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August 2005

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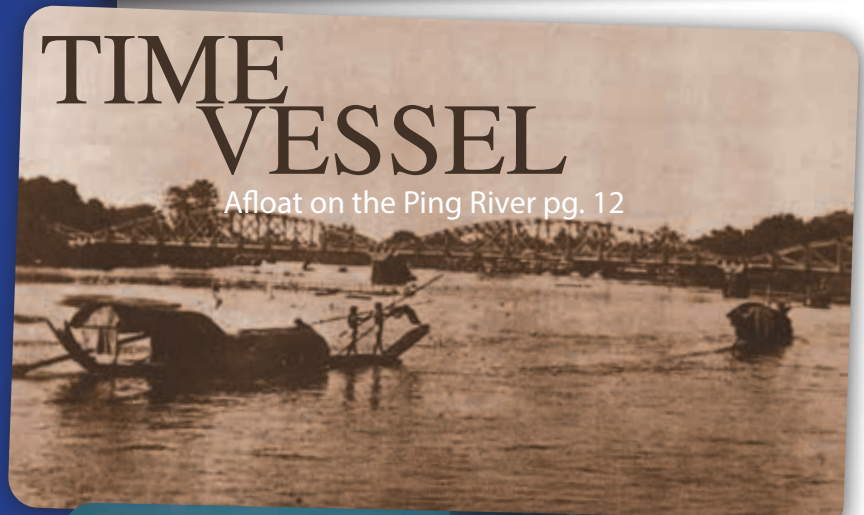
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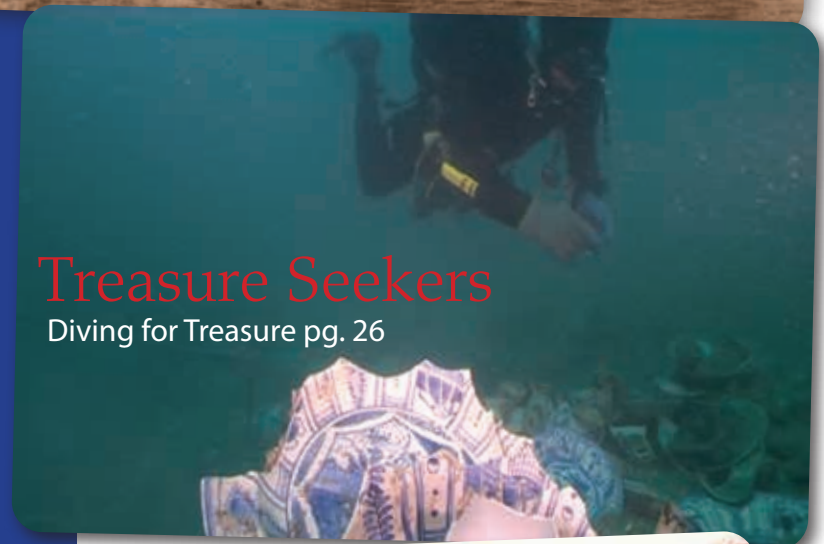
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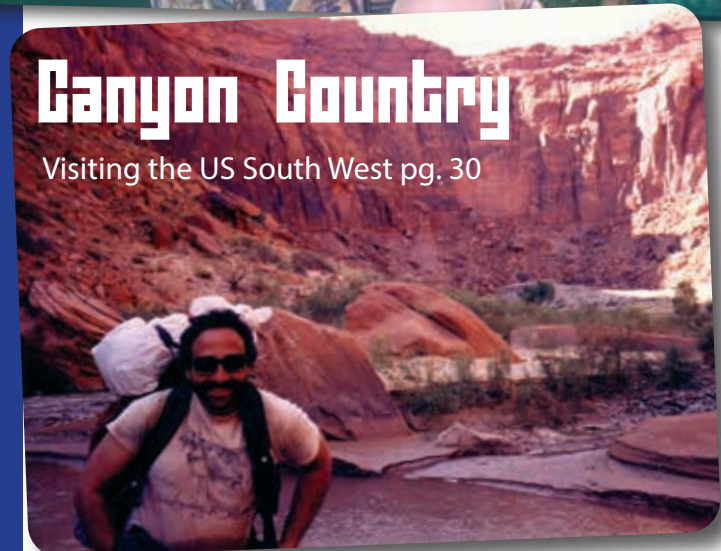
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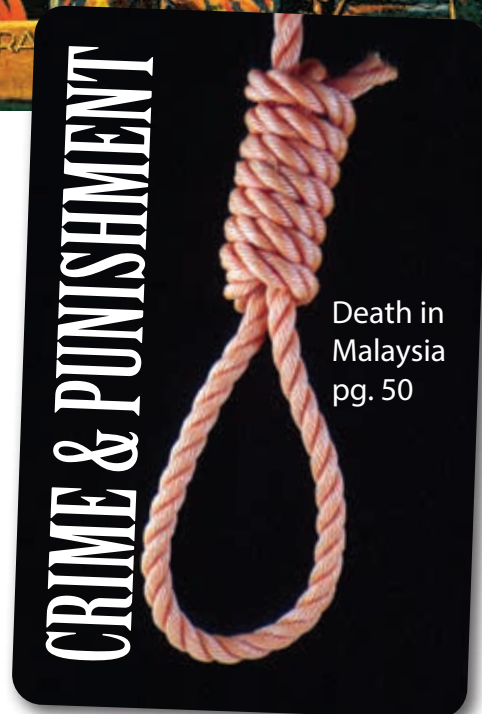
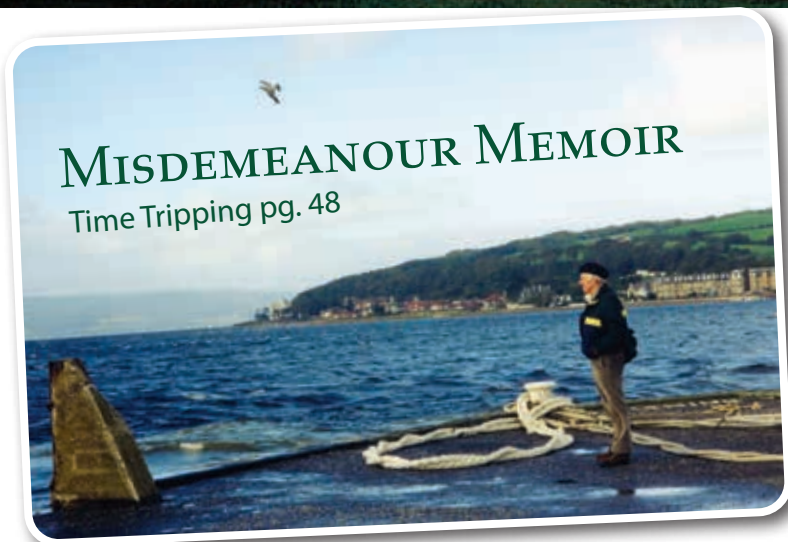
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# From the Editors

Welcome to the sultry month of August and Farang Untamed Travel's America Special. Now, you may ask yourself why we're doing a special on the US when we're a travel magazine based in Thailand. The fact is that no matter where you grew up in the on this planet, or where you live now, the world's last remaining superpower has an ongoing – and some would argue growing – influence on your life. George Bush may carry the title of "Leader of the Free World", but we, unfairly, don't get to vote for (or preferably against) him. And we can only look on helplessly from the sidelines waiting vainly for the impeachment proceedings to get underway.

Most of the world's popular media originates from the US and though it is generally very inward looking, sometimes it takes an outsider to see things as they are, a sentiment echoed by travellers everywhere. Inside this issue, you'll find stories from various perspectives. Tom Vater, from Britain and Germany, gives us the European view via a biting photo essay. We'll take a trip down memory lane with Hunter S. Thompson from those who knew and/or admired the recently deceased Granddad of Gonzo. In a nod to America's magnificent landscape, take a trip through the US southwest with Ken Silver. Rafael Frankel, a native of California now living in Israel has a look at America's closest ally in the Middle East. And offering the rags to riches view from the mean streets of LA, to the shopping malls of Bangkok Gangsta Rap Granddad Ice T sits down with Chief Editor Jim Algie and hoes in with a bunch of opinions on free speech, politics, and how his brand of music got started.

Closer to home we have a look at hangings in Malaysia, Tibet through the eyes of one hundred years of writers and filmmakers and what's happening on tsunami-ravaged Koh Phi Phi. Plus there are all your favourite regulars; Our Thai woman abroad, Aroon, looks up the kilts of Scotland; The Stalker, our outspoken woman of carnal leisure rounds up the sexiest travel destinations using the annual Durex survey as her tour guide; we herald the return of the much-mourned Bartripping column, and as usual the hefty listings sections offering up-to-date information on where to be and how to be it all around Southeast Asia, weighs in at the back half of the magazine.

So whether you're a citizen of the world's richest and third most populous nation on earth or maybe you'd just like to know more about what makes the US tick, read on and let us take you on a journey around the globe and back.



Daniel Cooper



Cameron Cooper



Jim Algie





# MAIN EVENTS August Thailand, America, Japan

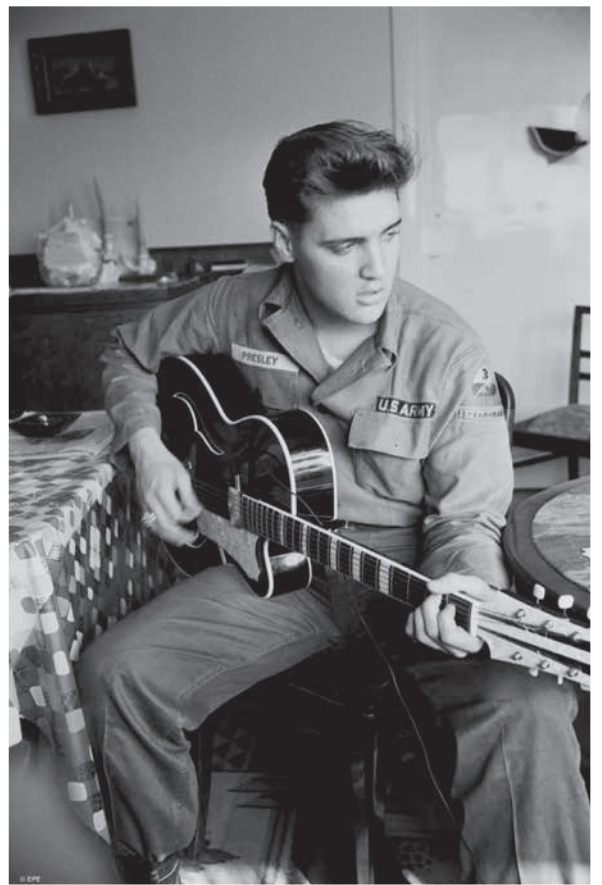
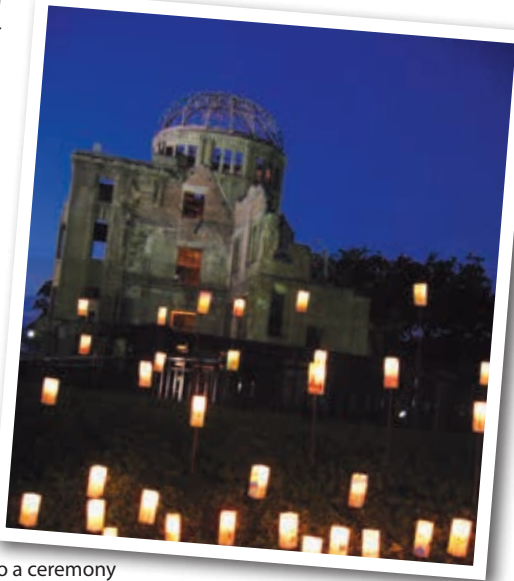


## REGAL MATRON

A wise and age-old Jewish proverb has it that "God couldn't be everywhere, so he invented mothers." And all over the world, from time immemorial, the mother figure has remained omnipotent. In Thailand, moms get their just desserts – well, actually just a free meal, some flowers and gratitude, but that's usually enough for these selfless martyrs – on August 12, which is also the birthday of Her Majesty the Queen. As one of the country's foremost matrons of the arts, it is fitting that HM the King paid homage to her with the painting pictured. In the evening, make a beeline for Sanam Luang to get bedazzled by some pyrotechnic displays (known in Thai as dok mai fai, or "fire flowers") and jamborees of song and dance.

## DAY FOR THE DEAD

All the Japanese who lost their lives when the atomic bomb was dropped on August 6 are commemorated in a solemn and colourful event called the Lantern Floating Memorial Peace Ceremony. In the evening, thousands of paper lanterns – inscribed with personal messages for the souls of the dead and prayers for world peace – are floated down the Motoyasu River, which wends its way through Hiroshima. It's also possible to purchase a lantern in front of the bombed-out Atomic Dome (pictured). At the time the bomb was dropped at 8:45am, some 60 years ago, a moment of silence is observed all across Japan. In Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park, there is also a ceremony beginning at 8am, where the country's prime minister and other officials call for nuclear disarmament across the world. To absorb some of the shock-waves of the blast that signaled Japan's surrender, take a look at the park's Atomic Bomb Museum.



## AMAZING GRACELAND

Long before he became a mainstream icon, Elvis Presley was one of the most rebellious iconoclasts of 20<sup>th</sup> century music. In mixing together a previously unheard combination of black, rhythm and blues and white, hillbilly hollers into what became rock 'n' roll, his sound was demonised by Christians back then as the "devil's music". They also organised public burnings of his records. When he appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show, the cameraman was only allowed to shoot him from the waist up because the sexy gyrations that earned him the nickname "Elvis the Pelvis" were deemed "too lewd" for public consumption. After going to rot in Hollywood and Vegas, Elvis died at the age of 42 on August 16, 1977 while sitting on the crapper with a pharmacy worth of drugs polluting his bloodstream. To salute his memory fans congregate by the thousands during "Elvis Week" from August 8 to 16. An annual event, the tribute showcases live performances, "Gospel Brunches," and a 50s-style "Elvis Dance Party" around Graceland in Memphis, Tennessee. Check out the incredible [www.elvis.com](http://www.elvis.com) for a full rundown of events, free e-cards, and other celebrations at Graceland throughout the year.

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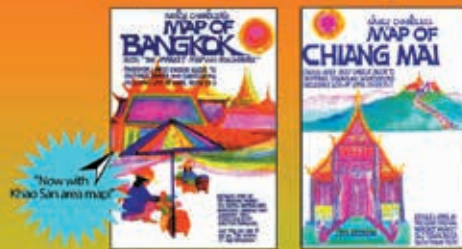
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### Woman-Eater Shot

A woman-eating leopard in Pakistan was shot and killed after being captured by police. The leopard has been blamed for six deaths, all women, in a single month in the nation's mountainous north. The women had been killed while collecting wood or animal fodder in the forest. The animal was shot after being captured at the site of its last kill when it appeared about to escape.

### Tough Time for Women

Pakistan has long had a reputation for violence against women but the latest outrage has even caught the attention of its president Mr Pervez Musharraf, who has condemned the affair. The woman in question, separated from her husband, had returned to his family's home to see her daughter but her father-in-law abducted her and that night took her outside the village and cut off her feet, assisted by her husband, brother-in-law and two other men, as punishment for alleged promiscuity. "It is a shameful act of cruelty against a woman and we are taking it seriously," said Talat Ali, a senior police official. "Those who have carried out this crime will not be spared." The incident occurred in Punjab province where in 2002 a woman was gang-raped on the orders of a village council.

### Guns in Schools

Teachers in Thailand's troubled deep South have been permitted to carry guns as a self-protection measure. "We have granted special rights for teachers to carry guns," said deputy education minister Rung Kaewdaeng last month. "They need guns. This is now a necessity as many people have survived attacks because they shot back at the attackers." The southern provinces of Yala, Pattani, Songkla and Narathiwat have been torn by violence since January 2004. Most of the violence in the mainly Muslim provinces has been directed against symbols of the Buddhist national establishment. Deputy Minister Rung added that 2,000 teachers have already requested guns.

### Engaged to the Phone

A recent poll in the city-state of Singapore has revealed that its citizens are so enthusiastic (or relaxed?) about mobile phone usage that 60% talk on them even while defecating. "What's the big deal? It's not as if the other party can smell your stink," says businesswoman Wileen Chang. The poll also indicates that most phone users would prefer to lose their purse or identity card than their phone.

### Ban on Nudity

They say sex sells and as China rapidly transforms from an oppressive communist regime to an oppressive commercial nation, businesspeople have been exploiting the body beautiful for a fast buck, prompting the General Administration for Industry and Commerce (GAIC) to slap a ban on nudity in promotions. The ban is to challenge the use of nudity or near nudity in advertising. In April a Japanese restaurant in the southern city of Kunming was reprimanded for offering meals served on a nude woman – the "feast on a beauty" promotion. The GAIC was also concerned about the use of nude models in shops. "Such activities are in violation of common decency and humiliate the human being," the GAIC said in a statement.

### No Beauties in Thailand

A survey conducted by Dove, a popular cosmetics brand, has revealed that only 1% of Thai women consider themselves beautiful and 63% would consider plastic surgery. The study, Asian Women's Attitudes Towards Self-Esteem, Body Image and Media Portrayal, was carried out in 10 countries and questioned 2,100 women. 30% of Thai women expressed an interest in cosmetic surgery but this figure jumped to 63% if the surgery was offered free, the highest number of any nation surveyed. Conversely, only 59% of Thai women were satisfied with their appearance. Of course, the fact that only 1% of Thai women consider themselves beautiful, as opposed to the 3% average, could also indicate that Thai women are unusually modest.

### Witchdoctor Arrested

An ex-monk mystic was arrested in Thailand last month for cheating women out of money and forcing them to give him sexual favours. Harn Raksajit, 45, also known as Nane Ae, was arrested and imprisoned ten years ago while still a monk, for roasting a still-born baby in order to summon a powerful ghost. Until recently Harn, whose body is covered in allegedly magical tattoos, was sought out by women in order to make themselves more sexually attractive. The shaman reportedly extorted hundreds of dollars from his customers and had sex with them during animist rituals. Assets seized from his estate included skulls, Buddhist and Hindu statues, a Mercedes Benz, wax dolls, Viagra, women's underwear and a collection of bankbooks under various names.

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It's 7pm at Carlito's Bar and Martin starts off the nightly Hi Phi Phi meeting. "Who's new here?" he asks. Out of the 80 people gathered on the beach, about 20 hands go up. "Great. Welcome. Okay, let me run through the jobs for tomorrow – we need five people for gardening and greenery, 15 people to pick up debris, an IT person, and eight people for the recycling programme. We need people to paint at a guesthouse. If you're a scuba diver, contact the dive camp."

Dion, a 33-year-old American, came here a few weeks after the tsunami struck Koh Phi Phi. His intention was to stay for three and a half weeks and do what he could to help out. Now, six months later, he is returning home to Minnesota. What made him stay all this time and sacrifice his job in the States, leave behind family, friends, and obligations, change his plane ticket nine times, and go for visa runs every month? After spending a few minutes talking to him, I get it. The energy of the volunteers here is unbelievable. The people who've been here for two months, two weeks, or just two days are all fully committed to helping the Thai people.

I'm staying at Jong's Guesthouse. They opened up again recently and as I'm entering the place, I'm stepping over volunteers who are paving the front steps. Everyone says hello, smiles, and makes eye contact. The manager of the guesthouse, Kay, guides me upstairs. "Downstairs not yet finished," she says. "No air-con. Only fan." For Bt300 a night I have my own room, attached bathroom, and an ocean view. "Wow, this place is nice," I say. She beams. "The volunteers help me so much."

The effects of the tsunami are still evident. Buildings are in various stages of reconstruction; concrete blocks and debris are strewn over empty lots. These are the images that most people know from watching the news or reading the paper. What most people don't realise, however, is that Koh Phi Phi is a fully functioning island. There are foot massages, restaurants with movie nights, shops selling clothes, jewelry, CDs, souvenirs. There's high-speed Internet access, guesthouses, bungalows, five-star hotels, activities like snorkeling, rock climbing, diving, island tours, and bars with fire shows, live music and parties. But with tourism down 90 percent, the Thais are struggling to make a living.

Hi Phi Phi is the only aid organisation on the island. Started on Jan. 1, 2005 by Emiel Kok, a Dutch expat on the island, the organisation is currently comprised of 95 Thai staff and about 80 volunteers (mostly hailing from the UK, Canada, and the US, respectively.) The Thais mainly work on basic infrastructure projects like repairing streets and wells; they are paid by donations to Hi Phi Phi. But the volunteers take on shorter term projects, depending on their skills. Those who have stayed on often take up roles as team leaders.

Emma, a 21-year-old from the UK, has been here since February. "At first there was nothing open. It was just cleaning up debris and sand, clearing the beach. You couldn't even walk a complete circuit around the island without climbing over piles of rubbish." Her current project is at October Guest House, where 20 volunteers are helping to repair it. The work is exhausting, but she's grateful for the fresh energy that new recruits bring. "They come up to me and say, 'I'm here for 3 weeks.' What can I do?"

In just one week, I met volunteers from Italy, Japan, Holland, Spain, Korea, Iran, and Germany, their professions ranging from electricians, paramedics, and carpenters to students, teachers, and artists. They are among the 2,000 volunteers who have visited Koh Phi Phi since the tsunami, at their own cost, and knowing no one, with varying degrees of fluency in English. As volunteers, they help rebuild the homes and businesses of locals and expats who have lost so much. As tourists, they spend money on accommodations, meals, and souvenirs to generate much-needed income for the locals.

So Hi Phi Phi's catchphrase, "Return to Paradise" is indeed a double entendre.

For more information on the project, check out [www.hiphippi.com](http://www.hiphippi.com)

# Return to Paradise

Tammy Hayano nails down some interviews with volunteer relief workers helping to rebuild Koh Phi Phi.







Aroon Thaewchatturat heads off to Scotland to steal food from squirrels and find out what the men have under their kilts.

# Frozen Highlands

A few years ago I was invited to give a talk at a conference in Scotland. At first I was worried about the visa process at the British Embassy, which has a tough reputation for turning down visa applications, particularly those of Thai ladies.

But I went to the embassy, my mind at full strength, and feeling fearless. My interviewer turned out to be an English gentleman with a white beard, white hair and a gentle manner. I replied to a series of questions, what job was I doing, why did I want to go to the UK, where would I stay and how long would I be there? After that he glanced at the invitation letter and my bank account statement (there was only a few baht in it), and authorised my visa. Wow! That was quick. Remind me not to slag off the English for the next few paragraphs.

While I wanted to be a patriotic passenger by using my national airline, I found it much too expensive and settled for Air Lanka. Customs at Heathrow let me into the country after just a few questions. At the King's Cross Station, the speaker announcements were so incredibly loud I could not understand a single word. It was tougher finding the right train than waiting for my British visa.

Autumn in London was fine but Edinburgh was harsher. In a campsite near Edinburgh (it was September and the organisers expected students from tropical countries to sleep outside), I shared a tent with a Croatian girl; it rained for six days and six nights.

My tent mate got drunk every night, but nevertheless managed to find her way back. She told me the reason she drank was because, "I don't know what to do with my life".

I felt kind of similar, but knew I wanted to go back to sunshine land. Every morning I sprang to my frozen feet and was the first one in the toilet, because it had an electric heater.

The sun came when we didn't need it any longer as we moved to the highlands and stayed in a hostel. I found it peculiar that with or without the sun, the guards at Edinburgh Castle always wore a short traditional skirt. They lifted their knees high up when they marched around. I wondered what was underneath the skirt. I got the answer after we went up north and were invited to a party, where we learned a Scottish dance and followed the instructor, who bent down and opened his kilt. Everybody went "wow". Now I know the real secret behind the Loch Ness Monster.

After having been entertained by Scottish dances and fish & chips, I still missed my fish and chili paste. But I'd brought an emergency ration. There were some other Lao and Indonesian people in the group I was traveling with who also enjoyed fish-and-chili paste sandwiches. We were the hot-chili 'heads' and when we had lunch outdoors we always sought out a shady spot, just as we do at home. While we were enjoying our chili, leaning against a shop wall, the owner opened the door and told us to fuck off. But we hadn't planned to rob him as we knew that he didn't sell chili. Luckily we understood what he said as we were by now used to the Scottish accent, so we left.

I went to the Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh where the picking of fruit was forbidden. A friend from Slovakia showed us the edible berries that grew there – free fruit, what a bonus. So we tried it. As we were

about to empty the whole tree, our guide said politely, "You're not supposed to do that." Anyway, we just carried on tasting various kinds of fruit. We were hungry and realised we were stealing food from the squirrels, but the British food was not good enough to eat.

Apart from the squirrels, there were not many animals up in the highlands – the monster from Loch Ness hadn't reared his ugly head again it was probably scared of getting shot at like all the deer. The Scottish keep deer heads hanging on their walls and told us that the deer breed so fast they have to get rid of them because they destroy the trees.

I wish they could breed them at the same speed in my country, as bush meat is a favourite dish in Thailand. In the end I never did get a chance to taste a highland deer. I had to fly back to the land of chili paste and sunshine, where the only person who tells me to fuck off is my Farang husband.





# TIME VESSEL

Dawn breaks slowly over Chiang Mai. A girl dressed in a sarong stands knee-deep in the river washing her long hair as her mother cleans plates. On the opposite bank a lone fisherman casts a line into the gentle current. He squats and waits. The groan of early-morning traffic can be heard on the bridge overhead. Below, the saffron reflections of monks' robes shimmer on the water. A perfect time of day to go canoeing.

To avoid the midday heat, go either at dawn or two hours before sunset. You will only need to put on a T-shirt and shorts and perhaps some sun-block, and your children will love it too. The gentle current ensures that novices will not be out of their depth. There are two clubs on the banks of the maenam ping (literally: Mother-Water Ping) that rent canoes cheaply to visitors. One is Chiang Mai Canoe Club Nakorping, set just south of Wat Faham; the other is Canoe Lanna, further south on the west bank inside Kavila Park. In fact you cannot paddle any further south than Kavila Park because

of a dam or 'shelf' on the river. Therefore we shall begin at that point and paddle northwards. You should always begin by paddling against the current anyway, because then you get the benefit of the downstream current when your arms and shoulders are tired.

As you set off from Kavila Park you will first pass Wat Chaimongkol on the other side of the river. With stairs descending into the water, this temple resembles a ghat on the River Ganges. Children can often be seen feeding ducks and geese at this point and the temple grounds are cooled with the ample shade of an enormous rain tree. It is from here that most of the scorpion-tail boat tours set off. Next door to Wat Chaimongkol you can see where the new luxury hotel, Chiang Mai Chedi, is currently being built on the site of what used to be the British consulate.

The River Ping is no more than 50 metres wide. Nowadays, during the rainy season, there is a stronger current, in which case you should save your energy by keeping to the inside lane as you

Colin Hinshelwood floats back in time as he canoes down Chiang Mai's historic jugular vein. Black and white photos courtesy of Wat Ket Museum.



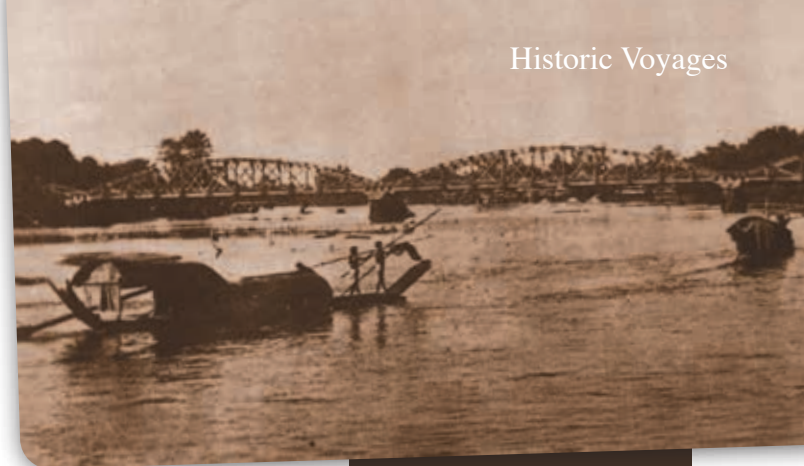


cut your way through the city. Try to maintain a smooth circular stroke; conserve your strength and move your body to the rhythm of the paddle – don't try to keep your back straight or you'll strain it. The first bridge you pass under is the metal expanse of New Bridge. (Watch out for fishing lines.) The impressive River Bar sits on the west bank and will probably be playing some music for you to paddle along to if you're passing around sunset. This is the busy section of Chiang Mai and if it's rush hour you might well find yourself overtaking the traffic on the road alongside you. Four hundred metres further on from New Bridge and on your right you'll see an imposing white church. This is the Chiang Mai First Church, founded by the legendary Dr Daniel McGilvary. Representing the American Presbyterian Church, Dr McGilvary was invited to Chiang Mai in 1867 by Prince Kawilorot who thought the good doctor might like to visit "the people of Laos," as the Lanna folk were regarded in those days. So McGilvary, his wife, children and entourage set off from Nakorn Sawan (where the River Ping meets the Chao Phraya) and traveled through malaria-infested jungle by steamboat, canoe, and pole-boat to reach Chiang Mai. The journey took 13 weeks. Naturally, the arrival of this tall, stern missionary with flowing white beard and a Bible in hand caused quite a stir. Daniel McGilvary, just like many other missionaries and expats in Chiang Mai ever since, is buried in the Chiang Mai Foreign Cemetery, just a kilometer and a bit further downriver.

Passing under Nawarat Bridge you immediately come upon the popular nightclubs and restaurants of the east bank – the Riverside, the Good View, the Fillmore Grill, the Gallery and the Brasserie. How much more exotic they appear from the middle of the river as opposed to the drab exteriors you see from the roadside.

One hundred years ago this strip of the River Ping was known as baan chang (Elephant Port). Traders from as far as China would be unloading silks, tobacco, fruit and teakwood at this junction. It is said that there was often so much timber on the river that 19th century residents could walk across from one side to the other on the flotilla of logs. Warorot Market first opened at this time, Chinese merchants being the first to capitalise on the Golden Age of Chiang Mai commerce with displays of foreign goods, exotic fruits and vegetables. You will next pass under a footpath known as Chansom Bridge. In fact this was the first bridge built over the river in Chiang Mai and its designer was another American missionary, a Dr Cheek. This teak bridge was erected in the 1890s and to impress the local prince, Chao Inthawichayanon, a grand opening was held where Dr Cheek personally led three elephants across the bridge to prove its strength. Imagine the scenes on the River Ping and along its banks 100 years ago in the days when no other transport linked Chiang Mai to the outside world. Remember that it was not until the 1920s that the railway opened in this city and until then all trade was done by river. Picture yourself as a Chinese junk boatsman, sailing down from Yunnan with a booty of opium and silk; or as a Sikh trader arriving after a three-month boat journey from Bangkok. Think how wild and innocent Chiang Mai must have appeared back then – bare-breasted women smoking cheroots as they gut fish; husbands chewing betel nut as they tended their bamboo fish traps. Traders on the look out for bandits hiding in the reeds along the riverbank. Bandits on the look out for tigers. Nowadays there is little if any traffic on the river. Children swim in the shallow banks, little old men cast fishing lines and karaoke melodies filter through the riparian air in the evening.

After passing under Rama IX Bridge you'll see Wat Faham on the east bank and the other canoe club. It should have taken you 30 to 40 minutes to reach this point. If your arms are already tired or the sun is setting it's time to turn back. In reality, you might find that it's easier to canoe the river by doing it in two installments: firstly, from Kavila Park to Wat Faham; and then another day, start from Canoe Club Nakornping and paddle north under the Superhighway into nature. This second route is much quieter and ideal if you feel the need to breathe green freshness. Leaving the city behind, you sail past beautiful teak mansions with manicured gardens: one is a Royal household, one used to belong to a notorious drug warlord, and another belongs to Chiang Mai's most famous singer. The river quickly becomes narrower and winds its way through rice



“One hundred years ago this strip of the River Ping was known as baan chang (Elephant Port). Traders from as far as China would be unloading silks, tobacco, fruit and teakwood at this junction.”

paddies, scarecrows, bamboo shacks and sleeping dogs. It might be easier to believe that you are now in the Congo or a tributary of the Amazons, it's so lush. You pass under bamboo trees and past old fish traps and marshy fields. Check your watch – you've probably lost track of time. About one hour (3-4 km) upstream from Wat Faham and the river is usually blocked by another step, one that locals often employ for netting fish. This is always a good point to think about turning back even if the dam is not in use. Remember that you will need your strength for the return journey even though it is downriver. Keep your eyes peeled for makeshift cafes and bamboo store-owners who will gladly come down to the bank to serve you a refreshment. As you weave your way back into the city along the serpentine banks, perhaps for the first time you'll realise just how tropical Chiang Mai truly is or how tropical it used to be.

Canoe Lanna  
Kavila Park  
Chiang Mai–Lamphun Road  
(Tel: 09-700-2122)  
Open: Tue – Sun,  
16.00 – 19.00  
(Rent one-man and two-man canoes for only 50 baht)

Chiang Mai Canoe Club  
Nakornping  
Inside Wat Faham  
Chareoenraj Road  
(No active telephone number)  
Open: Mon – Fri,  
16.00 – 19.00  
Sat – Sun,  
08 – 10.00, 16.00 – 19.00  
(Rent one-man and two-man canoes for 100 baht)







Extreme and bizarre religious ideas are so commonplace in American history that it is difficult to speak of them as fringe at all. To speak of fringe implies a mainstream, but in terms of numbers, perhaps the largest component of the religious spectrum in contemporary America remains what it has been since colonial times: a fundamentalist evangelism with powerful millenarian strands.  
-Phillip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs*

# LAND OF PLENTY

Tom Vater captures the good, the bad, and the obesity of America, while scalping Hooters' waitresses with his view-finder, during a month-long stint in a rented Japanese car.

In Texas, Osama Bin Laden remains a bogeyman, reaching into the Texans' subconscious via bill boards and far right wing Christian radio.



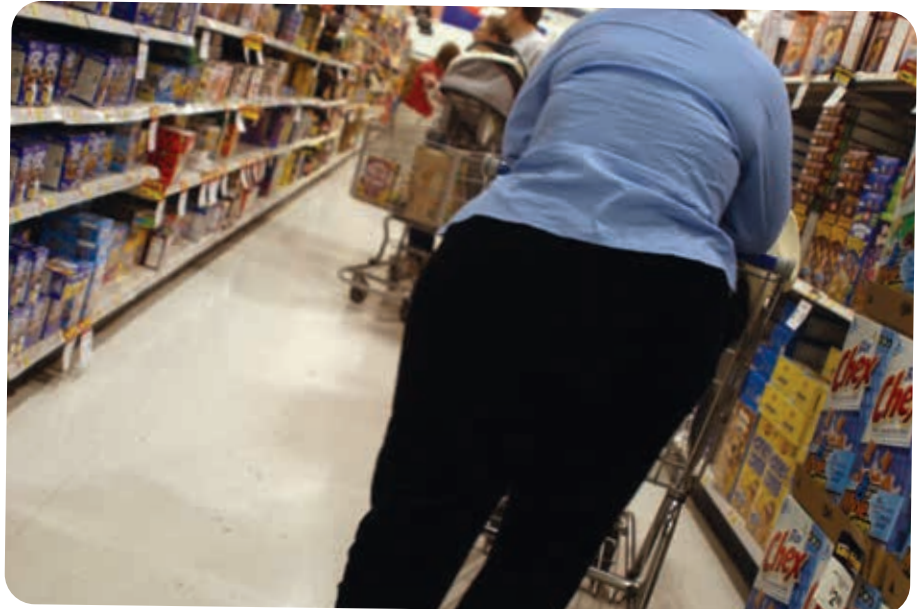




While young women are quite happy to expose themselves at every Mardi Gras celebration I witnessed, a rampant conservative putianism really rules the US value system, which the country continues to export round the globe. The far right, Christian pro-lifers are at the bottom of the moral chain, scooping up the weak and helpless, sowing hate and division in US society.

Many Americans are fat. Obesity is the most visible disability in the USA and it affects the poor more than any other group. Portions in restaurants and fast food outlets are enormous, beef in supermarkets is cheap and everyone always drives.

Thankfully, supermarket aisles are as wide as small highways in Europe and there are few chances of collision amongst the traumatised overweight shoppers who endlessly cruise the miles of aisles.



Cars are everything in the US and without a car a man/woman is crippled. No wonder the country embarks on military follies in order to keep gasoline prices low.





Anything to fight for freedom. The USA is the most patriotic country I have ever visited and national pride can be purchased in pill form.

Lubbock Texas is home to the States' largest university campus and the birthplace of Buddy Holly. But the city doesn't have much going for it, other than the gun and knife show. The stuff of legends.



Hooters is a fast food franchise with a difference. All the waitresses have large breasts. Hooters have more than 200 outlets across the US and rumours tell of an imminent opening on Phuket. The silicone doctors will be working overtime.



Just outside LAX International Airport, sex shows, adult shops and churches line the roads, introducing the unsuspecting first time visitor to the USA to a visual orgy of conservative conformity and unbridled hedonism.







In order to buy a gun in a in this Texas supermarket, you need a phone bill that proves you have been at your current address for 90 days.

At Mardi Gras in Tampa's Ybor City, the girls let it all hang out and by the end of the night, fat girls cavort topless in the streets while the police fire tear gas into unruly crowds. Interracial tensions definitely run high and by midnight, black gangs and white gangs face each other off opposite sides of Main Street.



Americans have an obsession with health and reproductive issues and of course someone has noticed that there's money in it. Advertisements for vasectomies, colo-rectal treatments and even dialysis are common.





# PRICKLY BUSINESSES

**B**ack pain? I prescribe a course of pins. Allergies? Needles. Leaky bladder? Fix it with punctures. Headaches? Prick the patient. Menopause? Give 'em the sharp end. Skin rash? Turn him into a pincushion.

All the ailments listed above, and many others, have been treated by acupuncture. In case you're not familiar with the technique, a practitioner treats the patient by inserting fine needles into the body. It sounds crazy and it is. But then again, in Western medicine leeches

in which it is held by many Western doctors, is because of the peculiar theory about how it works.

The idea behind acupuncture and much of Chinese medicine is that illness, pain, and the rest are caused by blockages and imbalances of the flow of Qi (or ch'i), an invisible and undetectable polarities divided into yin and yang energy, that is, positive/negative, male/female, light/dark and... you get the picture. So if you've got a spotty liver, it's not from a bad diet or alcohol abuse, but an unbalance of Qi, caused by bad diet and alcohol abuse – sorry to get your hopes up. In humans, Qi flows through the body along 20 “meridians” (divided evenly into yin and yang) and that's how acupuncture points are divined. Twelve of the meridians correspond to organs. For example, the three yin channels of the foot begin at the foot and travel up the inner leg to the chest and flank, corresponding to spleen, liver and kidneys. However, with Qi theory, organs are viewed as systems, and thus there's the San Jiao or “triple heater” which is not represented by an organ. There are eight extra meridians which don't connect to systems but are along for the ride.

So that's the theory. In practice, once you've been diagnosed by a Chinese traditional medicine practitioner you may be prescribed a course of acupuncture. Today, the needles are hair-thin, made of surgical steel and are often wiggled, heated or fed an electrical signal to stimulate a response. Traditionally, acupuncture was inseparable from moxibustion, where dried mugwort is applied to the end of the needle (not the end poking into you) and left to smoulder and transmit heat into the flesh.

The thing everybody wants to know is does it work? Of course, like so much in life, one must take a balanced yin/yang view and say, “Well, it's a little more complicated than that.” In the West, devotees have claimed its effectiveness in treating cancer, AIDS and plenty of other serious conditions. In the medical community the view is not quite so positive.

Firstly, there is no empirical evidence for Qi and, in the West at least, it is not taken seriously.

Secondly, many of the critics of acupuncture claim that successful treatments are due to suggestion and the placebo effect. Advocates take the position that it is a valid therapy “because it works”. There are millions of patients who have been successfully treated; the trouble is that nobody knows how many treatments are unsuccessful. However, in 2004 a study was conducted by the University of Heidelberg to investigate acupuncture's effectiveness in treating postoperative nausea and vomiting using a retractable needle on control subjects – a newly developed instrument. Although the results showed no statistically significant difference the method has opened a new avenue of research. In 1997 the NIH issued a statement saying: There is sufficient evidence of acupuncture's value to expand its use into conventional medicine and to encourage further studies of its physiology and clinical value. and: The data in support of acupuncture are as strong as those for many accepted Western medical therapies.

The report goes on to say: The incidence of adverse effects is substantially lower than that of many drugs or other accepted medical procedures used for the same condition. For example, musculoskeletal conditions, such as fibromyalgia, myofascial pain, and tennis elbow... are conditions for which acupuncture may be beneficial. These painful conditions are often treated with, among other things, anti-inflammatory medications (aspirin, ibuprofen, etc.) or with steroid injections. Both medical interventions have a potential for deleterious side effects but are still widely used and are considered acceptable treatments.

But we still don't know how, or if, it works. Probably the most logical theory is that acupuncture therapy releases endorphins (drugs your body produces that make you feel good), while others argue neurotransmitters are released.

Whatever you think of acupuncture, at the end of the day, as long as the needles are clean and the practitioner is well-trained, the treatment carries very little risk and, if you're of a sceptical disposition, your biggest worry should be getting ripped off.



used to be at the forefront of medical science and are still used as a valuable therapy today. There has been much speculation about the efficacy of acupuncture in the West but in the Far East it has been used for thousands of years. Much of the controversy surrounding the use of acupuncture, and the disdain



# Sexy Summer Holidays



When Karen Findlay, aka "The Stalker," plans a sizzling summer vacation, romping possibilities are at the bell end of her itinerary.

A sociology professor of mine once described an island in the Pacific where the men are trained to service women. As young teens, the boys are rounded up and assigned 'mentors,' women in their 40s whose 'village duty' is to teach them the ways of pleasing a woman. After months of rigorous training, the boys are initiated into manhood and are sent out to seduce the female population with only one stipulation: If they take a girl's virginity, they must 'visit' her repeatedly until she has learned what true sexual pleasure is.

Unfortunately, I have lost my university notes (not to mention my virginity) and, with them, the name of this island. If I knew it, I'd be planning a summer vacation there. (OK, to be honest, if I knew the name of the island, I'd probably have moved there years ago and been preparing to become one of the village mentors in a few years.)

That not being an option – unless one of Farang Untamed Travel's readers knows this fantasy island's name – I've had to rely on other sources for suggestions on sexually active summer vacation destinations.

Now, just to be clear, I am not into singles cruises or the exotic S&M festivals that Europe hosts through the summer. Nor am I into go-go boys, or go-go girls for that matter, nor the men who keep them in business, which rules out most 'sin cities' in Asia (although I have toyed with the latter on occasion). I did a Club Med vacation once but knowing that flirting is part of the job description for its GOs somewhat diminished the thrill of getting hit on left and right. Picking a destination and then going online looking for potential 'dates' doesn't work for me either, although I was willing to pay for it on one occasion, only to be sorely disappointed. (Planning a trip to Nevada with a gay friend, we learned that while brothels are legal there, none cater to heterosexual women or gay men. The Little Chicken Ranch suggested we simply hire a freelancer off the Internet, but we wanted a line-up to choose from, where you could pick someone who appealed to you, knowing what they really looked like, online profiles being most unreliable.) Once I found a series of guidebooks for the salacious traveller. Unfortunately, there were only two books to the series, *Horny? San Francisco: A Sexy, Steamy, Downright Sleazy*

*Handbook to the City and Horny?* Los Angeles. Considering the odds of finding a hot hetero man in San Francisco and considering that LA is not exactly the dream destination for a woman with natural breasts, well, I bought neither.

Study my travelogue and you will find sand and sea equals sex, with Lonely Planet having proved an invaluable guide to bars where the pickings are generally good. A friend recently pointed out a new formula for tailoring hot holidays, however: The statistic-rich Durex Global Sex Survey ([www.durex.com](http://www.durex.com)).

Last year's survey, for example, claimed the British win hands down in turning on their partners, with an average of 22.5 minutes spent on foreplay. Having been around, so to speak, I must question their conclusion: any man that (a) needs to spend 22.5 minutes on foreplay and/or; (b) actually times foreplay, clearly needs a few lessons in my book. The Thais on the other hand win for least amount of time spent on foreplay, which I would suggest is because the men are lazy in bed and the women are, well, well-trained?

There was some good news, in the fact that boys are losing their virginity earlier at 16.5 years of age, giving us women hope they will have learned a few hot moves by the time they become eligible for our attentions around age 20. (Note: Icelanders start at 15; Brazilians, Kiwis, South Africans, and most north-western Europeans including Germans at 16.) If safer sex is important (as it should be), be cautious with Australians, Brazilians, Irish, Kiwis, South Africans and Scandinavians (over half admit being lenient with the rules). Note that Spaniards and Germans are the most into safer sex, and both came in at over 20 minutes in the foreplay survey.

To truly gauge your potential pull rate in any country, however, one must study the tables presented on 'sexiest features' and 'sexual indulgences'. In most Western countries, for example, having a sexy attitude, a nice bottom and/or nice eyes would seem to guarantee you a romp on arrival. If you are into porn or anything kinkier though, you'll want to crunch some numbers yourself. I'm not revealing my predilections here, but I will say Iceland has been flagged on my list of potential summer vacation spots. Bulgaria is looking interesting too.

Got a question for the Stalker? Mail her at [stalker@farangonline.com](mailto:stalker@farangonline.com)



## Experimental Publishing

Review by Daniel Cooper

Not content with publishing guidebooks covering every corner of the earth, from Antarctica to the Yucatan, plus The Gap Year Book, Travel Writing, Travel Photography, calendars, playing cards, puzzles, CDs, DVDs, novels, phrasebooks, guides for walkers, divers, cyclists, bushwalkers and birdwatchers, nobody should be surprised that Lonely Planet are pushing the envelope with The Lonely Planet Guide to Experimental Travel (Lonely Planet, 2005).

The guide isn't so much about information on where to go but how to go, in new and theoretically interesting ways. If you're not familiar with experimental travel, and most of us aren't, it's basically the idea of travelling in a new, unusual or random way. For example, experiment #3, "Alternating Travel," suggests exploring a town by walking out of your hotel/hostel/tent and turning right, then left, then right and so on. For "Barman's Knock" (number eight) you go into a bar and ask the barman his favourite place and what he drinks there. Go there, order that and repeat the exercise until you're legless. "Monopoly Travel" suggests using a Monopoly board of the city you're visiting as a map.

The book is a beautifully bound hardcover and is filled with surreal Victorian-style illustrations. After an explanation of each exercise there is a short essay, "laboratory results", from people who have actually done it. Probably the greatest benefit of the book is that many of the experiments can be done in your home town, giving dedicated travellers a 'fix' over the weekend.

Although it is an interesting diversion, the tone of the book is unnecessarily pompous, which probably stems from co-author Joël Henry, who founded Latourex, the Laboratory of Experimental Travel, which inspired many of the experiments. The first section of the book is a navel-gazing tract on the history and philosophy of travel, focusing on situationalism, surrealism and Dadaism. Although containing many facts, it doesn't really teach the reader anything new – probably not surprising when French artistic movements are involved. The experiments are loaded with weighty analysis, though in some cases it's just a bunch of people running around playing silly buggers.

Despite being written in the tone of an uppity young backpacker off on a life-changing journey of self-discovery and spiritual growth, the book does have some fine ideas for games and pranks, either at home or on the road. Look for The Lonely Planet Guide to Travelling in Your Own Mind coming up next.



## Not Maths History

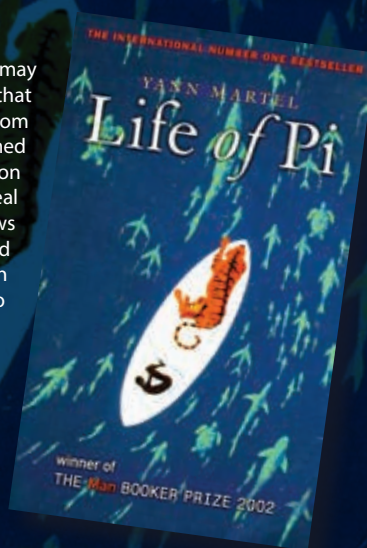
Review by Daniel Cooper

Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (Canongate Books, 2002) may sound like a scientific history of a certain number that approximates to 3.14 but nothing could be further from the truth. Instead we meet a young Indian boy named Piscine who takes the nickname Pi in order to take us on an extraordinary ride through his childhood and ordeal at sea, which makes up two parts of the book. Pi grows up in Pondicherry, India, the son of a zookeeper, and through the text we are introduced to various beasts in the zoo as well as their behaviour and adaptations to zoo life, a rich treatise on animal psychology. As he grows into a teenager Pi embraces Islam and Christianity, while continuing to practice Hinduism, much to the displeasure and confusion of family and his various spiritual mentors.

But this isn't a rite-of-passage book. While the family and zoo are en-route to Canada, they get shipwrecked, leaving Pi occupying a lifeboat with a wounded zebra, a hyena, an orang-utan and a 450-pound Royal Bengal tiger. Hilarity does not ensue.

Pi drifts for 227 days with Richard Parker, the tiger, trying to fend off thirst, hunger, exposure, and the beast. This is the real meat of the Booker Prize winner as we share Pi's trials in an imaginative and well-written adventure that really puts the reader there in the boat, and makes one feel the hunger and the terror of living in cramped quarters with a man-eater. However, the overall tone of the whole book is gentle and contemplative – Pi overcomes his problems using intelligence and insights into animal behaviour. This is a book that works on different levels. Many see it as a fundamentally religious work but it is really more of a spiritual text. Probably the most surprising thing is that the real story only becomes clear in the last pages of the book, skewing any assumptions the reader may have made up to that point.

Both of the above books are available at Bookazine



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## Budget Travel

I'm currently saving up to go to Japan for a holiday. So far I have saved \$400 – That should be about enough for the taxi fare from the airport and a can of Sprite.  
Kirsty Lane  
Glasgow

## Love isn't in the Air

The other day I was in the Chaweng branch of McDonalds on Koh Samui and there had been a problem with the drains, causing a foul smell and the toilets were flooded. The washroom area had been closed to the public and there was one young lady inside mopping up all the sewage and water all by herself. On the back of her T-Shirt it said 'I'm Lovin' It!' Funny, but the poor girl's face told a different story.  
Scott Rutledge  
Samui

## Ill Wind at 30,000 Feet

To the bearded man on Kuwait Airlines flight KU 105 from Bangkok seat 37B.  
Sorry for constantly breaking wind but if you hadn't been so antisocial I could have asked you to stand up so I could get past and distribute my methane evenly around the aircraft aisles like normal people do.  
James Porter  
Aberdeen

## Cameron Poole's Travel Tips

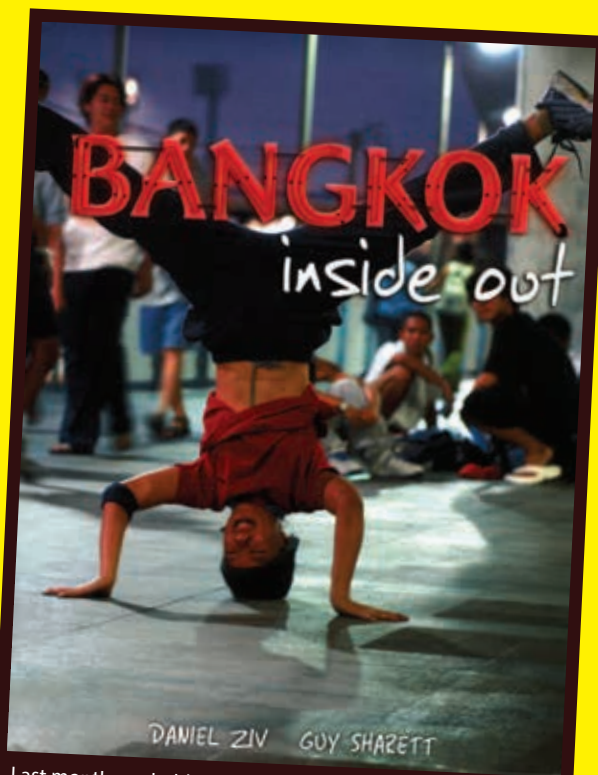
Long-time contributor Cameron Poole is back in jolly olde England and by his own admission, as miserable as a man who's rather be in Thailand can be. Nonetheless, always thinking of the other fellow first, he is sufficiently cheery to chip in his advice to less-seasoned travellers than himself, among other people who could use a helping hand in their path through life.

1. Cambodia Moto Drivers: Make sure that nothing works on your motorcycle and that you have absolutely no idea where you're going before accepting the fare.
2. Fool airline staff into thinking you have been sick by pouring vegetable soup down the front of your shirt and dribbling on it.
3. Save money on toilet paper by wiping your bum on an old T-Shirt. This can be reused once your wife or girlfriend has washed it.
4. Sign in at hotel reception desks under the name of the hotel. When they later discover that you've stolen a towel they will have a difficult time proving it is theirs and not yours.
5. Americans: If Singapore is too hot for you, why not try suing the country?

Eerie Parallels,  
I first saw your magazine about four years ago while travelling on my own around Thailand, back when Farang was famous as a plucky young backpacker mag. It's amazing the sort of Jungian synchronistic parallels that can crop up on one's journey through life. I have now returned with wife and child in tow and am astonished at how much the magazine has grown up in similar ways to myself. Great stories, great photos, great work, more mature, but still very funny. At least I hope that parallels me. Thanks for a great read and keep it up and I'll do my best to keep it up as well.

Josh Wopping,  
Wales, UK.

Farang replies:  
Thanks for noticing Josh. We'd like to think so as well, but then people think all sorts of things about themselves. But unlike you, there have not been any new Farang Untamed Children. By the way, if you want to subscribe and continue looking at your own reflection, you can do so through [subscribe@farangonline.com](mailto:subscribe@farangonline.com) or fill in the handy form on page 21.



Last month, we held another contest to win our last giveaway copy of Bangkok Inside Out, the popular guide to Thai pop culture that goes some way towards explaining the strange things you see around you in the sometimes bizarre metropolis. The first couple of goes we made the questions too hard and overly philosophical and we weren't getting the witty answers we were hoping for. So in the July issue, we made it easy, posing the question 2+2=? And what do we get? Wit! An obviously clever man named Joel Clement gave the answer: 2+2=(That character being the Thai for '4, you see.) Unfortunately, Joel wasn't clever enough to give us his mailing address, so won't receive his prize until he gets around to answering his email. This concludes our Bangkok Inside Out contest. Starting next month, we are planning on giving away crates of beer delivered to the winner's door. We'll see what sort of clever responses that generates.



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### Thai Rak Farang

If any of you men reading this see this sticker in a taxi window, you can rest assured that the driver will be able to say "Hello, where you go?", and "You want lady?"



### Tasty Treats

Always ahead of the curve, the Koreans have come up with the ideal beverage to wash down dog burgers.



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# Flying High

Due to popular demand and poorly veiled threats, Bartripping is back. Bigger, better, fatter and louder. Sadly, the original founders of the column, Dan & Andy, are no longer a team, ever since Andy made a clumsy pass at Dan after drunkenly mistaking him for a lady-boy he had once known Biblically, leaving it to Dan to take up the mantle on his own. A heavy burden by any standard, but a burden shared this month by guest bartripper, Executive Editor Cameron Cooper. In this, the first instalment of Bartripping v2.0, Dan & Cam start things easy by joining an organised mobile drinking event, the Groovy Map Skycrawl.

Starting Gate: The Londoner, Sukhumvit 33, 7pm

Dan: Turning up on time and politely queuing up, I had the opportunity to survey the Londoner for the first time. This fine English pub, modelled on a sports bar, features barmaids in faux-beefeater uniforms. It's underground (no windows – no pesky daylight telling you it's time to go back to the office) and big, making it the perfect shelter in case of nuclear attack. Since it has its own micro-brewery one could while away the months and years, waiting for the radiation to decay and the mutants to stop scratching at the door, sipping beer and watching football on TV.

Cam: Along with the Skytrain pass, free Groovy Map and discount drink vouchers, there was a complimentary shirt featuring an embroidered pith helmet, but the mere suggestion of wearing a uniform only brings back terrifying memories of a brief teenaged stint in the Air Cadets, where the men were just a little too manly for my taste. Besides, if the other people on the journey turn out to be nobs, one is guilty by association. Dan and I huddled over the complimentary snacks, struggled to get our drink orders heard in the chaos from waitresses in strangely sexy uniforms, and sullenly avoided meeting

the eyes of the strangers with whom we were bound on this disorienting journey. It was then I noticed to my horror that our host, Aaron Frankel, had a pea whistle dangling from his neck.

And They're Off: Chinoiserie, North Sathorn Rd, 8:40pm

Cam: As I'd feared, the whistle was not merely decorative. By the shank of the evening, Aaron would need to have it surgically removed from his mouth. I kept finding excuses to slap him on the back in the hope that he'd swallow it. Aaron, with the assistance of his partner Niki, a woman who needs neither introduction nor megaphone, led his befuddled charges, like drooling eight-year-olds on a field trip to a petting zoo populated with drunken goats, up and down platforms, on and off the Skytrain, obviously fantasising that he was the conductor on the Oriental Express. Nonetheless, under his guidance, the 60-strong mass of what we'll loosely call 'humanity' straggled into an ultra-swanky mansion restaurant, greeted guardedly by an overwhelmed host, who clearly hoped this rabble wouldn't wander the premises freely. Such was the confusion that Dan managed to fly in under the dress-code radar. We elbowed our way to the besieged bar, got our



drinks and wandering aimlessly, discovered the nicest bathroom in Bangkok.

Dan: Out of the door, up the stairs and onto the train. Being a noisy drunken spectacle can be fun if you're with a big gang of your mates, but I was all too sober. Our fellow Skytrain passengers averted their eyes from the black polo-shirted horde as we performed Chinese fire drills for our host's amusement. The fire drill apparently wasn't in jest as we arrived at Chinoiserie, a 105-year-old house, nay, mansion that used to be occupied by Royals and now serves Shanhaiinese cuisine. We waved to the tradesmen in the adjacent building site from the Skytrain stairs, who were drinking whiskey and banging an Isaan beat on the table, their Friday evening well underway, and entered the rarefied and perfumed air of our next bar. Old wood, red velvet and erect pinkie fingers were the order of the evening. I felt a little out of place in the plush surroundings, wistfully picturing the cummerbund at the foot of my

closet, but recalled the advice of a close Aussie friend from many years ago: "Dan, I'd feel at home anywhere in the world with a stubbie in my hand." Assuming he was talking about bottled beer, the bar beckoned.

The Straight: Hu'u, The Ascot Sathorn, 9:40pm

Dan: Ye gods! Another ultra-stylish and trendy bar. When will this end so I can slouch, let out the fart that's been brewing for the last half hour and stop denigrating people for being less sophisticated than I? Actually, I'm joking. I like a smart place as much as anyone and Hu'u did impress, even with its stupid name. Any fancy place with an enormous wall of whisky is going to get five little pint glasses in my book. Sadly, such opulence comes at a price and the little drink vouchers we'd been issued served only to lower the bar prices from ludicrous (Bt200, ludicrous on a journalist's salary – how the craft has fallen in public regard!) to the merely outrageous. I appealed to Cameron that, being my boss,



he should fill my glass. Sadly, Cameron informed me that, although rank hath its privileges that does not necessarily signify more lucrative remuneration. To add insult to injury, and perhaps in a moment of serendipity, a band of credit-card promoters entered the bar and started bandying about their big sign and buying free rounds for people holding their credit card. There's hungry people in the world, you know. Thirsty ones, too.

Cam: Peanuts. Truly fantastic peanuts. Every crag in my crumbling dental work was stuffed with salty pebbly bits that proved a joy to pick out over the remainder of the evening, using a long pinkie nail I have recently grown for just that purpose. Nice bar, pleasant lighting, hired dancers for entertainment, prices a bit high for my liking, but then I'm the kind of guy who refuses on principle to pay more than 70 baht for a beer. Then Dan had the audacity to suggest that I should buy him a beer on the flimsy premise that I'm his boss. He likes playing it both ways, that tightwad, and since he holds a black belt in stinginess, always has more cash on him than I do anyway. I put my money where his mouth is and told him I'd buy him a drink as his boss if he gave up insubordination. You could hear the gears grinding in his skull for a bit and he eventually opted to go Dutch. That settled, I supped my eighth beer of the evening, gazed at the fellow revellers round me and allowed the maudlin thoughts to flow. "Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right, here I am stuck in the middle with Dan."

The Finish Line: Fogo Vivo, President Tower, Ploenchit Road, 11:15

Cam: Even though there are only two lines to the Skytrain, with all the back and forth, along with the exhaustion of walking more than 100 metres anywhere in Bangkok, I was completely disoriented by the time we reached Fogo Vivo. We could have been in Tokyo for all I knew, but it turned out we were in Brazil. It was exactly like walking into a Ricky Martin video, except that I didn't have the urge to punch anyone in his shiny teeth. The dance floor was heaving with Thais doing the Lambada, the Cha-Cha, the Mambo, and one misinformed fellow attempting to do the mashed potato. Very sexy stuff. I'd never seen the like in Bangkok – totally at odds with the usual local dancing skills. To make it even more surreal, the place is managed by a Scotsman, who dispelled some of the mystery by explaining that they give free dance lessons on Wednesday evenings, thereby generating their own clientele who come at night to strut. I recall some young fans of the magazine slinging lavish praise at Daniel, who laps up such attention, since he spent much of his childhood locked in a closet. At this point the world was becoming a bit more obtuse, though I vaguely recall Niki, who was getting a bit tipsy, insulting me for no reason, which is a shame because if she'd given it any thought, she could have found one. The last thing I remember with any clarity was eating a piece of Aaron's birthday cake – maybe the pea whistle was a present from Niki. And then Daniel went home and puked... wait – no that was me.

Dan: There's nothing like the stomp of Latin dance on hardwood floors. The Tango was born in the brothels of Argentina and given Bangkok's reputation as a 'Sin City,' it should come as no surprise that this saucy swaying should raise its pomaded head here. But enough history, the night had reached its climax in this tasteful dancehall and restaurant and I was hoping to climax in one of the high-topped booths with an admirer of the magazine. Journalists rarely have groupies – especially the drunk overweight type like Cameron – so I decided to pounce upon the opportunity. I guess sexual harassment consciousness has come a long way since I was a lad, because I was quickly alone. In the end there was nothing for it but to scam a few drinks from Aaron. It was his birthday, after all.







# Treasure Seekers

Mark Mayne meets a Brit who has done some dangerous dives for submerged booty in shipwrecks around Southeast Asia.

Chris was the first person to touch the newly discovered shipwreck, loaded with valuable antique pottery, and one of the high points of searching the Southeast Asian seas for treasure.

Chris grabbed a few plates in a small catch bag and headed back up the line for a long decompression stop. "I could see the boss leaning over the rail while I waited. He knew I must have found something big because I stayed so long. Emptying the bag on the deck, his face lit up and I knew we had made an important find."

The pair returned to port to celebrate their discovery with wine and steaks, but the wreck had more secrets to surrender.

Briton Chris Scarffe spent several years wandering around and working overseas before he ended up teaching English in Taiwan at a government school. Over there he ran into

a dive instructor and local DJ named James with some used equipment for sale. James mentioned a friend in Malaysia who was involved in treasure hunting and archaeological recovery expeditions. "I'd always been keen on the idea," enthuses Chris. "Before I'd left England I'd seen a BBC2 programme about wreck diving and marine archaeology, and it seemed a dream job, with romance, adventure, history and diving, which I loved."

One emailed CV later, Chris was on his way to Malaysia to participate as a diver on a newly discovered wreck, the Desaru. "It was a rude awakening when I arrived. All the other divers were very experienced commercial divers and instructors, and I only had 50 dives and a PADI Rescue certificate!"

The company, Nanhai Marine Archaeology, was headed by marine engineer Sten

Sjostrand, based in Kuala Rogin, Malaysia, and had already found thousands of antiques beneath the waves.

The work consisted of two parts: spending long hours in the company's warehouse, cleaning recovered pottery with chemicals and desalination – rinsing salt particles from the precious ceramics – a process that can take up to six months; and heading out into the South China Sea for weeks at a time, searching for new wrecks, then diving on them. The sea stretches from Borneo up to Cambodia and the pottery itself is unique enough so when it's auctioned off, around the world, individual pieces can fetch thousands of US dollars.

"Sometimes the only way to find a new wreck is to get a tip-off from local fishermen. The trawlers drag their nets over the wrecks, and often land a few pieces of pottery or more rarely

a complete item. They know roughly the location of these finds, and pass the information on to Sten," says Chris. "Often they have no idea what they have found. On one occasion a fisherman brought in piles of bronze gongs, thought to be the earliest examples ever found. They were melting them down for scrap, getting 30 baht per kilo instead of hundreds of US dollars each."

Searching for submerged treasures requires the use of sonar. The search ship would plough up and down towing the sonar (or "mowing the lawn" as the slang goes), and scanning the seabed for hard objects likely to be pottery spilled from a wreck. The ships themselves have mainly settled into the silt over the last centuries.

"The work was tough, with lots of manual labour and long periods of staring at the sonar printouts looking for 'hard



returns'. We covered a square mile a day at best, sometimes less. The ship needed constant maintenance too, and working in the cramped engine room certainly wasn't the romantic ideal of going to sea!" says the 29-year-old, who now freelances as an underwater videographer. The dives could be dangerous. Diving down to depths of 30-60m makes decompression stops mandatory to stop the dreaded 'bends' from striking. This led to total dive times of nearly two hours for only 23 minutes of actual work. Conditions in the water are often severe, with less than one metre of visibility and

"Because wrecks are havens for marine life, frequently some extremely poisonous creatures such as Scorpionfish, Stonefish and sea snakes are a concern. You had to watch where you put your hands and with one-metre of visibility that's easier said than done."

extreme cold, due to the long waits.

"Because wrecks are havens for marine life, frequently some extremely poisonous creatures such as Scorpionfish, Stonefish and sea snakes are a concern. You had to watch where you put your hands, and with one-metre of visibility that's easier said than done." On top of this, divers are often required to operate heavy machinery called "eductors" to gently remove centuries of silt from the pottery. "Using the eductors was extremely tiring at depth. Bear in mind that at 60m there is a pressure of 103 pounds per square inch, compared to 14.7psi on the surface. Also, the pottery is extremely delicate, so moving the machinery had to be done with extreme care."

Even back on the ship danger was never far away.

"We usually had five anchors down when we were doing recovery work on a wreck. Sometimes they were in busy shipping channels. At night you had to sleep with one eye open or stay up all night watching the radar in shifts. After a long

day's work that's the last thing you wanted to do! One night we had a fishing vessel trawling close to the wreck that didn't see our lines – the trawl net rode up the anchor line and began to envelop the ship. We had to jump out of bed to cut it away before it did serious damage."

Their team was the "only group working with the department of Museums and Antiquities, training their staff in archeological procedures. We also worked slowly as we carefully recorded every detail of the wreck and its cargo. Our competitors were not as legitimate, just looking to remove the valuables, and often tried to steal GPS co-ordinates by following us to a site and logging our position. It's impossible to say how many other groups are operating illegally in the area, but we were called in by the government on one occasion because looting had been going on."

There's no danger pay in the profession. And the daily wage is roughly equivalent to working an hour in a McDonald's back in the UK, with the only upside being an option to take a percentage of any finds. Chris chose the percentage.

After months of hard labour, the golden tip came in. "A fisherman had landed a large and unusual storage jar. There had also been mixed reports about broken shards of pottery, all intricately patterned and obviously of high quality. Similar pieces have sold very well at auction. We knew there could be thousands more of them down there, worth a small fortune."

"Porcelain is sometimes known as 'white gold'. The right examples are worth more, weight for weight [than gold], and due to the high firing temperatures are impervious to seawater. This means that they are often perfectly preserved – sometimes so well that people doubt they have been under the sea for centuries."

This tip off led the treasure seekers to the wreck of the Wanli (a 17th-century ship of European design sunk between 1620 and 1644) in November 2003, off the

coast of West Malaysia. Chris set off alone with Sten to dive for the likely location of the wreck. Due to Malaysian government regulations, they were not allowed to survey the site, only dive. They dropped lead weights down on a line in 40m of water, and Chris followed them.

"I started to swim in an expanding circle around the line, and within 10 metres I found the ship. It was one of the most intense experiences I have ever had. After all the hard work, to be the first person ever to see the wreck was an amazing feeling. The ship was 17 metres by six metres, and surrounded by scattered pottery. I was working for a percentage and doing crazy sums in my head."

"Usually a wreck will keep around 70 percent of its cargo intact when it sinks. The merchants of the time knew what they were doing and packed the porcelain well. However, this wreck was different – almost all of the cargo turned out to be broken," Chris says.

The Wanli was probably built in the Philippines and experts believe that the ship was Portuguese and may have been heading for Melaka. A total of 6,813 pieces of intact and semi-intact porcelain wares were recovered, together with 9.5 tons of shards. Experts believe that the Wanli sunk because the crew of a rival merchant ship boarded the vessel and torched whatever they could not carry. It seems likely that the powder room exploded before the ship sunk, pulverising much of the precious cargo.

The porcelain is to be split 70/30 between Nanhai Marine Archaeology and the Malaysian government, while certain pieces are set to be auctioned there off in September. Much of the find is of historical interest, and several of the larger pieces have been put on display in Kuala Lumpur's National Museum as part of a unique exhibition of Southeast Asian ceramics scavenged from shipwrecks. A lot of the chinaware came from Thailand, while other pieces bear the hallmarks of Vietnamese craftsmanship.

Chris, however, remains ambivalent about the discovery. "The wreck may not have turned out to be the amazing treasure trove in financial terms

as we first hoped, but we did recover some exquisite artefacts and the memories of being the first person to see the vessel in almost 400 years are priceless." Chris can be contacted at [carfffe@hotmail.com](mailto:carfffe@hotmail.com). Or immerse yourself in more nautical history and archaic pottery at [www.mingwrecks.com](http://www.mingwrecks.com).



## AUCTION OF ANTIQUES

Some of these once-buried treasures are going to be auctioned off from September 4-11 in the Banquet Hall of the KL Convention Centre. For more information, contact Karen Loh on (60) 122039126.





#### 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.

#### 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.

#### PHI PHI ISLANDS

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

#### KOH TAO

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.

#### 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.

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# Hu'u in Bangkok



Hu'u in Bangkok

Sathorn sucks. Can't stand the place, despite the fact I live there. There are however a few gastronomic oases amongst the endless traffic jam and rank, grey clouds that masquerade as breathable air. Hu'u then is rather aptly named after 'a remote, idyllic, picturesque' Indonesian atoll. Having battled the Friday night motorcade and arrived in a harassed state at the luxurious Ascott, I did indeed have the feeling of a disheveled, malnourished adventurer finally reaching a tropical Shangri-la of hula girls and spit roasting wild boar.

Hu'u sounds and looks good in a number of ways. Launched in April this year, this is the latest offering from the team that gave us the award winning Hu'u at the Singapore art museum and Hu'u in Bali. The pre-club lounge and tapas bar on the ground floor seats 120, has the largest bar installation in Asia and a drinks menu of over 160 cocktails and 70 champagnes and wines. The fine dining area upstairs is a fantastically decorated, cool but comfortable setting, filled with works of art. Aural entertainment is provided by a live DJ, whom on my visit was spinning an 'eater-friendly' mix of jazzy, soulful house accompanied by a live female vocalist. An impressive place that certainly succeeds in being cutting edge without miserable staff and punters. Being the cynical bugger I am though, I always suspect style over substance in such settings until I've filled my belly.

Presided over by Thomas Smith (previously of the Savoy in London), Hu'u's kitchen whips up a truly global menu of dishes ranging from morsels to Tickle the Palate to Thai Favourites, Organic Enrichment to A Sweet Finish. I naturally went for the P.O.R.N. set menu. Nothing kinky unfortunately, but an extremely good value three-course menu at Bt999 net, including two glasses of wine. Poached baby rock lobster wontons were very palatable, dressed with tomato vinaigrette and wakame seaweed. The butter fried fillet of venison came up trumps. Delectably gamey red meat with sweet, red cabbage (a favourite of mine) and a crunchy potato rosti to mop up the juices. Having managed to steer one of my dining companions away from burger and chips, he grudgingly admitted that the pan roasted fillet of Argentinean Angus beef with wild mushroom duxelle filled pasta and red wine jus did indeed beat his local Berni Inn back in Hull. We both loved the desserts, especially warm chocolate brownie with pecan nuts served with crushed cookie enriched ice cream – a cloyingly chocolaty and creamy delight. The Bread and butter pudding topped with caramelized banana and almond ice cream wouldn't please traditionalists but was delicious nonetheless.

Bangkok's a tough place to get such a place established with a regular customer base but I hope this one works. A truly top notch, international-standard venue with plenty of effort put into the décor, food, drinks and service that I reckon will only get better as they get busier. Hu'u ate all the pies? Once again I'm happy to say it was me.

Hu'u is on the Ground & 2nd floor at the Ascott, 187 South Sathorn Road, Chong Nonsri Skytrain, follow the skytrain around the corner on to Sathorn Rd.

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# Canyon Country

Ken Silver has hiked through Grand Canyon, Goblin Valley, and the Painted Desert. Refusing to get stuck in a rocky rut he takes on his most death-defying challenge in America's southwest.





Over the last five years I've had plenty of ups and downs in the canyon country of America's southwest. Grand Canyon was the first and the easiest. Then I headed to Zion National Park with its "Narrows" to backpack through sections of canyon 1,000-feet high and 20-feet wide. After that arduous leg of the walk, I took it easy hiking around the rest of the park, through and alongside streams, while watching the colours of the sandstone change in the sunlight. There's a scenic little pool in the northern section where I used to float in the nude to get away from the midday heat, watching the waterfall bubbles cascade down through cool clear water to the bottom. After that, I passed a week in Paria canyon, where a ravens' flapping wings and call echoed for a long long time as it flew downstream. Then there was the aptly named Dark Canyon in Utah, where I got sick, dehydrated, started vomiting, and thought I was going to die.

I've even camped out in my car during the winter, doing a circuit that included Goblin Valley, Monument Valley, and Bryce Canyon, to end up at a buffet table in Las Vegas. Of that trip, I remember Painted Desert, with its pink ice and sand; and the nearby Petrified Forest with its stone trees, their bark glimmering with crystals. I also paid for an admission ticket to see Antelope Canyon, the most splendidly hued "slot canyon" of them all. There I met a Navajo Indian who claimed to own the rights to Antelope. He filled my head with Native American wisdom: "In the Navajo Nation, there's always money for weed." He teased my imagination with tales of huge, beautiful and rarely visited chasms to the south, just as great as Antelope, though with many more obstacles.

While researching them, I discovered that they required multi-tasking canyoneering – swimming, hiking, rock climbing – in isolated and treacherous conditions. Where I had hiked before, the rock was sedimentary, so it erodes, making for easy footing. But these canyons, around Northern Arizona's Mogillion Rim, were different. I could break my leg in an instant and wind up alone, 20 miles from a paved road. Time to find some fellow adventurers. How about that gang from the Escalante? They were fit, and once I had left Phil waist-deep in quicksand while I cleaned my camera, but hey, he understood the demands of art. They were also scientific types. For once I could let others plot a course through unknown terrain while I drifted along behind them. They were delighted to hear from me. That should have been my first warning. But their pre-trip planning was a marvel to behold, complete with satellite photos and reports on hydrophobic underwear.

Our first canyon would be West Clear Creek. It stretched from the middle of nowhere twenty miles downstream to the pit toilets of the Bulpen Ranch campgrounds. In between was lots of scenery, lots of real wilderness, and lots of narrowing canyon walls which would require us to swim through what might be fairly cool water. It's hot in Arizona, but much of the canyon water is never warmed by sunlight. I was ready to swim with a light wet suit, but I was overruled. They opted for four inflatable rafts, weighing five pounds each. That should have been my second warning.

But the most ominous omen was the last phone call from Phil. We were discussing the unlikely possibility of other canyoneers being down there. "Maybe we'll have to rescue them," he mused. I hung up, feeling amused. Why would anyone want to spoil their trip by aborting it for a rescue mission? Odd thing to say.

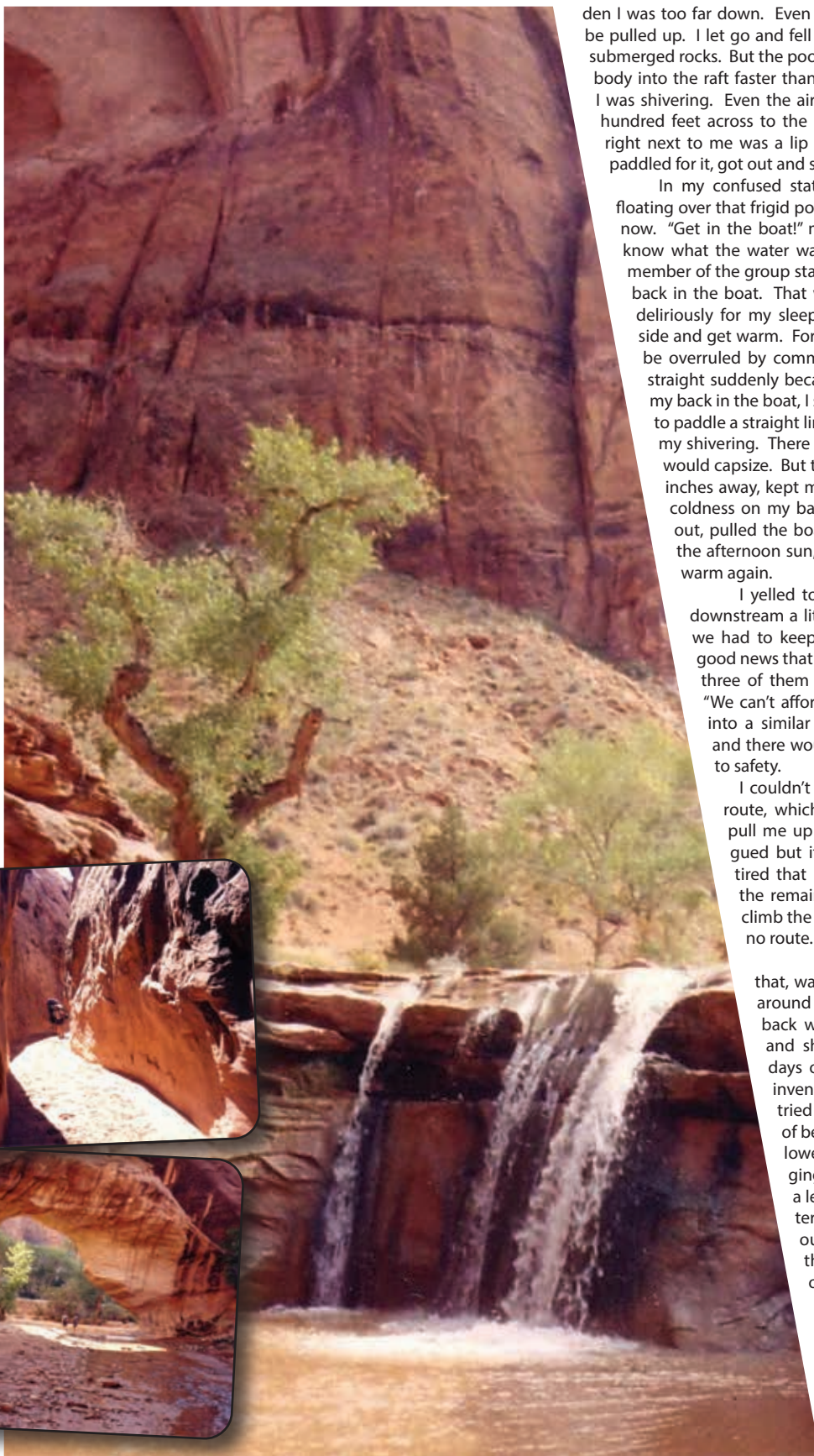
Even odder was our ride to the trailhead, where I actually heard their plans. I had been up for doing it quick and dirty, starting in West Clear Creek itself. But they wanted to take us in via a tributary canyon – a bad one. Willow Canyon, five miles of hell. I protested but was outvoted three to one. "We want the whole canyon experience," Phil said with a chuckle.

Willow was two day's worth of hard, hot, dirty work. If you think you can do ten miles of bad canyon in two days, think again. Really hot, really heavy packs, nothing but thorn bushes and every rock trying to pull us down. Then we hit a real obstacle. We'd been walking the dry stream bed. For the last hour it had held water, but we'd either splashed along or walked to one side. Just then Willows' walls closed in. And the stream bed dropped ten, twelve, fifteen feet into a long pool of dark water. Hard to measure but it was almost a sheer drop. We had to go through yet we had no rope. Their intelligence reports had indicated no technical climbing.

So into the wet suits we got and inflated the boats. Maybe there was a way to climb down. We dropped one boat into the water with a nylon cord. Cautiously, I scrambled down for a look see. All of a sud-

"Once I had left Phil waist-deep in quicksand while I cleaned my camera, but hey, he understood the demands of art."





den I was too far down. Even with three partners there was no way to be pulled up. I let go and fell into the pool. Thank God there were no submerged rocks. But the pool was a god damn ice box! So I swung my body into the raft faster than I had thought possible. Within seconds I was shivering. Even the air above the water was too cold. It was a hundred feet across to the other side, away from my partners. But right next to me was a lip of rock in foot-deep water. Frantically, I paddled for it, got out and stood in water up to my thighs.

In my confused state of mind this seemed far better than floating over that frigid pool. But it wasn't. I was shivering violently now. "Get in the boat!" my friends yelled. I refused. They didn't know what the water was like. Finally, the most mild-mannered member of the group started yelling obscene orders for me to get back in the boat. That woke me up. I got back in and pleaded deliriously for my sleeping bag so I could paddle to the other side and get warm. For an awful moment I thought I was gonna be overruled by committee. But I guess we were all thinking straight suddenly because they lowered it down. Lying flat on my back in the boat, I set off for the other side of the pool. Hard to paddle a straight line, hard to get a rhythm going because of my shivering. There was one awful moment when I thought I would capsize. But the thought of what was beneath me, just inches away, kept me going. I could feel the water's deathly coldness on my back. When I reached the other side I got out, pulled the boat up, and, once out in the warm rays of the afternoon sun, I did jumping jacks in my wetsuit to get warm again.

I yelled to the others that I was going to explore downstream a little. Not a great idea to scout alone, but we had to keep going. I returned in an hour with the good news that the canyon widened for a stretch. But the three of them responded to my news with disinterest. "We can't afford to go on," they said, because if we ran into a similar situation downstream we'd be trapped, and there would be no one to pull us back up and out to safety.

I couldn't believe they weren't going to follow my route, which had worked, and that they wanted to pull me up and head back to the paved road. I argued but it was no use, and at this point I was so tired that I could barely nod my head. So I spent the remainder of the daylight looking for ways to climb the canyon walls back to them, but there was no route.

The next morning, and the morning after that, was cold, scary, depressing shit, as I floated around that pool of death, feeling it always at my back while I laid Zen-still in the boat, my feet and shoulders hanging over the edges. Two days of slipping various harness systems they invented over my hips and shoulders while I tried not to move a frightened inch. Two days of being pulled half way up, then having to be lowered back into the boat again. Two frigging days of knowing that if my boat sprung a leak, or was ruptured by the rocks, or, most terrifying of all, if my movements knocked out the air plug, I'd be dead. All because those sons of bitches were afraid to get wet or take a chance.

In the end, they managed to pull me up and out. I wish now that they'd failed, and I'd gone down to West Clear Creek on my own. Or at least tried it, anyhow. I've come to realise that there's a point of no return where you can choose what you really want or regret it for years.

"All of a sudden I was too far down. Even with three partners there was no way to be pulled up. I let go and fell into the pool."



# TRAVEL SEASONS

Any season is doable, though summer is infernally hot and the area is overrun with tourists. May and September are workably hot with October being the primo hiking month. November can be cold, though. One morning, after camping out in my car, I had to warm up the car key with a cigarette lighter to melt the ice in the door lock. And April can be good, if unpredictable. Of course you have to factor in altitude and reserve the warmer months for crossing canyon pools.

## TRANSPORT

Phoenix and Las Vegas are the two main landing strips. Both are equidistant from their share of marvels, but Vegas is a lot more fun! You will probably get better air and car rental deals there. And you will need a car, because public transit is all but non-existent. Even for a solo traveler a rental car is a good deal as price wars are common. You can save more money by camping out for six to 10 dollars a night. Or stay at the inexpensive motels found in both small and large towns. I'd like to particularly recommend my friend Bashful Bob's Motel in Page, Arizona: [www.bashfulbobs.com](http://www.bashfulbobs.com). B&B's have also become increasingly popular in the area and start at around US\$100 per night. Many of them also arrange tours.

## CHEAP EATS

Buy a small gas stove, pick up some food at one of the big supermarkets in any two-horse town, and cook out. Or pick up a Navajo Taco at the Yuba City Truckstop, just one block into the Hopi Nation.



The canyon country of the American southwest is one big outdoor playground. Canyoneering, trekking, rock climbing, rafting, kayaking, mountain biking, and those are just for starters. Most of the area consists of small towns strung out on a well-maintained road system. Lonely roads lead from hiking trailheads to still more trailheads. Intricate and beautiful canyon systems are right outside the towns, like Paria canyon/Buckskin Gulch on the perimeter of Page, Arizona.

Beginning trekkers might want to start with Grand Canyon or Zion or Canyonlands National Parks. They have routes that are well-marked and have plenty of signposts. Zion is a rarity in canyon country – a landscape where many streams give it the appearance of a gorgeous, gargantuan Japanese garden! Zion is also home to big wall rock climbing, complete with schools for all levels. For the more experienced outdoors person, there is canyoneering in Buckskin Gulch – a slot canyon two shoulder width's wide for over ten miles!

Buckskin drains into Paria, a classic sandstone canyon which can be hiked in five or more days. When I trekked Escalante it was almost unknown. Now it has official status, even though it's still reasonably wild, complete with quicksand and monster sandstone walls. The main trek takes a week or more, but there are countless other routes in the entire drainage system.

Commit this town to memory:

Moab, Utah. Outdoor sports have transformed this prospector's town into a yuppie playground. There is rock climbing here also, but the big buzz is mountain biking, because of the endless routes of red rock with amazing vistas. Check out "The Poison Spider" in town for rentals, and then take a spin on Poison Spider Mesa. Moab is also a gateway to Canyonlands and Arches National Parks, and it's 30 miles from Monument Valley in the Navajo Nation.

If you are into slow-water or whitewater kayaking or rafting then the streams and rivers carving up this rocky topography are just the ticket. On big rivers like the Dirty Devil in Colorado, companies offer half-day or multi-day

tours, or rent kayaks. The big trip is of course the week-long Grand Canyon odyssey on the Colorado River, but there are plenty of other mind-blowing voyages.

The damned Americans did actually build a dam in canyon country; and the result is Lake Powell outside Page. A group of travelers can rent a houseboat to use for swimming, partying, or cruising to myriad trailheads along the lake, including the massive Rainbow Bridge and the trek around Navajo Mountain.

You can also stargaze outside of Bryce Canyon National Park or off any dirt road, visit the Navajo and Hopi Indian Nations, where Western culture is kept at bay, and buy jewelry at their roadside stands.



WILDTIMES







I never met Hunter but he was certainly no small influence on me. I wrote my Master's thesis at the University of Southern California School of Journalism in 1986 on "New Journalism," the school of writing he is most closely associated with (for his own style, called "gonzo"), and his work has long informed my own. Reading him taught me a great deal about the use of the first person, and the value of the subjective point of view. It is utterly ironic that he died as I had just started work on my fourth book, which will be my own attempt at "gonzo," where the writer himself becomes an important part of the story. (I had written the first chapter when I got the news.)

I first discovered Hunter when I read *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72* which was a reading text I had to use for my undergraduate course in American Politics, back in 1982, and being made to read a book had never been a more absorbing chore. I was fascinated by his maniacal nature, best encapsulated by his brother Jim in E. Jean Carroll's lively 1993 biography, *Hunter: The Strange and Savage Life of Hunter S. Thompson*, in which he said that visiting Hunter was a sometimes frightful experience because "you knock on the door, and you almost hope that no one's home, because you don't know what to expect when that door opens."

The only person I knew who knew Hunter intimately was the singer Warren Zevon (who died in 2003). Warren used to tell me stories about how he and Hunter would hang out shooting guns and doing other bizarre things whenever he visited Hunter in Aspen. I still think it's funny that he and Hunter wrote a song together, in 2001, which has a title that says it all: "You're a Whole Different Person When You're Scared."

I think that he brought a wicked, perverse humour to the world of letters that was distinctly American, a true literary descendant of Walt Whitman, and I am sure the

# GONZOMEMORIES

likes of him will not be seen again. Gerrie Lim is the author of *Invisible Trade: High-class Sex for Sale in Singapore* (Monsoon Books) and the forthcoming *Idol to Icon: The Creation of Celebrity Brands* (Marshall Cavendish).

## HUNTER IN BABYLON

I did know Hunter or at least I spent eight hours with him once. It was back in NYC when I was working at the *Village Voice* and doing double-time on a doctorate at SUNY Stony Brook. The university booked Hunter to come talk, and he called Lucian Truscott IV, one of the writers at the *Voice*, to get him to come along for the ride. Lucian, being a smart guy, wanted someone to help keep Hunter in line, and so he drafted me.

We picked Hunter up at LaGuardia Airport and he was more than toasted. He'd taken acid before he caught the plane from Colorado and then spent the flight drinking. He arrived two hours before he was supposed to talk, so we got him into a car and onto the Long Island Expressway. Unfortunately he saw a sign on the Expressway saying that the town of Babylon was the next exit, and needless to say he loved the name and wanted to go there.

We managed to divert him to the university instead. The kids had a bottle of Wild Turkey on the podium, which he proceeded to empty. By the end of the talk he was responding to questions about the Watergate scandal with answers about a local water feud he was having in Woody Creek.

We then took him back to Babylon because he wouldn't shut up. He proceeded to nearly get in a fight at the only country & western bar on Long Island by insulting two women in cowgirl suits who were there. We got him out a few steps ahead of a bartender who had picked up a baseball

bat. We then hit a few more bars at his insistence and got him back to LaGuardia Airport about 4 in the morning. He then decided to check into a hotel for a "45-minute" nap before he was due to catch a flight to Boston, where he was scheduled to have breakfast with Teddy Kennedy.

I was so hung over the next day when I had to teach a 1pm writing class that I stopped lecturing twice to buy 7-Ups out of the machine.

Bill Wasserzieher, of Long Beach, California, is a veteran music journalist who once taught English and Film at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and met Hunter S. Thompson during his time there.

## GOD & SATAN

Within minutes I was struggling to keep from laughing out loud. For you see my girlfriend had just handed me *Fear and Loathing* in Las Vegas as I boarded a small commuter plane somewhere in the Deep South of the United States. Adding weirdness to surrealism was the fact that I was seated next to a Southern Baptist minister, one of those fire-and-brimstone types, who was reading the Bible. As I struggled to contain myself, he kept looking over to see what was going on. Finally, Mr. Holy Roller felt compelled to try and save me. "What's ya readin' there, son?" he asked.

"Ah, just a book," I replied, tears having streamed down my face at this point.

"Well, me, too, except this is far more than just a book. This is *The Book*."

As he worked to convert this wild hippy child during the rest of our short time in the air, the hilarity of the situation proved to be far more entertaining than his rap. Sensing this, he settled for handing me his card and inviting me

A crew of writers, readers, and just plain wackos recall their encounters – either in real life, or on the printed page – with the late Hunter S. Thompson. Stage-managed and authored by Jim Algie.





to attend a service at his "House of God" if I was ever in town, no doubt feeling that yet another lost soul had probably slipped through his ring-encrusted fingers.

Looking back, it was sort of like Satan and God flying together through the clouds, and as usual, His Evilness was having much more fun.

The girlfriend, like that copy of Fear and Loathing and many a dose of psychoactive substances, became one of many that have come and gone through time.

Hunter, thanks for fighting the good fight, and for sticking around as long as you could. May you be "puffing your last chunk of Singapore Grey" with some errant angel right now, you old salty dog you. We'll miss ya down here.

Troy McFadden, actor, writer, and bodyguard for Hollywood strippers

#### BARSTOW PILGRIMAGE

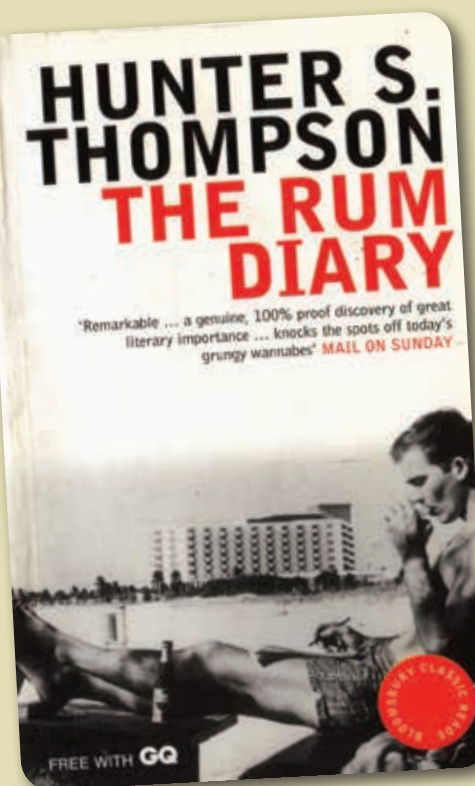
My favourite opening line in literature is Hunter S Thompson's awesome first words in Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: "We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold."

On a recent trip to California I drove from LA to Fresno. With Hunter in mind, I decided to make

a detour towards Barstow. Once past the San Fernando Valley, I turned onto a minor Interstate road that led straight through a hundred miles of scrub and gray hills, dotted with shacks and the occasional diner. I stopped to have a burger and watched part of a Chevy Chase movie with a bunch of obese Americans having breakfast. Back in the car, I put on "Sympathy for the Devil," lit a cigarette and hit the road. Eventually I got lost and found myself in the Mojave Desert, still following signs for Barstow. The road signs got sparser and sparser, it got colder and there was snow in the high sierras. At a T-junction a sign that had been peppered with buckshot pointed left to Lancaster. I took the other route and headed for Fresno. I'd done my pilgrimage. A couple of days later I switched on the TV in my motel room and there he was on the news. Hunter S. had blown his brains out.

At the first petrol station in Fresno I scored some weed from a punk kid with a Mohawk. Back at the motel, I lit up, overlooking the cemetery below my window.

There, with my perfect view of death, the absurdity of existence in the Land of the Free fell into place - the man who wrote about the end



## PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR AS AN EXPAT JOURNALIST

Review by Jim Algie

It's always fascinating to read a writer's first book and X-ray the thematic skeleton he would flesh out in his later wordsmithing. The voracious drinking, the acerbic asides, and the degenerate characters are all present in *The Rum Diary*, a novel about expat journalists in San Juan, Puerto Rico that was written in 1959, but wasn't actually published until some four decades later.

Thompson was only 22 when he wrote the book, seen through the lens of reporter Paul Kemp. As is the case with many first novels, Thompson hasn't quite found his own voice. The brawl that erupts between Kemp and his expat buddies, and a gang of Puerto Ricans, after they've all been pissing it up in a local bar, reeks of Hemingway. And the mad, sexy fiesta on a neighbouring island which is the novel's orgasm, tears a few pages from the profane gospel of Jack Kerouac.

This doesn't mean that *The Rum Diary* is not worth the eye strain. You can already see Thompson calibrating the machine-gun wit he turned on yuppie America in *Generation of Swine* and sighting his targets. Like in the paragraph when Kemp has breakfast in a touristy hotel. "All around us were people I had spent ten years avoiding - shapeless women in wool bathing suits, dull-eyed men with hairless legs and self-conscious laughs, all Americans, all fearsomely alike. These people should be kept at home, I thought; lock them in the basement of some goddamn Elks Club and see them pacified with erotic movies; if they want a vacation show them a foreign art film; and if they still aren't satisfied send them into the wilderness and run them with vicious dogs."

No matter how much Thompson, and his followers, would later play up his bad-assed outlaw streak, he always had a strong sense of ethics. When a former Marine hires Kemp to write brochures that will bring in boatloads of tourists to a neighbouring island, already being developed and about to be stricken with multiple bowling alleys, Kemp thinks, "I was being paid twenty-five dollars a day to ruin the only place I'd seen in 10 years where I'd felt a sense of peace. Paid to piss in my own bed, as it were, and I was only here because I'd got drunk and been arrested and had thereby become a pawn in some high-level face-saving bullshit."

In his later books, Hunter would never be so emotionally revealing (even romantic in parts, like when Kemp has sex with a woman in the pounding surf) as in *The Rum Diary*. But the shots of sentimentality are chased with much more bitter spirits. When Kemp talks about his sense of optimism for the future, "At the same time, I shared a dark suspicion that the life we were leading was a lost cause, that we were all actors, kidding ourselves along on a senseless odyssey. It was the tension between these two poles - a restless idealism on one hand and a sense of impending doom on the other - that kept me going."

It's an apt summation of the writer's explosive canon of work.





## BIO SKETCH

Words by Jim Algje

The violence and madness that underpinned much of Hunter S. Thompson's work came to a head on February 20th of this year when he died of a DIY gunshot blast at his long-time home around Aspen, Colorado.

Born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1937, Thompson did time in the Air Force and was a sports editor for a newspaper. His expat life, supported by journalism assignments, took him to Puerto Rico and Brazil in the late 50s and early 60s before his book "Hell's Angel's" (1966) brought him a flood of praise from legendary journalist Studs Terkel ("superb and terrifying") and The New York Times Book Review, "Thompson has presented us with a close view of a world most of us would never encounter. His language is brilliant, his eye remarkable."

From the bikers, whom he rode with for a year, the book earned him a severe beating.

Thompson took a shot at politics in 1970, gunning for the position of sheriff of Pitkin County Colorado on a Freak Power Party platform. As expected, he wanted to decriminalise drugs; but he also wanted to implement some environmental policies like banning traffic from downtown streets.

His most famous book, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, was allegedly inspired by an anti-drugs conference he attended in "Sin City" to write articles for Rolling Stone. Likewise, his next book, *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*, was put together from a collection of stories he wrote for the magazine, in which he famously lambasted Richard Nixon, "How low do you have to stoop in this country to become president?"

Some of his other more seminal books include an anthology of his scathing essays from the Watergate days, *The Great Shark Hunt*, and a gonzo view of Bill Clinton's presidential victory in 1992, *Better than Sex*.

Aside from inspiring the character of Uncle Duke in the Doonesbury cartoon, the protagonist Bill Murray played in the shlocky *Where the Buffalo Roam* (1980) was based on him; it's a film only memorable for paraphrasing a few of Thompson's real-life witticisms, "I've never advocated sex, violence and drugs but they've always worked for me." Johnny Depp, who became a close friend, did a much better job of portraying the writer in the 1998 film version of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, directed by Terry Gilliam. Rumours continue to circulate about a cinematic retelling of Thompson's first and only novel, *The Rum Diary*.

His last book, *Hey Rube: Blood Sport, the Bush Doctrine, and the Downward Spiral of Dumbness - Modern History from the Sports Desk*, a collection of rants and raves published at ESPN.com, came out in 2004, was applauded as a return to rabid form.



of the American Dream had long become part of it himself – both the dream and its deconstruction. "And suddenly there was this terrible roar all around us and the sky was full of what looked like huge bats."

Tom Vater is the author of *Beyond the Pancake Trench: Road Tales from the Wild East* (Orchid Books, 2004)

## HUNTER'S CAMOUFLAGE

I met Hunter only once, at the first and (I think) last annual Rolling Stone editorial conference held at Big Sur in late 1971. He was a tall, lean man, completely bald on top, short on the sides, wearing a polo shirt, Bermuda shorts, gym socks and white tennis shoes. And his voice was EXACTLY like Fred MacMurray's! I recognised it immediately for what it was. It was camouflage. No wonder Nixon talked to him. Who would ever suspect? Hunter had a gift: he could pass for straight. God rest his liver.

Jerry Hopkins has published some 40 books including the number-one bestseller *No One Here Gets Out Alive* (Warner Books, revised edition 1995) and *Thailand Confidential* (Periplus Editions, 2005).

BURYING RICHARD NIXON

When Richard Nixon died in 1994, I was outraged by all the eulogies this hateful criminal, who first entered politics running on an anti-communist McCarthyist ticket, received from the likes of Bill Clinton, Billy Graham, and of course, Kissinger. They all lauded him for being an excellent president and statesman, conveniently ignoring Watergate and all his war crimes. The only journalist I read who came out and dared to thrash Nixon was Hunter S. Thompson in an obituary in Rolling Stone: "If the right people had been in charge of Nixon's funeral, his casket would have been launched into one of those open-sewerage canals that empty into the ocean just south of Los Angeles. He was a swine of a man and a jabbering dupe of a president. Nixon was so crooked that he needed servants to help him screw his pants on every morning."

Yes, Thompson's political stories and books often relied on grandstanding and vitriolic one-liners. But they were never bereft of a righteous sense of injustice. For example, later in the story, he mentions how Nixon's illegal bombing of Laos and Cambodia resulted in the deaths of more people than all of the American troops lost in World War II, and how "Tricky Dicky" always denied these war crimes.

In that obituary, Thompson clev-



erly defends the 'gonzo' approach to writing as the only true defense against the political dogmas that continue to gnaw at the body politic of the USA. "Some people will say that words like scum and rotten are wrong for Objective Journalism – which is true, but they miss the point. It was the built-in blind spots of the Objective rules and dogma that allowed Nixon to slither into the White House in the first place."

The most omnipotent riff in all of his books – who has sounded the death knell for the American dream? – is also the chorus in this elegy: "By disgracing and degrading the Presidency of the United States, by fleeing the White House like a diseased cur, Richard Nixon broke the heart of the American Dream."

Jim Algie is the chief editor of FARANG Untamed Travel magazine, and has won several awards for his short fiction, including as a co-recipient of the Bram Stoker award.

#### CURTAIN CALL

Besides Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, the only other allusion I've ever seen to adrenochrome – the quasi-mythical extract of human adrenal gland gobbled by Raoul Duke and Dr. Gonzo near Vegas's climax – is in Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*. It is, Huxley writes, "a product of the decomposition of adrenaline, [and] can produce many of the symptoms observed in mescaline intoxication. But adrenochrome probably occurs spontaneously in the human body. In other words, each one of us may be capable of manufacturing a chemical, minute doses of which are known to cause profound changes in consciousness." And – after all – what is adrenaline but pure, chemical ego? And – journalistically speaking – what is ego if not Gonzo?

It wasn't the drugs – at least the consciously consumed ones – that got in the way of Hunter S. Thompson's work, it was Thompson himself. As he told me when I interviewed him in February 2003, "Drugs are no excuse, being drunk is no excuse. If that's how you're gonna operate in the world, don't try to blame it on some weird shit."

We were in Thompson's limousine, parked outside Elaine's, an old-guard literary bar on Manhattan's swank Upper East Side. Via a friend, I'd procured some weed for him, and – between puffs on the bowl – was trying to convince him to drive to Central Park and set off fireworks from the moon roof.

He said he was game, but he clearly wasn't. I didn't press. For the

first time that evening, Thompson was calm and coherent, seemingly content to be away from the bustle of handlers clustered at a table inside.

"It's a little bit of fun, maybe, to be taken as a lunatic," he told me. "[But] if you call the President a 'shit-eating dog' and then you say he should 'get the fuck out of Iraq,' it may give the 'get the fuck out of Iraq,' a crazy tinge." He sighed and heaved himself out of the limo.

Jesse Jarnow's writing can be found at [www.wunderkammern27.com](http://www.wunderkammern27.com)





# DREAMWORLD TIBET

*Western Illusions*

Martin Brauen

In this excerpt from *Dreamworld Tibet: Western Illusions* (Orchid Press, 2004), author Martin Brauen dissects the fraudulent way the country and its culture have been depicted in many Western movies.



# LOST HORIZONS



In 1928 the film *Potomok Chingis-Khana* (The Heir to Jenghis Khan or Storm over Asia) was produced in Russia under the direction of Vsevolod Ilarionovich Pudovkin. Although a film about Mongolia, it can nevertheless be described as the first feature film concerning Tibet, as Mongolian culture was very strongly shaped by Tibet from the 16th century and a clerical system arose in Mongolia that is very similar to the Tibetan one. In the film, the magnificent Mongolian-Tibetan clergy is primarily portrayed in the first part, with elements that appear to belong to the repertoire of Tibet stereotypes: 'Lamaism' is seen as the mirror image of Catholicism (in one conversation between a British colonel and his wife, a monastery's 'wild abbot, reeking of garlic, with matted [hair]' is called a Buddhist version of the Pope), the obligatory religious dances ('cham) are performed, and a young incarnation also appears in the film, who despite his tender age 'understands everything', as one of the monks tells the visitors. The undamaged life in the monastery stands in stark contrast to the struggle for survival of the partisans, avaricious merchants and foreign imperialists and to the Bolsheviks' revolution. The film takes the side of a nation that—according to the film—is exploited and treated like a puppet,

symbolically portrayed by the hero Lubsang, who transforms himself from a poor, small fur trader into a revolutionary who challenges his people to rise up. Full of critical contemporary references, it displays a film aesthetic the like of which we shall scarcely come across again in later Tibet films. The impressive authenticity, among other things, contributes to this aesthetic: Mongols were played by real Mongols, and monastery scenes were filmed in an actual monastery, in which the ritual instruments, the over-life-size Buddha and the ritual music were all genuine. This in turn allowed the camera to take impressive close-ups without running the danger that behind the picture an illusion could suddenly be discerned. One would have thought that such authenticity went without saying, but we shall discover that it was not until some sixty years after this Russian film that Hollywood recognized its necessity and its appeal, with the film *Kundun*.

Undoubtedly the best-known feature film in the Tibet films category was Frank Capra's film adaptation of the bestseller *Lost Horizons* in 1937. The film only departs in details from the novel, which we have already gone into. As we are concerned here above all with our images of Tibet, it is of interest to us how Frank Capra

portrays Shangri-La visually. Are Tibetan elements recognizable, for example in the architecture, the dress or the material culture in general? The answer, bluntly, is 'no'. Apart from a few clothes and musical instruments, the only thing that recalls Tibetan living space is some copies of stupas, which indeed have a few yaks passing in front of them on one occasion. Despite their realism, however, the stupas are of no

Instead of flat-roofed houses a settlement somewhere in the Alps is shown, a craftsman is pulling candles (which are unknown in Central Asia and Tibet) and the children, the sole people of clearly Asiatic origin apart from a few porters, sing 'Good evening, good night'...

These remarks should not be taken as criticism of the whole film, which went down exceptionally well with critics and

**"James Hilton chose Tibet as the location for Shangri-La because, on account of its great seclusion, it was suited for catching all the dreams that Western people had in the 1930s after the great economic crisis and in the face of the looming war."**

consequence beside the rest of the architecture of Shangri-La, which clearly displays features of Western architecture of the 1930s. Except for this, with the best will in the world nothing Tibetan can be recognized—no Buddha statues, Tibetan ritual implements, prayer wheels or long trumpets, no Tibetan prayers or ritual music.

As in the novel, it is whites who play the principal parts, but where in the film have the Tibetan and Chinese inhabitants of the 'Blue Valley' below Shangri-La gone?

the public, but simply point out that the director found it hard to make anything look Tibetan, if not Shangri-La itself (which has hardly anything Tibetan about it even in the novel) then at least the surroundings. Here it is expressed still more clearly than in the novel that neither for Frank Capra nor for the public was Tibet a real place. James Hilton chose Tibet as the location for Shangri-La because, on account of its great seclusion, it was suited for catching all the dreams that Western people had in



the 1930s after the great economic crisis and in the face of the looming war. Thus the film begins with an introductory paragraph that poses the suggestive question:

In these days of wars and rumors of wars—haven't you dreamed of a place where there was peace and security, where living was not a struggle but a lasting delight?

Of course you have. So has every man since Time began. Always the same dream. Sometimes he calls it Utopia—sometimes the Fountain of Youth—sometimes merely 'that little chickenfarm'.

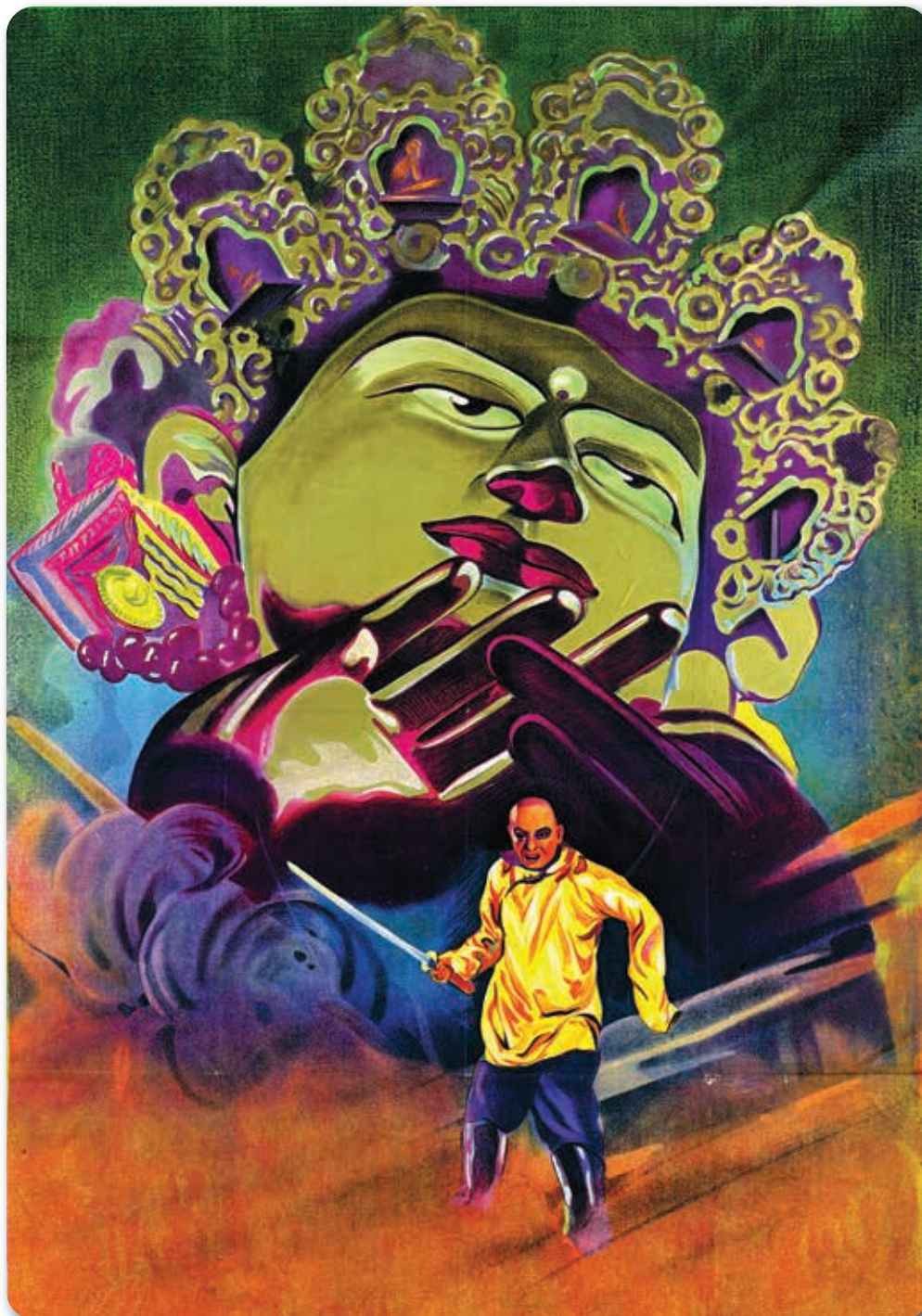
The remoteness and inaccessibility of Tibet—not its own religion and wisdom—made it the ideal place for the Utopian refuge of James Hilton and Frank Capra. Tibet as such did not interest them. We should not be misled in this regard by the fact that Father Perrault, at the top of the Shangri-La hierarchy, is called 'High Lama'. In his background, his outward appearance and also his conversation he resembles less a Tibetan 'high guru' than the eponymous hero of Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*.

In 1972 there was a remake of the film, which because of its dreadfully kitsch song-and-dance interludes, as well as its atrocious dramatization and lack of poetry, became a massive flop. This 'warmed-up film dish', as one critic called it, also had nothing in it that recalled the Tibetan location of Shangri-La: the architecture is a mishmash of neoclassicism and Moorish style, the monks' robes remind one of Tibetan monks' clothing mainly by their red colour, and nowhere is a Tibetan object to be made out, whether a ritual object, a musical instrument or an everyday object. Nothing can represent the mindlessness and triviality of the film better than the closing song, a hymn of praise to Shangri-La in distant Tibet:

Far from the earthly zone  
waits a world where the  
cannon has never boomed!  
There the shouts of war  
don't ring in your ear  
anymore.

Some more feature films on Tibet followed in the late '40s and the '50s, though they never achieved the fame of the first filming of *Lost Horizon*: *Black Narcissus* (1947), *Das verlorene Gesicht* (1948), *Storm over Tibet* (1952) and *The Abominable Snowman* (1957).

*Das verlorene Gesicht* (1948) recounts the enigmatic story of a young woman who for some time



takes on a second personality, which, it emerges in the course of the film, appears to be that of a Tibetan woman.

In Stuttgart, an apparently white woman with Asiatic facial features is picked up and admitted to a psychiatric clinic. There she recovers the power of speech, but nobody can understand her. The strange woman is called Luscha and is employed in the institute's kitchen, where Verena von A., the leader of the Theosophical Society in Stuttgart, soon visits her, in the company of two linguists. The latter come to the conclusion that Luscha originates from Tibet, for when she is shown a Buddha statue she takes it in her hands, places it on a windowsill and bows down in front of it, on which the professor present comments with the sentence:

"One could think, a Buddhist of strict observance—Tibet, typical Tibet! 'This impression is soon strengthened when Luscha gathers up all the knives nearby and puts them to one side, which the assistant interprets as further evidence for Luscha's Tibetan origin. According to the assistant, near a Buddha image there should be no objects with which one could kill.

With the words

"Perhaps she has been sent to us, perhaps she has a task to carry out on us,"

Frau von A. demonstrates her Theosophical background and that she believes in the girl's sincerity. Luscha is received by Frau von A. and subjected to several experiments, but her precise origin is not worked out. When a plaster cast is taken of her face, the Asiatic features disappear, Luscha no longer recognizes those present, and she apparently becomes again the woman she was before: Johanna, who had previously escaped from a reformatory, had an accident and was then found, with a new personality, by the Stuttgart police.



At a Theosophical Society conference, the speakers and audience puzzle over the strange phenomenon of a supposed splitting of the consciousness or change of personality. Where did the foreign speech come from, how did Luscha come to know how to behave as a Buddhist, how could it all be explained? The professor's answer is of some interest, as it expresses an idea we already know from Theosophy, as well as from Lobsang Rampa:

'Perhaps there really are secret powers in humans that can leap over great timespans and great distances to another person and change them. Perhaps we actually have people at the ends of the Earth, Tibetan priests or Indian holy men, with such powers that they can take hold of another person and make them truly possessed.'

And when a man from the audience retorts that in science one should not work with suppositions, riddles and mysteries, the professor answers:

'We do not work with them, but have to be prepared for them. And I find that that's good. It is good that there are still mysteries in our explored world.'

The professor therefore does not want to bring science and religion together in Theosophical fashion but simply wants a science that has deep respect for the mysterious and enigmatic, a science for which superhuman powers of Tibetan lamas or Indian yogins lie in principle within the realm of the possible. The supernatural powers of the Tibetan 'Brothers' are not made out to be self-evident in the manner of the Theosophists and esotericists. They are merely treated as a possibility, which remains as long as their non-existence has not been proven. But can the non-existence of a phenomenon be proven, even if it seems so unfounded and improbable? This is a question that we deal with in connection with the Tibet myths again and again and will be discussed in detail in Part 5.

#### STORM OVER TIBET

The film *Storm over Tibet* (1952) is about a mask. This mask of the god of death, Sindja (gShin-rje; Yama), has been stolen from a Tibetan temple by Bill March, which brings him bad luck: his plane crashes in the region of Tibet and he is thought to be missing... until his former friend David Simms in Los Angeles receives a package from Bill, in which is the mask. With Bill



March's wife, David sets out for an area of the Himalaya not marked on any map, to discover the secret of Sindja. He is convinced that Bill is still alive, for who else would have sent him the mask? Before he goes in search on Amne Mandu, he visits a high monk, who predicts to him that the mountain will be against him, which does indeed come true. David is almost killed and returns to the monastery without having achieved anything. There the monk reveals to him that after the crash, his friend was cared for in the monastery, but unfortunately died. He had been unable to tell David this because he 'had seen guilt in David's face', which he had to atone for with his life-threatening quest. Now he had been freed from his guilt.

A 'Tibet mystery' that was on people's minds at the time was the 'Loch Ness monster of the Himalaya', the yeti, a phenomenon that the film *The Abominable Snowman* (1957) took up. Dr John Rollason, his wife and an assistant are in Tibet collecting medicinal herbs and rare plants for a botanical establishment. But Rollason secretly has something quite different in mind. With other expedition members who are to join the group later, he wants to go in search of the snowman.

The expedition members are guests of the Hon-yuk monastery, whose 'lama' astonishes the foreigners with his clairvoyant abilities. Thus he is able to predict the arrival of people he knew nothing about. Asked how this could be possible, the monk replies that here one develops all the senses one has, and has the time to become aware of many things.

Apart from this well-known theme of the all-knowing, telepathically gifted Tibetan cleric, the film also shows the constantly ascertainable, opposing views of the Westerners regarding Tibet and the Tibetans: one either loves them or despises them, there seems to be nothing in between. Rollason, who obviously knows more about the area and its inhabitants than the others, finds

"A 'Tibet mystery' that was on people's minds at the time was the 'Loch Ness monster of the Himalaya', the yeti, a phenomenon that the film *The Abominable Snowman* (1957) took up."

the country attractive and treats the inmates of the monastery with fairness and respect. Other expedition members would like to get away as quickly as possible from this dreadful land with its cold, its terrible superstition and its frightful smells, for in this land dripping with filth there are only rocky tracks [and] greedy, uneducated people who call an abominable cuisine their own; abominable too is the yeti they are in search of. The lama hints that he does not believe in the existence of the yeti, this creature exists only in the strangers' heads. He also counsels the expedition members in sibylline fashion to be humble during the quest. Man is on the brink of destroying himself; instead of enlarging his territory, he should think about who should succeed him as heir.

The search for the yeti develops into a disaster. The Tibetan leader takes to his heels when a yeti hand appears under the tarpaulin, a yeti is bagged, the sensitive photographer cracks up because he cannot stand the yeti's howling any longer, one of them dies of a heart attack, and another sets





off an avalanche with a revolver shot, which buries them. Only Rollason survives the encounter with the yetis, but after returning to the monastery he claims that what he was looking for does not exist. Loss of memory or deliberate withholding of the truth? Probably the latter, for high up in the mountains Rollason had spoken to his companions, then still living, the following cryptic words:

'The yetis are not violent creatures ... They are waiting until mankind dies out. Perhaps we are the wild ones, we are the middle ages for them. Perhaps we are not Homo sapiens, thinking men, for where have our thoughts got us? Certainly not to wisdom, rather to destruction. If the world learns of these creatures, they will be destroyed ... If the yetis finish us off, their secret has been kept. Their only chance of survival ... perhaps until their time has come.'

The yetis are therefore wise, mysterious beings, who are waiting until the time is ripe. As they are in danger of being eradicated by men, it is better to deny their existence. Everything indicates that Rollason has survived because he has not given away the secret of the yetis. He thus comes close to the lama, who, as the film leaves no doubt, knew everything right from the start—once again confirming the image of the all-knowing Tibetan lama.

Let us throw a quick glance at the way Tibetan culture is depicted in the film *The Abominable Snowman*. The first takes already reveal that those responsible for the shooting had never looked round a Tibetan monastery. In the monastery courtyard one can recognize on a pillar a demon mask that comes from South-East Asia; the altar stands half in the open air, with the result that the monks sit outside to pray, even when it is snowing. Pictures of dragons are painted on the walls in a way that one would never encounter in a Tibetan temple, and the peal of bells arouses associations with a Western church, but not with a Tibetan monastery. The abbot is played by a white man, who does not manage to stay in yoga posture like a Buddhist monk. Around his neck hangs an amulet box such as women are in the habit of wearing. But the most peculiar thing is undoubtedly the portrayal of the masked dances ('cham), in which neither the masks nor the music nor the musical instruments (with

one exception) are Tibetan. One is happily fiddling on a Tibetan stringed instrument, although such instruments are never employed for religious purposes ...

#### THE RAZOR'S EDGE

In 1984 John Byrum shot the film *The Razor's Edge*, based on the well-known novel of the same name by W. Somerset Maugham, which was filmed the first time as long ago as 1946. Larry Darell [played by Bill Murray, who also co-wrote the screenplay, editor], unable to cope with either America or France after the First World War, is looking for the meaning of life in Asia. He is doing this on the advice of a pal who gives him as a present a translation of the Upanishads, but at the same time says one can find no answer in books but must set out on the Way oneself. In the film, unlike in the novel, Larry ends up not in the Indian ashram of a yogin, a holy man, but in a Tibetan monastery in the mountains, somewhere in the Himalaya or Tibet. The abbot of the monastery, who had already been expecting Larry thanks to his telepathic abilities (yet again a clairvoyant monk!), sends the seeking Westerner to a hut on the peak of a snow-covered mountain. Having reached it, Larry meditates and reads from a bound book, which is no doubt the copy of the Upanishads he was given. After reading, Larry burns the book, an action that is hard to interpret: has the meditation high up in the Tibetan mountains shown him the meaning of life, so that he can from now on do without religious texts?

Secluded Tibet is compared in an intercut sequence with the decadent world of Western high society: in one is silence, spirituality and warmheartedness, in the other, glamour, unemployment, economic crisis, alcoholism and depressions. However, after his meditation on the Tibetan peak Larry is ready to return to this degenerate world. Back in the monastery he takes his leave of the abbot, who is sorry that Larry is going away. The latter replies that it is easy to be a saint on the summit of a mountain, to which the monk retorts that Larry is already near, but the path to salvation is so narrow that walking on it is as hard as walking on the edge of a razor (hence the title).

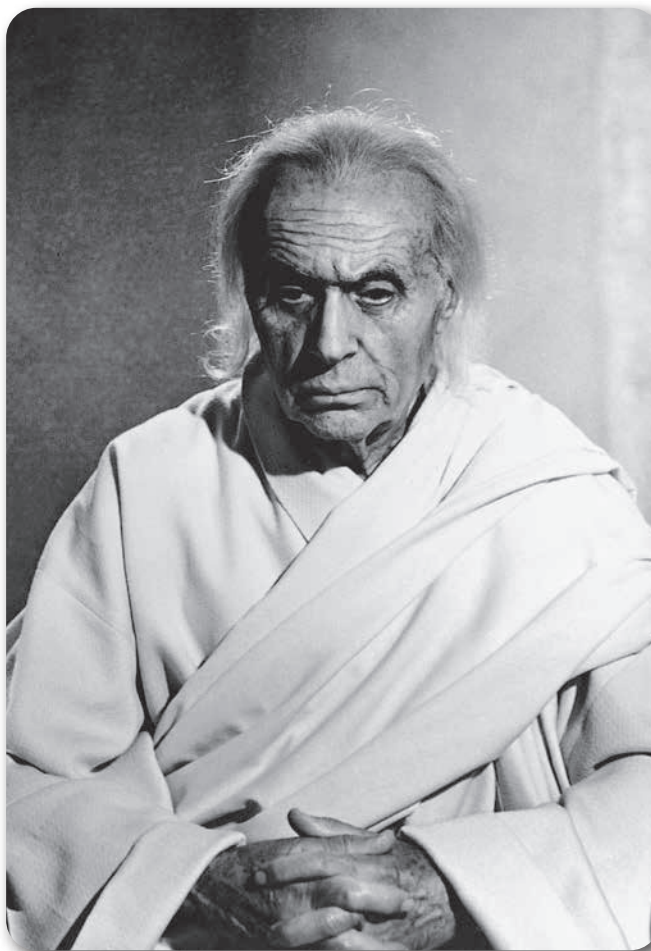
The rest of the course of the story has no more connection with Tibet, or at best an indirect one: after his stay in a Tibetan monastery, Larry is more balanced and tries to help others by giving them confidence and pleasure. In



"Secluded Tibet is compared in an intercut sequence with the decadent world of Western high society: in one is silence, spirituality and warmheartedness, in the other, glamour, unemployment, economic crisis, alcoholism and depressions."

one of the concluding sentences he admits he had tried to be a good man, but one must expect no reward, at least not immediately. Whether this is an allusion to the belief in karma remains open. After his long odyssey, during which his stay in Tibet has undoubtedly brought about decisive change, Larry wants to go home to America. The final image is optimistic: Larry is climbing the steps of a long, solid, stone staircase ...

It is instructive that John Byrum does not establish the concerned priest in India, as in the novel, but somewhere in Tibet. This shifting of the redeeming, sacred place from India to Tibet is probably a consequence of the demystification of India between the appearance of the novel (1944) and that of the second film adaptation (1984), as well as the politically



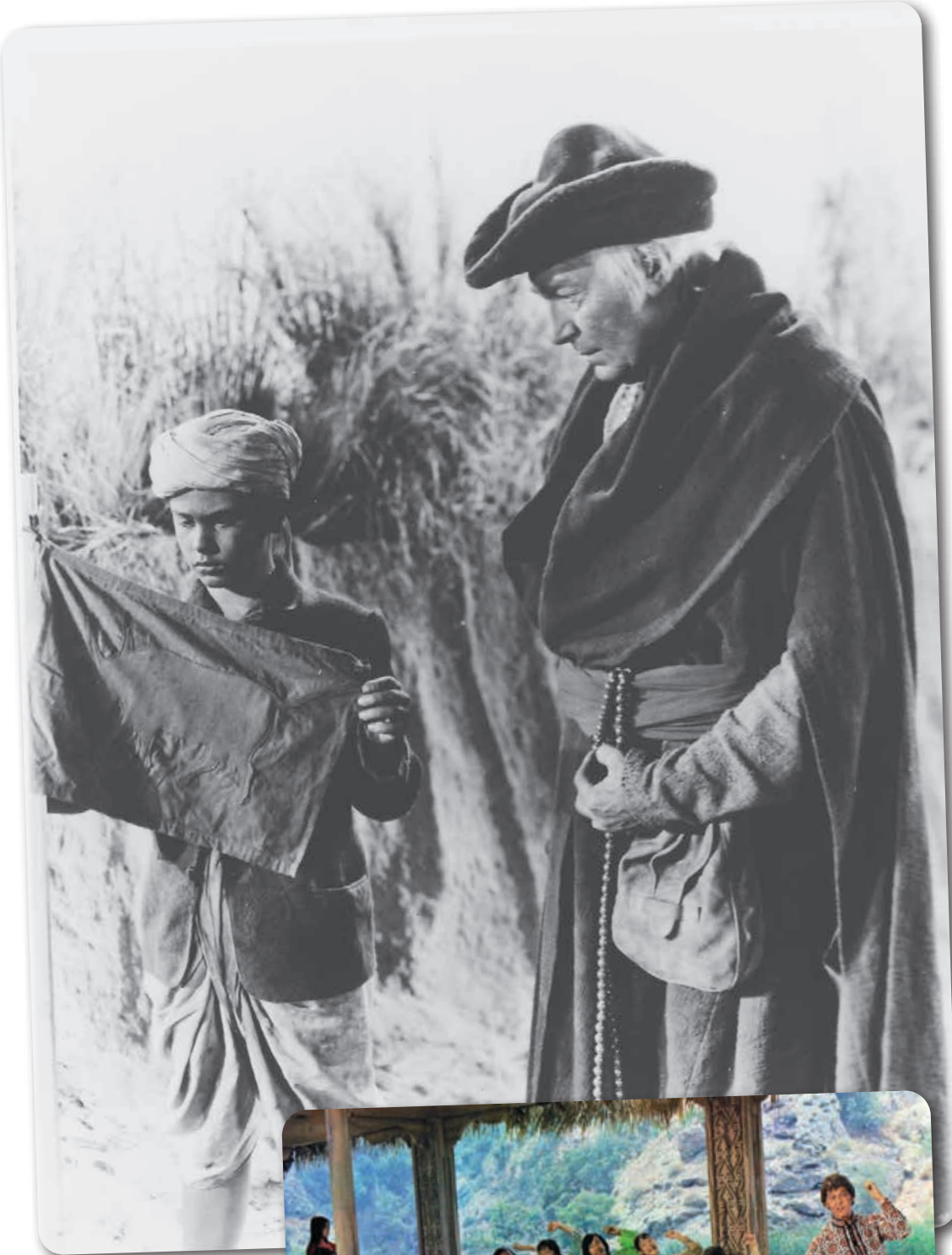


caused isolation of Tibet in the same period, which may have strengthened the mystification of that country.

The *Razor's Edge* is one of the few films produced before the 1990s whose Tibet scenes were filmed at original locations and in which the indigenous characters were played by Tibetans, or rather Ladakhis. For this reason the scenes are much more authentic than in most other Tibet feature films. Even in the mid-1980s it was by no means self-evident that Asians should play Asians, as is shown by the 1984 film version of another well-known novel, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. The film sticks quite closely to the novel, disregarding the sequence in which the Russian secret agents try to divert the Jamuna river by an explosion and so cut off Delhi's water supply.

Against the background of the Tibet image with which we are concerned here, it is particularly interesting how the lama is portrayed in the film. The first thing that leaps to the eye is that, as in other comparable films, a white man plays the holy man, so that the contrast Kipling deliberately brought out in his novel between the old, wise Asian lama and the young, lively Western Kim does not show to advantage. The lama is indeed wrapped in Asiatic-looking yellow clothing, but neither in cut nor in colour does it resemble the robes of a Tibetan monk. Around his neck hangs an amulet box as worn by women and he has a peculiar red hat on—breathing new life into the ancient myth of Tibetan red-capped monks worn out by Blavatsky. Finally, the lama has long, white hair, hanging down uncombed—ignoring the fact that with very few exceptions, Tibetan monks are bald-headed, and the few clerics who do have long hair tie it together in a knot. All this makes the lama look absurd, to which his silly recitation of the well-known mantra 'Om mani padme hum' also contributes—Tibetans pronounce it 'Om mani peme hung'. It gets completely ridiculous when, sitting in the train, the lama playfully alters the mantra into 'Om mani padme locomotive hum'.

In the first film version of *Kim*, of 1950, the lama plays a rather peripheral role, as the secret service scenes clearly predominate. Here too a white plays the lama, but his clothing is more convincing than in the 1984 version. He wears robes quite similar to a Tibetan monk's, at least in colour, with a rosary instead of an ornamental chain. However, in this earlier version too, his long, white, hanging-down hair is covered with a strange red



hat, in shape more like a cowboy hat than the head-covering of a Tibetan monk.

This coffeetable book (which boasts some 96 monochrome images and 167 colour plates) sells for Bt2,300 at the publisher's new shop, called Orchid Books, on the 4th floor of the Silom Complex, right beside the Saladaeng BTS station, in the same location as the old Merman Books shop. The shop is stocked with heaps of books on SE Asia and Asia usually not available elsewhere in BKK, and NO Harry Potter!





Israel. The holy land. The violent land. The oppressors. The oppressed. The crossroads of the world. The heart of monotheism. The axis around which 21st century global politics spins. Rafael D. Frankel examines the contradictions, stereotypes, and myriad attractions.

# EXPLODING STEREOTYPES



Even as a Jewish-Californian who has studied about this place since he was eight years old; who has followed the news about the Middle East incessantly since the now defunct 1993 Oslo Accords; who has visited five times and has now uprooted himself to live here; I find myself both entranced and confounded by Israel. And what does that make me? No different than any one of the millions of people who have lived, worked, or visited here since the dawn of time.

But one thing I have come to realise is that the more one travels here, the more one can at least begin to comprehend the many gravitational forces at work, which are constantly pulling people and land apart, pushing them together, and twisting it all upside down and inside out all at the same time.

The most important thing to consider about Israel is that it couldn't be more different than what you see on the news. As a journalist, I'm often struck by the kind of distorted view of reality the media often shows people about foreign lands, but there is no "kind of" about the distortion here.

So now I will deal with some of the stereotypes about this place and debunk most of them.

1. "Israel is a place where bombs are going off all the time and is so dangerous that unless you have to be

here you should just stay away."

It is certainly true that Israel has gone through periods where buses, cafes, and nightclubs were being routinely bombed by suicidal terrorists, but recently we've been enjoying something of a lull in the violence and there could not be a more kick-ass city in the world than Tel Aviv. The bars and cafes here are packed every night of the week until well after midnight, such as one recent Thursday night (the weekend here is Friday and Saturday) when everything in the city – cinemas, shopping malls, restaurants – stayed open until dawn to celebrate the summer. I found myself at a beach party with a DJ that more closely resembled Koh Phangan than I could believe. I also ran into one girl there whom I had met on Koh Phi Phi three years ago and had since fallen out

**"But what I've come to realise is that, for the most part, people here treat each other like family (they often call total strangers 'brother' or 'sister')."**

of touch with.

During the day, you can chill out on the Mediterranean Sea. There's a long boardwalk and the falafel, shawarma (lamb on a spit), and pita are plentiful. The weather is nice 300 days of the year.

Even though it's a tiny country, there are enough cool places to keep a traveler busy for a year: Historical sites like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Tzfat, and Matzada, the 2,000-year-old mountain top fortress, abound. There is also the natural beauty of the northern mountains, the Biblically profound Sea of Galilee, the Negev Desert

and some great diving in the Red Sea.

2. "Israelis are rude, obnoxious, insular pricks."

Look, there is a reason that Israelis have a bad reputation as travelers. When a group of them comes knocking the result often resembles the aftermath of a cyclone. On one of my first days here, I was boarding a bus from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. It was a Friday afternoon and people were in somewhat of a hurry to get home before the sunset when Jerusalem shuts down for the Jewish Sabbath. As the bus pulled







into the terminal there was a mad dash to get on, so much so that a man with two small children was being shoved aside until he asked me if I could let them on in front of me and I obliged. But what I've come to realise is that, for the most part, people here treat each

other like family (they often call total strangers "brother" or "sister"). Which means that while politeness goes out the window, they genuinely care for each other in heartfelt ways that are more profound than the shallow politeness of Americans, and even surpass Thai hospitality. So many times since I've been here, my cousins, their friends, and even friends of friends have gone out of their way to help me find a job, a place to live, or to deal with the daily adjustments to living in a new country. Given the history of this young country – its founding in the shadow of the Holocaust, five full-scale wars, and outbreaks of terrorism – people here feel bound together, and it shows.

### 3. "Israel is small."

Wrong. It's not small, it's tiny. This is the first stark realisation one comes across while traveling here. Looking on any world map that fact might be obvious, but there is something entirely different about driving only 15 kilometers east of Tel Aviv and hitting Palestinian towns in the West Bank, or driving 30 minutes east of Jerusalem through the West Bank and the Judean desert and coming down the hills only to see

Jordan right in front of your face with its capital Amman just 30km further. I did both on a recent day when my parents, brother and I picked up one of my oldest friends, Oren, in Jerusalem, and we went to visit his father on a kibbutz (communal farm/village). Both were born just south of the Sea of Galilee in northeastern Israel. You can drive from one end of the country to the other in an hour and a half (and that's taking the long route). Heading north, you can be in Syria or Lebanon in another 90 minutes or so. If you travel south along the coast from Tel Aviv, you get to Gaza in one hour and Egypt in thirty more minutes than that. It would be one thing if Israel were Switzerland, and bordered by friends in France, Italy, and Germany. But with hostile neighbours all around, or cold friends like Egypt and Jordan, you do get the sense of why Israelis feel oppressed and hemmed in.

### 4. "The Jews hate the Muslims and the Muslims hate the Jews."

Most of the people here get along just fine. Israel has a 20 percent Arab minority. These are not Palestinians, but Arabs with Israeli citizenship who have the same

basic rights. That's not to say they enjoy the same standard of living as the Jews here, nor that most of them live in mixed neighborhoods with Jews, but relations between Jewish Israelis and Arab Israelis are 99 percent peaceful.

One of the trendy new places for people in Tel Aviv to go is the old Arab city of Yafo (Jafa in English). During the day, there is a shuk (market) and at night there are numerous outdoor cafes and restaurants. Haifa, Israel's main port city, one hour north of Tel Aviv, has been called a "model city" of peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs who

**"Israeli women aren't just beautiful; they are spectacularly beautiful."**

have created a haven there mostly free of fighting. However, there was one suicide bombing several years ago in an Arab-owned restaurant known for its mix of Jewish and





Arab patrons. I could also point out numerous examples of Israelis and Palestinians who have tried very hard to live together in peace, sending their children to the same summer camps and protesting together against violence on both sides.

5. "Israeli women are beautiful." Israeli women aren't just beautiful; they are spectacularly beautiful. And the girls here tell me the men aren't so bad either. If you ever doubt this claim, all you have to do is go down to The Connection off Khaosan Road. Sit in the restaurant for an hour and you'll see what I'm talking about.

6. "Americans are revered here." The Israeli government may kiss the ass of the United States government quite often, but the people here certainly don't let that stop them from taking advantage of any tourists who don't speak Hebrew, including American Jews. And although most everyone here speaks English quite well, they do enjoy the occasional joke at the expense of Americans who can't understand Hebrew (thankfully, that does not include me). Just because we're in Israel, doesn't mean all the American stereotypes go away. And one of them is that the Americans who come have a lot of money, which, of course, they will milk if they can – just like anywhere else in the world.

7. "Where beaches are concerned, Thailand can't be beat." Not sure I can say that Thailand can be beat, but the beauty of the Sinai – just across the border in Egypt – is another thing all together. Where the Sinai Desert, with its barren heaps of rocks and treeless landscape, meets the turquoise waters and fluorescent reefs of the Red Sea is one of the most astonishing natural contrasts in the world.

I hit one bungalow operation down there last September called Freedom Mahmoud which is run by a family of Bedouins, the patriarch being, you guessed it, Mahmoud. The daily pattern my friends and I observed at their desert oasis was as follows: smoke hash, eat Arab food, lay on pillows underneath thatch huts, play Shesh-Besh (or backgammon, so popular in these parts it's like a sport) swim, repeat... always repeat.

The fish, reefs, and visibility in the Red Sea make the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea look washed up. And you don't have to swim out to them. The reef – at least where Freedom Mahmoud is situated – starts where the desert ends,

with a steep ocean cliff hanging just 10 metres out into the water. It was so beautiful and insect free in the desert that we slept outside under the stars as the waves and the warm, dry desert breeze lulled us to sleep every night.

"Where the Sinai Desert, with its barren heaps of rocks and treeless landscape, meets the turquoise waters and fluorescent reefs of the Red Sea is one of the most astonishing natural contrasts in the world."





## OUTRO

So hopefully this has clarified a few misconceptions about Israel. One thing I should note: The day after I started writing this, a suicide bomber struck at a mall in Netanya, a popular vacation town 30 minutes north of Tel-Aviv. It was the first bombing since March and five people were killed, including two 16-year-old girls who were best friends. As I write this, two more people are struggling for their lives. That is the reality here, even during the "lull" in violence we have now.

Still, life goes on just as it did before and there is no palpable change in the mood of the country. It brought to mind something my friend Oren told me last year a day after a double suicide bombing killed 16 people. "This country amazes me," said, an Israeli-American who has lived here since 1991. "I can't imagine any other country dealing with shit like this the way we do. Maybe we even deal with it too well."

## TRAVEL BASICS:

**Accommodation:** There are a number of guesthouses located in Tel-Aviv on Ben-Yehuda Street as well as Dizengoff St. Both locations are close to the beach and the centre of town. Expect to pay around US\$20 for standard rooms.

**Transport:** Getting around the big cities is very easy by local bus. In

Tel Aviv, large taxis called "Sheirut" also operate along the bus lines and cost NIS 5 (4.5 Shekels = \$1.00) per ride, and will pick you up and drop you off anywhere along the route. For traveling around the country, buses run from all the cities constantly and can be picked up at the central bus stations. The trip from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem goes for NIS 21.50.

**Drinks:** In Tel Aviv, there are pubs and "pick-up" bars everywhere. My favourite pub is Minzar B'R'a'ayon, on Allenby St., next to Nachalat Benyamina and the main shooch. Cheap brews on tap, indoor/outdoor seating, and a laidback atmosphere. To see the best Tel Aviv has to offer in terms of beautiful people, and for a cool outdoor gig as well, check out Elena's along the bridge of the Bima Theater near Dizengoff Center. There are also many cafes along the beach where you can sit on the sea and eat/drink until late night. In Jerusalem, pretty much all the bars are located around Ben-Yehuda St., but beware that EVERYTHING there closes down from late afternoon Friday until Saturday night.

**Food:** Falafel, Shawarma, Humus, and Barakus are plentiful, tasty and cheap. If you want a restaurant in Tel Aviv, try the place with no name on the corner of Ben-Yehuda and Ben-Gurion, with a variety of dishes and everything on the menu is 30 shekels.





# Misdemeanour Memoir



It was July of 1939. World War II had not yet started and thoughts of war didn't loom large in the mind of a ten-year-old boy. Largs, the small town in Scotland where I lived, was a holiday resort on the Firth of Clyde and always busy during the summer. I was constantly down at the pier where the Clyde steamers docked daily to pick up passengers. In those days, a dozen or more illustrious little ships arrived and departed over the course of a week. I knew all of them – Duchess of Montrose, Duchess of Hamilton, Duchess of Fife, Jeannie Deans, The Waverley, and I never tired of watching them proudly sail up to the Largs pier where lines were thrown to the dockhands, who fastened the vessel to the pier bollards. Gangways were connected; passengers disembarked and boarding passengers took their places. I envied these people, as I loved to sail on the paddle steamers. A visit to the engine room was the highlight of a trip. The giant shiny pistons looked so powerful as they pounded back and forth, propelling the paddles through the salt water, driving the ship to its destination. Even the destinations had a romance to them – Rothesay, Dunoon, Arran, Kyles of Bute and Tignabruich – much of the Scottish Highlands was accessible from Largs by sea. I had travelled on the boats, but not often enough for my liking. My latest trip had been with my mother on the Duchess of Montrose to view the giant ocean liner, the Queen Mary, as she lay at the estuary of the River Clyde.

The Carnival cruises that left in the evening were exciting in a different, more daring way. The ship had a small dance orchestra on deck and the young men and women who boarded looked so glamorous and attractive. "They hae some real carry-ons on yon carnival cruises," was often heard around town. This made me wish more than ever that I was sailing into the sunset with them.

The pier had other lesser attractions. Small boys fished from the shallower side with a line wound around a short stick with a single hook and a one-ounce lead sinker. Casting was hazardous as the line was whirled over the head for several seconds and then released, so junior fishermen were given a wide berth when casting. Most of the fish hauled in were small inedible scavengers. It was only when schools of porpoises swam into the harbour that larger fish, like cod and mackerel, were driven into the harbour.

At high tide, my friends and I swam in the harbour, jumping off a height of about fifteen feet. Sometimes large jelly fish were swept into the harbour and we would jump on them and smash them to bits. The risks of getting stung were high, but then so was the prestige. Wildlife conservation was unknown in those days, so we made our own contribution to the imbalance of nature in ignorant innocence. The problem with swimming there was that there were no change rooms at the pier. We had to go to the bathing station a quarter mile up the shore, change there and with towels slung jauntily around our necks, troop proudly along the promenade to the pier. The water in Scotland was never very warm so each swimmer, teeth chattering, later ate sandwiches we named 'chittery bites'.

The approach to the pier had several chocolate vending machines I could never use, since my meagre pocket money of three pennies a week was saved for a Saturday matinee at the pictures, leaving one penny for sweets, usually consumed by the time the serial was halfway through, or even before the show had started. On Wednesdays, my father's half-day off work, he always gave me a penny at noon, but that was soon gone. The wealthy holiday-makers from Glasgow were the ones who could afford the vending machines. There was one particular machine that was very high-priced that we called 'the hen'. It was constructed of a large green metal cylinder, topped by a red and yellow cast iron hen. Insert two pennies and the hen would give a cluck and lay a chocolate egg covered in brightly-coloured paper that arrived at an opening about half-way down the cylinder. To my knowledge, none of my peers had ever invested in the hen.

When the frustration of having no money in the face of these commercial enticements was too much to bear, my friends and I headed for the hills above Largs, away from the tourists, to the Gogo Burn, a small river with several pools deep enough for swimming. In mid-summer, we often went in bathing suits and towels but at other times of the year, we'd bathe 'bare skudd'. The one we called the 'octopus pool' was so deep none of us had ever

reached the bottom. The peat-coloured water gave it a dark foreboding look. Local rumour said that a trout fisherman had drowned there, which made swimming in it a daring adventure.

I rarely went into the hills alone, preferring the bustle around the pier. One particularly sultry evening, after several hours of watching the steamers, I ran into two of my friends – George

**Septuagenarian Rab Cooper looks at life in a small Scottish resort town in the 1930s through the eyes of the young boy who was once him.**





Wyber and Wullie McNeur. They were with another boy, Stevie Hart, who was a year older than we were. They were excited. "We're goin' tae get eggs oot o' the hen," said Wullie. "How can you do that?" I asked. "Stevie has a long skinny arm and he can reach up inside the hen, trip the spring and release the eggs, one at a time" George said. I wondered why they were telling me. Stevie must have read my mind. "We need another lookout to watch for the pier officers". I fell in with the plan immediately.

I was assigned to watch the office about twenty-five yards from the hen, but my attention was more focused on how Stevie was doing. The opening was fairly low down on the hen's cylinder, so Stevie had to get down on one knee to ease his right hand up inside the machine. George was guarding the pier access in case an officer came along in a boat. This was extremely unlikely.

The pier was busy with tourists, but Wullie, who stood beside Stevie, was prepared to inform any busybody that Stevie had put his tuppence into the hen and was trying to retrieve what was rightfully his. Stevie was struggling with his task. His arm was inside the cylinder well past his elbow. The whole scheme was taking longer than expected and I was becoming a little anxious. I deserted my post and moved over to Stevie. "Is everything O.K.?" I asked. "It seems to be different this time" said Stevie, and I detected a tremor in his voice. "Is your hand stuck?" asked Wullie. "Aye, it is," Stevie said.

I immediately felt sorry for Stevie, but it also occurred to me that what we were doing was illegal and, if we were caught, we'd be in serious trouble. We tried to haul Stevie's arm out but he yelled in pain. George, Wullie and I went off to the side for a furtive discussion. We had two choices. We could abandon Stevie to his fate or try to get official help. Happily, I recall that we threw out the first option immediately. Stevie by this time was reduced to tears.

"Who looks after these machines?" I asked. "Mr. Chalmers on George Street" Wullie replied, as always a font of knowledge about Largs' local populace. Wullie stayed with Stevie while George and I hurried off to find Mr. Chalmers, hoping for Stevie's sake that he would be home, but dreading the thought of confessing to our ill-conceived crime.

Mr. Chalmers was home and when we explained our predicament, he told us to wait while he went back into his house for his keys and a jar of Vaseline. He was silent on the ten-minute walk back to the pier. He opened the hen, smeared Vaseline around Stevie's arm and eased him free.

That accomplished, he folded his arms and glared down upon the four wee delinquents. "Did you get any eggs oot o' the hen?" he asked. Eyes cast downward in shame, we shook our heads. "Awright, this time I'll let ye go, but if I catch ye at this again, it'll be the polis." We thanked him profusely and made our way home. I can't say I remember ever seeing anyone as relieved as Stevie.

By the following summer, Britain was deep into World War II, and the pier had changed. The tourists and the vending machines were gone; the hen and the dance orchestras were only memories. My beloved fleet was decimated as the vessels were pressed into service for the war effort. The Waverley was sunk off Dunkirk in 1940.

My friends and I were too young to fight in the war but, afterwards, George joined the merchant navy. Wullie became an electrician and I a civil engineer. I lost track of Stevie and don't know what he became, but I am pretty sure he didn't become a criminal.



A replica of The Waverley was built right after the war and is still in service 60 years later. If you happen to be visiting the UK and want to experience a little old-style holiday romance, check out the Waverley's website at [www.waverleyexcursions.co.uk](http://www.waverleyexcursions.co.uk)



# CRIME & PUNISHMENT

Wong Seow Fung reports on capital and corporal punishment in Malaysia.

In 1986, two young Australian heroin traffickers were told their final appeals for clemency had been rejected and that they would be hung in 20 hours. Both of them were introduced to the Malay hangman, and then weighed, so he could determine how much rope to use in order to dislocate the third vertebrae, which is supposed to ensure that they are rendered unconscious and do not slowly choke to death.

Brian Chambers and Kevin Barlow had been arrested at the airport in Penang and charged with possessing 141 grams of heroin. According to the Australian Coalition against the Death Penalty, at Kuala Lumpur's Pudu Prison (closed in 1996 because it was deemed "too soft") they were allowed to see their relatives and have a last meal from the Happy Satay fast-food chain before being handcuffed and hooded.

The execution chamber was a 19<sup>th</sup> century relic of the British Empire. Above the gallows two nooses hung down. The hangman's assistant placed them around their necks and gave a signal to his boss, who triggered a lever to open the trapdoors. Later the hangman would say it was a textbook-perfect execution.

The two Aussies have been the only Westerners executed under Malaysia's tough drug laws. But in February of this year, the government revealed that it had executed 358 people in the past 24 years; the last death sentences were carried out on December 27, 2002, when three men were put to death at the Kajang Prison.

In Malaysia there are a number of crimes that carry a mandatory death penalty. These include possession of a firearm under Section 57 of the Internal Security Act of 1960, as well as murder and treason. Under the Dangerous Drug Act of 1952, those caught possessing 15 grams of heroin or 200 grams of marijuana will also have a blind date with the hangman.

Amnesty International (Malaysia) has been trying to raise awareness about the death penalty issue by distributing leaflets and organising private screenings of a documentary on the subject. Some local NGOs, like Suaram, have also tried to bring the issue out of the dungeon and into the light. Because of the country's harsh censorship laws, however, most debates of the issue, either in the press or even in conversation, have been stifled.

"Talking about the abolishment of the death penalty is still very new to the people. Even the people in NGO circles hardly discuss it. I think it's more crucial to have an information campaign to reach out to the public to create atmosphere for the public to discuss about the issue. It only will be effective to lobby the government when public concern is built up," says Choo Chon Kai, the coordinator of the Penang branch of the Suaram, a human rights organisation.

Official statistics show that the death penalty has been ineffective in combating the drug problem in Malaysia. The number of known new addicts has been on the rise from 7,154 in 1980 to 13,140 in 1995. The total number of known drug addicts in Malaysia from 1988 to 1995 was 194,797. In 1995 alone, the number of known new addicts rose by 18 percent in 1995. Since then these statistics have been slowly increasing. "There is no convincing evidence that the death penalty deters crimes such as drug-trafficking more effectively than other punishments," Amnesty International said. "The Malaysian authorities must take a long hard look at their use of the death penalty and impose a moratorium on further executions."

But the death penalty is only the most draconian aspect of a barbaric legal system.

According to statistics released in Parliament in October 2003 by the Home Ministry, 23 people died in police cells from 2002 until mid-2003. During the same period, 425 prisoners perished in prison. The ministry refused to specify the causes of death.

In August 2003, 28-year-old Ho Kwai See, a coconut trader, died at the Sungai Buloh Prison after earlier being detained for a week in a police cell on suspicion of drug offences. His family members suspected

foul play after seeing bruises on his body and sought a second post-mortem. Kwai See's brother wanted the authorities to explain how his apparently healthy brother had died so suddenly while in custody. The family members attempt to obtain a court order to have a second post-mortem was rejected by the Kuala Lumpur High Court.

In addition to incarceration, flogging with a rattan cane is also meted out for some 40 different crimes, ranging from rape and kidnapping to drug arrests and robbery. In December 1994, lashes of the cane were introduced for the white-collar crimes of embezzlement, tax fraud, and bribery. Two years later, the authorities amended the Immigration Act, so that a severe whipping, which leaves life-long scars, was added to the sentence for anyone convicted of using false passports and other such immigration offences.

These acts of brutality violate Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as Article 12 (2) of the Malaysian Human Rights Charter which states: "No person shall be tortured or subjected to cruel or degrading treatment or punishment by individuals, police, military or any other state agency."

In spite of protests from Amnesty International and local NGOs, the justice system's heavy-handed approach to prisoners has not softened. In March of this year, AFP reported that "Malaysia's hangmen and floggers had won pay rises. For every hanging, executioners would be paid the equivalent of 100 EU (490 Malaysian Ringgits), up from 60 EU." Prison officers in charge of flogging the convicts would also get pay rises, from 60 cents to 2 Euros, for every stroke of the cane. But illegal immigrants would be whipped "gently".

According to Internal Security Ministry Secretary-General Abdul Aziz Mohamad Yusof, the bonuses for some 50 hangmen and floggers, who execute these "challenging tasks", should have been boosted long ago.

Check out Suaram's website at [www.suaram.net](http://www.suaram.net).





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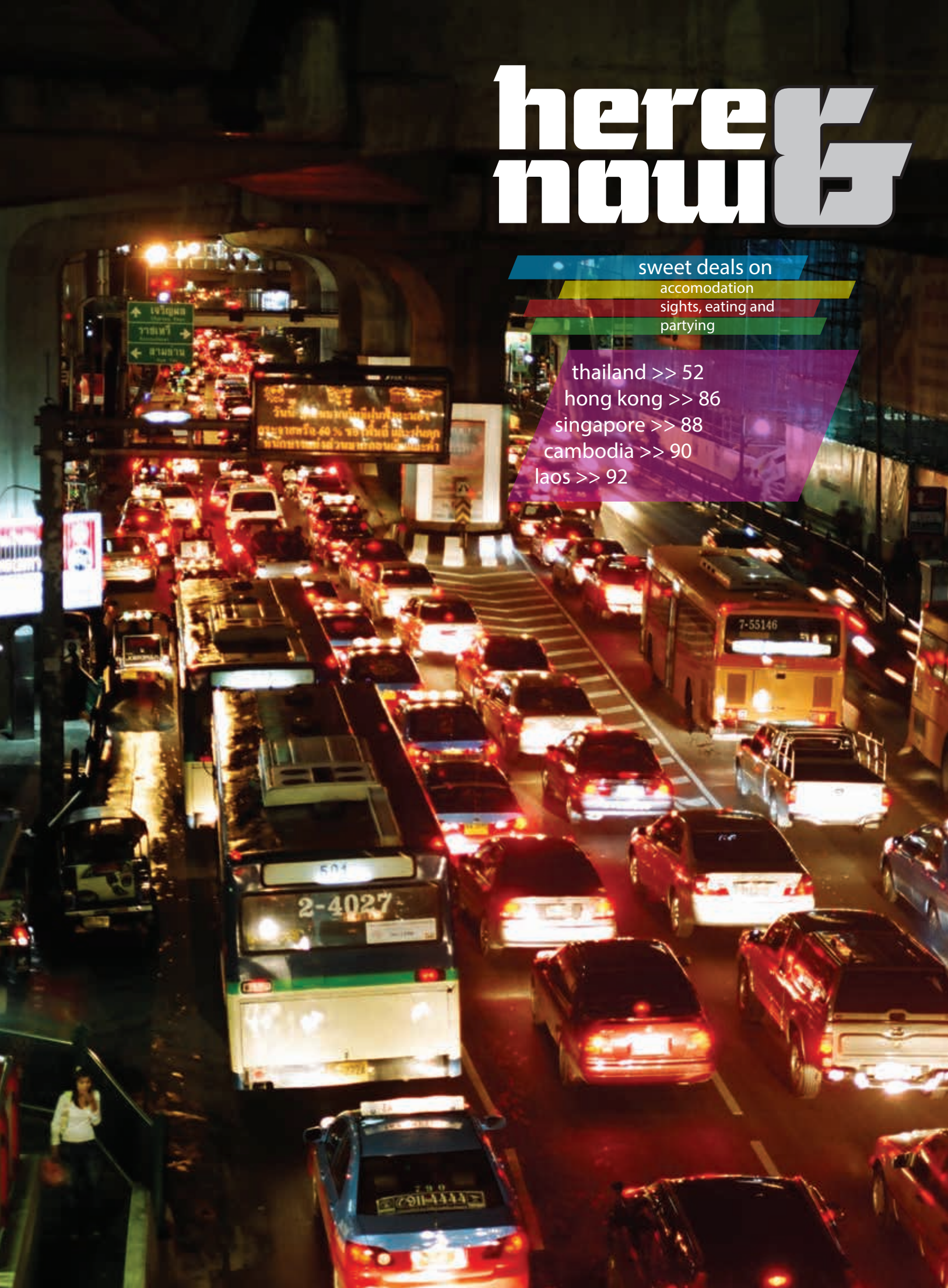
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# Un-Slumming It

Daniel Cooper laps up some four-star serenity in a city full of five-star chaos.

Phnom Penh is a lovely town. Filled with charming colonial buildings lining rustic streets, the city straddles the river lazily snaking its way through the country. On the riverfront at sundown, with an ice-cold Ankor Beer in your hand, you can close your eyes, hold your nose and imagine yourself in a pleasant post-colonial French city.

Of course, Phnom Penh is nothing like that most of the time. Sit on the riverfront and feast your eyes on the begging kids, multiple amputees and roaring traffic. Try walking around town during the day unmolested by moto-taxi drivers or try walking around town at night unmolested by muggers and prostitutes (to be fair, things have improved in this department.) Many of the streets are paved with dust, the traffic is disorganised chaos and the waft of rotting garbage dogs your step at each turn. The place is hot, hectic, sleazy and often infuriatingly frustrating.

Perhaps, after a hot day of stamping around the market, you want to take a moto-taxi back to your hotel. Uh oh, the driver's English is as patchy as

his shirt and he's never seen a map before. Don't worry; he'll just drive you all over town for the next hour until you give up.

The city holds many gems but for the new or sensitive traveller the place can be a bit much, and at the end of the day returning to a grotty hotel room with its mosquitos and shitty plumbing can be more than one can bear. Luckily, for those who can afford it, there is an escape.

Enter the Sunway Hotel, a four-star business hotel in Phnom Penh's embassy district, not far from Wat Phnom for which the city is named. As a veteran of many trips to Cambodia, this writer was shocked to find a correctly functioning luxury hotel at the heart of all this darkness. The staff is obviously well trained and their English is excellent. There's no blackouts, the water smells normal, the TV reception is great. After an hour in my room it dawned on me that, unusually for Cambodia, everything worked the way it was supposed to and nothing was broken. I could have been in Singapore, but actually it was Malaysia.

The Sunway is part of the

Allson chain from Malaysia and is one of only a handful of luxury hotels outside Siem Reap. Being close to many embassies, government departments and the like their usual clientele are businesspeople. However, the hotel has also played guest to stars like Matt Dillon who stayed there for three months while filming City of Ghosts.

There's the usual variety of rooms. During my stay I was crashing in a suite divided into two rooms that boasted its own kitchen. A fair step up from the \$2 guesthouse I stayed in when first visiting years ago, where the toilet emptied directly into the lake below.

Cambodia can be a bit overpowering at the best of times but it's nice to know that when it all gets a bit too much there is an oasis of civilisation and luxury close at hand.



## Oktoberfest!

As if anybody in Phnom Penh needed an excuse to drink, the Sunway's annual Oktoberfest is on again this year. From 7pm on the 16th and 17th of September get stuck into a free buffet, knock back free beer and be serenaded by Bayern-Land Echo, a real German oompah band from Munich. Price \$29 from which one dollar goes to a worthy local charity. They're expecting a crowd of around 1,000 people, so bring the beer-goggles.

## Stop Press!

Book and stay two nights at the Sunway before October 15th for only US\$55 per night. Single/double with free breakfast and use of gym, sauna, steam bath and Jacuzzi.

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## Top End:

Bangkok has heaps of five-star hotels and resorts, including the world-famous Oriental Hotel, Shangrila, Peninsula, Conrad, Sheraton Grande, Amari, Novotel, 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 1 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**  
Bt1000-1500, 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.

# 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.

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

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

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

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

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

Sawasdee Group has several places dotted around the Banglamphu area (and expanding throughout the country). All of them have cool Thai-style hangout



areas and clean rooms. See www.sawasdee-hotels.com. Prices range from Bt140-800. Some of the group include: Sawasdee Bangkok Inn 02-280-1251, Sawasdee Krungthep Inn 02-629-0079, Welcome Sawasdee Inn 02-629-2321, Sawasdee Smile Inn 02-629-2340-1, Sawasdee Khaosan Inn 02-629-4798-9.

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

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

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

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



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# DAWN TO DUSK



## BANGLAMPHU

### CORRECTIONS MUSEUM

Where: Mahachai Road, across from Thanon Luang  
When: Mon-Fri; 8:30pm-4pm  
Cost: Free  
Way to go: Ten minute walk south of Golden Mount.  
Some of the guard towers and rows of prison cells are all that's left of the hellish Mahachai Prison, where Warren Fellows (The Damage Done) was first incarcerated, in what is now the grounds of Romanee Lart Park. For a bowel-loosening display of barbaric torture instruments once used in Siamese prisons and wax tableaux of prisoners being beheaded and shot, visit the park's museum on the Golden Mount side.

### NATIONAL GALLERY

Where: Chao Fah Road, near Pra Pinklao  
When: Wed-Sun, 9am-4pm  
Cost: Bt30  
Way to go: Walk from Khaosan Road  
Brush up on Thai art history with a visit to this gallery near Sanam Luang (five minutes walk SW of Khaosan). The permanent exhibition is not spectacular, but the monthly exhibitions in the annex can blaze with brilliance.

### NATIONAL MUSEUM

Where: West side of Sanam Luang  
When: Wed-Sun, 9am-4pm  
Cost: Bt40  
Way to go: Ten-minute walk from Khaosan  
This storehouse of priceless artifacts and funerary chariots also has a number of exhibition rooms with themes like "Gallery of Thai History," "Gold Treasures," "Shadow Players and Entertainment," plus a fine selection of Buddha images and pottery from the Sukothai, Ayutthaya, and Lop Buri periods, as well as ancient weapons. Free guided tours in different languages each week, as well as occasional lectures on Buddhism and Thai history in English. Call 02-224 1404 or 02-224 1333 for more info.

### THAMMASAT LIBRARY

Where: Beside the National Museum on Na Phra That Road  
When: Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm, and Sat-Sun, 9am-3pm  
Cost: Bt20 per day  
Way to go: Enter the university through the front gate near the National Museum and walk past the sports field on your left, take the last right, and walk about 15 metres.  
Plenty of brain food on offer in this intellectual smorgasbord with more than 300,000 books in English, French, Japanese and other non-native tongues, 2,000 different kinds of periodicals and 27 newspapers. Large selection of English videos – from classics to cool trash – that you can watch on the VCRs.

### VIPASSANA MEDITATION CENTER

Where: Wat Mahadatu, Na Phra Lan Rd.  
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.

### WHAT 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 Subanahongsa, ridden by His Majesty the King back in 1999 during celebrations to mark the Sovereign's 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday. Adorned with a figurehead of a mythical swan known as hamsa (the mount of the Hindu god Brahma) it is 46-metres long and hewn from a single trunk of teak.

### SONGKRAN MIYOMASANE

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, 8am-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

### LIMPINI PARK

Where: Rama IV Road  
When: Daily, 6am-8pm  
Cost: Free  
Way to go: #15 bus from Wat Bowen Niwet, Saladaeng skytrain station, Silom and Lumpini subway stations  
A refreshing green lung in the midst of pestilent Bangkok. In the mornings and evenings, old people perform tai chi, joggers stop for a medicinal shot of snake's bile and buff chaps work out at the outdoor gym. In between, picnickers loaf and horny young couples coo. On weekends expect diverse musical and theatrical performances. But the best spectacle is the 6pm public aerobics attended by hundreds.

## PRATUNAM

### Hilton Hotel FERTILITY SHRINE

Where: 2 Wittayu (Wireless) Road, near the British Embassy  
When: Early morning to early evening.  
How Much: Dick all  
Way to go: Cannal taxi World Trade Center stop, Chitlom Skytrain Station  
Devoted to the Fertility Goddess Tubtim, this shrine, in the far north corner behind the hotel, is a sanctuary for the limp, the lovelorn, and prospective parents. It is studded with wooden phalluses (some are wrapped with colourful sashes) in all shapes, sizes, and hues; they are offerings made to the goddess for wishes to be fulfilled. Sitting pretty beside a canal, the main spirit house is surrounded by foliage and a sacred ficus tree.

## SAMUT PRAKAN

### ERAWAN MUSEUM

Where: Near the Crocodile Farm and Ancient City on Old Sukhumvit Road  
When: Daily, 9am-6pm  
Way to go: See the Ancient City listing.  
The three-headed copper elephant measures some 40 metres in height and weighs 250 tonnes. In the base is a museum devoted to Thai and Chinese





# WAY TO GO

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.

**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.

**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.

## 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.



The Tang Gallery is currently exhibiting some of the brightest and boldest painters from China, like Fang Lijun, Zhang Xiaogang, Wang Guangyi, and Yue Minjun in an exhibition entitled Chinese Contemporary Print. The original, highly sought-after paintings have been transformed into faithful reproductions using a refined technique called "Fine Art Printing."

Check out the show until August 6th in the exhibition venue, Unit B-28, in the basement of the Silom Galleria at 919/1 Silom Soi 19. The Tang Gallery is open from Mon-Sat, 11am-7pm.

**SPOT ON!** Leave your 500 page guidebook at home. Instead, bring a Groovy Map. **Newsweek**

● Your map is fantastic. I would consider it a must for anyone..  
- Anthony Rossi, MD., Miami, USA

● We usually annotate our maps with bars, sightseeing places etc, but this time we didn't have to because it was already done!  
- Joanna Welsh, UK

**GROOVY MAP**  
Bangkok by Night  
Bangkok by Day

**BANGKOK RAW**



# 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, 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 (Bt580). Bt800-1,200 per head will ensure a full trough not including booze.

### SIROCCO

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

### INDIAN HUT (NORTHERN INDIAN)

311/2-5 Suriwongse Rd, opposite Manora School (Skytrain Sala Daeng), 11am-11pm, Tel: 02-635 7876-7, major cards  
You have to admire any restaurant that rips off the Pizza Hut logo. Excellent and very fresh fodder, without the "fast food" variety of Indian cuisine so common outside its home country. A wide variety of lesser known Indian dishes especially from the tandoor and all are reasonably priced, with most main courses going for under Bt200. Also has a good vegetarian selection for around Bt100 a dish, a variety of breads and, according to the management, the finest Indian rice in Bangkok.

### JESTERS (PACIFIC RIM)

Peninsula Hotel, Charoen Nakorn Rd, Klongsan, Tel: 02-861 2888, 6:30pm-10:30pm snack food after 10:30pm, major cards  
Very cool, very stylish restaurant with real attention to detail. Jesters has river views, impeccable service and soulful, chilled-out music to accompany the culinary delights. Highly recommended is the degustation menu for Bt1,400 per head - a great way to sample 'n stuff. Live contemporary jazz accompanies a chocolate buffet every Friday and Saturday 7-11pm.

### 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 its own character. The Bangkok branch at the Marriot Resort and Spa has established itself as a dead cert for great food and a great dining experience in Bangkok. The immensely civilized riverside setting with outdoor terrace is a great place to enjoy the much talked about Sunday jazz brunch.

### TONGUE THAI (THAI)

18-20 Charoen Krung Rd (same Soi as Oriental Hotel), 10:30am-2pm, 5pm-11pm, Tel: 02-630 9918-9, major cards except Diners, JCB  
Intimate and tastefully decorated eatery tucked away amongst the antique galleries of Charoen Krung road, and a good place to fill empty bellies after a day spending your life savings on fake

Buddha sculpture and Chinese furniture. Traditional Thai fare like soft shell crab curry, mussels in a clay pot, and crispy morning glory go for around Bt100-400.

### PATARA (THAI)

2 Sathorn 11, South Sathorn Rd, 11:30am-2:30pm, 6pm-10:30pm, Tel: 02-212 6420-1, www.patarathailand.com, major cards  
Elegant Thai restaurant on Sathorn with some excellent Thai adaptations like raw tuna in a lime and lemongrass vinaigrette, and lemongrass marinated New Zealand rack of lamb with a spicy chilli sauce, green papaya and sweet rice rolls (Bt160-380 a dish). A good place for parties as they have ongoing group discounts and promotions.



Now take your time, ma'am, and point out the one who stole your purse

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**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**  
(INTERNATIONAL)  
The Ascott Sathorn, Levels 1 & 2, 187 South Sathorn Rd, (Skytrain Chong Nonsi), 6-10am, 11am-2pm, 5pm-1am daily, Tel: 02-676 6673/77, major cards  
Named after a small atoll in Indonesia and with successful outlets in Singapore and Bali, Hu'u is now in Bangkok at The Ascott on Sathorn. Aimed at attracting Bangkok's brightest, most buzzing crowd of high rollers, Hu'u Bar downstairs is for lounging, tapas munching and cocktail quaffing. Upstairs is for a more refined dining experience. Hu'u Epicure is a swish, antique 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](http://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. 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](http://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.

**CHESA (SWISS)**  
5 Sukhumvit soi 20 (skytrain Asoke), 11am-11pm, Tel. 02-261 6650, major cards  
No snow or silly woollen hats in sight. A laid-back Swiss restaurant serving the usual fondue fare plus some more interesting dishes in a comfy, off-piste environment. Around Bt1,000 a head for a full skier's fill up. The management pride themselves on disproving the belief that Swiss food is always heavy and stodgy.

**BOURBON ST BAR & RESTAURANT**  
29/4-6 Sukhumvit Rd Soi 22 (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 7am-1am, Tel: 02-259 0328-9, [www.bourbonstbkk.com](http://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](http://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.

**IKKYU-AN (JAPANESE)**  
635-637 Sukhumvit Rd. (opp. Emporium), Mon-Fri 11am-2pm, 5pm-8:30pm, Sat-Sun 11:30am-8:30pm, Tel: 02-260 3332, major cards  
The heavy shopper's Japanese restaurant, Ikkyu-An succeeds in dishing up reasonably priced, authentic Japanese grub in a decidedly 'un-stiff' atmosphere. Sushi counter downstairs and tatami seating upstairs.

**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](http://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.

**ABYSSINYA CAFÉ (ETHIOPIAN)**  
Sukhumvit soi 3 (near Grace Hotel), daily 11am-11pm  
Well worth seeking out for those looking to get off the well-eaten culinary path. A small café-like establishment with very limited seating, the magnificent smell of freshly roasted coffee (literally roasted in the restaurant area when we visited!) and good food. Small dishes sit upon a blanket of the sour Ethiopian bread injera, and are eaten together using the hands. Unusual (to most of us) but very tasty.

**SAN REMO (ITALIAN PIZZERIA)**  
253/2 Sukhumvit Soi 31 (Skytrain Phrom Pong) Mon-Fri, 6pm-11pm, Sat-Sun, midday-11pm, [www.dininginthailand.com/sanremo.asp](http://www.dininginthailand.com/sanremo.asp), Tel: 02-258 6919, major cards  
San Remo has a curious Mediterranean al fresco feel without actually being al fresco. Around 40 different pizza toppings (Bt235-285) such as good old heart-stopper, Four Seasons, and Gioiosa (mozzarella, small prawns, green peas, smoked salmon and Italian parsley) and a wide selection of pastas (Bt175-195) like Penne Treviso (penne pasta in cream sauce, Speck, raddiccio 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](http://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](http://www.pprincess.com), major cards  
Well placed for a Nipponese nosh up



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

**AMARANTH (ORGANIC FUSION)**  
545 Sukhumvit Soi 31 (Skytrain Phrom Phong)

11:30-2:30pm, 6:00-10:00pm, www.health-at-ease.co.th, Tel. 02-662 0795, major cards  
Organic and stylish, with not a dirty hippy in sight. The menu is a health-giving cocktail of Asian and western tastes which means interesting, inventive dishes (minus the unwanted chemicals), such as 'Amaranth salad with roasted polenta' or 'poached fillet of beef with wasabi mash.' Main courses range from Bt220-480. These can be washed down with a range of fresh fruit and veggie juices, organic coffees and herbal teas, or a selection of wines including some organic varieties.

**RANG MAHAL (INDIAN)**

The Rembrandt hotel, Sukhumvit soi 18, 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30am-10:30pm, Tel:02-261 7100 ext.7532, major cards  
A true Maharaja's eatery, Rang Mahal's sumptuously appointed with skyline views of Bangkok and fantastic Indian food. Live Indian music to accompany dishes such as Punjabi S amosa (Bt150) and Rogan Josh Kashmiri (Bt375).

**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 Convent (Skytrain Sala Daeng); New Road, Bang Rak; and Sukhumvit 35 (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 11am-3:30pm 6pm-10:30pm, major cards  
First established in 1979 by Cha Cha, chef to the rich and famous. Now in the hands of his son Kovit, who has another outlet in Silom. Specialising in North Indian, Mughlai Muslim and vegetarian food. Try the specials from the tandoor, at Bt140 for half a chicken you'll still have cash to knock a few back in one of the nearby pubs.

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

20/20-21 Ruamrudee Village, Ploenchit Road (Skytrain Ploenchit), 11am-2pm 5pm-10pm, www.witch-tavern.com, Tel.02-255 5354, major cards (except Diner's)  
If you want to get your date in the mood without the use of Rohipnol, this is the place. The only oyster bar we're aware of in Bangkok, it has an international range of the slippery aphrodisiacs imported from Australia and other Euro-style seafood. They also serve up some delicious British dishes such as roast rib of beef, stilton soup and lobster with orange and port sauce. Plenty of wines and malt whiskies for quality quaffing. Happy hour 5pm-8pm

**NIGHT FOOD MARKET (THAI/CHINESE)**

Soi 38 (Skytrain Thonglor)  
Thais come from far and wide to eat at this collection of gourmet street vendors. A cut above the usual but still dirt cheap, you can pick up dishes from different stalls and sit wherever you want. Must tries are the ba mii keow naam (wheat



Just wait until you take off these strings, you bastard

noodle soup with red, marinated pork and wontons), the super-tender braised pork leg (khao ka moo), and chicken satay. Stuff yourself senseless for under Bt100 before moving on to one of the nearby bars or clubs.

**LARRY'S DIVE**

(AMERICAN/MEXICAN)  
8 Sukhumvit Soi 22 (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 10am-1am, www.larrysdive.com, Tel. 02-663 4563, Visa, Master cards  
A beach-styled bar and restaurant complete with tropical fish murals and even a dive shop on premises. Popular with expats, Larry's is a great place for beer drinking, pool shooting, catching up on the latest gossip and stuffing down some of the excellent BBQ ribs, nachos, burritos and such (Bt75-250). Happy hour 4-8pm.

**AUBERGE DAB (FRENCH)**

Ground Fl. Mercury Tower (Skytrain Chidlom) 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30pm-10:30pm, Tel: 02-658 6222-3, major cards  
Fine French dining with fine prices to match. In true Parisian style, Auberge has built up a reputation for excellent food and service. Entrees include such delights as Atlantic salmon marinated in Chablis with a lemon and orange jus (Bt280), while mains like pan-seared red grouper with fennel and potato confits, white wine and salmon egg sauce go for Bt420 up. Also has an extensive wine list and some classic French desserts such as crepes suzette and profiteroles.

**MALAYSIAN AUNTIE (MALAYSIAN/INDIAN)**

Sukhumvit Soi 8 (first alleyway on the left) (Skytrain Nana), 10am-11pm  
A hidden gem off Sukhumvit Soi 8 with fantastic and cheap Indian/Malaysian grub. Wonderfully spiced creamy curries for around Bt100, an ample selection of breads (rotis, nans and chapathis only Bt15) and rice, washed down with homemade lassis. Judging by the frantic work going on in the kitchen, everything is pretty much made to order, a rarity amongst Indian restaurants.  
A good choice for vegetarians and meat lovers alike. A Thai menu also available.

**ATHENA (GREEK)**

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

major cards except JCB

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

**BANGLAMPHU**

**SHOSHANA**

86 Chakraphong Road, next to the petrol station, 10am-midnight, Tel. 02-282 9948, no cards  
The best in Banglamphu for cheap Israeli/Middle-Eastern food. Generous portions of humous, falafel, red rice, hazilim, cucumber and tomato salad, schnitzel, pita, and lovely chips for Bt35-60. Aircon, and friendly. Great for vegetarians.

**TAKETEI**

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

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

**JOK POCHANA RESTAURANT**

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

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

**HEMLOCK**

56 Phra Athit Road, near Peachy guesthouse, 4pm to midnight, closed

Sunday, Tel. 02-282 7507, no cards  
Hemlock was the first of the "arts cafes" on Phra Athit Road and is still the most successful, because the food is excellent and cheap — in spite of its swanky appearance when you peer in longingly from outside. An unusual feature of the extensive menu is a selection of "Ancient" dishes like the "Grand Lotus Rice" (Bt80), with spiced rice cooked with prawn, pork, egg and Chinese sausage wrapped in a lotus leaf and served with a sweetish mint sauce. Lovely stuff. They have some pretty inexpensive wines as well.

**NA PHRA LAN**

18 Na Phra Lan Road, 10am-10pm, closed on Sundays  
"It's An Art Café" read the name cards for this restaurant, which is across the street from the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Housed in a beautiful old wooden building, the restaurant serves up plenty of dishes in the range of Bt40-60, such as "Rice with fried fish, garlic and pepper", and "Spicy, fluffy catfish salad." They also host regular exhibitions by apprenticing artists of nearby Silapakorn University, who tend to hang out upstairs in the smoking section. If you just want to stop in for a jolt of caffeine, they've got Brazilian coffee for Bt45.

**LA CASA RISTORANTE(ITALIAN)**

210 Khaosan Road, noon-midnight, Tel. 02-629 1627-8, major cards.  
La Casa's success is proof that Khaosan has gone upscale. Fastidiously decorated, it's a great place for backpacker couples on their anniversary. A bargain for the quality — a plate of pasta runs about Bt125. Menu includes pizza, pasta, calzone, steaks, a wine list and desserts. All the waiters are named Luigi.

**RICKY'S COFFEE SHOP**

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

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



# DRINKS LIST

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

## SUKHUMVIT & AROUND

### 87 PLUS

Conrad Bangkok, All Seasons Place, 87 Wireless Road, Tel: 02-662 2374, www.conradhotels.com, major cards  
87 has re-launched as 87-Plus. Live music is the new plus, with a resident band, plus regular DJ sets. Slick and sumptuous club/bar/restaurant with a 'World Food/Global grooves' theme.

### MYSTIQUE

Sukhumvit Soi 31 (Skytrain Phrom Phong), Tel: 02-662 2374, www.mystiquebangkok.com, amex visa & master cards  
A truly sumptuous palace of a club based on a New York venue of the same name from back in the day (we were there of course). This three storied Bangkok version comes complete with five (yes FIVE) VIP areas overlooking the main dancefloor, a tank that used to have jellyfish but now has baby sharks, the very purple 'Purple Room' and a Moroccan rooftop area for chilling and sucking on sheisha pipes. Musical flavors vary from room to room and night to night including hip hop, funky house, drum 'n bass and eclectic world grooves. Bt650 on Friday and Saturday gets you in with two drinks, Sunday to Thursday no cover. Closed Monday.

### TOKYO JOE'S

9-11 Sivaporn Plaza, Sukhumvit Soi 24 Opposite Ariston Hotel, Open 17.30-01.30  
Tel: 02-661 0359, www.tokyojoesbkk.com, visa, master cards  
Live music seven nights a week with the top blues, groove and soul bands in BKK on a rotating schedule. These include The Soi Dog Blues Band, Cannonball, Savannah on the weekends, Adam on Acoustic Blues every Monday, and TAB with traditional blues on Tues & Thurs. Small beers are Bt90, Bt150 for large beers. Mixed drinks go from Bt100-150. Happy hour is 6-9pm with Bt80 beers and jugs of Asahi for Bt300. Tuesday is two for one beers after 9pm, with Georgia singing. Check the website for weekly lineups and their infamous vodka orange end of the month parties.

### GULLIVER'S TRAVELER'S TAVERN

Sukhumvit Soi 5, by Foodland, (Skytrain Nana)  
The upmarket sister to the pub we all know from Khaosan. And she's a bloody big sister at that. There's a big bar, a big screen, a big car rotating overhead and loads of pool tables. You're looking at a more American theme here rather than Banglamphu's faux-London drinker and the place is more popular with middle-aged expats and teachers rather than

young hipsters, but reasonably priced drinks and free Internet makes it worth a stop.

### CONCEPT CM2

Basement, Novotel Siam Square (Skytrain Siam), Tel. 02-255 6888, www.cm2bkk.com, major cards  
Hugely popular Novotel disco. Big and glitzy main room chock full of girls following whiskey bottles like moths to a light bulb. The resident DJ spins dance hits in between sets from cover band 'Too Close' (Friday to Wednesday). Get tanked early with the whiskey buffet from 9-10.30pm (Bt444 all you can drink). There's also Sensations karaoke for those who like the sound of their own voice. Pastel Lounge is the place to escape from the beats and relax. Free entry before midnight and a free drink for girls every Monday and guys every Tuesday. Spinning Hip Hop and R&B every night in the main room and The Boom Room are DJs Sit and Lek.

### Q BAR

34 Sukhumvit Soi 11. Take quick left at end of the soi. (Skytrain Nana) major cards, Tel. 02-252 3274, www.qbarbangkok.com, major cards except Diners  
A stylish venue with black, padded walls reminiscent of a nuthouse for vampires. Consistently plays quality, butt-wiggling music and regularly features international DJs. Vodka lovers will enjoy the wide selection of brands, all kept chilled to perfect quaffing temperature or served at Bt100 in jelly form. Downstairs is for mingling while the upstairs lounge is for romancing, and loners can sulk on the open-air terrace. Bt500 cover after 10pm with two drinks. There's Massive Mondays (Bhangra & Dancehall), Globalism Tuesday (afro, latin, percussive house, Wednesday is Ghetto Fabulous, uniting Hip Hop and House, Liquid Thursday (house), Frisky Friday (Freestyle), Saturday Night Fever (Funky House) and finally, Beat Therapy Sunday (Hip Hop).

### WITCH'S TAVERN

306/1 Sukhumvit 55, Soi Thonglor (between Soi 8 & 9), 11am-2.00am, Tel: 02-391 9791, visa, amex, www.witchstavern.com  
Equally good for lounging or partying, the Tavern is pub style with matching menu (Bt85-700) items such as fish and chips, pies and steaks as well as Thai dishes.



## EVENTS IN August

### Thursday 4th - DJ Kaori

LIQUID THURSDAYS AND ANOTHER CHIVAS LIFE EXPERIENCE PRESENT DJ KAORI (JAPAN) JAPAN'S TOP HOUSE DJ "LADY SOMETHING DIFFERENT" AKA DJ KAORI WILL BLESS Q BAR WITH HER WEST COAST AND CHICAGO HOUSE STYLES.

### Thursday 11th Roy Davis Jr.

LIQUID THURSDAYS LAUNCHES ITS NEW MEMBERS NIGHT WITH UBIQUITY RECORDING ARTIST ROY DAVIS JR. THE CHICAGO HOUSE LEGEND WILL BE SPREADING HIS SWEET SOULFUL SOUND. MEMBERS BENEFITS ALL NIGHT!



### Friday 19th - Kris Lopez

KRIS LOPEZ RETURNS TO THE Q BAR BOOTH TO CELEBRATE HIS BIRTHDAY AND DROP ANOTHER DOSE OF SEXY, SOULFUL, FUNKY HOUSE.

### Sunday 21st DJ Shy

LA'S TOP FEMALE HIP HOP DJ AND KIIS FM MIXMASTER. SHY HAS PLAYED FOR MISSY ELLIOTT, JAY Z, AND BUSTA RHYMES, TO NAME A FEW. DON'T MISS ONE OF HIP HOP'S MOST IN-DEMAND PARTY DJ'S.



## Weekly Schedule

### Frisky Fridays

DJ JOEKI & GUEST - FREESTYLE

### Saturday Night Fever

BILLY V & GUESTS - FUNKY HOUSE

### Beat Therapy Sundays

DJ'S TUL & BUDDA Q- UNDERGROUND HIP HOP, NEW R&B & HIP-HOP

### Massive Mondays

DJ'S TUL & CAVO REGGAETON/BHANGRA & DANCEHALL INTERNATIONAL ECLECTIC BEATS

### Globalism Tuesdays

DJ'S CAVO AND JOEKI AFRO, LATIN AND PERCUSSIVE HOUSE

### Ghetto Fabulous Wednesdays

DJ'S CAVO & OFAY I - HIP-HOP CLASSICS

### Liquid Thursdays

DJ'S BILLY V & JOEKI - FUNKY HOUSE

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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.

**NARCISUS**  
Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain Asoke) just behind Pegasus Club, Tel. 02-258 4805, major cards  
Gaudy and glitzy to the point of being ostentatious. Monster mirror balls and chandeliers have you thinking Dirk Diggler and his crew will enter the massive, rhythmically pumping dance floor at any time. The relentless trance techno vibes will send you panting upstairs to one of the best chill-out lounges in Bangkok. Mega amounts of beautiful people on patrol. Bt500 cover gets you three drinks.

**TAWANDANG**  
462/61 Rama 3 Rd, Tel:02-678 1114-6, www.tawandang1999.com, major cards  
Microbrewery and mega beer-hall, Tawandang was one of Bangkok's first pubs to brew their booze on-site. And what lovely booze it is. One can choose from weizen, lager, or dunken beers, all brewed to strict German purity standards by a real German brewmaster who pumps out up to 700,000 litres a year, by the half-litre for Bt100. The vast hall is also home to performers, ranging from Thai classical music, to popular indie bands and the good-old 'sexy girl singing to a backing track' gig. To round it off, their menu of Thai food is delicious and reasonably priced. Not an easy place to get music from some fine musicians. The late nightly jazz session, beginning at around 11.00pm is worth going out of your way for.

**BROWN SUGAR**  
Soi Sarasin, Lumpini, Tel. 02-250-1826, major cards  
A fabled jazz gig that's known around the world in the music business. In need of a little care and attention but serves up excellent jazz music from some fine musicians. The late nightly jazz session, beginning around 11pm, is worth going out of your way for. Small and intimate, it has hosted a number of international artists. Food and service, however, can be slow, so a dinner of local specialties at Ma Mout Ma Mao, two shops down, is in order. Happy hour 5-9:30pm.

**BAMBOO BEER BAR**  
Sukhumvit Soi 3, Tel. 02-253 2462, music from 9pm, www.bambooberbar.com, major cards  
Primarily a spacious pool room but also

has live music from The Fox, as well as performances from visiting guests. The Fox, led by Chor On, have been around forever and there probably isn't a song out there that they don't know, and with seven people in the band diversity is their strength. Good simple food and plenty of girls to talk to. A popular starter before heading off to less slauibrious 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 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 02-6513537, majorcards, 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, swirl and people/freak watch. It's been there forever and is a top spot for starting off the evening or finishing yourself off.

**LUCIFERS**  
Patpong Soi 1, Tel 02-2346902  
Fight your way past "You see fucking show!" and "Hello, t-shirt!" and up the stairs to where the prince of darkness shakes his booty. This club is a stayer on the Bangkok carousel and has kept people dancing to House and Trance and everything in between for years. It has a post-grunge feel and Bt150 drinks sets it apart from the slick sterility offered by most Bangkok clubs.

**NORIEGA'S**  
Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel 02-233 2813, major cards  
Small, modern two-level bar run by Frank, aka 'Frank Superstar' from his long-time involvement with the Superstar a-gogo in Patpong many moons ago. The small food menu is headed 'nufood menu' which just about sums up the mix of Thai, tex mex and international favourites. Downstairs the bar features prominently in this clean white space. Live music is currently provided seven days a week and this venue is one of the few in Bangkok to feature live blues every weekend from the city's premier blues outfits. Other nights feature jazz, latin and a range of bands catering to every taste.

**DIPLOMAT BAR**  
Conrad Hotel Lobby, All Seasons Place, 87 Wireless Rd (Skytrain Ploenchit), Tel: 02-690 9999, www.conradhotels.com, major cards  
While hotel lobby bars are rarely the chosen haunt of hipsters, the Conrad's Diplomat Bar bucks the trend, packing out on weekends with the monied and beautiful. Perhaps the attraction is the regular jazz band, usually a super-sexy diva out front, or maybe it's just one of those things. Being a 5-star hotel, drinks aren't cheap but it's worth popping in before 6pm for two-for-one drinks.

**TAPAS**  
Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-632 7883, 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 laire 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**  
54/1 Rambutri Rd (behind the Wat)  
Otherwise known as "The Korean Bar" this place is popular with teachers and other expats on Fridays and Saturdays. Remarkable because it has stayed the same when so much around it has changed. The upstairs bar features free pool and an open-air balcony offering a view of the road and temple below. Excellent Korean food, grilled seafood and cool beers.

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

**PRANAKORN**  
Just off Ratchadamnoen Klang Road, first Soi west of Thanon Tanoo, 58/2 Soi Damnoen Klang Tai, Tel. 02-522 0282, no cards  
This bar is like four different venues in one: on the ground floor, replete with posters for old Marlon Brando and Elvis movies, the DJ plays retro rock and Jazz and there's often live Thai acoustic music. The second floor is an art and photography gallery that sometimes features live music and even theatre. On the third floor, there's more dance and alternative tunes, along with a pool table and couches. Up top is the roof, with a great view of the illuminated Golden Mount, lots of tables, chilled-out tunes and classic tracks. One of the best things about this venue is the big menu of

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

**GULLIVER'S TRAVELLER'S TAVERN**  
Across from police station, Tel. 02-629 1988-9, major cards, www.gulliverbangkok.com  
The pub with the tuk-tuk over the door on the corner of Khaosan. If you're aching for English football, Farang food or a shot of pool, this is your place. Generous happy-hours mean this place is usually packed with punters. The place has become popular with young Thais looking for close encounters, (careful, some of the women are men) but whatever your fancy, this place has the best air-con in 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, special guests join in regularly (ask Pong if you want to sit in), and a sizzling jazz band on Mondays. The people are friendly and mostly intelligent, and beers are Bt60-80.

**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 CAFEÉ**  
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.

## DRINKS LIST



# Rappin' with Ice-T

Jim Algie talks to the former gangster-turned-rapper about music, bitches, his detective show, life and death on the darkest streets of LA, 50 Cent, Spike Lee and Quentin Tarantino.

"I think nothin' makes you  
more intelligent than travel."

In the middle of the MBK mall in Bangkok, one of hip-hop's most notorious anti-heroes is out shopping for DVDs and computer games. He's walking around with his blonde and buxom wife Coco and his collaborator Afrika Islam, when an old Chinese man comes running up and says, "Ice-T number one!" Soon they're surrounded by Japanese tourists taking photos of them. But the Thais are bewildered. They're not sure who's famous: Is it the chubby guy, the thinner one, or the blonde? Are they musicians or actors?

As Matt Hammond from Q Bar recounts these anecdotes to us in the club shortly before we're supposed to interview the rapper and actor, I have to ask him, "You mean Ice was cool with this?"

"He shook people's hands, posed for pictures. He's very down to earth," says Matt, who helped to pull off one of the biggest musical coups in Bangkok this year by bringing Ice-T in to hand out the awards for their "Battle of the MCs" contest, and lay down some live rhymes.

This is reassuring news. After all, Ice-T is the godfather of gangsta rap who, back in the late 80s, ignited a few firestorms, fanned by feminists and banned by censors, for all his multi-sexual references to "bitches" (and what you could do to them with a flashlight). Then Ice formed the group Body Count which soldered together metal, punk, and hip-hop to drive a scary new juggernaut called "rap-core." That group (three of the original members are now dead) created another controversy with the tune "Cop Killer" on their debut album from '92 – a record that was also noteworthy for proving that the New Jersey native, who grew up on the darkest streets of LA, was one of the few rappers who could actually sing, well, scream and growl mostly.

For the last two days, I've been writing up scores of questions, trying to memorise them, and dreading all the worst-case scenarios: Ice would sit there with his arms folded across his chest and shoot me down with a few rounds of .45-calibre glares and then punch me in the head. Or he'd think my questions were idiotic, reply with a few monosyllabic grunts, catch me sneaking a peek at his wife, and then punch me in the head.

Matt comes back to the bar where me and Dan the photographer are knocking back beer after beer in order to quiet our rioting nerves. "Okay, you guys are up. You've got 20 minutes." Shit. I should've picked up some adult diapers.

Upstairs, the 47-year-old is sitting beside his wife on the couch. From his baseball cap to his shoes he's entirely attired in black. Even his glasses are half-shaded with midnight. Seeing him sitting there only five metres away is like one of those nerve-racking moments every student remembers; you're walking into the classroom for a big exam and suddenly you've forgotten everything you studied. I can't remember any of my questions. So I just stand there, dumb and frozen as a statue, thinking I should send Dan over to ask Ice if he's into playing "Dungeons & Dragons" and let him be the one who gets punched in the head.

But I recall Matt saying something about a couple of new albums Ice is working on, one of them in collaboration with Chuck D from Public Enemy. That should be a conversational starter. Still twitching a little, I sit down beside him, and we shake hands.

So what's up with your new albums and collaborations?

"Machine is a group with me, Chuck, Ernie from Body Count, and different people rappin' and playin' instruments on it. It's kinda like Prodigy meets Body Count meets Public Enemy... but it's more of a virtual group like Gorillaz where we're all in the studio and there's a DJ playing the record and it's more of a multi-media presentation."

On this tour, when you've been rapping all over Asia and Australia, what tunes have you been playing?

"I've been playing tracks from the new Ice-T album, Gangsta Rap, and we're mixing a new Body Count album called Murder for Hire. In all honesty, I just wanted to come to Asia and I had a break from Law and Order [his American TV show] so let's go do a tour, play some small clubs, and other events, and give ourselves a reason to see it. So we're havin' a good time."

If you get a break when you're on the road, or just wanna take a holiday, where do you like to go and what do you get up to?

"I mean personally, when I'm spendin' my money," Ice laughs, "usually it's some place tropical, like the Bahamas, or South Beach Miami, anywhere it's warm and we can get in the water. That's my dream vacation, but sometimes it's fun to go out and explore and this is an exploration. It's rewarding too, because some of the places I've done with music I would never have gone in my life."

When you're travelling, does that inspire you to write new rhymes?

"Oh, definitely. I think nothin' makes you more intelligent than travel."



When you live in a closed-in environment you tend to think all your interests are your own, and you don't know they're worldwide. You don't understand life. You need to travel. You need to see different things. You come over here you might realize you're doin' alright."

With your new albums, what are you rapping about these days? Have your concerns changed much over the years?

"I changed a lot. I've matured. But no, my philosophy's pretty successful and I'm dealin' with my home boys who are in the same situation. I speak for them. Just because I'm doin' okay doesn't mean things have changed for the average black kid in the hood. So I try to remain that voice and I let you know I'm talkin' about other people."

With some of your early records like *Power* you were championing freedom of speech. When you look back from this vantage point, under the Bush administration with all its propaganda and censorship, does it seem to you like America is progressing or regressing?

"Unfortunately, man, I'm kinda cynical. I think what I said really didn't change the world, but maybe it got into some kids who now got power. And they go into a bank and the bank president says, 'I grew up on Ice Cube and Ice-T,' and just that little bit of maybe being part of your life, that was what was important. You're not gonna yell about this and things are gonna change. There's kids that grew up now who listened to Public Enemy, so when their mother said 'Nigger,' they yell, 'Ma, they're not niggers.' And that home invasion of it is what was more important to us. And I think it has shifted the way people think."

Has it been difficult for you to live up to your reputation as a tough, outspoken, womanizing guy?

"My thing is that a lot of the shit I do is more, I guess what you'd say, posturing yourself as a gangster. So we talk shit to the girls, we're just talkin' shit to the girls, ya know what I'm sayin'? It's not so much we take it to heart. It's kinda like, it's shit talkin'," Ice laughs. "But it's not really 'cause you still gotta have the balls to get on-stage and say it." Ice laughs again, showing a dimpled smile and breaks off eye contact, revealing a softer side of the man he likes to keep hidden. "It's no more different than the posturing of Slayer. When they walk on-stage and say, 'Yo we are the devil, and then they scare the shit outta you, and then after the



Eat your heart out, Nike

show they're playin' Playstation."

Ice cracks me up with that line.

I remember the first time I ever heard a tune by you, it was back in a punk rock club in Montreal around 1989, and this line jumped out of speakers at me, "He fucked the bitch with a flashlight." Me and my punk rock buddies at the time thought there was a lot of, uh pardon the pun, but black humour in your rhymes. But the feminists attacked you.

At some point, music becomes sonic. And what I mean by that is I can listen to Indian music. I may not understand any of the words, but I like the sound of it. People like the groove of hip-hop. They don't need to speak the language. I been to places where people can say the rhymes but don't know what they mean. And that's cool. I don't have a problem with that. There's guys who never been near a horse and they love country

how to play one. and give us the cops we meet on the streets. It's like yo, with law enforcement, if they're doin' it right you gotta respect 'em. I just hated brutal and corrupt cops who would put you in jail and then smoke weed on the way home. Or beat your ass for some bullshit. I mean honestly, bottom line is I'm nobody but a motherfucker from the streets and when the opportunities opened up, I took the opportunities."

## "So gangsta came about from entertaining gangsters."

"Oh they got serious. They lost their minds. That record was *The Iceberg* [from Ice-T's second album, *The Iceberg/Freedom of Speech*, 1989]." He begins rapping, "Evil E was out coolin' with a freak one night/Fucked the bitch with a flashlight/Pulled it out and left the batteries in/So he could get a charge when he begin.' You know, it's like how stupid is that?" Ice laughs. "Come on, man, it's just bullshit."

With the global explosion of hip-hop, and all these white kids, Asians, Hispanics going around calling each other "dog" and "homie" and talkin' about "bitches and hos," what's your take on that?

"I don't really care. They just like the music, ya know what I'm sayin'?

music and wear a cowboy hat. There's Elvis impersonators here, they never been to Memphis."

Right, sure, but Ice, when Spike Lee spoke out against Quentin Tarantino using the word "nigger" so much in his movies...

"I think Spike is stupid on that one. The thing you gotta remember is that black people are just like white people, we don't all agree. So Spike, yo, I think Tarantino was bein' realistic and he was lettin' you see how white people talk when black people ain't around, and we should applaud him for that. Because to me Tarantino is like a 'Hustler' magazine, or 'The Simpsons' or 'South Park,' he gives it to everybody. Spike, I respect the fuck out of his filmmaking and

So where would you be today if it wasn't for music and acting?

"Dead."

Yeah?

"Definitely dead, because my end was fucked up. I totally believe that the world owes me somethin' 'cause I don't have no mother, father, sisters or brothers. I was like a very bitter individual. I was the kinda person who'd come into

**"I just hated brutal and corrupt cops, who would put you in jail and then smoke weed on the way home. Or beat your ass for some bullshit."**





a place like this and be a hater, I'd wanna start a fight or somethin'. I was jus' angry. When I got my way to express myself, I didn't feel that anger anymore. 'Cause now I wouldn't have to act out about it, I could just make a song and get my point across. So right now you might wanna tell everybody in here to get fucked, right?"

Uh no, only about nine or 10 people... mostly journalists.

Ice grins. "So what do you do? Do you throw a bottle? No. You go make a record and you tell the whole world to –

"Get fucked!" we both say in unison.

But how did you actually start out in music?

"I started out with just party rhymes because I wanted to be a DJ. So I did the DJ thing and then I learned how to rhyme. And my friends, who were like criminals, said to rhyme about us. And that was the invention of gangster rap."

Ice breaks into a verse from one of his most famous songs, "Original Gangster," accenting the beats with his right hand. "Ten years ago I used to listen to rappers flow/Talk about the way they rocked the mic in the disco/I liked that as it was goin' down/Dreamt of rippin' the mic with my own sound/ So I tried to write rhymes somethin' like them/My boys said Ice that ain't you it sounds like him/So I sat back thought up a new track/ Didn't fantasize kept the pure facts/Motherfuckers got scared 'cause they was unprepared/To tell it how it really was who dared/Motherfucker from the West Coast LA/South Central kid where the Crypts and the Bloods play/When I wrote about parties it didn't fit/Six in the morning that was the real shit. "We had lots of money and we were the bad guys. It was more like me comin' into the club and cheerleadin' for my crew. Like right now if we were in here, and you were in the clique, you're worth a million dollars, you're 19 years old, you're rollin'. We got the cars, we got the motorcycles, and you want the girls. So you go to the DJ and say, 'I want my man to rap.' You give him 500 dollars and we got the cordless mic. We're sittin' in the corner. What's your name? "Jim." He raps, "My man Jim's in the house, hey all you bitches you're gonna suck his dick." I tune out for a line or two, thinking that after 25 years in the music business, being included in an Ice-T rhyme, well, it doesn't get any better than this, unless of course any of these bitches were actually gonna electrify my 'joystick'. "We were talkin' crazy, but it was so raw it just gave it a whole new style. So gangsta came about from entertaining gangsters. You gotta think that when you got a tough crowd, they don't wanna hear no happy shit. They wanna hear the rhymes about the cocaine, and the drugs, and the girls.

At this point in your career when you've had a fair bit of success, money, movie roles, beautiful women, is there anything else you'd like to do?" I'd like to direct films. We're startin' up a new label, a record label, and I wanna get behind the scenes and run a company, break some new artists. I go to movies and I'm still excited. I love the whole process of creation." With your group Body Count, three members have passed away, like the bass-player Mooseman in a drive-by shooting. Has that lessened your passion to make music?"

I couldn't work on Body Count for a whole year after D-Rock passed [the group's guitarist who was so shy he played on-stage wearing a hockey goalie mask like Jason in Friday the 13th] What we did was take the tracks he'd laid as a demo and I finished those tracks and did the vocals on them. So with this album we have D-Rock playin' on it. I'll put the record and the video out and see if there's enough interest to keep that band goin'."

But did you deal with all these deaths of your band-mates on any kind of emotional level or just through your music and acting?

"I hate to say this, but I'm so useta people dyin'. But it was really really tough with D-Rock..." Ice looks off into a dark corner of the club.

The pause is painful, so I take an off-ramp in the conversation.

You ever think about running for political office?"

No, I told you, I got outta crime." I chuckle, but to him politics is no laughing matter.

How do you feel about all the new R&B and hip-hop crossover artists like 50 Cent?

"It's dance music. It's club music. You can't hold 50 Cent up against NWA. It doesn't scare people. Everybody knows 50 will get a sneaker endorsement. It's tame. Only violence in rap [nowadays] is us rappers shootin' each other," Ice laughs. "We just talk shit on the record and bump into the motherfucker in the club, I mean aw shit, gotta kill him now."

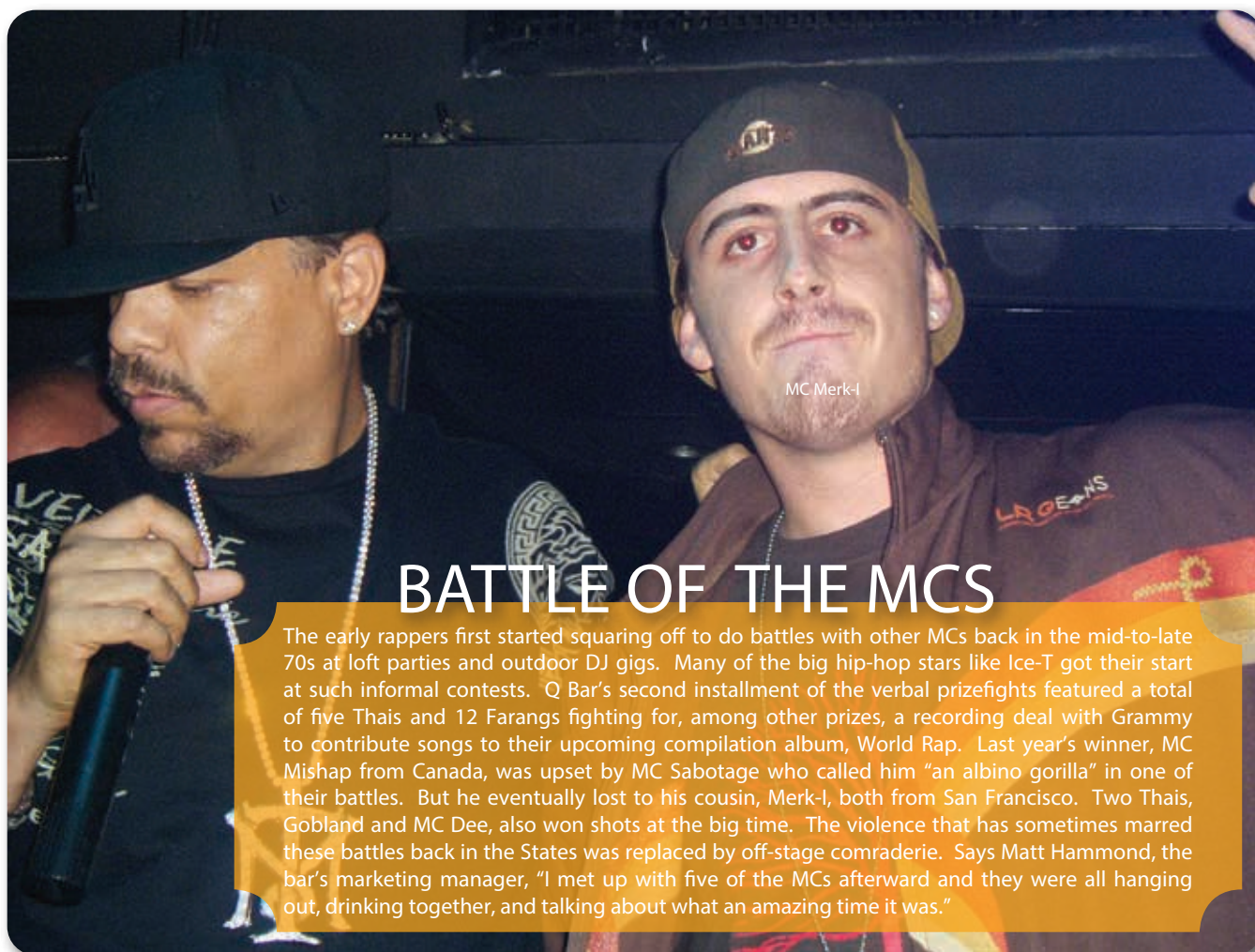
I laugh, say thanks a lot, and shake his hand again.

Ice goes, "Good interview."

Coco, aka Mrs. T







## BATTLE OF THE MCS

The early rappers first started squaring off to do battles with other MCs back in the mid-to-late 70s at loft parties and outdoor DJ gigs. Many of the big hip-hop stars like Ice-T got their start at such informal contests. Q Bar's second installment of the verbal prizefights featured a total of five Thais and 12 Farangs fighting for, among other prizes, a recording deal with Grammy to contribute songs to their upcoming compilation album, *World Rap*. Last year's winner, MC Mishap from Canada, was upset by MC Sabotage who called him "an albino gorilla" in one of their battles. But he eventually lost to his cousin, Merk-I, both from San Francisco. Two Thais, Gobland and MC Dee, also won shots at the big time. The violence that has sometimes marred these battles back in the States was replaced by off-stage comradery. Says Matt Hammond, the bar's marketing manager, "I met up with five of the MCs afterward and they were all hanging out, drinking together, and talking about what an amazing time it was."

## ICE IS IN THE HOUSE

When Ice-T, wearing a baggy black Versace T-shirt, finally takes the small stage by the DJ booth at Q Bar to give out the awards for the best MCs, he cracks the audience up by offering one of them "a bag of my knock-off shit from MBK" and gets a few more laughs by telling another rapper, "Second place is the first loser." But he poses for some pictures with his arms around the winners and even grins a few times. Maybe it's the small and packed-to-the-max venue, maybe it's having to play the nice guy for a change, but he doesn't seem all that comfortable in the role. When the first track finally kicks in, however, with Afrika Islam laying down some hard and heavy beats, Ice starts looking more in character. For a man pushing 50, he still sounds and looks like he's in his prime. The fat baritone of his vocals hasn't gone flabby and his bullet-point rhymes rarely misfire. Renowned for his showmanship, Ice is boxed in by the tiny stage, and largely reduced to spinning invisible turntables with his right hand, glowering at the crowd, and occasionally rubbing his crotch, but the cramped venue (even the walls were sweating) is way more intimate than a bigger club, and the crowd is thrilled to catch a bonafide musical renegade in action during yet another dull year of deadbeats playing half-alive in Bangkok.

Judging by the title track of his new album *Gangsta Rap* (to be released in 2006) Ice is still flying in the face of the prevailing trade winds in MTV hip-hop and has not toned down either his sound or content.

The crowd goes ballistic with applause for "Colors," his old smash about gang warfare, and he really brings down the house with "OG. Original Gangster" as Ice, backed up by another rapper, yells "OG," and shoves the mic into the crowd so the faithful yell back, "Original Gangster!" Seeing him live for the first time confirms an idea I'd hatched back in the 80s when I first started listening to Ice and Public Enemy and Niggers with Attitude; that hip-hop, far from being the sensationalistic fad it was once written off as by so many critics and censors, is actually part of a much bigger and longer tradition in African-American music, its bloodline coursing through Motown, Jamaica, the Mississippi-Delta, where Robert Johnson would alternate singing and speaking lines (the old "talkin' blues" it was called) on tunes about hell-raising and violence like "Me and the Devil Blues," and all the way back to Mali where the blues is said to have originated, and became one of the few possessions the black slaves were allowed to bring with them to America.

Fittingly enough, Ice ends the set with a shout out to the rap pioneer and legendary producer who fused so many of these different genres together. "Without Africa Bambattaa, there would've been no Ice-T." Yeah, and without Ice-T there would've been no Eminem.



# CHIANG MAI

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

## PLACES TO CRASH:

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

## Inside the Old City

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

**Comfort and Style:** Head for Gap's House, 3 Soi 4, Ratchadamnoen Rd, a cluster of old Lanna-style houses, plus a more modern longhouse, furnished with local antiques, all aircon, Bt250-400 including breakfast. The nightly Bt80 Thai veg buffet is legendary. At the higher end, join the celebs who gather at the Tamarind Village, 50/1 Ratchadamnoen Rd, a quiet oasis in the heart of the old city, Bt6,000 and up. Rooms in the five-star hotels (and there are a bunch of them) range from Bt1,000 upwards.

## Off Tha Phae Road

Daret's House, 4/5 Chaiyaphum Rd, is ordinary but fine. Service is efficient and it's big, a good bet when others are full – Bt100-140. Roong Ruang Hotel, perfectly positioned to take in festival parades at the end of Tha Phae

Rd, has large rooms with verandas around a courtyard, Bt250-400B, some with air-con.

## Near the Night Bazaar

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

## DAYTRIPPING:

### TEMPLES:

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

### Markets:

Near Chinatown, Warorot Market (kaat luang in local parlance, off Chang Moi [sic] Road) has hawked silks, housewares and foodstuffs since the 19th century. San Pa Khoi Market (off Charoen Muang Road on the way to the railway station) has food and cheap secondhand clothes; excellent for green curry after midnight. The Night Bazaar lines both sides of Chang Khlan Road every night selling baubles and trinkets for tourists. Head to Crazy Horse Butress, an eye-popping limestone cliff-and-cave complex east of town, and scale one of nearly 70 bolted routes. Or call Chiang Mai Rock Climbing Adventures (tel: 06-911 1470) for guided trips or instruction. The Chiang Mai Museum on the Superhighway displays lots of religious artifacts from the area. Prep for your trek at the Tribal Museum in nearby Ratchamangkla park. In the modern western suburbs of Chiang Mai, Gongde



Gallery off Nimanhemim Rd hosts exhibitions of Thailand's top artists, as does Chiang Mai University's Art and Culture Museum at the corner of Nimanhemim and Suthep roads. Everyone heads up Doi Suthep to Wat Phra Thai Doi Suthep. Sunset is the best time; the crowds are gone and the monks are out chanting. If you're curious about Buddhism, attend the meditation and dharma talk session with Western monks on Sunday afternoons at 3pm at Wat U Mong. Or travel further down the same road to Wat Ram Poeng, and spend 26 days practising meditation with an English-speaking teacher. Countless companies offer treks out of Chiang Mai, and most of them offer similar itineraries and prices. Treks booked at guesthouses tend to skimp on important things like blankets and food. One reliable standalone agency is Trekking Collective, Ratchawithi Road.

## 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 & Kotchasana, 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

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

#### NIGHTRIPPING:

While there's a clutch of seedy hostess bars bordering the east moat and especially along Loi Kroh Road, and a few gay bars around town, Chiang Mai's nightlife can't compete with Bangkok's for debauchery. Nevertheless, the city is lively after dark. Expect closing times to be 1am (or sometimes earlier these days) despite national entertainment laws allowing bars in 'tourist centres' to stay open 'till 2am. Chiang Mai police are notoriously corrupt. Tourists and Chiang Mai University students shimmy the night away to live Farang pop at Riverside Bar & Restaurant (9-11 Charoenrat Rd) where you can also dine on Western and Thai food on candlelit terraces by the water. In the same 'hood, local blues-rock guitar hero Took burns it up at Le Brasserie (37 Charoenrat Rd) from 11pm onwards, but the warm-up bands aren't bad either. UN Irish Pub (Ratwitahi Rd) is developing a reputation amongst the city's literati for their twice monthly open mic poetry readings, usually on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month beginning at 8pm (all readers get a free beer). Contact spokenwordcm@hotmail.com for info. You don't have to sport dreads to enjoy open-air, fairy-lit Rasta Cafe (off Ratchaphakhinai Rd), where travellers trade yarns around the ever-burning campfire whilst cruising the musical hippie trail from

Marley to Manu Chao. Across from the Rasta Cafe, long-term visitors drown their visa woes in buckets-of-joy Heaven Beach, which does live music on weekends. At the Drunken Flower (Mao Dok Mai, Soi 1, 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.

## PAI

#### 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

Keeping up with Tom Cruise's love life





# WILDWATER

It's August time again here in Thailand and a great time to visit the beach. How can this be? The Lonely Planet claims that it's monsoon season and that it's going to be bucketing down. Well, that's true for most of the region, the rains have come, the dusty plains have been blooming with greenery and Bangkok has been flooding as usual. However, the Gulf of Thailand is blessed during August with clear skies and sunny days, a one-month long mini-high season, just before things really kick off in December. That's all well and good, you may say, but what about the west coast? Surely that's being lashed by all of nature's fury? It must be a terrible time to visit. Well, that's mostly true again. For example, Koh Lanta is mostly closed up this time of year and Phuket sees its fair share of rain, but it's those storms that bring surfers to Kata and Karon beaches – being the only place in Thailand you can catch a decent break, and only at this time of year. Besides, even during the worst of the monsoon season you still get some sunny days. So it's not a bad time to go for a dip after all, every cloud has a silver lining and don't believe everything you read in the Lonely Planet.

## KOH CHANG

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

## KOH TAO

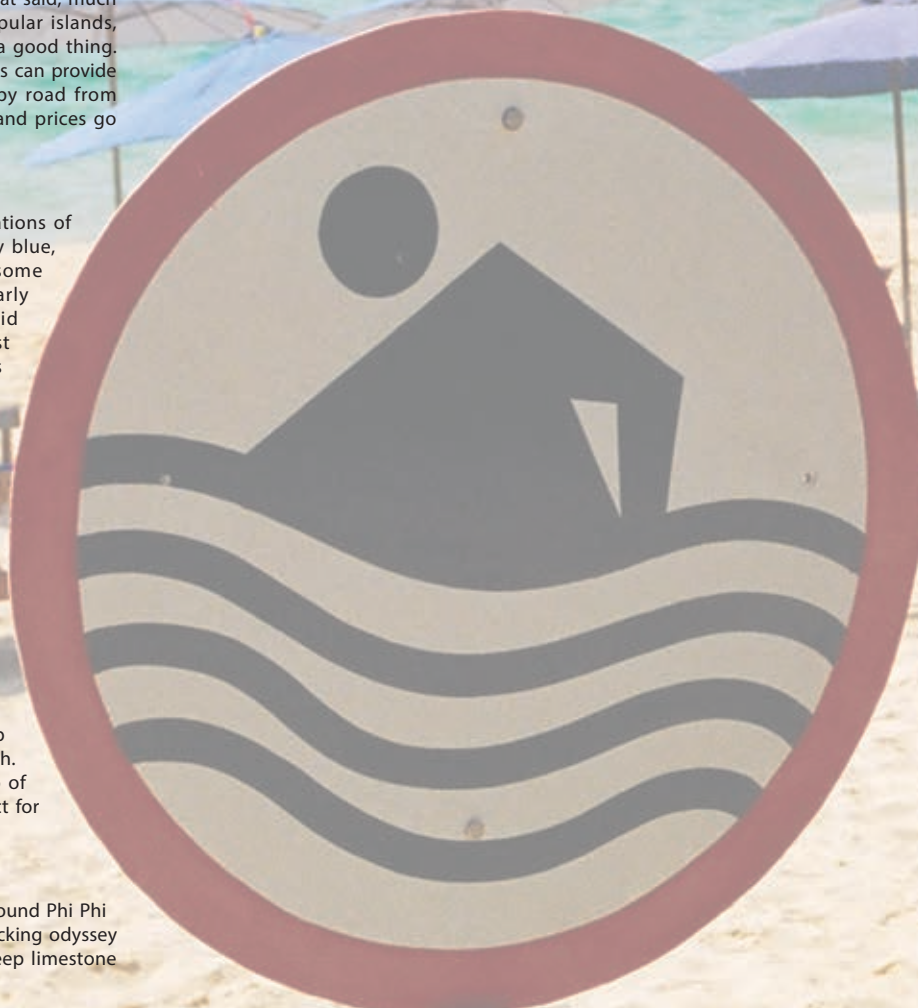
Tao is probably best known as a Mecca for divers. Generations of young and keen Cousteaus have ventured below the briny blue, pursuing their PADI Open Water certificate. There are some more challenging dive sites in Thailand, though not nearly so convenient – and because of gentle currents, a solid infrastructure,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

## KOH SAMET

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

## KOH PHI PHI

Possibly one of the world's most beautiful places, the area around Phi Phi was used in both The Man with the Golden Gun and backpacking odyssey The Beach. Phi Phi actually consists of two islands, both steep limestone



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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.

### 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.

### 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.

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## 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.

## 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.

## 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.



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# KOHLANTA LAY OF THE SAND

Until recently one of the last hippie holdouts along the Andaman coast, Lanta began going upscale with the arrival of a half dozen resorts for the wealthy two years ago. The 2004 tsunami took out four of them along the north western coast, but no doubt this was only a temporary setback. Ao Khlong Dao, the longest beach on the island is wide and flat, great for sunset walks. Next south, Ao Khlong Phrae ('Long Beach' to Farangs), is less expensive but even more crowded with resorts and businesses hawking massage, laundry and Internet (or all three services). Ao Khlong Nin and Hat Nui are smaller beaches with only a handful of places to stay. Ao Kantiang and Ao Khlong Jak occupy the southern tip of Lanta, and are the least spoiled, though large resorts soak up a lot of real estate here. The interior and east coast of the island still belongs to cashew and rubber plantations, and Muslim fishing villages.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

On Khlong Dao, head for Lanta Villa (from Bt400; 07-568 4129) or Golden Bay Cottages (Bt300-1,000; 07-568 4161) if you're on a budget, Southern Lanta Resort (from Bt,1600; 07-568 4174) or Lanta Sea House (Bt1,500-3,000; 07-568 4073) for more comfort. To stay close to the cluster of shops and restaurants in Hat Phrae Ae, pick from old-school The Sanctuary (Bt300-500; 01-891 3055) with its thatched huts and veggie fare, Relax Bay Resort (Bt800-1,300; 07-568 4194) or eco-friendly Lanta Marina Resort (Bt300-600; 07-568 4168). Join the Dream Team (Bt300-800; 01-228 4184) on tiny, secluded Hat Nui or go for the best-kept secret on the island, at pretty Ao Kantiang, Same Same But Different (Bt1,000), a kickback restaurant with a few ingeniously designed bungalows. Luxury digs are available at sprawling Sri Lanta (from Bt6,000; 07-569 7288) on Hat Khlong Nin, and the exclusive Pimilai Resort & Spa (from Bt10,500; 02-551 9388) on Ao Kantiang. Nicely secluded Andalanta Resort (Bt2,000-3,000) has its own private bay, Ao Khlong Jak, and a waterfall within hiking distance.

## DAY TRIPPING:

Ban Si Raya (aka Old Lanta) on the east coast offers a waterfront lined with busted-up old two-storey wooden shophouses dating to Lanta's glory days as a stop for trading ships moving goods along the Andaman coast from Moulmein to Singapore. Sniff bat guano and get lost inside the caverns at Khao Mai Kaew Cave, towards the centre of the island. Ko Lanta National Marine Park down south guards the last of the island rainforest, and a few scattered islets offshore. Diving is excellent at nearby Ko Rok Nok, Ko Ha and Ko Talabeng. Elephant treks (Bt800/two hours) can be arranged at Hat Phrae Ae and Hat Nui.

## NIGHTTRIPPING & FEEDING TIME:

Ban Sala Dan, the little port village at the north end of Lanta, has a row of seafood restaurant along the water's edge; Rimnum is the best. Back from Ao Phrae, Thai Cuisine Restaurant & Bar does better Thai than most places on the island. Same Same But Different is the perfect stage for a seduction, the bonus being incredible southern Thai cuisine (unsurprisingly, it's owned by the same Krabi native as Ruen Mai in Krabi).

Most islanders and tourists alike are asleep by 10pm, but you'll find a string of cheap beach discos and Reggae House in Ao Phrae.

## DIVING:

Contact Lanta Diver ([www.lantadiver.com](http://www.lantadiver.com)) or Ko Lanta Diving Center ([www.kolantadivingcenter.com](http://www.kolantadivingcenter.com)) to book trips to nearby islands or rent gear for local dives and snorkelling.

## ROADTRIPPING:

Songthaews in Ban Sala Dan and in Ban Si Raya can be chartered to any point on the island for Bt200, less for shorter trips.

## WAY TO GO

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# KOHSAMUI COCONUTREPUBLIC

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

## CHAWENG PLACES TO CRASH:

Worth checking out in the middle of Chaweng Beach Road are the Green Rooms, convenient location and spotlessly clean rooms (prices vary). 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:

CoCo Company adds another leaf to the tree with CoCo China House offering a buffet style menu of traditional Cantonese Cuisine (minus the shark fins). Highly recommended for group dining. Try The Deck for laidback eating with a huge menu. Blue Samui offers top-notch seafood at decent prices. Zico's, a newly built homage to Brasilia has an all-you-can-eat feast for Bt630, with the super-sexy Queen Samba dancers to

make your hormones salsa. One of the best Italian eateries in town is Vecchia Napoli and Prego is also good, boasting a soothing-on-the-senses design and an endless supply of free, tasty bread with balsamic vinegar and olive oil. Jeff Lord's Betelnut has some fantastic treats, like chili ice cream. If you want to watch the world pass by in the day while munching on a panini, take a street-side chair at Cafe Uno.

## NIGHTRIPPING:

The Islander, central Chaweng beach road is popular with tourists and expats offering draught beers and a varied menu with a view of the constant tourist traffic. Right on the Chaweng Beach Road, there's a great filling station for booze, Cajun and Creole food, and live blues called the Coco Blues Company. Opposite McDonald's is Tropical Murphy's with draught Guinness and Kilkenny, and Filipino cover band Ovada. Try POD for aircon and cool cocktails or Christy's for their ladyboy revue, which is funny and free. The big clubs in Chaweng are still the Reggae Pub, for Euro-beat and drinking games, and the Green Mango, for hard house and classic party tunes. Newcomer London-style Mint Bar has brought island nightlife up to par with cool tunes and celebrity DJs most months. Penny Lane, situated in the heart of town plays classic rock tracks and serves tasty food. Also on the blues and food kick, Springer Pub is in south Chaweng. Bar Solo plays US club sounds and half the club is outdoors. The latest club to open in north Chaweng is Pandora. It's a touch of al fresco Mediterranean and is the only club that has a sauna, Jacuzzi and a pool with fibre optic lights which change the colour of the water seven times every 30 seconds.

## LAMAI

### PLACES TO CRASH:

Smaller than Chaweng, but it's just as vibrant. Rest your head at

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

## FEEDING TIME:

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

## NIGHTRIPPING:

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

## BIG BUDDHA AND BAN RAK

### PLACES TO CRASH:

Known for its massive Buddha image at one end of the island, this is a tranquil area to get away from the nightlife and hooligans.

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

## FEEDING TIME:

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

## BOPHUT VILLAGE PLACES TO CRASH:

A peaceful oasis, this quaint 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,

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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 Jukka'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 Natien 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.



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#### 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.



# KOHPANGAN BUCKETISLE

Clear 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.

## 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.

## HADRIN

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

### PLACES TO CRASH:

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

On Sunrise: There is loads to choose from, though Paradise Bungalows has a good variety of rooms and Sea Garden and Jonathan are classy joints. Drop Inn also has a new hotel with spa and penthouse rockstar sweets.

On Sunset: Ya Ya's Guest House is a great find and Neptune's Villa, Phangan Buri and Vimarn Samut

are well run with great aircon rooms. Further around the peninsula, there are a few new resorts and some old-school bargains, Sari Kantang is an excellent find on Leela Beach.

## WEST SIDE

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

### PLACES TO CRASH:

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

## CHALOKLAM

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



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### 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-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 kayaks 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 **Lomptra Catermaran** for the quickest and most comfortable crossing or the **Had Rin Queen** for the most frequent crossings and a reliable service.



# KOHTAO TANKEDUP

Sunny days are here again as the island begins to fill up with the start of the European holiday season. Reduced bungalow prices are still available although expect prices to increase as the Island becomes busier. If you're here for the diving there are about 35 dive shops ready to cater for all your aquatic acrobatics from beginner to pro as well as technical diving. This is one of the best and cheapest places in the Gulf of Thailand to get a diving certification. For the less energetic, enjoy quiet days in secluded bays and take in the superb scenery which keeps people coming back here again and again.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

Accommodation caters for all tastes and budgets. Choices start from traditional Thai wooden huts to the more luxurious pads with the 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 beach hut costs roughly Bt400 a night, double if you want aircon. Bungalows inland and on the mountains are usually cheaper.

## MAE HAAD:

The main port of arrival for visitors has everything you would expect to find in a main town: 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 topical garden. Beach Club and Blue Diamond are also good choices.

## WEST COAST:

Sairee is the most popular area of the island, with the largest beach, where a full range of accommodation can be found. Starting from King Rama V Rock moving north, Intouch Resort is a traditional Thai-style resort with established huts and a relaxed atmosphere. AC Resort offers a choice of fan or aircon bungalows and a swimming pool. SB Cabana and Sairee Huts have good value centrally located wooden bungalows. Silver Sands offers old and new wooden bungalows set in a tropical garden. Simple Life Villas, an island institution with a loyal following, offer a choice of big concrete bungalows and smaller huts with a regular crowd and a great atmosphere. Sunset Buri Resort offers a Mediterranean feel and provides aircon or fan rooms and a swimming pool overlooking the beach. Blue Wind, is a quiet haven with daily yoga. 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 see 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 is a peaceful escape and offers meditation and massage.





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**THE EAST:**

The northeast coast is much quieter and more secluded with only a few places to stay. Worth checking out are Hing Wong Bungalows, Green Tree or View Rock resorts. Moving south, Tanote Bay has a small selection of rooms available. Tanote View resort and Poseidon Bungalows are good choices as is Blacktip Resort and Water sports centre. The southeast has 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 choice of accommodation and all the amenities you would expect to find being the third largest beach. Sunshine Resort, Koh Tao Tropicana, Taa Toh lagoon and Koh Tao Resort are all good choices.

**DAYTRIPPING:**

As a major diving certification centre blessed with an abundance of marine life and easily accessible dive sites, many would-be Cousteau's choose to start their dive careers here. A full range can be completed with either SSI or PADI being the major certification standards. Tech Diving courses are 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 ongoing projects aimed at promoting environmental awareness. With price competition all but levelled by the KT-DOC your choice of dive school depends on reputation, service, and quality. Fair play we say. Snorkelling also provides a good opportunity to see the abundance of marine life here. There are many secluded bays and beaches where you can while away the day's 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. 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 check out MV Sports, Blacktip Water Sports or Switch Water Sports, all offer wakeboarding and water skiing and more.

**KOH NANGYUAN:**

A perfect paradise; three islands joined together by sand bars – seen no where 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 marine life 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 the active type, trekking trails are plentiful and the most arduous routes reward the survivors with secluded bays and crystal clear waters or mountain top views and postcard photo opportunities. Alternatively hire mountain bikes and cycle your way to fitness taking in the scenery. Zen Gecko, on the road to Tanote Bay, offers rock climbing and bouldering.

**NIGHTTRIPPING:**

With dozens if not hundreds of divers completing courses daily and a regular party crowd there is always an air of celebration and vibrant party scene on the rock. A regular mix of home grown talent and visiting DJ's play a variety of musical styles with the freshest sounds guaranteed. Most venues are open nightly although the party night changes, keeping the atmosphere alive and the energy flowing non-stop. The party scene is one of late nights, great people and good spirits. Check out the many 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 and Jamie Mack, serving up housey breaks and beats with bundles of booze. Intouch with its open-

air design 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 Pixy and DJ 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. Relax and chill out at Lotus Beach Bar with a regular crowd and varied music policy. In Mae Haad Dragon bar serves up oriental mystique and seductive beats with an extensive cocktail list.

**FEEDING TIME:**

The choice of eateries on Koh Tao is impressive whether you're after tasty Thai tucker or your favourite Farang fodder. Puk's Kitchen and Yang's, Mae Haad, offer a wide choice of cheap tasty Thai food as does Tongs in Sairee. In Mae Haad, Café 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. 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. Mash balls

or Massaman it's all good as is the wit of the humorous host. Check out the new Tapas restaurant near Sairee 7/11 with a hookah lounge and (Thailand's only?) absinthe bar! El Toro dishes up a selection of western food and pizza with big screen movies. Choppers Bar and Grill, now bigger and better with a second story extension and pool tables, 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. Awesome!. Check out Green Mango Bar and Restaurant, Sairee, popular with expats serving superb Sunday roasts. New Heaven Restaurant, Chalok Baan Kao, has beautiful views from its open air restaurant serving fresh seafood. Many resorts and bungalow restaurants offer a wide choice of quality Thai and Western food.

**WAY TO GO:**

Trains leave Hualhumphong Station in Bangkok 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 Phangan 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.

**Crystal** dive resort  
 Mae Haad  
 T: 077 456 106-7  
 F: 077 456 105  
 Sairee Village  
 IDC Center - T: 077 456 100  
 Bangkok Office  
 T: 02 629 5357 - 07 067 8691  
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# PHUKET ALL SYSTEMS GO

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

## PATONG

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

## PLACES TO CRASH:

Decent, well-maintained rooms under Bt1,000 are Sweet Apartment (Bt500; 07-634 1359), Le Vele (Bt600; 07-634 0336) and Smile Inn (Bt900; 07-634 0455). In the Bt1,000-2,000 range try Club Bamboo (Bt1,100; Tel: 07-634 5345) or Icon Phuket (Bt1,800; 07-629 6735). At the top end, few spots are more beautiful than the The Avantika (Bt4,600; 07-629 2801).

## 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 (which doubles as a Thai cooking school), 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. Managed by an American woman, Rock Hard A Go-Go is Paton's most notorious jiggly bar. Soi Paradise is a friendly, flamboyant area with gay bars and discos. Dragon, Star Club, 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 (Bt300-850; 07-633 0572), Kata Country House (Bt600-900; 07-633 3210) and Friendship Bungalow (Bt500; 07-633 0499). In Karon, Bazoom Hostel (Bt80-490, 07-639 6914) and On The Hill (Bt800; 07-628 6469) – recommended for its views. More upmarket spots: the fetching Kata Minta (Bt1,500; 07-633 3283) and Sawasdee Village, featuring a gorgeous tropical swimming pool (Bt2,800, 07-633 0979), both in Kata.

## FEEDING TIME:

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

## NIGHTTRIPPING

There are few nightspots to recommend aside from the chill-out bars Dan Kwain and Café 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; 07-6281 325), Shanti Lodge (from Bt350, 07-6280 233). Rawai: Friendship Beach (from Bt1,000, 07-6288 996). Nai Harn/Ao Sane: Baan Krating Jungle Beach Resort (Bt2,000; 07-628 8264), Sunny's Nai Harn Beach Resort (Bt950; 07-638 8058), The Mangosteen (Bt4,500; 07-628 9399).

**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 Stone Music Café 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**

Kamala and southern Bang Tao caught the brunt of the big wave, but it will be a few more months before they're completely back to normal. Nai Thon is the most beautiful beach of the bunch, with reasonably priced rooms.

**PLACES TO CRASH:**

Aside from Maikhaio Bungalows/ Campground (01-895 1233)

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: Phuket Naithon Resort (from Bt3,500; 07-620 5233), Surin Beach Resort (from Bt1,850; 07-632 5000), Surin Bay Inn (Bt1,000; 07-627 1601).

**FEEDING TIME & NIGHTTRIPPING**

Some exceptional class-act restaurants/lounges in Bang Tao/ Surin with prices to match include Tatonka, Silk, 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; 07-621 1186), Talang Guesthouse (Bt320-550; 07-621 4225), Imperial Hotel (Bt650; 07-621 2311), Royal Phuket City (Bt1900, 07-623 3333).

**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.

**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, 07-625 0333, 07-627 0477 or 07-632 8274. Tuk-tuks: island-wide services, jaw-dropping prices. Songthaew buses run 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.

**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 kayak tour (Sea Canoe Thailand, 07-621 2252; John Gray's Sea Canoe, 07-625 4505). Inland, there's ATV or bicycle tours, elephant trekking, bungee jumping, Bang Pae and

Tonsai waterfalls, and the Gibbon Rehabilitation Centre in Khao Phra Thaew National Park, and Kathu waterfall. For wannabe or experienced sailors, the Ao Chalong Yacht Club welcomes anyone to join their regular Sunday sailing races (clubhouse near Chalong Pier, 01-892 4992).

**WAY TO GO:**

Plane: Bt2,730/5,460 ow/return (inc tax) from Bangkok with Thai Airways or Bt1,820/3,640 from Samui with Bangkok Airways  
Private Bus: From Bangkok, Bt480 (with stopover in Surat Thani) dep. 6pm arrives at noon  
Government Bus: Bt630 (direct) dep 5pm arrives 6:30am



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# KRABI CLIFFHANGER

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.



To ensure comfort in all weather, always dress in layers

## 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.

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

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

#### NIGHTRIPPING:

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

#### TONSAI

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

#### KHLONG MUANG

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

#### WAY TO GO:

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

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



Thongdaeng the telekinetic beach dog bends the spoon of another baffled tourist



# HUAHIN SANDTRAP

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 Bintaht (or Alms Bowl Lane, so named because there's a temple at the end of it) where you can bed down in a couple of guesthouses.

Soi Bintaht is also awash with beer bars and women with come-hither glances – like a slice of Phuket's Patong Beach, though some Farangs call it "Soi Disappointment" – but that's a pretty short walk on the wild side. Since Hua Hin tends to appeal to a slightly older crowd, the nightlife, in general, is pretty subdued but 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

# SAUSAGE & SINGLETS

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

Pattaya got its start during the Vietnam War when the US used an airbase 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.

## WIND IN YOUR FACE:

You'll see songtaews all over town, offering short lifts for Bt10, 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. Hiring a car usually means a minimum of three days or more, and costs about Bt1,000 per day.

## 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 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 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.

## WAY TO GO:

**Bus:** Buses leave from Mor Chit and the Ekami Bus Terminal on Sukhumvit Soi 63 regularly. Fares range from Bt70-90.

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

**The BLUES FACTORY**  
The best Live Music Venue in Pattaya  
2 LIVEBANDS 7 DAYS A WEEK  
Snowman, Mary & The Blues Machine Featuring  
Morten "Dr Hammond" playing nightly except Wednesday

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Draft Beer - 8:00 PM - 9:30 only 30 Baht!  
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The perfect place for Couples, Single Men & Women  
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Walking Street, Soi Lucky Star.  
[www.thebluesfactorypattaya.com](http://www.thebluesfactorypattaya.com)



# KOH CHANG PALMBEACH

Koh Chang National Park, a green-cloaked mountain range rising out of the sea has long been admired for its natural beauty and easy pace. Until its relatively recent discovery by backpackers, tourists ignored the island due to its proximity to war-torn Cambodia. However, a new airport on the mainland and a government sponsored push for the tourist dollar have put Koh Chang on the development path with new hotels popping up along the length of the west. It really can rain with a vengeance between June and October, therefore expect heavily discounted rooms and empty beaches if you're visiting during this period.

## 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 comfort, convenience and the company of other visitors are what you're after then Whitesands is for you.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

At the northern end of the beach you'll find Independent and Star Bungalows and a back-to-basics beach nomad vibe, while the long standing KC Grande Resort covers all the bases with Bt150-4,000 bungalows. Nearby, Cookie Hotel will do an all mod cons room for under Bt1,000. Proving the days of Bt100 aren't dead is Island Lodge the cheapest deal in the area. South, on Pearl Beach, a potpourri of budget and mid-range possibilities abound from the recently opened Baan Anushabar and the excellent boutique Keereeta Hotel to Charmed Resort, where accommodation comes in the form of converted shipping containers.

## KLONG PRAO

This long curving beach is tipped to become package tourist heaven, fortunately that day still seems a few years away. 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 best bet for suitcase lugging visitors, at around Bt1,500 - 2,500. Genuine travelers will love Thal Bungalows, as laid back and chilled as the Dalai Lama on ice. Nearby, on the estuary, Bt600 will get you an aircon room at Baan Rim Nam. 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 upmarket Seaview Resort & Spa. Mid-price, well kept, family run beachfront bungalows can be found at KB Bungalows or Kai Bae Beach Bungalows. Catering for budget conscious bar hoppers are a host of cheap & cheerful places roadside with rooms for Bt400 or less.

## 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.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

The often packed Nature Beach's Bt300 digs are smack on the beach. Next door, Bhumiya Resort offers 3-star comforts a stone's throw from the unwashed masses. South, on the rocky shore, Paradise Cottages's new huts go for Bt200 and up. Moving on, the back-to-nature hideaway, The Mangrove, Bailan provides hi-so hut living for Bt800. Down a notch or two in quality and price you'll find Bailan Hut and Happy Hut provide havens for world weary voyagers.

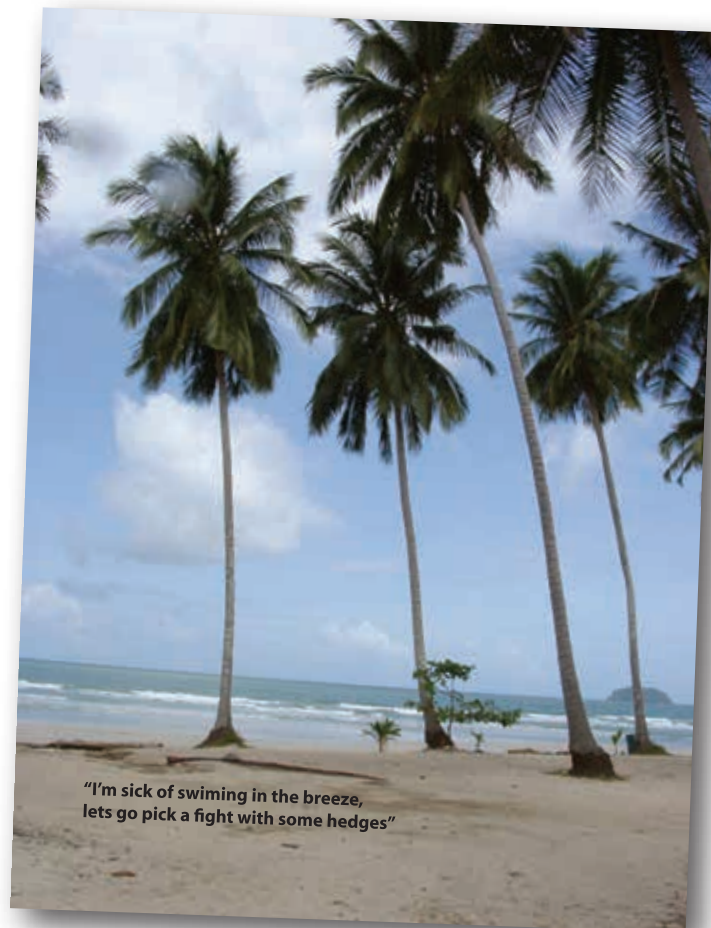
## BANGBAO

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 Bt1,500, is a must if you have the cash. Beautiful, but economical panoramic bay and mountain views can be had the remote, Bt150, Homestay Beach.

## ELSEWHERE



Having been responsible for putting Lonely Beach on the backpackers map several years ago, the Bt150 Treehouse has upped and moved to the extremely remote Long Beach in the far southeast of the island.

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

Koh Chang certainly ain't party central but Backsound, Lonely Beach, is cocktail-in-a-bucket heaven for the dance music loving Khaosan crowd. Experience modern Thai culture at Sky Bay Pub, Pearl Beach. On Whitesands, Oodies is an old fave for steaks and music and Sabay Bar is the still lithe granddaddy of beach bars. In Kai Bae, Porn's and No-name are the best of the motley beach bar crew.

## DAYTRIPPING:

Due to the distinct lack of visibility underwater, most dive schools shut up shop until August/September. 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. Defuse the toxic time bomb that masquerades as your bloodstream with a detox or fasting program at Natural High, Bailan.

## WAY TO GO

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

**By Bus:** Bt198. 7.30am & 9.30am aircon bus direct from Ekkamai to Centrepont ferry pier, a 4.5 hour trip.

**By Minivan:** A cramped, hair-raising way to spend Bt300.

**Ferry:** Bt60 one way, by car ferry or wooden passenger boat.



# KOH SAMET SANDTRIP

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

**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.

## 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

The Passion of the Kristie



# HONGKONG MIGHTYKONG

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

## GETTING AROUND:

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

## DAYTRIPPING:

### THE PEAK

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

### MUSEUMS

HK Art Museum, Museum of Science & Technology and the Cultural Centre are all at Star Ferry Terminal Tsim Sha Tusi. There is a large open waterfront area outside with occasional outdoor entertainment at weekends. The more recently opened Heritage Museum (ShaTin KCR) gives a great insight into HK and the HK History Museum is at Hung Hom KCR.

### CITY PARKS

Great for escaping the crush, but teeming with Filipino maids on Sundays, HK Park (Admiralty MTR) is landscaped and small. Catch earnest newlyweds posing in front of flower beds or check out the

aviary or Tai Chi Garden. The HK Zoological & Botanical Gardens are just over the road. Victoria Park (Causeway Bay MTR) and Kowloon Park (Tsim Sha Tusi MTR) are both bigger and better for watching people and the world go by.

### COUNTRY PARKS

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

### BEACHES / OUTLYING ISLANDS

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

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

### MACAU

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

### BUYING STUFF

HK revels in its self-proclaimed status as a Shopping Paradise, so whatever you're looking for, you can assume it will be available

somewhere. Even if you're not hunting down souvenirs or consumer durables, it is worth taking a look as this is a big part of local culture.

### ELECTRONICS AND GIZMOS

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

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

### FEEDING TIME:

There is a Chinese saying: "We eat anything with four legs except the table and anything with wings except the aeroplane," and the Cantonese eat things that even other Chinese won't touch. You can get your fill of guts and offal on just about any street. That said, other regions of China are well represented (in particular Shanghai, Sichuan and various Peking specialities). Don't let Chinese menus in the window deter you, as there will be an English version



When architects own Lego sets





inside and/or staff who are more than happy to talk you through what's on offer. Hong Kong is rightly proud of its eating scene, and you can find cuisines from all over Asia and beyond, but if you're on a budget, McDonald's is the cheapest – shoestring tourists often survive on little else. The seafood is great and best found by the sea. Favourite locations are Sai Kung and Sok Kwu Wan (Outlying Island Ferry Pier 4 to Sok Kwu Wan). Talk to the staff about quantities and prices of fresh seafood rather than relying on the menu. Food stalls selling dim sum and snacks are ubiquitous, though more common in the side streets of Kowloon than the shopping/business districts of Central. Bakeries are everywhere, selling cheap breads and pastries. In most areas, sandwich bars and coffee shops are easy to find though you'll pay more for this kind of home comfort.

#### NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

Blue Door, The Gecko, and The Bohemian Lounge. For dancing try Nu, Home Base, Amnesia, among other more exclusive options. Wanchai (MTR) enjoys a more down-at-heel reputation. Here there are Irish bars and sports bars and girlie bars, as well as straight-up bars vying for your attention. There's also live music at The Wanch and Carnegies and dancing on the tables at the Groovy Mule. This is where to head for late nights – try Dusk Till Dawn, Neptunes 2 or The Dock. If you're based in Tsim Sha 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.

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# SINGAPORE LIONPRIDE

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



## DAYTRIPPING:

### RAFFLES HOTEL

Way to go: City Hall MRT

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

### ORCHARD ROAD

Way to Go: Orchard MRT

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

### ZOO & NIGHT SAFARI

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

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

Night Safari; 7:30pm-midnight

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

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

### FORT CANNING PARK

Way to Go: Dhoby Ghaut MRT

When: Daily; 10am-6pm

Cost: \$8, \$5.

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

### JURONG BIRD PARK

Way to Go: Boon Lay MRT

When: Daily, 9am-5pm

Cost: \$12.25, \$5.10

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

### SENTOSA ISLAND

Way to Go: Harbour Front MRT

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

### MT. FABER

Way to Go: Harbor Front MRT

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

Cost: \$8.50, \$3.90

Across from Sentosa, Mt Faber offers one of the best views in Singapore. Take

the cable to the peak to glimpse old colonial houses, the bustling port and skyscrapers.

### BUKIT TIMAH

### NATURE RESERVE

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

When: 8:30am-6pm

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

### SINGAPORE RIVER

Way to Go: Raffles Place /Clarke Quay MRT

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

## LITTLE INDIA

Way to Go: Little India MRT

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

## CHINATOWN

Way to Go: Outram Park MRT

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

## ARAB STREET

Way to Go: Bugis MRT

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

## GEYLAND SERAI

Way to Go: Paya Lebar MRT

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

## ARTY STUFF:

### ASIAN CIVILIZATIONS MUSEUM

Way to Go: Raffles Place MRT

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

Cost: \$8.50, \$3.90

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

### ESPLANADE

Way to Go: City Hall MRT

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

### SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Way to Go: City Hall/Dhoby Ghaut MRT

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

Cost: \$3, \$1.50

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

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

### ALLEY BAR

2 Emerald Hill Rd. Sun-Thu 5pm-2am, Fri-Sat 5pm-3am

High-ceilinged, L-shaped bar opens into an alley. Dim-sum snacks.

### BALACLAVA

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



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

#### BAR NONE

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

Adult contemporary music with a rock edge provided by house band.

#### BREWERKZ

#01-05 Riverside Point, 30 Merchant Rd. Mon-Thu noon-midnight, Fri-Sat noon-1 a.m. 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-4am 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.

#### 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.

#### THE LIQUID ROOM

#01-05 the Gallery Hotel, 76 Robertson Quay, Wed-Sat 10pm-3am Classy atmosphere, beautiful people, huge dance floor.

#### ZOUK

17 Jiak Kim St. Wed-Sat 7:30pm-3am Pay to gain entry to one disco and get three. Can cost as much as \$35 when big DJs play, but you get two drinks included. The music is cutting edge and the club is pretty damn good. They kept Zouk open until 10am Sunday morning when a big US DJ span here once. Regularly have very big name DJs.

#### 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.



## Gentlemen, Start Your Turntables

As most of Singapore get's an early night in before National Day on the 9th of August, expect Zouk club to be full to the gunnels with dance fans, checking out the DMC/Technics World DJ Championships. The wheels of steel will be scratched, mixed and cut by the frenzied hands of local DJs trying to knock last year's champ, DJ Rattle. The eventual winner goes on to represent Singapore in the world finals in Paris. In case the local talent isn't up to scratch, punters will also be entertained by three-times DMC champion DJ Craze. \$15 entry before 10pm, more later.



# PHNOMPENH CRAZY TOWN

Not nearly as dangerous as it once was, the city can still be risky at night. Sure, it's not Bangkok or Singapore, but Phnom Penh has come a long way in the past five years. The city retains its faded French grandeur but has added a great drinking strip of bars by the river and an environment where getting hammered is still a 24-hour sport.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

Guesthouses in Phnom Penh are pretty consistent, ranging from \$3-5 for shared bath and fan to \$10-12 for aircon and private bath, hot water, and TV. The young traveller ghettos are around Boeung Kak Lake (Street 93), and the noisy centre of town. Around the lake they're all much the same, but don't fall in as you'll die on contact; in town The Capitol has a satellite of guesthouses around the intersection of streets 107 and 182. And Narin's have their own little kingdoms on streets 111 and streets 125. A small step up, the Dara Reang Sey Hotel (streets 13 & 118) has a loyal following (\$8 fan, \$12 aircon). California 2 along the river is popular with the older independent set. Got money to burn? Go five-star with the Raffles Le Royal or the Intercontinental.

## DAYTRIPPING:

Khmer Rouge horrors are documented at the Tuol Sleng Museum in town and the Killing Fields Memorial at Choeung Ek. On the way to the Killing Fields, check out the present-day horrors at the Phnom Penh garbage dump in Stung Meanchey district, a hundred-acre cesspool where a few hundred children scavenge through toxic muck for recyclables. West of the airport, there are two shooting ranges where you can fire off 30 rounds from an AK for about \$20 – same price for a grenade. A grenade launcher will set you back \$200. Back in town, the cultural attractions include Wat Phnom. According to legend, it's the site of the historic founding of the city in 1372. Near the river are the Silver Pagoda and Royal Palace. Make sure you pay the camera fee if you plan to take photos – they enforce it. Nearby, the National Museum has lots of carvings and stuff, much of it lifted from Angkor.

## NIGHTRIPPING:

If you go out in search of revelry after dark, take a taxi or a moto – don't walk. Phnom Penh has a reputation for street muggings, although these are relatively rare

today. If you are mugged, don't resist – they are not afraid to hurt you badly and take your wallet afterwards. Along the river there are notable holes-in-the wall such as the The Pink Elephant and The Cantina as well as larger corner establishments like the Foreign Correspondent's Club (FCC) and The Riverside. A whole line-up of bars on Street 51 between streets 136 and 178 include the long-running and now expanded Heart of Darkness (note: there have been some violent incidents there in the past year, but most nights are violence-free). Also on Street 51 are the Walkabout (open 24 hours), Howie's (another late-night joint), and Shanghai Bar (a single guy's kind of place). Elsewhere around town is Sharky Bar (street 130) which is a big bar with lots of pool tables and girls. Further up the river is the new Green Vespa.

## FEEDING TIME:

Along Sisowath Quay by the river is a plethora of restaurants with a wide array of international cuisines, including the famous FCC, Happy Herb's Pizza, Frizz, and around the corner on street 178 is the Rising Sun. Almost any street corner offers a noodle stall or a Khmer-style hole-in-the-wall rice and noodle shop. There are a few local fast-food joints (but no McDonald's yet). Street 240 offers a number of eating options, though many of these cater more to the NGO crowd.

## WAY TO GO:

From Thailand:

Plane: Bt5,420/10,335 one-way/return from Bangkok (Cambodia departure taxes are \$25 international, \$6 domestic)

Road: The road from Koh Kong is a seven-to eight-hour ride. A shared taxi costs about Bt400 for a small seat or the front seat for Bt700-800. A car is about Bt2,400. There are daily tourist vans from Mealy Chenda (Bt600) offering spotty service. There are also two border crossings near Pailin.



Boat: From Koh Kong to Sihanoukville, morning departure, \$15.

From Siem Reap:

Plane: Siem Reap Airways and President Air, \$55-60 one-way, several flights a day.

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

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

## VISAS & BORDER

### CROSSINGS:

To/from Thailand: Use Poipet if heading to Siem Reap from Bangkok. Use any if heading to Phnom Penh.

If coming from the north (Isaan, Vientiane) use Anlong Veng or O'Smach. Visa-on-arrival costs Bt1,000 but beware of scams.

To/from Laos: The border above Stung Treng is open. Lao and Cambodia visas aren't available here. Expect a \$3 'stamp fee'. A boat from Stung Treng to the border should be about \$25 for a boat or \$5 a person.



# SIEMREAP TEMPLECENTRAL

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

## PLACES TO CRASH:

\$3-5 rooms are scattered all over town. Along Highway 6 west of the river Jasmine, Hello, and the western-owned Earthwalkers are all good choices. On the same road on the other side of town take a look at Skyway or Peace of Angkor Villa. Wat Bo Road offers some old stand-bys in Mahogany and Mom's and the new Two Dragons (see box). The Old Market area is the center of nightlife. The guesthouses here tend to be mid-range. Check out the new Ivy, Molly Malone's, or the Mandalay. A short walk from the Old Market, the Ivy 2 guesthouse has budget fan rooms as does the Garden Village and Golden Temple Villa. A step up is the Red Piano. There is no shortage of upper end accommodation – new hotels are springing up constantly.

Hint: The kickback system for moto and taxi drivers is well established – don't bother fighting it, 'cause you won't change a damn thing.

## DAYTRIPPING:

Okay, at \$20 for a day, \$40 for three and \$60 for the week, the temples may seem a bit like a trip to Disneyland, but a week of living it up in Siem Reap and Angkor is cheaper than Bangkok, and the temples are well worth it. You can hire a motodop to take you around Angkor for \$6-8 per day. Other options include a car with driver (about \$20 a day) or a motorcycle-drawn rickshaw for about \$10/day. Guides can set you back another \$20-25 a day. They can be arranged through a tour agency, your guesthouse, or stop by the Angkor Tour Guide Association opposite the Grand Hotel.

## DAYTRIPPING BEYOND THE TEMPLES:

Go see the river carvings and take a jungle walk

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

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

## FEEDING TIME:

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

## WAY TO GO:

As FARANG went to press, the powers-that-be in Poipet concluded that any tourist going to Cambodia is a helpless idiot and must therefore purchase their transport from the local government's own service at \$11 a pop for a seat on a mini-bus, or a full taxi for \$35. The policies seem to change by the day, but if you head through this border crossing on your own (still preferable to the infamous Khao San Road scam bus) do expect some degree of control exerted upon your attempts to travel independently to Siem Reap.



# VIENTIANE

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



## PLACES TO CRASH:

There actually are luxury hotels in Laos; the Lao Plaza claims to be five-star and rooms start at US\$100, and the Novotel, near the airport has rooms for around US\$70. For the more budget-minded, pretty much all your accommodation needs are concentrated in the area of Samsenthai, Setthathirath and Thanon Fa Ngum – and all roads in between. Down on the river road, the Phet Phim Guest House is the best budget crash in town charging US\$3-5. If you're willing to spend a bit more, the runaway winner is the fairly new Dragon Lodge on Samsenthai, which has sparkling rooms for US\$12-15. Orchid Guest House on Fa Ngum Road is US\$12, and the rooftop lounge has stirring views over the Mekong. The cheapest rooms in town are at the Mixac Guest House on Setthathirath Road, where skanky dorm beds cost less than US\$2 and hideous rooms go for US\$3-5. Around the corner from the Santisouk, on the road behind Samsenthai, the Thawee Guest House is a lot newer and better value at US\$6-12.

## DAYTRIPPING:

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

At the end of That Luang Road is Pha That Luang, the nation's spiritual centre with a 400-year-old stupa allegedly containing Buddha relics. Heading back to the centre of town is the country's tallest building, the Victory Monument. This Asian Arc de Triomphe was built in 1969 by the Imperial Government using US-supplied cement intended for a runway to better facilitate America's secret war in the north. Carrying on south, there's Talaat Sao (Morning Market), the town's main shopping centre, selling everything, including some of the best hand-woven fabrics in Southeast Asia. From there, turn right onto Samsenthai Road and head for the Lao Revolutionary Museum. This large and thoroughly pompous building is great for a few discreet laughs at the ruling party's expense. The museum is devoted to

commemorating the glorious people's struggle to rise out of poverty, imperialism and oppression and achieve liberation, poverty and oppression instead. Next, head down to Setthathirath Road, past the President's Palace to Wat Si Saket, which was built in 1818 and the oldest temple in Vientiane. When Siam was raping and pillaging the city in 1828 (before taking the population as slaves), they spared this Siamese-style one. Finish off at Wat Sok Pa Luang, with a herbal sauna and massage for about \$3. The tuk-tuk drivers know the place.

## FEEDING TIME:

You're a fool if you don't try a Lao baguette (you might still be a fool if you do, of course). Stuffed with veggies and a suspiciously spiced pate and washed down with the supremely strong Lao coffee, they'll keep you going for hours. For

a nice sit-down coffee and pastry or croissant, the Liang Xiang Bakery House and Sweet Home Bakery, both on Chao Anou are not bad.

There are a quite ridiculous number of French restaurants in Vientiane – and they're all good. Check out the Le Nadao near Victory Monument next to Le Parasol Blanc Hotel, Le Provencal 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 Ngnin.

## NIGHTRIPPING:

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

# VANG VIENG

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



# LUANG PRABANG

## PLACES TO CRASH

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

## NIGHTRIPPING:

The New York-style Maylek Pub is a funky retro-esque nightspot where Luang Prabang's hip and happening – cashed-up relief workers and general posers – come to swill. Music is great considering there is nowhere to hear jazzy blues or hip-hop and funk within 500 kilometres of the place. Drinks are about 20% more expensive than elsewhere in the town, which still calculates to cheap. A competitor called the Hive Bar has also opened up on the quiet side of Phou Si Hill. The music is just as good and the drinks a little cheaper. For a more traditional night on the town, the Muang Khua Hotel on Thanon Phu Wao has the best Lao-style disco, with excellent Lao pop (there is such a thing, really!) and the rest.

## FEEDING TIME:

Xiang Thong Road is one of the town's great food streets and Khao Biak Sen is one of the best noodle shops in town. Round rice noodles cooked over an open fire outside a decaying French house – very tasty. The night market in front of the palace is the best spot in town to pick up cheap Luang Prabang specialities. The Luang Prabang Bakery is run by a Hmong woman who studied pastry in Bangkok and makes excellent sandwiches. The Scandinavian Bakery serves wholesome breakfast fare in an air-con setting. The Cafe de Arts is an exceptional eatery with a great mix of French and Lao dishes at very reasonable prices. Nearby is the Yonkhoun, where you can slice into a deer steak that is as tender as an angel's bum. Also good is Le Potiron, a cheap French/Euro joint with decent pizza and exceptional desserts – the best place in town for a budget binge of non-Lao grub. Villa Santi is in Luang Prabang's classiest hotel. The restaurant is excellent but not prohibitively expensive. Lao food is the best choice. Duang Champa, on Kingkitsalat Rd, has Lao and French cuisine in stylish surroundings. Colonial splendour with a generous bar, Han Sontam Khaem Khong is around Wat Nong on Manthatoulal 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.

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



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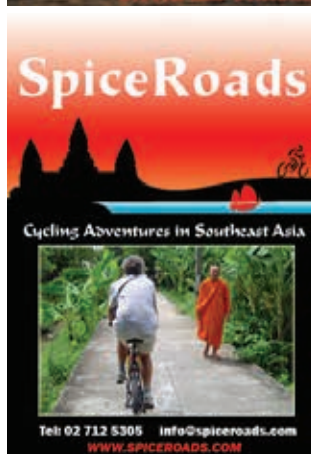
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## SHOPPING



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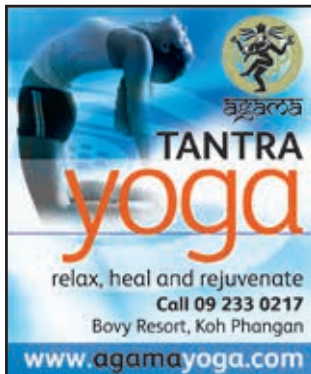
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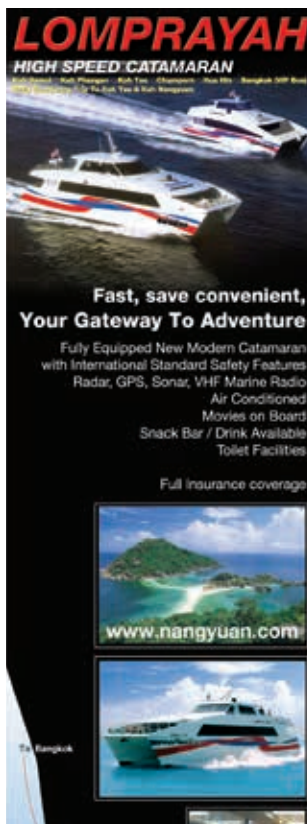


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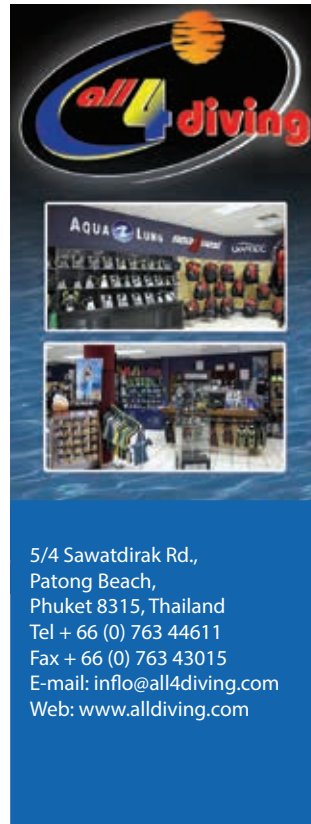
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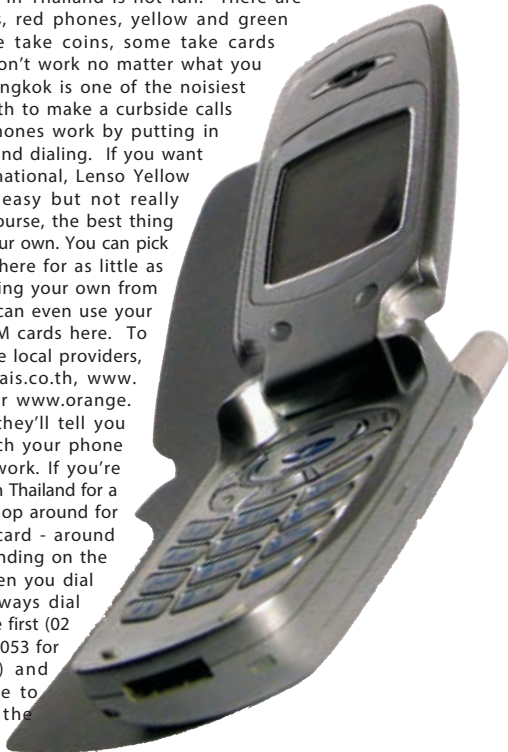


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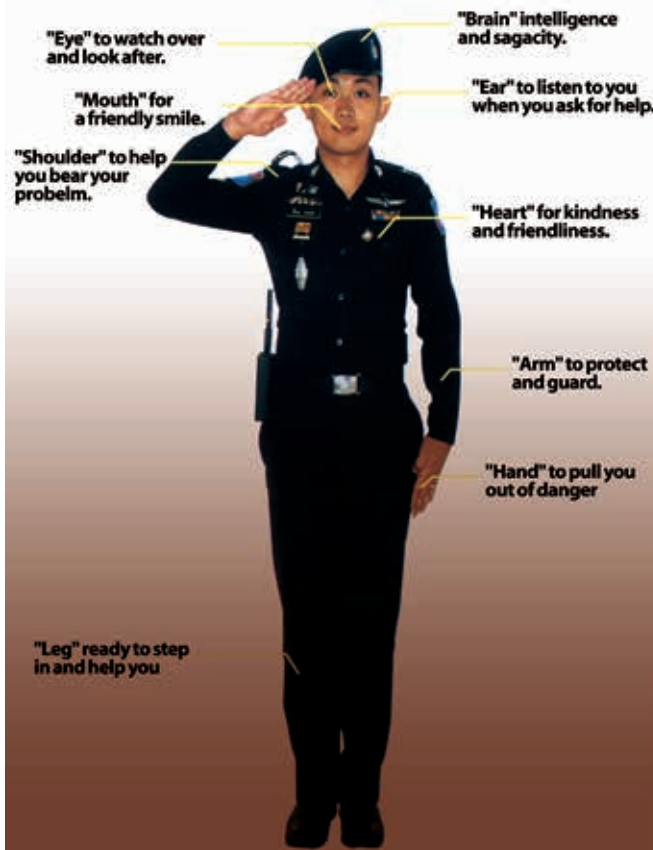


# CELLULAR CREDIBILITY

Making calls in Thailand is not fun. There are blue phones, red phones, yellow and green ones. Some take coins, some take cards and some won't work no matter what you do. Plus, Bangkok is one of the noisiest cities on earth to make a curbside calls from. Payphones work by putting in around Bt5 and dialing. If you want to call International, Lenso Yellow phones are easy but not really cheap. Of course, the best thing is to bring your own. You can pick up a phone here for as little as Bt2000 or bring your own from home. You can even use your own GSM SIM cards here. To check out the local providers, go to [www.ais.co.th](http://www.ais.co.th), [www.dtac.co.th](http://www.dtac.co.th), or [www.orange.co.th](http://www.orange.co.th), and they'll tell you how to switch your phone to their network. If you're going to be in Thailand for a bit longer, shop around for a local SIM card - around Bt400., depending on the number. When you dial you must always dial the area code first (02 for Bangkok, 053 for Chiang Mai) and the IDD code to call out of the country is 001.



## Your Friendliness



## hospitals

### THAILAND

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

### BANGKOK

Bangkok Adventist Mission Hospital (Private)  
430 Phitsanulok Road.  
(Near to Khaosan)  
Tel: 02-281-1422, 02-282-1100  
Bangkok General Hospital (Private, with international clinic)  
2 Soi Soonvijai 7 New Petchburi Road.  
Tel: 02-310-3000, 02-318-0066  
Siriraj Hospital (Government, Mahidol University)  
2 Prannok Road, Thonburi (across the river from the Grand Palace)  
Tel: 02-419-7000

### CHIANG MAI

Chiang Mai Ram Hospital (Private)  
8 Boonruangrit Road, Chiang Mai  
Tel: 053-224-861

### KOH SAMUI

(minor ailments only)  
Samui International Hospital (Private)  
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Koh Samui  
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### CAMBODIA

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

Heaven help you if you have any serious ailments while in Laos. There are few qualified doctors and they just don't have the facilities. Get to Thailand. From Vientiane, there are one or two okay hospitals just over the bridge in Nong Khai. Otherwise, it's back to Bangkok.  
Clinique Internationale, Luang Prabang  
(856) 214-022  
Centre de Traumatologie et d'Orthopedie de Vientiane (Private)  
On the Road to Tha Ngon, north of Vientiane.  
Tel: (856) 413-663, 413-306  
(Call for ambulance service)  
Nong Khai Wattana Hospital (Private)  
1159/4 Prachak Road, Nong Khai, Thailand - near Vientiane  
Tel: 042-465-201

## bangkok embassies

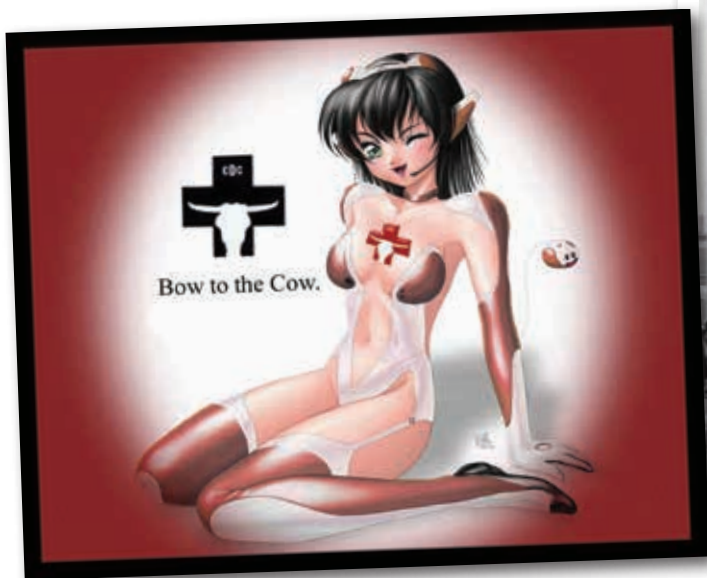
If you are having a serious problem, your embassy is your "last chance saloon". Good luck. However, they are very good at issuing visas for visitors. Here are the major embassies in Bangkok:

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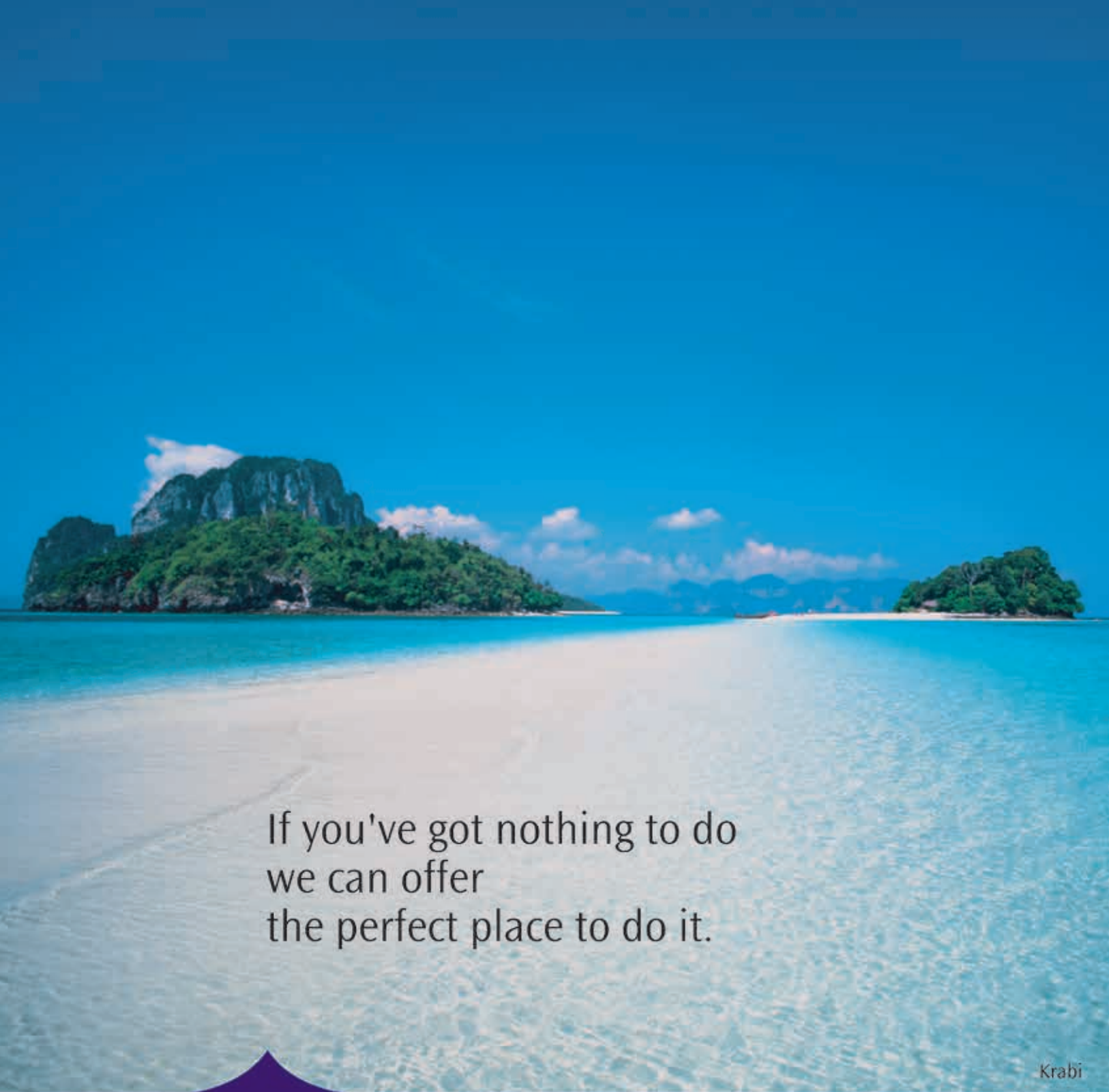


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