

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

# FARANG

May 2005

**UNTAMED TRAVEL**

**AFGHANISTAN**  
SOLDIER OF MISFORTUNE

**THAILAND**  
LADIES OF THE NIGHT

**TODD LAVELLE**  
HIPPIE MINSTREL

**SLUMMING IT**  
SHOOTING THE DRUG WAR

**MICK JAGGER**  
PAPARAZZI PURSUIT

**THE STALKER**  
AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 LAYS

**GREATEST  
HITS ISSUE**

**BORNEO:  
THE LAST TRIBE**

**INDIA:  
HOLY WILDMEN**

**BANGKOK:  
THE CORPSE COLLECTORS**



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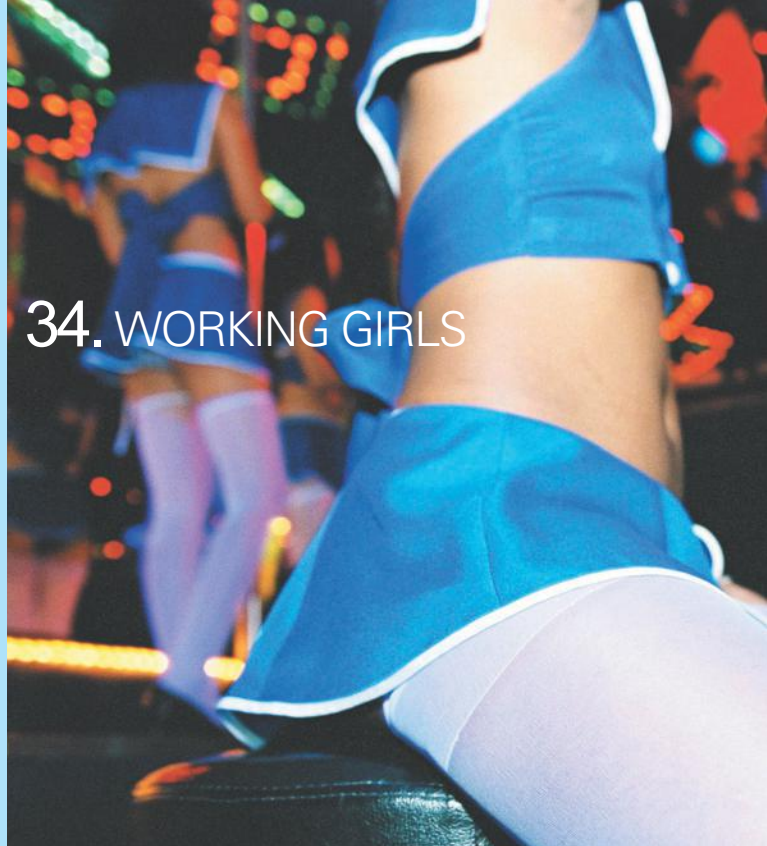
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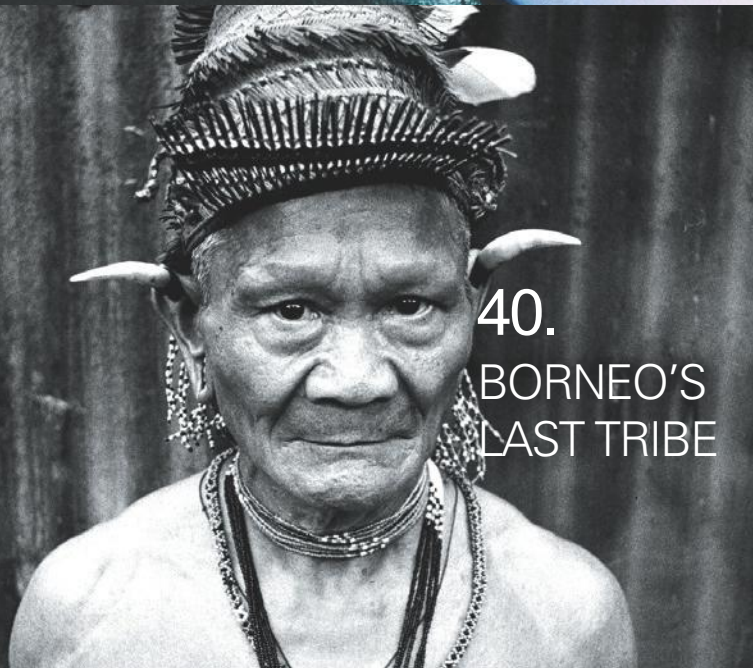
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"Q:What's worse than finding a worm in your apple? A:The Holocaust."

## 34. WORKING GIRLS



## 40. BORNEO'S LAST TRIBE



## 50. MICK AND ME





# Main Events

## May

Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore

### EDITORIALISING

Bands release Greatest Hits albums; artists do retrospectives; filmmakers re-release movies on DVDs with added extras; and drunken dickheads repeat their hoary tales of glory until their friends are bored to sneers. In this spirit, FARANG Untamed Travel Magazine presents a compilation of the wildest and weirdest, sexiest and funniest stories and profiles to ever grace and deface our pages.



### WHAT A BLAST

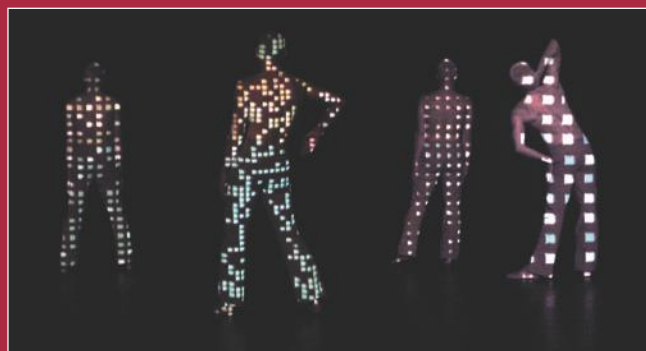
Locals blast several-metre-long bamboo rockets from 10-metre-steep platforms in an ancient fertility rite to ensure that the deities bless the rice paddies with rain and the time is ripe for a bountiful harvest; but let's just hope the gods don't piss on the parade. During the festivities, rockets ablaze with colour are escorted through the streets; staggering amounts of rice liquor are consumed; men dress up as women. And every year a couple of rockets explode on the launching pad and a few people die. In the contest to see which group can fire their rockets the furthest the winners are usually monks from a particular temple. Though many provinces in the northeast have similar rocket festivals, the most popular one is from May 14-15 in Yasothon province.



### WEIRD TASTE

While the words "Bun Festival" may arouse no wanderlust at all in most people, save for the well-hardened sex tourist, this celebration on Hong Kong's biggest fishing village – the island of Cheung Chau – is much more savoury and wholesome than its name may at first indicate to the likes of us terminal juvenile delinquents. Yes, Chinese-style buns are on the meal ticket, but they're stuck on high bamboo towers in front of the Pak Tai Temple. It's an ancient Taoist rite, though the main event of the three-day festival has been altered so it falls on the Buddha's birthday, May 15. Lion and dragon dancers are on hand – or on stilts – but the real show-stealer is the kids dressed up as folkloric heroes. Like a Hong Kong action movie, they appear to fly through the air, doing a variety of stunts. It's alarming to say, but the children have been drugged beforehand – no Farang volunteers please. But apparently their parents don't mind because it's supposed to bring the fisherfolk such good luck.

For more info, photos, and videos, check out [www.cheungchau.org](http://www.cheungchau.org)

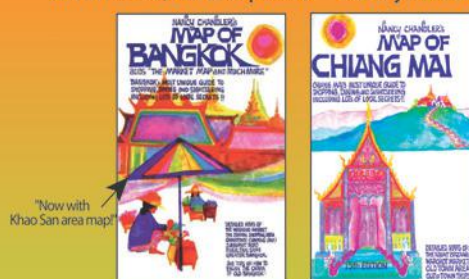


### FINE ARTS

In *Apparition*, by a prize-winning multi-media artist from Austria, electronica and high-tech are melded with movement so the dancers' bodies become a canvas, and they can interact with their own digital projected images. But this performance on June 6-8 is only one of a multitude of tradition-tinted or avant-garde performances slated for the Singapore Arts Festival from May 26 to June 26. Also scheduled to perform is the National Theatre Company of China; America's Bang on a Can All-stars, who marry rock with jazz; a chamber orchestra from Russia; and a humorous and kinetic "Kidsfest".

Check the website [www.singaporeartsfest.com](http://www.singaporeartsfest.com) for a full calendar of events.

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



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

# ALL OVER THE ASIAN MAP



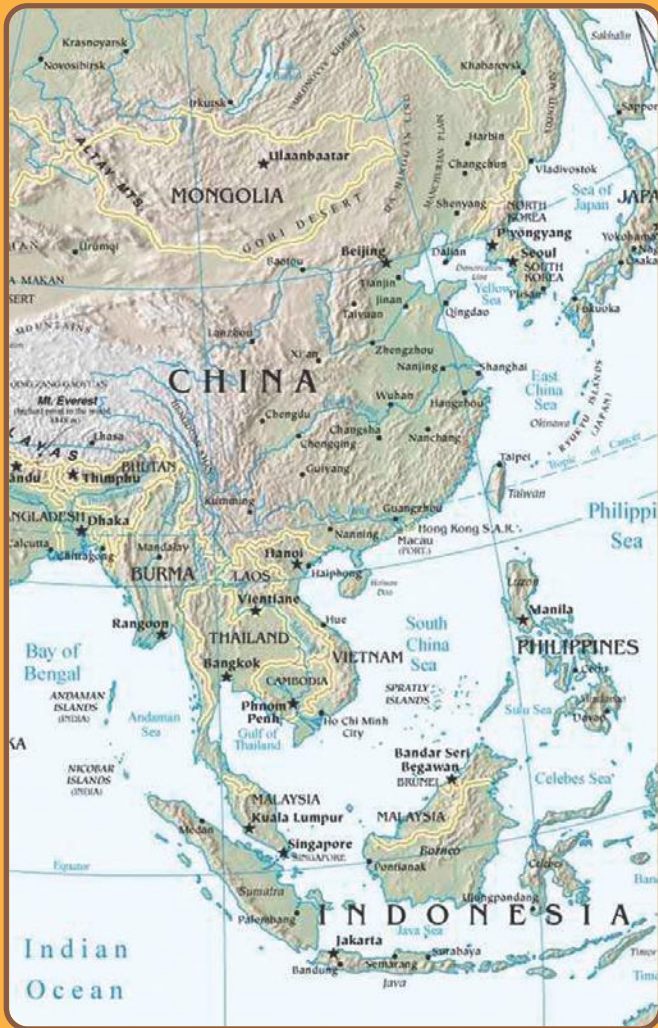
## BURIED BABIES

Police in India's Tamil Nadu recently arrested 80 people for burying young children alive as part of an ancient Hindu ceremony called "the Festival of the Pits". Children are drugged unconscious, laid out in shallow graves at temples, covered up and dug up again after a priest chants a prayer up to a minute long. Like a lot of brutal superstitious practices in India, the authorities have been trying to stop it for years. Those found guilty will be fined up to 5,000 rupees and as long as three years in jail.



## TOWERING TASTELESSNESS

The clever generals responsible for running Burma into the ground have just unveiled their latest brilliant project – a 60-metre-tall brick and glass tower amongst the temples of Pagan, one of Asia's greatest heritage sites, built in medieval times. The authorities were quick to defend their construction, saying that it gives a good view of the national heritage park. Besides, they can sell stuff in the gift shop. This is the latest in a series of archaeological travesties, including guesswork restorations and flimsy reconstructions that one Burmese academic has dubbed "Blitzkrieg Archaeology".



## TEMPTATION ISLAND

Some interesting if contrary suggestions were raised recently in Malaysia at a government debate on tackling the country's drug problems. Ruling party legislator Baharum Mohamed suggested that addicts who wish to go on taking drugs should be exiled to an island and given free drugs, lessening the burden on society, and allowing the government to concentrate on those who wished to be rehabilitated. Meanwhile, the more traditionally-minded Ismail Noh suggested that a better solution would be to behead or hang the addicts on television. Malaysia has executed 229 people convicted of drug trafficking in the past 30 years.



## CASHING IN THEIR CHIPS

Combating the drop in manufacturing income that is moving to China, tourism that is moving to Thailand, while reinforcing its makeover into "fun city", the Singapore government decided to legalise casino gambling starting with two casino resorts totalling US\$3 billion in development. The thinking behind it is of the "everyone else is doing it so we have no choice" school. Even Lee Kuan Yew, modern Singapore's virtual founder, supported the move, saying: "...if we become a backwater, just one of many ordinary cities in Asia, instead of being a cosmopolitan hub of the region, then many good jobs will be lost." The government plans to temper the social evil side by charging a high admission for Singaporeans and training casino staff to spot "problem gamblers."



BOOK NOW !!

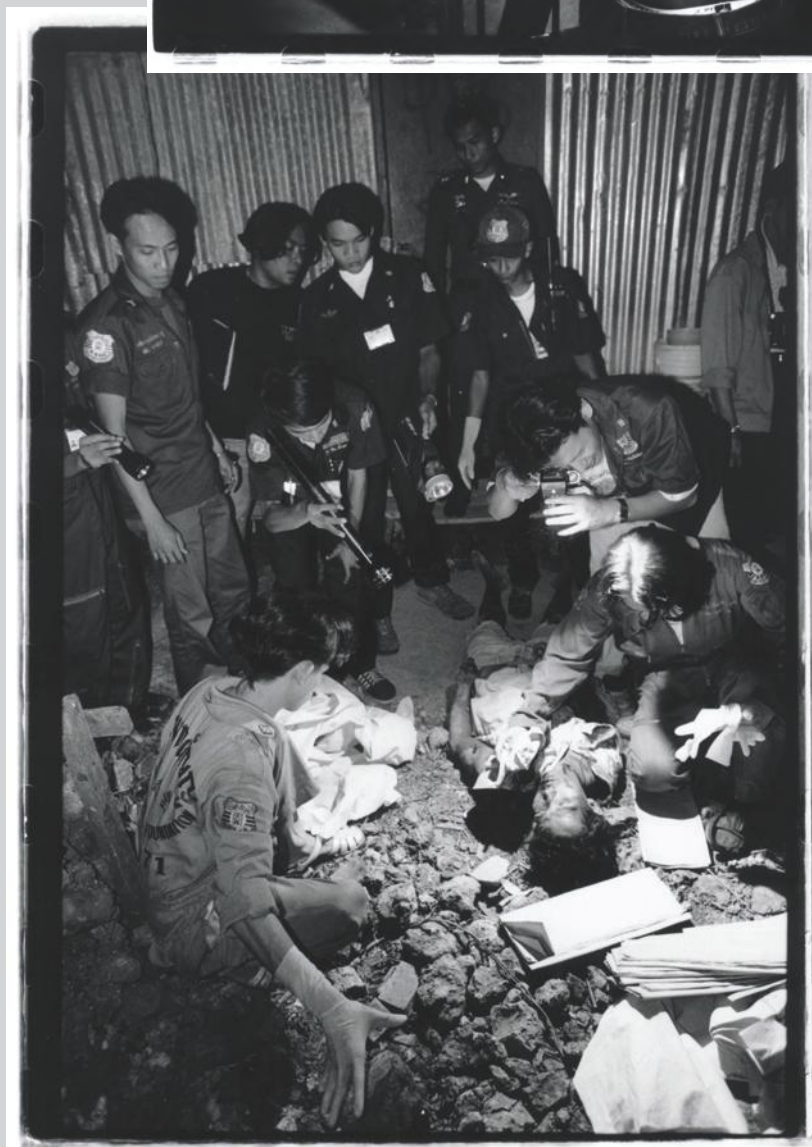
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# SHOOTING GALLERY

For a visual, tour de force into Bangkok's dark underbelly, check out the photo exhibition *Cutting the Links* by Jonathan Taylor. (The title refers to the Thai police slang for eliminating drug dealers during the war against drugs, which amassed a body count of around 2,500 people during the first round; and round three has only just begun.) Appropriately enough, the exhibition's opening party begins at 7pm on Friday, May 13, at the Kraichitti Gallery on Khaosan Road's Sunset Street, while the exhibition continues through the rest of the month. To eyeball a sampler of the Englishman's imagery of speed freaks, shantytown punch-ups, and a policeman helping a woman to give birth in the midst of a traffic jam, flip to Road Warriors on Pages 40.



# Letters to the Editor

## Holiday Carpetbaggers

It was interesting to see how a supposedly traditional culture-specific celebration – in this case Thai New Year – has become entrenched in unabashed capitalism, at least in Thailand's city centres. I must confess, I did go down to Khaosan, which is probably as bad as it gets (pure carnage), but the industry of those locals who set up impromptu stalls selling anything from Coke, beer and tissues, to scoops of water, or water-gun refills, for 10 baht a pop was notable. I watched one crew, located outside Khaosan's Buddy Lodge, for about 10 minutes, and they must've made about Bt700 profit on a bucket of tap water. One of their customers was this drunken old Farang goof who went back for about five refills on the trot. Take my money, toss, here's some more, another toss. Thing is, the people he was targeting couldn't have gotten any wetter. They say a fool and his cash are soon parted; that's never more true than when there's a "traditional celebration" to attend to.

Josh Quince  
Bangkok

## My Neighbour's Cock

Dear Mr. Editor,  
I've recently moved to a more rural area of Koh Samui, after living around Lamai. Nice place under a shady coconut palm canopy. The only drawback seems to be an all-night rooster. I'm not used to living around these birds, but doesn't tradition call for them to wail only at sunrise? This is no small problem, as it seems to be corrupting the other neighborhood cocks, and they've all got really healthy lungs. A pack of yelping mutts would be preferable. Is this normal behavior? I'm thinking in-breeding gone awry in hopes of one really mean-assed fighting cock. I've actually considered using a sling shot. The thought, though, of standing on the porch in the middle of the night with a kid's toy and a pile of ammo gets me to wondering about what remains of my dignity. Is there any good way to take out the little bastard? I'd like to hear suggestions.

Mr. Paul  
Koh Samui, Thailand

### Farang Replies:

*One of the editors here had a similar problem a couple of years ago, so went to the neighbour and asked to buy the rooster in question. When the owner was told that the intention was to kill and eat the bird by way of showing him who was higher on the food chain, the man was shocked and angry, and banished the editor from his premises. Turns out it was a prize fighting cock. Imagine a Vietnamese person dropping by your house in the suburbs of Seattle and offering to buy your poodle because he was having a barbeque. The point is that if you start taking pot shots at the rooster or poison him or just ring his neck in a fit of pique, your neighbour, given the kind of person who owns a fighting cock will, likely as not, shoot you in the fucking head.*

### Greatest Letters

*In the spirit of this month's theme, here are a few favourites dug up from the wine cellar.*

## Baby Names

My husband and I conceived our first child, Paris, when visiting the French capital city last year. I am currently six weeks pregnant with our second child who was conceived in Calcutta. We'd be grateful for any suggestions on a name as we're torn between Shithole and Leperdump.

Charity Smith  
London, UK

## Turning the Other Cheek

My Thai girlfriend is beautiful and has the perfect backside. It's soft and curvaceous, like a caramel peach. I like to hold her buttocks when we kiss and when she bends down to pick something up I can't help but admire her beautiful behind. But one should never judge a book by its cover as her petite rump has a far more sinister function; for after Lek has eaten something, shit comes out of it.

Klaus Maerlich  
Pattaya.

## Grassroots Travel

They say travel expands the mind, and it couldn't be more true for my buddy Patrick. He came off his bike in Koh Samui and a coconut truck drove over his head.

Seamus O'Reilly  
Dublin, Ireland

## Free Stuff!!

Win a free copy of the runaway bestseller *Bangkok Inside Out*, the fun-filled photographic and textual inquiry into the "real" Bangkok.

The two most creative answers to the following question will receive a copy of the book via the post:

*Q: How many 7-11 employees does it take to change a roll of cash-register tape?*

Send your answer to [winbig@farangonline.com](mailto:winbig@farangonline.com) before May 20, 2005 Multiple entries welcome. Winners' names will be published in the next issue.







Aroon adapts to a new climate

# Kathmandu's Crush Hour

**F**lames and smoke from burning tires welcomed me to Kathmandu. Suddenly, I found myself in what has become the most popular activity for many of the city's inhabitants: protesting against the monarchy. Not something likely to happen in my country. In Thailand, decorating your house with hammer-and-sickle flags is a no-no. But they're a common sight in Nepal, and I spent half my honeymoon trip in vast crowds boiling over with anger. How romantic.

Maoist insurgencies and street demonstrations aside, most travellers think of Nepal as a pleasant country to visit. Outside the city I gulped down the fresh mountain air, but inside it, a black smoke covers the Kathmandu Valley, similar to the air in Bangkok. But the pollution is worse in such a cold climate at a high altitude – you can't breathe freely. Never mind the weather, which is cold for a tropical girl like me.

I really did enjoy seeing the Nepali lifestyle and Newari architecture in the valley. The Newari are the old, indigenous inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley. In their traditional dwellings, wood and stone are combined harmoniously. The Newari, who work in Bhaktapur, a UNESCO World Heritage site, produce a lot of interesting souvenirs like wooden neckties and Buddhas.

The rights of the individual don't count for much in Thailand, and neither does the food in Nepal. There is self-expression in Nepal, but not in the kitchen. *Dhal bhat* is the staple here. All the ingredients – pulses, herbs, vegetables – are boiled together in a pot for a long time, so any sense of a taste explosion fizzles out on Thai tongues.

I assume that's why some people go to the Dakshin Kali temple. Here, thousands of animals are sacrificed every day to the Hindu goddess Kali. After the blood has been shed, chickens and goats skinned, or even boiled, and then returned to the pilgrims who had them sacrificed. The Nepalis cook the animals and have a party with loud pop music or hip-hop in the same valley as the temple, and its cremation grounds, which fills the entire valley with the stench of grilled human flesh. Death and disco in one place. What a life.

It was also incredible to be in the middle of such a happy crowd, watching a Nepali pop concert taking place in

Kathmandu's Durbar Square. The teenagers, wearing jeans and Western-style clothes, and fashionable sunglasses, were dancing in front of the stage. From time to time they lifted up one of their friends, a boy usually, and moved him around the crowd on their outstretched hands. The boy would then stick up his middle finger at the female singers and shout something in Nepali like, "Sexy sexy sexy, bitchy bitchy bitchy."

Durbar Square is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, too.

Nearby, on Thamel Road, the morning market is fascinating, with vendors hawking everything from guavas to brass, salt, and spices. Cows walk around freely on every street.

On the way out to the jail, the meat in another market was easier to identify because the heads were still intact: goat, buffalo, pig. I was fascinated by the stuff on sale, but suddenly my husband told me to go back to the hotel. I wondered what I had done wrong. But you see, nature and local culture don't interest my husband. He was on his way towards Kathmandu Jail where the famous serial killer Charles Sobhraj (See *FARANG*, February 2004) was incarcerated. This is the kind of guy I married. So my husband interviewed Sobhraj while I wandered the old city, waiting to resume my honeymoon.

The Kathmandu Jail is not a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

As we flew out of the country where the Lord Buddha was born, the atmosphere was gray from pollution, which is the same as the current state of Buddhism in my country, highly contaminated. I grabbed a *Bangkok Post* and concentrated on reading. Then a middle-aged, Asian-looking man said, "Excuse me," in English because he wanted to pass a spicy Thai snack to his wife, who was three seats away. I said, "*Mai pen rai ka*," and he was surprised because he'd thought I was Nepali.

Then I had a short conversation with his wife. She tried to ask me whether I knew that the entire Nepali Royal family had been massacred several years ago. But her husband interrupted her, "She doesn't know and don't ask her. After all, she's married to a Farang."

The land I grew up in produces millions of people like this.

**With childhood memories of the Buddha's birthplace and the snow-crowned Himalayas percolating in her mind, Aroon Thawchatturat finds in her first column that her honeymoon to Nepal only half-fulfills her fantasies. Photo of Aroon in balaclava by Tom Vater. Other pic by Aroon. First Published in October 2004.**

# THE CORPSE COLLECTORS

Words and photo by *Jim Algie*,  
First published January 2004

**6**:30pm, in the main office of Poh Teck Teung.  
A volunteer for the charity foundation is flipping through a photo album of crime-scene shots and grisly accidents. He stops at a shot of a motorcycle lying on its side. "We found a helmet down the road from here and I went to pick it up... the driver's head was still inside the helmet." He laughs and smiles. Either it's that usual Thai penchant for making light of the darkest situations. Or this guy's had a few too many nightmares about headless motorcyclists.

*7:12pm, in the videographer's pick-up truck.*

Poh Teck Teung pulls in millions of baht in donations every year. Donating to the organisation is good karma, the videographer says as we weave through Friday night traffic, because they help to rush the injured to the hospital and take the dead to the morgue. If nobody claims the body, they bury the remains at their cemetery in Samut Prakan province. Every few years, dozens of volunteers help to unearth and burn the bones of thousands of corpses in a mass cremation ceremony.

The foundation's rescue work on the blood-slicked streets of Bangkok has been documented by National Geographic TV, in a recent documentary, the BBC and CNN. When the latter network attempted to follow them around one night, their van crashed and Poh Teck Teung had to come to their rescue, he says with a laugh.

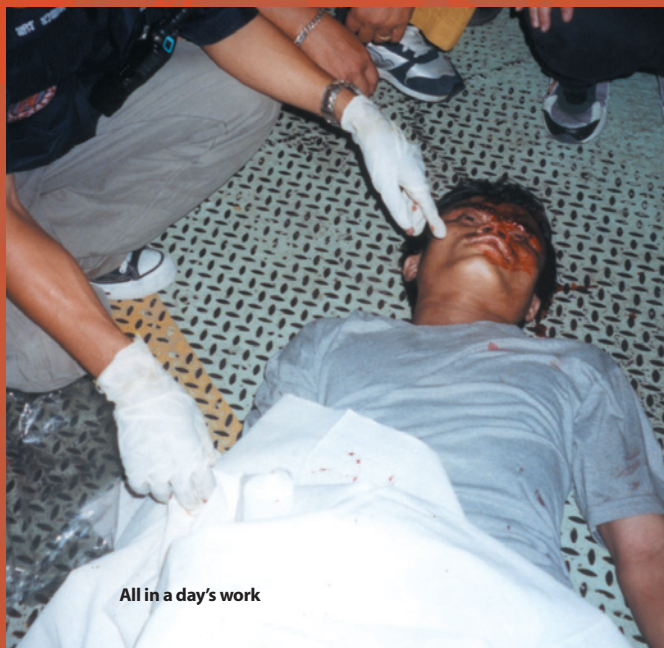
That's an apt warning for the hell-on-wheels kind of driving these speed demons do. When saving a life is a matter of minutes, velocity is of the essence.

A call comes in on the radio, he guns the gas, and we're off, bulleting down the road like a getaway car. The speedometer needle, glowing green, creeps up... 40, 55, 80. He's too busy passing cars to talk now. And I have no idea what the emergency is.

Near a pedestrian bridge on a busy road in the industrialized hinterlands of Bangkok, we pull over behind a fleet of Poh Tek Teung rescue vehicles. Men are running towards the bridge, jogging up the stairs. A policeman stringing yellow crime-scene tape across the top of the stairs lets us pass. Then we see the body: young, male, Thai, lying on his back. The glare of orange street lights gives the scene a hellish tint.

Whether he was shot in the forehead or smacked with something heavy like a crescent wrench, nobody's sure. For once, there's none of that Thai cheeriness. Everybody's somber and talking in funereal whispers above the drone of traffic. Speculation, however, is running rife that it might be a drug-related killing, or possibly one of the muggings – common on pedestrian bridges – gone violently wrong. This guy, wearing rubber flip-flops, lost his life for a few hundred baht?

A few members of Poh Tek Teung kneel down beside the corpse, pointing at the fatal wound, while a crime photographer from the grisly, police propaganda magazine, *191* (the emergency line in Thailand) snaps away. A couple of the older blood-hounds (read: tabloid reporters) and cops look lost in worrisome reveries, perhaps thinking, "What if that was my kid?"



*11:02 pm, Ram Intra Road*

Around 12 volunteers for the foundation, half of them female, are sitting around beside a mini-mart and petrol station, near one of the most accident-prone roads in Bangkok. One guy shows off his tattoo of the foundation's emblem. Another guy, Kittu Cheounarom, has been volunteering for 10 years now, while waiting on a lengthy list for a position among the 200 paid workers.

One night, he says, they received a call from a guy who'd been taking a piss in someone's backyard and smelled the stench of decomposition. Poh Tek Teung came out to dig up the backyard and found the skeleton of an animal. A minute later, an elderly woman opened the back door, and yelled at them. "What the hell are you doing? I buried my dalmation out there a few weeks ago."

Kittu and the crew laugh and laugh.

The most tragic and grotesque incident, he says grimly, was collecting the body parts of a young boy who'd been hit by a train.

For a while, nobody says anything.

*2:58am, the Poh Tek Teung Hospital on Bamrung Muang Road*

We've been sitting here for hours. A voice crackles over the radio, and the cameraman, who's been nodding off in the front seat, bolts upright and revs the ignition. Within 10 minutes we're entering a military barracks near the Samsen Railway Station.

Many of the soldiers live in these concrete cinder blocks. There are no balconies, only long open-air hallways. Up on the fifth floor, standing on a ledge, is a soldier dressed in shorts and a T-shirt. A policeman, standing about five metres to his left – we can only see his head and cap – is trying to talk him down. Surrounding us are a dozen ambulances from different hospitals. Everyone's getting a crimp in their necks, and taking shallow breaths, as we wait for him to jump.

Then a fire truck arrives. The firemen inflate a huge yellow bag and place it directly under the man. The tension dissipates. Interest wavers. People look away, talk, light cigarettes. Soon the cops coax him off the ledge. He's handcuffed, brought downstairs, and put into a police car.

It's disappointing. We want more blood, as long as it's nobody we know, and now there's nothing to do now but go home and watch TV. That must explain why Poh Tek Teung is so popular with the media and all of us visual vampires, gorging our eyes on the carnage.



# HEALTH

## THE EYES HAVE IT

Words by **Dr Nick** of *Mission Hospital*. First published in September 2003.

**I**'ve got clap where?!" she cried. The doctor realised that the explanations would drift in one ear and out the other once the big G word (gonorrhea) passed through his lips. Apparently, it had passed through her lips as well since she had gonorrhea of the throat.

"But he used a condom when we did it!" she added hopefully.

"That at least kept you from getting gonorrhea of the vagina, but did you have oral sex?" the doctor asked.

"Yes, before he put the 'thing' on," she muttered.

"One more item before the nurse gives you your shot and pills" the doctor continued, "I need to check your eyelashes."

"My what?" she exclaimed.

"Your eyelashes," he said. "Hmm, just as I thought, you have pubic lice eggs on your eyelashes."

"What are those?" she asked shakily.

"Oh, nothing serious, you have 'crabs' in your eyelashes."

As the nurse escorted the dazed woman from the room, the last familiar words the doctor heard her grumble under her breath were, "I'll kill him, I swear my boyfriend is so dead."

This little dialogue happens every day but we don't want it to happen to you, so read on to hear more about the amazing world of STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases), or as the woman above called it, 'So Totally Depressed'.

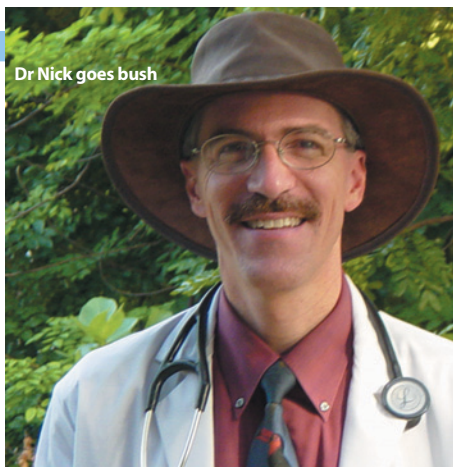
To start out with, yes, you can get gonorrhea of the throat, vagina, anus, and just about anywhere else a penis or vagina will travel, though the usual locations are by far the most common. Pubic lice or "crabs" can colonise pubic areas, beards, eyelashes and even hairy armpits. Genital herpes can be found up the bum, or in the mouth as well as the "traditional" spots. I could go on and on about unusual presentations of sexually transmitted diseases, but the point is, STDs don't always follow the rule books and there are many different kinds out there.

So what should you know about them and how can you keep from getting them?

STDs are anything transmitted by sex, and they include the usual frequent offenders such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, herpes, syphilis and HIV. They also include some not so commonly mentioned ones, such as trichomonas, lymphogranulosum venerum, granuloma inguinale and genital warts. They even include some diseases that are transmitted by sex, but we don't often think of them as an STD, like hepatitis B.

So how can you keep from adding a member of this motley collection as a souvenir of your travels? USE A CONDOM!!!

That means using it correctly. Women as well as men should learn how to put one on and take it off, and when to take it off, without ending up with bunched up condom filled with



Dr Nick goes bush

semen left behind in the vagina after Mr. Wiggly has gone to take a nap. It also means using the right kind and size of condom. Those condoms that are listed as "natural," made from something like lamb guts will prevent pregnancy, but not the transmission of some STDs like HIV. Latex condoms provide much better, but not perfect protection. Size is important as well. Some condoms will be too difficult for some men to put on because they are too tight. There is nothing like battling with a condom to destroy the mood and the rigidity of the moment. Oh, and one more thing – don't recycle.

Women's condoms are as effective as men's condoms in the prevention of STDs. For those who have never heard of them, they are a bit like a diaphragm with a sleeve attached to it that comes all the way out. It needs a special fit and some training to use.

There are STDs that are not prevented by condoms, or where condoms have minimal prevention, such as: genital lice (crabs), herpes, and genital warts. Crabs are easy to treat, but herpes is for life. Yes, there is medicine to make it go away faster, but once acquired, you will always carry herpes with you and it will usually show its ugly face at the worst times. Genital warts, besides being nasty to look at and tough to treat, can also lead to abnormal pap smears and even cervical cancer.

Okay, so now that I have totally drained all the fun out of life, how can sex be fun and not dangerous? The only true way to be safe is to have no sex at all. The next best method is to always use a condom correctly. What about oral sex? Varieties of barriers have been suggested, but the most interesting I have heard about is using kitchen cling wrap over the genitalia. Okay, so it doesn't solve all the problems, but these will certainly reduce the chances of getting dangerous diseases. Just remember to use them.

If you do get an STD, have a follow-up check to make sure that it is cured before you have sex. Besides being a courtesy to others, it is important for you too because if you are infected with an STD and you have sex with someone who is carrying HIV, the STD you have will greatly increase your chances of getting HIV from that person.

Have fun, but be safe. Crabs are much nicer on plates.

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# Feeling Offal

**T**he gastric adventures of Andre 'Leatherguts' Lepine continue as he gorges his way through the filth and the finery on offer in Asia's great food city. First published July 2003.

## Angelini (Italian), Shangrila Hotel

Grandeur, ambience, delicious Italian food and class – all good reasons to dine without any other members of the Farang Untamed Travel team, which I gladly did.

As you'd expect from the Shangrila, Angelini is a top-notch Italian eatery. The décor theme has a grand, *Phantom of the Opera* feel, the walls adorned with masks of Pulcinella (sort of like the Hofmeister bear but more classy), three-story windows and an open kitchen – so no worries about disgruntled chefs doing nasty things in your risotto. I had endured my usual five-hour pre-free-dinner fast so made quick work of the bread basket, which came accompanied by a carrot, tomato and garlic puree and a black olive tapenade, both of which hit the spot.

In the mood for shellfish, I'd chosen sauteed scampi and scallop salad with braised fennel and fresh flowers with salmon roe dressing (Bt420) for starters. The presentation was superb, the seafood fresh and cooked to perfection. A common complaint of mine is the prevalence of squash-ball like scallops that have been in the pan that tad too long, thankfully that wasn't the case here. Simple, despite sounding very flash – and tasty.

Round two consisted of the braised lamb shank in a savoury Barbera red wine sauce with consomme-infused potato (Bt440), deftly served by my fast, flawless and rather pretty waitress. A Henry VIII-sized portion of tender, slow-cooked lamb with a warming and homely, 'Mum's cooking' style sauce which soaked into the mash.

Gluttonous as I am, the lamb shank had me beaten but I still managed to shovel down the house speciality dessert of warm chocolate soufflé with vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce (Bt240). A very impressive and I'd imagine bloody hard not to cock up soft-centred soufflé, a delicate pocket of hot and sexy chocolate goo – this one's a guaranteed winner with a female date.

## Pat Thai Vendor,

soi Yaowarat, Sukhumvit 71

Now there's *pat Thai* and there's *pat Thai*, no two are the same and some are better than others. The Bangkok title holders of Thai-style noodles are for me a pair of sisters who have a stall on a soi off Sukhumvit 71.

They make only two dishes, the other being *hoy ton* (a bit like an oyster omelette), and they make them bloody well. The key to a good *pat Thai* is cooking it swiftly on a high heat and eating immediately, hence it doesn't become a soggy mess. These girls have mastered the



art and added a couple of special touches of their own.

*Pat Thai* is essentially a dish of rice noodles stir fried with bean sprouts, spring onion, dried shrimp, tofu and egg. Ground peanuts are either fried together with the noodles as I like and/or served on the side with fresh spring onion stalks and lime wedges. As usual, the dish can be seasoned to taste using the lime, crushed, dried chillis, sugar and fish sauce.

This particular *pat Thai* differs from the norm in that the noodles are pre-cooked and doused in a special, homemade chilli sauce giving the dish more punch than usual. The girls also cook on a large, flat hotplate rather than in a wok and use *sen lek* ('small line' about 5mm wide) noodles rather than the thinner variety that are sometimes used. My theory is that because the noodles are spread out on the hot plate they cook quickly and evenly, and excess fluids are able to evaporate quickly making the noodles less prone to stew in their own juices. The result is perfectly cooked noodles and fresh, crunchy beansprouts and spring onion – perfection for Bt20.

## Kuay jab vendor (Chinatown).

After a couple of days of veggie food and salads I felt the need for a good offal feast. Despite hailing from the island that proffered such delights as black pudding and haggis to the world, I have to admit that nobody cooks guts like the Chinese. *Kuay jab* are thick (approx. 4cm wide), flat noodles curled into tubes and served with pork tongue and entrails with or without stock. Whenever I fancy a good bit of tongue I always head for the *kuay jab* vendor on the street corner near Ling Hong (a well-known gold shop) in Bangkok's Chinatown.

On this occasion there was the usual queue of five or six tongue-hungry locals – always a sign of quality. Although rice (not egg) noodles are used, their size and shape gives them an *al dente* and filling pasta-like quality that you don't get with the thinner varieties. This vendor always has deliciously tender slices of tongue and powerful, sinus-clearing, peppery stock. Elsewhere you may see the noodles served in a dark broth thickened with corn flour into a glutinous gravy. I polished off two and a half bowls and left snot-free, sweaty and content.

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Words by Daniel Cooper Photo by Daniel Reid

**A**sk a Thai who Todd “Tongdee” Lavelle is and you’ll discover that he is probably Thailand’s best-known Farang, who sings in Thai and that he is famous for his frequent charity work and performances at schools. The folk-rockers from Scranton, Pennsylvania, has a long string of achievements in Thailand including writing a number of newspaper and magazine columns, frequently appearing on Thai television in interviews and dramatic roles, as well as giving 3,000 performances in the last 10 years in 12 countries.

So what path took the young American to Thailand and made him a household name? I was invited to interview Todd at Lavelle Productions in Bangkok.

### TODD THE CHILD

*“The greatest thing you can do, on this planet, is to love, is to be loved to learn how to love and then to create other people who are so good at loving that you forget you ever gave it to them.”*

Few would call Todd’s childhood ‘normal’. Instead of the 60’s-sanctioned Dad-at-the-office, Mom-at-home “bring me my slippers lifestyle” Todd was performing the part of “Mr Bones” in his father’s black-and-white minstrel show, the last of its kind in the US, at six years old. Thomas Lavelle, Todd’s father, was an extraordinary man. “He was an Olympic diver, he was an actor. Truly a genius in all the pluses and minuses of that word. And in the middle of all these dreams he had kids.”

Not just Todd and his five siblings (including a younger sister born deaf and autistic) but during Todd’s childhood, his parents adopted more than 40 foster children. “He brought in these older kids to babysit us. And then seeing that they were going and drinking, he would ask them to come and stay at our house instead of going out. And it became this hippie den, with never less than 30-40 people in it, about half of them living there. My oldest foster brother was there 26 years, and always saying he was going home that weekend. So I grew up with this incredible plethora of culture.”

This melting pot of personalities gave Todd a sharp mind and a hunger for achievement. He was inspired to read philosophy in order to argue more intelligently with his brother which complemented his later education.

### TODD THE SCHOLAR

**TL:** *I have two master’s degrees but I can’t make coffee.*

**DC:** *What are your degrees in?*

**TL:** *Not coffee.*

“There ‘s a group of priests, all over our world, called the Jesuits”, whom Todd studied under in high school and college “who were a great influence on the way I think.” He graduated from the University of Scranton with degrees in biology and Asian History. But it was the biology degree which landed him a Fulbright scholarship and brought him to Thailand to study herbs at Chulaongkorn University. “What I ended up doing was, when I got here I was with these really good professors they were a little too smart for me.” So Todd moved into ethnopharmacy, or the use of traditional medicines, and moved to Loei where he studied under Dr. Waew, a traditional herbalist.

“He taught me so many things; respect, how to breathe, how to laugh at myself,” and the two would become good friends, even though Todd spoke no Thai and Dr Waew spoke the Loei dialect. It was Dr Waew that gave Todd his Thai name, *Tongdee* (“Good Gold”). The forests where Todd was studying herbs were a hot spot during the 80’s. As the decade stared the horrors of genocide in Cambodia were still manifesting themselves, Thailand underwent coup d’tats on a regular basis, and in ‘88 Burma’s pro-democracy uprising was crushed by the military junta.

After finishing his M.A in Traditional Medicine, Todd returned to Thailand on another Fulbright scholarship, this time through the University of Hawaii, ostensibly to study Thai history and culture, but actually to work with refugees inside and on the Burmese border with a State Department resettlement program. “For me it was a storm inside, the things I was seeing. I was picking up women who had just been gang-raped, little boys with

their feet blown off, hands, bodies of every shape and colour.”

He published two papers on Burma and Cambodia but the traumatic experience moved him in other ways: “The overall feeling through all this then... was the amazing priorities of survival and the human spirit, and people somehow survive... and at the same time the limitless capacity for vengeance, anger, for acts of cruelty that no animal could devise.” The time spent with refugees was not wasted; “[I saw] all this as a resource, to learn, to maybe be a bit more sensitive, kind, strong with another person and without even realising it, all these journals – trying to write it down, trying to understand it and all of a sudden I thought, “These are songs, these are stories, these are television shows.” Todd later showed me his journals, that fill half a room, and told me he’s going to force his children to read them.

## TODD THE PERFORMER

*“All my work is very arrogant. I think I have something to say, I think I have something to teach and the reason for that is, because none of it is mine. If you don’t understand that premise then the way I talk is arrogant, self-righteous and all that stuff that Europeans have such a hard time with. You know, I am a good singer, I’m a great performer, I’m a decent writer, because all of that is a gift.”*

Beginning a career in singing with his father’s minstrel show, Todd continued to perform with his family in old-folks homes, resorts and the like. “I thought the shows were for the listeners, and the fact was that the shows were for us. I was six years old and we’d do a show at a convalescent home and afterwards we’d have to stay and listen to stories. My father would always say, “Don’t leave here until you get a song or a poem or something outta them old people. So I was 10 years old and I knew all these old American songs that no other kid knew, so at school I would start singing at lunch. And some kids would beat me up, and some would give me money.”

From busking with his sister to working as an entertainer on the QE2, the young Todd used his talents to make a living. The big break came in Bangkok, however, when he was asked to perform with the legendary Thai folk rock group Caravan. He impressed the band with his performance and joined their tour of Japan.

Ten years, 3,000 shows, 12 solo albums and any number of collaborations later, Todd is one of the best-known foreign singers in the Thai language, admittedly a small field that he shares with *lukthung* (Northeastern-style country music) singers Jonas & Christy (see FARANG Magazine March-April 2002).

“All my albums are concept albums,” he says of his music and claims to have developed a new genre of music: SIMS, or “Stories in Musical Settings.” There are plenty of folks who would claim that there are lots of songs containing stories but Todd says his projects are different. Many of his albums are published with accompanying books and the *Back to Samui* tour featured banners with illustrations and vignettes from the sleeve notes. The album itself follows the spiritual journey of a backpacker, BP, visiting Samui, through passages from a story accompanying each song plus a multimedia package of images, poetry (see box) and bonus tracks on the CD.

Todd feels very strongly that music should be a sincere form of self-expression, “I see these Philippine cover bands and they’re great but it’s soul-less and I say, ‘If you’re going to do something soulless, fix cars’, but please don’t desecrate this beautiful thing. What a gift, to have a voice and to sing.” Which is why he works so frequently with traditional Thai musicians, using over 300 to collaborate and tour with on *Rhythm of the Earth* in 1995. “The only shit music in Thailand is pop music.”

## TODD THE GOOD SAMARITAN

**FM:** *Why do you play so many charity concerts?*

**TL:** *It’s more fun than singing to a bunch of drunks at the Hard Rock Cafe. Ha ha. Kids are smarter than adults and being the utilitarian, selfish beast that I am, kids teach me more.*

Many of Todd’s performances are in schools and he has just finished an extensive tour of southern schools. For example, Todd worked with the Ministry of Health to bring his *Colours of Creation* seminar and performance series to schools. “I could never picture a government supporting it; it’s wild, it’s masturbation on my part and over and over people have come to me and asked, ‘How did you get that?’ The series invited students to be introspective, “OK, this song is buffalo, it’s real heavy. And when you feel sexual impulses, where can that go?”, in order to examine the pressures on adolescents in a non-judgmental environment.

“We broke the kids up into corners, 12 corners, the corners of creation, and the big question was, “What colour is your flame? Is your flame the colour of sex, the colour of drugs, the colour of sports, or of PR work. Everything I had designed they flipped on its head. Nobody went to the environmental corner; they’ll all be in the super-star corner.”

## TODD THE GIFT TO WOMEN

*“I’m a famous singer and it’s a very simple recipe: you get married, and your wife will start raising kids and you’ll start having girlfriends and your wife accepts that and I don’t want to do that.”*

Todd’s best-selling book is called *Thai Women* which is a collection of stories about women in contemporary Thailand, a subject that Todd has written widely on in his column in *The Nation* and three other regular columns. “They’re the engine that keeps this country running, and men are the obstacles, the tax.” Yet he remains unattached, with no family. “I want to get it right. I don’t want to get caught like my dad did,” he says, referring to his father who was torn between his art and his marriage. “I’ve dated so many women, I see a lot of women at one time, I’m in no way proud of that, it’s a handicap if I’m looking for someone.”

As it is, life on the road leaves little time for serious relationships and one would contend that Todd’s dedication to his own work precludes one. That said, Todd is taking time off from his tour schedule in the next few months to write new songs. “...probably the major faith, that I carry around with me, is I’m Lavellian. You know, my last name... I’d say even more than Catholic I’m Lavellian.”

## BEYOND THE NIGHT

Here night, fall the shadows of the self,  
Visions of the world could be,  
Dream on,  
For come the dawn weary angels  
will rest in my arms,  
Good Poseidon will lay wreaths as  
carpet red,  
Waves caressing my heart,  
The sands beneath my head,  
New light promising the will to live,  
For now,  
All that will be must rest in  
possibility,  
Help me to work the dark visions  
oh ye of power pure and tender,  
I rest all delusions of control,  
And rest in the ecstasy of  
surrender.

- Bonus CD-Rom track from Todd’s  
*Back to the Beach* (An Island  
Opera) available on Warner Music.



# The Stalker

## WHERE YOU COME FROM?

*In this rerun of an early stalker classic, Karen Findlay draws on years of research to prove that stereotypes do have their basis in fact. Toon by Nigel Price*

**L**et's face it: In a holiday romance, you don't have time to teach a new dog new tricks. The entire relationship, if it lasts more than a night, is unlikely to last more than a week. For those who know it won't last longer, it would help to know what you're getting before you invest great time or effort in any man you meet on the road. With this in mind, some of us 'experienced' holiday romance queens sat down in a cafe recently to compile a list of the best backpackers we've loved and left. The simplest way we could put it was to list them by nationality. Our apologies to sensitive souls who despise stereotypes. While we admit that stereotypes don't always fit (in fact, it's the rule-breakers we enjoy most), if you know what you're after, this is a guide to sourcing 'talent' in travellers:

### **Israelis:** Best Bodies

They may seem the most eager to get into your pants, all machismo and no brains, but after coming out to Asia after three years of military service, they've got the bodies of gods, they're great conversationalists (once you get past the machismo), and they're really quite conservative. If you want respect in the morning, follow the Israeli woman's rules of etiquette: The first night is for talking, the second for snogging, and only on the third night may you 'let him' take you home. (We will forgive you, however, if you do what we've done more than once, which is to apply the rules in reverse!)

### **English:** The Easiest

The Brits come in two molds: rogues and romantics. The first are rough and ready for action (the cruder their accent, the less likely they are to remember, let alone even ask for, your name or email). The latter are the sincerely nice guys (with accompanying posh accents) who will want it to last more than a week. What they have in common is that they're both relatively easy to score...and most plentiful on the trails of Asia.

### **Kiwis:** The Best Surprises

These boys have sensitive underbellies that like to be scratched yet few have actually really explored that side of themselves for some reason. Spend some time exploring his mind and body and we guarantee you'll find an erogenous zone he didn't even know he had. He'll turn to putty in your hands and from then on be dedicated to doing the same for you.

### **Irish:** Most Entertaining

If you like to be amused, these boys have the best tales to tell in and out of bed. In other ways, they are very much like the English (see above).

### **Australians:** Most Fun

Good time boys. Crude, rude and socially unacceptable, but oh what fun.

### **Scandinavians:** Best Lovers

Behind closed doors, these men worship women. Granted, all those we've 'known' have been momma's boys, but if that's what you have to put up with in exchange for being the recipient of hours of 'giving', don't put up a fight, take it lying down!

### **Americans:** Best Listeners

They haven't realised yet that the sensitive man of the 80s went out of style over a decade ago, but if you're a woman who wants a man to 'listen', shoot for them.

### **Dutch:** The Wildest

They'll throw in the missionary position just to surprise you, but only after all else is said and done.

### **Danes:** The Kinkiest

If you thought the Dutch had no shame, hook up with a Great Dane for an even greater ride. Warning: They tend to be louder than most, which can be fun in a bungalow with paper-thin walls and your friends staying next door.

### **Canadians:** Most Energetic

Some claim to be city boys, but the truth is they're really all country boys, with a love of roaming and excessive energy. During the day, they'll keep you moving down the road (instead of hunkering down in a hut with you for weeks on end) and at night, they usually have enough energy to 'entertain' through dawn.

### **Japanese:** Most Devoted

The Japanese backpackers you meet aren't the kinky Japanese businessmen you hear about. They may be the most difficult to score, but once you break the ice, they'll be your devoted student for as long as you're interested.

### **Thai:** Most Possessive

But some women like that and you'll expand on your cultural experience of Thailand... for those that want a thorough cultural experience.

### **French:** Most Romantic

They do send sweet notes and sometimes flowers. But we recommend them only to women who really need such romantic gestures, as we've generally found them to be more talk than action. Again, some women like that and, again, there are exceptions to every rule.

### **Germans:** Usually Taken

Generally, if you meet them in Thailand and they are under 35, they've come with a girlfriend. If they are over 35, they 'rent a girlfriend'. Granted, there are exceptions to every rule, such as the kinkier ones who like to, well, 'share'.)



# Road Reads

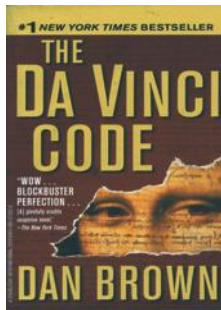
## Generic Fiction

Review by Jim Algie

*The Da Vinci Code* is one of those bestsellers that seems like it was written by a committee of publishing executives, or maybe even a computer programme, to appeal to as wide a cross-section of readers as possible. For Christians (the most rapidly growing segment of the book market in the USA), there's a quest for the Holy Grail. For feminists and the sensitive New Age guys who want to prod them into bed, the grail has much more to do with Mary Magdalene and the Pagan ideal of the "Sacred Feminine" than it does with being the cup Jesus drank from during the Last Supper. Conspiracy buffs will love the fact that there's an age-old secret society pulling the plot lines together. Action fans will thrill to all the chase scenes and the cliff-hangers at the end of every chapter, which came to remind me of far too many American TV dramas – to the point where I was wondering whether or not there would be a full-page ad for American Express popping up during the novel. For the pseudo-culture vulture there are some background details about everyone from Da Vinci to Sir Isaac Newton. And for geeks who love a good puzzle, there's plenty of code-breaking.

It's no surprise then that with all the gimmicks galore, and the driving narrative, Dan Brown couldn't afford to put any life-size characters in the book. About the most you'll get in terms of character reactions is, "He looked stunned," or, "She seemed startled." Brown's prose is about that prosaic. And the dialogue – mostly consisting of verbose explanations about all the aforementioned subjects – is rarely credible and never witty.

But any novelist working today knows that the real money is to be made off selling the screen rights to Hollywood. So *The Da Vinci Code* reads like a template for a ripping screenplay with all the character blanks left for Tom Hanks and the rest of the cast to fill in. Like Reality TV and Hollywood action yarns, this novel proves that you should never overestimate the intelligence of your viewers or readership.



## Murderous Mystery

Review by Jim Algie

How did a young man with a love for Khmer traditional music and French poetry, who was described by his university classmates in Paris as a "bon vivant", become one of the most notorious despots of the 20th century? This is the mystery Philip Short attempts to solve in his remarkable and assiduously researched new biography *Pol Pot: The History of a Nightmare* (John Murray, 2004), writing in the Acknowledgements that, "History is to a great extent detective work."

The super sleuth tracks the boy (known originally as Saloth Sar) through his early days in a rice-farming hamlet, when their family was very well off. Even then, there are dark undercurrents. Sar's father told the children about their grandfather, who had grown up during the so-called "Years of Calamity" when Cambodia was caught in the middle of a tug-of-war between the Siamese and Vietnamese. The former killed children right in front of their parents while the latter liked "gouging out their captives' eyes, salting their wounds, and burying them alive".

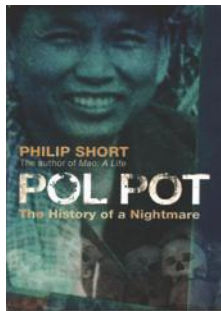
As a teenager, Sar's time spent in a very rigid Buddhist monastery, where individual creativity was punished and total obedience admired. This early discipline, and emphasis on eradicating the monks' personalities, would take on far more sinister overtones when the Khmer Rouge came to power, 30 years ago last month.

But it was in Paris, circa 1950, that Sar and his future comrades like Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan developed their notions of communism through readings of Stalin and the French Revolution (most significantly, "The Great Terror"). Sar admitted that he found Marx difficult to comprehend.

One of the biography's strongest points is how Short details the effects, and the fallout, of the Indochina War on Cambodia, and the internecine politics that fractured the country from within. If anything, Prince Sihanouk, fond of murdering all his political rivals and outlawing any kind of free press, comes off as devious, charming, and manipulative as Pol Pot himself.

While China, America, Thailand and Vietnam all played a part in creating the Frankenstein's monster that was the Khmer Rouge, Brother Number One directed its greatest abominations and most radical policies. In the end, Pol Pot seems like the ultimate Jeckyll and Hyde character: warm and friendly on the outside, cruel, paranoid, and vindictive on the inside. He rarely recanted any of his party's policies, saying only that the "line was drawn too far to the left".

Both of these books are on sale at Bookazine.



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# COUNTRY MATTERS

**H**aving become jaded with the boozing on offer in Bangkok, Dan & Andy travel to the Far East in search of new pleasures. In this case the Far East means Aranyaprathet, where the sweltering rice-paddies of Thailand meet the sweltering rice-paddies of Cambodia

Words by **Daniel Cooper** and **Andrew Morgan**,  
photos by Dan. First published in December 2003.



## **Streetside Restaurant, 7:28pm**

**Andy:** Beer and food were first on the agenda as I'm always nervous in new surroundings without these two essentials. I was also none too thrilled about being in a small town with a clown like Dan; the walls have eyes in these places and the blades of a combine harvester are sharp. A couple of long-necks (the bottle, not the tribe) and some *tom yum* mellowed my mood slightly, but I was a little concerned by the Farang freak show in downtown Aran – a show in which my simple friend and I appeared to be the stars. Still the food was great and the waitress was naturally giving me the eye. She didn't speak a word of English, but that's fine by me, as I'm fluent in the language of love.

**Dan:** Having been to Aran many times before, I was naturally a veteran of entertaining myself here in the evenings, waiting for the border to open on the morrow. As a host to Andy, who rarely sets foot outside *Krung Thep*, I took him to the finest street-side eatery in town. Trips to the countryside are always a treat for the simple food, kindly village folk and naive virgins. A shy smile from even the sleaziest foreigner will have these beauties sliding off their seats and kicking themselves the next day. Probably the highlight of this restaurant was watching *Robocop* dubbed in Thai. Mediocrity knows no bounds.

## **Aran Garden 1, 8:39pm**

**Dan:** 8:30pm is too early to paint the town red, even in the sticks, so we retired to our backpacker box to liquor up for the night. We had got a twin room for the benefits of TV and price, at the cost of privacy. In Aranyaprathet, TV keeps you entertained but privacy gets you nowhere. Being an arty type and not owning a television receiver, having one was something of a novelty. As we drank and channel-surfed we planned to watch *Octopussy* at 8:30 – Deli time. Ripper! To fill in the two hours in between, there was *Iron Blade*, a hilariously campy Conan-style film that I am convinced was made in Italy and an animated *Mr Bean*, interrupted by infomercials for electric tummy-toners, retailing at 1,400 rupees. Colour me entertained.

**Andy:** A sure-fire recipe for insanity, Saeng Som and Indian TV. Our room was indeed very much like the cell of a sanatorium. Provincial sloppiness is acceptable for Dan perhaps, but not for a high-flyer like me. After polishing off a bottle of Thailand's finest there was only one thing for it – make drunken fools of ourselves in the town; after all, we'd be leaving the next day.

**Climax Club, 11:58pm**

**Andy:** The main form of Friday night entertainment in Aranyaprathet appears to involve drunken young men careering around on motorbikes (minimum two per vehicle), shouting 'Hello!' and then pulling a barely controlled wheelie into the darkness. Entertaining as this was for all of 10 seconds, it didn't bode well for the evening. We eventually found a club though, and I was pleasantly surprised that it was actually quite plush – strange that a small town in Thailand has such a posh-looking venue. I thought of the kind of ex-working Man's club, dingy, beer-and-puke-stained carpeted shitholes that you would find in my home country in a similar small town. Despite the sophisticated décor, the music was Thai-pop-terrible and the only girls seemed to be under guard by their elder brothers.

**Dan:** This huge club next to the bus station had always piqued my curiosity but of course I was always too scared to go in. It was surprisingly nice inside – stylish, relaxed and relatively clean. But it was a complete sausagefest! No climaxing going on around here, but maybe there is a massive gay movement all along the Thai-Cambodian border and they were all here tonight. I think all the daughters of Aran are locked up after dark, or maybe they heard we were in town. The mediocre band on stage was called Mr King and as Andy and I stormed out they were playing "Happy Birthday". Quite a disappointment!

**Nameless Restaurant a Short Stagger from Club Climax, 1:30am**

**Andy:** If all else fails, more food and more beer will do the trick. Despite my by then, 'pissed out of his head Farang' appearance, I even managed to score the phone number of a waitress. I began to warm to these country girls. Unfortunately no roll in the hay was to be had that night and all I woke up with in the morning was a pounding head and a smelly, pasty-faced Aussie in the bed opposite.

**Dan:** The night must not die until the last drunk is spilt is my motto. Ask anyone. Andy and I were attracted to the bright lights and thatched roof of a nearby live-music restaurant. The usual assortment of musicians who wouldn't know a distortion pedal if it kicked them in the nuts, and a handful of sleepy guests. Andy was throwing out the big city love vibe (a common habit among the intoxicated) and our waitress was catching it in handfuls. The 2am closing time applies even this far out, but it looked like we were invited to a little "after hours private party" that in the countryside of any nation always translates to "squalid shag in a field". The waitress even recruited one of her colleagues to accompany me (now that's service), but it was not to be. After enjoying a late supper with the staff, two of the band members kindly but firmly offered to drop us home and I found myself escorting Andy back to the hotel. Bastard didn't even offer me coffee.





# Holy Wild Men

Writer and photographer **Tom Vater** delves deep into the past and present of India's sadhus, who wander the country practising asceticism, dispensing spiritual wisdom, tying their willies in knots, smoking hashish, and attending a gathering of some 30 million of peers and pilgrims, which is held once every 12 years.

**B**oom Boom Baba sits on a stone platform above the funeral *ghats*, the steps where millions of Hindu pilgrims come to Varanasi to bathe every year. "I am Naga, I am very dangerous. But I will pray for you and make a good *puja*."

Boom Boom Baba has all the vestiges of a *sadhu*. Dressed in black, his face smeared in ash, his hair matted, his beard long and wild, he looks like a Jamaican Charles Manson.

A group of lesser *sadhus* and a few foreigners sit around the holy man. The tools of his trade lie on a black cloth in front of him – his *danda*, a stick topped by a trident in honour of Shiva, a *kamandalu* or water pot, his begging bowl, an Italian copy of the epic poem the *Maharabata* and an enormous *chillum*, his stone pipe for the consumption of hashish or *charas* as it's known locally.

Boom Boom Baba also owns several animal skulls and a black cloth bag filled, he says, with the ashes of the dead, from one of the burning nearby *ghats*.



This Sadhu is in the business of imparting wisdom, of sorts. He has picked a most auspicious place for his spiritual dispensations. The *ghats* in Varanasi are considered so holy that to be burned here means instant freedom from the cycle of reincarnation. Hundreds of old men live in the shadows of the many temples situated along the riverside, waiting their turn.

Boom Boom Baba intones a *bhajan*, a prayer song, while unwrapping his *chillum*. Abruptly, he breaks off from his half-hearted mutterings and asks his audience, "You, someone give some *charas*."

A couple of foreigners gladly oblige and pull out several lumps of oily hashish.

The *sadhu* grabs the lot and passes it to a young Indian in saffron robes with a Bruce Lee haircut, who is quick to burn and crumble the *charas* before handing it back to Boom Boom Baba. The *sadhu* duly stuffs his stone pipe, lights up and disappears in a cloud of smoke.

"Bom Bolinath," he intones and coughs like a sick mule on its last journey. Another drag and the half-dead *chillum* is passed to one of the lesser sadhus. By the time the foreigners get to the precious smoke it's all but burnt out. But they don't care. For them, Boom Boom Baba represents the wisdom of the East. Or perhaps just entertainment?

Now Boom Boom is showing off his yogic abilities. With great effort he manages to tuck his legs behind his ears and stand on his hands. His face goes bright red from the strain. "Bom Bolinath. Boom Shiva," he groans and falls exhausted on his back.

The tourists and lesser *sadhus* look on in awe, while he is already cleaning his *chillum* for the next round.

I ask him whether he went to the great gathering of pilgrims

and holy men held the previous year.

He spits on the ground and says, "I have no time to go to Maha Khumb. Too many people come here to Varanasi to see me."

Then I ask him which *akhara*, or sect of sadhus, he belongs to, but he just shakes his head, apparently put off by my question. The other holy men and the sycophantic foreigners throw worried and irritated glances at me.

"I am Naga Sadhu. I have yogic power. You will see, tomorrow morning, on the other side of Ganga. We go together."

Boom Boom Baba opens his black cloth bag and is scooping out handfuls of ash. Now clearly agitated, he rubs the ash into his hair, amidst more intonations. "This special puja, you give me 50 rupees [Bt45], please."

The foreigners comply with his demand. The Indians all sit unmoving.

"Do you read your copy of the 'Maharabata'?" I ask.

Boom Boom Baba stares at me. He's trying to turn this encounter into a contest of wills. A second later he starts mumbling prayers again, dips his hand in the bag to scoop out more ash and then slaps it down hard on the head of the lesser *sadhu* next to him, then the next and so on. Before his foreign devotees can move out of the way, they too get a handful of corpse ash slapped onto their heads – hard!

"Boom Boom. I am Boom Boom Baba."

As I get up to leave before he can slap my head, the alleged 'ascetic' says to me, "Tomorrow you come, other side Ganga. I have yogic powers. You bring some *charas*, you bring some whisky. This Baba like whisky."

I fail to make any promises.





## The life and times of a Sadhu

**N**o one knows how many sadhus roam India today. The only headcount takes place at the *Maha Kumbh Mela*, the great gathering by the holy Ganga, held every 12 years in Allahabad, in central India, which I attended last year. *Sadhus* are split into four distinct groups, the most visible and well known being the *sannyasis* who follow Shiva, usually wear orange robes, have matted hair and smoke cannabis.

The *nagas* are a subgroup of the *sannyasis*, belonging mostly but not exclusively to the *juna akhara*, the monastic order that is said to have the greatest number of mendicant followers. In all there are six monastic orders or *akhara*s representing the *sannyasis*, while there are another seven that do not follow Shiva.

Some of these sects claim to have hundreds of thousands of members.

Originally, *akhara*s started off in the 9<sup>th</sup> century as militant regiments of Hindu mercenaries, founded to protect the faith against invaders. Orders of female *sadhus* emerged later but few remain.

Today, all 13 *Akhara*s are based in Haridwar, in northern India, and wield considerable influence on a local as well as national level. All business activities and property deals undertaken by these sects are tax-free.

*Akhara*s are low profile but some of its leaders are involved in the current nationalist struggle of the ruling BJP. Pilot Baba, an ex-airforce pilot who had a divine vision during a flight, is a vocal opponent of any compromise in the controversial Ayodhya impasse that has plagued northern India for years. In this small town in Uttar Pradesh, the birthplace of *Rama*, a fifteenth-century mosque was torn down in 1992 by an armed mob of Hindu fundamentalists connected with the ruling party. Riots erupted all over India, and thousands of people were killed. Recent massacres of Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat occurred for similar reasons – mostly because of the fundamentalists' desire to bring about a Hindustani state in which Muslims, Christians and Buddhists would all have to accept Hindu dominance. Propelled by the government and by various far-right institutions and violent militants, this movement is threatening India's culture of religious tolerance.

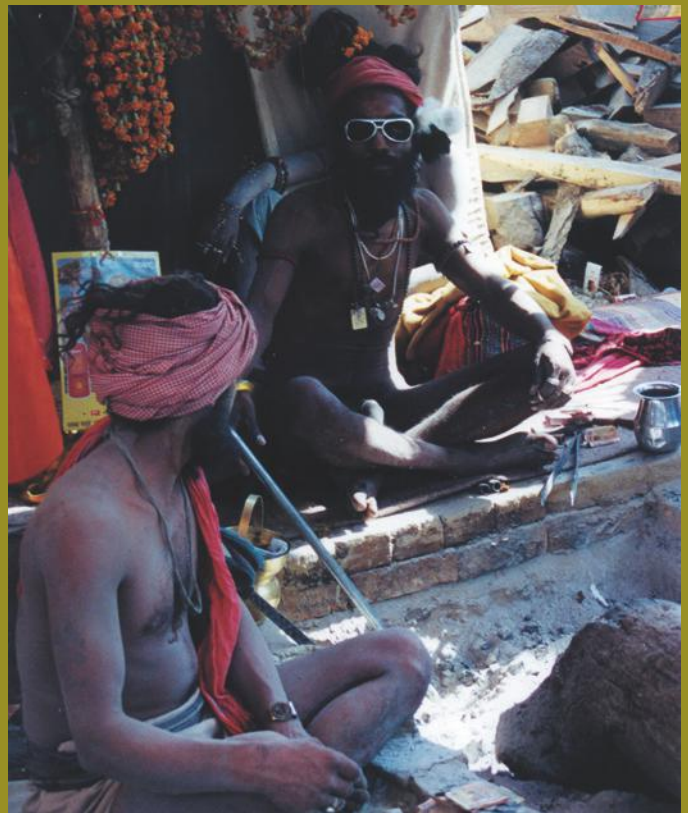
To become a *sannyasi*, one has to renounce one's worldly identity, let go of material and familial connections and embark on prolonged physical contortions.

Becoming a *sadhu* offers a way out of society's pressure cooker, and even a business option. Until recently a *sadhu* who went by the name of "Tourist Baba" operated around Durbar Square in Kathmandu. His saffron robe was spotless and he wore a leopard-skin print sarong that made him stand out in the crowds. Tourist Baba could provide a whole range of services to visitors from guided tours around the temples to the procurement of illegal substances.

Since the price of *charas* has risen steeply in the last years due to ever-increasing tourist consumption, many *sadhus* opt for the company of Westerners, especially around Manali, Pushkar and Varanasi. And some Westerners become *sadhus* as well, throwing away their passports and former identities to live in caves, forests and tourist cafes.

Holy jokes? Or the real deal? on a life-long journey to find the true self. Hindu devotees and other generous souls subsidise this lifestyle with donations of food and money.

Many holy men will take to the road, in which case they have to follow rules laid down at the time of their initiation on how

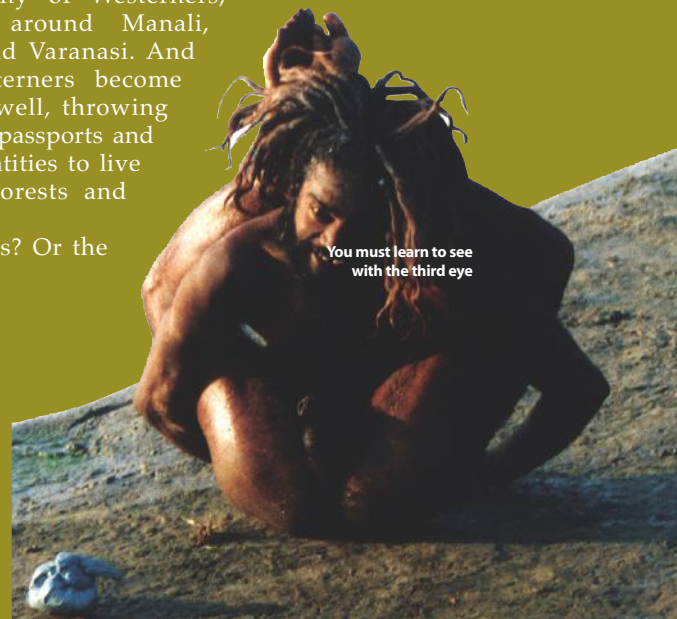


long they can remain in any city or village. Others may stay in just one location, like a cave or perhaps an *ashram*. Some sadhus opt for a more hardcore path of asceticism known as *tapas*, which includes self-mutilation and prolonged physical contortions.

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Holy jokes? Or the real deal?



## The Swami Speaks

**S**wami Satmitratnan presides over one of Haridwar's largest temples, the Bharat Mata Mandir. He is a *sannyasi* and a member of the *niranjani akhara*. The swami is also an internationally renowned speaker on issues of Hindu faith and philosophy. His *ashram* provides food services for the poor, a physiotherapy center, a service for the handicapped, an old people's home, hostel accommodation and finances various religious publications.

Swami Satmitratnan explains, "The *sannyasi* is totally free. He has no responsibility and all the time to realise the self. About 1,300 years ago Bhagwan Shankar Achar felt that without *sannyasis*, people would not be able to give more attention to society. He founded these six *akharas*. It is the duty of the *sadhu* to know his inner self, or *atma*. Then, when he's enlightened, he can give that energy to society.

"*Sannyasis* used to live in hermitages, in the shadows of trees. A thousand years ago Sanskrit schools were founded by *sannyasis*. So you see, the *sannyasis* take very few things from society. And they remove all the evils from society. Wisdom you cannot value by money. If you have no wisdom or intellect you are useless for your society, family and yourself too."

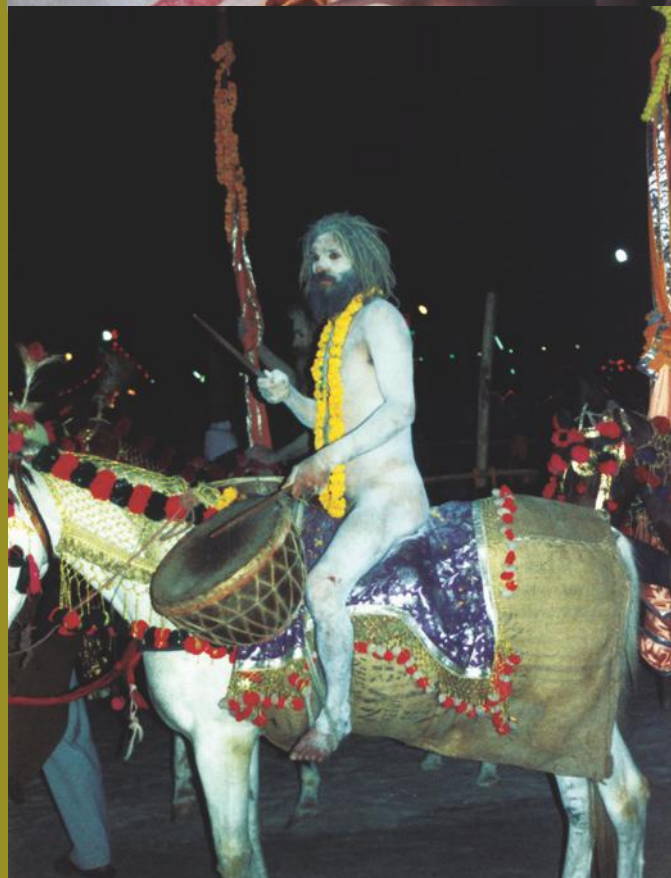
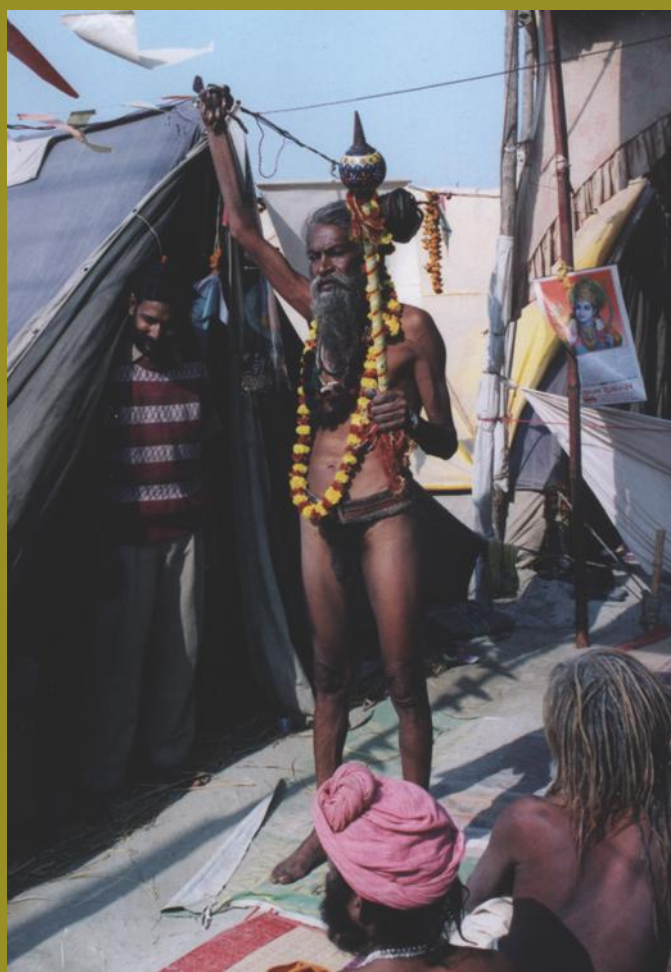
But the swami is also critical of his own ranks. "The *sannyasis* should know the holy texts, the *Brahmasutra*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*. But it is a real pity that 90 percent of *sannyasis* are now illiterate and they use ganja and hashish. This is not advised by our great masters."

The swami sees very different preconditions to lead the life of a true holy man.

"If you realise that this world is mortal, and an illusion, then you can become a *sannyasi*. Then you should go out and preach the Hindu scriptures based on humanity, not on sectarianism. We are not fanatics. The *sannyasi* religion is vast like an ocean. Anybody can come and go deeper and deeper into it."

As for the *akharas*, he is critical. "I have no day to day relations with my *akhara*. The heads of these institutions should have a modern ideology, then we can modify the system. The duty of *akharas* should be to start institutions, schools and help centres to teach the sadhus. Now the *akharas* are only managing their land, collecting revenue and reciting hymns. Some *akharas* arrange schools for the blind and camps for the handicapped. That's the limit of their activities.

Still, Swami Satmitratnan is confident about the future: "The times are changing fast. All the institutions are now thinking that they should have changed themselves. There are new camps all the time – meditation and yoga camps for pilgrims. I am very optimistic that in 10 to 12 years the *sannyasi* will get a new shape, new shine and new brilliance."







## Sadhu Power

**T**he police have cleared the area, the wide sandbank that marks the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, one of the most holy and auspicious places in Hindu mythology. Behind wooden barricades, 30 million pilgrims, a seething, enormous mass of people rise out of the early morning fog as one, expectant, excited and full of hope for a better future.

The water is cold, no more than six degrees Celsius, and the air even cooler. The cops shiver into their jackets, but it is not just the cold that has them shaking.

The greatest gathering of human beings the world has ever witnessed, the *Maha Kumbh Mela*, is taking place in India.

Speakers blast prayers and announcements in all directions. The crowd continues to swell, thousands spill into the shallow Ganga. The *sangam* lies deserted. Everyone present knows that the most important moment of his or her life is imminent.

At the crest of the *Sangam* a lone horseman appears. He is beating two drums, but the sound does not carry as far as the water. The naked horseman is smeared in ash, his long matted hair falling across his bare shoulders. A long beard covers his emaciated face. Two more horsemen, equally forbidding and ascetic in their attire, ride over the top of the *sangam*, long lances in hand. Eventually, the three riders spur their animals towards the water.

Gray figures emerge out of the dawn light, as hundreds, then thousands of ash-smeared *naga sadhus* pour down the *sangam* towards the river. The naked ascetics, wielding huge swords, tridents, spears, bows and arrows, look like a ferocious, seething, disorderly mob, bent on destroying the world. Their gray, corpse-like skin – the *nagas* regard ash as a manifestation of primal matter, a constant reminder of death and eternity – makes them look different than the other holy men.

At water's edge the entire army of *naga sadhus* comes to a halt. The time for the holy bath has to be exactly right. The crowd behind the barricades is pushing to get a better look, while the police lash out here and there with their bamboo sticks.

Thousands more *sadhus*, clad in saffron robes, have arrived. Traditionally these ascetics arrive on elephants, but after one pachyderm went berserk and killed several thousand people in 1956, tractors, jeeps and trucks have replaced the animals.

The heads of the 13 *akharas* have formed a long disorderly motorised procession, protected by Black Cats, a special machine-gun-toting unit of commandos clad in black uniforms and black bandanas.

After a signal from a saffron-robed priest, the crowd roars and the *nagas* go running, jumping, falling into the fast-moving, brown water as the first rays of the sun bathe this scene of surreal pandemonium in an orange light. As the *nagas*

disappear into the floods, the *sadhus* at the top of the hill begin to make for the river too. Finally, the pilgrims cannot hold back any longer. So the police give in, and the *sangam* is flooded from all sides, as pilgrims and police are all washed into the river as if tossed by a huge momentous tidal wave.

The *nagas*, once in the water, rejoice like children. Their swords have become mere toys, giving off glints of the sun, as the cold water washes away the ash of 20,000 thousand men.

The younger *nagas* race past me across the sandbank and begin to perform incredible feats of yoga and body contortions. The older men quietly pray, up to their waists in water, or sit on the sand in the shadow of their tridents, facing the sun. The energy that these men have poured into the river has infected everyone present. Following the example of the holy men, the 30 million pilgrims then take a dip.

During the festival, a rumour makes the rounds that a foreign girl has been sunbathing topless at a tourist camp several miles away on the outskirts of the giant tent city. The *sadhus* are incensed, and demand that the entire camp (the only luxury tourist accommodation at the festival) be closed down immediately. It takes a visit from the state minister, the district commissioner, the chief inspector of police and an army of minor dignitaries to calm down the *sadhu* representatives.





While tense negotiations are going on inside the camp, Casio Baba switches on his small clapped-out keyboard and cranks out a distorted melody, soon accompanied by his parched voice. Next to him a young *sannyasi* leans on a swing; he has been standing up for the past seven years. Another *sadhu*, wearing large silver shades, is trying to tie his cock around an iron crowbar, while others with more balls pull Jeeps around with their dicks. Meanwhile, one of the most celebrated holy men – he's been holding one of his arms up in the air for the past 25 years – grants interviews to the press at US\$50 a pop, and has his *chillum* constantly refilled by Western and Indian devotees.

These men do indeed contribute something extremely valuable to humanity.

To live the life of a *sadhu* may not be about wisdom, but about the marginal experience, the step into the unknown, to be in the world and yet outside of it.







Is Jonathan “Jack” Idema a hired gun in America’s war on terrorism in Afghanistan, or a deranged psychopath with a slew of phony military credentials, asks Richard S Ehrlich. First published in October 2004.

# SOLDIER OF MISFORTUNE

**A**merican bounty hunter Jonathan “Jack” Idema, who was recently put on trial and convicted in Kabul of torturing Afghans, arrived in Afghanistan alongside US invasion forces in 2001 and enjoyed threatening to kill journalists.

“That’s what I love about Afghanistan. If you tell someone you are going to kill them, they fucking believe you,” Idema said during several exclusive interviews in December 2001 and January 2002 in Kabul.

“If I’m in New York and I tell someone I’m going to kill them, they say, ‘Yeah motherfucker? Well, I’m going to kill you first.’ But not Afghanistan. Here they believe you.”

In mid-August of this year, Idema and two other Americans appeared on trial in Kabul denying allegations that they tortured Afghans they kept in a private jail. Idema told the court he hunted alleged terrorists with the knowledge of the US government. Both Washington and the Pentagon denied Idema worked for them after he was arrested in July.

In the winter of 2001-2002, the short, stocky Idema liked to dye his salt-and-pepper hair black and show off his pistol and his Kalashnikov assault rifle which he occasionally fired using bullets capable of piercing body armour. He travelled with a handful of young, armed Afghan men whom he ordered about, often shoving wads of cash into their hands and waving a big hunting knife at them while laughing theatrically with maniacal glee.

In a truly terrifying display, Idema threatened to murder an American reporter representing the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper after the journalist revealed that Idema served time in a US jail several years earlier “for a white-collar crime”.

“I just might have to fucking kill you!” an irate Idema shouted at the reporter during a December 2001 party while other foreign correspondents quickly exited the dining room, leaving the two men to argue amid frosted cake and drinks. “You don’t believe me? Test me. Just test me. But get the fuck out of here now before I do.”

The shaken *Stars and Stripes* journalist was hosting the party in a house he rented, and politely reminded Idema that this was his house.

“You think this house is yours?” Idema yelled at him, adding more expletives and threats until the journalist left the room.

Several days later, the *Stars and Stripes* reporter said to anyone who asked about the confrontation: “Look his name up on the Internet, and the story of him in jail will come up. His name is spelt I-D-E-M-A.”

As a result of his menacing behaviour, most foreign journalists avoided him and told each other he was an unreliable troublemaker who liked to brandish weapons and “play soldier” amid the anarchy of war. Idema, however, insisted he was acting in order to protect innocent Afghans from being exploited and abused by all sides, so they would not suffer either from the US invasion nor from the ousted Taliban and Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda network.

When asked who he really worked for, Idema grinned and told me: “I work for God and country.”

After much coaxing, he displayed a resume that he kept on his laptop which listed military badges he said he had earned, including “El Salvadoran Master Parachute Wings”, “Royal Thai Army Combat Parachute Wings”, “Kuwaiti Police Commander Badge”, “German Senior



**“But in a truly terrifying display, Idema threatened to murder an American reporter representing the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper after the journalist revealed that Idema served time in a US jail several years earlier ‘for a white-collar crime’.”**



Parachute Wings” and “Nicaraguan Senior Parachute Wings.”

His resume also listed: “11 years in the United States Army Special Forces, 18 years in Special Operations”, and “military adviser in

Nicaragua and South Africa” in 1978. But his biography stopped in 1991.

Asked about the 1990s, Idema replied: “For over 10 years, I’ve been ‘black,’” – implying secret missions he could not divulge. In Afghanistan, he called himself “a civilian adviser to the Northern Alliance” of Afghans who were helping America topple the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies. “I am a [former] Green Beret,” no longer on active military service, he said. “My original purpose here was to help humanitarian aid efforts to both the Northern Alliance and the Afghan people.”

He claimed to have sent a report to the US Defense Department which Secretary of State Colin Powell also read, describing problems with US food aid during the first months of the war.

He also boasted that armed Afghans recently threatened him on a road near the eastern city of Jalalabad, until he shouted that he was an American and bluffed that if anyone hurt him, a retaliatory US air strike would obliterate the place. Laughing as he told the retold the tale, Idema said the Afghans suddenly became gracious and allowed him to continue his journey.

In January 2002, he said his personal Northern Alliance “intelligence assets” discovered videotapes showing al Qaeda operatives teaching foreign fighters how to kidnap, bomb and assassinate people. The techniques appeared to borrow from US, British and Israeli commando tactics, he said. The Pentagon tried to block his attempts to sell copies of the seven-hour-long videotapes to TV broadcasters, Idema complained. But he eventually sold the videotapes, and photographs from it, for thousands of dollars to television networks and an international photo agency.

After watching the videotapes in Kabul, I asked Idema to take me to the former al Qaeda training camp where they were filmed. He initially demanded I pay him 100 US dollars for access to the secret site, but he eventually gave me a free tour of the bomb-littered al Qaeda compound in Mir Bacheh Kowt village, 20km north of Kabul. The heavily damaged buildings were formerly a children’s school, but were now littered with unused rockets, landmines, bullets and other ammunition scattered on the floor in dangerous heaps.

The videotapes showed foreign men at the compound, disguised as janitors and golfers, acting out strategies to seize and kill hostages.

In other scenes videotaped at the school, dozens of men of various races and ethnic origin fired Kalashnikov assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades while attacking a fake audience of VIPs at a mock golf tournament, and a convoy of vehicles.

“Arabic interpreters, and also Afghans, who viewed the tapes were able to identify the different dialects and we know for a fact there were Kuwaiti, Iranian, Iraqi and Libyan guys here,” Idema said.

He was proud about getting the videotapes, and delighted to cash in on the TV and photo rights.

“It just goes to prove a point: one guy, operating by himself independently with the indigenous population can gain more intelligence than 5,000 guys in a room watching satellites,” he said.

His real goal, he said, was to “build a security force [in Kabul] with a whole bunch of [US] former Special Forces guys,” to help the Afghan government train Afghans in “professional soldiers’ skills” so they could be bodyguards and commandos in a new, democratic Afghanistan.

On September 8, Idema and his two colleagues released a videotape – shot by Idema’s team – to reporters, which showed one of Idema’s eight Afghan prisoners – apparently detained for “interrogation” in June – talking

about a plot to kill Afghan politicians and attack a nearby US airbase. Afghan prisoner Ghulam Saki, however, recently told reporters he was tortured into making up the claims which included a story that his brother-in-law worked for the Taliban and Osama bin Laden. Questioned by Idema in the video, Saki appeared to agree that he wanted to go to the United States, be implanted with a bugging device, return to Afghanistan and then be tracked when he met bin Laden. Video imagery also showed Idema arriving at Kabul International Airport in a scene he claimed proved Afghan officials knew and approved of his manhunt.

The director of Kabul’s airport, alongside Kabul’s police chief General Babajan, hug the American in the video when he and his two American colleagues landed in April. Afghan officials, however, claimed they were tricked into believing Idema was a US government-sponsored counter-terrorist expert.

Idema insisted the US government was denying any links with him after publication of photos and other evidence of American forces gleefully torturing people in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

On September 15, an Afghan court declared Idema and his two American colleagues guilty and sentenced him to 10 years in a Kabul prison for running a private jail, kidnapping and torturing at least eight Afghans, and stealing their property.

Idema insisted he meted out “standard interrogation techniques” on his prisoners in a rented Kabul house, but never tortured them. “It’s the same sick Taliban judges, the same sick sense of justice,” a handcuffed Idema said as guards took him from the court.

“I knew that the American government wasn’t going to help me.”

Idema added: “I apologise that we tried to save these people. We should have let the Taliban murder everyone of them.”







# Working Girls

In this story from our August 2003 issue, Jim Algie looks at a Thai NGO fighting for the rights of sex workers. Photos by Jonathan Taylor.

**T**here are so many moralistic clichés and outright falsities perpetuated by the media about commercial sex for tourists and expats in Thailand that it's hard to winnow the few grains of truth from the bushels of bullshit you hear and read. Even Patpong Road itself, with its go-go bars like Pussy Galore named after a James Bond character, the glut of counterfeit goods in the Night Bazaar, and the constant come-ons from the bar-girls and doormen, seems like it was founded on fakery. And rumours run rampant around here. Like the go-go dancer I interviewed once, who claimed that a big British film crew had paid her to cry crocodile tears on camera and lie. "Mama, father sell me this bar. Now I have AIDS, cannot go home." She laughed when she recounted the story, but was it true? And she didn't even snicker, or bat a fake eyelash, when I told her my name was Bill Clinton.

Amidst all the deceptions and sordid stories, the titillation and tawdry glamour, the sex workers themselves are either portrayed as victims to be pitied or bad girls and boys to be scorned. Either way, they're stripped of their basic humanity. Which is hardly unique to Thailand. In Los Angeles, for instance, when a pimp or customer murders a prostitute, the police assign the case a low-priority tag known as "AVA, NHI," which stands for, "Asshole versus Asshole, No Human Involved."



Surang Janyam, the manager of EMPOWER's office on Patpong Road, has had similarly callous run-ins with the Thai police. One time, she took a female sex worker, who'd been beaten bloody by one of her customers, to a police box for help. But when she told the cop that the woman worked in a bar on Patpong, he said they couldn't do anything to protect her.

EMPOWER (the acronym stands for Education Means Protection Of Women Engaged in Re-creation) was formed some 18 years ago by Chantawipa Apisuk, who still runs the head office in Nonthaburi province, to fight for the basic human rights of working girls. "We believe that sex work is one kind of job women can do. But how can we make them safe?" asks Surang. "How can we ensure they have the same rights as other workers do? And how can they protect themselves?"

The only laws in existence to really protect sex workers – Surang hates the word prostitute – are for those under 18. If they get caught, she claims, they might get put in a state-sponsored shelter, but soon enough they're back in another bar with a different fake ID. And she understands why. "Yes, we have free school for 12 years, but if the young girls don't have the money to pay for food, uniforms, transport, how can they study?"

The NGO believes that *pooying borigan* ("service girls") should be considered part of the service industry. For well over a decade now EMPOWER has been lobbying the Ministry of Labour to bring the bar staff in commercial sex establishments – waitresses, doormen, go-go dancers, and cashiers – under the protection of existing labour laws, which would grant them health benefits, severance pay, and sick leave. All their efforts have resulted in little more than lip service from the Thai authorities and a load of unfulfilled promises.

Surang, a petite dynamo who can be sweetly sarcastic one minute ("I'm the angel of Patpong") and bluntly honest the next ("I'm very bitch sometimes"), says while in the latter mode, "We don't believe anything the government says. They're like kids playing a game."

If the recent allegations by massage parlour magnate Chuwit Kamolvisit – that he paid Bt12 million in bribes every month to police – are anything to go by, vested interests insure that the country's multi-billion-dollar sex industry remains in the hands of the wealthy and well connected. The government's two-year-old "social order" policy, which means bars must close at 2am, has only made it more difficult for many sex workers to make a living, Surang notes. But the number of

"The center's pro-commercial sex philosophy comes through proud and clear in its Thai-language newsletter *Bad Girls* which bears the cheeky English slogan, "Good girls go to heaven, but bad girls go everywhere."



Photo: JONATHAN TAYLOR



women entering the business is still rising.

Other attempts to regulate the flesh trade have been cursory failures or absurdities of justice. Definitely in the latter category was the group of high-ranking police officers from Bangkok who went to Pattaya for an "inspection tour" of the city's neon-splashed tenderloin some five years ago. The day after their arrival, The Bangkok Post reported, a bar-girl was arrested for driving around in a police car which she had borrowed from the officer who'd picked her up the previous night. She said he was still asleep back in their hotel room.

EMPOWER has made some progress with the police, though. For the last few years, the police academy has sent cadets to the office for a month of first-hand schooling in some of the country's social maladies. So many police cadets want to come here, Surang says, that the NGO is now their first choice among such organisations. "It's a positive development, but sometimes we wonder if they're really here to learn about social problems or if they just want to meet young, sexy women," laughs the former drama major, who specialised in Thai classical dancing.

Every day about 50 to 60 people involved in the business of pleasure drop by the Patpong office for counseling on everything from AIDS to abortions, and to attend free classes in English and Japanese or high-school courses in Thai. Out of the latter group of students, more than 70 have gone on to graduate from university. Each year EMPOWER adds some new courses to their curriculum; in the past, it was drawing, cooking, guitar playing, and batik making; soon it'll be yoga and, when the Japanese Embassy donates some new computers to the foundation, there will be Internet classes.

Many of the half-dozen volunteer teachers end up learning more than a few lessons from their students. Tanyaporn Wansom, a Thai who grew up in America and returned to Thailand on a prestigious Fulbright Scholarship to do work on HIV/AIDS, had some of her feminist theories challenged by teaching English at the center. "I'd just graduated from a very kind of liberal school in the United States which was big on women's rights and women's studies, and I think I had more of a black and white view [of commercial sex]... it's all disgusting, and it's like all bad. But after working here, and

meeting some of the people, I can see both sides more and I'm less judgmental."

Another volunteer teacher at EMPOWER is Francesca Russo. She's been teaching English here for the past three and a half years and recently completed a master's thesis about the organisation for an Australian university. "It's very very alternative in terms of its philosophy amongst NGOs in

Thailand, which think of sex work as a problem, rather than as a career. But EMPOWER supports women who wish to continue working in the industry. The other organisations are trying to get women out of the industry, or even trying to prevent them from entering in the first place."

The center's pro-commercial sex philosophy comes through proud and clear in its Thai-language newsletter "Bad Girls" which bears the cheeky English slogan, "Good girls go to heaven, but bad girls go everywhere." Says Surang, "We don't know what heaven looks like, but there are bars everywhere." One Thai woman writes in an issue of the newsletter, "I don't care what people say. We give them pleasure and we get money. That's enough!" Another writes, "Don't call us social garbage because we make this a paradise on earth."

Dee, in his early 30s, is one of the few men who come here. He works in a nearby bar and regularly attends English classes at EMPOWER. But for him, it's also a community center, where he can meet people

who work in the same profession and who don't look down on him. Dee admits that he doesn't trust people outside the "business," and that his old friends deserted him when he went to work in a bar. In spite of the boredom and deceit – "I hate having to be nice to people I don't like," he says – Dee still prefers this occupation to slaving away in a sweatshop like he did from the age of 15 to 22 in order to support his destitute family in the northeast. (The newsletter "Bad Girls" is filled with similar tales of young women and single mothers escaping desperate straits in villages with no electricity or running water.) As a factory drudge, he scraped by on Bt4,000 a month. But working in a bar he averages about five times that much. "So many of the girls get married to nice foreigners and have a better life." The bar, however, only pays him Bt100 per night – the rest of his income depends on customers



EMPOWER's founder, Chantawipa, in the Patpong office

buying him drinks and purchasing his sexual favours.

Brutal encounters with sadistic customers, and clients who fornicate and flee without paying, are the main occupational hazards. Three men from the bar where he works, Dee relates, were taken to Pattaya by a trio of foreign customers. Once inside a bungalow, the men set up a video camera and told them to perform a threesome of pornographic acts. They refused and were severely beaten. Fearing persecution, the three Thais did not report the incident to the police.

For Dee, and many others, the burden of shame is harder to bear than the occasional beatings and multiple deceptions. If left to fester for too long, these feelings of estrangement and self-loathing can lead to serious substance abuse problems. With downcast eyes he says, "I really wanted to be a good example for my brother and sister, but it was impossible to do so and still make enough money to help them." It took him a long time to confess to his parents what he does for a living. They're okay with it now, Dee says, but they still worry about him contracting AIDS.

Thanks to the pioneering work of EMPOWER, and other NGOs, in disseminating information about the virus, the number of HIV infections among sex workers has been decreasing. This was the official word from the Ministry of Health in its most recent report. That said, the disease is still laying waste to an alarming number of Thais – about one in 60 are HIV positive.

"Most Thai people feel shy about buying condoms at 7-11, but sex workers, no," Surang says, adding that the Ministry of Health is the only stage agency to give them any financial support in Thailand, and that's only for their work with HIV/AIDS. "We received a lot of publicity from abroad. So this inspired the government to give us a little help." Otherwise, EMPOWER remains a state pariah, receiving the majority of its economic support from abroad.

These financial constraints force them to operate with a skeleton crew of four full-time staff members in each of their three main offices: one in Bangkok and two up north. Around 40 percent of the women who drop by the Chiang Mai office are from minority hilltribes and Burma. At the center in Mae Sai, right on the threshold between Thailand and Burma, almost all of the sex workers coming for classes, counselling and medical assistance are Burmese. The lowest of the low on the sex industry's totem pole, they have to be schooled in the Thai language and condom usage. Since they don't have Thai ID cards, the women are not allowed to visit government hospitals. So EMPOWER has set up a clinic on the premises to remedy their ills.

In one corner of the classroom in the Patpong office is an exhibit of skimpy lingerie, dildos, condoms, and some of the props used in sex shows, such as strings of razor blades and gaudy, paper flowers. Lest anyone go off half-cocked about the exhibit's meaning, a placard on the wall spells it out: "Just like a factory worker who needs a needle for his sewing machine, a writer who needs her pens, and an electrician who needs his screwdriver, sex workers are professionals who are trained to use the tools they need for their job." Surang hopes to expand this museum in the coming year, and open it to the general public by the time a massive international AIDS conference is

held in Bangkok in July 2004. EMPOWER, along with some of its sister NGOS from the Asia Pacific Sex Workers Network, will be organising the seminar about sex work. Once again she is anticipating yet more problems, and blanket denials about commercial sex, from the Thai authorities. The last time they tried to organise such a big seminar in Bangkok the government wanted to cancel it. "We cannot have a sex worker's seminar here because that would mean we have sex workers here. It's funny," says a smiling and sardonically amused Surang.

On this particular afternoon, however, the future's on hold as a going away party is in progress for Tanyaporn; she's returning to the United States to study medicine. There's plenty of food and fruit on the classroom table, and light-hearted banter in the air. All the students are vying to have their photos taken with her, while Dee is camping it up big time and making everyone laugh with his humorous poses. As the party winds down in the late afternoon, some of the students hug their volunteer teacher, and look like they're on the verge of tears.

If you'd just stumbled in here on a whim you'd have no idea what profession the majority of these women and men are engaged in – it looks like any other typically hospitable and fun, social gathering of locals. But if you could read Thai, then you could figure it out by looking at some of the hand-written signs pasted up beside the whiteboard. They try to impart lessons to the students which could very well be mantras for EMPOWER. An excerpt from one of them reads, "I ride the bus, go to the bank and visit department stores. I like to sing songs and dance. I make my own money and I'm a sex worker."

*In 2004 Surang founded an organisation for male sex workers called SWING, located in the same building as EMPOWER.*



# Boring and Beautiful

"Do they wear lederhosen and slap each other's asses when they're drunk? Are there village yodeling competitions? Do they like stinky cheese? What kind of money do they use?"

Nobody knows who they are or what they are doing. But well-salted explorer **Rob Viereck** dares to meet... the Liechtensteinians. First published June 2003.

**A**n hour's drive out of Chiang Mai will bring you to a dark blue lake surrounded by jungle in the middle of a Thai national park. An open-air restaurant with the usual menu perches on a small hill overlooking the water and a shaded terrace below, where you can pitch your tent. They have clean toilets, too. It was so peaceful and quiet you could hear the birds singing, if there were any. There aren't, though. Nor is there any other wildlife, either. It's spooky. Maybe all the creatures have been hunted to extinction, or perhaps they were just playing possum the day I was there, when 70 Liechtensteinian boy scouts and girl guides, the flower of clean-limbed Aryan youth, came marching over the horizon.

Liechtenstein has always been a mysterious country to me. Not an exotic one, mind you, placed as it is somewhere in mid-to-northern Euro-land. It's just that it's hard to get a grip on the place. Do they wear lederhosen and slap each other's asses when they're drunk? Are there village yodeling competitions? Do they like stinky cheese? What kind of money do they use? Is there a king or what? Do people avoid going there because they're ashamed that they can't pronounce the country's name properly? Good God! I didn't even know what language they spoke.

If you think you're smart... Question: What's the capital of Liechtenstein? Answer: Who gives a shit!? If you're so bored that you bother to finish reading this, you'll know the answers to some of these stupid, pointless questions soon enough.

Before I could even say, "Schnitzel, schapps und schlager!" they had plopped their doughy, white asses on kayaks and, with quiet looks of northern determination, paddled away. If 70 of the country's scouts and guides are enough of a sample to get an accurate statistic, the average Liechtensteinian is as blonde and blue-eyed as a Viking. They are also, it must be said, a sturdy and not bad-looking group of people. As I watched them getting smaller, I imagined them setting off on an epic odyssey to colonise the lake shores of Northern



Thailand. Perhaps sticking water buffalo horns on their baseball caps and rowing around in long ships in search of a decent fondue. Here are some of the annoying questions that I asked them and their witty and succinct answers:



**Q:** Does L-stein have a drug problem?

**A:** No.

**Q:** What's the most famous thing in L-stein?

**A:** Nothing.

**Q:** Is there any unemployment in L-stein?

**A:** Not really.

**Q:** Are there any crazy sex scandals?

**A:** None that I can remember.

**Q:** What are the strange customs, if any, of L-stein?

**A:** No.

**Q:** What's the main export of L-stein?

**A:** I don't know.

**Q:** What L-stein's most famous dish?

**A:** There isn't one.

**Q:** Any serial killers, terrorists or pickpockets in L-stein?

**A:** Uh-uh.

**OK.** You get the picture. If you believe these people, Liechtenstein is the most prosperous, quiet, safe, normal and polite country on the planet. Unfortunately, from what I could gather from this generation of the country's people, it's also the most boring. They're so nice they make you want to die.

With their fresh, earnest, clear-eyed, freckled faces betraying neither smiles nor annoyance, maybe, just maybe, they were telling the truth, or they were having me on in a dry, ironic, northern sort of way. Perhaps they were all dosed on high-grade Prozac. In any case, after awhile I just stopped asking.

## 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 Yaong. 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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# Shooting Gallery

With his new exhibition opening in May, here's a retrospective of images by **Jonathan Taylor**.

Words by **Jim Algie**.

Originally published in June 2003.

## 2001, Bangkok

"The main duties of this police unit are to clear the way so mothers can get to hospitals. But if they can't make it to the hospital, then the police are trained to deliver the babies." "The reason I like this photo is because of the reflection in the window, and the beam of light on the baby's head, which makes it look like an angel."

**T**o be interviewing a notoriously hard-living photojournalist like Jonathan Taylor – renowned for shooting slums, speed freaks, cops, gangsters, and sex slaves – while sitting beside the pool of a five-star hotel where he has a membership to the fitness centre (and has just finished his afternoon swim session), seems a mite paradoxical.

But the venue and the renaissance of good health are turn signals indicating a detour in the brawny Brit's life and career. Although his images of sex-for-rent and drug-blitzed mayhem have gotten more exposure than his other work – and made the cover of *Time Asia* – he's quick to point out that they represent but a fraction of the pictures he's taken over the last 15 years.

Smack dab in the middle of the 90s, Jonathan was doing monthly lifestyle pieces for the Bangkok-born magazine *Manager*, which saw him become a fisherman, a rice farmer, a volunteer fireman, and hike through the jungle for days visiting malarial villages with a nomadic doctor. But his career took a turn for the sinister when he profiled a crime photographer named Manat Teratmek from 191 (the number of the Thai police hotline, and a propaganda mag for the coppers, which juxtaposes crime-scene carnage against super-model cleavage) and attempted to visit the scene of every homicide in Bangkok over the course of a month. The bloody-minded photographer even spent Christmas and New Year's eve and day shooting cops 'n' corpses.

"I wanted to illustrate that the homicide rate here is so high... back in the days when there were 30 a month. A high percentage were drug related, and the others were marital tiffs, and people getting drunk in the slums," says the 38-year-old, who was profiled on the BBC's docu-soap *Brits Abroad* around five years ago.

Since death is cheap in Thailand, the local crime photographer would only pick up Bt500 for every murder or suicide he shot and chronicled – except that in a case of either poetic justice, or bad luck, Manat lost his life in a car accident while racing to the scene of another



slaying.

Not much interested in the artier echelons of photography, Jonathan refers to himself as a “photojournalist,” though he has had some solo shows in England and at the Foreign Correspondent’s Club of Thailand in Bangkok.

These days, his “bread and butter jobs” may be doing profiles of businesspeople for *The Sunday Times*, and sporadically working as a fixer for foreign documentaries and TV shows, but he’s still using his camera to redress social imbalances, too. Unfortunately, when it comes to talking about their nascent story ideas and work that’s still awaiting publication, photographers (who are a cult unto themselves) can be as secretive as Freemasons; considering all the backbiting and idea-thieving in their profession, silence is wisdom. So you’ll have to keep checking *The Guardian* for some eye-gouging glimpses of the American-spawned abominations he witnessed on a recent journey to Vietnam.

Jonathan’s much more garrulous about what he describes as the “positive stories” he’s done about Thailand over the last few years. A poignant example would be the one about the special police unit which assists pregnant women. On the road with them for a mere two hours, they were called to help a woman in the back of a taxi trapped in a traffic jam.

“By the time we got there, the baby’s head was already coming out, but the husband hadn’t even taken her knickers off. He was just sitting there terrified off his head,” Jonathan says, adding, “I shot the photos from the polite side, but there was another photographer there who was shooting from the impolite side.

“It was quite nice to do a positive story about the Thai police,” he laughs.

*Jonathan’s new exhibition Cutting the Links opens at 7pm on Friday the 13th at the Kraichitti Gallery in Sunset Street on Khaosan Road, Bangkok.*



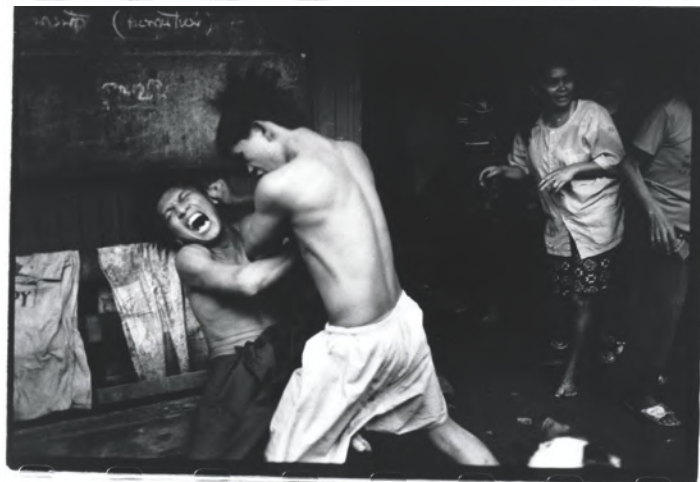
#### Bangkok, 1998

“The main light is the flash of the other photographer leaning over the body. I took about seven, eight frames and managed to catch that guy’s flash three times. Which is impossible. I didn’t have a slow shutter speed, so I can’t work out how I got those pictures.”



#### Bangkok, 1997

“Part of a story I did for *Arena* on Thai gangsters and hit-men. This was a portrait of the Thai cop known as ‘Rambo’. He took me around for a few days. I was his sidekick. One night, he took me out for a traditional massage, and then out drinking, the usual Thai thing. But he just sat there drinking soda water all night.” “He got the nickname ‘Rambo’ because he made promotional videos of himself arresting people, and intercut with that are scenes from ‘Rambo 3’. He portrays himself as Thailand’s gangbuster, and I think he’s a bit of a thorn in the side of the police because he likes the publicity.”



#### Dao Khanong slum in Bangkok, 1998

“I was doing a story about the slum itself, and they were drinking and smoking ‘yah bah’ (methamphetamines) and I didn’t know what it was in them days, and had no idea it would be such a big story in a few years time. Suddenly a fight erupted, and then they started having a go at me a little bit. And some big fat lady said, ‘It’s all right, he’s doing a feature.’ Then they all stopped and carried on fighting.”



# THE LAST TRIBE



Photojournalists **Nick and Andy Rain** spent a decade living on and off in the jungles of Sarawak with the last tribe of hunters and gatherers. On the run from the Malaysian military and the hired muscle of multinational timber companies, the two English brothers watched the Penan's ancient way of life slowly disappear along with the rainforests that had been their ancestral homeland. First published in February 2003.



**O**n our first trip to Borneo about 12 years ago, we were stopped by the Malaysian army in a restricted area. We had been looking for an elusive tribe known as the Penan. Since we didn't have the proper permits, six soldiers escorted us back to headquarters for questioning. They accused us of being journalists and of knowing Bruno Manser, a Swiss anthropologist-turned-activist who became globally renowned for being a Penan sympathizer, and the main instigator of their anti-logging protests. Living with the tribe for many years, adopting their ways and learning their language, Bruno was a folk hero. Eventually, the Malaysian authorities put a price on his head and sent in the army to track him down. Coming close to being captured many times, he escaped to his homeland, where he continued to campaign on the Penan's behalf.

We denied having ever heard of him. Still, that detention and interrogation session made us realise how sensitive Malaysia's logging issue had become. On that trip, the soldiers turned us around. But we returned the following year, traveling up a tributary of the Baram, Sarawak's second longest river, where we disembarked at a small Penan settlement of approximately 200 people. Stepping off the boat at Long Luteng, or Village of Fire, we were surrounded by 20 to 30 people. Their hair was wild and matted. Some of the men wore loincloths, while others wore dirty shorts and torn T-shirts. Young children peered at us from between the thighs of their parents.

The chief was unmistakable. Anyisiat (see sidebar on Page 44) had a weather-worn face, and bangs cut straight across his forehead. Big cat fangs pierced the top of his ears and stuck out like a bull's horns, while beaded bracelets adorned his neck

and forearms. Despite his ferocious-looking appearance, he hugged us firmly and introduced us to two of his sons – the small and frail Wan, and the burly and charismatic Tangan. Both of them shook our hands.

The Penan were timid deer-like people, who looked like one big family. Once they got over their initial shock, they welcomed us with open arms.

There was a peaceful air about the place. Plenty of space separated each hut. Vegetables grew wild throughout the village. A small school overlooked the settlement and a makeshift Christian church was set in the center. From time to time, each family went off into the forest to gather sago (their staple diet). After cutting the trunk of the sago palm, they split it in two and bash it to a pulp. The pith is removed and placed on a mat on a small wooden platform. Beneath the platform is another mat. The women add water, and then trample it, collecting the juice below. After draining the water, and leaving it to settle, only the sago powder remains.

At night the huts glowed red from the cooking fires. Children roamed around freely, sleeping wherever they wanted. If a hunter had any luck during the day, the carcass would be cut up and shared among the households. If someone had caught a monkey, the kids loved to crack open the skull and suck out the brains after slowly cooking them on the fire. But nothing created the excitement of a hunter arriving with a wild boar strapped to his back. Screams of "*babui, babui*" pierced the jungle air as people ran out to check the size of the pig.

One Sunday we met Iko, Wan's eldest son, a polite 19-year-old. He wore black pants, a white shirt and a black tie. The







village was preparing for church. In the early 1900s, the Penan converted to Christianity after the missionaries arrived, though many of them still retained their animistic beliefs, finding omens in their dreams and in the squawk of the sacred, great hornbill of Sarawak.

"Do you want to see the baby die?" Iko asked us. Not understanding what he meant, we followed him up the riverbank to a hut in the middle of the village. Inside, it was filled with smoke and the wailing prayers of people who sat at the feet of the chief's son, Tangan. A frail baby girl lay in his strong arms, her pupils dilated and fixed on the ceiling. Gently, Tangan



waved smoke into the baby's face from the billowing fire as he prayed, believing that this would drive out the evil spirits that possessed her. Compelled to help the dying child, we took her from Tangan, who then told most of the villagers to leave the tiny dwelling. Only the immediate family were allowed to stay. Iko, with his minimal English, translated. Placing her on the floor, we wrapped her in a blanket, and asked for a wet cloth to bring down her fever. She was weak, gasping for air, and urinating constantly, so we spoon-fed her some sweetened water.

Morning turned into late afternoon and she showed fleeting signs of recovery. Finally, her small hand grasped my finger, her eyes became vacant, she smiled with relief, and passed away.

Although a doctor flew in once a month, sickness plagued the village. We also had our health problems – mostly fevers and infections that got out of control.

But confrontations with loggers proved to be far greater threats to our well-being. On one occasion, we traveled downriver to Marudi, a trading post on the Baram, with Wan, his wife, and Rina (see sidebar on Page 48). We stocked up on supplies and decided to take a shortcut back to the Village of Fire. With a little luck we could catch a four-wheel drive vehicle from the logging camp of Long Tamala and be back home the same afternoon. While waiting for the truck, a Chinese worker drove up to us and asked what we were doing there. It was a hellishly hot day, so apart from the fact that we were with the Penan, which always raised eyebrows, we wore only shorts and had nothing on our feet. The logger's pock-

### HAIL TO THE CHIEF

The chief was in his 60s when we first met him. A proud and extremely friendly man, he'd share anything he had with you, and would take anything you had, too. Born in the Village of Fire, he called us his sons, even though he already had 13 children.

Unlike his children, though, Anyisiat wasn't interested in all the watches, shoes and Western-style clothes given to them by the logging companies. His attitude was kind of like, "Fuck off, we don't need your sugar, coffee, and beer."

During the first five years we went there, he was still a fiery old man, who'd catch a boat to town and debate the logging situation with the local government officials. He collected signatures for petitions, and helped to organise protests, like human blockades of logging roads. But it got to the point where he just became completely obsessed with logging, and couldn't talk about anything else.

On our final visit, he was blind, couldn't control his bladder, and he'd just stay in his hut and mumble to himself about how much he hated the loggers.

Anyisiat is probably dead now.





## Strange Trips

marked face, mirrored shades, and husky frame were intimidating. He demanded to see our passports and our permits. We showed him our visas, even though we knew we needed permits (rarely granted to journalists) to visit the area. So we feigned ignorance and pretended to be tourists.

"You need a permit to enter this area," he shouted.

"All right, mate. We'll take the next express boat back to Marudi to get our permits," we lied.

"There are no more boats today. I think better you swim back," he said in a threatening voice. "I know you bastards come here to make trouble for us. This is my land, not yours." Anticipating a fight, we moved over to where Wan, his wife and their kids sat with our supplies. The logger followed us and then punched both of us in the face a few times. Since he had plenty of friends around, we didn't fight back.

Just then, an express boat rounded the bend in the river. We ran down to the bank, leaving the Penan and our supplies behind. There was no time for goodbyes. Our faces bloody, and our nervous systems still in shock, we clambered aboard the boat and rode the whole way to Marudi in silence.

### GREEN ALERT

Large-scale logging started in this area in the early sixties. At the time, most timber was cleared along the coastal areas, far away from the Penan and other tribes. Over the decades,

though, the logging companies moved further inland. In 1965, Sarawak and Sabah were incorporated into the Federation of Malaysia. As a result, the government introduced new laws, forfeiting the Penan's right to the ancestral homeland they have inhabited for hundreds of years. The government also issued licenses to timber companies and to other multinationals cultivating oil palms.

Naturally, the effect on the local ecosystem has been devastating. The rivers have been poisoned, the air is hazy, and the wildlife has fled from the racket of whining chainsaws, lumbering bulldozers and logging trucks. Hunting also became more difficult for the Penan, because the hunters had to walk much further to pursue ever-scarcer quarry, and because so many tagem trees were felled. The toxin extracted from these trees is the basis of the poison for their blowpipe darts, which could bring down a monkey swinging in the rainforest canopy some 30 metres overhead. Similarly, sago palms, and the rattan trees used to weave their traditional baskets and mats, also became thin on the ground.

At present, eight square miles of forest are felled daily, which makes it the fastest per capita rate of deforestation on earth. The prime logs are exported to Japan and are processed into plywood, shipping crates and disposable chopsticks (of which Japan uses an average of 180 million per day). Profit maximisation has left a huge volume of low-quality logs lying to rot along Sarawak's riverbanks.





Alone in their struggle to halt further destruction, the Penan tried to make a courageous stand through non-violent protests such as human blockades of logging roads, until the government cracked down and began handing out two-year jail sentences to anyone caught hindering the loggers. Many Penan were jailed, and some were tortured. Then the tribe devised a new method to defend their ancestral land. Armed with red paint and brushes, they began demarcating the perimeter of their once-happy hunting ground, marking the trees with the sign “P X” (P is for Penan and X for do not cut). The timber companies paid no heed to these warning signs and, to this day, continue cutting a wide swathe through the jungle.

## AT LOGGERHEADS

In the next five years, we made eight more visits. But shortly after arriving on our ninth trip, we saw a front-page headline in *The Borneo Post*: “Foreigners Caught Supporting Penan Cause Will Be Severely Punished.”

Later that day, when we were checking into the Thai Foa Inn in Miri (a seedy oil town on Sarawak’s northern coast) the manager of the hotel explained that the special branch of Miri’s police department had come there asking questions. “They know of your visits to Long Luteng. They have a file on you, and they even know what cafe you drink in,” he said.

Spooked by this news, we jumped on the next flight to Bangkok.

Juggling other assignments, and the usual girl troubles, five years elapsed before we made it back to Miri. Once again we

travelled up the Baram River and deep into the jungle.

The changes in the Village of Fire were brain-boggling. For one thing, the huts were now bunched together with only a few meters between them. And each hut had its own government-sponsored tap with clean running water, so people now washed themselves from large water drums outside each hut, and the small beach by the river where the women and children once bathed was rarely visited anymore. Unlike in the past when most possessions were communal property, every house had a lock on its door and the small windows were protected with chicken wire and iron grills. Vegetable gardens and papaya trees were fenced off.

The former ambiance of the evening meal – a glowing fire with an aural backdrop of insect and bird chatter – had been replaced by fluorescent lights and the constant rumble of generators. Very few wild boars, sun bears or deer were brought back to the village. And many of the hunters had become reliant on rifles and buckshot; but when the ammo ran out, they lacked the willpower to hunt with the old blowpipes. So they spent more time in the settlement consuming pre-packaged sago powder, along with tins of sardines and luncheon meat. Not long before that, several of the hunters, who had been staunch, anti-logging activists, had pulled up stakes and began working for the timber companies, bringing home luxury items such as gold, watches and stereos. The happy and peaceful atmosphere of the village had changed, too. Now it was filled with envy, bitterness and misunderstandings.

While the Penan are trying to come to terms with their new world disorder, other natives of Sarawak have already weathered the storm. The Kayan, Kalabit and Kenyah tribes





### NICK AND RINA

We arrived there and fell in love with the village, the forest, the fresh air, the lack of cars and TVs, and how family oriented it was. The only thing our love affair with the Penan needed was a local girl.

Rina was a young, single woman, and obviously intrigued by two white guys who'd turned up out of the blue. One night, she walked into our hut and grabbed me by the balls – very primeval. At first, I didn't go for her. It was just too weird. But we slowly built up a friendship (giving each other longing glances all the while) and finally ended up in the sack one night. After that, we were always together, and she helped to teach me about their language and culture. Since they didn't really have wedding celebrations, we finally got permission from the chief to be considered man and wife, even though Andy and I were still taking regular trips back to Japan to sell updates of the story, because Japanese companies were funding the logging.

After five years, I got confused. Could I take this woman to Japan, or England, or Bangkok? No, I couldn't. And tempting as it was sometimes, I could never stay in the jungle permanently, because I couldn't hunt, and eventually the authorities would come and hunt me down like they did to Bruno Manser.

After five years of going back there again and again, I couldn't go back any more and I even threw my address book away so I wouldn't be tempted to write anyone a letter. Afterwards, I travelled the world doing photo shoots and fell in love with other women, but I still had this nagging sense of guilt that demanded I go back and explain to Rina why I'd left.

When we returned after a five-year absence, she was completely freaked out. Rina told me that she'd spent the first three years looking for me in all the towns down the river. Then she'd given up and found a Penan guy.

Against my better judgement, we slept together on our second night, and she said she wanted us to get back together again. For the next few weeks, we stayed together, but I knew it couldn't last. Finally, I called a big meeting with the whole village, explaining to them in their native tongue that I came from a different world and had gotten married to a Thai woman who had a bun in the oven. The Penan were sympathetic about it, and it was agreed that if I ever came back again Rina and I would just be friends.

Traditionally, when a person leaves the village the whole tribe comes to bid them farewell. Rina came too and she looked miserable. I tried to get a smile out of her. I tried to tell her, "These are your people. This is your husband. It's not my world." In the end, I did a get a little smile out of her just before we got on the boat. Usually, you'd wave at the tribe, and they'd wave back, or just stick up their arms, until you rounded the bend in the river.

But this time, this final time, it was just too painful. So I waved once, and then turned my back on 10 years of my life as the boat sped past dead logs floating in the brown river.

have realised they must change in order to support their families. For years now, they have been working for the logging companies: a diligent logger can earn up to US\$750 per month. The irony is that many workers feel saddened by what they are doing. A Kayan tribesman named Dasim said, "It's good I can earn money. It makes my wife happy and my children eat well and go to school, but when all the trees are cut down and the companies leave, I will have no work and no forest to hunt in either."

Like many other indigenous peoples across the globe, the Penan have now experienced what material wealth and

spiritual poverty can bring. As Iko, a young male Penan man from Long Luteng, told us, "For a while, I worked in a shop all day from seven in the morning to five at night. I had no time to relax, and just to eat some rice with a little meat in a restaurant or to buy vegetables in the market cost me a lot of money. I also had to pay for a room every month. I think it's good to have work and money but I'm not sure what's best. Here in the forest we can eat for free, and make a house for free. But if my daughter gets sick, what do I do?"

Illness – especially among the young and the old – is still rife in many Penan settlements. Owing to their nomadic past, knowledge of basic hygiene is scant. And because they spend so much time in their village these days, garbage and human waste pile up, bringing disease and swarms of malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Years ago, when the authorities encouraged the tribe to stop roaming, they were promised clinics and medicine. More years have passed, and they're still waiting.

## THE SWISS TARZAN

Before his mysterious disappearance some five years ago, the Swiss anthropologist-turned-activist Bruno Manser (who lived with the Penan from 1984 to 1990) had tirelessly campaigned for their rights, lobbying the government to preserve a large swath of forest where they could live and hunt. "My whole work here means nothing for the Penan as long as the logging continues. Not one of the promises made by the government has been fulfilled as yet... neither self-determination or a biosphere preserve," Manser said during a meeting with former US vice-president Al Gore in the early 90s.

On the other hand, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has often spoken out against the Penan, calling them, "helpless, half-starved, and disease-ridden people". And James Wong, Sarawak's minister for Housing and Public Health also believes that the tribe are ignoble savages. "They should move towards mainstream society, instead of running around like animals."

At the Bruno Manser Foundation in Basel, Switzerland – [www.bmf.ch](http://www.bmf.ch) – they still put out press releases and post them on their website. One press release from near the end of the millenium states, "The primeval forests and the Penan hunter-gatherers have but two years until their vitally necessary game and fish stocks will have disappeared and the last giant trees will have been cut down."

Around the same time, Manser received a cassette from the Penan about their perilous state of affairs. An elderly tribesman said, "If you do not come quickly you will later only see our tracks. Bare land, only the rain will fall on your head, there will only be wind. And wherever you reach out with your hand not I will greet you, not I will take your hand. Only rain and bare land."

Throughout the '90s, the man who was dubbed the "Swiss Tarzan" made several failed attempts to return to Sarawak. In 1999, Bruno finally managed to smuggle himself into the state capital along with a motorised hang glider. Then he flew around the city and landed outside the opulent mansion of forestry minister and timber billionaire Abdul Taib Mahmud. Waiting for Bruno were a horde of journalists, and the local immigration chief, who deported him.

A year later he was back and promptly disappeared into the jungle. Ever since then, he has been missing in activism, and has now been declared officially dead by the Swiss authorities. A page on the Greenpeace website says, "Greenpeace asks the

Malaysian Government to conduct a precise investigation into the reasons for Bruno's disappearance and take drastic measures, if violence has been used against Bruno Manser. At present, it is uncertain whether Bruno is lost, injured, detained, hiding to protect himself or even dead."

Given his penchant for publicity stunts, and despair over his failure to protect the Penan and the jungles of Sarawak – recent reports indicate that around 75 percent of the primary rainforests have now been chopped down, and only a few hundred hunters and gatherers wander through them – optimistic sources had speculated that he was still hiding out in Borneo, though after five years missing, this seems highly unlikely.

James Ritchie, a journalist who wrote a book about Bruno, and kept in touch with him until his disappearance, told *The Age* in Melbourne:

"I don't believe that he's dead. I think he's out there quietly doing as much as he can to record and preserve the heritage

of the Penan. He knows the forest is vanishing too fast and he wants to record as much as he can before it is too late. It helps if people think that he's dead. It gives him more time to do what he wants to do."

Maybe we'll have to finally meet the legendary activist when we return some day. In the past, we used to bring the Penan gifts of tobacco, buckshot, and batteries for their torches, because they went out hunting at 3am.

Next time we'll have to bring them watches and shoes.





## Cameron Cooper looks back on a lovely evening spent almost in the company of Mick Jagger. First published in May 2003.

As far as I knew it was all set. My friend, a reasonably well-known person in Thailand whom we will call 'Ted,' had been asked to take Mick Jagger and a female friend out for the evening. He could use a 'point man' – me – to scout ahead and reserve tables so Mick would have his own protected place to sit at each venue. Also along for the ride – or as it turns out, driving the bus – was Mick's bodyguard, a wall of muscle we'll call Harold, on what was supposed to be a rollicking evening out, with people staring enviously as we enjoyed free drinks in the company of Sir Mick. Since the Stones had cancelled their concert in Bangkok, and Mick was still hanging around, it seemed like a great exclusive for Farang Untamed Travel.

Ted and I had scouted out Soi Cowboy and Nana Plaza in advance, earmarking the best and most secure bars to visit while mapping out the itinerary. The hastily assembled plan was that Ted was to meet the Mick camp at 11pm at the Oriental Hotel, tell them the venues had been selected and that his point man was already stationed at Nana Plaza, standing by his mobile, poised to smooth the way. As Ted was hailing a taxi, leaving me by the side of the road, a nagging feeling hit me that somehow I might get cut out of the loop. "Hey Ted," I said extending my hand, "Buds for life, right?" He agreed, but somehow...

I positioned myself in a bar at the mouth of Nana Plaza, eyes glued to my phone, and ordered a beer. After an hour of "Where you come from?" "You have wife?" "How old you?" I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to send Ted a text message. "What's going on?" Ted, who was enjoying a Mick-decanted Heineken in his massive penthouse suite heard his phone beep. So did Harold. "Who is that?" the professionally paranoid Harold demanded. "Just a friend from Chiang Mai," said Ted, who later admitted feeling a bit intimidated by the rarified air and his unfamiliarity with the customs of the private planet he had gained temporary access to. He quickly sent a response, then complied with Harold's request that he switch off his phone.

My phone beeped. "Nana n". What in Christ did that mean? The North corner? (It later turned out to mean "Nana... no") Several unanswered messages later, Mick, Ted, a slender woman and a suspicious-looking Harold strode past me. (Mick, by the way, is very short, has a face like a raisin so that you can't even find his eyes in the folds of flesh, and moves like a man a third his age.)

There must be some mistake, I thought. They can't go ahead without their point man, can they? They seemed to think so. I paid my bill and hurried off after them, keen to correct the error. When I entered the Rainbow II, they were already seated at a table on the left. Nobody in the bar appeared to recognise Mick. I sat nearby where Ted could spot me and wave me over to the table, saying, "Hey guys, this is the point man I told you about."

Ted glanced over in my direction and failed to recognise me – utterly blanked me. It was then that I started feeling like a

complete wanker.

I struggled to avoid staring, only glancing over a few times nonchalantly, wondering what I was supposed to do next. I was all wired up with no place to go. Then a young woman in a bikini approached me; "What your name?" followed by the 19 other usual questions. My protestations that I was a married man had little effect on her dogged perseverance.

Meanwhile, at the beautiful people's table, an interesting conversation was developing. With a sour look on her face, Mick's female friend leaned over to Ted, and began what was obviously the standard Western woman in go-go bar conversation: "The guys in here are... pathetic, aren't they? Take that disgusting old guy with that young woman over there," she gestured towards me. I had become the focus of their conversation, clearly singled out as a prime example of slimehood. "What's he going to do with her?" She had conveniently forgotten that she was a woman in her late 20s cuddling up with a man of 59. Ted of course explained that most men like the repulsive fellow in question just have a couple of drinks, get their ego stroked by the girl for a bit, and eventually go home.

Then Harold hoed in with his opinion: "I think that guy is stalking us. We're leaving." They swiftly paid the bill and buggered off.

I suppose it's Harold's job to notice these things. Evidently, my body language tipped him off that I wasn't a normal punter. There was something sinister about me. Adding up the opinions in the room, I was a wanker, an old pervert, a threat to Mick's safety, and a potential customer who hadn't had a great blowjob in a really long time.

Harold's suspicions must have been vindicated when I tailed them to their next port of call, Hollywood II, and scanned the room, not realising they were seated on a small balcony. I sat in front of the stage, where two baby-oiled women a couple of feet away committed unspeakable acts. I figured that my last resort – the adoring fan photo op – had slipped away for good, so I dialled some friends who I knew were in the neighbourhood, hoping to buoy my spirits a bit with familiar company. Harold naturally assumed I was calling in a gang of gunmen or worse, the paparazzi. I guess it was a bit suspicious that I took a seat next to the stage and was oblivious to the show. Again they got up and escaped from my malign presence – this time to Soi Cowboy, and without me spotting them. Probably just as well. I was about two minutes away from Harold busting my arm.

My friends arrived and commiserated and were kind enough not to make me the sole subject of the evening's mirth. Two hours later, we were at the Grace Hotel coffee shop, surrounded by policemen who jabbed truncheons into my ribs and demanded we and 200 other people piss into little plastic bottles.

Not exactly the way I'd envisioned the evening panning out.

I talked to Ted on the phone the next day, asking him to explain where our little plan went wrong. "I'm really sorry man. You know, I was going to mention you, but they are really in complete control of that private world of theirs, and I just couldn't bring myself to do it -- especially after that thing with the phone message. I must have been crazy to think it could work." He'd had a lovely evening, and Mick was a very charming down-to-earth guy, he assured me, pausing only to laugh uproariously as I interjected with parallel descriptions of my own big night out. "The funny thing is, nobody recognised Mick but you. Strange, huh? I guess we didn't really need a point man after all."



# NATURAL GETAWAY

*Farang Untamed Travel correspondent-at-large Daniel Cooper travels to green and exotic Kanchanaburi for a battery recharge.*

**A**hhh, nature. There's nothing better than getting out of the big smoke and heading for the hills. It doesn't matter whether you're the type who likes to get back to nature or pit yourself against her; everybody likes the wide open spaces, the trees and fresh air. Not everyone likes the bugs and dust though, unpleasant memories from my boyhood days camping with my father.

Luckily I was headed to Mom Chailai, a forest retreat about 60km outside Kanchanaburi town, and reputedly free of bugs and dust. Indeed, upon entering the main gate the baked fields and roads of Kanchanaburi in dry season were left behind to be replaced with lush jungle.

Although Mom Chailai only opened last October, the grounds have been worked on for some time. Originally a chilli plantation, the site was reforested and landscaped many years ago. The resort buildings came later and are built around the existing trees. The whole site is perched on cliffs overlooking the River Kwai.

The other thing that strikes one about the grounds is the sensitive placing of stones, from smooth river rocks to enormous quartz boulders, some of which are cut and polished to make tables or chairs. Driftwood and sun-weathered wood, used in construction or as decorations, complement this theme.

I entered the lap of luxury in a samlor pedalled by a man in military uniform (he turned out to be the gardener) and was greeted by the receptionist holding a cup of tea and a cool towel. Just the thing for this hot day. In short order I was shown to my room, or in this case, house.



There are 16 houses in the resort, each with a different theme. There's the Waterfall House, the Forest Charm House or the Forest Kiss house, along with plenty of others ranging from single bed suites to the multi-room Lion King house. After a quick shower it was time to explore. Although the resort is blissfully isolated, there's plenty to see on the grounds themselves: a natural spring, a WWII Japanese encampment, beautiful limestone waterfalls and plenty of jungle trails to tramp.

For the more adventurous there are plenty more activities a short drive away, like elephant-back trekking, jungle walks or cruising the river. Plus there's an 18-hole golf course nearby for people who like clubs. If you just want to explore the area, the resort rents bicycles.

As night fell I was invited to view the stars from the top of a small hill nearby. This was probably the best part of my short trip, lying back on banana lounges staring at the heavens. Without the pollution of city lights or smog the stars and planets shone brightly, alive with colour.

In all, my weekend retreat was a restful and pleasant one. Mom Chailai isn't Action Central but more a place for resting the mind and body or perhaps a romantic weekend. When their conference facilities are completed, expect the place to be swarming with execs plotting their next financial year.

Finally, yes, there are a few bugs around at night. But they're outside, and somehow, the trill of crickets in the night always makes my sleep sounder.

*Mom Chailai Forest Retreat is located at Tumbol Thasao, Ampur Saiyoke, Kanchanaburi but you'll never find it without help. Get in touch with their Bangkok office at 02-662 0984-5, by fax (02-662 2743), or by email at [info@momchailai.com](mailto:info@momchailai.com) or via the web at*



# Hanging Your Hat:

## Places to sleep in Bangkok



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

### Top End:

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

### Pratunam/Siam Square Area

#### Holiday Mansion Hotel

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

#### Pathumwan House

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

### Silom Area

#### Anna's Café & Bed

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

#### Bangkok Christian Guest House

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

#### La Résidence Hotel

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

#### Intown Residence

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

#### Niagara Hotel

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

### Soi Ngam Duphli

#### Malaysia Hotel

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

### Sukhumvit

#### The Atlanta

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

#### Suk 11

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

#### Federal Hotel

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

#### Manhattan

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

### Sam's Lodge

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

### Banglamphu

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

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

### Buddy Lodge

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

### Nana Plaza Inn

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

### D&D Inn

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

### Thai Cozy House

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



## The Best On Khaosan Road

# D & D Inn

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



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

[www.khaosanby.com](http://www.khaosanby.com)

Email: [ddinn@khaosanby.com](mailto:ddinn@khaosanby.com)

# DAYTRIPPING

## DAWN TO DUSK



### BANGLAMPHU CORRECTIONS MUSEUM

Where: Mahachai Road, across from Thanon Luang

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

Cost: Free

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

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

### NATIONAL GALLERY

Where: Chao Fah Road, near Pra Pinklao

When: Wed-Sun, 9am-4pm

Cost: Bt30

Way to go: Walk from Khaosan Road

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

### NATIONAL MUSEUM

Where: West side of Sanam Luang

When: Wed-Sun, 9am-4pm

Cost: Bt40

Way to go: Ten-minute walk from Khaosan

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

### THAMMASAT LIBRARY

Where: Beside the National Museum on Na Phra That Road

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

Cost: Bt20 per day

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

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



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

### VIPASSANA MEDITATION CENTRE

Where: Wat Mahadatu, Na Phra Lan Road

When: Daily, 9am-4pm

Cost: Free

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

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

### WAT PHO MASSAGE CENTRE

Where: Thai Wang and Sanachai Roads

When: Daily, 8am-8pm

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

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

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

### NATURAL HEALING COMPANY

Where: 4th Floor, Bayon Building, Khaosan Rd

When: 7 days, 10am-10pm

Cost: Varies

Way to go: Use your shoes, dude

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

### THONBURI

#### SHED OF THE ROYAL BARGES

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

When: Daily, 9am-5pm

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

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

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



### SONGKRAN MIYOMSANE FORENSIC MEDICINE MUSEUM

Where: 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Adulaydejvigrom Building, behind Siriraj Hospital, Phrannok Road

When: Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm

Cost: Free

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

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

### DUSIT

#### DUSIT PARK

Where: Ratchawithi Road

When: Daily, 9am-4pm

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

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

### DUSIT ZOO

Where: Ratchawithi Road

When: Daily, 8am-6pm

Cost: Bt30 for adults; Bt5 for kids

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

### SUKHUMVIT

#### THE SNAKE FARM

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

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

Cost: Bt70

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



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

### JIM THOMPSON HOUSE

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

Way to go: National Stadium station on the Skytrain

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

Cost: Adult Bt100, Students Bt50

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

### WAT MAHABUT

Where: Sukhumvit Soi 77, Soi 7

When: Free

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

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

### LUMPINI

#### LUMPINI PARK

Where: Rama IV Road

When: Daily, 6am-8pm

Cost: Free

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

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



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

### PRATUNAM

#### HILTON HOTEL FERTILITY SHRINE

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

When: Early morning to early evening.

How Much: Dick all

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

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

### SAMUT PRAKAN

#### ERAWAN MUSEUM

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

When: Daily, 9am-6pm

Way to Go: See the Ancient City listing.

The three-headed copper elephant measures some 40 metres in height and weighs 250 tonnes. In the base is a museum devoted to Thai and Chinese antiques. Up above is an

incredible array of statuary, a stained glass ceiling, and a stairway leading up the elephant god Erawan's right hind leg into a vision of Buddhist heaven in his belly.

### THE ANCIENT CITY (MUANG BORAN)

Where: Kilometre 33, Sukhumvit Highway

When: 8.30am-5pm.

Cost: Bt50 adults; Bt25 children

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

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

### THE CROCODILE FARM

Where: Kilometre 30 on Sukhumvit Highway

When: 7am-6pm.

Cost: Bt300 adults; Bt150

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

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

## 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.

## OFF THE WALL

Putting a Playboy logo in the middle of a pastiche beside Buddha images, communist revolutionaries, and a fishnet-wearing harlot, surely signals that Zhang Kexin's exhibition at the National Gallery in Bangkok is all about conflicting values in contemporary China. But Zhang also shows off his versatility by including sculptures like "Mao Suit" and the paintings of the "Chinese Feature" series.

Spanning Border [sic] is on display at the National Gallery, near Sanam Luang, from May 12-29. The gallery is open Wed-Sun, from 9am to 4pm.



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# FEEDING TIME

## Places to Eat: Around Bangkok



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

### SILOM AREA

#### SOI CONVENT (EVENINGS)

Silom area (Saladaeng Skytrain)

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

#### BLUE ELEPHANT

(CLASSIC AND FRESH, FUNKY THAI)

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

#### SIROCCO

(CONTEMPORARY MEDITERRANEAN)

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

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

#### INDIAN HUT (NORTHERN INDIAN)

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

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

#### JESTERS (PACIFIC RIM)

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

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

#### TRADER VIC'S (POLYNESIAN)

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

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

#### TONGUE THAI (THAI)

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

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

#### PATARA (THAI)

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

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

#### ANNA'S CAFÉ (THAI/INTERNATIONAL)

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

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

#### O'REILLY'S (IRISH/CONTINENTAL)

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

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

#### 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

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## Thai kitchen ad

experience- Hu'u Epicure is a swish, antique 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 &amp; RESTAURANT

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

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

## ANA GARDEN (THAI)

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

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

## DA GIOVANNI (ITALIAN)

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

Tucked away in an unlikely location behind the Bamboo Pub and Restaurant, this cosy Italian trattoria is a surprisingly pleasant place to dine. Reliable pasta favourites such

as lasagna with beef, and vongole for (Bt180-290), and a selection of pizzas for Bt200-280. Grilled mains like Pollo al limone (chicken in lemon sauce, Bt250) and traditional starters like mozzarella with fresh tomatoes and basil (Bt90). Thai menu also available.

## THE BULL'S HEAD

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

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

## SAN REMO (ITALIAN PIZZERIA)

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

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, raddichio salad, parmesan cheese). Also worth trying is the anti-pasti selection which includes some delicious roast vegetables and prosciutto. Pick 'n' mix and sharing between mates is the best option.

## NOVOTEL SIAM SQUARE

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

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

ANTONIO'S TRATTORIA  
(TRADITIONAL ITALIAN)

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

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

## NABE YA (JAPANESE)

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

Well placed for a Nipponese nosh up after braving the hoards of teenage girls at MBK,

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



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

## AMARANTH (ORGANIC FUSION)

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

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

## TAMARIND CAFÉ (VEGETARIAN FUSION)

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

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

## HIMALI CHA CHA (INDIAN VEGETARIAN)

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

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

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

20/20-21 Ruamrudee Village, Ploenchit Road (Skytrain Ploenchit), 11am-2pm 5pm-10pm, [www.witch-tavern.com](http://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.larrysdiver.com](http://www.larrysdiver.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](http://www.athenabangkok.com), Tel. 02-392 7644, major cards except JCB

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

## BANGLAMPHU SHOSHANA

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

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



## TAKETEI

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

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

## JOK POCHANA RESTAURANT

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

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

## HEMLOCK

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

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

Chinese sausage wrapped in a lotus leaf and served with a sweetish mint sauce. Lovely stuff. They have some pretty inexpensive wines as well.

## NA PHRA LAN

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

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

## LA CASA RISTORANTE (ITALIAN)

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

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

## RICKY'S COFFEE SHOP

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

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# NIGHTTRIPPING

**B**angkok is rightly famous for its nightlife, offering all types and flavors of establishment, from old men selling beer from a wheelbarrow to mega-clubs, to the infamous sex-shows down at the 'Pong, and everything in between. Things are changing though, many punters are shocked by the 1-2am closing time (and that's if you're lucky). That's right and the only after-hours place is the street, but we like it down there. Also shocking is the no-ID no-entry policy, even if you're 80, so 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](http://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](http://www.mystiquebangkok.com), amex visa & master cards

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

#### TOKYO JOE'S

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

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

#### GULLIVER'S TRAVELER'S TAVERN

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

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

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

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

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

#### Q BAR

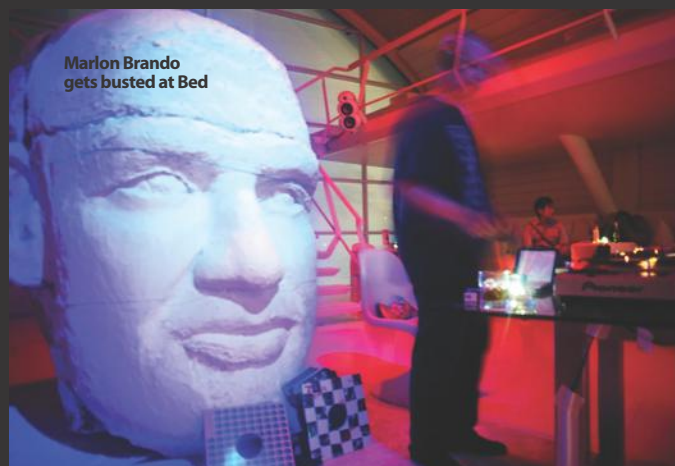
34 Sukhumvit Soi 11. Take quick left at end of the soi. (Skytrain Nana) major cards, Tel. 02-252 3274, [www.qbarbangkok.com](http://www.qbarbangkok.com), major cards except Diners

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

#### WITCH'S TAVERN

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

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



Marlon Brando gets busted at Bed

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](http://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](http://www.bambooberbar.com), major cards

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

#### 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



## BAMBOO

Pub and Restaurant

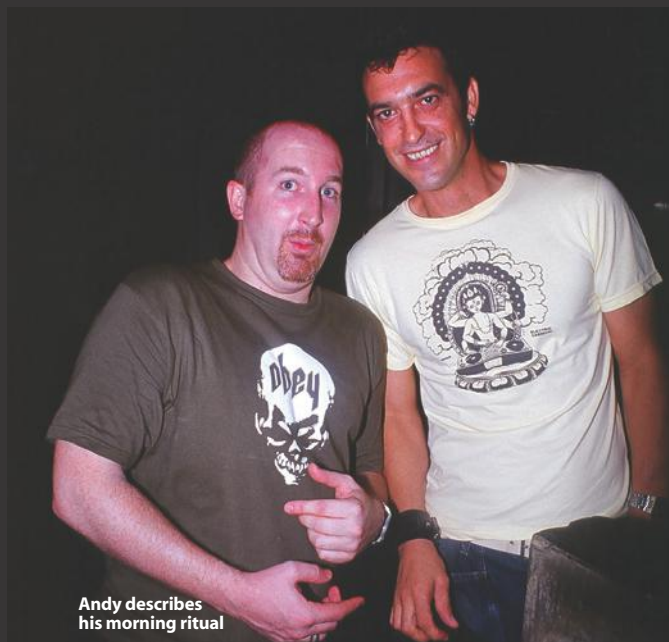
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I always drink to world peace



Andy describes his morning ritual

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. Al 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 Precussive Latin House. There is Hip Hop, Dancehall and old-skool on Thursday. The weekend starts with Heavy Pumping

Vocals on Friday, Hard and Funky Tech-House for Saturday. The week ends with Think Pink, Bed Bar's gay Sunday night.

## IRISH EXCHANGE

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

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

## THE DUBLINER IRISH PUB

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

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

## CHEAP CHARLIE'S

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

Less a bar than a ramshackle lean-to

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

## SILOM

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

## RADIO CITY

Patpong Soi 1

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

## MUZZIK CAFÉ

Patpong Soi 1

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

## LUCIFERS

Patpong Soi 1, Tel 02-2346902

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

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



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. 02-632 7883, 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 percussion 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 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 Ramburi Rd (behind the Wat)*  
Otherwise known as "The Korean Bar" this place is popular

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

#### Café DEMOC

*Corner of Ratchadamnoen Road beside Democracy Monumen, Tel. 02-622 2571, no cards*  
Everything from Trance to Hip-Hop to the latest dance beats are on the musical menu, plus requests, in this good-looking, Euro-style venue. Menu has Thai dishes and small Thai beers for Bt80.

#### PRANAKORN

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

#### GULLIVER'S TRAVELLER'S TAVERN

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

#### AD HERE THE 13TH

*13 Samsen Road. Walk up Chakrapong Road from the Police Station end of Khaosan about 400 metres, cross the bridge over the canal and it's on your left. Can't miss it.*  
The great little blues bar with the strange name. The band, led by guitarist Pong and husky-voiced belting singer Georgia is better than ever now, even if the local



...sweet homo

# Q

## BAR BANGKOK

### Q Bar Events - May 2005 Thursday 5th May



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**Cinco de Mayo**  
featuring



Join the fiesta as Q Bar celebrates Cinco de Mayo in spectacular style. Be one of the first to try the hottest new tequila in Thailand, XXX Premium, as DJs Chris Samba (UK) and Joeki (Q Bar) spice up the floor with latin house beats. It was a legendary party last year, don't miss it in 2005!

### Wednesday 25th May



presents  
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#### weekly resident dj schedule:

risky fridays  
dj Joeki & guests - freestyle  
saturday night fever  
dj Billy V. & guests - house  
beat therapy sundays  
dj's tui & budda q - r&b, hip hop  
massive mondays  
dj's tui, & cava - international  
eclectic beats  
sugar & spice tuesdays  
dj's Billy V. & Joeki  
ghetto fabulous wednesdays  
DJs Cavo & Gray One spin classic hip hop  
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dress code : no shorts, sandals or sleeveless shirts on men please Id. required by everyone (bring copy of your passport) no minors under 20

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.

## 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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**Paul van Dyk, Bangkok's Ministry of Sound,  
Nov. 2002**

*What got you started in DJing?*

Back in the old days electronic music was pretty much one dimensional, sort of deep straw techno, I don't think there was so much else... so I just made tapes for me and my friends, and one of my friends eventually passed one on to a promoter. 'Cause I never really intended to be a DJ, it just happened – but once I'd played out, that was it.

*Is what you play definable as trance?*

Erm, right now I'm not calling it anything except electronic dance music, cos that's what I'm playing; a little bit of techno, a little bit of what people call trance, a little bit house music, and hope it all works out.

*Where did you get your musical influences growing up in East Berlin; was it hard getting hold of music?*

Well, the good thing was in East Berlin we could listen to West Berlin Radio Stations, so I had my musical education through radio, I couldn't go into any record store and buy what I was listening to. I was a big fan of the Smiths and New Order, and in 1985 or something, I was listening to the first very early electronic dance music; stuff from Ron Elms and people like that.

*Have you been to Thailand before – what do you think?*

This is my second visit, after playing at the Ministry of Sound here in June (2002). I have to say I haven't seen much. Last time I went straight to the hotel, did the gig, then flew out again. I love it though, and this time I'm here a little longer.

*Jamiroquai's management cancelled his gig here, possibly down to the threat of terrorism in South East Asia; why did you still play?*

Well, I went to the USA a month after 9-11 and did a two week tour through the states, and the thing is of course with circumstances like this you think "should I go or shouldn't I", and there's many reasons. As an example, after the things happened in New York and Washington, we got so many e-mails with people asking "please come, don't let us down; these terrorists can't make us all fear for our lives", and this is what it's really all about, you just get together about what is going on, sort it out and kind of join hands.

*They play a lot of your tunes at the Full Moon Party, would you ever consider playing there, especially as it's a non-paying gig?*

Thank you, maybe I should go there sometime. I've never played there, but it has nothing to do with the money issue; I have just never thought about it and it was never scheduled.

*What have you got going on now?*

We have two major projects out right now; one is a DVD project called "PVD DVD Global" which actually consists of old tracks of mine that have all been re-recorded into 5.1 surround sound and I don't know if you remember that last time we had this camera with us and were filming for seven or eight months all around the world. One chapter of the DVD is completely Bangkok. Then I'm working on a new album, with several single releases planned throughout 2003.

*Who's your favorite musician?*

I don't have a favorite musician. When I am listening to music it is regardless of what music it is; it has to be intense and honest. I have to feel that there is an artist putting something across, not just some kind of like Brittany Spears puppet. If you want to live the whole pop vibe then don't do it as Brittany Spears, do it like Robbie Williams, he just is the way he is. The last record I bought was of a guitar band called Leiderho Satellite.

*What's your favorite city to play in?*

Well it has to be Berlin, but it's an unfair question as it's my hometown.

# Paul Van Dyk

Over the last couple of years, Thailand's dance music scene has progressed dramatically with a great influx of world-class DJs spinning their wares in the kingdom. Gone are the days when bedroom DJs on holiday with a bag of tunes could blag a play at a major club; and with venues like Q-Bar, Bed Supperclub and Tapas Room in Bangkok and the ever expanding scene on the islands, Thailand is getting a name for itself on the international club circuit. **Tom Green** talks to Paul van Dyk about what it means to be a DJ. Photo by **Daniel Cooper**

# NEAR BANGKOK

Near Bangkok

## IN KANCHANABURI BUILDING BRIDGES



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

### PLACES TO CRASH:

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

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

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

### DAYTRIPPING:

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

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



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

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

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

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

### NIGHTRIPPING:

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

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

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

### WAY TO GO:

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

**Train:** Trains leave the Thonburi Station. Bt24 in hard class; leaves at 7:35am and 1:45pm; takes about three hours.



# HIT THE NORTH

## CHIANG MAI

**I**t's getting cool. Thais start wearing balaclavas to bed. Aircon becomes superfluous. Days are sunny and dry and not too roasting, so take a walk down the winding sois of the "old city" inside the the quadrangle of moats and centuries-old brick walls, to see how the locals live. The more you lose your way, the more liable you are to find the 'real' Chiang Mai. Everyone who lives here, both Thai and foreigner moans about the traffic being so bad, but they get no sympathy from anyone who has been to Bangkok recently. 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 dhamma talk session with Western monks on Sunday afternoons at 3pm at **Wat U Mong**. Or travel further down the same road to **Wat Ram Poeng**, and spend 26 days practising meditation with an English-speaking teacher. Countless companies offer treks out of Chiang Mai, and most of them offer similar itineraries and prices. Treks booked at guesthouses tend to skimp on important things like blankets and food. One reliable standalone agency is **Trekking Collective**, Ratchawithi Road.

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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 Laikhrum** (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 deliciouso 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, Nimanhemin 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.

is some sort of 'power spot' and Pai pops out of the ground. Drawn by fresh air, endless forest walks, real whitewater rafting and idyllic hot springs, Pai's original close-knit community of back-to-nature Thais and O-puffing expats have transformed themselves into entrepreneurs to serve the backpacking troops – and it is starting to move upscale.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

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

## DAYTRIPPING:

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

## NIGHTRIPPING:

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

## FEEDING TIME:

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



# PAI



Shan-and-hilltribe mountain town, add a live music scene, a sprinkling of new-age hippies who think this



# BEACH ROUNDUP

## BAYS AND BEACHES

**S**un, sand, sea, sandwiches. Life doesn't get much better than this. So you're in Thailand and don't know where to lay your beach towel. It can be a tough choice. Am I looking for a deserted desert island? Am I looking for parties and wild times? Am I looking to absorb Thai culture from the seashore? Well, you've come to the right place; Beach Roundup is a quick rundown of the bays and beaches of Thailand's coast, giving you an idea of the character of each place. Each island has its own character. For instance, you'd never mistake Phuket for Koh Tao, although you'd be forgiven for thinking you're in Samui. Hua Hin is all golf courses and tailor shops, probably disappointing to the dreadlocked backpacker, but then it's hard to push a stroller on the sands of Koh Pangan.

A big factor in choosing your beach is its proximity to Bangkok. There's plenty of sand even a few hours from the capital, Koh Samet, Pattaya, Cha-Am. But the three couldn't be more different in culture. So read on. Thailand is large, and contains multitudes.

### KOH CHANG

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



### KOH TAO

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

### KOH SAMET

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

## KOH PHI PHI

Possibly one of the world's most beautiful places, the area around Phi Phi was used in both *The Man with the Golden Gun* and backpacking odyssey *The Beach*. Phi Phi actually consists of two islands, both steep limestone formations with a small section of flat land between them, on which Phi Phi village was nestled before the wave hit. Some places were undamaged, dive operators and snorkellers go on daytrips and rebuilding is underway. At present things are changing too fast to give an accurate picture but it is certain that tourist operators will appreciate your custom.

## KOH SAMUI

Once, years ago, Samui was a hippie traveller's playground. Back then there was only one bar on Chaweng, nobody shaved and the only thing anyone wanted was peace and love. Yup, 2001 was quite a year. But most of the backpackers have grown up, put on shorts, socks and sandals, had a few kids and are back on Samui – now looking for peace and quiet. You can find that, but you can also find pizza places, nightclubs, Starbucks, tailor shops and all the other trappings of modern life. Some may hanker for the old days, but the beaches are still great and if you're honest with yourself, air-con room beats bamboo shack every time.

## KOH PANGAN

"Hand me another mushie shake before these pills kick in, would you? And stop Bogarting that joint. Is that Harry lying in a puddle of sick

over there? Oh my god! I think my face is melting!" Yup, Koh Pangan sure is a wild, drug-crazed, hedonistic pleasure boat for hippies, slackers and other layabouts. Home of the Full Moon Party and all, and you've heard what happens there!

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

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

## KRABI

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



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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.

### 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 LANTA LAY OF THE SAND



oh Lanta is many things to many people. Up north, near the main town, the beach is speckled with dozens of high- to mid-range resorts, catering to the rich and middle class families. As one goes further south things become more rustic (including the road) and appeal more to the younger crowd and independent travellers. While the island doesn't have the hedonistic nightlife of Phuket or the movie-set splendor of Koh Phi Phi, Lanta is no ugly sister. It's a place for quiet times, beach lounging and exploring – with nary a tourist bus in sight.

Many of the resorts on Lanta typically shut down in May and don't reopen until November or later, due to rough weather. However, for those keen for a tranquil and undisturbed getaway, it's not hard to find somewhere still open.

## 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 Kao Caves** are also worth a visit, on the way to the old town. On your way over to the old town also check out the view from the top of **View Point Hill**. It looks over a



In paradise even the mobile signal is good.

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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# KOH SAMUI ISLE OF PLENTY

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

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

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



Wait! That isn't God

The latest club to open in north Chaweng is **Pandora**. It's a touch of al fresco Mediterranean and is the only club that has a sauna, Jacuzzi and a pool with fibre optic lights which change the colour of the water seven times every 30 seconds.

## LAMAI PLACES TO CRASH:

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

## FEEDING TIME:

**The Oasis** on the way out of Lamai on the ring road boasts Euro toilets, Bt70 breakfasts and Sunday roasts. The all-you-can-eat BBQ is a welcome weekly event at **El Dorado**, every Friday. Meanwhile, the biggest

fried breakfast award goes to **Harry's Bar**. **The Cliff** sells Portuguese *piri-piri* chicken, and has fantastic views over the sea with a bar that will make you think you're in an old Duran Duran video. Newly opened **Juice Dude** at Red Bicycles now offers power drinks, sports nutrition and organic juice. **The Red Fox** at Lamai beach just down a small street opposite McDonald's has Sunday dinners and pop quiz nights.

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

## BIG BUDDHA AND BAN RAK PLACES TO CRASH:

Known for its massive Buddha image at one end of the island, this is a tranquil area to get away from the nightlife and hooligans. While the beaches are nice enough, the swimming ain't so hot but the sunsets are great. **Shambala** offer rooms from Bt400-800 and has a good menu of Thai and Western dishes. **Shabash** (07-724 5035) has beach huts from Bt1,400-1,800 depending how close you want to be

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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 **Juza's** for pizza.

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

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

## MAENAM

### PLACES TO CRASH:

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

## FEEDING TIME:

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

## DAYTRIPPING:

The latest craze is the **Canopy Adventure** (07-741 4150) where you slide along ropes to various tree houses above the coconut trees and a waterfall for Bt1,400 per head. They offer a free shuttle service to the site. For those who like to take it a little easier you could spend the afternoon at the **Butterfly Garden** (07-742 4020) at Ntien Beach. They have spiders as well. A great way to see the island is to take a **Samui Safari** (07-741 5123-5). You can choose half or whole-day trips. They take you snorkelling, elephant

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

## ROADTRIPPING

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

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



## WAY TO GO

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

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

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

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



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# KOH PANGAN MOONSHINE MUST

**C**lear blue skies (mostly) 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.

## Say Ohm...

Not for the half-hearted, the newly-opened Agama yoga school in Koh Pa Ngan is a full-on sort of place for those wishing to pursue the finer points of the discipline. As an example, the one-month intensive course is accompanied by a densely-written 150-page book on the studied topics, which include: Hatha-yoga, Kriya-yoga, Kundalini-yoga, Raja-yoga, Karma-yoga, Jnana-yoga, Tantra-yoga, Nidra-yoga, Laya-yoga, and Bhakti-yoga. And then there are lectures on Yogic diet and healing through natural methods, purification and cleansing techniques, Ayurvedic medicine, Yin/Yang balancing, relaxation, Yogic physiology and psychology, mastery and transmutation of the sexual energy, Eastern philosophy, mental concentration, the use of music in Yoga and meditation. Serious stuff.

For more info, check out their website at [agamayoga.com](http://agamayoga.com) or dive right in and call 09-233-0217

## 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.



## 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 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 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.

### NIGHTTRIPPING:

The Full Moon Party is far more than a party; it is Had Rin's dance music festival, with everything from drum and bass to full-on psy-trance. **Paradise Bungalows**, the original FMP site, puts on the biggest show with inspired decor and superb resident and guest international DJs. Resident 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:** 1<sup>st</sup> class sleeper Bt1150 and 2<sup>nd</sup> class sleeper Bt650. Trains leave from Hualumpung station at 5 to 7pm and get you to Suratthani the next morning.

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

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



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# KOH TAO DIVING ECONOMY



Although best known as a diving paradise in the gulf of Thailand these days Koh Tao is attracting a more diverse group of visitors who come to enjoy the small island charm and laid back atmosphere which is increasingly missing from some of its larger neighbours. If you're after daily diving or lazy days in secluded bays there is as much or as little as you want to keep you happy here. With the government taking a more active role in community affairs the nightlife has been suffering and at the time of writing closing times are subject to change at the whim of local authorities. This being Thailand no doubt things will be sorted soon and we can return to the happy days of happy people here to have fun what ever the time.

## 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.



The small island of Koh Tao has become a mecca for divers

### 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. Moving south Tanote Bay has a small selection of rooms available. **Tanote View** resort and **Poseidon**



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**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

**M**ost 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 Mint** (Bt1,500; 076-333-283) and **Sawasdee Village**, featuring a gorgeous tropical swimming pool (Bt2,800; 076-330979), both in Kata.

## FEEDING TIME

Every second shop in Kata-Karon is a restaurant, so you're not going to



starve here. These have stood the test of time: **Las Margaritas**, **Karon Caf**, **Red Onion** (Karon); **Bluefin Tavern**, **Gung Cafe**, **Coffee Pot** (Kata).

## NIGHTTRIPPING

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

## SOUTH-Chalong, Rawai, Nai Harn, Ao Sane

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

## PLACES TO CRASH

From cheap and cheerful to super-luxurious. Chalong: **International Youth Hostel** (Bt180-450; 076-281-325), **Shanti Lodge** (from Bt350; 076-280-233). Rawai: **Friendship Beach** (from Bt1,000; 076-288-996). Nai Harn/Ao Sane: **Baan Krating Jungle Beach Resort** (Bt2,000; 076-288-264), **Sunny's Nai Harn Beach Resort** (Bt950; 076-388-058), **The Mangosteen** (Bt4,500; 076-289-399).

## FEEDING TIME

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

## NIGHTTRIPPING

**Yoonique Music Cafe** in Nai Harn is attracting a hip, young crowd with its Tuesday jam sessions, Friday Mexican food nights, and beach volleyball court. Other favourite

hangouts are the **Freedom Bar**, **Nikita's** and **Islander Beer Garden** in Rawai, and the **Tamarind** and **Green Man Pub** in Chalong.

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

What was once the playground of the wealthy and well-known, Kamala and southern Bang Tao caught the brunt of the big wave and is undergoing reconstruction. That said, the other beaches are in fine shape and is still a beautiful area to visit.

## PLACES TO CRASH

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

## FEEDING TIME & NIGHTTRIPPING

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

## PHUKET CITY

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

## PLACES TO CRASH

**Pengman** (Bt120; 076-211-186),





Four guys for ev-ery giiliiiiirl

**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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# IN KRABI BEAUTIFUL AS EVER



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One of the country's most gorgeous provinces, Krabi has a wealth of natural distractions, and is best known for its most prevalent symbol: the limestone crag. The city itself makes for an easy-going stopover before taking a short drive to Ao Nang, with its long strip of sand, decent nightlife, and all the amenities. But most travellers - including a lot of families - make waves for the main main beaches on the Phra Nang Peninsula, namely the east and west sides of Railay, which are as enchanting as ever, and the prices for rooms plummet dramatically in the low season. Just around the headland is Tonsai Bay, a chill-out pad for younger travellers. And of course Railay has another high point for Spidermen and women: rock-climbing on the crags, which affords panoramic views of the breath-stealing beachscapes.

## 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

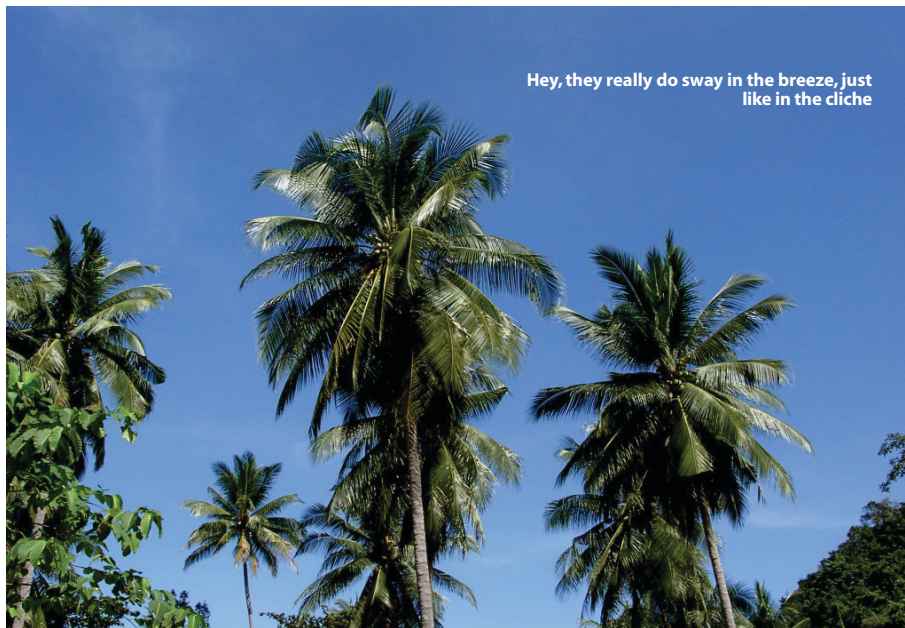
This once slow-motion town has grown in fame due to its tranquillity, beauty and what some call 'real Thai-ness', the principal reason why it so entices. The capital of Krabi province is managing to preserve its small-town charm even though it's morphing into a busy hub. A flurry of new hotels now provide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



## RAILAY

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

### NIGHTTRIPPING

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

## TONSAI

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

## KHLONG MUANG

**T**he latest addition to this spectacular coastal region is Khlong Muang. This unspoiled beach is just a stone's throw from Ao Nang and yet the peace and serenity is a million miles from the tourist traps and big brash resorts just down the road. Places to stay in the area are located directly on the beach. Luxury rooms and bungalows look out over the waters of the Andaman Sea, giving you the perfect view of a spectacular sunset. By far the cheapest place to stay is **Khlong Muang Inn** with fan rooms from Bt300. **Krabi Sands Resort** from Bt1,400 incl. breakfast. All lay in an area of hectic five-star resorts including the **Sheraton**, **Nakamanda**, **Pulay**, and **Taabkeak**.

### WAY TO GO:

**Bus:** Bt350 for a VIP Bus via Surat Thani or Bt650 for a government bus from the Southern Bus Terminal. Government buses cost more but are generally safer  
**Fly:** Bt2,560/5,120 one-way/return. Expect to pay Bt200 to extortionate taxi drivers for a lift into town.

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# HUA HIN SAND TRAP



Putting in the requisite hours



Hua 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 SAUSAGES & SINGLETS

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

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

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

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

## PLACES TO CRASH:

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

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

## DAYTRIPPING:

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



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

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

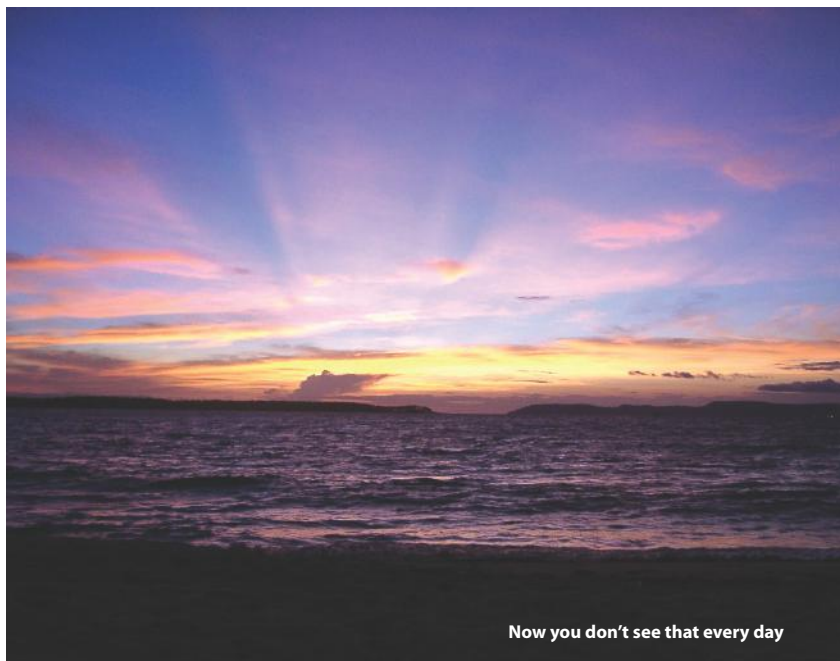
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# KOH CHANG SPLASH DOWN



Now you don't see that every day



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



## WHITESANDS

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

### PLACES TO CRASH

At the northern end of the beach you'll find the Independent Bo's, **Star Bungalows** and a back-to-basics beach nomad vibe while **KC Grande Resort** covers all the bases with Bt150–6,000 bungalows. Nearby, **15 Palms** will do you a good deal on an all mod cons bungalow. **Cookie** and **Tantawan** adequately cater for the surfside dwelling crowd with a Bt600–1,000 budget. South of Whitesands, on Pearl Beach, a boutique resort ambience can be found at the tropical **Remark Cottages**, the excellent **Keereeta** and the Balinese influenced **Saffron on the Sea**, all in the Bt1,500–3,000 bracket.

## KLONG PRAO

This long curving beach is tipped to

become the island's Chaweng in the coming years. Accommodation amongst the mangrove clad river estuaries provides a serene alternative to beach dwelling.

### PLACES TO CRASH

At the northern end, **Koh Chang Paradise** is the pick of the package-tour resorts, at around Bt2,500. Genuine travelers will love **Thal Bungalows**, as laid back and chilled as the Dalai Lama on ice. Nearby, the quiet estuary is home to Bt2,000 **Baan Rim Nam Holiday Home**. Further south, **Tropicana** is top banana in the 4-star bunch.

## KAI BAE

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

### PLACES TO CRASH

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

**Bungalows** or **Kai Bae Beach Bungalows**.

## LONELY BEACH

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

### PLACES TO CRASH

The often packed **Nature Beach's** Bt200 digs are smack on the beach. **Bhumiyama Resort** offers 3-star comforts a stone's throw from the unwashed masses. South, on the rocky shore, **Paradise Cottages** offer new huts for Bt200–300. Moving on, the back-to-nature hideaway, **The Mangrove** provides hi-so hut living for Bt1,000. Down a notch in quality and price you'll find **Bailan Hut** and **Happy Hut** provide havens for world-weary voyagers.

## BANGBAO

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

### PLACES TO CRASH

**Bang Bao Sea Hut**, at Bt2,000, is a must if you have the cash. More economical panoramic sea and mountain views can be had at **Cliff Cottages**, whilst you get what you pay for at the Bt150 **Homestay Beach**.

### NIGHTTRIPPING

Experience modern Thai culture at **Sky Bay Pub**, Pearl Beach. On Whitesands, **Oodies** is an old fave for steaks and music and **Sabuy**

**Bar** is the still lithe granddaddy of beach bars. If you're in need of a feed the excellent **Cookie Restaurant** is right next door. In Kai Bae, **Non Name** and **Rasta Baby** are the best of a motley bar crew. **Backsound**, Lonely Beach, is cocktail-in-a-bucket heaven for the Khao San crowd.

### DAYTRIPPING

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

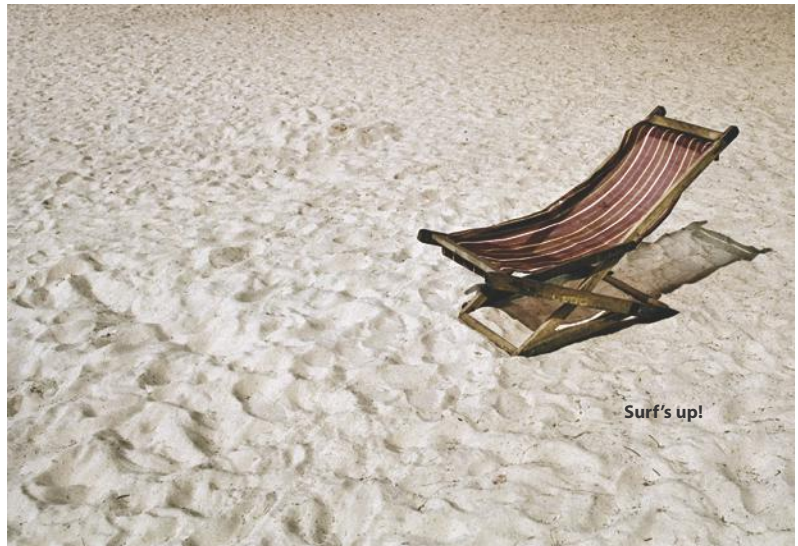
## WAY TO GO

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

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

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

# KOH SAMET TOUR OF BEAUTY



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

## HAT SAI KAEW

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

## MIGHTY KONG

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

(Pier 4) is smaller and more chilled, with a sizeable expat community.

### MACAU

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

### BUYING STUFF

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

### ELECTRONICS AND GIZMOS

Sure, HK is still a duty-free port, but that doesn't mean much these days. Still, it is one of the best

Words by Hugh Whitby

### GETTING AROUND:

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

### DAYTRIPPING

#### THE PEAK

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

#### MUSEUMS

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

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

#### CITY PARKS

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

#### COUNTRY PARKS

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

#### BEACHES / OUTLYING ISLANDS

The beaches are unlikely to impress you if you just blew in from other Asian sands but HK does have them, particularly at Sai Kung (minibuses from Choi Hung MTR) or on the outlying islands (ferries from Outlying Island ferry piers, Central). Shek O (bus 6 from Shau Kei Wan MTR) is the last remaining village on HK island, with a good beach popular with surfers who also frequent the nearby Big Wave Bay, but don't expect too much in the way of water sports.

Lantau island (ferry from Star Ferry Pier 5) is also worth a look for its Big Buddha and the views from the Lantau Peak (a do-able 1,000ft climb). Lamma island





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

## FEEDING TIME

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



I'm sick of noodles, bring me some mashed potatoes!

## 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 Tsui** 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 Tsui (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 LION PRIDE

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, knock knacks, antiques along Pagoda and Trengganu Streets.

## ARAB STREET

**Way to Go:** *Bugis MRT*

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

## GEYLAND SERAI

**Way to Go:** *Paya Lebar MRT*

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

## ARTY STUFF

**ASIAN CIVILIZATIONS MUSEUM**

**Way to Go:** *Raffles Place MRT*

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

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

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

## DAYTRIPPING

### RAFFLES HOTEL

**Way to go:** *City Hall MRT*

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

### ORCHARD ROAD

**Way to Go:** *Orchard MRT*

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

### ZOO & NIGHT SAFARI

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

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

*Night Safari; 7:30pm-midnight*

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

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

### FORT CANNING PARK

**Way to Go:** *Dhoby Ghaut MRT*

**When:** *Daily; 10am-6pm*

**Cost:** *\$8, \$5.*

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

### JURONG BIRD PARK

**Way to Go:** *Boon Lay MRT*

**When:** *Daily, 9am-5pm*

**Cost:** *\$12.25, \$5.10*

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

### SENTOSA ISLAND

**Way to Go:** *Harbour Front MRT*

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

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

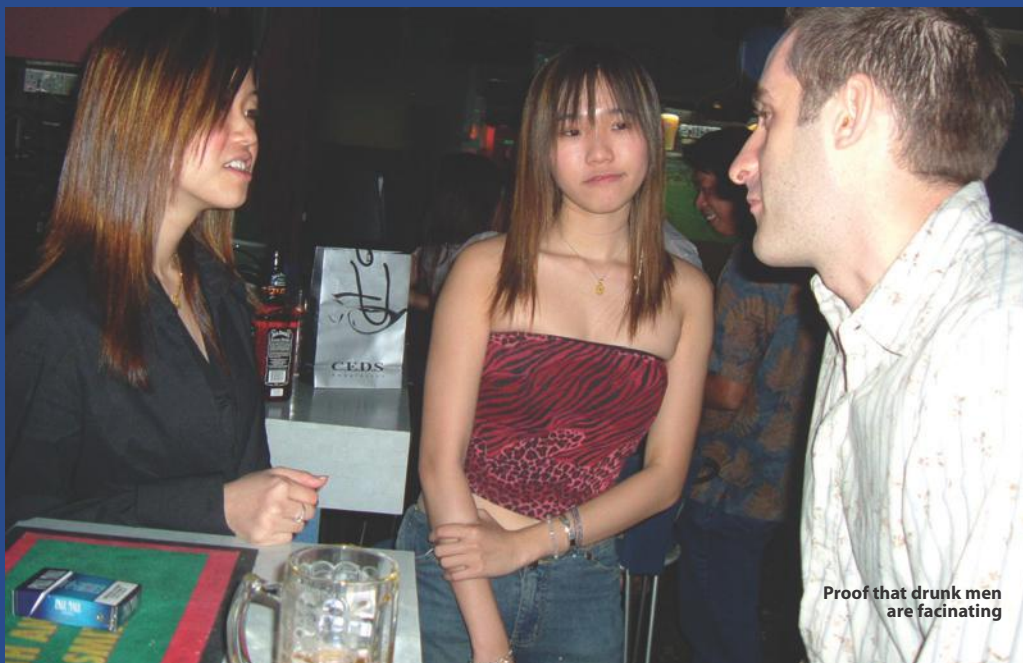
### BUKIT TIMAH

### NATURE RESERVE

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

**When:** *8:30am-6pm*

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



Proof that drunk men are fascinating

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

### MT. FABER

**Way to Go:** *Habor Front MRT*

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

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

Across from Sentosa, Mt Faber offers

**Way to Go:** *Raffles Place /Clarke Quay MRT*

Formerly the heart of Singapore, now a district of restaurants, bars, and renovated warehouses. Singapore's symbol of tourism, the Merlion, a half-lion, half-fish, water-spouting statue, is at the mouth of the river. Along the

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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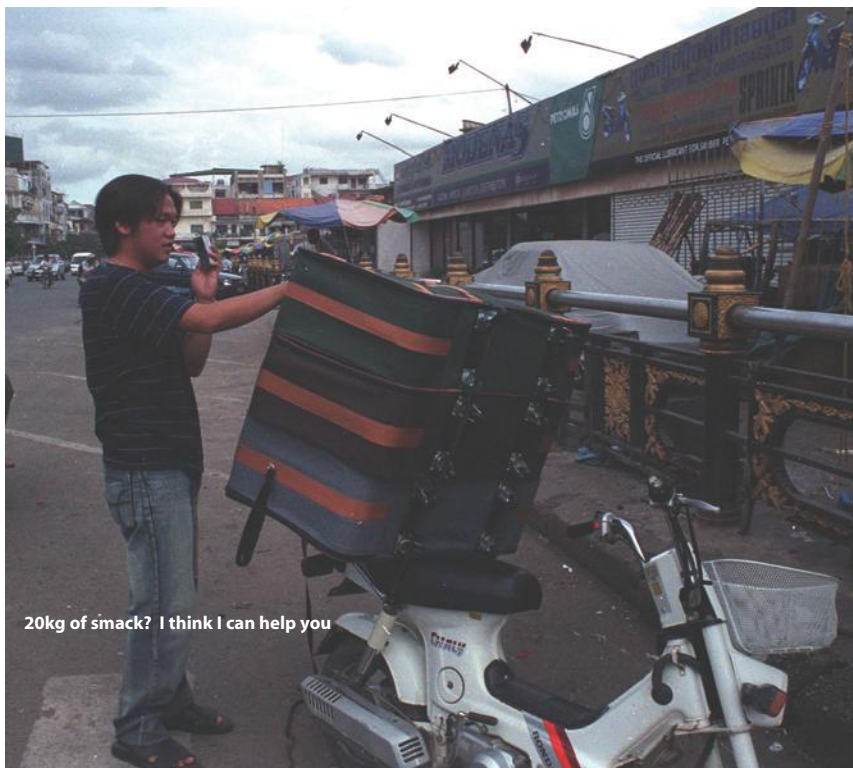




# PHNOM PENH CRAZY TOWN



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.



20kg of smack? I think I can help you

## 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 TEMPLE CENTRAL

**S**iem Reap means “Siam Vanquished” and was the administrative and spiritual centre of the bloodthirsty Khmer Empire, which rivaled the Roman in size before it, somewhat mysteriously, crumbled. The ruins are what remain of a large city. Angkor Wat is the big centerpiece here, and is a tribute to what unopposed fascism can achieve with the benefit of slave labour. This is one of the few tourist attractions that is not overrated. Six km from the temples, the town is relatively quiet and quaint.



## PLACES TO CRASH:

\$3-5 rooms are scattered all over town. Along Highway 6 west of the river **Jasmine**, **Hello**, and the western-owned **Earthwalkers** are all good choices. On the same road on the other side of town take a look at **Skyway** or **Peace of Angkor Villa**. Wat Bo Road offers some old stand-bys in **Mahogany** and **Mom's** and the new **Two Dragons** (see box). The **Old Market** area is the center of nightlife. The guesthouses here tend to be mid-range. Check out the new **Ivy**, **Molly Malone's**, or the **Mandalay**. A short walk from the Old Market, the **Ivy 2** guesthouse has budget fan rooms as does the **Garden Village** and **Golden Temple Villa**. A step up is the **Red Piano**. There is no shortage of upper end accommodation – new hotels are springing up constantly. Hint: The kickback system for moto and taxi drivers is well established – don't bother fighting it, 'cause you won't change a damn thing.

## DAYTRIPPING:

Okay, at \$20 for a day, \$40 for three and \$60 for the week, the temples may seem a bit like a trip to Disneyland, but a week of living it up in Siem Reap and Angkor is cheaper than Bangkok, and the temples are well worth it. You can hire a motodop to take you around Angkor for \$6-8 per day. Other options include a car with driver (about \$20 a day) or a motorcycle-

drawn rickshaw for about \$10/day. Guides can set you back another \$20-25 a day. They can be arranged through a tour agency, your guesthouse, or stop by the **Angkor Tour Guide Association** opposite the Grand Hotel.

## DAYTRIPPING BEYOND THE TEMPLES:

Go see the river carvings and take a jungle walk at **Kbal Spean**, the sacred **Phnom Kulen** with the less-than-sacred, \$20 foreigner admission fee. Or visit the floating village of **Chong Khneas** on the Tonle Sap Lake — gorgeous. The more adventurous can visit temples further afield such as **Beng Mealea** and **Koh Ker**. Trips further away can get expensive. Also worth an hour or two of your time is the **Landmine Museum**. All the moto drivers know it.

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

Most of the visitors go to “Pub Street” which includes the **Angkor What? Bar**, **Easy Speaking**, **Temple**, **Brodie's**, and **Red Piano**, among others. In the neighborhood is the **Ivy** (good food and music, too), the **Laundry Music Bar** (late nights), **Molly Malone's** (Irish bar), and the **Linga Bar** (a gay bar). A few blocks away on **Sivatha**, across from the E-cafe is the **Dead Fish Tower**, a large relaxing place.

## FEEDING TIME:

If you want to go “authentic, man” try the street stalls along **Sivatha Street** or the east side of the river just south of Highway 6. There are also numerous hole-in-the-wall Khmer rice and noodle shops all over town. Hygiene is an issue with many of these places. The bulk of proper restaurants are clustered in the **Psah Chas** (Old Market) area. Options include the **Ivy** (Western), **Soup Dragon** (Vietnamese-Asian), **Easy Speaking** (Asian, Western), **Tandoor** (Indian), and **Blue Pumpkin** (breakfast/lunch/bakery). Along **Sivatha Street** are scores of restaurants including the **Dead Fish Tower** (Thai) and **Tell Restaurant** (Western, Asian). In Wat Bo Village try the **Two Dragons** (Thai-Asian).

## WAY TO GO:

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

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

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

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

## Enter the TwoDragons

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





# VIENTIANE

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

## NIGHTRIPPING:

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

# VANG VIENG

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

# LUANG PRABANG



his town, at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers, is usually a few day's stop for travellers going south. The town has World Heritage status since it's loaded with history. Ancient Buddha-bedecked caves and colonial shopfronts, all dropped in the middle of beautiful, dirt-poor hills give the place a gallery-like feel. High marks go to the waterfall, the coffee and the abundance of good and cheap French and Lao food.

## PLACES TO CRASH

In Ban Wat That area, the best guest house is **Vanvisa**, a family-run house with a traditional Lao-style building out the back for US\$6-10. Not far behind is the **Hoxieng**, which is the same price. Nearby, the **Tanoy** is run by a nice lady and her eccentric, rather flirtatious daughter. Rooms for US\$4-7. Along the Mekong there are a clutch of guesthouses north of the palace, **Chaliny** on Souvannabanglang Rd has shiny wooden floors and views over the river for US\$5-8. Along Khem Khong Rd, the **View Khem Khong** (US\$6), **Boungnasouk** (US\$8) and **Bounthieng** (US\$4-8) are all worth a look, as is the **Mekong GH**. To find the **Phonethavy GH**, turn right just after Phousy Hotel and the school and walk 100m, excellent budget rooms, and it's followed by **Kounsavan GH**, with small but clean rooms. Further on

the right is **Chaleunsouk GH**, where they speak French. On Wisunalat Rd is the best guest house in all Luang Prabang - the **Mano**, with three-star rooms for less than US\$10. A bit of a walk from town, but worth it for the luxury.

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

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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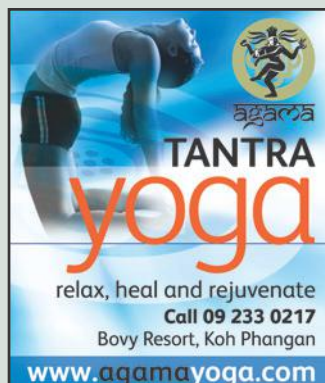
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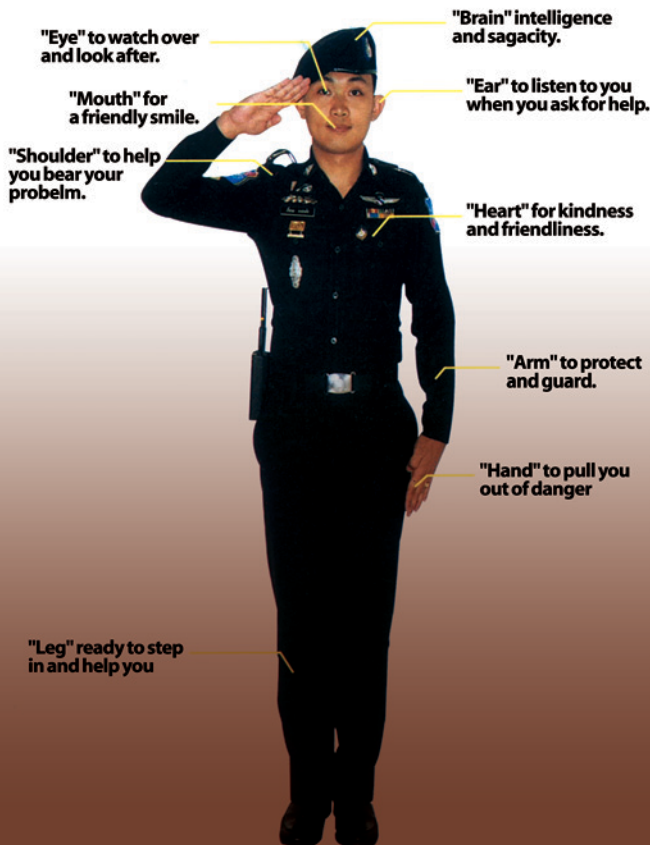


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# Your Friendliness



## At Your Service

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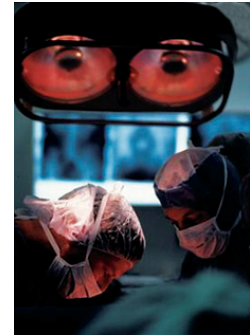
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## CAMBODIAN DOUBLE FEATURE

The country's far eastern province of Rattanakiri is home to a river that was the source of inspiration for the waterway in *Apocalypse Now*, as well as many tribal villages, and treks that cross over the Ho Chi Minh Trail. **Jim Algie** goes along for the ride. He also delves into the subject of "pro-poor tourism" discussed at the recent Mekong Tourism Forum in Siem Reap, and how a French NGO is trying to find new careers in tourism for the kids who scavenge at Phnom Penh's garbage dump.

## RED ARMY OF TRAVELLERS

Young Chinese urbanites are shunning package-deal tours in favour of shouldering a backpack, clutching a two-day train ticket, and heading into China's diverse hinterlands seeking adventure, culture and traditions paved over by the concrete jungle, writes **David Fullbrook**.

## SEX ON THE ROAD

At home sex may be a bit more of a taboo topic, but on the road it's the hottest. Almost every conversation **Dolores Banerd** had with fellow travelers in Thailand was hormonally saturated. One Farang even takes her on a misguided tour of a few red-light bars in Hua Hin.

## BUDDHIST PILGRIMMAGE

The Siddharta Highway, completed in 1970, is a prodigious feat of engineering, snaking its way over 188 km of rugged terrain from Pokhara, the trekking centre for the Annapurna Range of the Himalayas. **Ron Emmons** takes a bus across this perilous route on a pilgrimage to visit the Buddha's birthplace in Nepal.



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