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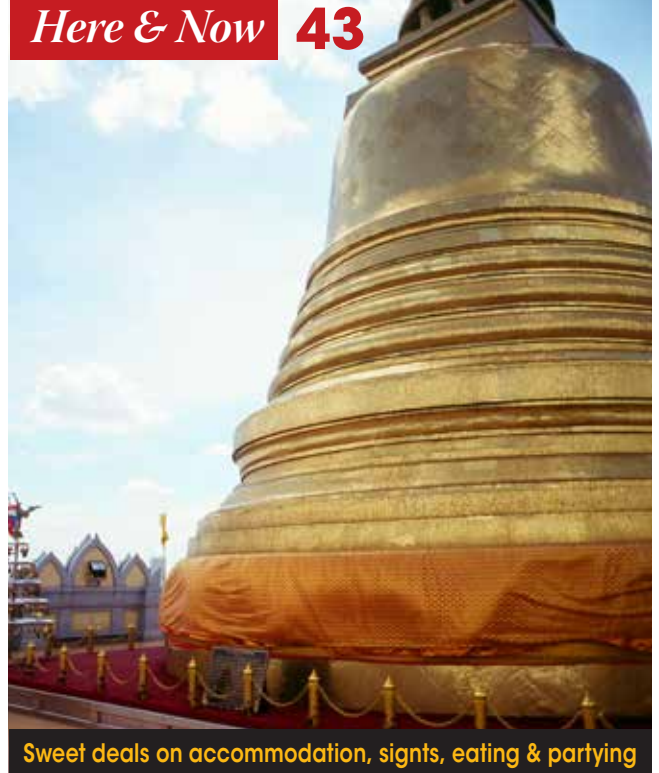
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Sweet deals on accommodation, sights, eating & partying



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UNTAMED TRAVEL

WILD TIMES



Ask any traveler, from any age group, what a few of their dream vacations are and going on an African safari would rank highly on that list. Cruising through a savannah gawking at rhinos and lions, hyenas and hippos conjures up memories of many folks' first encounters with foreign lands through *National Geographic*.

But in this issue, we've got a profile by Jim Algie of a Belgian-Flemish wildlife photographer who actually lived and worked in Africa for some 13-odd years. During his time there, Pierre Ryckmans had a number of near-death experiences with lions and hippos, not to mention genocidal maniacs in Rawanda.

The annual Buffalo Races in Chon Buri will remind no one of the Irish Sweepstakes or the Kentucky Derby, but then again, who's seen a thoroughbred with its hair dyed green or with a Buddhist altar mounted on its head? Daniel Cooper's photo essay shows a wilder and weirder side to these docile beasts of burden who double as mascots of Southeast Asian agriculture.

For wild times, the Rising Sun Anger Release Bar in China is hard to beat. It must be the only bar in the world where customers can catch a cheesy dance performance and then beat up the staff during a special midnight spectacle. Photographer Boaz Rottem and his writer wife Elizabeth Solomon had a smashing time at this "Fight and Dance Club."

If you count vermin, soi dogs, rabid sex tourists and vicious cops (called "dogs" in Thai slang) as beasts, then Bangkok really is a neon jungle. Rather than bitching about this beastly and patriarchal menagerie (or so the expat woman tirade goes) Janet Brown finds herself seduced by the city's gritty charm (mangy dogs included) and its charming women.

For sheer savagery, all the lions and tigers on earth look like pussycats compared to the Khmer Rouge. At S-21, their secret prison in Phnom Penh – now a well-known tourist attraction – female inmates were referred to as "female animals" and one of the most common criticisms of the regime by survivors is that they treated everyone "like animals."

In this month's book extract, writer and photographer Nic Dunlop tells you how he met "Pol Pot's chief executioner," the commandant of S-21, and how a Vietnamese photographer first exposed Comrade Duch's chamber of horrors back in 1979.

From the grasslands of Africa to China's punchiest bar and the Cambodian holocaust, this magazine refuses to be tamed by "cocktail tourism," cruise-ship frivolity, and backpacker lemmings who herd with their own kind on the well-rutted road to nowhere.

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During his years in Africa, Pierre Ryckmans had run-ins with lions, hippos and genocidal maniacs, he tells Jim Algie. All photos by Pierre. Captions by Jim and Pierre.



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MAIN events

THAILAND World AIDS Day

Have you been a good boy or girl this year? If you haven't, it may not be only Santa coming next December. World AIDS day in Bangkok, titled the Condom Chain of Life Festival, kicks off with a parade and finishes with a Guinness record attempt at the world's longest condom chain, a snapping good time for all.

Condom Chain of Life festival slips into Bangkok on the 1st of December, gets cuddly at noon in Lumpini Park and climaxes at 7:30pm. See www.unescobkk.org



THAILAND Nothing to Fear but Beer Itself

Bands, games and prizes coming to a town near you! The second Singha Challenge kicks off this month all over Thailand, and given the new Health Ministry regulations (see page 38) it may well be the last. The band line up features some of Thailand's best indie talent (Daytripper, Futon, T-Bone) and there's every Farangs' favourite gameshow, the Singha Challenge itself, hosted by former Untamed staffer and wicked funnyman, Bobby McBlain. Can you talk, walk and eat bugs like a Thai?

For full details, see page 16.



THAILAND Run for the Concrete Jungle

You've seen them on Adventure Sports channel – the latex-clad, perspiring fellows, armpit-deep in the mud of some remote land, racing for the trophy of some adventure race. Well, this month you can do that without the inconvenience of leaving town. The North Face Bangkok Challenge 2006 has teams of two running around East Bangkok, through paddy fields, across canals, down drains, up men's trouser legs, the lot. Organiser Active Management Asia pegs it as "a perfect introduction to the world of Adventure Racing," but it may be just as much fun to be a spectator.



The North Face Bangkok Challenge 2006 hits the starting blocks on Sunday November 19th at 9am in Nong Chok (around 40km out of BKK). See www.active-asia.com for more.

THAILAND Royal Yellow

If you forgot flowers last Valentine's day then what better way to make up with a vengeance than a visit to the Royal Flora Ratchaphruek 2006. It's an international horticultural exhibition and the largest display of tropical plants in the world, organised along the theme of "An Expression of Love for Humanity", which is a nice way to tell the 'trouble and strife' that she's special.



Stock up on hayfever medication and tiptoe through the tulips from the 1st of November until the end of January at the Royal Agricultural Research Centre, Chiang Mai. Check www.royalfloraexpo.com for more.

CARDINAL DATES

BANGKOK PRIDE FESTIVAL

28th October – 5th, November, Thailand. A week-long celebration of a rainbow of diversity for the gay, bi, lesbian and transgendered folks.

BURIRAM BOAT RACES

November 4th – 5th, Thailand. Be thrilled to tiny bits by the spectacle of dragon boats tearing up the river – or the streets if it floods.

PATTAYA GAY FESTIVAL

5th November – 2nd December, Thailand. Watch Pattaya's numerous elderly homophobes batten down the hatches.

SINGAPORE RUGBY 7S

November 4th – 5th. Not as big as the Hong Kong 7s but well worth a look in if you're a thugby fan.

SINGAPORE BUSKER'S FESTIVAL

All November, by the river. Big one on the circuit for globe-trotting buskers– those Singaporeans carry a lot of change you know.

RIVER KWAI WEEK

24th November – 7th December, Kanchanaburi, Thailand.

Actually two weeks of remembrance capped off by a spectacular sound and light show at the bridge.

CAMBODIA

Against the Flow

If you're in Phnom Penh at the time of the full moon this month you'll witness a spectacle seen nowhere else in the world. We're not talking about 20 midjets fighting a lion but the annual reversing of the Tonle Sap river's flow, which happens when the Mekong starts filling up the lake at the end of the river and is celebrated with ceremonies and



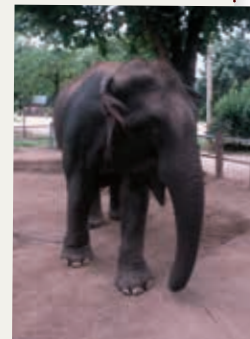
dragon boat races. See this while you can because when the Chinese dams on the Mekong go online, the earth will be bereft of reversing rivers.

The festival is set to go on the eve of the full moon which is on the 12th, but it's Cambodia so it could be any time.

THAILAND

Pachyderm Hoedown

Thais love elephants, the symbol of the Kingdom, and each year the nation's mahouts ride their charges to the Surin Elephant Roundup, the biggest elephant party in the world. It's a spectacular event with elephant cavalry re-enacting battles, elephant tricks, beauty pageants and of course, free-flowing rice whiskey.



Surin packs out over the festival, which thunders into town on the 18th-19th of this month, so book ahead.

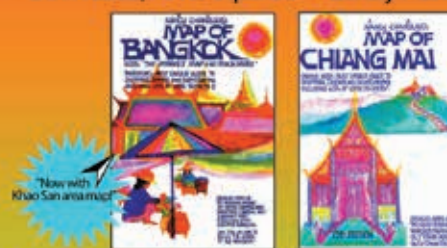
INDIA

Camel Jamboree

Although hardly the earth's most beautiful animal and famous for spitting, farting and general grouchiness, you may gain a new appreciation for the humble camel if you're in Pushkar this month. Then again, being surrounded by thousands of the brutes at the annual Camel Festival, maybe not. Either way, it's a spectacular event with races, camel trading, along with singing and dancing, against the backdrop of the Hindu Katrik Purnima festival.

Get your hump on in Pushkar, Rajasthan, from the 2nd to the 5th this month.

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ELEPHANT RAMPAGE

In a village hemmed in by dense forest in southeastern Bangladesh, wild elephants bulldozed two houses, killing a total of five people: three women and two children. The male members of the two households survived. Though elephants are known to damage property on a regular basis, actual attacks on humans are rare. Meanwhile, in the Indian village of Banta, 14 elephants, looking for one of their herd who had fallen into an irrigation ditch and drowned, besieged the town, crashing through houses and forcing many villagers to evacuate.

FAT OF THE LAND

A mainland Chinese bureaucrat investigating graft in the government gorged and boozed himself to death on an inspection mission. In a perverse twist of fate, the auditors of this department will now be investigated by the government.

THE CRUELEST CUT

The hideous practice of cutting off a female infant's clitoris that is carried out in some Islamic countries has now been banned in Indonesia. Such a practice ensures that women get no pleasure from sex and have less incentive to be unfaithful to their husbands.

THAI TOURISM REBOUNDS

The Pacific Asia Travel Association has released its statistics for "origin-destination" and "growth performances" for the first quarter of 2006. Compared to the same time frame for the previous year, Thailand's tourist arrivals have rebounded after the tsunami. In fact, Thailand came first, with visitors from the Russian Federation increasing by 138 percent, Chinese tourists by almost 132 percent and Korean's by 89 percent.

FIREBUGS AND FARMERS

A burning question hangs over Australia during its summer season of bushfires, it appears that one in five of the predominantly volunteer force of 70,000 fire-fighters is a pyromaniac responsible for starting some of the blazes. The sheer size of the force makes it difficult for the authorities to run background checks on all of them. Meanwhile, the sixth consecutive year of drought (the worst dry period in a century), has been the catalyst for one Australian farmer committing suicide every four days.

FOREIGN BRIDES WANTED

Singaporean men, disheartened by the way local women demand the "four C's" cash, condos, cars and credit cards, are marrying more foreign women, particularly from Malaysia, Vietnam and China. These marriages accounted for one quarter of all the marriages registered in 2005.

GENOCIDE TOURISM

The pagoda where the ashes of Ta Mok (the last leader of the Khmer Rouge after the death of Pol Pot in 1998, are interred is set to become one of the tourist sites in Anlong Veng. In the town) at the foot of the Dangrek Mountains, tourists can also visit the cremation site of Pol Pot and see the skeleton of his last home and bunker. Another macabre spot on the tour is the last house occupied by another top gun in the Khmer Rouge. On Pol Pot's orders, Son Sen and many of his relatives, including some young children, were slaughtered. Their bodies were then pulverized by a truck. After this massacre, Pol Pot was put under house arrest and Ta Mok (nicknamed "the Butcher" for his bloodlust) assumed command. Before his death at the age of 80, Ta Mok had been in prison, awaiting the genocide trial of former Khmer Rouge.

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CRIME FILES



SINGAPORE, MERCY FOR THE GUILTY:

The country, known for its harsh prison sentences and draconian punishments, where robbery with a firearm merits a death sentence, is softening its stance on rough justice. A recent case in point is Ridzuan Mohamad Hanafi. Instead of five years in jail and five strokes of the rattan cane for drug-trafficking, the 20-year-old got off lightly with two years' of probation and 150 hours of community service.

AUSTRALIA, SPEED FREAKS RUN AMOK:

At the first ever Australasian Amphetamine Conference, it was revealed that amphetamines were the most widely abused drug in eight of the 13 Asian-Pacific countries attending the conference. Other stats revealed at the conference showed that some 15.8 million speed pills were seized in Thailand; 11 full-scale methamphetamine labs were discovered in the Philippines, while Lao cops put the brakes on 4.7 million speed pills and 2.7 million pills were seized in Burma.

TAIWAN, SUPERSTITIOUS MURDER:

A Taiwanese fish-monger was arrested after stabbing a rival vendor to death. Pan Kuang-jung, 49, suspected the other man of putting a curse on him. He claimed that the curse had sent pain coursing through his entire body and that visits to the doctor and medication had brought him no relief.

CAMBODIA, KILLERS OR SCAPEGOATS?:

When the Cambodian union leader Chea Vichea was shot dead in 2004, two local men received 20-year sentences for killing him. But Va Sothy, the owner of the newsstand where Vichea was gunned down, has signed a statement saying that the two men were scapegoats rounded up by the police. Afraid for her life, she fled the country. The union leader was known for speaking out against government graft and myriad abuses of human rights.

SEX FILES



VIETNAM, REPRIEVE FOR DEATH ROW INMATE:

A Vietnamese woman convicted of drug trafficking and awaiting execution by firing squad has been commuted to a life sentence after it was discovered she was 12 weeks pregnant. Two guards in charge of the cell where Nguyen Thi Oanh, 39, was held have been fired. The *Lao Dong* newspaper reported that this was the first time a death-row convict had ever become pregnant.

AUSTRALIA, HIV INFECTIONS RISING:

A new health report says that Australia has seen its number of HIV cases increase by 41 percent since 2000. Part of the blame for this, says the Sydney-based National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, is that many people are no longer practicing safe sex. The report indicated that 30 percent of heterosexual women and 28 percent of heterosexual men had not used condoms in the last six months. In a related development, according to China's Ministry of Health, the country is becoming "like Africa" with 190 new HIV infections every day.

CAMBODIA, PEDOPHILE DEPORTED:

An American citizen, wanted in his homeland for 13 counts of sexually abusing young girls, as well as his own daughter, has been deported from Cambodia after being arrested for the second time on similar charges.

INDIA, SEX EDUCATION ON THE BOOKS:

The *Times of India* reported recently that schools across the country will begin teaching children as young as five about sex and drug abuse. Changing mores and ignorance about birth control, especially in the rural parts of the country, are said to be the reasons behind new classes.



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Corridors of Poo-er

Hi,

We've just found out that an Indian guy has been staying for free at hotels in Phuket and surrounding areas claiming to be writing a hotel review column. I'm not sure which magazine names he is using but keep an eye out. Not only is he freeloading, (he stuffs himself for hours at the free breakfast buffet, and then eats boiled rice and drinks the free tea in the spa the rest of the day), but he has been baffling staff at various resorts by making them move his bed outside his room (as the "walls feel like he's in prison") and crapping in public. Amusingly, most of the PRs didn't think of cross-checking the guy, as they assumed him to be for real. Makes you wonder how much of this kind of thing goes on.

Sincerely,

(An Esteemed Editor Who Wishes to Remain Anonymous So As Not To Piss Anyone Off)

Untamed Replies: Being mean-spirited and petty, we don't normally run letters from other local magazines that naively attempt to compete with us, but this editor is a decent enough bloke and prefers anonymity, so what the hell... So hoteliers beware – if a 'journalist' is sleeping and defecating in the hallways, he most likely doesn't represent Guru, BK, Untamed, or even Metro – though we aren't so sure about Big Chili.



What's in a Name?

I think it's high time someone 'outed' the globe-trotting, five-star resort schmoozing, long-time *Untamed* contributor Clovis LaPorte for the fag that he really is. I mean, come on, is this guy for real? No one in the world could possibly have this as a real name! 'Cloveeise' is bad enough, but he had to add the 'LaPorrrrte' for extra homo measure. When I think of 'Clovis LaPorte', I think of fluted sleeves, huge, wing-shirted collars and an extra sharp swish of the hips, hahaha! Anyway Clovis, rock on, keep living the high life, baby, that the rest of us can only dream of.

Big kiss to ya, suga lips – xxx mwah

Charly Busche, San Francisco

P.S. Have you got the balls to respond in print?

Clovis Replies:

Bigger than yours, "Charley" – though that isn't saying much since you are obviously a girl -- or at least wish you were. And speaking of girls, which I dearly (and regularly) love in both spiritual and physical ways, you should check out the September issue of Untamed where there is written proof of my sexual orientation. I only hope my mother, the woman who named me, isn't reading this issue because she would be mortified by your wishful thinking. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for hurting an old lady's feelings. But I think you'll find if you Google my name that it isn't uncommon in Louisiana, where my parents originally come from – home of the world's greatest heterosexual Mardi Gras.

Cheers, Clovis



Eye of the Beholder

Imagine you're in charge of beautifying Koh Chang for tourists. You need to decide what design you should use for a post box that will be placed at a well-known viewpoint. Something traditionally Thai? Something nautical? Something environmental? Something elephantine?

But if you work for DASTA (the government organisation in charge of this) and you want to go down in history as a forward-thinking guy, well what's more futuristic and up-to-the-minute than a scale model of Flash Gordon's rocketship from the 23rd century?

Ian McNamara
Koh Chang

Untamed hoes in:

You may be right, Ian, but then it could be subterfuge for Thailand's medium-range missile programme, using technology purchased from North Korea – it is red, after all. The geographically aware will also note that the "post box" is aimed at Cambodia and is probably filled with messages like, "Eat this, Hun Sen."



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).”

คำเตือน : การดื่มสุราก็ทำให้ตับแข็ง
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THE CHALLENGE

THAILAND'S FRUITIEST GAME SHOW

Is it really possible for farang to ever understand Thais? Whatever the answer, it's fun when they try. See for yourself as the 2nd Annual Singha Taste of Thailand Challenge hits the road again this winter, raising the roof at Thai tourist destinations nationwide in search of the farang with a heart most like a Thai.

This hilarious live stage show, which this year will visit Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pai, Samui and Pattaya, challenges brave tourists and foolhardy expats alike to wai, speak, eat, dance, sing and even box like a Thai to prove their 'Thai-ness'. A panel of celebrity judges (and a lynch mob of Thais in the audience) will decide which lucky contestant walks away with the ultimate accolade: Farang Sud Yord (ask a Thai), as well as a backpack full of prizes from regional tourism outlets.

While officially in its second year as the Singha Taste of Thailand Challenge, the show has actually been laughing its way around the country since 2002. Over the years this haphazard evening's entertainment has developed into a slick, well-produced, multimedia event. Sandwiched between live music from some of Thailand's top acts, the challenge has grown into a self-contained great night out: kind of like an alternative to the pub - down the pub. While there can only be one winner in the Singha Taste of Thailand, everyone takes a little bit of Thailand home with them in their heart. Come by and say hello: say 'Sawasdee' and that lucky winner could be YOU!



THE HOST

Is this guy the biggest Thai wannabe on the block or what? Worathep na Banglumpu claims he was reborn on Khaosan Road and adopted at (re)birth by a tuk tuk driver and a cook from a hostel on this famous backpacker street. Yeah, right!

Fifteen years ago, Worathep landed in the famous backpacker processing camp on the first leg of his round-the-world adventure - en route to Australia. He still hasn't left. To this day, the closest Worathep's been to the Land Down Under was watching the recent Steve Irwin tribute DVD he picked up at Panthip Plaza.

So how come he's not moved on after all the years? In his own words: "Thailand blew my mind: iced drinks in plastic bags, five on a motorcycle, salt in orange juice.

I remember my first day; everything was so different: liberating. My tuk tuk driver from the airport, shrouded in a mysterious pall of smoke, talked calmly to me in Thai. Even though I had just arrived, I understood every word: he was asking me had I eaten already and did I like Thai ladies. Little did I know at the time the tuk tuk driver would become Khun Por (or dad).

I realised there was so much to learn about this fascinating culture and I dedicated my life to understanding what my adoptive parents were going on about. Also when I found out that my favourite dish, Fried Rice with Crab, was called Cowpat Poo Crap in Thai, I knew I was home," said Worathep.

THE BANDS

This year we feature a pick o' the crop of Thailand's best.



T-BONE (BKK: Nov 16, Chiang Mai: Nov 24, Pai: Nov 26]
T-Bone is Thailand's most delicious musical dish to date! The recipe is reggae, ska, jazz with a distinctive Thai flavour, a little dash of tongue-in-cheek humour, dazzling performances and a compulsive desire to skank. This 10-piece outfit performs with a seemingly telepathic ability to communicate not only with each other but also with audiences from around the world. One of Thailand's most internationally recognised bands, T-Bone have performed with the likes of INXS (which named T-Bone as one of their top 10 favourite bands in an interview with Rolling Stone magazine), UB40, Tokyo Ska Paradise, and The Beat.



Futon [Samui: Nov 30, Pattaya: Dec 3]

If this band was a fashion label, it would be the united colours of Benetton: Two Thais (funky female bass player Oh and the alluringly androgynous front man Gene), two Brits (DJ Bee from the radio and Simon, the former drummer of Brit-poppers Suede) all rounded off with the moody posturing of Japanese vocalist Momoko. Futon straddles cultural boundaries with its androgynous, auto-erotic barrage

of electronic culture clash. Formed in Thailand and currently making waves across Europe this pink-punk outfit continue to defy categorisation.

TONIC RAYS [Chiang Mai: Nov 24, Pai: Nov 26]



Formed by Lonely Plant's main man in Thailand Joe Cummings, the Tonic Rays continually tour the north of Thailand (Joe's chosen chapter) playing an imaginative mix of popular covers and equally well-received original numbers. A traditional guitar, bass, drums and vocals outfit, the Tonic Rays will rock you.

CANNONBALL [Pattaya Hard Rock: Dec 3]

Probably one of the best blues piano players in Asia, Keith "Fingers" Nolan and Cannonball make the blues accessible to lesser mortals like ourselves; the band makes converts every where they play. Repent Pattaya!



DAYTRIPPER [The Deck Koh Samui Nov 30, 8 pm]

One of Thailand's original indie bands, Daytripper (named after the Beatle's song) has moved beyond Brit-Pop to develop a cynical, swashbuckling rant against the machine. Alternatively, you could just get a whole set of 60's covers. You never can tell with these guys. Too much Monty Python when they were kids, we fear.



DIAMOND JACK REMIXED -7pm November 16th Khaosan Rd. Five guys called Jack? All roads have led to Bangkok for these wandering soul brothers, who arrived in town with little more than their guitars, but plenty of ideas. Jack promise to stamp their own brand of funk-ed-up grooves on this year's show.



VENUES

BANGKOK - BUDDY LODGE -Thursday 16 Nov: Khaosan Rd.

Where better to kick off this year's nationwide schlep round the country than with an open-air event on the front doorstep of Buddy Lodge. Unofficially known as the 'Raffles of KSR', this tasty boutique hotel, restaurant, bar and spa is the ideal place to grab a bite, party the night away, sleep it off and then shake off the hangover in a herbal sauna.

www.buddylodge.com guestservice@buddylodge.com

CHIANG MAI - RIVERSIDE RESTAURANT - Friday 24 November: After rocking by the river for more than 25 years, Riverside is the original and still the best live music venue in Chiang Mai. The entire crew is happy about the venue as the Riverside also does the best burgers in the north of Thailand.

www.theriversidechiangmai.com

service@theriversidechiangmai.com

PAI - THE BE-BOP PUB - Sunday 26 November:

The music shack that became a country cottage; the newly rebuilt Be Bop is an intimate, charming, live entertainment venue in the hills. We'll change all that.

chartblues@hotmail.com

Tel: 089 560 8561



SAMUI - THE DECK- Thursday 30 November:

One of the best concert venues in Thailand, luckily in Samui, The Deck has seen some great nights...then we arrived. Come and join the abandon by the beach.

thedeck@samart.co.th

Tel: 0 7723 0897

PATTAYA - HARD ROCK CAFE - Sunday 3 December:

Last year we rocked the sidewalk in front of Hard Rock, this year they've invited us in - probably worried what the neighbours must have thought. It's the last event of the year, and possibly ever, if the new regulations kick in. We're expecting tears, we only hope they're not from the audience.

www.hardrockhotels.net rooms.pattaya@hardrockhotels.net

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

STAR WORLD: As you say goodbye to Thailand, keep an eye out for yourself on the telly. We film all the shame and broadcast it globally.
www.starworld.com

CAPITAL TV: This locally-based but internationally orientated production house films Destination Asia and Travel Thailand & Beyond.
www.capitaltv.co.th raine@capitaltv.co.th

NATIONAL MEDIA

BANGKOK POST: As the Bangkok Post celebrates 60 years they've choose to come on the road with us. We're honoured.
www.bangkokpost.com

UNTAMED TRAVEL : UT separates the wheat from the chaff for the more discerning traveller. UT's irreverent tone masks a more serious mission of providing accurate, reliable up-to-date regional travel information for the independent spirit in all of us.
www.untamed-travel.com editor@untamed-travel.com

ONLINE MEDIA

KHAOSANROAD.COM : From digs to diving, this regularly-updated busy web portal offers all the important local information without patronizing the pants off you.
www.khaosanroad.com info@khaosanroad.com

REGIONAL MEDIA

CHIANG MAI CITY LIFE: If anyone knows where the action is in this city it has to be these guys. On Friday 24 November they'll be hanging out with us. Does that tell you something?
www.citylife-citylife.com info @citylife-citylife.com

PAI POST: The most authoritative English-language newspaper in Pai - the only English newspaper in Pai. All joking aside, this is the village voice - if you want to know who's making up to who, who's in the news concerning me and you - look in the Pai Post.
www.paipost.com editor@paipost.com

SAMUI COMMUNITY PUBLICATIONS: Whether it's the newspaper or the lifestyle Community Magazine - these guys have got local life on Samui all sized up.
www.samuicommunity.com miki@samuicommunity.com

PATTAYA MAIL: It's a hard job but someone's got to do it. The buck for covering news on Pattaya stops at the desk of the Pattaya Mail editor - and he loves it.
www.pattayamail.com editor@pattayamail.com

ACCOMMODATION

PAI

Pai River Corner: A well-deserved bit of posh in the already relaxed hamlet of Pai. All the rooms are what your mother would call 'beautifully appointed' and all have a panoramic view across the meandering river.

Web: www.pairivercorner.com email: info@pairivercorner

SAMUI

Emerald Irish Bar, BoPhut, Samui

Hooray, we're staying in a pub. This latest Celtic offering in the north of the island ensures cold stout on a warm sunny day.

PATTAYA

Hard Rock Hotel: We've all been fighting for the Elvis suite apart from Richard our producer who insists on spending the night in the Robbie Williams studio. Whichever famous person you sleep with you're sure to have a rocking good night.

Web: www.hardrockhotels.net email: sales@hardrockhotels.net

PRIZES

Well let's face it our contestants are never going to put themselves through this ordeal without the freebies. We take our hats off to the local travel-related firms who have so generously offered some great prizes for this year's participants. They include:

Sabah Cafe, Horizon Thai Boxing Centre, Baan Chana Boutique Hotel, Viengthai Hotel, Bhiman Inn, Taptim Restaurant, Chez Allan Chiang Mai, Trang Hotel, Thai Cozy Hotel, Oh My Cod Restaurant, Buddy Lodge - Thanks, guys.



WWW.SINGHACHALLENGE.COM

For the latest updates & information on the Singha Taste of Thailand Challenge check the website, or take the challenge below.

TAKE THE SINGHA CHALLENGE

FEEL THAT 15 MINUTES OF FAME
COMING ON LIKE A COLD BEER,
OR JUST NEED THE FREEBIES?

Email us the answers to these ridiculously squeezed-out questions that any banana should know, and you could pip a place in Thailand's fruitiest game show.

info@singhachallenge.com



TASTE OF THAILAND

QUESTION 1: What is the Thai currency known as ?

Bath / Baht

QUESTION 2: What is the Thai greeting ?

Sawasdee / Crikey mate!

QUESTION 3: What do locals call the new Bangkok International Airport ? Cobra Swamp / Cobra Soup

COMPLETE THE SENTENCE....my Thai dream is..

Keep it "Riep Roy" (ask a Thai nicely)

KHAP KOON KRAP

CAN FARANG EVER BE THAI?



+



=



THAILAND'S FRUITIEST CROSS-CULTURAL GAME SHOW



WORATHEP NA BANGLAMPU

presents the

Taste of Thailand



SINGHA CHALLENGE

Thailand's Favorite
Ska/Reggae Band

T-BONE

+

**Diamond
JACK
Remixed**

+

THE
TONIC
RAYS

7PM THURS NOV 16TH BUDDY LODGE KHAOSAN RD BKK

FREE 8PM FRIDAY NOV 24TH RIVERSIDE CHIANG MAI

8PM SUNDAY NOV 26TH BE-BOP, PAI

futon + **CANNONBALL** + **Day Tripper**

MTV's Electro Kulture Klash Darlings

8PM THURSDAY NOV 30TH THE DECK, SAMUI

FREE

8PM SUNDAY DEC 3RD HARD ROCK CAFE PATTAYA

www.singhachallenge.com



FIGHT AND DANCE CLUB

Looking for a bar where customers are encouraged to beat up the staff? Then grab a ringside seat in this smashing Chinese club. Words by Elizabeth Solomon. Photos by Boaz Rottem.

There are two types of people in the world. You are either one of those people who acknowledge the dark side of the human psyche and accept the fact that negative emotions (anger, hatred, jealousy and sadness) are the flip side of all the positive emotions like love, caring and joy. Or maybe you are one of those people who choose to ignore and marginalise the more twisted aspects of the psyche and focus on the positive.

The Rising Sun Anger Release Bar in Nanjing is full of people who are on a mission to explore and even rejoice in the destructive aspects of our darker emotions, those livid feelings we work so hard to suppress in daily life.

When we arrived there at 10:30pm on a Friday night, the bar had all the hallmarks of a typical Nanjing hotspot. A seedy location, a hostess in a black latex mini and red stilettos at the door, images of women in skimpy outfits plastered onto the wall, a small thumping dance floor full of young people dancing stiffly to the beat of the latest Chinese pop and house, along with the occasional English song, a thick layer of smoke and the suffocatingly sweet smell of caramel popcorn floating in the air.

We sat down at one of the under-lit perspex tables, a group of six working expats along with a couple of our Chinese friends. We did not expect a lot. Or maybe we didn't really believe such a bar could exist. Our Chinese friends kept reassuring us that things would heat up soon. The dance music stopped, only to be replaced by a show which consisted of women in Flamenco costumes dancing to pseudo-Spanish music; a drag queen belting out a sleepy classical hit; and some more performers in belly-dancing costumes gyrating their skinny hips to a Middle Eastern tune.

As the show ended, the ambiance became tense and we knew the "anger stress release," as our Chinese friends called it, was about to commence. It was midnight when six, hefty-looking men lined up on the podium. Their shirts advertised the bar, and said things in Chinese like, "Hit me for a good feeling," and "Let your stress go and punch me." A man with a microphone touted their services and then asked for people to come up and start releasing their vengeance on the men who were trained not to respond to the blows. This option was free for women, but men had to fork out a small sum.

The staff members wore protective gear on their upper bodies and the customer was given a pair of boxing gloves. "Get the Party Started"



But the second customer, another local woman, had some real anger to vent

by Pink served as the soundtrack for this flurry of fisticuffs and flying kicks.

The first girl in the makeshift ring smiled all the way through her two minutes of allocated time, and the crowd counted down her last 10 seconds. But the second customer, another local woman, had some real anger to vent. She kicked the guy in the crotch and shins, which were surprisingly unprotected, and gave him some serious shots to the head and shoulders. The human punching bag just stood there and did not hit back.

This form of 'barroom brawling' is very popular with women and may tell you something about the angst they feel in the China of today. One Chinese woman, still panting with exertion, said it was all good fun, harmless and helped her unload some "pain of life".

Things got a lot more serious when the guys came on. All the protective gear came off and the fighting was less one-sided, even though the paying client was allowed to be more aggressive. The scrapping was an absurd mix of wild punches, kicks, shoves, screams and laughter. Other fighters awaiting their turn stood guard to ensure the brawls did not end in bloodshed. One of the paying clients told us that he had had a fight with his girlfriend and releasing his frustrations on the staff had helped him to find an outlet for his hostility.

The crowd was ecstatic and cheered the pugilists on. Watching them was as entertaining as watching the fighters.

After the fighting ended, the music came on again and the dance floor filled with happy groovers and shakers.

From fight club to dance club, just like that.

The owner, Wu Gong, said the idea for the club, which opened this year, was inspired by his life as a frustrated and angry migrant worker with nowhere to release his rage, a concept similarly explored in Chuck Palahniuk book *Fight Club*.

Who can say whether this extreme form of anger management is good for society or not? Is it better to have controlled violence or to let people walk around with all those emotions seething in them? Or does such a bar legitimize and promote violence?

These are big questions to ponder – and not the kind one finds answers to over beer and popcorn in a thumping, smoke-filled dance bar in Nanjing, China.

FACT CHECKS

The Rising Sun Anger Release Bar is located at Shengzhou Rd, east of Zhongshan Rd, and the nearest metro station is Sanshanjie. The club opens at 9pm but the special shows begin at 11pm. Beers cost around US\$2.





Beastly Beauties

Where else but in Thailand could a group of drunken farmers start a piss-take of a race that would eventually end up as a yearly festival? Now in their 135th year, the Buffalo Races began as a way for farmers to blow off steam and brain cells after the rice had been reaped and the money had been pocketed in the capital of Chonburi province.

Held every October, the main attraction is the surprisingly, fleet-of-foot bovines mounted by farmers armed with bamboo switches in place of riding crops. The races are fun once they're off and running, but getting the beasts to line up properly makes for a lot of false starts.

Other highlights of the festival include a "Miss Farmer Beauty Contest," traditional games like climbing greased poles to snatch bank notes, and a procession featuring boys in body paint and led by a buffalo with a Buddhist altar atop its horns. Then there's the most beastly of beauty pageants for these hay powered tractors who have their bodies tinted different colours or their horns bedecked with flowers.

Daniel Cooper jockeys for position to bring you this photographic report.



Bangkok, My Love



There's nothing quite so clichéd as expat women bitching about Bangkok and Thai women. But Janet Brown has come to admire both the city's gritty charm and its charming women.

Photos by Daniel Cooper.

I live in the ideal American city. Seattle is small enough to be friendly, large enough to be urban, and is surrounded by enough natural beauty to launch a million calendars. Its inhabitants can walk to work, drink the tap water, and pass by a dog without worrying that it might be rabid. It's a city without dengue fever, avian flu, malaria, or leprosy. The temperature rarely goes above 90 degrees fahrenheit or below freezing. Tourists come to the bookstore where I work, raving about this place, and it takes everything I have to keep from saying, "Thanks, glad you like it, but it bores me silly."

I can't help it. I've been warped for life. I've given my heart and whatever might pass for my soul to a city that is infamous around the world for its sin, pollution and political chicanery. It's such a filthy place that I've scraped dirt from my skin while sitting in an apartment 15 minutes after having taken a shower, and I've had to pick my way down neighbourhood thoroughfares to avoid stepping in dog shit. The air tastes like a cigarette and frequently smells far worse.

Most people can't wait to leave it, but I can't wait to return. Yes, it's true. I'm thoroughly besotted with Bangkok.

Like all lifelong relationships, this one has its flaws. It certainly wasn't love at first sight or a whirlwind romance, and I've tried to file divorce papers more than once but I've always come crawling back.

Bangkok is vibrant, and for me that covers a population bulge of sins, much in the same way that the perpetually increasing jungle of green vines covered the garbage that blanketed the vacant lot below the window of my first apartment.

That lot was a gathering point for taxi drivers with bursting bladders, and I frequently opened my curtains upon arising to see a small line of them energetically peeing. It was a piquant sight to gaze upon while drinking my first cup of coffee in the morning, and I found myself

waving to them insouciantly while muttering, "Good morning, boys. How's every little thing?"

This spot was also my building's unofficial garbage dump. From their apartment windows, tenants tossed out plastic bags of refuse that were visible for a little while, and then swallowed up by the green vines. It was an efficient arrangement and gave me, for the most part, a very rural and attractive vista, until the day that I awoke to see the





of a gigantic double bed reposing on top of all the greenery. Rodney dropped by with my mail to find me in a state of angry, hysterical sobbing. "Look at this," I demanded, dragging him to look at the huge, stained addition to the neighbourhood, "Just look – it's going to take months for the vines to cover that up."

The next morning I steeled myself, took my coffee over to the window, looked out and began to laugh. Below me were several dogs, mangy, scabbed and monstrous, running and bounding and leaping, having the time of their lives, playing on that mattress that was as grisly as they were and was now reborn as a trampoline for repulsive canines. At that point, an odd little shift occurred in my perspective, and laughing seemed to be the most valid response to many of Bangkok's little surprises.

That discovery came in handy when the rainy season began and I learned how to say "flood" (*nam tooam*) in Thai. There was a slew of them during my first year, and I became accustomed to taking off my shoes, pulling up my skirt and wading through knee-deep water down what had been a city street a few short moments before, but was now a lake filled with people sloshing and smiling. It was an inconvenient, dirty, and quite possibly health-threatening experience, but the people around me were reacting as though it were a "snow day" in Seattle, and I learned to feel that way too.

Knowing how to laugh at a predicament rewarded me with a horde of female friends one night, when I stepped backwards while being introduced to a large group of women, and got in the way of a gigantic fan that immediately began to devour my long, full skirt. It had captured several yards of silk that covered my lower body until one of the women turned it off, and it quickly became obvious that the fan and I were now as one.

"You will have to take off your skirt," said one of the women, but since we had only just met, I countered with a suggestion I thought more appropriate, "Why don't I carry the fan home with me and I'll return it in the morning?"

Since the fan was almost as large as I was, that suggestion was as amusing to all concerned as the first one had been. One of the women

I'm not the only American woman who learned that to be a female in Bangkok does not preclude being feminine

brought me a beer, and I tried to look nonchalant as I leaned against the fan, drinking my chilled Heineken while realising just how thoroughly ridiculous I was being.

"Oh, let's just cut the damned thing loose. I'm tired of it anyway," I pleaded. Somebody cut me free so carefully that the rip, when mended, was virtually invisible. Instead of losing a skirt, I gained a tableful of friends, all of whom called me "Fanny".

Women were the ones who opened the heart of the city to me and showed me how to live there. Thai women are beautiful, smart, strong people, and many of my friends are so cosmopolitan and worldly that I never spend time with them without feeling as though I should be picking the hayseeds out of my hair. I'm not the only American woman who learned that to be a female in Bangkok does not preclude being feminine, and that strength in every gender can coexist with tenderness, which is a valuable and sometimes difficult thing to learn.

"You are not beautiful," my friend Arun once told me, "but you have a strong charm." It's a phrase that I think of often when I think of my chosen city, rarely beautiful but always compelling. And yet in the middle of ugliness that is so profound that it becomes fascinating, beauty flickers in a persistent flame. It can be seen at night when light and shadow transform a polluted canal into gold-sparkled, deep purple splendour, when twilight deepens every visible colour in that instant or two before the disappearance of the day, when the music of chanting monks fills the grounds of a temple and erases the blaring city outside, when the sun rises above the low-hanging mist that cools the city's first light, and on those rare occasions when the Royal Barges float in an endless procession, they turn the Chao Phraya into a river of regal magnificence.

The most impossible-to-answer question between lovers is, "Why do you love me?" It can never be answered in 25 words or less. It's always so much easier to enumerate those things that make love less than perfect; curses are easier than endearments. When I think of the many times I've cursed and complained about this city, it's strange to think that my most enduring and most joyful relationship has been with Bangkok. My only regrets are that it took me so long to find it and that I can't continue my life there tomorrow.



Namibia, 2001: "Pierre about to embark on a camel trek out in the desert with the biggest and most beautiful sand dunes in the world. Some of the dunes are 300-metres high. They shoot many commercials and films out here. You can walk up the dunes and then you roll down."

into AFRICA



During his years in Africa, Pierre Ryckmans had run-ins with lions, hippos and genocidal maniacs, he tells Jim Algie. All photos by Pierre. Captions by Jim and Pierre.

Two years after arriving in central Africa in 1970, Pierre Ryckmans was wildlife-spotting in the Akagera National Park in Rwanda. Since he'd already been to the park about half a dozen times, the officials waived the usual restriction which insists that travelers are escorted by a guide and an armed forest ranger to protect them. Pierre and a couple of friends were driving around in a Volkswagon Beetle. For the first and only time during his many years in Africa, he spotted a lioness sitting on a tree branch. Pierre yelled at the driver to stop.

From the car he took a few photos. The tree was 30 metres away. Even with his zoom lens getting a decent close up was a long shot. Disobeying one of the main rules at safari parks, he got out of the car and went creeping towards the tree through elephant grass that stood almost two-metres high, as it was the end of the rainy season. Parting the grass like a curtain, he crept forward, trying to make as little noise as possible. Sweat blurred his vision. His heart thumped like a kettle drum in a classical symphony.

Some 10 metres from the tree Pierre stopped. Then he took the photo in this layout. Just after the shutter snapped and the gears whirred, he heard another lion roar. Snapping his head to the right, he saw the enormous head and mane of a male lion.

The beast was "looking at me furiously. I shot another photo and he roared again. Then I started backing up slowly, staring in his eyes, so as not to offend him. Halfway between the car and the tree, the male roared again, the lioness jumped out of the tree and they ran off, fortunately, in the opposite direction," he laughs.

The Belgian of Flemish descent had originally come to Africa as a

teacher in order to escape a mandatory year of military service. Instead he found himself on the front lines of an ethnic cleansing campaign that erupted into a full-blown genocide in 1994. (The bloodbath to come would claim some 800,000 victims.) Even in the early 70s, there were warning signs. Rwanda's Hutu majority was kicking out the minority of Tutsis (some 15 to 20 percent of the population), who had formed the first kingdom there before it became part of the Belgian Congo in 1890.

The former history major was in the middle of knocking back a banana beer when two of his colleagues came running into his house. Both of the Tutsis had been badly beaten by Hutus and were afraid they'd



be hacked to death with machetes. Pierre hid them under his bed.

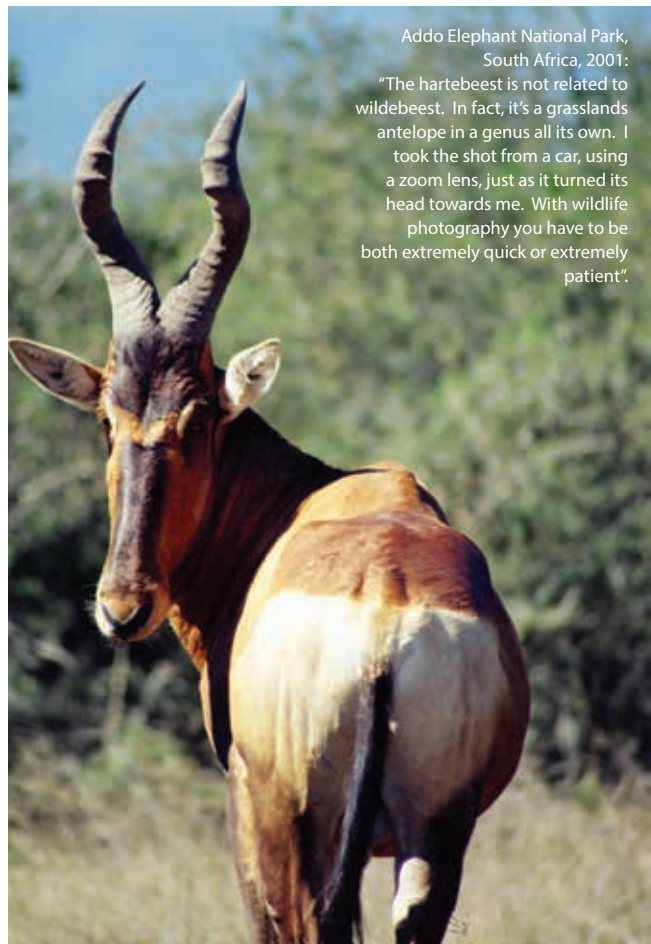
It was a false alarm. The death knell for Tutsis didn't start ringing for another year. Then Pierre drove a group of "10 or 12 Tutsi refugees to the border with Uganda, because I was living near there and I knew every dirt track and some places where roads were parallel with the border... Rawanda is nicknamed 'The Country of 1,000 Hills.' So I drove them across the border and the refugees fled through Uganda and the Congo to Burundi, which already had a Tutsi regime.

"For two months I had no news. They could've been beaten up or ended up in prison. But the first of May was a holiday so I went to the Burundi embassy for a tourist visa and drove my red Datsun the whole day to the capital of Bujumbura. All these towns are big villages, so we started talking to everyone and after we asked three or four times and found one [refugee], then the world spread like fire," he laughs, "and we found all of them."

Since Pierre owned the only red Datsun in all of Rawanda, the authorities, who labeled him a "white Tutsi," had no trouble tracking him down. He was then expelled from the country. Less intrepid men would've seen this as a signal to go home. Not Pierre. He continued teaching French and history in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and later the Comoro Islands (one of which is still a French colony) halfway between Mozambique and Madagascar in the Indian Ocean.

In the early 80s, he began working on bilateral development projects for the Belgian embassy in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, which sits at the confluence of the Blue Nile and the White Nile – a city he describes as "dull and dusty and has no charm at all". Only a year after he arrived, Sharia Law was imposed. Alcohol was forbidden. And public dismemberments became a spectator event.

"Thieves would have their left hand cut off and if you'd shot or



Addo Elephant National Park,
South Africa, 2001:
"The hartebeest is not related to
wildebeest. In fact, it's a grasslands
antelope in a genus all its own. I
took the shot from a car, using
a zoom lens, just as it turned its
head towards me. With wildlife
photography you have to be
both extremely quick or extremely
patient".



Hutbaai Bird Park, near Capetown, 2001: "The meerkat is a tiny member of the mongoose family which only weighs about a pound and a half. You can find them all over the Kalahari Desert in South Africa and in zoos all over the world. This creature occupies a lofty place in the mythology of Zimbabwe as it's known as a "sun angel" because it guards villages against an African breed of werewolf called a "moon devil".

wounded someone they would cut off your right foot," says Pierre. "Foreigners were not allowed to witness it, but local people were incited to see it after Friday prayers at the mosque. It was supposed to scare them."

Over the 13-odd years he spent in Africa, Pierre, who now sports a dyed-black moptop that would've done Ringo Starr proud in 1965, developed an eye for wildlife photography.

"The more you know about wildlife the more you start to train your eye. The gazelle, the zebra, at first you don't even see them. Little by little, it becomes a passion and east Africa is one of the best places in the world for safaris and game parks," he says, adding that around 90 percent of his wildlife photos have been taken with a 300mm zoom lens.

Before moving to Africa, he was already documenting his hitchhiking trips through Greece, Spain and Morocco, with his camera, "in the most stupid and silly way". Holding up his camera, he says, "I have the oldest and most ridiculous Minolta with a big zoom. Nothing special. The only thing I can do is change the lenses. And I'm ashamed to say that mostly I shoot on automatic."

Amazing! Hearing him say this in our office I felt a bit like the Christopher Columbus of journalism. Finally I'd discovered a photojournalist, after meeting and interviewing hundreds of them, who doesn't suffer from elephantiasis of the ego – one of the most prevalent symptoms being that you must frequently proclaim, "I am the greatest photographer in Southeast Asia today," as if you've just smoked a lot of crack and will fight anyone who dares to deny your 'irrefutable' genius (though most photographers, scorn writers as they may, don't actually know what irrefutable means).

Pierre is no Belgian waffler; when it comes to talking about his scariest shoots – he cuts straight to the chase.

"Wild buffalos are the most dangerous creatures. Out in the Congo, on the Bateke Plateau, I was walking with friends on a weekend in some very high grass. It was just after rainy season, and there was a huge number of buffalo galloping towards us. The grass was shaking like hell, and it was so frightening because you couldn't see them – it was like waves rippling over the grass and this thunderous noise. We couldn't move, we couldn't run. When they're angry they are the most dangerous animals. Lions kill when they're hungry, but buffalos are just sadistic."

For all of you photographers setting your sights on shooting for *National Geographic*, you may want to aim your view-finder a little lower, like taking photos of food, for example, as the risk of being trampled and gored by a cheese fondue is minimal.



Aegera Ntional Pari, early 70s:

"I was in a car with a forest ranger who was armed because if you get attacked by an animal, they have to shoot them. I had seen many hippos in the water but I'd never seen a whole creature on land before. The car was very close to it. I rolled down the window to take a photo when it came charging at us. I thought, 'Oh, my god, this hippo weighs two or three tons.' I looked over at the forest ranger and the door was open. The ranger was hiding behind a tree and trembling like a leaf, when the hippo came rampaging past the car only a metre or two away. The ranger could speak a little French so he told me, "That's one of the most dangerous moments, when you come between the hippo and the water. They feel a close connection to the water. That's why he ran amok. We were lucky hippos have terrible eyesight."

CALL SIGNS OF THE WILD

*For seeing birds and
beasts here are Pierre's
recommendations for Africa.*

**Serengeti National Park,
Tanzania:** These woodlands
and grasslands are most
famous for the migration
of 1.5 million herbivores
(blue wildebeest, gazelles,
zebras) every October and
April. They are easy prey
for predators. During every
migration, some 250,000
wildebeest die.

**Masai Mara, southwest
Kenya:** Like the Serengeti,
which the park borders, they
have the Big 5: elephants,
buffalo, lions, leopards, and
rhinos

**Hutbaai Bird Park, not far
from Capetown in South
Africa:** Pelicans, hornbills,
a huge collection of owls,
eagles, silver and gold
pheasants, as well as vultures
and crowned cranes from
the Nile Valley.

**Etosha National Park,
Namibia:** Because much
of the park is very dry, you
can see a lot more animals
when they come to the
watering holes, like the
endangered black rhinoceros
and the black faced impala.
There are lots of birds like
ostriches, pelicans and
flamingos, too.





PORTRAIT OF THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Name: Pierre Ryckmans

Age: 61

Nationality: Belgian Flemish

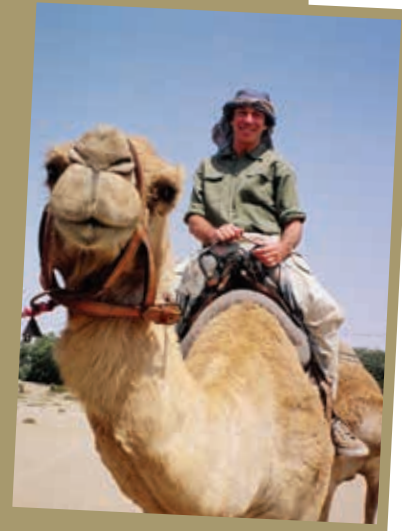
Base: Bangkok

Favourite Tittle: Red wine. Chilean, South African, Australian. I don't care about the country as long as it's good.


Travels: 927 flights and 96 countries

Work: Lost his job in 2000 because of restructuring of the Belgian Development Cooperation in Thailand. Unable to find further work teaching French, because he doesn't have a diploma, Pierre began writing in English in 2004 and has contributed travel stories and images to many local and regional magazines like *Untamed Travel*.

Project in motion: A photo-laden book about his travels in Asia.



Hutbaai Bird Park, 2001: "The park has species from all over the world, like the red ibis from South America and an amazing variety of owls and wild ducks. It's very popular with South Africans but not many tourists come here."



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Smooth as silk



The Call of the Weird

Review by Daniel Cooper

The name Theroux on the spine of a book used to refer to Paul Theroux, author of a number of travel books that changed the genre, and a bunch of so-so novels. But his son, Louis Theroux, made his name in television and has eclipsed his father's fame.

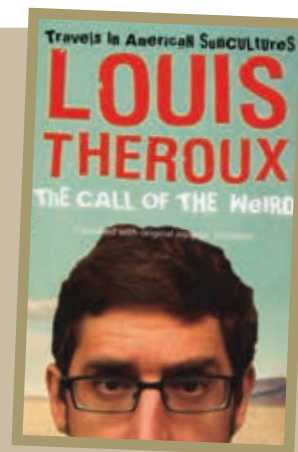
Over 10 years (mostly) in the USA, Louis made *Weird Weekends* for the BBC, a series of irreverent documentaries on American subcultures. When the series ended, he returned to the US to catch up with a few of the memorable characters and see how they were getting on. The result is *Call of the Weird*, a loose compilation of stories about his interview subjects today, along with his recollections on making the documentaries.

There's a great chapter on Ike Turner, whose episode never made it to air, a reunion with neo-Nazis, conversations with survivalists and prostitutes, and a trip to a UFO convention.

Those who watched the series will be familiar with Louis' talent for getting people to open up on camera, while he maintains an awkward English persona and takes the piss out of them; the book delivers much of the same. While it is easy to believe from watching the documentaries that Louis' geeky character is a construct to make his subjects comfortable so they can make fools of themselves on camera, in *Call of the Weird* he reveals a genuine affection for these often complex and conflicted souls.

Like his father, Louis writes in a clear, dry style, peppered with dialogue. Although there are some cracking stories inside, not every chapter lives up to its promise and he should have culled some of the lame ducks.

Nevertheless, *Call of the Weird* is a light, enjoyable book and deserves to do well on the travel circuit.



Vellum: The Book of All Hours

Review by Daniel Cooper

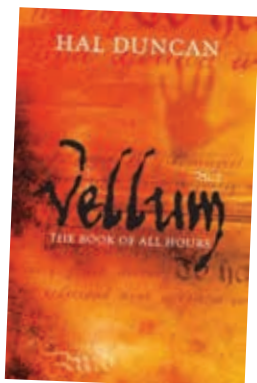
It's difficult to come to a conclusion on Hal Duncan's *Vellum: The Book of All Hours* (2005, Macmillan), so let's start by describing it. Reality as we know it is but a skein on the Vellum and the world is populated by a class of immortals known as the "unkin." Back in prehistoric times and the days of Sumer they used to be god-kings and rulers of empires until half of them got together and agreed to stop all the wars and killing. They became known as "angels," and the unkin not in the club, as "demons," all getting ready to fight it out at the end of time. That time is now, or is it?

The narrative follows a handful of characters, kind of. The "base" characters are Innana, a Sumerian princess/god and Tammuz, her husband, but they're manifest in a number of personas/avatars throughout the book, mythology and legend, time and alternative realities. Nothing is as it seems and contradiction is the norm.

Confused? Me, too. Nevertheless the book's sprawling and enthralling landscape is well written and entertaining, if a little dense at times (it's not called *The Book of All Hours* for nothing), and the text is defiantly non-linear. Between paragraphs we jump from World War I to 2017 to places where people have wings and horns and the Vellum, a land as big as the universe itself.

Duncan breaks most of the normal rules in *Vellum*, and whether this works is up for debate, polarising reviewers and readers alike. The book is squarely pitched at the fantasy/science-fiction audience and, frankly, probably won't appeal to readers who aren't accustomed to such works. There's also a degree of sophistication required as many of the references, plot jumps and concepts aren't explained at all.

The trick to enjoying the *Vellum* is not to try too hard to understand the plot, where the story's going or who's saying what. The real value of the book is in the concepts, Duncan's unique take on mythology and his stinging vignettes. And perhaps everything will be explained when the second volume, *Ink*, comes out later this year.



SHELF LIFE

Capsule reviews for Ritalin kids by Jim Algie

Lunar Park, Bret Easton Ellis, Picador

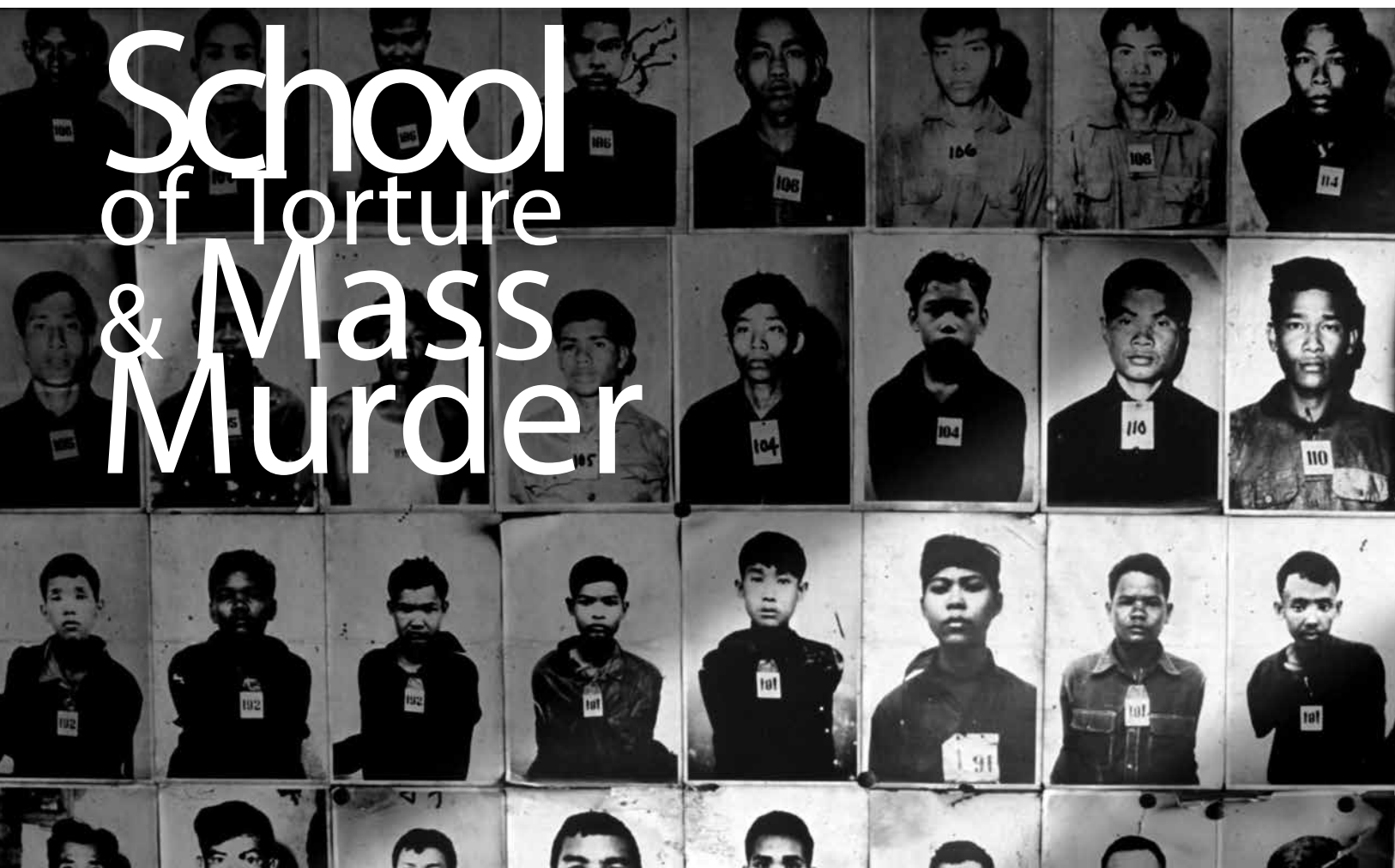
In this memoir-cum-horror novel, Ellis struggles with his demons: cocaine, booze, the ghost of his abusive father, and his most famous character, Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho*. Ellis has described this book as a "homage to Stephen King," but even readers who are not horror-mongers should enjoy his witty and sarcastic reflections on celebrity, suburban boredom, parenting and literature.



ANGKOR: Cambodia's Wondrous Khmer Temples, Dawn Rooney, Odyssey Books & Guides

The fifth edition of this classic book is embellished with 33 sites and details on how to see Angkor from a hot-air balloon or a helicopter. Packed with maps, travel info, history, mythology, outstanding photos and Dawn's wizardry with words, this is a *tour de force* of a ton of temples, and the great beyond, with a whole section about Phnom Penh, too.





*In this excerpt from *The Lost Executioner* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006) author and photographer Nic Dunlop tells how he met “Pol Pot’s chief executioner” in 1999, and how a Vietnamese photographer first exposed Comrade Duch’s chamber of horrors some two decades previously.*

In March 1999, I hitched a ride with a mine-clearance organisation into a former Khmer Rouge zone.

We left Battambang early in the morning and began our journey down Route 10, one of the most fought-over stretches in Cambodia. After an hour of bouncing over spine-jarring roads, past hills that soared like cathedrals from the flat rice plains, we turned left at a junction and all signs of civilisation vanished. There were no houses, no people, no fields. The road was new.

Here the road threaded deep into the mountainous forest close to the Thai border and our ultimate destination: the former Khmer Rouge district of Samlaut. This was the last area to have ceased hostilities with the Cambodian government after more than 30 years of almost continuous upheaval. Samlaut had been the first place to rise up against the government in the late 1960s. And it was here, in June 1998, that the Khmer Rouge finally laid down their weapons, bringing the conflict full cycle and opening the area up to outsiders. Although the war was over, and the Khmer Rouge defunct, the same local leaders remained in control. But the ghosts of the past were still far from being laid to rest.

The jeep jerked to a halt at a military checkpoint marking the start of former Khmer Rouge territory. Shacks of recently returned refugees were huddled in the trees along the side of the road. Young soldiers in government uniforms carried AK-47s and stared impassively at us and, despite our smiles, remained sullen but let us through.

Samlaut had been an area of conflict since the 1960s when a peasant uprising was brutally crushed. Often considered the birthplace of the Khmer Rouge revolution, the area had now arrived at a tense peace. Uniformed Khmer Rouge soldiers mingled with civilians who had returned from refugee camps in Thailand and had begun to rebuild their homes and lives in an area that was heavily mined. It was a bleak part of the country. Dry jungle, denuded forest and neglected farmland bore witness to the years of war.

The mine clearance team I was travelling with had arranged to meet the leaders in the area to discuss the removal of ordinance and hundreds of thousands of mines that lay waiting in the rich soil all around. While the meeting was taking place, I had wandered over to a group of people lying in hammocks beside the district office and begun talking to Khmer

Rouge amputee. A short, wiry man appeared wearing a white T-shirt emblazoned with the initials ARC (American Refugee Committee). Shaking my hand he politely introduced himself in perfect English as Hang Pin. He told me that he had been a schoolteacher specialising in mathematics and that he had originally come from Phnom Penh and had recently worked in a refugee camp on the Thai border. He had worked with American aid organisations since 1997. He took a keen interest in my Leica camera and using this opportunity to photograph the people in the group, I caught him in the frame. Large ears, bad teeth, cropped hair — he had aged a little, but the likeness to the photograph tucked in my back pocket was unmistakable. Hang Pin was Comrade Duch.

For twenty years no-one knew what had happened to Comrade Duch. He had left Phnom Penh with the rest of the Khmer Rouge when the Vietnamese invaded in 1979. On that same day, the 7th January, a Vietnamese photographer crossed Monivong Bridge and entered the deserted city of Phnom Penh. Ho Van Tay had followed the Vietnamese 7th Division Armoured Corps that led the attack into Cambodia on Christmas day 1978. An experienced journalist, Van Tay had covered the war against the Americans as a combat photographer and cameraman and had walked the entire length of the Ho Chi Minh trail, an extremely hazardous journey that took him three months to complete. He had been wounded in the leg during a US bombing raid and had filmed the liberation of Saigon in 1975.

Resistance was light. The Khmer Rouge defence collapsed under the weight of the Vietnamese onslaught. The night before, the division commander had asked Van Tay if he wanted to accompany him to Phnom Penh. They were still some 100 kilometres from the capital and Van Tay had expected the fighting to be heavy and protracted. He had known the Khmer Rouge before and, like many of his fellow countrymen, admired them for being formidable fighters.

“Are you joking?” he asked in disbelief.

The battle-hardened Vietnamese troops had never thought that the Khmer Rouge would give way so easily and many expected that the worst was yet to come, that Phnom Penh would be the place where the Khmer Rouge would make their stand.

“No,” the division commander replied. “This is for real, we’re going to take Phnom Penh.”

Clambering on top of an old American armoured personnel carrier he perched himself among 16 other heavily armed soldiers. The column rumbled its way through the night, arriving on the outskirts of the city at dawn. Cambodian and Vietnamese scouts had gone on in ahead. They waited. They could hear the sound of small-arms fire and the occasional boom of cannon, the echoes rolling through the streets to where they sat. Then, when the news came in over the radios that the city had been liberated, the main Vietnamese regular forces went in. What they found stunned them.

For three years, eight months and twenty days Phnom Penh, under the Khmer Rouge, remained a ghost town. Having evacuated the entire population at gunpoint as part of their radical restructuring of Cambodian society the city, save for a few thousand Khmer Rouge, became nothing more than an empty shell.

The central Monivong Boulevard became a vast deserted canyon where nothing stirred in the tropical heat. Its buildings had been painted white, but the back streets were scattered with the debris of looted buildings. Untamed gardens had begun to reclaim the

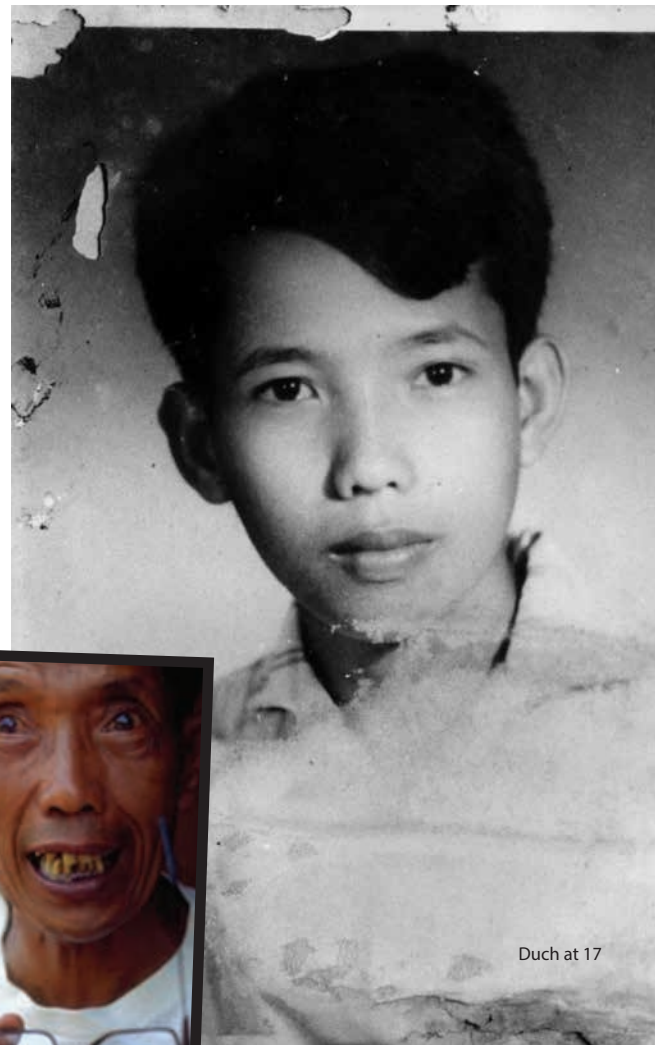
empty houses. Chairs, pots, sewing machines, mattresses and old family photographs lay scattered about in the vacant buildings and deserted streets. Just after the Khmer Rouge had been driven from power, one of the first western journalists to visit Cambodia had walked the entire length of Monivong Boulevard in the early morning, the same distance as from Hyde Park to Clapham Common. He didn’t see a single soul. The Khmer Rouge had blown-up the national bank before their departure and now thousands of useless bank notes fluttered through the vacant streets. The same journalist came across a chequebook on the bank’s counter made out to ‘cash’ and dated 17th April 1975, exactly as its owner had left it three years before.

Street and shop signs had been painted out and cars were swept into huge piles along with dishwashers, fridges and other electronic appliances considered ‘reactionary’ by the Khmer Rouge. There they sat among the weeds, rusting quietly in the scorching heat, no longer of use

Large ears, bad teeth, cropped hair — he had aged a little, but the likeness to the photograph tucked in my back pocket was unmistakable. Hang Pin was Comrade Duch.



Duch in the mid 70's



Duch at 17



Duch in 1999



Peering through the window, he saw the source of the stench: corpses in varying stages of decomposition, chained to iron bedsteads

in the new society. Elsewhere telephones that had been ripped out of buildings from all over the city had been dumped in a large pile, doused with gasoline, and set alight, leaving a blackened mass of melted plastic.

This was the scene that greeted Ho Van Tay when his country's Soviet-built T-55 tanks clattered into the silent city.

The sun was already high in the sky as the column thundered along the empty boulevards, their bewildered troops at the ready. "It was completely quiet," Van Tay recalled. "They didn't find anything. The Khmer Rouge had fled, they had just run away." Little did he realise that pairs of eyes were following their movements from the deserted buildings on either side of them. The grass was growing wild and coconuts lay where they had fallen in the middle of the streets. Armed with a 16mm camera and a Pentax, he shot scenes of the tanks arriving and the flag being raised. He then returned to Ho Chi Minh City with his scoop.

Van Tay delivered his material to his editor in Ho Chi Minh City and returned to Phnom Penh that same night. The traffic was heavy. Passing thousands of troops and columns of tanks, he arrived early the following morning. He filmed Khmer Rouge prisoners who had been captured and rounded up by the Vietnamese and their Cambodian allies, the vast majority of them children. "There were at least 2,000 that I saw and we had to feed them – they were very malnourished." They had been captured on the way to Phnom Penh and brought to a holding centre in the city centre. Most of them were under fourteen years old and a large proportion of them were young girls. Many were so small that they couldn't even carry their own AK-47s. Their fatigues were far too big for them. It was as though the Khmer Rouge army had somehow shrunk in the face of the Vietnamese invasion. Some older cadre were in their twenties, but most had fled leaving an army of confused and frightened children to defend the country.

That same day, at about noon, accompanied by his editor, his camera assistant and a driver, Van Tay drove through the city in an old US army jeep looking for things to film. In one area he came across a series of shop houses containing bizarre stockpiles of items. The first contained a neatly

stacked mountain of shoes that reached the ceiling – but only the left shoe. Next to it there was another shop that contained thousands of right shoes. A whole row of shops contained sewing machines, which had been placed on top of one another. Next to it was another containing stacks of cooking pots, another with chairs and another filled with tables. Then, as Van Tay drove along the road from the Olympic stadium

Name: Nic Dunlop
Age: 37 on October 20th
Birthplace: Dublin, Ireland

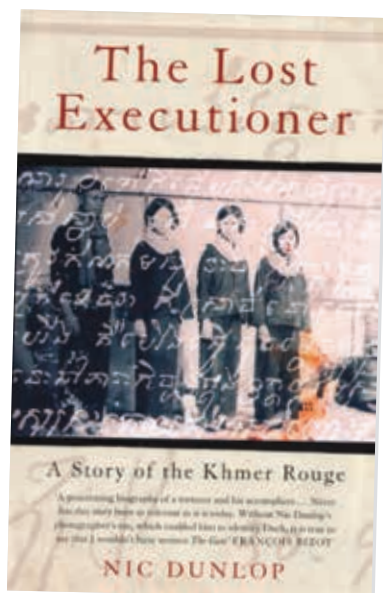
Favourite authors and photographers: Some of the photographers whose work I admire are Philip Jones Griffiths, Eugene Richards, Gilles Peres, Eugene Smith and Josef Koudelka. With writers it's usually a book rather than a writer, eg. *All the Wrong Places* by James Fenton or *Heroes* by John Pilger, *We Wish to Inform You...* by Philip Gourevitch, Evelyn

Waugh's *Scoop*, *Ten Men Dead* by David Beresford, *My Traitor's Heart* by Rian Malan, and *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler.

Most harrowing field work: Confronting Comrade Duch, and some of the work I did on *War of the Mines*, a campaigning book on landmines in Cambodia (Pluto Press, London, 1994).

Future projects: I've been working on a photo-led book on Burma's dictatorship and the way that it impacts the lives of ordinary people. This has been a full-time project for the past 20 months, but some of the work goes back more than 13 years. The completion date is set for March next year.





back towards the Independence monument, he passed through an invisible cloud of the most formidable stench. "I had smelt this smell before," he said. "It was very heavy in the air – not animal, but human. I can still smell it now," he told me as we sat in a hotel foyer in Ho Chi Minh City.

Van Tay and his colleagues followed the stench through what had been a well-to-do neighbourhood, passing large villas as they continued through the streets. "The closer we got, the worse it became," he said. Eventually they came to a corrugated iron wall crowned with

coils of razor wire. A sign above the entrance read, "Ecole Premiere de Tuol Sleng." He prised the gate open and climbed through. They found themselves in the back yard of what had been a large schoolhouse. Rats scattered as they approached. Ahead was a metal-framed structure with a corrugated iron roof and behind it four imposing grey buildings. Pots and chairs and sewing machines lay scattered about. Clothing hung from washing lines and several hammocks were suspended between the trees. It was clear that those who had once occupied the compound had left in a terrible panic.

The balconies of the buildings were covered in a netting of barbed wire; the former play area had recently been ploughed. Inside the rooms they found typewriters, telephones, photographs and office equipment, all of it hastily abandoned. Drawers had been left open and thousands of documents were scattered about. Bullets littered the floor next to a Chinese radio set. In another room they discovered hundreds of stacked fetters and padlocks that hung on nails with numbers next to them. Beside them a spilled bag of lime. Lying on tables were instruments of torture – whips, saws, axes, hoes and batons. Van Tay found busts of Pol Pot and a series of portraits that had been painted from photographs. One of the paintings depicted a particularly demonic-looking Pol Pot barking into a microphone. He crept up the stairs to the second floor of one of the building "There were flies everywhere," he said.

More papers were scattered about amid tufts of hair and large, inch-deep pools of semi-dried blood. Peering through the window, he saw the source of the stench: corpses in varying stages of decomposition, chained to iron bedsteads. There were perhaps twenty or thirty bodies in different rooms – men, women, children – "but it was impossible to tell their ages as they were so decomposed and swollen." Van Tay had to clamber over some of them. Vermin ran everywhere. The victims had been hit on the head with a shovel, their skulls exploding with the impact. "Some of the heads had been completely destroyed," he said. Careful not to disturb anything he tiptoed carefully around the rooms. "There was a popping sound from the maggots under my feet."

Gingerly, he made his way through the four buildings taking pictures as he went. "My hands were shaking I was so afraid." The last of the day's light was beginning to fade as they made their way out. Passing through the gate, Van Tay and his crew discovered four children, including a month-old baby, all of them extremely sick and malnourished. They hurried off in their jeep to seek medical attention and to inform the authorities of what they had found. The Khmer Rouge's darkest secret was about to be exposed to the outside world.

The new paperback edition of The Lost Executioner is available at bookstores in Thailand for Bt450, and all across Asia.

Q&A with Jim Algie and Nic via Email

What was it about seeing The Killing Fields over and over again that inspired you to become a photographer and eventually go to Cambodia? What The Killing Fields did was introduce me to a world I had little knowledge of. I grew up in a sheltered safe universe far from this other world of pain and suffering and I felt as though I had been cheated. It all seemed so perverse and so far from my understanding. Knowing about these things made existence, and my place in it, all the more uncomfortable by not addressing it. Being artistic (I had originally wanted to be a fine artist) photography seemed to me immediate, more political than fine art. As a young teenager the West's involvement in this horrific story shocked and angered me. Art school, and its indifference to the real world, bored me, which is why I left.

In trying to track down the commandant of the Khmer Rouge's secret prison, what were the biggest challenges you faced and how long did it take you to find him?

I suppose the greatest danger was the Khmer Rouge in Samalut. They weren't a friendly bunch. The area had only just opened up and the fighting only just ended. We were far away from any government-controlled zones, so things were still a little tense and it was hard to read the situation. That, for me, was the most uncomfortable thing. From experience I knew that things could change within seconds and without warning.

What were your personal impressions of Duch, the man you describe as "Pol Pot's chief executioner?"

It's six years ago now and I've replayed the experience over and over again in my mind. It was difficult to reconcile the man I met with his record of torture and savagery as commandant of Tuol Sleng. But then I didn't really know what to expect.

Many of the still-surviving leaders of the Khmer Rouge like Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea have shown no remorse at all for their grave misdeeds. What about Duch, who still languishes in jail, while the other two men are free?

Well, if I may, I think people should read the book and then they can judge for themselves...

How do you feel about the upcoming genocide trial in Cambodia?

I think it's important in that two million people still 'missing' are important, not only for those who survived, but also for the new generation who know very little of what occurred. I'm curious of what people in the countryside think. After all, that is where the majority live and it's in their name that the tribunal is being held. This process needs to be understood and made relevant to ordinary people to be meaningful.



On the Wagon



Stu loses his endorsement deal

After years of slobbering the face of doctor's orders, pleas from workmates and threats from girlfriends, both Dan and Stu have finally given up the amber ale and jumped onto the wagon. The office hasn't been the same without these two bright-eyed young scamps taking nips of whiskey under their desks, staggering in from a long lunch or resorting to fisticuffs in the smoking room. Yet It's taken a month of sobriety to get to know these two as they really are: a couple of grouchy assholes.

What fools we've been to waste so many years in the grip of the bottle. The scales have fallen from our eyes, we've accepted the greater power into our hearts and at last, given up the sauce for good. Who could have known that it would be Thailand's new Minister for Health, one Dr. Mongkol na Songkhla, that would point the way? Of course, the reason I was coming home drunk at all hours, belting the wife and kids then passing out only to wake up with my dick in the coleslaw is all because of alcoholic beverage advertising! And all these years I'd thought I was just a dickhead.

Last month it was announced that the good doctor was going to ban all forms of alcohol advertising (TV, radio, print, sponsorship, giveaways, merchandise, point-of-sale, anything with a logo on it, including non-alcoholic products) and, get this, raise the drinking age to 25.

It takes a brave man to put forward such radical ideas, but it looks like the doc, who is unimpaired by such distractions as a democratic mandate (having been appointed by the leaders of September's coup), has a pair of brass balls the size of coconuts.

As it turns out, the new cabinet returned the drinking age proposal to a committee made up of a fistful of ministries whose job will probably be to let the idea sink into the dregs of obscurity it deserves. However, it looks like a blanket-ban on alcohol promotion is going ahead.

But this isn't the great news it may sound like. The thing that has got the brewing industry in a stink is that Chang, beloved of tourists and synonymous with hangovers, sponsors Everton FC in the UK and, as it

turns out, live international games are the only media that will escape censorship. Great for Mr Chang, but it sucks for Mr Singha and his cronies.

They say that Thailand's brewers spend 30 percent of their gross earnings in a competitive war of promotion, which accounts for about three percent of all media spending. Therefore the new regulation takes about three percent off the bottom line of all media, including the esteemed publication you're tightly gripping now. This comes at the end of a year of stagnant growth, and is estimated by Wimonwan Udornporn of Riche Monde (marketer of Johnny Walker) to equal 30,000 job losses, although she may be exaggerating.

But at the end of the day all that will really happen is some media publishers will go broke, beer prices will fall by 30 percent as producers compete over prices and there'll be far less money for sporting events and concerts.

The Bartripping team has never been one to preach restraint but it is clear that Thailand has a problem with alcohol, other than not being able to buy it after midnight. About eight percent of all alcohol consumed (that is, eight percent of all the alcohol that's in beer, wine, whiskey and the rest) comes as *lao khao*, or rice whiskey. Lao khao is cheap, tastes like metho and is available at up to 50 percent strength. It is the tippie of choice for country folk, who abuse it regularly. This damaging local spirit isn't advertised at all, so the irony of this new regulation is that it may have little or no impact on alcohol abuse at all.

Top 5 Drinkers of the 20th Century

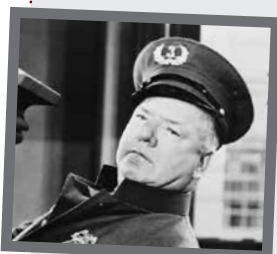
1. Winston Churchill

Having drunk enough brandy and port during the war to float the Royal Navy, Churchill takes top spot, not for his famous quip, "And you, madam, are ugly. But I shall be sober in the morning," in reply to MP Bessie Braddock's accusation that he was drunk, but for going off the bottle for a year in order to win a bet.



2. WC Fields

Everyone likes a funny drunk and WC Fields takes the cake. An unrepentant boozier, who wouldn't drink water, "because fish fuck in it," *Untamed* remembers him for his sound advice, "I like to keep a bottle of stimulant handy in case I see a snake, which I also keep handy."



3. Peter O'Toole

With a private life that overshadowed the giant characters he played on stage and screen, Peter O'Toole was a drunkard's drunk. Whether it was punching out French counts in Paris or setting a new speed drinking record, O'Toole was your man. The light that burns twice as bright fades twice as fast and O'Toole lost his pancreas to booze. "We were silly and young and drunken and jumping up and down and making complete clowns of ourselves. But I did quite enjoy the days when one went for a beer in Paris and woke up in Corsica," he once said.



4. Shane MacGowan

Ireland has produced enough legendary drinkers to fill a book but the singer for the recently reformed Pogues deserves a special mention. Introduced to booze and smokes at age five by his aunt, who extracted a promise that he wouldn't worship the devil in return, MacGowan became one of the world's most important and poetic songwriters while working on becoming one of



the drinking world's icons. And the secret of his success? "The most important thing to remember about drunks is that drunks are far more intelligent than non-drunks. They spend a lot of time talking in pubs, unlike workaholics who concentrate on their careers and ambitions, who never develop their higher spiritual values, who never explore the insides of their head like a drunk does." MacGowan's our favourite because he used to come to Thailand and write songs about Pattaya and Singha beer.

5. Charles Bukowski

Not a drinker to emulate, the notoriously sleazy author of *Women and All the Assholes in the World and Mine* liked to boast that he'd drunk more hard liquor in his life than most men had drunk water. A career at the post office and other dead-end jobs is enough to drive anyone to drink but this brew-hound wrote about going on week-long benders at the bottom of LA's barrel. Making a name for himself as a poet and novelist late in life, he was rewarded after the hard yards, spending his last years careening around LA with Sean Penn and Madonna for company. Although he was known as a vomiter, it was leukaemia that got him in the end. Last year, a cinematic version of his novel *Factotum* starred Matt Dillon as the wandering dipsomaniac, Henry Chinaski.



Honourable Mentions

Boris Yeltsin: The only man to drink a nation dry.

Jim Thompson: Not the silk trader in Thailand, but the father of modern crime fiction.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: For a man who couldn't hold his drink, he sure was keen on it.

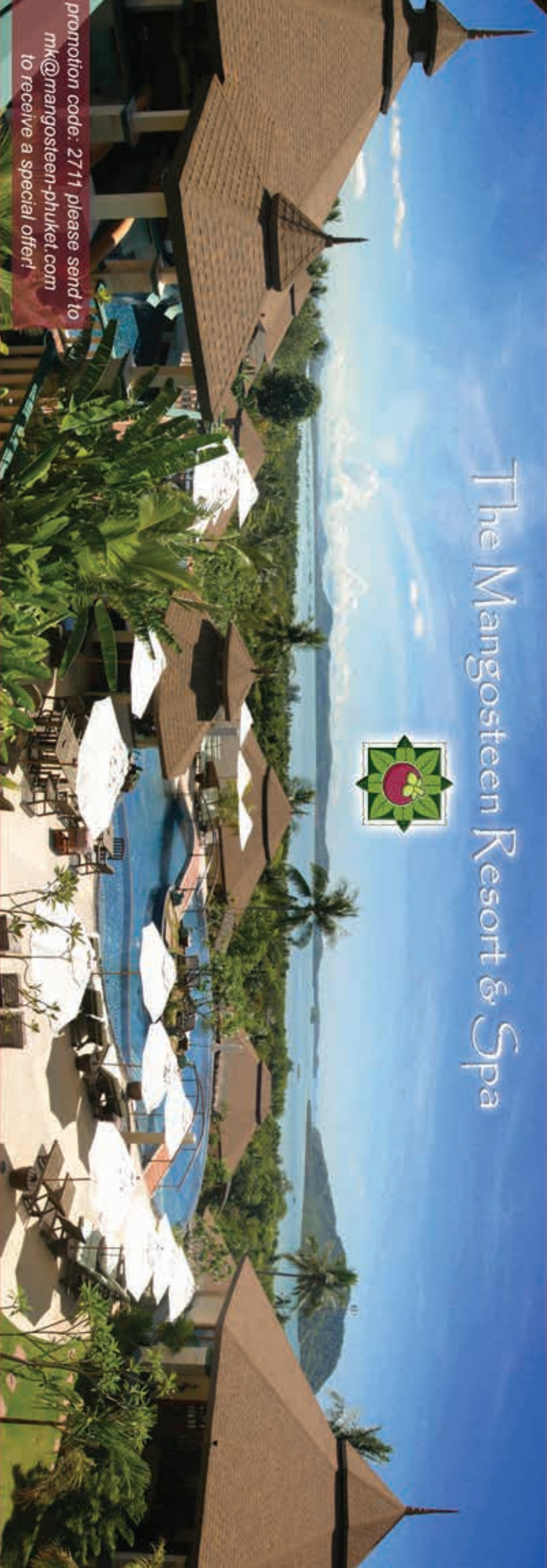
Sam Peckinpah: Director of *Straw Dogs* and *The Wild Bunch* set the standard for drinking in the directors chair.

Dean Martin: The king of the martini turned being drunk on camera into an art form.

Keith Richards: Doesn't make it onto the list as drink is just another one of Keef's vices, but he rates a mention.

George Best: Not easy to keep out of the top five, but hitting the sauce after getting a new liver just isn't on.

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Computer Lackey's Syndrome

The main occupational and recreational hazard for office serfs and gamers is a repetitive strain injury? Jim Algie is one of the typing wounded.

When I first mentioned to some of my male friends that I'd been afflicted with a repetitive strain injury, or RSI, the replies were unanimous: Change your wanking hand. Trouble was, and still is, it's my left hand and not Onan's little helper.

The overtures of this ailment began with a sporadic migraine in what might pass for the muscles in my left shoulder and around the top of that arm. Now and then, tingles like mild electric shocks would spider down my arm and scurry around the fingers of my left hand. I waited for a month to see if the pains would cease their complaining. But they only grew more insistent.

At long last I had to see a doctor for a full check-up. I hate doctors. They're forever putting their metaphorical heads up your ass and asking you the most probing questions like, "Is there any blood in your stools?" "Tell you the truth, doc, I haven't been checking that closely."

When I explained the symptoms at first the doctor thought it might be carpal tunnel syndrome (one kind of RSI). This ailment likes to squat in your wrists. It often attacks assembly-line workers. With computer lackeys like me – and pianists and guitarists – it's a more general RSI that wreaks havoc in the tendons, muscles and nerves around your shoulder and upper arms.

The doctor suggested I see a specialist at the hospital's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Department. The specialist confirmed my suspicions of the modern office worker's main occupational hazard. Still, I was stunned to learn that around 70 percent of the patients undergoing physiotherapy in this department are suffering from a computer-caused RSI. Some of the patients – fanatical gamers welded to their Playstations for 10 and 12 hours at a stretch – are in their early teens.

The doctor prescribed a course of painkillers and muscle relaxants called Noragesic, as well as an anti-inflammatory drug. The next day I began physiotherapy. The treatment consists of ultrasound, in which a nurse puts cooling gel on the infected areas and runs the nozzle of the machine over them for about 20 minutes.

After this, the nurse had me lay down on a bed, wrapped a heated towel around my neck like a shawl and fastened another pad around my left bicep. She turned up the electricity to send interferon waves shooting down my arm to reenergize the frazzled nerves and get the stagnant blood flow circulating again.

Then the doting, maternal nurse put a blanket over me and tucked me in for a 20-minute siesta; it's the closest I've ever come to being an infant again. That's the positive side of being a one-armed gimp. As my friend Rich said, "The whole reason people get sick is so they can see nurses."

The physiotherapy costs around Bt1,300 per session. And they recommend at least two or three sessions a week. One of the nurses told me that the minimum cure for any RSI is about five sessions. Therapy

must go hand in hand with proper posture (no slouching in your chair), using an ergonomic keyboard, and taking a break from the computer at least every two hours to do some stretching exercises. (These are also good preventive measures to stave off an affliction down the line.)

After about six or seven sessions, the pains and creepy-crawly tingles had lessened to the point where I thought I was cured. Wrong. The illness was laying dormant, waiting to be reawakened by another deadline grind. This is also common. A nurse told me that many of their patients come back for another round of physiotherapy sessions every month or two.

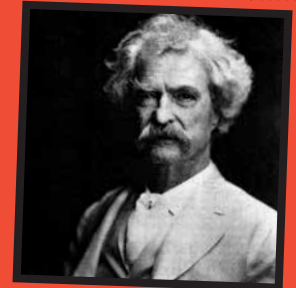
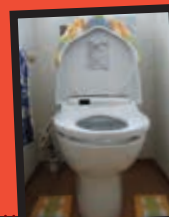
RSIs are like greedy imperialists and locust plagues. They eat away at your tendons and nerves and then keep moving. Now the pain – an almost constant ache at the top of my left arm – is working its way down to the bicep, and muscle spasms in my back make it seem like a couple of tendons are trying to leap out of my skin and immigrate to a healthier body. Yet more sessions and more anti-inflammatory drugs are on the way. At least my surrogate mummy is tucking me in again and the doctor has put me on some heavier morphine-based painkillers.

But this is the aggravating payback for cranking out some two million words of journalism and fiction over the last 25 years and editing about 10 times that amount, trying to make prima donna, agrammatical hacks look like they're semi-competent. I just hope you ungrateful pricks appreciate it. And if you don't, my right arm is still capable of delivering a decent right hook.

Like with any illness, the psychological traumas – bitterness and hostility – are just as debilitating as the physical effects.

HEALTH SCARE

According to the World Health Organisation, 42 percent of the world's population does not have access to proper toilet facilities. Because they have to urinate and defecate outdoors, they are much more susceptible to diarrhea, which kills 50 million people every year.



DOSE OF HUMOUR

"Quitting smoking is easy. I've done it many times."

- Mark Twain

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the joy LUXX club

Jetsetter and lover of fine things, Oliver Benjamin visited Bangkok recently and only the best of boutique accommodation would do. Photos by Daniel Cooper.

In big old Bangkok, *large* has unfortunately become wholly synonymous with *good*. Shopping malls compete to outdo each other for acreage, the biggest restaurant in the world serves 10,000 people a day, the new airport has the tallest control tower, and so many people are buying such massive SUVs that wing mirror pieces pile up on the sides of smaller *sois*.

Which is why it's so refreshing to come across a hotel like LUXX. Advertised as "The smallest hotel in Bangkok," it feels more like you're staying in a cozy luxury apartment block than some faceless, internationally branded tourist ziggurat. Forget about any hackneyed "traditional Thai" décor or sterile cookie-cutter five-star setup: The 13 lovely rooms at the four-storey LUXX look like they came straight out of some modern lifestyle mag, complete with sleek long lines, soft cottons and canvas, and tons of wood (they even have wooden tubs!).

A few other noteworthy ingredients: free wireless Internet, plasma screen TVs, personal DVD player, a kitchenette (with a manual juicer), hot beverage facilities, floor-to-ceiling windows, and a perfect central location just off Silom. The breakfast included is gut-bustingly massive; the "bed of heaven" is only slightly hyperbolic; there's an impressive reading library in the lobby; and last but not least, they provide you with a special box of aromatherapy toiletries to help erase the residue of that crazy city outside.

Oh, and the staff is really friendly and everyone calls you by



your name. It's kind of like staying with family – if your family was rich, stylish, helpful, generous and left you alone when you wanted them to. But anyone with a family like that doesn't need to travel.

Despite all this, the best thing about LUXX, however, might just be the tab. Ranging from Bt3,300 baht for a small studio to Bt6,200 for a huge, 50-square-metre, two-room suite, the “hip and trendy” traveller (or even the indie voyageur looking to splurge a bit) can really enjoy a big dish of swish in a city overloaded with mediocre, impersonal and overpriced crash closets.

Aside from the obvious connotation with “luxury,” LUXX also happens to mean “joy” in Sanskrit. It seems that joyous things do come in small packages, and if this hotel is anything to go by, the magnitude-obsessed architects of Bangkok would do well to think a bit smaller from time to time.

The LUXX hotel is located at 6/11 Decho Road, Bangrak Bangkok. Tel: 02-635-8800 or check www.staywithluxx.com for rates and bookings.



It's kind of like staying with family – if your family was rich, stylish, helpful, generous and left you alone when you wanted them to



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. Bt1,100-2,100. Inviting rooms, botanical garden grounds.
Pathumwan House: 22 Soi Kasem San 1, Rama I Rd (Skytrain National Stadium), tel: 02-612 3580 Bt 1,000-1,400. Big rooms and bird-caged décor.
PJ Watergate: 467 Soi Watanasil, Rachaprarop Rd, tel: 02-933 2874, www.pjwatergate.com Bt943-1,150. 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

Bt1,540-2,090. Wooden and honey-toned luxury.
Anna's Café & Bed: 44/16 Convent Rd, (Skytrain Sala Daeng), tel: 02-632-1323 Bt950. A bargain for the area.
Bangkok Christian Guest House: 123 Sala Daeng Soi 2, Convent Rd, tel: 02-233 6303, www.bcgh.org Bt1,100-1,800. Christian-principled boarding house.
Bossotel Inn: 55/12-14 Soi Charoenkrung, 42/1 Bangrak, tel: 02-630 6120/9, www.bossotelinn.com Bt1,400-4,000. Boutique hotel.
La Residence Hotel: 173/8-9 Surawong Rd, (Skytrain Chong Nonsi), tel: 02-233-3301, www.laresidencebangkok.com Bt1,200-3,700. Swanky boutique style, each room has different décor.
Niagara Hotel: 26 Soi 9/ Suksavithaya, Silom Rd. (Skytrain Chong Nonsi) tel: 02-233 5783 Bt680. Value for money.
Penguin House: 27/23 Sribumpen, Yenakat Rd, Sathorn, tel: 02-679 9991/2 Bt570-800. Funky, Thai-style guesthouse.
The Urban Age: 130/6, Soi 8 Silom Rd, tel: 06-883 9583, www.guesthouse-bangkok.com

Bt235-610. Shared/private rooms. Stylish, backpacker haven.
Urban House: 35/13 Soi Yommarat, Saladaeng Rd, tel: 01-492-7778, www.urbanh.com Bt800-1,300. Backpacker den. Free bottled water every day!

SUKHUMVIT

Bangkok Boutique Hotel: 241 Sukhumvit 21, Asoke, tel: 02-261 2850/4, www.bangkokboutiquehotel.com Bt1,440-4,921. Affordable, contemporary luxury.
Buri B&B: 58/14-15 Sukhumvit 55 Sukhumvit Rd, tel: 02-714 1508. Bt400-500. Modern Thai-style with net-café.
Big John's Guesthouse Hotel: 159/12 Sukhumvit 55 (between Thonglor soi 7 & 9), tel: 02-712 9712. Bt175-390. Shared/private rooms. Cheap and cheerful. Great location.
Hi-Sukhumvit: 23 Sukhumvit Soi 38, Sukhumvit Rd (Skytrain Thonglor), tel: 02-391 9338/9 Bt250-850. 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

Bt700-1,000. Comfort on a backpacker budget.
Suk 11: Sukhumvit Soi 11, (Skytrain Nana), tel: 02-253-5927, www.suk11.com Bt450-1,300. Shared/private rooms. A pleasant hangout.
The Atlanta: 78 Sukhumvit Soi 2, (Skytrain Ploenchit), tel: 02-252 1650, www.theatlantahotel.bizland.com Bt450-1,300. 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 Bt400-600. Quirky Victorian-style setting.
Buddy Lodge: 265 Khaosan Rd, tel: 02-629 4477, www.buddylodge.com Bt1,800-2,200. Up market and modern.
D&D Inn: 68-70 Khaosan Rd, tel: 02-629-0526, www.khaosanby.com Bt450-900. Good value rooms.
Sawasdee Group: tel: 02-280 1251, www.sawasdee-hotels.com Five guesthouses throughout Banglamphu. Bt140-800. Thai-style hangouts.
Thai Cozy House: 111/1-3 Taneer Rd, tel: 02-629 5870-4 Bt650-1,000. Three minutes' walk from Khaosan Rd for boutique comfort.
Thai Hotel: 78 Prajatipatai Rd, Pranakorn, tel: 02-677 6240-5 Bt560-1,800 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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UNPLANNED TRAVEL

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 **Vissavana 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 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 Prachatipok 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

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.

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



You wait for hours and they all come at once before you get a chance to finish your fag

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 B150 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.

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



No, we demand to be taken to a gem shop and get cheated out of our holiday money.

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 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



There's a backpacker born every minute.

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

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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

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 Bt25 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 hoipot. 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 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



When someone shouted "duck!" Harvey, being a duck, dismissed it as a taunt. Then his head was cut off.

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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.



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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 Mydopilafó.

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 TEPAN 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.

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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
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.



DARK SIDE OF THE SPOON

Words by Oliver Benjamin

THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD EGGS

Everyone knows that, like a fine wine, eggs just get better with age. Clever Chinese cooks just figured out a way to speed up the process. These black eggs are rumoured to taste a bit like cheese, though no one has ever been brave enough to find out. In shops they have pink shells. At restaurants they are usually served with fresh slices of ginger and onions and a sprinkling of peanuts. The Thai slang term for them is "horse-piss eggs" (*yam kai yeeo mah*), as they are sometimes cured in horse urine. Like now you want one.

GIUSTO (ITALIAN)
16 Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain Asoke, MRT Sukhumvit), 11:30am-2pm, 02-258 4321, major cards
Sleek, contemporary-styled Italian with its 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 brassiere 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.

SCOOZI (ITALIAN)

174/3-4 Surawongse Road, (Skytrain Saladaeng), Noon-2:30pm, 6pm-11pm, 02-243 0943, major cards
Another long-time Bangkok favourite, Scoozi 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), 11am-2am, 02-632 7898, major cards
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, 1 1am-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, Chakkrapong 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 POKHANA (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 gourmands, 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.



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Turkey Armageddon

Never mind the fact that the US of A is a million miles away (well 11,000 to be exact), Bangkokians can rustle up a party over any occasion, and this month marks the arrival of Thanksgiving. American expats are expected to invade and occupy the city's restaurants to celebrate the end of the harvest, unless they're Canadian, who celebrate thanksgiving on the second Monday of October. The Square restaurant at Novotel, Siam Square are hosting a buffet dinner brimmed to the hilt with bread stuffing, cranberry sauce and all the usual trimmings, whilst The Bull's Head promise to serve up juicy turkey cuts, gourmet sandwich style. To win your turkey wishbone head to Novotel, Siam Square on Oct 23rd for their special American-style dishes starting from Bt600.

Gobble The Bull's Head's special menu stocked with turkey-a-plenty throughout November.



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 Bt90 and up. Happy hour is 6-9pm. Tuesday is two for one beers after 9pm, with gravel-voiced blues diva Georgia singing.

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.

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 1am 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

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 Ploenchit), 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 (Bt85-700) 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. 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.*

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.



At the soon to be banned whiskey and beer fun park

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 Bf100 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). Bf500 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 Bf500 (Tue, Fri, Sat) and Bf400 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.dublinaeria.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

Bottle brunette



Scoring This Month

SPOTLIGHT: Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th - Bangkok's 6th Fat Festival rules this weekend under the 'No Angel or Satan' banner and promises three themed stages of musical mayhem. This year's new addition of the 'three minute magic stage' gives any festival-goer the chance to snatch their three minutes of fame in any way they want!

The devil rides out at Challenger Hall, Muang Thong Thani. See www.myspace.com/fatfestival for more details Saturday the 4th - Dude/Sweet host the after party for Elle Fashion Week at Central World. Starts 10pm.

Saturday the 4th - See Yngwie Malmsteen's guitar tricks at the Unleash The Fury World Tour 2006, at Thunder Dome, Muang Thong Thani. From 7pm onwards.

Tuesday the 7th - The UK's DJ Shortie Blitz drops in at Bed Supperclub laden with blingin', crunk, hip hop bangers.

Friday the 10th - Astra hosts Absolute New York Rock, garage underground riffs from Nick Zimmer (guitarist from the Yeah Yeah Yeahs).

Thursday the 16th - Hailed as Germany's answer to David Bowie and Iggy Pop, indie rockers, Diva International play the Goethe Institut Bangkok.

Thursday the 16th - Electro punk posers, SHITDISCO shake down at Jazz It, RCA.

Friday 24th and Saturday 25th - Motorola's 'Rising Soundz' claims to be the 'first and biggest street festival in Asia'. Taking place in the clubs and closed streets of the RCA, the TAT and Thai Airways, sponsors of the event promise a musical feast of cutting edge genres from 40 artists and DJs.

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 publife. For the *keeneow* (stingy), alcoholic, footie fans or all of the above, Saturday is the official Tiger beer Premier League day with pitchers of Tiger Bt100 from 2pm-2am!

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 'nufood menu' which just about sums up the mix of Thai, Tex-Mex and international favourites. Downstairs the bar features prominently in this clean white space. Live music 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 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.

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.buddylodge.com, major cards except Amex.* Huge bar hidden in the bowels of Buddy Lodge. The Brick Bar is notable as one of the few venues on Khaosan to feature live bands on a regular basis (Jazz, Blues, Ska

from 8pm). Get a seat on the upstairs balcony to check out the crowd, below.

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 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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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 hippology), 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 (maesaelephantcamp.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.



Beauty Suit, not Birthday Suit

They say beauty is in the eye of the beholder but the cunning artists of Chiang Mai examine just what it is that turns a fellow's head. Beauty Suit: Such is Life "includes a lively mix of installation performance and video art developed by artists in collaboration with communities in Chiang Mai, Udonthani, Yunnan and Sydney."

The exhibition launches from 3pm to 8pm on Saturday the 11th of November at the Doi Suthep Nature Study Centre, Chiang Mai University. Get there early before the free wine and cheese runs out. Beauty Suit: Such is Life runs until the end of November and is supported by the Heinrich Böll Foundation Thailand.

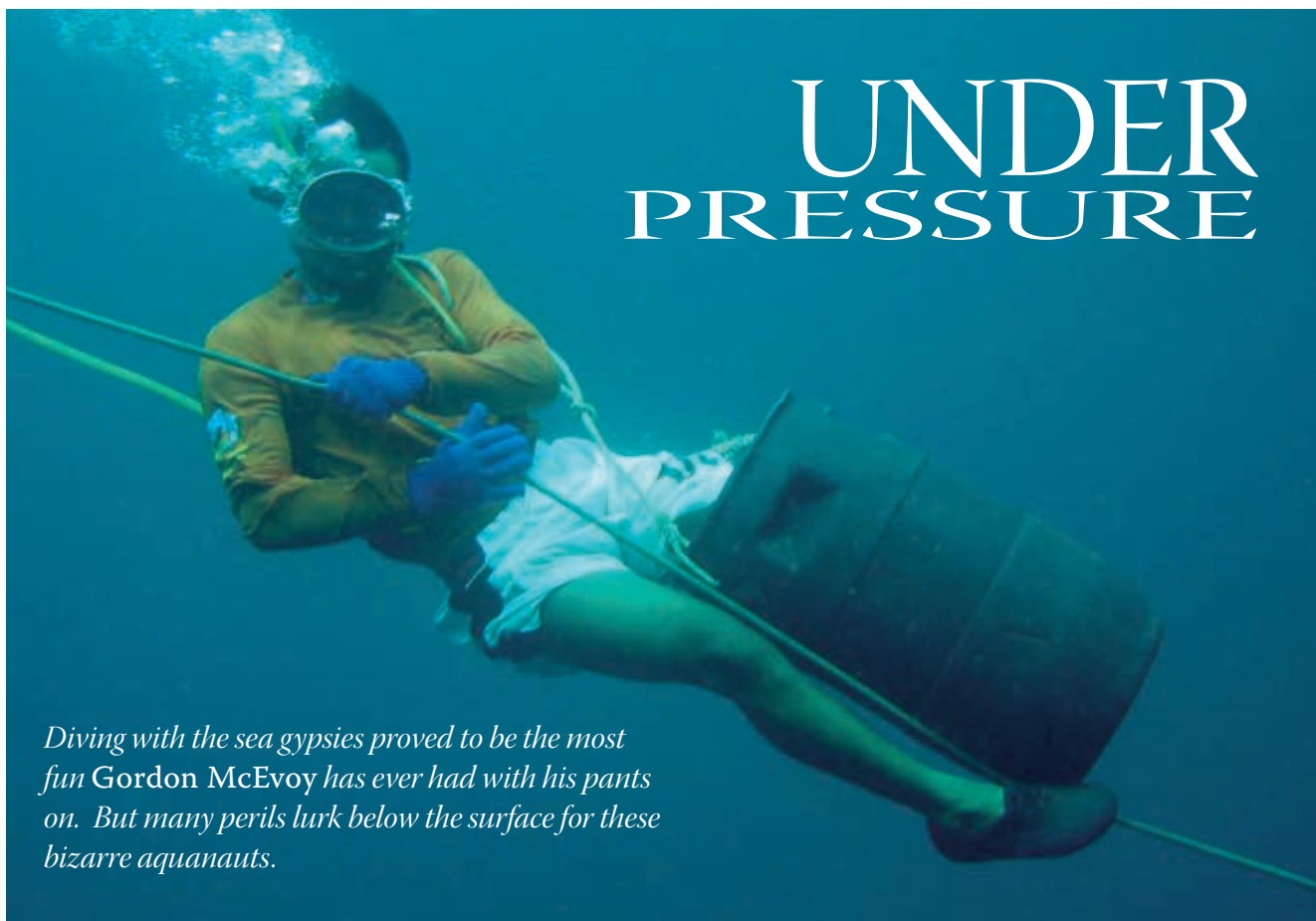
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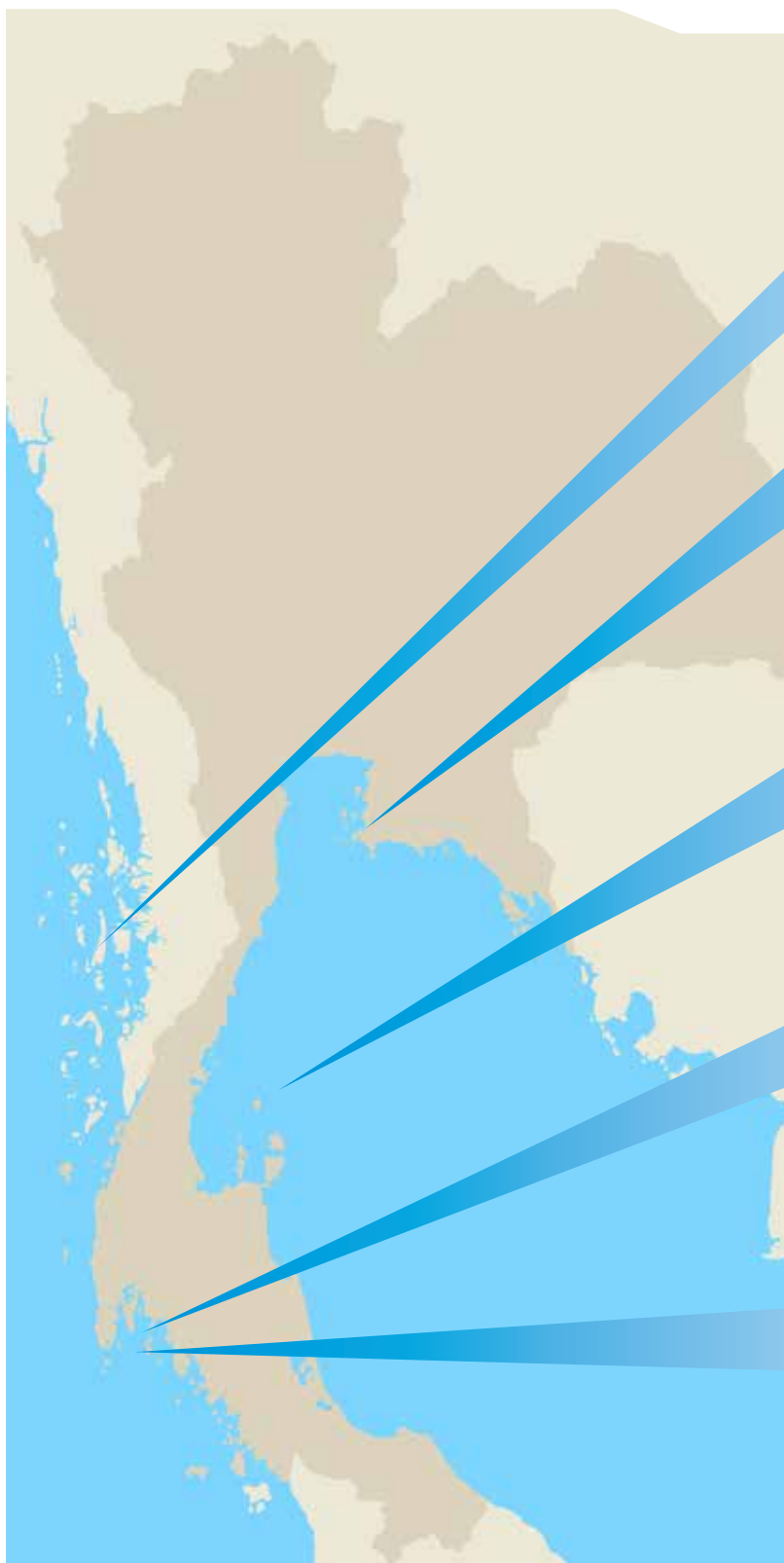


UNDER PRESSURE

Diving with the sea gypsies proved to be the most fun Gordon McEvoy has ever had with his pants on. But many perils lurk below the surface for these bizarre aquanauts.

The Taratao National Marine Park is Thailand's final frontier for scuba diving but I did not scuba dive and neither did the Chao-le ("people of the sea," or "sea gypsies"). SCUBA stands for "Self-contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus." To harvest their rattan fish traps from the sea floor, these divers use an aging air compressor as their breathing apparatus. Being neither self-contained nor underwater, it remained on the boat, coughing up black smoke. Pumped through a long breathing hose, the air connected directly to the lungs of the Chao-le aquanauts via a bicycle tire inner-tube nipple, spliced into a black rubber diving mask. These guys don't wear fins or weight belts, either, which would only slow them down. This is not recreational, PADI-certified scuba diving. There are no licenses or safety stops. Instead, it is dangerous, physically demanding work, reserved for the amphibiously fit and fearless. Tor and Wat, aged 19 and 22, led our team. To guard against theft by local pirates, the traps remain unmarked by surface buoys. We had 20 sites to check, some with four to five traps each. Standing tall on the bow of the long-tail boat, Tor directs the driver, eyeballing imaginary cross-hairs, which run from mountain landmarks on distant islands. On the first dive the anchor drop misses its mark, the divers follow and Wat pulls himself hand over fist along the rope, bullying down a big plastic barrel. On the sandy bottom, both fishermen pick up good-sized rocks, cradling them against their bellies. Amazed, I watch them run along the sea floor, faster than I can swim, searching for their traps, which explains their preference for light plastic shoes. Part of their speed can be explained by the fact they're pumped up on compressed air. I free-dive as deep as I can, re-surfacing only when in need of air. Tor and Wat dive deep and surface fast at a dangerous rate throughout the day. Wat ties the barrel to the top of the first loaded trap and places it over his

head, his over-charged mask fills the upside-down barrel with a sizeable pocket of excess air. The trap floats, full of flapping dusky jacks, red snapper, and a good-sized moray eel. Wat wrangles the ungainly contraption to the surface in a confusing blaze of bubbles. Raked of the bounty, the trap is dropped, and the divers follow, re-securing it before 'running' on to the next trap. Lipe dive-masters often find the Chao-le traps set 30 meters or more around popular dive sites such as "Eight-mile Rock," a deep rising pinnacle frequently surrounded by barracuda, manta rays, and occasionally, whale sharks. Before the arrival of air compressors on Lipe, Chao-le divers would set traps in the shallow coral reefs, using only carved wooden goggles fit with crude glass lens. This unaided skin-diving technique previously limited both depth and the number of possible dives. Modern air compressors aid the Chao-le's aquatic traditions but there are negatives. Their ability to dive unnaturally deep pushes safe diving limits, established by the professional community and exposes these men to the dangers of decompression sickness. I saw middle-aged Chao-le fishermen walking with a staggering limp. This painful condition, commonly linked to nervous system damage, results from pressurized air breathed in at depth, which then expands in the blood stream on a quick ascent. In the past, the fishermen attributed their injuries to malevolent sea spirits lurking in the darker water and colder currents encountered at deeper depths. But in the face of mounting medical evidence, these deeply animistic thinkers, who previously maintained a blurred distinction between their physical and spiritual worlds, can no longer afford to do so. *On the upside, a local NGO currently educates the Lipe Chao-le fishing community about the scientific principles associated with their injuries and encourages safer diving practices.*



THE SIMILANS

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

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.

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koh 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.



Fish tickling: taking the fashion world by storm



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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 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 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 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 BUDDHA/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

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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 Country Club** (07-741 8557), or try mini golf at **Yogi Bear Ha Ha** (01-787 9148), situated on a back road between Bohput 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 Bt150 per 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.

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 Pangan 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.

koh PANGAN

Whist 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 it's 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** (Bt500 - Bt5,000) and **Jonathan** are classy joints. **Drop Inn** (Bt2,350 - 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** (Bt1,000-2,500), **Phangan Buri** (Bt2,100-4,100) and **Vimarn Samut** (Bt1,250-5,600) 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 (Bt450-2,100) has aircon bungalows, swimming pool and sauna and **Hunsa Resort** (Bt650-2,500) in Ban Tai Village has aircon beachfront rooms with minibars, baths and TVs. **Milky Bay** (Bt1,200-4,000), **Morning Star** and **Dewshore** (Bt550-3,500) are also recommended. Do check out **Santhiya**, Koh Pangan's first luxury resort.

WEST SIDE

The west coast of Koh Phangan 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 Cabana** (Bt800-1,800). **See Thanu** (Bt250-2,500) and the bohemian **Sea Flower**. **The Village Green**

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UNTAMED TRAVEL

(Bt350-1,400) serves fantastic Euro-Asian cuisine.

Had Son resort (Bt400-12,000) 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** (Bt400-2,700) 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** (Bt1,700-4,000). 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** (Bt200-2,500) has some great aircon rooms. Had Khom and **Coral Bay** (Bt1,500) 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!

NIGHTTRIPPING

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 HQ 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 moon. 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; Bt80 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.

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).

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 Bt400 for a fan room, double that for aircon. Check out www.unfamed-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.

<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 *Partnering THE WAY*</p> <p>www.kp-property.com</p> <p>Invest in one of the fastest growing property markets in Asia with Koh Phangan'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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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 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 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**



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UNTAMED TRAVEL

Restaurant, Chalok Baan Kao, has beautiful views from its open-air restaurant, serving fresh seafood.

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.



Coconuts, like death, often come in threes

PHUKET

Thailand's biggest island also has big ambitions and has played host to the likes of Henry Kissinger and the Beckhams. Nonetheless, there is a range of possibilities, limited only by the imaginations of entrepreneurs and punters. And yes, the tsunami damage is all better now.

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

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Sairee beach

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Koh tao

UNTHINKED TRAVEL



Is it still paradise
if parmesan cheese is unavailable?

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 **Mangosteem**. 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 **Mangosteem** 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 at **Nikita's** (076-288 703) on the east end of the beach and work you 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 ambience with food matching the interior quality. **Natural Restaurant** behind the open market is Phuket's funkiest dining - budget an extra hour to check out the creative junkyard art. Food as exciting as the ambience, 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

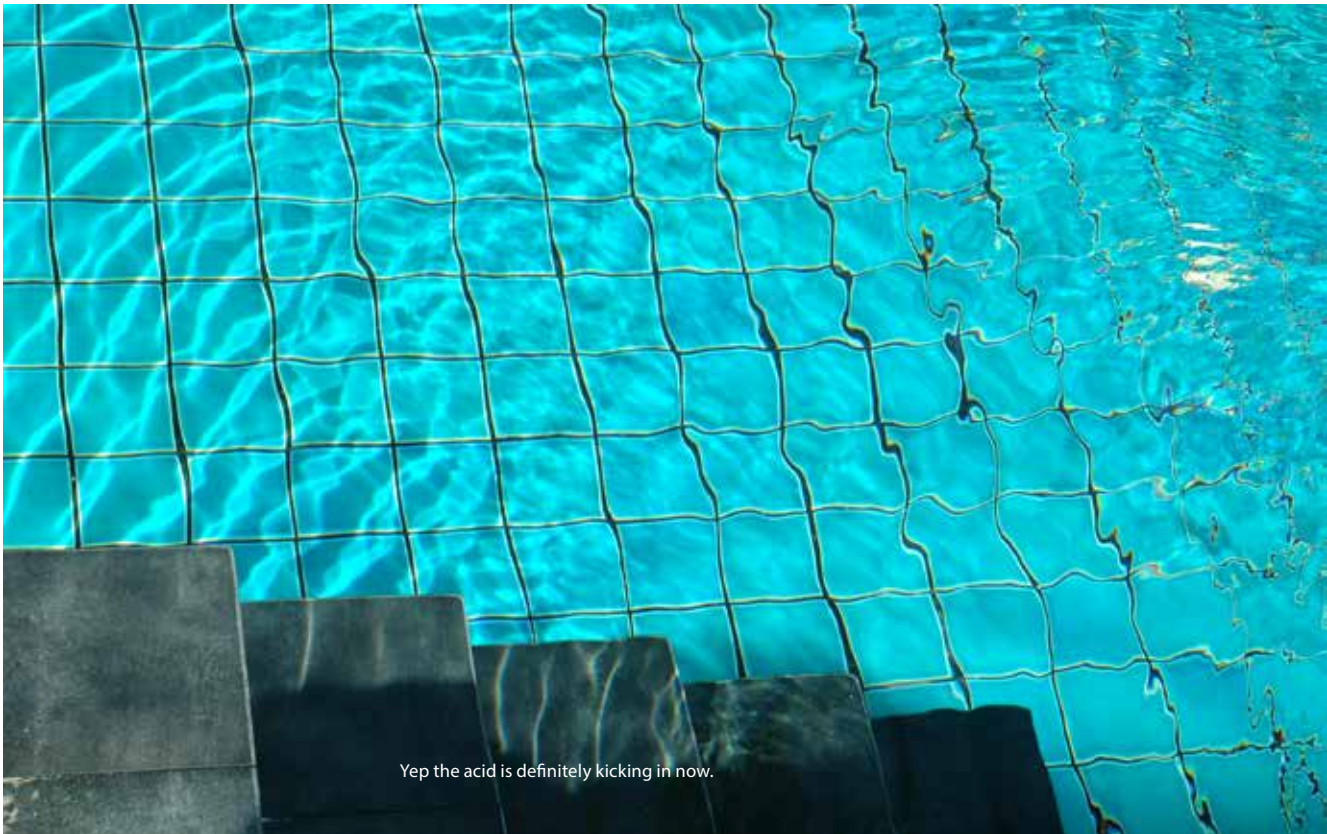
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Yep the acid is definitely kicking in now.

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 Thais 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.

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: B1,700

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

island is an easy-going "largely unknown" end of the tourist trail where Thai-Buddhists, Chinese-Thais, Thai-Muslims and "Sea Gypsies" all live together in harmony. Reputed to be "the island with no road," Lanta has laid a proper tarmac surface ensuring a safer and cleaner journey than ever. Rent some wheels to explore its significant charms but drive with care: dogs; goats; people and other traffic will force evasive manoeuvres. What makes for an interesting stay are all the caves, sea views, empty beaches, local villages, ocean-side bars and some of the best diving in Thailand. Accommodation varies from the cheapest, old-style bamboo bungalow up to five-star resorts offering rooms of mind-blowing luxury.

ACCOMODATION

The **RawiWarin** Resort opened in 2006 on Khlong Toab Beach. Asia's first "ocean-pool" and wonderful rolling gardens

koh
LANTA

Lanta is open during low season – and it's the best time of the year to visit. The

UNPACKED TRAVEL

are two of the lures at the latest five-star resort on Lanta. Rooms cost from Bt4,900 to Bt45,000. On Pra-ae beach **Relax Bay** is a wonderful resort with a semi-private setting to match. Rooms cost between Bt500 and Bt2,000. You'll also find **Lanta Garden Hill Resort**, Bt600 and Bt800. **Ozone Bar** has rooms for Bt200 on a deserted five kilometre beach. On Last Beach the **Bamboo Resort** is in its own stunning, "secret" location, with rooms for around Bt200.

FEEDING TIME

Lanta offers a great mix of everything, from small wooden shacks (try the **Thai-Isaan Restaurant**, Khlong Dao for some tantalizing surprises), beachfront eateries and still-top restaurants on the water in Saladan to some classy European food as well. **Faim de Loup Bakery** on Pra-ae beach fulfils all of your patisserie-based cake and bread cravings. Seafood galore is the speciality at the aptly named **Saladan Seafood** in Saladan; the sustenance is cheap and fresh, so you can sit back and enjoy the breeze wafting over the channel as you tuck into a towering plate of unending shellfish. **Mr. Wee's Pizza** on Pra-ae beach, at the **Ozone Bar**, does superb pizzas. **Relax Bay** in Pra-ae boasts a menu of European/Thai fusion food for reasonable prices in a lovely setting on their secluded private beach. Also in Pra-ae is the infamous **Red Snapper** – the island's true cordon bleu establishment with prices to match – which is nestled in a lovely tropical garden. Another wonderful choice, with a selection of mouth-watering fare is **Mr. Beans**; it's earned an enviable reputation for providing the weary traveller with the best pub-food available. Homemade sausages, Sunday roasts, meat and veg, a cold beer on the beach in Khlong Nin – you can't go wrong.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Although it usually quiets down by 10pm, there are still

a few establishments which go on into the early hours of the morning. All of them are located in Pra-ae. **Ozone Bar** is a busy old place with a motley crowd of local expats and tourists alike. Located on the beach it is the ideal location to ensure you wake up in the blazing sunlight with beach dogs licking your face and sand stuck to your ears. **Opium Bar** is another lively establishment and probably the closest thing that Lanta has to a nightclub. Great tunes, affordable drinks, fun staff, pool table, frequent BBQs and more. As with most areas in Thailand, Lanta also has its **Reggae House**. Sometimes they host live bands; at other times it will just be up to you to join the DJ on one of the many bongo drums scattered around the bar.

DAYTRIPPING

Tham Mai Geao and **Tham Seua** caves are worth a look but wear something that you don't mind getting covered in terracotta mud. The waterfall is famed for being nothing more than a trickle, but it still makes a lovely walk through the jungle via a wonderful viewpoint overlooking Lanta's southern islands. Koh Muk, Koh Kradan and Koh Ngai are impeccably beautiful. Hit Koh Muk, swim through a pitch-black tunnel piercing a vertical, karst-limestone rock formation and exit onto *The Beach!* Really, a beach in a land-locked sinkhole in the middle of an island – bizarre. Lanta can nearly guarantee you a dive with manta rays. Ask **Lanta Diver**, **Blue Planet Divers**, **Go Dive**, **Scool Divers**, **Ko Lanta Diving Centre** or **Dive and Relax**. Very cool but hot springs at **Bor Nam Pu Ron** are on the mainland, plus there's a deserted giant waterfall at **Hin Tok Hin Pheung**. Lanta also has plenty of mangroves to kayak around.

WAY TO GO

Ferries run from Phuket, Krabi and Phi Phi during high season, starting in November and ramping up until high season ends in May. Mini-

buses from Krabi and Trang go year-round and cost about Bt250. Trains run from Bangkok to Trang overnight for around Bt1,000.

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.

NIGHTTRIPPING

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,

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PADI



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 ฿900. The **Somkiet Buri** resort is in a wonderful location with rooms that go for about ฿1,200. Nowadays, the average "budget" fan-room in Ao Nang comes with hot water, TV and costs in the region of ฿350. Numerous guesthouses behind the beachfront are a safe bet with friendly staff.

NIGHTTRIPPING & 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**.

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 ensuite 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.

NIGHTTRIPPING

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.

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.

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 Bt300 and go up from there. There are the usual luxury hotels such as the **Amari**, the **Ambassador** or the **Dusit**. Odder exceptions are **Hard Rock Hotel**, featuring rock star-themed rooms and



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the **Cabbages & Condoms Resort**. The popular budget-traveller chain **Sawasdee** has five hotels in Pattaya town. Generally, the standards are high with even the cheapest rooms featuring TV, mini-bar and aircon, although some of the older buildings can be a little rundown. For a good night's sleep, avoid hotels next to one of the ubiquitous construction sites, or hotels that offer hourly rates.

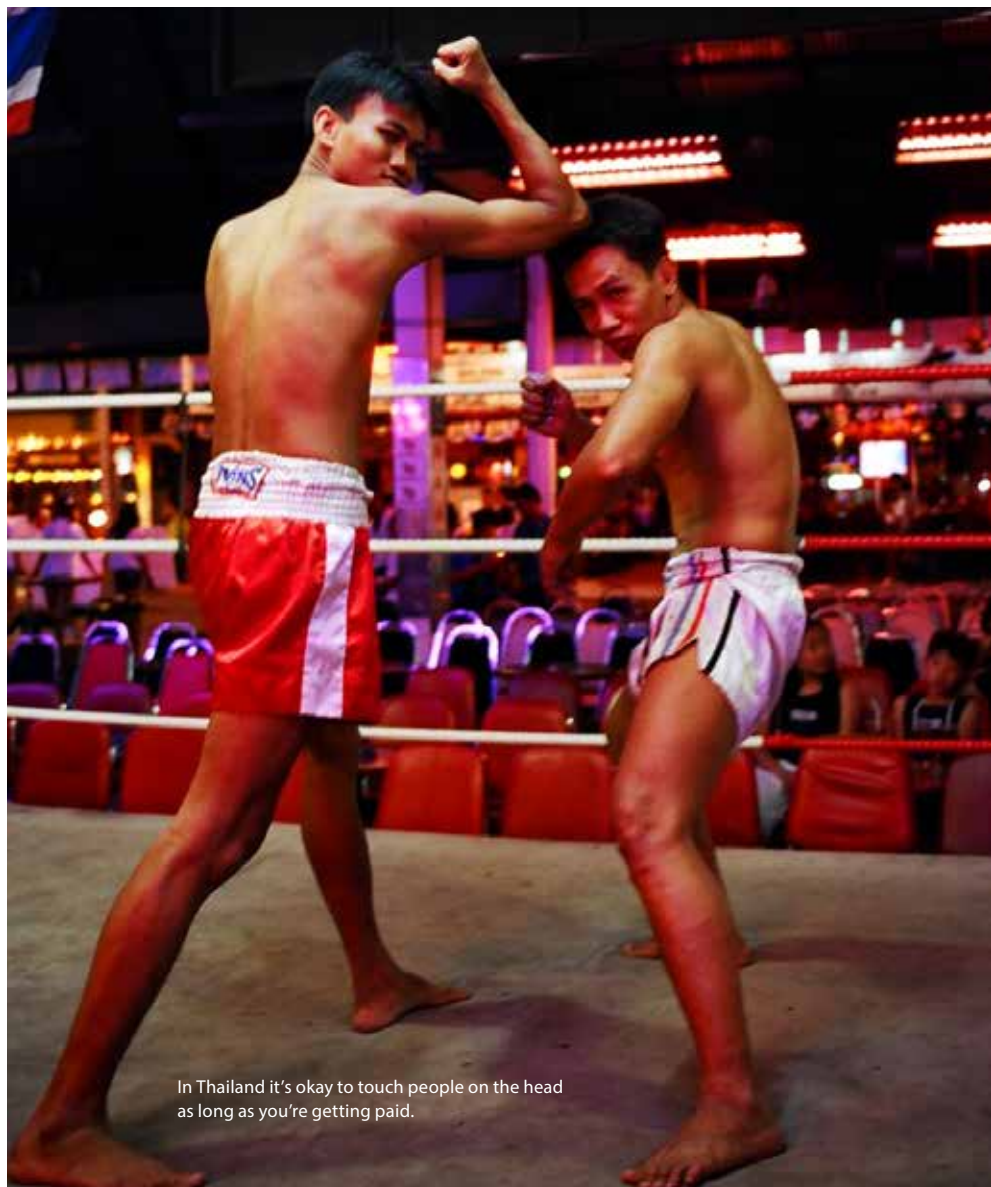
WIND IN YOUR FACE

You'll see songtaews all over town, offering short lifts for Bt10, depending on the distance and your gullibility. Motorcycle taxis are ubiquitous and about the same as Bangkok prices, around Bt20 for a couple of 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 Bt1,000 per day.

DAYTRIPPING

During daylight hours activities can be divided into two types: on land and on the water. Life is better out where it's wetter and apart from the usual beachside fun of banana boats and paragliding there's plenty of people to take you diving or on a day-trip to the offshore islands. For the livelier there's water and cable-skiing, windsurfing or yachting. On land, you can take in the **Sri Racha Tiger Zoo** (actually around 30km out of town), **Underwater World Pattaya** (an aquarium in South Pattaya), the **Snake Farm** or the **Orchid Farm** (both actually in Chonburi), the local branch of **Ripley's Believe it or Not Museum** (in Royal Garden Plaza), or shopping, shopping, shopping. If you're the sporty type there's Thailand's biggest 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



In Thailand it's okay to touch people on the head as long as you're getting paid.

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

UNTRAINED TRAVEL



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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.

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, B1250-1,200. 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 Bintabat**, 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 misspell flyers, as are the city's two boxing rings. Not satisfied with a "Bintaburger"



And remember son, a mouth is a mouth is a mouth.

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 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 **Eitiuskato 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.

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 photoworthy railway station in the country: a wooden masterwork of red and cream paint in Hua Hin.

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**

UNPAKED TRAVEL



Getting your grove on.

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

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UNTAMED TRAVEL

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 **Nangnual Restaurant** for its ladyboy cabaret.

DAYTRIPPING

Be pampered at **Bodiwork 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.

koh SAMET

Care for a slice of tropical beach pie with a filling of party flavours? Sameŕ 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

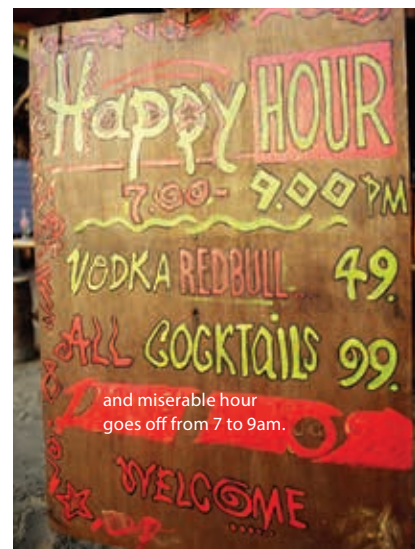
Home to **Silversand** disco, an alfresco affair on the beach that is staggeringly popular with the bucket brigade, who get the sand flying until late in the night. **Sea Breeze** resort has cool bungalows from around Bt600-1,500, however, the beach is quite small and can get overcrowded when the sun is beaming.

AO PUDSA & AO TUBTIM

Ao Tubtim has a small lovely beach with plenty of bungalows, but gets busy on weekends. Ao Puds 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



and miserable hour goes off from 7 to 9am.

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 Sakhumvit 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 bests if you're in a group.

Quiz Time

It's important to be prepared when travelling in Cambodia, so regular columnist **Gordon Sharpless** has worked up a short exam to test your preparedness. Coming soon to a border post near you.

Traveled around Cambodia a bit? What did you really learn? Planning a trip soon? Find out if you've done enough research.



1.) *You've taken a motorbike taxi ride a short distance. Reaching your destination you pay the driver 2,000 riel for the journey. He stands there holding the money with an incomprehensible grin on his face. What does this mean?*

- A.) You paid too much.
- B.) You paid too little.
- C.) He just passed gas.
- D.) How the fuck do we know? We said the grin is incomprehensible.

2.) *How many passengers can you put in the back of a pick-up truck?*

- A.) That depends on what kind of truck it is.
- B.) A carefully determined figure taking into account the stated gross vehicle weight, condition of the vehicle, the age and size of the passengers, and present road conditions.
- C.) 12.
- D.) One more.

3.) *Your guesthouse informs you that your laundry will be ready soon. Soon is how long?*

- A.) Within the hour.
- B.) Tomorrow.
- C.) Never.
- D.) When it's ready.

4.) *You are at the border and are told the tourist bus to Siem Reap is leaving now. When is it leaving?*

- A.) Now.
- B.) When it's full.
- C.) This afternoon.
- D.) Soon.

5.) *You flag down a moto, tell him your destination, and ask him if he knows where it is. He says "yes." You can conclude without a doubt that:*

- A.) He knows where it is.
- B.) He knows where you are.
- C.) He knows what "yes" means.
- D.) He knows how to say "yes."

6.) *You're buying a bottle of water from some kid in front of Angkor Wat. She asks for 1,000 riel. How much should you bargain?*

- A.) Haggle to the bone. Bleed her dry.
- B.) 500 riel.
- C.) 700 riel.

D.) The same amount that you bargained the price of the eight beers you were served by a British bartender in an expatriate/tourist bar the previous night.

7.) *You rented a motorbike and have just been stopped by the police. What should you do?*

- A.) Pay whatever is asked.
- B.) Stand around for ten minutes trying to bargain the "fine" down.
- C.) Offer sincere apologies for being an inconvenience to the good citizens of Cambodia.
- D.) Why on earth did you stop?

8.) *You'd like a posting as an election observer. What are the necessary qualifications and responsibilities of the job?*

- A.) Degree in political science and prior experience observing elections in fledgling democracies.
- B.) You come from Florida and helped count votes in the 2000 US election.
- C.) Your name is Charles Taylor or Robert Mugabe.
- D.) See no evil, hear evil, talk no evil.

9.) *You're visiting during rainy season. You ask the girl at the reception desk at your guesthouse if she knows if it might rain today. She says "maybe." This means:*

- A.) It might rain today.
- B.) It might not rain today.
- C.) You're an idiot for thinking the girl behind the counter has been imbued with special weather predicting powers.
- D.) All of the above.

10.) *You make a special food request – no tomatoes in your sandwich. It comes with tomatoes anyway. You send it back. What will happen?*

- A.) You'll get the same sandwich back without the tomatoes.
- B.) You'll get a different sandwich and without the tomatoes.
- C.) You'll get a different sandwich and with the tomatoes.
- D.) You'll get the same sandwich back and still with the tomatoes, because for as long as any of them have worked in the restaurant this particular sandwich has always been served with tomatoes and no one ever told them they could serve it without tomatoes and if you don't want tomatoes, just take them off yourself.

Answers: 'D' all the way. And if you answered all eight correctly you're well on your way to a safe and happy trip in Cambodia.

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 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 **Killing Fields 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



I don't get it, these fried cockroaches, spiders and maggots should be selling like hotcakes.

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.



Five lines nine lies.

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 2 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 B14,300/8,600 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-storied 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.



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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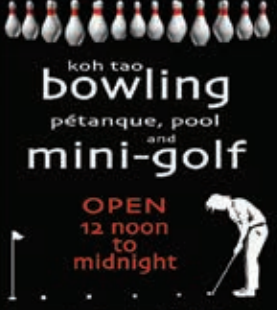
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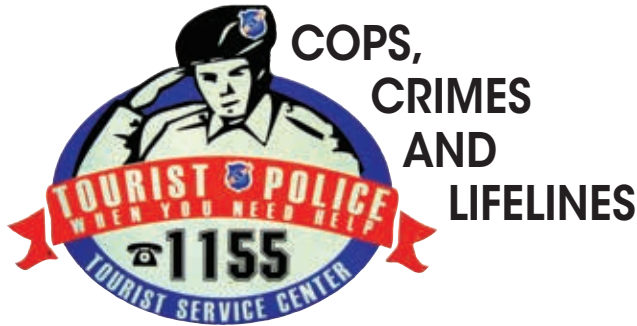
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THAILAND

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
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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.
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KOH SAMUI

Samui International Hospital

Northern Chaweng Beach Rd, 90/2 Moo 2, Bophut, Koh Samui, Surat Thani, Thailand, 84320.

CAMBODIA

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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

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02-287-1224

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Tel: 02-252-3135-40

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02-260-4856

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South Korea

Tel: 02-247-7535-41

Laos

Tel: 02-539-6679
02-539-6668

Malaysia

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Nepal

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02-390-2280

Netherlands

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02-261-1938

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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
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