

THE TRAVEL GUIDE TO THAILAND, CAMBODIA, LAOS, HONG KONG & SINGAPORE

FARANG

July 2005

UNTAMED TRAVEL

AXIS OF EVIL

Iran, Iraq, North Korea
Putting human faces
on inhuman regimes

STALKER
SPEED DATING

MEDITATION
HORNY RETREAT

THAI WOMAN
FINDING ROOTS

SIAMESE
BLUES EXPLOSION

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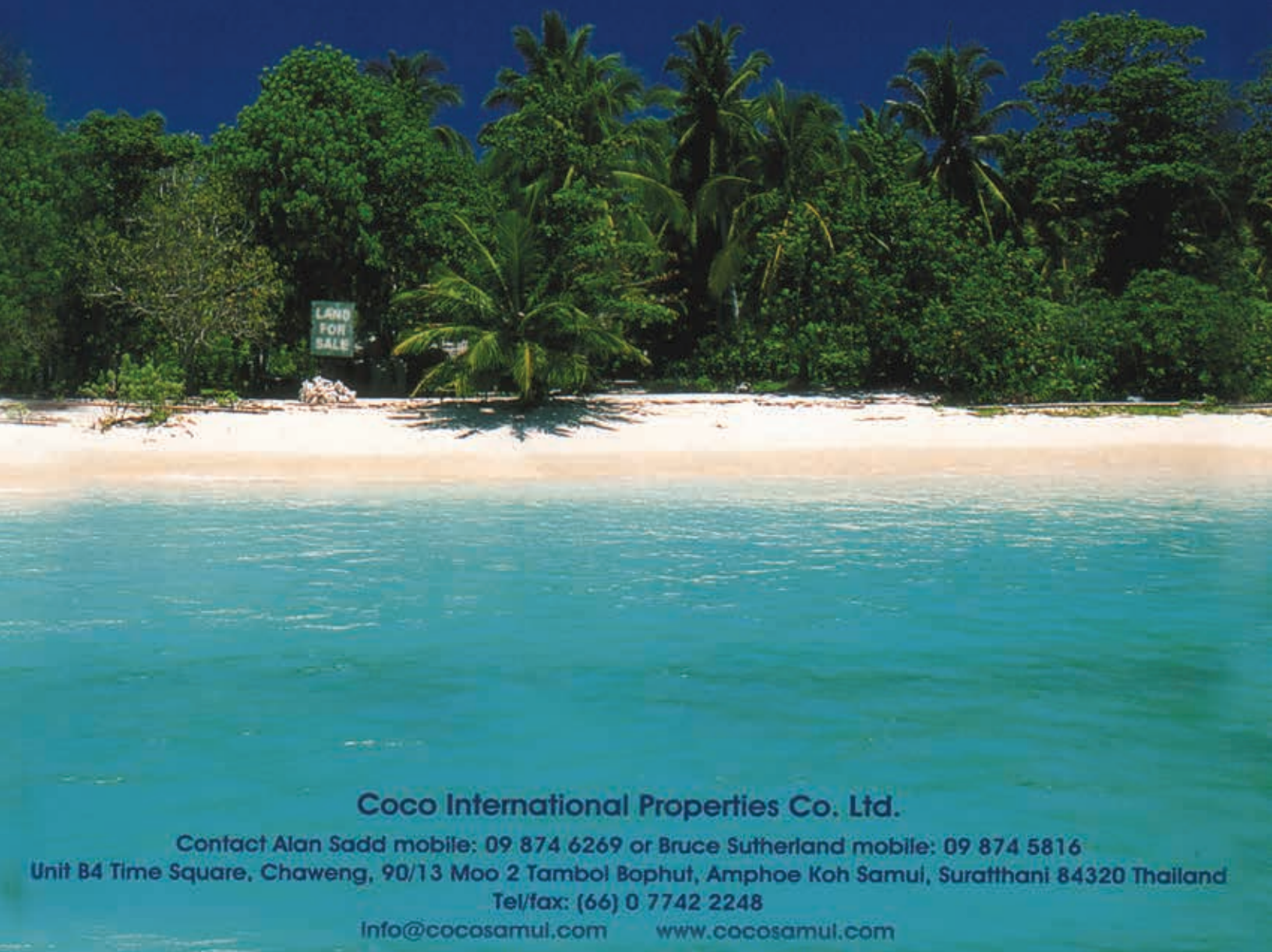


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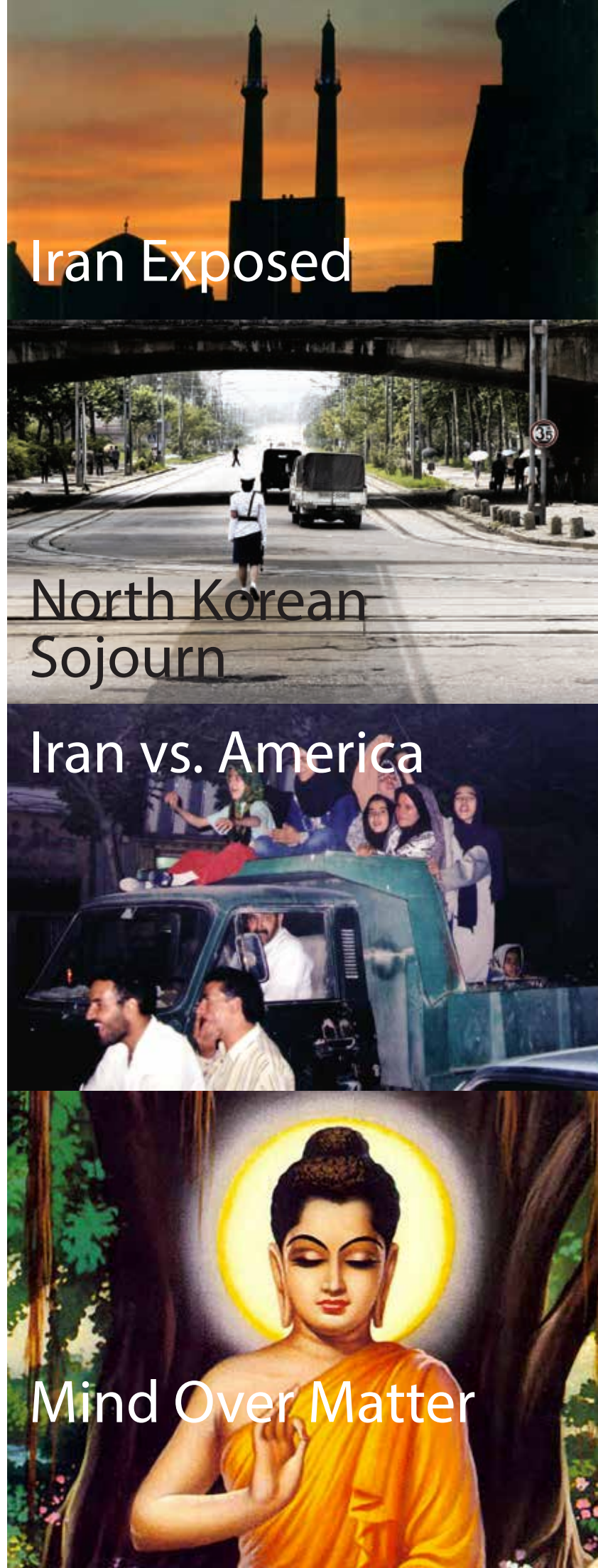


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Iran Exposed

North Korean Sojourn

Iran vs. America

Mind Over Matter



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Axes to Grind

Shortly after 9/11 an expat writer based in Bangkok was visiting California and standing outside a liquor store when an American man began accosting an obviously Asian-looking guy. "Are you Afghani? Are you Muslim?" he snarled. The other man had to repeat over and over again, under the threat of imminent fisticuffs, that he was actually American-Vietnamese. Around the same time, an English female journalist, formerly working in Bangkok, had a stopover in Dubai. An angry Arabic man walked up and spat in her face.

This ignorance of the under-travelled was compounded by the mass media's repetition of photos and videos depicting all Muslims as gun-toting, flag-burning terrorists and rabid fundamentalists. Adding fuel to the ire was George W. Bush's famous speech in 2002, when he labeled "Iran, Iraq and North Korea" as the "Axis of Evil." If the Muslims had already been stereotyped and Western travel advisories warned their nationals to avoid these three countries, who knew anything about the faceless North Koreans? Other than that they were all supposed to be iron-fisted Stalinist throwbacks, hell-bent on launching nuclear strikes at the rest of the world.

But what are these countries really like? Is it safe to travel there? Are all these people hostile to outsiders? Few people know because the supposedly free presses of the West and Asia know that the truth is not usually a marketable commodity.

Hence the theme of this issue: "Putting human faces on inhuman regimes."

In our main feature, writer and photographer Pierre Ryckmans finds that Iranians are some of the friendliest and most well-cultured people he has ever met, while venturing through 60-odd countries. Yes, and they also love skiing.

Tom Vater recounts his experiences in Iran during the historic World Cup Football Match between Iran and America in '98. Much to his surprise, none of the locals he meets are interested in haranguing him about Islam.

In our profile, photographer Nayan Sthankiya says his trip to North Korea yielded many astonishing, everyday images of beautiful female dancers in traditional garb, children wearing Sesame Street backpacks, smiling bureaucrats, waterfalls, and a square with a colossal statue of the late Great Leader.

Even though he's represented by a big Western photo agency, they could not sell the photos, because this isn't the image of the country that other Western and Asian governments, and their mass-media toadies, want to sell.

Meanwhile, noted author and Far Eastern Economic Review correspondent Bertil Linter fills in the gaps between these photos with an excerpt from his new meticulously researched book Great Leader, Dear Leader: North Korea's terrorist activities, the brutal working days and forced study sessions, the possibility of an American invasion, and an all-out nuclear holocaust.

Elsewhere in this issue, the former American soldier Mike Tucker writes about his travels as an observer with the 101st Airborne in Iraq, and his great admiration for the freedom-fighting Kurds, who are the world's biggest ethnic minority without their own nation.

When it comes to the "Axis of Evil," the old hip-hop hit by Public Enemy leaps to mind: "Don't believe the hype." Well, not all of it.



Jim Algie, Chief Editor,
Senior Staff Writer and
energy drink abuser



MAIN EVENTS July

Thailand, England, Canada



HORNY GHOSTS

The official party line states that this is a Buddhist-influenced festival, but for most people it really just seems like an excuse to get staggeringly drunk and dress up in colourful ghost costumes, wave wooden willies at all and sundry, roll around in mud, don ladyboy outfits, listen to some great northeastern folk tunes, and eyeball some bawdy dancers. Into the karmic bargain, you can also make some spiritual merit on July 9-10. Check out the TAT Newsroom website for reams more info – including how to make the masks from a sticky

rice container – www.tatnews.org/events/events/june/2351.asp.



RODEO ROUNDUP

The Calgary Stampede is billed as the "greatest outdoor show on earth" and that ain't no bull. Some of the top cowboys and cowgirls in the world compete in bareback bronco riding, bull riding, steer wrestling and barrel racing for a million dollars in cash prizes. Roping in big crowds since 1912, the Stampede (July 8-17th) turns what folks call "Cowtown" into a city-wide party with music, circuses, fireworks, and agricultural shows. One of the most exciting events – the chuckwagon races – runs like wildfire on an old barn every night.

Get in the saddle by visiting www.calgarystampede.com.

WORLD BEAT

The WOMAD festival is tuning up for another enormous jam session in celebration of the world's musical diversity. From July 29-31, on the banks of the River Thames in Reading, England, the bandstand will be lit up by such luminaries as the former Led Zep frontman, Robert Plant, playing with the Strange Sensation, Jamaica's smokin' Culture, and one of the most well-traveled and entertaining mainstays on the festival circuit, Youssou N'Dour et le Super Etoile de Dakar. The opening act at Woodstock, Richie Havens, is also confirmed. And making their first appearance at the 16-year-old festival is Farida & the Iraqi Maqam Ensemble, along with many other acts from Canada, England, Russia, Israel, the US and Brazil. If politics and religion are the world's worst dividers, then WOMAD proves that music is the greatest equaliser. Toboottickets on-line, and find out about camping, surf around www.womad.org. The website also has a list of other WOMAD festivals throughout the year, like one coming up in Singapore at the end of August.



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All Over the Asian Map

GOODNESS GRACIOUS ME

Mahatma Gandhi's family is terribly upset about a takeaway curry house on Australia's Gold Coast called "Handi Ghandi – Great Curries, No Worries". Not only does the shop use Gandhi's image as a logo, they sell a wide range of meat curries, including beef, which is sacred to Hindus. Gandhi was a staunch vegetarian, and his family feels this goes against the Mahatma's beliefs, and trivializes his contribution to Indian independence. The Indian government says there is little they can do, since Australia is outside of their jurisdiction. STOP PRESS: The curry house got the message. On their website handighandi.com, they present their new logo, a cartoon of an enthusiastic Sikh. The original name remains. For a good laugh, visit their homepage and listen to their ad jingle. The man with the fake Indian accent is no Peter Sellers.



MIDGETS LOSE TO LION

It would be nice to believe it's true, but as it turns out, 42 midget martial artists did not actually take on a grown lion

in a Cambodian arena before a live audience with the Cambodian government approving on the condition of receiving half the gate receipts. The story originated as a joke amongst friends, after one of them made a mock-up of a BBC World online news webpage. The mock news item claimed the midgets, who were only allowed to fight with their bare hands, conceded defeat at the claws and jaws of the lion after 28 were killed and 14 seriously mutilated. One of the lads posted it publicly on the net and it spread from there. The perpetrator, fearing lawsuits from the BBC, has since posted a retraction. But don't take our word for it, see for yourself at: lionvs40midgets.uk-directory.com



HOLIDAY CONS

Most holidaymakers spend a lot of their time in front of bars, but if Sri Lanka has its way tourists will find themselves behind them. Galle prison, which is part of 17th century fort that happens to be a World Heritage site, is being converted to accommodate guests. On arrival, visitors exchange in their normal clothes for a prison uniform and are shown to their iron-barred cell. No hot water, no Jacuzzis and no other frills, except you get a key and can wander freely around the grounds



PICKY ABOUT PACKETS

As of March 2005, the Thai government required all cigarette manufacturers to put ugly pictures on the packets to discourage people from smoking – or at least to make them feel more guilty. Among the images are stained teeth, a post-mortem spotty lung, ugly smoking people (one even has skulls in the background), and a sick man on a respirator. The result may or may not have reduced smoking, but it has definitely resulted in a surge in cigarette case sales. According to various reports, those who stick with the photo packs have become picky at the shop, rejecting the teeth and lung in favour of the ugly people.



REVENGE GONE WRONG

Four men armed with a single handgun stormed a school in Siem Reap last month with the intent of murdering the children of a South Korean expat who had once employed one of the men. These clever fellows took 30 hostages, killed a two-year-old to show their determination and to stop him crying. The police encircling the building eventually provided an escape van for the men and then overpowered them during their escape. Once captured, an angry mob descended on the hostage takers and beat them senseless. The ringleader sought revenge because his South Korean employer had once struck him.



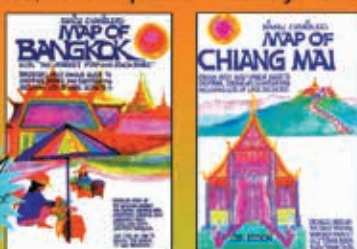
LUCKY DOG

A stray puppy with six legs and two penises

was found outside a Chinese temple in a Malaysian town by a temple caretaker. The dog, which is perceived as a bearer of good fortune by locals, is now being looked after by the temple committee. They have named him "Ong Fat" or "The Lucky One", presumably not because of the extra legs.

Nancy Chandler's Maps of Bangkok and Chiang Mai

"Oft imitated, never equalled" ~ Lonely Planet Thailand



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Siam Gets the Blues

Words by Cameron Cooper

How did the Land of Smiles get the blues? After decades of live bands confining the repertoire to "Hotel California" and CCR retreads, with a few chart-busting heartbreakers thrown in, the blues is popping up all over the country. Over the last four years or so, blues bands and blues bars have surfaced in the form of the Bebop Bar in the remote northern town of Pai, while in Bangkok, crowds of Thais and foreigners have been mingling at close quarters on the stage and in the crowd at the Adhere the 13th Bar and the Brick Bar in Banglamphu, Tokyo Joe's in Sukhumvit, Noriega's in Silom soi 4, The Blues Factory in Pattaya and Coco Blues in Koh Samui. Then, last year, the Samui Blues and World Music Festival marked a first in the country – and will be much larger this year.

So what's happened? According to Mr. Pong, proprietor and bandleader/guitarist at the Adhere the 13th Blues Bar, it was a matter of available inspiration. "There were always a few Thai musicians into the blues," Pong says, taking a break in front of his small but intense bar. "His Majesty the King wrote 'HM Blues,' probably the first Thai blues song long ago, but a lot of it came into the country during the Vietnam War with the GIs – mostly blues-inspired music. But the genuine blues recordings were very difficult to find when it was still on vinyl. Now you can get all of the old and new blues stuff on CD easily and the young musicians are studying with teachers and studying these recordings. So now maybe one out of 10 musicians is serious about playing the blues."

Joe Cummings, a blues and rock guitarist perhaps better known as the author of the Lonely Planet Guide to Thailand, sees it as a logical development. "I think Thai tastes for Western music are just now getting sophisticated enough where they understand what blues is about. Before, I think it was too amorphous for them, they couldn't get a handle on it," he wrote via email while recovering from three days at the Wakarusa music festival in Kansas.

But blues is usually an art form people get into by degrees. Few go out and buy a John Lee Hooker album from 1958 and groove on it without a bit of prior ear training. "You take what I call commercial blues – like Eric Clapton for example. That unplugged album was huge in Thailand. There was the hit song 'Tears in Heaven,' but you listen to the whole album and there are a few more down home blues numbers in there. It's a gradual introduction," says Jeff T. singer/guitarist with the Soi Dogs Blues Band, after wrapping up a hard-edged blues set at Khaosan's Brick Bar. "And then there's great bluesy stuff like Stevie Ray Vaughan and Jimi Hendrix – a lot of young Thais and foreigners know that music; they ask to hear it and we play it, and we also play the more hardcore blues, so they get used to hearing that as well."

Joe Cummings believes there's also a transitional element from Thailand's own home-grown country music as well. "The lyrics are a lot like mo lam lyrics – losing your woman, getting fired, having a bad crop, getting snaked by your best friend, fondness for getting drunk, that sort of thing," he says.

There are few places where you see foreigners and Thais mixing in equal measure, with music as the binding force. "Expats are looking for blues, while for Thais it's like an extension of the old Saxophone Bar," says Jeff T, who has lived for 40 years in Thailand. "But I think it's also a reaction to the electronic thing. With the blues, you can't just get up there with a couple of cute girls and let the electronics do the work. The blues is real, it comes from the heart, you have to mean it. And that's universal."

And now Alan Sadd, proprietor of Samui's Coco Blues Company, a huge blues fan and the main backer of the Samui Music festival, is raising the bar (or perhaps throwing down the gauntlet) bringing in well-known blues acts from overseas for extended stints to perform in his ever-expanding bar. (Recent names were harpist/singer John Nemeth and Coco York, who has also sung for Bill Clinton). "We're trying to bring the best possible blues we can and we hope this will help lift the whole thing up," says Alan, adding "we don't want the losers."

An enormous variety of acts have been booked for the festival, which runs from Sept. 23 to Oct 2, 2005, but in the blues oeuvre are Zakiya Hooker (daughter of the great John Lee) and Bluz 4 U, the Bay Area Blues Society Caravan of All Stars Revue, the UK's Jools Holland & His Big Band, The British Blues All Stars, British Ukele, Canned Heat and even the legendary James Brown, plus a load of local acts including Jeff T.'s Soi Dogs. In spite of the expense of this ambitious project, Alan sees a bright future for the blues in Thailand. "I'd like to see Thailand become known as a blues and music centre, with Samui at the heart of it." The way the blues are growing in this country, he may just get his wish.

**"We've got the Hungry Men's Blues.
You'll be hungry too, if you're in this band.
Don't you think that our music is grand?
We've got the Hungry Men's Blues.
You've eaten now all of you.
We'd like to eat with you too,
That's why we've got the H.M. Blues"**

**- Words to "HM Blues" by:
His Majesty the King of Thailand**

For more info on the music festival, make sure you get up coming issues of this magazine and check out the website kohsamuimusicfestival.com

To find some of the other bars and bands in the country, check out: cocobluescompany.com, tokyojoeslbk.com, brickbarkhaosan.com and bangkokgigguide.com



The Other Land of the rising sun

In this harrowing episode, Aroon Thaewchatturat travels in bullet proof trucks, braves poison arrows and gets into touch with her roots in India's remote and heavily forested northeast. Photos also by Aroon.

As India is an incredible country, and a second episode of my travels there needed to be written. I survived the crowds in Kolkata and jumped a midnight train to the northeast. I was heading to Arunachal Pradesh, a.k.a. the land of the rising sun. This remote region may not be safe from rebel attacks but it's safe from mass tourism. It seemed we were the only foreigners around.

I not only share my name with this state (Aroon means dawn) but the atmosphere reminded me of home too. And the more I saw of Arunachal Pradesh, the more it felt like going back to my hometown.

India's north eastern states supply major resources for the whole country - oil, coal and wood. The last great forests of India are found in this most north eastern state of India. But the logging companies are already here.

Thailand's northeast was once a beautiful green land too. Today it is the opposite - the country Thai Luk Tung singer Surapol Sombatcharoen described in his song "Traveling in Isaan" no longer exists. In his time, Thailand had about fifty percent forest cover. When I was six or seven years old, huge eighteen-wheeler trucks loaded with gigantic logs drove through from my hometown every day. My region's resources enriched a handful of people, but the area remains disadvantaged to this day. My government promises that poverty eradication schemes will be effective within five years, but in reality we have been slaves for centuries. We are catching our shadows.

Arunachal Pradesh is not so different. After three days on a train and ten hours on a bus, I finally arrived in a town called Miao. It was as if the bus had driven across several borders back to Thailand. The similarities were immediately obvious to the southeast Asian visitor - the indigenous people - the Kampti, Tangsa, Kunshi, Shakma and Singpho - looked a little like me. The food tasted familiar. In Miao, an Indian military outpost, the only locally owned restaurant was run by a group of Singpho ladies. I felt at home as soon as I had a first bite of steamed hot and spicy food wrapped in banana leaves. All ingredients were locally produced - it was the only way local people could open a restaurant. If they wanted to serve Indian food, they would have had to deal with the Indian wholesalers.

I soon realized I was not so much in a remote outpost but in the middle of homeland security forces. Miao is a very secure town, guarded by Indian army and police. They are everywhere and as much as I noticed them, they also kept an eye on me. The tourist lodge in Miao was fully occupied - not by tourists but by armed police. Across the road, the Assam Rifles were camped behind barbed wire and sandbags. In Arunachal Pradesh, the army is awake all night and aware all day.

We tried to get away from them so we rented a jeep to visit Namdapha National Park, one of the world's top biodiversity hotspots. The jeep was arranged for us by the Miao police

commander, who warned us of poisoned arrows, guaranteed to be aimed at us by people little better than the animals in the forest. Something to look for.

Despite the widespread logging in the state, Namdapha National Park, remains a healthy forest for now. Take a short walk along a jungle trail and you will hear a sound like a helicopter passing by. In the canopy, giant hornbills, not actually helicopters, fly above you in search of food. That moment makes you forget everything and you develop an immediate hornbill-watching habit.

But I was still searching for savages shooting poisoned arrows at me. Eventually I met these dangerous people, as they live in the forest. They were Lishu. I know the Lishu from Thailand, so I took some pictures of them and we talked. They are part of Arunachal Pradesh's tribal people. But Indians think of them as backward and illiterate. They didn't shoot at us.

Back in town, I was told that I was the first Thai visitor in the area and I found out that tourists never stay in this town. I wanted to talk with local people, but Arunachal Pradesh turned out to be the only place in India where nobody wanted to talk with me and where I wasn't stared at all the time. And I never saw a single rebel. After ten days, as much as the special permit for Arunachal Pradesh allowed, a bullet proof truck took us from the police station to the bus stop. What a comfortable way to travel! This is the land of the Rising Sun

Travel info:

Arunachal Pradesh, India's most remote state is best reached by plane or train from Kolkata (Calcutta). The cheapest option is to jump a 72-hour train ride from Kolkata to Tinsukia in Assam. Alternatively, there are flights from Kolkata to Guwahati in Assam.

From the railhead at Tinsukia, a long bus journey to Miao in Arunachal Pradesh takes you as deep into the state and as close to the Burmese border as possible, where you can visit Namdapha National Park. Permits for the park can be obtained in Miao.

Please note that special permits are required for Arunachal Pradesh. A maximum visitor's permit of 10 days can be applied for in Kolkata at the Foreigner's Registration Office. Only married couples may apply. No permit extensions possible.

A painting depicting a Buddhist monk in a meditative pose, seated in a forest setting. The monk is wearing an orange robe and has a serene expression, with a bright yellow halo behind his head. He is surrounded by three women in traditional Thai attire, including colorful sarongs and headpieces. The background features large, gnarled trees and a small stream, creating a peaceful, natural environment.

Throbbing in the Temples

Crash Winfield battles boredom, hunger and raging hormones during a 26-day meditation retreat in Chiang Mai.

They say that the more you press down on something the more it pops back up again. As I sit in Buddhist meditation, here in the present moment, free of worry about the past and the future, free of thought and concern, floating somewhere above this listless world, I find myself violently hurled back to the mundane. I have a boner.

They also say that the average male thinks about sex every 20 minutes. This is hard to measure in the swift mist of daily distraction, but sitting here on a linoleum floor, perfectly still, the only sounds a fan and chickens outside trying to murder each other, I realise that they are dead wrong – it is much more often than that.

This morning the ajarn (monk-teacher) told us that any feelings of discomfort should be dealt with in the following manner: "Feel pain in legs, acknowledge pain in legs. Feel sad, acknowledge sadness. Have to pee-pee, acknowledge pee-pee." Monks here seem to like to wax scatological. Days ago we were given an interesting lecture in which a monk compared idle chit-chat to sniffing dog shit. He made a special display of putting his finger in some imaginary canine feces and sniffing it, repeating the mime three times just in case the image wasn't already palpably clear. None of us understood the metaphor, but his acting was first-rate. One monk's truth, you might say, is another man's dumb joke.

So I am now following the acharn's sage wisdom. Acknowledge boner. Acknowledge throbbing, painful, annoying, ridiculous boner.

Through this technique of detached acknowledgement, pain and sadness are meant to drift away like clouds. It is only our constant dwelling on them that makes them chronic. So say the sages. Easy for them to say: They're old.

I'm not the only one who's been suffering from lack of human contact. All students are expected to meditate 12 hours a day, silent and alone. There isn't much time to socialise – whatever conversation occurs takes place during meals, and we aren't allowed to eat after noon. We are, however, allowed to drink just about anything we like. This rule has led people to come up with some inspired interpretations of the word "drink". Essentially, you're allowed to consume anything, provided you don't chew it. I try to buy a tiny package of biscuits one afternoon from a nun who is eating two ice creams at the same time, her face stained with sticky glop. "No can eat now," she admonishes me, pointing to the clock, "Tomorrow." She is not eating, of course. She is drinking the melted ice cream.

Consequently, around five o'clock in the afternoon everyday you see the temple grounds filled with meditators "not eating" incredible amounts of ice cream, hard candy (don't bite!), yogurts, chocolate milk and sugary sodas. In my opinion, this is a rule that has sorely backfired on itself. Imagine your mother telling you, "No, you may not gorge yourself on vegetables and rice. Instead, have a tub of ice cream and if you're still hungry, perhaps some custard."

I've struck up a friendship with my neighbour, a young spiritu-

"Watching your not-mind not-think no-thoughts can be as dull as watching golf on TV."

alist from New Mexico named Gideon. He knows the words to Bill Murray's rendition of the Star Wars theme and in my book that makes him pretty wise. Most of the other visitors here insist on talking about Buddhism constantly and perhaps I understand now what the monk was trying to get across with his pantomime. Talking about your personal spiritual blockages and breakthroughs is like talking about your digestive blockages and breakthroughs. Nobody really wants you to share. Here, smell my finger.

Gideon has told me that he studies tantric yoga. This is a type of yoga in which sexual energies are redirected to the mind and spirit, thrusting one into the all-embracing void of nirvana. I ask him if it works, and he said he doesn't know, he's been beating off too much.

Men aren't the only ones here for whom coarse biology insists on rudely crashing the private party of the soul. Women here must dress modestly, even employing a sash to cover their breasts else they might lure the monks away from their spiritual path and do something horrible.

Meanwhile, the monks themselves, mostly young, fit and tanned Thai men, sport chic off-the-shoulder outfits and fashionably shaved heads. This drives some of the foreign women crazy, not only because they get horny, but also because it shows the inequality of men and women of this country. What's a Buddhist feminist to do? Burn her Brahma? Furthermore, it's hot, and most wish they could cavort around in the bikini tops and tiny shorts they normally wear while cavorting through this modestly dressed land. Compared to Western females in Thailand, Thai prostitutes dress like Boris Yeltsin.

At tea break a heavyset English girl has her loose white pants pulled up and is fanning her crotch area when an old smiling nun laughs and kindly pulls her pants back down, covering tattoos, welts and mosquito punctuation marks.

"They're just me legs," the girl complains. This is difficult to argue, but the old Thai nun is right: We are all better off with them covered. The English girl shrugs a supercilious, liberated shrug and continues to fan at her crotch.

And yet, now, alone in my room, I can't stop thinking about the English girl. Yes, I am crushingly, astonishingly, phantasmagorically bored. I have never experienced anything so intensely dull in my whole life. Watching your not-mind not-think no-thoughts can be as dull as watching golf on TV.

But not everyone is suffering this affliction. Some people emerge from their rooms at lunchtime with faces withered and damp from hours of crying, having uncovered emotional traumas long repressed. Clearing their minds brought forth horrors they never imagined lurked beneath the surface. I would trade places with these people in a second. There is nothing I wouldn't do for some good old-fashioned trauma to help get me through another day. Either I'm a cold, unfeeling robot devoid of anything but libido, or I've led such an uneventful life that there's nothing to bubble to the surface.

One day, as I am washing my dish after lunch, I tell Gideon that I can not stand the boredom any longer and am planning to leave.

"But the boredom is something you create," he tells me.

"Huh?" I reply. Gideon holds on tightly to his dish and says, "It's like you're holding on to this dish and you're saying 'I hate this dish. I wish this dish wouldn't be here. This dish is driving me crazy.' But, see, you're the one who's holding on to it. Let go of the dish," he counsels.

This evening I let go of the dish. Gideon was right. I slowly come to realise we create all our bad feelings, and often we press on them like loose teeth, and pick at them like scabs. It reminds me of something Eleanor Roosevelt once said: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." One of the objectives of Buddhism, maybe, is to revoke this consent, to disallow yourself from making yourself feel bad. God knows why we spend so much time doing this to ourselves in the first place, but here was a method for casting that dish aside.

Gradually, things become more tolerable. Before I know it, 23 days are up. It is now time for "The Determination," an inhumane ritual in which the practitioner is expected to meditate for 72 hours straight, stopping only for meals. But no ice-cream soup, because you never get to leave your room. I think the reason it's called "The Determination" is because it makes you determined never to come back here again. Now that it's over, I wish I could say something about it, but I have no memory of it. Probably there was just not much to remember. Outside of the meals, it was a profoundly unmemorable three days. However, I never enjoyed food as much as I did those watery vegetables and unidentifiable pork parts. They were some of the most extraordinary, exquisite meals of my entire life.

For those of us who have completed our 26 days, there is a closing ceremony in which we prostrate to the Buddha and then to the ajarn. We chant scriptures in the Pali language that neither we nor most of the monks understand. And then, after a blessing and an invitation to come back anytime, we are free to return to the real world. I say goodbye to Gideon and some of the other students, and as they wave goodbye, it seems exactly like the end of a movie where the main character is finally released from jail, ready to try and make it again in society.

On the taxi ride back into town I see just how lovely it actually was in the temple; out here people are driving madly, rushing to and fro, scuttling mindlessly around like insects. I feel calm and somewhere above it all, watching but not judging, perceiving but not attaching. My breaths are deep and deliberate. And I realise that though most of the people I encountered inside were hardly exemplars of purity and grace, at least they were trying, and that sure counts for a lot.



At The People's Study Hall in Pyongyang we were shown a technical prowess that didn't seem possible in the DPRK. 95% of the library's books are available online through the local intranet. Computers, Pentium 3's running Windows server 2000 in English are available to the populace for use in the study hall. Book retrieval has been automated and checked out using the computer and delivered to the librarian through a rail system for dispersal.

Fun fairs, computer study rooms, a little girl with a Sesame Street backpack, beautiful, beaming dancers dressed in traditional grab – these are not the images most people would expect to glimpse behind the bamboo curtain of the People's Democratic Republic of Korea. Nor are they a propaganda show.

Photographer Nayan Sthankiya's 10-day stint in the country, shepherded by the Korean Friendship Association, pinned his eyelids back with astonishment on more than a few sightseeing outings. In particular, he was "surprised by the healthy and abundant crops, at least in the southern part of the DPRK where my travels concentrated on and also the fairly modern computers they had in Pyongyang at the People's Study Hall, Pentium 3's running Windows 2000 in English," the photographer writes in an email from his home turf in Seoul.

In Bertil Linter's recent book, *Great Leader, Dear Leader* (see Pages 28-31 for an excerpt) he writes that some prisoners in the country's forced labour camps are serving long sentences simply for talking to foreigners. The 36-year-old photographer was mostly kept under wraps by his minders and only had a few chances to speak with North Koreans.

"We were kept on a fairly tight schedule and not allowed a lot of freedom to walk around where we liked but we did spend some time in an English class where I sat down and spoke to a gentleman who peppered me with questions when he learned that I was living in Seoul. His English was quite good and he was very keen to hear about South Korea, out of earshot of the minders, asking were I had been in the South and how easy it was to travel around and then the question session was cut short

UNSHUTTERING NORTH KOREA

Portraits of daily life from the world's most reclusive regime courtesy of a photographer who traveled there. Interview by Jim Algie.



At the tail end of our trip we were treated to a traditional Korean musical celebration, dancers, singers and actors. Coming from South Korea I had seen many such performances in and around South Korea and immediately felt like I was in the South. Only the costume colours and songs were different.



Upon arriving at the airport in Pyongyang, visitors are given flowers that are to be presented at Mansudae Hill and the statue of Kim Il-sung. The massive sculpture of the elder Kim looks out over Pyongyang and its people. The monument sees pilgrims from all over North Korea coming to pay their respects, especially on the occasion of his birthday.

as one of our minders stepped up.

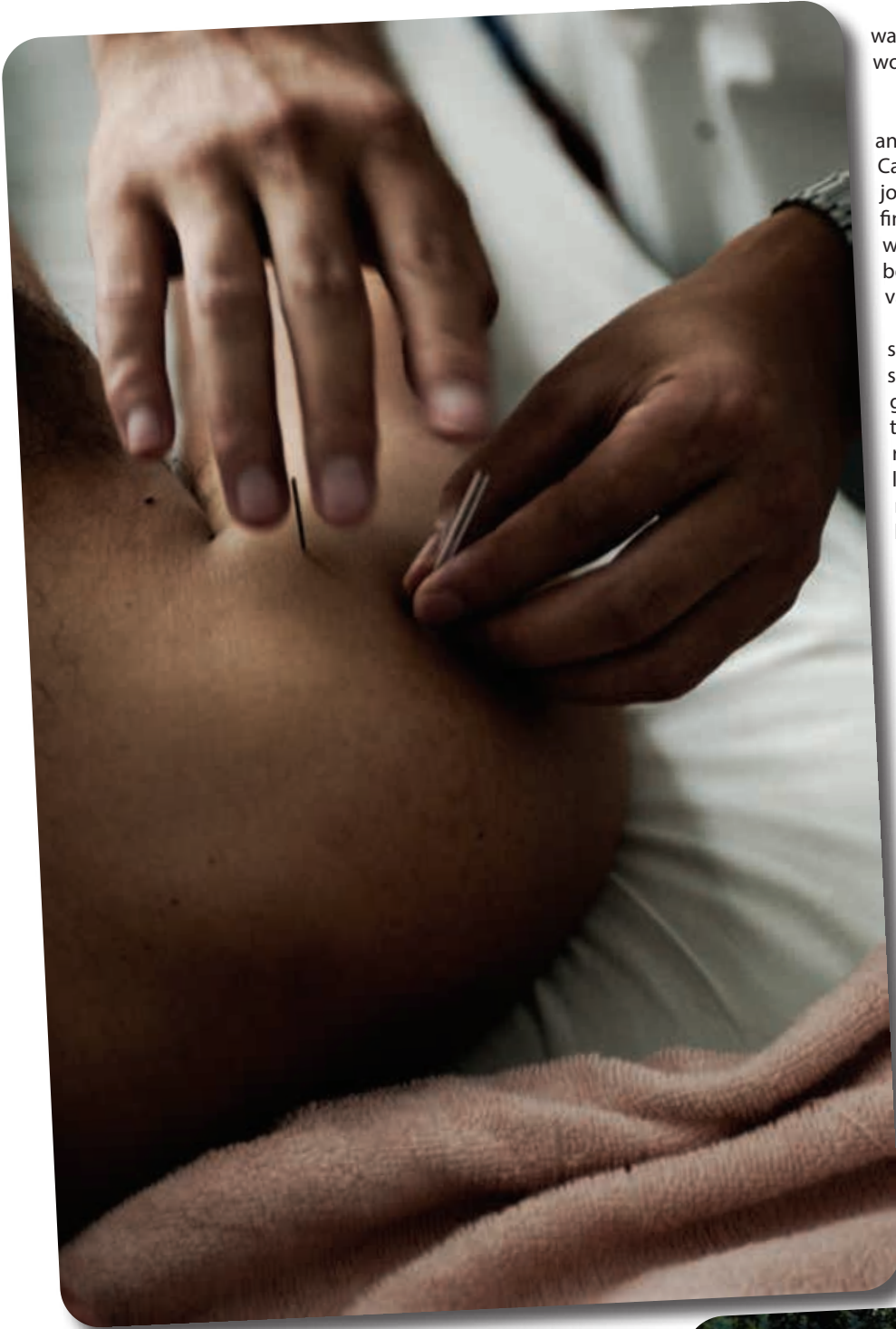
"We also accidentally ran across a large group picnic one day near the west sea and were able to mingle a little bit as they played cards and volleyball, barbecued squid and generally acted as most South Koreans do on a weekend away from work and the city. They were hesitant to have their pictures taken especially when approached by a large group of foreigners," writes Nayan, who is represented by the Corbis photo agency in France, and has had his images appear in the Village Voice, the CS Monitor, and The Korea Herald.

Were there any things he was not allowed to photograph or places that are off limits to visitors?

"We were asked not to photograph any military or military installations, infrastructure such as railroads, power plants, etc. Other than that we were given free rein to photograph what we liked within the confines of the tour. The average North Korean didn't appreciate their pictures being taken, especially when their permission



The Mansudae Children's Palace in Pyongyang house a school dedicated to training young performers. Many of the performers have visited other countries and even South Korea. This particular image seemed poignant as the DPRK tries to keep up pace with technology and the 21st century.



Acupuncture is a popular form of treatment throughout Asia and the DPRK is no exception. One of the journalists from Spain who was suffering from a chronic shoulder problem was advised by the resident doctor to have acupuncture and cupping treatments. I accompanied him to the diplomatic hospital in Pyongyang to document the procedures.

was not given. A smile and a few Korean words certainly changed their demeanour."

Did he see many other tourists there?

"There were quite a number of tourists and it is easy to tour the DPRK if you are Canadian, European, Asian, and not a journalist. They will check and they will find out. During the summer tourist season we were told that the tours are usually fully booked. Koryo Tours out of Beijing offers various packages."

While some of Nayan's images frame sights such as flag-waving patriots and a square full of soldiers presided over by a gargantuan statue of the late Great Leader that are in lockstep with the average news reader's preconceptions of this hard-line regime, the tour groups (as in most nations) are not blindsided by scenes of hungry have-nots and the squalor they call home www.koryogroup.com

"Where we were taken and what we were shown, I didn't see the wholesale starvation and poverty that we hear about all too often regarding the DPRK. However, it was interesting to see that Pyongyang, which has been given an image of a city for the elite, has people from all walks of life living there. We saw very well-to-do people and also those less fortunate much as you would in any major city in the world. There were street vendors, restaurants, barber shops, etc."

Giving Nayan's imagery a twice over, one can't help but speculate that the world's leaders and generals may have plenty of evil, power-hungry designs, but most folks are just trying to get an education, rear a family, earn a living, and forget about the workaday world when they're not.

Nayan's website with many more images from North Korea is at www.nayansthankiya.com. He is now working on a graphic novel about his experiences in the DPRK.



Our visit to Wonson was broken with a picnic at a waterfall just outside the city. Large sections of the country are undeveloped and the natural beauty of the mountains can be seen and enjoyed by those that have the means to visit them.

One of the real surprises of the trip was the visit to the amusement park in Pyongyang. The park boasts a double loop rollercoaster, video games and various rides not uncommon in most western amusement parks. The park seemed to suggest much better times in the DPRK.



The K.F.A. delegation was greeted in Gaeson by thousands of its residents waving the North Korean and unified Korea colours, dressed in traditional Korean Hanbok, generally reserved for special occasions or guests.

The Magic Bullet

Have a quick look at your body. Got any nicks or scratches? Perhaps you've had a motorcycle accident recently or even just cut yourself shaving or peeling the vegetables. Give a short prayer of thanks that you're in the 21st century and not the 19th, because even back in the 1930s that little scratch could kill you.

Back then, even the slightest nick could turn 'septic' giving you 'septicaemia', resulting in 'death'. Infections could also turn gangrenous, necessitating amputation. Scary stuff really, but not something we have to worry about so much these days, thanks to the world's first wonder drug – antibiotics.

Antibiotics inspired the "magic bullet" catchphrase from the way they act in the body. You see, antibiotics are highly toxic, poisonous chemicals. Luckily for us, they're only lethal to bacteria, killing the infection but leaving the host unharmed.

It has long been known that some moulds produce substances which kill bacteria. In 1888 E. de Freudenreich identified Pyocyanase, a bacterial secretion of *Bacillus pyocyaneus* toxic to its neighbours. Trouble is, it's toxic to people too.

Since Farang Untamed Travel is read by such an educated and intelligent audience, you're probably aware that the first antibiotic was penicillin. What you may not know is that its bacteria-retarding qualities were actually discovered in 1896 by Ernest Duchesne, a French doctor whose wife ironically but unfunny died of tuberculosis – a condition treated today with antibiotics. Ernest died a couple of years after documenting his discovery and the treatment was lost to medicine until its accidental rediscovery by Britain's Alexander Fleming. The penny dropped for Fleming when a petri-dish of bacteria was accidentally contaminated with mould. He noticed that the bacteria around the mould had died and realised it was producing a toxic substance. Perhaps the discovery wasn't as accidental as it sounds since Fleming was actively looking for a treatment for infection (being motivated by the horrors he witnessed as a doctor in World War I), plus the fact that his earlier discovery of lysozyme, a protein produced by the body that acts as an antibiotic, occurred after he accidentally sneezed into a petri-dish.

Fleming was doubtful that the substance excreted by the

mould, *Penicillium*, could be cultivated in quantities useful to medicine and penicillin again languished in the halls and labs of academia after publication in 1929. Languished, that is, until World War II proved a bonanza for infection and resources were poured into finding an effective treatment. Australian Howard Florey was the one to finally extract, isolate and manufacture penicillin in industrial quantities, for which he was awarded a Baronage and the Nobel prize.

In the present day, antibiotics work by disrupting the cellular walls of bacteria, but leave your own body alone, hence the 'magic bullet' moniker, meaning the bullet only hits its target. Because antibiotics are only effective against bacteria it's useless to take them if your malady is caused by a virus or if you have a fungal infection. Effective anti-fungal treatments are difficult to develop since, although that mouldy banana doesn't look like it, fungal cells are remarkably similar to a mammal's. Viruses are hard to kill since they're

not really alive anyway.

But here's the rub. Natural selection, the process that drives evolution, provides us not just with monkey's tails and penguins but also works for bacteria. When someone with an infection is treated with antibiotics, if by coincidence or some freak of nature that a dose of the bacteria contains genes which make them resistant, they will spread over the corpses of their brothers and continue to grow, unstoppable, invulnerable – unless counterattacked on another front by a different drug.

Antibiotic resistance is spreading and there is a continuous micro-biotic arms-race between science and evolution. Resistance is particularly widespread in hospitals, where there are lots of sick people being treated with antibiotics, and is the most common cause of entry into intensive care.

The use of antibiotics in animal feed is a particular cause of concern to many people, including the American Medical Association who oppose the use of medically useful antibiotics in livestock.

Drugs are added to animal feed to prevent disease and because it is proven that the animals grow faster. However, the risk is that if animals are fed antibiotics used in humans, diseases that become resistant in animals may spread to people. Resistance is also caused by the over-prescription of antibiotics, particularly to treat illnesses they are ineffective on, such as the common cold.

All very glum stuff and many people are becoming hesitant to take antibiotics for fear of developing an immunity to them. The thing is though, you're in Asia, where every cut is quickly infected. Lots of foreigners are surprised that when they go to the doctor they're given a handful of pills and told to stay on them for a week. What most foreigners don't understand is that in this hot, wet place conditions are ripe for bacteria growth – have a look under your mattress sometime. So if you are prescribed antibiotics by a local doctor, it's best to take them all, because the best way to avoid resistance is to stay the whole course, and kill the infection dead.



Ernest Duchesne

Some people will do anything for a shag. I'm one of them. Nothing works better than the "fire sale" approach at the very end of the evening when everything and everyone must go, and not even to the highest bidder. It's a free for all, and you rarely go home empty handed. Think Khaosan Road at 1:30am.

This failsafe method relies on beer goggles and alcohol's amazing ability to make the world appear a lot better than it actually is. Breaking down the barriers of better judgment, intoxication allows even the pig ugly to score and wake up the next morning, full of regret next to a stranger with morning breath.

But when I show Mr. Random the door, I can't help but think there must be an easier way to meet Mr. Right, or at least some guy I'd like without the assistance of enough whiskey to fuel a jet engine. A possible solution entered my inbox: Speed Dating organized by the Bangkok Network of Women.

Ah-ha, I thought, a ray of hope on the dark landscape of singledom in the kingdom, famous as a single white female's worst nightmare. In a nutshell, a more civilized way to get your leg over.

What's it all about then? Like every craze that reaches Thailand a year or two after everywhere else in the world, speed dating is touted as a way of meeting like-minded singles without doing the legwork normally involved in chatting someone up.

Basically, you're standing in a room with all the men sitting down. You have eight minutes to chat, then a bell rings and you move on to the next suspecting victim, noting down on a list whether you want to see a guy again. After everyone has circulated, you hand in your list of potential shag-pieces and wait to hear whether any of the guys also ticked your name and made a match. If so, you go on a few dates, cop off and live happily ever.

That's the theory, but reality is another thing. Before the event, the organizers sent out some "useful" speed dating tips. Reading through these, I knew I was doomed. I glanced upon list of "Don'ts" which included getting drunk and swearing excessively, the only two things I consider myself any good at.

I decided to do some research of my own. One Internet site suggested "interesting and novel conversation starters", my favourite being, "Oysters are 90 percent testicle". I knew that line would make me irresistible to the opposite sex. Head filled with similar one liners (did you know an ostrich's brain is smaller than one of its eyes?) and other crap about showing genuine interest, eye contact and avoiding food that could clog your teeth, I made my way to the event, shit scared and wondering what the hell I was doing. Was I really that desperate?

In the lift, one of the male participants turned to his friend and said, "I'm just doing my bit for the dogs". Now I know being single is a form of social leprosy, but referring to single women as dogs was going too far.

I nearly knocked him flat until I realized he was referring to the Soi Dog Rescue charity benefiting from the event. On reflection, I should have knocked his lights out anyway, since he was the same slimy twat who later told me, "I told my girlfriend the last thing I need is a girlfriend." Er hello mister? Speed dating is for singles; go home to your pipe and slippers. Sadly, he was one of the better men there.

After registering, everyone received a list of participants with their profession and interests. The first listed moonlight walks on the beach and Hello Kitty; he was obviously gay and at the wrong event. The others, 40 in all, were just as lame and uninspiring with travel and reading coming tops on the list of interests. Whoopee shite, you're an interesting fellow, aren't you?

Seating arrangements were sporadic and there was no structure, with both males and females mingling at will, few paying attention to the bell. It was a free-for-all with the younger



Every second counts: Confessions of a speed dating virgin

This month, local Farang woman Kelly May (her real name) stands in for Karen Findlay (not her real name), and takes it slow at speed dating.

and fitter alpha males not having to move, as the beauties made their way to them.

As is usual in Bangkok, the men had the better end of the deal, with 48 young professional women disproving the usual notions of over-the-hill fat-arsed Farang desperados.

Stone cold sober and feeling as self-conscious as hell, I found sanctuary with familiar faces, each having to justify why they were there. "I'm just here for a laugh," was the common response when asked why they decided to come, confirming the social stigma attached to being single.

Having completely lost the ability to speak to the opposite sex, I enlisted the help my old friend – booze. After a few glasses of the red stuff and buying a bottle to help things along, life wasn't so bad after all and employed my cockney charms to dazzle and delight.

With my new-found confidence, I managed to engage a few of the lads in conversation. 99.9% of the time, I wished I hadn't. Eight minutes can feel like a lifetime when a man with bad teeth is explaining how to extract oil from the Earth's core. Remembering my speed dating tips, I smiled sweetly and maintained eye contact while wanting to stab him with a blunt instrument. After escaping, I decided to hang out with a group of girls who seemed to be having a nicer time than everyone else. Finally! Some decent conversation and a laugh. Even if I didn't meet Mr. Right, I still met some nice girls to hang out with.

As the evening ended, I was so plastered I forgot to fill in my form, defeating the whole object of the night. But then, there wasn't one guy of the five I spoke to I'd want to see again. The guys I did fancy, I didn't have the nerve to approach. There was only one solution, the "fire sale" at Khaosan. And once again, I ended up with my old faithful Mr. Random for a one night stand.

I was informed a week later that one guy had marked me down as a potential – better than none, I suppose.

Maybe it was my "Nobody knows I'm a virgin" T-shirt or the oyster line, I guess I'll never know.

Cosmopolitan, man for all seasons that I am, constant exposure to the world's coolest restaurants, bars and bare breasts is inevitable. Inevitable, but tiresome. Despite an ever increasing number of eateries clamoring for the top spot as the hippest joint in town, Bangkok's still one of the best cities in the world for tasty, down to earth tucker – and not just the Thai kind. One of my favourite dining areas for some real food of the non-papaya salad variety is the Arab quarter between Sukhumvit Soi 3 and Sukhumvit Road. The restaurants that fill this mini-Middle east are not hip. They don't have BMWs parked outside and they weren't designed by an overpaid prick known as a 'consultant.' Choose your restaurant well however, and you'll be rewarded with a superb meal and a refreshingly un-east Asian atmosphere.

Of those that I've tried, I've consistently had the best food at Al Ferdoss restaurant in Schiller's Inn (30m on your right if entering the soi from Sukhumvit Road.). Whilst this place does lack the noisy, distinctively Arab atmosphere you'll find many of the other restaurants have, the food more than makes up for the ambience. The menu is Lebanese and Turkish, and short enough that you shouldn't stuff yourself senseless with the free pickles before you've even ordered. I recommend dining with friends or getting extremely full – portions tend to be big, and the dishes are of the kind that demands to be accompanied by a few others. Salads are big, fresh and really tangy, the fetoosh and salad with tahini will both get you salivating uncontrollably, but avoid the chicken salad – a sweet mayonnaise-slathered abortion.

No meal here is complete without the bread – a truly enormous flatbread with a great charred taste that achieves heavenly status when used to scoop up matubal (or babaganoush - an aubergine dip) or fantastically cloying, oily humus (the classic chickpea based paste), both Bt80. If there's more than one of you, it's well worth trying both dips. Not only do they both taste great but it will stop you fighting over the last scoop. A barbecue dish is also a must here. Grilled meats such as mutton, pigeon and chicken go for Bt130-150. The Iraqi kebab is an unbelievably juicy, char grilled lamb dish that could turn the strictest veggie into a flesh-eating beast. The mixed kebab also gets the thumbs up. Once you're full to brimming, you can even retire next door to the smoking room for a civilised sheesha pipe or two.

On Sukhumvit Soi 3 itself, a short walk away from that

monument to all things sleazy, The Grace Hotel, is Abyssinia café - Bangkok's only Ethiopian restaurant. Another culinary gem, Abyssinia café is a small but comfortable place with just a few tables and wicker seating inside. On my first visit I was greeted by the smell of freshly roasting coffee, literally being roasted over hot coals inside the restaurant - surprisingly smooth it was too. This was pretty much my first foray into Ethiopian food and I was pleasantly surprised. Chances are you won't know the dishes but the friendly Ethiopian lady who runs the place is on hand to point you in the right direction. All dishes are around Bt250 and one is more than enough person. They come platter-like, on a tray lined with injera – the Ethiopian flatbread that accompanies almost every meal. Made from teff, the bread itself resembles foam rubber somewhat but is great when torn off and dunked into the often sour and spicy stews, or used to pick up pieces of lamb fried with onions and chillies. Alcohol is served here and it's just as well because the food is wonderful washed down with a cold beer or two. No minimalist decor, no moody DJs, no subdued lighting- just real food.



Foodie's Diary

Taking his signature saltshaker and bib for a stroll, gourmand and glutton Andre LePine extraordinaire prowls the streets and sois of Sukhumvit's Little Bagdad in a quest for flesh and nourishment of his insatiable appetite for tasty fare.



Cinema by the Bushel

Review by Daniel Cooper

While coming in at close to a thousand pages, *1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die* (Cassell Illustrated, 2003) is hardly a book for the road, but if you pick up this heavy tome, it's pretty hard to put down. The book is a collection of 1,001 short essays on significant, groundbreaking and cult films from around the globe. Entries are chronologically ordered, commencing with *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and finishing up with *Chicago* (2003), *The Barbarian Invasions* (2003) and *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003), so the book takes the browser on a tour of 100 years of outstanding filmmaking.

Each essay, ranging from a half to two pages, describes the film in its historical, artistic and cultural context and covers all genres of film, from the experimental (*Scorpio Rising*) to the trashy (*Independence Day*), to the sublime (*Raising Arizona*). An excellent book for Sunday afternoon browsing or reference (there are indexes organised by genre, title and director, Alfred Hitchcock takes the cake with 18 films included) *1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die* appeals both to film buffs and the casual viewer.

With words from 58 contributors and edited by Steven Jay Scheider, the book serves to educate, trigger reminiscences about great films and inspire the reader to absorb more of the best of the art form.



Inside the Robes

Review by Daniel Cooper

What's the newest, fastest-growing and hippest belief-structure in the West? Buddhism. So it is unsurprising that Phra Peter Pannapadipo's *Phra Farang* (Arrow Books 2005) has been a big seller there. The book, originally published by the Bangkok Post, first appeared in 1997 and tells the story of the Englishman's discovery of Buddhism, entry into the monkhood, and the first few years of his life in the robes.

The book has value as it explains much of Thai Buddhism from an outsider's view but from the unique inside vantage point of a monk. The book begins with Pannapadipo's disaffection with his nominally successful but empty lifestyle as his motivation for seeking a spiritual compass in Buddhism. After years of attending a temple in England as a layman he decides to ordain in Thailand where he remains today. We join Pannapadipo in a Bangkok monastery and on his journey through other monasteries in the countryside and his meditative journey on the path to enlightenment.

The book is well written enough but Peter has the irritating habit of ending each chapter on the cusp of action, leaving the reader hanging – a fine device but overused in this text. The book's major fault is that he does not give any hint as to what his past life was like, except that he was a successful businessman in London and (guessing here) that he was something of a party animal. The opening sentence of the book, "The first question people ask me is 'Why did you become a Buddhist monk?'" Pannapadipo says his prior life was empty but never explains why. Sadly, by concealing the excesses, mistakes or losses that convinced him to embark on the eightfold path transmutes what could have been a story of spiritual awakening into a bedtime story.

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A Man's Castle

Dear Farang,
While on holiday in Koh Samet last month I found your magazine quite helpful. After a week of sunbathing, lounging, massage and swimming I was quite bored. While leafing through your magazine I found an article on the best way to build sandcastles and can confirm that the advice therein is an excellent help in constructing towers, walls, ramparts and portcullis, and my lands are now far more secure.

Kind Regards,

His Royal Highness Louis Xavier IV,
Kingdom of Impregnia,
Koh Samet

Mad Moto-Taxis

Dear Editor, I have a bit of advice for your commuting readers: Slow down speed happy motorcycle taxi drivers by squeezing them in between your thighs. If this doesn't work you can also increase the wind resistance by holding out your arms and opening your mouth.

Emma Brougham
Klong Tan, Bangkok

Repulsive Packet

Gentlemen, I don't know why the Thai cigarette companies are putting those nasty pictures of yellow teeth and blackened lungs on the front of their packets. If anything, it is likely to put people off buying the product.

Greg Ramsay
Bangkok

China Don't Surf

Dear Sirs,
We are a manufacturer in China. Our new Products : Surf Board
The spec. 1865x470x52 (mm)
The price : USD130.00/pc. The material : Glass Fibre and EPE Foam.
home.netvigator.com~sky888s/surf%20Board.jpg

Thanks,

Winnie

Dedicated Fan

Hello, I just wanted to congratulate you for your fascinating and informative publication. My friends and I buy it every month wherever we are in Southeast Asia. Well, I don't – I steal mine from newsstands at bus stations.

Kez
Via email

Art Imitates Life

I'm sick of people back home complaining that illegally copied DVD's are ruining the home theatre experience. I think that when somebody gets up for a piss in the middle of Star Wars and walks past the screen it merely adds to the realism.

Joe Hoffner
Stoke-Sub-Hamdon, UK

Another Winner!!

It may come as no surprise, but it appears to us that the sort of person who enters contests really isn't that bright, as a general rule. Just listen to people who win free CDs on the radio, and that becomes abundantly clear. Maybe the clever people already have all the stuff they need. You see, in the June issue, for the second month running, we held a contest to win the book Bangkok Inside Out, a wild and wacky yet informative guide to Bangkok and its oddities. We asked for a bit of wit and out of enough readers to fill a football stadium, got very little in response. This may have been due to the fact that in the June issue we neglected to include the email address of where to send your entry. Fair enough, we slipped there, but come on, how hard can that be to figure out? God knows plenty of lunatics find their way into our office in spite of the fact that the address is deliberately printed in five-point type. (One of them actually dropped by to tell us he thought our fonts were too small and hard to read) Anyway, the question was: "Name all the commercial icons imported from the West who wai to prospective customers." The winner's response follows:

Hi Farang,
Well, the two I know are Ronald McDonald and the Michelin Man... Are there more???

Regards,
Simon Paris.

Simon, being a photographer, was also kind enough to provide us with photographic evidence. Congratulations Simon, you win the book. We still have two more books to give away now. So the next contest question we will make easier:

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The Island Pulling Guide for the Modern Man

By Colin Anderson

If you're looking to get laid on the islands, sweet-talk doesn't cut it any more. Gone are the days when a winning smile and nifty bit of footwork could influence a girl's after-dance decisions. Today it's all about attitude, and the more thoughtful you appear, the more opportunities you'll have to come without using your hands.

After several meetings and much tele-conferencing, we've stripped the modern-day recipe for success down into three basic rules of the thumb.:

1. Laugh it off, and you'll never have it off. A woman can see through the cheesy smiles and tacky displays of joy worn by most guys. Maintain a mysterious edge... Keep the ladies guessing, and you'll soon be gusseting.
2. Go light on the piss, and the ladies you'll miss. Since ancient times drinking has been perceived as a masculine foray... so never stray too far from the bucket. If you have a stubby in your hand in the disco, you won't need to have one in your hand later on.
3. If you're conversant, you'll fail the velvet-purse hunt. Remain tight lipped. A busty prospect isn't seeking a blabbermouth. We give off signals every time we speak so remember.... Speak less, and there'll soon be a mess.



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Balls to the wall

Even some three decades after the greatest upset in World Cup history, when an Italian football club loses a crucial game, it's referred to as "another Korea." The reference is to the 1966 World Cup in England when North Korea kicked the Italians (heavily favoured to take the cup) out of the tournament with a 1-0 victory.

Nobody expected them to qualify for the World Cup, but the plucky North Koreans beat Australia in a special match arranged in Phnom Penh. Even then, since England and North Korea did not have diplomatic relations, the host country decreed that the Asian team's national anthem could not be played before their matches.

Football fans in Middlesbrough proved to be far more accommodating to their new guests. During their first game, more than 22,000 fans came out to watch them be trounced by the Soviet Union, 3-0.

But the North Koreans rallied their forces to stay alive in the tournament by drawing Chile in their next game.

"When they tied Chile, the crowd cheered so hard the strip lighting came down in the press box," Dan Gordon, the producer of this highly acclaimed documentary, told The Korea Herald.

Gordon became one of the first Western filmmakers ever to be allowed into North Korea. Towards the end of 2001, he went there to interview seven of the surviving members of the 11-man squad about their recollections of the World Cup. "The players told me they couldn't believe how much the local community supported them," said Gordon. "At every game the chant of 'Korea, Korea' went up in the stands."

"The North Koreans helped to change the course of football history through their speedy and forceful style on the pitch – perhaps reflecting their military indoctrination and socialist kind of teamwork – and this was what English football fans found so exhilarating about them."

The North Koreans helped to change the course of football history through their speedy and forceful style on the pitch – perhaps reflecting their military discipline and socialist kind of teamwork – and this was what English football fans found so exhilarating about them.

"Football in 1966 was incredibly slow and nowadays teams play like the Koreans did in 1966," says Gordon. "They were visionaries."

But even the draw with Chile was nothing compared to their besting of Italy, which made headlines around the globe. The Northern Echo newspaper said, "The fall of the Roman Empire has nothing on this!"

Surprisingly enough, the filmmakers say on their website that they were granted a fair measure of freedom in North Korea to shoot and interview whom

A British documentary puts viewers in the front row for the greatest upset in World Cup history, when a team of underdogs from North Korea unleashed a surprise attack on Italy.

THE GAME OF THEIR LIVES...

The greatest shock in World Cup history



"They couldn't possibly have drunk a Liverpool pub dry before their match with Portugal, could they?"

they wanted; they were also allowed to talk to members of the general public and had access to the players' scrapbooks and archival photos and film footage from the People's Democratic Republic of North Korea.

By the time the miracle team was set to face off against Portugal in the quarterfinals, they were now considered as the odds-on favourites to take the cup. They confirmed this impression by scoring in the first minute of the game, to raucous applause from 3,000 Middlesbrough fans who had come down to Liverpool to cheer them on. By the 22nd minute of the game, the North Koreans had scored two more unanswered goals.

One of the most fascinating things about the doco is that they examine (and sometimes explode) many of the myths surrounding the country's mysterious squad. Was the previous national team all killed during the Korean War? Did the country's footballers have to sustain 'blue balls' by going celibate and having to train in a military camp? Is it true that Korea invented football? Did the team really receive tactical advice from the country's Great Leader? Were they the smallest team to ever play in a World Cup? Did they bring their own cook and noodles with them to England? They couldn't possibly have drunk a Liverpool pub dry before their match with Portugal, could they?

And perhaps the most puzzling and long-lasting riddles of them all, when the players returned home were they punished for consorting with English women, or imprisoned for losing to Portugal? Finding out the answers to these questions should provide you with more than enough reasons to catch *The Game of Their Lives*. Check out the website for ordering information and much more at www.thegameoftheirlives.com/



In a country where only a decade ago, people were reduced to eating grass because of a mass famine, it's astonishing that they could produce a spectacle on the grandiose scale shown in the documentary *A State of Mind*. This latest collaboration between director and producer Daniel Gordon, and associate producer Nicholas Bonner, who made *The Game of Their Lives*, gives a never-before-seen glimpse into the DPRK through the eyes of two young female gymnasts preparing for the Mass Games in homage to the country's leader Kim Jong Il. The crew also follows the girls and their families through their daily lives, in the city and in the countryside, and on a 30-hour pilgrimage to the holy Mount Paekdu, which North Koreans revere as the birthplace of their late Great Leader Kim Jong Il, who is still the country's president for eternity. As their Korean minder explained, "You have to understand, no one has ever been allowed to see, let alone film, what you are witnessing." There are some riveting trailers on the website at www.astateofmind.co.uk/vv

Mass Games

Tour the DPRK

If you'd like to see the Mass Games, which have been described as the greatest spectacle on earth, and include up to 100,000 performers, you might just have the chance with Koryo Tours, under the direction of filmmaker Nicholas Bonner. Though the details have yet to be confirmed, it seems likely that on August 14th, the 60th anniversary of Liberation Day, when the Japanese colonial forces were vanquished and forced to withdraw, the games will be held. Koryo also offers affordable trailblazing tours of all the most historic and photogenic sites in the DPRK.

Take a look at their website www.koryotours.com for prices and itineraries. Or email massgames@koryogroup.com.



MANTA POINT

The sun sparkles off the choppy waves like a disco mirror ball. The weather is wondrous: a gentle breeze, wisps of cloud, not too hot. And the spray from the boat's bow, as those in front watch dolphins frolic, is refreshing. Our boat is heading for Koh Bon, touted by some sensationalist dive companies as "Manta Point". There it is now, a tall wedge of layered granite, clad in deep-green swatches of trees and scrub, with sea eagles gliding above.

Not part of the Similan Islands National Park, Koh Bon is close to it but its unprotected status means that liveaboards may be greeted by the plastic jetsam of fishing boats. Most of the reef around Koh Bon is rubble, with very strong currents. But the chance of seeing mantas is so great, between January and April, that you'll be lucky if no less than five other diving boats are accompanying you on the dive.

Watch a group of divers plummet down to 30 metres (even though you can see the fish flit above and below you from 15 metres). Don't miss at least four from that group who are abandoned somewhere above because they have problems equalising or not enough weight. It's a scramble of excitement down there on the West Ridge. Down the rest of the group

"It approaches head-on, forward pointing lobes rolling and unrolling, scooping plankton into its wagon-sized mouth, and you wonder if it could mistakenly swallow an object as big as yourself."

goes, armed with the latest in consumer electronics and National Geographic aspirations dancing in their heads.

If you don't see the manta first, you'll hear a shaker – a metallic tube that rattles loudly in order to get a diver's attention. Or a tank banger thwack metallically. Any sharp unnatural metallic sound means someone's spotted a manta. Whoa! They're lucky, it's a big one – four-metre wingspan, white chevrons over its head, embossing its bird's-eye-view profile. It glides back towards the ridge, saving the group from being swept off into the blue by the current. They chase it, snapping pictures, fidget-kicking, bicycle-riding with fins.

The manta-spotting season has pretty much wrapped up in Thailand's Andaman Sea, but after you read about Pete Botman's encounters with these overgrown angels of the deep, and their 'aquabatics,' you'll soon be booking a place for next year.

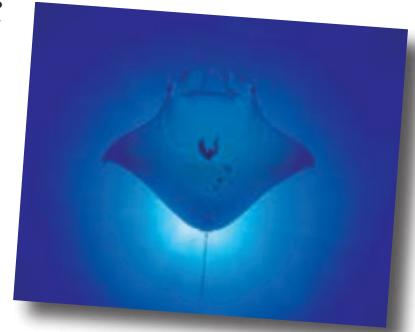
A manta doesn't have to worry about getting the bends. It can swoop up and down at any speed it likes. Some divers forget everything they've learned about decompression theory and try following the manta. Lucky for them, the manta decides there's no more plankton to be swallowed around the ridge and veers away into the blue.

So where have you been, observing all of this? A moderate depth, out of the current, hovering near the West Ridge, lucky enough to spot that mantis shrimp five metres below, checking out the blue for a manta to show up. And it does, but farther away from the masses, a vague shadow wavering. Do you shake

your rattle? No way. This baby's for you and your group to enjoy. Luckily they've seen it too and hang still, waiting for the show.

It approaches head-on, forward-pointing lobes rolling and unrolling, scooping plankton into its wagon-sized mouth, and you wonder if it could mistakenly swallow an object as big as yourself. It suddenly veers upward, flashing you its white belly, plankton-filtered seawater pumped out of long slashes of gills at an arm's length in front as it completes a semi-loop followed by a rolling turn, pectoral fins bending with unexpected pliancy. It circles around to meet you again as you are apparently hovering in the rich stream of plankton it so hungrily desires.

It glides towards you again, like a game of underwater chicken, with lobes channeling microscopic plankton into its yawning maw. (Imagine you or I eating by just moving around and slurping stuff hanging in the air.) It strafes you overhead, but you resist the urge to reach upward and stroke its belly because it's just not proper cricket to touch the wildlife, to risk pissing it off and ruining others' enjoyment. Watch it glide away and in parting, its body convulses, its cloaca spouts digested plankton, and you've been christened with manta crap.



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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.

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.

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.

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.

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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Behind the Bamboo Curtain

Bertil Lintner's new book *Great Leader, Dear Leader: Demystifying North Korea under the Kim Clan* (Silkworm Books, 2005) solves more than a few riddles about the world's most enigmatic country – its “military first” politics, terrorist activities, brutal repression and staunch nationalism – while questioning whether a nuclear holocaust is imminent. Here are four excerpts.

Chapter 2: The Famine and the Juche Idea

According to Swedish charge d'affaires Erik Cornell, Kim Il Sung combined theories taken from Confucianism's hierarchical worldview and Soviet industrialization ideology of Stalinist vintage, bleeding them into a unity, the specific Korean characteristics of which the North Koreans are keen to point out. The first of the three categories in this “Red Confucian” society is the 25 percent of the population that makes up the trusted “core class”. Their loyalty to the regime can be counted on controlling the others, especially the 20 percent who belong to the “hostile class”, descendants of old “landlords” and other “enemies of the people”. The “core class” do not have to be workers, peasants, or soldiers.

In keeping with his Confucian philosophy, Kim Il Sung, also emphasized the role of the intellectuals, which true Marxist-Leninists never did. Most of the members of the “core class” live in Pyongyang and other major cities, enjoying privileges such as party membership and holding administrative or military positions. In effect, they form a feudal hereditary class entitled to benefits in education, promotions, food rations, housing, and medical services. The remaining 55 percent described are as a “wavering class” – people who have suspect relatives, even two



or three generations back, or who for other reasons cannot be fully trusted. People from the wavering class would find it hard to get good government jobs, while “the hostiles” are excluded from almost everything.

While traditional cornerstones of old Confucianism such as family and respect for one’s parents were dismantled in Kim Il Sung’s neo-Confucian North Korea, new “families” emerged – the work collective, the party, and the state – as well as a new father figure that had to be respected: the suryong. To hammer these concepts into the minds of the population – even the “hostiles” and the “waverers” – every worker has to study them on a daily basis. The day begins at 8am with a one-hour study session under the direction of a party official. Save for a rest period in the middle of the day, work then continues to 8:00pm after which study sessions and self-criticism meetings are held until 10:00pm. Indoctrination begins at an even earlier age. A popular nursery school song expresses loyalty to the suryong: “Thank you Marshall Kim Il Sung for bringing us up as future pillars of society.” And that society is – or was until the great famine – a well-drilled army of workers and soldiers, who never questioned their leader or the policies of the party and the state. Even the parrot in Pyongyang Zoo was taught to say “Long Live President Kim!”

Due to the extraordinary power and importance of one man, the *juche* [“master of his own destiny”] philosophy became inextricably embedded in the economic, political, military, and cultural aspects of life in North Korea. And the “exceptionally brilliant and outstanding Leader” himself became worshiped as an almost divine being. Every North Korean wears a Kim Il Sung badge, which is distributed free by schools and state organizations. Not all badges are the same as they indicate different social status. There is one for party members, another for other adults, and a third for students. But the message is nevertheless the same: loyalty to the Great Leader. Contemporary North Korean poetry also praises the suryong in glowing terms:

We will follow you, dear Leader, to the limit of the Earth
Loyally attending you ‘til end of sun and moon.
Oh, your blessing we’ll convey, to this forever true,
We’ll remain forever loyal, all our faith in you,
To our leader we pray, with all that’s in our hearts,
To our great dearest father, long and fruitful years.

There are in North Korea no less than thirty-four thousand statues and memorials dedicated to Kim Il Sung, at least one in every town and village across the country. The grandest of all towers is outside the Korean Revolutionary Museum in Pyongyang: a twenty-meter-high bronze statue that at one stage was even gold-plated. The statue was gilded in 1977 to celebrate Kim Il Sung’s sixty-fifth birthday. But in what U.S. Korea specialist Helen-Louise Hunter calls “a rare admission to having exceeded acceptable limits in their idolization of Kim,” the gold cover was removed a year later. School children, groups of factory workers, and other visitors lower their heads in silent respect when they approach the statue in what appears to be more of a religious ritual than just paying homage to a revolutionary hero.

Numerous wreaths adorn the ground in front of the statue and it is customary for young couples to pay their respect to the statue on their wedding day. There were at least three such couples there when I visited the site on April 16, 2004, a sunny Friday.

Chapter 4: The Army and the Party

The Dear Leader Kim Jong Il walked slowly along the podium, smiling and waving at tens of thousands of troops assembled in Pyongyang’s Kim Il Sung Square. A flurry of balloons drifted toward the sky as a 21-gun salute echoed in the distance. The celebrations were opened by the minister of the People’s Armed Forces, Vice Marshall Kim Il Chol, who praised the great commander, Kim Jong Il, for turning North Korea into “an impregnable fortress... if the U.S. imperialists and their followers invade the inviolable land, sea and sky of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea... the army and the people who hold the dignity and sovereignty of the country and nation as dear as their own lives will deal merciless blows at the invaders.” A black limousine carrying a huge flag with a painted image of Kim Il Sung then drove in front of elite troops goose-stepping past Kim Jong Il, his closest comrades and a few foreign guests up on the dais.

It was April 25, 2002, the official seventieth anniversary of the Korean People’s Army – and less than three months after President George W. Bush made his “Axis of Evil”

“IT WAS APRIL 25, 2002, THE OFFICIAL SEVENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE KOREAN PEOPLE’S ARMY – AND LESS THAN THREE MONTHS AFTER PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH MADE HIS “AXIS OF EVIL” SPEECH, LUMPING NORTH KOREA TOGETHER WITH IRAQ AND IRAN AS THE MAIN THREATS AGAINST THE SECURITY OF THE U.S.”

speech, lumping North Korea together with Iraq and Iran as the main threats against the security of the U.S. That was probably the reason why Kim Jong Il made this rare public appearance and chose to do it on Army Day. As he was consolidating power following the death of the Great Leader in 1994, he replaced the party with the armed forces as the most important organs of the state by instituting a policy called “the military first.” Now, the North Korean leadership’s policy was given renewed emphasis, and the rhetoric grew fiercer. On February 8, North Korea hit back at the U.S., branding it the “empire of the devil.”

The U.S. has said time and again that it has no intention of invading North Korea, and that the situation there was different from that in Iraq. But the North Koreans were not convinced. Every North Korean schoolchild knows about the incident in 1866 when the U.S. battleship General Sherman sailed up the Taedong River toward Pyongyang – and the role Kim Il Sung’s great-grandfather allegedly played in destroying it. A century later – in January 1968 – a US intelligence ship called *Pueblo* was seized by the North Korean navy off the port of Wonsan. It was on a mission to pick up electronic transmissions from North Korea, and had the capability of identifying radar locations so they could be jammed in time of war. The Americans claimed it was in international waters but even Wayne Kirkbridge, a US army officer who was stationed in the DMZ in the 1970s, conceded. “It is possible that due to a navigation error the *Pueblo* was inside the twelve-mile limit.” The *Pueblo* carried eighty-one officers and privates and two civilian hydrographic experts. One



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sailor was killed and three wounded in circumstances that are not entirely clear. The crew was finally released eleven months later, but not the vessel. It sat in Wonsan harbor until it was moved to the Taedong River in Pyongyang, close to the place where the General Sherman was destroyed, which is commemorated with a plaque. The Pueblo has become a popular attraction for foreign tourists as well as locals – and a reminder of “the threat” the North Koreans perceive that the US poses against them. While the U.S., Japan, and their friends and allies see North Korea as a threat, the North Korean leadership sincerely believe that they are a potential target for attacks and invasion – and it is that perception that guides not only the way in which they negotiate with outside powers but also domestic policies such as “the military first” concept. It also explains why North Korea believes it must have a huge and well-equipped army – and the right to develop a nuclear deterrent.

Chapter 6: The Missions

North Korea’s own involvement in violent activities was not confined to infiltrating South Korea – which it did in January 1968, when a group of its commandos managed to enter the heart of Seoul and attack the presidential palace, the Blue House, almost killing President Park Chung Hee – but included actions well beyond the Korean peninsula. In the most spectacular operation, carried out in September-October 1983, a small “direct action” team was dispatched to Burma to assassinate the new South Korean president, Chun Doo Hwan. The leader of the hit squad, Major Zin Mo, was assisted by two demolition specialists, captains Kim Chi O and Kang Min Chul. They managed to get into Burma aboard a North Korean ship called Tong Gon Ae Guk-ho, which was ostensibly carrying construction materials to Egypt via Rangoon. On September 22, the three team members – disguised as sailors from the ship – went ashore, and contacted the North Korean embassy. On October 9, a powerful bomb ripped through the Martyrs’ Mausoleum in Rangoon, erected to honor Burma’s independence hero, Aung San, who was assassinated in 1947. It killed eighteen visiting South Korean officials, including Deputy Prime Minister So Suk Chun and three other government ministers.

That night, Zin Mo was arrested by a Burmese security squad – missing one eye and an arm which he had lost when he detonated a grenade in an attempt to kill himself. Kim Chi O and Kang Min Chul were arrested two days later, and, on November 4, the Burmese authorities officially announced that the North Koreans

were behind the bomb blast. The North Korean embassy in Rangoon was closed down, and its diplomats escorted to the city’s airport, where they boarded a plane bound for Pyongyang. Kim Chi O was hanged in 1985, but Kang Min Chul’s life was spared because he cooperated with the prosecution. He still languishes in Rangoon’s notorious Insein Jail in one of the city’s northern suburbs.

The next major North Korean terrorist attack took place on November 29, 1987, and also involved Burma – but this time up in the sky over the Andaman Sea. On that day, a bomb exploded aboard Korean Airlines flight 858, a Boeing 707 en route from Baghdad to Seoul via Abu Dhabi and Bangkok with 104 passengers and 11 crew members aboard. There were no survivors. A few days later, two North Koreans – an older man and a very attractive, twenty-five-year-old woman – were arrested in Bahrain. During the interrogation, both of them swallowed cyanide capsules, which they had concealed in cigarette filters. The man, Kim Sung Il, died immediately, but the woman, Kim Hyun Hee, got her capsule stuck in her throat, and was resuscitated by a Bahraini policewoman. On December 15, Kim Hyun Hee and the body of Kim Sung Il were flown to Seoul.

“THE NEXT MAJOR NORTH KOREAN TERRORIST ATTACK TOOK PLACE ON NOVEMBER 29, 1987, AND ALSO INVOLVED BURMA – BUT THIS TIME UP IN THE SKY OVER THE ANDAMAN SEA.”

In South Korea, Kim Hyun Hee confessed everything. She and her much older minder had boarded the plane in Baghdad, placed a time bomb in the overhead compartment, and got off in Abu Dhabi, from where they were going to fly via Bahrain in a round-about way to Europe. She was sentenced to death, but was never executed. On the contrary, she was granted a special amnesty and became something of a celebrity in South Korea. Her book about her life in North Korea and her experiences as a special agent for Pyongyang’s secret services, *The Tears of My Soul*, was an instant bestseller, dedicated to the “families of the victims of Flight 858. All the proceeds will be donated to them.”

The book was most probably ghost-written by her South Korea minders and interrogators but, if the details are true, it is nevertheless an astonishing document about the way in which North Korea selects and trains its agents, and also about the



motive behind the bombing. When Kim Hyun Hee first heard that they had succeeded in blowing up the plane – years before she wrote her book – she felt no remorse: “I was relieved to know for certain that we had accomplished our mission and been faithful to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. I was sure now that the 1988 Olympics would not take place in Seoul and that I had been part of an important step toward Korean reunification.”

That the 1988 Olympics were going to be held in South Korea was seen by Pyongyang as a blow to its prestige – but so, too, was the bombing of Flight 858. The North Korean government denied any involvement in the outrage, claiming that it had been staged by the South Korean government to discredit, Pyongyang. The rest of the world was not convinced, and in January 1988, the U.S. placed North Korea on its list of nations supporting international terrorism.

Chapter 9: The Future?

So what is likely to happen in North Korea? The first scenario, which has been widely predicted by Western observers, is collapse. Lack of substantial economic development and political repression will lead to chaos, and, eventually, the fall of Kim Jong Il's regime in Pyongyang in a way similar to that in which Romania's Nicolae Ceaucescu was ousted – and executed – in 1989. Given the levels of control and mass mobilization in North Korea, this is not likely to happen. Most totalitarian states exercise power in three different ways. The first is through normative control: a state ideology around which the citizens are expected to rally. The second is through remunerations to high-ranking officials: financial and other privileges to ensure the continued loyalty of people who matter in the hierarchy. The third is by instilling fear in the population at large: massive punishment for dissent and even disobedience. North Korea has practiced – and still is practicing – all three measures of control, and has done so more successfully than other totalitarian states.

Sanctions, as proposed by some U.S. legislators, are also unlikely to create a situation where the government's control mechanism breaks down. The continued survival of North Korea's highly militarized society shows that it can hold together against internal as well as external pressures, and the regime is more firmly in power than most outsiders believe. North Korea could also survive sanctions, even if they led to severe economic decline. Many Koreans – even South Koreans – point out that they are used to hardship, and that famine, suffering, and a strict social order are nothing new to them. For centuries they have suffered invasions and wars. In the 1930s, many landlords took 75 percent of the crop as “rent,” and then sold it to the Japanese colonial authorities. According to the 1935 Japanese government publication, “these poor people are driven by hunger from place to place, making shelters in log cabins and keeping their bodies and souls together by planting grain and vegetables on the hillsides.” Today's prosperity in South Korea is an entirely new phenomenon.

A second possibility, if or rather when sanctions prove ineffective, is war and invasion, or at least “preemptive” military strikes by the U.S. against North Korea's nuclear installations, military bases, and defense industries. In a surprisingly candid interview with Global Viewpoint in August 2002, former Central

Intelligence Agency director James Woolsey stated that “we had best get ready for war on the Korean peninsula. And only if we have a practical plan for war do we have the chance of avoiding it – which is convincing the Chinese that if they don't take action to change the Kim Jong Il regime, we will.” It is unclear exactly what action the U.S. wants China to take, but it has been suggested that Beijing should offer asylum and a safe haven in exile for Kim Jong Il and his inner circle “to solve that problem.” But it would go against the very nature of Kim Jong Il and his men. They are extreme Korean nationalists, and that is far more than a veneer for public consumption.

Kim Jong Il is much more likely to dig in and stay in Pyongyang. And, according to Kim Myong Chol, a pro-Pyongyang Korean living in Japan and a former journalist of Chongryun's weekly People's Korea, he is also well prepared for war, which is the reason why most military installations are located underground and built to withstand even nuclear attacks. There would be minimal damage, but such an attack would according to Kim Myong Chol most certainly provoke North Korea to fire, all at once, the 13,000 long-range guns and rocket launchers it has deployed along the DMZ.

Even if most of them were intercepted by America's and South Korea's advanced defense systems, many would still hit their targets and turn the area south of the DMZ, including Seoul, “into a sea of fire, a hell on earth.” If North Korea was attacked, Kim Myong Chol argues, it would give it an excuse to justify missile attacks on nuclear power stations in South Korea and “the neighbouring countries,” presumably Japan, as well as “nuclear retaliation on the United States.” Kim Myong Chol may be overstating North Korea's military capabilities, but a nuclear holocaust could well be the final outcome of an attack on North Korea. Japan is well aware of this, and, in 2003, decided to buy a sophisticated anti-missile system from the U.S. to protect the country from potential attack from North Korea. The program, set to cost US\$7 billion, makes Japan only the second of the major U.S. allies, after Israel, to invest in a missile defense system.

Had the war in Iraq gone more smoothly for the U.S., it is not inconceivable that North Korea would have been next, as Woolsey more or less suggested in his interview with Global Viewpoint. And that would have been in line with President Bush's “war on terror,” which he launched after the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, and the subsequent inclusion of North Korea in the “the Axis of Evil” along with Iraq and Iran. Acutely conscious of this, and to avoid the “nuclear holocaust scenario” that eventually would wipe out North Korea as well, Pyongyang has long been seeking a bilateral, nonaggression pact with the U.S. It dropped that demand in October 2003, settling for a letter from President Bush stating that he will never attack nor attempt to overthrow Kim Jong Il's regime. Such assurances must be forthcoming and relations between Pyongyang and Washington would have to be normalized before North Korea would abandon its nuclear ambitions, the North Koreans have argued.

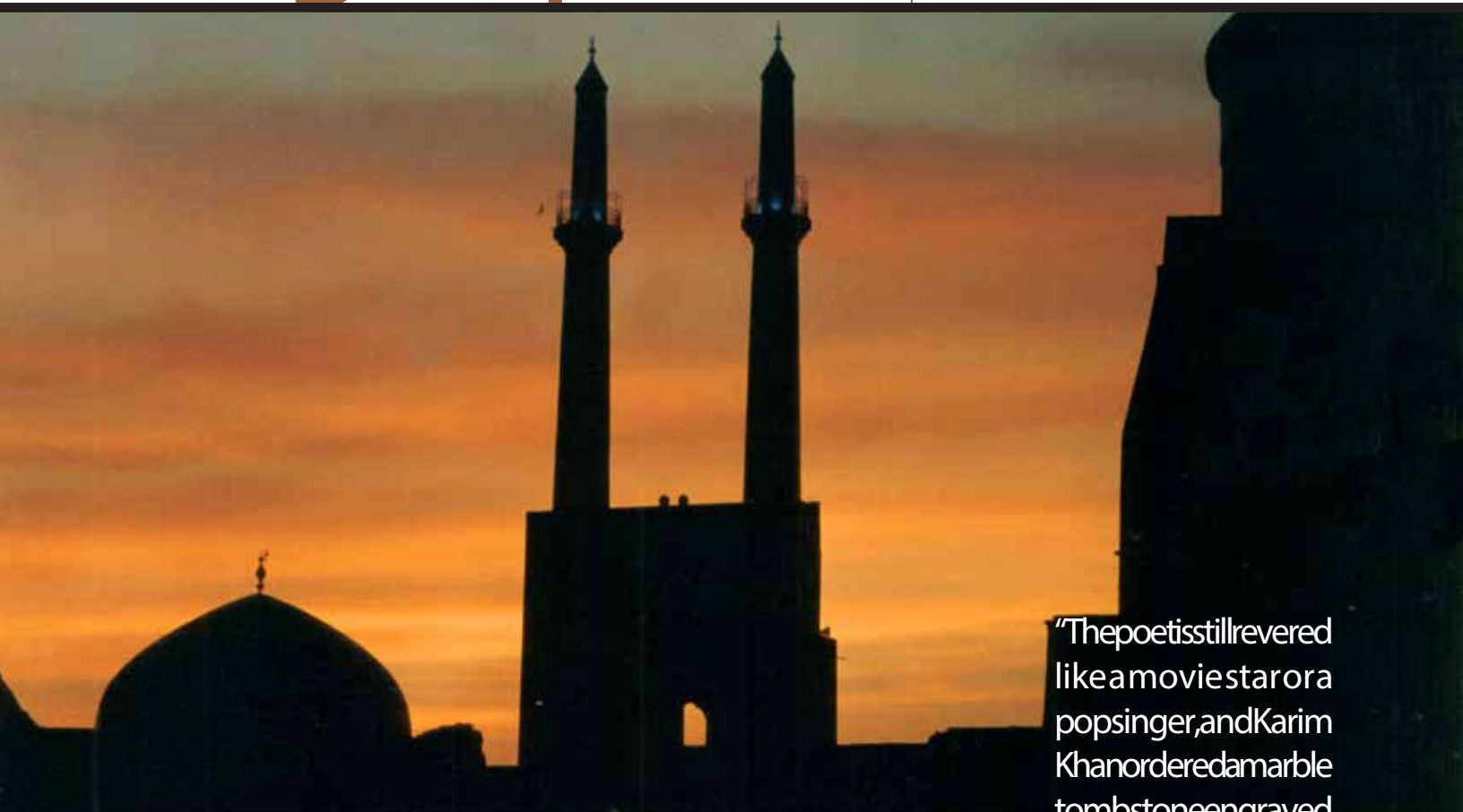
Great Leader, Dear Leader is available at bookshops in Thailand for Bt625. Silkworm's website is at www.silkwormbooks.info

AUTHOR BIO

Bertil Linter, a long-time correspondent for the Far Eastern Economic Review, has written many books, including *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948* and *Blood Brothers: Crime, Business and Politics in Asia*. In 2004, he received an award for excellence in reporting about North Korea from the Society of Publishers in Asia.

Magic Carpet Ride

Iran's rich Arabesques of colour and friendly people win over writer and photographer Pierre Ryckmans.



"The poet is still revered like a movie star or a pop singer, and Karim Khan ordered a marble tombstone engraved with "Ghazal", one of Hafez' long verses, to be displayed in an open, octagonal pavilion which I visited, surrounded by crowds of school children."

Would a white man really be welcome in such a bastion of male Islamic culture as a tea house?

Faded photos, water-pipes, lamps, mirrors and rusty utensils were suspended from the ceiling, or stuck to the greasy walls, of the Towhid Tea House in Shiraz, Iran. It was rather dark but all the customers – exclusively men – were sucking on a qalyan, or sheesha pipe. The bubbling of water in the ornate pipe was the dominant chord in this quiet concerto of hushed voices. Still, I wasn't sure if I'd be welcome or not, but when I sat down on a narrow, carpeted bench and signaled with my eyebrows and index finger that I wanted a qalyan-cum-tea, nobody seemed surprised or offended.

While smoking my apple-flavoured water-pipe the spectre of Karim Khan Zand came to entertain me. He was the founder of a dynasty that ruled over Shiraz in the second half of the 18th century and adorned the city with the many fine buildings I came to see, like the citadel, the octagonal mausoleum, and the Vakil Mosque. Not that Shiraz was in need of fine buildings. The Mongol rulers and the Turkic conqueror Timur, who occupied the city in the 13th and 14th centuries, and the khans who followed, had ordered the construction of much more grandiose buildings, so that Shiraz rivaled the other centre of Islamic gravity, Baghdad.

While the apple aroma faded away, I recalled the poems of the local hero Hafez, who was born in Shiraz around 1320. In Iran, people say that every house should contain two things: first the Koran, and after that the poems of Hafez. The poet is still revered like a movie star or a pop singer, and Karim Khan ordered a marble tombstone engraved with "Ghazal", one of Hafez' long verses, to be displayed in an open, octagonal pavilion which I visited, surrounded by crowds of schoolchildren. "Sit near my tomb," he wrote, "and bring wine, tobacco and music – Feeling thy presence, I shall come out of my sepulchre – Rise, softly moving creature, and let me contemplate thy beauty." Who could resist an invitation like that? So I sat near his tomb, enjoying some tobacco and tunes, but unfortunately I had to forget about the wine.

At the foot of Kuh-i-Rahmat, or "Mountain of Mercy," lay the historic ruins of Persepolis, some 500km south of the capital city of Teheran. Alexander the Great took revenge on the Persian emperor Darius for defeating the Greeks in an earlier battle by laying waste to Persepolis. Almost nothing is left of the huge palaces and shrines that once expressed the might and the piety of the Persian rulers; most of the sculptures that once adorned them are in the Louvre in Paris and in the British Museum in London. To my surprise though, I saw a great number of 2,000-year-old bas-reliefs still intact on walls and staircases: winged hybrids of humans and horses; eagle-headed griffins, the symbol of the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda; battle scenes;

and, humourously enough, dwarf dignitaries carrying jars of wine, incense pots and offerings of lamb.

A flight from Shiraz to Isfahan cost me a mere US\$40. In this storied city, from the famous Qeysarieh tea house located atop one of the shops surrounding the immense Imam Square, I enjoyed the remarkable view of a place once modestly nicknamed "half of the world".

I started a conversation with the owner of the Internet Café where I checked my email. With great pride, he told me about Isfahan, its well known and magnificent buildings erected in the first half of the 17th century. That was Isfahan's Golden Age, when Shah Abbas the Great made the city his capital and created – after the Islamic revolution – what were renamed Imam Square and Imam Mosque. Their domes of blue and cream, encrusted with flowers, the minarets, and vaulted portals tower over the rectangular square, which is over 500-metres long, and only surpassed by Tianmen Square in Beijing.

In the town's bazaar, a miniaturist gave me his take on America: The superpower should not bully the rest of the world into accepting a status quo in which only dominant countries plus Israel are granted the definitive right to possess nuclear weapons and scare other nations. They have been even more wrong in over supporting Israel in the geopolitical context of the Middle-East conflict, and should be more supportive of a settlement

giving Palestine, Israel, and their neighbouring Arab countries equal and fair rights. He added that Iran had the right to develop a nuclear programme for peaceful energy production, parroting his government's stance, and whispered, on a softer note, that every Iranian is scared of an imminent US attack.

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WORLD CLASS TRAVEL

According to UNESCO, Yazd is one of the oldest, still-inhabited towns on earth. That's why it's earned the status of a World Heritage Site. The oldest buildings date back to the 5th century AD. Some seven centuries later Marco Polo called this trade centre, situated on the Silk Road between India and China, "the noble city".

It's absolutely impossible to wander through the maze of narrow, tortuous alleys and not get lost. I tried in vain to keep the minarets of the Friday Mosque (the tallest in Iran), as reference points, but the alleys were so narrow and often beautifully

vaulted that they were more like tunnels than streets. The stillness and heat of the afternoon ensured that few people doddered about this adobe labyrinth that smelled of dust and decrepitude but was romantically picturesque. The skyline, when visible, is one of monochrome, desert-tinted mud walls and roofs, curiously latticed with "wind towers" that capture the slightest breath of hot desert wind and suck it down towards a cooling water pool, from which it runs through the half-buried rooms as an ancient and ingenious form of air-conditioning system.

Yazd is also renowned for being the last urban centre of Zoroastrianism in Iran, and has a religious-style Olympic flame said to be burning without interruption since 470 AD! The Zoroastrian Temple of Ateshkadeh (Sacred Eternal Flame) is on the outskirts of Yazd. The temple itself is a simple neo-classical edifice – nothing remarkable except for the emblem of Zoroaster (a bearded bird-man) above its entrance.

It was quiet at the temple, but considerably quieter at the nearby Towers of Silence. The two ruined towers are ancient Zoroastrian burial places. Perspiring like seaweed after crawling up the highest of the pair, I looked into a walled, stone-filled circle. As Zoroastrians, true ecology-minded pioneers, believe that dead bodies should not be buried or cremated, because that pollutes the earth and air, mourners used to carry them up and lay them out to be picked apart by vultures and crows. Praying and chanting, the high priests observed which eye the carrion birds preferred to start with – the right eye brought good luck for the afterlife. The Towers of Silence have not been used since the 1960s, when new laws forbade the practice, forcing the handful of remaining Zoroastrians to pollute the earth.

The inner courtyard of the Silk Road Hotel in Yazd is a little heaven of beauty and charm. The owner understands what enchants tourists. His old recently

renovated house has less than a dozen rooms surrounding a square patio filled with large traditional timber beds grouped around a fountain, pool, and a flower-filled garden. The slender and handsome Ali who manages the hotel speaks fluent German, understandable English, and his personal calling card is to greet other customers in Italian, Spanish, Japanese and Dutch.

I reclined on the carpet-covered cushions of one of the patio beds with my book, a green tea and a sheesha pipe. It's a great place to meet other travelers. A stocky Japanese woman, traveling alone, was in a euphoric mood as she talked about adding to her photo collection with images of Iran; a Dutch backpacker told me he couldn't find a room here but visited every evening for the wonderful atmosphere; a French trio laughed through the whole evening with a young Iranian in a suit and necktie; and another French woman entertained me with her African and Asian travel experiences, and told me traveling as a woman on her own in Iran was no problem at all.

All of them confirmed my impressions that Iranians are, in general, very intelligent and very friendly people.

Bazaars are among Iran's most intriguing places to stroll around in the late afternoon or early evening. The bazaar in Kashan, for instance, is a roofed maze of market streets, under a constellation of bright electric bulbs, where a hodge-podge of goods are sold and the ambience of One Thousand and One Arabian Nights simmers. It is bustling and noisy compared to the sleepy residential areas surrounding it. The bigger bazaars, like this one in Kashan, are divided into sub-districts, with vendors of similar merchandise grouped in the same corridor. Around the dresses and gold shops, I saw the biggest concentration of black burqa-clad figures. But there are also stalls bursting with glass handicrafts, dried fruits and nuts, ground spices, and carpet vendors who nap on their own wares. Like everywhere in Iran, people asked where I'm from – Belgium – and one female student not only accompanied me along the main alley and allowed me to take her photo, she also insisted on paying for the dates and dried nuts I bought.

THE AMERICANS ARE COMING

I visited only one village in Iran, Abyaneh, the 'Red Village', near Kashan. En route, the young taxi driver with the wide grin, accelerated to the maximum while passing the military facilities housing part of Iran's notorious nuclear development programme. The base is protected by anti-aircraft artillery. I asked the driver what he thought of the base.

"The Americans are coming!" he shouted, his grin going downhill. "We must kill them. They are very bad, very very bad. I go to Iraq and kill many." He didn't understand my next questions, and I never figured out whether he'd actually been to Iraq or not.

Abyaneh was a delight. Built out of red mud bricks, the village hangs from the side of a mountain tinged with the same earthy tones. Walking up the twisting alleyways in between the clay houses, I didn't see many inhabitants, except for a few women on mules inching up the mountainside, or just sitting in front of their houses. They were most likely Turkmen, because they wore long bright dresses and shawls with gaily coloured floral designs. The women were absolutely photo-resentful and shrieked with high-pitched voices whenever I took my lens cap off.

The left and right halves the old doors each had a different knocker – the circular one is used by women and the straight and heavier one by men. As the sounds are distinctive, the inhabitants can hear to which group the visitor belongs, and a same-sex member will go and open the door.

In the village centre, not only did my camera break down but I became a target for two stone-throwing children. Immediately a couple of elderly men shouted: "They are Afghanis, not Iranians!

SEX NO SKIING YES

In the smoggy capital of Teheran, walking from the hotel to the Taleqani Metro Station, I passed a long wall painted with colourful graffiti. It belongs to the former US Embassy, now officially called the "former US Den of Espionage". Instinctively, I fingered my camera, but decided to leave it in the bag. The embassy compound is now used as a sort of education camp for hard-line defenders of the regime and is strictly guarded. I had also read that people who took pictures of the picturesque wall were usually stripped of the film and/or their cameras. But two blocks further along I saw another wall adorned with hand-painted motifs and slogans, advising people to repress their sexual desires. Looking around, not seeing any suspicious uniforms, I quickly took a photo.

Near Teheran, the cable car brought me to an altitude of 3,000 meters in 22 minutes. It was pleasantly cool up on Mount Tochal and leaving the cable car I walked straight into the snow, dressed in a light, short-sleeved cotton shirt. The mountains were barren stone monuments, patchy with snow, in the early summer. Black burqa silhouettes contrasted oddly with the white background. On this Friday afternoon, hordes of Teheran weekenders were walking, picnicking, taking photos, or enjoying the vistas and the coolness, for in the city temperatures approached 35°C. After an invigorating, lung-cleansing walk I took the cable car up for the last stretch. The military guard warned me that I couldn't go that high in my summery outfit. I gave him the cold shoulder and went anyway, finding myself amidst chairlifts and dozens of skiing youths.

Some skiers glided down in polo shirts or spring overcoats, but the majority were coddled in thick jackets, colourful sweaters and woolen balaclavas. No more black burqas up here but fashionable girls with fancy trousers, baseball caps or bright scarves, and posh sunglasses. The wind was cold, but the sun kept beaming, and the whole scene was beautifully refreshing after two weeks of desert heat and stones-and-dust wilderness.

Back in Teheran, I went to Sofreh Khan-e Ayyaran, the traditional teahouse two steps away from Ferdowsi Square. Many students and young couples dated here, and enjoyed treats like delicious, whipped-cream cakes, juicy dates, and fresh fruit, which the senior male at each table carved and aesthetically arranged on a plate before offering it to his companions. The waiter who took my order spoke remarkably good English, as did one of his friends who was chatting with other customers and smoking a cigarette.

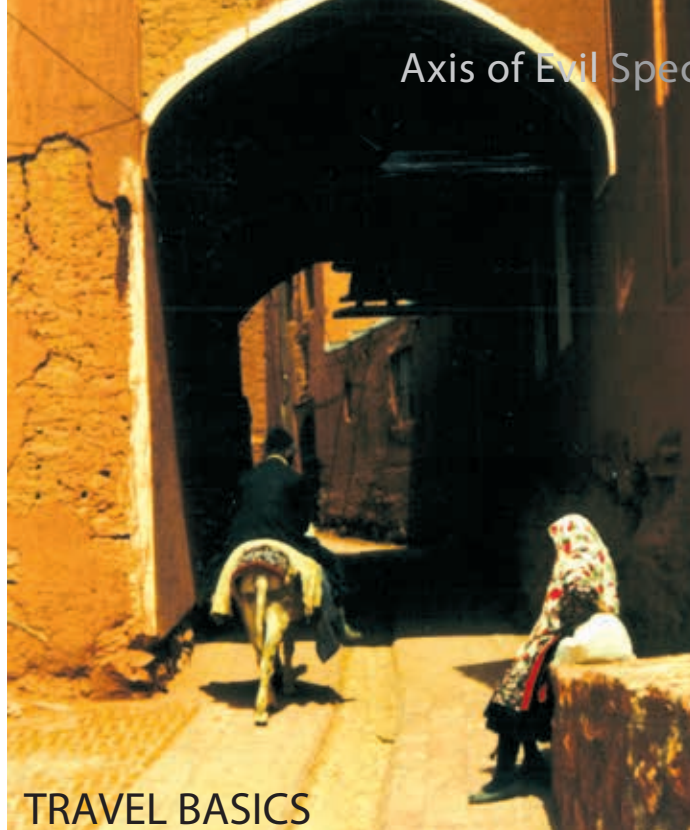
I started a conversation with a local, who denounced the harshness of the regime, the corruption and opportunistic enrichment of previous politicians who are again top candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections; he praised the intelligence and charisma of the popular, reformist-inclined

president, whose second term cannot be extended, before complaining about the rapidly rising cost of living and how it has resulted in high university entrance fees. Each year, one million students graduate to unemployment, he said, conceding that Iran had seen better times. He didn't cite the price of the heavily subsidized gasoline, however, around 3.5 baht per litre.

The man also repeated the question every tourist gets from locals: What did I think of the Iranian people? What choice does one have when talking with locals who are proud of their nationality and are constantly in search of agreement that their country is the most beautiful in the world? I contemplated the behaviour of the many young people present here, the numerous women illegally smoking a qalyan, the jokes and smiles more numerous than the complaints and scowls. It seemed to me that life could be much more depressing than this. But of course many dramas and dilemmas could be hidden under those burqas and behind the foggy little auras and thick grey columns of smoke blown out of the sheesha pipes.

Forget the politics and fundamentalism, if you can, and come for the magic carpet ride, like in One Thousand and One Arabian Nights, through a fantastic cultural tapestry.





TRAVEL BASICS

FLYING IN:

From Bangkok the Iranian company Mahan Air flies direct to Tehran three times a week. Gulf Air flies to Tehran and to Shiraz via Bahrain. The return ticket costs from Bt25,000-30,000.

PEAK SEASONS:

Summers are extremely hot and winters are very cold, so the best seasons are definitively spring and autumn. April to May and October and November are the ideal months, unless you go skiing.

VISAS:

Unless you are Turkish, you will need a visa to enter Iran. Every application must be sent to Tehran for approval. Count on a wait of two to three months. The visa allows you to stay for 30 days.

HASSLES & PRECAUTIONS:

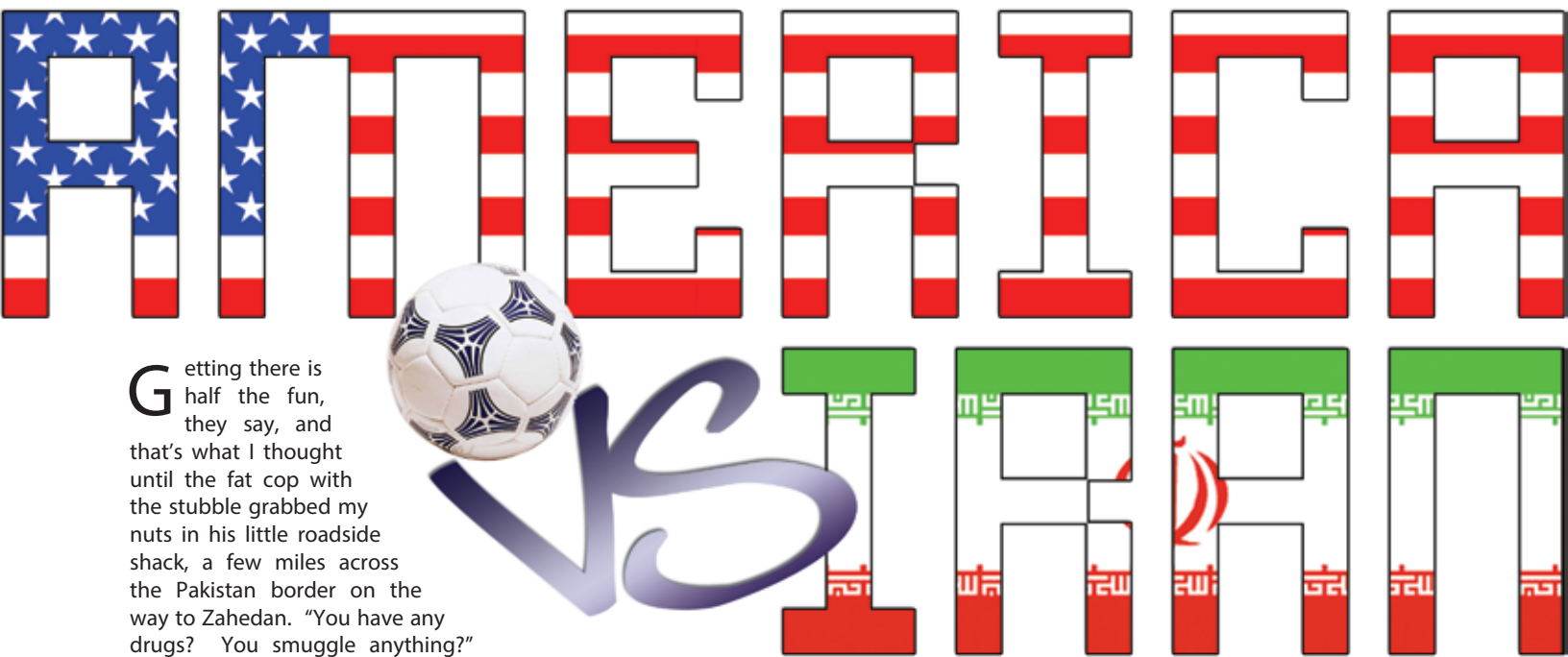
Iran is a safe country to travel in and the locals are generally very friendly and helpful. Not many speak English, though. It's also very safe for women to travel in Iran, even alone, but they must wear a scarf, long sleeves and long pants. A black burqa is not required, and many female travelers end up buying pairs of local trousers, jackets, and topping them off with a colourful headdress.

DAYTRIPPING:

I asked a travel agent and got a 1/2 day trip (Necropolis + Persepolis) for US\$12 (the car and driver, 8.30am to 2pm). This is definitely the best option. To visit the Zoroastrian Temple of Ateshkadeh and the Towers of Silence on the outskirts of Yazd, rent a taxi for US\$8. For more info about skiing, slalom through the Iran Ski Federation's website at www.skifed.ir.

ROOMS & FOOD:

Except in Tehran, hotel rooms are not plentiful, so advanced booking is recommended. Room rates range from US\$10-100. The Silk Road Hotel in Yazd is especially recommended (US\$15 for a single). It's located at 5 Tal-e Khakesary alley, near the Friday Mosque (Masjid Jame); email silkroad_hotel@yahoo.com. Food is cheap but mostly it's kebabs, bread and rice, and restaurants are not always easy to find. Tea and soft drinks are available, coffee is rarer, and alcohol is prohibited.



Getting there is half the fun, they say, and that's what I thought until the fat cop with the stubble grabbed my nuts in his little roadside shack, a few miles across the Pakistan border on the way to Zahedan. "You have any drugs? You smuggle anything?" he said, his stale breath on my face.

Two shady Baluchi guys in flowing white Pakistani shirts and pants were lingering outside, revving the engine of their shit-sparking racer, which was our preferred mode of transport across Iran. The cop eventually let go, frustrated that I did not try and shift a kilo of heroin from Pakistan into the Islamic Republic of Iran; then he could have torn my nuts off and the only one complaining would have been me.

I was on my way to watch a football match between the two most evil countries in the world. Iran and the United States were, by chance, placed in the same group for the 1998 World Cup in France. I had decided to watch the match in Esfahan, Iran's most beautiful city.

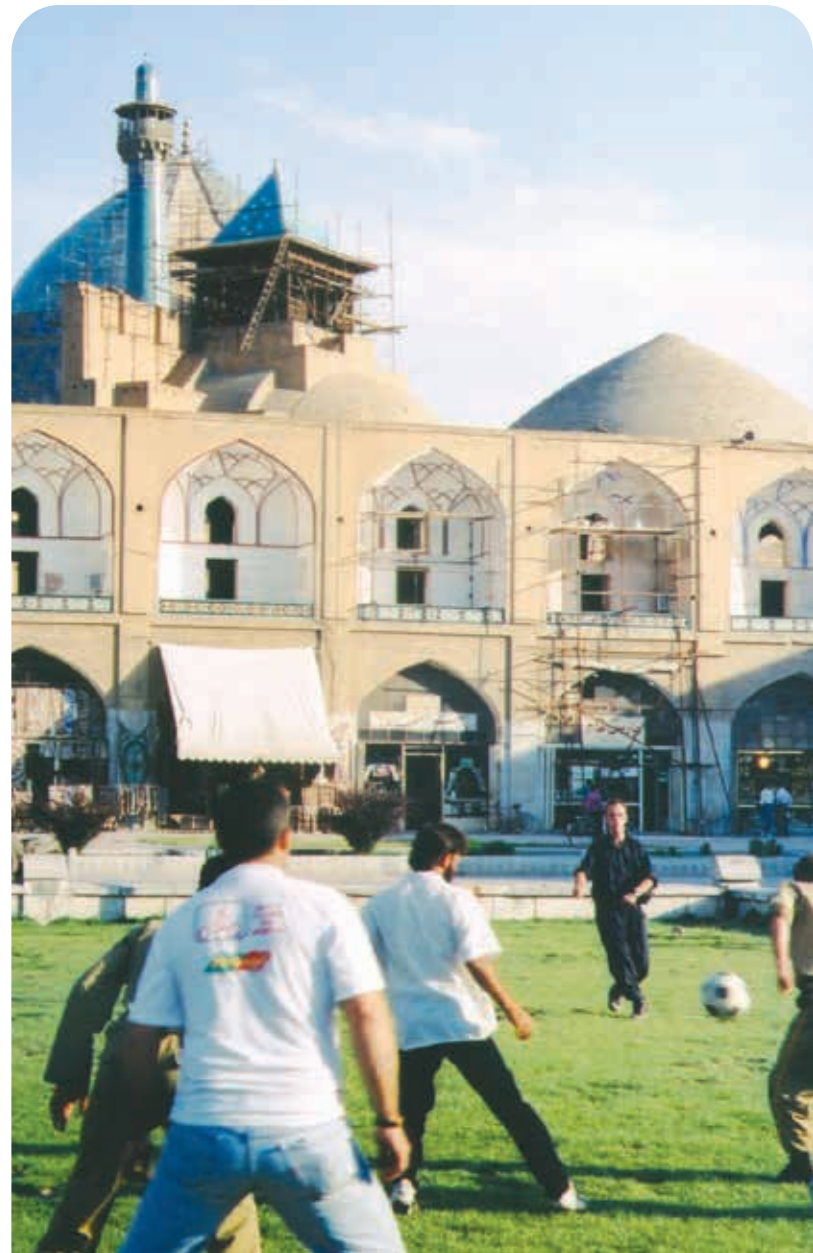
The game promised to have enormous political significance. The US president at the time, Bill Clinton, and Foreign Secretary Madeleine Albright both made fluffy statements about American ties with Iran improving, almost 20 years after the Islamic revolution had replaced the corrupt, murderous, right-wing, and US-backed Shah with an orthodox Islamic state not known for being particularly enlightened either. The sax-blowing president had even gone so far as to say that he hoped the match would encourage rapprochement between the two countries.

Iran was an oppressive place in 1998. On the road between Kerman and Bam all public buses were stopped at roadblocks and passengers were forced to line up along the tarmac to have their bags, all neatly lined up in front of them, searched. Sometimes the police, acting like the thugs they are, got angry for no reason and spilled the entire contents of people's bags on the highway. The undersides of the buses were searched with mirrors, though the authorities did not appear to be looking for anything in particular. It was that kind of place. Harassment stopped at once when they spotted foreigners amongst the passengers.

But Iranians themselves are fine people and the country as a whole seemed far more civilised than the USA. In the cities the religious pressure came from state organs like the secret Islamic police. No one ever berated me about the merits of Islam while I slowly moved towards Esfahan. People wanted to talk about football and tourism.

I spent the afternoon before the match in the city's Imam Square playing football against the police in the shadow of some of Persia's most beautiful mosques. I had two football-crazy Mexicans and a couple of decent Brits covering for my

Writer and shooter Tom Vater put his balls on the line to watch an historic World Cup match between Iran and America in Iran's most beautiful city.





own ineptitude on the pitch. The police were already playing the international match in their heads – against us. National honour was at stake on their side, two obsessed Mexicans on mine. I guess the Iranian security forces must have clinched the game because I remember the second half being brutal and I got laid out flat a few times. By late afternoon, the square, usually a popular picnic spot for thousands of people, was deserted, as everyone had gone home to watch the game.

the back of the flat-beds. Men raced their bikes and wore ecstatic, glazed expressions, despite the fact no one drank. Iranian flags flew high above the crowd and the security forces were out in force. But tonight they weren't moving.

One fan told me, "This is the first time we have had a street party since 1979. It's a great victory for us. But this is also a political demonstration. We are showing the government that we have power."

No one ever berated me about the merits of Islam while I slowly moved towards Esfahan. People wanted to talk about football and tourism.

Iran has some history in the sport. The Persians reached their first FIFA World Cup as the sole representative from Asia in Argentina back in 1978, when they drew Scotland 1-1 in between losses to finalists Holland and powerful Peru. Twenty years later they were back, facing the 'Great Satan' across the pitch in France. By early evening I was slouching on the lobby sofa of an up-market hotel, hemmed in on both sides by the Mexicans, counting my police-induced bruises. Most of the hotel staff was crowded round the TV set an hour before the game had kicked off.

In fact, no one in Iran saw the kick-off, because Iran's mullahs delayed the broadcast to edit scenes showing opponents of the regime in Lyon's Stade Gerland. The political overtones of this match were muted, but still present. While many Iranians dislike their autocratic government, they are nationalistic and perceive the US as a meddling foe, irrespective of the homegrown propaganda that rains down on them day and night.

Things got off to a good start. Prior to the kick-off each Iranian player gave his counterpart on the American team a white flower and the teams joined together for an uncustomary group photo. By the time the game kicked off on the TV in the hotel lobby in Esfahan, the streets of the city were utterly deserted and an eerie silence had descended over this desert metropolis.

For the hotel staff it was a white-knuckle ride from minute one. For everyone else it was an average game that felt like it had been rigged. Both teams played exceedingly fair. Unlike my opponents during the police-tourist match in the afternoon, the pros went out of their respective ways to avoid any brutality. In the end, Iran claimed their first victory in a world

cup by beating the USA 2 to 1.

As one commentator put it, "The USA failed to impress in all of their games, finishing with three consecutive losses and a single goal."

Needless to say, the historic win failed to substantially improve relations between the two countries, but it made Iran the only one of the four Asian sides at that tournament to win a match.

Twenty minutes after the game, the first vehicles started racing along the main road, honking their horns. Flatbed trucks arrived in the town centre, loaded with football fans. The atmosphere was electric and we made our way down to the river where thousands celebrated the victory. Girls danced in the street and on

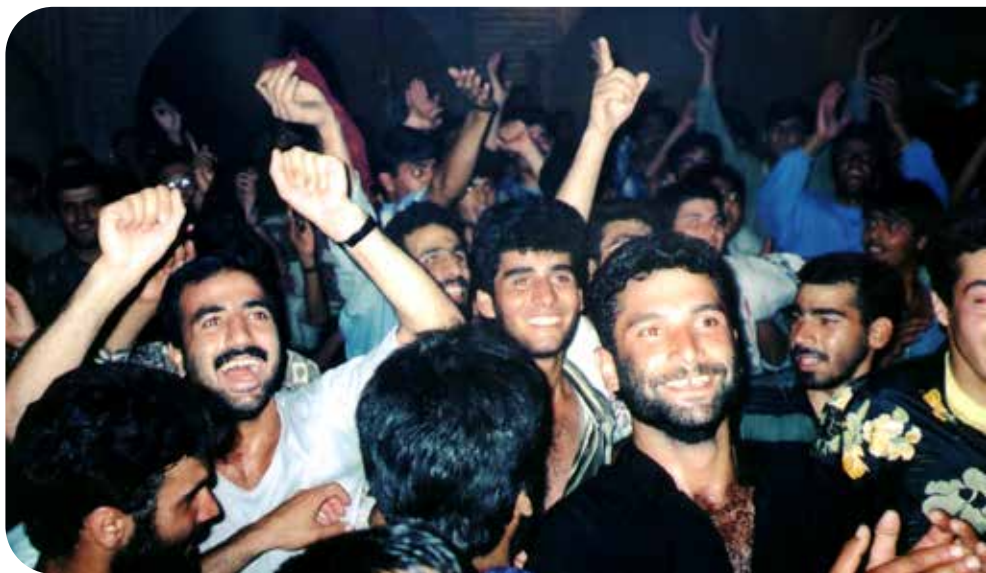
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The cops kept their distance until they spotted the foreigners. One uniformed officer approached me and said, "We will take you to your hotel. This is for Iranians only. Foreigners cannot watch. You must stay in your hotel."

They marched us back to our hotel room, past throngs of celebrants.

Seven years later and Iran is still a country where guests are likely to be banned from street parties and where the mullahs rule. America is still a country bent on attacking an old foe. Both nations are run by their lunatic religious fringes. Should the US have a go at invading, or attacking Iran, thousands of civilians will perish, mothers will lose their children and children will lose their limbs and never play football. Then again, Americans don't like football much – not unless the ball is shaped like a turd.



TOUR OF DUTY

In this excerpt from his thrilling non-fiction work, *Among Warriors in Iraq: True Grit, Special Ops, and Raiding in Mosul and Fallujah* (The Lyons Press, 2005), Mike Tucker finds that war is exactly like what Hemmingway said – it's a street fight.



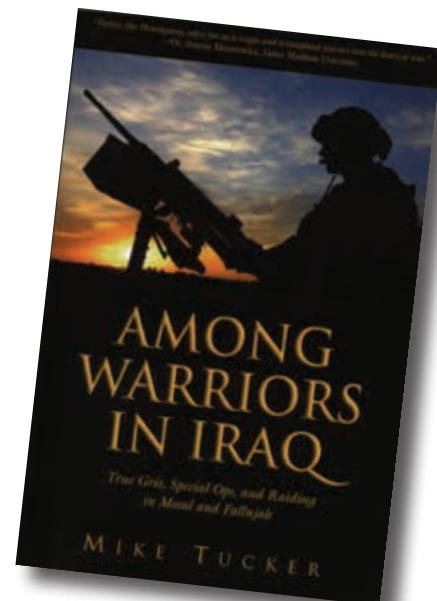
The mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, leading east to Iran, were shrouded by mist and rain as Kentucky Rifle nodded to the sergeant at the gate. We slowed to a stop, sheets of rain beating down in the darkness. A sandbagged machine gun position held the roof of a concrete bungalow to our right. A specialist inside the gray sandbagged walls nodded down at us, a heavy machine gun in his hands, barrel pointed east toward the shell of a Ba'athist building, eight stories reduced to jagged concrete slabs and rusting steel rebars bombed by the U.S. Air Force in April 2003.

Private First Class Tyler Gordy, the "Eureka Kid," a native of northern California, was in back of me. He leaned forward slightly, covering our three o'clock. He nodded back to the guard tower gunner and flicked the rain off his neck, unsmiling. The Eureka Kid was nineteen. He carried an M-4 5.56-calibre assault rifle with a forward grip, like the forward grips on Thompson sub-machine guns in WWII, and thirteen thirty-round clips in magazine pouches on his flak jacket. At his feet, in a loam-and-green camouflaged assault ruck, lay some six hundred more 5.56-caliber live rounds.

He was quiet. Maybe it was the rain or the war or both. Likely, it was the patrol. There is a saying in the infantry: Payback is a motherfucker. Today was payback.

I remembered Patton, rolling out the gate: "We must be eager to kill, to inflict on the enemy—the hated enemy—wounds, death, and destruction." Now, I thought as we began the dawn patrol in Mosul, now I understand him. The rain drenched us and the

"THE NABI YOUNIS MOSQUE WAS LOST TO THE NORTH IN THE DARKNESS WHERE JONAH'S BONES LAY ON A HILLTOP ABOVE TEEMING MARKETS AND NARROW STREETS PACKED WITH DONKEYS AND HORSE-DRAWN CARTS AND VENDORS CALLING OUT THEIR WARES IN RAPID-FIRE ARABIC."



scouts glared in the black pouring rain, and Iraqi men in long gray and black robes, their heads covered in black-and-white checked kaffiyeh scarves, walked slowly up an alley away from a mosque, rubbing beads in their right hands, glancing down and walking slowly in the rain in Mosul. The ivory white cross of an Assyrian Catholic temple perhaps three hundred meters northwest of us showed briefly through the mist and rain, veiled and unveiled in the darkness. The Nabi Younis mosque was lost to the north in the darkness where Jonah's bones lay on a hilltop above teeming markets and narrow streets packed with donkeys and horse-drawn carts and vendors calling out their wares in rapid-fire Arabic.

Near Nabi Younis, Gordy, Morales, Thoman, and all of Charlie Team and Bravo Team, Scout Platoon had been ambushed in Mosul on September 13, 2003. At about eight in the evening, Iraqi insurgents had tossed grenades wrapped with C-4 ball bearings, metallic shards, and det cord and nearly killed their comrade, Specialist Derick Hurt.

Hurt now lay in a hospital bed at Walker Reed Army Medical Hospital in Washington, DC, his right leg gone below the knee and his left shredded from shrapnel. And on a chill dark October

"WE'D WALK ALONG LIKE HUMAN MINE DETECTORS ON THE COUNTER-IED PATROLS IN MOSUL, EYEING EVERY GOLD-AND-GREEN PALM-OIL CAN FOR WIRES STICKING OUT OF IT; THE WIRES COULD BE TIED TO GRENADES OR PLASTIC EXPLOSIVES OR TNT WITHIN THE CANS."

dawn in Mosul, rain sluicing off our green ponchos, we rode to raid the Iraqi insurgents who'd ambushed the scouts.

We were some thirty klicks west of Xenophon's trail, where the Greek mercenary's light infantry had marched north up the Tigris River from Cunaxa—near present-day Fallujah in Western Iraq—on its retreat from Mesopotamia in September 401 B.C. On his long march north, Xenophon had fought near Nimrud, on the eastern banks of the Tigris. Nimrud was a day's ride on horseback south from Mosul in his time.

Far south of Mosul and west of Baghdad, Xenophon the Athenian had seized battlefield command on the eastern banks of the Euphrates River, near where Fallujah is now. With Cyrus (Prince of Persia), his general, killed by Persians under command of the King of Persia and half of the Greek officer corps killed or captured, Xenophon rallied the Greek light infantrymen and won the day. The Greeks then ended their expedition with a grueling retreat known as the "The March of the Ten Thousand," an epic journey that took nearly a year. Fighting as they marched, they crossed the Tigris and patrolled north, bypassing the settlements that grew into present-day Baghdad and Mosul.

Skirting Kurdish attacks, Xenophon led his men over the green rolling hills and wheat fields west of the Zagros mountains toward the valleys and highlands of Turkey, marching west of what is now the jewel of northern Iraqi Kurdistan, the beautiful mountain town of Dahuk. North of Dahuk, Xenophon's light infantrymen carried their swords and shields and pain and pride

across the Harburr River through a mountain pass where, today, a bridge spans the dark waters between the towns of Harburr, Turkey, and Zhakho, Iraqi Kurdistan.

He then led his men through the Kurdish highlands of southeastern Turkey and on across Armenia to the Black Sea, where his men famously, joyously proclaimed the "the sea, the sea" after months of long march and close-quarter combat and little food and less water, nearly a year since they'd last seen the Mediterranean's bewitching blue-green waters.

First Lieutenant Joe Thomas, the "Guerilla Fighter"—Scout Platoon leader in Mosul and a Mogadishu veteran of Task Force Ranger—had planned a regular counter-IED foot patrol at dawn on October 3 through Iraqi Arab neighborhoods bordering Whiskey India sector, the neighborhood in central Mosul where the Nabi Younis mosque stands.

IEDs are improvised explosive devices, roadside bombs command detonated, or, more often, remote-control detonated by insurgents. IEDs are often found on main supply routes and are aimed at Coalition supply convoys. The Scouts had main supply routes running right through the heart of their sector, in all compass points. We'd walk along like human mine detectors on the counter-IED patrols in Mosul, eyeing every gold-and-green palm-oil can for wires sticking out of it; the wires could be tied to grenades or plastic explosives or TNT within the cans. On foot patrol, you'd scan heaps of plastic bags and market refuse and empty plastic jugs, scoping especially for loose scattered dirt, which would indicate a freshly dug hole, and, bloody likely, Iraqi Army artillery rounds daisy-chained together with baling wire—as grunts in Iraq said, for maximum blast to kill or maim us.

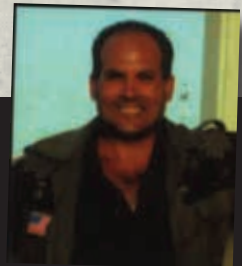
Our foot patrols that cold, wet black dawn of October 3 in Mosul were also a deception. We were hunting IED's, par for the course; we were also setting the raid in motion. The Guerrilla Fighter and Captain Daniel Morgan, Headquarters company commander who employed Scouts and Mortar Platoon in Mosul as a special operations element on raids and reconnaissance, knew there were insurgent lookouts throughout neighborhoods near Nabi Younis. They used the insurgent lookouts to our advantage in the raiding plan.

One more reason, I reflected that dawn, to call Morgan the "Commando". The Commando had served in U.S. Navy Special

AUTHOR BIO

Mike Tucker is a Marine infantry veteran with a Special Operations background, and an author. He broke Burmese Army lines in

2002 with Karen guerrillas, and has investigated war crimes in Burma and northern Iraq. In 2003, he journeyed throughout Iraqi Kurdistan, interviewing Kurds from all walks of life. Later, he joined U.S. Army snipers, scouts, light infantry, paratroopers, and Special Forces commandos for nineteen weeks on raids and patrols in northern and western Iraq. He remained in Iraq for fourteen months. He now lives in Asia.



Warfare in the late 1980s. Like Thomas, Morgan knew Arab Bedouin culture, and he showed it well in his operational savvy on October 3.

The insurgents were Arab Bedouin, and Arab Bedouin gossip at the drop of hat. I reckoned that the gossip that morning among their lookouts would be that the Americans are staying true to form. And the Commando and Guerrilla Fighter understand that, I remember thinking as the rain poured down in the cold black dawn, the Scouts drinking coffee and cupping their smokes from the rain and checking gear and weapons and flak jackets for body armor plates, final pre-combat inspection, before getting up on the trucks.

"Excellent battle plan, brother," I said to Morales, acting Charlie Team leader, as he grabbed my hand and pulled me up on the truck. He grinned, a poncho draped over him like a cape.

We would roll back toward the compound after the counter-IED foot patrols, normal patrolling pattern, and then circle around Whiskey India and swoop down tight, narrow streets to raid the insurgents. Morgan felt the Scouts could kill or capture the insurgents: the ground intelligence was worked, the time was right, and the op order was succinct and clever.

"We'll roll off the foot patrol and make the raid," Thomas told me that dawn, eyes the color of the sea, looking like he'd go kill Saddam all by his lonesome. He was carrying an M-4 and an M-9 9mm Beretta sidearm on his right hip. In the street fight in Mogadishu on October 3 and 4, 1993, he'd carried a light machine gun and was led by First Lieutenant Tom DiTomasso in that two-day siege in Somalia. At that time, the Guerrilla Fighter was Specialist Thomas, U.S. Army Ranger.

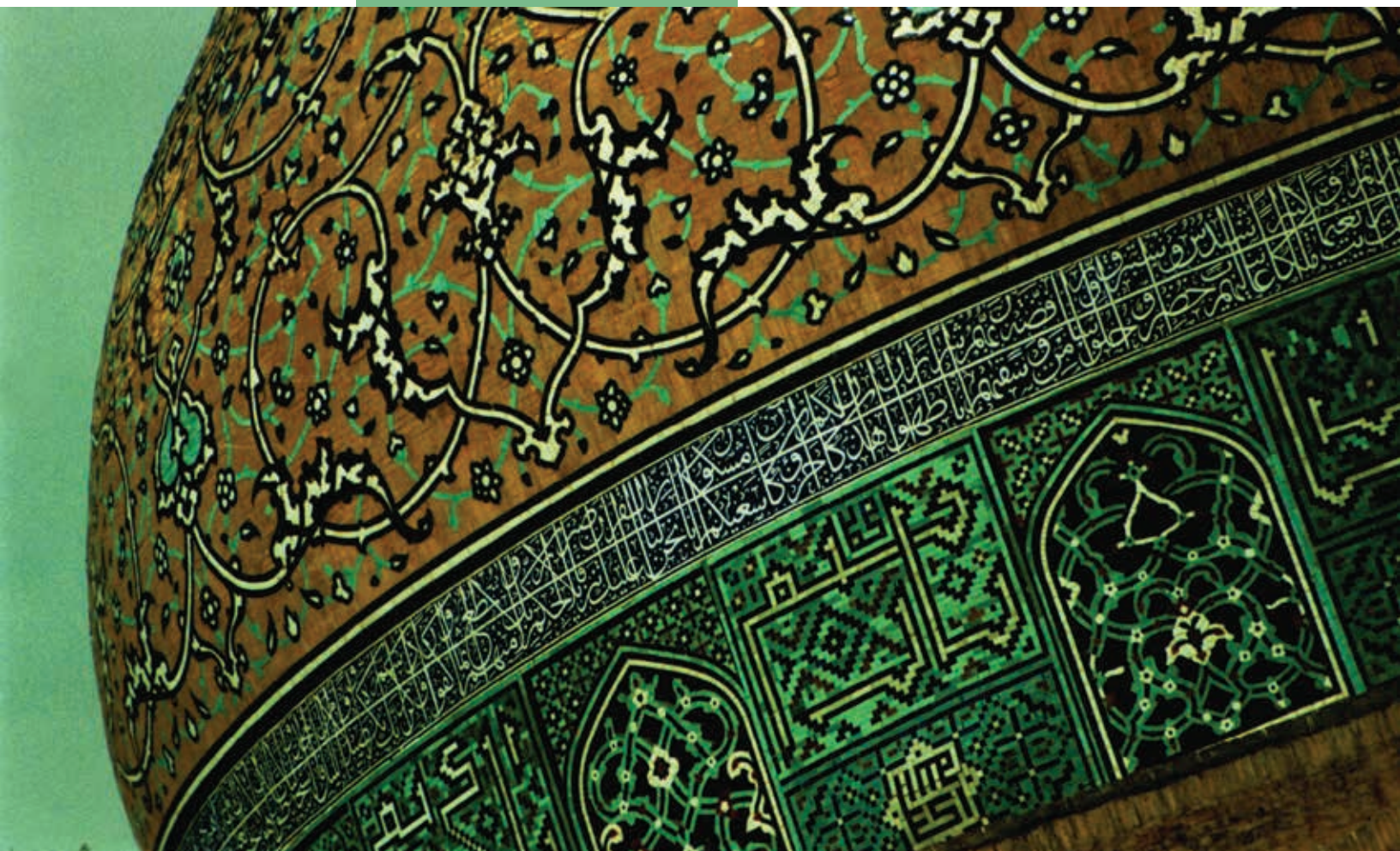
I'd nodded, reflecting that Thomas would likely get the feydayeen lookouts to report to their cell leaders that the Americans were making regular foot patrols, and get them to drop their guard. And if the feydayeen thought we were headed back inside the 3rd-502nd riverside compound, as they bloody likely would, all the better. Deception is the mother of stealth. And stealth is the key to victorious raiding – indeed, to victory in war.



Lieutenant

The world's largest ethnic group without their own nation, the Kurds have long engaged in guerilla warfare with Saddam's regime, which used chemical warfare against them. In Mike Tucker's new book of oral histories, *Hell Is Over: Voices of the Kurds After Saddam* (The Lyons Press, 2004), he speaks with their warriors, artists, political prisoners and women's rights activists. This is the introduction to the book, entitled "Why We Must Listen to the Kurds."

UNSUNG HEROES



“I reflected in Bangkok that the Kurds, who were betrayed by American governments twice in my lifetime, in 1975 and 1991, would find no honor in the CIA’s actions of April 12, 2003, in Mosul.”

I have stared into the wide dark sad eyes of far too many Kurdish children in Iraq who never met their grandfathers and grandmothers because they were murdered by Ba’athists. I have visited many Kurdish mountain villages – roughly, only 500 remain standing of the original 5,000 as a result of Saddam’s genocidal terrors against the Kurds. I have talked with Kurdish warriors known as peshmerga, which means “those who face death.” I have listened to survivors of massacres during Saddam’s murderous campaign against these proud people. I have discussed the future with Kurds following the liberation of Iraq. Their joy is palpable and contagious – even in these uncertain times of increased terrorism and insurgent attacks. The shackles of their tragic past have been pried free, and still, the Kurds are the unsung, unrecognized heroes of the Iraq War. They deserve better. And we need to listen to what they have to say.

When the American-led Coalition forces seized Baghdad, ending Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist dictatorship, after a twenty-one day campaign that concluded on April 9, 2003, in northern Iraq, a lesser known mission was carried out by Kurdish peshmerga, US Army 10th Group Special Forces, and CIA paramilitary. They assaulted Mosul, home to many key Ba’athists and high-ranking

“Kill the Kurds, they are dogs and jackals and thieves. When you kill a Kurd, you will receive the same treasure from Allah as when you kill an American soldier.”

UNSUNG HEROES

Ba’athist officers in Saddam’s army, after a spectacular night riverine raid by the peshmerga, who launched two waves of small black rubber boats across the Tigris River.

Three days later, Mosul fell to the joint 10th Group Special Forces and peshmerga assault force. Unceremoniously, the CIA ordered Kurdish peshmerga to depart Mosul in the early evening of April 12. Mosul is a city of 1.7 million divided by the Tigris River, whose eastern banks, comprising 55 percent of the city’s population, are Kurdish. U.S. Marines secured the Mosul airfield until relieved in the place by the US Army 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), commanded by Major General David Petraeus, on April, 2003

The removal of Saddam’s threat to Kurdish dignity and freedom was richly celebrated by all Kurds, especially by veteran Kurdish peshmerga fighters such as General Babakher Zebari, General Jamil Besefsky, and the legendary Muhammad Mala Khader, men who’d fought gallantly and without pay all their lives against Saddam’s Ba’athist dictatorship. These were men who’d buried Kurdish villagers who’d been chemically gassed to death by Saddam’s Ba’athist forces in the late 1980s. These were men who’d raided and won against Iraqi soldiers and Ba’athist secret police in deep mountain snows and under scorching highland summer sun from 1961-1991 in an epic guerrilla war. Long before the Bush administration realized the horror of Saddam’s dictatorship, Kurdish peshmerga were fighting to end that horror, in the highlands and valleys and back alleys of Iraqi Kurdistan. These were men, as one US Army 10th Group Special Forces commando put it, “who threw down against Saddam’s army with nothing but their Kalashnikovs and their balls. And the Kurds are the last men standing, not the Iraqi Army. True guerrilla warriors, who know their history and their people.”

Over a year ago, before my

travels in Iraqi Kurdistan, I was in Bangkok in April 2003, having earlier been refused embedded journalists status in Iraq with the First Marine Division. I was greatly disappointed on hearing peshmerga had been removed from Mosul, after liberating it. Ba'athists, historically, had deeply feared peshmerga.

Strategically, the American decision to sideline the Kurds denied the Coalition the best intelligence in all Iraq: Kurdish military intelligence. And wars, as Sun Tsu remarked a few thousand years ago, are won in great part due to spies. The better your intelligence, the closer you are to victory in battle. Moreover, I knew enough about Kurdish culture to know that the Kurds would be insulted by America's strange way of saying thank you to for fighting to free Iraq from Saddam's tyranny. There is an old saying among warriors: Never betray a comrade. And the Kurds are a warrior culture. I reflected in Bangkok that the Kurds, who were betrayed by American governments twice in my lifetime, in 1975 and 1991, would find no honor in the CIA's actions of April 12, 2003, in Mosul.

Many of the Kurds whose voices are present in this collection have survived decades of guerrilla war, much of it in close-quarter battle, against the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein. The peshmerga fought with uncommon valor, often driving off far superior Iraqi Army forces – superiors only in numbers, money, and technology. Statistics mean nothing in guerrilla war.

If we are to win the war in Iraq, we would do well to listen to the voices of the Kurds, who possess Kurdi zin duah, which, like the Vietnamese phrase Dauh Traunh, means much more than fighting spirit. It means love of homeland, respect and love of family, respect for ancestors and village spirits. We must, ourselves, believe in Ameriki zin duah, as Kurdish peshmerga said to me time and again in my travels here – in American fighting spirit and the love of land and culture and freedom that brought us victory against seemingly impossible odds in the American Revolution.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, American and Coalition forces continue to go in harm's way to capture or kill Iraqi insurgents. It was Kurdish peshmerga, of course, who went shoulder-to-shoulder with American fighting men throughout March-April 2003 in Iraqi Kurdistan, as previously noted. Yet Saddam's Ba'athist agents of tyranny, and the terror of al Qaeda and Al Ansar Islam, which were not destroyed during the 101st's time in northern Iraq (April 22, 2003 to January 31, 2004) continue to lash out at Kurds – for the crime of staunchly supporting American and Coalition forces in Iraq. Al Ansar Islam claimed the suicide bombing on February 1, 2004 in Hawlerr, Iraqi Kurdistan. One-hundred ten Kurds died in that bombing. Al Ansar was hammered near the Iranian border by 10th Group Special Forces and Kurdish peshmerga in March-April 2003, but has used bases inside Iran to rebuild and regroup, with the help of al Qaeda, according to General Zebari, former commanding general of 70,000 Kurdistan Democratic Party peshmerga and Faisal Rostinki Dosky head of KDP military intelligence.

A longtime friend and comrade of Genreal Zebari, the deeply-respected peshmerga commander Sami Abdul Rahman, was among the 110 Kurds murdered in Hawlerr on February 1, 2004. After the Hawlerr terrorist bombing, imams (Muslim clerics) in Mosul, the Ba'athist stronghold of northern Iraq, preached the following in their Friday sermons throughout February 2004, according to Kurdish military intelligence and Adnana Barwari, a Kurdish activist and translator who was in Mosul during that same time: "Praise the death of the Kurds! The martyrdom operations are joyous. Kill the Kurds, they are dogs and jackals and thieves. When you kill a Kurd, you will receive the same treasure from Allah as when you kill an American soldier. Kill the Kurds and Kill the American soldiers."



Crazed by war, poverty and brain disease, inmates of this mental institute in Jalalabad, Afghanistan are chained to beds or left in squalid oblivion in a desolate dirt yard. Some of the worst outbreaks of madness occurred in November, 2001, just after the Taliban regime collapsed under a massive U.S.-led bombardment.

"I am the son of Lenin and Indira Gandhi," a white-haired patient insisted in an interview at the time. Nothing could convince him that was impossible. Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin died in 1924 when India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was seven years old. "I killed Babrak Karmal," the inmate added, referring to the Afghan Marxist prime minister who Moscow installed at the end of their 1979-89 occupation of Afghanistan. Karmal was murdered in 1996 by the Taliban when they entered the Afghan capital. They dragged Karmal's corpse through Kabul's streets and hung it on a lamppost as a gruesome display of the new Taliban regime.

The patient said his name was Marshal Shah Medina – which may be a combination of a high military rank and the royalty of a shah mixed with an Islamic holy city in Saudi Arabia as a surname. "I am a gift to Afghanistan. I was born in the Kremlin. I was killed and now I'm alive again. I am 100 years old."

Psychiatrists and other staff chuckled and tried to calm the old man.

One doctor said to him: "If you were born in the

AFGHAN LOONYBIN

Kremlin, what street is the Kremlin on?"

Medina, assuming an air of superiority, waved and said, "I am the commander of the Russians. People have punished me with the pistol."

Voices which couldn't be overheard eventually baffled Mr. Medina into a brooding silence.

Other inmates at Jalalabad's Psychiatric Hospital were equally glum.

"I'm here for no reason," said Zadran Haiderlal who wore a dangling chain wrapped around his ankle unlocked to anything. "I want to leave."

"He killed his father," said Abdul Saboor, a hospital clerk eyeing Haiderlal. "His family brought him here. He has not had any trial and hasn't been brought to any court."

One of the hospital's psychiatrists, Dr. Syed Jalal, 55, said, "Maybe this patient's family brought him here to decrease the punishment which the government was going to do against him."

"I killed my father with a pistol," the chained man finally muttered. "I don't know why."

Elsewhere in the yard, a gray-bearded man wearing blue pajamas squatted on his hind legs. "I want to stay here," Ahmed Jan said. "I have been here 20 years. I'm 25 years old," he laughed, stroking his gray whiskers. "My brother brought me here." Mr. Jan squinted as if in pain and cupped his hands while gesturing like a beggar.

Saboor the clerk said, "This patient was previously in a Kabul hospital, but they sent him here because he couldn't be cured. He is a chronic schizophrenic."

Asked about his life today, Jan simply repeated the question with listless resignation.

All 17 patients in the hard-packed dirt yard were barefoot.

"Some patients were recently discharged," said Mohammad Noadair, an office worker at the hospital, adding, "some were let out because we had no money for their food in October at the beginning of the U.S. bombardment. Those patients who had relatives, we discharged."

Near the hospital's entrance, a muscular patient stretched out on a metal bed under a tree. A chain around his ankle led across the dirt and was locked around the tree's thick trunk. "I have no name," the chained patient said. "They lock me like this and keep me chained to a tree because if they unlock me, I will escape."

"He was a boxer," said Ajmal, the insane asylum's pharmacist. "He killed two people in Jalalabad. The Taliban brought him here about three months ago," the pharmacist said.

The chained man groaned, "I didn't kill anyone."

At the far end of the yard, curled against a wall with a blanket covering much of his head, Taza Gul stared bug-eyed and mute at the madness around him.

"Sometimes the patients become crazy if they have no drugs," said the pharmacist. "They will be very bad and noisy and attack each other and become dangerous."

Richard S. Ehrlich meets a man who claims to be the love child of Lenin and Indira Ghandi, among other wackos.



A person wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt, dark trousers, a white face cloth, and a traditional conical hat stands barefoot on a wooden pier. They are holding a long wooden pole. The background shows a body of water and a cloudy sky at dusk or dawn.

HERE & NOW

The Latest Deals on
Accommodation,
Sights, Eating
and Partying

Thailand: Page 48

Hong Kong: Page 82

Singapore: Page 84

Cambodia: Page 86

Laos: Page 88

Although Koh Pangan is a beautiful island, bursting with natural bounty and wonderful beaches, the rooms tend to be decidedly on the budget side. Have a quick look in the mirror. Count your tattoos, straighten out your dreadlocks and stack your one baht coins into a tiny pile. If this isn't your look then you may find the typical Pangan beach hut, with its noisy fan, no-flush toilet and frog in the bathroom a little disappointing. Plus, staying on Had Rin itself means listening to blasting music well after bedtime and the very real threat of room raiders thieving your valuables during the party itself.

Coco Hut is a pleasant surprise, offering an upscale base and crash-pad only a short stroll from the mayhem of the Full Moon Party. The first thing the resort has going for it is the location. Greater Had Rin is a hilly peninsula jutting out of the southeast corner of the island. On Had Rin Nok is the Full Moon Party and a party every other night. Just over the ridge is beautiful Lee La Beach, with only Coco Hut and another small resort on it, free from the noisy hippies on the other beach. While most bungalow operators offer bamboo huts, concrete-block aircon bungalows and a stoned Thai man to staff the restaurant, Coco has landscaped grounds, elevated walkways between cabins and a pool – one of only 25 on the island.

Rather than trying to be a boutique resort, Coco has stuck to its roots – a driftwood theme, banana pancakes, hammocks, and even a swing on the beach. There are two TV areas for lounging around watching movies, a dining room and the pool, with its own bar.

The accommodation varies from a very basic room in the guesthouse (popular with long-term stayers and tightwads) going for around Bt600, to the decidedly grand Executive Suite, running at Bt5,000 for this time of year. The bungalow FARANG stayed in was generously large with a TV (showing the in-house movie channel), fridge and aircon. A nice touch was the open-air shower, basically a bathroom without a roof but still with plenty of privacy, and no frogs either.

Finally, what separates Coco from most of the resorts we've reviewed is that this place is built and operated with Westerners in mind. We appreciated not banging our head on the door lintel, getting underneath the shower head without crouching, and that the little shrine thing low down on the wall was actually a craftily designed makeup mirror.

The service is excellent without being obsequious, but willing to go the extra yard. For example, all cigarettes are sold with a masking-tape block over the smoking-kills picture.

It is this formula that has given Coco a 70% occupancy rate for the last few months, shooting up to 100% during the FMP, not bad for low season, and there really is no better place to stay in Had Rin. However, if you want to head down and make the sand fly at this month's FMP (falling on Thursday the 21st), book ahead.

Coco Hut is located on LeeLa Beach (a.k.a Coco beach, just behind and over the hill from Paradise Bungalows on Had Rin). Call 07-737 5368 or check their website at - www.cocohut.com >> Internet bookings through www.phangan.info

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Hanging Your Hat: Places to sleep in Bangkok

There are hotels everywhere in Bangkok, but the main traveller hubs, especially for independent travel, are the Sukhumvit and Silom areas (the closest thing Bangkok has to a 'downtown', featuring much of the city's entertainment and shopping for foreigners and locals), and the famous (or infamous) Khaosan Road. Khaosan, known as the 'backpacker ghetto,' does still offer some very cheap accommodation, but has gone far more upscale in recent years, with rooms that are up there with the city's nicer hotels. If you're a planning sort of person, note that many of these places will give you a cheaper rate than listed if you book in advance online or by phone.

Top End:

Bangkok has heaps of five-star hotels and resorts, including the world-famous Oriental Hotel, Shangrila, Peninsula, Conrad, Sheraton Grande, Amari, Novotel, Hilton, and the rest. You can walk in if you like, but the rate will be a lot higher than if you book in advance, as those who stay in these hotels generally do – except for British royalty, who can drive their Aston Martin through the front window of the Ritz at 3am and still get a discount room – if not a freebie. So if you're a commoner, go to your travel agent, book online, or if you don't give a damn about money, walk in the door. The listings below cover a handful of the midrange down to the cheapest accommodation available in Bangkok, that are independent and a little harder to find.

Pratunam/Siam Square Area

Holiday Mansion Hotel
Bt2000 (including breakfast), 53 Withayut (Wireless) Rd, Ploenchit Skytrain, Tel: 02-255-0099. Good-sized rooms, clean, decent mid-range value, full range of room amenities.

Pathumwan House
Bt1000-1400, 22 Soi Kasem San 1, Rama I Road; National Stadium Skytrain, Tel: 02-612-3580. Big rooms with TV and bar and all that. Caged birds form the cornerstone of the décor.

Silom Area

Anna's Café & Bed
Bt950 (large room), 44/16 Convent Road, Sala Daeng Skytrain, 02-632-1323. A bargain

for this part of town. Not particularly fancy, but does the job well enough.

Bangkok Christian Guest House
Bt1100-1500, 123 Sala Daeng Soi 2, Convent Road, Sala Daeng Skytrain, 02-233-6303, www.bcgh.org. An old-style boarding house with some Christian principles still intact. Not the best choice for heavy drinking party animals. Fine for gentler folk.

La Résidence Hotel
Bt1000-2700, 173/8-9 Surawong Road, Chong Nonsi Skytrain, 02-233-3301. A cool boutique hotel, every room is different. The suites are very full-on with the décor.

Intown Residence
Bt600-700, 1086/6 Charoen Krung Road, near Si Phraya pier, 02-639-0960. Set in the winding sois of an Indian neighbourhood – a different Bangkok experience. Friendly staff, okay rooms.

Niagara Hotel
Bt680, 26 Soi 9/Suksavithaya, Silom Road, Chong Nonsi Skytrain, 02-233-5783. Clean rooms, TV, a real bargain for this area.

Soi Ngam Duphli

Malaysia Hotel
Bt700-800, 54 Soi Ngam Duphli, Rama IV Road, Lumpini Subway, 02-286-3582. This somewhat tacky area has alleyways full of cheap accommodation if you wander around, (it predated Khaosan Road as the independent traveller base). The Malaysia Hotel is the legendary grandpappy of them all. Decent rooms for the price, though the scene is on the seedy side.

Sukhumvit

The Atlanta
Bt485-665, 78 Sukhumvit Soi 2, Ploenchit Skytrain, 02-252-1650
This throwback hotel with the classic décor has been open for several decades. Some love it, some hate it (read the rule book), but there's nowhere else like it.

Suk 11
Bt250-500, Sukhumvit soi 11, Nana Skytrain, 02-253-5927, www.suk11.com. Budget accommodation on Sukhumvit even has dorms. A pleasant place to hang out.

Federal Hotel
Bt900 and up, 27 Sukhumvit Soi 11, Nana Skytrain, 02-253-0175, federalhotel@hotmail.com. A former GI hangout from the Vietnam days, 'Club Fed' has been upgraded now, but is still classic enough. Comfortable rooms.

Manhattan
Bt1400/1600 (with breakfast), 13 Sukhumvit Soi 15, Asoke Skytrain, 02-255-0166, www.hotelmanhattan.com. A standard-issue hotel in the heart of Sukhumvit. Nothing special, but okay value.

Sam's Lodge
Bt700-900, 28-28/1 Sukhumvit Soi 19, Asoke Skytrain, 02-253-2993. A new-ish guesthouse with shared baths. Make sure your room has a window before checking in.

Banglamphu

There are guesthouses everywhere in this area, so just start at Khaosan and wander around. They are often full, so you may

have to hoof around if you want a bargain. Here are a few of the more upmarket places.

Sawasdee Group has several places dotted around the Banglamphu area (and expanding throughout the country). All of them have cool Thai-style hangout areas and clean rooms. See www.sawasdee-hotels.com
Prices range from Bt140-800. Some of the group include: Sawasdee Bangkok Inn 02-280-1251, Sawasdee Krungthep Inn 02-629-0079, Welcome Sawasdee Inn 02-629-2321, Sawasdee Smile Inn 02-629-2340-1, Sawasdee Khaosan Inn 02-629-4798-9.

Buddy Lodge
Bt1800-2200, 265 Khaosan Road, Phra Athit boat pier, 02-629-4477, www.buddylodge.com. Looks like the Khaosan town hall from the outside, with very nice upscale modern Thai-style rooms.

Nana Plaza Inn
Bt400-600, 202 Khaosan Road, 02-281-6402. A hotel-style high-rise more civilised and comfortable than the usual backpacker haunt

D&D Inn
Bt450-900, 68-70 Khaosan Road, 02-629-0526-8. Another hotel style place with TV and fridge and all the proper stuff. Good value.

Thai Cozy House
Bt650-1,000 (including breakfast), 111/1-3 Tanee Road Khaosan Road, 02-629-5870-4. Boutique sort of place that is in fact cozy and away from the big noise of Khaosan.



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**BANGLAMPHU****CORRECTIONS MUSEUM**

Where: Mahachai Road, across from Thanon Luang

When: Mon-Fri; 8:30pm-4pm

Cost: Free

Way to Go: Ten minute walk south of Golden Mount.

Some of the guard towers and rows of prison cells are all that's left of the hellish Mahachai Prison, where Warren Fellows (The Damage Done) was first incarcerated, in what is now the grounds of Romanee Lart Park. For a bowel-loosening display of barbaric torture instruments once used in Siamese prisons and wax tableaux of prisoners being beheaded and shot, visit the park's museum on the Golden Mount side.

NATIONAL GALLERY

Where: Chao Fah Road, near Pra Pinklao

When: Wed-Sun, 9am-4pm

Cost: Bt30

Way to go: Walk from Khaosan Road Brush up on Thai art history with a visit to this gallery near Sanam Luang (five minutes walk SW of Khaosan). The permanent exhibition is not spectacular, but the monthly exhibitions in the annex can blaze with brilliance.

NATIONAL MUSEUM

Where: West side of Sanam Luang

When: Wed-Sun, 9am-4pm

Cost: Bt40

Way to go: Ten-minute walk from Khaosan This storehouse of priceless artifacts and funerary chariots also has a number of exhibition rooms with themes like "Gallery of Thai History," "Gold Treasures," "Shadow Players and Entertainment," plus a fine selection of Buddha images and pottery from the Sukothai, Ayuthaya, and Lop Buri periods, as well as ancient weapons. Free guided tours in different languages each week, as well as occasional lectures on Buddhism and Thai history in English. Call 02-224 1404 or 02-224 1333 for more info.

THAMMASAT LIBRARY

Where: Beside the National Museum on Na Phra That Road

When: Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm, and Sat-Sun, 9am-3pm

Cost: Bt20 per day

Way to go: Enter the university through the front gate near the National Museum and walk past the sports field on your left, take the last right, and walk about 15 metres.

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VIPASSANA MEDITATION CENTRE

Where: Wat Mahadatu, Na Phra Lan Road

When: Daily, 9am-4pm

Cost: Free

Way to go: Near Grand Palace; use the



southernmost entrance to the temple complex on Maharat Road

Fine purveyors of calm for more than four decades now, the centre offers three study sessions a day, in both Thai and English, with real live monks: 7-10am; 1-4pm; 6-8pm. The centre is near the southernmost entrance to the temple complex on Maharat Road.

WAT PHO MASSAGE CENTRE

Where: Thai Wang and Sanachai Roads

When: Daily, 8am-8pm

Cost: Bt120 for 30 minutes; Bt200 for an hour; herbal massage Bt300 per hour

Way to go: Bt30 tuk tuk, River taxi to Tha Thien pier or walk just past the Grand Palace Get bent into shape with a painful yet invigorating massage at the city's oldest temple and largest repository of Thai information about traditional medicine.

NATURAL HEALING COMPANY

Where: 4th Floor, Bayon Building, Khaosan Rd

When: 7 days, 10am-10pm

Cost: Varies

Way to go: Use your shoes, dude

Provides courses and healing using reiki, pranic healing plus meditation, yoga chigong, self-defence classes, massage and even serves health drinks to knock back on the terrace after a hard day's healing.

THONBURI**SHED OF THE ROYAL BARGES**

Where: Khlong Bangkok Noi, near the Thonburi side of the Pinklao Bridge

When: Daily, 9am-5pm

Cost: Bt30 for foreign adults, free for children; Bt100 more to take photos; Bt200 for video camera

Way to go: A little difficult to find, most people charter a long-tail boat from the pier by the Temple of the Emerald Buddha for a tour of Thonburi's canals and have a stopover here.

On display are eight of the Royal barges that are part of a 700-year regal tradition. The most awe-inspiring barge in this flotilla is the Subanahongsa, ridden by His Majesty the King back in 1999 during celebrations to mark the Sovereign's 72nd birthday. Adorned with a figurehead of a mythical swan known as hamsa (the mount of the Hindu god Brahma) it is 46-metres long and hewn from a single trunk of teak.

SONGKRANMIYOMSANEFORENSIC MEDICINE MUSEUM

Where: 2nd floor, Adulaydejvigrom Building, behind Siriraj Hospital, Phrannok Road

When: Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm

Cost: Free

Way to go: Take the cross-river ferry (Bt2) from Maharaj Pier (near Sanam Luang) to Phrannok Pier

What is quite possibly the most macabre museum (or is it a crypt?) in the world contains the preserved corpses of several killers, like Thailand's most famous mass murderer, the Chinese cannibal, See-Uey. Also on display are exhibits of murder weapons, stillborn children swimming in formaldehyde and a chilling, gut-churning exhibition of autopsy and crime-scene



photos. Nearby are several other museums of anatomy, parasitology, medical history, and anthropology.

DUSIT**DUSIT PARK**

Where: Ratchawithi Road

When: Daily, 9am-4pm

Cost: If you pay the Bt200 admission for the Grand Palace, you get a ticket for all of these museums. Otherwise it's Bt75

Way to go: Bt40 tuk tuk or taxi from Khaosan On the lush grounds of this park is the golden teak Vimanmek Mansion (well worth the trip), where King Rama V once lived and held court, along with museums containing HM the King's photos, Thai arts and handicrafts, sacred white elephants, Royal carriages and memorabilia.

DUSIT ZOO

Where: Ratchawithi Road

When: Daily, 8am-6pm

Cost: Bt30 for adults; Bt5 for kids

Way to go: Bt40 tuk tuk or taxi from Khaosan Probably the cheapest zoo in the world, this is a great spot to while away an afternoon in the company of rare Asian cattle, hornbills and shudder-inducing snakes and water dragons. The monkey cages are by far the liveliest area. Decent food, a lake and paddleboats, too. On weekends it's crowded with Thai families.

SUKHUMVIT**THE SNAKE FARM**

Where: Rama IV Road, near Henri Dunant Avenue, on the grounds of the Thai Red Cross Institute.

When: Weekdays, 8.30am-4.30pm; weekends, 8.30am-noon. Shows at 11am and 2.30pm on weekdays, and at 11am on weekends.

Cost: Bt70

Thrill to snake-handling demonstrations, watch cobras being milked of their venom and have your photo taken with a firehose-thick python. Before the demonstrations of daredevilry, there's also a slide show about the serpents of Thailand and what to do if one bites you when Crocodile Dundee isn't in the vicinity. Also on display are some living and dead snakes at what's officially called the Queen Saowapha Memorial Institute, which was set up nearly 80 years ago to produce anti-venom serum for the snake-bitten.

JIM THOMPSON HOUSE

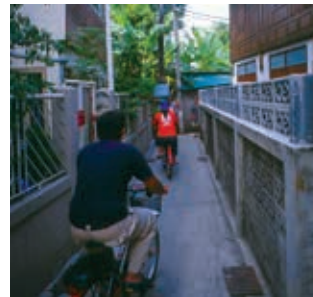
Where: Soi Kasemsan 2, opposite the National Stadium on Rama I Rd.

Way to go: National Stadium station on the Skytrain

When: 9am to 5pm everyday with the last Guided Tour at 16:30

Cost: Adult Bt100, Students Bt50

The Jim Thompson House museum is the former residence of the American Thai silk magnate of the same name. Before his mysterious disappearance in the Malaysian jungle, he collected art and artifacts from around the region and filled this traditional house with the stuff. A fantastic collection set in lush gardens and an insight into the



elegant lifestyle of the Bangkok wealthy before rampant industrialisation. A cool place to spend a few hours, it also has a reasonably priced restaurant on the grounds. The newly opened two-floor museum hosts regular exhibitions.

WAT MAHABUT

Where: Sukhumvit Soi 77, Soi 7

When: Free

Way to go: Skytrain to On Nut, then a 15-minute walk

Thailand's most notorious ghost Nang Nak (supposedly born more than a century ago in this district), is said to mangle at the temple. After dying in childbirth, her spirit returned to join her unsuspecting husband. Some believe that she killed several people in the area to keep her secret from him. At the back is a shrine dedicated to her. Hundreds of people come here daily to pray to her spirit to help them win the lottery or find a husband, attaching gold leaves to her face or pouring candle wax on the tree outside the shrine.

LUMPINI**LUMPINI PARK**

Where: Rama IV Road

When: Daily, 6am-8pm

Cost: Free

Way to go: #15 bus from Wat Bowen Niwet, Saladaeng skytrain station, Silom and Lumpini subway stations

A refreshing green lung in the midst of pestilent Bangkok. In the mornings and evenings, old people perform tai chi, joggers stop for a medicinal shot of snake's bile and buff chaps work out at the outdoor gym. In between, picnickers loaf and horny young couples coo. On weekends expect diverse musical and theatrical performances. But the best spectacle is the 6pm public aerobics attended by hundreds.

PRATUNAM**HILTON HOTEL FERTILITY SHRINE**

Where: 2 Wittayu (Wireless) Road, near the British Embassy

When: Early morning to early evening.

How Much: Dick all

Way to Go: Canall taxi World Trade Center stop, Chitlom Skytrain Station

Devoted to the Fertility Goddess Tubtim, this shrine, in the far north corner behind the hotel, is a sanctuary for the limp, the lovelorn, and prospective parents. It is studded with wooden phalluses (some are wrapped with colourful sashes) in all shapes, sizes, and hues; they are offerings made to the goddess for wishes to be fulfilled. Sitting pretty beside a canal, the main spirit house is surrounded by foliage and a sacred ficus tree.

SAMUT PRAKAN**ERAWAN MUSEUM**

Where: Near the Crocodile Farm and Ancient City on Old Sukhumvit Road

When: Daily, 9am-6pm

Way to Go: See the Ancient City listing.

The three-headed copper elephant measures some 40 metres in height and weighs 250

tonnes. In the base is a museum devoted to Thai and Chinese antiques. Up above is an incredible array of statuary, a stained glass ceiling, and a stairway leading up the elephant god Erawan's right hind leg into a vision of Buddhist heaven in his belly.

THE ANCIENT CITY (MUANG BORAN)

Where: Kilometre 33, Sukhumvit Highway

When: 8.30am-5pm.

Cost: Bt50 adults; Bt25 children

Way to go: Catch the #11 air-con bus on the north side of Democracy Monument or on Sukhumvit Road and get off at the Pak Nam bus terminal. Then hop on the No. 36 mini-bus for a few baht or a motorcycle taxi for Bt40.

Shaped like a gigantic map of Thailand, this 320-acre park has monuments, traditional houses and temples from all over the country, many almost as big as the originals. Attractions include royal barges, a sculpture garden with mythical characters from the Indian epic Ramayana, and the Old Market Town. Rent a bicycle – you won't regret it.

THE CROCODILE FARM

Where: Kilometre 30 on Sukhumvit Highway

When: 7am-6pm.

Cost: Bt300 adults; Bt150

Way to go: Same as Ancient City but ask the motorbike to take you to the farm

Watch Thai men wrestle with crocodiles, or just check out the exotic collection of Indian peafowl, Malaya sun bears, golden Thai pythons and about 50,000 other crocodiles. The politically suspect among you can even buy crocodile-skin handbags, shoes and belts, but watch out at customs.

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 Bt8-20, depending on distance. The big red and blue buses go all over town for Bt4 and Bt5, 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.

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 Saladaeng. It's a commuter system, so tourists tend to find the Skytrain more useful. Fares are Bt14-35 with a 15% discount until 2005.



SIAMESE SHADES

Harkening back to the great tradition of temple murals, and artworks coloured by the Buddhist canon and Siamese folklore, Preecha Thaotong has been enchanting gallery-goers with his magical talent for some 35 years. A gigantic retrospective of his work is currently on until July 10 at the Queen's Gallery Bangkok which is at 101 Ratchadamnoen Klang Road, near the Golden Mount.

If you happen to miss the Bangkok show the exhibition, From Light Shade to Himmaphan Forest According to the Royal Command of Her Majesty the Queen, will be on display at different galleries in Chonburi, Ubon Ratchathani, and Chiang Mai, throughout the rest of this year

SPOT ON! Leave your 500 page guidebook at home. Instead, bring a Groovy Map. **Newsweek**

● Your map is fantastic. I would consider it a must for anyone..
- Anthony Rossi, MD., Miami, USA

● We usually annotate our maps with bars, sightseeing places etc. but this time we didn't have to because it was already done!
- Joanna Welsh, UK



Places to Eat: Around Bangkok

Any visitors to Bangkok are happy to shovel discount pad thai into their gullets and adventurous types may even order the amusingly named khao pat, all the while praising the subtle interplay of flavours that can only be achieved by skillfully heaping your plate with chilli, sugar and fish-sauce. But Bangkok offers delights to even the most jaded palate, whether your thing is river dining, scrounging the lanes of Chinatown for the perfect shark-fin soup, or even just a quiet place to take Miss or Mr Perfect.

SILOM AREA

SOI CONVENT (EVENINGS)

Silom area (Saladaeng Skytrain)
Don't be put off by the name, this is an ideal place to fill the belly before a night out in Silom. A number of good quality street stalls dish up a variety of staples like khao man gai (chicken with rice) and steaming noodle soups to slurp on whilst watching the street life. If Northeastern style Thai food's your bag it's well worth trying the jim jum, Northeastern-style hot pot for communal troughing between friends, or Hai restaurant for som tam (spicy green papaya salad). For an international touch La Boulange has excellent French breads and pastries and there's a number of good restaurants like Café Swiss (Swiss), Zen (Japanese) and Khao Gub Kaeng (Thai) to choose from.

BLUE ELEPHANT

(CLASSIC AND FRESH, FUNKY THAI)
233 Sathorn Rd., (Skytrain Surasak), Tel: 02-673 9353, 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30pm-midnight, www.blueelephant.com, visa, amex & diners cards
Set in a restored old colonial-style house and part of the internationally renowned chain of Thai restaurants, this outlet serves as both cooking school and restaurant. The relaxed atmosphere and wooden interior make for a more informal alternative to hotel restaurants and it's one of the few eateries in town to successfully create new, inventive Thai dishes without sacrificing real Thai tastes. Animal haters should try the shameful foie gras with tamarind sauce (Bt580). Bt800-1,200 per head will ensure a full trough not including booze.

SIROCCO

(CONTEMPORARY MEDITERRANEAN)

63rd Floor, State Tower, Silom Rd (Skytrain Saphan Taksin), 6pm-11pm, Tel: 02-624 9555, www.thedome.com, major cards
The only place in Bangkok equally suitable for a romantic dinner and a suicide attempt. Open air and located on the 63th floor, Sirocco is the highest outdoor restaurant in the world and offers fantastic views across Bangkok (it looks much nicer from up there, believe us), live jazz and contemporary Mediterranean cuisine. Starters will set you back around Bt200-600, whilst mains go for Bt500-2,400. Very busy at present, so reservations are recommended.



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e-mail: epicurea@thais.com
tel 662-673.9001 fax 662-673.9155

Thai Kitchen (USA)
30315 Union City Blvd.
Union City, CA 94587
e-mail: info@thaikitchen.com
tel 510.675.9025 fax 510.675.9045

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INDIAN HUT (NORTHERN INDIAN)

311/2-5 Suriwongse Rd, opposite Manora School (Skytrain Sala Daeng), 11am-11pm, Tel: 02-635 7876-7, major cards

You have to admire any restaurant that rips off the Pizza Hut logo. Excellent and very fresh fodder, without the "fast food" variety of Indian cuisine so common outside its home country. A wide variety of lesser known Indian dishes especially from the tandoor and all are reasonably priced, with most main courses going for under Bt200. Also has a good vegetarian selection for around Bt100 a dish, a variety of breads and, according to the management, the finest Indian rice in Bangkok.

JESTERS (PACIFIC RIM)

Peninsula Hotel, Charoen Nakorn Rd, Klongsan, Tel: 02-861 2888, 6:30pm-10:30pm snack food after 10:30pm, major cards

Very cool, very stylish restaurant with real attention to detail. Jesters has river views, impeccable service and soulful, chilled-out music to accompany the culinary delights. Highly recommended is the degustation menu for Bt1,400 per head - a great way to sample 'n stuff. Live contemporary jazz accompanies a chocolate buffet every Friday and Saturday 7-11pm.

TRADER VIC'S (POLYNESIAN)

Bangkok Marriott Resort & Spa, 257 Charoen Nakorn Rd. (on the Chaophraya), Tel: 02-476 0022 ext1416, major cards

Although a worldwide chain, it's one that's succeeded in giving each outlet it's own character. The Bangkok branch at the Marriott Resort and Spa has established itself as a dead cert for great food and a great dining experience in Bangkok. The immensely civilized riverside setting with outdoor terrace is a great place to enjoy the much talked about Sunday jazz brunch.

TONGUE THAI (THAI)

18-20 Charoen Krung Rd (same Soi as Oriental Hotel), 10:30am-2pm, 5pm-11pm, Tel: 02-630

9918-9, major cards except Diners, JCB

Intimate and tastefully decorated eatery tucked away amongst the antique galleries of Charoen Krung road, and a good place to fill empty bellies after a day spending your life savings on fake Buddha sculpture and Chinese furniture. Traditional Thai fare like soft shell crab curry, mussels in a clay pot, and crispy morning glory go for around Bt100-400.

PATARA (THAI)

2 Sathorn 11, South Sathorn Rd, 11:30am-2:30pm, 6pm-10:30pm, Tel: 02-212 6420-1, www.patarathailand.com, major cards

Elegant Thai restaurant on Sathorn with some excellent Thai adaptations like raw tuna in a lime and lemongrass vinaigrette, and lemongrass marinated New Zealand rack of lamb with a spicy chilli sauce, green papaya and sweet rice rolls (Bt160-380 a dish). A good place for parties as they have ongoing group discounts and promotions.

ANNA'S CAFÉ

(THAI/INTERNATIONAL)

118 Soi Saladaeng, Silom Rd (Skytrain Saladaeng), Tel: 02-632 0620-1, 11am-11pm.

Extremely popular with a lively, almost raucous atmosphere at times - more choruses of happy birthday than any other restaurant in Bangkok. Very reasonably priced, tasty Thai dishes (Bt750-150), and European/fusion menu. Also has some pretty good Western desserts. There are also branches in Wireless Road and Sukhumvit (next to the Landmark hotel, Nana BTS).

O'REILLY'S (IRISH/CONTINENTAL)

Silom Road, corner Soi Thaniya, (Skytrain Saladaeng), 11am - 2am, 02-632 7515, major cards

A busy Irish pub attracting a mix of expats, locals and tourists and well placed for hitting the bars/clubs of Soi 4 or Patpong after a few pints. Traditional Irish pub grub (Bt250-300), continental dishes and steaks, and a Thai menu. Good value all-you-can-eat BBQ for Bt520 and set lunch for Bt195. They



Of course the food's safe. The monks blessed the stall last week

also have a wide selection of Belgian beers (around Bt250) - drink at your peril, these make beer Chang look like orange juice. Live music every night except Friday. Happy-hour from 4-7pm.

HU'U IN BANGKOK

(PACIFIC RIM, TAPAS AND TREATS)

The Ascott Sathorn, Levels 1 & 2, 187 South Sathorn Rd, (Skytrain Chong Nonsi), 6-10am, 11am-2pm, 5pm-1am daily, Tel: 02-676 6673/77, major cards

Named after a small atoll in Indonesia and with successful outlets in Singapore and Bali, Hu'u is now in Bangkok at The Ascott on Sathorn. Aimed at attracting Bangkok's brightest, most buzzing crowd of high rollers, Hu'u Bar downstairs is for lounging, tapas munching and cocktail quaffing. Upstairs is for a more refined dining experience - Hu'u Epicure is a swish, antique and art-strewn mezzanine restaurant serving innovative Pacific Rim cuisine. Previously of the Savoy in London, Chef Thomas Smith is responsible for the culinary creations.

MEZZALUNA (ITALIAN)

65th Fl, The Dome, State Tower, Silom Rd. Tel: 02-624 9555, 12-2:30pm and 6pm-11pm, major cards.

Housed inside the dome crowning State Tower, Mezzaluna is the refined interior to Sirocco's exuberant outdoors. The chandeliers, polished wood and comfy seating add to the feeling of all-out, classical, Italian opulence and as you'd expect there's superb views of the city from the window seating. Cuisine comes from all over Italy and the management stress the use of only the freshest imported ingredients. Appetizers from Bt310-Bt910 and mains from Bt850 up.

THE BARBICAN

9/4-5 Soi Thaniya, Silom Rd, (Skytrain Sala Daeng), 11:30am-1am, major cards, www.greatbritishpub.com, Tel: 02-234 3590

A split-level contemporary drinker that is smack in the middle of the Japanese Patpong. This is a great place to hang out with a few mates, sink beers and solve the problems of the world. Upstairs has big windows that affords a view of the comings and goings of Japanese gentlemen and their new friends. Happy hour is 3-7pm. Finally, The Barbican keeps the punters coming back with its pub-grub and a few other more nouveau items that has kept many an expat on his hardship posting fat and happy.

ANGELINI (ITALIAN)

Shangrila Hotel, New Road, 11:30am-2:30pm-6pm (light dining), dinner 6pm-10:45pm, Tel: 02-236 7777
Super-chic restaurant and bar with a

beautiful setting overlooking the Chao Phraya River, this is a perfect place to impress a date. The open kitchen enables diners to watch the chefs at work, cooking up some fabulous Italian dishes. Regularly changing promotions and menu. Other eateries on site include Salathip (Thai), Shang Palace (Chinese) and Edogin (Japanese)

SUKHUMVIT

CREPES & CO

(FRENCH/MEDITERRANEAN)

18/1 Sukhumvit Soi 12 (Skytrain Asoke), Tel: 02-653 3990-4, 02-251 2895, www.crepes.co.th, 9am-midnight, major cards

One of FARANG's favourites, tucked away from the Sukhumvit traffic at the end of Soi 12, C&Co. is now somewhat of a Bangkok institution after eight years of feeding the hungry a superb range of crepes and Mediterranean dishes. Sweet and savoury crepes come brimming with traditional fillings like the Chasseur (Bt160) or supreme as well as more inventive options like Casablanca (Bt200). There's also great appetisers, salads, pasta and other mains and ever changing promotions.

THE COURTYARD RESTAURANT (CAJUN CREOLE, INTERNATIONAL AND THAI)

Somerset Building, 9 Soi Tonson, Ploenchit Rd, 6am-11pm, Tel: 02-658 5678, major cards

A finer-dining US-style eatery from the same owner as Bourbon Street. Chef David whips a varied menu of his own Cajun/Creole inspired dishes together with the more traditional staples such as crawfish bisque, gumbo and jambalaya. A variety of US-certified steaks, salads and seafood such as fresh New Zealand oysters and Pecan crusted grouper with gumbo. Special brunch buffet on Sundays, happy hour from 2pm-7pm daily.

CHESA (SWISS)

5 Sukhumvit soi 20 (skytrain Asoke), 11am-11pm, Tel: 02-261 6650, major cards

No snow or silly woollen hats in sight. A laid-back Swiss restaurant serving the usual fondue fare plus some more interesting dishes in a comfy, off-piste environment. Around Bt1,000 a head for a full skier's fill up. The management pride themselves on disproving the belief that Swiss food is always heavy and stodgy.

BOURBON ST BAR & RESTAURANT

29/4-6 Sukhumvit Rd Soi 22 (Skytrain Phrom Phong), 7am-1am, Tel: 02-259 0328-9, www.bourbonstbkk.com, major cards

Popular US style muncher and tavern a stone's throw from the Emporium shopping center. A great place to stuff yourself

Feeding Time

senseless on the likes of jambalaya, blackened redfish and BBQ ribs (Bt200-400 per head). If you're skint and hungry don't miss the all you can eat Mexican buffet every Tuesday night (Bt250 ++).

ANA GARDEN (THAI)

67 Thonglo 3, Sukhumvit 55, Tel: 02-3911762, www.anagarden.com

A fantastic restaurant oasis for escaping the Bangkok mayhem and recharging the soul on Thai food and funky music. As the name suggests, set in a luscious tropical garden this is a restaurant that succeeds in keeping up the hip quotient without a dull atmosphere or minimalist decor. Plenty of grilled fodder, cool tunes and liquor to complement the outdoor setting. No need to head off to a club after eating either as there's a perfect after dinner groove den out back with plenty of space for dancing off that barbecued pork or slouching on the sofa.

IKKYU-AN (JAPANESE)

635-637 Sukhumvit Rd. (opp. Emporium), Mon-Fri 11am-2pm, 5pm-8:30pm, Sat-Sun 11.30am-8:30pm, Tel: 02-260 3332, major cards

The heavy shopper's Japanese restaurant, Ikkyu-An succeeds in dishing up reasonably priced, authentic Japanese grub in a decidedly 'un-stiff' atmosphere. Sushi counter downstairs and tatami seating upstairs.

DA GIOVANNI (ITALIAN)

71/1 Sukhumvit, Soi 3 (behind Bamboo Pub) Tel: 02-253 2462.

Tucked away in an unlikely location behind the Bamboo Pub and Restaurant, this cosy Italian trattoria is a surprisingly pleasant place to dine. Reliable pasta favourites such as lasagna with beef, and vongole for (Bt180-290), and a selection of pizzas for Bt200-280. Grilled mains like Pollo al limone (chicken in lemon sauce, Bt250) and traditional starters like mozzarella with fresh tomatoes and basil (Bt90). Thai menu also available.

THE BULL'S HEAD

Sukhumvit Soi 33/1, (Skytrain Phrom Phong) 11:30am-1am, www.greatbritishpub.com,

Tel: 02-259 4444, major cards

This is a British pub full of mostly expat Brits looking for a little taste of home. Comfort food for the needy. Thursday nights are Accumulator – win up to Bt18,000, Saturday and Sunday feature First Half Happy Hour, half price pints for the first half of every football game and Sunday nights are Toss the Boss until 7pm.

ABYSSINYA CAFÉ (ETHIOPIAN)

Sukhumvit soi 3 (near Grace Hotel), daily 11am-11pm

Well worth seeking out for those looking to get off the well-eaten culinary path. A small café-like establishment with very limited seating, the magnificent smell of freshly roasting coffee (literally roasted in the restaurant area when we visited!) and good food. Small dishes sit upon a blanket of the sour Ethiopian bread injera, and are eaten together using the hands. Unusual (to most of us) but very tasty.

SAN REMO (ITALIAN PIZZERIA)

253/2 Sukhumvit Soi 31 (Skytrain Phrom Pong) Mon-Fri, 6pm-11pm, Sat-Sun, midday-11pm, www.dininginthaailand.com/sanremo.asp, Tel:

02-258 6919, major cards

San Remo has a curious Mediterranean al fresco feel without actually being al fresco. Around 40 different pizza toppings (Bt235-285) such as good old heart-stopper, Four Seasons, and Gioiosa (mozzarella, small prawns, green peas, smoked salmon and Italian parsley) and a wide selection of pastas (Bt175-195) like Penne Treviso (penne pasta in cream sauce, Speck, raddicchio salad, parmesan cheese). Also worth trying is the anti-pasti selection which includes some delicious roast vegetables and prosciutto. Pick 'n' mix and sharing between mates is the best option.

NOVOTEL SIAM SQUARE

Siam Square Soi 6 (Skytrain Siam), 6am-10am,



The food is excellent in Thailand

11:30am-3pm, 6:30pm-10:30pm, major cards, www.novotelbkk.com, Tel: 02-225 6888

Right in the heart of Thai teenybopper land and housing three restaurants under one roof – Lok Hin Wah (Chinese), Focazia (Italian) and Chistera (international). The latter is the perfect place to stuff your face at the lunch-time buffets, only Bt430++, Mon-Sat. Sunday brunch (Bt519) is highly recommended. Or get Dim Sum-ed at Lok Hin Wah's all you can eat lunch for Bt388 until 2:30pm.

ANTONIO'S TRATTORIA (TRADITIONAL ITALIAN)

59/1 Soi Sawasdee, Sukhumvit 31 Rd, Tel: 02-258 4247, 02-258 4108

A bastion of truly authentic Italian food, Antonio's stands out amongst the zillion internationalised Italian eateries around town. Contemporary decor complements a cozy, trattoria style ambience and provides an ideal for setting some real mama-style cooking. An ample a la carte selection covering all bases from antipasti to grill. Well worth going the full monty rather than playing pasta-and-pizza.

NABE YA (JAPANESE)

2nd Fl., Pathumwan Princess Hotel, 444 Phayathai Rd, 11am-10:30pm, Sat-Sun buffet 11:30am-2:30pm, Tel: 02-216 3700 ext. 20226, www.pprincess.com, major cards

Well placed for a Nipponese nosh up after braving the hoards of teenage girls at MBK, and realizing you've bought armfuls of crap you don't really want. All the usual Japanese fare such as sushi, sashimi and tempura dishes as well as their speciality, hotpots, so it's a good idea to come with friends. Decent buffets available here and at neighbouring Korean restaurant Kongju.

AMARANTH (ORGANIC FUSION)

545 Sukhumvit Soi 31 (Skytrain Phrom Pong) 11:30-2:30pm, 6:00-10:00pm, www.health-at-ease.co.th, Tel: 02-662 0795, major cards

Organic and stylish, with not a dirty hippy in sight. The menu is a health-giving cocktail of Asian and western tastes which means interesting, inventive dishes (minus the unwanted chemicals), such as 'Amaranth salad with roasted polenta' or 'poached fillet of beef with wasabi mash.' Main courses

range from Bt220-480. These can be washed down with a range of fresh fruit and veggie juices, organic coffees and herbal teas, or a selection of wines including some organic varieties.

RANG MAHAL (INDIAN)

The Rembrandt hotel, Sukhumvit soi 18, 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30am-10:30pm, Tel: 02-261 7100 ext. 7532, major cards

A true Maharaja's eatery, Rang Mahal's sumptuously appointed with skyline views of Bangkok and fantastic Indian food. Live Indian music to accompany dishes such as Punjabi S amosa (Bt150) and Rogan Josh Kashmiri (Bt375).

TAMARIND CAFÉ (VEGETARIAN FUSION)

27 Sukhumvit Soi 20, Tel. 02-66 7421, Fax. 02-663 4261

One of the few decent veggie restaurants in this town of carnivorous beasts. Some extremely tasty and innovative vegetarian dishes with a fusion of international flavours and foodstuffs. They're also known for their variety of fruit shakes, smoothies and wide selection of teas. Rooftop dining area for romantics and photographic gallery, F-Stop, on site.

HIMALI CHA CHA (INDIAN VEGETARIAN)

Three outlets: Silom Soi Convent (Skytrain Sala Daeng); New Road, Bang Rak; and Sukhumvit 35 (Skytrain Phrom Pong) , 11am-3:30pm 6pm-10:30pm, major cards

First established in 1979 by Cha Cha, chef to the rich and famous. Now in the hands of his son Kovit, who has another outlet in Silom. Specialising in North Indian, Mughlai Muslim and vegetarian food. Try the specials from the tandoor, at Bt140 for half a chicken you'll still have cash to knock a few back in one of the nearby pubs.

WITCH'S OYSTER BAR & RESTAURANT (OYSTER BAR, SEAFOOD & GRILL)

20/20-21 Ruamrudee Village, Ploenchit Road (Skytrain Ploenchit), 11am-2pm 5pm-10pm, www.witch-tavern.com, Tel: 02-255 5354, major cards (except Diner's)

If you want to get your date in the mood without the use of Rohipnol, this is the place. The only oyster bar we're aware of in Bangkok, it has an international range of the slippery aphrodisiacs imported from Australia and other Euro-style seafood. They also serve up some delicious British dishes such as roast rib of beef, stilton soup and lobster with orange and port sauce. Plenty of wines and malt whiskies for quality quaffing. Happy hour 5pm-8pm

NIGHT FOOD MARKET (THAI/CHINESE)

Soi 38 (Skytrain Thonglor)

Thais come from far and wide to eat at this collection of gourmet street vendors. A cut above the usual but still dirt cheap, you can pick up dishes from different stalls and sit wherever you want. Must tries are the ba mii keeow naam (wheat noodle soup with red, marinated pork and wontons), the super-tender braised pork leg (khao ka moo), and chicken satay. Stuff yourself senseless for under Bt100 before moving on to one of the nearby bars or clubs.

LARRY'S DIVE (AMERICAN/MEXICAN)

8 Sukhumvit Soi 22 (Skytrain Phrom Pong), 10am-1am, www.larrysdive.com, Tel. 02-663 4563, Visa, Master cards

A beach-styled bar and restaurant complete with tropical fish murals and even a dive shop on premises. Popular with expats, Larry's is a great place for beer drinking, pool shooting, catching up on the latest gossip and stuffing down some of the excellent BBQ ribs, nachos, burritos and such (Bt75-250). Happy hour 4-8pm.

AUBERGE DAB (FRENCH)

Ground Fl. Mercury Tower (Skytrain Chidlom) 11:30am-2:30pm, 6:30pm-10:30pm, Tel: 02-658 6222-3, major cards

Fine French dining with fine prices to match. In true Parisian style, Auberge has built up a reputation for excellent food and service. Entrees include such delights as Atlantic salmon marinated in Chablis with a lemon and orange jus (Bt280), while mains like pan-seared red grouper with fennel and potato confits, white wine and salmon egg sauce go for Bt420 up. Also has an extensive wine list and some classic French desserts such as

crepes suzette and profiteroles.

MALAYSIAN AUNTIE (MALAYSIAN/INDIAN)

Sukhumvit Soi 8 (first alleyway on the left) (Skytrain Nana), 10am-11pm

A hidden gem off Sukhumvit Soi 8 with fantastic and cheap Indian/Malaysian grub. Wonderfully spiced creamy curries for around Bt100, an ample selection of breads (rotis, nans and chapathis only Bt15) and rice, washed down with homemade lassis. Judging by the frantic work going on in the kitchen, everything is pretty much made to order, a rarity amongst Indian restaurants. A good choice for vegetarians and meat lovers alike. A Thai menu also available.

ATHENA (GREEK)

594 Ekamai Rd, Sukhumvit Soi 63. (Skytrain Ekkamai), Mon-Fri, 3pm-midnight Sat 11am-midnight, www.athenabangkok.com, Tel. 02-392 7644, major cards except JCB

To our knowledge the only Greek restaurant in Bangkok, with a real Greek chef to boot. Mediterranean decor, real olive oil, Greek wine and plate smashing on Friday and Saturday nights. Plenty of parking space on site.

BANGLAMPHU

SHOSHANA

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

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

TAKETEI

Nana Plaza Inn, about 10 metres off Khaosan, 11:30am-1am, major credit cards.

With a Thai chef who has more than 30 years experience in preparing Japanese cuisine, fresh seafood brought in every afternoon, and a special section in the back with tatami mats, Taketei offers an authentic taste of Japan at a fraction of the usual price. Especially popular is the "Sushi Set" (Bt160), which comes with seven different kinds of sushi and three cucumber rolls. They have also created their own version of vegetarian rolls, serve up juicy steaks, green tea ice cream, and have 12 set menus on offer all day.

JOK POCHANA RESTAURANT

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

HEMLOCK

56 Phra Athit Road, near Peachy guesthouse, 4pm to midnight, closed Sunday, Tel. 02-282 7507, no cards

Hemlock was the first of the "arts cafes" on Phra Athit Road and is still the most successful, because the food is excellent and cheap — in spite of its swanky appearance when you peer in longingly from outside. An unusual feature of the extensive menu is a selection of "Ancient" dishes like the "Grand Lotus Rice" (Bt80), with spiced rice cooked with prawn, pork, egg and Chinese sausage wrapped in a lotus leaf and served with a sweetish mint sauce. Lovely stuff. They have some pretty inexpensive wines as well.

NA PHRA LAN

18 Na Phra Lan Road, 10am-10pm, closed on Sundays

"It's An Art Café" read the name cards for

this restaurant, which is across the street from the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Housed in a beautiful old wooden building, the restaurant serves up plenty of dishes in the range of Bt40-60, such as "Rice with fried fish, garlic and pepper", and "Spicy, fluffy catfish salad." They also host regular exhibitions by apprenticing artists of nearby Silapakorn University, who tend to hang out upstairs in the smoking section. If you just want to stop in for a jolt of caffeine, they've got Brazilian coffee for Bt45.

LA CASA RISTORANTE(ITALIAN)

210 Khaosan Road, noon-midnight,

Tel. 02-629 1627-8, major cards.

La Casa's success is proof that Khaosan has gone upscale. Fastidiously decorated, it's a great place for backpacker couples on their anniversary. A bargain for the quality — a plate of pasta runs about Bt125. Menu includes pizza, pasta, calzone, steaks, a wine list and desserts. All the waiters are named Luigi.

RICKY'S COFFEE SHOP

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.



Hail to the Americas

It's the fourth of July! Fireworks, turkey, apple pie and flag-waving Yankees. Love it or hate it, Independence Day (the celebration, not the movie) is a big one for the American community in Bangkok, but let's not forget that the term American technically covers Canadians as well (and Mexicans, and South America as well, but most US citizens think they stole the name) and Canada Day comes at much the same time of year, on July 1st. In the spirit of equality, Big John, of Big John's Pies

(and guesthouse and saloon) are celebrating both. Canadians should roll in for free Poutine (French fries with gravy, cheese curd, and a heart attack garnish) and a fine time reassuring each other that though Canadians may not know exactly what they are, at least they know they aren't Americans. Citizens of the USA can enjoy a generous buffet of hickory-smoked ribs and chicken, meatloaf, mashed potatoes, apple pie and ice cream but must cough up Bt200.

Even if you're not from North America, head on down there, Fridays are lady's night with free spirits between 5 and 9pm, Sunday night is cut-price BBQ night. Mondays is hospitality industry night, Tuesday are high-card wins. Wednesday is BYO meat BBQ night and Thursdays are 2 for 1 imported beers night.



New fast food outlet requires employees to work at near-light-speed

Farang: How did you make a start in the DJ business and how long have you been performing?

Shortee: I've been a DJ for 10 years. I'm originally a drummer and I met my husband (DJ Faust) in 1995 who taught me how to scratch & mix records. I started playing college house parties and then began to play clubs after about a year. I won the Fever Buzz Battle of the DJs mixing & scratching house records in 1997. At the same time we started this turntablist DJ crew, "Third World Citizenz" (Craze, Faust, Shortee, Shotgun, Klever, King James, T-Rock) which is where I really worked on my scratching and beat-juggling skills.

My first appearance on vinyl was on DJ Faust's debut album Man or Myth (featuring Craze, Shortee and Shotgun) which was the first turntablist album ever to be released. Shortly after I did a turntablist EP Fathomeless (Faust, Shortee and Craze) and went on my first tour With Faust, Craze and Develop, spinning hip hop and doing turntablist showcases. I released my first solo album The Dreamer in 1999.

What kind of music do you spin?

It all depends on the event and what the promoter requests. I play everything from Hip Hop (mainstream, old school and/or underground), Funk, Soul, Breaks, Drum 'n' Bass and House.

Although she promotes herself as Playboy magazine's tour DJ, DJ Shortee has a whole lot more tricks up her sleeve.

She's also the only female DJ to appear in the classic documentary Scratch, and has been a pioneer of the turntablist movement.

Daniel Cooper caught up with the diminutive artist on a stack of milk crates behind the decks of Q bar last month. Photo by Dan too.

You were the official DJ for the Playboy 50th anniversary club tour. How did you get that job?

I had played a few Superbowl parties for them (2003 and 2004) and they asked me to submit a demo because they were looking for a tour DJ who played multiple styles. I competed against a ton of other female DJs for that job.

“What was it like being on the road with Playboy and performing at the parties?”

It was a lot of hard work but a lot of fun too. It was super mainstream. I was originally booked to play multiple styles of music but all of the crowds wanted to hear mainstream hip hop with the occasional Brittany Spears song. (Playmates liked to hear Toxic... not quite my taste but they got what they wanted.) I played five hours a night in 50 cities, except one club which was nine hours at a casino in Lake Tahoe. That was the longest set I ever played. I was also the emcee for the entire tour, introducing all the playmates and the burlesque shows etc. We travelled on three tour busses and my husband travelled with me as my road manager, helping me with set up and break down of my gear in each city. I dressed in Playboy's leather skirts and some of their sexy tops which was not quite my style (I'm a b-girl at heart) but I was grateful for the free duds. The mansion parties are dope too. Lots of celebrities and I've gotten to meet a few. My favourites so far was meeting Big Daddy Kane, Jimmy Fallon & Alfonso Ribiero (Carlton from Fresh Prince of Bel-Air). The first time I played there was on the tour and I've played a few since then. It's beautiful there and Hef has his own zoo with all these exotic animals. I like the little monkeys the best.

You were the only female DJ to appear in the movie Scratch. What's that all about?

Scratch is a documentary by Doug Pray about the turntablist movement. Around the time when I was coming up as a turntablist, there were very few females scratching and beat-juggling. I am honoured to be recognized in the movie as a contributor to the scratch movement alongside innovators such as Afrika Bambaataa, Z-Trip, Q-Bert, Craze, Faust, Cut Chemist, Grand Wizard Theodore, Grandmaster Flash, X-ecutioners, Jazzy Jay etc. This movie was picked up by Palm Pictures and has been seen in theatres across the globe as well as HBO, Sundance, Cinemax, Showtime, VH1, Independent Film Channel, etc.

There are so few women Dj-ing on the world scene, why is this and do you find your gender an advantage?

There are actually tons of women DJs in the world now. When I first started it was very different, there were still some female DJs but it wasn't as common as it is now. Back then, it was harder to be taken seriously in a male-dominated culture, but now it's much easier for women to get recognized. It's actually an asset to be a female DJ but you gotta have skills to back it up if you want to be remembered and respected. It is still very rare to find female DJs that scratch & beat-juggle on a technical level but there are a few up and coming girls to look out for. Originally I created my instructional DVD series to pass on what I've learned to the next generation of DJs, male or female. I'm often told that my DVDs are a source of inspiration for many up & coming female turntablists, because it's the first instructional DVD where you can see a female scratching and juggling.

You're on the road a lot. What makes travelling as a DJ different to travelling as a tourist?

You don't get to see anything and sleep is rare. I usually fly in, sound check, perform and then fly out the next morning. All I really see is the airport, the hotel & the venue. Every once in a while I get the privilege to stay a little longer and see a bit of the city I'm in but that's pretty rare because I'm usually on my way to the next city. Regardless, DJ-ing has taken me all over the world and I am very grateful for the opportunities and doors that it's opened for me.

What projects are you working on at the moment?

Urban Assault: Drum & Bass production catalogue with my partner DJ Faust (www.urbanassaultdnb.com).

Turntable Tune-Up DVD: supplement DVD in the series that teaches how to tune and fix your turntables. (www.how2dj.com)

Shortee's DJ 303 DVD: next instalment in my DVD series which ranges from advanced DJ skills to production and remix techniques. (www.how2dj.com)

Twice as Nice: 4-turntable Breaks & Drum n Bass show with my female partner Dj Annalyze (twiceasniceds.com)

Next solo Album: I've been working on this for a while. No set deadline just taking my time.

Finally, what kind of music are you listening to at the moment?

Drum n Bass: Total Science, Pendulum, Baron, Subfocus, Mampi Swift, Blame, Shock One (too many to mention). Also plenty of Hip Hop, Funk, Soul, Breaks, Rock, House ...lots of mix CDs that people give me.

DRINKS LIST

Bangkok is rightly famous for its nightlife, offering all types and flavors of establishment, from old men selling beer from a wheelbarrow to mega-clubs, to the infamous sex-shows down at the 'Pong, and everything in between. Things are changing though, many punters are shocked by the 1-2am closing time (and that's if you're lucky). That's right and the only after-hours place is the street, but we like it down there. Also shocking is the no-ID no-entry policy, even if you're 80, so remember that PADI certificate or library card.

SUKHUMVIT & AROUND

87 PLUS

Conrad Bangkok, All Seasons Place, 87 Wireless Road, Tel: 02 690 9999, www.conradhotels.com, major cards

87 has re-launched as 87-Plus. Live music is the new plus, with a resident band, plus regular DJ sets. Slick and sumptuous club/bar/restaurant with a 'World Food/Global grooves' theme.

MYSTIQUE

Sukhumvit Soi 31 (Skytrain Phrom Phong), Tel: 02-662 2374, www.mystiquebangkok.com, amex visa & master cards

A truly sumptuous palace of a club based on a New York venue of the same name from back in the day (we were there of course). This three storied Bangkok version comes complete with five (yes FIVE) VIP areas overlooking the main dancefloor, a tank that used to have jellyfish but now has baby sharks, the very purple 'Purple Room' and a Moroccan rooftop area for chilling and sucking on sheisha pipes. Musical flavors vary from room to room and night to night including hip hop, funky house, drum 'n bass and eclectic world grooves. Bt650 on Friday and Saturday gets you in with two drinks, Sunday to Thursday no cover. Closed Monday.

TOKYO JOE'S

9-11 Sivaporn Plaza, Sukhumvit Soi 24 Opposite Ariston Hotel, Open 17.30 - 01.30 Tel: 02-661 0359, www.tokyojoesbkk.com, visa, master cards

Live music seven nights a week with the top blues, groove and soul bands in BKK on a rotating schedule. These include The Soi Dog Blues Band, Cannonball, Savannah on the weekends, Adam on Acoustic Blues every Monday, and TAB with traditional blues on Tues & Thurs. Small beers are Bt90, Bt150 for large beers. Mixed drinks go from Bt100-150. Happy hour is 6-9pm with Bt80 beers and jugs of Asahi for Bt300. Tuesday is two for one beers after 9pm, with Georgia singing. Check the website for weekly lineups and their infamous vodka orange end of the month parties.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELER'S TAVERN

Sukhumvit Soi 5, by Foodland, (Skytrain Nana) The upmarket sister to the pub we all know from Khaosan. And she's a bloody big sister at that. There's a big bar, a big screen, a big car rotating overhead and loads of pool tables. You're looking at a more American theme here rather than Banglamphu's faux-London drinker and the place is more popular with middle-aged expats and teachers rather than young hipsters, but reasonably priced drinks and free Internet makes it worth a stop.

CONCEPT CM²

Basement, Novotel Siam Square (Skytrain Siam), Tel. 02-255 6888, www.cm2bkk.com, major cards

Hugely popular Novotel disco. Big and glitzy main room chock full of girls following whiskey bottles like moths to a light bulb. The resident DJ spins dance hits in between sets from cover band 'Too Close' (Friday to Wednesday). Get tanked early with the whiskey buffet from 9-10.30pm (Bt444 all you can drink). There's also Sensations

karaoke for those who like the sound of their own voice. Pastel Lounge is the place to escape from the beats and relax. Free entry before midnight and a free drink for girls every Monday and guys every Tuesday. Spinning Hip Hop and R&B every night in the main room and The Boom Room are DJs Sit and Lek.

Q BAR

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

A stylish venue with black, padded walls reminiscent of a nuthouse for vampires. Consistently plays quality, butt-wiggling music and regularly features international DJs. Vodka lovers will enjoy the wide selection of brands, all kept chilled to perfect quaffing temperature or served at Bt100 in jelly form. Downstairs is for mingling while the upstairs lounge is for romancing, and loners can sulk on the open-air terrace. Bt500 cover after 10pm with two drinks. There's Globe Trippin' Monday (International Electric), Sugar & Spice Tuesday, Wednesday is Ghetto Fabulous, uniting Hip Hop and House, Meltdown Thursday, Frisky Friday (Freestyle), Saturday Night Fever (House) and finally, Beat Therapy Sunday (Hip Hop).



WITCH'S TAVERN

306/1 Sukhumvit 55, Soi Thonglor (between Soi 8 & 9), 11am-2.00am, Tel: 02-391 9791, visa, amex, www.witchstavern.com

Equally good for lounging or partying, the Tavern is pub style with matching menu (Bt85-700) items such as fish and chips, pies and steaks as well as Thai dishes. Regular and varied live bands playing everything from jazz to hip hop. Ladies night on Wednesday with free girl's drinks from 6pm to 10pm and bingo with cash prizes. Happy hour from 5-9pm.

RCA

Royal City Avenue (RCA), just off New Petchburi Road,

The place to be if you are young, Thai and out on the pull. RCA is a strip of clubs, pubs and bars. For many years this was teenie-pop central but a number of new places have raised the bar music and class-wise. Most places have outside seating and indoor dancing such as the massive and massively popular Route 66. Up and coming Code is worth checking and cool, arty cinema House offers welcome respite from Hollywood trash. Nearby discos Hollywood and Dance Fever (off Rachadapisek Rd) are gargantuan, whisky-soaked dance halls. Worth a look for those seeking a cultural experience.

NARCISUSS

Sukhumvit Soi 23, (Skytrain Asoke) just behind Pegasus Club, Tel. 02-258 4805, major cards Gaudy and glitzy to the point of being



BAR BANGKOK

Q Bar Events - July 2005

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Our annual MC Battle

featuring special guest the one and only **ICE T**

2 MC's and 1 Beat
Who has the skills to put the other away?

Be at Q Bar to see who will be crowned the champion Thai and English-speaking rappers in town!

Sunday 3rd July
Heats (Thai and English)

Sunday 10th July
Semis (Thai and English)

Wednesday 20th July
Grand Final (Thai and English)

First Prize: A recording contract with Grammy!
Second Prize: 15 hours of studio time at SAE Recording Studio!
Third Prize: Clothing by Ecco and Chivas gifts!

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frisky fridays
dj joeki & guests - freestyle
saturday night fever
dj billy v. & guests - house
beat therapy sundays
dj's tul & budda a. - r&b, hip hop
massive mondays
dj's tul & cava - international
eclectic beats
sugar & spice tuesdays
dj's billy v. & joeki
ghetto fabulous wednesdays
dj's Cava & Dray One spin classic hip hop
meltdown thursdays
dj's Billy V and Joeki - house music all nite long

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measures of bangkok's largest selection of spirits

dress code: no shorts, sandals or sleeveless shirts, on men please! id required by everyone bring copy of your passport no minors under 20

ostentatious. Monster mirror balls and chandeliers have you thinking Dirk Diggler and his crew will enter the massive, rhythmically pumping dance floor at any time. The relentless trance techno vibes will send you panting upstairs to one of the best chill-out lounges in Bangkok. Mega amounts of beautiful people on patrol. Bt500 cover gets you three drinks.

TAWANDANG

462/61 Rama 3 Rd, Tel:02-678 1114-6, www.tawandang1999.com, major cards
Microbrewery and mega beer-hall, Tawandang was one of Bangkok's first pubs to brew their booze on-site. And what lovely booze it is. One can choose from weizen, lager, or dunken beers, all brewed to strict German purity standards by a real German brewmaster who pumps out up to 700,000 litres a year, by the half-litre for Bt100. The vast hall is also home to performers, ranging from Thai classical music, to popular indie bands and the good-old "sexy girl singing to a backing track" gig. To round it off, their menu of Thai food is delicious and reasonably priced. Not an easy place to get music from some fine musicians. The late nightly jazz session, beginning at around 11.00pm is worth going out of your way for.

BROWN SUGAR

Soi Sarasin, Lumpini, Tel. 02-250-1826, major cards

A fabled jazz gig that's known around the world in the music business. In need of a little care and attention but serves up excellent jazz music from some fine musicians. The late nightly jazz session, beginning around 11pm, is worth going out of your way for. Small and intimate, it has hosted a number of international artists. Food and service, however, can be slow, so a dinner of local specialties at Ma Mout Ma Mao, two shops down, is in order. Happy hour 5-9:30pm.

BAMBOO BEER BAR

Sukhumvit Soi 3, Tel. 02-253 2462, music from 9pm, www.bambooberbar.com, major cards
Primarily a spacious pool room but also has live music from The Fox, as well as performances from visiting guests. The Fox, led by Chor On, have been around forever and there probably isn't a song out there that they don't know, and with seven people in the band diversity is their strength. Good simple food and plenty of girls to talk to. A popular starter before heading off to less slauibrious Nana Plaza.

AD MAKERS

51/1 Soi Lang Suan (Skytrain Chitlom + short walk), 5pm-1am, 02-652 1069

This is a very popular locals' hang out that also attracts a good following of expats. The outside suggests a more elegant venue than the beer hall-style operation within. There is a good bar, but that seems to be ignored in favor of the many bare wooden tables around the various areas. The food comes from an extensive menu which is predominantly Thai, although there are a few Farang dishes, including a pig hock, on offer. Ad Makers is clearly a place to chill-out and there are plenty of private bottles of JW Black behind the bar as testament to the regulars' preferences. The music is normally provided by one of the better Bangkok bands playing good covers with a strong rock bias.

Battle of Bangkok

It's on again, Q bar's second MC battle. You've seen 8-mile, so you know what it's about. Two MC's battle it out for crowd appreciation, taking place over three rounds on July 3rd, 10th and the final on July 20th. The final will not be one to miss with awards being presented by Ice-T and Africa Islam, who will also give a performance. There are two categories, one for English MCs and one for Thais and first prize is a recording contract with Grammy, second prize is 15 hours of studio time with SAE and third prize is a whole lot of Ecko Ult'd gear.



GROOVE KITCHEN

(back of Ana garden restaurant), 67 Thonglor 3, Sukhumvit 55, Tel: 02-391 1762

After dinner club at the back of Ana garden restaurant in cool Thonglor. Al fresco Ibiza style vibe with glass roof, tree on the dance floor and possibly the best door in Bangkok (for connoisseurs of such things). Equally suited for digesting, dancing or downing drinks.

HUNTSMAN PUB

Landmark Hotel Basement

(Skytrain Nana), Tel 02-254 0404, major cards
Hunting may no longer be PC, but this pub in the basement of the Landmark Hotel is always correct. House bands are always a tight unit who perform well-arranged covers of contemporary music with great harmonies and, although, it's all a bit Radio 2, it goes well with the surroundings. When the band isn't playing, the central bar makes a good focal point and if you're a bit peckish you'll find a good menu of mostly pub grub. The Sunday brunch, featuring all the pub favorites is popular with residents and visitors alike. Happy hour 3-8pm.

SAXOPHONE

3/8 Victory Monument on Phayathai Road (Skytrain Victory Monument), Tel 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 8 or 9pm. Mostly a friendly Thai crowd with a few Farangs thrown in, it has long been a hang out for American Peace Corps volunteers when they take time out from saving the world to come to the big city. Arguably the best live music in town. Small beer for Bt120, no cover. Good Thai food.

BED SUPPERCLUB

End of Sukhumvit Soi 11 (Skytrain Nana),

Tel 02-6513537, major cards,

www.bedsupperclub.com

Classy, all-white nightclub that looks somewhat like a spaceship. At Bt500 (Tue, Fri, Sat) and Bt400 other days, it's not the cheapest place in town, but that gets you two drinks and keeps the riff-raff out. Opposite the dancing bit is the eating bit (hence the 'supper' in Supperclub) with set meals served at 8pm sharp. There's a full schedule of music, with Mondays being Funky House and Breakbeat. Hip Hop is spun on Tuesday with Model's Night on Wednesday, dancing to Precussive Latin House. There is Hip Hop, Dancehall and old-skool on Thursday. The weekend starts with Heavy Pumping Vocals

on Friday, Hard and Funky Tech-House for Saturday. The week ends with Think Pink, Bed Bar's gay Sunday night.

IRISH EXCHANGE

1/5-6 Covent Road, just off of Silom (Skytrain Sala Daeng), Tel. 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! Live music on Mondays and Thursdays with Lee Shamrock, and Friday night is party night with Celtic Colours. Good Sunday sessions can be had with live jazz and traditional roasts and the daily happy hour runs from 4-7pm.

THE DUBLINER IRISH PUB

440 Sukhumvit Road, between Soi 22 and 24, (Skytrain Phrom Pong), Tel. 02-204 1841, major cards, www.dublinerasia.com

A handsome, three-story 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 a crowd here, so the vibe is great. Standard draught beer is around Bt110 a pint. Excellent pub food with big portions. Women eat and drink



DRINKS LIST



The roof, the roof, the roof is on fire...

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.

SILOM

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

RADIO CITY

Patpong Soi 1
Downstairs from Lucifer's, 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.

MUZZIK CAFÉ

Patpong Soi 1
The crossroads of Patpong 1 and Patpong 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, Tel 02-2346902
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. It has a post-grunge feel and Bt150 drinks sets it apart from the slick sterility offered by most Bangkok clubs.

NORIEGA'S

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel 02-233 2813, major cards
Small, modern two-level bar run by Frank, aka 'Frank Superstar' from his long-time involvement with the Superstar a-

gogo in Patpong many moons ago. 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 is currently provided seven days a week and this venue is one of the few 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.

DIPLOMAT BAR

Conrad Hotel Lobby, All Seasons Place, 87 Wireless Rd (Skytrain Ploenchit), Tel: 02-690 9999, www.conradhotels.com, major cards
While hotel lobby bars are rarely the chosen haunt of hipsters, the Conrad's Diplomat Bar bucks the trend, packing out on weekends with the monied and beautiful. Perhaps the attraction is the regular jazz band, usually a super-sexy diva out front, or maybe it's just one of those things. Being a 5-star hotel, drinks aren't cheap but it's worth popping in before 6pm for two-for-one drinks.

TAPAS

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-632 7883, 02-632 0920, tapasroom@hotmail.com, major cards
As a longtime leader in Soi 4, Tapas Room Club continue to be popular. Spinning soulful house and funk, DJs Neng, Wut and Oud & Tee keep bodies dancing with live percussion on Wednesdays (Bt200 entry) and weekends (Bt100). Currently, Tapas are promoting their rooftop as a private party venue.

THE BALCONY

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-235 5891, www.balconypub.com, major cards
The best Happy Hour in Soi 4 offers cut-rate specials (Bt49) on cocktails and brewskies from 7pm-9pm. Sister bar of Telephone, the gay club across the road -with a phone on each table so you can court the girl or boy of your choice. This is also a good place to be served by boys in shorts or make new friends. Happy hour 6-8pm, house drinks Bt59.

TELEPHONE PUB & RESTAURANT

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-234 3279,

www.telephonepub.com

Gay as Christmas, camp as a row of tents. Telephone has been a gay icon since 1987 and set the character for Soi 4 for the following decade. These days most of the soi has lost its pinkness, but Telephone remains fiercely homosexual. The pub also has food which can be consumed at tables out the front—perfect for watching people of the night flit from club to club.

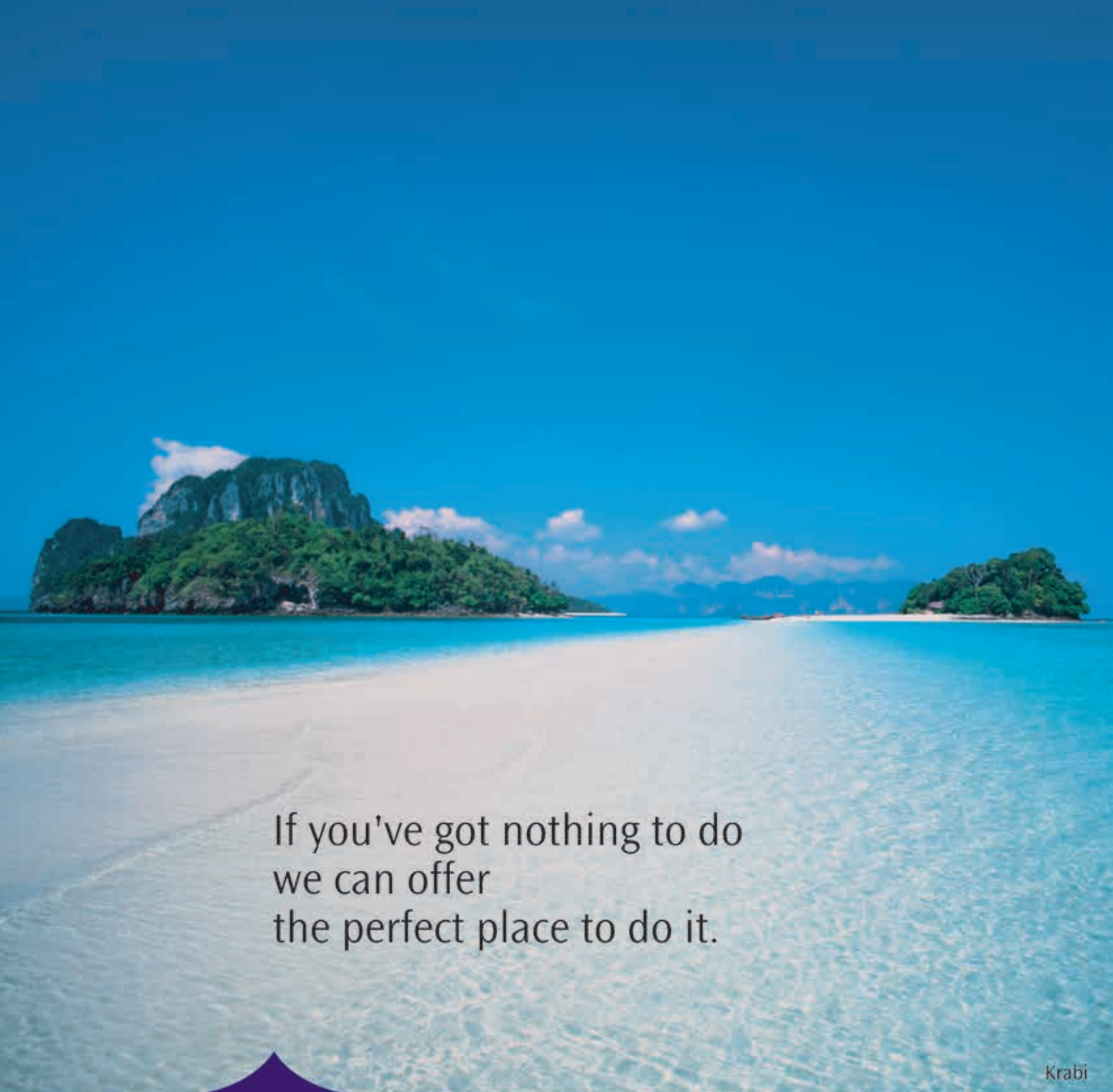
SPHINX

Silom Soi 4 (Saladeng skytrain), Tel. 02-234 7249, www.sphinxthai.com, major cards
Hidden at the shadowy 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 Fl., The Dome, State Tower, Silom Rd.
Tel. 02 624 9555, 12pm-1.00am, major cards
Claiming to be Bangkok's only specialty bar, Distil encompasses an authentic 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 or one of a huge selection of single malt whiskeys, then finish off with a Cuban cigar on the outdoor terrace.





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Krabi



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Smooth as silk



CHIANG MAI

It's getting cool. Thais start wearing balaclavas to bed. Aircon becomes superfluous. Days are sunny and dry and not too roasting, so take a walk down the winding sois of the "old city" inside the the quadrangle of moats and centuries-old brick walls, to see how the locals live. The more you lose your way, the more liable you are to find the 'real' Chiang Mai. Everyone who lives here, both Thai and foreigner moans about the traffic being so bad, but they get no sympathy from anyone who has been to Bangkok recently. 10 minutes on a motorbike or 20 in a car and you're hitting countryside. Chiang Mai combines the advantages of a good-sized city with plenty of jungle and babbling brooks nearby.

PLACES TO CRASH:

Offerings range from cheap dorms at Bt50 a night to plushly furnished aircon rooms for Bt1,000-2,000 – it's not an expensive town. Guesthouses are all over the place with most around Tha Phae Gate. Don't sign up for a trek until you shop around.

INSIDE THE OLD CITY

Cheap: The city's cheapest crash pads huddle along Moon Muang Soi 9, inside the northeast quadrant of the moat. **Supreme GH**, 44/1 Moon Muang Soi 9, has a loyal following - Bt150-250. Sois nearby yield bargains as well. **Blue Diamond**, 35/1 Moon Muang Soi 7, is exceptionally well run and has a good veg restaurant downstairs - Bt150. Other sois stacked with guesthouses include Moon Muang Soi 2 (**Top North** is popular, mainly for its tiny swimming pool – Bt400) and Ratchadamnoen Soi 5.

Comfort and Style: Head for **Gap's House**, 3 Soi 4, Ratchadamnoen Rd, a cluster of old Lanna-style houses, plus a more modern longhouse, furnished with local antiques, all aircon, Bt250-400 including breakfast. The nightly Bt80 Thai veg buffet is legendary. At the higher end, join the celebs who gather at the **Tamarind Village**, 50/1 Ratchadamnoen Rd, a quiet oasis in the heart of the old city, Bt6,000 and up. Rooms in the five-star hotels (and there are a bunch of them) range from Bt1,000 upwards.

OFF THA PHAE ROAD

Daret's House, 4/5 Chaiyaphum Rd, is ordinary but fine. Service is efficient and it's big, a good bet when others are full – Bt100-140. **Roong Ruang Hotel**, perfectly positioned to take in festival

parades at the end of Tha Phae Rd, has large rooms with verandas around a courtyard, Bt250-400B, some with air-con.

NEAR THE NIGHT BAZAAR

Baan Kaew Guest House, on Charoen Prathet Rd next door to the Alliance Francaise, does just about everything right: fans and aircon in the same room, fresh mossie coils outside the door every night, and friendly front desk, Bt350-450.

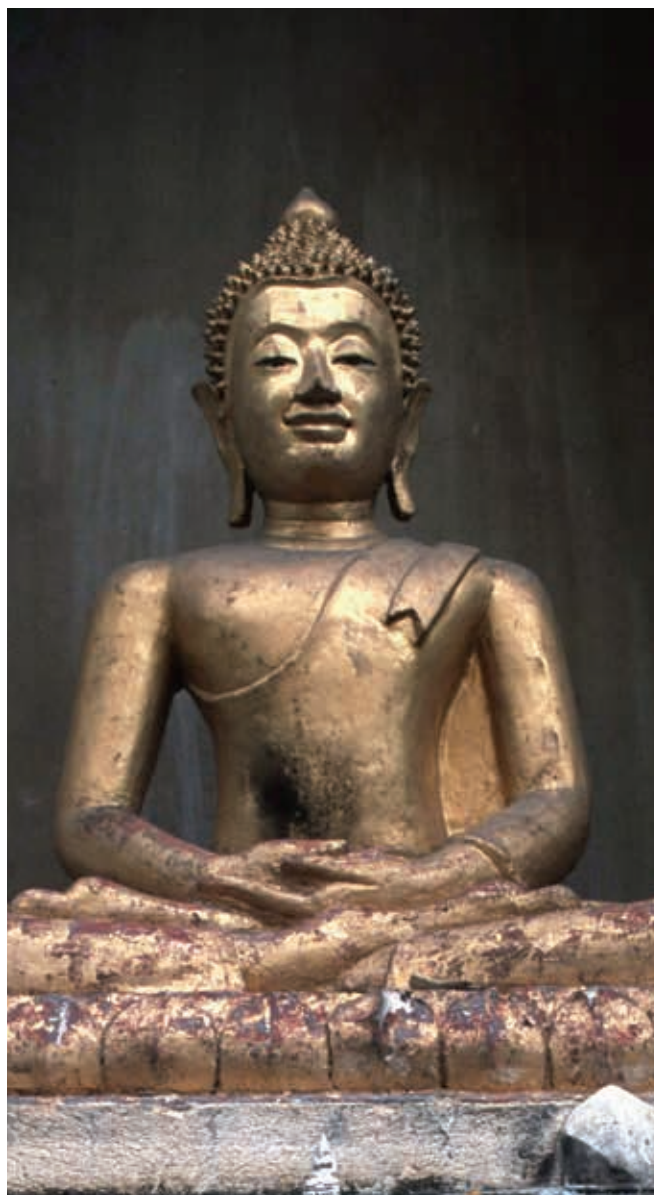
DAYTRIPPING:

TEMPLES:

Chiang Mai reputedly has 400 of these, mainly in the old city quadrangle. Most notable are **Wat Chiang Man**, the oldest in town, **Wat Chedi Luang**, with its 60 metre chedi, and **Wat Phra Singh** with murals of life in ye olde days.

MARKETS:

Near Chinatown, **Warorot Market** (kaat luang in local parlance, off Chang Moi [sic] Road) has hawked silks, housewares and foodstuffs since the 19th century. **San Pa Khoi Market** (off Charoen Muang Road on the way to the railway station) has food and cheap secondhand clothes; excellent for green curry after midnight. The **Night Bazaar** lines both sides of Chang Khlan Road every night selling baubles and trinkets for tourists. Head to **Crazy Horse Buttress**, an eye-popping limestone cliff-and-cave complex east of town, and scale one of nearly 70 bolted routes. Or call **Chiang Mai Rock Climbing Adventures** (tel: 06-911 1470) for guided trips or instruction. The **Chiang Mai Museum** on the Superhighway displays lots of religious artifacts from the area. Prep for your trek at the **Tribal**



Museum in nearby Ratchamangkla park. In the modern western suburbs of Chiang Mai, **Gongde Gallery** off Nimanhem Rd hosts exhibitions of Thailand's top artists, as does Chiang Mai University's **Art and Culture Museum** at the corner of Nimanhem and Suthep roads. Everyone heads up Doi Suthep to **Wat Phra Thai Doi Suthep**. Sunset is the best time; the crowds are gone and the monks are out chanting. If you're curious about Buddhism, attend the meditation and dhamma talk session with Western monks on Sunday afternoons at 3pm at **Wat U Mong**. Or travel further down the

same road to **Wat Ram Poeng**, and spend 26 days practising meditation with an English-speaking teacher. Countless companies offer treks out of Chiang Mai, and most of them offer similar itineraries and prices. Treks booked at guesthouses tend to skimp on important things like blankets and food. One reliable standalone agency is **Trekking Collective**, Ratchawithi Road.

FEEDING TIME

Ratana's Kitchen (tel: 06-320 322 Tha Phae Rd) does inexpensive Thai dishes geared to Farang

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palates, plus comfort foods like sandwiches, steaks and pancakes. **Art Cafe** (corner of Tha Phae & Kotchasan, opposite Tha Phae Gate) is the spot to camp, in air-conditioned comfort, when your group can't agree on what to nosh, as the menu covers Thai, American, Italian and Mexican.

The city's claim to noodle fame is khao soi, a bowl of squiggly egg noodles doused with a mild Shan-Yunnanese curry. Khao soi comes in many styles in Chiang Mai, but for the original head to **Khao Soi Fuang Fah** (Soi 1, Charoen Prathet Rd, near the Ban Haw Mosque); the khao mok kai (chicken biriyani) here is cheap and filling, too. For the fanciest version in the city, try the huge platter of khao soi and associated condiments served at **Just Khao Soi**, Charoen Prathet Rd. At **Heuan Soonthari** enjoy the atmospheric wooden house with a river view, decent Thai grub from the North and Northeast and live Northern Thai music by its greatest living proponent, owner Soonthari Wetchaynon.

Carrot-heads can choose from 35 vegetarian restaurants. The best and also the cheapest is the **Vegetarian Centre** of Chiang Mai at 14 Mahidon Road, on the way to the airport, open Sun-Thurs, 6am-2pm. Veggie Thai doesn't come any better or any cheaper than this. We know you're missing spicy curries from the deep south (Thailand, that is), so give your tongue another thrashing at **Khrua Phuket Laikhram** (1/10 Suthep Rd, opposite the south side of CMU). Try the khao phat po taek, 'broken fishtrap fried rice,' made with mixed seafood and slivered kaffir lime leaves. Farang food is no problem at all – and much cheaper than Bangkok. Build your own sandwich or baguette at the **Amazing Sandwich** (252/3 Phra Pokklao Rd), a minute's walk from

the THAI city office. **Da Stefano** (2/1-2 Chiang Mai Kao Rd), just 'round the corner from Tha Phae Gate, is a popular Italian restaurant, with rustic-chic ambience, efficient service, and delicious pastas and pizza. If you're on a strict budget, head for the much cheaper, Thai-owned **Italian Lang Mo** (the name means "Italian Behind the University"), down a tiny alley on the south side of Suthep Rd. Skip the pizza and go for some of the best pastas you'll find in Chiang Mai. **Jerusalem Falafel** (35/3 Moon Muang Rd) does Jewish mother-style home-cooked falafels, chicken-liver sandwiches, salads and home-made pastries.

NIGHTRIPPING:

While there's a clutch of seedy hostess bars bordering the east moat and especially along Loi Kroh Road, and a few gay bars around town, Chiang Mai's nightlife can't compete with Bangkok's for debauchery. Nevertheless, the city is lively after dark. Expect closing times to be 1am (or sometimes earlier these days) despite national entertainment laws allowing bars in 'tourist centres' to stay open 'till 2am. Chiang Mai police are notoriously corrupt. Tourists and Chiang Mai University students shimmy the night away to live Farang pop at **Riverside Bar & Restaurant** (9-11 Charoenrat Rd) where you can also dine on Western and Thai food on candlelit terraces by the water. In the same 'hood, local blues-rock guitar hero Took burns it up at **Le Brasserie** (37 Charoenrat Rd) from 11pm onwards, but the warm-up bands aren't bad either. **UN Irish Pub** (Ratwitahi Rd) is developing a reputation amongst the city's literati for their twice monthly open mic poetry readings, usually on

the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month beginning at 8pm (all readers get a free beer). Contact spokenwordcm@hotmail.com for info. You don't have to sport dreads to enjoy open-air, fairy-lit **Rasta Cafe** (off Ratchaphakhinai Rd), where travellers trade yarns around the ever-burning campfire whilst cruising the musical hippie trail from Marley to Manu Chao. Across from the Rasta Cafe, long-term visitors drown their visa woes in buckets-of-joy **Heaven Beach**, which does live music on weekends. At the **Drunken Flower** (Mao Dok Mai, Soi 1, Nimanhem Rd near Kad Suan Kaew) NGOers and young, socially mobile Thais mix at the tables outside, while regular drunks prop up the bar or lounge on tattered sofas inside. Owner Dai has a good CD archive of R&B and classic rock. Ask him to crank it up, it's never loud enough. The tiny **Pinte Blues Pub** (Moon Muang Rd) is one of the city's longest-standing watering holes, and an ideal spot for a chat over cheap drinks with a backdrop of possibly the best recorded blues collection anywhere in Thailand.

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**, Chaisongkhram

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

DAYTRIPPING:

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

NIGHTRIPPING:

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

FEEDING TIME:

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



Hey, you remember that scene in Apocalypse Now...

SILVER LININGS

Greetings, beach-bunnies! Welcome to the best beaches and bays in the region. Thailand is rightly famous for its coastline – in fact it has two. In this section you'll find a rundown of the most popular spots to lay your towel. The thing is though, July isn't actually the best time to get your feet wet, it's still rainy season in most of the country which can have a serious impact on your tan. Don't let that discourage you from heading down south though. The monsoon gets a lot of bad press in travel guides and the like but the reality is far from the rain-whipping, palm-tree uprooting typhoon portrayed on Gilligan's Island (a typhoon and a monsoon are completely different meteorological phenomena, you see). Certainly in the Gulf of Thailand, rainy season usually means no more than an hour or so of rain, often at night or early morning. Things are a little different on the west coast where Phuket starts to get pretty whipped, although the real rain won't start there for another month or so. The thing is, this is a great time to get away since the beaches aren't packed with wankers and bungalow operators are more pliant at the bargaining table. Generally the weather is harsher on the west coast, although this means that within a month or so you'll be able to surf in Phuket. In the gulf, Koh Samet, the closest to Bangkok, tends to stay the driest and is good if you're pressed for time. If you've got a week or two then by all means head down to the southern islands and you'll get your share of sunny days. On the other hand, if the weather gods decide that it's to be wet and miserable then there's no guilt about not getting out and about or in the water, leaving you free to pursue the goal you really came here to achieve, lying around relaxing and basically doing bugger all.



KOH CHANG

The name in Thai means "Elephant" and contrary to popular myth, this island is not named after a popular alcoholic beverage. Koh Chang is a relative newcomer to mainstream tourism and the addition of an airport on the mainland opposite is bringing heaps of sun hedonists. That said, much of the island remains less developed than many other popular islands, and to be frank, it ain't party central – which many see as a good thing. Excellent white sand, and the little sea critters on the beaches can provide excellent nighttime entertainment. It's only a few hours by road from Bangkok so on a weekend accommodation becomes tight and prices go up.

KOH TAO

Tao is probably best known as a Mecca for divers. Generations of young and keen Cousteaus have ventured below the briny blue, pursuing their PADI Open Water certificate. There are some more challenging dive sites in Thailand, though not nearly so convenient – and because of gentle currents, a solid infrastructure, and reasonable prices, this is one of the best places in the region to get started. Most of the operators have formed a dive association that is now working with some success to preserve the sites and open a few new ones, halt coral damage and such. Tao is a great place for whale sharks and the island itself is beautiful, with great food and a surprisingly lively party scene.

KOH SAMET

Ah, Koh Samet! A beautiful sand island and national park just a short motor from Bangkok. Don't worry about those malaria and rabies warnings; as a visitor you're pretty unlikely to pick up anything more than a tan. As the closest beach to Bangkok worth going to, Samet is popular with weekenders Thais, so rooms can be a bit short Saturday night and whenever there's a public holiday. But if you go midweek, you can enjoy empty beaches and cheap prices without the hassle of an overnight bus trip down south. Not much jungle interior to explore – it's really just a strip of white sand with sun, bungalows and bars on it, so it's perfect for quaffing, stuffing your face and relaxing – and little else.

KOH PHI PHI

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

KOH SAMUI

Once, years ago, Samui was a hippie traveller's playground. Back then there was only one bar on Chaweng, nobody shaved and the only thing anyone wanted was peace and love. Yup, 2001 was quite a year. But most of the backpackers have grown up, put on shorts, socks and sandals, had a few kids and are back on Samui – now looking for peace and quiet. You can find that, but you can also find pizza places, nightclubs, Starbucks, tailor shops and all the other trappings of modern life. Some may hanker for

the old days, but the beaches are still great and if you're honest with yourself, air-con room beats bamboo shack every time.

KOH PANGAN

"Hand me another mushie shake before these pills kick in, would you? And stop Bogarting that joint. Is that Harry lying in a puddle of sick over there? Oh my god! I think my face is melting!" Yup, Koh Pangan sure is a wild, drug-crazed, hedonistic pleasure boat for hippies, slackers and other layabouts. Home of the Full Moon Party and all, and you've heard what happens there!

Well, if that's your bag, man, you may be headed for disappointment. Things sure aren't like they used to be, and for most people it's good riddance. Sure, you can drink and dance all night at Had Rin on the full moon, but if the local coppers catch a whiff of draw or you're a little too artificially loved up, you're looking at an extended tour of Thailand's legal system.

The island boasts stunning beaches, good value rooms and a certain dreamy, isolated quality that has people staying for weeks at a time doing... absolutely nothing. Around full-moon time (check the Koh Pangan page for the date of the next party) the island fills up and rooms are hard to get. There are also plenty of supporting parties to the full moon that are often better than the main event.

KRABI

When people talk about Krabi (it's actually the name of the whole province) they're usually talking about one of three places. Firstly, there's Krabi Town, which is a charming seaport that serves as a ferry hub on the mainland and is famous for bargain accommodation and great food. There's Ao Nang, not far away, which is a tourist town centred on the beachfront road with plenty of resorts, restaurants and tailor shops. Up the beach and accessible only by boat are Tonsai and world-famous Railay. Famous primarily among rock-climbers, that is, who scale the spectacular limestone edifices that encircle the beach.

KOH LANTA

Although only 'discovered' by tourists relatively recently and often picks up the overspill when Phuket and Krabi are full, Koh Lanta is a large and lush island offering a variety of accommodation and activities. The tourist infrastructure starts in the north with luxury resorts and gets more and more rustic as one heads down the main north-south road. Since the island basically shuts down during low season, when storms batter the seaward coast, Lanta remains thankfully 'unsaturated' with tourist development.



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PHUKET

As Thailand's largest island with a long and prosperous history, Phuket can seem like its own world. Connected to the mainland by a causeway, the north-south oriented island has a jungle heart surrounded by white-sand beaches. The most popular area for tourism is Patong Beach, where you'll find bars, restaurants, hotels and shops all jammed together by what is actually a very nice beach. All the comforts of home are here, but if you're after something more rustic there's Phuket Town, an old Chinese-style town, and plenty of other more secluded spots inland.

PATTAYA

A couple of hours to the east of Bangkok, Pattaya is a lively town that caters to every whim. Notorious for its naughty nightlife, there is much more at this resort than its reputation would lead you to believe. Name a sporting activity or indulgent pastime (paintball, chopper riding, deep sea fishing, go-karting, drinking and eating sausages, to name a few) and they have it here. The beach is not spectacular in the town – you have to head to Jomtien for that, or out to sea, but it isn't the sort of place where you come to tan - unless your hotel has a pool.

HUA HIN

The first beach resort in Thailand, this is a more traditional-style resort town that is undergoing a bit of a renaissance these days. Only a few hours south of Bangkok, it is convenient, inexpensive (if you want it to be), surrounded by golf courses, and one of the few places in the country where you can ride horses on the beach. No beach bungalows here – you have to walk to the beach from the cheaper places, but accommodations cover the whole gamut from wooden cells to lavish five-star hotels.

CHA-AM

Like its big brother up the coast, Hua Hin, Cha-Am is most popular with Thai holiday makers who want to get out of Bangkok for a weekend. The difference between the two is that Hua Hin is somewhat Royal, has many five-star hotels and people walk around in polo-shirts. Cha-Am is more popular with students and young Thais who go there to swim, float around on inner-tubes and spend the night drinking and dancing, leaving the place deserted on weekdays. The township fronts onto the wide, white beach which is quite developed. No grass huts here. Certainly a cultural experience, just not the temple kind.

KHAO LAK

What was once an up and coming resort town on the Andaman coast came to a grim end on Boxing Day last year. While most of Thailand suffered relatively little damage and repairs have progressed quickly, Khao Lak, with its narrow bay and shallow beach focused the wave onto the land which flattened the place, taking many lives with it. It is difficult to say when things will get back to normal, but as an example, Le Meridian resort have announced that they will reopen in November. For now, travel here is not recommended.

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KOHLANTA LAY OF THE SAND

PLACES TO CRASH

Bungalows include: In Pra Ae/ Klong Dao, **Lanta Palm Beach** and **Lanta Long Beach**. In Klong Nin beach, all of the bungalow operations are open including **Atcha Hut**. For a Goa-style warm and friendly atmosphere try **Lanta Paradise** (with swimming pool), **Lanta Nice Beach** and **Nature Beach**. In the deep south of the island there are several cheap and picturesque bungalows although access can be difficult. This is a particularly beautiful part of Lanta but is an extreme journey to navigate by motorbike. Luckily, bungalow operators in these parts do have their own 4WD vehicles to take you to and fro. Bungalows in the south include **Kangtiang Bay Resort**, **Marine Park View**, **Waterfall Bay** and **Bamboo Bay** resorts. Prices vary from Bt100-400. Lanta plays host to a number of boutique resorts, check out **Relax Bay** on Phra-Ae for relaxed European vibes and an excellent bar, rooms Bt700-3,000.

DAY TRIPPING

If drinking beer and watching the waves lap gets boring, there's other stuff to do. Lanta's size makes it a great place to motorbike if you don't mind a few dirt roads and pot holes. Visit the **National Marine Park** in the far south for a good road adventure. On your way, make a stop at the **Phru Bon Waterfalls**. Follow the meandering river up to the falls for an easy 45 minutes. It ain't Niagara, but with the steady rain fall that now occurs on Lanta they are bound to be in high flow. The **Mai Kao Caves** are also worth a visit, on the way to the old town. On your way over to the old town also check out the view from the top of **View Point Hill**. It looks

over a cluster of Islands to the east side of the island that head towards Trang. You also can't leave the island without visiting the ubiquitous **seagypsies** over in Ban sang Ga U.

NIGHTRIPPING & FEEDING TIME

If it is variety that you are after, there are several independent restaurants still operating on the island. These include Thai restaurants in the Saladan and Klong Dao area, including **Lanta Seafood**, **Sea View** and **Sea Side**. In the main part of the town there is **Local Bar** which serves great coffee and Thai food in a cosmopolitan atmosphere. In Klong Nin there's **Otto Bar & Grill**, serving great Thai food, German food and the famous Otto chip (massive, thick chips). **Kook Gai** serves delicious contemporary Thai cuisine, and **Cafetero** serves the best coffee on the island while boasting an extensive Thai menu at very reasonable prices. You can also have a good flick through the cable channels. **Blue Moon**, apart from offering home stays, serves up fantastic food in a blissfully warm family atmosphere. There are also two nice restaurants in the old town worth a visit. These are **Fresh Restaurant** and **Krue Yai Restaurant** serving well-apriced authentic Thai cuisine. In terms of night-life, there are a number of independant bars and clubs operating along the west coast. Up near Saladan there's a clutch of bars with names like **Ozone**, **Funky Fish** or **Deep Forest**. On Klong Nin try out **Mofo's Clubhouse** or **Miami**. There's also a cool bar on top of **Viewpoint Hill**. Look out for flyers for parties that regularly occur.

WAY TO GO:

Train: (to Trang) Bt931 second class aircon, lower bunk, Bt1,480 for first class.

Fly: (to Krabi) Bt1,300 one way at the moment with special promotion from Bangkok Airways.

Bus: Many tour agents run buses to Lanta. Costs around Bt400 for 15 hours of discomfort interspersed with white-knuckle terror.

Koh Lanta is many things to many people. Up north, near the main town, the beach is speckled with dozens of high-to mid-range resorts, catering to the rich and middle class families. As one goes further south things become more rustic (including the road) and appeal more to the younger crowd and independant travellers. While the island doesn't have the hedonistic nightlife of Phuket or the movie-set splendor of Koh Phi Phi, Lanta is no ugly sister. It's a place for quiet times, beach lounging and exploring – with nary a tourist bus in sight. Many of the resorts on Lanta typically shut down in May and don't reopen until November or later, due to rough weather. However, for those keen for a tranquil and undisturbed getaway, it's not hard to find somewhere still open.

KOHSAMUI COCONUTREPUBLIC

Samui is a commonwealth of diversity: from five-star opulence to beach shack grunge, from Starbucks to street food, and from family central to hedonist's haven. You can come to Samui on a package tour, or you can just turn up and choose your own location. You can stay in the neon razzmatazz of nightlife areas in Chaweng or Lamai, or you can find your own mile of mostly deserted beach in Lipa Noi or Taling Ngam – with superlative views of the Angthong National Marine Park, beauty incarnate.

CHAWENG PLACES TO CRASH:

Lamai and Chaweng have the best beaches on the island. The largest village on Samui, most of Chaweng's accommodation is on the beach. A long-time favourite, **Ark Bar** (07-741 3798) has rooms from Bt2,000-2,500. Family Bungalows start at Bt1,000. A little luxury can be found at the **Montien House** (07-742 2145) for Bt2,200-3,000. North Chaweng is home to **Charlie's Huts**, (07-742 2343) recently refurbished into Bt700 aircon bungalows.

FEEDING TIME:

Try **The Deck** for laidback eating with a huge menu. **Blue Samui** offers top-notch seafood at decent prices. **Zico's**, a newly built homage to Brasilia has an all-you-can-eat feast for Bt630, with the super-sexy Queen Samba dancers to make your hormones salsa. One of the best Italian eateries in town is **Vecchia Napoli** and **Prego** is also good, boasting a soothing-on-the-senses design and an endless supply of free, tasty bread with balsamic vinegar and olive oil. Jeff Lord's **Betelnut** has some fantastic treats, like chili ice cream. If you want to watch the world pass by in the day while munching on a panini, take a street-side chair at **Cafe Uno**.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

Right on the Chaweng Beach Road, there's a great filling station for booze, Cajun and Creole food, and live blues called the **Coco Blues Company**. Opposite McDonald's is **Tropical Murphy's** with draught Guinness and Kilkeny, and Filippino cover band **Ovada**. Try **POD** for aircon and cool cocktails or **Christy's** for their ladyboy revue, which is funny and free. The big clubs in Chaweng are still the **Reggae Pub**, for Euro-beat and drinking games, and the **Green Mango**, for hard house and classic

party tunes. Newcomer London-style **Mint Bar** has brought island nightlife up to par with cool tunes and celebrity DJs most months. **Penny Lane**, situated in the heart of town plays classic rock tracks and serves tasty food. Also on the blues and food kick, **Springer Pub** is in south Chaweng. **Bar Solo** plays US club sounds and half the club is outdoors. The latest club to open in north Chaweng is **Pandora**. It's a touch of al fresco Mediterranean and is the only club that has a sauna, Jacuzzi and a pool with fibre optic lights which change the colour of the water seven times every 30 seconds.

LAMAI PLACES TO CRASH:

Smaller than Chaweng, but it's just as vibrant. Rest your head at **Lamai Inn 99**, (07-742 4211) with fan rooms from Bt600-1600. The bargain huts must be **No Name** (07-742 4666) from Bt300-800 with fan. Or try **Rose Garden** (07-745 8116) for comfort in heavenly floral surroundings at Bt400-950. **Spa** (07-723 0855) has new rooms for Bt800, or Bt3,000 with a sea view and an upstairs private deck. Spa also has one of the finest restaurants on the island, with a huge menu which must be annoying to all the fasting crew that hang out there. **Wanta** (07-742 4550) has fantastically equipped bungalows for Bt1,200-2,000 with wide-screen TV's and triple-wide beds.

FEEDING TIME:

The Oasis on the way out of Lamai on the ring road boasts Euro toilets, Bt70 breakfasts and Sunday roasts. The all-you-can-eat BBQ is a welcome weekly event at **El Dorado**, every Friday. Meanwhile, the biggest fried breakfast award goes to **Harry's Bar**. **The Cliff** sells Portuguese piri-piri chicken, and has fantastic views over the sea with a bar that will make you think you're in an old Duran Duran

video. Newly opened **Juice Dude** at Red Bicycles now offers power drinks, sports nutrition and organic juice. **The Red Fox** at Lamai beach just down a small street opposite McDonald's has Sunday dinners and pop quiz nights.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

Lamai also has a healthy club scene with **Supersub** boasting the only club to stay open past 2am, **Bauhaus** for all your foam-party needs, and plenty of beer bars where you can cheat Cupid by mingling with ladies of the evening.

BIG BUDDHA AND BAN RAK PLACES TO CRASH:

Known for its massive Buddha image at one end of the island, this is a tranquil area to get away from the nightlife and hooligans. While the beaches are nice enough, the swimming ain't so hot but the sunsets are great. **Shambala** offer rooms from Bt400-800 and has a good menu of Thai and Western dishes. **Shabash** (07-724 5035) has beach huts from Bt1,400-1,800 depending how close you want to be to the sea. They also serve up a unique menu of Middle Eastern, Indonesian, Indian curries and Thai specialties that are well worth sampling. **Samui Mermaid** (07-742 7547) offers great value for Bt500 with cable. If you want to spend a little more, the brand new **Saboey** (07-743 0450-8) resort will spoil you rotten with its luxury beach houses and so it should with bungalows beginning at Bt3,000-7,000.

FEEDING TIME:

For a great Western-style stuffing try **Elephant and Castle** – maybe the best Sunday roast on the island – or **Aux Amis** for some refined French grub. Every Sunday **Secret Garden**

Bungalows has live music with a bar and BBQ, which attracts many expats. If you're looking for a great area for sunset gazing, this is definitely the island's most technicolour spot.

BOPHUT VILLAGE PLACES TO CRASH:

A peaceful oasis, this quaint fishing village is the perfect middle ground between Chaweng and Maenam. The best deal is **Rasta Bay** for Bt250. **Papa Joes** has a dorm for Bt150, but if you want to splash out a little more try **Eden Bungalows** situated in a lush garden with a pool for Bt800-Bt1600. In Bophut, most shops and cafes have converted the rooms above to luxury apartment/rooms. One of the best bargains is **The Ayuthaya Garden Bar** offering air-con, fridge, cable and hot water with views: Bt800-1200. Also worth a look is **The Red House**, which has balconies facing the beach to watch the boats come in. It also has a great roof garden with 360-degree views for Bt1,650, with cable and air-con. The beach area has many other bungalow complexes. Further along, try the **Gecko** home of the mellow house groove "Sunday session" which goes until late; rooms start at Bt1,000. Other operations worth checking out further up the beach are **Freehouse**, **Cactus** and **Za Zen**.

FEEDING TIME:

This is the best place to eat on Samui and, apart from catching ferries to Koh Phangan, eating and relaxing is all you can do. There is a plethora of fantastic restaurants, from traditional Thai through French and Italian, to Middle Eastern. The **Happy Elephant** boasts the best in sea food, **La Baya** and **Juzza's** for pizza. Other must tries are **Two Tigers** for real home-cooked cakes tasty cookies, fresh juice and acoustic music and **La Siren** for a great French fodder. For something totally different

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there's **Healthy and Fun**, which is part vegetarian restaurant, part yoga and healing centre. They also show art films on occasion. Hit **Billabong** if you want a taste of down under.

NIGHTRIPPING:

Some of the popular haunts are **Billabong** for sports and live blues, and **The Starfish and Coffee Bar** for laidback sounds in a relaxing ambience. **The Frog and Gecko** has good beer and a popular Wednesday pub quiz with top prizes.

MAENAM

PLACES TO CRASH:

Maenam Resort (07-7425 116) has bungalows starting at Bt1200-1800; **Cleopatra's Palace** (07-7425 486) is Bt400 or Bt800 with aircon. The **Fah Hotel** is like a slice of the Florida Keys with a Thai twist and loads of charm. It has luxury rooms starting at Bt1,500, or for a real romantic treat and love inn, book yourself into the "Honeymoon Suite" for Bt2,000.

FEEDING TIME:

For grub, **Gallery Pizza** has freshly-cooked cakes, breads and pizzas and at **About Cafe** you can watch the passers-by whilst enjoying a fresh juice or homemade yogurt. Also, check out **The Lucky Monkey's** fine UK-style Indian curries. **Angela's Cafe** is an old favourite offering choice and value. There's an Italian restaurant called **La Trattoria** that serves home made ice cream and great lasagne.

DAYTRIPPING:

The latest craze is the **Canopy Adventure** (07-741 4150) where you slide along ropes to various tree houses above the coconut trees and a waterfall for Bt1,400 per head. They offer a free shuttle service to the site. For those who like to take it a little easier you could spend the afternoon at the **Butterfly Garden** (07-742 4020) at Nattien Beach. They have spiders as well. 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. They take you snorkelling, elephant trekking, 4x4 offroading, and to watch Thai cooking and even coconut milk-making. There is now a world-class golf course on the island, the **Santiburi Golf and Country Club** (07-741 8557) and **Samui Golf** (07-724 5384) can teach you how to swing and choose the right bat. For those who think golf is a great way to ruin a good walk, try **Yogi Bear Ha Ha** (01-787 9148). Situated on a back road between Bohput and Chaweng, **Red Bicycles** (07-726 7202) can rent you a mountain bike and take you on a tour through the jungle and more. A less strenuous way to see the island is from the sea. **Kia Ora** (07-745 2264) Catamaran will take you out to sea with a fully stocked bar. **Samui Quads and Paintball** (01-371 0744) has quads and paintball. If big-game



Chaweng's sock thieves at work

fishing

is a lure for you, then talk to **Mr Ung's** (07-723 0114). At **Samui Crocodile Farm**, located 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 derring-do are also on the cards at the **Samui Snake Farm** (07-741 8680-1). For the morbid soul, **Luang Pho Daeng** was a monk whose undecomposed body is in a glass case for viewing at the Khunaram Temple near the Namuang Waterfall. Most travel agents do daily trips to **Koh Tao**, probably one of the most beautiful places on earth. **Sea Breeze** (07-742 5607) tours and **Aquademia** (01-091 0107) can help. Bring a copy of **Farang to Aquademia** and get 10% off your booking.

ROADTRIPPING

The two main taxis are green and yellow aircon saloons and songthaews (shared pickups). A saloon costs about Bt300 anywhere on the island for two people, and more if you've other friends tagging along. For short trips expect to pay Bt150/200. Make sure you haggle over the price first, or have the meter running. Songthaews are Bt50-100 for the longer journeys and Bt20 for short trips. You can also hire one for a round-the-island trip for around Bt1,000. Motorbike taxis, however, can work out as the cheapest form of travel. Renting a motorbike is Bt150 per day, but remember that road accidents are the number-one cause of death

in Thailand.

With an average of four deaths on Samui and 200 serious accidents a month you are risking your life to ride one. There's no green cross code, or crosswalks on the roads of Samui. And to add insult to injury, if you get knocked off by a drunken local because he is jabbering on his mobile phone while driving an overpowered SUV, you will pay for the privilege – as much as the local bullies in brown think they can get out of you. Renting a Jeep is a much safer option. **Budget** is insured so is your best bet, if you don't want to end your visit in tears.



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WAY TO GO

FERRY: **Seatram** boats to Samui from Don Sak and Surrattani 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 frills like aircon and movies. Ferries to Surat Thani leave from **Nathon**.

PLANE: **Bangkok Airways** still has the monopoly on flights from Bangkok for now, leaving almost every hour until 9pm Bt3,500/ 6,500 OW/return. There are sometimes flights for Bt2000 usually the first and last of the day. Ring for details 02-265 555. There are direct flights to **Singapore, Phuket** and now **Krabi**. Don't forget the Bt400 departure tax and be wary of taxi drivers overcharging at the airport.

TRAIN: A sleeper ticket is Bt900 to BKK-Surat Thani for an aircon, lower bunk, second-class berth and Bt1,339 for 1st class. Prices vary for all sorts of odd reasons. Add Bt180 for bus and ferry transfers. Booking in advance is recommended as it is often fully booked.

BUS: Bt450 from Samui to Bangkok, or vice-versa, takes 14 hours in total.

KOHPANGAN BUCKETISLE

Clear blue skies (mostly) and emerald green seas welcome visitors and there's plenty going on to keep them occupied. Along with all the parties going off, there are also loads of activities, day trips and courses. Each region of the island has its own special character and there is enough to keep even the most energetic traveller occupied with amazing snorkelling and diving and everything from kiteboarding to cookery courses. But seriously, people come to this island as it is the home of the debauched Full Moon Party, a mad night of dance, drink and more drink. Luckily it's only once a month.

BAN TAI

Near the FMP – but out of hearing distance, Ban Kai and Ban Tai have some great resorts on never-ending white sand beaches.

PLACES TO CRASH:

Near the full-moon party – but out of hearing distance, **Ban Kai** and **Ban Tai** have some great resorts on never-ending white sand beaches. Try **Harmony** on a secluded **Ban Kai** beach with aircon bungalows, swimming pool and sauna or **Hansa Resort** in **Ban Tai** Village for aircon beachfront rooms with minibars, baths and TVs. **Milky Bay** and **Morning Star** are great new places and **Dewshore** is another favourite.

HAD RIN

There are untold places to rest your weary head in the island's nightlife capital but it does get full a week before the party. The Had Rin Peninsula has two main accommodation areas, either on the busy east-side (sunrise) or the quieter bohemian sunset side of Had Rin Nai.

PLACES TO CRASH:

There's untold places to rest your weary head in the island's nightlife capital but it does get full a week before the party. The Had Rin peninsula has two main accommodation areas, either on the busy east-side (sunrise) or the quieter bohemian sunset side of Had Rin Nai. Best to book ahead if you can.

On Sunrise: There is loads to choose from, though **Paradise Bungalows** has a good variety of rooms and **Sea Garden** and **Jonathan** are classy joints. **Drop Inn** also has a new hotel with spa and penthouse rockstar sweets.

On Sunset: **Ya Ya's Guest House** is a great find and **Neptune's Villa**, **Phangan Buri** and **Vimarn Samut** are well run with great aircon rooms. Further around the peninsula, there are a few new resorts and some old-school bargains, **Sari Kantang** is an excellent find on Leela Beach.

WEST SIDE

The west coast of Koh Pangan is a string of beautiful, white sandy coves; it has the best coral reef, great sunset views, loads of decent beach bars, and a giant freshwater lake.

PLACES TO CRASH:

In Woktum Bay, goodies include: **Porn Sawan**, **Cookies** and **Tranquil**; in Sri Thanu Village, **Chai Country** is a really cool place. Had Chao Phao is home to **See Thanu**, **Phangan Cabana** and the bohemian **Sea Flower**, all well-run resorts on a cracking beach. **The Village Green** is a great restaurant serving fantastic Euro – Asian cuisine. **Had Son Resort** is set on its own beach with a swimming pool and great service. Had Yao is a lively beach with everything from the **Eagle Pub** for a cracking night out, to **Over the Bay** for peaceful hillside vistas and great seafood. Sandy Bay is an all-time favourite. **Had Yao** and **Bay View Resorts** are also popular. Had Salad, is a beautiful deserted beach with good value **Salad Huts** and the luxurious **Had Lad** and **Green Papaya Resorts**. Near Ko Ma, Mae Had has the best diving and snorkelling on Koh Phangan; **Island View Cabana** and **Wang Sai** are good-uns.

CHALOKLAM

Chaloklam has some well-established resorts, a few cool

bars

and like many villages around KPN, there are some nice houses to rent.

PLACES TO CRASH:

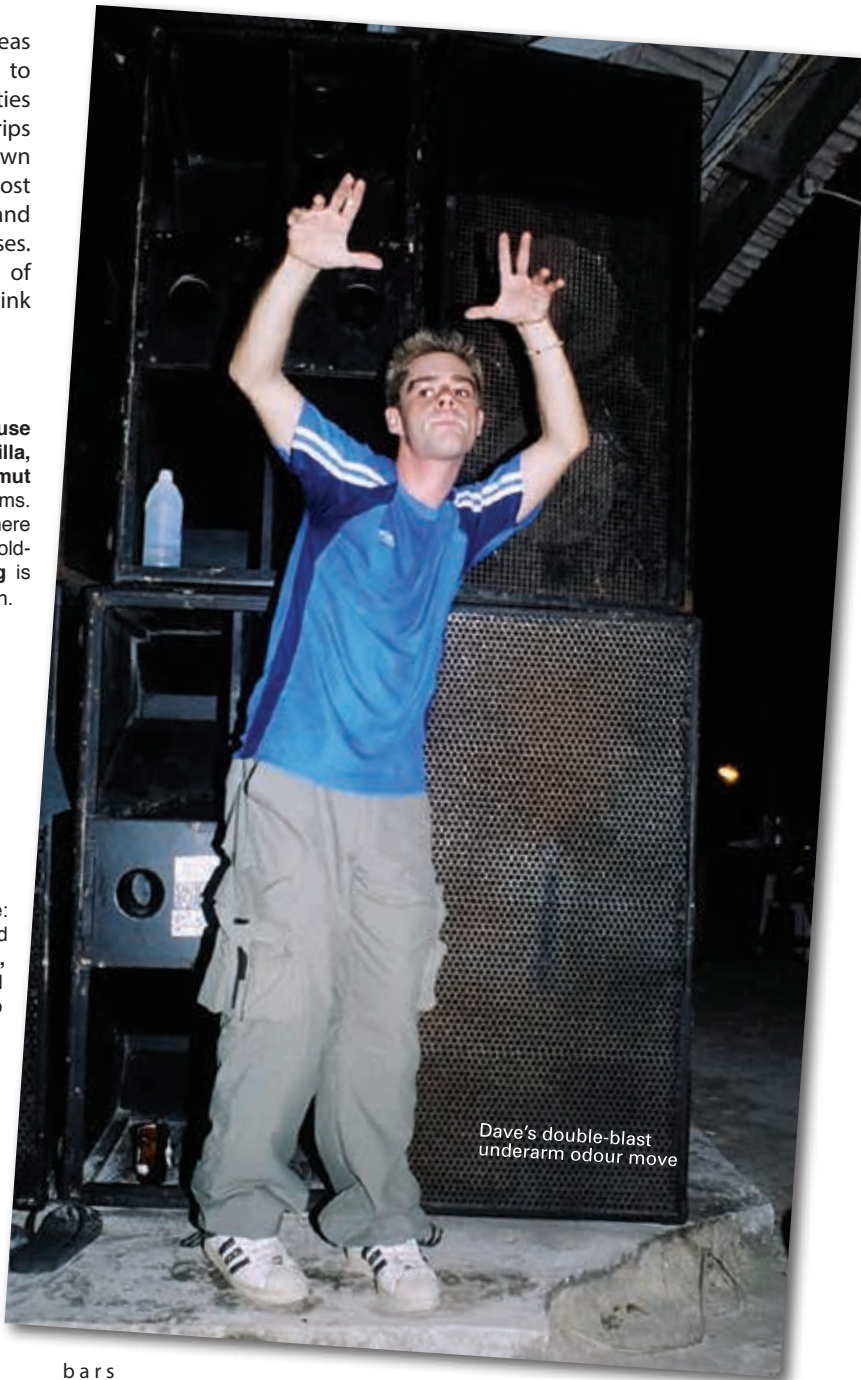
Chaloklam has some well-established resorts, a few cool bars and like many villages around KPN, there are some nice houses to rent. **Fanta** has nice beach gaffs and **Chaloklum Bay** is well run, has some great aircon rooms and is clean. **Had Khom** and **Coral Bay** are

on

their own secluded beach.

NORTHEAST

On the more remote side of the island there are three very popular beaches; Bottle Beach is Old Skool Phangan, Than Sadet is home to the island's biggest waterfall, and Thong Nai Pan has all the trappings of Bohemian beach life. Further round, it





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becomes more rugged; here Hat Tien and Hat 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.

PLACES TO CRASH:

On the more remote side of the island there are three very popular beaches; **Bottle Beach** is old-school Phangan, **Than Sadet** is home to the island's biggest waterfall and **Thong Nai Pan** has all the trappings of Bohemian beach life. Further round, it becomes more rugged; here **Hat Tien** and **Hat Yao East** provide real castaway dreams. **Bottle Beach** is only accessible by boat from Chaloklum, there's; sometimes a waiting list for good rooms. On **Thong Nai Pan Noi**, **Thong Ta Pong** are good as are **Thong Ta Pan**, **Panviman** and **Baan Puri** – posh pricey gaffs that take Visa cards. On **Thong Nai Pan Yai**, **Dreamland** and **Nice Beach** are popular. **Than Sadet** has a variety of cheap rustic bungalows and some more luxurious resorts like **Mai Pan Rai**. **Had Yao East** has just two resorts, and **Had Tien** is home to the infamous **Sanctuary**, with a real traveller vibe.

ROADTRIPPING:

If you take a songthaew solo, you'll pay about Bt250 to go anywhere on the island. Normal prices from Thong Sala (the main port and town) are: Bt20 for Ban Tai and Woktum; Bt50 for Had Rin, Chaloklam, Had Yao, Had Chao Phao, Sri Thanu; Bt80 for Thong Nai Pan, Mae Had and Had Salad.

Motorbike rentals start at Bt150 per day and dirt bikes start at Bt200 for a clapped out 125 to Bt400 and up for a 250. Suzuki Jeeps cost around Bt1,000/day. Only experienced riders should attempt the hills – and do it sober!

Boat taxis are available from Thong Sala, Chaloklam, Ban Tai and Had Rin. Costs are similar to songthaew prices.

DAYTRIPPING:

Rich coral reefs run along the north-west coast of the island, supporting a vibrant underwater world making it an excellent place to snorkel and one of the cheapest and least-crowded places to dive in Thailand. There are fishing trips, around the island boat trips and loads of watersports on offer including **catamarans**, **kiteboarding** and **cayaks** and **sunset horse rides** along the beach. There is also the **Jungle Gym** in Had Rin and Thong Sala, for fitness sessions and Thai Boxing tuition. Koh Phangan has acres of undisturbed tropical rainforest and a wild jungle interior. There are overnight mountain treks to the top of Khao Ra and coastline walks making it possible to beach

hop round the whole island. There are loads of temples to visit, spa and meditation retreats to sort your head out and it's also a pretty good place to do bugger all.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

The Full Moon Party is far more than a party; it is Had Rin's dance music festival, with everything from drum and bass to full-on psy-trance. **Paradise Bungalows**, the original FMP site, puts on the biggest show with inspired decor and superb resident and guest international DJs. Resident DJA also plays at **The Backyard**, starting at 11am as Had Rin shuts down and licks its wounds; they also put on three cracking nights per week. **The Vinyl Club** with its enormous sound system bangs out hardhouse-techno-psy-trance during the FMP, and all month long. **The Orchid** plays fresh drum and bass and **Harmony** plays underground progressive trance.

The **Cactus** and the **Drop Inn** squeeze in a few classics amongst a more commercial music policy. Breaking the psy-trance mould, **The Big Boom Bar** is busy day and night, especially with their volleyball contest a few days before the FMP. The music policy is progressive to tech/hard house. Those seeking a refuge should go to the **Floating Bar** or the **Outback Bar**.

There are loads of other great bars and places to go out around the island with Thong Sala a big favourite. There are also several cracking outdoor party venues, just look out for the banners to find out when the next big one is!

WAY TO GO:

Bus: Bt350 including ferry. Buses leave Bangkok about 7pm and get you to Suratthani the next morning. Thefts on the bus are common.

Train: 1st class sleeper Bt1150 and 2nd class sleeper Bt650. Trains leave from Hualumpung station at 5 to 7pm and get you to Suratthani the next morning.

For a fast comfortable crossing, get the **Seatran** ferry to Koh Phangan, it's half the time of the others for Bt370. The others are usually sold with a joint ticket, which are OK but not as luxurious.

From Koh Samui (Mae Nam) take the **Lomptra Catermaran** for the quickest and most comfortable crossing or the **Had Rin Queen** for the most frequent crossings and a reliable service.

KOHTAO TANKEDUP

Sunny days are here again as the island begins to fill up with the start of the European holiday season. Reduced bungalow prices are still available although expect prices to increase as the Island becomes busier. If you're here for the diving there are about 35 dive shops ready to cater for all your aquatic acrobatics from beginner to pro as well as technical diving. This is one of the best and cheapest places in the Gulf of Thailand to get a diving certification. For the less energetic, enjoy quiet days in secluded bays and take in the superb scenery which keeps people coming back here again and again.

PLACES TO CRASH

Accommodation caters for all tastes and budgets. Choices start from traditional Thai wooden huts to the more luxurious pads with the all mod cons and prices to match. Although many resorts have their own dive centres most are happy to cater for non-divers, except during the peak of high season. Don't despair, there are many places happy to house and feed you any time of the year diver or not. A typical beach hut costs roughly ฿400 a night, double if you want aircon. Bungalows inland and on the mountains are usually cheaper.

MAE HAAD

The main port of arrival for visitors has everything you would expect to find in a main town: shops, restaurants, travel agents, banks, health centres, post office and the much needed veterinary clinic. There is a small range of budget and luxury accommodation to be found here. **Sensi paradise** is a beautifully designed Thai-style beach resort set in a tropical garden. **Beach Club** and **Blue Diamond** are also good choices.

WEST COAST

Sairee is the most popular area of the island, with the largest beach, where

a full range of accommodation can be found. Starting from King Rama V Rock moving north, **Intouch Resort** is a traditional Thai-style resort with established huts and a relaxed atmosphere. **AC Resort** offers a choice of fan or aircon bungalows and a swimming pool. **SB Cabana** and **Sairee Huts** have good value centrally located wooden bungalows. **Silver Sands** offers old and new wooden bungalows set in a tropical garden. **Simple Life Villas**, an island institution with a loyal following, offer a choice of big concrete bungalows and smaller huts with a regular crowd and a great atmosphere. **Sunset Buri Resort** offers a Mediterranean feel and provides aircon or fan rooms and a swimming pool overlooking the beach. **Blue Wind**, is a quiet haven with daily yoga. For classic old style beach huts try **Mama O Chais** slightly further north.

If you want to be away from the beach and the oily tanners and still see the sea try **OK view** or **Moonlight Bungalows** inland from the beach on the mountain. Towards the north end of Sairee and the island there is a fair choice of rooms to be found. **Sun Sea** and **Silver Cliff** bungalows have basic cheap huts on the rocks. More



upmarket is **Thipwimarn** resort with a choice of aircon or fan and outstanding views from its terrace restaurant. **CFT Bungalows** is a peaceful escape and offers meditation and massage.

THE EAST

The northeast coast is much quieter and more secluded with only a few places to stay. Worth checking out are **Hing Wong Bungalows**, **Green Tree** or **View Rock** resorts. Moving south, Tanote Bay has a small selection of rooms 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 places can be arranged from the pier by either taxi car or long tail boat.

THE SOUTH

The main area here is Chalok Baan Kao, quieter than Sairee, set between San Jao beach and Taa Toh Lagoon. Easily accessible by road with a choice of accommodation and all the amenities you would expect to find being the third largest beach. **Sunshine Resort**, **Koh Tao Tropicana**, **Taa Toh lagoon** and **Koh Tao Resort** are all good choices.

DAYTRIPPING

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Koh tao

life and easily accessible dive sites, many would-be Cousteau's choose to start their dive careers here. A full range can be completed with either SSI or PADI being the major certification standards. Tech Diving courses are available for the less faint hearted. Most dive operations are members of the Koh Tao Dive Operators Club which is responsible for setting professional standards and monitoring and improving the marine ecology through ongoing projects aimed at promoting environmental awareness. With price competition all but levelled by the KT-DOC your choice of dive school depends on reputation, service, and quality. Fair play we say.

Snorkelling also provides a good opportunity to see the abundance of marine life here. There are many secluded bays and beaches where you can while away the day's snorkelling and swimming. Check out easily accessible Rocky Bay (฿20 entrance fee), Chalok Baan Kao, where you can snorkel with sharks and glimpse moray eels and, if you're lucky, turtles. A good day out can be had by long tail boat cruising round the island visiting the more secluded bays and beaches. Try Jansom Bay or Hing Wong. If you're still keen for some water based activities check out **MV Sports**, **Blacktip Water Sports** or **Switch Water Sports**, all offer wakeboarding and water skiing and more.

KOH NANGYUAN.

A perfect paradise; three islands joined together by sand bars – seen nowhere else in the world. With only one resort and no cars or motorbikes this island provides a true getaway or romantic retreat. The surrounding waters are teeming with marine life which makes it an ideal place for day-trippers into snorkelling and diving. Approximately 1km from Koh Tao it is also accessible direct from both Koh Samui and Koh Phangnan by Lomprayah Catamaran

For those who prefer *terra firma* there is plenty to keep you occupied. When the dive boats are out you can relax on peaceful beaches and sleep your hangover off in peace. If you're the active type, trekking trails are plentiful and the most arduous routes reward the survivors with secluded 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. **Zen Gecko**, on the road to Tanote Bay, offers rock climbing and bouldering.

NIGHTTRIPPING

With dozens if not hundreds of divers

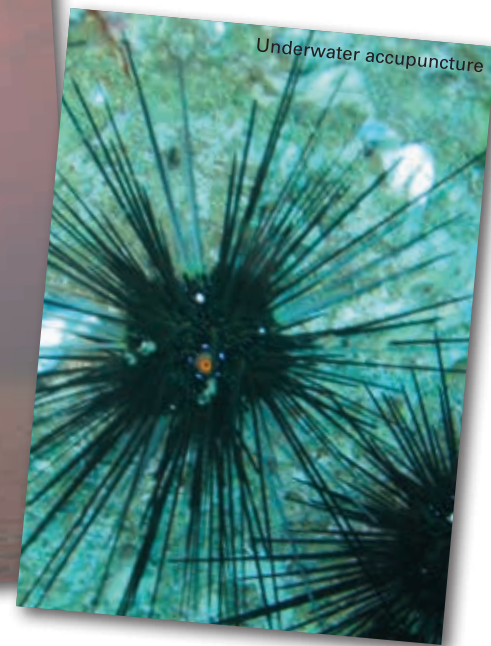
completing courses daily and a regular party crowd there is always an air of celebration and vibrant party scene on the rock. A regular mix of home grown talent and visiting DJ's play a variety of musical styles with the freshest sounds guaranteed. Most venues are open nightly although the party night changes, keeping the atmosphere alive and the energy flowing non-stop. The party scene is one of late nights, great people and good spirits. Check out the many posters and fliers for special party nights and musical style.

Check out **AC Bar's** party nights on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays with resident **DJ's Simon Solo** and **Jamie Mack**, serving up housey breaks and beats with bundles of booze. **Intouch** with its open-air design opens Wednesdays and Sundays with **DJ Funky K** and guests spinning the vinyl to a regular upbeat party crowd. **Maya Bar** takes Mondays and Fridays with **DJ Saan** and **DJ Coconut** playing a blend of progressive tech and house. **Whitening** in Mae Haad holds parties every Friday with **DJ Pixy** and **DJ T** keeping the music alive and spirits flowing.

For bar butterflies there are plenty of places to choose from. In Sairee forever popular **Dry Bar**, ideal for sunset, serves great drinks and music in a continuously creative beach lounge setting. Relax and chill out at **Lotus Beach Bar** with a regular crowd and varied music policy. In Mae Haad **Dragon bar** serves up oriental mystique and seductive beats with an extensive cocktail list.

FEEDING TIME

The choice of eateries on Koh Tao is impressive whether you're after tasty Thai tucker or your favourite Farang fodder. **Puks Kitchen** and **Yang's**, Mae Haad, offer a wide choice of cheap tasty 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 cuisine using traditional recipes. **Farango Pizzeria** also offers a selection of classic Italian dishes. Try **Whitening Restaurant** between the piers for superb international and Thai cuisine. If you're after a monster breakfast to cure the hangover try **Greasy Spoon** breakfast bar and chip shop. In Sairee, **Suthep on the beach** offers a top choice of quality Thai and western food. Mash balls or Massaman it's all good as is the wit



of the humorous host. Check out the new Tapas restaurant near Sairee 7/11 with a hookah lounge and (Thailand's only?) absinthe bar! **El Toro** dishes up a selection of western food and pizza with big screen movies. **Choppers Bar and Grill**, now bigger and better with a second story extension and pool tables, serves an impressive choice of Western and Thai-style home cooking, draught and imported beers, and all-live sports events on a wide screen projector. Awesome! Check out **Green Mango Bar and Restaurant**, Sairee, popular with expats serving superb Sunday roasts. **New Heaven Restaurant**, Chalok Baan Kao, has beautiful views from its open air restaurant serving fresh seafood. Many resorts and bungalow restaurants offer a wide choice of quality Thai and Western food.

WAY TO GO:

Trains leave Hualhumphong Station in 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. There are various travel companies offering joint bus-and-boat tickets from Bangkok. Several ferries of various speeds leave from Koh Phangnan and Koh Samui mainly in the morning. Times and boats change depending on demand and the weather. Check travel agents for latest times and prices.

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PHUKET ALL SYSTEMS GO

Most beaches off the island's western flank were unaffected by the tsunami, and the ones that were, with the exception of Kamala, are quickly being repaired. The shops and hotels along Patong's beach road did sustain some damage, however, but the rest of the area's attractions, and its vibrant nightlife, are still intact. Kata and Karon, likewise, were not hit too badly. Otherwise, the island's infrastructure is functioning normally, and the beaches and water are more beautiful than ever. Tourist numbers are way down, though, which means there are good deals on flights and rooms, and other holiday packages.



PATONG

What was once party beach got hit pretty hard by the big wave, but Patong remains Phuket's most popular beach with holiday makers and it's here that you'll find all your water activities and tailor shops. Businesses opposite the beach may be closed for some time but the town is doing fine.

PLACES TO CRASH

Decent, well-maintained rooms under Bt1,000 are **Sweet Apartment** (Bt500; 076-341-359), **Le Vele** (Bt600; 076-340-336) and **Smile Inn** (Bt900; 076-340-455). In the Bt1,000-2,000 range try **Club Bamboo** (Bt1,100; Tel: 076-345-345) or **Icon Phuket** (Bt1,800; 076-296-735). At the top end, few spots are more beautiful than the **The Avantika** (Bt4,600; 076-292-801).

FEEDING TIME

Many Patong dining spots are disappointingly overpriced and bland, but there are a few bright stars. Try **Pan Yaah**, **Lim's** or **Pum**, or **Sphinx Restaurant & Theatre**, which also puts on Broadway-

style shows in its intimate upstairs theatre.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Bangla Rd is the most hectic zone with beer bars galore and the tawdry **Soi Katoe** drawing in the curious and depraved. **Soi Paradise** is a friendly, flamboyant area with gay bars and discos. **Dragon**, **Tiger**, **Crocodile** and **Safari** are the disco flavours of the month, while some refined places to lounge about in include **La Diva** and **Corsicana**. Wackier spots are the glitzy **Phuket Simon Cabaret** and the tiny **Rasta Pub**, incongruously tucked down the end of the pussy-show-zone, **Soi Seadragon**. Rousing live music at **Scruffy Murphy's** and **2 Black Sheep**.

KATA-KARON

The second most popular beaches suffered only minor damage and continue to draw crowds. Although quieter than Patong these two beaches support an active bar-

scene and have plenty of international nosh on offer. It's to here that surfers flock from June to November to ride the ocean swells.

PLACES TO CRASH

Budget: In Kata, **Lucky Guesthouse** (Bt300-450; 076-330-572), **Kata Country House** (Bt-600-900; 076-

333-210) and **Friendship Bungalow** (Bt500; 076-330-499). In

Karon, **Bazoom Hostel** (Bt80-490, 076-396-914) and **On The Hill** (Bt800; 076-286-469) – recommended for its views. More upmarket spots: the fetching **Kata Mint** (Bt1,500; 076-333-283) and **Sawasdee Village**, featuring a gorgeous tropical swimming pool (Bt2,800, 076-330979), both in Kata.

FEEDING TIME

Every second shop in Kata-Karon is a restaurant, so you're not going to starve here. These have stood the test of time: **Las Margaritas**, **Karon Caf**, **Red Onion** (Karon); **Bluefin Tavern**, **Gung Cafe**, **Coffee Pot** (Kata).

NIGHTTRIPPING

There are few nightspots to recommend aside from the chill-out bars **Dan Kwain** and **CafeDel Mar**, and the hard-rockin' **Easyriders**, along Taina Rd, Kata. For late-night adventure, get thee to Patong.

SOUTH-Chalong, Rawai, Nai Harn, Ao Sane

Sailing, slacking off. The beaches of Chalong and Rawai are nothing to write home about but they're both fine places to relax, chat with sailors, catch an island-hopping trip and gorge on seafood. Nai Harn is a stunning white beach favoured by locals, while Ao Sane is a pleasant little cove with good snorkelling.

PLACES TO CRASH

From cheap and cheerful to super-luxurious. Chalong: **International Youth Hostel** (Bt180-450; 076-281-325), **Shanti Lodge** (from Bt350, 076-280-233). Rawai: **Friendship Beach** (from Bt1,000, 076-288-996). Nai Harn/Ao Sane: **Baan Krating Jungle Beach Resort** (Bt2,000; 076-288-264), **Sunny's Nai Harn Beach Resort** (Bt950; 076-388-058), **The Mangosteen** (Bt4,500; 076-289-399).

FEEDING TIME

Thai/seafood: **Kan Eang 1&2**, Chalong, plus many **fresh seafood shops** along the Rawai beachfront. Western: **Bagels & Beyond**, **Sunshine Bakery** and **The Lighthouse** in Chalong; **Don's Cafe** in Nai Harn.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Yoonique Music Cafe in Nai Harn

is attracting a hip, young crowd with its Tuesday jam sessions, Friday Mexican food nights, and beach volleyball court. Other favourite hangouts are the **Freedom Bar**, **Nikita's** and **Islander Beer Garden** in Rawai, and the **Tamarind** and **Green Man Pub** in Chalong

NORTH-Kamala, Laem Singh, Surin, Bang Tao, Nai Thon, Nai Yang, Mai Khao

What was once the playground of the wealthy and well-known, Kamala and southern Bang Tao caught the brunt of the big wave and is undergoing reconstruction. That said, the other beaches are in fine shape and is still a beautiful area to visit.

PLACES TO CRASH

Aside from **Maikhao Bungalows/Campground** (01-8951233) or **Sirinath National Park bungalows/tents** at Nai Yang, most accommodation is firmly in the mid-to-insanely-expensive range. Some of the better spots: **Bangtao Beach Cottages** (from Bt2,200; 076-325-418), **Surin Beach Resort** (Bt1,400; 076-325-000), **Surin Bay Inn** (Bt1,000; 076-271-601).

FEEDING TIME & NIGHTTRIPPING

Some exceptional class-act restaurants/lounges in Bang Tao/Surin with prices to match include **Tatanka**, **Red Room**, **JJ's Irish Pub** and **Supper Club** – well worth splashing out for. More low-key are **Pepper's Pub**, **Farang Paradise** (Bt50 steaks!), **Black Cat** and **Diver's Bar**.

PHUKET CITY

It's official, the island's main centre is no longer a town, having been recently upgraded to city status. Plenty of funky shops/art galleries and historical Sino-Portuguese buildings to see on an afternoon

stroll. Gluttons take note – the range and quality of restaurants in Phuket City far surpass any of the resort areas.

PLACES TO CRASH

Pengman (Bt120; 076-211-186), **Thalang Guesthouse** (Bt320-550; 076-214-225), **Imperial Hotel** (Bt650; 076-212311), **Royal Phuket City** (Bt1900, 076-233-333).

FEEDING TIME

Just a sampling, Thai: **Tung Kha Cafe**, **Phuket View**, **Thammachart**, **Lemongrass**, **Nai Yao**, **Ka Jok Sii**, **Kota Khao Mun Kai**, (yellow noodle) shop near **Metropole Hotel** circle, **vegetarian shops** along Ranong Rd, **shops** along Phang Nga Rd. Italian: **La Gaetana**, **Salvatore's**. Indian: **Khanasutra**.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Trendy spots: **Seua Saming**, **XVI**, **Kor Tor Mor**. Beer drinkin' spots: **Timber Hut**, **O'Malley's**, **Michael's Bar**, **Dorn's Place**.

DAYTRIPPING

Some of the best things to see in Phuket are not in Phuket at all, including the smaller islands of **Coral**, **Raya** and **Yao Noi**; the forests of **Khao Sok**; and the cool karsts of **Phang Nga Bay**, best seen on a **sea canoe** tour (Sea Canoe Thailand, 076-212-252; John Gray's Sea Canoe, 076-254-505). Inland, there's **ATV** or **bicycle tours**, **elephant trekking**, **bungy jumping**, **Bang Pae** and **Tonsai waterfalls**, and the **Gibbon Rehabilitation Centre** in **Khao Phra Thaew National Park**, and **Kathu waterfall**. For wannabe or experienced sailors, the **Ao Chalong Yacht Club** welcomes anyone to join their regular Sunday sailing races (clubhouse near Chalong Pier, 01-892 4992).

ROADTRIPPING

Phuket's transport situation is improving with an island-wide effort

to convert freewheeling taxis to metered services, and the threat of meter-taxi drivers getting clubbed to death by tuk-tuk thugs is on the decline. Still no beach-hopping bus service though. **Metered taxis**, 076-250-333, 076-270-477 or 076-328-274. **Tuk-tuks**, island-wide services, jaw-dropping prices. **Songthaew buses**, between the main beaches and Phuket City (Ranong Rd), daytime hours, Bt15-25. **Aircon micro-bus** service, around Phuket City, Bt10. **Motorbike rental**, Bt150/day. **Car/Jeep rental**, Bt900/day. Note that driving in Phuket is an extremely dangerous undertaking not recommended for the faint of heart.

DIVING

There are too many dive shops to mention at all price levels, with most concentrated in Patong and Karon/Kata. **All 4 Diving** (5/4 Sawatdirak Rd, Patong. Tel 076 344 611) is a good place for divers unfamiliar with Phuket to touch base as they not only sell a wide range of dive equipment, but also provide a bookings service for many other dive operators so can advise you on what best fits your requirements.



WAY TO GO:

Plane: Bt2,730/5,460 ow/return (inc tax) from Bangkok with Thai Airways or Bt1,820/3,640 from Samui with Bangkok Airways

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Public Bus: Bt630 (direct) dep 5pm arrives 6:30am



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KRABI CLIFFHANGER

One of the country's most gorgeous provinces, Krabi has a wealth of natural distractions, and is best known for its most prevalent symbol: the limestone crag. The city itself makes for an easy-going stopover before taking a short drive to Ao Nang, with its long strip of sand, decent nightlife, and all the amenities. But most travellers - including a lot of families - make waves for the main main beaches on the Phra Nang Peninsula, namely the east and west sides of Railay, which are as enchanting as ever, and the prices for rooms plummet dramatically in the low season. Just around the headland is Tonsai Bay, a chill-out pad for younger travellers. And of course Railay has another high point for Spidermen and women: rock-climbing on the crags, which affords panoramic views of the breath-stealing beachscapes.

AO NANG

Putting Ao Nang on the global tourist map has by no means been a difficult task given its breathtaking beauty which commands one's attention instantly. With its rise to stardom being rapid and the dramatic increase in tourist arrivals looking more 'promising' each year, it's no wonder low season is longed for, particularly if you enjoy being engulfed in the torrid steaminess of the monsoon. You can be guaranteed beach vendors or katoys won't stalk you. Even at Ao Nang, still the most popular and developed of Krabi's beaches, you will be left alone to work on your tan. These are the reasons why the same faces can be seen back in the province year after year. Other benefits at this time are the cheap hotel rates on offer. Try Krabi Seaview Resort from Bt625, the beautifully situated Somkiet Buri Resort 300m from the beach for Bt1,200, or Wanna's Place, directly across from the beach from Bt900. Great for those travelling on a tighter budget, as you don't have to dive so deep into the purse to get great accommodation.

NIGHTRIPPING

The **Irish Rover Bar & Grill** is one of the few consistently busy bars in town with a friendly, laid-back atmosphere, draught beer and great fry-ups and roasts. **Encore Cafe** is the best place in town for live music. The old stayer, **Full Moon Bar**, smack bang in the middle of Ao Nang, is where you just can't miss a minute of the action. Nearby is the new **JJ Sports Bar**, a cosy cafe-style bar screening football day and night; and inside Ao Nang Centre is **Pickles**, an Australian pub, fully equipped with BBQ, swimming pool, pool table and Aussie beer for Bt60; some good parties are to be had here. The **Last Fisherman Bar** is by far the most ambient beach location for sunset drinks that tend to stretch on into the night and the other old stayer **Luna Beach Bar**, famous for their 'any excuse' parties with great cocktail deals. For independent travellers, **Lost Pirate** is the place for the latest low-down.

KRABI TOWN

This once slow-motion town has grown in fame due to its tranquillity, beauty and what some call 'real Thai-ness', the principal reason why it so entices. The capital of Krabi province is managing to preserve its small-town charm even though it's morphing into a busy hub. A flurry of new hotels now provide alternatives for travellers who have had enough of dank guesthouse rooms but don't want to splash out. They're all pretty much the same 2-3 star standard providing average service, the most central being **Green House Hotel**, a stone's throw from the department store. Another is **Krabi Loma Hotel** on Chao Fah Rd with twin rooms at Bt650 with aircon, bath, satellite TV, mini-bar, Internet and pool. An oldie-but-goody is **Grand Tower Hotel**, conveniently located on the corner of Chao Fah Rd, near the favourite bars, from Bt250. If you don't want to dive into your purse so deeply then there's always the guesthouses of which Krabi has plenty. 'Old school' **Cha Guesthouse** offers the cheapest huts in town from Bt100. The charming **Dukes Cottage** has fan doubles for Bt280, a funky restaurant downstairs, a guitar for anyone wanting to strum a tune, and a jovial proprietor.

FEEDING TIME

When it comes to food in Krabi be assured to find anything your heart desires, if you look hard enough! For home-cooked meals **Popeye's** dishes up the heartiest grub, the chips are enough to write home about; here you'll find some savoury characters to chat to, or grab a traditional Danish hot dog at **Cafe Europa**. Popular with locals are the **Korean Suki BBQs**: simply seize a hut and eat all you can for Bt79, the one with the most ambience is near the Boonsiam Hotel. For a slice of pasta paradise visit **Viva Pizzeria** or **Da Franco**, the latter serving up the best tiramisu this side of Venice. For oyster lovers, the atmospheric **Chow Seau** has to be sampled, having a reputation for serving the freshest seafood in town; this



Ha, I can totally see your bumcrack



Because it was there

place is teeming with locals at the weekend. The oysters are so big you may need to dig in with a knife and fork. Besides great value, **Ruen Mai** is the most enchanting Thai restaurant.

NIGHTRIPPING

Krabi definitely avoids the excesses of Bangkok and is not exactly the liveliest city in Thailand but that's not to say it lacks buzz. Celebrated hideaways can be passed over if you're not in the know. One is the unassuming **Asia Road** on Chao Far Rd comprising a music collection not often found in this neck of the woods. Moreover, its claim to fame is its Bt90 frozen margaritas which are bound to stir the Latino in you. For those who can't get enough of Bangkok, there's the fashionable newcomer **Crazy Pub** on Maharaj Road. A big city contemporary-style bar in the middle of town clamouring with locals at weekends and for techno freaks **Mixer Pub** is the best on offer.

RAILAY

At the tip of Phra Nang peninsula are East Railay, West Railay and Phra Nang, the most popular stretch of Krabi's coastline described as one of the most beautiful capes in the world, and rightly so. The powder white beach that is Ao Phra Nang with the sacred Phra Nang cave at its mouth now attracts the wealthiest visitors where the only place to stay is the exclusive Rayavadee. But for those who don't perspire money the more middle-class crowd hangout is at West beach, sometimes referred to as Sunset Beach. Here big bungalow operations offer the same deals. Railay Bay Resort and Spa starts at Bt1200. Railay Sand and Sea from Bt900 with fan and breakfast and Railay Village Hotel at Bt500 are some options. The budget crowd tends to hug the mangrove-choked east beach, where the greatest concentration of less expensive bungalows, bars and restaurants are located. Seafood is the best restaurant and Ya Ya Bungalows have rooms from Bt150.

NIGHTRIPPING

Why fix something if it isn't broken? This is the philosophy behind Railay nightlife. Sunset entertainment generally begins with drinks on west beach while admiring the more energetic volleyballers and witnessing the magnificent colours of sunset, while the drink-til-u-drop party scene shifts over to east beach where all night parties and fire shows draw crowds. Favourites are **Gecko** and **The Cliff Bar**.

TONSAI

Budget travellers or those with unconstrained spirits tend to gather at the small beach just a walk through the adjoining cave from Railay. There are several inexpensive bungalow operations starting from Bt150 with standard restaurant fare. The main attraction is the rave party that goes off every night at **Freedom Bar** with super huge parties around full moon when longtail boats operate around the clock.

KHLONG MUANG

The latest addition to this spectacular coastal region is Khlong Muang. This unspoiled beach is just a stone's throw from Ao Nang and yet the peace and serenity is a million miles from the tourist traps and big brash resorts just down the road. Places to stay in the area are located directly on the beach. Luxury rooms and bungalows look out over the waters of the Andaman Sea, giving you the perfect view of a spectacular sunset. By far the cheapest place to stay is **Khlong Muang Inn** with fan rooms from Bt300. **Krabi Sands Resort** from Bt1,400 incl. breakfast. All lay in an area of hectic five-star resorts including the **Sheraton**, **Nakamanda**, **Pulay**, and **Taabkeak**.



WAY TO GO:

Bus: Bt350 for a VIP Bus via Surat Thani or Bt650 for a government bus from the Southern Bus Terminal. Government buses cost more but are generally safer

Fly: Bt2,560/5,120 one-way/return. Expect to pay Bt200 to extortionate taxi drivers for a lift into town.

HUAHIN SANDTRAP

Hua Hin's century-old status as a retreat for the Royal Family is one of the major lures for Thai visitors to this quaint seaside resort. In fact, Royal-watching is kind of a pastime here. The Royal Family's jaunts around town cause the odd gridlock, and near His Majesty the King's Palace, there's a supermarket called Golden Place. Thais queue up here to buy fruit and produce from some of the special agricultural projects initiated by HM the King. Thanks to His Majesty's not-so-secret service, Hua Hin is also the safest place in Thailand, both for touring or owning a business. One expat summed it up thusly: "Here the police actually look like real police."

Hua Hin is also known for its spacious beaches, which rank somewhere between Samui and Pattaya on the attractiveness and cleanliness scale, although the air is remarkably fresh and bracing. Besides laying on the beach doing pretty much jack-shit, trotting along the sand on a horse or pony is another welcome way to idle away some spare hours. If these options don't float your boat, then embark on an outing with Sea Dragon Cruises; they offer everything from daytrips to week-long jaunts in the Gulf of Thailand. Their latest pleasure trip is a sunset cocktail cruise – the only one on offer here. Call Martin at 9-0122302 for the low down. For most of us, driving a go-kart is about as close as we'll ever come to being a Formula One racer. And Hua Hin's own miniature speedway – B.T. Charlie Banana's Karting – for frustrated racers has the only high-speed bank turn in Thailand. The 13-horsepower karts (Bt500 for 15 laps) get up to about 70km an hour. When you're flying along with your butt about 10cm off the track, the sense of speed is increased ten-fold.

Not far from here, on Petchkasem Road, is Nino's Italian Restaurant & Pizzeria. Easily the best deal on Italian chow going in these parts, Nino's has the "only stone-baked pizza" in town, heaping portions of lasagna al forno for only Bt160, and – a big favourite with local expats – an enormous roast dinner every Sunday afternoon for Bt440. As Nino, the affable owner of this alfresco diner says, "Why would you trust an Italian restaurant which isn't run by Italians?"

With the Oriental now building a new hotel out by the airport, and Best Western and the Sheraton group poised to get in on the ground floor of a new construction boom, Hua Hin will soon have more 5-star hotels than even Phuket. For excellent value mid-range rooms (Bt2,000-2,500) check out the Pavilion Villa, replete with Thai-style décor and furnishings. (It's right across from the Sofitel, where some of the most suspenseful scenes in *The Killing Fields* were executed.) For cheaper digs in the Bt250 neighbourhood, head for Soi Bintaht (or Alms Bowl Lane, so named because there's a temple at the end of it) where you can bed down in a couple of guesthouses.

Soi Bintaht is also awash with beer bars and women with come-hither glances – like a slice of Phuket's Patong Beach, though some Farangs call it "Soi Disappointment" – but that's a pretty short walk on the wild side. Since Hua Hin tends to appeal to a slightly older crowd, the nightlife, in general, is pretty subdued but by no means comatose. Consistent crowd-pullers are the city's two night markets. In that typically Thai, helter-skelter way, they are jumbles of bric-a-brac, beach wear in screaming suntan shades, seafood restaurants, arts 'n' crafts, just plain junk, and exoticia.

Of the two nocturnal bazaars, more votes go to the one by Central Plaza, which has a revolving series of different items on different nights. However it's closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.

For a quiet drink in a friendly locale, make tracks for Naresdamri Road. There's a little enclave with Adrenaline, and next to that the brand new Koala Blue Steakhouse, where you can have a DIY Aussie-style barbecue. Across from there is Papa John, with a whopping selection of international dishes at local prices.

Probably the best place for a nightcap is right on the beach, which is where a lot of locals go, booze in hand, brain in the cosmos, for whitecap watching and star gawking.

WAY TO GO:

Bus: Buses leave regularly from the Southern Bus Terminal (get there on the #11 bus from Democracy Monument). Costs are about Bt200 for a 1st class bus and Bt140 for 2nd class. The bus trip takes around three hours. No matter what locals may tell you, the last bus back on Sunday leaves at 8pm, but it's usually booked solid by 7pm. If you get stranded, ask the motorcycle taxi drivers out in front of the station about the mini-bus. It's only about three minute's away by motorcycle, costs a bit less, and gets there faster. The last one also departs around 8pm.

Train: Trains leave Hualamphong all day, take under four hours and cost between Bt120 and Bt50 depending on whether the train is an express and hard or soft class.

PATTAYA SAUSAGE & SINGLETS

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.

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 could take in the **Sri Racha Tiger Zoo** (actually around 30km out of town), **Underwater World Pattaya** (an aquarium in South Pattaya), the **Snake Farm** or the **Orchid Farm** (both actually in Chonburi), the local branch of **Ripley's Believe it or Not Museum** (in Royal Garden Plaza), or shopping, shopping, shopping. If you're the sporty type there's Thailand's biggest bungee jump, which is just near the go-cart speedway (South Pattaya). Plus there's paintball, horseback riding, skydiving and shuffleboard. Needless to say, the landscape around Pattaya is littered with quality golf courses.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

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

FEEDING TIME:

If every second business in Pattaya is a bar then every third one is a restaurant. If you're aching for a taste of home, Pattaya provides some of the best Farang food far less than Bangkok prices. English-style pubs can be expected to provide excellent post-hangover fry-ups and there are several outstanding Japanese and Korean restaurants. For those Americans among us who long for Mexican food, the **Blue Parrot** on Soi 13/4 is a godsend – great tacos and margaritas, and generous portions of home-made salsa.

WIND IN YOUR FACE:

You'll see songtae's 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 kilometers. 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.

WAY TO GO:

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

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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KOH CHANG PALMBEACH

Koh Chang National Park, a green-cloaked mountain range rising out of the sea has long been admired for its natural beauty and easy pace. Until its relatively recent discovery by backpackers, tourists ignored the island due to its proximity to war-torn Cambodia. However, a new airport on the mainland and a government sponsored push for the tourist dollar have put Koh Chang on the development path with new hotels popping up along the length of the west. It really can rain with a vengeance between June and October, therefore expect heavily discounted rooms and empty beaches if you're visiting during this period.

WHITESANDS

The welcoming sight of a 7-11 greets visitors as the road winds down into the most developed of the island's beaches. If comfort, convenience and the company of other visitors are what you're after then Whitesands is for you.

PLACES TO CRASH

At the northern end of the beach you'll find **Independent** and **Star Bungalows** and a back-to-basics beach nomad vibe, while the long standing **KC Grande Resort** covers all the bases with Bt150–4,000 bungalows. Nearby, **Cookie Hotel** will do an all mod cons room for under Bt1,000. Proving the days of Bt100 aren't dead is **Island Lodge** the cheapest deal in the area. South, on Pearl Beach, a potpourri of budget and mid-range possibilities abound from the recently opened **Baan Anushabar** and the excellent boutique **Keereeta Hotel** to **Charmed Resort**, where accommodation comes in the form of converted shipping containers.

KLONG PRAO

This long curving beach is tipped to become package tourist heaven, fortunately that day still seems a few years away. Accommodation amongst the mangrove clad river estuaries provides a serene alternative to beach dwelling.

PLACES TO CRASH

At the northern end, Koh Chang Paradise is the best bet for suitcase lugging visitors, at around Bt1,500 - 2,500. Genuine travelers will love **Thal Bungalows**, as laid back and chilled as the Dalai Lama on ice. Nearby, on the estuary, Bt600 will get you an aircon room at Baan Rim Nam. Further south, Tropicana is top banana in the 4-star bunch.

KAI BAE

A good choice of bars, restaurants and decent accommodation make

this an ideal base camp for anyone who's evolved beyond 'drink till you puke' traveling.

PLACES TO CRASH

Family friendly comfort and privacy can had for a price at the upmarket **Seaview Resort & Spa**. Mid-price, well kept, family run beachfront bungalows can be found at **KB Bungalows** or **Kai Bae Beach Bungalows**. Catering for budget conscious bar hoppers are a host of cheap & cheerful places roadside with rooms for Bt400 or less.

LONELY BEACH

The key to Lonely Beach's success lied in its name, but 'lonely' is one thing this mish-mash of thinly walled accommodation isn't.

PLACES TO CRASH

The often packed **Nature Beach's** Bt300 digs are smack on the beach. Next door, **Bhumiyama Resort** offers 3-star comforts a stone's throw from the unwashed masses. South, on the rocky shore, **Paradise Cottages's** new huts go for Bt200 and up. Moving on, the back-to-nature hideaway, **The Mangrove**, Bailan provides hi-so hut living for Bt800. Down a notch or two in quality and price you'll find **Bailan Hut** and **Happy Hut** provide havens for world weary voyagers.

BANGBAO

This lazy fishing village, comprising one 'street' of wooden houses built on stilts into the sea, is now home to more dive schools, seafood restaurants and tour operators than fishermen.

PLACES TO CRASH

Bang Bao Sea Hut, at Bt1,500, is a must if you have the cash. Beautiful, but economical panoramic bay and mountain views can be had the remote, Bt150, **Homestay Beach**.



ELSEWHERE

Having been responsible for putting Lonely Beach on the backpackers map several years ago, the Bt150 **Treehouse** has upped and moved to the extremely remote Long Beach in the far southeast of the island.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Koh Chang certainly ain't party central but **Backsound**, Lonely Beach, is cocktail-in-a-bucket heaven for the dance music loving Khaosan crowd. Experience modern Thai culture at **Sky Bay Pub**, Pearl Beach. On Whitesands, **Oodies** is an old fave for steaks and music and **Sabay Bar** is the still lithe granddaddy of beach bars. In Kai Bae, **Porn's** and **No-name** are the best of the motley beach bar crew.

DAYTRIPPING

Due to the distinct lack of visibility underwater, most dive schools shut up shop until August/September.

Make time to visit **Baan Kwan Chang elephant camp**, they provide a free pick-up service. **Koh Chang Trekkers** will take you into the island's interior and bring you out in one, insect bitten, piece. Defuse the toxic time bomb that masquerades as your bloodstream with a detox or fasting program at **Natural High**, Bailan.

WAY TO GO

By Air: Bt4,000 return on Bangkok Airways twice daily flights.

By Bus: Bt198. 7.30am & 9.30am aircon bus direct from Ekkamai to Centrepont ferry pier, a 4.5 hour trip.

By Minivan: A cramped, hair-raising way to spend Bt300.

Ferry: Bt60 one way, by car ferry or wooden passenger boat.

Oh! The serenity

KOH SAMET SANDTRIP

Samet is one multi-faceted diamond in the rough. For Bangkok-incarcerated Thais and expats, it's a very welcome, weekend parole. For family folks, it's got some luxurious resorts and wholesome fun. And for younger travelers the island has got it going on party-wise, and offers some decent, lower-range accommodation. In other ways, however, the beach experience in Koh Samet is getting more and more generic, what with all the same banana boats, jet-skis and sarong vendors.

signs you'll see all over Samet advertises a fishing and snorkeling tour; it includes stops at nearby islands, lunch, and turtle and shark farms. "All this and a smile for only Bt400," the sign says. The tours run from 11am-4pm daily. Silversand also rents kayaks for Bt100 per hour or Bt400 for the day. And if you're gagging for a Sheesha pipe, drop in to Sheesha Cafe at Seabreeze bungalows.

AO PUDSA

Sometimes known as Ao Phudsa, this stretch of blinding white sand has a sign hanging from a tree that says it's a "Rabies Free Zone." Yes, the sand dogs can be a nuisance when you're eating, but they're not Cujo by any means. The best thing about this small and popular beach is that it's faraway enough from Ao Phai to be quiet but close enough to walk and party there. For Bt500 the bungalows at Ao Phudsa are a touch dirty and dilapidated. A better deal is Tubtim, right beside it, which has fan-cooled bungalows for the same price, or air-con jobbies for Bt1,200. And their restaurant is one of the best on the island. Period.

AO NUAN

To really get away from it all – even your irksome doppelganger Ernie – make a beeline for this small, secluded beach. It's just around from the boulder-strewn headland at the end of Tubtim. There's only one bungalow operation here – Ao Nuan – which has nine charming old-fashioned bungalows in the Bt300-600 price range. Even if you don't stay over here, it's a great place for swimming and rarely gets crowded.

BEST OF THE REST

Ao Vongduean is the longest beach. It attracts a lot of Thais with money and families because of some outstanding mid-range digs like the Malibu Resort with aircon bungalows for Bt1,200. One of the island's better bars and restaurants, Bay Watch is conveniently located on Vongduean for your partying pleasure. In general, the further south you go, the more Thai and isolated the island becomes. If you're into camping and marine biology make footprints for Ao Kiu. Here you can rent tents and camp near the beach. On the other side of the island is Ao Prao, which boasts a very fancy resort and is otherwise a cool place to venture for a sunset.

HAT SAI KAEW

The aptly named White Sand Beach is located around the hatchet head of the axe-shaped island. It's got some of the glitz but none of the vices of Samui or Phuket. In general, it is pricier and more family-oriented than the other beaches. That said, the nightlife has been picking up a bit, thanks to venues like the Beach Bar and, right next door, the Reggae Pub where, as all you psychics have predicted by now, Bob Marley's Most Overplayed Hits are in eternal rotation. There's sand like an angel's dandruff on this beach, and in case you don't believe the diving is better than on Koh Tao then an outing with Ploy Diving should convince you.

AO HIN KHOK

For parties, food and affordable accommodation Naga reigns supreme on the next beach southward. But with bungalows for Bt200 it can get pretty full. Some of the best parties on Samet are in their elevated bar which has coconut palms (festooned with fairy lights) growing right through the floor. Good selection of dance tracks, a pool table, and a special "Flip a Coin" promotion on drinks every night from 10pm-midnight. Tok's and Jep's are two of the other mainstays for global nomads, and also serve up their own extremely edible food, with the cuisine at Jep's topping Samet's charts. But we should remind you of this ruby of wisdom from the eminent Australian gourmand John McDonald: "Like most beach resorts in Thailand, the seafood is magnificent, the Thai food is competent, and the Western food is crap – order with caution." Yes, words to dine by, except for at the aforementioned Jep's, which does everything splendidly.

AO PHAI

At the north end of this beach is Ao Phai Huts where bungalows begin at Bt600. Next along is party central at Silversand. It's a sliver of Koh Pangan – without the Class A's or the blaring trance – and has mats on the beach, fire-juggling from 10pm, and it's open very late sometimes. They even teach fire-juggling here, and watching Farangs set their T-shirts aflame is a favourite pastime after midnight. Speaking of flames, check out Rayong's only sheesha cafe at Sheesha Cafe. One of the

WAY TO GO:

Public Bus: Departures every hour from Eastern Bus Terminal on Sukhumvit Soi 63, off the Ekkamai skytrain station. Tickets Bt125-150. Bear in mind that the last ferry (Bt50; takes 45 minutes) leaves Ban Phe at 6pm. In order to catch it you need to get the 2pm bus, because the journey takes around three-and-a-half hours. If you do miss the boat, then you can rent a speedboat for a minimum of Bt1,000 for four or five people.

Motorcycle Rentals: Bt350-400 per day. Drive easy, because the roads are both sandy and will leave you with a serious case of hemorrhoids.

GETTING AROUND:

It's all about the MTR, Hong Kong's underground, which services most of the major districts on the mainland and Hong Kong Island. Then there are the ferries that zip you back and forth across the beautiful bay and beyond for a pittance, and finally, an extensive and comfortable bus network servicing the rest of the territory. There's a tram on the island but it's kind of slow – good for a laugh, though. The Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR) runs between Tsim Sha Tsi and Lo Yw on the border with Shenzhen with about a dozen stops in between.

DAYTRIPPING

THE PEAK

Peak Tram from Garden Rd, Admiralty MTR / Bus 15 from Central / 15C from Star Ferry
The hill where the first colonials repaired from the heat now offers spectacular city night views obligatory for all visitors. There are pricey shops and restaurants there, but a picnic and a camera is all you need. Take the Peak Tram up and aim to get there for sunset on a clear day. The walk down through the gardens is pleasant but best done during the day, take the bus at night.

MUSEUMS

HK Art Museum, **Museum of Science & Technology** and the **Cultural Centre** are all at Star Ferry Terminal Tsim Sha Tsi. There is a large open waterfront area outside with occasional outdoor entertainment at weekends. The more recently opened **Heritage Museum** (ShaTin KCR) gives a great insight into HK and the **HK History Museum** is at Hung Hom KCR.

CITY PARKS

Great for escaping the crush, but teeming with Filipino maids on Sundays, **HK Park** (Admiralty MTR) is landscaped and small. Catch earnest newlyweds posing in front of flower beds or check out the aviary or **Tai Chi Garden**. The **HK Zoological & Botanical Gardens** are just over the road. **Victoria Park** (Causeway Bay MTR) and **Kowloon Park** (Tsim Sha Tsi MTR) are both bigger and better for watching people and the world go by.

COUNTRY PARKS

There are 23 country parks with walks and nature trails to suit all tastes and energies. Since only about a quarter of HK is actually built up, you may be surprised by the diversity of wildlife, vegetation and scenery. Ask at your hotel or hostel for recommendations but you don't really need a tour.

BEACHES / OUTLYING ISLANDS

The beaches are unlikely to impress you if you just blew in from other Asian sands but HK does have them, particularly at **Sai Kung** (minibuses from Choi Hung MTR) or on the outlying islands (ferries from Outlying Island ferry piers, Central). **Shek O** (bus 6 from Shau Kei Wan MTR) is the last remaining village on HK island, with a good beach popular with surfers who also frequent the nearby **Big Wave Bay**, but don't expect too much in the way of water sports.

Lantau island (ferry from Star Ferry Pier 5) is also worth a look for its **Big Buddha** and the views from the **Lantau Peak** (a do-able 1,000ft climb). **Lamma** island (Pier 4) is smaller and more chilled, with a sizeable expat community.

MACAU

An hour's ferry away (from Shun Tak Centre, Sheung Wan MTR), Macau is well worth a day or an overnighter. HK-ers go for the gambling, shopping and whoring, but it's nice just to go for the colonial architecture, relaxed pace and the spectacle of Chinese people speaking Portuguese.

BUYING STUFF

HK revels in its self-proclaimed status as a Shopping Paradise, so whatever you're looking for, you can assume it will be available somewhere. Even if you're not hunting down souvenirs or consumer durables, it is worth taking a look as this is a big part of local culture.

ELECTRONICS AND GIZMOS

Sure, HK is still a duty-free port, but that doesn't mean much these days. Still, it is one of the best shopping hubs in East Asia. In Chinese style, each product has its own street, one for consumer electronics, one for cameras and one for ripping off tourists (Nathan Road – never buy anything from a flashy shop there). There's also the **Temple Street** night market, the **Ladies' Market** and the **Flower Market**, plus numerous fresh markets. Most maps have these well marked.

FEEDING TIME

There is a Chinese saying: "We eat anything with four legs except the table and anything with wings except the aeroplane," and the Cantonese eat things that even other Chinese won't touch. You can get your fill of guts and offal on just about any street. That said, other regions of China are well represented (in

HONGKONG MIGHTYKONG

Everyone knows about Hong Kong's skyscrapers but you want to get a proper look at them in context. Set against hillsides and islands and a bustling harbour, HK is a visual treat. It has everything that busy cities do but most of the territory is actually rural, and there are plenty of other views and options available. The famous get-up-and-go (read: ravenous avarice) attitude of HK makes it a place where pretty much anything gets up and goes. It's a money town and wealth is the main topic of small talk. If you're not already wealthy, it's perfectly acceptable – and even a good idea – to pretend you are. The territory breaks down roughly along old treaty lines into HK island (business district, upper residential and nightlife); Kowloon on the mainland (much more populous and diverse); merging into the New Territories (NT) (largely countryside leading to the border with the People's Republic).

particular Shanghai, Sichuan and various Peking specialties). Don't let Chinese menus in the window deter you, as there will be an English version inside and/or staff who are more than happy to talk you through what's on offer. Hong Kong is rightly proud of its eating scene, and you can find cuisines from all over Asia and beyond, but if you're on a budget, McDonald's is the cheapest – shoestring tourists often survive on little else. The seafood is great and best found by the sea. Favourite locations are **Sai Kung** and **Sok Kwu Wan** (Outlying Island

Ferry Pier 4 to Sok Kwu Wan). Talk to the staff about quantities and prices of fresh seafood rather than relying on the menu. Food stalls selling dim sum and snacks are ubiquitous, though more common in the side streets of Kowloon than the shopping/business districts of Central. Bakeries are everywhere, selling cheap breads and pastries. In most areas, sandwich bars and coffee shops are easy to find though you'll pay more for this kind of home comfort.





NIGHTTRIPPING

Accept the fact early on that you'll never get used to the price of drinks while you're here, and if you do, it's too late since you're already broke. However, happy hours are absolutely standard and varied, running as late as 10pm, while some places offer a second late happy hour around midnight or after. So with a little planning, a night out needn't be too financially punishing. Ask around for all-you-can-drink deals. More good news is that there are effectively no licensing restrictions (time-wise that is) and any bar will serve you as long as they are reasonably busy. Areas to head for are: **Lan Kwai Fong** (Central MTR) – a small pedestrianised block or two traditionally favoured by expats; nowadays it's more of a mixed crowd with a wine bar feel to it. Named after Tiannemen, **Club 64** is a bit different. **Le Jardin** next door is similarly down to earth and there's a popular outdoor eating area here serving various Asian

food. A small hike up the hill towards **Hollywood Road** brings you to Soho. Here

you'll find brasseries, eateries and night clubs, and a generally more "beautiful class" of people. Prices have hiked up the hill with you too, but you can also catch some of HK's best jazz musicians in intimate surroundings. Check out the **Blue Door**, **The Gecko**, and **The Bohemian Lounge**. For dancing try **Nu**, **Home Base**, **Amnesia**, among other more exclusive options. **Wanchai** (MTR) enjoys a more down-at-heel reputation. Here there are Irish bars and sports bars and girlie bars, as well as straight-up bars ~~vying for your attention~~. There's also live music at **The Wanchai** and **Carnegies** and dancing on the tables at the **Groovy Mule**. This is where to head for late nights – try **Dusk Till Dawn**, **Neptunes 2** or **The Dock**. If you're based in **Tsim Sha Tusi** you'll still find pubs and bars, though they're more dispersed. There's live music most nights

at **48th St Chicago Blues** and trad-jazz at **Ned Kelly's**. Between Nelson Road and Hung Hom station is the old opium district which is now peppered with Chinese bars, which means Karaoke, Bluff-Dice (a drinking game and well worth learning) and football on TV. If you can find it, **Nutbush Terrace** is a strip of pricy but nice bars with the obligatory Filipino cover bands. As for clubbing, pack your credit card in a fireproof cover and develop a taste for Canto-pop.

ACCOMMODATION

It ain't cheap. Most tourists stay on 'The Golden Mile' of Nathan Road, in Tsim Sha Tusi (around the corner from **The Peninsula**). There you find a **Holiday Inn** and the horrible **Chungking Mansions** – a wretched tower of tiny guesthouses overflowing with semi-legal immigrants, but good Indian restaurants. Chungking is the cheapest, as long as you

don't mind risking hepatitis or casual assault. Far better to head to **Mirador Mansions** a block down, which is the same deal but far cleaner. **The Garden Hostel** on the third floor is the best bet and is favoured by long-termers. Everywhere costs around HK\$50 for a dorm bed and HK\$100 for a shoebox crash-pad. Either way, you'll be touted as soon as you step off the bus. For the big-budgeted or expense-accounted Hong Kong's hotels are a delight. Many of the mid-range luxury places are in Wanchai, which is also the expat red-light district, but kind of tame by Thai standards.

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SINGAPORE LIONPRIDE

For some travelers in Asia, part of the appeal is feeling richer than the local population. Well, in Singapore forget it. It's a wealthy place and has the prices to match. It is clean, modern, organised, and efficient. It is, in other words, a comfort zone where there is almost zero chance of getting food poisoning, pickpocketed, or even bitten by a mosquito. And yet it retains the variety and flavour of Asia, from its ethnic neighbourhoods to its funky food stalls, temples, markets and colonial architecture. It's also easy to get around, thanks to a three-line rapid transit system (called the MRT, it closes at 1am), and an efficient bus network. Taxis are cheap, with most journeys costing only a few dollars, and a ride from the airport to downtown is just over \$10. (Note: All prices are in Singapore dollars. Where two prices are shown, the second one is for children.) So be prepared to spend some money here, and to sample much of Asia's best minus the worst.

DAYTRIPPING

RAFFLES HOTEL

Way to go: City Hall MRT

One of the most hyped hotels in the world, Raffles is officially classified as part of Singapore's heritage. Opened in 1887, Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham and Rudyard Kipling stayed and wrote here. The **Singapore Sling** was invented here in 1915, and even at \$14 a pop, stopping by the Long Bar to sample this gin/cherry-brandy/fruit-juice cocktail is a must for many visitors.

ORCHARD ROAD

Way to Go: Orchard MRT

A shopper's paradise lined with mega-malls and five-star hotels. On Sundays the strip teems with crowds of Filipina maids come to socialise on their day off.

ZOO & NIGHT SAFARI

Way to Go: Ang Mo Kio MRT, then bus 138

When: Zoo, daily, 8:30am-6pm

Night Safari; 7:30pm-midnight

Cost: Zoo, \$12.25, \$5.10. Night Safari, \$15.75, \$10.50

More than 3,600 mammals, birds and reptiles make their home at the Singapore Zoological Gardens. You can even have tea with an orangutan. On the Night Safari, more than 1,200 animals lurk in a moonlit forest.

FORT CANNING PARK

Way to Go: Dhoby Ghaut MRT

When: Daily; 10am-6pm

Cost: \$8, \$5.

A green oasis in the city centre, with a Malay shrine atop the hill, and underneath, the Battle Box museum, where life-sized models reenact the British military's decision to surrender to the Japanese in 1942.

JURONG BIRD PARK

Way to Go: Boon Lay MRT

When: Daily, 9am-5pm

Cost: \$12.25, \$5.10

More than 8,000 birds including a flamingo-filled lake.

SENTOSA ISLAND

Way to Go: Harbour Front MRT

A theme park-like island off the southern tip of Singapore, full of attractions from the absurd to the marvelous. The Musical Fountain projects love messages onto a water screen. Other attractions/activities include a beach, nature walk, horseback riding, golf, kayaking.

MT. FABER

Way to Go: Habor Front MRT

When: Cable car operates daily, 8:30am-9pm

Cost: \$8.50, \$3.90

Across from Sentosa, Mt Faber offers one of the best views in Singapore. Take the cable to the peak to glimpse old colonial houses, the bustling port and skyscrapers.

BUKIT TIMAH

NATURE RESERVE

Way to Go: Bus No. 171 or 182 from Orchard Rd

When: 8:30am-6pm

Eighty-one hectares of forests. More plant species than all of North America. Trails for walkers and mountain bikers.

SINGAPORE RIVER

Way to Go: Raffles Place /Clarke Quay MRT

Formerly the heart of Singapore, now a district of restaurants, bars, and renovated warehouses. Singapore's symbol of tourism, the Merlion, a half-lion, half-fish, water-spouting statue, is at the mouth of the river. Along the south bank is Boat Quay, a lively strip of restaurants and bars. On the other side and upriver is Clarke Quay, a more laid-back area. Market on Read Bridge on Sunday afternoons.

LITTLE INDIA

Way to Go: Little India MRT

All the sights, sounds and smells of big India clustered in one neighbourhood along Serangoon Road. Visit Sunday evening (or don't) when 10,000 Indian men celebrate their day off.

CHINATOWN

Way to Go: Outram Park MRT

Historic home of the Chinese. Many traditional shophouses restored to their original specs. Souvenirs, knick knacks, antiques along Pagoda and Trengganu Streets.

ARAB STREET

Way to Go: Bugis MRT

The centre of Muslim culture. Good deals on textiles, batik, silk and more. Home of Sultan Mosque.

GEYLAND SERAI

Way to Go: Paya Lebar MRT

Traditional district of indigenous Malays. Market bubbles with cuisine, costumes and crafts.

ARTY STUFF

ASIAN CIVILIZATIONS MUSEUM

Way to Go: Raffles Place MRT

When: Mon 12-6pm, Tues-Sun 9am-6pm, Fri 9am-9pm

Cost: \$8.50, \$3.90

One of Singapore's best museums. Five galleries explore connections between Asian cultures.

ESPLANADE

Way to Go: City Hall MRT

Looks like a gigantic pair of fly's eyes and sometimes called the "durian buildings." A 1,600-seat concert hall and 2,000-seat theatre, along with smaller studios, galleries, performance spaces, restaurants, bars and boutiques.

SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Way to Go: City Hall/Dhoby Ghaut MRT

When: Mon-Sun 10am-7pm, Fri 10am-9pm

Cost: \$3, \$1.50

Housed in a classical baroque building. Focuses on Singaporean and regional artists, with a strong emphasis on electronic arts.

NIGHTTRIPPING

Drinking is not cheap in Singapore. To keep it cheap, have your beers at the open-air food centres and stalls you find everywhere. Most young Singaporeans do not drink much, so many places cater to the large community of highly paid expats working in the financial sector. (You remember the Barings Bank-buster Nick Leeson, right?). Irish pubs charge around \$13-\$14 a pint.

ALLEY BAR

2 Emerald Hill Rd. Sun-Thu 5pm-2am, Fri-Sat 5pm-3am

High-ceilinged, L-shaped bar opens into an alley. Dim-sum snacks.

BALACLAVA

#01-01B Suntec City, 1 Raffles Blvd. Mon-Thu 3pm-1am, Fri-Sat 3pm-2am.



Elegant atmosphere, designer armchairs and sofas. Live jazz. TVs at individual tables.

BAR NONE

Marriot Hotel, 320 Orchard Rd. Mon 7-2, Tues-Sun 7-3.

Adult contemporary music with a rock edge provided by house band.

BREWERYKZ

#01-05 Riverside Point, 30 Merchant Rd. Mon-Thu noon-midnight, Fri-Sat noon-1am. Sunday 11am-midnight.

Popular riverside microbrewery with California menu.

THE DUBLINER

165 Perang Road #01-00 Winsland House II, 11:30am-1am (Sun-Thu), 1:30pm-2am (Fri-Sat), Somerset MRT.

Rustic Irish pub with authentic Irish fare. Leather sofas, oak furniture, brick walls.

HARRY'S BAR

28 Boat Quay, Sun-Thu 11am-1am, Fri-Sat 11am-4am High-volume house band downstairs, laidback retreat upstairs. Nick Leeson's favourite.

JAZZ@SOUTH BRIDGE

82B Boat Quay, Sun-Thu, 5:30 pm-1am, Fri-Sat 5:30pm-2am.

Cozy mainstream jazz. Comfy sofas.

NO. 5 EMERALD

HILL COCKTAIL BAR

5 Emerald Hill, Mon-Thu noon-2am, Fri-Sat noon-3am, Sun 5pm-2am Traditional shophouse-turned-European-style pub. Pool room upstairs.

ORCHARD TOWERS

400 Orchard Rd, open 24 hours Nicknamed "Four Floors of Whores," this is a four-story complex that conjures the image of a tamer version of Bangkok's Nana Plaza. Neon-lit bars, thumping music, transvestites and Western men prowling for Asian women.

CLUBS

Singapore's hottest dance clubs are concentrated along Mohamed Sultan Road off River Valley Road. Most have cover charges and dress codes. Don't show up in shorts or flip-flops. A lot of the clubs are open late, and there are other after-hours venues, too.

THE LIQUID ROOM

#01-05 the Gallery Hotel, 76 Robertson Quay, Wed-Sat 10pm-3am Classy atmosphere, beautiful people, huge dance floor.

ZOUK

17 Jiak Kim St. Wed-Sat 7:30pm-3am Pay to gain entry to one disco and get three. Can cost as much as \$35 when big DJs play, but you get two drinks included. The music is cutting edge and the club is pretty damn good. They kept Zouk open until 10am Sunday morning when a big US DJ span here once. Regularly have very big name DJs.

FEEDING TIME

The variety of places to chow down is one of the best things about Singapore, from yummy inexpensive street food, to fine

international cuisine. Singaporeans munch gleefully away at all hours of the day or night in locations all over the city. For budget travelers, hawker stalls and food centres offer great grub, a relaxed atmosphere and clean surroundings for a few dollars a plate. But don't eat all your meals there, since there are so many superb restaurants and eateries to try. Simply choose a district and stroll through until you find something that strikes your fancy. Not surprisingly, you will find great Chinese food in **Chinatown**, and great Indian food in **Little India**, and many other locations around the city. Stroll along **Boat Quay**, and touts will jump out at you from every restaurant to show you a menu. It's rather touristy and not cheap, but the riverside atmosphere should be experienced. **Holland Village** at the other end of the city is a gathering place for Westerners and has good Italian and Lebanese food. Near Raffles Hotel, **Chijmes** is a collection of Western and non-Western restaurants in a former convent. For a more authentic local experience, try **Lau Pa Sat**, a sprawling open-air food centre in the stomach of the business district.

PLACES TO CRASH

The main strip of budget hotels is along Bencoolen St, near the city centre, though some have closed in recent years as the area gentrifies with larger hotels and offices. Still, there are a dozen or so cheap hotels and guesthouses with prices around \$15-\$50, and backpackers walk up and down the street at all hours. The area is easy walking distance of Little India and Orchard Road. Some favorite haunts include: **The Hawaii Hostel**, 171-B Bencoolen St., 6338-4187; **Green Curtains**, 131-A Bencoolen St. 6334-8697; **Waterloo Hostel**, 55 Waterloo St, Catholic Centre Bldg. 4th Fl, 6336-6555. 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; **The Inn on Temple St.** 36 Temple St, 6221-5333. In Little India, decent, boutique-style hotels are found for under \$100, including: **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; **Tai Hoe Hotel**, 163 Kitchener Rd. 6293-9122. If you're hankering for your own kind, crash at the Prince of Wales Backpacker Pub at 101 Dunlop St, \$12 a night in a four bed dorm and a free beer every night.



PHNOMPENH CRAZY TOWN

Not nearly as dangerous as it once was, the city can still be risky at night. Sure, it's not Bangkok or Singapore, but Phnom Penh has come a long way in the past five years. The city retains its faded French grandeur but has added a great drinking strip of bars by the river and an environment where getting hammered is still a 24-hour sport.

PLACES TO CRASH:

Guesthouses in Phnom Penh are pretty consistent, ranging from \$3-5 for shared bath and fan to \$10-12 for aircon and private bath, hot water, and TV. The young traveller ghettos are around Boeung Kak Lake (Street 93), and the noisy centre of town. Around the lake they're all much the same, but don't fall in as you'll die on contact; in town **The Capitol** has a satellite of guesthouses around the intersection of streets 107 and 182. And **Narin's** have their own little kingdoms on streets 111 and streets 125. A small step up, the **Dara Reang Sey Hotel** (streets 13 & 118) has a loyal following (\$8 fan, \$12 aircon). **California 2** along the river is popular with the older independent set. Got money to burn? Go five-star with the **Raffles Le Royal** or the **Intercontinental**.

DAYTRIPPING:

Khmer Rouge horrors are documented at the **Tuol Sleng Museum** in town and the **Killing Fields Memorial** at Choeung Ek. On the way to the Killing Fields, check out the present-day horrors at the Phnom Penh garbage dump in Stung Meanchey district, a hundred-acre cesspool where a few hundred children scavenge through toxic muck for recyclables. West of the airport, there are two shooting ranges where you can fire off 30 rounds from an AK for about \$20 – same price for a grenade. A grenade launcher will set you back \$200. Back in town, the cultural attractions include **Wat Phnom**. According to legend, it's 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.

NIGHTRIPPING:

If you go out in search of revelry after dark, take a taxi or a moto – don't walk. Phnom Penh has a reputation for street muggings, although these are relatively rare today. If you are mugged, don't resist – they are not afraid to hurt you badly and take your wallet afterwards. Along the river there are notable holes-in-the-wall such as the **The Pink Elephant** and **The Cantina** as well as larger corner establishments like the **Foreign Correspondent's Club (FCC)** and **The Riverside**. A whole line-up of bars on **Street 51** between streets 136 and 178 include the long-running and now expanded **Heart of Darkness** (note: there have been some violent incidents there in the past year, but most nights are violence-free). Also on Street 51 are the **Walkabout** (open 24 hours), **Howie's** (another late-night joint), and **Shanghai Bar** (a single guy's kind of place). Elsewhere around town is **Sharky Bar** (street 130) which is a big bar with lots of pool tables and girls. Further up the river is the new **Green Vespa**.

FEEDING TIME:

Along Sisowath Quay by the river is a plethora of restaurants with a wide



Cambodia! Now offering one-stop walk-in crime

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). **Street 240** offers a number of eating options, though many of these cater more to the NGO crowd.

WAY TO GO:

From Thailand:

Plane: Bt5,420/10,335 one-way/return from Bangkok (Cambodia departure taxes are \$25 international, \$6 domestic)

Road: The road from Koh Kong is a seven-to eight-hour ride. A shared taxi costs about Bt400 for a small seat or the front seat for Bt700-800. A car is about Bt2,400. There are daily tourist vans from **Mealy Chenda** (Bt600) offering spotty service. There are also two border crossings near Pailin.

Boat: From Koh Kong to

Sihanoukville, morning departure, \$15.

From Siem Reap:

Plane: Siem Reap Airways and President Air, \$55-60 one-way, several flights a day.

Road: Road is excellent. Bus \$4-6, five-six hours. Taxi \$35, four hours.

Boat: \$20-25, five to seven hours, daily am departure. Now that the road is good, this option is an over-priced tourist rip-off best avoided. Take the bus.

VISAS & BORDER CROSSINGS:

To/from Thailand: Use Poipet if heading to Siem Reap from Bangkok. Use any if heading to Phnom Penh.

If coming from the north (Isaan, Vientiane) use Anlong Veng or O'Smach. Visa-on-arrival costs Bt1,000 but beware of scams.

To/from Laos: The border above Stung Treng is open. Lao and Cambodia visas aren't available here. Expect a \$3 'stamp fee'. A boat from Stung Treng to the border should be about \$25 for a boat or \$5 a person.

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SIEMREAP TEMPLECENTRAL

PLACES TO CRASH:

\$3-5 rooms are scattered all over town. Along Highway 6 west of the river **Jasmine**, **Hello**, and the western-owned **Earthwalkers** are all good choices. On the same road on the other side of town take a look at **Skyway** or **Peace of Angkor Villa**. Wat Bo Road offers some old stand-bys in **Mahogany** and **Mom's** and the new **Two Dragons** (see box). The **Old Market** area is the center of nightlife. The guesthouses here tend to be mid-range. Check out the new **Ivy**, **Molly Malone's**, or the **Mandalay**. A short walk from the Old Market, the **Ivy 2** guesthouse has budget fan rooms as does the **Garden Village** and **Golden Temple Villa**. A step up is the **Red Piano**. There is no shortage of upper end accommodation – new hotels are springing up constantly. Hint: The kickback system for moto and taxi drivers is well established – don't bother fighting it, 'cause you won't change a damn thing.

DAYTRIPPING:

Okay, at \$20 for a day, \$40 for three and \$60 for the week, the temples may seem a bit like a trip to Disneyland, but a week of living it up in Siem Reap and Angkor is cheaper than Bangkok, and the temples are well worth it. You can hire a motodop to take you around Angkor for \$6-8 per day. Other options include a car with driver (about \$20 a day) or a motorcycle-drawn rickshaw for about \$10/day. Guides can set you back another \$20-25 a day. They can be arranged through a tour agency, your guesthouse, or stop by the **Angkor Tour Guide Association** opposite the Grand Hotel.

DAYTRIPPING BEYOND THE TEMPLES:

Go see the river carvings and take a jungle walk at **Kbal Spean**, the sacred **Phnom Kulen** with the less-than-sacred, \$20 foreigner admission fee. Or visit the floating village of **Chong Khneas** on the Tonle Sap Lake – gorgeous. The more adventurous can visit temples further afield such as **Beng Mealea** and **Koh Ker**. Trips further away can get expensive. Also worth an hour or two of your time is the **Landmine Museum**. All the moto drivers know it.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

Most of the visitors go to "Pub Street" which includes the **Angkor**

Siem Reap means "Siam Vanquished" and was the administrative and spiritual centre of the bloodthirsty Khmer Empire, which rivaled the Roman in size before it, somewhat mysteriously, crumbled. The ruins are what remain of a large city. Angkor Wat is the big centerpiece here, and is a tribute to what unopposed fascism can achieve with the benefit of slave labour. This is one of the few tourist attractions that is not overrated. Six km from the temples, the town is relatively quiet and quaint.



What?
Bar, Easy Speaking, Temple, Brodie's, and Red Piano, among others. In the neighborhood is the **Ivy** (good food and music, too), the **Laundry Music Bar** (late nights), **Molly Malone's** (Irish bar), and the **Linga Bar** (a gay bar). A few blocks away on **Sivatha**, across from the E-cafe is the **Dead Fish Tower**, a large relaxing place.

FEEDING TIME:

If you want to go "authentic, man" try the street stalls along **Sivatha Street** or the east side of the river just south of Highway 6. There are also numerous hole-in-the-wall Khmer rice and noodle shops all over town. Hygiene is an issue with many of these places. The bulk of proper restaurants are clustered in the **Psah Chas** (Old Market) area. Options include the **Ivy** (Western), **Soup Dragon** (Vietnamese-Asian), **Easy Speaking** (Asian, Western), **Tandoor** (Indian), and **Blue Pumpkin** (breakfast/lunch/bakery). Along **Sivatha Street** are scores of restaurants including the **Dead Fish Tower** (Thai) and **Tell Restaurant** (Western, Asian). In Wat Bo Village try the **Two Dragons** (Thai-Asian).

WAY TO GO:

Plane: Bt6,040/10,200 one-way/return

Boat: There is a US\$25, 6-hour boat ride from Phnom Penh, which is an over-priced tourist rip-off.

Khaosan Bus: DO NOT TAKE ANY BUS FROM KHAO SAN ROAD!!! Take a proper Thai government bus from Mo Chit to Aranyaprathet, then a share taxi or pick-up truck to Siem Reap.

Phnom Penh Bus: US\$4-6, five-six hours. Much better than the boat.

Enter the Two Dragons

Long time FARANG Magazine correspondent Gordon Sharpless has in one year managed to get married 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 promises to raise the bar of the crowded Siem Reap budget accommodation scene with the nicest rooms at the cheapest 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 his wife's Thai cooking. There's even a pickup service from the Poipet border (a shithole, somewhere you'll want to leave right away) so call ahead on +855-12-868-551 or 012-868-551 inside Cambodia or twodragons@talesofasia.com from cyberspace. Prices start at \$7 and end at \$20 for the air-con presidential suite, but Gordon says he'll give a 10% discount to folks toting this copy of FARANG Untamed Travel.

VIENTIANE

More of a big town than a small city, Vientiane follows the tradition of amalgamating a lot of small villages together, much like London, except that's where they stopped. The view from the top of the Victory Monument is one of palm trees swaying, crumbling French colonial buildings, golden temples and lots of wooden houses. There isn't a great deal to do in this town other than drink the excellent and cheap beer and gaze across the Mekong – not that there's anything wrong with that. In the morning there's croissants and other pastries with coffee and in the evening, sumptuous French cuisine for a handfull of dollars.

PLACES TO CRASH:

There actually are luxury hotels in Laos; the **Lao Plaza** claims to be five-star and rooms start at US\$100, and the **Novotel**, near the airport has rooms for around US\$70. For the more budget-minded, pretty much all your accommodation needs are concentrated in the area of Samsenthai, Setthathirath and Thanon Fa Ngum – and all roads in between. Down on the river road, the **Phet Phim Guest House** is the best budget crash in town charging US\$3-5. If you're willing to spend a bit more, the runaway winner is the fairly new **Dragon Lodge** on Samsenthai, which has sparkling rooms for US\$12-15. **Orchid Guest House** on Fa Ngum Road is US\$12, and the rooftop lounge has stirring views over the Mekong. The cheapest rooms in town are at the **Mixac Guest House** on Setthathirath Road, where skanky dorm beds cost less than US\$2 and hideous rooms go for US\$3-5. Around the corner from the Santisouk, on the road behind Samsenthai, the **Thawee Guest House** is a lot newer and better value at US\$6-12.

DAYTRIPPING:

Get your mitts on a bicycle (\$1/day) or motorbike (\$8/day), or even ride around in the slowest tuk-tuks on earth. There are about two day's worth of attractions worth visiting and that's allowing for hangover recovery time.

At the end of That Luang Road is **Pha That Luang**, the nation's spiritual centre with a 400-year-old stupa allegedly containing Buddha relics. Heading back to the centre of town is the country's tallest building, the **Victory Monument**. This Asian Arc de Triomphe was built in 1969 by the Imperial Government using US-supplied cement intended for a runway to better facilitate America's secret war in the north. Carrying on south, there's **Talaat Sao** (Morning Market), the town's main shopping centre, selling everything, including some of the best hand-woven fabrics in Southeast Asia. From there, turn right onto Samsenthai Road and head for the **Lao Revolutionary Museum**. This large and thoroughly pompous building is great for a few discreet laughs at the ruling party's expense. The museum is devoted to commemorating the glorious people's struggle to rise out of poverty, imperialism and oppression and achieve liberation, poverty and

oppression instead. Next, head down to Setthathirath Road, past the President's Palace to **Wat Si Saket**, which was built in 1818 and the oldest temple in Vientiane. When Siam was raping and pillaging the city in 1828 (before taking the population as slaves), they spared this Siamese-style one. Finish off at **Wat Sok Pa Luang**, with a herbal sauna and massage for about \$3. The tuk-tuk drivers know the place.

FEEDING TIME

You're a fool if you don't try a Lao baguette (you might still be a fool if you do, of course). Stuffed with veggies and a suspiciously spiced pate and washed down with the supremely strong Lao coffee, they'll keep you going for hours. For a nice sit-down coffee and pastry or croissant, the **Liang Xiang Bakery House** and **Sweet Home Bakery**, both on Chao Anou are not bad.

There are a quite ridiculous number of French restaurants in Vientiane – and they're all good. Check out the **Le Nadao** near Victory Monument next to Le Parasol Blanc Hotel, **Le Provencal** at the fountain for southern French food, **Le Cote d'Azur** on Fa Ngum for hearty rustic fare or **La Terrasse** on Nokeo Khumman, which serves up a bargain three-course lunch on Fridays for US\$4.

A few of those groovy cafes where people like to use the word 'eclectic' have sprung up in Vientiane in recent years. Among the best, in descending order of food quality and ascending order of popularity, are the **Xang Cafe** on Khun Bulom or **Sticky Fingers** on Francois Nginn.

NIGHTTRIPPING:

All nightspots start closing around the official 10:30pm and it's lights out by 11:30pm. The main focus for expats and tourists is the **Kop Chai Deu Food Garden**, a lovingly restored French colonial house near the fountain. The **Chess Cafe** is a, frankly, hilarious vista of expat drunks and taxi-girls, dancing to

Lao-accented Beatles' covers. It's open sometimes, closed sometimes. For lovers of raucous nightclubs, there's **D'Tech**, at the back of the Novotel and the **Future Bar** next door. **Deja Vu**, on the Nam Phu circle, is a snazzy spot that seems more Vienna than Vientiane. There are a couple of places in Vientiane that cater to the non-narcoleptic after closing time. **Samlor Pub**, a few minutes up the road from Kop

Chai Deu, is usually kicking past the witching hour. But if you're up for a round of beer and 10-pins, hit the **Lao Bowling Center** near the National Stadium, open all night.



VANG VIENG

The Khaosan Road of Laos it may be, but at least it's surrounded by some of the most wonderful countryside you're likely to see. And like Khaosan it's going increasingly upscale with loads of snazzy accommodation along the riverside for US\$35. But on the main drag you can't spit without hitting either a backpacker restaurant or a guesthouse. They're all pretty similar, really, but some notably good ones are Malany Guest House, where you'll get a large room with polished wooden floors for US\$5 and Thavisouk, run by a group of happy women, rooms for US\$4, and they'll sort you out with good seats for the bus trip to Luang Prabang. The Ngeunpanith is a bit pricier at US\$8. If you're after a more rural experience, try working for a week at the Suanmone Phoudindaeng Organic Farm north of town. You can work there, sleep in a dorm and get fed for US\$1.50 a day, after the first three days of training. The owner likes you to stay for at least a week.

PLACES TO CRASH

In Ban Wat That area, the best guest house is **Vanvisa**, a family-run house with a traditional Lao-style building out the back for US\$6-10. Not far behind is the **Hoxieng**, which is the same price. Nearby, the **Tanoy** is run by a nice lady and her eccentric, rather flirtatious daughter. Rooms for US\$4-7. Along the Mekong there are a clutch of guesthouses north of the palace, **Chaliny** on Souvannabanlang Rd has shiny wooden floors and views over the river for US\$5-8. Along Khem Khong Rd, the **View Khem Khong** (US\$6), **Bounnasouk** (US\$8) and **Bounthieng** (US\$4-8) are all worth a look, as is the **Mekong GH**. To find the **Phonethavy GH**, turn right just after Phousy Hotel and the school and walk 100m, excellent budget rooms, and it's followed by **Kounsavan GH**, with small but clean rooms. Further on the right is **Chaleunsouk GH**, where they speak French. On Wisunalat Rd is the best guest house in all Luang Prabang - the **Mano**, with three-star rooms for less than US\$10. A bit of a walk from town, but worth it for the luxury.

NIGHTRIPPING:

The New York-style **Maylek Pub** is a funky retro-esque nightspot where Luang Prabang's hip and happening - cashed-up relief workers and general posers - come to swill. Music is great considering there is nowhere to hear jazzy blues or hip-hop and funk within 500 kilometres of the place. Drinks are about 20% more expensive than elsewhere in the town, which still calculates to cheap. A competitor called the **Hive Bar** has also opened up on the quiet side of Phou Si Hill. The music is just as good and the drinks a little cheaper. For a more traditional night on the town, the **Muang Khua Hotel** on Thanon Phu Wao has the best Lao-style disco, with excellent Lao pop (there is such a thing, really!) and the rest.

FEEDING TIME:

Xiang Thong Road is one of the town's great food streets and **Khao Biak Sen** is one of the best noodle shops in town. Round rice noodles cooked over an open fire outside a decaying French house - very tasty. The night market in front of the palace is the best spot in town to pick up cheap Luang Prabang specialities. The **Luang Prabang Bakery** is run by a Hmong woman who studied pastry in Bangkok and makes excellent sandwiches. The **Scandinavian Bakery** serves wholesome breakfast fare in an air-con setting. The **Cafe de Arts** is an exceptional eatery with a great mix of French and Lao dishes at very reasonable prices. Nearby is

the **Yonkhoun**, where you can slice into a deer steak that is as tender as an angel's bum. Also good is **Le Potiron**, a cheap French/Euro joint with decent pizza and exceptional desserts - the best place in town for a budget binge of non-Lao grub. **Villa Santi** is in Luang Prabang's classiest hotel. The restaurant is excellent but not prohibitively expensive. Lao food is the best choice. **Duang Champa**, on Kingkitsalat Rd, has Lao and French cuisine in stylish surroundings. Colonial splendour with a generous bar, **Han Sontam Khaem Khong** is around Wat Nong on Manthatoulat Rd. Look for the green doors. It serves LP's most deadly spicy papaya salad. **Nazim's** Indian/Halal restaurant, a long-time hit in Vientiane, now has a branch in Luang Prabang.

LUANG PRABAANG

This town, at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers, is usually a few day's stop for travellers going south. The town has World Heritage status since it's loaded with history. Ancient Buddha-bedecked caves and colonial shopfronts, all dropped in the middle of beautiful, dirt-poor hills give the place a gallery-like feel. High marks go to the waterfall, the coffee and the abundance of good and cheap French and Lao food.

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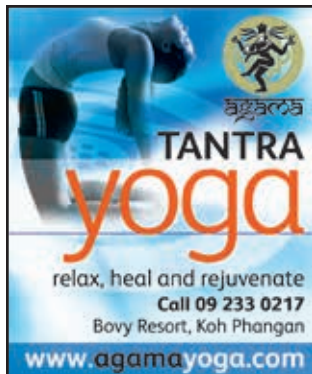
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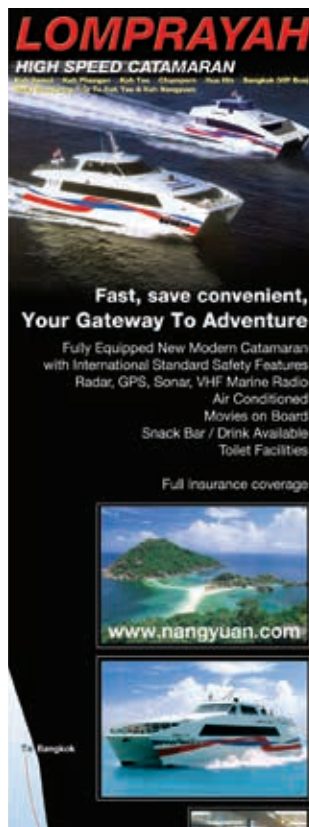


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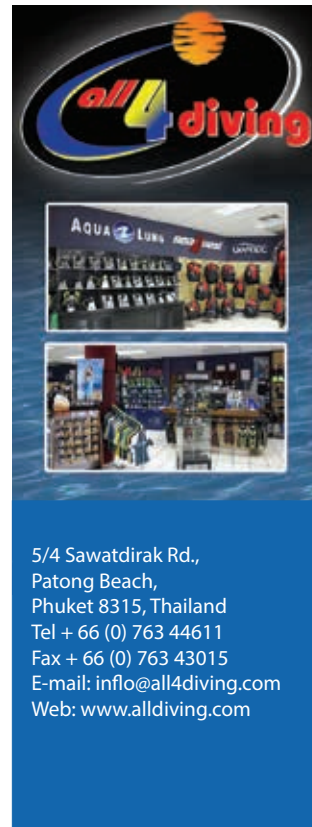
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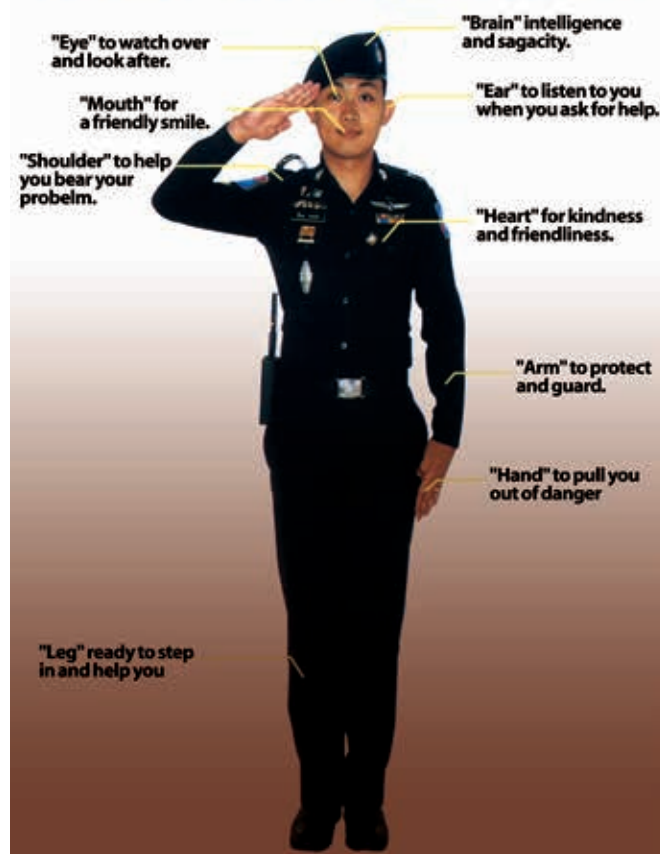
Remember, if you're going to have a good time, you have to pay for it.
fancy cocktails or single malt whiskeys, you have to pay for them.

Cellular Credibility

Making calls in Thailand is not fun. There are blue phones, red phones, yellow and green ones. Some take coins, some take cards and some won't work no matter what you do. Plus, Bangkok is one of the noisiest cities on earth to make a curbside calls from. Payphones work by putting in around Bt5 and dialing. If you want to call International, Lenso Yellow phones are easy but not really cheap. Of course, the best thing is to bring your own. You can pick up a phone here for as little as Bt2000 or bring your own from home. You can even use your own GSM SIM cards here. To check out the local providers, go to www.ais.co.th, www.dtac.co.th, or www.orange.co.th, and they'll tell you how to switch your phone to their network. If you're going to be in Thailand for a bit longer, shop around for a local SIM card - around Bt400., depending on the number. When you dial you must always dial the area code first (02 for Bangkok, 053 for Chiang Mai) and the IDD code to call out of the country is 001.



Your Friendliness



hospitals

THAILAND

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

BANGKOK

Bangkok Adventist Mission Hospital (Private)
430 Phitsanulok Road.
(Near to Khaosan)
Tel: 02-281-1422, 02-282-1100
Bangkok General Hospital (Private, with international clinic)
2 Soi Soonvijai 7 New Petchburi Road.
Tel: 02-310-3000, 02-318-0066
Siriraj Hospital (Government, Mahidol University)
2 Prannok Road, Thonburi (across the river from the Grand Palace)
Tel: 02-419-7000

CHIANG MAI

Chiang Mai Ram Hospital (Private)
8 Boonruangrit Road, Chiang Mai
Tel: 053-224-861

KOH SAMUI

(minor ailments only)
Samui International Hospital (Private)
90/2 Moo Bophut, Chaweng Beach,
Koh Samui
Tel: 077-230-781/2, 077-422-272

CAMBODIA

Cambodia is not a good place to get sick or injured. Basic stabilization facilities exist, but for serious treatment, evacuation to Thailand is the only option.
AEA International SOS Clinic
Has expat doctors and dentist and can set up evacuations.
House 161, Street 51, Sang-Kat Boeung Rung, Phnom Penh
Tel: (855-23) 216-911,
Bangkok Hospital
At last modern medicine arrives in Siem Reap.

LAOS

Heaven help you if you have any serious ailments while in Laos. There are few qualified doctors and they just don't have the facilities. Get to Thailand. From Vientiane, there are one or two okay hospitals just over the bridge in Nong Khai. Otherwise, it's back to Bangkok.
Clinique Internationale, Luang Prabang
(856) 214-022
Centre de Traumatologie et d'Orthopedie de Vientiane (Private)
On the Road to Tha Ngon, north of Vientiane.
Tel: (856) 413-663, 413-306
(Call for ambulance service)
Nong Khai Wattana Hospital (Private)
1159/4 Prachak Road, Nong Khai, Thailand - near Vientiane
Tel: 042-465-201

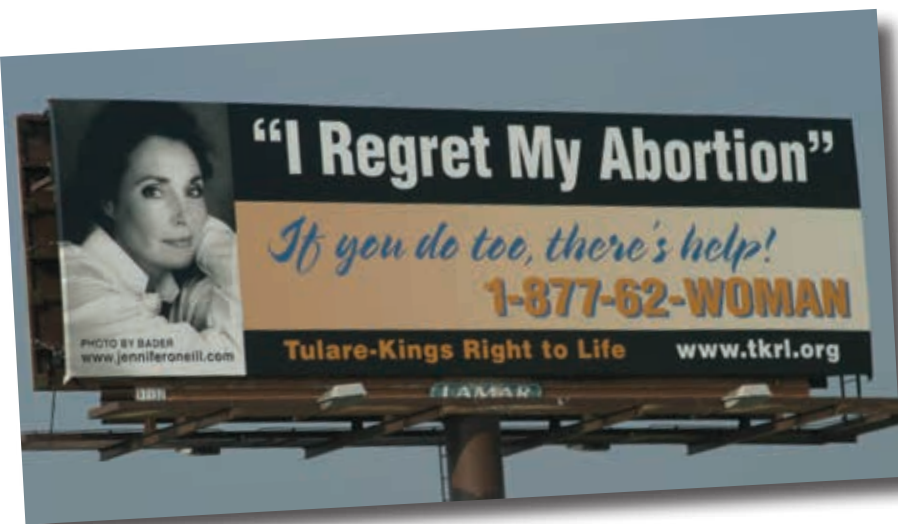
bangkok embassies

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

_AUSTRALIA
Tel: 02-2872680
_AUSTRIA
Tel: 02-303-6057
_BURMA
Tel: 02-233-2237,
02-234-4698
_CAMBODIA
Tel: 02-253-7967
_CANADA
Tel: 02-636-0540
_CHINA
Tel: 02-245-7032-49
_FRANCE
Tel: 02-627-2105
_GERMANY
Tel: 02-287-9000
_INDIA
Tel: 02-258-0300-6
_INDONESIA
Tel: 02-252-3135-40
_ISRAEL
Tel: 02-260-4854-9
_JAPAN
Tel: 02-252-6151-9
_SOUTH KOREA
Tel: 02-247-7537-9
_LAOS
Tel: 02-539-6667-8
_MALAYSIA
Tel: 02-679-2190-9
_NEPAL
Tel: 02-391-7240
_NETHERLANDS
Tel: 02-254-7701-5
_PHILIPPINES
Tel: 02-259-0139-40
_SINGAPORE
Tel: 02-286-2111,
02286-1434
_SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 02-253-8473-6
_SRI LANKA
Tel: 02-6657299-0
_SWEDEN
Tel: 02-263-7200
_TAIWAN
Tel: 02-670-0200-1
_UK
Tel: 02-305-8333
_USA
Tel: 02-205-4000
_VIETNAM
Tel: 02-251-5835-8

THAILAND EMERGENCY NUMBERS
THAILAND EMERGENCY NUMBERS:
Tourist Police 24-hour Tourist Hotline:
1155 then press 1
Tourist Information: 02-282-9773-6
Police Emergency: 191
Medical Evacuation and Ambulance
Service: 02-255-1133-6
Airport: (02) 535-1111
CREDIT CARD HOTLINES:
Visa: (02) 273-7449
Mastercard: (02) 260-8572
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