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 More winners on page 10!
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More questions aired over aid



Deputy PM Vissanu Kreangam, center, inspects one of the new alarm towers on Patong Beach with Patong Mayor Pian Keesin (left), Vice-Governor Winai Buapradit (2nd from left) and Patong Deputy Mayor Chairat Sukbal (right).

By Sangkhae Leelanapaporn & Anongnat Sartpisut

PHUKET: Six months after the tsunami, local people in the stricken areas are still asking the same question: "When will we receive our compensation?"

The man given the job of answering that question, Deputy Prime Minister Vissanu Kreangam, appointed by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra as chairman of the Tsunami Victim Administration, came to the region on June 18 for a one-day tour of inspection and to hear local grievances.

Speaking at the Thai Tsunami Victim Identification Center near Chalong, he said, "Local people are still complaining to MPs and to the Prime Minister that they are not getting any help from the government."

"But when we check with government officers they say they are doing their jobs correctly. So we [have to] check again."

The Deputy PM said that there seems to be a difference of opinion between local officials and the general public in regards to the tsunami funding.

"When I was in Phang Nga,

Prime Minister Thaksin phoned me and told me to be tenacious in the matter of tsunami donation money. We've heard so much about this money and yet it's not being used."

"I have asked many government officers involved and they say they have received no requests for money. We will have to bring this matter before the Cabinet very soon," he said.

"The donation money should not be spent on basic infrastructure such as roads or schools. The money is meant for victims," he added.

Continued on page 2

Tsunami 'has caused increase in piracy'

By Sangkhae Leelanapaporn

PHUKET: The national commander of the Marine Police, Pol Maj Gen Suraphol Thuanthong, visited Phuket on June 18 to discuss ways of protecting vessels going through the Straits of Malacca from pirate attacks, which he said have become more frequent since the tsunami.

Gen Suraphol said, "We don't really have accurate statistics, because not all cases are reported, but I think the trend of attacks has been increasing since the tsunami, as poorer people struggle to recover from it."

On June 1, the Thai skipper of a tanker taking fuel from Rayong, on Thailand's Eastern Seaboard, to Krabi was captured in the Straits, a long-time haunt of pirates, and held for ransom.

The pirates initially demanded US\$1 million (about 40 million baht) for his release. Sources in the Marine Office told the Gazette he was freed after the ship's owners in Bangkok paid US\$40,000 (1.6 million baht).

Gen Suraphol, who neither confirmed nor denied the details about the ransom, said, "The captain is safe, but we need to take action to ensure that the sea is safe and peaceful."

"I don't want to see this happening again, even outside Thai territorial waters. We must raise awareness among fishermen and other people on the sea about the danger from pirates."

He continued, "It is crucial that we network with our neighbors, especially Malaysia and Indonesia, and especially on incidents that happen outside Thai waters. We are working with our neighbors to coordinate information, which may solve this problem."

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Questions over tsunami aid

From page 1

"We have to restore and give back to the locals what was taken away from them as soon as possible. We also have to renovate the tourism areas. For the next high season we should be ready with full accommodation [and] facilities," he added.

As for compensation paid to the families of those missing after the wave, K. Vissanu was unequivocal. "We will push to change the laws regarding missing persons and their families. At present things take far too long. The missing victims' relatives should be able to go ahead with compensation claims."

The day before the Deputy PM arrived, the new chief of the Phuket Provincial Office of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (ODPM), Boonchai Somjai, released figures showing that more than a billion baht has been spent in Phuket on tsunami relief.

K. Boonchai, who took up the position of Phuket ODPM chief just the day before his announcement, said that aid from the ODPM so far totaled more than 67 million baht and that the Tsunami Relief Fund had spent more than 71 million baht in providing relief.

The bulk of state aid has come through the many government departments, and thus far totals more than 706 million baht.

The Phuket Provincial Administration Organization has spent more than 41 million baht in relief aid, while NGOs and charities have put forward more than 196.4 million baht.

K. Boonchai also explained that the figures do not include the 2.05 million baht stolen from Phuket Provincial Hall on February 15.

Apichart Nooprod, Chief of the Finance Division of the Phuket Provincial Financial Office, has been charged in connection with the theft. He has denied any wrongdoing and is awaiting trial. (See Between the Lines, page 21.)



Another 'Love Phuket' winner

The latest winner in the *Gazette's* "We Love Phuket" campaign, Arunvalaya Raess, collects her prize of a round of golf at the Phuket Country Club, from Phatsara "Yui" Raktammakit of the *Gazette's* Classified Advertising team.

Each week the *Gazette* prints the license plate numbers of six cars that have been spotted carrying "We Love Phuket" stickers. Check page 10 to see whether your car number is among them. If it is, you're a winner!

Penang expert advises on restoration

PHUKET CITY: City authorities have been given advice on preserving and enhancing historic Phuket old town by an expert in heritage and conservation from Penang.

Dr Gwynn Jenkins, a Penang-based British consultant in architectural heritage and cultural anthropology, met last week with Deputy Mayor Sornsiri Koopongsakorn and leading members of the municipality's public works department to share with them what she has learned from observing the renaissance of Penang's historic Georgetown.

During another meeting at Phuket Art Gallery on Thalang Road, she put her ideas to people who live in the historic buildings around Thalang Rd, Yaowarat Rd and Dibuk Rd. She also met with local architects.

Dr Jenkins told the *Gazette* that Georgetown could provide a template for what should – and should not – be done with the

buildings in the oldest part of Phuket City.

She said, "I have seen both good and bad repair of old buildings in Penang, and [in my talks] I gave examples of [both]. I think they could be used as examples for any new development in Phuket."

An example of what Dr Jenkins hopes can be achieved in Phuket is the Moa Marut Clinic on Thalang Rd. She said, "The clinic has a very beautiful design. I think the young architect either clearly understands or has learned to look at and appreciate [this architecture], to think about all aspects of design and make them modern."

Park completion delayed

PHUKET CITY: Because of a change of plan, part of a 40-million-baht park being built in honor of HM Queen Sirikit remains a muddy wasteland five months after the main part was finished.

Under the original plans, three rai of the 10-rai site, on the south side of Dibuk Rd, was earmarked for a new provincial treasury building.

However, Governor Udomsak Uswarangkura felt it would be better if the three rai were left open and landscaped, rather than built upon.

Thailand opens new consulate on Langkawi

By Gazette Staff

PHUKET: In a drive to promote relations between Thailand and Malaysia, a Thai consulate opened on the Malaysian island of Langkawi, just south of the Thai border, on June 10.

The consulate's opening was chaired by the Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kantathi Suphamong, and Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, who is known to have a particular affection for the island where, decades ago, he practiced medicine.

Sihasak Phuanketkeow, Director General of Information

of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told the *Gazette* that the consulate should make life a lot easier for regular "visa runners" and commuters between Thailand and Malaysia.

He said, "There is no Tourism Authority of Thailand office in Langkawi, so the Thai consulate will make life a lot more comfortable for tourists who want information about traveling within Thailand. At the same time we can take better care of Thai residents in Langkawi."

K. Sihasak added, "It's an improvement in terms of tourism destination links, and will be useful to the people who visit southern Thailand, especially Phuket, then continue on to Langkawi."

"We have been discussing plans to link the two destinations ever since Dr Mahathir was Prime Minister. Having a Thai consulate on Langkawi could help make these plans come to fruition."

He did not address the lack of direct air services between Phuket and Langkawi. Currently, the quickest route involves a dogleg through Kuala Lumpur.

More facilities for those planning "visa hops" will become available in July when the first phase of the Treasure Island casino and resort complex opens on two Burmese islands near Ranong.

The 3.5-billion-baht investment by the Singaporean DP Group of Companies will eventually see a massive complex built that will include two casinos, more than 400 guest rooms, and a marina for 50 yachts. It will also have Burmese immigration facilities.

Meanwhile, tourists from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan are being exempted from paying visa fees for Thailand as part of the ongoing attempt to revive tourism after the tsunami.

In addition to the government waiving the 1,000-baht visa fee until October this year, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is working with Thai Airways to put together a 3,500-baht mid-week package including round-trip flights from Bangkok to Phuket or Krabi, two nights' accommodation and airport transfers.

Hotels in Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi and Trang are being invited to join the promotion.

Suwalai Pinpradab, Director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand's office in Phuket, told the *Gazette* that it was hoped these initiatives would attract more mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and Hong Kong tourists to come to the Andaman provinces.



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IN BRIEF

Man drowns while fishing

RAWAI: Chartchai Chumkaew, 27, from Nakhon Sri Thammarat, drowned on June 17, apparently after being sucked into the sea while fishing near Nai Harn Beach. His body was found two days later by a scuba diving team.

K. Chartchai reportedly went fishing among the rocks at Ao Sane Bungalows near Nai Harn Beach. It is thought that a large swell pulled him off the rocks and into the sea. His family and friends searched for him in vain.

Pol Maj Chana Suttimat of Chalong Police Station said on June 20, "The diving team found him yesterday at noon. We sent his body to Wachira Phuket Hospital and have determined that he died by drowning."

Maj Chana added that a Japanese tourist nearly drowned at Kata Beach on the same day, but was saved by a Phuket Provincial Administration Organization (*OrBorJor*) rescue team using jet-skis.

May sees decrease in road fatalities

PHUKET CITY: Official figures from Wachira, Thalang and Patong hospitals, as well as Phuket International and Ruam-paet private hospitals show 10 people died while on motorcycles on Phuket's roads during May.

In addition, two people were killed in accidents involving cars they were in.

The figures represent a decrease of 45% on those for April when 22 people died in Phuket – 18 on motorcycles and three in cars, with one pedestrian fatality.

The hospital records also show that during May, 1,045 people were injured in road accidents. Of these, 950 were on motorbikes, 79 were in cars, 14 were on bicycles and two were on foot.

Repairs start on tsunami-hit roads

PHUKET: Work has started on a 32-million-baht project to resurface a major road damaged in the tsunami.

In addition to resurfacing Route 4233, which runs from Surin to Kata through Kamala, Kalim, Patong and Karon, workers will also install anti-landslide measures, and replace power cables damaged in the tsunami.

Phuket Highways Office engineer Tanit Sakiya said on June 17 that the landslide protection measures would consist of three-meter high boxes made from wire netting and filled with stones, then overlaid with soil and planted with grass.

K. Tanit said construction had started on June 14, and should be finished in September.

As oil prices rise, govt wants against 'hoarding'

PHUKET: The Phuket office of the Department of Internal Trade has warned against hoarding of fuel after the price was increased on June 14 by a further 0.40 baht a liter.

Officers at the department are worried that people may try to stockpile fuel in case the price rises still further. But, said the office, such stockpiles are a fire risk.

Individuals caught hoarding fuel could be fined up to 10,000 baht, while gas station

operators found to be buying fuel now and hoarding it to sell when the price rises again, face fines of up to 140,000 baht or up to seven months in jail, or both.

Consumers can report traders who hoard fuel, or who try to sell it for more than the set price, by calling Tel: 1569.

The 40-satang price rise, brought in on June 14 by the state oil company PTT, raised the price of fuel at gas stations to 18.99 baht

a liter for diesel, 21.14 baht for 91-octane gasoline and 22.94 baht a liter for 95-octane gasoline.

The government has warned that further increases may be on the way, as the price of oil on international markets continues to rise and the dollar, the currency used for oil trades, strengthens against other currencies, including the baht.

– Ananya Hongsa-ngiam

Governor airs ideas for boosting Phuket

By Athiga Jundee

PHUKET CITY: Six months after the tsunami, Governor Udomsak Usarangkura has said he is hoping to turn the first anniversary of the disaster into a major public relations coup for the island.

At his weekly CEO Governor's meeting, Gov Udomsak recently unveiled a "wish list" of promotional events aimed at attracting the world's attention.

An international beach volleyball competition, a property show, and cancellation of national park entry fees were all ideas put forward by the Governor.

He said, "The volleyball teams could coordinate with airline companies who, in turn, could fly in the teams and spectators."

"There are many businesses that are willing to help boost tourism in Phuket by reducing the price of their products. For example, airlines and hotels have slashed their rates by introducing local low-cost package deals."

"We, representing the public sector, should cooperate to help bring more tourists to Phuket."

He explained that a property show would attract upper-end tourists who would then invest in land and real estate.

Gov Udomsak also recommended that the island copy Chiang Mai's "Night Safari" project, and invited the private sector to invest in Khao Pra Taew National Park.

Panomphol Thummacharniyom, President of the Phuket Professional Guides Association, agreed that Phuket is offering many promotions but also said that excessively high taxi and tuk-tuk fares could spoil all the good that low-cost promotions do.

He explained that many tourists have complained that, although they had booked low-cost package holidays, when they used local transport they were forced to pay exorbitant prices.

...and Japanese club does some boosting of its own



Thinking 'happy' thoughts: Phuket Japanese Association President Kazushi Miyashita (2nd from right) and the TAT's Suwalai Pinpradab (in red).

PHUKET CITY: The number of Japanese tourists visiting Phuket is recovering – albeit slowly because of misperceptions and cultural sensitivity about visiting the tsunami disaster region.

To give the island's image a boost in Japan, a "Japanese Love Thais" festival was due to be held June 25 at the Royal Phuket City Hotel.

Phuket Japanese Association President Kazushi Miyashita said the March Japanese arrivals figure of 5,000 was only about 30% of last year's figures for the same month.

While low, however, the figure is still an improvement on the almost complete lack of visitors from Japan in the months immediately after the tsunami.

"I think the reason that more people aren't visiting Phuket is encapsulated in a Japanese saying: 'When people die, we stay home and mourn the dead,'" he explained.

He added that he hoped the one-day festival would help convince Japanese people that there is no longer any reason to feel guilty about coming to Phuket.

The event will feature traditional shows, games and even a chance for women to have themselves photographed wearing kimonos.

Mr Miyashita said that about half of the 100 or so Japanese-run businesses in Phuket have closed. They include restaurants, tour agencies, dive companies and language schools.

E-passports available to all Thais

PHUKET: Thais will be able to get new E-passports from passport offices in Bangkok, Khon Kaen, Chiang Mai and Haad Yai from August 1. Those who want them earlier can apply now at the Department of Consular Affairs, Chaengwathana Rd, Bangkok.

The holder of a new passport, instead of waiting in long lines at Immigration, will simply walk to an automatic gate and insert the passport, which is then scanned using an integrated circuit. Provided there is no problem with the passport, the gate will then open.

An official told the *Gazette* that no precise date has been set for the installation of scanner gates at Phuket International Airport, but that it will be "soon".

New Zealander's death 'suicide'

PHUKET CITY: The body of a 45-year-old New Zealander was discovered in a room at Phuket Merlin Hotel on June 19, in what police say was a case of suicide.

Terrance Hicks from Auckland, New Zealand, was found dead, surrounded by discarded pill containers, Pol Lt Thivakorn Kongpeth of Phuket City Police Station told the *Gazette*.

Investigators estimate that

Mr Hicks took 60 pills, among them antihistamine and tranquilizer drugs, causing his death. On a table by the bed was a note saying, "Please dispose of my body by fire [cremation] in Thailand."

Lt Thivakorn said, "We will contact the New Zealand Embassy to get in touch with the deceased's relatives. There are no pathologists here, so we will send it to Bangkok for autopsy."

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Queer News

A sticky end

BANGKOK: A life-insurance salesman was found dead on June 16, his nostrils and lips sealed shut with super glue, in what his family believes was suicide.

Pol Lt Col Mongkol Nanthajit, an inspector at Thung Mahamek Police Station in Bangkok, said Komkrit Chujan, 28, was found dead in his bedroom at 7 am by his younger brother, Thossaporn.

An empty tube of super glue was found near Komkrit's body, along with two pieces of paper and 1,500 baht in cash.

The first note said "This is all I have, take it all," and the second note read "Don't call it suicide, suicides are not entitled to compensation."

Komkrit was found lying on his bed with his lips glued together and his nostrils filled with adhesive.

His mother, Yuwadee Chujan, 49, said Thossaporn found 500 baht in his wallet and, thinking that the money had come from Komkrit, went to Komkrit's bedroom to ask him why he had given him so much. It was then that he found his brother's body.

The mother speculated that the first note might have been written for Komkrit's sister, who borrowed money from him.

The second note, K. Yuwadee believed, advised her not to tell the insurance company of the circumstances of Komkrit's death.

Col Mongkol said the evidence found in the bedroom indicated that Komkrit had taken his own life.

"I've been a policeman for 20 years, but I have never seen this kind of suicide," he said.

Source: *The Nation*

WEEDING OUT

The past couple of years have seen considerable tightening of the laws relating to smoking, with grisly pictures being printed on packs of cigarettes, a ban on smoking in most public areas and, coming soon, a ban on shops putting cigarettes on display.

How effective has this been? The *Gazette's* SANGKHAEELELANAPAPORN and STEPHEN FEIN check out the current state of play.

Despite having some of the strictest tobacco control regulations in the world, Thailand is still home to an estimated 10 to 13 million smokers. Despite a series of aggressive anti-smoking measures put in place by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), the number appears to have remained the same in recent years.

The reason? For each smoker who manages to kick the habit, on average, there is a new recruit lured into nicotine addiction, most of these being teenage boys who pick up the habit because of peer pressure, seductive marketing or the desire to "look cool".

To protect the health of non-smokers who have to mix with as many as 13 million nicotine addicts, the government in 1992 passed the Non-Smokers' Health Protection Act, which banned smoking in most "public places", defined in the Act as "a place or any vehicle where the public is entitled to enter".

It fell to the MoPH to flesh out the details of the Act, through a series of ministerial regulations.

Initially, the ministry allowed restaurants, bars and other entertainment venues to provide limited smoking sections for their guests. But a new set of ministerial regulations announced in 2002 essentially did away with this, banning smoking in almost all air-conditioned public places.

But the success of any law lies both in the willingness of the public to comply with it and, failing that, the ability of authorities to punish offenders – in this case by issuing them with fines up to the legal maximum of 2,000 baht.

The *Gazette* reviewed the success of the legislation with one of Thailand's leading anti-smoking advocates, Dr Prakrit Vateesatokit.

Dr Prakrit heads the Thai Action on Smoking and Health

Foundation and works closely with the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, a semi-autonomous body established in 2001 with annual revenue of about US\$35 million (1.4 billion baht), derived from 2% of the excise taxes on tobacco and alcohol.

The two groups were instrumental in establishing new tobacco control measures that are all too familiar to smokers, such as graphic warning labels on cigarette packets. They also successfully pushed for a new restriction, starting in September, that will force retailers to keep tobacco products under the counter.

Dr Prakrit told the *Gazette* he was not satisfied with current enforcement of the smoking ban.

"Enforcement is still a problem, especially outside of Bangkok. In the capital the law seems to be more 'self-enforcing', by which I mean that people are more likely to comply with it voluntarily," he said.

He added that, contrary to popular belief, the ban still doesn't apply to every air-conditioned public place – with traditional Thai massage parlors being one notable exception.

Another problem he mentioned is that MoPH officials cannot fine offenders directly.

"Actually, the ministry sends out a number of employees to enforce this law, but it's a bit complicated, because if they spot someone [smoking in the wrong place] they have to call the police to issue a fine.

"So what usually happens is that they just warn people and ask for their cooperation. If they [still] fail to comply, then they get the police," he said.

Dr Prakrit added that the police do not routinely enforce the law, but are willing to do so in certain cases – such as part of a public relations exercise.

Following His Majesty the King's birthday address last De-



cember, in which HM expressed concern about the number of teenagers taking up smoking, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra banned smoking in all government buildings.

"Civil servants must lead by example and refrain from smoking," he said.

Charged with the responsibility of carrying out the government's tough anti-smoking measures is Dr Samarn Suttrakul, who heads the MoPH's Tobacco and Alcohol Control Group.

He told the *Gazette* that figures supplied by the National Statistics Office indicate a slight overall decrease in the number of Thai smokers since the anti-smoking drive came in, but an alarming rise in the number of smokers in certain demographic groups, including teenage girls.

About two people an hour die in Thailand from tobacco-related illnesses such as cancer, heart disease and respiratory ailments, he said.

He also thinks that the need to contact police to issue fines to violators of the smoking ban has limited its effectiveness and caused confusion.

"I think it would be better

if, in the future, public health officials could issue fines directly and then work together with smokers to try and get them to quit as part of a more community-based approach," he said.

Dr Samarn noted that the smoking ban has actually been on the books for 13 years, but that its enforcement was stepped up two years ago after responsibility

for it was shifted from the MoPH's Department of Medical Services to its Department of Disease Control.

He pointed out that the government's current approach to tobacco control involves pushing for higher taxes on tobacco products, limiting points of sale and limiting advertising – as well as the ban

on smoking in public and increased treatment of nicotine addiction.

But even in Phuket's largest medical facility, enforcement of the ban has proven difficult.

Dr Jessada Jongpaiboonpattana, Director of Wachira Phuket Hospital, told the *Gazette* that in 2002 the MoPH began enforcing a ban on smoking in hospitals, both public and private, but that this still does not include private offices or

'Enforcement is still a problem, especially outside of Bangkok. In the capital the law seems to be more "self-enforcing".'

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THE SMOKERS



ban on smoking doesn't apply just to air-conditioned areas but covers the entire grounds," he said.

He added that, as a public-awareness exercise, the hospital stepped up enforcement of the ban on May 31, World No Tobacco Day, but that police taking part fined violators only a token 50 baht.

"Among doctors at the hospital, almost the entire staff is non-smoking," he said.

"We have about 60 doctors here, and I believe that only about 1% of them smoke. So I think we have had good cooperation in this regard," he said.

He added that he thought the hospital should start removing ashtrays from throughout the facility, with the exception of a single ashtray near the main reception area so that visitors could put out their cigarettes before entering.

In the future, the hospital plans to hire only non-smoking personnel, he said, though he conceded that there could be exceptions for certain individuals, such as doctors with unique abilities and talents.

The hospital is also planning to set up a clinic to help wean smokers off their addiction, he said.

Among foreign visitors who smoke, Thailand has long been viewed as "tobacco-friendly," with relatively cheap tobacco products and somewhat less contempt for smoking in public than in most Western countries.

If change is to come, therefore, it will probably have to result from a shift in public attitudes.

As with so many other public health and safety issues in Thailand, leaving enforcement of the no-smoking ban in the hands of the police is unlikely to bring about widespread compliance any time soon.



A sign at Wachira Phuket Hospital warns of the penalty for smoking in the wrong place. In reality, very few people have been punished.

private patient rooms in the hospital.

He added that signs have been posted around the hospital warning the public of the smoking ban and the maximum 2,000-baht fine that could be imposed on violators – be they employees, patients or visitors.

"I warn my staff that if I see them smoking in the hospital I will fine them the full 2,000 baht, but so far we haven't caught anyone smoking. I admit, however, that in reality our staff only warn people to stop when they see them smoking," he said.

"We pity smokers. That's why we usually just give them warnings rather than contact the police to have them fined," he said.

He added, however, that the hospital is currently preparing to become more strict in enforcing the ban.

"We are getting serious now and will soon put up big signs to remind people that the

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By Anongnat Sartpisut

On June 5 – World Environment Day – Phuket Governor Udomsak Uswarangkura presented Naret Sakulyim with a certificate recognizing him as the person who had done most to conserve the environment in Phuket during the previous year.

K. Naret says it was nice to be acknowledged, but he isn't really interested in awards or recognition. "I love trees, and I love to plant them, and I will do my best to continue to plant them, whether I get a reward or not," he says.

Born in Samut Songkhram, K. Naret moved to Phuket with his family in 1973. He says he planted his first trees – mangroves – in 1986, on Koh Sireh, and that he was inspired to do it after visiting India and Bangladesh as a fisherman and being struck by how few trees he saw there.

A trip to Kanchanaburi province was similarly thought-provoking. "I didn't see many trees at all, but I did see tables and chairs made of concrete molded into the shape of tree trunks and stumps," he remembers.

"I asked the local people why there were so many of these tables and chairs and they told me it was because once all the trees had gone, they realized how much they missed them, and that's why they chose tables and chairs that looked like trees."

In 1989, K. Naret made several visits to Khao Rang Nok – the smaller and lesser-known "sister" of Khao Rang – in Phuket City to meditate; while there he learned from residents how the forest around the city was being cleared to make way



Naret Sakulyim among his beloved trees: 'I think we should put nature first, ahead of development.'

THE BRANCH MANAGER

for pineapples, rubber and other crops.

Since then he has been planting trees around the city – on Koh Sireh, on Khao Toh Sae and in Kathu – but the main focus has been Khao Rang Nok.

The tree planting there did not start well, however. K. Naret did not know which trees were suited to the soil in the area – which is only a meter deep in places – and often he chose the wrong types, and they died within

months of him planting them.

He said, "My friend and I would drive up the hill on a motorbike twice a week to plant trees. I'd say we planted 10,000 trees; sometimes they survived, sometimes they didn't."

These days, some of K. Naret's trees are donated – by temples and public bodies and the like – but he still often pays for them himself.

Many times, K. Naret found himself fighting against land speculators and developers, before he eventually secured the land he is planting at present, which belongs to Khao Rang Nok temple.

The land is now populated by all kinds of trees, including Burma Padauk (*pradoo* in Thai), crepe myrtle (*tabak*); earleaf acacia (*krathin-narong*) and Golden Shower (*ratchaphruek*).

K. Naret acknowledges that some people may think he is a bit crazy, but it doesn't really bother him – even his family did not understand what he was trying to do when he started planting trees 20 years ago – and he has no intention of stopping his planting activities.

And he believes his work is now more important than ever. He said, "Phuket is undergoing a property and construction boom, even though this is a tourism province that is marketed very much on the basis of the beauty of its nature.

"I think we should put nature first, ahead of development. If we must have development, then the authorities should restrict it to certain zones, and have zones for nature, too. We need nature; we don't want to see nothing but buildings."

He continued, "It is humans who have destroyed most of the trees here. There is space to plant more trees, but it is difficult to persuade people to plant and protect them, not only because they can't see the need for the trees, but also because you need patience to take care of them.

"But it has to be done."

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Bleak outlook for Deep South

Intelligence officials believe that terrorists are planning to scale up violence in the Deep South, especially in Narathiwat Province.

Violence has intensified in the region in recent weeks, with terrorists resorting to beheading Buddhists, threatening Muslims and planting bombs inside motorcycles and cars. Security officials also found weapons being moved in Narathiwat's Yi-ngor District and border areas.

Pattani Governor Cherdpana Songkhla said he instructed the state agencies under him to inspect all vehicles parked at state buildings and to keep records of everyone who contacts government departments.

Everything is negotiable: The dispute over 23 million baht in lottery winnings may soon be resolved, with the victim of an apparent scam and the alleged perpetrators coming closer to a compromise.

Praiwan Hemsamak, who was allegedly conned into handing over her winning ticket to the ticket seller and her associates, said she would withdraw her complaint against the eight suspects if they gave her 18 million baht. She had initially demanded 20 million baht of the winnings.

Kittikachorn Chaleeputhaphong, the lawyer for the suspects, said his clients were willing to pay 13 million baht to bring the case to an end. He offered only 10 million in the first round of negotiations.

Corpulent corporals: Bangkok's Metropolitan Police Bureau will put 85 traffic policemen who have waistlines over 40 inches on strict weight-loss programs. The bureau was able to identify officers with weight



Mr Buffalo Universe: Num, a 780-kilo swamp buffalo, beat 60 rivals at the 11th National Buffalo Festival in Surin to be awarded the Best Buffalo Overall title. After winning the prize at the National Buffalo Festival last month, the three-year-old animal's value shot up to Bt300,000 – 20 times the normal price – from hopes about his breeding potential.

problems after check-ups were conducted on the city's 4,150 police officers.

In the first two-week stage, all 85 heavyweights will participate in daily exercise sessions and receive special meals and dieting tips. Those who are losing weight will continue on the same regimen for the remaining two weeks of the program.

Participants who show no change after two weeks will be admitted to hospital, where they will do yoga, aerobics and engage in other flab-fighting activities. Officers who find it impossible to lose weight will be re-assigned to desk jobs.

Jumbo support: Chang Beer has renewed its multi-million pound sponsorship contract with English Premiership club Everton, the most lucrative deal in the outfit's history.

Although the value of the contract was not disclosed at a press conference at Imperial Queen's Park Hotel, it was expected the Premiership side would receive around 111.5 million baht a year for three years.

After the success of the one-year sponsorship last season, Everton, who never have been relegated from the Premiership since its establishment in 1992, believed the deal would bear further fruit and help them to expand their interests in the region.

Green light for graft: Former National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC) member Wichianchot Sukchotrat said Thailand is likely to see an upsurge in corruption cases this year because the anti-graft agency was rendered impotent after its members were forced to resign en masse, having been

found guilty of malfeasance in issuing themselves a hefty pay raise.

Before the NCCC was suspended, it had about 6,000 unresolved cases on its books.

"Even if the new NCCC could begin functioning right away, it would take [more than a decade] to clear the backlog on the charitable assumption that it could resolve at least one case per day," he said.

Corruption will continue to increase if the pay structure for civil servants remains as it is, he added.

"Dishonesty is inevitable when the salary for a C-1 official is 4,700 baht and a kilo of pork costs about 100 baht," said the former graft-buster.

Hazing horror: Freshman Patiparn Inyabodhi, 21, decided to leave Rajamangala University of Technology's Nakhon Ratchasima campus after being injured in initiation rituals that involved a "penis tug of war", burning of pubic hair and being forced to eat dog meat.

"I just couldn't bear it any longer. Fortunately my parents understood and allowed me to quit this university," K. Patiparn said after being treated at a hospital in his hometown of Buri Ram. He said most of his classmates were also injured during the activities, while university lecturers ignored the cruelty taking place.

"In a penis tug of war, no matter if you win or lose, you get hurt," he noted.

Alien plagues: The Disease Control Department (DCD) is closely monitoring the spread of malaria, tuberculosis, syphilis, HIV and elephantiasis in provinces where immigrant workers

from neighboring countries are working.

"These are serious diseases spread from immigrant workers, who are carriers," the DCD's Dr Thawat Suntharajan said.

He said employers must register immigrant workers so that the Public Health Ministry can monitor and control the spread of diseases. Alien workers will also be required to undergo medical check-ups before employers will be granted licenses to hire them.

The rise in the number of malaria patients is most alarming as it has spread rapidly to Thais, who now comprise 65% of cases in the country, he said.

Broadcast news: At an "Artists for Internal Security" seminar organized at Government House, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra urged radio disc jockeys, artists and actors to use their prominent positions to promote energy conservation.

"It's the national agenda. Please tell people about energy savings. If we don't help each other, this will be our weak spot. We need to cut expenses, increase income and expand people's opportunities to earn a living. We can do that through energy conservation," he said.

"The weak point of society is the information system and the ability to analyze the information. Thus, opinions expressed are based on feelings, social groups or political motives... We have to prioritize national interests so things become much easier for people to understand," he said.

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

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B5bn plan to develop Koh Tao

The Governor of Surat Thani is forging ahead with plans to make Koh Tao an island of world renown. Vichit Vichaisarn recently applied for a staggering 5-billion-baht budget to spend on Koh Tao next year.

With so many people from around the world already visiting it, he sees great potential in the island, but also claims to understand that developing the island could cause serious problems without appropriate planning.

The Governor has identified nine areas that need to be addressed urgently including providing wind-driven electricity, building a 200,000-tonne water storage tank, transporting garbage to Samui for incineration, building a 10-bed public hospital and protecting the island's fragile forests.

The drug issue will also be addressed, especially the sale and consumption of marijuana, most of which finds its way to the island from Samui, Koh Phangan and Chumphon.

People power: The people of Nathon recently presented their ideas for the further development of Samui's port town to the Mayor

of Samui, Waragorn Rattanak. Community leader Suwit Nanthaphanit announced his fellow citizens' opposition to the reclamation of 500 rai of land off the coast of Nathon.

Most people think the amount of land is too large an area, and K. Suwit asked for an appointment with the Mayor to discuss the issue and present residents' reservations.

He stressed that the conflict is not to do with the concept of land reclamation, but rather with the size of the planned area. K Suwit also offered a number of other suggestions to help Nathon develop.

The first was a bypass road that would remove the need for

motorists to go through the town when traveling north to Mae Nam or south to Namuang. The road could also be constructed to act as a dyke, to prevent runoff from nearby hills causing flooding.

A beautification program was also suggested as Nathon is one of the gateways to Samui, and therefore the first place many tourists see.

Also, K. Suwit suggested that the town should be "zoned", as has happened in other parts of the island and the country at large.

Mayor Waragorn said that he was happy to receive the raft of suggestions direct from local citizens, and promised to act on them and apply for budgets to fulfil those deemed appropriate and necessary.

FROM THE GULF OF THAILAND



By Commander Sammy Swan



NO THANKS: Led by community leader Suwit Nanthaphanit, Samui residents recently voiced their disapproval of a plan to reclaim 500 rai of land off the coast at Nathon (pictured), saying that the amount of land to be reclaimed was too much.

It is as yet unclear which projects will receive immediate attention, but some will certainly be approved.

Getting the urban drift: According to local authority figures, who spoke on condition of anonymity, economic migrants from Phuket could soon cause problems on Koh Samui as increasing numbers of people switch from the west to the east coast to escape the continuing economic slump.

Public officials on Samui say that tourism is still suffering on the western side of the Isthmus of Kra, and that people now without secure work are looking to the nearest alternative, which for many is Koh Samui.

This could mean that jobs become scarce on Samui, which may affect the standard of living and the chances of employment for local people.

90th birthday party: Surat Thani City is preparing for its birthday celebrations. Pattanam Somboonpong, the Deputy Governor of the province, will manage the organization of several events beginning on 29 July, the date when King Rama VI gave Surat Thani its name in 1915.

Surat Thani means "city of good people" and, according to the authorities, such a day deserves a party.

The slogan for the celebrations will be the catchy "Open the doors to the city of good people".

Held from July 27 to 30, the events will include competitions and contests, as well as street parades with local citizens dressing up in costumes from the city's early days.

Street vendor scheme: Samui Municipality, along with Krung Thai and other banks, are joining forces to provide opportuni-

ties for the island's poor. Surinya Yunan, a deputy to the Mayor of Samui, has started registering street vendors to provide them with some form of guarantee that can be used to apply for credit at local banks.

Praveht Viengvira, Manager of a local branch of Krung Thai Bank, said the program is aimed at vendors operating in places such as Nathon Pier and the Grandmother and Grandfather Rocks.

Altogether, 83 people have already registered, and they will be allowed to borrow money from one of the participating banks to upgrade their business.

The vendors will be monitored. If they do well and are able to repay their loans, they will be allowed to increase their credit limit.

Cdr Sammy Swan is a writer for Samui's community magazine.

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This week



CLOWNING AROUND: Claude Sauter, Resident Manager of the Cape Panwa Hotel, and one of the clowns from Australia's "Magic from an Esky" troupe of comic magicians, plus a junior spectator, take a break from a show at the Cape Panwa Hotel on June 12. The clowns performed a series of shows in Phuket, Phang Nga and Ranong, with proceeds going to helping victims of the tsunami.



SPEEDY RECOVERY: Finnish Ambassador to Thailand Lars Backstrom (2nd from right) and Timo Korhonen (2nd from left) of the Finnish Red Cross present a token key to the nine ambulances donated to nine hospitals in Phang Nga Province to help improve emergency medical response times throughout the province.



TWO FOR THE SLICE OF ONE: Linda Cumming (2nd from right) and Kata Thani Hotel Manager Uwe Lukas cut the cake as they celebrate their birthdays with a joint party at the Twinpalms Phuket resort on June 5. Mrs Cumming celebrated her 60th birthday, while Mr Lukas celebrated turning 46 years old.



SVENKSA BOUND: Suraphong Lookhanumanjao (center), President of Bangkok Phuket Hospital, with doctors and nurses from his hospital before they leave for Sweden, where they will join a Scandinavian Red Cross meeting as special guests to discuss how Thai medical teams treated people injured by the tsunami.



PARTY STARTER: Andaman Group (Thailand) Managing Director Thanaseth Kulveera-aree (front, left of center, in light blue shirt), and Hester Chew (front, right of center, in gray shirt), Chairman of the Andaman Group Executive Committee, join Oishi (Thailand) staff for their annual staff party, which was held recently at the Oishi restaurant at Index Living Mall on the bypass road.



PAPER TRIAL: Dulwich International College Year 11 students Orashun Sethichaiyen (right) and Mayo Kishimoto (2nd from right) try their hand at journalism at the *Phuket Gazette* as part of the school's work experience program, with Desk Editors Alison Winward (left) and Sam Wilkinson.

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Andrew Hewett's 11 idyllic years of living on Phi Phi Don were shattered in minutes when his home and business were obliterated by the tsunami.

Mr Hewett, 40, first came to the island as a backbreaker, learning to scuba dive in the coral reefs that have attracted divers from all over the world.

He stayed and worked in the dive business for five years, during which time he met and married Mayuree, or "Je".

Five years ago the couple started The Adventure Club, a tour business specializing in cliff diving, shark watching and trekking.

Mr Hewett's philosophy was to respect nature, and to teach tourists and locals alike that preservation of the environment was paramount to the survival of Phi Phi.

He was also trying to improve the poor reputation the locals had for not caring about the environment.

On the morning of December 26, he and K. Je were in the company office with their two children, aged 9 and 5.

Normally the kids would have been at home or at the beach, but they were enjoying their Christmas gifts at the office; an exception that saved their lives.

Mr Hewett had been out on an early-morning shark watch,

PICKING UP THE

The tsunami of December 26 and the resulting relief efforts have had a profound effect on the collective psyche of those communities hardest hit by the disaster.

It has pushed survivors and relief workers to their limits, both physically and mentally, adding stress and creating burdens that are too heavy for some to bear.

In times like these, certain individuals tend to come to the forefront, whether they be natural leaders or people who possess enormous reserves of courage and energy, or sometimes a little bit of both. Some of these people sacrifice their time and efforts for others as their own way of dealing with their personal loss; others are altruistic to assuage the survivor's guilt they suffer from.

Gazette Krabi correspondent **Gus Reynolds** met one such leader, Briton Andrew Hewett, who has been rallying people on the battered Phi Phi Islands.

and had returned to the shop – another stroke of luck; the office's proximity to the hillside would save the entire family.

When the Hewetts heard warnings of incoming waves, confusion reigned. People were running in every direction, some from one side of Tonsai Bay to the other, only to be confronted by a wave approaching from the other side.

"The wave from Yongkesem Bay on the opposite side of the pier was stronger," Mr Hewett recalls, but many people ran from the pier side only to be sand-

wiched between two walls of water.

Mr Hewett and his family ran 200 meters up the hillside, still unaware of exactly what was happening. The clear sunny day confused everyone; an incoming wall of water made no sense at all.

After the first tsunami had withdrawn, Mr Hewett returned to survey the wreckage of what just moments before had been his office and his children's play area. He had little time to ponder his fate, as he was immediately handed an unconscious woman.



Andrew Hewett: The product of 11 idyllic years wiped out in minutes by the tsunami.

His attempts to resuscitate her failed, and she perished in his arms. He had little time to catch his breath; just then, the second wave swept in.

He climbed to the roof of his office and watched the torrent wash away what the first wave had spared.

He spent the rest of the day ferrying food and water to those less fortunate than him, then returned to his home only to find it gone, flattened and washed out to sea.

Many days later, while scuba diving, he would discover his home submerged in the bay, still filled with his personal belongings and children's toys.

Although his home was gone and his business was de-

stroyed, Mr Hewett felt fortunate that he and his family were still alive. He spent the next two weeks going to hospitals and funerals and writing a business plan to clean up the bay.

With that plan he started approaching various groups to help sponsor the project, dubbed the Phi Phi Tsunami Dive Camp. This soon turned into a full-time job. "I knew my adventure business would be closed for a long time," he explained.

Initially, he met resistance as organizations were reluctant to donate to an individual, but once many of the aid groups and foundations came to Phi Phi and saw the work he was doing, they readily supported his efforts.

People were running in every direction, some from one side of Tonsai Bay to the other, only to be confronted by a wave approaching from the other side.

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PIECES ON PHI PHI



Left: Smiles all round from the volunteers helping Andrew Hewett clean up Phi Phi don. Below, some of the debris retrieved from the reefs.



Right, the raft from which volunteers dive to retrieve debris left by the tsunami.



He took his plan to PADI Project Aware, a program to teach people about conservation, which had funds available for tsunami-related projects. The Pacific Asia Travel Association was also receptive, and became one of his major backers.

The project officially began on February 18, 2005, with cleanup work just off the beach in Tonsai Bay. At that point Mr Hewett's group was funded only by private donations and he was having difficulties hiring staff. The initial operations were small; he strapped two kayaks together as a makeshift pontoon. Later, with additional funding, he was able to secure a real pontoon.

A shot in the arm for the program came when the French Red Cross, in conjunction with the French Embassy, funded 20 police officers expert in debris removal. They brought a large crane, so the focus of the work shifted to bringing up large, heavy debris from the bay. "We found intact homes and full buildings under the water," Mr Hewett related.

While they were there for only two weeks, the French group added a necessary impetus to Mr Hewett's project. His workforce grew, and with 30 Thai staff and foreign volunteers the group, under Mr Hewett's direction, started removing debris from the coral reefs. "Some of the reefs were heavily damaged, while others were in relatively good shape," he said.

With the rainy season looming, the team was under pressure to remove debris to save the remaining reefs. Priority was given to reefs in better condition, and with the use of sand dredges,

many of these reefs have been cleaned out already. Other, more difficult areas could take an additional two months to clear, he said.

Mr Hewett's goals are to make Phi Phi Don and the surrounding area cleaner than was the case before the tsunami. He wants to continue educating both visitors and residents about the need to do a better job in maintaining the environment.

During the interview with the *Gazette*, his phone rang constantly, and staff asked for guidance. The strain in his voice indicated his exhaustion; the job is

all-consuming.

After the meeting he was off to Phuket. "It seems like the only rest I get is on buses," he said. When asked how far he would continue to push himself, he replied, "Until the job's done."

Andrew Hewett, Project Coordinator, Phi Phi Tsunami Dive Camp, can be contacted by email at: andrew@hidef.com or visit: www.phi-phi-adventures.com


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WEDDING DRESSING

— and not just for the bride



A wedding invitation arrives. The good news is that a party is in the offing. The bad news is that the recipient is faced with the “problem” of deciding what outfit to wear, which accessories to choose and – for women – “What should I do with my hair and make up?”

It is a dilemma that can remain unresolved until just hours before the wedding, especially if the event is taking place in an imposing venue.

This being Thailand, silk is a practical – and popular – choice. There are so many colors and patterns of silk to choose from that even if two people turn up in the same style of outfit (the ultimate fashion fear), chances are that they will not have chosen the same fabric, so their “same-same” outfits will still look very, very different.

The work of some of the finest tailors in the land, along with a great deal of very expensive jewelry, was on display recently at one of Phuket's biggest weddings of this year, when former *Gazette* reporter Pantuda “Koy” Suksirisumphon married Akarasate “Geng” Jivavisitnont, of the prominent Gee Teng family.

By Sangkhae Leelanapaporn



Nearly 2,000 guests came to celebrate the wedding at the Phuja Nirvana Restaurant in Central Festival Phuket, enjoying the international food buffet and gathering either around the stage where the ceremonies took place, or watching on big screens dotted around the venue.

Sources said that the party, organized by Mirage Creation of Phuket, cost nearly 2 million baht, and the rumor spread that the groom had handed over 9,999,999 baht for K. Koy's hand in marriage. The couple are honeymooning in Europe.

Gazette staff invited to the wedding bash took the opportunity to record some of the guests' fashion choices, presented here.

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exterior outdoor

GAN
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Spa MAGIC

By Alison Winward

Aspara

Helen Mertalla's reasoning, after the Aspara Spa she managed at the Holiday Inn, Patong, fell victim to the tsunami, was simple: "Life must go on."

Although the spa itself was pretty much undamaged – Helen's office on a lower mezzanine floor ended up shin-deep in water, but the 14 treatment rooms were untouched – it was closed for three months while the hotel around it was repaired and refurbished.

The Busakorn wing of the Holiday Inn reopened on April 1. "It was nice to be back," remembers Helen. "Life must go on; the people were safe and the building was safe, so it was okay for us to face reality."

During the first few weeks, clients seemed to be as interested in the tsunami as they were in beauty therapies, but Helen was sanguine – she is from the Philippines, where, as she points out, there are many natural disasters.

The builders are still working around the hotel, but there are few reminders of December 26 during the short walk from the hotel entrance to the spa reception; there are, for example, holidaymakers in the swimming pool, not the fish Helen remembers from just after the tsunami.

Despite the glass cabinets of beauty products lining the walls, the reception area is more like that of a business than a spa, and that businesslike impression persists when my colleague and I enter our treatment room.

The walls are pale and clean, the floor tiles an unimaginative but cooling green; the furniture, such as it is, would not



The masseuses' uniforms may be reminiscent of nurses' gear, but the main point about Aspara is that it delivers a high-quality, gimmick-free treatment.

look out of place in any Holiday Inn anywhere in the world, and the cabinet where we store our clothes and the therapists place the lotions they will be using on us, is functional rather than fancy.

There are no gimmicks in the showers, either – they too are spotlessly clean, perfectly maintained and equipped with the minimum amount of fuss – but it is unusually easy to set the water temperature and pressure.

On the way back to our

treatment room, I notice the vanity counter, with its hairdryer and little packs of cotton buds, individually wrapped combs and other items invaluable for anyone wanting to ensure they leave the spa looking smart as well as refreshed.

Our therapists are Khun Natty (mine) and Khun Lee (my colleague's), who, like the other 10 therapists, have had six months of training in Singapore – Aspara is part of the Singapore-based Spacare group, which op-

erates nine spas around Asia.

K. Natty and K. Lee are perfectly groomed, but wear uniforms resembling those of American nurses – white trousers and tunics – rather than the Thai-style outfits so common in other spas.

Over two and a half hours, they give us each a "Top to Toe Spa Pleasures" package, comprising a body scrub, using Body Glow scrub imported from Switzerland; an hour of "soothing aromatherapy body massage",

using the Aspara's own "relaxing oil", and a one-hour facial using German Biodroga products.

Both of us agreed later that the combination of unfussy rooms, practical uniforms and no-nonsense approaches of K. Natty and K. Lee did make us feel at times that we were in hospital rather than a spa.

But we also agreed that this was in no way a bad thing, because hospitals are (usually) places of competency, efficiency – and results.

A few years ago there was a very successful ad campaign in Britain for a range of wood preservation products, based around the slogan, "It does exactly what it says on the tin."

It may seem inappropriate to link a spa to wood preservatives (although perhaps some people would disagree), but the message behind the slogan was that this was a high-quality product in simple packaging,

rather than a fancily-packaged low-quality one.

And it's the same with Aspara – the spa is in no way unattractive, but it is gimmick-free, and if you go there in search of smooth skin, a glowing complexion and a relaxed body, that's exactly what you'll get.

The Aspara spa, Holiday Inn Resort Phuket, Busakorn wing, 52, Thaweewong Rd, Patong Beach. Tel: 076 340608, Fax: 076 342951, email: aspara@phuket.ksc.co.th also internet: www.holiday.phuket.com/busakorn/spa.htm

The "Top to Toe Spa Pleasures Package" – body scrub, massage and European facial – 3,500 baht per person, plus tax and service charge; same package also available for two as "Harmony at the Aspara" for 6,400 baht, plus tax and service charge, per couple.

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Few nightspots in Phuket City have as clear-cut an image as Timber Hut. Quite simply, the brick and wood pub on Yaorawat Rd is the Big Daddy of downtown nightlife because it's been around longer than anyone else.

Still bopping as it approaches its 16th anniversary in September, Timber Hut has seen a lot of musicians come and go over the years.

Local guitar legend Boonkerd "Kurt" Tayangkachawana played here for years before moving to Safari Disco and on to his present roost at Zan-zibar.

Dutch saxman Gerard Corneilje was blowing here 10 years ago and Timber Hut's current house band, Eurasia, are holding their own very well in spite of their illustrious musical antecedents.

The Dr Who Tardis-like atmosphere of Timber Hut is due – in part – to its efficient use of space and floor levels.

For a building no bigger than a large English pub, it's remarkable how much atmosphere the place has when it's in full swing.

The trick is to get to Timber Hut early, well earlyish (just past 9 pm) in order to grab a table.

There are bars on each of the venue's two floors so there's no hassle getting drinks when the place fills up but the big difference between *arriba* and *abajo* is the auditory factor.

The pub's huge JBL speakers, slanting downward from mounts surrounding the stage help to keep the sound fuzz-free.

With the band's equipment in full cry, downstairs must

be one of the noisiest places in town, whereas the sound level upstairs is merely an ear-pounding roar. A happy roar, but still a roar.

The music? Eurasia cover Jimmy Cliff, Robbie Williams, Maroon 5 (who?) and Earth Wind & Fire. They also blast out Thai tunes for the audience to yell along with and fall over to.

Timber Hut: Boppin' on to Sweet Little Sixteen

The lads have been together for years, and their music leans more towards the clean-cut than distorted funk. Eurasia don't have the blues, so they don't play them. They also don't do long, self-indulgent guitar solos.

When Eurasia aren't playing, DJ Jak scratches and spins in a booth high above the stage.

It's a lot of fun to sit in a place, neck a few beers and chat with a friend or two, confident that those dreaded, oft-heard chords won't kick in, sending you running for the door; yes folks, there's no *Hotel California* at Timber Hut – just sweet pop numbers.

The drinks? A

small bottle of Heineken costs 90 baht with Singha priced at 70 baht. The cocktails are all around 150 baht.

The food? Most plates are southern Thai and cost between 60 and 130 baht with an exotic-sounding *Fried Chinese Ravvioll* (sic) weighing in at 100 baht.

The vibe? There's something about the dark-stained wooden floors and stairs and dim lighting that puts one at ease.

Timber Hut is intimate and vibrant at the same time.

A huge movie screen hangs above and behind the stage, showing completely irrelevant and mute footage of... well just

about anything, from *Tom & Jerry* to the American presidential primaries.

Unlike at discos on the west coast of Phuket, there's a marked absence of working girls at the bar or on the minuscule dance floor but the glamor factor is still pretty high with a decidedly younger clientele – 90% Thai in these post-tsunami days.



And the band played on ... House band Eurasia don't have the blues, so they don't play any, and long self-indulgent guitar solos are out, too.

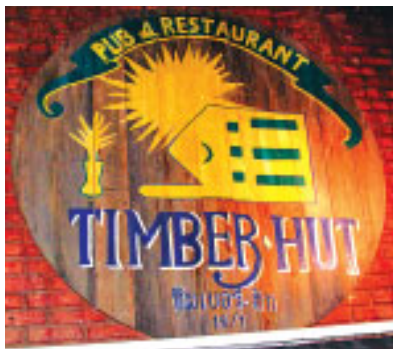
Peak time is around midnight on Fridays and Saturdays when the words "tin", "packed",

"sardines" and – for some strange reason – "forget" and "work" spring to mind.

Timber Hut Pub and Restaurant 118/1 Yaowarat Rd, Phuket City. Open daily from 6 pm till late.

After DARK

by Sam Wilkinson



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Central Festival

- The Books (3rd floor)
- B2S (3rd floor)

Index Living Mall

- Se-Ed Book Center (1st floor)

Of beauties and The Beach

On the map: The *Washington Post*'s website has a rather ethereal take on the island, "Phuket dangles off Thailand's southern coast like a tattered cocoon", while rachelcooley.blogspot.com puts Phuket into neat global perspective, "Phuket is to people living in Japan what Tenerife is to people living in Europe." So now you know.

Off the map: Worldwide coverage of the Miss Universe pageant helped get the message across that the island is not a heap of flyblown post-tsunami rubble, and that can only be a good thing.

The pageant also brought a whiff of controversy concerning, of all things, girls in swimsuits; a sight not entirely foreign to Phuket's beaches. www.channelnewsasia.com comments, "When she [Miss Indonesia] slipped into a swimsuit on a Phuket Beach with other contestants [how did they all fit into one swimsuit?] Artika knew she was stepping into uncharted territory".

I don't know about that; there are some pretty good maps of the island available in any good bookstore.

One thing is for sure; there must be a lot of money in being a beauty queen. etna.mcot.net/query.php?nid tells us, "The

What is Phuket to outsiders? How high does the island rate on people's brainometers? Short of interviewing people on the streets of New York, London, Paris and Springfield, the best way of finding out is to check out what people are saying on the Internet about Phuket.

OUTSIDE IN By Lis Kinswoman

beauty queens plan to donate 12 million baht to the Patong Hospital to help tsunami victims during their one-day visit to Phuket."

Wow! That's a lorra wonga for girls barely out of their teens.

Dancing on the moon: According to a very tongue-in-cheek farangonline.com/city.asp talking about Patong, "Here, alcohol consumption, commercial sex and even dancing are nightly occurrences." Gulp.

The site goes on to explain that "Tom Yam Kung is not just a tasty classic of Thai cuisine – it's healthier than a wheatgerm enema ..."

So there you go *Tom Yam Kung* is both delicious and good for you. Now, if Thailand would just get a space program.

Wacky spot: Kudos to the guy on forums.fark.com/cgi/fark who breaks up a self righteous "I know Phuket better than you" farang rant session with, "Ah... Thailand... the land of the midnight sun. An island full of exotic animals and large plains full of wheat. The majestic mountains rising up from the crystal blue sea. Her neighbor to the north, Brazil, and Peru, her friend to the east make her the jewel of the Carribean. Ah... Thailand... how I miss you so."

Blast from the past: www.thaistudents.com/thebeach is a worthy site written by Thai teachers to help their students learn English. Basically, the teachers read foreign newspapers and condensed the results.

We learn that eight years ago, during shooting of *The Beach*, "Leonardo Di Caprio and crew drank 60,000 baht's worth of wine a day"

Where did they put all the empty wine bottles, though? Did Leeeeo have his own garbage truck?

Hilarious romp down Sukhumvit

Why do clumsy expat writers believe that the world is waiting for yet another novel about Bangkok bargirls?

But *Sukhumvit Road* (Hosage Press International, Bangkok, 2005, 395pp) is funny and different. True to its title, *Sukhumvit* takes place mostly in a narrow erotic trench running from Nana to the Thernae to Cowboy.

Author David Young wrote a very decent first novel called *The Scribe* about a farang working as a letter writer for Thai hookers. He wrote two more novels which I confess I haven't read but *Sukhumvit* – in terms of wacky characters, convoluted plot and wildly comic language – is a big advance over *The Scribe*. It's a good-hearted Feydeau sexual farce, threaded with an ominous streak of evil.

Five Americans are in love with the same bargirl, Bami. Two happen to be sitting next to each other on a plane to Bangkok: an innocent young computer nerd named Nathan Fox who'd met Bami at Chatuchak Market and has no notion of the real job of his former live-in girlfriend, and Owen Macy, a middle-aged Protestant minister who has abandoned wife and faith for a hopeful new life with Bami on Koh Samui.

Also on the plane is the Tourist from Hell: a loud, drunken, reeking fat lout who calls himself Frye Fisk, a broadly comic incarnation of the Devil, capable of disappearing acts and casting nasty spells. (I told you this is a farce.)

The three others in the roster of Bami's lovers are her former boss Frank Russo, part owner of a Nana Plaza bar; Rollie, a drunk who is writing the story of her life; and Phineas McIntyre, a hit man on a convoluted mission involving marriage to the daughter of an underworld chief named Doctor Ruay. The characters all wind up in a fran-

tic chase around Bangkok, each desperately searching for their own ends.

Bami is a child of the Klong Toey slum and knows her own mind: "If it came to a choice, she would choose Owen. True, he had 20 or more years on her, but there were qualities in him that were missing in her former boyfriend. Owen, for example, never expected her to take care of herself. He never asked her to do

something with her time – to better herself or use her free moments constructively. Nathan was always buying her books to read ... Bami never knew what he wanted. That is, she never knew what finished product he had in mind. An exotic looking American? A girl who

liked the same movies and read the same books? Someone who shared his soul? That wasn't her, thank you. Sure, she loved him. But spend the rest of her life with him? Travel to America and eat sandwiches and hot dogs? Mae!

"Owen was the only one who loved her for what she was. The only one who didn't try to rescue her from misery and ignorance. The only one who didn't ask her to change ... Owen was

the one she would allow into her life. All the while letting him think it was he who was opening the door for her.

"Foreign men were so gullible that way."

There are any number of delightful plot switches culminating with all the characters pairing off with exactly whom you

wouldn't expect.

A series of great comic set pieces involve Peppermint, a drug-addled katoey, and Dandy, a dwarf "humanoid", who have taken over Bami's old apartment. Phineas and Bami, both looking to get out of their lines of work, develop a real friendship.

All find some kind of redemption, except of course the Devil, in his last incarnation as a nightclub comic who revels in his own damnation.



Off the SHELF

By James Eckardt



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Wordly wise

"My friends call this kind of man a person who goes anywhere, taking with him only his mouth but collecting feet along the way."

– Thai Rak Thai MP Wichai Chaichitwanitchakul, on June 16, denying a suggestion by Chart Thai MP and former massage parlor king Chuwit Kamolvisit that Wichai had accepted a bribe to disrupt the upcoming census debate against Transport Minister Suriya Jungreangkhit.


KIDS

THE FUN PAGE



FOR ALL

THE FAMILY

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!!

There is an animal hiding in each sentence below. Can you find them?


1. We can go at six o'clock; 2. It's nice to do good deeds; 3. Take soap and a towel; 4. Most rich people wear fancy clothes; 5. You can keep the watch or sell it; 6. Use a ladder; 7. It will be a rainy day; 8. I came late; 9. Tell me if I should start now; 10. Will a map help you?

1. goat; 2. dog; 3. panda; 4. ostrich; 5. horse; 6. seal; 7. bear; 8. camel; 9. fish; 10. llama.

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S MONSTER QUIZ

1. March 22, 1945; 2. 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, 23, 29; 3. Maharashtra; 4. Waterloo; 5. Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington; 6. Beef Wellington; 7. Iced Earth; 8. The Seychelles; 9. 00 353; 10. The Ying Yang Twins; 11. 1866; 12. 4.6%; 13. A falcon; 14. Boar; 15. West Virginia; 16. 36 years; 17. Coca-Cola; 18. John Pemberton; 19. Nikita Krushchev; 20. In your TV set.

Get your brain in gear with The Monster Quiz



Kids! Get Mum and Dad to help you find the answers to these questions. They're not easy, but if you do some research you should be able to find the answers to all of them.

1. What animal performed the wedding in *The Owl and the Pussycat*?

2. The bat is the registered trademark of which company?

3. To which flower family does garlic belong?

4. In Italian art, the Virgin Mary is usually depicted wearing what colour?

5. Who was last seen alive on the *Lady Ghislaine*?

6. Where would you be if you were sitting on a howdah?

7. In which year was the first email sent?

8. What is the smallest

number of moves a player can make to win a game of chess?

9. Which drink was named by its inventor after he had rejected the first six names that were offered?

10. Which multinational company is named after a character in Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*?

11. In which constellation would one find the Cat's Eye Nebula?

12. Who discovered it, and when?

13. Who is President-Elect of the United Nations General Assembly?

14. Who wrote *The Very*

Hungry Caterpillar?

15. *Dokki Doki! LOVE Mail* and *Zutto Suki de Iidesuka* were hit singles for which Japanese pop princess?

16. What is celebrated on June 25 in the US?

17. What is the most easterly point of Northern Ireland?

18. Who founded the Institute for Cooperation in Space, and when?

19. Who wrote the short story *The Sentinel*?

20. Harissa is a hot chili sauce associated with which region?

Answers next week

Never a Cross Word!

ACROSS

7. Place for babies or plants.

8. Far from the beginning.

9. Poisonous vapor.

10. Country of Castro and cigars.

12. Backbones.

16. Historical ruler of Venice.

17. Fighting knife.

20. Poem of praise.

21. Bram Stoker's creation.

DOWN

1. Garden ornament.

2. Bear in the night sky.

3. What motorcyclists should ue but often don't.

4. Hair or cloth coloring.

5. Cloud of interstellar gas or dust.

6. Perfect.

11. Mr Lincoln, US President.

13. *Hotel California* band.

14. Stupid person.

15. Toad noise.

18. Despondent.

19. Not even.

SOLUTION TO LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD

J	I	B	J	S	R	P	M
U	I	M	I	T	A	T	E
D	I	P	G	I	D	O	N
G	L	A	L	E			
E	R	A	S	E	D	T	E
N		I		Y			
K	N	E	E	O	R	W	E
N		G	A	S		B	E
I	D	A	L	P	R	I	M
F		S	O	P	R	A	N
E	S	P	S	N	W	I	N

Solution next week

What the future holds for you!

In The Stars

by Isla Star

CANCER (June 22-July 23): The way forward looks unclear at the moment. You should not commit for the time being, or there is a chance of going awry. Scorpio has some words of advice that may shed light on a personal problem. Quiet celebrations are forecast if you're celebrating coming of age this week, but these will be enjoyable nonetheless. The number 3 is lucky on Monday.

LEO (July 24-August 22): Love is in the air; romance is still highlighted for most Leos. An auspicious astral climate means that hearts will be opened and secrets shared soon. Sunday is the best day to arrange a sensual date, but make sure that the person in question hasn't already made plans. Check your administration to avoid making a mistake early next week. If you don't, this could be frustratingly difficult to unravel later on.

VIRGO (August 23-September 23): You don't normally put a foot wrong in business, but it appears that you made a minor error last month. This will occupy much of your attention this week. Visitors are poised to descend. If this causes inconvenience, suggest that they stay elsewhere. Taurus is looking for romance and this could be a match made in heaven.

LIBRA (September 24-October 23): Entertaining will be a priority this weekend. You have the knack for making guests feel at home, but one particular visitor will try your patience. Later next week, you will tap into deeper levels of motivation but it will be hard to enthuse others. Tuesday and Wednesday are the best days for putting your case forward. Number 9 holds good possibilities on Thursday.

SCORPIO (October 24-November 22): You are not usually renowned for being the last of the big spenders but this weekend temptation lurks around almost every corner. You can certainly afford to give yourself a treat or two, but refrain from pushing the boat out too far. On Monday, try to visualize tedious tasks at work as labors of love and more can be accomplished. The color caramel should sweeten your mood.

SAGITTARIUS (November 23-December 21): If you are embarking on a new career, you must make a serious effort to get off on the right foot. If you start by being too demanding, failure is guaranteed. There is much to be learned during the rest of this year if you are open to ideas. A puzzle in your personal life takes on added mystery this weekend when Aries reveals a secret.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 20): This week a storm of activity forces you to get into gear and face reality. Motivation comes from an unexpected source early next week. It may take until the beginning of next week for these sparks to help your engine run more smoothly, but a desirable objective will be truly in sight by then. Sunday and Thursday are your best days for romance.

AQUARIUS (January 21-February 19): You are usually adept at keeping the peace, but this week you will be tempted to take sides in a disagreement that has nothing to do with you. Don't give in; if your opinion is solicited, stay firmly on the fence. Earnings should rise, a trend that should continue. However, you must spend more time working and less time socializing.

PISCES (February 20-March 20): If you are not technically-minded you will be looking for advice this weekend. Don't cut corners when doing so; someone who doesn't have enough experience may try to convince you that they can fix the problem. Even though professional help comes at a price, it will be worth it in the long run. Romance will benefit from using some imagination; a relationship is in danger of growing stale.

ARIES (March 21-April 20): Increased confidence means that romance is more likely to blossom. Between now and July a meeting of minds is forecast, which will probably lead to more. If you're about to change direction regarding employment, don't sign any agreements that involve gray areas. Someone could try to convince you that these don't really matter; you know better.

TAURUS (April 21-May 21): Wet season weariness overcomes you this week; the only answer is to take time to rest. Others appear inclined to have you do some of their dirty work and you must be prepared to resist pressure. Let your imagination run free to get to grips with a long-term creative project that is destined for success before the end of this year.

GEMINI (May 22-June 21): You should keep your purse on a tight string because an end-of-the-month bill will be higher than expected. Spend quality time at home finding economical ways to brighten up your surroundings. Wednesday is the best day for dealing with tricky business matters; the stars will be on your side if a new deal is to be struck.

ISUZU D-MAX:

Thailand's top-selling pickup is the handsomely functional Isuzu D-Max.

Built at the Isuzu-GM plant outside Bangkok, more than 100,000 vehicles were sold in Thailand in the D-Max's first 12 months of production.

Although there are two-wheel drive versions, with a regular two-seater cab available, many drivers will opt for the four-wheel drive version with either a crew cab or an extended cab.

Leather is a worthwhile option too, transforming what is essentially a workhorse into an alternative to a sedan.

Although all models ride on rear leaf springs, the 2WD versions have independent double wishbones with coil springs at the front while torsion bars replace

the coil springs on the 4WD model.

Ride comfort is only moderately impaired by the rudimentary rear set-up, although there is a certain amount of noise when using rough roads.

There are a number of engine options, including a 2,400cc gasoline model and a 2,500cc turbocharged diesel.

However, the most popular is the 3-liter turbocharged-diesel unit with intercooler.

Producing a modest 145bhp (107 kW), the all-important torque figure of this impressive common-rail diesel

peaks at a commendable 294Nm, produced between 1,400 and 3,400rpm.

The 3-liter engine is mated to either a four-speed automatic transmission or a five-speed manual 'box, while the 2.5-liter turbodiesel comes with manual



By Jeff Heselwood



Boys and the size of their toys. Almost this workhorse far from utilitarian.

Best idea yet, bar

As if Patong doesn't already have enough discos, a new one was scheduled to open on the night of June 24 on the second floor of the Sukhumvit Road Entertainment complex, which until eight months ago was Soi Moodies Entertainment Complex.

Known as Night Station, the disco should be up and running on June 24. It is to be similar in style to the discos along Ratchada-Pisek Rd in Bangkok and will have twice-monthly live concerts, including an opening night concert by Grammy Entertainment recording artist Palapon, who, Stool Pigeon is told, is a very popular Thai pop star.

Admission will be free of charge, except when there is a live concert. Tickets for the Palapon concert were to be 180 baht.

This is not the first time investors have tried to give Patong a real Bangkok-style disco. The attempt to do the very same thing with Star War at the former Shark Club location apparently met with little success, however, which is why that place is now operating as Patong's second tourist-oriented Muay Thai boxing stadium.

No disrespect to former Soi Moodies Managing Director Dutchman Chris Koppers, but the area does seem to be looking better and appears to be pulling in more customers since it was taken over eight months ago and

rebranded by new Managing Director Wattana Meetam.

The man from Songkhla's Rattaphum District has a résumé that includes having run the now-famous Sukhumvit Square Night Entertainment Area, on Soi 10 of Bangkok's Sukhumvit Rd.

This was where some 150 small businesses – many of them bars run by foreigners – were bulldozed into twisted metal in a pre-dawn raid carried out by paramilitary thugs on January 24, 2003.

Although this sort of thing can and does happen in Thailand, there seems to be no end to the number of foreigners intent on

"living the dream" by running ginmills here.

Many are choosing to do it at Patong's Sukhumvit Road, where monthly rentals range from 10,000 to 30,000 baht and key money from 200,000 to 300,000 baht.

K. Wattana said he expects

Many of us – men, anyway – find that a good percentage of our hard-earned baht ends up in Nakhon Nowhere

This ad for a money-transfer card was spotted in a 7-Eleven store in Patong. A rough translation of the words in the speech bubble is: "Mother, your obedient little mouse of a daughter has just sent you the money."

Should be very popular.



all 40 of the bars – including some still under construction up on the second floor – to be rented by the start of the next high season.

Currently, 21 are occupied, bearing such intriguing names as: The Thunder Bar, Joe Nut, Pupe Bar, Happy Bar, New Friend Bar, 19th Hole Bar and – sure to be a hit with the Ministry of Public Health – Smoking Bar.

K. Wattana revealed that he leased the property from Thai-Indian magnate Reywat Sri-kulecha, who also has hotels at Ao Nang and in Pattaya.

Given the two-story courtyard set-up, one would think Patong's Sukhumvit Road may end up looking somewhat similar to Bangkok's Nana Plaza – something K. Wattana is actively working to accomplish.

Perhaps if they allow tuk-tuks, open fires, child beggars and aggressive ladybody prostitutes to form a phalanx at the mouth of

100,000 sales and counting



all versions of Thailand's biggest-selling pickup truck feature equipment that makes

transmission as standard.

Top speed for the larger-engined D-Max is a respectable – if academic – 175kmh while the 2.5 diesel is content with 141kmh.

Equipment levels on the D-Max are high. This, along with its macho airs, perhaps explains its sales success.

Power windows, electric side mirrors, central locking and four-speed windshield wipers are just some of the features not generally found on a pickup truck.

Safety items include side-impact beams in the doors, a high-mounted stop lamp and a laminated windshield.

So-called “wheel-stoppers” pre-

vent the front wheels intruding into the cabin in the event of a front impact.

Adding to occupant protection is a collapsible steering column, standard front and rear three-point seatbelts, and dual front airbags.

Isuzu has a remarkable history. Now under the wing of the world's largest auto maker, General Motors, it began as Tokyo Ishikawajima Shipbuilding & Engineering Co Ltd, building the Wolseley A9, the first passenger car made in Japan.

The first vehicle to bear the name Isuzu – which is Japanese for “sacred river” – was a two-ton truck in 1933.

General Motors acquired its stake in Isuzu in 1971, but it is only recently that any form of joint marketing has occurred, with a number of badge-engineered models between GM brands.

Isuzu is currently ranked as the world's largest diesel engine manufacturer and has produced more than 16 million units.

Outside Thailand, Isuzu is better known for its heavy truck and bus engines, and marine powerplants, and its latest vehicles all feature clean-diesel technologies that meet Japan's stringent emissions regulations.

The D-Max, based on the same platform as the Chevrolet Colorado (see *Gazette* June 12, 2004), is exported from Thailand to other countries in Asia.

A new model has been introduced this year, the MU-7 luxury SUV, which is also made in Thailand.

The 3-liter MU-7 seats seven in comfort, while its elegant lines will make it a top seller.

Prices for D-Max models range from 448,000 to 845,000 baht.

The local Isuzu dealer is Isuzu Andaman Sales, 99-99/1 Tambon Koh Kaew, Amphur Muang, Phuket, Tel: 076-355112.

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

none



the soi they will achieve the desired effect.

Unlike Nana Plaza, however, there is plastic roofing covering the entire complex making it a bit stuffy inside from the lack of moving air. That's the only drawback Stool Pigeon could see, apart from a relatively sparse number of hostesses currently working the place.

A positive feature is that all of the bars share a communal stereo system, which is the only method that seems to work in avoiding the mind-numbing cacophony of most strips of Thai beer bars. Stool Pigeon expects it to do well if and when the tourists start to return in big numbers.

For more information about renting a beer bar at Sukhumvit Road, contact K. Wattana, Tel: 01-8920671; 07-2647789; E-mail: Sukhumvit_Road@hotmail.com.

Tally-ho, you foxy devil!

In the interests of trying to encourage more quality tourists to visit the fleshpots of Pattaya, the incumbent City Hall brains trust has hit upon a wonderful idea: fox hunting.

Of course, anyone familiar with the environs of Fun Town would be quick to point out that the place is eminently unsuitable for people to go dashing about astride sturdy steeds, dressed in black hats, garish red jackets and jodhpurs, careening over rutted ditches behind a pack of baying hounds in pursuit of a solitary, furry, four-legged, ginger-toned carnivorous creature.

Fox hunting is a bucolic exercise, definitely not designed for the rigors of negotiating Soi 6 in the late afternoon or Third Road at sunset hour.

Fox hunting is a very British pastime; although it reeks of over-kill.

It's akin to using a Bunsen burner to light an after-dinner cigar.

So City Hall, ever mindful of the fact that a vast slice of English-speaking tourists to Pattaya come from Britain, have laid out the demographic charts, sharpened pencils and gathered up their crayons, spent countless hours with flow diagrams and income projections and – after a particularly lengthy brainstorming session in Porn's Pub Isarn and

House of Karaoke Machines – hit upon the unique-to-Thailand idea of organizing fox hunts.

Even after they woke up next morning and scoffed a few little white tablets to remove the pain from their throbbing heads, they remained convinced that the fox hunting idea stacked up.

It was certainly more attractive than holding a Mongolian yurt-building exhibition, a series of Japanese

tea ceremonies in Spicy Girls A-Go-Go or a Morris Dancing competition in Lucifer's Disco.

Although, it has to be said there might be something in the Morris Dancing.

Sporting the moniker “Tally-Ho to Thailand Tour”, the hunt will be promoted in such esteemed glossy magazines as *Country Life*, *Fox & Hounds*, and *Mayfair*.

Think of it: men with names such as Rupert, Jeremy, Bertrand, and Monty will start considering Pattaya as a second Berkeley Hunt (I know that sounds like rhyming slang for a very intimate part of the female anatomy, but I'm almost certain such an organization exists. If it doesn't, it ought to). [It does. – Ed]

Men who might have liked

to have been born with a plum in their mouth could find themselves attracted to the “Tally-Ho to Thailand Tour”.

After all, this will be an egalitarian hunt: come one, come all, and see those foxes run.

It came to the attention of the City Hall boffins that a certain style of fox hunting is conducted on Monday afternoons each week in Pattaya in the form of the Hash House Harriers run.

Men who answer to some very strange names indeed, most of which are unprintable in a family publication, take a bus to a predetermined destination and then engage in chasing a pair of hares, or bunnies, who leave a paper trail through virgin jungle and scrub land (Sanitation Department please note: revenue from fines for littering could exceed the monthly tea money obtained by pinching motorcyclists without helmets. Just a thought to help boost the flagging economy).

Fox hunting is a very British pastime; although it reeks of over-kill.

It's akin to using a Bunsen burner to light an after-dinner cigar.

One punishment is demanding that a runner drop his strides and park his naked backside on a largish block of ice.

Apart from taking the heat out of the nether regions it serves the purpose of giving those

who've managed to escape such a fate a good laugh.

City Hall officials, who had been appraised of the Monday fox hunt, came along as observers on one of the runs to determine if this could form the basis for the ‘Tally-Ho to Thailand Tour’, thereby removing the need to find real foxes, slaving hounds and trusty steeds. After being given bum's-on experience with the ice block they decided it was back to the drawing board.

Investigations are currently under way to determine whether there would be any interest in combining a Japanese tea ceremony and Morris Dancing in a select number of go-go bars and discos.

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Time to rethink the island's economy

On a number of occasions in the past, the *Gazette* has theorized about what might happen to the local economy if, say, an oil tanker sank and its cargo ended up on the island's beaches.

We never allowed our imaginations to expand to the thought of a tsunami hitting the region, but the argument made then still holds good now: Phuket's economy has (or rather, had) one good leg to stand on. Kick away that leg and it falls over.

Almost every commercial activity in Phuket is woven inextricably into tourism, including Phuket's other "miracle" industry, property.

If developers are to be believed, the property industry is still going full blast, but there must be questions about how long this will last. Several factors will inevitably come into play.

First, because of the drop in demand, the number of direct flights to Phuket has fallen drastically, making it more difficult to come here. For example, people living in Hong Kong, who used to be able to get here in four hours, now face having to fly to Bangkok and wait an hour or two before flying on to Phuket. That makes the island much less attractive as a weekend getaway destination.

Second, in the past many homes were sold on the assumption that the owners would be able to rent them out to tourists, thereby covering their monthly payments. Potential buyers for whom this is a serious consideration – and there are many of them – are now more likely to adopt a wait-and-see attitude.

Wichit Na Ranong, President of the Tourism Council of Thailand and a tourism industry pioneer in Phuket, recently gave a speech in which he said, "After the tsunami, it is clear that we have no alternative economic activity to support the community. Once tourism is dead, nothing functions, everything is crippled."

Arguing that mass tourism is not the answer, he called for sustainable tourism aimed at the top end of the market. While this is a laudable aim, the big question is whether sustainable tourism alone can sustain Phuket.

Surely now is the time for those in charge of Phuket's future to consider other ways to fuel the local economy – free-trade zones, possibly, or more serious attempts to get Cyber Paradise and long-stay retirement resorts off the ground.

The alternative is a continued reliance on low-end mass tourism, which results in environmental degradation and constantly having to worry when another disaster will come and sweep away businesses, jobs and people's hopes.

– The Editor

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Mass tourism gets going again in Phuket.



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.

Flaming waste

Maybe it would be a good idea to remove the logos from confiscated counterfeit clothes, [*Gazette*, June 18] and give them to the poor, instead of burning them.

That was 37 million baht's worth of goods – what a waste!

Jan Jaspers
Phuket

Bubble Blue blues

It was with a sad heart that I read your stories on June 7 and June 11 about the sinking of the liveaboard boat *Bubble Blue*.

In January 2004, I did a four-day dive trip with Bubble Blue Scuba on their former boat *Farsai*. The company is owned and operated by a Thai couple and is truly exceptional.

It was so enjoyable that I immediately booked their next five-day trip in February 2004. In March 2005, I brought two friends from Hawaii to dive from the new boat, *Bubble Blue*.

Over 30 years I have made hundreds of dives all over the world. I have never dived with better divers or crew than Bubble Blue Scuba. They were always professional, skilled and experienced, taking more care than most. The equipment was excellent and both boats were superbly laid out for diving.

Dive boats are not designed for extreme weather. Ironically, new boats may have hidden flaws that show up only in extreme conditions.

Really bad things do happen to good people. Sometimes there is no escape. Bubble Blue Scuba survived the tsunami with no mishaps. I would not hesitate to dive with them again at the very first chance.

I wish Bubble Blue Scuba all the best, as I do for all those on the Andaman Sea who have suffered so much lately.

James Herrington
Maui, Hawaii

Time to stall Stalin

Unbelievably, Konrad Stalin is at it again! I was reading his piece in this week's issue [June 18] and thinking, "Yes, he has written a worthy piece," when out of the blue comes blatant self promotion for his curry house, not just for the one in Bang Tao but also for the forthcoming restaurant in Patong.

When will the *Gazette* put a stop to his free advertisements? I am sure the policy for all *Gazette* contributors is "no free promotion", is it not?

By the way, Tesco-Lotus has some pretty good Ceylon tea in right now. I have a feeling that a nice cuppa and a sit-down are in order.

John Lock
Rawai

UBC's less-than-magic lantern

Am I the only person to notice the poor programming offered by UBC?

The cost is the same as what cable operators charge in the US, but the movies are very old, with no known stars, and plots about unknown teenagers being killed, killing, giant snakes, crashes involving anything that moves and, essentially, nonsense. Some – if not most – of the US series offered have no living cast members and no relation to today – I mean, 1960 autos?

Considering the low cost of labor in Thailand, we should get

better, more current programming, or pay much less for what is being broadcast now.

Don Aleman
Patong

Literally filthy

I read recently – in a British newspaper – an example of what I am sure will be just one of many such travel articles regarding post-tsunami Phuket.

Regrettably, I have to agree with much of what the writer wrote.

Although he pointed out that there was little sign of tsunami damage, the writer, on his first visit here for five years, described the island as a cross between a building site and a council garbage dump. The beaches he described as "filthy".

There is little that can be done to halt the current building boom, but the garbage problem is something else.

My local beach at Layan does indeed resemble a tip. If the tide is in, walking on this beach consists of wading through piles of broken glass and plastic.

Yet just behind it, the National Park has recently built a visitor center and various other buildings.

Last week I counted three park rangers sitting in the visitor center (which nobody appears to visit). Surely it would make more sense instead to appoint three cleaners to keep the beach clean.

Also, why not use some of the money raised [from tsunami donations] to employ people to clean up the island?

Unless Phuket quite literally cleans up its act, visitors who do return will do so only once.

John Dalley
Layan

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.

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

Where is my water?

I recently moved back to Phuket and I am living in Phuket Villa 2, off Chao Fa West Rd. It is such a nice place to live, except for the interrupted water supply.

I have been back for three weeks and I have already been without water, without warning, for three days. The first two days were during the hottest periods Phuket has known for years. I recently woke up at 6 am only to find I had no water.

If I had some warning I could have stored enough water to shower, wash dishes and go to the toilet.

Dirty and Smelly in Phuket Villa 2

Sayan Wareearoonroj, Manager of Phuket Provincial Water Supply (PPWS), replies:

The road expansion project along Chalermprakiat Ror IX Rd (the bypass

road) is affecting water distribution to areas along Wichit Songkhram Rd, Chao Fa East Rd, Chao Fa West Rd, Sakdidej Rd and Pattana Tongtin Rd.

From May 10 to 25, while the work continued, residents in those areas had at best 50% of their usual water pressure, though some elevated areas may not have had any water supply at all.

In addition, heavy construction equipment sometimes accidentally breaks a water mains, temporarily adding to the problem. It may take up to a week to fix a broken pipe.

I issued a press release to all Phuket radio stations on May 10 so they could inform people through public announcements.

For more information, contact the PPWS at Tel: 076-321023.

Blocked cinema doors and liability

Whenever a good movie is shown in town, the cinema is packed, but the fire exits at the cinema are often blocked with spare chairs. Who would be responsible for people not being able to exit the cinema during an emergency because chairs are blocking the exits?

Roland Mueller
Phuket.

Wisut Romin, Deputy Secretary, Phuket Provincial Administrative Office, replies:

If the cinema caught fire and people died or were injured, the incident would be investigated by the police.

If they found that the owner and management of the cinema were irresponsible in their duty of care for public safety, then they would be charged and prosecuted.

Tawee Homhuan, Engineer, Phuket Public Works and Town and Country Planning Office, responds:

The Phuket Public Works and Town and Country Planning Office conducts annual safety checks on all public buildings, including theaters, so that the premises are safe.

We check the fire exits and the firefighting equipment.

If there is a particular place you believe needs immediate inspection, you can report your concerns at the Damrongtham Center [at Phuket Provincial Hall, on Narison Rd, Phuket City, Fax: 076-211102]. The center can investigate immediately.

When filing your complaint, mark it for the attention of the center's Director, Witsawa Sathitsamith.

Where can I house my cat?

Are any catteries on Phuket? My preliminary research has identified some dog kennels, none of which – perhaps understandably – take felines.

Steve Lawrence
Phuket

The Gazette replies,

The Raksatt Dog Spa in the Central

Festival Phuket car park, level P2, has cat boarding facilities at about 100 baht a day. The phone number to contact is 076-209244-5.

Another service is provided by Matta Vet Clinic on Yaowarat Rd, Phuket City, at about 70-100 baht a day, depending on the size and species of the cat. Contact the clinic at Tel: 076-237385.

The Tsunami Fund theft case and CEO government

How close is the Tsunami Relief Fund theft case to resolution? Four months after the 2.05 million baht disappeared – and two months after the arrest of the lone suspect – no one can say. But whatever happens, the case sheds useful light on the workings of “CEO government”. Investigation has gone slowly and some doubt the possibility of resolution. On June 1, Phuket City police turned over evidence against Provincial Treasury official Apichart Nooprod to public prosecutor Boontan Tongtan.

Quoth K. Boontan: “First, we’ll report to the Regional Prosecutor’s Office; then a panel will try the case in moot court, as a review, and to ensure that both parties receive justice.” (The latter cant phrase is employed mostly in the case of officials charged with wrongdoing, “ensuring justice” often becoming synonymous with “protecting them from justice”.)

According to K. Boontan, at least one month must pass before a decision is taken regarding whether to prosecute Apichart: a whole month of silence in the press, because nothing is happening – plenty of time for the whole sordid affair to recede from our collective consciousness.

Make no mistake: that’s what is wanted. With the United Nations and two former US presidents insisting that billions of dollars in charitable donations must be distributed free of official corruption, the central government wants no scandals redolent thereof – certainly not in high-profile Phuket.

Might Apichart be a scapegoat? When the story broke on February 15 – of money missing from a strong box at the Provincial Treasury Office, where Apichart was Chief Currency Officer – officials expected a quick resolution and, significantly, the arrests of at least “two senior provincial officials”.

Phuket Governor Udomsak Uswarangkura noted just two people had keys to the box – which was under 24-hour video surveillance – and that neither could enter without a Treasury official escort. Finding the thief should have been a slam-dunk. It wasn’t.

An administrative investigation by Vice-Governor Supachai Yuwaboon’s committee cited sloppy accounting – not theft – for the shortfall. So, lacking a thief, Gov Udomsak suggested that finding one wasn’t necessary:

“The Provincial Disaster Relief Office and the Treasury Office share responsibility – one for the money; the other for the premises,” he opined March 3. Officials, then, must make up the shortfall themselves. (An anonymous source quoted in the local Thai press said officials earlier paid for a 1.5 million baht shortfall).

This eventuality the governor might contemplate philosophically, as it wasn’t his money.

Then Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Department Director-General Soontorn Riewleuang quietly dropped a bombshell: “We turned over 50 million baht to the governor ... If any disappears, he is responsible,” he announced on April 21.

The governor, as provincial “CEO”, is *pro forma* head of every important committee in the province, including that on Disaster Relief. Too many committees exist, however. He thus serves mainly as a figurehead. But here was Director-General Soontorn, apparently holding him financially responsible.

It must have been a shock. Public displays since then, accompanied by press reports headlined “Governor Blows a Fuse” and “Governor Chastises Civil Servants” suggest some anxiety.

The unfinished criminal investigation thus assumed new importance; were the loss charged to theft, administrative squabbling over responsibility would end. So it is perhaps notable that – a day after K. Soontorn’s comments – police arrested Apichart.

Phuket City Police Superintendent Pol Col Paween Pongsirin insists the mid-level Treasury Office official is “not a patsy”, but doubts persist – especially as investigators had consistently argued that the crime must involve conspiracy.

The judge certainly had his doubts, putting investigators through five hours of questioning before signing the arrest warrant.

A popular entertainment columnist suggested in May that Apichart would walk free because: “He knows too much – he might let the cat out of the bag. Big people wouldn’t like it.”

The missing cash, the columnist wrote, was loaned at interest to cover gambling debts, “and would have been returned were the loan paid back in time.” Denizens of Phuket’s karaoke bars, where much of the money ended up, knew the whole story, he suggested.

For many, it’s a credible scenario, accounting for sloppy bookkeeping; for the video recorder mysteriously turned off; and for why police finally seized a lonely mid-level bureaucrat whose hobby is Buddhist meditation.

Be that as it may, the case raises an issue concerning recent governmental re-structuring: should governors be forced to make up losses themselves?

It hardly seems fair that they should: “CEO governors”, unlike CEOs in business, have no power to hire and fire. Moreover, no individual, however rich, can cover government shortfalls, whether arising from corruption or otherwise.

Luckily for the governors, K. Soontorn’s opinion on their ultimate responsibility isn’t held unanimously. Suree Ratchapolsit, a legal expert at the Interior Ministry’s Legal Office, averred that: “By law, if the court acquits, no one is at fault ... and no one is responsible for the missing 2.05 million baht.”

So where does the buck stop? Nobody knows.

BETWEEN THE LINES

By Tang Rob

AMENDMENT

Mathew V McEvily, of McEvily & Collins Law Offices wishes to point out the following amendment:

In Issues & Answers of June 4-10, in “What are the taxes on property?” I erroneously wrote, “and 10% on interest payment income”. The phrase should have read, “and 10% on dividend payment income”.

ON THE MOVE



Swiss national **Claude Sauter** has been appointed Resident Manager of the Cape Panwa Hotel. A Hotel Management graduate from L'Ecole Hotelier in Geneva, Mr Sauter has more than 18 years' experience in the hospitality industry, including being the Resident Manager at the Impiana Phuket Cabana.



Singaporean **June Seah**, has been appointed Marketing & Communications Manager for the Hilton Sanya Resort and Spa on Hainan Island, China. Ms Seah spent five years as PR and Events Manager at the Blue Canyon Country Club, followed by a spell as Director of Marketing Communications at the Sheraton Grande Laguna.



Wichai Phusakulkajorn, 47, from Songkhla, has been appointed Chief of the Phuket Provincial Rural Roads Office. K. Wichai has a master's degree from the School of Public Administration at the National Institute of Development Administration and a degree in engineering and public works from Khon Kaen University.

Keeping in touch through the Net

The Internet can be used for everything from connecting computers with each other to connecting bosses to their main offices; from connecting local businesses and even grandchildren with the old 'uns.

Yet what is most important for most people is using it for staying in touch with friends and family.

Here are some simple ways to keep loved ones more involved in our lives here in Thailand.

Emailing photos: We all know how easy it is to connect with Broadband at amazing speeds and send large files to anywhere in the world in just a few seconds... right?

Well, maybe not yet in Phuket. Fear not; in two weeks, I'll dedicate a column to the real story about our local Broadband or – as some call it – Fraudband.

There are some helpful tools when sending photos over the Internet. Whether your connection is dial-up (ouch!) or Fraudband (eek!), these tools can save you hours of send time.

Depending on your digital camera or scanner settings, an average color photo file can range from 300 kilobytes up to 15 megabytes in size, or more.



Just to give this a little perspective, on a good dial-up day a 300Kb file sends in about five to 30 minutes; a 15Mb photo, well, let's just say we'll see you tomorrow ... and that's if you can stay connected for that long.

But there are some pretty cool programs out there that compress such files to less than 15Kb and you don't lose any noticeable size or quality.

The best – but among the most expensive – is Photoshop, but you can also check out www.freegraphics.com and www.jpegwizard.com. These sites offer inexpensive or even free tools that do a pretty good job.

One quick tip: in Windows Explorer, simply right-click on

your photo file and choose Send To | Compressed (zipped) Folder. This compresses the file by about 50%, depending on the file type.

My favorite is still Photoshop. First open your image file in Photoshop and choose File | Save for Web. Then, select JPEG | Medium and set the Image Size to around 300 pixels wide. This will make the photo about half the size of your computer screen.

On average, Photoshop can reduce a 15Mb file to a measly 15Kb. That's right, to around 1,000th of its original size with no obvious loss in quality, and it emails in about 15 seconds.

If you want a larger image, try choosing 1,000 pixels wide to make the image fill your screen. That'll make Grandma happy! You can even preview the image; just click the Browser icon at the bottom.

Remember to save this file under a different name so you don't lose the original.

Chatting online: This is a simple yet effective way to stay in touch with someone, but don't try this at work – you won't be popular with the boss.

The two most popular chat systems are MSN and Yahoo. You'll need to download and install some stuff so go to www.msn.com or www.yahoo.com; click on "messenger" – it'll walk you through the rest.

MSN makes it easy to send pictures while chatting with friends and it has a simple cam-



IT'S GOOD TO TALK: Skype (above) makes it easy, and cheap, to keep in touch with loved ones abroad, while free tools from www.jpegwizard.com (left) make it easy to compress and send photos over the Net.

era and headphones feature so you can be "uptown" and do some pretty impressive video conferencing.

Yahoo makes it easy to leave messages if your friend is currently offline – they'll see your message next time they connect.

It also has a vast selection of Yahoo Groups, excellent places where you can share your thoughts and ideas with like-minded individuals.

Keep in mind two things. First, it's easy to use up a lot of computer time and Internet speed so open an unlimited-use account or it'll cost you a bundle.

Second, it doesn't work well with satellite and GPRS Internet connections because of the delay between sending and receiving data.

Internet telephony: Also known as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), this is one of my favorites because it can easily knock 80% off of your international telephone bill.

No one seems to be sure if it is legal or not, and I'm not here to comment on the legalities of VoIP, only to relate the technologies involved.

That said, if it isn't legal, then why is CS Loxinfo advertising it on its IP Star site and why is TOT selling VoIP telephones?

There are two types of Internet Telephony. One uses computers to talk to each other and the other uses VoIP Telephones (or gateways) to connect any standard telephone here to any other telephone in the world.

Both rely on darn good Internet connections, so keep an eye out for the upcoming column on Broadband vs Fraudband.

The most popular computer-based solution is Skype (www.skype.com), and it's free.

It allows your computer to call another computer and to converse using a standard headset with a microphone (about 300 baht at Big C). It's like MSN and Yahoo Chat on steroids, and it's easy to install.

The other way is with true VoIP using a dedicated VoIP box or handset. It connects directly to your broadband without the need for a computer.

Check out www.net2phone.com, which is terrific if you are not a big PC user. It allows you to pick up the handset and dial any telephone anywhere and talk for as little as a baht a minute.

If that's still too expensive, you can put a VoIP box in your home and send one to Grandma in New Zealand and talk forever – for free.

Another great use of VoIP technology is to connect it to your home phone line. Then, while you're out and about you can use your mobile phone to call your home number, and make international calls from the gym or bar using your mobile phone, while still paying as little as a baht a minute.

Again, I'm not sure how legal this is, so maybe someone wants to contact TOT or CS Loxinfo. Let me know what they say and I'll be sure to include it in next week's column.

John Seebach has over 25 years consulting experience in management information systems and business process re-engineering. His company, Island Technology, serves businesses and individuals throughout Southeast Asia. Email: john@islandtechnology.com.



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Alcohol retail hours affect tourist sales

By Anongnat Sartpisut
& Sam Wilkinson

PHUKET: Retailers on the island are divided over the positive and negative effects of a recent initiative to curb teenage alcohol abuse, yet they all are able to agree on one thing: foreign visitors do not appreciate being subjected to the regulated hours as well.

The government has restricted the vending hours for alcohol, permitting the sale of alcohol only between 11 am and 2 pm, and 5 pm and 2 am.

The Phuket Excise Office (PEO) reports that this law is far from new, in fact it dates back to the Alcohol Act of 1950. Enforcement of the law was recently resurrected as part of the government's "better social order" movement.

The PEO also released figures showing that the number of alcohol outlets on the island has declined, from 7,455 in 2004 to 7,107 outlets this year. There was no accompanying explanation as to whether this was a result of the time restrictions or post-tsunami effects.

Wichan Meesen, Manager of Central Festival Phuket's Marketplace, believes the authorities should be more flexible.

"Many foreign customers and shoppers simply do not understand why shops have time restrictions on the sale of alcohol," he said.

"When people come shopping at 9 am they shouldn't have to wait until 11 am to buy alcohol. Many customers complain to us about this and we explain that we are not above the law."

He said that 80% of the Marketplace's customers are foreigners. When the outlet opened in September 2004, alcohol sales quickly reached 50,000 baht a day. After the tsunami, that figure dropped to 20,000 baht.

Paradoxically, the same law does not prohibit shoppers from buying alcohol in bulk – not less than 10 liters of the same drink – during restricted hours of the day. This is to allow catering and hospitality firms to buy stocks during otherwise restricted hours.

However, K. Wichan says the excep-

tion makes little difference to individual consumers. "Some customers buy beer by the crate or boxes of wine, but if they want to buy individual bottles they're wasting their time. Some customers simply leave without buying anything when they find that they cannot buy liquor or wine."

He added, "Many tour boats come to Phuket. When they want to restock before sailing they arrive in the morning to discover that they will not be able to make the departure time if they stay until 11 am."

"If, for example, they have specific shopping lists of three crates of beer and three individual, expensive, bottles of wine, we stand to lose up to 12,000 baht on the lost business. Since January [when the restrictions were imposed], we've been losing 30,000 baht a day."

Laurent Bizen of Chalong's Wine Connection is slightly more stoic. "We haven't really been affected by the law. Walk-in customers just come into our shops later. Our busiest hours have changed to past 6 pm now."

However, he conceded, "Customers aren't really happy when we tell them, for

example, that they can't buy a bottle of their favorite wine at 3 pm. They do not really understand the purpose of this law."

Anong Kra-Ad, Assistant Manager of Phuket Tesco-Lotus, sees the situation differently. K. Anong explained that initial negative feedback is fading and that, for locals at least, customers follow the TV news and are aware of the ban. "Besides", she added, "We put a [Thai and English] notice in front informing the public of the times when alcohol is available".

She agrees that Tesco-Lotus has lost many regular customers who buy the odd bottle or two but feels that it is good to help the younger generation stay away from alcohol.

K. Wichan is more pragmatic, suggesting that sales clerks check young customers' ages before selling alcohol to them.

He was also plainly irritated that smaller shops are not following the rules.

"If the government introduces restrictions, they should apply to all shops that sell alcohol, not only to shopping centers and larger stores," he said.

The debate over the fixed-exchange rate of the yuan, the Chinese currency, has been going on for some time.

Two years ago there was speculation that China would introduce at least an element of flexibility into its tight link to the US dollar. It did not happen then, nor has anything changed since, despite pressure from a number of countries for this to occur.

The Chinese authorities bluntly refuse to be swayed and have broadly hinted that the more pressure that is applied, the more they will resist and delay any change.

Underlying the Chinese attitude are a number of domestic political and economic concerns.

China is not a democracy and any non-democratic government will ultimately rule with cast-iron authority. It has, after all, an image to maintain with its own population.

The Soviet Union, when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, embarked on a series of reforms – including *glasnost* and *perestroika* – which Gorbachev rapidly found uncontrollable.

China has embarked on reforms but has militated them to the economy. We now see a total contradiction, an avowedly communist country embracing free enterprise.

What this means is that a communist government has openly concluded that Marxist economic principles were hogwash and has done an about-face.

However, it is not possible to change that direction completely without massive unemployment that even a booming private sector could not immediately absorb.

This is particularly true in the state-owned heavy manufacturing sector, which tends to be completely inefficient while at the same time employing a great number of people.

In order to continue oper-

China holds fast to US\$ linkage



MONEY TALKS

By Richard Watson

ating, these "smokestack" factories require almost continual and generally massive government cash injections.

Governments usually try to dispose of these plants as soon as possible, although privatizing most of them is not an option. This is because they have no real market value; industrial complexes, for example, have equipment that is so outdated and inefficient as to be commercially useless.

The other great problem the Chinese government faces is urban drift – people are moving from the countryside to the cities in search of a better standard of living. It is thought that the number of people involved in this migration in China may exceed the population of Western Europe.

The Chinese government may have been forced to accept economic reality, but the last thing it wants to do is lose power. It wants the best of both worlds.

Fortunately for China, the advanced countries in the world have realized that China has great potential as an economic power.

In time, as domestic prosperity increases, it offers the prospect of a gigantic consumer market. It may also offer foreign investors the ability to take part

in infrastructural spending on a vast scale.

A large percentage of goods exported from China are actually made by foreign companies operating there, and there is often mention of the importance of the American and European markets to Japanese manufacturers.

However, China became Japan's largest trading partner in 2004 and this will almost certainly increase in overall percentage terms as time passes.

Chinese officials stated earlier this year that they intend to liberalize their currency regime. They added, however, that they will not do so under pressure and that they intend to make the changes at the most unexpected moment, in order to prevent currency speculation on a very short-term but massive scale.

The Chinese government is also fearful of making any mistakes during any currency alteration. The country's rulers do not want to lose face, which could also mean a loss of their domestic standing.

Toughing it out? Thailand is finding 2005 a challenging year.

Widespread drought has had an impact on agricultural exports and this, combined with the increase in the cost of energy imports and the drop in tourism receipts, has led to pressure on the current account.

This has caused some global financial institutions to predict a depreciation of the baht. JP Morgan, for example, has stated that this is its view.

Some readers may incorrectly assume that such a conclusion was arrived at by currency analysts in New York who would find locating Thailand on a map difficult.

The reality is that JP Morgan, mainly through its ownership of Jardine Fleming, has a significant presence in Thailand as an asset manager.

Two factors may limit the extent of any currency downturn. First, the Bank of Thailand has significant foreign reserves to help limit downward currency movements.

Second, Thailand can always borrow foreign currency through the bond market. Thailand's credit rating is investment-grade, and borrowing will not be

that expensive. In any event, no one is predicting any major movement in the baht.

There is also a very easy way to attract more long-term foreign capital without any increase in Thailand's indebtedness: allowing foreigners to own land in Thailand in their own names.

I often meet people who would like to buy property here, but who are not interested in 30-year leases, condominiums or forming companies.

They simply want to buy a property for holiday or retirement, but – factoring in all the current restrictions – decide to do otherwise.

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: 01-081-4611. Email: imm@loxinfo.co.th.

VITAL STATISTICS: OVERALL ROOM OCCUPANCY REMAINS LOW

Room occupancy in 10 of Phuket's five-star hotels, from May 1-31, 2005.

Total number of rooms in the 10 hotels	2,893
Total number of rooms occupied	938
Percentage of rooms occupied	32.60%
Lowest average occupancy rate of one hotel	14.55%
Highest average occupancy rate of one hotel	78.76%
Average price per room	2,736.70 baht (US\$66.82)

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'Phuket' car comes fourth in class in Le Mans debut

By Andy Johnstone

FRANCE: Helping to promote Phuket, the Kruse Motorsport Courage C65, driven by locally-based property developer Ian Mitchell and fellow drivers Tim Mullen and Phil Bennet, came fourth in its class in its debut in the famed Le Mans 24 Hours race on June 18-19.

Speaking to the *Gazette* just hours after the race ended, a tired Mitchell – Kruse Motorsport's Team Director and the Project Director of Phuket's Paradise Bay Marina – said that mechanical problems had prevented him and his co-drivers from finishing higher up the standings in the LMP2 category.

"We analyzed the [engine] telemetry in the latter part of the race and determined that the engine was deteriorating, so we had to go off the pace," said Mitchell.

"It was a shame, because we were on track for a second or third place."

Racing in daytime temperatures well above 30°C, the Courage C65 led its class until a broken chassis frame followed by a broken brake pipe kept the car in the pits for a costly 50 minutes.

"That dropped us down to seventh place although we worked our way back up to fourth," said Mitchell.

"And then we had the engine problems ... But [our placing] is not bad when you consider that we formed Kruse Motorsport [just] six months ago.

"After all, there were guys who have been driving for 20 years who didn't even finish. We were quite lucky," said a cheerful Mitchell.

Fourteen LMP2 cars began the race, but nine were unable to complete the gruelling event. Overall, just 28 cars out of 50 starters completed the full 24 hours.

The Kruse Motorsport entry completed 268 laps of the



The Kruse Motorsport crew photographed after scrutineering, just before the start of the 24-hour race. The three drivers are in the white overalls.

13.64-kilometer circuit, covering some 3,655 kilometers.

According to the official figures from the ACO (*Automobile Club l'Ouest*) Le Mans website, Mitchell and his co-drivers completed their fastest lap in 3 minutes 54.684 seconds, which was faster than many of the cars in the larger-engined LMP1 and GT classes.

However, for Mitchell and the rest of the team, there was more to the race than going fast or finishing.

"We got a lot of coverage

for Phuket, especially with the media and on the pit walkabout day when there were thousands of people walking up and down, asking us questions about Phuket and how things are now.

"We were selling [Kruse Motorsport] merchandise on behalf of tsunami charities, but ran out of supplies in about two hours, unfortunately."

At the same time, some people attending the race had never even heard about the Asian tsunami. "I was amazed by how many people were asking us what

the tsunami was. Can you believe that?"

Mitchell said that he believes that the team was successful in getting the message across that Phuket is open and ready for business, so much so that he sold three Paradise Bay villas while at Le Mans.

Kruse Motorsport is next set to compete in the Le Mans Endurance Series 1,000km race at the *Autodromo Nazionale Monza* on July 10 before tackling Germany's Nürburgring on August 14.

Thai youngsters get Oz training

PHUKET CITY: Twenty Thai youngsters have been training with Australian Gold Coast teenagers under a well-known tennis coach at the Phuket City tennis courts.

Coach Bruno Leon, who oversees the program, told the *Gazette* that he believes Phuket has a lot of potential tennis stars.

He added, "Thai tennis players are very good, and will get better in the future."

The Gold Coast has traditionally been a source of top Australian players and the area has supplied many members of the Australian national squad.

Leon added that nine of his Gold Coast players will attend two tournaments in Thailand; the Toyota LTAT from June 25 to 28 and the Yonex tournament July 2 and 3.

Offshore win league

PATONG: With one round still to go, Offshore, on 53 points, clinched the current Patong Darts League on June 14 with a narrow win over Didi's, while Queen Mary, in a convincing victory over Piccadilly, cemented their second place. Shakers, seven points ahead of Didi's, came third.

VOLLEY GOOD

RAWAI: Beach volleyball players from Phuket and around the world faced off at the second annual Phuket Invitational Beach Volleyball Tournament held on June 11 and 12.

Altogether, 16 men and six women, from as far away as California, Hawaii and Japan, took part in the competition, which was held at a private home at Rawai Beach.

The first day's matches were played in a round-robin format, to establish seeding for the doubles elimination tournament on the 12th.

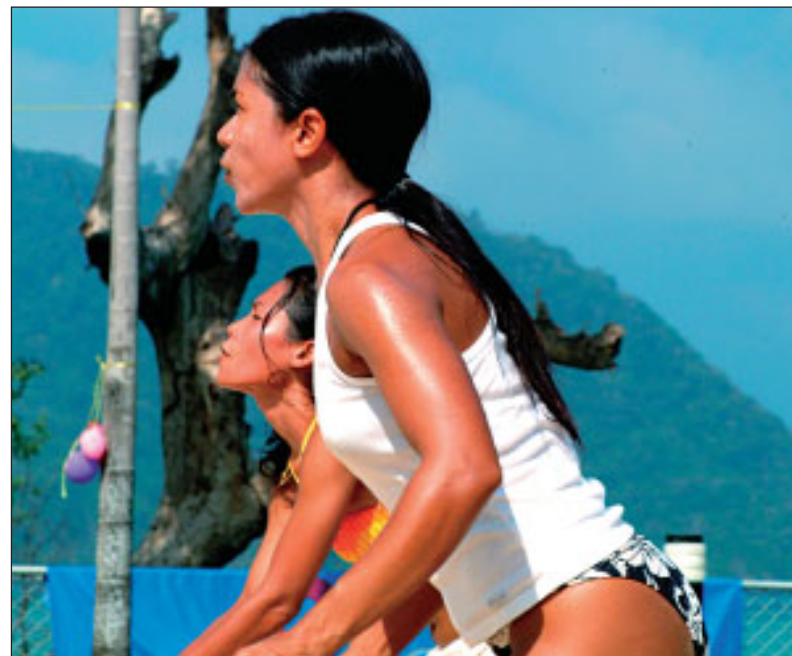
The winners of the men's event were the fourth-seeded

team of John Zagan of Germany and his partner Michael Trocherie of France.

Mina Krapenok and Rapepan Whitley of Phuket, who had been seeded first, won the women's event.

The organizers are already planning the third annual tournament for June next year. The entry fee of 1,000 baht will go toward paying for equipment rental, T-shirts for competitors and food and drinks.

For more information contact Bob Selznick at Tel: 076-289289 or by email to: phuketbeachvolleyball@hotmail.com



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Ao Yon Phuket
(west side of Cape Panwa)

Koreans Nabbed With Animal Parts

— *Phuket Gazette*, June 1995

On April 26, Pol Maj Tharin Chantratip arrested Chan Boom, 37, and Marcho Yong, 40, both from Korea. They were apprehended for working without work permits.

After the arrests, Police discovered that their shop, the Zoojo Shop, 22/39 Vanich Plaza, Phu-

ket Town, had numerous parts of animals that were due to be sold as ingredients for Chinese and Korean traditional medicines.

Some of the evidence collected included 42 packs of chopped deer horns, uncut deer horns, and deer and tiger penises. All of these products are highly-sought after in the production of ancient Asian "prescriptions".

Hitmen's alleged hirer surrenders

— *Phuket Gazette*, June 15-30, 2000

A man who is alleged to have hired three hitmen in March to kill a 77-year-old woman, surrendered to police on May 24.

As reported earlier in the *Gazette*, the three hitmen, Somporn Paotong, Wannarat Kamsoot, and Soontorn Siripan, were first contacted by Saman Jarnjit, a guard at a prawn farm, who hired them to kill the woman, Siwhoon Sae-Ong, who is a major landowner in Baan Samkong.

The hitmen apparently got cold feet and, instead of killing K. Siwhoon, tried to get her to pay them 25,000 baht to leave her alone.

She told them to telephone her the following day, then alerted the police who duly arrested the trio. This led to the subsequent arrest of Saman.

Pol Maj Amnuoy Kraiwutthinan of Phuket Town Police Station said that Saman alleged under questioning that the person

behind the intended hit was 67-year-old Somnuek Rachai from Samkong, also known as Goh Kao.

An arrest warrant was issued for Somnuek, who finally reported to the police station.

Maj Amnuoy said that Somnuek denied all the accusations and was released on bail of 200,000 baht. Investigations will continue, the major added.

THE TIME machine

News from the past

Choosing the best ... and avoiding the rest

WINE



By Steven Roberto

Most wine lovers prefer to visit restaurants where staff are knowledgeable about wine. It is easy to put oneself in the hands of someone with demonstrated knowledge, the ability to track down superb wines, the conscientiousness to handle and store them properly, and the ability to serve them with refinement.

Trust is absent, however, when visiting restaurants lacking these credentials and the dilemma for wine lovers is that they cannot always choose which restaurants they patronize. So how does one assess wine at unfamiliar restaurants?

Whenever possible, try to drop in on and review the wine list with the staff before dining there. Ask to see the cellar. If the staff cannot answer basic questions or if the cellar is grubby, don't buy wine at that restaurant. It's too costly in Thailand to take a chance on being disappointed.

Instead, inquire about the corkage fee and ask permission to bring your own wine. A typical corkage fee is 400 – 600 baht so you should bring something special that makes it worthwhile. But remember, it is poor manners and potentially embarrassing to arrive spontaneously with one's own wine.

On the other hand, if the restaurant seems promising, it is

possible to improve your odds of unearthing good wine value. First, avoid the house wines; most are unimaginative, dreary and predictable wines designed to maximize profits, not enjoyment. Instead, scan the list for wines that are either completely unfamiliar or that are personal favorites.

When it comes to unfamiliar wines, look for one similar to what you know and already enjoy. Avoid wines from places with significant quality variability like Burgundy, the Rhône, Germany, South Africa and Chile. Instead, look to the reliable climate and wine quality of New Zealand, Australia, California and Spain.

For the familiar, carefully note the vintage. Look for older

vintages as recent imports are often more expensive due to higher duty and tax. Phuket restaurants, especially hotel restaurants, tend to rely on unsophisticated costing formulas to price wines and seldom reprice older wines to current market value. Of course, one must investigate the wine's condition and be certain the vintage is not too old, although older vintages usually offer the best buys.

Make sure the space between the cork and the wine is not excessive and look for any telltale stickiness caused by exposure to heat. If the bottle looks okay, go ahead and take a chance. However, if the wine is spoiled, say so. But remember not to push your value quest too far. If nothing is wrong with the wine but you don't like it that is certainly not the restaurant's fault.

There are occasional great buys in unnoticed restaurants but you need good luck to find them. With a little calculated deliberation before placing your bet you can improve the odds of finding wines in new places that delight rather than causing regret.

Steven Roberto is a winemaker and restaurant consultant from California. He is the Managing Director of enVision Phuket, a Phuket-based wine importer and consultant. Email: stevenroberto@lycos.com.

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Phuket Diary

July 1
Canada Day celebrations at the Deevana Patong Resort & Spa. BBQ, wine tasting, pizza, drink specials, pétanque tourney, badminton, ping-pong, billiards, pool activities, prizes for 200 baht a person. Activities include:

- Pétanque tourney 3:30 pm.
- Oasis leisure area opens 10 am-7 pm.

- 3 pm-7 pm Canadian BBQ "The Oasis".
- 7 pm-1 am Canada Day continued at Hi'Pub.

For details, Contact: Marshall at Tel: 04-8429640 or Darren at Tel: 09-6472266.

July 21 Asarnha Bucha Day

This commemorates the first occasion when the Buddha, his teachings and five disciples were present together after his enlightenment. It is a public holiday, so banks and most government offices will be shut.

July 22
Vassupanayika (Start of Buddhist Lent)
Following Vassupanayika, monks are obliged to remain in a certain place, preferably a monastery, for a period of three months from the day after Asarnha Bucha Day. This, too, is a public holiday.

August 12
Birthday of HM Queen Sirikit
Also observed by Thais as Mother's Day, this is a public holiday. Most government offices close.



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Guest chef

By Jenna Wise

Koku Japanese restaurant was opened in 2002 by Titipong Chookajorn when he saw that good Japanese cuisine wasn't commonly available in Phuket.

K. Titipong, who lived in Japan for five years and runs a seafood business, recognized the importance of serving a high standard of Japanese food here in Phuket.

Koku is popular with Japanese customers as well as other foreigners and, of course, Thais.

Head chef at Koku is Wittaya Wongsaita, who learned the art of Japanese food preparation while working at Kinkaku Japanese restaurant in Bangkok.

To further enhance the Japanese atmosphere, Yukari Hatano started working at Koku two months ago as manageress.

She is from Tokyo where she worked at both the Imperial Hotel and Chinzanso restaurant. After she married, Yukari came to live in Phuket five years ago with her Thai husband. She speaks both Thai and English.

"I recommend that people who are not so familiar with Japanese food order set meals, as these are a good way of sampling a selection of dishes," says Yukari.

These are available from a very reasonable 165 baht, including the traditional *miso* soup.

Whereas some Japanese specialties, such as *sushi*, are challenging to prepare, many others are not.

K. Wittaya has given three recipes that are both simple and stylish. Recommended choices of accompanying beverages are saké or green tea.

To obtain Japanese food products, contact Andaman Sea Product Co at Tel: 076-236603 or 076-224864.

Koku seats about 40 people, and is always busy at lunchtime and on Friday and Saturday evenings. Booking is recommended for those times.

Gin Dara Shiyoyaki (Snowfish grilled with salt)

Ingredients Per person

1 snowfish fillet, about 150gm;
Small handful of very finely grated radish;
¼ fresh lime;
Small handful of fresh Japanese radish tops (or large cress);



TEMPTING TRIO: Above, *Tebagyzoa* (Stuffed Chicken Wings); Above right, *Hiyashi Wakame* (Fresh Seaweed); Right, *Gin Dara Shiyoyaki* (Snowfish grilled with salt).

A sprig of parsley;
Sea salt.

Method

Lightly press the fish fillet into the sea salt on both sides. Grill under medium heat for five minutes on each side. Decorate with the other ingredients and serve.

Hiyashi Wakame (Fresh Seaweed)

Ingredients Per person

100gm fresh Japanese seaweed (*wakame*);
1 small teaspoon shrimp eggs;
1 small teaspoon sesame seeds;
A small handful Japanese radish tops;
1 tablespoon Mirin rice vinegar;
1 teaspoon sesame oil;
1 small pinch of sugar;
1 small pinch of salt;

Method

To prepare this salad, mix all the ingredients except the radish tops

together and marinate overnight. Serve with a decoration of radish tops.

Tebagyzoa (Stuffed Chicken Wings)

Ingredient Per person

3 chicken wings, boned;
50g minced pork;
1 cup very finely chopped cabbage;
2 tablespoons finely chopped *kuichai* (Chinese spring onions);

1 teaspoon Shoyu soy sauce;
Salt and pepper to taste;
½ teaspoon sesame oil;
A small side salad.

For the accompanying sauce:
5 tablespoons Shoyu soy sauce;
4 tablespoons regular rice vinegar;
2 tablespoons Mirin rice vinegar;
1 tablespoon sesame oil.

Method


Blend the sauce ingredients together before preparing the chicken. Make the stuffing by

mixing the remaining ingredients except the salad and sauce.

Cut sideways through the chicken wing to make a hole big enough push some stuffing into the wing, then and close. Secure firmly with toothpicks and grill for about 20 minutes under medium heat, turning occasionally.

Serve with the side salad and a small dish of sauce.

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The unspoiled beauty of the northern and eastern parts of Phuket is attracting more and more people – and developers.

Not only is the scenery attractive but many of the new developments are also closer to Phuket City, the shopping centers and other desirable facilities than their counterparts on the more expensive west coast.



Construction Update

Karon to

KARON: A lifestyle condominium, Baan Paradise, comprising 46 units worth a total value of about 330 million baht will be completed in Karon by March 2007.

The Presidents of developer Priority Village Ltd, Steffan Liback and Jonas Broberg, along with Managing Director Markus Sandqvist, talked about the project.

Mr Sandqvist told the *Gazette*, "The reason we are building Baan Paradise at this location is that we love it, and it's what we would choose for ourselves.

"It's close to the beach and, because we've lived here for many years, we know what people from Europe usually want and that's a perfect location."

Mr Broberg added, "We called it Baan Paradise because everyone wants to live in paradise. In my opinion, I wouldn't want to stay in Patong because it's too intense. It's very good for partying – the No 1 partying place, in fact – but property in Kata and Karon is more upmarket than Patong.

"Still, it's only about 15 minutes to Patong. Kata and Karon beaches are, in my view, are the best beaches in Phuket."

There will be two types of apartment. Type A, of which there will be 16, are two-story apartments of 88 square meters up to 89.5sqm. Prices range from 4.3 million baht to 4.9 million baht.

Type B, of which there will be 24 units, are three-story apartments ranging from 106sqm to 123.5sqm. Prices are from 6.4 million baht to 6.8 million baht.

There will be six penthouse units above the type B apartments, each with 364sqm of living space, with prices starting at 16 million baht. The penthouses will feature Jacuzzis and a sala as well as "an unbeatable sea view".

The apartments come unfurnished but fully equipped. Customers can also order their own particular interior design according to their tastes.

Other facilities and services will include a clubhouse, a res-

The east coast of Phuket is being vaunted as the future of Phuket development. The fact is that it has to be. The south and the west coasts have been developing for 15 years, so now it has to be the north and the east.

Even though it's a "new" area, the east coast is actually not a bad spot. There is some spectacular scenery and several developments have done well, such as East Coast Villas, which has proven that there is a market for those who don't want to spend too much money on a holiday pad.

Cape Yamu, the first large area to be developed, is already seeing five major projects on the go. This is the cape that extends out between Sapam Bay, where the Phuket Boat Lagoon Marina entrance is located, and Ao Por, where there will be another new marina.

The interesting thing about Cape Yamu is that, apart from being a pretty spectacular area, it's actually closer to Phuket's main infrastructure and facilities

East is east, west is west

LARGER THAN LIFE

By Graham Doven

than the more developed west-coast areas.

I guess it's a question of priorities. Some consider that proximity to the beach is more important than, say, shopping centers or golf courses.

Others definitely see the bright lights and delights of Patong nightlife as much more essential than shopping centers,

schools, hospitals, marinas and the like.

Each to his own. I myself am occasionally partial to the lure of bright lights, cold beer and the "rhythm of the night", as the song goes. The beach you can keep; it's okay if you can sit in a small restaurant with a cold beer and look at it.

In any case, even if you live on the east coast, it only takes 15 or 20 minutes to drive to a west coast beach if you really need one.

Cape Yamu is about to become a very high-end area. Projects such as the Cape Yamu project itself and Grove Gardens have already been written about.

The developers of Baan Nern Khao, now known as Paradise Heights, are building a marina on the north side of the cape and the newest project, Baan

Yamu, a three-stage project of large executive-style villas and smaller courtyard villas, will be located overlooking both sides of the cape.

Further on past Cape Yamu, have a drive around the northeast corner of the island. The best way to go is to head out towards Ao Por and turn left at the sign that says "The Estate". That's the turn just before East Coast Villas.

Follow that road and you'll see some of the most spectacular views of Phang Nga Bay and the top of the island. Don't bother about the fact that the road looks a bit unused; keep going, it's worth it.

And if you've met somebody who says Phuket is already overdeveloped, then take them on that drive.

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become new Paradise



Above: Work continues at Baan Paradise in Karon. STRIKE A POSE (Inset): The management team of Baan Paradise developer Priority Village Ltd – from left, Co-President Jonas Broberg, Head Designer Janne Rasimus, Co-President Steffan Liback and Managing Director Markus Sandqvist.

restaurant, a bar with pool table, a gym and a spa.

A large swimming pool surrounds the club house in the center of the project.

The apartments, in turn, surround the pool. The project is located less than 10 minutes' walk from shops, bars, restaurants and the beach.

All power cables are underground and there will be Internet and cable TV connections, a house cleaning and laundry service, and 24-hour security.

Mr Sandqvist explained that, with prices ranging from about 5 million to 16 million baht, Baan Paradise's target customers are in the "middle range".

Mr Liback said, "Our project is quite different from others. From my own experience, I know it's hard to find residential projects that offer full hotel facilities."

Mr Sandqvist added, "For the first year we will take care of



A computer-generated perspective shows what the central water feature of Baan Paradise will look like.

maintenance ourselves and if customers are satisfied, we can continue, or we can bring in a management company."

Ten units at Baan Paradise have already been already sold

and construction is 10% complete.

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Home of the Week

Rawai

Luxury hideaway

This well-presented two-bedroom, two-bathroom home is in the Andaman Place estate, in a quiet and well-maintained area of Rawai.

Bordered by homes of equal standard, the house has typical Thai styling but a contemporary interior.

Entry to the home, secluded behind a high wall and an elegant, embellished front gate, is via a small wooden bridge that crosses a series of ponds, which have striking water features.

The open-plan living and dining areas have high, stepped ceilings and a touch of the East about the décor. The Western-style kitchen has top-of-the-range appliances and fixtures, including imported granite work surfaces.

A guest bathroom and laundry room are adjacent, and there is also a study-cum-office.

The two bedrooms both

have eye-catching en-suite bathrooms and, like the living areas, face onto a large swimming pool and terraces. There is also a sauna and alfresco bathroom by the pool.

Traditional glazed roof tiles, timber, granite, top quality ceramics and sanitaryware, a cool modern color scheme in soft earth tones, and Roman blinds have all been stylishly combined to create a remarkable property.

Other features include fans and air conditioning, a home security system, cable/UBC TV, two telephone lines, hot water systems and water filtration, and a garage.

Built only 12 months ago, this home is priced at 12 million baht. The land title is Chanote.

Contact: Richard Lusted, Siam Real Estate at Tel: 076-288908, Web: www.siamrealestate.com or Email: info@siamrealestate.com



The entrance to the secluded home is via an embellished front gate and over a small wooden bridge (above). The home has several water features (below). The interior is cool and comfortable (below left)



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Gardening

with Bloomin' Bert

I am a fan of silly names. Who can ever forget the immortal Dicky Bird, the English cricket umpire? He could quite easily have chosen to call himself Richard, but obviously decided not to.

Then there's another Richard, the coach for the American version of rugby (the one where they wear all that padding). He was saddled at birth with the name "Dick Buttkiss". Well it's spelled "Butkus", but even he says "Buttkiss", apparently.

How about the timeless *double-entendres* in Captain Pugwash, the 1970s children's cartoon that ran for several years before somebody twigged. Were I a little braver, I'd list their names here and imagine your childish sniggers. But I'm not, so I won't.

Bart Simpson has a lot to answer for, too. For anyone that has never seen *The Simpsons*, he's a feisty young lad to say the least.

His idea of fun is to call the local bar and ask if "Al Kaholic" is there, then sit back as the name is broadcast around the bar.

He's asked for some classic "patrons" – Oliver Clothoff, I P Freely, Jacques Strap, Mike Rotch, Hugh Jass, Ivana Tinkle, Anita Bath, and Heywood U Cuddelmee have all been requested over the years.

They never seem to be there, funnily enough.

Anyone would think that all I've done during my time on this planet is watch cartoons and chortle at anything that resembles a daft name. I suppose I probably have, come to think of it.

The plant world has its own fair share of daftness when it comes to plant names, too. The most unlikely name of all has to be the yucca gloriosa.

Presumably, it dates back to the days when nobody knew what anything was called, and they made it up as they went along.

Want to know more
about a plant
in your garden?

Email Bloomin' Bert at:
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Gloriously yucky



NASTY, BRUTISH, BUT NOT SHORT: The long leaves of the yucca gloriosa have sharp edges that can slice through skin, and can cause irritation or an allergic reaction.

This one has to have been named by some bored drunken botanist after he'd staggered home from the gin house.

Anyway, the yucca gloriosa is also known as the Spanish dagger, or *chii-hup* in Thai. It has a bit of a mean disposition, really.

Over the eons, evolution has given it some of the most spiteful leaves in the plant world.

Growing outward from a central stem, close to the ground, these leaves have an edge to them like a row of shark's teeth – small ones, that is – and they are nasty and brutish although generally not short.

Brush one of these in the wrong direction, and you'll walk away bleeding.

Additionally, as I've found to my cost in the past, handling this plant can cause skin irritation or an allergic reaction.

While transplanting one of these to a new pot a few years ago, I was scratched in the most unlikely of places. The scratches itched for days.

Typically, the yucca gloriosa is around a meter tall (about the length of the longest leaves), although in theory older examples can grow up to a couple of meters. I don't think I've ever seen one that big in Phuket, though.

Like other members of the yucca family, such as the dracaena or the yucca houseplant my mother has in England, it's native to the southern regions of North America, northern Mexico and the West Indies.

Apparently, the root of this herb is used medicinally. It con-

tains vitamins A, B complex, C, as well as calcium, potassium, phosphorus, iron, manganese and copper.

Yuccas contain steroid saponins, whatever those are [*Glucosides that lather when agitated in water. They are used commercially in detergent manufacturing, and may also help to control cholesterol – Editor*], which give it strong healing properties.

Native Americans used the yucca to treat external wounds, and also as dandruff shampoo. Today yucca is used to create the foam in many kinds of Root Beer soft drinks.

The plant can also be taken as a tea, or in tablet or capsule form. Its main benefit seems to be helping the internal digestive

process, if that isn't too much information.

If I were not a man of "regular" habits, I'm not convinced that I would want to ingest any of it, though.

This is a plant that demands full sun, so should be stuck right in the middle of the garden. Given its psychopathic tendencies, it's probably best to keep it away from paths.

It has average water requirements so water it regularly, but don't overdo it.

There are a couple of ways you can propagate the yucca gloriosa: you can divide the underground rhizomes or tubers, by just snapping them apart, or you can collect the seeds that appear every now and then.

Allow the pods to dry on the plant, and then break them open to collect the seeds.


If for some bizarre reason you decide to use the alleged medicinal properties of this plant, don't use the leaves whole.

If you do, you'll find that everything will itch, and the pain on exit will be a lot worse than when it went in.

Ouch.

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accommodation. I am looking for 2- or 3-bedroom accommodation for my wife and myself when we arrive in Phuket in October. We require aircon, a Western kitchen, telephone line and UBC. As our dog will be accompanying us, we require a large, enclosed garden. We are looking for a suitable property in the Nai Harn-Rawai area. The rental period will be for a minimum of 12 months. Our rental budget is 15,000-20,000 baht per month. Email: jonahship1@btopenworld.com

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We are looking for a furnished one-bedroom apartment, house or bungalow in the Kata-Karon Beach area from February 8, 2006 to March 14, 2006. If possible, please send price, pictures and info about your property. Thank you. Email: mats.kennedy@dof.se

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to rent long-term from September or October. Should be furnished, have a garden and privacy, and be near a beach. Would prefer with telephone, ADSL and computer as well. 20,000 baht per month, maximum. Email: ma333499@ucf.edu

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APARTMENT

at Kata Beach. I'm looking for a nice, clean apartment on Karon or Kata Beaches. I will stay for a long time. Not more than 5,500 baht per month. Must have aircon, cable TV, and small kitchen. Please contact for more info. Tel: 04-6304243. Email: jurgen.hugli@gmail.com

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long-term rent. I am looking for a house to rent in the Rawai/Chalong/Nai Harn area for at least one year. Ideally it will have two bedrooms, at least one aircon, and be furnished (although unfurnished is also an option). And as I have a pet dog, the house should have an enclosed garden. Pls contact for more info. Tel: 01-9262334. Email: LaureninThailand@hotmail.com

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For positions 2, 3, 4

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Fax: 076 271-765
Email: jutimaw@lagunaphuket.com



Construction Quality Manager

J.D. Pools is the premier swimming pool company in Thailand. We are currently seeking a Construction Quality Manager to set higher standards on the construction site.

Requirements:

Minimum 3 years working experience in construction, preferably in pool building field, degree in the construction field, good leadership and motivational skills, ability to manage construction projects and focus on customer expectations. Good command of spoken English.

Please send your CV and recent photograph to
norbert@jdpools.com or call direct 01-8916143.

SAILING SKIPPER

required. Kia Ora Catamaran Charters, located on Koh Samui, requires an experienced skipper to operate our 52ft day-charter sailing catamaran. Please contact for more information. Tel: 077-425264 or Email: mark@kiaorathailand.com Alternatively, for more information, please see our website at: www.kiaorathailand.com

NEED DRIVER

urgently for Pa Khlok area. Good salary. Please call. Tel: 076-273427, 01-8295388.

WEB SHOP

designer. I need to hire some professional Web shop builders to do updates, create new shops, etc. I work with OS-Commerz and Shop-Factory (PHP, MySQL). Please contact for more information. Tel: 09-8093566. Email: lennartviberg@hotmail.com

SITE MANAGEMENT

We need a professional individual or company to manage a small condo project in Karon. Please call for more information. Tel: 06-6673249 (English), 09-4005907 (Thai).

BILINGUAL

secretary. Thai female, experienced, knowledge of Microsoft Office, ability to speak English, and bookkeeping knowledge. Please email CV or fax. Fax: 076-281084. Email: non@islandhomephuket.com

COOK NEEDED

Small restaurant urgently needs a cook for breakfast, European food and Thai food. For more info or to apply, please contact. Tel: 01-891-4019. Email: tkoschig2000@hotmail.com

PURCHASING STAFF

English-speaking, min 5 years' experience, knowledge of interior design & furniture purchasing. Please call for appointment. Tel: 076-261931.

SECRETARY/PA

wanted. Established lighting business needs fluent English-speaking, experienced secretary to assist in day-to-day business management. Please contact for more information. Tel: 076-254826, 01-8937027. Fax: 076-254827. Email: ian@andamanlighting.com For details of our company please see our website at: www.andamanlighting.com

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Employment Wanted

FULLY QUALIFIED

I am a native English, fully-qualified ACCA accountant seeking employment in Thailand. I have over 8 years' accountancy experience and have more recently been working as a project accountant. If you have any vacancies or could advise me, please contact me by email. Email: mazz2625@hotmail.com

DO YOU NEED

a babysitter? French girl - 26 years old, experienced with kids, English-speaking, fluent Thai - looking for a job, part-time or full-time as nanny or housekeeper. Tel: 01-187-4540. Email: mias.sandy@caramail.com

RESORT GM

More than a decade of experience in Thailand. Seeking to return to Phuket for personal reasons. Serious offers only, please. Email: resortgm@gmail.com

THAI WOMAN,

39, returning to Phuket. Thai woman, 39 years old, is returning to Phuket after more than 12 years in Europe and is looking for employment. Experienced in tourism-related jobs (receptionist and head-cashier in hotels, lounge hostess at Vienna International Airport, employee in a tour agency), computer literate, native Thai speaker, good command of English, excellent command of German language, good personality, friendly, polite, concerned about customer care and service-oriented. CV available on request. Please contact Mrs Metta Krenn for more information. Email: gueni.k@gmx.net

ENGLISH TEACHER

I am a native English-speaker and I am currently traveling in Thailand. I have recently achieved my TEFL qualification and am looking for work teaching English. If you have any vacancies or can help advise me please contact me at my email address. Email: mazz2625@hotmail.com

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Bulletins

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 at 7 pm and on Fri at 8 pm

For more info, please call
012732053 (Scandinavian),
018954763 (English) or
018912895 (Frank)

NORWEGIAN SERVICE

Priest Rume Birkeland holds a service in Kata every Sunday at 5pm. Tel: 01-569-5018. Scan-Club Phuket and Thailand Network. T. Lodden, PO Box 173, Phuket Post Office. Tel: 06-2672-161. Email: tlodden@yahoo.no

Business Opportunities

SMALL SPA

for sale, Patong. Includes healthy yearly profit and 900,000 baht in investment. Please contact for more information. Tel: 076-233348, 01-8958837. Fax: 076-212901. Email: siripornp@asianwind.biz

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A GO GO BAR

for sale/lease. Off Soi Bangla, full licenses, company, work permit. Please contact for more information. Tel: 01-4571871, 01-4764700. Email: barpatong@yahoo.com

RESTAURANT/BAR



in Phuket City for sale. 2 units, 4 stories, seats 100-plus. 1.5 million baht, 30,000 baht per month. For more info contact Ploenta at 07-9795048.

BUSINESS FOR SALE

Resort with over 20 rooms, for immediate takeover. Please call Khun Na. Tel: 01-8918082. Email: dianagohlf@yahoo.com

HOTEL AONANG

Krabi for sale. 17 rooms and restaurant on the main road; incredible mountain view. Please contact for more information. Tel: 01-8935105. Email: we_are95@hotmail.com

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Patong. 5-star luxury nite-club. 3-4 entertainment licenses, work permits, Thai company. Cost to build: 12 million baht, selling for 6 million baht. Please contact for more info. Tel: 07-8817-600. Please see our website at: www.homebarphuket.com

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Personals

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KITTENS FOR FREE

2 female kittens need new home, both 2 months old, one black and one gray. Don't want to put them in a temple, so please help adopt them. Email: phuketinasia@yahoo.com

NEED DOGSITTER

Reliable, trustworthy, honest dog-lover needed to baby-sit my two dogs from time to time, at my home or possibly yours, either long days or overnight or holidays. Must have excellent references and they will be checked. Email: chantanaj@yahoo.com

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