

FARANG

UNTALED TRAVEL

OCTOBER 2006

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CRASHING
IN VIETNAM

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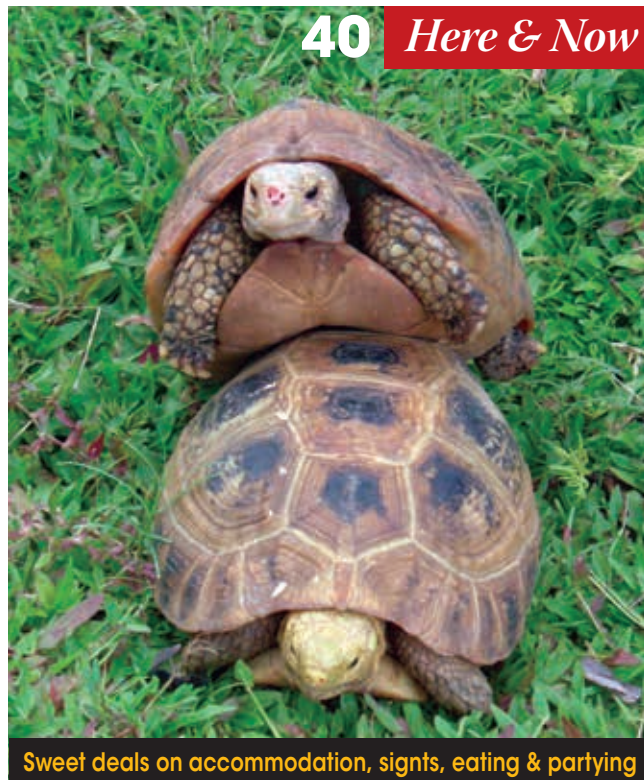
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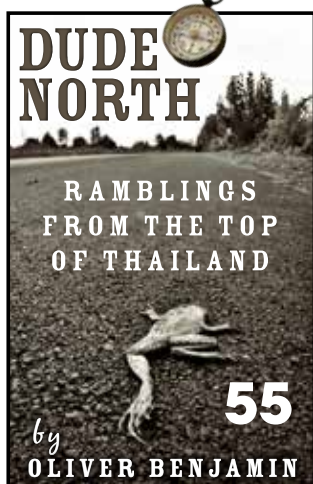
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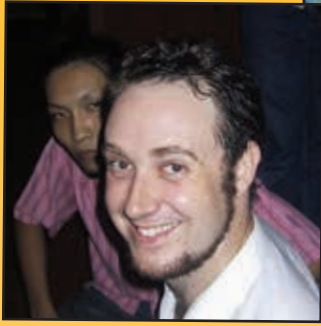


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by OLIVER BENJAMIN



UNTAMED TRAVEL



THE CONGENIAL COUP *(SO FAR)*

As we approached a military checkpoint in Bangkok, on a drizzly grey morning after the *coup d'état*, a middle-aged Thai man was handing out pink roses (a typical offering for the much-venerated spirit of King Rama V) to various soldiers. Most of the military men accepted them with a grin. Behind them sat two tanks with a pair of soldiers standing behind the guns. Sprouting from the barrels were bouquets of white jasmine – a symbol of Buddhist benevolence. Most of the soldiers had yellow ribbons hanging from the ends of their gun barrels or around their shoulders to show their solidarity with the monarchy. The tanks, likewise, had yellow ribbons wrapped around the bell ends of their gun barrels. Some of the other images we shot – a sampler is on Pages 16 and 17 – show a beaming young Thai man hanging from the barrel of a tank – imagine trying that in Burma or America! But we also saw young Thai women flashing grins and peace signs, as they stood beside soldiers and gave them flowers – just like the hippies did back in the late 60s. Some *Untamed* staffers (anxious to appease our parents who thought we'd all been executed or imprisoned) also posed for photos beside the tanks. For a coup d'état, in the midst of a city under martial law, these scenes were surprisingly congenial. But they were proof positive that, so far, it's been tourism as usual in Thailand.

As of this writing, all of the country's international airports are open. Tourists and expats are free to enter or leave the country. Not a single shot has been fired. And the few arrests that have been made were politically motivated; no travelers or expats have been detained. Though a holiday was declared today, September 20th, and banks and government offices were closed, things are expected to return to normal in the next few days. Even the 1am curfew only lasted for one night. Naturally, we've been inundated with calls from foreign papers and radio and TV stations eager for tales of carnage. So far, we've had to disappoint the pesky, bloodthirsty mosquitoes of the mass media by saying that there haven't been any.

Many of the biggest tourism agencies like the Pacific Asia Travel Association have issued statements saying that "Thai tourism is operating normally." But of course you can expect to read hysterical travel advisories warning you about the dangers of traveling in Thailand from all foreign countries. These diplomatic timid mummies are the antithesis of untamed travel.

Whether it's getting their photos taken beside a sign for the Golden Triangle or a tank on the streets of Bangkok, travelers have always prided themselves on their spirit of adventure or at least by getting some voyeuristic infamy by association. After all, that's why we left our safe, predictable homelands in the first place.

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Alien sightings of day-glow punks, fantasy maidens and Sci-Fi replicants around Bangkok can now be official confirmed. CASSANDRA BECKFORD entered the virtual world of manga and anime on a visit to Bangkok's first Maid Café.

MAIN events

THAILAND Pride Fest



Since the success of the first event organised in the late 90s, Bangkok's Pride Festival has become a trans-national event. Based on the ideology "by Thai people, for Thai people" it promotes diversity, awareness and tolerance in Thai society for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. This year's festival kicks off with a party, has badminton, tennis and a community fair as fillers, before returning to spectacular and flamboyant form with Pride in the Park on Saturday and the big Sunday afternoon parade on November the 5th.

Come out and "Join your hands and hearts in Pride," from October 28th – November 5th. Visit www.pridefestival.org for the complete schedule of events.

CARDINAL DATES

NAGA FIREBALLS

October 7th. Mysterious gas floats up from the depths of the Mekong River and flares up into multi-hued fireballs. The mystically inclined believe it's from the Naga, or Serpent King, paying homage to the end of Buddhist Lent, but nobody knows for sure. Nong Khai, Thailand.

CHON BURI BUFFALO RACES

October 6th. Spectacular racing bovines not far from Pattaya, Thailand.

ILLUMINATED BOAT PROCESSION

October 2-8. Brightly lit boats in tribute to the Buddha. Mekhong River, Nakhon Phanom, Thailand.

CONFUCIUS' BIRTHDAY

October 18th. Cakes and "Pin the Tail on the Donkey" in China and worldwide.

WORLD FILM FESTIVAL

October 15-24. Films from Asia and all over the world at EGV Metropolis, Bangkok.

TOKYO FILM FESTIVAL

October 21-29. Flicks for kicks at the Bunkamura and Roppongi Hills.

DO SON BUFFALO FIGHTS

October 30th. Clash of the titans at Do Son, near Haiphong, Vietnam.

HALLOWEEN

October 31st. Ghosts and ghouls abound. In Bangkok, Khaosan Road and Silom Soi 4 are party central.

LOI KRATONG

November 1-5. Candlelit bouquets of love and devotion floating down the Thailand's waterways make for a picturesque festival.

KOH SAMUI MUSIC FESTIVAL

Sep-29-Oct-8. Sway, twist and jive to blues, jazz, reggae and ska at Coco Blues on Chaweng Beach

THAILAND Bloody Vegetables

The idea of a vegetarian festival, may conjure images of sanctimonious hippies rabbiting on about mung beans, but oh no... The Phuket Vegetarian Festival is an ancient rite of purification brought from China by a troupe of performers over a century ago. Participants dress in white, eat no flesh and don't indulge in alcohol or sex. Over the last few days, there are several processions where people stick all manner of crazy silverware, ornaments, musical instruments and anything else to hand through their faces and dance around in trances, making this the most macabre spectacle of the year.

Pack the Dettol and head for Phuket on the 22nd to the 30th of this month.



CHINA Harvest Mooncakes

Mooncakes have been given out and consumed as long as anyone can remember to celebrate the end of harvest, but back in the 14th century, secret messages were transmitted on the decorative pastries to revolutionaries who went on to bring down the Yuan dynasty and usher in the Ming. Hey, it beats eating paper messages, then again the mooncakes taste like glucose-soaked sawdust so maybe not.

This message will self-destruct all over China and anywhere Chinese communities dwell on the 6th of October.

INDIA Shining Triumph

The Festival of Lights is the greatest event on the Indian calendar and celebrated all over the nation, as well as in Malaysia and Singapore. The name comes from Sanskrit, *Deepa* meaning light and *vali* meaning row, reflecting the rows of oil lanterns hung out to celebrate the return of Rama from his battle with evil, to illuminate the fact that light triumphs over the troops of darkness.

Celebrations go off, gifts are given and cards are played on the 21st of October.





SEX FILES

CAMBODIA, ADULTERERS COURT JAIL TERMS:

While it may be typical for Cambodian men to have a few extra wives and scuttle off to the nearest brothel on a carnal whim, a new law passed by parliament will see adulterers go to jail for up to a year. Critics of the hotly debated law have compared it to the strictly puritanical policies of the Khmer Rouge and the Taliban.

HONG KONG, OLDEST WHORE THROWS IN THE TOWEL:

A woman of 75, thought to be the oldest prostitute in Hong Kong, has vowed to stop selling sex. Busted many times before, Wu Wei-geen was recently caught leaving a room with a 60-year-old customer, whom she charged around US\$2.50 for sex, probably with the lights out. The woman complained of not being able to survive on her social welfare payments and has promised to sell recycled cardboard, which many elderly indigents do for extra cash in Hong Kong.

JAPAN, MANNEQUIN LOVER NAILED:

An unemployed Japanese man was arrested for trying to pilfer a female mannequin from a shop window. Shoji Shibuzaki claimed it was love at first sight.

CHINA, PARK FOR MATCHMAKERS:

A park near Beijing's Forbidden City has become a hunting ground for parents who want to find a suitable marriage partner for their adult-aged offspring. Several other such parks have sprouted up recently, too. On weekends they attract thousands of matchmakers.

TAIPEI, WATER OF DEATH:

After a serious quarrel with her elderly husband, a Taiwanese woman drowned herself in the family's water tower. She had hoped that her husband, 80, would drink the tainted water. But her hubby, with whom she had frequent arguments over the little money he gave her, noticed that the reeking water was pink and had their son check the water tower, where he found the corpse of his 55-year-old mom.

JAPAN, BRITNEY ALLOWED TO FLAUNT IT:

Revealing posters of Britney Spears, swollen with child, have been allowed to be put on display by a local publisher in Tokyo's subway stations. At first, the images, which show the pop tart sitting nude but with her legs closed and arms covering her breasts, were half-censored.

CRIMEFILES

THAILAND, DEATH FOR HIT MAN:

In 1999 an Australian auditor named Michael Wansley, 58, was shot to death by a hit man riding on a motorcycle. Recently sentenced to death were a retired Thai cop, who acted as the shooter, and another local man who drove the motorcycle. The company's human resources manager, Boonphan Sutheevirawan, received life imprisonment for allegedly masterminding the hit. Wansley had been employed by the banking creditors of the Kaset Thai Sugar Co to investigate the company's debt of Bt16 billion.

AUSTRALIA, FATHER HUNG OUT TO DRY:

An Aussie man who put a baby into a dryer because she spilled medicine on herself has been sentenced to eight months in jail. Samuel Mar Barnes-Siddall left his 14-month-old daughter in the dryer for about two minutes. While the girl suffered some serious burns, she has recovered well and will not have any lingering scars.

CHINA, HAVE UNDERWEAR, WILL TRAFFIC:

A Chinese woman has been accused of ferrying 1.44kg of heroin soaked into men's long-johns and women's underwear. The woman has pleaded not guilty, saying the underwear had been planted in her luggage.

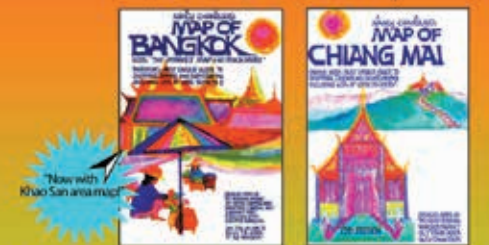
CAMBODIA, KILLER GETS 20 YEARS:

A Cambodian teenager has been sentenced to 20 years in jail for knifing a British man to death during a robbery gone awry. Lao Chamrong, 18, pleaded guilty to the charge of murdering David Mitchell, who owned the Ginger Monkey Bar in Phnom Penh, and wounding his girlfriend, the New Zealand journalist Jane Nye.

AUSTRALIA, STINGRAYS SLAUGHTERED:

Many stingrays have been found butchered on beaches after the Australian TV star and crocodile wrestler Steve Irwin was killed in a freak accident while snorkeling over a stingray whose barbed tail pierced his heart. Normally, stingrays are placid and not dangerous to humans.

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BEER & BAR'BOUP

Hey Guys,

As a regular traveller to and from Bangkok who can finally say more than just *sawadee ka*, even though it was Coup night, I felt there was no better time than the present to try out my Thai linguistics with the soldiers who were dotting about. Sadly, the conversations didn't veer much from smiles and 'move along please.' I couldn't decide whether to blame my lack of interaction on my miserable grasp of Thai or just bad timing, but decided to finish the night on a positive, more boozy note anyway.

Wandering out of the Khao San ghetto and descending the bridge onto Samsen Road, I stopped off on Soi 2 for a beer and nibbles and, as the *Untamed* lot are an infamous bunch, it was great to see your fearless presence in the Soi, (your t-shirts are a dead giveaway) still whooping it up with conversation and supping up your beers.

You may recall that I came over and gave a few intelligible mumbles to you guys, but the point is with all the panic stations and emails from home pleading for my immediate return, I felt a little more reassured seeing you guys drinking beer, eating barbecued prawns and taking it all in your stride. Cheers!

Keep on keeping on

Lee
Bangkok

Untamed Replies:

Thanks Lee. Yeah we remember you—it was only last night, after all, and females rarely approach our table for some reason. Actually the coup gave us the best excuse we've had since the 2004 tsunami to slack off work, and spend several pissed up hours holding forth knowledgeably about things nobody could possibly know.

The Terry Fox Run

for Cancer Research

RUN FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE

Terry Fox was a young Canadian who had his right leg amputated above the knee in 1977 due to cancer. While in hospital Terry decided to run across Canada to raise both awareness and funds for cancer research, a run that was dubbed the Marathon of Hope. Terry ran for 143 days and over 5,000km until cancer forced him to stop. He died shortly before his 23rd birthday in 1981. Terry Fox's achievement inspired charity runs that have now spread all over the world. So, on Sunday, October 29th, the Four Seasons Hotel and the Thai Oncological Society (supported by HM the Queen of Thailand and the Canadian Embassy) are holding just such an event at Lumpini Park. Anyone gargantuan or diminutive, dawning rod skinny or disgustingly obese can walk or run 5 or 10km starting at 8:05am. Registration starts at 7:30am. 350 baht gets you an official t-shirt, a finishing certificate, refreshments and a crack at winning prizes. For more information you are spoiled for choice. Call Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok's Concierge Counter, Health Club or Mocha and Muffins at 02-250 1000, The Oncological Society of Thailand at 02-246 1294-99, the Thai-Canadian Chamber of Commerce at 02-266 6085 or the Canadian Embassy at telephone number 02-636 0560 extension 3253.



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FLAMING DAN

By God, but a lot of people hate Untamed Travel's Managing Editor Daniel Cooper and take particular umbrage at his pithy book reviews. Not a month goes by without some disgruntled author who thinks he's the 21st century's answer to Charles Dickens accusing Dan of being an idiot, a moron, a charlatan, a fraud and an asshole. We beg to differ. He is definitely not an asshole. Once again, we present here the latest complaint from disgruntled author Phil Karber, who admittedly has lost some of his original fire since Dan first penned the review of his book 'The Indochina Chronicles' [see Untamed Travel June 2006].

Hey [Chief Editor] Jim,
I've been traveling in the Middle East and just returned to Cambridge. Thanks for the package with the magazine and t-shirt. It was a fair gesture of you to include my letter to the editor, especially since I surmised that Daniel had not read the book, which he now admits to. But why give Daniel a rebuttal to my rebuttal?
I have attached a review from the *South China Morning Post* that came in while I was gone. Though I expect some level of criticism in all reviews, this guy lays off for some reason. Daniel might want to read it as an example of someone who read the book and knows how to write.
Best,
Phil

Untamed Replies:
Okay, Phil, this time we won't print a rebuttal to your rebuttal of Dan's rebuttal, not because we believe it is good journalistic practice, but because when we asked Dan if he wanted to reply he said, "Ah, just tell him to fuck off!"

UNREST IN PEACE

One of our regular contributors sent along a personal email from a friend of his in Hat Yai in Thailand's south who lost a friend in the September bomb attacks there.

Hi,
Just in case you heard about some bombs on the other side of the planet. Yeah, most of them went off about a 1/2 mile away or less from my apartment. I'm ok.
My friend who I had dinner with last night – no luck. Last night he was eagerly anticipating his fellow Canadian arriving in Hat Yai by train even if it was at 6:30am on a Saturday. "This guy is the best – he turned me on to all the music I currently listen to.
He's bought an mp3 player and put in a jillion songs and he's giving it to me tomorrow!" Today I was text messaging our mutual friend and we were discussing an album to get for Jessie. So last night Jessie left us after a quick dessert across the street because he had to wake up early and knew tonight (Saturday) night would be a late one. It wasn't late – it ended roughly at 9:10pm. I guess the next time I'll see him he'll be horizontal with his eyes closed. For the last few hours people have been text messaging each other: "ou ok?" "Yeah, I'm ok – haven't heard from Jessie yet..." Finally about 30 minutes ago I got the news.
Most everybody here stays away from the three danger provinces to our immediate south. Before Jessie moved to Hat Yai he actually lived with a family in one of those provinces for a month. Nobody else I've met



UNTAMED BABY

Sorry to mention him again, but Managing Editor Daniel "whoops!" Cooper, in spite of what some may say, has undergone a remarkable transformation in the last nine months or so from overeager lover to reluctant and confused expectant father to loving dad, as the soon-to-be Mrs. Pookie Cooper gestated and eventually produced the first and very possibly the last Untamed Travel Baby, Amelia Cooper.

will set foot down there let alone live there. He spoke Thai remarkably well for being here such a short time. When a white person would say "freakin' Thais man, blah blah," or "those Muslims, blah blah," Jessie would always come to their defense. Nobody I know of here had such an appreciation and rapport with the locals as he did. That is not exaggeration.
So naturally – there's close to 200,000 people here – about 150 are Western foreigners – and he gets popped. Why the hubbub around here? Like many places after a war – borders get moved around. In this case – what was once Malaysia...
Hope all is well. Remember to articulate hope.
Name Withheld

UNTAMED TRAVEL

FULL *Throttle>>>*

Graham Roemmele revs up his Russian bike for a sometimes hair-raising and sometimes hilarious journey through Vietnam's scenic northwest. Photos by: Graham





slammed down on the kick-start and my decaying bike roared to life. Thick clouds of oily blue smoke filled the gas station, leaving the pump attendant gagging. “Don’ fo-get. Mix oil an gas to-gev-er... fie puh-sen oil,” yelled Mr. Dang, the friendly but nervous owner of the fume-spewing Minsk (Russian-made motorbikes) that my two comrades and I had just hired. I nodded at him, and then, with an offensive roar, maneuvered onto the busy streets of Hanoi. In my mirror I saw Mr. Dang perform a little ritual that looked more like a prayer than a blessing.

My friends and I planned to do a 1,200km loop of Northwest Vietnam. We had set aside six days to cover the distance, taking in the cities of Son La, Dien Bien Phu and Sapa. The trip would lead us into Vietnam's highest mountain region, and through lush valleys tended by hill-tribe farmers. We would cruise along the borders of Laos and China and shudder and grind over mountain passes 1,900m high. With my aging Nikon FM around my neck, I was sure there would be plenty of photographs. And I wasn't disappointed.

Putting faith in our rudimentary map, leaving Hanoi seemed straightforward. It proved anything but. After riding around crumbling tower blocks and rubbish dumps on Hanoi's outskirts, we finally found

for a drink at her family's house on the way to Mai Chau. We accepted the kind invitation, but after her sister opened the sixth free bottle of beer and cracked open the rice whiskey, I wondered if the girls ever wanted us to leave. We needed to get moving before waking up hungover, shackled to a ball and chain. As we dropped her in Mai Chau as promised, she softly whispered, "Forget me not," before we sped off.

PLIGHT OF THE RED BARON

The thought of climbing back on the bikes both thrilled and appalled me. We had already driven 320 butt-chafing kilometres. Waking up stiff and hungry, we ate a swift breakfast, started the bikes and watched Son

Nearby, a group of women in the river started to shriek and laugh, and we suddenly realised they were bathing butt-naked

the highway to the northwest. The traffic eased, whilst mountains loomed ahead and the scenery turned a thousand shades of green. The swarming motorbikes of Hanoi vanished, replaced by packs of students on bicycles, waving at us like mad hatters.

Leading the way, I approached a three-way fork in the road and pulled out the trusty map to check which prong to take. Suddenly a passing motorbike driver started pointing and gesturing wildly at my map. I slowed to a halt and he pulled alongside, jabbering in Vietnamese to me, and pointing at the back of my bike. I thought it was on fire or something, when his passenger suddenly spoke up, "I go Mai Chau?" Before I knew what to say, Comrade Jason grinned as he helped her up onto his bike.

Our new friend, Moon, a 24-year-old teacher, insisted that we stop

La disappear in the rearview mirror, whilst dodging potholes around the contours of the hills. We descended into a tranquil valley and stopped to look at an old waterwheel. Nearby a group of women in the river started to shriek and laugh, and we suddenly realised they were bathing butt-naked – the highlight of our day.

Twenty minutes later my Minsk was screaming beneath me, and blasting clouds of dust into my comrades' faces. We lurched up a dangerous and rocky section of dirt road, the machines struggling to make the steep grade. Suddenly, Dean's bike, the Red Baron, packed up. A few slack-jawed locals came to help us, prodding the engine like it was a stone tablet from 2001: *A Space Odyssey*.

After coasting back down the road, pulling Dean along to the nearest *xe may* (repair shop), we drank a well-deserved beer while the efficient mechanic fixed it. Once again it spluttered to life, farting a cumulus-sized cloud of fumes from its arse, but this wasn't to be its last trip to the grease monkey. The Red Baron was always a few kilometers from the scrap yard.

THE HIGH ROAD TO SAPA

Jason and I had spent the night drinking *bia hoi* (cheap and nasty beer) with a gang of locals, who insisted that we down our glasses every time they said, "Yo [Cheers]." We got up at 6am feeling like a truck had hit us. A nuclear-strength cup of coffee was our kick-start to the day.

Making up for lost time, we barely stopped in Dien Bien Phu. The Army Museum was seemingly closed for an all-day lunch break, and



Arrivals

Flights: Air Asia operates flights from Bangkok to Hanoi, departing at either 11:45 or 19:00 daily. Fares fluctuate but booking early guarantees a good deal. I paid Bt3,200 return (inclusive of fuel surcharges) by booking five weeks ahead.

Departure taxes: Bt700 in Bangkok and US\$14 US in Hanoi, payable at the airport, and never included in the price of your air ticket.

Visas: For application forms and information, visit: www.vietnamembassy.or.th/visa.html

Accommodation

Hanoi: The brand new Holidays Hotel near Hoan Kiem Lake, has excellent value rooms with air-con, fridge, cable TV and hot showers for negotiable prices between US\$10-30 per night. www.hanoiholidayhotel.com



the only decent restaurant in town had been taken hostage by a bride wearing a dress that looked more like the cake.

Pressing on, we passed through a luminous valley where clouds of green butterflies filled the air. It was a beautiful sight, but damned painful when they bounced off my face. Our pace had picked up and we were the fastest thing on the road. Out of nowhere, a little puppy ran straight at the Red Baron, snapping at Dean's ankle. But it caught a foot peg in the face, sending it spinning into the ditch like a dust devil. Fearing a machete-wielding owner, or even worse, an invitation to a road-kill barbeque, we just hit and ran.

Sapa, northwest Vietnam's most famous destination, was just a couple of hours away, but Vietnam's highest road (1900m), the Tam-Tron-

Fearing a machete-wielding owner, or even worse, an invitation to a road-kill barbeque, we just hit and ran

Pass was the link. It's the kind of treacherous road that makes you piss your pants, so we drained our bladders before getting started. It was a good idea, because whilst soaking up the incredible scenery and crisp air we had to overtake the odd truck, passing blindly through clouds of filthy soot being belched from its screaming engine. As we finally reached the top, we paused to look back at the most spectacular road any of us had ever seen.

Dean and the Baron dropped off the radar again as we rolled into Sapa. I found them about a minute away from the town centre, and Dean was properly pissed off. We pushed him along to the xe may for the third time and went looking for a hotel, as Dean contemplated throwing the Red Baron off the top of the Tam-Tron-Pass.

A little later, as we relaxed in a bar facing Fansipan (at 3,143m it's Vietnam's tallest mountain) an ancient-looking hill-tribe lady came to sell us an attractive handmade blanket. Minutes later another hill-tribe lady came to sell us hats, and after her, another one came to sell us shirts. We got out of the bar only to realise that scores of Hmong had descended upon the town. Awestruck, we wandered around until a 19-year-old Hmong girl asked us, "Hey guys, whatcha up to? Fancy shooting some pool?" Surprised by how well she spoke English, we joined her and a friend in a bar to watch them continually kick everyone's ass on the table. Bored of winning, they took us to the night market to down some shots of cutthroat rice whiskey, whilst we danced around in drunken circles,

making a racket with our new Hmong instruments that had just cost Jason US\$20.

FALLEN COMRADES

At the gas station, we watched the pump attendant slop ladles full of oil into the petrol tanks of the other customers' Minsk. Ignoring Mr. Dang's wise words in Hanoi about mixing the oil and gas together, we stupidly let her do the same for us, assuming it would be fine. Two hundred metres down the road the Red Baron seized up. It was a bad start to our last day's ride back to Hanoi.

After fixing the bike, we rumbled through the countryside passing town after town without stopping, well aware of the huge 370km distance to Hanoi. Ahead of the others, I reached a bridge, which also served as a train crossing and carefully crossed the tracks, taking care not to jam a wheel between the rails. But Dean opted to ride between the rails "James Bond style". He came a cropper, flying arse over tit as the Baron's front wheel jammed into the rails and landed on its side. Both parties were not too damaged, but Dean was understandably shaken up.

Such was our speed, during the entire day's ride we were overtaken just once. As a storm-threatening night began to creep up on us, so did Hanoi. Stopping to regroup, Jason and I waited for Dean a full 10 minutes before anxiously turning around only to find him at the side of the road.

He had hit a pothole hidden under a puddle. A few grazes aside, he was largely unhurt and had been lucky not to be mowed down by truck drivers, who drive like drunken kings of the road. The Red Baron had not fared so well. The steering was askew, the gearlever bent double and the left foot peg was history; but the robust Minsk wasn't bound for the scrap yard yet. I traded bikes with Jason and drove the Baron for the last leg of the trip.

In the dark and drizzle, starved and knackered, we limped through Hanoi's chaotic streets turning heads with our disheveled appearances.

Just minutes from the hotel, Dean lost his concentration and drove my pristine Minsk into the gutter for his third accident of the day. As we triumphantly hobbled off the bikes for the last time, one thing was for sure: We had all gotten back feeling more alive than before we left, except for the poor old Red Baron.

On the Road:

It's hard to anticipate the stopovers. We stayed overnight in Son La, Tuan Giao, Lai Chau and Sapa. There are several hotels in the major towns on this route, and also a few in the minor towns. We paid no more than US\$12 a night between the three of us. Ask the hotel to park the bike in the lobby, because Minsk don't have keys.

The Minsk's Hiring Checklist:

- Most travel agents can arrange bikes for you in a day or two. Ask around. We paid US\$7 a day.
- Leave your yellow departure slip as a deposit; you need your own passport for hotel check-ins.
- Hire the bike a day early to check for faults. Be shown how to operate it and how to mix the fuel/oil together correctly.
- Bring your own helmet; the drive is extremely rural.
- Normally, repairs are easy to arrange at any xe may. There's one in nearly every village or town and the Red Baron cost Bt500, in total, for four separate jobs.

Everything you need to know about motor biking in Vietnam and the Minsk can be found at: www.minskclubvietnam.com www.exploreindochina.com



As staff photographer, the duty of collecting the first images fell to me and frankly, given Thailand's quirky habit of shooting it's citizens on the streets every few years I didn't relish it. While everyone else was sitting at the pub with phones glued to their heads I went for a walk. The office being near Khaosan Road I'd already had a look there and seen the bars shut up and the CNN coverage. I'd heard there was a roadblock up Samsen Road so headed in that direction and saw nothing but empty streets until Sri Ayuttahaya Road. Looking right down the boulevard it was empty and lit by yellow streetlights and at the end of the wet tarmac a tank in silhouette, muzzle facing me. Slowly I strolled towards the tank, squeezing off a few shots in case I got turned back by the track-suited soldiers ahead. As it turns out the troops were very accommodating and around the corner a bunch of Japanese tourists were having their photos taken with another tank. Trust the Thais to turn a military takeover into a bit of fun. - Dan Cooper, managing editor



Emails from home
 "I'm sitting here trying to type my email to you, whilst your father is pacing the room, switching between watching the news, muttering about Thailand and mumbling things I should type to you over my shoulder"
 "Will they take you guys prisoner?"
 "I just saw the news about the ARMY and thought of you. This hasn't happened in Thailand for the last fourteen years! I think you should get on the first plane home, right now!"
 "My friend's crying over a bottle of wine as we speak. She just spent her last year's savings on a plane ticket to Bangkok and is now contemplating tearing it in two. Glad to hear its calm so far..."
 - Friends of Cassandra Beckford, associate editor



UNPAID TRAVEL



During a live interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, our national radio station, on September 21, I was asked whether or not I felt my life was in danger when we walked up to a military checkpoint to take photos of the tanks and ask the soldiers a few questions. "At first, I was a bit wary, but then I noticed a Thai man handing out pink roses to the soldiers who accepted them with cheery grins." The next day, getting ready to come to work and expecting a very solemn air on the streets, I was amazed by some farang neighbours firing up the barbecue and already downing beers. The prevailing mood was festive and decidedly Thai in its "anything for a holiday and a party" vibe. "What's up?" I asked. "You guys having a barbie-coup?"
- Jim Algie, chief editor

Hours after the coup, we went for a stroll around the past coup haunts – the places where demonstrators had been shot and/or lynched before. It was dead quiet except there were loads of taxi drivers cruising for passengers. What sort of coup was this? I thought men were supposed to point guns at you and order you to go home. Our local street side restaurant, designated Untamed Travel's Official Command & Intelligence Centre served beer until 5am as usual. But though things have started off pleasantly enough, it is important not to err on the side of gullibility. We have to wait and see if the ruling council makes good on its promises. If by next week they are ordering us to wear our underwear on the outside to prove that it is adequately clean, then we know we might have some problems with a smooth transition back to democracy.
- Cameron Cooper, executive editor.

TANKS for the MEMORIES



ORAL HEX

JIM ALGIE
tunes in to the
world's only radio
programme where callers
recite stories of the supernatural...

Haunted house photo by AROON THAEWCHATTURAT.
Movie still from NANG NAK. All other images by JIM ALGIE.

UNTAMED TRAVEL

"The owner of a company that screens movies at temple fairs and outdoor festivals received a telephone call from a man named Vinai to show some ghost films at a Buddhist temple fair near Korat," said the radio show's first caller. "When he arrived there, the owner met Vinai, who told him to screen the movies behind the temple. While the films were playing that night for an audience of 50 or 60 people, the projectionist saw some women in really old-fashioned clothes and wondered why they were dressed like that. The projectionist slept overnight at the temple and the monks woke him up the next morning and asked him why he'd shown films behind the temple, when no one had asked him to do so. The monks were perturbed because some people had died under mysterious circumstances not far from there. So the projectionist told them about the man named Vinai. The old mortician at the temple, who prepared the bodies for the cremation ovens, then showed the projectionist a memorial plaque for a dead man named Vinai."

And so begins another eerie evening of ghost stories on one of Thailand's most popular radio shows: Shock Radio on 102 FM. Hosted by Kapol "Pong" Thongplub from the witching hour until 3 a.m. every Saturday and Sunday, the programme mostly consists of callers reciting tales of the occult, which they've experienced personally, or heard from friends and family members.

Most of the stories deal with such traditional Thai spectres as *phi pop* – a kind of supernatural parasite that possesses people – and *phi kraseu* ("filth ghost"), the villainess in many a Thai horror movie. This ghoul, which flies around rice fields at night, has a hideous female face and a green or red light in its head that flashes on and off, while its body consists of dangling intestines. Its staple diet is blood, human excrement, and the entrails, placentas, and foetuses of pregnant women.

Since its first broadcast in 1992, the programme has built up an audience of more than 100,000 listeners per night. Before letting

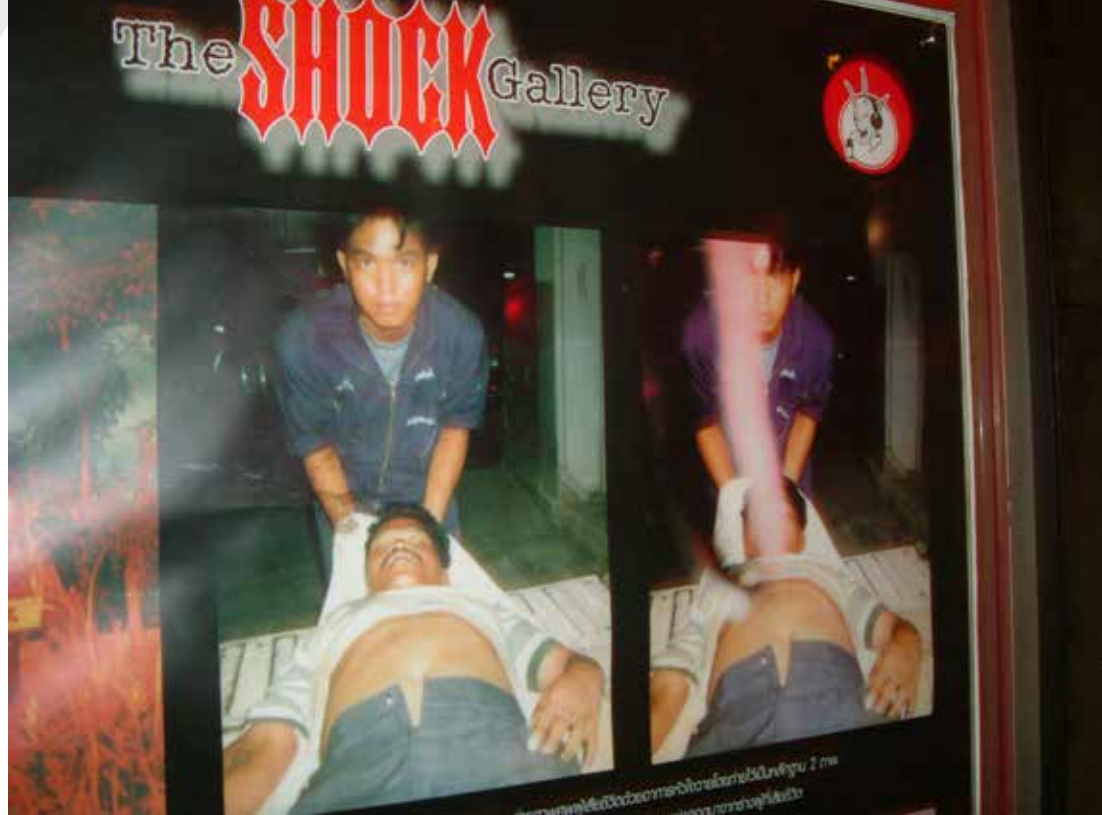
callers on air, the announcer and his staff screen the calls first. Although there is a long tradition in Thailand of comedic ghost movies starring such satirical phantoms as “Miss Sexy Ghost” and “Miss Universe Ghost,” the Shock Radio programmers are only interested in the more hell-raising tales. Sometimes listeners call in with anecdotes about aliens and paranormal phenomena, but mostly they tell ghost stories, from all over Thailand.

One of the most repeated tales has become something of an urban legend around the country’s universities. “Two students are roommates, and one of them goes out at night to buy some food,” the shock-jock Pong tells me at the radio station. “He ends up getting cut in half by some psychopath, but his ghost feels guilty about not bringing back the food, so he goes back home. The ghost’s roommate answers the door and sees his now-dead friend’s upper torso floating there holding a bag of noodles for him.”

Such tales, far-fetched as they seem, say a lot about the Thai sense of friendship, love of food, and especially their faith in the spirit realm. As a matter of conjecture, Pong reckons that about 80 percent of Thai people, particularly in rural areas, firmly believe in the supernatural.

DARK INFLUENCES

The radio programme is also helping to keep the spirit of oral story-telling alive in Thailand. It’s an age-old tradition that mostly relies on tales of the supernatural. In turn, this tradition has spawned countless comic books known as *phi saam baht* (“three-baht ghost stories,” the Thai equivalent of the “penny dreadful”), and a lot of music, from northeastern folk tunes to indie rock. Vasiit Mukdaviijit, one of Thailand’s most influential underground rockers, is a regular listener to Shock Radio. During a 2003



This ghoul, which flies around rice fields at night, has a hideous female face and a green or red light in its head that flashes on and off, while its body consists of dangling intestines

interview he recounts how his strange experiences on a trip to the island of Koh Chang inspired the creepy ballad “Death Star” from his band, Day Tripper’s second album *Pop Music*.

“I was walking along this dark beach with my girlfriend when these ghostly hands appeared out of nowhere and, I don’t remember this, but my girlfriend said I freaked out and tried to attack her. But I don’t know for sure. I was kind of drunk that night.”

Later on, in their bungalow, his British girlfriend saw “strange colourful shapes appear” just as the singer himself was spooked by the sight of a huge, seven-legged spider crawling up the wall. “My auntie told me that seven-legged spiders are signs of the Buddhist devil,” says the singer.

Some of Shock Radio’s story-tellers, Pong notes, are as young as seven and as old as 75. The majority are teenagers. For many college students, the show is a thrilling diversion from late-night cramming. Anchana Muangnil, during her student nursing days, recalls how the students at her faculty played pranks on each other based on stories they’d heard on the programme.

“A friend and I switched off the lights in a lab where some of the students were studying, and where they had dead babies floating in jars. We put surgeons’ masks over our faces, pulled our hair down over our eyes, and shuffled around the room like zombies, moaning, ‘Give us our children back.’ The other students started screaming. But after we



UNTAMED TRAVEL

switched the lights on, we saw that the babies were all floating upside down – completely the opposite of how they usually were. Playing jokes like that is bad luck.”

Among the younger generation, old traditions may be dying a slow death, but their devotion to animism is very much alive. One of my former Thai colleagues, a 25-year-old journalist with a dyed-red bob, once told me, “I’m not going to celebrate Loy Krathong [the late October or November festival to pay homage to the goddess of water] this year by putting a banana-leaf float in the water, but by floating my brain in alcohol. Then the smile disappeared and she said more seriously, “But I always pray to the ‘Mother of Water’ before I go swimming.”

Such beliefs also have a more practical value. In *The Damage Done: Twelve Years Of Hell In A Bangkok Prison*, Warren Fellows, an Australian who was imprisoned for heroin trafficking, writes that the Thai inmates did not crack up the way the Westerners did. He attributed this to their ability to meditate and their faith in reincarnation and the spirit realm.

HUNTING GHOSTS

But the host of Shock Radio isn’t that concerned about the serious side of the supernatural and whether the stories set off his bullshit detector. “The show is about entertainment,” insists Pong, who also co-hosts the weekly TV show *Chuamong Pitsawongse* (“The Hour of Supernatural Encounters”) on Channel 7 every Tuesday night.

During the radio show’s reign of terror, Pong and his crew have generated more volts of shock value by using a mix of theme songs from famous Thai horror movies, and sound effects of everything from villainous chuckles and bloodcurdling screams to excerpts from a CD called *Demoniac Soundscapes*. But for the most part, the emphasis remains on the anecdotes told by the callers, which seem anything but rehearsed. After six or seven of them have recited their spooky stories,

Pong reads some of the e-mails and other tales sent in by listeners. Usually, they receive more than 25 e-mails per week.

In 1999, Pong opened the Shock Pub, near the Chatuchak Weekend Market. Five years later he closed that down and moved into a much bigger venue on Ramindhra Road, near the expressway and the Tesco-Lotus in the Ladprao district of Bangkok. Above the Shock Khao Tom Phi Restaurant (*khao tom* is “rice porridge” while *phi* means “spirit”) is a bust of the horror-movie icon Freddy Krueger lit by a spotlight. On the menu are a variety of specialties like “The Shock Khao Pat” (a thermonuclear version of fried rice); a snakehead fish that comes served in a tiny black coffin; and the “Headless Ghost” (shrimp heads fried in garlic).

In the back of the restaurant is the “Shock Gallery.” Bloodied with red light and air-conditioned to the freezing point of a morgue, the gallery has a boy’s severed head dangling from the roof and a Grim Reaper-like figure hanging from steel bars. It also displays dozens of photos purported to be phantoms. Some are sketchy at best. The fog shrouding the spire of a Buddhist temple at night could be, well, fog, or an abortion from a film-processing lab. Other images give credence to the incredible. Take, for instance, the snapshot of a car wreck and what looks like a ghostly figure emerging from it.

Many of the images were shot when the crew from Shock Radio went out hunting for phantoms at haunted hospitals, hotels, and houses, in and around Bangkok. Usually, says Pong, they survey the place first before taking a group of listeners there and doing live reports via mobile phone.

One night, they visited a derelict house in Rangsit that is supposed to be the haunt of two ghostly lovers. Urban legend has it that the couple moved in there against the wishes of their parents and later committed suicide together.

“A young Thai actress was with us, and she went crazy inside the house,” says the chubby host. “We think the female ghost got inside her





In all his years hosting the radio and TV shows, and reporting from graveyards and abandoned hospitals, Pong says the freakiest experience came when they paid a midnight visit to the shrine for Thailand's most celebrated wraith

and made her jerk around and speak in this strange voice. It took seven of us to control her. When we finally got her out of the house and down the street, a few blocks away, she came out of this trance and said she couldn't remember a thing about what had happened."

Or was the actress merely doing a different kind of screen test? And hoping to break into the horror film biz, Thailand's most popular and lucrative field genre of cinema.

13 WAYS TO MEET SPECTRES

Pong's researcher for both the radio and TV shows, Kohprew na Ratchaburi, who also works as a DJ at the pub and restaurant, says the ghost-hunting expeditions have caused the show loads of trouble. "Some of our listeners hear the reports and then they come down to visit these places, too. Sometimes the teenagers get in fights with other gangs and we've heard reports that thieves have also showed up later on to rob people. That's why we've been going to other nearby provinces and now we always take a policeman with us."

To celebrate the show's 13th anniversary in 2005, they released a VCD called *The Reality Shock* in which 13 people agreed to spend 13 hours in 13 different spots allegedly infested with malevolent spirits. Some of the contestants, says Kohprew, got spooked and left early. It wasn't what they saw – Hollywood has given us an overblown version of the occult – so much as what they felt. "It's very hard to get the supernatural on videotape, but a lot of the time when we're out there, it's just the atmosphere, this horrible feeling of dread, that gets to me," he says.

The cover of the VCD proclaims that watching it will show you "Thirteen ways to meet ghosts," many of them based on ancient Siamese superstitions like smearing your eyelids with the ash from a cremated corpse, or covering your face with a death shroud. Kohprew tells me that the reality show is the precursor to a feature-length ghost story he and Pong are scripting, loosely based on the five CDs and anthologies of weird tales they've compiled from Shock Radio.

In all his years hosting the radio and TV shows, and reporting from graveyards and abandoned hospitals, Pong says the freakiest experience came when they paid a midnight visit to the shrine for Thailand's most famous wraith, Mae Nak, at the Buddhist temple named after her on Sukhumvit Soi 77. They went there with director Nonzee Nimibutr, whose 1999 film, *Nang Nak*, about a woman who died in childbirth in 19th century Bangkok, is still one of the highest-grossing Thai films of all time and a celluloid legend in many other parts of Asia.

"The minute we lit some joss-sticks to pay respect to her, this big wind came up," Pong says. "It suddenly stopped when we planted them in the ground. Later on I tried to play the theme music for the film on the show. But the tape didn't work, so I gave it to a technician, and he ended up taking it home with him. A few weeks later he died in a motorcycle accident. At his funeral, I talked with his widow. She told me that before her husband died she'd had all sorts of nightmares about Nang Nak, who said she wanted to take her husband away to the spirit world."



Pong, left and Kohprew, right

supernatural BANGKOK

Ahead of Halloween, celebrated in many bars and clubs – especially around Khaosan Road – Jim Algie runs down some of the capital’s strangest and scariest attractions.



thailand’s bogeyman

To really get in the Halloween spirit, the place to chill is the Songkran Niyomsane Forensic Medicine Museum in Bangkok. It’s part of the country’s oldest hospital, Siriraj, which is said to be infested with spirits. The museum is full of gory autopsy photos with causes of death written in simple English, “Cut throat from broken beer bottle,” and early shots at forensic science – bullet holes putting full stops in the skulls of unclaimed cadavers so the doctors could study entry and exit wounds.

But the main attraction here is See-Uey Sae-Ung. His cockroach-brown body, waxed with the preservative formalin, stands slumped against the back wall of his final resting case. The empty eye sockets, as well as the bullet holes left by the executioner armed with a machine-gun, have been filled in with white paraffin.

Many Thai children who grew up in the 60s and 70s received the same warning from their parents. “Don’t stay out after dark, or the ghost of See-Uey will get you.”

In the late 50s, the malign young cannibal of Chinese descent was

on a killing binge around Bangkok, and some of the nearby provinces, finally racking up a body count of between five and seven children. His confessions traumatised Thailand, producing a bogeyman who still haunts the nation’s psyche and keeps turning up in films and fiction. After stabbing the children in the throat, he told police, the human carnivore then



slit open up their chests and ate their hearts and livers, which is what he did with dead Japanese soldiers when he was a soldier in China’s army.

This ghastly rite (also practiced by the Khmers of the Angkor era, and the Khmer Rouge during

their legacy of barbarity) is often associated with black magic.

fertility shrine

Devoted to the Fertility Goddess Tubtim, the shrine’s walkway is lined with wooden phalluses in all sorts of shapes, sizes and hues. Many of them are offerings made by both men and women whose wishes have been fulfilled by the goddess, says one of the security guards, who works at the Swissotel Nai Lert Park on Wireless Road.

Married couples, particularly if they’re middle-aged, come to ask the supposed spirit-in-residence for a child. Single women will pray for a husband who is prosperous and faithful, while men entreat her to help them rise above impotence.

Behind the sanctuary, shaded by a natural umbrella of foliage, is the San Sahp Canal. Formerly one of the area’s commercial bloodlines, where floating brothels once plied their trade, the original altar was erected under a sacred ficus tree (it’s still there) after several people experienced a run of good luck by praying to a spirit named Tubtim, rumored to reside in the tree.

Some of the phalluses stand up two metres tall, while another one has the legs and torso of a pig (which is a Chinese symbol of fertility) and the head of a dick.

In Thailand, every day is Halloween, full of homages to the dead and incantations to the supernatural. Touring some of the country’s most macabre attractions affords glimpses into the nation’s soul, which, unlike so many other things, has yet to capitulate to Coca-colonization.

Among Siamese specters Nak reigns supreme. At Wat Mahabut on Sukhumvit Soi 77, her shrine is at the back of the temple, beside the booths with the fortune-tellers and palm-readers, near the canal buzzing with boat traffic. Hundreds of supplicants come here a day to beseech her for various boons, from luck in love to lucky numbers for the lottery. They make traditional Buddhist offerings: flowers, incense, applying gold leaves to her golden image. But other tributes include toy tanks and Formula One cars for her child, along with clothes and cosmetics for her.

As the legend goes, Nak lived around here in the middle of the 19th century. She died in childbirth while her husband Mak was soldiering into battle. But she came back from the dead, along with their ghostly offspring, so she could take care of him. To keep her secret from him, she began killing off the villagers who threatened to expose her.

The legend has had some 20 celluloid reincarnations, most famously by Nonzee Nimibutr in 1998, and most recently in 2005 by the English director and scriptwriter Mark Duffield, in *The Ghost of Mae Nak*.



haunted ISLANDS

When staying on Koh Lipe in southern Thailand, watch out for the spirits because the hippies and dive shop groupies aren't the only scary residents of the island, writes Gordon McEvoy.

Prior to the recent resort boom, the Chao-le people (also known as Sea Gypsies), occupied Lipe Island alone with their ghosts and gremlins. The Chao-le word for ghost is *ha-too*. Ask villagers if there are any ha-too on Lipe and the inevitable response is, "Many many." One old fisherman said to me with an eerie whisper, "Sometimes too many."

Local Rasta-man, Monkey Joe, was woken up one morning by his excited Chao-le friends showing him the ha-too crap left outside by mysterious beings of the night. The sea gypsies take their ghosts seriously. I even ran across a group of young kids checking out ha-too tracks in the sand along the main path of the island one afternoon.

Most foreigners might dismiss such beliefs as superstitious folklore. The crazy thing about Lipe is that tourists are seeing and hearing things, too.

"On Lipe everything is all mixed up," says local cultural heritage specialist, Bart Vranken, who has lived and worked with the sea gypsies for years.

He explains that the Chao-le are an animist culture, retaining a strong respect for and connection to the spirits of their ancestors and the "living" world around them, including coconut trees, whale sharks, and the sea. If these spirits are not kept happy, things start to get weird.

Bart and I toured the island's "power spots."

Our first stop was at the infamous bad-seed coconut tree along the main path bisecting the island. Walking past the tree one day, Bart felt a heavy force push him to the ground. Consulting his Chao-le friends, they laughed knowingly, suggesting he visit the six other islanders accosted by this mischievous tree spirit.

One woman told Bart she was lifted off her scooter while riding past the tree and gently set down on her feet, the bike crashing into the jungle. Others felt immobilized as if gripped by unseen hands. Eventually, the tree was cut down and used in the construction of the Banana Tree Restaurant. The stump remains; carved into it is an odd, primitive-looking face.

Then strange things began happening in the restaurant. Two young farang girls witnessed a group of people walk off the path, through the restaurant and into the kitchen, where they suddenly vanished. More recently, a group of Thai tourists reported seeing a group of unspeaking specters dressed as pirates sitting at a table in the restaurant. Most Chao-le refuse to walk this path at night.

Paulo, an Italian living on the island, heard the sound of coconuts falling late one night. Realizing there are no coconut trees around his house, he went outside to investigate, but his flashlight mysteriously stopped working. He heard a huge animal crashing into the jungle. In the morning, he was surprised to find no tracks. While he says the animal must have been a panther, his Chao-le girlfriend chuckles, saying it sounded more like "King Kong". She knows it was the spirits of her grandparents, whom she had neglected to appease with offerings of cold drinks and cakes in the small "spirit house" outside their home (Chao-le ancestors seem to prefer strawberry Fanta).

Tin, a towering Lipe native, recounts how, as a young boy, he saw an unfamiliar man chopping down a *takian* (massive hardwood) tree, which is supposed to be the haunt of a wailing female spirit. Tin called out to him, but the man did not respond. When Tin later returned, the man was gone, but the tree remained – bearing no axe marks. He says this tree is now "very, very big."

As a teenager, Tin was camping with his family on the nearby "uninhabited" Rawi Island, where they were accosted by



invisible hands throwing sand on their dinner. The attack was so severe they abandoned their meal and quickly fled to the nearby Adang Island.

Krom, who also grew up on the island, explained that these sand-throwers were surely gremlin-like creatures called *waytan*, known by Chao-le to inhabit the trees and beaches of Rawi.

Krom is a direct descendent of To'-Kiri, one of the founding fathers of the village on Lipe. A wooden icon of To'-Kiri stands in the ancestral shrine located in the Chao-le cemetery on the north-east point of the island – the most sacred of "power spots." Relatives routinely gather in the cemetery to share snacks and whiskey with their dearly deceased.

Resort bungalows now back up all the way to the cemetery – perhaps a little too close for spiritual comfort. Krom tells the well-known story of a foreigner staying in one of these bungalows, who saw a large spider with the head of a strange-looking human. The shaken tourist sketched the anomaly and brought it to the leader of the Thai people on the island, who dismissed the foreigner as crazy. However, two monks soon arrived from Satun, claiming to have seen visions while meditating of occult trouble on the island. The monks stayed in the bungalow, practicing healing rituals to banish the bad spirit to Rawi Island. The bungalow was then destroyed.

So, yes, things on Lipe can get a little strange. If you dare to go when the high season begins in November, don't forget to pack extra strawberry soda, and watch out for ghost crap in the morning.



Bangkok's Fantasy Maidens

Alien sightings of day-glow punks, fantasy maidens and Sci-Fi replicants around Bangkok can now be official confirmed. CASSANDRA BECKFORD entered the virtual world of manga and anime on a visit to Bangkok's first Maid Café.

Photos by: Aroon Thaewchatturat



When *Mahoromatic: Automatic Maiden* aired on Japanese TV, it spawned a legion of copycat maids, adding their own dark twist to the look by adopting the 'Gothic Lolita' fashion style haunting Tokyo's Harajuku area. To the Japanese, it seemed only natural that once Suguru (the male star of the show) got his own maid, every other male should have one too, and Japanese girls also found this noble service appealing. It was this kind of thinking that paved the way for the influx of maid café culture.

With its name derived from Tokyo's Akibahara, the sprawling electronics hub, Akiba, Thailand's first maid café, is the epitome of cute (that's 'Narak' in Thai, for those who want the local lingo). The café's tagline, "Let Your Dreams Fly" aptly suits its fantastical, otherworldly environment. Taveelarp "Vee" Kumpolkarnjana, the manager of Akiba, said, "You can read manga in a Starbucks café, but in my store you are surrounded by other manga lovers and completely immersed in the otaku [see terminology box] culture."

In the restaurant you can gorge yourself on delightful creations like *Black Stone* (an Oreo cookie

milkshake named after a manga punk band), *Moe Omelette* (decorated with ketchup art by the maids) and *Paradise Kiss* (a shaved ice, red beans and sorbet concoction). But the café also has an online gaming point, a meeting place for manga fans, and a store crammed with manga novels, anime DVD's and other related merchandise, all running over two floors. Its prime location in Siam Square is perfect for snaring the teeny-bopper crowds that linger after school or university in an area where Thailand's most extreme fashionistas are seen.

With Japanese fashion now widely popular among Thai teens, one regularly sees kids kitted out in the 'Harajuku' style. True to "cosplay" (see terminology box) fashion, 19-year-old Irvy, an Akiba maid, is the embodiment of *'Mahoromatic'* style; from her sweet voice and rosy blushed cheeks, to her neatly starched outfit and bobby socks. Another maid, Nokutesu, provides an enigmatic compliment, striking a chic pose as a "crossplayer" (see terminology box) in her butler's outfit. The 22-year-old university student said, "Traditional Thai fashion and dancing is seen as out of date. Thai kids won't wear these things in the street. In Japan, people still wear kimonos as they



Nokutesu, left and Irvy, right and far right



OCTOBER EVENTS

“Cosplay & Cover Mania contest” is on October 7 at the PP Hotel in the town of Khon Kaen. And the next “Mainichi J-Trends in Town” (usually held every first Saturday of the month) is slated for October 14 outside Bangkok’s MBK mall, near Japanese Dessert St.



DEATH NOTE

If you could kill anyone, anywhere in the world, and nobody would know it was you, whom would you choose to take out? Shonen Jump's latest outing gives the old 'high school student saves the world' plotline a significant twist. After finding a notebook dropped by a *Shinigami* (think Grim Reaper) with the title "Death Note" written on it, Light Yagami soon discovers that he can use this tool to kill anyone whose name he chooses to write on its pages. Initially embarking on a crusade to rid the world of evil (killing murderers and other ne'er-do-wells with his death notes), this almighty power soon goes to his head and he becomes malicious. Add to this a cat-and-mouse chase with the world's most senior detective, "L," and the stage is set for a tour de force adventure.

MANGA: 12 volumes (2004 – 2006)

ANIME: Release date October 2006

MOVIES: Death Note (2006). A sequel is due for release in October 2006. American release dates and a Hollywood remake are also imminent.



The café's tagline, 'Let Your Dreams Fly' aptly suits its fantastical, otherworldly environment.



have been updated for the current times, but it's hard to wear old Thai dress in the streets."

Amongst the huge numbers of Thai teenagers that frequent Akiba (around 300 on weekdays and up to 1300 on weekends) Khun Vee says that his café also serves Japanese businessmen, older Thai men and some foreigners. Laughing, he added, "I think it is mainly otaku's that come here, though some family groups also attend."

An Akiba customer and teenager nicknamed Jubei said the café attracts a mixed crowd. "The people who come here are really diverse. Some Thai people think it is nonsense or useless to do the things we enjoy. I don't think I will cosplay forever, life moves on, but for now I will happily watch *Full Metal Alchemist* for three days straight."

CYBER MAIDS

Maid cafes originated in Japan in 2000 and have spread to other Asian countries such as South Korea, China, Hong Kong and since mid-2006, Bangkok. Most of these themed cafes are not as extreme as those in Japan, where the female staff dress as elegant, manga-style maids and treat the predominantly male clientele on a par with how a 'master' would be served in the home. Customers are greeted with a servile, "Welcome home, Master," on entering the café. The maids kneel to pour their tea, and even perform more personal tasks such as cleaning the customer's ears. For a fee, customers can even sit and chat with the maids in a special, manga-decorated room. From start to finish, both the customer and the employee role-play as servant and 'lord of the manor,' just like the robotic maid in the *Mahoromatic* cartoon.

Asked about why his café is so tame in comparison, the manager Vee said, "Thai culture is more conformist and conservative. This would be seen as too extreme or inappropriate and would probably make front-page headlines in the tabloids."

In Japan many cafes have their own websites featuring photographs and profiles of the maids with titles like, "Maid of the Month," and "Hot New Server," using a mix of sexy photos, saucy word play and tech-savvy jargon. That's why maids are such a hot topic

in many chat rooms and forums, even for surfers who have never been to Japan. One Western female blogger posted, "My new favourite person in the world is Rio from Royal Milk. She loves eating strawberries and making cocktails. If anyone in Tokyo sees her, tell her I said hi, or whatever is proper."

Some female manga fans have posted comparisons between the maids and Bangkok's go-go dancers, enviously noting that these girls don't have to take their clothes off, or have sex with their customers to make stacks of money.

Compared to Japan, where 300 women apply for each position, with only one or two girls making the grade, the competition in Bangkok is not nearly as fierce. Of the 10 students that staff the Akiba café (seven women and three men) most already knew each other through chatting online and their united interest in cosplay. Both male and female staff play an equal role in the service, standing as testament to Akiba's bucking of the Japanese trend for separate maid and butler cafes.

LET'S PLAY DRESS UP

Akiba maintains a fun, fresh and innocent environment; you won't find any sexy sleaze or tease here. Why? As Vee says, "Thailand is not Japan. When Thais see cosplayers out and about on Bangkok's streets, it is common for them to judge, criticise or



Vee



FINAL FANTASY (FF)

This huge franchise began virtual life as a series of computer and console role-playing games produced by Square Enix. As the most widely distributed game series of all time, it consistently tops the rankings for the best computer game ever made. Each title in the series has a different story and characters, interweaving elements of history, the human psyche, mythology and religion. But it was the reappearance of some characters, monsters and "items" that helped to unify each chapter in the series. Character development and design, rousing music, epic back stories, the creation of new 'worlds' and an unrivalled in-game battle system, set this series apart from the mass of imitators.

MANGA: FFXI: *The Out of Orders* (2004). There are many dojinshi art sources for this series.

ANIME: FF: *Legend of the Crystals* (OVA, 1994) FFXII: *Last Order* (OVA, 2005)

FF: *Unlimited*, 52 TV episodes (2001-2002)

MOVIES: FF: *The Spirits Within* (2001) FFXII: *Advent Children* (2005)

VIDEO GAMES: FF I – XII (1987-2006) FF Versus XIII, *Crisis Core*: FFXII are forthcoming titles.

(NB: *Video game sequels, prequels, mobile phone games and side spin-offs from the main series not included here.*)

think, 'Hey, your weird! How come you're so old and still read manga?' Japan is the opposite: it is normal for people of all ages to enjoy manga and anime."

In line with Japan as a pop culture leader, the maid Nokutesu said, "Since I started to read manga nine years ago I've been inspired by Japanese lifestyle, fashion and culture to form my own cosplaying circle. In cosplay you love the characters so much, you just want to be them for awhile." Her favourite cosplay characters are *Akari*, the female heroine from the *Aria* series, *Sephiroth* (the nemesis of *Final Fantasy VII*) and *Yazoo* of *Final Fantasy: Advent Children*.

Maid Irvy (who shortened her manga nickname from Irvine, a male character in *Final Fantasy VIII*) said, "In Thailand only the cosplayers

"In cosplay you love the characters so much, you just want to be them for awhile and can feel powerful in the fantasy realm."

dress so crazily. Normal teenagers are not so wild. At first people stared, but now they see the link between our style of dress and the manga, so it's ok. In our cosplay environment, everyone accepts us, because it's our fashion."

To Nokutesu, what may seem like frivolous fantasy is the embodiment of female empowerment. "For Asian women, cosplaying offers the extended experience of watching a movie then taking things a step further. You can feel powerful in the fantasy realm," she said. Both girls bask in the limelight of wearing their maid costumes by day and cosplaying at themed events, such as *'My Comics My Heroes'* and *'Doujinshi* [see terminology box] *Cosplay*', Thailand's November Comic Market. They either buy or make their own costumes and write their own dojinshis to sell at these events.

A favourite spot for the cosplayers to gather is outside of Bangkok's MBK shopping centre, but the locations tend to change often and followers of the scene regularly check the web for updates (see October's Events box, pg.25).

DRAWING ON JAPANESE CULTURE

Japan's long tradition of borrowing the best from outside and giving it a Japanese spin has helped manga dominate the global market. The end result is a medium that is weird, yet ordinary, Japanese, yet international. With hundreds of titles issued every year, the US is manga's biggest overseas market, earning US\$100 million last year. Even mainstream publishers such as Random House have begun their own line of manga. This is especially poignant at a time when book sales creep up by one or two percent a year, whilst manga sales have shown triple-digit increases, with some titles hitting the mainstream bestseller lists of the *New York Times*.



FULL METAL ALCHEMIST (FMA)

The scientific practice of alchemy (transforming matter into different matter, like lead into gold) is given a fantasy twist in this imaginary world, where magic produces infinite possibilities. After the death of their mother, two brothers, Edward and Alphonse Elric try to revive her using notes on alchemy that their father left behind. The results are disastrous; Edward loses an arm and sacrifices his leg in order to graft Alphonse's soul to a suit of armour, because he lost his whole body. Encouraged by a mentor to become state alchemists, the brothers hear news of a Philosopher's Stone and set out to find it, encountering friends and foes along the way, in a quest to regain their former bodies. As the top selling manga of 2005, fans across the globe couldn't get enough of this scientific-sibling tale and its thought-provoking quotes such as, "Humankind cannot gain anything without first giving something in return," and "There are some rules that should never be broken."

MANGA: 12 volumes (since 2002) Still Running.

ANIME: FMA: *Reflections* (OVA, 2005) 51 TV episodes (2003-2004)

MOVIES: FMA the movie: *Conqueror of Shamballa*

VIDEO GAMES: FMA and the Broken Angel (2003) FMA 2: *Curse of the Crimson Elixir* (2005) Three other titles also available in Japan.



HAIBANE RENMEI

Also known as Charcoal Feather Federation, this is a classic case of art imitating art, as the series was inspired by Haruki Murakami's novel *Hard Boiled and the End of the World*, set in a walled city that no one is allowed to leave. The characters known as "Ash-wings" (haloed humans with flightless wings) have no recollection of their former lives. When Rekke, a new Ash-wing, arrives in the community, she acts as a catalyst for change, helping to uncover secrets from the past. Slow-paced and full of depth, this extraordinary tale diverges from the usual 'crash-bang-wallop' battles and action of other popular anime that deals with teenage suicide.

MANGA: 10 volumes (2001), still running.

ANIME: 13 episodes (2002)

"My generation grew up surrounded by Japanese influences. We read the comics, played the video games and listened to the music, so it's no coincidence that we present ourselves in a Japanese style."



GHOST IN THE SHELL (GITS)

A heavyweight in the *Blade Runner*-inspired cyberpunk anime, the series is set in 2029 where the lines between real and virtual have been blurred. Humans have implant-enhanced bodies, while robots and computers strive to emulate human minds. Major Motoko Kusanagi, an enhanced female cyborg and Batou Togusa a Section 9 police operative, have been assigned to tracking the case of the Puppet Master who has waged a 'ghost-hacking' (memory or identity-theft) war. Throw in Kusanagi's own struggles with her cyborg identity and you have the perfect future vision masterpiece.

MANGA: GITS: 8 volumes (1998-1996)

GITS 2: 11 volumes (2005), still running

ANIME: GITS: Stand Alone Complex (2002-2003)

MOVIES: GITS (1996)

GITS 2: Innocence (2004)

VIDEO GAMES: GITS (1997)

GITS: Stand Alone Complex (2005)

Though manga has attracted a cult following throughout Europe, Australia, and isolated parts of Africa and Latin America, it is in East and Southeast Asia where it's the most popular outside of its homeland.

Akiba's head honcho Vee, who is in his early 30s, says, "My generation grew up surrounded by Japanese influences. We read the comics, played the video games and listened to the music, so it's no coincidence that we present ourselves in a Japanese style. In my youth there were no anime shops. A guy would pedal his goods around by bicycle, constantly on the move. I was highly influenced by my first visit to Japan and wanted to change the 'norm' of these outlets in Thailand,"

GENDER BLENDING

Manga traditionally adopts a *shonen* (boys) and *shojo* (girls) gender split but *dojinshi* has influenced much crossover in these fields. Males still tend to be the main consumers of commercial manga, while females dominate the *dojinshi* market, which has helped to break down gender barriers and make the unlicensed comic market balloon.

In line with changing manga culture, the definition of exactly who is an otaku seems desperate for a makeover. These days, there are hordes of females who devour the merchandise and obsess over the books and videos, but don't fit the nerdy, anti-social and, most importantly, male stereotype.

Sompan, an Akiba customer said, "Back in the day when manga was all science fiction, the otaku were mainly all men. Now it includes everything: war, horror and romance. I think that's why more females are interested."

Aiya, a teenage female fan hanging out at the Bangkok café, said the gender differences are becoming more androgynous. "There is a lot of stuff I read that is done by boys that is really cute, and really violent stuff done by women."



SERIAL EXPERIMENTS LAIN (SEL)

Following the current trend to exploit all media formats, creator Yasuyuki Ueda wrote and designed SEL as a video game and anime simultaneously. The suicide of a classmate initiates Lain into the world of the Wired, an international computer network that enables communication between people and machines without an interface. Drawing heavily from cyberpunk theory, the series poses questions about the collective unconscious, conspiracy theories, God and reality. Dispensing with a linear plot, each episode in the story is called a "layer," and each of them depicts the hallucinations of Lain and other central characters. Hoax "layers" were also included to further throw viewers off the track, with the whole tale being pulled together through a final cross dissection. Full of bizarre, creepy twists and turns; in the end nothing is what it appears to be, not even Lain herself.

MANGA: The Nightmare of Fabrication (1998).

Five artwork books and 21 research papers have also been written, including one on Apple computers, as many of their products are featured throughout the series.

ANIME: 13 episodes (1998)

VIDEO GAMES: SEL (1998)

GUNNM

Though it is known under a variety of different names across the globe (Battle Angel Alita, Gun Dream) Gunnm is the Japanese name for the series. The tale is set in the post-apocalyptic world known as Scrapyard, a junk heap spewed from Tipharex (Salem) the floating city which resides in the sky. Here, Dr. Ido, a 'hunter-warrior' finds the remnants of a female cyborg (known as Alita in the manga and Gally in the Original Video Animation (OVA)). Rebuilt by Dr. Ido from scrap metal parts, Alita chooses to become a hunter-warrior, embarking on a journey to recollect her past and piece together her true identity. A Hollywood remake under the direction of James Cameron (*Terminator*, *Alien*) is planned for a 2009 release.

MANGA: 9 volumes (1991-1995); Last Order (2006) is still running.

ANIME: Battle Angle Alita (OVA, 1993)

VIDEO GAMES: Gunnm: Martian Memory (1998).

What's with the Slang? TERMINOLOGY

ANIME: The Japanese word for animation (animated cartoons). These are often adaptations of popular manga series that are created once market interest has been established.

COSPLAY: A slang term for the contraction of the English words "costume" and "play." Begun as a Japanese subculture in the early 70s, it has grown into a global phenomenon whereby fans dress up as their favourite characters from manga, anime, video games and fantasy movies. Characters from *Harry Potter*, *FF* and *Mahoromatic* (also known as the Gothic Lolita style) are hot right now.

CROSSPLAY: This is cosplay whereby you dress up as a person of the opposite sex. Manga and anime's best-known fictional crossplaying characters are "Man-Faye," a man dressed as Faye Valentine in *Cowboy Bebop* or "Sailor Bubba" crossplaying in *Sailor Moon*. Handsome bishonen characters from games like *FF* or Hollywood movies like *Harry Potter* are very popular with female cosplayers.

DOJINSHI: Self-published manga or novels created by amateurs. The term translates as "niche journal." Unlike mass-marketed manga sold in licensed stores, dojinshi are often printed in small batches and sold through mail order, specialist shops or Comikets (slang for 'comic markets'). A big business in its own right, often as many as 480,000 people attend the twice-yearly Comikets in Japan. Dojinshi often includes art collections, hentai anime and video games. Groups of dojinshi artists refer to themselves as a "circle." The popular, all-female publishing house, CLAMP (famous for its *Chobits* and *Cardcaptor Sakura* titles) started out as a dojinshi group.

FAN SERVICE: This is the act of adding something that has no direct relevance or character development to a story, purely for the sake of pleasing the fans. In manga and anime the inclusion of seductively posed, well-endowed or nude women is common, such as panty shots or cleavage close-ups (plenty of which can be seen in *Mahoromatic*). Video games often use this too, and may include "Easter Eggs" (hidden messages, featured objects or characters from manga, anime and other video games that can be unlocked for play). The inclusion of cosplaying characters, in-jokes and masses of technological information also greatly pleases fans.

GLOMP: This is a form of greeting used by anime fans based on anime. Glomping involves bear-hugging someone, sometimes from a running start and latching on tightly. It can also refer to a hug from behind, in which one grabs a girl's breasts in the course of the hug. It has since expanded into slang amongst otaku, in chat rooms

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION (NGE)

From religion to psychoanalysis, mecha robots to mental illness, this epic series has it all. It's often been said of Evangelion that if you feel your life is horrible, watching this can make you feel a whole lot better, as every character appears to be far more dysfunctional than yourself. Fourteen-year-old Shinji Ikari is the central character, who has been abandoned by his father and coerced into piloting a huge biomechanical "robot" known as an "Eva" or Evangelion. This is anime at its best. An infamous series, it spawned a thousand copycats because of its exploration of the characters and their tenuous grip on reality.

MANGA: NGE, 10 volumes (1995-1996); NGE: Angelic Days, 6 volumes (2006)

ANIME: 26 TV episodes (1995-1996)

MOVIES: Evangelion: Death and Rebirth (1997)
The End of Evangelion (1997); Revival of Evangelion (1998)

VIDEO GAMES: Girlfriend of Steel (1998); Evangelion 64 (1999); Ayanami Raising Project (2002); Shinji Ikari Raising Project (2004); Girlfriend of Steel 2 (2005)

Web chat rooms often discuss the rise in popularity of the Yuri and Yaoi (see terminology box) manga and anime genres with women, which also fit the current crossover trend. With Yaoi manga in particular, strangely enough, female fans grow jealous when their favorite male characters get involved with a girl, even those of the two-dimensional type. It is not uncommon for factions of female readers devoted to particular characters to squabble over how the males are portrayed by different artists. One blogger states, "Boy-meets-boy affairs seem to appeal simply as they differ from the norm. Same-sex relationships are so alien to most Japanese readers, and so, lend the stories a dreamlike quality."

It is this surreal quality and a yearning for a different kind of existence that accounts for the appeal of *Mahoromatic* to manga fans. What might have remained a simple boy-meets-girl teen love tale in a Western format becomes a completely different cyberpunk kind of story. The boy is a lonely orphan

and Internet forums as an extended form of greeting.

MANGA: This is the Japanese word for comics and graphic novels. Outside of Japan, it usually refers specifically to Japanese comics and animation. It uses a black-and-white format, except for colour front and back covers, though some manga include colour plates. Characteristics of the style include "speed lines" to show movement, detailed background effects and symbols used to denote the characters' mood, personality and state of mind. Writers are known as mangaka and write topics, from cookbooks to car manuals, for every sector and age group of society. There are a variety of genres including magical girl and

Robot or 'Mecha'. As testament to the format's increasing popularity, *The Los Angeles Times* recently began publishing manga on a weekly basis, in place of the usual American-style comic strips.

OTAKU: Anyone who is fanatical or obsessed with one particular theme, topic or hobby is an otaku. For example, a person who watches anime excessively would be an "anime otaku." Be it anime, train-spotting or stamp collecting, when the term was previously used it generally conjured up images of nerdy young boys. As anime and manga are now popular with legions of women, this term no longer specifically relates to young men.

YAOI: Anime or manga that focus on homosexual relationships between males. It can also be sexually explicit. This term is more widely used in America, whereas the term "Boys Love" (BL) is more popular in Japan. Female otaku are big on this genre. Popular titles include *Only the Ring Finger Knows*, *Wild Rock*, and *Lies and Kisses*.

YURI: Or "Girl Love" (GL) is anime or manga that includes lesbian themes, possible with sexually explicit content. Unrequited love and playground romance themes often feature in these stories. Popular titles in this category would include *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, *Sailor Moon* and *Dirty Pair*.

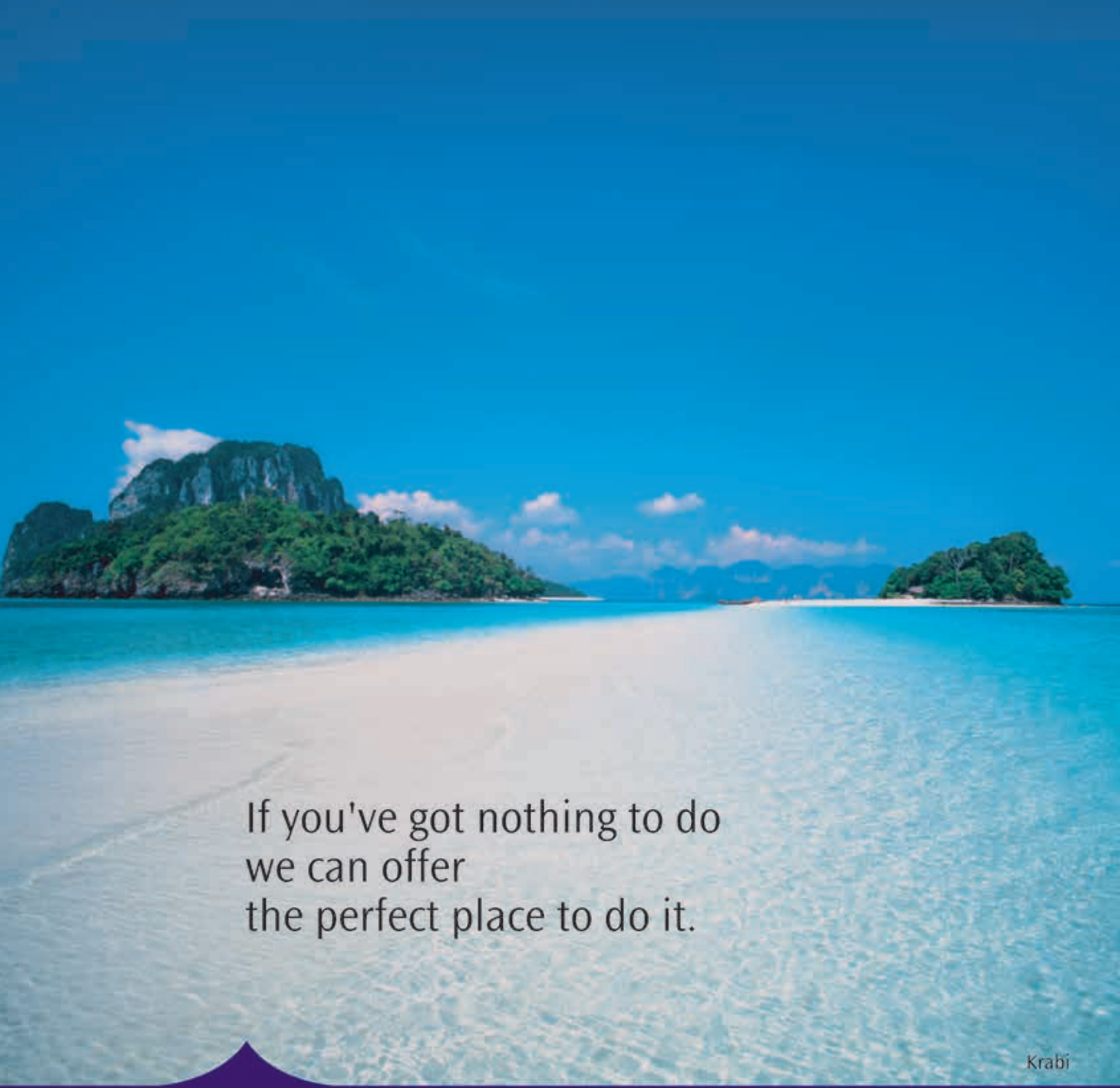


who hires a maid that unbeknownst to him was created by his father. The girl is a decommissioned combat android. She chooses to have her weapons removed and work as a maid to prolong her lifespan and allay the feelings of guilt she has about not being able to save her creator's life in a past battle. Bypassing the usual sweet and sappy ending in most mangas, like *Sailor Moon*, the story veers towards a sour and cynical conclusion about lost love and the eventuality of death.

In spite of the occasional tints of darkness and violence, most fans find the imaginativeness of the genre teaches some real life lessons even while it inspires dreams.

"Manga and anime are a kind of education, a serious event," says Vee. "It's those brilliant ideas that helped me make the transition from being a fan to building a business. I was inspired and realised that anything can be possible."

Akiba is open daily from 11am-8pm, 2F-3F, 430/35-36, Siam Square Soi 7, Phayathai Rd.
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LIFE

DURING WARTIME

Suzan Crane finds herself enmeshed in the safety net of Tel Aviv during the recent spate of violence between Israel and Lebanon, but then the net is torn asunder. Photo by Rafi Frankel.

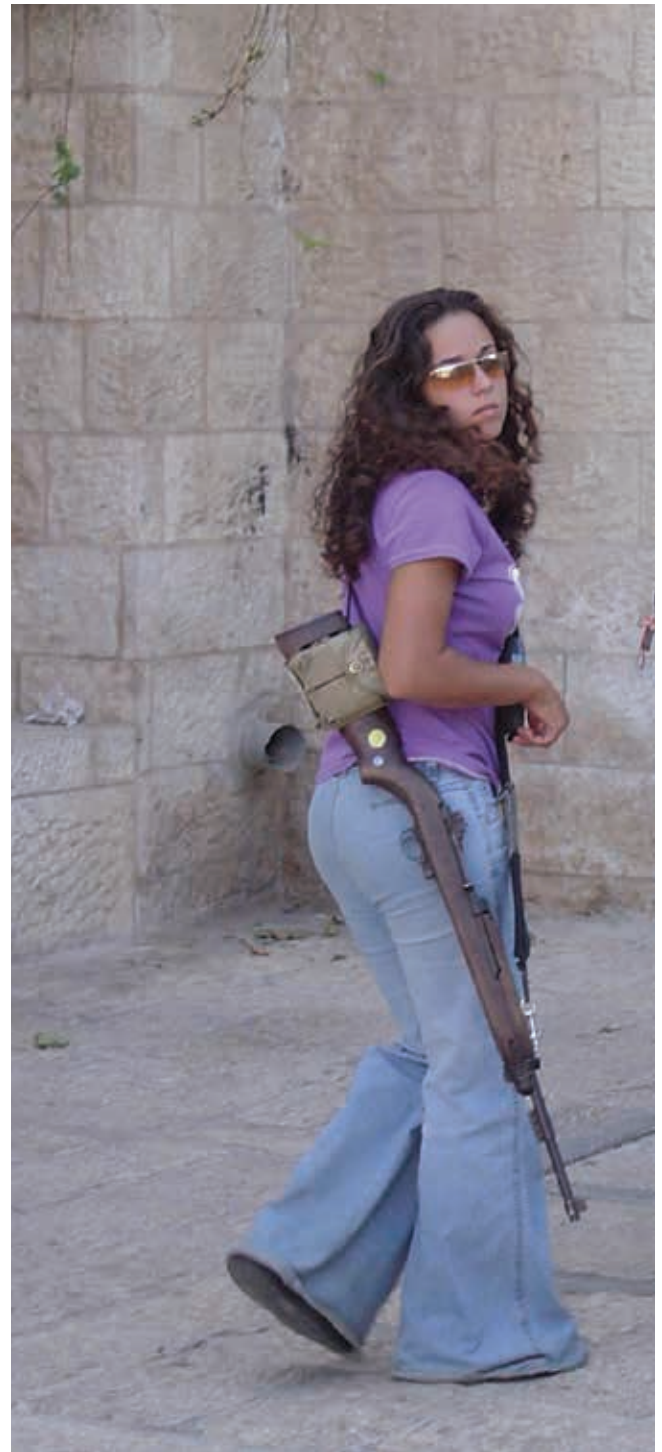
“**T**el Aviv exists in a bubble,” my friend Rei declared as he darted out the door to visit his brother in the hospital. Israel’s war with Lebanon was about two weeks old and Rei’s younger brother had been injured. But aside from the ubiquitous news reports, Tel Aviv seemed far removed from the battles raging in the north, only a few hundred kilometers away from the nation’s hip, modern capital. The wide Mediterranean beaches girding the city were still packed with sunbathers, Shenken Street still teemed with hungry shoppers, and the spirited nightlife continued even as towns such as Haifa and Galilee were getting pounded.

Being in Israel at a time when Middle East tensions and global alarm were peaking was a surreal experience. Although harboured in the relative safety of Tel Aviv, I received a glut of emails from friends and family imploring me to “get out”. It would’ve been stupid to explore the rolling hills and verdant valleys of Israel’s northern region; but I did get to behold the aquamarine buoyancy of the fabled Dead Sea – the lowest point on earth above the water’s surface – and the sacred relics and biblical sites of Jerusalem.

It was not a coincidence that I found myself in the Holy Land – where I had long hoped to connect with my heritage and religious roots – at this crucial time in history. The experience explained a lot about the national psyche in a country where uniform-clad, machine gun-wielding, post-adolescents are an omnipresent sight and violence and piety co-exist. At first the contradictions struck me as bizarre, but I soon grew accustomed to a bus full of kids brandishing a gun in one hand and a mobile phone in the other. I couldn’t help but wonder how it must impact both boys (serving three years) and girls (two years), who must relinquish the security of family for the rigours of military service. It shed light on the mutinous behavior exhibited by the battalions of young, recently emancipated Israelis who flock to India and South America in search of drugs, sex and a perpetual party.

Having temporarily departed Israel while the war was still raging, I returned a few weeks later to catch my flight to Spain. One night was just long enough to sense the increased tension and changed mood in the country. Whereas it took 10 minutes to cross the border between Aqaba, Jordan and Elat, Israel just a month earlier, this time I was detained for nearly six hours as I crossed in the north. Even in Tel Aviv the “bubble” seemed to have burst, as long-range rockets began to strike the city’s peripheral areas.

On this night, my friends Sharon and Amit evacuated their apartment as locals braced themselves for a forecasted onslaught. “If you hear sirens don’t worry. Just get up and leave the apartment,” Yuval and Vered, the



couple with whom I was staying, said nonchalantly. After all, for them this was the reality of living in Israel. They’d been through this before; sirens, suicide bombers and gun-toting youths have been with them since birth.

For now the war is over and life is back to ‘normal’ in Israel’s throbbing cities, scenic mountains, beaches and desert communities. Normal, if you consider normalcy always being on the brink of warfare. With all its attractions and history, the only thing the country lacks is enduring peace.

To quote Pope John Paul II in an Apostolic Letter (“Redemptionis Anno”): “I think of and long for the day on which we shall be so ‘taught by God’ (John 6:45) that we shall listen to his message of peace and reconciliation. I think of the day on which Jews, Christians and Muslims will greet each other in the city of peace with which Christ greeted the disciples after the Resurrection: ‘Peace be with you (John 20:19).’”

at Her Majesty's PLEASURE

Long-time contributor CLOVIS LAPORTE wasn't always a completely honest man. Noting recently that the statute of limitations has run out on his crimes, he confesses to his short stint in a UK prison back in his mid-20s where he fought the law and he won. Illustration by NIGEL PRICE.

There was a tugging sensation

on my big toe that grew more urgent as I sluggishly regained consciousness. In the back of my skull there was a little man with cotton-wrapped fists attempting to punch his way out. Fragments of video clips with bad sound, apparently recorded the night before, spooled off in my addled mind in no particular order as sunlight cast a red glow behind my eyelids.

"Rise and shoine sweet'art!" said a man with a Cockney accent to a roomful of masculine chuckles. I squinted into the light. I was on a large comfortable bed, the Cockney fellow shaking my toe was a helmeted policeman, as were the seven other uniformed men poking around the room. I was in the Mayfair Hotel and I recalled to my horror that, "Oh fuck," my friend and I had checked in here roaring drunk on a fraudulent credit card. There was a half-empty bottle of Dom Perignon Champagne in a silver bucket of tepid water. I remembered that it cost 85 pounds and that I was in deep shit.

My friend David, an acquaintance of three weeks, sat on the edge of the other bed, head buried in his hands. We weren't allowed to speak to each other of course, but he dove over to me and spoke in my ear: "It's alright, I'll tell them you didn't know anything about it – deny everything!" before the police dragged him back. The Cockney examined the bottle. "Do you always have champagne for breakfast then?"

"Why the fuck shouldn't I have champagne for breakfast? I'm a wealthy man," David said.

So they handcuffed him, perhaps because he was big, strong and from Newcastle, or maybe just for being cheeky, but left me bare-wristed,

and denying our urgent requests for a pee, paraded us down the carpeted hall of one of London's finest hotels. Outside the lift, the night manager, presumably the one who grew suspicious at our lack of luggage and staggering gait, and decided to alert the police, glowered alongside the irritated day manager, who clearly didn't want his shift to start like this. Next to them was the Trinidadian room-service guy who received a 10-pound tip for bringing us the champagne at 3am. He smiled broadly and gave an obsequious nod as we passed.

I don't know what tabloids we appeared in if any, but there was a small scrum of three photographers outside as they pushed us into separate cars. It must have been a slow day for adulterous footballers. For the next 14 hours, David and I were kept apart.

The police love to manhandle you. The Cockney, who had apparently been assigned to my case, lightly but firmly shoved me into an empty holding cell at the Picadilly police station, and as I suppose most amateur prisoners do, I turned around to face my gaoler. He smiled, gave me a three-fingered wave and shut the thick steel door with an echoing boom.

There are few things that make your heart sink further than a prison cell door slamming in your face. They finally have your liberty – it is theirs to toy with, and suddenly you want nothing more than to get out of that room and out from under authority's omnipotent thumb. If someone paid you 10,000 pounds to stay in that room for three days it would be no problem, but remove the choice and the feeling is one of instant despair. Of course they know that.

Ten minutes later, my bobby returned, released me and led me down the long hallway of battleship-grey steel doors to a lone desk. We sat opposite each other and he produced my wallet and passport, the only personal effects I had to take away. "Let's go over your story, shall we?" Though I had already demanded my public defender, whom they assured

me would arrive "in four or five hours," I decided to cooperate a bit. Nobody was taking notes, this guy didn't seem all that bright, and it was nice to be out of the cell for awhile.

"Right. What are you doing in the UK?" I realised that some lies were going to be in order, but the best and

The Cockney fellow shaking my toe was a helmeted policeman, as were the seven other uniformed men poking around the room

most easily remembered lies are always based on the truth. "I've been travelling around Europe for the last year. I visited Denmark, had some money stolen at my hostel, so I headed down through Italy to Greece, worked there as a bartender, flew back to the UK, worked at Boots as a stereo salesman in Somerset, then moved to Germany to stay with a beautiful Bulgarian defector in a student dormitory while working as a forklift driver in a stereo warehouse on an American Army base..."

As I spoke, the Cockney was removing the contents of my wallet piece by piece. Photos, train boat and plane tickets, souvenirs of foreign currency, he examined them casually, as if they were his. "Hang on." He held up a photo. "Is this the Bulgarian then?"

"No, that's my girlfriend in Somerset."

"Not bad... Did she know about the Bulgarian?"

"Yeah, but she couldn't really say much because she's already married."

"Yeah? So is this one the Bulgarian, or this one?"

"No, she's a Canadian I met on the plane on the way over here from Canada last year, and this one's Norwegian, but I was just getting to that part. Here, this is the Bulgarian."

"Oooh, nice tits!"

"Yeah, I thought so." He wasn't going to wind me up with such a cheap ploy – not that he was lying. And his interest seemed genuine. "Do you have a girlfriend?" I asked, genuinely curious.

"Yeah, Scottish bird – but 'ang on, I'm asking the questions here! So, you worked in Germany with the Bulgarian bird?"

"Yeah, then after a few months I had to move on because she was insane. So I went to Denmark again, on the way to Norway to stay for 10 days with that Norwegian girl I showed you already."

He laid out all the photos in front of me. "Are you shagging all these birds?" he asked with a growing sense of awe. I nodded and smiled bashfully.

"All right for some, cavortin' round Europe and shagging exotic birds, isn't it?"

I tried to assure him that anyone who didn't look like Quasimodo

could do it – even him – all you have to do is saddle up and hit the road. He seemed sceptical.

"So it was in Copenhagen that I met David. We were chasing after a group of French girls at the hostel."

"And...?"

I wasn't sure whether he wanted to know more details about my friendship with my credit card fraud partner or how we got on with the

There are few things that make your heart sink further than a prison cell door slamming in your face

French girls.

He eventually got down to his job properly and made me explain a few things about how I came to be in the Mayfair Hotel with this bloke I hardly knew on a false credit card with a bottle of incredibly expensive Champagne. Then he shoved me back into my cell.

They decided to feed me, perhaps as a reward. The metal flap in the door clanged open and a metal plate slid through. It was overcooked Heinz baked beans, every one of them burst open, bread fried almost black, hard and dry fried eggs and a single slice of bacon. I forced it down my dry hangover throat. A few minutes later, the door opened again and a steaming mug of tea came through. It tasted heavenly. They may be sadistic cooks, but the English can't help but make a good cup of tea.

I was released again to see the public defender, a silver-haired man in his late forties with a bit of a posh accent that may have been an affectation. "So, tell me your story – the same one you plan to tell the interrogating inspector, an Ulster chap by the way, had a lot of dealings with the IRA in his day – and it may be useful to know that your friend – David is it? – says that you knew nothing about the credit cards being fraudulent – he used four different ones on your big night out, you know, though it apparently escaped your attention nonetheless. He's made a full confession, so you should be alright, if you get your details...correct."

Famished for nicotine, I asked for a cigarette. "Sorry, I don't smoke anymore – haven't for years now. You really should give up. You're obviously a well-educated chap, good background and all that. That nasty habit is best left to the working classes these days – like your friend in the cell."

I unfurled my story, the barrister making little corrections along the way. ("Are you sure it was like that? Didn't you actually go to this place before going to that other place?" "Oh yes, that's right, thanks for reminding me.")

He summoned the Cockney copper and the three of us headed for interrogation room number three. Within were the Irishman and a stenographer. The three of us sat down and the Irishman started right in. "You look nervous." It was true. I was an accomplice to credit card fraud. "There's no reason for that if you've done nothing wrong. You haven't done anything wrong, have you?"



“No.”

“All right, so tell me all about the things you haven’t done wrong. Start with when you met David. Where was that?”

I explained that we had met in Copenhagen at a youth hostel. I mentioned the French girls as our convergence point, but he didn’t seem interested.

In fact, there had been a third man and this had been my big worry. David and Tony had been travelling mates for six years, defrauding Visa and Mastercard while Eurorailing around the continent indulging in drink and women and visiting the occasional cathedral. I met them both together, and we travelled together from Copenhagen until the night before our arrest when Tony wandered off in a drunken haze and wasn’t seen again that night, leaving a very drunk me to convince an even drunker David that it would be a really good idea to check into an expensive hotel, even though he should have known better. So I had to make sure that for all the truth I told this IRA interrogator, that it was always “he,” not “they” and “David,” not “David and Tony”.

“All right for some, cavortin’ round Europe and shagging exotic birds, isn’t it?”

“So David and I got on very well and he decided to join me on my trip to Norway to stay with a lady friend.”

“You brought him along, why?”

“Well, we’d become close mates since he’d done me a couple of favours.” (Like saving me in Copenhagen’s notorious Christiania, an old army base turned hippie commune. Tony and Dave and I had been smoking bong after bong all afternoon and I passed out next to a falafel stand, squirting tahini all over my jacket. They opted to take me back to the hostel rather than removing the 1,000 pounds from my money-belt and leaving me behind. They were clearly good folks even though they were cagey about their history.

“What sort of... favours?”

“David let me have the better-looking French girl.”

“So you went to Norway together, the two of you.”

It may have been paranoia, but it seemed to me that this guy was good. Years of blackbagging IRA suspects and wiring their gonads up to car batteries had clearly honed his instincts. He just seemed to know when I wasn’t telling the complete truth.

“And you stayed with a woman?”

“Yes, and David became friendly with her best friend.” This time the pictures stayed in my wallet.

“Ah, and then you came back to England by boat, you say?”

“Correct”

“And went out for a big night on the town, courtesy of your good friend David and his credit cards.”

“Yes.”

“You consumed, let me see... 11 bottles of expensive wine at a succession of wine bars, and a lavish dinner at a French bistro, and after being turned away by the night manager at the Ritz – ah, you thought we didn’t know about that, did you? – the two of you checked into the Mayfair Hotel, and proceeded to order a bottle of one of the world’s most expensive champagnes. It didn’t occur to you at some point that it is perhaps a bit unusual for a man to spend that sort of money on another man?”

“Well no, you become fast friends on the road. David had told me he had plenty of money and besides, he was grateful that I paid his boat fare.”

“From Sweden?”

Ah, that old trick. “No, from Norway, as I said before. About 90 pounds.”

“You paid the boat fare of a stranger? And why wasn’t he wealthy at that point?”

“He said something about bank transfer problems.” It was true. I did pay their boat fare and they’d paid me back as soon as we got to England. They had suddenly run out of money and seemed keen to get rid of me for an afternoon while they went to the bank. They had given me their video camera and asked me to film every fit bird who walked down the high street of Oslo. The pieces started to fall into place. They were into something dodgy, but I kept my mouth shut. As it worked out later, their last bogus credit card had been cancelled.

The Irishman instructed the stenographer to stop writing.

“Are you homosexual?”

“Of course not.” I was genuinely insulted, but I suppose years on the force dealing with the scum of earth had taught him never to trust strangers, and he needed a believable explanation. “If it was true, I’d tell you, because then it might make more sense to you, but we’re just mates, that’s it.” He obviously hadn’t talked at length with the Cockney.

He kept asking me to repeat my story over and over, inserting falsehoods and forcing me to correct them. It went on for about two hours, and he was growing frustrated, especially when I asked the stenographer to read back portions of my previous testimony. They hate it when you exercise your rights.

“Look, I put it to you that you knew all along that the cards were false and as such were an accomplice to fraud.”

“That’s not true and if you don’t believe me, ask David.”

They returned me to my cell for awhile and about an hour later, the door swung open. Fourteen hours had passed since my incarceration. I was exhausted.

“You’re free to go. Stay out of trouble,” said my new bobby.

I went to the reception area and David was waiting there. The family lawyer had vouched for him by phone in lieu of bail. Delighted to be reunited after our ordeal, we embraced, and I noticed that the Irishman was sitting in one of the chairs nearby, head tilted, squinting, wondering whether his gay hypothesis wasn’t correct.

Outside, David said, “It was a bit touch and go there. They wouldn’t release me until I told them where the car was. They took the keys and searched it but said they didn’t find anything – which was strange because there were three more cards in the glove box.”

The car wasn’t far off so we walked, grateful to stretch our legs. We got in the car and saw a note jammed into the car lighter.

“8:00AM: Lads, got completely rat-arsed and passed out in a laneway last night. Taking the train back to Norwich, see you there. Hope you had a better night than me. Tony.”

Somehow the police had missed it – and the three cards in the glove box. So we laughed all the way back to Norwich.

EPILOGUE:

I flew back to Canada five days later. David appeared in court, claiming it was the first time he’d committed fraud and was ordered to pay back all the money from that evening (including the bellboy’s tip) plus a fine of 500 pounds (all paid with the remaining three cards) and had to do six months probation, reporting weekly, after which he joined Tony in the south of France to resume their adventures. When the prosecutor asked him how he had worked out such a clever credit card scam, he said, “I learned how on the telly – one of those crime shows.”



Phu Ying DJ

On her return to Glow in Bangkok, the former model DJ Nakadia sounded off to Cassandra Beckford about her European tour, in between spinning an entertainingly eclectic set. Photo by Sebastian Lehmann.

How does it feel to be back in Thailand?

I'm from the northeast of Thailand and live on Koh Samui but Bangkok still feels like a hometown for me. I love my country and its open and friendly people. I've been to many places but nothing compares with the feeling of coming home.

Tell me about the places you visited on your tour?

Playing at Berlin's Love Parade was great. In Italy I played at parties for fashion designers in some incredible settings; mansions with mini-lakes and beautiful statues. Portugal and Latvia were also good. In one Latvian club my decks were set up in front of an amazing digital backdrop. In Russia one taxi journey was six hours of speeding night driving along a winding road to dash to the club, feeling like we would fall over the cliff edge at any minute. I was like, "Oh god, help me!" I'd never heard about this place before and was expecting bombing or something like that but it wasn't dangerous at all. I also played the Fashion TV party.

I like meeting people of different cultures.

Is there a different vibe between Thai and European crowds?

Wherever I play, I try to give the crowds what they want, matching my sound to the clubbers or venue. If they like harder music like breakbeat, nothing too banging, then I will play that. At the fashion parties, I play a more smoothed-out, house sound. Thai people like hard music (similar to the Latvians), or hip-hop and R&B, whereas foreigners seem more open-minded towards different musical styles.

How did you manage to break into the international market?

I started out modelling in Europe. My friend and current tour manager Sebastian got me started. As my mentor, he taught me how to DJ, introducing me to the European club scene. Listening to different musical styles was a great influence. I realised I didn't have to play the typical trance or techno I was used to hearing in Thai clubs. At first we promoted

me as a model but once I stopped modelling to DJ full-time we changed my promotional focus. For example, on my Myspace page we swapped my modelling shots for pictures of my DJ'ing gigs and things grew from there.

How do you find being a woman in this profession?

Being Asian, a Thai female and former model, it was a little difficult at first. People in the industry were curious; I think they didn't believe I would make a good DJ and booked me just to check me out, but were surprised to find that I was quite good. Seeing other female DJs playing helped me realise that this was something I could do. For sure it was hard at first, having to prove myself in this business, which is still seen as a 'man's job,' but I did it. I can't speak for other women though.

How do you describe your DJ sound?

Looking back I feel my style was a little immature, not very polished. I'm 26 now, but come from a farming Thai background, so I missed out on hearing Western

music in the 80's, and started from nothing. But my love of dancing and clubbing helped me learn about music and what sound I wanted to play. I saw European clubs playing different music in each room, picked up on the different atmospheres and decided to play the sound that gave me the best feeling. Initially I played the trance sounds of DJs like Tiesto but soon moved on. Now I play electro house and breakbeat.

Do you find other Thai women treat you as a role model?

Girls contact me on the Internet and tell me I am their idol. Seeing other beautiful brown girls like me on Myspace gave me the confidence to start my own web page, so I hope it influences others. I've heard of some Thai girls falling prey to guys offering to make them 'stars' overseas so I like to support others when I can.

What have you got planned for the future?

I'm producing new tracks that will be released early 2007. Hopefully, an album will follow after that.

MIDriff crisis

Sticking out like a potbellied stove in the land of the lithesome? Jim Algie chews the fat with a nutritionist about healthy eating.

Nowadays, obesity is swelling the ranks and the torsos of a disproportionate number of Thais, as evidenced by a survey from the Public Health Ministry indicating that almost 40 percent of Thais above the age of 34 are overweight, mostly because of fatty foods and soft drinks.

Much of the blame, especially in urban centres, can be attributed to all the fast food chains and convenience stores breaking out like pimples on an adolescent's face. Indicators of wealth and status, Western-style foods supposedly prove that Asians have cosmopolitan tastes. For example, in the 2004 hit single "Wai Jai Dai Gaw" (northern Thai slang for "Do You Trust Me?") by Lanna, the female vocalist ridicules her lack of sophistication by singing, "I've never eaten pizza." (Indeed, Pizza Company has notched up double-digit sales growth in recent years.)

One of the principal factors that had once saved Asians from corpulence is a lack of sugar in their diets, says Jeff Nieuwenhuizen, the head of

Holistic Treatments at the renowned Chiva Som resort and spa in Hua Hin. "But a lot of Asians are now following the worst eating habits of Westerners," says Jeff over the phone.

Not that he has any pretensions of being the Nostradamus of nutrition, but he predicts that these dietary changes will have some serious side effects in Thailand, and cause a rash of Type 2 Diabetes cases. The Public Health Ministry survey bears this out with 24 percent of the more than 6,000 respondents complaining of chronic illnesses like high blood pressure and diabetes.

When you're living off the fat of the land going on some kind of diet is an inevitability. The most popular one in recent years is the Atkins diet. It's very well-researched, says Jeff, even though he advises his clients to throw away the first half of the book – about retooling your health and shedding excess kilos in just six weeks – and take the book's maintenance diet at the end to heart.



"Since Dr. Atkins was a famous cardiologist who died of a heart attack, it goes to show that diet is not the only contributing factor to good health," says Jeff.

In fact, this naturopath who studied in Australia believes that nutrition alone is the most difficult and agonising way to lose weight.

"We're all too sedentary and don't get enough exercise. Golf is not exercise," Jeff says. "I wore a heart-rate monitor to play a round and only burnt 15 more calories than I normally would have. I'm not a good player, but the spread between burning calories and diet is what really counts."

What Jeff recommends is an hour-long session of physical exertion, four times a week. "The body's really stupid, and has a short-term memory. So you have to give it consistent commands, like training a dog every day."

Building up muscle mass also guarantees that your calorie intake is not going straight to your belly.

Most of the popular diets, like the blood-typing one, which posits that certain foods go better with certain blood types, have some validity to them, says the nutritionist. But you should be wary of the more extreme

variations like eating only cabbage soup.

"In this kind of diet, you're basically starving yourself. So the first thing your body does is to burn muscle mass, not the fat, because muscle mass is an option and fat is a survival mechanism," he notes, adding that reducing your muscles also lowers your potential to burn calories.

Jeff cautions that if you're in the midst of a midriff crisis you should aim for realistic goals, like losing a kilo a week, and learning some new eating habits that are sustainable in the long run.

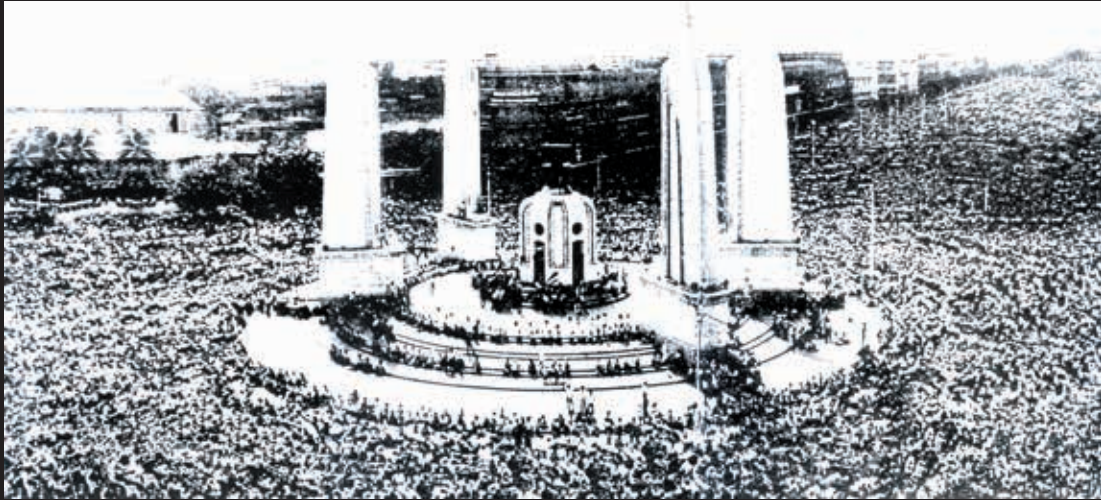
Beyond that, his philosophy boils down to moderation, not asceticism: drinking a couple of glasses of beer or wine in a night, before giving your liver a few days off; and to get your required daily intake of vitamins and protein by making sure about two-thirds of your meals consist of relatively fresh and unprocessed food: veggies, fruit, and whole grains.

As Jeff says, "If you have 18 meals a week that you can tell your mother about, then you can afford to have three meals of junk food."

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THE CATAclysms OF OCTOBER



By the early 70s, Thai people had become sick of being ruled over by military strong-men. Young college students, in particular, weaned on democratic ideals, clamoured for change and a proper constitution, writes Jim Algie.

In June 1973, student protesters were outraged by the fact some of their peers had been expelled for publishing anti-government material. By October, when a group of young people were arrested for distributing pamphlets calling for a constitution, the agitation increased.

Huge demonstrations of up to half a million people took to the streets to voice their discontent with the military regime of generals Thanom Kittikachorn and Praphas Charusathian. Frequently, these firebrands clashed with the police.

On Oct 14, the two generals had to resign and were promptly sent into exile.

Even with the promulgating of a new constitution, and a civilian government in place, political unrest was the norm and a right-wing backlash was beginning to brew. Finally the turmoil spilled over into violence on Oct. 6, 1976, around Thammasat University and Sanam Luang. Acting on trumped-up charges that the students had committed lese majeste during the staging of a political play, police and right-wing

rabble (partly incited by an army radio station urging listeners to "kill communists") swooped down on the university. Even a well-known monk said on the radio that it was not a sin to kill a communist.

The resulting carnage was hideous. Students were beaten to death, set on fire, and lynched. Perhaps the most enduring image of this horror is of a student hanging from a tree in Sanam Luang. A middle-aged man is holding aloft a folding metal chair with which he is bashing the young guy's head in, while a circle of people (including several smiling boys) look on.

One of the greatest tragedies of the barbarity is how little of it is included in Thai history, and how the monument to these martyrs of democracy was only constructed a few years ago on the corner of Ratchadamnoen and Tanao Roads.

To commemorate the 30TH anniversary of this cataclysm, there will be a variety of artistic performances, exhibitions, speeches, and rallies around the monument.

QUEST for a Chinese UTOPIA

Review by Daniel Cooper

Regular readers of our humble publication may have read some of the letters that irate authors have sent me, questioning my judgement and impartiality as a reviewer. The reason for this is simple – I review crappy books and then make fun of their authors. Mean-spirited, I know, but if fame eludes me at least I'll be notorious. Since I live in Bangkok where adventures for males both young and old are commonplace and printing is cheap, the book we all carry inside us can come spilling out like a miscarriage of poetic justice.

It's no big secret that there's a lot of rubbish printed by horny old expats and Dean Barrett, whom I first met through the pages of *Murder at the Horny Toad Bar & Other Outrageous Tales of Thailand*, seemed to personify the ageing and unrepentant whoremonger who's too dazzled by the neon to see the paradoxes of commercial sex. I'd muse upon this as he shuffled to the podium at Bangkok Poetry nights to recite verses from his collection, *The Go Go Dancer Who Stole My Viagra & Other Poetic Tragedies of Thailand*.

So it was with evil glee that I grasped a review copy of *Don Quixote in China: The Search for Peach Blossom Spring* (Village East

Books, 2003). The book, with nary a go-go dancer in sight, recounts Dean's travels to China to find Peach Blossom Spring, a fictional utopia described in the poem *Tao Hua Yuan Chi*, written by Tao Yuan-ming in the 4th century AD and known by Chinese schoolchildren for generations. Barrett readily admits that his scheme is a bit mad, if somewhat romantic, but it makes a nice frame for what is essentially a travelogue.

My greatest complaint (that poison pen of mine still drools venom!) is Barrett's sometimes stumbling prose and love of long lists. To wit:

"After all, in the old days, Chinese had associations for everything: cotton hong, cotton yarn hong, dealers in cotton fabrics, gold shops, silver shops, rice stores, black tea companies, green tea companies, kung yee tea hong, king yee tea hong, satin ribbon hong, raw silk hong, dealers in fish maw, silk piece good hong, sandalwood hong, wet nurse hong, dry nurse

hong, bird's nest shops, rattan dealers... ad nauseum.

It's a common refrain for reviewers of travel books to lament that "he's no Paul Theroux," and Barrett neatly admits to this in the first line of his introduction, and later, when in a jam will wonder, "What would Theroux do?"

As the book goes on, though, I found myself captivated. Barrett has a deep and considered knowledge of things Chinese – he first came to Asia as a Chinese linguist during the Vietnam War – and has a gift for expressing his passion for the country's history and art. The characters he describes are fully fleshed out and fit nicely into the narrative. Although the book takes a while to get going, when Barrett finds his stride the book becomes a pleasant tale of an often ill-fated quest through baffling, modern China, packed with history and finely wrought details.

Don Quixote in China was a surprising find, and while it probably won't win any awards or sell a million copies, it deserves a place on any Sinophile's bookshelf.

BOOKINGS

Capsule reviews for Ritalin kids by Jim Algie

Confessions of a Bangkok Private Eye, Warren Olson, Monsoon Books:

True crimes of passion, mostly dealing with wayward bargirls (if that isn't an oxymoron), whose adulterous behaviour (if that isn't another oxymoron) has been exposed by a Kiwi detective, or his zoom lens, the collection has been ghost-written by the bestselling, shoot-to-thrill author Stephen Leather.

Retiring in Thailand, Philip Bryce and Sunisa Wongdee Terlecky, Paiboon Publishing:

From visas to purchasing land and investing in a business, to health concerns and leisure activities, this is an essential guide to retiring in Thailand that covers Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Hua Hin, Pattaya, the islands and Isaan. Plenty of interview snippets from expats give this fact-packed book a few chorus lines of authenticity.

Heart Talk, Christopher G. Moore, Heaven Lake Press:

The Thai language must have more expressions for the heart than any other tongue. So the third edition of *Heart Talk*, which has been greatly expanded, will give your Thai skills a triple bypass. Never again will locals chuckle at your I-am-Tarzan Thai. Now they'll just giggle like leprechauns on laughing gas at your off-key pronunciation.



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SLEEPY time

Bangkok has heaps of five-star hotels. Fabulous, if you happen to print your own money. Though the city is known for delivering cheap deals-a-plenty, its magical aura still can't make money grow on trees and clever folks know that 'expensive' and 'cool' are often worlds apart. To this end, all listings, apart from the five-stars, are fairly easy on the pocket and well suited to today's flashpackers, who are happy to stray from the beaten track. Boutique hotels are all the rage. Think reception areas that double as an art gallery and Thai-style rooms and gardens that evoke the Sukhothai era. Book in advance over the phone or visit their website for cheapest rates.

PRATUNAM / SIAM SQUARE

Moeleng Boutique Residence:

21/1 Soi Ratchatapan, Ratchaprarop Rd, tel: 02-642 4646. Bf1,100-2,100. Inviting rooms, botanical garden grounds.

Pathumwan House: 22 Soi Kasem San 1, Rama I Rd (Skytrain National Stadium), tel: 02-612 3580 Bf 1,000-1,400. Big rooms and bird-caged décor.

PJ Watergate: 467 Soi Watanasil, Rachaparop Rd, tel: 02-933 2874, www.pjwatergate.com Bf943-1,150. In the centre of Pratunam market. Handy for shopping.

SILOM

@Home Silom: 166/2-3 near Silom 12, Silom Rd, Bangrak, tel: 02-234-4995/6

Bf1,540-2,090. Wooden and honey-toned luxury.

Anna's Café & Bed: 44/16 Convent Rd, (Skytrain Sala Daeng), tel: 02-632-1323

Bf950. A bargain for the area.

Bangkok Christian Guest House: 123 Sala Daeng Soi 2, Convent Rd, tel: 02-233 6303, www.bcgh.org Bf1,100-1,800. Christian-principled boarding house.

Bossotel Inn: 55/12-14 Soi Charoenkrung, 42/1 Bangrak, tel: 02-630 6120/9, www.bossotelinn.com

Bf1,400-4,000. Boutique hotel.

La Residence Hotel: 173/8-9 Surawong Rd, (Skytrain Chong Nonsi), tel: 02-233-3301, www.laresidencebangkok.com

Bf1,200-3,700. Swanky boutique style, each room has different décor.

Niagara Hotel: 26 Soi 9/ Suksavithaya, Silom Rd. (Skytrain Chong Nonsi) tel: 02-233 5783 Bf680. Value for money.

Penguin House: 27/23 Sribumpen, Yenakat Rd, Sathorn, tel: 02-679 9991/2

Bf570-800. Funky, Thai-style guesthouse.

The Urban Age: 130/6, Soi 8 Silom Rd, tel: 06-883 9583, www.guesthouse-bangkok.com

Bf235-610. Shared/private rooms. Stylish, backpacker haven.

Urban House: 35/13 Soi Yommarat, Saladaeng Rd, tel: 01-492-7778, www.urbanh.com Bf800-1,300. Backpacker den. Free bottled water every day!

SUKHUMVIT

Bangkok Boutique Hotel:

241 Sukhumvit 21, Asoke, tel: 02-261 2850/4, www.bangkokboutiquehotel.com Bf1,440-4,921. Affordable, contemporary luxury.

Buri B&B: 58/14-15 Sukhumvit, 55 Sukhumvit Rd, tel: 02-714 1508.

Bf400-500. Modern Thai-style with net-café.

Big John's Guesthouse Hotel: 159/12 Sukhumvit 55 (between Thonglor soi 7 & 9), tel: 02-712 9712.

Bf175-390. Shared/private rooms. Cheap and cheerful. Great location.

Hi-Sukhumvit: 23 Sukhumvit Soi 38, Sukhumvit Rd (Skytrain Thonglor), tel: 02-391 9338/9

Bf250-850. Shared/private rooms. Funky haunt with garden and roof terrace.

Sam's Lodge: 28-28/1 Sukhumvit Soi 19 (Skytrain Asoke), tel: 02-255 4516/02-651 1703, www.samslodge.com

Bf700-1,000. Comfort on a backpacker budget.

Suk 11: Sukhumvit Soi 11, (Skytrain Nana), tel: 02-253-5927, www.suk11.com

Bf450-1,300. Shared/private rooms. A pleasant hangout.

The Atlanta: 78 Sukhumvit Soi 2, (Skytrain Ploenchit), tel: 02-252 1650, www.theatlantahotel.bizland.com

Bf450-1,300. Classic décor, history and conservatism. Check the website to read the in-house rules.

BANGLAMPHU

238 Guest House: 238 Pahurad Rd, Pranakorn, tel: 02 623-9287, www.east-thai.com/238guesthouse Bf400-600. Quirky Victorian-style setting.

Buddy Lodge: 265 Khaosan Rd, tel: 02-629 4477,

www.buddylodge.com Bf1,800-2,200. Up market and modern.

D&D Inn: 68-70 Khaosan Rd, tel: 02-629-0526,

www.khaosanby.com

Bf450-900. Good value rooms.

Sawasdee Group: tel: 02-280 1251, www.sawasdee-hotels.com Five guesthouses throughout Banglamphu. Bf140-800. Thai-style hangouts.

Thai Cozy House: 111/1-3 Taneer Rd, tel: 02-629 5870-4

Bf650-1,000. Three minutes' walk from Khaosan Rd for boutique comfort.

Thai Hotel: 78 Prajatipatai Rd, Pranakorn, tel: 02-677 6240-5 Bf560-1,800 shared/private. Comfy rooms with wi-fi. Free tuk-tuk rides to Khaosan Rd.

Champagne

Banyan Tree: Sathorn, tel: 02-679-1200

Conrad Hotel: Ploenchit, tel: 02-690-9888

Four Seasons Hotel: Ploenchit, tel: 02-250-1000

Grand Sukhumvit by Sofitel: Sukhumvit, tel: 02-651-9501

JW Marriott: Ploenchit, tel: 02-656-7700

Lebua: Riverside, tel: 02-624-9999

Metropolitan Hotel: Sathorn, tel: 02-625-3333

Millennium Hilton: Riverside, tel: 02-442-2000

Shangri La Hotel: Bangrak, tel: 02-236-7777

Sheraton Grande: Sukhumvit, tel: 02-649-8666

Sukhothai Hotel: Sathorn, tel: 02-344-8888

The Oriental: Riverside, tel: 02-659-9000

The Peninsula: Riverside, tel: 02-861-2888

The Westin Grande: Sukhumvit, tel: 02-207-8000

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DAY tripping

RATTANAKOSIN

Within spitting distance of Khaosan Road — hint, hint — this is the city's most regal, historic and heavily touristed area with the scintillating **Grand Palace** and **Temple of the Emerald Buddha**. For some real insights into Buddhism, however, visit the nearby **Vispassana Meditation Center** (Wat Mahadatu, Na Phra Lan Rd.) for one of the free, daily monk-instructed meditation sessions. Get a glimpse of the **Giant Reclining Buddha** or a rubdown at the massage



Giving with the one hand and taking with the other three

school at **Wat Pho** (Thai Wang and Sanchai Road). Templed out already? Then take some cultural lessons at **The National Museum** (west side of Sanam Luang, open Wed-Sun). Or stroll over to the legendarily hellacious Mahachai Prison, now housing a park and the **Corrections Museum** (Mahachai Road), which has a collection of historical torture devices and waxworks of execution scenes by machine-gun and sword. It's right near the **Golden Mount** where you can walk up the winding stairs for commanding views of the area. Across Ratchadamnoen is the **Queen Sirikit Art Gallery** (10am-7pm, daily

except Wed), and just up the boulevard is the **Ratchadamnoen Boxing Stadium** where the fists and kicks begin flying on Mon, Wed, Thurs in the early evening.

THONBURI

The original city across the banks from the new one has been steeped in waterborne history, like the ornate 700-year-old barges ridden by Thai Kings and kept at the **Shed of the Royal Barges** (Khlong Bangkok Noi, near Pinklao Bridge). Meanwhile, the **Forensic Medicine Museum** (Siriraj Hospital, Mon-Fri), fascinates morbid souls with exhibits of famous murder weapons, crime-scene photos, serial killer corpses and abominations preserved in formaldehyde. Equally eccentric museum displays can be viewed at the nearby facilities for parasitology, anatomy, medical history and anthropology. To pick up your spirits, head for the riverside **Wat Arun** (an earthly manifestation of the Hindu heavens) or **Wat Prayoon** on Prachatiptok Road.

DUSIT

The former grounds of King Rama V, **Dusit Park** (Ratchawithi Road) houses the stunning, golden teak **Vimanmek Mansion** as well as museums containing historic photographs, handicrafts, homages to sacred white elephants and Royal carriages. Nearby is the **Dusit Zoo** with a menagerie of exotic wildlife. A popular picnicking spot for Thai families on weekends, the zoo also has paddle boats, an especially creepy reptile house, a World War II bomb shelter and "The Wild Wild World Show."

SUKHUMVIT

Best known as a spot for eating, drinking, shopping and seeing expats in what almost seems like their natural habitat, the longest road in the *Guinness Book of Records* begins not far from the city's **Snake Farm** (Rama IV Road, near Henri Dunant Road). Visitors can see the poisonous reptiles fed and milked at this anti-venom-producing **Red Cross Institute**. The **Jim Thompson House** (Soi Kasemsan 2, opposite National Stadium) houses the authentic collection of Thai silks, furnishings, and handicrafts accumulated by the American CIA agent-turned silk magnate-turned man that went mysteriously-missing-in-Malaysian-jungle. Near the Phra Khanong BTS is **Wat Mahabut** (Sukhumvit 77, Soi 7) with its shrine to the

spirit of the country's most famous ghost, Nang Nak, drawing hundreds of people praying for luck, wealth or romantic bliss each day.

LUMPINI

An island of green in an ocean of grey, **Lumpini Park** (Rama IV Road) is Bangkokians' favourite place to run, walk, do aerobics, relax by the lake or get buff on the public exercise machines. Early morning or early evening is best for working out. Muay Thai fans can get punch drunk at the **Lumpini Boxing Stadium** on Tues, Fri, and Sat evenings. But in Thailand you're never too far away from the occult, so lurking nearby is the **Erawan Hotel Fertility Shrine** (2 Wireless Road) devoted to the Fertility Goddess Tubtim. The outdoor shrine, behind the hotel, is studded with wooden phalluses and other

offerings made by the limp, the lovelorn, and mothers-in-waiting.

SAMUT PRAKAN

Some 320 acres of monuments, traditional Thai houses, replicas of famous temples, Royal barges and other cultural incarnations, the **Ancient City** or **Muang Boran** (Kilometre 33, Sukhumvit Highway) only costs Bt50 to enter and slightly more to rent a bicycle. Sun bears, Indian peafowl, and men wrestling reptiles are some of the attractions at **The Crocodile Farm** only a few km closer to Bangkok, on the same road. Near the reptile repository, the **Erawan Museum** is built into the world's largest elephant statue. You can walk up through Erawan's leg to see a Buddhist version of heaven, or check out all the priceless antiques in the pedestal beneath the three-headed elephant god.

WAY TO GO

TAXIS

Meter taxis are safe, cool, plentiful and cheap. They are required by law to turn their meters on, so if the driver refuses, find another one. A tip is nice though — these guys don't earn much.

BUSES

Buses vary in price and comfort: blue aircon buses cost from Bt10-20, depending on distance. The big red and blue buses go all over town for Bt7 and Bt8, 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. However, tuk-tuks are the safest form of transport for women late at night due to the difficulty of sexual molestation.

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 Sala Daeng. It's a commuter system, so tourists tend to find the Skytrain more useful.



Basic Training

MALLS & markets

It's fair to say that everyone loves a good spending spree, and here, in Bangkok, the opportunities to splurge are endless. Due to a vast array of goods, venues and outlets on offer, wandering the city's cavernous malls and street-markets can be an interesting but, at times, overwhelming experience. Everything is on offer: designer brands, quirky kitsch, souvenirs, uncut gems and handicrafts to high-tech gadgetry. The Skytrain or subway have stops in most shopping areas, whisking you from one hot and crowded market to the next.

Chatuchak Weekend Market (a.k.a. JJ): As the world's biggest weekend market, this is a shopping universe. There are around 15,000 vendors here selling every item every item known to mankind and a few that aren't. Equip yourself with water and patience as hunting for bargains in the heat and crush is draining. Get a copy of the Nancy Chandler shopping map for a consumer's compass. Get there by Skytrain at Mo Chit or Chatuchak Park station on the subway.

Suan Lum Night Bazaar: A comprehensive night market offering a good selection of CDs, souvenirs, clothing, and handicrafts, conveniently centred around a beer garden with a kitsch Thai pop cabaret show and some decent food. Across from Lumpini Park at the Lumpini Subway.

Pahurat Indian market
Located in 'Little India', this market is renowned for selling Indian, Malay and Thai clothes, textiles and accessories and costume jewellery. A walkthrough of tastes, smells and sights, you'll find a wide variety of Indian foods, sweets and spices on offer. It's popular with those who want fancy, affordable fashion, along with sequined fabrics, bows, tiaras

and all the other trappings necessary to cut it as a bona fide Bollywood queen. Take the riverboat to Tha Saphaan Phut and it's just a short walk away.

Nakhon Kasem Once known as the much cooler named Thieves Market, due to the large amount of second-hand items on offer, today you'll find many unusual things in this Chinatown area: outdated household appliances, imitation antiques, porcelain, brassware are illegally smuggled marital aids. Nearby Sampeng Lane (aka Soi Wanit) has a good range of historic costume items. You'll find it between Yaowarat Road and Charoenkrung Road.

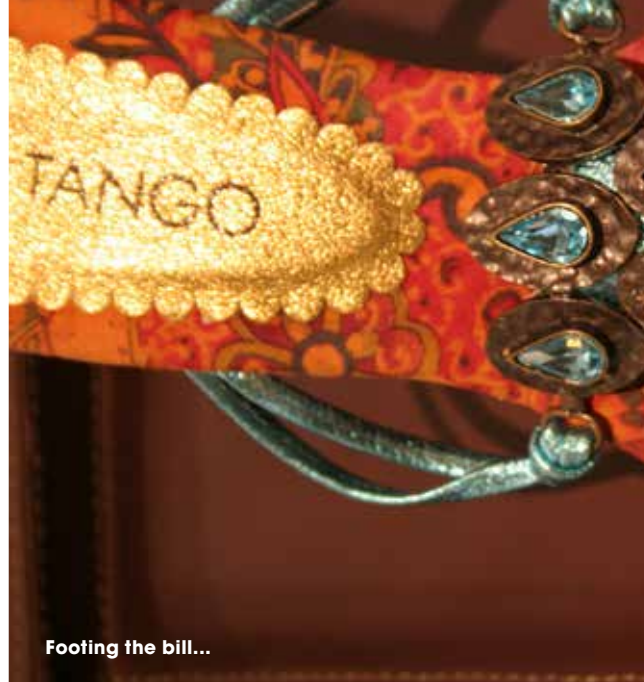
Pok Klong Talat (Flower Market): See Bangkok's best known orgy of botany in fullest bloom at 3am, down in Chinatown.

Khaosan Road Known worldwide as the backpacker boulevard, this area is rapidly going upmarket. Boots the chemist have laid down roots here, along with Burger King and a couple of swanky hotels. However, there's still plenty to suit those on a shoe string budget: hippie fashions, trinkets and souvenirs, bootleg CD's, silver jewelry and counterfeit ID cards. Young Thais who have embraced the concept of "going Inter", (international), also enjoy shopping, drinking and hanging out around here.

Pratunam Market: An extensive street and indoor market best known for cheap shoes, clothes, and fabrics, it's located around the corner of Petchaburi and Ratchaprarop Roads, where it almost interfaces with the microchip mania of Panthip Plaza.

Patpong Night Market: For the tourist wanting cheap DVDs, a fake Rolex, or Same Same T-shirts, assembly-line Buddhas and some sneak peeks into go-go bars. Skytrain Sala Daeng.

Emporium: Open, airy, and airconditioned, this mid-Sukhumvit mall (Skytrain Phrom Phong) is full of designer shops and the hi-so types that fill them. It's also got a couple of Great English



Footing the bill...

bookstores, an impressive food market, and is generally a good place to be rich.

Siam Paragon: The Bangkok shopping bar has been ratcheted up a notch with the opening of Paragon, now Southeast Asia's largest shopping-mecca. Encompassing a first-class food court with outlets from some of Bangkok's best restaurants, a 16-screen Cineplex, including an IMAX cinema, a 38-lane bowling alley and an enormous gym, not to mention a vast array of shops with outlets for a constellation of brands including Hermès, Chanel, Giorgio Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Versace, Chloé, Tod's, Bottega Veneta, Ermenegildo Zegna, Salvatore Ferragamo, Mulberry, Jimmy Choo, Emilio Pucci, Escada, Kenzo and Jim Thompson. Phew! Not so much a shopping centre as an all-day excursion.

MBK This marble mall complex includes over 2,000 fashion stores, a cinema complex, karaoke and hundreds of great budget food options. Extremely popular with Thai teens, MBK boasts half a floor of mobile phones and is good for business cards, cheap fashion cosmetics and leather goods and is easily accessible by the Skytrain (take the Silom line to National Stadium Station).
Pantip Plaza

An electronic bazaar for IT lovers, if you can't find a computer product here, it probably doesn't exist. Counterfeit software and DVDs, games, digital cameras and hardware, hardware, hardware, this place has the lot at rockbottom prices. Exit the Skytrain at Ratchathewi station on the Sukhumvit line and get a taxi.

Gaysorn The curiously named Gaysorn Plaza offers luxury items at top-end prices. Brands such as Louis Vitton, Fendi and Prada can be found here. The top floor has a stylish tea room where ladies can nibble on snacks, relax in style and compare their purchases.

Central World Plaza
Situated across the street from the Gaysorn Plaza, this newly-renovated shopping complex boasts a hotel and an 11-screen cinema, as well as an outlet for Jim Thompson Silk and a King Power duty-free shop. During cool season, the plaza has three of the biggest beer gardens in town out front. Get off at Chidlom Skytrain stop.

Siam Discovery Center
Spread over six floors, Discovery was the first of its kind when originally built and specialises in children's goods and other chic design retailers such as Calvin Klein, Timberland, Armani and Guess clothing. Exit the Skytrain at the Siam interchange station.



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UNTAMED TRAVEL

FEEDING time

Bangkok truly is a foodie's city. Whether you're a high-flyer with a hankering for foie gras or a twat who thinks ฿25 is overpriced or a bowl of noodles, this town has it all. In addition to the restaurants we've listed there are countless food stalls, canteens, shop house diners and food courts serving affordable and tasty tucker.

In the Silom area of town, Soi Convent is lined with some excellent foodstalls serving everything from noodle soup, chicken and yellow rice, to BBQ pork and jim jum hotpot. Sukhumvit Soi 38 (Skytrain Thonglor) is home to a well-known collection of food stalls and shophouses dishing up quality Thai-Chinese food in the evenings — very popular with locals. For more international cuisine, the small Arab quarter off Soi Nana and Sukhumvit houses some really good Middle Eastern restaurants and kebab stalls. Soi Nana itself even has Bangkok's only Ethiopian restaurant, Abyssinia Café. Worth visiting for a completely different atmosphere than elsewhere in Bangkok. Soi Thaniya (and almost any downtown Sukhumvit Soi) is jammed with Japanese places, most of which are laid-back and informal. In Bangkok, shopping-centre food need not mean the golden arches. Almost all have inexpensive food courts offering a huge variety of Thai, Chinese and some international food. MBK, Siam Paragon, Siam Center and Emporium, amongst others, all have them. The posher malls and department stores also now have up-market versions (The Park food hall at Emporium, the Orangery at Paragon, and Food Loft at Central) in which international restaurants from around town have their own outlet. These can be pricey but nevertheless convenient for non-Thai food.

SUKHUMVIT

BED SUPPERCLUB

(INTERNATIONAL)
26 Sukhumvit Soi 11, (Skytrain Nana), 7:30pm-1:30am, 02-651 3537, major cards
Ultra-cool hybrid of restaurant, club and art space renowned for its ground-breaking tubular, all white design. Excellent Pacific Rim-type grub served

alongside a live DJ and entertainment.

CREPES & CO.

(MEDITERRANEAN/CREPERIE)
18/1 Sukhumvit Soi 12, Skytrain Nana, 9am-midnight, 02-653 3990-1, major cards

Really popular, longstanding restaurant. Reasonably priced crepes and Mediterranean fodder served in a cool and casual atmosphere. Look out for ongoing promotions and food festivals.

LE DALAT INDOCHINE

(VIETNAMESE)
14 Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain Asoke), 11am-2:30pm, 6-10pm,

02-661 7967-8, major cards
Charming Vietnamese restaurant bursting with French-Vietnamese character and ambience. One of the few decent restaurants of its kind in Bangkok.

LE BANYAN (FRENCH)

59 Sukhumvit Soi 8, (Skytrain Nana), Mon-Sat 6.30pm-midnight (kitchen closes 9:30pm), 02-253 5556, major cards

Truly authentic French restaurant open since 1989 and set in a converted wooden house. Specialities include the likes of Pressed Duck Roennaise.

GOVINDA (ITALIAN VEGETARIAN)

6/5/6/6 Sukhumvit Soi 22, (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 11:30am-3pm, 6pm-11:15pm, closed Tuesdays, 02-663 4970, major cards

Homely vegetarian restaurant with reasonable prices, located on a quiet soi. Pizza, pasta, veggie mains and desserts all prepared by an Italian chef.

BELLA NAPOLI (PIZZERIA)

3/3 Sukhumvit Soi 31, (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 11am-2pm, 6pm-midnight, 02-712 5422, 02-259 0405, major cards
Hugely popular with local

At the locomotive bistro



Thais, this down-home pizzeria is always packed and buzzing. Some of the best pizza around, but also worth trying the pasta.

KOI (JAPANESE)
26 Sukhumvit Soi 20, (Skytrain Phrom Phong or Asoke), 6pm-midnight, closed Mondays, 02-258 1590, major cards
Very stylish restaurant serving Japanese cuisine with Californian touches. Attracts a sophisticated, high-flying crowd of socialites. Also houses a separate bar, cocktail lounge and four private rooms.

KUPPA (INTERNATIONAL)
39 Sukhumvit soi 16, (Skytrain Asoke), 9:30am-late, 02-663 0450-4, major cards
Bustling restaurant popular with both Thais and foreigners. Kuppa has a lively atmosphere and tasty food with enough variety to satisfy all tastes. Desserts are top notch.

MAHANAGA (THAI)
2 Sukhumvit Soi 29, (Skytrain Phrom Phong or Thonglor), 11.30am-2:30pm, 5:30pm-11pm, 02-662 3060, major cards
A beautiful restaurant with an outdoor courtyard. The food is basically a fusion of cuisines but with a distinctively Thai identity. Signature dishes like Alaskan King Crab in spicy milk soup come well recommended.

MES AMIS (French)
102/3 Thonglor Soi 5, (Skytrain Thonglor), 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30pm-10:30pm, 02-260 6445-6, major cards
Definitely one of the better Thonglor restaurants, and not overpriced, considering the high standard of the food and service. The atmosphere is casual but the restaurant is still stylish and classy.

PIZZERIA LIMONCELLO (PIZZERIA)
17 Sukhumvit soi 11 Skytrain Nana Noon-2pm, 6pm-11:30pm, 02-651 0707, major cards
A lively pizzeria complete with chequered tablecloths and a wood-fired oven. Pizzas are thin-crust, of course, and the pastas and salads are also worth trying.

TONY ROMA'S (AMERICAN)
87 Sukhumvit Road in the Nai Lert building, (Skytrain Nana), 11am-11pm (last orders 10:30pm), 02-254 2912, major cards
Part of an American chain and now with a branch also at Siam Paragon. As you'd expect, portions of American fare, like baby back ribs, are big and satisfying. One of the better places in town for burgers.

VENEZIA (ITALIAN)
24 Sukhumvit Soi 11, (Skytrain Nana), 11am-2:30pm, 5:30pm-midnight, 02-254 6655, major cards
Neat but lively Italian restaurant with good food and Italian wines. Bargain set lunches and live music in the evenings. A good place to eat before a night out at one of the nearby clubs.

GIANNI RISTORANTE (ITALIAN)
34/1 Soi Tonson, Ploenchit Road, (Skytrain Chidlom), noon-2:30pm, 6pm-10:30pm, 02-252 1619, major cards
One of the cornerstones of Bangkok's burgeoning Italian restaurant scene. Top notch, fine Italian food — the large following of loyal regulars are testament to its quality.

RIOJA (SPANISH)
1025 Ploenchit Road, (Skytrain Chidlom), 11am-2:30pm, 6pm-11pm, 02-251 5761-2, major cards
Bangkok's only Spanish restaurant as far as we know. Great value set lunches. Tapas and paella, of course, but many more lesser-known dishes and a good wine list.

BOURBON ST. (AMERICAN, CAJUN & CREOLE)
29/4-6 Sukhumvit Soi 22 (Washington Square), (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 7am-1am, 02-259 0328-9, major cards
Longstanding, award-winning restaurant and bar. Don't miss the superb Cajun and Creole favourites like gumbo and blackened crawfish. Also serving hearty American and Mexican tucker.

THE BULL'S HEAD (ENGLISH)
Sukhumvit Soi 33/1, (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 11am-1am, 02-259 4444, 02-261 0665, major cards
Arguably the most authentic British pub in Bangkok complete with chirpy, Cockney landlord and a crowd of expat regulars. Great chip-shop-style chips and other affordable pub food. Look out for the Punchline Comedy Club nights.

WITCH'S OYSTER BAR (EUROPEAN)
20/20-21 Ruamrudee Village, (Skytrain Ploenchit), 11am-2:30pm, 5pm-11pm, 02-255 5354-5, major cards
Specialises in seafood and grilled fare, and noted for its wide variety of imported oysters. An interesting mix of European cuisine, mixed with contemporary British food not really seen elsewhere in town.

ATHENA (GREEK)
594 Soi Ekamai, Sukhumvit 63, (Skytrain Ekamai), 5pm-2am, 02-392 7644, major cards

Bangkok's only Greek restaurant, as far as we're aware. A down-to-earth place with a suitably Mediterranean ambience. Serves a variety of hearty Greek staples such as Souvlaki and Mydopilaflo.

WOODSTOCK (AMERICAN)
Soi 13, Thonglor, (Skytrain Thonglor), 11am-1am, 02-715 0202-3, major cards
Nicely appointed eatery with good American and Mexican grub from the likes of Creole Gumbo to Argentine steaks and burritos. The three floors also house a pool table, sports bar and big screen TV. Huge music selection on the computerized jukebox.

MARU TEPAK YAKI AND BAR (JAPANESE)
Sukhumvit Soi 33, (Skytrain Phrom Phong), Mon-Sat 11:30am-2pm, 6pm-11pm (Sunday/holidays 5pm-10pm), 02-662 1744-5, major cards
Small but satisfying teppan yaki place. Also offers a variety of steaks and a good, value for money lunchtime shabu-shabu and sukiyaki buffet.

BEI OTTO (GERMAN)
1 Sukhumvit Soi 20, Skytrain Asoke, 11am-1am, 02-260 0869, major cards
Cosy restaurant serving quality German food such as

sauerbraten and pork knuckle, as well as other European favourites. Also has a bakery and delicatessen on site.

ENOTECA ITALIANA (ITALIAN)
Sukhumvit Soi 33, follow the sign posts, (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 6pm-midnight, 02-258 4386, major cards
Homely and welcoming Italian restaurant with a strong emphasis on completely authentic Italian food from the heart. Superb selection of Italian wines, meats and cheeses. The enthusiastic owners and chef are always on hand to offer advice on food and wine.

GOURMET GALLERY (EUROPEAN)
6/1 Soi Promsri 1, Sukhumvit Soi 39, (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 11:30-2:30pm, 6pm-10pm, 02-260 0603, major cards
Unique, elegant and comfortable restaurant with some great comfort-food. Lots of modern art and classical music create a really relaxing atmosphere. Very affordable menu.

FOGO VIVO (BRAZILIAN)
President Tower Arcade, 973 Ploenchit Road, (Skytrain Chidlom), 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30pm-11pm; bar 11:30am-1pm, 02-656 0384, major cards



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UNTAMED TRAVEL

Bangkok's only Brazilian Churrascaria grill. A good place to fill up with the all-you-can-eat seafood and meat served for both lunch and dinner.

AUBERGE DAB (FRENCH)
Mercury Tower, 540 Ploenchit Road, (Skytrain Chidlom), 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30pm-10:30pm, 02-658 6222-3, major cards
Real classical French restaurant with excellent food and on-the-ball service. Expect traditional French dishes such as roasted duck leg confit and lobster thermidor. Not the place to go for a cheap dinner.

OAM THONG (THAI)
7/4-5 Sukhumvit Soi 33, (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 11:30am-11:30pm, 02-662 2804-5, major cards
Popular with local big-wigs and sophisticates. Traditional and modern, inventive Thai food and seafood are available. Well located for after shopping or pre-night out dining.

GIUSTO (ITALIAN)
16 Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain Asoke, MRT Sukhumvit), 11:30am-2pm, 02-258 4321, major cards
Sleek, contemporary-styled Italian with it's own parking. Known for their outstanding wine list Giusto also has a wine bar on site.

SILOM & PATPONG
BLUE ELEPHANT (THAI)
233 South Sathorn Road, (Skytrain Surasak), 11:30am-2:30pm, 6.30pm-11.30pm, 02-673 9353-4, major cards
Part of the world-renowned restaurant group of the same name, you can expect the same high standards. Royal-Thai cuisine alongside some more inventive creations. Set in a beautifully restored old building.

BANN KHANITHA & GALLERY (THAI)
69 South Sathorn Road, 11am-2pm, 6pm-11pm, 02-675 4200-1, major cards
An award-winning, classy Thai restaurant with superb food and beautiful decor. Filled

with fine art, natural wood and happy diners this place has become a household name in Bangkok. Also has a branch on Sukhumvit 23.

LE BOUCHON (FRENCH)
37/17 Patpong 2, (Skytrain Saladaeng), Noon-4pm, 6:30pm-11:15pm, 02-234 9109, major cards
A tiny Parisian-style brasserie serving authentic French fair. Tucked away in an unlikely Patpong location but full of character. Good value set lunches.

EAT ME (INTERNATIONAL)
1/6 Soi Pipat 2, (Skytrain Saladaeng), 3pm-1am, 02-238 0931, 02-233 1767, major cards
Sophisticated and contemporary international, Pacific Rim cuisine. Indoor and outdoor seating available. Excellent desserts.

HU'U IN BANGKOK (INTERNATIONAL)
Levels 1 & 2, the Ascott Sathorn, 187 Sathorn Road, (Skytrain Chong Nonsri), 6am-10:30am, 11am-2:30pm, 5pm-11pm, 02-676 6677, major cards
Chic mezzanine restaurant with good Pacific Rim cuisine. Check out the downstairs bar for cocktails and regular party nights.

SCOZZI (ITALIAN)
174/3-4 Surawongse Road, (Skytrain Saladaeng), Noon-2:30pm, 6pm-11pm, 02-243 0943, major cards
Another long-time Bangkok favourite, Scozzi now has a superb fine-dining restaurant set in the converted house plus an excellent pizzeria/café on the main road. Particularly notable for its seafood.

SIROCCO (MEDITERRANEAN)
63rd Fl, the Dome, State Tower, 1055 Silom Road, (Skytrain Saphan Taksin), 6pm-1am, 02-624 9555, major cards
Outdoors, 63 stories up, the views and atmosphere are fantastic, but the food is arguably over-priced. Also part of the same complex are the cool Distil bar and Mezzaluna Italian restaurant.

ZANOTTI (ITALIAN)
Saladaeng Colonnade

Condominium, Soi Saladaeng, (Skytrain Saladaeng, Subway Silom), 11.30am-2pm, 6pm-10:30pm, 02-636 0002, 02-636 0266, major cards
Really popular restaurant with a reputation for quality food and atmosphere. Zanotti also has a comprehensive list of Italian wines and the enthusiastic chef/owner vis usually on hand to offer suggestions.

LITTLE INDIA (INDIAN)
64/38-39 Soi Wat Suan Phlu (opposite main entrance to Shangri-la Hotel), (Skytrain Saphan Taksin), 11am-11pm, 02-630 7906-7
Authentic and tasty North Indian food. The owners

pride themselves on serving healthy, non-oily Indian food prepared to your taste. Live cricket and football on TV.

PATARA (THAI)
2 Sathorn Soi 11, (Skytrain Surasak), 11:30am-2:30pm, 6pm-11:30pm, 02-212 6420-1, major cards
One of the best for contemporary Thai food in a sophisticated setting. Traditional as well as inventive dishes such as raw tuna in a lime and lemongrass vinaigrette are served but all retain the real Thai taste.

PATTY'S FIESTA (MEXICAN)
Corner Patpong 1, Silom Road, (Skytrain Saladaeng),

DARK SIDE OF THE SPOON

FLUFFY PORK

Words by Oliver Benajmin

During the great candy floss shortage of 1898, resourceful Thais substituted the next closest thing, pork, and an industry was born. Dried pork is magically turned into a sweet fibrous fluff that goes with simply everything from sandwiches to ice cream to foie gras. In a pinch it will also make a fine toupee.





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One of only a handful of Mexican restaurants in Bangkok, Patty's enjoys a longstanding reputation helped along by gregarious Patty, who frequently visits Mexico for the latest taco trends.

THE BARBICAN

(INTERNATIONAL & PUB)
9/4-5 Thaniya Road, (Skytrain Saladaeng, Subway Silom), 11.30am-1am, 02-234 3590, major cards
Brasserie-type restaurant and wine bar popular with expats and after work drinkers. Reasonably priced food and friendly, attentive staff. Win or Lose happy hours Monday-Friday 5pm-7pm and a bevy of other regular promotions regularly.

IRISH XCHANGE (PUB)

1/5-6 Convent Road, Silom, (Skytrain Saladaeng), 9am-1pm, 02-266 7160, major cards
Lively Irish pub with a mixed crowd of expats, locals and the odd tourist. Sports on big screen, pool table and good food including excellent fry-ups and a Sunday carvery. Also has live music on Monday and Thursdays.

ANNA'S CAFÉ (THAI)

18 Soi Saladaeng, (Skytrain Saladaeng), 11am-10pm, 02-632 0619, major cards
Hugely popular, great fun Thai restaurant known for birthday celebrations and raucous atmosphere. Excellent value, tasty Thai food with a sprinkling of Western dishes, especially on the dessert menu.

AOI (JAPANESE)

132/10-11 Silom, Soi 6, (Skytrain Saladaeng), 11.30am-2.30pm, 5.30pm-10.30pm, 02-235 2321-2, major cards
Popular with Japanese expats and locals, Aoi has a wide selection of quality, fresh seafood. Also has a sushi bar and now another branch at Emporium shopping centre.

BAAN KLANG NAAM

(SEAFOOD- THAI & CHINESE)
Soi 14 Rama 3 Road, near Montien Riverside Hotel, 11am-1pm, 02-292 0175, 02-292 2037, major cards
Extremely popular with locals, Baan Klang Naam serves some of the best seafood in town in a converted house on the Chaophaya River. Live entertainment in the evenings. Don't miss the awesome deep-fried soft shell crab.

BANGLAMPHU

ROYAL INDIA (INDIAN)
95, B1 Soi Rambuttri, Chakrapong Road, 1:30am to midnight, 02-282 6688
Set back from the bustling

road, in Rambuttri Village, the restaurant has the feel of, well, someplace much nicer than Khaosan. Outdoor seating around a fishpond may not make you think of India, but the food will leave you with visions of the Taj Mahal. This is a branch of the oldest Indian restaurant in Bangkok, and they definitely know their stuff. Best loved dishes here are Chicken Tikka Masala, Paneer Tikka, and delicious Garlic Nan. The delicious mint sauce is a good bet too. Royal India serves veg and non-veg dishes all day and does Western breakfast, from 7am.

SHOSHANA (ISRAELI)

86 Chakraphong Road, next to the petrol-station, 10am-midnight, 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.

JOK POCHANA (THAI SEAFOOD)

Samsen Soi 2, 6pm-4am (and beyond), 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.

OH MY COD (FISH & CHIPS)

95D, Rambutri Village Inn, Soi Rambutri, Chakrapong Road
A welcome addition to the area's culinary scene, serving superb fish and chips and filling the gap in the English breakfast market with massive fry-ups, pies and mushy peas to die for.

RICKY'S COFFEE SHOP (SANDWICHES)

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.

HOTEL RESTAURANTS

JW MARRIOTT BANGKOK
4 Sukhumvit Soi 2, (Skytrain Ploenchit), 02-656 7700, major cards
A great choice for gourmards, the JW houses some superb restaurants. Sister restaurants Tsu and Nami provide the full monty of Japanese food from traditional sophistication, at the former, to lively teppanyaki dining at the latter. New York Steakhouse is one of the city's most highly-regarded grills, with top-notch steaks and flawless service. Man Ho offers a wide variety of Chinese fair, whilst White Elephant is the place for refined Thai cuisine.

THE ORIENTAL HOTEL

48 Oriental Avenue (riverside), (Skytrain Saphan Taksin), 02-659 9000, major cards
This world renowned, safari-suit-and-pith-helmet of a hotel houses Bangkok's best French restaurant, Le Normandie - fine food and fine prices to match. There's also a charming Chinese restaurant, China House, and the Italian Ciao serving good pizzas and pasta. Lord Jim's is a lively seafood restaurant, whilst the Verandah offers all day dining both outdoors and indoors.

THE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL

89 Soi Wat Suan Phlu, New Road (riverside), (Skytrain Saphan Taksin), 02-236 7777, major cards
Another grand and luxurious riverside hotel. Angelini is perhaps their best-known restaurant serving sumptuous Italian food in a sophisticated setting. Sala Thip offers classical Thai cuisine on the banks of the Chaophaya. Edogin is the hotel's Japanese offering, and Next2Cafe and terrace a lively, international buffet restaurant.

THE SHERATON GRANDE SUKHUMVIT

250 Sukhumvit Road, (Skytrain Asoke), 02-649 8364, major cards
A conveniently central hotel with some quality eateries. Basil is a sleek restaurant serving traditional Thai food, whilst The Sala has Thai food in a more relaxed poolside setting. Rossini's is a much-praised Italian serving delicious, authentic fare. Stuffed diners can move to the Living Room for live jazz after dinner.

THE INTERCONTINENTAL BANGKOK

973 Ploenchit Road, (Skytrain

Chidlom), 02-656 0444, major cards

Well located for cashed-up shoppers near the Gaysorn and Erawan Bangkok shopping malls. Fireplace Grill is the hotel's best-known restaurant serving simple, high quality steaks and seafood. Summer Palace offers traditional Chinese cuisine, and Espresso a varied international buffet.

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL BANGKOK

155 Rajdamri Road, (Skytrain Rajdamri), 02-255 5443, major cards
Biscotti is one of Bangkok's best-loved Italian restaurants, whilst home-grown culinary fair is available at Spice Market. Shintaro is the hotel's Japanese eatery and the Madison, a New York-style grill, has good steaks and seafood.

REMBRANDT HOTEL

19 Sukhumvit Soi 18, (Skytrain Asoke), 02-261 7100, major cards
Senor Pico is one of the few restaurants in town to serve up really delicious Mexican food in a lively atmosphere. Award-winning Rang Mahal is a fantastic Indian restaurant — reservations are recommended as the great food is no secret. For Thai food there's Red Pepper, for Italian, Da Vinci.

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UNTHANKED TRAVEL

Those fine lads of the British Empire, *Dan* and *Stu*, have been at it again. After a one-month hiatus from the bottle, both have been working up a thirst that can only be quenched by a Herculean boozing marathon.

Luckily, Bangkok's hospitality is as free flowing as the night is long.

5:50pm, Tenderloins, Sukhumvit 33

Stu: In a departure from our usual late start/late finish nights and on the recommendation of our Great Leader, we hit the after-work drinking scene in naughty-but-posh Soi 33. The big draw for Tenderloins at this hour is the Bt69 happy-hour pints. Unlike most happy-hour places, this establishment employs a cunning

sliding-scale of discounts, keeping you on your barstool until you slide off it. Taking full advantage we caned five pints before the next step up the price ladder.

Dan: Outside was blazing Bangkok sun but inside was cool minimalist slick. Tenderloins touts itself as an Australian-style drinker but I had trouble reconciling the plush interior with the pubs I know in my homeland. For a start, where's the smell of piss? Why isn't anyone bleeding? And shouldn't there be horse racing on TV? As it is, Tenderloins is more of a city pub in that mid-Atlantic metro style, and firmly planted in the expat

market. No Sangsom buckets or dreadlocks here! The astute and dirty-minded may note that the name, Tenderloins, the location on Soi 33 and the beer price suggest a risqué element but despite a bevy of local beauties there isn't any monkey-business to be had here – time to move on.

7:57pm, Q bar, Sukhumvit 11

Dan: Q bar wasn't open yet, but we were there to escort our fellow writer, Cassandra, to her interview with famed D&B DJ LTJ Bukem (see September 2006 issue). Unlike most clubs, Q bar looks OK when it's empty, so we lingered in an effort to collect gratuities, though not too long, as we accompanied LTJ up the road

to the tailors for his suit fitting. While we didn't get a free beer at the club, the tailor was very generous with the Chang. Ahh, Bangkok.

Stu: Not wanting to miss a chance to meet the man to whose music I wasted my teenage years, I was more than happy to break the Bartripping schedule to shake him by the hand and ask him what he was going to do about all my failed exams.

9:20pm, Old German Beer House, Sukhumvit 11

Stu: More like a Bavarian beer hall than a bar, the street-frontage gives no hint to its size, kind of like boozy version of *Dr. Who's* Tardis. Big tables, big rooms and big steins. The five pints and the Chang I had at the tailor's were getting the better of me. The only sensible thing to do was keep drinking and hope for a second wind. My lasting memories were of tiny *fraulein* waitresses, pasty German men and Dan reminding me not to mention the war.

Dan: Always one to sample new cultures and always thirsty for another one, we staggered into this monster of a bar. The first item on the menu was *Bismarck Herring in Brine* but, in a concession to my hangover, I opted for the *Fassbier Heinekin*, by the half litre. I don't actually know how to order in German but the helpful operators of the place give each table a service bell. Several dings later we were happily bending our arms, which get quite a workout with these enormous tankards. To sum up, bargirls and moustaches served with a whiff of cigar smoke.

10:36pm, Gallery 11, Sukhumvit 11

Dan: Tucked away in the Sukhumvit maze is Suk 11, a backpacker oasis. Barely remembering a drunken bartripping night here a year ago, we went in for more. "We don't sell beer," the pissed-off looking guesthousier snapped so we pulled up a couple of Thai cushions next door, the attached Gallery 11. Obviously the beer had done its work for we were charming, charismatic and undeniably attractive to the two Pippi Longstocking Scandanavian types at the next table. For some reason, though, when they announced that they were going to bed they didn't invite us, leaving me crying into my garland-bedecked beer.

Stu: Designed in Ayuthaya-period style, this place is the Shangri-La of Sukhumvit, all very quaint with its wood, Thai cushions and pansy-looking

water features. Hardly the place for belting down beers and cruising for snatch, we found ourselves dining on delightful traditional Thai snacks while discussing Thai art with the Swedish ladies next door. As soon as it got out that we were 'journalists', the manager made us take a tour of the attached spa. Stumbling up the stairs we made the appropriate noises about aromatherapy and the merits of detox, not easy when you're more than half-cut. Mildly traumatised by this break in rhythm, we happily spilled out onto the soi.

Midnight, Q bar, again, Sukhumvit 11

Stu: Completely hammered by now, I was keen to return to the spirit of my teenage years. Unfortunately my at-one-time-envied Drum and Bass two-step dance moves were impeded by my ballooning waistline and

ravaged bladder. Luckily I was too drunk to care, although the people around me were acutely aware. My apologies, fellow Bartrippers, but for some reason from this point on, my notes and memory become unreliable and my journey home a mystery...

Dan: Our Great Leader's five-hour plan of starting early was an excellent vision, but our corruption of the policy by finishing late was admittedly stupid. LTJ put in a sterling set of trad-style D&B and was a superb showman. Not that I can remember a damn thing though. By any account we'd had a respectable night. Cheap pints, tailor's shops, a jaunt in Germany, rebuffed by Swedish birds, hobnobbing with the stars, and nary a vomit! It's a tough job, reporting on Bangkok's nightlife but it comes with rich rewards, like the screaming hangover I had the next morning.



NIGHT tripping

Bangkok's nightlife scene may lack the late night stamina it once had, but it has grown increasingly sophisticated and eclectic. Where once the city's DJs, tunes and bands were several years behind the times, they're now poised on the shank of yesterday - and visiting DJs and bands keep bringing things more into the present day and beyond. From traditional English and Irish pubs to mega-clubs, live blues, tranquil lounges and Japan's revenge for Hiroshima - karaoke - there are a staggering number of places to get legless. But bartippers should be warned that at most venues Tam is the closing time and to enter some of the bigger clubs you will need to show ID - even if you are 65 years old with wrinkles like the Marianas Trench.

SUKHUMVIT & AROUND

TSUKIYO Soi Ekamai 28, Sukhumvit 63 (100m from Phetburi Rd), 06-527 0099, 01-511 4755, no cards, www.tsukiyobkk.com, closed Tue. Tucked away in the depths of Soi Ekamai, this summerhouse-turned-bar has seen continued popularity under the watchful eye of DJ Octo. Downstairs is an open sprawl of cushions and platforms, upstairs is aircon-cooled funk. More lounge than rave. Serves good food until midnight.

SIN BAR Rooftop above Ball in Hand, 18 Sukhumvit Soi 4, 02-265 64840, major cards, www.sin-bangkok.com. Stylish and cool rooftop bar just down the soi from Nana plaza. Sin has raised the bar on Soi 4 nightlife, steering clear of the beer-bar/go-go bar, flesh-for-sale concept. Great view of the neighbourhood and a decent menu. The top-line DJ club downstairs is sometimes closed but worth checking out.

TOKYO JOE'S 9-11 Sivaporn Plaza, Sukhumvit Soi 24 Opposite Ariston Hotel, Open 5:30pm-1:30am, 02-661 0359, www.tokyojoesbkk.com, Visa, Master cards. Live music seven nights a week with BKK's top blues and soul bands on a rotating schedule, including The Soi Dog Blues Band, Cannonball, Savannah on the weekends, Adam on Acoustic Blues every Monday, and TAB with traditional blues

on Tues & Thurs. Drinks B190 and up. Happy hour is 6-9pm. Tuesday is two for one beers after 9pm, with gravel-voiced blues diva Georgia singing.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELER'S TAVERN Sukhumvit Soi 5, by Foodland, (Skytrain Nana). The upmarket much bigger sister to the Khaosan madhouse. Big bar, big screen, big car rotating overhead and loads of pool tables - big American roadhouse style. Reasonably priced drinks and free Internet.

BACCHUS 20/6-7 Ruam Rudee, Pathumwan, (Skytrain Pleornchit), Tel: 02-650 8986, major cards, www.bacchus.tv. Priding themselves on their stock and knowledge of fine wines. Bacchus also serves Italian and French fusion food with your own certified sommelier to guide you through the rocky terrain of matching the right wine with your grub.

CONCEPT CM2 Basement, Novotel Siam Square (Skytrain Siam), 02-209 8888, www.cm2bkk.com, major cards. Popular and notorious disco in the basement of the Novotel, CM2 attracts an international crowd of beautiful people who cluster around whiskey bottles and ogle each other. The main room showcases the resident band, playing from Friday to Wednesday. There's also the Boom Room playing Hip-Hop or Sensations Karaoke for the self-indulgent and their tin-eared friends.

WITCH'S TAVERN 306/1 Sukhumvit 55, Soi Thonglor (between Soi 8 & 9), 11am-2am, 02-391 9791, Visa, Amex, www.witchstavern.com. Equally good for lounging or partying, the tavern is pub style with a menu of (B185-700) fish and chips, pies, steaks and Thai dishes. Regular and varied live bands playing everything from jazz to hip-hop. Ladie's Night on Wednesday with free drinks for women from 6pm to 10pm and bingo with cash prizes. Happy hour from 5-9pm.

RCA/RACHADA

The place for young and restless Thais out on the pull. Royal City Avenue is a huge strip of clubs, pubs and bars. For many years it has been pop central but recently reborn as the mecca of Bangkok's nightlife scene. Nearby discos Hollywood and Dance Fever (off Rachadapisek Rd) are gargantuan, whisky-soaked dance halls. Good for those seeking a local-style drinking experience.

FLIX / SLIM Block D, RCA. Brothers, sisters whatever they are; Flix and Slim are and were key to the RCA revolution.



Figures by Mattel

Switching RCA's staple teeny-pop to sophisticated-groovin' was a painless move, and both clubs are jam-packed every night of the week. Slim caters to lovers of the all conquering Hip-Hop, while Flix offers strictly 4-4 beats. Flix has also played host to some household names in House music: Judge Jules, Seb Fontaine and Little Louie Vega among others. Entry is free but you'll need your passport as ID.

ROUTE 66 Block D, RCA, 06-300 0817, major cards, www.route66club.com. With the arrival of Flix/Slim, Route 66, a legendary RCA hangout, also evolved into a more upscale venture (which bears more than a passing resemblance to Bed Supperclub). Route 66 originally had the same Hip-Hop & House split as Flix /Slim but soon switched both of its huge rooms to cater exclusively for Hip-Hop. The huge outside terrace area is a welcome retreat. Also free but passport essential.

CLUB ASTRA Block D, RCA., 0-9497 8422, no cards, www.club-astra.com. Club Astra hosts big-name

international DJs on an almost weekly basis, like Paul Van Dyk, Goldie, Deep Dish, The Stanton Warriors and DJ Craze, to name a few. With an 'international' style dance floor - no tables and chairs - Astra's huge expanse lends itself to serious boogie action. Check their site for upcoming events.

INCH 55/49-60 Ratchadapisek Road, 02-641 2963, major cards, www.inchclub.com. Costing 100,000,000 baht, this new mega-club is one of the most expensive and ambitious nightlife ventures in Bangkok. The look is sci-fi space-port and disco-chic, and very, very BIG. INCH prides itself on unique cocktails, whipped up by 'international mixologists'. Though the club has fantastic sound and lighting the music policy might leave international guests baffled.

NARCISSUS Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain Asok) just behind Pegasus Club, 02-258-4805, major cards. Gaudy and glitzy to the point of ostentatiousness, with monster mirror balls and chandeliers that would have embarrassed Caligula. The relentless trance techno vibes

will send you panting upstairs to one of the best chill-out lounges in Bangkok. Bt500 cover includes three drinks.

TAWANDANG 462/61 Rama 3 Road, 02-678 1114-6, www.tawandang1999.com, major cards.

Microbrewery and mega beer-hall, Tawandang was one of Bangkok's first (successful) brewpubs. Choose from weizen, lager, or dunkel beers, all brewed to strict German purity standards by a real German brewmaster pumping out 700,000 litres a year, by the half-litre for Bt100. The vast hall features performers, ranging from Thai classical music, to popular indie bands and the good-old "sexy girl singing to a backing track". Their Thai food menu is delicious and reasonably priced. The 1pm jazz session is worth going out of your way for.

SAXOPHONE 3/8 Victory Monument on Phayathai Road (Skytrain Victory Monument), 02-246 5472, major cards, www.saxophonepub.com.

Live blues, R&B, Jazz, Rock, Reggae and even Ska house bands enclosed in a woody, cozy wrapper seven nights a week, from around 8pm. Mostly a friendly Thai crowd with a few Farangs thrown in. Some of the best live music in town. Small beer for Bt120. No cover. Good Thai food.

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

A stylish venue decorated in black. Plays quality, butt-wiggling music and regularly features international DJs. Huge vodka selection, chilled to perfect quaffing temperature or served at Bt100 in jelly form. Downstairs is for mingling, the upstairs lounge is for romancing, and loners can sulk on the terrace (or pop into the adjacent Wasabi restaurant for an excellent Japanese feed). Bt500 cover after 10pm with two drinks. There's Massive Mondays (Dancehall & Reggae beats), Globalism Tuesday (Afro, Latin, Percussive House), Wednesday is Ghetto Fabulous, uniting the best of old school Hip Hop, Funk & more. Liquid Thursday (House with special guests), Frisky Friday (Freestyle), Saturday Night Fever (Funky House) and Beat Therapy Sunday (Hip Hop).

BED SUPPERCLUB End of Sukhumvit Soi 11 (Skytrain Nana), 02-6513537, major cards, www.bedsupperclub.com.

Classy, shiny all-white nightclub that looks 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. The music policy varies throughout the week - see website. Opposite the dancing bit is the eating bit (hence the 'supper' in Supper club) with set meals served from 7.30pm (8pm sharp Fri, Sat).

GLOW 96/4-5 Sukhumvit 23, 02-261 3007, major cards, www.glowbkk.com. Glow offers some of the largest pours in Bangkok, at very reasonable prices. It's a great place to start off an evening's drinking or clubbing with a swing. A sanctuary for anyone sick of the constant rotation 'Bling-Bling', Glow has a 'No Hip-Hop policy'. Instead, some of Bangkok's finest DJs drop all genres of House music.

THE DUBLINER IRISH PUB 440 Sukhumvit Road, between Soi 22 & 24, (Skytrain Phrom Pong), 02-204 1841, major cards,

www.dublinerasia.com.

A handsome, three-storey 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 humming. Standard draught beer is around Bt130 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. Oh yes, and it's cheap - about Bt60 a small beer.

Silom

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

RADIO CITY Patpong Soi 1. Downstairs from Lucifer's (see below).

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.

IRISH EXCHANGE 1/5-6 Covent Road, just off of Silom (Skytrain Sala Daeng), 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 life. 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!

MUZZIK CAFÉ Patpong Soi 1.

The crossroads corner of Patpong 1 & 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, 02-234 6902.

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. Bt150 drinks and a post-grunge feel set it apart from the slick sterility offered by most Bangkok clubs.

NORIEGA'S Silom Soi 4 (Sala Daeng skytrain), 02-233 2813, major cards. Small, modern two-level bar run by Frank. The small food menu is headed 'nfood 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 seven days a week and one of the few venues in Bangkok to feature live blues every weekend from the city's premier blues outfits. Other nights feature jazz, Latin and a range of bands catering to every taste.

TAPAS Silom Soi 4 (Sala Daeng skytrain), 02-2344737, www.tapasroom.net, major cards. As a long-time leader in Soi 4, Tapas



Q BAR BANGKOK

EVENTS **OCTOBER** 2006



Home Bru

MONDAY 2ND OCT
EAVESDROP: DOWNTempo BEATS & BREAKS
DJ KOTAU DJs OCTO & TUL

FRIDAY 6TH OCT
JUB CHAI: ECLECTIC MIXED MUSICAL SOUP
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GLOBALISM: DEEP HOUSE & GLOBAL RHYTHMS
DJ TUAN DJs JOEKI & SUM 1

THURSDAY 12TH OCT
LIQUID: BREAKS, HOUSE & ELECTRO
FUNKY GANGSTER DJs JOEKI

SUNDAY 15TH OCT
BEAT THERAPY: HIP-HOP & R 'N B JOINTS
DJ CAVO DJs TUL & OFAY 1

SUNDAY 22ND OCT
BEAT THERAPY: HIP-HOP & R 'N B JOINTS
DJ SUNNY & MOUSE
DJs TUL & OFAY 1

TUESDAY 24TH OCT
GLOBALISM: DEEP HOUSE & GLOBAL RHYTHMS
RONNIE SLAMA
DJs JOEKI & SUM 1

WEDNESDAY 25TH OCT
BLOCK PARTY: OLD SCHOOL CLASSICS
DJ DUKE & SKA DJs OCTO - SUM 1

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UNTAMED TRAVEL

Room Club continues to be popular. Spinning soulful house and funk, DJs Neng, Wut and Oud & Tee keep bodies dancing with live percussion on Thursdays and weekends (Bt100 entry).

TELEPHONE PUB & RESTAURANT *Silom Soi 4 (Sala Daeng skytrain), 02-234 3279, www.telephonepub.com.* Telephone has been a gay icon since 1987 and set the character for Soi 4 for the following decade as the heteros commandeered the place – as usual. These days most of the soi has lost its pinkness, but Telephone clings to its roots. The pub also has tables out the front – perfect for watching people of the night flit from club to club.

THE BALCONY *Silom Soi 4 (Sala Daeng skytrain), 02-235 5891, www.balconypub.com, major cards.* The best Happy Hour in Soi 4 offers cut-rate specials (Bt49) on cocktails and brewskies from 7pm-9pm. Sister bar of Telephone, across the road. This is a good place to be served by boys in shorts or make new friends. Happy hour 6-8pm, house drinks Bt59.

SPHINX *Silom Soi 4 (Sala Daeng skytrain), 02-234 7249, www.sphinxthai.com, major cards.* Hidden at the shadowy bottom end of Soi 4, this is the place to refuel. The menu maximizes on excellent Thai and Farang food. Broad cocktail menu along with ancient Egypt-cum-Godfather ambience is good for wining, dining and 69ing.

DISTIL *64th Floor, The Dome, State Tower, Silom Road, 02 624 9555, 12pm-1.00am, major cards.* Claiming to be Bangkok's only speciality bar, Distil encompasses a proper 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, then finish off with a Cuban cigar on the outdoor terrace. Not cheap.

BANGLAMPHU SILK BAR *Opposite Krung Thai Bank, Khaosan Road, 02-629 4447, www.silkbars.com, major cards.* Khaosan has definitely gone upscale—any fool can see that—and the Silk Bar isn't the only 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 aimlessly 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 Road (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 funkified joint when so much around it has changed. The upstairs bar features a free pool table and an open-air balcony offering a view of the road and temple below. Excellent Korean food, grilled seafood and cool beers.

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

PRANAKORN *Just off Ratchadamnoen Klang Road, first Soi west of Thanon Tanoo, 58/2 Soi Damnoen Klang Tai, 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 really decent live Thai 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.

There's a big menu of splendid and affordable Thai dishes and booze is cheap. Considering the bar is close to Khaosan and Café Democ, it attracts a surprisingly low quota of white backpacking trash. The

majority are Thai Bohemians.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELLER'S TAVERN *Across from police station, 02-629 1988-9, major cards, www.gulliverbangkok.com.* The pub with the tuk-tuk over the door on the corner of Khaosan. If you're aching for English football, Farang food, and a shot of pool, this is your place. Generous happy hours mean this Yank-style roadhouse is usually packed

with punters. The place has become popular with young Thai females looking for close encounters. (careful, some of them are men). Best aircon in Banglamphu. Happy hour 3-9pm.

LAVA CLUB *Downstairs at the Bayon building at the Buddy Lodge end of Khaosan Road, 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.

Scoring This Month

The Bangkok International DJ Festival: From November 28th to December 4th 2006 two of Bangkok's heavyweight venues **Bed Supperclub** and **Q Bar** link up to launch the latest entry on the international party circuit. Expect a line-up of stellar talent including DJs Premier, Doc Scott, Jazzy Jeff and Nic Fanciulli along with both clubs' resident DJ's. Check www.bkkdjfestival.com for further details.

Astra *Thursday the 5th* Live set from Futon for new album launch. DJ set from Wassana 'Pa Wassy'.

Thursday the 26th DJ Sasha and Kevin Shiu go back to back

Indus Bar *It's 'Bling Monday', every Monday from 9pm with Bill Calhoun banging out Hip Hop lessons.*

Café Democ *Saturday the 7th* DUBTECH party of tech house and breaks with DJ Tee-Plus.

Saturday the 14th Hip Hop exclusive, Japanese style with DJ Ma & friends.

Sunday the 15th DJ's Pauly & Shiko from the Common World crew drop drum and bass.

Funky Dojo *The combination of good electro house music, a late license and fun crowd make this club stand out on the weekends.*

Q Bar *Saturday the 7th* SOL OF DIWALI. DJ Romeo spins the best in 'Urban Bollywood' beats for the "Mercy Days" charity, raising money for Thai kids with Thalassemia.

Rock Pub (Ratchatewi BTS) *Sunday the 8th* 12-6pm. A full roster of 14 bands including Thai favourites, 'Slowly Killing Nameless Victims' and 'Empty Glass Means Nothing'.





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How Confucius got his best ideas

SUNSET STREET Bang in the middle of Khaosan Road. 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 and the 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

colonial-style building housing a Starbucks. In all, the design is stylish, the prices are decent and it's a nice place to hang out.

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, 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.

BRICK BAR Back of Buddy Lodge on Khaosan Road, 02-629 4747, 02-629 4848, www.buddyloodge.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.

SUZIE PUB 108/5-9 Khaosan Road. Down the Soi from Nat Guesthouse, 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, 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 need an electric cattle-prod to belly up to the bar. Ladies night on Tue from 5-10pm.

AD HERE THE 13TH 13 Samsen Rd.

Walk up Chakrapong Rd from the Police Station end of Khaosan about 400 metres, cross the bridge over the canal and it's on your left — you can't miss it. This small but mighty gem of a blues bar features a house band led by beatific guitarist extraordinaire Pong and husky-voiced belting singer Georgia and just keeps getting better. Special guests join in regularly (ask Pong if you want to sit in), and there's



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a sizzling jazz band on Mondays. It feels like a house party, with free and friendly mingling in one of the only places in town where the invisible stone wall between Thais and foreigners was never built. Beers are Bt80.

BAGHDAD CAFÉ *On Samsen Road next to Ad Here the 13th (see previous page). 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. Bt180 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.*



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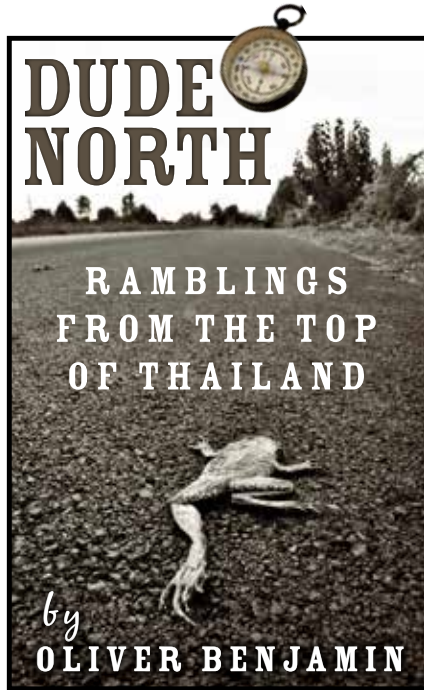
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UNPLANNED TRAVEL



International Chiang Mai of Mystery

If there's one thing that people just can't stop yammering about it's how amazing Thai culture is. Blah blah Thai massage blah blah hill-tribe hats blah blah mai pen rai and so on. Well, that's all fine and good, but after a while it's easy to miss the familiar old crap you left behind. And while there may be plenty of McDonald's and Irish pubs and Japanese porn to help make you feel right at home, sometimes it just isn't enough. Luckily, all the internationally

oriented stuff happening around Chiang Mai will warm the cockles of your sentimental and secretly xenophobic heart.

Get Teed Off

Finally, a fully pimped-up golf holiday is now accessible even to those of modest means. Seven nights of plush accommodation, six rounds of 18 holes at the best courses in Chiang Mai, caddy fees and all sorts of extras will only set you back Bt20,000. Any high-class geezer will tell you that's chump change for a leisurely week of this great old Scottish game. Make sure to watch movies like *Caddyshack* and *Happy Gilmore* and *Tin Cup* first so you'll know how to misbehave in the proper comic fashion whilst inadvertently capturing the audience's heart. Note: Ridiculous checkered pants and pastel polo shirts aren't included.

For more information contact magnus@cm.ksc.co.th, teeoffservice@yahoo.com or visit www.thailandgolf.hostway.net.

Adjust Your Antenna

One of the coolest things to come out of Britain since the ice-lolly, *Antenna* originated as a regular screening of the latest cutting-edge music videos from the UK and interviews with directors of some of these videos at the National Film Theatre of London. In the spirit of interactive media, the audience will be invited to discuss the videos afterwards, presumably leading to inspired commentary such as, "Whoa, dude," "Tippy colours," and "While I admire the auteur's vision and talent, I really would have liked to see more of Kylie's bum."

For more information contact 053- 242 103 Ext. 14 or jon.glendinning@britishcouncil.or.th. Program: starts 7pm at Major Cineplex Airport Plaza: 25th October - Antenna 2, 22nd November - Antenna 3, 7th December - Antenna 4

The House of Techno

Chiang Mai's favourite centre for gadgetry and gizmos, Pantip Hall is throwing a grand, garish salute to the leading lights of technology. All the latest doodads will be on display, a slew of doohickeys will be heavily discounted, and workshops will teach you how to operate an assortment of impressive whatsits. You can't afford not to spend all your money! There will even be a team giving instructions about robot controls, a student exhibition, and the requisite army of pretty promo girls who know absolutely nothing at all about technology outside of cell phones and pregnancy tests. For more information call 053-288383 ext 103, 104.

Nice Bloomers

The hills are alive – with the sound of Mexican sunflowers? *Ay caramba!* Every year this incredible natural phenomenon takes place on the hills of Doi Mae U in Mae Hong Son province. Mexican sunflowers as far as the eye can see, amigo. How did they get here? Some say it was the same space aliens who built the pre-Aztec pyramids. Others claim it was Cheech and Chong on a late 70s quest for Thai stick. All in all, it's a riddle inside a mystery, wrapped in an enigma, rolled in a joint. Don't pass it up, man. From now until December, for more information call 053-612982-3.

Hash House Harriers Interhash 2006

Famous for their slogan "A drinking club with a running problem" the Hash House Harriers have been slogging away towards that pot of golden lager at the end of the rainbow for over 60 years. With branches all over the world, this association of expat ambleholics are finally taking their quixotic crusade to Chiang Mai for a stumble through our jungle at their annual Interhash. To wit: Hash House events usually consist of a brisk run/walk (for health!), after which everyone gets utterly annihilated on beer. Come join the fun and meet hashers from all over the world. It might be the only chance you'll get to vomit in public *before* you actually start drinking. October 27-29. For more information call 053 206822, 081-9935827.

Rong Rian of Rock

Both *School of Rock* and *Revenge of the Nerds* proved that you don't need talent or good looks to win a battle of the bands – all you need are really stupid costumes. With all the cheap and cheesy tailors in Chiang Mai, we could easily have this year's Global Battle of the Bands competition sewn up. If your band makes it all the way to the December final in London you can win US\$100,000 and the admiration of unsung dorks everywhere. Open to all applicants, irrespective of style, but to be honest, you're not likely to go very far if you play ancient Bob Marley covers – which neatly eliminates about two-thirds of the local talent.

Applications are open from now to 15th October 2006, fees are B2,500 per band. Contact 02-6415190-1 or www.gbobthailand.com

Please visit dudenorth.com for additional events, comments or suggestions. This column is info-powered by www.citylife-citylife.com and www.city-now.com

chiang MAI

Ask someone in the know what's so special about Chiang Mai and even the fondest aficionado will waffle, "Um, well, I suppose there's some nice scenery and there's some good restaurants and lots of elephants and temples. Easy to get around. Plenty of 7-11s." But that sure doesn't do it justice. Chiang Mai is so much greater than the sum of its parts. A recent survey in a mainstream travel mag just rated it the fifth best city in the world! Why? Maybe because it's a medium-size university town with both big-city sophistication and small-town intimacy. It's safer, cheaper, friendlier and cheaper (did we say cheaper?) than most other tourist spots in Thailand or even Southeast Asia for that matter. And it not only has an astonishing per-capita number of temples, but it probably has an even higher punters-to-pubs ratio as well. Yet for those with a healthy bent, the opportunities for physical and spiritual advancement are unparalleled. Chiang Mai's got it all. Aside from a beach, that is. Upside: no sharks.

PLACES TO CRASH

If it seems as if every other building in Chiang Mai is a guesthouse, that's because in some areas, it is. Consequently, you should have no trouble finding a comfy, good-value place to flop. The most popular tourist ghetto is inside the northeastern corner of the old city - around Moon Muang Soi 9. A perennial favourite in that area, but often full is **Supreme House**, managed by ever-cheerful Scottish Gordon. People check in but never seem to leave. Down the lane you'll find **Grace House**, which features shiny rooms and a good restaurant, and **S&P Hotel** which boasts a small

swimming pool. Looking for something a bit more quaint? **Mountain View Guest House** on Sri Poom road and **Gap House** off Ratchadamnoen road both feature Lanna-style architecture and a leafy garden. **Sri Pat Guest House** on Moon Muang Soi 7 is a small boutique-style hotel catering to those looking for a little more comfort. Farther afield you'll find many other popular gems like **Julie Guest House** - people who stay there love it so much and so vocally that you wonder what they put in the food. **Daret's Guest House** benefits from its perfect location right at Tha Pae Gate, with a fun outdoor eating area and cheap, good dishes. Those seeking upscale accommodation can find world-class-and-wonderful crash palaces like **Baan Sabai**, the **Mandarin Oriental Dhara Devi**, **The Four Seasons Resort, Tamarind Village** and **Ratchamankha**. Your pretty penny will purchase outrageously picturesque panoramas - all four mix modern amenity with ancient mystical charm. Finally, for those truly skint, head on over to **Banana Guest House** for dorm beds at Bt50 a bum.

DAY TRIPPING TEMPLES

More than that you can shake an incense stick at. But each one is unique in its way. **Wat Umong** could be the coolest, featuring a cute garden with inspirational sayings nailed to the trees, an unusual "starving Buddha" statue, a small zoo, catacombs, and instructive illustrations of wayward dogs getting drunk and driving too fast. **Wat Chedi Luang** is massive and particularly impressive when lit up at night. Don't miss the jaw-droppingly authentic wax dummy of a revered old monk. **Wat Suan Dok** offers monk chats every evening at 5pm - everything you wanted to know about *samsara* but were afraid to ask.

MARKETS

You can encounter just about anything at **Warorot Market**, including smells strong enough to oxidize your clothing. But this is where the

local colour is. Every damn colour you can imagine. The **Night Bazaar** would be great if it weren't for all the fat tourists blocking the sidewalk. Still your best bet for a fake Rolex and Beer Chang T-shirts for friends back home. One of the best markets in South East Asia is the **Sunday Walking Street**, branching out from Tha Pae Gate in the old city. All sorts of old fashioned cute newness can be found here. Great for people-leering.

ACTIVITIES

Where to begin? Trekking, elephant-riding, white-water rafting, rock climbing, massage (both receiving and learning), yoga, meditation (and other hippyology), and so on. You'll not be stuck for something to do. Check out

the new **Night Safari** - the controversial new nature park where the endangered animals almost made it onto the menu. Or cruise north of town to the **X-Centre** in Mae Rim where every kind of extreme adventure can be undertaken. Saturday you can make a day of it at the world's cheapest **Horse Races**, and then have a leisurely meal at nearby lakeside restaurants and visit the adjacent and interesting **Hill-Tribe Museum**. Nature lovers can find a wide variety of **treks** out into the hinterlands, often coupled with **bamboo rafting** and **elephant riding**. For those with a more adventurous streak, take to the hills on an **enduro-cycle** (*endurotours.com*) or **mountain bike** (*mountainbikingchiangmai*).

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**, Chaisongkham Rd, offers more upmarket room and A-frame cottages, Bt500-800 including breakfast.

DAYTRIPPING

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

NIGHTRIPPING

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

FEEDING TIME

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

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com), go down that river rapidly (siamrivers.com) and learn to train those loveable elephants yourself (maesaeelephantcamp.com). Finally, no trip to Chiang Mai would be complete without a visit to marvelous Doi Suthep Temple on a hill overlooking the whole valley. On a clear day you can see forever. Most of the time, regrettably, considerably less.

FEEDING TIME

There's so much good grub in Chiang Mai that many a traveller's day is made up of sitting around

waiting impatiently to be hungry again. For a big plate of healthy and hearty sustenance visit **Blue Diamond**, which also happens to be the headquarters for spiritual backpackers a-seekin'. Other traveller favourites include the friendly **Ratana's Kitchen**, which not only serves a wide variety of fab yum, but is blessedly air-conditioned too. For a special night out, hit any of the lovely riverfront restaurants – **The Riverside** is the most popular and tastiest, featuring affordable fare, great ambience and

excellent live music. An incredible buffet brunch can be had at the **Sheraton** – eat your weight in imported cheese and shrimp cocktails for only Bt450. Best burgers in town can be found at the **Chiang Mai Saloon**, though their service can be slow – if crowded try **Mike's Burgers** instead. And while Chiang Mai may be beachless, sumptuous and fresh cooked-to order seafood can be had at **Anusarn Food Market** near the Night Bazaar. Over on the west end of town you'll find the popular and healthy **Khun Churn**, which offers a

formidable vegetarian lunch buffet for only Bt60, and farther up a hidden gem – **Mi Casa** provides unforgettable gourmet Mediterranean cuisine in a lovely old house at great prices. Finally, for an awesome view of Chiang Mai at night, check out **Palaad Tawanron**, nestled in the foothills of Doi Suthep, where the good food, service and ambience ensure it's often packed to the gills.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Pub-crawlers are well tended to at expat hang-outs like the **U.N. Irish Pub**, **True Blue Pub**, **Bliss Pub**, and even just **The Pub**. Buffalo soldiers should check out Chiang Mai's "Little Jamaica," an area in the centre of town featuring rasta-themed bars with live music: **Babylon**, **Roots Rock Reggae**, **Heaven Beach**, **Utopia** and others. Fans of live rock are required by all that is holy to see local legend Tuk shred his Stratocaster into sawdust at the **Brasserie** bar – not to be missed. Dancing the night away is also an option at local clubs like **Bubbles**, **Warm Up**, **Bossy**, and **Monkey Club**. All feature young Thais wrecked out of their minds looking good and looking desperately to hook up, though not necessarily with you. Avoid the shamelessly racist **Mandalay** – they charge foreigners Bt300 while Thais get in free! For those looking for a more respectable night out, hit the **Drunken Flower**, a popular hangout for local artists and literati. Owner Dai has an astonishing CD collection and a welcoming way. Visiting writers should stop by **The Writers Club and Wine Bar** on Friday nights to rub ink-stained elbows and drink with the local scribes. Finally, musicians should drop by **Santia's Grotto** for impromptu jam sessions in what is very likely the only papier-mâché cave in all of Southeast Asia. Finally, for a truly sordid experience, cap off your night at **Spicy**, the only place in town that offers pizza, carnal knowledge and punch-ups past 2am.

Tsunami Bike Ride

Beginning in Chang Mai and finishing up in the Golden Triangle, this Thailand Charity Cycle is held in association with the *Piers Simon Appeal (PSA)*. All interested riders need do is pay the registration fee and agree to raise a pre-set amount of money. The PSA began after the death of Luke Simon's elder brother, Piers, who sadly passed away on Koh Phi Phi during the 2004 tsunami. The charity aims to "aid community regeneration... and alleviate suffering and hardship" offering support to all who suffered in the tsunami.

Covering a 400-km trail, some parts of which are off-road, the challenge takes place over five days. Some basic training or cycling skills are required, though the ride will be broken into manageable chunks, giving ample time for breaks to enjoy the culture and people of the countryside.

The Northern Thailand Charity Challenge 2006 rides out on 15th-21st October. To hop in the saddle visit www.pierssimonappeal.org or www.northerntrails.com



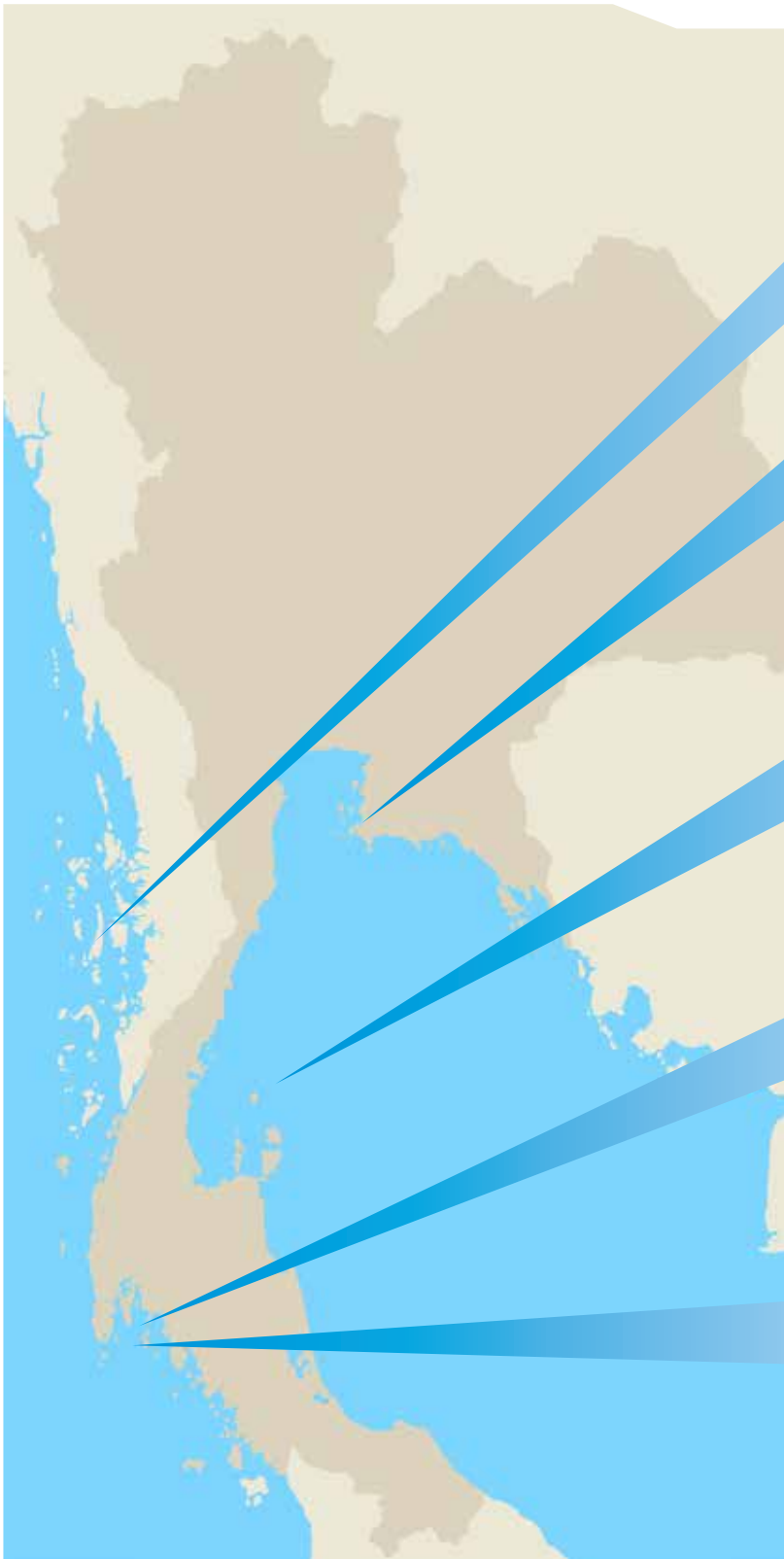
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THE SIMILANS

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 hawkbill 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

UNPLANNED TRAVEL

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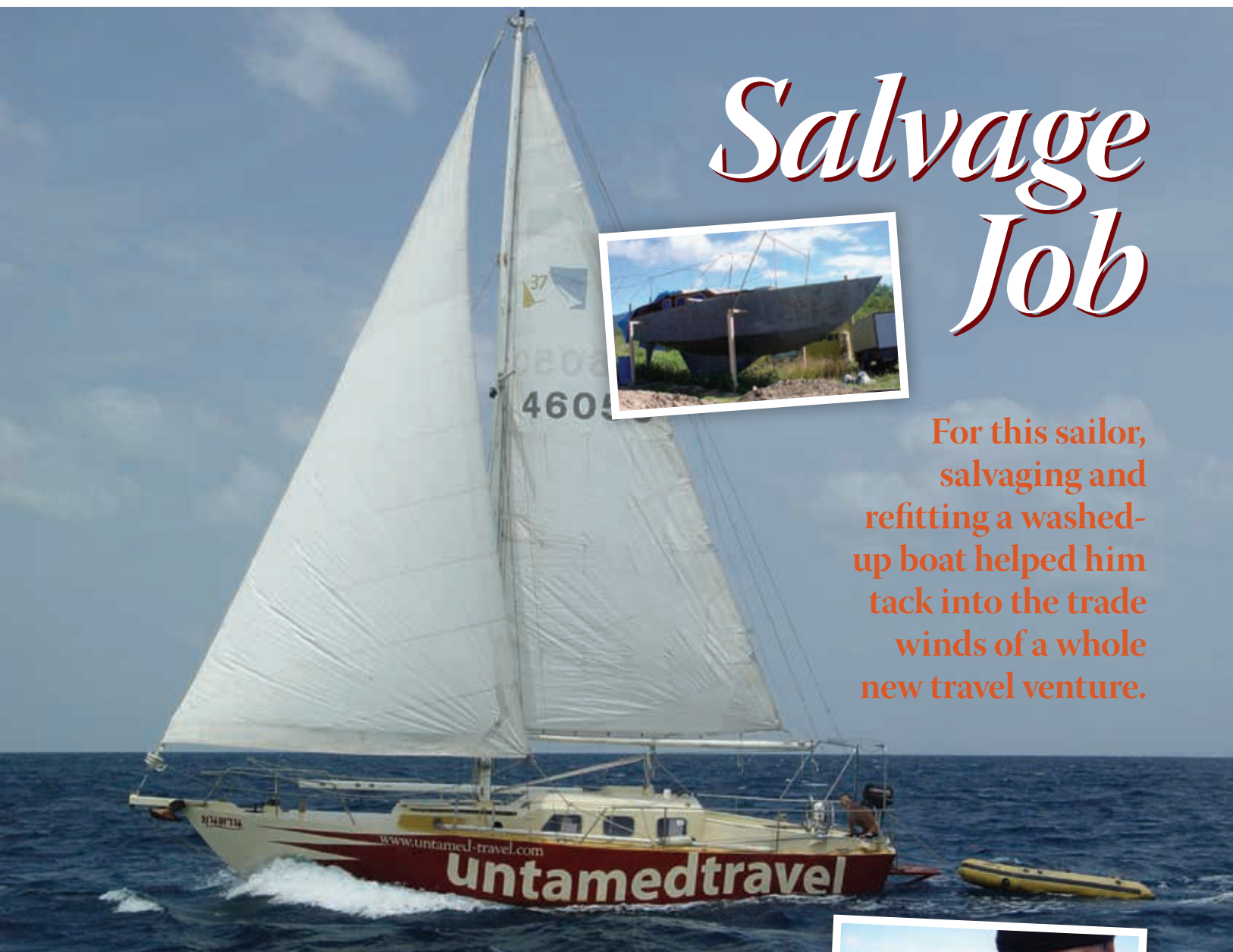



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Salvage Job

For this sailor, salvaging and refitting a washed-up boat helped him tack into the trade winds of a whole new travel venture.



When Sacha Bading first saw the metal boat in Australia – landlocked and forlorn, scabbed with rust, a hole punched in its hull – he thought it looked like a tank. To make her seaworthy again, the Berliner invested nearly a year of full-time toil; most of the craft had to be stripped for major repairs to the hull.

In September 2005, he embarked on an argosy of some 2,600 nautical miles to bring the *Yun Khan* to Thailand. The first five weeks of straight sailing brought him from Australia to the Indonesia archipelago and, after a short break in Singapore, Sacha and his two-person crew (consisting of his Australian partner and their four-year-old daughter) arrived on Koh Tao after 10 weeks – long enough to brew their own beer on board and become gourmet chefs of “shark curry”.

A real feat of derring-do for a self-taught skipper who learned the ropes from a Turkish man we met while working as a dive instructor in the Red Sea. Over the phone from Koh Tao, the 40-year-old says they encountered a few “minor technical problems, like in the Straits of Singapore, which is very busy and something got caught in the propeller.” But he’s not one to blow his own foghorn when it comes to being a mean mariner.

For most of the journey they used the sails, except when the wind

became breathless. Still, the trip only cost them 300 litres worth of diesel fuel, he says.

At the helm of a new travel venture, Sacha is launching special sunset cruises

around Koh Tao, longer trips to the Angthong National Marine Park and special charters. Of the latter trips, he says, “It’s up to the customers what they want to do, if they want to go snorkeling, and one price will cover it all, including as much as they want to drink.”

The 38-foot *Yun Khan* (sporting the UNTAMED logo) can accommodate around eight people and his partner’s boat, *Freedom Fargo*, is a little longer. This month, they hope to launch some of their tours and Sacha expects that the company “will be going full speed ahead by mid-December.”

Wade through his website for prices and more details at <http://www.yun-khan.tk>



BEACH roundup

If you haven't planned ahead, knowing where to lay your beach blanket in Thailand can be tricky. Thailand is justly famous for its miles of largely unfouled white sand beaches and new places crop up each year. While not exhaustive, the following wraps up the main beach destinations.

Of course the other worry is weather. Keen as a fellow may be on a hand or two of poker, few want to spend their holiday playing indoors waiting for the rain to stop. Luckily, we're in the tropics which means that most of the time the rain comes in intense but short-lived bursts, leaving the rest of the day dry, if a little overcast.

Being fairly close to the equator, Thailand's seasons are not pronounced. Nationwide there are three main seasons: Hot season starts in mid-February or March, reaching its peak in April until rainy season starts in May, then it rains until cool season begins to nip in November, which marks the beginning of high season, when the tourists come. Of course, that's only for central Thailand - things are a little different in the south where most of the islands are. On the Andaman (west) coast the seas get rough and the skies get cloudy at the beginning of May and get progressively wetter until the end of October. In the Gulf of Thailand, things get wetter later but it takes almost until December to dry up, although July and August are unusually fair.

All that said, there's people on the beach all year 'round, and turning up in low season just means that you pay half as much for your room.

KOH PHI PHI

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

KOH TAO

The ideal island for the diver or diver wannabe, Koh Tao can be a bit of a vortex, drawing people that just don't



Shinny blurry people

want to ever leave. With spectacular underwater vistas and generally placid waters, Tao's underwater world can become addictive. Most divers who come here are getting their PADI Open Water Certificate as Koh Tao is one of the cheapest places in the world to get yourself hooked and hooked up to diving. There are bazillion places here

that operate courses and standards are good and most operators are actively involved in reef conservation.

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

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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 SAMUI

From monkeys to motorbikes, Samui has a smattering of everything. Direct flights from Bangkok have made this Gulf island a commercial hub. You can still find the idyllic beach experience here along with pubs, nightclubs, hair-braiders, and fish and chips shops.

KOH PANGAN

"Hand me another mushie shake before these pills kick in, would you? And stop Bogarting that joint. Is that Harry lying in a puddle of sick over there? Oh my god! I think my face is melting!" Yup, Koh Pangan sure is a wild, drug-crazed, hedonistic pleasure boat for hippies, slackers and other layabouts. Home of the Full Moon Party and all, and you've heard what happens there! Well, if that's your bag, man, you may be headed for disappointment. Things sure aren't like they used to be, and for most people it's good riddance. Sure, you can drink and dance all night at Had Rin on the full moon, but if the local coppers catch a whiff of draw or you're a little too artificially loved up, you're looking at an extended tour of Thailand's legal system. The island boasts stunning beaches, good value rooms and a certain dreamy, isolated quality that has people staying

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FOUR WHEELS GOOD, TWO WHEELS BAD

Hiring a motorcycle on the islands is by far the cheapest way to get around and remarkably expands your holiday horizons, particularly on Thailand's two most popular islands where the taxi-mafia rule. Not only cheap, nobody cares if you've got a licence, insurance or can even ride.

The trouble is that road accidents are the leading cause of death in Thailand, particularly amongst tourists, to the tune of at least one Farang a month going home in a box from Samui alone.

When you consider the cost and inconvenience of a prosthetic limb, hiring a bike looks like less of a deal. You're actually better off hiring a 4WD, which is cheap when split with two or three friends.

If you must ride, use your head. Put that head in a helmet. Don't drive around drunk. Assume everyone else on the road is trying to kill you because, due to lawlessness and the negative attitude of some islanders, they probably are.

First gear on most scooters is for going uphill only and you can usually take off in a more controlled manner in second.

Finally, drive shit scared. Think about how much skin you'd lose and what the bones would sound like when they break if you come off that next curve and you'll probably take it a little easier.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

KOH SAMET

What was once a small fishing center is now a popular weekend getaway for both city-bound Thais and foreigners. Samet is Thailand's authentic desert island and it's close to Bangkok to boot. White Sand beaches line the east side of the island and range from clubby and crowded to almost empty save for a few bungalows. Midweek the island is cheaper and you can have your pick in beach chairs.

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

Sin City Thailand is conveniently located a couple of hours east from Bangkok for your hedonistic pleasure. Whatever your whim, paintball, eating schnitzel, shopping or deep sea fishing, you can satiate your thirst for pleasure in Pattaya. Speedos abound on the city's streets and beach, which is a bit on the grotty side. To get some nice sand go to Jomtien a few miles east, or take a boat out into the great turquoise abyss.

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SAMUI

Samui is no longer a backpacker's paradise but you can still find the odd bargain room and cheap eat. For now, the south of the island is still a scene of tranquil countryside with empty beaches, and waterfall bedecked hills that make for a peaceful stroll. Apart from the north's, vast developments, Samui has small city feel, a clubbing capital with new bars and clubs opening all the time and it's showing no signs of slowing down. Samui likes to party and with the new Q bar about to open it seems to be going in the right direction.

PLACES TO CRASH CHAWENG

P. Chaweng Guest House has TV, aircon and fridge, a real bargain for Bt600 on Soi Colibri. **Central Bay Resort** on the beach is cheap and cheerful starting at Bt600 for a fan bungalow while **Charlie's Bungalows** is so legendary that half the world has stayed here at one time or another. It was refurbished last year and bungalows start at Bt700.

Baan Chaweng Beach Resort and Spa is going upmarket but it's still good value with prices starting at Bt2,400.

BOPHUT

Everything is a Frisbee toss away in this quaint old fisherman's village. **Ban Bophut** is a fairly new and luxury hotel on the beach; at Bt2,400 the price is right. The petite boutique hotel **L'Hacienda** has a small pool on the roof with views of Koh Phangan in the distance, and accommodation for Bt1,900. **Eden Bungalow** has spacious rooms in a lush garden from Bt1,200, while **Red House**, in the centre of the village, offers rooms with balconies facing the sea. **Smile House** is an old favourite – two large pools and peaceful bungalows starting at Bt1,600. Many of the shops, bars and restaurants in Bophut also have apartments upstairs for short-term rental. **Ayuthaya Garden Bar** is probably the best deal starting at Bt1,200. Further up the beach are many upmarket hotels but also some old-school bungalows, many on the beach. You can



Be sure to sample the local cuisine

find beachfront bargains at **Cactus**, **Freehouse**, **Gecko** and **Calm Beach** with prices beginning at Bt500 or less for a basic room.

LAMAI

Wanta has wide-screen TVs and triple-sized beds, proving one of the best deals in town from Bt1,400. **Spa Samui** has newly redecorated rooms from Bt800, but most occupants are there for the healthy activities like detox programmes. Spa Samui also has one of the best restaurants on the island, which must be frustrating to the fasters that hang out there. **Long Island**, from Bt700 to Bt4,000, now has a spa and a fantastic restaurant.

MAENAM

Mae Nam Villa has bargain bungalows at the Bophut end of the beach starting at Bt300 for a basic fan room.

Maenam Resort has great beach huts for Bt1,800. **Sandy Resort** is small, tidy, friendly, and family run, offering good food as well as aircon bargains for Bt1,000.

BAN RAK and BIG BUDDHA Samui Mermaid has sea views, aircon, cable TV, mini-bar and two swimming pools from Bt600, while old-school **Shambala** (Bt650 and up), has a fine restaurant, and is situated in the centre of Ban Rak, on the beach. **Saboev** is more upmarket, beginning at Bt3,000 per night, and now has a top-class restaurant.

FEEDING TIME

CHAWENG

If you're in the mood for original food (chilli ice cream!!), try **Betelnut's** tasty dishes by master chef Jeff Lord who fuses California with Thai. Brasilia homage **Zicos** has an all-you-can-eat flesh feast for Bt650; the amount of food they offer is

WAY TO GO

FERRY

Seatran boats to Samui from Don Sak and Surat Thani 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 aircon and movies. Ferries to Surat Thani leave from **Nathon**.

PLANE

Bangkok Airways leaves every hour until 9pm, Bt3,500/6,500 Ow/return. Look out for early-bird and red-eye flights for as little as Bt2,000. Ring 02-265-555 for details, but don't forget the Bt400 departure tax.

TRAIN

A sleeper ticket is Bt900 from Bangkok-Surat Thani for an aircon, 2nd-class berth and Bt1,339 for 1st class. Prices vary for all sorts of reasons. Add Bt180 for bus and ferry transfers.

BUS

Bt450 from Samui to Bangkok, or vice-versa, takes 14 hours so bring a book, an iPod and some sedatives.

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Every year, twenty nearsighted tourists die attempting to read this sign

impressive as are the super-sexy Queen Samba dancers. **Prego** is a good Italian place, boasting a soothing-on-the-senses design and an endless supply of free, tasty breads. **The Deck** in central Chaweng is a laidback eatery with a huge menu of yummy stuff. Newcomers **Rice, Digress** and **Coco China House** are just three of the upper-end nosheries with excellent word-class tucker.

BOHPUT

The latest addition to Bophut's dining scene is **Dao Wa Deng**, chef Luke's fusion food with a Moroccan twist is delicious. **Happy Elephant** is the oldest place in town and has seafood specialities. **Seaweed** is another fantastic newcomer serving Nordic pleasures like pan-fried cod with broccoli potato mash. Many masticators have reported eating the best steak in the world at **The Shack**. Don't miss **Yoga Cafe** with daytime healthy stuff and special theme nights. **Jonnies Cafe** and **Steve's Pub** have the best Sunday roasts.

LAMAI

El Dorado has a popular all-you-can-eat BBQ on Wednesday for Bt250. **Harry's Bar** wins the biggest fried breakfast award. **Black Diamond** serves up cheap and good Thai and Western tucker while **The Cliff**, on the main ring road towards Chaweng, has incredible cliff-top views, offers Portuguese Piri Piri and has a bar where you may find James Bond or members of Duran Duran.

MAENAM

Angela's Cafe is an old favourite offering choice, quality and value. Also on the main ring road, **La Trattoria** serves homemade ice cream and great lasagne. **Hot Pot Maenam** has an all-you-can-eat BBQ, so you can cook the food on a Korean hot stone pot at your table. For Bt89, including ice cream, the food is surprisingly good. **BAN RAK/BIG BUDDHA** For a great Western-style

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stuffing try **Elephant and Castle** or **Aux Amis** for some refined French grub. **BBC** stands for Big Buddha Café and also for good grub and a weekly buffet special.

NIGHTTRIPPING CHAWENG

For those who like the party scene, Chaweng Lake View is a popular, banging, having-it kind of place. Check listings for Black Moon party and Escape nights. Rock lovers head to **Penny Lane** for classic tracks or to **Springer Pub** for live sounds. **Reggae Pub**, the classic old haunt, starts late and doesn't play much reggae. The best cool and modern sounds in town are spun at **Mint Bar** by world-class visiting DJs. **Green Mango** is for loud thumping party times and ladies of easy virtue while **Bar Solo** has a bucking bronco and is open late. **The Art Palace** is a cool club/hotel with a decadent feel. **Pod** and **ESP** are two of the best new bars on Soi Colibri and are situated right next to each other. The classic venue **Christies** has a free lady-boy cabaret show at 11pm every night. Hats off to **Coco Blues** for bringing

in some seriously good musicians from abroad and at home - a welcome change of tunes from the blip-blop android flatulence of most places.

LAMAI

Fushion Bar is a good place to drop yourself into first gear and then get yourself all revved up at **Supersub**, the only club to stay open past 2am. For good clean fun try **Bauhaus** for all your foam-party needs. But the real black heart of Lamai is its female mud-wrestling show and go-go beer bars.

BOPHUT/BIG BUDDAH/BAN RAK

Bands and BBQs go down a treat at **Secret Garden** by the beach, every Sunday evening. **The Looking Glass, Frog and Gecko** and **Billabong** provide the only late-night loudness in Bophut. Sadly, the **Gecko** (not Frog and Gecko) have stopped their Sunday sessions, "thanks to constant bollocks from our neighbours," they say. A moment's silence, please.

ACTION PANTS

Experience the jungle with **Canopy Adventure** (07-741 4150) where you slide along

ropes to various tree houses above the canopy, Bt1,400 per head. 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, from snorkelling and elephant trekking to 4x4 off-roading. There is also a world-class golf course on the island, the **Santiburi Golf and County Club** (07-741 8557), or try mini golf at **Yogi Bear Ha Ha** (01-787 9148), situated on a back road between Bophut and Chaweng. Samui also has **Football Golf** (09-771 7498) near Chong Mon, and **Frisbee Golf**, in Bophut past the **Monkey Theatre**. Heading back to the zone of sanity, **Red Bicycles** (07-726 7202) rents mountain bikes and arranges tours through the jungle and beyond. 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. For more action try **Samui Quads and Paintball** (01-371 0744). A newcomer to the sports scene in Samui is two freshwater fishing lakes stocked with huge fish in Taling Ngam (enquiries@fishingthailand.com). Meanwhile, at the **Samui Crocodile Farm**, 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 daring are also on the cards at the **Samui Snake Farm** (07-741-8680-1), where the Guinness-record-breaking Scorpion Queen and

Centipede King also hold court. For *CSI* fans fond of forensic mysteries, **Luang Pho Daeng** was a monk whose undecomposed body is in a glass case for viewing at the Khunaram Temple near the Namuang Waterfall. For boat charters and diving, talk to **Aquademia** (01-091 0107). Bring a copy of **Untamed Travel** to **Aquademia** and get a 10 percent discount.

ROADTRIPPING

The two main taxis are green and yellow aircon cars and *songthaews* (shared pickups). A ride in a car costs about Bt300 and they never put their meters on, just as well as they're rigged to hit Bt500 in five seconds. For short trips expect to pay Bt150/200, but make sure you haggle over the price first. *Songthaews* are Bt50-100 for the longer journeys and Bt30 for short trips, but it's every man for himself after dark. Renting a motorbike is Bt150per day, but remember that road accidents are the number-one cause of death in Thailand, with Samui being ground zero. There's no green cross code, or crosswalks on Samui and it's getting more dangerous by the minute. Renting a Jeep is a much safer option: **Budget** is insured so that's your best bet if you don't want to end your visit in tears or the Emergency Room.



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koh pangan

Whilst the rest of Thailand gets settled in for the rainy season, the islands in the Southern Gulf get one or two more months sunshine as the monsoon works its way down the country. Offshore thunderstorms light up the horizon at night and the occasional rain-shower clears the air, but the days are invariably dry with cool breezes making sun-worshipping bearable. Pangan will still be fairly full due to the mini high season created by the European summer holidays thus room prices are not as cheap as they could be, but the weather more than makes up for it! Full Moon Party is on the 7th September this month, also look out for the excellent half and black moon parties that go off over the month.

PLACES TO CRASH HAD RIN

Get there a week before the party or book first to ensure a room at Full Moon.

On Sunrise: **Paradise Bungalows** and the **Backpackers Lodge** have a good variety of rooms and **Sea Garden** (฿500 - ฿5,000) and **Jonathan** are classy joints. **Drop Inn** (฿2,350 - 19,900) 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** (฿1,000-2,500), **Phangan Buri** (฿2,100-4,100) and **Vimarn Samut** (฿1,250-5,600) are well run with great aircon rooms.

BAN TAI

Near the FMP - but out of hearing distance, Ban Kai and Ban Tai have some great resorts.

Harmony (฿450-2,100) has aircon bungalows, swimming pool and sauna and **Hunsa Resort** (฿650-2,500) in Ban Tai Village has aircon beachfront rooms with minibars, baths and TVs. **Milky Bay** (฿1,200-4,000), **Morning Star** and **Dewshore** (฿550-3,500) are also recommended. Do check out **Santhiya**, Koh Pangan's first luxury resort.

WEST SIDE

The west coast of Koh Pangan is a string of beautiful white sandy coves; it has the best coral reef and great sunset views. In Sri Thanu, **Chai Country** is a top place where Chai takes guests on unique day trips. Had Chao Phao is home to high-class **Phangan**



Full moon Frank realized he was on the Wrong boat... again

Cabana (฿800-1,800), **See Thanu** (฿250-2,500) and the bohemian **Sea Flower**. **The Village Green** (฿350-1,400) serves fantastic Euro-Asian cuisine. **Had Son resort** (฿400-12,000) 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** (฿400-2,700) and **Had Yao** are popular while the good-value **Over the Bay** has peaceful hillside vistas. Had Salad is a beautiful deserted beach with mid-range **Salad Huts** and luxurious **Salad Beach Resort** (฿1,700-4,000). Near Koh Ma, Mae Had has a variety of huts with the best diving and snorkelling. **Island**

View Cabana and **Wang Sai** are also good ones. **CHALOKLUM** Chaloklam has some well-established resorts and like many villages around KPN, there are houses to rent. **Fanta** has nice beach huts and **Chaloklum Bay** (฿200-2,500) has some great aircon rooms. Had Khom and **Coral Bay** (฿1,500) are

on their own secluded beach.

NORTHEAST

On the more remote side of the island there are three very popular beaches; Bottle Beach is old-skool Pangan, Than Sadet is home to the island's biggest waterfall and Thong Nai Pan has all the trappings of Bohemian beach life. Further round, it becomes more rugged; here Had Tien and Had Yao East provide real castaway dreams. Bottle Beach is only accessible by boat from Chaloklum and there's sometimes a waiting list for good rooms. On Thong Nai Pan Noi, **Panviman** (Bt2,300-19,000) and **Baan Panburi** (Bt380-4,500) are posh gaffs that take Visa cards and **Thong Ta Pan** and **Star Huts** are good value. On Thong Nai Pan Yai, **Dreamland** (Bt300-1,500) and Nice Beach are popular. **Than Sadet** has a variety of cheap rustic bungalows and some more luxurious resorts like **Mai Pan Rai** (Bt200-800). Had Yao East has just two resorts and Had Tien is home to the infamous **Sanctuary**, with a real traveller vibe, and many detox and yoga programmes

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 hug the north-west coast of the island, making it an excellent place to snorkel and one of the cheapest and least-crowded places to dive in Asia. There are fishing trips, 'round-the-island boat trips and loads of watersports on offer, including catamarans, kiteboarding, windsurfing and kayaks. There is also the **Jungle Gym** for fitness sessions and Thai boxing tuition. Pangan has acres of undisturbed tropical rainforest and a wild jungle interior. There are overnight mountain-treks and coastline walks, temples to visit, elephant treks, paintball, spa and meditation retreats to sort your head out and it's also a pretty good place to do bugger all!

NIGHTRIPPING

Pangan has a wildly varied nightlife with everything from its infamous beach parties

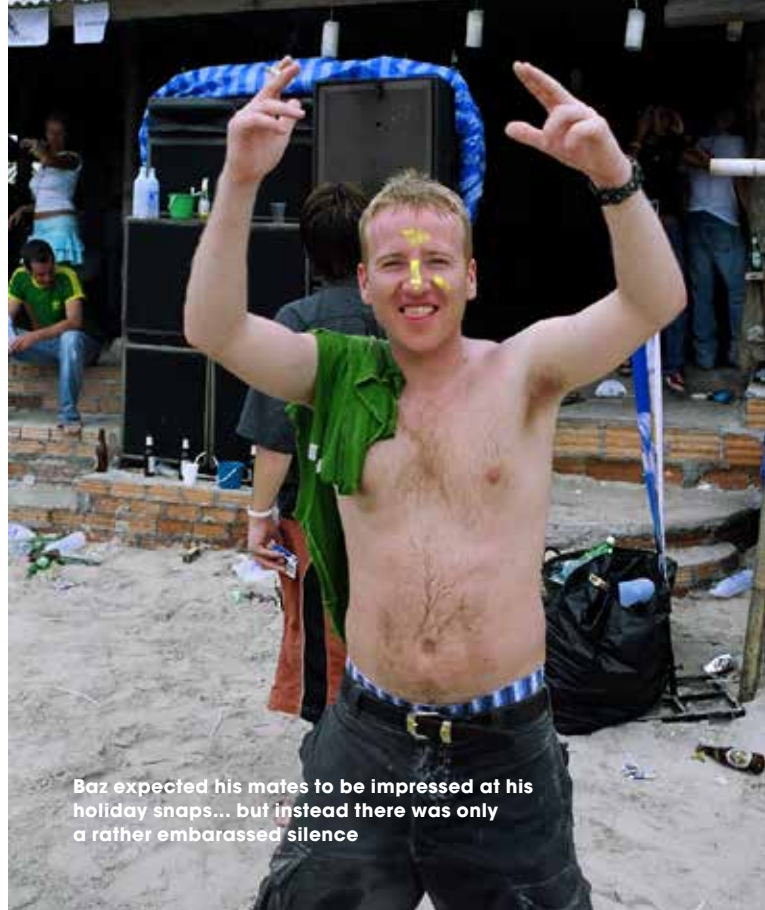
to high-class restaurants and beach bars. If you are not into parties, just head to any beach outside Had Rin, while Thong Sala is a great place to head for a gourmet feed and a few beers.

Pangan's party H.Q. is Had Rin, with the Full Moon Beach Party (FMP) every month and nightly parties at a great variety of venues with everything from drum and bass to trance to R'n'B - just take a wander up Sunrise beach to find something you like. On Sunset, the **Outback** has quality tunes and food and try not to miss the **Backyard** for its infamous recovery party that goes on all day the day after the moony.

Outside Had Rin, **Black Moon Culture** hosts one of the biggest outdoor parties in Ban Kai Jungle two weeks after the FMP, whilst the **Half Moon Festival** goes off a week before and a week after the FMP; both in brilliantly decked-out jungle with excellent facilities; expect hard, progressive and quality trance. Other venues include the **Moon-Set Party** at the **Pirates Bar**, Chao Phao Beach going off three to four days before each FMP in a secluded private cove and the **Ban Sabai** daytime after-parties that go off after any major event in a super-sandy beachfront venue.

ROADTRIPPING

To hire a songthaew it's about Bt350 to go half-way across the island and over Bt500 for hard to get to places. Normal prices from Thong Sala (the main town) are: Bt30 for Ban Tai and Woktum; Bt60 for Had Rin; Bt 80 for 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 cost Bt200 to Bt400. Only experienced riders should attempt the Had Rin/Thong Nai Pan hills - and do it sober! Much safer Suzuki Jeeps cost between Bt600 to Bt1,000/day. Boat taxis go from Thong Sala, Chaloklam, Ban Tai and Had Rin. Costs are similar to songthaew prices.



Baz expected his mates to be impressed at his holiday snaps... but instead there was only a rather embarrassed silence

WAY TO GO

PLANE

The easiest course of action is flying with Bangkok Airways to Koh Samui Airport. Then take a ferry to Pangan (about 45min); flights also go to Surat Thani airport on the mainland, a cheaper route but takes longer to get to the island (five hours). When flying, check your arrival times to ensure you can get a ferry that day; it's best to arrive at Samui before 2:30pm.

TRAIN

From Bangkok; the train is a great way to go, first-class sleeper Bt1,150 and second-class sleeper Bt650. Leaves from Hualampong station between 5pm and 7pm and gets to Surat Thani the next morning.

BUS

Cheapest at Bt600, including ferry. Tourist buses leave from around Khaosan Road around 7pm, arriving at Surat Thani the next morning. From there, it's a three-and-a-half hour bus and ferry transfer to Pangan.

FERRY

From Koh Samui North (Bophut/Airport) take the Lomphraya Catamaran or Seatran Express for the quickest and most comfortable crossings to Thong Sala or the Had Rin Queen for the most frequent crossings. From Koh Samui South take the Sonserm Express at 11am or the Seatran Car Ferry at 6:30pm (book first to ensure a place for cars).

<p>WWW PHANGAN.INFO</p> <p>www.phangan.info</p> <p>FULLY COMPREHENSIVE ISLAND GUIDE ON-LINE ACCOMMODATION BOOKING SERVICE ISLAND & FULL MOON PARTY INFORMATION PRINT AND WEB MARKETING SOLUTIONS tel: 077 238765 info@phangan.info</p>	<p>KP PROPERTY AND BUSINESS AGENCY "Finding The Way"</p> <p>www.kp-property.com</p> <p>Invest in one of the fastest growing property markets in Asia with Koh Pangan's leading property consultant. Offering real estate, project management, legal advice and business services. tel: 077 377018 info@kp-property.com</p>	<p>VGD VILLAGE GREEN DEVELOPMENTS CONSTRUCTION DESIGN PROPERTY</p> <p>Professional engineers working to European standards. Fully insured quality assured construction work on contract, built with the environment in mind. info@villagegreendevelopments.com tel: 077 238764 mobile: 06 2810006</p>
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UNTAMED TRAVEL

koh TAO

With an exploding infrastructure Koh Tao now offers more choice than ever. Cheap diving is still the main attraction however Tao now attracts more upmarket visitors, as evidenced by the numerous spa resorts and boutique hotels.

PLACES TO CRASH

Accommodation choices are varied and cater for all tastes and budgets; from beach-shack chic to the more luxurious pads with all the mod-cons and prices to match. Most resorts now have a choice of fan or aircon bungalows. Expect to pay around Bf400 for a fan room, double that for aircon. Check out www.untamed-travel.com for latest accommodation deals.

MAE HAAD

This main point of arrival and departure has everything you would expect from a main town: shops, restaurants, bars, travel agents, banks, a post office and the veterinary clinic. A small range of budget and luxury accommodation can also be found. **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 highest concentration of bungalows and the longest beach. Starting from King Rama V rock moving north, **Intouch Resort** is a traditional Thai-style beach resort with well-established huts and a chilled-out atmosphere. **AC Resort** has a

choice of fan and aircon rooms and a newly-built swimming pool. **SB Cabana, Lotus Resort**, and **Sairee Huts** have good value, centrally located aircon or fan bungalows. **Silver Sands** has old and new wooden bungalows set in a beautiful tropical garden. **Simple Life Villas**, an island institution with a regular party crowd offers a choice of large concrete bungalows or older Thai huts. **Sunset Buri Resort** offers Mediterranean-style bungalows with a swimming pool overlooking the beach. **Blue Wind**, a quiet haven with a relaxed atmosphere and daily yoga classes, has a wide choice of accommodation. If you want to be away from the beach and relax in the cooler mountain breeze try **OK View Bungalows** or **Moonlight** inland from Sairee beach. There is a fair amount of accommodation in North Sairee. **Sun Sea** and **View Cliff** have basic, cheap huts on the rocks with great views of the sea. More up-market is **Thipwimarn Resort** with outstanding views from its terrace restaurant. At the end of the road and island is **CFT Bungalows**, a quiet retreat which offers daily meditation and massage.

THE EAST

The northeast coast is much quieter and more secluded with a smaller selection of accommodation. Worth checking out are **Hing Wong Bungalows**, **Green Tree**, or **View Rock Resorts**. Moving south **Tanote Bay** has a small selection of bungalows 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 bays can be arranged from the pier by either taxi or longtail boat.

THE SOUTH

The main area here is Chalok Ban Kao, quieter than Sairee, set between San Jao beach and Taa Toh Lagoon. It is easily accessible and has all the conveniences you would expect to find at the third-largest beach. **Sunshine Resort**, **Koh Tao Tropicana**, **Taa Tao Lagoon** and **Ko Tao Resort** are all recommended.

DAYTRIPPING

As a major diving certification centre, blessed with an abundance of marine life and easily accessible dive sites, many would-be Cousteaus choose to start their dive careers here. A full range of courses can be completed with SSI and PADI being the major standards. Tech-diving courses are available for the less faint hearted. Alternatively, snorkelling is another way to see the fishes. With many secluded bays and beaches, try a day snorkelling and swimming at **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, water skiing and the rest.

For those who prefer terra firma there is plenty to keep you occupied. If you're the active type, trekking trails are plentiful and the most arduous routes reward the survivors with isolated 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. Try your hand at bowling and mini-golf at Koh Tao's new Leisure Park.

NIGHTTRIPPING

With hundreds of divers completing courses daily, there is always a vibrant party-scene on the rock. A regular mix of home-grown and visiting DJ's play a variety of musical styles, assuring the freshest sounds. Most venues are open nightly, although the party night changes, keeping the atmosphere alive and a scene of great people and good spirits. Check posters

WAY TO GO

TRAIN: Trains leave from 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.

BUS: Joint bus-and-boat packages leave from Bangkok early in the morning, transporting you to the island by mid-afternoon.

FERRY: Several ferries of various speeds leave from Koh Pangan, Koh Samui and Chumphon, mainly in the morning. Times and boats change depending on demand and the weather. Check travel agents for latest times and prices.

PLANE: Fly in style to Samui, with planes departing hourly, and catch a ferry to Koh Tao.

 <p>PARK II SUSHI BAR JAPANESE . KOREAN</p> <p>Sairee Plaza Tel : 077-457002, 09-9937500</p>	 <p>EL-GRINGO THE FUNKY MEXICAN RESTAURANT & CATERING</p> <p>LIVE SPORTS SHOWS... MAEHAAD & SAIREE -KOH TAO-</p>	 <p>Chopsticks FINE CHINESE CUISINE</p> <p>MAE HAAD ROAD TEL : 0 6943 6058</p>	 <p>Home of the legendary sunday roast GREEN Mango Koh Tao's best fish and chips</p>	 <p>NOORI INDIA KOH TAO'S FINEST AUTHENTIC INDIAN CUISINE TEL : 07 892 9970</p>
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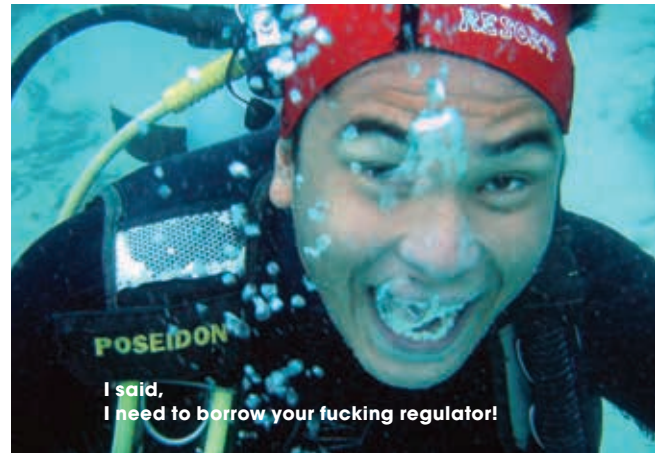
SAIREE VILLAGE FROM 9AM

DRAFT BEERS:





CHOPPERS BAR & GRILL



and fliers for more info. For bar butterflies there are plenty of places to choose from. In Sairee the forever popular **Dry Bar** is ideal for sunset and serves great drinks and music, in a continuously creative beach lounge setting. Just along the beach is **Manana** a new daytime chill-out bar. Next door is **Lotus Bar** with a regular crowd, varied music policy and vibrant party atmosphere. In Mae Haad, **Dragon Bar** serves up oriental mystique and seductive beats with an extensive cocktail list. Irish pub **Dirty Nelly's** is a welcome addition to the Mae Haad bar-scene serving traditional pub grub.

FEEDING TIME

The choice of eateries on Koh Tao is broad and impressive whether you're after tasty Thai tucker or your favourite farang fodder. **Puk's Kitchen** and **Yang's** - Mae Haad, offer a wide choice of cheap 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 cooking, using traditional recipes. **Farango Pizzeria** also offers a fine 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 soak up the sauce try **Greasy Spoon** breakfast bar and chip shop. For fiery curries, funky tunes, and expat prattle, **Tattoo Bar** is the place to be. A new addition to the international-cuisine scene is **Chopsticks** with a selection of tantalizing Chinese fare.

In Sairee, **Suthep**, on the beach offers of quality Thai and Western food. **Papas Tapas**, near the Sairee 7/11, has a hookah lounge and a selection of absinthes. **Choppers Bar and Grill**, a wicked two story Aussie-style sports bar with an impressive selection of Western and Thai-style home cooking, draught and imported beers, has two wide screen projectors to watch all the current sporting events. Live music twice a week with the Roaring Boys and monthly with the infamous Lee Shamrock. For fine authentic Indian cuisine sample the delights of **Noori India**. **New Heaven Restaurant, Chalok Baan Kao**, has beautiful views from its open-air restaurant, serving fresh seafood.

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UNTAMED TRAVEL

PHUKET

Phuket is jumping again. Patong is full of sightseers, shoppers and party hounds, and the beaches are filled with families enjoying the low-season rates. It's a good time in Phuket, but remember the treacherous monsoon-season swimming conditions. The choppy seas present numerous rip currents and undertows, and Untamed Travel wants you to enjoy your stay. This month's big news is Ao Po's new ultramodern 600 metre jetty and the brand new Sino-Portuguese-style TAT offices on Talang Road. Complaint of the month is the Bt400 National Parks fee - the parks never saw any benefit from Bt200! Where will all that cash go? Be careful on any trip to Phi-Phi. Speedboats are often overloaded, not a good thing in rough open seas. If the boat is over-capacity, better to get your money back than take any chances. Phang Nga Bay is always protected from the waves, with everything from sightseeing to sea canoeing, so stay in calm seas. Away from water, spend a day in Phuket town.

PATONG PLACES TO CRASH

The **Novotel** on Kalim Beach is the usual five-star fare but has a low season rate of about Bt3,000, not bad by Phuket prices. Forum comments give it top ratings. **Patong Lodge** (Moo 5 Patong Beach, 076-341 020) on Kalim beach has excellent rooms at around Bt1,500 and up. Basic, but good value. **Expat Hotel** (076-342 143) in Soi Expat is set back from the beach and has rooms for around Bt750 and up. **Club Bamboo** (076-345 345) offers quiet Thai-style ambience on Patong hill for around Bt1,100, while **Amari Coral Beach** in South Patong still comes in for under US\$100/day.

FEEDING TIME

Concaved Beach Restaurant offers a panoramic view right from the centre of Patong Beach, everything from red meat and poultry to the grilled white snapper that is the speciality of the house. Nice wines and desserts and excellent beachfront ambience. Patong street food is good fun, cheap and generally safe - remember Thais don't want to get sick any more than you do. At Patong's north end is the always famous **Baan Rim Pa**. You can't eat every meal

there, so also try **Lim's Baan Yin Dee la Casa** and **Pum's** Thai cooking school.

NIGHT TRIPPING

Patong is all about night life - Soi Bangla rivals Bangkok and Pattaya for debauchery. Something for everybody, but watch out for the ladyboys in the Silly Soi's and Soi Paradise gay district - most are expert pick-pockets (blowing in your ear as a distraction whilst lifting your wallet). The best place to see men dressed as women is **Simon Cabaret**. Bar flies find Soi Animal appealing, with **Tiger Disco** and **Crazy Horse Saloon**. **Dragon, Star Club, Crocodile Disco** and **Safari Club** round out Patong's disco scene.

KATA-KARON

PLACES TO CRASH

Pacific Club Resort on Patak Road in Karon comes in at US\$46. Sitting on a cliff overlooking Karon Beach, the **Central Karon** is stunning at any price. **Orchidacea** (formerly Pop Bungalow) in an excellent hillside location and with great value rooms overlooks Kata Beach, starting at Bt2,000. Alastair Why's **Aspasia** is great value in low season with a Jacuzzi in your room - on the point behind Peach Hill. Excellent location and value. Northern Lanna-style boutique hotel **Kata Minta** is five minute's walk from Kata Beach and is great value.

FEEDING TIME

Forget the old name-places, overpriced and serving the emperor's new clothes. Find good eats by walking toward the mountains from Kata Corner. There are plenty of reasonable Thai, Italian and seafood restaurants. On Kata Noi, head to the south end of the beach and pick your restaurant - great ambience and better food than the big-name hotels, at local prices. Walk from the traffic circle about 100 metres to find good eats. **Chanadda** in Kata Noi, **Cinnamon**, and **Perfection's Fashion Café** are thenames to look for

NIGHT TRIPPING

Ratri is a new jazz club high up Kata Mountain, with a roof that's higher still. The food is great, and the music better. Call owner/operator Jae on 09-874-5286 for directions.

SOUTH END

PLACES TO CRASH

South Phuket is far from the maddening crowds and hosts our favourite Phuket 5-star, the owner-operated **Mangosteen**. Transfers take you to any beach you can see from your mountaintop

abode. **Cape Panwa Hotel** is 15 minutes from Phuket town and excellent value at under Bt3,000. **House of the Rising Sun** private villas is in a class of their own, beyond backpacker's budgets, but excellent value for expat families. Studios start at US\$200. Old-time resorts like **Friendship Bungalows** are going upscale, but still in the Bt1,000-2,000 range. **Shanti Lodge** is a true eco-resort from Bt350-1,000. If that's too high, try the nearby **International Youth Hostel**. (Bt200-450). **Baan Maai** on Koh Lone in Chalong Bay includes free transfers to Chalong Pier, US\$150 and up. Starting at Bt2,000, **Nai Harn's Baan Krating Jungle Beach Resort** is refurbished, idyllic and funky. At Bt950, **Sonny's Nai Harn Beach Resort** remains a great deal.

FEEDING TIME

Belgium Bakery near Wat Chalong is so popular with local expats it's difficult to get seated for breakfast. **Don's**

Mall isn't at his old place anymore, but the food is still great (and so is the deli market) so Don's remains the afternoon-evening gathering place in Phuket's South. Homesick Brits find **The Green Man** pure heaven, a perfect rendition of a top-end old English pub and restaurant. Thursday is Quiz Night. **Family Restaurant**, across from the Chalong cop shop, has Thai, Western and Middle Eastern food at excellent prices. A kilometre towards Phuket Town, **Something Fishy** is the new fish 'n' chips sensation. In Rawai, it's the **Mangosteen** again - one of the few hotels anywhere where you go just for the food. Down at Rawai Beach (longtail heaven) just pick an open-air seafood restaurant and take your chances - we've never been disappointed in almost 20 years.

NIGHT TRIPPING

Rawai Beach's beer-bars aren't exactly Patong-style, but may be more fun. Start

WAY TO GO

AIR: One-way Bangkok to Phuket:
Bangkok Airways: Bt2,470 • Nok Air: Bt2,750 (varies)
Thai Airways: Bt3,230 • One-2-Go: Bt1,700

TRAIN: 2nd Class Aircon (Pullman berth): Bt788 + Bus Surat Thani-Phuket Bt238
3rd Class Air Con (Seat sleeping): Bt578 + Bus Surat Thani-Phuket Bt238

BUS: Bangkok-Phuket direct
VIP - Bt970
Aircon - Bt626

Acts of Faith



Phuket's Annual Vegetarian Festival is set for **October 22-30** during the ninth moon of the Chinese calendar. The generally accepted origins follow the fable of itinerant Chinese workers who contracted malaria near Phuket. For nine days they abstained from meat, sex and other primal privileges, and were cured.

Many tourists focus on the "blood and guts" activities, including body piercing, sword-ladder climbing and fire walking. In recent years participants have escalated their rituals to the truly bizarre, much to the chagrin of old-timers. What used to be sword piercing in one cheek and out another now involves entire bamboo plants going in one cheek and out the other, branches and all. Each year new creative ways of professing one's faith to the Taoist gods are invented, so it's difficult to predict what this year has in store.

Phuket goes "veggie" and thousands of food stalls offer vegetarian fare at ridiculously low prices. Many shops display offering tables covered with red clothes to repel evil spirits. Red paper separates the tables from the ground so the tables are suitable to present offerings to the gods.

Untamed Travel suggests checking out the TAT schedule and visiting the crowded temples an hour before a procession so you can view the aesthetics as they slip into trances before "demonstrating their faith".



at **Nikita's** (076-288 703) on the east end of the beach and work your way west. **Friendship Bungalow** (076-288 996) now has Jazz every Sunday from 4-8pm, but usually goes on later. The pub at **Don's Café** gets rolling after 9pm, about when the rest of Rawai goes to sleep.

NORTH END PLACES TO CRASH

Try **Phuket Country Home** for a little peace, built on a hillside 10 minutes from the airport and a short walk to the beach, but beware, this place is *quiet!* Bang Tao is now its own destination. On the way to **Amanpuri**, you pass **Twin Palms, Surin Beach Resort** and **The Chedi**, all luxurious. New kid on the block **Phuket Pavilion** can set you back US\$1,000 and up. Bang Tao Beach is back in business with accommodations from three-star to beachfront bungalows. **JW Marriott** at Mai Khao is very five-star with low season rates averaging US\$300. Their **Vacation Club** has great deals if you attend a low-key sales pitch. Back by the Airport, **Indigo Phuket** (formerly Pearl Beach) starts at US\$100. A short way, but worlds apart in style, is **Mai Khao Bungalows** (01-895 1233). Even more natural is beach-camping or bungalows at **Sirinath National Park**.

FEEDING TIME AND NIGHT TRIPPING

Albatross in the centre of Laguna Phuket is the best

dining value north of Patong. If you stay at a Laguna Phuket hotel, just jump in the Canal Village boat shuttle. Open-air over-water dining is so quiet the trees sing in the breeze, with unreal food that doesn't damage your wallet. Try anything scampi. Albatross even has an elegant private dining room for special occasions. For a bit more, try **Tatonka, JJ's Irish Club** and **Supper Club**.

PHUKET TOWN

PLACES TO CRASH **Metropole** and **Royal Phuket City** are downtown Phuket standards, along with world-famous **On-On Hotel**, refurbished for "The Beach" but still Bt250. Next to Marine Biology Institute, **The Bay** is excellent family value from US\$75. Old stand-bys include **Talang Guest House, Thavorn**, and **Merlin**, which also houses Phuket's most happening underground disco.

FEEDING TIME

China Inn, Dibuk restaurant and **Ka Jok See** set the trends in Phuket town restaurants, all superior to typical tourist fare and much better prices. **Tung-Ka Hilltop** restaurant hosts Phuket's all-time best panorama view - the food is so good reservations are a must. The architecture along Dibuk and Talang roads are also a highlight. The low prices and art-shops make Old Phuket top value. Across from the Merlin Hotel, **Baan Klung Jinda** offers spectacular Sino-Portuguese ambiance

with food matching the interior quality. **Natural Restaurant** behind the open market is Phuket's funkier dining - budget an extra hour to check out the creative junkyard art. Food as exciting as the ambiance, at local Thai prices.

NIGHT TRIPPING

You won't find many Phuketians in Patong - they frequent Phuket Town's great local clubs. Our recommendation is to get out of the tourist areas, take a local bus to Phuket in the morning, enjoy lunch on Dibuk or Talang Roads, do the afternoon walking tour, and enjoy dinner at **Ka Jok See** or **Baan Klung Jinda**. Finish off with **Jammin'** or **Timber Hut**, and take a meter taxi back to your beach hotel.

OFF PHUKET

Guests call **The Sarojin** in Khao Lak "the World's Greatest Hotel" but maybe they haven't been to **Mangosteen**. Even so, this place is so amazing it's worth the drive to Khao Lak. Over on Koh Yao Noi, try the **Koh Yao Resort**, an old stand-by that's blended in with the island for almost a decade without making waves, nothing like the tacky mainstream hotel on the north side of the island. Visit Koh Yao before mainstream tourism destroys this idyllic island.

At the other end of the spectrum (and the island) is **Capt. Bean's Bungalows and Restaurant**. The

bungalows may be basic, but the restaurant makes no apologies to any fancy night spot.

ROADTRIPPING

Best advice - don't drive, especially a motorbike. Phuket roads are 50 times more dangerous than most in Western cities - motorbike deaths about five times that. Remember Thailand's second most common cause of accidents is turning into traffic without looking. Accidents caused by Thai driving in the wrong side of the road are common. If you do drive, rent a car, drive defensively, slow and on the left. Phuket now has over 20 rental car agencies. Avoid Tuk-Tuks - rude and overpriced. Best to order a meter-taxi. At the airport, walk the parking lot towards the exit gate to find the local taxi stand. Avoid dangerous transfer concessions - low-paid drivers speed just to make ends meet. Best to take the local bus from anywhere to Phuket town for the day - cost is Bt20 or less.

DAYTRIPPING

There's plenty to do on and off Phuket - remember, it all started as a dive resort. Unfortunately, finding straight answers at the tour counters is difficult. For honest advice, try **Albatross** in **Canal Village**, and the **Tourism Authority of Thailand** at their new Sino-Portuguese digs on Talang Road.

KRABI

Krabi is a must-see province. A varied and veritable montage of scenery, rich in natural appeal – deserted beaches, thick jungles, spooky caves, towering waterfalls, twisting mangroves. Best to rent your own transport and make your way to these hidden wonders yourself – otherwise you're stuck in the middle of one of the most well-developed tourist traps in the region. This also means that you'll never find yourself far from a comfortable and affordable room, a hot shower, great pasta or good old steak and chips. The town centre is host to a rather fragrant market. Only a short drive from Krabi town is Ao Nang, a resort town offering all the pleasures and necessities for the modern tourist. Around the corner on a sea-locked peninsula is one of the world's natural marvels: Railay – two main beaches, (east and west) plus Phra-Nang beach on the southern tip. Tonsai Beach, hidden away in the northwest of the peninsula, is home to a diverse crew of backpackers and rock-scaling thrill-seekers.

KRABI TOWN

Fast changing into a large urban centre, Krabi town still retains its classic local charm. Numerous hotels of a two- to three-star standard offer aircon rooms with hot-water bathrooms and satellite TV (sometimes better to check which particular channels). Try the **Krabi Loma** or the **Krabi City Seaview** for comfy rooms in the vicinity of Bt600 and helpful, well-mannered staff. Old Chinese shophouses adorn the Khong Kha and Chao Fah Roads, where you can still find various levels of cheaper rooms between Bt150 and Bt400 at **Cha** and **Judy Guesthouses**.

FEEDING TIME

Krabi has a real buffet of choices. The Khong Kha Road Night Market sells all types of local delectables, from simple noodle soup through to crispy, fried oyster omelettes, which are way tastier than they sound. Want to loosen the bowels? Southern Thailand is renowned for its liberal use of chillies in the local curries. Head for the day market on Soi 10 and marvel at the aromas wafting around you at the restaurant stalls. If unsure, just point and ask, "Chicken? Beef? Pig guts?"

Ruen Mai is charming and cheap; it has all sorts of exciting and exotic flavours, plus some great seafood. But the best seafood in town is served up at Chow Seua. Tired of spice and rice? **Café Europa**, one of Krabi's first foreign-owned restaurants, serves a smorgasbord of

Scandinavian favourites. And the Italian-owned **Viva Pizzeria** has great antipastos, pasta and pizzas.

NIGHTRIPPING

Bangkok it is not but that doesn't mean you have to stay in your room playing dominoes. If in doubt about the town's varied nightlife, stop the nearest motorbike taxi and in your best Thai accent, ask "Techno? Band? Pub?" Of these three distinct types of different local styles **The Crazy Pub** can be recommended for having a fairly "pumping" atmosphere as live bands and DJs entertain you with a combination of Thai and European tracks. Fashionable, fun, smiley clientele surround you and the beer boys and girls refill your glass the minute you sup the last drop of liquid. For the Asian "dance music" lover, you can risk heading to **Mixer Pub** where the music is loud and sometimes makes your eyelids twitch.

DAYTRIPPING

Rent your own car or bike if you're feeling daring and take a spin to Wat Tham Seua (the Tiger Cave Temple), the Khao Phanom Bencha National Park with Hua Toh waterfall, Ao Leuk and Ao Thale with mangroves and caves, hot springs, the Emerald Pool, or just keep on driving along the coast and marvel at the countless kilometres of empty, unsullied beaches.

AO NANG

If you haven't been here for a few years, then you may not recognise this once sleepy and quiet beachfront road. There may be a McDonalds, fashion malls, five-star resorts and more concrete than greenery, but Ao Nang is still a cool base camp for a few days. Recently, all of the phone lines and electric cables on the beach road were relaid – underground! Get off the main strip and you will find a stunning, nature lover's location with some of the most scenic sites that Krabi has to offer within a short hike. The level of accommodation in Ao Nang has climbed over the years. **Wanna's Place** has rooms for around Bt900. The **Somkiet Buri** resort is in a

wonderful location with rooms that go for about Bt1,200. Nowadays, the average "budget" fan-room in Ao Nang comes with hot water, TV and costs in the region of Bt350. Numerous guesthouses behind the beachfront are a safe bet with friendly staff.

NIGHTRIPPING & FEEDING TIME

A regular haunt is the **Irish Rover Bar & Grill** for its lively atmosphere and some marvellously meaty dishes, good tunes and live sports on the TV. For the more serious sports freak, **JJ's Sports Bar and Café** is notable for its giant screen, decent pub food and a bouncy, enjoyable atmosphere. The juiciest steaks in town can be found at **Café 154**. Live music pumps out of the **Encore Café**: jazz, blues or good ol' rock 'n' roll will put a bounce in your step. **The Last Fisherman** and **The Last Café** offer a relaxed atmosphere on the beach, where you can soak up a cocktail and the last rays of the setting sun before tucking into a variety of local dishes. From the old days, **The Luna Bar** has survived thanks to their UV lighting, neon paint, trancey-music and party-hard atmosphere, which inspires unplanned 'parties' that stretch on late into the night.

DAYTRIPPING

Aqua Vision takes you on the best diving trips the area can offer while **Koh Kayak Expeditions** (www.kayakthailand.com) offers adventurous travellers the best self-catering trips available (for the less confident, a guide can accompany you on your quest) in real sea kayaks with waterproof compartments for storing a cooker, navy maps, mobile phone (just in case!), tents and hammocks. So you can head off into the ocean blue yonder, buy fresh food from a passing fisherman and cook it up on any secluded beach you've chanced upon. Or charter a longtail boat (Bt1,500) for the day and make waves for offshore islands. Real white sand, fringing reefs and natural shade from the palm trees all guarantee a magical day out. Further out there's **Koh Hong** (Bt2,000). For snorkelling, diving and water-sports equipment visit the **One Stop Dive Centre**.

WAY TO GO

BUS

Mini buses cost about Bt350. Government buses are about Bt700 from the Southern Bus Terminal.

AIR

Flights from Bangkok cost about Bt2,500 one way.

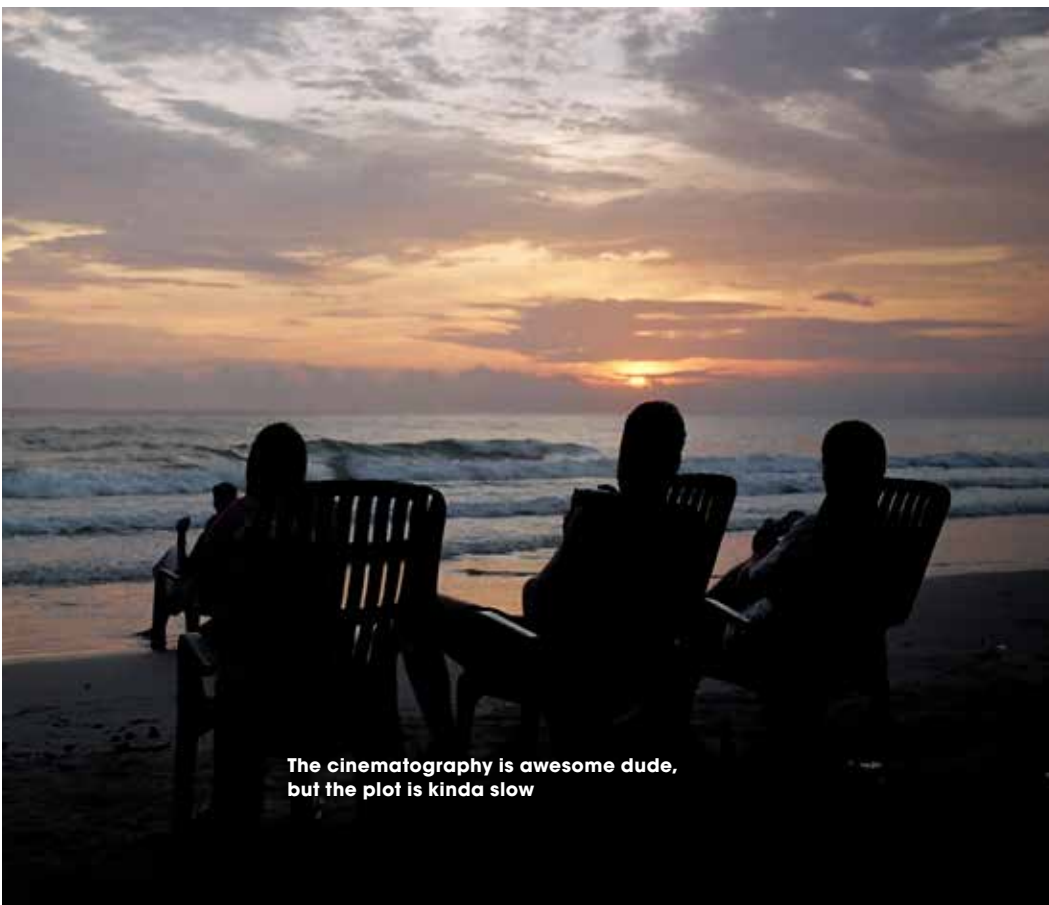


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The cinematography is awesome dude,
but the plot is kinda slow

RAILAY

A healthy and hedonistic hideaway for backpackers, couples or families, travel surveys repeatedly vote Railay as one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Split into four stretches of sand, the East Beach, West Beach, Phra Nang and Tonsai, the Railay peninsula offers the traveller a multitude of ways to spend their time. Relax while watching a magenta sunset, or sweat it out climbing the megalithic limestone cliffs, which, half a billion years ago, formed part of the world's largest coral reef. On the west (sunset) side, room prices are higher. **Railay Bay Resort and Spa** offers the cheapest in luxury with rooms ranging from Bt1,050 to Bt2,000. **Railay Sand & Sea Resort** has similar rates. The east side is home to the cheaper restaurants, bars and bungalows. **Viewpoint Resort** and **Diamond Cave Resort** both come complete with comfy and spacious two- to three-star standard rooms with swimming pools; and Bt400 should get you a comfortable bungalow with en-suite bathroom during the high season. Meanwhile, that old classic, **YaYa Resort** has upgraded their rooms but kept the prices down to around Bt350. **Cabanna Resort** provides basic bungalows with attached shower room.

NIGHTRIPPING

The east side also hosts most of the main bars with parties rotating between them nightly. The best of the bashes are at the **Gecko Bar** and the **Last Bar**, both boasting warm welcomes and that usual cocktail of Sangsom buckets, contemporary music, happy-smiley people and a headache in the morning. The Gecko Bar also has live music from time to time.

TONSAI

What Railay was like the in good (or bad) old days, this is where you do nothing but watch climbers, base-jumpers, slack-liners, and jugglers. A very laidback location blessed with some of the cheapest accommodation around. **Tonsai Bay Resort** will give you the closest in 'luxury' that Tonsai can offer for Bt1,200. **Banyan Tree Resort** has cheaper but comfortable rooms for an affordable Bt350 and **Jungle Huts** have basic bungalows with showers for Bt200 per night. If you're craving a full-on night of cheap drinks and heady tunes try out the **Sawasdee Bar**. For dancing, The **Freedom Bar** hosts regular beach "raves" with DJs playing the latest club anthems from Europe.

DAYTRIPPING

Diamond Cave, a diamond-studded cave (well, more likely to be Pyrite but, hey, the walls sparkle) is worth a visit. A well-built pathway takes you in, where giant stalactites and stalagmites await. There's a Bt200 entry fee, but if you are smart then head up after sunset when it's closed. Alternatively, you could take a treacherous journey up and over the mountain to the lagoon, a true landlocked treasure. Ask any climbing shop for info or a guide. The descent is not for the faint-hearted but children have made it, so why shouldn't you? **Hot Rock**, **Cliffsman**, **King Climbers** all offer similar deals for climbing courses/guides/route maps/equipment. **Railay Diving** offers a variety of choices for the beginner through to the experienced diver – definitely explore the King Cruiser wreck.



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PATTAYA

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 B1300 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



My name is Puk
I am eight and a half
I can add and subtract
I can read and fingerprint
And I can kick your fucking head in

construction sites, or hotels that offer hourly rates.

WIND IN YOUR FACE

You'll see songtaews all over town, offering short lifts for B10, depending on the distance and your gullibility. Motorcycle taxis are ubiquitous and about the same as Bangkok prices, around B120 for a couple of kilometres. 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 B1,000 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 bungy 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 Ekamai Bus Terminal on Sukhumvit Soi 63 regularly. Fares range from B170-90.

AIR

Not really worth flying from BKK, but Bangkok Air flies to and from Samui twice daily.

TAXI

Impress your mates by hailing a cab and taking it to Pattaya, a bargain at B1,500 with beers and sing songs along the way. You can often bargain for B1900 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.

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UNTAMED TRAVEL

hua HIN

A few years ago Zimmer frames and handkerchief headgear would have outnumbered Honda Dreams in Thailand's oldest and most prestigious beach resort city. Things are changing. H.M The King's decision to make Hua Hin his primary residence, the exploding property market and the recently completed Market Village complex, with over 40,000 square metres of shopping, international eateries and entertainment have kicked Hua Hin firmly onto the playing field as southern Thailand's most up and coming mainland destination.

PLACES TO CRASH

In terms of accommodation the city is rich with luxury hotels and resorts. The **Hilton**, the **Marriot**, the **Dusit** and the historic **Sofitel** (built in 1923 and still resplendent of that era) all compete for the upscale visitor's baht. For the slightly less well-heeled the **Peony guesthouse** offers aircon rooms opposite the Sofitel from 1,400 B. For those travellers still on the comfort verses beer quota kick, try the **London Guesthouse** or **Top Marks** (it deserves them) in Poolsuk road, Bt250-1,200. Both offer good sports coverage and Western food in their popular downstairs bars.

FEEDING TIME

Want the best tom yum in Thailand? Try the **Sirin** opposite Burger King. Gastronomes wanting a second opinion should visit **La Mer** or **Supatra** in Khao Takiap. Both of which will delight the tastebuds without giving your wallet a coronary. In town **La Brasserie de Paris** on the waterfront stands apart from the competition offering a French country twist to Thai seafood and steaks. Street-stall aficionados should check out the **Grand Night**

Market (4pm-12pm). For a little more northeastern spice try the strip between Soi 88 and the railway station. Breakfast is best served, at either end of the day, by **Crawford's Irish Bar** in Poonsuk road next to the temple.

NIGHTTRIPPING

If "Hello, welcome" is your kind of thing then head down to **Soi Bintabart**, otherwise known as 'Soi Disappointment'. **Crawford's** and **Butterfly Rock** offer imported draught beers in aircon surroundings before proceeding to the **Brewhouse** owned and operated by the **Hilton**, the closest Hua Hin currently has to a nightclub. The **Country Club** next to the **Grand hotel** hosts big-name Thai acts from time to time, usually well advertised via mobile loudspeakers and misspelt flyers, as are the city's two boxing rings. Not satisfied with a "Bintaburger" and an early night? Head to **Sam Sam** bar next to the **Brewhouse**, open as long as the owner's eyes are. The karaoke strip behind will take you through until dawn along with the friendly local constabulary finishing the nightshift.

DAYTRIPPING

The biggest tourist-pullers are the nine 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, bananaboating, 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 four kilometres 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

WAY TO GO

ROAD

Buses leave regularly from the Southern Bus Terminal in Bangkok, take around three hours, and cost about Bt150. Buses from Hua Hin to Bangkok go every 45min, 3am-9:30pm.

RAIL

Trains leave the Hualamphong station in Bangkok all day and cost around the same as the bus. 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.

dinosaurs. 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. Another good daylight option is the **Elephant Village**, located near the Palau Waterfall and the

Etiuskato Temple. Heading further out of town, the **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park** (30km 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 snorkelers.



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koh CHANG

As the annual construction season comes to an end, new resorts, shop units and bars rise, with varying degrees of architectural unsightliness, along the last of the previously undeveloped stretches of west coast road. Down on the beach the main changes are the annual price rises which ensure that Koh Chang continues to provide some of the most expensive mid-range rooms in Thailand.

Thankfully, the size of the island and lack of a ring road ensure the adventurous visitor can find deserted stretches of beach and explore fishing villages with barely a t-shirt vendor or souvenir shop in sight.

WHITESANDS

Tourist town. If you like everything you could possibly need within five minutes walk of your room, head here.

PLACES TO CRASH

At the very northern end of the beach you'll find **White Sand Beach Resort**, Bt1000 and up and located on a

pristine beach. The long-standing **KC Grande Resort** covers all the bases with Bt400 huts to Bt6,000 villas. Shoestring travellers have the choice of sleeping in a ditch or at **Island Lodge** – the cheapest deal in the area. South, handily located opposite Paddy's Palms Irish pub is **Top Resort**, good value & great sunset views for Bt1,600.

KLONG PRAO

The northern stretch of this curving beach is package-tourist heaven; the southern stretch is home to luxury resorts and budget bungalows.

PLACES TO CRASH

At the northern end, **Koh Chang Paradise** is the best bet for suitcase-lugging visitors, but not cheap at Bt3,500 or more. **Tiger Huts** and **Thale Bungalows** compete in the Bt300 baht segment of the market. Shelling out Bt900 buys you peace and quiet at the charming **Baan Rim Nam** guesthouse and around these parts luxury comes in the form of **Aana Resort**, **Tripicana Resort** and **Amari Emerald Cove**.

KAI BAE

Quickly catching up with Whitesands for the title of most overdeveloped stretch

of roadside, Kai Bae attracts mainly older backpackers and families travelling independently.

PLACES TO CRASH

You want stunning views? ... stay at **Seaview Resort & Spa**, from Bt2,500 to 12,000. The pick of the locally owned, well run bungalow resorts is **KB Bungalows**; with **Porn's** and **Siam Holiday** being the choice cheapies.

LONELY BEACH

Koh Chang's haven for unadventurous backpackers. If you use the word 'chill' as an adjective, noun or verb in every sentence you utter you'll love it.

PLACES TO CRASH

The often packed **Nature Beach's** Bt400 digs are smack on the beach. **Oasis** has new, Bt300 en suite huts with great views. Moving upmarket, **Siam Beach Resort** has surprisingly nice hotel accommodation for Bt2,500 high season and Bt900 aircon bungalows.

ELSEWHERE

The peninsula near Bangbao provides travellers with a choice of Bt5,000 luxury at **Nirvana** or basic huts at **Remark Puzi** (which isn't pronounced 'pussy') or **Homestay Beach**. On the far-flung east of Koh Chang, **The Spa Koh Chang**, caters to the health-conscious whilst in the even further flung southeast **Treehouse** is a Bt100 home away from home on a deserted beach.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Sweet Zone, **Lemon Bar** and **Backsound**, Lonely Beach, provide DJ-driven entertainments for the bucket brigade. **Sabay Bar**, Whitesands, is a more mature beach bar with an eclectic mix of rock, pop and 70s disco, courtesy of the house band. **Paddy's Palms**, Whitesands is worth a stop for a pint of Kilkenny or Guinness. In Kai Bae, pick from **Porn's Bar** for its regular beach BBQs or **Nannual Restaurant** for its ladyboy cabaret.

DAYTRIPPING

Be pampered at **Bodiwork**



The ensuing threesome ended in tragedy

Spa, Klong Prao and Kai Bae or try **Sima Massage**, Klong Prao if you're counting your cash. **Attipol Tours** run good value Bt500 snorkelling trips. Get PADI certified with **BB Divers** and **Scubadive Thailand**, both based in Bangbao. A visit to **Baan Kwan Chang** elephant camp is a must, or trek on foot with **Mogli Treks** or **Jungleway**, both Klong Son.

ISLAND HOPPING

Twice daily service from KC – Koh Wai –Koh Mak-Koh Kood on **Island Hopper**, departs from Bangbao at 8am and 12pm. Live frugally at **Paradise Bungalows**, Koh Wai for Bt300 or in affordable luxury at **Koh Mak Villa**, Koh Mak, for around Bt2,000. But for a real escape, live out your Robinson Crusoe fantasies at **Rayang Resort** on the private island of Koh Rayang for around Bt1,600.

WAY TO GO

AIR

Bt4,800 return to Trat Airport on Bangkok Airways. Three flights per day from November onwards.

BUS

Bt250 - 280. Catch the 7.45am or 9.45am express aircon bus from Ekkamai bus terminal to Koh Chang ferry or Centrepoint ferry pier.

MINIVAN

A cramped, hair-raising way to spend Bt400.

FERRY

Bt50 - 90 one way, by comfortable car ferry or overcrowded wooden passenger boat.

Songtaew: Shared pick-up truck taxi, from the ferry piers to the west coast beaches, Bt40 - 80

Motorbike rental: Honda dream, Bt200-250, customized 400cc chopper Bt600 - 800.

Choose to take a vacation. Choose Thailand. Choose an island. Choose a beach. Choose a generic three star resort, choose an air-conditioned bungalow, a mini-bar, 40 channel cable TV, a Continental breakfast, a seafood buffet dinner and a beach massage. Choose colour co-ordinated beachwear. Choose idly lying by the pool reading a mind-numbing novel. Choose Factor 40 tanning lotion. Choose an overpriced snorkelling trip and 'Made in China' souvenirs.

I chose not to follow the herd: I chose something else. And the reasons? There are no reasons. Who needs reasons when you've got www.lamKohChang.com?

koh SAMET

Care for a slice of tropical beach pie with a filling of party flavours? Samet is a great place for multi-basking in the sun and ocean spray by mega-watt daylight, or gorging and revelry under a chandelier of stars by night. The 3.5-hour bus trip from Bangkok is worth it for the island's bracing sea breezes and vast expanse

of blue sky. Koh Samet is popular with both Thais and Westerners, so it's the best of both worlds, if you subtract a few neo-Neanderthals who can't hold their booze, and some locals who can't tune their guitars. Jump the bus from the Eastern Bus Terminal in noxious Bangkok, or one of the minibuses from Victory Monument, and you're well on your way to the bliss of tropical amnesia.

HAT SAI KAEW

If you like herds of people then you'll find many of them here. In general, it's a crowded beach with lots

of places to stay and to eat, and a plethora of jet-skis and speedboats for all your watersporting indulgences. At night, most places set up tables on the beach for drinking and dining under the stars. **Haad Sai Kaew Villa** and **Ploy Talay** have clean and affordable rooms for Bt500-1,000. Also, Ploy Talay has opened up a hi-tech, indoor disco on the beach for people who like it trendy and aircon, rather than beachy and sweaty.

AO HIN KHON

Naga Bungalows have reasonably priced rooms without much of a view, but the **Naga Pub** has reopened under new management. There's also **Jep's Bungalows** with a good restaurant, but chill out and don't check your watch after you ordered - it can take a while. The lodgings here are away from the beach and have a nice view but be careful crossing the street at night.

AO PHAI

Home to **Silversand** disco, an alfresco affair on the beach that is staggeringly popular with the bucket brigade, who get the sand flying until late in the night. **Sea Breeze** resort has cool bungalows from around Bt600-1,500, however, the beach is quite small and can get overcrowded when the sun is beaming.

AO PUDSA & AO TUBTIM

Ao Tubtim has a small lovely beach with plenty of bungalows, but gets busy on weekends. Ao Pudsas has bungalows close to the beach for whitecap-watchers. Prices range from Bt600-1,500.

AO VONGDUAN

This lovely bay is blessed with a long stretch of white sand and a calm sea due to its shape and a wide range of bungalow operations. **Seahorse Bungalows** is the cheapest at Bt500-1,500. At night check out the many seafood restaurants and barbeques or kick back with an exotic fruit cocktail at one of the bars. The **Baywatch Bar** is located in the middle of the beach and has a chilled atmosphere, cool cocktails and good music. For those seeking a slower pace, on both sides of the bay you have Ao Chao and Ao Thian within walking distance. Great places to unwind or enjoy a book. **Vongduan Resort** and **Vongduan Villas** drip with luxury at a reasonable Bt1,000-3,500. Get there via regular ferries departing from Ban Phe. If you want your beach idyll to be as quiet as a monk, head further south, just a hop, skip and skedaddle from Ao Vongduan, where you'll find Ao Thian, and even further along, Ao Lung Dam.

WAY TO GO

BUS

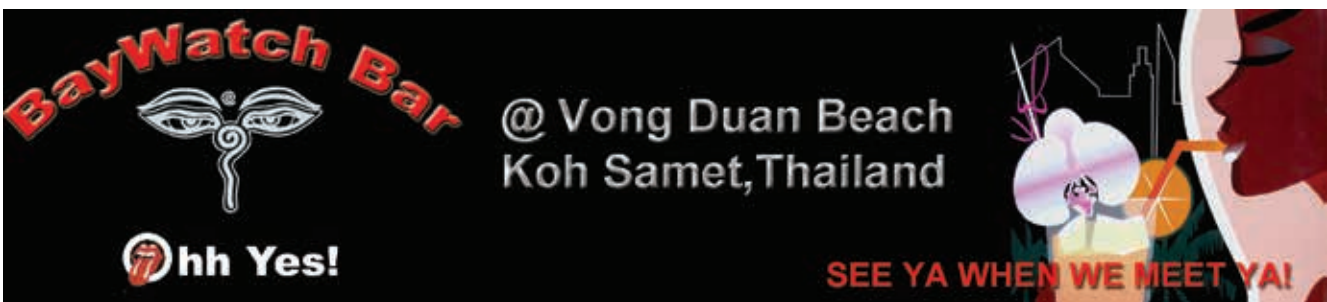
Departures from the Eastern Bus Station on Sukhumvit Soi 63 hit the tarmac every hour until 8.00pm and take around 3.5 hours to get to Ban Phe, setting you back the pauper's ransom of Bt150. You can also take minibuses from Victory Monument, which cost about Bt30 more, but machete an hour off the journey.

FERRIES

Keep in mind that the last ferry from Ban Phe to Koh Samet departs around 6pm. Ticket start at Bt50, depending on your destination. You can also spear through the waves on a speedboat at any time for around Bt1,000.

COVER CHARGE

Being a national park, you have to pay Bt200 to land on the island. If this seems a little stiff, take a boat after 5pm to avoid the charge. Works best if you're in a group.



UNTHANKED TRAVEL

Small Wheels Keep on Turning

Cambodia corespondent *Gordon (talesofasia.com) Sharpless* narrows his gaze and takes a good hard look at what's what at Angkor Wat. Decisions are being made and change is on the march in the ongoing debate about who will ferry people arorund the temples, and how.

For years and years the Apsara Authority has been trying to push through an Angkor transport scheme whereby all tourists are shuttled between temples in these electric (okay, battery powered) cars; something sort of like a long golf cart – you've probably seen them, I don't know, in amusement parks or somewhere. Long ago the contract was awarded to a Korean firm.

Why this is good: For years there has been concern that the pollution, noise, and vibration, all of which buses, automobiles, tuk-tuks (oh, sorry *remorques*), motos, etc, contribute to, are bad for the temples.

Why this is bad: A Korean firm gets the contract and puts a few thousand Cambodian taxi and tuk-tuk (oops, I did it again, *remorque*) drivers out of work.

Mix it all together and it's a lot more bad than it is good, especially when you hear the rest of the plan, which goes something like this:

Drivers bring the tourists out to the ticket gate and drop them off. For a tuk-tuk this ride might be worth \$2. From here the tourists are taken around the Angkor Archaeological Park in one of those battery/ electric/Korean thingies, a privilege for which they pay \$2 extra as it would be too easy to include the cost in the price of admission. Exit a temple, take a seat, wait for it to fill up, and off to the next temple whether it's the one you want to visit now or not. Finish the day and eventually one of these electric cars will get you back to the ticket gate. Now you need a taxi or moto back to town. But will there be one? Seeing as the plan said that taxis would pay \$1 an hour to park and tuk-tuks 500 riel an hour, who is going to wait? And if that's not enough, the authorities are actually trying to convince the public that this plan will reduce poverty by bringing more tourists to Angkor. How's that again?

Nice plan, huh? Turn your transport infrastructure over to Korea and send a few thousand drivers out looking for new work. What's that about Siem Reap having a low crime rate?

The drivers staged a couple of protests and essentially made the following demands:

1. We do not want foreign tour guides.
2. We welcome any foreign investment to help the development of Cambodia but not if it is off the back of the Cambodian people.
3. We do not want to pay any money for vehicle parking in the temple area.
4. We do not want any battery cars to cut down poverty. Every person living in Siem Reap is depending on the tourism industry so Khmer people must love and protect each other.

Fair enough. Top to bottom.

Fortunately, smarter heads prevailed and the drivers may continue to ferry visitors around Angkor as before. But the bigger problem is not gone.

More and more tourists are coming to Angkor. They need to be transported. There is not enough room for them all, nor for the tuk-tuks and taxis that transport them. The temples need to be protected. But so, too, do the Cambodians who rely on Angkor for their livelihoods.

As a footnote, this latest brouhaha has once again started the rumour-mongering and general dissemination of false information in respect to who controls or "owns" the Angkor temples, so here are the facts:

- 1) The Angkor temples are, by law, the property of all Cambodian citizens and ethnic Khmers. No one individual or corporation owns so much as a single blade of grass, nor piece of stone.
- 2) The administration of the Angkor Archaeological Park is handled by a government agency, the Apsara Authority.
- 3) The selling and inspection of tickets is handled by a private Cambodian company called Sokimex, operating as Sokha Hotel Co. Ltd. They own NOTHING except maybe the staff uniforms. They sell and inspect tickets – that's all. They don't make policy.

CAMBODIA MORALITY

First they banned 3G phones (people could send porno to each other), then they did away with the "Miss Cambodia" contest (people could think porno to each other), now they've made adultery illegal (people could do porno to each other). Why they don't just ban sex is beyond me. It would make things so much easier.



PHNOM PENH capital GAINS

PLACES TO CRASH

<\$20: The young traveller ghettos are around Boeung Kak Lake (Street 93) and the centre of town (**Narin's**, **Capitol**, **TAT**). One's polluted, the other is noisy. Skip both and try **Dara Reang Sey Hotel**, corner of streets 13 & 118, or the **Bodhi Tree**, street 113 opposite Tuol Sleng Museum.

\$20-\$50: Along the river the **California 2** and the **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 and in the heart of it all.

\$50+: **Raffles Le Royal** or the **Intercontinental** are the places to go but the **Sunway**, at Wat Phnom, and the **Bougainvillier** or **Amanjaya** along the river are cheaper (the latter is not affiliated with the famous Aman Resorts).

NIGHTTRIPPING

Though not Bangkok or Singapore, Phnom Penh has come a long way in the past few years. And yes, it's safe to go out at night. For the most comprehensive listings of food and drink, grab a copy of the free *Cambodia Pocket Guide - Drinking & Dining Phnom Penh*. But in a nutshell, along the river there are notable holes-in-the wall such as the **Cantina** and the **Jungle Bar**, as well as larger street-corner establishments like the **Foreign Correspondent's Club** (FCC) and the **Riverside**, and single guys might wander into **DV8**. A huge selection 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 place as is much of this neighbourhood). Forget about the **Heart of Darkness**, not worth the effort unless dodging bullets is your thing. Elsewhere is **Sharky Bar** (Street 130), 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 on Street 104 is the **Pickled Parrot**, one of several worthwhile places on this

All the cotton candy and comic books I want?



street. Along Street 178 sports fans will want to seek out the **Gym Bar**, for a touch of Irish, visit **Rory's**, and the **Ginger Monkey** was voted bar of the year by readers of the aforementioned *Cambodia Pocket Guide*. **Talkin to a Stranger** down on Street 294 is another highly rated establishment with good eats, too.

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 Sorya Shopping Mall. There is a **Dairy Queen** in the airport. Street 240 offers a number of eating options, though many of these cater more to the NGO crowd.

DAYTRIPPING

Khmer Rouge horrors are documented at the **Tuol Sleng Museum** in town and the **KillingFields Memorial** at Choeung Ek. Cultural attractions include **Wat Phnom**, which according to legend is 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. **River cruises** are available, cheap and

expensive varieties, the former from boats docked along the riverfront waiting just for you, expensive ones complete with lunch and drinks - check with your hotel. Shopping - **Central Market** for browsing, **Russian Market** for spending. Small art galleries on Street 178 and Street 240.

WAY TO GO

FROM THAILAND

AIR

Bangkok Airways, around Bt5,000/10,000 one-way/return from Bangkok, Air Asia one flight a day as low as \$25, taxes included (excluding departure tax). 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, dodgy.

FROM SIEM REAP

AIR

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

ROAD

Road is excellent. Bus \$4-9, five-six hours. Taxi \$40-50, four hours.

BOAT

\$20-25, five - seven hours, daily morning departure. Now that the road is good, this option is an overpriced tourist rip-off best avoided. Take the bus.

SIEM REAP

majestic PILE

PLACES TO SLEEP

<\$10: we recommend either the **Ivy 2 Guesthouse** not far from the Old Market or **Jasmine Lodge** on Highway 6 near the Caltex.

\$10-\$20: **Two Dragons** in the quiet Wat Bo Village area, **Ivy Guesthouse** in the Old Market area, and the **Villa Siem Reap** to the west of town.

Want more of a hotel? Try **Sydney Angkor**.

\$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**.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Most folks head to "Bar Street" which includes the **Angkor What?** bar, the **Temple Club**, **Red Piano**, and a host of other establishments. In the same neighbourhood is the **Ivy** (good food and music), **Warehouse** (get drunk and silly), the **Laundry Music Bar** (late nights), **Molly Malone's** (Irish), the **Funky Monkey**

(well, a bar), and the **Linga Bar** (gay). A few blocks away on Sivatha, across from the E-cafe is **Dead Fish Tower**, a large rather bizarre place.

FEEDING TIME

The bulk of restaurants are clustered in the Psah Chas (Old Market) area. Options include the **Ivy** (Western), **Soup Dragon** (Vietnamese-Asian), **Kama Sutra** (Indian), **Pizza Italiano** (err, Italian) and **Blue Pumpkin** (breakfast/lunch/bakery). **Khmer Kitchen** is probably the most well-known joint serving local fare, all conveniently stacked next to each other. Along Sivatha Street are scores of restaurants including the **Dead Fish Tower** (Thai), **Tell Restaurant** (Western, Asian), **Curry Walla** (Indian) and quite a few local joints. In Wat Bo Village try the **Two Dragons** (Thai and Khmer), **Home Cocktail** (Khmer), or **Hawaii Pizza**. Street food is along Sivatha Street, but the Khmer restaurants in the alley behind "Bar Street" are a safer bet.

DAYTRIPPING

Err, **Angkor Wat**, maybe? At \$20 a day, \$40 for three and \$60 for the week, the temples don't come cheap, but they are well worth it. You can hire a motorcycle-drawn rickshaw (locally but erroneously referred to as a tuk-tuk, or by the French word *remorque*) for about \$10-12/day. An aircon car and driver will set you back \$20-25. Guides (drivers don't guide, guides don't drive) can set you back another \$20-25 a day. Arrange both at your hotel.

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 life is the **Landmine Museum**. All the moto drivers know it. Other than the temples and the lake, there's not much else to see or do.

WAY TO GO

AIR

Bangkok Airways fares range from Bt4,300/8,600 one-way/return on the internet to much much more from travel agents. Fly Air Asia to Phnom Penh and then spend a few hours waiting for a 12:30pm bus (\$9/person), or take a cab straight away (\$40-50).

ROAD

Take the government bus to Aranyaprathet, cross the border, take taxi to Siem Reap. Expect to pay \$40-45 for a whole car, \$10 for a seat if sharing. The road is wretched, plan on four hours of dancing in your seat. Don't take any kind of bus between Poipet and Siem Reap, they are all scams. No exceptions. None. Zero.

FOR AN ENJOYABLE TRIP, DO NOT PURCHASE A BUS TICKET TO SIEM REAP FROM THAILAND FROM ANY TRAVEL AGENT ANYWHERE.

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 \$20 and there is no reason to pay more no matter what they tell you.

TO/FROM VIETNAM

Bavet/Moc Bai if heading to Saigon, Chau Doc if heading to the Mekong Delta.

TO/FROM LAOS

The border above Stung Treng is open. Cambodia visas are available here (use the land crossing, not the river), Laos visas are not. Cambodia now offers an e-visa, it's \$25 and only valid at the airports. Not really worth it.

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 and lower-middle 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 brainchild 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 from cyberspace. Prices start at \$8 and end at \$25 for the aircon presidential suite, but Gordon says he'll give a 10% discount to folks toting this copy of Untamed Travel.

SINGAPORE

Singapore has changed remarkably over the past five years – “out” are the bans on chewing gum, the pedestrian barriers on Orchard Road, and the Tam bar closing, and “in” is the revitalised river area – a bit of culture at the new Esplanade, local foods ‘til dawn at Glutton’s Bay hawker’s market, and a spruced up Clarke Quay for late-night partying. Even the old party favourite Zouk has had a facelift!

DAYTRIPPING SHOPPING

Shopping all centres on the famous **Orchard Road**, a shopper’s paradise lined with mega-malls and five-star hotels. If you fancy some high-end window-shopping, the “top end”, up the road from Orchard MRT station, has all the Gucci, Prada, LV etc you’ve ever dreamed of. Girls, drop off your guy at **Wheelock’s Apple** store and **Borders** bookstore, and check out the **Tang’s** dept store’s HUGE collection of handbag stalls on the ground floor across the road. The shopping fun extends all the way down with **Wisma Atria** (newly renovated), **Takashimaya** and **Paragon** (the twin hearts of Orchard’s high-end). For younger style check out the cheaper **Far East Plaza**, and the hip local designers on the 4th & 5th floors of the **Heeren**, above HMV. Further down Plaza Singapore and the brand-spanking new **Cathay** allow another half-day of shopping centred on Dhoby Ghaut MRT station, both boasting 10-screen movie cineplexes.

CHINATOWN & ARAB STREET

Chinatown is excellent for shopping, food and culture. Must-sees include the **Thian Hock** Buddhist temple, the **Sri Mariamman** Hindu temple, as well as “Food Street” (Smith Street) and the **Maxwell hawker’s centre**. Chinatown is now easily reached by a new MRT line, as is Little India with its great food and market-life atmosphere. **Arab Street** is getting more attention. Check out the lovely tree-lined Bussorah Street parallel to Arab Street, with its eclectic shops and local cafes.

OLD FAVOURITES

There’s also a laundry-list of Singapore icons: The US\$500/night **Raffles Hotel** (City Hall MRT) oozes heritage; it opened in 1887; Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham and Rudyard Kipling stayed and wrote here. By the 70’s it was showing its age,

becoming a favourite of the backpacker and hippie set, but a full renovation in the 80’s restored its lustre. The Singapore Sling was invented here in 1915, and even at \$14 a pop, stopping by the original Long Bar or newer Courtyard Bar to sample this gin/cherry-brandy/fruit-juice cocktail is a must for many visitors.

The most common tourist question is probably, “Where’s the Merlion?” Singapore’s symbol of tourism, a half-lion, half-fish, water-spouting statue. There are actually two, the most-photographed one being located at One Fullerton, with the **Esplanade** theatre (nicknamed “The Durian”) offering a spectacular backdrop. Get there from either the City Hall MRT, walking via the Esplanade, or the Raffles Place MRT, walking via the grand Fullerton Hotel. The other statue is eight-storeys high and located on **Sentosa** Island, which now has its own MRT connection at the Harbourfront station. Sentosa is shedding its “theme park” reputation with the closing of some of the lesser attractions, and a lot of landscaping and F&B options emerging. A day on the beach might even seem like home to some — the sand was imported from Thailand! The **Musical Fountain** is a bit tacky but surprisingly fun — an 8pm show projects stories and love messages onto a water-spray screen. It’s worthwhile to take the **Cable Car** from Harbourfront MRT (daily, 8:30am-9pm, \$10) to Sentosa, but be sure to also visit the cable car’s other stop, **Mt. Faber**, with glimpses of old colonial houses and WWII fortifications.

NATURAL DISTRACTIONS

The **Zoo**, **Night Safari** and **Bird Park** are old favourites, and still by far the top tourist attractions. The best is the Night Safari, but there’s an excellent value ticket covering all three (\$20 for one, or \$31 for all three). The Zoo closes at 6pm and the Night Safari runs from 7:30pm-midnight, but there’s food and entertainment in the interim. Take the MRT to Ang Mo Kio, then bus 138. The Bird Park is near Boon Lay MRT. Taxis are cheap in Singapore, so unless you’re by yourself, just grab a cab. The **Bukit Timah Nature Reserve** (Bus No. 171 or 182 from Orchard Rd) comprises 81 hectares of forests, and more plant species than in all of North America! A cab ride away is the new Tree-Top walk where you look down from above the rainforest canopy, and the MacRitchie Reservoir

which offers 5km of very pleasant boardwalk perched over the edge of the water. Last but not least is the untouched and undeveloped **Pulau Ubin**, where you can rent a bike for half a day (\$8) and experience pre-development Singapore! Info on all of these at www.nparks.gov.sg

WELL CULTURED

Singapore’s surprise is the growing sports, arts and culture scene. The **Singapore Art Museum** (City Hall/Dhoby Ghaut MRT), housed in a classical baroque building, focuses on Singaporean and regional artists, with a strong emphasis on electronic arts, while the **Asian Civilisations Museum** (City Hall or Raffles Place MRT) has a mix of permanent and visiting displays focusing on South East Asia culture. It also has a small but excellent (and free!) display on the history of the Singapore River. The visually striking **Esplanade theatre** (nicknamed “The Durian”) is an excellent venue for large-scale performances, and attracts many international shows, including notable Western and Asian theatre. On the sporting front the Singapore Slingers begin their first season in Australia’s National Basketball League, with a number of home games against Australian teams at the **Singapore Indoor Stadium** during September/October. Never mind that there aren’t actually any Singaporeans on the team – expect to see top-quality professional basketball, as the Australian league is pretty competitive, with plenty of rough and tumble.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Drinking is not cheap in Singapore, but there are some great outdoor bar locations, and nightclubs. To keep it cheap, have your beers at the open-air food centres and stalls you find everywhere (\$7 for a big one). Most young Singaporeans do not drink much, so many places cater to the large community of highly-paid expats working in the financial sector, like Boat Quay’s famous **Harry’s bar** (\$14 a pint). The **Singapore River** has cemented its place as the stomach and liver of the nightlife scene. The 30 to 40 bars and restaurants at **Boat Quay** (spectacular location, but a bit touristy and not always great value), is complemented by the newly renovated and buzzing **Clarke Quay** with a like number of bars and restaurants, plus a **Reverse**

Bungy Jump (do this BEFORE your meal!). The **Esplanade** also has a thriving youth scene on the waterfront promenade, including free concerts every Fri/Sat/Sun night by local bands. Making a big splash is the brand new “Q Bar”, modeled on the Bangkok icon of the same name. Lavishly decorated in a gorgeous colonial building (Old Parliament House) directly across the river from Boat Quay, Q Bar offers a wider selection of cocktails and a great atmosphere. For the best-tasting beer hit the **Brewerkz** micro-brewery located on the other side of the river from Clarke Quay, where Brits catch football, Aussies catch AFL and Super 14, and Americans can glimpse NFL and baseball. Next door is **Iguana**, with great margaritas and Mexican food, and even a range of quality, aged tequilas.

Best hotel bar (and a must-see) is **New Asia Bar**, with a spectacular view from the 72nd floor of the Swissotel. It’s expensive, but drinks are half price 3-9pm (City Hall MRT, next to Raffles Hotel). **Bar None** at the Marriott Hotel (Orchard MRT) is pricey but popular, with it’s top-quality local cover bands. **Jazz@South Bridge** has cosy mainstream jazz and comfy sofas; it’s at the far end of Boat Quay, away from the city end.

For debauchery of the carnal kind, **Orchard Towers** (400 Orchard Rd, Orchard MRT) is open 24 hours. Nicknamed “Four Floors of Whores,” this is a four-storey complex that conjures the image of a tamer version of Bangkok’s Nana Plaza. Neon-lit bars, thumping music, transsexuals and Western men prowling for Asian women. Singapore’s hottest dance clubs are **Zouk** (the oldest and still the best), and the Clarke Quay newcomers **Attica** and **Ministry of Sound**. All three are open Thurs-Sat til 5am and the cover is about \$25, with two drinks included. The music is state-of-the-art. All have dress codes – don’t show up in shorts or flip-flops.

FEEDING TIME

The variety of places to chow down is one of the best things about Singapore, from yummy, inexpensive street food available 24/7 to fine international cuisine. For budget travellers, hawker stalls (outdoors) and food courts (indoors) offer great grub, a relaxed atmosphere and clean surroundings for a few dollars a plate. Of course there’s **Chinatown** and **Little India** for authentic treats.



Singaporean boat people

Boat Quay is rather touristy and expensive, but the riverside atmosphere should be experienced. **Clarke Quay** has newer and more refined restaurants. Meanwhile, **Chijmes**, near Raffles Hotel, is a collection of Western restaurants and bars in what was a formerly a Catholic convent girls school. The new **Glutton's Bay** (next to the Esplanade Theatre at the mouth of the river) is a glutton's heaven, with new branches of old stalls carefully selected by the writer of Singapore's excellent hawkers' centre guidebook, the *Makan Sutra*.

PLACES TO CRASH

There is accommodation for all budgets in Singapore – even top-end hotels are affordable, relative to other cities. Expect to pay S\$200-250 for excellent five-star central hotels like **Swisshotel**, **Raffles the Plaza**, **Marina Mandarin**, **Pan Pacific**, or \$300 for high-end **Ritz-Carlton**, **Fullerton**, **Conrad** or **Marriott**.

"Budget hotels" in Singapore mainly mean those that also rent by the hour, and there's literally dozens of them. The main chains are **Hotel**

81 (www.hotel81.com.sg) and **Fragrance** (www.fragrancehotel.com). 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. In Little India, decent, boutique-style hotels for under \$100 include: **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.

There are also a few new backpacker hostels which (unlike the older backpacker hostels) are pretty pleasant. You share a dorm with others, but the upside is free breakfast, free Internet and tips from other travellers. All are modern, clean and nicely decorated, the best being **Sleepy Sam's** (www.sleepysams.com), **Hangout**, and the **Inn Crowd** (all about \$25/night).

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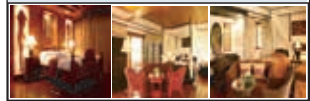
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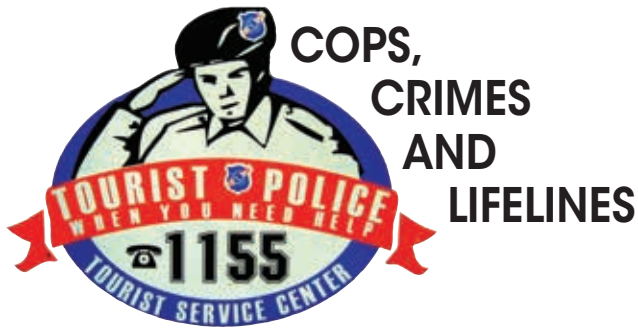
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THAILAND

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 is 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 airconditioned 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.

LOST CREDIT CARDS

If your credit cards get stolen, it's best to call their head offices in America. Remember to add 001 for an international call and then the country code 1 for the US. Phone Net is the most inexpensive card at Bt4 per minute, while some travel agencies in Thailand charge Bt15 per minute. The following numbers are not toll-free outside of the US.

VISA's U.S. emergency number 800/847-2911 or 410/581-9994. **AMERICAN EXPRESS** cardholders and those with traveler's check call 800/221-7282. **MASTERCARD** holders can ring 800/307-7309 or 636/722-7111. For other credit cards, call the toll-free number directory at 800/555-1212.

CREDIT CARD HOTLINES IN THAILAND

VISA 02-263-2091-2

MASTERCARD 02-670-4088-99

AMEX 02-273-0022

DINERS 02-232-4100



EMERGENCY CASH

When in dire financial straits, get money wired to you via **Western Union** (tel. 800/325-6000; westernunion.com), which has 225,000 agents in 190 countries and territories.

hospitals

THAILAND

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

BANGKOK

Bangkok Adventist Mission Hospital (private)
430 Pitsanulok Rd., Dusit,
Bangkok 10300
Tel: 02-2811422

Bangkok Genral Hospital (Private)
2 Soi Soonvijai 7 New Petchburi Rd,
Tel:02-3103000 Hotline: 1719

Bumrungrad Hospital (Private)
33 Sukhumvit 3 (Soi Nana Nua)
Wattana, Bangkok 10110 Thailand
Tel: 02-6671000

Samitivej Hospital (Private)
133 Sukhumvit 49, Klongton Nua
Wattana, Bangkok 10110
Tel: 02-7118000

CHIANG MAI

Chiangmai ram Hospital (private)
8 Boonruangrit Rd,
Chiang Mai 50200.
Tel: (053) 224851, 224861, 224871

KOH SAMUI

Samui International Hospital
Northern Chaweng Beach Rd,
90/2 Moo 2, Bophut, Koh Samui,
Surat Thani, Thailand, 84320.

CAMBODIA

AEA International (Cambodia Pte Ltd.)
House 1611, Street 51, Sang-Kat
Boeung Peng, Khon Daun Penn
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Tel: 855 23 216 911

LAOS

Heaven help you if you have any serious ailments while in Laos. There are few qualified doctors and they just don't have the facilities. Get to Thailand. From Vientiane, there are one or two okay hospitals just over the bridge in Nong Khai. Otherwise, it's back to Bangkok.

Clinique Internationale
Luang Prabang (856) 214-022.

Centre de Traumatologie et d'Orthopedie de Vientiane (Private)
On the Road to Tha Ngon, north of Vientiane.
Tel: (856) 413-663, 413-306
(Call for ambulance service)

Nong Khai Wattana Hospital (Private)
1159/4 Prachak Rod,
Nong Khai, Thailand - near
Vientiane. Tel: 042-465-201

bangkok embassies

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

Australia
Tel: 2-3446300
02-344-6400
Austria
Tel: 02-303-6057-9
Cambodia
Tel: 02-254-6630
02-256-0196
Canada
Tel: 02-636-0540-9
China
Tel: 02-245-7032-3

France
Tel: 02-627-2105

Germany
Tel: 02-287-9000
02-287-1224

India
Tel: 02-258-0300

Indonesia
Tel: 02-252-3135-40

Israel
Tel: 02-204-9200
02-260-4856

Japan
Tel: 02-252-6151-9
South Korea

Tel: 02-247-7535-41

Laos
Tel: 02-539-6679
02-539-6668

Malaysia
Tel: 02-679-2190-9

Nepal
Tel: 02-391-7240
02-390-2280

Netherlands
Tel: 02-02-254-7701-5

Philippines
Tel: 02-259-0139-40
02-258-5401

Singapore
Tel: 02-286-2111
02-286-1434

South Africa
Tel: 02-253-8473-6

Sri Lanka
Tel: 02-261-1934
02-261-1938

Sweden
Tel: 02-263-7200

Taiwan
Tel: 02-670-0200-9

UK
Tel: 02-305-8333

USA
Tel: 02-205-4000

Vietnam
Tel: 02-251-5836-7

THAILAND EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Tourist Police 24-hour Tourist Hotline: 1155 then press 1
Tourist Information: 02-282-9773-6
Police Emergency: 191
Medical Evacuation and Ambulance Service: 02-255-1133-6
Airport: (02) 535-1111

UNTAMED

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avatar

Spa Mountain Suites

Avatar is a fantasy hideaway that sets a new design motif for a spa sanctuary. At a time when the concept of spa retreat has become synonymous with traditional minimalism, Avatar breaks the mould by being entirely and originally constructed of concrete – all surfaces and ‘furniture’ are fashioned of bare concrete that take on unexpected hues ranging from blues and ambers, depending on the light – rendering concrete in a beautiful form, a veritable artistic accomplishment. Interior surfaces are given texture by imperfectness: wavy and lumpy ceilings, and scratched pitted walls. But the comforts are uncompromising: the 44 suites are cocoons of exclusive luxuries, including expensive king size mattresses that fit snugly in the rooms (the smallest rooms are seventy square meters) which have extraordinary depth, with a courtyard upfront and a terrace perched over the lagoon outback. The exterior is more dramatically outlandish, a building is shaped like a three-blade fan surrounded by lagoons, and set in a private exclusive valley that is girdled by primeval mountains at the fringes of Thailand's largest and wildest national park.

In this private sanctuary you can have the experience you desire. There's a romantic candle-lit rooftop restaurant, a three-section pool that has a super salty part that recreates the experience of the Dead Sea, an impressive spa center that has all the range of traditional treatments and massages as well as high-tech treatment gizmos such as a cyro sauna, and a club where you can snuggle in your private booth and play your own music.

Total privacy is assured – and nothing is impossible. You can be discreet or you can be irreverent; you can walk around with a sarong if you like. You can treat Avatar as a private place that comes with all-round pampering provided at the flick of a finger. You can indulge – the price of the room includes many facilities, free meals, unlimited selected drinks, and spa treatments – or you can opt for a contemplative and regenerative retreat by tending crops in the garden, and picking the vegetables that you want in your dinner, or activities such as yoga and meditation. All of this, combined with the inspirational design and timeless dreamy setting, allows Avatar to become personal and inimitable: Avatar can be what you like it to be.

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Culture



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Sukhothai (Thailand)



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Luang Prabang (Laos)

Nature



Samui (Thailand)



Phuket (Thailand)



Pattaya (Thailand)



Koh Chang (Trat/ Thailand)



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