

# Phuket Gazette

August 29 - September 4, 2015

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‘IT’S TOO EARLY TO KNOW WHAT IMPLICATIONS IT WILL HAVE’



The Chinese New Year is always a highly anticipated celebration for those catering to the Chinese market in Phuket. Photo: Chutharat Plerin

# ¥uan impact

**Chinese currency devaluation could shake top tourist market for Phuket**

By Chutharat Plerin

LEADERS in Phuket's tourism and property industries are uncertain what the impact of the yuan's tumble this month will be, as tremors continue to be felt throughout the world.

A 138% surge in Chinese visitors during the first half of 2015 helped pave the way for the Thai tourism industry to bank more than 697 billion baht in total visitor expenditures, according to figures released by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports.

However, on August 11, the People's Bank of China's (PBOC's) devaluation of the yuan caused the currency to fall to a four-year low, decreasing the spending power of its citizens abroad and raised fears of a global 'currency war'.

The PBOC quickly moved to calm fears as stock markets around the world took a major hit.

"Looking at the international and domestic economic situation, currently there

is no basis for a sustained depreciation trend for the yuan," the PBOC said.

Though the Chinese arrival and expenditure numbers look strong at the moment, officials are aware that the full impact of the Bangkok bombing and devaluation of the yuan may not be seen in the tourism and property markets for several months.

"I warn that China might launch another round of currency devaluation and that this sudden currency depreciation reflects a looming Chinese economic crisis that could be much larger than thought, and will have a greater affect on global economic balances," Anusorn Tamajai, dean of economics...

Continued on Pages 4 and 5

## Millions of baht lost in national park fee scandal

HUNDREDS of millions of baht disappeared during the collection of fees at Koh Phi Phi National Park over the last three years, alleged the National Reform Council.

Full story Page 3

## BUSINESS



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## Two arrested for pyramid scheme

A COUPLE surrendered to Chalong Police on August 23 for their alleged involvement in the international 10-billion-baht UFUN pyramid scheme.

Damrongsak Pitisuk, 38, and his wife Pornthicha Pitisuk, 37, had both received 'Achievement Awards' at the 'The Black Night Party by URICH' in December last year. The party was held in order to applaud those who managed to recruit investors of 1 million baht or more.

Mr Damrongsak and Mrs Pornthicha had nearly 40 million baht running through their bank accounts that was allegedly connected to the UFUN system, explained Consumer Protection Police Division Deputy Chief Angkul Klaikleung.

Together, they have recruited about 100 members to the network, said Col Angkul.

— **Kritsada Mueanhawong**

## Rogue waves sink cargo ship

FISHERMEN rescued two men after their cargo ship was allegedly sunk by rogue waves in Krabi on August 20.

Phon Boon Phi Phi Don 1, carrying construction materials to Phi Phi, was reported missing by the boat owner at about 3:30pm, said Krabi Marine Police Chief Anurak Parinyasathiragul.

Marine Police and the Navy immediately began a search for the 15-meter-long boat and the two men on board, Anan Buabthong, 49, and Somporn Jindakorn, 52.

"While conducting the search we received a report from fishermen that they had

# Officials announce alternative routes



Officials have released alternative routes for the first and second phase of the Chalong Underpass, which passed its final public hearing in August. Construction is slated to start next month. For the full story, visit [PhuketGazette.net](http://PhuketGazette.net). Photo: PR Dept

located the pair and took them to Koh Pai, where they were being taken care of by Phi Phi National Park officers," said Lt Col Anurak.

The estimated cost of the loss of the boat and supplies is 700,000 baht, Col Anurak confirmed.

— **Chutharat Plerin**

## Large pothole suspected in biker's death

POLICE suspect a large pothole caused the death of a man

## LOCAL NEWS Briefly

driving a Honda 150cc CBR motorcycle on a curvy road in Mai Khao on August 23.

Pattanapong Nainet, 20, was wearing a helmet at the time of the crash, said Lt Thanom Thongpan of the Tah Chat Chai Police.

"There was no identification cards on his person, only 42,360 baht cash," Lt Thanom said. "By using his mobile phone, we were able to contact relatives and identify him."

Based on the accident scene, police believe Mr Pattanapong hit a large pothole in the road, lost control and fell from the bike before crashing into a traffic barrier.

— **Winai Sarot**

## Bangkok Bank warns of fraud

BANGKOK Bank has issued a warning about malicious software designed to make bank transactions from the accounts of customers who have regis-

tered for their online banking service, 'Bualuang iBanking'.

Bangkok Bank's warning explained that false messages have been sent to iBanking customers via SMS, MMS and emails purporting to be from the bank.

The messages ask the receiver to download or install malicious software onto their mobile phone, tablet or computer, which allows scammers to make transactions without the account owner knowing it, explained Wassana Nakchaineramit, senior marketing officer of Bangkok Bank Phuket branch.

Bangkok Bank will never send an SMS, MMS or emails requesting customers to download or install any software or application to make a transaction, confirmed Ms Wassana.

— **Nattha Thepbamrung**

## Officers hunt fugitive on secluded island

POLICE are hunting one more fugitive after catching an attempted gang murder suspect hiding on a secluded island east of Phuket this week.

A 50-man raid of the island rooted out Danai Homhuan, 36, who had given away his posi-

tion by firing warning shots at local fishermen earlier this year.

Mr Danai was wanted by Thalung officials for two prior cases: drug dealing in 2011 and attempted gang murder last year.

— **Nattha Thepbamrung**

## Beach chair judgment day put on hold

THE final decision on how to manage Phuket's controversial beach chair services has been delayed yet again as Prince of Songkhla University (PSU) researchers and Governor Nisit Jansomwong have not yet discussed the university's research results.

Governor Nisit previously told the *Gazette* that the PSU Phuket campus would be presenting their results to him on August 20.

"We will consider the information they bring to the table and balance it with other factors that will weigh into ensuring the greatest benefit for the public," Gov Nisit said.

However, currently there is no rescheduled date in sight.

"I will send a letter to the governor. However, when we meet will depend on him," said Associate Professor Pun Thongchumnum, Dean of Faculty of Technology and Environment.

— **Kongleaphy Keam**

## Governor to tackle flood prone areas

PHUKET Governor Nisit Jansomwong has ordered all relevant local authorities to tackle the chronic flooding issues on Phuket.

Flood-prone areas cited by the Governor were Baan Kok Mud and Baan Nai Yang.

As part of the effort, a committee was established to control housing projects' drainage systems and ensure that they are connected to the existing systems installed by the local government.

The Provincial Initial Environment Evaluation committee was also asked to specifically focus on monitoring developments that they have already approved, in order to ensure that there are no flood risks being created.

Local authorities have been put in charge of preventing drains from becoming blocked.

— **Nattha Thepbamrung**



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## Food for the soul at annual Hungry Ghost Festival

PHUKET'S traditional Chinese *Por Tor*, also known as the annual Hungry Ghost Festival, began on Wednesday.

It is believed that the spirits of ancestors visit their relatives for 15 days during the ninth month of the Chinese calendar. Believers will prepare food for the spirits in order to express their

gratitude for their ancestors, said Phuket City Mayor Somjai Suwansupana.

Food is also prepared for those spirits who have no living relatives to visit.

"Believers in return will receive luck and good health," Mayor Somjai added.

During the festival, various foods, including fruits and col-

orful desserts, will be prepared.

One of the most common dishes is the red turtle dessert called *Ang Ku*. Made from wheat flour and sugar, *Ang Ku* will be offered in many shapes and sizes.

"The color red represents good luck and the turtles are a symbol of longevity," Ms Somjai said.

"It is a great event to pro-

mote and preserve local Phuket culture, especially for the new generation and for tourists. Everyone is invited to join."

Parades will be held in honor of the *Por Tor* Festival on August 30 and September 1, starting at Queen Sirikit Park on Thalang Road.

— **Kongleaphy Keam**

## Divers found after night lost at sea



Marine police resume their search the next morning.

TWO scuba divers were found and safely rescued on August 21 after disappearing from the tour group they were part of the night before.

VTT Group brought the tourists to Koh Racha Noi to scuba dive. When it came time to bring everyone back on board the boat, the crew realized that Thai tourist Asang Saelor, 31, and Chinese tourist Huaqiu Ji, 25, were missing.

"We searched the area, but it was starting to get dark, so we were forced to call the Phuket Marine Police and return to Phuket without them," the 31-year-old speedboat driver Wacharin Saelor said.

Phuket Marine Police dispatched a search and rescue team to the area, but were unable to locate the pair.

"We resumed our search the next morning. Luckily, VTT Group received a call informing them that their clients had been rescued by a Malaysian cargo ship at about 10:30am," said Maj Nattapong Pruktharathikun of the Phuket Marine Police.

The vessel found the two divers, still wearing their equipment, floating at sea about 10 miles north of Koh Racha Noi, confirmed Maj Nattapong.

— **Kritsada Mueanhawong**

# National Park fees plundered

By **Kongleaphy Keam**

HUNDREDS of millions of baht disappeared during the collection of national park fees at Hat Noppharat Thara - Mu Koh Phi Phi National Park over the last three years, alleged Thon Thamrongnawasawat, a member of the National Reform Council (NRC).

A two-month, national-level investigation by the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) uncovered unnerving discrepancies in the number of visitors to the park and the actual amount of money that should officially be accounted for.

"On May 17, only one day before the officers arrived, the total amount of Phi Phi national park entrance fees was recorded at only about 80,000 baht," Dr Thon said. "However, a day after, the amount became more than a half million baht. During the two-month investigation, June and July, they collected about one million baht on some days."

As part of the investigation, Chaithat Boonphupantanti, chief of the national park, was transferred to the position of Director of Watershed Conservation. Sorayut Tansathian was named as the new park chief



Koh Phi Phi is one of the many national parks that have discrepancies with their collection fees.

"During the last high season, December to April, they recorded collecting about 30mn baht. However, during the two-month investigation, which took place in the low season, they recorded collecting about the same amount," Dr Thon pointed out.

It is estimated that more than one million tourists visit Phi Phi national park annually, with each required to pay 400 baht per person if they are visiting Phi Phi Leh (Maya Bay), Koh Mai Pai or Rai Leh. Tourists visiting Susan Hoi or Thap Kaek are charged only 200 baht.

"The numbers simply don't

add up. So we brought the issue to Cabinet and the Prime Minister approved a change in how park fees are collected," Dr Thon said.

The new system will require all national park fees to be paid directly to the central DNP office in Bangkok, similar to the system established by Thai Ticket Major. The changes are expected to be pushed through by October.

"By doing this, we can ensure that all fees are being collected properly. Also, the DNP can better regulate the number of tourists visiting cer-

tain fragile ecosystems in national parks," said Dr Thon. "Local national park officers will still be sent out to check that tourists have bought tickets, but will not be permitted to sell tickets."

Following the investigation into the possible fraudulent accounting of national park fees in Phi Phi, the DNP will be launching investigations into seven other national parks, including Mu Ko Similan National Park, Mu Koh Surin National Park, Ao Phang Nga National Park and Mu Koh Lanta National Park, Dr Thon said.

## Beach Police roll forward with patrols

THE Phuket Beach Police program is rolling forward successfully, despite having booked no cases yet, said Phuket Provincial Police Deputy Commander Peerayut Karajedee.

"Things are going well. However, we will run the program for a bit longer before we do our own evaluation and source community feedback," Col Peerayut said. "It's just too early to know what the exact impact of the program is going to be."

On August 14, island offic-

ers hit the beaches on two wheels as the Phuket Provincial Police deployed the new patrol force with the idea of boosting tourists' and locals' confidence in their safety, as well as benefit the officers' health by having them exercise.

"At least the beach police are making people in the area feel safer and deterring criminal behavior," said Col Peerayut.

Officers in Kata and Karon are conducting a total of eight patrols a day, some of

which are after dark, confirmed Karon Police Superintendent Sompong Boonrat.

"We received four more bikes for our police officers to conduct patrols," Col Sompong said. "Even though we have not been allocated more officers to carry out the patrol, we are doing our best to ensure everyone's safety."

The idea for the project was first announced to the public by Phuket Provincial Police Commander Patchara Boonyasit last November.

— **Chutharat Plerin**



# Submarine cables push power to Coconut Island

MUCH-NEEDED mainland power is now flowing to Naka Yai and Coconut Island, off the coast of Phuket.

"We have invested in the project, not because we expect to make a profit, but because we can improve the quality of life for the locals and improve their economic situation," said Provincial Electricity Authority (PEA) Governor Sermsakul Klaikaew, who chaired the opening ceremony with Phuket Governor Nisit Jansomwong on Monday.

Prior to the installation of the 112-million-baht submarine cable, island residents were only able to use electricity for about four or five hours a day. The cable, which has a maximum capacity of 14 mega watts, will be operational for about 30 years, confirmed Mr Sermsakul. Currently, the two islands have a combined power consumption



PEA Governor Sermsakul (left) and Gov Nisit turn on the lights.

of 1.2 mega watts a day.

"It goes without saying that this is probably the biggest development for us since we opened our doors in 2007," said Tom Gordon, director of sales and marketing of The Village Coconut Island, the island's dominate business. "For years we have fought hard through

tough times to operate a fantastic island resort with huge operational costs due to the lack of [mainland] power. With these savings, we will be able to further develop the resort into one of Phuket's top destinations, offering an island holiday on the doorstep of Phuket's great activities and infrastructure."

Also joining the festivities at the opening ceremony were children from the Baan Koh Maprao School.

"There are more than a thousand local people living on Coconut Island in 161 households. Though 149 houses use electricity generated by solar cells, it is not enough for everyone living here," said Yunob Petchdee, the Baan Koh Maprao School director. "I am glad that PEA understands the situation and invested in the power supply to Coconut Island."

— *Nattha Thepbamrung*

# Taking

From Page 1

...at Rangsit University, told the *Gazette*.

"While China is struggling to maintain its economic expansion to prevent turmoil, the decision to use exchange rate policy by depreciating its currency is a means of exporting part of its internal problems to other countries for collective responsibility."

Chinese visitors are the largest source of both tourists and expenditure for Thailand, including Phuket, totaling 4 million arrivals in the first six months of this year and representing an enormous number of room keys on the island.

Nonetheless, Bill Barnett, founder and managing director of C9 Hotelworks, explained that there will likely be little impact on hotel occupancy from the yuan's fall.

"Thailand remains a short-haul destination for the Chinese market. We may see Chinese who once travelled

long haul go to closer destinations such as Thailand. Location remains Phuket's key advantage," Mr Barnett said.

The real impact the Chinese market has had in the last two years is driving room rates down with the pressure of mass market numbers.

"Room rates have been strongly impacted for the past 12-18 months by the Chinese movement, and we can expect this to continue. The key [for Phuket] is to find replacement markets, and despite growth in short-haul arrivals, and from some locations like Spain and South Africa, there is no major solution," Mr Barnett said.

The Cabinet is already considering a bill to help combat cheap tour group packages, but is not expected to negatively affect arrival numbers for Phuket, explained Santi Pawai,

Director of the Phuket office of the Ministry of Tourism and Sport (MOTS).

"If Cabinet passes this into law, it will be a step forward for the tourism industry."

Although the bill is designed to put an end to 'zero baht tours', which rely on mass tourism to be commercially viable, Mr Santi explained that it would not affect the number of Chinese budget tourists taking part in group tours in Phuket.

"Chinese companies are ready to pay a standard rate.

However, Thai tour companies are constantly trying to undercut each other by providing cheaper and cheaper packages," Mr Santi said.

"Smaller, less established companies will be the ones most affected by the bill."

Kritchakorn Roongmongkolnarm, executive committee member of the Phuket Tourism Association, who oversees the Chinese market on the island,

agreed that the bill would not have a negative impact on the tourism industry and that the devaluation was nothing to worry about.

"I do not think there will be any negative impacts on Phuket. This is a good situation for China to balance its currency, and it will be good for tourism," Mr Kritchakorn said. "There was a previous devaluation of the baht, which caused the yuan to go up almost 20 per cent over the last two years. Now, the yuan has been decreased. It's a good balance."

Mr Kritchakorn said the devaluation was nothing compared to the drop in the Russian ruble, which saw an exodus in one of Phuket's most important markets.

"We may see some changes in the long term, but at this point we just have to wait and



Thailand remains a short-haul destination for the Chinese market... Location remains Phuket's key advantage.

— *Bill Barnett, founder and managing director of C9 Hotelworks*

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# yuan for the road

see. It is too early to be concerned," he said.

The local Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) director also said a 'wait-and-see' policy is best.

"At this point, the Chinese market has not changed here. There have been no cancellations or any other signs that should concern us," said TAT-Phuket Director Anoma Wongyai. "It really is too soon to tell. It takes time for us to see the effects of something like this – for better or worse."

A slump in the Chinese tourism market, which has yet to be seen, could be an indicator for changes to come in the property market, pointed out Mr Barnett.

"Summer months are the Chinese high season, followed by Chinese New Year, so the timing is disconnected," Mr Barnett said. "It took six to eight months to realize the impact of the Russian debacle."

Unlike Mr Kritchakorn, Mr Barnett said it was too early to tell whether or not the island



Arrival numbers at Phuket International Airport continue to grow regardless of the devaluation.

will face something similar to what happened to the Russian market on the island.

"There is nothing comparable to China, so we are

heading into unknown territory. While speculation is easy, it's a wait and see situation," said Mr Barnett.

The real worry is the domino

effect the devaluation could have, pointed out Mr Barnett,

"You have to view the knock-on effect of the yuan issue on global currencies, as

that's the greater concern. Phuket's Chinese property market is only a ripple in the stream, but if there is contagion to other markets, that's a trigger," said Mr Barnett.

"In the later part of the 2000s, the decline of the UK currency had a far stronger impact than the Global Financial Crisis, given the leveraging of that currency to a large catchment of property buyers."

In fact, there are indications that devaluation might have a positive impact on the property market.

"There are signs that the move may spur other Asian countries to match this move. Given the impact on exports and those trying to match it, this could see the baht depreciate and create more value in the market for opportunistic buyers," Mr Barnett said.

"However, in broad terms, events like this are generally not a good thing for investment sentiment in property," he concluded.



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Wrecked Kamala resort asked to clean up tsunami "eyesore"  
 Making the boat on maritime safety  
 r buries underground cable pleas

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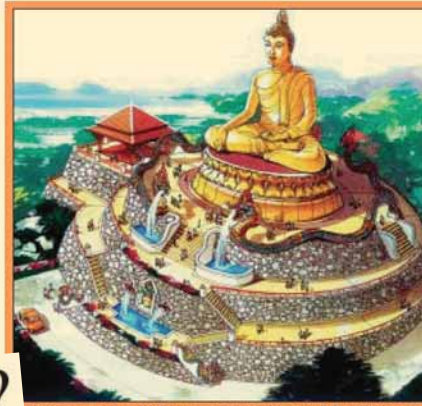
## MORTGAGES for foreigners

By Alasdair Forbes & Sangkhae Leelanaporn

PHUKET: Bangkok Bank has broken ranks with the Thai banking establishment to become the first Thai bank to offer mortgages targeted firmly at foreigners wanting to buy property in Thailand.

The mortgages are fairly limited in scope – they can be applied only to condos; the buyer must come up with the first 50% of the purchase price; and the mortgage term is only 10 years – but they are being hailed as a breakthrough by property developers and real estate agents.

The inability of foreigners to get mortgages to cover home purchases in Thailand has not



Artist's impression of the proposed world-record Buddha image.

## Work starts on 'world's largest' Buddha

PHUKET: Construction of a 1,000-ton concrete Buddha image, touted as the largest of its kind in the world, has started on the Nakkerd Hills be-

meters high and 25 meters wide. He claims that it will be the biggest meditating, or Pang Manravichai, Buddha image in the world.

## Rainmakers return to Phuket

By Chris Husted & Ananya Hongsa-ngiam

PHUKET: Despite recent rain showers, the Royal Rainmaking Project has been called in again to help stave off yet another looming water shortage in Phuket.

Isara Anukul, Chief of the Water Allocation Division of the Phuket Irrigation Office (PIO), told the *Gazette* on August 17, "The water level in Bang Wad Reservoir [Phuket's main water source] has dropped to 450,000 cubic meters ... That is enough to last about a month."

K. Isara said, "We have been making plans to cope with a water shortage since February because there has been very little rain since the beginning of the year."

"Officers from the Royal Rainmaking Project will come to help solve this problem. We will start making 'artificial rain' [cloud seeding] this Saturday [August 20]," he said.

Cloud seeding is a process whereby chemicals – silver iodide, frozen carbon dioxide crystals or even salt – are dispersed into clouds, by craft or large, ground flares.

The theory behind seeding is that it introduces moisture into a cloud,

I had to run for it  
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## Phuket Air jet seized

SEOUL: A Phuket Air jumbo jet

## Practical guidelines to survival in a disaster

Sorry, Officer! I applied for a license and they told me to come back in three years.

At last, the perfect excuse.

GROUND was broken a decade ago for the iconic Big Buddha image, which has already become a calming, reassuring and dominating fixture on the skyline of southern Phuket.

"The world's biggest meditating Buddha [Pang Manravichai] should be finished in the next three years," Suporn Vanichakul, who remains the head of the project committee, told the *Gazette* in 2005.

Ten years later, construction at the site continues as numerous side projects sprout up on the Forestry Department land, nestled atop the Nakkerd Hills at an elevation of 400 meters above sea level. Prior to the project, the Forestry Department had consistently refused to grant permission to those wanting to use the protected land for commercial ventures.

However, they gave the green

light when asked for the land to be used to construct a Buddha image, which was a non-profit development. Even after the project got underway, it wasn't smooth sailing for Mr Suporn. Just last year, landslide risks and water management concerns were tabled by the local government.

The real irony of the season, however, was nestled into a single column on Page 1 of the August 27- September 2 issue of the *Gazette*: Rainmakers return to Phuket.

Fears of water shortages – yes, shortages at this time of the year – led to the Royal Rainmaking Project being called in. With Phuket Governor Nisit Jansomwong currently calling on all relevant authorities to help prevent Patong Police Station and a number of villages from becoming underwater ar-

cheological sites, it is hard to imagine the need for cloud seeding during the 'Green Season'.

However, perhaps our current predicament can be partially traced back to the government's concern about managing water resources on the island, as it was at the forefront of a number of governor's agendas over the last decade.

Additionally, the establishment of reservoirs was also a priority for the late Phuket Provincial Administration Organization President Paiboon Upatising. These efforts have paid off. Though that's not to say there aren't issues still remaining in places like Kamala. However, at least we aren't trying to pull anymore rain out of the clouds that are already so well endowed.

That being said, the pace of development, poorly organized drainage

systems and the blocking of natural water routes has led to many of the flooding problems that leave most of us wondering if perhaps a kayak is the wiser form of transportation during the 'Green Season'.

The sluice to troubled waters in the August 27 issue though was let open when Bangkok Bank broke ranks with the Thai banking establishment to become the first Thai bank to offer mortgages targeting foreigners wanting to buy property in Thailand.

Though the measure was an essential step to level the playing field for developers and real estate agents battling against other tropical destination markets, a person doesn't have to be on the island long to hear the never ending sob stories of foreigners having their dream villas pulled out from under them faster than the table cloth on a magician's dining table.

– Isaac Stone Simonelli

## The gift of hindsight



## NATIONAL NEWS

# Briefly

### Bangkok cops say bomber's trail is cold

ALTHOUGH the authorities reported progress on Monday in the investigation into the August 17 bombing in Bangkok, police admitted that the trail in the hunt for the bomber has gone cold.

National Police Chief Somyot Poompanmuang said that they were unsure whether or not the man who planted the explosive at the Erawan Shrine was still in Thailand. Nonetheless, Gen Somyot is confident those behind the bombing will eventually face justice.

The national police chief did admit that the bombing was the work of a professional and that the attack had been well planned, adding that the perpetrator had changed his mode of transport a few times before arriving at the shrine.

The explosion killed 20 people and injured more than 100 others. Up to 50 of the injured are still being treated in hospital.

### Their Majesties offer aid to slain victims' kin

THEIR Majesties the King and Queen have granted 90,000 baht in financial aid to each of the families of victims killed in the bloody Bangkok bomb blast.

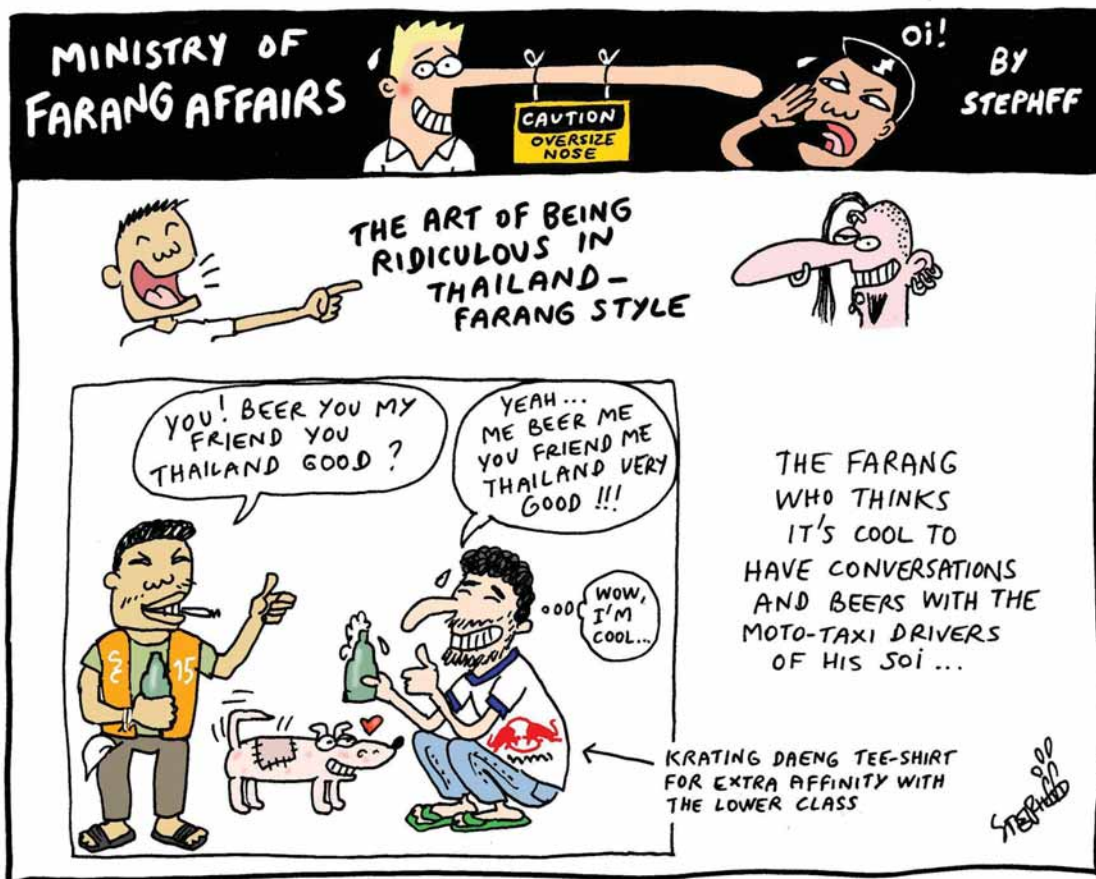
Many of the injured victims were still being treated on August 20, with six still in intensive-care units.

Government Spokesman Sansern Kaewkamnerd said Their Majesties would also pay for any medical cost that could not be reimbursed.

"Privy councillors have been assigned to take flowers to the injured victims," he added.

The Thai government and Thai Airways International will help transport the foreign victims' bodies to their homeland.

The families of foreign victims will receive 300,000 baht compensation from the Tourism and Sports Ministry through a fund set up to provide coverage to foreign tourists.



The compensation will be on top of the 100,000 baht that the Justice Ministry has provided.

### Tourists looking like bomber come under police spotlight

SWEDISH national Marcus Westberg was working on his laptop when police came knocking – he is one of a handful of foreigners being questioned because of their similar looks to the primary Erawan bomb suspect.

Initially Mr Westberg, who is in Thailand on holiday, thought the questioning in Bangkok was just part of a routine security check. But then police asked him to account for his whereabouts on the night of the bombing.

"It was not until they asked to see my phone and started going through my photos that I considered that something might be wrong," he said. "They told me that I very much resembled their main suspect."

Other foreigners have found themselves in a similar predicament since the deadly blast as police scramble to locate the suspect and any accomplices he may have had.

Most appear to have come under suspicion because they share a passing resemblance to the primary suspect, seen leaving a backpack under a bench at the shrine just moments before the bomb went off.

A sketch of the alleged

bomber released by Thai police, based on closed-circuit TV (CCTV) footage and witness descriptions, shows a young

man dressed in a yellow T-shirt with dark shaggy hair, a suggestion of stubble and thick-rimmed glasses.

### Police suspect bombmaker was foreigner

A POLICE bomb expert says the Erawan attack was carried out by a group and its members may be foreigners who are expert bomb makers.

The source said a forensic examination of the scene of the deadly explosion at the Ratchaprasong Intersection and an explosion at Sathorn Pier the following day found that the devices contained ball bearings, which could easily be obtained in Thailand.

He said the bombs were skillfully made, so not much remained of them after they exploded. Such explosives had never been used in Thailand before.

He said bombs made by Thais usually contained nails or metal parts.

The officer said that even though the evidence pointed to foreigners making the bombs, it was clear Thais had supported them by sourcing the materials for the devices.

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# Cyclocops roam

THE recent launch of two-wheeled 'Beach Police' patrols at every police district on the island is a small, yet potentially positive pedal forward for a provincial police force that has developed a less than stellar reputation when it comes to ensuring tourist safety along our world-famous shorelines.

It is sad that the initiative, ordered by the Police Region 8, had to come in direct response to the brutal slaying of two British tourists on Koh Tao in September last year. However, reactive measures are better than none at all when it comes to protecting the safety of tourists, who are not only the lifeblood of the local economy, but also guests in our Kingdom.

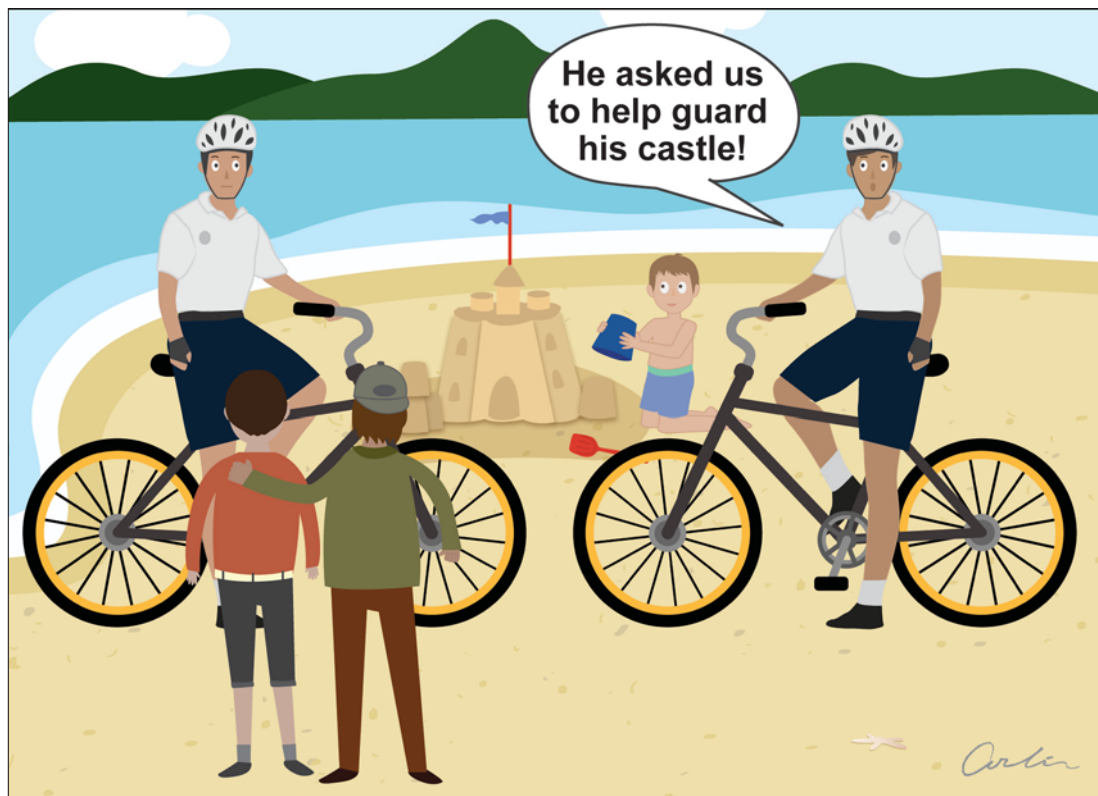
Despite many setbacks, Phuket has a positive record overall in terms of tourist safety. The millions of visitors to the island every year – both foreign and domestic – make the occasional tragedy almost statistically inevitable.

It goes without saying that having a few officers roaming about on mountain bikes will unlikely have a game-changing effect on tourists' safety. However, the bikes should give officers increased mobility and access to the beaches when on patrol. The move might also help improve the officers' fitness and make them more visible and accessible to the public. Given the results of our recent poll indicating that a majority of readers do not feel police can be trusted, any move aimed at improving their public image should be seen as a step in the right direction.

One important, yet often overlooked, component to tourist safety on the beaches was the presence of beach chair and umbrella rental operators. Many of these enjoyed a base of loyal, repeat customers who entrusted them to look after their belongings while in the water and heeded their advice to stay out of the water when red flags were flying. The rental operators also kept undesirable beach vendors at bay and helped their clients deal with many other difficulties.

Their removal from the beach, following orders by the National Council for Peace and Order, has greatly changed many aspects of a beach holiday experience in Phuket. A correct decision on whether or not to allow them to return, and if so under what conditions, is even more vital to tourist safety on the beaches than the presence of police on bicycles.

The *Gazette* hopes the government lets limited numbers of beach chair rental operators return in time for the next high season so that they can coordinate with beach guards, the Beach Police and resorts to maximize both the safety and satisfaction for all visitors.



## Aggressive tailors are just the beginning

I have no idea how aggressive tailors were back then, but they are aggressive now, screaming and grabbing unsuspecting tourists.

Something should be done to curb their aggressive tactics and a crackdown is way overdue on those militant 'massage' women.

They are a front for prostitution, targeting only western men. If they were genuine masseuses, they would target both men and women.

If you must have them, move them to a red light district, so those men who are looking for hookers, can go to that area.

As for taxis and tuk tuks, there is an obvious scam going on, as they will not haggle with customers. They just quote an exorbitant price, hence why tourists tend to walk if possible. These drivers are outpricing their service.

Finally, the government could, at very little expense, provide a bus that services the beaches of Patong, Karon, Kamala and so on, for tourists and locals alike.

Sadly, I think the high number of tourists that Phuket once enjoyed will start diminishing soon, as there are far more cheaper places to go.

*R Jackson  
Sydney*

## Bang Wad doesn't need more tourists

*Re: Gazette online, Budget*

### Letters to the Editor

*Do you have an opinion to voice?  
Email Editor@PhuketGazette.net*

*peddles out cash for bike lanes,  
August 20*

Two things we definitely don't need at Bang Wad Dam. 1) A bike lane. The road just got new pavement. There are hardly any cars, mostly just joggers and cyclists. What would be the bike lane be needed for? 2) And we absolutely don't need tourists there. There are not many places left on Phuket without buses full with tourists. This is one of them. Keep it that way, please.

*Michael  
Gazette forum*

### Bike lanes will turn into parking areas

*Re: Gazette online, Budget  
peddles out cash for bike lanes,  
August 20*

"We have also set aside 20 million baht to build bike lanes on 10km of Sakdidet Road, running along both sides." Waste of time and money, as they will become parking areas, particularly outside convenience stores and mini marts, as has happened on the stretch of Vichitsongkram Road outside of Kathu's orbortor offices.

*another steve  
Gazette forum*

### Reduce the number of vehicles

*Re: Gazette online, Phuket's aspirations call for new projects, August 19*

What a wasted opportunity. 2 billion baht received, almost all gone on ill-conceived road projects that won't make the slightest difference to the congestion and chaos. Vehicle numbers need to be reduced – and the only way that can be achieved is with an effective public transport system that Phuket so badly lacks.

*agogohome  
Gazette forum*

### Dangerous potholes should be marked

*Re: Gazette online, Pothole suspected in Phuket biker's death, August 24*

Sadly, I am not at all surprised if this young man was killed from getting thrown off his motorbike after hitting a pothole. There are so many random, deep pot holes on otherwise very smooth roads. If the road is either dark, or inundated with water, there is no way to see them before it's too late.

There should be a policy that if a pothole is a certain depth or could cause property damage or bodily harm if not seen, there should be cones or a sign.

*Alex Roberts  
Nai Harn*

## Phuket Gazette

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# Small hospital with big debt

## FIRST PERSON

AT PATONG Hospital, 25 per cent of our patients are foreigners. Therefore, we need to set up a good management system to deal with these foreign patients.

I start with having qualified staff. Almost all of our staffers, from low to high rank, can communicate in English. We are ready and well prepared to communicate with tourists in English. Medical documents can also be issued in both Thai and English languages.

To improve our staff's English, we have English lessons every Friday afternoon.

However, the problem is that not all tourists can speak English, for example, some Russian patients. We have faced big issues with this.

To deal with this problem, we have volunteer foreigners who can speak multiple languages, such as German, Russian, and many others to help our staffers interpret important information.

When our interpreters are not available, technology can help.

I advise all staffers to use technology to deal with this type of situation. Using translation devices, such as Google translate, to communicate with patients who cannot speak English or using mobile phone applications to talk to each other is extremely helpful. Luckily, we rarely face this scenario.

We also focus on the ever-important insurance system. If we are weak in this, then we will have problems with our financial system as well.

Currently, we are in contact with about 50 insurance companies, including more than 20 western and European compa-



**Dr Sirichai Silpa-archa** has been the director of Patong Hospital since 2013. Prior to becoming hospital director, he worked at Vachira Phuket Hospital for 26 years. He earned his medical degree from Chulalongkorn University, and later earned a specialist degree in urology from Chiang Mai University.

Here he talks about the trials and tribulations of managing a small, local hospital trying to accommodate the growing number of international patients in Phuket.

nies. The more contacts we have with insurance companies, the easier it is to deal with foreigners' payments.

Patong Hospital has an annual debt of over one million baht, which is spent on taking care of foreigners who don't have insurance and are unable to pay the hospital, especially for urgent cases where we have to provide treatment immediately.

It is the doctors' code of ethics to provide life-saving measures and treatment to a patient, even before confirming whether they are able to pay for it. However, this has built a huge debt for us.

To deal with this issue, we have tried asking for help from embassies, however, they said they have no funds to support this kind of issue.

Should a patient need surgery, the expense will be at least 100,000 baht. And on top of the hospital payment, some of the patients have no money to return home.

Or in more serious cases, if the patient dies, the hospital has to be responsible for their body and provide a ceremony for them.

We have done good job of contacting relatives through embassies. However, sometimes their relatives cannot afford the expense, which makes it a serious problem for us.

We have to solve the problem at the source. The problem starts when patients don't have insurance. We would like to suggest that all tourists are made to take out an insurance policy before traveling, so that they do not face financial issues here.

Another option is to buy insurance here in Thailand. It doesn't have to be health insurance, accident insurance would be enough.

We are now expanding our hospital to support more international patients. Our hospital only has 60 beds currently and we are planning to expand it to 120 beds next year.

The building is already finished, but we are still negotiating with the Ministry of Public Health for more staff, such as nurses, otherwise we cannot manage 120 beds.

Patong Hospital is just a small, local hospital, but we are ready and able to help service foreigners' needs.



What would the world be like without food on a stick? Photo: lccgirl

## Put it on a stick

FOOD on a stick is a very important staple of street food in Thailand.

Coming from the midwest region of the US, I can assure you that we too have our obsession with food on a stick.

Every year, we anxiously await the announcement of new food booths at the state fair to see what concoctions have been invented. Thus far, I think the two top contenders are stuffed meatloaf on a stick, filled with mozzarella and pepperoni, and spaghetti and meatball on a stick, which is spaghetti and meatballs stuffed into garlic bread.

That being said, I really enjoy the relaxed atmosphere of food on a stick here. It's simple, it's tasty, it's traditional.

Unsuccessful research of its origin led me to understand that it's the art of impaling a food item on to a stick, and is for people who are 'sweaty, far from home and confused, or American'.

Unfortunately, I think I was misinformed and it actually goes further back to when people hunted and fished, cooking their kill over a fire... on a stick.

Phuket is full of wonderful food items on sticks. The walking street market in Phuket Town is abundant with hard decisions.

Most of the time it's meat, such as pork, chicken satay, fish balls and hot dogs. Sounds boring, but there's something about

## Island View

By Katie P Arnold

Do you have an opinion to voice?  
Email [Editor@PhuketGazette.net](mailto:Editor@PhuketGazette.net)

watching them grill over a fire, or put into a hot pot of oil and scooped up into a personalized carrying bag just for you.

The egg wontons are a favorite, especially served with sweet chili sauce, and let's not forget the bugs and spiders that attract thousands of photos from tourists every day – surprisingly, they are not that bad.

Vegetarians can enjoy tofu or potato, if they are not squeamish about it being in the same container as meat, and a healthier option comes from the fruit vendors. Granted, the fruit is not cooked on a stick, but it is what you eat it with, sometimes with an excellent sugar-chili mixture.

Vlad the Impaler would surely have mixed emotions about seeing cantaloupe on a stick, but even historical figures get hungry. It's science.

Phuket street food has brought me back to basics. There is no need for bells and whistles all the time, and when I go home to America for a visit, I will be standing listlessly in a crowd of deep fried cheese curds looking longingly for my egg wontons.

## Words from the Wise

**"I am determined to be cheerful and happy in whatever situation I may find myself. For I have learned that the greater part of our misery or unhappiness is determined not by our circumstance, but by our disposition."** – *Martha Washington*

**"I have learned that to be with those I like is enough."** – *Walt Whitman*

## Issues & Answers

### Where is a proper place to dispose of batteries?

I AM wondering where people go to throw away their old batteries. In the normal rubbish bin? If so, I don't think it's very good for the environment. Does the Department of Natural Resources and Environment help with battery waste?

*Curious Recycler*

**Dr Pornsri Suthanaruk, director of the Regional Environmental Office replies:**

Thank you for your question. You can bring your old

batteries to your local municipality or Administration Organization (*OrBorTor*). From the 22nd to 25th of each month, all batteries are col-

lected by Phuket City Municipality and disposed of properly.

We have launched many activities to raise awareness and educate people about battery waste management, including telling them not to throw them in the rubbish bin.

Please collect them at home and then take them to your local municipality or *OrBorTor*.

We also have a box to put used batteries in at Robinson's in Phuket Town and plan to place more boxes in future.

Send us your queries and we'll ask the right people to respond to them.

Submit your issue at:

[www.PhuketGazette.net/IssuesAnswers](http://www.PhuketGazette.net/IssuesAnswers)



# Greece's economy not too big to fail



## Finance

By Don Freeman

AS THE Greek crisis continues to rattle financial markets and the Euro, investors need to understand that Greece being in default is actually business as usual for the country when you look more closely at its history:

Greece's first default occurred during fourth century BC when around a dozen Greek city-states borrowed from the Temple of Delos at the end of the Persian Wars. The temple lost most of its principal and Pericles relocated the treasury to Athens.

In modern times, Greece has defaulted on its external sovereign-debt obligations five times – in 1826, 1843, 1860, 1894 and 1932. However, this record is only half as bad as record holding serial defaulters Venezuela and Ecuador who have ten defaults each.

In 1824 during the Greek War for Independence from the Turks, a loan was secured on the London Stock Exchange with an additional loan floated the following year. However, London middlemen skimmed most of the proceeds and no interest payments were ever made in part because Greece descended into Civil War - which made it difficult to determine who should receive the funds raised



In modern time, Greece has defaulted on external sovereign-debt obligations five times. Photo: Simon Cocks

as well as pay them back. It took until 1878 for the Greek government to finally settle the debt.

After an 1860 default, Greece was kicked out of international financial markets until 1878. When the country was allowed back in, the government promptly borrowed excessively from overeager lenders - causing the 1894 default.

From 1824 to 1897, Greece contracted ten foreign loans totaling 770 million francs. However, the country received only 464.1 million francs with the rest of the amount withheld as fees to financiers.

In 1898 following a defeat in the Greco-Turkish war of 1897 (which resulted in huge war repa-

rations), international pressure forced Greece to accept the creation of the International Committee for Greek Debt Management to monitor the country's economic policy, tax collection and management systems. The Committee implemented austerity and apparently remained active until the German invasion during WWII (which devastated the country's economy).

Greece's 1932 default during the Great Depression was caused by the country's reliance on foreign capital which made it vulnerable to external shocks. This default lasted until 1964.

Between 1800 and 2008, Greece is estimated to have spent 50.6% of its time either

in outright default or trying to reschedule its debt. In fact only Angola, Ecuador and Honduras have been greater financial deadbeats.

And now some interesting facts about the Greek economy:

In 2014, Greece's GDP was US\$237.59 billion representing just 0.38% of the global economy and 1.78% of the Euro Zone economy while Athens' GDP was estimated to be US\$129.62 billion. In contrast, Bangkok's 2014 GDP was estimated to be US\$306.76 billion, Frankfurt's GDP was US\$229.98 billion, Munich's GDP was US\$219.94 billion and Berlin's GDP was \$157.71 billion.

In 2009, the OECD estimated the size of the Greek 'grey market' to be around €65 billion (or 25% of GDP) resulting in at least €20 billion in unpaid taxes every year.

Although some blame the rich for not paying their 'fair share', more than 100 per cent of the self-reported income of Greece's professional classes is going toward paying off consumer debts – suggesting massive tax evasion by the country's self employed (one-third of all Greeks). In fact, one study estimated that €28 billion in tax was evaded in 2009 (when the total tax base was just €98 billion) by self-employed people alone.

The bottom line: Greece is a mess (which is historically normal), but it's not too big to fail - except perhaps for European politicians who keep extending lifelines that are dragging out the crisis longer than necessary.

*Don Freeman, BSME is president of Freeman Capital Management, a registered investment advisor with the US Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) based in Phuket. He has over 15 years experience working with expatriates, specializing in portfolio management, US tax preparation, financial planning and UK pension transfers. Don can be reached at: 089-970-5795 or email: freemancapital@gmail.com.*

## Bank account ownership high

THAILAND has the third-highest level of bank-account ownership for adults among Southeast Asian countries after Singapore and Malaysia.

According to the World Bank's 'Global Findex 2014', 78 per cent of the Thai population aged over 15 years have bank accounts, an improvement from 73 per cent in the 2011 index.

Global Findex is a comprehensive report on financial inclusion released by the World Bank every three years. It mea-

sures how individuals in 143 countries save, borrow, make payments and manage risks.

The report showed that the global bank-account rate was 62 per cent in 2014.

Dr Jose de Luna Martinez, World Bank Group senior financial economist, told a media briefing that Malaysia was a success story in terms of its financial system's development plan and carving out a niche as a specialist in Islamic banking.

– *The Nation*

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## Joint push for chip-embedded debit cards

THE Bank of Thailand (BOT) has called on commercial banks to cooperate in promoting electronic data capture (EDC) for card-based payments and offer incentives to small and medium-sized merchants to ensure wider use of chip-embedded debit cards.

Next year, all ATM and debit cards issued by Thai financial institutions will use embedded microchips instead of magnetic strips, to comply with the policy of the BOT's Payment Systems Committee.

To ensure a high standard for the new system, the Thai Bankers' Association is cooperating and has signed an agreement with China's UnionPay International to establish the Thai Standard Format.

Tongurai Limpiti, BOT deputy governor for financial institutions stability, said at the signing ceremony that the chip system would help prevent the



BOT encourages commercial banks to use chip-embedded cards. Photo: Sean MacEntee

skimming of ATM and debit cards, and the chips in the cards would facilitate the move towards wider e-payment in the future.

At present, there are 50 million debit cards in Thailand. After the country adopts the card-chip technology, more merchants should begin utilizing EDC technology for payments, Ms Tongurai said. Commercial banks that issue the cards should also think about how to promote

EDC to small and medium-sized merchants.

The key factors to ensure the acceptance of debit cards were security, communication and infrastructure development, she added.

"Security is essential for using debit cards for making transactions. Payments in the future will be seen on other platforms such as smartphones, tablets and even watches, and the advances of technology will bring not only opportunities, but also new risks. Therefore, the banks have to prepare [ensure] the security of the chip debit cards."

Kobsak Duangdee, secretary-general of the TBA, said Thai Standard Format would be applied to the chips embedded in ATM and debit cards, and Thailand having its own standard would support the widening acceptance of debit cards in the future.

– *The Nation*



# Your business needs social media



## Business Buzz

Simon Wetherell

THESE days you hear that every business should have a social media presence, but why is this the case?

This week, we explore the main reasons why social media is so important and, if done correctly, what benefits it brings to your business.

### BRANDING & EXPOSURE

To launch a company, create a brand name and even just to be in the consumer's awareness zone used to be difficult and very expensive. Well planned strategies using radio, television and newspaper advertising all took a long time to plan and action. Lead times on newspapers and television could often be weeks.

There was also the accepted marketing principle of the 7 touches. It was believed a potential customer needed to experience a brand 7 times before they would trust the brand enough to make a purchase.

With the advent of modern technology, social media research suggests that our attention span has shrunk, and this means the average number of contacts to build brand trust has increased to about fifteen; however this is much easier,

faster and cheaper to achieve with modern social media.

### RAPPORT & TRUST

Part of the seven touches principle was that it built brand awareness, but more importantly it started to create trust and rapport. People saw the brand a number of times, so there was a positive experience and this generated consumer confidence. When our subconscious recognizes that we have seen something before, even if we cannot remember if the specific context was positive or negative, we instantly assume it was positive. Obviously, if we have a bad experience, that will trump everything, but a neutral experience becomes positive.

### UNDERSTAND MARKET BETTER & QUICKER

Modern social media are both instant and effective. Through the use of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, etc, we can instantly see how consumers react to live events and content shared with them. We can see what is trending (we have all seen the #).

If used effectively, this can provide us with instantaneous feedback on our products. For example, if I had a restaurant launching a new menu, I could



How do you use social media platforms? Photo: Official GDC

ask my audience for their suggestions, or to comment on my own suggestions, or even vote on them. I can put up whatever content I like and interact directly, getting instant and very valuable feedback.

### MORE COST EFFECTIVE

The use of social media also generates huge cost and time savings compared with tradi-

tional methods and we can get instant results, which in many cases are essentially free.

I have mentioned many times the power of a database in marketing – this is where the true power lies in social media marketing. The value of Facebook is not just that it is fun and interactive; it is that 1.6 billion people agree.

These platforms also allow us to 'rent' their database and

even to use it to build our own.

Most people do not realize the amount of information that is collected about us individually. We can target people very specifically on the normal age, sex, marital status, race and geographic factors that have always been used, but modern social media also know our spending habits, the places we frequent and our personal likes and preferences, so we can be even more focused on who we want to have seeing our messages. And instead of costing a small fortune, we can have our messages in front of our very specific target audience for fractions of a cent.

The end result is we can find new customers quicker and cheaper, build a rapport with existing customers, and all the time be building brand awareness and a social media footprint that makes it easier for others to find us. This all means more profit for your business!

So are you using Social Media to support, drive and benefit your business?

*Simon Wetherell is a Social Media Expert, Lawyer, Best Selling Author and International Speaker. He now resides in Phuket where he trains businesses and individuals on how to profit from the Social Media industry. For more information, go to <http://PhuketOnlineMarketingSchool.com> or call him on 095-085 3355.*

## ADT says Tourism and Sports Ministry should split responsibilities

BIG players involved in tourism agree there must be a separation of the Tourism and Sports Ministry's two portfolios to strengthen the travel business and increase the country's competitiveness amid the current political and economic instability.

"I agree with the separation of tourism and sport. The tourism job should not be included with sport. The ministry should be overseeing only tourism," said Suthikiati Chirathivat, chairman of the board of Centara Hotels and Resorts, one of the country's largest hotel chains.

He said the tourism sector needed a good long-term plan and good infrastructure with focus on 'quality' tourists.

Yutthachai Soonthornrattana-

vate, president of the Association of Domestic Travel (ADT), said it was time to prop up the Tourism and Sports Ministry as the key agency to drive the economy in the current situation, as tourism is the only optimistic sector that could help drive the entire economy forward this year.

The association called on the government to play a greater role in promoting tourism by drafting a long-term development plan.

Mr Yutthachai added that the ADT had proposed that the government increase competency at the three major tourism bodies: Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Department of Tourism, and Tourist Police.

– The Nation

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## Governor has fun with the media



Phuket Governor Nisit Jansomwong (right) gives a lucky draw prize to Charoen Thinkohkeaw from 94 City Radio at the recent Media 2015 party



Enjoying themselves at this party are (from L-R) Boonrat Apiwantanakorn, president of the Phuket Reporters Club; Phuket Vice Governor Suthee Thongyam; Bussaya Jaipiam, chief of Phuket Public Relations Office; and Sopon Keimkarn, deputy chief of Phuket Public Relations Office.

## Bodyslam rocks for charity at Laguna Phuket

Five thousand fans flocked to the Bodyslam Charity Concert 2015 at Laguna Phuket on August 22. Part of the ticket sales go toward the refurbishment of a locker room and installation of proper storage cabinets, lockers and shelves at a student dormitory in Phuket Punyanukul School.



Thailand's number 1 rock band, Bodyslam, on stage with five thousand fans looking on.



Napaporn Promsorn, assistant director of Phuket Punyanukul School (5<sup>th</sup> from right), receives the donation from Laguna Phuket's management team with Anthony Loh, senior assistant vice president (4<sup>th</sup> from left); Passapong Nantarak, assistant vice president (3<sup>rd</sup> from left); and Prapa Hemmin, director of sales-MICE and corporate events (5<sup>th</sup> from left); handing it over. Also joining the presentation ceremony are Ma-ann Samran from Works.com (International) Company (3<sup>rd</sup> from right) and members of the Bodyslam band.

**BROADCASTING PHUKET TO THE WORLD**  
 Phuket Today takes the Pearl of the Andaman to an international audience. PGTV's one-hour show features the personalities, lifestyle, sports and leisure activities that make Phuket famous.

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## ents in Paradise

### Special award for Kathu Deputy Mayor

Kathu Deputy Mayor Somboon Aiyarak displays the shield he received at Miracle Grand Convention Hotel in Bangkok on August 5 after being chosen as this year's role model for executive health by the Ministry of Public Health's Health Department.



### Games taking place on island

Competitions are still being held in the 'To Be Number One Youth & People Games' which were launched by Somjai Suwanasupana, Phuket City Mayor, at Saphan Hin Stadium on August 15 and will run until August 31. Photo: Pacharawat Wasikarn



### MAC's colorful workshop at Central

Shoppers had a whale of a time at the MAC 'Makeup Live Demo' at Central Department Store on August 14.



Seen at this fun event are (from L-R) Supreeya Jitrawiparat, Central Department Store Phuket Branch's store marketing manager; Wisut Sueanoo, MAC makeup artist; Phattharamalin Nasawasad, a model; Panat Pookpho, Central Department Store Phuket Branch's GM; and Thanika Sabpon, marketing officer at Central. Photo: Pacharawat Wasikarn.

### Heavenly party at condominium

Angels flew in to join the Seven Heaven Seven Seas Party, which took place at Phuket's Seven Seas Condo Resort on August 8.



Warmly welcoming Palakorn Wongphati, GM of Headstart International School (3<sup>rd</sup> from right), is Thida Changpradab, Seven Seas Condo Resort's GM (2<sup>nd</sup> right).



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# Close encounter with the highly beautiful

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

IN 1968, Jean-Claude Forest's French comics were brought to the silver screen in the French-Italian science fiction film *Barbarella*: In the far future, a highly sexual woman is assigned to find and stop the evil Durand-Durand. Along the way, she encounters various unusual people.

Nearly fifty years later, in Phuket, Thailand, Earth, a threesome of equally beautiful, futuristic space travellers are to land at a double-pool villa at the Banyan Tree. The unusual people they encounter: the co-hosts of Galassia, Adriano Trapani and Manny Librodo. They will be joined by their motley crew of Bohemian photographers, makeup artists and a costume designer.

"I like this style of workshop, which brings like-minded people together for a party and to learn from each other," Adriano said. "The idea has always been to turn Phuket into a hub for photography and visual arts by elevating the standards."

The goal of the workshop goes beyond just boosting the quality of the photography on the island, as it aims to also raise the standards for all ele-



**SIZZLING:** A model poses during a previous Bohemian Workshop in Phuket Photo: Adriano Trapani

ments involved in the workshop, including models, makeup artists, location and – less we forget it is a Bohemian workshop – the party.

"In the past, we held elemental workshops with fire and water, before taking advantage of graffiti artist Noe Two being in town and launching the 'United Colours of Bohemian Workshop'. This time I wanted a little bit more metal, gold and silver," Adriano said.

"I envisioned a space tribe visiting us as they passed by Earth, and we were lucky enough to record this close encounter with these galactic Valkyries."

Prior to the launch of the bohemian series, the only place a photographer in Thailand could find a quality workshop was in Bangkok.

In fact, Adriano attended a Bangkok workshop in 2012 that was hosted by Manny, who

is also the Sony ambassador for the Philippines.

The two photographers' styles have changed a great deal since 2012, which will provide a stark contrast between their ways to approach shooting and post-processing for those taking part in the Bohemian workshop on September 5 and 6.

Manny is known for his uncanny use of natural light and heavy post-processing to create images that seem to teeter be-

tween reality and something captured with paint on a canvass. Adriano's style is quite the opposite with a strong focus on studio lighting in order to shape shadows and subjects, with a lighter touch during the post-processing that focuses on cleaning up the image and beautifying.

"I am proud to be co-hosting a project with Manny, as it shows just how far I have come since that workshop with him. My techniques have improved, my style has been refined and even before this project together I had already started holding workshops for other photographers," Adriano said.

As for the futuristic Valkyries – choosers of the slain in Norse mythology – they will create an otherworldly juxtaposition with their tranquil surroundings: a 1,300-square-meter villa with a private garden, personal pool, steam room and outdoor shower.

As first impressions of Earth go, a Bali-Thai style luxury villa nestled in tropical Thailand isn't a bad start. In fact, it might be exactly what's needed to encourage the women to return to Phuket, hopefully returning the hearts of the photographers when they do so.

## WHAT'S ON in Phuket

### September 5-6. East Meets West Garage Sale

Discover a treasure trove of high-quality used and second-hand items at the first East Meets West Weekend Garage Sale at Phuket Boat Lagoon. The family fun under cover at the new Boat Arcade Community Mall promises bargains galore, fine food and excellent entertainment for Thais, expats and tourists alike. Both days, 10am to 4pm.

### September 5-6. Fourth Bohemian Workshop

Phuket's very own Adriano Trapani will be holding the fourth edition of his 'Bohemian' signature photography workshop on September 5 and 6 at Banyan Tree Phuket, co-hosted by Sony Ambassador for the Philippines, Manny Librodo.

For more information and booking, please contact

adriano.trapani@gmail.com or call 084-844 9215.

### September 18. China High-end Tourism Showcase

American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM) members and guests will have an opportunity to hear from David Johnson, managing director of

leading public relations firm Delivering Asia Communications (DAC) and digital marketing specialist Vanessa Zhu, the firm's Shanghai-based director of communications for China.

The session will offer solutions for Phuket's resorts and hotels on how they might

better understand and navigate the China tourism landscape and influence the purchasing decisions of the new brand of wealthy independent travellers.

There will be a question and answer session to follow.

Registration begins at 4:30pm and the session starts

at 5pm. Admission is open to the public and is 500 baht for non-AMCHAM members.

### October 23. Chulalongkorn Memorial Day

Chulalongkorn Day commemorates the reign of Rama V, who is best remembered for introducing many progressive reforms and for the abolition of slavery in Thailand.

### December 5. HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej's Birthday

HM The King's birthday is also marked as Father's Day in Thailand, with festivities taking place throughout the country. Make sure to keep checking the *Gazette* for local celebrations.

### December 10. Constitution Day

This day commemorates the day on which Thailand's first constitution was promulgated by HM King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) in 1932. Parades and fireworks take place throughout the country.



# Lucky Air launches Phuket service



By Stephen Fein

GOOD news for Phuket's tourism industry came with the July 16 launch of thrice-weekly services between Kunming and Phuket by Lucky Air, China's fastest growing airline.

Lucky Air, with its hub at Kunming Changshui International Airport (KMG), is 40 per cent owned by parent company Hainan Airlines Group. In operation since 2006, it has demonstrated phenomenal growth in recent years with an expansion of services inside China, where it provides services at 12 domestic airports.

Lucky Air's growth has hardly been limited to its operations out of KMG, China's seventh busiest airport through which over 33 million passengers transited last year.



China's fastest growing airline has launched services in Phuket three times a week. Photo: byangel

Lucky Air launched its first international route from Guiyang, China to Singapore, early last year.

Its first routes to Thailand followed shortly thereafter with the launch of a thrice-weekly service from Kunming to Samui Island, making it the first carrier to offer a service to Surat Thani's premier resort island.

The next step was the introduction in early February of midnight flights from Kunming to Krabi International Airport, putting it in direct competition with China Eastern Airlines, which also uses KMG as a hub.

The Phuket flights will also

operate three times a week on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. This route is also served by China Eastern Airlines, which likewise operates a service three times a week.

The flight takes off from KMG at 8:35am, covering a distance of under 2,000 kilometers in about three hours and lands in Phuket at 10:35am, local time. The return flight leaves Phuket at 11:40am and lands at 3:40pm. (Kunming is one hour ahead of Thai time.)

In addition to serving mainland Chinese tourists wanting to visit Phuket, the flights will make it easier for many ethnic

Han Chinese in Phuket to visit Kunming.

To facilitate foreign air passengers wishing to transit through Kunming and see some of the local attractions, Kunming Airport authorities offer most foreign visitors with third-country visas a 'transit without visa' option, lasting 72 hours from the time of arrival.

This option is open to foreigners from 51 countries with clearly detailed departure information from KMG within the 72-hour time frame, which cannot be extended.

However, it cannot be used for people with round-trip

flights and those using this option can only travel inside the administrative region of Kunming City.

Also important to note is that Thailand is not listed among the countries which qualify for the 'transit without visa' option.

However, the option might prove useful to Phuket's legions of 'visa runners,' as Thailand has a consulate in Kunming City with a one-day turnaround time for most non-immigrant visa applications. There is also a Lao consulate there for those wishing to continue their travels in that country.

But Lucky Air appears to have a long way to go to tap into the Thai and expat markets.

For a start, the carrier's website ([www.luckyair.net](http://www.luckyair.net)) is in Chinese language only, and the airline has yet to establish much of a presence in popular online English-language booking sites. However, similar flights on rival airways, such as AirAsia, start at about 15,500 baht round trip, but they have very long stopovers – as long as nine hours – in Bangkok.

## Aviation tip: Drone tech

ANYONE interested in drone aircraft technology should not miss a recent *Inquiring Minds* science podcast in which host Indre Viskontis interviews Eric Cheng, director of Aerial Imaging and general manager of the San Francisco office at DJI, the makers of the Phantom aerial-imaging quadcopter.

Mr Cheng describes how he used a drone equipped with a GoPro camera to capture amazing images of a volcanic eruption in Iceland.

The GoPro eventually melted, but the memory card remained intact and the results have been posted as a popular YouTube video.

Mr Cheng offers fascinating insight into drone technology and answers common questions, such as: Why are so many people afraid of drones; how do they work; and why are they so useful for so many applications?

The podcast, episode 89, is available for free at: <http://feeds.feedburner.com/inquiring-minds>.

– Stephen Fein

## Emirates adds four Phuket-Dubai flights

EMIRATES announced four new weekly flights between Phuket and Dubai starting on December 1.

"Since the launch in 2012, Phuket has been a solid success story. The fact that we are now adding a further four weekly flights highlights, not only the desirability of the destination, but also the demand from passengers wishing to travel with Emirates," said Emirates' Executive Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer Thierry Antinori.

Representing a capacity increase of 57 per cent on the Phuket-Dubai route, the four new flights will improve connection options for Phuket's travel trade to exploit, reported *TTR Weekly*. Connecting times between flights from cities in the Americas and key destinations in Europe and the Middle East will be shorter at the airline's Dubai hub.

"Phuket is one of Thailand's premier holiday destinations and is a key gateway to many other islands in the region. Not



The move represents a 57 per cent increase in capacity. Photo: Brussels Airport

only are these additional flights great news for holiday markets, but also important to support travel and tourist companies which see great value in the direct flights to Phuket," said Jabr Al-Azeeby, area manager for Thailand and Indochina.

"The additional flights will make it even more convenient for residents in the southern part of Thailand to connect to Dubai and the rest of the world," Mr Jabr added.

– Phuket Gazette

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# Khao Sok cave diving might return

## Diving

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

IN A knee-jerk reaction, national park officers enforced a ban on all diving in the Chio Lan Reservoir, the center piece to the extraordinary Khao Sok National Park, following the deaths of two experienced cave divers in a diving accident while using technical rebreathers last year.

However, the ban might not last, Khao Sok National Park Chief Chaichana Wichaidit said.

Though the dive communities in the region were regularly using the area, it has always been illegal, Mr Chaichana explained. However, the park chief has since put forward a proposal to the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) requesting six dive sites in the lake be opened to the general public.

Officers from Bangkok have already inspected the sites once, but have yet to give Mr Chaichana an indication of whether or not his request will be approved.

The sites were named as: Tham Long, depth 25m; Khao Ta Chae, depth 40m; in front of Pae Plern Prai, depth 20m; Chom Plern Cliff, depth 22m; Tham Khang Khao, depth 25m and Tham Klorng, depth 20m.

"They have to consider whether or not the diving is

safe. Also, they have to ensure that the diving will not negatively affect the park's natural resources," Mr Chaichana said.

The beauty of Khao Sok, above and below the water, is indeed something to be cherished and preserved. The multitude of cave systems carved out of the karst topography of the looming limestone walls blanketed with jungle flora, as well as the dynamic underwater landscape, is exactly what has drawn divers to the man-made lake year after year.

"There are amazing stalactites and stalagmites in the caves, as they used to be dry caves. The whole experience: long tail boat, staying on the lake in the floating accommodation, waking up to the sounds of animals instead of traffic, great local people and great food all create an extraordinary experience for divers," Simone Reynolds of Blue Label Diving said.

Yet, perhaps like Phuket itself, it is not only the beauty of the location, but the accessibility that make the sites so important to dive companies in Phuket and essential to those in Khao Lak.

Those most affected by the closure were diving companies specializing in technical diving, perhaps only 15 in Thailand, as well as companies based in Khao Lak, as they are unable to access the Similians during the 'Green Season'.



The entire dive trip is a true adventure. Photo: Kris Dhiradityakul

"Our main business is trips to the Similan and Surin islands, but we also need other dive sites to bring customers in," said Melanie Andriolo of Sea Turtle Divers in Khao Lak.

"The closing of Khao Sok hurt our business a lot. We can't sell the trips and have had many customers tell us how disappointed they are to find out the national park is closed to diving."

Khao Sok was the only lake large enough and wide enough in Thailand for recreational divers to visit as an alternative

to the ocean. Though there are other options for tech and cave divers in southern Thailand, most of them are not ideal and end up being a completely different experience.

"The tech market is small, but it's growing. On a yearly basis, we run at least two cave diving trips per month with about two people," said Ms Reynolds.

"All recreational divers are potential technical divers. However, Thailand's cave diving locations, such as Khao Sok, are not only for the tech divers.

Recreational divers love to see something new as well.

The sites are not all geared toward tech divers, as limestone tufas and other rock formations present an otherworldly underwater landscape for beginners taking part in wall dives, while more experienced divers can work toward their cave diving certification in the multitude of caverns hidden below the lake's tranquil surface.

"More and more people are finding out that Thailand has caves that can be dived," said Ms Reynolds.

"The limestone ridge, stretching throughout southern Thailand is very old and has acidic water from the rainforest above, which has carved enormous, mostly unexplored tunnels. Because of the limestone, Thailand has over 2,000 caves, both wet and dry. Today, less than 10 per cent of these are known," says seasoned Thailand cave diver Ben Reymenants of Blue Label Diving.

However, when it comes to easy access to submerged caves in Thailand, Khao Sok was second to none, with an entire infrastructure for transportation, accommodation and dining already in place. At this point, divers around the world, local dive shops and Mr Chaichana himself will have to wait with bated breath for the final decision by the DNP.

## Explore Thai high-art of dancing in shadows

SHADOW theater has a long tradition in many countries, but especially in Southeast Asia and Thailand where it became high art. There are other forms of shadow puppetry in Thailand, Nang Talung in the South for example, where crowds are entertained by articulated puppets telling bawdy jokes. However, Nang Yai, which probably predates the Ayutthaya period, was reserved for the royal family and reached its zenith in the Rattanakosin Era, when stories from the Thai epic, *Ramakien*, were performed for the court.

Whereas in other shadow theaters, the puppets are small with moving parts, Nang Yai 'puppets' are static pictures held up against the illuminated screen. The movement comes



Puppeteers use Nang Yai puppets. Photo: Niwat Tantayanusorn

from the puppeteers themselves. Until recently, Nang Yai was a dying art, but now its traditions are being preserved and promoted at Wat Khanon in Ratchaburi. The temple not only looks after Nang Yai puppets, but also teaches a new generation of puppeteers how to stage the elaborate performances.

The first puppets told the story of the Monkey King Hanuman, but the artists went on to create hundreds more from cowhide and exotic materials, such as bear and tiger skin. Some 313 of their creations are now on display in Wat Khanon's museum.

- TAT

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# Male eating disorders on rise

By Patricia Reaney

LOW-SELF esteem, poor body image and a perception of not meeting the modern ideal of masculinity are driving more men to consume over-the-counter body-building supplements, constituting what researchers believe is an emerging eating disorder.

Supplements such as whey protein, creatine and L-carnitine are used to improve athletic performance and physique and are sold in grocery stores, vitamin shops and online.

The products are popular among gym members to increase energy and build lean tissue mass. But researchers at Alliant International University in Los Angeles said overuse is increasing and dangerous.

"Men are using the supplements in a way that is risky both to their physical health and their health in terms of relationships



When it comes to body-image issues, men are catching up quickly – wonder why? Photo: Mc Nasser

and their own emotional well-being," said Richard Achiro, of the California School of Professional Psychology at the university. "It is an expression, or variance, of eating disorder behavior in these men."

Unlike anorexia or bulimia in

women, which result from a desire to be thin, men are aspiring for a physique that is both lean and muscular and are using supplements to achieve it.

Achiro said overuse of the products, which are not regulated by the US Food and Drug Ad-

ministration, can cause diarrhea, kidney disease and renal failure.

"Taken together low self-esteem and gender role conflict, which is an underlying sense of insecurity about one's masculinity, contribute more to the overuse of these products than

body dissatisfaction alone," he said.

Achiro found in a study of nearly 200 men who took supplements in the past month that 29 per cent expressed concern about using them.

Eight per cent admitted their doctors told them to cut back or stop and 40 per cent said their use had increased over time.

Achiro said he and his co-author, Peter Theodore, showed statistically that the excessive use of the supplements was a form of eating disorder.

"The way in which men's bodies are being objectified by the media is catching up rapidly to what has been done to women's bodies for decades," he said.

"It makes sense to believe that as that occurs men's mental health and emotional issues are going to be expressed more and more in eating disorder behavior." – Reuters

## Small-scale study raises concerns over hot yoga

THERE are multitudes of styles of yoga in Phuket, though it seems that most tourists and expats who are interested in the practice at one point or another try Bikram Yoga, one of several forms of hot yoga.

Although not everyone's idea of fun, moving through the poses in a room between 40 and 40.5 degrees with a humidity of 40 per cent undeniably gets a person sweating.

However, a study sponsored by the American Council on Exercise found that practicing yoga in such a warm environment can lead to potentially dangerous core body temperatures of 39.4 degrees and higher. (It should be noted that the study used a very small number of subjects, which does make one question the validity of the results.)

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin had 20 regular Bikram practitioners swallow core body temperature sensors prior to performing the standard 26 poses for 90 minutes in a room with 40 degree heat and 40 percent humidity, reported *Yoga Journal*.

One male in the study had a body temperature of 40 degrees by the end of the class, and seven of the subjects had body temperatures greater than 39.4.



Though the study showed high core temperatures, no participants had signs of heat intolerance. Photo: DigBoston

Researcher's concern was that some people will start displaying early signs of heat intolerance when their core temperature reaches 40 degrees, said Cedric Bryant, chief science officer of the American Council on Exercise.

However, Dr Bryant emphasized that despite the elevated core temperatures, none of the subjects in the study displayed signs of heat intolerance.

"If you adhere to common-sense guidelines, most presumably healthy individuals can have very safe experiences practicing Bikram Yoga," he told *Yoga Journal*, adding that Bikram offers a number of health benefits from improved flexibility to relaxation and should not be discouraged.

– Isaac Stone Simonelli

# NICE PEAK

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# Myriad designs becoming more popular

By Nina Suebsukcharoen

AS MOST villa projects in Phuket are individually owned and cater to the requirements of the individual buyer, one sees a plethora of interior designs ranging from very conservative to highly modern. However, those that are influenced by Thai architecture stand in sharp contrast to replicas of European styles.

“Rightly called the Isle of Million Dollar Homes, Phuket has attracted the rich and famous to build and buy resort homes and villas”, said Dr Saeed Zaki, DWP Cityspace Company’s Regional Managing Director.

“While most of the hospitality projects of international brands are designed by big name design firms, individual villas have given an opportunity to talented boutique design firms, and even individual designers in Phuket and Bangkok, to showcase their design skills.”

However, as design is something that constantly evolves, the advent of new technology and availability of more sophisticated design tools have led to a shift toward sleeker yet more complex forms, and even more interesting, technology-integrated designs with increasingly minimalist spaces.

“Use of material also plays an important role as new tech-



Availability of more sophisticated design tools have led to a shift toward sleeker, more complex forms.

nology brings about more composite materials that can be used to create forms previously unimaginable,” added Dr Zaki.

While the new designs are fascinating, this well-established Indian architect and urban designer warns that in places like Phuket the most important factor for all home buyers to keep in mind is that the materials and equipment used to build their homes must

be able to resist water and air with a high degree of salinity.

“It is advisable to use materials and equipment that are resistant to corrosion. Thus, one finds that in construction near the sea, natural materials such as timber, stone etc. are the prime materials of choice.

“Anything that can corrode easily should be avoided,” he said.

While developers might cut

some corners, the astute and successful ones seldom cut the design fee because in paying the full amount buyers not only get a good design, but they are also able to use the design firm’s brand for marketing.

“This makes the buyers more confident of the project and the quality of design and building they will receive. In simple terms, the design fee for a mid-size resort costs

around 5 per cent, so any saving on that puts at risk 95 per cent of the developers’ investment.”

Dr Zaki, who has been active in the Phuket market for over 20 years, added that successful resorts, especially those developed with commercial factors in mind, need to be designed and built within the established budget to achieve the projected return on investment.

Here again big name design firms have an edge because they have a track record of successfully delivering such projects and have a team of professionals who are well-rounded and experienced, not just in concept design, but in implementation and delivery as well.

Strong design companies are also able to easily survive times of economic difficulty while smaller less well-known firms flounder. Dr Zaki pointed out that in an economic downturn it is in fact the real estate sector that sinks first because people hold back on investment, and this is also the last to bounce back when the economy is back on track.

“Well-known firms continue to remain sought after even during the tough times and have the ability to survive downturns due to their reputation and quality of work.”

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## Ace 1 condo case to reach prosecutor

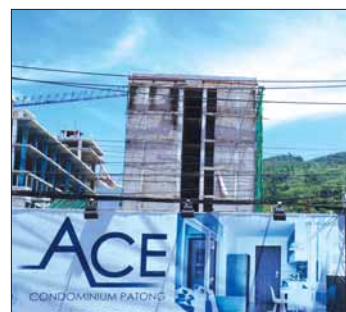
POLICE will hand the case against the developers of the unfinished condominium project Ace 1 over to the Public Prosecutor by September 9.

Despite the case being submitted, pre-build purchasers will be able to continue to file complaints and submit evidence to police, confirmed Lt Col Anukul Nuket of the Patong Police yesterday.

“We are still in the process of questioning buyers. Some of them have not filed a complaint yet, while others have just done so,” Lt Col Anukul said. “We still need several more days to get everything organized.

Although the contracts signed said that construction would start in February 2014 and be completed in April 2015, nothing has been built, confirmed Ampol Wongsiri, secretary general of the Consumer Protection Board (CPB), in July.

On June 15, the company developing the project, Nine



Construction was meant to finish in April 2015. Photo: Gazette file

Property (Patong), was given two weeks to address compensation to pre-build purchasers.

However, they allegedly took no action.

CPB officers have been negotiating with the company to refund the buyers’ booking and down payments for several months, but to no avail, Mr Ampol said.

Consequently, the Consumer Protection Police Division has slapped company director Prawat Suppipattana and shareholder Sutporn Litkitinthirak

with five charges: defrauding the public; developing a project without permission according to the Land Development Act BE 2543; generating fake IT information leading to members of the public suffering losses according to the Computer Crimes Act BE 2550 (2007); putting out fake or exaggerated advertisement leading to a misunderstanding of the main concept of the product or service according to the Consumer Protection Act BE 2522 (1979); and failure to obtain permission to build a condominium according to the Building Control Act BE 2522.

“Evidence has been sent to the NACC [National Anti-Corruption Commission] in regard to suspected money laundering,” added Mr Ampol in July.

CPB is also filing a civil suit with the Phuket Provincial Court to get the buyers’ money back.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong



# Waking up the ever-looming giant



**Property Watch**

**By Bill Barnett**

TECHNICALLY there is no specific way to jump-start a snoozing behemoth. Sure, a stun gun might do the trick or a slap on the face, but look at poor little Jack who had to scamper down that beanstalk.

In Thailand's current property market there continues to be a strategic emphasis on fishing where the fish are. Look no further than the recent Sansiri joint venture with BTS for twenty-five condominium projects in Greater Bangkok valued at over 100 billion baht.

Turn back the island pages a few years and small condo units dominated the real estate scene here as well.

One market that suffered perhaps the most when the Russian ruble crashed was Pattaya. Both the tourism and property sectors had seen heavy investment by Eastern Europeans and the fallout from massive drops in the currency and arrivals has created a huge void in business activity.

Recently making news has been the redevelopment and expansion of U-Tapao airport, which is shifting focus from the public to the private sector and is essentially becoming a third Bangkok hub.



One market that suffered the most when the Russian ruble crashed was Pattaya. Photo: Aleksandr Zykov

AirAsia's launch of direct flights from Kuala Lumpur and then Thai AirAsia's plans of positioning aircraft there and adding in regional flights is a massive plus for Pattaya.

Mainland China and short-haul routes are the growth engines of tourism these days. While Phuket continues to voice its angst about not wanting more Chinese travellers, rest assured the eastern seaboard will gladly accept them.

I recently did work in Hua Hin and viewing the legacy location versus broader Pattaya,

I can't help but realize that the transport infrastructure to the former remains a strong fundamental. Yes, it can be argued that the long running plan for the North/South railway will improve access, but the reality is this is at least five years away.

Although Hua Hin's tourism is highly leveraged in the domestic market with over 70 per cent of hotel stays coming from the Thai market, Pattaya remains more diverse. That said, a key catalyst of growth for the latter was the development of Central Festival which un-

locked the local property trade.

The timing of the collapse of the Russian market could not have been worse as it coincided with the completion, or at least latter development phases, of a number of sizable condominium projects. Suddenly a shift has taken place away from off-plan sales to offerings in the secondary sector with buyers even willing to write down prices in order to spur transactions.

It's a strange dynamic unlike any other real estate market and one has to wonder where it will end.

From my viewpoint the location and impressive additions to airlift and transport are lurking as strong positives. Yet while Pattaya hotels are increasingly moving towards the mainland China grail, the question is will the property market heavens suddenly open with Chinese buyers?

Phuket's tourism industry needs to understand that despite the angst over low-rated business the reality at the end of the day is putting heads on beds. Airlift is a prime instigator of long-term success and U-Tapao's growth plans are something that needs to be understood in the context of the competitive playing field.

The stock of vacant residential units in Pattaya is pretty high and in the age of Airbnb, non-traditional accommodation continues to haunt Thailand's hotels. It's a certain evolution that there is now a giant looming over the hospitality sector as condo-hotels and unlicensed operations continued to erode what used to be a warm marketplace. As for that giant I still have no idea how long he is set to live in dreamland.

*Bill Barnett is Managing Director of C9 Hotelworks (c9hotelworks.com), a Phuket-based hotel and property consulting firm. His BLOG (thephuketinsider.com) is the source for all hotel and real estate news within greater Phuket.*

## Kirimaya budgets B1bn for developments

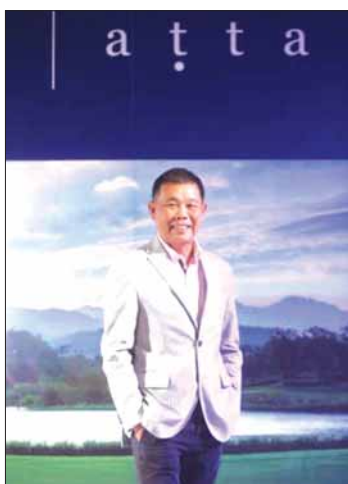
KIRIMAYA Co, a property developer in the Khao Yai area of Nakhon Ratchasima province, has set aside an investment budget of more than 1 billion baht for 2016-2019 to develop residential and hospitality projects outside the area, said the company's owner and chairman of advisors, Kitti Thanakitamnuay.

"We see business opportunities outside Khao Yai after the company's success in developing both residential projects and luxury hospitality and villa projects there since 2005," Mr Kitti said.

"As a result we will expand the same business model in other provinces. And we may also expand overseas later."

Mr Kitti said that up to 50mn of the 1bn baht would be spent on renovating the Kirimaya Golf Resort and Spa and the five-star Muthi Maya Forest Pool Villa Resort in Khao Yai.

The company's latest project



**Kitti Thanakitamnuay, owner of Kirimaya Co.** Photo: The Nation

near Khao Yai National Park is the 1.98bn-baht Atta Lakeside Resort Suite and Condo.

Kirimaya owns 1,200 rai in the Khao Yai part of Pak Chong district, with nearly half of that already developed.

The company plans to develop the rest of the land over the next five to 10 years, de-

pending on market demand.

Atta Lakeside Resort Suite and Condo's construction has finished. Mr Kitti said sales of 75 per cent had been achieved and would be transferred to the owners by end of the year.

The owners can rent the properties out, which the company will handle while guaranteeing an average return on investment of 4 per cent a year.

Mr Kitti said the demand for hotels and resorts in the Khao Yai area grew by an average of 10 per cent a year.

According to the company, the rental income for four and five-star properties in Khao Yai reached 207mn baht in 2005, while the estimated figure this year is 1.29bn baht.

This year, the company expects to achieve 550mn baht in revenue, 150mn baht of which is targeted to come from its hospitality business and the rest from sales of its residential projects.

— *The Nation*

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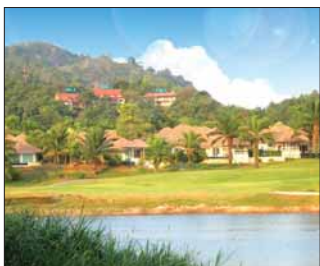
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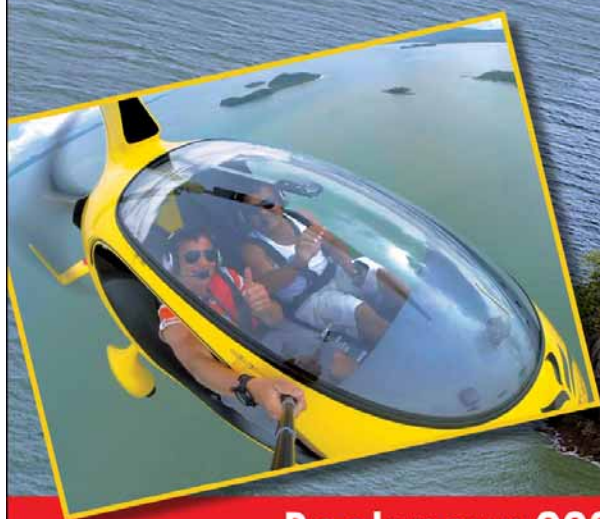
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# Rendezvous with Ae Peerasak

By Baz Daniel

PHUKET Town is in the throes of a revolution of innovation and reinvention that is re-making it into a trendy, happening destination. Walk down any of the ancient Sino-Portuguese streets and you will be impressed by the hive of activity as new coffee clubs, funky bars and restaurants beckon you to enter, grab a drink and hang out.

One leader of this revolution is Peerasak 'Ae' Sripuk owner and manager of the charming Rendez-Vous coffee bar and restaurant on Takuapa Road.

Like so many of the other hip entrepreneurs re-casting the image of Phuket Town, Ae garnered a wealth of international experience through classic hospitality industry channels prior to going out on his own.

Ae studied Hotel Management at Prince of Songkhla University, but upon graduation headed off on a highly exciting young man's quest for travel and adventure.

As a good athlete, he qualified as an instructor in

windsurfing and snowboarding then taught these fine skills for Club Mediterranee and the Accor Hotel Group in such exotic locations as Bali, the Seychelles and the Maldives.

That goes some way to account for Ae's near perfect English, but more importantly in explaining his combination of international and local perspectives and the creative values that helped him make his own business so successful.

"While I was traveling and enjoying an adventurous life, I was always thinking about returning to Thailand, settling down and starting my own restaurant. I qualified as a chef and have a great passion for good food and the happy companionship that should go with their enjoyment. My vision was always to find a place to create my own restaurant where I could make this happen," Ae says.

On January 18, 2013 Ae realized his dream by opening Rendez-Vous in a funky converted shop-house on the same Old Town soi as Michael's Bar and the infamous Ka Jok See restaurant.

Ae supervised the renova-

tion, design and decor of his creation with a view to creating an 'experience' not only in dining, but in friendliness and sociability.

Rendez-Vous took off almost as soon as it opened and most days and nights it now brims with a happy throng of local Phuket residents.

"Eighty percent of our guests are locals who come to see us two or three times a month and my chef and staff have all stayed with me since I launched, so we have built a family feel into the fabric of Rendez-Vous," Ae says.

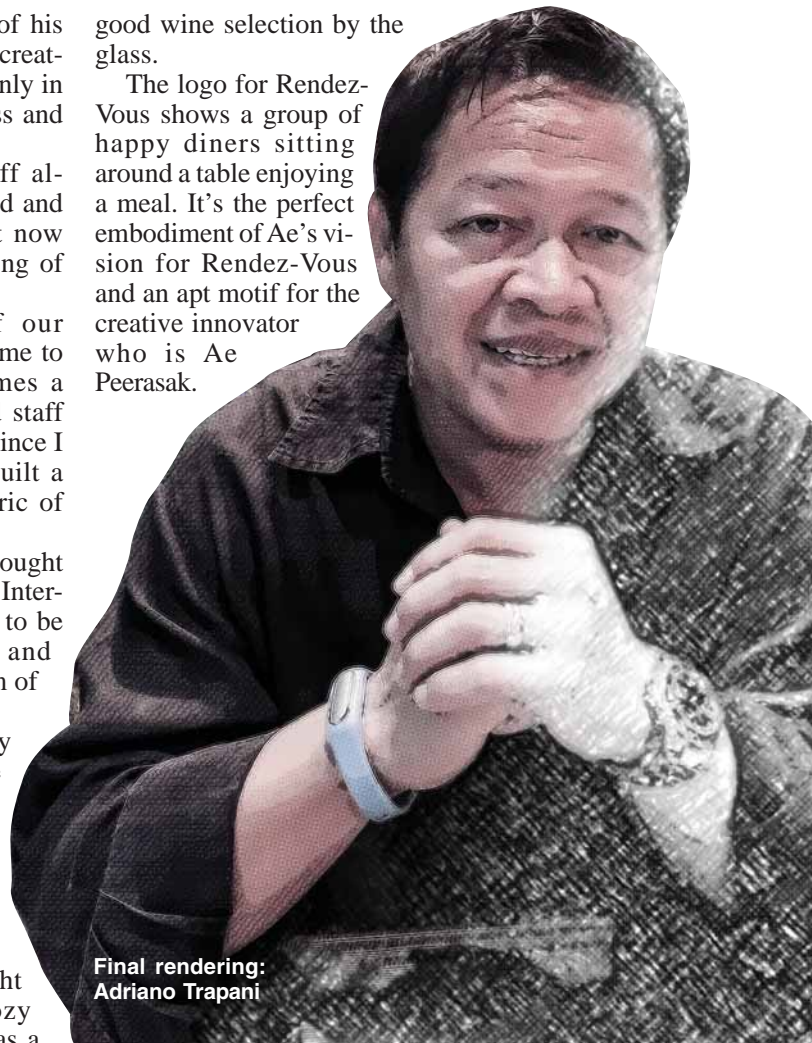
Ae's menu is a well thought out selection of Thai and International dishes designed to be accessible, affordable and meeting a broad spectrum of tastes.

"I am at the market by 6:30am each day where I meet my regular suppliers in order to keep our menu 'alive' and innovative as the seasons change," Ae explains.

Ae offers fine draught German beer at his cozy welcoming bar, as well as a

good wine selection by the glass.

The logo for Rendez-Vous shows a group of happy diners sitting around a table enjoying a meal. It's the perfect embodiment of Ae's vision for Rendez-Vous and an apt motif for the creative innovator who is Ae Peerasak.



Final rendering:  
Adriano Trapani

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