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Mystery over Briton's death

By Andy Johnstone & Siripansa Somboon

PATONG: Mystery surrounds the death of Briton Stephen Harris, leaving his family saddened and confused.

Mr Harris's body was discovered at the Monte Carlo Hotel on Rat-U-Thit 200 Pi Rd, Patong, on October 29 [see also *Gazette*, November 6].

At the time, Pol Lt Col Boonlert Onklang of Kathu Police Station told the *Gazette* an initial inspection by a doctor indicated the cause of death was a broken neck, and that Mr Harris, 46, had also suffered a dislocated right elbow.

Mr Harris's remains were sent to Bangkok for autopsy before being repatriated to Britain in the middle of November.

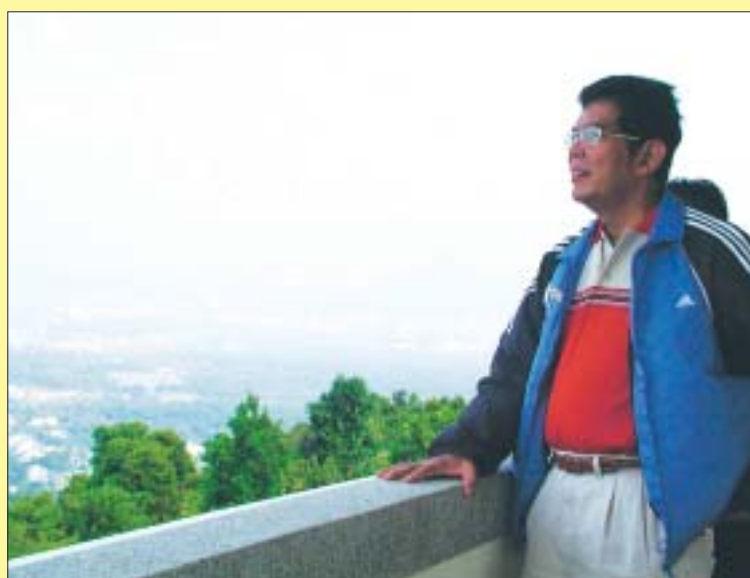
However, when the body arrived in the UK, his family were unhappy at the cause of death – heart failure – given on the death certificate that accompanied it.

Speaking with the *Gazette* this week, Mr Harris's sister, Angela Farmer, said, "The death certificate that came back with Stephen said that he had died of a heart attack.

"I wasn't happy about that, so the coroner for Worcester [where Mr Harris lived] has opened an inquest.

"We've been told that Stephen did not have a heart attack, and we're still waiting for the results from [a second] autopsy, although Stephen has now been buried. [The coroner here] can't find a cause of death."

Mrs Farmer said that Worcestershire County Coroner Victor Round, whose area includes



Vice-Governor Winai Buapradit admires the view after the official opening of the tower.

Khao Khat viewpoint opens

AO MAKHAM: Vice-Governor Winai Buapradit on December 10 presided over the opening ceremony of the new Khao Khat Tower, which affords visitors a dramatic 360-degree view of the coastline and islands in Phuket Bay.

Work on the tower, a restaurant, a parking lot, several shops and landscaped gardens was carried out by the Wichit Tambon Administration Organization, funded by a 24-million-baht development budget from the Interior Ministry.

The tower and its environs, which cover about 10 rai, can be reached via either Sakdidet Rd or the Borrae-Khao Khat road. Admission is free.

Kidderminster, where Mr Harris lived, "...wasn't happy [with the autopsy results from Thailand]. He is trying to get information from the Thai coroner who supposedly did an autopsy, but information is very slow coming through [from Thailand]."

Mrs Farmer also said that Mr Round said there appeared to be no fractures or dislocations to any part of Mr Harris's body.

She added, "It's been a very

distressing time for all of us, as you can understand. [The Foreign Office] haven't been much help and it's very hard to take, because we still don't know the cause of his death."

Coroner's officer Ian Harding told the *Gazette* an inquest was opened into Mr Harris's death on November 23 and will remain open until inquiries have been made with the Foreign Of-

Continued on page 2

Call for demolition of Laguna buildings

By Kamol Pirat

PHUKET: A new land row is brewing at Laguna after the head of the national Land Inspection Working Group called for a toilet block to be demolished, charging it is built on state land.

Speaking after a meeting of 14 local officials, Senator Pricha Pitanon backed local land officers' claims that the toilet, plus another building covering just four square meters, stand on land that does not belong to Laguna Resorts & Hotels (LRH).

In January this year, the Phuket Provincial Land Office (PPLO) and the provincial version of the Committee to Solve Problems of Encroachment on State Land (*KorBorRor*) told the *Gazette* they were confident that the 13 plots of land on which the Laguna complex is built are all covered by legitimate land titles.

But these two small buildings are away from the complex, on land close to the beach, which staff from the PPLO say they have determined is owned by the state.

Sen Pricha said Cherng Talay Tambon Administration Organization (*OrBorTor*) had already issued a notice ordering LRH to demolish the buildings.

The *OrBorTor* invited the senator to chair the meeting, which took place at the office of Governor Udomsak Usawarangura and was attended by Vice-Governor Winai Buapradit, PPLO Chief Suphot Suwannachote, lawyers and officers of Cherng Talay *OrBorTor*.

Sen Pricha, who appears to specialize in problems with Laguna land, said the meeting had agreed that the Land Office and the *OrBorTor* were right in con-

Continued on page 2

Bickering over ICEC 'has wasted B100bn'

By Gategeo Phetsawang

PHUKET CITY: Juthamas Sirivan, the Governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), has lamented the long delay in coming to a decision on the site for Phuket's International Convention and Exhibition Center (ICEC), saying that the arguments have cost Phuket 100 billion baht in lost revenue.

"Building an ICEC in Phuket has to be delayed until we

have a clear picture of exactly what people want, and where they want it," K. Juthamas said on December 14. "But the slow process has cost an unseen 100 billion baht, which is not a small amount to lose."

"Whether an ICEC is built [in Phuket] or not depends on the judgment of Phuket people. I don't want to keep repeating that Phuket has wasted many opportunities to decide where to build an ICEC, but I do want people to

think of what Phuket deserves but which is being lost," she added.

K. Juthamas contrasted the delay in building an ICEC in Phuket with the progress in building an ICEC in Chiang Mai.

"We haven't done anything about the ICEC in Phuket. It still has not passed the decision-making process, while in Chiang Mai they already have completed construction and design plans and will soon begin."

K. Juthamas pointed out that the revenue generated by an ICEC could go towards developing Phuket and protecting the island's environment, and suggested that an ICEC would attract more "quality tourists".

"There are 4 million tourists [a year] in Phuket, but if 2 million of them were tourists who came for meetings and to use an ICEC, it would mean we would have more 'quality tourists' and [Phuket's environment] would probably suffer less damage."

K. Juthamas also said that the TAT is willing to support private companies in building an ICEC in Phuket. "I know there are private companies that want to invest in building an ICEC [in Phuket] and we are willing to support them as well," she said.



Sen Pricha: OrBorTor should use force of law to compel Laguna to comply.

buildings in the complex violates state land.

"We are serious about complying with the law," he stressed.

Laguna under microscope again

From Page 1

cluding that the two buildings were on state land. He added that the OrBorTor should, if necessary, use the "force of law" to compel LRH to remove them.

He conceded that the original order from the OrBorTor, "did not specify which buildings were to be demolished and did not specify which area is state land."

However, he said, "At this meeting, I recommended that the OrBorTor issue a new order and compel the company to operate according to the law."

However, Niyom Tassaneetipagorn, Assistant Vice President of LRH, told the *Gazette* the company had not received any order from the OrBorTor, and that he was confident that none of the

Phuket golf world record attempt

PHUKET: In the December 11 issue of the *Phuket Gazette*, an incorrect email address was given in the story ("Duffers' delight") about Phuket's attempt at a golf tournament record.

The correct email address for obtaining more information about the event is info@phuketgolf.org. We apologize for any frustration this may have caused.

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Democrats, TRT in slanging match at fund-raiser

THALANG: Senior figures from Thailand's two main parties went head-to-head at a fund-raiser for youth education at Baan Nanai on December 10.

Surin Pitsuwan, Deputy Leader of the Democrat Party, made a speech in which he charged the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party with "buying" a former Democrat Party MP representing a province near Phuket.

The MP has announced that he will run as a TRT candidate in the upcoming general election.

K. Surin alleged that the price for getting the MP to jump parties was 40 million baht.

After K. Surin's speech, an outraged Pichet Sathirachawal, the TRT's Andaman Region Candidate Selection Chairman, took to the stage to refute the charge.

"That's a lie," he said. "The TRT has no policy of buying MPs from other parties. [The MP] joined the TRT solely out of a desire to serve [his province] better," he said.

The TRT is confident, he added, of winning at least one parliamentary set in each of the five Andaman region provinces – including Phuket.

"Our chances of winning come from the successful policies of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra," said K. Pichet. "People can see how the government's work has improved their lives, such as by raising the prices of rubber and palm oil."

"I am responsible for Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, Ranong and Trang. I believe my party will win at least one seat in each of these provinces."

However, K. Surin slammed the government's failure to resolve the violence in southern Thailand.

"The failed policy stems from the government's misperception that problems in the region were minor."

"This caused it to close government agencies such as the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center, thereby losing an important body for understanding regional concerns and resolving disputes," he said.

The event was attended by Phuket's two sitting Democrat Party MPs, Suwit Sa-Ngiamkul and Chalermklak Kebsup, and TRT Phuket Region 2 candidate Wisut Santikul. – **Kamol Pirat**

Mystery surrounds Briton's death

From Page 1

fice and the Thai agencies involved. He declined to comment further on the case.

Despite the fact that the body has been returned to the family, with a death certificate, police in Patong say they still have not received the official autopsy report.

Col Boonlert told the *Gazette* that he is still waiting for the report to come from the Royal Thai Police Institute of Forensic Medicine (IFM) in Bangkok.

All he has received so far,

he said, is a vague verbal notification that the cause of death was "failure of the circulatory system".

In the meantime, investigators continue trying to puzzle out what happened in Mr Harris's hotel room, Col Boonlert said. "We are still trying to find out who was with him on that day."

"One man who was among the last to see him didn't appear aggressive or strong enough to kill someone this way [by breaking his neck]."

"We have interviewed a friend called Peter, and the maid and the owner of the guesthouse. We are still trying to find other witnesses, but it's not easy, because the bar was closed on that day."

"We have a list of people who knew him, but we have yet to speak with all of them."

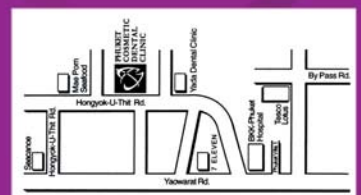
"We are also waiting for the autopsy report. We have asked the IFM when they will send us the report, but have had no reply yet. We may have to wait a few months."

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Some 4,000 visitors attended the Phuket International Marine Expo (PIMEX) 2004, held at the Boat Lagoon from December 9 to 12. The show attracted 150 companies from 18 countries, including 30 property companies from Bangkok, Phuket, Pattaya and Bali.

B40m facelift for Nai Harn Lake area

NAI HARN: As the high season gets into full swing, trees around Nai Harn Lake have been felled in a project to "improve the view" around the tidal lake.

The grassy area around the lake has already been dug up and tons of rock are being dumped to strengthen the banks.

Local residents have been disturbed to see brown earth from the excavations leaching into the lake, discoloring it, and have complained to the *Gazette* about the sound of excavators, and the combination of their exhaust fumes and dust from the work disturbing what was until recently a peaceful location.

However, when the work is over the area will be much improved, according to Rawai Tambon Administration Organization (OrBorTor) Chairman Aroon Solos.

He explained, "We must cut down the old trees to be able to plant new ones. The new trees will have yellow flowers, and will look better than the [non-flowering] trees they will replace."

Construction of three toilet-and-shower blocks just off Nai Harn Beach has also begun as part of a 40-million-baht improvement plan for the Rawai area.

The next stage of development will see the ramshackle

jetty at Rawai Beach replaced by a 300-meter-long pier. Koh Lone, too, will get a new pier, and sea walls will be built close to Rawai Beach to protect it from erosion.

A tourist information center will be built at the Rawai OrBorTor office and the sports field near Laem Promthep will be upgraded. — *Siripansa Somboon*

Patong Tower auction declared 'a big success'

PATONG: A total of 55 units were sold in the December 12 auction of apartments in the 32-story Patong Tower. Around 500 people turned up to bid in the auction, held at the Patong Resort Hotel.

On the block were 61 one-bedroom apartments, seven two-bedroom apartments, seven three-bedroom apartments and five four-bedroom penthouses.

The media were barred from the auction and the Tower's owner, Divine Development and Property, declined to say how many of the units were sold, or how much individual units sold for.

However, Benjaporn Pan-ngarm, Customer Service Supervisor for auctioneers Asset Auction Center Co Ltd, did say,

Beach party is over, says Vice-Governor

By Kamol Pirat & Dhiraat Boonkongsan

PHUKET: Vice-Governor Winai Buapradit has ordered officials to take action to prevent drunken youths and tourists "swarming" onto beaches when entertainment venues close at 1 am.

"People have complained to the Provincial Office about the disturbance caused by tourists and youths drinking and dancing on the beaches after the bars have closed," said V/Gov Winai. "People who live near beaches say they can't sleep for the noise."

He said the impromptu partying was a problem in Patong, Kata and Karon.

V/Gov Winai said he had discussed the situation with Governor Udomsak Usawarangura, who has ordered officials to inspect the beaches for revelers after they have checked entertainment venues to make sure they have closed on time.

V/Gov Winai added that Saphan Hin in Phuket City would also be checked. He said the Governor had ordered Phuket City Municipality to tackle the problem there, as well as clean up the park.

"If officers catch young people behaving badly, taking drugs or having sex, they will record that they have been caught, then contact the young people's parents, although we won't take them to court for a first offence," said V/Gov Winai.

Meanwhile, in a move that will be welcomed by many of the island's residents, owners and managers of "noisy" and "dark" bars are being warned to clean up their acts — or face temporary closure.

The Ministry of the Interior has announced that, from December 18, officials will be monitoring the volume of noise emanating from entertainment venues, and checking that venues are adequately ventilated, as part of a nationwide clean up.

Wisut Romin, Deputy Secretary of the Phuket Provincial Administration, told the *Gazette*, "Noise must not exceed 91 decibels, while the venue should be properly lit and ventilated, and there should be proper emergency exits, too."

K. Wisut said those who infringe the regulations will be fined 100 baht.

"In the case of persistent offenders, we will get an order from the Governor to have them closed down for, say, 15 or 30 days."

Editorial: Page 22

Two sought for murder of restaurateur

RAWAI: Police are hunting a man and a teenager allegedly involved in the beating to death of a Koh Racha restaurateur.

A 15-year-old boy turned himself in to Chalong Police Station on December 10, telling police officers that he was one of three people who had attacked restaurateur Dern Wora-ngon and his 26-year-old nephew, Jantree Mahawongpan, a few hours earlier.

Pol Col Chalit Kaewyarat, Superintendent of Chalong Police Station, told the *Gazette* that K. Dern and K. Jantree had been ambushed as they arrived at Bangkhontee Beach, Rawai, by Tailee Salee, a 48-year-old boat captain, and two teenagers, one of whom was the one who had turned himself in.

The youth — who cannot be named for legal reasons — insisted that although he had punched and kicked K. Dern and K. Jantree, he had not used a weapon, Col Chalit added.

During the attack, K. Jantree fled into the sea, but K. Dern fought the attackers, one of whom hit him with a piece of wood. K. Jantree reported the attack to Chalong Police Station, but by the time officers arrived, K. Dern had been beaten to death. The blood-stained piece of lumber was lying nearby.

Col Chalit said the body also displayed injuries that were a more likely caused by a sharp weapon.

He said Tailee and his friends often drank at K. Dern's restaurant but had often refused to pay the bill, adding that K. Dern and Tailee had come to blows previously over the debts.

— *Gategao Phetsawang*

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Queer News

Knot
conventional

PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN: Two women will marry next month at a ceremony with actors who look like the nation's top political figures providing the entertainment.

Sooksri "Nut" Praisri, 29, accepted a marriage proposal from Chalinee "Nooch" Tiamtat, 36, after they fell in love six months ago.

K. Nooch said that so many men fancy her fiancée that she has to get married quickly. So the couple set the date – January 20 – with the ceremony to take place at Pone Kingpetch Park in Hua Hin before 200 invited guests.

Although at first worried that people might think the wedding unconventional, K. Nut said that when her parents gave their blessing, she decided to wed.

Adding to the unconventional nature of the ceremony will be some of the guests – actors from the ITV satirical show, *Comedy Council*. Among the actors will be one who looks like Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who will act as MC, and another who looks like Deputy PM Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh.

Source: *Daily News*

Does Phuket have

Phuket has been a popular destination for "marine tourism" for many years, but the island is now increasingly being promoted as a "golf paradise", in an attempt to persuade golfers from around the world to sample the delights of local golf courses.

There are five golf course businesses in Phuket: Phuket Country Club in Kathu, Mission Hills in Thalang, Laguna Golf Club in Cherg Talay, Loch Palm Golf Course and Country Club, in Kathu, and Blue Canyon in Thalang.

Phuket's courses attract more than just golfing visitors. They attract people who want to stay – but as householders rather than golfers.

This is because, flanking the courses, are some of the island's most prestigious housing developments, where luxury homes command high prices because of their green setting and the access homeowners have to high-class amenities at the clubhouse.

If anyone is in a position to assess the state of play of Phuket's golf courses it is Surin Bamrunghol, the President of the Phuket Golf Association,

Golf is heavily promoted overseas by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). But do Phuket's golf courses live up to the TAT promotion? Are they the rising stars of the Thai tourism industry? Or are they nothing more than a way of persuading homebuyers to pay more than they otherwise might for a property? The Gazette's reporting team sample local opinion.

who has been playing golf around the world for 17 years.

He believes that Phuket now boasts five top-class golf courses that are as good as any in the world.

"I think we have enough golf courses for the moment," he told the *Gazette*, "but we should have more in the near future."

"I've heard that someone has been buying land at Baan Manik in Thalang District, intending to build a new golf course."

K. Surin said around 200,000 people, Thai and foreign, played golf in Phuket last year, pouring around 2.7 billion baht into the local economy through course fees, accommodation, living expenses and the like.

Having a variety of courses is important in attracting players, K. Surin said; golfers like to test

their skills on several different courses, and they especially like to try out the leading courses of a country.

"Golf is so popular now because in some countries children have been playing since they were at primary school, so a whole new generation of golfers has been created."

The Phuket Golf Association is currently supporting local attempts to have a Phuket course named "golf course of the year".

But gold courses are not simply about clubs, balls and greens. Increasingly, property developments are an essential feature of the island's courses, with the greens being used as the focal points for multi-million-US-dollar housing estates and apartment complexes.

Said K. Surin, "Right now, there is a trend to have property or apartments on courses, be-

cause there are so many tourists, particularly Japanese, who like to stay close to the golf course.

"To be honest, I doubt that the businesses that own the golf courses are making that much money from their golfing facilities when compared with what they are making from property development."

"Many people believe that their home looks more luxurious if it is surrounded by the lush green grass of a golf course."

"Plus, the rise in land prices means that a piece of land near a golf course which cost, say, 700 million baht five years ago would now be worth 2 billion, if it went on the market."

K. Surin may believe that Phuket's golf courses are not too profitable per se, but the island still needs more of them, says Phuket Country Club owner Phummasak Hongsyok.

He said, "We have five good-quality golf courses and they are still not enough for golfers because most play golf at two or three different courses on their golf circuit."

"Each golf destination has its own facilities. I can't tell which is the best because golfers also like playing different



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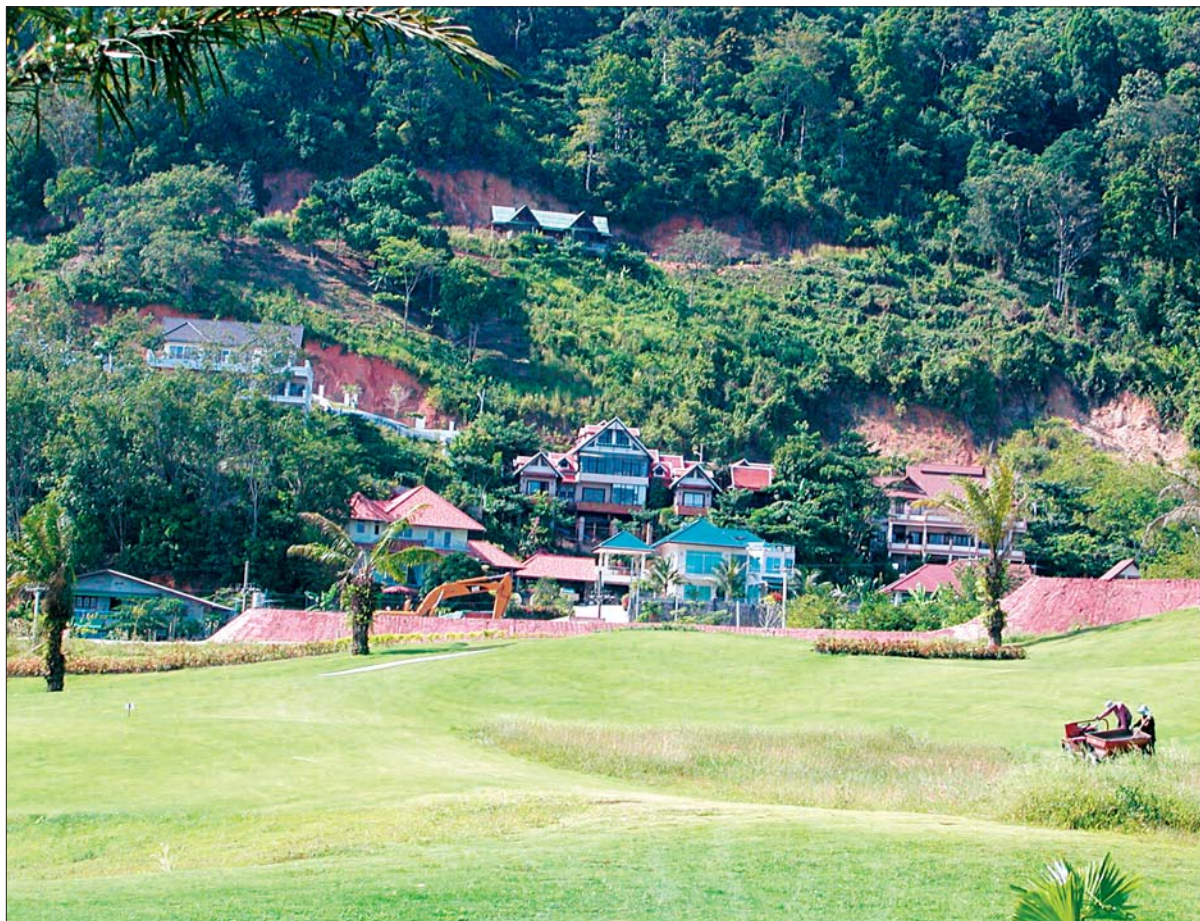
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enough golf courses?



In a sort of financial symbiosis, homes spring up like mushrooms around new golf courses. These private homes are being built near the 14th hole of Loch Palm's second course, due to open next month

courses to practice their skills."

He continued, "Budget airlines, natural resources and good service are other things that attract golfers to Phuket."

"Even a golf course that doesn't generate much profit is a good amenity for surrounding properties. It's better to have an expanse of green than a redundant tin mine."

Adisai Ngamjitsuksri, General Manager of the Phuket Mission Hills Golf Resort and Spa, agrees that Phuket needs more golfing facilities. He said, "Phuket sets the standard for golf courses in Thailand, but still we don't have enough courses."

"We should have eight golf courses, and we should work to make Phuket a golf destination."

"Golf should be promoted to attract tourists to Phuket, but

if we are going to do that, the island has to have enough quality courses, currently we don't."

"At Mission Hills, which opened in November, we have the capacity to handle 240 golfers a day. Mission Hills as a brand is famous abroad, so we can rely on repeat customers, such as expats based in places such as Japan, Singapore, China and Korea, who come here independently, as well as from hotel contracts."

"We have customers from Europe as well as Asia, and we're happy so far because 60% of our golfers are repeat customers."

He continued, "The most important aspects of running a golf course are the quality of service you provide and the standard of the golf course."

"I think customers are hap-

pier with that than with always changing courses."

"The 'perfect' golf course is about more than just the greens, no matter how good they are. It's about providing facilities for guests before and after they play their rounds."

"All Phuket's golf courses have clubhouses, lockers, food and beverage and other facilities, but the standards and range of these depend on the class of customer each hopes to attract."

K. Adisai believes that property development can make an important contribution to developing and maintaining those facilities."

He said, "Property has always been used to subsidize the golf business, and it can bring a rapid return on investment."

"Say, for argument's sake,

we have one rai of land that's cost one million baht. We build a hotel or other accommodation on it and the value rises to [as much as] eight million baht a rai."

"Selling property can be good for the course. A golf course company has to justify the green fees it charges, and if the course isn't good, then the customers won't come, and then, of course, the company won't have enough money to maintain the course."

"For example, it costs us around 3 million baht a year to maintain our course, so we need to keep money coming into the system, and property development is a good way of doing that."

"Then again, even if we developed all the land here, or sold it all for development, I doubt we would have enough money, so we have to concentrate on satisfying our customers so that they keep coming back."

Unlike some, though, K. Adisai is not convinced that the quantity of golf courses on the island is more important than the quality."

He said, "I don't think customers necessarily get bored playing the same course, because one day they might play well, and the next day they'll play badly, and they'll meet different people on the course each day."

Golfers are highly desirable tourists, said Suwalai Pinpradab, the Director of TAT's Region 4 Office in Phuket, because they spend almost double what other tourists do."

She said, "On average, golfers spend more than 6,000 baht a day each – and that's just on golf and transport – while other tourists spend an average of 3,700 per person per day."

K. Suwalai told the *Gazette* that most of tourists who come to Phuket to golf are from Asian countries, such as Japan, Singapore, China and Korea."

"The Chinese market has real potential for us, because

course fees are very high in China."

But, she said, "We are also promoting golf tourism in some European countries – we're going to launch a German-language handbook for the German golfers coming here, for example."

"We don't target the US, Canada or even Australia, because those countries all have their own nice golf locations, and fees aren't very high, so people from those countries aren't prepared to fly for 30 hours just to play golf in Phuket."

K. Suwalai thinks there are advantages to having property round a golf course, especially if the property provides facilities for golfers."

She said, "There should be enough facilities of a sufficiently high standard for the golfers. Take [Laguna Golf Club], for example. In addition to it having its own accommodation, it gives golfers access to the resources of all the Laguna hotels."

"Blue Canyon and Mission Hills also offer their own accommodation, which they can include in golf packages; golfers even have the option of staying in Tai Muang and Khao Lak in Phang Nga, because it's quite convenient to travel from there."

Demand for golf courses is rising, said K. Suwalai."

"There are many golf courses opening nowadays and they – with the support of the TAT – do a really good job of marketing themselves overseas, and this is creating more and more demand."

"People are attracted to Phuket on the strength of the island alone – it's well known for its natural resources – but more and more visitors are being drawn here because of the attractive golf courses."

Reporting by Sangkhae Leelanaporn, Dhirarat Boonkongsaen, Gategao Phetsawang and Anongnat Sartpisut.



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24 hr

By Sangkhae Leelanapaporn

When Phuket-born Yotin Teamjan and his five colleagues started work on their first album earlier this year, they hoped their music might sell well in Phuket.

So the six members of Andaman Indy – five of whom were born in Phuket – were taken by surprise when their album, also called *Andaman Indy*, on the Sony Music Bec Tero label, became a nationwide hit, topping the charts of radio stations at Surat Thani and Songkhla.

K. Yotin, 32, who wrote the songs as well as singing them and co-producing and marketing the album, told the *Gazette*, “When we started out, we would have been happy if it was just people in Phuket who listened to the album, but it turned out to be more successful than we had ever expected.”

Not a bad achievement for an album that came about almost by fluke, as K. Yotin explained.

He explained, “I went to Bangkok intending to contact some CD makers, and I went to see a friend at Sony Music, where I had previously worked as a concert organizer.

“I told him I had just put together some songs and I let him listen to them. And the next day he told his boss about the songs and the boss decided to take us on.”

It took the band six months to complete the album. “At first,” said K. Yotin, “we just wanted to make contact with young people in Phuket with an interest in music, to give them a chance to get in touch with us if they were interested in being involved with music makers.



LAID-BACK AND LOVIN' IT: Local pop group Andaman Indy take a well-earned break. Their debut self-titled album became a hit with music lovers nationwide earlier this year, inspiring them to record their second album in Phuket.

Phuket 'Indy' hits high note

“We would like Phuket to be a center for music, and we want to raise the profile of local music nationally.”

K. Yotin said he and the five other band members – Thanikarn Kaewsangon, Nittaya Yungyeon, Kreksak Reaungjirattian, Nannapas Nimpitakpong and Chai-kamol Thongmee – were brought together by a love of music and

by their backgrounds in the industry, as music studio owners, musicians, backing vocalists and singers.

He continued, “Three people produced the album and we all came from the same place musically.

The band's Phuketian roots are reflected in its name - “The Andaman is the Phuket sea,” said

K. Yotin, “while Indy comes from ‘independent’ and means that we like to have freedom in what we do.”

He continued, “I'm so proud that we can say that the album is entirely our own work, that Sony Music didn't change a thing.”

The band plans to promote the album by doing a tour of

schools, universities and department stores.

The group is currently writing and recording their second album in Phuket, which should be released before April next year.

K. Yotin can be contacted at Tel: 01-7191415, or visit the website: http://www.phuketall.com/andaman_indy/

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

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



PM pledges to boost kids' IQs

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra pledged to reform Thailand's education system, thereby increasing the intelligence quotient (IQ) of children by at least 25% over the next 10 years.

As part of the reform, the government will allocate 80 billion baht to establish six new organizations to oversee children's learning.

The PM told a seminar at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University that IQ development needed to begin before birth, with pregnant women being taught techniques for helping their children develop higher IQs.

He said curricula must also be reformed to match children's brain development and that children from birth to six years of age should be taught to develop cognitive thinking abilities.

The PM said his government would also provide scholarships to children from poor families, so they could finish secondary school, and supply loans to needy students to allow them to go to university.

Trick or treat: Police arrested 26-year-old prostitute Rommanee Wisanukul in Bangkok's Huay Kwaang District, recovering less than half of the US\$117,000 (4.5 million baht) she had stolen from a Jordanian customer, 46-year-old Saed Nazer Sulaiman Jade, just a few days earlier.

The victim said he met Rommanee in Soi Nana and invited her to his room, where he had stored the cash in a briefcase. The next morning he found that Rommanee was gone – along with his briefcase and the money.

Rommanee told police she stole the briefcase after she saw the great amount of cash in it. The next day she exchanged more than 2 million baht's worth of dollars and, during a spending spree, bought a Honda car and expensive jewelry.

Shell shock: Biologist Dr Jarujin Naphitaphat, of the National Science Museum, warned that Malayan snail-eating terrapins, or rice-field turtles, are on the verge of extinction in Thailand because farmers harvest their eggs, which are believed by some to be an aphrodisiac.

"Unless the government launches a successful awareness campaign to educate farmers, the terrapins could well be extinct soon," he said.

Dr Chawal Thaphikorn, director of the Wild Animals Conservation Division of the National Parks Department, said the species is protected and that harvesting and consuming its eggs is illegal. Violators would face a fine of 40,000 baht, a jail term of up to four years, or both.

Cold play: Holiday makers have been flocking to Doi Inthanon, Chaing Mai., the country's high-



WHATEVER FLOATS YOUR BOAT: People in fancy dress row along the river in front of Wat Bangkok Noi as part of the tradition known as *Tak Bat Phra Roi Pad*, during which they collect money to restore and build Buddhist temples.

est peak, to view ice and frost, regarded as a remarkable phenomenon by people living in the sub-tropical lowlands.

"Visitors were thrilled to see beautiful white ice crystals, or *mae khaning*, at dawn," said Inthanon park chief Surachai Tuamsomboon. For about an hour after the break of dawn, frost crystals in a variety of shapes could be seen everywhere on the mountaintop, he said.

He urged people to come and experience the phenomenon, saying the park has designated a 10-rai plot for campers and expects to receive about 100,000 visitors during the New Year holiday.

From porn to scorn: Culture Minister Anurak Chureemas has moved to block the appearance of Thai actress Ketsarin Chai-chalernpol at a New Year celebration in Roi Et Province, saying he believes she is a bad role model for children.

The actress, affectionately known as Nong Nat, was scheduled to perform at the Red Cross fair in the province between December 29 and January 6. But K. Anurak said he felt very uneasy about the appearance of Nong Nat in his home town, and called

on Roi Et Governor Nopporn Chantong to cancel the performance.

Nong Nat made media headlines a few months ago when it was revealed she had acted in X-rated movies. She defended herself by saying that she was forced to appear in the films.

Hotel closures: Some 45 hotels

in Narathiwat may soon have to close because of the unrest in the Deep South.

"Under the prevailing security situation, it is impossible for the hotel industry to stay afloat," said Kittikorn Thernburin, manager of the Royal Princess Hotel Narathiwat, which will close its doors on December 31.

Abdulayi Awaesuemae,

chairman of the Narathiwat Tourism Association, said hotels in the province would not survive if peace is not restored quickly.

Within months of the outbreak of violence earlier this year, the number of Malaysian tourists, who constitute about 75% of foreign visitors to the region, declined at an alarming rate, he said.

Between the lines: Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam instructed special branch police to monitor newspapers and magazines for thinly-disguised advertisements for prostitution services.

DPM Wissanu said the crackdown was ordered because Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had received complaints from a number of parents that the print media were full of such advertisements.

He said police were already monitoring ads in newspapers and weekly magazines, but that they were having trouble keeping tabs on less frequent publications.

The special branch would first warn publications carrying sex-oriented ads that legal action would be taken against them if they persisted in running such ads, he said.

You can go your own way: In a 16-hour operation, a team of eight surgeons at Khon Kaen Hospital successfully separated a pair of Siamese twins who were joined at the abdomen and shared a liver and gall bladder.

The boys, Nonthakan and Nanthawat, were born on August 11 to Oy Onla, 29, of Khon Kaen's Ban Fang District.

Doctors waited for the twins to turn three months old so they would be strong enough to survive the operation.

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

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Take me home, dusty road

Bang Niang beach residents and business owners were pleasantly surprised on November 14, when heavy equipment was brought in to repair roads, as promised.

Many private bets had been made over beers as to when the authorities would begin the work, if ever. Few dared believe that not only would the *tambon* administration do the work – but that it would actually begin on time.

The Bang Niang roads were in a deplorable condition, so terrible in fact that some tourists moved from Bang Niang Beach to Nang Thong Beach, so that they would no longer have to stumble through 30-centimeter-deep mud puddles just to get back to their resort.

But the euphoria did not last long. After two weeks, when all roads were leveled, straightened, tamped down and presumably ready for paving – the construction suddenly stopped.

After a few inquiries by

residents, word came back that only the beach road would be paved with concrete. The other roads might be paved next year, depending on the *tambon*'s fiscal 2005 budget.

Even though the unpaved roads are far better than the 4WD test tracks they replaced, they remain far from perfect. Even at speeds as low as 20kmh, the dust produced by even a single car or even a motor-bike causes a big problem for restaurants located along the road. Only time will tell whether Bang Niang Beach will ever have properly paved roads like the other beaches in Khao Lak.

New eateries: Some positive news for Khao Lak visitors: several new restaurants and cafés have opened, filling some of the many blanks in Khao Lak's rather dodgy culinary scene.

The Eule Restaurant, catering mostly to the German-



ANDAMAN COASTING
By Franky Gun



Let them eat cake! Few people are likely to venture to Khao Lak in search of cake, but those who do will now be well rewarded. **Stempfer Café**, run by the amiable Eddy, now serves an impressive selection of cakes and other baked goods.

speaking market, serves typical German fare, including *kartoffel-salat* (potato salad).

A tiny Mexican food joint named Siesta Bar also opened its doors at the beginning of this high season. In addition to typical tasty Mexican snacks, there are also many Thai dishes on the menu.

Both new venues can be

found in central Khao Lak, on the main road near the Khao Lak Minimart.

But the best is yet to come: the dream of any Khao Lak expat with a sweet tooth has become a calorie-rich reality. With the arrival of the recently opened Stempfer Café, Western delights such as Black Forest cake, Sacher

torte and apple cake, and even *mohnkuchen* (poppy seed cake) are now a part of everyday life in Khao Lak.

All cakes, tarts as well as rye bread are baked fresh daily by a professional team, led by a friendly German named Eddy, who leaves nothing to chance.

As this excellent café has a decidedly upscale look, the menu holds a very pleasant surprise: prices are more than fair.

Stempfer Café is located between PT Plaza and Nang Thong Supermarket, on the left side of Highway 4 as you drive in from the south.

North and south: While the trend in both land sales and building continues to move in a northerly direction, little attention has been given to the stretches of beautiful hills and forests between Thai Muang and Khao Lak.

This may soon change. Rumor has it that big projects are in the works, including a large golf course and a new marina in the Laem Kaen area, the first signs of tourism development spreading into that area. Perhaps Phuket and Phang Nga and Phuket will some day merge into a one enormous continuum of tourism.



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Pruerk-lawan	112.6	11,850,000	100,000	3,455,000	8,295,000
Pruerk-umpai	157.80	14,480,000	100,000	4,244,000	10,136,000



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Location Map



This week



CREST OF A WAVE: Enjoying the King's Cup Regatta are, from left, Phil Hollywood, Ann Hanson, Sue Armstrong Ultman and (2nd from right) Hilton Phuket Arcadia Resort and Spa GM Peter Hourigan and his family.



LOOSE CHANGE: At the grand opening of two condom vending machines at Connect Guesthouse in Patong, an event held to mark World Aids Day, are (from left): Amorn Kittithornkul, Head of the Aids Control and Prevention Unit of Phuket Provincial Health Office; Padungkiet Utakosenee, Asst Director of Patong Hospital; Arnaud Verstraete; Dr Taweesak Netwong, Patong Hospital Director; and Ulf Mikaelsson of Connect Guesthouse.



MARRIOTT MARINE MAGNANIMITY: (above) Craig Smith (2nd from right), the GM of JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa, presents a donation to staff of Phuket Marine Biological Center to help preserve local marine life.

DANCE FEVER: (left) John Everingham (left), MD of ArtAsia Press, with dancers from the Katherine Dance Studio who performed at a party to mark the 15th anniversary of *Phuket Magazine* on December 3.



MOVING MOVIE: Performance Motors Thailand, led by Phuket BMW GM Pingpan Rattana (3rd from right), present the *BMW Exotic Movie* at Central Festival Phuket.



FIRM FOUNDATION: Kuson Songkroh Foundation President Sombat Atiset (left), committee members and Thai Hua School Manager Anan Sameaumit (right), mark the agreement to begin a Chinese language course at Thai Hua School in conjunction with the Mandarin Education School.

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Kids sing for their supper

Christmas is coming and all of Phuket is in party mode. **Howard Digby-Johns** recently hosted an epicurean feast at his Green Man pub in Chalong for the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, the world's oldest society dedicated to the celebration of food.

"The Chaîne was founded in what is now France in 1248 by the guild of goose roasters for the royal table," explains Howard, "and functioned up until the French Revolution. There was a pause of 150 years before the Chaîne was re-established in 1950 and since then it has become the most distinguished club for gourmet diners in the world."

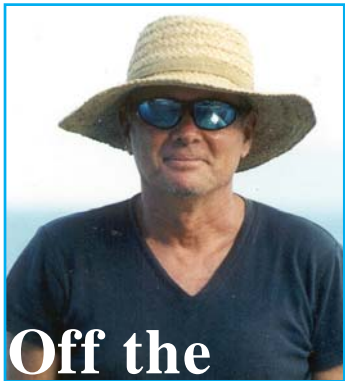
Howard produced a seven-course dinner in his recently opened Goose and Gridiron suite, a menu he describes as a

"journey through time". The first course was grilled meats that would have been served in the 13th century accompanied by troubadour music for that era.

Next was parrot's eye, beluga caviar served with Champagne and accompanied by renaissance music. His extravaganza concluded with foods from the 1950s, with blue cheeses and figs, apricots and nuts and a Green Man Bonbon Ravier, while the music of Elvis Presley entertained.

Howard is such a *bon vivant* and food enthusiast that he hand-carried many of the evening's dishes such as a Lake District specialty, mutton ham, on the plane from England.

Big Apple art: Galerie Martini in The Plaza at Surin Beach is holding a Christmas open house on December 22 at 8 pm.



Off the WALL

With Bruce Stanley



HUNGRY FOR LOVE: Children being cared for by Child Watch Phuket sing at a recent charity golf tourney, held by the British Business Association of Phuket and the Blue Canyon Country Club, which raised funds to go toward the children's needs.

Curator **Nick Anthony** has invited New York-based painter **Thomas Moller** to exhibit his vivid impressionistic paintings over the holidays.

Moller is a traveling artist who translates his impressions of the world into an explosion of bright images and ideas.

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check out the quality of art that New Yorkers buy.

Child care: While we are all rushing around from one exciting event to another, don't forget that there are some on the island that are not so fortunate. **Dr Supaluck Kanchanamethakul** tells me that local charity Child Watch Phuket is struggling to provide lunches and milk for many of Phuket's most disadvantaged children.

"The booming tourism industry provides many opportunities for local people, but there are also many others who lose their jobs or their families, so the number of poor people also grows," she explains.

Happily, Child Watch is often assisted by generous local donors, such as those involved in the charity golf tournament organized by the British Business Association of Phuket (BBAP) and the Blue Canyon Country Club last month. Proceeds from entry fees and charity auctions went to help Child Watch provide care for many of the children who, in return, sang for the BBAP members and their guests.

Neil Smith knows the secret of dealing with kids. "Maybe it's because I was a naughty boy when I was at school that I know the problems."

"Every time the children try to do something naughty, I am already inside their heads and I know what they are going to do, just like my father always knew when I had done something wrong."

That's a handy trick when you are the head of Dulwich International College's primary school.

Mr Smith, 37, spoke to the *Gazette* as he prepared to leave Phuket – at the end of January – for Sydney, Australia.

The move may not be permanent, though. "I'd like to come back to Phuket in a couple of years. It's a good place for a family," he said. "Phuket has what a family needs. This is a beautiful place for children, with the high quality of life and the schools."

And, if all goes according to plan, Mr Smith, and his Australian wife, Linda, will be sampling Phuket's quality of family life for themselves, as Mr Smith explained that one of the main reasons for returning to Australia is to start a family.

But, in one sense, Mr Smith already has a number of children. He said, "Thai people always ask me how many children I have, and I tell them I have 400."

That's how many young charges he has at Dulwich, which he joined in 1998, having worked in Kuwait – where he met his wife – and Singapore.

Mr Smith said, "I left Britain when I was 21, to see the world and to challenge myself. After I finished college I went to Turkey to work with a holiday company for older people."

"I went back to the UK, then to Australia and New Zealand, but I had to go back to the UK for medical treatment to one of my kidneys ... After I had my treatment, straightaway, I wanted to go overseas again."

"I looked for a job in an international school and I got a job in Kuwait in January 1993. It was the first time I had taught."

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Goodbye, Mr Smith



Neil Smith, head of Dulwich International College's primary school, will leave for Australia next month, but he has his sights set on returning to Phuket with children of his own.

The job was a first in more ways than one. Said Mr Smith, "People were surprised when they saw a male teacher teaching young children – they thought it was a ladies' job."

"But after about a couple of weeks, people realized that it's acceptable for men to teach young children; it's good for children to have both male and female role models."

But Mr Smith was perhaps not the best role model when he himself was a pupil. He said, "I was a bad boy. Well, actually, a little bit naughty, not so bad. I just wanted to make jokes in the classroom."

"I liked school, though. It was a chance to play soccer and rugby. I like sport a lot."

In Australia, Mr Smith intends to complete the master's degree in education and business that he started eight years ago. "I should stop teaching if I stop learning. If you believe there is nothing left to learn, you really have a problem. That's why I have to go back to university," he said.

"There is so much happening and so much to learn. If I fail at something, I don't see it as a problem – I don't worry about it. We all make mistakes; the trick is to learn from them and do things better next time."

"In the same way, in education, we have to look back to see what we have done, see what didn't go well and work out how to do it better."



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Dulwich College's popular Head of Primary School, Neil Smith, will be moving on next month, heading for Australia. **Dhirarat Boonkongsan** found out what makes him tick.

He continued, "I didn't have a favorite teacher [when I was a pupil] but I was impressed by one teacher who tried to make geography interesting."

"I don't think you have to be brilliant in a subject to be a teacher; you should teach something you enjoy. Children need you to help them, to inspire them."

"Once, in Singapore, I had to teach poetry, which I hate to teach. I took the children to a national park, where they could see animals, trees. They came back and did a good job of the poetry because they were inspired by what they had seen, felt and smelled for themselves."

But being a teacher is about more than just subjects. Said Mr Smith, "We want children to learn to understand and tolerate other children. If you can teach children to respect other children, other people's feelings and be-

liefs, then you have done a terrific job."

Teaching requires more than just teachers, he believes. "Parents should be role models too. If we get angry and we say things that are not nice, children will pick them all up."

"Like, you might get angry when you are driving and you have children in the car. If you can, you should just control yourself and be calm."

"I think we should treat people the way we would like to be treated."

Although Mr Smith's current role is more about managing than teaching, he makes time to spend in the classroom. "It's good to see more children," he said, "I still take care of some classes, such as physical education and swimming."

"Even if I don't have my own class, I can still see the chil-

dren, tell them stories, do silly things with them, and that's good."

Not quite so good is saying goodbye to the children when they leave or move on to Dulwich's secondary school. It's not far geographically, but it is still wrenching. That's "the bad part" of a teaching career, according to Mr Smith. Soon, of course, it will be the teacher rather than the pupils who will be moving on.

Mr Smith said his first priority after he and his wife reach Sydney will be to train for the Ironman triathlon due to take place in New Zealand in March.

Mr Smith completed the recent Laguna Triathlon, but the Ironman is a far greater undertaking, involving a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile cycle ride and a full marathon of 26.2 miles.

After that, he intends to combine his master's studies with a part-time job and making the house he and Linda own in Sydney into a home. He said, "It has a big garden, with lots of trees. In Phuket, we've been renting; this is a house we own. I'll have a lot of work to do."

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HAIR CARE with Sangkhae

A new twist on hair accessories

A hairpin has to be one of the easiest ways of keeping long hair out of the way. The hair is wrapped around the pin to make a bun, then the pin is twisted and pushed through the bun to anchor it in place. Simple.

The great thing about hair pins is that they come in all shapes and sizes, to suit all styles of long hair. They can be very decorative, too: a chopstick-like hairpin has to be a far more sophisticated way of finishing off an evening look than even the fanciest bobble.

Hairpins are easy to carry and there are many styles and designs to choose from, to suit any occasion, from casual to glamorously formal.

Some of the most decorative and expensive hairpins are more like jewelry than hair accessories, as they are set with jewels and crystals.

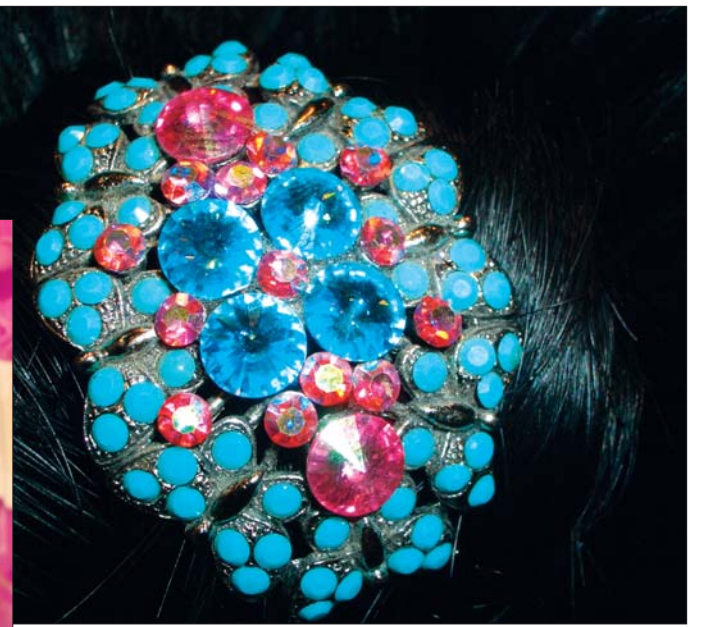
People who have never used a hairpin before should

probably experiment with an improvised hairpin, such as a pen or chopstick, to help them decide what sort of pin to go for.

For example, hairpins with two or more prongs – especially those with sizeable decorations – may be too heavy for fine hair, and will fall out almost as soon as they are put in, but someone with long, very thick hair would probably need a hairpin with two prongs.

A chopstick-like pin is versatile enough to be used in all kinds of hair, from fine to very thick, apart from the very shortest of styles.

Spice, at Central Festival Phuket (3rd floor) and Thaweewong Rd, Patong, has a range of hairpins – from which the pins pictured here were taken – priced from 129 to 999 baht.



COCKTAILS with Anongnat

The Long Bar at Singapore's renowned Raffles Hotel is one of the most famous bars in Asia, and the Singapore Sling is the most famous drink to come out of that bar.

The Sling was devised about 100 years ago by Ngiam Tong Boon, a Hainanese-Chinese who was the bartender of the Long Bar, the elegant hangout of choice of Malayan plantation owners.

The bar remains a must-see for visitors to Singapore, who, even if they can't afford to stay at the Raffles itself, often can't resist sampling the Asian-Colonial charm of the Long Bar or participating in the tradition of

eating nuts and throwing the shells onto the floor.

The Sling was originally devised as a drink for women, hence the pink color, but today, men and women alike can be seen sampling it in its Long Bar birthplace.

The Sling has a subtle taste, sweet, but with a hint of bitterness.

Ingredients:

30ml gin
15ml cherry brandy
120ml pineapple juice
15ml lime juice
7.5ml Cointreau
7.5ml Dom Benedictine
10ml Grenadine
Dash of Angostura Bitters

Method:

Put all ingredients and 3-5 ice cubes into the shaker, and shake until well blended. Pour it into a glass and garnish with a slice of pineapple and a cherry.

Our thanks to to AirAsia for flying the writer to the Long Bar.

Slings and nutshells at the Long Bar of Singapore's famed Raffles Hotel.



Janjira Sattabutr (right) enjoys her Singapore Sling.



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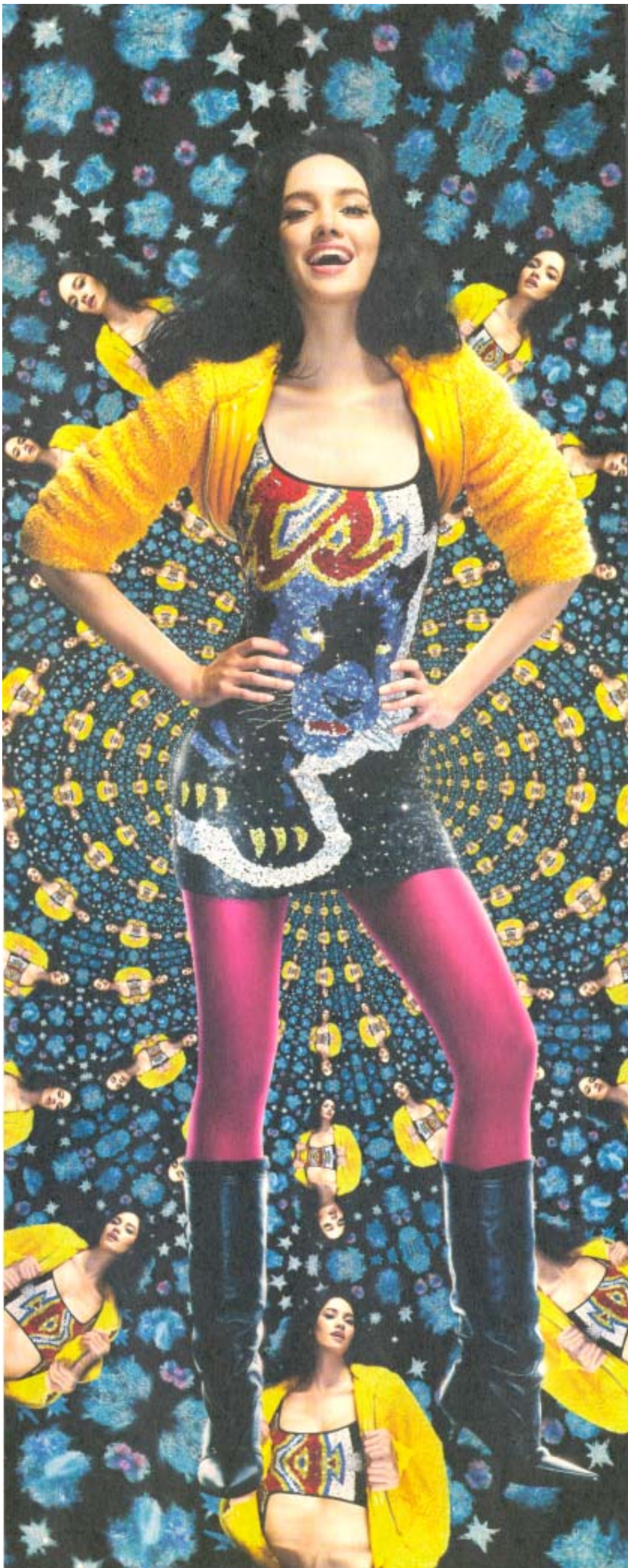
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DELICATE DELIGHTS OF DIGITAL DINING

Once wrote a book entitled *The Right Hand Is For Eating*. It recounted my youthful travels in India, and was rejected by just about every publisher on the planet for no conceivable reason. Maybe they were all having bad hair days.

The title referred to the traditional Indian custom of eating with the fingers of the right hand, instead of using forks, spoons, chopsticks, or the fingers of the left hand, which are used to perform an entirely different function which cannot even be hinted at in a respectable family newspaper like this.

Some time ago I returned to India and rediscovered this enchanting custom. You will understand my enthusiasm if you know that the first thing every American kid learns is to wash his hands before eating.

The second thing he learns is not to eat with his fingers. "Don't eat with your fingers," my mother used to admonish me. "They're dirty."

Dirty? How could they be dirty? I'd just washed them. It was contradictions like this that led me to doubt the dogma of parental infallibility.

For years I was an anal-retentive eater, fastidiously em-

ploying knife and fork to pick at my food in obedience to my parents' psychotic dictates.

Then I discovered India, and my joy was unbounded. For the first time in my life, I could

flout the ancient mandate, toss to the winds all petty rules about using cutlery, and dig my fingers into the rice and curry.

At first, I found it an awkward business. The Indians

used to wink and nudge each other as I put a handful of food up to my mouth and try to get it in without spilling it all down the front of my shirt and into my lap.

But eventually I became fairly skilled at this arcane art. The secret lies in mashing the rice and curry into a reasonably solid ball, putting your fingers up to your mouth, and pushing the ball inside with your thumb.

Just a little thought compels the conclusion that eating with your fingers is the way to go. Forks, knives, spoons, and even chopsticks are redundant utensils.

God, after all, has given us fingers to eat with; and for us to try to improve upon what God has given us might easily enrage a wrathful deity and make him consign us to Hell – especially if He were having a bad hair day.

Besides, cutlery poses a potential health hazard. It has been used by other people and

unless the utensils have been carefully washed, they may still retain some particles of someone else's food. But you know for sure that nobody else has ever eaten with your fingers.

In fact, your fingers have probably never been in anybody else's mouth but yours, unless you're a dentist. (Thoughtful digression: I've never understood how dentists can stand spending the bulk of their professional lives with their fingers in other people's mouths – it's even worse for proctologists.)

No, eating with one's fingers conveys a bracing sense of liberation from the excessive niceties imposed by the effete dining practices of the West, the mincing and dandified fussing with knife, fork, and spoon that makes Western eating such a chore.

Silverware is for sissies. Real Men eat with their fingers. So do Real Women and Children. (Real Dogs and Cats can't eat with their fingers because they don't have any.)

Having said that, I have to admit that some food cannot easily be eaten with the fingers. Try eating soup that way, for instance. Or noodles. Those slippery little devils will drop through your fingers every time.


This is not a problem for the Indians, because traditionally they don't eat soup or noodles. But it's a problem for more cosmopolitan sophisticates like myself. I solve the soup problem by raising the bowl to my lips and slurping it down. The only civilized way to eat noodles is with chopsticks, however.

So there are exceptions to God's mandate that food ought to be eaten with the fingers, but in general, eating your food this way automatically qualifies it for Colonel Sanders' immortal encomium: "finger-lickin' good."


S. Tsow can be flamed at stsow@yahoo.com, except when he's trying to eat noodles with his fingers.










By S. TSOW



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No place like...

Every now and then something really new and different happens in Phuket's night scene, something with that extra ingredient that makes it special.

Home is such a venue. Until my visit there I would have said that either Corsicana or Sphinx was the most beautifully designed bar in Patong. Both are exceptional, but Home is a whole different level. It's exquisite.

The Home experience begins before you even enter with two beautifully dressed welcome staff and possibly the grandest door I have ever seen. A stunning chrome design forming the word Home, beautifully lit – it's a lift just walking up to the place.

Situated on Soi Viking, on the "wrong" side of Soi Bangla, the venue has added a confident touch of class to the area. The man behind the venue, Peter, is a veteran of the sophisticated high-end nightlife scene in his native Australia and previously developed very successful venues in both Sydney and Melbourne.

The appeal of these clubs was his uncompromising dedica-

After DARK

by Sam Vimes



The attention to detail at Home is awesome.

tion to high standards of both décor and service. His ability to deliver as promised saw him become the center of a scene for the open-minded and urbane élite of those cities, and he is hoping that Phuket's "A list" will seek him out here.

So what will you find if you do? A gorgeous, richly-designed lounge bar with comfy couches, deep (and I mean *deep*) seating – it really is fabulously well done. If you are one of those frequently disappointed when it comes to the opening of allegedly high-class venues, then get yourself down there sharp; it'll do your jaded heart the world of good.

One of the elements that marks a place as a real class act is attention to detail, and in this venue it is everywhere.

The sound system is top quality and Peter has scoured many sources to get the right background music. It's the sort of stuff you can tune in or out of, always rewarding yet never dominating the ambience this place is perfect for: conversation.

The air-conditioned toilets? They alone are worth a trip Home – very plush, lots of marble and it is clear that this area has been as well thought-out as the other parts of the venue.

Service is impeccable, a good standard of English is common among all staff, who are as gorgeous as the club itself.



The classy front door and stylish uniforms of the hostesses who greet customers as they enter Home give a taste of what's inside.

There are some great little touches in drink presentation, including a delightful mixed drinks arrangement. All spirits are free-pour and the measures are very generous indeed. Accompanying my Jack Daniels was a tray with my own mini-ice bucket and tongs, and a mini bottle of Coke, enough for two glasses.

The full list of spirits was present and correct, standing to attention ready for my inspection. This was reassuring as a so-called "high class" venue I went to last year had only the basic whisky, rum, gin and vodka. This place has everything and an extensive cocktail list to make the most of the selection available.

There are two bars. The one downstairs is very modern in style, with strong neon giving the place an updated '80s New York feel. The seats opposite the bar have been custom-made and turn into large open, sofa beds, and are so comfy I nearly nodded off.

This is an ideal spot to gather with friends, though I would not linger there once everyone has ar-

rived, as the upstairs bar is just so ... perfect.

The venue is available for private parties and I could not think of anywhere better for entertaining important business contacts.

This is certainly not a place for the "Changaratti", so you need not be bothered about being cornered by another "aren't-the-Thais rubbish-I-know-big-police" unwashed and singled person.

Given the venue's location, it's unlikely package tourists will find their way down the soi, so you'll probably also avoid the "tell-him-how-much-you-haggled-the-Versace-bag-for-Maureen" type of dialog.

I think the right type of tourist will find the place via the Internet – Home's website is as gorgeous as the venue.

I know lots of residents who really ought to be going there and I hope they turn up. Patong has needed a venue like this for a long time, and it has been done to perfection. It's up to you sophisticats to support the man.

The deep lounges and soft lighting upstairs create an ambience for true relaxation in style.



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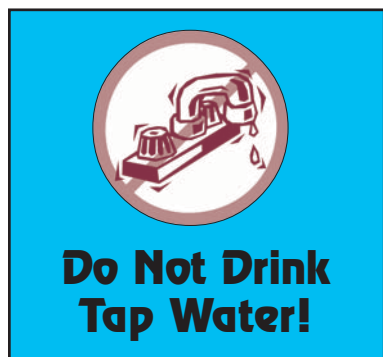
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KIDS

THE FUN PAGE

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Spot the Difference



Can you find the seven differences between the two cartoons below? And can you find them faster than the rest of the family?



Brain Buster!!

Q: Alan, Ben, Charlie, David and Eric took the five top places in a cross-country race. Charlie placed third, and Eric came second. Alan was not last, but came in after Eric. David was not first. What was the final order?

A. Ben, Eric, Charlie, Alan, David.

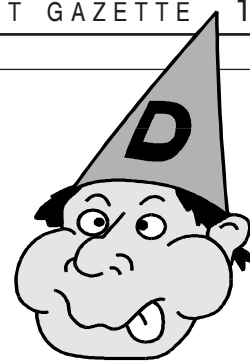
ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S MONSTER QUIZ

1. 12,345,678,987,654,321; 2. They were all invented by women; 3. Bruce Lee; 4. Germany and Italy; 5. Franklin Delano Roosevelt; 6. At the Jewish festival of Rosh Hashana; 7. A traditional form of paper made in Korea; 8. 30.76 years; 9. Italian artist and architect Leon Battista Alberti; 10. "Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion."; 11. Scylla; 12. Led Zeppelin; 13. Leaded gasoline and CFCs; 14. September 28, 1987, in Houston; 15. Moe; 16. *Artemis Fowl*; 17. Tom Clancy; 18. Burkina Faso; 19. Upper Volta; 20. A fish.

Solution to last week's crossword

S	P	I	N		E	R	U	P	T	S
H		A		I		E		A		H
A	M	M	O	N	I	A		T		O
R				D		D	I	T	T	O
P	U	P	P	E	T			A		T
		A		X		S		Y		
U		R				A	T	T	A	C
T		R	A	N	G		A			I
T		P		O	R	G	A	N	I	C
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R	A	T	I	F	Y		N	E	S	S

Get your brain in gear with The Monster Quiz



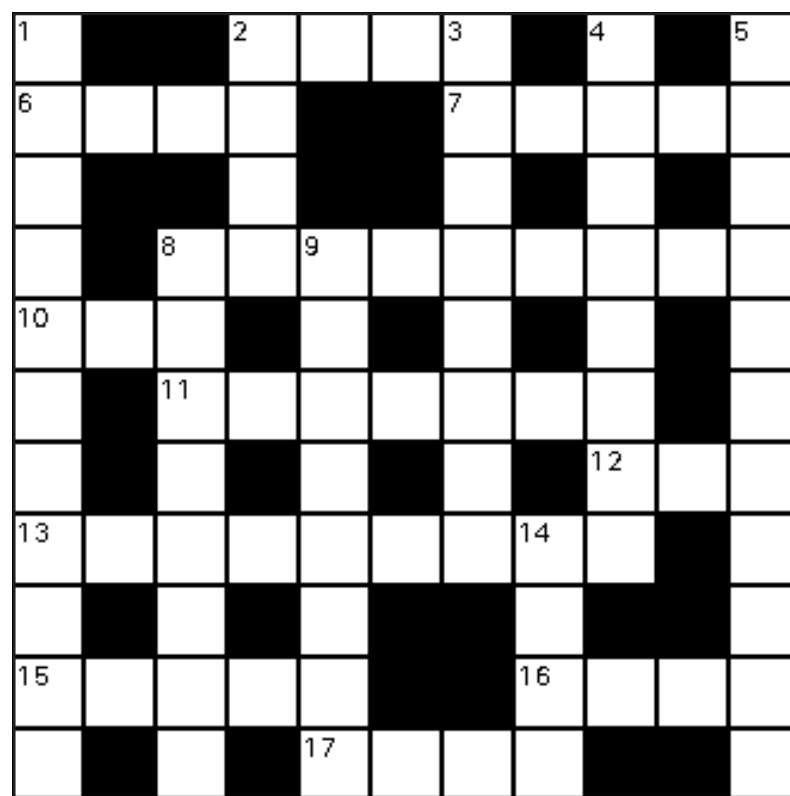
- What is a comedo?
- What is the correct word for the worship of fish?
- What is the technical name for a shark's tongue?
- "Unlit bike ramjets" is an anagram of which popular singer's name?
- Where would you wear a brassard?
- What instrument could Scotch Tape inventor Richard Drew play?
- India annexed which Portuguese colonies on December 18, 1961?
- Where was the confect-
- tionary marshmallow reportedly invented?
- What is the name of the landmark arch on Pariser Platz in Berlin?
- Who composed the *Brandenburg Concertos*?
- In which city would you find Stuttgarterstrasse, Rue de Cambrai and Adelaide Street?
- Who became the first elected president of Afghanistan on December 7 this year?
- At 914 meters, Chances Peak is the highest point of which island?
- What is the correct adjective to describe a govern-
- ment composed of one legislative body?
- A portmanteau steak is made by cutting a slit in it and placing what inside?
- How many pairs of chromosomes are there in a human cell?
- Marble is created when a particular stone is exposed to great heat and pressure. Which stone?
- What term is given to high-energy electromagnetic rays?
- Who wrote the novel "Of Mice and Men"?
- What is the smallest independent republic in the world?

Answers next week.

Never a Cross Word!

Across

- Mongolian desert.
- Smell.
- State to northeast of New Hampshire.
- They hire workers.
- Vietnamese new year.
- Unpredictable.
- Ram's dam?
- William, England's first Norman king.
- Ms Lauder.
- Unnamed person, in short.
- What King's Cup people do.



Down

- Built.
- One millionth of a tonne.
- She pretends to be someone else.
- It keeps a gun quiet.
- Length, breadth or depth, for example.
- It's forever.
- Scents.
- Squashed circle.

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HEARD & scene

The *Gazette's* Siripansa Somboon went out and about and asked, "If you could be an animal, what animal would you be, and why?"



Teerayuth Kongsuwan
Age: 31
From: Bangkok
Occupation: Self-employed

I would be a cat, like Doraemon, the computer animal. If I had a magic pocket like Doraemon, I would use it to clean up the garbage in Phuket. Actually, I'm a similar shape to Doraemon, and I can sing a Doraemon song too!



Endoo Suwannaphum
Age: 32
From: Kanchanaburi
Occupation: Self-employed

I would like to be a firefly because fireflies have a nice light which they create naturally. Their light can make me feel romantic in the night time and people feel happy when they see it. Fireflies can fly anywhere, too.



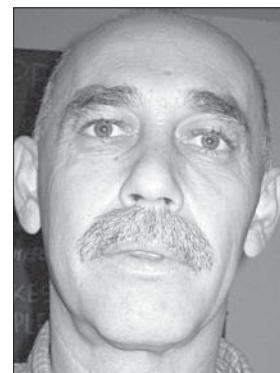
Marcus Demaria
Age: 50
From: Australia
Occupation: Import/export business

I would like to be a dolphin because dolphins have great affinity with humans. Also, dolphins have no natural predators and they have a wonderful life living in harmony with nature in the ocean.



Suntanee Aiumsauad
Age: 23
From: Phathum Thani
Occupation: Accountant

I would like to be Khun Tong Daeng, HM the King's dog, because he is cleverer than other dogs; if only he could talk! I would be happy to live with the King. Dogs are the best animals; sometimes dogs are more honest than people.



Jackie Beyers
Age: 50
From: America
Occupation: Retired

I would choose to be a spider – a black widow spider – because the female black widow spider, when she makes love to her mate, turns around and eats him afterwards.

(We're seriously worried about you, Jackie - Editor)

In The Stars

by Isla Star

SAGITTARIUS (November 23-December 21): The focus this week should be on treating others as you wish to be treated. A cultural difference is indicated and you should handle this with tact and understanding. Crossed wires are especially likely on Monday and Tuesday. After this, the atmosphere will lighten. Wear light turquoise to encourage romantic interest.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 20): Those celebrating a birthday later this week should enlist the help of friends and organize a multi-purpose party. If you do this, you will be spoiled for choices to enjoy the festive

season. This is the perfect solution to combat the vulnerable mood that is likely to overcome you at this time of the year.

AQUARIUS (January 21-February 19): Any Aquarian intent on burning the midnight oil will need to top up vitamin levels by eating lots of fresh fruit this week. Ignore the signs of fatigue and you may be spending New Year's Eve collapsed in your hammock. On Wednesday, Gemini will try to get your attention.

PISCES (February 20-March 20): You could find yourself flapping your fins in frustration early next week – you are about to be

faced with a series of hurdles regarding a business arrangement that hasn't quite been finalized. Be sure to read all the fine print. Where gift shopping is concerned, if you are on a strict budget, you should buy accordingly.

ARIES (March 21-April 20): Arians who have been counting the satang lately are about to receive a bank balance boost. There will be no excuses for not hosting a New Year's celebration. Family news will also arrive; if this announces an impending visit that's not totally welcome, try to look on the bright side.

TAURUS (April 21-May 21): One New Year's resolution should be to banish doubts about your own success. The only barrier between you and your ambitions is lack of belief. This applies to all areas of your life,

though romance is likely to bring the most surprises. As the week goes on, make plans to reveal the new you; book a spa treatment.

GEMINI (May 22-June 21): Geminis floating on a sea of sensuality will resent having to come back to dry land. But this week brings deadlines and if you don't deliver on time, the cost could be high. Tuesday is the most auspicious day for business discussions, but don't commit to any agreements after Wednesday.

CANCER (June 22-July 23): Dreaming and scheming is high on your agenda this week, but your partner's aspirations probably don't quite match yours. A firm touch of reality needs to be injected into your ideas before you find yourself floating solo above the clouds. The number 9 can bring good luck on Monday.

LEO (July 24-August 22): Most Leos will be looking forward to low-key holiday celebrations and friends should understand your need for quiet time at home. Make an effort to escape from your den during the weekend; Aquarius has an important message to pass on. Next Wednesday communication is well-starred, so this will be the time to make an awkward phone call. The color amber will encourage tranquil vibrations when you need them.

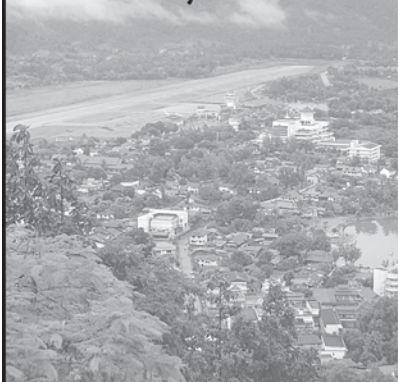
VIRGO (August 23-September 23): The third week of December is a good time to seek out new accommodation; you are likely to find a more suitable home. An answer to a work-related mystery doesn't quite fit, so prepare to dig deeply if you really want to find the truth. Sagittarius can offer clues but you will need to track them down.

LIBRA (September 24-October 23): The caring side of your nature is activated this week, but don't jump in with offers of help without testing the depth of the water. Librans who fear they'll be stuck out on a limb during the holiday season can rest assured that invitations to celebrate are on the way.

SCORPIO (October 24-November 22): With only seven days to Christmas Scorpios who have delayed gift shopping need to get their skates on. Someone special has pushed the boat out to surprise you with a thoughtful present so this is not the time to hold onto the purse strings too tightly. Don't believe everything you hear early in the week; at least one rumor needs to be taken with a good pinch of salt.

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God's representative in Pattaya

Father Ray Brennan, an American Redemptorist priest, founded the famous Pattaya Orphanage 30 years ago and died last year at the age of 70.

In the Name of the Boss Upstairs (The Thomas J Vincent Foundation, Bangkok, 2004, 311pp) is the story of his life, written by Jerry Hopkins, most famous for his two biographies of Jim Morrison, *The Lizard King* and *No One Here Gets Out Alive*, the latter co-authored by Danny Sugerman.

Hopkins never met Fr Ray but for more than a decade he's been great friends with a prime source: Fr Joe Meier, Bangkok's slum priest and Fr Ray's colleague. And Fr Ray left behind an extensive paper trail of newsletters and private correspondence.

All that Hopkins had to do was the shoe-leather work of interviewing family, friends, co-workers and, most importantly, the orphans themselves.

He approached his work methodically. He describes the Chicago Irish

immigrant milieu in which Fr Ray grew up, the origins of the Redemptorist order, the rigors of the seminary education.

In 1960 he was assigned to Loei in northeast Thailand. Conditions were frugal and when the skinny young priest returned to Chicago for his first home leave, he gained 50 pounds in eight weeks: beer, cheeseburgers, ice cream. He would carry around a big gut for the rest of his life.

In 1969, FR Ray was assigned to a small church in Pattaya, serving mainly expat weekenders from Bangkok and US servicemen from U-Tapao and Sattahip military bases.

Pattaya was a mite different in those days. "There were dolphins in the bay and the water was crystal clear," he would recall years later. "I'd go fishing with a piece of white cloth as bait, that's all you needed to catch fish. In the evening, you could see phosphorus glisten atop the waves. I used to just sit

there and enjoy the view with a bottle of beer. The road down the coast was made up of dirt tracks and narrow wooden bridges."

In his first year, a woman approached him, begging him to take care of her infant. More followed, and he opened the Pattaya Orphanage in 1974 with five kids.

When he died, 750 youngsters were in his care and thousands more had graduated into varying degrees of success in life. He opened special schools for the blind, the deaf and the disabled – schools that ranked among the very best in Thailand.

He prided himself that every graduate from his vocational school for the handicapped got a job upon graduation in fields such as computer and electronics repair. As Pattaya became "Sin City", he expanded his care to street kids and prostitutes.

He gathered around him a dedicated staff and a global network of donors, keeping in touch with regular newsletters liberally laced with humor. A major butt for his japes – and practical jokes – was the mother superior of the orphanage's nursing sisters, Mother Shark:

"I try to live a quiet, celibate life, but having Mother Shark around is like

being married without the fun."

Hopkins also brings Fr Ray to life through a meticulous description of the shambles of his office and his frugal living quarters. Special chapters are devoted to a close observation of a typical day for the deaf and blind students. He relates the life stories of dozens upon dozens of kids who started off in life with

the odds stacked heavily against them.

Of course, no good deed goes unpunished. Eight months before he died in August 2003, a slimeball Brit tabloid reporter set him up for a smear pedophilia attack. This got good news play at a time of widespread clerical sex scandals around the world.

The orphanage survived the phony firestorm but Fr Ray was deeply hurt. "It didn't kill him," said a long-time friend, "but it made his last months miserable."

There were many tributes upon his death. A typical heartfelt reaction came from Pachanee Nanthaniran, who had come to the Pattaya Orphanage at age 10 and was now a university graduate.

"I'm an orphan again!" she cried.



Off the SHELF

By James Eckardt

In the Name of the Boss Upstairs



The Father Ray Brennan Story
by Jerry Hopkins

Fast and reliable don't go together

At least half of the mail I receive comes from folks who are looking for fast, reliable Internet connections in Phuket. This letter just came in via the *Phuket Gazette* Website:

I would like to know the most secure and reliable way to connect to the Internet from Phuket. It's important that the service be online 24/7 – no breaks – as I'm dealing in stock markets. Thank you in advance.

BL, Sweden

I'm happy to report that Phuket has fast and reliable Internet connections. Unfortunately, the connections here that are reliable aren't fast. And the connections that are fast aren't reliable. Come to think of it, they're not very fast, either.

As I write this, I'm painfully aware of the fact that my TTT Hi-Net ADSL service has been breaking down, on average, at least once a day.

Sometimes I can restore the service by unplugging my ADSL modem from the wall and plugging it back in again. Sometimes the system's just dead, and no amount of wailing or gnashing of teeth will bring it back.

So I have to hurry to get any Web work done while the line's up. And I have to pray that the line stays up long enough to get this column filed.

Internet connection reliability problems run the gamut from ancient telephone wires to over-zealous backhoe operators to

Internet Service Providers who don't have enough available lines. These problems exist all over the world, but I would submit that Phuket has more than its fair share of mundane hiccups.

The Achilles' Heel here on the island, though, is the connection between Phuket and the outside world. Essentially all of the Internet traffic on the island gets off the island and onto the Internet in one of three ways.

If you use a dial-up modem or a mobile phone GPRS connection, the data goes over standard voice telephone lines to get off of Phuket. Dial-up Internet traffic is similar to regular telephone traffic, and Phuket is blessed with pretty reliable voice connections. As long as Phuket has voice telephone contact with the outside world, dial-up Internet or mobile GPRS should work.

The second way off Phuket is by ADSL lines. As far as I can tell, all of the ADSL service on the island gets routed into one solitary line that runs from Phuket to Bangkok. Even the best (and most expensive) ADSL service in Phuket gets knocked out from time to time because Phuket's entire ADSL destiny hangs from this one single thread.

The third way off the island is by satellite, and when it comes to satellite there's only one game in town: iPSTAR. Fortunately, iPSTAR is finally offering a one-price unlimited access monthly account, so you don't have to pay

for every byte that goes up or down the link. Satellite service is no longer extortionate, it's merely expensive.

Unfortunately, satellite service here suffers from the same problems that satellites have everywhere: there's a "stutter" (a transmission latency period, when the signal goes up to the satellite and back) if you aren't uploading or downloading data continuously.

When the weather turns sour, satellite signals are the first to go. When the heavy rains fall, your dish will receive data about as well as a bare nipple on Patong Beach. Count on it.

If you're looking for a reliable Internet connection, stick to one of the premium dial-up services, or get an unlimited-use GPRS account from one of the mobile phone companies. The people I know who use CS/Loxinfo dial-up or GPRS seem to have the fewest complaints about availability. Of course, they suffer with dial-up

speeds that would afflict most of us with narcolepsy.

If you need a fast connection ("fast" being in the eye of the beholder – my nominal 2 Mbps ADSL line rarely delivers more than 250 Kbps), and reliability is crucial, consider installing both a satellite connection and an ADSL line.

You'll have to switch back and forth manually between the systems in the event of a problem. That can be a real pain in the neck, so make sure you understand how to switch before the technician leaves your house or office. I would admonish you to test both connections frequently, but if you rely on ADSL for your

primary connection, you'll be testing your alternate connection far too often anyway.

To answer your question in a nutshell, BL, you can get a reliable but not very fast connection in Phuket. You'll have to keep two accounts going, and it'll be expensive (say, 7,000 baht a month). Finally, you should be prepared to switch things around by hand when the sky falls.

As far as security goes, Phuket is the same as everywhere else – any data on the Internet can be intercepted by a kid with a tin can and a piece of string. But that's a topic for another column.

– Woody Leonhard
woody@khunwoody.com

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What happened to 'sanuk'?

Anyone who has spent more than a couple of days in Thailand probably knows the word *sanuk* – fun – and has probably figured out that it is central to Thai culture.

Sadly, the government does not appear to like it very much. Indeed, if one is to believe the various pronouncements from Bangkok, much of what the man in the street would regard as *sanuk*, and therefore at the heart of Thai culture, is, according to a variety of ministries, actually against Thai culture.

Sanuk does not mean only going bowling or having ice cream with friends. *Sanuk* can often include a naughty, flirtacious element or, even, sometimes, a slice of delicious abandonment.

The government, it would appear, wants to expunge the naughtiness. In this, it exhibits the symptoms of all too many right-wing control-obsessed regimes around the world who target fun, usually as a way of deflecting attention from real problems and of demonstrating that they are in charge.

The tax on dancing, the raids on beach parties, the pee-in-the-cup raids on discos, the restrictions on opening hours for entertainment venues and those on hours during which alcohol may be sold are all examples of this mentality.

It is true, of course, that the furthest edges of *sanuk*, especially when fueled by excess alcohol, can slide into violence, sleaze and crime.

But this, surely, is the responsibility of the police, who could, if they wished, control the nastier aspects of societal behavior by enforcing perfectly adequate laws that already exist.

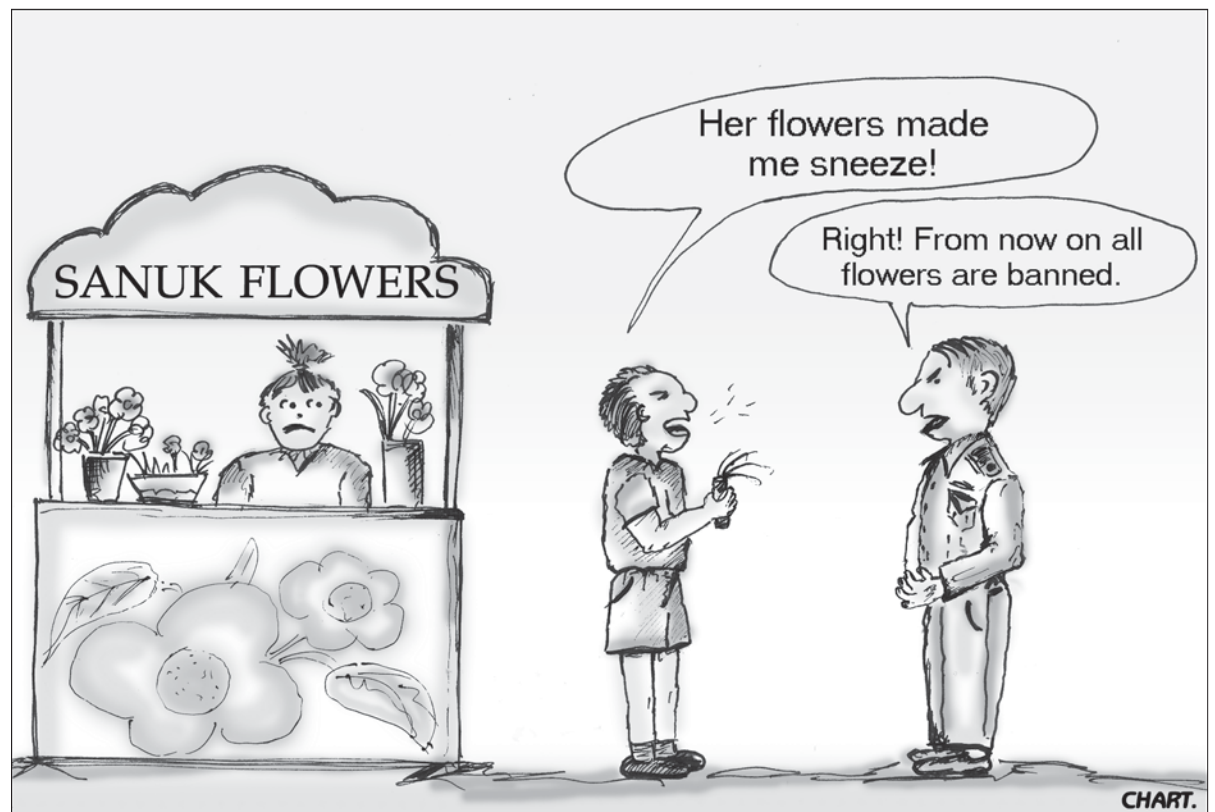
What is happening instead is that new blanket regulations are being brought in that target everyone indiscriminately. Now, even a group of friends with some beers and a guitar, enjoying an evening on the beach around a driftwood fire, risk being "raided" by a posse of officials.

In the meantime, those who profit from the nastier aspects of "fun" can generally protect themselves from the irritation of official action by employing their connections or by casting their bread upon the waters.

So let's take this mentality to its logical conclusion, and apply it to other aspects of life in Thailand. Where shall we start? Some people ride motorbikes in a dangerous manner, so let's ban all motorbikes. Some restaurants are unhygienic, so let's close them all. Some property developers damage the environment, so let's ban all development...

We should probably also look seriously into abuses in ice-cream parlors.

– The Editor



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.

Tiger in cramped zoo cage would be better off as soup

I recently visited Phuket Zoo with my young daughters and we were all appalled by the inadequate and excruciatingly uncomfortable cage the tiger was kept in.

It was a tiny, hot jail cell. There was scarcely enough room for the tiger to move, although that didn't really matter since it is so stiflingly hot in there that all the tiger could do was lie on the concrete floor under the bakingly hot zinc roof and pant, half unconscious.

We saw the animal desperately licking some moisture off the floor, since no water was available.

By keeping a tiger in such torturous conditions, Phuket Zoo is giving a terrible image of Thailand.

Phuket Zoo, stop torturing this poor tiger! Its living conditions are worse than death. Please keep your tiger in a proper environment, or if you can't afford to do that, just sell it for penis soup, as it would probably be better off.

Patrick M Legrain
Chalong

Sitthiphan Tantaweewong, manager of Phuket Zoo, comments:

In the daytime, the tigers are taken to two small shelters with a tile and wood roof, so visitors can take photographs of them.

The animals are then taken to a feeding area of around 4 x 6 meters, where there is a Banyan tree and a zinc-roofed shelter over a concrete floor.

They spend only around one hour there, before being

transferred to a big cage behind the area where the elephants perform.

This cage is bigger and open-air. Some of the floor is concrete, but there is an artificial cave where the tigers can rest, as well as a small shelter with a tile roof.

We have four tigers and we show them to guests in rotation. In the future, though, we may leave the tigers in the open air cage rather than put them in the zinc-roofed cage, because we are going to improve the area near that cage, or maybe even dismantle it.

A bright bike idea

This is my second trip to the wonderful country of Thailand and, having witnessed so many motorcycle accidents on the roads here, it has occurred to me that I may have a way of saving some of the pain and suffering endured by the beautiful people of Phuket.

It would cost just a few baht to equip each motorcycle with spoke reflectors, making them far more visible – especially at night.

I have always tried to leave things better than I found them; my plan would make things safer for all road users.

Rick Frost
Hawaii

Recognizing Phuket's heritage

Bravo to Ayoot Thansirirotj and the Old Phuket Foundation for their moves to open the arched walkways on Thalang Rd. The old-world charm and huge tourism potential of Phuket's city center have always been underrated by its residents.

Singapore realized a few

years ago the value of these old Sino-Portuguese roads, but they have none that are as concentrated as Phuket's. If the plan could be extended to Dibuk Rd, it would be even better.

The ultimate aim, though, should surely be to put the electric cables underground on these roads – in order to showcase the beautiful lintel fronts on many of the buildings. Any chance of the electricity company cooperating?

Ken Sowton
Phuket

Spa tax gives clues to the government's real agenda

I really do pity the poor spa owners who are being forced to pay the controversial 10% excise tax, but I doubt that there will be a rethink of this policy – even if Governor Udomsak Usawarang-kura does manage to get Finance Minister Somkid Jatusripitak to "reconsider" the issue.

K. Somkid knows his job is to implement Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's policies, not question them and the same can be said for the Governor, who is an appointed bureaucrat, not an elected official.

At the heart of this tax lies the government's desire to collect taxes from businesses that are thought – rightly or wrongly – to offer commercial sex services.

That the government is willing to play pimp in this way should be evidence enough that all its talk of better "social order" is just talk.

The real issue is money.

Spa-ringing partner
Samkong

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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.

Real estate laws need re-think

Any major construction project must be subject to an Initial Environment Evaluation (IEE) or Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) before the developer is allowed to start work.

IEEs and EIAs are reports to evaluate how the project may affect the environment, and to examine ways of minimizing those effects.

If a commercial housing development concerns land subdivided into between 11 and 99 plots of land, or covers 19 rai or less, the developer must have an IEE carried out, but for a development of more than 99 plots or more than 19 rai, an EIA is required.

But this rule applies only to Phuket. In other provinces, an EIA is required only for developments of 500 plots or more.

The difference between the two surveys is that an IEE is appraised locally, by a local committee, while an EIA must be sent to Bangkok for approval.

Recently, though, there has been a complication in the interpretation of one section of the ministerial notification, resulting from a letter sent from the Of-

FIRST PERSON

Real estate developments across the nation are subject to controls laid down in a Natural Resources and Environment Ministerial Notification. But while enforcement of the regulations is lax in some parts of the country, in Phuket it is strict.

So says President of the Phuket Real Estate Club (PREC) and former Phuket City Mayor Phummisak Hongsyok. Here K. Phummisak argues for a re-think on the law as it currently stands.



fice of Natural Resources and Environment Policy and Planning to the local committee in Phuket, which was – ironically – intended to clarify the situation.

The letter stated that only projects involving subdivisions of between 11 and 99 plots of land *and* covering 19 rai or less could be subject to an IEE, while those involving more than 99 plots *and* covering more than 19 rai, must be subject to an EIA.

This suggests that if a project involves fewer than 99 plots but covers more than 19 rai, the developer must obtain an EIA and submit it to a Bangkok-based

committee, but this is not entirely accurate.

In fact, the ministerial notification clearly uses the word *or*, which means that any project that meets either of the criteria – 11 to 99 subdivisions or 19 rai or less – should be considered by the local committee here in Phuket.

This distinction is important for investors because while an IEE costs around 100,000 baht, an EIA report costs around four times that – 400,000 baht.

But cost isn't the only difference between the two – there's time, too. It takes at least a year

for an EIA to be approved after being submitted to Bangkok, despite the law stating that a decision must be made within 75 days.

Another concern is that if a development has the maximum number of plots – 99 – but an area of 19 rai or less, only an IEE is needed.

But really, if a project involves many plots of land, it should have to pass an EIA – even if it covers just, say, 18 rai – because of the crowded living conditions and the amount of waste that will be produced there.

The PREC has already written to Governor Udomsak Usa-

warangkura to ask him to re-interpret this regulation, then we propose to ask the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry to reconsider the law according to the Governor's re-interpretation.

We have also suggested that the ministry look for ways to speed up the approval process, in the light of the difficulties caused to investors by having to get an EIA approved by Bangkok.

As things stand, it is possible – and tempting – for a developer with a 30-rai plot of land simply to divide it into two pieces of 15 rai apiece and have IEEs done on each of them, rather than go to the trouble of having a lengthy EIA done on one 30-rai plot.

This is an example of what developers can do to get round the law as it is currently interpreted – which, of course, makes a mockery of the law's purpose of protecting the environment.

It also suggests that developers and the government should cooperate to draw up clear and sensible regulations, which will leave the developers with an obligation to act in good faith when complying with them.

What can be done to stop elephant cruelty?

I have just returned once again from a holiday on Phuket, where I was so sad to see the poor elephants tied to a tree, with their legs chained, at Liam Sam Rd, near the Peach Hill Hotel & Resort in Kata Beach.

The elephants cried every night and the only exercise they seemed to get during the whole day was to go to the Dino Park Restaurant to attract tourists.

I just wondered when someone was going to do something about this.

Paula Champagne

Jirayu Niranvirot, a Phuket Provincial Livestock Office veterinarian responsible for taking care of elephants in Phuket, replies:

I have already checked the condition of these elephants, in response to a complaint from the Khon Rak Chang Foundation (which protects elephants in Thailand).

The two elephants are female and they are chained because they are quite active and

aggressive; they are five or six years old, and they are like awkward teenagers.

They are fine and healthy but they are chained up to control them. If they were not chained, they might wander off, or chase someone.

The little elephant, Sara, is used to promote Dino Park. I told her owner and mahout she should not work so late – elephants usually sleep at about 8 pm – and they accepted this.

Chains are a normal way of controlling animals that are kept close to humans, and it happens everywhere in Phuket where animals are close to tourists

Just as humans have laws to control their societies, the elephants are chained, and this control doesn't hurt them at all.

I checked the elephants and could find no wounds, blood or evidence of maltreatment, but I did tell the mahout not to try to make them sit in a certain way, as they are elephants and so can't do what humans do. I will keep an eye on them.

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

How to obtain planning permission

I would like to know how to find out if a certain piece of land already has planning permission, and if it doesn't, how I can apply for a permit.

PA
UK

Pratuan Tanarak, LLB, of the International Law Office, replies:

The building permission would be issued by the local tambon administration organization (*OrBorTor*) or the municipal office responsible for the area where the land is, but the landowner should know whether there is an existing building permit.

Building permits have a limited lifespan, after which they expire.

A building must be built to the specifications given on the plans that were approved. If any changes are required, an application must be made to change the plans, and this must go through the approval process again.

If there is no building permit, you should submit the plans for the structure you would like to build to the *OrBorTor* or municipality. The plans must be certified by an architect or an engineer.

Can a deportee return to Thailand?

A good friend has just been deported from Thailand but received no stamps in his passport – just the normal exit stamp. If he has no stamp in his passport other than the normal one, and no other paperwork saying he is banned from returning to the Kingdom of Thailand, I believe he should be able to re-enter Thailand. Is this correct?

Kevin Peacock
Malaysia

Pol Col Chalermpong Vahanasukha, Deputy Superintendent of Immigration Division 3, in Bangkok, replies:

If your friend was deported,

he must have been given a document stating this when he was deported.

He should make doubly sure that he has no stamp in his passport nor any document stating that he has been deported from Thailand and is banned from returning.

If he is absolutely sure that he isn't banned, and he tries to return to Thailand and is denied entry by an immigration officer at the airport or any check point, he may appeal against this decision by filing a TM35 form.

The appeal must be lodged within 48 hours of denial of entry.

Seat belts for tuk-tuk drivers?

I've never seen a tuk-tuk driver wearing a seat belt, yet when they are stopped at a checkpoint, none of them are fined, while drivers of other vehicles are. Why is this?

GT
Patong

Teerayuth Prasertphol, Chief Technical Officer of Phuket Provincial Transportation Office (PPTO), replies:

Tuk-tuk drivers are exempt from the law requiring drivers to wear seat belts.

Dealing with the deadly scourge of poison

In this column I shall be dealing with a subject that I am regularly asked about, and one that is of great concern to pet owners: poisoning.

Sadly, the poisoning of cats and dogs, both strays and those kept as pets, is a common occurrence on the island – and it is not confined to the predominantly Muslim areas, as many people mistakenly believe.

Numerous documented cases of poisonings have taken place all over the island, some even at Buddhist temples.

Perpetrators appear to employ the rationale that the animal somehow “chooses” to eat the poison, thus clearing them of any moral responsibility for their actions.

For pet owners, it is important to understand that most pets

are poisoned for a reason – not just out of sheer malice.

Dogs or cats that are poisoned are likely to have been causing problems to someone, whether it be by killing chickens, barking too much, knocking over garbage cans or defecating in the wrong place.

Prevention:

There is an old saying: there are no bad dogs, just bad owners. Many owners are oblivious to the real annoyance their animals can cause to neighbors.

All dogs should be confined to their owner's property and only taken out for supervised exercise.

Incessant barking or howl-

ing, which can be a nightmare for neighbors, is easily preventable. Shamu Shamu, the new pet shop on Chao Fa West Road, stocks virtually every pet accessory available, including very effective auto-

matic bark prevention collars.

These emit either a high-pitched sound or a static-electric shock when the dog starts to bark. The levels increase if the dog continues. These collars are both humane and effective.

Have your animal sterilized. As well as preventing the obvious, it will also reduce wandering, fighting, and, in the case of cats, wailing.

If you live in an area where poisonings frequently occur, get into the habit of regularly patrolling your garden perimeter.

A common method of poisoning is to throw a poisoned piece of food over a garden wall or fence.

Signs: These can vary depending on the type of poison used. If your pet is staggering or shaking and frothing at the mouth, suspect poisoning.

Other symptoms can be diarrhea, severe vomiting, asthmatic breathing, convulsions and coma.

In some cases, the animal will display no signs for two or three days, but patches of red/purple or dark blue on the body or gums begin to develop later. These are signs of internal bleeding.

Treatment: It goes without saying that if you suspect poisoning, you should take your pet to a vet without delay.

As mentioned in a previous article, many vets will make house calls for genuine emergencies. Ask your vet for his or her mobile number, and remember, there are effective antidotes for most poisons.

This article is not meant to alarm readers. If you are a responsible owner, you really should have very little cause for concern, wherever you live on the island.

However, it is always best to be prepared for an emergency.



By Top Dog

Seven guides to end the sins of the flesh

I have said it before and I will say it again: a combination of weight training and aerobic exercise is an important key to a healthy life.

Unfortunately, many people fail to make exercise an everyday part of their lives.

In my last column, I presented a simple, twice-weekly fitness program based on 18 minutes of weight training and 12 minutes of cardiovascular work. For those who have embarked on the program, here are seven guidelines to keep in mind:

Constancy: Quitters never win, and winners never quit. Have you heard that one before? Well, it holds true all the way – if you don't stick to your schedule, you won't achieve what you set out to do.

Positive attitude: “I can't” is a phrase best purged from your lexicon. If your mind can't imagine success, your body won't do the job for you. Only when you can picture yourself actually being fit will you become so.

Eat smart: If you want to gain weight, a moderate daily over-consumption is the ticket – without going to foolish extremes and pigging out. On the flip side,

if you want to lose weight, the best approach is to maintain a slight calorie deficit over a long period of time. As always, the keys are moderation and common sense. Stick with what you know to be healthy and what feels good for you and results will come over time. There is no substitute for a healthy, balanced diet maintained over the long term.

Balanced training: Bodybuilders generally love training their chests and arms while their hamstrings, calves and necks seldom get the same enthusiastic treatment. Guess what? Over time it starts to show.

There's no sight more ri-

diculous than a huge guy with spidery legs, and your first step to avoiding this is to balance your training. As a simple rule of thumb, do the exercises you least enjoy at the beginning of your workout and finish with the enjoyable stuff. It's not fun, I know, but over time you'll appreciate the results. Runners and triathletes should also have a balanced program of weight training at least twice a week.

Listen to your body: Don't overtrain! If your body tells you it's taken too much exercise, give it an extra day of rest. If you have a lingering fever, back off from the training – even if you feel fine otherwise.

A pulled muscle or joint pain could be the sign of a more serious condition, so stop doing any exercise that causes irregular pain immediately – and try another way to train that muscle that doesn't cause discomfort. Pushing yourself through two more sets, or running the extra mile just because it's written down in the log is a pointless exercise if it causes an injury that will sideline your training for weeks or months down the road.

Keep track: Write down what

you eat and how you train every day as accurately as possible. In a few months' time, this will give you a hint of what you have been doing right – or wrong. If you gained muscle, but also got pudgy, you will have a pretty clear idea of the “calorie bandits” you should avoid next time.

If you had been growing stronger, but suddenly hit a plateau, you can look back and see where your training became stagnant. Without a log, you're fumbling in the dark.

Understand the Big Picture: Enjoy your training and learn to view it as a positive aspect of your life, and not as simply another task that needs to be completed. Exercise may help you live longer and more healthily. Understand that there are no “quick fix” solutions. Your health should always come first, so be extremely skeptical of any “magic” ways to lose fat, gain muscle or improve stamina.

Pensri & Joe Lewis are fitness and equipment consultants at Fitness R Us. Tel: 09-8663736 Email: jlewis@loxinfo.co.th.



Fitness FANATIC

By Joe and Pensri Lewis

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Ocean Princess sails into Andaman

By Dhirarat Boonkongsan

CAPE PANWA: The Ocean Princess Group has entered the Andaman cruise tour market with its new 122-meter Thai cruise liner, *Ocean Princess*, the largest cruise liner registered in Thailand.

Ocean Princess Group Managing Director Patana Vongthongsri told the *Gazette* that the company launched its tours in April. "We started cruise tours on April 12, but only in the Gulf of Thailand, where we will continue to sail each April to November. The rest of the year we will sail in the Andaman region."

K. Patana explained that the move to buy the *Ocean Princess* marks the company's entry into the cruise market. "We have been operating cargo ships for years, but the *Ocean Princess* is our first luxury cruise liner," he said.

He explained that the ship used to sail cruise tours in Europe, though under a German flag and a different name. "The

liner cost almost 200 million baht to buy and about 60 million baht to renovate," K. Patana said.

The ship has 131 guest cabins – two VIP suites, 29 deluxe cabins, 15 superior cabins, 34 family cabins and 51 standard cabins – and can accommodate about 200 crew and 400 passengers.

Ocean Princess began its Andaman tours from its base at the Cape Panwa Deep Sea Port on November 18, running cruises on Phang Nga Bay, to the Similan Islands and Koh Surin, as well as south to Tarutao National Park in Satun province and to Trang province.

The tours bring it into direct competition with *Andaman Princess*, a 101-meter cruise liner that can accommodate some 330 guests, and which is already running cruise tours out of Phuket.

"Some of our routes are similar to those offered by the *Andaman Princess*, but we have tried to adjust our cruise tours to be different," said K. Patana. "But I

think our services and the condition of the ship put us in a highly competitive position. We also have larger cabins, that is our strength."

He added that Ocean Princess Group is currently targeting customers from Bangkok. "About 99% of our clients are Thai. We have not yet started a serious marketing effort targeting foreigners because we need to prepare our staff to serve them. We should be ready in a year, then we will start looking at the foreign markets," said K. Patana.

"However, we have started promoting tours to Russian tourists and people in some other countries that do not have beautiful coastlines," he added.

It will take a while to recoup the 260-million-baht outlay for the ship and its renovation, K. Patana said, "Under our business plan we intend to break even after seven years. We will review our performance each quarter to see if we are on target. If we see that we are not on track,

then we will need to promote more.

"We expect to spend the first two years developing our market, and not to make [an operating] profit during that period," he added.

Although *Ocean Princess* is currently running at 30% occupancy, K. Patana said that both the Thai Gulf and Andaman tours have been well-received. "Since we started sailing in April, everything has been going well. We generated about 60 million baht in revenues by sailing the Thai Gulf routes, and we expect the Andaman services to do much the same," he explained.

However, he said, there was much room for improvement. "Our potential is much more because we are at only 30% occupancy. And for the tours in the Thai Gulf, we originally planned to have 60% 'walk-in' clients and 40% from group tours, but we got the reverse.

"But in the Andaman, most customers booking tours have been 'walk-in' customers, which is what we prefer," he said.

ON THE MOVE

Phuket native **Kamol Pirat** has been appointed as a staff reporter on the *Phuket Gazette*. The holder of a degree in political science from Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok, K. Kamol is a seasoned reporter with 10 years' experience with the Nation Group, where he worked as Chief Reporter, Political News, on the Thai-language mass circulation daily *Kom Chad Luek*. He also worked for three years at the newspaper *Thai Financial*.



Stephane Wartner, from Switzerland, has been appointed Assistant Food and Beverage Manager of the Evason Phuket Resort and Six Senses Spa. Mr Wartner has a degree in international hospitality management from the Ecole Hoteliere Lausanne, in Switzerland. His experience in the hospitality industry includes work with Le Mirador Kempinski Lake Geneva and Eurotel Victoria, both in Switzerland.



Le Méridien Phuket Beach Resort has announced that Australian **Rick Gamble** will join its human resources development team in a program development and support role. Before joining Le Méridien, 41-year-old Mr Gamble was a lecturer in social psychology at the Prince of Songkla University, Phuket campus. In Australia, he worked as an F&B trainer and for various businesses related to the hospitality industry.



Been promoted? Made a career change? Know someone who has? Let us know by email to onthemove@phuketgazette.net.

Taking an interest in the future

A question almost everyone ponders on a regular basis is, "What does the future hold?" When it comes to personal financial planning, the future is seldom predictable. I'm not referring here to the ups and downs of life but to the economic environment in which we have to invest our savings.

Many readers are entirely dependent on making the right decisions with their "nest egg" to survive the future while others, to a greater or lesser degree, will have their present or future income augmented by private and/or government pensions.

This article is intended more for the former group of readers than the latter.

Economic forecasting regarding interest rates, stock market performance, property markets and so on will never be an exact science. The best anyone can do is to assess the current situation and project forward.

Obviously, this requires other factors to be taken into account. For example, if one is trying to assess where interest rates are heading, it is necessary to look at them from two different aspects: short-term and medium/long-term. Short-term interest rates are basically those which will be altered by the central bank controlling the currency in question.

The committees of central banks meet on a regular basis to set interest rate policy. Factors that control decisions on whether to change current interest rates include the strength (or weakness) of the underlying economy, inflation, asset prices and credit creation.

When one looks at the world economy, it is clear that different economic areas and countries are experiencing widely differing scenarios. For example,



MONEY TALKS

By Richard Watson

the US economy is growing at a healthy rate; the interest rate, which is currently 2.0%, will almost certainly be raised again – probably during this month – to 2.25%.

However, the US central bank, the Federal Reserve, is being very cautious in its approach. It is very concerned about the "knock on" effect of each interest rate increase.

It is also aware of the substantial budget deficit that is helping economic growth, albeit at the cost of a growing national debt. The current budget deficit, at around 6% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), is double that recommended as a sustainable maximum.

Unemployment is moderate but job creation, while reasonable, is lower than expectations.

There appears to be a basic misunderstanding of deficits that continually manifests itself in the press, which is to link the budget deficit to the current account deficit as a cause of the current US Dollar weakness.

There is a relationship, but it is somewhat tenuous. However, sections of the media seem to believe that it is imperative for foreign capital to buy US Bonds to stop long-term interest rates from rising to appalling levels.

The reality is somewhat different. Early in 2004, 10-year US

Treasury Bonds were trading at almost 4.90%. Now, even with a lower dollar, these yields have fallen to around 4.40%.

When one considers the vast sums that the Bank of Japan was injecting into US Treasury Bonds earlier this year compared with its zero intervention at present, it makes a mockery of media theorizing.

Still deflating: In Japan, the recovery may well still be "on track", despite some worrisome recent economic data. However, I still believe that the Bank of Japan should print some more "funny money" to defeat deflation.

Last week's article went into my reasons for this suggestion but did not cover deflation. Deflation is not a scenario most people are familiar with – usually inflation has been either the problem or the threat. If one has a choice between, say, 2% inflation and 2% deflation, the former is far more attractive. In an environment of 2% inflation, everything generally works well; consumption continues and asset prices (in a perfect world) rise gradually, as do wages and profits.

In an environment of 2% deflation, everything is reversed, and this influences the mindset of the consumer. Why buy anything today that is not a necessity when it can be purchased later, at a lower price?

But in an environment of 2% deflation, everything is reversed, and this influences the mindset of the consumer. Why buy anything today that is not a necessity when it can be purchased later, at a lower price?

This becomes self sustaining; asset prices shrink – and this includes real estate, stock markets and so on. Companies are very hesitant about hiring staff; indeed, they tend to shed staff to lower costs.

Consumers, noting that the value of their homes and other assets are falling, react by going into a type of survival mode. Pessimism becomes the normal outlook.

Japan has suffered in this scenario for almost 15 years. It is one of the causes of the huge bad debt problem that Japan's banks are at last managing to deal with.

If Japan, the world's second-largest economy, had enjoyed better economic management, it would be in a much better position today.

Interest rates for 2005? Higher in the US, sideways-to-lower in Europe and stable in Japan. Well, that's my prediction.

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.

Riding a motorcycle? Please ...



Thai law requires that motorcycle drivers and passengers wear a safety helmet with the chin strap fastened at all times – 24 hours a day.

PHUKET PROVINCIAL
TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT

Technically paradise

Many people consider Phuket to be paradise but to Mathew Partridge and Andrew Fortune it is a different kind of utopia. For them, Phuket is a technical paradise.

Oceanzone Divers Pro-Tech is the latest dive shop to open in Phuket but it is very different from the 118 or so other dive shops registered in Phuket.

This is just as well – the last thing Phuket needs is another run-of-the-mill dive shop.

Oceanzone Divers Pro-Tech stands out because it specializes in “technical” diving rather than entry-level PADI open-water courses.

Oceanzone is not the first dive shop here to specialize in technical diving. Deep Blue Divers, another technical diving shop, is hidden away in Rawai, although it is well known within the technical diving community.

Dive-shop operators tend to be like nesting trigger fish – territorial and somewhat aggressive when it comes to competition.

However, Oceanzone Divers Pro-Tech and Deep Blue Divers are amicable about the competition and look forward to working together.

For readers not in the know, a technical dive can be defined as any dive involving extensive preplanning, possibly with gas-switching (using breathing gas with a higher percentage of oxygen) and/or an “overhead environment”.

An overhead environment can be defined as a wreck, a cave or a decompression stop, which Andrew refers to as a “virtual overhead”.

Decompression stops are mandatory pauses at certain depths for a certain time as the diver surfaces. Technical dives are more complex than recreational dives and require more training.

Between the two instructors at Oceanzone Divers Pro-Tech there doesn't seem to be a single recognized technical dive agency or course missing from the list of those taught, including instructor-training courses.

Their credentials are impressive. Oceanzone Divers Pro-Tech will also be in charge of the technical deviation of the



Jörg Zebisch of Deep Blue Divers during a technical dive.

CTDA, the Thai affiliate of the Confédération Mondiale des Activités Subaquatique (CMAS).

Mathew's fascination with diving began when he was 14 years old. He has worked as a professional diver for seven years and owned a dive shop in Britain, his home country.

Andrew is also British but was born in Geneva, and is fluent in French. He is a commercial diver with more than 30 years' experience and is a fully-qualified recompression chamber operator. The two met in Phuket and realized they shared a vision – to have a full-service technical center.

Phuket, according to Mathew is a technical diving paradise because “[it] has some of the best dive sites in Thailand. There are many places deeper than 70 meters and conditions are great. Where else can you go to 100 meters and still have 26°C water? Magical.

“Also there are wrecks in the local waters. There is the *HMS Vestal* and we have the coordinates for her sister ship.

Oceanzone Divers Pro-Tech has the equipment to conduct an expedition to look for the ship. It's just a matter of getting enough divers to go out and find it.”

Oceanzone's principal markets are Britain, Switzerland and France. The new company draws divers from these markets because it can provide the same courses as in Europe, to the same

standards of safety, but at considerably lower costs.

Until recently, few people thought of Thailand as a location for technical diving, and Mathew credits Mark Ellyatt, the technical diver who broke the world record for the deepest solo scuba dive in December 2003, off Phuket, with putting the island on the technical map.

“I think Mark has done a lot for publicizing [technical diving in] Thailand back in Europe because people had never seen [Phuket] as a technical area. With him breaking the record and promoting [Phuket] as he has done in the UK, he has raised the profile of country,” said Mathew.

Deep Blue Divers opened three years ago and has seen its client group alter from overwhelmingly native German-speakers to an increasing number from Britain. Jörg Zebisch, of Deep Blue Divers, points out that his company is the only shop in Phuket that operates the “Buddy Inspiration” closed-circuit rebreather system.

Deep Blue Divers has researched the wreck of British warship *HMS Vestal*, and has researched and planned expeditions to the *SS Petaling*, a 1920s steamer that sank off Kata.

Record-breaker Mark Ellyatt, meanwhile, has recently been teaching in Phuket. He teamed up with Deep Blue Divers to share space and costs on the new *MV Catalina* for some technical dive courses. He is also working on a book and some technical training manuals, but is also available to teach Phuket. Mark may be reached at mark@inspired-training.com.

For more information about Oceanzone Divers Pro-Tech visit www.oceanzonedivers.com. The Deep Blue Divers website is at www.deep-blue-divers.de



Songkhla runner wins Kathu mini-marathon

KATHU: Karter Senmood from Songkhla was first home to win the open class of the Kathu Mini Marathon on December 12. It was the first time he had competed in the Kathu run. More than 400 people ran in the 12-kilometer event.

Winners of other classes were: Men: under-13: Songkran Wetkama (Phuket); under-16: Watcharin Kerdsuk (Phuket); under-21: Somchock Jangwang (Trang); 30-34 years: Paiwan Imkaew (Phuket); 35-39: Sudjai Attanai (Phuket); 40-44 years: Narong Phonjareon (Phuket); 45-49 years: Wanle Yumui (Phu-

ket); 50-59 years: Tawee Pattarakul (Phuket); over-59s: Tiensang Boonyapinihan (Phuket).

Women: under-13: Titima Raksomboon (Phuket); under-16: Siriyakorn Kamlai (Phuket); under-21: Karuna Nakara (Phuket); open: Raiwadee Kaewyok (Surat Thani); 30-39: Aranya Sukanmet (Phuket); 40-49: Saibua Nilsang (Surat Thani); over-49: Kallaya Jantraporn (Phuket).

The “family” class was won by Apasara Piriya-pret of Phuket, while Papasorn Boonkao, also of Phuket, won the under-7 children's race.

...but Phuket entrants dominate Khao Kad race

AO MAKHAM: Sinchai Siriya showed other runners a clean pair of heels at the Khao Kad Mini Marathon on December 10, finishing the 10.5-kilometer course in 24 minutes 40 seconds to win the open category.

Narin Pandean came second in 25:06, followed by Jai Putchuai (27:24) in third place.

Athletes who won their age category races on the 10.5-km course included Pakorn Somsab (28:17) in the under-16s, Paiwan Imkaew (27:47) in the 30-39-years-old category, Richard Schilpkneon (26:19) in the 40-49 years, and Kara Sae-Aou (34:45), who won the 50-years-or-older category.

In the women's races, Apasarat Woranut finished in 34 min-

utes and 8 seconds to win the under-16s, with Karuna Nakara recording an identical time to win the open category. Anong Piriya-pret (33:20) won the 30-39 years category and Ketsaraporn Boonkao (40:18) won the 40-and-over category.

Winners in the men's categories on the 3.5-km course were Pu-nge Sangkaew (9:42), who won the open category, while Dusit Tongyam (11:20) won the under-13s and Watcharin Kerdsuk (10:23) won under-19s.

Rewadee Kaewyot (11:59) was the fastest woman on the 3.5-km course, winning the under-19s, while Preumjit Chaikamjorn (12:20) won the open category and Papasorn Hiran (13:09) won the under-13s.

Thailand crashes out of soft tennis tournament

CHIANG MAI: Thailand's national soft tennis team, which includes eight players from Phuket, missed out on top-three placings in all of the categories of the 5th Asian Soft Tennis Championships 2004 held in Chiang Mai from December 8 to 12.

Niphon Jang-iam, head coach of the Phuket soft tennis team and representative of the Thai Soft Tennis Association, said, “I am not satisfied with the

result. Thailand could have made it past the quarter-finals of this tournament.”

Fourteen nations took part in the tournament, with Taiwan's Lin Shun Wu taking the honors in the Men's Singles and Rie Watanabe scooping the Women's Singles prize.

Looking on the bright side, K. Niphon conceded that the competition was “good practice” for the Phuket players.

PATONG DARTS LEAGUE

PATONG: With just two weeks to go, Off Shore maintain a one-point lead in the league, not including the December 14 games that were played too late to be included in this edition. Off Shore also have one game in hand over the other teams near the top of the table.

December 7 results: Fat Boy Saloon 2 Shakers* 7; Didi's 5 Amigos* 4; Off Shore* 6 Champs 3; Piccadilly* 4 Happy Days 5; Valhalla 4 Nag's Head* 5. (*=Winners of beer leg.)

Standings after December 7: 1. Off Shore (40); 2. Happy Days (39); 3. Nag's Head (36); 4. Piccadilly (35); 5. Queen Mary (34); 6. Champs (32); 7. Didi's (30); 8. Amigos (23); 9. Two Black Sheep (19); 10. Shakers (15); 11. Fat Boy Saloon (11); 12. Valhalla (1).

December 21 fixtures: Champs v Valhalla; Didi's v Off Shore; Nag's Head v Amigos; Queen Mary v Piccadilly; Shakers v Happy Days; Two Black Sheep v Fat Boy Saloon. (Home teams first.)

Beneath the SURFACE
By Sylvie Yaffe



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Two racers battle for position before climbing the hill at Bang Pan field, near Loch Palm Golf Club.

Tawatchai the king of the mountain bikers

KATHU: Tawatchai Masae from Yala proved his mettle by winning the grueling 45-kilometer Open Type-A section of the Phuket Mountain Bike Challenge on December 11.

Contested over a 9km course at Bang Pan Field near Loch Palm Golf Course, the challenge attracted more than 200 competitors of all ages.

Tawatchai, a member of the Thai national mountain-bike team, and his fellow competitors saw the stifling mid-afternoon heat give way to a torrential downpour later on, adding a new element – viscous mud – to the day's challenges.

Earlier in the day the Type-C junior events, consisting of one lap of the circuit, were won by Attapong Sukjai and Mesiya Suksawat in the Under-13 Boys and Under-14 Girls respectively. Both are members of Nakhon Sri Thammarat's P Group team, which also scored victory in the Under-17 Women's category,

won by teammate Dararat Suwan.

The three-lap limited-age Type-A races saw Phuket well represented on the winners' podium. Phuket Beach Boys' Winai Tanboon won the 35-39-year-old class and teammate Jirawat Chulak won in the 40-44 class. The Trang Gang's Paiboon Samdeang was first across the line in the 45-49 year category, while Phuket Hellbikes' Suwit Saejong won the veterans' 50-and-over class and Sakai Yala's Krittika Silapat won the Women's Open category.

The Type-B event, consisting of two laps, also saw plenty of local heroes. Chaiwat Kobwet of Phuket Beach Boys' team won the Men's 35-39-years class; Phuket Freestyle's Jamroon Saetan won the Men's 40-44-years class; Phuket Asupon Diesel's Srichai Iamtawon won the 50-and-over class; and Phuket Freestyle's Sittiporn Puangjit won the Open category.

Countback gives Hi Fidelity victory in King's Cup

By Chris Husted

KATA: Neil Pryde's *Hi Fidelity* snatched victory from Peter Ahern's *Yo!* in the Racing class of this year's King's Cup Regatta after winning the final race on December 11, forcing victory to be decided by each yacht's performance during the previous week's racing.

Hi Fidelity went into the final race one point behind *Yo!*, but her crew pulled out all the stops and scraped through with a win, with *Yo!* close behind in second place.

This performance forced race officials to compare the yachts in terms of the number of wins they had scored. *Hi Fidelity*, with four, outranked *Yo!*, with two, to be declared winner.

In the Sports Boats class, Geoff Backshall's Samui-built *Buzz 8* made an impressive King's Cup debut, winning six of seven races.

Hannes Waima's *Jativa* came second in its final race to place second overall, with David Bell's *Pink Pussy Cat* finishing third overall.

Richard Grimes's *Yendys* won both races on the final day to take top honors in the American Express Premier Cruising class, with Brian Haydon's *Vida* finishing second overall and Marcel Liedt's *Hocux Pocux 2* was in third place.

In the Multihull class, another Samui-built boat, Kym Thomas's twin-mast catamaran, *Coco Blues*, was overall winner, with Mark Pescott's *Charro* and Henry Kaye's *Cerberus*, both from Phuket, finishing second and third respectively.



Beers and Cheers: Neil Pryde (3rd from left) and the crew of *Hi Fidelity* enjoy a well-earned beer after winning the Racing class of this year's King's Cup Regatta.

The winners of the remaining classes were:

IRC1. 1. *Ruby Tuesday* (John Vause), 2. *Foxy Lady* (Bill Bremner), 3. *Di Hard* (Team Yachtpro).

IRC2. 1. *Royal Thai Navy 1* (PO1 Vivat Poonpat), 2. *Royal Thai Navy 2* (Lt Jg Veerasit Puangnak), 3. *La Samudra* (David Lindahl).

IRC3. 1. *Abraxas* (Greg Coops), 2. *Minx* (Kevin Gillow), 3. *Patrice III* (Tracey Williams).

Sunsail One Design. 1. *Princess Anna* (Christian Eschenburg), 2. *Princess Arieta* (Nick Cox), 3. *Princess Athena* (Per Svendsen).

Ocean Rover. 1. *Aquavit III* (Hellmut Schutte), 2. *Cordelia* (Alex Joyce), 3. *Tarawadee* (Team Yachtpro).

Classic class. 1. *Green-sleeves* (Claus Karthe), 2. *Phuket Sail Sanook* (Julian Hill), 3. *Sunshine* (Peter Wood).

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Wines with real character

Some people say that wines naturally assume the personality of the winemaker. One thing is certain: people from many different walks of life have made wine their outlet of personal creative expression as well as their life's work.

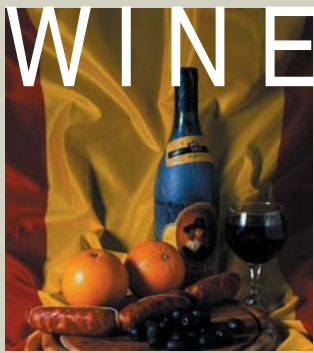
Here for example, are three of the many varied life stories of the owners of the wineries in California's Napa Valley, and how those stories are reflected in their wines and the craft of wine making.

William Jarvis was an Oklahoma geologist who made a fortune mining crystals in underground caves. He fell in love with ballet, the arts and wine after visiting France, but it was during a visit to Napa Valley that he decided to make California his home and pursue his passion for fine wine by building a state-of-the-art winery – entirely underground.

The Jarvis winery, which has an underground stream running through its cavernous chambers, is fascinating to visit. Many commentators cannot help but see a link between the underground setting of the winery, the austere nature of the Cabernet and Chardonnay produced there, and William Jarvis's early love of cave geology.

There is probably no greater contrast in Napa to William Jarvis and his social lifestyle and state-of-the-art winemaking than Randy Dunn, the owner of the legendary Dunn Vineyard.

Randy is one of Napa's most reclusive and iconoclastic winemakers; on the rare occasions when he ventures into



By Steven Roberto

town, he wears a straw cowboy hat and drives an old pick-up truck.

At the renowned Caymus Winery, right in the heart of Napa Valley, Randy established himself as a gifted winemaker. But then, instead of embracing the self-importance of Napa, he headed to the nearby Angwin Mountain, to get away from the crowds of tourists and grow grapes in solitude.

Dunn Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon is powerful, tannic and long-lived. Randy's wines are a lot like him: sturdy, rugged and individualistic. They speak of an uncompromising attitude towards life.

On the other side of Napa Valley, in 1980, Joyce and Jerry Cain bought a

Spring Mountain homestead dating back to the 1840s.

The Cains were looking for a mountain where they could realize their dream of planting the five classical Bordeaux grape varieties that, to their tastes, make the most elegant of all red wines.

The vineyard setting is breathtakingly beautiful, surrounded by forest and offering panoramic views. Cain wines all have great character and elegance. Everything about them, the place and the people included, speak of love and passion for winemaking.

Their flagship wine, Cain Five, has always been one of my favorite California red wines.

Three families, three approaches to life, three ways to live a dream through the crafting of nature's most revealing yet mysterious gift, wine.

A new restaurant opening under the umbrella of the famed Lan Kwai Fong Group (LKFG) of Hong Kong always promises to be something of an event.

Not to be confused with restaurant chains, which seem to be sprouting in every shopping mall from Peking to Perth (Scotland) to Perth (Australia), each of the LKFG restaurants boasts a unique identity.

And what better place for LKFG's new establishment to open but the rather swish Plaza, at Surin Beach?

A trek worthy of Norgay and Hillary to the top floor – the lift appeared to have been spiked with Valium – had us in dire need of refreshment.

Ushered to our seats, and just ahead of ordering a round of cocktails, one of my dining companions suggests – in a husky Lauren Bacall voice (“Asian ’flu?” I wonder) – that the large sofas dotted around the balcony would, with their red enclosing curtains, be ideal for an intimate tête-à-tête, or a head-to-... something.

Derek Wong, Operations Manager Hong Kong and China for LKFG, has just enough time to meet and greet us – and suggest a rather pleasant Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough – before zooming off to a party.

Obviously proud – and justifiably so – of Silk, he leaves us in the capable hands of K. Kwang, Silk's Guest Relations Manager. Wearing one of her self-designed dresses, she exudes charm and knowledge about all aspects of food.

We leave her to decide for us, no easy feat as our party consists of a vegetarian, a demi-vegetarian and me.

Always one to look askance at dishes where tofu is substituted for meat, I am more than a little surprised by the *Panang Tao Hoo Thod* – Panang curry with deep-fried tofu.

It tastes great, and the absence of meat is more than compensated for by the lusciously creamy texture of the tofu, which blends superbly with the rich, fragrant sauce, once its crispy crust has melted in my mouth.

I may live *ai no corrida* (I'm a Taurean after all) but I still hesi-

SLICKLY SILKY



The *Boo Nim Thod Grathiem* almost dissolves in the mouth.

tate at certain new experiences. But I am game, and I try something else new tonight: soft-shell crabs deep-fried with chili, garlic and basil, or *Boo Nim Thod Grathiem*.

The demi-veggie is tucking into them like there's no tomorrow and urges me to do likewise. I listen to her, and start eating. It is nothing like I expected. It is

heavenly. Soft, but with a veneer of the herbs and spices, the crab almost dissolves in the mouth.

Our wine glasses appear to be refilled by magic, almost as quickly as they empty. The staff are discreet and attentive. I wave my hands to emphasize a point and my napkin falls toward the floor, only to be caught a split-second before it hits.

Next, the *Ahaan Wang Jan Pised* (special snack) platter of prawn cakes, fresh spring rolls and noodle-wrapped prawns arrives. We can hardly get enough of these prawns, which are something of a local specialty.

The noodles, deep-fried a golden brown, flake upon the tongue, and the accompanying *nam jim* – or dipping sauces – bring the taste of the prawns to the fore.

Our wish is granted – the demi-veggie and mine anyway – in the shape of *Goong Phad Makham Piak*, or sautéed king prawns with a fresh tamarind and lime juice sauce.

Speaking again with the delightful K. Kwang over dessert – mango and sticky rice in coconut milk – coffee and brandy, we learn that Silk offers a ludicrously well-priced four-course set lunch for 295 baht.

Everything on the menu – both lunch and dinner – is traditional, one might even say simple, Thai cuisine. However, the rare feat of cooking and presenting the dishes in precisely the right way is achieved.

One request: stick with the lounge sounds and dump the polyester Christmas music. Then I'll be ready to slip into Silk again very soon.

Silk is at The Plaza Surin, 5/50 Moo 3, Cherng Talay, Tel: 076-271702. The restaurant is open from noon to 2:30 pm for lunch and from 6 pm until 11 pm.

On the menu with Andy Johnstone

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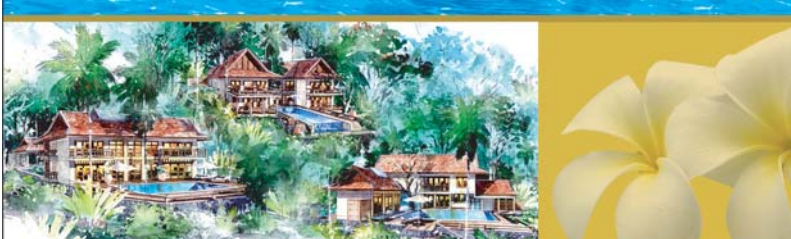
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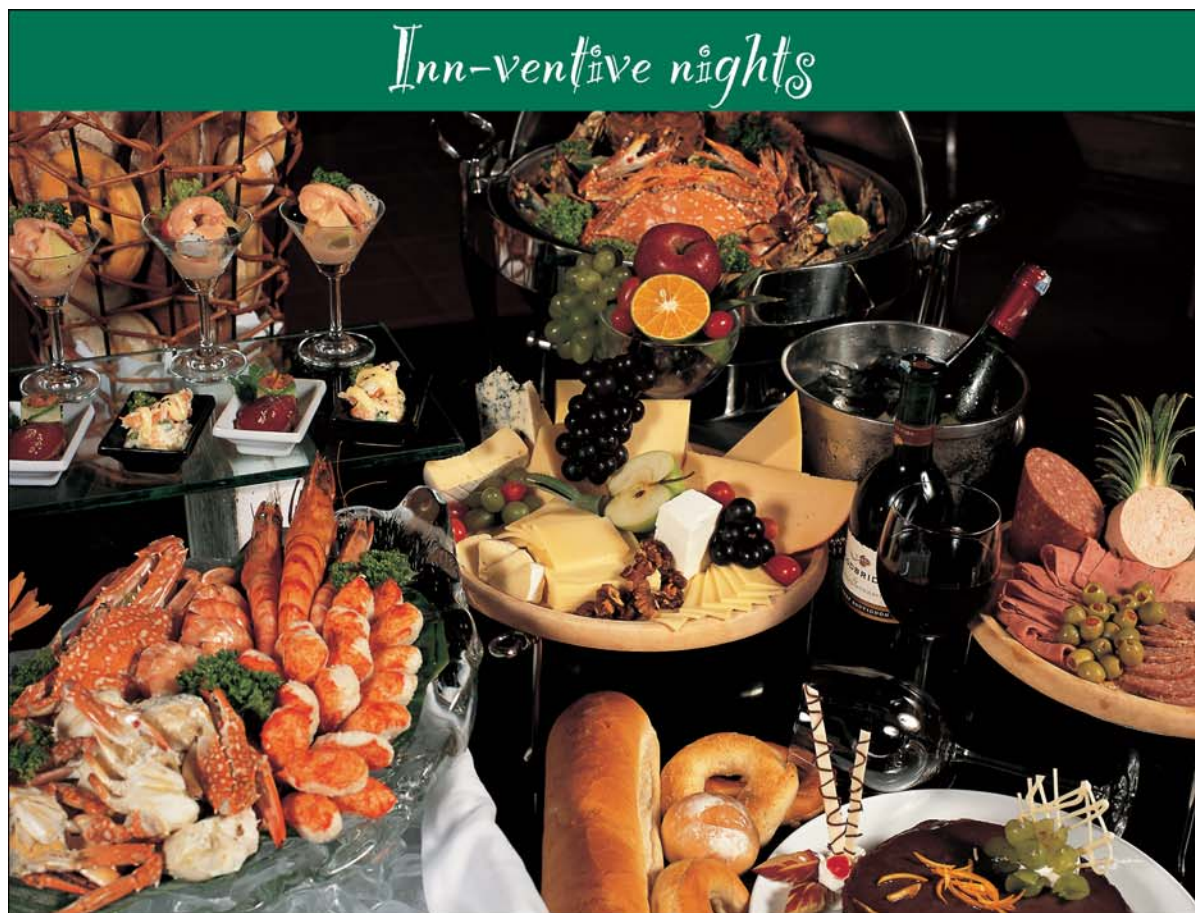
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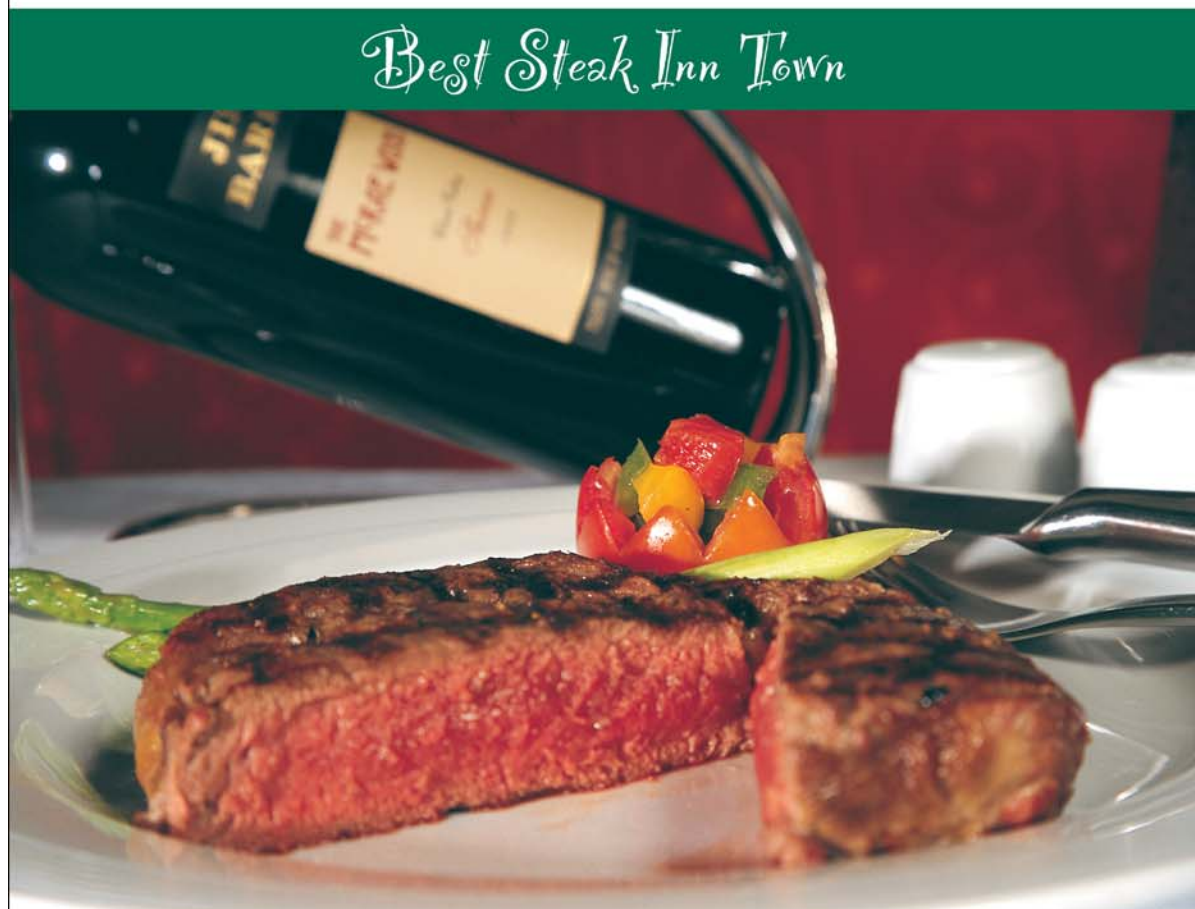
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The nature of the baby beast

**BEHIND
THE
WHEEL**
By Jeff Heselwood

The Golf GTi probably defines the words "hot-test hatch". It was the first and is still one of the most desirable hatchbacks, despite interlopers from French auto makers Peugeot and Citroën, and from Ford with its performance versions of the Focus.

More than 1.5 million high-performance Golf models have been sold, and once again the car has received a facelift, taking it into its fifth generation. Volkswagen is clearly determined to maintain the GTi's position as No 1 of the sporting hatchbacks.

The GTi was originally launched in 1976, creating quite a stir at the time. It promised 110bhp (81kW) and had a top speed of a shade over 180kmh – impressive in that era. It boasted a four-speed manual gearbox and front-wheel drive, but there the similarity with the latest model ends.

The new Golf GTi is also front-wheel drive, but it has 200bhp (147kW) under the hood and peaks at 235kmh. It has a six-speed gearbox and can cover the 0-100kmh sprint in just 7.2 seconds. The optional direct-shift gearbox (DSG) pushes the GTi even faster, reaching 100kmh from a standstill in 6.9 seconds.

The DSG effectively allows the driver to select the next gear without resorting to the clutch, virtually eliminating any power hesitation during acceleration.

The engine in the GTi is the normal four-cylinder Golf version, but is turbocharged and has direct fuel injection. As well as a healthy power output, the torque figures make pleasant reading, with 280Nm between 1,800rpm and 5,000rpm.

This even spread of torque is due in part to the exhaust-driven turbo, but also to the constantly adjusted intake camshaft timing. The other benefits are low fuel consumption and reduced exhaust emissions.

The new GTi is available in either two- or four-door version, but for the first time it is dis-



tinctly different from other Golf models, with its unique front grille in black framed with red, the grille grid a honeycomb mesh, and with fog lamps either side.

There is also an integrated front spoiler and the ride height is 15 millimeters lower than the standard model. At the rear a neat roof spoiler emphasizes the

sporting nature of the beast. Should there still be any doubt, twin chrome tailpipes demonstrate the power available.

The side view reveals meaty 17-inch alloy wheels with ultra-low-profile tires and red-painted brake calipers gripping huge ventilated discs all round.

The interior, as you would

NEED FOR SPEED: The latest model Golf GTi has a top speed of 235kmh, and its optional direct-shift gearbox pushes the baby beast from a standstill to 100kmh in 6.9 seconds.

expect, is classic sports, with a new-design "bucket" seat complete with GTi insignia on the headrests, plenty of aluminum throughout, a thick leather-rimmed steering wheel and a black roof lining.

The rev counter, a little optimistically, goes to 8,000rpm while the speedometer has similarly been extended to indicate the higher speeds available.

Safety features fitted as standard include rain and ambient light sensors, electronic stability program and a tire pressure monitoring display. Active front headrests are standard and there are six airbags.

When the GTi made its debut in 1976, the plan was to produce a limited run of 5,000 cars. But so successful was this little projectile that in 1984 a second-generation GTi was introduced, followed in 1986 by a 16-valve

model producing a respectable 138bhp (102kW).

A 20th anniversary model followed in 1996, before the fourth incarnation of VW's minor miracle in 1998. The turbo version, with 179bhp (132kW) on tap, followed in 2001 before this latest model appeared.

While there is plenty of competition in the performance hatchback segment now, the Golf GTi somehow still sets the standard by which others are judged. And looking at the 2005 GTi it is unlikely to be seriously challenged for many years to come.

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



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A CASA IN KATA

KATA: Casa Del Co Ltd is investing 430 million baht to develop a mixed shophouse, serviced apartment and hotel project on a 9.5-rai plot of land off Kata Rd, within walking distance of Kata Beach.

Managing Director Anucha Voranatiwong, whose previous projects include the Tana Patong Hotel, the nearby Phuket Kata Resort and developments in Khao Lak, said second-phase work on the Kata Casa Del project will begin in February and is expected to take one year.

At the project's front, lining the entryway to the hotel on both sides, will be 16 shophouses, two of which will face directly onto Kata Rd.

Behind these will be the 160-room Kata Casa Del Hotel, planned as a 4½-star resort.

Hotel amenities will include an Internet room, library, lounges, three shops, children's recreation room, a spa and restaurants. Room rates are expected to start at US\$120 a night, and the hotel will be managed by an international hotel brand. Chains based in Europe, Australia and Singapore are currently being considered for the management contract.

First-phase work on the shophouses, begun in October, is scheduled for completion in April next year. Fourteen of these will be "Home Office" units, wider than standard shophouses, at 7.5 meters in width by 11m deep.

Ranging in cost from 7.8 to 12 million baht, the three-story units are designed for the ground floor to be used for commerce, the second floor as an office, and the third floor as a two-bedroom home.

All units will be fully decorated and will have parking for one vehicle.

K. Anucha said about 40% of the shophouse units have al-

ready been sold, including the two that face out onto Kata Rd.

Behind the hotel will be 60 serviced apartments in four-story buildings. Three different design styles will be available.

Type A units (selling for 4.2 million baht) will have floor areas of 55 square meters and a basic studio apartment design, with bathroom and pantry. Type B units (6 million baht) will be 80 sqm and have a living area. Type C units (8 million baht) will be 120sqm and have two bedrooms, a bathroom, living room and pantry.

All apartments are also available on a 30-year-lease basis and can be subleased, with the hotel serving as agent, for those seeking an investment opportunity. K. Anucha said he expects all of the units to be sold within a year.

Water plays a role in the project's design. There will be lotus ponds in the central gardens and a large swimming pool. Guests staying in ground-floor serviced apartments will have direct access to the pool from their balconies via a network of "swimming canals".

Other features of the central gardens will include a wooden deck, sala, sunbathing area and pool bar.

On a hillside at the property's rear will be 18 "penthouse" serviced apartments, each with 200sqm of floor space and a sea view. Ranging in price from 12 to 15 million baht, each unit will comprise two bedrooms, two bathrooms, one living room and a pantry.

The target market is both Thais and foreigners – especially Scandinavians – wishing to live



Artists' impressions of (above) the Garden Court, seen from the main lobby; (below) the project's "home offices"; and (left) a living room in the hotel.



or to do business in the area.

Project design is by DCS Associate Co and Intend Architectural & Consultant Co. TAA &

Associate Co is the contractor.

For more information contact Kata Casa Del Co Ltd at 30/9

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Home of the Week

Chalong

Clean lines, modern living

Clean, modern lines and a secluded location on a paved cul-de-sac that is shared with just two other properties mark out this five-year-old home as worthy of further inspection.

Built on a gently sloping 800-square-meter plot, the house is a few minutes' drive from Chalong Circle and its variety of shops, cafés and medical clinics, and of course, Chalong Bay.

The lower floor consists of spacious living and dining areas, which have doors to the gardens. This floor also houses a spacious master bedroom and bathroom, and a Thai-style kitchen.

A delightful terrace on the upper floor offers splendid views to the lush tropical gardens and surrounding hills. This floor also has two bedrooms, both of which are pleasantly light and airy, and a shared bathroom.

The property has two air conditioners, insect screens and a covered carport. Utilities include UBC TV, well water, a septic tank and three-phase power.

The land title is *NorSor 3 Gor* and the property is for sale at 10 million baht.

For more information, contact: Richard Lusted, Siam Real Estate, at Tel: 076-280805, Email: info@www.siamrealestate.com or visit their website, www.siamrealestate.com



Top, the attractive front entrance of the home. Right, though close to all the amenities of Chalong, the house is surrounded by nature.

The concept of apartment living is really on the way up in the Phuket property market. Increasing numbers of buyers in Phuket are finding apartments, ranging from budget to luxury, preferable to stand-alone villas.

Because of their cost, maintenance, security, convenience, rental returns and for a variety of other reasons, apartments are picking up an increasing share of the market, both on the east and west coasts of Phuket.

Last week's column was about the Layan Beach area and the variety of projects there. One development in the area is Layan Gardens, a new project from one of the developers of Lakewood Hills and Lakeshore, Paul Moorhouse.

Mr Moorhouse is sure the apartment trend will continue. "Now, many buyers are moving away from the big villas," he says. "I believe that, based on dealing with the market over the past five years and from what potential buyers are telling me now, the growing market is in luxury apartments."

One area that could stand to benefit is between Surin Beach and the airport, where there are almost no large luxury apartments available. There is a growing market there for people who don't want a sprawling villa but are seeking something that's easier to look after, lock up or rent out, yet still has a high standard of luxury and quality.

Layan Gardens is positioned in this up-market luxury category.

With fine views from a hillside overlooking Layan valley and Bang Tao Bay, the project will be terraced with a total of 40 apartments in five blocks set among landscaped gardens.

The first and second floors of each block will have a total of six two- and three-bedroom apartments, which will range from 160 to 165 square meters of built-in living space, with balconies ranging from 38sqm to 64sqm, depending on the design.

Each building will have two penthouses on the top floor, each with three bedrooms, four bathrooms, huge living, study and



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Do Not Drink Tap Water!



Tumbling down the hillside: Layan Gardens is catching a swelling wave of demand for high-end apartment living, as opposed to high-maintenance villas.

Living the life apart

dining areas, as well as maid's quarters, laundry, storage and utility areas, all within a 250-sqm built-in area.

In addition, each penthouse will have some 90sqm of balconies and entertaining areas, and a 250-sqm private roof garden – bringing the total private living area to nearly 600sqm altogether.

The center area of the complex will feature three swimming pools with the water cascading

LARGER THAN LIFE

By Graham Doven

downhill from one to another. The total pool area will be more than 1,600sqm, and there will also be a pool bar and a children's pool.

In addition, the project will have a tennis court, golf chipping and putting greens, a children's playground, an exercise area and six barbecue salas.

Prices for the apartments will range from 13.25 million baht to 27 million baht, including fully managed resort-style management with no restrictions on use by the owners. Layan Gardens is due for completion around August 2006.



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- Service Entrance
- Staircase

2nd Floor (Upper Fl.)

- Master bedroom+Master Bhr
- 2 Bedroom+2 Bhr
- Family area



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Le Raffiné Sukhumvit 31 Project developer and owner: Le Raffiné 24 Company Limited. Registered capital: 350,000,000 Baht (fully paid up). Office location: 54 Sukhumvit Soi 24 (Kasem), Sukhumvit Road, Klongtoey Sub-District, Klongtoey District, Bangkok 10110. Managing Director: Pimpa Vajrabukka, M.D. Residential condominium 30 floors with 45 units. Site location: On title deeds No. 2635, Klongtoey Sub-District (South Bangkok), Phraekong District (Bangkok), Bangkok. Land area: (Type 1-1.98) approximately 598 square wah. Project encumbered and supported by Krungthai Bank Plc. Building construction permit has been approved: # 401/2547. Construction begins: July 2004. Completion expected: December 2006. The project shall be registered as the condominium after completing the construction. Common area fee will be paid by buyers in accordance with regulation of condominium juristic person.

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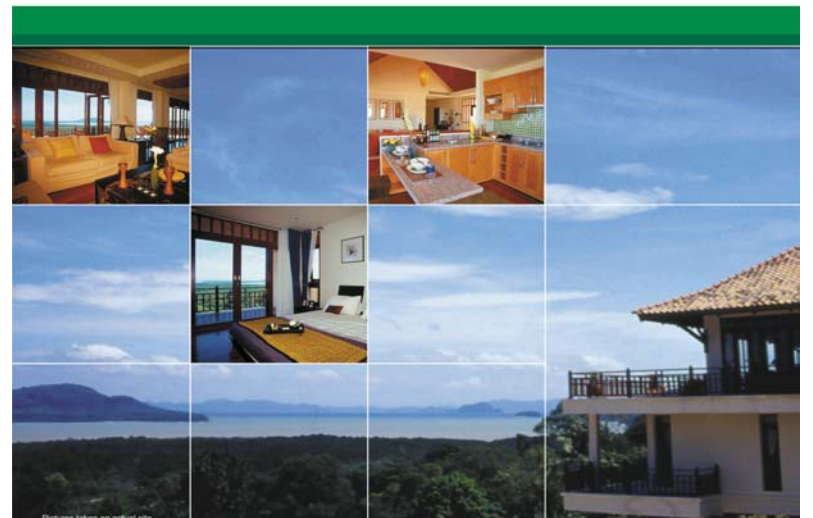
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Gardening

with Bloomin' Bert

An egg-ceptional bloomer

I don't remember a great deal about my formative school-days. After all, those days were a long time ago now. I do remember a rather severe Year 2 teacher who insisted on beating one of my classmates daily; I also remember having to wear shorts in the depths of winter. Neither of these was particularly a problem – that's just the way it was.

Safety education wasn't big back then, either. Funnily enough, one of the few dangerous episodes I recall is a gardening-related incident. There was a huge laburnum tree growing in the garden neighboring our school and it overhung into the playground. Had it been there today, it would have been hacked back mercilessly, as the seeds it contains are rather poisonous.

The problem is that these seeds look very much like regular garden peas – they even

come in pods. They don't exactly come with a government health warning, although under current EU regulations that oversight will probably be resolved very soon.

One day I found one of the younger children at the school munching eagerly on these "peas", and rushed off to get a teacher, who immediately whisked the hapless little girl off to the hospital to get her stomach pumped. I don't think she ever forgave me for that, despite the fact that she would have been in dire straits otherwise.

The laburnum is extremely common in the UK, but the nearest we get to it here is the *cassia surattensis*, or *song baa daan* in Thai. Unfortunately, it's one of those plants for which the "experts" just can't seem to decide on a name – some of them have decided to give it a new name – *senna surattensis*. Thankfully, it already has one of the best alter-

native names imaginable – the scrambled egg tree.

It's not difficult to imagine why it has this alternative epithet, as it's festooned with bunches of small, bright yellow flowers on the ends of just about every branch, bunches that could very easily pass for scrambled eggs when seen from a distance. Somebody would have to be extremely enthusiastic with the wok though, as there are huge numbers of these flowers per branch, and thousands per tree. Certainly a few breakfasts.

The flowers appear almost continually, but are particularly abundant after prolonged dry periods, when they produce prodigious amounts of pollen. As the rainy season is now behind us, we're approaching the time of the year when the scrambled egg tree starts to show its true colors – and it really is a bit of a show-off.

Even the leaves are distinctive. They appear uniformly, in pairs, on opposite sides of the branches. The leaves line up in formations with almost military precision.

In Phuket, the scrambled egg tree is probably most commonly seen along roadsides, just minding its own business, sitting on the verges. It requires little in the way of care or maintenance, and will continue to look impressive even if you do absolutely nothing to it. It will even thrive in the sunniest of spots and in the most nutrient-deprived soil imaginable. Actually, I'm not sure if there's anything you could possibly do to harm this thing once it's established. It's a survivor.

There are some wonderful examples of the *cassia surattensis* on the roads around the lake at Nai Harn. I can't believe that anyone has tended those trees since they first appeared, which is serious testament to their durability.

In many other parts of the world, scrambled egg trees grow



The yellow blossoms of the scrambled egg tree, or *song baa daan* in Thai, are a common sight along Phuket roadsides.

to around three or four meters high. It must feel particularly at home here in Phuket, as some of the Nai Harn trees have got to be over eight meters in height. Like the rest of us, it's made itself very much at home here.

You don't even need to prune the scrambled egg tree. Unlike many of its relatives in the plant world, it won't get leggy or start to look a bit unkempt and scruffy if you allow it to grow wild – it will continue to behave itself and produce showers of golden-yellow flowers.

Its closest relatives are called shower trees, from the golden shower tree to rainbow showers, with hybrids in pink and

apricot, and shades of yellow.

At certain times of the year, all species produce brown flattened seedpods which initially resemble the peas in a pod that the girl in my primary school enjoyed so much. The Thai version of the laburnum comes without an EU warning though – isn't that one of the many reasons why some of us are here?

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Property Gazette

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condo for sale with freehold title. Property has a fantastic view, measures 92sqm and is priced at 2.2 million baht, payable in instalments. 1.2 million baht initial payment, the remaining 1 million baht transferred at the Land Office. Financing available. Pls contact for info. Tel: 09-4740227. Email: chotip_5@hotmail.com

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KAMALA HOUSE

90 sq wah with full title, two bedrooms, aircon, sat TV, large kitchen and living room, and big garden. Located in a sought after area of Kamala. 3.7 million baht. Pls contact for details. Tel: 01-6064649.

LAND FOR SALE

4 rai with seaview for sale at Kho Yao Yai; just 100 meters from the beach. Price: 4 million baht. Pls call for details. Tel: 01-6078567.

FULL VIEW OF OCEAN, KALIM



Panoramic view of Patong Bay and the sunset. One rai in Kalim, power and water available. 3-min walk to the beach. Price: 10 million baht. Pls contact Phuket LandSearch for more info. Tel: 076-290509, 076-340348. Email: sales@phuketland.com

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House for sale at Kata Beach, near the sea. Please contact for more details. Tel: 076-284065, 06-5958512, 01-9704638. Email: nalumana@phuket.ksc.co.th



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Property Gazette



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Newspaper Direct Co., Ltd is a young international distribution company. We distribute international newspapers from 52 countries all over Thailand to hotels and subscribers. We are urgently looking for an Office Manager to be in charge of the entire office in Phuket.

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- Female, Thai nationality, between 28 and 35 years old;
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- Good command of written and spoken English;
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wanted. 3 computer literate (MS Office) administrators with accounting skills and some English-language ability wanted for Khao Lak, Koh Samui and Koh Tao. Please contact for details. Tel: 09-8145532. Email: ayasp55@hotmail.com

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for sale. Good location on Patong Beach, 60% local customers, easy to run. Rent is 15,000 baht/month. Pls contact for more info. Tel: 01-7356684, 04-1871939.

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Bulletins

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We are exploring the possibility of a small Archery Club on Phuket.

Interested latent Robin Hoods, with or without experience, should contact . . .

archery@lagunaphuket.com or telephone Little John at 076 271 006

Alcoholics Anonymous

is holding meetings in English at the following places:

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Mission Hospital
on Wed and Sun at 7 pm

Bangkok Phuket Hospital
on Fri at 7 pm

Patong

Patong Hospital
on Mon, Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun
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