

WHAT'S THE STORY?

10. Main Events

Thailand, Burma & America

13. A Thai Woman Abroad

Incredible India

14. Water Warfare

Thingyan in Burma

16. Road Warriors

Meet Jason Lang

20. Health

The Thirst that Kills

21. Extras! Extras!

Read All About Them

22. The Stalker

Gaydar Alert

23. Road Reads

Welcome to the Moral Vacuum

24. Letters

Stephen Leather is Full of Shit

26. Colostomy Bags

Poo Poo in the Pub

30. The Diving News

Decompressed Whales

32. Pom Pom Kids

Gimme an Ass! Gimme a Hole!

37. Invisible Trade

Singapore's High-Class Callgirls

43. Thai Folks

Making a Living

46. Natural Extremes

Travelogueing Chile

HERE & NOW

52. Posh Living

Getting Fruity in Phuket

54. Daytripping

Dawn to Dusk in Bangkok

56. Feeding Time

Nosebag Bangkok

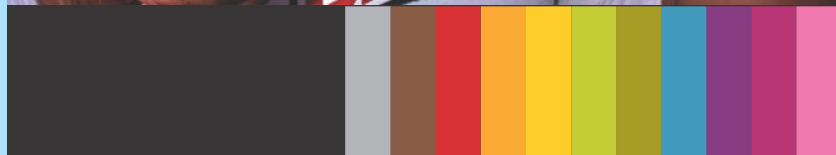
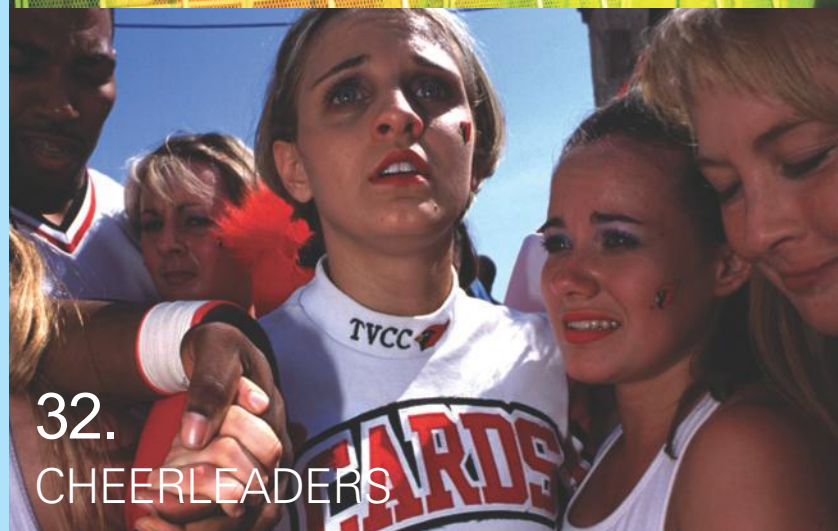
59. Nightripping

Being a Devil in the City of Angels

64. The North

Chiang Mai & Pai

CONTENTS



AD

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

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"If I'd known you had more time I'd have taken off my pantyhose"

INVISIBLE TRADE

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37. SINGAPORE BEDWORK



40. MEET THE LOCALS



46.Chilean Adventure



Main Events

April

Thailand, Burma, America



NEW YEAR'S MELTDOWN

During the sweltering season, brains sizzle, willpower wilts, and the big splash of Songkran seems like an oasis for a thirsty man marooned in a desert. Plenty of places around Bangkok's Rattanakosin Island, such as Sanam Luang, Ratchadamnoen Road, and Khaosan, make for splendid settings to catch all the tradition-soaked festivities. In these areas, from April 13 to 15, there will be water fountains with 'dancing lights,' beauty pageants, the bathing of Buddha images, processions, concerts, traditional sports, devotees making sand *stupas*, and water water everywhere. But as your mother might say, "It's all fun and games until someone loses their life." And the annual death toll on the roads for Songkran is around 700 people so it's best to wait until the deluge dries up before resuming your wanderings. Trawl through the TAT's website newsroom.tat.org to catch sneak previews of all the Songkran-related events across the country.



WATER OF LIFE

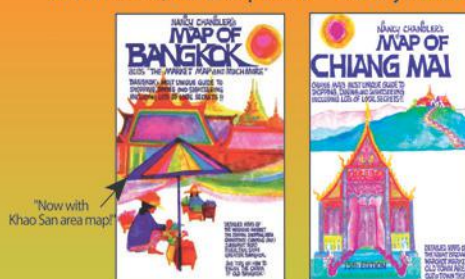
Burma, Cambodia, and Laos also usher in the annum to come with a high tide of H₂O, drunken mirth, and a wealth of similarly entertaining festivities. For some cultural immersion about Burma's New Year antics, check out the story on Pages 14-15.



AMERICAN BOOTY

Cheerleading is a highly popular spectator sport in where else but the US of T&A. With titillating acrobatics, undulating booties, skimpy uniforms, and a bare minimum of cerebral activity, dozens and dozens of babely squads bring their pom poms – and not much else – to Florida every April for the biggest and most brazen cheerleading competition in the world. Break out the tissues, or an air-sickness bag, finger-comb your mullet, and flip to Page 34 for the lowdown on all the hi-jinks.

Nancy Chandler's Maps of Bangkok and Chiang Mai
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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



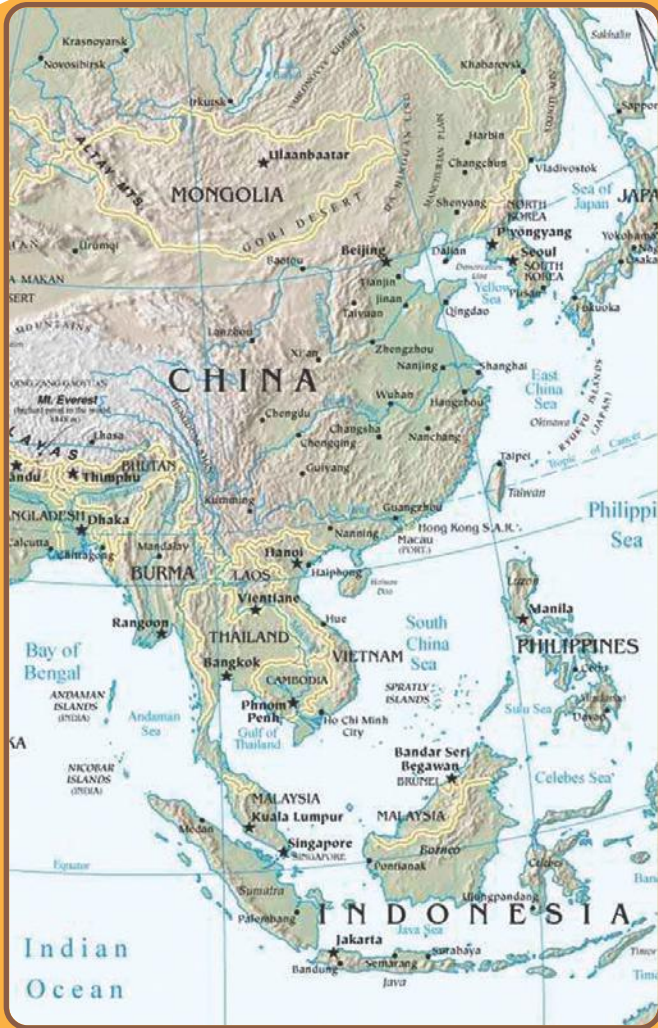
"HONOUR RAPISTS" ACQUITTED

A Pakistani court recently overturned the convictions of five men who had been sentenced to death for gang raping a woman. The men had been instructed by a tribal council to rape the woman as punishment for her brother having an affair with a woman from a rival clan. Such "honour punishments" are relatively common in Pakistan and can also take the form of acid burnings and even murder. The victim, ironically, has since become an activist against such crimes.



EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Thai women, according to a MasterCard survey, rank highest in women's socio-economic levels in 13 Asia-Pacific countries – including Australia. The kingdom's women scored a 92.3 on the gender equality scale, with 100 representing a level playing field between men and women, indicated by workforce participation, education and income equality. Malaysian women ranked second with 86.2. The surveyors speculated that Thai and Malay women are more confident than their regional sisters and that Thailand had a high proportion of educated females.



SIMIAN SOLUTION

Tests of a bird flu vaccine in Vietnam have proven successful after monkeys developed antibodies following injections of the vaccine. However, the country does not have the lab facilities to expose the inoculated subjects to the bird flu. If positive results continue, tests are likely to begin on humans later this year. The World Health Organisation has expressed grave concern that the bird flu virus H5N1 could pose a major threat to humans in the event of the mutation to a more transmittable form – potentially killing between two and 50 million of people. Some countries such as Canada and Australia have already begun stockpiling huge reserves of experimental vaccine in anticipation of a possible pandemic.



MATRIMONIAL MONGRELS

Four puppies became the brides and grooms of two boys and two girls in a small northern state of India. The marriages took place at the end of a festival and were performed to ward off evil. One child's parents pointed out that since her one-year-old daughter had been a victim of the inauspicious omen of having her first tooth come in on the upper jaw, there was no choice but to perform the ceremony. Another relative said that the ceremonies are taken very seriously and that all customs were followed, but didn't specify if this included consummation.



Happy Dumping Grounds

Officials in the northeastern state of Kelantan have announced a plan to create public toilets at popular locations that feature pleasant, piped-in music and newspapers to read to make the voiding of one's bowels an even more pleasant experience than it already is. According to a state official, this will enable folks to keep up on current events, "perform their business" and enjoy soothing tunes all at the same time. Good idea, but we suggest that instead of music, they could better assist the constipated by using the sound system to broadcast ghost stories.



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Once in a Full Moon

– 23rd April 2005

Koh Phangan's legendary, nay, infamous Full Moon Party has been a must-see on every visitor's itinerary for most of its 16-year history. What started with bongos around a fire on the beach has evolved into a giant free-form dance festival, with over two million satisfied punters to its name.

Now it is time for the Full Moon Party to change again. The Phangan Tourism Association and Deep South Promotions have teamed up to put on a special FMP, bigger, brighter and louder, with a swag of top-name DJs descending on Had Rin beach for one night of disc spinning devilry.

Better still, this is one night of debauched hedonism that you can go home with a clean conscience from: all proceeds are to be split between the Save the Children foundation for the relief of tsunami victims and a fund to develop the Full Moon Party – that's from the Bt100 donation on entry.

This is a one-off event and capacity crowds are expected, so dust off your best boogie sarong, don your chicist flip-flops and book your room early.

MAIN ARENA

Located in the middle of the beach, the main arena presents some of the biggest and best acts in the world; including a live set by Thai band Futon, Lisa Loud, Lori the Hi Fi Princess and Ryan Dent. Expect tough progressive/tech house, electronica, and trance.

DEEPSOUTH ARENA

London's deep house specialists will be at the north end of the beach in the Soulsonic arena. DJs include Stuart Patterson, Terry Farley, Matthias Heilbronn. Expect deep, funky and soulful house.

HEAT UK ARENA

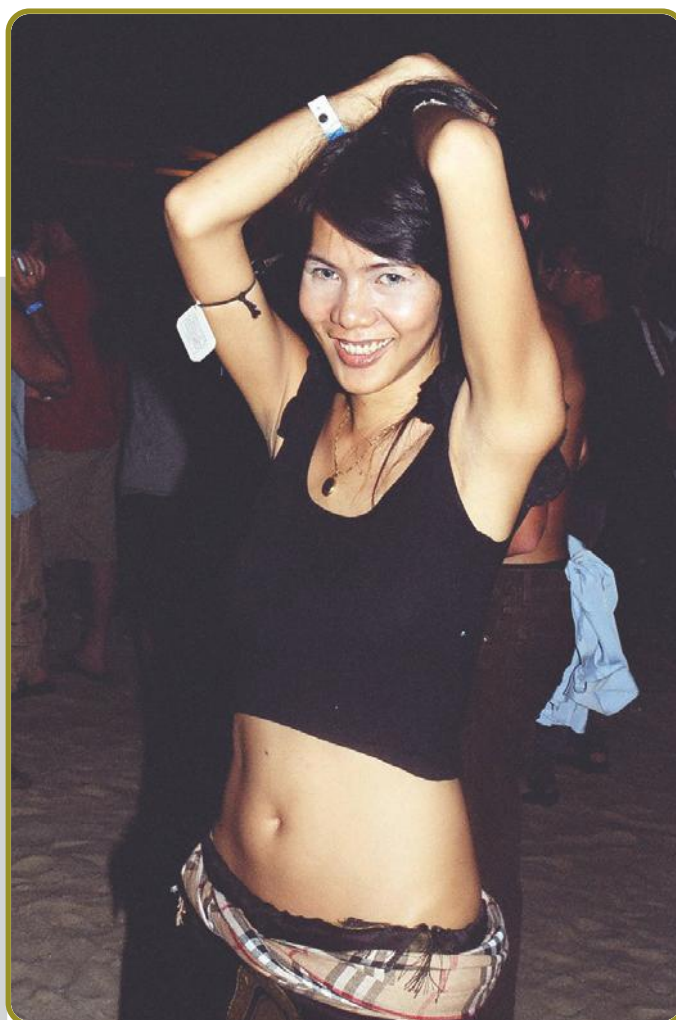
The huge underground hard-house outfit Heat UK are bringing some of their best resident and guest DJs to Koh Phangan including Steve Blake, Spencer Freeland and Marc French. Located in the central section of the beach; expect uplifting trance, hard and tech house.

MINT BAR ARENA

South Thailand's premier nightspot presents an all-star cast of its regular guests including Samba La Casa, breaks supreme Krafty Kuts and live PA from Lisa Shaw. Expect hip hop, breaks, vocal and funky house.

BED SUPPERCLUB ARENA

One of Asia's coolest clubs teams up with one of Europe's biggest promoters right in the centre of the beach. Acts include Fred Jungo, John Ezelle and Emanuel. Expect funky deep house mixed with hip hop beats.



DEEPSOUTH

MINT BAR

HeatUK

 **Save the Children**

Phangan Tourist Association
PTA
Suratthani Thailand

SOULSONIC

bed
SUPPERCLUB

1 ONCE
IN A FULL MOON



Incredible India

After having the goat curry on the flight across the Andaman Sea, the air hostess passes me the immigration form that states on the front page: "Incredible India, Welcome to India". I feel assured that my trip will be incredible, because I come from "Amazing Thailand".

Calcutta (now known as Kolkata) is a three-hour hop from Bangkok, traversing Burma and passing a giant mangrove swamp, part of the world's largest delta and the Sunderbans Wildlife Sanctuary. As the plane closes in on Dum Dum Airport (named after a bullet), I can see kilometre after kilometre of coconut trees covering the city. At this point, I am being berated by an elderly Indian passenger who watches me trying to photograph the great City of Joy. The old gentleman leans across the aisle and says sourly, "It is strictly forbidden to photograph our airport, Madam."

Anyway, I made it through the airport without being arrested. A giant billboard outside the airport says, "Welcome to the City of Joy." Calcutta trades on the bestselling tale of human misery by Dominique Lapierre, a title so famous it has a blurb by Pope John Paul II on the back cover: "A lesson of hope and faith for the world."

Out on the streets everything looks the same as on my last visit a couple of years ago. It's reassuring to see that cows, Ambassador taxis and human rickshaws still share the roads.

Calcutta is India's multicultural city and the capital of West Bengal was the British East Indian Company first stronghold on mainland India, before they moved to Delhi. Calcutta also happened to be the first port of call in India for the Siamese King in 1872, who came to observe how the British worked in India. There are lots of bookshops and India's independent film industry is based here. There are also resident Chinese and an Anglo-Indian community. But the taxi drivers are all from Bihar and can't read the street signs.

Even today, the gigantic Victorian buildings like the Indian Museum, with a huge collection of artifacts, or the Victoria Memorial, are not that easy to overlook. This should be a World Heritage Site; instead it's falling apart. Although some buildings are under restoration, the architectural downfall of the city continues. It looks like the city was once abandoned

and left to ruin. Then the people came back and had to work so hard to eke out a living that there's been no time to repair much.

Calcutta is as frenetic and cacophonous by day as it's quiet by night. Every driver uses his horn, all the time. A sign on the back of most buses and cars reads, "Blow Horn Please". I try to avoid the horns by walking down some back alleys to the New Market, built many decades ago. But the butchers inside are not bothered by the crows flapping around and cawing over scraps of meat. Above the stalls, the high ceiling is as beautiful as one in a five-star hotel, even though it looks like it will fall down any second.

Author Dominique Lapierre regularly returns to oversee a multitude of NGOs involved with legions of the poor and homeless in Calcutta and beyond: "The City of Joy" he wrote about has been moved to a suburb without water or electricity, because land prices near the Hoogly River have gone up. While Calcutta is cleaner than 25 years ago, poverty remains a desperate issue.

In its own way, Calcutta is incredible, yet according to the immigration bureau, I am one of a few Thai visitors. I guess there just aren't enough malls and golf courses.

**Aroon
Thaewchaturat
discovers that
visiting the City
of Joy is not
necessarily a
miserable
experience.**





High Water Lark

Any country like Burma that tolerates a weeklong holiday with the expressed purpose of encouraging its citizens to throw water on each other has reached a high level of tolerance in the books of writer and photographer **Austin Bush**

Based on my own reactions to Burma's New Year celebrations, I don't think the average American would consider having dirty water thrown into his or her face by a drunken teenager a particularly merry way of ringing in the New Year. But the Burmese are a tolerant folk, and the enduring existence of *Thingyan*, their lunar New Year festival, and the reason for all this water throwing, proves their tolerance.

For those who have not been in SE Asia during the month of April, it is during this month that the people of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Burma celebrate the annum to come. The word Thingyan (and the corresponding Thai word, Songkran) comes from the Sanskrit word *sankranta*, meaning "crossed over". The origins of water's role in the celebration is obscure and debatable, but a dish of water, lightly perfumed and gently sprinkled on the hands of an elder, is a respectful gesture in many parts of Southeast Asia. This peaceful, respectful act is most likely the origin of the Thingyan celebration, which today manifests itself in a largely anarchic frenzy of water-throwing and spraying.

If what I have heard about the New Year festivals in other Southeast Asian countries is true (large plastic bags full of water being thrown at motorcyclists in Cambodia, for example), the minimal amount of water being thrown, and the way it was being chucked, were, for the most part, very civil. Before pouring cold water down the back of my neck, most Burmese would politely ask, "It's okay?" and then pour the water before I could answer. Almost all Burmese carried small water pistols that were capable of producing only a tiny spray, but always seemed to be aimed directly at my eyes, or my US\$1,500 digital camera.

A day or two into the festival, the activities became more belligerent. Walking down Yangon's narrow streets I was often hit by a shower of water thrown from a second-floor window, usually followed by the laughter of children. And immediately preceding my departure from Yangon (and also a significant catalyst for my departure), the festival had reached the stage where soggy, drunken men prowled the streets, just to find foreigners at whom they could shout "HEY YOU!" followed by hysterical laughter. (Incidentally, "you" sounds like the Burmese word that means crazy. But I have a feeling that for them this double entendre was not the funny part of the joke.)

Several days before Thingyan began, ramshackle stages sprung up on many streets in Yangon. They were decorated by different sponsors, and equipped with very large speakers and an array of coloured hoses. The greatest concentration of stages was in the area north of town on Inya, University and



Saya Sin Streets, far from the city centre. After the festival had started, these streets were the main destination for Jeeps and trucks, dangerously stacked with wet teenagers and driven by their inebriated parents and friends. The stages were thronging with even more wet teenagers, screaming to antiquated hip-hop music like Vanilla Ice and spraying water on the passing vehicles. The people on the stages were almost unanimously dressed in baseball caps worn backwards, baggy jeans, gratuitous sport team logos; and they appeared wealthier than most people in Burma. The gritty Guns 'N' Roses-influenced youth rebellion that formerly existed in the military dictatorship seems to have been thoroughly replaced by this more commercial hip-hop style. While taking photos at Saya Sin Street I asked to go up on one of the stages and when I reached the top a youth in a FUBU shirt brusquely asked me, "Do you have permission to be up here?" I pointed in the general direction of the person who let me up and continued to take photos. Later I learned that the stages were largely regarded as private parties and some people had to pay as much as 10,000 kyat for the privilege of being on one.

The main official ceremonies in Yangon were centered near Sule Pagoda, in front of City Hall. As the festival approached, the area directly in front of this building was festively barricaded by a two-layered, barbed-wire barrier and several armed police and soldiers. Inside, and facing a large stage, were chairs for the lucky ones able to go past the security corridor. This group consisted mainly of a few men wearing identical traditional outfits, and the numerous employees needed to keep up such a defensive wall. The rest of the population had to stand quite far from the stage, leaning on the barrier or crouching in the scant shadow of Sule Pagoda. The entertainment on this stage was pretty much composed of several identically dressed women dancing in time to age-old tunes. These performances were very long – 15-20 minutes – and I was genuinely impressed that the women could manage to freeze-frame their smiles for that length of time.

"I came to the conclusion that the festivities seemed an appropriate metaphor for the country: a place where iron-fisted rule and virtual anarchy exist side by side."

At one point, on the second day of the festival, it was decided that the general public was for some reason allowed into the de-militarized zone. The people were thoroughly frisked by soldiers and policemen, escorted through a thin opening in the barrier, and quickly led to seats where they could watch the dancing women.

The next day, the chaotic convoy of jeeps and trucks, overloaded with people, which I watched north of the city, were allowed to drive by the stage. The barrier was widened

enough for the vehicles to pass and the more sober groups were ushered in near the stage by armed guards.

Every Southeast Asian festival must include food, and Thingyan is no exception. An especially ubiquitous snack was skewered sheep's entrails dipped into a large vat of viscous, brown liquid. Although I would normally jump at the chance to eat intestines, on this particular day I chose noodles instead. I sat down on one of the ridiculously low chairs that only the Burmese seem to be able to sit on with any grace and ordered a dish of noodles. The man at the opposite side of the table grabbed a handful of the noodles, before adding the various sauces and other ingredients, proceeded to mix the whole sticky mess together, slowly and laboriously, using his fingers. I had become used to this handmade way of preparing food during my two-week stint, but was unprepared for the manner in which this man watched me eat while thoroughly licking the same fingers he had used to make my noodles.

I came to the conclusion that the festivities seemed an appropriate metaphor for the country: a place where iron-fisted rule and virtual anarchy exist side by side. I found these extremes fascinating, but was tired of having water sprayed on my camera, so I went home.

On one of my last days at the festival I was taking photos of a particularly raucous stage when a wet youth approached me. "Why you taking photos?" he asked me, somewhat defiantly.

"Why not?" I countered, wondering in what direction this conversation was going.

"It's okay," he said with a wet, toothy grin. "You can do whatever you want. It's free, like a democracy!"





SHOOTING ASIA

Open a magazine like this one and you may wonder who the people behind the glossy photographs are. Who got that cover shot? How do they work? What's it like being a high-flying photographer? **Daniel Cooper** meets the gregarious Jason Lang, asks him all these questions and a few more.

Jason Lang is a good guy to know. Not only is he a successful photographer but he's also a fine fellow. The story of how this California boy came to the shores of Thailand is an interesting one. Although in university he studied to be a ceramicist, ever since getting a Pentax K1000 from his father Jason has had a continuing interest in photography.

Friendly, talkative, tall and somewhat handsome in that California-boy sort of way, Jason is stressed out at the moment: "Man, I lost my camera bag," left in a taxi, a hazard common to many in Bangkok. This hasn't slowed him down though. When he was interviewed by *Farang*, he was engaged to take photographs for a guide to Bangkok, as well as various other jobs. "My first job was an interior shoot of a hotel but I prefer shooting...I like to shoot food, food culture. I'm into food, I love food. I do a lot of restaurant stuff. I just helped a friend out in

New York, a famous chef named Patricia Yo with some shots for her cookbook. I'm a food photographer, I guess, if I had to pigeonhole myself."

Like so many others, Jason came to Thailand to teach. Arriving with aspirations of travel, he was quickly into work. "I put in my application just on a whim and the next day the guy called me back for an interview, I went in and I had the job two days later." Teaching photography (his second major at the University of Southern California) lasted for a number of years both around Bangkok and Chiang Mai, where he started shooting for local magazines. For a while, he and a friend set up a garment export business, with their own chain of stores in the US. "We were sarong kings. It was great, we were making a ton of money too. 9/11 pretty much killed our business. No one was going to shopping centres, no one was spending money and I wasn't saving a whole lot of money. So we just kinda closed down all the shops. So what I did was sold off my little piece of the business, sold my car that I bought and, you know, got my 5,000 bucks and came back to Thailand."

Things followed a similar course to before. "I taught a little bit, I was picking up photo jobs and this and that. It was kind of like history repeating itself," says Jason. "Then I met a writer – this is about three years ago. His name is Rod McKeown. From that point on photography has been full time."

Going full-time has been kind to Jason. Many amateur photographers come to Bangkok with dreams of going pro, only to find a long queue ahead of them. Meeting Rod McKeown was a breakthrough, My first commercial, the magazine gig was for 'Wallpaper' and it was shooting the Shangrila Putrajaya down in Malaysia. "





Going pro at home often means shooting weddings, but in Asia many hope to become photojournalists. What Jason has done is to build a career through *Gourmet Traveller*, *Destinasian* (the April cover shot is his) and the like. This keeps him shuttling between Bangkok, Singapore, Seoul and Shanghai for highly-paid shoots of hotels and restaurants.

On travel: "I deal pretty well with it. I do have a girlfriend here [Bangkok] and I assume it's pretty hard for her. But other than that I really enjoy travelling and most of the time it's to places I haven't been." Travel affords Jason the opportunity to exercise his artistic instincts, shooting in medium-format.

"I've been really lucky and fortunate to meet the people I have," Jason says when asked about how to get ahead in photography. "I would say, be a people-person, go out and meet people. No matter how good your photography is, you need to meet people. Say yes to people, do things for free and you start to make a name for yourself.

"I'm not rich, I'm living paycheck to paycheck, but I'm doing what I love to do."





HEALTH

GETTING YOUR THIRST ON

I imagine this: You wake up in Bangkok with a screaming hangover from all the free booze on the plane the night before. Your mouth feels like century-old wallpaper but you've only got a few days in town so head out to the Grand Palace for a pleasant day of walking around in the baking heat. Over a few beers in the evening you realise all is not right in your tummy and spend the night on the can, bent over double, puking and shitting.

Not only are you in danger of ruining your trip but you're looking at a serious case of dehydration, something you've probably never had to deal with at home, but have to watch out for around Southeast Asia.

Dehydration is caused by – no need to consult Stephen Hawking just yet – not having enough fluid in your body. This happens when you forget to drink enough, which is actually very easy when you're travelling around and seeing stuff. The other way is if you're sweating and urinating fluid faster than you can drink it, like when you're sick. If you're drinking diuretic things like alcohol, coffee or caffeinated drinks, or smoking heavily then you're heading for thirsty land too. Strangely, all the fun things in life, like getting drunk, smoking, taking drugs and horizontal folk dancing seem to dehydrate you.

Your body needs a minimum level of water and salts to operate. When these are depleted, the symptoms of mild dehydration kick in, like being thirsty and having a dry mouth and lips. Your urine may be dark yellow as well. Things don't usually progress far beyond that if dehydration is caused by heat or exertion – you can just go get a drink. Most adults (babies and kids, being littler, are more susceptible to dehydration and die world-wide at the rate of one every 14 seconds; think about that one, parents) only get the symptoms of moderate dehydration if they've been vomiting or have diarrhoea. Then you'll see symptoms like sunken eyes and poor skin turgor. That last one means your skin doesn't bounce back quickly when pinched. People with severe dehydration have a rapid, weak pulse, increased respiration, blue lips and cold hands and feet. Plus, they are confused and lethargic. If you're at this stage you need immediate medical care, as well as a drink, and may be subject to seizures, brain damage and a bad case of death.

Hopefully, the majority of Farang Untamed Travel readers are healthy adults and not penniless children in third-world countries, so you're unlikely to reach the severe stage of dehydration, but it is very easy to get in a



bad way, especially if you have a case of "Bangkok Belly".

Even for severe cases, oral rehydration salts (or ORS, as they're called by the bonesaws), are an effective first treatment. You can buy them by the sachet in any pharmacy and they contain a collection of various salts and sugars that, when added to water, form a foul but life-saving concoction. Incidentally, they're pretty good for recovering from a hangover too, so no traveller should be without some, but don't take them all the time. Energy and sports drinks can actually do more harm than help since they often contain a lot of sugar that can irritate already sick bellies. If your case warrants hospital care, they'll put you on a drip.

This is a pretty warm part of the world, and when you first get here, you're likely to be sweating bullets and drinking more alcohol than usual. Not being able to drink tap-water can come as a shock for some, (actually, Bangkok's tap water is perfectly drinkable; it's the pipes carrying it which are the problem; so even the locals buy bottled water). It can also be a surprise to find that you need to drink a couple of more litres each day than at home.

Remember that tap water is for external use only, and in the end, the best way to avoid a mighty thirst is to pay homage to the old adage, "Three beers then water, won't get slaughtered. No water, all beer, wake in fear."



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Extra Work

If you want to reside in Thailand, but you're not corporate sponsored, you cringe at the idea of teaching English to fat Chinese brats and petty crime doesn't appeal, there is one avenue you may wish to explore – being a film extra – writes **Tom Chard**.

The only form of work that can be legally undertaken by a foreigner without a work permit in Thailand is acting and modelling. This is, of course, only because Thai people can't look like a Farang. With the boom in foreign advertising agencies and film studios shooting in Thailand to take advantage of the low cost of labour (making Thailand a great place to be for budget commercials and telemovies), there's more work around for a constant supply of foreigners with delusions of grandeur and empty pockets.

But to get in one of the big-name productions like Oliver Stone's *Alexander*, you usually have to be registered with several legitimate agencies and show up to castings, which requires half a day and a few hundred baht in taxi fare, plus some acting ability. The chances are that, as a traveller, or an actor who relies on the industry for a living, you will have to do extra work.

Before you get too enthused, think about the hours: The day can begin as early as 3:30am, depending on where the shoot is. There is no union or minimum wage and the only rule is that they have you for 12 hours from the time you arrive on set. Including transport this can end up being an 18-hour day, and, on average, you will be paid an astounding Bt1,500 for your troubles. There are many quality acting and modelling agencies out there who can find you work ranging from Bt5,000 to Bt40,000 a day (excluding the minimum 30 percent commission), however, the average traveller will only come in contact with the Khaosan people-herders – shady, pimp-like characters who pounce on disoriented and drunken visitors, trying to convince them they can be a star, so they can undercut the legitimate agencies.

"Hurry up and wait" is the catch phrase of all professional extras. Imagine standing around for 12 hours being yelled at: "You, Farang, go there, do that, one more time." The phrase "too many cooks in the kitchen" comes to mind as you have several different Thais in different positions trying to make themselves look important by telling you to do different things at the same time. It's like training day at a tuk-tuk driver's



English school. Even the assistant director, who usually has the most valid instructions, will disorientate you by asking you too "act more spicy" then changing his/her mind to "happy, cold, spicy, hot and funny" all at the same time. "No, not you, be more like Beckham!"

On the positive side, I have met many interesting people, from aspiring porn lords and Muay Thai fighters to neurotic mothers of precocious child stars. I have been taken to Chiang Mai, Pattaya and Kanchanaburi, all expenses paid. I have played the role of businessman, matrix agent, soldier, POW, father, Scandinavian sauna fiend, CIA agent, wrestling fan and gay university student.

So it's a worthwhile way to get your 15 seconds of fame, but if you think you will get famous, get paid fairly, or treated with any respect, then think again. Just remember, there are plenty more where you came from.

Schedule of a Movie Extra

3am Scrape yourself out of bed if you bothered sleeping, nurse hangover or drink more.

3:30 Go to 7-11 buy a Gatorade, Red Bull, canned coffee and anything that vaguely resembles breakfast food, then get in taxi.

4:00 Meet at rendezvous point. Stand around and wait. Curse yourself for arriving on time when everybody else is late.

5:00 Jump into a minivan full of Farang that smells like a pub carpet, and try to sleep.

6:00 Arrive at location, try to stay in van asleep and unnoticed, or stand around and wait.

7:00 Eat breakfast if provided, drink Nescafe with Coffee Mate, stand around, wait.

8:00 Have make-up applied by lady-boy. Try to avoid kissy faces, knee rubs and eye contact.

8:15 Have hair done by lady-boy. Try to politely dodge sexual advances or scalp massage while incapacitated by hairspray poisoning.

8:30 Have clothing selected by lady-boy, try not to be assigned the low-cut hot pink tank top or beret. Laugh at each other's lame clothes while standing around and waiting.

9:00 Watch film crew set up, stand around, wait.

1:00 Work. Which consists mostly of doing nothing, occasional bouts of ritual self-humiliation and standing around waiting.

6:00 Finish work, collapse, stand around, wait

7:00 Get paid, jump back in minivan, which now smells like a pub carpet and gym locker.

8:00 Arrive at drop-off point in evening traffic, usually Sukhumvit or Silom. Swear never to do this again, attempt in vain to remove lady-boy make-up in bar toilet with liquid soap, and drown sorrows in beer.

The Stalker

ONE FOR THE BOYS

*That damsel of Bangkok, **Karen Findlay**, sings the praises of gay men and lifts the lid on why women love them so much.*

Gay men, WE LOVE YOU! I thought it was time one of us girls shouted it from the rooftop. As a heartbroken Canadian friend of mine said this month, what would we do without you?

In her case, all she got from the girls in reaction to her heartbreak were a few hugs and knowing looks. "You'll get over it," they all said. From the boys, however she got shrieks of indignation, an immediate order to get out of bed and get dressed, three beautiful men arriving within the hour, taxi in tow, to whisk her off to Bangkok's hottest gay dance club.

There they began plying her with drinks and found her a spot on a speaker where she could dance the night away, not one worry about what any man there thought of her as they were all gay. As long as she had a good time, that was all that mattered. Or so she thought. But this was no proper 'girls night out'. She was, after all, out with 'the boys'.

The alcohol started to kick in. She was still dancing but no longer oblivious to the muscular bodies moving beneath her to rhythms of their own. She stared too long, not for what she'd lost, but for what she could have were these men not all gay. And that's when her gay friends proved themselves capable of what no girlfriend can do for a woman in need.

Seeing her eyes start to wander, they reached up, one on either side, and lowered my friend to the ground. With a conspiratorial wink and a naughty nudge, they pointed out a tall dark stranger on the other side of the dance floor. "He's not gay," they proclaimed in unison. Not allowing her a chance to object, they then swooped her up again and carried her across the floor, delivering her to the tall dark stranger... who turned out to be a South African who was indeed straight, interested, and something of a heart healer at that. Three weeks later, glowing from her short but very satisfying affair, my friend simply said, "Girls, without gaydar, you just couldn't have delivered."

Gay men, you are indeed our best wing men, evil though you may be at times. You'll make sure that if you can't have that well-built Adonis from Amsterdam, we will have him for you. Thank you. Granted, many of us have spent a night out with a gay friend competing for the same man only to lose and have to face that smirk you give when you wander away with the target, having known all along you would win. (Sometimes, gaydar be damned.)

If I may continue without making you blush, we love you because you are there for us when we're in need (unless you have a date, of course, in which case we know you'll call as soon as it's over). You are generally so much more fun than straight men too, willing to dress up, to sing, to dance, to prance and play all night long (assuming you don't 'make a date' on the dance floor and disappear for an hour). When you do 'date', you return from your rendezvous with tales which rival even the most outrageous of those girlfriends share with each other. (What woman would admit to waking in a hut in the ricefields somewhere a B400 return taxi fare from Bangkok with no clue of how she got there or which of the two boys in the hut she went with?)



Travelling with gay men is truly fun too. As long as there are men around, all's okay. You flirt with bus divers, train conductors, noodle stall waiters, one and all, adding a sexual undertone to all we do together. You don't complain there's no footy on TV at the hotel as long as there are men playing football on the beach to watch instead. You'll allow us to check them out with you, discussing their physical attributes in ways no straight male friend would stand for. You wink at us in our bikinis if you think we need a little encouragement (even when we should instead be encouraged to cover up). You also give us space when we need it (albeit leaving us alone for a day as you travel around an island in search of really local rendezvous points like rest stops and public toilets is a bit worrisome). Sunset drinks and dinner conversations with gay travellers is also guaranteed to be entertaining. (I've only met one dull gay man in my life and I have

known more than a few.)

Last but not least, you give us a true measure of men we do choose to date. If they can't hang with you, they can't hang with us. Life without good gay friends simply wouldn't be much of a life.

A tip now for straight men: Gay men often do travel with straight girls so if you see a man checking you out, do look around. Befriending him could open doors to true pleasure. Courtesy of us women with him, that is.

PS: Straight men in Bangkok looking for an excuse to prowls a gay dance club for hot women, check out The New Roxy on Silom Soi 4 this month (April). It's hosting 'Gay Idol' nights (along the lines of *American Idol*) and is sure to pull in a lot of us hot women.

Road Reads

Welcome to the Moral Vacuum

Thailand plucks the creative strings of many who choose to live here and there have been a few who have stayed to write or set up publishing companies. In this month's Road Reads column, **Daniel Cooper** picks three local titles.

Essential Reading

The slim volume titled *Deutsch – Thai Bar Guide* (Bangkok Book House, 2004) appeared in the *Farang Untamed Travel* office several months ago only to quietly grow fungus on our bookshelves since none of the staff speak German. There is an English version as well but we didn't get that one. The book merits mention though as it is a phrasebook like no other. Does the *Lonely Planet* phrasebook have a section on ranssexuals? Ever wanted to know how to say "Du bist so sexy und du hast so einen tollen Kurper" in Thai? It's actually "Khun pen phuujing sexy la mii ruub rang dii mak," or "You are so sexy and you have a beautiful body." Handy stuff to know. The guide promises all the phrases you'll need at the massage parlour, beer bars, go-go bars, Patpong, Nana, Cowboy, Pattaya and the rest.

The book is an interesting marketing idea, the concept of selling sex-tourism accessories, but if you don't speak English (the *lingua franca* of Thailand's sex industry) the book could come in handy. Or get you into worlds of trouble.



Behind the Curtain

*Met you as a stranger,
Took you as a friend.*

*Hope we meet in somewhere
When friendship never end.*

The popular belief amongst visitors to Thailand is that the dancers of Patpong earn their money from sleeping with men. This is incorrect. Barfines and the money earned from being a prostitute is pocket money. The real cash cow that bargirls are chasing is a Farang man who will send a monthly stipend from abroad. Successful bargirls have a series of duped men around the world sending them money each month so "their" girl doesn't have to dance.

Hello My Big Big Honey is a collection of correspondence and was groundbreaking in exploring the complex nature of bargirl/customer relationships. In the 21st century we have SMS and SMS *For Lover & Friend* (Ploy Chan Books, 2547). The book has almost 200 sample SMS messages, with Thai script translations, basically aimed at Thais who need to communicate with Farangs in a romantic way.

*This heart of flower, I give it to you.
Please keep it closer
To your heart too.*

The book reveals volumes about the chambers of the heart, and is a codebook for anyone who is participating in a cross-cultural SMS romance.

Lessons Learned

Thailand is littered with the limbs and torsos of English teachers. In past times, anyone who was a native-speaker was pretty much guaranteed a job on a walk-in basis. Of course, things are a bit different now, but the tradition of English teaching is still the profession of first (only?) choice for many expatriates. *Experience Preferred But not Required* offers 10 character studies, written in the first-person by Paul Murphy, who definitely has his finger on the pulse of English teaching. The text is, on the whole, a grim look at the vocation and is at odds with the light-hearted front-cover illustration. Far from being a jolly book of student-teacher liaisons, this is a study in flawed characters.

I am fifty-two years old, and I have never had a teaching job. The rows of brown faces look at me curiously as I prepare to introduce myself. Last night's whiskey is sitting uneasily in my stomach. The fans that buzz around me can do nothing to stem the torrents of sweat that seep out of my pores. I lick my lips nervously, staring at the Thai ten year-olds as they stare back at me. There aren't too many times in your life when you think you've made a serious error of judgement. Maybe it happens once or twice every ten years. I am now experiencing one such moment and am fully aware of it.

The book is unusually well-written for a Bangkok-based novel and the author knows his subject. Anyone who has ever done a stint in the blackboard jungle will find echoes of past colleges, as well as the old dread of fronting the class every day. For anyone contemplating a career in teaching in Thailand, this is a valuable primer to the various weirdos, twits, maniacs and browbeaters that pass foreign tongues on to the nation.



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Letters to the Editor

I Disagree Sir!

Dear Editors,

Stephen Leather is full of shit.

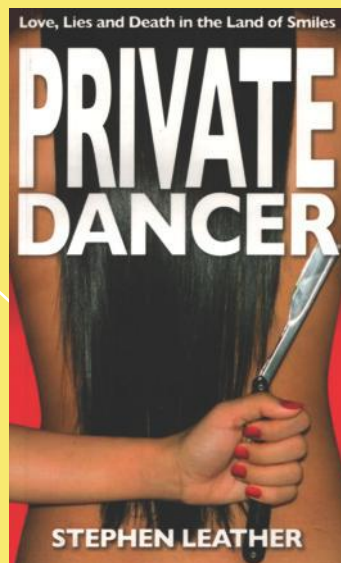
[Editor's note: Leather is the author of the bargirl/customer novel "Private Dancer", interviewed in the Farang's March '05 issue.]

He says 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." I must remember that every time I kiss my wife goodnight and good morning. And I must share this Trink-like wisdom with the dozens (yes, dozens) of Farangs I know who have married girls out of the bars and either share homes here with them or took them back to Europe, Australia, and the United States, where from all appearances they're living happily. I haven't read Steve's new book, but admit I've enjoyed several of his earlier titles and I recommend them to readers of that genre [thrillers]. For those who may not know, *Private Dancer* was inspired by personal experience that he chronicled in pathetic detail in the December 1996 UK edition of *Esquire*. It was called "Hooker, Line and Sinkers" and it told how, after ten years of visiting the Land of Smiles, believing he knew his way around, he fell in love with a girl he met at the Voodoo Lounge in Nana Plaza. She assured him that she had no other love interest and in a short time, he wrote, she said she'd quit the bar and become his "private dancer."

It was when he considered marrying her that he hired a private investigator who reported back with a photograph of Ying and her husband. In the picture, the guy was wearing a shirt that Steve had given Ying. Seeking revenge, he told her he'd

buy a pickup truck and deliver it at a birthday party he would host for her in Bangkok. Some thirty guests were invited, including 20 from her village in Surin. He said he'd meet her at the party and stayed at home in Dublin instead, sticking Ying and her family with the bill. He didn't buy the truck, either. When I read that, I thought: he's not only a jerk, he's stupid. If he ever returned to Thailand and any of the male Thais in Ying's life – husband, brother, whomever – encountered him, they'd kill him. That hasn't happened so far. Be warned, Steve. Thais have long memories. By the way, if you want to read a good book about the local bar scene, Steve is right, there's only one worth the effort. It's called *Woman of Bangkok* and it was written by Jack Reynolds and published in the early 1950s.

Jerry Hopkins
Bangkok



Job Applications 101

Hello,

I recently picked up an issue of Farang Magazine, and noticed so many errors in it that I can only assume you probably need help with editing in English. :) Luckily, I am an American female (native English speaker) who currently resides in Bangkok, and am seeking work as an English writer/editor.

I have finished successfully several freelance projects in Bangkok in the past couple of years, from editing documents translated into English for EQHO communications, to website architecture and design for a major stock photography site, to writing web content for a jewelry exporter. I also write as a hobby in my spare time, and have my own website with a large readership. Recently I have picked up other freelance writing projects – for example, as a contributor to *khaosanroad.com*. I have a decent understanding of the Thai language and Thai culture. I also have a laptop and internet access, and can be reached via email or phone at any time of the day or night. I have several references I can provide who will verify my dependability and the quality of my work, and I would be happy to forward you samples.

You are welcome to have a look at my professional portfolio at: <http://nicole.ciremedia.com>. Please drop me a line so that we might set up a time to further discuss! I would love to demonstrate my expertise for you personally!

Look forward to speaking with you.

Nicole Furi

Farang Replies:

Sorry Nicole, though you obviously



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possess the rudeness skills necessary to be an editor at Farang Untamed Travel, your email contained no significant typos, grammatical errors, or clumsy sentence structure, so we're afraid you just wouldn't fit in around here.

Missing

Tom Ash and his wife Aya and their daughter were visiting Kanchanaburi in a rented car on February 10, 2005. While Tom and his daughter visited a local festival, Aya remained in the car. When they returned, Aya was gone, the car was locked and the only thing missing



was her passport and a couple of personal items, so abduction seems unlikely. Aya has a history of depression and was on medication at the time, though Tom believes it highly unlikely she could leave her daughter. According to immigration, she has not left the country. If you have seen this woman, please contact Tom Ash with any information. Tel: 04-840-3101, email: tomash101@yahoo.com

After the Wave

The Tsunami charity photo exhibition *After the Wave*, co-sponsored by Farang Untamed Travel, the Kraichitti Gallery and the Royal Photographic Society of Thailand, that opened on February 16th proved a success during its three-week run, selling several photographs and generous donations from sometimes weeping visitors. The exhibition raised more than Bt130,000 for Royal

Rajaparchanukroh Foundation, a charity under the supervision of HM the King that is providing shelter and education for children in Thailand orphaned by the disaster. Farang would like to thank everyone who participated in getting the show off the ground and all those who threw the hard-earned cash into the pot.

Thai Rak Thai

Dear Editor,

Recently I have witnessed blatant discrimination against Thai people, in Thailand. I come from the U.S. and have worked in Thailand for the past year, very much enjoying learning the language and about the culture. I've also met and become friends with many wonderful people, and become involved with a Thai woman. She was born and raised in Bangkok, is very well-travelled and works for an international company. Her work has allowed her to travel a lot, and interact with many different people from around the world.

This month two American friends came to Thailand. I reserved them a room at a guesthouse on Khaosan Road. I found the staff at the guesthouse to be very friendly with me. I'd reserved a room with them before for another friend, and they remembered me. They know I currently live in Bangkok and seemed to appreciate the business.

My girlfriend and I went to meet them at the guesthouse and I was allowed in to get them. We later returned, and our friends invited us up to the room. When we walked into the lobby area together, the staff sternly said (in Thai): "Thais can't come in." Apparently, my girlfriend was not allowed into this "public" lodging, internet, and travel agency establishment simply because she is Thai. I explained that we were simply collecting some things from the room, and it would only take a few minutes. Their response was that there was no exception. Under no circumstances would they waver on their "no Thais" policy.

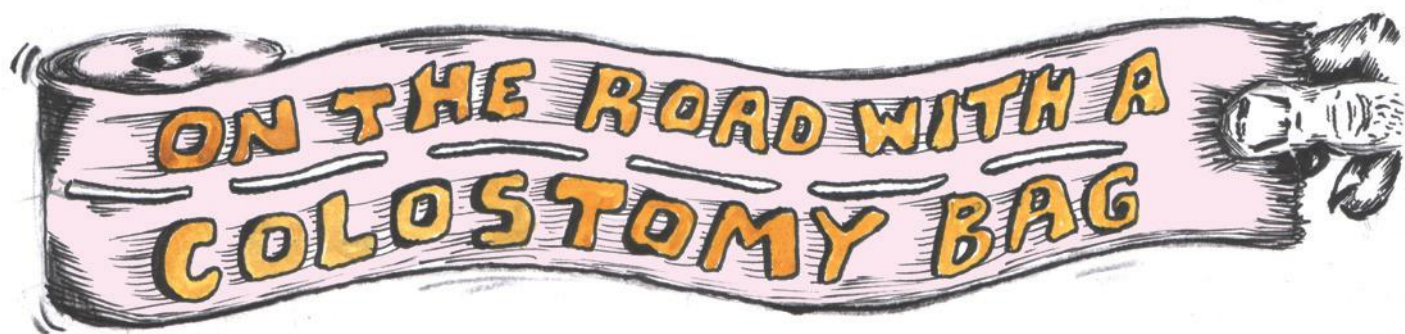
I know that Khaosan road is different from most other places in Thailand, catering particularly to backpacker tourists, but it should not be exempt from upholding basic rights and respect for the people who are native to this country.

My girlfriend was very embarrassed and ashamed that her own people would treat her this way. Our friends were appalled. How could these people, who had been so friendly and trusting with me, a foreigner, treated a fellow local so badly? Unfortunately, my friends' first impression of Thailand was quite negative, but perhaps revealing of some less obvious ugliness existing in the "land of smiles." I realize that there are some deeply-rooted problems partly responsible for the guesthouse's "no Thai" policy. Of course, it is in the establishment's best interest to not allow opportunities or tolerate illegal activity inside its premises. However, I don't believe it is reasonable to allow such establishments to so harshly exclude an entire ethnic group or nationality. I would like to encourage people with similar stories to report them to the authorities and the local media.

Daniel Clarke
Bangkok

Farang Replies

We checked with a couple of Khaosan guesthouses, and those who do maintain this policy told us it is intended to prevent theft. One of the establishments had an "everyone welcome" policy before, but experienced many room break-ins, which stopped after they implemented the no-Thais policy. Why wouldn't they make an exception in an obvious case like that of your girlfriend? Most likely because they are employees acting under their big boss' guidelines and in keeping with local custom, avoid using their own judgment lest they get in trouble. Under Thailand's most recent constitution, this practice discriminates between nationalities and/or races, and so is a violation – much like double pricing for foreigners. However, this has to be proven in constitutional court to enact it as law, and it seems unlikely that anyone will bother to sue guesthouses (or the national park authority) anytime soon.



After several months of living with the humiliation and inconvenience of a colostomy bag, **Ben Hopkins** can take it no longer and heads off on an English country weekend in an attempt to live like a normal person



It was midsummer. The English weather was perfect; breezy, sunny and fresh. And as I loaded up the van and climbed into the back with a handful of friends, a feeling of optimism for the road ahead rose with the morning sun. Cans of brew were cracked open and as London receded into the distance, a long lingering sense of gloom slipped lightly from my shoulders.

You see, the first few months of living with a colostomy bag, albeit a temporary one, are bleak. No matter what you're doing; whether it's drinking beer with your mates or sipping tea with your grandma, your thoughts are always going to be preoccupied with something else – namely shit. But I was determined that this three-day camping trip out in the green fields of Sussex would mark a turning point.

And so it did. Everything went smoothly that weekend. That was until the eve of our return, when the rain came hammering down and a powerful wind tore branches from the trees, making the narrow country lanes slightly treacherous. In no hurry to get home, we decided to stop in at a thatched roofed pub some 40 miles south of London. We'd have a couple of beers, toast a fine weekend and wait for the storm to abate.

The interior was homely. Whitewashed stone walls were adorned with sepia-tinted photos from days gone by. In one corner stood a large oak table beside an open fire, in the other a smattering of locals propped up the bar and in between hung a well-used dart board.

My friends took a seat around the old oak table while I got the beers in, sharing a joke with a local farmer whom I nicknamed cyclops on account of his being a foot taller than everyone else and having a disproportionately large eye unusually close to the middle of his forehead.

Then suddenly he flicked a peanut into my beer and the mood changed.

"I don't like like it. I don't like it one bit. You come down 'ere with yer 'la-di-da' friends from the city prancing about like a bunch of toffs."

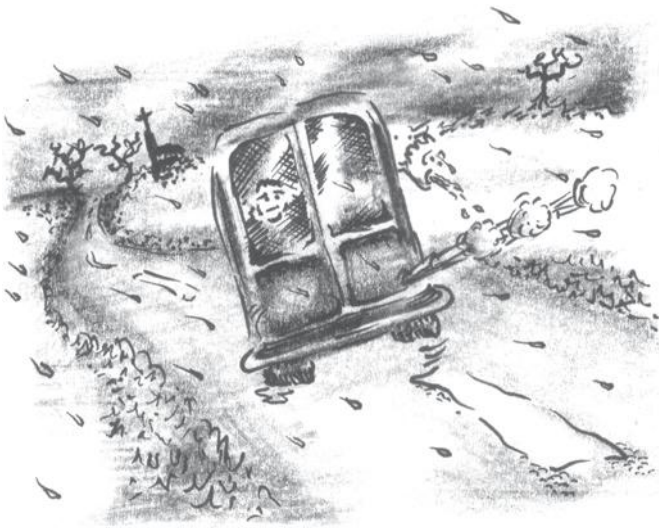
I assured him I bore no ill wishes but that just seemed to boil his blood all the more.

"You better watch it boy. I got my eye on you."

Then, like a coward, I told him about my medical condition and that an accident could be very nasty for both of us.

This had him in guffaws of laughter and as he wacked me on the back he explained,

"I were only winding you up yer daft bugger. What d'ya think I am, a monster? Come on, lets have a game of darts. The winner gets the beer."



Cyclops turned out to be a great drinking companion for the night, twisting the landlord's arm into bringing in a barrel of the finest home brew that he shared amongst my friends. In England, it's common to drink warm, flat beer called Bitter and there are a thousand different brews, all with their own unique taste. This particular one went down like liquid gold. However, drinking heavily that night would later prove to be a bad idea. Gas seeped into my bag, pumping it to bursting point and the more I drank, the less I noticed or cared.

It wasn't till the midnight hour that the darts got serious. The score stood at one all in a best of three competition. I forget the double it ended on, but the sweet moment of victory was short lived.

A loud cheer from the locals was followed by a congratulatory wallop on the back from Cyclops which sent me flying toward the big oak table where my friends sat.

The corner of the table hit hard against my colostomy bag, winded me, burst the bag with an audible pop and sent shit with the consistency of yoghurt splashing across the table. The girls shrieked and everyone darted out of their chairs as I fell ungraciously onto the cold stone floor.

Catching my breath, I knew this was a moment that would forever remain a stain on my psyche. Emerging from a puddle of shit, I rose to my feet, buckled up like the Hunchback of Notre Dame. A deformed, stenching freak cast out from civilized society.

The silence was tangible. Faces that only seconds ago were aglow with beered-up exuberance suddenly shot into the distance, betraying looks of horror, repulsion and pity.

Staggering towards the toilet, the silence was broken only by Cyclops, who burst into a great roar of laughter and called out: "By God, what a stench! Worse than all the pig farts in Sussex put together that one."

Locking myself in the gents, I squatted down, dug my fingernails into the back of my head and prayed to God that a great hole open and swallow me up. But he wasn't listening. A banging at the door bolted me back to reality. It was the landlord demanding that I get the hell out of his bar.

The only person left inside was Cyclops, who was still shaking with laughter and as I darted from the bogs to the exit he bellowed out: "What a performance that was! I never laughed so much in years. I'd shake yer hand and buy you another beer if it weren't for the fact fact you're covered in shit."

My friends were huddled up on top of one another in the front of the van with a space reserved in the back for me. We beat a hasty retreat and raced home with the rain streaming in through the open windows. Cigarettes and matches were constantly lit to fend off the stench, bottles of perfume were emptied and a seamless stream of shit jokes were hurled in my direction in an attempt to make light of the situation.

This worked well and as we entered central London at two in the morning I opted to walk the final few kilometres home through the rain and into my bathtub.

It wasn't till three months later that I awoke in a morphine haze from a four-hour operation to fix all that was wrong with my guts. Above me an angel in a nurses uniform looked down and smiled.

"Are you alright?"

"Yeah, wonderfull."

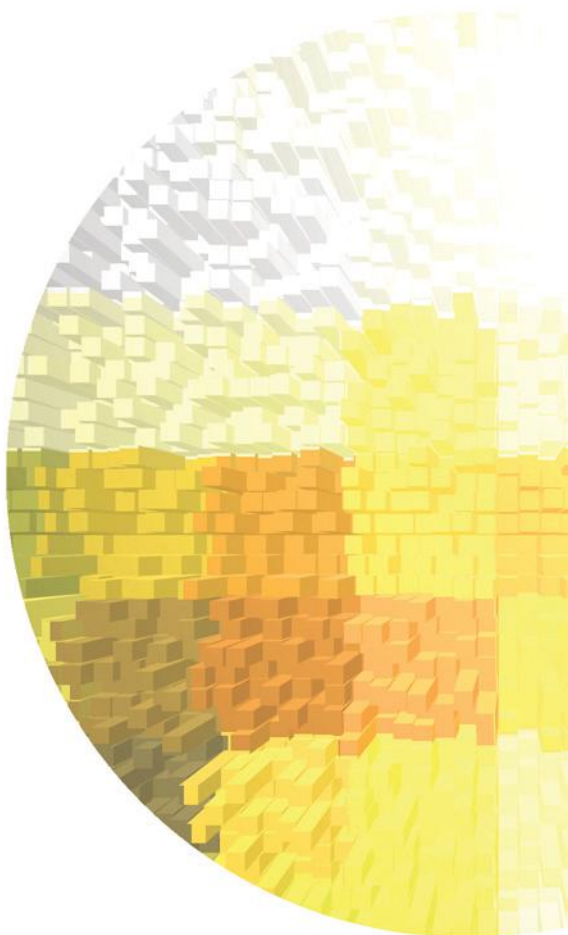
"Well, you'll be pleased to know the operation was a success so you can say goodbye to colostomy bags forever."

I think I may have fallen in love there and then but the spell was quickly broken.

"However, for the first few weeks we suggest you live next door to a toilet. It'll take time to relearn how to control bowel movements so you'll most likely be shitting yourself constantly."



PARTY HEARTY



It's been a year since legendary Singapore club Zouk opened up a branch in Malaysia. Exporting the three-clubs-in-a-club concept has gone down well with Kuala Lumpur's punters, and Zouk's striking white building is regularly crowded.

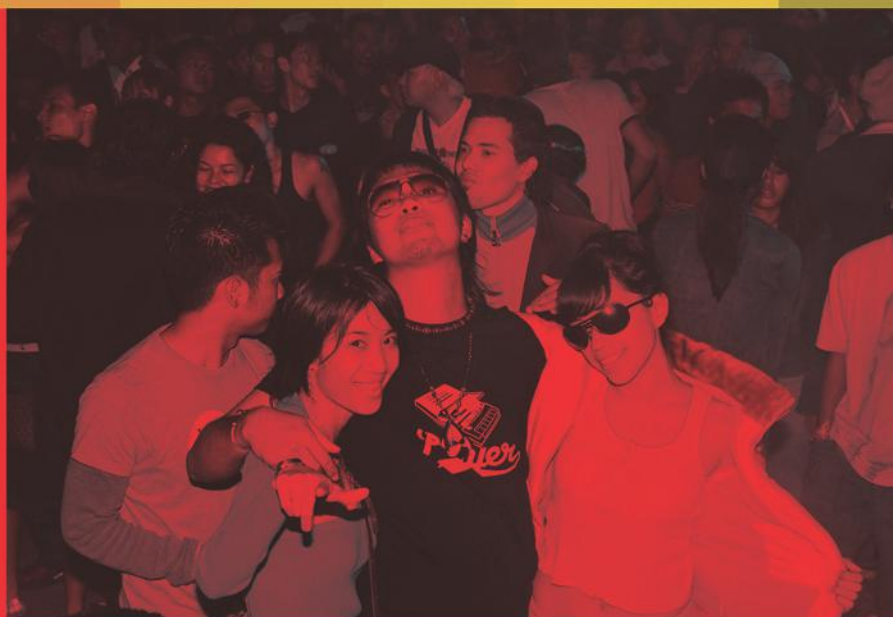
But, just as there's more to Zouk than the club in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur has imported Singapore's yearly dance festival, Zoukout. Having already shaken and stirred my thang at Zoukout in Singapore, I was keen to see through glazed and rheumy eyes how the concept would play to a Malaysian crowd.

So there I was on Saturday March 5th, picked up from the airport by private vehicle as if I were someone who actually matters, winding in air-conditioned comfort up the steep road from Kuala Lumpur to the Genting Highlands, a Cuban cigar in each hand, eventually arriving at the Zoukfest site. As jungle gave way to temperate alpine forest, and the clouds started rolling over the peak, I knew this would be an interesting night.

When we pulled into the massive First World Hotel, that the organisers were using as a base, the scene was one of thousands of young clubbers, milling around in thick mist and waiting for things to get underway.

Quite right that they should be excited, the Zoukfest team had assembled a crack squad of DJs from around the globe to spin their stuff on one of the three stages that were built for the occasion. At the huge Main Arena Mr C, Futureshock and Way Out West, all British lads, were about to drive the masses mad, with Belgian duo Filterheadz playing at the climax of the night. On the lounge-like Velvet Underground stage, cool cats would be grooving to the likes of Jon Cutler,





Hardsoul and ATFC while Cut La Roc, Deadly Avenger and Aussies Fluke & Simon Sez would be whipping the masses into a frenzy at the Ghetto Heaven Arena.

As darkness fell the crowds gathered. I'd been told that pre-sale tickets had sold out already, 14,000 warm bodies, and that there were only another 1,000 door tickets. From the que at the ticket booth it looked like there would be a few thousand disappointed folks.

When things got started it was so foggy I could barely see the DJ from the front of the stage. There was a chill in the air and the wind was high. So high in fact that in the first set, one DJ's record blew right off the deck. The cold and wind didn't deter the punters though, and there were plenty of party people dancing up a storm.

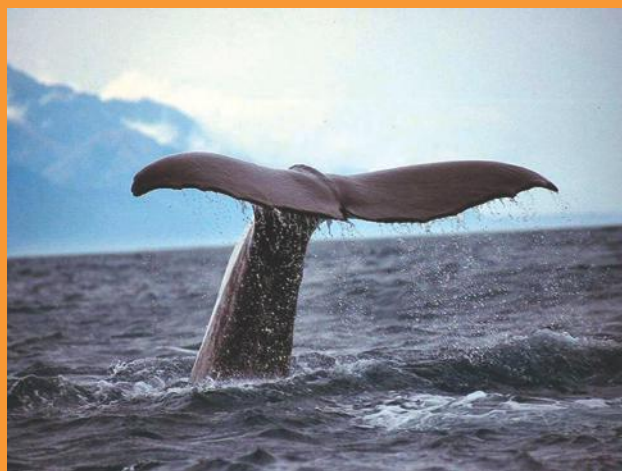
Entertainments were provided by stilt walkers and two vixens from Bali who walked around the crowd spanking people. By the end of the night 16,000 people had filed through the gate and the place was packed. I'd been drinking in the VIP area since midnight and staggered down to the main stage to catch the Filterheadz play a rocking set while the stilt-walkers took angle-grinders to their crotches, showering me in sparks. It was a fine way to end the night – drunk, dancing and happy as an Italian with a fresh haircut

Words and photos by Daniel Cooper



WE HAVE WINNERS!

In last month's issue, we held a contest wherein readers could win a DVD called Discover Scuba Diving Thailand merely for being amongst the first ten people to send us an email with the subject header "Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!" Well, there's nothing like free stuff to bring out the correspondent in people. Sorry to those who made the effort a bit too late and didn't win, but we did insert the "no whining" clause. The winners, who are receiving their prize by mail are: 1. Jock 2. Tongen 3. Wittawat Jaisaan 4. Simone Muniandy 5. Trevor Corey 6. Wesley Tsu 7. Colin Anderson 8. Tyler Firth 9. Ellen Hargreaves and 10. Nick Themelis Congratulations to you all, and may you enjoy many pleasant evenings of vicarious diving in front of the TV.



Even Whales Get the Bends

According to research conducted by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in the US, whales, long thought to be immune from decompression sickness do suffer from the bends. Studying the bones of whales dating from 100 years ago to the present day, and found that older whales showed a greater accumulation of pits and lesions consistent with mild, but chronic decompression sickness over their lives. Researcher Michael Moore, who heads the team, speculates that it is the cost of living in a pressure gradient environment – normal physical stresses for a whale, much as humans accumulate damage to joints and the spinal column due to living in an environment subject to the damaging forces of gravity.

Previous research has shown that whales do make what may well be "safety stops" as they head towards the surface, though researchers weren't sure at the time why they stopped for these rest periods. The Zoological Society of London has also done research on the tissues of dead whales and found bubbles indicating severe decompression sickness. It was speculated by this team that military sonar was responsible for frightening the whales into going against their instincts and surfacing too quickly, since the sea is quietest nearer the surface.



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Dive Sites of Thailand

THE SIMILANS

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

PHUKET

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

PATTAYA

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

KOHTAO

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

PHI PHI ISLANDS

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



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Losers, Spotters, and Cheerleaders

Apart from their nationality, what do Ronald Reagan, Madonna, Jack Lemmon, Meryl Streep and George W Bush all have in common? The answer is that in their college years they all practiced the peculiarly American art of “cheerleading”, a strange potpourri of gymnastics and dance which is believed to be a genuine sport and competitive event in the USA. Words and photos by **Dan White**

“When not actually in action, the spotter is posted directly underneath the mini-skirted cheerleaders staring fixedly skywards at a never-ending succession of firm teenage behinds.”



If you took everyone from the TV audience of *The Jerry Springer Show*, and all their families, and put them all in one rundown string of shabby buildings fronting a white sand beach, then you may come close to understanding the atmosphere of Daytona Beach, Florida. But then you'd have to add the disclaimer that in what looks like a state bylaw, all men must have a mullet and all women must chew gum constantly and sport bottle-blond, bouffaunt hairdos.

Those buildings that aren't shabby concrete motels are shabby diners; and each eatery must have a theme. Some of them have names like "The Old Cowpoke's Rest". Others are shrines to a mythical fifties Shangri-la when all the men dressed like James Dean and all the women stood over open sewers with their skirts billowing billowing.

It is late and the fumes of petrol are poisoning the taste of my beer. That's because the theme of this particular diner is motorcar racing. It is, to all intents and purposes, a garage, except for the fact that they don't actually do anything useful, like fixing cars, for instance.

Daytona Beach is a place that adds a frisson of real desperation to the concept of homesickness. But there may yet be salvation. Tomorrow this dreary string of prefabs and concrete will be transformed into Barbie Doll heaven. From all over the US, thousands of nubile young women will flood into town for the All America National Cheerleading Championships. The effect this invasion may have on the local population of slack-jawed rednecks should be a performance in itself.

POMS AWAY

The next day Daytona Beach is basking in bright, late spring sunshine. I would love to say it looks better in the daytime, but I would be lying. There is, however, a change in the people. Whilst the seafront is still peppered with the usual obese and sartorially challenged holiday-makers and residents, there is now a new contingent that looks like an outing from the set of *Baywatch*.

Groups of tanned, lithe young woman dressed for the gym are wandering around in groups and lounging on the seaside walls. Although smaller in number, their male counterparts, all of whom seem to be of hulk-like proportions, are throwing Frisbees and conical footballs, or doing endless sets of press-ups, sit-ups and pull-ups. They are also doing a lot of friendly whooping and shouting "Yeah!!!" and "Alright!!!"

As I arrive at a grassy area in front of the main hotel, the scene evolves into something truly bizarre. The cheerleaders have arrived and the show is underway. The competitors practice for this all year and what I am witnessing is the final dress rehearsal. In separate groups, teams of cheerleaders from all over the States are flinging each other about in ways that look both reckless and impressive. One team from New England has "Dogs" written in large letters across their backsides and is in the middle of a fracas; their trainer is yelling at the row of downcast faces. "This is not the max! Okay! You gotta go for the max and achieve the max. This awesome is not the max!"



Turning on one girl who is gently and uncontrollably weeping, the coach vents his ire: "Candy, your awesome is a disgrace and your facials are a joke."

Utterly confused by both his tone and his language, I approach Candy as she takes a break and sips a Coke. "He is so on our case," she says, "and we practice hours and hours every day. I can't take it! It's too much! How can I go to the max on my facials when I want to cry all the time because Brad keeps shouting at me for screwing up my awesome? It is so, so unfair!"

None the wiser, I comfort her by suggesting she takes a piss on his bed and I seek out someone who may enable me to decipher this strange litany of angst. The person who enlightens me confesses to being a "tosser". These are the male members of the troupe who with precision, strength and skill fling and catch their lighter female teammates. If the tosser screws up, the girl can die or be paralysed for life.

"The facial is like so important," Brad says. "They have to look like they are so psyched when they do the routines. If the facial is bad the team loses points."

So this is the only sport in the world where you get marks for smiling and looking a bit manic? "That's right," says Brad.

I ask him about the problems Candy has encountered with her 'awesome'. Brad explains, "An awesome is when the girl is lifted by the tosser and then balanced on his hand right up in the air. If she blows it on the facial, the tosser is gonna find it hard to trust her the next time on the awesome. We all train so hard for this."

Although we share something like a common language and I respect his obvious passion and professionalism, I realise that Brad and myself are culturally as far apart as pygmies and Eskimos. But he has a point. This 'sport' may be weird, but it is also very, very dangerous. Between 1982 and 1994 more female athletes were injured in cheerleading than in any other sport in America. In 1990 alone 12,000 cheerleaders were admitted to hospital with injuries. A number were paralysed for life.

So I witness the first heats of the competition with some interest. In a large unatmospheric hall under harsh strip lights, team after team goes through their 12-minute routines: a blur of tumbles, twists, jumps and back-flips. At first I look on with real admiration at the gymnastic and rhythmic skills of the contestants as the panel of 12 judges gives them marks for athleticism, creativity and the joyful insincerity of their

"This 'sport' is also very, very dangerous. Between 1982 and 1994 more female athletes were injured in cheerleading than in any other sport in America."

facial expressions. But there are 180 teams in this competition from the United States alone, along with many more from Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico and Japan.

After the 30th team has gone through the motions of bumping, grinding, flinging, jumping, landing and slapping their perfect little backsides to a sound track of fifth-rate stadium pop or innocuous white-boy rap, I am sick and tired of it.

I wander over and talk to one of the huge burly men who is in the business of cheerleader protection. Called "spotters", their job is to catch the girls if they fly off in the wrong direction. When not actually in action, the spotter is posted directly underneath the mini-skirted cheerleaders staring fixedly skywards at a never-ending succession of firm teenage behinds.

Not surprisingly, one of the spotters tells me, "It's the best job in the world. If I catch them in a fall, they are often very grateful. Very, very grateful. I have myself a ball down here."

After hours of being told things like "cheerleading is a way to grow as a human being and learn to love others in a way that makes us all better as human beings" by cheerleaders, trainers and judges alike, the spotter is the only participant whose motivation and sincerity I can completely understand. His name is Steve and I ask him if the tossers from the teams see him as some kind of a threat.

"Hell no!" says Steve. "Half of them are gay in any case so the percentages work out fine for us and them. Four gals to every red-blooded guy."

Steve looks happier than a groupie on a Linkin Park tour bus.

While he is in the mood for talking, I ask him who is the most lusted after team from a purely non-technical point of view?

"Well, the girls from Georgia are sure the purtiest and they sure have the best asses. But the girls from Houston, Texas are just downright dirty, so I sure will be hopin' one or two of them takes a wrong kind of fall into my comfortin' arms."



Totally Awesome

Two thirds of the teams having been eliminated – God knows by what criteria – in the opening heats. The next day sees the grand final in a magnificent outdoor arena surrounded by gleaming corrugated iron. Inside, important-looking men with fat arses and Rolex watches are busying themselves around the stage. They are, apparently, the national media. Taking up a position at the front, I am informed that, “You cain’t stand there, sir.” The word “sir” is uttered in a manner used only by Americans in authority and is delivered in a tone that implies the real meaning is not “sir” but “douche bag”.

“This spot is reserved for national TV,” he says pompously.

Although he makes himself and the event sound more important than the signing of the Bosnia peace treaty, I make way both for him and his even more serious-looking retinue of sour-faced interns.

He is not the only one behaving as if all this meant something. Following Steve’s advice, I seek out the team from Houston, Texas. They are in a huddle giving each other strength for the upcoming routine. As I approach I realise that the only custom more vacuous in this event than the “facials” must be the “verbals”.

“Love y’all!” shouts one to all the others.

“Right on! To the max!” another one replies.

“We are Houston! We are Houston!”

Having grasped the gist of their strategy meeting, I return to the main stage, where the Georgia team is performing, and there’s “Steve the Spotter” looking eagerly up at the objects of his lust. After two days of this, I, however, am now so bored

as to feel dizzy. All the routines are exactly the same as the ones they did yesterday, and exactly the same as those of their competitors. A man can only endure so many back flips and inanely stupid facial expressions before he wanders off to lay his hands on an axe.

But I have to stay to see if Houston, now my adopted team, can stay the course. Dirty they might be, but they’re a disaster when it comes to flinging each other about. Two of them tumble right off the mat, much to Steve’s gleeful satisfaction, no doubt. Their “awesome” crumbles and they’re at the bottom of the heap. But I don’t care. I’ve had enough.

At the end of the afternoon the losers drown their sorrows in alcopops while the winners strut along the promenade and whoop a lot. But in a country that doesn’t tolerate anyone losing, the winners console the vanquished with cornball wisdom. A girl from the winning Georgia team puts her arm around a losing tosser from Houston and says, “You didn’t lose. You came 10th.”

Not daring to ask what you would actually have to do to be a loser in this town, I content myself by watching the event’s finale of an awesome performed by 100 girls. It is an impressive sight – a forest of nubile flesh – and a superb national party trick. Every mullet-headed redneck in town stands transfixed. But I can’t help thinking... what’s the point?

For a complete listing of all the cheerleading competitions coming up in April check out

cheercoachmagazine.com/directory/pages/competitions_page2.php



FINANCIAL FLESHPOT

In this new section, here's a saucy excerpt from a kinky new book by **Gerrie Lim** about high-end sex in Singapore, an entertaining read where fully fleshed out portraits of the call girls couple with penetrating insights into the business of pleasure.

It's nine o'clock in Singapore, a typical balmy night in the tropics. Humidity hangs heavily in the air as Jasmine hails a taxi into town. It's time to go to work. She's going to strangle a man again.

Philip's already waiting when she reaches the hotel on Orchard Road. He's just flown in from his office in Tokyo. He called the escort agency from his cellphone while waiting for his bags at Changi Airport, requesting Jasmine once more. Where some might view this as impatience, Philip prefers to think of it as anticipation. He knows what he wants, so why delay the gratification? Book the girl as soon as you get in. Lock and load. Crosshairs on the target.

Philip likes this tall, lithe girl from Mongolia, with her jet-black hair and long, strong legs. And strong legs are essential for what he has in mind. Philip thinks she's easily impressed, especially with his suave looks, designer labels, and taste for fine wines.

Tonight, he's already made a start on a 2000 Joseph Phelps Insignia Napa Valley, S\$250 a bottle, a score of ninety-two from Wine Spectator. But Californian Cabernet isn't what Jasmine really comes here for, and she's not that easily impressed. After all, at S\$600 an hour, she's worth a few bottles of those, though she feeds a distinctly different appetite.

No fancy dinner, no small talk. Jasmine reclines on the carpet fully clothed as Philip undresses himself. Totally naked now, he rests his neck on

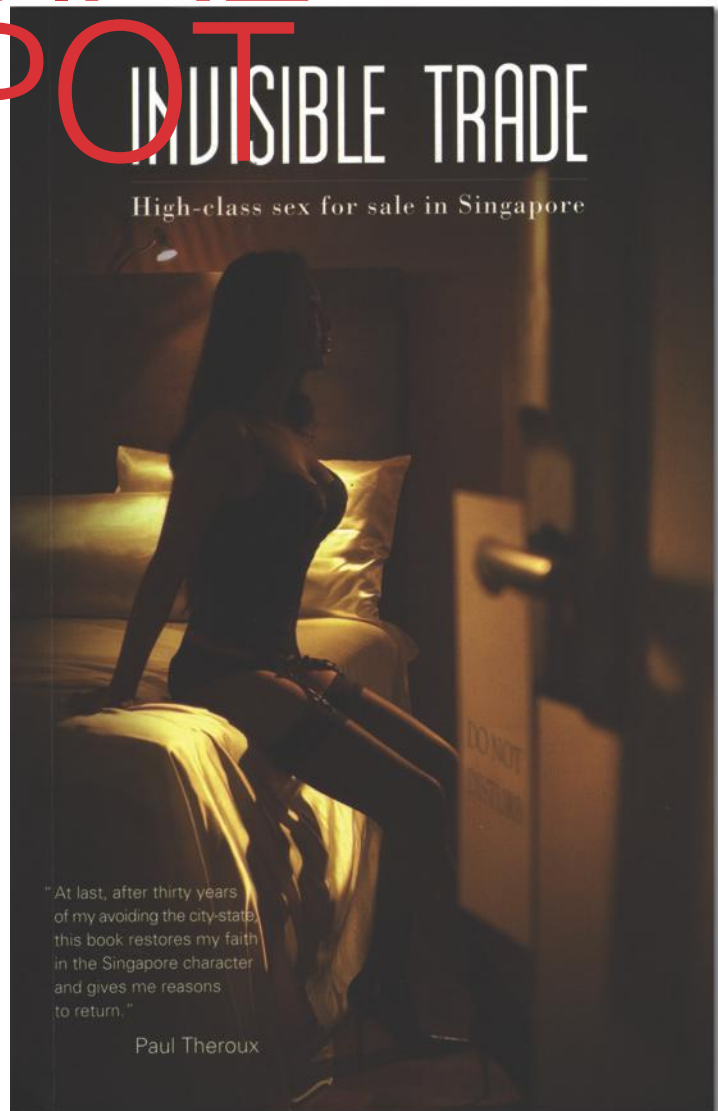
her thighs and signals for her to begin. Ten minutes later he reaches climax and they're done.

Auto-asphyxiation normally requires a man to loop a noose around his neck with a rope or a belt. The choking sensation produces a terrific rush when he masturbates to climax. But Philip isn't going the way of Michael Hutchence of INXS, who did just that and was found dead in a Sydney hotel room. That's why he needs Jasmine, who chokes him—with her thighs.

If by chance he's quaffed too much wine, he'll slap her leg gently. This is their signal, meaning she's supposed to stop.

"He likes me to strangle him so he can reach a really intense orgasm, and he always comes," explains Jasmine. "When I'm doing it, I'm usually dressed and he's the one who's naked. I wear jeans. I can't wear any kinds of pants that can be slippery. They have to have a grip."

Jasmine, now twenty-eight, first came to Singapore eight years ago when a friend enrolled her in a computer programming class. She learned the basics in Singapore before completing her computer science studies in Melbourne, Australia, funded in part by her escorting tips. Until she met her current agency boss in Singapore six



“Philip likes this tall, lithe girl from Mongolia, with her jet-black hair and long, strong legs. And strong legs are essential for what he has in mind. Philip thinks she’s easily impressed, especially with his suave looks, designer labels, and taste for fine wines.”

years ago, Jasmine had never worked in any area of the sex industry.

“In the beginning, every job was difficult for me,” she recalls. “I wouldn’t say I’m very experienced even now, but I know what I’m doing. Once I made the decision to do this, it took about six months for me to get used to it and a year to get to the point where I could feel confident in my abilities. In my opinion, that’s slow compared to some other girls. In the early days I wouldn’t even know which hotel to go to and when I got there, I’d get lost. I got lost at the first big hotel I had to go to. I didn’t know which of the three wings the room was in! I went back to the agency crying. They sent another girl. I lost that client.”

People outside the sex industry suspect there’s sex involved in escorting, but they don’t know how much. The average booking lasts for three hours but this is for escorting only: dinner, dancing, karaoke, or maybe even a shopping trip. Sex usually takes place afterwards, if requested by the client, and is always negotiated separately after the initial booking time has elapsed. The carnal congress can last as long as the client’s money allows. “It depends,” Jasmine reveals. “It can last from thirty minutes to an hour. Usually, they like to finish pretty quickly but I can get them going again after that. That’s how I get repeat customers—I’d say 40 percent of mine are repeats. But I had one guy who took a very long time, almost one hour, to get fully aroused. When it comes to sex, I usually don’t mind if the guy is good and can really last a long time, because I can last a long time myself. But it’s hard if it takes a long time for him to even get erect. I had to do a lot of touching and a lot of encouraging.”

Such techniques require learning, outside the classroom. “Sometimes I watch porno movies,” Jasmine giggles. “You can get them even in Mongolia, believe it or not, especially in the capital, Ulan Bator, where I grew up.” Actually, pornographic material is also available in Singapore, even though it’s officially banned; everything is for sale if you know where to look. Lucky for Jasmine, since she intends to remain in Singapore rather than return to Mongolia. “If you’re shopping in Ulan Bator, you have to choose between ethnic art, ethnic dresses, cashmere sweaters, and chess sets. And if you want to mail a letter, you have to personally go to the post

office; mailboxes on the streets don’t exist.” Not the sort of place where a girl gets paid to strangle a guy for his sheer sexual pleasure then—particularly with her thighs.

“I have also done strangling with my arms but I don’t think I’m strong enough for that,” Jasmine concedes. “I have had guys ask me to try to use my arms. Some girls prefer to do that, but not me. I’m more comfortable doing it with my legs. When I’m done, I don’t even have to clean him up. He just goes off to the toilet himself and I’m done.”

The S\$600 Jasmine earns from Philip is not bad at all for ten minutes’ work. Agency rules are such that Philip has to pay the entire hourly rate, even if it took a mere ten minutes. Strangulation is S\$600 (US\$370) an hour, and anything kinkier, like whipping or spanking, starts at S\$700 to S\$1,000 an hour. As Jasmine leaves the room with S\$600 in cash, she gets a peck on the cheek from Philip. She ambles down the corridor and into the elevator as Philip returns to his Joseph Phelps.

Jasmine’s had sex in three rooms of this hotel in the past year. Only one strangulation, but there have been a few more in other hotels, other rooms. The money sure is good, assuming you don’t kill anyone.

Invisible Trade (Monsoon Books, 2004) is widely available at bookshops in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. The publisher’s website is at www.monsoonbooks.com.sg

WRITER'S BLOCK

Interview by Jim Algie

Gerrie Lim is the author of *Inside the Outsider*, a collection of his rock star interviews and he is currently the International Correspondent for AVN Online (www.avnonline.com). Gerrie has also contributed to such publications as *Billboard*, *Details*, *Elle*, *The South China Morning Post* and *Playboy*. His latest book is called *Idol to Icon: The Creation of Celebrity Brands*, to be published by Marshall Cavendish next month. In the writer's own words, "It is based on my own background as an entertainment journalist and examines the idea of celebrityhood today and how it has merged with the modern marketing concept of "branding" (a la Jennifer Lopez and David Bowie, two celebrities I have previously interviewed) and there is also a chapter on Asian celebrities like Jackie Chan and Michelle Yeoh."

Via email Gerrie answered some questions about the book.
How long did it take to research and what were the major revelations or shocks in doing all the interviews and legwork?

"The book took a year, including six months of actual research and interviewing. I wouldn't say there were any major revelations or shocks except for how secretive some of these girls were. Some were quite effusive and expressive about their sexual experiences with clients, as long as I changed their names and protected their real identities, while others were very reticent. One girl, a blond and usually vivacious

Australian, turned out to be the hardest interview. She clammed up when I asked her about sex, stuck to monosyllabic answers or terse replies, and also refused to let me tape-record her (the only girl that did so). While she was usually socially gregarious and had good people skills, which is a prerequisite for her job, she clearly had big issues with being seen as a slut. Many of them do, and see escorting as being different from prostitution.

I was (and still am) fascinated by these kinds of metaphysical boundaries that people draw for themselves, which is why the last section of my book covers



things like identity and motivation."

Your portraits of the women and men working in the high-class sex trade tend to be very sympathetic and well-drawn, yet the authorial voice is quite different than in other books of this genre, like Sex Slaves or Patpong Sisters, which put a heavier accent on feminism and morality. How did you achieve this balance?

"I think there have been too many books already with that sort of feminist slant and they all tend to play up the "victim" angle, which has become a cliché. I read both *Sex Slaves* and *Patpong Sisters* and while both have their merits, I was covering completely different territory – the high-end of the sex industry, which very few have ventured to investigate. Girls who make S\$3,000 a night are not victimised, believe me, and they choose to do what they do. I believe that this informed my narrative stance and enabled me to achieve the kind of balance that you mentioned. I am glad to hear you thought so, by the way.

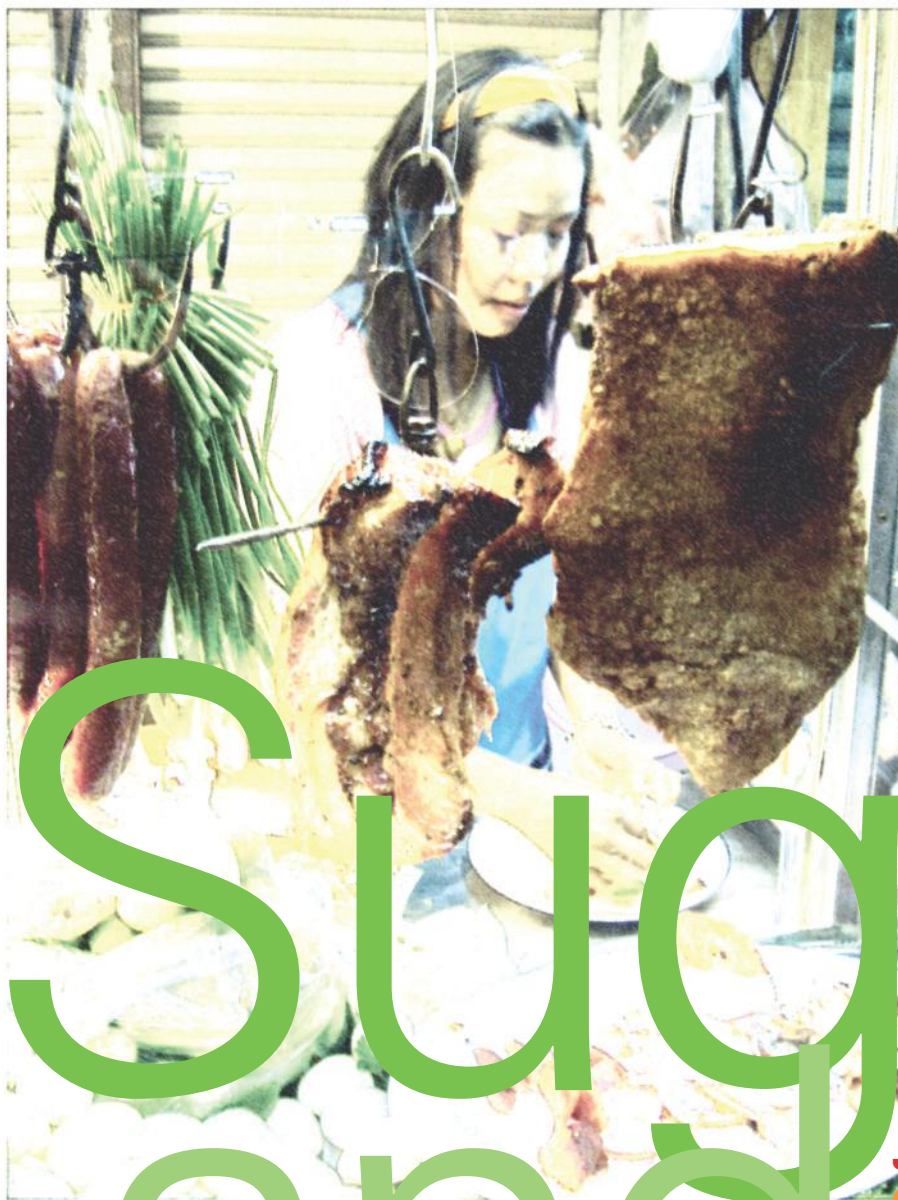
Thanks for the compliment."

In the feedback you've received from other readers and writers, does it seem that the book is turning people on or off of commercial sex in Singapore?

"Most people in Singapore who have read it tell me they are 'surprised' or 'shocked' that such a high-class niche exists. Everyone knows about Geylang and Orchard Road, nobody bats an eyelid anymore, but the very notion of five-star hotels where rich men get entertained in kinky ways really gets readers to perk up and entices them to read on. Several people I know told me they finished the book in one sitting.

One girl told me she had strange dreams for days afterwards. That being

said, I am not sure that many people in Singapore have given much thought to the idea of commercial sex except that they know it exists. (Well, I am actually of the opinion that most people in Singapore have not given much thought to anything at all, unless the government tells them they have to, but that's a whole other story and one you surely have heard by now.)"



Jim Algie examines some of the venerable staples of age-old Thai culture – street food, massage, and the martial art of Muay Chaiya – through profiles of three practitioners

Sugar and Spice

The curbside chef Somboon Chataljorenmonkong describes herself in a typically Thai way as a “*khon doen din khao gaeng*; literally,” a person who eats curry on rice at a street stall”; but figuratively speaking, she’s saying that she’s humble and easy-going. It’s an expression Thais often use when asked, “So what’s he like?”

If you want to know the importance of food to the average Thai, this sort of slang provides a few clues; and just a glance at the yin-and-yang condiments on any table – sugar and chilli? – attests to the sweetness and volatility of people like Somboon. All the years of street-vending may not have dimmed her coquettish smile, nor deepened her schoolgirl’s giggle, but she did once let the green-eyed monster out of its bone cage and put a black-magic curse on a former boyfriend who had forsaken her.

The ingredients? An admixture of chili peppers and salt set alight in a wok. Then, while fanning the flames, she whispered his name and fanned the smoke in the direction of his house to put a curse on him.

Somboon, easily the nicest black magician I’ve ever met, has her own food stall at the mouth of the legendary food strip on Sukhumvit Soi 38. For finicky foodies in a country which must have more restaurants per capita than any other, just uttering the soi’s name induces a drooling, almost Pavlovian reaction. At first it’s hard to see why. The street stalls are nothing fancy – just the usual chickens strung up by their necks, fold-up tables and plastic stools. The restaurants have the same Pepsi-poster decor as every other hole-in-the-wall eatery across the country. And there aren’t any bizarre delicacies for the more intrepid palate: no snake curry, deep-fried bullfrogs, or “dancing river shrimps” (spooned up as they salsa across the diner’s plate and are eaten alive). On Soi 38, it’s pretty much the staple dishes like boiled chicken breasts and rice, basil leaves fried up with the flesh of an ex-animal or sea creature, and rice or egg noodles.

That said, the high quality of the food and the higher levels of hygiene ensure that your intestinal tract won’t be tied up in sailor’s knots later on, an occasional curse of curbside eating. And most of the cooks here are long-timers like Somboon, who are the salt of the earth, or the nearest Thai equivalent, *kert dai dom* (“born in the mud”). In many ways, she has had the typical hardscrabble life of a northeasterner. Brought up in a rice-dependent village in Si Sa Ket province, she left school after only six years to slog through muddy, knee-deep waters, planting and harvesting rice, on the family

farm. At 15 she got married and came to Soi 38 to help her husband’s parents with their food stall.

Now 31, she’s still there, though her in-laws retired some years ago. In the afternoon she goes down to the Klong Toei fresh market to buy some pig’s legs. She always selects the back legs, because they’re meatier. Then she has to wax and scrub the hair from the legs, deep-fry them, and boil them for around two and a half to three hours. The final step entails adding Chinese herbs and black soy beans to the broth.

Working from 6pm to 3am, Somboon usually reaps profits of around 2,000-3,000 baht per night. Not bad, though the cash harvest was more bountiful a few years ago. “Now there are so many other night markets and street stalls around. Our prices have gone up so our customers have changed, too. Mostly we get business people now, and after the bars close, a lot of nightlife people,” says Somboon, who has two daughters, aged five and 10; sometimes they help her out at the stall, even though they much prefer eating at KFC and McDonald’s.

The glut of competitors ensures that she often works seven evenings a week and she’s grateful to the last Bangkok governor Samak Sundaravej for not closing them down one day a week, the result of his great fondness for eating street food; Somboon also appreciated Samak putting a curse on crooked Bangkok policemen by posting signs in government offices wishing them untimely deaths and unsightly diseases, because they were harassing street vendors so much for bribes. Hence, it’s hardly a revelation that her favourite TV show is *Chim Bai Bon Bai* (“Taste and Complain”) on ITV. The programme stars Samak, who goes out to fresh markets to buy food and then prepares different dishes while cracking jokes and bitching about current events.

(Now how many other countries have spawned powerful politicians with their own cooking shows?)

For the vendors of Soi 38, the worst occupational hazards are the noxious fumes and the constant din of cars, buses grinding their gears, motorcycles whining, and blind singers shrieking through amplifiers turned up to distortion levels that would even make industrial noise-rockers like Nurse with Wound say, “Shit, that’s pretty damn annoying.”

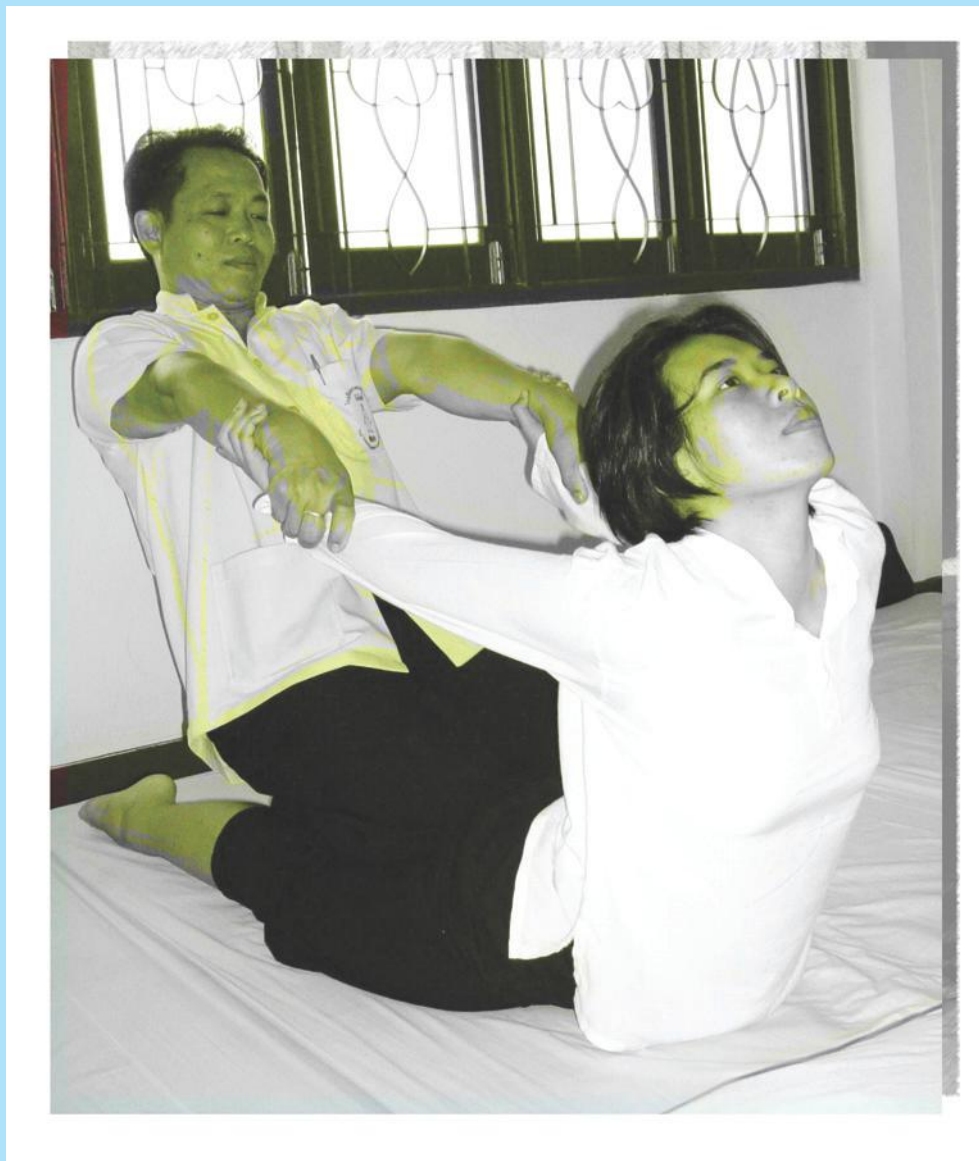
Through it all, the high tides of traffic, and the obnoxious drunks, Somboon does her best to save face under pressure; but sometimes she feels her friendly façade is just superficial, or like Thais say, “*Pak chee loy nam*” (coriander leaves floating on water). Inside, she’s often consumed by fears that her business will continue going down; that her daughters will have to work as street vendors one day; that she will not be able to save enough money to start another business in the next five years.

To assist her, she keeps a number of phallic talismans at the bottom of the plastic bowl where she puts her nightly earnings. And what if the lucky charms don’t work?

“Well,” she grins, “I guess I might have to put a curse on my competitors.”

“She did once let the green-eyed monster out of its bone cage and put a black-magic curse on a former boyfriend who had forsaken her.”

A former electrician has learned all about the power-points of the body electric through Thai massage. Words and photo by Jim Algie



Massage Missionary

On the grounds of Wat Po, full of towers encrusted with broken ceramics, a reclining Buddha stretching some 15 metres, and statues of yogis assuming positions worthy of circus contortionists, an electrician was trying to untangle a viper's nest of electrical cables. It was a life-threatening job. His legs and arms had been burned many times by blue sparks shooting out of live wires. Working under a molten sun, sweat was oozing out of every pore, his arm hairs tingled with a sense-memory of how his own perspiration had nearly killed him, when his sweaty arm touched an exposed cable and the resulting shock left his arm completely numb for a month.

He looked up from his work to see two men carrying another guy, groaning with agony, into the temple's Massage School. An hour later, the guy walked out of the school, under his own steam, talking and laughing with his two buddies. For the electrician, it was an epiphany. "I cannot believe they healing him so fast," says Suchart.Wongurprasert in English.

That's when he decided to study massage here, and 16 years later he's still there. But now Suchart's a teacher who's racked up plenty of frequent-flier points by traveling all over the world to give hands-on classes in a discipline which dates back some 2,500 years to the age of the Buddha.

At the Wat Po School of Traditional Medicine and Massage, Suchart is one of 60 teachers. Mostly they work with groups of four to six students. A beginner's class lasts 30 hours, but it is intensive: six hours a day for five days straight. Now maybe this is part of his sales pitch, but he maintains that "everyone can do massage." (Yes, and people say everyone can write a novel too. The trouble is they often do.)

In the first classes, he says, "the students must learn positions. Then come the techniques, with the palm, the elbow, with the knee or feet somewhere, but not use everywhere." After that, the apprenticing masseurs and masseuses have to really get down to the bones of their patients' woes. Where does it hurt and why? Too much sitting, standing, driving? Of equal importance is ascertaining any ailments the person might have, and not stretching their limbs or pain tolerance to the breaking point. Basically, you have to learn how to think with your hands.

Suchart's first rule of thumb is "safety first". And one of the most morbidly fascinating things about taking such a course, he says, is finding out how many Achilles' heels the human body really has, and how easy it is to break a blood vessel, pinch a nerve, or even paralyse someone. Suchart claims, and a few of his students backed him up on this, that such knowledge (painful to accrue) has given him more sympathy for people in the long run – especially for the suffering. True to its Buddhist origins, these courses still contain a healthy dose of empathy.

But when the students begin kneading, elbowing, and treading on flesh, what kinds of mistakes do they usually make?

"A little bit high or a little bit low, or right on the bone. This is very sensitive area. Under the bone is better," says the 44-year-old native son of Ayuthaya province.

"But here's where physiology rubs up against psychiatry: Some mental disorders have physical symptoms. And as the medical world searches for more natural, less toxic forms of holistic healing, ancient massage techniques have become more crucial than ever, Suchart says."

In a sense, Suchart's old line of work has given him an advantage. That's because massage methods help to unblock the power-lines of the body's natural grid of nerves and muscles, in order to boost energy levels and keep people limber.

But here's where physiology rubs up against psychiatry: Some mental disorders have physical symptoms. And as the medical world searches for more natural, less toxic forms of holistic healing, ancient massage techniques have become more crucial than ever, Suchart says.

The students come to Wat Po from all points of the compass, but the biggest contingent is Japanese. Hardly surprising given that the highest demand for Thai-style masseurs outside of the country is in Japan. Suchart has traveled there many times to give classes, and a few years ago he was even pressed into service during the annual Thai Food Festival in Tokyo's Yoyogi Park for a live demonstration of his healing art, complemented by displays of Thai boxing, dance, and music. This massage missionary has also given classes in Vietnam, Brunei, Korea, Germany and Switzerland.

It's easy to see why the man is in such demand, because he displays the seemingly paradoxical qualities found in the best teachers; he's both authoritative and approachable. He also seems very concerned about the wellbeing of everyone around him. Only 30 minutes into the interview, Suchart is already asking me and photographer Dan White about our physical woes. Maybe we're just displaying the journalists' unerring instinct for freeloading, or he really does seem that concerned and trustworthy. Either way, I have to confess to being one of those office-bound, computer coolies who's having some back problems – Suchart says this is a common complaint these days – and immediately begins working some of the crimps out of my neck.

Then Dan confesses to having had his head and face dented in by some mad Russian on speed, wearing steel-toed boots, so that Dan lost most of the feeling in his face, and was physically incapable of smiling for several months. As Dan speaks, Suchart nods sympathetically and then begins massaging the side of his face. Within a few minutes, the photographer confides that his facial muscles feel "more animated. Thank you."

Few jobs offer such an instantaneous sense of accomplishment, or bring the reward of someone's heartfelt gratitude like those in the healing arts. And the living proof can be glimpsed in the teacher's warm, Buddha-like smile, when he says, "Helping people, always satisfaction for me." Check out the website www.watpomassage.com.



For this fighter and artist,
Muay Chaiya is a battle
between fighting and
artistic techniques.
Words by Jim Algie.
Photo by Dan White.

Martial Artist

On the back wall of Kridakorn “Lek” Sodprasert’s boxing studio are portraits, in descending order, of a revered monk, Their Majesties the King and Queen, and Lek’s first two kickboxing instructors. He met the second teacher at the funeral of the first one. After asking if he could study with him, the teacher demanded that Lek punch him in the face. He took a swing, but the instructor blocked it, and punched him twice in the mouth, bloodying his lips. Right then and there, Lek decided that this man was to be his new mentor in one of Thailand’s oldest and most significant martial arts – Muay Chaiya.

“He was a very kind person, but very violent too,” says Lek.

No doubt some of Lek’s students at his al fresco boxing gym on Sukhumvit Soi 63 would make the same contradictory claims. For the last eight years he’s been schooling both Thais and a lesser number of Farangs in this ballet of brutality and self-defense at his Ban Chang Thai stronghold. The classes consist of two-hour sessions held Friday and Saturday night. And the students range from little hellions, whose parents want to instill some discipline in them, to young women learning ways to ward off would-be rapists, to some very bloody-minded students hoping to become professional pugilists, and a sprinkling of older gents trying to keep a few laps ahead of the wheelchairs-and-walkers brigade.

Kridakorn says that this regional school of Thai boxing combines military-like discipline with the teachings of Buddhism – a combination of violence and kindness that seems fitting given its origins. Some 250 years ago a soldier from Bangkok named Por Tan Mar (hearsay has it that a stillborn coup was the catalyst for his departure) fled to a temple in the town of Chaiya in Surat Thani province. The soldier then ordained as a monk. At Wat Tung Jab Chang he forged a new hybrid of older fighting styles, heavy on defensive postures. Since the fighter must constantly be ready to block punches and kicks with his elbows and knees, which are always slightly bent, even when going on the attack, this style has been likened to the spiky armour of the durian.

Khru Lek, who is also a successful artist, creating traditional dolls, puppets, and mystical artworks coloured by the Buddhist canon, enjoys the artistic side of Muay Chaiya: the tiger-like leaps and the fluid footwork.

“It’s not like Muay Thai. That’s a ring sport,” says the 47-year-old divorcee, who has yet to propagate the species. “And nowadays Muay Thai is all about scoring points and big, flashy kicks. It’s about winning and making money. But Chaiya is derived from battlefield styles and street fighting.”

As he is quick to demonstrate – amazingly quick for a short, balding man whose paunch points out that he hasn’t missed too many mealtimes – the Chaiya school has loads of dirty tricks. Like jabbing your fingers into an opponent’s eyes. Like booting him in the balls.

“And nowadays Muay Thai is all about scoring points and big, flashy kicks. It’s about winning and making money. But Chaiya is derived from battlefield styles and street fighting.”

Then he shows us how to defend one’s self against a knife-wielding attacker. A student comes at him, using a mobile phone in place of a switchblade. He lunges at Lek like a fencer. The teacher blocks the surrogate weapon with his left forearm, spins around and side-kicks him in the knee, and before the mind can explain what the eye has seen, he’s disarmed the attacker.

Pointing to his forearm, the teacher says, “In this kind of street-fighting, you’re going to get hurt. So you have to be brave.”

Though he’s never fought professionally, has Lek ever been baited into a barroom brawl? Or just felt like showing off his training techniques by inflicting a gratuitous beating on some poor schlep passing by?

He laughs. “When I was younger I was quite hot-tempered, so I’ve been in a few scraps. One night, about 12 years ago, when I was living in Thonburi, there was a car full of Indians driving around, harassing street vendors and then they parked in front of my house. I told them to calm down a little. So they hurled insults at me and then all four of them got out of the car along with a woman. The men were quite big, but I knocked two of them out and then the other two ran away. I didn’t hit the woman, but she fainted anyway,” laughs Lek, who comes from an eclectic family of Bohemians: an architect father from Bangkok, a jewellery-making mother from the gem-rich province of Chantaburi, and his brother is a classical guitarist of note.

What he relishes the most about teaching is bequeathing genuine Thai traditions to a new generation of Lek figures who are being led astray by non-Thai influences. In class, he comes across as stern at times, putting as much emphasis on the grace of the movements, as the accuracy of the punches and kicks, during the repetitive line drills. But there are moments of levity. When one of the young boys has stepped way out of line, and is joking around with his two friends, Lek picks him up by the armpits, carries him back to his proper place and puts him down again. He smiles at the boy while all the other students laugh.

At the end of the class, the teacher and his charges kneel down to pay obeisance to the monarchy, the Buddhist clergy, and Lek’s two old boxing teachers. Then they stand up. As the students begin talking, he walks up and straightens the portrait of his kind and violent mentor in Muay Chaiya.

The cost is Bt2,400 for three classes of two hours each. Contact Lek at banchangthai@yahoo.com

CHILE'S EXTREMITIES



Stretching from the Tropics to the Antarctic, Chile looks like a 4,300-km long string bean on a map and has an extreme amount of spellbinding attractions, from volcanoes and geysers to the urban sprawl of its extremely rich and despicably poor capital. Scribe and shooter **Pierre Ryckmans** dons a variety of clothes to deal with the country's diverse geography.

The upper half of the 2,806 metre-high Tolhuaca volcano, the symbol of the Tolhuaca National Park, is covered with snow. I saw the lonely, isolated mountain at first through the branches of the most typical of all Chilean trees, the Araucaria or 'monkey-puzzle tree', a kind of pine tree first discovered in Arauca in Southern Chile. It's a very curious coniferous tree, a magnificent evergreen that reaches a height of 45 to 50 metres and is covered with a prickly jumble of whorled branches and stiff, needle-pointed leaves, discouraging monkeys and other creatures from climbing it.

On poor roads, and negotiating primitive, hand-pulled ferry-boats to cross sleepy rivers, my friend meandered his four-wheel drive through rough bush until we reached a small village. A project, co-financed by my government in Belgium, was being implemented in this village by an NGO and my colleague did his utmost to squeeze his best Spanish into a goodwill speech greeted by sullen looks from the native Indians. They are poor and, as almost everywhere in Chile, not integrated with the Spanish-looking comfort-class which dominates the country.

In the capital of Santiago the contrast is disturbing. The city centre is completely inhabited by rich or middle-class people, driving their unnecessary, luxury cars around, living in state-

of-the-art apartment buildings and drinking the gorgeous local wines in open-air restaurants and pisco sour (the national alcoholic drink made of a transparent grape brandy mixed with lemon juice, egg white and powdered sugar).

In stark contrast to this, the peripheries of the suburbs are spider webs of shantytowns. So there I was in an Indian Mapuche community. After the official meeting and discussion came the obligatory unofficial part. The village butcher hung a skinned goat on a pole, went for his sharpest knife, and carved off bloody chunks. An hour later the whole community shared the pastel de choclo, a maize casserole of the leathery goat and some indefinable veggies.

The National Park of Huerquehue, one of the many stunning natural reserves of Chile's Lake District, is southeast of Temuco. The enjoyable Lago Verde day trek led us up from 700 to 1,300 metres and the forest clearings offered fantastic vistas of the emerald-green lakes and the snow-covered mountains. To me, the most impressive site was the Volcan Villarica, a 2,850-metre high, perfectly conical and white volcano dome, caressing the sky and refusing to melt.

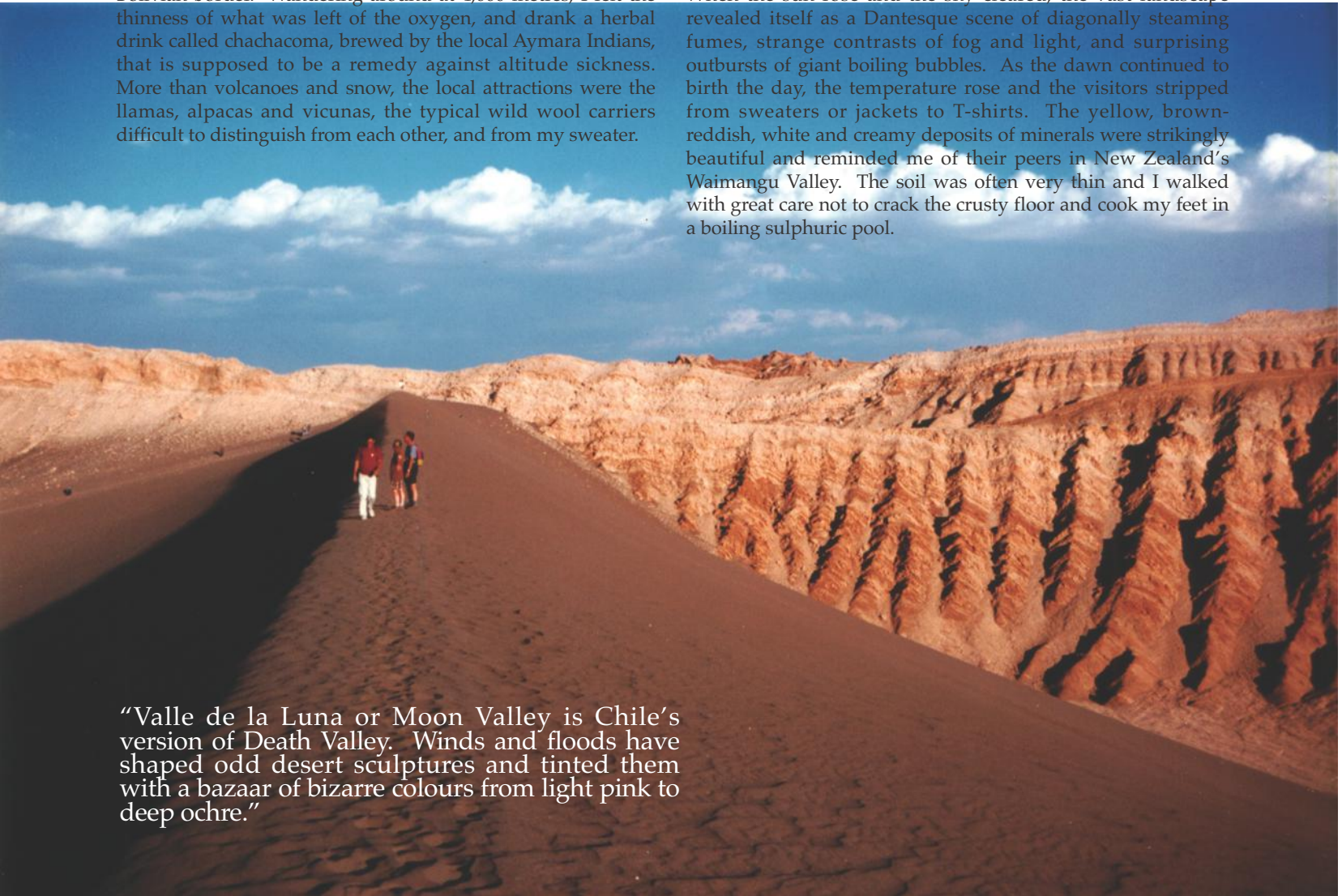
In the Southern Lake District I marveled at the sight of a volcano once in a while, but in the Northern National Park of Lauca, a huge wilderness refuge between 3,000 and 6,300 metres high, the white volcanoes were uncountable. It was chilly but very pleasant in this mountainous area near the Bolivian border. Wandering around at 4,000 metres, I felt the thinness of what was left of the oxygen, and drank a herbal drink called chachacoma, brewed by the local Aymara Indians, that is supposed to be a remedy against altitude sickness. More than volcanoes and snow, the local attractions were the llamas, alpacas and vicunas, the typical wild wool carriers difficult to distinguish from each other, and from my sweater.

COTTON SHIRT TRIP

Valle de la Luna, or Moon Valley, is Chile's version of Death Valley. Winds and floods have shaped odd desert sculptures and tinted them with a bazaar of bizarre colours from light pink to deep ochre. On foot or on a mountain bike, these valleys, sand dunes and rocky ridges can be explored, provided that one smears oneself abundantly with sun block and carries water reserves: the sand and stones absorb and give off intense heat. I walked several kilometres, climbed huge sand dunes, followed footsteps on ridges, and sweated like a citizen of hell. But when I returned on a much-promoted "Full Moon Trip" I needed my sweater again, as the temperatures had dropped to seven degrees Celsius. In winter-time it's freezing here.

San Pedro de Atacama, the popular tourist hub from which this area can be visited, is a very pleasant little place, heavy on white houses made of adobe. In the guesthouses the electricity only runs until midnight. Behind the little adobe church of San Pedro and the Casa Incaica, the house where Pedro de Valdivia, the first Spanish visitor, slept in 1540, is the unavoidable tourist market, a narrow street overhung with branches.

The second main attraction here is the El Tatio geyser field. Leaving at 5am to join a tour group in a minivan that climbed to an altitude of 4,300 metres, I arrived at this equally unearthly spot just before dawn. The sound of boiling and bubbling water and hissing fumaroles added to the dramatic solitude. When the sun rose and the sky cleared, the vast landscape revealed itself as a Dantesque scene of diagonally steaming fumes, strange contrasts of fog and light, and surprising outbursts of giant boiling bubbles. As the dawn continued to birth the day, the temperature rose and the visitors stripped from sweaters or jackets to T-shirts. The yellow, brown-reddish, white and creamy deposits of minerals were strikingly beautiful and reminded me of their peers in New Zealand's Waimangu Valley. The soil was often very thin and I walked with great care not to crack the crusty floor and cook my feet in a boiling sulphuric pool.



"Valle de la Luna or Moon Valley is Chile's version of Death Valley. Winds and floods have shaped odd desert sculptures and tinted them with a bazaar of bizarre colours from light pink to deep ochre."



SWIMMING SUIT TRIP

On my way back to Santiago, I stopped in Antofagasta, a coastal town 700km south of Arica and 1,350km north of the capital. With 250,000 inhabitants, it's one of Chile's 'big' cities. A short drive north of the town is the Monumento Natural La Portada, a sort of natural arch eroded by the stormy Pacific, which protrudes into the ocean like a triumphal marine gateway and is linked to the mainland by a rocky obstacle course that can be seen and crawled over at low tide. Once upon a time, when this neck of land was still complete and a group of windswept walkers reached the extremity of the isthmus, the stone link collapsed and fell with a thunderous hubbub into the foaming ocean. The tourists were eventually evacuated by helicopter. Here was the deepest ocean blue I have ever seen. I descended to the white sand beach and was the only person to go for a swim. My dip was curtailed by the freezing water temperature, but the sunbathing and reading afterwards were heightened by clement weather.

JACKET TRIP

The Pullman long-distance coach brought me back to Santiago, the city's pollution, racket and traffic. In a supermarket with 52 cashiers I bought some wine to bring back home. A diplomat with whom I used to work in Jakarta invited me for dinner in an elegant restaurant with a necktie-and-jacket code in Barrio Bellavista. So I borrowed my friend's jacket and headed for the

night-life quarter, passing many parillas or grill restaurants, from which the smell of charcoaled steaks, sausages, kidneys and intestines tempted my nostrils, while a group of sandwich-board-clad women demonstrated against the injustice of ex-dictator Pinochet's impunity.

After the inevitable pisco sour I went for a *sopo de mariscos* – a creamy seafood soup – and an enormous beef steak topped with two fried eggs floating on a thick mattress of French fries. To wash down this cholesterol horror we chose a red Santa Rita shiraz, which was the highlight of the night. The conversation centered around Chile's population and social problems. Most Chileans are *mestizos*, descendants of a Spanish breed mixed with indigenous Indians, although many claim to have pure European DNA. Even more important seems to be the social class to which one belongs. Jealousy and social tension are widespread, and the working class calls the rich elite *momios* (mummies) because "they are so resistant to any change that they might as well be embalmed," to cite the colourful Chilean film director Miguel Littin.

As I walked back, I discovered a Mapuche Indian street vendor painting magnificent landscape miniatures on tiny rectangles of window glass. I bought a couple of them. When he gave me his little masterpieces and the change without a smile, even without a glimpse, I couldn't help thinking that his monthly income was probably equal to the price of the bottle of wine we'd just had.



"When the sun rose and the sky cleared, the vast landscape revealed itself as a Dantesque scene of diagonally steaming fumes, strange contrasts of fog and light, and surprising outbursts of giant boiling bubbles."

THE BASICS

Arriving: A return ticket from Asia is around Bt60,000, but there are no direct flights from Bangkok, Singapore or Hong Kong. From Bangkok, for instance, the easiest way to reach Santiago is via Sydney, Frankfurt, Paris or Los Angeles.

When to Go:

As Chile has a range of different climates and seasons you can visit all year round. For Santiago and central Chile the best seasons are spring (September-November) and autumn (February-April). The Lake District and the south are best visited in summer (December-March). You can go to the northern part all-year round, as the weather is more temperate and there's little rainfall.

Visas:

Citizens of the USA, Canada, Australia, the UK and most Western European countries can get a 90-day visa on arrival. Other nationalities need to obtain a visa before departure.

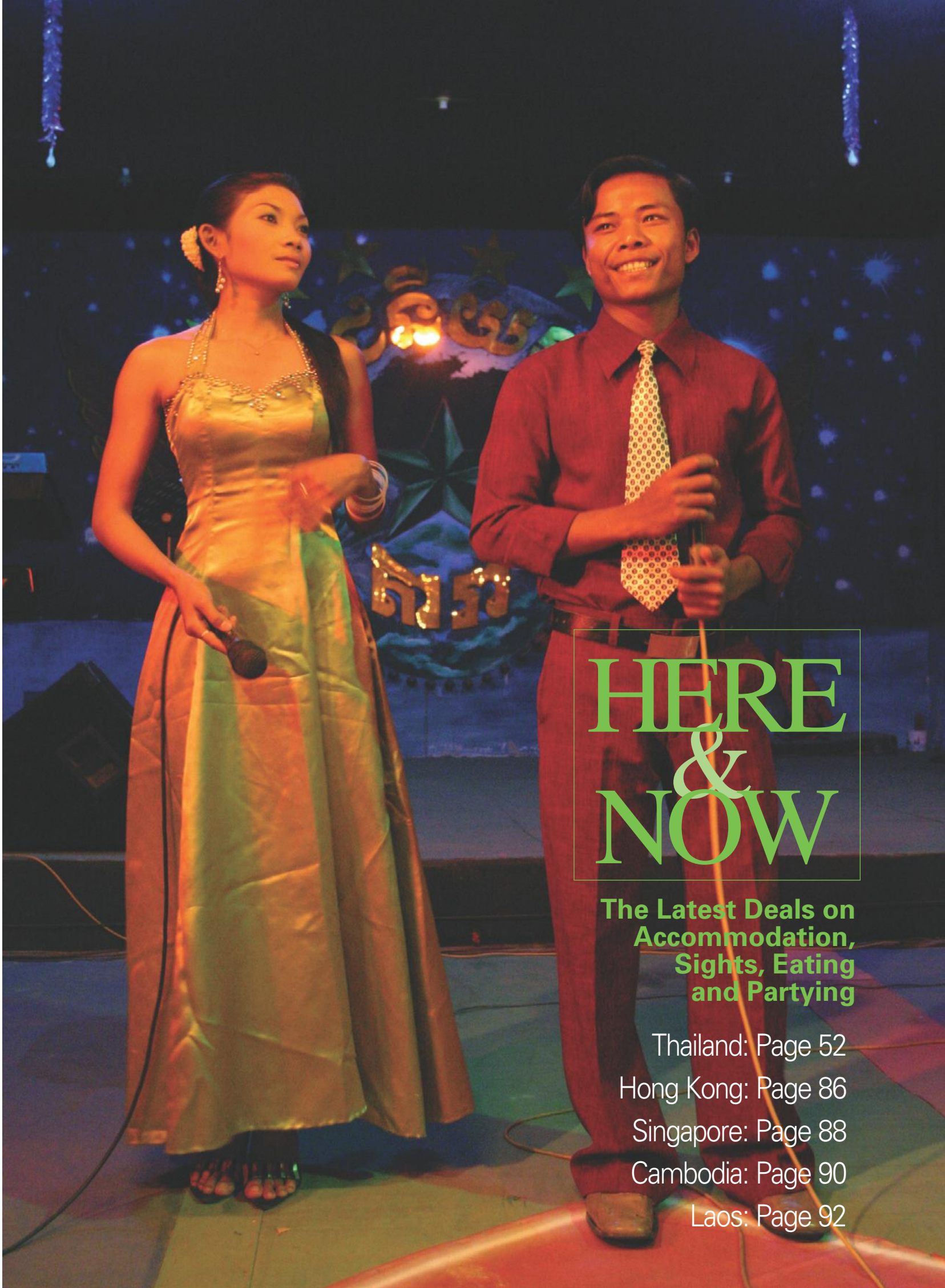
Dangers:

Unlike most of the other South American countries, Chile is pretty safe for travelers. Of course the normal precautions must be taken because petty theft is quite common, but the streets of Santiago and other cities can be walked day and night.



Crashing:

All categories of accommodations are available everywhere, from five-star hotels to camp grounds, pensions, home-stays and hostels. Getting a room in a private home is cheaper than a hotel and puts you in touch with the locals. Look for the sign Casa de Familia. Rates are US\$16-20 per person. Cheap hostels, charging between US\$5-15 are called *hospedajes*, *pensiones*, or *residenciales*. The latter cater more to long stays. The mid-range hotels charge from US\$25-55 per night, and the upscale ones are \$75-250.



HERE & NOW

**The Latest Deals on
Accommodation,
Sights, Eating
and Partying**

Thailand: Page 52

Hong Kong: Page 86

Singapore: Page 88

Cambodia: Page 90

Laos: Page 92

STRANGE FRUIT



*Farang's Executive Editor **Cameron Cooper** decides that everyone hates him and heads to the Phuket's Mangosteen Resort and Spa to try and become a nicer person*

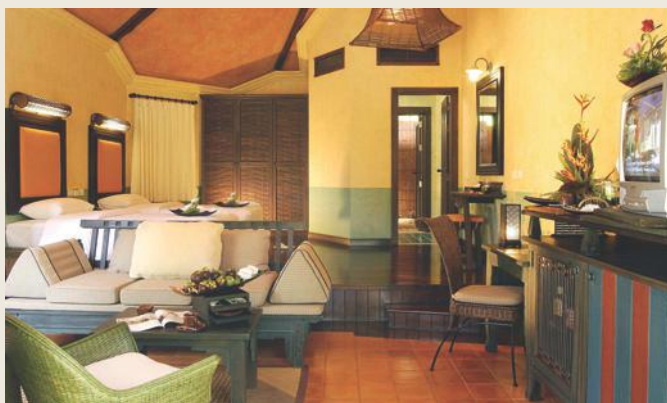
I'd had enough and badly needed a vacation. You might not believe this, but editing a magazine is not necessarily the glamorous job some people seem to think it is. You have to order resentful employees around, do endless rounds of cocktail parties where the wine is rarely as good as it looks, saying "hello, dahling" to people whose names you don't remember or would rather forget, and you spend much of your time fending off nutcases who send you hate mail or drop by the office, thump the admin lady's desk and demand to see you because they didn't like the magazine's review of their friend's book. Then there are the ridiculous hours and the crap pay. Oh yes, and people shout "Farang" after you within a 200-metre radius of your office – the geographical limit of your fame. Overall, it's a thankless task.

But I digress. I realise I'm not the only person with a stressful job, and this is probably why resorts (and hence this page) exist in the first place. Yes, a resort – just the ticket. Me and my long-suffering missus, infinity pools, breakfast buffets, a big comfy bed, a bit of romance and luxury, and a little break from heavy boozing seemed the solution to all ills.

So I told everyone in the office I was off for a week to Phuket, (none of whom bothered conceal their glee), made a few phone calls and within a very short time was at the Mangosteen Resort and Spa, lying on a sun lounger by the pool and contemplating my rather ugly toes. Though it is a long-standing Khaosan Road tradition to name guesthouses after pieces of fruit, the similarity to a dank backpacker hovel in Bangkok's Banglamphu ends there.

The Mangosteen is perched on a hill with a great view of, though not actually on Nai Harn beach (though regular shuttle buses will take you there and back), near Phuket's Rawai area. It's one of those newer-style funky, attention-to-detail sort of places, with huge octagonal bungalows, rain-showers and Jacuzzis in a pebbled-floor bathroom, reams of natural fabric and wood, massive windows, burlap hammocks, couches, muted multihued walls, and really cool shampoo and body wash containers. It's just a shame they can't find wooden televisions.

All the facilities take on that personal boutique style, from the spa to the restaurant, with its Southern European/Thai fusion approach, to the smallish lounge bar with a really decent jazz band on the night I dropped in. The little woman was delighted, which of course clears the way for me to be happy as well. I actually managed to do three laps around the



curving grottoesque pool without once running through my extensive mental list of people I would like to have killed. For all too brief a stretch,

I wasn't the executive editor of *Farang Untamed Travel*; I was just another pasty-skinned middle-aged guy floating around enjoying the good life and wondering idly what the peasants were getting up to.

And so it went. Admittedly, I was reluctant to return to Bangkok and the mountains of abandoned work that awaited me, but I didn't yell at or hang up the phone on anyone for more than a week after my return, even though half the staff did absolutely nothing in my absence. As holidays go, I'm pretty sure I got the better deal.

Check out more details on the Mangosteen Resort and spa at mangosteen-phuket.com

Hanging Your Hat:

Places to sleep in Bangkok



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

Top End:

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

Pratunam/Siam Square Area

Holiday Mansion Hotel

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

Pathumwan House

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

Silom Area

Anna's Café & Bed

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

Bangkok Christian Guest House

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

La Résidence Hotel

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

Intown Residence

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

Niagara Hotel

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

Soi Ngam Duphli

Malaysia Hotel

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

Sukhumvit

The Atlanta

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

Suk 11

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

Federal Hotel

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

Manhattan

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

Sam's Lodge

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

Banglamphu

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

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

Buddy Lodge

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

Nana Plaza Inn

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

D&D Inn

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

Thai Cozy House

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



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DAYTRIPPING

DAWN TO DUSK



BANGLAMPHU

CORRECTIONS MUSEUM

Where: Mahachai Road, across from Thanon Luang

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

Cost: Free

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

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

NATIONAL GALLERY

Where: Chao Fah Road, near Pra Pinklao

When: Wed-Sun, 9am-4pm

Cost: Bt30

Way to go: Walk from Khaosan Road

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

NATIONAL MUSEUM

Where: West side of Sanam Luang

When: Wed-Sun, 9am-4pm

Cost: Bt40

Way to go: Ten-minute walk from Khaosan

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

THAMMASAT LIBRARY

Where: Beside the National Museum on Na Phra That Road

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

Cost: Bt20 per day

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

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



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

VIPASSANA MEDITATION CENTRE

Where: Wat Mahadatu, Na Phra Lan Road

When: Daily, 9am-4pm

Cost: Free

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

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

WAT PHO MASSAGE CENTRE

Where: Thai Wang and Sanachai Roads

When: Daily, 8am-8pm

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

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

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

NATURAL HEALING COMPANY

Where: 4th Floor, Bayon Building, Khaosan Rd

When: 7 days, 10am-10pm

Cost: Varies

Way to go: Use your shoes, dude

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

THONBURI

SHED OF THE ROYAL BARGES

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

When: Daily, 9am-5pm

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

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

On display are eight of the Royal barges that are part of a 700-year regal tradition. The most awe-inspiring barge in this flotilla is the 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.

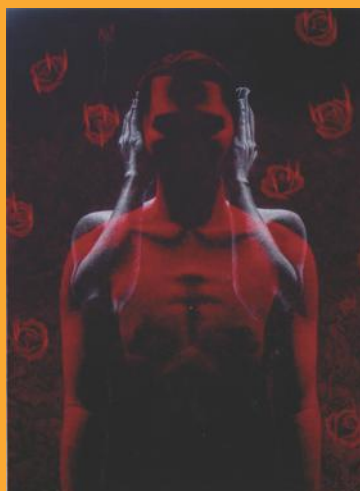
SUBWAY

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.

COLOUR US IMPRESSED

Even though the two Thai painters Narakorn Sittites and Yuthasak Roikanchan were both born in 1980, they've already amassed an impressive array of awards and exhibition credits. From April 21-May 14, the two artists are holding an exhibition of work entitled *Credence* at the Tang Gallery. The opening party is on April 21, with the freeloading beginning at 6pm. So make sure you get your fill of booze and snacks before the rest of the passengers on the gravy train disembark. Also make sure to ponder a few of the paintings while you're there and drop a few artistic comments like, "Ahh, the chiaroscuro in this work really stirs my loins," in order to justify your presence; but please draw the line at stealing the cutlery.

The gallery is located at Unit B-28 in the Silom Galleria at 919/1, and their website is at www.tanggallery.com.



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

Although a worldwide chain, it's one that's succeeded in giving each outlet it's own character. The Bangkok branch at the Marriott 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.

HU'U IN BANGKOK (PACIFIC RIM, TAPAS AND TREATS)

The Ascott Sathorn, Levels 1 & 2, 187 South Sathorn Rd, (Skytrain Chong Nonsi), 6-10am, 11am-2pm, 5pm-1am daily, Tel: 02-676 6673/77, major cards

Named after a small atoll in Indonesia and with successful outlets in Singapore and Bali, Hu'u is now in Bangkok at The Ascott on Sathorn. Aimed at attracting Bangkok's brightest, most buzzing crowd of high rollers, Hu'u Bar downstairs is for lounging, tapas munching and cocktail quaffing. Upstairs is for a more refined dining experience – Hu'u Epicure is a swish, antique



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Thai kitchen ad

and art-strewn mezzanine restaurant serving innovative Pacific Rim cuisine. Previously of the Savoy in London, Chef Thomas Smith is responsible for the culinary creations.

MEZZALUNA (ITALIAN)

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

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

THE BARBICAN

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

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

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 luscious 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.dininginthailand.com/sanremo.asp, Tel: 02-258 6919, major cards

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
(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.pprincess.com, major cards

Well placed for a Nipponese nosh up after braving the hoards of teenage girls at MBK, and realizing you've bought armfuls of crap

DA GIOVANNI
ITALIAN TRATTORIA

Homemade Pasta
and Pizza House
Italian Chef

(Behind Bamboo bar)

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



Feeding Time

you don't really want. All the usual Japanese fare such as sushi, sashimi and tempura dishes as well as their speciality, hotpots, so it's a good idea to come with friends. Decent buffets available here and at neighbouring Korean restaurant Kongju.

AMARANTH (ORGANIC FUSION)

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

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

TAMARIND CAFÉ (VEGETARIAN FUSION)

27 Sukhumvit Soi 20, Tel. 02-66 7421, Fax. 02-662 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 romantic and photographic gallery, F-Stop, on site.

HIMALI CHA CHA (INDIAN VEGETARIAN)

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

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

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 keeow 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.

LARRY'S DIVE (AMERICAN/MEXICAN)

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

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

AUBERGE DAB (FRENCH)

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

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

MALAYSIAN AUNTIE (MALAYSIAN/INDIAN)

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

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

ATHENA (GREEK)

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

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

BANGLAMPHU SHOSHANA

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

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



TAKETEI

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

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

JOK POCHANA RESTAURANT

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

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

HEMLOCK

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

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

stuff. They have some pretty inexpensive wines as well.

NA PHRA LAN

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

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

LA CASA RISTORANTE (ITALIAN)

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

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

RICKY'S COFFEE SHOP

22 Phra Arthit Road, 8am-Midnight daily, no cards
Probably the best baguettes in Banglamphu, for around Bt80 they include olives, salad, and olive oil. Even better for the cheese lovers among you with a choice of Danish blue, Dutch edam and regular cheddar cheeses plus ham, pastrami, salami, and more. A range of all-day breakfasts, good coffee, Thai and vegetarian dishes, too. To complete the picture, there's a rustic wooden interior with atmospheric photos of Peking from the '20s.

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NIGHTTRIPPING

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 PLUS

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

87 has re-launched as 87-Plus. Live music is the new plus, with a resident band, plus regular DJ sets. Slick and sumptuous club/bar/restaurant with a 'World Food/Global grooves' theme.

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.tokyoesbkk.com, visa, master cards

Live music seven nights a week with the top blues, groove and soul bands in BKK on a rotating schedule. These include The Soi Dog Blues Band, Cannonball, Savannah on the weekends, Adam on Acoustic Blues every Monday, and TAB with traditional blues on Tues & Thurs. Small beers are Bt90, Bt150 for large beers. Mixed drinks go from Bt100-150. Happy hour is 6-9pm with Bt80 beers and jugs of Asahi for Bt300. Tuesday is two for one beers after 9pm, with Georgia singing. Check the website for weekly lineups and their infamous vodka orange end of the month parties.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELER'S TAVERN

Sukhumvit Soi 5, by Foodland, (Skytrain Nana) The upmarket sister to the pub we all know from Khaosan. And she's a bloody big sister at that. There's a big bar, a big screen, a big car rotating overhead and

loads of pool tables. You're looking at a more American theme here rather than Banglamphu's faux-London drinker and the place is more popular with middle-aged expats and teachers rather than young hipsters, but reasonably priced drinks and free Internet makes it worth a stop.

CONCEPT 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.

QBAR

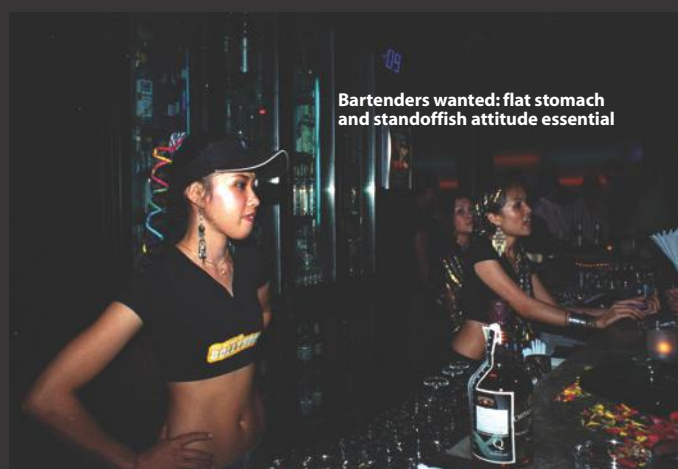
34 Sukhumvit Soi 11. Take quick left at end of the soi. (Skytrain Nana) major cards, Tel. 02-252 3274, www.qbarbangkok.com, major cards except Diners

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,



Bartenders wanted: flat stomach and standoffish attitude essential

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.

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 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 sleazebrious Nana Plaza.

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



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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.

GROOVE KITCHEN

(back of Ana garden restaurant), 67 Thonglor 3, Sukhumvit 55, Tel: 02-391 1762

After dinner club at the back of Ana garden restaurant in cool Thonglor. All fresco Ibiza style vibe with glass roof, tree on the dance floor and possibly the best door in Bangkok (for connoisseurs of such things). Equally suited for digesting, dancing or downing drinks.

HUNTSMAN PUB

Landmark Hotel Basement (Skytrain Nana), Tel 02-254 0404, major cards Hunting may no longer be PC, but this pub in the basement of the Landmark Hotel is always correct. House bands are always a tight unit who perform well-arranged covers of contemporary music with great harmonies and, although, it's all a bit Radio 2, it goes well with the surroundings. When the band isn't playing, the central bar makes a good focal point and if you're a bit peckish you'll find a good menu of mostly pub grub. The Sunday brunch, featuring all the pub favorites is popular with residents and visitors alike. Happy hour 3-8pm.

SAXOPHONE

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

www.saxophonepub.com

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

BED SUPPERCLUB

End of Sukhumvit Soi 11 (Skytrain Nana), Tel 02-651 3537, major cards, www.bedsupperclub.com Classy, all-white nightclub that looks somewhat like a spaceship. At Bt500 (Tue, Fri, Sat) and Bt400 other days, it's not the cheapest place in town, but that gets you two drinks and keeps the riff-raff out. Opposite the dancing bit is the eating bit (hence the 'supper' in Supperclub) with set meals served at 8pm sharp. There's a full schedule of music, with Mondays being Funky House and Breakbeat. Hip

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

IRISH EXCHANGE

1/5-6 Covent Road, just off of Silom (Skytrain Sala Daeng), Tel. 02-266 7160-11, major cards Irish Pub, sports bar and restaurant catering to mixed crowd of expats, tourists and locals who've developed a taste for publife. For the keeneow (stingy), alcoholic, footie fans or all of the above, Saturday is the official Tiger beer Premier League day with pitchers of Tiger Bt100 from 2pm-2am! Live music on Mondays and Thursdays with Lee Shamrock, and Friday night is party night with Celtic Colours. Good Sunday sessions can be had with live jazz and traditional roasts and the daily happy hour runs from 4-7pm.

THE DUBLINER IRISH PUB

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

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

CHEAP CHARLIE'S

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

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

SILOM

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

RADIO CITY

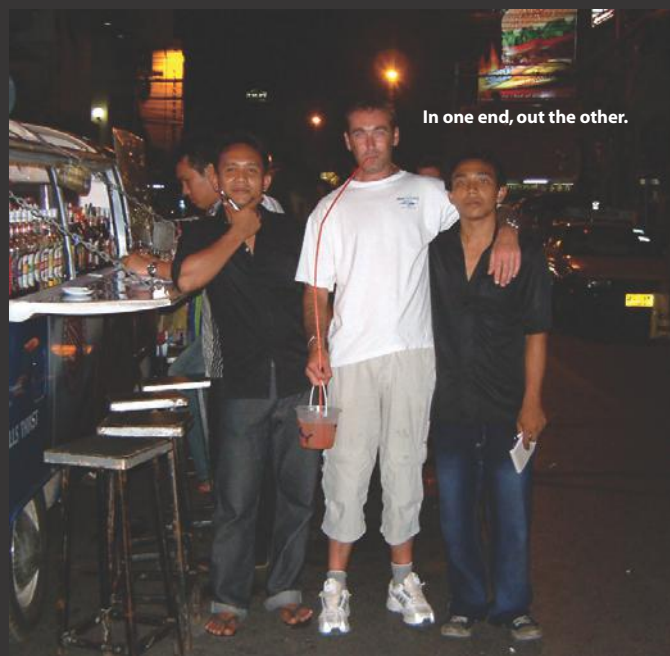
Patpong Soi 1

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

MUZZIK CAFÉ

Patpong Soi 1

The crossroads of Patpong 1 and Patpong



In one end, out the other.

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

LUCIFERS

Patpong Soi 1, Tel 02-2346902

Fight your way past "You see fucking show!" and "Hello, t-shirt!" and up the stairs to where the prince of darkness shakes his booty. This club is a stayer on the Bangkok carousel and has kept people dancing to House and Trance and everything in between for years. It has a post-grunge feel and Bt150 drinks sets it apart from the slick sterility offered by most Bangkok clubs.

NORIEGA'S

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel 02-233 2813, major cards Small, modern two-level bar run by Frank, aka 'Frank Superstar' from his long-time involvement with the Superstar a-gogo in Patpong many moons ago. The small food menu is headed '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, tapasroom@hotmail.com, major

cards

As a longtime leader in Soi 4, Tapas Room Club continue to be popular. Spinning soulful house and funk, DJs Neng, Wut and Oud & Tee keep bodies dancing with live precussion on Wednesdays (Bt200 entry) and weekends (Bt100). Currently, Tapas are promoting their rooftop as a private party venue.

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



T. 02 234 4737, 02 632 7883 / www.tapasroom.com

"Best Bar in Bangkok" Metro High Five Awards 2003

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 Monumen, Tel. 02-622 2571, no cards.

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

PRANAKORN

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

This bar is like four different venues in one: on the ground floor, replete with posters for old Marlon Brando and Elvis movies, the DJ plays retro rock and Jazz and there's often live Thai acoustic music. The second floor is an art and photography gallery that sometimes features live music and even theatre. On the third floor, there's more dance 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 Banglaphu. Now open upstairs as well with several tables for the serious pool player. Happy hour 3-9pm.

AD HERE THE 13TH

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

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

LAVA CLUB

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

Every night 8pm until 2am. Just the place for the lounge too lazy or frightened to explore greater Bangkok. This comfy black and red replication of Hades plays mostly hip hop through an excellent state-of-the-art sound system to a crowd of Thai and International 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.

Davey Jones' illegitimate son takes a stab at "Daydream Believer"



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Thursday 14th April

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By Jesse Saunders


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weekly resident dj schedule:

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saturday night fever
dj Billy V. & quests - house
beat therapy sundays
dj's tul & budda q. - r&b, hip hop
massive mondays
dj's tul & cayo - international
eclectic beats
sugar
dj's Billy V. & Joeki
ghetto fabulous wednesdays
DJs Cayo & Dray One spin classic hip hop
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DAN & ANDY'S UNIFIED THEORY OF HANGOVERS

"It provokes, and unprovokes; it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance," so wrote the Bard, who obviously knew a thing or two about boozing. Getting plastered is a two-edged, if rather floppy, sword. Sure, it's fun to get rat-assed and dance around on a table with your cock hanging out (even if you're alone), but in the morning when you've got cat-pee mouth, coal for brains and the coordination of a three-year-old, alcohol seems like the sweat of the devil himself.

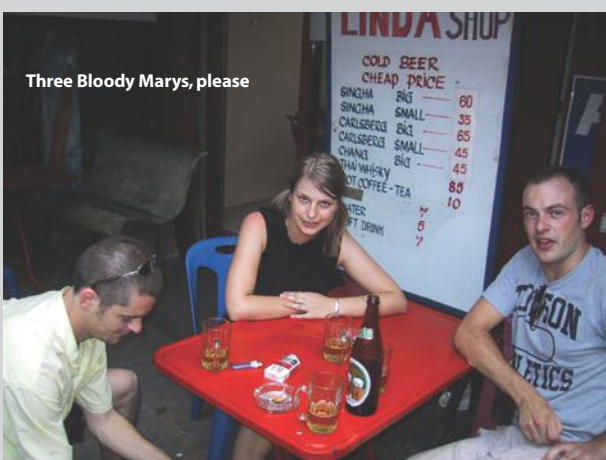
A quick search of the internet will reveal a lot of quackery about dehydration and blood-sugar but we're here to tell you where hangovers *really* come from. As everyone knows, quantum physics shows that every phenomenon is slightly altered by the act of observation. Logically, it follows that simply by existing and observing, we are changing and have an element of unconscious control of the universe.

We all know that when you've had a few, the old grey matter doesn't perform as it should, and your view of the world changes. In fact, because you're changing the universe by observing it, when you're drunk you are actually changing the universe in drunken ways. It's all real!

Now, you never go to bed hung over. It always starts in your sleep. In your drunken state and with your imagination completely unrestrained you have wild dreams, which actually become reality although you won't remember them when you wake up.

So when you sleep, your unconscious mind causes dozens of tiny trolls to emerge from the shadows, climb the sheets and trek up your face and into your slackly gaping mouth. They wipe their muddy feet on your tongue before assembling and splitting into two groups. The first group climb down to your stomach where they start doing aerobics, body-checking each other into the walls and leaving their dirty towels on the floor. The second group drill holes in your skull, dynamite an opening and begin digging at the coal-face of your brain. The excavated brain matter is carried by bucket-brigade back to their lair where the trolls use it to fuel their troll-furnaces. By the time you wake up, the trolls are long gone and you're stuck with an aching tummy and a screaming headache. Well, on a normal morning. It is commonly accepted that the only sure-fire way to avoid a hangover is to not drink at all. Of course, that is a preposterous solution, and a failure of Occam's Razor. In fact, based on the evidence above, the only way to avoid a hangover is to sleep with a ball-gag and a stocking over your head.

Q.E.D



BAGHDAD CAFÉ

On Samsen Road next to Ad Here the 13th Great little sheesha bar. If you've never smoked sheesha (a traditional Arabic bong) before, you haven't really lived. The pipe is loaded with fruit-flavoured tobacco and you and your mates take turns pulling smoke through the hose. Since it's small, the bar is always crowded and Roachie, the affable Australian host, is always on for a chat and has an encyclopaedic knowledge of all things Middle-Eastern. Bt120 buys you a charged and lit bong which will last you and your mates for an hour or more. But leave the wacky-weed at home, kids.

BRICK BAR

Back of Buddy Lodge on Khaosan Rd, Tel.02-629 4747, 02-629 4848, www.buddylodge.com, major cards except amex
Huge bar hidden in the bowels of Buddy Lodge. The Brick Bar is notable as one of the few venues on Khaosan to feature live bands on a regular basis (Jazz, Blues, Ska from 8pm). Get a seat on the upstairs balcony to check out the crowd, below.

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IT BEGAN IN AFRICA...

Rafael D. Frankel hangs out with turntable godfather Afrika Islam, who played Bangkok last month, to discuss the important things in life – girls and shopping

When I walked up to the second floor of Q-Bar to interview Afrika Islam before his Feb. 20 show, the Santa Claus-built DJ was playing with an oversize novelty styrofoam hamburger and one of the notoriously stunning QBar waitresses.

Decked out in a Yankees baseball cap and donning a button-up retro-style New York shirt circa the 50s, Afrika Islam was using the hamburger as a puppet to bite the laughing waitress.

"I've had fun since I got off the plane," he said, once I sat down. What kind of fun? "Fucking around with girls and shopping."

If I had a dollar for every musician I've interviewed here in Bangkok that said something to that effect I would have 10 dollars – not a lot of money, but a lot of musicians that have given me that answer.

To be sure though, there is more to Afrika than girls and shopping. Unlike some of the other acts here I've interviewed, Afrika says he enjoys traveling immensely and that he didn't come to Bangkok just for a fat cheque.

Though he was born in the South Bronx of New York City – an old-school neighbourhood that produced a lot of the original East Coast rappers and DJs – Afrika now says he spends 90 percent of his time "on the road". Although, since he keeps apartments in New York, Los Angeles, Berlin, and probably soon Melbourne, it's not exactly clear what the road is for Afrika.

Since his first trip overseas in 1982, when he went to Japan with the Rock Steady crew, Afrika has traveled six continents extensively and says he will try to get to Antarctica soon. "In my last life I was probably a penguin."

"The truth is I'm at home on the road. Especially here in Thailand. Any time people accept me for being me, I'm happy." So happy that the ebullient DJ with corn rows and a smile that only quits while he talks orders me a drink of my choice to go along with the beer delivered by the waitress he was flirting with.

His easy-going style and genuine friendliness –there was nothing forced about his affability – aren't so common to many who've had similar success. This is, after all, a man who has produced gold albums for Ice-T and also produced and remixed for Michael Jackson, New Order, De La Soul, Wu Tang Clan, and the Eurythmics, among others. And though he has no problems tooting his own horn in that respect, it is an impressive list. "I'm completely honoured to play with them all," he says.

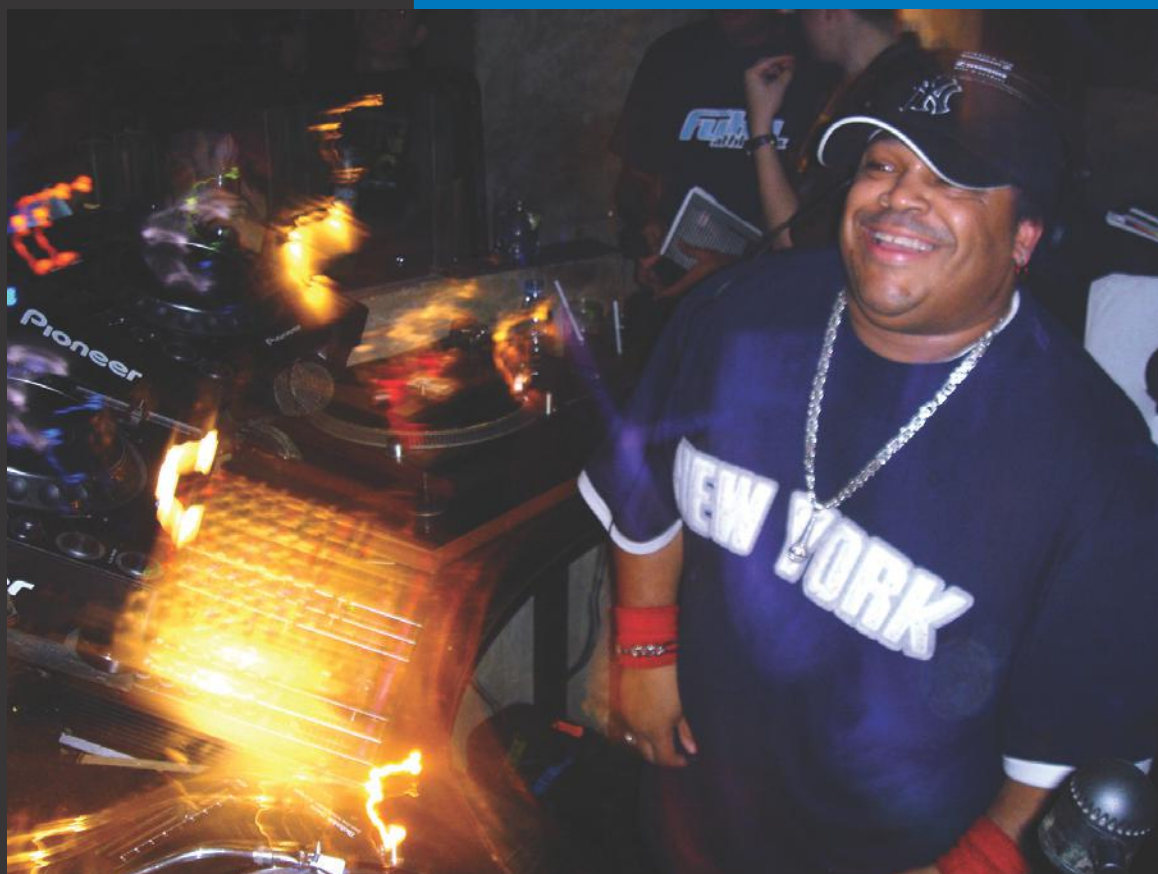
At some point, I find myself wanting to know if all his Yankee regalia is just for show, or if he's actually a fan. Turns out he's a die-hard, and he's still in shock from the comeback the Boston Red Sox made on his team in the 2004 playoffs. "It's a good thing you aren't wearing any Red Sox clothes, otherwise I wouldn't have talked to you." Hmm, good thing indeed since I was about to put on my Red Sox jersey before rolling over but decided to switch at the last minute. "Anyways, we had the subway series already," he says, alluding to the World Series played between the Yankees and their cross-town rivals the Mets in 2000, "so my life is complete."

Soon I begin to realise that, unlike the last DJ I interviewed at Qbar (I know I keep making references without naming names) I actually like this guy. Settling into the conversation more as a chum than a journalist now, I turn to the other topic guys talk about: girls.

Then, as if to throw a wrench in his glow he starts talking about his girlfriend back in Melbourne whom, he says, he loves very much. I don't bother asking the most obvious question: If you love your girlfriend so much, what's going on with all the girls here? After more than four years in Bangkok, I'm accustomed to the incongruous nature of love and relationships most people have in Southeast Asia. It's obvious in his eyes and the softer, slower tone of his voice when he speaks about her that he does love his girlfriend in Australia.

So with just a few minutes left before it's time for him to turn the tables and a 20-year-old supermodel VJ from MTV chomping at the bit to get him on camera, I finish up by asking him what he's going to do with his few days in Thailand.

"Shop. Get some cheap DVDs. I got every DVD I want. Fuck Hollywood. All you need is some popcorn and a Thai girl." Sage words for those of you who are international DJs.



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 Buttress**, an eye-popping limestone cliff-and-cave complex east of town, and scale one of nearly 70 bolted routes. Or call **Chiang Mai Rock Climbing Adventures** (tel: 06-911 1470) for guided trips or instruction. The **Chiang Mai Museum** on the Superhighway displays lots of religious artifacts from the area. Prep for your trek at the **Tribal Museum** in nearby Ratchamangla park. In the modern western suburbs of Chiang Mai, **Gongde Gallery** off Nimanhemin

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.

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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 Laikhram** (1/10 Suthep Rd, opposite the south side of CMU). Try the *khao phat po taek*, 'broken fishtrap fried rice,' made with mixed seafood and slivered kaffir lime leaves. Farang food is no problem at all – and much cheaper than Bangkok. Build your own sandwich or baguette at the **Amazing Sandwich** (252/3 Phra Pokklao Rd), a minute's walk from the THAI city office. **Da Stefano** (2/1-2 Chiang Moi Kao Rd), just 'round the corner from Tha Phae Gate, is a popular Italian restaurant, with rustic-chic ambience, efficient service, and delicious pastas and pizza. If you're on a strict budget, head for the much cheaper, Thai-owned **Italian Lang Mo** (the name means "Italian Behind the University"), down a tiny alley on the south side of Suthep Rd. Skip the pizza and go for some of the best pastas you'll find in Chiang Mai. **Jerusalem Falafel** (35/3 Moon Muang Rd) does Jewish mother-style home-cooked falafels, chicken-liver sandwiches, salads and home-made pastries.

NIGHTRIPPING:

While there's a clutch of seedy hostess bars bordering the east moat and especially along Loi Kroh Road, and a few gay bars around town, Chiang Mai's nightlife can't compete with Bangkok's for debauchery. Nevertheless, the city is lively after dark. Expect closing times to be 1am (or sometimes earlier these days) despite national entertainment laws allowing bars in 'tourist centres' to

stay open 'till 2am. Chiang Mai police are notoriously corrupt. Tourists and Chiang Mai University students shimmy the night away to live Farang pop at **Riverside Bar & Restaurant** (9-11 Charoenrat Rd) where you can also dine on Western and Thai food on candlelit terraces by the water. In the same 'hood, local blues-rock guitar hero Took burns it up at **Le Brasserie** (37 Charoenrat Rd) from 11pm onwards, but the warm-up bands aren't bad either. **UN Irish Pub** (Ratwitahi Rd) is developing a reputation amongst the city's literati for their twice monthly open mic poetry readings, usually on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month beginning at 8pm (all readers get a free beer). Contact spokenwordcm@hotmail.com for info. You don't have to sport dreads to enjoy open-air, fairy-lit **Rasta Cafe** (off Ratchaphakhinai Rd), where travellers trade yarns around the ever-burning campfire whilst cruising the musical hippie trail from Marley to Manu Chao. Across from the Rasta Cafe, long-term visitors drown their visa woes in buckets-of-joy **Heaven Beach**, which does live music on weekends. At the **Drunken Flower** (Mao Dok Mai, Soi 1, Nimanhem Rd near Kad Suan Kaew) NGOers and young, socially mobile Thais mix at the tables outside, while regular drunks prop up the bar or lounge on tattered sofas inside. Owner Dai has a good CD archive of R&B and classic rock. Ask him to crank it up, it's never loud enough. The tiny **Pinte Blues Pub** (Moon Muang Rd) is one of the city's longest-standing watering holes, and an ideal spot for a chat over cheap drinks with a backdrop of possibly the best recorded blues collection anywhere in Thailand.



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**, Chaisongkham 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**



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.

BEACH ROUNDUP

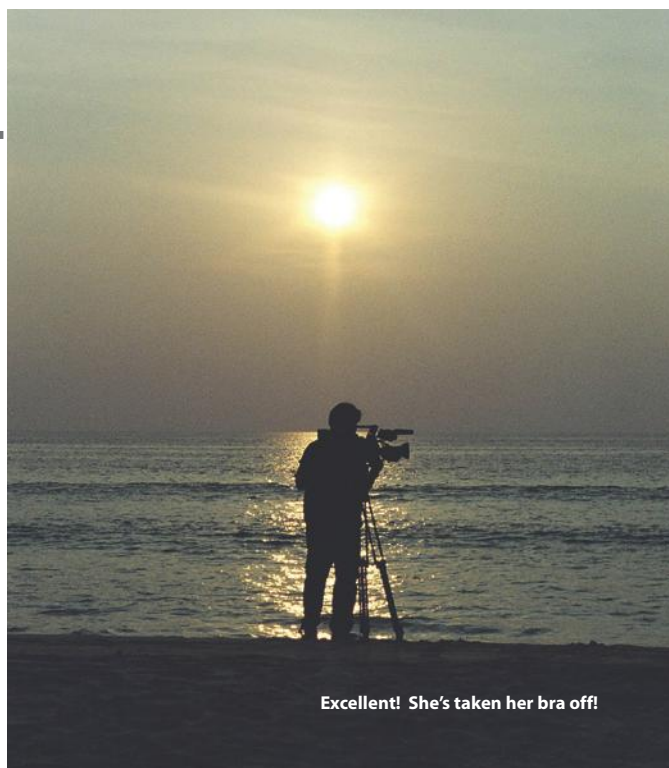
GET SET TO GET WET

It's that time of year again. April in Thailand means stinking hot weather and Songkran. For those who don't know, Songkran is the Thai New Year which traditionally is celebrated by people travelling back to their hometowns and honouring their elders by pouring water over their hands while giving a blessing. There's talcum powder involved somewhere as well. But Thailand is fast entering the modern age and such customs have been updated and accelerated by the advent of water-pistols and high-pressure pumps. Now the annual celebration has become the world's largest waterfight, lasting from the 13th to the 15th or even longer.

What this means to you, the travelling foreigner, is that apart from getting soaked to the skin, every Thai in the nation hits the road, meaning that planes, trains and roads are booked and choked and the usual holiday spots are packed. Plus, you don't want to travel during the festival itself – you'll probably be happier participating or cringing in your hotel room.

If you're down south, Songkran is usually a one-day event and isn't celebrated at all in Muslim areas, so if being wet (outside the pool) is likely to make you cranky, that's the place to go.

Songkran is a lot of fun. It's three or four days of chaos, flying water and binge-drinking. On a more sober note, hospital admissions during the Songkran period last year outnumbered the total number of casualties in the Second Gulf War, so watch yourself on the roads.



Excellent! She's taken her bra off!

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 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 –

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

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A man with short brown hair, shirtless, is sitting on a wooden boat deck. He is wearing blue shorts and has a black Canon camera strap around his neck. A white towel is draped over his left shoulder. He is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. In the background, there is a body of water and a metal railing. The text "That'll be 20 Baht, thanks" is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

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.

"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.

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.



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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.

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.

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PATTAYA

A couple of hours to the east of Bangkok, Pattaya is a lively town that caters to every whim. Notorious for its naughty nightlife, there is much more at this resort than its reputation would lead you to believe. Name a sporting activity or indulgent pastime (paintball, chopper riding, deep sea fishing, go-karting, drinking and eating sausages, to name a few) and they have it here. The beach is not spectacular in the town – you have to head to Jomtien for that, or out to sea, but it isn't the sort of place where you come to tan - unless your hotel has a pool.

HUA HIN

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

CHA-AM

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

KHAO LAK

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

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KOH SAMUI 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 chili ice cream. If you want to watch the world pass by in the day while munching on a panini, take a street-side chair at **Cafe Uno**.

NIGHTRIPPING:

Right on the Chaweng Beach Road, there's a great filling station for booze, Cajun and Creole food, and live blues called the **Coco Blues Company**. Opposite McDonald's is **Tropical Murphy's** with draught Guinness and Kilkenny, and 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**



I should have been a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas. Say, you got any rolling papers?

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.

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FEEDING TIME:

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

NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

BIG BUDDHA AND BAN RAK PLACES TO CRASH:

Known for its massive Buddha image at one end of the island, this is a tranquil area to get away from the nightlife and hooligans. While the beaches are nice enough, the swimming ain't so hot but the sunsets are great. **Shambala** offer rooms from Bt400-800 and has a good menu of Thai and Western dishes. **Shabash** (07-724 5035) has beach huts from Bt1,400-1,800 depending how close you want to be to the sea. They also serve up a unique menu of Middle Eastern, Indonesian, Indian curries and Thai specialties that are well worth sampling. **Samui Mermaid** (07-742 7547) offers great value for Bt500 with cable. If you want to spend a little more, the brand new **Saboe** (07-743 0450-8) resort will spoil you rotten with its luxury beach houses and so it should with bungalows beginning at Bt3,000-7,000.

FEEDING TIME:

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

BOPHUT VILLAGE PLACES TO CRASH:

A peaceful oasis, this quaint 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 air-con, 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**.

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 Nattien Beach. They have spiders as well. A great way to see the island is to take a **Samui Safari** (07-741 5123-5). You can choose half or whole-day trips. They take you snorkelling, elephant trekking, 4x4 offroading, and to watch Thai cooking and even coconut milk-making. There is now a world-class golf course on the island, the **Santiburi Golf and Country Club** (07-741 8557) and **Samui Golf** (07-724 5384) can teach you how to swing and choose the right bat. For those who think golf is a great way to ruin a good walk, try **Yogi Bear Ha Ha** (01-787 9148). Situated on a back road between Bophut 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 Surattani 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.

KOH PANGAN MOONSHINE MUST



April 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 Phangan; **Island View Cabana** and **Wang Sai** are good-uns.

CHALOKLAM

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

PLACES TO CRASH:

Chaloklam has some well-established resorts, a few cool bars and like many villages around 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 Phangan, **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.

NIGHTRIPPING:

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 DJA also plays at **The Backyard**, starting at 11am as Hat 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 Hualumpomg 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 Catamaran** for the quickest and most comfortable crossing or the **Had Rin Queen** for the most frequent crossings and a reliable service.



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KOH TAO DIVING ECONOMY

From a former political prison and fisherman's port in a storm to a diving paradise and world renowned holiday retreat in the Gulf of Thailand, Koh Tao has been through many changes in its history. Change is still upon us with the government taking a more active role in improving the infrastructure and consequently, community affairs. April is the hottest month and sees temperatures soaring into the mid-40's. It also means Songkran, Thai New Year, which provides a welcome break from the heat in the form of all-out water warfare in the streets and on the beaches, with some of the year's best parties guaranteed. If you're into diving then this is also one of the best times of the year to see Whale Sharks. With a severe lack of rain this year there is a major water shortage threatening. Use water wisely and be aware and care for the environment both in and out of the water.

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.

MAE HAAD

The main port of arrival for visitors has everything you would expect to find: shops, restaurants, travel agents, banks, health centres, post office and the 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**, and island institution with a loyal following, offer a choice of big concrete bungalows and smaller huts with a regular crowd and a great atmosphere. **Sunset Buri Resort** with a Mediterranean feel provides aircon or fan accommodation and a swimming pool over looking the beach. **Blue Wind**, a quiet haven

with daily yoga, has a choice of old and new style huts. For classic old-style beach huts try **Mama O Chais** slightly further north. If you want to be away from the beach and the oily tanners and still view the sea try **OK View** or **Moonlight Bungalows** inland from the beach on the mountain. Towards the north end of Sairee and the island there is a fair choice of rooms to be found. **Sun Sea** and **Silver Cliff** bungalows have basic cheap huts on the rocks. More upmarket is **Thipwimarn** resort with a choice of aircon or fan and outstanding views from its terrace restaurant. **CFT Bungalows** a peaceful escape 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.



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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 south east has a several small bays dotted along it. Try **Ao Leuk Resort** in Leuk Bay or **Coral View Resort** and **New Heaven Huts** in Sai Daeng. Transport to the more secluded places can be arranged from the pier by either taxi car or long tail boat.

THE SOUTH

The main area here is Chalok Baan Kao, quieter than Sairee, set between San Jao beach and Taa Toh Lagoon, easily accessible by road with a similar choice of accommodation and all the usual amenities. **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 there 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. There are many secluded bays and beaches where you can while away the day snorkelling and swimming. Check out easily accessible **Rocky Bay** (Bt20 entrance fee), **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. Try **Jansom Bay** or **Hing Wong**. If you're still keen for some water-based activities checkout **MV Sports** or **Blacktip Water Sports**, both offer wakeboarding and water skiing.

Koh Nangyuan: A perfect paradise; three islands joined together by sand bars – seen nowhere else in the world. With only one resort and no cars or motorbikes this island provides a true getaway or romantic retreat. The surrounding waters are teeming with fishes, which makes it an ideal place for day-trippers into snorkelling and diving. Approximately 1km from Koh Tao it is also accessible direct from both Koh Samui and Koh Phangan by Lomprayah Catamaran

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. The party scene is one of late nights, great people and good spirits. Check out the many posters and fliers for special party nights and musical style. Check out **AC Bar's** party nights on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays with resident DJ's **Simon Solo**, **Mr Mack**, and **DJ Martin** serving up housey breaks and beats with bundles of booze, now with aircon and open late again. **Intouch** with its open-air design and live performance-art

opens Wednesdays and Sundays with **DJ Funky K** and guests spinning the vinyl to a regular upbeat party crowd. **Maya Bar** takes Mondays and Fridays with **DJ Saan** and **DJ Coconut** playing a blend of progressive tech and house. **Whitening** in Mae Haad holds parties every Friday with **DJ Pixie** and **T** keeping the music alive and spirits 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. Also check out **The Rox** a new bar with an inspired design set between the boulders on the beach. Relax and chill out at **Lotus Beach Bar** with a regular crowd and varied music policy. Thursdays are open-mic nights. In Mae Had, **Dragon bar** serves up oriental mystique and seductive beats with an extensive cocktail list. Also check out **Sea Monkeys** 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** offer a wide choice of cheap tasty Thai food as does **Tongs** in Sairee. **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. Try **Whitening Restaurant** between the piers for superb international and Thai cuisine. 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 top choice of quality Thai and western food served with the perennial patter 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. 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. Also well worth a visit is **Famous House**, Chalok Baan Kao, which offers fantastic home cooked Thai cuisine.

WAY TO GO:

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



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PHUKET 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 Minta** (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



Proof that two heads
Bartenders wanted; flat stomach and
standoffish attitude
essential Bartenders wanted; flat
stomach and standoffish attitude
essential aren't always better than
one

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 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 **Tatonka**, **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**, 076-250-333, 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

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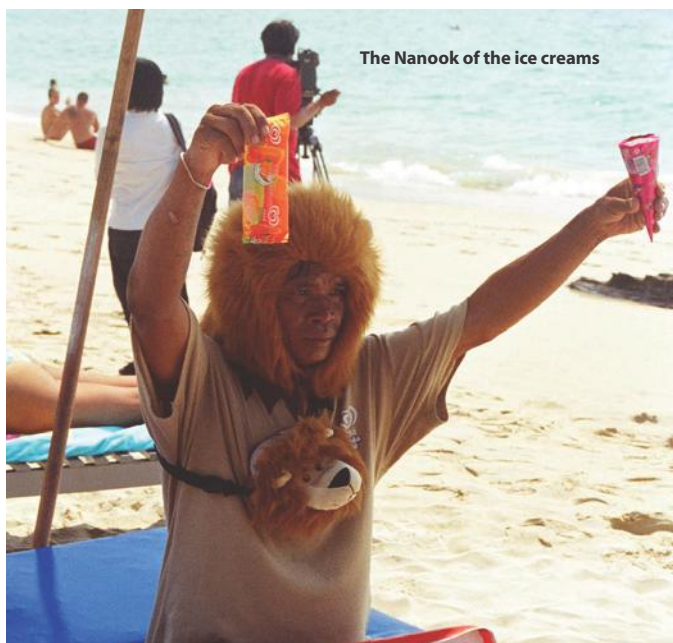
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IN KRABI BEAUTIFUL AS EVER



The Nanook of the ice creams

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

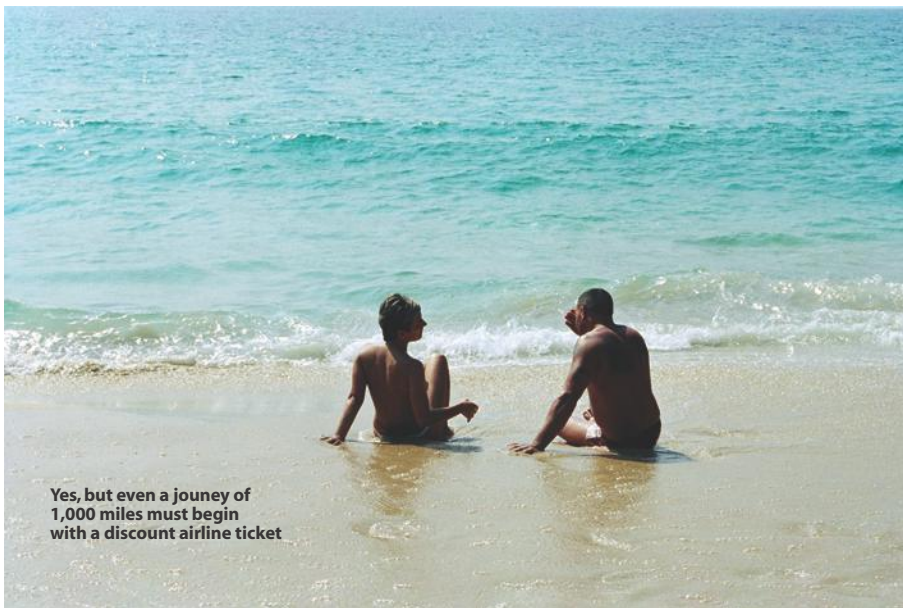
This once slow-motion town has grown in fame due to its tranquillity, beauty and what some call 'real Thai-ness', the principal reason why it so entices. The capital of Krabi province is managing to preserve its small-town charm even though it's morphing into a busy hub. A flurry of new hotels now provide 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.



Yes, but even a journey of 1,000 miles must begin with a discount airline ticket

RAILAY



At 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



Budget 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



The 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.

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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 economic tidal wave.

PLACES TO CRASH

Bungalows include: In Pra Ae/ Klong Dao, **Lanta Palm Beach** and **Lanta Long Beach**. In Klong Nin beach, all of the bungalow operations are open including **Atcha Hut**. For a Goa-style warm and friendly atmosphere try **Lanta Paradise** (with swimming pool), **Lanta Nice Beach** and **Nature Beach**. In the deep south of the island there are several cheap and picturesque bungalows although access can be difficult. This is a particularly beautiful part of Lanta but is an extreme journey to navigate by motorbike. Luckily, bungalow operators in these parts do have their own 4WD vehicles to take you to and fro. Bungalows in the south include **Kangtiang Bay Resort**, **Marine Park View**, **Waterfall Bay** and **Bamboo Bay** resorts. Prices vary from Bt100-400. Lanta plays host to a number of boutique resorts, check out **Relax Bay** on Phra-Ae for relaxed European vibes and an excellent bar, rooms Bt700-3,000.

DAY TRIPPING

If drinking beer and watching the waves lap gets boring, there's other stuff to do. Lanta's size makes it a great place to motorbike if you don't mind a few dirt roads and pot holes. Visit the **National Marine Park** in the

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

NIGHTTRIPPING & FEEDING TIME

If it is variety that you are after, there are several independent restaurants still operating on the island. These include Thai restaurants in the Saladan and Klong Dao area, including **Lanta Seafood**, **Sea View** and **Sea Side**. In the main part of the town there is **Local Bar** which serves great coffee and Thai food in a cosmopolitan atmosphere. In Klong Nin there's **Otto Bar & Grill**, serving great Thai food, German food and the famous Otto chip (massive, thick chips). **Kook Gai** serves delicious

contemporary Thai cuisine, and **Cafetero** serves the best coffee on the island while boasting an extensive Thai menu at very reasonable prices. You can also have a good flick through the cable channels. **Blue Moon**, apart from offering home stays, serves up fantastic food in a 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.

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HUA HIN REGAL RETREAT



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

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

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

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

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

With the **Oriental** now building a new hotel out by the airport, and **Best Western** and the **Sheraton** group poised to get in on the ground floor of a new construction boom, Hua Hin will soon have more 5-star hotels than even Phuket. For excellent value mid-range rooms (Bt2,000-2,500) check out the **Pavilion Villa**, replete with Thai-style décor and furnishings. (It's right across from the **Sofitel**, where some of the most suspenseful scenes in *The Killing Fields* were executed.) For cheaper digs in the Bt250

neighbourhood, head for **Soi 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.



Four wheels, one testicle

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 sing songs along the way. You can often bargain for Bt900 on the way back.

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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

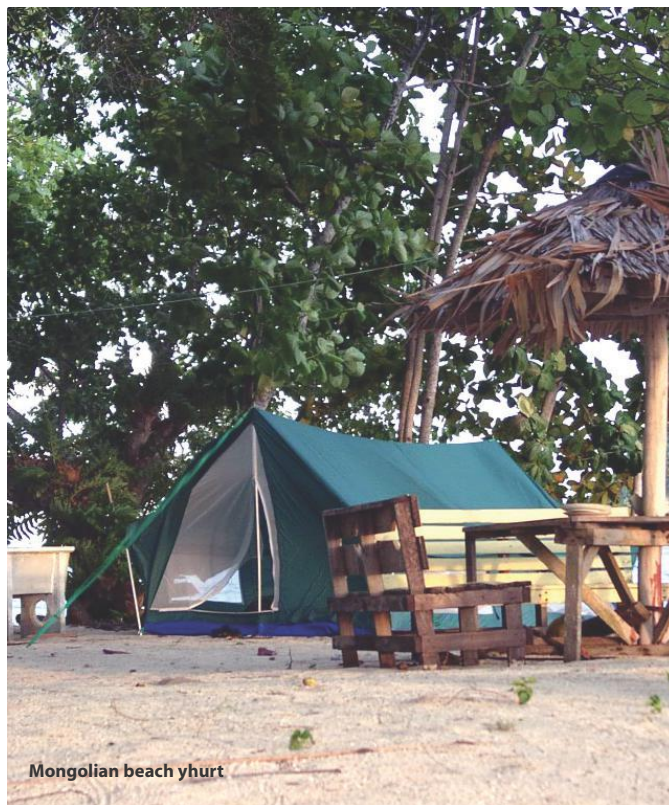
A good choice of bars, restaurants and decent accommodation make this an ideal base camp for anyone who's evolved beyond 'drink till you puke' traveling.

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.



Mongolian beach yurt

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.



Despite special consideration, Leon failed to win the sand sculpture contest

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).

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 overnigher. 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

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





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 there's a popular outdoor eating area here serving various Asian food. A small hike up the hill towards **Hollywood Road** brings you to Soho. Here you'll find brasseries, eateries and night clubs, and a generally more "beautiful class" of people. Prices have hiked up the hill with you too, but you can also catch some of HK's best jazz musicians in intimate surroundings. Check out the **Blue Door**, **The Gecko**, and **The Bohemian Lounge**. For dancing try **Nu**, **Home Base**, **Amnesia**, among other more exclusive options. **Wanchai** (MTR) enjoys a more down-at-heel reputation. Here there are Irish bars and sports bars and girlie bars, as well as straight-up bars vying for your attention. There's also live music at **The Wanch** and **Carnegies** and dancing on



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

ACCOMMODATION

It ain't cheap. Most tourists stay on 'The Golden Mile' of Nathan Road, in Tsim Sha Tsi (around the corner from **The Peninsula**). There you find a **Holiday Inn** and

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

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.

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



Car, credit card, condo, career, club, circles

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.

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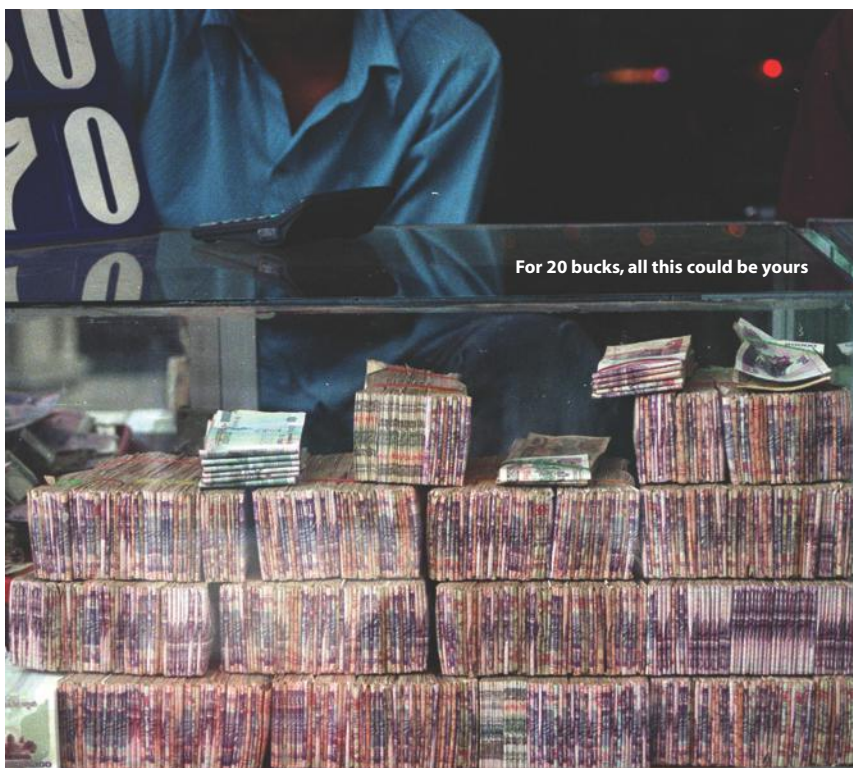
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PHNOM PENH DAS KAPITAL



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:

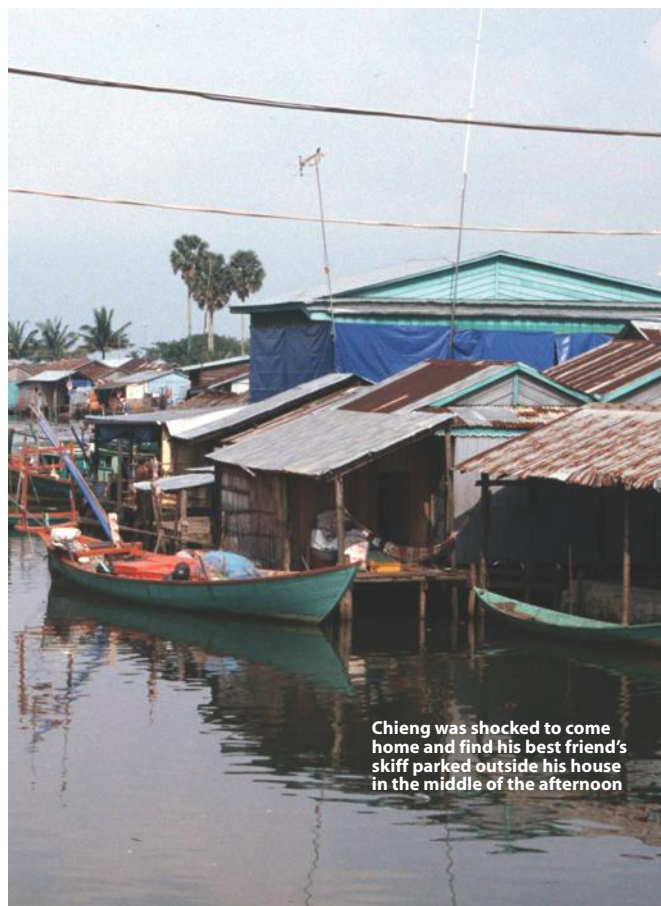
Go see the river carvings and take a jungle walk at **Kbal Spean**, the sacred **Phnom Kulen** with the less-than-sacred, \$20 foreigner admission fee. Or visit the floating village of **Chong Khneas** on the Tonle Sap Lake — gorgeous. The more adventurous can visit temples further afield such as **Beng 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”



Chieng was shocked to come home and find his best friend's skiff parked outside his house in the middle of the afternoon

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 handful of dollars.

PLACES TO CRASH:

There actually are luxury hotels in Laos; the **Lao Plaza** claims to be five-star and rooms start at US\$100, and the **Novotel**, near the airport has rooms for around US\$70. For the more budget-minded, pretty much all your accommodation needs are concentrated in the area of Samsenthai, Setthathirath and Thanon Fa Ngum – and all roads in between. Down on the river road, the **Phet Phim Guest House** is the best budget crash in town charging US\$3-5. If you're willing to spend a bit more, the runaway winner is the fairly new **Dragon Lodge** on Samsenthai, which has sparkling rooms for US\$12-15. **Orchid Guest House** on Fa Ngum Road is US\$12, and the rooftop lounge has stirring views over the Mekong. The cheapest rooms in town are at the **Mixac Guest House** on Setthathirath Road, where skanky

dorm beds cost less than US\$2 and hideous rooms go for US\$3-5. Around the corner from the Santisouk, on the road behind Samsenthai, the **Thawee Guest House** is a lot newer and better value at US\$6-12.

DAYTRIPPING:

Get your mitts on a bicycle (\$1/day) or motorbike (\$8/day), or even ride around in the slowest tuk-tuks on earth. There are about two day's worth of attractions worth visiting and that's allowing for hangover recovery time.

At the end of That Luang Road is **Pha That Luang**, the nation's spiritual centre with a 400-year-old stupa allegedly containing Buddha relics. Heading back to the centre of town is the country's tallest building, the **Victory Monument**. This Asian Arc de Triomphe was built in 1969 by the Imperial Government using US-supplied

cement intended for a runway to better facilitate America's secret war in the north. Carrying on south, there's **Talaat Sao** (Morning Market), the town's main shopping centre, selling everything, including some of the best hand-woven fabrics in Southeast Asia. From there, turn right onto Samsenthai Road and head for the **Lao Revolutionary Museum**. This large and thoroughly pompous building is great for a few discreet laughs at the ruling party's expense. The museum is devoted to commemorating the glorious people's struggle to rise out of poverty, imperialism and oppression and achieve liberation, poverty and oppression instead. Next, head down to Setthathirath Road, past the President's Palace to **Wat Si Saket**, which was built in 1818 and the oldest temple in Vientiane. When Siam was raping and pillaging the city in 1828 (before taking the population as slaves), they spared this Siamese-style one. Finish off at **Wat Sok Pa Luang**, with a herbal sauna and massage for about \$3. The tuk-tuk drivers know the place.

FEEDING TIME

You're a fool if you don't try a Lao baguette (you might still be a fool if you do, of course). Stuffed with veggies and a suspiciously spiced pate and washed down with the supremely strong Lao coffee, they'll keep you going for hours. For a nice sit-down coffee and pastry or croissant, the **Liang Xiang Bakery House** and **Sweet Home Bakery**, both on Chao Anou are not bad. There are a quite ridiculous number of French restaurants in Vientiane –

and they're all good. Check out the **Le Nadao** near Victory Monument next to Le Parasol Blanc Hotel, **Le Provençal** at the fountain for southern French food, **Le Cote d'Azur** on Fa Ngum for hearty rustic fare or **La Terrasse** on Nokeo Khumman, which serves up a bargain three-course lunch on Fridays for US\$4.

A few of those groovy cafes where people like to use the word 'eclectic' have sprung up in Vientiane in recent years. Among the best, in descending order of food quality and ascending order of popularity, are the **Xang Cafe** on Khun Bulom or **Sticky Fingers** on Francois Nginn.

NIGHTRIPPING:

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

VANG VIENG

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

LUANG PRABANG



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 specialties. The **Luang Prabang Bakery** is run by a Hmong woman who studied pastry in Bangkok and makes excellent sandwiches. The **Scandinavian Bakery** serves wholesome breakfast fare in an air-con setting. The **Cafe de Arts** is an exceptional eatery with a great mix of French and Lao dishes at very reasonable prices. Nearby is the **Yonkhoun**, where you can slice into a deer steak that is as tender as an angel's bum. Also good is **Le Potiron**, a cheap French/Euro joint with decent pizza and exceptional desserts - the best place in town for a budget binge of non-Lao grub. **Villa Santi** is in Luang Prabang's classiest

hotel. The restaurant is excellent but not prohibitively expensive. Lao food is the best choice. **Duang Champa**, on Kingkitsalat Rd, has Lao and French cuisine in stylish surroundings. Colonial splendour with a generous bar, **Han Sontam Khaem Khong** is around Wat Nong on Manthatoulat Rd. Look for the green doors. It serves LP's most deadly spicy papaya salad. **Nazim's** Indian/Halal restaurant, a long-time hit in Vientiane, now has a branch in Luang Prabang.



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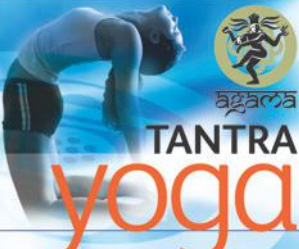
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