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UNTAMED

TRAVEL

December 2006

**XXXMAS
GIVEAWAYS**
see pg.13

HO! HO! HO!
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IN SIAM**

PHNOM PENH
**PUNCH UP
STREETKIDS
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**RATS & EXORCISMS
IN INDIA**

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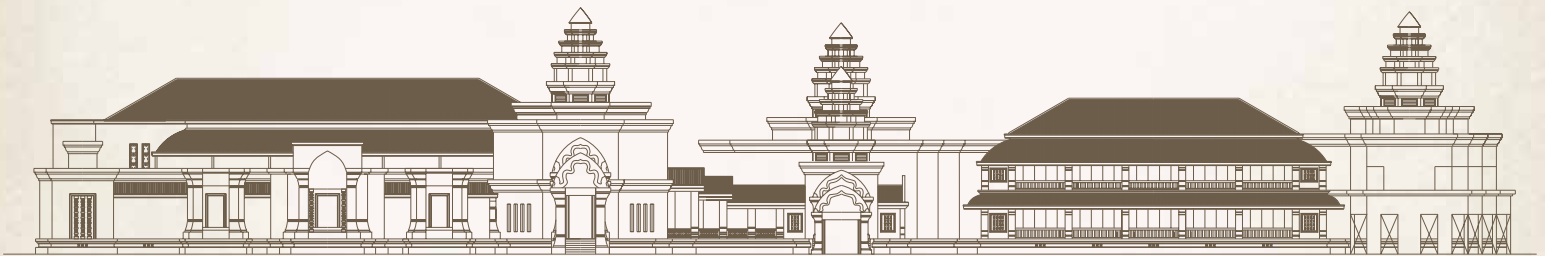


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Sweet deals on accommodation, sights, eating & partying



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UNHAPPY HOLIDAYS



Cassandra



Aaron, Tom and Joe Cummings

When we asked a slew of our regular contributors and correspondents for their recommendations for the holiday season, we received zero responses via email and a couple of terse spoken ones. The silence (and far too many personal experiences) reconfirms our suspicions that Christmas is pretty much crap in a gift-wrapped box in SE Asia. And New Year's Eve is just another Friday night out but with more hugging and false good will.

When attempting to sum up the tackiness of the holiday season we were stumped for a cover until one wit suggested we shoot a bar-girl in a Santa hat with the words, "Merry Syphilis. Ho ho ho," beside her.

Even our shopping and nightlife correspondents, who contributed Christmas rundowns to the Here and Now section, wrote their pieces as if they'd recently undergone heavy doses of electro-shock therapy after losing a parent.

No wonder this is such a downbeat issue.

As your mother must've surely told you as a child, when many Westerners are heating up the oven to roast their turkeys, around 500 million Indians are lighting up cowpats for cooking fuel. Or using them as sacred offerings at a temple where demons are exorcised. Writer Tom "Zippo" Vater and his sharp-tongued spouse/photographer Aroon Thaewchatturat, contributed this feature – as well as another piece on an Indian temple where devotees worship rats.

(In person, when asked about their holiday plans, Tom said, "I'm not big on Christmas and Aroony refuses to acknowledge it." Then Aroon yelled something unintelligible from the kitchen that was either an Isaan battle cry or a plea for more Beer Lao. To commiserate the holidays they are wisely heading for Cambodia.)

Yet more doom and tombs can be found in a photo essay/interview with our long-suffering designer Richy May, who recently headed to Okinawa to pull up some of his buried family roots and eyeball a few women in kimonos. This story was authored by our associate editor Cassandra Beckford, who, shortly before deadline gleefully shouted, "I'm out of this motherfucker [that's a Mancunian euphemism for Bangkok] in three weeks." Yes, she's going back to Manchester for a proper family Christmas.

A few months ago our regular columnist Suzan Crane had everything she owned stolen in Costa Rica. In this month's "Views from a Broad" she files a travel crime report.

Cheery enough for you yet?

No? Okay, well at least you can enjoy something of a white Christmas in the Himalayas through Rob Viereck's prose poem about all his highs and lows traipsing through the mountains. (Just skip the parts about the vulture and the serpent, okay?)

Asked what he thought the significance of Christmas and New Year's was, Rob said, with no discernible merriment, "They're good excuses to get pissed I suppose."

But as a present for our readers, in the true Christmas spirit of benevolence and selflessness, we have decided to spare you our regular rogues' gallery of editors on this page in favour of some pics of our stalwart contributors and dutiful correspondents. So let's raise a toast and a cheer to these good Samaritans of journalism. If it wasn't for the likes of them, some of us would be returning to our old jobs as security guards and rodeo clowns.

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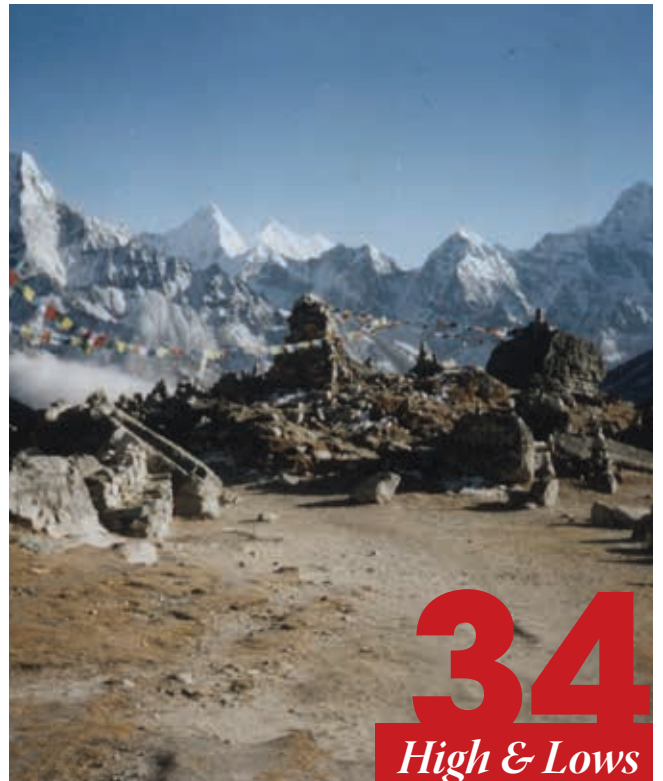
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MAIN events

THAILAND: Happy Birthday, Your Majesty

It's been a big year for royalty in Thailand, kicking off last April with huge events celebrating HM the King's 60th year on the throne. There has been a continuous series of exhibitions and celebrations to honour the world's longest reigning living monarch, all accompanied by the entire population donning yellow (royal) shirts. The King's birthday signals a close to the celebrations and should be spectacular. Bangkok will be lit up all month and there is an illuminated procession on Rachadamnoen Avenue and music in Sanam Luang.

The candles are lit across the nation on December 5th, a public and alcohol-free holiday.



THAILAND: Capital Lights

The kingdom of Ayutthaya ruled Thailand for around 400 years with a firm, if somewhat fascistic hand, until that fateful day in 1569 when the Burmese rolled in, knocked the heads off the Buddha images and walked off with all the gold and the city's population enslaved. Today the ruins are a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which lights up once a year for fireworks and a big sound and light show.

Relive the glories of Ayuttaya from the 13th to the 19th of December.



THAILAND: Yachtie Yuk Yuk

Splice the mainbrace and reef the yardarm! It's time to set sail on the ole' briny blue in honour of HM the King's birthday. As the biggest event on Thailand's yachting calendar, the Phuket King's Cup Regatta is set to impress, with a veritable armada of vessels of all classes racing for the cup. Expect Phuket to fill up with men in funny hats and shoes, using words like "keelhaul" and get up early if you want to sign onto one of the boats as ballast.

Sail into Ao Chalong in Phuket from the 2nd to the 9th, but skip the first day unless watching sail measurements really floats your boat.



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CARDINAL DATES

LOPBURI SUNFLOWER BLOOMING FESTIVAL

1-10th December, Lopburi, Thailand. Blooming Sunflowers blooming all over the blooming fields.

CATHAY PACIFIC HONG KONG CUP

10 December, Sha Tin Racecourse, HK. Watch Chinese lose the family fortune in a matter of hours. One of a series of 12.

BANGKOK JAZZ FESTIVAL

15-17th December, Sanam Suea Pa, Dusit, Bangkok, Chilled out tunes

SINGAPORE: Beach Blanket Boogie

Singapore sets the sand flying on Sentosa this month with the annual Zoukout DJ and dance fest. Selling from the first one in 2000, this beachside event has attracted top-class DJs and punters from around the world. Rock your socks off to Steve Lawyer, Jazzy Jeff, Ferry Corsten, Ben Sims, DJ Pippi, the Cuban Brothers plus a stack of other international and local talent.

Zoukout spins onto Tanjong Beach over two nights on the 9th and 10th of this month, tickets starting at S\$28 with packages from Bangkok and regional capitals on Jetstar Asia



JAPAN: Open Palace Day

For hundreds of years commoners caught not even a glimpse of Japan's Emperor; and entering the heavily fortified palace grounds guaranteed you a one-way ticket to paradise or hell. Things are a bit different these days since once a year, on *Tenno Tanjobi*, a.k.a. the Emperor's birthday, the gates are swung open to all and sundry who come in and poke through the royal bookcase and bathrooms. Don't expect him to invite you to stay for supper though. *Storm the palace on December 23rd and if you bring a birthday present, remember it's the thought that counts since he's probably got everything already.*

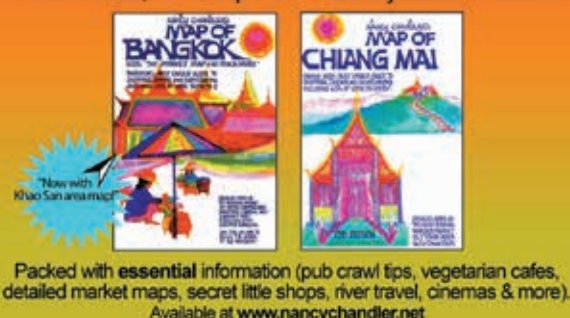


SINGAPORE: It's Christmas in Heaven

Retailers know Christmas comes but once a year, when we all go into a spending frenzy to celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus – before he was old enough to develop dreary philosophies against materialism. Back in the West it's a standoff between Santa and Jesus and it's no secret who's winning. Luckily, in largely Buddhist Asia, we're unencumbered by such beliefs and the yearly shopping orgy is largely for its own sake. Being clever chaps, the Singapore Tourism Board has arranged a heady programme of festivities to celebrate the arrival of the Son of God with their Christmas in the Tropics campaign. "Must Do's" on their website include the Christmas tree light up and shopping on Orchard Road.

Christmas in the Tropics runs all month until the 2nd of January. Expect December 24th to be the big night.

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SHAME TAX

Even the IRS in the United States could learn a few dirty tricks from the tax collectors in India's most lawless state, Bihar, where eunuchs clad in saris have been accompanying municipal tax collectors on their rounds to shame people into paying up. On their doorsteps, the eunuchs chant, "Pay the tax! Pay the Patna Municipal Corporation Tax!"

WOMAN TOPS CHINA'S RICH LIST

For the first time ever a woman has come out on top in the list of China's richest people. Cheung Yan, 49, is the chairwoman and founder of the massive Chinese paper packager Nine Dragons Paper (Holdings) Ltd. Because of the firm's initial public offering in Hong Kong, her family fortune was multiplied by nine so she's now worth US\$3.4 billion.

TINSELTOWN, THAILAND

Last month, Denzel Washington was in Bangkok to shoot a few scenes for a new film called *American Gangster*, in which he plays a drug baron. Early in 2007, Sly Stallone is coming to shoot *Rambo IV: In the Serpent's Eye*. Around 75 percent of the film will be shot in the mountain-studded north of Thailand, as John Rambo, who has been in retirement in Bangkok (presumably working on his tap-dancing skills) comes to defend missionary aid workers helping ethnic minorities in Burma. The filmmakers have been warned by the Thai government not to make the film too violent.

POPULATION CONTROL

According to a recent story by the party-line-toeing Xinhua news agency, the population in China would have swelled by 400 million people if it wasn't for the government's "one child" policy. Critics charge that this policy has resulted in an unbalanced sex ratio (families prefer male heirs), abortions of female fetuses and sterilisations.

TSUNAMI WARNING SYSTEM

Almost two years since the tsunami devastated many parts of Asia, Thailand's National Disaster Warning Centre has partnered up with the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to install the first tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean. The American-made system, consisting of buoys and sensors, has been installed some 1,000-plus kilometers off the Andaman coast, near the Nicobar Islands. If the system detects any tsunami-like undercurrents, it sends a signal to warning centres on Phuket.

SEX ACTIVISM

A Cambodia woman once sold into sexual slavery has been honoured by the American magazine *Glamour* for the work she has done as the president of Afesip (a French acronym meaning Acting for Women in Distressing Situations). Somaly Mann was named one of the magazine's women of the year and was presented with the award by Mariane Pearl, a journalist and the widow of the murdered *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl.

REINCARNATION OF GODDESS?

Thousands of Indians are descending on a tiny village to pay homage to a baby girl they believe is the reincarnation of the many-armed mother goddess Durga. The little girl, born in the eastern state of Bihar, has been afflicted with a rare case of tumours that look like extra limbs.

THE IMELDA COLLECTION

Imelda Marcos, the wife of the late Filipino dictator who was used by the American government as a ventriloquist's dummy, has launched a new jewellery collection. Called the Imelda Collection, it consists of castoff items from her collection, costing from US\$20-100. A Filipino commission trying to recover the ill-gotten assets from the Marcoses said about US\$4.4 billion worth of assets is tied up in both civil and criminal cases in the archipelago.

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CRIME FILES



THAILAND, SCHOOLS OF HARD KNOCKS:

A study released just before the World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse revealed some shocking facts about the violent methods of punishment exacted by teachers against their students in Thai schools. While corporal punishment is officially banned, some teachers use punches, kicks, blunt objects, locking their students in dark rooms and even threatening them with guns and knives. Around 60 percent of the teachers surveyed believe that corporal punishment is the best way to make students behave.

CAMBODIA, SUICIDAL PEDO:

An alleged pedophile from America, in police custody for molesting a 14-year-old Cambodian girl, has supposedly committed suicide. A police guard watching Donald Rene Ramirez apparently left his gun on a table outside the cell when he visited the bathroom. Supposedly, Ramirez used a broom to brush the pistol into his cell, where he shot himself. US authorities are hoping to make a clean sweep of the filthy case.

PAKISTAN, BOUNTY HUNTERS:

A new memoir released by Pakistan's president says that the American government has paid Pakistan millions of dollars to hand over terrorists, like the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks and the London subway bombings, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. General Pervez Musharraf, 63, writes in his book, *In the Line of Fire*, that he had no choice but to shift his support from the Taliban to the US or face a serious "onslaught". The general also lambastes America for the Iraq debacle, writing that it has made the world "more dangerous".

THAILAND, DEAD DRUNKS:

Is it a crime to drink too much? Only if you end up inadvertently killing yourself. The floods in September and October washed away some 180 lives in 18 provinces. Of 120 deaths in eight provinces, a Public Health Ministry survey revealed that the leading cause of death (around 27 percent) was excessive alcohol consumption. And the number of male victims outnumbered females by six to one.



BANGKOK, GO-GO LESSONS:

The Empower foundation (see *Farang Untamed Travel*, August, 2003) located on Patpong Road is going to give dancing classes to go-go girls in order to teach them graceful moves and suitable fashions, so they can get a leg up in their profession. As always, the NGO is lobbying the new government to accept sex workers as legitimate members of the service industry, given the same rights as other workers.

SINGAPORE, BUGGER THE LAW:

Anal and oral sex, once illegal in the island state, may finally be decriminalised amongst heterosexuals, but not gays. That's the word from the Ministry of Home Affairs, which recently posted a public consultation paper on repealing the law "between a consenting adult heterosexual couple aged 16 years old and above".

VIETNAM, TRANNY SINGER COMES OUT:

The debut album by the country's first transsexual singing star, Cindy Thai Tai, has been officially approved by its ultra-conservative Ministry of Culture. She named herself after her heroine, the super-model Cindy Crawford and traveled to Thailand in 1999 to get a series of sex-change operations.

BEIJING, FIRST GAY CLINIC:

Until not so long ago, homosexuality was still considered a mental illness in China and during the reign of Mao gays were rounded up and sent to death camps. But that's all changing now. A recent story in the *China Daily* said that the country has opened its first free clinic for gay folks to get medical checkups. They can register anonymously for the service on-line. Estimates of China's gay population range from five million to 50 million.



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Stick it to the Man

Dear Editors,

As we all know Stickman's boyish rants on his website (www.stickmanbangkok.com) about the go-go bar scene, complete with investigative outings of the 'sexy, naughty, bitchy' bar girls has recently seen him go head to head, and lose with John Galt, the impostor who used Stick's site as the prototype for his own climb to Web fame. Can't really say I'm mourning the loss of Stick's site. As someone quite rightly commented on mangosauce.com, it's only the "sexpat humpbacks who'll be writhing around in social isolation," ha-ha-ha! But Galt's fire and brimstone attacks, as well as threatening the man with the loss of his work permit and visa, taken things way too far. The battlefield was far from fair: Galt fires off his attacks from the cocoon of his cosy, Isaan village whilst Stick, well, 'sticks' out as an obvious target in Bangkok. Regarding the 'banana incident' (it had something to do with fruit and a certain part of the male anatomy), Stick's never been one for political correctness but I too have heard 'sweet, innocent' Thai women make slapstick jokes like this in my workplace, so it's not that unbelievable after all. What goes around comes around, I say, so it won't be long before Galt finds his own neck on the chopping block. As men who have fought and conquered to carve out your own farang niche, what's your take on the whole death match?

Mildly amused,

Richard Hughes,
Bangkok

Untamed Replies:

We're glad you asked because this has been the biggest storm in the online expat teacup since modern day equivalents of The Bangkok Post's "Night Owl" Bernard Trink went online with their tales and advice revolving around Bangkok's lurid nightlife offerings. For those unaware of this internationally popular subculture, (sub being the operative word here), slaving males from all over the world who have either been to Thailand before or have only concocted wild dreams based on the lurid descriptions of friends who have, start searching the Net for more information on the subject of naughty nightlife. And in recent years, a few web entrepreneurs (read: Bangkok English teachers) have been only too happy to fill the void. Stickmanbangkok.com was probably the frontrunner on this one, though others have caught up. (For our money, the best of the bunch is mangosauce.com because it is funny and doesn't take itself too seriously.) But it all went sour when a former sex tourist calling himself John Galt set up a site called notstickmanbangkok.com dedicated to attacking what Mr Galt saw as inaccuracies, to ridicule Stickman on a weekly basis. Eventually, Galt went too far and started exposing Stick's real identity (a serious violation of the unwritten rules of the Net), thereby possibly costing him his job and his website. No worries though, the local web community banded together to reveal Galt's real identity in retaliation and slander him to all and sundry, and he now appears to have backed off a bit. He's still a sanctimonious twat though.

Cockroach Ahoy!

You have to hand it to the Thais. Come hell or high water, the bars will still be open and serving. After being stranded in the flood that gridlocked the Siam Square area on Oct. 10th, I witnessed it first hand. Caught three km from our hotel with no taxis willing to take us in, my companion Richard and I decided to try and walk it.

After a few blocks of wading, we stopped at a nameless pub for a quick beer and some oysters before heading back into the mess. Granted, I was a little leery about eating raw shellfish from a bar with no name that was under three feet of water, but in the end, could it really be more dangerous than trudging through flooded streets filled with human and animal waste, garbage and rotten vegetation? Even the cockroaches were less than pleased. I passed a whole fleet of them, each the size of my hand, paddling furiously against the tide. Somehow we survived the filthy water. Actually, looking back, I do believe that those were the best chilled oysters I have ever had.

Misty, Bangkok
Photo by Richard Viner





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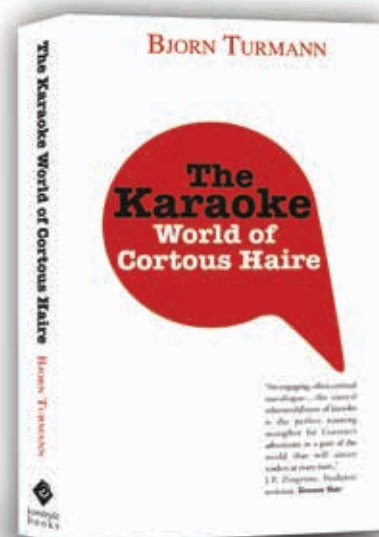
For those of you out there who still read, we have a free book (actually three copies of the same book) to give away. The book is called "The Karaoke World of Cortous Haire" and is apparently a fictitious work about the travels through Asia of the guy in the title. We'd refer you to the youtube.com promotional video of the book, but quite frankly, it's crap. We haven't

actually read the book yet, but have heard on good authority that it isn't crap, though the final word on that will emanate from the toxic keyboard of Untamed's regular book reviewer Daniel Cooper.

So, the skill-testing question for which the first three correct answerers will receive a free copy of the book is:

What is the capital of Singapore?

Send your answers to winbig@untamed-travel.com



Free Untamed T-shirts!

We'll be honest with you. We got bugger all letters this month so we are filling in space by holding cheap contests that make us look generous. The fact is that we get a lot of emails from people (and snail mail letters from convicts), but month after month they are all the same: "Your mag rocks, can I bear the editor's children?"; "I'm a grate writer; and fast lerner and wants to live in Asian, and your writting and editing is shit so can I have a job?"; "Id like to drown your book reviewer Daniel Cooper and then torture him"; and "your text is too small and I'm only 93 years old". So a T-shirt contest it is!!

The first 10 people to answer this skill testing question will receive a T-shirt not unlike the one gracing the luscious figure of our Associate Editor Cassandra, pictured here.

Skill Testing Question:

What was Untamed Travel Magazine called before it changed its name in October 2005?

Again, send your answers to: winbig@untamed-travel.com

Or if you want to be guaranteed a T-shirt without having to strain your cerebral cortex, subscribe to Untamed Travel and we will send you one as a signing bonus. Simply send an email to subscribe@untamed-travel.com and our admin staff will get straight back to you to shake you down for payment.





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Robbed on the Road



Costa Rica is known as the “Switzerland of Central America” for its abundance of greenery and supposed safety. Not for Suzan Crane who was robbed of everything she owned.

I hear that Costa Rica is dangerous,” my friend warned as I prepared to head west after nearly four years in Asia, India and the Middle East. “Nah,” I protested in defense of this small, peaceful nation with no military presence and an enviable 93 percent literacy rate. “It’s a major tourist destination full of expat Americans and Europeans.”

But the truth is, the eco-tourism paradise which attracts more than one million visitors annually is experiencing an alarming rise in crime. According to the US Embassy’s Regional Security Office (based on statistics provided by the Costa Rican Judicial Police), non-violent crime, ranging from vehicle break-ins to home invasions are on a steady upswing (for example, home robberies increased 28 percent between 2004 to 2005) with theft and pick-pocketing the most prevalent violations. Furthermore, in 2005, the US Embassy processed 30 percent more applications to replace stolen passports – each one carrying a potential street value of up to US\$10,000 – ranking Costa Rica as the number-one country in the world for stolen American passports.

So, as my friend prophesied, Costa Rica can indeed be dangerous and on my second day here, I learned that first-hand when I was robbed at a small bus station in Limon with two traveling companions nearby. Gone like the wind were my passport, credit cards, cash, camera and, most tragically for this freelance journalist, my laptop containing stories and photographs documenting my global wanderings. It happened quickly and despite a station full of witnesses, no one saw a thing, including the people guarding my day pack. Within two hours, the thieves had greedily exploited the illicit credit card, spending more than US\$2,000 at shops in Cartago and San Jose before their last attempt was foiled.

“They can possibly be identified,” I insisted to the investigator taking my report at the Organisation of Judicial Investigation in San Jose. “There are procedures and we can’t begin the investigation until Monday” the listless public servant recited as if by rote. “By then it will be too late!”

“Well, that is our policy,” she yawned and directed me to call the

Limon office in two days.

So I did, speaking to an officer named Tony at least five times. But when I called a few days later, I was told that Tony did not exist. Was he a phantom? Did I imagine conversing with a man who promised to prowl Limon’s black market in search of my laptop? Did I also imagine possessing three copies of the police report, replete with case number and telephone contact information, proffered by the English-speaking investigator in San Jose, one Monge Palma Rafael Angel, after our hour-long meeting?

Even the representatives at my country’s embassy in San Jose proved to be lethargic and neutral as repeated requests for counsel with the security advisor went unheeded and a promised 15-minute wait for the passport ballooned into a three-hour ordeal for myself and four other Americans whose documents were also stolen in recent days.

As a diligent person, inspired by my journalistic instincts and years of watching bad cop shows, I embarked on my own investigation, focusing on La Cueva, San Jose’s Mecca of second-hand and reportedly stolen goods. “*Muy peligroso* [very dangerous],” I was told, as I headed there alone to inquire about laptops. I found a few: a Mac Powerbook and one or two others, but no Averatec. Then one guy asked me what I was looking for and I opted to answer honestly. “My laptop,” I said.

Seemingly sympathetic, he promised to sniff around there, but two weeks later I was still a computer-less crime victim no closer to retribution than I was the day the keystone cops in Limon stood idly by in a bus station where no one saw a thing. Now I must accept that the past is gone, my work is history and the slate has been irrevocably cleaned. I choose to view this as a symbolic new beginning, a rebirth. When one door closes, another opens, and all that sort of stuff.

Last night the friend for whom I am house-sitting here in Tamarindo emailed me with this observation: “I can’t believe,” she marveled, “that you have traveled throughout the world and Costa Rica is doing you in!”

“Yeah, strange,” I replied. I guess the places you deem most safe are the ones to watch out for.

The One That Got Away

There is something appealing about establishing one's superiority in the animal kingdom by getting the better of another species with a brain a fraction of the size of one's own. Bored with practicing this skill at ad agencies and nightclubs, Cameron Cooper (words) and Daniel Cooper (photos) decided to try it out on fish at Bangkok's most densely populated lake.



When Dan and I arrived at the lake, the fish were jumping like well-paid extras for a music video of "Summertime". Enormous fins poked massive ripples that overlapped across the entire surface of several acres of water, like a shark feeding frenzy in a low-budget 'B' movie. The brochure's wild promises of catching fish the size of pianos looked like they would actually come true.

Eddie, the affable proprietor of Fish Thailand, (a tour company specialising in, um, fishing tours) had invited us to come for a day of angling at Bungsam Lan Lake, a former tin quarry that had apparently been filled in equal measure with water and fish, and we, feeling a tinge of shame at being desk-bound key-punchers who have spent a lifetime avoiding gym class, schoolyard fights, moose hunting and other such manly pursuits, took the bait. It seemed easy enough, and a framed photo hanging proudly behind your desk in which you are holding aloft one of the monster catfish that Eddie guarantees you will catch seemed a shortcut to credibility among certain types of freelancers who drop by the *Untamed* office from time to time in between visiting Maoist rebel training camps and shooting photos of carnage whilst dodging heavy artillery fire.

We were invited primarily as observers since today's punters, the male contingent of an extended family on holiday (the womenfolk were shopping), had booked themselves exclusive dock and shed privileges for the day, believing that it would make for a languid recovery after a rousing evening on the sauce in the fleshpots of Patpong. They had managed to enjoy about two hours of sleep before being bunged into the fishing van not long after sunrise. Introductions revealed that three of the six blokes were named 'Dean', though a bit of delicate questioning confirmed the relieving fact that none of those three were actually brothers.

We settled in as the guides readied the bait, a mix of bread crusts and coconut milk and a few other secret local ingredients – fish, like the English, can't resist a nice bread pudding curry. Eddie informed us that one of the guides, a quiet and dark-skinned man with a ready smile and an air of natural humility, actually held the lake record for largest fish ever caught in the lake, a Mekong giant catfish tipping the scales at about 100 kilos.

"It looked like hard work, and Dean was cracking a booze sweat with about 70 metres of reeling still to go."



The lines were cast and a queue was formed to see who would take each 'strike'. Any illusions the boys had of a relaxing and easy day nursing hangovers and coming to terms with Judeo-Christian guilt (the younger ones were already nodding off in their deck chairs, not yet having learned the middle-aged man's secret of working through pain) were dashed in less than two minutes when the first monster carp wrapped his lips around the hook. One of the Deans scampered up and got a quick lesson on how to reel the stubborn bastard in – nestling the rod into the hip, pulling back and upwards, dropping the tip of the rod down and taking up the slack with the reel – over and over and over. It looked like hard work, and Dean was cracking a booze sweat with about 70 metres of reeling still to go. Exciting stuff too – with much whooping and hollering. With the dockside assistance of the guides, Dean hauled in a 12-kilo carp with a mouth like a storm drain, posed for his photo and tossed him back in to be fooled another day.

And so it continued, strike after strike, one enormous fish gasping for breath as a beaming Englishman, also gasping for breath, got yet another photo to lord over his less fortunate mates back in Blighty.

But I was growing restless and took Eddie aside, asking him when I'd get a crack at reeling one in, feeling like a third-string basketball player asking the coach to put me in the game, giving heartfelt assurances that I wouldn't cock it up. Eddie asked the Deans and the other lads if it was okay for me to have a go, and they said to go ahead, but it was pretty clear that I was only going to have one chance at the prize. Then the strikes dried up for a bit. I was wild-eyed with a combination of excitement at landing the biggest fish of my life and fear at making a fool of myself by falling in. Finally, after 15 minutes of unrequited adrenaline, the reel started spinning and I leapt forward to take my place. It was murder. The finned beast – which I immediately nicknamed 'Iron Jim' – must have weighed 18 kilos and he was not keen on being landed, swimming with the strength of Johnny Weissmuller in every direction but towards me.

Pull and reel, pull and reel, the muscles of my slender arms burned with oxygen deprivation. But at last Iron Jim surfaced a mere two metres from the dock. "You're mine, you fucker!" I screamed aloud. Then Jim slipped under the dock and twice around the pillars – my fault for not following some shouted instruction during the fight – where he found enough purchase to tear himself free of the hook.

My disappointment was immeasurable. I couldn't look anyone in the eye and wanted to retreat behind the shed for five or six smokes and a good cry.

The strikes started coming in again and the boys resumed flawlessly reeling them in. Torn between lost pride in front of the lads and lost pride in front of my co-worker, I actually had the temerity to ask one of the Deans if I could briefly borrow his fish for a photo. The look on his face belied a belief that it wasn't really cricket, but he took pity on me. So I held up another man's carp and Dan dutifully recorded the blatant lie with his camera. Then the fish sprang violently to life, perhaps sensing that I wasn't his rightful conqueror, and stabbed me in the inner elbow with a spine like a darning needle. I yelped in pain and dropped him, suffering the raucous laughter of several hung-over, yet somehow better men.

And yes, the photo is on the wall behind the desk, alongside the photoshopped image of me with Frank Sinatra, and though there is a certain shame in that, it must be said that 'Iron Jim' was far larger than the one in the photo. No, really, I'm telling you, he was.



"Pull and reel, pull and reel, the muscles of my slender arms burned with oxygen deprivation. But at last Iron Jim surfaced a mere two metres from the dock. 'You're mine, you fucker!' I screamed aloud."

The Comeback Kids

For many teenagers in Phnom Penh, life is a series of hard knocks. But one foreigner is showing them how to unleash their angst in a more positive fashion.

Words and photos by Dave Stamboulis.



Phnom Penh has come a long way since its Wild West days, when going out on the town used to be like playing “Russian Roulette.” These days, despite the “Say No To Weapons” signs that grace every shop front, the city has become less menacing. But given the lack of jobs and money, being a teenager in Phnom Penh is still a dubious proposition. So it’s a shot in the arm when self-made men like Paddy Carson show up to help the wayward lads bounce back off the ropes.

Paddy Carson is one of the hardworking, freelance rebels who seem to make their way east after getting bored of the West. Originally hailing from South Africa, Paddy spent much of his youth surfing and playing football. One day a friend brought him to a karate class. Since then, he’s devoted his life to boxing and training fighters.

A few of his career highlights include training five world champions in kickboxing and becoming the first promoter to bring kickboxing into South Africa’s casinos, hotels, and other venues. His daughter, Michelle, became the youngest person to ever contend for the ISKA (International Sport Kickboxing Association) kickboxing title, and in a disputed bout, was denied a championship belt.

Twenty years ago, Paddy came to Thailand for a visit, developed a feverish passion for the tropics and eventually returned to settle down. But the xenophobic nature of the kickboxing industry rules out foreigners promoting fights. So Paddy settled for training; one of his



Providing them with free equipment, vitamins, and loads of techniques, Paddy soon found himself with dozens of young Khmer students.

protégés, the legendary “Micky,” is a farang who went on to knockout six of the top Thai *muay thai* fighters.

Three years ago, Paddy came to Cambodia and opened up a small gym. The gym started out slowly, with only 10 customers a day, but as more money flowed into Phnom Penh, that figure grew to over 300 folks a day. Paddy added a kickboxing centre alongside the gym, offering to train young guys that were serious about wanting to learn. Providing them with free equipment, vitamins, and loads of techniques, Paddy soon found himself with dozens of young Khmer students.

A friend once remarked to me that Cambodia, even in the post-Pol Pot era, remained a very sad and hard place to live; without an education, most men become moto drivers, and women turn to prostitution. While that’s a slight exaggeration, one only has to wander around Phnom Penh to see that there are brothels everywhere and moto drivers hanging around almost every corner.

When there’s no hope, young people turn to vice: petty crime, gambling, drugs and alcohol. That’s why sport can be such a healthy alternative. The daily training regimen instills discipline and focus. Afterwards, there’s little energy leftover to expend on self-destructive time-killers.

Bo, a strapping 18-year-old with bulging muscles and *apsara* dancers tattooed on his biceps, has an intense look in his eyes as he takes repetitive jabs to his head and stomach from a fellow competitor. Bo has been training for the past six months. He is slated to fight in a national kickboxing bout at Phnom Penh’s main stadium the following weekend.

When I ask him why he comes to the gym, he smiles shyly and says that it makes him strong, impresses the girls, and keeps him out of trouble. As the star pupil, he also commands a lot of respect in the ring. Several young fighters-to-be, perhaps no more than nine or 10, look up to him like an older brother and emulate his moves. Despite his tough-guy stance in the ring, when Bo comes over to chat with me, he *wais* me and, as both an elder and a foreigner, he treats me respectfully.

I ask Paddy what the most difficult thing is about training these young fighters compared to those back in South Africa, and he says the language barrier can be insurmountable. His girlfriend, who is Cambodian, often comes over to help him hurdle this obstacle and translate the things he cannot mime, but she is often busy and cannot spend all day in the ring.

Even tougher are some of the cultural differences. Back home, a boxer who isn’t challenging himself or performing below par might get a verbal smack-down from his trainer, whereas here, such an outburst would surely cause a loss of face and have completely opposite results.

On some days in Phnom Penh, wandering around the rundown back streets amidst the rough-and-tumble shacks, the daily grind for most folks is akin to banging one’s head against a brick wall – fruitless and without a future. Yet watching the faces of the boys as they kick, jab, and follow Paddy’s instructions to push their bodies to the max, I am reminded of the adage that if enough people bang their heads against the wall, it will eventually fall down. And with the gritty resolve that these guys have, it might be a lot sooner than later.



KIMONO GIRLS

"I shot this outside the Okinawa Convention Center who organise meetings for the Okinawan expat community. The girls were handing out pamphlets about the event, spotted me as the only young *farang* around and started giggling. I learned that Okinawan kimonos have different patterns than Japanese ones, though the cut and the way you put them on is the same. Who doesn't like looking at beautiful girls in a kimono?"

Return to the Homeland

Often seen as a man of few words, Untamed's designer Richy May waxes historical to Cassandra Beckford about his 10-day return to his ancestral birthplace, Okinawa. All photos by Richy.

札幌	→	4時間10分
仙台	→	3時間15分
東京	→	2時間45分
名古屋	→	2時間20分
大阪	→	2時間10分
福岡	→	1時間35分

A typical deadline usually sees Richy and myself seated side by side. He whizzes through the fastidious task of laying out the pages of the magazine using an imposing Apple Mac no one dares to touch, whilst I proofread the copy. Last deadline, however, I looked over at the man's machine, but instead of spying the usual hottie wallpaper pics that presumably aid his creative inspiration, Richy was lost on a whimsical journey, scanning the holiday snaps from his latest trip to Okinawa, an island off the coast of Japan. I jumped at the chance to get inside the head of this reticent young man.

Richy first visited Okinawa at the age of 12. "Seventeen years ago when I was last here, there was no city, it was all jungle. I climbed the highest peak I could find and took an aerial shot of the city. The place has exploded now but the pace of life is still much slower than on the mainland."

In the 70s, Richy's father was based in Okinawa, which is where he met his bride to be.

"My interest in photography came from my dad, a navy medic attached to a recon unit. He never left the house without his camera." The connection between father and son became ever more apparent on his recent return. "My dad's best friend took one look at me and laughingly said, 'That Nikon! Like father, like son.'"

Being of half-Japanese, half-American heritage, Richy grew up on the east coast in Miami and now lives in Bangkok. The Japanese did not have a

problem with his mixed ethnicity. "Okinawan people were cool about me being *hik kreung* [half Asian and half Caucasian]. It's the same in Thailand, where it's cool to have lighter skin. No one looks down on me. My wavy hair always got attention, because it's not straight and black like everyone else's," he said.

In Okinawa, he found himself straddling both sides of the language barrier. "Of course, everyone in Okinawa spoke Japanese and I felt a little stupid sometimes. People would look at me like, 'What? You can't speak Japanese?' I was glad to have friends and family there to translate for me but strangers often stopped me in the street to practice their English."

Getting in touch with his roots, and spotting the differences between the mainlanders and the islanders, proved pivotal on the trip.

"Okinawans have a real sense of pride and their dialect is different to that of the mainland Japanese. Though the Japanese claim they 'own the island,' the Okinawans see themselves as separate and different from the mainlanders. I felt a real urge to learn about my history, understand what happened in Okinawa and get a sense of where the people are coming from."

For Richy, it was the tombs and malls that appeared to be the biggest tourist attractions of Okinawa. The numerous visits to the latter he blames on his mother and sister (though his recent office attire would appear to state otherwise), whilst the former proved to be inescapable. "Tombs are everywhere. Okinawans are extremely superstitious. And who can blame them? This really is the city of the dead."



GOKUESENDO PARK

"I took this photo inside the museum. The girls pictured were taken out of school by the Japanese soldiers and assigned to work in the military hospital during the WWII battle for Okinawa. One day they went out on a mission to help the soldiers in the field and none came back; they all died. See the blank spaces in the photo where the girl's pictures are missing? Well, these girls just vanished, became 'nobodies'. It's kinda sad that no one knows what they looked like or where they came from."



GRANDMOTHER

"It may sound strange but I don't even know my grandmother's first name, I just call her 'oba-san', meaning 'grandmother'. Seeing her was a shock. I remembered her as chipper and sprightly. Since my grandfather died she has lost a lot of weight and slowed down a lot. She was hobbling along for her daily walk and I took this the moment she sat down. It hit me there and then, 'Whoa – that's my roots right there, she's a part of me.'"



URASOF-UDORE

"This memorial shrine was built to commemorate the deaths of the students buried in the cave below. People went there to hide during WWII. Around 2,000 people died or committed suicide at this spot."



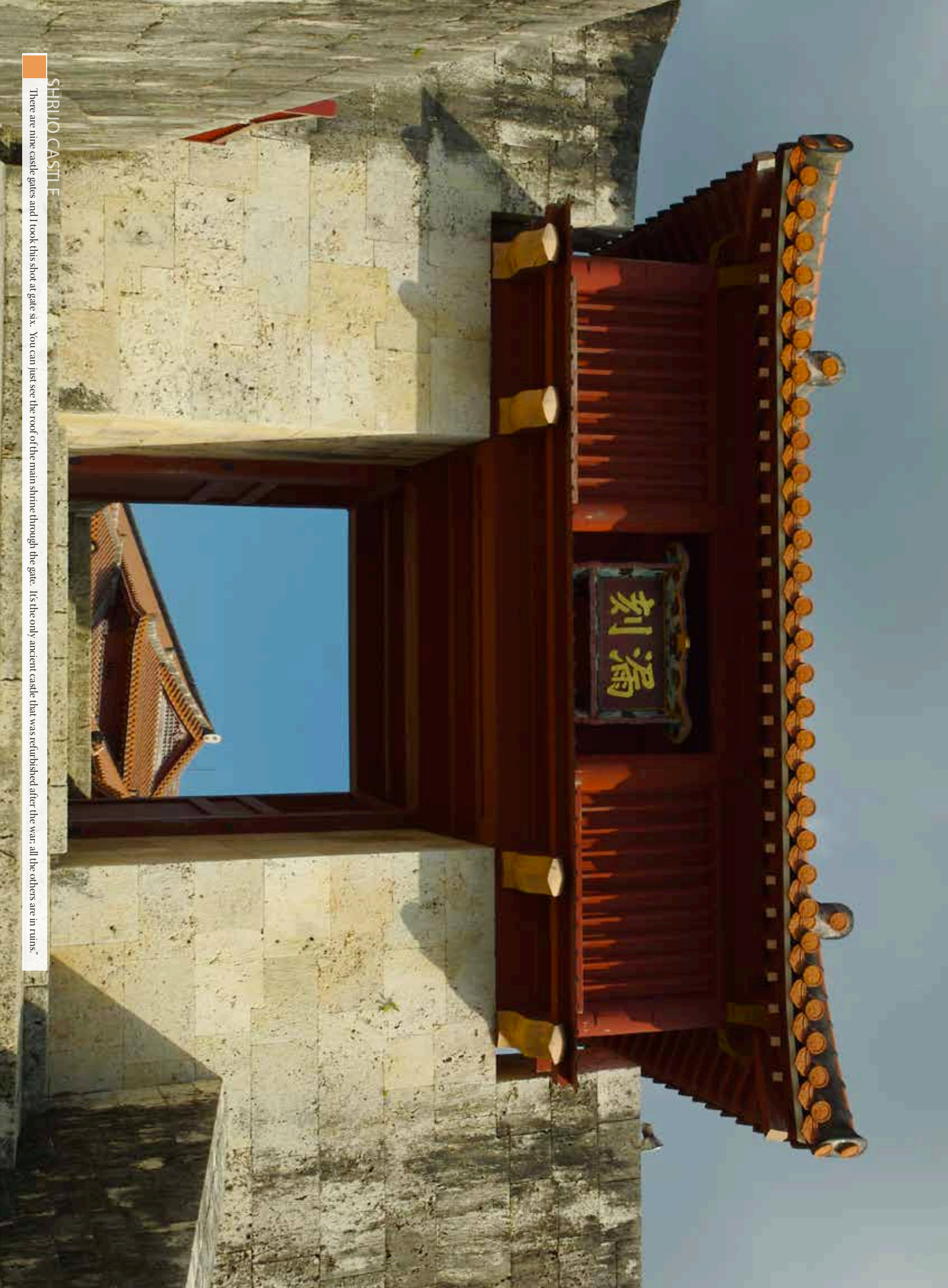
OHAKA

"There are acres and acres of tombs like this in Okinawa, encasing whole family generations. Poor people are usually buried in square-shaped tombs but the curved shape of this tomb tells you that moneyed people of a higher class were buried there. Death and Buddhist beliefs go hand in hand; the curves signify a woman's womb, the doorway represents her genitals. So the cycle goes, 'We are born from a woman, die and return to the womb to be reborn as something else.' I respect the recognition of where life comes from – it's kinda cool."



URASOE-UDORE

"During the war the Japanese told the Okinawans that the Americans were going to 'enslave everyone, rape their women and burn their villages.' This was all to scare the Okinawans into working for them rather than the Americans. Again, people died right here."



SHRIJO CASTLE

There are nine castle gates and I took this shot at gate six. You can just see the roof of the main shrine through the gate. It's the only ancient castle that was refurbished after the war; all the others are in ruins."



SEAWEED FARMER

"These guys harvest seaweed. They stake down nets with wooden sticks (a little more than one by two metres in size) on the bottom of the ocean floor and leave them there for six months so the seaweed can grow. Each farmer harvests a different type of seaweed, like one for *miso* soup, one for frying, another for wrapping sushi. Some types are as thick as four to five sheets of paper and have a shiny texture.



PORTRAIT OF THE DUDE

Name: Richy May

(top right, with relatives in Okinawa)

Age: 30

Career:

Working full-time as a designer/photographer, his interest in photography began during high school, aged 17.

Photo style:

Richy's preference is a Nikon D705. "I like to sit back and take candid shots, whereas some people would go right up into people's faces. Most people don't even know I've taken their picture until afterwards."

Phobias:

I don't like heights because I suffer from vertigo.

Lives for:

Skateboarding, any music that has a good vibe, from classical to strange Japanese, and my turntables.

Final word:

To anyone who knew me before I reached 22, I'm sorry for being an asshole :oP

The Olly Lama Takes on... Kathmandu

Rock star Bob Seger famously sang, "If I ever get out of here, I'm going to Kathmandu." Well, that was back when Kathmandu was an exotic, hard-to-visit place. Nowadays, wide-eyed folks from all over the world show up at the doorstep of the Himalayas for prepackaged adventure and enlightenment, cheap apple pie and putrid yak-butter tea. The recent Maoist insurgency, however, has caused tourist numbers to dwindle, laying a blanket of calm over the city. It may not be the party town it used to be, but then, let's be honest it never really was. Kathmandu does not rock and roll – it gets stoned and falls asleep. It's a place to acquire ancient impressions, lofty insights, and if you're not careful, a bad case of amoebic dysentery, writes Oliver "Olly Lama" Benjamin, our city guru.



THAMEL

Every big city has its tourist ghetto, but in the case of Thamel, the inmates are running the asylum. In high season (autumn, and to a lesser extent, spring) the streets are alive with the clamour of international tongues. Of course,

most of them are screaming, in different languages, "Leave me alone!" at pushy touts. Nepali seems to work best: "Jar! Jar!" (This is supposedly where George Lucas got the idea for his irritating *Star Wars*' character, Jar Jar Binks.) When not barking at beggars, these same tongues are wolfing down huge quantities of baked goods and highly dubious Mexican, French and Viennese food. Stick to Indian and Nepali grub if you don't want to spend your holiday in the toilet.

DURBAR SQUARE

Here, naked ash-painted holy men mingle with fluorescent-clothed Europeans while cute young Nepali girls aggressively hawk rotten fruit as consumptive flute-sellers cough into their merchandise over the din of moto-rickshaws and mooing metropolitan cows. Sit all day at the Maju Deval temple and watch the world go by as you go mental. Admire the temple's erotic carvings while chatting up a magenta-clad Swedish girl. If you tell her you're a Tantric meditation expert and she doesn't run away, you're in there, dude.

FREAK STREET

Once a Mecca to the world's malingerers, the last few hippies have long since moved to Thamel. Accordingly, Freak Street is the best place to stay for a little peace, man. Ever since marijuana was made illegal, Kathmandu has seen far fewer stuck-up hippies with trust funds. Unfortunately, they have been mostly replaced by stuck-up yuppies with investment funds. It's hard to say who is more annoying. But yuppies do smell better.

SWAYABHUNATH (The Monkey Temple)

This may be yet another fine example of Buddhist temple architecture, but what makes this one truly awesome are the hordes of acrobatic monkeys skilled at entertaining and robbing you blind if you're not careful. In fact, when the faithful make food offerings to the Buddha the sacrilegious primates steal them a second later. This will cause them to be reincarnated as cockroaches, so the joke's on them!

KUMARI DEVI

Not many countries can claim to house a living deity – so of course this Dalai Lama-like darling is one of Kathmandu's most prized citizens. While the Kumari Devi is supremely powerful as a child, like most child stars, she is rendered utterly useless at puberty. The heavily made-up divinity makes multiple appearances throughout the year – resist the urge to scream, "Well hello, Dolly!" or she might have you struck by lightning.

DASHIN KALI TEMPLE

Had a rasher of bad luck lately? Need to make a quick animal sacrifice? This is the place to do it. Crowds of the faithful come here year round to send chickens and goats straight to the gods' buffet table. More gore than in all the Rambo movies ever made. Afterwards, have a nice snack at a nearby restaurant, where prices are surprisingly low.



BODHNATH

Reportedly the biggest Buddhist stupa in the world, the Bodhnath Temple is Nepal's most iconic structure, featuring giant eyes painted on the side, a host of Tibetan monasteries encircling it, and even more

importantly, great shopping! Haggle over Tibetan *thangka* paintings, prayer wheels and fake jewelry, then visit a monastery and meditate over the futility of material possessions.

PATAN & BHAKTAPUR

These are the two other medieval towns that share the valley with Kathmandu. Both make interesting day trips. Bhaktapur is especially notable for its temple carvings depicting giant elephants having sex in improbable positions. Call them the “The Kama Sumo.”



THE HIMALAYAS

Want to see the mighty Himalayan range? You can either go to the village of Nagarkot and take them in from The Restaurant at the End of the Universe or you can shell out US\$100 and see them aboard a convenient Buddha Air flight. If visibility is poor you don't even have to pay. Awfully selfless of them, isn't it?

OUTSIDE THE KATHMANDU VALLEY
WORLD'S SECOND TALLEST BUNGY JUMP

This 160-metre drop was once the longest non-fatal freefall on earth until a South African outfit trumped it. Bring a licensed therapist and a change of underpants.

POKHARA

The perfect getaway from the bustle and filth of Kathmandu, it's a peaceful spot on a pretty lake with colourful canoes and good food. You'll need to relax for a few days after the harrowing ride past canyons littered with burnt-out buses that didn't properly negotiate the hairpin turns. Plus, it's a perfect spot to start a trek into the Himalayas, if you're so inclined.

TREKKING

Nearly everyone who visits Kathmandu goes on a trek. Halfway through a 10-day trudge most just want to get back to the comparative comfort of the capital's flat streets, banana pancakes and water not cold enough to kill you. Plus, nothing is more shameful than being continually passed by elderly Swiss women with ski poles and tiny barefoot Sherpas carrying three times their body weight. Nevertheless, beautiful landscape photos last a lifetime, so you'll quickly forget how much it actually sucked.

CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK

Great place to ride elephants while watching rhinos – if you're lucky. Mostly, you'll just see cows and goats, but the lovely surroundings make for great strolls and you're bound to find some good free ganja.

MAOIST REVOLUTIONARIES

That's a gun in their pocket, *and* they're glad to see you. As far as terrorists go, these guys are pretty cool. If they surprise you on a trekking trail the most they're likely to do is ask you firmly for a donation. They'll even issue you a receipt! Al-Qaeda could learn a thing or two from these guys – you catch more flies with honey than with videotaped executions, right?

ON THE TOWN

Moon Sun Disco

Upper class Nepalis shake their groove thing in pressed slacks. It's okay if you've got cash and your own bird, otherwise it's like watching the Wheelchair Olympics.

Jump Club

Amateur DJs spin discs for dancers on a small floor. Great way to rub elbows with strangers, or various other body parts. Don't actually jump or you might land on the bare feet of hippie chicks, and there's nothing more useless than a crippled hippie.

Rum Doodle Bar

Probably the most happening bar in town, this is where everyone gathers to share trekking stories. You can read the footprint-shaped notes on the wall and live vicariously through sad bastards who think they actually accomplished something heroic by going on a bit of a stroll. Climb Everest and you eat here free for life – which might not be a long time if you go in for that sort of thing.

New Orleans Café

If you love endless versions of “Knocking on Heaven's Door” played on guitars, tablas, sitars and didgeridoos, don't miss the Sunday night jams here. Word to the wise: armpit farting is not considered an actual instrument and is frowned upon.

Upstairs Bar

Secret expat hideout. Live jazz several nights a week. Ask around where it is, walk in, and act like you've been there all your life. But remember, it's top secret, so don't tell anyone. Oops.

SHOPPING

Thangka Paintings – Amazingly intricate Buddhist paintings depicting heaven and hell and everything in between. You can even learn how to do it at the Kopan Monastery near Bodhnath, but your attempts are guaranteed to look more like hell.

Books – Not much else to do at night on a trek other than read by candlelight. Which is why there are so many good second-hand books in Kathmandu, where high altitude meets higher learning.

Trekking supplies – A wide range at unbeatable prices. Pick up brand-name hiking boots, sleeping bags and woolen hats that you'll never ever use again.

Gurkha knives – These famous knives won the Nepali warriors worldwide esteem. As good for slicing cheese as disemboweling sworn enemies.

Embroidered clothing – Get your name woven on a shirt in Tibetan script! Hopefully they don't just write “I'm a twat” on it. Geniuses with a sewing machine, these artists can make a statement or a picture of anything you want out of coloured thread and a high-speed needle. Set aside a few days if you want an XXL Mona Lisa.

Handmade Paper

A local specialty and a good gift for mom or a girl you like back home: diaries, photo albums, and stationery, all made out of handmade paper with flowers and twiggy-looking stuff in it. If you don't know the first thing about diaries or flowers, ask some female tourist which one she likes and she'll think you're sensitive and sweet and deep. Try not to laugh when she says this.

The Temple at the End of Insanity

Twice a week people have their demons exorcised at an Indian temple. Writer Tom Vater and lenswoman Aroon Thaewchatturat wake up and smell the burning cowpats.

We are on our way to Balaji Mandir, a temple dedicated to the mighty monkey god Hanuman, who plays a starring role in the Ramayana, a tale known by virtually everyone in India.

Ashok, our driver, has been there twice with his wife and child and is enthusiastic: “On Saturday it is most busy. There will be many people, from Haryana, from Delhi, from Punjab. They come from all over to make a *puja* for Hanuman. It is a most famous temple in Rajasthan.”

It's 7am and we are slowly rolling through the early morning traffic out of Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan. Ashok, who once worked for the US embassy and drove Chelsea Clinton around India during her father's state visit, relaxes behind the wheel of his gleaming white Ambassador as we clear the city gates.

Ashok knows his temples and has made pilgrimages to Hindu religious sites all over India. But Balaji Mandir, on the main Jaipur to Agra Highway, right in the heart of India's tourist triangle, is especially close to his soul: "It is very good temple, so many people go there every Saturday and Tuesday, but maybe foreigners don't know about this place."

About a 100km east of Jaipur, we slow down at a traffic crossing clogged with cars, buses, rickshaws, donkeys, camels and people. There's no sign, but clearly this is our turnoff. The side road we take is lined with small temples, ashrams and chai shops. The further we drive from the main road, the denser the crowd around the car gets. Pilgrims and swamis of all ages swarm around us – half-naked sadhus and old women with faded tattoos on their faces and arms, the nouveau riche with their mobiles and wives in jeans, farmer families that have just stepped off their fields and into the modern world.

The Ambassador glides through the crowd, which gives way only at the last minute. Ashok parks the car right in front of a souvenir shop selling cheap bangles and images of Hanuman, naturally, in all shapes and sizes, for a mind-boggling range of prices. We have arrived at a religious supermarket. The shop owner protests, but Ashok, a big man, shouts something, points at us and we are sucked into the heavy current of pilgrims that sweeps us all the way to the main temple – a bland two-storey building.

There's a queue of about 1,000 people out front, driven into a narrow corralled corridor by temple security and a few desultory cops. The sun's up, it's hot as hell and the floor is caked with food, sweat and *prashad*

(sacred sweets) from the temple.

People are slowly boiling in the morning sun and the queue is so long that many will have to wait for hours before they reach the temple gate. By now we have attracted a sizable crowd – about 100 people – of beggars, street kids and sadhus.

As she sucks in the noxious fumes, she babbles and screams intermittently before returning to inhale the burning bovine feces.

As the pressure to see, talk to and touch the aliens is about to reach fever pitch, we are rescued by a skinny old man dressed in a thin *kurta*. This innocuous-looking individual clearly has authority and he knows who we are – probably because of Ashok's feverish networking with a group of hustlers and sadhus.

We make straight for the VIP gate (all the crowded temples in India seem to have one), an iron bar is pulled back, a chain comes up and 2,000 eyes follow us with a mix of envy, curiosity, and laughter as we are led into another office to meet a temple official who eyes us with neutral curiosity.

"Which country?" he suddenly barks.

Looking at the Thai photographer Aroon Thaewchatturat, he barks, "She not Germany!"

The meeting ends and we follow Ashok deeper into the temple.

Behind us the noise level is increasing rapidly. The man with the chain at the temple entrance has just opened the floodgates. Thousands are straining to enter – it feels like a summer sale – and they're pushing as if the deity was present for a limited period of time only.

We are led through a side entrance to the main inner sanctum, which looks a bit like a prison. Pilgrims are squeezed double file onto a narrow walkway until they reach a set of bars. Beyond the bars is a box for donations and beyond that a glass wall. A statue of Hanuman, flanked by Shiva and Parvati to his right and Krishna to his left, is just visible from where we are standing.

None of the pilgrims mind that they are being herded through the temple like cattle, that they will throw part of their hard-earned savings into the box and that in less than 10 minutes they will be outside again, heading for buses to take them back to their village. Plastic bags of loose change are handed to grim-faced Brahmins beyond the iron bars, who dump them in the big silver box in front of them. The pilgrims are given *prashad* (a ceremonial sweet) and despite the many hours of waiting and the dense crowds, they head happily to the exit.

We move through the bowels of the main temple complex until we find a concrete stairway that leads into a long dark room upstairs. On the second floor, men and women sit in small groups, often in circles around one person, usually a woman who is nodding back and fourth. Little light falls through a row of barred windows into the room.

Some scream, others mumble. A few women are convulsing all by themselves.

The crowd around us moves through this long room and I try and make out exactly what is going on in the semi-darkness – human beings on a shadowy trip through trance-land appear to inhabit this upper storey. The *shakti* (or personification of God as the Divine Mother) is



strong and this strange trip is only taken by women.

The pilgrims around us carry large brass trays of cooked rice on their heads, ignoring the people on the floor. The crowd is so dense and so homogenous, there is no opportune moment to stop in the current and we are swept through a small door into the morning sun. But the sun doesn't belong here. We are now around the back of the temple. The smell of something rotten is so strong I am almost gagging. But Ashok already has a handkerchief held to his face.

In a small courtyard immediately in front of us, men dump their rice onto the floor, which is already covered in a metre-thick layer of rice by earlier pilgrims. A small army of women with long brushes removes some of these donations but they are mostly concerned with pocketing as much baksheesh as possible and the bulk of the food, mixed with *prashad*, sticks to our bare feet. Dogs scavenge in the rubbish that lies everywhere. Ashok leads us along the back temple wall.

Here, the most extraordinary activities take place – a scene so blissfully insane any doubts one might harbour about India's unique eccentricities are immediately restored.

About a dozen women have prostrated themselves in a long row, facing the temple wall and a shallow ditch full of refuse. Immediately in front of their faces, which are very close to the filthy ground, they have placed a smoldering piece of dry cow shit - a traditional cooking fuel, still much used in India today. Each cowpat has had some sacred sweets and *ghee* (clarified butter) placed on top and the air is filled with a smell that is nothing less than apocalyptic.

The men and women in prayer are berated by supervisors who walk the line behind them, sometimes pressing a pilgrim's head closer to the ground and encouraging the rest to pray vigorously. Some of the younger girls are crying and retching but no one breaks ranks.

We follow the line of these true believers until we get to even truer believers – old women who have had enormous granite boulders laid on their hands, or feet or even on their heads. Most of these ladies are all but immobile as they are inhaling cow shit. Beyond the building a stairway leads up a steep hill. This denuded and filthy hillside is covered in small shrines; most of them are crudely fashioned from concrete and a few cheap tiles.

Amongst the shrines, the truly insane rule supreme.

"The women have heavier medium, the men only light," Ashok explains.

Indeed, up here the women are also in the majority – the only competition are the overfed and aggressive monkeys – because, after all, this is a temple dedicated to Hanuman.

The ground between the shrines is covered in rotten food, several

inches thick. A young woman in front of us has placed her cow turd on a shrine. As she sucks in the noxious fumes, she babbles and screams intermittently, before returning to inhale the burning bovine feces.

A shallow pool a little further down the ravine is filled with what looks like an entire family. Old women throw the water about like small children while the dogs and monkeys are in a permanent state of combat readiness, prepared to fight to the death for the next bit of fresh food to be dumped around them.

By now our feet are totally encrusted in sacred filth and the smell of rotten sacrifices has seeped deep into our skin, hair and clothes. Ashok, of course, is enjoying every moment of this and happily acts as a shield for Aroon's camera.

As we leave, Aroon raises her camera to an old lady whose hands are stuck between several heavy boulders. The woman sees her and howls at the crowd: "Camera! Camera!"

Ashok makes for the stairway to a side exit at double speed and we follow suit.

A narrow corridor between two buildings takes us back to street level. Sadhus and professional beggars occupy this entire stretch, their bowls at the ready, all of them expecting the generosity of the pilgrims. We are flushed out into the real world – a street crammed with thousands of smiling and shouting devotees, happy and perplexed to have a couple of foreigners amongst them.

Tom Vater's latest book is the travel thriller The Devil's Road to Kathmandu (Dragon's Mouth Press, Hong Kong, 2006). Check out his website (www.tomvater.com) for more cool stories and publishing news.





Revered Rodents

After Tom Vater's train breaks down in the desert of Rajasthan, he makes tracks for a temple where thousands of rodents, thought to be reincarnations of holy men, are fed, watered and cared for. Photos by Aroon Thaewchatturat.

A sign outside the imposing temple gate of Karni Matter Mandir in Deshnook asks us "Is it 8th Wonder of World." While we sweat and stare, tour buses disgorge foreign package travelers and pilgrims in their thousands on the grimy forecourt of the temple. Out in the sun, there's not a rat in sight, just plenty of beggars, exhausted dogs and sacred cows stupefied by the heat.

Suitably impressed by the commotion outside, we cross the threshold into the inner temple courtyard – minus our shoes. It is considered auspicious if a rat runs across the feet of the faithful. The true believer will eat sacred sweets that the holy rodents have salivated over. But this is for the hardcore and we are mere voyeurs.

In the late afternoon it is still boiling hot inside and there are far fewer rats about than I had expected. What's more, they all look sick. I don't see any infant rats, just grownups with swollen bellies. No wonder, there's food everywhere: sweets, milk and even huge bowls of alcohol stand in the shadows. Around the food containers, dozens of rats scurry around. Many of them are deformed – their testicles look like little balloons that the males drag behind them. An albino rat is especially auspicious and spotting one means good luck, but we don't see any.

The pilgrims all pile into the inner sanctum where a Brahmin priest performs a *puja* waving a tray of hot coals. In the dark, there is plenty of movement, but we are not allowed to enter and watch from the doorstep. Rats scurry past us. The temple floor is covered with rat droppings and the atmosphere is anything but agreeable.

The package tourists don't linger. Off go their flashes, "WOW," they shriek and then they pile back into the air-con bus and head off for a buffet lunch. I don't blame them – there's not much to see at the 8th Wonder of the World; our feet stick to the pestilential ground; the rats are out to lunch and there isn't enough rodent saliva to go around for all of us.

Yet the idea, more than the reality, of worshipping rats and the way they do it has a peculiar attraction. Where else in the world would people go out of their way to get rodents pissed?

Check out the excellent three-minute clip about the temple @ www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACzWdSfZXmw

Daft Rally for Noble Causes

Imagine an international, 6,500-km rally where the cars must cost less than 100 pounds and many of the drivers don't even have insurance. Daniel Cooper chats with one of the competitors before the rally gets in gear this month.



You've probably heard of the Paris-Dakar Rally, a punishing endurance event across the Sahara contested by professional sportsmen and millionaire playboys. It had been Julian Nowill's lifelong dream to participate in the race but when it came time to stump up the money, the £10,000 entry fee seemed a little stiff, not to mention the requirements for his vehicle.

Appalled by the race's elite-only status, he devised his own race, the Plymouth to Dakar rally, a race for the rest of us. The egalitarian and off-beat nature of the contest becomes clear after reading the rules. First and foremost, cars may only cost £100, and only £15 may be spent on modifications. Further, there's no support from organisers when the race is underway. Finally, all the cars are auctioned off for charity at the end of the race. (The fifth rule is a little more prosaic: cars must be left-hand drive).

It all sounds a bit daft, and it is, but it's also great fun, and the fifth annual race is set to take off this month.

The event has an international flavour with teams from as far as the

"disorganisers," as they call themselves) felt he was equipped for the challenge. "There's no calling your mum or the rally organisers saying you're broke down in Mauritania – you're on your own."

The next task was to get a car for under 100 pounds – not that there's any shortage of bangers in the UK but this one had to be left-hand drive. As it turned out an appearance on Cambridge morning radio did the trick and Team Rally Ace, as they're known, now has wheels.

The 1987 Peugeot 205 has 17,000km on the clock and is named Daisy. Since Rally Ace are making a film, they're taking along a support vehicle, Stuart's old 1972 Volkswagen campervan, with an unknown number of miles "because it's gone around the clock".

The rally is not a race per se, and most teams are expected to travel the African wastelands in convoys of around 60 cars. The course covers 6,500km, seven nations, two continents, one minefield and Stuart reckons it will take around 25 days "if everything goes to plan". Christmas day is in Marrakesh while there's a party scheduled for New Year's Day in the Sahara. In fact, there's no fewer than four party days on the official itinerary, the last taking place in the Safari Garden hotel

The course covers 6,500km, seven nations, two continents, one minefield and Stuart reckons it will take around 25 days.

USA and Siberia and, this year, one team from a little island in the Gulf of Thailand.

Regular readers may remember Stuart Sutton's *Barat*, a documentary he and his team made about their road-trip down the Grand Trunk Road in India (*Untamed Travel* October 2005) and his wheels are in motion to race in the Plymouth to Dakar this month.

"I heard about [the rally] from a friend over a drunken conversation once. We were talking about the Paris to Dakar rally and he mentioned this Plymouth to Dakar rally and it stuck in my mind so I decided to do some investigations and through the website and things like that I managed to find out what's going on and I made an application," he said.

Over 2,000 teams applied for the 300 positions in the rally. Stuart's application was late but given his past experience, the organisers (or

in Banjul, Gambia (actually, the rally doesn't stop in Dakar) where the cars are auctioned off to raise money for the Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism and the Gambian National Olympic Committee. Last year they raised over 135,000 pounds, not bad for a stack of old bangers.

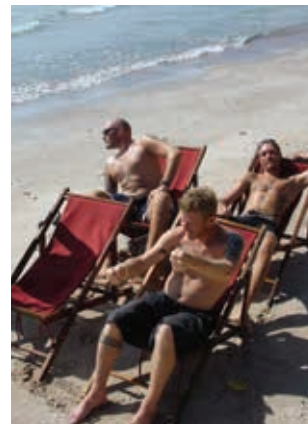
Stuart and his team are also raising funds for SOS Children's Villages and the Motor Neuron Disease Association, through donations and sponsorships, most of which have come from bars on their native Koh Tao. Ace Marine is the primary sponsor, as two of the team members are employees.

Untamed Travel will be running updates on Rally Ace throughout the trip, so look out for the January edition or check the website to see how the lads are getting along.



Read All About It

Excitement is high in the *Untamed* offices as the start date, December 16th, draws near. Stuart and the crew will be filing updates from the road, which you can read on our website at www.untamed-travel.com. The official Rally Ace website is at www.rallyace.com and includes daily updates of the team's progress. Here's a recent entry: *None of our cars have insurance, tax, MOT or even registration papers. Some other teams' cars are fully legit, while others are planning on swapping number plates over from country to country. It might fool the border cops, but if you crash you're in the crap, big time. I think that one team doesn't even have valid licences. None of us have had any vaccinations or sorted out any visas but at least we have licences, not international ones but at least licences.*



Doin' it for the Kids

ASSET: The Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism assists and advocates tour guides, guesthouses, fruit-juice pressers and local tour operators. Touts and scammers not welcome. www.asset-gambia.com

Gambia National Olympic Committee: Has a pretty obvious mission. They also run other sporting events and recently sent a team to the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. www.gnoc.gm

SOS Children's Villages: Provide care to orphans and children in need as well as supporting families in 132 nations. www.sos-childrensvillages.org

Motor Neuron Disease Association: The MND Association funds and promotes research into the causes of and treatments for Motor Neurone Disease, as well as supporting sufferers. www.mndassociation.org

Donations can be made on the Rally Ace website, www.rallyace.com

HIGHS & LOWS

Up in the Himalayas, without a guide, mountain man (just don't call him "Grizzly Adams") Rob Viereck shares his experiences on mountaineering, medical aid, Maoist rebels, mysticism, village life and having a vulture circle him, thinking he was dead.



MOUNTAINEERING

Walking between hundreds of piles of rocks in a small valley knowing that each pile represented a person who had died while climbing the mountains.

Walking to the foot of Mt. Everest and wondering if I had frostbite on my hands and feet.

Crossing a 5,000-metre mountain pass through ankle deep snow as the sun goes down, not having seen another person for days.

Building a fire in a cave, staying up all night eating popcorn and listening to the mysterious noises outside getting closer.

Climbing over a massive rock pinnacle and then sitting at the top for an hour, getting stoned, and not knowing how to descend.

Swimming alone, naked in a chilly pool at the base of a 500-metre jungle waterfall, watching the sunset turn the slopes of a massive mountain a flaming red-gold.

TRAILBLAZING

Walking slowly down a shady path on a hot day watching huge purple flowers fall lazily from the overhanging bamboo.

Sipping tea in a stall by the trail, watching army commando snipers shoot young Maoists armed with pistols.

Sitting beside the trail, crying, because I realised my knees were too inflamed to walk to the next village.

MYSTICAL MOMENTS

Staying up all night drinking hallucinogenic beer while watching shamans chanting, and doing animal spirit dances to bless a house and its inhabitants.

Going into a trance, listening to the monks and nuns chant and drum for hours in an ancient Buddhist monastery while sipping their salty, buttery tea.



WILD THINGS

Waking up to see a vulture with a two-metre wingspan hovering over me, staring me in the eyes to see if I was dead or just resting.

Realizing that the thing that just jumped over my head was a full-grown *thaar* (wooly mountain goat).

Watching black butterflies as big as my hand licking the sweat off my arms.

Feeling black, fuzzy bumblebees the size of ping-pong balls bouncing off my head – seven stings can kill a man.

Suddenly realising that the snake that just crossed in front of me is one of the most deadly in the world – a saw-toothed viper.

Sitting, half asleep, on the toilet in the morning, watching a huge boar squeal with delight as he greedily gobbled up my shit, as it fell into his gaping mouth.

Being surrounded by thousands of ravenous, chirping, metallic-blue birds as they ate their way through the berry bushes on the slopes of a mountain.

Walking through the jungle at night, hearing noises in the bushes. The next day I saw a man dripping with blood being carried home in a basket. He'd been badly mauled by a bear in the same jungle, when cutting wood.

Watching a pig being ritually strangled until it was unconscious and then stabbed in the heart with a bamboo spear. (It tasted good, too!)

VILLAGE LIFE

Cutting millet in the terraced fields for a day with a tribal family. Eating cactus fruit and drinking water buffalo milk for lunch.

Using a razor blade to cut open and drain the huge blisters of a baby suffering from second-degree burns while she watched without saying a word or shedding a single tear. Feeling dizzy as her mother gave me tea and put a necklace of marigolds around my neck.

Sitting at night beside a young mother and her child as they died of pneumonia in their house, having already used up all my medicine and not knowing what else to do.

Watching tiny, snot-nosed children, dressed in rags performing ancient, graceful dances in an impoverished village.

Singing and playing guitar for a village of children beside a raging river with a full moon shining through fluorescent white clouds in a jet-black sky.

Sitting around the fire pit in a mud house trying to communicate in a 10,000-year-old Mongolian dialect with the village elders.

Getting lost in the rice paddies in the middle of nowhere and being taken in for the night by a family who had never seen a foreigner. The 73-year-old grandmother grabbed my guitar and started singing and dancing. She had to be restrained.



GET ME TO A NUNNERY

Sakya: finally a pristine little truly Tibetan town; no one can speak Chinese. A guy I met on the bus took me up to a pretty, little convent up on the hill outside of town, at sunset. It's the first time I've been inside a Tantric Buddhist convent. The nuns giggled as I took a photo of them posing in front of two skeletons joyously copulating (a la Grateful Dead stickers).

The next morning, I actually got up early to sneak into the original Sakyamuni Monastery before the "ticket monks" appeared. Wow! Huge amazing *thankas* of the whole pantheon of flaming, befanged, drinking-blood-from-skulls, human-skin-wearing, evil-dwarf-stomping, grinning-skull be-crowned, demons-turned-Buddhist. There they were, large as life, staring down at me from the ceilings and walls. More scary than any horror movie. I'm starting to think Tibetan Buddhism is kinda heavy.

There was a funeral ceremony for someone important and some of the Lamas put on wooden masks and did a twirling drum dance. They were positively fearsome!

Went to catch a bus to wherever but just as I spied one, my old friends from the PSB (Public Security Bureau) pulled up in a white Jeep, said something to the driver and took off. When I arrived to buy a ticket, he acted nervous and told me I couldn't get on the bus or he'd get a fine, and a beating. There was a brief discussion and I decided to back off and start walking.

A horse cart came along, so there we were, jogging along, me playing guitar and my farmer friend kicking his faithful steed in the ass to keep rhythm. A half hour up the road, what do we see? The bus that I didn't get on, upside down, having gone off the road and rolled down an embankment. Good karma or what?

Maybe the PSB really are my friends, after all?!



Female Confessionals



It's a full-time job posting morning, noon and night but Cassandra Beckford finds the women who do nothing but.

One afternoon of trawling through dull profiles of those seeking to "add me as a friend" culminated in a peek at the blog section of the server. And what a venomous nest that opened. To be sure, Myspace is a social networking site, but I was amazed to find such "tell-alls" on a site with a predominantly musical focus. Glued to my monitor for the next six hours, I sifted through

joys, niggles, fears, and confessionals; a virtual peephole into the secret cyber lives of others.

Being female, I immediately homed in on other women, wanting to explore the crucial concerns of my feminine peers. Since I'd read the

reports about scores of female professionals and stay-at-home mums dominating Net dating, gambling and online shopping, I expected to find women at the forefront of the blogging ranks.

I followed Lauren's "Me and Angelina" series for eight months, a fantasy collection penned in tribute to her wet dreams and constant worship of the Hollywood starlet. Lauren originally listed herself as a hardcore lesbian, but her grand finale and telling exit from the forum entitled "Lauren goes bi-bi," was a four-page apology to her fans. Having started a relationship



Teenage Decrepitude?

Is your Bangkok lifestyle *Almost Heaven* or *Sin City*? Take this test and put yourself in or out of misery, as www.realage.com gives it to you plain and simple. You exercise? You eat well? Congratulations, you're 10 years younger than your real age. You ride the *motorsai* to the 7-11? You guzzle pints and have a fag dangling from each corner of your mouth? Commiserations, you're an old crow.

TIMELY INVENTION

You Tube, which had 27.6 million visitors in September, and was recently sold to Google Inc for US\$1.6 billion, won Time magazine's "Invention of the Year for 2006."



Ok, I'll admit I jumped on the Myspace bandwagon too – but didn't everyone? In an age where most of your working life is spent in front of a computer, it's nigh on impossible to miss the big Net trends (my boss swears that these days, at least 90 percent of all Net traffic goes via You Tube, but that's a whole other article). So back to Myspace; after the initial buzz of 'pimping your page' (using codes to generate flashy wallpaper, graphics and fonts), tracking hot tunes, reading the profiles of friends and strangers, and gathering the obligatory "thanks for the add, honey" and other back-slapping replies, what else is there to do?

with – shock! horror! – a man, Lauren “wanted to concentrate on enjoying real life” and “no longer felt inspired to write,” so it was bye-bye to blogging. Was Lauren’s blogging pattern a true reflection of other women on the Web?

I’m sure Psycho Bitch, a Latino tornado whose twisted vortex I was immediately sucked into, would beg to disagree. This J-Lo look-alike catalogues every step of her life in minute, fanatical, but often humorous detail. Don’t be fooled by that sweet smile, though, this controversy queen creates the most poisonous pen notes on the server, using her rapid fangs to bite, mangle and spit out the competition.

In online popularity polls, Psycho Bitch unleashes her ‘cult’ of eager followers to vote and support bloggers of her choosing, leaving the tag “I’m voting for ‘....’ because Psycho Bitch told me to.” Beat that for mind-boggling, virtualised power and control. For your viewing pleasure, here’s a chunk from the thousands of words typed daily by the woman herself:

“Yes, I am a self-proclaimed TOP blogger. You don’t like that term? Your problem. NOT mine. Why do I say that? Because I can, and because I feel like it and because I am an attention whore. I’m a freaking LEO for Christ’s sake. Let’s not forget my blogs, most of the time, make the TOP 10. I’ll break it down for you... THE...TOP (notice the word top)...10.

I’VE SPENT HOURS, DAYS AND MONTHS BLOGGING TO REACH WHERE I AM. IT’S JUST MYSPACE MY FUCKING ASS! THIS PLACE MEANS SO MUCH TO ME. AND I DON’T GIVE 2 FLYING FUCKS HOW PATHETIC THAT SOUNDS TO YOU. I’VE MADE FRIENDS HERE, AND LEARNED MORE THINGS ABOUT MYSELF THROUGH BLOGGING THAN ALL OF

This controversy queen creates the most poisonous pen notes on the server, using her rapid fangs to bite, mangle and spit out the competition.

MY 50 PSYCHOLOGISTS OR PSYCHIATRISTS CHUNKED TOGETHER HAVE.”

Awesome Zara, another Myspacer, succinctly defines the attraction, or compulsive addiction, that blogging holds:

“I had 200 subscribers after one week but still yearned to do better in the rankings. If I was 10th one day, I wanted to be 8th the next day. My personal life sucked, so this was a prime way to escape from it. Better than any reality television show. This was something that I could actually have some CONTROL over. The first time I broke 1,000 daily views, astonishment! When I failed to meet that mark two days later, disappointment. It’s an ugly addiction.”

But Myspace bloggers and their insular world is only the tip of the self-obsessed ice pick. Bloggery, begun in May 2005, compiled an “A, B and C” list of bloggers. Their A-List maintained a heavy New York slant, which was quite the opposite of Myspace, in which the bloggers came from worldwide destinations. Of the 166 bloggers on the A-list, only 25 were women. As such, my theory of women as the dominant bloggers was blown right out of the technosphere. Bright stars on this list include: **Dana Bruneau’s Perfect World** (www.adn.com/life/perfect_world/); view the world through this

opinionated teen.

Meana Trott’s website (www.sixapart.com), which links to the fun and frivolous ‘vox’ space. Elizabeth Spier’s Fishbowl NY (www.mediabistro.com/fishbowlny), a true gem for those who worship at the creativity altar.

So who reigns as the Queen-Pin? Boingboing.net is the most popular blog in the world, and Xeni Jardin wears the co-editor crown. This Monroe-esque tech-messenger has written for everyone from *The Guardian* to *Fortune*, *Gizmodo* to the *New York Times*, and lends her words to the battle against blogging for profit.

Collectively, the boingboing.net crew (of which the other four members are men) provide a perfect portal into the wonders of the Web; but it’s Xeni’s championing of quirky topics like camera phone art exhibitions and cyber fashion that helps her shine.

For now, however, I’m inclined to give top-rated, polished blogs a miss, in favour of something more real and raw. It’s the return to those blubbing female exposes, akin to harbouring a guilty secret, which makes sifting through the blogosphere a perfectly satisfying way to waste company time.

Down Memory Lane

Remember those doodled drawings and notes that were the sum effort of an afternoon class spent ignoring your teacher? Well, imagine logging onto www.foundmagazine.com and seeing that old note pop right out at you as this month’s “new find.” Amongst other things, it’s the collection of old notes, messages and photos that fuel this lost-now-found craze. Log on to see the day’s new find, or better yet, peek at the sister project – “Dirty Found,” for a rip-roaring ride through other people’s smut, love letters and pornographic Polaroids.



NET WORTH EXPANDS

A British Internet monitoring firm recently revealed that the number of websites has driven past the 100-million milestone. Netcraft attributed this to the dizzying rise of on-line diaries (or blogs), as well as virtual stores for small businesses.

Bangkok Blender

Finding sobriety just too boring, Dan and Stu wave goodbye to their newfound AA friends and seek out the bright lights and late nights of Bangkok's legendary nightlife. Will the boys still be on form after a month out of training? Crack a can and read on.

6:06pm, *Gulliver's, Sukhumvit Soi 5*

Dan: This Khaosan institution squats halfway down Soi 5 among the massage and tattoo parlours like a well-dressed dragon. Inside is all neon, TV monitors and slick fittings, long on decoration, short on atmosphere. It's not really their fault as the place is massive, with non-smoking areas, a beer garden, chess superdome and pool tables up the wazoo, but it feels more like a drinking factory than a proper pub. As it is, the customers seem to be older tourists and expats and English teachers, except for the fellow across the bar in wraparound shades, who was obviously a dickhead.

Stu: A behemoth of a beer hall, straight from the corporate cookie-cutter, as are the clientele – ideal for lonely travellers missing the chain-pub atmosphere, or lack thereof. The most interesting features are the spinning car and the huge guitar-shaped bar. Having been on the wagon for some weeks, we wanted a neutral, friendly kind of place to start the evening, but this was just too much, and he could only stand to stay for two beers.

liven up the place. Luckily owner and operator 'E.T' was at hand to provide the fuel for a tour of his boozy universe. And what a trip it was, blasting us into orbit with atomic-strength Jager-bombs and laying on in-flight refuels of Heineken. After a quick briefing on the bartripping mission, E.T stepped up the pace, matching us drink for drink with the highest octane booze in the hold.

Dan: Opened last December, Bully's is an example of Bangkok's drinking future. On the site of a shitty old girly-bar, the room has been transformed into an American/European-style drinker. Lots of wood and bulls about (the name refers to the animal, not the clientele) one could be forgiven for forgetting you're in Bangkok. Then again, after a few drinks E.T did offer us each a blowjob, so perhaps we weren't so far from home after all. As it turned out, he was using an old bit of barman's wit and two tall shot glasses appeared on our table, leaving me red-faced and doing up my fly. What we didn't know was the shooters were a feint and E.T was setting us up for a one-two punch when the Duval, a super-strength (9.5%) Belgian beer that makes Chang look like orange juice. It's an ancient brew and as Stu said, "You become history after drinking it." Switching back to local beer to calm our nerves and regroup, E.T brought out the big guns, delivering two double

6:50pm, *Bully's, 8 Sukhumvit Road*

Stu: Following the recommendation of barfly/guru Andy (a piss-up pioneer whose generous nose for the sauce is always pointed toward the finest of public houses), we found ourselves in Bully's. Being early, we caught the tail-end of the after-work herd and decided to



Belfast Carbombs (a heady mix of Jameson's whiskey, Bailey's, and Guinness topped off with nitro) to the table. Taking the bull by the horns we lifted glasses and fought our way to the bottom. Sad to say, we left half a beer unfinished, a bartripping no-no, on our retreat to the door. I'm told Bully's serves up an excellent Sunday roast, has free wi-fi and regular live blues music but I really can't remember a thing.

9:30pm, Bed Supperclub, Sukhumvit 11

Dan: One kebab from Soi 3 later and we were feeling up to facing Bed Supperclub. There had been the opening of their 'Fossil' art installation, accompanied by two hours of free-flowing vodka, which was our original target, but we arrived just in time to miss it. Looked like it had been a roaring night though as we fit right into the legless crowd, captained by *Untamed Travel* cartoonist and vodka aficionado Nigel Price. The installation is an old roadside petrol kiosk and to my disappointment they weren't serving mixers from the pump. However, as anyone who has hired a motorcycle in the back-blocks of Asia knows, these places serve their petrol out of old whiskey bottles, reproduced faithfully in this swanky bar, which I found deliciously ironic. Equally delicious were the drinks being poured down my throat by the two European lasses Stuart was schmoozing. As a married man, my role has gone from group leader to wingman, soon to be grounded and put on traffic control, so I did my best to intercept bogies while Stu went in for his bombing run.

Stu: Bollocks! Mr. Freebooze had left the building, so I abandoned the exhibition in search of an alcoholic benefactor and was fortunate to encounter an ill DJ in the shape of Jamie, a.k.a DJ Octo. The charitable thing to do

was relieve the ill performer of his drinktickets (Cheers, Octo), thus shouldering the burden of the morrow's hangover. Truly plastered by now and obviously in desperate need of female conversation, I tried out a new Bartripping strategy by clutching Dan's notepad and interviewing any woman with a pulse and a drink in her hand. Before I knew it, I had stumbled into two young flowers, freshly plucked from the heart of Europe who expressed suspicion at my drooling, profanity-laden interview technique. Clearly it was time for plan B – stop speaking, start writing. What resulted was a permanent record and testimony to my clumsy and vulgar attempt at seduction, but we live and learn.

1:20am, Four Brothers Noodle Stall, Sukhumvit 11

Stu: Sensing an imminent coma, Dan suggested a noodle remedy. The only memories I have of this part of the night are the stains on my T-shirt, but then memories can be deceptive.

Dan: Hardly the social hub of Bangkok, this noodle stall is nevertheless an institution and witness to many of my late-night 'one for the road' mistakes. Tonight was no exception and we found ourselves supping 'one for the gutter' out of 7-11 Big Gulp cups. It's a testament to the cunningness of street vendors and the trusting naivety of police that we can do this right under the noses of the law and order machine. The booze took Stuart hard though, ranting at the staff and refusing to pay. It must have been a big night as we could only get one down before retiring to our respective beds with only a brewing hangover for company. But I learned something that night, and again in the morning – never order a drink that comes with whipped cream on top.



High Tech Relic

A rundown
gas stand
receives a
new lease
on life from
Bangkok-
based artist,
Adi Kirketerp.

A focus on the erosion of the past seems to be the topic of choice for both Thai and Thailand-based artists at the moment. Student filmmaker, Urupong Raksasat recently earned praise for his documentary that captured the changing life in his home village in Chiang Rai.

For Adi Kirketerp, a Danish artist, the sight of a wooden shack with a hand-powered petrol pump encouraged her to capture the reality and rapid change in the everyday existence of her local landscape, namely the disappearance of small businesses in favour of large conglomerates.

The petrol shack, until recently located in Prachuap Khiri Khan province, and close to Adi's weekend home, functioned as a meeting point for the local residents who stopped there to fill up on gas.

In a drive to memorialise this image, Adi purchased the rickety shack, moved it to Bangkok and reconstructed it piece-by-piece. Throughout November it was housed within Bed Supperclub, where it was been transformed into a drinking den known as 'Fossil Bar'.

Through the juxtaposition of placing archaic artefacts in a cutting-edge space, Adi aims to evoke a complete sensory experience, from the drinks served at the bar to the supporting video installation, and to challenge the thinking of the wealthy, urbanities that frequent this nightspot with an experience from a rural Thai community.

Kirketerp's previous work "Bedlam" was exhibited at the Eat Me Art restaurant, also in Bangkok. This 10-piece show of her abstract mixed media collages used acrylic and 'found' objects like scraps of cloth, cinema tickets, pieces of handwriting, and sometimes, her own personal items, to comment on today's consumer society. She also participated in *Transitions*, a joint exhibition with a fellow Bangkok-based woman, Margaret Ingles, earlier this year.

Adi hopes that the installation of this gas station-cum bar in the nightclub space can stand as evidence that 'adapting the old to fit new formats' is the best approach to survival in the modern age.



Stillborn Abortion Mystery

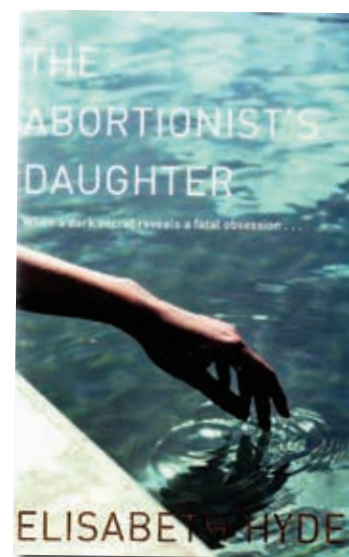
Review by Daniel Cooper

Diana Thompson, abortion doctor and vocal pro-choicer is dead, probably murdered, leaving her 19-year old daughter Megan and husband Frank to pick up the pieces. Of course the death of a controversial figure in small-town Colorado piques the interest of the public and press. Throw into the mix that Frank, also the local district attorney, had a bust up argument with the dead woman earlier that day and questions about her relationship with the head of the local anti-abortion coalition, and the stage is set for a plot with more twists than a cat's intestines, shot through with the continuing thread of how Megan can come to terms with her last words to her mother: "Have fun killing babies today."

Elisabeth Hyde's *The Abortionist's Daughter* (2006, Pan Books) tacks between the pros and cons of pregnancy termination, Diana and Frank's struggle to keep their marriage together and Megan's difficult entry into adulthood. The narrative jumps between various protagonists, the investigating officer, Frank, Megan and the dead woman. Frank is a suspect in the case and won't give an alibi, driving a wedge between Megan and her father. But Megan has a history that may or may not be relevant, and is also attracted to the policeman investigating the case.

Hyde quickly fleshes out her characters with a full set of habits and quirks, in true Stephen King style, and quickly knots them into the twisted plot. What results is a read that's easy to start but difficult to put down. However, what promises to be an investigation of family relations, ethics, faith and the clash between ideals and real-world pragmatism is railroaded back onto the familiar tracks of the mystery novel. Not that the book fails as a whodunit, it is an excellent potboiler with moments of serenity, but the high-minded debate and plot fork off about halfway though and by the end rub shoulders uncomfortably. The murder-mystery vehicle should carry the exploration of abortion, family and trust but, at the end of book, what stays with the reader isn't the tensions between the characters but a feeling of "I knew it was the butler all along."

Some reviewers have accused Hyde of using a high-impact title to sell *The Abortionist's daughter* but that's unfair. The book is well written and entertaining, but Booker Prize material it ain't.



Bangkok in Your Back Pocket

Review by Daniel Cooper

Wallpaper City Guide: Bangkok*, from the good folks at *Wallpaper** magazine and Phaidon, breaks the mould of the garden-variety guidebook by being brief and concentrating on stunning architectural and interior photographs, many shot by *Untamed Travel* contributor Jason Lang. At just over 100 pages this little number isn't going to take up much space in your backpack but it's not going to be much help when you're stuck in Chinatown at 2am looking for a place to stay, unless you're going to drop 10 grand at the Oriental. But the guide isn't for hippies or gap-year backpackers; it's squarely aimed at the moneyed jet set who are looking for something a little different from the usual Bangkok experience. Heavy on design, of course, there's also room for historical scenes such as Khlong Om or Lumpini Park. More for inspiration than navigation, the guide does give a unique view of a remarkable city.



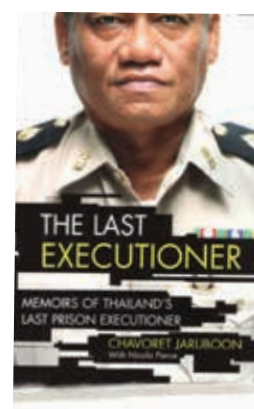
SHELF LIFE

Capsule review for *Ritalin kids* by Jim Algie

The Last Executioner: Memoirs of Thailand's Last Prison Executioner, Chaovoret Jaruboon with Nicola Pierce, Maverick House, 2006.

How did a young Thai Buddhist with a Catholic school education become a teenage rock 'n' roller, who dressed like his hero Elvis Presley to play shows in bars for American GIs, turn into the trigger-man behind 55 executions at Bang Kwang Central Prison in Bangkok?

This is the autobiography of a likeable, family man who took the *Old Testament* dictum of an eye for an eye to its deadliest extreme. The editing may be shoddy in places, typos abound, and the translation can be rickety, but chances are you won't mind too much when poring over grotesquely fascinating scenes about a female inmate who had to be executed twice, and the book's centrepiece: a full-scale prison riot.



Transport, Koreans and Poo

Our Cambodia correspondent Gordon Sharpless once again tells it like it is with generous meaty slabs of unminced words (you can call Gordon a lot of things, but mincer isn't one of them). This month he is banging on about Siem Reap's shiny new airport, the perpetually shitty Poipet road, Korea's invasion of Angkor Wat and the unceremonious eviction of 'UnCambodian' temple dogs.

Siam Defeated – Again

Let's talk about the new airport. No, not that new airport, the other new airport. I bet you didn't know Siem Reap opened a new airport terminal this past July, did you? Yes it did and there should be no doubt that the Siem Reap-Angkor International Airport stands heads above Bangkok's new King Power-Suvarnabhumi Intl Shopping Plaza. Why? Consider the following points: Since the new Siem Reap airport opened in July... no one has complained about not finding a bathroom; no one's gotten lost making the trek between the arrival/departure halls and the airplanes; no one's tripped over a duty-free shopping display; no one's complained about the noise, no one's needed to sit through three hours of traffic to get to their hotel, there aren't any cracks in the asphalt, and it opened not a day too soon. So there.

The Never-ending Road

Road construction between Poipet and Siem Reap continues though I wonder if it's really on schedule. The Bangkok Airways monopoly on the Bangkok-Siem Reap route ends in 2009, so I would imagine that would be a convenient year to finish it. Watching the pace of construction – slow – it does give one ideas.

Admittedly though, they had a few distractions when a few sections of road went underwater in late October, resulting in hysterical cries of, “o-ma-god the road is closed!” When it wasn't, unless you thought the only way to travel is via the backpacker scam bus. Well, they sold a lot of Siem Reap-Battambang boat tickets to hysterical I'm-not-a-tourist-I'm-a-traveler backpackers who couldn't get anywhere without a guesthouse or travel agent acting as a surrogate mummy and selling them some kind of ticket to Nirvana San Road.

Rains stopped on schedule, the road was quickly put back together again, and for the most part the dirt portion of road is in the best condition it's been in about two and a half years. As for the asphalt sections, let's not talk about them. Unlike the airport, they are, well, I like calling them cracked.



High-Powered Koreans

The new power lines from Thailand to Siem Reap that run parallel to the road were supposed to be finished by now. Seems a few of the pillars broke in transit plus whatever other behind the scenes “problems” delayed the construction of this thing. And it was all in anticipation of the opening of the Gyeongju-Angkor Expo which I'm sure readers are just chomping at the bit to attend.

What is this expo anyway, other than hyperbole? Basically, Korea is brought to Cambodia (some say it's already here). See... Koreans are the number one source country for Angkor tourism, with about a quarter million last year and about a quarter billion this year, so someone, we can assume someone involved in promoting cultural expositions, got an idea to have an exposition in Siem Reap that starts some time in November and ends as soon as possible. Or some time in January. Not sure who would come to Siem Reap to experience any more Korean culture than they have to – with 250,000 Korean tourists last year it's hard not to experience some Korean culture when at Angkor – but Cambodian officials are optimistic this will be a huge event. And if I were a tour operator based in Seoul, it would be. But I'm not. And like most of us who aren't we expect to hardly notice a thing. And we like it that way. Yawn, plop.

Problematic Pooch Poo

And is there any connection to the arrival of the Korean expo and the banning of dogs from the Angkor temple grounds? Yup, about a month or two ago they officially banned dogs from the temples. A couple of years ago it was cows that got the boot (they didn't have tickets), now it's dogs. Dogs pooping in the temples is, according to some interviewed official, “against Cambodian culture.” Somehow I never thought to equate dog crap with anybody's culture, but if the shoe fits and it feels good...

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SLEEPY time

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

PRATUNAM / SIAM SQUARE

Moeleng Boutique Residence:

21/1 Soi Ratchatapan, Ratchaprarop Rd, tel: 02-642 4646. 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.

BANGKOK HOSPITAL GROUP

Changpangne

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

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

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

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

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

Lebua: Riverside, tel: 02-624-9999

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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DAY tripping

RATTANAKOSIN

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

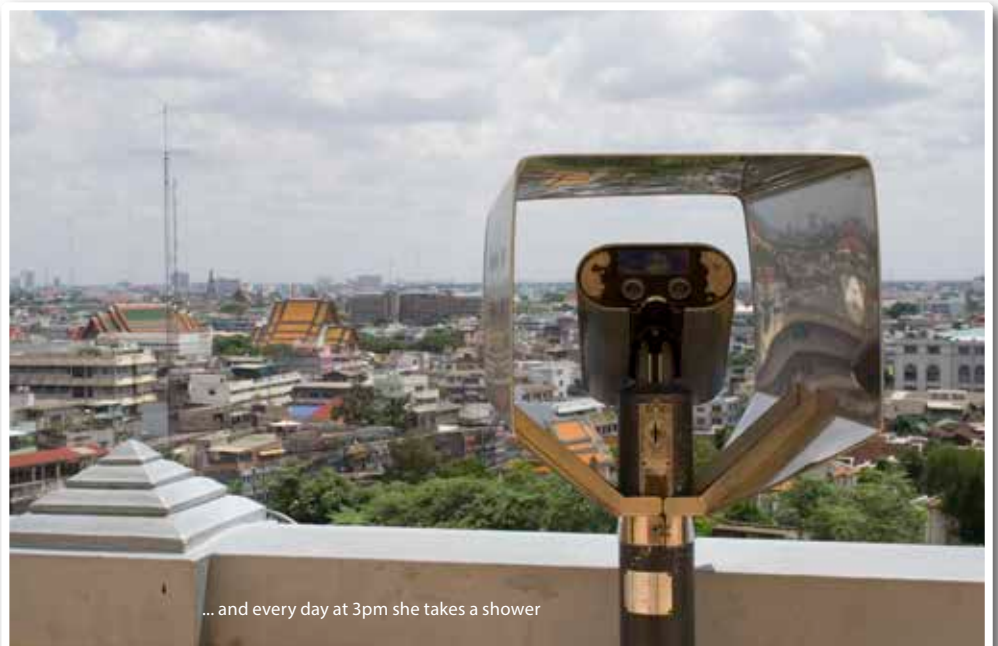
SUBWAY

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



... and every day at 3pm she takes a shower

the Fertility Goddess Tubtim. The outdoor shrine, behind the hotel, is studded with wooden phalluses and other offerings made by the limp, the lovelorn, and mothers-in-waiting.

SAMUT PRAKAN

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

MALLS & markets

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



areas, whisking you from one hot and crowded market to the next.

Chatuchak Weekend Market (a.k.a. JJ):

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

or Chatuchak Park station on the subway.

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

Pahurat Indian market

Located in 'Little India', this market is renowned for selling Indian, Malay and Thai clothes, textiles and accessories and costume

jewellery. A walkthrough of tastes, smells and sights, you'll find a wide variety of Indian foods, sweets and spices on offer. It's popular with those who want fancy, affordable fashion, along with sequined fabrics, bows, tiaras and all the other trappings necessary to cut it as a bona fide Bollywood queen. Take the riverboat to Tha Saphaan Phut and it's just a short walk away.

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

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

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

Pratunam Market: An extensive street and indoor market best known for cheap shoes, clothes, and fabrics, it's located around the corner of Petchaburi and

Xmas Sweep/Bangkok Steals

Fancy racing over for some Christmas shopping in Bangkok? Those who touch down in the Kingdom for that very reason may find the bucks just won't stop flowing through your fingers. The first stop is a welcome fleeing, right at **Suvarnabhumi airport**, where the gift shop strip begins straight after customs; then it's on to the malls.

Siam Center and Siam Discovery are the places to pick up trendy international brands at a fraction of the prices back home and you can show off your cosmopolitan cool by snapping up quirky new Thai labels. Most malls have sparkling chains of golden baubles that are sure to rope you in. There are no seasonal sales, though, so even a 50 percent discount might sound an alarm of Christmas fear rather than good cheer for your credit card.

It's worth giving old favourites like Chatuchak Market and Pratunam a look in for both the usual trinkets and seasonal chintz like singing Santa cigarette lighters, remote-controlled reindeers and dancing elves.

Expats stuck in the city sunshine should plan on mailing presents home early. Alas, no snow or singing feeble carols. But they do have chestnuts roasting in open woks in Chinatown.

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

Central World Plaza

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

Siam Discovery Center

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

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 for a bowl of noodles, this town has it all. In addition to the restaurants we've listed there are countless food stalls, canteens, shop house diners and food courts serving affordable and tasty tucker.

In the Silom area of town, Soi Convent is lined with some excellent foodstalls serving everything from noodle soup, chicken and yellow rice, to BBQ pork and jim jum hotpot. Sukhumvit Soi 38 (Skytrain Thonglor) is home to a well-known collection of food stalls



and shophouses dishing up quality Thai-Chinese food in the evenings — very popular with locals. For more international cuisine, the small Arab quarter off Soi Nana and Sukhumvit houses some really good Middle Eastern restaurants and kebab stalls. Soi Nana itself even has Bangkok's only Ethiopian restaurant, Abyssinia Café. Worth visiting for a completely different atmosphere than elsewhere in Bangkok. Soi Thaniya (and almost any downtown Sukhumvit Soi) is jammed with Japanese places, most of which are laid-back and informal. In Bangkok, shopping-centre food need not mean the golden arches. Almost all have inexpensive food courts offering a huge variety of Thai, Chinese and some international food. MBK, Siam Paragon, Siam Center and Emporium,

amongst others, all have them. The posher malls and department stores also now have up-market versions (The Park food hall at Emporium, the Orangery at Paragon, and Food Loft at Central) in which international restaurants from around town have their own outlet. These can be pricey but nevertheless convenient for non-Thai food.

SUKHUMVIT BED SUPPERCLUB (INTERNATIONAL)

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

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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,



You can eat it or beat someone to death with it. After you pay, it's up to you.

(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 Phrom Phong or Thonglor), 11.30am-2.30pm, 5.30pm-11pm, 02-662 3060, major cards
A beautiful restaurant with an outdoor courtyard. The food is basically a fusion of cuisines but with a distinctively

Thai identity. Signature dishes like Alaskan King Crab in spicy milk soup come well recommended.

MES AMIS (French)
102/3 Thonglor Soi 5, (Skytrain Thonglor), 11.30am-2.30pm, 6.30pm-10.30pm, 02-260 6445-6, major cards
Definitely one of the better Thonglor restaurants, and not overpriced, considering the high standard of the food and service. The atmosphere is casual but the restaurant is still stylish and classy.

PIZZERIA LIMONCELLO
(PIZZERIA)
17 Sukhumvit soi 11 Skytrain Nana Noon-2pm, 6pm-11.30pm, 02-651 0707, major cards
A lively pizzeria complete with chequered tablecloths and a wood-fired oven. Pizzas are thin-crust, of course, and the pastas and salads are also worth trying.

TONY ROMA'S (AMERICAN)
87 Sukhumvit Road in the Nai Lert building, (Skytrain Nana), 11am-11pm (last orders 10.30pm), 02-254 2912, major cards
Part of an American chain and now with a branch also at Siam Paragon. As you'd expect, portions of American-fare, like baby back ribs, are big and satisfying. One of the better places in town for burgers.

VENEZIA (ITALIAN)
24 Sukhumvit Soi 11, (Skytrain Nana), 11am-2.30pm, 5.30pm-midnight, 02-254 6655, major cards
Neat but lively Italian restaurant with good food and Italian wines. Bargain set lunches and live music in the evenings. A good place to eat before a night out at one of the nearby clubs.

GIANNI RISTORANTE (ITALIAN)
34/1 Soi Tonson, Ploenchit Road, (Skytrain Chidlom), noon-2.30pm, 6pm-10.30pm, 02-252 1619, major cards
One of the cornerstones of Bangkok's burgeoning Italian restaurant scene. Top notch, fine Italian food — the large following of loyal regulars are testament to its quality.

RIOJA (SPANISH)
1025 Ploenchit Road, (Skytrain Chidlom), 11am-2.30pm, 6pm-11pm, 02-251 5761-2, major cards
Bangkok's only Spanish restaurant as far as we know. Great value set lunches. Tapas and paella, of course, but many more lesser-known dishes and a good wine list.

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

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

WITCH'S OYSTER BAR
(EUROPEAN)
20/20-21 Ruamrudee Village, (Skytrain Ploenchit), 11am-2.30pm, 5pm-11pm, 02-255 5354-5, major cards
Specialises in seafood and grilled fare, and noted for its wide variety of imported oysters. An interesting mix of European cuisine, mixed with contemporary British food not really seen elsewhere in town.

ATHENA (GREEK)
594 Soi Ekamai, Sukhumvit 63, (Skytrain Ekamai), 5pm-2am, 02-392 7644, major cards
Bangkok's only Greek restaurant, as far as we're aware. A down-to-earth place with a suitably Mediterranean ambience. Serves a variety of hearty Greek staples such as Souvlaki and Mydopilafa.

WOODSTOCK (AMERICAN)
Soi 13, Thonglor, (Skytrain



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Chompot's first court appearance went better than expected

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 TEPA 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 tepan yaki place. Also offers a variety of steaks and a good, value for money lunchtime shabu-shabu and sukiyaki buffet.

BEI OTTO (GERMAN)
1 Sukhumvit Soi 20, Skytrain Asoke, 11am-1am, 02-260 0869, major cards
Cosy restaurant serving quality German food such as sauerbraten and pork knuckle, as well as other European favourites. Also has a bakery and delicatessen on site.

ENOTECA ITALIANA (ITALIAN)
Sukhumvit Soi 33, follow the sign posts, (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 6pm-midnight, 02-258 4386, major cards
Homely and welcoming Italian restaurant with a strong emphasis on completely authentic Italian food from the heart. Superb selection of Italian wines,

meats and cheeses. The enthusiastic owners and chef are always on hand to offer advice on food and wine.

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

FOGO VIVO (BRAZILIAN)
President Tower Arcade, 973 Ploenchit Road, (Skytrain Chidlom), 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30pm-11pm; bar 11:30am-1pm, 02-656 0384, major cards
Bangkok's only Brazilian Churrascaria grill. A good place to fill up with the all-you-can-eat seafood and meat served for both lunch and dinner.

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

OAM THONG (THAI)
7/4-5 Sukhumvit Soi 33, (Skytrain Phrom Phong),

11:30am-11:30pm, 02-662 2804-5, major cards
Popular with local big-wigs and sophisticates. Traditional and modern, inventive Thai food and seafood are

available. Well located for after shopping or pre-night out dining.

GIUSTO (ITALIAN)
16 Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain



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

SILOM & PATPONG
BLUE ELEPHANT (THAI)
233 South Sathorn Road,
(Skytrain Surasak),
11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30pm-
11:30pm, 02-673 9353-4,
major cards
Part of the world-renowned
restaurant group of the
same name, you can
expect the same high
standards. Royal-Thai
cuisine alongside some
more inventive creations. Set
in a beautifully restored old
building.

BANN KHANITHA
& GALLERY (THAI)
69 South Sathorn Road,
11am-2pm, 6pm-11pm,
02-675 4200-1, major cards
An award-winning, classy
Thai restaurant with superb
food and beautiful decor.
Filled with fine art, natural
wood
and happy diners this place
has become a household
name in Bangkok. Also has
a branch on Sukhumvit 23.

LE BOUCHON (FRENCH)



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

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

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

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

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

ZANOTTI (ITALIAN)
Saladaeng Colonnade
Condominium, Soi
Saladaeng, (Skytrain
Saladaeng, Subway Silom),
11:30am-2pm, 6pm-10:30pm,
02-636 0002, 02-636 0266,
major cards
Really popular restaurant
with a reputation for quality
food and atmosphere.
Zanotti also has a
comprehensive list of Italian
wines and the enthusiastic
chef/owner is 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,



DARK SIDE OF THE SPOON

Words by Oliver Benjamin

Durian

The fruit from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve ate it they knew then that evil existed in the world. Don't worry about accidentally ingesting this biohazard: even in a plastic bag you can smell it from miles away. And don't trust people who tell you it's an acquired taste: They are the minions of Lucifer.

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

The American beans ensured that the German beans would never again invade the French Beans



Extremely popular with locals, Baan Klang Naam serves some of the best seafood in town in a converted house on the Chaophaya River. Live entertainment in the evenings. Don't miss the awesome deep-fried soft shell crab.

BANGLAMPHU

ROYAL INDIA (INDIAN)

95, B1 Soi Rambuttri, Chakrapong Road, 1:30am to midnight, 02-282 6688

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

SHOSHANA (ISRAELI)

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

midnight, 02-282 9948, no cards

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

JOK POCHANA (THAI SEAFOOD)

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

OH MY COD (FISH & CHIPS)

95D, Rambutri Village Inn, Soi

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

RICKY'S COFFEE SHOP (SANDWICHES)

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

HOTEL RESTAURANTS

JW MARRIOTT BANGKOK

4 Sukhumvit Soi 2, (Skytrain Ploenchit), 02-656 7700, major cards.

A great choice for 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.

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



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Cajun Creole Cuisine from New Orleans
to Bangkok established 1986 in the same location
Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner 7 am-1am

Boutique Apartments
Daily or Monthly



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.

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 bartrippers 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 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.

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

BACCHUS 20/6-7 Ruam Rudee, Pathumwan, (Skytrain Pleornchit), 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

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.



The blind entertaining the deaf

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

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

NIGHT tripping



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

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

CLUB ASTRA Block D, RCA, 0-9497 8422, no cards, www.club-astra.com. Club Astra hosts big-name international DJs on an almost weekly basis, like Paul Van Dyk, Goldie, Deep Dish, The Stanton Warriors and DJ Craze, to name a few. With an 'international' style dance floor – no tables and chairs – Astra's huge expanse lends itself to serious boogie action. Check their site for upcoming events.

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

Though the club has fantastic sound and lighting the music policy might leave international guests baffled.

NARCISSUS Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain Asok) just behind Pegasus Club, 02-258-4805, major cards.

Gaudy and glitzy to the point of ostentatiousness, with monster mirror balls and chandeliers that would have embarrassed Caligula. The relentless trance techno vibes will send you panting upstairs to one of the best chill-out lounges in Bangkok. Bt500 cover includes three drinks.

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

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

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

Live blues, R&B, Jazz, Rock, Reggae and even Ska house bands enclosed in a woody, cozy wrapper seven nights a week, from around 8pm. Mostly a friendly Thai crowd with a few Farangs thrown in. Some of the best live music in town.

Small beer for Bt120. No cover. Good Thai food.

Q BAR 34 Sukhumvit Soi 11, take quick left at end of the soi. (Nana Skytrain), 02-252 3274, www.qbarbangkok.com, major cards except Diners. A stylish venue decorated in black. Plays quality, butt-wiggling music and regularly features international DJs. Huge vodka selection, chilled to perfect quaffing temperature or served at Bt100 in jelly form. Downstairs is for mingling, the upstairs lounge is for romancing, and loners can sulk on the terrace (or pop into the adjacent Wasabi restaurant for an excellent Japanese feed). Bt500 cover after 10pm with two drinks. There's Massive Mondays (Dancehall & Reggae beats), Globalism Tuesday (Afro, Latin, Percussive House), Wednesday is Ghetto Fabulous, uniting the best of old school Hip Hop, Funk & more. Liquid Thursday (House with special guests), Frisky Friday (Freestyle), Saturday Night Fever (Funky House) and Beat Therapy Sunday (Hip Hop).

BED SUPPERCLUB End of Sukhumvit Soi 11 (Skytrain Nana), 02-6513537, major cards, www.bedsupperclub.com. Classy, shiny all-white nightclub that looks like a spaceship. At Bt500 (Tue, Fri, Sat) and Bt400 other days, it's not the cheapest place in town, but that gets you two drinks and keeps the riff-raff out. The music policy varies throughout the week – see website. Opposite the dancing bit is the eating bit (hence the 'supper' in Supper club) with set meals served from 7.30pm (8pm sharp Fri, Sat).

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

Instead, some of Bangkok's finest DJs drop all genres of House music.

THE DUBLINER IRISH PUB 440 Sukhumvit Road, between Soi 22 & 24, (Skytrain Phrom Pong), 02-204 1841, major cards, www.dublinerasia.com. A handsome, three-storey structure with a regular pub on the ground floor and a lounge on the second floor, while upstairs are pool tables and a dart board. Always humming. Standard draught beer is around Bt130 a pint. Excellent pub food with big portions. Women eat and drink for half price on Wednesdays.

CHEAP CHARLIE'S Sukhumvit Soi 11, first soi on your left. (Skytrain Nana), no cards. Less a bar than a ramshackle lean-to surrounded by stools and a couple of outdoor tables. The place is a booze bonanza for budget drinkers. Buffalo skulls, phallic fetishes, fish mobiles, 60s hits and white fairy lights complete the decor. Oh yes, and it's cheap – about Bt60 a small beer.

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

RADIO CITY Patpong Soi 1. Downstairs from Lucifer's (see below), Radio City offers live music with plenty of seating and plenty of cold beer. But what people really come to see is Thai Elvis or Thai Tom Jones. If you're bummed out by all the touts inviting you to play ping-pong, this place is a welcome respite.

IRISH EXCHANGE 1/5-6 Covent Road, just off of Silom (Skytrain Sala Daeng), 02-266 7160-11, major cards. Irish Pub, sports bar and restaurant catering to mixed crowd of expats, tourists and locals who've developed a taste for 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

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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

Party Season

Tis the season to be jolly and when it comes to celebrating, finding the right place is crucial. Here's our pick of the motley crew of do's to suit the season.

Fogo Vivo: Scrumptious meaty cuts and samba sounds equal the best carnival atmosphere for the holidays.

Call 02 656 0384 for more on shaking your tail feathers.

Marriott Resort & Spa

Do Christmas Eve Riverside Buffet style (Bt1,999). Make a pig of yourself on the big day, choosing from the Grand Jazz Brunch (Bt3,200), Candle Light Dinner (Bt2,999) or special cruise (Bt4,500) themes.

New Year's Eve goes off with a bang at Bt3,200 or slouch into the "Recovery Brunch" at Bt1,999 the next day.

Call 02 476 0022 ext 1416 or visit www.marriottdining.com to book.

Novotel Bangkok on Siam Square

Leap into the snow-covered party world of *Narnia* for Xmas. Dinners start from Bt690, or rave the night away at Concept CM2 (from Bt799). A Chinese feast (Bt800) is available throughout the holidays at their Lok Wah Hin restaurant.

To ho, ho, ho on up call 02 209 8888.

Tapas: This highlight on the club land circuit promises saucy, swanky nibbles and an NYE party to die for.

Call the Hogmanay hotline on 02 234 4737

The Barbican: Bt1,200 sets a turkey on your table for Xmas. Fulfil your flight-cabin fantasies at the Mile High NYE party, where boarding passes get you drinks and a chance to win holiday tixs.

Call 02 234 3590 for more info on the business-class service.

The Bull's Head: Sit down for dinner with strangers and make new friends at the only place in town offering a family-style dining experience.

If you yearn for a good 'ol English Xmas call 02 259 4444.

The Peninsula: Turn up at the pre-Christmas Teddy Bear picnic (9th, 10th, 16th, 17th December) to sit in Santa's lap and gorge on naughty chocolates or pastries (Bt300 for lil'uns; Bt600 for the bigger kids).

Swigging chrimbo cocktails (from Bt350) equals having fun whilst raising funds for the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Dial 02 861 2888 or see www.peninsula.com for more info

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 Tanao, 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 ฿80.

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. ฿180 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.



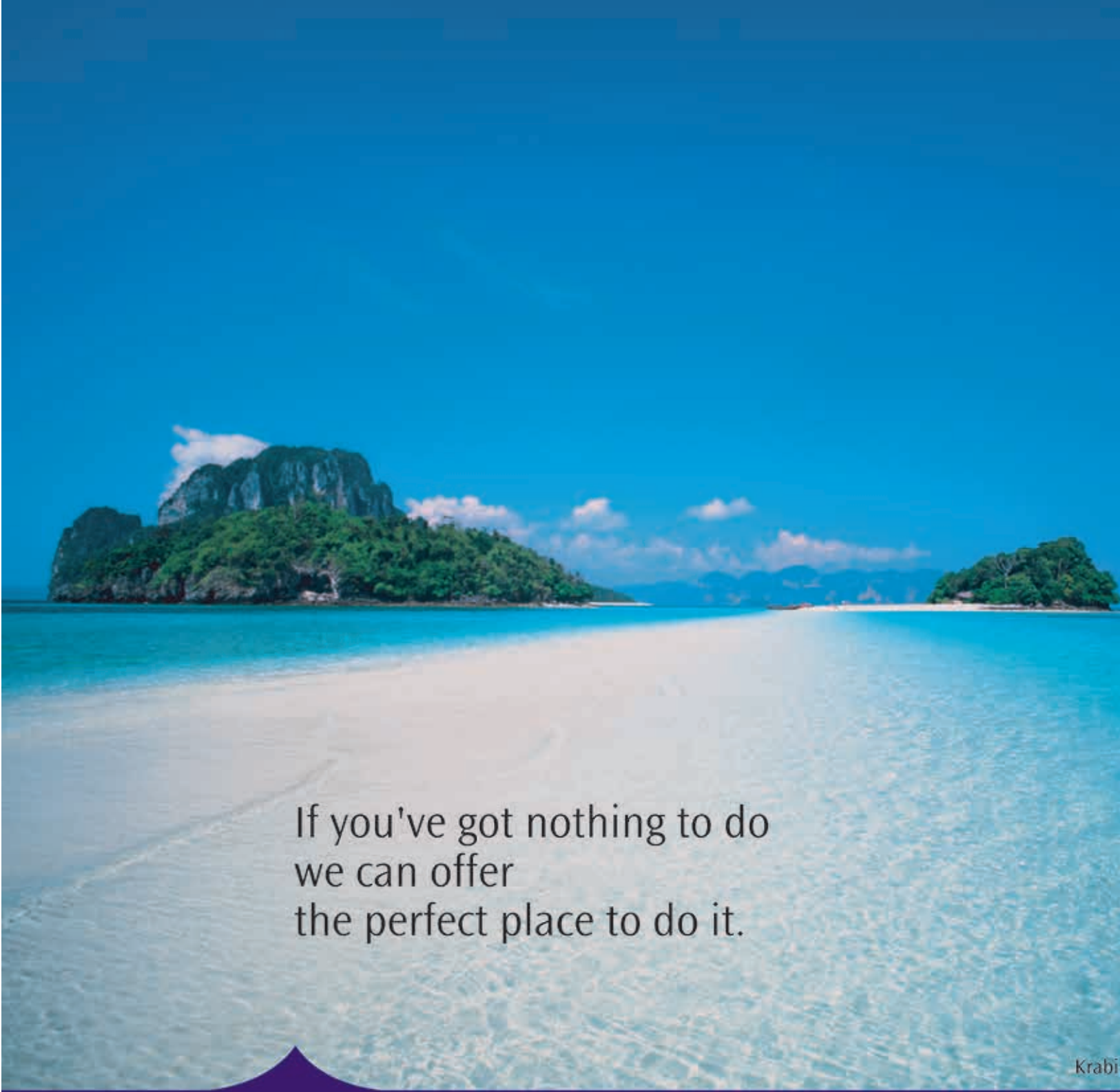
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Smooth as silk



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. **Dare'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**, **Tamarrind Village** and **Ratchamankha**. Your pretty penny will purchase outrageously picturesque panoramas – all four mix modern amenity with ancient mystical charm. Finally, for those truly skint, head on over to **Banana Guest House** for dorm beds at Bt50 a bum.

DAY TRIPPING TEMPLES

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

MARKETS

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

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

ACTIVITIES

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

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

PAI

PLACES TO CRASH

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

DAYTRIPPING

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

NIGHTRIPPING

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

FEEDING TIME

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





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com), go down that **river rapidly** (siamrivers.com) and learn to train those loveable **elephants** yourself (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.

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Snorkeling Supreme

There's no need to splash out on a liveaboard diving trip to the Surin National Marine Park when you can go camping and skin-diving around some of the most psychedelic coral reefs in the world, writes Gordon McEvoy.



FACT CHECKS

ARRIVALS: The Surin National Marine Park is open from November 15th through mid-May. The Park Station pier is located not far off coastal Highway 4, outside the town of Kuraburi, in Phang-nga province. The ferry to the islands departs here daily at 9am and takes four hours. Accommodation in and around Kuraburi is available, but limited. You can also get there from the Kapok district pier in Ranong province, which takes seven hours. Or stay in Khao Lak (north of Phuket) – and hit the road to the pier early in the morning. **BOOKING:** Telephone ahead to confirm ferry departure times and reserve a tent in the campground. A limited number of bungalows are also available. Mu Koh Surin National Marine Park's office is located at the Kuraburi pier: (087)-649-1378.

GEAR & FOOD: Real snorkelers pack their own gear. But mask, snorkel and fins can be rented for reasonable rates at the park (along with blankets and sleeping pads to properly outfit your tent). Pack what you'll need to stay comfortable: flashlight, toilet paper, sun-block, mosquito repellent, etc. Thai food in the canteen is basic but edible. A small shop supplies emergency snacks.

The archipelago's relative inaccessibility, along with the park's protected status, and strong, deep currents keep the sea here pure and pollution free. The underwater visibility is stunning – typically 25 to 30 metres or more. Coral grows best in clear water down to a depth of 20 metres, giving Surin's snorkelers easy access to a wash of colours.

This thriving marine habitat harbours an estimated 80 percent of Thailand's coral species (like giant Gorgonian sea fans), as well as leatherback turtles, octopus, lobster, squid, and of course the fish – reef sharks, manta rays, mackerel, oversized grouper, and plenty of big barracuda.

Sure, there's stuff to do above water: visit the turtle hatchery, check out the Moken sea gypsy village, or jungle trek in search of monkeys and monitor lizards. But ya gotta get yer fins wet. This is the best snorkeling in Thailand.

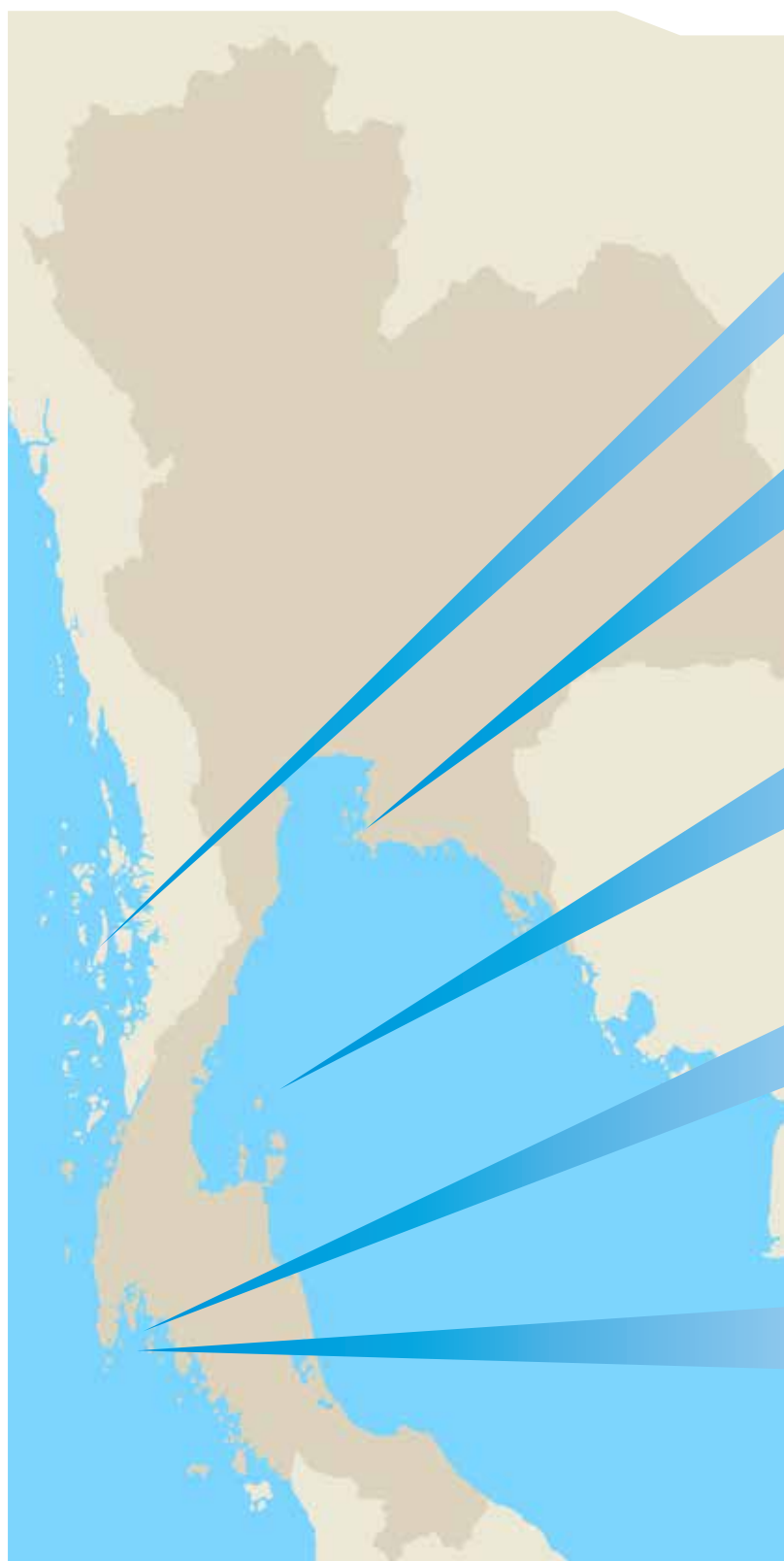
The Surin islands – Thailand's northernmost archipelago in the Andaman Sea – are not easy to reach: They are tucked within a few kilometres of the Myanmar maritime border, and a three-hour drive north from Phuket or south from Ranong to the Park Station ferry pier.

But this is part of the reason why these islands have not been deluged by mainstream tourism.

Park staff kindly provides longtail tours leaving from the campground beach every morning and afternoon – a swell deal adding up to only 120 baht for a full day of first-class snorkeling. These government-sponsored trips (unique to Surin) are always low-stress, flexible affairs. Pay as you go or choose a snooze in a hammock at the last minute. “Up to you,” as Thais like to say. The morning trips are usually full, but the afternoon tour is often whittled down to only a few lonely snorkelers.

Or skip the longtail trip and snorkel out on your own directly from the beach. Grab a buddy and slip into Mai Ngam Bay, directly in front of the new campground. It's full of massive, mushroom-shaped hard coral heads and weird creatures of the shallows.

For less confident swimmers, snorkeling from the longtail boat tours is easy. If you can swim, you can snorkel. If you can't swim, throw on a life jacket and float close to the boat. Park staff will help you adjust to the snorkel gear and fins. The vibe is leisurely and ego-free. More advanced snorkelers head off in any direction they choose, exploring steep walls or searching for blacktip reef sharks cruising nearby.



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.



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. **Saboe** 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. **Jonnie's 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




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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 ฿89, 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.

NIGHTRIPPING 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 above the canopy, ฿1,400 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

Santa in Samui

If you're after a traditional Christmas dinner, head to Tropical Murphy's for the full Monty and if that's too rich head for their arch-enemy, The Islander, but there's plenty more on offer. Aaron Ross is DJing at Mint Bar on Christmas Eve, Long Island has him on New Year's Eve. No details yet on Q Bar's new place but it's sure to be swanky. If you can't wait for the big date, check out the boat parties on Tuesday and Saturday nights (1,500 all you can drink) or one of Ark Bar's Full Moon and Escape parties by the lake at Chaweng.



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 Bophut and Chaweng. Samui also has **Football Golf** (09-771 7498) near Chong Mon, and **Frisbee Golf**, in Bophut past the **Monkey Theatre**. Heading back to the zone of sanity, **Red Bicycles** (07-726 7202) rents mountain bikes and arranges tours through the jungle and beyond. A less strenuous way to see the island is from the sea: **Kia**

Ora (07-745 2264) catamaran will take you out to sea with a fully stocked bar. For more action try **Samui Quads and Paintball** (01-371 0744). A newcomer to the sports scene in Samui is two freshwater fishing lakes stocked with huge fish in Taling Ngam (enquiries@fishingthailand.com). Meanwhile, at the **Samui Crocodile Farm**, near the airport, you can watch a brave fool stick his head in the jaws of a prehistoric monster. Cold-blooded, reptilian capers and human daring are also on the cards

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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

As high season approaches Koh Pangan will be fuller than ever this December with the Full Moon Party loaded at the start of the month. The party faithful should start arriving early, occupying Had Rin for the whole month, so if you want to stay in the Headquarters of Hedonism - be prepared to hunt for rooms as they will be scarce.

The rest of the island will also start filling up; and with the monsoon rains coming to an end Thong Nai Pan and Thaan Sadet will be a hell of a lot more accessible than in recent months and well worth the visit if only to take in the lush jungle and re-stocked waterfalls of the area. If you ain't into partying - don't worry as Pangan has plenty to offer those seeking a tropical island getaway; and with loads of secluded beaches like Had Salad and Bottle Beach - there is always the opportunity to spend months in a hammock without hearing a single beat of Psy-Trance (unless a group of Arthur Dailey's turn up; but they are easily moved on with a large roll of bangers under the hut every morning at 6am).

PLACES TO CRASH:

HAD RIN:

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

On sunrise: Paradise Bungalows and the Backpackers Lodge have a good variety of rooms and Sea Garden (Bt500 - 5,000) and Jonathan are classy joints. Drop Inn (Bt2,550 - 19,500) 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** (Bt2,200-4,500) and **Vimarn Samut** (Bt1,950-5,600) 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** (Bt800-3,500) are also recommended.

WEST SIDE:

The west coast of Koh Pangan is a string of beautiful white sandy coves; it has the best coral reef and great sunset views. In Sri Thanu, **Chai Country** is a top place where Chai takes guests on unique daytrips. Had Chao Phao is home to high-class **Phangan Cabana** (Bt800-1,800), **See Thanu** (Bt300-2,500) and the bohemian **Sea Flower**. **The Village Green** (Bt350-1,400) serves fantastic Euro-Asian cuisine. **Had Son** resort (Bt450-12,000) 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** (Bt500-2,700) 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 Koh Pangan, there are houses to rent.

Fanta has nice beach huts and **Chaloklum Bay** (Bt500-12,000) has some great aircon rooms. **Had Khom** and **Coral Bay** are on their own secluded beach.

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NORTHEAST:

On the more remote side of the island there are three very popular beaches; Bottle Beach is old-skool Pangan, Than Sadet is home to the island's biggest waterfall and Thong Nai Pan has all the trappings of Bohemian beach life. Further around, it becomes more rugged; here 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** (Bt3,000-19,000) and **Baan Panburi** (Bt650-2,000) 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** (Bt250-800). Had Yao East has just two resorts and Had Tien is home to the infamous **Sanctuary**, with a real traveller vibe.

DAYTRIPPING:

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

NIGHTRIPPING:

Pangan has a wildly varied nightlife with everything from its infamous beach parties to high-class restaurants and beach bars. If you are not

into parties, just head to any beach outside Had Rin, while Thong Sala is a great place to head for a gourmet feed and a few beers.

Pangan's party 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; Bt 80 for Chaloklam, Had Yao, Had Chao Phao and Sri Thanu; Bt100 for Thong Nai Pan, Mae Had and Had Salad. Motorbike rentals start at Bt150 per day and dirtbikes cost Bt200 to Bt400. Only experienced riders should attempt the Had Rin/Thong Nai Pan hills – and do it sober! Much safer Suzuki Jeeps cost between Bt600 to Bt1,000. 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



PartyMoon

Full Moon Party is on the 6th of December; and there will be loads of other outdoor events throughout the month, especially good are the well established Half Moon and Black Moon parties, (HM on the 13th and 28th, BM on the 20th); not forgetting the monster NYE party that draws twice the number of punters that a normal moonie can muster.



<p>WWW PHANGAN.INFO</p> <p>www.phangan.info</p> <p>FULLY COMPREHENSIVE ISLAND GUIDE ON-LINE ACCOMMODATION BOOKING SERVICE ISLAND & FULL MOON PARTY INFORMATION PRINT AND WEB MARKETING SOLUTIONS tel: 077 238765 info@phangan.info</p>	<p>KP PROPERTY AND BUSINESS AGENCY "passion for life" 1997</p> <p>www.kp-property.com</p> <p>Invest in one of the fastest growing property markets in Asia with Koh Pangan's leading property consultant. Offering real estate, project management, legal advice and business services. tel: 077 377018 info@kp-property.com</p>	<p>VGD VILLAGE GREEN DEVELOPMENTS CONSTRUCTION DESIGN PROPERTY</p> <p>Professional engineers working to European standards. Fully insured quality assured construction work on contract, built with the environment in mind. info@villagegreendevelopments.com tel: 077 238764 mobile: 06 2810006</p>
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Koh Samui. 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 Bangkok 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.untamed-travel.com for latest accommodation deals.

MAE HAAD

This main point of arrival and departure has everything you would expect from a main town: shops, restaurants, bars, travel agents, banks, a post office and the veterinary clinic. A small range of budget and luxury accommodation can also be found. **Sensi Paradise** is a beautifully designed Thai-style beach resort set in a tropical garden. **Beach Club** and **Blue Diamond** are also good choices.

WEST COAST

Sairee is the most popular area of the island with the highest concentration of bungalows and the longest beach. Starting from King Rama V rock moving north, **Intouch Resort** is a traditional Thai-style beach resort with well-established huts and a chilled-out atmosphere. **AC Resort** has a choice of fan

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

THE EAST

The northeast coast is much quieter and more secluded with a smaller selection of accommodation. Worth checking out are **Hing Wong Bungalows**, **Green Tree**, or **View Rock Resorts**. Moving south **Tanote Bay** has a small selection of bungalows available. **Tanote View Resort** and **Poseidon Bungalows** are good choices, as is **Blacktip Resort** and **Water Sports Centre**. The southeast has small bays

dotted along it. Try **Ao Leuk Resort** in Leuk Bay or **Coral View Resort** and **New Heaven Huts** in Sai Daeng. Transport to the more secluded bays can be arranged from the pier by either taxi or longtail boat.

THE SOUTH

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

DAYTRIPPING

As a major diving certification centre, blessed with an abundance of marine life and easily accessible dive sites, many would-be Cousteaus choose to start their dive careers here. A full range of courses can be completed with SSI and PADI being the major standards. Tech-diving courses are available for the less faint hearted. Alternatively, snorkelling is another way to see the fishes. With many secluded bays and beaches, try a day snorkelling and swimming at **Jansom Bay** or **Hing Wong**. If you're still keen for some water-based activities check out **MV Sports**, **Blacktip Water Sports** or **Switch Water Sports**, all offer wakeboarding, water skiing and the rest. For those who prefer terra firma there is plenty to keep you occupied. If you're the active type, trekking trails are plentiful and the most arduous routes reward the survivors with isolated bays and crystal-clear waters or



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Untamed Waves

Koh Tao's Island Cruises pries open its hatches to the public this month with day and overnight sailing charters around the Gulf of Thailand. For less than the price of a

carton of smokes in Manchester, you can raise the skull and crossbones for a day of beers and cruising, or you and your mates and women you hardly know can go for the big four-day Safari around the stunning Angthong marine park, one of the nicest azure stretches of sea and untouched islands in Asia.

Two boats are available for charter, the Yun Khun and the Freedom Fargo, though we have a bias towards the former (pictured here), because our logo on the side fools people into thinking that we actually own it. Look to the February issue of this mag for tales of the Untamed crew's adventures, swashbuckling, backbiting and drunken seasickness on an overnight jaunt, which we will write as soon as we've actually done it.

For more information or to book your berth, see www.island-cruises.tk or phone (66) 08-986-6052 and tell them Untamed Travel sent you.



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 of quality Thai and Western food. **Papas Tapas**, near the Sairee 7/11, has a hookah lounge and a selection of absinthes.

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

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.

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Koh tao



PLANE:

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PHUKET

The best high season since 9/11 promises to pack Phuket, so make reservations early. Thanks to the Internet you don't need travel agents switching you to what they

want to sell, so hit the keys and book your hotel direct to actually get what you want as Phuket hotels report the best bookings in five years. You may have to look for a room, but Phuket has so many accommodations in so many ranges that the persistent traveller is sure to find a bed. If all else fails, check the Hotel Association counter at Phuket Airport's domestic arrivals. December means the King's Birthday.

Phuket celebrates it with the King's Cup Regatta, the highlight of several boating festivals that suit the island's claim as the Pearl of the Andaman Sea.

CRASH PADS

PATONG

Of course, Patong is packed with hundreds of choices in lodging, far too many to list here. These are just a few. The Thai Oriental Inn is very Thai-

style, and is an exceptional deal 209/9-10, Rat-U-Thit Rd Patong. **The Expat Hotel** is a Patong institution, Soi Expat is at the top of Soi Bangla, the "heart of Patong". Expat Hotel 163/17 Ratuthit Road (Soi Expat). **Club Bamboo** has quiet Thai-style ambiance on Patong Hill with a variety of rooms starting at Bt1,500. Avantika (Bt3,900+) offers luxury accommodations at the south end of Patong Beach, good value for its standard. The **Novotel** is just across the street from Baan Rim Pa in Kalim, yet only 15 minutes into the middle of Patong. **Patong Merlin** is right in the heart of Patong, yet-family style. Rooms start at Bt4,500 and up at 44, Thaveewong Road. **Merlin Beach** stole one of our favourite beaches, an excellent location at 99 Muen-Ngoen Rd., Tri-Trang Beach. **Patong Bay Garden Resort** is right on the beach at 33/1 Thaveewongse Road.

KATA-KARON

Orchidacea (Pop Bungalow) at 210 Khoktanod Road has an excellent hillside location and great value rooms (Bt3,000+) overlooking Kata Beach, at reasonable rates for the luxury. Just remember it's a long walk to the highest rooms on the hill. Alastair Why's luxurious **Aspasia** on the point behind Peach Hill on famous Laam Sai Point between Karon and Kata is excellent location, with a Jacuzzi in each room. The luxury has prices to match, starting at US\$170 until Dec. 19. Villas can go for US\$2,000+ in high season, but nobody complains. 1/3 Laem Sai Road, Kata Beach, Karon Sub-



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Scoring this Month

Dec. 2-9	Phuket King's Cup Regatta
Dec. 3	Laguna Phuket Triathlon
Dec. 7-10	Phuket International Marine Expo
Dec. 9-16	Rubson Raid Turquoise
Dec. 12-14	Kata-Karon Music & Seafood Festival
Dec. 12-20	Blue Water Round The World Cruising Rally
Dec. 17	Jazz Royale Festival
Dec. 19-20	Phuket Invitational Super Yacht Rendezvous

District. One of Phuket's finest values is the **Kata Minta**, a Northern Lanna-style boutique hotel starting at Bt1,200, a five minute walk from Kata Beach at 6/56-58 Moo 2, Patak Road, Kata Beach. The **Kata Thani** (B3,000+) has a variety of rooms in one property, and a spectacular beach. On-site food is better than off-property, a rarity in the hotel industry. Rooms start at US\$135 until Dec. 21. **Kata Noi Beach** at 14 Kata Noi Rd. Central Karon is stunning at any price, and internet rates start at B3,850 until Dec. 19. **Peach Hill Hotel** is basic 3-star, so if you aren't into burning money, try this centrally located Laam Sai property at 2 Laam Sai Road. High season rates start at B2,000, a great deal for the location and facilities. One of Phuket's original luxury nature resorts located on the north side of Laam Sai, **Marina Cottage** is a Phuket institution with great rooms and good food at 47 Karon Road, Karon Beach. Rooms still available at US\$120, a bargain for what you get. **Karon Café & Inn** started as a crash pad in converted shop houses, the Karon Inn is now a lodging legend. Fourteen years old, this little gem is an old-timer by Phuket standards. Rates start at Bt1,100 walking distance to the beach.

SOUTH END - Chalong, Rawai, Nai Harn, Ao Son
Avoid the crowds and craziness and stay in Phuket's tranquil south, where funk

reigns and 5-stars are few, apart from two gems. Owner-built and operated hilltop **Mangosteen** is Phuket's most conscientious 5-star and our top recommendation. Rates start at around US\$200. Transfers take you to any beach you can see from your mountaintop abode. Environmentally aware **Racha Island Resort** is Phuket's top island get-away. Winning *Conde Nast's* award for top 100 hottest resorts in 2005. Quiet and slow, Rawai's **Siam Phuket Resort** is Phuket's oldest tourist hotel, yet stays up with the times. High season rates start at US\$20 - and that's not a misprint. Located right on the beach in Rawai at 24/24 Rawai Beach., **Rising Sun Residence** private villas are a class of their own - excellent value for families. The villas, each with its own swimming pool, overlook Wat Chalong at 48/13 Moo 6, Sai Sai-Namyen, ChaoFa West Road, Chalong. Old time resorts are going upscale, but still in the Bt1,000-2,000 range, try **Friendship Bungalows**. **Shanti Lodge** is a true eco-resort from Bt350-1,000. Great for backpackers and folks who want something special without burning money. If that's too high, try the nearby **International Youth Hostel** (Bt200-450). If you want island getaway luxury yet convenient to Phuket, try **Baan Mai** on Koh Lone in Chalong Bay - includes free transfers to Chalong Pier. Beachfront rooms start at Bt5,800. Starting at Bt2,000,

Nai Harn's **Baan Krating Jungle Beach Resort** is idyllic and funky, without the speedboat habit that infests its expensive next-door neighbour. Spectacular location with rooms starting at Bt4,000. At Bt950, **Sonny's Nai Harn Beach Resort** remains a great deal.

NORTH END CRASH PADS
Laguna Phuket is mainstream heaven, with your choice of **Banyan tree, Sheraton, Dusit Laguna, Allamanda** or **Laguna Beach Resort**.

Bang Tao Beach is back in business with a wide range of accommodations from 3-star to beachfront bungalows contrasting several resorts in the US\$1,000 range. **Amanpuri** on Pansea Beach in Surin is ultimate prestige and luxury with prices to match. North of Laguna is the new Millionaire's Row, with some of the world's most exclusive properties. Legendary GM Anthony Lark found a new home at on-the-beach **Trisara**, an all-villa property where it's difficult to see your neighbours through the jungle. The place is luxury gone mad, with prices starting at US\$745 and ranging up to US\$8,000 for a 4-bedroom villa. Hottest new property in the Bang Tao area is the **Pavilions Phuket**, with GM and managing director Scott Gorsuch looking after every luxury. Total privacy and personal pools start at US\$400. Famous hotelier Wichit Na Ranong's latest masterpiece is the remodelled **Indigo Pearl Hotel**, five minutes from the airport in Nai Yang Beach and National Park, "Indigo" is spectacular with soft opening rates starting around US\$200. **JW Marriott Resort and Spa** is the jewel of the far north, very 5-star. The Marriott is consistently listed in the World's top 100 most ethical corporations. Enough said. Marriott's **Vacation Club** has great luxury villa deals if you attend their low-key sales pitch. It's worth it, and the villas are spectacular. The famous Hong By Starlight trip is included for

free. Nearby, but worlds apart in style and price, is **Mai Khao Bungalows**.

PHUKET TOWN CRASH PADS
Fifteen minutes south of downtown is **Cape Panwa Hotel**, one of Phuket's original hotels and recently remodelled. A great deal on a private beach and a favourite with royalty, movie stars and Thailand's finest families. Across the hill from Cape Panwa, **The Bay** is an excellent family-value with apartments starting at around Bt2,000 and privileges at the Cape Panwa. **The Metropole** is in the heart of downtown Phuket near all the shopping at 1 Soi Surin, Montri Road. Rates start at Bt3,000. **Royal Phuket City Hotel** is very modern with a great bakery in the lobby. The world famous Sino-Portuguese **On-On Hotel** was refurbished for *The Beach* but is still B250+, would a 5-star ever do that? Rates are so cheap that Phuket.com books them direct with no mark-up.

FEEDING TIME PATONG

Street food is good fun, cheap and generally safe - remember, Thais don't want to get sick any more than you do. At the other end of the scale is **Baan Rim Pa** on Kalim Beach and their various restaurants. Reservations required, so call 076-340-789. "Big Bill" Sawyer's parent corporation "Food for Pissheads & Stoners Inc." owns **Flower Foods** based on famous NYC eateries. Eat there or take-away, all top-quality and very tasty. Deli Supermarket, 31 Rat-U-Thit Rd. Patong. Mid-range but tasty eats include **Pan Yaah, Lim's** and **Pum's** Thai cooking school.

KATA-KARON

Forget the old-name places, all overpriced and serving The Emperor's New Clothes. Find nice eats by walking toward the mountains from Kata Corner. There's plenty of reasonable Ma-and-Pa Thai, Italian and seafood restaurants to fill your belly. On Kata Noi,

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just walk to the south end of the beach and pick your restaurant – great ambiance and better food than the name hotels – at local prices. Karon is reeling from rapid growth, so the old traffic circle sidewalk restaurants are gone, but walk from the traffic circle only 100m to the Karon Inn neighbourhood and find plenty of good eats. **Family Restaurant** across from Chalong Cop Shop has Thai, Western and Middle East food at excellent prices. A kilometre towards Phuket, **Something Fishy** is the newest Fish' N Chips sensation. **Don's Mall** isn't his old place, but the food is still as great as Don's personality. Homesick Brits find **The Green Man** pure heaven, a perfect rendition of a top-end ole English pub and restaurant. On Rawai Beach, just pick an open-air

seafood restaurant and take your chances – all offer great Thai seafood. **Belgium Bakery** is excellent, and has a few tables inside and outside. Try their sandwiches and other excellent European-style baked goods.

PHUKET TOWN

Phuket Town's trendy restaurants are all superior to the typical tourist fare. **Khao Jok Si** started as a funky jazz-style restaurant. **Tung Ka Café** on Rang Hill is a Phuket Institution. Funky Sino-Portuguese architecture and art shops set the stage on artistic Dibuk Road, try **Dibuk Restaurant** and the **New China Inn**.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Patong is all about nightlife – **Soi Bangla** rivals Bangkok

and Pattaya for debauchery. Something for everybody, but watch the katoys in the silly sois and Soi Paradise gay district – most are expert pick-pockets. If you pine to see men dressed as women best to blow your baht at **Simon Cabaret**. Patong's most notorious night spot is **Rock Hard-A-Go-Go** while Soi Expat is the obvious Bangla Rd extension. Bar flies find **Soi Animal** appealing, with **Tiger Disco** and **Crazy Horse Saloon**. If you seek ladies who make their own choices, try one of Patong's fruit-fly discos, like **Banana**, **Crocodile**, **Dragon**, **Safari Club** or **Star Club**.

KATA

Ratri is a new jazz club set high up Kata Mountain, with a roof that's higher yet. Food is great and the music better.

Call owner/operator Jae at 09-874-5286 for directions.

RAWAI

Rawai Beach's beer bars aren't exactly Patong-style, but may be more fun. Start at **Nikita's**. **Green Man** owner Howard holds Quiz nights every Thursday. **Friendship Bungalow** now has Jazz Jamming every Sunday from 4-8, but usually goes later.

ROADTRIPPING

Best advice – don't drive, especially a motorbike. Remember Thailand's second highest cause of accidents is turning into traffic without looking. Despite what authorities say about farang drivers, accidents resulting from Thais driving in the wrong side of the road are common. If you do drive, rent

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a car, and drive defensively, slow and on the left. Avoid Tuk-Tuks, rude and overpriced, best to order a meter-taxi. At the airport, turn right just outside the arrivals gate to find the meter-taxi stand and avoid the dangerous transfer concessions – low-paid drivers have to speed dangerously just to make ends meet. One of Thailand's beauties is great transportation infrastructure, so it's best to take the local bus from anywhere to Phuket town for the day – cost is Bt20 or less.

DAY TRIPPING

There's plenty to do on and off Phuket – remember, it all started as a dive resort. There are so many islands and reefs that Phuket is the speedboat capital of the world, if you book, ask for 4-stroke outboard engines – none are available yet, but pollution statistics on 2-stroke outboards and jet skis are staggering, so we have to start somewhere. If you want to see Phi-Phi (sadly overrun by development, including post-Tsunami high rises.), take the ferry, not a speedboat. You're better walking off-property to a small Ma-and-Pa agent to book your tours rather than using airport or hotel tour counters – or find a reasonably priced taxi.

WAY TO GO:

AIR: Bangkok Airways fly for Bt3,055, Nok Air for Bt2,750 BS Thai Airways for Bt3,230. All prices one-way.

TRAIN: 2nd class aircon bed, Bt788. Add a bus from Surat Thani to Phuket goes for Bt238

BUS: Busses take 13 hours BKK to Phuket. A 'VIP' coach set's you back Bt970, aircon Bt626

koh LANTA

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



... just a suggestion

"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 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.

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NIGHTRIPPING

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 Phueung**. 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.

NIGHTRIPPING

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

DAYTRIPPING

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

AO NANG

If you haven't been here for a few years, then you may not recognise this once sleepy and quiet beachfront road. There



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you ever had one of those pisses that just won't stop?

may be a McDonalds, fashion malls, five-star resorts and more concrete than greenery, but Ao Nang is still a cool base camp for a few days. Recently, all of the phone lines and electric cables on the beach road were relaid – underground! Get off the main strip and you will find a stunning, nature lover's location with some of the most scenic sites that Krabi has to offer within a short hike. The level of accommodation in Ao Nang has climbed over the years. **Wanna's Place** has rooms for around Bt900. The **Somkiet Buri** resort is in a wonderful location with rooms that go for about Bt1,200. Nowadays, the average "budget" fan-room in Ao Nang comes with hot water, TV and costs in the region of Bt350. Numerous guesthouses behind the

beachfront are a safe bet with friendly staff.

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



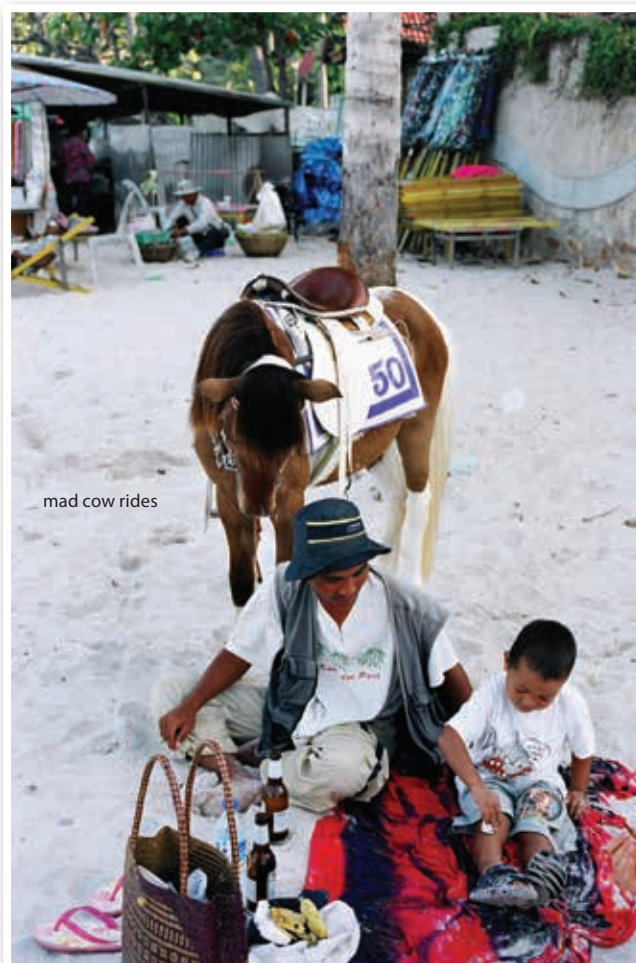
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mad cow rides

watching a magenta sunset, or sweat it out climbing the megalithic limestone cliffs, which, half a billion years ago, formed part of the world's largest coral reef. On the west (sunset) side, room prices are higher. **Railay Bay Resort and Spa** offers the cheapest in luxury with rooms ranging from Bt1,050 to Bt2,000. **Railay Sand & Sea Resort** has similar rates. The east side is home to the cheaper restaurants, bars and bungalows. **Viewpoint Resort and Diamond Cave Resort** both come complete with comfy and spacious two- to three-star standard rooms with swimming pools; and Bt400 should get you a comfortable bungalow with en-suite bathroom during the high season. Meanwhile, that old classic, **YaYa Resort** has upgraded their rooms but kept the prices down to around Bt350. **Cabanna Resort** provides basic bungalows with attached shower room.

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



Spike fooled many a tourist with the 'look at me i'm a sand sculpture' ruse

Street. Jomtien is further south and is a nicer beach with more accommodation, and it's popular with Thai weekenders. So is Pattaya paradise? It's a party town for sure. No matter who you are there's something to occupy you, be it paintball, bungee jumping, kayaking or just loafing around getting drunk all day; Pattaya accepts all comers.

PLACES TO CRASH

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

WIND IN YOUR FACE

You'll see songtaews all over town, offering short lifts for Bt10, depending on the distance and your gullibility. Motorcycle taxis are ubiquitous and about the same as Bangkok prices, around Bt20 for a couple of 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 bungee jump, which is just near the go-cart speedway (South Pattaya). Plus there's paintball, horseback riding, skydiving and shuffleboard. Needless to say, the landscape around Pattaya is littered with quality golf courses.

NIGHTTRIPPING

The main nighttime activity in Pattaya City quickly becomes obvious on arrival. If you happen to be a white male in town, a quick stroll around dusk will illicit several

invitations for a drink or other offers that may make you blush or tremble. Beer-bars sprout from every bit of available space and there seems to be another acre of them around every corner — plenty of go-go bars around the downtown as well. Two of the more famous clubs and hunting grounds for happy hookers, and the men who lust after them, are Walking Street's **Marine Disco** and the Bangkok-based **Lucifer's**. If that's your gig, then you're not alone: Pattaya seems to have the world's largest concentration of overweight middle-aged men and you may feel out of place not sporting a mullet or moustache. There tend to be a lot of katoeys, or ladyboys, around town as well. Luckily they're not all picking pockets and you can go to **Alcazar**, **Simon** or **Tiffany's** cabaret shows for a gender-bending evening. In need of live music? Check out **Blues Factory** or **Climax Bar**, both on **Walking Street**. To stay away from the sleaze, hang out with a member of the opposite sex or try one of the better hotel bars.

FEEDING TIME

If every second business in Pattaya is a bar then every third one is a restaurant. If you're aching for a taste of home, Pattaya provides some of the best Farang food far less than Bangkok prices. English-style pubs can be expected to provide excellent post-hangover fry-ups and there are several outstanding Japanese and Korean restaurants. For those

Americans among us who long for Mexican food, the **Blue Parrot** on Soi 13/4 is a godsend — great tacos and margaritas, and generous portions of home-made salsa.

WAY TO GO

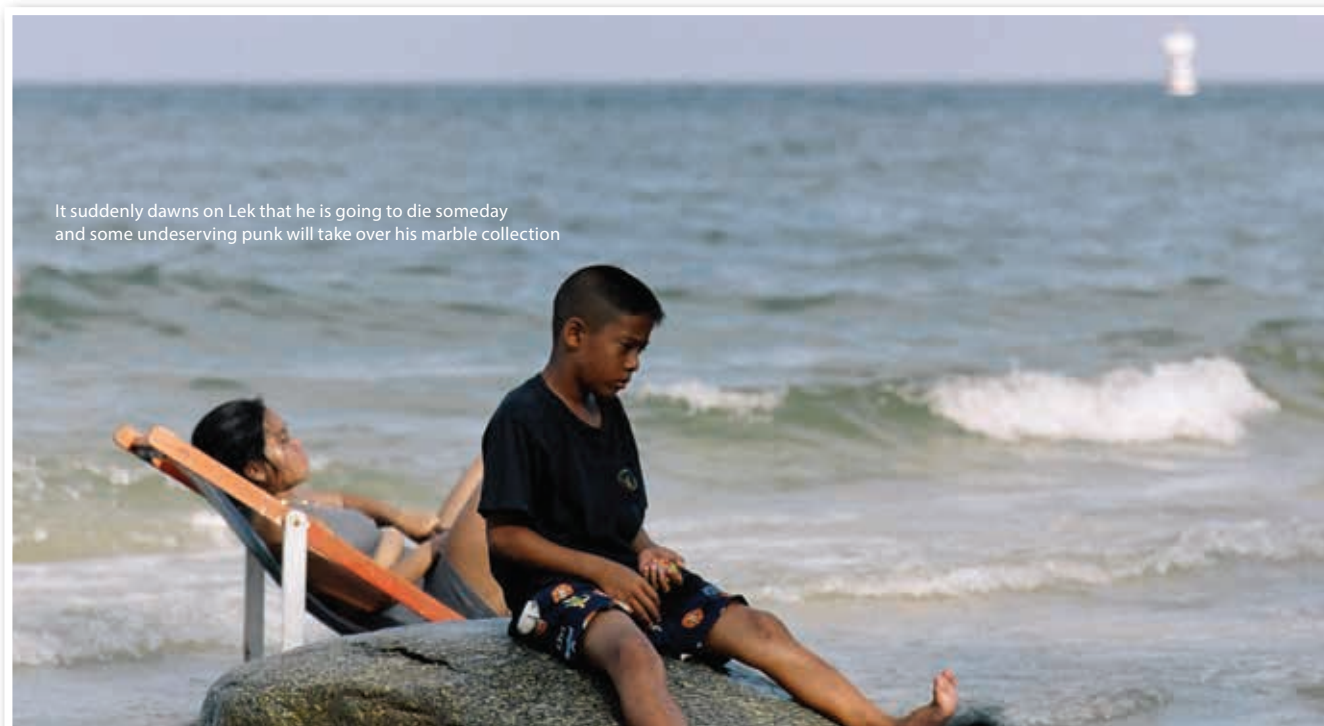
BUS: Buses leave from Mor Chit and the Ekamai Bus Terminal on Sukhumvit Soi 63 regularly. Fares range from Bt70-90.

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 Bt1,500 with beers and singsongs along the way. You can often bargain for Bt900 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



It suddenly dawns on Lek that he is going to die someday and some undeserving punk will take over his marble collection

onto the playing field as southern Thailand's most up and coming mainland destination.

PLACES TO CRASH

In terms of accommodation the city is rich with luxury hotels and resorts. The **Hilton**, the **Marriot**, the **Dusit** and the historic **Sofitel** (built in 1923 and still resplendent of that era) all compete for the upscale visitor's baht. For the slightly less well-heeled the **Peony guesthouse** offers aircon rooms opposite the Sofitel from 1,400 B.

For those travellers still on the comfort verses beer quota kick, try the **London Guesthouse** or **Top Marks** (it deserves them) in Poolsuk road, Bt250-1,200. Both offer good sports coverage and Western food in their popular downstairs bars.

FEEDING TIME

Want the best tom yum in Thailand? Try the **Sirin** opposite Burger King. Gastronomes wanting a second opinion should visit **La Mer** or **Supatra** in Khao Takiap. Both of which will delight the tastebuds without giving your wallet a coronary. In town **La Brasserie de Paris** on the waterfront stands apart from the competition offering a French country twist to Thai seafood and steaks. Street-stall aficionados should check out the **Grand Night Market** (4pm-12pm). For a little more northeastern spice try the strip between Soi 88 and the railway station. Breakfast is best served, at either end of the day, by **Crawford's Irish Bar** in Poolsuk 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 misspelt flyers, as are the city's two boxing rings. Not satisfied with a "Bintaburger" and an early night? Head to **Sam Sam** bar next to the **Brewhouse**, open as long as the owner's eyes are. The karaoke strip behind will take you through until dawn along with the friendly local constabulary finishing the nightshift.

DAYTRIPPING

The biggest tourist-pullers are the nine golf courses, some of which are on a par with the best courses in SE Asia. On weekdays green fees range from Bt1,200 for the oldest course, the **Royal Hua Hin** (built in 1927) up to Bt2,500 for the **Springfield Royal**. Even when you add on another Bt600 for the cart and Bt200 for the caddy it's still a sweet deal. But if you prefer to play in a bigger sand trap, there's always the beach that rims the city. Pony-riding, bananaboating, and lazing around getting a lobster-tan are the three paramount pleasures here. It's also swell for a breezy nightcap. **Khao Takiap**, or "**Chopstick Mountain**," is four kilometres south of town and boasts a hilltop temple and a hyperactive community of monkeys, along with a cluster of Buddha images sitting strangely beside models of dinosaurs. In homage to some of the special projects initiated at His Majesty's behest, there's

a supermarket called **Golden Place** where Thais queue up to buy fruit and produce from these royal projects. Hua Hin's reputation as a health centre is bolstered by numerous spas (**Chiva Som** being the most legendary), in addition to a multitude of massage and reflexology centres. Another good daylight option is the **Elephant Village**, located near the Palau Waterfall and the **Etiuskato Temple**. Heading further out of town, the **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park** (30km south of Hua Hin) has some photogenic beaches, limestone hills, and caves. The park is also a roost for sea eagles, painted storks, and purple herons, and a lair for deer, serow and many different kinds of primates. A two-hour drive and a 15-minute speedboat brings you to the island of **Koh Thalu**. The coral reefs around here, teeming with tropical fish, provide sunken pleasures for snorkelers.

WAY TO GO

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

RAIL: Trains leave the Hualamphong station in Bangkok all day and cost around the same as the bus. The real bonus is catching a glimpse of the most photo-worthy railway station in the country: a wooden masterpiece of red and cream paint in Hua Hin.

koh CHANG

With the high season upon us, anyone looking for a good value room in one of Koh Chang's tourist-class beachfront resorts over Christmas or New Year will be disappointed. If you're arriving without accommodation try the resorts on Pearl Beach - some nice small places by the sea, located midway between Whitesands & Klong Prao beaches.

This Dec 31st visitors will have more to look forward to than simply the prospect of having to fork out Bt2,000 for a decidedly average hotel buffet complete with an ice carving and transvestite singer, as Ad Carabao, Thailand's king of country rock and erstwhile energy drink mogul will be playing a beachfront concert on New Year's Eve outside Sabay Bar, Whitesands, high tide permitting.

WHITESANDS

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

PLACES TO CRASH

At the very northern end of the beach you'll find White Sand Beach Resort, Bt1500/night and up and located on a pristine beach. The long standing KC Grande Resort covers all the bases with Bt400 bamboo huts to Bt6,000 villas. Shoestring travelers 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, German efficiency and great sunset views for Bt1,600.

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KLONG PRAO

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

PLACES TO CRASH

At the northern end, Koh Chang Paradise is the best bet for suitcase lugging visitors at Bt3,500+. Need a cheap aircon room but don't care about the view? Try Koh Chang Inn, located in an apartment block in the less than picturesque VJ Plaza. Tiger Huts and Thale Bungalows compete in the Bt300 niche market. Splashing 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, Tropicana Resort and Amari Emerald Cove all of which should be booked in advance online.

KAI BAE

Quickly catching up with Whitesands for the title of most overdeveloped stretch of roadside, Kai Bae attracts mainly older backpackers and families traveling independently. **PLACES TO CRASH** You want stunning views? . . . stay at Seaview Resort & Spa, from Bt2,500-12,000. The pick of the locally owned, well run bungalow resorts is KB Resort; with Porn's & Siam Holiday being the choice cheapies under Bt300.

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 good value Bt900 aircon bungalows.

ELSEWHERE

The peninsula near Bangbao provides weary travelers with a choice of Bt5,000 luxury at Nirvana or basic huts at Remark Puzi (which isn't pronounced 'pussy') or Homestay Beach. On the far flung east of Koh Chang, The Spa Koh Chang, caters to the health conscious whilst in the even further flung southeast Treehouse is a Bt100 home away from home on a deserted beach. Yachties should moor up at the Island View pier, Salakphet where a growing band of boat owners are based and who are more than happy to share their nautical knowledge over a beer or three.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Sweet Zone, Lemon Bar and Backsound, Lonely Beach, provide DJ-driven entertainment for the 'drinks-in-a bucket' crowd, whereas Sabay Bar, Whitesands, is a more mature beach bar, with an eclectic mix of hard rock, pop and 70s disco courtesy of the Filipino house band. Paddy's Palms, Whitesands may not have the atmosphere of an Irish pub, but is worth a stop for a decent pint of Kilkenney or Guinness. In Kai Bae, pick from Porn's Bar's regular beach BBQs, Lek Bar's live English footy or Nangnual

Restaurant's ladyboy cabaret. Tough choice.

DAYTRIPPING

Be pampered at Bodiwork Spa, Klong Prao & 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 through Mogli Treks or Jungleway, both in Klong Son.

WAY TO GO

AIR: Bt4800, return, to Trat Airport on Bangkok Airways. Three flights per day from 1 Nov onwards.

BUS: Bt250-280. Catch the 7.45am or 9.45am direct aircon bus from Ekkamai to Koh Chang Ferry or Centrepoint ferry pier.

MINIVAN: A cramped, hair-raising way to spend Bt500.

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 on Koh Chang should be Bt40-80.

MOTORBIKE RENTAL: Automatic bike Bt200-250, customized 400cc chopper Bt600-800

Head south from Bangbao and you'll hit the barely-developed Koh Wai. There's absolutely nothing to do here other than enjoy the panoramic views of Koh Chang and snorkel off the beach. Visitors who opt to stay overnight aren't snowed under with options – either live frugally at Paradise Bungalows for Bt300 or splash out Bt600-1,000 at Pakarang Resort, they even have electricity.

koh MAK

A cross-shaped island located 10km south of Koh Wai whose two west coast beaches both complete with palm trees, clear seas and white sand. What you won't find are beer bars, beach vendors and large hotels. No wonder it was recently chosen by none other than *The Sunday Times* as one of the world's finest islands. Sixteen small resorts provide everything from Bt300 bamboo huts at TK Huts and Lazy Days through to mid-range comfort at the gaily decorated Baan Koh Mak to the boutique, home comforts of the hilltop Baan Koh Mak where you'll experience what are probably the best vistas this corner of Thailand has to offer. 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.

ISLAND HOPPING

SLOW BOAT: twice daily service from Bangbao – Koh Wai – Koh Mak on *Island*



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hh Yes!



SEE YA WHEN WE MEET YAI

Hopper, departs from Bangbao at 8am and 12pm.

FAST BOAT: Koh Mak Resort's new speedboats make a twice daily service from the east coast port of Dan Mai - Koh Wai - Koh Mak at 10.15 am & 4.15pm

koh SAMET

Care for a slice of tropical beach pie with a filling of party flavours? Samet is a great place for multi-basking in the sun and ocean spray by mega-watt daylight, or gorging and revelry under a chandelier of stars by night. The 3.5-hour bus trip from Bangkok is worth it for the island's bracing sea breezes and vast expanse of blue sky. Koh Samet is popular with both Thais and Westerners, so it's the best of both worlds, if you subtract a few neo-Neanderthals who can't hold their booze, and some locals who can't tune their guitars. Jump the bus from the Eastern Bus Terminal in noxious Bangkok, or one of the minibuses from Victory Monument, and you're well on your way to the bliss of tropical amnesia.

HAT SAI KAEW

If you like herds of people then you'll find many of them here. In general, it's a crowded beach with lots of places to stay and to eat, and a plethora of jet-skis and speedboats for all your watersporting indulgences. At night, most places set up tables on the beach for drinking and dining under the stars. **Haad Sai Kaew Villa** and **Ploy Talay** have clean and affordable rooms for Bt500-1,000. Also, Ploy Talay has opened up a hi-tech, indoor disco on the beach for people who like it trendy and aircon, rather than beachy and sweaty.

AO HIN KHON

Naga Bungalows have reasonably priced rooms without much of a view, but the **Naga Pub** has reopened under new management. There's also **Jep's Bungalows** with a good restaurant, but chill out and don't check your watch after you ordered - it can take a while. The lodgings here are away from the beach and have a nice view but be careful crossing the street at night.

AO PHAI

Home to **Silversand** disco, an alfresco affair on the beach that is staggeringly popular with the bucket brigade, who get the sand flying until late in the night.

Sea Breeze resort has cool bungalows from around Bt600-1,500, however, the beach is quite small and can get overcrowded when the sun is beaming.

AO PUDSA & AO TUBTIM

Ao Tubtim has a small lovely beach with plenty of bungalows, but gets busy on weekends. Ao Pudsas has bungalows close to the beach for whitecap-watchers. Prices range from Bt600-1,500.

AO VONGDUAN

This lovely bay is blessed with a long stretch of white sand and a calm sea due to its shape and a wide range of bungalow operations.

Seahorse Bungalows is the cheapest at Bt500-1,500. At night check out the many seafood restaurants and barbeques or kick back with an exotic fruit cocktail at one of the bars. The **Baywatch Bar** is located in the middle of the beach and has a chilled atmosphere, cool cocktails and good music.

For those seeking a slower pace, on both sides of the bay you have Ao Chao and Ao Thian within walking distance. Great places to unwind or enjoy a book.

Vongduan Resort and **Vongduan Villas** drip with luxury at a reasonable Bt1,000-3,500. Get there via

regular ferries departing from Ban Phe.

If you want your beach idyll to be as quiet as a monk, head further south, just a hop, skip and skedaddle from Ao Vongduan, where you'll find Ao Thian, and even further along, Ao Lung Dam.

WAY TO GO

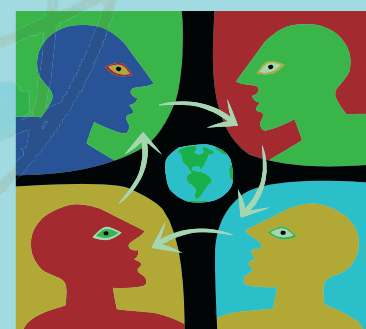
BUS: Departures from the Eastern Bus Station on Sukhumvit Soi 63 hit the tarmac every hour until 8.00pm and take around 3.5 hours to get to Ban Phe, setting you back the pauper's ransom of Bt150. You can also take minibuses from Victory Monument, which cost about Bt30 more, but machete an hour off the journey.

FERRIES: Keep in mind that the last ferry from Ban Phe to Koh Samet departs around 6pm. Ticket start at Bt50, depending on your destination. You can also spear through the waves on a speedboat at any time for around Bt1,000.

COVER CHARGE: Being a national park, you have to pay Bt200 to land on the island. If this seems a little stiff, take a boat after 5pm to avoid the charge. Works best if you're in a group.

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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 **KillingFields Memorial** at Choeung Ek. Cultural attractions include **Wat Phnom**, which according to legend is the site of the historic founding of the city in 1372. Near the river are the **Silver Pagoda** and **Royal Palace**. Make sure you pay the camera fee if you plan to take photos - they enforce it. Nearby, the **National Museum** has lots of carvings and stuff, much of it lifted from Angkor. **River cruises** are available, cheap and expensive varieties, the former from boats docked along the riverfront waiting just for you, expensive ones complete with lunch and drinks - check with your hotel. Shopping - **Central Market** for browsing, **Russian Market** for spending.

Small art galleries on Street 178 and Street 240.

WAY TO GO

FROM THAILAND

AIR: Bangkok Airways, around Bt5,000/10,000 one-way/return from Bangkok, Air Asia one flight a day as low as \$25, taxes included (excluding departure tax). Cambodia departure taxes are \$25 international, \$6 domestic.

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

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

FROM SIEM REAP

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

ROAD: Road is excellent. Bus \$4-9, five-six hours. Taxi \$40-50, four hours.

BOAT: \$20-25, five - seven hours, daily morning departure. Now that the road is good, this option is an overpriced tourist rip-off best avoided. Take the bus.



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SIEM REAP majestic PILE

PLACES TO SLEEP

<\$10: we recommend either the **Ivy 2 Guesthouse** not far from the Old Market or **Jasmine Lodge** on Highway 6 near the Caltex.

\$10-\$20: **Two Dragons** in the quiet Wat Bo Village area, **Ivy Guesthouse** in the Old Market area, and the **Villa Siem Reap** to the west of town. Want more of a hotel? Try **Sydney Angkor**.

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

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

NIGHTTRIPPING

Most folks head to "Bar Street" which includes the **Angkor What?** bar, the **Temple Club**, **Red Piano**, and a host of other establishments. In the same neighbourhood is the **Ivy** (good food and music), **Warehouse** (get drunk and silly), the **Laundry Music Bar** (late nights), **Molly Malone's** (Irish), the **Funky Monkey**

(well, a bar), and the **Linga Bar** (gay). A few blocks away on Sivatha, across from the E-cafe is **Dead Fish Tower**, a large rather bizarre place.

FEEDING TIME

The bulk of restaurants are clustered in the Psah Chas (Old Market) area. Options include the **Ivy** (Western), **Soup Dragon** (Vietnamese-Asian), **Kama Sutra** (Indian), **Pizza Italiano** (err, Italian) and **Blue Pumpkin** (breakfast/lunch/bakery). **Khmer Kitchen** is probably the most well-known joint serving local fare, all conveniently stacked next to each other. Along Sivatha Street are scores of restaurants including the **Dead Fish Tower** (Thai), **Tell Restaurant** (Western, Asian), **Curry Walla** (Indian) and quite a few local joints. In Wat Bo Village try the **Two Dragons** (Thai and Khmer), **Home Cocktail** (Khmer), or **Hawaii Pizza**. Street food is along Sivatha Street, but the Khmer restaurants in the alley behind "Bar Street" are a safer bet.

DAYTRIPPING

Err, **Angkor Wat**, maybe? At \$20 a day, \$40 for three and \$60 for the week, the temples don't come cheap, but they are well worth it. You can hire a motorcycle-drawn rickshaw (locally but erroneously referred to as a tuk-tuk, or by the French word *remorque*) for about \$10-12/day. An aircon car and driver will set you back \$20-25. Guides (drivers don't guide, guides don't drive) can set you back another \$20-25 a day. Arrange both at your hotel.

BEYOND THE TEMPLES

Go see the river carvings and

take a jungle walk at **Kbal Spean**. Deep in the jungle visit **Beng Mealea** temple or really take a journey and see **Koh Ker**, too. **Phnom Kulen** is not worth the \$20 admission so give it a miss. The floating village of **Chong Khneas** is also poor value, instead if you want to see the lake (and we think you should), spend a few extra dollars and get yourself to **Kompong Phluk**. You won't regret it, it's gorgeous. Also worth an hour or two of your life is the **Landmine Museum**. All the moto drivers know it. Other than the temples and the lake, there's not much else to see or do.

WAY TO GO

AIR: Bangkok Airways fares range from Bt4,300/8,600 one-way/return on the

internet to much much more from travel agents. Fly Air Asia to Phnom Penh and then spend a few hours waiting for a 12:30pm bus (\$9/person), or take a cab straight away (\$40-50).

ROAD: Take the government bus to Aranyaprathet, cross the border, take taxi to Siem Reap. Expect to pay \$40-45 for a whole car, \$10 for a seat if sharing. The road is wretched, plan on four hours of dancing in your seat. Don't take any kind of bus between Poipet and Siem Reap, they are all scams. No exceptions. None. Zero.

FOR AN ENJOYABLE TRIP, DO NOT PURCHASE A BUS TICKET TO SIEM REAP FROM THAILAND FROM ANY TRAVEL AGENT ANYWHERE.

VISAS & BORDER CROSSINGS

TO/FROM THAILAND

Use Poipet if heading to Siem Reap from Bangkok. Use any crossing if heading to Phnom Penh. If coming from the north (Isaan, Vientiane) use Anlong Veng or O'Smach. Visa-on-arrival costs \$20 and there is no reason to pay more no matter what they tell you.

TO/FROM VIETNAM

Bavet/Moc Bai if heading to Saigon, Chau Doc if heading to the Mekong Delta.

TO/FROM LAOS

The border above Stung Treng is open. Cambodia visas are available here (use the land crossing, not the river), Laos visas are not.

Cambodia now offers an e-visa, it's \$25 and only valid at the airports. Not really worth it.

ENTER THE TWO DRAGONS

Long time *Untamed Travel Magazine* correspondent Gordon Sharpless has in a short period of time managed to get married, become a father, and fulfil his life's-dream of opening his own guesthouse in his adopted home of Siem Reap. The **Two Dragons Guesthouse** in Wat Bo Village has raised the bar of the crowded Siem Reap budget and lower-middle accommodation scene with the nicest rooms at the best prices, along with cable-TV, free tea and coffee, curtains, beds, even pillows! The real gold is in photographer Gordon's encyclopaedic knowledge of the area, advice on avoiding scams, and a home-spun menu, the brainchild of his Thai wife (who might even cook the meal for you...). There's even a pickup service from the Poipet border (a shithole, somewhere you'll want to leave right away) so call ahead on +855-63-965-107 or 063-965-107 (inside Cambodia) or twodragons@talesofasia.com from cyberspace. Prices start at \$8 and end at \$25 for the aircon presidential suite, but Gordon says he'll give a 10% discount to folks toting this copy of *Untamed Travel*.



SINGAPORE

Singapore has changed remarkably over the past five years – “out” are the bans on chewing gum, the pedestrian barriers on Orchard Road, and the 1am 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 Dorian”) offering a spectacular backdrop. Get there from either the City Hall MRT, walking via the Esplanade, or the Raffles Place MRT, walking via the grand Fullerton Hotel. The other statue is eight-storeys high and located on **Sentosa** Island, which now has its own MRT connection at the Harbourfront station. Sentosa is shedding its “theme park” reputation with the closing of some of the lesser attractions, and a lot of landscaping and F&B options emerging. A day on the beach might even seem like home to some — the sand was imported from Thailand! The **Musical Fountain** is a bit tacky but surprisingly fun — an 8pm show projects stories and love messages onto a water-spray screen.

It’s worthwhile to take the **Cable Car** from Harbourfront MRT (daily, 8:30am-9pm, \$10) to Sentosa, but be sure to also visit the cable car’s other stop, **Mt. Faber**, with glimpses of old colonial houses and WWII fortifications.

NATURAL DISTRACTIONS

The **Zoo**, **Night Safari** and **Bird Park** are old favourites, and still by far the top tourist attractions. The best is the Night Safari, but there’s an excellent value ticket covering all three (\$20 for one, or \$31 for all three). The Zoo closes

at 6pm and the Night Safari runs from 7:30pm-midnight, but there’s food and entertainment in the interim. Take the MRT to Ang Mo Kio, then bus 138.

The Bird Park is near Boon Lay MRT. Taxis are cheap in Singapore, so unless you’re by yourself, just grab a cab.

The Bukit Timah Nature Reserve

(Bus No. 171 or 182 from Orchard Rd) comprises 81 hectares of forests, and more plant species than in all of North America! A cab ride away is the new Tree-Top walk where you look down from above the rainforest canopy, and the MacRitchie Reservoir which offers 5km of very pleasant boardwalk perched over the edge of the water. Last but not least is the untouched and undeveloped **Pulau Ubin**, where you can rent a bike for half a day (\$8) and experience pre-development Singapore! Info on all of these at www.nparks.gov.sg

WELL CULTURED

Singapore’s surprise is the growing sports, arts and culture scene. The **Singapore Art Museum** (City Hall/Dhoby Ghaut MRT), housed in a classical baroque building, focuses on Singaporean and regional artists, with a strong emphasis on electronic arts, while the **Asian Civilisations Museum** (City Hall or Raffles Place MRT) has a mix of permanent and visiting displays focusing on South East Asia culture. It also has a small but excellent (and free!) display on the history of the Singapore River. The visually striking **Esplanade theatre** (nicknamed “The Dorian”) 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 its 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 **Affica** 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 **Swissotel**, **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).



<p>singapore's highest rated bed & breakfast for backpackers! dorms S\$25/night</p> <p>www.sleepysams.com sms / call +65 9277 4988</p>	<p>sleepy sam's singapore bed & breakfast</p>	<p>mixed & female dorms beautiful city location Lovely decor free breakfast free internet full security full airconditioning</p>
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THAILAND

Most of the prime tourist spots in Thailand are perfectly safe except for some slash-and-grab robberies, gem scams, and the occasional drugging and mugging by ladies of the evening.

Lifeline: 1155 is the 24-hour hotline for the Thai Tourist Police. Their office is located in the Cimic Tower, 209/1 Sukhumvit Soi 21, Cimic Tower. Open 8am-5pm. Tel: 02-668-7173.

HONG KONG

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

Lifeline: 999; all operators speak Cantonese and English.

SINGAPORE

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

Lifeline: 999; English and Cantonese operators.

CAMBODIA

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

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

LAOS

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

Lifeline: Ha ha ha.

LOST CREDIT CARDS

If your credit cards get stolen, it's best to call their head offices in America. Remember to add 001 for an international call and then the country code 1 for the US. Phone Net is the most inexpensive card at Bt4 per minute, while some travel agencies in Thailand charge Bt15 per minute. The following numbers are not toll-free outside of the US.

VISA's U.S. emergency number 800/847-2911 or 410/581-9994. **AMERICAN EXPRESS** cardholders and those with traveler's check call 800/221-7282. **MASTERCARD** holders can ring 800/307-7309 or 636/722-7111. For other credit cards, call the toll-free number directory at 800/555-1212.

CREDIT CARD HOTLINES IN THAILAND

VISA 02-263-2091-2

MASTERCARD 02-670-4088-99

AMEX 02-273-0022

DINERS 02-232-4100



EMERGENCY CASH

When in dire financial straits, get money wired to you via **Western Union** (tel. 800/325-6000; westernunion.com), which has 225,000 agents in 190 countries and territories.

hospitals

THAILAND

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

BANGKOK

Bangkok Adventist Mission

Hospital (private)

430 Pitsanulok Rd, Dusit, Bangkok 10300
Tel: 02-2811422

Bangkok Genral Hospital (Private)

2 Soi Soonvijai 7 New Petchburi Rd, Wattana, Bangkok 10110 Thailand
Tel: 02-3103000 Hotline: 1719

Bumrungrad Hospital (Private)

33 Sukhumvit 3 (Soi Nana Nua) Wattana, Bangkok 10110 Thailand
Tel: 02-6671000

Samitivej Hospital (Private)

133 Sukhumvit 49, Klongton Nua Wattana, Bangkok 10110
Tel: 02-7118000

CHIANG MAI

Chiangmai ram Hospital (private)

8 Boonruangrit Rd, Chiang Mai 50200.
Tel: (053) 224851, 224861, 224871

KOH SAMUI

Samui International Hospital

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

CAMBODIA

AEA International (Cambodia Pte Ltd.) House 1611, Street 51, Sang-Kat Boeung Peng, Khon Doun Penn Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Tel: 855 23 216 911

LAOS

Heaven help you if you have any serious ailments while in Laos. There are few qualified doctors and they just don't have the facilities. Get to Thailand. From Vientiane, there are one or two okay hospitals just over the bridge in Nong Khai. Otherwise, it's back to Bangkok.

Clinique Internationale

Luang Prabang (856) 214-022.

Centre de Traumatologie et d'Orthopedie de Vientiane

(Private) On the Road to Tha Ngon, north of Vientiane.
Tel: (856) 413-663, 413-306

(Call for ambulance service)

Nong Khai Wattana Hospital

(Private) 1159/4 Prachak Rod, Nong Khai, Thailand - near Vientiane. Tel: 042-465-201

bangkok embassies

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

Australia

Tel: 2-3446300
02-344-6400

Austria

Tel: 02-303-6057-9

Cambodia

Tel: 02-254-6630
02-256-0196

Canada

Tel: 02-636-0540-9

China

Tel: 02-245-7032-3

France

Tel: 02-627-2105

Germany

Tel: 02-287-9000
02-287-1224

India

Tel: 02-258-0300

Indonesia

Tel: 02-252-3135-40

Israel

Tel: 02-204-9200
02-260-4856

Japan

Tel: 02-252-6151-9

South Korea

Tel: 02-247-7535-41

Laos

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

Malaysia

Tel: 02-679-2190-9

Nepal

Tel: 02-391-7240
02-390-2280

Netherlands

Tel: 02-02-254-7701-5

Philippines

Tel: 02-259-0139-40
02-258-5401

Singapore

Tel: 02-286-2111
02-286-1434

South Africa

Tel: 02-253-8473-6

Sri Lanka

Tel: 02-261-1934
02-261-1938

Sweden

Tel: 02-263-7200

Taiwan

Tel: 02-670-0200-9

UK

Tel: 02-305-8333

USA

Tel: 02-205-4000

Vietnam

Tel: 02-251-5836-7

THAILAND EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Tourist Police 24-hour Tourist

Hotline: 1155 then press 1
Tourist Information: 02-282-9773-6

Police Emergency: 191

Medical Evacuation and

Ambulance Service: 02-255-1133-6
Airport: (02) 535-1111

A photograph of three young children of Pacific Island descent sitting on a beach next to a large hammerhead shark. The child on the left is a girl with curly hair wearing a pink patterned shirt. The child in the middle is a boy wearing a dark blue polo shirt. The child on the right is a boy with a shaved head wearing a blue t-shirt and light blue pants, holding a small green fruit. They are all smiling at the camera. The shark's head and large, flat hammerhead are in the foreground, resting on the sand. In the background, there are boats and a rusty metal structure.

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avatar

Spa Mountain Suites

Avatar is a fantasy hideaway that sets a new design motif for a spa sanctuary. At a time when the concept of spa retreat has become synonymous with traditional minimalism, Avatar breaks the mould by being entirely and originally constructed of concrete – all surfaces and 'furniture' are fashioned of bare concrete that take on unexpected hues ranging from blues and ambers, depending on the light – rendering concrete in a beautiful form, a veritable artistic accomplishment. Interior surfaces are given texture by imperfectness: wavy and lumpy ceilings, and scratched pitted walls. But the comforts are uncompromising: the 44 suites are cocoons of exclusive luxuries, including expensive king size mattresses that fit snugly in the rooms (the smallest rooms are seventy square meters) which have extraordinary depth, with a courtyard outfront and a terrace perched over the lagoon outback. The exterior is more dramatically outlandish, a building is shaped like a three-blade fan surrounded by lagoons, and set in a private exclusive valley that is girdled by primeval mountains at the fringes of Thailand's largest and wildest national park.

In this private sanctuary you can have the experience you desire. There's a romantic candle-lit rooftop restaurant, a three-section pool that has a super salty part that recreates the experience of the Dead Sea, an impressive spa center that has all the range of traditional treatments and massages as well as high-tech treatment gizmos such as a cyro sauna, and a club where you can snuggle in your private booth and play your own music.

Total privacy is assured – and nothing is impossible. You can be discreet or you can be irreverent; you can walk around with a sarong if you like. You can treat Avatar as a private place that comes with all-round pampering provided at the flick of a finger. You can indulge – the price of the room includes many facilities, free meals, unlimited selected drinks, and spa treatments – or you can opt for a contemplative and regenerative retreat by tending crops in the garden, and picking the vegetables that you want in your dinner, or activities such as yoga and meditation. All of this, combined with the inspirational design and timeless dreamy setting, allows Avatar to become personal and inimitable: Avatar can be what you like it to be.

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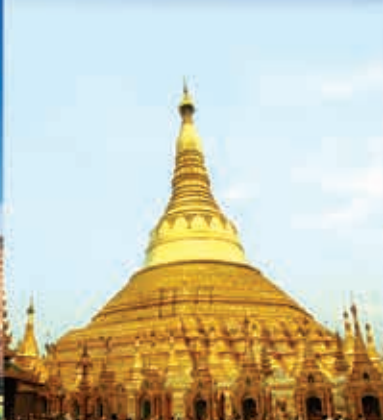
Culture



Siem Reap (Cambodia)



Sukhothai (Thailand)



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Luang Prabang (Laos)

Nature



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