

FARANG

UNTAMED TRAVEL

March 2007



Snow Patrol



Placebo



Oasis



Franz Ferdinand



Ian Brown



Keane

NEPAL
POST WAR
POSTINGS

CAMBODIA
HOT IN THE
KITCHEN

HANOI
UNDER
WESTERN EYES

ECO-TOURISM
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BANGKOK ROCKS?

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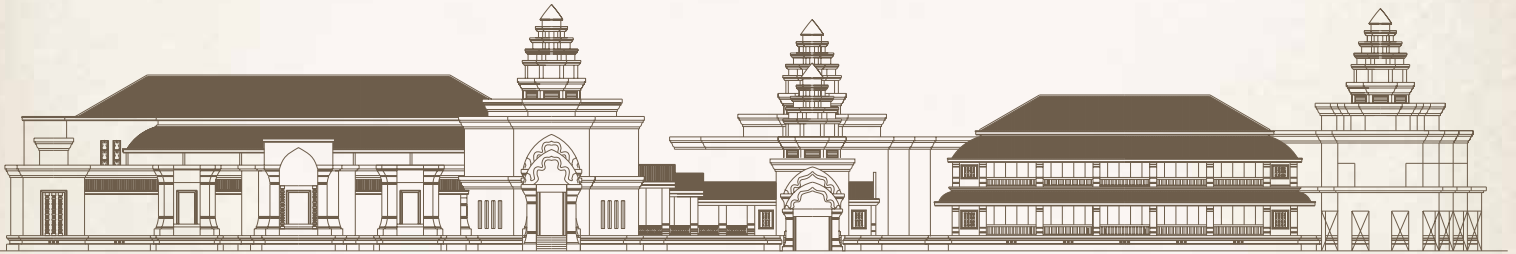


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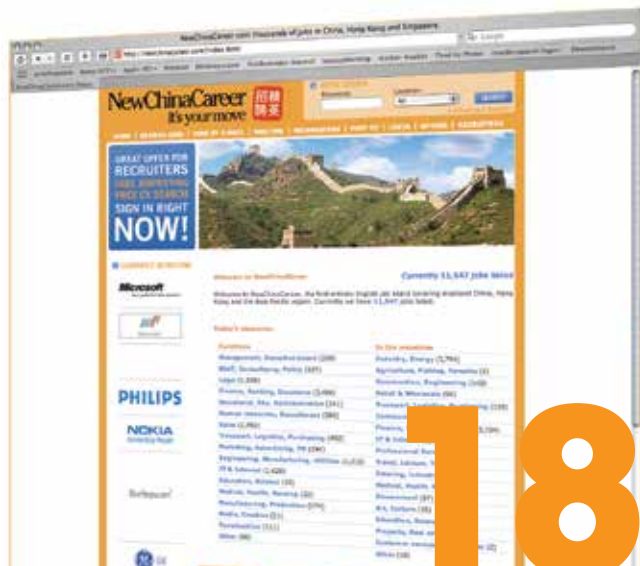
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UNTAMED TRAVEL

FUTURE SHOCK NOW



The title of Alvin Toffler's prophetic non-fiction work from 1970, *Future Shock*, referred to the fact that as the world changes more and more rapidly, less and less people will be able to keep up. The effects could manifest themselves in a number of unhealthy ways, from depression to madness to substance abuse to complete apathy and voyeurism (picture the Reality TV phenomenon.) Toffler compared the magnitude of these shocks to the high-voltage jolts a person experiences when visiting a foreign land.

This constancy of change also makes it difficult for travelers to keep up with what's going on as last year's updated guidebook becomes this year's history text. Only a short time ago, the Maoist rebels were still running amok in the mountains of Nepal, caught up in a 10-year civil war that claimed thousands of lives and seized up the country's economic engine: tourism.

In this reprint from our May 2004 issue (hopefully, it will all be history now), Thayer Walker finds himself under the gun as he meets the rebels in one of their Himalayan strongholds. We also update the main story with crucial info about the recent truce between the rebels and the government.

Hanoi is another destination torn between past and present, capitalism and communism, militarism and pacifism. Daniel Cooper captures some of these shifts in a photo essay called "Small Quarter, Big Change."

The biggest buzzword in travel hives of the past five years is ecotourism. What does the term exactly mean? How has it been changed from a money-making moniker to a groundbreaking reality? Where do the tours go? What do they include? Jim Algie examines the gray areas of green tourism.

Should the Internet really be included on a list of the Seven Wonders of the World? Cassandra Beckford looks at the free-for-all that ensued when major media players like *USA Today* vied to let their readers and viewers decide on a new list of wonders.

Bangkok's live music scene could easily be entitled "Tunes from the Crypt" as the walking dead of Western schlock rock 'n' marshmallow pop (Toto, Robin Gibb, Lobo, Uriah Heep) prove that dinosaurs still walk the earth. What happened to all the great bands like the Beastie Boys and Sonic Youth and the Smashing Pumpkins who used to come here? Cameron Cooper talks to the Scotsman who organized the biggest rock festival in SE Asian history and who wants to reanimate the country's dead music scene.

Now before you change your mind about purchasing this issue – or decide to clip out the listings of a free copy – head directly to the cashier and hand over your 99 baht before the Untamed Thought Police give you an epilepsy-inducing jolt of psychokinetic electro-shock.

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what's inside

features

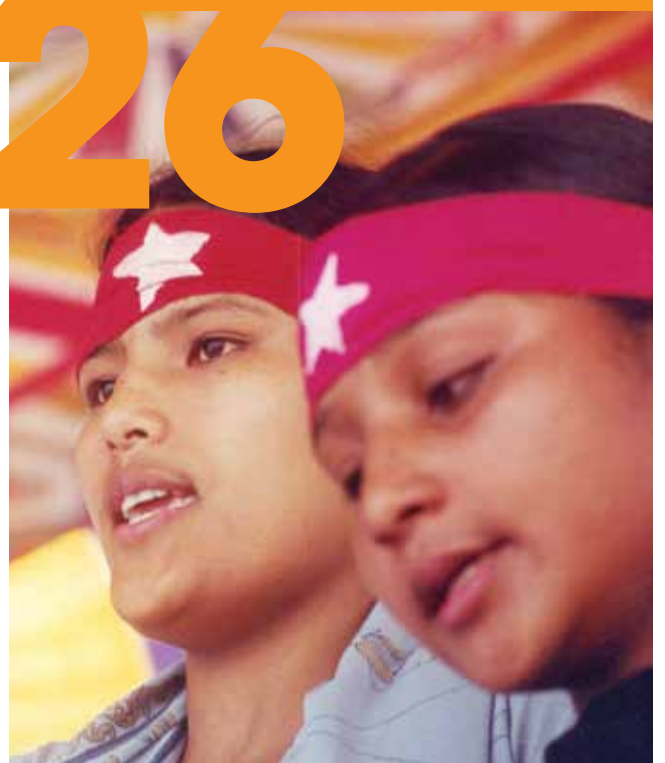
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*HELL'S
KITCHEN*



MAIN events

INDIA: Local Colour

Krishna cries to his mother, "Why is my love Radha so fair and I am so dark?" Mother replies, "Apply colour to her face and see how her skin changes." Fast forward a few thousand years and welcome to the Holi festival, celebrated by Indians throwing coloured powders and water on each other and anyone else who happens to be about. If you're familiar with Thailand's Songkran water-splashing festival, imagine that with coloured dye. It sounds messy and it is.

Put on a shirt you never want to wear again and head for the streets all over India on March 3rd.



27TH FEBRUARY - 25TH MARCH, HK ARTS FESTIVAL, HONG KONG:

The only place in Asia to see the Welsh National Opera company perform *La Boheme*.

3RD MARCH, ELEPHANT FESTIVAL, JAIPUR, INDIA:

An ancient pachyderm hodown recently revived for tourists, but that's OK because elephants rock.

3RD MARCH, GIRL'S FESTIVAL, MANJI SHRINE, TOKYO:

Float a paper doll of your daughter over the waters to wash away sickness and bad luck, then head off to the big-dick festival (see right).

3RD MARCH, MAGHA PUJA, THAILAND:

Candles in the night and wrapping temples in cloth, the Grand Palace is ground zero.

11TH - 25TH MARCH, MARCH BASHO, OSAKA, JAPAN:

Round two on the sumo circuit, who will be the victor? Odds on it'll be a fat bloke.

20TH MARCH - 7TH APRIL, HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL:

Lots of films from around the region and beyond - some with subtitles!

25TH MARCH - 13TH APRIL: CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL, JAPAN:

Thrill to the spectacle of drunken Japanese lying on their backs staring at the trees.

30TH MARCH - 1ST APRIL: HK RUGBY 7S, HONG KONG:

The biggest event in the region for the 'other' football. Book early.

30TH MARCH - 8TH APRIL, BANGKOK MOTOR SHOW, BITEC, BANGKOK:

Forget about the cars, turn up for the "Miss Presenter Beauty Contest."

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THAILAND: Go Fly Your Kite

At the beginning of March the winds start to blow from the Gulf of Thailand and kite flying season begins. Hua Hin and Bangkok's Sanam Luang are where the string-tugging action takes place, as *Chula* (male) and *Pakpao* (female) fight it out in the skies. Kite fanciers come from around the globe to fly all manner of craft, some up to 10 metres long.

Unreel your string during the month of March. Exact dates are uncertain as we wait on the wind.



They're the earthly representation of the gods, come to impregnate mother earth and provide a good harvest. The star of the show is a 400-kg, 2.5 metre-long hard on, which is delivered to the shrine by 60, 42-year old men.

Stop your giggling and get thee to Tagata, north of Nagoya, on the 15th this month.



THAILAND: Extreme Jungle Feet

Swimming, kayaking, running and cycling. Down rivers, over hills and up men's trouser legs. It can only be an extreme adventure race, and the place is Kanchanaburi. There's two levels for the fit and not so fit, and the course meanders through picturesque state forest, in the stifling tropical heat. It's a manly sport but women are invited too.

The North Face River Kwai Trophy get set, ready and go in Amphur Sayoke, Kanchanaburi on the 10th of March. Check out www.riverkwaitrophy.com for the low-down.

THAILAND: Rock of the South

Get out of town for one weekend and head to Pattaya for the annual Pattaya Music Festival and a generous sampling of Thailand's finest musical talent. Multiple stages and multiple bands rock out over this two-day event, drawing thousands from across the land. Book early or plan to dance all night. This being Thailand, acts have yet to be announced, but it will all come good on the day.

The Pattaya Music Festival turns it up to 11 from the 16th to the 18th this month in, you guessed it, Pattaya.



JAPAN: Festival of the Big Dicks

You've seen it on TV, you've read about it in books, now, this month, you can travel to Japan and see for yourself one of the world's most notorious fêtes, the Tagata Fertility Festival. Once a year the small town of Komaki comes alive as thousands of spectators line the streets to witness the procession of the penises. Wooden penises to be exact, as this festival is not to be confused with the Naked Man festival, which was last month. Before the parade begins, great tubs of sake are shared around the crowd and when everyone's good and drunk, out come the woody willies.

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Asia-Pacific Gazette

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WHEN EAGLES ATTACK

Two of Australia's biggest birds of prey (wedge-tailed eagles with two-metre wingspans) attacked paragliding's number-one sports woman from England. One of them got tangled up in her lines and tried to claw her head. But Nicky Moss, 38, managed to lose them some 100 metres from the ground and land safely. Most likely the birds thought she was a feathered intruder in their territory. The attacks came as Moss, a member of the UK's paragliding squad, was getting ready for the world titles.

BIG-TIME SPENDERS

When it comes to splurging no one can outspend Hong Kongers, according to a survey by the market researcher AC Nielsen. For 93 percent of the populace, shopping is a form of entertainment, whereas only 74 percent of consumers from the rest of the world agreed with them. Some members of AC Nielsen speculated that for many Hong Kongers, living under cramped conditions that would force a snail to do the limbo, visiting malls was a great getaway.

HAIL BHUTAN'S NEW MONARCH

The arrival on the world stage of the new Bhutanese king (just 26 and an Oxford graduate) signals a seismic political shift in the hermetic nation: He will watch over the Buddhist country's move from a strict monarchy to a parliamentary democracy next year. Jigme Kesar Namgyel, the son of the former king who abdicated in December, recently traveled to India to sign a friendship pact with the country. Travel experts hope that this will open the tiny Himalayan nation of 700,000 to more tourism. Great – another destination for snowboarding yahoos!

LAND OF THE RISING GUN

Japan's post-war constitution put an end to its imperialistic, war-mongering ways – that and two atom bombs. But now, amid security fears from those ever-sensible North Koreans, the country is establishing

its first Defence Ministry since 1947. As of press time, pundits predicted an invasion of Bhutan is unlikely any time soon.

HONEY, I SOLD THE KIDS

After a woman who had already given birth five times died while birthing twins in the impoverished Indian state of Chhattisgarh, the father reportedly took them to another town and sold them for US\$2 to a childless couple so he could feed his other children. The couple denied buying them, though they said they gave the man 100 rupees. Officials are investigating – time, sloth and baksheesh permitting.

FELINE GETS CREDIT CARD

An Aussie woman, who wanted to see if her bank's security system was secure, managed to get a credit card issued to her cat, Messiah. Kathleen Campbell had applied for a secondary card, on her account, under the cat's name. The Bank of Queensland has coughed up a fur ball of apologies.

ARTY HOMAGE TO TSUNAMI VICTIMS

Recently opened to the public, the Tsunami Memorial Park in Krabi province was designed by the 96-year-old, artist Louise Bourgeois. Some of the famous French woman's artworks have sold for up to US\$4 million. But she donated these installations, called "Hold Me Close," for free. They consist of wooden walkways and two evocative sculptures.

CUTTING-EDGE GIRLS

With Singapore rapidly taking on all the mores and fashions of the West, it seems natural that even the sickest phenomena would eventually catch on. As of late, the island-state's psychiatrists have been aghast over the trend that sees a rash of adolescent girls slashing themselves with pen knives. One child behavioural expert in Singapore attributes the trend of pact-slashing to peer pressure.

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CRIME FILES



TOKYO, FAIL AT ENGLISH, SUCCEED AT ARSON:

A teenaged boy, worried that his parents might find out that he had lied about his marks on an English exam, torched the family home, as you do, if you're a sick fuck in an uptight society. In the blaze, his stepmother and two pubescent siblings were roasted alive.

SINGAPORE, NO SOLUTION FOR A HEROIN FIX:

A drug used to help heroin addicts kick their fix spiked in popularity last year. So much so that Subutex has now been made illegal. The drug had been prescribed by doctors for some years. Around 30 percent of the drug abusers taking it had become hooked. Others mixed it with different tranquilizers for a recreational high.

NEW ZEALAND, DON'T BANK ON THIS ROBBER:

In a plot worthy of Guy Ritchie or Quentin Tarantino, a bank manager was arrested after staging the robbery of his own bank, along with his wife and two accomplices. The manager, Mark Andrew Scott, 39, was a one-time US Marine who served in the Gulf War. He received a jail sentence of six and a half years.

THAILAND, HOAXERS GET BUSTED:

Thai police have a short fuse for bomb hoaxers. After the New Year's Eve blasts in Bangkok they received a number of crank calls. One of the bomb hoaxers was a 12-year-old girl hoping she could get her school closed down for the day. Police tracked her down through her mobile phone number. Another hoaxer was Thaksin supporter Prapatsorn Pornsurin who was likewise arrested after calling in a bomb threat from his mobile phone. If convicted, he faces a charge of inciting public panic and could be sentenced to up to 18 months in the slammer. The girl, however, is being groomed for a top slot in the country's secret police.



SEX FILES

PAKISTAN, CROSS-DRESSING SUPERSTAR:

Recent news of two uncles killing their teenaged nieces because they had sex out of wedlock only underlines the stereotype that this country, where sex is a forbidden topic, is full of rough justice for those who flout the taboo. So how do you explain the popularity of a racy talk show, *Late Night with Begum Nawazish Ali*, where the host dresses as a woman? Saleem, 28 and an open bisexual, believes that the success of his show proves that Muslim Pakistan is not as conservative as outsiders perceive.

MALAYSIA, VIETNAMESE BRIDES FOR SALE:

A local political party has lashed out at what they perceive as the "sickening practice" of parading young and attractive Vietnamese women in rural coffee shops so single or divorced men can purchase them as brides for up to Bt300,000. The MCA Party, a member of the ruling National Front coalition, has recently condemned this practice as something that shames the nation.

AUSTRALIA, PAID TO GET LAID:

The Aussie press recently exposed the fact that officials in Sydney have shelled out thousands of dollars to private detectives so they could bed prostitutes in order to gather evidence to shut down illegal brothels. Officials say that the evidence the private dicks have amassed has helped to close two such houses of ill repute.

THAILAND, TEENAGE GIRLS MORE SWEET THAN TART:

The Culture Ministry and the cops and concerned parents may have done patrols around youth-oriented areas like Bangkok's RCA and "love hotels" to ensure any would-be Cupids kept their arrows in their quivers on Valentine's Day. But as it turns out, Thai teens are more prudish, or just better liars, than their parents believe. A recent survey by ABAC stated that almost 40 percent of the 18-year-old girls surveyed would have refused to have sex with their boyfriends on Valentine's Day.

Roman Pride

Dear Untamed Editors,
 Why you make-a fun of me in your magazine?
 I go-a back to Roma. My friend, he-a tell me
 I in-a the magazine and send me a one. You
 tell-a me go home! All I want is good-a pizza
 like my mamma make and you make the fun
 of me in the magazine! I no like. I come back
 to Bangkok with-a my brothers and burn-a
 your car. But before that, maybe you can-a
 help me with something... When I stay in my
 hotel in-a the Bangkok, the maid, she ask me if I
 want-a the fresh sheet on-a my bed. I tell her if she
 sheet on-a my bed, I will-a kill her. Why she wants
 to sheet on-a my bed? I think I know-a now why
 the pizza, she is-a no good.

Amore,

Tony Ravioli,
 Rome

Untamed Replies:

Sorry Tony, none of us have cars, so we suggest that you and your brothers set fire to the motorcycle taxi queue at the corner of Nakorn Chaisri and Samsen Road instead. And as for your question, we think it is pretty obvious that either the maid just didn't like you or she thought you were Japanese.

Mysterious Disappearance

We haven't heard much from our old letters contributor Cameron Poole recently, so can only assume that the student loan people finally caught up with him. Missing him terribly, we were trolling through some old files and found a few of his travel tips that we had not published before. Cameron, if you are reading this, can you please come by the office and pick up your ice hockey equipment and your collection of figurines?



Ethnic Slurs

Dear Untamed
 I noticed that your New Year issue letters page contained two letters with very poor English; one from a supposed Italian (suspiciously named Tony Ravioli), on a hunt for a good pizza, no less, and another from an alleged German in a car accident. Do people really write you letters in phonetic English – or has your delight in what we Brits call ‘taking the piss’ reached new heights?

Raised eyebrowed and somewhat amused,

Phil Porter,
 Middlesex, UK.

Untamed Replies:

We are glad you asked this. We'd love to take credit for Tony's letter, but he is apparently a real guy. His letter made no sense at all at first. But the editorial team worked for hours deciphering it and decided to leave in some of the vernacular to preserve its naïve charm. By coincidence, Tony actually sent us another letter this month and he is a bit steamed. And speaking of 'taking the piss,' you can't fool us – there can't possibly be a place called Middlesex; Queen Victoria would never have allowed it.



Cameron Poole's Travel Tips

***Want to get upgraded to business class? Fool airline staff into thinking you have been sick by pouring vegetable soup down the front of your shirt, lolling your head back and forth and dribbling.

***Slow down speed-happy motorcycle taxi drivers by squeezing them in between your thighs. If this doesn't work you could also try increasing the wind resistance by holding out your arms and opening your mouth.

*** Sign in at hotel reception under the name of the hotel. When they discover upon your departure that you've stolen a towel they will have a difficult time proving it is theirs and not yours.

***Americans: If Singapore is too hot for you, why not try suing the country?

Reader Submission of the Month:

We love it when readers submit. We get all sorts of stuff in the inbox – most of it crap. But we kind of liked this “One man’s Bangkok slice of life,” even though it was written by a fellow whose space bar doesn’t work. Richard, if you are reading this, we’d like you to know it took TWO HOURS to put in all the spaces after the full stops. Get that keyboard fixed, man. In any case, you get a little pile of free copies to show your friends and send to your mother, though we’re not sure she’d approve of some of the places you hang out in.

Duong and Englebert

by Richard Round

Duong says I have the legs of a 90-year-old. I’m 46. “Why everything hurt?” she asks, as her vice-like hands force my skinny, white, un-supple limbs into positions that they were never meant to be put into. “I think you take lady too much,” she accuses. I whimper and groan and moan and plead, “Please be careful,” as I lie on my back and she pushes my leg back as far as it will go, which is about 45 degrees before I fear it will snap like a twig. “Okay, okay, I know what I do,” she assures me before clamping off the blood supply to both of my legs under her not inconsiderable weight. “I want to go home,” I joke as she pins me to the bed. She laughs her wheezy smoker’s cackle before releasing the blood back into my legs, which flows with a warm tingle back down to my toes.

Duong is the wrong side of 49, overweight, smokes too much, drinks large bottles of Chang Beer whenever the opportunity or money arises, is as lazy as a Mexican and keeps a soi dog called Yaap. But she gives the best massages I’ve ever found in Bangkok. There are no happy endings, just a bowl of mama soup and a bottle of Chang.

If her phone hasn’t been cut off again, I call and tell her I’m on my way. Skytrain it to the end of the line and a motorbike taxi to the edge of the map way down On Nut 44. She lives in a little ramshackle one-storey wooden house that even in the swamplands of Louisiana would be called a shack. It creaks with every step you take across its worn floorboards, holds the heat like a furnace and sits over lifeless green water that I assume was once a lake or pond. A broken-looking walkway leads from the little soi across the water to the veranda. I always feel a sense of relief to make it over without falling through or off the thing.

Farangs are few and far between in this particular corner of Bangkok, but I’m a known face now. I always enquire about the neighbours as the Grim Reaper has usually paid a visit to someone while I’ve been away. Illness, accident, suicide, or old age. Or they just disappear in the night with gambling debts and no money to pay the rent. Duong herself will always scrape together the money from somewhere for the underground lottery.

Alcohol finally took the poor old boy next door, though he probably

wasn’t as old as he looked. Duong told me he’d just get pissed all day while his wife was out at work. Some days she’d get home and beat the crap out of him for wasting the money she’d earned. Sometimes she’d have to take him to the local clinic and pay out more money to treat the injuries she’d inflicted on him.

I first met Duong at the Beer Garden when it was still just a place you knew by word of mouth. I love it now in its new barn-like incarnation, but I loved it more back when it was hidden away down a shadowy Soi 7. The place had a thatched roof over it, which just about kept the rain off. A parrot would sometimes go into a mad squawking fit in the corner until one of the girls threw ice cubes at its cage. There were fewer girls then and they were less forceful than they are today. Many a pleasant night was spent slowly sinking into the bar. But the music needs work. It’s bad enough now but when I first found the place it was almost all Bavarian drinking music, accordions, tubas and lederhosen. It was awful. Annoyingly, I’d suddenly discover that my foot would be tapping along to it. Then bizarrely, amongst this thigh-slapping Alpine goat-herder’s stuff, Engelbert Humperdinck would start singing “Please Release Me.” This was the late eighties.

I’d be comfortably slumped at the bar with several girls, Engelbert would sing and somehow it just seemed so right. I don’t know why. They were wonderful happy nights and I must confess that whenever I hear “Please Release Me” I get misty, remembering those lost and slightly more innocent times.

It is late afternoon at Duong’s and a fan pushes the warm air around. Sometimes I fall asleep and Duong just leaves me to it as she smokes another cigarette out on the veranda. If the phone has been cut off I give her money for that as well as the massage.

Near dusk we walk to the end of the soi for a couple of beers and to sit and watch the world go by at the busy little junction. A nearby market has come to life, street vendors are cooking and the last of the sunlight filters through the smoky air. “When you marry with me?” Duong asks, as she always does, and I say, “Duong, I might have the legs of a 90-year-old but I’m not ready to drop dead just yet.”

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GREEN PIECE

Jim Algie examines the grey area of green tourism in Thailand and why it's the most rapidly blossoming branch of the global travel tree. Photo of fisherman by Tim Loft. Other pics by Jim.

Only a few metres from the walking trail stands a strangling fig tree, which provides shelter and sustenance for hornbills, macaques, and white-handed gibbons. "It's an entire eco-system in itself," says Nick Ascott of North by Northeast Tours.

No matter how many times he comes across sights like this in Khao Yai National Park, he's still awestruck.

Such natural phenomena have sown the seeds for eco-tourism's metamorphosis into the fastest growing sector of the tourism market in the world. That's the official word from the International Eco-tourism Society (TIES), a global NGO with more than 1,700 members in 70 countries. In total, TIES estimates, ecologically-minded tourism now accounts for more than 20 percent of the global market.

The most frequently reiterated catchphrase about this field is "sustainable development". For many tour operators, this means limiting the number of tourists on any one trip so as to minimise the impact on the environment, keeping the noise down so as not to disrupt the sleeping and feeding patterns of wildlife, along with staying in traditional dwellings (electricity not included) made of natural materials.

Demands like these pose a very basic problem for tour operators. "It's hard to be eco-conscious when you have to be cost-conscious too, and you're not bringing in these busloads of tourists," says Nick, adding that two of their most popular tours are wildlife-spotting around

Khao Yai and kayaking around the rainforest-rich Khao Sok National Park (home to tigers, gaur, and the world's largest flower, the rafflesia) in southern Thailand.

Another dilemma faced by tour operators is that their high-end clientele still want all the modern amenities and conveniences even when they're out in the middle of a primeval jungle. "I'm sorry, but you can't sip your martini out on a terrace and still watch tigers mating," laughs Nick.

Equally as important as conserving the wilderness, and wildlife, however, is to help maintain the livelihoods of the locals and to sustain their traditional lifestyles. Nick says that his company, which opened its first office in Nakhon Phanom, and has since expanded to Bangkok and Luang Prabang, is trying to develop "long-term relationships" with the villagers. Helping local kids to get a better education and have better access to health care are responsibilities, he feels, which come with the territory; seeing that the money is divvied up fairly among different villagers is another one. Indeed, TIES also defines one of the main tenets of eco-tourism as providing "financial benefits and empowerment for local people".

Eco-tourism's economic growth is far easier to calculate than how

much effect it has had on preserving or disturbing Thailand's great outdoors, or how successfully government policies have been put into practice here. Michael Spjuth, the Swedish owner of the Big Blue Diving on Koh Tao and Koh Samui, believes that the Thai government has done more than any other administration in Southeast Asia to promote eco-tourism and green awareness among Thais and tourists. Still, he claims that most of the grassroots work is being done by the tour operators themselves.

As an example, Michael, who established the dive shop back in 1991, mentions the sweeping clean-up campaigns organised by resorts and dive shops in Koh Samui to tidy up the beaches and seabed.

If the road to conserving Thailand's natural resources has been an uphill race against time and vested interests, there have been some signposts of progress along the way. In the opinion of Joe Cummings, Lonely Planet's main author in Thailand for 20-odd years, two of the government's major successes were "getting the resorts and golf courses out of Khao Yai National Park around eight or 10 years ago. And the fact that they've stopped any more bungalows being built on Koh Samet. You can renovate existing bungalows there, but you can't build any new ones."

These days, eco-tourism and being environmentally friendly have become such common sales slogans for many hotels, travel entrepreneurs, and brands of floor wax, that there are more grey areas than green.

"A lot of hotels say they're environmentally friendly because they put notices in the rooms saying that you don't have to have your towels and bed sheets washed every day," Nick laughs, "and then they're pumping out pollution into Pattaya Bay."

Everytime he has lectured on the

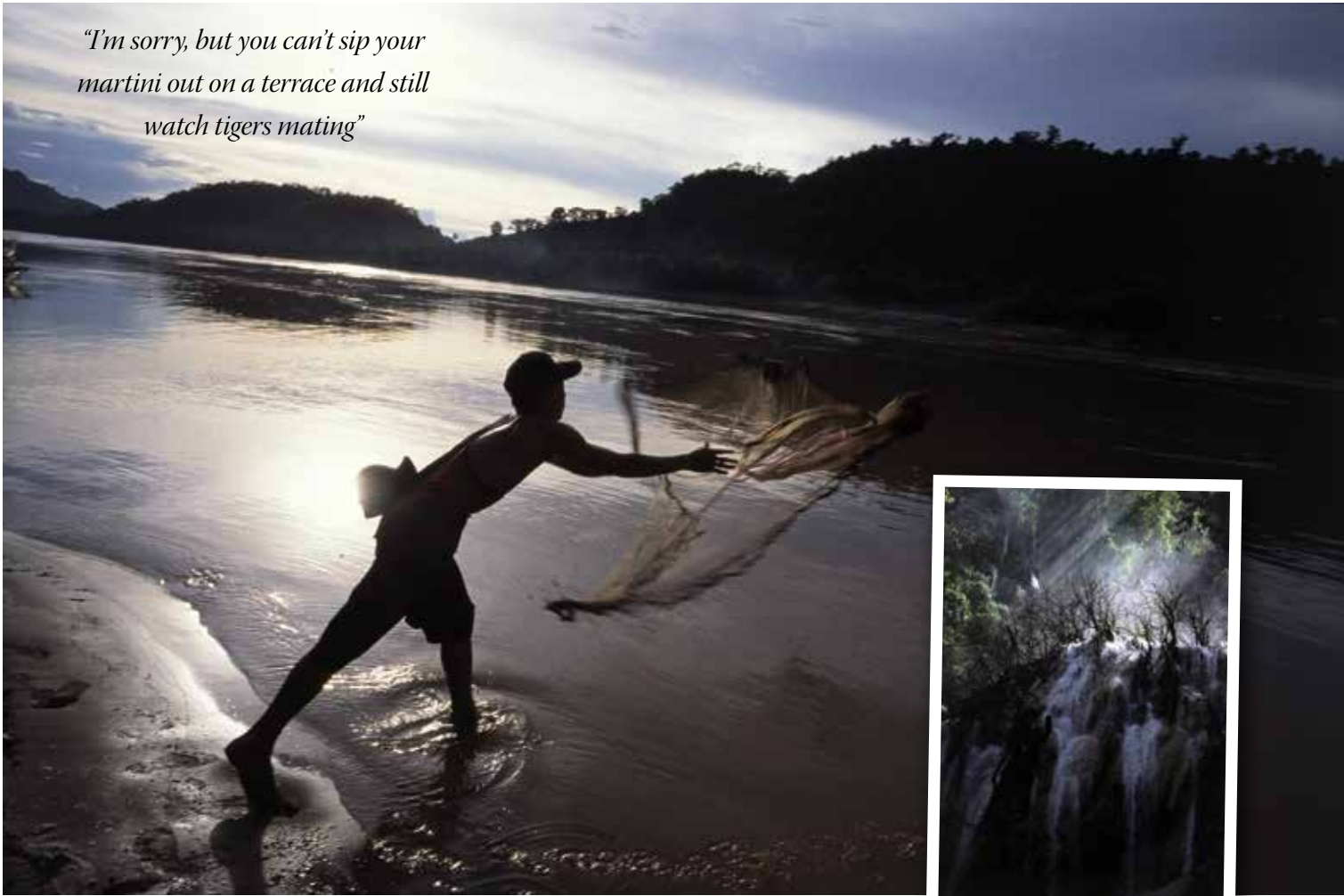
Eco-tourism and being environmentally friendly have become such common sales slogans for so many hotels, travel entrepreneurs, and brands of floor wax, that there are more grey areas than green

subject he starts out by telling the audience that everyone there probably has a different definition of what eco-tourism is. But he's not so sure there is – or ever was – any kind of 'pure eco-tourism'

"In pure eco-tourism, you're supposed to eat local food, use local transport, and do everything on a local level. Travellers might feel adventurous, but not necessarily in the morning. So we'd rather feed them



"I'm sorry, but you can't sip your martini out on a terrace and still watch tigers mating"



something they know for breakfast rather than beetles, for instance. But there are so many definitions of eco-tourism around now that it's hard to know what it really refers to."

Certainly the need to set standards for tour operators and resort owners has been a hot topic of debate among Thailand's conservationists. And the chorus of quarreling voices has been amplified in recent years by severe shortages of water on islands like Koh Tao and Koh Samui.

At the "Ethics in Eco-tourism" seminar at the Youth and Eco Travel Mart 2003 held in the Queen Sirikit Centre, Professor Surachet Chettamart, a speaker from Kasertsart University and leading environmentalist in the country, pointed out that international standards of environmental protection and wastewater treatment have to be agreed upon and implemented. "In the next few years we hope that tour operators and hotels complying with these standards will be certified. This will lead to eco-tours of a higher quality, more interest among visitors, and higher profits for operators."

Admittedly a Herculean challenge, it's now four years later and there has been no such certification.

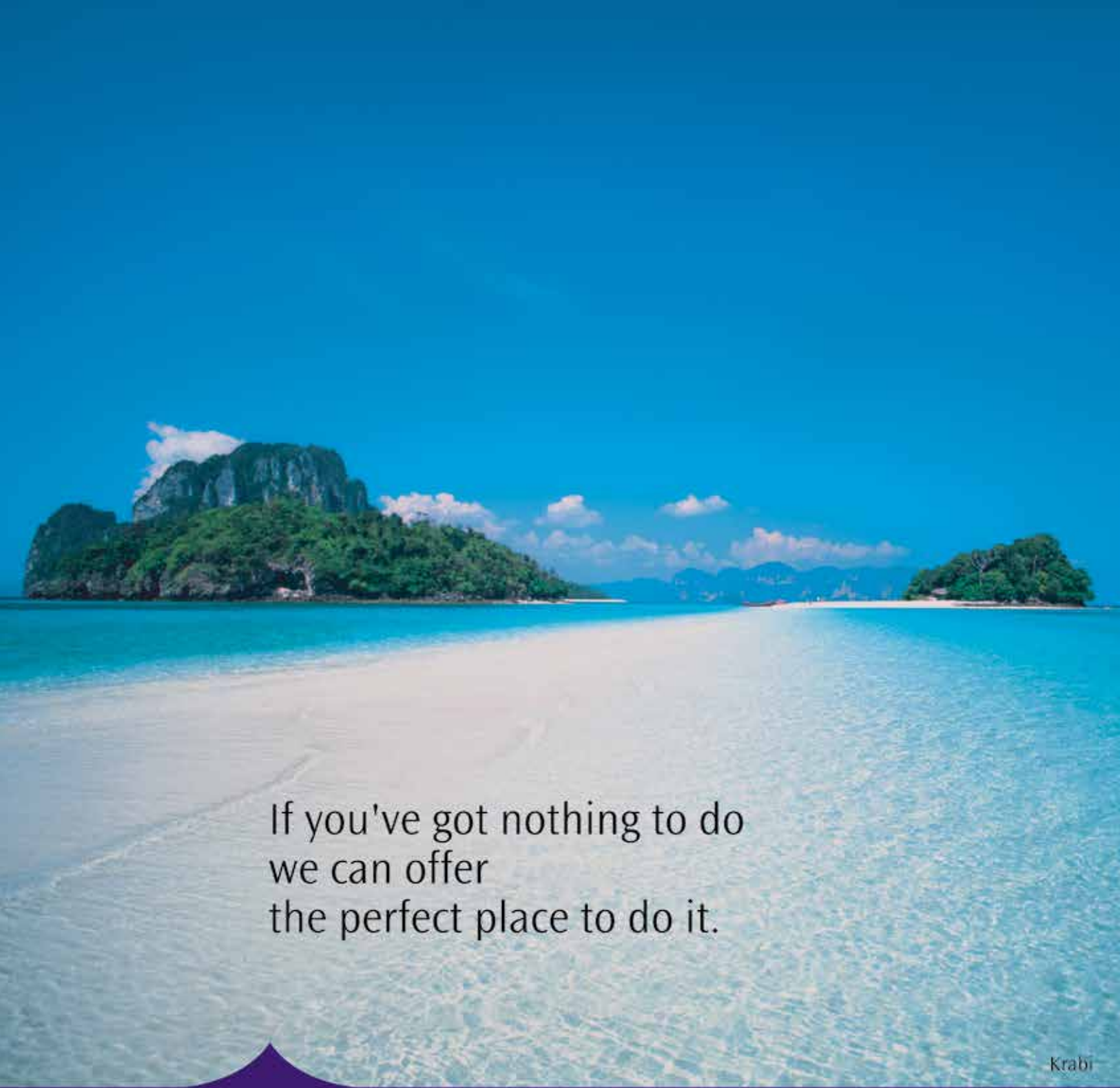
Working towards international standards of sustainability and cost-effectiveness is the reason why some of the biggest resorts on Koh Samui have teamed up with Green Globe Limited – an international organisation with affiliates around the world – to run their own wastewater recycling systems. And one of the forerunners in the green sweepstakes here, the Chumphon Cabana Resort and Diving Center, has long been collaborating with universities in Germany, along with the

Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok and the University of Hawaii, on energy-saving systems and new forms of housing. They also grow their own rice and vegetables. During their stay, interested visitors are encouraged to get some hands-on experience in farming.

"The self-sustaining resort," said Michael of Big Blue, "is going to be a future trend."

Green-leaning tour entrepreneurs will also have to blaze some new trails (both geographic and cultural) if they want to stay ahead of the competition in the future. Nick Ascott characterised some of their tours in Isaan and Laos as "real Indiana Jones type stuff". One tour they organised was a five-day excursion along the Ho Chi Minh Trail with the famous Vietnam War photographer Tim Page riding shotgun, while providing colourful commentaries about the country and his most perilous experiences shooting there. They've also put together itineraries for walks around the wild side of Thailand with well-known naturalists leading the way.

Most travel industry experts and writers agree that business will continue to blossom for back-to-nature trips with an emphasis on exploring local cultures and natural distractions. "The more the world gets urbanised," says author Joe Cummings, "the more people yearn for nature holidays. And the field of eco-tourism will keep growing because the more that environmental issues become politicised the more people want these guilt-free vacations which are supposed to be environmentally friendly. So consumers are going to have to be a lot more discerning about anything that claims to be eco-tourism."



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New World Disorder of Wonders

Cassandra Beckford *unravels the confusion about the new lists of world wonders.*



It's clear that changing trends in travel, like eco-tourism trips, have played their part in sexing up travel. Globetrotters and 'arm-chair travellers' alike have had their fill of package holidays and insipid, conventional pilgrimages, and are opting for stranger trips at more inspirational sites. Though we at *Untamed* continually flog those off-the-beaten-track destinations, consumer travel also seems to have risen to the challenge.

But just what constitutes an interesting destination or landmark?

The Ancient Seven Wonders of the World List has always been around, and though there is no true consensus for what it takes for a site to qualify, two organisations battled it out last year in a race towards a more modern version.

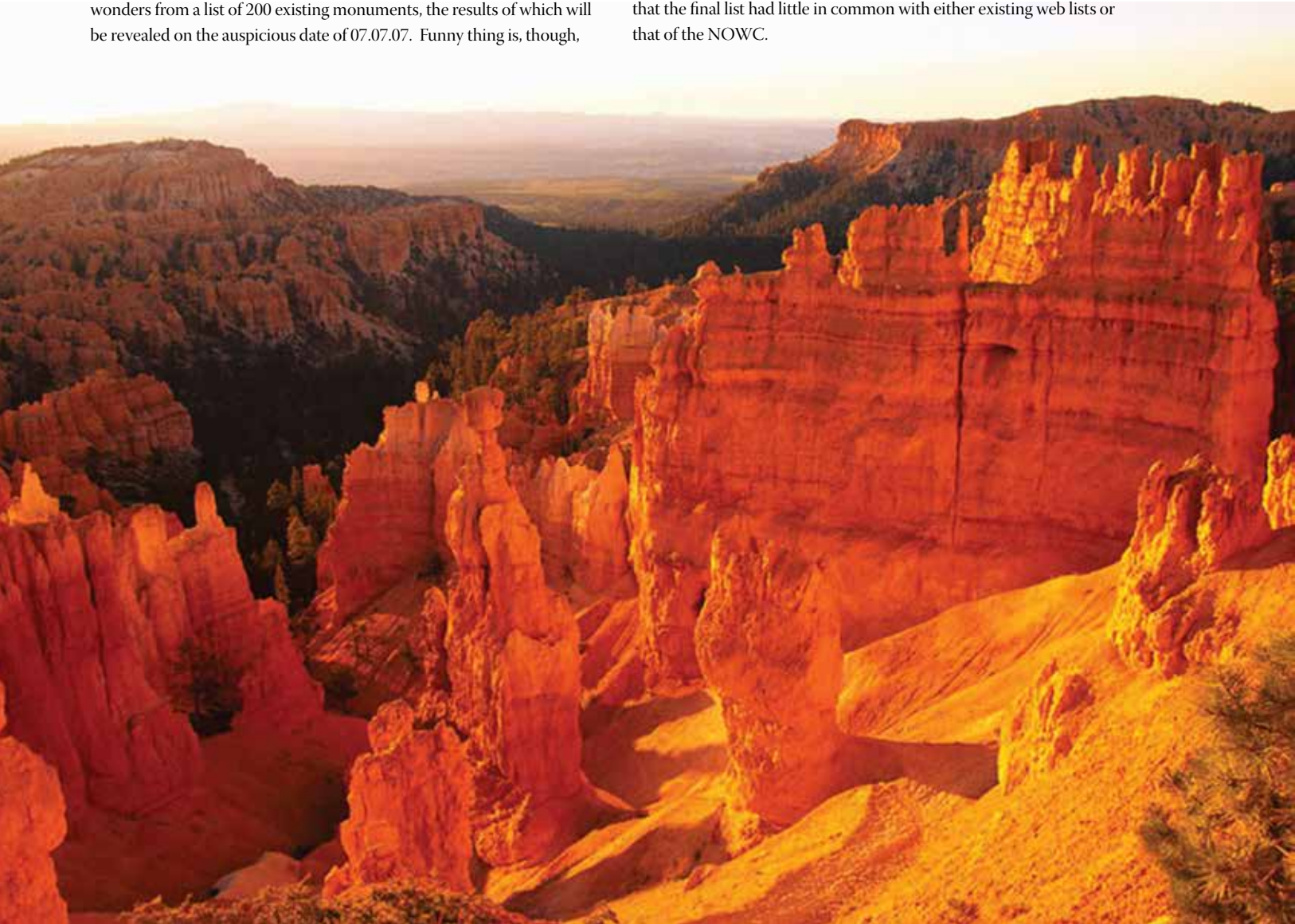
In January 2006, the Swiss organisation, New Open World Corporation (NOWC), launched an initiative to choose seven new wonders from a list of 200 existing monuments, the results of which will be revealed on the auspicious date of 07.07.07. Funny thing is, though,

there's really nothing new about it, just a rehash of the predictable that includes the Great Wall of China, the Pyramids of Giza, Rome's Colosseum, the Eiffel Tower... sorry, am I boring you?

Dissatisfied with their list, *Good Morning America* and *USA Today* began their own New Seven Wonders campaign in November 2006. This hot news gripped online web boards, as millions of voters banged away at their keyboards, eager to take part in a shake up of the old list.

The first voting system of its kind to incorporate the Internet and television, *Good Morning America* aired the list, along with a special "eighth wonder" slot.

The tactic of revealing one wonder per day, over the course of a week, built up anticipation. But the true shock came when it turned out that the final list had little in common with either existing web lists or that of the NOWC.



That the Internet could take fifth place on the American list shows how traditional conceptions of destinations can be renovated

And, without further ado, here's what the Yanks came up with:

1. Potala Place, Tibet
2. Old City of Jerusalem, Israel
3. Polar ice caps
4. Northwestern Hawaiian Islands National Monument
5. The Internet
6. Mayan ruins, Yucatan Peninsula, Mesoamerica
7. Great Wildlife Migration of the Serengeti and Masai Mara parks in Kenya and Tanzania
8. Grand Canyon, Arizona

That the Internet could take fifth place on the American list shows how traditional conceptions of tourist destinations can be renovated. It's not fixed or tangible, but for millions and millions of folks cyberspace has become the place to visit. Since the best holidays are usually planned (and even booked) on the Web first, this choice makes perfect sense.

And what of the hot debate surround the nominations for a new and notable eighth wonder? Though the Grand Canyon, the most conservative option, took this slot in the end, other wonders that made the short list included:

- *Andre the Giant* (1946-1993) – a professional wrestler reputed to have been over 7ft (213 cm) tall.
- *Mille and Christine McCoy* – the African-American, conjoined twins born of slave parents. Nicknamed the "Two-Headed Nightingale," their birth defect bought them worldwide travel, fame and notoriety. Before their death from tuberculosis in 1912, both had learnt five languages and learned to play a variety of instruments.
- *King Kong* – no explanation necessary.

Modernisation has led to the realization that anything can be a wonder, so as the mainstream travel world is forced to navigate uncharted waters, it's becoming truly *Untamed* as we are.

China Goes Live

NewChinaCareer.com, the first website of its kind in Greater China, recently launched a one-stop shop for China's top recruiters and professionals. Now interested candidates can search through thousands of individual postings as some of Asia's largest recruitment firms place their available jobs online.

It's the first website in China ever to have its content solely in English, and this presently free service is expected to raise the number of job postings from the current 10,000 to over 20,000 in the next few months.



Weht.net (Whatever Happened To...)

Take a break from that repetitive report to trawl the hilarious hall of shame of one-hit wonders, infamous headline grabbers, dictators, and where-are-they-now's. From The Knack ("My Sharona") to porn star Tracy Lords, all the washed up celebs are here.



Look Up the Lingo

Even words and sayings have their 15 minutes of fame these days so *urbandictionary.com* doesn't 'tell it like it is' but, well, helps out somewhat. Try these for starters:

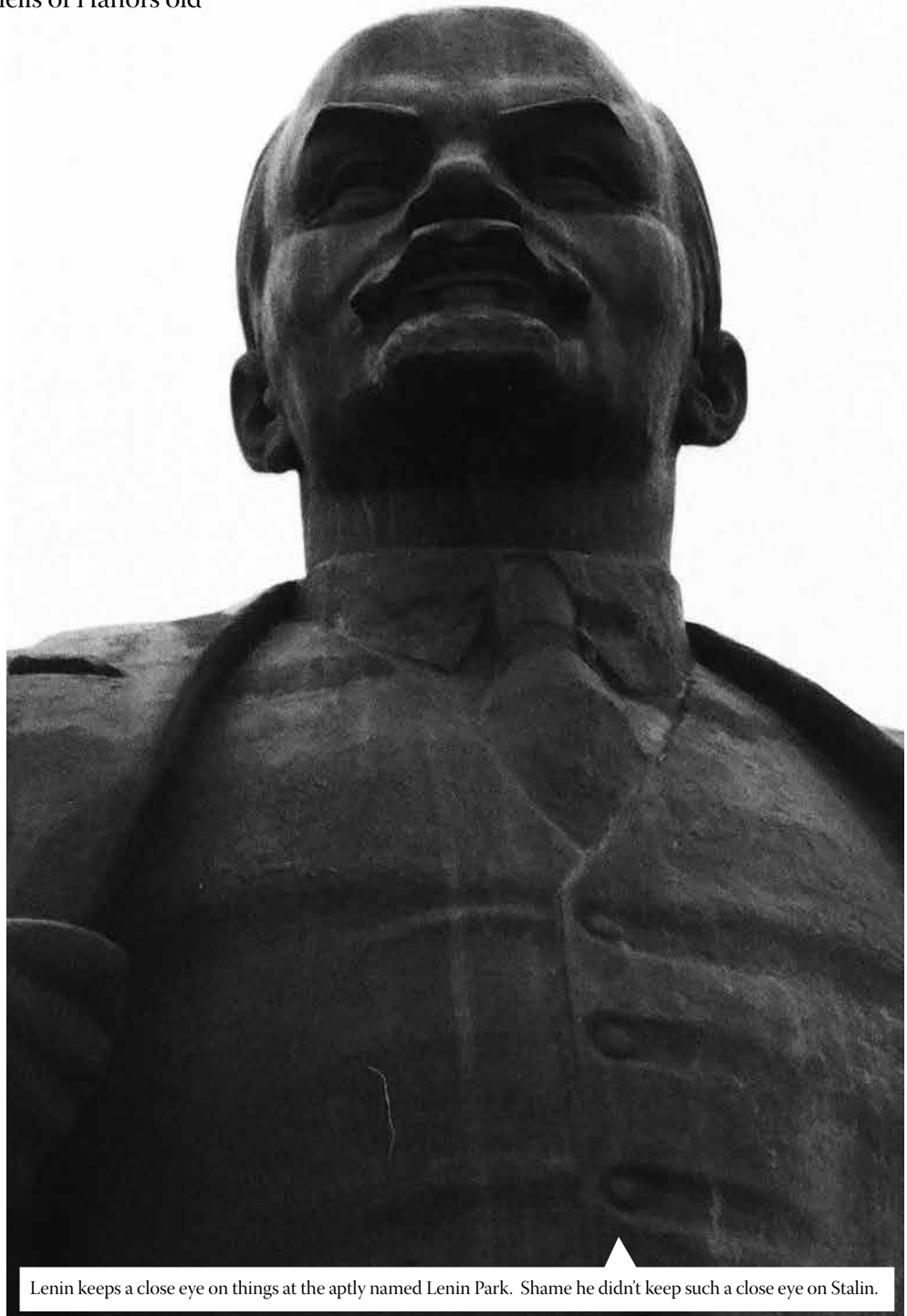
- *Brokeback* – anything of questionable masculinity, derived from the Hollywood blockbuster, *Brokeback Mountain*
- *Ear jacking* – eavesdropping on a conversation you have no business hearing
- *Word out* – marks the end of a conversation and your departure, the opposite of word up
- *January joiner* – joining the gym in January and quitting by February
- *Jump off* – something that is hip, chic or in fashion
- *Dandruff* – one who always 'flakes' on group activities
- *Shoulder Surfing* – chatting him/her up, but always scoping around for someone better
- *Dinner whore* – a girl who dates for free meals or expensive gifts
- *Babysit* – paying no attention to your drink, letting it sit idle while you pretend to nurse it.

Impress friends with your new, hip lingo or bewilder them over a beer as you speak gobbledeygook they've never heard before.

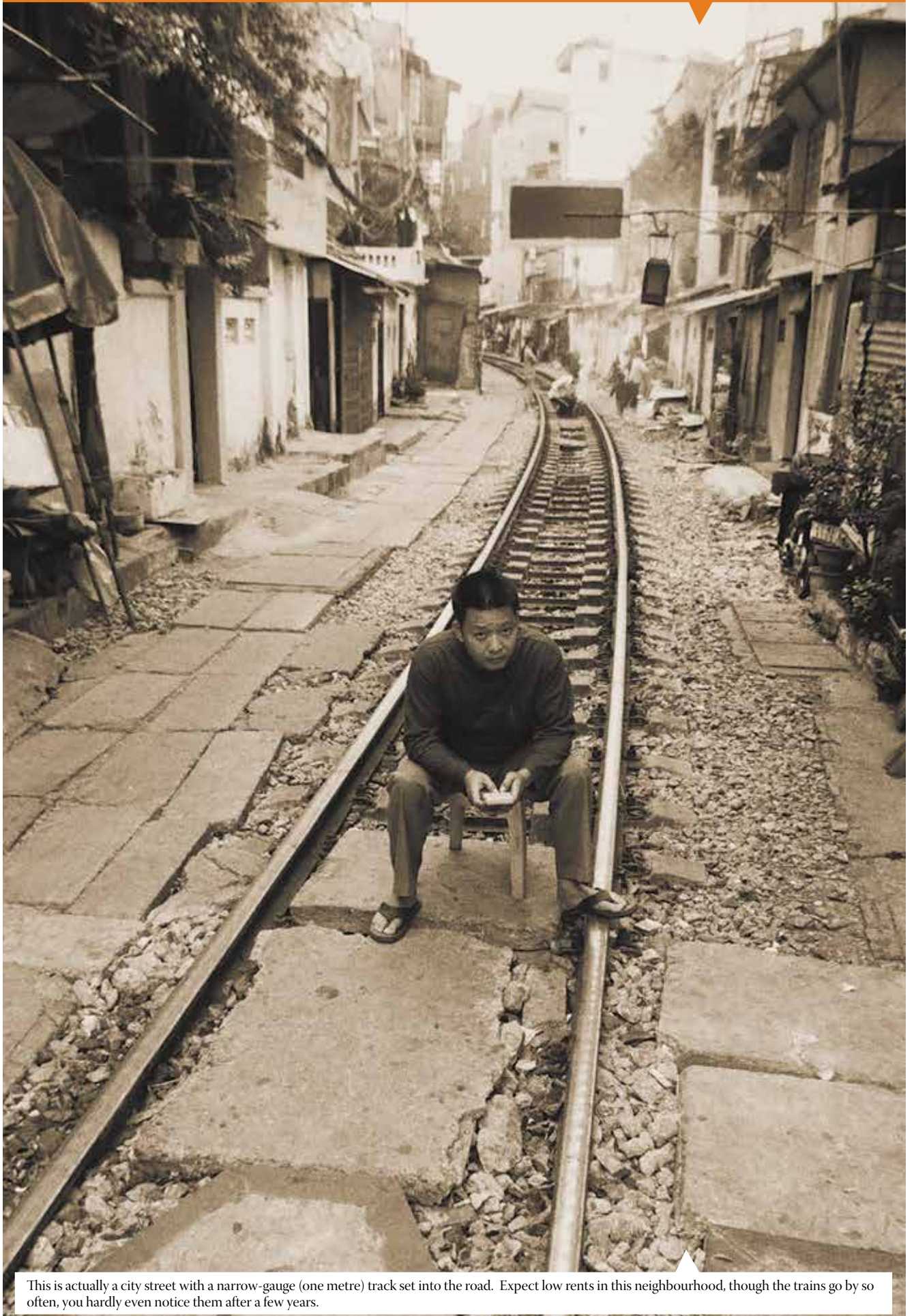
Small Quarter **BIG** Change

Intinerant scribbler and lensman Daniel Cooper snaps up the scenes and smells of Hanoi's old quarter.

The French colonial buildings in Hanoi's old quarter echo with the roar of motor scooters. The shophouses haven't changed much in the last 50 years but the neighbourhood has. Today this old section of town is the city's tourist ghetto and the narrow lanes are packed with cheap hotels, souvenir shops and trendy bars. That said, finding a bowl of noodles or cold *bia hoi* is as easy as tripping over one of the many street stalls selling them. And there is no substitute for sitting on the footpath in a preschool chair, half a yard from booming traffic, filling up on beer and local nibbles for small change.



Lenin keeps a close eye on things at the aptly named Lenin Park. Shame he didn't keep such a close eye on Stalin.



This is actually a city street with a narrow-gauge (one metre) track set into the road. Expect low rents in this neighbourhood, though the trains go by so often, you hardly even notice them after a few years.



This shot may not look unusual, but it's not that easy to get a shot without people in it. I had to wait 10 minutes for this one.



A Mig-21 on display at the Hanoi Army Museum. Note the stars on the nose indicating combat kills. No wonder they won the war.



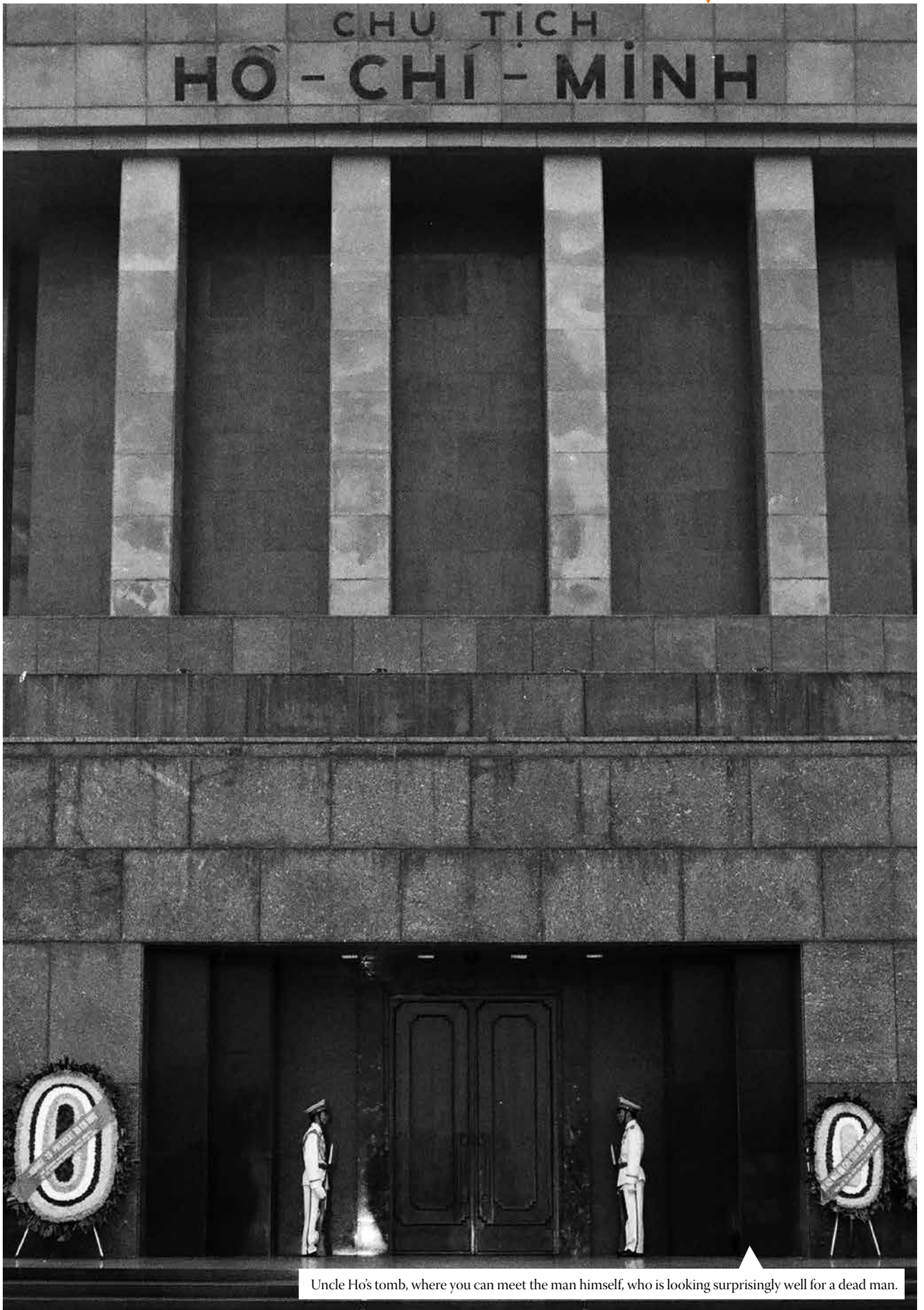
This sculpture at the Hanoi Army Museum is made out of pieces of American aircraft shot down during the war.



The sign means 'motorcycle taxi' apparently, but there's really no need for a sign, one can't walk 10 yards without some scruffy gent on a bike offering you a lift – for a fee of course.



These are wooden stamps on display at a shop that carves personalised ones for you. Traditionally these stamps are used to sign documents but today are more likely to be made out of plastic and accompanied by a less forgeable signature.



Uncle Ho's tomb, where you can meet the man himself, who is looking surprisingly well for a dead man.

Maoists in the Mountains

Now that a truce has been called and Nepal is safe again we reprint this classic story from May 2004 in which H. Thayer Walker III encountered Maoist guerillas in some of the most beautiful and dangerous terrain on earth. But the repercussions from the decade-long civil war are still being felt. Photos by Narendra Shrestha, Deependra Bajracharya and Thayer Walker



I'm standing at 11,000 feet in the foothills of the Annapurna Mountains. My water bottle has frozen solid and I can't feel my feet. But these are the least of my worries because a revolutionary has just stuck an automatic rifle in my face. Not quite hell frozen over, but it's open season for ice skating on the River Styx.

His English is bad, my Nepali worse. He speaks fast but drops words like "money" and "donation" in the midst of the frantic babble. His gun interprets. He wants 1,000 Nepali rupees: I give him half. He issues a formal receipt complete with the faces of Mao, Engels, Marx, and Lenin, the hammer and sickle, and "The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)" printed at the top. For the seven bucks I give him, he'll get a combination of food, clothes, and weapons. I get a gun taken

out of my face. It's a fair deal.

There is a war raging, but you won't see it on the evening news. It's not on the radio, and few papers give it any column inches. It doesn't involve a nuclear power and the country has no oil and few cost-effective natural resources. Jesus never walked here. It is one of the poorest countries in the world and its plight has been lost in the mixture of Iraq, al-Qaeda, the Middle East, and "Arnie the Governator".

Yet the nearly 1,500 casualties here since the ceasefire ended in September 2003 is more than the Israeli Occupied Territories has seen in a year and a half. In a region once dubbed a "Realm of Peace" by the international community, villages are terrorised, civilians shot, and children kidnapped and conscripted. Welcome to Nepal's Civil War.

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

The village of Solta rests quietly on the banks of the Karnali River, in the far west of Nepal. It is one of the most beautiful villages in the country. In the lowlands of the Terai, Solta is nestled amidst a confusing expanse of foothills, jaggedly marching their way up river until they become the tallest mountains on earth. By the time the Karnali flows peacefully past Solta, on its way to India, it has exhausted itself through thousands of metres of descent and raft-eating rapids, all the way from China and the Tibetan Himalaya. The region has a continuous supply of water and a mild, even warm, winter climate (more like the hot plains of India than the Himalayas), conducive to year-round farming. Indeed, at first glance

“For the seven bucks I give him, he’ll get a combination of food, clothes, and weapons. I get a gun taken out of my face. It’s a fair deal.”

42 weather-beaten souls (42 of literally millions of Nepalis who find themselves in the same situation) are the real victims of this eight-year civil war.

They had walked six days to the place where they now rested, and would later continue on to the main road. They would catch a bus, probably the next day, to the Indian/Nepali border town of Mahendranagar. From there they would walk into India, and look for backbreaking work as unskilled labourers, like digging ditches, or smashing big stones into pebbles, and pebbles into dust for concrete. But they came from one of the poorest and least educated parts of Nepal and

the banks of the Karnali seem a place of peace and tranquility.

Don’t look too hard.

An hour from the main road, we met a dusty band of pilgrims heading the opposite direction. They rested in the shade of a large banyan tree, some with a smoke, or a snack, or comforting a crying baby. They said they were walking to India; in reality, they were running from Nepal. These

there was little else they could do. The youngest member of the group was four months old, the oldest 75. Some planned to work in India for three months, some for six months, some for longer. In all probability, they would not all make it back home.

Poor Nepalis have been migrating to India to work for centuries, but only recently has their motive and mass changed. The group of 42 mountain villagers I met, like the other 80 percent of the country’s population living in rural areas, have found themselves caught in the crossfire. An Immigration Officer I spoke to at the Mahendranagar border (just one of the country’s dozens of sieve-like borders with India) estimates 500 Nepalis leave for work in India every day, though just a few days before we spoke he watched an exodus of more than 3,000. A few years ago, he says, a busy day might see 100 Nepalis leave. In all likelihood, across the country, a few thousand leave for India each day. Official numbers are unavailable due to the open border policy between the two countries: citizens from both nations cross countries with no more formality than crossing the street.

UNDER THE GUN

Why are Nepalis leaving in such large numbers? A typical scenario in the mountains: Maoists move into an area in hopes of expanding their influence and finding new recruits. Or they may simply be on the run from the army. Maoists enter a village, sometimes just a handful and other times hundreds, with guns and explosives. On their way through they ask villagers for food and shelter. These peaceful subsistence farmers are in no position to refuse men with guns, so they acquiesce. Sometimes the communists ask for more than just food or shelter. Sometimes they ask for monetary “donations”. Sometimes they ask for a son or daughter.

The Maoists leave the village having taken what they wanted. Later, government forces arrive, looking for them. When they don’t find arms-carrying revolutionaries the army singles out villagers who gave the



Maoists support. These villagers are accused of being Maoist themselves. Sometimes they are harassed, other times jailed. During crackdowns like Operation Romeo, which are essentially rebel-hunting campaigns, security forces kill Maoist and villager alike. For the average Nepali, this is the fruition of 14 years of democratic struggle.

In April 1990, after more than 200 years of autocratic rule, and a 30-year ban on political parties, Nepal decided to join the democratic world. Though communism was falling throughout Europe, Nepal's first post-People's Movement elections in May 1991 served an impressive victory for Nepal's fractured, albeit strong, communist parties. Together the various parties won 36 percent of the vote. The Communist Party of Nepal (United Marx-Leninist) won the second most seats in Parliament, and the United People's Front of Nepal (UPFN), finished a surprising third.

Yet as in any nascent democracy, the first years are full of struggle, mistakes and compromises, within and between parties. The UPFN was unable to settle internal differences (a major one being the urgency of an armed struggle to overthrow the monarchy for a true republic), and two members, Pushpa Kumar Dahal, also known as "Prachanda", and Dr. Baburam Bhattarai splintered off to create their own faction of the UPFN. Both factions approached the Election Commission for recognition: Prachanda and Bhattarai were refused. The group went underground, changed its name to the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), and began planning their "People's War".

The first attacks came on February 13, 1996. They were small scale, well coordinated, and trans-national. Maoists raided two police stations in the west, and one in the east. They took a government loan office in the central district of Gorkha, torched a Pepsi bottling plant in Kathmandu, and raided the private residence of a wealthy landlord in eastern Nepal, making off with more than one million rupees. The Maoists' coming-out party got them publicity for their cause, guns and explosives seized from the police, and a fistful of cash. No one died in the attacks, but the Maoists gave notice that they were everywhere and nowhere.

MEETING A MAOIST

We arrive in Solta at dusk. We drop our packs at the house of a friend my guide has in the village, and walk into town for tea. The entrance into town is marked by a large monument, a martyr's gate. It is one of many scattered throughout the country. A husband and wife from Solta who had taken up arms for the Maoist cause were killed in a battle in the surrounding hills two years ago. The red-and-white gate stands five-metres tall, and is topped by a hammer-and-sickle flag. Nepali is scrawled all over it, roughly translated to me as, "The spilling of blood will only make us stronger!" Less than 30km from the closest army post lay a formal entrance to Maoist territory.

In the early years of resistance the west central districts of Rolpa and Rukum, and the outlying areas, served as the primary Maoist homeland. But eight years is a long time; the movement has spread and Maoists guerrillas now operate to varying degrees in all of Nepal's 75 districts. The west, however, is still their stronghold. Communist rhetoric has a huge appeal for these poor, uneducated, and entirely neglected masses. There are few job opportunities out here, very little electricity, and the province of Rukum has no roads. These are the places the Maoists call home.

My guide is nervous. He knows I didn't come to Solta for a scenic riverside hike. I came to Solta to talk to Maoists. He imagines himself in a similar situation as the pilgrims we met on the riverbanks; slammed in between guns on both sides, with nowhere to go. He's taking a serious



"During crackdowns like Operation Romeo, which are essentially rebel-hunting campaigns, security forces kill Maoist and villager alike. For the average Nepali, this is the fruition of 14 years of democratic struggle."





risk. I introduce him to the concept of danger pay.

We plan out the next day that evening. A group of several dozen Maoists had been in the village a week before, but had since dissolved into the hills. As armed rebel insurgencies don't usually have phone numbers or mailing addresses, we would have to throw ourselves into the back country in hopes of meeting Maoists. As my guide says, "You don't find them, they find you." The plan is crude, unorganised and superfluous. In town, the next morning, over a cup of tea, we meet our man.

He introduces himself proudly as Comrade Rawal, the second-in-command at a nearby training camp. He has a typically Nepali build. Standing no more than five and a half feet he is slightly built, but looks to have the strength of well-woven rope. His eyes are also typically Nepali – those kindly flickering eyes full of a warmth not even eight years of conflict can extinguish. Yet behind the eyes and beneath the pleasant demeanour I sense a storm. He is a man disinclined to smile.

He wears clean pants and a plaid collared shirt. He doesn't carry a gun, nor does he wear the red headband with white star, and he left his camouflage uniform back at camp. He looks like any other Nepali, in any other place. He could be a teacher or a farmer. But he is a Maoist, buying supplies. That is one of the conundrums in which security forces now find themselves. When they storm rural areas looking for Maoists, the revolutionaries can simply throw down their guns, pick up hoes and dissolve into the countryside. As one teacher said, "Who is a Maoist? Is it you? Is it me? Is it that farmer tilling his fields, or the shopkeeper down the road? Who is a Maoist? If they are not pointing a gun in your face, how can you tell?"

Comrade Rawal and I speak for over an hour. He is polite and well spoken. Having completed Grade 10 he is one of the more educated people in the country. Now 22, he joined the movement at 18. The second of five brothers and sisters, he was tired of seeing his parents toil for nothing. When the Maoists came through his town speaking of "getting respect for the poor", "dividing land evenly" and "creating a society with no rich or poor", phrases he now preaches to me, Rawal joined the movement. His family is very proud of him, he explains, because he is an important man in a movement fighting for the rights of the poor. I hesitate to mention it is the poor who are suffering the most from this war.

Rawal is in town, among other reasons, to buy shoes. After our conversation he will head back to the training camp, a two-day walk from Solta. The camp houses some 600 armed and indoctrinated guerrillas, the 'hardcore' fighters, as the military describes them. The soldiers there, Rawal says, eat

1,000kg of food a day. As these are soldiers, and not farmers, they must get their food from somewhere, so the pressure inevitably falls on local villages. The camp buys some of it with money from looted banks or local and tourist “donations”, but Rawal is frank about taking much of it from locals. This is the kind of pressure many Nepalis find too strong to bear.

Rawal is a soldier, not a politician. He is hard pressed to cite a country whose political model the rebels admire, and cannot explain what kind of policies the group would implement were they to come to power. He is young, poor and angry; he and those like him have been neglected by the government for generations, and he is ready to fight. The closest he comes to any substantial political ideology comes in his parting words, “The rich of the world, the corrupt, we poor are gathering, we are fighting, and we are powerful.”

Rawal shouldn't be blamed for espousing communist rhetoric and military threats in lieu of an actual political agenda. There is little else propping up their confusing ideology. The two top leaders, Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai, have gone underground, and were last seen in India. While the group calls itself Maoist, they wave a Soviet flag, speak of a “new democracy,” and revealed in April 2003 that were they to come to power they would implement a free market economy. Their only solid political foundation is their disdain for monarchy, even a constitutional one. At best, the platform is contradictory; at worst, a confusing reason to die.

WAR WITHOUT END?

If Santa Claus were clean-shaven and Nepali, he'd probably look a lot like Colonel Deepak Gurung, Chief Information Officer of the Royal Nepalese Army. Whether offering tea or explaining the difficulties of guerilla warfare in Nepal, the colonel smiles often. I like him immediately.

“Nepal is a combination of the mountains of Afghanistan and the jungles of Vietnam,” Col Gurung explains. The army, he continues, is not fighting one enemy, it's fighting two: the Maoists and the countryside. Nepal is an ideal chessboard for guerilla warfare. Labyrinthine hills weave their way into stupendously huge mountains; dense bush and jungles thrive in areas too steep or infertile for cultivation. Maoists can hit a target and disappear into familiar territory with ease. In pursuit, the army must launch its first attack on the hills or bush land, and its second on the rebels.

Evidence of this is apparent in the Annapurna region, where I had my first encounter with the Maoists. It is no secret they camp in the hills around the villages of Ulleri, Gorepani, and Ghandrung. Everyone knows it – even the tourists, who have not been caught in the crossfire, but are still subject to Maoist tax. But what can anyone do about it in this kind of terrain?

“His family is very proud of him, he explains, because he is an important man in a movement fighting for the rights of the poor. I hesitate to mention it is the poor who are suffering most from this war.”



Ulleri is indicative of the land's strategic value to the Maoists. The village clings to a cliff side, nearly 300 metres above a river valley. Any platoon making their way up to the village and into the hinterlands would have to follow one, well-worn footpath. From Ulleri, the army could be spotted from two km away; and nearly every village has at least one scout to send word up the road if the military is on its way. As Col. Gurung put it, “We know they are there, but by the time we get there it's too late. They're gone.”

At times, though, the army is able to catch the Maoists by surprise, launching pre-emptive attacks into the hills. I was headed to Ghandrung when I paid the Maoist toll and was issued a receipt. The Ulleri-

Ghandrung circuit is a popular four-day trek through the Annapurna foothills, characterised by friendly villagers and spectacular panoramic views of the Himalayas. On the second day of the trek, word had come down the line that the army had managed to surprise the Maoists in Ghandrung, killing two, and clearing the hundreds of other rebels out of the area. I did not meet any communists on the rest of the trek, and a few days after I passed through Ghandrung, the army had cleared out. Less than two weeks later, I went back to Ulleri. The day before I arrived, hundreds of Maoists had converged on the town to buy food and supplies. Not a fortnight after their engagement with the army, the revolutionaries had moved back into the area.

It does not take many nationwide strikes to wreak chaos (see sidebar "Strikes"). Numbers are vague, but official army estimates peg the number of "hardcore guerillas" at somewhere between two to three thousand, though other estimates range between five and ten thousand. The army's approximation relies primarily on the number of weapons the Maoists have seized from security forces in raids, and does not include weapons that are being smuggled into the country from areas like Kashmir. When factored in with the 10,000-15,000-strong informal militia and around 35,000 "sympathisers" (both army statistics, and both possibly twice as high), the insurgents pose a formidable challenge to the military.

At this point Nepali security forces number around 70,000, a number widely considered insufficient to suppress the revolution. When I asked how many troops would be enough, Col. Gurung merely chuckled. "It is purely theoretical how many troops we need. At this point we can only contain and degrade." He paused for a moment, considering the problem, and then this usually beaming man who has devoted his life to the army, said gravely, "There is no military solution."

The two sides are at a stalemate. The Maoists can't win this battle with guns: they are too few, and in spite of the chaos they have managed to wreak throughout the country, the government still holds all the cards. Yet today democracy in Nepal is a farce. From the village level all the way up to the prime minister, the people have no elected bodies. The country rings in 2004 with no parliament, a suspended constitution, its 14th prime minister in as many years, and a vague promise from the king to have democratic elections in a year. As much as the Maoist revolution

is tearing the country apart, they do have some valid points.

Like most other conflicts in the world, this one will only be settled with compromise. No revolt will be crushed, no government toppled. But since the outbreak of violence in 1996, the two sides have come together for two failed peace talks. Each round of talks has ended in bloodshed.

The king may need to relinquish some of his power and push the country towards a constitutional monarchy like Thailand or Japan rather than a dictatorship like North Korea. Prachanda, the top Maoist leader, was quoted in an interview as saying "monarchy has gone away forever from the hearts of the people". He may have to realise that while Nepalis don't want to move backwards towards the autocracy of pre-1990, the country, on a whole, is not ready to abandon centuries of monarchic rules.

For now, however, compromise is more difficult than war.

BURNING QUESTIONS

When Nepali Hindus die, if lucky, they are cremated in Kathmandu at the temple of Pashupatinath Aryaghat, one of the holiest Hindu shrines in the world. Members of the royal family are cremated here. Though Nepalis die and burn on a daily basis, when I hopped in a taxi one afternoon to go there I didn't know I would be attending a military funeral.

Security personnel dressed in the blue camouflage of the armed police stood at attention all along the riverbank. A marching band played. The day before, Inspector Hari Bahadur Basnet, 48, was killed in a Maoist raid on a police post in the Syanga district, near Pokhara. His body was helicoptered 140km to Kathmandu for a full military cremation. An average cremation at Pashupati might attract several dozen family and friends. On this day, hundreds stood there, crowding the steps on both sides of the river, to pay their final respects. When the music stopped his widow's sobs filled the air. The crackle of the funeral pyre would soon drown out her cries. And six children would have to go home without their father.

I sat at Pashupati for hours, watching the band and the funeral, the mourners and the cremation. I watched people collapse into each others arms, and then, finally, I watched them leave. And as I sat there, alone, watching the flames consume his body, I had to wonder if the country is next.



AFTER THE WAR

Now that the 10-year civil war has finally ended, and the Maoist rebels have laid down arms and become part of the interim parliament, Nepal is becoming stable again and travelers are not giving it the cold shoulder. Photo by Rob Viereck.

In mid-January, the Maoist rebels selected 73 MPs to make up its quota of the interim parliament. Sticking to their guns, theoretically speaking, more than one-third of their candidates they chose were women – a surprising move in a country not noted for its feministic tendencies.

They also selected 11 members of their faction from the lowly Untouchables class and 22 from indigenous ethnic tribes. Political pundits say this shows the renegades are putting their ideology into practice.

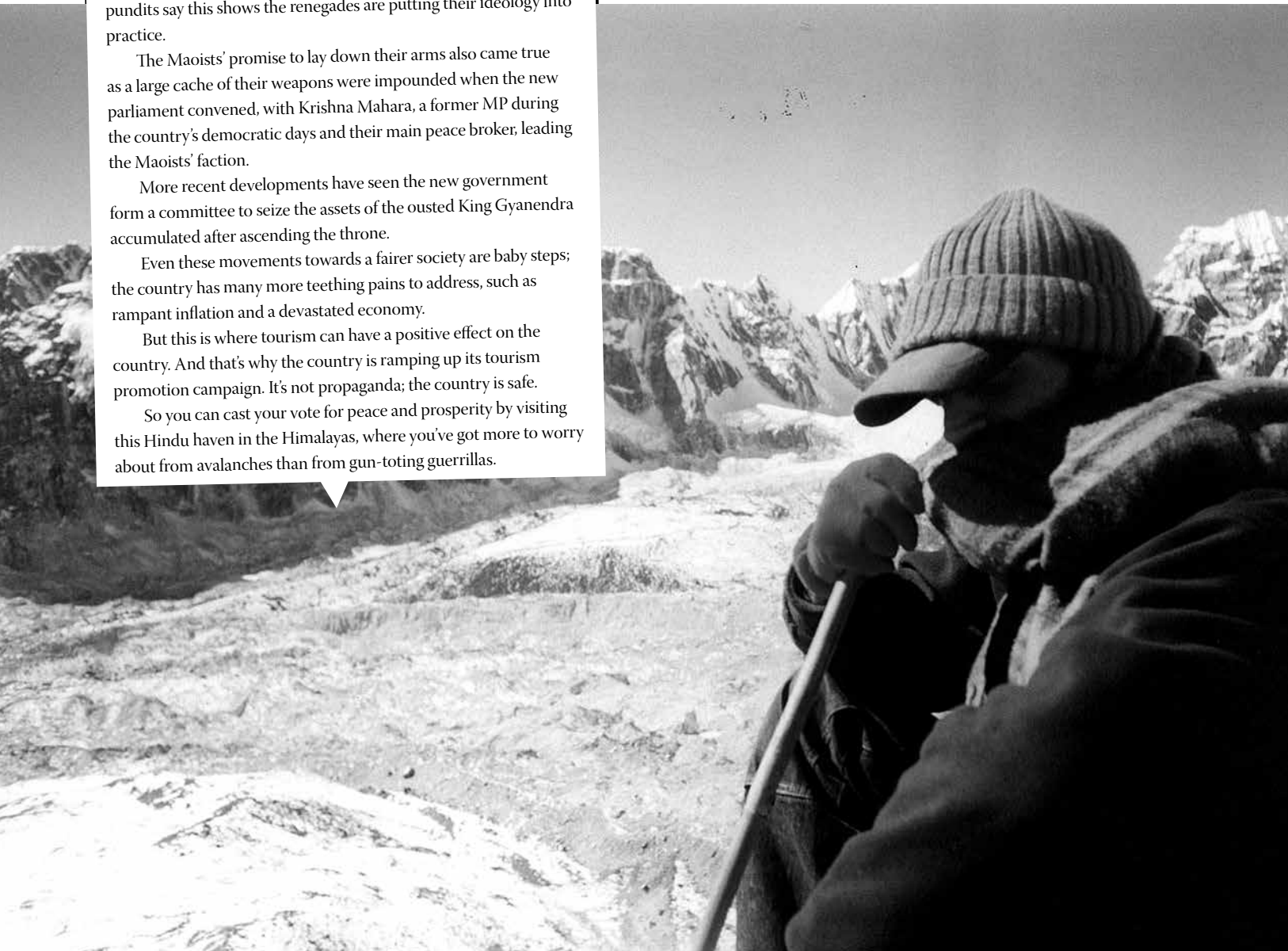
The Maoists' promise to lay down their arms also came true as a large cache of their weapons were impounded when the new parliament convened, with Krishna Mahara, a former MP during the country's democratic days and their main peace broker, leading the Maoists' faction.

More recent developments have seen the new government form a committee to seize the assets of the ousted King Gyanendra accumulated after ascending the throne.

Even these movements towards a fairer society are baby steps; the country has many more teething pains to address, such as rampant inflation and a devastated economy.

But this is where tourism can have a positive effect on the country. And that's why the country is ramping up its tourism promotion campaign. It's not propaganda; the country is safe.

So you can cast your vote for peace and prosperity by visiting this Hindu haven in the Himalayas, where you've got more to worry about from avalanches than from gun-toting guerrillas.



Coitus Units

Review by Cassandra Beckford

In *The Sexual Life of Catherine M* (Corgi, 2001), Catherine Millet recounts an uninhibited, Parisian lifestyle she began in the 70s. As an honest account of orgies with mostly male, sometimes female strangers in the sex clubs and streets of the Bois de Boulogne and at the private parties of the social elite, Millet takes pride in her ability to get it on anywhere and with everyone.

On an erotic level, the book works best when she eases off on the art-house whimsy and keeps things rugged and raw. For example, it's easy to get off on the thought of a mass of knotted bodies and limbs flailing in orgasmic unison. But you would be hard pressed to get the 'horn' over intellectually heavy examinations of the pros and cons of sex in urban and outdoor spaces, which Millet sometimes spews in chunks.

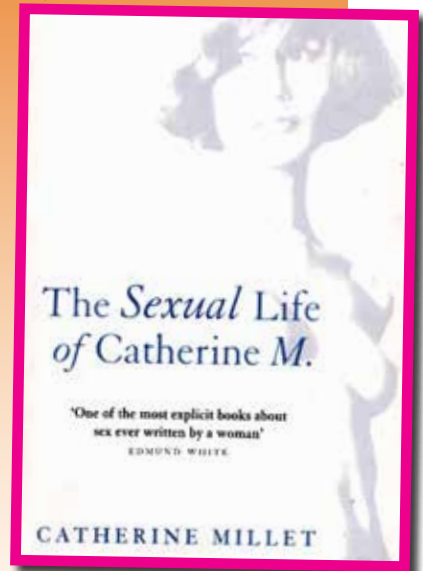
Her memoirs, however, are not the first expose of sex and numbers to ruffle societal feathers. Anyone who remembers *The World's Biggest Gang Bang* (1995) porn flick, in which Annabel Chong slept with 70 men, racking up a world record of 251 sex acts, may recall the uncomfortable feeling it left you with, and Millet often hits this cringe-worthy note. Born and reared in Singapore, Chong was the first to speak publicly about serving man after man (usually with men in all orifices and both hands simultaneously), and Millet takes up right where she left off.

Though Chong's sexual overindulgence was lambasted at the time, her movie played a crucial role in priming the mass media for further, extreme works by women; creating a fertile climate in which books like this one can become international bestsellers.

Critics often compare Millet's book to Pauline Reage's classic, *The Story of O*, and as both novels revel in the shock factor it's not hard to see why. But where Reage's fictitious tale fleshes out the complexities of this lifestyle and the inner musings of the woman living it, Millet's attempt at sexually highbrow discussion appears flaccid in comparison.

Scattered snapshots of the author's childhood, punctuated with random graphic scenes tell us next to nothing about her or what pushes her along this debauched path. As the founder and chief editor of the revered *Art Press* magazine, Millet says nothing about the spooning of her professional and sexual lives.

In the end the sensationalism strikes an empty note. Female readers may enjoy the book as a peep into the habits of someone more extroverted than themselves, but that's okay, for most, the greatest erotic thrills are best saved for fantasy.



SHELF LIFE

Reviews by Jim Algie

Singapore City Scoops, City Scoops Media, Edited by Adam Pillsbury
The declining market for mainstream guidebooks has seen a massive shift in the kind of royalty-free writers they recruit to do work for hire.

No longer do you have to know the local language or anything much about the place to get the gig – any young hack who's not on a respirator will do. So it's cool to see guides like this with sections like "Area Scoops" and "Super Scoops" written by a trio of insiders. Artfully laid out and photographed, this is a kind of boutique guide, with plenty of personality, to a city that's becoming quirkier and more out there by the week. In places, they could weed out some of the tourism-board clichés, but at least they've got the low down on the "Singing Cabbie" and the "Bike Boutique." Overall, though, I'd say the guide is probably better suited to the repeat visitor – or the more adventurous traveller – than the first-timer or itinerant insurance salesman.

Insider's Guide to Beijing 2007, Immersion Guides,
Almost 800 hundred pages on one city? That's right. And that's part of what makes this book such a monumental achievement. Another thing is some of the hilariously snide commentary, like in Jon Campbell's tips for how to write about Chinese rock, "Remember, it's only been thirty years since the end of the Cultural Revolution so you'll want to make as many comparisons between life under the Great Helmsman and today as possible." Built atop a solid foundation of info are a number of intriguing structures (the sort you don't find much anymore in mainstream guidebooks) like historian David Spindler's demystifying of seven myths about the Great Wall: "Myth #3, Dead labourers were buried in the wall." Fully revised for this third edition, the crew sprinkles some witticisms over the photos with captions that also, thankfully, deviate from the dull-as-dust norm in travel lit.



PULP FICTION COVER OF THE MONTH



Rocking the Crossroads

Rock 'n' roll and Bangkok aren't words you see together too often but that's all set to change. Cameron Cooper chats with veteran international concert promoter Dave McLean who has big plans for this town.



For awhile there a, few years back, Thailand was threatening to morph into Asia's coolest cutting-edge music town, second only to Japan.

In those days local promoters were staging acts like Mudhoney, Pearl Jam, The Beastie Boys, Sonic Youth, Foo Fighters, Smashing Pumpkins, Suede, Rage Against the Machine, Green Day, and even Radiohead – on their first album tour, no less.

It was the early to mid-Nineties and Bangkok was awash with money, ambition and a desire to play a larger part on the world stage. Everyone was throwing cash around like it was Monopoly money, which, as it turned out, it kind of was.

Then the crash of '97 punched everyone in the wallet and the concerts (and even Bangkok's roads) went quiet for a bit. The only major act within the following year was Whitney Houston – safe as a concrete bunker and just as exciting. It didn't bode well for the future of Thailand's concert scene.

Fast forward a decade. BEC Tero dominates the market for name bands, and continues to play it safe. Eric Clapton, Carlos Santana Video Elvis, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, and in a fit of mad daring, Linkin Park, Ronan Keating, Robbie Williams (and even "Finding Nemo on Ice") are all big, popular, established, and well and good in their place, but in case nobody has noticed, and it appears they haven't, there is a new generation of both musicians and fans who would be more than happy to get together for a bit of fun.

This is something international concert promoter Dave McLean intends to make happen. Dave was the "hired gun" who, in collaboration with Thailand's Matching Entertainment booked and coordinated the acts of last year's "Bangkok 100" festival, the biggest

and most varied international rock festival ever held in Bangkok, featuring international bands Placebo, Snow Patrol, Franz Ferdinand, Ian Brown, Futureheads, Maximo Park, dEUS, as well as local favourites Body Slam and Modern Dog and Ebola, with Oasis headlining.

Satisfied with the result, Dave plans to promote this big festival every February in Bangkok, starting in 2008. "I think the time for this is long overdue. Bangkok is a great town, with an excellent vibe – it's the most vibrant city in Asia and one of my favourite places in the world," says Dave, during a soft-spoken rant in the lobby of the Dusit Thani, his Scottish accent underscoring the passion of his mission.

"I'm in this for the long haul," he says. "It won't take long to make this grow into THE rock festival in Asia and among the biggest in the world. It's not rocket science. The bands are all happy to come here – it is a great place to play and to have a wee holiday after the shows. After the 100 festival, most of the bands hung around for a few days, which is not normal. Usually they fly in and out to the next gig. But the punters are ready for it as well. We had 40,000 people at the 100 festival over the two days, in spite of the 'teething problems' that you get the first time out. Each year gets easier, runs smoother and if you book great bands, gets much bigger."

It sounds convincing enough,



but it also sounds a bit like a spiel from one of those guys you meet in Bangkok saloons – washed up has-beens and ain't-never-wases – who come to Bangkok to die and while waiting for this event, tell whopping lies about their achievements to the man on the next barstool.

But Dave has the pedigree. Aside from spending the last 30 years booking just about every band you ever heard of (Nirvana, The Clash, Simple Minds – “At an early gig, we paid them 15 quid and six cans of Skol,” Dave confesses.) Name a band and he has probably booked them and his company, Riverman, (www.riverman.co.uk),

“It is a great feeling seeing everyone at the show enjoying themselves.”

riverman.co.uk), based in the UK, with a SE Asia office in Bangkok, also manages Placebo, Bryan Ferry and other bands while putting out music on Riverman Records. They have organised more than 2,000 concerts in the last 12 years.

Okay, so he isn't a barstool braggart. But why does a successful promoter and band manager want to put the effort into Thailand? “When I first started in this business 30 years ago, putting on small shows with bands like Iron Maiden and Simple Minds and loads of others, I always got a buzz from getting 300 people through the door and putting on a good show. And then as I learned the business, the numbers grew and the venues got bigger and each move up the ladder was exciting for me – developing the potential of the bands and making events happen. With Thailand, I see enormous



enjoy playing my part in making it grow.”

But this isn't a project he plans to do alone. “Likeminded people are welcome to come on board as partners – we can put on great shows – and also make a lot of money.

“Though the Southeast Asian and especially Thai audience is a large part of who we are aiming for with the festival, we wouldn't stop there. This country is very popular and an international crossroads. There's no reason foreigners can't build their holiday around the show. We'll set up travel packages with international travel agents to get people in from all over the world.

“So we plan to aggressively promote the festival internationally, with media outlets like *NME*, the *Telegraph*, major music magazines like *Q* and *Mojo* – I've been promoting through all these people for decades now – plus Australia, Europe and regional coverage. Normally, concerts here are promoted only locally, with maybe a bit of regional coverage. But with our festival, the sponsors get far more coverage for their money than they usually get.”

But despite the business side of it, Dave still waxes sentimental given half a chance and last August he struck out on his own with his company Riverman

Bangkok and brought Keane to Muang Thong Thani to test the waters further.

“It is a great feeling seeing everyone at the show enjoying themselves. When we did the Keane show I was amazed at how many in the crowd sang along. As far as I know they weren't getting that much airplay and yet everyone seemed to know the songs. I think that's great.

These are fans who are seeking out new music and getting into it – you can't hold the fans down. And these are the

people who will ultimately make the festival the kind of success I know it will be.”



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THE BIG PICTURE

A competitor in last year's River Kwai Trophy crosses the river in the final leg of the race. This year's North Face River Kwai Trophy takes place on the 10th of March in Ampur Sayoke, Kanchanaburi, Thailand.

Moonshine Holiday

Too much of anything is bad, but too much of good whiskey is barely enough. -Mark Twain

The light music of whiskey falling into a glass - an agreeable interlude. -James Joyce

Freedom and Whisky gang thegither! -Robert Burns

A fellow of literary pretensions, Daniel Cooper throws his lot in with the great authors of the ages and boldly forays into the breach of Thailand's domestic whiskey offerings.



Sang Som

Thailand's most recognised *wish-key* isn't actually whiskey at all, it's made out of sugarcane, which in my book (and indeed any properly researched book on booze) makes it a rum. Nevertheless it enjoys huge popularity with both tourists and the local population. Sang Som used to go under the name of Sang Thip and was widely rumoured to contain amphetamines or some other sort of stimulant. Nobody can confirm this for sure but I remember once an Australian Army officer telling me he banned his men from drinking it on leave.

Serving Suggestion: Best sipped through a straw from a bucket of ice, Coke and redbull – friends optional. Don't drink this one neat unless you want to wake up with scars on your face.

Taste: Sweet. Slides down fast and comes back up just as quick.

Impact: This one should only be drunk if you don't have anything to do the next day. The more you drink the more drunk and hepped up you get, giving rise to 'secret ingredient' rumours.

Lao Khao

The *real* Thai liquor, just as *lao lao* is the *real* Lao firewater and *ruou can* is the *real* Vietnamese rotgut. They're all white distilled spirits made from rice and they all taste like old socks, yet there's no shortage of nations willing to call it their own. Perhaps that's not surprising, given the popularity this paint-stripper-of-a-drop has with the salt-of-the-earth types who make up pastoral scenes of Southeast Asia. You've seen them, the old dudes with the scraggy beards, and conical hats, sitting on a country stile and smoking a pipe before politely passing out. Oh, for the simple life of the countryside.

Serving Suggestion: This tittle is best enjoyed neat, not because it tastes anything like OK, but because there's no substance known to man that can mask its pungent flavour – it's a search that's eluded scientists and barmen for centuries.

Taste: Like day-old bread in kerosene.

Impact: There's really only one reason to drink this crap and that's to get legless. To quote Douglas Adams, it's "like having your brains smashed out by a slice of lemon wrapped round a large gold brick."

Yah Dong

My Malaysian nearly-but-for-the-grace-of-god-father-in-law had a deer foetus in a jar of dry gin, but here in Thailand they use Lao Khao to make medicinal booze, exposing nearly-dad as either a barbarian or a man of fine taste. Steeping herbs, woodchips and small reptiles in high-test liquor has been an excuse for getting loaded from time immemorial ("Really



dear, it's for my health,") but, given the correct herbs or lizards and enough soaking, the effects can be surprising. The name *yah dong* is an umbrella term for anything soaked in booze, except for the drinker. For the backpacking set, the Five Satang Bar, in Pai, is the place to sample these exotic brain-killers, where you can choose from *Kicking Horse Whiskey*, *Dick Stand Up Whiskey*, *Little Girl Fall Out of Bed Whiskey* and others. Ask them nicely and they'll give you a shot of *Sell the Car*, *Sell the House*, *Sell the Kids*, *Find Somebody Else*, *I'm Never Coming Back Whiskey*.

Serving Suggestion: No point in mixing this one as it's technically a ready-mix, traditionally sipped from a bamboo shot glass.

Taste: Varies. There could be a woody taste, a hint of rabbit poo or even a snake-like tang, but alcohol is the main flavour.

Impact: There's an old story about two backpacking boys who drank three bottles of snake whiskey and died from the diluted venom, so quite pronounced I'd say.



knock over the pot though – you'll never get the smell out of the carpet.

Serving Suggestion: There's really only one way to drink this – through long straws, and

standing up. Usually everyone drinks at once and it's bad form not to suck your weight.

Taste: Sweetish, sourish. Reminiscent of spoiled rice, with a cheeky hint of cabernet.

Impact: A bit of work to get toasted on, but the journey is half the fun.

Johnny Black, Chivas, etc

I'll never forget the night when, as a pressman, I'd been invited to a

champagne and caviar hi-so do and they were giving out Johnny Walker Gold. I'd never heard of the stuff before, but it shouldn't be surprising that Thailand

should be the place to see it. After all, Thais swallow more Johnny Black than anywhere outside of the US of A – which is why Chivas Regal have been going after the market so hard.

The obsession with luxury hooch is more an indicator of class-consciousness than fine taste, but that's OK because anyone trying to be the big man will be easy to hit up for drinks.

Serving Suggestion: Best drunk over ice, slightly melted. Sadly it's usually drowned in Coke. At least they don't measure it with the bottle cap anymore.

Taste: Like good whiskey.

Impact: Gets you hammered, but so does brake fluid. Difference here is that you're unlikely to be blind or dead in the morning.



Mekong

This Thai whiskey deserves a mention for being referred to frequently in detective novels set in Bangkok, where the protagonist is always drinking Mekong with Coke in go-go bars. That's because the old bastards who write these crappy novels haven't been out on the piss properly for 20 years or so. This rice-based spirit (amazing what a little caramel colouring can do) is the product of a partnership between a local Chinese entrepreneur and a Farang alcoholic, back in 1985, and has been pickling livers ever since.

Serving Suggestion: Same as Sang Som, they've been competing to get in your guts for years.

Taste: Like it came out of the Mekong. Ha ha, not really, but sometimes I just dream that the Mekong flows with whiskey.

Impact: Like the war drums of hell.

Lao Hai

This countryside cocktail is not something you can usually order in a bar. You buy a large pot stuffed with wort, mostly rice-husks, fill with water and let the yeast do its work. An hour or so later, have your mates over, grab a bamboo straw each and start sucking. Top up the water as you go and you've got a pissy rice-wine all night long. Don't get sauced and

White Cock vs. Black Thai



It's Black Thai by default. White Cock is no longer on the market, but we think it's a funny name anyway.

Bored of Phnom Penh's usual main courses of tourism, Jefferey Bergman bones up on ancient Khmer fare. Photos by Amy Irani.

HELL'S Kitchen



Pop into Phnom Penh for a few days and you soon find yourself devoid of interesting time-killers after the exhausting the rather limited selection of temples, schools of torture, towers of skulls and fields of fragmented femurs and phalanges. Shoot off a few dozen AK-47 rounds or blow up a water buffalo with a hand grenade, and what's left to do but inebriate one's self in one of the many seedy watering holes?

If you do find yourself with a day to slay in the vicinity of the killing fields, and are uninspired by local gin joints or weapons of warfare, check out the only classic Khmer cooking school within a few hundred kilometers – the brainchild of “Frizz,” a Dutch journalism dropout-turned-local culinary entrepreneur.

But first I would suggest you bone up on classic Khmer meal at his river-front restaurant of the same name, and then ask yourself, “Would I waste a day to learn to reproduce some of these regional delicacies at home?”

Ancient Khmer culture dominated the region some thousand years ago, and has a profound influence on modern dishes we now associate with Thai, Vietnamese, Laotian, Burmese and even Malaysian standards. The Kingdom produced classics such as red and green curries, chicken and fish wrapped in banana leaves, as well as some delectable desserts, all of which are now mistakenly identified as originating in neighbouring countries. The major distinction is the absence of chilies, which did not arrive in Southeast Asia until Portuguese traders brought them in the 16th century, making traditional Khmer cuisine far milder than neighbouring adaptations.

I joined Christine Bergman, an associate professor in the F&B Department at the University of Nevada, and Amy Irani, an environmental health supervisor in the same state, for a day of one of the finest blends of entertainment, education, culture and cuisine I have experienced in decades of globetrotting.

For US\$20 per head you will be picked up at your hotel or guesthouse in the morning, and whisked off to a local fresh produce market for a guided tour. Master Khmer chef and instructor Chanpon Chun, mother of five, survivor of the barbarous Khmer Rouge regime, and long-time Thai border refugee camp resident, spent two years as a chef and housekeeper for a family in the US. Chanpon explains which herbs, condiments, fresh produce and other local delicacies are on offer at the market. After that they take you to a fully equipped rooftop cooking school with individual gas burners to train a dozen

or more wannabe chefs. And a gigantic mirror above allows you to simultaneously view and replicate the teacher's actions.

You have your choice of three different menus; including vegetarian, and famous Khmer offerings such as *amok* (steamed fish with coconut in banana leaves), *num chiao* (Khmer-style spring rolls), *sayong jawk* (Cambodian sausages in banana leaves), and a kind of Khmer rice cake, known as *num pra pei ney*. So everyone is likely to find a local dish they appreciate and would like to make at home.

Late morning, round one ends with lunch in a quiet garden-like setting. Round two finishes up early in the evening with a feast of the afternoon's creations, much of which we were unable to finish so we packed it up for a late-night snack when Frizz drove us back to our guesthouse.

My own personal favourite was *saich moan char trop* (a savory minced chicken breast with charcoal-roasted eggplant stir-fried with garlic in oyster sauce). I tried it the first night we dined at Frizz's restaurant and was instantly enamored. The next day I learned how to prepare it myself and, slaving for more, went back the following evening for one last serving before jetting back to Bangkok. I now regularly prepare the dish at home to the overwhelming praise of family and friends.

During the Khmer Rouge days, and the fallout during the 80s and 90s, it was slim pickings for most Cambodians, to the extent that tarantulas became a delicacy. So it's a wonder that these traditional recipes have been preserved by people like Chanpon.

And besides, shooting a goat with an RPG while running around in army fatigues (see *Farang*, January 2004) is even beneath the imbeciles on Reality TV.

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SLEEPY time

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

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Moeleng Boutique Residence:

21/1 Soi Ratchatapan, Ratchaprarop Rd, tel: 02-642 4646. Bt1,100-2,100. Inviting rooms, botanical garden grounds.

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

PJ Watergate: 467 Soi Watanasil, Rachaparop Rd, tel: 02-933 2874, www.pjwatergate.com Bt943-1,150. In the centre of Pratunam market. Handy for shopping.

SILOM

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

Bt1,540-2,090. Wooden and honey-toned luxury.

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

Bt950. A bargain for the area.
Bangkok Christian Guest House: 123 Sala Daeng Soi 2, Convent Rd, tel: 02-233 6303, www.bcgh.org Bt1,100-1,800. Christian-principled boarding house.

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

Bt1,400-4,000. Boutique hotel.

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

Bt1,200-3,700. Swanky boutique style, each room has different décor.

Niagara Hotel: 26 Soi 9/ Suksavithaya, Silom Rd. (Skytrain Chong Nonsi) tel: 02-233 5783 Bt680. Value for money.

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

Bt570-800. Funky, Thai-style guesthouse.

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

Bt235-610. Shared/private rooms. Stylish, backpacker haven.

Urban House: 35/13 Soi Yommarat, Saladaeng Rd, tel: 01-492-7778, www.urbanh.com Bt800-1,300. Backpacker den. Free bottled water every day!

SUKHUMVIT

Bangkok Boutique Hotel:

241 Sukhumvit 21, Asoke, tel: 02-261 2850/4, www.bangkokboutiquehotel.com Bt1,440-4,921. Affordable, contemporary luxury.

Buri B&B: 58/14-15 Sukhumvit, 55 Sukhumvit Rd, tel: 02-714 1508. Bt400-500. Modern Thai-style with net-café.

Big John's Guesthouse Hotel: 159/12 Sukhumvit 55 (between Thonglor soi 7 & 9), tel: 02-712 9712. Bt175-390. Shared/private rooms. Cheap and cheerful. Great location.

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

Bt250-850. Shared/private rooms. Funky haunt with garden and roof terrace.

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

Bt700-1,000. Comfort on a backpacker budget.

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

Bt450-1,300. Shared/private rooms. A pleasant hangout.

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

Bt450-1,300. Classic décor, history and conservatism. Check the website to read the in-house rules.

BANGLAMPHU

238 Guest House: 238 Pahurad Rd, Pranakorn, tel: 02 623-9287, www.east-thai.com/238guesthouse Bt400-600. Quirky Victorian-style setting.

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

Bt1,800-2,200. Up market and modern.

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

Bt450-900. Good value rooms.

Sawasdee Group: tel: 02-280 1251,

www.sawasdee-hotels.com Five guesthouses throughout Banglamphu. Bt140-800. Thai-style hangouts.

Thai Cozy House: 111/1-3 Taneer Rd, tel: 02-629 5870-4 Bt650-1,000. Three minutes' walk from Khaosan Rd for boutique comfort.

Thai Hotel: 78 Prajatipatai Rd, Pranakorn, tel: 02-677 6240-5 Bt560-1,800 shared/private. Comfy rooms with wi-fi. Free tuk-tuk rides to Khaosan Rd.

Champagne

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

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

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

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

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

Lebua: Riverside, tel: 02-624-9999

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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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** (Khlong Bangkok Noi, near Pinklao Bridge). Meanwhile, the **Forensic Medicine Museum** (Siriraj Hospital, Mon-Fri), fascinates morbid souls with exhibits of famous murder weapons, crime-scene photos, serial killer corpses and abominations preserved in formaldehyde. Equally eccentric museum displays can be viewed at the nearby facilities for parasitology, anatomy, medical history and anthropology. To pick up your



Jaberwocky eats another tourist

WAY TO GO

TAXIS

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

BUSES

Buses vary in price and comfort: blue aircon buses cost from Bt10-20, depending on distance. The big red and blue buses go all over town for Bt7 and Bt8, respectively. Bus maps are available at all bookshops — the Nelles Bangkok map is the best of the lot.

TUK-TUKS

Kind of dangerous, but has to be done once anyway. All Bt10 tuk-tuk rides are scams. Unless you know the language and the city, a meter taxi is usually cheaper and cooler. However, tuk-tuks are the safest form of transport for women late at night due to the difficulty of sexual molestation.

MOTORCYCLE TAXIS

Motorcycle taxis are the only way to get anywhere quickly during the day. Most drivers are fairly sensible, but the bikes are dangerous — keep your knees in. Fares are about the same as meter taxis.

SKYTRAIN

The Skytrain is comfortable and fast and great for getting you around the centre of town, but needs to cover a much bigger area to be truly effective.

SUBWAY

At long last the metro, or MRTA, is open. There are interchange stations with the Skytrain at Mo Chit, Asok and Sala Daeng. It's a commuter system, so tourists tend to find the Skytrain more useful.



Catching the 6:37 to Silom

spirits, head for the riverside **Wat Arun** (an earthly manifestation of the Hindu heavens) or **Wat Prayoon** on Prachatipok Road.

DUSIT

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

SUKHUMVIT

Best known as a spot for eating, drinking, shopping and seeing expats in what almost seems like their natural habitat, the longest road in the *Guinness Book of Records* begins not far from the city's **Snake Farm** (Rama IV Road, near Henri Dunant Road). Visitors can see the poisonous reptiles fed and milked at this anti-venom-producing **Red Cross Institute**. The **Jim Thompson House** (Soi Kasemsan 2, opposite National Stadium) houses the authentic collection of Thai silks, furnishings, and handicrafts accumulated by the American CIA agent-turned

silk magnate-turned man that went mysteriously-missing-in-Malaysian-jungle. Near the Phra Khanong BTS is **Wat Mahabut** (Sukhumvit 77, Soi 7) with its shrine to the spirit of the country's most famous ghost, Nang Nak, drawing hundreds of people praying for luck, wealth or 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 Waniit) 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



VISIT BANGKOK'S NIGHT BAZAAR WHILE YOU CAN
With Nancy Chandler's Map of the Suan Lum Night Bazaar

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On the map, top shops, great drinking spots and more.
Map available at bookstores and online at www.nancychandler.net

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

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

Pantip Plaza

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

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

Central World Plaza

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

out front. Get off at Chidlom Skytrain stop.

Siam Discovery Center

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

FEEDING time

Bangkok truly is a foodie's city. Whether you're a high-flyer with a hankering for foie gras or a twat who thinks Bt25 is overpriced for a bowl of noodles, this town has it all. In addition to the restaurants we've listed there are countless food stalls, canteens, shop house diners and food courts serving affordable and tasty tucker. In the Silom area of town, Soi Convent is lined with some excellent foodstalls serving everything from noodle soup, chicken and yellow rice, to BBQ pork and jim jum hotpot. Sukhumvit Soi 38 (Skytrain Thonglor) is home to a well-known collection of food stalls and shophouses dishing up quality Thai-Chinese food in the evenings — very popular with locals. For more international cuisine, the small Arab quarter off Soi Nana and Sukhumvit houses some really good Middle Eastern restaurants and kebab stalls. Soi Nana itself even has Bangkok's only Ethiopian restaurant, Abyssinia Café. Worth visiting for a completely different atmosphere than elsewhere in Bangkok. Soi Thaniya (and almost any downtown Sukhumvit Soi) is jammed with Japanese places, most of which are laid-back and informal. In Bangkok, shopping-centre food need not mean the golden arches. Almost all have inexpensive food courts offering a huge

variety of Thai, Chinese and some international food. MBK, Siam Paragon, Siam Center and Emporium, amongst others, all have them. The posher malls and department stores also now have up-market versions (The Park food hall at Emporium, the 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.

SUKHUMVIT

BED SUPPERCLUB

(INTERNATIONAL)
26 Sukhumvit Soi 11, (Skytrain Nana), 7:30pm-1:30am, 02-651 3537, major cards
Ultra-cool hybrid of restaurant,

crepes and Mediterranean fodder served in a cool and casual atmosphere. Look out for ongoing promotions and food festivals.

LE DALAT INDOCHINE

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

LE BANYAN (FRENCH)

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



And they taste as bad as it looks

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

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

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

BELLA NAPOLI (PIZZERIA)
3/3 Sukhumvit Soi 31, (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 11am-2pm, 6pm-midnight, 02-712 5422, 02-259 0405, major cards
Hugely popular with local Thais, this down-home pizzeria is always packed and buzzing. Some of the best pizza around, but also worth trying the pasta.

KOI (JAPANESE)
26 Sukhumvit Soi 20, (Skytrain Phrom Phong or Asoke), 6pm-

midnight, closed Mondays, 02-258 1590, major cards
Very stylish restaurant serving Japanese cuisine with Californian touches. Attracts a sophisticated, high-flying crowd of socialites. Also houses a separate bar, cocktail lounge and four private rooms.

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

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

MES AMIS (French)
102/3 Thonglor Soi 5, (Skytrain Thonglor), 11:30am-2:30pm, 6.30pm-10.30pm, 02-260 6445-6, major cards
Definitely one of the better

Thonglor restaurants, and not overpriced, considering the high standard of the food and service. The atmosphere is casual but the restaurant is still stylish and classy.

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

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

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

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

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





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UNTAMED TRAVEL

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

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

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

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

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

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

BEI OTTO (GERMAN) 1 Sukhumvit Soi 20, Skytrain Asoke, 11am-1am, 02-260 0869,

major cards
Cosy restaurant serving quality German food such as sauerbraten and pork knuckle, as well as other European favourites. Also has a bakery and delicatessen on site.

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

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

FOGO VIVO (BRAZILIAN) President Tower Arcade, 973

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

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

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

GIUSTO (ITALIAN) 16 Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain Asoke, MRT Sukhumvit),



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Chad the impaler



DARK SIDE OF THE SPOON BLOOD JELLY

Words and pic by Oliver Benjamin

Looks like tofu, feels like tofu, tastes like old socks. Lovely purple colour brings to mind blood-engorged parts of the male anatomy you're supposed to slurp not masticate. Some authorities claim that blood is one of the world's healthiest foods, but that's only because they're vampires who work for lifeblood-sucking hospitals and health insurance companies.

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

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

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

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

authentic French fair. Tucked away in an unlikely Patpong location but full of character. Good value set lunches.

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

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

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 longstanding reputation helped along by gregarious Patty, who frequently visits Mexico for the latest taco trends.

THE BARBICAN (INTERNATIONAL & PUB)
9/4-5 Thaniya Road, (Skytrain Saladaeng, Subway Silom), 11:30am-1am, 02-234 3590, major cards. Brasserie-type restaurant and wine bar popular with expats and after-work drinkers. Reasonably priced food and friendly, attentive staff. Win or Lose happy hours Monday-Friday 5pm-7pm and a bevy of other regular promotions regularly.

IRISH XCHANGE (PUB)
1/5-6 Convent Road, Silom, (Skytrain Saladaeng), 9am-1pm, 02-266 7160, major cards Lively Irish pub with a mixed

crowd of expats, locals and the odd tourist. Sports on big screen, pool table and good food including excellent fry-ups and a Sunday carvery. Also has live music on Monday and Thursdays.

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

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

BAAN KLANG NAAM (SEAFOOD- THAI & CHINESE)
Soi 14 Rama 3 Road, near Montien Riverside Hotel, 1 1am-1pm, 02-292 0175, 02-292 2037, major cards Extremely popular with locals, Baan Klang Naam serves some of the best seafood in town in a converted house

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ROYAL INDIA (INDIAN)

95, B1 Soi Rambuttri, Chakrapong Road, 1:30am to midnight, 02-282 6688 Set back from the bustling road, in Rambuttri Village, the restaurant has the feel of, well, someplace much nicer than Khaosan. Outdoor seating around a fishpond may not make you think of India, but the food will leave you with visions of the Taj Mahal. This is a branch of the oldest Indian restaurant in Bangkok, and they definitely know their stuff. Best loved dishes here are Chicken Tikka Masala, Paneer Tikka, and delicious Garlic Nan. The delicious mint sauce is a good bet too. Royal India serves veg and non-veg dishes all day and does Western breakfast, from 7am.

SHOSHANA (ISRAELI)

86 Chakraphong Road, next to the petrol-station, 10am-midnight, 02-282 9948, no

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

JOK POCHANA (THAI

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

OH MY COD (FISH & CHIPS)

95D, Rambutri Village Inn, Soi

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

RICKY'S COFFEE SHOP (SANDWICHES)

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

HOTEL RESTAURANTS

JW MARRIOTT BANGKOK

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

A great choice for gourmands, the JW houses some superb restaurants. Sister restaurants Tsu and Nami provide the full monty of Japanese food from traditional sophistication, at the former, to lively teppanyaki dining at the latter. New York Steakhouse is one of the city's most highly-regarded grills, with top-notch steaks and flawless service. Man Ho offers a wide variety of Chinese fair, whilst White Elephant is the place for refined Thai cuisine.

THE ORIENTAL HOTEL

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

THE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL

89 Soi Wat Suan Phlu, New Road (riverside), (Skytrain Saphan Taksin), 02-236 7777, major cards Another grand and luxurious riverside hotel. Angelini is 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 convenient 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



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0444, major cards
Well located for cashed-up shoppers near the Gaysorn and Erawan Bangkok shopping malls. Fireplace Grill is the hotel's best-known restaurant serving simple, high quality steaks and seafood. Summer Palace offers traditional Chinese cuisine, and Espresso a varied international buffet.

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

REMBRANDT HOTEL 19 Sukhumvit Soi 18, (Skytrain Asoke), 02-261 7100, major cards
Senor Pico is one of the few restaurants in town to serve

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

NIGHT tripping

Bangkok's nightlife scene may lack the late night stamina it once had, but it has grown increasingly sophisticated and eclectic. Where once the city's DJs, tunes and bands were several years behind the times, they're now poised on the shank of yesterday - and visiting DJs and bands keep bringing things more into the present day and beyond.

From traditional English and Irish pubs to mega-clubs, live blues, tranquil lounges and Japan's revenge for Hiroshima — karaoke — there are a staggering number of places to get legless. But bartenders should be warned that at most venues Tam is the closing time and to enter some of the bigger clubs you will need to show ID — even if you are 65 years old with wrinkles like the Marianas Trench.

SUKHUMVIT & AROUND TSUKIYO Soi Ekamai 28, Sukhumvit 63 (100m from Phetburi Rd), 06-527 0099, 01-511 4755, no cards, www.tsukiyobkk.com, closed Tue. Tucked away in the depths of Soi Ekamai, this summerhouse-turned-bar has seen continued popularity under the watchful eye of DJ Octo. Downstairs is an open sprawl of cushions and platforms, upstairs is air-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 Arston 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 ฿90 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 Pleomchit), 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 (฿85-700) fish and chips, pies, steaks and Thai dishes. Regular and varied live bands playing everything from jazz to hip-hop. Ladie's Night on Wednesday with free drinks for women from 6pm to 10pm and bingo with cash prizes. Happy hour from 5-9pm.

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

FLIX / SLIM Block D, RCA. Brothers, sisters whatever they are: Flix and Slim are and were key to the RCA revolution. Switching RCA's staple teeny-pop to sophisticated-groovin' was a painless move, and both clubs are jam-packed every night of the week. Slim caters to lovers of the all conquering Hip-Hop, while Flix offers strictly 4-4 beats. Flix has also played host to some household names in House music: Judge Jules, Seb

Fontaine and Little Louie Vega among others. Entry is free but you'll need your passport as ID.

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

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

INCH 55/49-60 Ratchadapisek Road, 02-641 2963, major cards, www.inchclub.com. 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. ฿500 cover includes three drinks.

TAWANDANG 462/61 Rama 3 Road, 02-678 1114-6, www.tawandang1999.com, major cards. Microbrewery and mega beer-hall, Tawandang was one of Bangkok's first (successful) brewpubs. Choose from weizen, lager, or dunkel beers, all brewed to strict German purity standards by a real German brewmaster pumping out 700,000 litres a year, by the half-litre for ฿100. The vast hall features performers, ranging from Thai classical music, to popular indie bands and the good-old "sexy girl singing to a backing track". Their Thai food menu is delicious and reasonably priced. The 1pm jazz session is worth going out of your way for.

SAXOPHONE 3/8 Victory Monument on Phayathai Road (Skytrain Victory Monument), 02-246 5472, major cards, www.saxophonepub.com. Live blues, R&B, Jazz, Rock, Reggae and even Ska house bands enclosed in a woody, cozy wrapper seven nights a week, from around 8pm. Mostly a friendly Thai crowd with a few Farangs thrown in. Some of the best live music in town. Small beer for ฿120. No cover. Good Thai food.

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



Another good reason to fear clowns

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 ฿100 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). ฿500 cover after 10pm with two drinks. There's Massive Mondays (Dancehall & Reggae beats), Globalism Tuesday (Afro, Latin, Percussive House), Wednesday is Ghetto Fabulous, uniting the best of old school Hip Hop, Funk & more. Liquid Thursday (House with special guests), Frisky Friday (Freestyle), Saturday Night Fever (Funky House) and Beat Therapy Sunday (Hip Hop).

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

Classy, shiny all-white nightclub that looks like a spaceship. At ฿500 (Tue, Fri, Sat) and ฿400 other days, it's not the cheapest place in town, but that gets you two drinks and keeps the riff-raff out. The music policy varies throughout the week - see website. Opposite the dancing bit is the eating bit (hence the 'supper' in Supper club) with set meals served from 7.30pm (8pm sharp Fri, Sat).

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

THE DUBLINER IRISH PUB 440 Sukhumvit Road,

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

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

SILOM

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

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

IRISH EXCHANGE 1/5-6 Covent Road, just off of Silom (Skytrain Sala Daeng), 02-266 7160-11, major cards. Irish Pub, sports bar and restaurant catering to mixed crowd of expats, tourists and locals who've developed a taste for publife. For the keeneow (stingy), alcoholic, footie fans or all of the above, Saturday is the official Tiger beer Premier League day with pitchers of Tiger Bt100 from 2pm-2am!

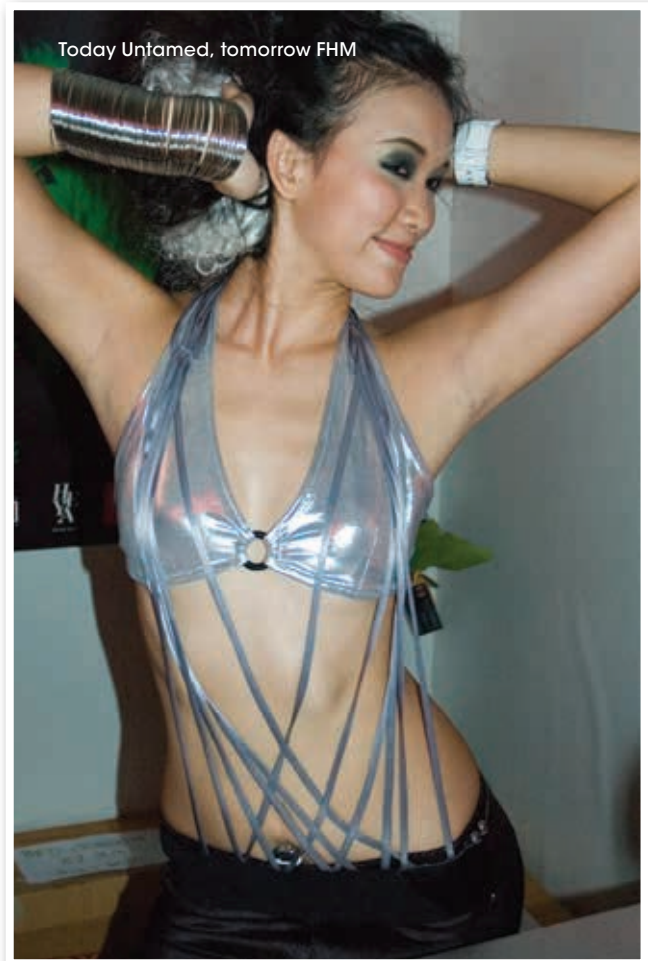
MUZZIK CAFÉ Patpong Soi 1. The crossroads corner of Patpong 1 & 2 is a great place to sit, swill and people/freak watch. It's been there forever and is a top spot for starting off the evening or finishing yourself off.

LUCIFERS Patpong Soi 1, 02-234 6902. Fight your way past "You see fucking show!" and "Hello, t-shirt!" and up the stairs to where the prince of darkness shakes his booty. This club is a stayer on the Bangkok carousel and has kept people dancing to House and Trance and everything in between for years. Bt150 drinks and a post-grunge feel set it apart from the slick sterility offered by most Bangkok clubs.

NORIEGA'S Silom Soi 4 (Sala Daeng skytrain), 02-233 2813, major cards. Small, modern two-level bar run by Frank. The small food menu is headed 'nufood menu' which just about sums up the mix of Thai, Tex-Mex and international favourites. Downstairs the bar features prominently in this clean white space. Live music seven days a week and one of the few venues in Bangkok to feature live blues every weekend from the city's premier blues outfits. Other nights feature jazz, Latin and a range of bands catering to every taste.

TAPAS Silom Soi 4 (Sala Daeng skytrain), 02-2344737, www.tapasroom.net, major cards. As a long-time leader in Soi 4, Tapas Room Club continues to be popular. Spinning soulful house and funk, DJs Neng, Wut and Oud & Tee keep bodies dancing with live percussion on Thursdays and weekends (Bt100 entry).

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



also has tables out the front - perfect for watching people of the night flit from club to club.

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

SPHINX Silom Soi 4 (Sala Daeng skytrain), 02-234 7249, www.sphinxthai.com, major cards. Hidden at the shadowy bottom end of Soi 4, this is the place to refuel. The menu maximizes on excellent Thai

and Farang food. Broad cocktail menu along with ancient Egypt-cum-Godfather ambience is good for wining, dining and 69ing.

DISTIL 64th Floor, The Dome, State Tower, Silom Road, 02 624 9555, 12pm-1.00am, major cards. Claiming to be Bangkok's only speciality bar, Distil encompasses a proper malt whiskey bar, oyster bar, wine bar, cigar bar and outdoor terrace. Truly a bar to wallow in luxurious excess, one can stuff oneself on fine de claire oysters from France and beluga caviar from Iran, washed down by 42 Below vodka, then finish off with a Cuban cigar on the outdoor terrace. Not cheap.

BANGLAMPHU SILK BAR Opposite Krung Thai Bank, Khaosan Road, 02-629

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UNTAMED TRAVEL



Every night Rob would discover the solution to cold fusion and forget it by morning

4447, www.silkbars.com, major cards. Khaosan has definitely gone upscale—any fool can see that—and the Silk Bar isn't the only trendy bar on the street. That said, the design gives a nod to the traditional style of bar featuring a large street-front drinkery for watching the parade of nations walking aimlessly up and down the road. Beers aren't cheap, but you're definitely with a better class of people.

DONG DEA MOON 54/1 Rambutri Road (behind the Wat). Otherwise know as "The Korean Bar" this place is popular with teachers and other expats on Fridays and Saturdays. Remarkable because it has stayed the

same funkified joint when so much around it has changed. The upstairs bar features a free pool table and an open-air balcony offering a view of the road and temple below. Excellent Korean food, grilled seafood and cool beers.

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

PRANAKORN Just off Ratchadamnoen Klang Road, first Soi west of Thanon Tanao,

58/2 Soi Damnoen Klang Tai, 02-522 0282, no cards. This bar is like four different venues in one: on the ground floor, replete with posters for old Marlon Brando and Elvis movies, the DJ plays retro rock and Jazz and there's often really decent live Thai music. The second floor is an art and photography gallery that sometimes features live music and even theatre. On the third floor, there's more dancey and alternative tunes, along with a pool table and couches. Up top is the roof, with a great view of the illuminated Golden Mount, lots of tables, chilled-out tunes and classic tracks. There's a big menu of splendid and affordable Thai dishes and booze is cheap.

Considering the bar is close to Khaosan and Café Democ, it attracts a surprisingly low quota of white backpacking trash. The majority are Thai Bohemians.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELLER'S TAVERN Across from police station, 02-629 1988-9, major cards, www.gulliverbangkok.com. The pub with the tuk-tuk over the door on the corner of Khaosan. If you're aching for English football, Farang food, and a shot of pool, this is your place. Generous happy hours mean this Yank-style roadhouse is usually packed with punters. The place has become popular with young Thai females looking for close encounters, (careful, some of them are men). Best aircon



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LAVA CLUB Downstairs at the Bayon building at the Buddy Lodge end of Khaosan Road, 02-281 6565, no cards. Every night 8pm until 2am. Just the place for the lounge too lazy or frightened to explore greater Bangkok. This comfy black and red replication of Hades plays mostly hip hop through an excellent state-of-the-art sound system to a crowd of Thai and International boogyers.

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

IMMORTAL BAR First floor in Bayon Building on Khaosan,

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

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

BRICK BAR Back of Buddy Lodge on Khaosan Road, 02-629 4747, 02-629 4848, www.buddylodge.com, major cards except Amex. Huge bar hidden in the bowels of Buddy Lodge. The Brick Bar is notable as one of the few venues on Khaosan to feature live bands on a regular basis (Jazz, Blues, Ska from 8pm). Get a seat on the

upstairs balcony to check out the crowd, below.

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

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

AD HERE THE 13TH 13 Samsen Rd. Walk up Chakrapong Rd from the Police Station end of Khaosan about 400 metres, cross the bridge over the canal and it's on your left — you can't miss it. This small but mighty gem of a blues bar features a house band led by beatific guitarist

extraordinaire Pong and husky-voiced belting singer Georgia and just keeps getting better. Special guests join in regularly (ask Pong if you want to sit in), and there's a sizzling jazz band on Mondays. It feels like a house party, with free and friendly mingling in one of the only places in town where the invisible stone wall between Thais and foreigners was never built. Beers are Bt80.

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

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chiang MAI

Ask someone in the know what's so special about Chiang Mai and even the fondest aficionado will waffle, "Um, well, I suppose there's some nice scenery and there's some good restaurants and lots of elephants and temples. Easy to get around. Plenty of 7-11s." But that sure doesn't do it justice. Chiang Mai is so much greater than the sum of its parts. A recent survey in a mainstream travel mag just rated it the fifth best city in the world! Why? Maybe because it's a medium-size university town with both big-city sophistication and small-town intimacy. It's safer, cheaper, friendlier and cheaper (did we say cheaper?) than most other

tourist spots in Thailand or even Southeast Asia for that matter. And it not only has an astonishing per-capita number of temples, but it probably has an even higher punters-to-pubs ratio as well. Yet for those with a healthy bent, the opportunities for physical and spiritual advancement are unparalleled. Chiang Mai's got it all. Aside from a beach, that is. Upside: no sharks.

PLACES TO CRASH

If it seems as if every other building in Chiang Mai is a guesthouse, that's because in some areas, it is. Consequently, you should have no trouble finding a comfy, good-value place to flop. The most popular tourist ghetto is inside the northeastern corner of the old city - around Moon Muang Soi 9. A perennial favourite in that area, but often full is **Supreme House**, managed by ever-cheerful

Scottish Gordon. People check in but never seem to leave. Down the lane you'll find **Grace House**, which features shiny rooms and a good restaurant, and **S&P Hotel** which boasts a small swimming pool. Looking for something a bit more quaint? **Mountain View Guest House** on Sri Poom road and **Gap House** off Ratchadamnoen road both feature Lanna-style architecture and a leafy garden. **Sri Pat Guest House** on Moon Muang Soi 7 is a small boutique-style hotel catering to those looking for a little more comfort. Farther afield you'll find many other popular gems like **Julie Guest House** - people who stay there love it so much and so vocally that you wonder what they put in the food. **Daret's Guest House** benefits from its perfect location right at Tha Pae Gate, with a fun outdoor eating area and cheap, good dishes. Those seeking upscale accommodation can find world-class-and-

wonderful crash palaces like **Baan Sabai**, the **Mandarin Oriental Dhara Devi**, **The Four Seasons Resort**, **Tamarind Village** and **Ratchamankha**. Your pretty penny will purchase outrageously picturesque panoramas - all four mix modern amenity with ancient mystical charm. Finally, for those truly skint, head on over to **Banana Guest House** for dorm beds at Bt50 a bum.

DAY TRIPPING TEMPLES

More than that you can shake an incense stick at. But each one is unique in its way. **Wat Umong** could be the coolest, featuring a cute garden with inspirational sayings nailed to the trees, an unusual "starving Buddha" statue, a small zoo, catacombs, and instructive illustrations of wayward dogs getting drunk and driving too fast. **Wat Chedi Luang** is massive and particularly impressive when lit up at night. Don't miss the

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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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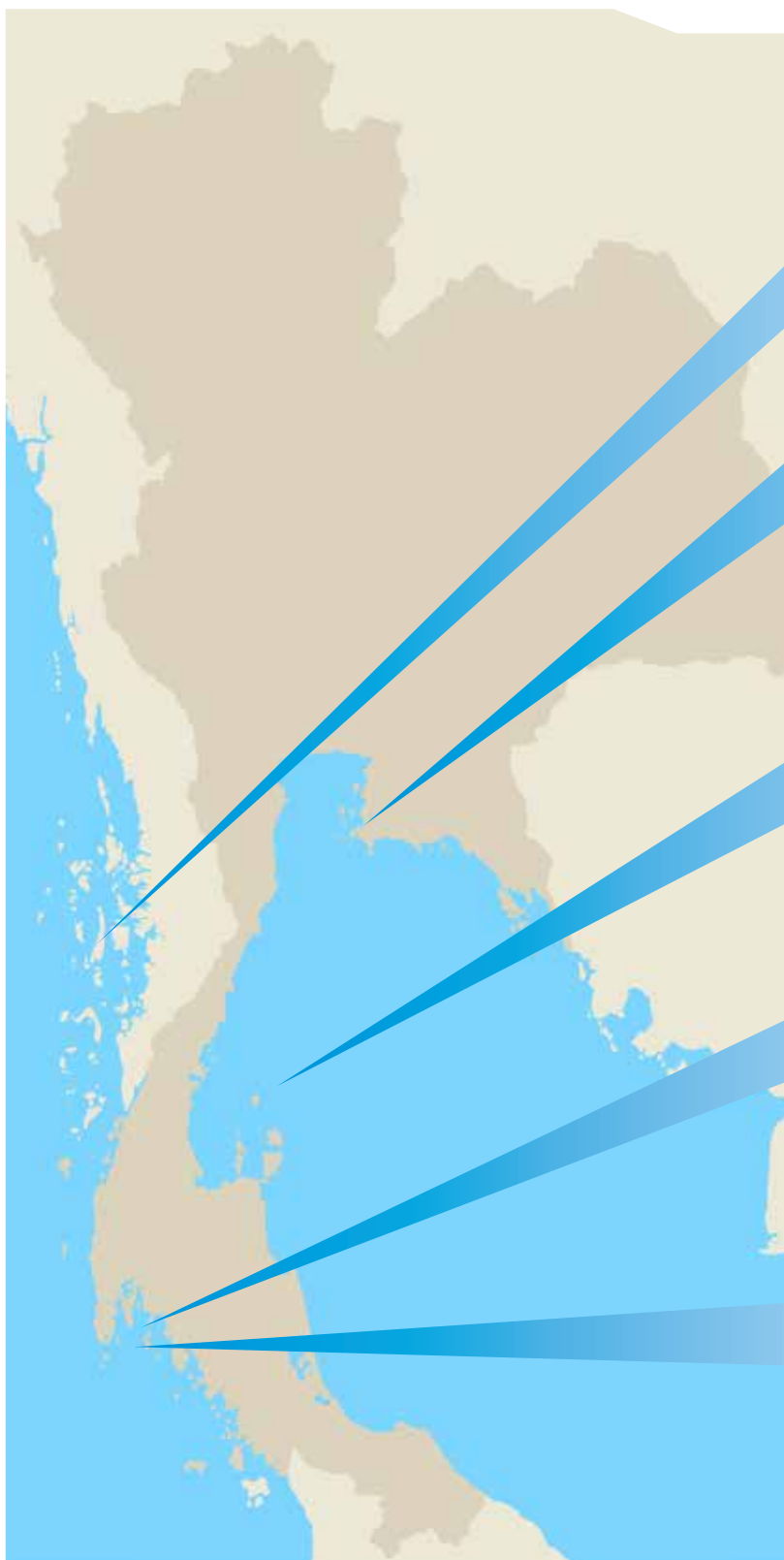
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THE SIMILANS

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 now 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.

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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, minibar and two swimming pools from Bt600, while old-school **Shambala** (Bt650 and up), has a fine restaurant, and is situated in the centre of Ban Rak, on the beach. **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 Bohput's dining scene is

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

LAMAI

El Dorado has a popular all-you-can-eat BBQ on Wednesday for Bt250. **Harry's Bar** wins the biggest fried breakfast award. **Black Diamond** serves up cheap and good Thai and Western tucker while **The Cliff**, on the main ring road towards

Chaweng, has incredible cliff-top views, offers Portuguese Piri Piri and has a bar where you may find James Bond or members of Duran Duran.

MAENAM

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

BAN RAK/BIG BUDDHA

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

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

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

BOPHUT/BIG BUDDAH/BAN RAK

Bands and BBQs go down a treat at **Secret Garden** by

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

ACTION PANTS

Experience the jungle with

Canopy Adventure (07-741 4150) where you slide along ropes to various tree houses above the canopy, Bt1,400 per head. A great way to see the island is to take a **Samui Safari** (07-741-5123-5). You can choose half- or whole-day trips, from snorkelling and elephant trekking to 4x4 off-roading. There is also a world-class golf course on the island, the **Santiburi Golf and County Club** (07-741 8557),

or try mini golf at **Yogi Bear Ha Ha** (01-787 9148), situated on a back road between Bophut and Chaweng. Samui also has **Football Golf** (09-771 7498) near Chong Mon, and **Frisbee Golf**, in Bophut past the **Monkey Theatre**. Heading back to the zone of sanity, **Red Bicycles** (07-726 7202) rents mountain bikes and arranges tours through the jungle and beyond. A less strenuous way to see the



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island is from the sea: **Kia Ora** (07-745 2264) catamaran will take you out to sea with a fully stocked bar. For more action try **Samui Quads and Paintball** (01-371 0744). A newcomer to the sports scene in Samui is two freshwater fishing lakes stocked with huge fish in Taling Ngam (enquiries@fishingthailand.com). Meanwhile, at the **Samui Crocodile Farm**, near the airport, you can watch a brave fool stick his head in the jaws of a prehistoric monster. Cold-blooded, reptilian capers and human daring are also on the cards at the **Samui Snake Farm** (07-741-8680-1), where the Guinness-record-breaking Scorpion Queen and Centipede King also hold court. For CSI fans fond of forensic mysteries, **Luang Pho Daeng** was a monk whose undecomposed body is in a glass case for viewing at the Khunaram Temple near the Namuang Waterfall. For boat charters and diving, talk to **Aquademia** (01-091 0107). Bring a copy of **Untamed Travel** to **Aquademia** and get a 10 percent discount.

ROADTRIPPING

The two main taxis are green and yellow aircon cars and *songthaews* (shared pickups). A ride in a car costs about Bt300 and they never put their meters on, just as well as they're rigged to hit Bt500 in five seconds. For short trips expect to pay Bt150/200, but make sure you haggle over the price first. *Songthaews* are Bt50-100 for the longer

journeys and Bt30 for short trips, but it's every man for himself after dark. Renting a motorbike is Bt150 per day, but remember that road accidents are the number-one cause of death in Thailand, with Samui being ground zero. There's no green cross code, or crosswalks on Samui and it's getting more dangerous by the minute. Renting a Jeep is a much safer option: **Budget** is insured so that's your best bet if you don't want to end your visit in tears or the Emergency Room.

WAY TO GO

FERRY

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

PLANE

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

TRAIN

A sleeper ticket is Bt900 from Bangkok-Surat Thani for an aircon, 2nd-class berth and Bt1,339 for 1st class. Prices

vary for all sorts of reasons. Add Bt180 for bus and ferry transfers.

BUS

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

koh PANGAN

The home of Bt100 bungalows and the full moon party, Koh Pangan is regarded as paradise to some and Gomorra by others. The place has undergone a few changes since its halcyon days as a hippie boot camp; the old wooden ferry still runs but most punters are turning up on the Lomphraya high-speed catamaran now. Likewise, the cheap and cheerful (and lizard infested) bungalows are still about, but now you can get aircon and a comfy bed by spending a bit more. What hasn't changed is that the island is still replete with stunning beaches and around its beating jungle heart.

PLACES TO CRASH:

HAD RIN:

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

On sunrise: Paradise Bungalows and the Backpackers Lodge have a good variety of rooms and Sea Garden (Bt500 - 5,000) and Jonathan are classy joints.

Drop Inn (Bt2,550 - 19,500) has a new hotel with spa and penthouse rock-star suites! **On sunset:** **Ya Ya's Guest House** is a great find, and **Neptune's Villa** (Bt1,000-2,500), **Phangan Buri** (Bt2,200-4,500) and **Vimarn Samut** (Bt1,950-5,600) are well run with great aircon rooms.

BAN TAI:

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

Harmony (Bt450-2,100) has aircon bungalows, swimming pool and sauna and **Hunsa Resort** (Bt650-2,500) in Ban Tai Village has aircon beachfront rooms with minibars, baths and TVs. **Milky Bay** (Bt1,200-4,000), **Morning Star** and **Dewshore** (Bt800-3,500) are also recommended.

WEST SIDE:

The west coast of Koh Pangan is a string of beautiful white sandy coves; it has the best coral reef and great sunset views.

In Sri Thanu, **Chai Country** is a top place where Chai takes guests on unique daytrips. Had Chao Phao is home to high-class **Phangan Cabana** (Bt800-1,800), **See Thanu** (Bt300-2,500) and the bohemian **Sea Flower. The Village Green** (Bt350-1,400) serves fantastic Euro-Asian cuisine.

Had Son resort (Bt450-12,000) is a cracker, on its own beach with a full range of rooms and a fantastic swimming pool. Had Yao is a lively beach with some great bars and beachside restaurants. **Sandy Bay** (Bt500-2,700) and **Had Yao** are popular while the good-value **Over the Bay** has peaceful hillside vistas. Had Salad is a beautiful deserted beach with mid-range **Salad Huts** and luxurious **Salad Beach Resort** (Bt1,700-4,000). Near Koh Ma, Mae Had has a variety of huts with the best diving and snorkelling. **Island View Cabana** and **Wang Sai** are also good ones.

CHALOKLUM:

Chaloklam has some well-established resorts and like many villages around Koh Pangan, there are houses to rent.

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

NORTHEAST:

On the more remote side of the island there are three very popular beaches; **Bottle Beach** is old-skool Pangan, Than Sadet is home to the island's biggest waterfall and Thong

Nai Pan has all the trappings of Bohemian beach life. Further around, it becomes more rugged; here Had Tien and Had Yao East provide real castaway dreams. Bottle Beach is only accessible by boat from Chaloklum and there's sometimes a waiting list for good rooms. On Thong Nai Pan Noi, **Panviman** (Bt3,000-19,000) and **Baan Panburi** (Bt650-2,000) are posh gaffs that take visa cards and **Thong Ta Pan** and **Star Huts** are good value. On Thong Nai Pan Yai, **Dreamland** (Bt300-1,500) and **Nice Beach** are popular. Than Sadet has a variety of cheap rustic bungalows and some more luxurious resorts like **Mai Pan Rai** (Bt250-800). Had Yao East has just two resorts and Had Tien is home to the infamous **Sanctuary**, with a real traveller vibe.

DAYTRIPPING:

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

NIGHTTRIPPING:

Pangan has a wildly varied nightlife with everything from its infamous beach parties to high-class restaurants and beach bars. If you are not into parties, just head to any beach outside Had Rin, while Thong Sala is a great place to head for a gourmet feed and a few beers. Pangan's party HQ is Had Rin, with the Full Moon Beach Party (FMP) every month and nightly parties at a great variety of venues with everything from drum and bass to trance to R'n'B - just take a wander up Sunrise beach to find something you like. On Sunset, the **Outback** has quality tunes and food and try not to miss the **Backyard** for its infamous recovery party that goes on all day the day after the moon. Outside Had Rin, **Black Moon Culture** hosts one of the biggest outdoor parties in Ban Kai Jungle two weeks after the FMP, whilst the **Half Moon Festival** goes off a week before and a week after the FMP; both in brilliantly decked-out jungle with excellent facilities; expect hard, progressive and quality trance. Other venues include the **Moon-Set Party** at the **Pirates Bar**, Chao Phao Beach going off three to four days before each FMP in a secluded private cove and the **Ban Sabai** daytime after-parties that go off after any major event in a super-sandy beachfront venue.

ROADTRIPPING:

To hire a songthaew it's about Bt350 to go half-way across the island and over Bt500 for hard to get to places. Normal prices from Thong Sala (the main town) are: Bt30 for Ban Tai and Woktum; Bt60 for Had Rin; 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 Pangan (about 45min); flights also go to Surat Thani airport on the mainland, a cheaper route but takes longer to get to the island (five hours). When flying, check your arrival times to ensure you can get a ferry that day; it's best to arrive at Samui before 2:30pm.

Train:

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

Bus:

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

Ferry:

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

koh TAO

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

PLACES TO CRASH

Accommodation choices are varied and cater for all tastes and budgets; from beach-shack chic to the more luxurious pads with all the mod-cons and prices to match. Most resorts now have a choice of fan or aircon bungalows. Expect to pay around Bt400 for a fan room, double that for aircon. Check out www.untamed-travel.com for latest accommodation deals.

MAE HAAD

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

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WEST COAST

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

THE EAST

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



Bungalows are good choices, as is **Blacktip Resort** and **Water Sports Centre.** The southeast has small bays dotted along it. Try **Ao Leuk Resort** in Leuk Bay or **Coral View Resort** and **New Heaven Huts** in Sai Daeng. Transport to the more secluded bays can be arranged from the pier by either taxi or longtail boat.

THE SOUTH

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

DAYTRIPPING

As a major diving certification centre, blessed with an abundance of marine life and easily accessible dive sites, many would-be Cousteaus choose to start their dive

careers here. A full range of courses can be completed with SSI and PADI being the major standards. Tech-diving courses are available for the less faint hearted. Alternatively, snorkelling is another way to see the fishes. With many secluded bays and beaches, try a day snorkelling and swimming at **Jansom Bay** or **Hing Wong.** If you're still keen for some water activities check out **MV Sports, Blacktip Water Sports** or **Switch Water Sports,** all offer wakeboarding, water skiing and the rest. For those who prefer terra firma there is plenty to keep you occupied. If you're the active type, trekking trails are plentiful and the most arduous routes reward the survivors with isolated bays and crystal-clear waters or mountain-top views and postcard-photo opportunities. Alternatively, hire mountain bikes and cycle your way to fitness taking in the scenery. Try your hand at bowling and mini-golf at Koh Tao's new Leisure Park.

NIGHTTRIPPING

With hundreds of divers completing courses daily, there is always a vibrant party-scene on the rock. A regular mix of home-grown and visiting DJ's play a variety of musical styles, assuring the freshest sounds. Most venues are open nightly, although the party night changes, keeping the atmosphere alive and a scene of, great people and good spirits. Check posters and fliers for more info. For bar butterflies there are plenty of places to choose from. In Sairee the forever popular **Dry Bar** is ideal for sunset and serves great drinks and music, in a continuously creative beach lounge setting. Just along the beach is **Manana** a new daytime chill-out bar. Next door is **Lotus Bar** with a regular crowd, varied music policy and vibrant party atmosphere. In Mae Haad, **Dragon Bar** serves up oriental mystique and seductive beats

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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 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** offers a selection of classic Italian dishes. Try **Whitening Restaurant** between the piers for superb international and Thai cuisine. If you want a monster breakfast 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



Aw christ, not another idyllic sunset in paradise

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

About 20 years ago Thailand's tourism scene was getting ready to explode into what it is today, and a lot of the exploding happened in Phuket. What was once a sleepy tropical island full of people fishing and digging up pineapples is today visited by more than two million tourists a year, all seeking sun, sand and Sang Som. The well-heeled head for the five-star places to sun by the pool while the backpackers stay in old

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shophouses and gawp at fat Germans on the beach. It's a world-class holiday destination, full of things to do and look at, it's just a shame the tuk-tuk drivers are such a pack of assholes.

CRASH PADS

PATONG

Of course, Patong is packed with hundreds of choices in lodging, far too many to list here. These are just a few. The **Thai Oriental Inn** is very Thai-style, and is an exceptional deal 209/9-10, Rat-U-Thit Rd Patong. The **Expat Hotel** is a Patong institution, Soi Expat is at the top of Soi Bangla, the "heart of Patong". Expat Hotel 163/17 Ratuthit Road (Soi Expat). **Club Bamboo** has quiet Thai-style ambiance on Patong Hill with a variety of rooms starting at Bt1,500. Avantiika (Bt3,900+) offers luxury accommodations at the south end of Patong Beach, good value for its standard. The **Novotel** is just across the street from Baan Rim Pa in Kalim, yet only 15 minutes into the middle of Patong. **Patong Merlin** is right in the heart of Patong, yet-family style. Rooms start at Bt4,500 and up at 44, Thaveewong Road. **Merlin Beach** stole one of our favourite beaches, an excellent location at 99 Muen-Ngoen Rd., Tri-Trang Beach. **Patong Bay Garden Resort** is right on the beach at 33/1 Thaveewong 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 getaway. Winning *Conde Nast's* award for top 100 hottest resorts in 2005. Quiet and slow, Rawai's **Siam Phuket Resort** is Phuket's oldest tourist hotel, yet stays up with the times. High season rates start at US\$20 - and that's not a misprint. Located right on the beach in Rawai at 24/24 Rawai Beach., **Rising Sun Residence** private villas are a class of their own - excellent value for families. The villas, each with its own swimming pool, overlook Wat Chalong at 48/13 Moo 6, 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 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 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 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**, 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

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Sairee beach



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Koh tao

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

of a top-end ole English pub and restaurant. On Rawai Beach, just pick an open-air seafood restaurant and take your chances - all offer great Thai seafood. **Belgium Bakery** is excellent, and has a few tables inside and outside. Try their sandwiches and other excellent European-style baked goods.

PHUKET TOWN

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

NIGHTTRIPPING

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

KATA

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

RAWAI

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

ROADTRIPPING

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

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UNTAMED TRAVEL

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

WAY TO GO:

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

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

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

koh LANTA

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.



What happened to the flower kid

ACCOMODATION

The **RawiWarin** Resort opened in 2006 on Khlong Toab Beach. Asia's first "ocean-pool" and wonderful rolling gardens are two of the lures at the latest five-star resort on Lanta. Rooms cost from Bt4,900 to Bt45,000. On Pra-ae beach **Relax Bay** is a wonderful resort with a semi-private setting to match. Rooms cost between Bt500 and Bt2,000. You'll also find **Lanta Garden Hill Resort**, Bt600 and Bt800. **Ozone Bar**

has rooms for Bt200 on a deserted five kilometre beach. On Last Beach the **Bamboo Resort** is in its own stunning, "secret" location, with rooms for around Bt200.

FEEDING TIME

Lanta offers a great mix of everything, from small wooden shacks (try the **Thai-Isaan Restaurant**, Khlong Dao for some tantalizing surprises), beachfront eateries and still-top restaurants on the

water in Saladan to some classy European food as well. **Faim de Loup Bakery** on Pra-ae beach fulfils all of your patisserie-based cake and bread cravings. Seafood galore is the speciality at the aptly named **Saladan Seafood** in Saladan; the sustenance is cheap and fresh, so you can sit back and enjoy the breeze wafting over the channel as you tuck into a towering plate of unending shellfish. **Mr. Wee's Pizza** on

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

KRABI

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

tip. Tonsai Beach, hidden away in the northwest of the peninsula, is home to a diverse crew of backpackers and rock-scaling thrill-seekers.

KRABI TOWN

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

FEEDING TIME

Krabi has a real buffet of choices. The Khong Kha Road Night Market sells all types of local delectables, from simple noodle soup through to crispy, fried oyster omelettes, which are way tastier than they sound. Want to loosen the bowels? Southern Thailand is renowned for its liberal use of chillies in the local curries. Head for the day market on Soi 10 and marvel at the aromas wafting around you at the restaurant stalls. If unsure, just point and ask, "Chicken? Beef? Pig guts?" **Ruen Mai** is charming and cheap; it has all sorts of exciting and exotic flavours, plus some great seafood. But the best seafood in town is served up at Chow Seua. Tired of spice and rice? **Café Europa**, one of Krabi's first foreign-owned restaurants, serves a smorgasbord of Scandinavian favourites. And the Italian-owned **Viva Pizzeria** has great antipastos, pasta and pizzas.

NIGHTRIPPING

Bangkok it is not but that doesn't mean you have to stay in your room playing dominoes. If in doubt about the town's varied nightlife, stop the nearest motorbike taxi and in your best Thai

accent, ask "Techno? Band? Pub?" Of these three distinct types of different local styles **The Crazy Pub** can be recommended for having a fairly "pumping" atmosphere as live bands and DJs entertain you with a combination of Thai and European tracks. Fashionable, fun, smiley clientele surround you and the beer boys and girls refill your glass the minute you sup the last drop of liquid. For the Asian "dance music" lover, you can risk heading to **Mixer Pub** where the music is loud and sometimes makes your eyelids twitch.

DAYTRIPPING

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

AO NANG

If you haven't been here for a few years, then you may not recognise this once sleepy and quiet beachfront road. There may be a McDonalds, fashion malls, five-star resorts and more concrete than greenery, but Ao Nang is still a cool base camp for a few days. Recently, all of the phone lines and electric cables on the beach road were relaid – underground! Get off the main strip and you will find a stunning, nature lover's location with some of the most scenic sites that Krabi has to offer within a short hike. The level of accommodation in Ao Nang has climbed over the years. **Wanna's Place** has rooms for around Bt900. The **Somkiat Buri** resort is in a wonderful location with rooms that go for about Bt1,200. Nowadays, the average "budget" fan-room in Ao Nang comes with hot water, TV and costs in the region of Bt350. Numerous guesthouses behind the beachfront are a safe bet with friendly staff.

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PADI



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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 two- to three-star standard rooms with swimming pools; and ฿400 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 ฿350. **Cabanna Resort** provides basic bungalows with attached shower room.

NIGHTRIPPING

The east side also hosts most of the main bars with parties rotating between them nightly. The best of the bashes are at the **Gecko Bar** and the **Last Bar**, both

NIGHTRIPPING & FEEDING TIME

A regular haunt is the **Irish Rover Bar & Grill** for its lively atmosphere and some marvellously meaty dishes, good tunes and live sports on the TV. For the more serious sports freak, **JJ's Sports Bar and Café** is notable for its giant screen, decent pub food and a bouncy, enjoyable atmosphere. The juiciest steaks in town can be found at **Café 154**. Live music pumps out of the

Encore Café: jazz, blues or good ol' rock 'n' roll will put a bounce in your step. **The Last Fisherman** and **The Last Café** offer a relaxed atmosphere on the beach, where you can soak up a cocktail and the last rays of the setting sun before tucking into a variety of local dishes. From the old days, **The Luna Bar** has survived thanks to their UV lighting, neon paint, trancey-music and party-hard atmosphere, which inspires unplanned 'parties' that stretch on late into the night.

DAYTRIPPING

Aqua Vision takes you on the best diving trips the area can offer while **Koh Kayak Expeditions** (www.kayakthailand.com) offers adventurous travellers the best self-catering trips available (for the less confident, a guide can accompany you on your quest) in real sea kayaks with waterproof compartments for storing a cooker, navy maps, mobile phone (just in case!?), tents and hammocks. So

UNTHINKED TRAVEL

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. 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.



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Fueled by male hormones
Inspired by female hormones

NIGHTRIPPING

The main nighttime activity in Pattaya 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. 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 town 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 is a restaurant. If you're aching for a taste of home, Pattaya provides 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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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

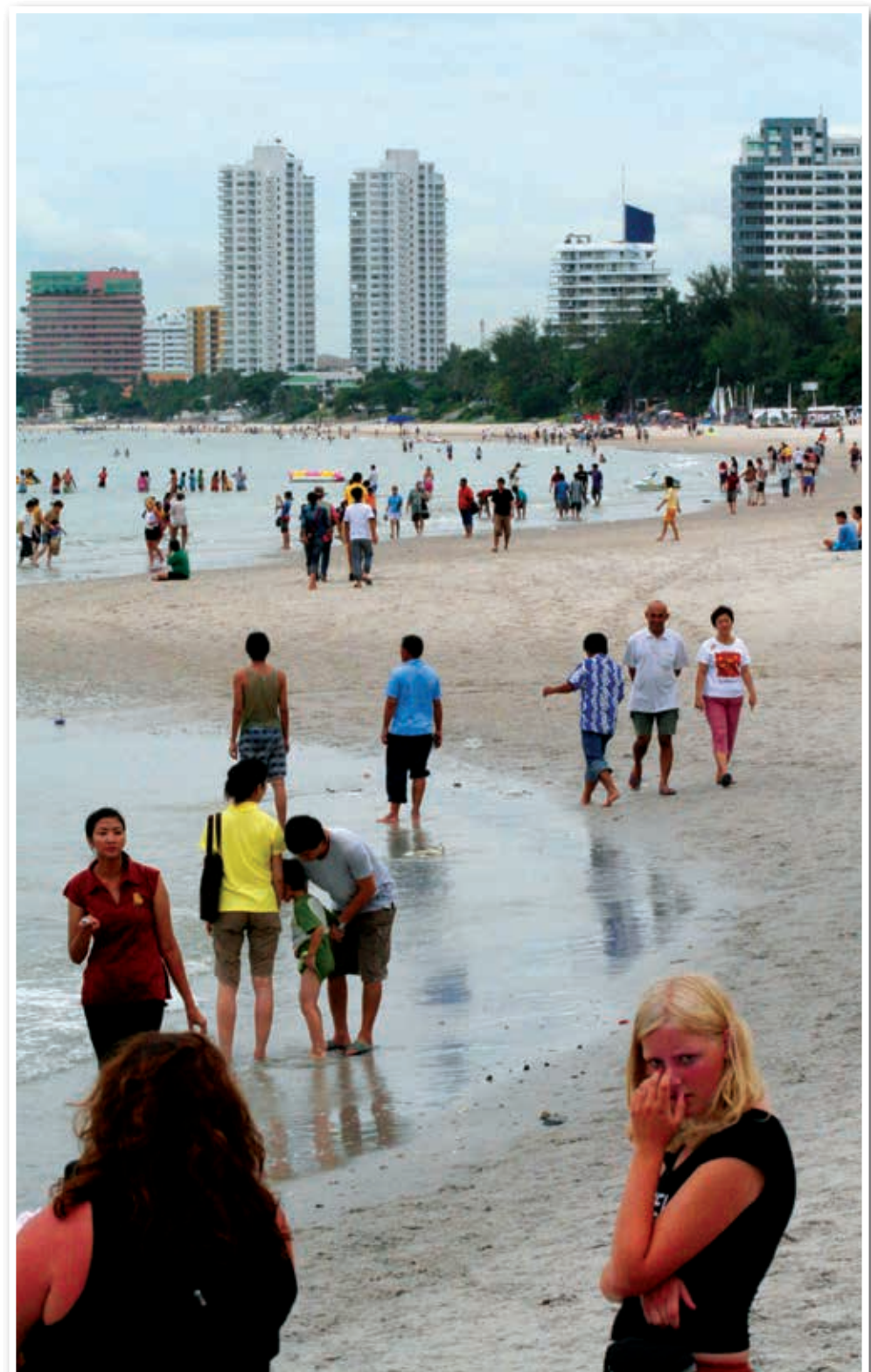
In terms of accommodation the city is rich with luxury hotels and resorts. The **Hilton**, the **Marriot**, the **Dusit** and the historic **Sofitel** (built in 1923 and still resplendent of that era) all compete for the upscale visitor's baht. For the slightly less well-heeled the **Peony guesthouse**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

NIGHTTRIPPING

If "Hello, welcome" is your kind of thing then head down to **Soi Bintabat**, otherwise known as 'Soi



Disappointment'. **Crawford's** and **Butterfly Rock** offer imported draught beers in aircon surroundings before proceeding to the **Brewhouse** owned and operated by the **Hilton**, the closest Hua Hin currently has to a nightclub. The Country Club next to the **Grand hotel** hosts big-name Thai acts from time to time, usually well advertised via mobile loudspeakers and misspelt flyers, as are the city's two boxing rings. Not

satisfied with a "Bintaburger" and an early night? Head to **Sam Sam** bar next to the **Brewhouse**, open as long as the owner's eyes are. The karaoke strip behind will take you through until dawn along with the friendly local constabulary finishing the nightshift.

DAYTRIPPING

The biggest tourist-pullers are the nine golf courses, some of which are on a par

with the best courses in SE Asia. On weekdays green fees range from Bt1,200 for the oldest course, the **Royal Hua Hin** (built in 1927) up to Bt2,500 for the **Springfield Royal**. Even when you add on another Bt600 for the cart and Bt200 for the caddy it's still a sweet deal. But if you prefer to play in a bigger sand trap, there's always the beach that rims the city. Pony-riding, bananaboating, and lazing around getting



koh CHANG

Being only a few hours out of Bangkok, Koh Chang sees its fair share of visitors. A freeze on expanding resorts keeps this national park nice and green but what used to be a backpacker's paradise has rapidly gone upscale. Good for a quick stop on your way back from Cambodia, or a long rest on one of the small isles nearby. Don't confuse this place with the other Koh Chang on the Andaman coast.

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

a lobster-tan are the three paramount pleasures here. It's also swell for a breezy nightcap. **Khao Takiap**, or "Chopstick Mountain," is four kilometres south of town and boasts a hilltop temple and a hyperactive community of monkeys, along with a cluster of Buddha images sitting strangely beside models of dinosaurs. In homage to some of the special projects initiated at His Majesty's behest, there's a supermarket called **Golden Place** where Thais queue up to buy fruit and produce from these royal projects. Hua Hin's reputation as a health centre is bolstered by numerous spas (**Chiva Som** being the most legendary), in addition

to a multitude of massage and reflexology centres. Another good daylight option is the **Elephant Village**, located near the Palau Waterfall and the **Eitiuskato Temple**. Heading further out of town, the **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park** (30km south of Hua Hin) has some photogenic beaches, limestone hills, and caves. The park is also a roost for sea eagles, painted storks, and purple herons, and a lair for deer, serow and many different kinds of primates. A two-hour drive and a 15-minute speedboat brings you to the island of **Koh Thalu**. The coral reefs around here, teeming with tropical fish,

provide sunken pleasures for snorkelers.

WAY TO GO

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

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

UNPACKED TRAVEL

around these parts luxury comes in the form of Aana Resort, Tropicana Resort and Amari Emerald Cove all of which should be booked in advance online.

KAI BAE

Quickly catching up with Whitesands for the title of most overdeveloped stretch of roadside, Kai Bae attracts mainly older backpackers and families traveling independently.

PLACES TO CRASH

You want stunning views? ...stay at Seaview Resort & Spa, from Bt2,500-12,000. The pick of the locally owned, well run bungalow resorts is KB Resort; with Porn's & Siam Holiday being the choice cheapies under Bt300.

LONELY BEACH

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

PLACES TO CRASH

The often packed Nature Beach's Bt400 digs are smack on the beach. Oasis has new, Bt300 en suite huts with great views. Moving upmarket, Siam Beach Resort has surprisingly nice hotel accommodation for Bt2,500, high season, and good value Bt900 aircon bungalows.

ELSEWHERE

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

NIGHTTRIPPING

Sweet Zone, Lemon Bar and Backsound, Lonely Beach, provide DJ-driven entertainment for the 'drinks-in-a bucket' crowd, whereas Sabay Bar, Whitesands, is a more mature beach bar, with an eclectic mix of hard rock, pop and 70s disco courtesy of the Filipino house band. Paddy's Palms, Whitesands may not have the atmosphere of an Irish pub, but is worth a stop for a decent pint of 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 Bodivork Spa, Klong Prao & Kai Bae or try Sima Massage, Klong Prao if you're counting your cash. Attipol Tours run good value Bt500 snorkelling trips. Get PADI certified with BB Divers and Scubadive Thailand, both based in Bangbao. A visit to Baan Kwan Chang elephant camp is a must or trek on foot through Mogli Treks or Jungleyway, both in Klong Son.

WAY TO GO

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

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

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Once he was tough and ruthless now he is rough and toothless

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 you'll find many of them here. In general, it's a crowded 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 staggeringlly

popular with the bucket brigade, who get the sand flying until late in the night. **Sea Breeze** resort has cool bungalows from around Bt600-1,500, however, the beach is quite small and can get overcrowded when the sun is beaming.

AO PUDSA & AO TUBTIM

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

AO VONGDUAN

This lovely bay is blessed with a long stretch of white sand and a calm sea due to its shape and a wide range of bungalow operations. **Seahorse Bungalows** is the cheapest at Bt500-1,500. At

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

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

Vongduan Resort and **Vongduan Villas** drip with luxury at a reasonable Bt1,000-3,500. Get there via regular ferries departing from Ban Phe.

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

WAY TO GO

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

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

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

UNPAID TRAVEL



Neighbourhood Watch

Gordon Sharpless has never been one to call a spade a human-powered excavation device, and this month aims his vorpal wit at local service staff, Phnom Penh's regulators and those dicks at the Poipet border.

Tourist Blues

So another high season is set to wind down. The lights stayed on most of the time, the water table didn't dry up, and despite a glut of low to mid-range accommodation choices, most of the better establishments stayed full most of the time.

But Siem Reap is due for a shake out. I already hear restaurant and bar owners complaining that business has been down, so it's only a matter of time before the accommodation end feels it too. You can't keep building forever, maybe this is the year. And the folks in Poipet are certainly doing their part to help.

If you've paid any attention to Cambodian tourism matters you probably already know that Poipet is synonymous with tourist hassles, but at the moment it's gotten as bad as it's ever been. Though a less chaotic place than in the past, the local transport mafia has pushed taxi prices for Poipet to Siem Reap to US\$60+ (locals pay less than \$30), which in itself is bad, but when the touts start physically threatening tourists who try to find their own transport then you know things are getting way out of hand. Other than simply not going through Poipet, which means caving into the other monopoly – Bangkok Airways. I really don't have the solution, but Poipet has a real problem and presently all indications are that nobody gives a toss. It would be a bummer if the tourist market started thinking the same thing about Cambodia.

Ad Wars

Advertising is supposed to remind you to buy stuff. But not in Phnom Penh. The city powers, not of the electrical kind, decided that ad boards on the back of tuk-tuks were ugly and stood in the way of preserving social order so they are now banned, depriving tuk-tuk drivers of extra income and businesses of a very reasonable advertising outlet. Preserving social order by banning ad boards on tuk-tuks? And you thought Thailand was weird...

Fawly Service and Five Easy Pieces of Bacon

This one from a local guesthouse, right out of Fawly Towers: A potential customer walks in off the street looking for a room. The girl at the counter, a fairly new employee and generally pleasant if anything, greets the potential customer:

"Hello sir, may I help you?"

"I'd like a room if you have one."

"Aircon or fan?"

"Fan would be fine."

"Oh, sorry, fan room full."

"Umm, okay, how about aircon?"

"Oh, sorry sir, air con room full, too."

But try placing a special food order...

An expat is sitting at one of the many riverside restaurants along Phnom Penh's riverfront and places an order for some lunch and puts in a request for a side order of bacon. Though not listed on the menu as a side order, seeing as the restaurant serves breakfasts as well as a number of sandwiches containing the ingredient, the expat figured they out to be able to manage a side of bacon.

The waitress, confused at this request, flips through the menu and not finding bacon as a side order tells the customer that bacon is not available. The expat points out that bacon is obviously available as it's a common ingredient in a number of the restaurant's dishes.

"No have," the waitress replies a second time.

"Okay," the slightly agitated customer says, "do you have BLT sandwiches?"

"Oh, yes, have bacon, lettuce, tomato samwich. You like?" She asks with a big smile.

"Yes, I like. Bring me a BLT, but... no lettuce, no tomato, no bread, and no mayonnaise? You can do that?"

"You want bacon, lettuce, tomato samwich wif no lettuce, no tomato, no bread, no maylaze, yes sir?"

He nods in agreement at the young woman trying to grasp what exactly a BLT minus everything but the bacon will look like. She walks off to the kitchen only to return a few minutes later to reconfirm the order as obviously the cook is no less confident in sorting out this order than she is. Order reconfirmed, ten minutes later a side order of bacon is produced and everyone's happy if not a little confused.

Well, that's the story, anyway.



PHNOM PENH capital GAINS

PLACES TO CRASH

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

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

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

NIGHTTRIPPING

Though not Bangkok or Singapore, Phnom Penh has

come a long way in the past few years. And yes, it's safe to go out at night. For the most comprehensive listings of food and drink, grab a copy of the free *Cambodia Pocket Guide - Drinking & Dining Phnom Penh*. But in a nutshell, along the river there are notable holes-in-the wall such as the **Cantina** and the **Jungle Bar**, as well as larger street-corner establishments like the **Foreign**

Correspondent's Club (FCC) and the **Riverside**, and single guys might wander into **DV8**. A huge selection of bars on Street 51 between streets 136 and 178 include the **Walkabout** (open 24 hours), **Howie's** (a very late-night joint), and **Shanghai Bar** (a single guy's place as is much of this neighbourhood). Forget about the **Heart of**

Darkness, not worth the effort unless dodging bullets is your thing. Elsewhere is **Sharky Bar** (Street 130), a big bar with lots of pool tables and girls. Further up the river is the **Green Vespa**, and attached to the Tonle Sap Guesthouse on Street 104 is the **Pickled Parrot**, one of several worthwhile places on this street. Along Street 178 sports fans will want to seek out the **Gym Bar**, for a touch of Irish, visit **Rory's**, and the **Ginger Monkey** was voted bar of the year by readers of the aforementioned *Cambodia Pocket Guide*. **Talkin to a Stranger** down on Street 294 is another highly rated establishment with good eats, too.

FEEDING TIME

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

DAYTRIPPING

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

your hotel. Shopping - **Central Market** for browsing, **Russian Market** for spending. Small art galleries on Street 178 and Street 240.

WAY TO GO

FROM THAILAND

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

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

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

FROM SIEM REAP

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

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

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

NGOs, building a better yesterday





Hi-sow

SIEM REAP majestic PILE

PLACES TO SLEEP

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

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

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

\$50+: Go all the way and try the **Amansara** (\$775/night). Other four and five star offerings include the **Sofitel**, **Victoria Angkor**, **FCC**, **Angkor**

Village, **Le Meridien**, **Hotel de la Paix** and the **Grand Hotel**.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Most folks head to "Bar Street" which includes the **Angkor What?** bar, the **Temple Club**, **Red Piano**, and a host of other establishments. In the same neighbourhood is the **Ivy** (good food and music), **Warehouse** (get drunk and silly), the **Laundry Music Bar** (late nights), **Molly Malone's** (Irish), the **Funky Monkey** (well, a bar), and the **Linga Bar** (gay). A few blocks away on Sivatha, across from the E-cafe is **Dead Fish Tower**, a large rather bizarre place.

FEEDING TIME

The bulk of restaurants are clustered in the Psah Chas (Old Market) area. Options include the **Ivy** (Western), **Soup Dragon** (Vietnamese-Asian), **Kama Sutra** (Indian), **Pizza Italiano** (err, Italian) and **Blue Pumpkin** (breakfast/lunch/bakery). **Khmer Kitchen** is probably the most well-known joint serving local fare, all conveniently stacked next to each other. Along Sivatha Street are scores of restaurants including the **Dead Fish Tower** (Thai), **Tell**

Restaurant (Western, Asian), **Curry Walla** (Indian) and quite a few local joints. In Wat Bo Village try the **Two Dragons** (Thai and Khmer), **Home Cocktail** (Khmer), or **Hawaii Pizza**. Street food is along Sivatha Street, but the Khmer restaurants in the alley behind "Bar Street" are a safer bet.

DAYTRIPPING

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

BEYOND THE TEMPLES

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

WAY TO GO

AIR: Bangkok Airways fares range from Bt4,300/8,600

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

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

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

VISAS & BORDER CROSSINGS TO/FROM THAILAND

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

TO/FROM VIETNAM

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

TO/FROM LAOS

The border above Stung Treng is open. Cambodia visas are available here (use the land crossing, not the river), Laos visas are not. Cambodia now offers an e-visa, it's \$25 and only valid at the airports. Not really worth it.

ENTER THE TWO DRAGONS

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

SINGAPORE

Singapore has changed remarkably over the past five years – “out” are the bans on chewing gum, the pedestrian barriers on Orchard Road, and the Tam bar closing, and “in” is the revitalised river area – a bit of culture at the new Esplanade, local foods ‘til dawn at Glutton’s Bay hawker’s market, and a spruced up Clarke Quay for late-night partying. Even the old party favourite Zouk has had a facelift!

DAYTRIPPING SHOPPING

Shopping all centres on the famous **Orchard Road**, a shopper’s paradise lined with mega-malls and five-star hotels. If you fancy some high-end window-shopping, the “top end”, up the road from Orchard MRT station, has all the Gucci, Prada, LV etc you’ve ever dreamed of. Girls, drop off your guy at **Wheelock’s Apple** store and **Borders** bookstore, and check out the **Tang’s** dept store’s HUGE collection of handbag stalls on the ground floor across the road. The shopping fun extends all the way down with **Wisma Atria** (newly renovated), **Takashimaya** and **Paragon** (the twin hearts of Orchard’s high-end). For younger style check out the cheaper **Far East Plaza**, and the hip local designers on the 4th & 5th floors of the **Heeren**, above HMV. Further down Plaza Singapore and the brand-spanking new **Cathay** allow another half-day of shopping centred on Dhoby Ghaut MRT station, both boasting 10-screen movie cineplexes.

CHINATOWN & ARAB STREET

Chinatown is excellent for shopping, food and culture. Must-sees include the **Thian Hock** Buddhist temple, the **Sri Mariamman** Hindu temple, as well as “Food Street” (Smith Street) and the **Maxwell hawker’s centre**. Chinatown is now easily reached by a new MRT line, as is Little India with its great food and market-life atmosphere. **Arab Street** is getting more attention. Check out the lovely tree-lined Bussorah Street parallel to Arab Street, with its eclectic shops and local cafes.

OLD FAVOURITES

There’s also a laundry-list of Singapore icons: The US\$500/night **Raffles Hotel** (City Hall MRT) oozes heritage; it opened in 1887; Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham and Rudyard Kipling stayed and wrote here. By the 70’s it was showing its age,

becoming a favourite of the backpacker and hippie set, but a full renovation in the 80’s restored its lustre. The Singapore Sling was invented here in 1915, and even at \$14 a pop, stopping by the original Long Bar or newer Courtyard Bar to sample this gin/cherry-brandy/fruit-juice cocktail is a must for many visitors.

The most common tourist question is probably, “Where’s the Merlion?” Singapore’s symbol of tourism, a half-lion, half-fish, water-spouting statue. There are actually two, the most-photographed one being located at One Fullerton, with the **Esplanade** theatre (nicknamed “The Durian”) offering a spectacular backdrop. Get there from either the City Hall MRT, walking via the Esplanade, or the Raffles Place MRT, walking via the grand Fullerton Hotel. The other statue is eight-storied high and located on **Sentosa Island**, which now has its own MRT connection at the Harbourfront station. Sentosa is shedding its “theme park” reputation with the closing of some of the lesser attractions, and a lot of landscaping and F&B options emerging. A day on the beach might even seem like home to some — the sand was imported from Thailand! The **Musical Fountain** is a bit tacky but surprisingly fun — an 8pm show projects stories and love

messages onto a water-spray screen.

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

NATURAL DISTRACTIONS

The **Zoo**, **Night Safari** and **Bird Park** are old favourites, and still by far the top tourist attractions. The best is the Night Safari, but there’s an excellent value ticket covering all three (\$20 for one, or \$31 for all three). The Zoo closes at 6pm and the Night Safari runs from 7:30pm-midnight, but there’s food and entertainment in the interim. Take the MRT to Ang Mo Kio, then bus 138. The Bird Park is near Boon Lay MRT. Taxis are cheap in Singapore, so unless you’re by yourself, just grab a cab. The **Bukit Timah Nature Reserve** (Bus No. 171 or 182 from Orchard Rd) comprises 81 hectares of forests, and more plant species than in all of North America! A cab ride away is the new Tree-Top walk where you look down from above the rainforest canopy, and the MacRitchie Reservoir which offers 5km of very pleasant boardwalk perched over the edge of the water. Last but not least is the untouched and undeveloped **Pulau Ubin**, where you can rent a bike for half a day

(\$8) and experience pre-development Singapore! Info on all of these at www.nparks.gov.sg

WELL CULTURED

Singapore’s surprise is the growing sports, arts and culture scene. The **Singapore Art Museum** (City Hall/Dhoby Ghaut MRT), housed in a classical baroque building, focuses on Singaporean and regional artists, with emphasis on electronic arts, while the **Asian Civilisations Museum** (City Hall or Raffles Place MRT) mixes permanent and visiting displays focusing on South East Asia culture. It also has a small but excellent (and free!) display on the history of the Singapore River. The visually striking **Esplanade theatre** (nicknamed “The Durian”) is an excellent venue for large-scale performances, and attracts many international shows, including notable Western and Asian theatre. On the sporting front the Singapore Slingers begin their first season in Australia’s National Basketball League, with a number of home games against Australian teams at the **Singapore Indoor Stadium** during September/October. Never mind that there aren’t actually any Singaporeans on the team – expect to see top-quality professional basketball, as the Australian league is pretty competitive, with plenty of rough and tumble.



...and what isn't forbidden?



Downwardly mobile

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 til 5am and the cover is about \$25, with two drinks included. The music is state-of-the-art. All have dress codes – don't show up in shorts or flip-flops.

FEEDING TIME

The variety of places to chow down is one of the best things about Singapore, from yummy, inexpensive street food available 24/7 to fine international cuisine. For budget travellers, hawker stalls (outdoors) and food courts (indoors) offer great grub, a relaxed atmosphere and clean surroundings for a few dollars a plate. Of course there's **Chinatown** and **Little India** for authentic treats.

Boat Quay is rather touristy and expensive, but the riverside atmosphere should be experienced. **Clarke Quay** has newer and more refined restaurants. Meanwhile, **Chijmes**, near Raffles Hotel, is a collection of Western restaurants and bars in what was a formerly a Catholic convent girls school.

The new **Glutton's Bay** (next to the Esplanade Theatre at the mouth of the river) is a glutton's heaven, with new branches of old stalls carefully selected by the writer of Singapore's excellent hawkers' centre guidebook, the *Makan Sutra*.

PLACES TO CRASH

There is accommodation for all budgets in Singapore – even top-end hotels are affordable, relative to other cities. Expect to pay S\$200-250 for excellent five-star central hotels like **Swissotel**, **Raffles** the **Plaza**, **Marina Mandarin**, **Pan Pacific**, or \$300 for high-end **Ritz-Carlton**, **Fullerton**, **Conrad** or **Marriott**.

"Budget hotels" in Singapore mainly mean those that also rent by the hour, and there's literally dozens of them. The main chains are **Hotel 81** (www.hotel81.com.sg) and **Fragrance** (www.fragrancehotel.com).

For more culture and character, try Chinatown or Little India; both offer good, small hotels. In Chinatown, those in the \$100-\$150 range include: **Damenlou Hotel**, 12 Ann Siang Rd, 6221-1900; **Dragon Inn** Chinatown, 18 Mosque St, 6222-7227; **Royal Peacock** 55 Keong Saik Rd, 6223-3522. In Little India, decent, boutique-style hotels for under \$100 include: **Perak Lodge**, 12 Perak Rd, 6299-7733; **Mayo Inn** 9A Jalan Besar, 6295-6631; **Broadway Hotel**, 195 Serangoon Rd, 6292-4661; **Dickson Court Hotel**, 3 Dickson Rd, 6297-7811; **Fortuna Hotel**, 2 Owen Rd., 6295-3577.

There are also a few new backpacker hostels which (unlike the older backpacker hostels) are pretty pleasant. You share a dorm with others, but the upside is free breakfast, free Internet and tips from other travellers. All are modern, clean and nicely decorated, the best being **Sleepy Sam's** (www.sleepysams.com), **Hangout**, and the **Inn Crowd** (all about \$25/night).

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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.

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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.

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hospitals

THAILAND

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LAOS

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

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bangkok embassies

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

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