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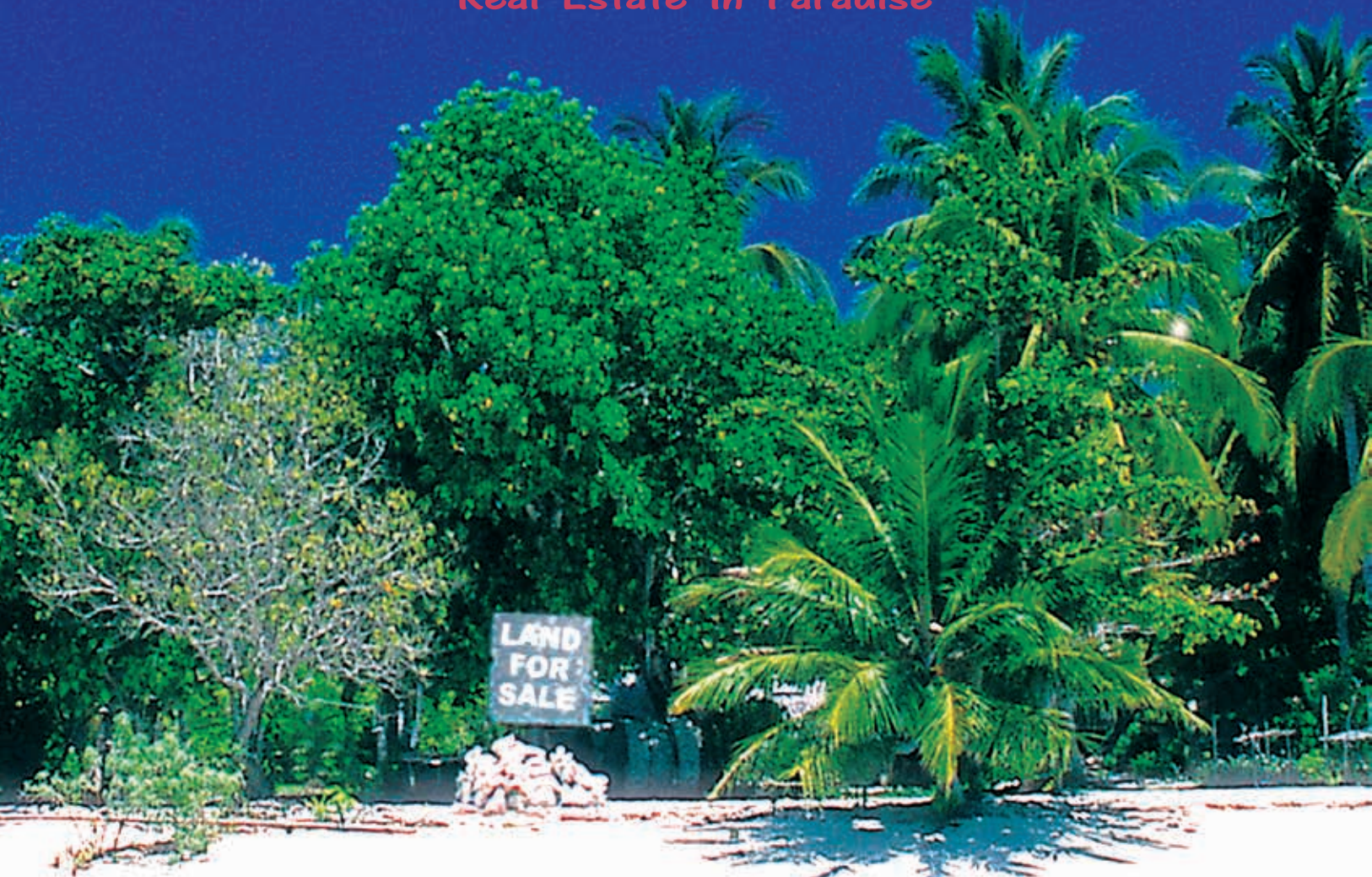
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## features;>>

### TOURIST MASSES

pg>>18

Thailand will commemorate the first anniversary of the tsunami on December 26 with some mystical memorial services. Though the high season is picking up, some expat-owned businesses are still struggling to keep their heads above water. **Emily Goldstein** reports.

### Rising Above

pg>>20

Volunteers from Thailand and around the world are lending a hand to help locals in the worst-hit area of Khao Lak to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. **Jay Lamey** and **Jim Algie** sort through the detritus. Photos by Jay.

### ACTION VILLAIN

pg>>23

To cash in on carnage, merchants across Asia are using Osama bin Laden's face and misdeeds to animate singing dolls, spark up lighters, front T-shirts, and inspire computer games. **Richard S. Ehrlich** reports.

pg>>26

### POWER PLAY

Bodybuilding is going from strength to strength in Thailand, writes **Steve Sandford**, and the national team is competing this month in Manila.

### Drag RACE

pg>>28

Novice beauty pageant judge **Joe Cummings** helps to separate the beauties from the beasts at the famous contest for the transgendered in Pattaya.

### ShowMEN & Girls

pg>>30

**Martyn Goodacre** drops in at the famous ladyboy cabaret on Koh Samui to find out how warped entertainment and gender-blending has become a great night out for straight audiences. All photos by Martyn.

### SAIGON SHOPPING BINGE

pg>>34

**Dawn DelVecchio** finds herself all wrapped up in the woes of Christmas shopping until she's liberated in what's becoming one of SE Asia's coolest cities for consumers.

### Women Wronged

pg>>44

Will the forced sterilisation of Tibetan women result in the end of the race? This is but one of the serious questions examined by **Suzan Crane** in this report about the grotesque violations of women's rights in Tibet.

### bachelor of seduction

pg>>36

Author **Neil Strauss** spent more than a year infiltrating, influencing and eventually becoming totally absorbed by an online network of pick-up artists – men, often former geeks and nerds who dedicate their entire existence to the craft and science of picking up women.



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### HEALTH



## THE SPOILS OF BOILS

pg>>40

Erica Fry's fascination with her boil comes to a disgusting head.

### the Stalker



## Lusty Lit

pg>>25

When not curled up in bed with a bad boy, Karen Findlay snuggles down with a good book and her own fine company. Not content with issuing practical advice, this month The Stalker assigns a pillowbook reading list from classic tomes to contemporary works. Toon by: Nigel Price

### roadreads



## Bangkok's Slimy Underbelly

Daniel Cooper looks at a pair of sordid thrillers about the capital.



pg>>48

### foodie's diary



## Bacchus Takes a Holiday

pg>>41

Thailand may be famous for its spicy food, lovely-looking people, smiles so big they can't possibly be sincere, ornate temples, absurd traffic jams and filthy canals, but mention Thai wine and you'll either get a guffaw in your face, or a skeptical raised eyebrow. Those people are stupid and ignorant, because there is such a thing, and it's getting pretty good. Andre Lepine weaves his way to the Siam Winery to see what's what with his own tongue.

### DIVESITES



## CORAL GRIEF

After the tsunami inundated Koh Phi Phi a local expat began salvaging the bodies and then cleaning up the debris. Alison Winward reports.



pg>>42

### bartripping



## Diamonds in the Rough

Laughing in the face of countless angry phone calls and idle threats from malcontent bar owners whose view of themselves differs from the rheumy but sharp eye of Bartripping's main helmsman, Daniel Cooper heads out on the tiles with his good mate and co-worker Stu. Tonight's target is Banglamphu.

pg>>46







Cameron Cooper



Daniel Cooper



Jim Algie

## TRAGEDIES AND TRIUMPHS

It's been almost a year now since the great wave caught Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and many other countries completely unaware, killing more than a quarter million people in the space of one day. Survivors and the bereaved will be remembering this grave anniversary on December 26<sup>th</sup>.

Read about Phuket's memorial services and recovery on page 18, along with the excellent work of foreign and Thai volunteers in Khao Lak on page 20. Koh Phi Phi also got bulldozed by the wall of water, but scuba divers are doing their bit to rehabilitate the reefs on page 42.

You'd have to be blind not to notice our cover model, Sing, and her bulging biceps. She's the number two female bodybuilder in Asia but doesn't need those thighs of steel to snap you in half – 10 years of judo prepared her for that. Read about how she and other Thai bodybuilders are taking on the world on page 26.

There are only three things to do in bed: sleep, read, and shag, although not necessarily at the same time. The Stalker is a well-read lady of erotica and will let you in on a few of her secret pleasures on page 25. Rather than reading books about the chambers of the human heart, Neil Strauss wrote one. He spent a year hanging out with pick-up artists and ended up with a *New York Times* bestseller. Read a chapter from *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists* on page 36.

Speaking of things sexual and questionable, Joe Cummings travelled to Pattaya last month to judge an international transgender beauty contest and lived to tell the tale on page 28, while ex-music biz photographer Martyn Goodacre gets an inside view of Samui's premiere ladyboy cabaret, Christie's.

Top magazines are built on the strength of their columns and we've introduced three new columnists to support the edifice in this issue. Newcomer Oliver Benjamin gives us some northern exposure with his first "Dude North" instalment (see page 63), long-time *Untamed Travel* correspondent Gordon Sharpless (the cyber-helmsman of the ultra-popular and highly respected talesofasia.com) returns by popular demand with his "Holidays in Cambodia" column (page 85).

To balance out the X and Y chromosomes, Suzan Crane begins "I on India" about her experiences living as an expat there. On page 14 she kick-starts her saga with a trip by motorcycle over the "highest motorable road" in the world.

2006 has been, to paraphrase Dickens, the best and worst of times, and it's a relief to get another 12 issues out. It's been one hell of a huge, whopping, tumultuous year and we all deserve a good holiday. You'll see the *Untamed Travel* staff on a beach or falling off a barstool near you.

To get in the proper holiday spirit and not Scrooge our faithful readers, we've reduced the price from Bt120 to a paltry Bt99.

The *pad thai* is on us this Christmas, folks.

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### STILL QUAKING

As winter sets in, the death toll from the Pakistan earthquake has climbed to more than 87,000 and the UN says it desperately needs another US\$40 million to keep bringing in supplies like food and tents. If more aid doesn't arrive soon, it is feared that many people will freeze to death.



### IN THE BLACK

As Chinese art catches on with flying colours in the West, a painting of parrots sitting on tree branches has become the most valuable Chinese ink work of art by selling for around Bt153 million. The painting was by the elderly Wu Guanzhong.



### UNLUCKY STARS

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is refusing to speak to the press right now and says he will not do so until his star is clear of Mercury around the end of this year. "Mercury is aligned directly with my star [right now]. Mercury is no good," he said.



### 'ROO ON THE MENU

There's a new contest in Australia to find a name for kangaroo meat that will make it more palatable for Aussie diners. In Europe, the meat has become a big-seller worth some A\$200 million a year, while Russians make it into sausages. In Australia, however, it's mostly used for pet food. In different aboriginal dialects, there are more than 300 different words for kangaroo. Organisers are suggesting that entrants put a spin on one of them.



### INSECTS ATE HER EYE!

Widely feared for its poor medical care system, Calcutta has gone one length further in the gross-out sweepstakes. Recently, the family of an Indian woman convalescing after post-surgery infection took the bandage off her left eye to find a gaping eye socket teeming with ants. Earlier, when the woman had begun screaming, the nurses attempted to reassure her by saying pain was a natural by-product of an infection.



### NEPALESE TRUCE

The Maoist rebels are finally ready to join together with other political parties (which controlled the majority of seats in the parliament when it was dissolved by the king in 2002) in a quest for democracy. According to former deputy prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, who met with them, "They have given a positive response to the three points we raised: accept multi-party democracy, stop terrorising and killing innocent people, accept the democratic process and return to the political mainstream," he told Reuters. "They are also ready to lay down arms once there is an overall political settlement."



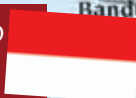
### BINGING BABES

Young women in Singapore are binge-drinking more and more often says a new survey. Binging (which is defined as downing at least five drinks during a single session) has increased threefold among female drinkers under 30 in the last three years, according to a national health survey in the *Sunday Times*.



### BOMBER DEACTIVATED

One of Asia's most wanted terrorists blew himself up after a shootout with police in rural Indonesia. Azahari Husin played an important role in both of the Bali bombings. Originally from Malaysia, Azahari was part of the JI network linked to al-Qaeda.



### RAISING A STINK

Ranilo Rose was so pissed off by the fact that a Filipino radio broadcaster and healer named "Johnny Midnight" had not cured his perpetually stinky feet that he shot him in the left hip and wounded him.





## CRIME FILES

**Hong Kong, Chopping Spree:** Right in the middle of a crowded public park, in the middle of the afternoon, a 58-year-old fishmonger had his hand hacked off with a beef knife. He bled to death. The attack bore all the hallmarks of a Chinese triad. In order to put the frighteners on someone, local gangsters cut off limbs, which are later attached. They don't usually kill their victims.

**Hanoi, The Price of Gold:** A boy believed to be 13 was arrested for killing a toddler for his gold ring. At first Nguyen Vu Phong attacked the young boy with a brick. Then he strangled him with a piece of string before running away with his gold ring.

**Bangkok, Real Fear Factor:** At a fun fair put on by a subsidiary of the entertainment giant GMM Grammy, they put on an event named after the American TV show *Fear Factor*. During the stunt, a handsome young singer named Vaikoon Boonthanom had to hold on to a barrel raised up in the air by a crane. The 22-year-old completed the stunt. But when he was taking off his safety harness back on the ground, the 20-kilo barrel fell on his head. Vaikoon died of brain injuries. The crane operator fled the scene and is wanted by police.

**Singapore, Cyber-sexual:** Little did Ravinderpal Singh, 20, realise that when she sent her boyfriend a topless picture of herself with her camera phone that he would try to blackmail her with it later. The 20-year-old soldier had threatened to post it on the Internet if she didn't pay him around Bt10,000. She went to the police and he's now serving 18 months' probation.

**Phnom Penh, Poverty's a Bitch:** What happens when a poor Cambodian man approaches his fiancée's family with US\$500 he's borrowed and is told by his fiancée's family to come back with US\$1,000? In the case of 24-year-old Hun Thout, now in police custody, he beat his best friend to death so he could steal his new motorcycle.

**Phnom Penh, Backpacker Serial Killer:** One of the Khmer Rouge commanders responsible for the brutal murders of three young backpackers from Australia, Britain and France back in 1994, has been rearrested. Chouk Rin, 51, had gone on the lam while waiting for a Supreme Court Ruling and was working as a farmer at the last Khmer Rouge stronghold of Anlong Veng, which was overrun in '98.



## Sex Files

**Bangkok, Archaic Sexism?:** Social Development and Human Security Minister Watana Muangsook has been making headlines in newspapers and putting frown lines on the faces of feminists as he argues in favour of reviving a centuries-old marriage ritual where women have to prostrate themselves at their husband's feet. Women's rights advocates are outraged by the idea. The minister also wants to propose to the government that rapists should be executed.

**Kuala Lumpur, Succubus on the Loose:** For some 16 years a Malaysian man had nightmares of a female phantom who demanded sex from him every evening. After losing five girlfriends and 10 jobs because of lack of spunk, and lack of sleep, he went to see an exorcist who helped arrange an after-life wedding, with paper dolls of a groom, driver and maid. All the dolls were burnt to keep the ghost from being lonely.

**Sydney, Handicapped Sex:** A plan that sets aside government taxes for sex-workers to copulate with the mentally and physically fucked has aroused a serious controversy in Australia. The woman who is in charge of the programme, Michelle Swallow, told *dpa*, "Access to sex workers who are matched to clients with an intellectual or physical disability enabling them to have a sexual life is an important option."

**Jakarta, Sex Education Practice:** A group of young Indonesian students should've gotten A's for putting sex education into action, but F's for bad behaviour as two couples recently put on a demonstration of oral sex for seven other students. All eleven of them got kicked out of high school in the town of Cinajur in West Java.

**Bangkok, Stealing Kisses:** The recent arrest of three good-looking transvestites resulted in a perverse confession; to drug their clients they would keep sleeping pills under their tongues then spit them down the men's throats when French kissing. The three were accused of stealing more than Bt300,000 worth of cash and valuables from a Bangladeshi businessman.



## PRESS FREEDOM REPORT

When Cambodia is ranked the highest in SE Asia in terms of press freedom on the annual report from Reporters without Borders, it goes to show how the rest of the region has been press-ganged into toeing party lines both political and corporate.

Rankings for ASEAN nations:

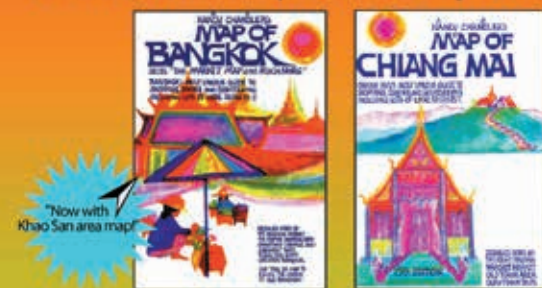
90. Cambodia
102. Indonesia
107. Thailand
113. Malaysia
139. Philippines
140. Singapore
155. Laos
158. Vietnam
163. Myanmar



Out of the 167 countries on the list, seven were tied for first – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland – while North Korea came in dead last, and America only made it to #44.

## Nancy Chandler's Maps of Bangkok and Chiang Mai

"Oft imitated, never equalled" ~ Lonely Planet Thailand



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



## Thailand : Happy Birthday to the King

On December 5th, His Majesty the King of Thailand celebrates his 78<sup>th</sup> birthday, which is also Father's Day in Thailand. The biggest celebration packs out at Sanam Luang, the enormous open field near the Grand Palace.

Among the numerous satellite events will be the King's Cup Regatta in Phuket from December 4-11 with more than 900 competitors. (For more on this event, see [kingscup.com](http://kingscup.com)).

Hot on the heels of the regatta is the PIMEX Marine Expo from the 8th - 11th December 2005. Bring lots of money, boats are expensive.



## Thailand : Flower Power

Ever wondered where sunflower seeds come from? A lot of people don't realise this, but they actually come from sunflowers. And for flower lovers and sunflower seed lovers, the place to be from December 1-10 is the Lopburi sunflower blooming festival, the must-attend event of the Lopburi social calendar. Among the events are a Miss Sunflower blooming contest and drinking. The town also has some 12<sup>th</sup> century Khmer Temples that are teeming with monkeys, as is the centre of town. *Lopburi is about 150km north of Bangkok. Buses leave from the northern terminal every half hour or so or grab one of the trains departing every couple of hours from Hualumpong station.*



## Thailand : Spoils of War

For 14 golden years now, UNESCO has recognised the ruins of the old Siamese capital of Ayutthaya as a World Heritage site. The irony is amazing when you consider it – in a way, the Burmese did them a big favour by attacking the place back in 1767 and smashing it into tiny pieces, thereby prompting the government to move the capital to what is now Bangkok. (The brilliant strategy here was that the Burmese would never attack a swamp.) Now, if they hadn't done that, they would have just gone on building over top of the old structures and the place would look like Bangkok, which hadn't won any beauty prizes from any major international bodies last time we looked. So all you Thai people reading this, next time you see a Burmese person on a construction site or refugee camp or something, shake his hand, or give him a big hug and thank him for helping to get your country on the international list.

Anyway, from December 3-19th there will be various events, like processions, fireworks, ordinations, food, ceremonies and such. And the ruins are always worth a visit, especially when the weather is excellent, like now. *Trains to Ayutthaya leave from Hualumpong train station every ten minutes or so and cost next to nothing for third-class seating.*







## Singapore : One-Party People

Every year, Singapore does the Singaporean equivalent of dropping its trousers, painting itself orange, screaming like a chicken and sleeping with a compliant stranger, which is to say the young people go to a concert and dance a bit. We speak here of the fifth annual Zoukout Dance Festival on December 10th on Siloso Beach on Sentosa Island. This year's event includes cosmic luminaries of playing other people's records such as Nick Warren, Lil Louie Vega, Chus & Ceballos, Armin Van Buren, Cash Money and more.

It must be said the Zouk club people really pull out all the stops, and someday the Singaporeans will have that stick surgically removed from their collective backsides and get down on it, without having to first be told by the government.

*The event runs from 8pm to 8am on eight stages and includes a broad spectrum of genres, plus rides, palm readings and other fun stuff. Admission is from S\$28 to \$48, depending on when and where*

*See [zoukout.com.sg](http://zoukout.com.sg) for more details*

## Japan : To Die For

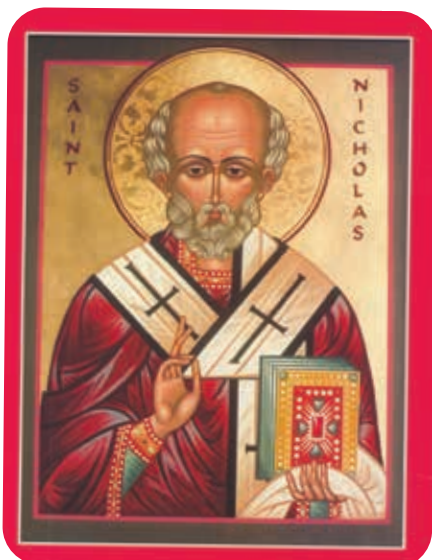
Nobody can take their own lives with the unbridled enthusiasm of the Japanese.

Sure, Finland may have a higher suicide rate in the wintertime, but you can bet that they are all glum and selfish when they kick out the chair from under them.

Not so the Japanese; for them it is a time of celebration and great honour and elevated social status that sadly, they don't actually get to witness. If you don't believe us, visit the Sengaku-ji Temple in Tokyo on the 14th of December. Every

year at this sacred location, they commemorate Gishi-sai: Vendetta of the 47 Ronin which involved the ritual suicide of 47 Ronin (masterless Samurai) back in 1702. The story goes that these 47 fellows avenged the death of their master, placed his enemy's head on the master's grave, then stabbed themselves to death.

Obviously, this is spectacular even by Japanese standards, because they are still banging drums about it 300 years later. This annual celebration of the honourable way out includes parades, colourful costumes, and doubtless a few drunken salarymen who get carried away with the spirit of the thing and jump in front of the train on the way home.



## Turkey St Nicked

A lot of people don't realise that the fat bearded guy who breaks into your house on Christmas Eve and leaves far more stuff for rich kids than poor ones (and is therefore probably a Republican), was originally based on a fasting ascetic-turned-bishop in fourth century Demre, Turkey. How did the transition occur to the fat jolly, over-egg-nogged Anglo-Saxon icon with the elves and reindeer? Probably because the human race is comprised primarily of greedy ethnocentrics, this is a matter of historical debate. In any case, they celebrate the man's humbler origins every December 6th at the Martyrium church, the site of the saint's tomb, by placing candles on the crypt. Unfortunately, the body was stolen by Italian pirates (or moved to the North Pole) in the 11th century. The festival is accompanied by feasting and general merrymaking.

*For more details, see: [turkishtourism.demon.co.uk](http://turkishtourism.demon.co.uk)*





## So Loony

Dear Sirs,

As the heroic fellow who swam the unprecedented 36 (NOT 35) km from Hong Kong to Macau last month, I was also the undeserving recipient of your magazine's unprovoked, not to mention inaccurate and poorly written jibes last month.

I particularly quibble with your use of descriptor 'loon.' Not only does it unfairly imply my lunacy, it is a poorly-employed metaphor, given that loons are known for diving under the water, not swimming in it. Rarely do they swim along the water's surface or indeed in any fashion other than with an inefficient bobbing motion that would hardly characterize the methods that took me from Hong Kong to Macau.

This is not to mention the fact that you unfairly and inconsistently identify me as a loon in the same 35-word bit that you identify me (correctly, for once) as an academic. I think (and I am an academic) you are the loons, you loons.

With little respect and no regards,  
Zhang Liang

*UT Preamble: We receive a lot of emails from people wanting to print stories in the magazine. We try to answer them all (actually, mostly Chief Editor Jim Algie answers them all), but occasionally we print them – especially when we don't have enough mail to fill these two pages, mainly as fine examples and cautionary tales. You decide which category the following letter falls into.*

Hi,

I emailed you in 2003, at that time from Australia, attempting to publish an article (any article!). Cockfighting, I think it was that time, but I admit, as a fledgling journo student my writing was probably a bit...tame...or lame. Whatever. But you were kind enough to throw some ideas back at me. Well, now I am back in Thailand and have finally seen your magazine in print. It looks great, I'm a page flicker by heart. Don't worry, I'm not trying to publish any articles – I see the long list of contributors and imagine a longer list waiting – I just want to ask if it's possible to enlarge the font. Or is the occasional decreasing font size a trick of my eyes? Perhaps a trip to the optomer...er... eye doctor for me.

Jodie Rossiter  
Koh Tao

*UT Replies: Thanks Jodie. You know, fonts are a funny thing. Everyone seems to think you have to increase the point size to improve the readability, when this isn't necessarily the case – kerning and leading come into play, as does serif vs. sans serif, and coloured or busy backgrounds. When it comes to readability, size is not everything. If we go up to a nine-point from our current 8.5, that would be the upper limit – any more than that and it starts looking like a Dr Suess book. But rest assured that we continue vigilantly on our quest for a font that will be easy to read whether you are 12 or 78, that still has a small enough point size to ensure we still fit enough words on the page to give you some hefty and satisfying reading. So keep your eyes peeled; we will achieve exactly that eventually. It would be worth it just to have an end to the complaints.*

## The Coolest Bar

*UT Preamble: Marc, documentary filmmaker and serial letter writer hoes in with another installment of his quest for the perfect bar/country/world.*

Hi Guys,

I found the coolest bar in Phnom Penh called the Rock Zone near the central market, one block south of Kampuchea Krom Ave. A Taiwanese guy manages it and plays his vast collection of rock LPs of the 70s and 80s. You can choose your own songs too and smoke as much as you want, like Wong's place in Bangkok, but without visuals, I guess. The only downside is that the customers are mostly barangs who work at NGOs, but there were also some funny people when I was there. The first song I put on was "War Pigs" and everybody got up and danced, very funny. I advise you guys and maybe your readers to check it out next time you're there. Just got back to freezing Hamburg. Phnom Penh was great but it was good to get out of there after 4 weeks of constant drinking mayhem.

Marc

## Tsunami Charity

InSIGHT Out! a non-profit organization offering multimedia training to youth in Aceh and Thailand affected by the tsunami, is seeking donations of used or new digital and film cameras, tripods, desktop or laptop computers and printers. Please contact Khun Nat: (66)-4-135-2640 or Jeanne: (66)-6-003-2316 or email: [hallacy@loxinfo.co.th](mailto:hallacy@loxinfo.co.th) Thank you!

*UT Adds a bit: So if you missed the chance to give any money or help last year, or you've recovered financially and feel like helping out with the ongoing problems and solutions, contact the email above or take a closer look at [freewebs.com/insightout](http://freewebs.com/insightout)*



### Dickory Dock

Dear UT,

For years, I have had trouble waking up in the morning, and have lost many jobs due to this malady, but recently I discovered a solution that may be of use to those of your readers who share my problem. If you glue a mousetrap to the top of your alarm clock and set the trap before you go to bed, you will not roll over and go back to sleep in the morning after you hit the snooze button.

Regards,  
Avril Watson

### Shop Press!!

*UT Says: We've always liked Orchid Press and their non-profiteering approach to publishing, printing books they think should be printed and hang the popularity and the profit. Honestly, we don't know how they do it – perhaps there are enough people out there who appreciate the method and buy enough books to keep their mission alive. Anyway, we've decided to give their new shop a plug here, courtesy of our most-published freelancer of all-time, Tom Vater.*

### Orchid Press Challenges Complacent Book Outlets

Orchid Press, one of Thailand's longest running independent publishers, opened its first retail outlet in Bangkok last month. The specialist bookshop, located on the fourth floor of Silom Plaza, next to Sala Daeng Skytrain Station, was the brainchild of Chris Frape, Director of Orchid.

"As I was looking for titles on Buddhism and Asian art, I got more and more wound up by the fact that I had to travel to another continent to get hold of material that would help me learn about the region I live in."

Chris Frape has long been buying books on Asia over the Internet or on trips to Canada and Europe. No wonder, as bookshops in the Thai capital generally cater to the lowest common denominator – chain outlets carry mostly mainstream fiction, coffee table dross and travel guides, and you'd be hard pressed to find staff members who have read any of the books sold in their shops. What's more, there is no book shop that gives foreign visitors or local buyers any idea of the wealth of English-language titles published on and in South Asia.

Orchid Books aims to change all that. The shop offers more than 1,700 new non-fiction titles, as well as an eclectic selection of out-of-print and antiquarian books on Asia. And if you are looking for something that's not on their shelves, the staff of Orchid Books will share their experience in sourcing obscure and rare titles. We lifted that last sentence from the press release, but manager Victor Titze leaves no doubt that Orchid Books is different. "We aim to have all locally published titles on Asia on our shelves and we are continually ordering titles published outside of Thailand to add to our stock."

You can find the Orchid Books Shop at: 411, 4th Floor, Silom Complex, 191 Silom Road, Tel. 66-2-231 3300.



### South America Hotels

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With regret, I have to make the admission that sometimes I must rely on men. I need them to carry heavy things, play handyman, and to ferry me around on big motorbikes. Particularly the latter. Although I've long had a passion for big, aggressive motorcycles, the thought of my piloting anything larger than a scooter kick-starts my anxiety. So, over two years in India, my passion for big bikes has aroused envy for those who roam this country unfettered by bus and train schedules, free to explore with reckless and gleeful abandon.

Then one day a big biker named Troy – an expat American who loves to brag about the thousands of kilometres he's logged on his Enfield Machismo (yes, the Machismo!) – invited me to ride shotgun on a journey through Kashmir and Ladakh in India's high Himalayas. Completing our posse was Gokarn from Turkey, his Israeli girlfriend Gili, and Irishman Dominic.

Barely 50 kilometers from our starting point of Dharamsala, Gokarn's motorcycle hiccupped, coughed and died the first of many malfunctions that would, from time to time, grind our journey to a halt. An hour later, Troy's bike suffered a punctured tire. Soon after, two stranded Israeli bikers required the skills of our resident mechanics. I was quickly being introduced to the "Enfield Experience"...

Circumnavigating omnipresent military convoys, eating dust for breakfast and exhaust fumes for lunch, we were consistently covered in grime as we needled our way over the world's highest motorable road and flew past Drass, the second coldest inhabited place on earth (minus 60 in January, 1995). Alternatively, we donned or removed layers of clothing as the frigid air pierced, or the sun melted our epidermises, but not the snow glazing the adjacent mountains. How to describe the sensation of sitting atop a monster machine and being able to touch the icy veneer of a Himalayan hillside? No barriers, no windscreen, no division between nature and (wo)man. How to describe this utterly liberating, absolutely divine sensation as I sat perched on my passenger seat, two rucksacks tethered to either side of the bike, other than to say that the "Enfield Experience" is an unrivaled travel experience.

The Enfield – formerly an English bike – is India's inferior version of a Harley-Davidson. Big and imposing, the screaming engine is actually subterfuge for a notoriously unreliable motorcycle. But that doesn't discourage the throngs of tourists – including a healthy minority of women – who throttle them into oblivion as they cut a swathe across India.

During this expedition I was introduced to "Biker Etiquette." You stop for other bikers in distress. You often invite a lone biker to join your pack. You serve as a message centre for riders who lost their flock. You always wave to another Enfield and often share a roadside chillum. There is a camaraderie and sense of privilege amongst the Enfield crowd.

After spending our initial exhausted night in Udhampur we hit the road at dawn, passing the first of many checkpoints as we approached the 3 km Jawahar Tunnel (reputedly the longest tunnel in Asia) which divides Jammu and Kashmir. Chaos ensued upon our arrival in Srinagar, Kashmir's capital, a myriad of touts smelling potential customers like bloodhounds tracking a fox. Srinagar is famous for its houseboats fringing the city's two lakes. But with the tourist industry waning due to Kashmir's political problems, the sight of five foreigners – disheveled as we were – provoked an onslaught of forceful sales pitches. Eventually directed to our pre-booked houseboat on Nageen Lake, serenity prevailed until the next morning when a shawl-hawker infiltrated our parlour, his wares strewn about the floor. Renowned for their tenacious sales tactics, the isolation of a floating lair doesn't deter the determined Kashmiri vendors.

The old city of Srinagar is also famous for ostensibly housing Jesus' tomb, which we visited one hazy morning. It is believed that Jesus spent much of his youth and later years here and that he died and was buried in Srinagar. A book called "Jesus Lived in India" by Holger Kersten

Suzan Crane revs up her new column about the travels and tribulations of an expat woman living in India. A former record company exec, Suzan left her BMW in LA and now prefers riding shotgun on a motorcycle across the "highest motorable road" in the world.

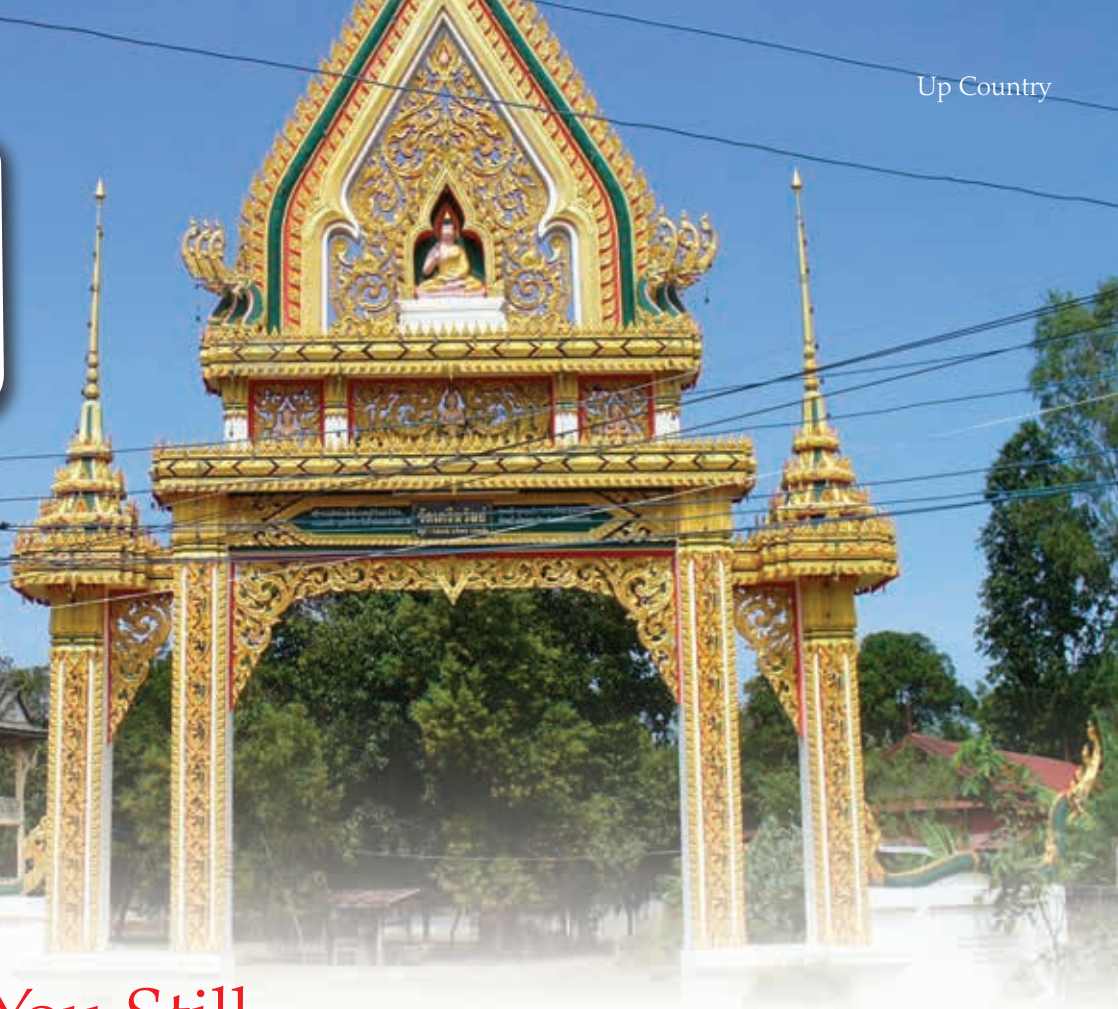
endorses this theory, as do several others that state Christ survived the crucifixion and travelled widely in the Far East, absorbing Eastern teachings (eventually eliminated from the Bible) before leading a happy family life in the Kashmiri Valley where Mary died.

Heading to Kargil via Zoji La Pass (3,529 metres), we planned to visit the remote Zaskar Valley. Our attempts thwarted by impassable mudslides and untenable river crossings, we redirected to Mulbeck, home to an ancient stone carving of a future Buddha and usually a quick pit stop en route to Leh. Once again, a mudslide prevented us from advancing. The following day we traversed the 4,100 metre Fatu La Pass to Lamiyuru, the site of India's oldest monastery, having clearly segued from Kashmir's Muslim traditions to Ladakh's Buddhist culture. Once in Leh we prepared for our excursion to the fabled Nubra Valley via the Khardung La Pass, the highest motorable road in the world at 5,604 metres. The valley is surreal with incongruous sand dunes enveloping tall Himalayan peaks.

There are no petrol stations between Leh and Nubra so the guys had packed extra fuel for the return trip. But inexplicably, 27 km from Leh, Troy's bike sputtered and stalled – out of gas. In an extraordinary feat befitting this extraordinary journey, our Enfield Machismo coasted the remaining downhill course, delivering us safely to the petrol stations and comforts of Leh.

# THROTTLING THE HIMALAYAS





## 'Can You Still ... Get It Up?'

*In his third column about life in the Isaan hinterlands, Stephen Evans gets grilled by a cop about whether or not he can still rise to the occasion.*

Ordinarily, I can't go far in my wife's hamlet without being invited to join a group of beer drinkers, but the harvest was on, and the entire hamlet seemed to be on the wagon. Persistence pays, however, and one afternoon I did find drinking buddies.

The hamlet is miles off the highway, deep in Isaan. There is a community-owned store, a plain cinder-block structure, liable to run out of supplies. ("What?! You're out of beer?" "Yeah. Can you lend us a couple thousand to stock up?") Many of the houses are simple wood frames on stilts. The shady area underneath is a living area, where people lounge, nap and eat on bamboo platforms the size of a king-sized bed. The spaces between the houses are lush with banana plants, stands of bamboo, mango trees and dirt. The vacant lot, chaotic with trees and brush, reminds you that not long ago this hamlet was no more than a clearing in the forest. From anywhere it is no more than a five-minute walk to the edge of town and the sudden expanse of rice fields.

I was taking a walk in the dusty afternoon heat when I was hailed by a group of men and women lounging under a house across from the community store. As he poured my beer one of the men, At, told me that this was the police station.

With the village Farang on tap, the conversation turned to polite but effective ways of hailing tourists and luring them into taxis and brothels. A pick-up truck pulled up and a man with stars on his shoulders got out and asked: "What's the Farang doing here?"

"He's Grandpa Yai's son-in-law," At said. "He speaks Thai."

"Have a beer," I said.

The man slid onto the bamboo platform next to me. "I'm the district police commander," he said, showing me his badge and hitting me with the obligatory questions: whether I liked Thailand, how long I had been here, how many wives and children I had, how old I was.

"Over 50!" the commander said. "Can you still get it up?"

Such questions are not on the learning Thai tapes, and comprehension came slowly. At, helping by pointing at my crotch and thrusting his finger in the air. By the time I managed to say, "No problem," there was a chorus of men and women asking, "Can you get it up?" "Can ya?" "Huh?"

The commander decided that we were best friends. He pulled a bundle of strings out of his pocket and proceeded to tie one around my wrist reciting a "best-friends-forever" formula. Out of another pocket he pulled a small Buddha image and presented it to me.

"Tell you what I'll do," he said. "I'll pick you up tomorrow. We'll get some erection medicine and go looking for girls."

Appealing as the proposal was, there were reasons for hesitation. Strings around wrists notwithstanding, I didn't know this guy from Adam. He might well get me into a brothel, then arrest me and demand a huge bribe. Worse, in a community of this size there are no secrets; my wife may have been in Bangkok, but that's only a telephone call away.

On the other hand, one does not want to offend the police commander. I pretended to not quite understand, and for the next few days I went out to the fields early.

When he came for me, At told him I was staying at my sister-in-law's, but Uncle Mee, who lives next door, told him that I was out in the fields, he didn't know where.

Still, my equipment became a bone of contention. As I was walking past the monastery on my way to Grandpa Kong's, a man shouted from under his house, "Hey, Uncle Farang! Can you still get it up?" Wandering aimlessly through freshly harvested fields, I stopped to watch a group of women loading shocks of rice onto a cart. They paused in their work, said "Sawatdee," and wondered aloud, without so much as an embarrassed giggle, while pointing, whether I was fully functional or not.

On my last day, Uncle Mee, whose wife had allowed him to get drunk now that the rice was in, grabbed my crotch, and asked, "What is it then? Can you still get it up?"





Cameron Hansen



Gerhardt Joren



Dan White

# After the Wave

It all started with an idea sprung between an *Untamed Travel* staffer and Thanandon Rattanasuk (Mr Tha), curator of the Kraichiti Gallery in Sunset Street, Khaosan Road. Why not run an exhibition of news photography taken of the tsunami and use it to raise money for a worthy charity?

Like any good idea, it quickly snowballed out of control and we began receiving startling images from *Untamed Travel's* extensive stable of freelance photographers. The Royal Thai Photographic Association came on board and generously offered their services to print the photos, as well as contributing images from Thai photojournalists. A few short and busy weeks later, the exhibition, titled "After the Wave: Deconstruction and Reconstruction" opened at the tail end of February 2005, co-hosted by Thai TV-star and singer Marsha (Vadhanapanich).

Nobody knew what the audience reaction would be when the often frightening images were unveiled, but over the next two weeks the prints sold brusquely. The donation box also filled up rapidly with the donations of often tearful tourists – one Scandinavian couple put in Bt20,000.

The Bt130,000 raised was donated to the Royal Rajaparchanukroh Foundation, under the patronage of HM The King, which is providing shelter and education for children orphaned by the disaster. We'd like to thank all of the photographers who contributed their photos – sometimes against the wishes of their agencies – to make the exhibition possible.





Steve Sandford



Steve Sandford



*Thailand will commemorate the first anniversary of the tsunami on December 26 with some mystical memorial services. Though the high season is picking up, some expat-owned businesses are still struggling to keep their heads above water. Emily Goldstein reports.*

Last January, when Thais launched thousands of candle-filled balloons into the sky to mark a mass prayer session for thousands of victims of the tsunami, it was a moving and mystical ceremony that could have only happened in Thailand. As the balloons floated across the sky, the candles flickered for a while, and then died out one by one. Here was one of the guiding lights of Buddhism – the transient nature of life – inspired by one of the basic principles of animism – the frightful power of nature – lighting up the sky with a funeral pyre of reds and yellows.

Expect to see similar shows of respect for the dead, the missing, and the grieving on December 26<sup>th</sup> this year just as CNN and the BBC replay footage of the natural disaster that claimed some 300,000 lives (around 10,000 in Thailand).

In spite of all the shockwaves of sadness, and all the masses for the dead in several southern provinces, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, and many local tour operators, are confident that this high season will see a turnaround in the Andaman's fortunes and prevent a bigger misfortune: tens of thousands more layoffs and bankruptcies.

To date, more than 80% of the rooms on Phuket have been booked for the December-January holiday season. The beaches are clean, the water is clearer than ever, new species of fish have been discovered, and authorities have repaired much of the damage. Still, the region is struggling to recover from one of the lowest low seasons ever.

The question in many tourists' minds is whether or not it's appropriate to visit places where so many people have died and suffered. But the president and CEO of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Peter de Jong says it's time for travellers and the travel industry to rally behind the destinations: "It is understandable that some travellers may have some concerns about travelling to destinations where many lives have been lost. But we cannot help communities get back on their feet by staying away. The best thing we can do now is continue to inform tourists that it is appropriate and supportive to visit and that they will have a great holiday experience."

On Phuket, many businesses, big and small, have suffered from a lack of clients in the past year. Many businesses went bankrupt; many others are beleaguered with debts. Six years ago, Frank Couture and his wife launched a surfboard company. Last year, they had five stores and 20 employees. Today, only one store remains open in Kata. With 90% of his monthly turnover lost and high fixed costs, Frank's business prospects are almost wiped out.

Eight years ago, Christian Chevrier started Phuket Adventures, an agency specialising in tours on and around the island. During the high season Christian employed up to 300 people to cater to some 5,000 tourists per month. Following the many cancellations after the tsunami, he only had 45 customers in January 2005. Although Christian did receive some help from the Thai government in the form of tax exemptions and low-interest loans, he still found himself in financial difficulty and was forced to let go 220 employees, many of whom returned to their families in the country.

Another expat with a happier tale to tell is Rene Chevalley. He set up the Swiss Palm Beach Hotel on Patong Beach 18 years ago. The waves destroyed part of his establishment, but after some legal wrangling with insurance companies he began rebuilding. Although



he had to close down for three months, his cash reserves were sufficient enough to keep his 30 employees on during the renovations. He also benefited from the support of his loyal clientele abroad who sent donations that Rene redirected to local associations.

Philippe Chettou started, Aquamarine Divers in October 2004. Talk about bad timing. In comparison with other parts of the travel trade, he says, the diving business is picking up too slowly and too late, with only a 40%-50% booking rate to date, in contrast to around 70%-80% during a 'normal' high season. He mentions that the PADI organisation reimbursed its members for their yearly subscription fee, which, although it was only AUS\$400, was important as a symbol of solidarity. Still, Philippe believes that dive shops are going to flounder this season.

Bigger companies have also been inundated with red ink, even if their fiscal reserves shored them up during the slow season. Daniel Meury is the general manager of the Chedi, a five-star resort surrounded by Pansea Bay. He explains that February, March and April were particularly difficult for all businesses, especially the small ones that didn't have the financial capacity to wait for business to return.

The grim, and sometimes fraudulent, media coverage (see *FARANG Untamed Travel*, February 2005) did a lot of damage to the reputation of Phuket and its environs. Some of the more ridiculous reports to surface said that Phuket's entire infrastructure had been wiped out; and that most of the coral in the Andaman Sea had been ruined.

Philippe says, "The negative media attention had dramatic consequences. That really hurt us economically, probably even more so than the tsunami itself."

Although some have accused the TAT of having a very wishy-washy plan of action, they have made a few initiatives to restore confidence amongst tourists. For instance, Thailand was the first tsunami-ravaged country to implement an early warning system, which is fully operational on Phuket and 70% operational in the rest of the region.

And another initiative worthy of column inches is the Andaman

Fans Project. Uniting a group of 20 Andaman Ambassadors, both Thai and foreigners, these spokespersons use online channels to promote tourism in the Andaman to worldwide travellers. Mr. Suraphon Svetasreni, the deputy governor for Publicity and Public Relations of the TAT says, "The TAT has aimed at online marketing to promote the Andaman region. This will boost our tourism economy and bring back worldwide travellers to the area. The campaign will run until April next year."

The project combines the launch of an online travel agency ([www.thailandhotdeal.com](http://www.thailandhotdeal.com), which provides great deals on travel products with an online travel community website ([www.andamanfans.com](http://www.andamanfans.com)). "This project is meant to help everyone, Thais and foreigners alike. Anybody can go on the website and participate in the Andaman project by sending an e-card to their friends anywhere in the world," explains Nalina Suranakarin, one of the ambassadors.

These days, most of the aforementioned expat business owners are optimistic about tourism picking up in Phuket and the region. Rene's hotel and Daniel's resort are fully booked for the high season.

As Frank puts it, "We've survived SARS and the avian flu; we'll get over the tsunami." Still, Frank doesn't have the heart to start up his surfboard business again. "The tourism industry in the area is too unstable; it's less risky to invest in construction projects," he explains.

For Christian, everything is riding on the upcoming season. "This is the last chance. At 55, I've invested everything in my business and although I'm confident that the high season will be a success – booking levels are close to normal – any mishap or other disaster would leave me on my knees."

Daniel sums up the opinion of many tour operators and locals who are dependent on the tourism trade for their livelihoods (nearly 250,000 of them were laid off during the low season): "When tourists come to Phuket, they stay in our hotels and eat in our restaurants. Donations are great, but you don't really know where the money is going.

"We've survived SARS  
and the avian flu; we'll get  
over the tsunami."



# Rising Above

*Volunteers from Thailand and around the world are lending a hand to help locals in the worst-hit area of Khao Lak to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Jay Lamey and Jim Algie sort through the detritus. Photos by Jay.*



"They found my brother," Ning says happily after putting down the phone. Ten months after the tsunami, DNA evidence helped to identify his corpse in one of the many refrigerated shipping containers that still dot the coast of Phang Nga and Phuket in Southern Thailand. Now she is only waiting for news of her missing father.

That such tragic news can be greeted with such joy says a lot about the post-tsunami experience. When so much is lost and destroyed, when there is so much uncertainty, perspectives change. Small mercies are always welcome, even if it relates to something sad.

For the foreign volunteers who are helping Ning and her youth group in Taptawan Village start a restaurant and batik studio, Phang Nga is a place of hope where they find their theories about life put into practise. The testimonies they have left behind are proof positive of life-affirming experiences in the midst of so much death and destruction. The volunteers write about "appreciating everything," "constantly learning," "discovering capacities," "a truly rewarding experience" and "a wonderful memory."

Those traits for which Thais are justifiably famous, the giant smiles, friendliness and generosity, have gone a long way in quelling the nervousness experienced by foreign volunteers while helping to insulate them against the shock of coming to an area where so much havoc has been wrought: families torn apart, businesses and entire villages gone with the waves, bad luck and drowned spirits scaring off Thais and many Asian tourists.

The volunteer phenomenon is a great irony of the tsunami, because the disaster has proven to be a personal watershed for so many foreigners and Thais, enabling them to rise above the tide of despair and do something positive. As an exemplary altruist, there's the young American traveller who provided the money and helped build the youth center for Ning and her friends. Brian Cohen's year on the road turned into a year in Phang Nga, though he entrusted his mother with the task of raising funds at her church in Minnesota while he looked for a cause to back. Helping the stoic young girls, who not only lost their families but had their sources of income swept away, and to top it off, had their property threatened by real estate developers, seemed like the right thing to do.

## GOOD TIDINGS

Jay Lamey is the V-STAY project manager, which helps young people from abroad volunteer in the tsunami zone.

The philosophy of the project is neatly imbedded in the V-STAY

## BOUTIQUE ISLAND

Though much of Koh Phi Phi – bungalows, restaurants, Internet cafes and tour operators – is back up and running, the government is formulating a plan to turn it into a "boutique island" to preserve the islands' natural charms and bring in more revenue from upscale tourists.

In a recent meeting about the island's environment, much of which was already poisoned before the tsunami mucked it up even more, Deputy Prime Minister Phinij Jarusombat, said that the number of tourists would be limited to around 400,000 per year (down from a million) and many tourism facilities would be upgraded. "Accommodation on the island," he said, "will be in a higher price range of between 5,000 and 30,000 baht rather than the 300 to 1,000 baht at present."

However, no time table has been set for the changeover.

Local tourism operators fear that only the big guns and chain hotels will reap any substantial rewards from such a project.

Meanwhile, locals and expats, as well as a contingent of foreign volunteers working for the Koh Hi Phi Phi project ([www.hiphippi.com](http://www.hiphippi.com)) are labouring to restore the island to its state of tropical grace.





acronym: "Volunteer – Serve Thailand and Yourself." The project focuses on mutual benefits, providing hands-on assistance to tsunami victims and opportunities for personal growth and adventure for volunteers.

V-STAY was started by a dynamic young Thai named Jarunee Jarusruangchai and is a partnership between the Millennium World Peace Foundation and AIESEC Thailand. V-STAY volunteers come for a minimum of 2 months, which allows them to get involved with the community and pursue some of their own projects. For example, an Australian volunteer raised A\$1,000 at his local video store before arriving in Thailand. In the world of international aid it may not be much, but he was able to provide textbooks and stationery for an entire Burmese community school. Likewise, two volunteers from Malaysia and the Philippines joined a traveling puppet show, visiting isolated schools in the six tsunami-affected provinces and thrilling the children with colourful renditions of classics like "Three Billy Goats Gruff."

Participants stay together in a house near the Phang Nga coast and most work involves construction projects and teaching English in schools. However, the extent that someone gets involved at a local level depends a lot on their own initiative. There is a small fee but it includes accommodation and transport to and from Bangkok, and it's definitely less than if someone rented a bungalow in the area for a few months.

*Anyone interested in volunteering should write to [info@wyps.org](mailto:info@wyps.org) with the subject 'V-STAY enquiry'. All are welcome, and people with construction experience are often in demand.*

#### TSUNAMI VOLUNTEER CENTRE

Established only days after the high water hit, this Thai NGO, based in Khao Lak, is devoted to reconstruction projects, outreach programmes for children and cleaning up beaches and reefs. They have also begun developing small businesses.

One of them is a boat yard – many local fishing vessels were reduced to kindling and toothpicks by the waves – to help fishermen whose careers were washed up. They have also started a furniture-building company that is craftily named Thaikea.

Yet another successful start-up is a Craft Centre. It's located in Bang Niang of Phang-nga province. This tiny hamlet took an extreme pounding from the tsunami. And the centre is situated near the marine police boat which the waves dragged some 1.5 km from the ocean. It has been left as a monument to the victims of this natural catastrophe.

The Craft Centre provides a living for some 250 locals who lost their homes and jobs. As of the end of October they had notched up almost Bt300,000 in sales. At the centre, they sell products from 13 different camps of displaced survivors. One of the most popular items is the "tsunami doll." It is made from the leftover clothes donated by people from around the world. They are filled with grains of sand intended to symbolise the frailty of life for the dead, the survivors and the volunteers. Words stitched on the front of each doll like "Hope", "Spirit" and "Renewal" read like mantras for all the people and countries still trying to rise above this tragedy of tragedies.

*To date, more than 3,500 volunteers from 51 different countries have come to help out, and more are on the way. For details about volunteering, donating, or general info, check out [www.tsunamivolunteer.net](http://www.tsunamivolunteer.net)*



## TSUNAMI MEMORIAL & ARTIFICIAL ATLANTIS

### TSUNAMI MEMORIAL & ARTIFICIAL ATLANTIS

The cornerstone for the tsunami memorial at Khao Lak Lamru National Park will be taken from a royal guard vessel that sunk during the disaster. The cornerstone has 38 corners to symbolise the 38 nations who lost their citizens last Boxing Day. From December 23 to 28, the five short-listed designs will be exhibited in the park.

The chairman of the sub-committee for the Tsunami Memorial Project, Plodprasop Suraswadi, has come up with a bizarre plan: He wants to construct a sunken town, not far from the planned memorial and museum, as a tourist lure. His plan calls for constructing the town out of artificial coral reef. Between the new attraction, and the memorial, Plodprasop wants to have a tunnel built so visitors can swim from one to the other.

To commemorate last year's calamity, he says some 5,000 lanterns will be launched into the sky while around 1,000 ships tap out a Morse code that says, "Today is the first anniversary of the tsunami. We would like to express our condolences to the lost souls. May they have better new lives."



**ดับเบิลเอ** กระดาษที่เครื่องถ่ายเอกสารแนะนำให้เลือกใช้



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**1759 Hotline**



# ACTION VILLAIN

*To cash in on carnage, merchants across Asia are using Osama bin Laden's face and misdeeds to animate singing dolls, spark up lighters, front T-shirts, and inspire computer games. Richard S. Ehrlich refuses to buy in.*

**T**he Osama bin Laden cigarette lighter is adorned with his raised, chrome portrait, an embossed "9.11", sketches of the World Trade Center, an approaching airplane, and a big red splotch. When you flick the sleek, metal lighter open, a light-emitting diode illuminates the splotch so it glows bright red on one of the buildings, emphasising the first crash site. Loud, computerised music beeps out a loop of Mozart. Made in China – as are many of the latest, gimmicky, Osama bin Laden souvenirs – the butane lighter recently showed up in Cambodia.

"I paid two US dollars for it, in the old Soviet market in Phnom Penh," a Canadian traveler, who asked not to be identified, said. "One man's catastrophe is another man's cheesy souvenir. I bought three, for the novelty. I'll give them to people who would appreciate the irony that they even exist." In a crammed, middle-class shopping mall in Bangkok, you can buy a small, inexpensive hand puppet of bin Laden wearing boxing gloves. On Khaosan Road, stalls sell Halloween masks of a droopy, rubbery bin Laden, alongside other scary faces.

The trickle of souvenirs appear to be made not by Osama's supporters, but by profit-seeking factories which have slapped bin Laden's visage onto existing generic toys and other items in a crass effort to reach a fresh demographic of buyers. While Asian customers often appear nonplussed or bored with the al Qaeda leader's appearance in their markets, many foreign tourists express shock and awe at the commercialisation of the world's most wanted killer. But some (even a few Americans) find them funny.

One common T-shirt in Thailand, which seems to attract mostly cynics and anti-right-wingers, is printed with the faces of bin Laden and President George W. Bush side-by-side, and captioned, "CIA and FBI Presents: Twin Terrors."

"I bought one of the T-shirts," said a snickering New Yorker who visited the Patpong Road night market. "But I'm afraid of bringing it back to America. Can you imagine what Customs might do to me if they find it in my luggage?"

Much bigger, and more bizarre, is a 37-cm tall, battery-powered, action figure of bin Laden. The box promises it "can dance and sing, hands can act, waist can wobble."

The plastic bin Laden's excited singing is reminiscent of India's Bollywood film songs.

Two fake, plastic hand grenades clip onto the doll's vest. Five tiny fake rockets, a pistol, and a knife are stuffed into his pockets. "Not suitable for children under 3 years old due to the danger of tearing off and swallowing small parts," the doll's "Warfare Puppetry" box warns.

In October, French police demanded an investigation when the doll appeared in a Paris shop, amid allegations it was "apologising for terrorism". The Paris police bust made headlines in *Le Parisien* magazine. *Associated Press* picked up the story and it went around the world. Around the same time, the doll also appeared in Bangkok's so-called Arab Quarter, based around Sukhumwit Soi 3. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, a hand-held "Laden vs. USA" computerised game is available in Hanoi showing photos of bin Laden wearing a white turban alongside a grimacing President Bush. Amid the game's 10 white push-buttons for playing, a matchbox-sized screen showed a photo of a World Trade Tower exploding, while a second airplane impacted in flames into the other tower. The player's low-flying airplane had to defend itself from attacks by jet bombers.

"The game is divided into 20 levels," the package explained. "What's more, the inspiring music will play during the game."



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# LustyLit

When not curled up in bed with a bad boy, Karen Findlay snuggles down with a good book and her own fine company. Not content with issuing practical advice, this month The Stalker assigns a pillowbook reading list from classic tomes to contemporary works. Toon by: Nigel Price

Ah, it's that time of year again. The New Year beckons, and I plan to spend it on the beach with a good book in one hand, a beer in the other, and a tall, strong, handsome young man at my beck and call. Which is probably why I am still single: most men don't appreciate the way I treat them on beach holidays.

If I'm not demanding sex, or getting it for that matter, I'm most likely to be found curled up with a book and a beer somewhere, oblivious to the world and perfectly content to be left alone, actually insistent on it. Some men appreciate the break, even if it is only for an hour. Others throw little tantrums, demanding we do something 'meaningful' each day like tour the island or go rock climbing or kayaking. I rarely cave in unless they promise me sex on a deserted beach at the end of the day or a ride on an old motorcycle (older rental bikes vibrate deliciously). To me, the perfect man is there when you need him but otherwise perfectly capable of entertaining himself. But I digress.

This year, I will be reading *The Game*, as featured in this issue of *Untamed Travel* (see page 36). The editors are hoping I will pick up a few new tricks, (as if I need them), while I'm hoping I'll get a cheap thrill out of it. With that in mind, I thought my holiday gift to those of you planning a beach holiday and feeling a bit adventurous would be a few reading recommendations of my own.

A few naughtier reading recommendations, that is. Recommendation number one: find a book with a removable cover and remove that cover because you're going to need it. Sexual literature today comes in all genres, but the titles listed below are best read in public with fake covers. They include classics (a term loosely applied to any book that made a major impact on the genre, whenever published) as well as compilations, modern erotica, and how-to books.

While most classics are either soft erotica (Anais Nin, yawn) or hardcore S&M (the Marquis de Sade should have been hung and quartered in my opinion), there are a few rare classics that I love in part for their exotic settings. Among them is *Emmanuelle* (1957) by Emmanuelle Arsan which describes a French woman's sexual adventures as an expatriate wife in Bangkok. Feminists may sneer, but readers living in Asia should get a thrill out of the characters and locales of her various liaisons. Believe me, you'll never look at a Thai-tuk tuk driver the same way again. Another favourite is Xavier Hollander's biography, *The Happy Hooker* (1972). In it, the author describes her transformation from 'innocent' Dutch girl to top New York City madam via stints in South Africa, Puerto Rico and elsewhere. Her sense of humour and mischief are contagious, and women may find it empowering.

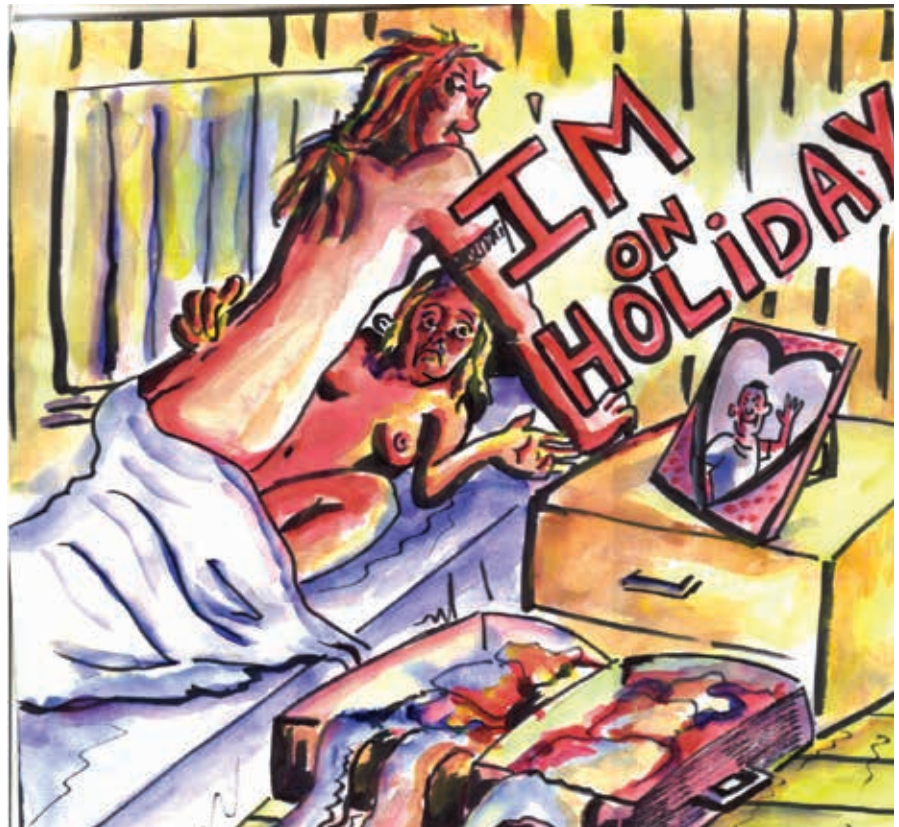
For those interested in the darker classics, try Anne Rice's *Sleeping Beauty* series. Though not into S&M, I found it fascinating, if only for the author's sheer gall in rewriting a fairytale ending (the book opens with the awakening of Sleeping Beauty) and taking it to such deep, dark depths (her training to be a princess is not for the weak of heart). If *The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty*, *Beauty's Punishment* and *Beauty's Release*, written under the pen name A N Roquelaure, are too extreme, try softer S&M *Exit to Eden*, also by Anne Rice, using the pen name Ann Rampling.

Prefer more variety in your reading? Try Nancy Friday's *My Secret Garden*, *Forbidden Flowers*, and *Women on Top*. Skip the academic intros to each chapter and these classic compilations of women's fantasies from the early 70s will open your eyes. If you ever harboured any guilt about some of your naughtier fantasies, you're about to find out how tame yours really are: some women do actually fantasise about sex with their dogs (men too, as in Friday's *Men in Love*.) Bold enough to toss the pretence of academic research her books offer? Try a copy of the

modern *Letters to Penthouse* series (the newest compilation, *Letters to Penthouse XXIV*, due out this month).

Looking for something you can put to use while on holiday? My favourite how-tos are *Sex Tips for Straight Women from a Gay Man* (which includes hand and blow job basics as well as some most insightful grooming tips) and *The Fine Art of Flirting* (which will have you strutting your stuff by sunset, guaranteed).

Want something a little more appropriate to read in public? You could hunt down a copy of Lonely Planet's *Brief Encounters: Stories of Love, Sex and Travel*, but I must add two disclaimers: one, there's something for everyone within, from the romantic to the lewd, which means you'll probably only enjoy a chapter or two; two, it's written by highly respected travel writers. Highly respected travel writers are travel writers, rather than authors of erotica, and for a reason. Still, it makes a respectable read and can be good pick up bait: "I didn't know Lonely Planet did erotica," said the Australian surfer to the Swedish sunbather, if you know what I mean.





A full-page photograph of a very muscular man in a gym. He is wearing a grey tank top with a small rainbow circular logo on the chest, a brown weightlifting belt, and black knee sleeves. He is performing a pull-up on a horizontal bar, with his arms fully extended and his head tilted back. The background shows a typical gym environment with various machines and a fan.

# POWER PLAY

*Bodybuilding is going from strength to strength in Thailand, writes **Steve Sandford**, and the national team is competing this month in Manila.*

Thai youngsters peek out from behind their parents' legs as a line-up of painted, bikini-clad men flex their biceps on the outdoor stage. Posted on a wall next to a table full of trophies, a life-size photo of muscle-man Arnold Schwarzenegger overlooks the jam-packed crowd of curious onlookers.

"This is the first time that a bodybuilding exhibition has been held in Lopburi during Loy Krathong," exclaims local fitness trainer Om, as he points to the holiday revelers pushing forward to see the spectacle.

Groups of people begin hollering and clapping as their favourite competitors strike poses to the trebly twangs of "up-country" Thai tunes.

As the Western health craze flexes its muscles in Asia, physical fitness and bodybuilding have grown in stature and popularity in the Kingdom. And every

"Among the gold-medal favourites is the current 84-kg silver medalist at this year's Mr. Universe Contest, Sitthi Charoenrith."



month, dozens of new gyms or health centres are popping up to keep pace with the demand.

Thailand even has a national bodybuilding team with a coach imported from Switzerland.

"Their biggest mistake was nutrition. That is very important in bodybuilding – at least 60%," bellows the ex-Swiss champion Severin "Mike" Michel, amid the grunts and groans of weightlifters at the Power Zone gym in Bangkok.

"You can't grow muscles on noodles. You need protein," explains the solid 240-pounder responsible for shaping the team into winning form.

In a country where white rice is favoured over brown, and scoops of sugar and salt are ingredients in every meal, diet is one of the biggest challenges.

To help the team tone up those abs, pecs and triceps, a cook at a neighbouring restaurant has been taught to prepare sugar- and salt-free dishes during their training sessions. In the eatery, a Thai weightlifter pokes at a plate of boneless chicken breast, with side orders of steamed broccoli and carrots. Despite the occasional grunts of dissatisfaction, the athlete finishes his meal – more out of hunger than desire.

Still, the bland food is producing some healthy results. At a recent competition in Singapore the entire six-man team came away with medals, including a pair of golds. Currently, they're putting on another show of strength at the SEA Games in Manila, which finish on December 5. Among the gold-medal favourites is the current 84-kg silver medalist at this year's Mr. Universe Contest, Sitthi Charoenrith.

"When I started competing 10 years ago, no one knew how to train properly or eat healthy food," explains the soft-spoken 35-year-old. "Before and after workouts a lot of bodybuilders used to eat 'mama,'" he remembers, referring to the popular flour noodles mixed with boiling water and covered with a handful of spices. The cheap ready-to-serve dish is devoid of any nutritional value and devoured by millions of Thais every day.

Managing their exercise regimen has been another obstacle to overcome.

"I would see some of the Thais doing arm curls or bench

presses for three or four hours in a row," says their Swiss coach. The problem wasn't a lack of discipline so much as the lack of proper training material in Thai.

Mike now has them working specific muscle groups on alternate days, breaking the sessions with a cardiovascular workout in-between.

For the Thai Body Building president Douglas Latchford, the public's newfound acceptance of a sport once looked upon as a low-class labourer's pastime is a big first step towards becoming competitive on a world scale.

Meanwhile, Sitthi recalls his motivation for getting into the sport.

"I was inspired by the movie *Conan* with Arnie," he says with a laugh.



## THE COVER GIRL'S STORY

Judo expert Roongtawan "Sing" Jindasing, 31, became fascinated with bodybuilding after watching three-time Thai Fitness Queen Apipron "Jeab" Chomsomboon strutting her stuff in Bangkok last year. The third-degree black-belt began pumping iron shortly afterwards and has become an overnight sensation.

Both Sing and Jeab, who now train together, placed in the top three in their categories at the Asian Body Building and Fitness competition held in Korea a few months ago. Sing prefers the lean Asian look in an evening gown and heels over the "big woman in a black bikini" look – a common sight in Western bodybuilding circles.

But don't let her feminine side catch you off-guard. When not showing off her lean physique, the national judo coach can be found kicking the asses of her male counterparts and preparing for upcoming martial arts competitions.

"I like to fight and show off my power," she explains between sets of stomach crunches.

With the SE Asian Fitness championships coming up in Singapore in May 2006, expect both Sing and Jeab to be muscling in on the action and some prospective titles.



# Drag race

*Novice beauty pageant judge Joe Cummings helps to separate the beauties from the beasts at the famous contest for the transgendered in Pattaya.*

When I received an email inviting me to judge the Miss International Queen transvestite/transgender beauty pageant in Pattaya, my first thought was that I didn't know enough about the drag world to take the job. What would I be critiquing, I wondered? The relative absence of Adam's apples, the contestants' physical proximity to 'real' beauty queens or how much they could make me, a straight guy, feel some kind of sexual pull?

Seeing that the Miss International Queen organisers were willing to pay my Chiang Mai-Bangkok-Chiang Mai air fare, provide land transport to Pattaya and a room at the Woodlands Resort (one of my all-time favourite Pattaya properties), I decided the event would be a good chance to check in on Sodom-and-Gomorrah-by-the-Sea. Later I could work out the logistics of judging 'third sex' beauty.

As it turned out, they didn't have a room for me at the charming Woodlands. I was instead shuttled off to a new high-rise hotel whose reception desk was 12-deep with Russian tour groups checking in. In the two days I stayed there I rarely saw fewer than 100 of them milling about in the lobby.

To escape the crowds, I turned up at Tiffany's, the main pageant sponsor, to pick up a press kit for the event, plus a CD containing a list of the contestant's names, their photos and their measurements. Never having been to Tiffany's before, I was bowled over by its sheer scale: a huge, state-of-the-art performance hall, a French café-style open-air restaurant out front plus a reception hall and ballroom upstairs. Most surprising of all: one wing of the building contained an FBI-style shooting range, hung with black humanoid silhouettes emblazoned





with white concentric circles receding to bull's eyes on the chest. Although I suppose Tiffany's offers the range as an additional attraction, I couldn't help but wonder if the cross-dressing performers tossed off their beehive wigs and fired off a few rounds whenever they were feeling that extra Y chromosome.

That night I stopped in at the Blues Factory in South Pattaya to meet Ken "Snowman" Minahan, guitarist-leader of the house blues band. At Snowman's generous invitation, I sat in on guitar with the Blues Machine for a set and was blown away by their musicianship and by the on-target singing and rocked-out stage presence of vocalist Mary, who refused to give me her last name but who, like many of Thailand's better club musos, hails from the Philippines.

The following night I showed up at the invitation-only pageant reception at 7pm, where a crowd of models, make-up artists, blue-blood ladyboys and local society tramps were treated to jug wine and a lip-synched Diana Ross drag performance by Tiffany Ross, one of the night's beauty contestants. Two hours and six glasses of wine later, I still hadn't met any of my fellow judges, nor had I been briefed on the judging methodology, when suddenly they were announcing the pageant was about to begin.

One of the Thai staff for the PR company handling the pageant led me downstairs through the packed house to the front of the performance hall. There I was guided into a chair in front of one of 12 computer terminals lined up at the foot of the stage. Once all 12 judges were seated, an attendant quickly explained how the judging programme worked. Each of our computers was installed with software dedicated to beauty pageant judging. The contestants' names and numbers appeared on the home screen, and as each section of the pageant unfolded, we were to enter a score of one to 10 in a little box in the lower right-hand corner of the screen. The programme automatically tabulated the conglomerate scores for each category (national costume, swimsuit, evening gown, Q&A), then sorted out two sets of finalists and finally the three winners (Miss International Queen plus two runners-up).

The show was well organised, combining group dance performances (featuring contestants along with Tiffany's regular performers) and contest sections. As the 18 transgender beauties strutted their stuff during the first event - national costumes - I quickly developed a preference for number 2, Mary Jane Castro. According to the judges' stats sheet she (my mind quickly stopped quibbling over 'he' versus 'she') hailed from the Philippines, weighed 50 kilos and measured 34-24-36. To me she exuded the most feminine charm of the entire group, had the best national costume and was, well, the best looking. The least attractive national costume, to my mind, was one worn by Mimi Marks (American, 38-25-38), a cheap-looking Supergirl knockoff that made her hips appear closer to 45 than 38.

As we moved through the scoring of the swimsuit and evening gown competitions, my Mary Jane didn't even make it into the 10 semi-finalists. I couldn't believe it, as she looked killer in both the swimsuit and evening gown events, heads above the rest I thought. So I began wondering whether the computers were rigged.

Meanwhile, the pageant MCs - two prominent Thai TV personalities whose names escape me - kept the show moving along at a brisk pace, complimenting the various contestants and cracking bilingual jokes about the married men in the audience leaving their wives to chase drag queens.

Very quickly we were down to five finalists, Andressa (Brazil, no last name, easily the most masculine-looking of the group), Victoria Rall (USA, half-Thai), Yu Ri (Korea, very feminine but slightly cross-eyed), Tiptantree Rujiranon (the only contestant from Thailand, following pageant rules) and Mimi Marks (USA again). At this point the MCs were interviewing Thai members

of the audience about whom they thought should win and why. Citing her 'classic' looks, several men favoured Mimi.

The judges - nine of whom were Thai - must have agreed, as when the final envelope was torn apart, Mimi Marks (listed

*"To me she exuded the most feminine charm of the entire group, had the best national costume and was, well, the best looking."*



profession: "Entertainer") accepted the crystal tiara from the mayor of Pattaya and from last year's Miss International Queen, Treechada Petcharat. For her performance, Miss Mimi, who last year took the Miss Transsexual World title, was awarded US\$8,000 plus a voucher for a Bangkok Airways round-trip ticket of her choice.

Now that I'm a seasoned beauty pageant veteran, I'm expecting a call any day now to appear as a judge at next year's Miss Thailand World contest.





# SHOWMEN & SHOW Girls

Martyn Goodacre drops in at the famous ladyboy cabaret on Koh Samui to find out how warped entertainment and gender-blending has become a great night out for straight audiences. All photos by Martyn.





Audiences gape with awe as a transsexual stand-in for Marilyn Monroe slowly morphs into a man during Shirley Bassey's version of "My Way"; and they provide the laugh track as a chubby caricature of Tina Turner gyrates and lyp-synchs to "Proud Mary."

These are but two of the show-stoppers at the Christie's Cabaret and she-male revue on Koh Samui.

Almost 10 years ago Mark Cookson and Christie, who had worked at the world-famous Tiffany's and Alcazar transvestite cabarets, opened the club which has undergone major cosmetic surgery since its infancy.

Originally, "it was in an open-sided shed and the toilets were scary," explains Mark, an ex-minicab driver who came here on holiday, and has only been back to his native Enfield once in the last 10 years. That was for a funeral. "In those days we had seven performers compared to 24 now and 10 staff," he says.

Even after all these years the club and the campy shows haven't become a drag for him.

"It's been great, every day is New Year's Eve. Mind you, I have to admit it was a bit wilder when we started, with lads getting blowjobs on stage and such like. The *katoey's* [transsexuals] were better looking as well.

One of them even married a Swedish doctor and moved to a life of riches in Stockholm. We always lose the best looking ones. They get a boyfriend with cash and off they go.

"Sadly, we also lose some to AIDS. It's a much bigger problem in Thailand than anybody will let on. Why not use a condom? If you don't, you have to be mad."

Samui used to have constant power cuts so they bought a generator to keep the show from getting blacked out. But every time it was hauled out it wouldn't start as one of the *katoeys* had pinched the fuel for her motorbike.

However, one performer called "Linda" had the worst luck of all. She woke up one morning to find out that one of her breasts had burst during the night. A year later she went for the big chop but did it on the cheap. During the operation the surgeon joined her tubes up the wrong way so afterwards she found herself pissing inside of herself. Linda survived, but only just.

The newer and slicker Christie's



1. Dame Edna Everage: Still funny and still performing after 40 years, Dame Edna is the creation of the Australian comic Barry Humphries. "Quote: 'Never be afraid to laugh at yourself, after all, you could be missing out on the joke of the century.'"

2. Boy George in his Culture Club days: Accepting a Grammy Award in the mid-80s, the fully made-up singer quipped, "America, you know a good drag queen when you see one." Now a successful DJ, Boy George faces 15 years in prison after cocaine was found recently in his luxurious New York home. The 44-year-old, who still wears makeup and outrageous hats, says the drugs were not his.

3. Dana International: The gorgeous Israeli transsexual won the Eurovision contest back in 1998 and recently reprised her hit at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the awards, when viewers from 31 different countries voted ABBA's "Waterloo" as the greatest Eurovision winner of all time. Dana's "Spanish Bride" outfit by Gaultier revealed plenty of faux cleavage.

4. Divine: The chubby transsexual appeared in some of John Water's cult classics from the early 70s like *Pink Flamingos* and *Female Trouble* which trashed most of the cinematic and cultural taboos of the time. Divine passed away in 1988 after notching up several Top 20 hits in the UK like "You Think You're a Man."

5. Most of the Men in England: Never has one race of males enjoyed cross-dressing so much.

## Top Transminded



(in the soi by the Burger King on Chaweng Beach) is frequented by couples and a slightly older crowd. Mark opened another club down the road next to the Green Mango disco but couldn't get the right crowd in. "It was just gangs of blokes shouting, 'Show us yer bollocks!' The people who enjoy this show wouldn't go up there. Soi Green Mango is too noisy and hectic for them so I turned it into a sports bar."

One of the great things about Christie's is that the show is, and always has been free, so you can go back again and again, though you do have to buy a drink. Anyone who doesn't is turfed out and that could be quite embarrassing as the ladyboys can be brutal if need be. A stiletto is a dangerous weapon when attached to a pissed-off ladyboy.

Though two other clubs of female pretenders have given a shot of estrogen to the cabaret scene on Samui, Christie's still reigns supreme in the local drag queen scene.

"We're still the best," says Mark. "Some people make it here every night of their holidays, and it's popular with the locals, especially if they have guests. Then it's the first number one night out on the island."

He's right, of course, and there is a certain tawdry magic in the air as the lights go down and you are suddenly in all the glitter, glamour and razzmatazz of Las Vegas or at least Reno.

Ten minutes to the 11pm show time Mark takes me backstage. There are feathers and dresses everywhere and a dozen men in several stages of dress and gender reassignment surgery. Even after being in the dressing rooms of bands AC/DC and Primal Scream I feel a little shy at, but the girls don't give a hoot that I am there shooting and getting in the way. The show runs, as Mark said, like clockwork.

As the performers run through their routines, mixing myriad costume changes with dazzling choreography, mimicry and hilarious histrionics, the old Broadway show tune by Liza Minelli leaps to mind: "Put down the knitting the book and the broom/Time for a holiday/Life is a cabaret oh chum/Come to the cabaret."

## Times About Trannies

1. "Lola," the biggest smash by The Kinks. "I'm not dumb but I couldn't understand/How she walked like a woman and talked like a man."

2. "Walk on the Wild Side" by Lou Reed, who was actually married to one for a few years. "Shaved her legs then he was a she."

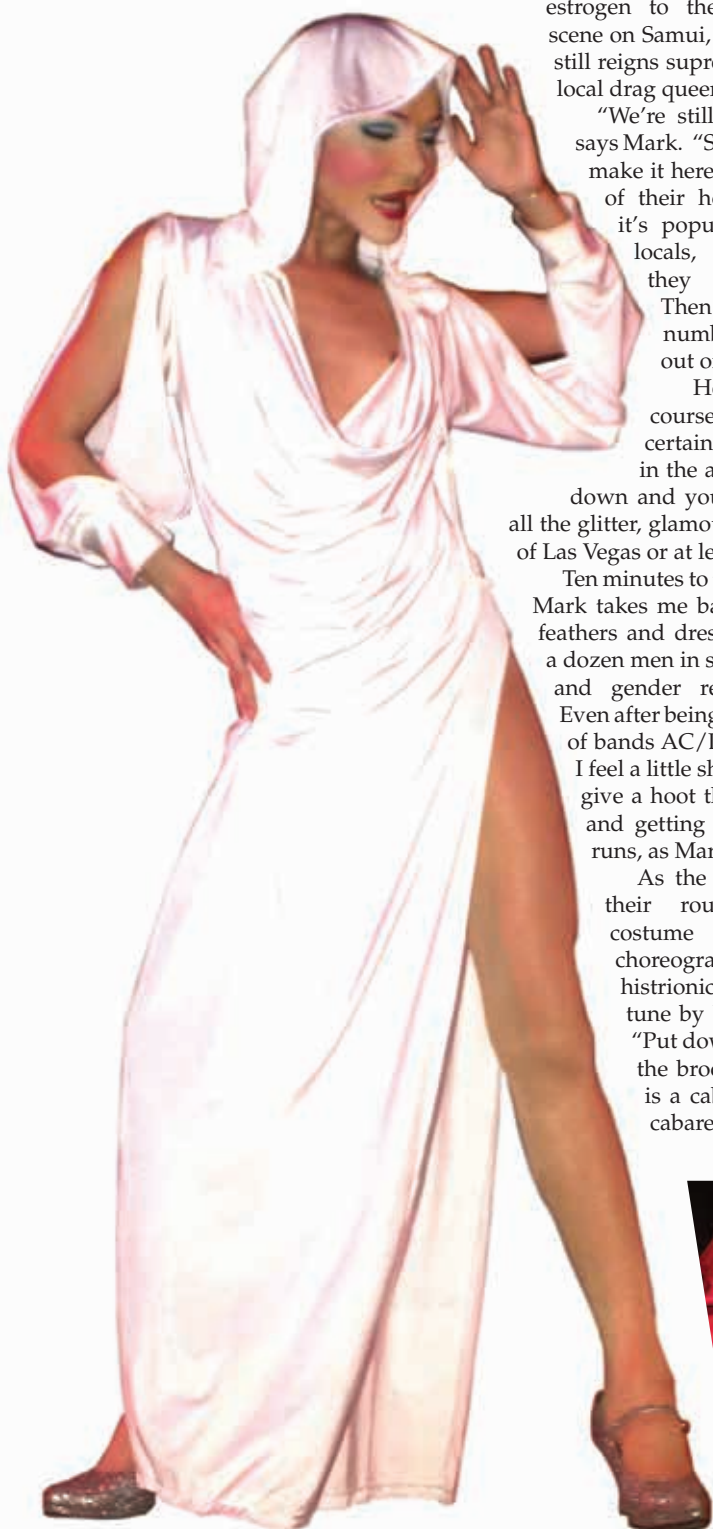
3. "Royal Orleans" by Led Zeppelin. "When I step out, strut down with my sugar, she'd best not talk like Barry White"

4. "I'm a Lumberjack" by Monty Python. "I cut down trees, I wear high heels, suspendies and a bra/I wish I'd been a girlie just like my dear papa."

5. "Arnold Layne" by Pink Floyd. "Arnold Layne had a strange hobby/Collecting clothes moonshine washing line/They suit him fine."

Also give a listen to "Hash Pipe" by Weezer; "Long Tall Sally" by Little Richard; "Get Back" by The Beatles; "Rebel Rebel" by David Bowie; "The Dude Looks Like a Lady" by Aerosmith; and The Pogues' Lola-esque surf-rocker "House of the Gods" about meeting a ladyboy of the night in Pattaya.

"Put down the knitting the book and the broom/Time for a holiday/Life is a cabaret oh chum/Come to the cabaret."







## *Camp Classics At Christie's*

1.) "Two Timing Man" by Paul Anka with the performer dressed as half-man/half-woman, only revealing the other side at the end.

2.) "My Way" by Shirley Bassey with a sample of Sinatra at the end. The lyp-syncher starts off dressed as Marilyn Monroe and slowly strips down until she becomes a he.

3.) "Proud Mary" by Tina Turner. A live version of the song with crowd noise adds some punch to the mix. This performance, enacted by a demented Tina clone with a big wig, thunder thighs, and a retinue of boy dancers, will make your hair stand on end.

4.) "I Will Survive" by Gloria Gaynor. The classic ugly transvestite shtick (in Thai they're known as "albino buffalos"). She's fat and repulsive, she's wearing a dildo and she wants to kiss you. A good reason not to sit in the front row.

5.) "I Can't Get You Out of My Head" by Kylie Minogue. Featuring a chorus line of gals in loose dresses revealing a lot of leg. Subtle and classy.





Wooden elephants went over well for year one. Embroidered purses and silk scarves made suitable gifts for the next. In fact, Christmas shopping had never been so easy or cheap, and back home all the presents were considered exotic!

But one can bank on the novelty value of SE Asian handicrafts and bric-a-brac for only so long. With another Christmas in Southeast Asia right around the corner, I felt myself caving in to the lazy consumer's gift certificate or worse, the mail-order fruit basket.

Mentioning this dilemma to a friend, she mentioned her gift-buying excursion to Vietnam. While I always thought Vietnam was a destination better suited to crawling through tunnels or sun-basking around the South China Sea, Diana assured me that I would find easy-to-wrap attic-stuffers there for the whole family, so I joined her for a long weekend.

Ho Chi Minh, as the city is now known, was named after the founder of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, fondly referred to (by his advocates at least) as "Uncle Ho." The story is a long and dreary one that anyone born before 1975 is familiar with, but suffice it to say that Uncle Ho was probably not a fan of Yuletide capitalist spending.

Having once relied heavily on support from the USSR, the Soviet demise required new plans for this narrow country hugging the east edge of old Indochine. In 1986, an economic renovation called *doi moi* was introduced, and the country has since been on a rapid rise. Despite the shakeup of the 1997 Asian market crash, the government's plan to transform Vietnam into an industrial power by 2010 has the nation enjoying a fiscal boom, and shoppers are taking notice.

Unlike the markets of Singapore and Hong Kong which specialise in electronic items and other high-priced goods, Saigon is making a name in the region as the place to go for home furnishings, art, handicrafts, and even fashion. In fact, Saigon and shopping are becoming synonymous as tourists from around the globe are heading to Ho Chi Minh to trade their cash for goodies at all times of the year.

#### BEN THANH MARKET

We had four days to shop and lots of ground to cover. To begin, we headed to the Ben Thanh Market, centrally located in the old French



# SAIGON SHOPPING BINGE

*Dawn DelVecchio finds herself all wrapped up in the woes of Christmas shopping until she's liberated in what's becoming one of SE Asia's coolest cities for consumers.*



Quarter of District I. The market is huge, with two wide intersecting aisles and a maze of tiny walkways loaded with shops in each quadrant. It has an outer ring that is a bit easier to navigate and makes a great starting point for easing into an enormous selection of goods from clothes to knock-off watches to plastic flotsam and handicrafts galore.

Outside the market are countless small shops and street vendors eager for your business. There are folks selling illegal copies of every Lonely Planet guide in the region, a better selection of cigarettes than Bangkok's 7-11s, wandering coconut peddlers and old women frying tiny, tasty waffles on the side of the road.

A common sight is the "Ray-Ban Man." These guys

entering the silk shops was a totally different experience.

Forget Paris or Milan. Silk Street Saigon offers holiday shoppers custom-tailored clothing, attentive (but not intrusive) service, pleasing environs and high-quality fabrics. Unlike the capitals of couture, shopping here is affordable. By comparison it is almost criminally cheap.

#### OTHER MARKETS

Chinatown's Binh Tay Market, located near the Cholon bus station is also worth a visit. The four-storey complex affords a great chance to buy cheap goods in bulk, while savouring all the local flavour of a shopping compound with water-spouting stone dragons.

Even the most militaristic of

*"Expat gals take note: if you are like me and suffer from the discouraging limitations of Bangkok female fashion, like frilly mini-skirts, mincing heels and Hello Kitty blouses cut just low enough to emphasize your generous Western hips, the ao dai is your revenge."*

stroll around waving clumps of sunglasses from each hand. I stopped to talk to one who was peddling his wares, pointing out the fact that I already had a pair on my face. He argued that I should own at least two pairs and that surely I had a few friends who could use an extra set of designer shades. He was so smooth that I couldn't resist and asked him how much.

"Ten dollars? The ones I am wearing only cost me six in the USA!"

"Oh, madam, but those are plastic, *these* are Ray-Bans."

I laughed. "Thanks anyway."

"Okay, okay, how much you pay?"

My designer fakes eventually set me back two bucks.

#### SILK STREET

For the swankier side of things, one can visit Dong Khoi, also in District I. Shoppers will find up-scale attention, without the haggling, along a street lined with boutiques, high-end craft shops, and old colonial houses purveying haut cuisine. While a few street hawkers were, let's say "assertive", (with one 11-year-old demanding I take him to the market to buy him some milk),

gift-givers can go to town (and then war) in Saigon. Nguyen Cong Tru's Dan Sin Market offers a full stock of fake military surplus with weapons, camouflage and other G.I. Joe accessories.

Or scare folks in another way by buying your gifts at the Thieves Market. Just a short walk from Dan Sin, you'll find things like pig's feet or bottles of booze with snakes inside them. Weird, but still likely to be better received than the standard fruitcake.

#### THE WRAP UP

It was not long before my list was checked once, checked twice, and the Xmas shopping trip to Saigon ruled a success. Bear in mind the best part of all was the trip was done completely without the backdrop of silly commercial displays, animatronic Santas, maddeningly repetitious Muzak versions of "Jingle Bells," etc.

And so I left Saigon, maybe not on reindeer, but at peace with the holiday season and a sack stuffed with all sorts of goodies sure to please the pals back home. The two little silk numbers for me won't look too bad during Bangkok's holiday bashes either.

#### LOCAL SPECIALTIES

Fine silk clothing, great woodcarvings, well-made handicrafts and some of the wackiest junk you can imagine can be found in Ho Chi Minh, with prices ranging from cheap to cheaper. Check out some of these specialties:

**Wooden Wonders:** Furniture, fat Buddhas, miniature Chinese junks and Western sailing ships in a range of sizes.

**Bountiful Basketry:** Purses, boxes, coasters and trays, chopstick holders and toilet roll containers are particularly well made with tightly woven fibres and delicate designs.

**Creative Clay:** Ceramic tea sets and other small items are found everywhere.

**For the Love of Lacquer:** A traditional art form of the country, lacquer ware items such as bowls, plates and trivets are great gifts. They're colourful, light and easy to wrap.

**Silky Smooth:** The Vietnamese traditional women's attire is called *ao dai* (pronounced "aow yai") and it is making a comeback. These elegant silken suits combine a simple pair of trousers and long tunic that splits down the front and sides. Ben Than market is loaded with cheaper versions while high-quality *ao dai* can be found or made at small boutiques. The selection of fabrics and designs is enormous. (Expat gals take note: if you are like me and suffer from the discouraging limitations of Bangkok female fashion, like frilly mini-skirts, mincing heels and Hello Kitty blouses cut just low enough to emphasize your generous Western hips, the *ao dai* is your revenge. They gently accentuate curves while emphasising a slimmer profile.)

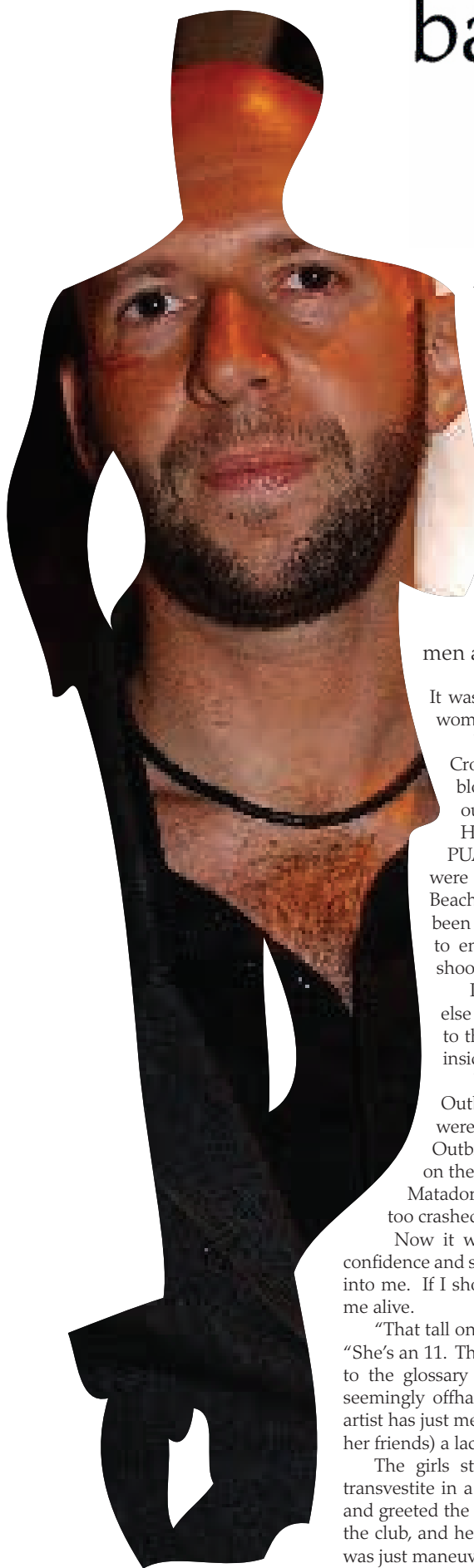
**Hip and Haut:** Funky handbags, great jewelry and a colourful selection of elegant shoes can be found in most markets and boutiques. Some designers have their own small storefronts with one-of-a-kind works.

**Strange, Silly and Spurious:** In need of a pickled cobra? Perhaps a mini aircraft carrier made from a coke can, or plaque of Bart Simpson shining a moon will suit that special someone. A particularly handy item is the two-

headed rain poncho, and don't forget one of those little ceramic Buddhas who whistles the national anthem. Phony Zippo lighters made from ammo casings are a good deal, and you can find plenty of reproduced art around town, so if you are in the market for a real fake Matisse or a Van Gogh, you are in luck.



# bachelor of seduction



Author Neil Strauss spent more than a year infiltrating, influencing and eventually becoming totally absorbed by an online network of pick-up artists – men, often former geeks and nerds who dedicate their entire existence to the craft and science of picking up women. The result of his research, *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society Of Pick Up Artists* (Regan Books 2005), a whole new self-image and a *New York Times* bestseller – a cautionary tale or a how-to guide, depending on your gender. In this excerpt, Neil pulls off a “kiss-close” with a woman he just met, and conclusively proves the age-old truism: Women are stupid, and men are assholes.

It was the perfect sarge [a session devoted to picking up women].

When they walked into the VIP area of Miami's Crobar, everyone noticed. They were both platinum blondes with well-tanned fake breasts and identical outfits—tight white tank tops and tight white pants. How could anyone not notice? They were what the PUAs [pick-up artists] would call perfect 10's, and they were dressed to turn men into beasts. This was South Beach, where testosterone levels run high, and the pair had been whistled and hollered at all night. The girls seemed to enjoy the attention almost as much as they savored shooting down the men who gave it to them.

I knew what to do—and that was to do what everyone else wasn't doing. A pickup artist must be the exception to the rule. I had to suppress every evolutionary instinct inside me and pay them no attention whatsoever.

With me were Mystery and two of our students, Outbreak and the Matador of Love. The rest of our pupils were sarging on the perimeter of the dancefloor downstairs. Outbreak went in first, complimenting the platinum twins on their outfits. They brushed him off like a gnat. Next, the Matador of Love moved in with the Maury Povich opener. He too crashed and burned [to be rudely rejected].

Now it was my turn. This was going to take every bit of confidence and self-esteem that Steve P. and Rasputin had hypnotized into me. If I showed even a flicker of weakness or doubt, they'd eat me alive.

“That tall one isn't a 10,” Mystery leaned in and whispered to me. “She's an 11. This is going to take some hardcore negging [according to the glossary in the back a neg “is an ambiguous statement or seemingly offhand insult delivered to a beautiful woman a pickup artist has just met, with the intent of actively demonstrating to her (or her friends) a lack of interest in her].”

The girls strolled to the bar where they began talking to a transvestite in a black tutu. I moved in, not even glancing at them, and greeted the transvestite as if I knew him. I asked if he worked at the club, and he said no. It didn't really matter what I said to him: I was just maneuvering into position, pawning him for the two-set.

Now that I was in range, it was time to neg. “That girl over there is biting your style,” I said to the 10, the shorter of the two. “Look at her.” I pointed to another platinum blonde in a white outfit.

“She's just got the same hair,” the 10 replied, dismissively.

“No, look at her outfit,” I persisted. “It's almost the exact same.”

They looked over, and here was the make-or-break moment. If I didn't come up with something good to follow, I'd lose their interest and be branded just another weirdo. So I continued with the negging. “You know what?” I told them. “You both look like strange little snowflakes.”

It was a bizarre, cryptic comment, but now I had their attention. I could sense it, and my heart began to pump faster. I continued with what I knew all along would be my true opener: “I have to ask you something. Is your hair real?”

The 10 looked shocked, then recovered her composure. “Yes,” she said. “Feel it.”

I pulled it gently. “Hey, it moved. It's not real.”

“Pull harder.”

I complied, and yanked it so hard that her neck jerked back. “Okay,” I said. “I believe you. But how about your friend there?”

The 11's face reddened. She leaned over the bar and looked me hard in the eye. “That is really rude. What if I'm bald underneath here? That could really hurt someone's feelings. It's disrespectful. How would you feel if someone said that to you?”

The pickup is a high stakes game, and to win you have to play hard. All I had done so far was commandeer their attention and provoke an emotional reaction. Sure, it was a negative one, but now we had a relationship. If I could turn her anger around, I'd be in.

Fortunately, I happened to be trying to make a point to the students and was wearing a black mod wig and a fake lip piercing—just to show that looks don't matter. It's all game.

I leaned over the bar and stared the 11 down. “Well,” I told



her. "I actually am wearing a wig, and I am bald underneath here."

I paused, and she looked at me with her mouth open. She didn't know how to respond. Now it was time to reel her in. "And I'll tell you something else. Whether I go out totally bald, in this wig, or in some crazy long-haired wig, it doesn't change the way I'm treated by other people. It's all your attitude. Don't you agree?"

Everything I say in a pickup has an ulterior motive. I needed to let her know that unlike every other guy in the bar, I am not and will not be intimidated by her looks. Beauty to me was now a shit test ["a question, demand, or seemingly hostile comment made by a woman intended to gauge whether a man is strong enough to be a worthy boyfriend or sexual partner"]; It weeded out the losers who got dumbstruck by it.

"I live in Los Angeles," I continued. "It's where the most beautiful women in the country come to try and make it. You look around a club there, and everyone's good-looking. It makes this VIP room look like a dive bar." They were words I'd learned, almost verbatim, from Ross Jeffries. And they were working.

I let her look around, then continued: "And do you know what I've learned? Beauty is common. It's something you're born with or you pay for. What counts is what you make of yourself. What counts is a great outlook and a great personality."

Now I was in. It was the girls who were dumbstruck now, not me. I had entered their world, as Jeffries once put it to me, and demonstrated authority over it. And, to ensure my position there, I threw in one more neg, but softened with a slight compliment, as if they were winning me over: "And you know what? You have a great smile. I can tell that underneath all that, you're probably a good person."

The 10 sidled up to me and said, "We're sisters."

A lesser pickup artist would have thought that his work was done, that he had won them over.



But no, this was just one more shit test. I looked very slowly at both of them, and then took a chance. "Bullshit," I said, smiling. "I bet a lot of guys believe you, but I'm a very intuitive person. When I look at you both, I can tell you're very different. Too different."

The 10 broke into a guilty smile and said. "We never tell anyone this," she said, "but you're right. We're just friends."

Now I'd broken through her programming, moved her away from the auto-pilot responses she gives to men, and demonstrated that I was not just another guy. I took another chance: "And I'd be willing to bet that you haven't even been friends for that long. Usually, best friends start to have the same mannerisms, and you two don't really."

"We've only known each other a year," the 10 admitted.

Now it was time to back off my game and fluff [to make small talk] a little. However, I made sure never to ask questions; instead as Juggler had taught me, I made open-ended statements that led them to ask me the questions.

The 10 told me they were from San Diego, so we fluffed for a while about the West Coast and Miami. As we talked, I kept my back to the 11, as if I were less interested in her. This was class Mystery Method: I wanted her thinking more about me, wondering why I wasn't giving her the attention she was so used to. Nothing in the game is an accident.

I think of a woman's interest in me as a fire, and when it starts to die out, it's time to turn around and stoke it. So, just when the 11 was about to walk away to find someone to talk to, I turned around and delivered a beautiful line. "You know what? When I look at you, I can see exactly what you looked like in middle school. And I'm willing to bet you weren't so outgoing or popular then."

Sure, it was a truism. But she stared at me flabbergasted, wondering how I could possibly know that. To seal the victory, I laid out one last beauty-neutralizing cold-reading routine. "I bet a lot of people think you're a bitch. But you're not. You're

actually shy in a lot of ways."

She began to give me the doggy dinner-bowl look, as the PUAs call it. It is the look that is the goal of any approach. Her eyes glazed over, her pupils dilated, and she just watched my lips move, entranced and attracted. I noticed, however, that the more interested the 11 became, the more kino [touches] the 10 gave me.

"You're interesting," the 10 gushed, pressing her breasts against me. I could see Mystery, Outbreak, and the Matador of Love rooting me on in the background. "We have to hang out with you in L.A."

She leaned in and gave me a tight hug. "Hey, that'll be thirty dollars," I told her, disentangling myself. "This shit ain't free."

The more you push them away, the more they run toward you. "I love him," she told her friend. Then she asked if she and her friend could stay with me next time they were in L.A.

"Sure," I said. But as the words left my mouth, I realized, too late, that I should have made my hospitality more of a challenge. There's so much to remember and juggle during a pickup that it is hard to get everything perfect. But no matter. She gave me her phone number, and I gave her mine.

You may have noticed that I haven't been referring to these girls by their names. That's because I never introduce myself during a pickup. As Mystery had taught me at that first workshop, I wait for the woman to introduce herself or ask for my name. That way, I know she's interested. So, as we exchanged numbers, I received my first real IOIs [indicators of interest] and learned that the 10 was Rebekah and the 11 was Heather. Now it was time to separate the two of them and see if I could get enough IOIs to kiss-close Heather.

A guy they knew suddenly showed up and bought three shots—for Heather, Rebekah, and himself. I held out my empty hand and looked around, pretending to be hurt. Heather, who I was slowly realizing was actually a sweet girl beneath that







laboriously wrought exterior, took the bait. "Don't mind him," she said, pointing to their guy friend. "He's just rude."

As she called the bartender over and ordered me a shot, Rebekah threw her a dirty look. "Remember our rule?" she whined.

I knew what their rule was: Girls like this love it when guys buy them drinks. But David X had taught me better: Girls don't respect guys who buy them drinks. A true pickup artist knows never to buy meals, drinks, or gifts for a girl he hasn't slept with. Dating is for tools.

"We promised not to buy any drinks on this trip," Rebekah whined.

"But you're not buying a drink for yourself," I told them. "You're buying one for me. And I'm different from all the other guys."

I'm not really that arrogant, but in the game there are rules. And the rules must be obeyed, because they work.

Suddenly, Mystery walked toward me and whispered in my ear, "Isolate!"

"I want to show you something," I said to Heather, as I took her by the hand. I led her to a nearby booth, sat her down, and performed the ESP experiment. Behind me, I saw Mystery punching his fist into his open hand in slow motion. It was a code: the signal to phase shift, to slow down and move in for the kill.

I told her about soul-gazing and, with house music and dozens of conversations blaring around us, we stared into each other's eyes and shared a moment together. In my head, I imagined her as the pudgy middle school student she used to be. If I'd been thinking about how beautiful she really was, I would have been too nervous to sully her with my lips, as I was about to attempt to do.

I slowly moved my head toward hers.

"No lips," she said, quietly.

I held up my index finger, placed it against her lips, and said, "Shhh." Then I kissed her—on the lips.

It would have been the most beautiful kiss of my life. But I

was so lost in the seduction that I forgot I was wearing a fake lip ring. Worried that it would fall out (or, even worse, end up on her lip), I pulled back, looked at her again, and then nibbled on her lower lip.

Her tongue darted out of her mouth. "Hey, not so fast," I told her, as if she were the one hitting on me. The key to physical escalation, David DeAngelo had said in his seminar, is always two steps forward, one step back.

We made out carefully, and then I returned her to Rebekah at the bar. I had a workshop to wing, so I told them both that it was a pleasure meeting them and I should rejoin my friends. We confirmed our plans to spend a weekend together, and I left with my heart singing.

The Matador of Love was the first person to run up to me. He took my hand in his and kissed it. "In India, we put ourselves prostrate before people like you," he said, flapping his arms excitedly. "You've given me a new meaning on life. It was like watching John Elway do the two-minute drive. You knew he had game before, but in that moment he really proved it. You got the Super Bowl ring."

For the rest of the night, I was on fire. Women who hadn't even seen me with the platinum non-sisters were opening me. They could smell it.

When I ran into Heather again, I asked her, "You're not a thief, are you?"

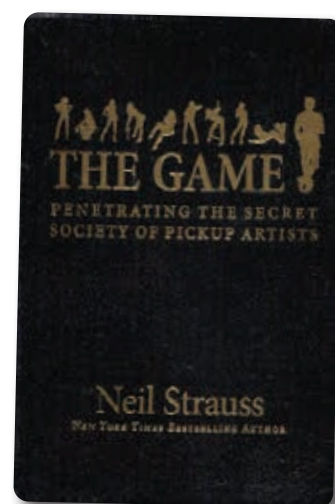
"No," she said.

I removed my necklace and very slowly put it around her neck. "This is still mine," I whispered, kissing her lightly. "It's something to remember tonight by. But I want it back next time I see you. It's very special to me."

As I walked away, I knew I'd just made her night.

It didn't even matter whether I got laid or not, because this was the game artfully played. It was exactly what I'd been working so hard for. I just didn't realize that I'd ever be able to pull it off so smoothly or that, in the process I was creating a hunger that could never be satiated.

*The Game* is Available at Fine Book Shops Across Asia





My friend Mike got one up his nose on Christmas. My boss Jess received several on her legs, her knuckles, and one especially painful one on her ass.

Mine came just days after winning the Marshall Islands mile championship – a nasty one smack dab in the centre of my leg that, because of its timing and placement – village gossips thought it had been caused by one especially sore loser's act of black magic.

That I had been targeted by such a spell was troubling; that it had amounted to a pus-filled mound which looked like a pubescent breast sprung from my lower leg was even more troubling and became a wholly consuming hobby.

I quickly became engrossed with its grossness. Its size, its spread, its constant and speedy swelling; the persistent and sometimes debilitating dribble of pus that would vary in shade and flow. Where such unannounced and unforeseen pressures and properties of the body could have previously resided. Surely, there was magic in it.

What was initially intriguing as a science, became unendurable as a disease. Mighty painful and producing soreness, throbbing, and the persistent ooze, it was hard to bandage and harder to ignore.

The boil (aka furunculosis or folliculitis) disappeared from the medical consciousness of most places with the dawn of hygiene, long ago. For those who don't bathe, or who travel in lesser-developed lands (particularly ones with hot, humid climates or pervasive witchcraft), the sexy skin infection with the sexy name may still rear its ugly red lump of a head.

An infection deep within the hair follicle, the boil appears much as mine did – as a red lump or pustule that will grow and fill with pus into a form much like an untapped volcano. Often growing to a golf ball's size, the infection usually takes root in the more embarrassing body cavities and crevices such as those of the armpit, groin, buttocks, and nose.

The nasty wound lasts an average of 10 days, hurts like hell, looks even worse than it feels, and will leak, at random or with slight pressure applied it, a thick fluid that could come out in any number of alarming shades of grey, green, purple, red, or white. More often it will be a fascinating and disgusting amalgamation of all five.

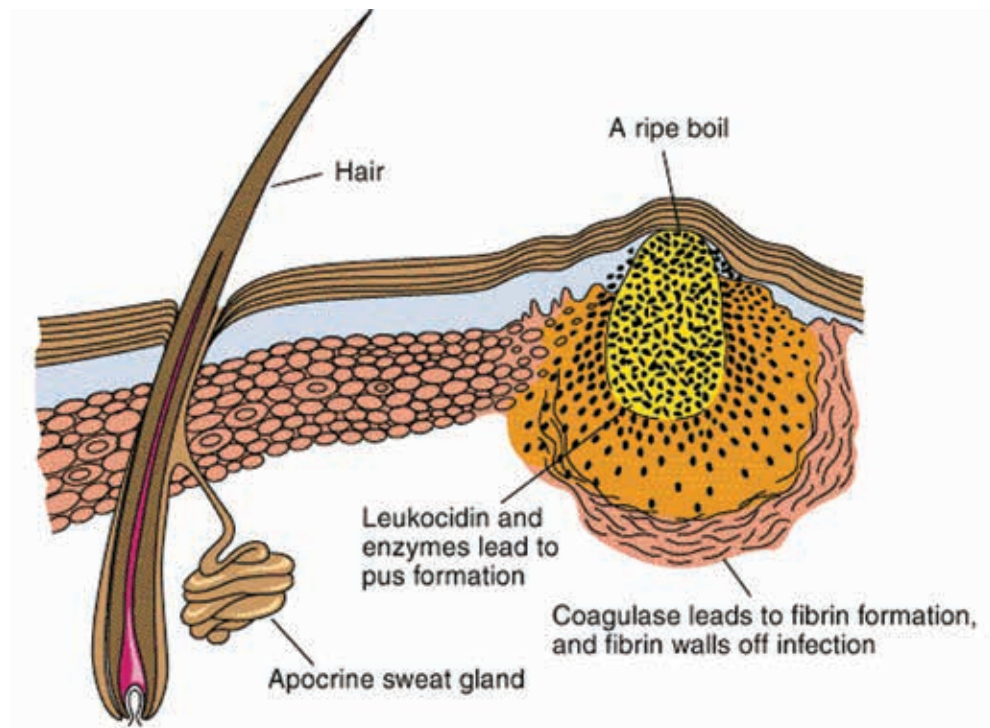
You can relieve some of the tension by draining or lancing it. This involves taking a sharp instrument and plunging it into the head of the wound. I took a few stabs at it, using a paperclip compulsively cleansed with a bottle of hydrogen peroxide.

But then I attempted to remedy the situation by paying a visit to the village doctor. He gave me some antibiotics and used Third World draining techniques that were a cut above mine. He offered no medical explanation other than magical ones and I left with a sense of physical, if not spiritual, relief.

I won US\$80 and village celebrity in the race – spoils that lasted slightly longer than the pus-filled mound the run may or may not have caused on my leg. But fame and fortune are transient, while the bullet-sized scar left behind on my leg is there for good.

# THE SPOILS OF BOILS

Erika Fry's fascination with her boil comes to a disgusting head.





# Bacchus Takes a Holiday

*Thailand may be famous for its spicy food, lovely-looking people, smiles so big they can't possibly be sincere, ornate temples, absurd traffic jams and filthy canals, but mention Thai wine and you'll either get a guffaw in your face, or a skeptical raised eyebrow. Those people are stupid and ignorant, because there is such a thing, and it's getting pretty good. Andre Lepine weaves his way to the Siam Winery to see what's what with his own tongue.*

Christmas is a time of feasting. In my opinion, it's not, however, a time for culinary excellence, at least in my family.

Why? Because everyone is too drunk to cook or to appreciate fine food. So whilst most food columnists would be harping on about the perfect Christmas pudding (little more than a flaming laxative), I've decided to take a look at the real spirit of Christmas – alcohol.

While Thailand may be best known for super-strength beers and whiskies of dubious content, that could all be changing. Situated near Samut Sakhon, 40 km southwest of Bangkok, the Thai Siam Winery is fast gaining international recognition for the quality of its Monsoon Valley wines.

The story starts in 1986 when wine enthusiast Chalerm Yoovidhya, having established Red Bull as the energy drink of choice and a Thai cultural icon, decided to take on a new and seemingly impossible challenge – fostering a domestic wine industry. Thailand, along with the rest of Southeast Asia, already slugs back massive quantities of rice wine but prefers it distilled into gullet-searing firewater, so convincing Thai palates that red wine is just fine is no easy task. So Yoovidhya has produced a set of wines that complement the tangy and spicy flavors of Thai cuisine. Hence, the *Thai wine for Thai food* catchphrase of Monsoon Valley products.

The first move was to launch Spy Wine Cooler – a beverage that now sells 90 million bottles a year, and is the most guzzled alcoholic beverage by women in Thailand – in order to establish a presence on the booze shelf of your local supermarket. Whilst certain wine snobs may scoff, being generous with the Spy at the office Christmas do is often a much more effective method for bachelors to score than the 'grab your coat, luv' approach. Just guessing but its name probably comes from the fact that three or four bottles make all men look like James Bond.

Developing its premium wine business, Siam Winery followed up the Spy with the launch of the Chatemp wines in 1999 and Monsoon Valley in 2003.

It's not just the fact that these wines are produced in Thailand that makes them unusual, the grapes are grown locally, and the composition is often uniquely Thai, using the Malaga Blanc white grape and the Pokdum red varieties.

Both of these grapes are grown in what are known as the 'floating vineyards' of the Chao Phraya Delta. Five to 10 metres above sea level, rows of vines are planted on islands separated by canals. The floating vineyards produce two annual harvests with all work done manually by hand or by boat. The winter harvest runs from December to March and gives the best crop, producing wines with good structure and concentration; the summer harvest, running from June to September, is better for the production of lighter and fruitier wines. When the harvest is finished, all leaves are removed manually, and the vines are pruned. It takes only 4-6 weeks before the leaves burst out again and the new season starts.

The Malaga Blanc grape is one of the main varieties planted in Thailand and was reputedly introduced to the country in 1685 by the first Embassy of King Louis XIV of France to King Narai the Great of Siam.

Well suited to the local climate, the fish or the exotic aromas of

lemongrass and watermelon. Malaga Blanc variety, like the Gallic race that gave birth to it, is thick-skinned, and hence resistant to the heavy rain we all know and hate in the region. This grape is used to produce a Monsoon Valley white, ideal to complement spicy Thai dishes such as green curries

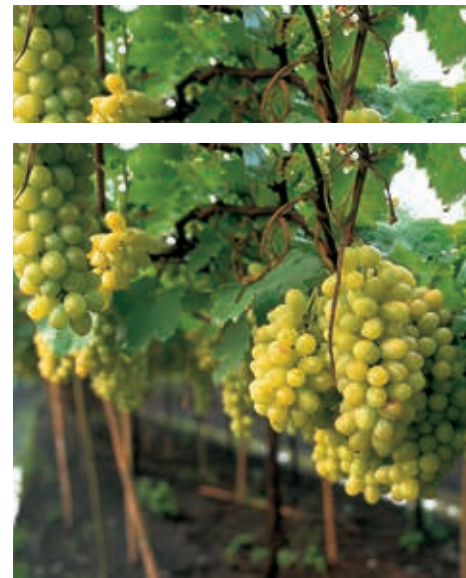
Pokdum is a mutation of the Black Queen grape and is used in the Monsoon Valley Pokdum red. This is blended with Shiraz and Black Muscat to produce a medium-bodied wine with bright and clean red fruit aromas and goes down a treat with red curries and grilled beef.

Pokdum is macerated and fermented together with Black Muscat to produce the Monsoon Valley Rose, a light-bodied wine with a crisp and delicate finish. Monsoon Valley also offers a Shiraz Special Reserve and the newly released Colombard 2005.

Whilst the slogan, *Thai wine for Thai food* rings true, the winery has no intention of keeping it all inside the borders. Siam Winery is now exporting to Japan, the United Kingdom, Australia and Europe. The wines have proved particularly popular with Thai restaurants abroad; Monsoon Valley is already in over 250 Thai restaurants in the UK, selling 15,000 bottles per month. (One has to wonder if it complements the carrot-based *somtam* for which British Thai restaurants are famous.)

The Thai wine industry faces challenges from high wine taxes, a low production volume and the recently lowered import duties, but then again, Thailand ranks as the fifth highest per-capita alcohol consumer (behind Moldova, Portugal, the Bahamas and plucky St. Lucia), so perhaps there's a rosy-nosed future after all.

I, for one, will be enjoying a few bottles of Monsoon Valley this Christmas until long after I am able to taste the turkey.



*"Grapes are grown in what are known as the 'floating vineyards' of the Chao Phraya Delta, five to 10 metres above sea level, rows of vines are planted on islands separated by canals"*





# CORAL GRIEF

*After the tsunami inundated Koh Phi Phi a local expat began salvaging the bodies and then cleaning up the debris. Alison Winward reports.*

Two hundred and fifty tonnes. That's the weight of 250 family saloon cars and of the debris removed from the bays around the tiny Thai island of Phi Phi Don by thousands of volunteer divers since the December 26 tsunami. While it was clear to anyone who saw Phi Phi Don – or even pictures of it – how the waves had devastated the island itself, less obvious was the effect they had had on the sea surrounding it.

But, as the volunteers at the Phi Phi Dive Camp discovered, the tsunami dragged countless items, from wedding rings to whole buildings, into the sea. Dive Camp founder Andrew Hewett said: "We've found everything you could imagine down there: entire bungalows, Christmas decorations and trees, baubles, personal items such as wedding rings and wallets, my children's toys and my [diving] certificates – now that was weird."

Andrew, originally from Kent in England, had arrived on Phi Phi Don as a backpacker a decade before the tsunami, and decided to stay and take up a career in diving. Six years later, he and his wife, Mayuree, set up an ecotourism business, the Adventure Club, offering diving, climbing, trekking, and adventure tours around Phi Phi.

Andrew, Mayuree, and their two young children managed to reach higher ground about 15 seconds before the first wave of the tsunami hit, but the Adventure Club office was wrecked.

Within a couple of weeks Andrew had decided that rebuilding his business – and others on the island – would involve more than just repairing his shop. Knowing that tourists

were unlikely to return until the environment was restored, Andrew set up the Phi Phi Dive Camp to organise volunteer divers to monitor and repair damage to the reefs. He secured funding from, among others, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), the Piers Simon Appeal Fund – put together by the family of a British man who died in the tsunami at Phi Phi – and PADI's Project Aware.

Andrew estimates that in the months since the tsunami volunteers have made around 7,500 dives. Some are travellers who have come to Phi Phi on holiday – hotels, restaurants and shops are functioning again – learn about the camp and decide to help out, while some are divers who head for the island specifically to help at the camp.

Phi Phi Don, the larger "sister" of the uninhabited Phi Phi Le – where *The Beach* was shot – is almost two islands, joined by a narrow causeway about one-and-a-half kilometres long and 800 metres wide. The tsunami pounded over the causeway from both sides – survivors have likened it to being caught in a giant washing machine – but the wave was considerably more powerful from the northwest. It was strong enough to drive whole buildings into Ton Sai Bay, and, as it receded, to churn up thousands of tons of sand from the seabed and the beach.

Most of the tourism businesses were concentrated around the Ton Sai causeway, and as Phi Phi Don was popular with young backpackers who liked to party late into the night, many were still in bed in their bungalows and guesthouses when the tsunami hit. It is estimated that 700 people, foreigners and Thais, were killed.

Even volunteers who did not lose loved ones have sometimes struggled when recovering items such as passports and jewellery. Said Andrew: "People do get

upset when they see personal items and they wonder whether the owner lived or died, but it is too much to dwell on. If you dwell on things like this for too long, it gets the better of you and then you can't operate."

If recovering smaller items has been emotionally challenging, what's the best way of dealing with an entire bungalow lying on the sand? The divers have not entered submerged buildings but have taken them apart from the outside, piece by piece, using crowbars and saws. Debris has been collected in dive nets and carried to the surface by snorkelers, who place it on longtail boats to be taken to the shore.

The first phase of the project – clearing debris from bays and reefs – was completed in August, and volunteers are now moving onto phase two – reef restoration. But Andrew is aware that the clean up of Tonsai will probably never really be over, as there could still be so much hidden, waiting to be revealed as the sand shifts. A few months back the divers recovered a body, and given the discrepancy between the number of people reported missing and the number of bodies found so far, chances are this was not the only one.

"After the tsunami, I was busy picking up bodies," Andrew said. "After seeing so many you tend to get more used to it, although emotionally I suppose I am still affected by what's gone on. Everything has changed here, nothing is going to be the same again, and there is the loss of life – people I know who have lost family members and that is so, so sad."

"One of the things I was worried about was that I didn't do enough; I felt I should have done this or that, but doing this makes me feel better, and everyone else I have talked to feels the same."

Potential volunteers can contact him at [andrew@hidedf.com](mailto:andrew@hidedf.com) or see the website: [www.phiphidivecamp.com](http://www.phiphidivecamp.com)

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### 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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# Women Wronged

*Will the forced sterilisation of Tibetan women result in the end of the race? This is but one of the serious questions examined by **Suzan Crane** in this report about the grotesque violations of women's rights in Tibet.*

You don't have to be as politically aware as Richard Gere to be unsurprised by the most recent U.S. State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004 which found that Chinese authorities in Tibet "continued to commit serious human rights abuses." Less well known and more shocking is the way that Tibetan women (girls of four and nuns of 40) are regularly wronged – sterilized, forced into prostitution and routinely abused on a daily basis.

In an oral statement delivered at the 61<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in April 2005, Dr. B. Tsering Yeshe, addressed these violations. Despite the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), which affirmed women's rights as an inalienable part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, she asserted that "violence against women continues in its worst forms such as honour killings, genital mutilation and systematic rape of women... some endorsed and enforced by the state. Violence against women becomes a two-fold challenge when women are discriminated against because of their gender and race."

This report is hardly unique. In 2003, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, then Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women for the United Nations, said, "Women in Tibet continue to undergo hardship and are also subjected to gender-specific crimes including forced sterilization, forced abortion, coercive birth control policies and the monitoring of menstrual cycles."

Such observations have been confirmed by personal testimonies. In her 2002 statement to the exiled Tibetan government's Department of Information and International Relations, Dr. Losersky Gombo, a Tibetan-born, Chinese-educated mobile sterilization doctor, disclosed that China targets rural women, that are often unmarried or childless. According to her declaration, the on-site sterilizations, as well as abortions, were performed under unhygienic circumstances – often by unskilled practitioners – without regard to physical or psychological repercussions.

Reproductive rights violations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) were found to be so grave that they "present the possibility that the Tibetan people and culture will be destroyed within the coming century" and CEDAW's "continued requests for explicit information regarding gender-based violence against Tibetan women in the form of statistics, legislation and other measures taken for protection have not been honoured."

According to the last information available, if a Tibetan woman exceeded the two-child limit, the authorities imposed financial penalties on the family, and the third child was denied basic health, education, and welfare privileges.

Exiled Tibetan women claim that the severe birth control violations have led to family troubles, with their husbands frequenting brothels, and divorce rates and domestic violence increasing. These measures have also contributed to the fact that Tibet has the highest maternal and child mortality rates







“They are imprisoned and subjected to sexual and physical torture by the prison authorities, and medical attention is denied until the last stages of a prisoner’s health.”

in China: One in 40 women die in child birth, a figure up to eight times higher than the national rate.

Dr. B. Tsering, president of the Dharamsala, India-based Tibetan Women’s Association (TBA), also maintains that Tibetan women inside the state face discrimination in education, employment, and health care. Sexual harassment within the school system prompts numerous young girls to drop out; and a lack of employment opportunities spurs many into becoming prostitutes.

In her February, 2005 interview with the Department of Human Rights and Democracy, a teenaged Tibetan refugee and former prostitute, Migmar Dolma explained that [“unable to support the entire family, my parents sent me to work as a servant in my uncle’s shop.”] I ran away to work at a Nangma bar in Lhasa. At 15 I was the youngest girl, although most were under 25. I earned 50 yuan [Bt250] a day. I escaped to India to try and get an education and help my family’s poor living conditions back home. My biggest concern is that there are many young girls like me destroying their lives in the dance bars of Lhasa.”

Since 1959, prostitution has flourished in Tibet, primarily in the Lhasa area. While the majority of prostitutes are Chinese, increasing numbers of young rural Tibetan girls are joining the ranks.

“Prostitution was something that was non-existent in traditional Tibet,” Dr. B. Tsering says. “Now in Lhasa it is a burgeoning evil element.” In 1998 an estimated 658 brothels existed in Tibet’s capital. Some Tibetan prostitutes are as young as 13 or 14 and charge as little as 30 or 40 cents for sex. Health workers are reporting a high incidence of STDS and a growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in Tibet. China’s claims that prostitution is “under effective control” are unfounded, the report maintains.

Tsering says that Tibetan women are victims of gender-specific violence for expressing political opinions. “They are imprisoned and subjected to sexual and physical torture by the prison authorities, and medical attention is denied until the last stages of a prisoner’s health. Sexual violence, especially by the prison authorities in China, is a blatant violation of the Convention Against Torture and the CEDAW, both

ratified by China in 1988 and 1980, respectively. Many prisoners die in prison due to the serious psychological and physical impact of torture. Those who survive often come out broken mentally and physically, and unable to cope with the normal routines of everyday life.”

The majority of political prisoners are Buddhist monks and nuns, whose devotion to their faith and His Holiness the Dalai Lama makes them easy targets for the Chinese authorities. Buddhist nun Phuntsok Nyidron, Tibet’s recently-released longest-serving female prisoner of conscience (16 years) and the Winner of the 1995 Reebok International Human Rights Award was “kicked and beaten during her arrest and later given electric shocks on the hands, shoulders, breasts, tongue and face. During interrogation she was suspended from the ceiling by her hands – which were handcuffed behind her – and beaten with iron rods. In 1993 her sentence was increased when she and 13 other prisoners sang and secretly recorded freedom songs which were then smuggled out of prison,” according to TBA.

Exiled nuns Namdrol Lhamo and Gyaltsen Dolkar, two of the fourteen other “singing nuns” imprisoned with Nyidron, also talked about incidents of torture and persecution, Released several years ago, they were spurned by their nunneries – which fear reprisal from the Chinese authorities and continue to suffer from physical and mental health problems that keep them from ever living normal lives again.



# Diamonds in the Rough

Laughing in the face of countless angry phone calls and idle threats from malcontent bar owners whose view of themselves differs from the rheumy but sharp eye of Bartripping's main helmsman, Daniel Cooper heads out on the tiles with his good mate and co-worker Stu. Tonight's target is Banglamphu. Is it still cool, hip, trendy, buzz and dope? More importantly is it too hip, trendy, buzz and dope for Dan and Stu? Read on...

8:02pm, Kon Koen (*The Klong Bar*), Klong Banglamphu

**Stu:** Dan, fucking late again, the bastard, kept me loitering with intent in local bars while getting aurally abused by the dragon dance festival going on across the road. After many unanswered calls and text messages, Dan finally arrived with chapped lips and a thirsty liver, eager to start the shenanigans. By the time we got to the local best kept secret, the Klong Bar, I was half-starved, half-cut and ready for another beer. A typical island-style bar with wonky wooden walls, a musty smell and rickety tables, you'd barely know you were in Bangkok.

**Dan:** Arriving while the annual Soi 2 Chinese noise festival was in full swing, Stu chastised me for lateness. It's hardly my fault if Dan Senior decided to make his yearly call from the old country during 'working' hours. The festival features Chinese lion-dancers, Ming opera and free outdoor movies, all at top volume and only drowned out by the 24/7 bingo game. Shouting to be understood, I suggested that we retire to the Klong Bar, an oasis of peace and quiet in otherwise deafening Bangkok. Quiet that is, until they turn the jukebox up full blast to drown out the noise.

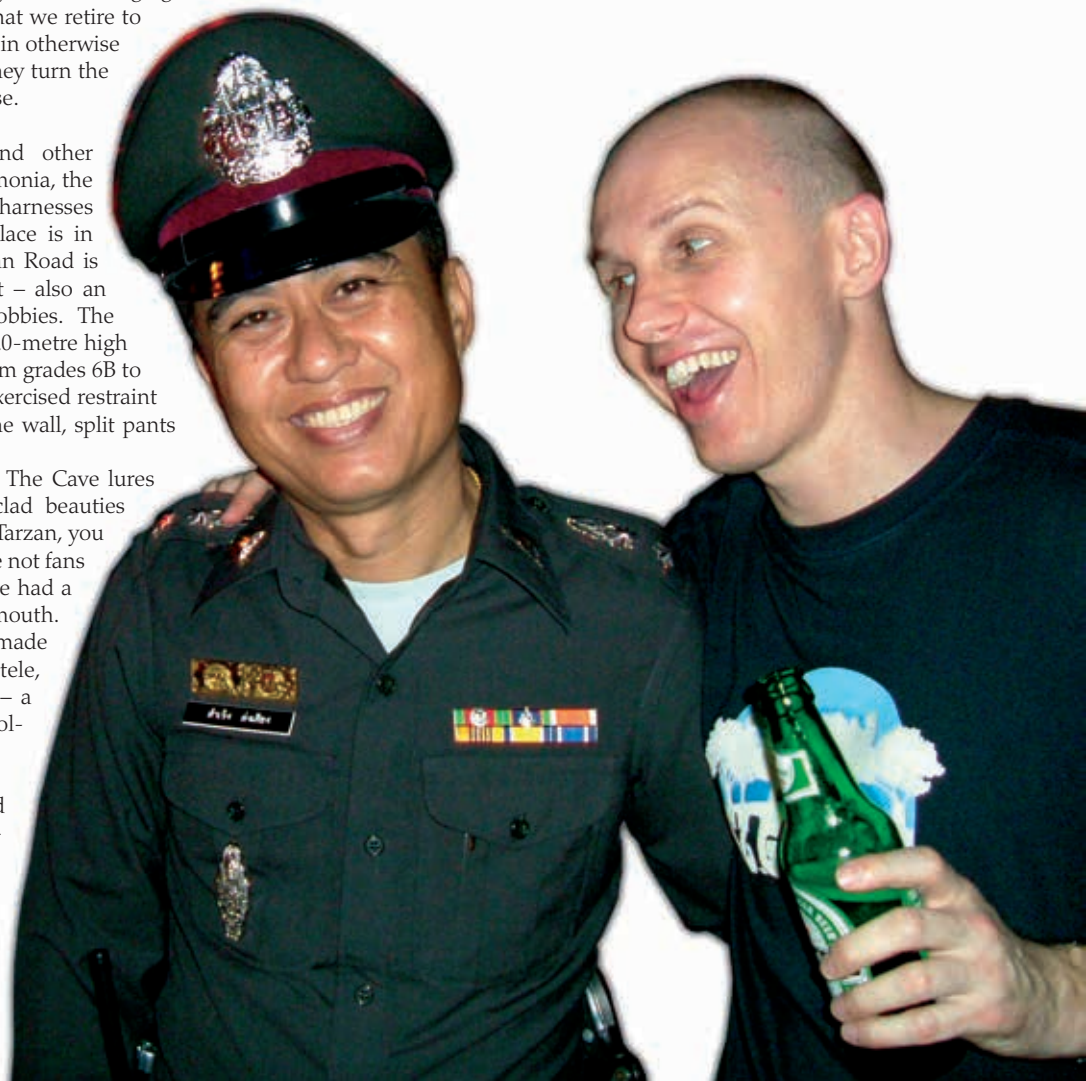
9:40pm, *The Cave*, Khaosan Road

**Dan:** Readers of the *Bangkok Post* and other subversives may have spotted ads for Demonica, the city's only fetish club – an arena of ropes, harnesses and unusual hobbies. Turns out that place is in Sukhumvit Soi 33. The Cave on Khaosan Road is Bangkok's only sport-climbing restaurant – also an arena of ropes, harnesses and unusual hobbies. The main feature of this restaurant/bar is the 20-metre high climbing wall, mapped out with routes from grades 6B to 9A. Being the more sober of our duo, I exercised restraint and allowed Stu to stagger his way up the wall, split pants and all.

**Stu:** Set just off the main Khaosan drag, The Cave lures punters inside with three animal-skin-clad beauties touting customers on the street. My "Me Tarzan, you Jane," quip fell on deaf ears. I guess they're not fans of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Nevertheless we had a job to do and scrambled into The Cave's mouth. The cavernous three-storey interior was made even more profound by the lack of clientele, which is a shame since it's a nice place – a place that finally unites exercise and alcohol-fuelled excess.

10:20pm, *Reggae Bar*, Trok Mayom

**Stu:** Upon exiting the Cave we bumped into Bangkok Billy, the notorious light-bulb-headed manager of the Bull's Head who swapped the glory of Sukhumvit for the great unwashed of Khaosan on his





night off. Following Billy's recommendation, we ventured forth to one of his old haunts, the Reggae Bar, a small establishment straddling Trok Mayom (a lane, for those who don't know), with a midget-sized pool table, a TV projector screen bigger than said pool table and a love of Rastafarian iconography.

**Dan:** Trok Mayom used to be the haunt of junkies and footpads, a dark alley worthy of the opening scene from *The Beach*. It's also the place I called home all those years ago when I first arrived on these shores, a bright-eyed and naive young backpacker. The Rare Art Gallery has moved into the Sunset Street complex and the lane is now all silver shops, leather crafters and tattoo parlours, but the Rasta lives on, not unlike the smelly old stoners you sometimes see wandering Khaosan these days, dreaming of full-moons past. Still not able to snap out of barman mode, Billy got a round of Long Islands in.

**11:30pm, Immortal Bar, Bayon Building, Khaosan**

**Dan:** The Immortal has gone up and down like the Afghan flag over the last four years. Born as a metal pub and resurrected as a hip-hop bar, the place seems to be on a downward slide again. Not 12 months ago this used to be my nightly hangout spot and by midnight the place was packed with L.A. gangstas (by way of Thonburi), wanna-be molls and genuine negroes. We got a hint of why there were so many empty barstools when the police popped in to say hello. Nevertheless the punters did pile in at around 12:10.

**Stu:** Mortally drunk, I was mortified by Dan's choice of venue. The dark and dank interior was set off by the retired DJ booth, a tuk-tuk, in the corner while two talented performers scratched it up at the newly installed turntables. I was slightly stunned by the entrance of the local constabulary but Billy took the bull by the horns, posed with the pigs and proffered himself for a picture.

**12:50pm, Susie Pub, Soi Susie**

**Stu:** Devastated, distraught and disappointed with Dan's final choice, I fought my way through the throng of bumping and grinding Thais to the bar only to be further humiliated by the Bt100 beers. Enough!

**Dan:** I'd been to Susie once before on a previous drinking expedition. The girls in the office had taken me out to be their token Farang man on a whiskey-guzzler. Needless to say, with half a bottle of 100 Pipers in me and four attractive Thai ladies dancing with me, I had a wonderful night. Those illusions were cruelly shattered by a noisy, dimly lit Susie, rammed to the rafters with disagreeable men and women who weren't interested in me. There was nothing for it but to return to our regular street-side eatery where they serve beers until seven in the morning. I guess I must have been a little worse for wear since Stuart had me ordering frogs on a dare for my midnight snack but on reflection, they're probably better than 7-11 hotdogs. It had been an interesting night, the Khaosan area holds many nooks and crannies, interesting and unknown bars, and it's reassuring to know that new adventures are there for the taking when one staggers off the beaten path.





John Burdett's *Bangkok 8* lifted the bar for the usually sorry scene of Thailand crime fiction back in 2003, and he released a follow up this year – *Bangkok Tattoo* (Bantam Press, 2005). *Bangkok 8* won acclaim for its highly-charged look at Thai society through the eyes of Detective Sonchai Jitpleecheep, a deeply spiritual Bangkok policeman. And it's widely regarded as the best novel of the genre.

While *Bangkok 8*'s plot unwinds into an elaborate tale of gender reassignment, sadism and the jade trade, *Bangkok Tattoo* starts in the more familiar Bangkok crime-fiction territory of go-go bars and prostitution. Jitpleecheep is working at his mother's bar, the Old Man's Club, which is surviving only on the talents of their star performer, Chanya.

"Killing customers isn't good for business," says Jitpleecheep's mother in the first line of the book. Chanya has killed, castrated and partially flayed an American customer. The bar's co-owner, the hopelessly corrupt Police Colonel Vikorn, is summoned and the three casually begin a cover-up. Hardly news in hard-boiled Bangkok.

Things get more complex as the pages turn. It turns out that the American works for the CIA, and has been stationed in Thailand's troubled Deep South looking for radical Muslims. The plot is further spiced up when it's revealed that Chanya had a relationship with the murdered man back in the U.S. where she was working as a masseuse; and she's the reason he has moved to Thailand. Throw in an imam who's trying to ward off civil war in the South, a troubled but brilliant Japanese tattoo artist, a drug-peddling army general, a pair of spooks from the U.S., and the story is on the boil.

Detective Jitpleecheep is character is developed in this sequel. In *Bangkok 8* he is quite the Buddhist puritan, but in this one he struggles to balance his questionable occupation as the manager of a bar/brothel, his ambition and infatuation with Chanya with his beliefs. As in the last book he is the mouthpiece for Burdett's explanations of Thai culture and Thais' worldview.

Colonel Vikorn is promoted from his puppet-master role in *Bangkok 8* to a protagonist in this one, and he evolves into a likable yet appalling character. Vikorn's intelligence, wit and role as a leader are endearing but his animal cunning and corruption at times overshadow Jitpleecheep as the more entertaining member of the cast.

While Burdett keeps delivering the insights into Bangkok society that made his previous book famous, *Bangkok Tattoo* sees Jitpleecheep spending far more time in the city's red-light districts, which is a disappointment since so many authors dwell on the subject and it was notably absent from *Bangkok 8*. However, Burdett's description of the working girl's life is well handled and probably good background to readers not familiar with Thailand.

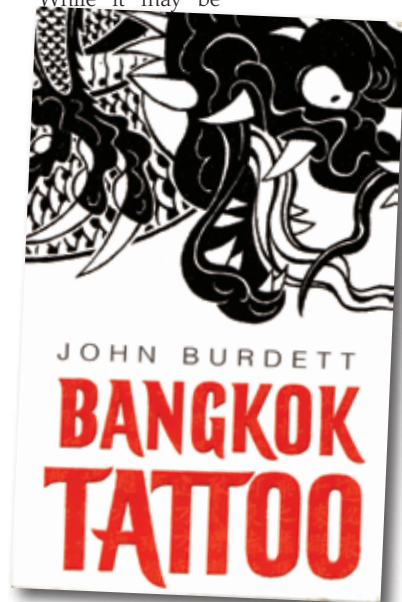
A continuing theme in Burdett's Thai-culture exposition is the comparison and contrast to Western life. Jitpleecheep often addresses the reader directly. "Drink Kloster or Heineken, *farang*, when you come for your vacation, they're cleaner brews," he advises at one point. But more often he is chastising the Western mind for its many faults: "How like a *farang* to find a sweet spot in life and ruin it by excess!" Criticising the reader's culture is a bullying tactic used by writers who have immersed themselves in foreign cultures. While it may be good for readers to look at their own way of life through different eyes (which is what travel is about anyway), it can come off as a holier-than-thou attitude that detracts from the story and the character. While Western culture is far from perfect, so is Thailand's.

It is impossible not to compare *Bangkok Tattoo* to *Bangkok 8*, which was a masterwork. While it is not as strong as its predecessor, *Bangkok Tattoo* is a strong, well-written detective yarn with more twists than a cobra and it slithers deeply into the city's underbelly.

Both of the novels are available at Bookazine and other fine bookstores.

# Bangkok's Slimy Underbelly

Daniel Cooper looks at a pair of sordid thrillers about the capital.



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Reviewing a hotel with a broken foot is a bit of a double whammy. Staff that would naturally do everything possible to make a stay smooth and peaceful are further moved by the sight of a slow and clumsily moving gimp on crutches.

It was not surprising then, when I poked my way into the Swana Bangkok Hotel, that every door opened, that all three receptionists offered to take my bag, and that I was personally escorted and oriented to my room by polite hotel security. Getting an assisted shower seemed like an imminent prospect.

All the same, I got the feeling that the fantastic courtesies and hospitality would have been not much different had I been the average traveler with two working legs and wearing that same "Same Same" T-shirt.

The Swana, located on the quiet bend of Visuttikasat Road, near Samsen Road in Banglamphu, offers a break from Bangkok's bustle without going far. Furnished with classy, contemporary Thai décor and full of nifty features like the lobby's wall-mounted waterfall, one is instantly met with the call for inner calm.

A goldfish pond (albeit with a serenity vibe slightly betrayed by its blue and black power cords running along the bottom) and lounges with comfortable chairs (albeit with a serenity vibe slightly betrayed by a stock of American men's magazines) add to the restful ambiance of the place.

Outfitted with the basics, a cable TV and a fun mod futon, the 55 rooms come in standard, superior and deluxe sizes and fall in the affordable US\$30-50 range.

The hotel also houses a 24-hour Internet station and offers, in slightly oxymoronic fashion, a "tuk-tuk limosine" service that will deliver you to nearby attractions in downtown Bangkok and around Khaosan Road.

Before hitting the sites, you can fuel up at the cafeteria-style Anda Café on the ground floor, or enjoy lunch or dinner up on the fourth floor at a terrace restaurant with mouthwatering Thai, Chinese, and European fare. The hotel also has 24-hour room service.

Offering comfort, quiet, and convenience for reasonable rates, the Swana is a good deal. Feeling recharged and fully refreshed, I left with new bounce in my busted foot's step the next morning.

Call 02-282-8899 for more information or reservations. Check out the website at [www.swanabangkok.com](http://www.swanabangkok.com).

# HOME AWAY FROM HOME

*Close enough to all the historic attractions around the Grand Palace, but far enough away from the backpacker swarm of Khaosan Road, a new hotel offers a distinctly relaxing charm and hospitality galore. Erika Fry digs the vibe.*





# *Hanging Your Hat:*

## Places to sleep in Bangkok

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

### Top End:

Bangkok has heaps of five-star hotels and resorts, including the world-famous Oriental Hotel, 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 mid-range rooms down to the cheapest accommodation available in Bangkok, that are off-the-beaten track and a little harder to find.

### Pratunam/Siam Square Area

**Holiday Mansion Hotel**  
Bt2,000 (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**  
Bt1,000-1,400, 22 Soi Kasem San 1, Rama I Road; National Stadium Skytrain, Tel: 02-612-3580. Big rooms with TV and bar and all that. Caged birds form the cornerstone of the décor.

### Silom Area

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

**Bangkok Christian Guest House**  
Bt1,100-1,500, 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**  
Bt1,000-2,700, 173/8-9 Surawong Road, Chong Nonsi Skytrain, 02-233-3301. A cool boutique hotel, every room is different. The suites are very full-on with the décor.

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

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

### Soi Ngam Duphli

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

### Sukhumvit

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

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

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

**Manhattan**  
Bt1,400/1600 (with breakfast), 13 Sukhumvit Soi 15, Asoke Skytrain, 02-255-0166, www.hotelmanhattan.com. A standard-issue hotel in the heart of Sukhumvit. Nothing special, but okay value.

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

### Banglamphu

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

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

**Buddy Lodge**  
Bt1,800-2,200, 265 Khaosan Road, Phra Athit boat pier, 02-629-4477, [www.buddylodge.com](http://www.buddylodge.com). Looks like the Khaosan town hall from the outside, with very nice upscale modern Thai-style rooms.

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

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

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

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## 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.

### WAT PHO MASSAGE CENTRE

Where: Thai Wang and Sanachai Roads

When: Daily, 8am-8pm  
Cost: Bt120 for 30 minutes; Bt200 for an hour; herbal massage Bt300 per hour  
Way to go: Bt30 tuk tuk, River taxi to Tha Thien pier or walk just past the Grand Palace  
Get bent into shape with a painful yet invigorating massage at the city's oldest temple and largest repository of Thai information about traditional medicine.

### NATURAL HEALING COMPANY

Where: 4th Floor, Bayon Building, Khaosan Rd  
When: 7 days, 10am-10pm  
Cost: Varies  
Way to go: Use your shoes, dude  
Provides courses and healing using reiki, pranic healing plus meditation, yoga chi-gong, self-defence classes, massage and even serves health drinks to knock back on the terrace after a hard day's healing.

## THONBURI

### SHED OF THE ROYAL BARGES

Where: Khlong Bangkok Noi, near the Thonburi side of the Pinklao Bridge  
When: Daily, 9am-5pm  
Cost: Bt30 for foreign adults, free for children; Bt100 more to take photos; Bt200 for video camera  
Way to go: A little difficult to find, most people charter a long-tail boat from the pier by the Temple of the Emerald Buddha for a tour of Thonburi's canals and have a stopover here.  
On display are eight of the Royal barges that are part of a 700-year regal tradition. The most awe-inspiring barge in this flotilla is the 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, 9am-4pm  
Cost: If you pay the Bt200 admission for the Grand Palace, you get a ticket for all of these museums. Otherwise it's Bt75  
Way to go: Bt40 tuk tuk or taxi from Khaosan  
On the lush grounds of this park is the golden teak Vimanmek Mansion (well worth the trip), where King Rama V once lived and held court, along with museums containing HM the King's photos, Thai arts and handicrafts, sacred white elephants, Royal carriages and memorabilia.

## DUSIT ZOO

Where: Ratchawithi Road  
When: Daily, 8am-6pm  
Cost: Bt30 for adults; Bt5 for kids  
Way to go: Bt40 tuk tuk or taxi from Khaosan  
Probably the cheapest day out in Bangkok, the zoo is alive with black panthers, hornbills, silvered langurs, and Malayan sun bears. There's also a special "Reptile House" with Siamese albino cobras and crocodiles, well worth the extra Bt10.  
"The Wild Wild World Show" runs at 11am, 2pm and 3pm Mon-Fri, and on Sat-Sun and national holidays there are extra shows at 1pm and 4pm. The zoo also has okay food, a lake, paddle boats, and special area with rides for children.

## SUKHUMVIT

### THE SNAKE FARM

Where: Rama IV Road, near Henri Dunant Avenue, on the grounds of the Thai Red Cross Institute.  
When: Weekdays, 8.30am-4.30pm; weekends, 8.30am-noon. Shows at 11am and 2.30pm on weekdays, and at 11am on weekends.  
Cost: Bt70  
Thrill to snake-handling demonstrations, watch cobras being milked of their venom and have your photo taken with a firehose-thick python. Before the demonstrations of daredevilry, there's also a slide show about the serpents of Thailand and what to do if one bites you when Crocodile Dundee isn't in the vicinity. Also on display are some living and dead snakes at what's officially called the Queen Saowapha Memorial Institute, which was set up nearly 80 years ago to produce anti-venom serum for the snake-bitten.

### JIM THOMPSON HOUSE

Where: Soi Kasemsan 2, opposite the National Stadium on Rama I Rd.  
Way to go: National Stadium station on the Skytrain  
When: 9am to 5pm everyday with the last Guided Tour at 16:30  
Cost: Adult Bt100, Students Bt50  
The Jim Thompson House museum is the former residence of the American Thai silk magnate of the same name. Before his mysterious disappearance in the Malaysian jungle, he collected art and artifacts from around the region and filled this traditional house with the stuff. A fantastic collection set in lush gardens and an insight into the elegant lifestyle of the Bangkok wealthy before rampant industrialisation. A cool place to spend a few hours, it also has a reasonably priced restaurant on the grounds. The newly opened two-floor museum hosts regular exhibitions.

### WAT MAHABUT

Where: Sukhumvit Soi 77, Soi 7  
When: Free  
Way to go: Skytrain to On Nut, then a 15-minute walk  
Thailand's most notorious ghost Nang Nak (supposedly born more than a century ago in this district), is said to malingering at the temple. After dying in childbirth, her spirit returned to join her unsuspecting husband. Some believe that she killed several people in the area to keep her secret from him. At the back is a shrine dedicated to her. Hundreds of people come here daily to pray to her spirit to help them win the lottery or find a husband, attaching gold leaves to her face or pouring candle wax on the tree outside the shrine.

## LUMPINI

### LUMPINI PARK

Where: Rama IV Road

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

## PRATUNAM

### HILTON HOTEL FERTILITY SHRINE

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

## SAMUT PRAKAN

### ERAWAN MUSEUM

Where: Near the Crocodile Farm and Ancient City on Old Sukhumvit Road  
When: Daily, 9am-6pm  
Way to Go: See the Ancient City listing.  
The three-headed copper elephant measures some 40 metres in height and weighs 250 tonnes. In the base is a museum devoted to Thai and Chinese antiques. Up above is an incredible array of statuary, a stained glass ceiling, and a stairway leading up the elephant god Erawan's right hind leg into a vision of Buddhist heaven in his belly.

### 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.

Who said  
“visa runs”  
were fun?



## THE VISIONARY

One of Thailand's first, and still foremost, surrealists and abstract expressionists, Pratuang Emjaroen's retrospective of more than four decades of work bedazzles the eye with lines, shapes, and hues that seem to have lives of their own. As one's eyes traverse the oil-on-canvas frames, snakes, Buddhas, skulls, amoebas, orchids and figures from Thai mythology emerge from the swirls of paint like life forms in the Hindu creation myth.

Held to commemorate the maestro's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, Spirit of Art ranks as the most important exhibition held in Thailand this year. Small prints of his greatest works, like “Dharma” (oil on canvas, 1970), are on sale in the gallery's coffee shop and gift store for only Bt50.

The solo show continues at the four-storey Queen's Gallery until January 24<sup>th</sup>. The gallery, located on Phra Sumen Road, near the Golden Mount is open from 10am-7pm daily except Wednesdays.



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# Places to Eat: Around Bangkok

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



## SILOM AREA

### SOI CONVENT (EVENINGS)

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

### BLUE ELEPHANT

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

### LITTLE INDIA (North Indian)

64/38-39 Soi Wat Suan Phlu (Opp Shangri-La Hotel, main wing), off Charoen Krung Rd, 11am-11pm daily, Tel: 02-630-7906-7, major cards In a city of largely poor quality Indian restaurants, Little India stands out as a rare gem. Tucked away at the end of the soi leading up to the main entrance for the Shangri-La Hotel, this place is a quiet and congenial eatery serving superb North Indian cuisine. The management pride themselves on providing extremely tasty but non-oily dishes with an authentic Indian taste. Suitable for veggies and carnivores, it also has a Thai menu, and live cricket and football on TV.

### 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 it's own character. The Bangkok branch at the Marriot Resort and Spa has established itself as a dead cert for great food and a great dining experience in Bangkok. The immensely civilized riverside setting with outdoor terrace is a great place to enjoy

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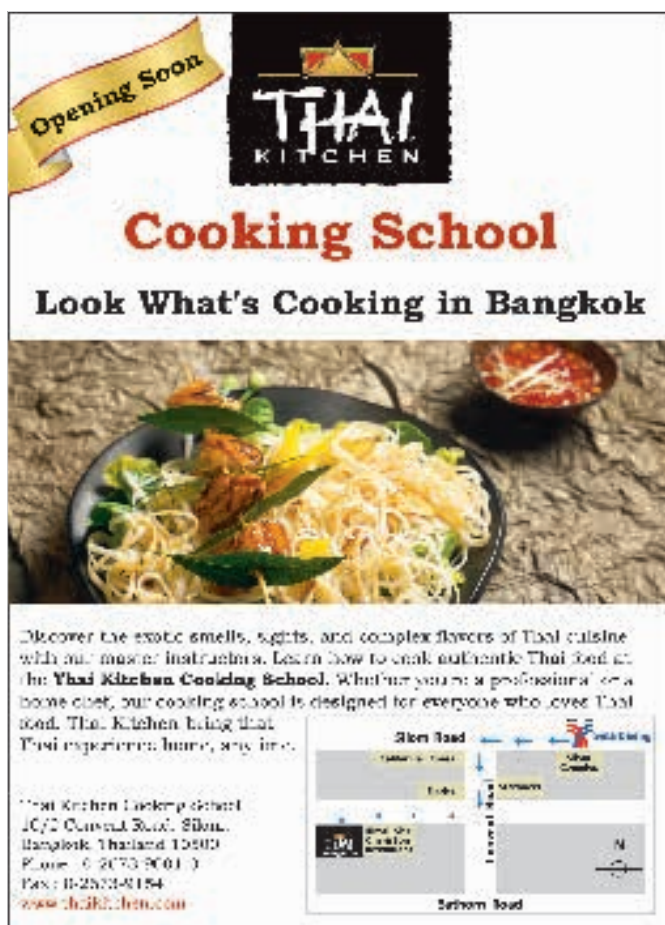
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the much talked about Sunday jazz brunch.

#### 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.

#### 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, 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)

Shangri-la 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, 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, 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 ++).

#### 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, 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.

#### ABYSSINIA 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.dininginthaailand.com/sanremo.asp, Tel: 02-258 6919, major cards San Remo has a curious Mediterranean al fresco feel without actually being al fresco. Around 40 different pizza toppings (Bt235-285) such as good old heart-stopper, Four Seasons, and Gioiosa (mozzarella, small prawns, green peas, smoked salmon and Italian parsley) and a wide selection of pastas (Bt175-195) like Penne Treviso (penne pasta in cream sauce, Speck, raddicchio salad, parmesan cheese). Also worth trying is the anti-pasti selection which includes some delicious roast vegetables and prosciutto. Pick 'n' mix and sharing between mates is the best option.

#### NOVOTEL SIAM SQUARE

Siam Square Soi 6 (Skytrain Siam), 6am-10am, 11:30am-3pm, 6:30pm-10:30pm, major cards, www.novotelbkk.com, Tel: 02-225 6888 Right in the heart of Thai teenybopper land and housing three restaurants under one roof – Lok Hin Wah (Chinese), Focaccia (Italian) and Chistera (international). The latter is the perfect place to stuff your face at the lunch-time buffets, only Bt450++, Mon-Sat. Sunday brunch (Bt550) is highly recommended. Or get Dim Sum-ed at Lok Hin Wah's all you can eat lunch for Bt420 until 2:30pm.

#### ANTONIO'S TRATTORIA (TRADITIONAL ITALIAN)

59/1 Soi Sawasdee, Sukhumvit 31 Rd, Tel: 02-258 4247, 02-258 4108 A bastion of truly authentic Italian food, Antonio's stands out amongst the zillion internationalised Italian eateries around town. Contemporary decor complements a cozy, trattoria-style ambience and provides an ideal for setting some real mama-style cooking. An ample a la carte selection covering all bases from antipasti to grill. Well worth going the full monty rather than playing pasta-and-pizza.

#### NABE YA (JAPANESE)

2nd Fl., Pathumwan Princess Hotel, 444 Phayathai Rd, 11am-10:30pm, Sat-Sun buffet 11:30am-2:30pm, Tel: 02-216 3700 ext. 20226, www.pprincess.com, major cards Well placed for a Nipponese nosh up after braving the hoards of teenage girls at MBK, 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.

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

**LARRY'S DIVE (AMERICAN/MEXICAN)**  
8 Sukhumvit Soi 22 (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 10am-1am, www.larrysdive.com, Tel. 02-663 4563, Visa, Master cards  
A beach-styled bar and restaurant complete with tropical fish murals and even a dive shop on premises. Popular with expats, Larry's is a great place for beer drinking, pool shooting, catching up on the latest gossip and stuffing down



some of the excellent BBQ ribs, nachos, burritos and such (Bt75-250). Happy hour 4-8pm.

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

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

**ATHENA (GREEK)**  
594 Ekamai Rd, Sukhumvit Soi 63. (Skytrain Ekkamai), Mon-Fri, 3pm-midnight Sat 11am-midnight, www.athenabangkok.com, Tel. 02-392 7644, major cards except JCB  
To our knowledge the only Greek restaurant in Bangkok, with a real Greek chef to boot. Mediterranean decor, real olive oil, Greek wine and plate smashing on Friday and Saturday nights. Plenty of parking space on site.

## BANGLAMPHU

### SHOSHANA

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

**TAKETEI**  
Nana Plaza Inn, about 10 metres off Khaosan, 11:30am-1am, major credit cards. With a Thai chef who has more than 30 years experience in preparing Japanese cuisine, fresh seafood brought in every afternoon, and a special section in the back with tatami mats, Taketei offers an authentic taste of Japan at a fraction of the usual price. Especially popular is the "Sushi Set" (Bt160), which comes with seven different kinds of sushi and three cucumber rolls. They have also created their own version of vegetarian rolls, serve up juicy steaks, green tea ice cream, and have 12 set menus on offer all day.

**JOK POCHANA RESTAURANT**  
Samsen Soi 2, 6pm-4am (and beyond), Tel. 02-282 9396, no cards  
This Thai-style seafood place has been feeding the faithful excellent food and late-night beers for well over a decade. Jok Pochana offers big prawns, crab sausage, steamed mussels, and decent prices — try the Bt60 tom yum kung, nature's tastiest hangover cure. More importantly for some, once the doors have closed on the bars of Khaosan, you can still sit on the street here eating and drinking until the wee, wee hours of the morning. A large Heineken is only Bt70 — only a couple of baht more than the shop.

**HEMLOCK**  
56 Phra Athit Road, near Peachy guesthouse, 4pm to midnight, closed Sunday, Tel. 02-282 7507, no cards  
Hemlock was the first of the "arts cafes" on Phra Athit Road and is still the most successful, because the food is excellent and cheap — in spite of its swanky appearance when you peer in

longingly from outside. An unusual feature of the extensive menu is a selection of "Ancient" dishes like the "Grand Lotus Rice" (Bt80), with spiced rice cooked with prawn, pork, egg and Chinese sausage wrapped in a lotus leaf and served with a sweetish mint sauce. Lovely stuff. They have some pretty inexpensive wines as well.

**NA PHRA LAN**  
18 Na Phra Lan Road, 10am-10pm, closed on Sundays "It's An Art Café" read the name cards for this restaurant, which is across the street from the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Housed in a beautiful old wooden building, the restaurant serves up plenty of dishes in the range of Bt40-60, such as "Rice with fried fish, garlic and pepper", and "Spicy, fluffy catfish salad." They also host regular exhibitions by apprenticing artists of nearby Silpakorn 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.





Bangkok is rightly famous for its nightlife, offering all types and flavours 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

## TSUKIYO

Soi Ekamai 28, Sukhumvit 63 (100m from Phetburi Rd), Tel. 06-527-0099, 01-511 4755, no cards, [www.tsukiyobkk.com](http://www.tsukiyobkk.com), closed Mondays Tucked away in the depths of Soi Ekamai this summerhouse-turned-bar opened last March and has seen continued popularity under the watchful eye of Octo, divemaster-turned-DJ. Downstairs is an open sprawl of cushions and platforms in what looks like the world's most tasteful carpet. Upstairs is aircon-cooled funk. Not a place for raving, more of a lounging place to sink beers and eat yummy food. Kitchen closes at midnight.

SIN BAR

Rooftop above Ball in Hand, 18 Sukhumvit Soi 4, Tel. 02-265 64840, major cards, [www.sin-bangkok.com](http://www.sin-bangkok.com) Slick and cool rooftop bar just down the soi from Nana plaza. The operators of Sin have raised the bar on 4 soi nightlife, steering clear of the beer-bar/go-go bar, flesh-for-sale concept, by opening a stylish modern bar. Great view of the neighbourhood and a decent menu to boot. The club

downstairs is sometimes closed but worth a check when it is open as the owner employs top-line DJs.

## 87 PLUS

Conrad Bangkok, All Seasons Place,  
87 Wireless Road, Tel: 02 690 9999,  
[www.conradhotels.com](http://www.conradhotels.com), major cards  
87 has re-launched as 87-Plus.  
Live music is the new plus, with a  
resident band, plus regular DJ sets.  
Slick and sumptuous club/bar/  
restaurant with a 'World Food/Global  
grooves' theme.

## MYSTIQUE

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

A truly sumptuous palace of a club based on a New York venue of the same name from back in the day (we were there of course). This three storied Bangkok version comes complete with five (yes FIVE) VIP areas overlooking the main dancefloor, a tank that used to have jellyfish but now has baby sharks, the very purple 'Purple Room' and a Moroccan rooftop area for chilling and sucking on sheesha pipes. Musical flavours vary from room to room and night to night including



# THE JOY OF SIX

SIX YEARS OF STRENGTH TO SET THE TRENDS AND RAISE THE BANGKOK NIGHTLIFE.

## Friday 16th December

COME JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE SIX YEARS IN THE GAME, FEATURING AWARD WINNING DJ'S, TV AS THEY MIX THE BEST OF THE IMAGES INTO A NIGHT OF MUSIC.



WE'VE BEEN IN THE GAME FOR SIX YEARS IN THE GAME, WE'VE BEEN A TEAM ADDICTIVE AND CUTE UP DAVID'S Q BAR OF MUSIC AND SOUND!





### Monday 5th DJ Patrick

MASSIVE BASS, HIGH ENERGY

### Tuesday 6th DJ Clement

DIRECT FROM PARIS, AKA THE DJ OF THE NIGHT AND PULSATING BEATS

### Wednesday 7th DJ Yoda

ROLLING STONE BROTHERS DJS TO SEE BEFORE YOU LEAVE



DON'T MISS THIS GROUND-BREAKING, STRETCHING DJ DOING THINGS ALONGSIDE DJS CRAV AND OFAYI, PLUS CLEVER BARTENDERS AND THE USUAL OLD SCHOOL HIP HOP Ghetto FABULOUS NONSENSE!

### Tuesday 13th DJ Penny Slama

GLOBE TROTTER, HIGH ENERGY

### Tuesday 20th DJ Manu Boulli

Q BAR WELCOMES DJ'S WHO SHIFTS SERIALS ON... YOU GOT IT

### Thursday 22nd DJ Saeed Younan

LIQUID THUNDERBOLTS PROUND TO ANNOUNCE THE LAUNCH OF RETRO, A MONTHLY PARTY HOSTED BY DJ SASIT, FEATURING SPECIAL GUEST DJ SAEED YOUNAN, AS A TOP INTERNATIONAL DJ AND PRODUCER, SAEED YOUNAN HAS DEVELOPED INTO A FORTH ARTIST OF THE GLOBAL DANCE SCENE, CARRYING A SOUND ALL HIS OWN, MIXING SEAMLESSLY BETWEEN



HOUSE, TECHNO, TRIBAL, AND EXCLUSIVE GROOVES. HE'S HAD NUMEROUS TOP 10 HITS AND A #1 SPOT ON BILLBOARD DANCE CHART.

DON'T MISS THIS WORLD CLASS HOUSE DJ!



### Tuesday 27th I'm dreaming of a BLACK Xmas

Q BAR PRESENTS THE SPECIAL PARTY HEADLINERS PHILIP, PHILIP, AND PHILIP, WITH DJS CRAV, OFAYI AND TIA. BANGKOK'S FIRST BLACK XMAS WITH ROCK

### Saturday 31st New Year's Eve

ALL QBAR ROCKERS COME TOGETHER





SPECIAL OFFER: 10% OFF ALL BOTTLES OF CHIVAS



## NightTripping

hip hop, funky house, drum 'n bass and eclectic world grooves. Bt650 on Friday and Saturday gets you in with two drinks, Sunday to Thursday no cover. Closed Monday.

### TOKYO JOE'S

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

### CHAMPAGNE ROOM

8 Sukhumvit Rd, (next to the Marriott), 02-656-9058, major cards, wi-fi Luxuriously decorated upstairs bar right at the start of Sukhumvit (or the end if you're coming from Cambodia.) Eight booths sporting their own theme from old Siam to the Snake Room that are big enough for large groups. Excellent bar with plenty of the bubbly but don't walk in without a credit card or a wealthy mate. This place is aimed at top-end loungers and business types out to impress, as are the many attractive hostesses.

### 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](http://www.cm2bkk.com), major cards Popular and notorious disco in the basement of the Novotel Hotel, CM2 attracts an international crowd from the rooms above and the streets outside who cluster around whiskey bottles and ogle the beautiful people. The main room showcases the resident All Stars Band, playing from Friday to Wednesday. For the more aurally aggressive there's the Boom Room playing Hip-Hop or Sensations Karaoke for those who like the sound of their own crooning. Mondays are Lady's night (free entry and drink for chicks), Thursday's belong to DJ Lek & Kid spinning Hip-Hop.

### Q BAR

34 Sukhumvit Soi 11. Take quick left at end of the soi. (Skytrain Nana) major cards, Tel. 02-252 3274, [www.qbarbangkok.com](http://www.qbarbangkok.com), major cards except DinersA 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](http://www.witchstavern.com) Equally good for lounging or partying, the Tavern is pub style with matching menu (Bt85-700) items such as fish and chips, pies and steaks as well as Thai dishes. Regular and varied live bands playing everything from jazz to hip hop. Ladies night on Wednesday with free girl's drinks from 6pm to 10pm and bingo with cash prizes. Happy hour from 5-9pm.

### RCA

#### Royal City Avenue (RCA),

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

### NARCISSUS

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

### TAWANDANG

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

for.

### BROWN SUGAR

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

### BAMBOO BEER BAR

Sukhumvit Soi 3, Tel. 02-253 2462, music from 9pm, [www.bambooberbar.com](http://www.bambooberbar.com), major cards Primarily a spacious pool room but also has live music from The Fox, as well as performances from visiting guests. The Fox, led by Chor On, have been around forever and there probably isn't a song out there that they don't know, and with seven people in the band diversity is their strength. Good simple food and plenty of girls to talk to. A popular starter before heading off to less slaubrious 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.

### TITANIUM

Sukhumvit Soi 22, major cards Plenty of novelty in this upmarket drinker. Flat plasma-screen TVs showing silent movies, a walk-in ice-chest vodka bar that's kept at 10 degrees below, an all-girl band performing nightly, and saucy waitresses sporting Vietnamese-style ao dais. Not the cheapest place for a drink but will impress the visitor to Bangkok.

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

#### 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. Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup> sees Ana Garden's Full Moon Party, and don't miss their City of Angels party on Thursday the 24<sup>th</sup>

#### MUZZIK CAFÉ

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

#### LUCIFERS

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

#### NORIEGA'S

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel 02-232813, 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](http://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](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](http://www.sphinxthai.com), major cards  
Hidden at the shadowy end of Soi 4, this is the place to refuel. The menu maximizes on excellent Thai and Farang food. Broad cocktail menu along with ancient Egyptian-Godfather ambience is good for wining, dining and 69ing.

#### DISTIL


64th Fl., The Dome, State Tower, Silom Rd.  
Tel. 02 624 9555, 12pm-1.00am, major cards  
Claiming to be Bangkok's only specialty bar, Distil encompasses an authentic malt whiskey bar, oyster bar, wine bar, cigar bar and outdoor terrace. Truly a bar to wallow in luxurious excess, one can stuff oneself on fine de claire oysters from France and beluga caviar from Iran, washed down by 42 Below vodka or one of a huge selection



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# NightTripping

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](http://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 know as "The Korean Bar" this place is popular with teachers and other expats on Fridays and Saturdays. Remarkable because it has stayed the same when so much around it has changed. The upstairs bar features free pool and an open-air balcony offering a view of the road and temple below. Excellent Korean food, grilled seafood and cool beers.

### CAFÉ DEMOC

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

### PRANAKORN

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

### GULLIVER'S TRAVELLER'S TAVERN

Across from police station, Tel. 02-629 1988-9, major cards, [www.gulliverbangkok.com](http://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

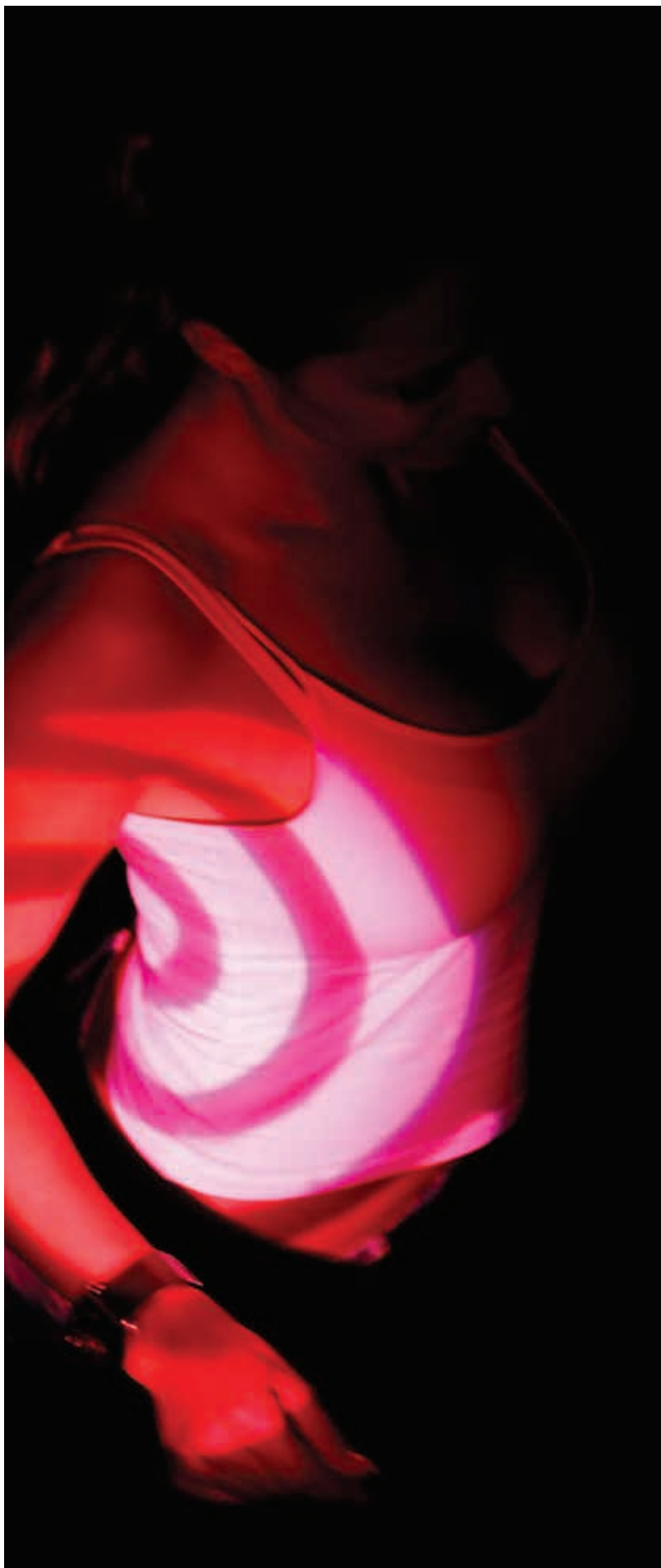
149 Soi Rambutree, just off Chakrapong Road, Tel.02-629 4443, visa, master cards Cool juxtaposition between Thai wood carvings, murals, paintings and contemporary grooves, Hip-Hop and D&B. Come midnight on the weekends, the place is usually so full you'd almost need an electric cattle-prod to belly up to the bar. Ladies night on Tuesday from 5-10pm.

### BAGHDAD CAFÉ

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

### BRICK BAR

Back of Buddy Lodge on Khaosan Rd, Tel.02-629 4747, 02-629 4848, [www.buddylodge.com](http://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.

# KANCHANABURI

# BUILDING BRIDGES

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

## PLACES TO CRASH:

On arrival at the main bus station, negotiate for a samlor or motorcycle taxi to take you to the river area (Mae Nam Kai Road) for Bt30-50. Here you'll find the best in budget accommodation and amongst them is the **Apple Guesthouse** next to the intersection of Mae Nam Kwae and Nam Hip Oi Road. Built under a huge mango tree, this friendly guesthouse offers clean and airy single bungalows with fan and bath for Bt150 a night and doubles for Bt200. The guesthouse restaurant is excellent and offers cooking courses for those who can't get enough. Too bad it's usually full. A couple of hundred metres north along the same road is the larger and busier **Jolly Frog Guesthouse** at 28 Soi China. There are 50 rooms in this bamboo motel, along with a good tourist information service and a popular restaurant. Rooms range from singles with shared bath (Bt70) to doubles with A/C and bath Bt290. A hundred metres or so along the same road is the quieter and smaller **Sugar Cane One** guesthouse (Soi Pakistan, Mae Nam Road). Raft rooms with private bath and veranda go for Bt200-400. A pleasant restaurant with friendly staff overlooks the river. Nearby and set off the road on the banks of the River Kwai is **The C & C River Kwai Guesthouse** (Soi Angrit). Here you'll find singles with shared bath for Bt60 and doubles with bath for Bt120. The grounds are green and spacious and it's a fine spot for taking a dip in the famous River Kwai. There are lots more choice places to stay along this strip, like **Sam's Guesthouse** – fan rooms have screen windows so they can be noisy; air-con bungalows on the river go for Bt350.

## DAYTRIPPING:

Mountain biking, hilltribe treks,

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

A worthwhile afternoon trip is the **Tiger Temple**. Most tour operators can sort out a pick-up truck taxi (Bt150, leaves around 3pm) to take you 50km west to the temple, where tigers roam free under the watchful eye of the temple's abbot, who keeps them calm while a pack of tourists tentatively stroke and photograph the fearsome creatures. The tigers were born in captivity, abandoned or rescued by the monk as cubs. Though they may appear docile and friendly don't step on their tails or wear red. A sign at the entrance informs visitors that the authorities bear no responsibility for injury or death.

The **JEATH War Museum** on Pak Phraek Road contains replicas of the long bamboo huts used to house allied POW's during the occupation

## WAY TO GO:

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

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



and within the bamboo huts are crude but effectively crafted life-size models of starved and emaciated POW's struggling to survive. Open from 8:30am till 6pm daily, the admission is Bt30.

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

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

## NIGHTRIPPING:

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

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



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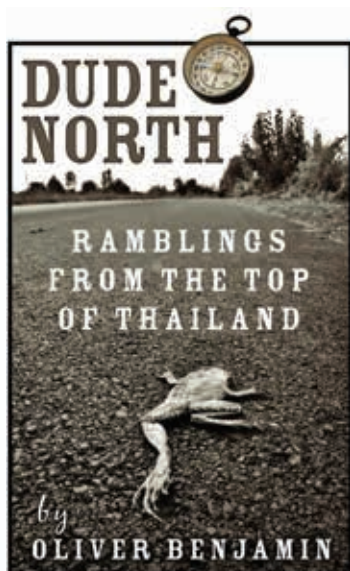


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# NORTHERN HIGHLIGHTS

*If, as Prime Minister Thaksin suggests, Chiang Mai is on its way to becoming the IT, aviation and tourist hub of Southeast Asia, then think of this column as your hub of hubs or "hubba hubba." In this column, Oliver Benjamin will be sharing with you the wealth of my knowledge and highly-biased viewpoints. Feel free to dissent. To quote Jeff Lebowsky, the greatest dude of all time: "Well, that's just, like, your opinion, man. Lotta ins, lotta outs. Is this a weekday?"*

It could easily become the Woodstock or Glastonbury of Thailand – with loads of accommodation, wide open fields, and year-round droves of spoiled hippies.

Now's the time to set aside your fears of sharp rocks and choking to death on muddy water because it's **river rafting** season in northern Thailand. Nothing's more life-affirming than taming the liquid highways of Mother Nature, with the Pai River and the Mae Taeng being the two perennial favorites. Any local travel agent can set you up. Accommodation, food, and next-of-kin notification sometimes included. Visit [siamrivers.com](http://siamrivers.com) and [tinyurl.com/7b4wr](http://tinyurl.com/7b4wr) for more info.

Seems like just yesterday that Nimmanhaemin Road's biggest attraction was one of those newfangled video rental shops. Now it's the downtown epicentre of coolsville in Chiang Mai. Celebrating its rags-to-riches glory, the **Sixth Annual Nimmanhaemin Art & Design Promenade** promises to attract the finest artists with black,

It's about time the **songtaew** mafia finally relented and allowed Chiang Mai to run proper municipal buses with real seats, fixed routes, and fixed prices. Thanks, *Al Kaporn*. Now the city can finally enter the modern world, along with the likes of Sukhothai, Kathmandu, and Zanzibar.

The recent gratis **benefit concert in Pai** went off like gangbusters. Over 20,000 people showed up. And not only was it the first time in decades that Carabao and Caravan played on the same stage, but they did so for free (even though Ad Carabao did try to flog his "all the great flavour of whiskey with none of the alcohol" energy drink). Special thanks to organisers Suwat and Lot, who not only provided everyone with 12 hours of mud-stomping joy, but also showed that Pai is the perfect place for a music festival.

thickly framed eyeglasses and androgynous haircuts the city has to offer. Forget about shopping, this is a place to see and be seen. Which probably explains all the eyeglasses. December 2-5 on Nimmanhaemin Soi 1. Lots of music and shows too.

Dreaming of a **white Christmas**? Sorry, Nazi, Jesus Day is for everybody. Expect to see every restaurant in town hosting some kind of Christ-crossed event. But if you want to do it traditional style (*sans* durian fruitcake and 1,000-year old eggnog), you will have to visit a stalwart *farang* haunt. Sandy (Claus) at the Irish Pub throws a great bash every year, with live music and a huge buffet. Come back in a week for New Year's, if you can move by then. Also check out Art Café, the Pub, and True Blue.

Looking for something more posh? Hit the incomparable Sheraton Hotel buffet. For something gastro-colonial, the Gymkhana Club features an annual Christmas competition and party (053 24 1035 for more info). New Year's, however, is probably best spent hurling firecrackers and stomach contents into the river at one of the many popular riverside restaurants. Reserve early.

Go Putt-Putt **Crazy Golf** course is just the place to go for the holidays, especially if you've got wee ones. You can play all day for one low price and the internationally-themed holes will make you feel as if you actually went somewhere. This is contingent, of course, on how much booze you drink. Consequently, beer, wine and

cocktails are buy two-get-one-free in December (if you show this article.) Tel: 053-851643-4. [www.goputt-putt.com](http://www.goputt-putt.com)

Had enough *tittilateture* by resident *sexpats*? Grab Steven Epstein's instructive and funny **Lao Folktales** instead. Most feature the inveterate trickster Xieng Mieng, the supreme fooler of grandiose rulers – he could probably go toe to toe with Thailand's current CEO. Steve's hosting his first book signing at Suriwong Book Center Dec. 10 at high noon. There won't be a hooker with a heart of gold anywhere in sight.

Suggestions? *Slurs*? Visit [www.dudenorth.co.nr](http://www.dudenorth.co.nr) This column is info-powered by



# 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

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THAPAE GATE

Thapae Gate Books

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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 yе 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 Nimanhem Rd hosts exhibitions of Thailand's top artists, as does Chiang Mai University's **Art and Culture Museum** at the corner of Nimanhem 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 & Kotchasan, opposite Tha Phae Gate) is the spot to camp, in air-conditioned comfort, when your group can't agree on what to nosh, as the menu covers Thai, American, Italian and Mexican. The city's claim to noodle fame is khao soi, a bowl of squiggly egg noodles doused with a mild Shan-Yunnanese curry. Khao soi comes in many styles in Chiang Mai, but for the original head to **Khao Soi Fuang Fah** (Soi 1, Charoen Prathet Rd, near the Ban Haw Mosque); the khao mok kai (chicken biriyani) here is cheap and filling, too. For the fanciest version in the city, try the huge platter of khao soi and associated condiments served at **Just Khao Soi**, Charoen Prathet Rd. At Huan Soonthari enjoy the atmospheric wooden house with a river view, decent Thai grub from the North and Northeast and live Northern Thai music by its greatest living proponent, owner Soonthari Wetchaynon. Carrot-heads can choose from 35 vegetarian restaurants. The best and also the cheapest is the **Vegetarian Centre of Chiang Mai** at 14 Mahidon Road, on the way to the airport, open Sun-Thurs, 6am-2pm. Veggie Thai doesn't come any better or any cheaper than this. We know you're missing spicy curries from the deep south (Thailand, that is), so give your tongue another thrashing at **Khrua Phuket Laikhram** (1/10 Suthep Rd, opposite the south side of CMU). Try the khao phat po taek, 'broken fishtrap fried rice,' made with mixed seafood and slivered kaffir lime leaves. Farang food is no problem at all – and much

cheaper than Bangkok. Build your own sandwich or baguette at the **Amazing Sandwich** (252/3 Phra Pokklao Rd), a minute's walk from the THAI city office. Da Stefano (2/1-2 Chiang Moi Kao Rd), just 'round the corner from Tha Phae Gate, is a popular Italian restaurant, with rustic-chic ambience, efficient service, and delicious pastas and pizza. If you're on a strict budget, head for the much cheaper, Thai-owned Italian **Lang Mo** (the name means "Italian Behind the University"), down a tiny alley on the south side of Suthep Rd. Skip the pizza and go for some of the best pastas you'll find in Chiang Mai. **Jerusalem Falafel** (35/3 Moon Muang Rd) does Jewish mother-style home-cooked falafels, chicken-liver sandwiches, salads and home-made pastries.

### NIGHTTRIPPING:

While there's a clutch of seedy hostess bars bordering the east moat and especially along Loi Kroh Road, and a few gay bars around town, Chiang Mai's nightlife can't compete with Bangkok's for debauchery. Nevertheless, the city is lively after dark. Expect closing times to be 1am (or sometimes earlier these days) despite national entertainment laws allowing bars in 'tourist centres' to stay open 'till 2am. Chiang Mai police are notoriously corrupt. Tourists and Chiang Mai University students shimmy the night away to live Farang pop at **Riverside Bar & Restaurant** (9-11 Charoenrat Rd) where you can also dine on Western

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

## 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).

### NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

# SHINE ON SUNSHINE

It's the festive season when Santa comes to visit all the good children before they turn bad for New Year 's Eve. No chance of a white Christmas here unless it's on a white-sand beach. You'll be carving into mud crabs at the dinner table instead of turkey and Santa's going to be squeezing down the air conditioning ducts unless your beachside bungalow has a chimney. Let's not forget though that December 25<sup>th</sup> is celebrated for the birthday of a dude called Jesus. Around 2005 years ago he was getting around in sandals with an untrimmed beard, long hair and the Aramaic equivalent of Speedos, preaching love and peace to everyone. Slap on a couple of tattoos and he'd look like one of the old hippies walking around Had Rin. Of course any old hippie on Had Rin will tell you straight that December 25<sup>th</sup> is actually in celebration of Saturnalia, a pagan festival that was co-opted into Christianity in fourth century. Astute scholars will tell you that Saturnalia is actually a Roman festival worshipping the god Saturn, but you don't meet many of them on Koh Pangan. Whether you're on Thailand's sunny shores to escape the winter or you just can't stand the family at this time of year, December is a great time to visit and sees tourist arrivals jump. By mid-month the rains have finished up in the gulf, and in Phuket, the Germans have commandeered all the poolside lounge chairs, the English are bitching about the beer being too cold and the Israelis are trying to bargain down the prices in 7-11s across the nation. It's a grand time of warm weather, cool evenings and enough sunshine for everyone and with the twin celebrations of Christmas and a welcome party for 2006, December may be the drunkest month of the calendar.

## 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.

## KOHTAO

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

## KOH SAMET

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

## KOH PHI PHI

Possibly one of the world's most beautiful places, the area around Phi Phi was used in both The Man with the Golden Gun and backpacking odyssey The Beach. Phi Phi actually consists of two islands, both steep limestone formations with a small section of flat land between them, on which Phi Phi village was nestled before the wave hit. 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.

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## 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,

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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.

### 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 MOIST PLACES

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.

## NIGHTRIPPING & 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.

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# KOHSAMUI BEACHBONANZA

It doesn't matter what time of year it is on Samui the island is always ready to cater to the various tourists who grace its shores. The whole gamut of holiday experiences are available from 5-star opulence and indulgent spa treatments, to beach-shack chill out and all night parties. As a renowned and developed tourist destination, Samui is guaranteed to satisfy all tastes and budgets – what ever your needs.



street-side chair at **Cafe Uno**.

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

**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 Kilkeny, and Filippino cover band Ovada. Try **POD** for aircon and cool cocktails or **Christy's** for their ladyboy revue, which is funny and free. The big clubs in Chaweng are still the **Reggae Pub**, for Euro-beat and drinking games, and the **Green Mango**, for hard house and classic party tunes. Newcomer London-style **Mint Bar** has brought island nightlife up to par with cool tunes and celebrity DJs most months. **Penny Lane**, situated in the heart of town plays classic rock tracks and serves tasty food. Also on the blues and food kick, **Springer Pub** is in south Chaweng. **Bar Solo** plays US club sounds and half the club is outdoors. The latest club to open in north Chaweng is **Pandora**. It's a touch of al fresco Mediterranean and is the only club that has a sauna, Jacuzzi and a pool with fibre optic lights which 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**

## 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



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(07-742 4666) from Bt300-800 with fan. Or try **Rose Garden** (07-745 8116) for comfort in heavenly floral surroundings at Bt400-950. Spa (07-723 0855) has new rooms for Bt800, or Bt3,000 with a sea view and an upstairs private deck. **Spa** also has one of the finest restaurants on the island, with a huge menu which must be annoying to all the fasting crew that hang out there. **Wanta** (07-742 4550) has fantastically equipped bungalows for Bt1,200-2,000 with wide-screen TV's and triple-wide beds.

#### FEEDING TIME:

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

#### NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

### BIG BUDDHA AND BAN RAK PLACES TO CRASH:

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

#### FEEDING TIME:

For a great Western-style stuffing try **Elephant and Castle** – maybe the best Sunday roast on the island

– or **Aux Amis** for some refined French grub. Every Sunday **Secret Garden Bungalows** has live music with a bar and BBQ, which attracts many expats. If you're looking for a great area for sunset gazing, this is definitely the island's most technicolour spot.

### BOPHUT VILLAGE PLACES TO CRASH:

A peaceful oasis, this quaint fishing village is the perfect middle ground between Chaweng and Maenam. The best deal is **Rasta Bay** for Bt250. **Papa Joes** has a dorm for Bt150, but if you want to splash out a little more try **Eden Bungalows** situated in a lush garden with a pool for Bt800-Bt1600. In Bophut, most shops and cafes have converted the rooms above to luxury apartment/rooms. One of the best bargains is **The Ayuthaya Garden Bar** offering air-con, fridge, cable and hot water with views: Bt800-1200. Also worth a look is **The Red House**, which has balconies facing the beach to watch the boats come in. It also has a great roof garden with 360-degree views for Bt1,650, with cable and air-con. The beach area has many other bungalow complexes. Further along, try the **Gecko** home of the mellow house groove "Sunday session" which goes until late; rooms start at Bt1,000. Other operations worth checking out further up the beach are **Freehouse**, **Cactus** and **Za Zen**.

#### FEEDING TIME:

This is the best place to eat on Samui and, apart from catching ferries to Koh Phangan, eating and relaxing is all you can do. There is a plethora of fantastic restaurants, from traditional Thai through French and Italian, to Middle Eastern. **The Happy Elephant** boasts the best in sea food, La Baya and Juzza's for pizza. Other must tries are **Two Tigers** for real home-cooked cakes tasty cookies, fresh juice and acoustic music and **La Siren** for a great French fodder. For something totally different there's **Healthy and Fun**, which is part vegetarian restaurant, part yoga and healing centre. They also show art films on occasion. Hit **Billabong** if you want a taste of down under.

#### NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

### MAENAM PLACES TO CRASH:

**Maenam Resort** (07-7425 116) has bungalows starting at Bt1200-1800; **Cleopatra's Palace** (07-7425 486) is Bt400 or Bt800 with aircon. **The Fah Hotel** is like a slice of the Florida

Keys with a Thai twist and loads of charm. It has luxury rooms starting at Bt1,500, or for a real romantic treat and love inn, book yourself into the "Honeymoon Suite" for Bt2,000.

#### FEEDING TIME:

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

#### DAYTRIPPING:

The latest craze is the **Canopy Adventure** (07-741 4150) where you slide along ropes to various tree houses above the coconut trees and a waterfall for Bt1,400 per head. They offer a free shuttle service to the site. For those who like to take it a little easier you could spend the afternoon at the **Butterfly Garden** (07-742 4020) at Nattien Beach. They have spiders as well. A great way to see the island is to take a Samui Safari (07-741 5123-5). You can choose half or whole-day trips. They take you snorkelling, elephant trekking, 4x4 offroading, and to watch Thai cooking and even coconut milk-making. There is now a world-class golf course on the island, the **Santiburi Golf and Country Club** (07-741 8557) and **Samui Golf** (07-724 5384) can teach you how to swing and choose the right bat. For those who think golf is a great way to ruin a good walk, try **Yogi Bear Ha Ha** (01-787 9148). Situated on a back road between Bohput and Chaweng, **Red Bicycles** (07-726 7202) can rent you a mountain bike and take you on a tour through the jungle and more. A less strenuous way to see the island is from the sea. **Kia Ora** (07-745 2264) **Catamaran** will take you out to sea with a fully stocked bar. **Samui Quads and Paintball** (01-371 0744) has quads and paintball. If big-game fishing is a lure for you, then talk to **Mr Ung's** (07-723 0114). At **Samui Crocodile Farm**, located near the airport, you can watch a brave fool stick his head in the jaws of a prehistoric monster. Cold-blooded, reptilian capers and human derring-do are also on the cards at the **Samui Snake Farm** (07- 741 8680-1). For the morbid soul, **Luang Pho Daeng** was a monk whose undecomposed body is in a glass case for viewing at the **Khunaram Temple** near the **Namuang Waterfall**. Most travel agents do daily trips to Koh Tao, probably one of the most beautiful places on earth. **Sea Breeze** (07-742 5607) **tours** and **Aquademia** (01-091 0107) can help. Bring a copy of **Farang** to **Aquademia** and get 10% off your booking.

#### ROADTRIPPING:

The two main taxis are green and yellow aircon saloons and songthaews (shared pickups). A saloon costs about Bt300 anywhere on the island for two people, and more if you've other friends tagging along. For short trips expect to pay Bt150/200. Make sure you haggle over the price first, or have the meter running. Songthaews are Bt50-100 for the longer journeys and Bt20 for short trips. You can also hire one for a round-the-island trip for around Bt1,000. Motorbike taxis, however, can work out as the cheapest form of travel. Renting a motorbike is Bt150 per day, but remember that road accidents are the number-one cause of death in Thailand. With an average of four deaths on Samui and 200 serious accidents a month you are risking your life to ride one. There's no green cross code, or crosswalks on the roads of Samui. And to add insult to injury, if you get knocked off by a drunken local because he is jabbering on his mobile phone while driving an overpowered SUV, you will pay for the privilege – as much as the local bullies in brown think they can get out of you. Renting a Jeep is a much safer option. Budget is insured so is your best bet, if you don't want to end your visit in tears.

#### WAY TO GO

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

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

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

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



# KOHPANGAN FIREISLAND

Koh Pangan starts to buzz in December as the place begins to fill up for the incoming high season. The rains usually stop in the first week and from there on after it gets busier by the day. One reason for this steady influx of thousands of island explorers is the monster party fest that is the Christmas/New Year's Eve season; though now there is nearly as large a proportion that comes here for the nature and outdoor sports. Most folk find a place to plot up and stay until they can't extend their ticket home anymore, so if you are looking for a long term place, this is the time to get the best ones.



## CHOOSING YOUR BED:

Koh Pangan has a great variety of accommodation options ranging from budget beach huts to aircon palaces. Most of the old skool Bt80-100 huts have been replaced with Bt200-300 fan rooms and newer more luxurious Bt400-800 fan rooms with hot water and posh finishings; aircon rooms go for Bt550-4500 depending on how flash they are; a lot of gaffs now have swimming pools, saunas and spas.

Many resorts on KPN rely on you eating there once or twice a day to keep the room prices low. Try to respect this, or come to an arrangement before they kick you out for a better earner! Check out [www.phangan.info](http://www.phangan.info) for accommodation bookings.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

### Had Rin:

There's an untold number of 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 are loads to choose from, though Paradise Bungalows and the Backpackers Lodge have a good variety of rooms and Sea Garden and Jonathan are classy joints. Drop Inn also has a new hotel with spa and penthouse rock star suites.

**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 is classy Coco-Huts and some old skool bargains, Sari Kantang is an excellent find on Leela Beach.

## BAN TAI:

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.

## 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.

Starting from Thong Sala, in Nai Wok Bay there's old favourite Tranquil next to Grand Sea Resort with posh Thai cottages and a great swimming pool. In Sri Thanu Village, Chai Country is a top place where Chai takes

guests on unique day trips. Had Chao Phao is home to high class Phangan Cabana, great value See Thanu and bohemian Sea Flower. The Village Green resort has a few great rooms and serves fantastic euro – Asian cuisine.

Had Son resort is a cracker, on its own beach with a full range of rooms and a fantastic swimming pool.

Had Yao is a lively beach with some great bars and beachside restaurants. Sandy Bay, and Had Yao are popular top end resorts while Over the Bay has peaceful hillside vistas and great seafood. A little further round is Had Salad, a beautiful deserted beach with good value Salad Huts and luxurious Salad Beach Resort.

Near Ko Ma, Mae Had has variety of huts with the best diving and snorkelling; Island View Cabana and Wang Sai are good-uns.

## CHALOKLUM:

Chaloklam has some well-



## The Party Continues December 16th

Party season is here again and Pangan will be filling up with thousands of revellers counting down for the massive New Year's Eve celebration. There will be outdoor events throughout December starting with **Black Moon Culture** on Dec 1st where the **Black Moon Posse** host one of the biggest outdoor parties in **Ban Kai Jungle**; with amazing décor, a multi level dancefloor, driving progressive beats, underground trance and **DJs Bang, Leung and Jonny**. Next up is the **Half Moon Festival** on December 9th that goes off in brilliantly decked out **Ban Tai** jungle with excellent facilities; expect hard progressive and quality trance from the ultra professional **Harmony** team.

The **Full Moon Party** is on the 16th Dec and is sure to be massive with a freaky festival atmosphere in the numerous clubs lining **Had Rin** beach (which are also open throughout the month). **Paradise** play quality house to progressive trance and **Drop-Inn** plays everything from rock to house anthems. **Zoom** and **Vinyl** are both Psy-Trance enclaves and **Cactus** plays an eclectic mix of R'n'B, house and rap. Sadly the **Big Boom** has closed as the lease ran out – so it's goodbye (for now) to the beach's House Music HQ. The **Orchid** is Had Rin's drum and bass central and at the top of the beach **Tommy's** plays full-on trance. The **Floating Bar** and the **Rock** are excellent venues to sit back and watch all the action whilst the **Outback** provides a refuge from the madness with quality tunes and food and an excellent choice of booze. And if after all that you still have the power, head to the **Backyard** for its infamous recovery party that goes on all day the day after the moon.

A week later the **Harmony** Team put on their second **Half Moon Festival** of the month on the 23rd and then **Black Moon Culture** goes off on the 29th to give you just enough time to dust down the flip flops and hit Had Rin for New Year's Eve – the yearly monster mash with around 25,000 punters welcoming in the new year with buckets of whiskey and coke. Other venues are the **Moon Set Party** at the **Pirate's Bar**, **Chao Phao Beach** on the west coast that goes off around three days before each Full Moon Party in a secluded private cove and is reminiscent of the old skool Pangan parties; the mountaintop **Amsterdam Bar** with parties just before full moon in **Woktum**, weekly **Apple Bar** parties every Sunday at Had Yao, live music at **Lizard Lounge** and **Tranquil** and the **Ban Sabai** daytime after parties that go off after any major event in a super sandy beachfront venue.

established resorts, a few cool bars and like many villages around Koh Pangan, there some nice houses to rent.

**Fanta** has nice beach gaffs and **Chaloklum Bay** is well run, has some great aircon rooms and is clean. **Had Khom** and **Coral Bay** are on their own secluded beach.

### NORTHEAST:

On the more remote side of the island there are three very popular beaches; **Bottle Beach** is Old Skool Pangan, **Than Sadet** is home to the island's biggest waterfall and **Thong Nai Pan** has all the trappings of Bohemian beach life. Further around, 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, Panviman and Baan Puri are posh gaffs that take Visa cards and Thong Ta Pan and Star Huts are good value.

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 **Sanctuary**, spa and health retreat with a real traveller vibe.

### DAYTRIPPING:

Koh Pangan is full of things to keep you occupied and most of it can be done on a few Baht. 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 water sports on offer including catamarans, kiteboarding, windsurfing and kayaks. There is also the **Jungle Gym** in Had Rin and Thong Sala, for fitness sessions and Thai Boxing tuition.

Koh Pangan 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, elephant treks, an ATV track, spa and meditation retreats to sort yer head out and it's also a pretty good place to do bugger all.

### ROADTRIPPING:

If you take a songthaew solo, you'll pay about Bt350 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 and Sri Thanu; Bt100 for Thong Nai Pan, Mae Had and Had Salad. Motorbike rentals start at Bt150 per day and dirtbikes start at Bt200 for a clapped out 125cc to Bt400 and up for a 250cc. 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.

### WAY TO GO:

**Bus:** about Bt450 including ferry. Buses leave Bangkok's tourist hives about 7pm and get you to Suratthani the next morning.

**Train:** first-class sleeper, Bt1,150 and second class sleeper Bt650. Leaves from Hualumpong station at 5 to 7pm and gets you to Suratthani the next morning. Busses then take you on a one hour ride to the ferry at Donzak unless you get the Sonserm ferry from Suratthani.

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



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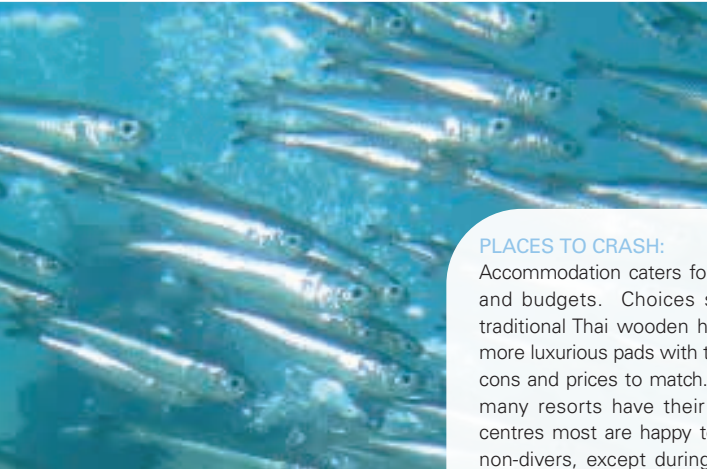
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# KOHTAO TANK HOGS

The end of the European holiday season marks quiet times for Tao and perhaps one of the best times to visit and avoid the crowds. Between now and low season in November great deals can be found on accommodation. Spend time relaxing in quiet bays and bars chatting to the large expat community while admiring the outstanding scenery.



## 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.

## 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 tropical garden. **Beach Club** and **Blue Diamond** are also good choices.

## WEST COAST

Sairee is the most popular area of the island, with the largest beach, where a full range of accommodation can be found. Starting from King Rama V Rock moving north, Intouch Resort is a traditional Thai-style resort with established huts and a relaxed atmosphere. AC Resort offers a choice of fan or aircon bungalows and a swimming pool. SB Cabana and Sairee Huts have good value centrally located wooden bungalows. Silver Sands offers old and new wooden bungalows set in a tropical garden. Simple Life Villas, an island institution with a loyal following, 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.

## 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

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**dive resort**  
koh tao : thailand





blessed with an abundance of marine life and easily accessible dive sites, many would be Cousteau's choose to start there dive careers here. A full range of courses can be completed with either SSI or PADI being the major certification standards. Tech Diving courses are 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. 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. You can now also try your hand at Bowling with the opening of Koh Tao Bowling.

#### 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 DJ Martin, 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 DJT 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. A new addition to the beach bar scene is simply, Pure, nestled between the rocks on Sairee beach promising unadulterated tunes and unrivalled energy. 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. Also new is Irish pub Dirty Nelly's, a welcome addition to the Mae Haad bar scene.

#### FEEDING TIME:

The choice of eateries on Koh Tao is impressive whether you're after tasty Thai tucker or your favourite Farang fodder. Puks Kitchen and Yang's, Mae Haad, offer a wide choice of cheap tasty Thai food as does Tongs in Sairee. 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. For fiery curries and funky tunes, Tattoo Bar is the place to be.

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. Papas Tapas restaurant near Sairee 7/11 has a hookah lounge and (Thailand's only?) absinthe bar! For funky Mexican El Gringo's, Mae Haad and Sairee, has a reputation for wicked Fajitas washed down with tots of tequila, excellent!. 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. Ripper Mate! 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.

#### WAYTO GO:

Trains leave Hualumphong 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 leaving from Bangkok early in the morning transporting you to the island by mid-afternoon. 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.

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# PHUKET ANDAMAN LOVEBOAT

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**

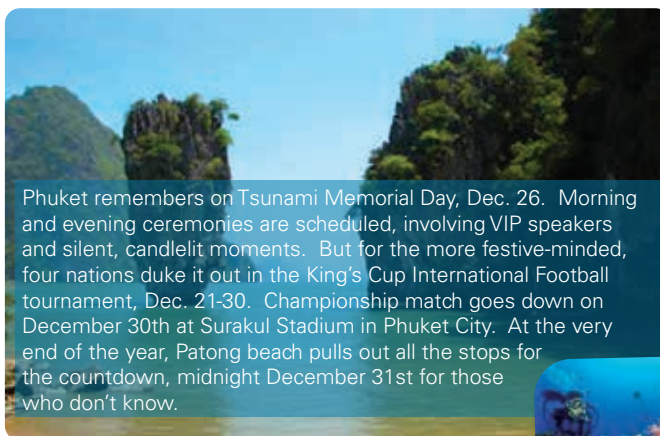
(Bt1,800; 07-629 6735). At the top end, few spots are more beautiful than the **The Avantika** (Bt4,600; 07-629 2801).

### 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



Phuket remembers on Tsunami Memorial Day, Dec. 26. Morning and evening ceremonies are scheduled, involving VIP speakers and silent, candlelit moments. But for the more festive-minded, four nations duke it out in the King's Cup International Football tournament, Dec. 21-30. Championship match goes down on December 30th at Surakul Stadium in Phuket City. At the very end of the year, Patong beach pulls out all the stops for the countdown, midnight December 31st for those who don't know.



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



## 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

# KRABI BUT NOT GROUCHY

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



## AO NANG

Putting Ao Nang on the global tourist map has by no means been a difficult task given its breathtaking beauty which commands one's attention instantly. With its rise to stardom being rapid and the dramatic increase in tourist arrivals looking more 'promising' each year, it's no wonder low season is longed for, particularly if you enjoy being engulfed in the torrid steaminess of the monsoon. You can be guaranteed beach vendors or katoys won't stalk you. Even at Ao Nang, still the most popular and developed of Krabi's beaches, you will be left alone to work on your tan. These are the reasons why the same faces can be seen back in the province year after year. Other benefits at this time are the cheap hotel rates on offer. Try Krabi **Seaview Resort** from Bt625, the beautifully situated **Somkiet Buri Resort** 300m from the beach for Bt1,200, or **Wanna's Place**, directly across from the beach from Bt900. Great for those travelling on a tighter budget, as you don't have to dive so deep into the purse to get great accommodation.

## NIGHTRIPPING:

The **Irish Rover Bar & Grill** is one of the few consistently busy bars in town with a friendly, laid-back atmosphere, draught beer and great fry-ups and roasts. **Encore Cafe** is the best place in town for live music. The old stayer, **Full Moon Bar**, smack bang in the middle of Ao Nang, is where

you just can't miss a minute of the action. Nearby is the new **JJ Sports Bar**, a cosy cafe-style bar screening football day and night; and inside Ao Nang Centre is **Pickles**, an Australian pub, fully equipped with BBQ, swimming pool, pool table and Aussie beer for Bt60; some good parties are to be had here. The **Last Fisherman Bar** is by far the most ambient beach location for sunset drinks that tend to stretch on into the night and the other old stayer **Luna Beach Bar**, famous for their 'any excuse' parties with great cocktail deals. For independent travellers, **Lost Pirate** is the place for the latest low-down.

## KRABI TOWN

This once slow-motion town has grown in fame due to its tranquillity, beauty and what some call 'real Thai-ness', the principal reason why it so entices. The capital of Krabi province is managing to preserve its

small-town charm even though it's morphing into a busy hub. A flurry of new hotels now provide alternatives for travellers who have had enough of dank guesthouse rooms but don't want to splash out. They're all pretty much the same 2-3 star standard providing average service, the most central being **Green House Hotel**, a stone's throw from the department store. Another is **Krabi Loma Hotel** on Chao Fah Rd with twin rooms at Bt650 with aircon, bath, satellite TV, mini-bar, Internet and pool. An oldie-but-goody is **Grand Tower Hotel**, conveniently located on the corner of Chao Fah Rd, near the favourite bars, from Bt250. If you don't want to dive into your purse so deeply then there's always the guesthouses of which Krabi has plenty. 'Old school' **Cha Guesthouse** offers the cheapest huts in town from Bt100. The charming **Dukes Cottage** has fan doubles for Bt280, a funky restaurant downstairs, a guitar for anyone wanting to strum a tune, and a jovial proprietor.

## FEEDING TIME:

When it comes to food in Krabi be assured to find anything your heart desires, if you look hard enough! For home-cooked meals **Popeye's** dishes up the heartiest grub, the chips are enough to write home about; here you'll find some savoury characters to chat to, or grab a traditional Danish hot dog at **Cafe Europa**. Popular with locals are the Korean Suki BBQs: simply seize

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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.

## New Year's Green

The Greenspirit team are back for another go at their Psy-Trance New Year's Eve party after last year's was cancelled because of the tragic tsunami. This year's event promises to make up for things though, with a great line-up including DJ Goblin (Psysex HOMmega), Azax Syndrom, DJ Shivajoerg, Trauma/Beat Hacker, Gataka/Sesto Sento, DJ Sabai Sabai and Paul Taylor playing over three days. Festivities start at 4pm on the 3 in a rubber plantation at Na Thai village, around four kilometres out of Ao Nang. Tickets go for 18 Euros (around Bt870) presale and 23 Euros at the gate but if you pass for Thai you can get in for Bt500. Check out [www.greenspiritkrabi.com](http://www.greenspiritkrabi.com) for more.



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# HUAHIN GREENTEASE

On the road near the airport is a billboard that reads "Hua Hin Queen of Tranquility." That's a good introduction to this easy-going city which sits prettily on the sandy lap of the Gulf of Thailand. A hit with golfers and families, Thais and Farangs, Hua Hin is also becoming increasingly popular with expat retirees and trendy young Thais in search of a breather from noxious Bangkok. The biggest tourist-puller is the six golf courses, some of which are on a par with the best courses in SE Asia. On weekdays green fees range from Bt1,200 for the oldest course, the **Royal Hua Hin** (built in 1927) up to Bt2,500 for the **Springfield Royal**. Even when you add on another Bt600 for the cart and Bt200 for the caddy it's still a sweet deal.

But if you prefer to play in a bigger sand trap, there's always the beach that rims the city. Pony-riding, banana-boating, and lazing around getting a lobster tan are the three paramount pleasures here. It's also swell for a breezy nightcap.

**Khao Takiap**, or "Chopstick Mountain," is a dozen km's or so south of town and boasts a hilltop temple and a hyperactive community of monkeys, along with a cluster of Buddha images sitting strangely beside models of dinosaurs. Great views of the sea and fishing vessels here remind one that up until around 1992 Hua Hin was but a humble fishing hamlet and summerhouse for the Royal Family; and His Majesty the King still spends a lot of his time at the palace here. In homage to some of the special projects initiated at His Majesty's

behest, there's a supermarket called **Golden Place** where Thais queue up to buy fruit and produce from these royal projects.

Hua Hin's reputation as a health centre is bolstered by numerous spas (**Chiva Som** being the most legendary), in addition to a multitude of massage and reflexology centres scattered around town. Another good daylight option (not so good if you've got hemorrhoids) is the **Elephant Village**, scenically located near the **Palau Waterfall** and the **Eitiuskato Temple**.

Heading further out of town, the **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park** (some 60 km's south of Hua Hin) has some photogenic beaches, limestone hills, and caves. The park is also a roost for sea eagles, painted storks, and purple herons, and a lair for deer, serow and many different kinds of primates.

A two-hour drive and a 15-minute speedboat brings you to the island of **Koh Thalu**. The coral reefs around here, teeming with tropical fish, provide sunken pleasures for snorkellers.

When it comes to grub and Thai palates, Hua Hin is synonymous with seafood. Right along the beachfront's Naresdamri Road are restaurants like **Meekaruna**, **Ketsarin**, and the **Sea Side**, specialising in marine creatures. As in Bangkok, Italian fare is running second in the Farang food sweepstakes, with numerous options and **Nino's Pizzeria** (out by the Weekend Market) getting good marks. The classy **Hagi Japanese Restaurant** serves up the raw delicacies that have given the

Japanese the longest life-spans on earth. They also have a "live cooking station". Close to that, and the Sofitel, is **Papa John**. Founded back in the mid-90s, it's got a real mixed bag of a menu with Thai, international, ostrich meat, and even Finnish cuisine.

In terms of accommodation, the city is rich with luxury hotels and resorts. The **Marriot**, the **Hilton**, the **Anantara**, the **Hyatt**, and the historic **Sofitel** (built in 1923 and still resplendent of that era) all compete for the upscale visitor's baht. But the mid-range vacationer will feel right at home in the **Thipurai City Hotel**, in the city centre, with rooms ranging from Bt1,800-2,800 in the high season.

Inexpensive lodgings also abound all over town (the **Catwoman Guesthouse** deserves a mention just for its name alone), so the skinflint backpacker can brag he's just discovered the cheapest accommodation this side of a hollowed-out tree stump.

Once tepid, the nightlife thermometer has risen a few degrees in recent years. Casanovas in lust with beer bars and racy thrills should head down to **Soi Binhaban**, or the **Hua Hin Night Bazaar** up around the top of Soi Kanjanomai. To get your pugilistic kicks, behind the City Beach Hotel, there's **Thai boxing** every Tuesday and Saturday night, with five bouts for Bt300, which includes a free drink. Down on Soi 72, the **Night Market** is a good spot for shopping, scoffing, and people-spotting.

With the 60th anniversary of HM the King's ascension to the throne coming up in 2006, Hua Hin is undergoing extensive renovations to make sure it keeps up its reputation as the country's monarch of beach resorts and queen of tranquility.

## WAYS TO GO:

**By Road:** Buses leave regularly from the Southern Bus Terminal in Bangkok, take around three hours, and cost about Bt150. They also run every 45 minutes from Hua Hin to Bangkok, beginning at 3am. The last bus heading back to BKK departs at 9:30 pm.

**By Rail:** Trains leave the Hualamphong Station in Bangkok all day and cost around the same as the bus. The journey takes about an hour longer. But the real bonus is catching a glimpse of the most photo-worthy railway station in the country: a wooden masterwork of red and cream paint in Hua Hin.



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# PATTAYA VACATIONVILLE

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 can 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.



**JOMTIEN HOLIDAY HOTEL**

Jomtien Holiday Hotel is situated in a perfect location overlooking the beach. A choice of premier suites with panoramic seaviews and separate living area or deluxe rooms with aircon, Satellite TV, phone, and a sea view terrace are available.

79 M1, Najomtien, Sattahieb, Chonburi 20250  
Tel: 038-231111 Fax: 038-232898



# KOH CHANG ISLAND PARK

## WHITESANDS

If comfort, convenience and the company of hoards of holidaymakers make your holiday complete, 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 Bt250 huts to Bt6,000 villas. Nearby, **15 Palms**, is one of the few resorts here with aircon rooms for around Bt1,000. Proving the days of a Bt150 bed 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 excellent boutique **Keereeta Resort** to **Charmed Resort**, where accommodation comes in the form of converted shipping containers.

## KLONG PRAO

This long curving beach is tipped

to become overcrowded 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 life.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

At the northern end, **Koh Chang Paradise** is the best bet for suitcase lugging visitors, but not cheap at Bt2,500 or more. Genuine travellers will love **Thalé Bungalows**, as laid back and chilled as the Dalai Lama on ice. Nearby, on the estuary, Bt900 will get you an ensuite, aircon room at the charming **Baan Rim Nam**. For an additional US\$100, a room opposite at **Aana Resort**, the pick of the island's luxury hideaways, can be yours. South, **KP Huts** caters to quests on Bt500/night budgets.

## KAI BAE

A wide variety of bars, restaurants and decent accommodation make this an ideal base for anyone who's

evolved beyond 'drink till you puke' travelling.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

Family friendly comfort and privacy can had for a price at **Seaview Resort & Spa**. For well kept, family run beachfront bungalows, head to **KB Bungalows** or **Kai Bae Beach Bungalows** where prices range from Bt500 - 2,000.

## LONELY BEACH

The key to Lonely Beach's success lied in its name, but 'lonely' is one thing this mish-mash of wooden huts and banana pancake vendors certainly isn't.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

The often packed **Nature Beach's** Bt400 digs are smack on the beach. Next door, **Bhumiyama Resort** offers 3-star comforts a stone's throw from the unwashed masses. On the rocky shore, **Paradise Cottages's** new huts go for Bt200 and up. Nearby, in sleepy Bailan, **Bailan Family Bungalows** and **Bailan Hut** provide homely, basic huts for Bt500 and Bt200 respectively.

## BANGBAO

This once lazy fishing village is now home to more dive schools, seafood restaurants and tour operators than fishermen but still retains a certain charm.

## PLACES TO CRASH:

**Bang Bao Sea Hut**, at Bt1,800+, 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 **Treehouse** has upped and moved to the extremely remote Long Beach in the far southeast of the island. Get there by boat from Lonely Beach.

## 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:

A multitude of boat owners offer '4 island' snorkelling day trips for Bt450 – 900 whilst prices for scuba trips and PADI courses seldom differ between dive operators. However, **BB Divers** and **Scubadive-Thailand**, are both worth checking out. Make time to visit **Baan Kwan Chang** elephant camp, it's a must and call Lek for a trek into the interior, he can be found near the camp at **Jungleway**. Defuse the toxic time bomb masquerading as your bloodstream with a detox or fasting program at **Natural High**, Bailand.

## WAY TO GO

**By Air:** Bt4,800 return on Bangkok Airways. Flights twice, sometimes thrice, daily.

**By Bus:** Bt232 7.30am & 9.30am aircon bus direct from Ekkamai to Centrepont ferry pier.

**By Minivan:** A cramped, hair-raising way to spend Bt350.

**Ferry:** Bt110 one way, by car ferry or wooden passenger boat.

**Sea View**  
Resort & Spa Koh Chang

It is the best location and **Sea View Resort & Spa Koh Chang**, the place for each time, comfortable and relaxing to visit when you want to peacefully enjoy the life of the island. The sea and sunset are of the best, the morning breeze, the white sand beach, the fish market directly reached from the sea, the sea view a kind of paradise, that first of course, you can play, relax and enjoy the huge beauty of the **Koh Chang Islands Park**.

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# Don't D your Tu

Koh Chang's festivities are limited to events organised by individual resorts, bars and restaurants. The local authorities haven't begun to throw any municipal bashes for tourists. Head to **15 Palms** for a beachfront Christmas lunch and **Sabay Bar** to ring in the New Year. Elsewhere, Santa will be in residence at **Amari Emerald Cove** whilst party-goers will congregate at **BackSound** on Lonely Beach to down Yuletide buckets of vodka and Red Bull.

# KOH SAMET BE BY THE SEA

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



## HAT SAI KAEW

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

## AO HIN KHOK

For parties, food and affordable accommodation **Naga** reigns supreme on the next beach southward. But with bungalows for Bt200 it can get pretty full. Some of the best parties on Samet are in their elevated bar which has coconut palms (festooned with fairy lights) growing right through the floor. Good selection of dance tracks, a pool table, and a special "Flip a Coin" promotion on drinks every night from 10pm-midnight. **Tok's** and **Jep's** are two of the other mainstays for global nomads, and also serve up their own extremely edible food, with the cuisine at Jep's topping Samet's charts. But we should remind you of this ruby of wisdom from the eminent Australian gourmand John McDonald: "Like most beach resorts in Thailand, the seafood is magnificent, the Thai food is competent, and the Western food is crap – order with caution." Yes, words to dine by, except for the aforementioned Jep's, which does everything splendidly.

## AO PHAI

At the north end of this beach is **Ao Phai Huts** where bungalows begin at Bt600. Next along is party central at **Silversand**. It's a sliver of Koh Pangan – without the Class A's or the blaring trance – and has mats on the beach, fire-juggling from 10pm, and it's open very late sometimes. They even teach fire-juggling here, and watching Farangs set their T-shirts aflame is a favourite pastime after midnight. Speaking of flames, check out Rayong's only sheesha cafe at **Sheesha Cafe**. One of the signs you'll see all over Samet advertises a fishing and snorkeling tour; it includes stops at nearby islands, lunch, and turtle and shark farms. "All this and a smile for only Bt400," the sign says. The tours run from 11am-4pm daily. Silversand also rents kayaks for Bt100 per hour or Bt400 for the day. And if you're gagging for a Sheesha pipe, drop in to **Sheesha Cafe** at **Seabreeze bungalows**.

## AO PUDSA

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

## AO NUAN

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

## BEST OF THE REST

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

## WAY TO GO:

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

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





# PHNOMPENH BAGUETTEBURG

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:

**Budget:** The young traveller ghettos are around Boeung Kak Lake (Street 93) and the noisy centre of town (Narin's, Capitol, TAT). Our personal recommendation is in neither location and is the **Dara Reang Sey Hotel** at the corner of streets 13 & 118. Rooms from \$8 fan, and from \$12 for aircon.

**Mid-range:** Along the river the **California 2** and the recently opened **Tonle Sap Guesthouse** are recommended. In-town the **Billabong** (\$35-\$50) is a peaceful oasis amongst the chaos. Those visiting Phnom Penh seeking nightlife might want to check out **Flamingo's**. Just off Street 51 in the heart of it all.

**Upper:** **Raffles Le Royal** or the **Intercontinental** are the places to go. For more sane rates, try the **Sunway**.

## DAYTRIPPING:

Khmer Rouge horrors are documented at the **Tuol Sleng Museum** in town and the **Killing Fields Memorial** at Choeung Ek. 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. No, you cannot shoot a cow, that's an urban legend. 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:

Though not Bangkok or Singapore, Phnom Penh has come a long way in the past few years. Still, if you go out in search of revelry after dark, take a taxi or a moto – don't walk. Although not nearly as dangerous as it once was, the city can still be risky at night. That said, 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. Along the river there are notable holes-in-the wall such as the **Cantina** and the **Jungle Bar**, as



well as larger corner establishments like the **Foreign Correspondent's Club** (FCC) and **Riverside**. A whole line-up of bars on Street 51 between streets 136 and 178 include the **Walkabout** (open 24 hours), **Howie's** (a very late-night joint), and **Shanghai Bar** (a single guy's kind of place). Forget about the **Heart of Darkness** and what you heard about this being "the" place to be. It ain't the place to be unless you we're looking to have a gun stuck in your face. And right now it's closed because someone was recently shot dead inside. 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 **Green Vespa**. And attached to the Tonle Sap Guesthouse is the **Pickled Parrot**. Sports fans will want to seek out the **Gym Bar**. For a touch of Irish, visit **Rory's**.

## 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) and the **Pizza Company** just opened a branch in the Suraya Shopping Mall. Street 240 offers a number of eating options, though many of these cater more to the NGO crowd.

## WAY TO GO:

### From Thailand:

**Plane:** Bt5,400/10,800 one-way/return from Bangkok

(Cambodia departure taxes are \$25 international, \$6 domestic).

**Road:** Most direct way is to use the Poipet border crossing. There are early morning buses from Poipet (you'll have to spend the night in Poipet to get one), and taxis run all day for around \$60 for the whole car or shared.

**Boat:** From Koh Kong to Sihanoukville, morning departure,

\$15.

### From Siem Reap:

**Plane:** Siem Reap Airways and \$55-70 one-way, several flights a day.

**Road:** Road is excellent. Bus \$4-6, five-six hours. Taxi \$40, four hours.

**Boat:** \$20-25, five to seven hours, daily am departure. Now that the road is good, this option is an overpriced 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 crossing 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 MIGHTY PILE

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:

**\$10 or less:** we recommend either the **Ivy 2 Guesthouse** not far from the Old Market, **Jasmine Lodge** on Highway 6 near the Caltex, or **Garden Village** tucked down a narrow sidestreet.

**\$10-\$20:** **Two Dragons** in the quiet Wat Bo Village area or the **Ivy Guesthouse** in the Old Market area.

**\$20-\$50:** Many good choices. Old Market area try **Molly Malone's**. Along the river go for the **Bopha Angkor** or **La Villa Loti**. Want a quiet side street locale? Try **Peace of Angkor** or **Mystere's d'Angkor**.

**\$50+:** Go all the way and try the **Amansara** (\$775/night). Other four and five star offerings include the **Sofitel**, **Victoria Angkor**, **FCC**, **Angkor Village**, **Le Meridien**, **Hotel de la Paix** and the **Grand Hotel**.

## DAYTRIPPING:

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 they're well worth it. You can hire a motorcycle-drawn rickshaw (locally but erroneously referred to as a tuk-tuk) for about \$10/day. An aircon car and driver will set you back \$20. 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**. Deep in the jungle visit **Beng Mealea**

temple or really take a journey and see **Koh Ker**, too. **Phnom Kulen** is not worth the \$20 admission so give it a miss. The floating village of **Chong Khneas** is also poor value, instead if you want to see the lake (and we think you should), spend a few extra dollars and get yourself to **Kompong Phluk**. You won't regret it, it's gorgeous. Also worth an hour or two of your time is the **Landmine Museum**. All the moto drivers know it.

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

Most folks head to "Bar Street" which includes the **Angkor What? Bar**, **Temple Bar**, **Red Piano**, and a host of other new establishments. In the same neighborhood is the **Ivy** (good food and music), 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 rather bizarre place. All the upper range hotels have relaxing lounges.

## FEEDING TIME:

The bulk of proper restaurants are clustered in the **Psah Chas** (Old Market) area. Options include **Soup Dragon** (Vietnamese-Asian), **Easy Speaking** (Asian, Western), **Taj Mahal** (Indian), **Pizza Italiano** (err, Italian) 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 and Khmer). If you want to go "authentic, man" try the street stalls along Sivatha Street. There are also numerous hole-in-the-wall Khmer

rice and noodle shops all over town. Hygiene can be an issue with many of these places. Fine dining can be found at any of the four and five-star hotels.

## WAY TO GO:

**Air:** Bangkok Airways: Internet fares from Bt4300/8600 one-way/return, to much much more from travel agents.

**Road:** Take Thai government bus to Aranyaprathet, cross border, take taxi to Siem Reap. Expect to pay \$35-40 for a whole car, \$10 for a seat shared. Road is wretched. Plan on five hours of dancing in your seat.

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD YOU PURCHASE A BUS TICKET TO SIEM REAP FROM ANY TRAVEL AGENT ANYWHERE!



**Enter the Two Dragons**

Long time Untamed Travel Magazine correspondent Gordon Sharpless has in a short period of time managed to get married, become a father, and fulfil his life's dream of opening his own guesthouse in his adopted home of Siem Reap. The Two Dragons Guesthouse in Wat Bo Village has raised the bar of the crowded Siem Reap budget accommodation scene with the nicest rooms at the best prices, along with cable-TV, free tea and coffee, curtains, beds, even pillows! The real gold is in photographer Gordon's encyclopaedic knowledge of the area, advice on avoiding scams, and a home-spun menu, the brain child of his Thai wife (who might even cook the meal for you...). There's even a pickup service from the Poipet border (a shithole, somewhere you'll want to leave right away) so call ahead on +855-63-965-107 or 063-965-107 inside Cambodia or [twodragons@talesofasia.com](mailto:twodragons@talesofasia.com) from cyberspace. Prices start at \$7 and end at \$20 for the aircon presidential suite, but Gordon says he'll give a 10% discount to folks toting this copy of FARANG Untamed Travel.

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# SINGAPORE TROPOLIS

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-brandy/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 Filipino 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 Suncity City, 1 Raffles Blvd. Mon-Thu 3pm-1am, Fri-Sat 3pm-2am.

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

##### BAR NONE

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

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

##### BREWERYKZ

#01-05 Riverside Point, 30 Merchant Rd. Mon-Thu noon-midnight, Fri-Sat noon-1am. Sunday 11am-midnight. Popular riverside microbrewery with California menu.

##### THE DUBLINER

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

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

##### HARRY'S BAR

28 Boat Quay, Sun-Thu 11am-1am, 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-1am, 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.



## art du nud

Singapore club goers get lucky, or almost so this month, with the opening of Le Crazy Horse Paris, a 50-year old entertainment venture that celebrates the 'art of the nude, or *art du nud* off French tongues. The 100-minute show stars the likes of Lala Fagola and Misty Flashback, who, under projected stage lighting and the spell of sultry music, dance around in their birthday suits.

The club, situated in Singapore's Clarke Quay, will become the franchise's largest, offering a 400-seat theater, and a host of other options prefaced by the French article *le*. *Le Restaurant, Le Lounge, Le café*.

Catch the show, with a drink for S\$85, or with a half bottle of champagne for S\$360. Check out [www.lecrazyhorseparis.com](http://www.lecrazyhorseparis.com) for crazy pix or all 200 clever and coquettish titles.

# HONGKONG SPECIALPARTYREGION

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 Tsi 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 Tsi. 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 Tsi 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 flew in from other Asian sands but HK does have them, particularly at Sai Kung (minibuses from Choi Hung MTR) or on the outlying islands (ferries from Outlying Island ferry piers, Central). **Shek O** (bus 6 from Shau Kei Wan MTR) is the last remaining



village on HK island, with a good beach popular with surfers who also frequent the nearby **Big Wave Bay**, but don't expect too much in the way of water sports.

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

#### MACAU

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

#### BUYING STUFF

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

#### ELECTRONICS AND GIZMOS

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

#### FEEDING TIME:

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

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

#### NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

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

#### ACCOMMODATION:

It ain't cheap. Most tourists stay on 'The Golden Mile' of Nathan Road, in Tsim Sha Tusi (around the corner from The Peninsula). There you find a **Holiday Inn** and the horrible **Chungking Mansions** – a wretched tower of tiny guesthouses overflowing with semi-legal immigrants, but good Indian restaurants. Chungking is the cheapest, as long as you don't mind risking hepatitis or casual assault. Far better to head to **Mirador Mansions** a block down, which is

the same deal but far cleaner. **The Garden Hostel** on the third floor is the best bet and is favoured by long-termers. Everywhere costs around HK\$50 for a dorm bed and HK\$100 for a shoebox crash-pad. Either way, you'll be touted as soon as you step off the bus. For the big-budgeted or expense-accounted Hong Kong's hotels are a delight. Many of the mid-range luxury places are in Wanchai, which is also the expat red-light district, but kind of tame by Thai standards.



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# VIENTIANE

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

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 Ngin.

## NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

# VANG VIENG

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

## 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



# LUANG PRABANG

## PLACE TO CRASH

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

## NIGHTRIPPING:

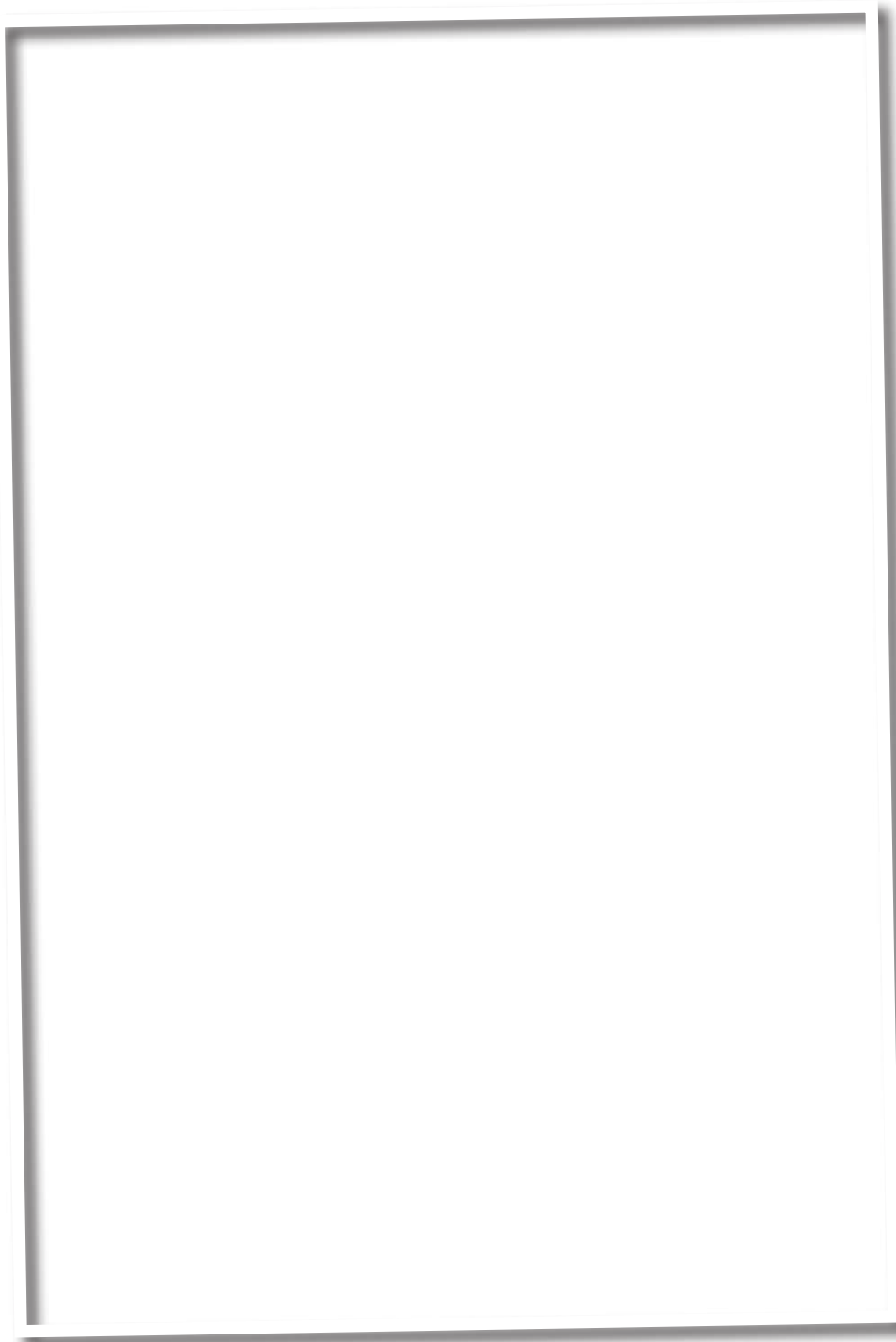
The New York-style **Maylek Pub** is a funky retro-esque nightclub where Luang Prabang's hip and happening – cashed-up relief workers and general posers – come to swill. Music is great considering there is nowhere to hear jazzy blues or hip-hop and funk within 500 kilometres of the place. Drinks are 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 Somtam 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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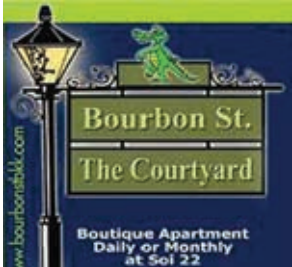
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# Cops, Crimes & Lifelines



**Thailand:** Most of the prime tourist spots in Thailand are perfectly safe except for some slash-and-grab robberies, gem scams, and the occasional drugging and mugging by ladies of the evening.  
**Lifeline:** 1155 is the 24-hour hotline for the Thai Tourist Police. Their office located in the Cimic Tower, 209/1 Sukhumvit Soi 21, Cimic Tower. Open

8am-5pm. Tel: 02- 668-7173.

**Hong Kong:** Not known as a particularly dangerous place for street crime, save for pickpockets and bag-slashers. The most common rip-offs are being overcharged for goods. And the streetwalkers along Nathan Road in Tsim Sha Tsui have been known to spike their clients' drinks and denude them of their valuables.

**Lifeline:** 999; all operators speak Cantonese and English.

**Singapore:** The country's strict laws make street crimes a no-no. They also mean that travelers should stay away from recreational drugs. This year, the police have thrown an enormous anti-narcotics dragnet over the city-state, snaring many drug-takers in clubs, and quite a few of the big-fish dealers.

**Lifeline:** 999; English and Cantonese operators.

**Cambodia:** Poi Pet and Phnom Penh are the two most dangerous places for muggings at gunpoint. Just fork over your money and avoid wearing a shirt air-conditioned by bullet holes.

**Lifeline:** The Tourist Police are under the Ministry of Interior at #275 Norodom Blvd., Phnom Penh. Call (855) 023-721-905, 023-726-052 and 023-721-190.

**Laos:** Bandits on the road from Vientiane to Luang Prabang are no longer a threat, but traveling on your own in remote areas (especially for women) can be risky.

**Lifeline:** Ha ha ha.

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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.

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(856) 214-022

Centre de Traumatologie et d'Orthopedie de Vientiane (Private) On the Road to Tha Ngon, north of Vientiane.

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## 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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### Austria

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