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More tsunami-warning buoys to be deployed

By Natcha Yuttaworawit

PHUKET CITY: The National Disaster Warning Center (NDWC) has received 165 million baht from the central government to install two more tsunami-warning buoys in the Andaman Sea.

They are to be installed by the middle of this year, NDWC Director Dr Smith Dharmasaroja told a conference in Phuket City on January 21. The conference, at the Royal Phuket City Hotel from January 21 to 24, was held to simultaneously update a total of 77 key figures in the region.

At the seminar were Phuket Vice-Governor Tri Augkaradacha, the directors of 24 schools in Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, Ranong, Trang and Satun.

Also present were officers from Phuket office of the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM - Phuket), the Provincial Fisheries Office, Phuket Provincial Education Office, the NDWC and the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology.

Dr Smith confirmed that the budget was approved the day before the seminar, on January 20.

"The two buoys will be about 250 to 300 kilometers from Phuket, closer to shore than the one already installed, which is about 1,000km from the coast.

"They will give us better and faster information than the old buoy; the Meteorological Department will be responsible for making sure they are function-



The National Disaster Warning Center (NDWC) has received 165 million baht to install two tsunami-warning buoys in the Andaman Sea in addition to the one that was installed in 2006 (pictured).

ing," explained Dr Smith.

"The buoys will confirm whether a tsunami is approaching, and will be critical in making the decision whether to issue a tsunami warning," he added.

"We must hurry because there have been many earthquakes in the region and foreigners trust our information more than they have before," he said.

"We have to open the bidding for contractors to build and install the buoys soon," he said.

He also expressed concern about the system of warning towers throughout the six tsunami-affected provinces.

"Many areas still need more warning towers and some islands still do not have any warning towers at all.

"But it's difficult for us to do anything now because we have to ask for more budget

from the government, although we have received many requests from Krabi, Phang Nga and Ranong provinces for more warning towers," he said.

"I still worry for villages that are far from high ground. They should have tall buildings for tsunami shelters.

"We now have the budget to build four tsunami shelters this year, but we have yet to begin construction.

"Koh Phi Phi Don has only one tsunami shelter. I think that's not enough because there are many tourists on the island, and don't forget what we owe to tourism," he warned.

"Currently, we have only 79 warning towers in the six Andaman provinces. It's not enough because many danger areas are still isolated.

Continued on page 2

Chalong Circle under threat

By Sompratch Saowakhon

CHALONG: Motorists in the southern end of the island may soon be missing their favorite landmark as the provincial highways office is considering removing Chalong Circle and installing traffic lights in its place.

Saraj Suwinchai, director of the provincial office of the Highways Department, told the Gazette that the idea behind the proposal is to relieve traffic congestion at the junction.

"Our plan is to remove the roundabout and install traffic lights on the four main roads at the junction that lead to Kata-Karon [Patak Rd], to the bypass road [Chao Fa East Rd], to Phuket City [Chao Fa West Rd] and to Rawai [Wiset Rd].

"Vehicles entering the junction from Chalong Pier will be forced to turn left onto Wiset Rd. They must do a U-turn and come back and wait at the lights to enter the junction again," he said.

However, before the plan can go ahead, agreement must be reached with the Phuket Provincial Administration Organization (OrBorJor) on what is to be done with the fountain that sits in the middle of the roundabout.

"Although the roads are our responsibility, the fountain is the OrBorJor's and we must have their permission to remove it," K. Saraj explained.

Prasong Manokarn, chief of OrBorJor's department of civil works, told the Gazette, "I have talked with K. Saraj about the plan twice within the past two months. It's possible because we don't need a large budget to do it and it can be done quickly - and it will reduce the number of serious traffic jams there.

from page 1

Tsunami precautions to receive boost

"Also, Patong has only three towers and they are not loud enough. Patong should have at least five towers.

"If we have more towers, we will not have problems with people not hearing the warning. We are also currently improving the language used in the warning," he said.

However, Dr Smith warned, "I'm not satisfied with warning tests. It's not good enough. We should hold tests more often and not warn people that a test will be held.

Key organizations and figures, such as the Ministry of Interior and local leaders, must develop evacuation routes, he added.

"We will inform people of the warning system through TV and through public notices in tourist areas.

"People in risk areas should be warned as soon as possible and be able to react quickly," he said.

Dr Smith repeated his call for the NDWC to be an independent body.

"Our problem is that we have only a few officers and our organization is not an independent entity.

"Some of our executives are from other government sectors. We will appeal to the new government [once one has been established] to pass a law to make us an independent entity.

"The NDWC is already recognized by various nations for our duty, service and ability.

"I want all people in the six Andaman provinces to trust our system and I urge them to follow instructions from officers when we conduct our [tsunami-warning] tests," he said.

2 tonnes of smuggled beef incinerated

By Gazette Staff

PHUKET CITY: Nearly two tonnes of smuggled beef went up in smoke at the Phuket Incinerator in Saphan Hin on January 13. The meat, worth an estimated 153,600 baht, was from cattle infected with foot-and-mouth disease, said Phuket Vice-Governor Smith Palawtichai.

Most smuggled meat was from diseased animals and was of low quality, he added.

According to a Department of Livestock Development (DLD) press release, the meat arrived from India and was packaged under the brands Allana, EatCo and ALM.

DLD Director General Sakchai Sriboonsue said that the meat came in 96 packs weighing 20 kilograms each.

The shipment was smuggled into Phuket through the Tah Chat Chai checkpoint. It was discovered on December 20 in an outdoor freezer on Soi Siangtai, off Thepkasattri Rd in Phuket City, he said.

Somboon Intharat, the owner of the storage unit, was found to have brought the meat into Thailand without a permit or correct health certification, and without following Customs regulations, he said.

Somboon, who will be fined an as-yet undisclosed amount, has been charged under the Animal Epidemics Act of 1956.

This was the sixth time that smuggled meat had been incinerated in Phuket since November 2007.

"We have a network of 70 animal-quarantine checkpoints across the country. We

are strict about enforcing the law against people who import meat without permission from the Department of Livestock Development.

"We are concerned about the safety and quality of food. It is very important for tourism, business and our people," said K. Sakchai.

Between October 2006 and September 2007, 650 arrests were made nationwide for animal and meat smuggling.

During the same period, Customs seized more than one million ducks, 25,000 chickens and almost 2,000 goats, as well as more than 40,000kg of poultry meat.

The total value of animals and meat seized was estimated at 92.3 million baht, added K. Sakchai.

Patong beach food crackdown launched

By Natcha Yuttaworawit

PATONG: Patong Municipality has warned Patong beach vendors against cooking and selling food on the beach, saying violators will be arrested.

"If we find any vendors cooking food on the beach we will arrest them. Only drinks can be sold on the beach and all vendors doing so must pay a tax and trash-collection fee to the municipality," said Chairat Sukkaban, deputy mayor of Patong Municipality.

"Any vendors caught breaking the regulation will have their beach chair and umbrella stand concession revoked. Next week, I am going to file a report asking for help from the District Office and Provincial Office. I will also ask police to monitor the area," he added.

Seri Mekcharoeniawattana, from Narathiwat, who has been a vendor on Patong Beach for more than 15 years, said, "I know



BEACH-EATERS ANONYMOUS: Beachgoers at Patong can no longer order hot meals on the beach, as Patong Deputy Mayor Chairat Sukkaban has launched a campaign to stop beach chair operators from serving cooked food.

the municipality has talked to us many times [about selling food], but some people are still cooking food on the beach.

"I don't want to blame anyone because I understand that they just want to make money. I always follow the rules, I pay tax every year and pay the fee for trash every six months.

"I think that cleanliness is

the most important aspect of a tourist destination. Cooking is not suitable on the beach. It's a place to relax, not cook. When tourists are hungry they can walk up to the footpath, where there are many vendors," said K. Seri.

"I would like all vendors to respect the rules, because it is good for both us and the government officers," he added.

Phuket Provincial Police Commander Pol Maj Gen Decha Budnampeth told the *Gazette* that he hoped the municipality would try to settle the matter before involving the police.

PITO calls for voluntary price freeze

PHUKET: The Phuket Provincial Internal Trade Office (PITO) on January 15 called for shops and restaurants to join its Blue Flag, voluntary price-freeze program, aimed at giving consumers some relief from rising prices.

Prices of many everyday necessities have risen in Phuket, reflecting price increases for raw materials, PITO Chief Wassana Utsaharam said.

The strong baht has driven up the cost of imports, including oil, she added.

Under the Blue Flag project, shops and vending stalls are inspected by PITO officers to ensure they comply with all hygiene, quality, price and price-display requirements. Those that pass are given Blue Flags to display.

As part of the project, large retailers including Makro, Big C and Super Cheap have set up "Blue Flag corners", where 20 different consumer goods defined by PITO as "everyday necessities" are available at discounts of 2% to 20%, K. Wassana said.

Among the discounted products are staples such as rice, fish sauce, milk and laundry detergent.

Restaurants are also being encouraged to join the project, she added.

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German caught robbin' the hood

By Semacote Suganya

CHALONG: Jannik Norbert Volz, 19, from Germany, was arrested about 2 am on January 20 while he was attempting to steal a motorbike just after he had stolen a hunting bow and arrows from Phuket Shooting Range.

Police arrested Jannik and charged him with "nighttime theft", which in Thailand carries a stiffer penalty than daylight robbery, after he was seen stealing the bow and 13 arrows on closed circuit television (CCTV) installed at the shooting range.

Jannik rode to the shooting range on a black Honda Click motorbike he had rented from a motorcycle rental shop in Patong. After stealing the bow and arrow, he then ditched the rental bike in favor of a red motorcycle of the same make and model that was parked near a stage where monkeys perform shows next to the shooting range, according to police reports.

Chalong Police Superintendent Col Samarn Chainarong said that questioning of the young German revealed that he had originally intended to steal a gun from the shooting range but the bow and arrows were an easier target. Jannik did not say why he decided to steal a weapon, Col Samarn added.

Jannik does not speak any Thai and only a little English. We



Jannik Norbert Volz with the bow and arrows he attempted to steal from Phuket Shooting Range.

have contacted the German Embassy and asked them to contact Jannik's parents so that he can be deported, said Col Samarn.

Jannik was staying in Thailand as a tourist at an unregistered address on Nanai Road in Patong. He had planned to leave the country on February 6, but will now be processed for deportation after he is charged with night time theft, said Col Samarn.

Despite the young tourist's evening of erratic crimes Col Samarn said that Jannik did not seem to be intoxicated or on drugs at the time of his arrest.

Jannik said he was operating alone, although we are investigating whether there is anyone else involved, Col Samarn added.

Room tax generates B65m

PHUKET: About 65 million baht in tax on hotel rooms was collected in Phuket in 2007, some 5 million baht more than expected, said Anchalee Vanich Tephabutra, president of Phuket Provincial Administration Organization (OrBorJor) on January 19.

"Our target was 60 million baht. More tax was collected because we met with a large number of hotel operators and explained to them how the system of hotel-room tax works.

"In the past year, there have been many tourists from Europe, as well as new charter flight tourists from places including India and Dubai," she said.

Hotels in Phuket are required by law to charge a 1% room tax. In the past, however, some hotel operators have defied paying the tax, citing a lack of clear information about what the money is used for.

"For 2008, we have set a target of 65 million baht again. We plan to meet with hotel operators more frequently to help them better understand the tax. Some hotels in Kata-Karon and Patong have yet to start paying the tax," she added.

"The hotels that paid the tax will be invited to join our international road shows. We will take hotel representatives overseas to help promote Phuket as a tourist destination," K. Anchalee said.

She added that the roadshows had generated much interest in Phuket. Through the increased number of tourists and the room tax collected, money has been generated to help develop Chalong Pier and pay for life-guardians, she said.

Income generated in 2007 through tourism in Phuket was between 80 billion baht and 90 billion baht, K. Anchalee added.

CRUSHED

The woman driver of this sedan escaped serious injury after a six-wheeled truck with failed brakes (inset) plowed into her car on Patong Hill on January 19.

The owners of the house on the precarious hairpin curve just before Wat Patong also were unharmed. Sopon Borirak, duty inspector at Kathu Police Station, declined to give any details of the accident.

- Photo by Dan Miles



Marine tourism held as cornerstone of provincial 4-year development plan

By Janyaporn Morel

PHUKET CITY: The provincial government's next four-year development plan aims to establish the island as a world-class marine tourism destination by 2012 while sustaining annual 10% increases in tourism-industry revenue over the four-year period starting in 2009.

The ambitious plan, drawn up by the Governor's Office, was presented to elected local officials and representatives of government agencies at a meeting at the Phuket Merlin Hotel on January 17.

The event was chaired by Phuket Governor's Office Chief Rapeepat Na Nakorn in place of Phuket Governor Niran Kalayanamit, who left Phuket January 17 on a study trip to Spain and Portugal.

During his trip, Gov Niran visited marinas, deep-sea ports and medical facilities in both countries before returning on January 25.

The four-year plan is mandatory for obtaining central-government funding for provincial

development projects through the Interior Ministry.

The strategy presented on January 17 listed four objectives:

1. Establishing Phuket as a world-class marine tourism center by development of both natural and man-made tourism resources, including infrastructure, in an effort to attract more visitors from around the globe. Under the plan, success will be defined as increasing tourism-industry revenue by 10% for four successive years, starting in fiscal 2009.

2. Raising the standard of living of all Phuket people while maintaining the island's unique identity. The goal calls for equal access to government services, with all government agencies working to help develop citizens into moral and productive members of society with a good sense of their identity as Thais.

3. Implementing more sustainable and better-managed use of natural resources, especially marine and coastal resources, while improving the quality of coastal water.

4. Development of local

government administrative systems to better serve the people, including enforcement of anti-corruption measures already in place.

To achieve this, administrators must improve work procedures and develop staff potential to raise organizations to a high standard.

Listed as key elements in achieving these goals were improvement to the island's road and marine transport networks and services, both in terms of safety and overall standards.

The province must also work to develop Phuket's reputation as a tourist destination by disseminating accurate information about safety and security issues, according to the plan.

During the meeting, local officials were also reminded that a Cabinet resolution made in November earmarks a total budget of 15 billion baht for the central government's *Yoo Dee Mee Suk* (Good Life and Happiness) grassroots development initiative and that these projects also need budget approval from the Interior Ministry.



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TUK-TUK TROUBLES

TRANSPORT SHENANIGANS IN PHUKET

Few people are more acutely aware of the fact that Patong's image is suffering from a surfeit of tuk-tuks than Daroon Sooksai, Chairman of the Phuket Tuk-Tuk Co-operative Ltd, based in Phuket City.

He is in complete agreement that there are too many tuk-tuks operating in Patong.

"We have been together for 21 years now and are the oldest transport co-op on the island. In the past we had 500 to 600 drivers as members, but now our numbers have fallen to just 173," said K. Daroon.

While all tuk-tuks may look alike to tourists, quite a bit of information can be gleaned from the appearance of each vehicle, K. Daroon explained.

Red tuk-tuks with side doors are usually those of Phuket Tuk-Tuk Co-operative members, who own them outright. Red tuk-tuks that load from the back belong to the Thavorn Company, which owns about 600 vehicles that are rented to drivers.

They are currently the largest single group of tuk-tuks. In addition, there are also about 600 independent operators, he estimated. Every tuk-tuk painted a color other than red is that of an independent operator, he explained.

"In a situation like this, there is no central control over tuk-tuks. No-one has ever stepped forward to try and get some control over us," said K. Daroon, who suggests getting all the independent drivers to form a single group as a potential first step to finding a solution.

"I accept that tuk-tuks in Phuket have a bad image among tourists. However, I can confirm

For years, one of the single greatest sources of complaints among tourists visiting Phuket has been the island's public transport, especially the teeming hordes of tuk-tuks that clog the one-way streets of Patong nightly in search of fares.

The *Gazette* reports on what is being done to improve the situation.

that my co-op uses strict measures to control our drivers and expels any driver found to have taken advantage of or harmed a tourist. Our drivers are not the ones behind all the negative news one hears, but there are many different groups," he said.

Because the Thavorn Company is run as a business, not a collective, its main organizational objective is to make money through the collection of rental fees – not to control its drivers, K. Daroon said.

K. Daroon thinks the tuk-tuk industry in Phuket should be regulated at the provincial level, as it is in other provinces.

"I don't know why the province doesn't take steps to control all the tuk-tuk chaos that we see nowadays. At the moment, almost all the tuk-tuks converge at Patong and a few other well-known places.

"The province seems to have no plan to control tuk-tuks or any other segment of the transport sector, including taxis,

limousines and motorcycle taxis. Each of these needs to be regulated, with service areas established to ensure that services are available across the island, not just in a few locations," he said.

"I am a Phuket native and I care about the island's reputation. I would like to see the condition return to what it was five or 10 years ago. I think the responsibility falls with

the Phuket Provincial Transport Office. They must take swift action and put rules in place. If they do, I am sure everything would improve quickly," he said.

As for the high fare rates commonly charged by tuk-tuks, K. Daroon said this was yet another result of years of inadequate regulation.

Even if asked to lower rates by the Transport Office, he thinks it would be impossible to do so because the rates have already been in effect for so long.

"There is no point comparing tuk-tuk fares on the island with those in other provinces be-

Red tuk-tuks with side doors are usually those of Phuket Tuk-Tuk Co-operative members, who own them outright. Red tuk-tuks that load from the back belong to the Thavorn Company, which owns about 600 vehicles that are rented out to drivers.



'I get complaints from tourists, both Thai and foreign, who say the public transport here is among the most expensive in the world'

– Patong Deputy Mayor Chairat Sukkaban

cause Phuket has become a such a popular destination that prices have gone up across the board and driven up the cost of living," he said.

"I would like to propose to the Transport Office that they make it mandatory for all tuk-tuks to join the Phuket Tuk-Tuk Co-operative. Then, the Transport Office could simply refuse to provide annual registration stamps for any tuk-tuks who have not joined. This would be an easy way to get serious about controlling tuk-tuks," he said.

So dismal are official efforts to regulate the transport sector that the Phuket Tuk-Tuk Co-operative has already met three times with the leaders of the Phuket Limousine and Business Services Co-operative (PBC) and the heads of about eight mo-

torcycle taxi groups in an effort to brainstorm ways of improving their services and image.

"We plan to ask both police and Transport Office officials to join in our discussions, too," he said.

"I accept that the current situation with three groups is too poorly regulated. We need one government office to step up and get serious about regulating our industry...I think that agency should be the Transport Office because it has the authority to issue the necessary regulations. If the Transport Office issues the needed regulations, we are ready to follow them," he said earnestly.

Jaturong Kaewkasi, Chief of the Phuket Provincial Transport Office Academic Division, told the *Gazette* his agency is well aware of the problems created by the approximately 1,200 tuk-tuks registered with his agency.

The main problem the PPTO faces with regulating tuk-tuks is the fact that, unlike buses, they do not operate along fixed

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For the same price as a 10-minute tuk-tuk ride in Patong, foreigners can rent a motorcycle for a day.

routes. Thus, it is impossible to apply a fixed fare structure to them, he said.

The PPTO twice organized meetings between tuk-tuk drivers and a provincial committee in 2000 and again in 2002, asking for their co-operation in adhering to fixed fare structures when operating between locations such as Phuket City and Patong, for example.

Part of the agreement was that tuk-tuks would advertise these fares inside their vehicles as a sort of "bargaining guideline" for passengers. Unfortunately, few continue to post the signs or charge fares at the suggested rates.

Under the agreement, suggested fares "within a district" are just 10 baht; the recommended fare for a trip from Patong Beach to Phuket, set in 2002 and still applicable today, is 210 baht.

In reality, fares charged to

foreign tourists for short trips within a district are typically 100 baht in Patong, while trips from Patong to Phuket City are at least double the suggested fare.

"There is little the PPTO can do about this," he said.

"Under the law, tuk-tuk fares are agreed to by mutual consent between driver and passenger. Thus, we cannot legally regulate them like buses or vans that run over fixed distances. As with taxis and motorbike taxis, they are intended to serve passengers needing a door-to-door service," he said.

"While there are fixed fares on buses running between destinations such as Phuket City and Patong, these routes do not normally meet tourists requirements," he added.

"Patong is a nightlife entertainment spot and the needs of the tourists who go there are better served by door-to-door forms of transport like tuk-tuks and mo-

torcycle taxis," he said.

His office is well aware of the high fares being charged, but has no legal right to intervene. The PPTO can only ask for voluntary co-operation on the part of drivers. The fact that some 80% of tuk-tuks in Phuket are rented by their drivers was another factor keeping fare prices as they are, he said.

K. Jaturon admitted that the level of co-operation among various groups of tuk-tuk drivers in Phuket to maintain high minimum fares was quite unlike the situation in other provinces, where drivers bargained individually and free market forces prevailed.

"In an effort to address the problem, the PPTO once proposed fitting tuk-tuks with meters. However, officials at the Department of Land Transport headquarters in Bangkok failed to understand the situation here and refused to allow it," he said.

"I am trying to find a solu-

SUGGESTED FARES

Suggested fares agreed to by a provincial government working committee in 2002 and still in effect today – at least theoretically.

Source: Phuket Provincial Transport Office

Journey	Distance	Fare
Phuket City-Patong	15km	210 baht
Phuket City-Karon Beach	20km	270 baht
Phuket City-Chalong Bay	11km	160 baht
Karon Beach-Cape Panwa	23km	300 baht
Karon Beach-Patong	6km	100 baht

tion because good public transport should be the cornerstone of a province such as Phuket, where the economy depends on tourism," he added.

Another much-needed service the PPTO would like to launch is a "minibus" service for Patong.

"Under the plan we have drawn up, minibuses would run north in a circular route along the beach road, then south along Phang Muang, behind Jungceylon. Fares would be from 15 to 30 baht and passengers would be able to board or get off

proving the situation in Patong.

In the absence of any private investors, he said he would like the Transport Office to request a budget of 10 million baht from the provincial government to buy 10 minibuses so that such a service could begin

"Everyone knows about this problem, but it can't be solved by one agency alone. We all need to work together, recognizing that we have a serious problem in need of immediate attention," he said.

To see what effect the tuk-tuk crisis is having on tourism, the

Gazette asked Suwalai Pinpradab, Director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Region 4 office in Phuket for her opinion.

She told the *Gazette* the TAT has received com-

plaints that transport fees in Phuket are among the most expensive in the world.

"Some tourist get charged up to 1,000 baht for a ride from Phuket International Airport to their hotel. Others pay 800 baht for the same service. Phuket has no standard transport fees.

"Tourists often come as a group but split up and take different tuk-tuks when they go

Continued on page 6

"If there are other, less expensive options tuk-tuk drivers will be forced to lower their fares if they are to remain competitive. But who will come in and do it?"

K. Jaturon sees increasing transport options in Patong – not more regulation of existing ones – as the key to persuading the tuk-tuk drivers to lower their rates to more reasonable levels.

"If there are other, less expensive options tuk-tuk drivers will be forced to lower their fares if they are to remain competitive. But who will come in and do it?" he asked rhetorically.

K. Jaturon said he wanted get the province involved in im-

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Hands, paws and automobiles

PHUKET: People and pooches are invited to join the first Phuket Dog Rally, which will see a "mutley" crew of participants drive from Saphan Hin to Nai Harn on Sunday January 27.

The day will be filled with activities for dogs and their owners, who will set off in their cars at 8:30 am, stopping at several checkpoints along the way to Nai Harn, where the day will end with a hound-friendly picnic at the beach, complete with prizes.

Each checkpoint will present a task for dogs and their owners to perform. Prizes will be awarded for the best human-canine partnerships.

Dogs should bring their owners on a leash and supply their own doggy bags full of treats and water for the beach picnic.

Registration for the rally is 150 baht per person, which includes a commemorative shirt and sticker. There is no limit to the number of dogs an owner can bring to the rally. Registration can be made at the Modern Dog shop on Chao Fa Rd, opposite Big C, Suan Luang. Alternatively, call at 076-246072 or 089-7776307 before January 25.

Free meditation training

PHUKET CITY: The monthly Middle Way meditation training for January will be held on Sunday, January 27 starting at 1:30 pm.

The teaching monk will be English speaking Phra Tada Jaranataro of the Dhammakaya Foundation.

For a change of scenery, this month's training will be held indoors at the air-conditioned Middle Way Meditation Center located at Vanich Plaza in Phuket City.

To get to the center from Seng Ho Bookstore, turn left and go straight along Luang Por Wat Chalong Rd, then turn right into Vanich Plaza. Go about halfway around the roundabout inside the plaza. The three-story Meditation Center building is on the left.

The sessions are free and conducted in English. All nationalities and faiths are welcome to join.

For more information call 081-9793669 or 081-3704005, or visit www.meditationthai.org.



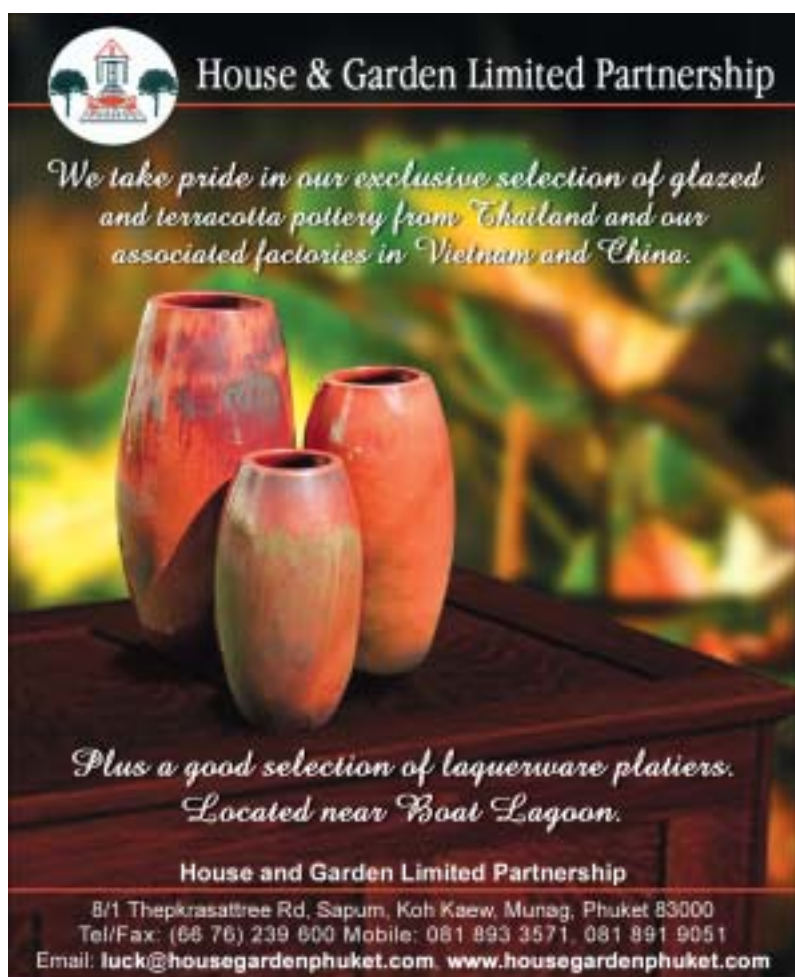
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Transport woes continue to tarnish island's image

From page 5

places. When they get back together with the rest of their group they discuss what they were charged by their tuk-tuk drivers. When they realize the differences, bad feelings are created," she said.

I am always thinking about ways to institute a system of fixed, reasonably-priced fares so that tourists will not be overcharged like this," she added.

"It certainly has an effect on tourism overall. I know I would feel fed up if I went abroad and felt like I had been cheated on a taxi fare," she said.

K. Suwalai said she has discussed the issue with the PPTO and encouraged them to better publicize the suggested fare rates among tourists.

She also asked those who overcharge on taxi fares to consider what the long-term effects they might be having on tourism.

"People need to use common sense. I would like to ask them not to act like predators who simply kill and consume, but rather to act like egg collectors who might get less at first but will reap greater benefits in the long-term," she said.

"If they continue to tarnish Phuket's image by taking advantage of tourists, then before long, those tourists will choose alternative destinations such as Vietnam," she added.

Another person on the receiving end of numerous complaints about the prevailing tuk-tuk chaos is Patong Deputy Mayor Chairat Sukkaban.

"I get many complaints from tourists, both Thai and foreign, who say that Phuket's public transport is among the most expensive in the world," he said.

The overabundance of tuk-tuks has also created a severe lack of parking spaces for residents and visitors alike, he noted.

"I think only temporary



'We need one government office to step up and get serious about regulating our industry...I think that agency should be the Transport Office'
— Phuket Tuk-Tuk Co-operative Chairman Daroon Sooksai.

parking for pick up and drop off should be allowed along main roads of Patong, because road surface space is very limited there," he said.

"Patong Municipality lacks the authority to set fares for tuk-tuks and motorbike taxis, while enforcement of road traffic laws in Patong are the responsibility of the Kathu Traffic Police," he said.

"Patong Municipality is happy to comply with orders from

main in order to improve the city and its economy," he said.

'Patong Municipality lacks the authority to set fares for tuk-tuks and motorbike taxis, while enforcement of road traffic laws in Patong are the responsibility of the Kathu Traffic Police.'

governor several months ago complaining about having to pay to park there.

the Traffic Police to paint lines on roads marking no-parking zones and do other such work, but what happens if nobody enforces the rules?" he asked.

The municipality also lacks the authority to regulate tuk-tuk activity on private roads like Soi Sansabai, which has become an important connecting road between Rat-U-Thit 200 Pi Rd and the new Phang Muang Rd that runs parallel to it further inland.

"In my opinion, roads like Soi Sansabai and a few others that effectively serve as public roads should be consigned over to the public do-

Also on the topic of Soi Sansabai, he confirmed that the people collecting money from people who choose to park there are not *tessakij* (municipal officers).

One group of business owners operating in the area lodged a complaint with the



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War on Drugs probe draws a blank

An independent committee probing drug-related killings during Thaksin Shinawatra's first term as prime minister has found no solid evidence linking senior government figures with the murders, a source in the Justice Ministry source said on January 16.

After five months of inquiries, the panel led by former attorney general Khanit na Nakhon has obtained only statistics of the number and nature of the murders – and nothing to implicate police or Thaksin as instigator of a shoot-to-kill policy on drug suspects.

The main content of the panel's report is facts and government records showing how Thaksin's order was carried out from top to bottom through the bureaucracy.

One of the most potent pieces of evidence is that an anti-narcotics center under the Interior Ministry was ordered to issue a blacklist naming drug dealers and users nationwide, as well as an appraisal measure to show a "decline" in the number of people blacklisted.

However, the report contained no conclusion that may subject any individual to criminal liability.

The report said that 2,819 people were killed in 2,559 murder cases between February and April in 2003.

Of those killed, 1,370 were related to drug dealing, while 878 of them were not. Another 571 people were killed without apparent reason.

The overall murder rate two years before and two years after the three-month "War on Drugs" was 454 cases a month, or a third of the number killed between February and April 2003.

Phrae for teak. Police in Phrae province on January 15 arrested four men for poisoning a large number of teak trees in Mae Yom National Forest in Phrae.



CROP DUSTING

After running out of fuel, this two-seat Zenair STOL CH 701 aircraft owned by Royal Thai Navy Vice-Admiral Chumpol Sirinawin, crashed landed nose-first into a field in front of a country home about half a kilometer from the landing strip at Lampang Airport on January 13. V/Adm Chumpol and his pilot survived the crash.

Of 296 dead teak trees, 19 had been felled and 33 logs were found nearby. The trees were part of the last complete teak tree stand in Mae Yom National Forest.

Narung Kardmanee, Theerawat Bunyuen, Kanya Saengkhamlue, and Phajon Khamkhern have reportedly confessed to felling the trees using weed killer and logging equipment.

They said they wanted the logs to renovate homes and to sell for money.

Phrae police later searched sawmills in the province for illegally felled logs and to find out if the mills had bought the logs or hired the suspects to kill the trees in order to secretly fell them later.

Mongkhon Saengrungrun-arun, the chief of the Mae Yom National Forest, was transferred for failing to protect the teak trees.

Fair hike. Upcountry coach operator Transport Company will

raise fares by three *satang* a kilometer starting February 16.

Company chairman Piyan Champsut, who is also deputy permanent secretary for transport, said the state enterprise has lost about 60 million baht since the government denied its request on October 15 to raise fares.

Current fares are calculated on a diesel price of 23.84 baht per liter, while diesel is now 29.34 baht a liter, K. Piyan said.

The Transport Company will hold fares at existing rates for three weeks before the new rates take effect, he said.

The company lost some 50 million baht when it halved fares for several days to encourage voters to travel to their home constituencies to vote in the constitutional referendum and the general election, he added.

Dam tragedy. Seven bodies found floating in the Srinakharin Reservoir on January 17 and 18

might be those of illegal immigrants trying to sneak into the country when their boat accidentally capsized, said Pol Lt-Col Pornpoj Suwansri, head of the Mae Chalaeb border checkpoint in Kanchanaburi.

Five bodies – that of a man, three women and a boy – were found on the night of January 18.

The bodies of a man and a boy were found a day earlier, police said.

Cell phone surprise. A snap search of death row at the notorious Klong Prem Central Prison in Nonthaburi unearthed items banned to prisoners, including three mobile phones.

The January 18 search of Area 2, a maximum-security wing housing 300 inmates sentenced to death or life in prison, turned up two knives, two pornographic magazines and dice.

As many as 60 prison guards conducted the one-hour

search. The items were buried in a ditch screened by a concrete cover. Prison staff are continuing to identify the owners.

The Corrections Department said that the search was part of the department's crackdown on drug-dealing by inmates.

Area 2 is home to high-profile criminals, including former police Lt-Gen Chalor Kerdthet, convicted for double murder in the Saudi jewelry scandal, and drug lord Suparb Seedaeng.

Scammers. By paying fines and using surrogate jailbirds, operators of illegal pyramid schemes often get away to start new get-rich-quick schemes, Pol Maj Gen Wisut Wanichbutr, who heads the Department of Special Investigations (DSI), Economic and Cyber Crimes (Ecotec) Division, has said.

Maj Gen Wisut explained that most people suspected of running pyramid schemes planned to operate "hit-and-run" businesses from the start.

They also hired "fall guys" who would be sacrificed in return for a huge payout, which they could enjoy after serving a light jail sentence.

According to the DSI, while most of these criminals try hit-and-run businesses just once, or wait until being charged with such a crime expires before trying again, there are also many who plan new schemes soon after the existing operation ends.

DSI spokesman Piyawat Kingket said there were now around 400 suspicious pyramid schemes in operation, with objectives and procedures different from what had been originally declared, under investigation.

The main objective of the DSI-led joint operations was to get as much money as possible back to the innocent investors, he added.

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



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Paton-Smith walks free

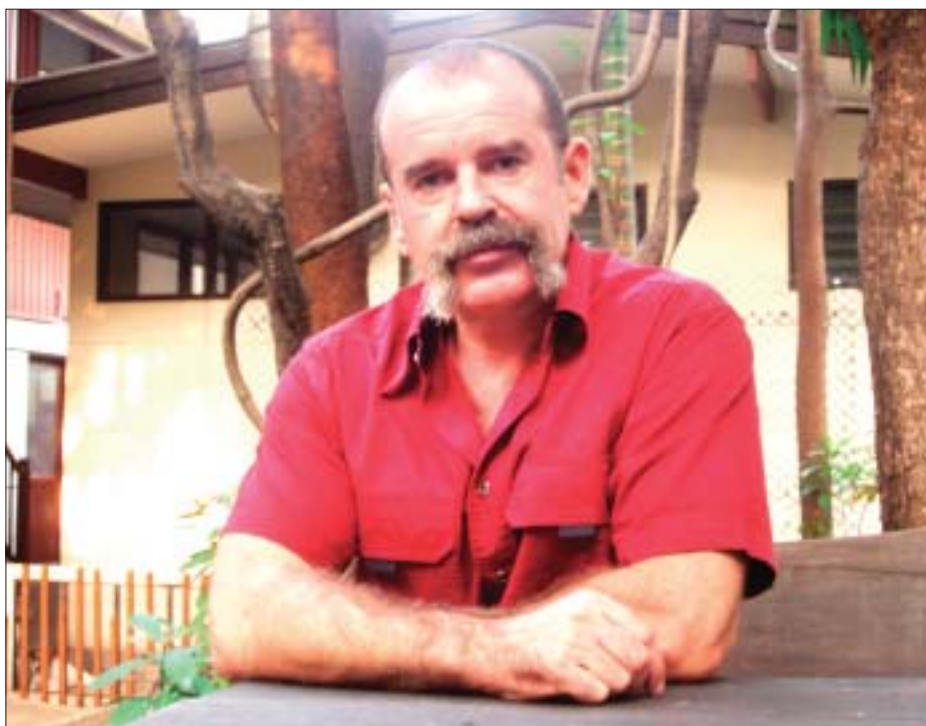
Final court proceedings in December put an end to charges against long-term Samui resident Crispin Paton-Smith.

Mr Paton-Smith was cleared of all charges and released on December 27 at 7pm after being incarcerated for more than 18 months in the notorious Klong Prem Prison, Bangkok.

Mr Paton-Smith was arrested in July 2006 in Pattaya amid a media frenzy.

He was arrested along with two other expats living on Samui. The three were accused of offenses including attempted murder, money laundering, extortion, drug trafficking, human trafficking, racketeering, prostitution, bribing government officials, illegal land sales and transfers, rape, fraud, illegal weapons trading and being officers in a secret society.

The court heard several witness accounts leading up to the decision. Mr Paton-Smith's original offenses were cut down to two remaining charges. The first was being an officer in a secret society, which was in relation to Mr Paton-Smith's involvement with the Banditos, a



well-known biker gang.

A charge of extortion came about after the alleged souring of business deals made with other members of the secret society who were also living on Samui. The prosecution was unable to produce conviction-worthy evidence against Mr Paton-Smith

after a key witness failed to appear in court on a number of occasions.

The verdict went uncontested, Mr Paton-Smith's British passport was returned and he was granted permission to remain in Thailand.

A group of friends and sup-

FREE AT LAST: Long-time Samui resident Crispin Paton-Smith walked free after the prosecution's case against him fell apart with a lack of key witnesses and evidence.

porters of Mr Paton-Smith celebrated after news of his release.

A website set up for people to show their support for the long-term Samui resident contained many messages sent

from well-wishers to Mr Paton-Smith while he was in prison.

An attendee of the verdict reading said, "We knew he was innocent all along. It's very hard to watch someone you know go through all of this. We are so happy to see justice served."

Democrats prevail. The Democrat Party was the clear winner on Koh Samui during the general election that took place December 23.

Officials reported that 20,405 people cast their ballots in favor of the Democrats, while the People Power Party (PPP) came in second with 1,781 votes and the Peua Pandin Party came in third with 345 votes.

Out of 34,474 eligible voters, 72.25% cast their ballots. Of these, 1,285 were declared in-

valid and 477 ballots were left blank. Koh Samui District Chief Adisorn Kamnerdsiri expressed his satisfaction with the high voter turnout. No problems were reported during the election.

Pha-ngan prepares for tourists. Business operators on Koh Pha-ngan are hoping that the island will see increased visitor numbers in 2008. Plans are being put in place to improve the island's public areas to make Pha-ngan a more appealing destination.

Pittaya Inthakhong, administrative chief of Koh Pha-ngan, said that trees and flowers will be planted along the main roads on the island. It is hoped that other roadways and passages will be given similar treatment, he added.

K. Pittaya also announced plans to improve road safety by installing more street lights and traffic signs.

Koh Pha-ngan has a reputation for attracting budget holidaymakers and it is believed that some people are avoiding the island because of poor infrastructure and a lack of efficient public transport.

K. Pittaya is hoping to remedy the situation to return the island to its once appealing state.

"If basic things related to security and modern conveniences, including transportation, are sorted out, I'm sure that tourist numbers will increase. Our

island surpasses neighboring ones in terms of natural beauty. I want tourists to experience everything here. The roads will be safer once our plans are put into place," he said.



FROM THE GULF OF THAILAND

By Max Rogers



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Southern unrest enters fifth year

A Muslim man who worked as a military informant was shot dead in Pattani on the morning of January 21, police said.

While he was riding his motorcycle to downtown Pattani at 8:30 am, Abdulloh Toh-adam, 40, was killed by a pillion rider. He was attacked on the Pattani-Yala Road in Tambon Baraho, Muang District.

Police said the man was an informant for military-intelligence officials.

The assassination highlights the increasing importance of intelligence gathering by both sides in the ongoing conflict in the Deep South.

On January 7, three intelligence officers of the Internal Security Operations Command of the southern region and seven policemen were arrested on charges of spying for southern insurgents.

Following the scandal, Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont, Army Commander-in-Chief Gen Anupong Paochinda and Police Commissioner-General Seripisut Temiyavej visited Yala on the morning of January 21 to be briefed on the latest situation in the Deep South.

Gen Anupong previously said that he would listen to officials to see how they have been operating before considering how to improve the system to prevent leakage of official information.

He has also ordered the intelligence agencies to review and screen their personnel.

A few days before his visit, PM Surayud said Muslim insurgents in the Deep South were "inspired" by al-Qaeda, but probably not being supplied by the group in terms of financial or material support.

Analysts have long been divided over whether Thai insurgents are plugging into a broader Islamic movement.

Regardless, the violence continues to take a heavy toll on

security forces.

On the morning of January 19, 13 suspects were arrested in three villages for allegedly taking part in an ambush that killed eight soldiers in Narathiwat on January 14.

The attack came as the separatist rebellion entered its fifth year.

Little progress has been made in curbing the violence, despite the presence of nearly 40,000 police and soldiers in the region.

Gunman got. Police in Nakhon Sri Thammarat arrested a suspected hired gunman wanted in connection with a number of cases, including the murder of a policeman in 1991.

Thirty-nine-year-old Mek Srikan, alias "Seu Mek" (Tiger Mek), was arrested outside Karom Cafe in Lan Saka District at 1 am January 19.

The arrest was led by Nakhon Sri Thammarat Provincial Police Deputy Commander Col Somchai Ouamthanom.

Police had received intelligence from Lam Thap District Police in Krabi that Mek was seeing a singer who worked at Karom Cafe. Col Somchai travelled to Krabi and waited at the club until closing time, when Mek arrived to pick up his ladyfriend.

Officers then swooped on the suspect and placed him under arrest, despite his protestations of innocence, Col Somchai added.

Seua Mek was one of Police Region 8's most-wanted men. He had a number of outstanding arrest warrants, including one for the shooting murder of an officer with the Thung Song District Police in 1991.

Other warrants included one for the attempted murder of an on-duty police officer from Lan Saka District Police and one for resisting arrest in Chawang District, also in Nakhon Sri Thammarat.

His latest alleged crime is the robbery and murder of Pra-



A bomb-squad member inspects the wreckage of a motorcycle. Suspected insurgents concealed an explosive on the bike and parked it in a crowded market in Yala on January 15. The bomb went off, injuring 37 people, six critically.

— Photo by Nakharin Chinnawornkomol

phan Duangnamkaow, the 61-year-old owner of a number of rubber and palm plantations in Lam Thap District, Nakhon Sri Thammarat.

K. Praphan was tortured until she revealed where her valuables were concealed, then strangled with an electrical cord in May last year.

The witness to that murder was her grandson.

"Seua Mek has a long history of committing violent crimes, including murder, attempted murder and robbery in Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Krabi and nearby provinces. He was the most-wanted man for many local police forces and was also in the Police Region 8 and national police black book of suspected gun-

men," said Lt Col Chaowasin Bunpradit, Nakhon Sri Thammarat Provincial Police deputy superintendent for criminal investigation.

Murder most foul. A man in Nakhon Sri Thammarat's Cha-ut District killed his four-month-old daughter in a fit of rage on the morning of January 19 after she would not stop crying.

Yakop Usaman, 43, confessed that he had first throttled his baby daughter Arauma.

Then, when she continued

crying, he picked her up by her feet and hurled her against the wall, inflicting a fatal head injury.

When police led by Lt Col Pricha Chimphakdee, duty inspector at Cha-ut District Police Station, arrived at the scene, they found a crowd of people outside the house shouting curses at Yakop. As the crowd grew larger, police officers set up a cordon to prevent people getting into the house and lynching the suspect.

Inside the house, police were met by the victim's mother, 37-year-old Kanlaya Usaman. She was sitting and weeping, cradling the body of her dead baby. Yakop, who was still in the house, was placed under arrest.

K. Kanlaya told police that the incident occurred while she was out selling meat at Cha-ut Market. Her five-year-old daughter, who witnessed the attack, ran to the market to tell her what had happened. She rushed home, but Arauma was already dead by the time she arrived, police said.

Col Pricha said that Yakop made no attempt to evade arrest and seemed agitated. Yakop told police that he had killed his daughter in a fit of rage as he had been up until the early hours chopping meat for his wife to sell at the market in the morning. At about 6 am, Arauma had woken up and started crying.

Yakop got up to prepare some milk for her, but when she would not stop crying, he threw her against the wall.

Yakop was detained at Cha-ut District Police Station and charged with murder, Col Pricha added.

Around The South news round-up is sourced from the pages of The Nation and Kom Chad Luek newspapers.

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Taking a pier into the past

By Sangkhae Leelanaporn

There is a small island off Phuket's east coast with no resorts, go-go bars or tuk-tuks. It's a place where children ride bikes without engines, fish and rubber trees are mainstays of family incomes, and beaches are lined with locals' homes instead of umbrellas. Koh Maphrao remains a little-visited time warp to Phuket's past where quiet prevails.

The only public access to and from Koh Maphrao, or "Coconut Island", is a longtail boat ride from Laem Hin fishing port. Once across the two-kilometer stretch of water, visitors can hire a motorbike or motor-cart ride to take them from the village center for 15 baht.

This mostly Muslim community remains largely untouched by the booming tourism that has transformed Phuket over the past 30 years.

About 150 families make up the island's population of approximately 500, most of whom work on the rubber plantations or as fishermen. Koh Maphrao is about 2,600 rai, with 80% of this striped with rubber plantations.

Wallop Khamhaeng of Koh Kaew Tambon Administration Organization (*OrBorTor*), the local authority responsible for the island, said tourist traffic to Koh Maphrao remains low because it lacks basic facilities, such as mains-supplied electricity. Koh Maphrao isn't on the Phuket power grid; most of the islanders' electricity comes from small solar panels provided to families by Koh Kaew *OrBorTor* over the past three years.

The beaches are not as long as those at Patong or Nai Harn, but are refreshingly empty of beach chairs and sun-soaked



JUMP-OFF POINT: Laem Hin Pier (left) at dawn. Koh Maphrao is just 10 minutes by longtail boat from the end of the pier.

YESTER-YAO: Yao Beach (above), located on the bayside of Koh Maphrao, resembles Phuket's beaches 30 years ago.

WORTH A GANDER: The main street in the fishing village (below).

bodies. Crabs strafe across sand still strewn with seashells, yet to be picked clean by memento-seeking tourists.

According to local motor-taxi driver Ason Abdulamum, the most beautiful beach on Koh Maphrao is Yao Beach, or "Long beach" – a stretch of unspoiled beauty of only about 30 meters.

"Not many people come to this beach because it is at the back of Koh Maphrao, but some days small tour groups visit. It's a favorite fishing spot for local people because many of the rocks make good seats for fishing," he added.

There are a couple of small restaurants serving standard Thai

dishes, but the choices are minimal because most of the islanders cook family meals at home.

Most of the tourists to Koh Maphrao are day-trippers, cycling around the island on a rented pushbike, chatting with residents, taking in the village life or fishing. However, there are two home stays for those wanting to spend a night or two.

Serm Nookhaet, owner of Uncle Serm Home Stay in the middle of the village, has four rooms available at 300 baht a night, but has had no guests at all since New Year.

"There are not a lot of activities for tourists to do here, but they can go fishing, swimming at the beach or walk around to see the natural environment, which is like Phuket 30 years ago," he said.

In a coco-nutshell, Koh Maphrao retains the charm that



brought holiday travelers to Phuket in the first place.

To reach Laem Hin port drive north from Phuket city on Thepkasattri Rd. When you see the Laem Hin Seafood restaurant sign on your right hand side, make a U-turn and proceed down that road.

The longtail-boat ferry service from Laem Hin to Koh Maphrao operates from 5:30 am to 10 pm every day. The fare is 15 baht per person. Motorcycle taxis from Koh Maphrao Pier to the village costs about 15 baht per person. To contact Uncle Serm Home Stay call 089-8712315.

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When people hear the word "Swiss", they often think "expensive". Switzerland's signature exports are luxury items like Swiss chocolates and Rolex watches.

Going against the stereotype, one restaurant in Phuket, The Zürcher, features a wide variety of classic European dishes in the Zurich style for just 99 baht.

The proprietor is Nakhon Phanom native Sudarat "Ju" Chaiyamong, who opened the Zürcher with her Swiss boyfriend Bruno Wegmueller in April last year.

Bruno, a Swiss man who lives and works in Zurich – thus, a Zürcher – spent much of his time cooking on vacation in Phuket. Following numerous compliments from his friends, he decided to pursue a lifelong ambition by opening a restaurant.

He and Ju set up The Zürcher in a small shophouse on Chao Fa East Rd and hired a cook, Sakorn Kerd-opas, who has years of experience preparing similar cuisine from his time working at an Austrian restaurant in Patong.

Although Bruno has since returned to Europe, his legacy lives on at The Zürcher. In addition to the 99-baht European main dishes, all served with a light salad, The Zürcher offers a selection of Thai dishes.

There are enough dishes to keep even the least adventurous Thai in your dining party more than satisfied without stressing the wallet; dishes start at around 35 baht.

The Zürcher's low prices – just a fraction of what many restaurants in Patong serve for similar fare – were part of an effort to attract Thais to dine there.

"We thought that since there are not many foreigners in this

Switzerland neutral? Send in the schnitzel!



Sudarat "Ju" Chaiyamong presents The Zürcher's most popular combination, the 99-baht champion schnitzel (also far right), with side salad.



area, we would set our prices low to attract more Thais to eat farang food. But now we don't know how to raise the prices, because almost all of our return customers rely on us for high-quality, low-cost cuisine," said K. Ju.

K. Ju said that the culinary prowess of Chef Sakorn made it easy for her to adapt to cooking Swiss meals, since they only differ slightly from typical Austrian fare.

In the mornings, the breakfast menu offers simple omelet

dishes starting at 30 baht. For the diner who has spent the whole night before plowing a field, however, there is the Big Farmer's Breakfast, a fry-up complete with eggs, potatoes, bacon, onion and coffee or tea – a real bargain at 99 baht.

Sandwich lovers are also in for a treat, with club sandwiches, tuna and chicken all for 60 to 70 baht. The perfect accompaniment to these are the soups, such as onion and tomato soup, at just 40 baht per cup.

Main dishes, including several kinds of schnitzel, are served with salad for 99 baht. The most

popular is the champignon schnitzel, made from tender fried pork and creamy mushroom sauce – as filling a European meal as you will find anywhere on the island.

Other popular selections include wiener schnitzel, and chicken or pork cordon bleu.

For those who miss European-style pasta dishes, The Zürcher has several different pasta dishes – such as spaghetti bolognese, carbonara or seafood – at prices ranging from 60 to 90 baht per dish.

"We can maintain these prices because our overhead is low. We are outside the city cen-

ter in an area where there aren't many foreigners, so our monthly rent is cheap. We also work hard to find the freshest and highest-quality ingredients at the most reasonable prices," said K. Ju.

"All of our meat products are from Tops Supermarket at Central Festival. We source our imported ingredients mostly from the Promphan Store on Chao Fa West Rd and stock up of fresh vegetable at Makro," she added.

"We have had a good response so far. Right now, we serve about 60 to 80 people a day, usually Europeans from Switzerland, as well as Belgium, Germany, France and Austria. Some of these are our regular customers. Our year-round average is about 50 customers a day," she said.

The Zürcher is one of a growing number of restaurants, mostly in and around Phuket Town, featuring authentic, low-cost foreign fare prepared by Thai staff.

The Zürcher is located at 70/156 Chao Fa East Rd (inbound) in Wichit Village 1, near the entrance to Phuket Villa California village. Open daily from 10.30 am to 10.30 pm. Open on Mondays for dinner only. For more information call K. Ju at 076-225048 or 081-8089679.

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Happily Ever After

Recent weddings in Phuket

Natthanit Thammakeeratiwong and Payung Chanasuk were married at the Royal Phuket City Hotel on January 13.



Richard Payne and Katie Wilkie from the United Kingdom exchanged vows last month at Laguna Phuket's Chapel-on-the-Lagoon.

I will bet twenty thousand pounds that I make a tour of the world in eighty days or less," said Phileas Fogg, protagonist of Jules Verne's 1873 romance *Around the World in 80 Days*. His wager was prompted by conversation during a game of whist: Someone observed that the earth might be traversed in three months. Fogg corrected him.

"Eighty days," he said. But another counseled that 80 days was only an estimate. "A well-conceived minimum," replied Fogg, "suffices in everything."

Joost Schaefer's was not playing cards at the time, but he hit upon more or less the same conclusion about well-conceived minimums just after completing the ground-up restoration of a classic Italian speedboat.

He was in the middle of Holland's Weer Water Lake, when he experienced a moment of epiphany. His boat, a 28-foot, 1,200-kilogram Cranchi Taunus, crafted of wood on the shores of Lake Como in the Lombard Alps 42 years before, had been faithfully, painstakingly restored.

"I liked the classic design, it's like sitting in a car," he recalls.

"But I knew that, had I designed it myself, I'd do many things differently."

Thus inspired by the Taunus,

Crafting a

By Marque A. Rome

he undertook his own modern "classic", called the Dutch Pike, using the latest computer-aided design (CAD) programs, modern construction techniques, parts and power plant. "But still made of wood," he says.

Like Phileas Fogg's, Schaefer's is a high-stakes undertaking, made possible by advances in technology, communications, banking and travel.

He grew up around boats, but it's not as if Schaefer's were born to the business. Now 42 years old, he is the youngest of four brothers. The family grew up in Amstelveen, a suburb of Amsterdam. His father was a seller of natural stones and a contractor.

"As kids, we were always around water."

From their father, the Schaefer's boys learned early self-reliance. "We built a wind-powered electrical generator for my father's factory when we were still young," he says.

While still a teenager, the brothers built an ice boat – a metal frame with runners and a sail for skating across frozen lakes: "They go amazingly fast," he said. The adrenaline rush hooked him, and thereafter he retained an interest in fast boats.

With adulthood came greater independence and more responsibility. Aged 16 years, Joost studied mechanical arts and wood-working in technical school.

Schaefer's ability to adapt, and his skill at carpentry and cabinet work, led him to a career in home renovations and property development.

"After the first Gulf War, my brother and I started buying old houses, renovating, then reselling them," he explains.

A connection in Egypt led the brothers to buy one square kilometer of land overlooking Cairo's ring road. "It's all only



Joost Schaefer's holds a scale model of his Dutch Pike design (above), constructed at the Latitude 8 shop (right). Schaefer's takes his restored Cranchi Taunus for a spin (far right).

sand, but ... it's a nice location, really."

Plans to develop the property stalled. "Land values are shooting up there and it's more cost-effective just to wait," Schaefer's says, which left him free to devote time to creation of the Dutch Pike.

In re-modeling and building homes he had become proficient in the use of CAD programs – or so he thought, until turning to speedboat design.

"I quickly discovered that the boat I wanted to build is all curves," he explains. "Houses are mostly straight lines and corners." Drawing curves with CAD programs "is another level of difficulty."

Schaefer's designed and built two boats before renovating his Cranchi. One was a simple flat-bottomed runabout; the other fanciful – like a Buck Rogers spacecraft on water, with Porsche 928-like retractable headlights. "It planes on the water as soon as it's underway," he explains, "allowing it with as little as 30 horsepower to tow skiers."

He bought his Cranchi Taunus for about US\$5,000 and

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mariner's dream



began the long travail of restoration. It was no small effort. "Inside, it was all made from the same tree, as regards grain and color."

But he searched for and found the perfect match, and after seven months work – replacing much of the hull and installing a new Volvo Penta 6-cylinder engine – the Taunus was like new again.

Restoration costs totaled US\$7,500, paid from Schaefer's profits speculating in a booming real estate market. "I'd buy [a government-controlled] home while it was still in blueprints, put it for sale and by the time I got the key it was sold," he explains.

He knew "right away" he would do his own design. He liked the Taunus's car-like character but deprecated its lack of conve-

nience and modern features.

"Things should be easy to use," he says.

Also, he wanted "a toilet, places to sleep, a refrigerator and sink, cup holders for every seat, pockets between inner and outer hull within easy reach, a conveniently-placed fire extinguisher, dry storage for wet-suits and space to stow life jackets and docking fenders."

Modern technology was also needed: Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) equipment for easy navigation, autopilot, fish-finder, sealed compartments to prevent sinking and mundane items that make life easier – drawers under the back seats, an anchor winch and joystick-oper-

ated spotlights that swivel.

He especially wanted a stern-drive propulsion unit: "Old boats' engines stood in the middle with a shaft-drive going down to the rear, and a small rudder," he explains. "I've put on a stern drive with the engine all the way in the back. Stern drives swivel, and so require no rudder; and can be shifted forward or back."

They make turning, docking, trimming and backing up a breeze. They also sit at the appropriate angle in the water (fixed drives are at best a compromise); and can be raised from the water for

propeller de-fouling – which might otherwise require diving under the boat.

The Dutch Pike is born. The *Dutch Pike* began with Schaefer's drawing six lines on his laptop's Auto-CAD program: bow line, beam, profile, descending line from deck to center line, bottom, and hip-line that melds into the hull.

"From these six lines you can tell whether it's going to look nice." A glance at any boat drawings shows the extensive calculations necessary before the final angle for each line was arrived at. It was a mathematical puzzle as well as an art passed from generation to generation.

Auto-CAD simplifies all that. The program creates three-dimensional renderings viewable instantly from any angle, always in correct perspective. It further integrates sourcing and pricing information for parts.

Clicking any portion of a completed drawing can expand the view, show internals or externals, provide measurements of stresses and angles, or tell the boat-builder where to order parts from and how much they cost. It's a marvel.

Schaefer spent six months designing, making perhaps a thousand detailed, integrated drawings. The effort proved its worth later not only in construction, but in negotiating with the contractor.

His next step was to make a 1:10 scale model from the plans. "In detail it is just like the real boat, all of wooden strips, but in miniature. It was probably as hard – maybe harder – to build."

In the meantime, he was contacting suppliers in Italy, Australia, Sweden and the United States. Although initially Schaefer wanted to build the Dutch Pike in the Netherlands, prices were forbidding. Using the Internet, he consulted suppliers and boat-builders around the world.

The consensus opinion fa-

vored Rawai's Latitude 8 boatyard, which was building natural wood classic speedboats.

But "there's many a slip," as they say, "twixt cup and lip."

After more than three years waiting – for the boatyard to recover from the tsunami's destruction, for schedules to free up, for budgets to be met – the end is now in sight – and the first Dutch Pike is a thing of beauty.

With voluptuous haunches and sloping rear deck (think '59 Corvette sports car), narrow waist, wrap-around windscreen, and arresting deep-V bow that promises to cleave hearts as well as waves, the svelte 3,300-pound, 28-footer justifies its creator's concept of mating classic design and modern technology.

Although hand-constructed of epoxy-sealed woods, the Pike proves that wooden boats needn't be heavy – it displaces just 28 inches in water.

Powered by a 320hp Volvo Penta V-8 Aquamatic duoprop gasoline engine with stern drive, it caters to the power-lust of speedboat owners while affording state-of-the-art reliability, flexibility, electronics and safety features.

Not many years ago, undertaking such a project might have been all but impossible without either bundles of cash or marrying a speedboat builder's daughter.

But just as technology in the time of Jules Verne broadened the possibilities of personal travel, technology in our day – to say nothing of improved travel and electronic wire transfers – has broadened the possibilities available to creative individuals. Dreams are no longer manufactured only in your head.

With a well-conceived minimum, you can now manufacture and market them in the materials of your choice – and get underway, as in the Dutch Pike, behind 320 horsepower.

It's a brave new world of speedboat building we're entering, and the navel may be Phuket.

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This week



BRICK BY BRICK: The Zwilling school building at Chao Thai Mai School in Thai Muang district, Phang Nga province, opened its doors on January 15, as part of a Minor Group-sponsored charity effort to help the school and families in the area who were affected by the tsunami. Celebrating the opening is William Ellwood Heinecke (far right), CEO of the Minor Group, along with (from left) Stephan Toepfer, Managing Director of Orgatec Co Ltd, Kathleen Ann Heinecke and Bernice Constance Murphy Heinecke.



BIKES FOR TYKES: Stephen Fineberg (yellow shirt) and Bill Smith (left), representatives from The Love Shack Bar under Tiger Disco and The Yorkshire Inn Hotel, present 70 new bicycles for donation to Patong schoolchildren to Patong Deputy Mayor Chairat Sukkaban (2nd from right) and Secretary to the Mayor Prasan Yodtaa (right) on January 12.



SIZZLING NEW YEAR: Gulu Lalvani (center), Chairman of the Royal Phuket Marina, hosted a New Year's party, themed 'Fire & Ice', at the marina. Joining him in the festivities were his son, Dino Lalvani (left), along with Sir Terry Leahy (2nd from left), CEO of Tesco Plc, and guests.



GOING TRIBAL: TriBallistic organizer Shaun Boulter (blue shirt) along with fellow athletes and volunteers opened registration for the upcoming charity triathlon at Skippers' sports bar. Also pictured are: Helle Kirstein (right), Margie Campbell (center) and her son Ali (back), Sue Boulter (black shirt) and a competitor. Skippers later donated 50,000 baht towards the event's beneficiary, the Thai Kids Social Program.



BREAKING GROUND: Sumit Soontornnont (3rd from left), President of Sea Pearl Business Co Ltd, joined by David Lloyd (center), Chairman of the David Lloyd Group – UK, Bryan Lunt (3rd from right), Chairman of the Absolute Group of companies, and guests to celebrate the start of construction on their new project in Patong, Absolute Sea Pearl Villas and Spa Resort.



BUNDLE OF JOY: *Phuket Gazette* Managing Director Oranee 'Ann' nīe Pienprasertkul and her husband Jan von Hildebrand welcome the arrival of their baby son, David, born on January 11 at Bangkok Hospital Phuket.



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EVENTS CALENDAR

Upcoming events on the island

January 26. Super BBQ Buffet at Wine Connection Chalong.

A truly special BBQ buffet with cheeses, cold cuts, excellent mains, salad, desserts and live band. 650 baht per person. 6:30 pm until 11 pm.

For further information email Pascal at fb.phuket@wineconnection.co.th or call 087-8896074.

Until January 27. 2nd Andaman Spa Invitation.

This spa exhibition for Thailand's health and beauty industries offers product and treatment demonstrations from Thailand's leading spas.

Discover a wealth of discounts on spa products and packages on the ground floor of Central Festival Phuket from 11 am until 8 pm.

For details contact Peerachak Chunharatchapan. Tel: 081-5357803. Email: peerachak@mirageorganizer.com Website: www.mirageorganizer.com

Until January 27. French Cuisine Festival at Mom Tri's Boathouse.

Mom Tri's Boathouse is hosting the annual "Quinzaine de la Gastronomie Française", an extravaganza of French cuisine each night from 7 pm to 11:30 pm.

Guest Chef Maitre-Cuisinier de France Jean Noel Lumineau, in collaboration with Mom Tri's Boathouse Executive Chef Tummanoon Punchun, present a four-course degustation menu every evening.

Each course is accompanied by a superb French wine, chosen by the Boathouse's Wine Director, Georges Ciret.

The Boathouse Wine & Grill a la carte menu will remain available throughout the festival.

For more information contact: Pinyo Thippimas. Tel: 076-330015. Email: fb@boathousephuket.com Website: www.boat-housephuket.com

January 27. PC Group Therapy – Chalong.

Join *Windows for Dummies* author Woody Leonhard and his band of techy irregulars in a wide-ranging discussion of computer topics from 10 am until noon.

If you can't get Windows to work right, if Office is driving you crazy, if you need to find a decent Internet connection, if you're going to buy a computer in Thailand or if you need to get one fixed, this is the place to be.

Visit www.khunwoody.com for driving instructions. On January 27, the session will be held at the new Sandwich Shoppe at Fisherman Way Business Center in Chalong.

For further information contact Woody Leonhard. Tel: 089-1960940. Email: woody@khunwoody.com

Until January 30. My Awakening.

Varaporn "Map" Ponrit's latest solo exhibition, titled "My Awakening 'P'", is on show at the Watermark bar and restaurant.

Join us for a glass of wine and some exotic color combinations.

The exhibition is open until January 30.

Strong, powerful paintings that stir emotions and appeal to the passions are K. Map's trademark.

Contact Stuart at Tel: 081-7376184, 076-239730. Email: stuart@watermarkphuket.com Website: www.watermarkphuket.com

January 29. Exclusive Wine Dinner at Royale Nam Tok.

Exclusive visit of Henri Lurton, winemaker and owner of Chateau Brane Cantenac, Margaux. Special menu with each course pairing two vintages of this top wine. Price is 3,600 baht. Limited seating.

From 7:30 pm until midnight. For details contact Coory and Marc. Tel: 087-2637327. Email: royale.nam.tok@hotmail.com Website: www.royalennamtok.com

February 3. PC Group Therapy – Patong.

On February 3, head to the Sandwich Shoppe in Patong.

February 3. Malaiwana Tri-Ballistic Race at Indigo Pearl Resort.

The new TriBallistic series will get underway at Indigo Pearl Resort at Nai Yang Beach, from



Shari Puerto (pictured), another top US blues act from Southern California, will perform on the Saturday night of the Blues Fest.

Phuket International Blues Rock Festival

February 22-23

Presented by HotelTravel.com, the third year of Phuket's biggest international blues rock festival will be huge – expanded to 12 bands – showcasing 10 of Southeast Asia's finest acts and topping it off with an American headliner each night. We will have one of Australia's top blues bands, as well.

Returning is guitar phenomenon Rich Harper and his band from California, and another top US act will close the show on the Saturday night.

Plenty of food and drink as well as games and a prize raffle. From 6:30 pm to 12:30 am, at the Hilton Phuket Arcadia Resort & Spa.

Shari Puerto and other top acts from the festival will be playing at Tai Pan in Patong on February 21, from 10 pm, and at Saxophone on Thaweewong Rd on February 24, also from 10 pm.

See full details at www.PhuketBluesFestival.com and check back for updates. Sponsorship opportunities are available. Email: PhuketMusic@yahoo.com

6 am to 11 am.

- Senior Sprint: 750m swim, 20km bike, 5km run.

- Junior Race: 200m swim, 6km bike, 1.5km run

- Splash & Dash: 50m swim, 3km bike, 750m run.

Registration available at www.triballisticclub.com, BIS library.

Registration can also be by email to info@triballisticclub.com or by calling 089-5902014. Races start 7:30 am.

For details contact Shaun Boulter (Tel: 089-5902014, Email: info@triballisticclub.com) or visit www.triballisticclub.com

February 10. PC Group Therapy – Laguna.

On February 10, the session

will be at the Sandwich Shoppe Laguna.

February 14. Valentine's Day at Sheraton Grande Laguna Phuket.

Celebrate this special night

with the one you love at one of Phuket's finest Italian restaurants, Puccini. Enjoy a five-course set dinner in a poolside setting under a canopy of stars. 3,900 baht per couple including two complimentary glasses of Moët & Chandon. 6:30 pm until 10:30 pm.

For reservations and more information, contact Adam Beasley (Tel: 076-324101. Email: fbreservation@sheratonphuket.com Website: www.luxurycollection.com/phuket

February 17. PC Group Therapy – Chalong.

At the new Sandwich Shoppe at Fisherman Way Business Center in Chalong.

February 28-March 1. BIS Under-15 Fobissea Games.

The Fobissea Games will be held at BIS, offering a wonderful opportunity to join a major competition and mix with like-minded students from other international schools in Southeast Asia.

For details contact Patrick du Preez. Tel: 076-23871120. Email: ppreez@bcis.ac.th Website: www.bcis.ac.th

March 8-29. Light of Life Art Exhibition.

Light of Life will feature acrylic and oil on canvas by Thai artist Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul at D Gallery, Royal Phuket Marina. His previous exhibitions were of oil on aluminum sheets.

His landscapes focus on the interplay between shadow and light, together with the beauty and simplicity of rural and suburban Thailand.

Opening cocktail reception at 6:30 pm. Open daily 11 am to 7 pm. For details, contact Gem at Tel: 076-360867, 087-8875279. Email: gem@dgallery.co.th Website: www.dgallery.co.th

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Out of the box



The White Box restaurant in Kalim kicked its doors open in fine style on January 19 with a grand party. Phuket's who's who were all in attendance dressed in classic casual blue and white... or anything else slightly less formal and more comfortable.

Beach babes

By Pathomporn Kaenkrachang

An extra touch of loveliness was recently added to Phuket's beaches as 12 contestants for the 2008 Miss Czech beauty contest made their way to the island for a series of photo shoots and some fun in the sun.

The 12 beauties will battle it out for the top spot in a nationally-televised broadcast in their native land on February 2. More than 3,000 women entered the contest, which was narrowed down to 150 and then to the final group of 12 via an SMS vote by people across the country.

Aged between 18 and 26, the contestants are Antonínová Romana, Buckova Eliška, Charalambidu Elisavet, Frýbortová šárka, Lámerová Michaela, Matušsová Lucie, šamanová Katerina, Svobodová Hana, Sychrová Aneta, Vartová Adéla and Faitová Aneta.

Arriving in Phuket on January 10 as part of a whirlwind tour of Thailand, the women swam, scuba dived, danced and dined, in addition to photo shoots on Nai Harn and Karon Beaches.

Hajabá Roman, an organizer of the tour, said, "I have been in Thailand five times before. It's a beautiful place with

many beautiful islands and we will show that on the air with the swimsuit modeling. We would like to present Phuket to the Czech people and to Eastern Europeans."

There were some challenges, however, during the film shoots. "It's not easy for staff to clear the area because everyone wants to take a photo with the girls, especially tourists and Thai boys," said Mr Roman.

The Miss Czech tour received 1 million baht in sponsorship from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, which hopes to boost visitor numbers from the republic.

In addition to providing TV exposure on the national broadcast, organizers of the beauty contest have agreed to publicize Thailand via billboards featuring Thai tourism destinations in Prague, as well as advertising on a leading radio program for three months and articles in local newspapers and magazines.

In 2006, visitor arrivals to Thailand from the Czech Republic totaled 13,128, up 27.26% from 2005. Repeat travelers totaled 7,329, or 55.83% of the total.

The winner of the Miss Czech contest will go on to compete in Miss Universe 2008.

Faitová Aneta, 20: 'I have no idea about my best feature. Maybe my lips.'



Sychrová Aneta, 20: 'My best features, I think, are my smile and my laugh.'

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DAY 3: Krabi to Phi Phi

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Grand awards ceremony and closing party at the Puravarna Phuket Yacht Club Hotel, Nai Harn, 10th February



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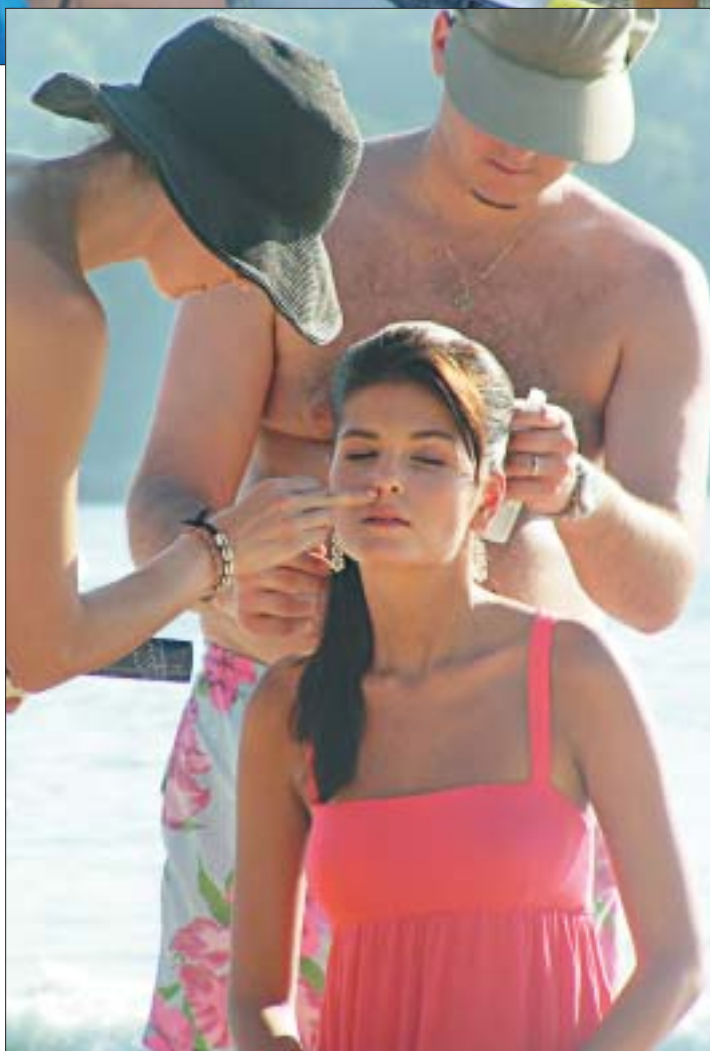
Czech out Phuket



ABOVE: Sychrov Aneta (left) and Matusov Lucie pose at Nai Harn.

RIGHT: Charalambidu Elisavet is tended to during a shoot at Nai Harn Beach.

BELOW: Svobodov Hana, 20: 'I always love it when people tell me I have beautiful eyes.'



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Holidays are about not working. There are many ways to spend your time not working: a relaxing massage, shopping, hitting the bars, sitting in a deck chair surrounded by oily Europeans, taking boat trips to islands or diving.

Phuket has plenty of good restaurants, bars, shopping centers and markets, but there are some activities that can ruin a vacation.

If you want to have a great holiday and go home with memories that leave you looking forward to the next visit, three things are best avoided. Stay away from beach parachutes, jet-skis and motorbikes.

All of these have become the subject of government travel warnings – and rightly so. Motorbikes are dangerous. It doesn't matter how slowly you drive, it's the other idiots. A drunk in a pickup truck speeds around a corner and next thing you know, you're all over the road, perhaps in bits.

It's not only drunks in pickups; it's the pea-brained foreigners who hire big road bikes and scream through a village like some oversized, not-so-bright Valentino Rossi. If you want to

Have a nice holiday



drive, stay on four wheels.

Parasailing is fun, but unfortunately another version of Winnie the Pooh is often driving the boat (Pooh was often referred to as "a bear of little brain"). I just watched a video of a woman being dragged along one of Phuket's main beaches, her legs whacking deck chairs and beach umbrellas, screaming her head off and scared to death. She was left

covered in cuts and bruises.

Some were not so lucky. Two Thai boys fell to their death a couple of years ago while riding piggy back with a girl. One tourist lucked out when an inexperienced captain let the boat drift too close to the beach, dropping the rider and parasail into a beach-front resort's swimming pool; a story related to me by the General Manager of the hotel. Tragi-

cally, another girl flew into power lines and died.

Jet-ski are not too dangerous, but some of the operators have been running a nasty racket – an oldie but a goodie – which is all too common in Phuket. They rent a jet-ski to a tourist, then a friend of the operator "acciden-

tally" bumps into the rented jet-ski. When the tourist returns it, the operator claims the rented jet-ski is damaged and extorts large sums of money using threats.

This scam was the subject of a document

issued by the Australian Embassy recently. A young man and his girlfriend rented a jet-ski, were bumped and asked to pay.

They objected to the operators demand of 50,000 baht for damages that were clearly some old scratches.

The thugs proceeded to threaten and push around the man's girlfriend. When the man threatened to call the police, an officer conveniently appeared and negotiated a better deal of 30,000 baht.

The policeman told them that if they didn't pay, he would take them to the station and lock them up.

This isn't always the case, but in general, I recommend staying away from this activity. Jet-

skis are noisy, offensive, dangerous to swimmers and actually barred in Phuket.

Instead, go to the pub and drink yourself to death – it's more fun.

LARGER THAN LIFE

By Graham Doven

My friends recently shocked me for the first time in ages. They all come from good Greek stock and are made of strong Mediterranean stuff. So why did conversation over a recent dinner party suddenly turn to Botox?

My childhood Greek friends, along with most women in north London, have started to contemplate the idea of channeling their inner Footballers' Wives. Nobody has yet decided definitely to go for it; at the moment it's just a giddy conversation about something that happens to other people.

However, they seem to be teetering closer to the needle.

I had previously assumed that the botch-u-lism revolution was the sole preserve of slightly jaded London Alpha females with too much money, too many handbags and a nervous, competitive grasp on their own vanity. I was wrong.

A definitive shift has occurred. Over the past six months, I've started to view girlfriends who've had the injections not as desperate, but rather fabulous.

My Bodar – the ability to spot a Botoxed brow at 10 paces – is now finely tuned, and I am more advanced in the subject than I ever expected. So much so that when a clearly Botoxed acquaintance caught the laughter lines around my eyes

Behind enemy lines

recently and said, "You know what, Ambrosia? There's a crow out there somewhere that wants those feet back."

I was able to bat back with a tart remark, "No need to give me the needle just because someone has given it to you."

But I honestly never expected to find it on my own doorstep – and in my own family. It took my aunt to point out that Botox is now fully integrated into polite society.

I love having a gently glamorous aunt. What I love most is that her glamor has never superseded the fact that it is what's inside that counts. It's just that the outside needs a little dusting off every now and again.

I asked my cousin Katrina about Botox, and she slipped effortlessly into the celebrity conversation that surrounds the assisted-beauty debate.

"The thing with these celebrities," she said, with brilliant inflection on the word celebrity – half awe and half disgust – that only Greek women possess, "is that they are having their looks scrutinized by the magazines. They need to look flawless."

AMBROSIA'S

ambrosia@phuketgazette.net



SECRETS

She thought for a second. "Mind you, the thing with us is that we don't have the benefit of airbrushing for a family photo, do we? Isn't it really just one step up from having your nails done?"

She's always been the sensible one, Katrina.

So I really have to stop stressing about what Botox means in the modern

world. These days it's like going to get your hair done in a fancy salon.

And oddly, it makes more sense in suburbia than it did under the exclusive ownership of aging pop stars, fashionistas, Hollywood haridans and their hangers-on.

I looked at my friend Maria over dinner and considered the Botox thing in a different light. If spending 20-odd years of your life tweaking, perming, washing and blow-drying suburban bored housewives in Wembley doesn't earn you the right to de-crease your forehead, then what does?

Why should American actress Demi Moore have the monopoly on looking 30 when she's over 40? I think Maria's next birthday present might be in the bag...I mean needle.

Ambrosia Sakkadas, a UK-born Greek Cypriot and graduate of Central St Martins College of Art & Design in London, is an artist, designer and newspaper columnist. Her first novel, Greek Girls Don't Cry, is available from amazon.com

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A decade ago, Phang Nga Bay was home to five species of kingfisher – common, white-collared, black-capped, white-throat and brown-winged.

Now, to the best of my knowledge, only one kingfisher remains, not the species, but a single bird. The largest of Phang Nga's kingfisher species, the brown-winged, competes with egrets for the larger baitfish, often called "fry". Smaller fry are more susceptible to pollution and disappeared from the bay years ago, as did the smaller kingfishers that fed on them.

Seeing these changes reminded me of the finest reef I've known. Gilan'gila Bay in Fiji's restricted Lau group is off-limits to outsiders and far from the nearest village.

In late 1998, I found a half-meter lobster sunbathing on a coral head. Having never known people, it moved only antennae while I lectured it on the dangers of humans.

Two years later, Gilan'gila had been fried by global warming. Floating over the dead reef in my kayak, I felt like an alien in a space-ship surveying a barren planet. The absence of kingfishers was the first hint of disaster there. Gilan'gila took less than two months to die.

Phang Nga Bay's food chain is also dying, not due to reef bleaching, but because of tourism. The subtle destruction is easy to prevent, but it seems that nobody cares.

In a 1998 *Bangkok Post* article, I supported national park fee increases, "if it leads to sincere education and enforcement". Unfortunately, it seems the parks' management has been so obsessed with collecting admission fees that they have forgotten all about enforcement and

Counting what's missing

education. This is peculiar, because the official website for the national park claims that there isn't all that much to count. Phuket tourist arrivals are expected to exceed 5 million this year, but the Park Service website at www.dnp.go.th says that Phang Nga Bay National Park receives only 43,397 visitors a year – an average of almost 119 tourists a day.

Our company is the smallest of our 19 competitors, taking 30 people per day, so those other 89 visitors make a terrible mess jumping from trip to trip.

My favorite villains are speedboats with two-stroke engines, which now rival "high volume, low quality" sea canoe companies as Phang Nga's environmental destroyers. We've already reported the oil slick ringing north Koh Penak. Aside from giving kayakers headaches, this slick kills small baitfish, which are vital to Phang Nga's food chain.

When I collect rubbish there these days, there's a two-decimeter ring of dead fish around North Penak's waterline. Banded water monitors should enjoy the feast, but the lizards have been poached, so the place smells like a cannery.

Pacific reef egrets remain though, but it won't be long before this graceful modern pterodactyl follows the kingfishers' disappearing act.

Environmental damage in the caves and *hong* is also significant. True sea kayaking is the ultimate in high-quality, low-volume eco-tourism. Kayaks don't even leave a footprint, but in Thailand, a good idea often finds



MISSING LINK: Pollution has removed these Slender Ponyfish, *Plapan*, from the food chain.

– Photo by Ukkrit Satapoomin, Phuket Marine Biological Center

its lowest common denominator.

Sea kayaking in Phang Nga Bay is called "sea canoing". I invented the term on my first night in Thailand in January 1989. Surrounded by copycat merchandise, I invented "sea canoe" as a joke on future copycats. It's really "kayaking", but then, it's not.

In South Thailand, "sea canoing" is mass tourism prostitution of an eco-friendly industry. Operating in pristine locations with limited space without standards, sea canoing can cause considerable environmental damage.

What should be a properly planned "high quality, low volume" educational industry is a national disaster. It's the usual downward pricing spiral – make a low-quality copy, start a price war and starve each other into poverty.

Many companies compensate low prices by operating four or five boats with poorly paid, untrained guides, 50% commissions and kickbacks. That may be "culture" on dry land, but it's disastrous for nature.

Responsible planners, governments and operators understand that a "high quality, low volume" policy protects natural sites. Policy is managed via carrying capacities, professional standards, and operators whose primary investment is a lifetime of experience and respect for nature.

We recently took a Phuket environmental club on an educational trip, leaving early to have some caves and *hong* to ourselves. The ambiance was great until we arrived at Bat Cave, where dozens of inflatables waited inside the cave just to enter the *hong* – and daylight.

Of course, the huge lagoon was carpeted with kayaks, loud talking and tourists feeding monkeys with not one park ranger in sight. Why should there be? The park's own website shows only 119 visitors to the park every day.

After Bat Cave, we passed North Bay. Common sense and basic dignity says the cove is too confined for speedboats, but there they were, spewing exhaust into the still waters, foul-

ing quiet air – and breaking the food chain without even knowing it. I explained the dangers of unaware businessmen running tourism in nature to our group. "Forgive them Lord, for they know not what they do."

During my eco-talk, the shocked advisors dropped their heads and the students were in disbelief. When I told them, "This is your country, it is your duty to protect your natural treasures," they became very emotional.

The next day, we took an international student group to Koh Hong, Krabi. Somewhere on the books is a regulation keeping motorboats out of the lagoon, but that was a dozen years ago.

Of course, on this day, the lagoon was packed with speedboats. It's basic common sense and respect for one's own country that motorboats should not be inside Koh Hong.

Koh Hong receives about 1,000 visitors a day, so it's easy to understand how the impoverished park cannot afford to station a ranger at the lagoon's entrance to enforce a "no motorboats" policy.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) promotes Thailand's nature with a "bull in a china shop" mentality, pouring billions of baht into the national parks and foolishly judging its performance by arrival counts. Their marketing campaigns bring millions of tourists to Thailand, but there is no planning and no consideration of the consequences.

Instead of developing and enforcing proper planning, it's easier to ignore the accidents, monkey bites, environmental degradation and unrestricted abuse of our national treasures.

Phang Nga's natural beauty deserves world heritage status, but its "management" denies that status. The solutions are so simple and inexpensive that one has to wonder why there is no interest in "world heritage".

If you understand the numbers and you understand the trade-off.

THE GRAY AREA



By John 'Caveman' Gray



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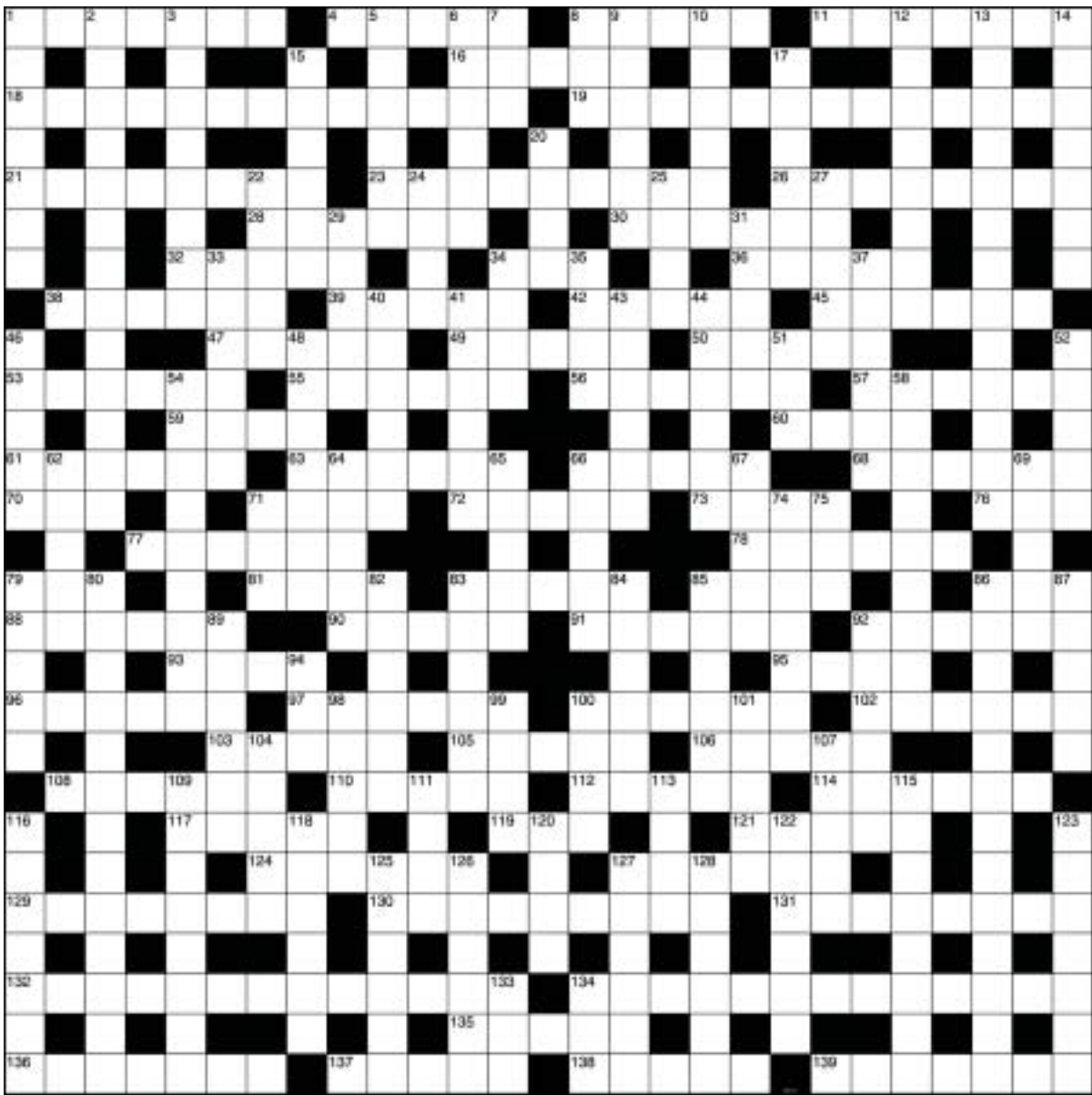


The BIG Crossword

Hidden Words

Hidden in the grid below are at least 25 names of roads in Phuket. The words may read vertically, horizontally or diagonally. They may also read right-to-left or down-to-up. Score: 15 or more, good; 20 or more, very good; 25 or more, excellent. Solution on the next page.

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



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Across

1. Acclaimed actor, ...Banderas
4. Sabre or rapier
8. Compel
11. Bubbling
16. Keen
18. Marvellously
19. Air force officer (4,9)
21. Ruling (of monarch)
23. Hesitant
26. Elevated railway
28. Old-fashioned (3,3)
30. Country
32. Cut off
34. Proof of Life star, ...Ryan
36. Scoff
38. Muss (hair)
39. Yellow pigment
42. Of the nose
45. Safe haven
47. Martini fruit
49. Angry & flustered (3,2)
50. Brick barriers
53. Come to a halt (4,2)
55. Rock band, ...Chili Peppers (3,3)
56. Italian sausage
57. Male flyer
59. Stink
60. Settles account
61. Stale (of butter)
63. Shade
66. Harmless fib, ...lie
68. Drinks noisily
70. Unborn chick
71. Cow calls
72. Indonesian dish
73. Dismiss
76. Fixed (ideas)
77. Deaden
78. Sparkles
79. Piece of turf
81. Prolific actor, Richard...
83. Chaotic
85. Participate in game
86. Globe
88. Spins
90. Land units
91. ...& chairs
92. Blunt (of angle)
93. Nobleman
95. Insect stage
96. Happens repeatedly
97. Public speaker
100. Seek to attain, ...to
102. Able to be eaten
103. Vietnam's capital
105. Sister's daughter
106. Henry VII royal house
108. Without doubt
110. Geometric shape
112. Long curl
114. Lively
117. Established practice
119. Mayday call (1,1,1)
121. Neither ...nor those
124. Indian port, now Chennai
127. ANC hero, ...Mandela
129. Snake-fighting animal
130. Intentionally (2,7)
131. Respected
132. Terrifying (5-8)
134. Corroborates
135. Satan, The...
136. Naturally grown
137. Wrench
138. Cries weakly
139. Loser (4-3)

Down

1. Attests
2. Skittles game (6,7)
3. Closeness
5. Riches
6. Give in
7. Sunlight hours
8. Not many
9. Beginning
10. Young swan
12. Fanaticism
13. Warm autumns (6,7)
14. Distorted (message)
15. Waggle
17. Good judgment, ...sense
20. Liver spread
22. Fiction book
24. For ...& every
25. Goods trucks
27. Actor, Ryan ... (1'4)
29. Used automobile
31. Mideast religion
33. Ran off to marry
34. Be introduced to
35. Wildebeests
37. University compositions
40. Lebanese trees
41. Aegean island
43. Indifference
44. Is in store for
46. Fungus seed
48. Aggravating
51. Cheek
52. Acute anxiety
54. Spoon-bender & psychic (3,6)
58. Pakistan's capital
62. Radiant
64. Venomous hooded serpent
65. Identifies
66. Midriff
67. Bird of prey
69. Tapering fruit
71. Assault & rob
74. Clutched
75. Under lock &...
79. Initiate
80. Abandoning
82. Choux pastry
83. Cantaloupes
84. PLO hero, ...Arafat
85. Hair braids
86. Portable engine for boat (8,5)
87. Cap
89. Cummerbunds
92. Musical dramas
94. Horror actor, ...Chaney
98. Lassoed
99. Spectacles frame
100. Behaves
101. Corrodes
104. Throat projection, ...apple (4'1)
107. Prophetic signs
109. From The Continent
111. Ayatollah's land
113. Former lovers
115. Barricades
116. Amounts to (5,2)
118. Scottish language
120. Rowing paddles
122. Cultivating (ground)
123. Concerting and sports venue, ...Square Garden
125. Paint spreader
126. Outlays
127. Small lump
128. Fatal
133. Acquire
134. Point gun

Solution on next page

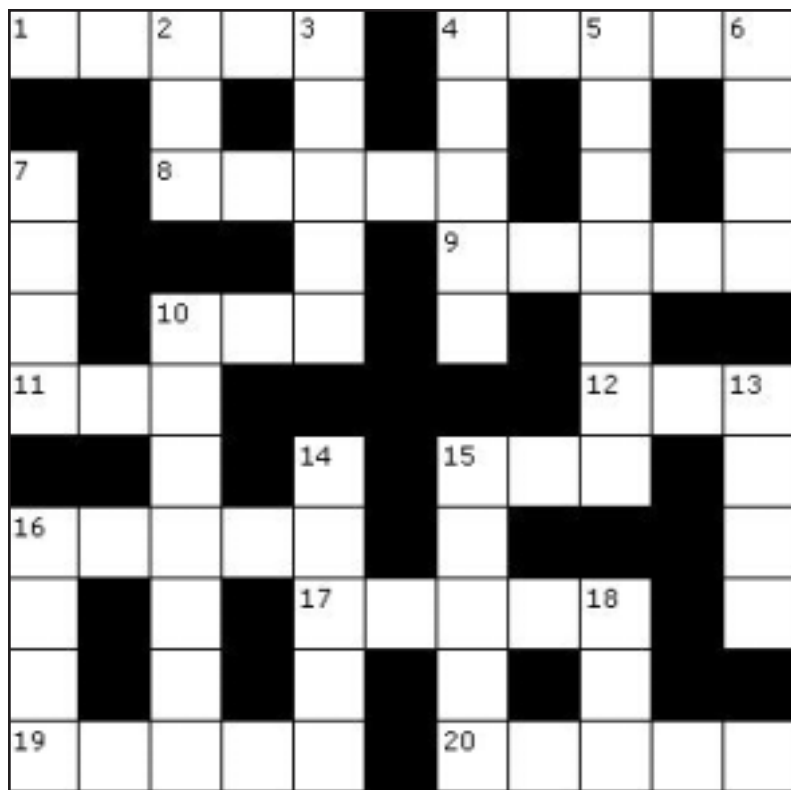
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Solution, tips and computer program at www.sudoku.com

7		6		4			9	3
	1	4			7			
	8		9	2		6		
	9	1			3	5		4
			1		8			
5		8	4			7	2	
		3		1	2		6	
			5			3	7	
2	4			6		8		5

Sudoku is very simple: each row, each column and each "box" of nine squares within the puzzle must contain all the numbers from 1 to 9 with, naturally, no repetitions. Beware: there is only one solution to this puzzle, which is on the next page.



Quick Crossword

Across

1. Water vapor
4. Type of dance
8. Same as
9. Midday meal
10. Take to court
11. Brief sleep
12. Type of tree
15. All-powerful being
16. Tough guy
17. Easy to understand
19. Bird homes
20. Fool

Down

2. Adam's partner
3. Small rodent
4. Singer, ...Parton
5. Smacked
6. Promise
7. Grassy area
10. Group of creatures
13. Lots of
14. Worn on feet
15. Wanting too much
16. See a night
18. Type of sleep

Solution below

Get your brain in gear with The Monster Quiz



Kids! Ask 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 does the "A" in AK-47 stand for?
2. During WWI, about seven pounds of peach pits were needed to make what?
3. Tanzania, Uganda & Kenya all border which African lake?
4. Tolstoy was partly inspired to write which novel after a neighbor threw herself under a train?
5. The Black Dragon Society aided in Japan's seizure of which Chinese region in 1931?
6. Franz Kafka's tombstone in Prague is inscribed in which language?
7. Andinismo is climbing on which continent?
8. In 1918, priest "Padre Pio" received what "wounds"?
9. The word geometry means to "measure" what?
10. What is the term for the point toward which lines of magnetic flux converge?
11. What sailor's phrase means the grave of all who perish at sea?
12. In Tibetan legend, their people originated from the union of a female demon and which animal?
13. The most common cause of mild anemia is a low level of which mineral?
14. What is the one-word synonym for a blood thinner?
15. Where are Baluchistan, the Northwest Frontier, Sindh and Punjab?
16. What ancient device is used to calculate by moving beads moving along parallel rods?
17. What connectible blocks' name means "play well"?
18. The 1978 discovery of footprints in Tanzania showed that hominids may have been doing what 3.6 million years ago?
19. What adjective is used to describe a person who is afraid of open spaces?
20. In 950 AD, what in Winchester Cathedral needed 70 men to work the bellows?

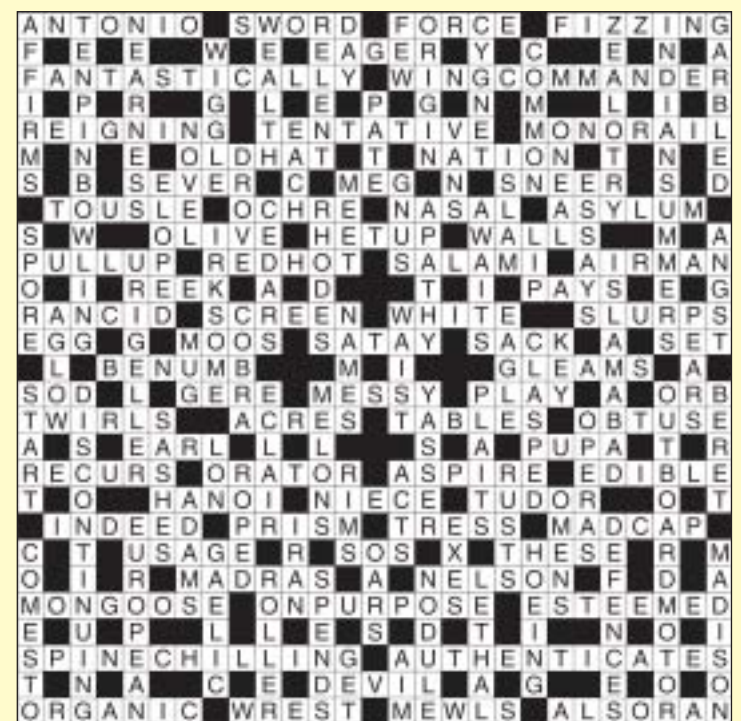
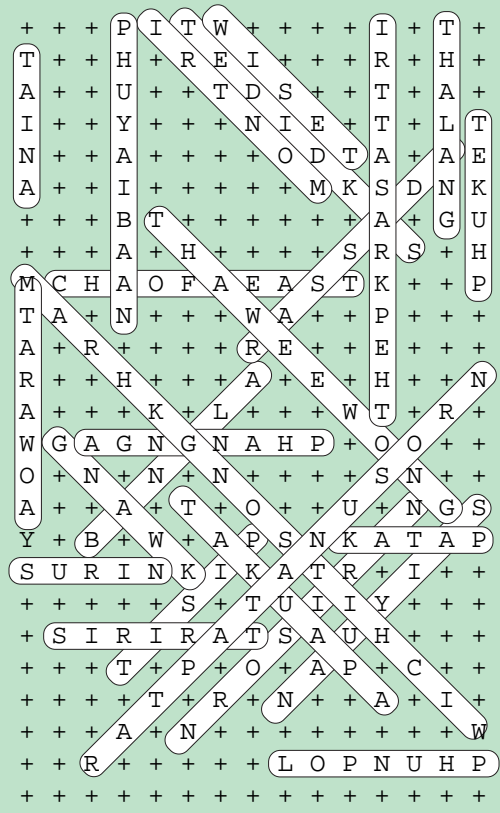
Answers below

Puzzle Solutions

Solution to this week's Quick Crossword



Hidden Words SOLUTION



Solution to this week's BIG Crossword

Solution to this week's Sudoku puzzle

7	2	6	8	4	5	1	9	3
9	1	4	6	3	7	2	5	8
3	8	5	9	2	1	6	4	7
6	9	1	2	7	3	5	8	4
4	7	2	1	5	8	9	3	6
5	3	8	4	9	6	7	2	1
8	5	3	7	1	2	4	6	9
1	6	9	5	8	4	3	7	2
2	4	7	3	6	9	8	1	5

Monster Quiz Answers

1. "Abtomat", which means "automatic device" in Russian; 2. Gas mask; 3. Lake Victoria; 4. Anna Karenina; 5. Manchuria; 6. Hebrew; 7. South America; 8. Stigmata; 9. The world, or Earth; 10. Pole; 11. Davy Jones' locker; 12. A monkey; 13. Iron; 14. Anticoagulant; 15. Pakistan; 16. An abacus; 17. Lego; 18. Walking upright; 19. Agoraphobic; 20. The organ.

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The past few decades have seen Phuket Town transformed into what was once a humble, sleepy place from a modern hive of activity. In 2004, Phuket Town was officially given city, or *tessaban nakhon*, status – even though most islanders still call it “Phuket Town”.

By whatever name, the area we know today is markedly different from the way it was for the children of generations past.

Each of the roads that runs through Phuket City marks a legacy to a moment in the history of the old town; each road name is a story in itself.

Chaising Na Nakhon and his wife, K. Maneerat, are enthusiastic Phuket historians. K. Chaising said that public infrastructure in Phuket City first appeared in the early 20th century. Phuket Governor Phraya Rassada Nupradit, known to locals as Ko Sim Bi, was in charge of constructing the first roads in the old town.

You can see a statue of Ko Sim Bi in the little park at the top of Rang Hill.

The first roads in Phuket were a far cry from the (mostly) smooth concrete we know today. Roads were usually nothing more mud paths forged through cleared land, suitable only for carts, horses and pedestrians.

The first cars arrived in Thailand around the turn of the century. Chao Phraya Surasak Montri was reputedly the first Thai to own a motorcar. The Siamese royal family were known as advocates of technological progress.

All roads lead to Phuket

Shortly after Chao Phraya Surasak had his wheels, Krom Luang Ratchaburi Direkridhi traveled to Paris for medical treatment. While he was there, he bought a car from German manufacturer Daimler-Benz AG.

On his return to the Kingdom, Krom Luang Ratchaburi Direkridhi presented the automobile to his father, King Chulalongkorn. By

1904, there were three cars cruising around the streets of Bangkok, and before long the canals there were filled in to accommodate more of them. Cars didn't make their way to Phuket's roads until several years later.

K. Chaising added that the process of using tin mine tailings to pave roads in Phuket became common over time. Thai laborers needed help with mining operations, resulting in an influx of Chinese immigrants to the island.

The Chinese community grew rapidly, with various social classes spread across the town. The buildings on Deebuk Rd today are a throwback to the influence of the Chinese on the area.

The buildings ranged from rows of small houses, to large, detached homes that belonged to the richest families. Deebuk translates as “tin” in English, reflecting the importance of the road to the trade at a time when tin was the island's most precious commodity.

Near Deebuk Rd is a soi



A school parade makes its way down Thalang Rd, one of the oldest roads in Old Phuket Town. Photograph courtesy of Patara Suwannakarn, whose family has been in Phuket for many generations.

try was divided into administrative regions called *monthon*.

Each *monthon* comprised many provinces that today are administered separately. Back then, Phuket Town was the administrative capital of *Monthon* Phuket, which encompassed what are now the provinces of Phang Nga, Krabi and Satun.

K. Maneerat said that naming roads in the capital after other parts of the *monthon* may have been a way by those in power of showing the significance of those regions.

Thalang Rd, believed to be the oldest road in Phuket, was named to honor Thalang Town and its governors, who held authority over Phuket Town in the early 20th century.

So, next time you're driving around Phuket Town, take a minute to think back to the Chinese miners, mud paths and brothels of years gone by.

with a racy history. Soi Romanee was once a red-light zone. “Romanee” translates roughly as “fooling around sexually with ladies”.

Along the soi, there were numerous brothels that served the Chinese laborers who had come to work in the tin mines. Today, lined with beautiful old buildings as you can see from Thalang Rd, the soi reveals little of its raunchy past.

Close to Deebuk Rd there are numerous roads named af-

ter other districts: Satun Rd, Krabi Rd, Ranong Rd, Takuapa Rd. K. Maneerat offered one explanation, saying that in some cities, such as Trang, roads were named after the districts that they led to.

In Phuket, where only one road leads off the island, this theory is quite debatable.

A more feasible explanation lies in how Thailand was divided at the time. Many of the roads in Phuket were built in the early 1900s. During this time, the coun-

In The Stars

AQUARIUS (January 21-February 19): Celebrations will be a pleasant surprise to those of you who have a birthday in the week ahead. Family and friends are ready to show their love and appreciation in an innovative way. Where business is concerned, you hit the nail on the head mid-week when a promising deal comes to light. Libra can be trusted to carry out your wishes, but Pisces has other fish to fry. The number 9 is lucky on Wednesday.

PISCES (February 20-March 20): You would be forgiven for thinking that it never rains, but it pours during the last days of January. However, your luck is about to change as the stars shine on your attempts to improve a situation at work. Your should delay important interviews until the first week of February to

make the most of this advantage. Your luck in love is strong this week and Capricorn would appreciate a move in the right direction.

ARIES (March 21-April 20): You will have no excuses not to push the boat out this week. As your financial outlook becomes brighter, this is the time to make home improvements. Your partner will enjoy being spoiled to show your gratitude for recent support. Those of you who are single and ready to embark on a romantic voyage should go out and do something different this weekend. The colors moss green and sky blue encourage a better balance of emotions.

TAURUS (April 21-May 21): Those of you feeling under pressure at work are advised to approach people in power to request

fairer delegation. If you don't protest about shouldering others' responsibilities, it will continue to happen. Cupid is acting on your behalf and the chances of romance with Aries are positive, but you need to show a sensitive side to make the right impression. Number 1 can bring luck on Thursday.

GEMINI (May 22-June 21): The planets are prepared to support your attempts to branch out. Those of you who have been toying with the idea of a radical change of career receive useful help this week. Sagittarius has the relevant experience to assist, but Aquarius' credentials are less impressive. Your quick wit has made a good impression on Virgo and romance receives the green light. Use the color ebony to encourage a more practical outlook.

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Ford Thailand is to be commended for making its entire range of Focus models E20 gasoline-compatible. For those who were not aware, an E20-capable vehicle can use gasoline only or a mix that contains up to 20% bio-ethanol. The engine is able to sense a change in fuel composition and adjusts itself automatically without compromising power or performance.

Following the government's new excise tax policy on E20 vehicles, which came into effect January 1, Ford has announced a new pricing policy for its entire Focus gasoline models.

"As the first automaker to introduce E20 capable vehicles in Thailand, Ford is committed to supporting the government's alternative fuel policies," says Saroj Kiatfuengfoo, senior vice-president of Ford Thailand. "With immediate effect, new pricing for our Focus E20 models is available through our nationwide network of authorized Ford dealerships."

The E20-capable Ford Focus was first introduced in Thailand in 2005 as part of Ford's commitment to sustainability and reduced dependence on fossil fuels.

Ford keeps green in Focus

"The Focus E20 offers Thai customers immediate benefit from the new legislation," adds K. Saroj. "They will be able to make an environmentally-friendly purchase decision, while benefiting from the lower pricing we are able to pass on as a result of the new policy."

Ford is a global leader in flexible-fuel vehicles (FFV), with more than 1 million ethanol vehicles worldwide and aims to become

Thailand's leader in ethanol technology. Ford's partner in Thailand is Bangchak Petroleum promoting ethanol technology.

The Focus is a worldwide bestseller and is available in four- or five-door formats, as well as the upmarket Ghia version or a Sport model. Both 2- and 1.8-liter engines are available. Power from the smaller engine peaks at 162bhp (120kW), a little more from the two liter version, while torque is a reasonable 165Nm (185Nm for the larger motor).

All models are available with either a manual or an auto-



The entire range of Ford Thailand's Focus models are E20 capable, able to use gasoline and bio-ethanol without even flicking a switch.

matic gearbox, while leather is optional for the interior. All are equipped with CD players.

Disc brakes on all wheels are standard, as are attractive 15-inch alloy wheels. A driver's airbag is standard on the lower specification cars; dual airbags on the top-of-the-range models. Also on the top models, you will find a six-disc CD autochanger and six quality speakers. The Sport version of the car has various aero

appendages added to the exterior panels.

This season Ford has won the manufacturers' title in the World Rally Championship for the second consecutive year, courtesy of Finland's Marcus Gronholm and Mikko Hirvonen, both driving gasoline-powered Ford Focus WRCs, but over in Sweden, Volvo – owned by Ford of course – has produced a bio-ethanol racing car in the form of

its C30 and competes with Green Racing in the Swedish Touring Car Championship.

In the US, the Indy Racing League (IRL) runs 100% ethanol in its Honda engines. Although alternative fuels have been discussed in Formula One, no consensus has been reached to date.

Currently, the US consumes around 160 billion gallons of gasoline annually, but only four billion gallons of ethanol. That is bound to change as global warming and the reliance on depleting resources become ever more important.

Built at the Auto Alliance plant in Rayong, the Focus meets all Ford's global quality standards. Since the introduction of the Focus to Thailand, more than 7,000 E20-capable vehicles have been sold. The new prices will increase that number substantially.

Prices for the E20 Ford Focus start at 829,000 baht for the entry-level 1.8L model. The top-of-the-range version is the two-liter Ghia at 949,000 baht.

For more information about the Focus range available in Thailand visit www.ford.co.th

Jeff Heselwood can be contacted at jhc@netvigat.com

by Isla Star

CANCER (June 22-July 23): Material matters are less important for most of you during the beginning of this year. Keep your ears open to learn of an opportunity to combine travel with work from a Leo acquaintance – this could lead to a new way of life. Personal relationships are well-starred for those who are prepared to admit they're not perfect. Tuesday is best for appointments with bureaucracy. Number 8 can be lucky on Thursday.

LEO (July 24-August 22): Someone's irritating attitude at work could prove to be the final straw. Monday is the best day for instigating an open conversation and you are likely to discover that there's a genuine reason for the untoward behavior. Allow extra time for traveling this weekend as delays are likely. A Sagittarius is keen to get to know you better.

VIRGO (August 23-September 23): February will turn out to be a productive month. Getting sidetracked by difficult situations in

romance should be avoided. If you are serious about succeeding this year, priorities should be established now. A financial windfall is due to occur later in the week and it's time to think about sprucing up your appearance. Wear charcoal gray to make lasting impressions.

LIBRA (September 24-October 23): Those of you looking for a last chance at a sinking love affair will be disappointed, but as February gets into gear, your attention will be diverted by a new flame. Job satisfaction is highlighted later in the week when your competence could be rewarded in a surprising way. Set time aside for family commitments this weekend as there are warning signs that those close to you are feeling left out. Number 3 is lucky on Wednesday.

SCORPIO (October 24-November 22): A complete turnaround in someone's attitude will encourage you to proceed with an abandoned business plan. Having Aquarius on board could

help to navigate troubled waters, but you will need to establish boundaries first. Romance has the support of the stars for those of you still searching for your a soulmate. A hot date this Sunday peps up your mood for a busy week ahead. Wear a piece of jade to encourage sensible decisions.

SAGITTARIUS (November 23-December 21): You shouldn't

jump at the first opportunity this week. Where business is concerned, there are signs that you could be tempted to sell yourself short. Preparing an up-to-date resumé should enable you to see how valuable your talents are. This is also an auspicious time for home improvements; incorporate earth tones in your environment to encourage more stability. The number 5 can bring good fortune on Wednesday.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 20): Dedication to work is one of your assets, but while some socializing is a good thing, avoid too much contact with a troubled Taurean. Chances for boosting finances are highlighted mid-week; agreements should be made before February begins. On Monday, magic is in the air when you meet an alluring Piscean. The scent of sandalwood enhances self-confidence.

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Public transport the solution to tuk-tuk troubles

Nowhere in Phuket is the practice of collusion more visible than among tuk-tuk operators in Patong, a town where the simple forces of supply and demand seem free to dictate prices of just about every commodity imaginable – except for a ride in a tuk-tuk.

Virtually everyone the *Gazette* spoke with while compiling this week's news feature [see Inside Story, pp 4-6] agrees that the nightly traffic chaos in Patong and the endless complaints from tourists about being overcharged highlight the need for better regulation of the 1,200 drivers who make up Phuket's tuk-tuk industry.

While it is certainly unfair to brand all tuk-tuk drivers as opportunists, there is no doubt that their collective ability to maintain artificially-high fares continues to damage the image of Phuket's all-important tourism industry.

Among those crying out for better regulation of the industry is Daroon Sooksai, chairman of the Phuket Tuk-Tuk Cooperative. Insisting that the local Transportation Office put measures in place to better organize the industry, K. Daroon points the finger of blame at the successive provincial administrations for remaining in "neutral gear" on the issue.

The need for Patong to have a low-cost minibus or "baht bus" service, as used in Pattaya, has been the subject of much futile editorializing in this space over the years, but now the Transport Office has drawn up a plan for such a service. Remarkably, it is only awaiting a private-sector investor to step forward and take advantage of the offer. Thus far, none has.

Speaking on behalf of the Transport Department, Jaturong Kaewkasi said that he doesn't know why no investors are interested in operating the service, which would charge passengers fares in the range of 15 baht to 30 baht.

The *Gazette* strongly suspects that the reason for this is nothing other than simple fear regarding the reaction of the tuk-tuk drivers who will have if their virtual monopoly jeopardized.

The *Gazette* notes that back in 1994, the Transport Office offered a concession for a *songtaew* bus to operate between Patong and Karon. After just three days, the driver was pulled from his vehicle and badly beaten by competitors. The concession remains open to this day, but no person has shown interest in it.

For this reason, it is imperative that an organization such as the Phuket Provincial Administration Organization run these service as it does the green-bus service in Phuket City.

Close support from the police will, of course, be essential.

— The Editor

Do you have an opinion you want to share?
Email editor@phuketgazette.net

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Letters

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

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

Fish? What fish?

Regarding the story "Chalong Bay marina construction delayed" [*Gazette*, January 12-18], exactly what fishermen are you talking about? Chalong Bay doesn't have any fishermen and the only fish living in Chalong Bay live in fish pens on the north side.

The other so-called "fishermen" that have longtail boats have not been fishing in Chalong Bay – or anywhere else – for about 20 years. They have been so busy charging people to take them out to their yachts that they don't have any time to fish.

Once in a while, one can see a Thai person casting a net for whatever they can catch, some fish only the size of a guppy.

It's the old story where the wheel replaces the porters. Chalong Bay has always been full of cry babies.

Khun James
Via Email

Better burglars than closed-circuit TV

In the "From the Gulf" column [January 12-18 issue], Max Rogers describes how a hotel in Samui, unnamed, set up security video cameras inside guest rooms as a way to catch burglars in the act. I suppose I should be glad that this action resulted in the arrest of 11 alleged thieves, but I'm left with a great deal of unease.

I understand that when I'm in a public place there's a good chance that I'm being filmed – such is life in this post-9/11 era. However, when I'm staying in a hotel room, I would like to presume that my privacy is both accepted and protected.

Is it not illegal to place video

cameras inside private rooms? While it is not mentioned in the story, one would assume that guests staying in the hotel during that time were not advised of this infringement on their privacy.

Allowing security concerns to triumph over human rights is a slippery slope and this recent vigilante action definitely tipped the balance towards a more Orwellian future. Note to hotel owners: Get your prying eyes out of my room! I'll take my chances with the thieves, thanks.

Winston Smith
Chalong

Farang ranting makes me anxious

Seth Bareiss's "First Person" [see *Gazette* of January 12-18] chilled me to the bone. Not because of the subject, not because of the scary-looking photo and not because he has opened my eyes to the incredible amount of property ads lining and littering Phuket's roadsides.

It chilled me because it may be setting a precedent: the prospect of *farang* ranting in your pages every week about what's wrong with Phuket is enough for me to reach for the Xanax.

Sam W
Rawai

Bummed about the state of the beach

A group of 24 friends and I have been coming to Phuket from South Africa for 15 years. I would like to ask the authorities concerned about the beach vendors to get their priorities right.

What are they going to do about the filthy, dirty seawater, the

increase in algae, the unbearable traffic on the roads?

Leave the vendors [of hot food] alone and focus on the most important areas: cleanliness, quality of water and traffic.

We have decided not to come back to Patong next year because of the terrible water quality at the beach.

Stan Friedmann
South Africa

It'll take more than blessed teddy bears

I have been a Phuket resident for more than a decade and I spend almost six hours a day in a car, so I know the attitude of Phuket's drivers very well.

At the announcement of the "Nong Prodpai" campaign [to increase driver awareness by distributing teddy bears] over the New Year holidays, I appreciated the event and I thought that the authorities had finally understood the necessity of giving more education to the road users.

During the campaign period, I was happily interested to see how the campaign itself affected peoples' driving habits.

The result was a bitter disappointment: drivers didn't change their behavior at all!

People have continued to drive on the wrong side, to ride motorbikes without wearing helmets and carrying three or four people under the indifferent eyes of the police, to cross intersections when the traffic light is red, to drive in the wrong lane, cunningly jump queues and so on.

For the above and other reasons, Nong Prodpai [safe sister bear] certainly wasn't happy!

Serge Gainard
Phuket City

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

Let's work together to fight crime

The police are often blamed for increasing crime rates, traffic problems and exploitation of tourists in Phuket. People want to know why we can't stop criminals or haven't solved a case, but it's important to consider how those accidents and crimes occur in the first place.

Crime and social problems should not be seen as the responsibility or result of failure by a single organization, such as the police. It is a responsibility shared among several organizations, such as the Tambon Administration Organizations [OrBorTor], the Tourism Authority of Thailand and local governments.

Phuket continues to attract more tourists every year. Between 2006 and 2007, 4.7 million tourists visited Phuket, and this year we are expecting more than 5 million. This puts a lot of additional pressure on my police force.

Another factor is the growing population of unregistered people living and working in Phuket. They come here to work in the hotels, restaurants and other tourism-related business. This increase in numbers also adds to the traffic problems and crime in Phuket.

The rise in crime can mostly be attributed to this influx of people who come here to work. Out of those people moving here, we don't know which of them has a criminal background.

I believe the governor is trying to solve the problem by en-

FIRST PERSON

This week Phuket Provincial Police Commander Pol Maj Gen Decha Budnampeth discusses the duties of his police force in Phuket, pointing out the problems and issues his department must address in 2008. He explains how the large unregistered population and high volume of traffic in Phuket place a strain on his officers and gives some tips on how you can help the police make Phuket safer.



couraging people who have moved here to register as residents. There are more than 300,000 unregistered people living in Phuket, which is equal to the number of registered Phuket residents.

Among these are poor families with maybe just one member of the family working, while others may turn to crime to support themselves.

Also, while Phuket welcomes more tourists, the airport and the roads cannot handle the extra load. There are traffic jams to and from the airport in the morning and evening, which becomes an inconvenience that the police have to deal with. Traffic back-ups in Kata-Karon, Patong and Phuket City are not the result of police not doing their jobs,

but the high volume of tourism-related traffic and local cars using a route that needs to be expanded.

I think the traffic problem will continue to worsen and I don't see any projects to expand the roads and reduce the traffic problems. I know the number of motorbikes that are actually registered in Phuket is much higher than 300,000 bikes.

The amount of work the police have to do is constantly increasing while the number of officers is decreasing.

Some of my officers want to transfer from here to another province because of the pressure of working here. Officers in other provinces never request to be transferred here.

Police would normally work

eight hour shifts and rest for 16 hours, but Phuket police officers often work up to 20 hours a day because there are always special events and special guests who need security. Ideally, Phuket should have 1,500 officers but we have only 1,000 officers to cover the entire island.

I requested many additional officers for the high season, but some were sent to surrounding provinces. Even though we have the help of police volunteers at the police station, we still do not have enough officers to patrol the island effectively.

It is also important for people to help us maintain law and order. People should first look after themselves and make sure they are being a good citizen, while reporting crimes or infor-

mation about criminals to the police.

When road accidents occur police officers have to leave what they are doing and go to the accident scene, even if they are busy with something else. If everyone on the roads follows some simple rules, such as not parking in the white and red or white and yellow zones, even if it's for a little while, the police would have more time to take care of crime.

As you know, just one car can create a traffic jam. If you commit a traffic violation, a police officer has to spend time writing you a ticket, you have to pay a fine and you're not happy.

If you see someone commit a traffic offense please remind them that they could be fined. This simple action can help us a lot. I know everyone is in a hurry to go somewhere, but if everyone obeys the traffic rules and keeps their speed down, fewer accidents will happen.

I would like to ask tourists to learn and follow some of the laws that are different here. For example, not wearing a shirt when driving or going topless in public is against the law and punishable with a fine. When we go abroad, we have to follow the laws of those countries too, so please follow ours.

Lastly, I'd like to say that we have to help each other solve the crime and traffic problems. I appeal to both locals and tourists to follow the law, and not to support those who break it.

Scary roads and rubbish

I have been living in a house in Cherng Talay for quite some time now and whenever private companies have carried out construction work on or near the road, they have always cleaned it up and repaired the area afterwards.

About a month and a half ago, a number of drainage pipes were laid, which I assume are under the local government's responsibility.

This is not a problem and I am in favor of progress, but the construction has not been finished and there are open pipes and rubbish everywhere.

The beat-up and pot-holed road quickly filled in with mud, creating dangerous bumps where trenches had been dug.

There is now a layer of mud at least two inches thick. When it rains, it is very dangerous for those on motorcycles. I had an accident there this morning.

The main construction work was finished weeks ago, but there is only one man left working on this huge job now.

Could you please tell me what the regulations are for making a road safe again after construction work and put me in contact with someone who can help?

The other issue I have is

Issues & ANSWERS

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that the land next to my house is empty, unused land.

However, over the past month or so, people have been coming every day and dumping rubbish on it.

This rubbish is nearly at my door and it stinks. Is this legal and, if not, who can I contact to make sure it is cleaned up?

Luke Reeder
Cherng Talay

Manode Phanchalard, Cherng Talay Tambon Administration Organization (OrBorTor) chief, replies:

Thank you for making us aware of these issues. For clean-

ing up an area after construction, we send out members of our staff to clear it.

As for garbage, if the land belongs to you, you can put up a sign that tells people not to dump their trash there.

To the area in question we will also send a team of staff to clear it up. I would like to know exactly where the land is located.

You can send photographs and details of these or any other problems in Cherng Talay to my secretary. Email: nan.yung@hotmail.com

Alternatively, you can call us at 076-325943, 076-270196-7.

Registering name changes after a marriage ends

Please correct me if I am wrong. In Thailand, when two Thais are married, it is my understanding that the woman's name is automatically added to the man's house registration document [tabien baan] and the woman must take the man's surname. Then, upon a divorce, the woman's name is automatically removed from the man's house registration document, and her name is restored.

I am asking if all this is automatic. For example, is it possible for a Thai woman to have divorced a Thai man and still be on his house registration document and still have his surname?

Greg Stefkovic
USA

Siranee Leelanont, chief of Registration and Census Department of Muang District Office, replies:

In Thailand, a woman has the right to choose if she wants to keep her maiden name or change her surname to that of her husband's when she marries. She must, however, change her title from Miss to Mrs. The name and title changes are not automatic.

They must be registered at a District [amphur] Office by the wife within 60 days of registering her marriage.

Adding a wife's name to her husband's tabien baan is also not automatic and is not related to a couple getting married. To register her name on his tabien baan, she must also apply to do this at a District Office. Until she does this, her name will remain on the tabien baan she was registered on before the marriage.

This is also the same regarding divorce. Her surname and title must be changed by application to a District Office. As well, a wife's name will not automatically be removed from her husband's tabien baan if the couple divorce. She must register these changes herself, otherwise her name will remain wherever she last registered it.

So, in answer to your question, yes it is possible that a woman can retain the surname of her ex husband and remain on his tabien baan. It is likely that the Thai woman added her name to her husband's tabien baan when she married him but has not taken it off since the divorce.

Bob Woodward is the ultimate big-foot journalist. Like his predecessors Walter Lippmann and the Alsop brothers and his contemporary Robert Novak, Woodward enjoys near-unlimited access to the corridors of power in Washington. He earned his place, of course, with *All the President's Men*, the story of Watergate and the fall of Nixon.

State of Denial (Simon & Schuster, New York, 2006, 558pp) is his 14th book and the third in a series called "Bush at War".

"In researching and reporting for a newspaper series in *The Washington Post* and my two previous books on Bush's war decisions, I interviewed him four times – December 2001, August 2002, and finally twice in December 2003," Woodward writes at the end of his book. "The transcripts for the combined seven-and-a-half hours of interviews ran hundreds of pages.

"Those were the days when Bush was a popular president – post-9/11 and later during the first nine months after the Iraq invasion. As the war dragged on, as American and Iraqis continued to die, and as Bush's approval rating dropped dramatically in 2005 and 2006, so did my chances of getting another interview with him."

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, however, gave Woodward an interview as late as July 2006 – four months before he resigned in disgrace in the wake of the disastrous Republican defeat in the mid-term elections. In his replies to Woodward's aggressive questioning, he is flannel-mouthed, evasive, persnickety and a downright liar.

Exposing a crackpot



Off the SHELF

By James Eckardt

The theme of this book is: how did it all go wrong in Iraq – and who's to blame?

A big portion belongs to Rumsfeld. He was part of a team of old hands who were brought in to manage President Bush, including Vice-President Dick Cheney and Secretary of State Colin Powell. A former defense secretary during the Ford Administration, Rumsfeld took over the Pentagon with preconceived notions of "reform".

Through an avalanche of memos called "snowflakes", persistent questioning and public humiliations, he managed to destroy the morale of the uniformed men in the Pentagon. The Defense Department became his personal fiefdom. He feuded with Colin Powell at the State Department and ignored National Security Director Condoleezza Rice. Shortly after September 11, 2001, he was ready to invade Iraq.

"The Iraq war plan was the chessboard on which Rumsfeld would test, develop, expand and modify his ideas about military transformation," Woodward writes. "And the driving concept was 'less is more' – new thinking about a lighter, swifter, smaller force that could do the job better. Rumsfeld's blitzkrieg would vindicate his leadership of the Pentagon."

He demanded control of post-war Iraq and got it. With too few troops on the ground and no effective planning, the country turned to mass looting, a collapse of infrastructure, and then organized resistance. Former general Jay Garner, the first man in charge of reconstruction, was replaced by pro-consul Jerry Bremer, who made three terrible mistakes: disbanding the Iraqi military, purging the civil service of Baathists, and dumping the Iraqi leadership group. When Garner reported this to Rumsfeld in Washington, he added: "There's still time to rectify this. There's still time to turn it around."

Rumsfeld's response?

"Rumsfeld looked at Garner for a

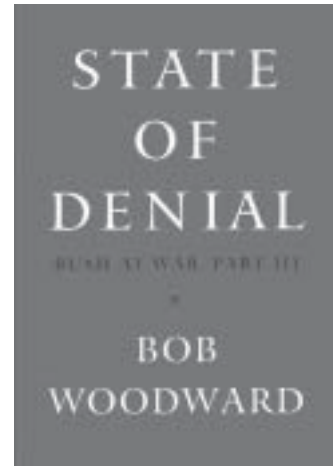
moment with his take-no-prisoners gaze. 'Well,' he said. 'I don't think there is anything we can do, because we are where we are.'

Ultimate responsibility for the debacle in Iraq falls on the hapless head of George W. Bush. His chief of staff Andrew Card tried for a year to get him to fire Rumsfeld. Bush accepted the resignations of Colin Powell and his assistant Richard Armitage, and later of Andrew Card himself, but refused to budge on Rumsfeld. Many sources in this book accuse Bush of living in a White House bubble. Nobody wanted to

tell him bad news.

"In these moments where Bush had someone from the field there in the chair beside him, he did not press, did not try to open the door himself and ask what the visitor had seen and thought," Woodward writes.

"The whole atmosphere too often resembled a royal court, with Cheney and Rice in attendance, some upbeat stories, exaggerated good news, and a good time had by all."



Tragic makes a tragedy, alright?

I have a question about the word "tragedy". It has become a synonym for "lethal accident", as in "Two people died in a highway tragedy last night." If the word "accident" is mentioned, it usually has "tragic" in front of it. Is this usage a cliché or something else?

PJ Maitland
Kingston, Ontario

Barbara replies:

You're not the first person to have written me disapprovingly about the way the media uses "tragedy", and I'm puzzled. Don't you find the accidental loss of human life tragic?

Welcome to Word Court, where Barbara Wallraff unravels some of the mystery that shrouds the English language, debunking confusing usage and clearing away the clutter that stops clear understanding – all by answering reader's questions.

It's true that originally a "tragedy" was a kind of drama or literary work, but the word has also long been used to refer to "a disastrous event: calamity", as Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines it. The death of a stranger may not be a calamity to you or me, but no doubt it's presumed that we will empa-

thize with the person's relatives and friends.

As for "tragic accident," consider, for example, the headline "Man killed in tragic accident." The alternative phrasing "Man killed in fatal accident" is no good, because it's redundant. And "Man killed in accident" seems unfeeling, inasmuch as an "accident" can be something as minor as spilled coffee or a scraped fender. So no, I think "tragic accident" is a useful phrase, not a cliché.

Speaking of clichés, a few weeks ago I published a list of words and phrases that a reader who works in corporate communications bans his staff from using.

I chimed in with a few more

expressions that I think deserve to be banned and asked if anyone could come up with anything simultaneously more pretentious, obscure and stale than "Not to put too fine a point on it."

Here are some of the better suggestions, in no particular order: at this point in time, touch base, parameters (especially bad if the person using it thinks it's a synonym for "perimeter"), the long and the short of it, rush to judgment, get a handle on, proactive, he/she has a full plate, push the envelope.

I have long wanted to write to you concerning "all right". My very fine high school English teacher back in the '50s pointed out that as we would never write "alwrong", we have no reason to write "alright". Let's stamp out "alright".

Ann Christenson
North Liberty, Iowa

Barbara replies:

I'm with you that "all right" is the spelling to use in anything

even slightly formal. Dictionary entries for "alright" include words such as "variant" and "disputed", but I think we'd both better start preparing ourselves to give in gracefully in the future.

What your English teacher didn't mention is that "already" and "altogether" are long-accepted words in the same form as "alright". "Already" doesn't mean the same thing as "all ready", "altogether" doesn't mean "all together" — and "all right" doesn't mean that all is right. It has a distinct meaning of its own, so it would make sense for it to have its own spelling.

For now, though, the fact that "alright" is not standard and, depending on your point of view, looks either sloppy or casual is reason enough to avoid it in most writing.

Barbara Wallraff is a weekly syndicated columnist for *King Features* and a contributing editor and words columnist at *The Atlantic Monthly*, where she has worked since 1983.

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Information and communications technology in Phuket will outstrip that of Singapore within two years, the head of Phuket's newly-established Software Industry Promotion Agency office ambitiously predicted (*Phuket Gazette*, April 17-23, 2004). Was this wishful thinking or just a bold lie? We're still in the IT dark ages here in Phuket. Most of us can access the latest technologies, but Internet access is painfully slow.

Nothing is better for getting to grips with the latest online breakthroughs than thumbing through a good book – or it's digital equivalent. On the Internet, there are countless articles that can be read in place of a book, but the real evolution is the availability of podcasts and videos.

From a podcast, I can get background information from experts, learn about their history and, in many cases, learn how to pronounce their names for the first time. I bought my first MP3 player so I could listen to podcasts.

Also, there are many easily-accessible videos of presentations given at information-security conferences. From these, I can get to know the experts on a more personal level, plus I can see demonstrations of software tools.

Many content producers now post their videos on Google Video or YouTube. Podcasts and videos have become invaluable tools in a person's learning arsenal, but an average 30-minute MP3 can be up to 20 megabytes and a 40-minute video can be up to 150MB.

Finding a good Internet connection in Phuket to download any of these, however, is half about getting what you paid for and half about sheer luck.

At home, I have two modes for connecting to the Internet: TOT ADSL and CAT EV-DO. In the past, I used my CAT as backup because the download speeds were three-to-four times slower than my ADSL line. Not any more.

Something happened around mid-December (high season?) and my TOT ADSL connection just plain sucks. It's fine in the mornings until about 11 am. Over the course of a day, it gets progressively worse until it reaches disaster level at 5 pm and then starts to speed up around 7 pm, eventually returning back to normal.

As if a slow connection isn't bad enough, I often cannot

Life in the slow lane

connect to the Internet at all.

I did about 20 hours of research to get to the bottom of my abysmal ADSL line speed. I referenced 10 websites that I frequent: one in Thailand, three in Singapore, two in Europe and four in the US. I used several different tools, including:

1. The command line "traceroute" utility.

2. IP-address lookup by country (www.ipgeo.com/tools/country.php).

3. Pingplotter, a visualization tool that shows packet routes (www.pingplotter.com).

4. Domain-name registration lookup for North America (www.networksolutions.com/whois/index.jsp), Europe (www.ripe.net/whois) and Asia (www.wq.apnic.net/apnic-bin/whois.pl).

5. Communications in Thailand wiki (www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communications_in_Thailand).

6. NECTEC's daily Internet map of Thailand (www.internet.nectec.or.th).

In my opinion, it's not all TOT's fault though they can be blamed for not providing enough bandwidth locally. Most Internet roads out of Thailand pass through CAT's central Internet exchange (reportedly, TOT can go to Singapore directly but my research shows me not often). The main clogging starts at the CAT exchange and extends beyond, especially when ocean-hopping.

Watching a video in real time is out of the question with a slow Internet connection, but with many video players embedded in Internet browsers, you can pause



Tired of Internet cut-outs from interrupting downloads? Iggy uses Download Accelerator Plus, free from speedbit.com, to continue downloading without having to start from the beginning.

the player just after starting the video and eventually the entire video will download on its own – then you can view it in its entirety without interruption.

The obvious downside is that you have to wait eons for the entire video to download and it is not stored locally so you can't view it at a later date.

Fortunately, there are web-

sites that allow you to enter a video link that produces a downloadable URL. You can then use that address to download the video independently of the video player for offline viewing.

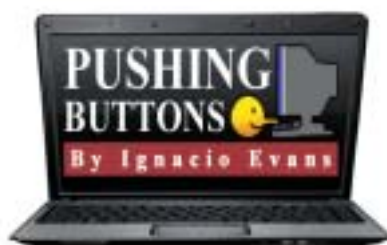
Examples are KeepVid and VideoSnagger. There are others, all easily found with Google. There are free media players for any format, including Flash video.

Next, get a download manager. There's nothing worse than getting a download 95% complete, only to have it cut out. A download manager will keep track of download points, so if your connection drops, it can be resumed at that point. My favorite is Download Accelerator Plus (DAP) from speedbit.com. The basic version is free and by default it's easy to use.

A word of caution: with free software, you have to question why it's free. In DAP's case, they want you to upgrade to a paid version. If you ever have a bad feeling about free software, do an Internet search for negative reports. Also, if you don't have runtime A-V protection, scan the installer file once it has downloaded.

If you have success with this, you'll soon be out of hard-disk space and will need to look into increasing your storage capacity.

Ignacio Evans is an information security consultant based in Southeast Asia who tries to be in Phuket whenever he can. Email him with questions, complaints or comments at: iggy69@gmail.com



ARE YOU HOT?

Here are just two of the absolutely free Wi-Fi access hotspots on Phuket.

• Juice Internet Cafe & Juice bar. 2 Mbps connection. 49 Phuket Rd (next to the Imperial Hotel). Open 8 am to 11 pm, Monday to Saturday.

• Liquid Lounge, Surin Beach. Open daily 4pm to 1am. Tot 1Mb. Download: 428 kbps (53.5 KB/sec transfer rate). Upload: 206 kbps (25.8 KB/sec transfer rate).

If you're hot – and free – just drop Woody an email at: Woody@KhunWoody.com

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About mid-January, I had a chat with a long-time resident on Phuket. He surprised me when he said that UK insurance group Friends Provident had defaulted on their commercial property fund. This article will explain the true situation of not only Friends Provident's commercial property fund, but many others as well.

It was perhaps helpful that the previous week I was at an investment seminar in Hong Kong and had dinner with a regional sales manager of Friends Provident International. During the investment conference, I had ample time to chat with long-term acquaintance John Robertson of Synergy Partnership, the Asian agents for Glanmore Property Fund, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Deutsche Bank.

Commercial property is simply another asset class. It is often ignored by private investors as it requires expert knowledge and huge amounts of capital to offer any hope of diversification.

Commercial property covers everything from office blocks to shopping centers to warehouses to hotels. The only practical way for almost any private investor to have access to this sector is via a property fund or a similar "vehicle", such as a REIT (Real Estate Investment Trust).

Last year saw the emergence of a "credit crunch" that is now affecting many economies around the world. One of the latest casualties is the commercial property market as investors have started to flee this sector in droves.

Friends Provident were one of the first to appreciate the situation and to manage the outflow simply closed their fund for encashment. It is not that these institutions have suddenly become financial casualties themselves, it is that commercial property has one specific disadvantage in times of economic stress: it is a very illiquid investment.

Property funds slam the exit windows shut



Glanmore's holdings, as listed on its website www.glanmore.com. Cashing out of the fund has been restricted due to the difficulty in liquidating property in time to meet the needs of fleeing investors.

When a fund manager is managing a portfolio of equities (shares) or bonds (fixed interest) or even a fund that contains both, such as a "balanced fund", it is generally easy to liquidate assets within seconds, minutes or hours.

The stock markets and bond markets – in any market of substance – are generally so "liquid" that it is easy to sell. Therefore, when investors head for the exit doors en masse, the fund manager is well placed to return their cash.

If there is a panic or a "crash", prices realized may be a disappointment to investors but at least they have their money or, for the cynical, what's left of it.

Commercial property funds are entirely different. It is impossible to sell off office blocks or

shopping centers at a moment's notice. When property funds fall victim to falling markets, they usually, in the initial stages, simply increase the fund's borrowings and pay out investors.

However, we are living in a period of economic stress and fund managers facing high redemptions have no alternative but to close the fund.

Glanmore, which manages more than a billion pounds sterling (around 70 billion baht), is a perfect example. After redemptions in December became too large, the board of directors on December 28 closed the fund to immediate redemptions and instead offered payouts to investors after a six-month notice period.

There is one caveat: what-

ever the ruling price is six months from now, investors placing redemptions must accept this price. There is no turning back; they cannot change their minds.

Fund managers in this situation are ruled by strict governmental oversight and whatever price is realized will be a fair market price. However, the primary responsibility for the fund manager is to those who want to "go the distance".

The six-month delay is to allow the fund manager to sell properties at the best price possible in order to satisfy redemptions. It is not a situation that any fund manager relishes – they lose money. A management fee of 1.5% on a billion pounds sterling is a lot more than, say, 1.5% of 800 million pounds.

This is not new to the commercial property industry. It has happened before and it will happen again. It is all part of the greater economic cycle. However, it is heartening to note that Glanmore, for example, still anticipates returns of 6%-8% during 2008.

Glanmore's Asian agent recommends not taking advantage of the six-month offer unless absolutely necessary. Patience will almost certainly be a virtue in this case.

Friends Provident and Glanmore are just two of many commercial property funds that are in an identical situation. Many of these funds are owned by groups with very deep pockets.

Over the years in this column I have written about Brandeaux and its ground rent, student accommodation and "mixed asset" funds. Fortunately for me, Adrian Perry, who is sales and marketing director for Brandeaux, was having a family holiday in Phuket and kindly set aside time for a meeting.

He has been with Brandeaux for 10 years and previously was head of acquisitions for the company, for both ground rents and student accommodation. His technical knowledge is vast, having spent 25 years in the commercial property sector.

Brandeaux is in a totally different situation than other commercial property managers. Due to the high yielding and specialized niche it occupies, its funds are actually attracting record inflows of cash. It is the old story; one person's bad news is another's good news.

For all those steeped in doom, history shows that these downturns seldom last for long. As interest rates fall, as they will, returns on commercial property will start to appear attractive in comparison.

Richard G Watson runs Global Portfolios Co Ltd, a Phuket-based personal financial-planning service. He can be reached at Tel: 076-381997, Fax: 076-383185, Mobile: 081-0814611. Email: imm@loxinfo.co.th. Website: www.global-portfolios.com

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MAI KHAO: Phuket International Airport (PIA) officially opened its second terminal on January 8 as part of its 20-year plan to expand the airport's facilities and services in order to cope with the growing number of visitors to the island.

The new building, to the north of and joined by a walkway to the old terminal, comprises charter flight check-in counters only.

All domestic and international arrivals are still processed through the old terminal.

"We originally planned for the new terminal to reduce congestion at the check-in counters in the old terminal by serving all charter flights. The new terminal can support in total two 747s or three Airbus planes, which is about 600 passengers, departing at the same time," said Phuket Airport Director Sq Ldr Pornchai Eua-aree.

He added, however, that by the time the new terminal was complete the number of mid-size charter flights had exceeded expectations. Some charter flight departures, therefore, are still processed through the original terminal.

K. Pornchai said that PIA at its peak can process about 2,000 international flight passengers and about 1,500 domestic flight passengers per hour.

"In the high season we have 20% more flights than in the low season, but the difference

Airport terminal expansion falls short of rising demand

By Natcha Yuttaworawit

between the peak periods in the high and low seasons is not that great because during the high season there are more night flights."

In the next stage of expansion, the Immigration counter area will be widened to handle 1,200 to 1,500 passengers an hour, up from its present capacity of 900 passengers an hour.

Airplane docking capacity is also being stretched to the limit. "During the high season there are not enough parking stands for aircraft, especially at night," K. Pornchai said.

"Many Russian airlines, for example, need to park their aircraft for about 10 days at a time, so we have to ask them to park at Ranong or Surat Thani airports to make space at PIA."

The airport needs to add more parking stands as the 23 in operation will not be enough to handle demand within the next five years. Stands for large planes such as 747s each cost about 100 million baht, said K. Pornchai.

The number of vehicles dropping off departing tourists at the airport is another problem, K. Pornchai said. "The second floor of the old terminal [the departures area] gets jammed with passengers and we can't expand there.

"For example, we have 20 flights departing today, with about 300 passengers per flight, so that's 6,000 passengers. If they all arrive by car – even with three people per car – that's 2,000 cars coming to the airport to drop off passengers," he said.

"We are currently talking to construction companies about expanding the car park. We are not looking at expansion just for the immediate future, but enough to cater to what we will need for the next 20 years," he said, adding that airport parking is a source of many complaints.

"We should ask for some help from other related organizations to help solve problems with public transportation to and from the airport," he said.

"As our airport is by the sea, it would be good if we could take tourists directly to their hotels or

resorts by sea – that would be nice, and we could promote it as another tourist attraction," K. Pornchai added.

Plans are afoot to also further develop retail and other commercial outlets at the airport to boost PIA's rental income.

"Most of the airport's income – about 70% – comes from the airlines that use it, while only 30% is revenue from commercial outlets," K. Pornchai said.

From 2004 to 2006, the PIA's income was about 900 mil-

lion baht per year. In 2007, that figure increased to about 1.4 billion baht, about 40% to 45% of which was derived from airport tax paid by passengers, he explained.

"This is very different to the income earned at larger international airports, such as Suvarnabhumi, Hong Kong International or Changi in Singapore, which receive about 40% of their income from airlines and about 60% from commercial outlets," K. Pornchai added.

Sharp rise in overseas arrivals

PHUKET: November 2007 statistics released by Phuket International Airport (PIA) show an increase of just over 34% in the number of international passengers compared with the same period in 2006.

November 2007 saw 650 more domestic flights carrying 27,000 more passengers than in 2006, bringing the total number of domestic passengers passing through PIA to 295,413.

The number of international passengers jumped by 34.06% from 155,328 to 208,225 people arriving on 1,521 international flights – an increase of 224 additional flights compared to the 1,297 flights recorded in the same period in 2006.

Domestic cargo increased from 1,340 to 1,341 pieces, while international cargo rose by 38.6%, from 647 to 897 pieces.



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Tennis pro serves up Thailand's next aces

PHUKET: Whether they're hoping to be the next Paradorn Srichaphan or just looking to have fun, junior tennis players in Phuket now have a wide variety of coaching options and even the opportunity to take part in a junior master's tournament.

Under the watchful eye of tennis pro Lorenzo Marcuzzi, Phuket's next generation of tennis stars are being guided toward bright futures.

Currently, Lorenzo holds tennis classes at British International School, Phuket, for BIS students on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Lorenzo is also in the process of establishing tennis classes at the Laguna Phuket resort.

The classes, which will be held Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, will be open to any young tennis players on the island and are expected to begin in mid-March.

Lorenzo is the tennis pro at Laguna Phuket, Sheraton Grande Laguna Phuket and Banyan Tree Phuket.

His fun classes aim to promote a healthy enjoyment for the sport. Lorenzo regularly gives out mini-prizes to his students, such as vouchers for drinks and snacks after training.

Phuket's youth tennis stars are currently mid-way through the island's first master's tournament. Thirty students from various schools in Phuket are taking part in the eight-round tournament at BIS, which started last September.

Students play each other on a round-robin basis, winning the points used to establish the ranking system.

Boys and girls from eight up to 11 years old are grouped together, while boys and girls in the 12-15 age bracket play and are

ranked separately.

At the end of the tournament, the top four in each of the three divisions will go through to the final round, currently slated for June 1.

Students can earn bonus points for attending all of the preliminary rounds.

At the end of the tournament, a number of prizes will be awarded, including for best players, the best-behaved children and the most-improved players.

Two of Lorenzo's students achieved success during a national ranking tournament held in Saphan Hin in December.

Poo, 8, was the runner-up in the boys' competition, while Michela, 11, made it to the semi-finals. Both study at Kajornkiet Pattana School.

The training at BIS costs 8,800 baht per term. Lorenzo said that he expects the training at Laguna to be similarly priced.

Speaking with excitement about the tennis scene on the island, Lorenzo said that he is also planning to organize more tournaments for adult tennis players.

Lorenzo also has an off-island mission that he is about to embark on: He is part of the humanitarian organization Tennis for Africa, which supports young tennis players in Africa.

In April, Lorenzo will visit Sudan to take part in a tennis clinic.

Tennis for Africa will also donate tennis equipment and money to poor people in the area. For more information visit www.tennisforafrica.org

For more information about tennis in Phuket contact Lorenzo Marcuzzi (Tel: 081-0802453; Email: lorenzotennis@libero.it Website: www.tennis-plus.com).

Cebu-City legend trains boxing stars of the future

By Scott Mallon

Cebu City is not only the second-largest metropolis in the Philippines, but it is also the country's number-one tourist destination, thanks to sandy beaches and crystal-clear waters.

A natural center for Filipino boxing, Cebu is home to one of the finest and best-equipped gyms in the Philippines – the ALA Boxing Gym.

The gym's current stable includes such names as WBO minimumweight champion Donnie Nietes and Rey "Boom-Boom" Bautista.

Past fighters who have received guidance or trained at the gym include world flyweight champion Nonito Donaire and world bantamweight champion Gerry Penalosa.

Oversized fight programs on the wall of the gym offer links to battles from the past, compelling those in training to look forward to the future while remembering they too will some day become a part of history.

Behind the success of the gym is Tony "Sir Ala" Aldeguez, a 66-year-old entrepreneur who for the past 25 years has done his best to further the growth and quality of Filipino boxing by training, managing and promoting fighters.

The wretched poverty that plagues much of Cebu makes it perfect breeding ground for young men looking for a better life.

Aldeguez is happy to lend a hand. "My goal is to produce good fighters and even better citizens," he said.

"Almost every day we get guys coming in here who want to take up boxing as their liveli-



At 66 and with numerous businesses to run, Tony Aldeguez still finds time to work one-on-one with young fighters.

hoods. Some of them come with only the clothes on their backs, malnourished, with not even a change of underwear.

"Normally, I will give them a week of training and make a decision on whether or not I think they have what it takes to be a fighter: the right attitude, the willingness to work hard.

"If not, I'll give them a few bucks and send them on their way," he said.

Located in the bustling Talamban area of Cebu City, the gym is set in the back of a compound that serves as headquarters for Aldeguez's numerous businesses ventures.

Not only is the compound the command center for Aldeguez, it is also the domicile of numerous wild animals.

There are five monkeys, a variety of birds, fish and two large crocodiles.

Aldeguez said that they are his secret weapon to motivate boxers.

"When the fighters get lazy in their training, we throw them to the crocs," he said, jokingly.

At an age when many are content with retirement, Aldeguez is a busy man.

The gym is Aldeguez's turf, his home away from home and the place he relies on most to relax.

Like an old, battle-scarred lion, he patrols the grounds, searching for weaknesses in his

students, correcting them when need be and always trying to better prepare them for their future encounters.

Each afternoon, when Aldeguez makes his way into the gym, his fighters greet him one by one with a "hello" and a kiss on the cheek.

He is highly revered by those around him in boxing and business.

"There are a lot of frustrations in boxing for sure and I've had my share of setbacks, but for me, what I enjoy the most in the sport is the development; seeing a young person grow into a fighter and into a man," he said.

Aldeguez takes no money from his fighters and loses money on the majority of his promotions. He continues to promote his fighters for the love of the sport.

Last year, Cebu was the scene of two world title bouts: Z Gorres-Fernando Montiel and Donnie Nietes-Pornsawan Kratingdaenggym. The ALA camp went 1-1, with Gorres losing a hotly-disputed split decision and Nietes becoming Aldeguez's first world champion.

On February 2, Gorres will vie for a world title in Cebu when he takes on Vic Darchinyan.

Win or lose, Tony Aldeguez will continue to do what he always does, developing fighters and turning them into productive citizens. Boxing could use more people like him.





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Golfers prepare for annual tourney

KATHU: The inaugural Phuket Challenge, a team golf tourney in Ryder Cup format between Thais and foreigners living in Phuket, will be held at Phuket Country Club from January 28 to 30.

Competition, which will start daily at midday, will consist of foursomes, fourballs and singles play. Each team will field 12 players daily.

The purpose of the event is to encourage team competition and also promote fellowship and camaraderie between the Thai and international golfing community, explained Neale Avery of the organizing team.

The event is not open for general entry, he said.

Early in 2007, local golfing legend Aussie Wayne Fielder was asked to assemble a team of golfers to play in a series of practice matches against the Phuket Ryder Cup Team, who were scheduled to play their regular biennial match against Pattaya.

From this humble beginning, Kijja Pongprapas and Prajuab Subcharoen worked together with Mr Fielder to create the annual event, Avery explained.

Due to the generous sponsorships received from Paul Gibson of The Yorkshire Inn and Robert Barrie, a platform for healthy competition has been created, he added.

The opening ceremony dinner will be at the Yorkshire Inn/Tai Life complex in Soi Sansabai, Patong, January 27. The prize presentation dinner will be at the Phuket Country Club January 30.

To register for the prize-presentation dinner call Phuket Country Club at 076-319200-4.

Thai takes windsurf title

PHUKET: Thailand's first international windsurfing rally championship, the Puravarna Windsurfing Rally for His Majesty the King, was held over four days from January 16 to 19, with homegrown windsurfer Navin Singsart taking first place.

K. Navin (114 points) narrowly beat Poland's Kamil Lewandowski (113 points) to take the title. Another Thai, Arun Homraru (106 points), took third place.

Thirty-one windsurfers from 21 countries, including Great Britain, the US and Germany, took part in the rally along with seven Thai entrants.

Scoring for each day of racing was based on the number of surfers in the race, with 30 points going to the winner and zero points to the surfer in last place.

The grueling course took competitors 100 kilometers along the west coast of the island, starting from Nai Yang Beach on January 16 and ending at Nai Harn Beach on January 19.



Thirty-one windsurfers from 21 countries, including Great Britain, the US and Germany, took part in the rally along with seven Thai entrants.

The rally was organized by the Eastern Windsurfing Club, with support from Tourism Authority of Thailand, the Yacht Racing Association of Thailand and the Windsurfing Association of Thailand.

The top-10 participants were awarded trophies by Dr Suwit Yodmanee, minister of Tourism and Sports, who chaired

the closing ceremony held at the Royal Phuket Yacht Club on January 19.

Dr Suwit commended all those involved in the racing as well as the event organizers.

The event will be broadcast to 170 million households worldwide via 30 TV channels, including Fox Sports, Star Sports and Global TV.

Undefeated streak leaves YFH A top of the league

THALANG: The second round of football matches in the Phuket Fair Play Junior League took place on January 18 and 20, with mixed results for the three teams from Youth Football Home (YFH).

On January 20, Wat Thepkasattri School were held 2-2 at home to Cherg Thalay Wittayakom School, while all three YFH teams won on the road.

YFH A narrowly defeated British International School, Phuket, 3-2, while YFH B walked over Thalang Pranangrang School 4-0. YFH C beat Baan Prujumpa School 3-0.

YFH A had less luck at home to Thalang Pranangrang School on January 20, as they were held to a 1-1 draw.

Meanwhile, YFH B suffered a 3-2 away defeat to Cherg Thalay Wittayakom School, while YFH C annihilated BIS 5-0.

Playing at home, Baan Prujumpa School beat Wat Thepkasattri School 1-0.

YFH A now stand at the top of the league with seven points, while YFH C and Baan Prujumpa School follow with six points apiece.

The Phuket Fair Play Junior League is organized by YFH, which is a charity that provides homes for orphans and destitute boys.

There are eight teams taking part in the two-month league.

PATONG DARTS LEAGUE

PATONG: The first week of the new season got off to a good start, with all teams from last season staying in the league and playing their matches.

Beach House, who won the toilet seat for coming bottom last season, ambushed last season's runners-up Dog's Bollocks with a 5-4 win at home, also taking the beer leg to sweep all three points. Justin from Beach House took the high score.

January 15 results: Sick Buffalo 0 Queen Mary* 9; Beach House* 5 Dog's Bollocks 4; Valhalla 2 Piccadilly* 7; Simply Red* 3 Offshore 6; Market Bar 3 Shakers* 6 (* = winner of beer leg).



January 29 matchups: Valhalla v Queen Mary; Simply Red v Dog's Bollocks; Market Bar v Piccadilly; Shakers vs Offshore; Sick Buffalo v Beach House (home team first).

Members of the Queen Mary dart team celebrate their win and undefeated season at the league party held on January 8 at their venue on Soi Patong Resort.

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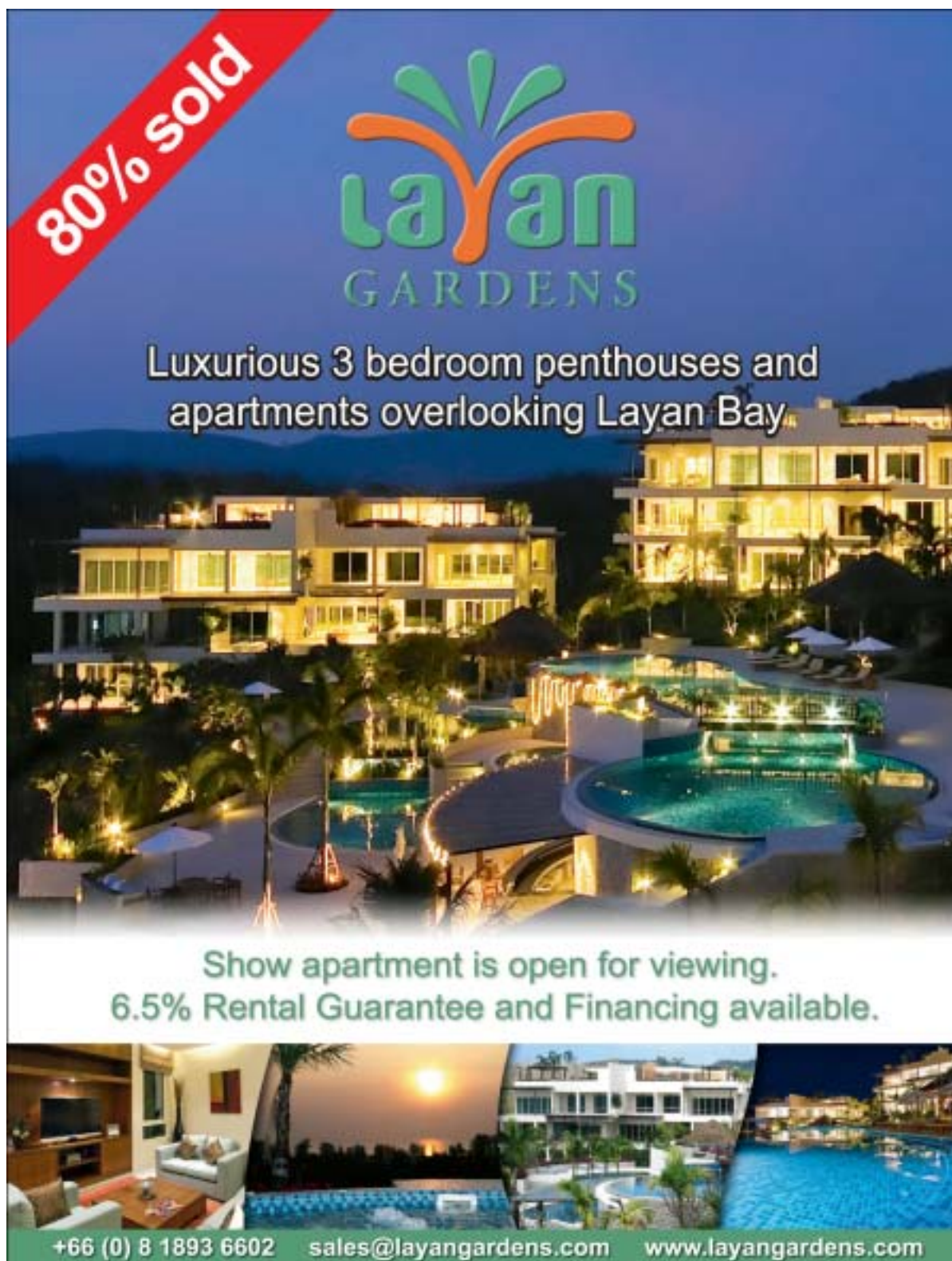
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Construction Update

by Janyaporn Morel

Rassada Municipality moves on up

RASSADA: In the stakes for the most impressive local authority offices on the island, Rassada Municipality has entered the fray with a purpose-built, five-story, Sino-Portuguese-style building costing 24.3 million baht.

The new building, which is 80% complete, ranks third in the budget stakes for the best local municipality offices. Kata-Karon Municipality's new building cost 56 million baht and Wichit Municipality's new home cost 35 million baht.

Construction of the new Rassada Municipality offices, designed by Home One Design Co Ltd, began January last year and is expected to be complete by the end of February, about a month behind schedule.

Rassada Municipality Public Works Chief Nipit Charoenkarn explained to the *Gazette* that contractor Thippawan Construction suffered labor shortages during construction that delayed completion the project.

"The company has to pay 24,300 baht per day for finishing the work late. However, we expect that the building will be ready by the end of February as now there are only some minor works to complete, such as the installation of sanitary ware and flooring, and painting the outside of the building," K. Nipit said.

When finished, the building will have total usable area of 2,500 square meters, ready for officers to serve the 32,000 residents in Rassada's seven villages, he added.

The first floor will feature the offices of the municipal treasury, revenue, public health and social welfare departments. The second floor will include offices for general administrative staff,



a storeroom and a meeting room measuring 4.5m by 6 meters that can seat about 10 people.

The third floor will feature the public works and education department offices, while the fourth floor will house an office with a lounge for Mayor Surathin Lain-udom and separate offices with a shared lounge for his deputy mayors.

The fifth floor will comprise the offices of the municipal council president, vice-president, a municipal council office and a meeting room that can seat about 50 people.

K. Nipit said that it will take about three months to complete the interior, which is funded by a separate budget of about 10 million baht. The interior decoration budget includes the cost of an elevator, office materials and an

air-conditioning system.

"We expect to move into our new offices about October this year, after the interior decoration has been completed and the fur-

niture installed," said K. Nipit.

The new building follows Rassada Municipality being upgraded from a Tambon Administration Organization (*OrBorTor*)

Rassada Municipality's new office building on Rassada-anusorn Rd is expected to be finished by March, with the building open for business by October.

in August due to the expanding population and development in the subdistrict.

"Most of the people who come to us ask for municipal electricity and water supply. People also come to apply for building permits. We conduct land surveys and inspect land encroachment in our area. Our work also includes garbage collection and to respond to any complaints filed," K. Nipit added.

After the municipality moves into the new building, the old two-story building, about 50 meters from new one, will be demolished to make way for a car park.

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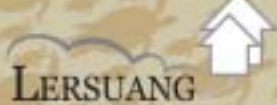




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Home of the Week

Koh Maphrao

This single-story, four-bedroom pool villa sits on pristine beachfront on Koh Maphrao (Coconut Island) off the east coast of Phuket, where the pace of life is relaxed and tranquil.

The furnished veranda commands views of Phang Nga Bay and the surrounding islands, as does an outdoor spa tub and sala by the beach.

In Balinese style, the open-floor plan comprises four bedrooms, a living area, three bathrooms, a kitchen and a dining area.

The kitchen is fully fitted with modern appliances, including gas oven, microwave, refrigerator, washer and dryer, and ample worktop space. Kitchen cupboards are made from teak and counters are black marble.

Off the living room is an air-conditioned office with large windows looking onto the property's fern garden.

The spacious air-conditioned master bedroom has a large walk-in closet and en-suite "home spa" bathroom with black marble and white porcelain double sinks. Glass doors open onto the veranda and garden, which has an alfresco bathtub tucked away in the privacy of the enclosed garden.

Sea views can also be enjoyed from the guest bedroom, also equipped with an en-suite

Just quietly...



bathroom, a large built-in closet and sitting area. Doors lead onto the veranda.

The other two single bedrooms are also air conditioned, have built-in closets and share an en-suite bathroom and views of the surrounding forest.

All the bedrooms have solid teak floors and the main living

area has high vaulted ceilings with wood accents.

The pool area is just a few footsteps from the beach and is surrounded by a mature garden, which is attractively lit by night. The pool measures five meters by 12 meters, and there is an outdoor Jacuzzi and a shower.

The property includes a

separate air-conditioned building that currently houses the maid-and-gardener husband-and-wife team. The building has a bedroom, two bathrooms, a kitchen, lounge and a laundry room.

Fresh water supply for the villa and garden comes from two private wells. The water is stored in pressurized 5,000-liter tanks

with filters. There are two underground septic tanks, set far from the villa.

Electricity is provided by a self-contained 60KVA generator providing 220v or 120v 50-60 Hz supply. There is no noise pollution from the generator as it is contained in a separate building at the back of the garden. All bathtubs, showers and sinks use solar-heated water. Mains electricity from the mainland is expected to be hooked up to the home in the near future.

Although there is just one shop on the island, modern facilities and amenities, including international schools, hospitals and shopping centers are just a short boat ride away.

The boat crossing of about 500 meters to Ao Por Pier on the mainland takes just 10 minutes. British International School is 10 minutes' drive from there, and 15 minutes to Phuket's international hospitals and shopping centers.

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Design

by Nick Davies

Keeping chic with custom kitchens

For high-quality, long-lasting fitted kitchens designed specifically to your tastes and style of cooking, Malaysian furniture design company Zeyco offers kitchen design consultancy, fabrication and fitting services.

Zeyco kitchens have a modern look with ovens, grills, hobs and even coffee machines integrated into the cupboards and work surfaces as well as snugly aligned large cupboard doors, cutlery drawers and chic wall-mounted ovens, all with a smooth-line finish, a hallmark of Zeyco kitchens.

Since opening in Phuket about two years ago, Zeyco has been a popular choice of kitchen furniture for Phuket's high-end property owners. Customers can select from a wide range of solid, stained wood and aluminum kitchen furniture to create a kitchen that best suits them and their home.

Zeyco's Phuket branch marketing manager Raymond Teh said that they ensure long-lasting quality of their kitchen designs by using solid wood instead of chipboard or plywood, which are commonly used for kitchen cabinets.

"We use Malaysian and European woods, such as maple, walnut, beach, cherry, oak and pine, plus Burmese teak. The wood is also treated to ensure that it is water resistant, so there is no chance of rapid deterioration from mold or damp," he said.

"As we work very closely with customers to ensure the kitchen will meet their exact specifications based on their preferences and the measurement of the kitchen space, the planning of a new kitchen design can take anywhere between three to six months to finalize.

"After a customer places an order it takes about another 40 to 50 business days for the kitchen units to be built at our factory in



Smooth lines complemented by appliances being integrated into the work surfaces and kitchen units are a hallmark of Zeyco's modern look.

Malaysia and delivered to Phuket. The units arrive pre-assembled, ready to fit right in," he added.

Although Zeyco manufacture only the wood cabinets, doors and drawers, they help customers select other kitchen hardware, such as the hobs, sinks and extractor units from a variety of manufacturers and ensure that they are properly incorporated into the whole kitchen's design, installing them all at the one time.

"We can help plan the kitchen from the moment the foundations of a house are begun. Depending on where the kitchen units will go, the position of power points, drainage and extractor fan vents are incorporated into the kitchen plans," Mr Teh said.

Customers can choose from a wide range of colors for the resilient paint finishes, which comprise no less than seven layers to ensure they'll take a few hard knocks over the years.

"Many people come to us to solve problems they have with their existing kitchens. They may have bought an expensive, furnished house somewhere in the region of 20 to 25 million baht with a built-in kitchen, but they often find that the kitchen furniture is of low-quality plywood or chipboard," Mr Teh said.

"We have no 'latest models', as all our furniture is custom built to customers' specifications," he added.

Popular designs at the moment are plain white or black with

a flush finish of smooth lines with most of the kitchen hardware, such as washers and dryers, hidden away. The high tech "soft close" drawers gently glide open and shut at the push of a finger or they will gently slide back into place even if they are pushed closed too hard.

The acrylic imitation marble counter tops are impressive. They have the same look and feel as marble, but, of course, are cheaper and lighter than the real thing, and no-one will notice the

difference, even when they look closely.

Because of the focus on quality, Zeyco kitchen designs don't come cheap. They start at about 150,000 baht and require a 50% deposit, then 40% paid when the units arrive and the final 10% is paid upon installation.

The Zeyco showroom is on Rassada Rd, Phuket City. Tel: 076-261695. Email: zeycoth@gmail.com Website: www.Zeyco.com.my



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Gardening

by Bloomin' Bert

Talking afoul on composting

I like swearing. It's effective. Some people don't, but it sounds ludicrous when some one drops a hammer on their big toe only to blurt out, "Oh fiddlesticks" or "Blinking heck". It just doesn't work.

They're annoyed. In fact, they're angry – several pounds of steel dropping on any part of your anatomy is going to hurt. A lot. Swearing, therefore, provides a release. I'm not sure whether uttering a random expletive physically eases the pain, but I'm convinced that it helps in some way.

Unfortunately, there are those from certain parts of the world who need to learn how to swear properly. The uncomplimentary word that used to refer to a child of unwed parents is a good example. Those from the south of England, please try to get it right. The "a" sound is the same as the start of "apple", not "aardvark". Besides, it's somehow a lot more effective if you at least attempt to utter the word with some variation of a Yorkshire accent.

And a little advice for Americans: don't say "bloody". You just sound silly. While we're on the subject, that also applies to "mate". It's as daft as Brits going round addressing everyone as "buddy".

Anyway, back to swearing. Some swear words are no longer swear words – and that's official. In the late '70s, the rebellious British punk-rock band The Sex Pistols released an album called *Never Mind the Bollocks*. The manager of a shop displaying posters was arrested and charged under the Indecent Advertising Act.

The court case revolved around the alleged indecency of the word "bollocks". The decisive



Photo courtesy of The Composting Association.

Some people think that Bert talks a load of compost. This week, he's out to prove them right.

evidence came from a professor of English and former priest, who successfully argued that the word was accepted slang and had been in use for centuries.

He explained that a bollock was an Anglo-Saxon word meaning "small ball". "Bollocks" was also 18th-century slang for a clergymen, owing to their reputation for talking nonsense, or, in common parlance, a load of old balls. The professor won the day, the shop manager was acquitted and The Sex Pistols' notoriety was assured.

Anyway, back to swearing – again. I'm probably not al-

lowed to use the word "shit" in this column, but this is basically what this week's rambling is all about. Technically, it's not shit, but it's close. I'm talking about manure, properly known as compost in gardening circles. I don't go all tree-hugger very often, but composting really does make sense.

It's easy to make compost. You can do it in your back garden with no experience whatsoever. All you have to do is pile a combination of organic ingredients on top of one another in a way that ensures the air and moisture necessary to develop bacteria permeates the pile. Then, you churn the pile on a regular basis to make sure that the bacteria thrives.

The ingredients can be just about any organic material. Coffee beans, banana peels, grass clippings, sawdust, bark, mulched leaves, grass, branches – anything. Any of these are fine, as long as there are no nasty chemicals in them.

Other items that will compost well include scraps of fruit

and vegetables, tea leaves (including tea bags), vegetable-plant remains, cardboard, old flowers, old straw and hay, animal bedding, egg shells, plants and weeds (dead or alive) and even hair (human, dog, cat, guinea pig and so on).

You can create compost in containers specifically designed for composting or simply in piles described above, strangely enough, known as compost piles. Each method has its pros and cons. Piles can be tilled and churned more easily, but a bin would probably look more proper in a garden.

Bins can better provide the moisture and temperature necessary for composting to occur, too. If you begin with a compost pile or pit, it will attract earthworms that will assist in breaking down the ingredients of the pile.

Make sure you select a sunny spot for your project and start by placing a layer of plant waste: straw, hay, leaves, old veg-

etables and fruits are perfect for starters. Add a layer of manure and bedding about 10-centimeters deep and then add a layer of top soil about 1cm thick.

Sprinkle a small amount of lime on top. You can substitute this with dust or wood ashes to add to the mineral content. Make sure to add water often, continue to add layers and make sure to keep the compost loose and free to breathe.

The heap will begin to shrink and heat up within a few days. Turn the whole lot after about three weeks with a hoe or pitch fork and do the same thing again three weeks after that. Make sure to turn out the entire pile to expose all of the internal juicy bits that require aeration.

Be careful not to turn the pile too much, as heat needs to build in order to facilitate the decaying process. It's surprising how hot a compost pile can get. Keep it moist but don't soak it. Your compost should be ready in about three months.

When it comes to applying compost onto your garden, timing and method have a lot to do with the age of the pile and the degree of composting that has already occurred. If fully matured, this pile will be rich in nutrients and the scent will be musky and earthy.

If it's only half-completed, the smell and look will be far less rich and bits of fiber will still be seen in the pile. You should probably let it finish maturing. You'll want to apply your compost about a month or so before you plant in order to let it properly mix with the soil.

Some say, perhaps with justification, that this particular column is always full of compost. This week, I think I've pretty much proved it. I can even say it's bollocks. I'm allowed to.

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SEAVIEW, 2-BEDROOM

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Property Gazette

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51.4sqm, in Chanakran Property Village, 3 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms. Behind TOT Public Co Ltd in Chalong. Price: 3.6 million baht. Please call for more details. Tel: 081-9562406.

PROPERTIES FOR SALE

and rent. For a more personalized approach to your property, please visit www.phuketproperties.com. If you are a real estate developer or owner, you may list your properties with us. Contact Khun Noi or Julie. Tel: 081-8931360, 081-7192903.

CHEAP LAND

Fantastic value, mission hills area. 1.7 rai for 2.2 million baht. Email: phkt51@yahoo.com

POOL VILLA FOR SALE

3-4 bedrooms, Bang Tao, living area 200sqm, garden. Tel: 084-8516121. Website: www.phukethome.ws

KHAO LAK LAND

for sale. 4 rai in prime location on main road to Ranong, on corner of public road, access to Pak Wib Beach. 8 million baht for quick sale. Tel: 081-6065772.

TOWNHOUSES AT LOCH PALM

3 townhouses for sale: 2-bedroom, partly furnished; 2-bedroom, fully furnished; and 4-bedroom, partly-furnished, with swimming pool. Tel: 081-9390176. Email: beaver@tstf.net

PHUKET CITY HOME PROJECT



* Detached house for sale
* 105sq wah, 2-story
* Upstairs has 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms
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* Remote control door
* 3 aircons
* Bathtub
Price 5.95 million baht. Contact K. Nathnarin at Tel: 089-9739873.

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Fully furnished, 2-bedroom, 2-bathroom freehold condo. Best views and layout in the development. Pool, yacht harbor, town square and hill views. 24-hour security. 21 million baht. Tel: 083-133-2024. Email: globalvision3@yahoo.com Website: www.royalphuketmarina.com

HOUSES AND LAND

Magic views, 3 homes with pools. 2 plots of land: 972sqm or 732 sqm. Keen vendor. Tel: 076-383059, 086-2817605. Email: paradise@phuket-house-land.com For details, please visit our website www.phuket-house-land.com

RAWAI BEACH FOR SALE

480sqm, Chanote. 1.7 million. Can walk to the beach. Tel: 085-0330726.

POOLHOUSE- HACIENDA

Near Laguna 4. Bar, cheap. Price: only 9.5 million baht. Tel: 085-17839062.

RAWAI LAND

1,436sqm. Flat, square plot off Soi Suksan. Chanote title with approved plans if required. 3.2 million baht. Tel: 081-6910391. Email: info@liveandletdive.com

DISCOUNT PRICE!

A beautiful villa in Rawai will soon be ready. 4 rooms, great kitchen, outdoor Jacuzzi. Now 4.5 million baht, after January 5.5 million baht. Contact owner K. Nico. Tel: 085-7955383.

Properties For Rent

VILLAS FOR RENT



in a pretty, peaceful residence, from April until October 2008. 40,000 baht per month, for a minimum 1 month and up to 6 months. Electricity and Internet not included. Located at Rawai, 11/22 Suksan 2. Five minutes to one of the most beautiful beaches, The residence Christiane's Blue offers you very beautiful villas of 220sqm with 3 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms and toilets, each with individual access. Living room, dining room, TV, DVD, aircon, fully-equipped kitchen. Swimming pool, bar, restaurant, Wi-Fi Internet access. French management. Contact Lionel. Tel: 087-2678389. Email: info@christianesblue.com or visit www.christianesblue.com

BOAT LAGOON LUXURY

waterfront townhouses for rent. 2 & 3 bedrooms, True TV. Long- or short-term rent. Pool, sauna included. Call K. So at Tel: 081-3444473, 081-8622962.

KAMALA BEACH STUDIO

Kitchen, bathroom, True TV, aircon, pool. Rent weekly: 6,000 baht; monthly: 18,000 baht. Electricity and maid. Tel: 084-8500568.

RAWAI HOME WITH POOL

1 or 2 bedrooms, furnished, True TV, ADSL. 12,000 baht per month and up. Tel: 086-9408914. Email: chotip07@yahoo.com

SEAVIEW APARTMENT

58sqm, fully furnished modern, clean, aircon, Sat TV, kitchen separate, big bedroom, parking, pool. Tel: 081-0825707 or visit www.phuketaccommodation.info

PATONG APARTMENT

Studio apartment 400m from the beach. Modern, clean, TV, aircon, fridge, pool, parking. Tel: 081-0825707. Please visit www.phuketaccommodation.info

RAWAI BEACH VILLA

4 bedrooms, 4 bathrooms, True TV, ADSL, private pool. Rent: 45,000 baht a month. Tel: 084-0579266. Email: chotip07@yahoo.com

HOUSE FOR RENT

New house for rent, 25,000 baht per month and for sale: 4 million baht. Call Tel: 087-2646808, 083-1743880.

2-BEDROOM VILLA

Weekly or long-term. 3km from Mai Kao Beach, 10 mins to golf course and airport. European standards, new sala, 25sqm and antique furniture. Tel: 081-7197015. Email: eanfievat@voila.fr

COMFORTABLE HOUSE

in secure environment, 3 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms (2 en suite), living room, study, garage, kitchen/dining room, fenced garden, furnished, True TV, ADSL. 35,000 baht per month. Near Wat Chalong. Tel: 084-8439579. Email: somlerdee@yahoo.com

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Property Gazette

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NEW SINGLE HOUSE FOR RENT



Near Heroines' Monument, 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, fully furnished. 16,000 baht per month. Tel: 086-6900626. Email: suksavat@hotmail.com

NEW FURNISHED VILLA



close to Laguna. 300sqm. Fully furnished, 3 bedrooms, living-room, dining, kitchen and pool. 2 mins to Laguna. Long- or short-term rent. Please contact K. Gai Tel: 081-7344324 or visit our website at: www.phuketgreenlandvillas.com

PRIVATE HOUSE FOR RENT



Soi Ruam Nanachart, Saiyuan, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, big garden, aircon, furnished, telephone, ADSL. 5 mins to Nai Harn, long-term only. 30,000 baht per month (negotiable). Tel: 076-215367, 081-5351570.

RAWAI BEACHFRONT



3 bedrooms, aircon, telephone, True TV, 1-year contract. Contact Gina. Tel: 089-6499939.

PATONG TOWER CONDO: A BEAUTY



Beautiful Patong Tower beach condo with stunning 280° panoramic views of the ocean, hills and town. Large outdoor patio and wrap around balcony. Completely renovated, Internet and washing machine. Available from February 26. Tel: (011) (86)-13816344147. Email: TXXZT@yahoo.com For further details, please see our website at www.PatongTowerRental.com

RAWAI POOL STUDIO

Furnished, aircon, fridge, True TV, ADSL. 6,000 baht per month. 300 meters from the new pier. Tel: 086-9408914.

2-BEDROOM APARTMENT

at Surin. A few minutes from Surin & Bang Tao Beaches. Common pool, aircon, bedroom fans, timber floors, fully furnished, phone. 30,000 baht per month. Contact Harry. Tel: 081-2731740.

SEAVIEW POOL VILLA

3.5-bedroom villa between Patong and Kamala. Long-term, 90-120,000 baht per month. Tel: 081-6919106. Email: kent@karlssons-phuket.com For further details, see at www.karlssons-phuket.com/villa

HOUSE FOR RENT

3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, 40sq wah. Srisuchat 2. Tel: 084-1857041. Website: www.phuketshopping.com

OFFICE BUILDING ON BYPASS ROAD

2 stories, 600sqm. Just 2km from Tesco-Lotus. Tel: 084-6255179. Email: supotpac@phuket.ksc.co.th

BUILDING AND LAND

Take over lease, 9 years left. Building is approximately 8m x 24m, almost 1 rai of land. Located on the main road to Cherng Talay, 4.5km from Heroines' Monument. Industrial zone. Tel: 081-6930766. Email: danielboychuk@gmail.com

RAWAI/NAI HARN HOUSE

Fully furnished, 2 bedrooms, aircon, TV, telephone, big walled garden. Long- or short-term rent, 19,000 baht per month. Tel: 085-7873045.

CONDOS FOR RENT

in Rawai. Renovated, aircon, TV, DVD, kitchenette, hot water. Tel: 086-9456650. Email: phuketcomfortcondos@hotmail.com

HOUSE FOR RENT

Bungalow with 3 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, 4 aircons and fan. 5km from bilingual school. 22,000 baht/month, long-term rent. Tel: 081-6770663.

LUXURY VILLA LAGUNA



For details please visit www.saitaan18.com

HOUSE FOR RENT LONG-TERM

2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, hot water, living room, nice kitchen, furniture. 8,000 baht. Tel: 086-6903639.

BANG TAO BUNGALOW

2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, furnished, cable TV, ADSL. Long-term rent for 12,000 baht + utilities per month. Will install 1 aircon for 1,000 baht month. Tel: 086-2786465.

KATA APARTMENTS

in new pool-villa close to the beach. Long-term rent: 19,000 baht a month. Tel: 081-2738230 (Thai), 084-8387801 (Eng). Email: kjartan1965@hotmail.com

KAMALA BEACH

New apartments and houses for rent. Close to beach, furnished, nice area, private. 15,000 to 30,000 baht per month, short- or long-term. Contact Larry. Tel: 083-9680662.

LAGUNA ENTRANCE

Guesthouse, swimming pool, restaurant, bar, spa. 2 rai. Sell: 5 million baht; Rent: 15,000 baht per month. New and ready. Tel: 083-1823751.

CHALONG BEACHFRONT

New 3-level, furnished house with swimming pool, great views. 22,000 baht per month. Tel: 089-4706104.

BUNGALOW FOR RENT

2-bedroom bungalow for rent in Cherng Talay, short- or long-term, maid service available. Tel: 081-8912926, 081-8911826. Email: info@baanboosakorn.com

PALAI GREEN HOUSE
with big garden. Fully-furnished, 2 aircons, 2 bedrooms, hot shower, ADSL, and cable TV. 12,000 baht per month. Chalong area. Tel: 081-8924311.

CHALONG SHOPHOUSE
This new 3-story shophouse is available for long-term lease. Ideal for home office/shop accommodation. Inquiries at Tel: 089-6521473.

LAND AND HOUSE PARK

Chalong, new house for rent, fully furnished, nice decoration, 3 bedrooms. 3 months to 8 months. Tel: 085-7863213. Email: fabebemo@yahoo.fr

HOUSES FROM WELLTA

You want to rent or buy a house on my island? Maybe I can help you. My name is Wellta. Tel: 081-9680309. Email: info@houseinphuket.com Also visit: www.houseinphuket.com

STUDIO APARTMENT WITH INTERNET

off Nanai Rd, 30sqm, fully-furnished. Includes TV, DVD, large fridge, hot water, fan, aircon and kitchenette. From baht 7,500 baht a month, long-term. ADSL Internet optional. Tel: 087-2650652. Email: gisbert1@gmx.net

3-BEDROOM VILLA FOR RENT

Full aircon, ADSL Internet, Cable TV, excellent condition. Close to Ao Yon and Central Festival. 9,000 baht a month. Please call K. Kob at Tel: 081-5357767 to view. Email: brickyjon@yahoo.com

HOUSE FOR SALE OR RENT

3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, aircon, partially furnished, gardens (front and side). Telephone, cable TV and Internet. For sale at 2.2 million baht, or long-term rent at 14,000 baht per month. Tel: 089-6686603, 084-9729434. Email: chris@jonesalpine.fsnet.co.uk

HOUSE FOR RENT

2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, fully furnished, with swimming pool. Short-term 45,000 baht. Tel: 084-6268105.

NEW CONDO, PATONG

Beautiful 1-bedroom condo. Best/quiet location with sea and mountain view. All amenities. Long-term only. Tel: 081-9701479. Email: caltiror@hotmail.com

EXCLUSIVE RENTAL

Close to BIS school, 24hr security, 5 bedrooms, 2 parking spaces, pool, maid's room. Family and child friendly. Available now. Tel: 081-4077403.

HOUSE IN CHALONG

for rent near Palai Beach, 2 or 3 bedrooms, aircon, fully furnished, phone line. Tel: 089-7288311.

LONG-TERM LAND FOR LEASE

Koh Yao Yai island, near Ao Klong Son area. 5,033 rai/8,052sqm available on 30-year leases. 5 minutes to the beachfront, 300 meters. 1.5 million baht per rai. Tel: 076-261375, 089-473-0990. Fax: 076-261375. Please email: kasina888@gmail.com

4-BEDROOM BALINESE VILLA

Western-style, furnished, 4-bedroom landscaped villa. Great location, 5 mins to Laguna, 8 mins to Surin Beach, 8 mins to International School! New Western kitchen. 24hr security. Bargain rental. Price based on length of contract and deposit. Tel: 089-2167220. Email: houseforrent@julianburgess.co.uk For further details and to see a slideshow visit our website: www.julianburgess.co.uk/4bedvilla.html

ROOM IN KAMALA: B4,500/MONTH

34sqm. Quiet area, mountain view. 4,500 baht a month. Tel: 087-2945737, 089-224-3153. Email: ronaldo6328@yahoo.de

POOL VILLA RAWAI

to rent. 2 large bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, fully furnished, large gardens, pool, maid and gardener all included. Long-term rent only. Tel: 084-8512373.

HOMES FOR HOLIDAY

Near Laguna, 3 bedrooms, pool, spa. Cheap rates and weekly rates. Need car to access house. Tel: 089-5944067.

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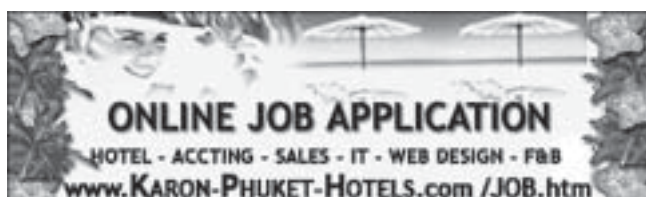
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