

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

FARANG

March 2005

UNTAMED TRAVEL

INDIA

KIDS ENSLAVED

WALKING ENGLAND

BEERS IN THE RAIN

PHILIPPINES

ADOPT A BUSH BABY

SEX SURGERY

DUDE, WHERE'S MY DICK?

OPIUM TOURS

BIKING THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

UZBEKISTAN

HALT...WHO GOES THERE?

**FARANG INTERVIEWS:
JEREMY IRONS
OLIVER STONE
MICHAEL DOUGLAS**

ISSN: 1685-3520



8 858109 009996 >

SINGAPORE S\$5.95
HONG KONG HK\$35
THAILAND Bt100

WHAT'S THE STORY?

10. Main Events

Thailand, Philippines & Malaysia

13. A Thai Woman Abroad

Face to Face with Germany

14. Golden Tourist Trap

Cycling North Thailand

16. English Safari

Adventure on the Fells

20. Health

Kicking the Habit

21. Foodie's Diary

Embracing Chocolate

22. The Stalker

Chatting Your Way to Failure

23. Road Reads

Interview with Stephen Leather

24. Letters

Writings of Reverence and Revulsion

26. India's Child Slaves

The Dark Side of the Carpet Trade

30. The Diving News

Koh Tao's Photo Comp Results

32. Uzbekistan Revealed

Getting Around the Land of Bread and Beards

36. Bangkok Film Fest

Talking to the Glamour People

43. Chang Ping

Living the Low Life in China

44. Walking Saigon

Hoofing in Ho Chi Minh

46. Bush Babies

Making Friends in the Philippines

48. Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

Gender Reassignment in Thailand

50. Speed Dating 2005

No Longer Lonely in Bangkok

HERE & NOW

54. Daytripping

Dawn to Dusk in Bangkok

56. Feeding Time

Nosebag Bangkok

CONTENTS



16. BEERS IN THE RAIN



26. KIDS ENSLAVED



32. UZBEKISTAN



AD

59. Nightripping

Being a Devil in the City of Angels

64. The North

Chiang Mai & Pai

66. 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

Executive Editor/Director Cameron Cooper cameron@farangonline.com • **Chief Editor** Jim Algie jim@farangonline.com • **Managing Editor** Daniel Cooper dan@farangonline.com • **Proofing and Copy Editing** Joel Quenbey • **Art Director** Nakhon Saksuralai nui@farangonline.com • **Sales Manager/Director** Andrew Morgan andy@farangonline.com • **Correspondents: Northern Thailand** Joe Cummings • **Koh Pa Ngan** Tom Green • **Koh Samui** Martyn Goodacre • **Koh Tao** Stuart Singleton • **Krabi** Lady Di • **Phuket** This position open • **Koh Chang** Ian McNamara • **Cambodia** Gordon Sharpless • **Laos** Mat Oakley • **Contributing Writers** Stuart Singleton • Ben Hopkins • Rob Viereck • Mark Beales • Vicky Bell • Troy McFadden • Pierre Ryckmans • Joe Cummings • Larry Seabring • Calvin Tang • Richard Ehrlich • Cameron Cooper • Tom Green • Andrew Morgan • Aroon Thaewchatturat • Daniel Cooper • Jim Algie • Speedy Crackhead • Sandy Bowels • Angus Podgourney • **Contributing Photographers:** Bangkok Network of Women • Zoukfest Malaysia • Peninsula Hotel • Aroon Thaewchatturat • Ben Hopkins • Rob Viereck • Jan Plihal • Anchana Muangnil • Tom vater • Stuart Singleton • Mark Beales • Paul Foley • Brent Madison • Troy McFadden • Vicky Bell • Larry Seabring • Calvin Tang • Richard Ehrlich • Pat Oancia • Ian Mc=acNamara • Richard Taylor • Jim Algie • Daniel Cooper • Steve Sandford • Dan White • **Chief Administrator:** Naritsara Kanluan mai@farangonline.com • **Distribution Manager:** Yupaporn Sisad yupaprn@farangonline.com • **Printing and Distribution:** Bangkok Post • **Cover** Brent Madison, Jeremy Irons at Bangkok Film Festival • **Here & Now Cover** Will Baxter, Koh Tao.

For subscription information, contact

Subscription@farangonline.com

Published by: **Toolbox Media Co. Ltd.**

72/5 Soi Samsen 2, Pranakorn, Bngkok 10200. Phone: 02-629-3991

Fax: 02-629-3992

www.farangonline.com

All listings and reviews are independent of advertising. Opinions expressed in FARANG are not necessarily those of the publisher. Toolbox Media Co. Ltd. cannot be held responsible for any errors or changes in information. All rights reserved.

"Wrecked 'em, damn near killed 'em"



36. BANGKOK FILM FEST



44. HOOFING SAIGON



46. ADOPT A BUSH BABY



Main Events

March



PATTAYA ROCKS

Easily the coolest event of the year in this beach resort, the Pattaya Music Festival delivers a sound selection of eclectic tunes on a variety of stages. Usually, there's one stage for pop and easy-listening ear-candy; another one for indie, punk and hardcore; then another platform for jazz and blues. The festival attracts some of the country's old-guard stars and young lions, as well as a smattering of international acts to add a few different spices to this sonic stew. Admission is free for all of the gigs at the festival, which rocks from March 18-20, at stages near the beach.



CHRISTIAN GUILT TRIP

Penitents lash themselves with cat-o'-nine tails made out of bamboo until their backs bleed. Dozens and dozens of them wear crowns of thorns on their heads as they follow a procession out to a makeshift Golgotha on the outskirts of town. The main Christ figure, dragging a wooden cross for several kilometres, is then crucified on the same wooden cross, which is borne aloft, and the Jesus surrogate hangs there for a good 10 minutes under the broiling sun, before thousands of local and foreign on-lookers. Usually, around a dozen other men, and a few women, are crucified too, in this Good Friday ceremony, which aims to recreate the "Passion Play". The main Filipino town for Biblical barbarism is San Fernando Pampanga, only a few hours from Manila. This year's procession begins around 10am on March 25. Later that night, there's another religious procession in the town. And it's worth hanging around for Easter Sunday which is celebrated with great verve and fervour across the Philippines.



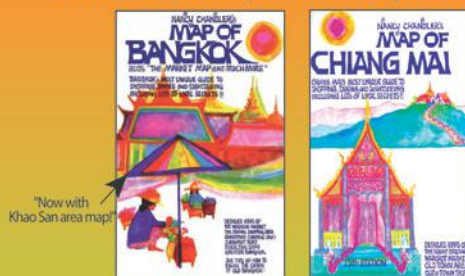
Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia



RECHARGE YOUR BATTERIES

Rarely has an outdoor dance music spectacular been held amidst such splendid scenery, namely, the Genting Highlands, some 40 minutes uphill from Kuala Lumpur. The music, generated by a formidable array of DJs, for Recharge@ZoukFest, runs the genre gamut from electronica by Zouk residents, to hip-hop and R&B grooves from Ghetto Heaven, to the soul-and-Latin tinged beats of the Velvet Underground club. Plenty of international DJs like Futureshock, who have done remixes for Underworld, Moby and the Chemical Brothers, will be laying down the sonic templates. Also don't miss Hardsoul, starring Holland's number one garage and house DJ Roog, who shot to dance music stardom with the huge 2003 anthem "Back Together" with Ron Carroll. Adding to the excitement will be some tasty food stalls, a flea market, and some chill-out zones, like the Recharge Zen Spa, where you can relax with massage and holistic therapies, along with games and video screenings. This dusk-to-dawn party is going off on March 5.

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



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

ALL OVER THE ASIAN MAP



SAFE AS HOUSE ARREST

Nepalese tourism officials have hit the road region-wide to reassure people that Nepal is safe to visit, in spite of Maoist rebel

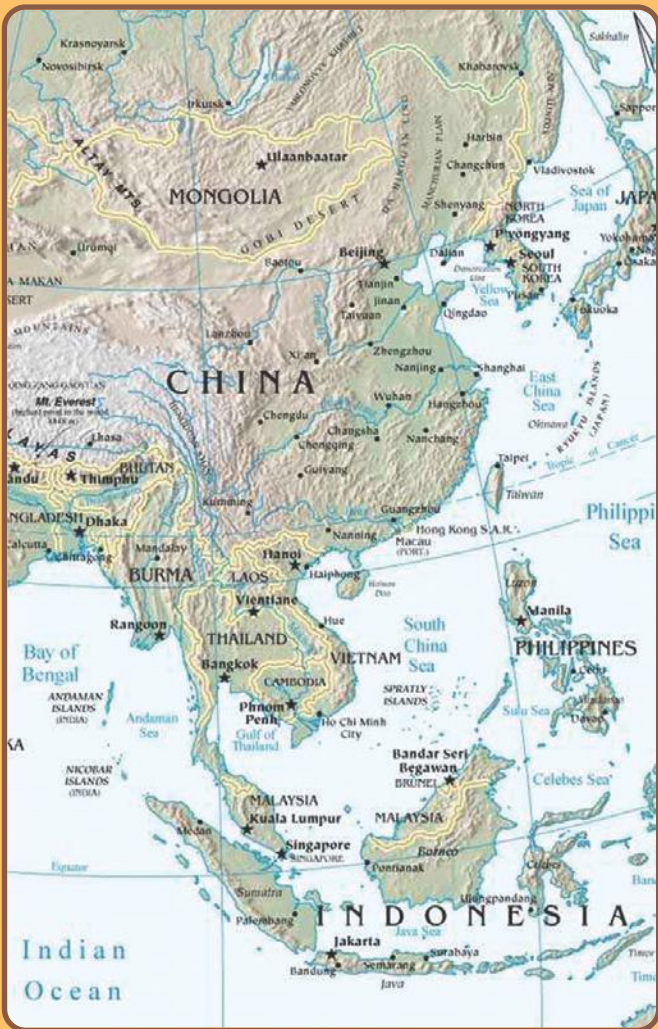
blockades of Kathmandu and the fact that the King has imposed absolute rule. One tourism official was quoted as saying that though the country had experienced some tour cancellations, tourists and expats were now traveling again because they were confident of the King's ability to sort out the problems.



TOUGH LOVE

After a poll of Thailand's youth, (whose "declining morality" is the

object of much fascination for the Thai media), led to the shocking discovery that about 100,000 Thai youths planned to "give themselves" to their partners on Valentine's Day, the police swung into action and raided motel rooms on the big night, imposing harsh penalties on anyone caught having sex with minors. Although a Thai person is not legally considered an adult until 20 years old, the age of consent for sex is 15. Meanwhile, at the Institution for Female Offenders Rehabilitation in Pathum Thani, 14 grooms were permitted by the authorities to visit their female partners on Valentine's Day to get married. Nine of them turned up.



BARRACUDA BURGUNDY

A Chinese entrepreneur has launched a

company in China named the Dalian Fisherman's Song Maritime Biological Brewery that has been developing wine brewed from fish. Apparently, the process involves cleaning, boiling and fermenting the fish. The company has already received orders within China as well as from Russia and Japan. None from France so far.



SUSHI SUICIDE THREAT

A 68-year-old unemployed man,

annoyed that the government had cut off his benefits, set his apartment on fire, and brandishing a knife, burst into a shop, and demanded that they feed him the best quality sushi or he'd kill himself. After an hour or so of eating bananas and vitamins and drinking alcohol taken from the cooler, police managed to subdue him



CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

A lucky tree in Hong Kong was not very

lucky for an old man and a young boy when a huge branch broke off of it and fell on their heads. The branch was apparently heavily burdened by wishing tokens attached during Chinese New Year — oranges attached to paper slips — and gave way as the pair threw their oranges into the tree. Legend has it that if your orange lodges in the tree, the wish written on the slip of paper will come true. They were treated for head injuries at a local hospital and released.



BOOK NOW !!

Asiarooms.com

24/7 Call - (66)3-836-4700

more than 12,000 Discounted Hotels

After the Wave

Destruction and Reconstruction

As everyone in the world with a television knows, the tsunami on December 26, 2004, caused unfathomable destruction around the Indian Ocean to several countries, killing more than 300,000 people and destroying property and livelihoods.

The images on the airwaves and newspapers were difficult for most to take in. Death, panic, grief and mountains of rubble kept on flying in our shocked faces for weeks.

Farang Untamed Travel teamed up with the Kraichitti Gallery in Khaosan's Sunset Street entertainment complex and the Royal Photographic Society of Thailand to hold a charity exhibition of photographs focussing on the Tsunami's impact on Thailand's Andaman coast. The exhibition comprised a collection of sometimes horrifying images, taken by the country's best Thai and foreign photographers, that tell the story of the area's destruction and the ongoing reconstruction. All proceeds from the exhibition went to the Royal Rajapachanukroh Foundation, a charity under the supervision of His Majesty the King that is providing shelter and education to children orphaned by the Tsunami.

The exhibition, which launched on February 16th and carried on until the end of February, kicked off to an enthusiastic reception. The event, attended by several television reporters and a hundred or so other guests was emceed by Thai singer and actress (and very nice person as it worked out) Marsha Vadhanapanich, who spearheaded a short series of speeches before letting everyone get on with absorbing the impact of the show.

Farang Untamed Travel would like to thank sponsors Shark Cool Bite and Beer Singha, Khun Surat and Khun Surasak of The Royal Photographic Society of Thailand, Mr Ta of Kraichitti Gallery, Ms Marsha, all the photographers for contributing their images (and for having the guts to go down and chronicle the event in the first place), and the guys who stood on ladders with their arms over their heads for hours, trying to get the pictures to hang level.





Robotic Germany

Germany may be famous for its beery Oktoberfest in Munich, but I ended up in Mannheim, a city well known for its Thai population, not least because a young Thai student committed suicide here last year due to stress and home-sickness. Being nomadic myself, I have no home to miss or get sick of, so Germany was great.

Mannheim has a controversial outdoor art showpiece. According to the local press, many citizens are up in arms over a beautiful pile of firewood. That's what it looks like. But perhaps the African artist is telling us that the world is connected by nature, not by human beings.

Southern Germany is famous for its white wine, but they also grow corn, turnips, and flowers. It's quite green and very clean, as if one could eat off the pavement. But this is also an industrial city and the forests in southern Germany are dying from the onslaught of acid rain.

One of the greenest places I visited was the *Luisenpark*. My kind of place, it has a botanical garden, cactus house, a butterfly dome, zoo, playground and a Chinese teahouse.

Beyond the gates of the park, the city is very organised. Beside the roads, there are many warning signs. As a pedestrian, if you cross the street when the light is red, you will be fined – no matter if the road is empty.

Perturbed by this rule, as the lights changed at an intersection I did a perfect robot walk across the road, jerking this way and that. An old lady next to me started laughing – she understood what I was doing. Hmm, I hope it is not forbidden to walk like a robot: I like doing it when the scene gets too straight around me. And there are so many other things that are *verboten* (forbidden) as the signs say. Most shops are not allowed to open on Sundays. So it's a bit spooky and deserted then, like a scene from a zombie movie.

The polite, lawful silence that descends over Mannheim inspired me to visit Heidelberg, just 30 minutes away. King Rama VIII was born in Heidelberg in 1925. The city also has a global reputation for its medical school; they have been cutting people up here for hundreds of years.

But the main attraction is Heidelberg Castle, a magnet for package tourists – especially Asians and Americans. The members of these package groups all wear identical hats. From a distance, they look like a colony of mobile mushrooms. Deep inside the castle there's a wine barrel with a capacity of more than 221,000 litres.

Back in Mannheim, I took a stroll down the shopping precinct. One department store put on a Vertigo Fashion Show to celebrate its 125th anniversary. Amazingly, a big crowd gathered outside the store to watch models abseil from the roof and do silly dance routines on a stage in the road. Perfectly legal. But when my German husband, a high roller from the Bangkok chapter of the Insomniacs Club, photographed a passing police car, the cops immediately stopped and made him delete the image.

After a week of rules and laws, I headed back to Thailand, where nothing is impossible and everything is permitted, unless someone more powerful than you decides it is *verboten*.

Writer and
photographer
**Aaron
Thaewchatturat**
visits the land of
forbidding signs,
medieval castles,
and abseiling
models.





GOLDEN TOURIST TRAP



Even though an ugly American warns **Ben Hopkins** of the dangers of cycling in the mountains, he pursues the opiates of adventure.

My wake-up call comes courtesy of a loud American who's deafening the locals outside my room. Poking my head through the shutters of my guesthouse, he immediately spots me and hollers up: "What are ya doin' here, man? Ya comin' down to breakfast?"

I'm in the hilltop village of Mae Salong on day three of a nine-day mountain bike tour of Thailand's northernmost province, Chiang Rai. My new buddy introduces himself, with a bone-crushing handshake, as Rambo and before I have a chance to order coffee plummets into a rant about the dangers that lurk in the hills of Chiang Rai.

"The government wants ya to believe its safe up here, but it's not."

"What's not safe?"

"Jesus, man, ya don't know? They're still growing the poppies and shooting anyone who goes near. Nothing's changed since '79. Everyone knows it but no one dares speak out. The government, generals and drug lords are in business with the Burmese military. You'd better just stick to the road."

Until a few years ago, Chiang Rai was Thailand's major producer of opium. But as a result of a military crackdown and a crop substitution program most of the trade has been pushed over the border. Nonetheless, the veins continue to pop out of Rambo's neck as he rants about the supposed dangers that lurk in the surrounding hills.

Having spent the previous night sleeping under the stars beside a campfire, after losing my way in an attempt to cycle off-road from Chiang Rai, I decide to take it easy for the day, hire out a moped, and explore this so-called lawless region for myself. The town of Mae Salong straddles a 1,000-metre-high hilltop and every open space offers a vista of green rolling hills rich with tea plantations. Most of the people here are of Chinese descent. Fleeing their country during the communist revolution they took refuge in Myanmar and were forced across to Thailand in the early sixties by a Burmese government eager not to anger their powerful Chinese neighbours to the north.

There's no sign of the dangers that Rambo spoke of. The shops are full of local produce that's replaced the opium crops, such as tea, coffee and fruits wrapped up in fancy packaging and sold to the busloads of tourists who pass through every day. A young boy who's keen to improve his English takes me on a guided tour of a tea factory.

When I return to the guesthouse Rambo's standing on the front steps throwing peanuts into the street and laughing at a couple of scruffy-looking kids on hands and knees picking them up and shoving them into their pockets.



“Look at the monkeys fighting for peanuts.”

If the men of this region were confrontational people like Rambo would be dead by now.

By the following morning, I'm on the road from Mae Salong to Mae Sai, which roller-coasters its way over some of the steepest hills I've ever climbed. The heat soars and the thick humid air has sweat seeping out of me like a perforated tea bag being lifted from a cup. Several times, I'm forced to dismount and push my pannier-laden mountain bike up the steep hills before making amends on the descents which scissor sharply, testing my cornering skills and daring me to let go of the brakes and fly.

Thailand's northernmost town Mae Sai is 70km north of Mae Salong and straddles the border with Burma, where the crowds congeal and bristle with activity. Shops and stalls stacked high with produce sneaked over from the border are sold at incredibly cheap prices.

Most of the guesthouses in Mae Sai run along a quiet street beside a narrow river that separates the two nations. Taking an early evening stroll up to the water's edge I focus my camera on the other side. Before I have a chance to click I'm grabbed by a Thai who pulls me back demanding I get the hell out of there. On the other side a handful of men are shouting and waving their arms in the air.

Later I learn the spot where I attempted to take the photo is the place where Burmese smugglers cross the border and return home every night. Gunmen on both sides guard it and the produce coming over includes guns, jewelry, and heroin, while *yah bah* (methamphetamines) is as cheap as candy on the Burmese side. The town of Mae Sai, colourful and alive with activity during the day, takes on a bleak and eerie chill once night falls. People stay inside; most of the bars and restaurants close; and the streets become the domain of the smugglers who don't take kindly to being noticed. The only busy places are the brothels that service them.

“On a couple of occasions I'm forced to dismount and push my pannier-laden mountain bike up the steep hills before making amends on the descents which scissor sharply, testing my cornering skills and daring me to let go of the brakes and fly.”

Unless shopping is your passion, there's little appealing here so I pack up my panniers and make an early exit the following morning. It's a relief to be back on the flatlands with the steep hills of the Thai-Burmese border melting away on the receding horizon. There's little traffic en route and the villages I rest up in offer ice-cold sugar cane juice and bowls of spicy noodle soup to assure pedal and bowel movements are kept equally active.

Under a blazing sun that's been peeling the skin off the back of my neck I pull up in a small village called Sop Ruak, the official centre of the Golden Triangle since it's located where Laos, Burma and Thailand merge in a geographical *ménage à trois* at the confluence of the Ruak and Mekong Rivers. Tempting as it is to invent sightings of one-eyed bandits boiling vats of opium in forests where intoxicated monkeys fall from the trees, the truth is the adventure quota here is next to zero.

Tourism has replaced opium as the local source of gold. There's The Golden Triangle Souvenir shop, The Golden Triangle Restaurant and with hotels and shopping centres sprouting up at

the rate of poppies in post-Taliban Afghanistan it could soon be time to rename to the place, “The Golden Triangle Tourist Trap”. But it's worth sticking around to check out the superb, recently opened Opium Exhibition Hall.

For the following two days back to Chiang Rai I swing off the road once more to explore the mud tracks and hill-tribe villages of Thailand's most rural province. The tracks trace an undulating landscape through meadows and fruit orchards descending fast into dips where the hot air cools in the thick vegetation before rising to high points that offer impressive vistas of the surrounding landscape.

Night descends quickly and without a guesthouse in sight I'm forced, once again, to sleep outdoors. The stars seem close enough to light a cigarette from and after a couple of swigs of whisky I eventually fall asleep to a chorus of screeching insects and a crackling campfire.

At dawn I follow the burnt ochre tracks through orchards of lychee trees and a multitude of other crops. In late April these crops are coming into season so it's not long before I give in to temptation and stuff myself full of the white virginal flesh dangling from the branches of a lychee tree. My punishment from above comes in the form of a crazy rabid dog who barks with such ferocity I wonder how its guts don't come flying out of its mouth.

The scare is enough to have me hammering on the pedals with my head down back to the relative luxury of my guesthouse in Chiang Rai.

The following evening, sore from sunburn, I'm refueling in a restaurant when suddenly someone wallops me on the shoulder. “Hey man, ya made it back in one piece.”

It's Rambo, who pretty much followed the same route I took, only where I saw old ladies picking tea he saw heavily armed outlaws leading phantasmagorical convoys of smugglers through the forests to the border.

“Did ya see 'em?”

We share a pizza and drink some beer, toasting our respective adventures like two Vietnam War veterans who've just emerged from the apocalyptic hell of a SE Asian war zone – only Rambo's off his pizza and looking a bit sickly. “It's the goddamn fruit. Found myself in field after field full of fruit trees. Mangos, lychees, oranges. Couldn't stop eating 'em.”

When I suggest it's the danger of forbidden fruit, not gun-toting militia men, which are the main danger to us travelers he tells me I'm crazy and lucky to be alive. Keen to avoid another paranoid tirade and remembering the dog incident, I curse those god-damn communist mongrels and propose a toast to our good fortune.





Rob Viereck takes a hike on the wild side, following ancient Roman roads and sheep paths through some startling scenery where black panthers roam the highlands and peat bogs.

Last March to celebrate the end of winter in England, I decided to get a little fresh air by heading up north to walk across the fabled Cumbrian Lake District, using only an outdated, 1982 copy of Alfred Wainwright's classic *A Coast to Coast Walk*. Insanely, I decided on the "trekking-lite" approach – no maps, no fancy gear, sleeping rough. I fancied myself keeping true to the spirit of "fell-walking", as they call it here. If it rained, I would simply head for the closest public house and sample a pint or two of the local elixir while toasting my toes on their fiery hearth.

When I told friends about my plans, they assumed worried expressions and gave me dire warnings of being beaten by inbred villagers, shot by crazed farmers, trampled by stampeding sheep, savaged by rabid wildcats, and slowly dying of exposure while sinking into a frozen peat bog. "Nonsense!" I snorted, imagining myself bathed in glorious sunshine, traipsing through pastoral scenes of fluffy, flocks of sheep and frolicking through fields of purple heather as craggy, bucolic shepherds in tweeds put their trusty border collies through complicated paces with merely a whistle – finally, an authentic English experience.

I got off the bus, well after dark, in the port of Whitehaven, the town closest to the trailhead, to be greeted by the sound of screams, breaking glass and ritual chanting. Strange for a Sunday night; perhaps it was some local, pre-Christian celebration? As I made my way down the high street, the hardy, barely clothed townsfolk spilled out of the many bars, bleeding, vomiting, fighting, chasing each other and cursing in a dialect that sounded very much like 16th century buccaneer English, *a la* Long John Silver – and that was just the women. Later, I found out that the local rugby team had won for the first time since John Paul Jones raided the port, back in 1778, with almost the same resulting chaos.

Scuttling off in the darkness, before being keelhauled and quartered, I found a small beach to kip out on. It was a quiet night, save for the crashing of the surf. In the morning, I noticed the giant sign: "Danger! Huge, great boulders falling from cliff above!" that I'd missed in the dark. My tiny, ridiculous tent was right in a field of them.

One of the greatest things about trekking through the Cumbrian highlands is sampling the local delicacies and, although excellent pub grub is available, I'm talking beer now. Not the anaemic, chilly lagers consumed by the punters in most countries; not even the pressurised, mass-produced kegs of Guinness or Newcastle ale you can get in any Irish pub from Beijing to Bangkok. I'm talking little, family-owned microbreweries producing, arguably, the best beer on the planet; heady (4-7 percent) brews hand-pumped from unpressurized casks by young, smiling, voluptuous bar wenches. Chocolatey stouts, creamy ales and flaming-amber bitters that enable you to taste the very soil, history and spirit of the villages you're passing through; ancient, tiny villages which can contain sometimes two or three competing microbreweries. What can beat the feeling of resting your aching bones by a crackling fire while getting pissed as a newt and talking a load of utter shite with a flat cap-wearing farmer whose thickly accented English you can barely comprehend? "Weers 't bin, thoo girt daft trailpike? Les gaa an git kalied t'neet! (Translation: Where have you been off to, you silly wanderer? Let's go and get drunk tonight!)

A few days and 40 kilometres of trudging through muddy fields and mountains of cow poop later, I arrived at "England's most isolated youth hostel," the Black Sail, a converted, stone shepherd's hut, deep in the Cumbrian wilderness. It was there I discovered that rumours of big cats roaming the fells may actually have some substance. Sightings of lynx, leopards,

"The steward of the hostel took out an album and proudly showed me a photo of a full-grown cheetah and her cub lazing on the hostel's front lawn."

pumas and even black panthers have become common in recent years. The steward of the hostel took out an album and proudly showed me a photo of a full-grown cheetah and her cub lazing on the hostel's front lawn. I shit you not. Apparently, many have escaped from zoos or private menageries and found their way, instinctively, to the wild hills of Cumbria, attracted to the clean environment and plentiful sheep. Suddenly, the chewed up carcasses I'd noticed by the side of the trail made sense. Now the prospect of sleeping outside made me break into a cold sweat. That night, camped in a copse of trees, out on the fells, I lit a fire and kept a vigil, in the hope of not ending my life as "cat food". If you've ever seen the movie *An American Werewolf in London* you'll have no problem imagining the depths of my fear. (By the way, if you actually do see a large cat, don't try to run away – I hear that just pisses them off.)

You know, once you get up to an elevation of 1,000 metres in the Peak district, it really starts to look like Tibet in the wet season. Stark, velvety green slopes studded with gigantic rocky outcroppings and flocks of a species of sheep brought over during the Viking invasions. There are rushing, crystalline streams zigzagging crazily through meadows of purple and orange peat and trailing away towards deep, mist-shrouded valleys; screaming gusts of wind that threaten to lift you right off the high ridges, like a human kite; huge banks of dark grey

clouds which sweep out of the sky and part dramatically to reveal giant, slanting gothic columns of golden light which sweep over the landscape like some searchlight of God; deep-blue tarns (high, glacier-formed lakes) full of fat, jumping speckled trout; the shrieking of buzzards and golden eagles, just overhead, soaring and surfing the invisible torrents of air, scanning the meadows for chubby little field mice and even new-born lambs. When taking in these panoramas, all weariness is forgotten.

Little lambs weren't the only things getting lost up there. For two days, I wandered around aimlessly, trying to use a cheap plastic compass with a wildly spinning needle to navigate some of the highest and most desolate peaks in England. Finding no correlation between the tiny maps on the sodden pages of my book and the surrounding, blurry geographical features, I often found myself following ancient stone walls, sheep paths, the occasional muddy footprint and rows of Neolithic cairns. I began talking to myself in order to calm down. "Let's see turn left at the Roman road. Goddamn it! Where's the Roman road? It's been here for 2,000 years and, now, I can't fucking find it. Where the hell did it go?"

There are stories still told here of the Romans racing their chariots across the fells on these wide, level roads; roads that sneered at the obstacle courses these mountains presented to the locals, to cut dead-straight lines across their newly conquered domains to join together the many isolated forts. Even out here, in the middle of nowhere, there's still an awareness of civilisations come and gone. The sheep wear expressions indicating they've seen it all before and they couldn't give a shit.



Then, things started to go south. Thunderclouds cloaked the sky in a blanket of woolly grey. The heavy, steady drizzle of fat drops began to turn the peat into slurry of green mush that sucked at my boots. My waterproof jacket, rain pants and shoes, turned out to be as permeable as sieves. Unable to see the horizon, I became more and more disoriented, missing the few signposts along the trail and eventually wandered into huge dead-end valleys containing grazing pastures of gigantic proportions. Whenever I did find a village with a local, I would strip off my sodden clothes and decorate the wall radiators with them, order a cheap beer and then, despite my aching joints, begin to nod off, to the great annoyance of the publicans. Not that they would say anything. They were, after all, British. This went on for two miserable, energy-sucking days, until, finally, I staggered into the unbelievably picturesque, medieval market town of Kirkby Stephen, nestled in a valley between the Cumbrian and Pennine mountains, approximately 140 kilometres from my starting point.

I noticed a beautiful, pale yellow, Victorian-era railway station by the side of the road and decided to stop and rest. It was closed, but in a little wooden switching tower beside the tracks, a face in the upper window beckoned me to approach. The heavily-bearded man in the tower, a retired Wensleydale cheese-maker, now manned the switching post for what was one of the busiest steam train lines in Britain, and still runs down the spine of the UK to connect the Scottish capital with

northern English cities. Nowadays, it only handles a few freight and commuter trains each day, and so, he invited me in for steaming coffee and a chat about the station. He explained that the long, heavy, cast iron switching levers and antique wooden bell-signal boxes were the original equipment, in use for the last 150 years, yet all in perfect working order. As if to demonstrate, one of the bells struck three times, indicating a train approaching. He yarded back on one of the levers which was connected to a complicated system of wires running down the tracks. A completely mechanical system still functioning in 21st century England!

Later, on the High Street, I was having difficulty keeping up with an 80-year-old man who had just had both hips replaced. I asked him where a weary pilgrim might find shelter from the elements. He directed me to the ancient Saxon "Cathedral of the Dales" in the centre of town, where I wandered around the dark and deserted cloisters, searching for a dry spot on which to spread my bedroll. There, I spent a restless night lying on a cold stone bench under the gothic portico, dreaming of the parade of English pilgrims over the centuries who had hauled their wares (mostly wool) for miles, in wooden horse carts, over rutted country lanes, to arrive here on market day, and then stop at this cathedral to give thanks to their God and receive a blessing, before beginning the long trek back to their lonely stone houses, out in the fells. The next morning, so lame that I was unable to walk, I realised the trip was over.

"Chocolaty stouts, creamy ales and flaming-amber bitters that enable you to taste the very soil, history and spirit of the villages you're passing through."





Rob beside Wordsworth's grave

BEFORE YOU GO

Gear: It rains like a bugger up there! Check the long-range weather report before setting out. Waterproof hiking boots, rain pants and a jacket will become your best friends. A good woollen sweater, socks and fingerless gloves will help, too. Anyway, count on getting four seasons in one day.

Navigation: Bring an updated guide; the routes change, seasonally. Buy a waterproof ordinance survey map; there are special "strip maps" available for many routes. A good compass is necessary in foggy weather. Some people bring a GPS instrument. There are still enough dummies out there getting lost that the local Volunteer Rescue Association is active year round.

Courtesy: Most trails pass through farmers' private land; sometimes even through their buildings. Close all gates behind you, always smile and say "Hi!" (Cumbrians say: "Y'aw rrrright, deh?). And please try not to molest the sheep.



Foodie's Diary

Dark Chocolate

Andre Lepine sinks his sweet teeth into a toothsome confection while throwing in some dollops of saccharine history and the lowdown on Bangkok's new Chocolate Bar.

Some kids dream of chocolate. I had nightmares. Nightmares in which I'm being led around Willy Wonka's chocolate factory by Gene Wilder in a purple suit and top hat. I'm trying my best to resist eating the sugary delights surrounding me as I know that I won't eat my dinner and I'll only get a beating if I come home with chocolate on my clothes. But it's no good. The sucrose demon has me in his grip and relentlessly leads me to the warm, beckoning, cocoa-coloured river of chocolate. As I dive in I look down and realise too late who I've become – Augustus Gloop – a fat German (or was he Swiss?) schoolkid destined to be remembered for getting stuck in a pipe full of chocolate due to his own insatiable greed.

Even now that I'm a grown up it's still buried deep in my psyche, that chocolate is sinful. Sinful, seductive and dark but immensely pleasurable, and I don't think I'm the only one.

Cacao beans come from the cacao tree, originally a native of central and South America but now cultivated in Southeast Asia as well as Africa and the Caribbean. There are three main varieties of cacao beans: Forastero (the most common), Criollo (the rarest and most prized amongst chocolate makers) and Trinitario, a cross between the two. Eating chocolate was not pioneered by Cadbury's either; the roots of chocolate are said to go back even further than the Aztecs, who apparently consumed gallons of the stuff as a strong, bitter drink laced with chilli.

It was first brought back to Europe by the Spanish where it metamorphosed into the sweet chocolate drink we all know. It wasn't until 1828 that Dutch chocolate-maker Conrad J. Van Houten developed the economical method (now known as 'Dutching') of using a hydraulic press to create cocoa powder, a development that gave birth to the modern age of chocolate making, Yorkie bars, Cadbury's cream eggs and overpriced dentistry.



Knocking up a chocolate bar these days is no simple matter. Chocolate-makers use a variety of strangely named processes such as conching, winnowing and tempering to produce a result versatile enough for a Valentine's Day seduction or a Christmas gift for granny. The feel-good effect of chocolate is certainly hard to beat and one that's spurred scientists to research. Apparently, chocolate is home to over 300 chemicals, some of which, like caffeine and phenyl ethylamine, are stimulants which may contribute to that happy feeling.

This is nothing you can't get from a cup of instant coffee or a swift exchange with a nightclub bouncer, however. Researchers at the Neurosciences Institute in San Diego reckon that chocolate contains some substances which can have an effect on the brain that may be responsible for certain psychoses associated with chocolate craving. A neurotransmitter called anandamide has been isolated in chocolate (as well as being produced naturally in the brain) and these researchers believe that it can trigger a reaction inside the brain cell, which may create that warm, soothing feeling one gets when eating chocolate.

For those in Bangkok who need bit of brown, there's nowhere better to indulge in chocolate heaven than the Peninsula hotel's new Chocolate Bar. Located at the super-cool Jesters Restaurant and Lounge on the lobby level of the Peninsula Bangkok you can see and, most importantly, eat every kind of cocoa creation from chocolate sushi to fresh fruits dunked in melted chocolate (available every Friday and Saturday from 7-11.30pm at Bt499++ per person).

We all have a bit of Augustus Gloop in us – just don't dive in...

BOOK NOW !!

Asiarooms.com

24/7 Call - (66)3-836-4700
more than 12,000 Discounted Hotels



The Stalker

TOO MUCH INFORMATION?

*That dame of the sheets, **Karen Findlay** a.k.a The Stalker, shoots off another missive on everyone's favourite subject. This month she examines the art of conversation, and why it should die an early death.*

It was a hot night. The full moon shone overhead, the music from the candlelit beach bar drifted up the hill, waking travellers from their evening naps, calling them down to the water's edge for one of those special nights so easily forgotten when travelling in Asia. On this particular night on Koh Samet, a busty blonde American girl joined her friends on a mat on the sand. A tall, dark Italian man took one look and moved right in. He knew all the right words, touched her in all the right ways, swept her off her feet and carried her away from the crowd, down the beach to "a quiet place where they could get to know each other better".

Whispering sweet nothings in her ear, kissing her softly, he made her melt. Just when she thought she'd found heaven, however, he leaned back on his arms, unzipped, and said, "Keeesss it, kees it, you know you weelll looove it."

Kiss it, she did not. Run, she did. What was he thinking? Time may be short when on holiday. You may know what you want is not exactly honourable. But really, there are some things that should remain unspoken.

Another place, another time, an Englishman insisted I check out some of the profiles on the Asian Friends Finder website he visits regularly in search of potential sexual partners coming to town. "Here's one for you," he said, singling out what, to me, appeared to be a rather average man of about 35 with a rather large nose who was (thankfully) dressed in his picture (unlike so many others).

"Don't look at his picture. Read what he wrote," said my friend. "Wouldn't you like that?" Well, to be honest, I would, but reading exactly what this man promised to do to me step by step, minute by minute, over a four hour period should we ever meet, I found myself quite disheartened. "What was he thinking?" I asked. "Why would I agree to meet him when I already know exactly what he's going to do?" I'm sorry, but it's the thrill of the hunt and the following surprises in bed which excite me.

Sexual preferences aside, you really can learn too much about someone too soon. In my case, it's usually during that time when you're not sure if you've found the best man on the beach for the night, when

you're flirting outrageously, but with one eye on other options. Or as more polite people would put it, it's during that time when you're "getting to know each other" that you could, just possibly, learn too much for your own good.

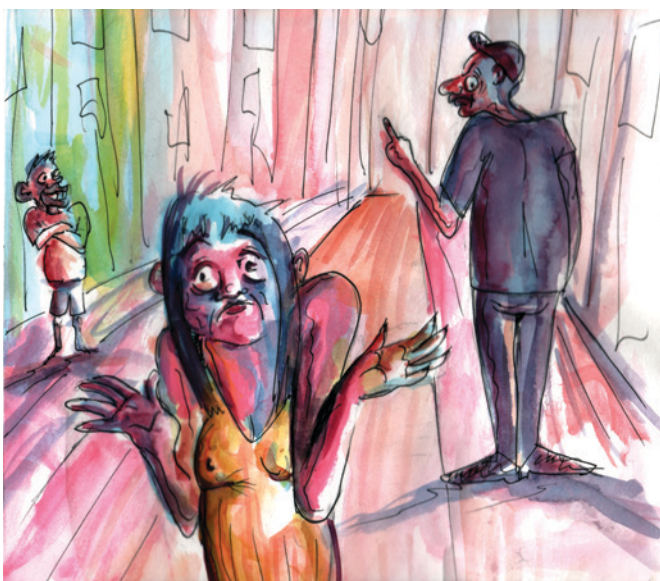
As I've said to myself time and time again, "Why, oh why, did I let the conversation go on so long? He might have had a chance otherwise." As a friend said to me the other day, "I heard you have an uncanny ability to attract men on occasion, but I was never told you have an equally uncanny ability to repel them." But it wasn't my fault, I swear: Too much information can be fatal to a promising fling.

What was she referring to? An American who proudly told us he voted for George W Bush was promptly sent home, alone, no explanation needed. A Canadian who proudly told us all about his two ex-girlfriends, the first of whom had denied him permission to date the second, who happened to be her sister (shame on him), he too was sent home alone, running actually. (I figured his betrayal of the first justified a few low blows on my part.) Then there was the Australian I'd been chatting with who noticed me surreptitiously checking out a particularly hot Latino moving in on a Thai dancing girl. He asked if I was interested in that other man, adding, "He's probably bisexual. You know, that's how women get AIDS, from sex with bisexual men."

"Women get AIDS from sex without condoms," I said coldly, then added, "My ex was bi." See another man sprint.

Granted, I have been known to reveal too much myself. (Did I really need to tell the Swedes how many Swedes I'd been with before or tell the Kiwi to meet the next night as someone else was first choice that night?) Finding out some facts before the final seduction can be a good thing.

That said, I have a friend who as a rule allows no conversation to put her off. If she sees something she likes, she just goes over and attacks. "It increases my pull rate," she says proudly. And so it does. Now if you'll excuse me, I think I see something I like. May the conversation be short and the night a long one.



HEALTH

KICKING AND SCREAMING

You shake a Marlboro from that iconic red-and-white pack and, letting it dangle from your lips, you flick open your Zippo with practiced ease. Cupping the flame from imaginary wind, you light up, snap the lighter closed and inhale. The familiar flavour of cigarette smoke floods the senses and a few seconds after it hits your lungs you feel the nicotine sway your world, a welcome counterpoint to the mild burn that comes from inhaling smoke. After a second you exhale through your nostrils, blowing smoke like a dragon and casually tap ash from the tip of your cigarette. You're cool, you're hip and you're participating in a minor form of conspicuous consumption. You're also taking around 13 years off your life, and even if you ash that dart right away you'll still be at a greater risk of smoking-related disease 15 years later.

We all know that smoking isn't good for us but did you know that half of all smokers will be killed by cigarettes? That's five million a year at the moment, and they'll probably die a painful, ignoble death. But that's a long way away for most of us. In the short term you ladies may be distressed to learn that smoking causes wrinkles, due to poor circulation, and men may be upset to learn that they're up to 60 percent more likely to suffer erectile dysfunction. Puffing a Cuban cigar may be a highly phallic act but it ain't no good unless you've got trouser-material to match it. Think about that, Marlboro man.

The good news is that, at least in the West, there are as many ex-smokers as there are practicing smokers, so kicking the habit can't be that hard. Also, there is a range of medications available today that can help make quitting less of an exercise in iron will versus chemical need. That said, Southeast Asia is a hard-smoking region where temptation abounds and smoking is on the rise. But the reasons for giving up smoking are legion: Smoking turns your teeth yellow, makes your clothes stink and pisses off your non-smoking buddies. Or look at giving up for the greater good; it's estimated that out of every pack of darts sold in the US in 1999, \$3.45 was spent on medical care for smoking-related diseases and \$3.73 went in lost productivity; that's \$7.18 for those who slept through maths class.

Travel and smoking go hand-in-hand. Even people who don't usually smoke at home can pick up the habit on the road, and why not? Smokes are cheap here and you tend to spend a lot of time at bus stations or in bars, both dens of combustion. However, the big change in environment that makes non-smokers want to experiment can also make it easier for a confirmed smoker to give up. Smoking is a habit so a change of scene can be a powerful tool in giving up. If you're tramping around temples and markets all day, you may not even notice you haven't



had a smoke in three days. Of course this necessitates forgoing the duty-free carton at the airport, as smoking is all about temptation.

If you are keen to give up, it's best to make a plan and set a 'quit' date. This gives you plenty of time to get ready. If you're a heavy smoker, you're not going to enjoy the next few days. On the big day you should throw out all of your fags, ashtrays, bongos, hookahs, pipes, rolling papers and what-have-you. After all, you're never going to need them again. For the next few days you're likely to feel the effects of withdrawal, like restlessness, irritation, and increased appetite. This is a good time to warn your spouse/partner/pets to be forgiving over the next few days, as well as an excellent opportunity to say exactly what you think of them. During this time you should also drink a lot of water, get some exercise and keep your hands busy. Avoid alcohol.

It's during the withdrawal stage that you can use gums, patches or inhalers for "nicotine replacement therapy" to get you out of the habit of lighting up. The patches have a good success rate but are prescription-only and in Thailand are only available from hospitals. New developments include prescribing the anti-depressant Bupropion (Zyban) to avoid the jitters. However, side-effects include excitement or anxiety, insomnia and change in appetite or weight (sound familiar?). A nicotine vaccine is undergoing trials in the US which will employ the body's immune system to eliminate nicotine, but that won't even go for FDA approval before 2007.

In the meantime, probably the most important things that will help you stay off the tabs are taking each day as it comes, the support of friends and family, and a great deal of patience.



With more than 60 stores in Thailand, we are ready to serve all your vacation needs with expert advice and unique quality products. English-speaking pharmacist available.



Ask our Licensed Pharmacists

for Expert Advice

24 Hours a Day

Call Phone Number

02 2330575

or Free Phone Number

1 800 200 444

or Email:

pharmacist.24hours@bootsrt.com

Be Healthy Be at



Check out

Boots Vacation Healthcare Tips!

Road Reads

Exclusive Interview: Stephen Leather

Review by Daniel Cooper

For all the trees pulped to print books about Bangkok's bar-scene, the most recommended novel was for many years only available online. *Private Dancer*, by bestselling British author Steven Leather, has finally made it into print, in Thailand at least. Leather had to start his own publishing label to print it, as his usual publisher, Hodder & Stoughton, felt the book was such a departure from his usual subject that it would upset his readers. Given the intense nature of the book, it would probably shock as well.

The novel follows the relationship of Pete, a British travel-writer posted to Bangkok, and Joy, a bargirl working in the infamous Nana Plaza. The book has attracted much praise for its lucid look at relationships between Farangs and Thais, clients and prostitutes. The book is written in the first-person, but the viewpoint switches between characters, which allows Leather to write part of the book from Joy's point of view, uncommon amongst most Patpong odysseys.

The book tracks the star-crossed lovers' relationship which is torn by competing expectations, cultural clashes and conflicting desires. What follows is a stark and disturbing look at a story that happens all too commonly in Thailand. *Farang Untamed Travel* contacted Leather via email:

The book is set in 1996, how much time had you spent in Thailand before that?

I've been visiting for 20 years, pretty much. I was here most of 1993-1995 writing two books, *The Solitary Man* and *The Tunnel Rats*, and learning Thai at the AUA language center.

The book has quite detailed descriptions about the bar scene in Bangkok, how did you do your research and where did you get your material for the plot?

Mainly sitting in Jool's Bar, in Soi Nana, listening to the regulars bitch and moan. *Private Dancer* is a work of fiction but it's based on all the tales I heard while getting legless in Jool's.

The book has been available in online form for years. Were you surprised by the response?
Nah, it's the best book on the Bangkok bar scene, bar none. Mainly because it examines the bargirl/punter relationship from so many angles. This year it's been downloaded up to seventy times a day, which shows you how popular it is.

The book is set almost ten years ago, pre-crash. Has the Thailand you describe changed and are the conclusions you reach still valid?

Sure, the bar scene now bears little relation to what was going on in the nineties. They are very tame compared with the way they were. But the observations on the bargirl/punter relationship are as valid now as they were then.

You portray the bargirl characters in the book as being quite heartless and perhaps cruel: have you been accused of being racist by your readers?

Nah, the bargirls are the only sympathetic characters in the book. All the Farangs are sad fucks (the original title of the book was gonna be *The Sad Fucks*). The bargirls are just doing their job, there's nothing heartless or cruel about them. It's just the stupid Farangs who think that they're loved for themselves and not for their money. It's nothing to do with race. It's not a book about a Thai-Farang relationship. It's about a bargirl-punter relationship.

***Private Dancer* dwells on the complexity and difficulty of cross-cultural relationships: was this your main purpose for writing the book? And if so, why's it so grim?**

Nah, it's not a specific relationship, which has more to do with the girl's profession than with her culture. Anyway, I kept hearing guys pontificating about life in Thailand, and most of it was complete bollocks. I wanted to write a story looking at a bargirl-punter relationship from multiple viewpoints; and I wanted to show how the bargirls think, something that most books on the bar scene neglect. Why is it so grim? Because it is impossible to have any real relationship with a girl once you have paid to have sex with her. Anyone who tells you different is lying to you, and to themselves.

Finally, read any good books lately?

Nah. Read *Bangkok 8* and it was awful.



Media Thains

Thailand's largest chain of foreign language bookstores.

Bring in this ad and get
10% Off any purchase

BOOKAZINE LOCATIONS

BOOKAZINE SIAM
BTS SIAM ST., Opposite Siam Center

BOOKAZINE PATPONG
Silom Rd., 1st Fl., C.P. Tower

BOOKAZINE SILOM
Silom Rd., 3rd Fl., Silom Complex

BOOKAZINE PLOENCHIT
BTS CHIDLOM ST., 3rd Fl., Amarin Sogo

BOOKAZINE SUKHUMVIT
BTS NANA ST., Nai Lert Bldg., Sukhumvit Soi 5

BOOKAZINE WIRELESS ROAD
2nd Fl., All Seasons Place, Next to Conrad Hotel

BOOKAZINE GAYSORN
BTS CHIDLOM ST., 2nd Fl., Gaysorn Plaza, Ploenchit Rd.

BOOKAZINE PATTAYA 1
1st Fl., Royal Garden Plaza

BOOKAZINE PATTAYA 2
2nd Fl., Central Festival Center, Pattaya Two Road

BOOKAZINE JOMTIEN
410/471 Jomtien Beach, Nongprue, South Pattaya

BOOKAZINE HUA HIN
Naresdamri Rd., Across Sofitel Hotel, Hua Hin

BOOKAZINE PHUKET
18 Bang-La Rd., Patong Beach, Phuket

BOOKAZINE SAMUI
Chaweng Beach, Opposite McDonald's, Borphud, Koh Samui

BOOKAZINE CHIANG MAI
Ground Fl., Chiang Inn Plaza, Changkian Rd., Chiang Mai

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT
0-2742-7100 EXT. 300, 302, 303

Letters to the Editor

That's Entertainment?

Dear Editors,

It was with alarm that I read Tom Vater's report in your February issue on the "Fat Festival". It appeared that Mr Vater was applauding the behaviour of the performers at the show and condemning the police for trying to maintain control over the thousands of would-be-drunk youngsters who attended this hedonistic display, flouting accepted values and morals. Let's take a look at what we have here: A group of performers who consider it entertaining to set fire to their own intestinal wind, a man covered in chains and bleeding, a young and attractive woman who screeches like an animal and seems to believe that underwear is suitable stage attire, a singer with "tarty" scrawled across his chest. What is the purpose of all this, if not to corrupt youth, encourage them to defy their parents and other forms of authority and generally encourage anarchistic behaviour that erodes the foundations of a decent and prosperous society? I understand that young people are full of energy and need to have fun, but surely such festivals are not in the best interests of the nation's present or future. There must be more constructive ways for them to express themselves. I would appreciate it if Mr. Vater could justify his support of these subversive activities and explain why the authorities should just stand by and permit it to continue.

Voravan Narathiwat
Bangkok

Farang Responds:

Sorry Ms Voravan, but Tom Vater is unavailable to respond because he is

bouncing around America filming a rather subversive documentary on the secret war in Laos, (the one that killed thousands of innocent people, through history's biggest per capita bombing campaign), which was perpetrated by people who always wore suits, never lit their farts, advocated traditional values, discouraged the young from defying authority by encouraging riot police to beat them with batons and rarely had sex with their wives.

We Have a Winner!

We held a subscription contest in the months of December and January, where anyone who subscribed during those months was entered in a draw for a resort weekend. We threw all the entries into an oil drum, rolled it up and down the soi for a bit and drew out the name of Milan K Ghorai, who will be treated to a weekend for two at the Amari Trang Beach Resort, including flight, three nights' accommodation, a spa treatment and other hedonistic goodies.



Former Farangers Wed

At the risk of appearing sentimental and vain, we feel it incumbent on us to pay tribute to former Farang staffers Vinnie and Jeab, who got married last month on Koh Chang in the presence of a load of Vinnie's Irish friends and relatives, who flew all the way to Thailand for a good tropical piss-up, with the added bonus of being allowed to smoke cigarettes in the local pub. So even though there was a suspicious drop in the stationary and toilet paper supply on the day of their departure from our employ, we at Farang heartily congratulate them.

Open for Business

Dear Editors,

I was wondering what kind of coverage you guys will be doing on post tsunami Phi Phi. I was just down there for a week and despite conflicting reports, Phi Phi IS open. There are some resorts that are open and starving for business. I spent time at a place called Toh Koh Beach Resort. The woman who runs the place, Porn, is an absolute gem. The place was fantastic.

Ton Sai beach is destroyed. It looks like it was hit by an A-bomb. I spent a day volunteering with an organization called Help International Phi Phi. They have a website: www.hiphphi.com. They were clearing debris to help local businesses open again and providing food and work for some of the locals.

It was actually a good time to visit Phi Phi. It felt good to help the local economy and do some volunteering. There were very few people there and it was a real privilege to enjoy a place so beautiful without the crowds.

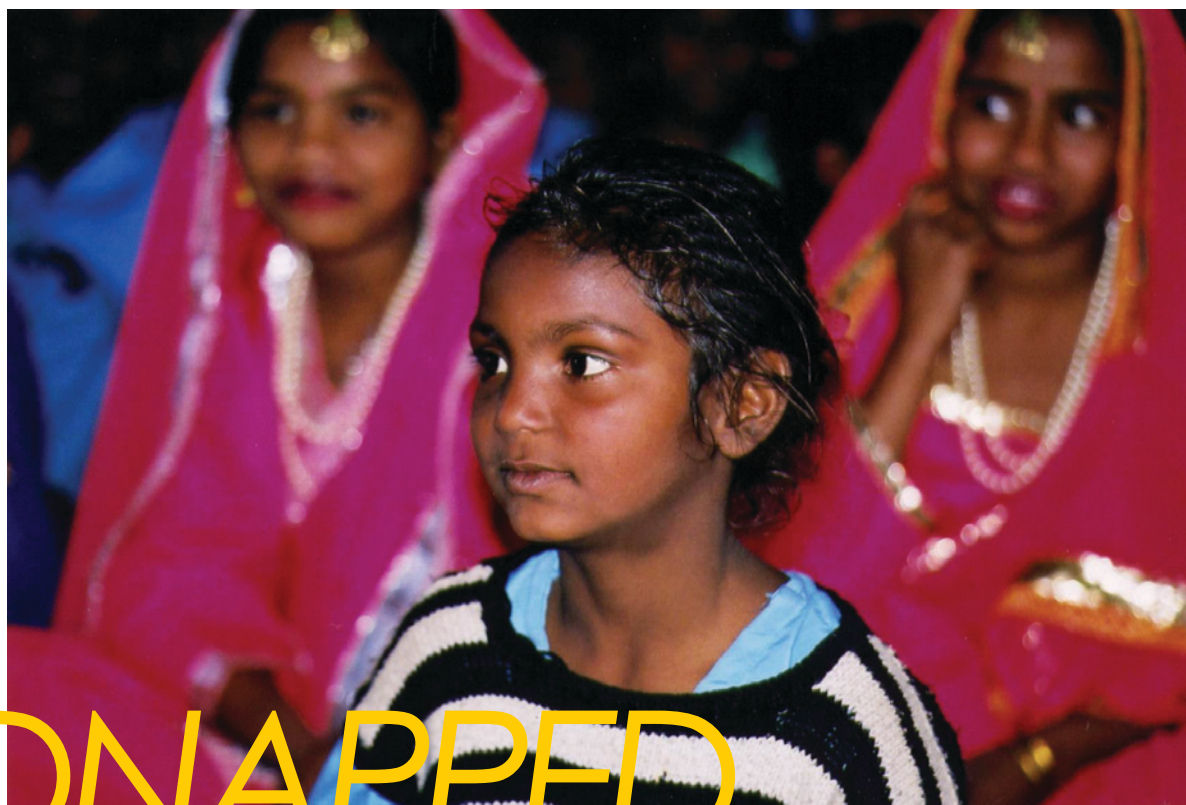
Scott Stier
Bangkok



Great food from Bangkok's
best restaurants **delivered**
to your home or office
within an hour

Great food
Delivered
02-663 4 663

www.foodbyphonebkk.com



KIDNAPPED & ENSLAVED

For many child slaves in India, 18-hour days and little food, couple with physical and sexual abuse, are part of their job descriptions in the carpet trade. **Mark Beales** scopes out the horrifying details of this widespread social evil, and meets a man risking his life to fight it.

Nagashwar and the other slaves waited until their master was drunk on cheap whisky before making their escape. As they ran for their freedom Nagashwar realised one of his friends had been left behind at the carpet factory, so returned to find him. But when he arrived back the master had awoken from his stupor, and took his fury at the escape out on Nagashwar. Demanding to know where the other children had gone, he beat him until he bled, but the young boy refused to say a word.

The next morning the master tied the terrified child up with rope, fetched a stove and heated it up. He stuck an iron inside the stove until it was red-hot and then used it to go systematically down the boy's body, from his neck to his groin, branding him in the hope he would speak. But Nagashwar

stayed quiet and after two-and-a-half hours of torture help arrived in the form of the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS).

The group looked after Nagashwar, who was so traumatised he didn't speak a word for months. The master is still at large and has not been charged with anything, but Nagashwar is back in his home town and has become a community leader teaching others their rights.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Nagashwar's story is that it is not unique. There are plenty of children working in wretched conditions for pennies, and gradually many of these are being freed and fighting back. Everywhere I went in central India there were horrific stories of child abuse. I met children who had been kidnapped, locked up, paid virtually nothing

and beaten for no reason. Most work in the carpet trade, making beautifully-intricate creations that are sold for hundreds of dollars around the world, and nearly all are *dalits*, the lowest caste in Indian society.

I visited India with Christian Aid. It funds SACCS, which is responsible for rescuing more than 55,000 children and rehabilitating them in ashrams, or sanctuaries, where they are taught their rights, literacy and awareness. When they leave they are no longer victims, but fighters.

Kailash Satyarthi, the group's founder and leader, is eloquent, resolute and amiable, traits that have enabled him to unlock many doors, sometimes literally, in his quest for a better India. Kailash isn't just the founder of a pressure group; he's an icon for thousands of people and has received a string of human rights' awards, and been personally thanked by ex-US President Bill Clinton for his efforts.

He qualified as an engineer and was expected to go on to have a comfortable career and life, but after witnessing the injustices and inequalities of life in India, he gave it all up to pursue the eradication of child labour.

That was 20 years ago and, although it was a slow process, gradually Kailash met like-minded people who began to make some noise. The SACCS was formed in 1987 and is made up of more than 650 groups fighting child labour across Asia. As well as raising awareness, it raids factories where boys are forced to make carpets, and sets them free. They are taken to places such as Mukti Ashram, which was my first stop. It's an hour away by car from New Delhi, and we found it after negotiating some dust-ridden pathways and stopping for a few sacred cows. High brick walls surround the site to prevent disgruntled factory owners getting in, not to stop anyone getting out. Inside, there are workshops where freed children are learning to mend motorbikes or sew cloth, and classrooms where they are taught to paint and read. Everywhere we went the children were studying hard and clearly relished the work. These weren't children waiting for the bell to end class: They were eager to hear the bell that started lessons.

Across the road was a newer girls-only ashram: Balrika. As we entered, four girls sat sewing on a step and gave us breathtaking smiles as we walked past. It looked similar to Mukti, apart from a huge hole in the ground. When the ashram was being built they needed extra soil, so they dug a pit and then decided to use it as a mini-parliament where debates take place. Inside, a class was marveling at the new black-and-white television that had just arrived.

After a lunch of potato, rice and peas – all cooked by the kids – we were taken to the main room. I took off my shoes before entering and as I walked in the silence was broken by the piercing chants of children singing freedom songs. Surrounded by flaking white-washed walls, the boys had put on their best blue shirts and the girls wore bright pink, yellow and green dresses. These children, who had been beaten, sexually abused and barely fed, were now shouting and punching the air with their mantras. It was a scene of raw courage and hope.

Their warmth was infectious and I clapped along with them. Afterwards, they presented me with flowers and several of the children spoke of their experiences. Suman, one of the directors, translated: "This boy was breaking rocks with his family. One of his fingers was blown off in an accident, but his master gave him no medical treatment."

One six-year-old girl, Jasan, was tiny for her years, and had been working in a field with her bonded family, and another had been sexually abused while working in a stone quarry.



"On one raid a BBC journalist accompanied Kailash, but the factory owner had been tipped off. He approached Kailash with a pistol and said he was going to shoot him."

Bonded families have taken a loan from their bosses, but the astronomical interest rates and penalties mean they effectively work for nothing.

SUFFER THE CHILDREN

There may be up to 55 million children working in India; that's virtually the entire population of Britain. Most of those in the ashrams are from remote villages and are enticed away from men full of empty pledges. The carpet trader will approach the children, or their parents, and promise an education or job that hitherto could only be dreamed of.

In some cases the parents agree to send their children away. In other instances they are simply kidnapped. Once the children are taken, they are locked in a carpet factory, beaten if they make a mistake, or laugh, cry or talk, and work up to 18 hour days. The task itself, weaving the wool, creates night-blindness, poor joint movement, TB due to the dust, and destroys all self-confidence. One myth states that children are preferred as their hands are better suited to knitting the tight knots, but the real reason is because they are cheap.

Once the SACCS finds out where a factory is it obtains a court order, breaks in and releases the children. They are then taken to one of three ashrams, where they are rehabilitated and given new skills. Kailash explained that not everyone approves of his organization, and corruption, via the courts, police, and factory owners, is a major obstacle. Two of his team have been murdered, his house attacked and his daughter told that her daddy would be killed the following day.



pistol and said he was going to shoot him. Kailash embraced the man, and explained he was a government official who bore a remarkable resemblance to the nasty SACCs leader. The man eventually believed Kailash, and even gave him food and shelter for the night.

Kailash even told them he was from the priest caste and upon hearing this, the other men in the village asked if he

would read their palms. With remarkable insight, he predicted the factory owner would have a difficult future. The next day the place was raided and 35 children set free.

After leaving Mukti Ashram we visited another school in the town of Meerut, where children applauded us we arrived and some people started taking photographs. Everyone wanted to shake our hands and it was somewhat overwhelming to be treated as celebrities, especially as we hadn't actually done anything. One girl gave me a tray, and daubed my head with the traditional red greeting symbol, the *bindi*. She then stuck some rice on it and gave me sweet milk cakes.

Now when I say they had a new school you have to remember this is a village where cattle roam freely, roads are hard to distinguish from the rest of the dirt and sand, and five men sit around a car wheel all day figuring out how to re-attach it. The children sat in a shaded area at the rear of the 'school', which was in reality an empty piece of land with four walls. Not that they cared what it looked like. A few were coerced into singing freedom songs for us and we watched a mocked-up lesson take place as they recited the alphabet and counted to 100 in English.

A couple of years ago the children were stitching footballs or cricket balls with their families. School was not an option, as their young, dexterous hands were needed to bring in money so everyone could eat. With no education, their prospects were startlingly bleak. One villager wanted the children to have an education, while realising he couldn't deprive the families of the money they created. He contacted SACCs and they funded the building of two schools. The children still do some stitching, but it is much less than before, and their mornings are spent in a classroom. Some of them may never leave the village for their entire lives, but at least some now have a chance to do something better.

Towards the end of our visit, Sanghita produced several acres of woven cloth as a gift. Then some others left quietly and returned with Coke, bananas and a yellow raspberry-type fruit that looked like an under-ripe tomato. Here were people who

"There may be up to 55 million children working in India; that's virtually the entire population of Britain."



“With the consent of his own parents, the boy was taken to a temple for the ceremony. But when the machete’s first blow failed to decapitate him, village custom meant he was spared, and simply abandoned.”

could hardly afford to eat, giving food away to those who had way too much.

I really wanted to return the favour but had nothing on me, so in a laughable bid to reciprocate their generosity I wrote one girl’s name in shorthand. She was thrilled, and humbly requested me to autograph the scrap of paper.

The final ashram was more of a trek to reach. Bal Ashram is situated on a large area of land, surrounded by mountains and open fields not far from Jaipur. On the way there we passed fields full of families toiling away and closer to the ashram we saw several children and their parents working by the roadside under the burning sun. Kailash arrived at the ashram minutes after me. The second he stepped from his vehicle dozens of children were around him, falling at his feet in adulation and chanting his name. He picked them up, shrugging off the accolades, and came to meet me.

We sat in a raised wooden shelter that had a pagoda-style roof, and tea was served in a surreally-civilized manner. One child, Pradeep (pictured this page), stayed close to Kailash the whole time. When Pradeep was born, another family in his village experienced bad fortune. Village leaders decreed that this was clearly no coincidence and that Pradeep was an evil soul who must be sacrificed. With the consent of his own parents, he was taken to a temple for the ceremony. But when the machete’s first blow failed to decapitate him, village custom meant he was spared, and simply abandoned. Now Pradeep clings to his rescuer and is determined to be like Kailash when he grows up.

While we talked another car came in carrying six children. They were brought to meet Kailash, who said that these were the boys we had seen working by the roadside minutes earlier. This was the culmination of five months of talks between SACCS and the employer, who had been using an entire family to build the roads, paying them 50 rupees a month for doing so, less than a quarter of the legal minimum wage.

The youngest boy was only six. Some of them hadn’t washed for a week; one thought it may have been two months, he couldn’t remember.

Bal Ashram [*bal* meaning children] can house up to 100 boys, who come from the carpet trade, bonded labour, or stone quarries. It’s a big place, with brick-built sleeping quarters, a kitchen area, open showers, and a mini school. In the evenings I would sit on a garden swing as Kailash’s son spoke of the jaguars and cobras in the hills behind us, and the 27 tigers in the nearby jungle, one of the densest populations in the world. If I had stayed an extra day he would have taken me on a drive to try and find one of the beasts, but I couldn’t spare the time.

Dinner was served in front of a fire that was fed by small logs and afterwards the children performed street theatre. Once again their past was present, as one pretended to be a carpet master, while the other fought bravely for his freedom. Once the theatre was complete I sat with my hosts at the front of the group while the children began to beat a drum and dance for us. As the rhythms gathered momentum, the noise grew louder, and the fire’s orange flames danced higher in the darkness, I was dragged up to dance with them. It was a wonderful feeling, the children loved to watch the visitors join in and dance with them, and it was hard to believe that these were anything other than normal, healthy children.

GOVERNMENT SOLUTIONS?

Back in New Delhi I tried to discover why these children had been put in such a perilous position. Christian Aid helped out by organising a meeting with Maneka Gandhi, the minister for the brilliantly titled Department of Social Justice and Empowerment. Her secretary was happy to see us, and more than happy to correct us when we mentioned we were here to talk about child slavery.

“We don’t have slavery, it’s child labour,” he said, mildly admonishing our naivety.

Maneka was more direct. The sister-in-law of Indira Gandhi, she was brusque and to the point. No, there weren’t child slaves in India, no, nobody in England supports Rugmark, a scheme aimed at promoting child-friendly carpets, and no, education is not the answer when there are so many children needing to work to support their families.

I asked whether education was actually compulsory in India, and she almost snorted with derision that of course it was. When I then asked why it seemed that hardly any children went to school, she wasn’t so forthcoming. After a while she loosened up a bit, although she was never exactly on first-name terms, and when it was time to go, she let us know.

Maneka Gandhi has a reputation among the locals here for speaking her mind, and that could be why several months later she found herself out of a job. Even if Maneka didn’t grasp the scale of the crisis, there are plenty who do, but since few of them hold any positions of real power, the issue of child slavery is far from being resolved.

India is an incredibly multi-layered country, a place with a plethora of problems, many of which are connected to its ancient history and traditions that still hold sway. As you read this, children somewhere are making carpets in a darkened room, with not enough water to go round. And for as long as that happens people like Kailash will continue to protest and risk their lives.

For more details visit www.globalmarch.org.uk or www.christian-aid.org.uk





A Land Divided

Writer and photographer Pierre Ryckmans visits the architectural wonderland of Uzbekistan. En-route, he marvels at the country's rich and bloody history, the bread shaped like golden Frisbees, the Russian beer, and a pop music video about rebels fighting the Taliban.

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. Yes, there are many reasons to be fascinated by this Central Asian country populated by the Uzbeks, a Muslim population speaking a Turkic language. The people are a good starting point: Look at the way the womenfolk drape their plump bodies with dark, flower-studded dresses and wear square embroidered caps above very thick eye brows (a beauty signifier), and the richer ones even have gold teeth (a status symbol).

But in the capital of Tashkent I was surprised to see sexy ladies dressed in ultra-mini skirts and toothpick-heels, exposing some unsuspected cleavage, their lips and hair painted with bright rouge.

Not until my visit to the Chorsu bozori, the capital's biggest market, did I understand that the population of Uzbekistan comprises a vast majority of autochthonous farmers and a completely different (and indifferent to tradition) urban core of Russian-immigrant descendants: Kazakhs dispersed by Czar Peter the Great, or Soviets displaced by the Bolshevik regimes.

But the main reason the few tourists come here is for the



remarkable architecture. Khiva was the least known and most surprising of the three historic pearls we visited. As we sat on the carpeted terrace between our rooms, sipping Russian beer, we contemplated the turquoise domes of the mosques and their tiled minarets, above the desert-coloured city walls, houses and surroundings. It was hard to imagine the despotic khans who ordered the building of these architectural beauties, but ruled with such ferocity: beheading enemies after letting them rot for months in dark and narrow pits with only rats and vipers for company.

Madrassas (Islamic schools), mosques and caravanserais with brightly twinkling enamel decorations tower above the sand-brick dwellings. Hand-woven socks and fur caps are sold by women sitting in 40°C weather. Carpets are spread out and sold in mosques, in private houses, and even in our guesthouse rooms.

Khiva is a captivating outdoor museum, a maze of quiet narrow streets filled with beautifully restored historical buildings, but empty of people. When the restoration work started the inhabitants were forced to live outside the medieval city walls. Only those working in the tourism industry are scattered around the old centre, and only during the daytime. So

the city lacks human warmth.

Igor, our driver, understood three words of English and spoke even less. At times he sped recklessly only to slow down to a turtle's pace when he sniffed out a corrupt cop in the vicinity. Our minivan, like every other vehicle, was stopped at road-blocks. Igor mumbled what must have been a Russian curse or slight, ironed his scowl out, and showed the registration documents, whereupon a stereotypical conversation started, which ended with a short joke or, more often with him ready to hand over his passport filled with a couple of liberating banknotes inside it.

The day trip was interrupted by the sole restaurant on this monotonous desert road. This spacious eatery was a collection of decayed plastic stools, warped timber tables, dust, and lively bird's nests. We could choose between two dishes, which represent half of Uzbek cuisine: fatty *shashliks* or meat kebabs, barbecued alongside the road under thick walls of smoke and served with the omnipresent mixed and vinegared salad of diced tomatoes and cucumbers; or you can try *laghman*, a soup of big round noodles, vegetables, and cubes of meat (read: fat), richly sprinkled with dill. Fortunately each dish was accompanied by bread, the most exquisite Uzbek food, which comes in the shape of golden Frisbees, has a thick and crusty rim, and a thin inner disc decorated with geometrical figures.

The Labi-Hauz in Bukhara is a pleasant square with *chaikhana*s (teahouses) around a man-made water basin in which children dive from the branches of a mulberry tree. The city is a shadow of its ancient glory, when it blossomed as a

"It was hard to imagine the despotic khans who ordered these architectural beauties to be built, but ruled with such ferocity."





“Our hero is on the verge of succumbing, but after one single look at his fiancée’s photo he finds the strength to recover.”

cultural and religious centre between the 9th and the 13th centuries, and again as a political and commercial centre in the 16th century, until it unraveled along with the Silk Road at the end of the same century. The most famous of its last emirs, Nasrullah Khan, was renowned for butchering all of his brothers and 28 other relatives after ascending the throne in 1826. But the madrassas and mosques are esthetic witnesses to the glory days when Bukhara was the centrepiece of Islam in Central Asia.

The buildings are much bigger here than in Khiva. For example, the Kalon minaret is an elegant masterpiece of brickwork, standing 47-metres tall. Even the art-hater Genghis Khan demanded it be spared from destruction. And, yes, non-Muslims are allowed inside.

Strolling back through the covered bazaar and its tourist traps we arrived at the House of Faizullah Khujayev, the son of a 19th century merchant who built this palace. He collaborated with the Bolsheviks to dump Bukhara’s last emir, Alim Khan. For his political efforts he was rewarded with the presidency of the People’s Republic of Bukhara, later the presidency of the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan, and, in a final display of gratitude, Stalin had him executed. His palace was turned into a museum of local Marxism with endless portraits of comrades, where you can also watch a live – though not lively – show of traditional costumes.

In legendary Samarkand, we immediately headed down to the Registan, the most amazing square in Central Asia; it’s surrounded by three giant madrassas, the highlights of Uzbek-Persian architecture. But every old Uzbek city seems to possess a unique dome style, in terms of shape and colour. The Sher Dor, or Lion-madrassa, is the most original of the trio. Islam forbids the artistic representation of men and animals, but this ban has been overruled in Samarkand with a sense of humour: above the entrance gate two cartoon characters ride tigers meant to be lions. On the opposite side, the Ulughbek-madrassa is decorated with two suns and hundreds of stars. (Ulughbek, Timur’s favourite grandson, loved astrology.) This was considered scandalous by the religious authorities and the ruler was sentenced and decapitated by his very own son.

To increase their meager incomes some Uzbek families invite

tourists for dinner at their homes, and generally they seem surprised and delighted by their foreign company, though you have to pay them. Maxim, our guide in the Fergana valley, Uzbekistan’s granary and horse-breeding centre, invited us.

Uzbekistan, and especially the Fergana valley, is definitely in the grip of the Taliban-versus-West trauma, with an ex-communist president who turned pro-US in Central Asia’s geopolitical context, and a much-divided population sympathetic to antagonists.

At dinner Maxim was entertaining, but he was reluctant to talk about the Taliban and other religious fundamentalists, so he put on a music video to illustrate the quandary.

Set to a honeyed melody, “Asrasin” is a top hit by pop singer Yulduz Abdullaeva. In the video a beautiful young girl is parting from her soldier-boyfriend and crying a cascade of tears. He then puts on his battle gear and hides his face beneath a black balaclava. A couple of seconds later he dangles James Bond-style under a helicopter, and lands in a Taliban training camp, populated by frightful individuals with long beards, turbans and big savage eyes. A fierce and bloody fight follows with lots of throat-cutting and sword-swinging. Our hero is on the verge of succumbing, but after one single look at his fiancée’s photo he finds the strength to recover, kills one more rebel, and escapes to passionately kiss his beloved at the end of the song.

THE BASICS

How to Get There

From Bangkok: Uzbekistan Airways flies direct four times a week to the capital of Tashkent. The flight takes almost seven hours. Uzbekistan Airways is on the 29th floor of the United Center Building, 323 Silom Road, in Bangkok. Tel: 02-6355400, or visit www.airways.uz. It’s also possible to fly to Tashkent via New Delhi on Wed, Fri and Sat, with a combination of Thai Airways International/Air India or Uzbekistan Airlines/Indian Airlines flights.

From Singapore/Kuala Lumpur: Direct flights from KL, and convenient connection flights from Singapore via KL, BKK, or Amritsar.

From Hong Kong: No direct flights, only via Hanoi, Beijing, Bangkok or New Delhi.

When to Go

As Uzbekistan has a continental desert climate, summers are extremely hot and winters are very cold. The best months to visit are May-June. March and April are moderate in terms of temperature, but get more rainfall. The Fall months of September and October are also quite wet and cold at night.

Dangers

It’s okay to visit the capital and the old cities like Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand, but one must be more careful in the Fergana valley as fundamentalist organisations are active there.

Visas

Visa applications require a confirmed booking for at least three nights accommodation for visitors flying in. You must pay for a room and get a ‘visa support letter’. Local travel agencies provide both accommodation booking and a visa support letter, but charge US\$15-20 for the latter, which takes two to three weeks. You can then apply for a visa at the nearest Uzbekistan embassy or upon arrival. For overland travelers the letter and advanced bookings should not be necessary. US citizens do not need a visa for a maximum stay of 30 days.

Travel Agencies

Tashkent:

Asia Travel: www.asia-travel.uz

Sairam: www.sairamtour.com.uz

Sambuh: www.sambuh.com

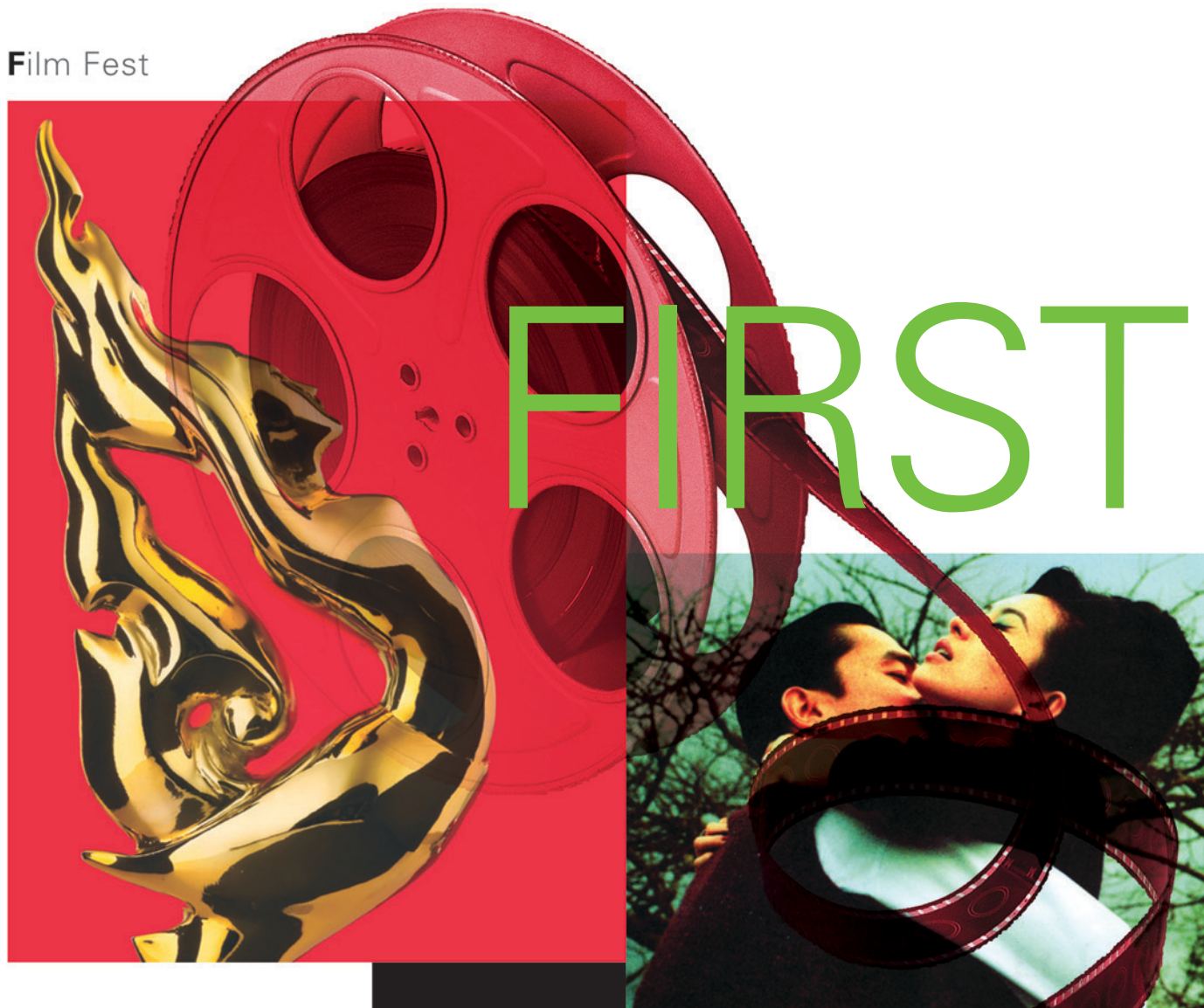
Where to Stay

The Hotel Tashkent at Sharaf Rashidov 50 is US\$25-50 a night and centrally located opposite the Navoi Opera Theatre. But I stayed at the Orzu Tashkent Hotel, US\$30 for a single room, with a restaurant-bar, internet café and travel agency which arranges visa support letters: www.orzu-hotels.com. But there are cheaper places in the capital, like the clean Hotel Bakht at Chilanzor kvartal 8, priced at US\$7 per night. For upmarket digs, try Le Meridien at Uzbekistan Ovozi 2 for US\$190/210, or the best hotel in town, the Hotel Intercontinental, Amir Timur 107A, from US\$255.

Homestays

In other places like Khiva, Bukhara, Samarkand, and Fergana, there are a number of pleasant home-stays and B 'n' Bs in the \$20-30 dollar range.





FIRST

REEL

Aspiring actor **Troy McFadden** schmoozes, boozes and cruises his way through Bangkok's biggest film festival, doing interviews with **Oliver Stone** and **Michael Douglas**, while crashing some of the debauched after-parties. Meanwhile, **Joe Cummings** profiles our cover celeb, **Jeremy Irons**, who was also recently in Bangkok.



Celebrities. Award ceremonies. Posh after-parties. Wheeling and dealing. Schmoozing. Breast-baring wardrobe malfunctions. Libidinous stars in mating mode. Oh yeah, and I almost forgot: a few hundred high-quality movies playing in Bangkok's cinemas (for a change!)

The third annual Bangkok International Film Festival, on Jan 13th-24th was the week that the showbiz movers-and-shakers from the rest of Asia, much of Europe, and of course, Hollywood, came to town.

Day one arrives and our posse strolls into the lobby of the Shangri-La Hotel for registration. We have our group agenda as well as our individual motives. I, as an actor, am hoping for exposure, and to make connections with some Hollywood people prior to moving there to pursue my career. Maybe an agent will show some interest, or a director, a producer... or even a janitor at a major studio, cause I'm poor and will need a job in LA as soon as I arrive in town, if not sooner.

Perhaps, though, there's no reason for me to leave, as both Los Angeles and Bangkok have more in common than just poor air quality and traffic congestion: Both cities translate as "The City of Angels". Now that we've got ourselves a few American movie stars, all we need to do is graft Krabi's Raleigh Beach onto the edge of this city, as Malibu is to LA, and we'd be set. The rest of the infrastructure is already in place, including enough cosmetic surgery centres to beautify the entire populace.

As I have pre-discussed writing this article for FARANG with the editors, it empowers me to somewhat brazenly request a press pass. I have no proof of my association with said publication, but I guess I smiled the right way at the right time. Or perhaps they were just being politely Asian and do not want to make a scene. Anyway, I got the pass, which would let me into some parties that I would otherwise not be welcomed at ("You're who?"), and maybe land me some other goodies.

The first big score is awaiting me in the "press only" room: sign-up sheets for interviews with the celebrities. As I'm registering early in the game, I'm near the top of the list for my requested slots with Oliver Stone, Michael Douglas, Jeremy Irons, and Joel Schumacher.

Only in Thailand could this be happening. Should I abandon all dignity and integrity, and cheekily slip the prominent directors my "head shot"? Ask famous actors if I can live in their guest room? Or doghouses? No, I will just try and ask a few interesting questions, if only by accident.

Then I go to check out the suite allotted us. It looks cool. It looks like a hotel room that I could never afford in the real world, but this is the world of film... it's all make-believe. Perfect! I can use a good lie to believe in about now; I haven't had one since my last girlfriend.

Said domicile affords me a home base outside of the press room. Three floors of the Shangri-La hotel are serving as temporary offices for lots of production companies, filmmakers, and scriptwriters – all vying for a chunk of the checkbooks making the rounds. I myself am featured on a poster for a movie-in-development, *Thai Gold*, based on the novel by Jason Schoonover, which makes me feel slightly more part of the action – "closer to the heat," as they say in this business.

Despite having been acting here in town for a year, with some success, I have often felt very isolated from any kind of film industry core, as things are very spread out on every level here in Thailand, so it's great to see so many people together that I have gotten to know during the course of my stay. David Winters, of *West Side Story* fame, and producer of the forthcoming epic *The Kingmaker* (starring *Alexander's* Gary Stretch) is on hand, as is my favourite local celeb, "Wild" Joe Cummings, best known for his Lonely Planet guidebooks, and a few other actors.

But there are also a lot of bottom-feeders around – people calling themselves "directors" and "producers" who haven't really done shit, but have somehow decided Asia affords them a backdoor into celebrity circles. I may well be considered among this group, but as I fell into all of this showbiz stuff by "accident", I also have the bemused smile of one relatively unattached.

In addition to the wanna-bes and hangers-on, the middle range of the pyramid includes some of the real-deal people from large companies who are backed by real money and who are actually legitimate filmmakers, distributors and the like; people scouting the world for finished products, as well as scripts, and even just ideas, to purchase. Sometimes a large company will buy one of the aforementioned items (even a completed movie), for the sole purpose of keeping the concept off the market so they can eradicate the competition. I wonder how many great movies are sitting in a storeroom collecting cobwebs, and never to be seen, while we are fed a steady diet of *Gigli* and *National Treasure*.

Here's a big lesson I got about the film industry: What we all usually see are the movie stars, and maybe the occasional celebrity director or producer. But these people are just the tip of a very big iceberg. Underneath, it's the businessman (and, thankfully, more and more often, businesswomen) propping up the artists.

At the top of the pyramid, it's the hired guns – the big names that have been essentially rented by the sponsors of a film festival to show up and validate the proceedings.

Does it all seem, well, staged somehow?

That's showbiz, babe.

PROD. NO.

SCENE

TAKE

ROLL

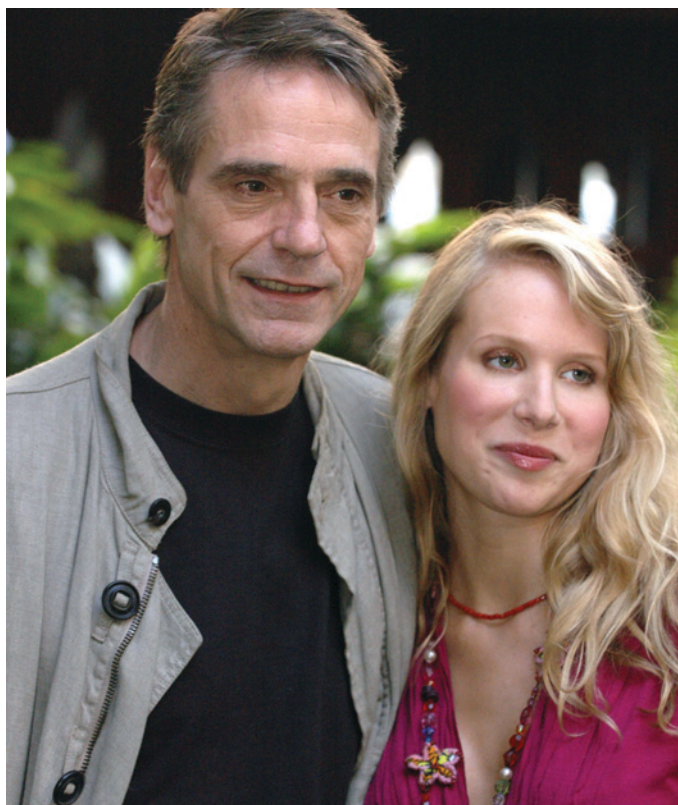
DATE

SOUND

PROD. CO.

DIRECTOR

CAMERAMAN



BEING JEREMY

Jeremy Irons talks about his most challenging roles, like working with Robert DeNiro, and his respect for Thai people. Story by Joe Cummings. Photo by Brent Madison.

Seated comfortably on a love seat in the VIP Room of the Shangri-La Hotel, Jeremy Irons fiddles with a compact rolling machine, nonchalantly sprinkling black Halfzware shag tobacco onto a rectangle of chocolate-brown cigarette paper. The tall, velvet-voiced actor is in town to promote *Being Julia*, a film based on Somerset Maugham's 1947 novel *Theatre* and directed by arty Hungarian István Szabó. Irons plays an ex-actor theatre owner whose wife, an aging diva (Annette Bening) of the stage, seeks a passion that her husband and the theatre are apparently no longer capable of delivering.

Although Maugham is most known today as a novelist and short story writer, his first flush of success was as a playwright. Like Maugham, Irons enjoyed an early career in live theatre. The cream, unstructured linen jacket he's wearing today looks like it was made to warm actors waiting between scenes in drafty stage wings. Asked whether his experience on the boards helped him understand his character in *Being Julia*, he conceded that, "The world I inhabited, in the film, was a world that was very familiar to me."

His way of articulating a point flirts with the academic, suggesting that Irons can detach himself from the process of acting at will. His baritone voice, though seemingly soft, easily cuts through the racket of coffee cups knocked over in the hallway outside.

Because the film was held up at customs in Rome, I try to shift the conversation towards a self-appraisal of his career, and ask why he has taken supporting roles in his five most recent films. His frankness is simultaneously charming and disarming. "Because I wanted to work and there were no leading roles I was interested in."

"When I read a good script, it's like reading a good book. You think, 'Ah, I want to be part of that'. Then I look at the character. Is it a character I've played before? Because filming is actually quite tedious. Unless you're really fascinated by the

character you're playing, it can be exceedingly tedious.

"In the case of *Being Julia*, I also wanted to work with this director, and with Annette Bening. She's an extraordinarily professional actress, very hardworking. To watch her create her performance as Julia was a great privilege."

And what about his more commercial films like *Dungeons and Dragons*, and *Time Machine*? "Sometimes I'll do a film purely because I need to earn the money." Irons purses his lips to draw on another hand-rolled cigarette, knits his brow as if to elicit sympathy, exhales and then breaks into a wry grin. "Around the time I contracted for those movies, I'd bought an old medieval castle in Ireland that needed heavy restoration."

Having been a staunch Jeremy Irons fan ever since the notorious BBC series *Brideshead Revisited* in the 80s, I'd like to know which of his films were the most challenging, and which ones he still feels the most passionate about.

Without hesitation, he leans forward to stub out his cigarette and replies, "*The Mission*. I watched it again only a week ago after not having seen it for 15 years, and I was amazed at what a good film it is. An actor always remembers the movies that were the most fun to make, and for me that was *The Mission*. At the time, it was also a huge leap for me as I was working against Robert DeNiro. Or with Robert DeNiro, though at times it felt more like against. That was very difficult for an actor relatively new to the screen."

"Lolita was also a great challenge because I had to make a man who behaved in a very immoral, antisocial way likeable and understandable to an audience. I'm very proud of that performance. Other than that, I'd say *Dead Ringers* and *Damaged* held up the most challenging roles."

Asking him whether an actor who excels at playing twisted characters (Irons won an Oscar for his role as real-life hi-so murderer Claus Von Bulow in 1990's *Reversal of Fortune*) has any affinity for normal holiday pursuits, he replies, "I tend not to travel outside my work very much. The most I ever traveled was during the filming of *The Mission*, when I knocked around South America for five weeks. A couple of years ago I went to Nepal and trekked for three weeks. In the main, on my holidays I'll rent a boat somewhere and sail."

"I've never been to Thailand before, but I love it, it's great. Of course it's important to stay in touch with Asian audiences, marketing-wise, and that was my first motivation for attending the festival. But it's very pleasant here. I love being out on water, and was lucky to have made two films in Venice. So yesterday I was out on the khlongs all day. If I could look at

"Lolita was also a great challenge because I had to make a man who behaved in a very immoral, antisocial way likeable and understandable to an audience

people's houses built along the river's edge for another hundred years, I'd be happy."

Warming up to the subject, Irons continues. "It's very difficult to get to know a culture when you only have 10 days. I went to Patpong last night, to observe the various activities there. Drank some beer, watched the girlies. It was great. It's part of the experience here. You have to take a look at everything."

Asked how he felt being in Thailand so soon after the Boxing Day tsunami, he confesses, "What has impressed me, and what continues to impress me, is the Thai propensity for forgetting and getting on with life. In England and the West, we tend to dwell upon our tragedies, almost to an unhealthy extent. Maybe it's something about the religion here, where people know that tragedy is expected, but that life goes on."

I ask Irons whether he's aware that Somerset Maugham was a famous guest at the Oriental Hotel, where he's staying. "Yes, the idea crossed my mind that it was appropriate, since *Being Julia* is based on a novel of his." Jeremy smiles, "But they've put me in the James Michener suite."

"We're children of the 60s," said Michael Douglas. "We will always be political." That's how Douglas, the consummate movie star, described the global activism and artistic expressions of himself and long-time friend, director Joel Schumacher (*The Lost Boys*, *St. Elmo's Fire*, *Phantom of the Opera*), who was in town to accept his Golden Kinnaree "Career Achievement" Award.

"I wish that film changed the world," said Joel. "That's one reason why Mike and I have both dared to create characters of ambivalent morality." (Now how many of us would fit that description?)

Mr D added that: "Movies are a struggle between art and commerce. You've really gotta be in love [with the process of making movies]. Otherwise, it makes for a very bad marriage."

That's partly why he's found other avenues to more directly effect change, such as working with the UN on issues like global disarmament and poverty.

"The world spends US\$900 billion dollars a year on the military. It would only take US\$50 billion dollars a year in order to completely eliminate poverty," said Douglas.

When I mentioned the fact that throughout his career he has tended to represent his baby-boomer generation through its various upheavals by playing young, idealistic, rebellious types (not to mention producing the Oscar-winner set in a lunatic asylum *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*), 80's greed barons (*Wall Street*) and materialistic snobs (*The Game*), to characters who eventually become disillusioned (*Falling Down*), he said: "None of that was intentional. My first responsibility is entertainment, then, hopefully, we can represent something with some substance. I do like to mix it up, and I do tend to play contemporary roles. I can't play a hippy my whole life!"

With his characteristic deep, engaging voice, he spoke eloquently and knowledgeably about Thailand, despite this being his first visit here.

OLD HIPPIES MAKE GOOD

Troy McFadden listens to actor Michael Douglas and director Joel Schumacher talk about entertainment versus activism in cinema and the actor's newfound family-first philosophy. Photo by Brent Madison.



"The world spends US\$900 billion dollars a year on the military. It would only take US\$50 billion dollars a year in order to completely eliminate poverty."

- Michael Douglas

He immediately acknowledged the tsunami tragedy (making a donation on behalf of the film festival to Prime Minister Thaksin) as well as the recent subway accident, and was eager to convey how well Thais are perceived by the rest of the world. "The way in which you have responded has shown the rest of the world how special that your society is. It shows me much about your culture, and much about your hearts."

At this point, the press conference was over and several of us were afforded a semi-private interview in the nearby VIP room, with only Mr. Douglas present. Some dumb shit from a major local paper that I won't name started off the session with the most inane question: I would've had to work awfully hard to come up with something as insulting as, "Your career seems to have come to a virtual standstill while that of your wife's has

skyrocketed. Is this by design?" God, and this journalist was English – he's supposed to have better manners!

Douglas really impressed me with his poise and character by calmly responding, "Yes, it is very much by design. I have really enjoyed sharing time with my family, learning Spanish and spending time at home. That's one of the great things about a 25-year difference in age. We're at different places, and it works out well. I would never have chosen family over career at that point in my life, but now I can."

HISTORY FAVOURS THE BOLD



The director of such controversy-prone classics as *Platoon* and *Natural Born Killers*, as well as the screenwriter of disturbing films like *Midnight Express* and the *Scarface* remake, Oliver Stone chats with Troy McFadden about his love of Thailand and his latest epic, *Alexander*.

Given the films he's made, it was surprising that when I referred to him as being "a hero of the left" Oliver Stone refused to accept the mantle.

"I am not an ideologue," he protested. "I consider myself an independent [politically] and I always have." He went on to say that he is rooting for the administration, despite opposing US involvement in Iraq. "We need to get out of there," said Oliver, while also reminding Asia that "the [American] media does not report overseas protests well; we are struggling with a media that is corporate controlled, and it is very easy to fool the masses. The war in Iraq was sold to the American people like a

TV commercial. Frighteningly enough, everything that George Orwell wrote about is coming true, and the dead Iraqis are the major victims."

He certainly doesn't sound like a right-winger, now does he?

Stone has great reverence for Thailand and its people, and feels a deep connection with this part of the world. He first came to Asia when he was 19, then again at 21 as a soldier in Vietnam. He has also filmed several movies here in the kingdom, including *Alexander* as well as *Heaven and Earth* (shooting that movie in Phang-na province was one of the best experiences of his life, he enthused).

"Westerners should visit Thailand in order to experience and



learn from the Thai people's spirituality, openness, and gentleness. I sincerely hope that the tsunami does not prevent the continuation of many foreigners coming here to learn, as they have for many hundreds of years, to open their minds and their hearts."

After praising the Thai people for their efforts and genuine caring in regards to the crisis, he waxed philosophic: "Such an event reminds us how fragile that life really is, and how quickly it can be gone... and this puts a good perspective on terrorism."

He elaborated on his Asian affinities when talking about his latest epic, *Alexander*. "In the movie, Aristotle tells the young Alexander that 'the East has a way of swallowing men's dreams,'" said Stone. "It is interesting to note that Alexander never returned home from Asia. In fact, he ended up becoming more and more Asian over time, and ended up paying the ultimate price for it, being murdered by his own countrymen largely because of their belief in Western superiority and their desire to keep the cultures separate."

"Remember that Alexander believed in a fusion of East and West. He was one of the first to attempt this kind of thing, and we would do well to remember his unique and positive contribution. If he was alive today, [the wars in] Vietnam and Iraq would not have happened," he said, adding that, "I love the East. I have an Asian wife and child, and I would be

honoured to die here.”

When I asked this practicing Buddhist how his spirituality had influenced his art, he responded by saying that his own evolution and understanding of certain concepts are apparent in his work. “When I first started out, the ‘enemy’ in my movies was more external, more obvious. As I have grown, I have come to understand the idea that there is no ‘enemy’ but that which is within us. This began to influence my writing and direction. You can see that I started representing more of these internal demons in later work.”

Alexander has received some negative reviews, mostly regarding the homoerotic elements within it (a very minor aspect of the story), but I would imagine that disapproval is nothing new for this iconoclastic auteur.

“*Alexander* has been well received overseas. While I was not interested in breaking ground with sexual politics, ‘Americans,’ as Angelina Jolie recently said, ‘are juvenile in matters of sexuality.’” He went on to give examples of military heroes like Julius Caesar who are well-known for their bisexuality. “It is interesting to note that in Korea, a very homophobic society, they didn’t cut such scenes from the movie, even though [the censors] wanted to. It opened very strongly, which shows that even a society like that can overcome such aversions if they have a sincere interest in history.”

When asked what his next project might be, he responded: “In all honesty I have been so involved with *Alexander* that I really haven’t had time to think about it yet.” But when asked what subjects still remain to be tackled, his passions bubbled forth as he simply stated “too many to mention”.

Lastly, I inquired about his famous (or to some infamous) partying, something us hedonists at FARANG (and many of our readers) can well relate to. He laughed and said: “Yes, I enjoy myself. I make no distinction between sin and pleasure, and I believe that pleasure is a gift from God.” With that, I fought the urge to ask him out to a beer garden somewhere near a wat... or perhaps even a “holy smoke,” but being the budding professional that I am, I bit my tongue.

Whether he is examining the absurdity and horrors of US involvement in Southeast Asia (*Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Heaven and Earth*), the shameful aspects of its political machinery (*JFK*, *Nixon*), or the renaissance that was the 60s, as



“Alexander never returned home from Asia. In fact, he ended up becoming more and more Asian over time.” – Oliver Stone

well as its dark side (*The Doors*), Stone has had the courage, and the artistic integrity to portray these subjects with great passion and brilliant direction. He has been widely criticised for these efforts, mostly by the powers-that-be, who are threatened by anyone intrepid enough to make a public statement that counters the status quo.

But as the narrator in *Alexander* says, “History favors the bold”. With 11 Academy Award nominations to date, Oliver Stone is the living proof of that assertion.

PARTY WITH THE STARS

With the eye and the libido of a Hollywood tabloid reporter, Troy McFadden watches the stars get down and dirty, drunk and debauched.

When our chauffeured mini-van arrived at the Queen Sirikit Convention Centre for the “Gala Event”, the awards ceremony, I, the first one to step out, was greeted by a screaming mob at the entrance. At first I figured they thought I was someone famous, or perhaps they were still excited because a carload of Thai movie stars had just exited ahead of us; but no, I was to later find out that it was a “rent-a-crowd”, a self-defining concept that I had never before



Troy and date



“Everyone kept up their pogoing, and once and a while they tossed in some simulated sex acts with each other.

encountered and now will never forget. Oh well, it felt cool while it lasted, as I strolled down the red carpet into movie star central, wearing my Bt6,000 tuxedo.

Lots of important-looking people were wandering about the regal lobby of the centre, competing for attention. Aside from the movie stars and their entourages, the film industry people and assorted Klingons, there were a myriad of unique displays, small “islands” of Thai culture. Some featured indigenous crafts; others showcased dancing bird-women (the *kinnarees* whom the awards are named after) and other figures from Thai mythology. Most featured food, which were the ones I went for, in order to layer my stomach from the glasses of champagne I was swiping off the trays that kept passing my way.

After schmoozing and smiling for the cameras a lot (hey, you never know who’s watching), I entered (along with everyone else) into the inner sanctum, a huge auditorium filled with many regal-looking dinner tables, loads of movie cameras lining the back, and a brightly lit stage at the front. Since most of my meals consist of a bowl of noodles on the side of the road, these were the most pleasant dining environs I had experienced in quite a while.

Then we were treated to a bit of traditional Thai theatre, a delicious meal, and a blessedly short awards ceremony that featured some Hollywood celebs, a few prominent Thai and European filmmakers, and of course several politicians using the occasion to look cool and win votes. (For a full rundown of the winners check www.bangkokfilm.org though it strangely makes no mention of director Joel Schumacher’s Lifetime Achievement award.)

But there were plenty of after-parties during the festival at cool venues like Bed, Q Bar, and Hu’u, a new restaurant and lounge. But the first big night of revelry was one of the sexiest and most memorable. It was not a very happening affair until local filmmaker Kaprice Kea (*The Butterfly Man*) and I ended up watching a not-to-be-named famous cinematographer jumping up and down with a motley crew, including famous Chinese-American actress Bai Ling. Said “DP” (that’s cool movie jargon for “Director of Photography”) drunkenly waved to Kaprice, and we shared some slurred words. Everyone kept up their pogoing, and once and a while they tossed in some

simulated sex acts with each other. I was wishing I had a camera (bad journalist, bad) because the hot vixen from *Star Wars 3* was simulating oral sex with the cameraman.

But soon enough I kicked myself even harder for not having a camera. The Asian diva started up an erotic solo dance, and as she twirled towards me, the top of her dress dropped down, exposing her aesthetically pleasing mammaries. Was it a sign of sexual angst, poverty, or greed that I immediately thought of how much a tabloid in Hong Kong might pay me for that kind of money shot? Sorry to get all *People* magazine on your asses, but move over Janet Jackson, there’s a new wardrobe malfunctioner in town, and her breasts are actually real.

Mystique, as usual, rocked. I particularly liked it because I was able to sit in the VIP area with local celebs and scads of Russian models, some of whom I actually know from castings. Of course, they wanted nothing to do with an old man like me but provided quality, ambient eye-candy nonetheless. So I enjoyed the *hors d’ouerves* and pondered a holiday in the Ukraine or one of the Whatthefuckistans: cheap prices and hot chicks (hey, I was drunk, gimme a break). Then I caught myself – “Hey, dude, you’ve already got that here!” Also, I made my best contact yet, with a manager from LA. Holy Hollywood Batman, here I come!

Making the evening even better was the appearance of “the Kit Kats”, the local dance troupe now making regular appearances within Mystique’s “friendly gothic” interior. These girls actually dance with spirit and soul, unlike the passive movements of go-go girls at other local clubs. Of course, these beauties are sexy, professional dancers, and NOT available, as made apparent by their hovering, overly protective boyfriends.

The new Brazilian restaurant and bar Fogovivo was the host venue after the gala awards event. It was fun and crowded, and I enjoyed viewing a classic moment when the lovely Bai Ling left with director Rodrigo Prieto, who had just received his Golden Kinnaree “Crystal Lens Award”. As they were leaving, I overheard two women being catty: “I can’t believe she’s going with him. She’s sleeping her way to the top”. To which the other replied: “Her career won’t last doing that.”



LESSONS LEARNED

Vicky Bell winds up teaching English in a concrete Chinese hell-hole where dogs are a culinary delicacy.



I 'll give you Bt45,000, fly you there and back and pay for your visa. Plus, the accommodation is free, en-suite bathroom, hot water and food included."

With an offer like that I'd be foolish to say no. Admittedly, I'd never taught before, but I thought I'd give it a go. If nothing else, a hot shower was enough to seal the deal.

What I didn't know was that Chang Ping was a concrete jungle, built overnight, with the atmosphere of a funeral, and the personality of a lentil. It was going to be a long five weeks. From the Land of Smiles to the land of "Smile? No, I'm afraid not."

As things progressed I began to wonder if the Chinese people ever had time off, or spent any quality time with their heads in a toilet bowls like most 20-year-olds in a drunken stupor – apparently not.

As the only female Farang in the compound we were to call home, where our school was also located, the evenings my colleagues and I spent with red wine and local beer were frowned upon, but at Bt60 a bottle we were not going to be dissuaded.

Chinese culture was difficult to fathom. Over lunch I quickly learned that using your hands to eat is a *faux pas*. If, however, you want to spit bones on the table, or phlegm on the floor of a restaurant, or take your shirt off, feel free – no one will raise an eyebrow.

It reminded me of a time I'd spent in Patthalung, a province in southern Thailand, sitting with my chin resting on my knee and I was quickly told: "Vicky, *mai soo pahp* [impolite]!" just as the mother of the house walked past in her



bra. There are some cultural norms that I just cannot understand.

Chang Ping itself is stuck in a hazy 80s timewarp, and you'll be hard-pressed to find a bar or a pub. Neon restaurants rule and if you are one for experimenting with your food, there's nothing they won't eat. In five weeks I only saw one dog - the rest had been munched. So be careful what you order, it could be Rover or Fluffkins.

Lunch at the school was interesting, if not completely gut-wrenching at times. I sat down only to find myself surrounded by chickens' feet desperately trying to claw their way out of the bowl in some futile attempt at a reunion with their owners, as well as beaks and heads, even a tasty frog's leg tendon.

Chang Ping is like no other place I have ever been. It felt like I was on a movie set with a prefab backdrop because even the trees at the local park

were man-made.

As for communication, no one speaks English and the beauty of sign language is a foreign concept. Many a time I found myself faced with blank expressions or "What is this funny Farang doing?" looks. A dance, a jig ... anything but trying to communicate, it would seem.

So I'd suggest avoiding Chang Ping if you can, but like all learning experiences, you never leave completely empty-handed. One afternoon a friend and I asked to be given Chinese names. Matthew was graced with "Ma Fay" meaning, quite poetically I thought, a horse with wings.

My name, Vicky, was altered somewhat to "Wey Kay", meaning... "ice cream factory". I was overjoyed with my fabulous new nickname, and left with my head held high. At least it beats eating canines.

Hoofing in Saigon

Saigon is booming with new visitors and if you haven't got round to it yet, you should. FARANG's rambling sawbones

Dr Larry Sebring takes you on his personal tour of the city's finest bits and pieces, and offers sage advice on how not to get burned. Photos by Doc Larry too.

One of the most vibrant up-and-coming cities in Southeast Asia, Ho Chi Minh City can be frustrating for newcomers. The country is still ramping up its tourism industry and not everyone has got the message that ruthlessly cheating tourists is a bad long-term play. The motorbike traffic gets old quickly and the heat can be incapacitating. After my first month as an expat in the city, I wanted to leave; two years later I am still coming back.

I spend most of my days in the city hub, District One, officially named "Saigon". The name still applies to the city centre and most of the locals call the whole town by its former name. The other strange irony is that free enterprise is thriving in the streets these days to a degree far surpassing the capitalist states of the West.

First thing in the morning, I emerge from my hotel onto Le Thanh Thon where I make the first death-defying crossing of the motorbike-infested streets. I begin my walk along Pasteur Avenue and the beautiful, grand old architecture of the Ho Chi Minh City Museum with its massive garden, completed by a Russian built tank, a US fighter bomber and a helicopter. Today, a young teacher herds her chatty gaggle of girls past these remnants of destruction. The lovely old museum harbours an interesting



collection of natural history, archaeological finds, and of course war mementos. My favourite exhibit is the stuffed water buffalo on the second floor. It also seems to be the most popular place in Ho Chi Minh for wedding pictures.

Next I turn right onto Nguyen Du Street and weave through breakfast-munching locals sipping coffee, sitting on small stools by the street vendors. A bit further down, in sight of the huge Saint Mary's Cathedral, I pull up into Highlands Coffee on the corner of Nguyen Du and Dong Khoi for my morning cup of Vietnamese-style "drip coffee white" – an intense brew mixed with condensed milk.

I visit my friend, Dr John, at a local

expatriate clinic, where he reminds me that all expats and their families should be de-wormed every six months or so (relax; it's only a couple of pills). On that note, we head off to lunch.

Vietnamese food is some of the best in Southeast Asia. Not as spicy as Thai, it depends on fresh herbs, fruits and spices more than chilli. Fish sauce is ubiquitous, delicious and addictive (the stories about it smelling bad are all rubbish). At least once a day I will have a large steaming bowl of Pho (pronounced "fur") – the staple of Vietnam – hot soup with fresh beef, noodles and a few greens. Pho 24 – Vietnam's answer to MacDonald's – serves up a nice Pho, fast food-style.



Next comes District Five – Cholon, the Chinatown of Ho Chi Minh. Two things worth seeing here are the Chinese medicine shops and the Pagodas. Entering the main spice street in Cholon, I'm greeted by a shop filled with preserved animal foetuses, including deer and dogs as well as lizards and snakes in a glass display case, along with several shark skeletons with fins intact. All manner of more conventional ingredients: mushrooms, ginseng and spices line the shelves.

Late afternoon, a 10,000 Dong (US\$63 cents) motorbike taxi hauls my carcass to Pham Ngu Lao – Ho Chi Minh's Khaosan Road. John has knocked off work and we stroll down the side streets past mini-hotels; six to ten USD per night for aircon and bath with hot water.

For gifts and souvenirs there are two main choices: Pham Ngu Lao or the famous Ben Thanh market. There is more stuff at Ben Thanh, but the small shops at Pham Ngu Lao have some cool stuff. For name brand clothing you couldn't afford back home, head to Saigon Square on Hai Ba Trung street behind the Central Post office.

We stop for a beer at Allez-Boo, a major landmark on the corner of the main strip. The Vietnamese food here is tasty, but we decide to get off the main drag to the next alley over and eat at the Asian Kitchen – uninspiring name but with excellent cheap food and beer. While you eat, you will be approached by the book ladies, who earn their bowl of rice

by lugging around huge stacks of copied books for sale for about US\$3 each.

There are heaps of pubs in Pham Ngu Lao and a night pub-crawling the area is good fun; but the more adventurous should try Apocalypse Now, on Thi Sach near the intersection with Dong Du, which has evolved from an expat hangout to the place where the young and fashionable, locals and tourists, meet after 11 pm. There are numerous other bars nearby, ranging from innocent beer stalls with football matches on the TV, to the billiard clubs overflowing with young Vietnamese hostesses who are delighted to spend all night playing pool and chatting as long as the drinks are flowing. A large cluster of the more interesting night venues are on Hai Ba Trung Street, which is behind the City Opera House.

Dong Khoi is the main tourist artery in the city and lined with bars and eateries of the PG-rated, sterilized-for-tourists variety. One exception, and a favourite expat hangout, is The Underground at 69 Dong Khoi, offering a tasty barbeque early in the evening and becoming a lively bar late at night.

At the end of Nguyen Hue Avenue at the intersection of Le Than Thon is the People's Committee Hall – a spectacular landmark fronted by a statue of Ho Chi Minh himself. This is a great place to visit in the evening to watch the locals and get a feel for the rhythm of the city.

The local authorities seem to have street crime under control, and the most

ubiquitous form of relieving you of your hard earned cash is old-fashioned overcharging and scams.

I was once approached late at night by an incredulous young Aussie: "Can you help us mate? They want US\$80 for a round of drinks!" Turns out he and his buddies had violated the first rule of travel in Southeast Asia: ask the price first! Despite my gallant efforts at playing ambassador/expat Farang advocate, the mamasan was not persuaded, and the hapless Aussies had to fork over \$20 each for a few drinks with the girls. Not all bars are this aggressive; most are friendly and play fair, so ask first and have a better night.

Late night taxis are a scam just like every other city in Southeast Asia, only worse than most. Drivers hang around outside the nightclubs and have a "broken" meter. More insidious are the guys who accelerate the meter settings, doubling or tripling the price. Catch a ride well away from the big bars – there are plenty of legitimate taxis around the big hotels and in the city shopping areas. As a rough guideline, most fares around the city centre should be less than 35,000 Dong. Airport to the city centre should be 60,000 Dong or less.

In spite of the irritations, with a little common sense and some street savvy, you can enjoy this beautiful, exotic city, with its world class cheap food, excellent sightseeing and as much nightlife as you can handle.





BUSH BABIES

What the koala is to Australia, the tarsier is to the Philippines. Already endangered by hunters, and by tourists keeping them as pets, these creatures often commit suicide in captivity, reports writer and photographer **Calvin Tang**

Motoring around the Chocolate Hills on the Filipino island of Bohol, I searched far and wide for the rumoured “bush babies”. Not the whining, alcoholic daughters of the current US President, but rather the animal erroneously referred to as the world’s smallest monkey. (Actually, it’s related to the lemur and the tree shrew.) With a height of less than five inches (excluding tail), the tarsier’s most prominent feature is its huge eyes. Each one is larger than its entire brain, and nearly twice the size of a human eye. The disproportionate size of its eyes compared to the rest of its body lends it a cartoon-like appearance.

As I gently plucked a tarsier off of a nearby branch, I noticed that its head swiveled around nearly 180 degrees to gaze at me. Being a nocturnal creature, the little guy looked drowsy, and its eyelids drooped lazily and its pupils shrank nearly to pin-holes in the bright mid-afternoon sunlight.

Tarsiers inhabit four islands in the southern and central parts of the Philippines, as well as several islands in Indonesia.

There are five distinct sub-types, with the Filipino breed being the cutest. Mostly they subsist on lizards and insects, leaping like frogs across distances of three metres from branch to low-hanging branch. Their long, furless tails help to perform this predatory balancing act. At a meagre four ounces, the tarsier keeps its hide safe from predators such as the owl, by making its home in small burrows in the trunks of trees.

Though it’s not yet on the endangered species list, that dubious distinction seems imminent. In Manila, they are sold to tourists and kept in enclosures on the side of the road on many of the islands where they live naturally. Usually, they

“The tarsier comes out and savagely mutilates the poor lizard and brings it back to its den for a feast with its comrades.

only live two to five years in captivity though their natural lifespan is more than 13. In a bid to escape confinement, some commit suicide by smashing their heads against the walls, or the bars of their cages.

The government may not have the funds to protect them, but an organisation set up by businessmen on Bohol, known as the Philippine Tarsier Foundation Inc., has made a forest sanctuary for them.



“In captivity, the female tarsier has been observed developing a vaginal plug after copulation as a natural chastity belt.”

Another good place to view a tarsier in its natural environment is in the Tangkoko National Park on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. Here you can also see hornbills and black macaques. Most likely your guide will pluck some unfortunate lizard off of the path and tie it to a branch near the inhabited tree. After a few moments the tarsier comes out and savagely mutilates the poor lizard, bringing it back to its den for a feast with its comrades. Though this is a bit gruesome (for the lizard and the traveller), at least you are not contributing to the further capture of wild tarsiers.

The creature has a sweet bird-like trill used to communicate and woo its mates. Giving birth to only one offspring per year, the tarsier's mating season begins in April or May. In captivity, the female tarsier has been observed developing a vaginal plug after copulation, as a natural chastity belt. Thank goodness a human equivalent has yet to materialize, though “Piss off, loser!” tends to work pretty well.

In all, viewing the tarsier ‘monkey’ is a pleasant experience, but a bit saddening when you see tourists blinding them with flash bulbs as they try in vain to remain asleep during the day. Since their cuddly appearance is more of a liability than an asset these days, you may not have many more years to see them in the wild.



Swift Courtships

Looking for love in all the wrong places? **Daniel Cooper** penetrates Bangkok's speed-dating scene.

Photographs provided by **BNOW**.



I've always been a little suspicious of matchmaking services. My parents never chose a wife for me, I've never met a professional go-between, I've never even been on a blind date. I did once post an online personal: "Desperado seeks similar for unsatisfying, humiliating couplings." And I actually got a response. Anyway, those services are for guys who can't pull a bird. So I wasn't sure what attending Bangkok Network of Women's (BNOW) speed-dating event would do for my lady-killing reputation (i.e. James Bond, not Ted Bundy).

Speed-dating, fast-dating or mini-dating came about in the Jewish community of LA in the 80s and has become particularly popular in similarly socially constipated communities such as Japan and Singapore. How it works is like this: An even number of single men and women come together for a series of five-minute 'dates'. Every five minutes you switch partners and at the end you've had a quick conversation with each woman in the room. After the meeting you mark on your scoresheet if you'd like to contact the person again. The sheets are collected at the end of the event, collated, and people who have both marked 'yes' are put in touch with each other.

Surprisingly this is not a competitive event and there are no prizes given for those with the most pulling-power; it's more of an ice-breaker for the busy or shy to meet people for romance and networking opportunities.

So the fateful night comes around. It's a benefit gig for the Soi Dog Rescue project and I'm hoping they haven't bolstered the numbers by a visit to the pound. Around 80 folks have turned up, many at the last minute which causes chaos on the scoresheets, but things are soon underway. It's a mix of Thais and Farangs, young and old, mostly moneyed professionals,

now clutching their sheets and looking nervous.

The whistle sounds and things are underway. Waiting for a beer at the bar, I'm late for my first date. We've all got a collection of 50 suggested questions like "If you had to write your eulogy, what would it be?" but not, "I love the way you dress, I'd like to watch you sometime."

In five minutes there's little time to get past the basics. Women remain seated and at each blow of the whistle men move seats clockwise, or is it anti-clockwise? Hell, the chairs aren't even in a circle and I'm soon lost, jumping into any empty seat.

Psychologists have been observing speed-dating functions to study mate selection. "Speed dating [offers] us, as psychologists, something that we rarely get in conducting research: A systematic look at the genuine behaviour of people selecting mates," says a University of Pennsylvania professor. What they've discovered is that attraction happens at first glance, matching hobbies and interests have little to do with

it, which makes speed-dating a very effective method of, well, getting laid.

For me, I'm making a lot of professional contacts, meeting women who work in my field and I'm having a great time. Some chats go nowhere: "You're too young for me anyway," (never heard that one before), "but at least we're the same height." Now that's okay.

By the bar, things have fallen apart and people are just wandering around after each whistle blow, but things are looking very serious at the other end of the room where there's a cute young Thai student.

Since people are rotating in order, it's tough for me to get back into the groove but I manage to talk to her. The conversation is awkward and we don't really click and all too soon the whistle blows and the next man in line is eager to take my place.

I drift over to the bar and start chatting with a Japanese executive a year or two older than me. We talk about the event: "It's a bummer you can't smoke in here," I say. "You smoke? Let's go outside for one," she says with relief.

For the rest of the night we sit in the garden, puffing tabs and knocking back beers and getting on like a house on fire. Suddenly the final bell sounds and I mark down a big tick on my sheet, keen to spend more time with her.

A few days later I get my results via email. I've got two matches, not bad since I didn't tick that many boxes. But my Japanese friend isn't among them. Broken-hearted again.

Oh well, in the words of Frank Zappa, "broken hearts are for assholes."

January's speed-dating event raised Bt40,000 which goes to improving the lives of stray dogs across the nation.

HERE & NOW

**The Latest Deals on
Accommodation,
Sights, Eating
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. Prices range from Bt140-800. Some of the group include: **Sawasdee Bangkok Inn** 02-280-1251, **Sawasdee Krungthep Inn** 02-629-0079, **Welcome Sawasdee Inn** 02-629-2321, **Sawasdee Smile Inn** 02-629-2340-1, **Sawasdee Khaosan Inn** 02-629-4798-9.

Buddy Lodge

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

Nana Plaza Inn

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

D&D Inn

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

Thai Cozy House

Bt650-1,000 (including breakfast), 111/1-3 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.



The Best On Khaosan Road

D & D Inn

Lifes little luxuries at a price you can afford in the central location of Bangkok



- Swimming Pool
- Satellite TV
- 24 Hours Reception & Safetybox Service
- Sun Bathing Terrace
- Thai Massage
- Beauty Salon
- Thai Cooking Class
- Fantastic View of Grand Palace
- 24 Hours Security
- Price Start from 450-1,350 Baht
- All rooms include Breakfast

68-70 Khaosan RD., Phranakorn, Bangkok 10200 Thailand Tel: (662) 629-0526-8 Fax: (662) 629-0529

www.khaosanby.com

Email: ddinn@khaosanby.com

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 chi-gong, self-defence classes, massage and even serves health drinks to knock back on the terrace after a hard day's healing.

THONBURI

SHED OF THE ROYAL BARGES

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

When: Daily, 9am-5pm

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

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

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



SONGKRAN MIYOMSANE FORENSIC MEDICINE MUSEUM

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

When: Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm

Cost: Free

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

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

DUSIT

DUSIT PARK

Where: Ratchawithi Road

When: Daily, 9am-4pm

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

Way to go: Bt40 tuk tuk or taxi from Khaosan On the lush grounds of this park is the golden teak Vimanmek Mansion (well worth the trip), where King Rama V once lived and held court, along with museums containing HM the King's photos, Thai arts and handicrafts, sacred white elephants, Royal carriages and memorabilia.

DUSIT ZOO

Where: Ratchawithi Road

When: Daily, 8am-6pm

Cost: Bt30 for adults; Bt5 for kids

Way to go: Bt40 tuk tuk or taxi from Khaosan Probably the cheapest zoo in the world, this is a great spot to while away an afternoon in the company of rare Asian cattle, hornbills and shudder-inducing snakes and water dragons. The monkey cages are by far the liveliest area. Decent food, a lake and paddle-boats, too. On weekends it's crowded with Thai families.

SUKHUMVIT

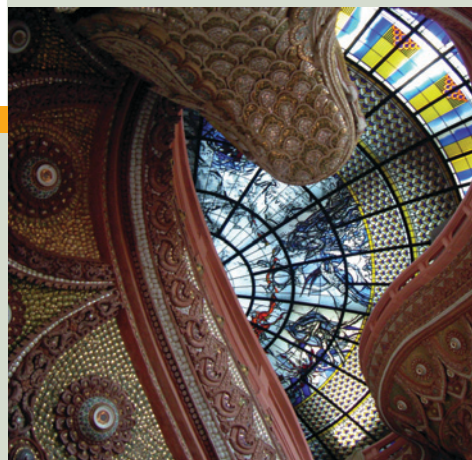
THE SNAKE FARM

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

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

Cost: Bt70

Thrill to snake-handling demonstrations, watch cobras being milked of their venom and have your photo taken with a firehose-



thick python. Before the demonstrations of daredevilry, there's also a slide show about the serpents of Thailand and what to do if one bites you when Crocodile Dundee isn't in the vicinity. Also on display are some living and dead snakes at what's officially called the Queen Saowapha Memorial Institute, which was set up nearly 80 years ago to produce anti-venom serum for the snake-bitten.

JIM THOMPSON HOUSE

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

Way to go: National Stadium station on the Skytrain

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

Cost: Adult Bt100, Students Bt50

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

WAT MAHABUT

Where: Sukhumvit Soi 77, Soi 7

When: Free

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

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

LUMPINI

LUMPINI PARK

Where: Rama IV Road

When: Daily, 6am-8pm

Cost: Free

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

A refreshing green lung in the midst of pestilent Bangkok. In the mornings and evenings, old people perform tai chi, joggers

stop for a medicinal shot of snake's bile and buff chaps work out at the outdoor gym. In between, picnickers loaf and horny young couples coo. On weekends expect diverse musical and theatrical performances. But the best spectacle is the 6pm public aerobics attended by hundreds.

PRATUNAM

HILTON HOTEL FERTILITY SHRINE

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

When: Early morning to early evening.

How Much: Dick all

Way to Go: Canal 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.

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.

Little Park of Horrors

Billed as a "connoisseurs' Guide to Cambodia, Laos, Thailand & Vietnam", the new anthology *To Asia with Love* features dozens of stories about the region's hidden gems: obscure restaurants, nature trails, temples, festivals, adventure tours, and macabre museums. This excerpt is by **Jim Algie**.

Schoolgirls play badminton here; teenagers shoot hoops on the concrete basketball court; people of all ages work out at the outdoor gym, go through the slow motions of tai chi, and jog around the flower-brightened park. But then you notice a row of vacant prison cells on the north side, and guard towers standing like big stone sentinels.

Welcome to Romanee Lart Park, once the site of Maha Chai Prison, Bangkok's most draconian penitentiary. Built by the French some 100 years ago, most of it was torn down back in 1990.

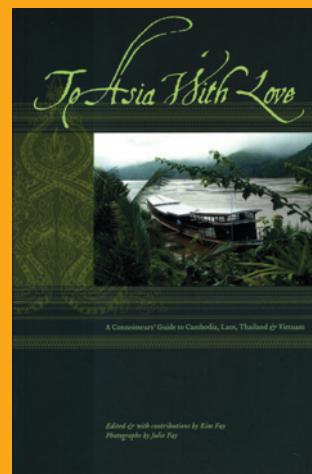
In his cult autobiography, *The Damage Done: Twelve Years of Hell in a Bangkok Prison* (1998), convicted heroin trafficker Warren Fellows recounts some of his hellish experiences in Maha Chai, like being locked in a "darkroom" for 23 hours and 55 minutes a day. The cell was so cramped there was not even enough room to lay down, and some of the prisoners, left there for months at a time, ate flattened cockroaches mixed with fish sauce in order to survive. If that wasn't enough, the sadism of the guards goes far, far beyond anything in *Midnight Express*. In one particularly nauseating episode, Fellows (who was imprisoned there in the late 70's) writes how a guard forced a bunch of the prisoners to stand in a septic tank, chin-deep in excrement for many hours, because they'd been playing a dice game in their cell.

To check out Maha Chai's legacy of barbarity, the harshest penal tortures from Siam of yesteryear, as well as the old machine gun used to execute prisoners at Bang Kwang Prison in Bangkok, head over to the Corrections Museum in the southeast corner of the park, which is just down the street from the Golden Mount, but on the opposite side of the street.

Sommai, a pleasant young Thai man, will be happy to show you around and explain some of the exhibits. On the ground floor, there's a big rattan ball with long, sharp nails on the inside. A prisoner, curled up in a ball, was placed inside it and then an elephant would kick it around. This form of punishment was outlawed a century ago by King Rama V.

Also on display are knives and syringes made by the former inmates. But upstairs is the real coup de grace: a wax-dummy depiction of two machete-wielding executioners dressed up in red outfits, ready to lop the head off a condemned man who sits on the ground blindfolded, clutching three lotus blossoms, a yellow candle, and incense. The hands of the condemned man are tied together with the sacred white thread monks use to bless people and ward off evil.

Because the museum has never appeared in any big travel guides it only receives about 10 foreign visitors a month. So please don't tell any travel guidebook writers about it and, as always, happy horror-mongering. Information about the museum's opening hours is on the opposite page. As for the handsomely laid out and photographed anthology *To Asia with Love*, it can be ordered through the publisher, Things Asian Press, on their website (www.thingsasian.com) for US\$18 dollars. It should be available in local bookshops soon.



FEEDING TIME

Places to Eat: Around Bangkok



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

SILOM AREA

SOI CONVENT (EVENINGS)

Silom area (Saladaeng Skytrain)

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

BLUE ELEPHANT

(CLASSIC AND FRESH, FUNKY THAI)

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

SIROCCO

(CONTEMPORARY MEDITERRANEAN)

63rd Floor, State Tower, Silom Rd (Skytrain Saphan Taksin), 6pm-11pm, Tel: 02-624 9555, www.thedome.com, major cards

The only place in Bangkok equally suitable for a romantic dinner and a suicide attempt. Open air and located on the 63th floor, Sirocco is the highest outdoor restaurant in the world and offers fantastic views across Bangkok (it looks much nicer from up there, believe us), live jazz and contemporary Mediterranean cuisine. Starters will set you back around Bt200-600, whilst mains go for Bt500-2,400. Very busy at present, so reservations are recommended.

INDIAN HUT (NORTHERN INDIAN)

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

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

JESTERS (PACIFIC RIM)

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

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

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 it's 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.

TONGUE THAI (THAI)

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

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

PATARA (THAI)

2 Sathorn 11, South Sathorn Rd, 11:30am-2:30pm, 6pm-10:30pm, Tel: 02-212 6420-1, www.patarathailand.com, major cards

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

ANNA'S CAFÉ (THAI/INTERNATIONAL)

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

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

O'REILLY'S (IRISH/CONTINENTAL)

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


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

MEZZALUNA (ITALIAN)

65th Fl, The Dome, State Tower, Silom Rd. Tel: 02-624 9555, 12-2:30pm and 6pm-11pm, major cards.

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





french & mediterranean café - restaurant

s o f a s
g a r d e n
m u s i c
m a g a z i n e s
f l o w e r s
c r e p e s
b r u n c h
c o u s c o u s
t a p a s
s a l a d s

EST. 1996 & RECOMMENDED IN MOST TRAVEL GUIDE BOOKS

18 Sukhumvit Soi 12
Tel: (02) 653 3990 - 1
www.crepes.co.th
Open Daily: 09:00 - Midnight

BOOK NOW !!

Asiarooms.com

24/7 Call - (66)3-836-4700
more than 12,000 Discounted Hotels



Thai kitchen ad

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 ++).

ANA GARDEN (THAI)

67 Thonglo 3, Sukhumvit 55, Tel: 02-3911762, www.anagarden.com

A fantastic restaurant oasis for escaping the Bangkok mayhem and recharging the soul on Thai food and funky music. As the name suggests, set in a lush tropical garden this is a restaurant that succeeds in keeping up the hip quotient without a dull atmosphere or minimalist decor. Plenty of grilled fodder, cool tunes and liquor to complement the outdoor setting. No need to head off to a club after eating either as there's a perfect after dinner groove den out back with plenty of space for dancing off that barbecued pork or slouching on the sofa.

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.dininginthaailand.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.

ANTONIO'S TRATTORIA (TRADITIONAL ITALIAN)

59/1 Soi Sawasdee, Sukhumvit 31 Rd, Tel: 02-258 4247, 02-258 4108

A bastion of truly authentic Italian food, Antonio's stands out amongst the zillion internationalised Italian eateries around town. Contemporary decor complements a cozy, trattoria style ambience and provides an ideal for setting some real mama-style cooking. An ample a la carte selection covering all bases from antipasti to grill. Well worth going the full monty rather than playing pasta-and-pizza.

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.princess.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)

DA GIOVANNI ITALIAN TRATTORIA

Homemade Pasta and Pizza House
Italian Chef

Buy one Pizza, get one free for the month of February

(Behind Bamboo bar)

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



11:30-2:30pm, 6:00-10:00pm, www.health-at-ease.co.th, Tel. 02-662 0795, major cards

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

TAMARIND CAFÉ (VEGETARIAN FUSION)

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

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

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 Rohipnol, this is the place. The only oyster bar we're aware of in Bangkok, it has an international range of the slippery aphrodisiacs imported from Australia and other Euro-style seafood. They also serve up some delicious British dishes such as roast rib of beef, stilton soup and lobster with orange and port sauce. Plenty of wines and malt whiskies for quality quaffing. Happy hour 5pm-8pm

NIGHT FOOD MARKET (THAI/CHINESE)

Soi 38 (Skytrain Thonglor)

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.

Bourbon St.
Bar & Restaurant
Cajun Creole Cuisine
Boutique Apartments
Daily or Monthly

Bourbon St. Restaurant & Bar
29/4-6 Behind Washington Theatre
Sukhumvit Soi 22, Bangkok 10110, Thailand.
Tel: 0 2259 0328-9 Fax: 0 2259 4318 Homepage: www.bourbonstbkk.com

The Courtyard
(Our Newest Branch)
Seafood - Certified Angus Steaks
Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner 6am - 11pm
Elegantly Comfortable Dining 0 2658 5678-9
Soi Tonson in the Somerset Building
150 metres from Ploenchit BTS Chidlom

NIGHTTRIPPING

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

DRINKS LIST

SUKHUMVIT & AROUND

87

Conrad Bangkok, All Seasons Place, 87 Wireless Road, Tel: 02 690 9999, www.conradhotels.com, major cards

Slick and sumptuous club/bar/restaurant with a 'World Food/Global grooves' theme. Stuff yourself stupid, lounge on the sofas or dance all night to funky disco, reggae and hip-hop.

MYSTIQUE

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

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

TOKYO JOE'S

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

Live music seven nights a week with the top blues, groove and soul bands in BKK on a rotating schedule. These include The Soi Dog Blues Band, Cannonball, Savannah on the weekends, Adam on Acoustic Blues every Monday, and TAB with traditional blues on Tues & Thurs. Small beers are Bt90, Bt150 for large beers. Mixed drinks go from Bt100-150. 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 CM²

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

Hugely popular Novotel disco. Big and glitzy main room chock full of girls following whiskey bottles like moths to a light bulb. The resident DJ spins dance hits in between sets from cover band 'Too Close' (Friday to Wednesday). Get tanked early with the whiskey buffet from 9-10.30pm (Bt444 all you can drink). There's also Sensations karaoke for those who like the sound of their own voice. Pastel Lounge is the place to escape from the beats and relax. Free entry before midnight and a free drink for girls every Monday and guys every Tuesday. Spinning Hip Hop and R&B every night in the main room and The Boom Room are DJs Sit and Lek.

Q BAR

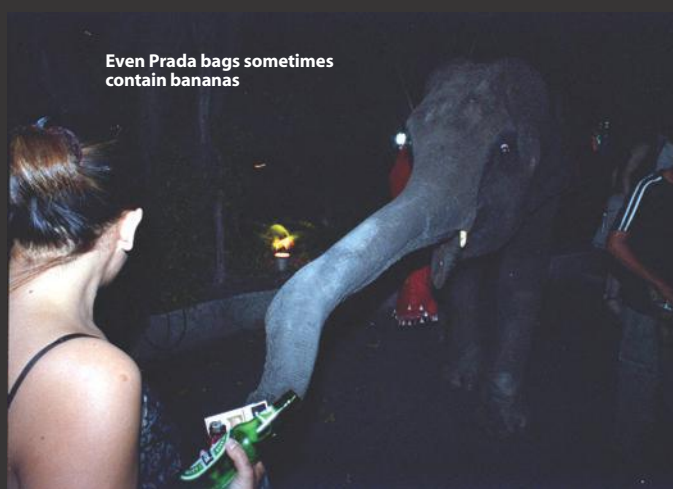
34 Sukhumvit Soi 11. Take quick left at end of the soi. (Skytrain Nana) major cards, Tel. 02-252 3274, www.qbarbangkok.com, major cards except Diners

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

WITCH'S TAVERN

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

Equally good for lounging or partying, the Tavern is pub style with matching menu (Bt85-700) items such as fish and chips, pies and steaks as well as Thai dishes.



Regular and varied live bands playing everything from jazz to hip hop. Ladies night on Wednesday with free girl's drinks from 6pm to 10pm and bingo with cash prizes. Happy hour from 5-9pm.

RCA

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

The place to be if you are young, Thai and out on the pull. RCA is a strip of clubs, pubs and bars. For many years this was teenie-pop central but a number of new places have raised the bar music and class-wise. Most places have outside seating and indoor dancing such as the massive and massively popular Route 66. Up and coming Code is worth checking and cool, arty cinema House offers welcome respite from Hollywood trash. Nearby discos Hollywood and Dance Fever (off Rachadapisek Rd) are gargantuan, whisky-soaked dance halls. Worth a look for those seeking a cultural experience.

FAITH CLUB

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

Ultra-chic night spot resembling a Goth hero's hideout playing funk and chill out during the week and house and trance on the weekends. Very cool core residents hang-out. Upstairs is an intriguing glow-in-the-dark pool table. The week starts with Chillout on Sunday, then Laid Back Mondays. Things pick up with Hip-Hop on Tuesday, Reggae on Wednesday then Techno Groove Thursday. The weekend sarts with Bigbeat Friday and climaxes with Party Uplifting Saturday. Happy hour all Tuesday and Thursday.

NARCISSUS

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

Gaudy and glitzy to the point of being ostentatious. Monster mirror balls and

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

TAWANDANG

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

Microbrewery and mega beer-hall, Tawandang was one of Bangkok's first pubs to brew their booze on-site. And what lovely booze it is. One can choose from weizen, lager, or dunken beers, all brewed to strict German purity standards by a real German brewmaster who pumps out up to 700,000 litres a year, by the half-litre for Bt100. The vast hall is also home to performers, ranging from Thai classical music, to popular indie 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



BAMBOO

Pub and Restaurant

Live Music • Pool
International Menu

71/1 Sukhumvit., Soi 3, Nana Nua, Bangkok 10110 Thailand
Phone: (662) 253 2462 www.bamboobeerbar.com

Free buffet every
Friday from 9:20pm
onwards, all welcome



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 slauibrious 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



The next step in India's global takeover bid

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.

Anja Garden
THE GROOVE KITCHEN CLUB
COME And Experience
THE FUNKIEST DJS
THE GROOJEST MUSIC
AT THE NEWEST PILLAR OF CLUB CULTURE AND THE COOLEST CLUB IN TOWN
67 THONGLO 1-3 SUKHUMVIT 55 BKK TEL : 02-2991662
WWW.ANAGARDEN.COM
Coca-Cola SINGHA JACK DANIEL'S

tapas room club
Silom soi 4
4737, 02 632 7883 / www.tapasroom.com "Best Bar in Bangkok" Metro High Five

CHEAP CHARLIE'S

Sukhumvit Soi 11, first soi on your left. (Skytrain Nana), no cards
Less a bar than a ramshackle lean-to surrounded by stools and a couple of outdoor tables. The place is a booze bonanza for budget drinkers. Buffalo skulls, phallic fetishes, fish mobiles, '60s hits and white fairy lights complete the decor.

SILOM

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

RADIO CITY

Patpong Soi 1
Downstairs from Lucifer's, Radio City offers live music with plenty of seating and plenty of cold beer. But what people really come to see is Thai Elvis or Thai Tom Jones. If you're bummed out by all the touts inviting you to play ping-pong, this place is a welcome respite.

MUZZIK CAFÉ

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

LUCIFERS

Patpong Soi 1, Tel 02-2346902
Fight your way past "You see fucking show!" and "Hello, t-shirt!" and up the stairs to where the prince of darkness shakes his booty. This club is a stayer on the Bangkok carousel and has kept people dancing to House and 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 'nufood menu' which just about sums up the mix of Thai, tex mex and international favourites. Downstairs the bar features prominently in this clean white space. Live music is currently provided seven days a week and this venue is one of the few in Bangkok to feature live blues every weekend from the city's premier blues outfits. Other nights feature jazz, latin and a range of bands catering to every taste.

TAPAS

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-234 4737, 02-632 0920, no cards
The leader in original funky House in Silom Soi 4, playing soulful House. Bt100 entry on weekends and Bt200 on Wednesday. Very crowded on weekends, the upstairs dance floor is intimate and sweaty. Outside seating lets you pose and see all the young, beautiful people as they pose right back at you. DJ Neng, DJ Wut are residents, with DJs Tee and Mike taking the spotlight on Fridays and Saturdays.

THE BALCONY

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-235 5891, www.balconypub.com, major cards
The best Happy Hour in Soi 4 offers cut-rate specials (Bt49) on cocktails and brewskies from 7pm-9pm. Sister bar of Telephone, the gay club across the road -with a phone on each table so you can court the girl or boy of your choice. This is also a good place to be served by boys in shorts or make new friends. Happy hour 6-8pm, house drinks Bt59.

TELEPHONE PUB & RESTAURANT

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-234 3279, www.telephonepub.com
Gay as Christmas, camp as a row of tents. Telephone has been a gay icon since 1987 and set the character for Soi 4 for the following decade. These days most of the soi has lost its pinkness, but Telephone remains fiercely homosexual. The pub also has food which can be consumed at tables out the front—perfect for watching people 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 Egypt-cum-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—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 Rambutni 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 Monument, Tel. 02-622 2571, no cards
Everything from Trance to Hip-Hop to the latest dance beats are on the musical menu, plus requests, in this good-looking, Euro-style venue. Menu has Thai dishes and small Thai beers for Bt80.

PRANAKORN

Just off Ratchadamnoen Klang Road, first Soi west of Thanon Tanoo, 58/2 Soi Damnoen Klang Tai, Tel. 02-522 0282, no cards
This bar is like four different venues in one: on the ground floor, replete with posters for old Marlon Brando and Elvis movies, the DJ plays retro rock and Jazz and there's often live Thai acoustic music. The second floor is an art and photography gallery that sometimes features live music and even theatre. On the third floor, there's more dancey and alternative tunes, along with a pool table and couches. Up top is the roof, with a great view of the illuminated Golden Mount, lots of tables, chilled-out tunes and classic tracks. One of the best things about this venue is the big menu of splendid and affordable Thai dishes. Booze is also cheap. Considering the bar is close to Khaosan and Café Democ, it attracts a surprisingly low quota of white backpacking trash. The majority of the clientele are Thai Bohemians.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELLER'S TAVERN

Across from police station, Tel. 02-629 1988-9, major cards, www.gulliverbangkok.com
The pub with the tuk-tuk over the door on the corner of Khaosan. If you're aching for English football, Farang food or a shot of pool, this is your place. Generous happy-hours mean this place is usually packed with punters. The place has become popular with young Thais looking for close encounters, (careful, some of the women are men) but whatever your fancy, this place has the best air-con in Banglamphu. Now open upstairs as well with several tables for the serious pool player. Happy hour 3-9pm.

AD HERE THE 13TH

13 Samsen Road. Walk up Chakrapong Road from the Police Station end of Khaosan about 400 metres, cross the bridge over the canal and it's on your left. Can't miss it.
The great little blues bar with the strange name. The band, led by guitarist Pong and husky-voiced belting singer Georgia is better than ever now, even if the local constabulary are making the rounds with decibel meters they don't really know how to use. The people are friendly and mostly intelligent, and beers are Bt50-70.



BAR BANGKOK

Q Bar Events - March 2005
Wednesday 2nd March



Presents:
The Return of the Macks
Our legendary mid-week party goes up another gear! DJ Cavo, reunited with Q Bar favorite, Oray One throw down every old skool, hip hop, hip house dance classic in their bags in a bid to raise the Q Bar roof! Head upstairs and check out who our gorgeous celebrity bartender is and try one of their signature cocktails. Only the celebrities will change we'll be Ghetto Fabulous every week!

In association with:



Thursday 31st March
DJ Tynee 
Live and Exclusive from 
(Hong Kong)
Currently a hot talent on the Hong Kong scene, DJ Tynee grew up in New York to the sounds of Louie Vega and Kenny Dope. With skooling like that, no wonder she's turning heads with her sounds all around the region from Beijing to Bangkok. Her sets range from sexy to downright dirty beats that are guaranteed to rock the Q Bar house!

weekly resident dj schedule:
frisky Fridays
dj Joeki & guests - freestyle
saturday night fever
dj Billy V. & guests - house
beat therapy sundays
dj's tul & budda q. - r&b, hip hop
massive Mondays
dj's tul, & cavo - international
eclectic beats
sugar & spice Tuesdays
dj's Billy V. & Joeki
ghetto fabulous Wednesdays
DJs Cavo & Oray One spin classic hip hop
meltdown Thursdays
DJs Billy V and Joeki -
house music all nite long
entertaining 7 days a week, 8 pm to 1 am
kitchen closes 12.30 am
tel. 02 252 3274, #34 sukhumvit soi 11
www.qbarbangkok.com
wap.qbarbangkok.com
pouring new york (big 45 ml.)
measures of bangkok's
largest selection of spirits

dress code: no shorts, sandals or sleeveless shirts on men please. Id. required by everyone (bring copy of your passport) no minors under 20

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 boogyers.

SUNSET STREET

Bang in the middle of Khaosan Rd

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

IMMORTAL BAR

First floor in Bayon Building on Khaosan, no cards

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

THE CLUB

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

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

SUZIE PUB

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

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

THE BANGKOK BAR

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

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

BAGHDAD CAFE

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.

EAT IT LIVE

It's a big month coming up. Things get started with pop-legend **Blondie** playing at the Thai Cultural Centre on Wednesday the 2nd. Tickets aren't cheap though, starting at Bt1,000. Starting on Thursday and running through Friday and Saturday as well is the ever-hilarious **Punchline Comedy** at the Bull's Head. This time round you can see **Phil Butler**, **Craig Campbell** and **Roger Monkhouse** putting themselves on stage for you to laugh at. Book ahead. For vinyl-lovers, Bed Supperclub host **Gilles Peterson** on the 2nd and **Ian Carey** on Friday and Saturday the 25th and 26th. Q Bar's **Ghetto Fabulous Wednesdays** bring a celebrity to serve your drinks upstairs and they've got Hong Kong's disc-spinning diva **DJ Tynee** on Thursday the 31st. Also at the end of the month, Activ Square in Impact Arena hosts an eight-hour music extravaganza including **Avril Lavigne & Simple Plan** from Canada, and local heroes **Modern Dog**, **Futon**, **Paradox**, **AB Normal** and **Thaitanium**.

Thanks to the Roll Call mailing list: rollcall@eastbound-downers.com

Meet to enjoy
Enjoy to meet
at the Barbican



THE BARBICAN Soi Thaniya, off Silom Road Tel: 0 2234 3590



A Local with character.

The Bull's Head Pub & Restaurant Sukhumvit Soi 33/1
Tel 0 2259 4444, www.greatbritishpub.com

PATTAYA'S PARTY ISLAND

Words and Photos by Daniel Cooper

Thailand is famous for its beach-party scene, but that reputation is under threat as the world changes around it. The legendary Full Moon Party enjoys worldwide notoriety, but anyone who's been in the last few years can see it for what it is: a lot of bars playing loud music rather than an organised event. Seasoned ravers are pretty disappointed by the sight of pissed-up backpackers bopping to trance on Had Rin.

So it's nice to see a well-organised event on our shores, bringing in pro, international DJs and the best of local talent. Vulcan Entertainment's inaugural Party Island event, titled "Vulcan Love Launch and Fundraiser" took place on Pattaya's Koh Lan on Saturday the 12th of last month. Things kicked off at noon and the sand was flying until 6am the next morning. An armada of ferries took keen punters to the island to be entertained by some of Bangkok's best live talent. The Eastbound Downers, Super Baker and Apartment Khunpa got things rocking in the afternoon but the climax came courtesy of Futon, playing a smashing set with their new drummer, ex-Suede stick-man Simon Gilbert.

Next up was a swag of DJs: Sunzone, Britisher Tom Stepan, NIN and star of the show Adam Freeland. In between were Penguin Villa, local hip-hopsters Thaitainum and reggae act Kai-jo Brothers. A touch of the surreal came from a Bali-based art group who put on displays of stilt-walking, crotch-angle grinding and many startling performances by two dancers costumed as Fook Yu and Fook Mi from Austin Powers 3: Goldmember. DJ Ronnie and DJ Stewart wrapped up with the dawn set.

The party is intended to be the first in a series of regular events, with organisers hopeful that punters will make the trek from Bangkok for the music and the chance to party all night. This writer is hopeful that their dreams come to fruition.



HIT THE NORTH

CHIANG MAI

It's getting cool. Thais start wearing balaclavas to bed. Aircon becomes superfluous. Days are sunny and dry and not too roasting, so take a walk down the winding sois of the "old city" inside the the quadrangle of moats and centuries-old brick walls, to see how the locals live. The more you lose your way, the more liable you are to find the 'real' Chiang Mai. Everyone who lives here, both Thai and foreigner moans about the traffic being so bad, but they get no sympathy from anyone who has been to Bangkok recently. 10 minutes on a motorbike or 20 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 Butress**, 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 Nimanhemin 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 dharma 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.

The largest selection
of used books in
SE Asia.

Also try our other shop,
Thapae Gate Books

Gecko *Used*
BOOKS
IN CHIANG MAI
Quality AND Quantity

... "The best used bookshop in Southeast Asia"
The Bangkok Post

MOON MUANG ROAD
THAPAE GATE
Thapae Gate Books
Chang Mai Kao Rd
Gecko Books
2/6 Chang Mai Kao Road
(near Thapae Gate & Thapae Road)
Tel. 053 874 056

FEEDING TIME

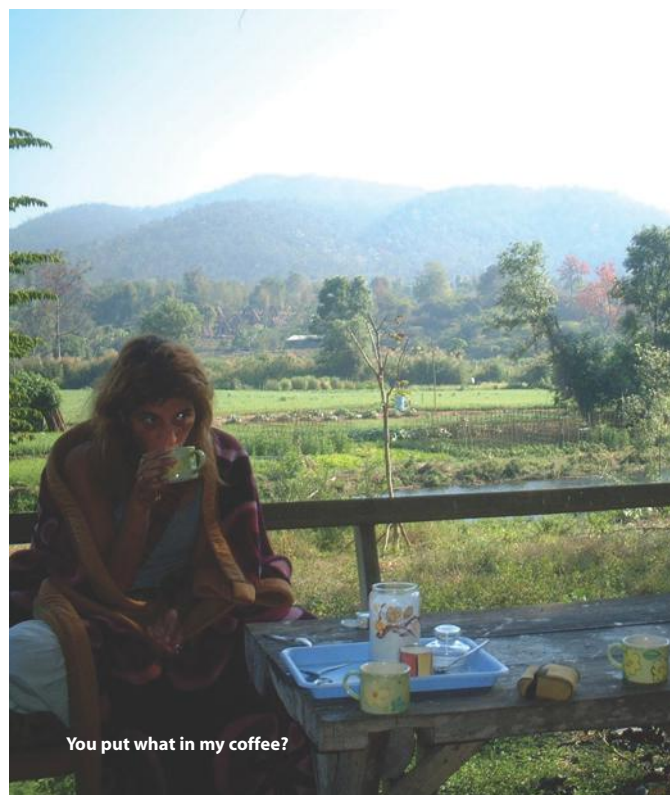
Ratana's Kitchen (tel: 06-320 322 Tha Phae Rd) does inexpensive Thai dishes geared to Farang palates, plus comfort foods like sandwiches, steaks and pancakes. **Art Cafe** (corner of Tha Phae & Kotchasan, opposite Tha Phae Gate) is the spot to camp, in air-conditioned comfort, when your group can't agree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

The city's claim to noodle fame is *khao soi*, a bowl of squiggly egg noodles doused with a mild Shan-Yunnanese curry. *Khao soi* comes in many styles in Chiang Mai, but for the original head to **Khao Soi Fuang Fah** (Soi 1, Charoen Prathet Rd, near the Ban Haw Mosque); the *khao mok kai* (chicken biriyani) here is cheap and filling, too. For the fanciest version in the city, try the huge platter of *khao soi* and associated condiments served at **Just Khao Soi**, Charoen Prathet Rd. At **Heuan Soonthari** enjoy the atmospheric wooden house with a river view, decent Thai grub from the North and Northeast and live Northern Thai music by its greatest living proponent, owner Soonthari Wetchaynon. Carrot-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 Laikham** (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* 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) NGOs and young, socially mobile Thais mix at the tables outside, while regular drunks prop up the bar or lounge on tattered sofas inside. Owner Dai has a good CD archive of R&B and classic rock. Ask him to crank it up, it's never loud enough. The tiny **Pinte Blues Pub** (Moon Muang Rd) is one of the city's longest-standing watering holes, and an ideal spot for a chat over cheap drinks with a backdrop of possibly the best recorded blues collection anywhere in Thailand.



PAI

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

PLACES TO CRASH:

Pai River Lodge, Bt100 and **Baan Tawan GH**, Bt200-300, both on the river towards the east side of town are choice cheapies. Across the river towards the hot springs, **Sun Hut** scatters thatched huts around a garden, and adds a treehouse – Bt200-450. **Mr Jan's Bungalows**, Soi Wanchaloem 18, is favoured by the healing set for Jan's massage teachings and the herbal baths on heavily-foliaged grounds; Bt80-200. **Rim Pai Cottage**, Chaisongkhram Rd, offers more upmarket room and A-frame cottages, Bt500-800 including breakfast.

DAYTRIPPING:

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

NIGHTRIPPING:

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

FEEDING TIME:

Most of the restaurants in Pai are hard to get excited about. A reliable choice includes the ages-old **Nong Beer**

BEACH ROUNDUP

SANDY SHORES

Well, Thailand's beaches have certainly got a lot of attention this year, although much of the media spin hasn't been exactly fair. I'm talking, of course, about the big wave. Don't fret though, gentle reader, that was months ago and things are back to normal now. You're pretty unlikely to notice much change in Phuket and it was the west coast and the rest of the country is fine. Indeed, down south they just want the tourists back so everyone can get on with their lives and forget about the whole thing.

Now that it's March the weather is going from hot to steaming before the great warm and wet climax of Songkran (water-throwing festival) in April. If there's a time to hit the beach, it's now. We're in the tail-end of high season so things should be in full-swing on the nation's bays and beaches. So if you are going for a dip, a few words of caution. A tan is great but don't get trashed on Chang and pass out in the sun, you'll look pretty silly with second-degree burns on your nose. Then again, more people get killed by falling coconuts than snake bites (development of a coconut anti-venom has been alarmingly sluggish) so perhaps the shade isn't that great either. Don't worry about going swimming after eating, that's a big fib, and all the sharks in this country are pretty friendly. What wrecks most people's holidays and knee-joints are motorcycle accidents. Yup, the two-wheeled killer stalks this land day and night in its thirst for blood and gravel-rash. Don't believe me? Check out how many people you see on Samui with bandaged limbs. So, look left, look right, hang on tight and remember that everyone else on the road is out to kill you.

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.

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. The northeast section of the island, where there are a handful of resorts was relatively undamaged and is operating normally.

An advertisement for the Koh Tao Dive Operators Club. It features a school of blue fish swimming in the water. The text reads: "KOH TAO DIVE OPERATORS CLUB KOH TAO, THAILAND", "Celebrate Life! Experience Koh Tao!!", "Jump in & Join the Fun", "12-13 th February 2005", "2nd Underwater World Day Festival", "info@kohtaodoc.com 077 456 753", and "www.kohtaodoc.com". There is a small circular logo at the bottom left.

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, 2001 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, although the fishing fleet was badly mauled.



- Sheridiah Dive Center
- Courses starting every day
- We teach in nine languages
- Complete course, transfer and accommodation packages
- 10 years in business
- Full retail outlet
- Restaurant and beach bar
- Ocean Kayaks for rent
- Full dive medical insurance coverage

Big Blue Diving Koh Tao
Retail - Mae Head Pier Tel 077-458050-2 Fax 077-458048
Resort - Sairee Beach 077-456415 info@bigbluediving.com

KOH TAO

www.bigbluediving.com

Big Blue Diving Bangkok
Viental Hotel, Rambutri Rd (near Kao San Rd)
Tel 02-6293830 info@bigbluediving.com



BIG BLUE DIVING CENTERS



PHOENIX DIVERS
Rising above the rest

PADI 5 Star Resort
multilingual dive centres
small groups, large boat
daily live boat trips

become a part of our family!

077-456 031 / Fax 077 456 034 info@phoenixdivers.com



ac the party pub
"koh tao's original party spot"

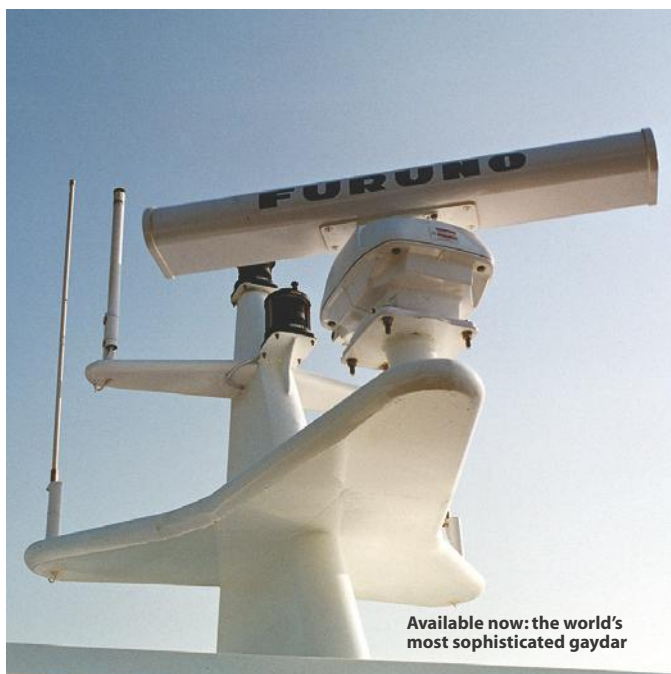
happy hours 8pm - 11pm
party on tuesday - thursday - sunday
pool table - sports on giant screen - fireworks
open daily on sairee beach



A.C. Resort
Koh Tao - Thailand

budget priced
cosy family resort
private swimming pool
all travellers services
PADI 5 star dive center
& famous a.c. party pub

acresort@yahoo.com T: 077 456 197 F: 077 456 034



Available now: the world's most sophisticated gaydar

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 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 exceptions depending how people's insurance claims are coming along – 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.



EASY DIVERS

Thailand's PADI 5 Star Dive Centers

easydiversgroup.com

COURSES	TOURS	TRIPS	EQUIPMENT	TRAVEL
---------	-------	-------	-----------	--------

EASY DIVERS



Welcome to

THE SOUTH

The Gulf of Thailand with its Islands & Marine Parks
Fabulous Diving & Relaxing
The Ultimate Adventure

Go Dive...

Professional Advise & Care
Bus & Boat Service
Dive Centers, Guesthouses
and Beachfront Resorts in
**Chumphon, Koh Tao,
Nangyuan and Bangkok**

Special rates for divers
Non-Divers welcome






Located opposite 'The Pizza Company', Rambuttri Road (Khaosan Area)
Tel 0 2629 1115, Fax 0 2629 1116 / bangkok@thaidive.com

WIN a Free Dive Holiday!
Call or email us to find out how to join the DIVE-O-RAMA!



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.

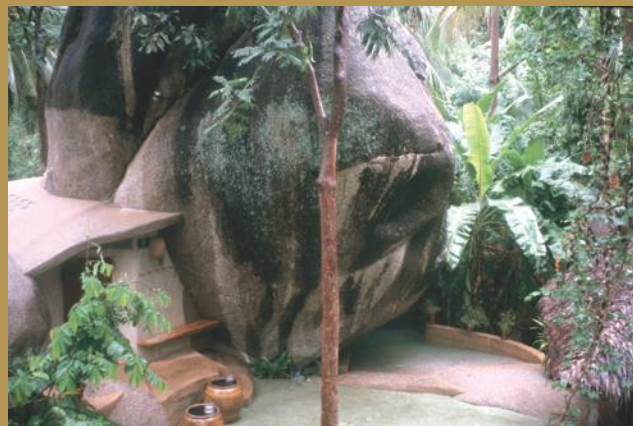
Chillin' Time

Words by Stuart Singleton

Lots of people think of living on a tropical island as heaven. Sure, Koh Samui's nice. But I'm as busy as any of you, and it's work, not all morning swims and pineapple cocktails. No matter what your race, creed or lifestyle, everyone needs a chance to chill out and let someone else take care of you for a while.

So it was with relish that I volunteered to visit Tamarind Springs Spa for a day in the interests of investigative journalism. Now, you may or may not have heard of Tamarind Springs but everyone is sure to recognise its plunge-pool (conveniently set next to the steam room) set in jungle surrounds next to a massive boulder. The spa offers the best of the usual services including back massage, face massage, head massage, foot massage, herbal massage, oil massage and, needless to say, Thai massage. If that's not enough there's the "over the top" massage – two and a half hours of work on the head, neck, back and shoulders. That one is only available in one of the private couple's salas, so bring a friend. Of course it's not all massage; no visit would be complete without a visit to the herbal steam room for a good scented sweat, which is included in most of the many packages on offer.

Although there are a plenty of spas on Samui and more popping up every day, Tamarind's been around long enough and has the experience to get everything right, from the moment you walk in to when you're wheeled out like a jellyfish on Valium.



BOOK NOW !!

Asiarooms.com

24/7 Call - (66)3-836-4700
more than 12,000 Discounted Hotels



KOH SAMUI ISLE OF PLENTY

Samui is a commonwealth of diversity: from five-star opulence to beach shack grunge, from Starbucks to street food, and from family central to hedonist's haven. You can come to Samui on a package tour, or you can just turn up and choose your own location. You can stay in the neon razzmatazz of nightlife areas in Chaweng or Lamai, or you can find your own mile of mostly deserted beach in Lipa Noi or Taling Ngam – with superlative views of the Angthong 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 chilli ice cream. If you want to watch the world pass by in the day while munching on a panini, take a street-side chair at **Cafe Uno**.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

Right on the Chaweng Beach Road, there's a great filling station for booze, Cajun and Creole food, and live blues called the **Coco Blues Company**. Opposite McDonald's is **Tropical Murphy's** with draught Guinness and Kilkenny, and Filipino 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 change the colour of the water seven times every 30 seconds.

LAMAI PLACES TO CRASH:

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

FEEDING TIME:

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

NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

BIG BUDDHA AND BAN RAK PLACES TO CRASH:

Known for its massive Buddha image

at one end of the island, this is a tranquil area to get away from the nightlife and hooligans. While the beaches are nice enough, the swimming ain't so hot but the sunsets are great. **Shambala** offer rooms from Bt400-800 and has a good menu of Thai and Western dishes. **Shabash** (07-724 5035) has beach huts from Bt1,400-1,800 depending how close you want to be to the sea. They also serve up a unique menu of Middle Eastern, Indonesian, Indian curries and Thai specialties that are well worth sampling. **Samui Mermaid** (07-742 7547) offers great value for Bt500 with cable. If you want to spend a little more, the brand new **Saboey** (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 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 a little more try **Eden Bungalows** situated in a lush garden with a pool for Bt800-Bt1600. In Bophut, most shops and cafes have converted the rooms above to luxury apartment/rooms. One of the best bargains is **The Ayuthaya Garden Bar** offering aircon, fridge, cable and hot water with views: Bt800-1200. Also worth a look is **The Red House**, which has balconies facing the beach to watch the boats come in. It also has a great 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 goes until late; rooms start at Bt1,000. Other operations worth checking out further up the beach are **Freehouse**, **Cactus** and **Za Zen**.

THE BEST CRAIC ON THE ISLAND

Draught Guinness
& Kilkenny

A First For Thailand !!
Watch Live GAA via Setanta Satellite
Finest Food
From Around The World



KOH SAMUI'S
IRISH PUB & RESTAURANT

Irish Owned
& Managed

Located Opposite McDonalds
Chaweng Beach Road
www.tropicalmurphys.com
Tel - 077 413614

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 **Juzza's** for pizza. Other must tries are **Two Tigers** for real home-cooked cakes tasty cookies, fresh juice and acoustic music and **La Siren** for a great French fodder. For something totally different there's **Healthy and Fun**, which is part vegetarian restaurant, part yoga and healing centre. They also show art films on occasion. Hit **Billabong** if you want a taste of down under.

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 Ntien Beach. They have spiders as well. A great way to see the island is to take a **Samui Safari** (07-741 5123-5). You can choose half or whole-day trips. They take you snorkelling, elephant trekking, 4x4 offroading, and to watch Thai cooking and even coconut milk-making. There is now a world-class golf course on the island, the **Santiburi Golf and Country Club** (07-741 8557) and **Samui Golf** (07-724 5384) can teach you how to swing and choose the right bat. For those who think golf is a great way to ruin a good walk, try **Yogi Bear Ha Ha** (01-787 9148). Situated on a back road between Bohput and Chaweng, **Red Bicycles** (07-726 7202) can rent you a mountain bike and take you on a tour through the jungle and more. A less strenuous way to see the island is from the sea. **Kia Ora** (07-745 2264) Catamaran will take you out to sea with a fully stocked bar. **Samui Quads and Paintball** (01-371 0744) has quads and paintball. If big-game fishing is a lure for you, then talk to **Mr Ung's** (07-723 0114). At **Samui Crocodile Farm**, located near the airport, you can watch a brave fool stick his head in the jaws of a prehistoric monster. Cold-blooded, reptilian capers and human derring-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.



Barolo Bongos

Soi Reggae Koh Samui



Live Music Venue



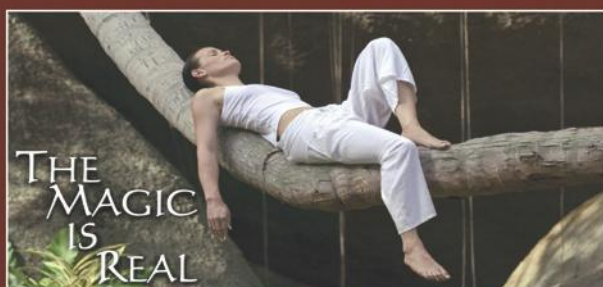
Ice Cold Beers



Pool Table

Happy Hour From 5pm-7pm
(Flip a coin for free beers
you call get a free beer
house wins you pay
full price-DEAL???)

Contact: Kenny on 062713800
or Kenmccafferty@hotmail.com



TAMARIND SPRINGS
tropical day spa & villas

tel. 66 77 230 571 or 66 77 424 221 www.tamarindretreat.com

KOH PANGAN MOONSHINE MUST

March 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's plenty going on to keep them occupied. Along with all the parties going off, there are also loads of activities, day trips and courses. Each region of the island has its own special character and there is enough to keep even the most energetic traveller occupied with amazing snorkelling and diving and everything from kiteboarding to cookery courses. But seriously, people come to this island as it is the home of the debauched Full Moon Party, a mad night of dance, drink and more drink. Luckily it's only once a month.

CHOOSING YOUR BED:

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

PLACES TO CRASH:

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

On the more remote side of the island there are three very popular beaches; **Bottle Beach** is old-school 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, there's; sometimes a waiting list for good rooms. On **Thong Nai Pan Noi**, **Thong Ta Pong** are good as are **Thong Ta Pan**, **Panviman** and **Baan Puri** – posh pricey gaffs that take Visa cards. On **Thong Nai Pan Yai**, **Dreamland** and **Nice Beach** are popular. **Than Sadet** has a variety of cheap

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 decor and superb resident and guest international DJs. Resident DJ A also plays at **The Backyard**, starting at 11am as Had Rin shuts down and licks its wounds; they also put on three cracking nights per week. **The Vinyl Club** with its enormous sound system bangs out hardhouse-techno-psy-trance during the FMP, and all month long. **The Orchid** plays fresh drum and bass and **Harmony** plays underground progressive trance.

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

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

WAY TO GO:

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

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

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

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

THE PARTY CONTINUES – MARCH 24TH

Words by Tom Green

Party season is still in full swing on Pangan with the **Half Moon Festival** on **Mar 3rd** 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 **Mar 9th** where the **Black Moon Posse** host possibly the best outdoor party on the island on **Ban Tai Beach**; with amazing decor, a super sandy venue, driving progressive beats, underground trance 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 **17th Mar**. Also look out for the new **Selenite Jungle Parties** on the north-west coast around the **20th Mar**.

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

The **FMP** is on the **24th Mar** and is sure to be massive with the island full to the brim. **DJ Simon Solo (Mint Bar)** and **Kenny** 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 moon.



THAI MASTER TRANSPORT INTERNATIONAL SERVICE (T.M.T) CO., LTD.

"INTERNATIONAL AIR-SEA FREIGHT FORWARDER
- AUTHORIZED CUSTOMS BROKER"
AIR - SEA FREIGHT SERVICES CUSTOMS CLEARANCE
TRANSPORTATION

HEAD OFFICE:

91 Soi Intamara 18 (Vibha 4), Vibhavadee Rangsit Road,
Dingdeang, Dingdeang, Bangkok 10400, THAILAND.
Tel +66 02690 8041-60 Fax +66 0 2690 8030
E-mail: tmtbkk@tmtcargo.com
Website: www.tmtcargo.com

AIRPORT OFFICE:

Room 330/1-2 Floor 3 Thai Carco Terminal Building 1,
Bangkok International Airport, Donmuang, Bangkok
10210, THAILAND.
Tel. +66 0 2535 4550-2 Fax +66 0 2504 2849
E-mail: airfreight@tmtcargo.com



KOH TAO DIVING ECONOMY

Following last month's underwater festival, Koh Tao is gaining a big reputation for a small island, reflected in the increasing number of visitors who come here to enjoy both the underwater wonders and laid-back fishing village charm which exists here. Koh Tao maintains a happy balance between daily diving, chilled beach action, and nightly parties. Whether it's on, under or by the water, Koh Tao's got it.

PLACES TO CRASH:

Accommodation caters for all tastes and budgets. Choices start from traditional Thai wooden huts to the more luxurious pads with all mod cons and prices to match. Although many resorts have their own dive centres most are happy to cater for non-divers, except during the peak of high season. 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 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.



10% DISCOUNT WITH THIS AD

MORE BRANDS THAN A TEXAS RODEO

AQUALUNG - APEX
SEAQUEST - TUSA
TECHNISUB

SCUBA REVOLUTION

Join The Revolution

KOH TAO'S BIGGEST EQUIPMENT STORE - OPEN 7 DAYS

SCUBA REVOLUTION

to Sairee

Safety Stop Pub

KT-DOC

Seamoney

Post Office

7-11

V-Shop

Prosit Email

Bank

to Chulok

mae haad square - koh tao

077 456 782

samuirifle@hotmail.com



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 nowhere 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 non-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 Matta** has a wide selection of authentic Italian cuisine using traditional recipes. **Farango Pizzeria** also offers a selection of classic Italian dishes. All are in Mae Haad. 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.



Koh Tao Enters the Record Books

Last month's second Koh Tao Under Water World Festival was a big event for a small island with over 5,000 people attending the two-day festival, opened by the Governor of Suratthani. The highlight was the successful attempt to break the current world-record of 592 divers underwater simultaneously. The island's dive shops joined forces to achieve in excess of 720 divers from over 25 countries underwater at the

same time, to set what will hopefully be recognised as a new Guinness world record. The evening's main entertainment was the Miss Dive Shop beauty pageant, with each Farang contestant addressing the crowd in Thai wearing full traditional Thai dress. Can Farang behave like Thais? The jury's still out, but the contest provided hilarious entertainment for both Farang and Thais alike.

The main focus of the event was to promote Thailand and Koh Tao as a premier diving destination and increase environmental awareness and marine education. Thanks to CMAS (Thailand) Diving Association for the donation of Koh Tao's, and probably Thailand's, first purpose-built tuk tuk to be sunk in shallow water off Koh Tao to provide a new diving attraction.

All in all the festival provided a rare opportunity for locals and tourists to come together and help promote Koh Tao as the diving pearl in the Gulf of Thailand, while providing unforgettable entertainment and increasing environmental awareness helping preserve Koh Tao and its waters for future generations to enjoy.

The official DVD of the event including additional underwater footage is available from Liquid Media Koh Tao: 06-2807483. liquid_kohtao@yahoo.com

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.

LOTUS BAR
beach lounge

Mon - Beach Party
Thur - Open Mike Night

50 Baht Sunset
Happy Hour 4-7pm!!

North Sairee - Koh Tao

Aussie/Irish Owned & Managed – Koh Tao's biggest & best Sports Bar – Live sports on 6 TVs & a huge projector screen – Open Air Movie Deck – Draught & Imported Beers – Western & Thai Home Cooking.

Sairee - Koh Tao
Tel. 077 456 641

CHOPPERS
BAR & GRILL

It's all good!

PHUKET READY AND WAITING



Most 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 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' **Easyriders**, along **Taina Rd**, Kata. For late-night adventure, get thee to Patong.

SOUTH-Chalong, Rawai, Nai Harn, Ao Sane

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

PLACES TO CRASH

From cheap and cheerful to super-luxurious. Chalong: **International Youth Hostel** (Bt180-450; 076-281-325), **Shanti Lodge** (from Bt350; 076-280-233). Rawai: **Friendship Beach** (from Bt1,000; 076-288-996). Nai Harn/Ao Sane: **Baan Krating**

Jungle Beach Resort (Bt2,000; 076-288-264), **Sunny's Nai Harn Beach Resort** (Bt950; 076-388-058), **The Mangosteen** (Bt4,500; 076-289-399).

FEEDING TIME

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

NIGHTTRIPPING

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

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

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

THE ORIGINAL

<http://www.seacanoe.net>

Seakayaking at...

- Phuket
- Phang Nga
- Krabi
- Samui
- Khao Sok
- Tarutao

Sea Canoe (Thailand) Co., Ltd.
 367/4 Yaowarat Rd., Muang
 Phuket 83000 Thailand
 Tel. 66 76 212252 Fax. 66 76 212172



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** (yellow noodle) shop near **Metropole Hotel** circle, **vegetarian shops** along Ranong Rd, **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-

DON'T MENTION THE WAVE

Yes, we've all seen the footage and everyone who was there is sick of telling the same story. Some people say they don't want to go and dance on the graves of so many who died. Others are just misinformed. The thing is, while Phuket remains quiet, the locals are trying to come to grips with the change in pace. It's normal for the place to be swarming with Europeans, so their absence is a freakout for the people who live there. Last month a team of 70 journalists were invited down to Phuket to check out what's what, including a young lad from FARANG Untamed Travel. The fact is, Phuket's pretty damn good at the moment. The water is clear, rooms are cheap and you don't have to race Germans for a deckchair by the pool.



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

There are too many dive shops to mention at all price levels, with most concentrated in Patong and Karon/Kata. All 4 Diving (5/4 Sawatdirak Rd, Patong. Tel 076 344 611) is a good place for divers unfamiliar with Phuket to touch base as they not only sell a wide range of dive equipment, but also provide a bookings service for many other dive operators so can advise you on what best fits your requirements.



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
Public Bus: Bt630 (direct) dep 5pm arrives 6:30am





Thailand's biggest Dive Store



Equipment Sales

Service Center

PADI Dive Courses

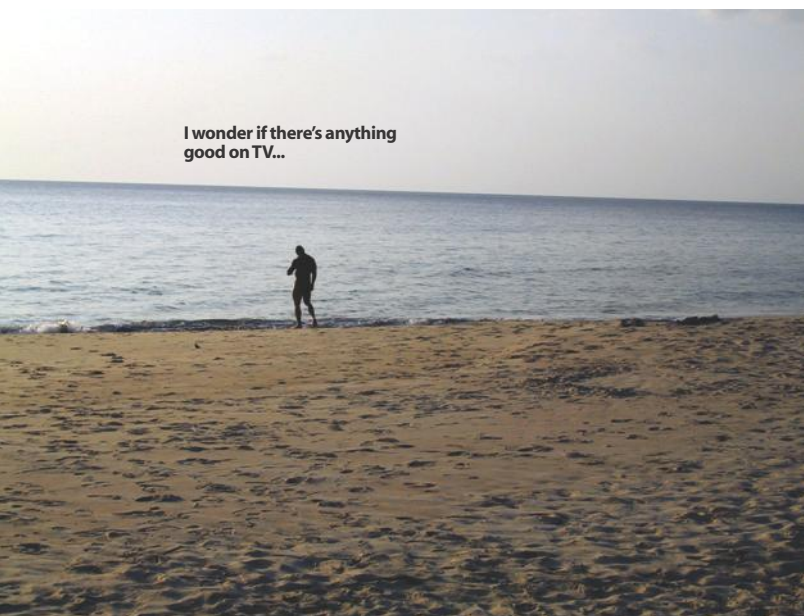
Liveaboards

Daytrips

5/4 Sawatdirak Rd., Patong Beach, Phuket 83150, Thailand

Tel. +66 (0)76 344611 Fax +66 (0)76 343015 E-mail: info@all4diving.com Web: www.all4diving.com

IN KRABI BEAUTIFUL AS EVER



I wonder if there's anything good on TV...

One of the country's most gorgeous provinces was largely spared a lashing by the tsunami. Over at Ao Nang, the sea wall behind the beach helped save the area from 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-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.



In only four hours, the Somchat Losuvalna quintet had earned enough for a second bottle

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 buses cost 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.

WINNER OF
9 PRODUCT
AWARDS



YOUR BODYGUARD
against Mosquito and Insects



Mosquito
the carrier
of Malaria
Dengue Fever
Encephalitic
etc.



**Protect
yourself
with
Jaico**

- **Effective protection for at least 7 hours**
- **Available in easy roll-on bottle, spray and towel**
- **Also effective against insects**

Available at leading supermarket, drugstores, and in your hotel rooms.

Imported & Distributed by All Plants International Ltd.
Tel: 203-0816-7, 74 9-5041-2 Fax: 203-0815

AIDEX AD

KOH LANTA LAY OF THE SAND

Contrary 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. 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.

NIGHTRIPPING & 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 blissfully 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-apriced 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.

Relax Bay
Resort
Koh Lanta
(Long Beach)



Remember this sign and you will never forget the place



Relax Bay
Productions
Present

Tel: +66 75 684 194
Fax: +66 75 684 196
Email: relaxbay@hotmail.com
www.relaxbay.com

Day trips & live aboards

PADI Courses from Beginner to instructor

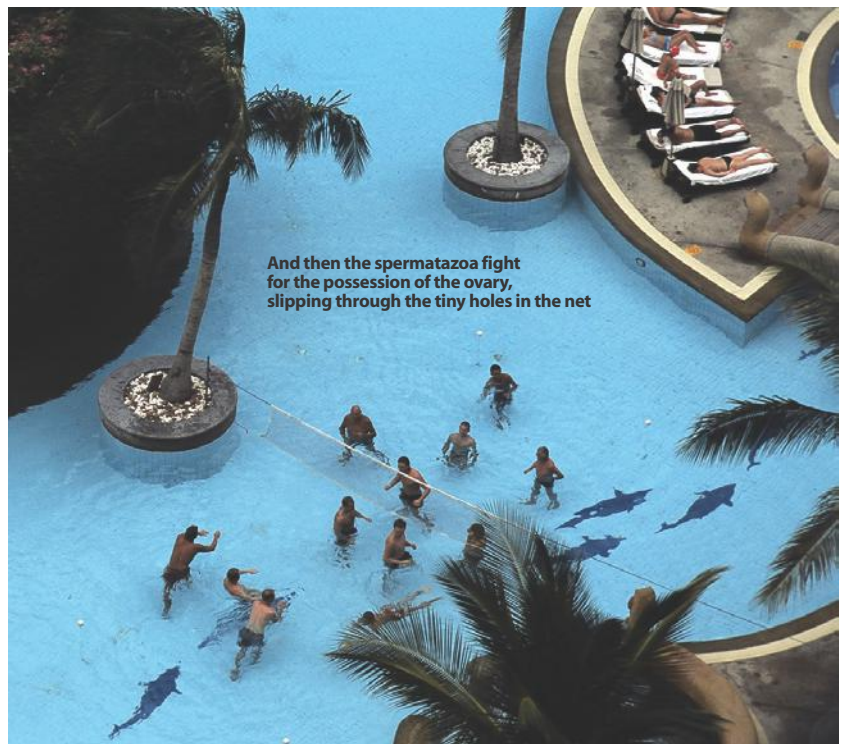
Full range retail store & equipment service

www.lantadiver.com
Phone : 075 68 42 08, 01 271 90 50

The Andaman Adventure begins here

Air Conditioned class Rooms & swimming pool

HUA HIN REGAL RETREAT



And then the spermatazoa fight for the possession of the ovary, slipping through the tiny holes in the net



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 Bintabaht** (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 Bintabaht 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 by no means comatose. Consistent crowd-pullers are the city's two night markets. In that typically Thai, helter-skelter way, they are jumbles of bric-a-brac, beach wear in screaming suntan shades, seafood restaurants, arts 'n' crafts, just plain junk, and exotica.

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

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

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

WAY TO GO:

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

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

PATTAYA FAT OF THE LAND

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

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

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

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

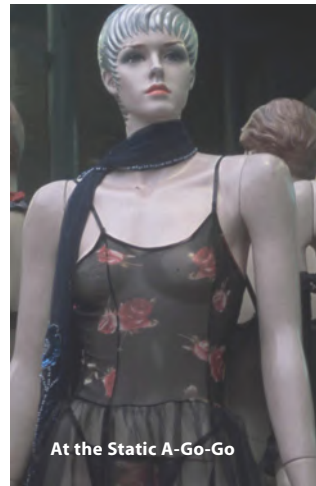
PLACES TO CRASH:

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

can be a little rundown. For a good night's sleep, avoid hotels next to one of the ubiquitous construction sites, or hotels that offer hourly rates.

DAYTRIPPING:

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



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

NIGHTTRIPPING:

The main nighttime activity in Pattaya City quickly becomes obvious on arrival. If you happen to be a white male in town, a quick stroll around dusk will illicit several invitations for a drink or other offers that may make you blush or tremble. Beer-bars sprout from every bit of available space in town and there seems to be another acre of them around every corner – plenty of go-go bars around the downtown as well. Two of the more famous clubs and hunting grounds for happy hookers, and the men who lust after them, are **Walking Street's Marine Disco** and the Bangkok-based **Lucifer's**. If that's your gig, then you're not alone: Pattaya seems to have the world's largest concentration of overweight middle-aged men and you may feel out of place not sporting 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.

BOOK NOW !!
Asiarooms.com

24/7 Call - (66)3-836-4700
more than 12,000 Discounted Hotels



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.

KOH SAMET TOUR OF BEAUTY

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

HAT SAI KAEW

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



Let's see you do that with no fingers, asshole

Silversand also rents kayaks for Bt100 per hour or Bt400 for the day. And if you're gagging for a Sheesha pipe, drop in to Sheesha Cafe at Seabreeze bungalows.

AO PUDSA

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

AO NUAN

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

BEST OF THE REST

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

WAY TO GO:

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

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

HONGKONG

HONGKONG

OUT

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

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 Island ferry piers, Central). **Shek O** (bus 6 from Shau Kei Wan MTR) is the last remaining village on HK island, with a good beach popular with surfers who also frequent the nearby **Big Wave**

Bay, but don't expect too much in the way of water sports.

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

MACAU

An hour's ferry away (from Shun Tak Centre, Sheung Wan MTR), Macau is well worth a day or an overnighter. HK-ers go for the gambling, shopping and whoring, but it's nice just to go for the colonial architecture, relaxed pace and the spectacle of Chinese people speaking Portuguese.

BUYING STUFF

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

ELECTRONICS AND GIZMOS

Sure, HK is still a duty-free port, but that doesn't mean much these days. Still, it is one of the best shopping hubs in East Asia. In Chinese style, each product has its own street, one for consumer electronics, one for cameras and one for ripping off tourists (Nathan Road – never buy anything from a flashy shop there). There's also the **Temple Street** night market, the **Ladies' Market** and the **Flower Market**,

plus numerous fresh markets. Most maps have these well marked.

FEEDING TIME

There is a Chinese saying: "We eat anything with four legs except the table and anything with wings except the aeroplane," and the Cantonese eat things that even other Chinese won't touch. You can get your fill of guts and offal on just about any street. That said, other regions of China are well represented (in particular Shanghai, Sichuan and various Peking specialities). Don't let Chinese menus in the window deter you, as there will be an English version inside and/or staff who are more than happy to talk you through what's on offer. Hong Kong is rightly proud of its eating scene, and you can find cuisines from all over Asia and beyond, but if you're on a budget, McDonald's is the cheapest – 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

Imagine our surprise when the fish head choir launched into "Sweet Adeline"



there's a popular outdoor eating area here serving various Asian food. A small hike up the hill towards **Hollywood Road** brings you to Soho. Here you'll find brasseries, eateries and night clubs, and a generally more "beautiful class" of people. Prices have hiked up the hill with you too, but you can also catch some of HK's best jazz musicians in intimate surroundings. Check out the **Blue Door**, **The Gecko**, and **The Bohemian Lounge**. For dancing try **Nu**, **Home Base**, **Amnesia**, among other more exclusive options. **Wanchai** (MTR) enjoys a more down-at-heel reputation. Here there are Irish bars and sports bars and girlie bars, as well as straight-up bars vying for your attention. There's also live music at **The Wanch** and **Carnegies** and dancing on the tables at the **Groovy Mule**. This is where to head for late nights – try **Dusk Till Dawn**, **Neptunes 2** or **The Dock**. If you're based in **Tsim Sha Tusi** you'll still find pubs and bars, though they're more dispersed. There's live music most nights at

48th St Chicago Blues and trad-jazz at **Ned Kelly's**. Between Nelson Road and Hung Hom station is the old opium district which is now peppered with Chinese bars, which means Karaoke, Bluff-Dice (a drinking game and well worth learning) and football on TV. If you can find it, **Nutbush Terrace** is a strip of pricy but nice bars with the obligatory Filipino cover bands. As for clubbing, pack your credit card in a fireproof cover and develop a taste for Canto-pop.

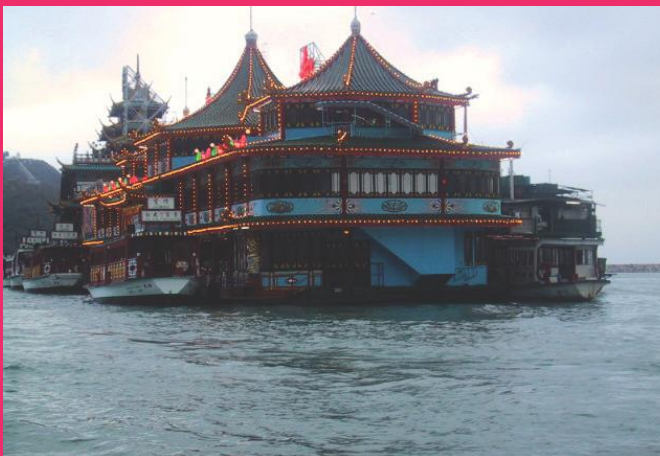
ACCOMMODATION

It ain't cheap. Most tourists stay on 'The Golden Mile' of Nathan Road, in Tsim Sha Tusi (around the corner from **The Peninsula**). There you find a **Holiday Inn** and the horrible **Chungking Mansions** – a wretched tower of tiny guesthouses 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.



SINGAPORE PARTY TIME

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

LITTLE INDIA

Way to Go: *Little India MRT*

All the sights, sounds and smells of big India clustered in one neighbourhood along Serangoon Road. Visit Sunday evening (or don't) when 10,000 Indian men celebrate their day off.

CHINATOWN

Way to Go: *Outram Park MRT*

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

ARAB STREET

Way to Go: *Bugis MRT*

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

GEYLAND SERAI

Way to Go: *Paya Lebar MRT*

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

ARTY STUFF

ASIAN CIVILIZATIONS MUSEUM

Way to Go: *Raffles Place MRT*

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

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

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



include a beach, nature walk, horseback riding, golf, kayaking.

MT. FABER

Way to Go: *Harbour Front MRT*

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

Cost: *\$8.50, \$3.90*

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

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.

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.

BREWERYKZ

#01-05 Riverside Point, 30 Merchant Rd. Mon-Thu noon-midnight, Fri-Sat noon-1am, Sunday 11am-midnight.

Popular riverside microbrewery with California menu.

THE DUBLINER

165 Perang Road #01-00 Winsland House II, 11:30am-1am (Sun-Thu), 1:30pm-2am (Fri-Sat), Somerset MRT.

Rustic Irish pub with authentic Irish fare. Leather sofas, oak furniture,

brick walls.

HARRY'S BAR

28 Boat Quay, Sun-Thu 11am-1 am, Fri-Sat 11am-2am

High-volume house band downstairs, laidback retreat upstairs. Nick Leeson's favourite.

JAZZ@SOUTH BRIDGE

82B Boat Quay, Sun-Thu, 5:30 pm-1 am, Fri-Sat 5:30pm-2am.

Cozy mainstream jazz. Comfy sofas.

NO. 5 EMERALD HILL COCKTAIL BAR

5 Emerald Hill, Mon-Thu noon-2am, Fri-Sat noon-3am, Sun 5pm-2am

Traditional shophouse-turned-European-style pub. Pool room upstairs.

ORCHARD TOWERS

400 Orchard Rd, open 24 hours

Nicknamed "Four Floors of Whores," this is a four-story complex that conjures the image of a tamer version of Bangkok's Nana Plaza. Neon-lit bars, thumping music, transvestites and Western men prowling for Asian women.

PRINCE OF WALES

101 Dunlop St, open 4:30pm-1am

An Aussie-style pub and beer garden in Little India that has a good line of draft beer staffed by Australians. Card carrying backpackers get a whopping 50% discount.

CLUBS

Singapore's hottest dance clubs are concentrated along Mohamed Sultan Road off River Valley Road. Most have cover charges and dress codes. Don't show up in shorts or flip-flops. A lot of the clubs are open late, and there are other after-hours venues, too.

CENTRO

#02-02 One Fullerton, 1 Fullerton Rd. Wed-Thu 10 pm-3. Fri-Sun 10pm-4am

Massive dance floor. House, garage and techno beats. Some of the best DJs from around the world.

THE LIQUID ROOM

#01-05 the Gallery Hotel, 76 Robertson Quay, Wed-Sat 10pm-3am

Classy atmosphere, beautiful people, huge dance floor.

LOLA

#02-02 One Fullerton, 1 Fullerton Rd. Tues-Sat 10pm-3am

Intimate and eclectic. Wall murals and crystal chandelier. Latin beats.

ZOUK

17 Jiak Kim St. Wed-Sat 7:30pm-3am

The original Singapore club and still one of the hottest. DJs from around the world. Same complex as Phuture and Velvet Underground.

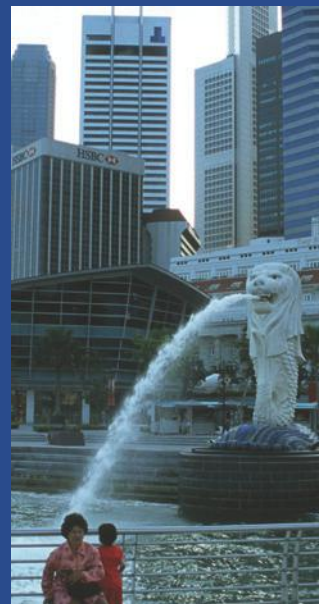
FEEDING TIME

The variety of places to chow down is one of the best things about Singapore, from yummy inexpensive street food, to fine international cuisine. Singaporeans munch gleefully away at all hours of the day or night in locations all over the city. For budget travelers, hawker stalls and food centres offer great grub, a relaxed atmosphere and clean surroundings for a few dollars a plate. But don't eat all your meals there, since there are so many superb restaurants and eateries to try. Simply choose a district and stroll through until you find something that strikes your fancy.

Not surprisingly, you will find great Chinese food in **Chinatown**, and great Indian food in **Little India**, and many other locations around the city. Stroll along **Boat Quay**, and touts will jump out at you from every restaurant to show you a menu. It's rather touristy and not cheap, but the riverside atmosphere should be experienced. **Holland Village** at the other end of the city is a gathering place for Westerners and has good Italian and Lebanese food. Near Raffles Hotel, **Chijmes** is a collection of Western and non-Western restaurants in a former convent. For a more authentic local experience, try **Lau Pa Sat**, a sprawling open-air food centre in the stomach of the business district.

PLACES TO CRASH

The main strip of budget hotels is along Bencoolen St, near the city centre, though some have closed in recent years as the area gentrifies with larger hotels and offices. Still, there are a dozen or so cheap hotels and guesthouses with prices around \$15-\$50, and backpackers walk up and down the street at all



hours. The area is easy walking distance of Little India and Orchard Road. Some favorite haunts include: **The Hawaii Hostel**, 171-B Bencoolen St., 6338-4187; **Green Curtains**, 131-A Bencoolen St. 6334-8697; **Waterloo Hostel**, 55 Waterloo St, Catholic Centre Bldg. 4th Fl, 6336-6555. For more culture and character, try Chinatown or Little India; both offer good, small hotels. In Chinatown, those in the \$100-\$150 range include: **Damenlou Hotel**, 12 Ann Siang Rd, 6221-1900; **Dragon Inn Chinatown**, 18 Mosque St, 6222-7227; **Royal Peacock** 55 Keong Saik Rd, 6223-3522; **The Inn on Temple St.** 36 Temple St, 6221-5333. In Little India, decent, boutique-style hotels are found for under \$100, including: **Perak Lodge**, 12 Perak Rd, 6299-7733; **Mayo Inn** 9A Jalan Besar, 6295-6631; **Broadway Hotel**, 195 Serangoon Rd, 6292-4661; **Dickson Court Hotel**, 3 Dickson Rd. 6297-7811; **Fortuna Hotel**, 2 Owen Rd., 6295-3577; **Tai Hoe Hotel**, 163 Kitchener Rd. 6293-9122. If you're hankering for your own kind, crash at the Prince of Wales Backpacker Pub at 101 Dunlop St, \$12 a night in a four bed dorm and a free beer every night.

BOOK NOW !!

Asiarooms.com

24/7 Call - (66)3-836-4700
more than 12,000 Discounted Hotels



PHNOM PENH



ot 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 getting hammered 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, but don't fall in as you'll die on contact; 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. Got money to burn? Go five-star with the **Raffles Le Royal** or the **Intercontinental**.

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.

NIGHTRIPPING:

If you go out in search of revelry after dark, take a taxi or a moto – don't walk. Phnom Penh has a reputation for street muggings, although these are relatively rare today. If you are mugged, don't resist – they are not afraid to hurt you badly and take your wallet afterwards. 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 most nights are violence-free). 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 and girls. Further up the river is the new **Green Vespa**.

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 (Cambodia departure taxes are \$25 international, \$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) offering spotty service. There are also two border crossings near Pailin.

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 excellent. Bus \$4-6, five-six hours. Taxi \$35, four hours.

Boat: \$20-25, five to seven hours, daily am departure. Now that the road is good, this option is an over-priced tourist rip-off best avoided. Take the bus.

VISAS & BORDER CROSSINGS:

To/from Thailand: Use Poipet if heading to Siem Reap from Bangkok. Use any 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 open. Lao and Cambodia visas aren't available 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.

SIEM REAP CLIMB THE STEPS

Siem Reap means “Siam Vanquished” and was the administrative and spiritual centre of the bloodthirsty Khmer Empire, which rivaled the Roman in size before it, somewhat mysteriously, crumbled. The ruins are what remain of a large city. Angkor Wat is the big centerpiece here, and is a tribute to what unopposed fascism 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 relatively quiet and quaint.

PLACES TO CRASH:

\$3-5 rooms are scattered all over town. Along Highway 6 west of the river **Jasmine**, **Hello**, and the 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**. Wat Bo Road offers some old stand-bys in **Mahogany** and **Mom's** and the new **Two Dragons** (see box). The **Old Market** area is the center of nightlife. The guesthouses here tend to be mid-range. Check out the new **Ivy**, **Molly Malone's**, or the **Mandalay**. A short walk from the Old Market, the **Ivy 2** guesthouse has budget fan rooms as does the **Garden Village** and **Golden Temple Villa**. A step up is the **Red Piano**. There is no shortage of upper end accommodation – new hotels are springing up constantly. 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 a bit like a trip to Disneyland, but a week of living it up in Siem Reap and Angkor is cheaper than Bangkok, and the temples are well 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 \$20-25 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** and **Koh Ker**. Trips further away can get expensive. Also worth an hour or two of your time is the **Landmine Museum**. All the moto drivers know it.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

Most of the visitors go to “Pub Street” which includes the **Angkor What? Bar**, **Easy Speaking**, **Temple**, **Brodie's**, and **Red Piano**, among others. In the neighborhood is the **Ivy** (good food and music, too), the **Laundry Music Bar** (late nights), **Molly Malone's** (Irish bar), and the **Linga Bar** (a gay bar). 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. Hygiene is an issue with many of these places. The bulk of proper restaurants are clustered in the Psah Chas (Old Market) area. Options include the **Ivy** (Western), **Soup Dragon** (Vietnamese-Asian), **Easy Speaking** (Asian, Western), **Tandoor** (Indian), and **Blue Pumpkin** (breakfast/lunch/bakery). Along Sivatha Street are scores of restaurants including the **Dead Fish Tower** (Thai) and **Tell Restaurant** (Western, Asian). In Wat Bo Village try the **Two Dragons** (Thai-Asian).

WAY TO GO:

Plane: Bt6,040/10,200 one-way/return

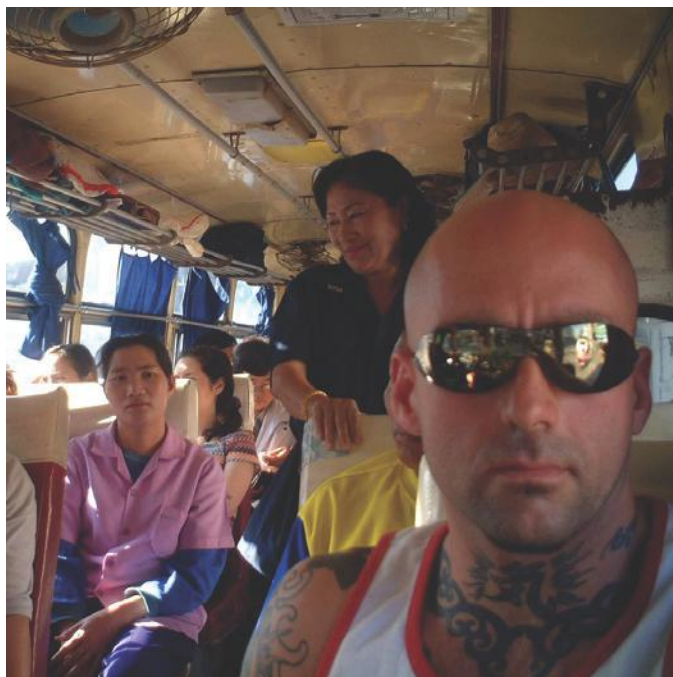
Boat: There is a US\$25, 6-hour boat ride from Phnom Penh, which is an over-priced tourist rip-off.

Khaosan Bus: DO NOT TAKE ANY BUS FROM KHAO SAN ROAD!!! Take a proper Thai government bus from Mo Chit to Aranyaprathet, then a share taxi or pick-up truck to Siem Reap.

Phnom Penh Bus: US\$4-6, five-six hours. Much better than the boat.

Enter the Two Dragons

Long time FARANG Magazine correspondent Gordon Sharpless has in one year managed to get married and fulfil his life's-dream of opening his own guesthouse in his adopted home of Siem Reap. The **Two Dragons Guesthouse** in Wat Bo Village promises to raise the bar of the crowded Siem Reap budget accommodation scene with the nicest rooms at the cheapest prices, along with cable-TV, free tea and coffee, curtains, beds, even pillows! The real gold is in photographer Gordon's encyclopaedic knowledge of the area, advice on avoiding scams and his wife's Thai cooking. There's even a pickup service from the Poipet border (a shithole, somewhere you'll want to leave right away) so call ahead on +855-12-868-551 or 012-868-551 inside Cambodia or twodragons@talesofasia.com from cyberspace. Prices start at \$7 and end at \$20 for the air-con presidential suite, but Gordon says he'll give a 10% discount to folks totting this copy of FARANG Untamed Travel.



VIENTIANE

More of a big town than a small city, Vientiane follows the tradition of amalgamating a lot of small villages together, much like London, except that's where they stopped. The view from the top of the Victory Monument is one of palm trees swaying, crumbling French colonial buildings, golden temples and lots of wooden houses. There isn't a great deal to do in this town other than drink the excellent and cheap beer and gaze across the Mekong – not that there's anything wrong with that. In the morning there's croissants and other pastries with coffee and in the evening, sumptuous French cuisine for a handfull of dollars.

PLACES TO CRASH:

There actually are luxury hotels in Laos; the **Lao Plaza** claims to be five-star and rooms start at US\$100, and the **Novotel**, near the airport has rooms for around US\$70. For the more budget-minded, pretty much all your accommodation needs are concentrated in the area of Samsenthai, Setthathirat 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 Setthathirat 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 Setthathirat 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 Nginn.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

All nightspots start closing around the official 10:30pm and it's lights out by 11:30pm. The main focus for expats and tourists is the **Kop Chai Deu Food Garden**, a lovingly restored French colonial house near the fountain. The **Chess Cafe** is a, frankly, hilarious vista of expat drunks and taxi-girls, dancing to Lao-accented Beatles' covers. It's open sometimes, closed sometimes. For lovers of raucous nightclubs, there's **D'Tech**, at the back of the Novotel and the **Future Bar** next door. **Deja Vu**, on the Nam Phu circle, is a snazzy spot that seems more Vienna than Vientiane. There are a couple of places in Vientiane that cater to the non-narcoleptic after closing time. **Samlor Pub**, a few minutes up the road from Kop Chai Deu, is usually kicking past the witching hour. But if you're up for a round of beer and 10-pins, hit the **Lao Bowling Center** near the National Stadium, open all night.

VANG VIENG

The Khaosan Road of Laos it may be, but at least it's surrounded by some of the most wonderful countryside you're likely to see. And like Khaosan it's going increasingly upscale with loads of snazzy accommodation along the riverside for US\$35. But on the main drag you can't spit without hitting either a backpacker restaurant or a guesthouse. They're all pretty similar, really, but some notably good ones are **Malany Guest House**, where you'll get a large room with polished wooden floors for US\$5 and **Thavisouk**, run by a group of happy women, rooms for US\$4, and they'll sort you out with good seats for the bus trip to Luang Prabang. The **Ngeunpanith** is a bit pricier at US\$8. If you're after a more rural experience, try working for a week at the **Suanmone Phoudindaeng Organic Farm** north of town. You can work there, sleep in a dorm and get fed for US\$1.50 a day, after the first three days of training. The owner likes you to stay for at least a week.

LUANG PRABANG



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), **Bounnasouk** (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.

SMALL ADS - BIG DEALS

Contact:
bigdeal@farangonline.com

CLASSIFIEDS

BANGKOK ACCOMMODATION

D&D INN – Khaosan Road: Check in and enjoy all our facilities. TV, phone, A/C, 24-hour security. Cool off in Khaosan Rd's only swimming pool. Tel: 02-629-0526-8.

NEW SIAM II GUESTHOUSE
50 Trok Rong Mai, Phra-athit Rd, Bangkok
Opposite UNICEF Building
Tel: 0 2629 0101 Fax: 0 26290303



newsiamguesthouse.com

Sawasdee Sukhumvit Inn
Your Privacy in Town

Bring this ad. & get 10% discount on room
Until 31 September 2005

The Best Budget Hotels

Room rates 500 - 630 baht/room

Location easy access to skytrain (Maha station) 300 metres in side Sukhumvit Soi 4

123 Soi Sukhumvit 57, Sukhumvit Rd., Prakhong Bangkok 10110 Thailand.
Tel: (662) 714-6700, (662) 714-6704
http://www.sawasdee-hotels.com
E-mail: info@sawasdee-hotels.com

Thai Cozy House

111/1-3 Taneer Road,
Taladyod, Pranakorn,
Bangkok 10200

Tel: (66) 02-629-5870-4 Fax: (66) 02-629-5875
E-mail: kathy@thaicozyhouse.com
Website: www.thaicozyhouse.com

NEW

"Feel like family at Thai Cozy House..."

We Provide Nice & Clean room with reasonable price • International Cuisine & Thai cooking Class
Thai Massage • Internet & Tickets & Tours

Woraburi Hotel & Resort
The Beautiful Resort
on Sukhumvit Soi 4

Bring this ad. & get 20% discount on room
Until 31 September 2005

Room rates 900 - 2,200 baht/room

Location easy access to skytrain (Maha station) 300 metres in side Sukhumvit Soi 4

128/1 Sukhumvit Soi 4, Klongtoey, Bangkok 10110 Thailand.
Tel: +66 (0) 2 656-7071, +66 (0) 2 656-7234 Fax: +66 (0) 2 656-7027
http://www.woraburi.com E-mail: info@woraburi.com

TRAVEL AGENTS

Discover Asia Travel

operates action packed, relaxing and fun filled quality tours at reasonable prices; Sea Kayaking, Rainforest Trekking, Nature and Culture Eco-Tours, Air Ticketing, Hotel Bookings are our specialties.

DISCOVER ASIA TRAVEL CO., LTD.
19/9 Soi Suk Chai, Sukhumvit 42, Phrakhanong, Klongtoey, Bangkok 10110,
Phone: 02-381-7742,
Fax: 02-381-7708
(TAT license #11/02227)
E-MAIL: trekking@ksc.th.com
www.asiantraveladventures.com

Olavi Tours

We have moved to
Buddy Village, Unit 5,
265, Khaosan Road
Banglumpoo
Bangkok 10200

Tel. 02 629 4710-3 Fax 02 629 4714
Email: travel@olavi.com

Airline Tickets
International & Domestic flights

Train & Bus
Tickets for all destinations

Visas
For Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos,
Burma, India and more

http://olavi.com

SpiceRoads

Cycling Adventures in Southeast Asia

Tel: 02 712 5305 info@spiceroads.com
WWW.SPICEROADS.COM

RESTAURANTS

ATHENA

Bangkok's only
Greek Restaurant
Located at 594
Soi Ekkamai
Sukhumvit Rd.
www.acropolitian.com
Call for
reservation
Tel: 02-392-7644

NIGHTS OUT

BAGHDAD CAFÉ

Exotic Tea & Coffee
Over the canal
on Samsen Rd
opposite Soi 2

Where East Meets East

www.larrysdive.com

Bringing the beach to the people.

Larry's DIVE

DIVE CENTER, BAR & GRILL

0-2663 4563 • Sukhumvit Soi 22

Tokyo Joe's

LIVE BLUES
Every night

Tokyo Joe's Blues Bar & Restaurant
Sivaporn Plaza, Sukhumvit Soi 24
Opposite Arston Hotel. Tel: 02-661-0359
BTS - Phrom Phong Station
email: info@tokyoesbkk.com

BAMBOO
Pub and Restaurant

International Menu
Live Music - Pool

Free buffet every Friday night 9pm.

71/1 Sukhumvit Soi 3, Nana Nua,
Bangkok 10110 Thailand
Phone: (662) 253 2462
www.bamboobeerbar.com

DA GIOVANNI
ITALIAN TRATTORIA

Homemade Pasta
and Pizza House
Italian Chef

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

BODY & SOUL

Rx

KHAOSAN PHARMACY

Feeling Unwell?

Come and visit for FREE medical advice.
All Medicines are stored in an Air-Conditioned Environment.
Need to ORDER? We can help!

Sidewalk Café
KHAOSAN Road
Buddy Lodge Basement

Downstairs in Buddy Lodge, Khaosan Road, BKK
Tel & Fax: 02-629-5084

SMALL ADS - BIG DEALS

Contact:
bigdeal@farangonline.com



Reiki Healing
Pranic Healing
Meditation Course
Yoga-Pilates
Chi-Gong
Kung-Fu
Massage

Bangkok Natural Healing Co., Ltd.
Bayon Shopping Plaza 4th Floor,
249 Khaosan, Bangkok 10200
Tel: 02 629 4618
www.Bangkoknaturalhealing.com
e-mail: Bkok_Natural_Healing@hotmail.com



THE - WAY -
THINGS - ARE
KARMA
SOUL★MATING
QUIETING THE
MIND NOISE

Checkout:
www.next-life.com

WINNER OF 9 PRODUCT AWARDS 
YOUR BODYGUARD
against Mosquito and Insects



Mosquito
the carrier
of Malaria,
Dengue Fever,
Encephalitis
etc.

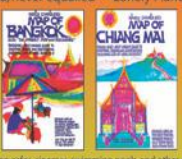
Protect yourself with Jaico

- Effective protection for at least 7 hours
- Available in easy roll-on bottle, spray and towel
- Also effective against insects

Available at leading supermarket, drugstores, and in your hotel rooms.
Imported & Distributed by All Plastic International Ltd.
Tel: 0-2203-0816-7, 0-2769-5041-2 Fax: 0-2203-0815

SHOPPING


Beat the Heat with
Nancy Chandler's Maps of Bangkok and Chiang Mai
"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

NORTH

The signature
dish of
northern Thai Cuisine



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

GECKO BOOKS -
Chiang Mai:
2/6 Chang Moi Kao -
near Taa Phae Gate. The largest
selection of quality used books in
Northern Thailand. You can sell us
your books, too.



 **The Red Lion**

*The English Pub & Restaurant
at the Night Bazaar*

Beers ★ Wines ★ Spirits
Snacks & Meals
Satellite TV ★ Live Sports

123 Loi Kroa Rd. Chiang Mai.
Tel: 053 - 818847.
Email: redlion@loxinfo.co.th

BTS (2000)
TRAVEL SERVICE

When in Chiang Mai Let Boong sort it out


Tours, Treks, Car Rental, Visa Service,
Worldwide Hotel & Ticket reservation



Tel/Fax: 0 5328 4042

SOUTH

CoCo
International Properties Co. Ltd.
Real Estate In Paradise



SEA CANOE (THAILAND) Co., Ltd.
Phuket & Krabi:
The original
Thailand
kayaking experience.
Phuket: 367/4 Yaowarat Rd. Tel: 66 76
212 252
Krabi: 164/8 Moo 2, T. Ao Nang, Krabi
Tel: 66 75 637 170 **www.seacanoet.net**



TAMARIND SPRINGS

Day spa on Samui

Don't miss it.

Incredible herbal sauna,
dip pool and fabulous
massage treatments in
a superb tropical hillside
setting.

Reservations 0 7723 0571

TROPICAL MURPHY'S -
Chaweng Beach -
Koh Samui: For the
best 'craic' on the
island - Guinness/
Kilkenny's on draught. Major sporting
events live via satellite. Opposite
McDonalds. Probably the best
breakfast on Samui and pure Irish
hospitality for the rest o' the day.



Learn to Cook Thai

at Southern Thailand's culinary
center for foreigners, Chaweng
Beach, Koh Samui. Instruction is
completely hands-on in English.
Twice daily classes for visitors,
and monthly 12 day professional
training courses for chefs. Visit
our online store for ingredients,
cookbooks, carving texts and
videos. We ship worldwide.

SITCA  **www.sitca.net**
Samui Institute of Thai Culinary Arts

EASY DIVERS
Thailand's PADI 5 Star Dive Centers

Welcome to **THE SOUTH**

The Gulf of Thailand with its Islands &
Marine Parks, Fabulous Diving & Relaxing
The Ultimate Adventure

Go Dive...
Professional Advice & Care
Bus & Boat Service, Dive Centers,
Guesthouses and Beachfront Resorts in
Chumphon, Koh Tao, Nangyuan & Bangkok
Tel 0 2629 1115, Fax 0 2629 1116
Info@thaidive.com




Located opposite 'The Pizza Company, Rambutit Road (Khaosan Area)

The **Irish rover** Email: dutchkeu@loxinfo.co.th
Bar & Grill
Ao Nang Beach
Krabi
Tel: 075 637 607




Draft Guinness & Kilkenny,
excellent pub grub, darts,
pool, live sports, located
between mcdonalds and
phra nang inn

SPRINGER PUB



Live Music
Blues - Rock'n'Roll
South Chaweng - Koh Samui



Billabong Surf Club
Sports Bar & Grill



Open Daily 10am - 2am Bophut Beach Road,
Fishermans Village, Bophut, Koh Samui, Thailand.
Tel: 0 7743 0144



Koh Tao - Sairee Beach



DRY BAR

cocktail tree bar sunset beach lounge

SMALL ADS - BIG DEALS

Contact:
bigdeal@farangonline.com

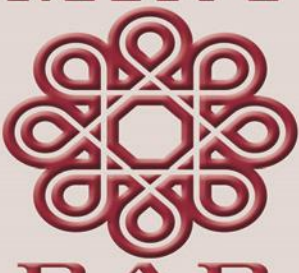
PENNY LANE
ROCK CAFE
KOH SAMUI

Classic Rock Tracks
Pool Table - Darts
Tasty Thai &
Western Food
Live Football & Sports
Rooms For Rent:
TV - Aircon. - Hot Water
Booking: 0-7741-3014

Chaweng Beach Rd.
Burger King
Green Mango
Bans
Full Circle
Moby Dick
PENNY LANE

www.xtravel.co.th/samui/pennylane

MINT



BAR

SOI GREEN MANGO
CHAWENG KOH SAMUI

LOTUS BAR
beach lounge



Mon - Beach Party
Thur - Open Mike Night
50 Baht Sunset
Happy Hour 4-7pm!!
North Sairee - Koh Tao

INTERNET CYBERSPACE

voyagenow.COM: Up to 70% discount on hotel rooms. More than 5,000 rooms in 17 countries. 24/7 telephone booking available - just call 02 913 6030 or visit our website www.voyagenow.com.

just do it!

-  Hotel & Resort
-  Train Ticket
-  Flight Ticket
-  Bus Ticket
-  Tour Program

Call Us
Tel. 02-6139854
Ms. Natalee
Thailandday.com

FARANG *Untamed Travel*

Seeks a self motivated, enthusiastic advertising sales representative.

Salary plus commission - high earning potential for the right candidate.

Opportunity for travel around Thailand

Requirements:

Thai national
Good standard of English
Highly driven to close sales and able to work under own initiative
Sales experience a benefit but not essential

Email cover letter and resume to:
andy@farangonline.com
or fax to 02 629 3992.



The Andaman Adventure begins here



PADI Courses from Beginner to instructor



Full range retail store & equipment service



Scandinavian Lanta 5 star IDC center

www.lantadiver.com
Phone : 075 88 42 08, 01 271 80 60

Your Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone _____ Email: _____

Preferred Payment Method:

☐ **By Cheque:** Made Payable to: TOOLBOX MEDIA CO., LTD.
Sent Registered Mail to us at: 72/5 Samsen Soi 2, Pranakorn, Bangkok 10200

☐ **Bill me later**

☐ **Credit Card:**

Visa: ___ Master: ___ SCB: ___

Name on the Card: _____

Number: _____

Expiry Date: ___ / ___ / ___

Last Three Digits Number on the Signature strip on card: ___

Total (Subscription+Postage) _____

Signature: _____

Select the colour of your FARANG T-Shirt (Free Size) ☐ White ☐ Black

SUBSCRIBE! Save 20%

subscribe@farangonline.com

12 issues of FARANG *UNTAMED TRAVEL*

Book Rate

Bt1,000/\$25 per year - (normally Bt1,200)

Plus shipping:

Bangkok - Free:

Rest of Thailand - Plus Bt200 per year

International - Contact subscribe@farangonline.com



72/5 Samsen Soi 2, Pranakorn, Bangkok 10200.

Tel +66 02 629 3991 Fax +66 02 629 3992

subscribe@farangonline.com

