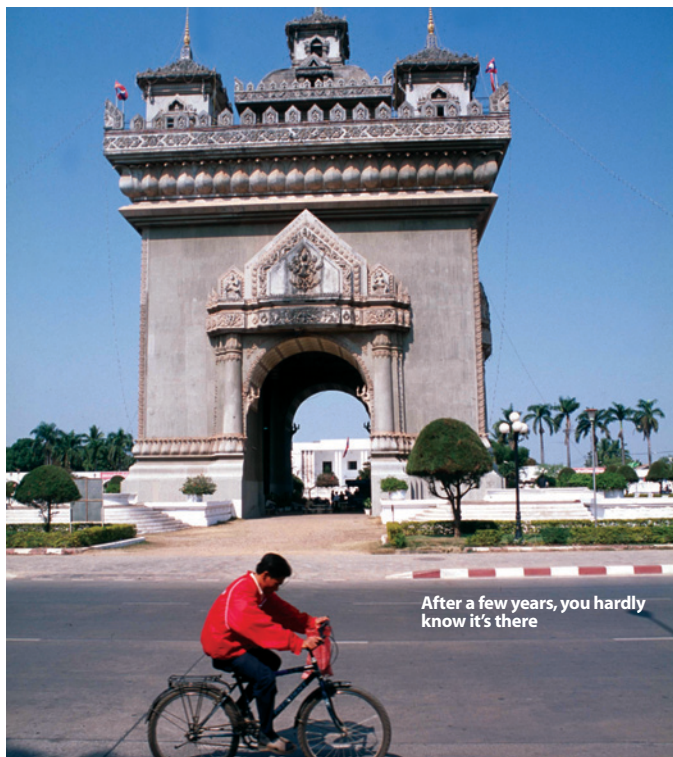
their guesthouse, making it hard to find a place to stay. Sixteen hours, not cheap, and painful.

**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](mailto: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.





After a few years, you hardly know it's there

# VIENTIANE

**M**ore 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

**T**he 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



his 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 **Maylek Pub** is a funky retro-esque nightspot 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 Manthatoulat 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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"Of imitated, never equalled" - Lonely Planet Thailand

Indexes list aircon cafes, cinemas, swimming pools, and other essential info (veggie cafes, pub crawl tips, secret little shops, market maps & more).  
[www.nancychandler.net](http://www.nancychandler.net)

## NORTH

The signature dish of northern Thai Cuisine

**Just Khao Soy**  
Chiang Mai Thailand  
bookings/directions: Ph: 053 - 818641

**Chiang Mai Shopping Secrets** - 101 reasons to stay another day. Brand new shopping guide full of insider tips on the best deals. First edition in bookstores, hotels and good travel shops this September.

**The Red Lion**

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**SITCA** [www.sitca.net](http://www.sitca.net)  
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# SMALL ADS - BIG DEALS

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Moby Dick  
Penny Lane

www.xtravel.co.th/samui/pennylane

**MINT**



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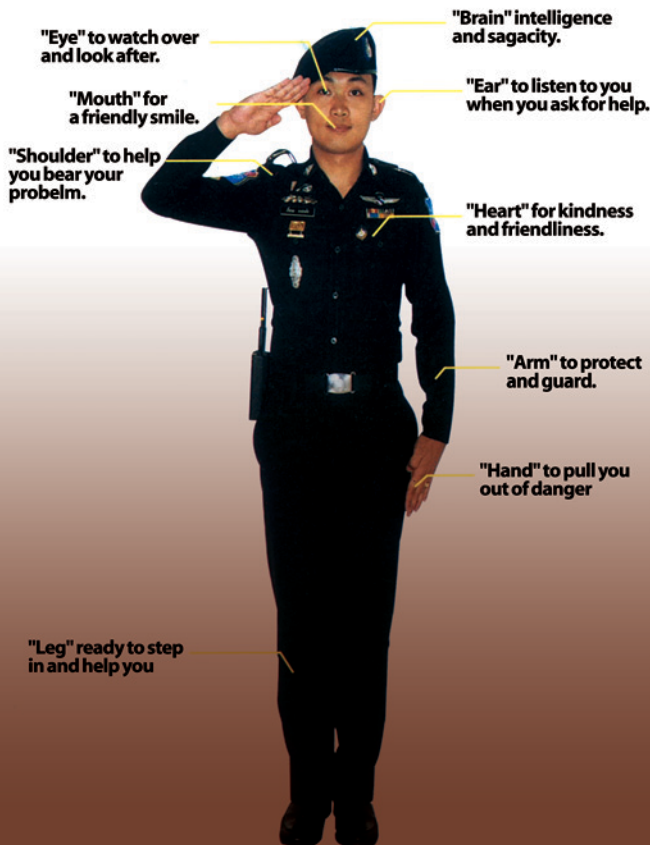


# Cellular Credibility



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](http://www.ais.co.th), [www.dtac.co.th](http://www.dtac.co.th), or [www.orange.co.th](http://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.

# Your Friendliness



## At Your Service

### HOSPITALS THAILAND

Hospitals in Thailand are cheap by Western standards, but can still eat a lot of money. They may require proof that you can pay before treating you. Government hospitals are cheaper and generally very good, but you may have to wait awhile. Most hospitals (unlike many small clinics) have a high standard of health care.

#### BANGKOK

**Bangkok Adventist Mission Hospital (Private)**

430 Phitsanulok Road.

(Near to Khaosan)

Tel: 02-281-1422, 02-282-1100

**Bangkok General Hospital (Private, with international clinic)**

2 Soi Soonvijai 7 New Petchburi Road.

Tel: 02-310-3000, 02-318-0066

**Siriraj Hospital (Government, Mahidol University)**

2 Prannok Road, Thonburi (across the river from the Grand Palace)

Tel: 02-429-7000, 02-246-0832

#### CHIANG MAI

**Chiang Mai Ram Hospital (Private)**

8 Boonruangrit Road, Chiang Mai

Tel: 053-224-861

**KOH SAMUI (minor ailments only)**

**Samui International Hospital (Private)**

90/2 Moo Bophut, Chaweng Beach,

Koh Samui Tel: 077-413-349, 077-413-348

### CAMBODIA

Cambodia is not a good place to get sick or injured. Basic stabilization facilities exist, but for serious treatment, evacuation to Thailand is the only option.

**AEA International SOS Clinic**

Has expat doctors and dentist and can set up evacuations.

House 161, Street 51, Sang-Kat Boeung

Rung, Phnom Penh Tel: (855-23) 216-911,

**Bangkok Hospital**

At last modern medicine arrives in Siem Reap.

### LAOS

Heaven help you if you have any serious ailments while in Laos. There are few qualified doctors and they just don't have the facilities. Get to Thailand. From Vientiane, there are one or two okay hospitals just over the bridge in Nong Khai. Otherwise, it's back to Bangkok.

**Clinique Internationale, Luang Prabang**

(856) 214-022

**Centre de Traumatologie et d'Orthopedie de Vientiane (Private)**

On the Road to Tha Ngon, north of

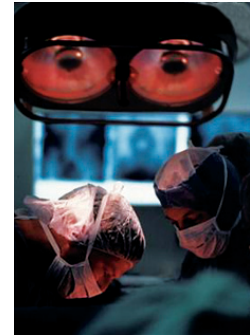
Vientiane. Tel: (856) 413-663, 413-306

(Call for ambulance service)

**Nong Khai Wattana Hospital (Private)**

1159/4 Prachak Road, Nong Khai,

Thailand - near Vientiane Tel: 042-465-201



### BANGKOK EMBASSIES

If you are having a serious problem, your embassy is your "last chance saloon." Good luck. However, they are very good at issuing visas for visitors. Here are the major embassies in

Bangkok:

**AUSTRALIA**

Tel: 02-287-2680

**AUSTRIA**

Tel: 02-287-3970-2

**BURMA**

Tel: 02-233-2237,

02-234-4698

**CAMBODIA**

Tel: 02-254-6630

**CANADA**

Tel: 02-636-0540

**CHINA**

Tel: 02-245-7032-49

**FRANCE**

Tel: 02-287-2585-7

**GERMANY**

Tel: 02-287-900

**INDIA**

Tel: 02-258-0300-6

**INDONESIA**

Tel: 02-252-3135-40

**ISRAEL**

Tel: 02-260-4854-9

**JAPAN**

Tel: 02-252-6151-9

**SOUTH KOREA**

Tel: 02-247-7537

**LAOS**

Tel: 02-539-6667-8

**MALAYSIA**

Tel: 02-679-2190-9

**NEPAL**

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### THAILAND EMERGENCY NUMBERS

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**Tourist Police 24-hour Tourist**

**Hotline:** 1155 then press 1

**Tourist Information:** 02-282-9773-6

**Police Emergency:** 191

**Medical Evacuation and**

**Ambulance Service:** 02-255-1133-6

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**Global toll-free hotline:**

001-800-11-887-0663

**Amex:** (02) 273-0022-44

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# Coming in March

## THE EXPAT FILES

How Dr. Larry Sebring learned to stop hating Ho Chi Minh City, and came to appreciate its appetising food, rousing nightlife, and intriguing pagodas. Mind you, he's still iffy about the Chinese medicine shops filled with preserved deer, dogs, lizards and snakes in glass display cases, and the city's motorcycle mayhem.

## STAR POWER

At this year's Bangkok International Film Festival, Troy McFadden and Joe Cummings interviewed such celebs as director Oliver Stone, and actors Jeremy Irons and Michael Douglas. They also attended some of the debauched after-parties where a certain, well-loaded Chinese starlet was really letting it – or rather “them” – all hang out.

## THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE'S SPOKES

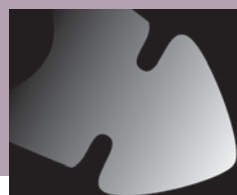
During a mountain-biking trip around the peaks and down through the green valleys of the Thailand's mountainous north, past lush orchards and strange villages, Ben Hopkins meets a nutcase he dubs “Rambo,” who cautions him to watch out for drug-traffickers armed to the teeth.

## UZBEKISTAN

“The Silk Road passed by it. Alexander the Great reached it. Marco Polo crossed it. Genghis Khan destroyed it. The Soviets annexed it. The Americans need it,” writes Pierre Ryckman. And the adventurous traveler really should visit this land of architectural marvels.



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“Another reliable long-running agency is Vieng travel, Trang Hotel, 99/8, Wisut Kasat, Banglamphu”: Lonely Planet.