

FARANG

# UNTAMED TRAVEL

New Year Issue



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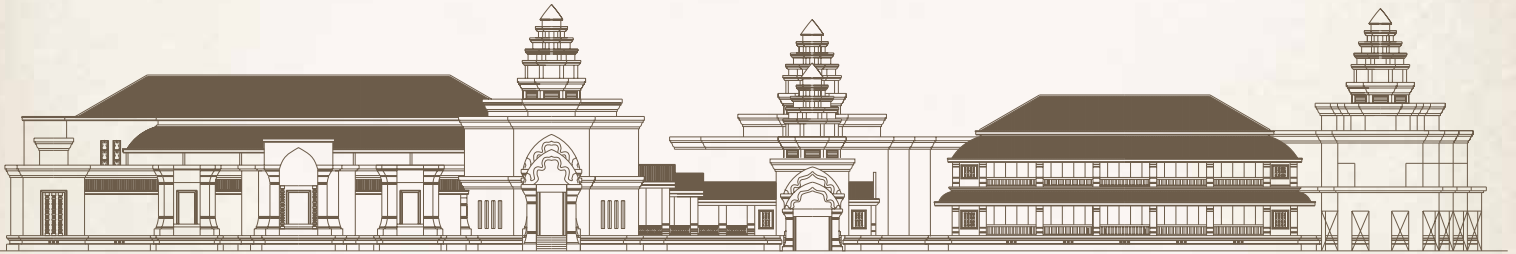
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# Substance:

*what's inside*

8 Main Events

12 Letters

42 Health

43 Road Reads

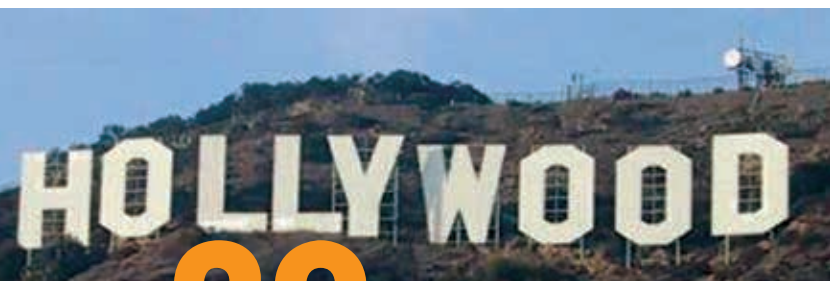
# 16

*Sketching a Serious Crime*



*EXIT Earth: ENTER Second Life*

# 28



# 20

*City of Fallen Angels*



# 22

*Shark Hunt*



# 40

*Bar Tripping*

UNTAMED TRAVEL

# AND THE WINNERS ARE...



Daniel sees no evil, Cameron speaks no evil, and Jim hears no evil

For the first time ever, in this extraordinarily special issue of *UT* we've selected a collection of prize-grabbing stories, nominated by us, from some of our new and die-hard contributors. Without further fanfare, and without Chris Rock in da house to host the awards, let's get started. Snagging first prize in the "I Was Ripped Off by a Frankenstein Ladyboy and Lived to Sell the Tale" category is one Victor Borg, whose harrowing feature about a close encounter with a deadly mutant will prickle your pubes.

In the "Sexiest and Kinkiest Photo Spread Ever to Appear in a Travel Magazine" category, Joan Sinclair came out on top. Marking her first ever contribution to *UT*, Joan's photos from her new book *Pink Box* are a beautifully shot and morally neutral expose of the rarely glimpsed and kinky-as-barbed-wire commercial sex world in Japan.

For bruising honesty and scathing wit, there's no one quite like Oliver Benjamin. Once again, the venerable "Olly Lama" gives your funny bone multiple fractures with his prize-winning guide to LA in the category of "Sharpest Hatchet Piece on a City That Really Deserves It" (In the New Year, watch out for the first collection of Olly's satirical travel features to be published by Bangkok Books. Within five years, we're guessing that he'll either replace Jay Leno as the host of the *Tonight Show*, or get lynched by a livid mob of travel agents.)

Not surprisingly, our "Boozers of the Year" award goes to our own dipsomaniacal duo of Daniel Cooper and Cameron Cooper (no relation). For this issue they've taste-tested all the beers on sale in Thailand and you can drink in and soak up the yeasty results.

For the much-coveted "Journo on a Beano" award, all hail Steve Sandford, the pride of Medicine Hat and former "rig pig" (or roughneck), who bagged a great freebie to a fantastical new resort on Phuket and admirably refused to gloat about it too much.

Taking the top honours in our sparsely contested, "Hey, I'm Not Going to the Middle East, You Go" category is none other than one of Asia's oldest expat hands in the journalism business, Richard S Ehrlich, who ventured to Turkey to write about the fez, whirling dervishes and the country's inability to get into the EU.

All the winners will receive a five-kilo case of the finest guavas from Chachoengsao Province, a bottle of rice whiskey from Si Sa Ket, and a plastic bucket from Tesco to puke them into.

Who knows? One of these days they might even get paid.

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# Substance:

*what's inside*

*features*

24

*The Panjim Connection*



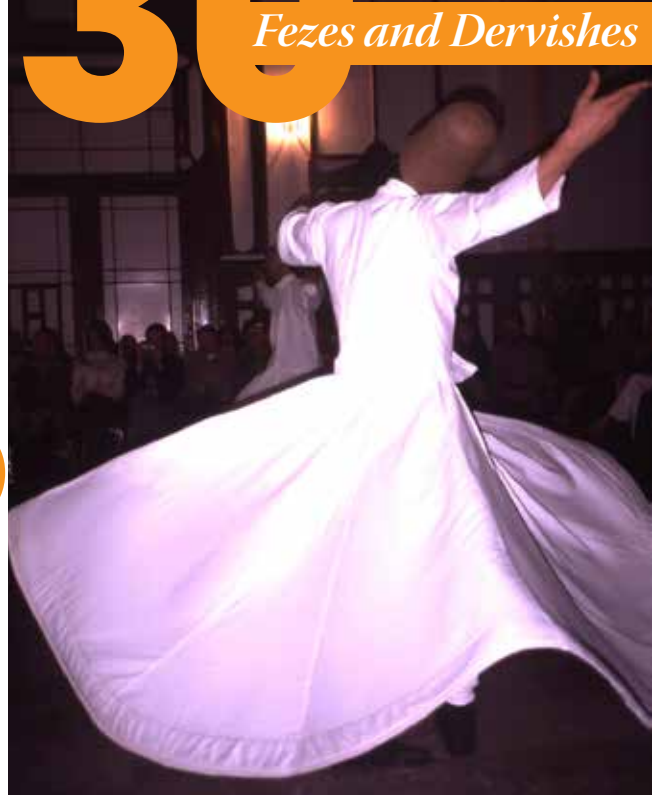
*Funeral Rites*

26



30

*Fezes and Dervishes*



34

*ShockingPink*



# MAIN events

## INDIA: Jallikattu

Abusing bulls isn't restricted to Spanish culture. Kind of like the running of the bulls in Pamplona, young Indian lads impress the ladies by wrestling their bovine friends to the earth. Sounds sensible, you say? But this bull has sharpened horns and is trained to wound – not only that, the unfortunate animal has had his tail cut off just before the event, to piss it off. So it is perhaps understandable that, instead of the traditional *mano a toro*, one-on-one bouts, the boys tend to gang up these days. Oh, and there's no arena as such, just a big crowd for the bull to charge into. Like all good festivals, its origins are a mystery.

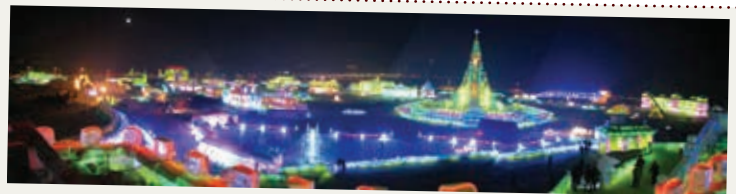
*Take the bull by the horns in any village in Tamil Nadu sometime this month. Pack a telephoto lens though, people die at this one.*



## AUSTRALIA: The Big Day Out

Australia's biggest rock fest travels all over Australia and NZ later this month. This year's line up includes Tool, Muse, The Vines, Eskimo Joe, The Streets, Jet, The Violent Femmes, Crystal Method and far too many others to mention or even see in one day alone. Plus, there's art installations, DJs, refreshments and about 40,000 punters to enjoy the day with. Tickets have already sold out for the Sydney and Melbourne shows but, this being the electronic age and all, scalpers are selling them online – undeterred by a recent court case.

*The Big Day Out starts in Auckland on the 19th and wraps up in Perth on the 4th of February. Check [bigdayout.com](http://bigdayout.com) for info, [ebay.com](http://ebay.com) for tickets.*



## CHINA: Harbin Ice Festival

What to do when it's -25 degrees Celsius outside? Snowball fights and skating aside, the icy city of Harbin, on China's Russian border, holds its annual ice festival deep in the frosty heart of its cold, cold winter. Ice sculptures may not seem very cool (except in the literal sense) but this chilly town gives a warm welcome to over 600 artists from around the globe as well as thousands of gawkers. Ice trees, ice mazes, ice climbing walls, ice chickens, ice everywhere in fact, except in your drink.

*The Harbin Ice festival gives visitors the big chill from January 5th to February 5th. Pack the winter woollies or you're sure to catch your death of cold.*

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# CARDINAL DATES

Arrivals

## 6TH JANUARY, FESTIVAL OF THE THREE KINGS, GOA

The three wise men in colourful costumes arrive at the local church bearing gifts, but it turns out that Jesus was born 12 days and 2007 years before, in Israel.

## 8TH JANUARY, WAKAKUSA YAMAYAKI, NARA, JAPAN

Spectacular festival where local priests dress as warriors and set a hill aflame. Yes, a hill – with grass on it. This yearly festival is attended by more than 100,000 suspected pyromaniacs and has been going on for 800 years – why is anyone's guess.

## 9TH JANUARY, FEAST OF THE BLACK NAZARENE, MANILA

You've got to hand it to Filipinos for their unique take on Christianity. The Black Nazarene is a dark wooden statue of Christ toting a cross with magic healing powers (the statue, not the cross). He's rolled out this month for thousands of devotees who crush in for a touch or perhaps rub a towel on the statue for takeaway healing.

## 14TH JANUARY, KITE FESTIVAL, GUJARAT, INDIA

The high-fliers of the world's kite community breeze into Ahmedabad this month for aerial battles with their kites.

## 14TH-28TH JANUARY, JANUARY BASHO, TOKYO.

It's the start of sumo season in Japan, so book your ringside seat and check out the biffo at the Basho.

## 27-28TH JANUARY, DINAGYANG, PANAY, PHILIPPINES

The fun never stops in the Philippines and just a week after the wacky Ati-Atihan (see top right), Iloilo, to the south, kicks off with their own song-and-dance show; the outrigger regatta's supposed to be the high point but if it's any kind of festival, those boats will be floating on liquor.

## PHILIPPINES: Ati-Atihan

Once a year, the natives of Panay Island and their Filipino friends gather in the main town, paint themselves black and dress up like African warriors, rock stars or anything else that crosses their mind. Then they dance to drums and blast music while swigging heroic quantities of *arak* (rice spirit). All pretty normal so far, you say, but this is a Christian festival. After two days of dancing and drinking themselves into a trance, revellers pile into the cathedral, not to piss in the font, but to be massaged by the priests and sing hymns.

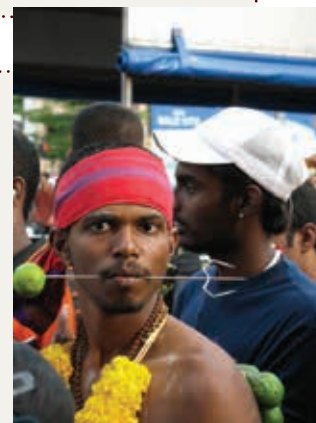
*Purify your soul on Panay Island in the Philippines, 20-21st of this month. See [www.ati-atihan.net](http://www.ati-atihan.net) for info, photos and hi-jinx.*



## MALAYSIA: Thaipusam

When the star Pusam is high in the sky, Tamils everywhere celebrate the birthday of Lord Murugan, one of Shiva's kids. Preparations begin with prayers and fasting and on the big day itself everyone carries a burden to the temple, something innocuous like an urn of milk on the head or a huge altar decked out in peacock feathers and supported by 108 skewers through the skin. We can't get enough of worshipers making *shashliks* of themselves here at *Untamed* and the parade at the Bantu Caves in Kuala Lumpur is probably the biggest event on the calendar. As a bonus, there's fire-walking and self-flagellation. Not for the squeamish, yet tens of thousands of tourists attend each year.

*Climb the 272 steps to the caves on the 1st of February. The procession starts at the Maha Mariamman temple in town from where devotees walk 15 painful kilometres to the Bantu Caves.*



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# Asia-Pacific Gazette

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## A TALL ORDER

When you're the tallest man in the world at 2.36 metres tall, what else can you do for gainful employment except for playing basketball, starring in a David Lynch movie, or saving dolphins? The Mongolian herdsman Bao Xihun chose the latter. He was recently pressed into service, pulling pieces of plastic out of the insides of two dolphins at an aquarium in Liaoning province.

## FEMALE FOETICIDE

Going by the global sex ratio, around 38,000 baby girls should be born every day in India. In fact, the average is 7,000 less, because of sex-determination tests that drive women to abort female fetuses. All over India, boys are favoured and female foeticide is common. The latest stats were revealed at the launch of Unicef's "State of the World's Children 2007" report.

## FIGHT TO WORK

All those food stalls and bamboo-pole vendors hawking hard-boiled eggs and those bicycles selling squid and stickers seen across Thailand mean that the country has the lowest employment rate in the world – 1.9 percent in 2005 – according to the International Labour Organisation. South Korea and New Zealand tied for second with a 3.7 percent unemployment rate. South Africa came in last with a whopping 26.6 percent of the populace lacking work.

## AMNESTY CELEBRATION

At long last, it seems that the murderous 10-year civil war in Nepal has come to a peaceful end. The country recently celebrated a national holiday after an accord was signed by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and the Maoist rebel leader Prachanda. The new accord will see communist rebels joining an interim government.

## KILLER CROC CAPTURED

After a killer crocodile was captured in Kupang Bay in eastern Indonesia, livid locals hacked it to death with machetes. Inside the five-metre/500-kilo crocodile they found a human leg, two hands, a T-shirt and some shorts. The beast was suspected of killing at least one of three missing men, the *Jakarta Post* reported. Once again, we'd like to warn our readers of pulling a Steve Irwin in Indonesian waters.

## IMMUNITY TO PAIN

It's a sad fact that much medical science only proceeds through personal tragedies. A case in point is a young Pakistani street performer who eked out a living by walking on burning coals and pushing knives through his arm. Though he suffered injuries, the youngster felt no pain. This led geneticists to study him and some of his relatives in pursuit of an extremely rare phenomenon: people who cannot feel pain. In the new issue of the British journal *Nature*, they have published their findings. But the boy's relatives were certainly not immune to anguish when, at the age of 14, he jumped to his death from a building.

## DEATHLY POLLUTION

Pollution has many Asian urbanites in a deadly chokehold. According to a new study by the Asia Development Bank, some 530,000 people in Asia died prematurely because of contaminated air, out of an estimated global average of 750,000. Some of the measures recommend using mass public transport systems, building more urban housing that lowers emissions and energy consumption, as well as promoting clean, renewable energy sources and curbing outbursts of mass flatulence.

## WAKE OF THE DEAD

In Thailand, the last batch of unidentified victims from the 2004 tsunami – 110 in all – were finally interred in Phangnga province last month. Across from the Bang Maruan cemetery, a new Bt36-million memorial to the drowned was unveiled last month.

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# CRIME FILES



## BANGKOK, DRUG WAR DEATHS REINVESTIGATED:

The Department of Special Investigation (DSI) is going to reopen four cases of extra-judicial killings during the war on drugs orchestrated by the ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. One of the cases deals with a nine-year-old boy caught in a hail of police bullets and the disappearance of his mother. Another case concerns a couple in Isaan who had just won Bt6 million in lottery prizes and were then shot dead after being denounced as drug dealers. Not bad. Four cases down, only another 2,000 to go.

## BEIJING, TYCOON NABBED AND JAILED:

There are few things more heartening to us poor middle-class clods, we the Leo Beer drinkers, the L&M smokers, the sardine eaters, than seeing some rich-ass tycoon get nailed. So we're as pleased as Sarah Jessica Parker in a sex shop to see the youngest magnate on *Forbes* magazine's list of China's 400 richest people get sentenced to the biggest 'bum deal' of all – life behind bars – for fraud. The 32-year-old Zhou Yiming, the official Xinhua agency said, was convicted of falsifying financial reports to borrow US\$48 million in 2002. It should give him plenty of time to ponder how he buggered the poor.

## TAIPEI, MOTHERLY LOVE BEYOND DEATH:

A middle-aged man kept his mother's corpse for seven years because he believed she would come back to life. The son, Lin Chun-jan told police that his mother had died in a countryside town and that he preserved her corpse by draining the blood from it. After seven years, he gave up hope that she would be resurrected and contacted police. They are investigating the case.

## GUWAHATI, THE BIN LADEN OF ELEPHANTS:

A rogue elephant responsible for up to 14 deaths in the northeast of India was finally killed by a sharpshooter after authorities put out a death warrant on the elephant, which had been dubbed "Laden" by locals.



# SEX FILES



## CHINA, LESBIAN HOTLINE:

China's first lesbian helpline began taking calls in Shanghai recently. Around 10 female volunteers offer advice and counseling every Saturday from 2pm to 4pm.

## HANOI, SEX ADS A NO NO:

Two sports papers were temporarily suspended because they ran ads for SMS sex services. Neither of the papers was shut down, though.

Afghanistan, Porn Land: The former stronghold of the puritanical Taliban – still fighting to wrest control from the Allied forces – is now becoming a hotbed of pornography, with explicit VCDs on sale at street vendors and erotic movies available on satellite TV.

## HONG KONG, SHAME ON THE SHAMEFUL COPS:

Last month we reported on a "shame parade" after police in Shenzhen arrested 100 prostitutes and their customers and made them walk down the street, the women in handcuffs and the men wearing surgical masks and yellow tops. Hot on the high heels of the parade comes an official investigation. The investigation began after the All-China Women's Federation complained that the police had violated citizens' rights and degraded women. Some 30 years ago, Shenzhen was a small fishing hamlet near Hong Kong. Now it's metastasized into a large city, notorious for its nightlife.

## KELANTAN, RAVERS BEWARE:

The most traditionally Muslim state in Malaysia is loosening up a bit in order to attract more tourists. Dance clubs are permitted now – but here's the rub – just as long as they don't serve liquor, couples don't dance together, and women don't bare their navels. It all sounds as alluring as a high-school dance in a gymnasium in Idaho, doesn't it?

# A dog's Life

Dear Untamed,

Hello, my name is Layton Fishback. I tutor with a woman who works at your magazine named Cassandra, she gave me her email in order to submit some writing. However, I misplaced it and I no longer tutor at the facility. Here is the story, please let me know if you are interested. I moved to board the taxi boat as I did every morning, but this time there was some type of commotion on the dock. Someone ran to grab a long stick to push what I assumed was only one of many large clusters of plants which float all over the river and sometimes fool people into thinking the river is green and not the muddy brown it really is. A current took the greenery around the edge of the dock and into view. That's when I saw the cause of the commotion and also the cause of distress for me for the duration of the trip. A dog that somehow ended up in the river had become tired of swimming and climbed up onto the large floating island of plants and debris.

The dog was just a typical street animal. So common in Bangkok you don't ever stop noticing them, though you hope that you will, since each one is more tragic than the next but you can't – like so many other things that crowd the city. He was black and white and soaked to the bone and I immediately looked for a way to help him off of his temporary island and back onto terra firma. I desperately searched for a way to reach him from the dock but he was too far out. I looked to the shoreline to see

if he could possibly crawl onto land when his island reached the side. I saw the problem, the reason he looked as though he had been out in the water so long, and his impending doom. The entire shoreline was concrete, built high and rigid. He could not escape. I couldn't take my eyes off of him and his trapped desperation.

Without the island he would be forced to swim, and from his look of exhaustion I knew he did lack the strength to last long off his precarious perch. I looked to the people standing around me. They were also watching yet seemed unaffected as so many Bangkokians, or anyone who lives in a big city often is.

The boat pulled up to the dock and the people boarded. Conflicted, I boarded as well, though my gaze never left the frightened eyes of the dog, and even amid the crowd pushing and shoving, I watched. As the boat pulled away, moving the island out of sight, I searched the river for some way out, something to give me hope later that he might have made it. I searched the entire way to my stop yet I found no escape from the muddy water.

Departing the boat, I began to cry, and cried the entire way to school, feeling desperate and suffocated. The people I passed on the street looked up at me with my white skin and strange clothes, face red and tear-streaked, and appeared unaffected. I was not surprised this time, nor anytime after.

*Thanks for the story mate, most touching. Unfortunately so many people just accept such things as some other unfortunate creature's karma. "Yes, it is a bucket of shit, but of course it is not my bucket". There is one question we have though. Does your name originate from some great great great great grandfather who had a fin on his back like a fish, so all the townspeople called him Mr Fishback (initially behind his fish-back, but you can't keep these things quiet for long in Mediaeval villages), and eventually the name stuck whether he liked it or not and with an air of resignation, he passed it down through the generations until it reached you. Or was your ancestor the sort of fellow – perhaps even a fisherman – from whom*

*people were always stealing fish and he had to keep stealing them back? Anyway, whether you answer this question or not, because it is entirely possible you don't know the answer yourself, you win the Letter of the Month award and get a couple of contributor's copies of the magazine and a T-shirt, as soon as we get one made that can accommodate a dorsal fin.*



## Offensive Cover

Dear Untamed,

It was with some dismay that I first gazed upon your latest front cover [December 2006]. So, you've decided to sell out and start putting sexy women on the cover like everybody else does. As a long time reader, I am most disappointed in you as I had always assumed with your intelligent writing and insightful stories that you wouldn't stoop to such levels.

*Untamed Replies:*

*Actually that cover was a tribute to the great comic genius of Benny Hill on the anniversary of his death. At the time we set up the shoot, we thought of it as a parody of those cheap sexist covers that exploit women just to sell a few extra magazines. But then the issue started selling out and we actually ran out of restock copies, so we thought "what the hell, these exploiters are onto something" and decided to put a woman in a bikini on the cover in this issue as well. Sorry, but we have recently decided to reverse our five year policy and put money ahead of integrity. And oddly enough, it feels better than we expected.*

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## Pizza Thai-Style

Dear Untamed Editors,

I in-a the Bangkok for two weeks now but, Mamma Mia! I can-a find-a the good-a pizza! When-a I go in the Pizza Factory and-a the Pizza Hut, the pizza, she is-a no good. What is ketchup, why they put it on-a the pizza? Why they put the sausage in-a my crust? It's-a no good, I wanna the pizza like-a my mama make. Where can I buy?

Gracias,

Tony Ravioli,  
Bangkok

*Untamed Replies*  
Dear Tony,  
Go back to Italy.



## A Case of the Benz

Dear Herr Travel

I haf been in der Bangkok fur two weeks also and I cannot understand zis unbelievably disrespect for ze rules. None of ze autos stop at ze zebra crossing –especially Mercedes cars, vich maks me very sad. Vis out rules zer iss no order, vis out order zer iss no civilization. And vis out civilization both my legs haf been broken.

Danke,

Helmut Schmidt  
Bangkok Nursing Hospital

*Untamed Replies*  
Dear Helmut,

*While you are healing you might enjoy reading the comprehensive review of Thai beers on pages 40-41 of this issue since you were obviously drunk when you were crossing the road. After all, without beer there is no civilization. Mind you, we're pretty sure that most of the local breweries don't follow the German Beer Purity Laws, so it may not be to your taste. And after your legs heal, go back to Germany.*

## Free Book!

For those of you who read the letters page last month, we have three free copies of a 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. The book is supposed to be good though.

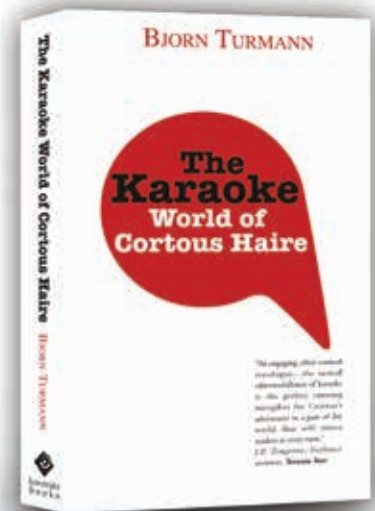
Last month's skill-testing question proved a bit challenging:

What is the capital of Singapore? Elicited the clever responses "Jakarta" and "The Singaporean Dollar". It was in fact a trick question. The capital of Singapore is Singapore because it is a city state, you bloody morons.

Right, so we'll make it an easy one this month. The question is:

If black bugs bleed blue blood, do blue bugs bleed black blood?

If you want to win the book, you can answer the question by email at [winbig@untamed-travel.com](mailto:winbig@untamed-travel.com), or you can phone Untamed Travel Global Headquarters at 66-2-629-3991 and ask for Daniel Cooper then recite the phrase quickly three times in a row without making a mistake, which of course pretty much disqualifies any Asian readers – sorry about that.



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UNTAMED TRAVEL

# Burma Bizarre

In which Daniel Cooper harks back to his halcyon pre-work permit days and one of his more unusual monthly border adventures.



**H**eading back to Bangkok from Koh Tao in January 2006 I decided to do the Victoria Point visa run to Burma. Early boat to Chumpon on the mainland where I was met by the visa run company. Turns out it was only me and a quiet German lady crossing the border this day so while she invaded and occupied the front seat, I reclined on the back bench of the pickup assigned to us.

The road from Chumpon on the Gulf coast to Ranong, on the Andaman Sea, is a pleasant drive along winding roads through some of the last of Thailand's unmolested rainforest, passing across the Isthmus of Kra. Folded double in the back I slept most of the way.

I awoke as we pulled into the Immigration office's car park where we got stamped out of Thailand. I have no idea what happens if you just go back to Bangkok from the office, which is nowhere near the port – but it can't be good, so I paid a Bt400 overstay fine and promised not to do it again for another month.

Off to sea, or, more accurately, to the decaying concrete pier to dodge sea-lice and whatever else thrives on fish guts. Being a proper visa run company we were boarding a putt-putt boat rather than the longtails that take indy runners. Ahh, luxury. Waiting in port for the tide or correct alignment of the stars, I saw a curious sight on the neighbouring jetty.

A dark fellow was assembling and cleaning an M16. He was wearing camouflage gear but was no soldier. Some of his mates turned up, similarly attired in fatigues and black 'Delta Force' T-shirts, and started loading more guns into the speedboat moored below. M16s, rifles, shotguns and each man wore a pistol. These were some seriously toolled up Thais. But also into the boat went fishing rods, whiskey, bongo drums and a guitar. Last in was a large polystyrene box surely containing ice.

*Pai Nai?* I called out.

*Pai Koh (something or other – some island).*

It's a good rule in Asia not to aggravate blokes with guns and whiskey, so I let it lie. Being a Friday I guessed these guys were off for a party on Koh Arsefuk, probably in Burmese waters, and would have to battle for a good spot on the beach.

Off to Burma over the rocky waves, with five minutes on shore to gather duty-free booze, smokes and prescription pharmaceuticals. There's always a tout waiting on shore to help you part with your cash and I met mine, Nuk, right off the boat. Nuk was a lucky man. Not only did he have a lucrative job touting 'tourists', he had three thumbs, indicating Lord Buddha's affection and a certain special closeness between members of his family.

Back on the boat, into the truck and arrival at Chumpon train station for a ticket. The two-hour wait turned into three, then four.

Finally a train pulled into the station, but not mine, this one was going south and was all flatcars loaded with military vehicles. More guns, more camo-pants, but worn by real soldiers and they weren't off to a party. Two companies or so were headed for Thailand's troubled south, apparently to dish it out to the Muslims but more probably to play the part of extras in bombings and drive-bys. They were travelling with their equipment: trucks, containers, trailers but no artillery pieces, thank God.

The soldiers were young, probably conscripts, with a few older officers thrown in. They descended to the platform's shops, buying up horrible Thai snacks and ice. It was a sobering sight, 200 young men slung in hammocks in the back of their trucks, heading for a conflict with no clear enemy, no clear objective and no real honour.

My train arrived shortly after they moved off and I hit the dining car to sink a few beers. Someone had set up a boom box and the diners danced the night away swayed by the train. Guns, bongos, extra thumbs and rumours of war. Weird day, great night. Wouldn't be dead for quids.



# THE ROYAL TROPHY

## EUROPE VS ASIA GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP

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# Sketching a Serious Crime

*Near Khaosan Road, Victor Borg was picked up by a sexy Thai woman and her ladyboy friend only to be violated in the most sensitive place of all.*



I noticed the girl before she had spoken to me. She was milling about in a dingy restaurant and bar on Soi Rambutri. After 1am, mats are put on the street for late-night drinkers to quench their thirst. There were the usual assortment of loose-enders – travellers (mostly drunk), prostitutes (the obvious and the less obvious), and bums or petty criminals. The girl struck me with her eyes – a sparkling piercing gaze that I associate with passion, adventure, ambition, and mischief – and it turned out, a day later, that I was correct about her mischievousness, but it was the wrong kind of mischief. But right then those eyes hypnotised me, and when she noticed me looking at her she inched over, bit by bit, until she was close enough to start a conversation.

My Thai companion, a scruffy unconfident man who slept on a friend's floor and relied on people's kindness for food, was slumbering next to me on the mat. The girl's name was Dao ("Star") and her ladyboy friend was named Duan ("Moon"). I wondered what a young beautiful girl was doing with such a sour-looking and aging *katoey*?

All the dead-end small talk was heightened only by the titillation of flirtatiousness. I had been in Thailand long enough to know the dynamics. Dao was tacitly available – a sexy girl sitting cross-legged close enough for me to smell her perfume, and holding my gaze for long enough to cajole my latent desires. I was interested, but only as a voyeur: otherwise, I wanted to avoid sex with prostitutes. I just wanted to flirt, but I was also fooling myself as part of me wanted to believe she could be girlfriend material.

"Why isn't your friend talking," I asked Dao.

"She can't hear well," she replied. "She has hurt her ears. She has to go to hospital this morning."

It was already 4am. The ladyboy looked at me with melancholic weariness; I also noticed a tinge of bitterness in his gaze. His short hair did nothing to conceal his ugliness, and his blue spotty hat made him look all the more weird, though I feel pity for them in Thailand because they are the subject of prejudice and aversion.

The conversation sputtered on, propelled by flirtatious innuendos, and Dao finally said: "I can look after you tonight if you like."

"Maybe," I said. "No sex." But first I needed to take a piss.

When I came back I was thinking about the idea of drinking with this girl in my room – getting close, stopping short

of body contact, an exploratory kind of frolic. But was I fooling myself again? My ambivalence and confusion were growing by the minute. I even started to feel high. The night was growing thin, and a deep blue seeped through the eastern sky. I began to stammer. My vision was becoming blurred; everything started to have the misty detached quality of a dream. And everything was happening in slow motion. Feeling high from what? I hadn't been drinking much.

"Come," Dao said, motioning to her bag. "I have food and drink. You like *tom yam*?"

When had she bought the food? Now she was standing up, extending her hand, leading me to a taxi. Dao and I slipped into the backseat. The *katoey* followed, jumping into the front seat. I was becoming more bewildered. Why was the *katoey* coming with us? It didn't seem like a good idea. What was the point of him sitting in a sulky manner, saying nothing, while a man and woman flirted and pretended to be interested in each other's minds? That's what I wanted to say, but I could only utter unintelligible gibberish.

When we got to my place, I was tottering so much that I had to sit on the bed. Dao sat next to me, telling me that I was drunk and that she would look after me. The *katoey* paced around – he was definitely impatient now – and he seemed to be snooping. Why had his





&lt;&lt;ROOFIES

demeanour become so rapacious now? And why was he looking at me with such contempt? I thought I'd have to throw them both out, but that was the last thing I thought before I collapsed.

It was dark when I got up. I tried to check my watch, but realising I didn't have one I checked the clock on the bedside table and was stunned that 16 hours had elapsed. I felt disoriented. Then I remembered the girls – where were they? I found the front door open, and in the front room the floor was a mess: crumbs of food, empty cans of beer, cigarette butts crushed on the floor. I stumbled back to the bedroom. Drawers were hanging open, books and magazines were strewn around. My empty wallet was on the bedside table. My phone was gone, my gold necklace was gone, my credit card was gone, my digital dictionary was gone – in fact everything worth more than Bt300 was gone.

Then I saw a piece of paper on the pillow next to where I had slept. It was a page from an A3-sized artist's sketchbook, and it had a sketch on it. The sketch was of the beautiful woman, Dao, and she looked as I had remembered her – piercing, twinkling eyes, high cheekbones, hair cascading down her face, and the coy mischievous smile. And there was something written in Thai on the sketch. The writing said: "She is mine."

#### THE POLICE INVESTIGATION

I was checking mugshots of katoeys who had been arrested before in Khaosan Road, and the young cheerful police inspector was looking over my shoulder. "Beautiful," he mused, "but dangerous."

The police inspector and I had built up a friendly rapport. We had spent many hours together – making a detailed police report, taking pictures of the crime scene (my place), and taking photos and making sketches of the bar on Soi Rambutri. And we had spent a whole day at the headquarters of the Metropolitan police making identikit of the two criminals – Dao and Duan – who had committed a serious crime by slipping a pill known as Rohypnol in my drink (more popularly known as the "date rape drug," a sedative that has triggered heart attacks in some cases), then took me home and stole my things. The cost of the theft amounted to Bt138,000, and that included two laptops bought on my credit card – something that made me suspect I had been the victim of an organised gang that included foreigners, as a Thai turning up with a foreign credit card under a foreign name to buy a laptop would surely arouse suspicion.

Worse than the financial loss was the way I had been violated. My possessions, strewn around my room, the detritus of their celebratory feasting and the sketch meant they must have spent at least a couple of hours there, gloating over their fallen victim.

The police told me not to touch anything in my room until forensic evidence could be collected, and for a couple of nights afterwards I had to sleep among the reminders of my violation. I slept facing the door. I

put a knife under my pillow. I was afraid to sleep alone, and every little rustle I heard sounded like footsteps – even the faint patter of rain would wake me up. For the first time I could understand why victims of torture or rape feel so psychologically wounded.

For a week afterwards, I didn't sleep more than four hours a night, and by the end of the week I felt exhausted. Only then did I also understand the debilitating condition known as "battle fatigue." Worse: I felt melancholic, I'd lost my confidence, I was unable to work, and I became obsessed with vengeance. It was as if only vengeance could exorcise my neurotic anguish.

The police also wanted to get them. The government had just issued a decree to the police that crimes on foreigners should be taken seriously, and that investigations had to be handled by the senior investigators. We had lots of evidence, including a toxicology test I did at the hospital that showed traces of Rohypnol in my blood.

I also went around Khaosan Road making inquiries among ladyboys. I found one *katoey* who knew the culprit, and upon hearing my story he told me he would help me catch him.

They used to go to a gay club together, and he spilled all he knew, the real name of the culprit and something about his criminal history: He had been in prison for four years on drug-dealing charges; he was a gambling addict; he had tried to drug an Israeli guy a few months before; and this guy had smashed a bottle on his head, so the ladyboy had gone to Bangkok Christian Hospital to have stitches put in. "That is why," the other *katoey* said, "his hair is short now and he wears a cap that he never takes off."

I gave the information to the police – now there were enough leads to track him down – and I asked the inspector, "When can you catch him?" The inspector laughed and said: "Not so fast!!!" The problem was that the Thai police didn't have a centralised database of ex-prisoners.

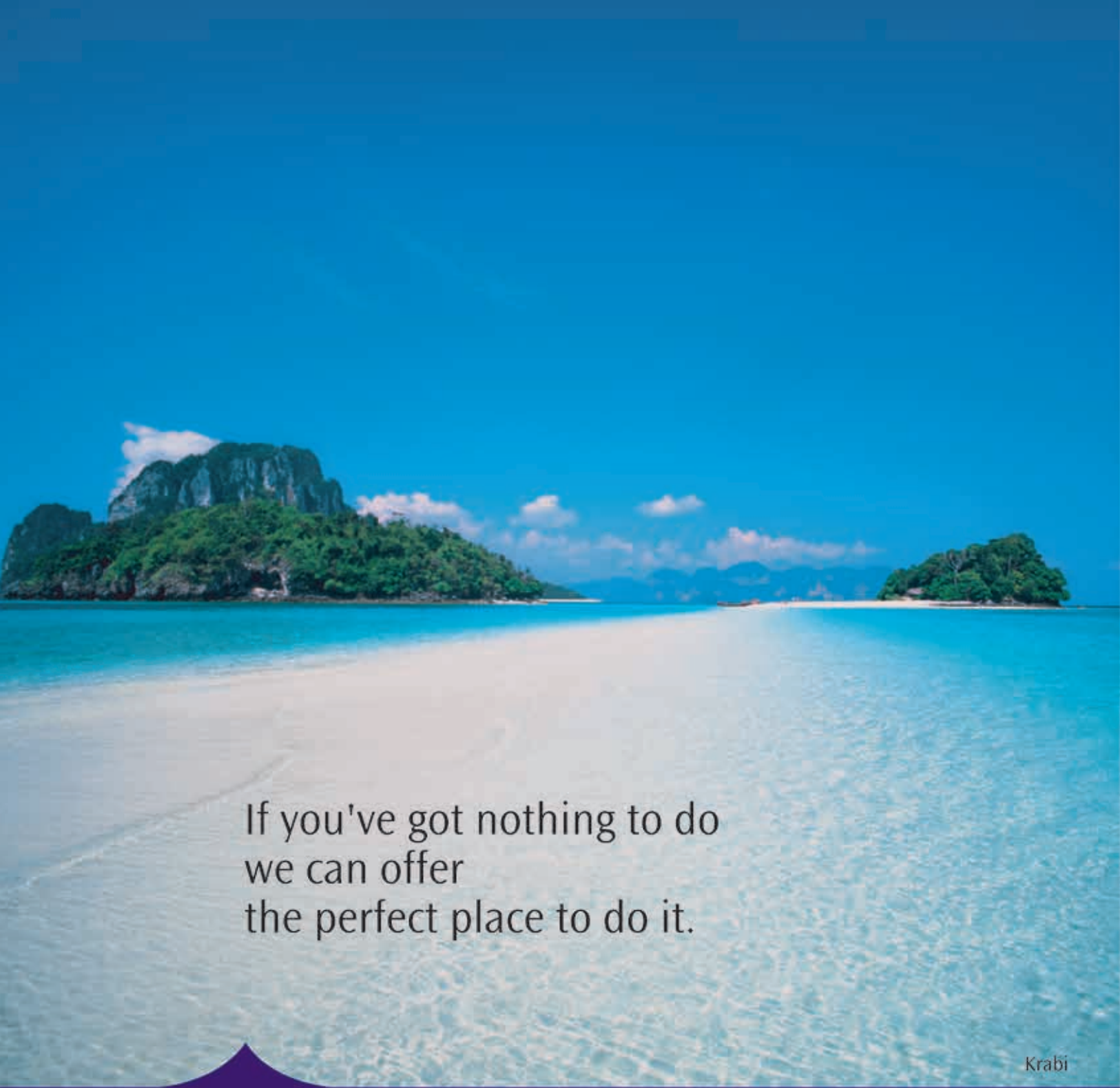
I said, "The hospital would have his record."

"I can't ask the hospital to provide me with confidential patient data," the inspector replied.

I was tired, dejected, and blowing more money for the investigation to proceed. The police inspector was dedicated, but he didn't have the resources to do his job. He didn't even have an official vehicle, and I had to pay all the taxi fares. Then I had to pay two prostitutes to give statements to the police, buy coffees and drinks for everyone. In two weeks, I had spent about Bt10,000.

So I decided to go away for two months to clear my head. When I came back a friend who had done some interpreting for me said the inspector had told her they had caught the *katoey*, and he had been bailed out for Bt100,000. I waited for the police to contact me to stand as a witness, but they never did. Nor did I contact them. I was weary and yearned to forget. I wanted to put it down to experience, but I still feel pangs of fury, humiliation and violation every time I remember.

*I slept facing the door. I put a knife under my pillow. I was afraid to sleep alone, and every little rustle I heard sounded like footsteps*



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*Smooth as silk*





## Thailand on the Tongue

They came, they saw, they had a couple of beers. Last month's annual Singha Challenge, A Taste of Thailand, is over for another year and 2006 was bigger than ever. Taking in Bangkok, Pattaya, Chiang Mai, Pai and Samui this roadshow-cum-gameshow-cum-concert tour drew crowds from across Thailand and the world.

Can Farang be like Thai? Worathep Na Banglamphu put tourists through their paces by making them dance like Thais, speak like Thais, box like Thais and drink like Thais, all in pursuit of generous prizes. If watching unsuspecting backpackers wrap their tongues around Bangkok's full name (*Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Ayuthaya Mahadilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Buriram Udonwathaniwet Mahasathan Amon Piman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit*), bugs and Singha beer wasn't entertainment enough, punters were also soothed by the dulcet tunes of T-Bone, Futon, Cannonball, Daytripper, The Tonic Rays.

Being the sporting sort, *Untamed* set up a booth at each of the events and watched the Singha flow. Oddly, nobody can remember the details of any of the events we went to so we leave it to organiser and MC, Worathep: "The sponsor was grooving, the contestants were moving, the bands were hopping, the crew was rigging and the venues were swinging; I wish I'd stayed sober to appreciate them all more."

# City of Fallen Angels

*The center of the cinematic universe, LA is a weird and wacky place where celebrities hang out with the homeless, impossibly perfect bodies are more common than clouds, and caviar dreams are washed daily into the surf. Our city guru Oliver “The Olly Lama” Benjamin tells you about the hippest hangouts, restaurants, beaches and dead-celebrity tours.*



## Hip Society Hangouts

Wanna rub elbows with the Tinseltown glitterati? Your best bet these days is to hang out at one of the hip LA hotel bars. The Roosevelt (*Hollywood*) and The Standard (*Downtown*) are so self-consciously cool you might have trouble getting in. Go early. If you still can't get inside, or can't afford a US\$20 margarita, get drunk in your car and lurk around out front.

## TV Show Tapings

Sit in the audience of your favourite shows for free! Go to [tvtickets.com](http://tvtickets.com) to sign up in advance. Make sure to wear a jumper because the studios are as cold as meat lockers. Now you know why even the fattest actors never break a sweat.

## Hustler Shop

Porn impresario Larry Flint was the first to make it easy to be sleazy. His amazing Hustler Store, consequently, is no less than a Magical Kinkdom of Jigglyland. Stock up on filth, meet your favorite porn star or even watch a film being made. If you're lucky they may even be short on staff. *Located in Hollywood.*

## The Grove

The coolest shopping mall in town is laid out like an Italian village. Faux-Mediterranean architecture and cobblestone streets make it a neon middle-class Monaco. There's a free trolley to take you around and real fake snow in the winter. For eats, go to the next door Farmer's Market – a funky mix of homegrown outdoor eateries and cool bars. No actual farmers. *West Hollywood.*

## Muscle Beach/Third Street Promenade

Featured in nearly ever film ever shot here, no visit to LA would be complete without a gawking stroll down the Muscle Beach boardwalk (*Venice*). Monsters of G-stringed silicone and sinew parade daily down this postcard-perfect stretch of coastline. Grab a beachside beer and stare in utter disbelief. Afterwards, stroll around with the fully-dressed at the saner, quainter and cleaner Third Street Promenade (*Santa Monica*).

## Malibu

A legendary surfer's Mecca and home to some of California's most stunning beaches. Oddly, there's a modest Hindu temple on a nearby hill. Perform some *pujas* and implore Shiva for some gnarly surf breaks, dude. There's also a pretty Yogananda ashram nearby that's open to the public. What is this, *Goa West?*

## Ethnic Neighbourhoods

They call LA a melting pot, and not just because it's warm all year round. There are all sorts of interesting ethnic neighborhoods to visit: Chinatown, Little Tokyo, Olvera Street, Thai Town, Little Ethiopia and Little Saigon and Little India. Depending on your definition of "ethnic" you might also want to visit Weirdville (Melrose Avenue in West Hollywood), Stinking Rich Town (Beverly Hills), and Suburban Hell (The San Fernando Valley).

## Central Library

Enormous library. Don't worry about checking anything out – bring a laptop and spend the day copying all the free music CDs and DVD movies. Free Internet and art exhibits and an amazing book collection. Nice architecture. Park for \$1 after 3pm. Earlier, it will cost you an arm and a foreskin. *Downtown.*

## Death Tours

Los Angeles is the home of the Faustian bargain. But dying young and beautiful is a good career move – just ask James Dean and Marilyn Monroe. Of course, they can't answer you, but plenty of tour operators can: They'll take you around to visit cemeteries and last known addresses of deceased Hollywood legends. For a truly wacky experience, take a guided tour of the county coroner's office. Official black T-shirts with a chalk outline of a dead body make great souvenirs.

## Watts Towers

Possibly the weirdest monument in America, this is not only a massive and elaborate structure made out of garbage, but it's also the nation's smallest national park. Proof that one man's trash is another's national treasure.

# BEST OF LA

## Sights:

**Cooliest Strip Club** – Jumbo's Clown Room. Courtney Love first flashed her wares here. It's skanky, it's seedy, but best of all, it feels like home. Friendly, unassuming and no one pressures you into buying an overpriced lap dance. *East Hollywood.*

**Best Drive** – Sunset Strip. Rent a convertible. Driving the strip in a coupe is like showering in a raincoat. This is where the Doors got their start and Johnny Depp's live music club the Viper Room is located. *Hollywood.*

**Second Best Drive** – Pacific Coast Highway. Easy to overdo it and end up in San Francisco eight hours later. Beach Boys soundtrack required by traffic law.

**Third Best Drive** – Mulholland Drive. Great views, crazy curves and prime make out spots. *Hollywood Hills.*

**Best Place to See Crazy People** – Take the public bus anywhere. But don't make eye contact. Public buses in LA are essentially mobile mental hospitals.

**Best Lounge Bar** – The Dresden Room. Featured in many films. Hilariously awful Marty and Elaine have performed lousy pop tunes here for decades. *Hollywood.*

**Best Nature Stroll** – The grounds of Griffith Park Observatory. You can even rent a horse. This is where James Dean got killed in *Rebel Without a Cause*. (Wander around too late at night and you might too.) The observatory is amusing and the views are excellent. Afterwards go down to Thai Town and see the free Thai Elvis show at Palms restaurant for a hunka hunka burning lunch.

**Best Place to See Weird New Agers** – The Bodhi Tree bookstore. See what happens when you mix Eastern philosophy, Western commercialism and LA vanity. It would be a funny place if only everyone wasn't so bloody serious.

**Drunk and Civilized at the Same Time** – During the summer, cheap outdoor classical concerts are held at the stunning Hollywood Bowl – you can bring your own wine and cheese. But getting wasted and slam dancing to Chopin is frowned upon.

**Best Places to See Celebrities** – Sunset Plaza Mall (West Hollywood). Any yoga studio or county jail.

**Best Place to Get Laid** – Sharkeez Bar in Hermosa Beach draws a steady stream of post-



college bimbos craving attention and free drinks.

**Best Bar to see Tomorrow's Best Band** – The Mint. The coolest up-and-comers pass through here without fail.

**Best Botanical Gardens and High Tea** – Huntington Gardens. Great if you're traveling with your mum or just need a break from the madness. *San Marino (near Pasadena)*

**Best Thrift Store Shopping** – Find all sorts of vintage bargains on Lankershim Blvd. in *North Hollywood*. Wash before you wear.

**Free Art Gallery Openings** – On the first weekend of any month on LaBrea Blvd in *West Hollywood* artistes show off their demented creations and try to trick you into buying them with free booze. The art uniformly sucks but the company is always cool and convivial.

## Food:

**Best Mexican food** – Tito's Tacos. Not eating Mexican food in LA is like not eating Israeli food in Manali. With Mex, it's the greasier the better, and Tito's is a holy grail of grease. *Culver City.*

**Best Burger** – In-N-Out Burger. A California institution. Out-of-towners drive hours for a "double-double." The truly adventurous can order the "animal style" burger which will render you immobile for hours. *Various locations.*

**Best Hot Dog** – Pink's. Low-rent shack draws Angelenos like magnets. They probably put something illegal in the chili. *Hollywood.*

**Weirdest Fast Food** – Oki-Dog. What do you get when you mix pastrami, beans, a hot dog, cheese and wrap them up in a Mexican tortilla? (Other than diarrhea, that is.) You get this weird, wonderful disaster on a soggy paper plate. The original fusion cuisine. *Hollywood.*

**Best Brunch** – Gospel Brunches at the House of Blues (*Hollywood*) and BB King's Blues Club (*Universal City*). The best time you'll ever have whilst having the blues. Music to shake your ass to and grub guaranteed to enlarge it.

**Best Happy Hour** – Great cheap food, drinks, live music and gob-stopping views at Toppers restaurant in *Santa Monica*.

**Best Pizza** – Abbot's Pizza. California invented the gourmet pizza. Here at Abbot's they bring high cuisine to the scruffy masses. A couple of colourful slices at this friendly neighbourhood shop and you're good to go. *Venice.*



*During Marcus Brogden's sojourn in Papa New Guinea he stumbled across a group of villagers killing and butchering a pregnant female shark to sell in the local market. Found in many tropical waters, the hammerhead is mostly harmless to humans.*

# SHARK HUNT

**FACT CHECK**

**Species:** There are nine species of hammerhead, including the scalloped, which is two to three metres long, the smooth, which is bigger, and the great hammerhead, which can grow up to seven-metres enormous.

**Diet:** Other sharks, rays, squid, octopus, fish. They hunt at night by themselves, like other sharks.

**Breeding:** The males are real rednecks in their pursuit of females, even biting them until they give in. Females give birth in shallow water once a year to around 12 to 40 pups. Unlike other shark species, the pups are born live. The parents then leave them to fend for themselves.

**Schools:** Hammerheads are often seen in schools of up to 100. This makes them easy prey for fishermen.



UNTAMED TRAVEL



## The Panjim Connection

The colonial charm of India's smallest and most picturesque state capital continues to live on in a beautiful collection of exclusive heritage hotels for all budgets, writes Tom Vater. Photos by Aroon Thaewchatturat





## CHECK IN

The Panjim Inn  
E 212, 31s January  
Road, Fontainhas,  
Panaji, Goa  
Tel: 91-832-2226523  
Fax: 91-832-2228136  
[panjiminn@sancharnet.in](mailto:panjiminn@sancharnet.in)  
[www.panjiminn.com](http://www.panjiminn.com)

**P**anaji, Goa's capital city and a Portuguese colony for almost 500 years, retains plenty of old world charm. Asia's only Latin quarter, Fontainhas, crammed with narrow alleyways, crumbling colonial properties in various states of disrepair and a Mediterranean flair unique to the region, make Panaji well worth visiting on the way to the state's highly touted beaches.

The urban pace is slow, the sun beams all year round, the city is crammed with Portuguese churches and cathedrals, while old men sit in dingy bars sipping *Feni*, the local cashew liquor. The streets are uncluttered by cows and humans, and though the pavements are slowly rotting into the pot-holed tarmac, the city is clean. The hustle and turmoil of India that can be so overwhelming has not reached Panaji yet.

Ajit Sukhya, who appears to be a somewhat gruff and bohemian character at first glance, has long been a champion of Goan culture and history. Sporting a permanent stubble threatening to expand into a full-blown beard, the portly landlord dresses modestly and exudes an air of sophistication that is mirrored in the charm of his hotel, his love of contemporary art and his ambitious plans for the upkeep of Goa's cultural heritage.

Ajit's family has lived in Goa's capital Panjim, or Panaji as it is now called, for generations. The Panjim Inn is the family property. An elegant townhouse in Fontainhas, the inn was built in 1880 by Sukhya's great grandfather, one Francis Assisi Silvera, a mixed Portuguese-Goan, whose clan had converted to Christianity.

The spacious, two-storey building, fronted by a wide verandah overlooking an overgrown forecourt is redolent of another age.

Ajit is keen to promote the post-colonial ambience of India's most tranquil state capital. Opened to the public in 1984, the Panjim Inn is an eye of calm in the hurricane of India.

"When my ancestors built this house, Panaji was little more than a mangrove swamp turned coconut grove. The real capital of colonial Goa, Old Goa, had been founded in 1510, but a couple of plagues and political changes led the Portuguese to abandon it and move their government here," he said.

The people of Goa know their history and some of the city's older inhabitants have vivid memories of what they perceive as a lost golden age of privilege and splendour. Percival Noronha, a local historian now

in his 80s, recalls, "Panjim was a most beautiful city. And in those days, there was no corruption. Electricity was available 24 hours a day. Now we have frequent power cuts. It's a mess."

Ajit Sukhya is less nostalgic: "Panjim under the Portuguese was a very controlled space. People here did live well until 1961. But the rest of Goa was completely undeveloped and had no electricity whatsoever. I think we have come a long way since liberation."

Nevertheless, the hotelier is worried about the decay of many historical buildings in the city. "In 1996, we opened the Panjim Pousada, an old Hindu townhouse. The only way I can finance the maintenance of a 100-year-old building is to turn it into a hotel."

A short walk round the alleys of Fontainhas is both exhilarating and a little depressing. The sheer number of different heritage properties is overwhelming. But almost all of the townhouses are in a state of disrepair. And time is not on Panjim's side. Across the canal that divides the town, a concrete jungle is springing up. Shopping centres with glass fronts are slowly replacing the houses.

Ajit Sukhya recently purchased another ruined building and opened the Gitanjali Gallery on its ground floor.

"I have long collected Goan art. In fact I find it very hard to sell any of it, so my hotels have slowly turned into galleries," he said.

Paintings are found in every corridor of Ajit's properties. The gallery showcases large oil canvases and bronze sculptures by several artists and Gitanjali holds regular exhibitions during high season from October to February. Upstairs, Ajit has opened four large luxury rooms, crammed with antiques and 17<sup>th</sup>-century maps. "For my most discerning guests," he laughed, adding, "I would love to restore more buildings in Goa. But there are so many obstacles. People don't want you to start anything good, because they feel they are missing out on something. So they'd rather have a building collapse, than let me have a go at rebuilding it. Outside the city, there are so many old properties that would make fantastic hotels."

But he is lucky. Not only do his son Jack and daughter-in-law Miriam share his vision of a cultured and beautiful Panaji, over the past 20 years he has revitalized a part of Panaji's Latin Quarter and given visitors a reason to linger a little longer.



## FUNERAL RITES

*Indonesia may be something of a dead zone for tourists these days, but the bizarre last rites practiced by the Toraja are bringing some life back to the region, writes Paul Dixon.*

**O**ur motorbike weaved deftly between craterous potholes up the steep mountainside, and drew to a halt on a narrow green verge outside a wooden homestead decked out in patterned red awnings. My guide, Hendrik, unleashed his jet-black lady-killer mane from beneath his motorbike helmet and told me to wait. He wandered over to a group of men sitting on a wooden platform slamming down cardboard dominoes. A few puffs of cigarette smoke later he returned and told me that the funeral had moved to the next village. But with a broad grin he said it was my lucky day as the men were just about to sacrifice the large buffalo chewing the cud on my left in order to expedite the deceased's journey to heaven.

Located on the bizarrely shaped island of Sulawesi, Indonesia, Tanah Toraja is the land of the Toraja people famed for their striking rituals of death. Guidebooks dedicate chunks to the region and yet with all the turmoil in Indonesia, tourists are conspicuously absent. Rantepao, the damp highland town which is the base for most visitors, is empty. Here, a tourist can easily achieve the Pied Piper effect with legions of children in crisp school uniforms yelling, "Hello, Mister!" and giggling at the unkempt foreigner.

The emerald Torajan countryside, with its cloud-covered peaks and snaking brown rivers, beguiles all but the most jaded visitor.

The Torajans are mainly Christian; early 20th century Dutch Protestant missionaries converted them and gleaming white churches fan out across the rice paddies. However, the Torajans have held onto many of their old beliefs surrounding the rituals of life and death.

The dead's journey to the afterlife is made smooth by the sacrifice of numerous buffalo and swine. The ill-fated buffalo on my left was slowly tugged by the bronze ring in its nose onto the earthen ground at the centre of the homestead and its hind legs lashed to a stake. All eyes were on the buffalo as a teenager crept up to its neck and made a quick deep incision before bolting out of the way of the stunned bovine. Litres of blood spilled onto the red earth and the buffalo writhed around the stake, snorting until it slowly collapsed. As it lay quivering, and bleeding profusely, the teenager returned and enlarged his earlier incision, speeding up the animal's demise.

My shock was not mirrored in the expressions on the faces of the Torajans who quickly returned to their cigarettes and dominoes.

Hendrik and I sped off down the mountainside in search of the funeral. In a valley we reached another homestead filled with people dressed in sombre colours. The community consisted of a few traditional *tongkonan* houses and *lumbung* (rice silos) with their upturned, boat-shaped roofs built to honour their ancestors who migrated to Toraja from the Indochina region. The front of the house was adorned with a pole leading from the sweeping gable to the earthen floor. This pole was decorated with numerous buffalo horns, which show how many buffalo the family has sacrificed – an indication of their status. A visitor to a Torajan funeral must provide a gift, the details of which are carefully logged for return at a future ritual of significance.

A gaggle of toothless women huddling in the shade at the entrance sold me a carton of clove cigarettes and Hendrik led me through the crowds of bubble-blowing children and bobbing chickens towards the family of the deceased. Hendrik's presence ensured me the necessary invitation and generally foreigners are made to feel quite welcome; the more guests that attend a funeral, the more honour is bestowed upon the dead.

The cigarettes were handed over to the dead man's son, a young farmer, who warmly shook my hand and bade me to sit down with the family. Though all the family were decked out in black and many ladies wore black veils it was smiles all round. As is typical in Toraja, the man had died a year and a half ago and had been 'sleeping' in the family home until today. The corpse is kept preserved by means of a mixture of herbs and chemicals in a sealed coffin in the home until the family has

A Torajan funeral lasts between four and five days as the body is moved around the homestead

accrued the finances necessary to provide a decent funeral. This is no mean feat considering a farmer might earn from one to two million rupiah (US\$110-220) per month and the price of a buffalo is from six to 60 million rupiah. Depending on social status a minimum of 25 buffalo is needed plus a substantial number of pigs. A good send-off often requires the calling in of many favours and ritual demands.

The family offered me some tea and then, with much laughter, produced an orange jerry can of *balok* (fermented rice wine). It looked like milky water and tasted like effervescent vinegar. After downing one glass to many cheers another was duly poured and I was offered some food. I had the choice of fatty pork with wrinkly black skin or a stick of glutinous rice. I chose the rice and sat back to the sound of pigs squealing as they were dispatched behind one of the buildings.

A gong rang out beneath the biggest *tongkonan* to inform the family that it was time to move the body from the house to beneath one of the rice silos. A Torajan funeral lasts between four and five days as the body is moved around the homestead.

Educated in the intellectual centre of Yogyakarta, Java, Hendrik lamented this drawn-out procedure and with a conspiratorial wink, whispered that he had told his parents to throw him into the sea when he dies.

The family carried the coffin, draped in red, out of the house and put it beneath a rice silo where people gathered around it and patted it slowly whilst continuing their village gossip. A villager buzzed around the crowd getting it all on video.

The Torajans used to bury their dead in wooden coffins placed on the side of cliffs and after dodging several rainstorms, Hendrik brought me to one such area to the south of Rantepao. The coffins had rotted away and in many cases they were simply platforms piled high with bones and skulls. Amongst these bones were cigarettes and damp bank notes, thrown in as offerings. In carved niches in the wall were macabre, doll-like effigies known as *tau taus*. Some niches contained whole families of intricately carved tau taus staring at their mortal remains.

Nowadays, the Torajans prefer to bury their dead in special *tongkonan* reserved for the family or inside rock tombs in the countryside with photos instead of effigies. You can't escape the omnipresent feeling of being watched by these photos and tau taus on a drive around Tanah Toraja.

Hendrik is confident that the tourists will return. Toraja deserves to be visited, not only as a place to see deathly rituals, but also for the friendly folks who are very much alive.



ARRIVALS

Tanah Toraja is easily visited as a side trip from Bali. Given that the Indonesian government decreased the visa on arrival from a free 60 days to a payable 30 days, fewer tourists are making trips outside the main tourist areas of Java and Bali. The outer islands of Indonesia are blessed with some stunning tourist destinations that are easy to reach with low-cost carriers.

**FLIGHTS:** The nearest major airport to Rantepao is Makassar in southern Sulawesi. Garuda Indonesia has daily flights to Makassar from Denpasar in Bali for around US\$130 return.

**BUSES:** Jl Gunung Merapi at 139 in Makassar operates a comfortable fleet of buses for the eight-hour journey from Makassar to Rantepao for US\$8.

**LODGINGS:** There are numerous options in Rantepao, including the Hotel Indra, which has three different hotels in the town. They vary in price from US\$11 to US\$45. The hotel closest to the river has excellent views and a pleasant garden. If you arrive late, your bus will most probably drop you outside the popular Maria 1 on Jl Sam Ratulang, which is a great place to meet some knowledgeable freelance Torajan guides. The rooms here cost around US\$11.

**GUIDES:** You will probably need to hire a guide to visit a funeral. Official guides can be found at Rantepao's Tourist Office (Jl Ahmad Yani 62a, 62 42321277) and freelance guides can be found at the aforementioned hotel. Guides charge around US\$12 for a day plus 60,000 rupiah (US\$7) for the use of a motorbike and fuel; more for a Jeep. You will also need to provide a gift for the family at the funeral. A carton of good quality clove cigarettes costs about US\$8.

# Exit Earth: Enter Second Life

*With one million members and counting, Second Life is the only virtual world worth spending your time in, writes Cassandra Beckford.*

**I** magine a meeting that sees rocket scientists rub shoulders with filmmakers, where federal government officials get there groove on to trendy DJ sets, a woman wears a lycra catsuit complete with claws protruding through her gloves, and a skinhead in dark glasses steps up to the microphone to gleefully introduce himself with, "My name is Stroker Serpentine, and I'm a pervert." Most people would be hard pressed to imagine what they could possibly have in common, but for those who turned up, the appeal of discussing their hobby in the real world is obvious.



Second Life (SL), begun in 2003, is a virtual online society. Marketed under the tagline of "your world, your imagination," it gives players a chance to reinvent themselves, lead a double life or become the person they've secretly dreamed about. For the nominal fee of US\$15 (Bt528) per month, you can access Linden Labs 3-D software and a virtual world built and owned entirely by its residents.

Starting with the creation of your avatar, or virtual you, gamers are able to unleash that fantasy person who's been trapped on the inside. People who yearn to fly create an avatar with wings; cat-worshippers might add claws and a tail; and there are many who take on underwater, alien or cyber forms. The fantasy element appears on all levels of SL life; people can travel by hoverboard, jetpack or yoga levitation, and homes range from a Tolkien-esque village to a cyberpunk squat.

SL's focus lies in interaction and communication. You can Instant Message anyone in SL at anytime or schedule an "Event" (meeting) that gets added to everyone's Event List. Invite friends to your party; send

## Boys' Toys

Bored to sneers with the socks and novelty boxers you got this Christmas? Don't despair; just visit [www.iwantoneofthose.com](http://www.iwantoneofthose.com) to brief your girl on exactly what you want next year. Be it the Homer Simpson torture chair (feed him endless doughnuts and wait for the explosion); the finger drum kit that offers a new age alternative to simple nail desk drumming, or the cheeky penis pokery book (with holes in all the right places), there are options-a-plenty to splurge on gifts and gizmos that are actually fun.

*The creation of in-game items like clothing, homes and cars has attracted the attention of big business in the real world*

them the “way point,” or address, and the correct evening attire, all at once.

Alternatively, you can retain your privacy with the private-mode setting, for more personal meetings and conversations. The supporting blogs are also varied and exciting, as would be expected from such a creative environment, and explore topics like “Hot SL fashion and what it says about society at large,” “Sex and relationships: From cybersex to BDSM,” and “Musicians in SL: The future of virtual performance.”

SL has a “Marketplace” or digital trading hub which allows users to conduct commerce with the Linden dollar, an in-world currency that can be converted into US dollars via online currency exchanges. All residents retain the rights to their digital creations and while some people use the space solely for fun, others see SL as an opportunity to make serious money. “Work” through the creating, selling and promoting of items like clothing, homes, cars and even face, body and hair types for avatars has attracted the attention of businesses and entrepreneurs in the real world. Adidas and Toyota are eager to invest in what they believe to be the leading searchlight for virtual business ventures of the future; Jay-Z recently performed in-world and Mia Farrow held a talk on the genocide in Sudan.

SL’s main criticism, the creation process, also lies at the heart of the game and some players have commented on the inaccessibility for new or casual gamers. Creating items proves to be both a complex and time-consuming process, and tutorial manuals for the game are filled with techy jargon like, “prims,” “scripting,” “clipping” and “misalignment.” Newcomers are advised to attend the tutorials presented by game veterans and Linden employees, or visit the forums first to get a real understanding of the game.

Exploration in SL may begin as a solo enterprise but once you begin to create you will find yourself enmeshed in this socio-virtual world. Players have the freedom to explore and engage in all that interests them, be it property development or sex, while the omission of quests, goals or a storyline is what thrusts SL light years ahead of its competitors.



### USEFULS

- [www.slcc2007.wordpress.com](http://www.slcc2007.wordpress.com) – the official website.
- [www.secondstyle.com](http://www.secondstyle.com) – go here to buy the hottest fashions for your avatar.
- [www.nwn.blogs.com](http://www.nwn.blogs.com) – Wagner James Au’s irreverent and detailed blog on the new world.

### Rip ‘em to Shreds

Fed up of reading about the beloved bands, pet names and favourite foods of others, when all you really want is the close-up body shots? Well, [www.hotornot.com](http://www.hotornot.com) delivers the best in good, clean, speed voyeurism. It’s all about pics, tick boxes and keyword matches, so you don’t have to wade through the tedious texts of others. A few clicks of the mouse guarantees matches with others in a matter of minutes. Send some love to that shameless hottie or trash the well-buffed hunk.



### Console Wars

The new Nintendo Wii console, launched with Dragon Ball Z, allows gamers to throw fireballs and mimic Goku’s moves instead of punching in old-school, square-circle-triangle battle combinations. Nintendo Wii secured first place in the console wars, ahead of its competitors Xbox 360 and PS3. But is console choice really that big a deal? Most certainly in a gaming industry that made more money in 2005 than the entire US box office tally and where Madden NFL, the Xbox 360’s launch title, made Bt3.58 million in its first week of release.



### Mobile Monopoly

As possibly the most personal computer you will ever own, today’s mobile phones don’t ask what can it do but what it can’t? Drift phones, available in the US, offer a “social mapping” service that pinpoints the exact location of you and up to 25 of your friends, which can be switched off and on as the mood takes you. Critics of the service highlight the myriad of security measures and further loss of privacy, but on the plus side, at least we won’t be needing that bar code on the back of our necks just yet.



UNTAMED TRAVEL

# Fezes and Dervishes

*Once banned as symbols of Islamic fundamentalism, the fez and the Whirling Dervish remain symbols of Turkey for tourists, but not necessarily for locals. Richard Ehrlich takes you on a whirlwind tour.*

The cylindrical fez, with its dangling black tassel, provokes feelings of resentment, humiliation and grim memories of repression among many proud, nationalistic Turks.

Another traditional symbol of Turkey, the white-robed Whirling Dervishes and their 700-year-old mystical Sufi brand of Islam, conjure up different responses, evoking a confused mix of suspicion and admiration.

Welcome to Turkey, physically split between Europe and Asia by the Bosphorus Strait, which now hosts expensive real estate along its shores amid

seafood restaurants, a modern art museum, and lovingly restored mansions.

This East-meets-West crossroads hopes to join the European Union, as Turkey's new generation is becoming increasingly hip and globalised, while Islam competes to survive.

Young foreign tourists boast to awestruck Turks about beer bongs and Western girls, but a local discreetly clicks off the radio's rock music when the neighborhood mosque's muezzin calls faithful Muslims to prayer via minaret-mounted electric loudspeakers.

The Ottoman Empire and its ruling, turbaned, Muslim sultans are frequently condemned as exploitative oppressors, defeated by independence fighters led by Mustafa Kamal Ataturk who created modern Turkey in 1923. Ataturk's secularist cultural revolution banned the fez, the Whirling Dervishes, and other forms of behaviour he perceived as Islamic fundamentalism, backward rituals, and other hurdles to liberation.

Today, belly-dancers and less risqué entertainers add "Ottoman Cuisine" to their live shows in order to attract tourists. Hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops include the title "sultan" in their name to create a bit of exoticism.

But a bloody, long-simmering struggle between Islamists and secularists vexes Turkish society and often kills people on both sides. Amid the violence, courts barred women wearing Muslim headscarves in public schools and government offices.

And the fez, now legal, is still widely despised.

"During the Ottoman Empire, the fez was worn by fundamentalist Muslims who were against democracy and Turkey as a republic," said businessman Mehmet Dasdeler in Goreme, 750km southeast of Istanbul.

"In 1925, Ataturk made a decree for people not to wear a



fez. He changed our habits. Atatürk made all sorts of modern reforms,” Dasdeler said, adding that in “the last three or four years, money has changed people’s ideals,” and new fezzes – made of cheap, bright red velveteen – are popular souvenirs on sale throughout Turkey for about US\$5. In contrast, an old, genuine, dark maroon fez, with a worn inner leather headband and three tiny air holes on top, goes for around US\$50 in a Goreme antique shop.

“No one is wearing a fez in all of Turkey. It has become stupid, silly. It’s like an old memory,” he claimed.

Rasheed, an office worker in Istanbul’s old Sultan Ahmet neighborhood, agreed.

“You see the fez worn in some restaurants or places for tourists. But if you ask Turks, some are very sensitive about it, because they think the West looks at Turkey as an old country, where people still wear the fez and who are not modern,” Rasheed said.

“Actually, I don’t like it when someone asks me about the fez. Turkey is not like that anymore,” he added, with annoyance.

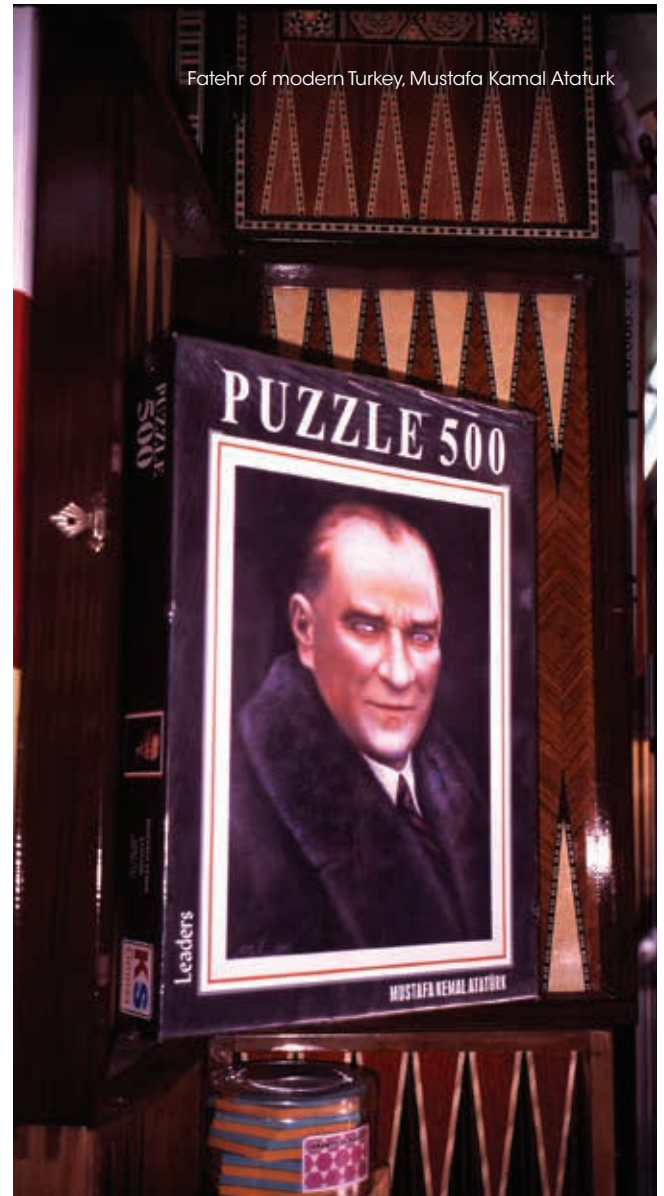
“During the Ottomans, the fez was mostly for people in the big cities who worked in the government, or the rich people,” Rasheed’s office colleague, Hassan, chimed in.

## Cemeteries at some mosques display old tombstones topped by a chiseled fez, identifying the deceased as a member of the Ottoman elite.

On trendy Akbiyik Street, Fez Travel uses the hat as its logo, plastered on tour buses and brochures.

“It is an easy symbol for tourists to recognise, and easy to say ‘fez,’ but actually it is still a problem for Turkey because of this whole thing about how the West looks at us, and how the European Union doesn’t want us to join,” Hassan said. “We also don’t understand why today in Hollywood, when you make a movie, you still show the people wearing a fez.”

Cemeteries at some mosques display old tombstones topped by a chiseled fez, identifying the deceased as a member of the Ottoman elite.





### DANCING WITH GOD

Whirling Dervishes suffered a different fate. After Ataturk died in 1938, Turkey allowed public performances accompanied by music, by groups like the fabled Galata Mevlevi.

Most Dervishes are men. Women may whirl, but usually in a separate room. Twirling individually while circling in a room - representing planets revolving as they orbit the sun - Dervishes imagine a rapturous unity with God.

Poetry by 13th century Sufi mystic Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, who founded the Galata Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes in central Turkey, is surprisingly popular among Americans and other foreigners enthralled by Rumi's words of love. Rumi's major work, *The Masnavi*, also describes ancient "tyrannical" Jewish kings exterminating Christians, and God punishing "evil" Jews.

Counter-clockwise whirling dissolves the ego and creates "an intoxication of the soul... mercy, offering consolation to those under tyranny," Rumi's Galata Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes said in a written statement before a performance in Istanbul.

A Dervish's extremely tall, conical, honey-colored, wool or camel-hair fez, "symbolises a tombstone of the ego," the Mevlevi said. A discarded black cloak represents the ego's "tomb." The billowing white robe is the ego's "shroud." "Be like me and know. Whether in light or darkness, until you have been like this, you can't completely know love," the Galata Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes said.

Osama bin Laden and his fellow Saudi Arabian Wahhabi Muslims condemn Sufis as liberal, pacifist deviant Muslims.

But for many people the dance is a simply a money-maker.

"I have some Turkish friends who are Whirling Dervishes, but they are doing it in performances for money. I don't know anyone doing it to get clean inside. They are just doing it as a job," said Dasdele. "There are not many Sufis in Turkey. There are more Sufis in America. Those

[Galata Mevlevi Whirling Dervish] guys in Istanbul are real. They are Sufis.

"But when you become a Sufi, you have to give up your business and be clean about everything. You don't work for money, you work for God."

*Richard S. Ehrlich, a freelance journalist who has reported news from Asia for the past 28 years, and co-author of the non-fiction book, HELLO MY BIG BIG HONEY! - Love Letters to Bangkok Bar Girls and Their Revealing Interviews. His web page is at [www.geocities.com/asia\\_correspondent](http://www.geocities.com/asia_correspondent)*

## WHIRLWIND TOURS

The Sufi Group of Istanbul's Galata Mevlevi Lodge perform a "Music and Whirling Ceremony" in the evening on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays in the exhibition hall at Istanbul's Sirkeci Railway Station near Sultan Ahmet, for one hour. It is best to reserve a ticket in advance. The Mevlevi Monastery in Istanbul also offers Sunday evening performances. In Turkey's central town of Konya, home of the Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes, performances are also available. Check local schedules and prices which vary. Restaurants and entertainment places offer shows, too, but these are more commercial.



# TURKEY IN EU?



**T**urks are also debating possible membership in the European Union. "Ten or 15 years ago, we had Romanian girls in Istanbul selling their bodies as prostitutes," said Hassan. "You remember those days?" he asked Rasheed, who snickered at the memory. "Now Romania can join the EU ahead of Turkey," Hassan lamented. "Why? I don't believe Romania, or even Bulgaria, are something better than Turkey. They are also nice countries. But it is only because Turkey is Muslim that the EU treats us like this."

Turkey flaunts a bizarre response to such cynical outbursts. At Istanbul's Grand Bazaar, atop a stone entrance, the EU flag with its circle of yellow stars flaps alongside Turkey's Islam-inspired flag with its white crescent moon and white star on a red background. The isolated pair of snapping flags may give the false impression that Turkey is a full EU member. But rueful Turks express confusion over the hoops their nation still needs to go through to join the grouping.

Supporters of EU expansion claim Christian-majority Europe can win friends throughout the Islamic world by using the "soft power" of generously accepting Muslim-majority Turkey. It would also extend Europe's influence to Turkey's frontiers with Iran, Iraq and Syria. EU expansionists compare this with the "hard power" America brandishes through its worldwide war against Islamist insurgents, and Washington's liquidating, caging or monitoring anyone perceived as suspicious.

Embracing Turkey in the EU, supporters say, would be a unique method of defraying fears of discrimination among many of the world's Muslims – in a way America cannot, because no Muslim nation can ever become a US state.

EU membership, however, also depends on a solution to problems raised by the minority Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK). The secessionist guerrillas have been waging a bloody war against Turkey's repressive military for more than 20 years. More than 30,000 people have perished. The EU is also observing how Islamist extremists, often through random terrorist attacks, are influencing Turkey's government, described as "moderate Islamist."

Many Americans, Europeans and others, meanwhile, find this country safe and friendly.

Back in Goreme, for example, two blonde teenage girls confidently shopped for souvenirs in a sleepy street market while wearing sweatshirts emblazoned with Incirlik High School Class of '08. Incirlik American High School, for US Defense Department dependents and others, is

located at Incirlik Air Base, a key NATO base and home to the US Air Force's 39th Air Base Wing in southern Turkey.

While the American high-school students shopped alongside their family – including two men with blonde buzz-cut hair – several Turkish men pointed and chuckled. When gossip turned to Turkey's EU membership, their mood was less cheerful.

"The EU won't happen, that's definite," insisted the businessman Dasdeler while watching the teens inspect woven cloth illustrated with Whirling Dervishes.

"America is [governed by] a Christian religious party. England is becoming a Christian religious party. The EU will never accept Turkey because Christians are getting closer together, deciding to help each other. And Muslims are getting closer to help each other. Also, Turkey is a very young country, but Europe is old and retired already, so I would have to work and pay tax to them," to fund retirement and other benefits for elderly Europeans.

"Turkey has a big population. The EU is getting many countries from East Europe, but they do not have the population of Turkey. Remember, whoever has more population, has more power in the EU," Dasdeler said. Turkey's 73 million people are governed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leader of the Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party. Erdogan favours EU membership and endorses a secular regime, though he was imprisoned for several months for reading an Islamist poem at a political rally.

Another black mark on Turkey's reputation was its bloody massacre of Armenians – mostly Christians – at the end of the Ottoman Empire 90 years ago, which some historians describe as genocide.

Prime Minister Erdogan expressed dismay in May about the draft of a proposed French law which would make it a crime – punishable by a year in jail, plus a US\$57,000 fine – to deny Turks massacred up to 1.5 million Armenians.

Many of the Armenians died in 1915 during forced "resettlement" deportation marches.

When Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper recently described the killings as genocide, Erdogan ordered Turkey's pull out from NATO's military maneuvers in Canada.

Germany's Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler, viewed the aftermath of the Turks' slaughter of Armenians as proof that the world forgets atrocities.

According to historians, Hitler told his army commanders in 1939: "Thus for the time being, I have sent to the east only my Death's Head Units, with orders to kill without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish race or language. Only in such a way will we win the vital space that we need. Who still talks nowadays about the Armenians?"

Some Turks, however, insist their country is being singled out while other nations avoid similar censure.

"The West keeps talking about how Turkey killed the Armenians. They should give up on this subject," Dasdeler said after the American girls from Incirlik passed by. "We never talk about what happened to the American Indians. We don't bring this subject up again and again."



UNPAVED TRAVEL

# Shocking Pink



*In Joan Sinclair's remarkable and photo-laden Pink Box: Inside Japan's Sex Clubs (Harry N. Abrams Inc, 2006), she opens doors into a rarely glimpsed and deeply twisted realm of erotica, from Race Queen Peep Shows to the Marilyn Monroe Club and the Groping Train. There's also a historical overview of commercial sex in Japan by James Farrer and telling quotes from working women and customers sprinkled throughout, like one 65-year-old man: "I think men are universally perverted; it's just that in Japan we do something about it." Roland Kelts (author of Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.) interviewed the 33-year-old American photographer, who first came to Japan as a young English teacher.*



Body Stocking Service, Osaka

“I often went with either a regular customer or one of the girls. I wore a suit, and I would always bring gifts from the U.S. and a business card.”

*Q: What does the title, PINK BOX, actually mean?*

*A: In Japan, pink is the euphemism for commercial sex the way red is in the US, as in “red light district.” And “Pink Box” is the name of a private dancer’s room in the back of a famous Osaka club. I took a photo of two girls bathed in pink light in this private room. It was so beautiful, and it gave me the perfect working title.*

*Q: Why did you want to document the sex industry in Japan?*

*A: It’s the second largest industry in Japan (automobiles are the first). It’s too much a part of Japanese modern culture to be ignored. Ten years ago when I was an English teacher in Tokyo, I overheard a conversation about these clubs and had a friend take me on a tour of Kabukicho – the biggest red-light district in Japan. I was blown away. There were train clubs with all-you-can-grope commuting women. And fake hospitals, where the customer can lie in bed and get “treated” by a pantless nurse. There were “Sexual Harassment” offices where men can tear the pantyhose off their “secretaries.” I returned to California and started a career as a corporate lawyer, but I never forgot about those clubs.*

*Q: Japan is a tough nation to crack for any outsider, and sex industries worldwide are notoriously resistant to journalists. As a foreign photographer, and as a female, how did you achieve access to these forbidden regions of Japanese society?*

*A: Basically, I arrived in Japan with one phone number in my pocket and a camera.*

People often ask if I had to pay money, but the bottom line is that there is no amount of money that could have bought me access. These places make millions of dollars a year. It wouldn’t be worth it for them to take the risk. And they were very respectful of the women’s privacy. I was really surprised by that. The women

came first, really.

*Q: So, how did you actually get in the door of these places?*

*A:* Basically, it took a lot of singing karaoke with unsavory characters. I knew I had only one year to shoot, as my husband was home waiting for me in California. So I learned the industry slang, and went about it in four different directions at once. I got to know the managers, the customers, the women – and their advertisers. In Japan these clubs are serious business, and there's lots of competition, and they spend tons of money on advertising in several thick glossy magazines that are nothing but guidebooks to the industry. They also all have websites.

*Q: Did you go alone?*

*A:* I often went with either a regular customer or one of the girls. I wore a suit, and I would always bring gifts from the U.S. and a business card. In Japan, a formal introduction from someone on the inside was really important.

*Q: Especially since you're not Japanese.*

*A:* That's right. Almost none of the clubs allow foreigners, even if they speak Japanese.

*Q: Why not?*

*A:* 1. Foreigners don't understand the rules – of which there are admittedly many. 2. They scare the Japanese customers. 3. They complain too much. 4. They can't communicate well with the women if the women get uncomfortable. 5. They may have AIDS.

*Q: How many clubs did you eventually shoot?*

*A:* I ended up shooting 90 different clubs, in Osaka, Kobe, Tokyo, Nishi-Kawaguchi, Fukuoka and Sapporo, and the



“Almost none of the clubs allow foreigners, even if they speak Japanese.”

finished book contains photos from about 80 of those clubs. I knew by the sheer numbers of places, of women working, and the percentage of my contacts who personally knew someone involved that I would be able to eventually finish the book. That's what kept me going.

*Q: What is it about Japan that makes this industry so ubiquitous?*

*A: A 400-year-old history of the industry, a lack of a Judeo-Christian religious philosophy, a need for release in a tightly wound society, an emphasis on customer appreciation, a set of laws so complex that the industry is virtually legal...*

*Q: And the costumes and fantasy rooms. What makes them so popular?*

*A: In Japan, company uniforms and school uniforms are still widely used. People's social place is identifiable at a glance by their costume. These clubs allow people to break the social rules, using everyday archetypes. The schoolgirl, the commuting secretary – the women you see every day – are forbidden fruit. These sexualized archetypes are reflected in Japan's wildly popular dirty comic books.*

*Q: Would you say that being a woman helped or hindered you?*

*A: Let's start with hindered. If I were a man, I'd instantly have more respect as a photographer in Japan. And in some clubs I would have been able to get in as a customer. And if I were a Japanese man, it would have been much easier. As a woman, a foreigner and a photographer, I am three of the things the doormen do not allow in the clubs. Three of three. They just took one look at me and made the "no" sign in Japanese. It was a really tough barrier. At least if I were a man, I could engage them in conversation. The only way being a woman helped me was that because I was a woman, the glossy magazines, the advertisers, that fourth category, were interested in covering me for*



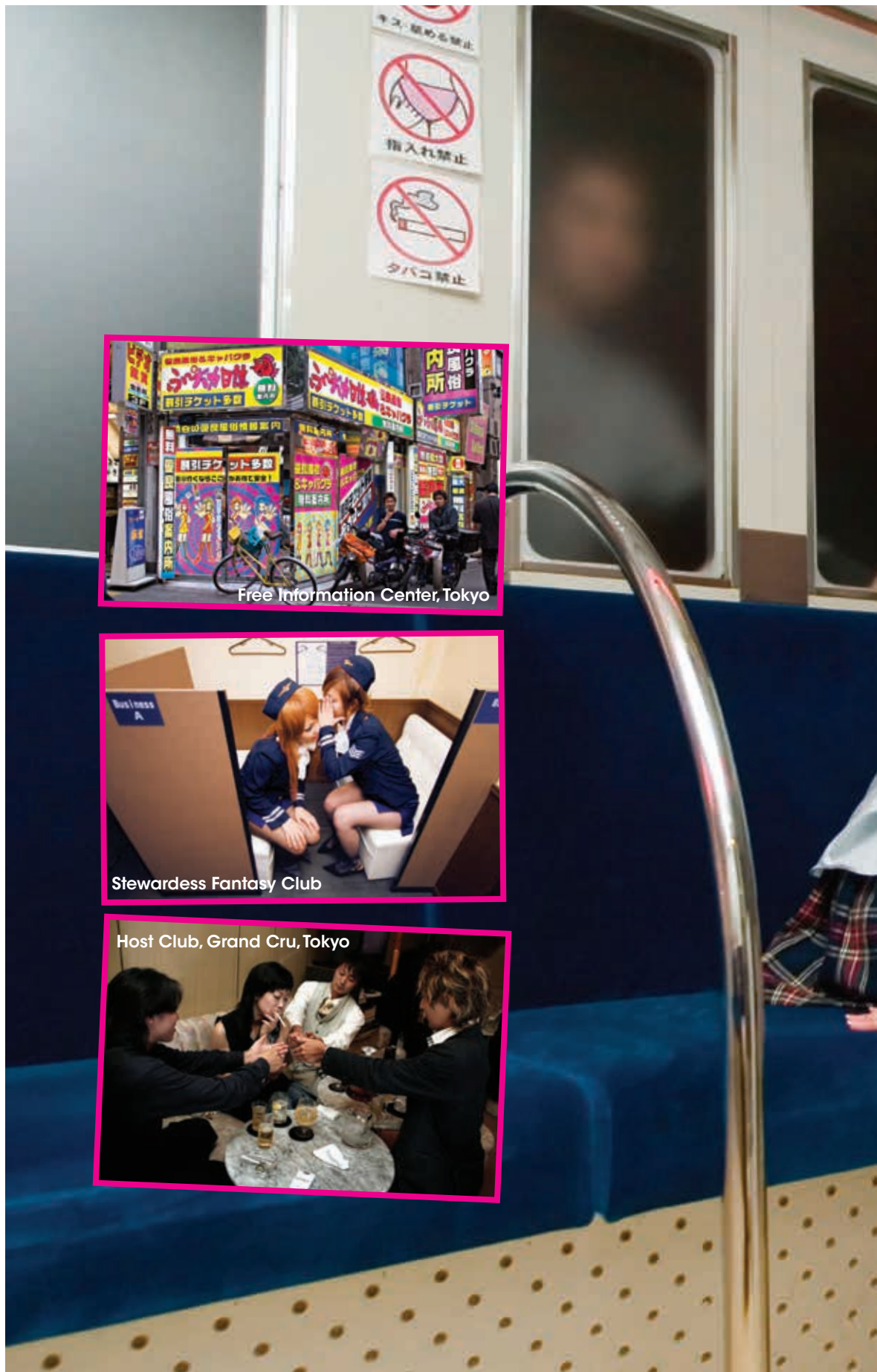
“These clubs allow people to break the social rules, using everyday archetypes. The schoolgirl, the commuting secretary – the women you see every day – are forbidden fruit.”

content purposes. I literally had a column in a magazine named *Tokyo Soapland* called “Through Her Blue Eyes.”

One of the key characters who helped me was the editor of *Tokyo Soapland* magazine, and he knew that I wanted shots of the most visually interesting clubs. So he took me to an old fashioned-themed soapland, a wedding soapland, a policewoman soapland, a harem-themed soapland, and a Korean woman themed soapland.

*Q: But as a female photographer, and an American woman who cares about feminism, are you not propagating what the clubs do by publishing this book?*

*A: From the beginning I gave myself some rules: Don't change how the women or the environment look. I photographed the women exactly as they appeared, and I never chose them. They chose me; they volunteered because they wanted to be photographed. We did include some photos that are more difficult to look at – not always showing the sweet and beautiful side of things. These aren't staged cheesecake pictures to make them look sexy.*



Free Information Center, Tokyo



Stewardess Fantasy Club



Host Club, Grand Cru, Tokyo

Pervert Train Densha de Go Go





# A whiff of Hops...

Due to a hangover of elephantine proportions, Stuart 'pansy-pants' Singleton is replaced this month by Managing Director Cameron 'rotgut' Cooper. While the ban on alcoholic beverage advertising is emptying the pockets of publishers, gig promoters and sportsmen across the land, one must remember that every turd has a silver lining and we can finally say what we want about the booze being passed across the bar in Thailand without fear of ads being pulled – not that we ever promoted anything we didn't believe in, which is quite easy with beer, but perhaps there have been a few lies of omission. So it's all the Kingdom's beers head to head on one boozy night.

In the interests of fair play and pickled livers, premium beers were tested first to give the cheap ones a handicap. All beers were served at room temperature, with ice. At no point was the spittoon utilised. Performed under controlled circumstances. Readers should not try this at home as it is best left to the professionals.

**ASAHI:** "Japan's No. 1 Beer", 5%

**Dan:** One of my favourites, a good beer to start on but tastes awful after drinking another brand. Sadly, usually only available in Japanese restaurants and go-go bars.

**Cam:** Flavourless yet subtle, much like Japanese cuisine, but easy to drink and inoffensive.



**KLOSTER:** "Schutz Marke", 5.2%

**Dan:** Definitely 'bier' with its full nose and hoppy flavour. Like Asahi, you can't switch to it after Chang, but Kloster scores points for having a big cat on the label (the sign of any worthwhile beer). Plenty of character; just one I'm not fond of.

**Cam:** Some people swear by Kloster, but then some people like to have their bums paddled. A strong start and end to the flavour, but kind of hollow in the middle. Not bad, but I always drink to world peace and it's just wrong to do that with a German beer.



**HEINEKEN:** "Premium Quality", 5%

**Dan:** Familiar territory this one. For so long the green bottle has ruled the roost for its clean taste and mild hangovers. A familiar flavour, in that there isn't one, except for that sudsy, bloated feeling you get after the first half dozen.

**Cam:** The red star says it all. A capitalist beer with communist leanings – the brew for the proletariat who can afford it. Has a very mid-range taste, inoffensive with no highs or lows. Popular, though hardly revolutionary.



**SAN MIGUEL:** "Since 1890", 5%

**Dan:** Another lager beer, but don't make the mistake of referring to it as a Filipino brew as it's actually from Spain. For me, a swallow of Senor Miguel brings back memories of Hong Kong, where it's the cheapest on the rack.

**Cam:** A bit of tang in this bevvie, and the sweetest tipple so far. Not sure if I'd want a big night on this one – it's more of a dessert beer.



**TIGER:** Has gold medals from London, Geneva, Paris, 5%

**Dan:** Another big cat beer. Tiger is made by the

Heineken bunch here and slipped into the gap left when Carlsberg told Mr Chang to go fuck himself, though only after getting fucked by Mr Chang for far too long. Tiger gets my vote just for that. **Cam:** As the poor man's premium beer there's not much to say about Tiger – not much character, fairly inoffensive, but it is my regular tipple at deadline time, so God bless 'em, they've inspired many an off-colour photo caption.

**CHANG LIGHT:** "Thailand's finest larger beer", 4.2%

**Dan:** A few years ago I would have never used the word 'Chang' and 'light' in the same sentence, yet today this green-bottled beverage is gaining ground

in the mid-range market. No gold medals on this one, yet – maybe the manufacturer hasn't got around to buying them yet. **Cam:** After a very limited number of Changovers and swearing off the stuff, I must admit that this is a surprisingly fine drop. Like a cheeky San Miguel with none of normal Chang's characteristic afterburn.



**SINGHA:** "The original Thai beer since 1933", 6%

**Dan:** Singha, or Lion Beer (cats again) has a long and more recently dishonourable history. Known

for its sour taste and atomic hangovers, it is, nevertheless, Thailand's first ever attempt at brewing the amber ale that didn't





result in a massive explosion.

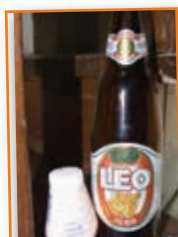
Cam: Surprisingly, Singha stacks up pretty well against the competition tonight. A little sweet, this full-flavoured beer isn't as bitter as it used to be. As I used to hear in my dark, dank and highly embarrassing English teaching days, it is a "manly beer" as claimed by the same manly men who also thought themselves immune to AIDS.



**SAN MIG LIGHT: "Low Calorie", 5%**

Dan: Coming in a clear bottle, they evidently don't expect 'San Mig' to be on the shelf too long before going skunky. I guess the 'light' refers to its slimming qualities as its alcohol content is up there with the best of them.

Cam: Certainly tastes light and inoffensive, in fact, it's a bit like Bangkok tap water with less flavour. A girly beer, in spite of being named after a Russian fighter plane.



**LEO: Gold medals from Munchen and Munic, 5.5%**

Dan: Good old Mr Reliable has a cat on the cover too. I've got a soft spot for Leo's sweetish-sour taste and he's put me to bed on more occasions than I care to remember. Like most Leo drinkers, I'm a sucker for the tolerable taste and Bt39 price tag.

Cam: Like a journey down the old dirt road. After the first metallic tang kills your mid-tongue region, it becomes like riding a moped or a fat lass – fine as long as your friends don't see you. But even if they don't, you'll hate yourself in the morning.



**CHANG DRAUGHT: 5%**

Dan: Who let the draught in? Ha ha. No catchphrase on the bottle, so I guess they expect this to sell itself based on the fine times you had with it in your favourite tapperly. Personally, I prefer the lighter, more full-bodied Chang Light.

Cam: One thing you can say for this nothing beer is that it doesn't taste shitty. Chang Draught has no start, middle or finish. I can't think of a man over 20 who'd drink it unless someone else was buying.



**BLUE ICE: "Ice Smooth", 6.4%**

Dan: The San Miguel people slip another bottle into the scrum. We're well acquainted with ice beers in Australia so verbiage like "Redefines refreshment," or "Special cooling effect," bounces off my boozy armour and I see this for what it is – rocket fuel.

Cam: Hyperbole aside, this beer tastes like no other, in fact it doesn't seem like beer at all. More like a hopless malt beverage that might just pass for Baby Duck sparkling wine at a redneck cocktail party in Fort MacMurray, Alberta. A rare brew where the hangover kicks in before you even get drunk

**RED HORSE: 6.9%**

Dan: Ahh, scrape the bottom of the shopping cart and there's yet another offering from San Miguel, squarely aimed at the manly Thai man who likes a beer that's harsh on the noggin but easy on the pocket. Tastes like a red horse had some mictural involvement in its production.

Cam: This isn't beer either. Goes down like syrup with a finish to make a Russian weep. Is it lager? Ale? Lighter fluid? How



many potatoes does it take to make one bottle? Needs plenty of ice, and nobody will accuse you of being gay if you make a shandy out of it because it will still be stronger than anything they're drinking.

**CHEERS: "Full flavour, smooth beer", 5.6%**

Dan: The people who make Heineken get their revenge with Cheers, the beer where everybody knows your name but you can't remember your own. Cameron cried out after his first sip as if tasting something foul, making me nervous about this one. Doesn't taste like beer.

Cam: Heineken bottles print "Enjoy Heineken responsibly," on their labels but they don't bother with that nonsense on Cheers. "Go on, get fucked up and see if we care," is the motto they were too timid to print. If I was a Thai lumberjack with a hangover, this is what I'd put on my pancakes. Amusingly, they have a gold medal printed on the neck that looks like it was borrowed off General Chavalit's chest – and equally deserved.



**CHANG: AIBA Gold Medal, 6.4%**

Dan: Let's get one thing straight: AIBA stands for Australian International Beer Award and used to be judged by a bunch of brewing students (pissheads) in my home town of Ballarat. Chang won their medal in the first year of the awards, along with everyone else who turned up. Popular with backpackers for its

low cost and mule's kick, don't drink this one in quantity if you have any plans for the next day or two.

Cam: Ah, the dreaded Chang. With its ignominious history of being poured down the throats of the public when the brewery forced distributors to purchase it if they wanted to receive any *Lao Khao* (the popular cheap rice liquor), this didn't become number one for its quality. But at three for Bt100 – sufficient to make a television screen visually indecipherable – the peasants embraced it. Overpowering flavour, but unlike the other cheapies, it does actually taste like beer.

**THAI BEER: 6.5%**

Dan: Boon Rawd Brewery returned fire to the Chang fortifications with Thai Beer – a little bit stronger and a little bit cheaper, which should be a recipe for success, yet guts and glory and huge sales remain elusive for this budget lager. Maybe they should put a lynx on the label.

Cam: Although bordering on not being beer at all, Thai's surprisingly not bad. A little thick with plenty of taste – just not a very good taste.



**The Winner**

One could say that Cameron and I are the winners as we spent a very long night getting tanked on company money (and we didn't drop baby Amelia even once) but, Heineken unexpectedly wins by a nose for its clean taste and consistent quality, and because we know from long subjective experience that it carries the lightest of all the hangovers.

# Tropical Maladies

From cat scratch fever to giardia to the most horrifying affliction of them all, clownophobia, Rob Viereck has his finger on your sweat glands.

As you may already have read in your guidebook, there are some obvious things that you should do in order to reduce your chances of "taking home a little friend" from your travels (and we're not talking about your buff rock-climbing instructor from Railay Beach or that dancer you met in the bar) such as: not petting Bangkok's ubiquitous, mangy, scrofulous street dogs, always wearing a name-brand condom during your weekend sorties and washing your hands before eating Bangkok's yummy finger food. All of the above situations could happen consecutively or even concurrently on a proper night out. Despite taking these very sensible precautions, there is still a slight chance of acquiring one of dozens of virulent tropical diseases. Here is a short list of the most popular ones:

## The list:

**Malaria** – shaking, sweating, vivid hallucinations... a classic "status" disease

**Dengue fever** – see Malaria, above... but this one's just temporary fun

**Giardia** – gaseous, sulphurous, explosive diarrhea... breaks the ice at parties!

**Amoebic liver abscess** – nothing a few shots of *lao khao* (Thai moonshine) won't kill

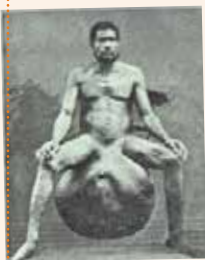
**Viral Hepatitis** – Jaundice, since you already have "Yellow fever"...

**Cat scratch fever** – commonly accompanies the above yellow fever and frequently caused by listening to "Da Nuge"...

**Larvae Migrans** – a popular Thai street snack, crawling under your skin

**Japanese Encephalitis** – swelling, itching, festering brain... another classic!

**Elephantiasis** – the biggest balls on your block... absolutely guaranteed



## Coulrophobia

(Popularly known as "Clown-o-phobia")

Symptoms include: breathlessness, dizziness, excessive sweating, nausea, dry mouth, feeling sick, shaking, heart palpitations, inability to speak or think clearly, a fear of dying, becoming mad or losing control, a sensation of detachment from reality or a full-blown anxiety attack. Sufferers seem to agree that the most fear-inducing aspect of clowns is the heavy makeup, often accompanied by the bulbous nose and weird hair colour that conceals the wearer's identity. OK, if you've ever had any of the above symptoms after accidentally walking into a Khaosan bar full of fat, drunken slags on a Saturday night, you probably have an insight into the unspeakable horror and disgust that clown-ophobia can produce in the human psyche. And they call it an irrational fear... hmm, I think not. As if you weren't already feeling paranoid enough.



### FAMOUS EVIL CLOWN MOVIES

- Stephen King's made-for-TV movie *It*, based on the book.
- The sci-fi movie *Killer Klowns from Outer Space*
- Zombie clowns who drowned in a circus train accident return to eat the living in *Dead Clowns*



- In the Victor Salva film, *Clownhouse*, lunatics murder three circus clowns: Cheezo, Bippo, and Dippo, and assume their identities while terrorising children

- *Xtro*, *Killjoy*, *S.I.C.K. Serial Insane Clown Killer*, *Fear of Clowns* and *Mr. Jingles* all feature evil clowns. Happy viewing, Bozos.

### Where to Go, Go, Go Just in Case:

Hospital for Tropical Diseases,  
Faculty of Tropical Medicine, Mahidol University  
420/6 Rajvithi Rd, Rajthewi  
Bangkok, Thailand 10400  
Tel: 02-3549100 ext. 1420/1225

## SOPHOMORE KINKS

Review by Jim Algie

Wei Hui's debut novel *Shanghai Baby* became a *success de scandale* in 2000 after it was banned by the Chinese government, which also burned 40,000 copies in public. As many readers and critics pointed out, the book's depictions of sex and drugs among young Bohemians trashed Chinese taboos that had long since been flouted in the West by writers like Henry Miller and Erica Jong.

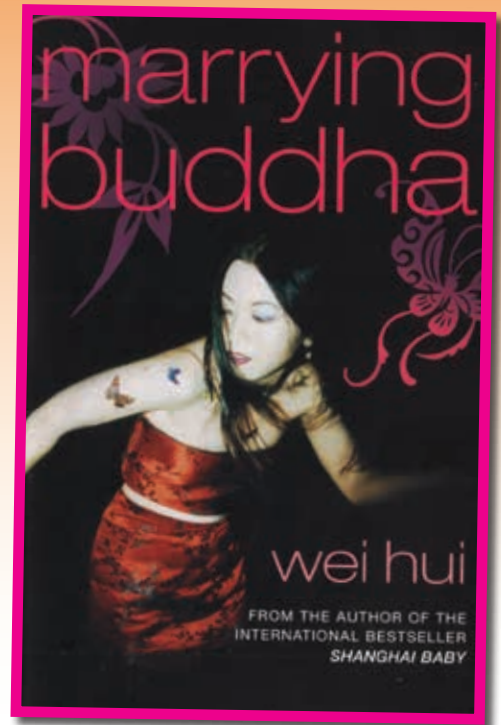
But for all its shortcomings it was still an enjoyable romp with some genuinely erotic scenes – the heroine just loves the sound of her silk *cheong sam* being torn by her lover. And the author's photogenic looks – yes, that's her on the cover of both novels – made for sexy layouts and easy write-ups for *Sex and the City's* slaving fans.

*Marrying Buddha*, (Constable and Robinson, 2005), her follow-up novel, has a much more promising premise. What are the differences between physical and spiritual love? The plot follows Coco, the heroine of *Shanghai Baby*, as she gets tangled up in another love triangle, while living in New York, and promoting her book in Spain and South America. None of these locations are painted with any more colour than a stage backdrop in an amateur theatre production.

But at least Coco is marginally less vainglorious in this novel. That's good. Because in *Shanghai Baby* she is constantly preening, lauding herself, and having ageing Chinese professors applaud her short fiction as "being like good sex".

Interspersed with the main story line in *Marrying Buddha* are scenes set on the island of Putuo (known for its many temples like the Temple of Righteous Rain) where the heroine was born. What could have been a fascinating meditation on body and spirit, sex and desire, or contemporary Western mores butting up against Asian traditions, makes for frigid bedfellows in this flaccid and unsatisfying tale.

Some five years in the writing, if this is the best Wei Hui can do for a sophomore novel it looks like she may end up being written off as a one-book wonder and a footnote in Chinese literature.



## SHELF LIFE

Capsule Reviews for *Ritalin Kids* by Jim Algie

*Blue List: 618 Things to Do & Places to Go*, Lonely Planet

Travel guidebooks are getting in line with the current publishing obsession with loads of lists, lots of photos and miniscule content. In this case, that means "Best Foodie Destinations," "Best Places to Get Naked," "Most Unusual Restaurants and Bars," and anorexic city guides. Can you really use "Three Words to Describe This Country" and sum up Chile as "Tall, slim, civilized"? Perfect bytes of baby food for the infantile travellers of today. As for me, I'll be adding this book to my shit list while hyperventilating over future travel titles like *The Blue List of World Fridge Magnets*.



*Mysterious World Ireland*, Doug Elwell Inc, Ian Middleton and Douglas Elwell

It takes more than 300 pages of background on history, Druids, folklore and sea monsters before we even get into the destination guides and attractions for the country. Beautifully illustrated, photographed and put together, without skimping on essential details, if only this debut release from the Mysterious World website was the voluminous shape of things to come in travel writing.



## PULP FICTION COVER OF THE MONTH

Words by Jim Algie

So many of Cornell Woolrich's novels of crime and suspense had the word black or darkness in them that this style of writing came to be called "noir."

Under the pen name William Irish he also churned out a number of pulpy thrillers like *Marihuana* (Dell, 1941). The cover blurb says, "A cheap and evil girl sets a hopped-up killer against the city." Many of Woolrich's novels and short stories were turned into Hollywood films, most famously by Alfred Hitchcock in *Rear Window*. But we're still waiting for Tarantino or Spike Lee to make *Marihuana* into a new joint of reefer madness.



# The First Luxury Resort on Koh Phangan ... with Pure Nature



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Resort Review | HomeSweetHome\_ 46

# Home Suite Home

*A new hotel on Phuket has come up with a novel concept; it's a wonderland for kids that leaves parents free to play, writes Steve Sandford.*



One of the biggest gripes that so many parents have after taking their kids on holiday is the lack of rest and relaxation. That's why the Ramada Resort on Karon Beach in Phuket has designed a kids-oriented four-star hotel to help take the stress load off parents trying to juggle a relaxing holiday while keeping the youngsters amused.

"I try to see the world through my 10-year-old boy's eyes and teach him to look at the world through my eyes and that's what I created in the kid's club," explains manager Florian Halerman as he sticks his head between the jaws of the pool-side T-Rex statue.

The Kidz' Club is an indoor playground paradise where toddlers can don top hats and gowns in the Fantasy Dress-up Corner, mix up concoctions in Einstein's Lab or pig out on the bottomless bowl of ice cream in Uncle Joe's Ice Cream Parlor.

Youngsters can also learn how to cook up a storm at the Cooking Corner or show off their artistic streaks in Picasso's Creative Center.

For older kids, there is the Play-station room with stacks of games and a big-screen TV. In the adjoining theatre room youngsters can stretch out on beanbag chairs and watch Nemo, Luke Skywalker and other big-screen heroes save the day on the giant wall screen.

Outside the clubhouse, basketball hoops and a K2 climbing wall provide healthier alternatives so the fruits of your loins don't turn into spoiled-rotten couch tomatoes.

Out of the 121 splashy rooms in the resort, the most unique ones are in the Duplex suites where they have 14 theme rooms like the Outer Space Room, the Castle Room and the Underwater Room (complete with over 300 fish), the only ones of their kind in Thailand.

"We even had a few couples thinking about renting out the theme rooms on their wedding nights," says Halerman with a chuckle.

Many of the theme rooms are adjoined to spacious king-sized bedrooms. And the whole resort (along with many of its rooms) has been designed in a colourful Mexican-hacienda style.

Adults wanting to sneak off for a breather can visit the hotel's Castle Bar and Grill at night or the World Press coffee shop for the latest selection of magazines and international newspapers. Or the whole family can chow down together in Joe Kools, a 50's-style American restaurant.

And if the parents really need a break from their hyperactive kids, they can hire fully trained nannies (Bt600 for a full day or Bt400 for a half) to enjoy a day out touring the island and pretending their carefree kids once again.

*Special introductory room rates start at about US\$60 (including a breakfast buffet) as the resort just opened in November. For bookings and reservations, please contact the Bangkok Sales Office at 02-266-7316; Phuket at 07-639-6666; or visit [www.ramadaphuket.com](http://www.ramadaphuket.com).*

# SLEEPY time

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

## PRATUNAM / SIAM SQUARE

### Moeleng Boutique Residence:

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

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

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

## SILOM

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

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

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

Bf950. A bargain for the area.

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

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

Bf1,400-4,000. Boutique hotel.

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

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

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

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

Bf570-800. Funky, Thai-style guesthouse.

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

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

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

## SUKHUMVIT

### Bangkok Boutique Hotel:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## BANGLAMPHU

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

**Buddy Lodge:** 265 Khaosan Rd, tel: 02-629 4477, www.buddylodge.com

Bf1,800-2,200. Up market and modern.

**D&D Inn:** 68-70 Khaosan Rd, tel: 02-629-0526, www.khaosanby.com

Bf450-900. Good value rooms.

**Sawasdee Group:** tel: 02-280 1251,

www.sawasdee-hotels.com Five guesthouses throughout Banglamphu. Bf140-800. Thai-style hangouts.

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

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

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

Champagne

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

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

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

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

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

**Lebua:** Riverside, tel: 02-624-9999

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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JANTAMED TRAVEL

# DAY tripping

## RATTANAKOSIN

Within spitting distance of Khaosan Road — hint, hint — this is the city's most regal, historic and heavily touristed area with the scintillating **Grand Palace** and **Temple of the Emerald Buddha**. For some real insights into Buddhism, however, visit the nearby **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** (Khleng 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 earthy 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 **Vimannek 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."

## 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 Bf10-20, depending on distance. The big red and blue buses go all over town for Bf7 and Bf8, 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 Bf10 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.

traffic is hell...



## SUKHUMVIT

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

## LUMPINI

An island of green in an ocean of grey, **Lumpini Park** (Rama IV Road) is Bangkokians' favourite place to run, walk, do aerobics, relax by the lake or get buff on the public exercise machines. Early morning or early evening is best for working out. Muay Thai fans can get punch drunk at the **Lumpini Boxing Stadium**



on Tues, Fri, and Sat evenings. But in Thailand you're never too far away from the occult, so lurking nearby is the **Erawan Hotel Fertility Shrine** (2 Wireless Road) devoted to the Fertility Goddess Tubtim. The outdoor shrine, behind the hotel, is studded with wooden phalluses and other offerings made by the limp, the lovelorn, and mothers-in-waiting.

#### SAMUT PRAKAN

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

## MALLS & markets

*It's fair to say that everyone loves a good spending*

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

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

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

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

#### Pahurat Indian market

Located in 'Little India', this market is renowned for selling Indian, Malay and Thai clothes, textiles and accessories and costume jewellery. A walkthrough of tastes, smells and sights, you'll find a wide variety of Indian foods, sweets and spices on offer. It's popular with those who want fancy, affordable fashion, along with sequined fabrics, bows, tiaras and all the other trappings necessary to cut it as a bona fide Bollywood queen. Take the riverboat to Tha Saphaan Phut and it's just a short walk away.

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

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

**Khaosan Road** Known worldwide as the backpacker boulevard, this area is rapidly going upmarket. Boots the chemist have laid down roots here, along with Burger King and a couple

of swanky hotels. However, there's still plenty to suit those on a shoe string budget: hippie fashions, trinkets and souvenirs, bootleg CD's, silver jewelry and counterfeit ID cards. Young Thais who have embraced the concept of "going Inter", (international), also enjoy shopping, drinking and hanging out around here.

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

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

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

Guaranteed not to come alive at night and eat you.





An offer even Judas couldn't refuse

Cineplex, including an IMAX cinema, a 38-lane bowling alley and an enormous gym, not to mention a vast array of shops with outlets for a constellation of brands including Hermès, Chanel, Giorgio Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Versace, Chloé, Tod's, Bottega Veneta, Ermenegildo Zegna, Salvatore Ferragamo, Mulberry, Jimmy Choo, Emilio Pucci, Escada, Kenzo and Jim Thompson. Phew! Not so much a shopping centre as an all-day excursion.

**MBK** This marble mall complex includes over 2,000 fashion stores, a cinema complex, karaoke and hundreds of great budget food options. Extremely popular with Thai teens, MBK boasts half a floor of

mobile phones and is good for business cards, cheap fashion cosmetics and leather goods and is easily accessible by the Skytrain (take the Silom line to National Stadium Station).

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

**Gaysorn** The curiously named Gaysorn Plaza offers luxury items at top-end prices. Brands such as Louis Vitton, Fendi and Prada can be

found here. The top floor has a stylish tea room where ladies can nibble on snacks, relax in style and compare their purchases.

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

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

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 Orangerie 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.

## 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 Bf25 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*

### SUKHUMVIT BED SUPPERCLUB (INTERNATIONAL)

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

### CREPES & CO. (MEDITERRANEAN/CREPERIE)

18/1 Sukhumvit Soi 12, Skytrain Nana, 9am-midnight, 02-653 3990-1, major cards  
Really popular, longstanding restaurant. Reasonably priced crepes and Mediterranean fodder served in a cool and casual atmosphere. Look out for ongoing promotions and food festivals.

### LE DALAT INDOCHINE (VIETNAMESE)

14 Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain Asoke), 11am-2:30pm, 6-10pm, 02-661 7967-8, major cards  
Charming Vietnamese restaurant bursting with French-Vietnamese character and ambience. One of the few decent restaurants of its

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I'll have a bowl carbon monoxide with a side order of indeterminate particulate matter.

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)



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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.

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

**MARU TEPAK YAKI AND BAR** (JAPANESE)  
Sukhumvit Soi 33, (Skytrain Phrom Phong), Mon-Sat 11:30am-2pm, 6pm-11pm (Sunday/holidays 5pm-10pm), 02-662 1744-5, major cards  
Small but satisfying 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

**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



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## DARK SIDE OF THE SPOON

Words by Oliver Benjamin

### Chicken or Duck Embryo

(on the half-shell)

This falls into the egg category, but just barely. The eggs are fertilised and cooked just before the chick is ready to be born, then you unpeel and eat the entire thing. Environmentally friendly as it saves on packaging – poultry with its own takeaway box. Gives new meaning to the term “peckish.” Bill, please!

European favourites. Also has a bakery and delicatessen on site.

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

**SILOM & PATPONG BLUE ELEPHANT** (THAI)  
233 South Sathorn Road,

(Skytrain Surasak), 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30pm-11:30pm, 02-673 9353-4, major cards

Part of the world-renowned restaurant group of the same name, you can expect the same high standards. Royal-Thai cuisine alongside some more inventive creations. Set in a beautifully restored old building.

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

**LE BOUCHON** (FRENCH)  
37/17 Patpong 2, (Skytrain Saladaeng), Noon-4pm, 6:30pm-11:15pm, 02-234 9109, major cards  
A tiny Parisian-style 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.

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

**SIROCCO** (MEDITERRANEAN)  
63rd Fl, the Dome, State Tower, 1055 Silom Road, (Skytrain Saphan Taksin), 6pm-1am, 02-624 9555, major cards  
Outdoors, 63 stories up, the views and atmosphere are fantastic, but the food is

arguably over-priced. Also part of the same complex are the cool Distil bar and Mezzaluna Italian restaurant.

**ZANOTTI** (ITALIAN)  
Saladaeng Colonnade Condominium, Soi Saladaeng, (Skytrain Saladaeng, Subway Silom), 11:30am-2pm, 6pm-10:30pm, 02-636 0002, 02-636 0266, major cards  
Really popular restaurant with a reputation for quality food and atmosphere. Zanotti also has a comprehensive list of Italian wines and the enthusiastic chef/owner 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, 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 long-standing reputation helped along by gregarious Patty, who frequently visits Mexico for the latest taco trends.

**THE BARBICAN** (INTERNATIONAL & PUB)  
9/4-5 Thaniya Road, (Skytrain Saladaeng, Subway Silom), 11.30am-1am, 02-234 3590, major cards

Brasserie-type restaurant and wine bar popular with expats and after-work drinkers. Reasonably priced food and friendly, attentive staff. Win or Lose happy hours Monday-Friday 5pm-7pm and a bevy of other regular promotions regularly.

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

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

**AOI** (JAPANESE)  
132/10-11 Silom, Soi 6, (Skytrain Saladaeng), 11:30am-2:30pm, 5:30pm-10:30pm, 02-235 2321-2, major cards  
Popular with Japanese expats and locals, Aoi has a wide selection of quality, fresh seafood. Also has a sushi bar and now another branch at

Emporium shopping centre.

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

**BANGLAMPHU ROYAL INDIA** (INDIAN)  
95, B1 Soi Rambuttri, Chakkrapong Road, 1:30am to midnight, 02-282 6688

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

**SHOSHANA** (ISRAELI)  
86 Chakraphong Road, next to the petrol-station, 10am-midnight, 02-282 9948, no cards

The best in Banglamphu for cheap Israeli/Middle-Eastern food. Generous portions of humous, falafel, red rice, hazilim, cucumber and tomato salad, schnitzel, pita, and lovely chips for ฿35-60. 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 ฿60 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 ฿70 — only a couple of baht more than the shop.

**OH MY COD** (FISH & CHIPS)  
95D, Rambutri Village Inn, Soi Rambutri, Chakkrapong 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 ฿80 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 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,



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whilst home-grown culinary fair is available at Spice Market. Shintaro is the hotel's Japanese eatery and the Madison, a New York-style grill, has good steaks and seafood.

#### REMBRANDT HOTEL

19 Sukhumvit Soi 18, (Skytrain Asoke), 02-261 7100, major cards

Senor Pico is one of the few restaurants in town to serve up really delicious Mexican food in a lively atmosphere. Award-winning Rang Mahal is a fantastic Indian restaurant — reservations are recommended as the great food is no secret. For Thai food there's Red Pepper, for Italian, Da Vinci.

## NIGHT tripping

*Bangkok's nightlife scene may lack the late night stamina it once had, but it has grown increasingly sophisticated and eclectic. Where once the city's DJs, tunes and bands were several years behind the times, they're now poised on the shank of yesterday – and visiting DJs and bands keep bringing things more into the present day and beyond. From traditional English and Irish pubs to mega-clubs, live blues, tranquil lounges*

*and Japan's revenge for Hiroshima — karaoke — there are a staggering number of places to get legless. But 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 B190 and up. Happy hour is 6-9pm. Tuesday is two for one beers after 9pm, with gravel-voiced blues diva Georgia singing.

#### GULLIVER'S TRAVELER'S TAVERN

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

**BACCHUS** 20/6-7 Ruam Rudee, Pathumwan, (Skytrain Pleorchit), 02-650 8986, major cards, www.bacchus.tv.

Priding themselves on their stock and knowledge of fine wines. Bacchus also serves Italian and French fusion food with your own certified sommelier to guide you through the rocky terrain of matching the right wine with your grub.

**CONCEPT CM2** Basement, Novotel Siam Square (Skytrain Siam), 02-209 8888, www.cm2bkk.com, major cards.

Popular and notorious disco in the basement of the Novotel, CM2 attracts an international crowd of beautiful people who cluster around whiskey bottles and ogle each other. The main room showcases the resident band, playing from Friday to Wednesday. There's also the Boom Room playing Hip-Hop or Sensations Karaoke for the self-indulgent and their tin-eared friends.

#### WITCH'S TAVERN 306/1

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

#### RCA/RACHADA

The place for young and restless Thais out on the pull. Royal City Avenue is a huge strip of clubs, pubs and bars. For many years it has been pop central but recently reborn as the mecca



A rose tattoo in any other place would smell as sweet?

# Q BAR BANGKOK

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**GLOBALISM TUESDAY**  
AFRO, LATIN AND PERCUSSIVE HOUSE  
DJS: JOEKI, SUMI

**BLOCK PARTY WEDNESDAY**  
HIPHOP AND FUNK PARTY CLASSICS  
DJS: OCTO, SUMI

**LIQUID THURSDAY**  
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of Bangkok's nightlife scene. Nearby discos Hollywood and Dance Fever (off Rachadapisek Rd) are gargantuan, whisky-soaked dance halls. Good for those seeking a local-style drinking experience.

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

**ROUTE 66** Block D, RCA. 06-300 0817, major cards, [www.route66club.com](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.saxophonepub.com).

Live blues, R&B, Jazz, Rock, Reggae and even Ska house bands enclosed in a woody, cozy wrapper seven nights a week, from around 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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.



There once was a place in Nantucket...

**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**

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UNTAMED TRAVEL

Daeng skytrain), 02-234 3279, [www.telephonepub.com](http://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](http://www.balconypub.com), major cards.*

The best Happy Hour in Soi 4 offers cut-rate specials (Bt49) on cocktails and brewskies from 7pm-9pm. Sister bar of Telephone, 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](http://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](http://www.silkbars.com), major cards.*

Khaosan has definitely gone upscale—any fool can see

## Tears in Bangkok

There won't be a dry eye in Impact Arena or a cigarette lighter not held aloft on January 15th when Eric Clapton plays "Tears in Heaven" for his encore. With 18 Grammys and 50 million album sales under his belt, Clapton has been around the block a few times and is sure to put on a good show, backed up by Derek Trucks and Chris Stainton. Tickets from Thai Ticketmaster go for as little as Bt1,000 (take binoculars)



up to Bt5,000 for a seat close enough to count the great man's nostril hairs. Rumour has it, at this show only, he's going to tell us who shot the sheriff.

*Eric Clapton plays Singapore on the 13th, Bangkok on the 15th, Hong Kong on the 17th, Shanghai on the 20th, Seoul on the 23rd, New Zealand on the 27th, then does nine gigs in Australia before playing another 24 in the US and Canada, after which he'll probably go home for a nice cup of tea and a lie down.*

that—and the Silk Bar isn't the only trendy bar on the street. That said, the design gives a nod to the traditional style of bar featuring a large street-front drinkery for watching the parade of nations walking aimlessly up and down the road. Beers aren't cheap, but you're definitely with a better class of people.

**DONG DEA MOON** *54/1 Rambutri Road (behind the Wat).*

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

**CAFÉ DEMOC** *Corner of*

*Ratchadamnoen Road beside Democracy Monument, 02-622 2571, no cards.*

Everything from Trance to Hip-Hop to the latest dance beats are on the musical menu, plus requests, in this good-looking, Euro-style venue. Menu has Thai dishes and small Thai beers for Bt80.

**PRANAKORN** *Just off Ratchadamnoen Klang Road, first Soi west of Thanon Tanoo, 58/2 Soi Damnoen Klang Tai, 02-522 0282, no cards.*

This bar is like four different venues in one: on the ground floor, replete with posters for old Marlon Brando and Elvis movies, the DJ plays retro rock and Jazz and there's often really decent live Thai music. The second floor is an art and photography gallery that sometimes features live music and even theatre. On the third floor, there's more dancey and alternative tunes, along with

a pool table and couches. Up top is the roof, with a great view of the illuminated Golden Mount, lots of tables, chilled-out tunes and classic tracks. There's a big menu of splendid and affordable Thai dishes and booze is cheap. Considering the bar is close to Khaosan and Café Democ, it attracts a surprisingly low quota of white backpacking trash. The majority are Thai Bohemians.

#### GULLIVER'S TRAVELLER'S TAVERN

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

The pub with the tuk-tuk over the door on the corner of Khaosan. If you're aching for English football, Farang food, 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



Silom Soi 4 / Tel: 02 632 7883 / [www.tapasroom.net](http://www.tapasroom.net) "Best Bar in Bangkok" Metro High Five Awards 2003

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 loungeur too lazy or frightened to explore greater Bangkok. This comfy black and red replication of Hades plays mostly hip hop through an excellent state-of-the-art sound system to a crowd of Thai and International boogyers.

**SUNSET STREET** Bang in the middle of Khaosan Road. The stylish looking Sunset Street is unmissable under its big neon sign, with the front bar being set over two levels for maximum street gawking. Stroll inside and the place goes on, and on, and on. Past the shiny white lounging area in the front you'll find a nightclub, restaurant, another bar and a fountain, set in front of a beautifully restored, century-old colonial-style building housing a Starbucks. In all, the design is stylish, the prices are decent and it's a nice place to hang out.

**IMMORTAL BAR** First floor in Bayon Building on Khaosan, no cards. The Immortal's fortunes have waxed and waned over the years but is currently in favour as a Hip-Hop club. The DJ tends to play similar sets each night but look out for visiting performers. Despite its underground vibe, the place is packed out every night with backpackers and Khaosan's crazier denizens, bumping and pitching in a seething, sweaty mass.

**THE CLUB** Under the huge neon sign, about halfway up Khaosan on the north side, 02-629 1010, Visa cards. This cavernous, Euro-style architectural wonder is a hit with the young Thais who populate Khaosan at night — especially on weekends. Few Farangs in sight here. Features an extensive Thai and Western menu, including hefty steaks at relatively reasonable prices.

**BRICK BAR** Back of Buddy Lodge on Khaosan Road, 02-629 4747, 02-629 4848, www.buddylodge.com, major cards except Amex. Huge bar hidden in the bowels of Buddy Lodge. The Brick Bar is notable as one of the few venues on Khaosan to feature live bands on a

regular basis (Jazz, Blues, Ska from 8pm). Get a seat on the upstairs balcony to check out the crowd, below.

**SUZIE PUB** 108/5-9 Khaosan Road. Down the Soi from Nat Guesthouse, 02-282 4459, no cards. Once a rock and dance club shared by tourists and Thais alike, today you'll be lucky to squeeze through the crush of Thai students, clustering around whiskey bottles and wriggling to Hip-Hop. The bar out the front is a fine place to drink a beer and ogle the queue.

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

**AD HERE THE 13TH** 13 Samsen Rd. Walk up Chakrapong Rd from the Police Station end of Khaosan about 400 metres, cross the bridge over the canal and it's on your

left - you can't miss it. This small but mighty gem of a blues bar features a house band led by beatific guitarist extraordinaire Pong and husky-voiced belting singer Georgia and just keeps getting better. Special guests join in regularly (ask Pong if you want to sit in), and there's a sizzling jazz band on Mondays. It feels like a house party, with free and friendly mingling in one of the only places in town where the invisible stone wall between Thais and foreigners was never built. Beers are Bt80.

**BAGHDAD CAFÉ** On Samsen Road next to Ad Here the 13th (see previous page). Great little sheesha bar. If you've never smoked sheesha (a traditional Arabic bong) before, you haven't really lived. The pipe is loaded with fruit-flavoured tobacco and you and your mates take turns pulling smoke through the hose. Since it's small, the bar is always crowded and Roachie, the affable Australian host, is always on for a chat and has an encyclopaedic knowledge of all things Middle-Eastern. Bt180 buys you a charged and lit bong which will last you and your mates for an hour or more. But leave the wacky-weed at home, kids.

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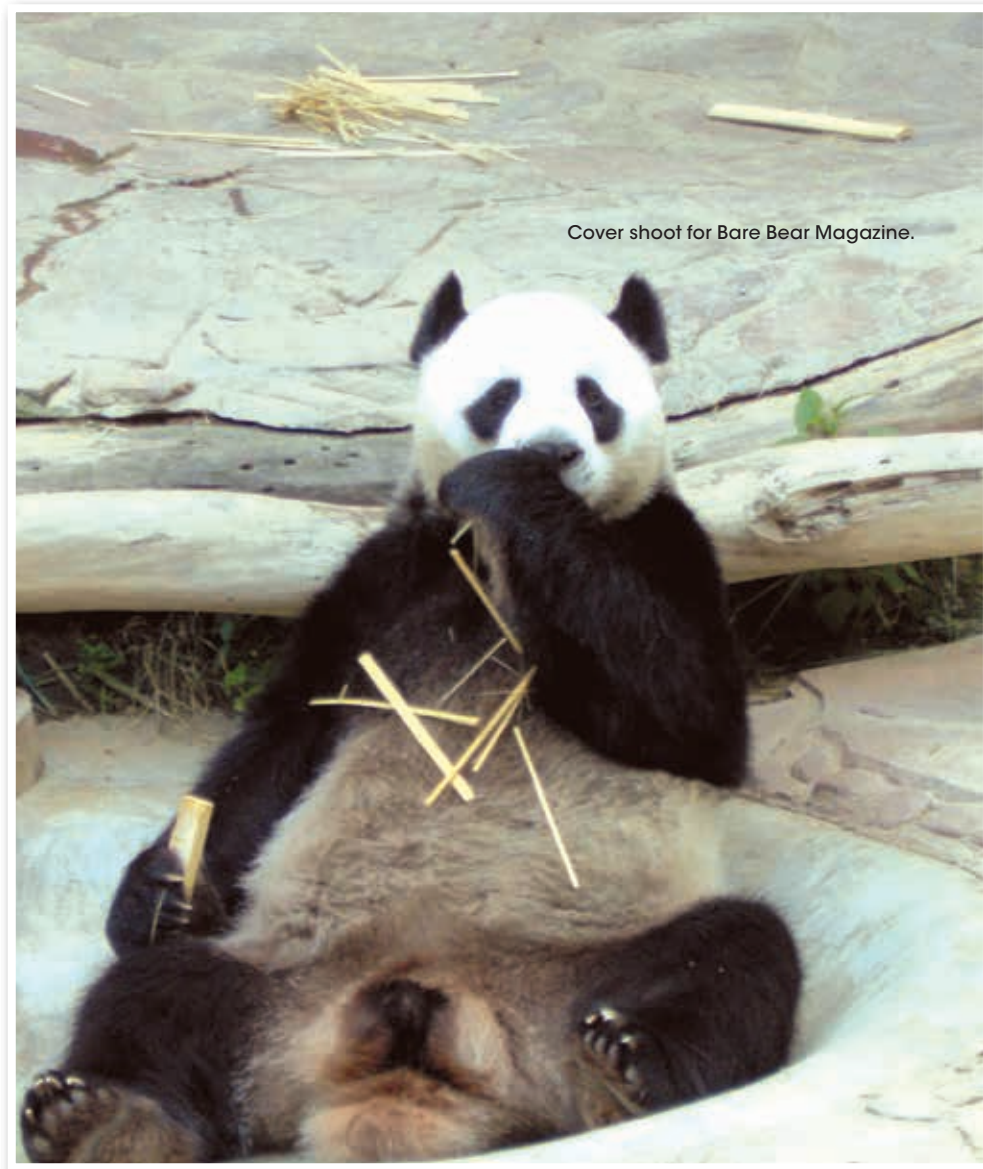
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# chiang MAI

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

## PLACES TO CRASH

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



Cover shoot for Bare Bear Magazine.

swimming pool. Looking for something a bit more quaint? **Mountain View Guest House** on Sri Poom road and **Gap House** off Ratchadamnoen road both feature Lanna-style architecture and a leafy garden. **Sri Pat Guest House** on Moon Muang Soi 7 is a small boutique-style hotel catering to those looking for a little more comfort. Farther afield you'll find many other popular gems like **Julie Guest House** - people who stay there love it so much and so vocally that you wonder what they put in the food. **Daret's**

**Guest House** benefits from its perfect location right at Tha Pae Gate, with a fun outdoor eating area and cheap, good dishes. Those seeking upscale accommodation can find world-class-and-wonderful crash palaces like **Baan Sabai**, the **Mandarin Oriental Dhara Devi**, **The Four Seasons Resort**, **Tamarind Village** and **Ratchamankha**. Your pretty penny will purchase outrageously picturesque panoramas - all four mix modern amenity with ancient mystical charm. Finally, for those truly skint,

head on over to **Banana Guest House** for dorm beds at ฿50 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**

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**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.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.

## 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).

#### NIGHTTRIPPING

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

#### FEEDING TIME

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

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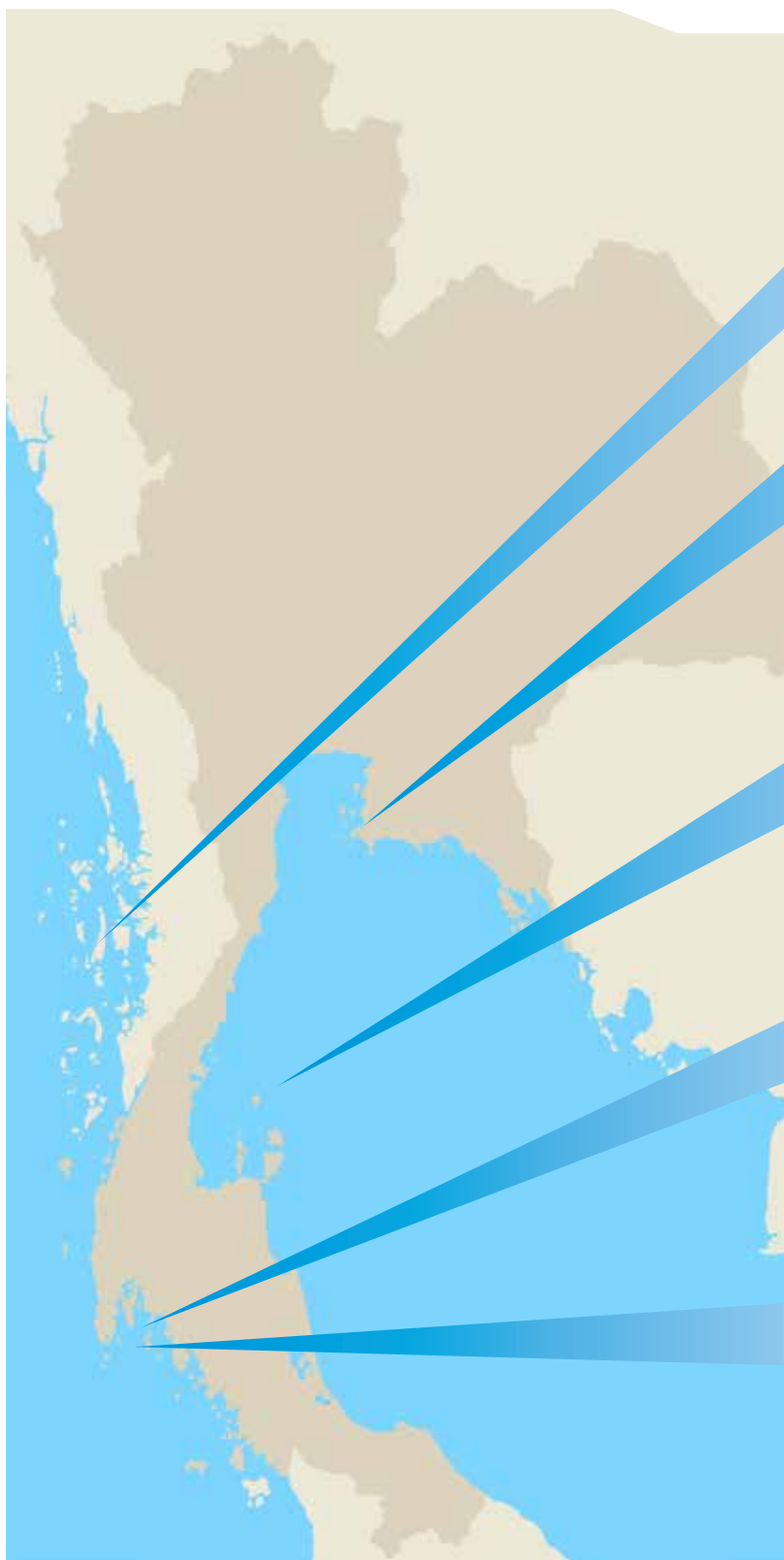
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**THE SIMILANS**

The reputation of these nine islands has made international waves, as they are one of the earth's greatest living treasures for the amphibiously inclined. Situated around 100km northwest of Phuket, you'll most likely have to book a liveaboard to navigate these pristine waters. Some of the more legendary sites here are Elephant Head, off Island #8, which is renowned for its scenic swim-throughs and plethora of lionfish, coral trout, yellow goatfish, and on occasion, the 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 Bohput 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 Bohput 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

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**Shambala** (Bt650 and up), has a fine restaurant, and is situated in the centre of Ban Rak, on the beach. **Saboey** 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 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



Unlucky Alf comes to Samui

pot at your table. For Bt89, including ice cream, the food is surprisingly good.

#### BAN RAK/BIG BUDDHA

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

#### 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

**Fashion 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.

#### BOHPUT/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, Bt1,400 per head. A great way to see the island is to take a **Samui Safari** (07-741-5123-5). You can choose half- or whole-day trips, from snorkelling and elephant trekking to 4x4 off-roading. There is also a world-class golf course on the island, the **Santiburi Golf and County Club** (07-741 8557), or try mini golf at **Yogi Bear Ha Ha** (01-787 9148), situated on a back road between Bohput and Chaweng. Samui also has **Football Golf** (09-771 7498) near Chong Mon, and **Frisbee Golf**, in Bophut past the **Monkey Theatre**. Heading back to the zone of sanity, **Red Bicycles** (07-726 7202) rents mountain bikes and arranges tours through the jungle and beyond. A less strenuous way to see the island is from the sea: **Kia Ora** (07-745 2264) catamaran will take you out to sea with a fully stocked bar. For more action try **Samui Quads and Paintball** (01-371 0744). A newcomer to the sports scene in Samui is two freshwater fishing lakes stocked with huge fish in Taling Ngam ([enquiries@fishingthailand.com](mailto:enquiries@fishingthailand.com)). Meanwhile, at the **Samui Crocodile Farm**, near the airport, you can watch a brave fool stick his head in the jaws of a prehistoric monster. Cold-blooded,

reptilian capers and human daring are also on the cards at the **Samui Snake Farm** (07-741-8680-1), where the Guinness-record-breaking Scorpion Queen and Centipede King also hold court. For *CSI* fans fond of forensic mysteries, **Luang Pho Daeng** was a monk whose undecomposed body is in a glass case for viewing at the Khunaram Temple near the Namuang Waterfall. For boat charters and diving, talk to **Aquademia** (01-091 0107). Bring a copy of **Untamed Travel** to **Aquademia** and get a 10 percent discount.

**ROADTRIPPING**

The two main taxis are green and yellow aircon cars and *songthaews* (shared pickups). A ride in a car costs about Bt300 and they never put their meters on, just as well as they're rigged to hit Bt500 in five seconds. For short trips expect to pay Bt150/200, but make sure you haggle over the price first. *Songthaews* are Bt50-100 for the longer journeys and Bt30 for short trips, but it's every man for himself after dark. Renting a motorbike is Bt150 per day, but remember that road accidents are the number-one cause of death in Thailand, with Samui being ground zero. There's no green cross code, or crosswalks

on Samui and it's getting more dangerous by the minute. Renting a Jeep is a much safer option: **Budget** is insured so that's your best bet if you don't want to end your visit in tears or the Emergency Room.

**WAY TO GO FERRY**

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

**PLANE**

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

**TRAIN**

A sleeper ticket is Bt900 from Bangkok-Surat Thani for an aircon, 2<sup>nd</sup>-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**

*The island is peaking this month with some full-on parties, like the Full Moony on Jan 3; the Half Moony on Jan 10-12, the Black Moon on 17-19, yet another Half Moon on 25-27 and the ultra-rare Blue Moon for Didgeridoo Scholars date and time TBA. At the former bashes, the young ones will be havin' it to hard house, tech house, sci-fi house, big house, extremely boring and repetitive house, and whatever in-house urinals they can heave into. But if you're piqued by parties, don't fret, coz hippies, librarians and people who like to assemble IKEA furniture can find havens of solitude at outlying beaches like Had Salad and Bottle Beach.*

**PLACES TO CRASH:**

**HAD RIN:**

Get there a week before the party or book first to ensure a

UNTIMED TRAVEL

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 Phangan is a string of beautiful white sandy coves; it has the best coral reef and great sunset views. In Sri Thanu, **Chai Country** is a top place where Chai takes guests on unique 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 Phangan, 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.

**NORTHEAST:**

On the more remote side of the island there are three very popular beaches; Bottle Beach is old-skool Phangan, 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 Phangan 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. Phangan has acres of undisturbed tropical rainforest and a wild jungle interior. There are overnight mountain-treks and coastline walks, temples to visit, elephant treks, paintball, spa and meditation retreats to sort your head out and it's also a pretty good place to do bugger all!

**NIGHTTRIPPING:**

Phangan 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. Phangan'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 for 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 Koh Samui. Then take a ferry to Phangan (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).

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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

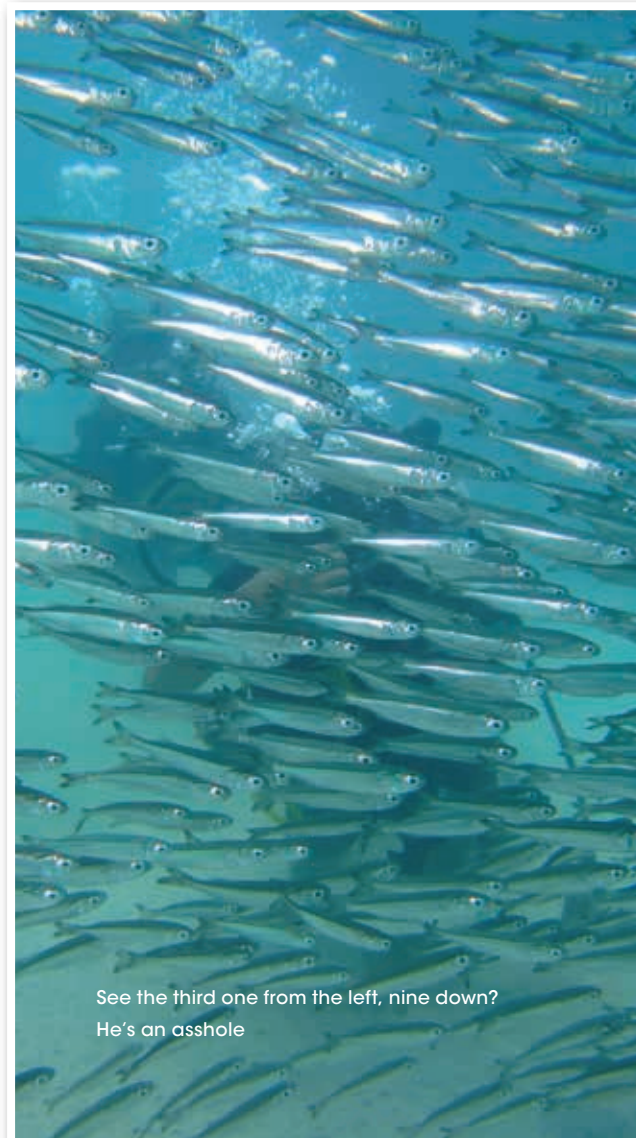
aircon. Check out [www.untamed-travel.com](http://www.untamed-travel.com) for latest accommodation deals.

### 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



See the third one from the left, nine down?  
He's an asshole

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-

<p><a href="http://www.phangan.info">www.phangan.info</a></p> <p><b>www.phangan.info</b></p> <p>FULLY COMPREHENSIVE ISLAND GUIDE ON-LINE ACCOMMODATION BOOKING SERVICE ISLAND &amp; FULL MOON PARTY INFORMATION PRINT AND WEB MARKETING SOLUTIONS tel: 077 238765 info@phangan.info</p>	<p><b>KP PROPERTY</b> AND BUSINESS AGENCY</p> <p><a href="http://www.kp-property.com">www.kp-property.com</a></p> <p>Invest in one of the fastest growing property markets in Asia with Koh Phangan's leading property consultant. Offering real estate, project management, legal advice and business services. tel: 077 377018 info@kp-property.com</p>	<p><b>VGD</b> 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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largest beach. **Sunshine Resort, Koh Tao Tropicana, Taa Tao Lagoon and Ko Tao Resort** are all recommended.

**DAYTRIPPING**

As a major diving certification centre, blessed with an abundance of marine life and easily accessible dive sites, many would-be Cousteaus choose to start their dive careers here. A full range of courses can be completed with SSI and PADI being the major standards. Tech-diving courses are available for the less faint hearted. Alternatively, snorkelling is another way to see the fishes. With many secluded bays and beaches, try a day snorkelling and swimming at **Jansom Bay** or **Hing Wong**. If you're still keen for some water-based activities check out **MV Sports, Blacktip Water Sports** or **Switch Water Sports**, all offer wakeboarding, water skiing and the rest.

For those who prefer terra firma there is plenty to keep you occupied. If you're the active type, trekking trails are plentiful and the most arduous routes reward the survivors with isolated bays and crystal-clear waters or mountain-top views and postcard-photo opportunities. Alternatively, hire mountain bikes and cycle your way to fitness taking in the scenery. Try your hand at bowling and mini-golf at Koh Tao's new Leisure Park.

**NIGHTTRIPPING**

With hundreds of divers completing courses daily, there is always a vibrant party-scene on the rock. A regular mix of home-grown and visiting DJ's play a variety of musical styles, assuring the

freshness 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.

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

**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



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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, Thaweewong 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 Thaweewongse 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-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

## From Sea to Sky



Excitement is high on the Andaman coast with the launch of Thailand's newest airline, Destination Air. No, not another budget operator hauling visa-runners down to Singapore but the country's first seaplane service.

Sure, Phuket's got an airport but if you want to go to Krabi, Phi Phi or Koh Lanta then it's a long ferry ride with the hoi poloi. But no more! Destination Air can meet you at the airport or your hotel and whisk the busy and/or cashed-up punter to scenic Phi Phi in as little as 13 minutes. They're running 12 flights a day, that's one every two hours, piloted by experienced Aussie, Canadian and American seaplane pilots. Even if you're not in a rush, the planes are available for excursions to some of the Andaman's best swimming and snorkelling bays.

*Destination Air takes off on February 1<sup>st</sup>, book online at [www.destinationair.com](http://www.destinationair.com)*

*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, Soi 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

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No artificial ingredients ... just pure and soulful music the way nature intended.

Koh tao

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, just walk to the south end of the beach and pick you 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**.



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**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 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



Let's go this way.  
I could use a decent evacuation.

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:** 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 "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

UNPACKED TRAVEL



water in Saladan to some classy European food as well. **Faim de Loup Bakery** on Pra-ae beach fulfils all of your patisserie-baked 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.

#### 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 Pheung**. Lanta also has plenty of mangroves to kayak around.

#### WAY TO GO

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

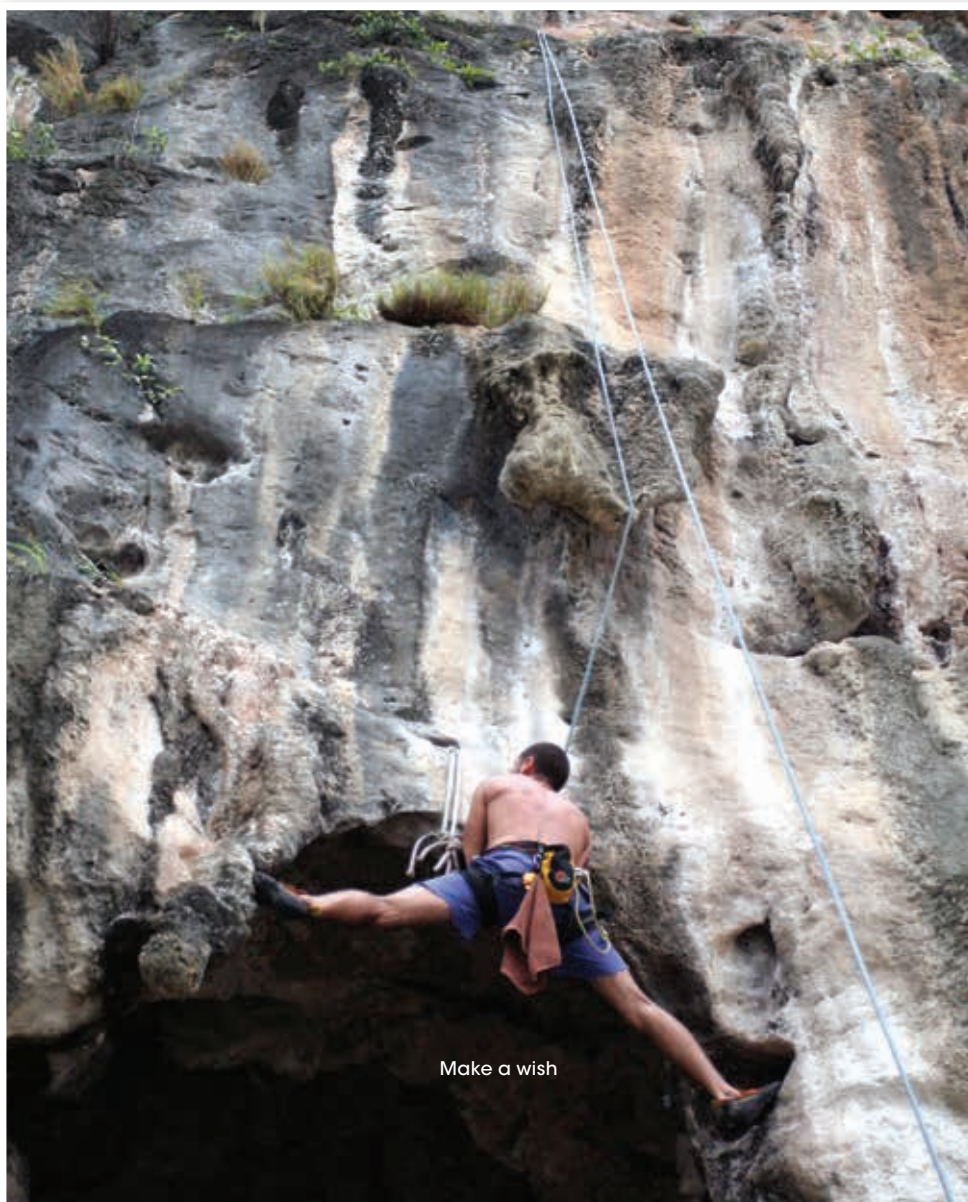
#### DAYTRIPPING

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 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

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Make a wish

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](http://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 (฿1,500) 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** (฿2,000). For snorkelling, diving and water-sports equipment visit the **One Stop Dive Centre**.

**RAILAY**

A healthy and hedonistic hideaway for backpackers, couples or families, travel surveys repeatedly vote Railay as one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Split into four stretches of sand, the East Beach, West Beach, Phra Nang and Tonsai, the Railay peninsula offers the traveller a multitude of ways to spend their time. Relax while watching a magenta sunset, or sweat it out climbing the megalithic limestone cliffs, which, half a billion years ago, formed part of the world's largest coral reef. On the west (sunset) side, room prices are higher. **Railay Bay Resort and Spa** offers the cheapest in luxury with rooms ranging from ฿1,050 to ฿2,000. **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

Krabi has to offer within a short hike. The level of accommodation in Ao Nang has climbed over the years. **Wanna's Place** has rooms for around ฿900. The **Somkiet Buri** resort is in a wonderful location with rooms that go for about ฿1,200. Nowadays, the average "budget" fan-room in Ao Nang comes with hot water, TV and costs in the region of ฿350. Numerous guesthouses behind the

beachfront are a safe bet with friendly staff.

**NIGHTRIPPING & FEEDING TIME**

A regular haunt is the **Irish Rover Bar & Grill** for its lively atmosphere and some marvellously meaty dishes, good tunes and live sports on the TV. For the more serious sports freak, **JJ's Sports Bar and Café** is notable for its giant screen, decent pub food and a bouncy, enjoyable atmosphere. The

juiciest steaks in town can be found at **Café 154**. Live music pumps out of the **Encore Café**: jazz, blues or good ol' rock 'n' roll will put a bounce in your step. **The Last Fisherman** and **The Last Café** offer a relaxed atmosphere on the beach, where you can soak up a cocktail and the last rays of the setting sun before tucking into a variety of local dishes. From the old days, **The Luna Bar** has survived thanks to their UV lighting, neon paint,

UNRANKED TRAVEL

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 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.



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It was Mai's job to guard the sandpit... but she never knew why

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.

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Putting the 'ass' back in 'class'

## hua hin

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

### PLACES TO CRASH

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

aircon rooms opposite the Sofitel from 1,400 B. For those travellers still on the comfort verses beer quota kick, try the **London Guesthouse** or **Top Marks** (it deserves them) in Poolsuk road, Bt250-1,200. Both offer good sports coverage and Western food in their popular downstairs bars.

### FEEDING TIME

Want the best tom yum in Thailand? Try the **Sirin** opposite Burger King. Gastronomes wanting a second opinion should visit **La Mer** or **Supatra** in Khao Takiap. Both of which will delight the tastebuds without giving your wallet a coronary. In town **La Brasserie de Paris** on the waterfront stands apart from the competition offering a French country twist to Thai seafood and steaks. Street-stall aficionados should check out the **Grand Night Market** (4pm-12pm). For a little more northeastern spice try the strip between Soi 88 and the railway station. Breakfast is best served, at either end of the day, by **Crawford's Irish Bar** in Poonsuk road next to the temple.

### NIGHTTRIPPING

If "Hello, welcome" is your kind of thing then head

down to **Soi 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. Buses from Hua Hin to Bangkok go every 45min, 3am-9:30pm.

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

# koh CHANG

*Koh Chang is stuffed to the gills with tourists in January, but if you've got nowhere to stay, try the resorts on Pearl Beach, some nice small place midway between White Sands and Klong Prao Beaches. More importantly, our correspondent on Koh Chang has posted some humble requests on his website - [www.iamkohchang.com](http://www.iamkohchang.com) - for you to make donations via Pay Pal. Choice 1: Buy me an Ipod or some other impulse purchase gadget that I'll only use when I'm in an airport Departure Lounge. Choice 2: Give a few baht to the Koh Chang Animal Foundation and I personally guarantee you'll have a warm, fuzzy feeling throughout the holiday season. Choice 3: Ignore both of the other choices.*

**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.

**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

UNPACKED TRAVEL

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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 Kilkenny 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 Bodework Spa, Klomg Prao & Kai Bae or try Sima Massage, Klomg 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 Jungleyway, both in Klomg 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

## koh WAI

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 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

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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 mactete an hour off the journey.

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

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

Free test drive with purchase of bedspread.



**BayWatch Bar** @ Vong Duan Beach Koh Samet, Thailand

**hh Yes!**

**SEE YA WHEN WE MEET YA!**

UNTHINKED TRAVEL



## Tourist Season's Open, Bag your Limit.

Never one to call a glass half-full, Gordon Sharpless sights his steely eye at Cambodia's woes and shoots from the lip.

The transport system out of Poipet has gone completely crap again. It's hard to argue that it had ever improved, but for a time in some respects it did. After the government decided to create their own transport mafia, the prices of taxis Poipet to Siem Reap were jacked to \$45 US, with \$30 to the driver, \$10 as a "government tax" and \$5 to the touts on the ground that "assisted" the tourists. And for quite a period of time they did their job surprisingly well, getting the tourists through the border and on to the transport station a kilometer and a half away and taking their \$5 cut and that was that.

Starting a couple of months ago when the road fell apart and the taxis needed more money – what, you think getting your car towed through water for a few kilometers is free? – the touts, seeing that tourists would actually pay these increased fares (\$60-70) have held on to these rates, even if the drivers have not. And blinded by greed, helpful politeness has been replaced with belligerent arrogance and I've heard about a dozen reports of tourists getting charged from \$60 to \$80 and even that took an hour of haggling, of being followed and bullied by these touts, which several locals have referred to as gangsters and seem no less enthused at their presence than any of us, and every dollar over \$40 is going into these guys' pockets. Hmm, \$30 to the taxi, \$10 to the guy upstairs with the stars and bars on his shirt, and \$20 or \$30 to the "gangsters" on the street. Something ain't right. Poipet has a serious transport problem again. Good luck.

Heading to Siem Reap soon? Fly. And no, the buses sold from guesthouses and travel agencies on and around Khaosan Road are no better.

Speaking of "gangsters," which is becoming a popular word in the local vocabulary, PM Hun Sen and National Police Chief Hok Lundy have decided that Cambodia has a "gangster" problem. Something just about every expat has known for as long as there has been a problem, which, limitations of anecdotal evidence notwithstanding, does seem to be getting worse. Don't see too much of it in Siem Reap, but I hear a lot of comments about it from Phnom Penh. Two or three teenage punks on a Honda Wave riding up and down and around Monivong, robbery, simple assault, or let's just hassle the farang with a Khmer girl on the back of his bike. Seems there are too many kids graduating school with worthless degrees and no job to find.

A few people I know have had some recent unfortunate run-ins. Nothing serious, a couple of robberies but no violence involved thankfully, a threat of a thrashing, punk stuff. Apparently when these kids can't find any Westerners to harass they turn on themselves. A few months ago on a street corner of Norodom somewhere around street 170 or thereabouts, at about 11pm I saw a group of five or six giving two other punks a good belting. My motodop even asked if I wanted to stop and watch. Perhaps natural selection will take over and the punks will simply annihilate each other.

Seems Thailand is struggling to keep tourists. Well, if what I saw on a popular travel forum last week is any indication it seems the folks staffing the tourist information booths in Bangkok must be desperate to keep folks from leaving the country, certainly if they are going to spout shit like this: "The Thai Tourist information office said not to go to Cambodia because all the beaches are in bad shape due to the tidal wave and that it's the typhoon season." Puh-lease! The tsunami never came near Cambodia, ...can't say the same for Thailand, though. But let's be honest, I'm not a big fan of Sihanoukville but I'm even less of a fan of such blatant dishonesty. So I have two suggestions: One, don't ask Thais for advice about visiting Cambodia (unless you can find one that's actually been there) and two, stay away from Thai beaches. Since the coup, the military have set up bases on every beach to prevent the former PM from sneaking back to Thailand in a canoe. Several females have reported strip searches and at least twenty tourists have been executed for suggesting the coup might have been just a tad anti-democratic. *Som num na.*

# PHNOM PENH capital GAINS

## PLACES TO CRASH

<\$20: The young traveller ghettos are around Boeung Kak Lake (Street 93) and the centre of town (**Narin's**, **Capitol**, **TAT**). One's polluted, the other is noisy. Skip both and try **Dara Reang Sey Hotel**, corner of streets 13 & 118, or the **Bodhi Tree**, street 113 opposite Tuol Sleng Museum.

\$20-\$50: Along the river the **California 2** and the **Tonle Sap Guesthouse** are recommended. In-town the **Billabong** (\$35-\$50) is a peaceful oasis amongst the chaos. Those visiting Phnom Penh seeking nightlife might want to check out **Flamingo's**, just off Street 51 and in the heart of it all.

\$50+: **Raffles Le Royal** or the **Intercontinental** are the places to go but the **Sunway**, at Wat Phnom, and the **Bougainvillier** or **Amanjaya** along the river are cheaper (the latter is not affiliated with the famous Aman Resorts).

## NIGHTTRIPPING

Though not Bangkok or Singapore, Phnom Penh has come a long way in the past few years. And yes, it's safe to go out at night. For the most comprehensive listings of food and drink, grab a copy of the free *Cambodia Pocket Guide - Drinking & Dining Phnom Penh*. But in a nutshell, along the river there are notable holes-in-the wall such as the **Cantina** and the **Jungle Bar**, as well as larger street-corner establishments like the **Foreign Correspondent's Club** (FCC) and the **Riverside**, and single guys might wander into **DV8**. A huge selection of bars on Street 51 between streets 136 and 178 include the **Walkabout** (open 24 hours), **Howie's** (a very late-night joint), and **Shanghai Bar** (a single guy's place as is much of this neighbourhood). Forget about the **Heart of Darkness**, not worth the effort unless dodging bullets is your thing. Elsewhere is **Sharky Bar** (Street 130), a big bar with lots of pool tables and girls. Further up the river is the **Green Vespa**, and attached to the Tonle Sap Guesthouse on Street 104 is the **Pickled Parrot**, one of several worthwhile places on this

street. Along Street 178 sports fans will want to seek out the **Gym Bar**, for a touch of Irish, visit **Rory's**, and the **Ginger Monkey** was voted bar of the year by readers of the aforementioned *Cambodia Pocket Guide*. **Talkin to a Stranger** down on Street 294 is another highly rated establishment with good eats, too.

## FEEDING TIME

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

## DAYTRIPPING

Khmer Rouge horrors are documented at the **Tuol Sleng Museum** in town and the **Killing Fields Memorial** at Choeung Ek. Cultural attractions include **Wat Phnom**, which according to legend is the site of the historic founding of the city in 1372. Near the river are the **Silver Pagoda** and **Royal Palace**. Make sure you pay the camera fee if you plan to take photos - they enforce it. Nearby, the **National Museum** has lots of carvings and stuff, much of it lifted from Angkor. **River cruises** are available, cheap and expensive varieties, the former from boats docked along the riverfront waiting just for you, expensive ones complete with lunch and drinks - check with your hotel. Shopping - **Central Market** for browsing, **Russian Market** for spending. Small art galleries on Street 178 and Street 240.

## WAY TO GO

### FROM THAILAND

**AIR:** Bangkok Airways, around Bt5,000/10,000 one-way/return from Bangkok, Air Asia

one flight a day as low as \$25, taxes included (excluding departure tax). Cambodia 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.



When you're stoned you'll eat anything

UNFAMMED TRAVEL

I dunno, what you do you want for dinner?



## SIEM REAP majestic PILE

### PLACES TO SLEEP

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

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

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

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

### NIGHTTRIPPING

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

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

### FEEDING TIME

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

### DAYTRIPPING

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

### BEYOND THE TEMPLES

Go see the river carvings and

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

### WAY TO GO

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

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

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

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

### VISAS & BORDER CROSSINGS

#### TO/FROM THAILAND

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

#### TO/FROM VIETNAM

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

#### TO/FROM LAOS

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

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

## ENTER THE TWO DRAGONS

Long time *Untamed Travel Magazine* correspondent Gordon Sharpless has in a short period of time managed to get married, become a father, and fulfil his life's-dream of opening his own guesthouse in his adopted home of Siem Reap. The **Two Dragons Guesthouse** in Wat Bo Village has raised the bar of the crowded Siem Reap budget and lower-middle accommodation scene with the nicest rooms at the best prices, along with cable-TV, free tea and coffee, curtains, beds, even pillows! The real gold is in photographer Gordon's encyclopaedic knowledge of the area, advice on avoiding scams, and a home-spun menu, the brainchild of his Thai wife (who might even cook the meal for you...). There's even a pickup service from the Poipet border (a shithole, somewhere you'll want to leave right away) so call ahead on +855-63-965-107 or 063-965-107 (inside Cambodia) or [twodragons@talesofasia.com](mailto: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 Durlin”) 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](http://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 Durlin”) 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 **Attica** and **Ministry of Sound**. All three are open Thurs-Sat till 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](http://www.hotel81.com.sg)) and **Fragrance** ([www.fragrancehotel.com](http://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](http://www.sleepysams.com)), **Hangout**, and the **Inn Crowd** (all about \$25/night).

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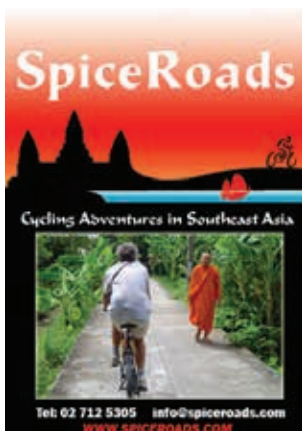
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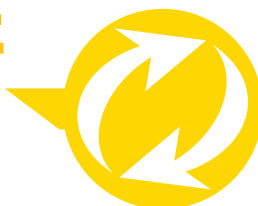
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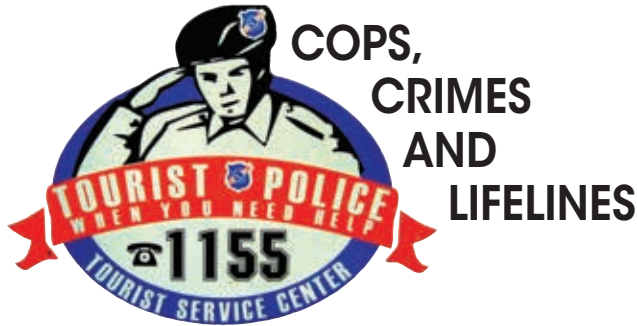


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**THAILAND**

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

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

**HONG KONG**

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

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

**SINGAPORE**

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

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

**CAMBODIA**

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

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

**LAOS**

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

**Lifeline:** Ha ha ha.

**LOST CREDIT CARDS**

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

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

**CREDIT CARD HOTLINES IN THAILAND**

- VISA** 02-263-2091-2
- MASTERCARD** 02-670-4088-99
- AMEX** 02-273-0022
- DINERS** 02-232-4100



**EMERGENCY CASH**

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

**hospitals**

**THAILAND**

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

**BANGKOK**

**Bangkok Adventist Mission Hospital** (private)

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

**Bangkok Genral Hospital** (Private)

2 Soi Soonvijai 7 New Petchburi Rd, Tel:02-3103000 Hotline: 1719

**Bumrungrad Hospital** (Private)

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

**Samitivej Hospital** (Private)

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

**CHIANG MAI**

**Chiangmai ram Hospital** (private)

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

**KOH SAMUI**

**Samui International Hospital**

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

**CAMBODIA**

**AEA International** (Cambodia Pte Ltd.)

House 1611, Street 51, Sang-Kat Boeung Peng, Khon 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

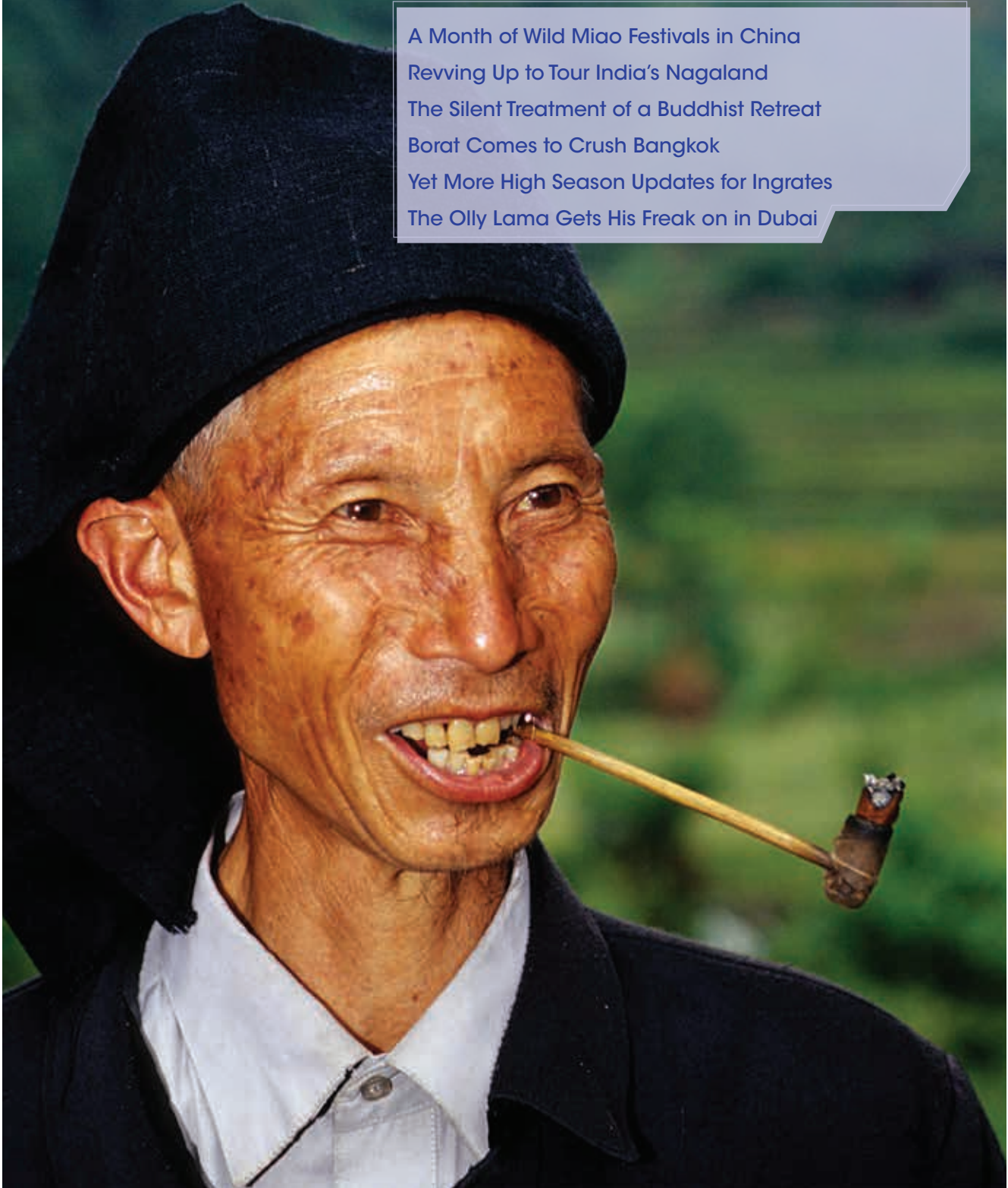
**THAILAND EMERGENCY NUMBERS**

- 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

UNTAMED TRAVEL

# UNTAMED TRAVEL NEXT MONTH

A Month of Wild Miao Festivals in China  
Reving Up to Tour India's Nagaland  
The Silent Treatment of a Buddhist Retreat  
Borat Comes to Crush Bangkok  
Yet More High Season Updates for Ingrates  
The Olly Lama Gets His Freak on in Dubai





# avatar

## *Spa Mountain Suites*

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

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

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

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Resort Tel +66 (0) 5659-6164 Fax +66 (0) 5659-6109  
[www.avatarsuites.com](http://www.avatarsuites.com) • [sales@avatarsuites.com](mailto:sales@avatarsuites.com)



# Culture



Siem Reap (Cambodia)



Sukhothai (Thailand)



Yangon (Myanmar)



Luang Prabang (Laos)

# Nature



Samui (Thailand)



Phuket (Thailand)



Pattaya (Thailand)



Koh Chang (Trat/ Thailand)



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