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IN THIS ISSUE

NEWS: Hotels call for action to improve Patong; New town planned. **Pages 2 & 3**

INSIDE STORY: Man with a mission at Mission Hills. **Pages 4 & 5**

AROUND THE ISLAND: 1,000-km bike ride is no big deal for Dutch foursome. **Page 6**

AROUND THE REGION: The many facets of singer Todd Thongdee. **Page 8**

PEOPLE: Husband-and-wife team at the cutting edge of Aids research. **Pages 10 & 11**

LIFESTYLE: Romantic candles; Sensitive skin. **Page 13**

FIRST PERSON: What's behind the land probe? **Page 19**

BUSINESS & MONEY: Billion Plaza to be 'a new landmark'; Signs of grumbling from the market bear. **Page 21**

NEW! DIVING: What Thai dive instructors think of the issues. **Page 22**

GOOD LIVING: Samurai inspirations at Tukiji. **Page 25**

PROPERTY: Are billboards appropriate for selling property? The high life in Kamala. **Pages 26 & 27**

PLUS

QUEER NEWS 4; AROUND THE NATION 7; HAPPENINGS 9; THAILAND TRAVELER 12; HEARD & SCENE, HOROSCOPES 14; KIDS 15; COMPUTERS, BOOKS 16; HEALTH, LAW 17; EDITORIAL & LETTERS 18; ISSUES & ANSWERS 19; TOON TOWN, EDGEWISE 20; SPORT 22 & 23; MOTORING 24; WINE 25; GARDENING, CONSTRUCTION 28; CLASSIFIEDS 29-35.

Govt refuses to close dog pound

By Dhirarat Boonkongsan

PHUKET CITY: At a sometimes tense meeting on July 13, the Phuket Provincial Livestock Office (PPLO) stuck to its guns and rejected the urging of animal support charities to close the controversial dog pound.

However, it was agreed at the meeting, held at the Public Health Office and chaired by Vice-Governor Winai Buapradit, that a number of improvements must be made to the pound, and that matters such as food must be much better organized.

The Chief of the PPLO, Sunart Wongchawalit, who has borne the brunt of criticism of the pound, admitted there were some failings, but blamed others.

"After we had caught 243 dogs from Phuket City, we found some parts of the fence were destroyed by people trying to let the dogs out, so we have posted a guard around the clock," he said.

The design of the pound came in for serious criticism. Tawee Homhuan of the Public Works and Town and Country Planning Office said that his office had built the pound to PPLO specifications.

"It was made according to the PPLO's plans. We don't know anything about looking after dogs, so they should have told us [what they wanted]. I don't think the way some people complained about me was fair."

K. Sunart countered, "The blueprint was changed before construction started, and I did not get to see the changes."

He also complained, "The water pump at the pound stopped working after two days, and there was not enough food.



Officials from various government organizations visit the pound after the meeting to discuss how it can be improved.

"Some doglovers brought food, which was a big help because the supplies of dried food we had were not sufficient.

"We have already asked the Thai Hotels Association to organize food for us," he added.

But getting food from the hotels to the pound was apparently not in the plan. Samarn Sa-Ingthong, Managing Director of travel agency JST Travel, stepped into the breach, volunteering himself and Chris Koppers, Managing Director of Moodies Entertainment in Patong, to take on the responsibility of organiz-

ing hotels to donate food and local government organizations to deliver it to the pound.

He also responded generously to comments that the pound seemed badly understaffed, with just four people cleaning the facility, treating sick dogs and getting newcomers sterilized.

"Just hire some more staff," he said. "We in the private sector can afford it. Three people, that's 18,000 baht a month. It's not a big deal."

K. Sunart moved on to another topic.
Continued on page 2

CAT cuts call rates to thirty countries

By Siripansa Somboon

PHUKET: The Communications Authority of Thailand (CAT) has announced a promotion whereby it has slashed to six baht a minute its charges on international calls to 30 countries, regardless of what time of the day the call is made.

The discounted rates apply to calls to the US, the UK, Canada, Germany, Australia, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Guam, Indonesia, Brunei, Korea, Italy, Norway, Macau, Brazil, Israel, Laos, Malaysia, Mexico, Russia, Kuwait and South Africa.

To make a discounted call to any of the above countries using the CAT service, callers must first buy a CAT PhoneNet card.

They can then make a discount-rate call by dialing 1544, entering the PhoneNet card's PIN Code (located under a scratch-off patch), then pressing "9" followed by 009 + country code + area code + telephone number and then pressing "9" again.

PhoneNet cards are available in Phuket City at the CAT office at 112/2 Phang Nga Rd and at the Tops supermarket in the Robinson department store. They are also available at the CAT office on the upper floor of the Patong Post Office on Thaweewong Rd.

In the past, such promotions have often resulted in the service being so jammed by callers as to be inaccessible, so another, slightly more expensive option is being offered in con-

Continued on page 2



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Hotels call for action to improve Patong

By Gategeo Phetsawang

PATONG: Eight Patong hotels held a joint press conference at the Holiday Inn Resort Phuket on July 8 to officially announce the results of the 3rd Annual Patong Beach Survey. The group called on both the public and government agencies to do a better job in maintaining Patong's attractiveness to tourists.

Survey results, which were compiled through random questioning of 1,200 foreign tourists between November 2003 and February 2004, were reported in the *Gazette* in April.

Apichart Asa, General Manager of the Phuket Grand Tropicana Hotel, said that the results indicate that, in general, many tourists are not sufficiently satisfied with their experience in Patong to want to make a return visit. He noted that seawater quality in the bay and the overall cleanliness of the town have continued to decline over the past two years.

K. Apichart said the survey results, along with a call for government action, will be forwarded to the Phuket Governor, the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the Presidents of both the Phuket Provincial Administration Organization and Patong Municipality.

Speaking about the poor condition of the walkways along the beach road, he said, "We sent a letter to the municipality about the need to improve walkways.

"But they told us that there will be a project to [bury] electricity cables alongside the road,



Wolfgang Meusburger (left) and Apichart Asa present the results of the survey.

so they plan to wait until the Provincial Electricity Authority starts work. We still don't know when [that will be]," he said.

Visitors had become less aware of the presence of Tourist Police, K. Apichart said, adding that this might be attributed to a growing number of tourists while the Tourist Police establishment had remained the same.

Wolfgang Meusburger, General Manager of the Holiday Inn Resort, said that there had been little progress toward acting on the recommendations made after previous surveys, and noted that having four municipal elections in Patong over the past two years – with long stretches in between without a town council – had hindered development.

from tourists included:

- Making more garbage bins available;
- Hiring a beach clean-up team;
- Preventing shops from leaving garbage on walkways;
- Cleaning walkways weekly with a high-pressure water hose;
- Introducing a scheme whereby the private sector would plant and maintain beachside greenery.

Other issues listed as "needing consideration" were:

- Aggressive taxi drivers, tuk-tuk drivers and street vendors;
- A ban on touts from tailor shops and time-share operations;
- Enforcement of the law banning unlicensed taxis;
- Implementation of set fares for tuk-tuks;
- A solution to the problem of an estimated 300 tuk-tuks parking along the beach road;
- The purchase of land to build a public parking lot;
- Barring vehicles from Thawee-wong Rd and Soi Bangla.

The report also suggested:

- Building more public showers and toilets at the beach;
- Improving zoning for jet ski and parasail operators;
- Weekly inspection and repair of walkways;
- Widening of walkways;
- Introduction of bus routes between Patong and other beaches.

Editorial: page 18

Burasari Resort Managing Director Lily Udomkunnatum said that tourists who visit Phuket want pleasant views and clean beaches.

Noting that Patong faces competition from other tourist destinations, she said everyone needs to cooperate to make tourists want to return. She warned that if the current trend continues, within two years foreign tourists might stop considering Patong when planning vacations.

Comments and suggestions

BLACKOUT SCHEDULE

PHUKET: The Phuket Provincial Electricity Authority (PPEA) has announced scheduled blackouts for July. The blackouts, from 9 am to 4 pm, are as follows:

July 22, **Phuket City:** Montri Rd, from Phuket Post Office to Surin Circle.

Phang Nga Rd, from the intersection with Surin Rd to the Sinthavee Hotel, and including Phang Nga Rd Sois 1, 2, 3 and 4.

July 28, **Wichit:** Chao Fa West Rd (west side), from the PPEA substation to the Darasamut School intersection, includ-

ing Soi Nimit and Baan Suan Thai.

Wichit Songkram Rd, from the Darasamut School intersection to Moo Baan Anuphas Golf Ville, including Soi Thida, Baan Ketho, Moo Baan Irawadee Ketho, Soi Chumchon Ketho and Soi Kathu 1.

July 30, **Wichit:** Chao Fa East Rd, from Sakdidet Rd to Soi Paisarn, including Soi Pasuk.

Note: This information is subject to change without notice. To check the latest status, call 076-211663.

Govt sticks to its guns in stray dog controversy

From page 1

other crucial matter that was apparently overlooked in the original plan. "We need one more important thing: a trough to put the food in," he said. Currently, food is dumped in grubby bowls or on the ground.

Yet again K. Samarn offered private sector help to make a trough, but in the end it was decided that the provincial government would find the budget for this and take care of it.

Margot Homburg Park, founder of dog charity the Soi Dog Foundation, who has vigorously opposed the pound since its inception, once again advocated that it be abandoned.

"Many dogs have already died in fights. Why don't you just leave them [where they are]?" Ms Park asked.

K. Sunart retorted, "Who will guarantee that the dogs won't bite people? We have been rounding them up because people have told us they are scared [of being bitten]."

Ms Park also commented, "It would be better for the animals if we put them to sleep peacefully, rather than keeping them in these bad conditions."

K. Sunart snapped back, "If you want to do that we will provide the poison. When do you want to start?" Ms Park said that she would let the PPLO know "later".

After the meeting, officials went to look at the pound to see what needed improving. K. Tawee told the *Gazette* that the malfunctioning pump, the installation of a feeding trough and repairs to the damaged fence would be carried out in the next 10 days.

Covering the ground at the pound with blacktop will take longer. At the moment, with the rain, the ground is mostly mud.

A defiant K. Sunart said, "The problems will be fixed soon and then we will carry on with this project."

CAT slashes rates for overseas calls

From Page 1

junction with the CAT promotion.

This option, applying to the same 30 countries over the same period, is via Thai telecommunications company eFONE, which is offering calls at seven baht a minute.

To make a discounted call using the eFONE service from a fixed-line phone, dial 001-809 + country code + area code + telephone number.

If calling from a mobile phone (AMPS, CDMA, DTAC, AIS, Orange, One-2-Call), dial 009 instead of the 001-809 prefix.

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Phummisak reveals plans for new town

By Sangkhae Leelanaporn

PHUKET: Phummisak Hongyok, having stepped down as mayor of one town – Phuket City – is now planning to build his own town: a community glory-

ing in the name of Chao Fah City.

The new town will rise on 1,510 rai of currently empty land between the Prince of Songkhla University and Kwang Rd.

K. Phummisak, Managing Director of Anuphas and Sons Co Ltd, told the *Gazette* that his priority will be to ensure the entire project is well planned.

"In the draft master plan, we have already separated the area into zones for different functions, such as residential, resorts, shopping and perhaps a university. We plan to build a place that has a high quality of life," he added.

"Some businesspeople interested in leasing land in the development have already contacted me.

"The first project will be the development of the Phuket International Night Bazaar on 170 rai, with entertainment venues and a shopping area. We will be launching this officially in Bangkok on Wednesday [July 14]," he added.

An in-depth report on the new town will appear in the *Gazette* issue of July 24.

Governors 'should have the power to levy taxes'

BANGKOK: Former Phuket Governor Chadej Insawang, now Secretary of the newly-formed Mahachon Party, which will contest the coming national elections, has advocated sweeping devolution of tax-raising powers from Bangkok to the provinces.

Speaking with the *Gazette*, K. Chadej said, "Giving governors the responsibility to set budgets for essential services rather than [only] administer them will lead to resources being allocated faster and more appropriately."

Provincial governors currently receive funds from two central government budgets. The first covers services such as health, education and police and is set annually by central government. In addition, governors may request special budgets for major projects such as new roads.

"[Mahachon] has adopted decentralization as part of its platform [ahead of the 2005 general election] to ensure that the people who know the provinces best – the governors – can make their own decisions on what is best for their region," he said.

– *Kamol Pirat*



Police in Phuket City demonstrate crowd control techniques during Gen Ronnarong's visit.

Top brass check police stations

PHUKET CITY: Officers at Phuket City Police Station on July 8 found themselves under the scrutiny of Pol Maj Gen Ronnarong Yungyuen, the Deputy Commissioner of Police Region 8, and five other senior officers from Region 8 headquarters in Surat Thani, who were in Phuket to assess the performance of police stations on the island.

The inspection tour, which reached Phuket on July 6, was

part of the annual "Police Station for the People" assessment of police stations in Region 8, which also covers Chumphon, Ranong, Phang Nga, Krabi, Surat Thani and Nakhon Sri Thammarat provinces.

Phuket City Police Station won first prize in the "Police Station for the People" competition in 2002 for its performance in terms of justice, security, serving people, traffic control, improving

staff and the station itself, working systems and public relations. Last year, however, it was topped by Samui Police Station.

"Police in Phuket City are considered the best in Phuket, and are very well-trained. They may be the most efficient team in Region 8," the General said.

A date has yet to be set for the announcement of this year's winner of the best police station award. – *Gategao Phetsawang*

Pirate bags and shoes seized in Patong

PATONG: Kathu Police seized about 1,000 pirate copies of designer shoes, handbags and clothing on July 8 and arrested one vendor.

Undercover officers posing as customers bought a pair of sport shoes from a vendor operating along Thaweewong Rd. She was identified as Pichamon Somji, 25, of Surat Thani.

K. Pichamon was arrested and charged with selling goods in violation of copyright laws.

All of her merchandise was seized. Police estimated the value of the haul at 500,000 baht. Among the brands imitated in her goods were Christian Dior, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Puma and Nike.

Pol Col Chalit Thinthanee, Superintendent of Kathu Police Station, said the bust was in line with the government's policy to rid Patong of counterfeit goods.

"So far this this year we have made about 100 arrests and

eliminated 80% to 90% of the trade in counterfeit goods," he said.

He admitted, however, that it would be difficult to eliminate the trade completely because small factories in China continue to churn out the phony items, which find a ready market in Thailand.

He added that vendors had changed their marketing approach in response to police action. Rather than set up stalls,

many vendors have switched to peddling their wares directly to tourists.

"Some vendors also use a delivery system similar to the one used in pizza home delivery. When the customer orders the goods, a phone call is made and the merchandise is delivered directly to the customer's [hotel].

"We are keeping our eyes open and expect to arrest the people who are doing this soon," Col Chalit said. – *Kamol Pirat*

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Queer News

No hard feelings

NONGKHAI: Under Thai law it is impossible for a wife to bring rape charges against a husband, but that doesn't mean women are defenseless against the unwanted nighttime advances of their spouses.

One man who learned this lesson the hard way was 29-year-old "Mike" (not his real name), a farmer from Nongkhai's Boongkhla District. Mike found himself in the local hospital with his penis almost completely severed after his 25-year-old wife kicked him in the groin to stop his sexual advances.

Never has detumescence been achieved so quickly and with such lasting effect, for the long nail on the woman's big toe cut into Mike's penis, nearly severing it at the base. The supply of blood which had only moments before supported Mike's excited member now spouted out, splashing across the couples' bed and ensuring that Mike would be sitting on the sexual sidelines for a long, long time. From the wife's point of view, the move perhaps worked too well.

A reporter who happened to be in the Boongkhla Hospital during the early morning hours of July 5 noticed the sorry young man lying in a cot with an intravenous tube running into his arm and his penis wrapped in gauze. Doctors there had stitched it back on with a needle and 12 sutures, but it was not reported when – or if – it would return to normal functioning.

Mike recounted the evening's horror to the reporter in a soft and sorry voice.

"I was at home with my wife 'Mem' (not her real name). We had been arguing. It was nothing unusual, just your typical lovers' spat. As we lay in bed I tried to make up with her, but she wasn't having any of it. After a while I started to feel frisky. That's when I started grabbing her. She tried to fight me off, but I kept at it. Finally, she thrust her right leg down into my naughty bits to stop me. But her toenail sliced into my penis, almost completely cutting it off."

Mike told the reporter that he didn't want to press charges against Mem, who had rushed him to hospital. He said he still loved her and, having made her so angry, felt partially responsible for the accident.

Source: Daily News

A smoking pot of stew

PHUKET CITY: During the June 29 meeting of the Committee to Maintain Stability and Peace in Phuket, Phuket Prison chief Panya Panatnachee told fellow members that someone had smuggled 20 grams of dry marijuana into the facility.

While the presence of drugs in a Thai correctional facility hardly constitutes news, the manner in which it was smuggled is worthy of note. Apparently someone stuffed the contraband inside a fish, which was then used to make a pot of the local delicacy *gaeng som*, a bright orange stew.

Prison officials lodged a complaint with Phuket City Police, asking that the guilty party be tracked down. But police doubted the investigation would be successful because the prison failed to provide sufficient clues, such as records of who had visited the prison or the gifts they had brought. All they had presented as evidence was the marijuana, which had somehow remained dry.

Source: Siang Tai

THE ZEAL

Adisai Ngamjitsuksri could not escape golf even if he tried. His golf-mad parents gave him the nickname "Golf" and he was swinging a club before he reached his 10th birthday.

His fascination with golf – an occasionally expensive hobby – has led to the construction of Mission Hills Phuket at a cost of 2 billion baht.

This course, the fourth in Thailand bearing the Mission Hills name, joins courses in Bangkok, Kanchanaburi and Nakhon Ratchasima, as well as courses in China.

"It was an ambition of mine to open a course close to a beach," says K. Golf. "When Mission Hills opens at the end of August this year, Phuket will have a course between the mountains and the sea, with views across a rubber plantation."

"This is the first course of its type in Phuket, and there are very few courses anything like this in Thailand," he said.

The course – designed by Golden Bear Jack Nicklaus – covers more than 800 rai in Pa Khlok. In addition to the 18-hole daytime course spread across 500 rai there is a floodlit nine-hole course covering a further 200 rai. Both have spectacular views of Phang Nga Bay.

K. Golf points out that the latest jewel in Phuket's golfing crown is no more than 45 minutes' drive from anywhere on the island. "Traveling for 45 minutes is nothing for a golfer who is used to taking a few hours to get around a course," said K. Adisai. "The facilities and convenience

To the raft of other categories – including diving and sailing – in which Phuket regularly features in the "World's Top 5", must come golf.

The four existing courses on the island – Blue Canyon Country Club, Banyan Tree Phuket, Loch Palm and Phuket Country Club – will soon be joined by a fifth, the Mission Hills (Phuket) Golf Club Resort and Spa. The *Gazette's* Anongnat Sartpisut recently spoke with the man behind the mission, Adisai 'Golf' Ngamjitsuksri.

that we offer here will encourage golfers to play and stay at this resort.

"Mission Hills is also within striking distance of the island's four other courses," he added.

K. Golf admits that the

going to sell a vision, a concept of Thailand, to players and guests from overseas," he explains.

The facilities that will be at the disposal of both golfers and non-golfers appear to rival those of the premier resorts on the island.

It will have a "world-class" spa and fitness center, and the Thai-style clubhouse – which, according to K. Golf, will be unique in Thailand – will have a grill room, a Japanese restaurant and an Italian one, a coffee shop, a library, a business center, a tennis pavilion and a swimming pool.

It will also have a 72-room hotel comprising 32 superior and 32 deluxe rooms, four "mini-suites" and

four executive suites. Prices per night will range from around 8,000 baht to 18,000 baht for the executive suites.

Lions feature large in K. Golf's vision of Mission Hills. Viewed the right way round, and with a fair amount of squinting, the 18-hole course resembles a lion. The leonine motif continues throughout to the detail of the clubhouse. Carved and molded lions will grace the outside of the building.

"The course, buildings and details inside and out will showcase the fine works of Thai artisans. Our customers will only find the best at Mission Hills," claims K. Golf.

"I estimate that we will have an average of 400 golfers a day playing at Mission Hills. The 72 rooms and suites could probably be filled three times over during the high season."

Then, of course, there's the golf itself. Golfers will be able to play seven days a week, from 6 am through to midnight – Mission Hills will have the first floodlit course in Phuket – seven days a week. "We have invested 50 million baht in a Philips lighting system. Their systems are designed exclusively for golf



'If we build [homes for sale] on this land, then it will spoil the views [from the course] to the sea. It is better to leave the land alone, retaining the views for the players.'

project has gone over budget, though he is cautious about revealing by how much. "But what I will say is that, as a businessman, I cannot worry too much about overspending when the end result will justify the cost."

"It is the details, the final touches, that players and guests will remember."

Construction began in September 2002, and K. Golf has been very "hands-on" in every aspect of the design and construction. "Construction of Mission Hills has not been rushed, but has been measured and done on a stage-by-stage basis," he says.

"The marketing phase of operations hasn't even really begun yet; completing and readying the product is the main objective at the moment."

But word about the new course has spread, and a quick search for "Mission Hills Phuket" on Google brings up more than 3,500 hits many from property developers eager to add "Mission Hills" as a tagline to their portfolios.

Bucking the trend of "Thailand for Thais", K. Golf says that foreign tourists – not Thais or local expats – will be the target group for Mission Hills. "We are

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WATER HAZARD: The views across Phang Nga Bay may be enough to put any player off his stroke.

courses and must be configured in such a way as to eliminate shadows all the way from the tee to the flag."

Playing 27 holes in a day might be a little much for some golfers, but K. Golf says that players can mix and match, opting for nine holes in, for example, the morning, spending time at the spa or other facilities until dark and then enjoying some night-time play.

Prices for an 18-hole round of golf are, at 3,800 baht, pitched toward the more expensive end of Phuket's five golf courses. Standard fees for a nine-hole round are pegged at 1,900 baht but an after-dark session will attract a surcharge of an additional 800 baht to cover the electricity.

That said, there will ini-

tially be no membership fees, K. Golf says.

He does not see Mission Hills as competing with the island's other golf courses. Indeed, he believes that Phuket should have more courses.

"There should be at least eight courses," he ventures. "The other golf course operators on the island and I consult each other from time to time – we have formed an informal alliance – and rather than compete, we are all [working together] to attract more golfers to the island for our shared benefit.

"I'm not worried about Mission Hills' 'market share'. Although golfers may have their favorite course in Phuket, they are also a little 'promiscuous' in their golfing behavior. People

who play at, for example, Banyan Tree, will also play at Loch Palm."

Addressing concerns about environmental damage caused by the construction of a course and also the use of fertilizers and their impact upon water reserves, K. Golf said, "A course should have no adverse impact upon its environment if it is designed and constructed properly. In this respect, I must give credit to Nicklaus Design, the best golf course designers in the world."

Mission Hills, he says, is in harmony with its now partially natural environment, despite the felling of countless rubber trees during its construction. "Our golf course has added to, not detracted from the [environmental] value of the island.

"Mission Hills' impact on the water table will be minimal. The course is at the base of Khao Prataew and run-off water from here will be used to irrigate the course and to refill the lakes, the natural reservoirs.

"The lakes hold about 1 million cubic meters of water, but should a drought ensue the resort's gray water can be treated and used for irrigation. In addition, one of the types of turf laid, called Sea Isle 1, has a high tolerance for saltwater."

K. Golf says fertilizers will be used sparingly, perhaps twice a year, and cites economic factors as one of the reasons. The turf at Mission Hills is unique in Phuket, and was chosen because it is hardy and retains its green color even in moderate drought conditions.

"The environment is of concern to golfers; they want to enjoy the scenery as much as the golf. Sure, the land [at Mission Hills] has changed but the view, from the mountains to the sea, blends seamlessly. It's beautiful here, especially at Hole 5, close to the beach.

"In fact, apart from making sure that each hole will provide a sufficient challenge to each golfer, we have tried to retain as much of the original landscape as possible. "We want playing golf here to be fun," he adds.

One impact becoming noticeable is the price of land in the locale. K. Golf says that any significant building development – golf or otherwise – is like a flower.

"The flower blooms and attracts bees that then help to pollinate other flowers that in turn bloom, and so on. One project can be the catalyst for the regeneration of an entire area."

But he acknowledges that a certain peacefulness has been lost. "It isn't as silent around here as it once was. There is much more noise and an increased

number of cars these days."

Prices for land close to the new golf course have risen from around 700,000 baht per rai just a few years ago to 2 or 3 million baht a rai now, according to advertisements in the *Gazette*.

Golf, or rather developing a golf course, appears to be something of a long game. "You don't get into the golf course business to make a quick profit," said K. Golf. "It could be 10 years, or even 40 years, before a significant profit is made [by this golf course], but by that time the prices of land will have risen dramatically."

He added that Mission Hills has an additional 200 rai of unused land that would make an ideal housing development, from some perspectives.

Around 80% of this land is close to the sea, but K. Golf, wearing his golfer's hat rather than a businessman's says, "If we build on this land, then it will spoil the views [from the course] to the sea. It is better to leave the land alone, retaining the views for the players."

One of K. Golf's dreams is to get inside the psyche of golfers and to make each hole at Mission Hills memorable: "I want all the golfers who play here to take a [mental] snapshot of each hole, each stroke that they play at Mission Hills. I want them to have an image of this course that will stay with them, something that they can try to explain to their friends. And then they – and their friends – will want to come back here year after year," he smiles.

"I love golf, and my aim is simply to allow as many people as possible to share in this passion."

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SPOKESPERSONS AT LARGE

By Anongnat Sartpisut

When people think about transport, they are usually thinking of how to get from A to B as quickly and cheaply as possible. That explains why the options for long trips these days usually boil down to buses, trains and airplanes.

Sure, you can fly to Bangkok in an hour, or take an overnight tour bus to the capital, but did you ever wonder what you were missing as the miles fly past by in the darkness?

Holland is the one country in Europe where bicycles still rule as a transport option for young and old alike. So anyone from Holland would not be surprised to learn about the two retired Dutch couples who recently made their way to Phuket from Bangkok by mountain bike.

Dutch nationals Marja Griffioen (57), Co Griffioen (60), Marian Salomons (65) and Kor Salomons (63) surprised many Thais when they rolled through village after village, covering as much as 100 kilometers on the days when they pushed their bikes hardest.

Generally, however, they proceeded at a more leisurely pace, stopping off at interesting sites and soaking up the un-

spoiled beauty that still makes up much of rural Thailand – but which is seldom visible from the country's major highways.

Kor Salomons, now retired from his career as a contract lawyer for Nederlandse Spoorwegen, the Dutch railway company, told the *Gazette*, "Now that I am retired, I have time to take longer trips.

"So we thought 'Why don't we go to Thailand and see it by bicycle?'"

"We think we see more interesting things this way. We get to meet more interesting people and see their real way of life," he added.

He explained that such a journey would surprise no one in Holland.

"Here, many people use motorcycles," he noted. "But in Holland, we cycle everywhere. Boys and girls pedal to school and older people cycle to their offices for work. The bicycle is the most popular form of transport

in Holland, except along highways."

"We have more bikes in Holland than there are in China,"

'It was never boring. We met many nice people, and they greeted us with laughter and kindness'



The four Dutch cyclists who took their national passion onto Thai roads are, from left, Marja and Co Griffioen, and Marian and Kor Salomons.

he said with a laugh, adding that the country's flat landscape made it easy to pedal just about anywhere.

So how did the Thais react to the unusual sight of four gray-haired foreigners rolling through their neighborhoods?

Marian Salomon said, "It was never boring. We met many nice people, and they greeted us with laughs and kindness," she said.

Co Griffioen added, "When people saw us, they always shouted hello and encouraged us. They seemed to admire what we were doing. Everybody along the road was shouting, saying 'Hello.' Everybody, really everybody, and that is very special for us."

All four told the *Gazette* that age was never a factor in the decision to pedal their way through Southern Thailand. Their eyes positively beam when they talk about the happiness, the good health and the experiences to be gained through cycling.

The one-month journey started on June 5 and ended on July 1 when the foursome finally rolled into Phuket.

They could have covered the 1,000-kilometer distance faster, but stopped off at a number of locations along the way, enjoying the landscape, bird-watching and getting into the sorts of locations that could well make them poster people for the Unseen Thailand campaign.

And as they did it with their own transport, they were idyllically free of having to deal with some of the less attractive elements of Thai tourism, such as tuk-tuk mafiosi or *ya bah*-chomping bus drivers.

They told the *Gazette* that although they were sometimes obliged to ride along highways, the trip was quite safe overall because they rode carefully and stuck to side roads whenever they could.

Cycling can of course be hard work, especially since Thailand is not flat like the Netherlands. The travelers also had to stop frequently because of rain. But none of this, they said, was a problem; Dutch people generally start cycling at the age of four or so, and often continue into their mid-80s.

The two-wheeled journey was not their first – they have already ridden together from Holland to France, and all around the Mediterranean.

Nor will it be their last. They are already thinking about their next destination and considering Laos, Vietnam or Singapore.

Marian said, "It is very healthy to bike and have a wonderful holiday at the same time."

But first, it's back to Holland. By air.

WARNING: SELLING ALCOHOL TO PERSONS UNDER 18 YEARS OLD IS ILLEGAL

*When the taste is perfect,
it can be the start of a friendship.*



National Library to go high-tech

Culture Minister Anurak Chureemas announced plans to upgrade the National Library in Bangkok with a computer system linking it to private and public libraries across the country.

The network will improve systems for storing and conserving rare books, allowing the public to retrieve information using "e-books" and thus avoiding damage to the original texts.

In May, the Cabinet approved 1 billion baht in funding for the project, which also includes renovation of the National Library.

Tiger in: Thai Asia Pacific Brewery, the local producer and distributor of Heineken beer, is spending 300 million baht to introduce Singapore's Tiger Beer to the Thai market.

Brewed in Nonthaburi, Tiger is aimed at the "standard" beer market segment currently monopolized by Singha. Large bottles will retail for 45 baht and small bottles for 25 baht.

The product will be available at 10,000 retail outlets nationwide within six months, the company says. Tiger is available in more than 60 countries and is brewed in seven countries, including Thailand.

Tigers out: Plodprasop Suraswadi, the permanent secretary of the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, may be suspended or transferred to an inactive post pending a disciplinary investigation into his approval of the export of 100 Bengal tigers to China in 1997.

K. Plodprasop's boss, Natural Resources and Environment Minister Suwit Khunkitti, is considering his options, sources said. If K. Suwit chooses to transfer him, K. Plodprasop is likely to be moved to the Prime Minister's Office.

A government panel led by National Intelligence Agency Director General Jumpol Manmai has recommended disciplinary proceedings against K. Plodprasop for approving the export of protected animals despite incomplete documentation.

Fossil foundation: The Cabinet



IN THE LINE OF FIRE: Emergency response officers in full protective gear "rescue" a "chemical attack victim" during a drill at Suvarnabhumi International Airport, now under construction in Samut Prakan's Bang Phli District. The three-hour exercise was held to test the new airport's security preparedness before its completion, scheduled next year.

has approved draft legislation aimed at conserving the nation's fossil heritage.

The draft, prepared by the Mineral Resources Department, will encourage the study of fossils so as to deter damage to existing fossil resources and create a national registration system and research center.

Under the plan, a ban on the export and sale of fossils would be established and penalties imposed on violators. New zoning rules would apply at excavation sites and a fossil-management foundation would be created.

The Mineral Resources Department is also preparing to propose to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) that the 13 million-year-old fossilized freshwater shellfish site in Lam-

pang's Mae Mo district be declared a World Heritage Site

One born every minute: The newly-established Special Investigations Unit is investigating a complaint by a Thai man who claims to have lost 1.9 million baht in an Internet lottery scam.

Last month the man transferred 1.9 million baht to a bank account in London to redeem the 4 million euro (196 million baht) online lottery prize he purportedly won after clicking on an Internet ad banner.

A payment of 1 million baht was supposed to secure a 4-million baht guarantee on the prize, while another 900,000 was supposed to cover taxes and other fees.

The victim, who teaches computer science at a university

in the North, said he is planning to write a book to expose the fraud network behind the scam.

"There is no such thing as a 'free lottery'," he said, adding that those who received congratulatory e-mail messages from lotteries should go to the police.

High hopes: Tarutao National Park in Satun province is plan-

ning to incorporate into its protected zone a marine area rich in vibrant coral reefs and rare fish for scuba diving – a move aimed at enhancing its tourism prospects.

The area, south of Koh Lipeh, is expected to become a part of the national park soon, said park chief Wattana Wettayaprasit.

"The scuba-diving zone will be able to attract up to 100 billion baht to our area each year," he said.

K. Wattana said businessmen in Satun and nearby southern provinces were aware of the potential of the dive industry in this province, which is renowned for its abundant resources.

Better off dead: A married couple who took poison in a dual suicide attempt later stripped in front of a public hospital to protest excessive force by nurses.

Sompong Yindee, 39, a pork vendor, and her husband Pasakorn Chaimala, 25, were rushed to Nakhon Pathom Community Hospital after trying to poison themselves, but the couple later stormed out of the hospital and stripped after undergoing detoxification treatment.

K. Sompong said a nurse pulled her ears and hair during treatment, and caused her false teeth to fall out.

The hospital director said that he had investigated the incident and found that K. Sompong had resisted the treatment and therefore had to be held down by nurses, an act he admitted K. Sompong might have construed as violent.

Around the Nation news roundup is sourced from the pages of The Nation and Kom Chad Luek newspapers.

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We recently had the pleasure of seeing Todd Thongdee perform at the Encore Café in Ao Nang. He put on quite a show. Todd is one of the most popular and recognizable entertainers in Thailand, which is quite a feat for a Westerner.

Todd has been involved in numerous activities during his career, from music-based theme shows to writing educational books for young Thai people, and from producing 10 CDs to volunteering countless hours entertaining the sick and elderly.

We caught up with Todd after his show and asked him to give us an insight into his remarkable career.

Q. Your list of artistic achievements is quite impressive in the breadth of genres covered, but also in its depth through the use of multimedia.

What is the typical development path of such projects as Rhythm of Earth? Did you just wake up one morning with this idea in your head or did it take a long time to germinate?

Todd: One of my problems is that I have ideas all day, every day. I write them down, even record them into a tape recorder

when I'm working out. I often watch them slip away, but they may come back to me with added thoughts, ideas and questions.

Rhythm of Earth came from many ideas. One was growing up in a family with a deaf/autistic sister – we all stressed human resources, asking, "What can you do?" I also had a desire to record, interview and understand the traditional and blind musicians I was finding throughout Thailand; wanting to create original real world music that celebrated the colors and life stories of each piece. And I had a need to put to use some of what I write every day – songs, poems, stories.

When I actually got to work on *Rhythm of Earth*, the 300 musicians involved had a lot to say about what transpired. Some of the songs I prepared were put aside when I listened to these musicians' life stories. I am proud of *Rhythm of Earth* because it is an absolute celebration of life.

Q. Your talents span a broad spec-

trum – singing, speaking, acting, writing, even comedy. Which skills come naturally and which do you have to work at?

Todd: I have tried to live by a conviction that I will do my art right – be a talented and industrious person and a happy, kind artist. My voice is a gift that I have overused and abused, but which I have learned how to use decently, with practice, through 35 years of stage experience.

Being an athlete, thinker, laughter, singer and writer are all natural expressions. In each performance, I find elements of acting, writing, singing and comedy. I have performed over 6,000 times and each performance is practice.

I figured out early that if I let the audience determine much of the show's course, I would be challenged and each show would mean growing, learning, messing up and discovering [more]. Whether I am singing, writing, acting or playing basketball, I want more – more laughter, more love, more understanding.



Todd Thongdee sings at the Encore Café in Ao Nang.

Q. Which is your true love: touring and interacting with people, or writing and producing in the studio?

Todd: Great question! I love both, and dearly miss one if I stop [doing it]. I have many ideas for writing as I perform and when I write, I am often thinking of what these words look like to an audience.

I am definitely schizophrenic. I have performed too much

over the past two years; I am hungry to write.

Q. What would you do on your perfect evening?

Todd: Perfect Night in my Dreams: I am on a big farm, with my family and cousins, Mark Twain, animals running around, and lots of kids. My Mom and Dad, and my brothers and sisters, sit on the porch.

I sit in a rocker and write. Mark Twain smiles. My father is confident and happy again. My mother is fulfilled. Kelly, my deaf sister, can hear me sing as I write.

Perfect Night in Reality: Play basketball with my nephews and my best friend Gene's four boys. Drink Gatorade. Shower.

Take my whole family to the bar next door where they all listen to me sing. They then take over the stage.

Then I take the whole kit 'n' caboodle over to my house and I make them all French toast. Everyone falls asleep – safe and warm – around my house.

I sit in a chair with the dogs and fall asleep. All is safe in the world.



ACROSS THE BAY

By Gus Reynolds



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THE FUN CLUB: Club Med's Chef de Village, Christian Noret (left, behind board), resort staff and children from Baan Pitak and Wat Sri Sunthorn schools enjoy themselves at a party held at the resort. Similar parties were held on the same day at all Club Med resorts around the world.



THE ROARING FORTIES: Julie Street (2nd from left), Director of the Maan Tawan development, celebrated her 40th birthday with friends at the Twinpalms Phuket on June 26.



CUT! Dr Anuroj Tarnsiriroj (3rd from left), Director of Phuket International Hospital, and Managing Director Anurak Tarnsiriroj (2nd from right), hold things together as Visawa Sasismith, Phuket's Provincial Chief Administration Officer, opens the hospital's Child Psychiatry Clinic.



DIVING FOR PEARLS: Rear Admiral Likit Charoensaph (2nd from left) – appropriately enough given the venue – presents Narisara Chitsawad, the owner of the Frogman Restaurant in Chalong, with flowers to celebrate the eatery's opening.



HAIL FROM YALE: The Whiffenpoofs from Yale University – the oldest collegiate *a cappella* group in the world – at their recent Kata Thani Beach Resort performance with compere for the night, Ajarn Pranee Sakulpipatana (holding bouquet) and the resort's Senior Vice-President, Urairat Atiset (blue shirt).



WE'RE OPEN! At the opening ceremony of Acqua Co Ltd – exclusive agents for Alila Phuket Villas – are: Adrian McCarroll (2nd from left), Project Architect for Original Vision Co Ltd; Frederic Flageat Simon (4th from left), MD of Alila Hotels and Resorts; Mark A. Edleson (3rd from left); President of Alila Hotels and Resorts; and Montira Thomson (right) MD of Acqua Co Ltd.



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Top team in the battle to beat HIV and Aids

Professors John and Deborah Greenspan are among the world's leading authorities on HIV/Aids detection through oral manifestations of the disease – they were in San Francisco in the early 1980s when HIV/Aids was first detected in the West.

More recently the British husband-and-wife research team were in Phuket to attend the 5th World Workshop on Oral Health and Disease in Aids, held at the Pearl Village Hotel at Nai Yang.

They explained to *Gazette* reporter Anongnat Sartpisut how they came to be so involved in the global fight against the pandemic, and their role in preventing deaths from Aids.

Gazette: Was being a dentist the ambition for both of you since you were young?

John: I decided to study dentistry because, when I was 16, when I had to choose what I was going to study at university, a lot of people were interested in science as a profession. I looked at medicine and dentistry, and I chose dentistry.

So I went to dental school and I graduated in my early 20s I did a PhD and then I gravitated toward pathology and then into Aids [research].

Deborah: I decided when I was about 16. I was really interested in dentistry and I was very taken with the appearance side of dentistry.

I liked the idea of improving people's appearances by saving teeth. It seemed to be a very nice career, a professional career

whereby I could work with people and also be able to run my own life.

I liked the idea of being able to organize things and have my own practice, and that took me to dentistry school.

John and I met when we were in dental school and we got married when I was still a student. John earned his PhD and I worked in general practice for nearly 10 years, which I really enjoyed. Then we went to the US for a year when John took a sabbatical.

I became very interested in oral medicine and did extra training, and then continued working in the university in my specialty.

Gazette: What did you do before working in your current positions?

Deborah: I worked with

people who were receiving treatment for head and neck cancer, and I looked after people who had all sorts of problems from radiation therapy and chemotherapy.

I also became involved in diagnosis of mouth cancer and doing the procedures of advising people on how to manage their mouths and the consequences of therapy.

People who have radiation therapy to the head or neck have a lot of 'dry mouth', a lot of 'sore mouth'. I was working with those people and managing their problems.

Gazette: What are the challenges of working with Aids?

John: I think the challenge of Aids came to us rather than the other way around. We were both in San Francisco working in our own fields – Deborah as a



clinician and me as a pathologist.

In 1981, when this strange disease was discovered, two things happened.

First, many of the men – they were mostly gay men with what we subsequently learned to call Aids – had infections in the mouth, and Deborah started to look after them in the clinic.

I started a specimen bank and a serum bank. After a while we discovered that we were studying the same cases, and it became our interest, then it be-

came our preoccupation. And now here we are 23 years later talking about this for the next generation.

Gazette: What have been your most interesting experiences in this work?

Deborah: One of the most interesting things for me was the discovery of the oral condition Hairy Leukoplakia. During the very early days of Aids being discovered in San Francisco,

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Professors Deborah and John Greenspan have been in the frontline of the fight against HIV/Aids since before the disease even had a name. John Greenspan describes HIV/Aids as 'the biggest threat to the human race since the Black Death in the 14th century'.

Deborah: No, in the early days when we first started dealing with people who were getting sick, we did not know what caused of the problem.

We were seeing young men who were developing mouth problems and then other problems, and getting chest infections and skin tumors, and dying.

We realized that is was probably caused by an infection, and then HIV was discovered. I think that there was a lot of fear because people did not understand how the virus was transmitted. But now people understand how this virus is transmitted, and they understand that the risk to healthcare workers is very, very small.

It has, however, made a lot of difference to the way medicine and dentistry is practiced. Before Aids, dentists did not wear gloves, but now they do. The same with people in other forms of healthcare, they use more procedures to protect themselves. But once you understand how the virus is transmitted, I think you would not necessarily be scared.

Gazette: Do you think that Aids will be eliminated in the near future?

John: No, Aids will not be eliminated in the near future. In fact, we will not be able to stop it even in the not-so-near future. But we may be able to slow it down if every country did what Thailand and Uganda have done, and that is to educate young people and others about safe sex, and to plan to make the [antiretroviral] drugs available free to everybody who is HIV-positive. That is what Uganda and Brazil are doing now, as are Thailand and India.

We can slow it down, but this epidemic will be with us for our lifetime, and for your lifetime. It is not going away, it is the biggest threat to the human race since the Black Death in the 14th century.

Gazette: What has been the most significant of contribution to Aids knowledge?

John: The discovery of the virus, which was in 1983, because then we understood what was causing the disease. Since then, all research has been directed at stopping the virus – testing for it, reducing its effect and producing a vaccine.

Deborah: I think that the discovery of new drugs so that people can now live with HIV infection has been one of the big discoveries. The development of drugs to keep people alive is very important.

The other important thing is the recognition that HIV can be prevented through education. If we are failing in anything, it is that we are not providing enough education. Where we can educate people, we can prevent HIV infection.

John: People who get HIV infection can live a normal life. They should have normal family relationships. They can have sexual relationships if they use condoms. They can be people.

we started to see people developing white patches in the mouth. This had never been seen before.

I was working with John and his colleagues who discovered this new condition that we called Hairy Leukoplakia, caused by the Epstein-Barr Virus.

This virus causes white lesions to form, mostly on the tongue. We were seeing people in San Francisco developing these white patches in the mouth and then later being diagnosed as having Aids.

For me, it was amazing to be associated with discovering a

new problem in the mouth that actually indicated that somebody had what we now know to be Aids. It was very much the early days of Aids.

Gazette: Does working with people infected with Aids scare you?

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Phi Phi people get their act together

The new Seatran ferry left at 8:30 am and as we cruised away from Rassada Harbor, I realized what a difference this was. My last trip to Phi Phi was more than four years ago on one of the older ferries with bus-like seats and no deck to walk around on.

Seatran's Japanese-built vessel is different. Full air-conditioning inside and two observation decks outside mean that passengers can relax during the 75-minute crossing.

First port of call is Maya Bay on Phi Phi Lay, the smaller and uninhabited southern island, which was the location for the filming of *The Beach*. I can't understand why there was all that fuss about the production crew planting palm trees along the beach and "destroying" nature. The beach looks the same as it did on my last trip, possibly cleaner than before.

After a short cruise around Phi Phi Lay, we headed directly to Tonsai Bay, the main bay on Phi Phi Don, the larger island.

The bay, surrounded by the cliffs to the west and white sandy

beaches to the east, is a stunning sight. The only visible difference from my last trip was the large number of speed and dive boats now moored here.

A short walk through the village brings me to the Phi Phi Princess Diving & Spa Resort – my simple but comfortable home for the next few days, with air-conditioned rooms opening directly onto the beach.

Despite the obvious increase in building, there does now seem to be a determined effort to preserve what is left of

the environment on this stunningly beautiful island.

The old shack-style buildings, once at the very heart of the village, are disappearing, being replaced by small but elegantly built shops and restaurants as well as the inevitable dive shops. (I counted 15 during a brief walk through the village.)

Things also seem to be improving in terms of tours and activities offered, and those denied; a complete ban on jet-skis and parasailing has been imposed. It seems odd that this can



Despite pollution, the underwater scenery at Phi Phi is still stunning.

be achieved in Phi Phi but not in Phuket.

New, more eco-friendly activities are being promoted, including – for the brave at heart – cliff climbing, while the real adrenalin junkies out there can try cliff jumping – a spectacular free fall from heights of nine to 18 meters. The ultimate hangover cure?

Shark-watch tours now seem to be topping the list of must-dos, along with night snorkeling, a welcome development because Phi Phi's nightlife is

quiet. The few bars which are open tend to be sports bars. The hedonistic times of all-night discos are long gone, though rumors abound that the Reggae Bar may soon reopen, and that Phi Phi may also get an Irish pub.

After the over-development of the past few years, Phi Phi is gradually getting its act together. It is certainly worth a few days' visit, if only to relax on the beach with a book and to soak in some of the most beautiful island panoramas in the world.

How to Get There

A wide range of ferries depart but for comfort and service, the new Seatran Ferry, which departs daily from Rassada Harbor at 8:30 am, is strongly recommended.

Costs for a one-way transfer: adults 500 baht including pick-up by minibus, or 450 baht for the boat trip only. Tel: 076-355410-2 or 076-219391-2. Email: info@seatran.co.th

Where to Stay

There are plenty of bungalows and resorts on the island to suit all budgets and tastes, but for a really comfortable stay, try Phi Phi Charlie's or Phi Phi Princess. Prices for low-season rooms start at 1,500 baht per night, including breakfast. Tel: 075-620595.

What to Do

Diving and snorkeling: Princess Divers at the Princess Resort, Tel: 01-0780993; Cliff jumping, night snorkeling and shark-watching tours: Adventure Club in the main walking street. Ask for Andrew, a mine of information on what's on and where to go. Call Tel: 01-8951334 or log on to www.phi-phi-adventures.com for more details.

Bill Owen, who has lived in Phuket and worked in the island's travel industry for more than 15 years, is General Manager of Oriental Leisure Co Ltd, a leading event management company in Phuket. He can be contacted by email at: owen_b@hotmail.com. Website www.oriental-events.com

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Teddy likes them too: candles from Fai Sor Kam.

Waxing lyrical

Decor by Siripansa

Who could dispute that candles usher life and love into our lives? Having transcended their original purpose of merely providing light in a world without electricity, for many people they are now an indispensable part of home décor.

The delicate glow, the gentle flickering can transform any room. And can you imagine a romantic dinner for two without candles?

For those with romance on their minds, don't forget that just about anyone can be transformed by candles' soft radiance into something resembling a god or goddess – without the need for expensive cosmetic surgery.

Candles have obvious religious connections, and perhaps this is why it has taken some time for their contemporary – and purely decorative application – to take off in Thailand.

But the range of candles, especially scented ones, available on Phuket seems to be growing daily, as is the number of shops selling them.

The *Gazette's* three suggestions for shops offering aesthetically-pleasing ranges of candles and paraphernalia are:

Asia Emporio on the top

floor of Big C supercenter. Their products are sourced from Isarn and Chiang Mai and feature many intriguing designs. Tel: 06-921-5079.

Fai Sor Kam, 30 Yaowarat Rd, Phuket City. Staff say that their products meld the occidental with the oriental – without either losing its identity. Check this for yourself, either in the heart of the city or at Fai Sor Kam's branch at the Kata Thani Beach Hotel and Resort. Tel: 09-7243878.

Veerada Art & Gift Shop in the mini-shopping mall of Baan Suan Place Apartments, on Klong Bang Yai Rd, (behind the Big C supercenter) offers many different types of candles and holders, as well as oil and incense burners. Tel: 076-249308 or log on to: www.veeradaartandgift.com

– **Siripansa Somboon**

Sun worshippers or those who work outdoors and are exposed to the sun's harsh rays can suffer quite a lot of skin damage, not only temporarily but also long term.

Dermatologist Dr Orawan Kitchawengkul, who runs the Phuket Rejuvenation Center at Bangkok Phuket Hospital, advocates sunscreen and paying particular attention to what we put on our skin – and how we take it off.

She also advises that working too closely with chemicals, or even taking too-frequent dips in a chlorinated swimming pool, can also result in hypersensitive skin.

Smoking and drinking too much alcohol – and not drinking enough water – take their toll, too.

"Some people are just plain unlucky," she says, "And suffer from sensitive skin because of genetic factors."

Sensitive skin can become reddened, flaky, scratchy and itchy. Not ideal for the beautiful people of Phuket.

Many women already practice the three-step process of cleanse, tone, moisturize on a daily basis. But trying to cope with sensitive or allergic skin can be a minefield, especially with many of the products on the market that boast "skin-whitening" power. Check the information on the product carefully.

Beauty soaps that contain lanolin or other moisturizers work well for some women, but one should avoid soaps that contain potent chemicals that can dry or irritate already sensitive skin.

Phuket has little air pollution, but even a few days in a metropolis like Bangkok can leave skin thoroughly dirty. Choose a mild cleanser as, again, drying out the skin should be avoided. So, too, is upsetting the skin's delicate pH balance.

A good toner is essential for tightening the pores and making the skin look rosier and feel refreshed. Watch out for alcohol,

Taking good care of *sensitive* skin.

Skin Talk by Dhirarat



Watch out for the sun – it can cause long-term problems.

which is a component of many toners and has the tendency to be too astringent for delicate skin. Avoid products with dyes, colorings or scents. Finish this routine off with a good moisturizer.

And you chaps out there should avoid looking too chapped around the face. Shaving, while a good form of exfoliation, dries your skin out too. Zipping around on a yacht in the sun and sea spray may give you a pleasantly weatherbeaten face but at a cost. Choose a mild shaving cream and apply a dab of moisturizer after shaving. Aftershave invariably contains alcohol. Ouch.

Dr Orawan says that most people have, at one time or another, suffered an adverse reaction to a soap or a cosmetic. Strangely, this may occur not only when you start to use a new product, but also when you stop using an old favorite, to which your skin had actually become conditioned, "addicted" even.

For most people these problems tend to rectify themselves within a week or so, but for some people it can take years for the torture of problem skin to be ameliorated.

Serious conditions such as psoriasis or vitiligo require a trip to a dermatology clinic.

Allergy patch testing (minute amounts of allergens pricked onto the skin) to determine the irritant, or medication – or a combination of both – are often very successful in treating chronic conditions.

Most sensitive skin problems disappear with time, when you find the cosmetics that suit you skin, or by adapting your lifestyle.

Dr Orawan Kitchawengkul's Phuket Rejuvenation Center, is on the 2nd floor of the Bangkok Phuket Hospital, 2/1 Hongyok Utis Rd, Phuket City. Tel: 076-254425.

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HEARD & scene

The *Gazette's* Siripansa Somboon went out and about in Phuket and asked people, "If you could be a car, what type of car would you be, and why?"



Michelle Hepworth
Age: 24
From: England
Occupation: Teacher

I would like to be a Mini, especially one of the older models – they are classic vehicles with real character. They have never gone out of style and have appeared in loads of great films, such as *The Italian Job* and *The Bourne Identity*. Ok, forget about Mr Bean, please.



Jaruwit Sangsuwan
Age: 29
From: Songkla
Occupation: Policeman

I'd want to be a Walls ice cream van because Walls ice cream is delicious and the van is painted in lots of colors. Everybody likes ice cream, and anywhere I went there would be children and young people running after me. But I would warn the ladies that eating too much would make them fat!



Sasitorn Onksatirakul
Age: 22
From: Phuket
Occupation: Guest service staff

I would like to be a Honda Jazz because right now it is a very popular car, so there would be many other Honda Jazz cars that would be my friends on the streets. I could say "Hi" to them by beeping my horn when we met. And if I got sick, there are lots of places where I could get tuned up.



Suradach Yikusang
Age: 26
From: Bangkok
Occupation: Stock trader

I'd like to be a red Mercedes-Benz sports car – red because Benz sports models look strong in red, and it would be a great way of attracting a lot of girlfriends everywhere I went. I think every woman would want to go for a drive and scream with delight at snuggling into a red sports car.



Yana Rakipava
Age: 19
From: Russia
Occupation: Hotel trainee

If I could be a car, I would like to be a black Porsche because it is a beautiful car, and it is very popular. I think most men like Porsches, so I could use my fabulous beauty to attract lots of guys and pique their interest so they would want to get inside. Ah Porsche – what a wonderful car!

In the Stars

by Isla Star

CANCER (June 22-July 23): Cancerians will benefit from listening to their partner's point of view. You might think that too much hot air is being stirred up about nothing, but there's more going on than meets the eye. If your birthday is this week, celebrate it somewhere unusual and invite people from outside your social circle.



LEO (July 24-August 22): Finances are a prevailing factor this week for Leos. Money may be flowing out faster than it's trickling in, but you must make certain investments to further your career. Just don't give in to the temptation to borrow. If you're looking for luck, the number 6 could help.

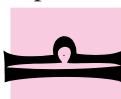


VIRGO (August 23-September 23): Your workload begins to

ease early next week, but there could be some unexpected fireworks to deal with regarding a shaky agreement. Domestic disruptions require an intervention that you should have made a few moons ago. Get a grip on the situation, or risk losing personal freedom.



LIBRA (September 24-October 23): This week sees the pace of life picking up for Librans. In general, everything should go swimmingly but you must be aware of a looming deadline. Get out and about this weekend if you want to dip your toes into a hot spring of sizzling romance.



SCORPIO (October 24-November 22): Don't believe everything you hear this



week; someone close to you is temporarily suffering from an attack of the green-eyed monster and wants to rock your boat of confidence. The financial wheel of fortune is about to turn in your direction. Remember those who helped you along recent rocky paths.

SAGITTARIUS (November 23-December 21): Sagittarians will be in the mood for serious shopping this weekend. New gadgets and gizmos will catch your eye and you are certain to find at least one bargain. Early next week; an introduction to new acquaintances could lead to fruitful outcomes. Aquarius harbors romantic aspirations toward you – expect an approach soon.



CAPRICORN (December 22-January 20): Don't despair if you meet a dead end regarding a ca-

reer move this week; sunnier opportunities are just around the corner and you can hone your skills as you play the waiting game. Personal relationships are put under the spotlight at the weekend; you may learn something that's hard to swallow.



AQUARIUS (January 21-February 19): Aquarians whose appetite for spicy intrigues is whetted will stop at nothing to get to the bottom of things. In romance, someone's feelings about you become clear. Don't allow the situation to grow more complicated if a third person is involved; you are the one likely to get burned. The number 10 holds promise.



PISCES (February 20-March 20): Pisceans who have been toying with the notion of bouncing away in a new direction work-wise should hesitate no longer. There will be no better astrological conditions in the coming months, so act now. Romantic attachments strengthen, but with so much else going on you may find it difficult to meet your partner's need for attention.



ARIES (March 21-April 20): This week brings a golden oppor-

tunity to initiate a conversation with someone who has been rather a stranger recently. The stars are smiling on Arians who are ready for reconciliation, so don't miss the chance to set matters straight. If you are preparing to sign a new contract relating to work, be sure that you agree with every detail. Your lucky number midweek is 4.



TAURUS (April 21-May 21): Life should be peachy for Taurians this week, with only a slight hitch arising on Monday or Tuesday. The only thing to do is go with the flow. Single Taureans who meet a potential partner are advised to tone down their approach. Your listening skills are appreciated by a friend this weekend.



GEMINI (May 22-June 21): Geminis suffering from cabin fever should make the effort to venture further afield than usual this weekend. Even if wet weather inspires you to do nothing more than curl up inside, getting out and about will clear your head. Although there is no action you can take to sort out current work-related problems, solutions will come out of the blue next month.



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Phuket Gazette

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The Gazette Distribution Team - always eager to serve you!

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KIDS

THE FUN PAGE FOR ALL THE FAMILY

Hidden Words

Hidden in the grid below are the names of at least 20 airlines. The names may read vertically, horizontally or diagonally. They may also read right-to-left or down-to-up. See if you can find more than your family or friends.

Score: 10 or more, good; 15 or more, very good; 20 or more, excellent.

J	P	N	N	F	C	W	A	D	K	F	I	G	I	I
A	S	N	A	H	T	F	U	L	I	R	B	I	A	R
A	R	M	E	R	Z	K	S	N	L	I	E	R	H	L
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N	O	T	A	K	I	T	T	K	I	O	U	D	Q	U
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U	G	J	G	D	L	V	E	R	S	K	Z	L	W	T
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R	G	I	R	A	V	T	Q	P	G	E	O	T	Y	H
X	L	E	M	I	R	A	T	E	S	R	U	T	H	W
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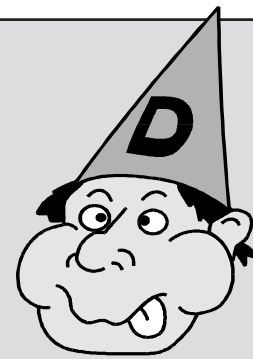
Brain Buster!!

Q. Fast Eddy was driving his new Ferrari at high speed when he felt thirsty, so he slammed on the brakes outside the Wheelie Bar. Nine police cars had been chasing him and when he stopped, the result was a huge pile-up as the first cop car hit the Ferrari, the second hit the first, and so on.

How many bumpers were damaged?

81 V

Get your brain in gear with The Monster Quiz



- In medieval Britain, what would you buy from a bodger?
- Where was the Treaty of the European Union signed?
- Who wrote, "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive"?
- An ampersand may be used in lieu of which word?
- Before turning to singing, how did Perry Como earned a living?
- Which US president's face is on the \$100,000 bill?
- What gets its name from its inventor, Col John Taliaferro Thompson?
- Yuri Gagarin was the first man in space. Who was second?
- In which sport did Bobby Hull and Bobby Orr excel?
- Which US state is also known as the Land of Enchantment?
- Calais is at one end of the Channel Tunnel. Which town is at the other end?
- King Zog was monarch of which country from 1925 to 1939?
- Who was super heavy-weight boxing champion in the 1988 Olympics?
- What color is the national flag of Libya?
- Which US state is between Texas and Mississippi?
- Which movie star was born Daniel Michaeli?
- Who was prime minister of Britain immediately before Margaret Thatcher?
- What is the official language of Andorra?
- Name the car Craig Breedlove used to break to 600mph land speed record in 1965.
- Whom do the French remember on May 14?

Answers next week.

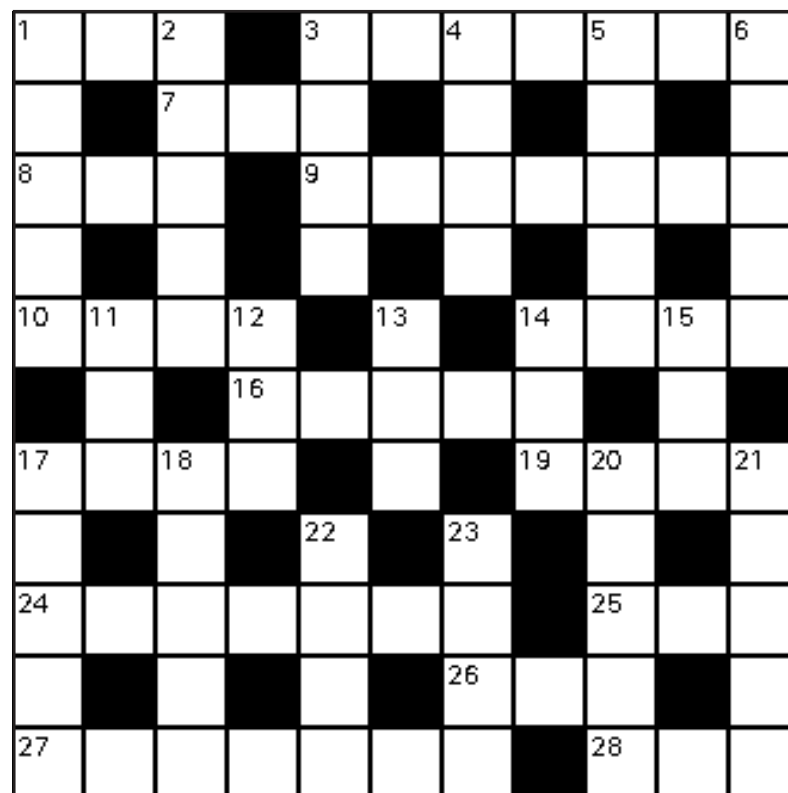
Never a Cross Word!

Across

- American soldiers.
- Tree flowers.
- In favor of.
- Big fuss.
- 78s, 45s or 33s.
- Baikal or Lugano, for example.
- Join two pieces of metal.
- The one after Virgo.
- Cow meat.
- Garden entrance, maybe.
- Tenth month.
- Father.
- Square root of one.
- She followed the yellow brick road.
- Not happy.

Down

- Arthurian quest goal.
- Scare a horse.



- Make other people yawn.
- Killer whale.
- Heavy suit material.
- Pondered.
- Beer.
- Santa's helper.
- Japanese sash.
- A dog's tail may do this.
- Rent out a dwelling.
- A bunch of chicks.
- Go into.
- South American mountain range.
- Finished.
- Help a criminal.
- Helen's home town.

Solution next week

Solution to last week's Crossword



ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S MONSTER QUIZ

- Coconut; 2. Arnhem; 3. Whitehorse; 4. Phar Lap; 5. *Götterdämmerung* (Wagner's *Ring Cycle*); 6. Thomas à Beckett; 7. 1861; 8. John Denver; 9. *On Golden Pond*; 10. Addis Ababa; 11. Western Samoa; 12. Chris Evert; 13. Tracy Austin; 14. Liberia; 15. Magician; 16. Turkish; 17. New Guinea; 18. Russia; 19. Lampang; 20. Blarney Stone.

ASK KHUN WANIDA! MOMMA DUCK

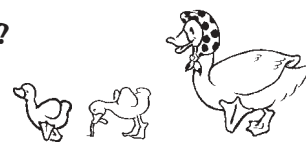
Problems with an extra-marital affair?

Questions about Thai culture?

Having communications problems?

Need somebody to Love?

Read her advice in the *Phuket Gazette*.



Fax 076-213971 or email momma@phuketgazette.net

One of the best ways to share photos with friends is to post them on a website. It's more efficient and practical than sending lots of emails with attachments. Many websites that host photos are fairly private – the URL to the web page featuring your photos is not given out to the public, and most sites will host the photos only temporarily.

But what's the best way to do it? There are some subscription services that let you share photos, though these services are rather simple and often quite limited. The good news is that it is just as easy to make your own site using the resources you already have.

Most Internet Service Providers (ISPs) include some "web space" as part of their offering. As long as you don't exceed the disk space limit, this is a cheap way to post your photos.

If you have no web space, there are plenty of companies that offer low-cost services, including Dundee Internet (www.dundee.net) and FutureQuest Inc (www.futurequest.net).

Another option is to host the website on your own computer via an ADSL connection with a static IP address or dynamic mapping service, but this method is for advanced users and has various risks – not to mention that consistent ADSL connection speeds in Phuket are still hard to come by.

Most digital images are large, at least 1MB or more, so displaying many of them on a web page can take a long time to load. The solution is to provide "thumbnails" – small versions of the full-size pictures.

A simple web page of photos has a lot of thumbnails. When you click on one of these, the full image appears in the browser window. There are more complicated options available, for example a series of thumbnails on the side or the bottom and the full-size image taking up the rest of the page, just like the filmstrip view in Windows XP.

Using such frills and designs can make the photo gallery look either really cool or incredibly messy. Complicated layouts are fine for about 50 to 100 images, but look choked when the gallery gets too large.

It's also worth remembering that the more "elegant" web designs may require particular browsers, or even a particular version of a certain browser. For maximum compatibility – and less complaints from frustrated friends or relatives – it is better to go for a simple web design.

Thankfully, making a snazzy web design is quite easy, as there are plenty of tools available to make thumbnails and web pages.

The first place to look is among the software you may already have. Any digital camera



When you've got the superyacht, the Porsche 911 and the Champagne girlfriend, make your friends jealous by publishing pix of your fabulous lifestyle on your own website.

Share photos through a host, not by post

or scanner comes with software that can probably make web pages from groups of photos. For example, Adobe's Photoshop Elements (www.adobe.com), a stripped-down version of the popular Photoshop software, seems to be bundled with every second box of software I open these days.

The recent versions of FrontPage have a Photo Gallery option under Insert | Picture that will take a group of images and turn them into a fancy web page.

There are some small and effective programs that will take a group of images and make pages and thumbnails in a straightforward way. I've been using a simple freeware program from Matthew Monroe called HTML Photo Gallery Cataloger (www.alchemistmatt.com).

This will make thumbnails and a simple web page with links to the main images. The result is basic, but you can make any changes you like.

One important point: make sure that you back up your original photos because, if you make a mistake, you may find that you have reduced the size of the originals while converting them for web use.

Once you've created the picture gallery you'll probably want to customize it to some extent. Regardless of how you've created the gallery, you can open it in FrontPage (or any other website editor) and change it.

Be careful when making changes that you don't "break" the pages, including breaking any links to full-size pictures. This applies especially to the more complicated designs that have a

lot of code behind the scenes.

Whatever you do and however you do it, make sure you test the website before going public with it. In FrontPage, save all web pages then choose File | Preview in Browser. If you think friends or relatives may be using older computers, preview the site in 640 x 480 resolution.

I usually put some comments on the opening web page to help viewers. Most importantly, I tell them how to copy images to their own computers: "To copy any photo to your computer from Internet Explorer:

Right-click with your mouse on the full size image and choose: Save Picture As... then choose a place to save it on your computer."

Once you've made and checked your photo gallery, you can publish it with FrontPage using File | Publish Site or an FTP program like the venerable WS-FTP (www.ipswitch.com).

Depending on the size of the gallery and images, transferring your files and images to your website may take some time, especially if you have a dial-up connection. If you have a broadband connection make sure you don't exceed download/upload limits.

One side-benefit of making a website is that it can also be copied to a CD or DVD. Anyone you give the disk to can click on the index.htm file in the root folder to launch the browser and view the contents just like a normal website, except of course that it will be much faster.

Woody Leonhard has written a number of books in the "...for Dummies" series on computing. Readers can contact him at: woody@khunwoody.com

A weird childhood in Brooklyn

Jonathan Lethem's latest novel is called *The Fortress of Solitude* (Doubleday, New York, 2003, 511pp) which, as any comic book aficionado can tell you, was Superman's secret abode at the North Pole.

Comic books do indeed draw together the three main characters of this novel and it's only appropriate that Michael Chabon, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, the tale of two Brooklyn friends who invented a comic book hero, should contribute a back-cover blurb: "... [Lethem] captures precisely – as only a great novelist can – how it feels to love the world that is, on a daily basis, kicking your ass."

The kid getting his ass kicked is Dylan Ebdus and his crime is being white in Gowanus, a black and Puerto Rican neighborhood in Brooklyn.

His liberal Jewish mother brags on the phone that Dylan is one of only three white kids not just in his third grade class but in the entire school.

The shelves of American literature – from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *To Kill a Mockingbird* – groan with tales of nasty whites inflicting suffering on helpless blacks. Here the plot is reversed, with black kids constantly mugging helpless Dylan and stealing his money. And here is his view of the world out in the mean streets of Brooklyn in the 1970s:

"Rabbit-furred parka hood laced tight around his neck, tunnel vision further reduced by his bowed head, the boy's narrowed view consists only of his own ribbed Converse sneaker toes shooting forward in alternation through a fur-lined oval window of rushing-past pavement. He walks this way along Atlantic Avenue to Flatbush and Fourth, hands plunged in pockets, winter giving a certain minimal cover, a chance to mask hand, face, all whiteness."

Through his love of comic book heroes, he forms a bond with a half-black kid – Mingus Rude, son of a once-famous soul

singer – who has moved into the house opposite his own.

Comic books also bring him close, reluctantly, with the other white nerd in his junior high school class, Arthur Lomb, whose big ambition is to pass the entrance test to an elite high school in Manhattan and thus escape persecution. Of Arthur Lomb Lethem writes:

"His monologues were all brow-furrowed and lip-pursed, craven machinations cut with philosophical asides and vice versa. His jabber had a glottal, chanted quality, seemingly designed to guide you past the territory where you might wish to tell him to shut up already or even to strike him, into a realm of baffled wonderment as you considered the white noise of a nerd's id in full song."

There are any number of bravura passages like this in the novel which, sometimes, does go over the top. In keeping with the comic book theme, Dylan acquires a ring from an old derelict

which enables his friend Mingus to fly like a superhero, saving Dylan from comic-book mugging situations.

Ironically, when Dylan introduces Arthur to Mingus, the white kid decides to become black, aping the clothes and slang and going on graffiti raids and, later, drug deals with Mingus.

Ironically too, it's Dylan who gets into the elite high school and later a posh Vermont college.

The book then jumps to Dylan's adulthood in 1999 in Berkeley, California,

where he is living and fighting with his black girlfriend who is rich, scholarly and chronically depressed. Dylan is a rock journalist, a prolific writer of album notes.

A reunion with his father leads him to return to his old neighborhood, gentrified now and called Boerum Hill. Arthur is a wealthy landlord and Mingus is in prison for crack dealing.

Dylan heads off to the prison intent on springing Mingus with the magical ring, which now allows him to become invisible.

Preposterous? Yes, but the force of the writing drives you to the very end.



Off the SHELF

By James Eckardt



'His monologues were all brow-furrowed and lip-pursed, craven machinations cut with philosophical asides and vice versa.'

Battling breathless emotion

We all have different ways of dealing with our emotions. Some of us bottle them up, some blow them out and yet others seem somehow to avoid emotions altogether.

The word emotion is actually *e*-motion, or energy (put into motion). That is what our emotions do; they move energy and set events in motion.

Learning and then employing techniques to release trapped energy can bring happiness into our lives. Blocking emotions – or trapping this moving energy inside our bodies – creates an imbalance which can lead to physical problems.

We tend to treat physical symptoms instead of consciously getting to the core of the emotional energy block.

When we are stressed, the body's automatic reaction is to make our breathing shallower, which holds this energy inside our bodies. Some therapists have found that the most effective way to cleanse the body of emotional toxins is to consciously breathe in and out, one breath immediately following the next, without pausing.

Not everyone believes that Western medicine or conventional exercise regimens have all the answers to maintaining good health.

Many alternative forms of therapy are advocated by a variety of people in Phuket. Here is one such view.



**ALTERNATIVE
HEALTH**
By Rhonda Ann Clarke

This simple breathing technique is called "breathwork" and the effects of over-oxygenating our bodies and forcing the trapped energy to come out are dramatic, immediate and permanent.

Many years ago, this breathing technique was advocated by therapists who realized that the trauma of being born affected people throughout their lives. This breathing technique was first called "rebirthing".

Therapists later recognized that this technique not only releases emotional trauma left over from birth, but also allows emotional stress from childhood and adulthood to escape. They therefore renamed it breathwork.

The effect is that you release the deepest, most intense layers of emotions from past experiences. These experiences are often hidden from the conscious mind but breathwork allows them to be expressed in a safe way.

And yes, once released, the effect is permanent; the old, heavy painful feelings actually go away leaving you feeling freer and more content.

The thought of doing a breathwork session can be frightening at first. You cannot plan what will come out because whatever emotion is ready to express itself will appear.

Almost everyone has experienced some form of physical or emotional abuse in their lives that is unique to them (and at which time they had no conscious outlet for these feelings) and these emotions remain trapped inside the body.

As a result, everyone has a different experience during the sessions. Sometimes you cry with sadness, laugh with joy, scream with anger or quiver with fear. The emotional layer or layers to be released will be released only when good and ready. It feels fantastic when it happens.

It is vital to begin these sessions with a trained, compassionate breathwork practitioner, as the depth and intensity of the feelings expressed can be overwhelming at first. Once you have gone through breathwork a few times, you will gain the confidence to do this consciously connected breathing technique on your own at home.

This technique is also very effective in the water; many sessions have been done in the ocean with a mask and snorkel. It's a less intense but equally beautiful sensation.

The amount of emotion released in one session is totally up

to the individual because you control how much emotion you feel. But the corollary is that the more you control things, the slower the release will be.

However, as you progress through the sessions, you will be able to access deeper layers of suppressed emotions.

Often after a session, you feel like every last drop of emotion has been wrung out of you, but in fact there are many layers left to uncover.

The number of sessions you need depends on how ready and willing you are to experience such intense feelings. When you experience this intensity, it's important to trust that you can continue through it no matter how strong or unpleasant it seems.

An indication that you don't need any more sessions is when you stop reacting with fear, anxiety, or anger to certain situations that come up in your life.

What is there to lose? It's safe and it's effective. Try it.

Find out more about breathwork by calling Rhonda Ann Clarke at Tel: 01-7975065 or visiting The Movement Center's website at: www.phuketmoves.com

At home, it pays to look before you leak

The problems people in Phuket encounter when building a home apply equally to Thais and foreigners. An example is this story of Ms G, a Thai lady who moved to Phuket quite some time ago.

Ms G bought some land and started to build a house.

She employed a building contractor, who took quite some time to complete the construction, but finally Ms G moved into her house.

During the first days of the rainy season Ms G discovered that the roof leaked. As there was still a one-year guarantee on the construction, Ms G called the contractor and asked him to repair the roof, which the contractor did.

Unfortunately, the next time it rained the roof leaked again. Despite the contractor coming to fix the roof many times, there were leaks each time it rained.

Ms G asked the builder to fix the roof one more time, but this time he did not show up. She decided to take the contractor to court and sought legal



**LAYING
DOWN
THE LAW**
With Friedrich 'Sam' Fauma

advice about what she could do to get the contractor to repair her roof properly.

She first had to get an independent engineer to certify why the roof leaked, and it was then that she found out that the roof structure was fundamentally wrong.

The entire roof and all supports would need to be changed in order to put an end to the leaks.

Finding an independent engineer prepared to do this was not easy, especially as the engineer will have to appear in court as the main witness.

Ms G, however, now has her report and is ready to file a case against the contractor in court, which will take some time to come to its decision.

In the meantime, Ms G's roof will still leak. So she has decided to pay for the repairs out

of her own pocket and recover the cost later through the court, in the form of damages.

However, whether the contractor will have enough money to pay any damages the court awards remains to be seen. It may be necessary to get an order to have the contractor's assets frozen and sold at auction, which will take even more time.

In addition to this, Ms G also has to pay for court and legal fees.

And while she is waiting for the repairs to be made, her roof continues to leak, which is causing water damage to the walls and floors of her home.

So, when building a house it is good advice to employ an independent surveyor to be at the building site during construction to see that all the work is done properly.

It is also prudent to hold back some payment from the contractor as an assurance that any necessary repairs after completion will be made.

This column is compiled from the collective experience of the partners in the International Law Office, Phuket City. Tel: 076-222191-5. Fax: 076-222-196. Email: interlaw@loxinfo.co.th

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and at 152 other places around the island.

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It's time to get on the bus

Releasing the official results of the third annual Patong Beach Survey (see news pages), the eight hotels that funded the research pressed for the introduction of bus services linking island beaches as one of the ways that Patong's image among tourists could be improved.

As the survey demonstrated, the need for public transport linking Kata/Karon to Patong is painfully obvious – even to first-time visitors. Since the survey's inception, tourists have consistently cited rip-offs by tuk-tuk drivers as being among their most negative experiences on the island.

Ten years ago a *songtaew* service between Patong and Karon was established, but it was only three days before the driver was pulled from his vehicle and beaten senseless for having the audacity to come up against the forces that control transport along the coast road.

Not surprisingly, no other private operators have since approached the Provincial Transportation Office about taking over the route – and Patong continues to suffer. It is interesting to compare Phuket's public transport system (if it can be called a system) with those of other provinces. In Songkhla, it is possible to travel all the way from Songkhla Town to Haad Yai International Airport, a distance of at least 40 kilometers, for less than 30 baht. In Patong, tuk-tuk drivers collude to extort a minimum of 100 baht for any distance, no matter how short. Tourists have no option but to pay because there is no alternative. This is the very definition of collusion.

Even Pattaya, the crowning jewel in a province that has long held a reputation as Thailand's most corrupt, has introduced air-conditioned public buses. Research by a land transport expert has shown that 98% of residents favor the new buses over the baht-bus cooperative, citing the politeness of the drivers, the convenience and the boost to the city's image.

If the forces that conspire to control transport in Patong are too intimidating to be overcome by the private sector, the government must take the initiative. Under the Governor's CEO powers, it would be easy to authorize the Tourist Police, for example, to provide security for the service. Vested interests might resort to violence (indeed, they already have) against individuals trying to earn a living by providing the public with an honest service, but it is unlikely they would do so against members of the Royal Thai Police.

Another finding of the survey is that tourists have become less aware of the presence of the Tourist Police in Patong. Having the Tourist Police protect a badly-needed public transport system would not only raise their profile; it would probably turn them into heroes overnight.

– The Editor

The Phuket Gazette

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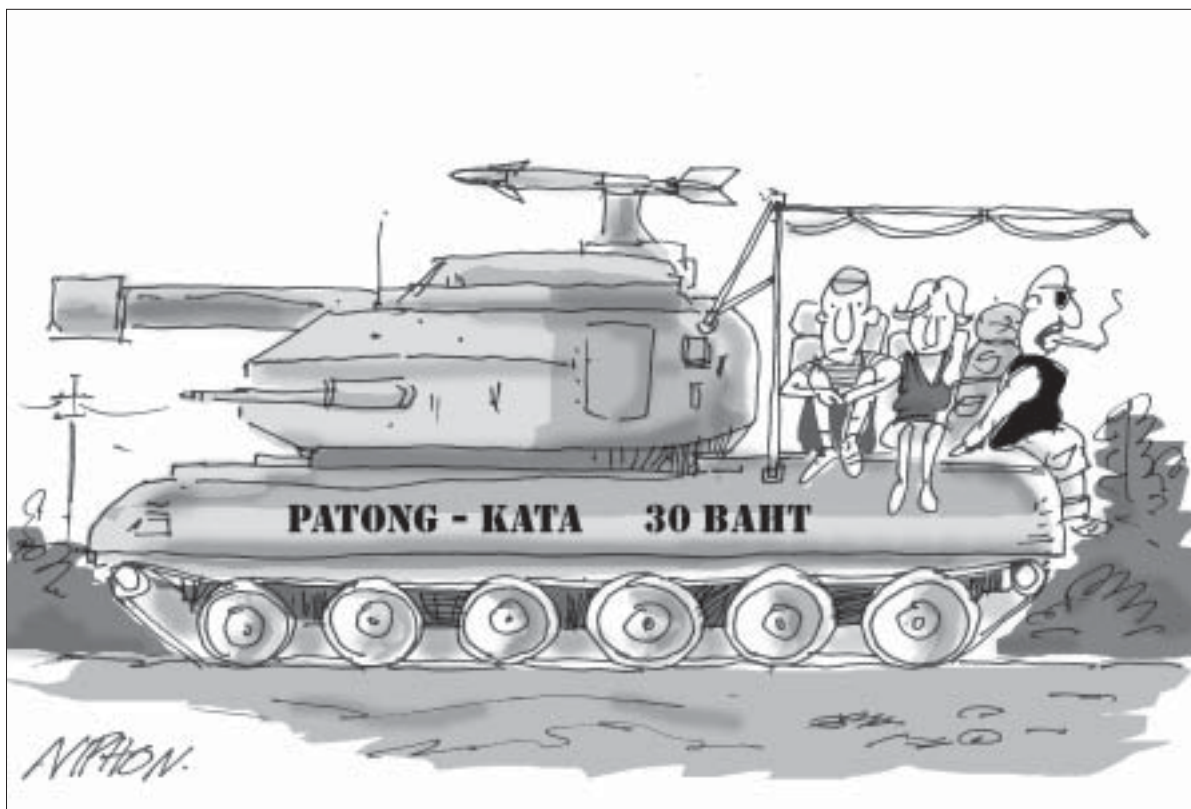
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Letters

The *Gazette* is pleased to receive mail from readers. Please write to us at 367/2 Yaowarat Rd, Amphur Muang, Phuket 83000, fax to 076-213971 or send an email to editor@phuketgazette.net

with your views for publication in our next issue. We reserve the right to edit all letters. Pseudonyms are acceptable only if your full name and address are supplied.

Vendor removal bad for Phuket tourism

Countless people, Thai and farang, enjoyed dining at the restaurants that bordered Rawai Beach – particularly on Sunday afternoons – over the past 25 years. But now the restaurants are no more.

I wonder at the people supposedly in charge of Phuket, and their grand plan for improving the island. It seems to me that they are intent on destroying some of the local culture.

Dejected diner
Phuket

Rawai will never be the same again

I for one would like to say how saddened I am by the removal of the food vendors from Rawai Beach, which, with so many boats moored there, is not suitable for bathing.

Having somewhere to eat with a view of the sea and the boats should have been considered an asset to the community. It certainly was, judging by the large number of Thai families that used to eat there at the weekends and on public holidays.

Another backward step for Phuket's tourism industry.

Roger Neill
Chalong

Will illegal karaokes be the next to go?

Following the wholesale removal of the "illegal" vendors on Rawai Beach, can we now expect the same for the cacophony of karaoke bars operating along

Patak Road in Chalong? These must surely be operating illegally in view of their not conforming to the law requiring them to operate inside, behind glass doors. And if not, why not?

Ranca Trollope
Chalong

Cyber City seems to be a long way off

On Saturday, June 26, at around noon, the dial tone on our house phone suddenly died. Knowing that the Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT) often blames the wiring from the telegraph pole in the street to the house, I checked the line at the pole using a rigged telephone. This test confirmed that the line at the pole was dead.

First thing on Monday morning my wife and I went in person to the TOT telephone office on Chao Fa West Rd to report the problem. We were told the problem was "already being attended to".

On Tuesday morning the phone was still dead, so we went to the TOT office again. This time we saw the supervisor, K. Kamol. He received us in a friendly and courteous manner, and said that he would send a repairman out "soon".

At 3:30 pm, my wife went again to the TOT office to ask what had been done. She spoke with a younger man this time and at the conclusion of their brief conversation, he said, "Your husband is *farang*. What sort of service does he expect? This is Thailand."

On Wednesday morning at 9 am, my wife again went to the TOT office and was told that the

problem would be taken care of. Another phone call to the TOT late in the afternoon solicited the response that the line was fixed. When my wife told the telephonist that our line was still dead, the girl then said, "Oh, then it is being done now."

On Thursday morning I went in person with a Thai friend, K. Gai, and spoke with K. Kamol again. He said that somebody would be out later that morning or at 1 pm.

We waited in until 3 pm when my wife and I drove to the TOT office in Phuket City and met with the Customer Service Manager, K. Boonsri.

K. Boonsri immediately made several phone calls and told us that a technician would be out and making repairs before we arrived home. We received a call to our house phone at 3:45 pm confirming that the problem had finally been fixed.

As a result of all this I have not been able to go online, or make or receive calls for almost a week, and apart from K. Boonsri, I cannot say that I have received any sort of service.

Government spokespeople are quoted in almost every edition of the *Gazette* as saying that Phuket will become a "Cyber City" rivalling places like Singapore or Hong Kong.

With two- to four-hour power cuts happening almost every week, and a telephone service that takes six days to fix, I am compelled to ask when and how Phuket can achieve this.

I feel sure that your readers as well as myself would appreciate a response from a spokesperson at TOT.

John Darroch
Chalong

Letters conveying views and suggestions are published here. Those seeking comment from government officials and/or business owners are published in *Issues & Answers* on the facing page.

Land probe and political machinations

The ongoing land investigation is only one of the problems facing Phuket. The biggest problem is the environment.

Our natural resources in Phuket have been destroyed, especially the forest areas.

This destruction is not just in Forestry Department land or other public land holdings, but also includes deforestation of privately held land.

If we don't decide definitively what kind of business can be conducted on private land, investors will continue to be able to do anything they want, such as cutting down trees. Some public land has also been encroached upon and trees destroyed. This situation has worsened.

On the eastern side of Thalang district, especially in Tambon Pa Khlok, where there are mangroves, there are shrimp farms that are involved in land title controversies. People there say they have land titles to cover their shrimp farms. It's the responsibility of the Forestry Department office to find out the truth.

If the shrimp farmers have clean land titles, we can't do anything about [mangroves being cut down]. But if the officials can prove that it's Forestry land, it should be returned to the public.

Pa Khlok is developing. There is now a golf course, hotels and other buildings. It's normal to have more construction when an area is growing. Development gives local residents new ways to earn a living.

However, the provincial government should have good town planning [for this area], otherwise Pa Khlok and the rest of Thalang District will change [for the worse].

When it comes to the [controversy over] tin mine concessions in the Cherng Talay area, I'm not quite sure about [the past history] of those lands, but I have talked to older local people who

FIRST PERSON



Chalermklak Kebsup is the Democrat MP for Phuket District 2. She is also a former Patong town council President and heir to the political throne of one of Patong's most powerful families.

With her sister Yanyong Kebsup now embroiled in the ongoing *SorPorKor* 4-01 land investigation, the *Gazette* asked K. Chalermklak whether or not she thinks the land probe has been used by the Government as more of a political tool than a genuine attempt at justice, and what issues she feels the government should be tackling in Phuket in the run-up to the next round of parliamentary elections, scheduled to take place during or before February next year.

know about the tin mining period.

People who wanted to mine tin on public land needed permission from the government [through the Mineral Resources Department], as did those mining private land.

When the concession expired [or all the tin was extracted], public land was supposed to be returned to the state. If the mining was on private land, however, the land would remain the owner's private property.

Land encroachment is another chronic problem. Officers have always had to keep an eye out for this, but never before was it [such a public matter] as it has become in the past two years.

There were cases some time ago on Koh Sireh in which land titles were revoked. The investigators handled the investigation steadily, case by case.

In fact, if you ask villagers whether the investigation procedures have changed, they will probably say 'no'. What they will tell you is that the publicity surrounding land investigations has really changed.

Government officials are investigating land issues in many provinces, but there is criticism

and suspicion that it's only in Democrat Party strongholds that the investigations are carried out strictly.

People feel uncomfortable about what the government is doing. They feel it is unfair. The government should consider this more thoroughly.

Phuket does have land problems, but it's not suitable for the government to trumpet this, because Phuket is a tourist destination. People both in Thailand and around the world are interested in the island and know what is happening here.

Why do [the government] have to press the land issue in Phuket? Do they have any [ultimate] reasons or tricks behind this?

We have to ask the government why they do this. I wonder why they created so much controversy then let the matter rest, only to stir up the issue again with national elections approaching.

They have announced twice already that illegally issued land titles were to be revoked, but there has been no progress. Newspapers ran stories about revocation of *SorPorKor* land titles, but these reports too have lacked clarity.

It's a problem for villagers because they are not familiar with government organizations and are afraid to meet with them. If the officers have some [investigation] in progress, they should keep the villagers informed.

Villagers shouldn't have to worry about this every time an election approaches.

Phuket is developing and land prices are increasing. Having a few rai of land is like carrying a large amount of money. This makes many people want to own land, but it's only a small group of people who encroach on public land to achieve this.

It's also impossible for anyone to come into possession of public land without the collusion of civil servants.

Newin Chidchob [Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives, from Surin Province] said that Phuket would be a "pilot province" in solving land issues and reallocating land to villagers to earn a living. But after scaring people in Phuket, the authorities have done nothing [in terms of giving land to poor farmers].

Such reallocations have already been carried out in other regions, most notably Isarn. Why

do [government assistance programs] always seem to focus on the Northeast [where K. Newin comes from]?

K. Newin may say that there are many people and many urgent problems in Isarn.

I find it difficult to comment on this objectively.

We are being treated unfairly because news has been spread that Phuket people are deceitful. I just talked with my sister about her land title [problem]. She has been very much affected by this matter. She bought a piece of land that was later declared to have an illegally issued land title. But so far, [no civil servant] has been found to have been responsible.

My sister asked for documents to prove her land title was issued illegally by the Land Office, but none have been provided. She is not allowed to do anything on her [disputed] land while the title is under investigation, but she still has to pay interest to the bank [which financed the purchase].

The way government officers act is not fair. It affects innocent people. Some government agencies involved in the investigation have made innocent people look bad in public. It's probably because K. Yanyong is my sister that the government is pursuing this case.

The land issue also affects investment in Phuket. Foreign investors have lost confidence in land titles issued by government officers. Officers now have to confirm repeatedly that the land titles are completely legal, even though the titles were issued by [their colleagues].

I can't really say if the government will be able to solve this problem. If they are sincere, it could be done.

But if they just want to make headlines, they won't solve it. They will only create more problems in the future.

New-design license plates for motorbikes

It seems that motorcycles in Bangkok are being issued a new style of license plates. They are square, bigger and do not have a red line across the middle like the old ones. I recently moved to Phuket from Koh Samui, and I have three motorbikes to re-register. As I would like to have the new-style number plates for my bikes, when will they be available in Phuket?

Also, what has motivated the Land Transport Office to change the style of motorbike licence plates?

John Hamilton
Australia

Teerayuth Prasertphol, Chief

of the Phuket Provincial Transportation Office (PPTO) replies:

At first only motorbikes registered in Bangkok were issued the new-style licence plates, but now these new-style plates are available in the provinces, including Phuket.

The new licence plates are indeed square, bigger and have no red line across the middle. They are white with black characters showing the full name of the province where the vehicle has been registered on the top half, with three digits below.

This style makes it much easier for officials to identify in which province the vehicle has been registered.

Visa query

I have visited Phuket every year for the past 10 years on a 30-day tourist visas but I have decided to spend longer on my next visit.

However, an application for a three-month tourist visa would necessitate me traveling to London twice to visit the Thai Embassy in order to complete my application for a visa – they do not accept postal applications.

Is there any means by which I can enter Thailand on a 30-day tourist visa, and then extend it?

Paul Johns
UK

The *Gazette* responds:

That depends on how long you want to stay. See <http://www.phuketgazette.net/issuesanswers/details.asp?id=567> for an expla-

nation of how to get a 10-day extension without leaving Phuket.

To stay longer, you can do a "visa run" into either Myanmar or Malaysia and come back in again, which will give you another 30 days.

Issues & ANSWERS

Want to know how to get something done? Can't understand some of the dafter things that seem to go on in Phuket? Want to pitch an idea to Phuket's authorities or institutions? Then this is the forum for you. Submit your queries or suggestions to us and we'll ask the appropriate people to respond to them.

Write to: The Phuket Gazette, 367/2 Yaowarat Rd, Muang, Phuket 83000. Fax 076-213971, or submit your issue at www.phuketgazette.net

If you prefer to get the visa before you come to Thailand, note that in addition to the London embassy, Thailand also has consulates in Liverpool, Birmingham, Hull, Cardiff and Glasgow.

I tried to go for breakfast the other day in a place that had always been a contender for my annual best brekker review. The place in question was the English Pub on Soi Patong Resort.

But when I got there I was astonished to learn that it had been closed for at least three months.

Here was a place that seemed to get everything right. It was reasonably priced, had tasty food served promptly by polite staff, an affable manager (despite the fact that he was an ardent Manchester United supporter) and a decent, air-conditioned environment. And it was all gone. The owners must now be wondering what one has to do to win here.

Another bar with a different theme just doors away is apparently also for sale, even though this is decent spot too. The tale of the other small sois on the south side of Bangla seems to be similar. They appear to be the road least traveled in Patong's nightlife scene.

This does not affect everyone, though. On the same soi we have the legendary Islander Bar, which has been getting it right for donkey's years;

the ever-popular Buffalo Steak House and the well-established meatball meisters at The Rundgarten, with their great potato salad and cheap-as-chips prices.

The soi is also home to the Navrang Mahal, which last year did us the favor of an all-you-can-eat Indian buffet. It was great while it lasted. Please do it again. The same street is also occupied by one of Phuket's most pukka chaps, master tailor Jaspal. He can't be doing too badly because he's opened a huge hotel in

Hard lessons for Patong eateries

Karon, which by all accounts is doing very well.

So what on earth did the other guys do wrong? Is there a limit to the number of punters that a street can draw? Both of those establishments really should have thrived.

Maybe it just takes a while for it happen in this area. I know that some of the people on this soi went through the pain of a few lean years at the beginning, and for that they get the respect they deserve and enjoy the patronage of the same punters year in, year out.

The only other idea I can offer is that all the successful places I mentioned advertise to a greater or lesser extent, so maybe a bit of paid publicity is not an optional business expense in this area.

So few places make it past their first year that they fail to reap the benefits of return customers. Other off-Bangla places, like the very excellent Heroes, Football Crazy, Phuket Island Lager Bar and TJs know the value of repeat business. They worked hard to establish themselves and have stayed around long enough to now enjoy a level of return patronage that ensures their continuing success.

The lesson here is that if you want to open a watering hole, you should plan to be around for more than a year. Also, be prepared to experience some lean times at the outset and make sure you take very good personal care of everyone who comes in.

It's not easy being the favorite host – the main reason why people come to your bar. Ask any of these guys; sometimes they'd prefer to be at home watching TV, but they know that so-and-so is coming in from Hong Kong, Leeds or London and will expect to see them.

So there they are, the owners, answering the same dumb questions night after night, comforting the broken-hearted, showing new hopefuls the ropes, and trying to locate every Noi, Poi, Ding or Dong that has raised some customer's passion.

What the successful ones understand is that this is their job, and they have to do it well. The list of guys who do this job well is so long that I can't mention everybody here, but I can say to you all that you should use the dreaded low season to take a well-deserved break

Whinemail: Last month saw yet another email whingeing about my only writing about bars where I drink. Listen pal, if I relied on bars where I don't drink to supply me with news and events via email,

this column would be pretty thin. In fact, it would not even exist.

So get over it. I am unlikely to start drinking in bars I don't like just in the hope that they might supply me with some useful information.

Simply gone: Simple Computers has closed down, which is a sad state of affairs indeed. It was the only place I would trust with my machine when it broke. Apparently new business in Bangkok was the main reason for the closure; they were doing great last time I looked.

The good news is that the main technician, Hash regular Simon, is still available for computer emergencies and more. He is the only man in Phuket who gets new Terry Pratchett novels faster than I do. With him and the outstanding Khun Woody on the island, our computers should continue to run smoothly.

Stunner: I was lucky enough to be invited to Andy Street's better half Julie's party at the new TwinPalms Hotel in Surin last month. Although the place had not yet officially opened, they did an outstanding job of getting the restaurant in shape for what was a stunning do.

Former Le Royal Meridien Phuket Yacht Club GM Olivier Gibaud assured me that plans are being laid for a special "Sunday Session" Roast Carvery, with all the trimmings.

Result? We Nolos (North Of Lotus types) love him already. The restaurant has been designed by one of the best designers in Asia and is one of the tastiest-looking modern restaurants on the island.

Konrad Stalin may be reached at konradstalin@hotmail.com.



Burying the stinking sea serpent

I am trying to fit the clip onto the smart silver tube in which I carry my slim new reading glasses. It irritates me that the clip has broken because now I can't clip the tube into the little glass carrying pouch that my daughter bought for me in Chiang Mai, and which I wear around my neck.

Fiddling around with things like this is my prelude to getting down to writing. It could be sharpening a pencil, clipping my nails or picking my teeth – any-

EDGEWISE

By John Gilpin

thing to put off the moment of truth.

I have been thinking about writing about my recent trip to London. I took the train from Eastbourne on the coast here in England up to The Big Smoke for the first time since I arrived from Phuket a month ago.

I went up to meet an old friend who was over from Auckland, Chinese-Kiwi Peter Wong.

A man with remarkable skills, both on the pool table and as a graphic designer, Peter has absolutely no sense of direction and can't even read a map.

This is surprising considering that design and pool are all about lines and angles and the relationships of space and shapes.

Peter said that on his first day in London he went down the road to buy a newspaper and couldn't find his way back to his hotel.

He wandered around, lost on the streets of London for a couple of hours, before hailing a cab. It was a two-minute journey back to the hotel. I asked him if he had ever got lost in his own living room.

Pete's story, I said, reminded me of when my wife and



were driving around Ireland. We stopped at a little village on the Kerry coast where we met a character called Michael Murphy in a pub.

Mike told us how he walked out of his home one afternoon to buy a box of matches and came back 10 years later, drunk. His wife had left him so he didn't eat anymore, he explained; for nourishment he drank 10 pints of Guinness a day.

After the pub closed, we

buried a rotting sea serpent – that's what they said it was and that's what it looked like – on the beach there in the middle of the night.

Mike and his friend Paddy dug a hole in the sand with a couple of shovels, tipped in the stinking serpent, which was covered with flies, then fired shotguns into the sky as they do at an IRA funeral.

Mike said the stench of the dead creature had been disturb-

ing the nuns who were living in a holiday house on the beach.

We then went back to Mike's house, which he shared with 17 dogs, to drink poteen, a homemade liquor so powerful that it makes your toenails curl. We slept soundly that night in Mike's flea-ridden bed.

Pete said that when he had been in Glasgow a couple of days earlier he had popped out of the pub where he was drinking with friends to a betting shop around the corner to place a bet on the European Cup.

But he couldn't find his way back to the pub. He had to hail a cab (again) to take him back to the pub whose name, fortuitously, would have been hard to forget: it was called The Bloody Mary.

These stories pass through my mind while I'm looking for the pliers to mend my glasses case. I figure that they might be in the wooden tuck box that used to belong to my brother, but first I have to remove a few cardboard boxes that are standing on top of the box.

S***! The bottom falls out of one cardboard box, spilling old tubes of glue, carving chisels, paint scrapers and a tin of wax polish on the floor. I put all this back in a plastic bag, find the pliers and mend the tube for my glasses. Now I'm ready to write about my trip to London.

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Billion Plaza 'will be a new landmark'

By Kamol Pirat

SAMKONG: Yet another large commercial complex is now underway along the bypass road, on the corner opposite the Tesco-Lotus supercenter.

The development is named Billion Plaza, to reflect the number of baht that will eventually be invested.

Phase I, costing 300 million baht, will comprise 59 commercial units in Sino-Portuguese design. Each 4-story unit will be five meters wide and 20 meters deep, with a total 320 square meters of floor space. This phase is scheduled for completion around the beginning of 2006.

The project is being developed by Billion Assets Plaza Co (BAP), which is owned by business partners Pisarn Trangkasombat and Somsri Karnjanalai.

It is the first venture in commercial real estate sector for the pair, who own the Tropical Garden Resort at Kata Beach.

"This will help make BAP the leading property developer in Phuket," said K. Pisarn, who is Managing Director. He

added that there are plans to list the firm on the Stock Exchange of Thailand.

Project Manager Thanit Prateepnathalang told the *Gazette* that the 300 million baht investment in Phase I did not include purchase of the land, which was already owned by the developers' families.

Prices for most Phase I units range from 4.95 million baht to 7.95 million baht, though the corner unit directly facing the intersection is priced at 17.9 million baht. Potential buyers will be able to finance their purchases through Bank of Ayudhya, Siam City Bank or Siam Commercial bank, K. Thanit said.

Purchasers will be required to adhere to the project's green-and-white design theme, but there will be no restrictions on the type of business activity to be conducted; K. Thanit said that BAP believes noisy or dirty businesses will not be attracted to such an upscale development.

Among the businesses expected to be attracted are dental clinics, mobile-phone shops, information technology businesses and tour agencies, he said.

K. Thanit explained that only half of the total eight rai of the first phase will be built-up; the remainder has been reserved for rest areas, gardens, access roads and parking.

He expects many business operators to use the bottom floors for business and to live in the upper stories.

A private security firm will be hired to provide around-the-clock security for residents.

The project is being promoted at the "Architect Engineering Exhibition" at the Royal Phuket City Hotel from July 15 to 18, during which potential buyers can reserve units.

About 20 units have already been reserved and the project's second and third phases, to be named "Billion Plaza 2" and "Billion Plaza 3" respectively, are already in the planning stages.

K. Thanit is confident that the quality and location of Billion Plaza will result in all units being sold quickly, generating around 100 million baht in profit for the developers.

Phase II, which is expected to gen-

erate about 500 million baht in sales, will be built on an adjacent 14-rai plot south of the Phase I property, and will consist of 60 units following the same design plan as in Phase I.

The developers are also planning to build a seven-story five-star hotel as part of Phase II.

Phase III will be on another adjacent lot of 15 rai along the Samkong-Kathu Rd, and is being planned as a residential development.

"The entire 37-rai development, with a commercial complex, luxury hotel and housing development, will help transform the area around Samkong Intersection into a new business district for the island," K. Thanit said.

"The [widening of the] bypass road will finish concurrently with Phase I, after which people will see a beautiful new road lined with new buildings."

K. Thanit forecasts continued growth in the Phuket property market. This growth will be driven, he maintains, by high-class people from around the world who want to build homes in Phuket.

Signs of grumbling from the bear

When the subject of stockmarkets arises, so do the twin specters of the bull and the bear. It is important that investors remember both animals.

This was never more true than in the "bull market" of the late 1990s, when those with a bearish, or negative, view of the market's direction was often scorned. The herd was in full stampede until it ran off a cliff in early 2000.

There are some signs that the bears may have a point right now as well.

Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the US Federal Reserve (central bank), the "Fed", has received widespread acclaim as an excellent central banker. However, some people believe that he and the rest of the board of the US central bank have allowed themselves to fall behind "the curve" of inflationary pressures in the US economy.

Central bankers are ideally supposed to be ahead of "the curve" – raising short-term interest rates above the inflation rate because, history tells us, when central banks keep interest rates below the inflation rate, damage ensues.

When the genie of inflation escapes from the bottle it can be extremely difficult to recapture it and attempts that do succeed generally end up with the economy in recession.

Only history will tell us definitively whether the Fed is currently behind the curve but if it is, then this has global significance because the performance of the US economy is used by all other markets as a yardstick.

Inflation has almost disap-



MONEY TALKS

By Richard Watson

peared from most major economies over the past two decades. Many adults today are too young to remember the problems that it caused from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s.

The US economy has benefited from the Fed's combination of very low interest rates and accommodative monetary policy from 2001 onwards, spurred on by the 9/11 attacks.

The US was already in recession before 9/11 and the shock of the attacks made the Federal Reserve "bend over backwards" to rescue the situation. This was no ordinary recession; the stock-market crash that accompanied the recession, combined with the shock of 9/11, had all the ingredients to create the "perfect storm".

The actions of the Fed, combined with the Bush administration's tax cuts, put money back into the pockets of the average American. It allowed many people to refinance the mortgages on their homes at much lower interest rates.

It also allowed the housing sector to flourish; people might have lost money in the stock-market but many were more than adequately compensated by rising real estate values.

Consumers could also buy new vehicles at zero or near-zero interest rates and often end up with US\$3,000 to US\$4,000 cash in hand as part of the deal.

Today's situation is differ-

ent. The stock market reached highs early this year and is now stuck in a limited trading range, unable to reach higher levels. Investors borrowed heavily at low interest rates and huge amounts of money were invested in various areas, including emerging market bonds and stock markets.

These are therefore starting to suffer as interest rates rise. Semiconductors and securities brokers are other sectors starting to feel the pinch.

Interest rates in the US are now on the rise – the 0.25% increase on June 30 is only the beginning of a trend. This threatens the huge amounts of money in "carry trades", whereby money is borrowed at low interest rates and then invested in higher-yielding areas.

Huge amounts of cash are

in the hands of hedge fund managers who have been at the leading edge of these carry trades. With a continuation of the trend toward higher interest rates, which is virtually certain, many carry trades are going to have to be unwound.

The unwinding of these positions carries many risks, especially when one realizes that much of this money was borrowed in the US but then invested outside it, which threatens to have a huge impact on smaller markets that can't tolerate large movements of cash (remember Mexico in 1994 and Asia in 1997?).

Some economic models are already warning of rising PPI (Producer Price Inflation) or core CPI (Consumer Price Inflation, which ignores energy and food prices). As interest rates rise, such trends could lead to slow-

ing vehicle sales, lower corporate profits, and so on.

This school of thought says that a huge global bubble has been caused by low interest rates and carry trades and that this bubble is going to burst with very unpleasant consequences around the world.

There are even rumors that the US government is trying to manipulate the stock market via an S&P 500 futures account.

Washington has strenuously denied this, but at least one source has even published the number of the account. Well, it is election year.

Richard Watson runs Global Portfolios Co Ltd, a Phuket-based personal financial planning service. He can be reached at Tel and Fax: 076-381997, Mobile: 01-0814611. Email: imm@loxinfo.co.th.

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Oops – not quite far enough for one of the younger Phuket players

Phuket sides dominate pétanque

THALANG: Phuket side Suan Aharnbaanrao 4 won the inaugural Manik Sampan Pétanque Tournament held at Baan Manik School on July 10.

The tournament attracted 164 players of all ages from Phuket, Phang Nga, Ranong and Trang provinces.

The competition was held to encourage people to play competitive pétanque and to raise funds to pay for repairs to the school's buildings and to have new gates fitted.

The tourney started at 10 am with Round 1 of the open category, during which 52 teams of

pairs played for 32 berths in Round 2.

After Round 2, winning teams went on to play in Division 1 while the losers were relegated to Division 2.

In Division 1, Suan Aharnbaanrao 4 went on to beat Suan Aharnbaanrao 2 in the final, with the teams winning 7,000 baht and 4,000 baht, respectively, in prize money.

Visitors Takuapa 5 received 2,500 baht for their efforts, which gave them 3rd place, ahead of fellow Phang Nga players Tai Muang 1 in 4th place, who won 1,500 baht.

Each of the teams that finished in the top four places also received trophies.

In Division 2, Takuapa 10 were the "best of the rest", winning 1,000 baht, with runners-up Kankeera 2, also from Phang Nga, winning 500 baht.

Baan Manik teams played well in the under-16s category, finishing in three of the top four places, but failing to take the top honors. Winners Takuapa 2 received 1,500 baht, while Manik 4 won 1,000 baht for coming second, Manik 3 won 500 baht for finishing third, and Manik 5 won 300 baht for coming fourth.

Democrats organize futsal tourney

PHUKET CITY: The Democrat Party Phuket branch is organizing its third annual five-a-side futsal tournament, to take place from July 31 to August 2 at the Saphan Hin sports complex, Building 1.

Competition is split into four categories: under-11s; under-14s; under-17s years and over-35s. There is no open category.

Organizers explained that there is no category for 17- to 34-year-olds because there are plenty of other tournaments for them to play in. The idea of the Democrat tourney, they said, was to give youngsters and older people the chance to shine.

Trophies and cash prizes in the following amounts will be awarded to the winning teams: first 3,000 baht; second 2,000 baht; third 1,000 baht.

Teams have until July 20 to enter the competition. Applications should be made at the Phuket office of the Sports Authority of Thailand, Tel: 076-250110.

Local views on diving issues

Recently, a wide range of opinions have been voiced on various aspects of the Phuket dive industry. However, a viewpoint that has been missing all along is that of the Thai instructors.

To balance this out, we spoke with two experienced Thai dive instructors working out of Phuket – Monton "Gai" Bumpenyu, who has worked in the industry for more than nine years, and Ruethaiwan "Noon" Chakrutpong, who has four years' experience.

Like their foreign counterparts, both seem to agree there is a need for a greater emphasis on regulation and conservation if the industry is to remain prosperous.

Gazette: How has the dive industry affected Phuket?

Gai: It has provided Thai people with an opportunity to learn from foreigners. Twenty years ago we knew nothing about the diving business.

Noon: It is an additional attraction for tourism. Phuket has the ideal environment for diving, which brings in more money. Also, it gives opportunities for Thai people to work in the industry.

Gazette: What are your opinions about all the foreign instructors? Do you feel they are tak-



Monton "Gai" Bumpenyu

ing work away from Thai instructors?

Gai: I don't make a distinction between Thai and foreign instructors. What I think about is the quality of the instructor. Some foreigners are very good to the environment, but others don't care because they just come here to work. It's not their country or their environment. Also, if your shop has European customers, then why should [a customer] have to choose an instructor of a different nationality?

Noon: We need them because most of the customers are foreigners. Thai people cannot take care of the entire market, especially if the student speaks a language other than English. If



Ruethaiwan "Noon" Chakrutpong

there are no foreign instructors, then Phuket will lose the market.

Gazette: What are some of the problems in the dive industry?

Gai: There are too many divers and many of them are inexperienced. They can breathe underwater, but don't know about coral, the environment, and how to take care of it.

Noon: People just want to get as much money as possible without thinking about the environment. They do not care if the divers have been diving for less than a year and may damage coral. The Similan Islands requires advanced diving skills. Only divers who will not damage the reef should be allowed to dive there. Those with low skill levels or lack of experience should not.

Gazette: What are some possible solutions?

Gai: We have to educate divers about the marine environment. When I worked in the Similans, I had to inform every diver about the coral: how fragile it is, how slowly it grows, and how easily it dies if touched.

Noon: Screen divers and inform them about the level of diving required. If they haven't

dived in six months make it mandatory for them to do a refresher course [which would take only a few hours].

Gazette: What is the biggest threat to the reefs in the Similans?

Gai: Too many divers, inexperienced divers and open-water [entry level] courses still being done in the Similans.

Noon: The number of boats and divers. Sometimes you will have over 50 divers at one time on the same dive site, and not all of them are good divers.

Gazette: What should be done about these problems?

Gai: Speak with the government, perhaps the National Park, about controlling the level of divers permitted in the park, to regulate it in the same way they do in the Maldives Islands. The skill level, not just the certification level, of the divers should be checked before they dive.

Noon: Limit the amount of boats, screen the divers before entering the Similans and bar beginners. We must think of the future. If we start now and limit the numbers, then we may have less money coming in over the short term, but it will be possible to have more money coming in over a longer period of time.

Gazette: And if you could alter one thing about diving around Phuket, what would it be?

Gai: I would go back 20 years and start with better regulations and enforcement. I think it's nearly too late. We didn't realize there was going to be a problem until it happened.

Noon: Limit the boats and the number of divers, and regulate access depending on the skill level of the divers permitted into the Similans.

Sylvie Yaffe is a semi-retired dive instructor. She can be reached at sylvie@phuketgazette.net

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Charity runs to mark HM the Queen's birthday

PHUKET CITY: Two fun runs will be held on August 8 to mark the 72nd birthday of HM Queen Sirikit and to raise funds to buy much-needed renal dialysis equipment for the Wachira Phuket Hospital.

There will be a five-kilometer run for under-15-year-olds and

a 12-km run open to all, with both courses starting and finishing at Suan Luang on Chao Fa Rd.

To enter the under-15s category costs 50 baht per person, while entering the open category costs 200 baht per person.

Registration forms are available from the Phuket Provin-

cial Administration Organization office at Phuket Provincial City Hall, on Narisorn Rd, or runners may register at Suan Luang on the day of the races.

For more information call the Phuket Provincial Administration Organization at Tel: 076-211877.

City primary school games get underway



In the pink: The cheerleaders from Baan Samkong School saw their teams do well in volleyball.

By Anongnat Sartpisut

PHUKET CITY: The annual week-long sports tourney for students attending the five government primary schools in Phuket City got underway at Saphan Hin on July 10.

About 200 students aged 5 to 12, competed in a range of sports, including volleyball, soccer, table tennis, pétanque, swimming, athletics and *sepak takraw*, with the final day of competition scheduled for July 17.

The games started with the volleyball tournament. In the boys' competition, Muang Phuket School beat Baan Bang Niew 2-0, while Plookpanya beat both Baan Samkong and Wat Kajornrangsun by 2-0.

In the girl's volleyball opening matches, Baan Bang Niew beat Wat Kajornrangsun 2-0, while Baan Samkong beat Plookpanya 2-0.

The soccer competition also kicked off on July 10, with Baan Bang Niew beating Baan Samkong by a convincing 6-1, and Plookpanya trouncing Wat Kajornrangsun 9-0.

On July 11, Baan Samkong drew with Muang Phuket 1-1, while Baan Bang Niew matched Plookpanya's winning margin by beating Wat Kajornrangsun 9-0.

Boys' volleyball continued on July 11, with Muang Phuket beating Baan Samkong 2-1, Wat Kajornrangsun beating Baan Bang Niew 2-0, and Baan Samkong redeeming their earlier loss

by beating Baan Bang Niew 2-0.

Girls' volleyball matches saw Baan Samkong beat Wat Kajornrangsun 2-0, with Muang Phuket beating Baan Bang Niew by an identical margin.

The games continued through the week, with athletics scheduled for July 16 and 17.



Golden marathon man raises 400,000 baht

Phuket resident Les Bird, in bib number 664, reaches the finish line to complete the 42-kilometer 2004 Gold Coast Airport Marathon earlier this month, thereby securing 400,000 baht in sponsorship for the Phuket charity Life Home Project.

Mr Bird finished 144th in the men's 50-54 years old category in a net time of 5 hours 32 minutes 51 seconds. He was the 1,697th athlete to cross the finish line out of the 11,804 runners on the day.

Patong Darts League head for a cliffhanger finale

PATONG: The final round of the current Patong Darts League is shaping up to be a cliffhanger.

With just one round to go, In-Between and Happy Days are level-pegging on 34 points, while Champs are, theoretically at least, still in contention on 31 points.

The final and deciding round of the league will be played on July 20.

tween 5; Offshore* 4 Champs 5. (* = Winner of beer leg)

Overall standings after July 6: In-Between (34 pts); Happy Days (34); Champs (31); Offshore (28); Football Crazy (22); Shakers (19); Piccadilly (19); Valhalla (18); Didi's (18); Amigos (17).

July 20 matches (final week of play): Champs at Amigos; Didi's at Football Crazy; Piccadilly at Happy Days; Shakers at In-Between; Valhalla at Offshore.

Results of July 6 matches: Amigos* 4 Didi's 5; Happy Days* 8 Valhalla 1; Piccadilly* 6 Shakers 3; Football Crazy* 4 In-B-

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Four-seat hurricane



By Jeff Heselwood

New models of Ferrari are somewhat rare, and four-seater Ferraris are even harder to find. We had the 456 and the 550 Maranello (later to be upgraded to the 575), but now Ferrari has introduced a completely new model: the breathtaking 612 Scaglietti, which replaces the outgoing 456.

Although the 612 was designed by Pininfarina, as are the majority of Ferraris, the name derives from the great Sergio Scaglietti, a Modena coachbuilder and stylist who, during the '50s and '60s, drafted some of the most beautiful Ferrari designs ever made.

Although the 612 is front-engined rear-drive, the V12 engine is mounted well back in the all-aluminum chassis to give almost perfect weight distribution. In addition, the six-speed gearbox is incorporated into a transaxle at the rear, aiding this almost perfect weight distribution of 46:54.

The engine, as you would expect from a Ferrari, is mightily impressive, delivering a magnificent 540bhp (397kW) at 7,250 rpm, while a strong torque figure of 588Nm at 5,250rpm is quoted.

Everything about the Scaglietti is measured in superlatives: Maximum speed is 320kph, while the sprint to 100kph from a standstill is going to take you only four seconds, not much longer than it will take you to read this line.

With performance like this, the Scaglietti can rightly claim to be the fastest four-seater in production. It's substantially quicker



Inside and out, the new Ferrari 612 Scaglietti is a stunner.

than the Bentley Continental and faster even than its stablemate, the Maserati Quattroporte (see *Gazette*, May 15).

Enzo Ferrari's first car was built in 1940, but it was not until 1947 that the Italian first produced one under his own name. But Ferrari was really only interested in racing and he turned to producing customer cars only in order to finance the factory's racing activities.

In fact, Enzo is said to have held his customers in complete disdain, reasoning that if they were "stupid enough to pay him money for a car, he was quite happy to take it".

Enzo was born the son of Alfredo and Adagisa Ferrari in 1898, two years after his brother Alfredo.

His birth certificate shows the date to be February 20, but in actual fact the birth occurred earlier, on the 18th, due to heavy snow in the area it took his father two days to get to the nearest town to register the birth.

In 1908, Alfredo took his sons to see a motor race in Bologna. Stars of the race were a pair of gleaming red Fiats, which inevitably made an impact on the younger Ferrari. Several years later, in 1919, Enzo himself became a racing driver.



Successful though he was as a driver, it is his cars that have been more successful, taking a number of top drivers to world titles, including, in the 1950s, Alberto Ascari, legendary Argentine Juan Manuel Fangio, and Britain's Mike Hawthorn; and in the 1960s, Phil Hill and John Surtees.

The 1970s saw Niki Lauda take two titles for Ferrari, with Jody Scheckter winning the drivers' championship in 1979.

Then came a long drought; Ferrari was not to win a drivers' title for 21 years until Michael Schumacher won his third world

championship and his first for Ferrari in 2000. We all know what has happened since then.

There was a possibility that Ferrari would be floated on the Milan Stock Exchange, but this idea has been temporarily shelved due to the financial problems currently experienced by parent company Fiat.

The problem is that if Ferrari is floated it becomes liable to its shareholders – and that may bring into question the vast amount of money the company sinks into its racing team.

Despite generous Marlboro sponsorship, the resources de-

manded by the most technically advanced racing team in the world would surely raise eyebrows at any shareholders' meeting.

Meanwhile, with the introduction of the 612 Scaglietti, demand continues to outstrip supply for Ferrari road cars – and long may it continue to do so.

With the Ferrari racing team so clearly outclassing the competition, perhaps Enzo is laughing at the eager buyers from the grave.

Jeff Heselwood may be contacted by email at jhc@netvigator.com.

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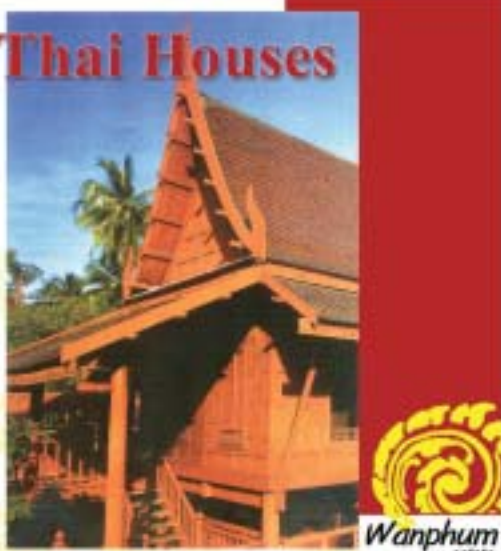
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Whining about wine tax is a futile exercise

Comments about Thailand's high taxes on wine constitute the majority of mail I receive. A recent *Gazette* article about the reduction in tax on Australian wine, after the Thai-Australian Free Trade Agreement (Tafta) goes into effect at the beginning of next year, generated many optimistic inquiries.

Unfortunately, the chances that wine prices will fall any time soon are slim. The reason is that Tafta will lower only import tariffs, leaving the rest of the convoluted combination of taxes and fees intact. These include excise tax, value added tax, Interior Ministry fees and a host of others.

These taxes are compounded. First, import duty is levied. Then excise is calculated on the price including duty, and so forth. Those familiar with the "plus plus" formula used in calculating hotel restaurant bills will be familiar with the

general concept.

Driving the final cost even higher, the price on which import duty is calculated includes the cost of freight and insurance. Also, the exchange rate used is calculated at the time the wine is released from bond, not when it was purchased. This can further drive up expenses if the baht falls during the interim.

How do consumers react? When wine prices are high, they switch to less expensive beverages. When prices are more reasonable, they return to wine. Overall, expenditures for beverages do not change. In this zero-sum game, any eventual reduction in the price of Australian wine would not lead to more wine purchases, just more purchases of Australian wine.



By Steven Roberto

Thailand consistently affirms its determination to be at odds with other nations by maintaining one of the world's highest taxes on wine, which it views as a luxury item. It is harebrained to hope they will lower taxes on wine simply because consumers complain, so here are some strategies for coping.

Buy wines that offer value, not a low price. Avoid inexpensive wines in large supermarkets, especially the generic wines of France, as they are usually dreary wines that are dumped here simply because they cannot be sold elsewhere. Check the vintage; many wines shipped to Thailand are too old.

Seek wines from overlooked nations that strive for quality, such as South Africa, Argentina, and New Zealand. These

wines are often inexpensive and delicious. Look for the wines of small, unknown artisan producers who lack mass-marketing clout and must therefore ask less for their wines.

Find a salesperson who knows wine and ask him to contact you when a bargain is available. And, always, always ask visiting friends from abroad to bring as much wine as they are permitted when visiting.

That special bottle, enjoyed with friends who have come a long way to see you, is usually enough to put a smile back on the face of even the most disgruntled wine lover.

Steven Roberto is a winemaker and restaurant consultant from California. He is the Wine and Beverage Director for the award-winning Baan Rim Pa restaurant in Patong. Email: stevenroberto@lycos.com

INSPIRED BY THE SAMURAI

It was repeat viewings of *The Last Samurai* that led to the choice of Tukiji Japanese Restaurant for a night out in a wet Phuket City. Finding the place, however, was something of a challenge as there is no outdoor sign; look for the large Step! sign opposite the northern side entrance to the Robinson department store, and cross the road.

Tukiji also serves Thai food and offers restorative reflexology sessions upstairs. Slightly schizophrenic though this may be, the welcome is warm, and petite Pannaree "Pim" Na Nakorn, the sometime manager (whose day job is running the family's other business, the Herb Garden & Spa), is attentive to customers' needs.

My dining companion and I are seated and almost before the extensive cocktail menu is presented, the single word saké is uttered by said companion. There was, strangely, no mention in the drinks list of the *kamikaze* (divine wind) cocktail. Cultural sensitivity, I suppose.

K. Pim's family have enjoyed Japanese cuisine for many

years, and it was a long-time Japanese associate of her family who made the suggestion that they open a restaurant, almost to further a hobby.

The family listened to the friend's advice on everything from Japanese protocol for bowing to the handling of *meishi* (name cards), and even went en masse to Japan to immerse themselves in the culture.

Ah, the hot saké arrives and we get down to ordering from a menu that, although it is not the near-poetic *oshinagaki* of some Tokyo restaurants, is at least comprehensive and features attractive, large photos of what is on offer.

Our *hashi* (chopsticks) are getting restless, but a word of caution: use the other end of your chopsticks if you want to take a piece of food from your companions' plate – Japanese protocol again.

Maki sushi is a necessary choice. The small parcels of vinagered sticky rice wrapped with *nori* (dried seaweed) could appear on this diner's daily menu from now until forever without inducing boredom. The delicate



Toothsome: *Nigiri sushi*, with wasabi and ginger to cool the fire.

taste of the *kappa maki* (sushi with slivers of cucumber) is enhanced by learning that *kappa* is, in Japanese folklore, a cucumber-loving water sprite. Poetic menus indeed.

The *tekka maki* tuna dish is named after the gambling dens favored by *yakuza* gangsters. Our tuna is dark and meaty, and almost dissolves in the mouth.

We enjoy the *nigiri sushi*, ovals of rice topped with thin slices of various raw fish including the *maguro* tuna dish and boiled *ebi* (shrimp), as well as the

ubiquitous green dynamite that is *wasabi* (horseradish). It brings smiles to our faces and tears to our eyes – a tad too much *wasabi* – meaning it's time for the *gari* (pickled ginger root) to cleanse the palate.

And then comes the *tempura ebi*, which we eat straight from the fryer – quickly dipped into the *shoyu* (soy sauce) – while the batter is still steaming hot.

The tasty morsels are accompanied by a side dish of slightly chewy *soba* buckwheat noodles served cold and on a bed

of ice. We are starting to feel rather full.

As we leave, we see people scurrying off for an identi-burger or fried chicken seemingly unaware of this fine little eatery in the center of town, serving, for just a couple of 100 baht more than Western fast food, extremely fresh and healthy Japanese cuisine.

My companion laughed when I mentioned that one of my favorite episodes of *The Simpsons* was when Homer developed a fatal craving for *fugu* (blowfish), sadly not on the menu here. I was glad that my companion's, ahem, *kamikaze* came before we went into Tukiji.

Tukiji Japanese Restaurant, 13-21 Thavornvongwong Rd, Phuket City. Tel: 076-256026. Open daily from 9:30 am to 10 pm.

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Time to rethink the tools for selling property

Phuket's rapid development and the accompanying benefits and distractions are constant subjects of conversation and letters to editors. One issue gaining prominence over the past three years has been the ever increasing numbers of roadside billboards.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, during a recent visit to Phuket, urged the Governor to make the drive from the airport more attractive for visitors.

Anyone who has driven along that road would agree that the huge number of roadside billboards would have been part of the inspiration for PM Thaksin's comments.



Effective sales tool? Or self-defeating approach that is backfiring by blighting the island?

Apart from their size and rapidly increasing numbers, many of the billboards fail to deliver their messages as they are partly obscured from the driver's view.

Granted, the presence of billboards possibly helps break the scenery during the trip from Bangkok International Airport to the capital city's center, saving motorists from seeing an expanse of dingy old rooftops and unpleasant concrete blocks. But in Phuket the green of the countryside would be much more pleasant without them.

The main culprits are, of course, the usual mainstream

corporate products and consumer goods, such as soft drinks, motor vehicles, fashion brands and so on, but the property development industry is also partly responsible.

Large billboards advertising luxury villas with beautiful views and scenery obscure, er, beautiful views and scenery – vistas of rubber plantations that are part of the attraction of Phuket to newly-arrived visitors and an integral part of the island's history.

The question is: are billboards necessary to sell property, or could the industry market its products to visitors on the island in a more sophisticated and attractive way?

Many visitors say that the

island is being overdeveloped, and this belief is probably reinforced by the first impression created by the huge number of billboards, an impression that may override the reality that much of the island is still stunningly beautiful.

If such a thing as enforced zoning were to be implemented here, a policy introduced successfully by the Brunswick Shire Council in Western Australia could form the model for Phuket.

There, billboards have been confined to certain areas where the largest volume of traffic passes by. The council claims that this policy causes passersby to pay more attention to the advertising, as they are aware of the "billboard free" zone rules.

This concept is, of course, ridiculously Utopian in Phuket, where many people rely on rent charged for signs stuck on their buildings or on their land.

But perhaps the property and hotel industries could consider more subtle ways to promote their products on Phuket.

They may even find that most discerning visitors appreciate the absence of such obtrusive advertising.

PROPERTY & HOMEZONE

By Graham Doven

Home of the Week

Cool

Poised on a hilltop, this contemporary villa overlooks Kamala Bay. Part of an exclusive community of similarly-styled homes, this three-bedroom, five-bathroom villa features about 200 square meters of indoor space, with an additional 180 square meters of decks, patios and poolside area.

This brand-new house is a two-story creation in concrete, water and glass, with stunning views of mountains or the ocean from each of the rooms' floor-to-ceiling, sliding glass doors.

Comprising two separate pavilions, the property offers the utmost privacy, while the large windows and spacious adjoining patios give a sense of openness. The pool, looking more like a reflecting pond, achieves the designer's goal of providing a calming influence that permeates the entire residence.

The open-plan kitchen, living and dining area is on the top floor, and the large patio for outdoor entertaining has a sweeping view of the Andaman Sea. The state-of-the-art kitchen has granite countertops and a spacious, custom-built pantry.

The Thai kitchen overlooks the pool area from an adjoining balcony. The floors throughout the entire upper level are natural black slate.

Across an open-air atrium from the living room is the master bedroom, which boasts floor-to-ceiling windows looking west. You can watch the sunset in the evening and check the surf con-

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Kamala

living up high



Above, the pool at night. Right, the elevation of the home ensures good sea breezes.

ditions in the morning without leaving the master bed.

If you must bring your work home, there's nowhere better to do it than in the study off the master bedroom, which has soothing views of ocean and jungle.

The master bathroom has a large bathtub and is complete with an indoor-outdoor bamboo garden. The master shower is panelled entirely in slate with a custom-made chrome shower spout rising up out of the floor.

An open, outdoor staircase overlooks the pool and leads to the other two bedrooms that comprise the wings on the ground floor. Each has a private bathroom and terrace, built-in cabinets and warm terracotta floors.

Stepping-stones lead over the 45-sqm infinity-edge pool, which has a shallow area for children to swim in and an inset "wet" bar. Surrounded by lush tropical greenery, the pool deck



is the ideal for sipping on lemonade or margaritas.

The poolside bathroom, complete with shower, is the perfect place to rinse off the sand from nearby Kamala Beach before taking a swim at home.

The room next to the poolside shower can be used as the maid's quarters or for storage.

This villa, air-conditioned throughout, is fully furnished in-

side and out with décor as stylish and durable as the building itself. The price is 19.5 million baht.

For more information, please contact Richard Lusted at Siam Real Estate. 48/19 Moo 9, Soi Ao Chalong, Chalong, Phuket 83100. Tel/Fax: 076-280805. Mobile: 01-2710496. Website: www.siamrealestate.com

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Gardening

with Bloomin' Bert

When a tree isn't a tree at all

Everyone knows what trees are. They're big and green, and they have leaves. Some flower and produce fruit, others just provide a welcome relief from the Phuket sun; welcome shade under which to enjoy a polite beer or two.

According to my dictionary, a tree is a "large woody perennial plant that grows to a height of several feet and typically has a single erect main stem with side branches".

Trees should therefore be easy to categorize, and there shouldn't be too much confusion over whether or not a big tall green plant is a tree or not. Predictably though, there's an exception to every rule, and one of the more common Phuket "trees" isn't a tree at all. The banana tree is an herb. In other words, there's no wood in it.

Every year Thais celebrate the *Loy Kratong* festival, during which the *kratong* – which are made from cuts of banana tree "trunks" – are floated on open water. Look closely at the base of the *kratong* and you'll see that the cross section of the banana stem it's cut from is actually made from leaves tightly wrapped together.

Leaves are exactly what the trunk of this plant is made from. As the plant grows, the leaves form continually, hiding themselves in the stem and only appearing when the time is right. Once the leaves burst forth, they're huge, which is probably why they start their furtive growth early.

Once the stem has grown to its full height, flowered and produced fruit, that's it. It can't do this twice, so the stem commits hari-kari and leaves the business of growing and producing more fruit to other parts of the plant.

Although they die very soon after they've produced fruit, before then they're incredibly

resilient. Try as you may to kill a banana plant, it will refuse to die.

Some time ago, I watched some neighbors cut all the leaves off two banana plants opposite my house, reducing them to bare stems peeping out of the soil. Despite my conviction that they were well and truly destroyed, a week later new leaves sprouted forth out of the cut stems. A couple of months later the tree was so happy that it produced more shoots nearby.

These shoots became miniature banana plants, destined to provide even more bananas for the neighborhood. Then someone decided to burn off some garbage right next to the now one-meter-tall banana "saplings". Sure enough, a few days later, new green leaves appeared, in total defiance of what they were subjected to the previous week.

There are more varieties of banana plant than you could ever imagine. Apart from the obvious fruit-bearing varieties seen throughout the Thai countryside, there are also a number that are grown in gardens purely for their ornamental value.



Ornamental banana trees have flowers ranging in color from bright red to orange.
Photo by Alasdair Forbes

These smaller variations of the musaceae family, or *kluay* in Thai, are smaller than their commercially grown cousins. The

dramatic flower they produce is similar, but it's not edible. (My neighbor disagrees with me on this, and swears that the bulbous

tops of the musaceae plants outside his home are *aroi maak*. But when I asked him to demonstrate this, he wasn't quite as convincing.)

The common factor with all members of the musaceae family is the bulbous flower. On the big, fruit plants this is a deep burgundy color. The shape and color of this prompted comments from my aging mother when she was in Phuket that probably weren't appropriate for a lady her age.

The smaller varieties come in shades ranging from bright red to orange.

If you grow any variety of a banana plant in your garden, just about the only aspect of its care that needs to be considered is its location. It's not keen on strong wind, as the leaves are easily torn, and end up hanging in strips like a grass skirt.

Also, put it in a spot with plenty of air – this isn't a plant for the heart of the jungle.

Apart from that, stick it in the ground and leave it to get on with growing and multiplying. Just remember: it's not a tree.

Construction Update

By Anongnat Sartpisut

The Pearl Village Hotel Phuket at Nai Yang is undergoing changes that will allow it to better accommodate the flourishing business in hosting meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions groups, labeled collectively as the Mice market.

Hotel Manager Robert Frei told the *Gazette* that his hotel alone had been missing out on 10 to 20 Mice groups a year because of insufficient space.

"If you don't have meeting rooms of the right size with the right facilities," he said, "you lose the group." He said that Pearl Village had invested more than 50 million baht in its new

Pearl Village sets sights on Mice market

conference pavilion (pictured) and on upgrading facilities in its older function rooms.

"The pavilion covers some



550 square meters and is more than 5 meters high," he said. "We can seat 670 people theater-style and divide the pavilion into two separate soundproofed sections."

The pavilion boasts the most modern facilities in southern Thailand, said Mr Frei. These include fully computer-controlled lighting and air-condition-

ing, wireless high-speed Internet, wireless LAN, and a 360° high-speed combined dome camera and projector.

For details contact Robert Frei at Pearl Village Hotel Phuket on Tel: 076-327006. Fax: 076-327338-9. Email: pearlvil@loxinfo.co.th.



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Property Gazette

Property Wanted

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SOUTH END LAND

I want buy one plot of land in the south of Phuket. Max price: one million baht. The price depends on location and quality. Email: gimko_8@hotmail.com

LOOKING FOR HOME

I am looking to buy a small-to medium-size home anywhere on Phuket Island in the 1.5-to-2-million-baht range. Would like Western-style kitchen and air conditioning. Area for a garden would be nice. Email: inpatongnow@yahoo.com

1 RAI OF LAND

with sea view wanted for building a private house. Must be in a quiet area and have a road and electricity. Prefer in the south, around Nai Harn/Rawai, but open to other areas of Phuket. Email: bauer_ctu_la@hotmail.com

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WANT TO BUY HOUSE

I want to buy a house with a sea view, or near the beach. Looking to pay 3-4 million baht. Email at: bluelakayaine@hotmail.com

APARTMENT WANTED

Apartment with telephone, view and kitchen wanted for long-term rental. Prefer in Kata or Patong. Tel: 09-511-6408. Email: kevinsan2001@yahoo.com

HOUSE WANTED

2- or 3-bedroom house in Baan Prangthong Villa for under 5 million baht. Email: lorisdb@hotmail.com

Accommodation Available

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wanted. Looking for a 2-bedroom apartment or house in Patong, with access to pool, fully furnished and with security. Would like to rent from September 1 to April 30 next year. Email: lilla_4ever@hotmail.com

HOUSE TO RENT

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- ▶ Graphic-design skills and knowledge of Adobe Illustrator, PageMaker, Photoshop and Dreamweaver programs are required
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- ▶ English speaker

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is holding meetings in English at the following places:

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Patong Patong Hospital
on Mon, Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun at 7 pm and on Fri at 8 pm

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Asian male – resident in Australia – is looking for an attractive Thai lady (preferred age 35-40) for a long-term relationship and marriage. Divorced, widowed and with kids considered. Send a recent photo and brief details by email. More than one photo would be welcome. Tel: 03-97498111. Email: alan_7486@hotmail.com

LOOKING FOR

a sweetheart. Nice looking, educated and successful farang man, living in Phuket, would like to meet a smart, cute Thai woman. Email: jaiyai2547@hotmail.com

SEEKING THAI LADY

I am a single man, 44 years young, and would like to meet a nice Thai lady, age 30 to 40. Email: wilco59@excite.com

TOMBOY WANTED

I am a 25-year-old single man working in Phuket. I am staying alone and would like to meet a tomboy, age not over 23. Tel: 09-4745898.

TRAVEL COMPANION

30-year-old Dutchman seeks nice, attractive, slim and open-minded Thai female to be holiday travel companion. If you send me your picture, I will surely reply to you. Email: doeidoeiduzend@hotmail.com

NEW FRIENDS

I am a frequent visitor to Phuket. I would like to meet other Thai people to learn/practice Thai language and in return can offer help with speaking English. I will next be in Phuket on 25th Aug. Please email: tom_woods6@hotmail.com

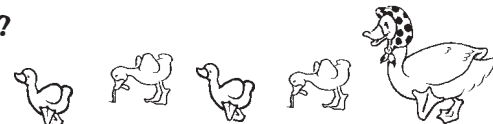
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I am a 30-year-old, beautiful, slim Thai lady looking for an older gentleman companion to live with and cater to his every need. I can send email with my picture. My name is Nok, which means bird. Email: intaraman_nok@yahoo.com

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