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101

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Publisher's Letter

For a long time now Bangkok has been a place where you could pretty much get anything you wanted... for a price! In recent decades this city has become a playground for both local and international high rollers, and every year it seems there's more and more lavish things to spend one's money on—from limited edition Rolls-Royces, to hotel suites so lavish they almost cost the price of a car.

Of course we all love to dream about being wealthy enough to afford such items, and in so doing we come to realize that a little pampering can go a long way in making this life more enjoyable. Splurging on an over-the-top day at the spa may not be fiscally practical, but it sure feels good while you're doing it. So take a glance at our special luxury lifestyle feature (starting on page 14) and start dreaming of extravaganzas big or small that you could, would, and should indulge in. Check out how the other half lives and ask yourself why you're not doing the same. After all, remember the wise old saying: "You can't take it with you."

And, in keeping with our luxury lifestyle theme, our travel feature (starting on page 44) takes a look at Koh Samui, a desirable destination that caters to luxury travel *par excellence*. Check out the opulent resort properties this beautiful island has to offer as well as tips on wining, dining, and having some fun in the sun. Finally, nothing says 'the glamorous life' better than high fashion and haute couture, which is why our special arts report takes a look at the recent Bangkok International Fashion Week 2017 (see pg. 74).

All this and more—including our 101 archive and extras—can be found online at www.bangkok101.com. A couple of clicks are all it takes to keep in touch with what's happening in Bangkok and beyond. And if you as a reader feel there's something we're not covering, but should be, please drop us a line at info@talisman.asia.



Enjoy.

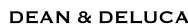
Mason Florence
Publisher



What is Bangkok 101

Independent and unbiased, Bangkok 101 caters to savvy travellers who yearn for more than what they find in guidebooks. It brings together an authoritative who's who of city residents, writers, photographers and cultural commentators. The result is a compact and intelligent hybrid of monthly travel guide and city magazine that takes you on and off the well-worn tourist track. Bangkok 101 employs the highest editorial standards, with no fluff, and no smut. Our editorial content cannot be bought. We rigorously maintain the focus on our readers, and our ongoing mission is to ensure they enjoy this great city as much as we love living in it.

BANGKOK 101 PARTNERS



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bangkok 101

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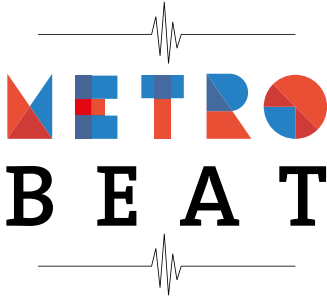
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METRO BEAT

DAYS OFF

There are two major holidays in May in Thailand, starting with **Labour Day** (also known as **May Day**) on the first of the month. It's a public holiday to commemorate the workers of the world, but happily it's celebrated by everyone *not* working (insert joke here). The next is on May 10th when the people of Thailand are treated to yet another public holiday with the celebration of **Visakha Bucha**—which commemorates the three major events in the life of Buddha: his birth, his enlightenment, and his death. However, if you're looking to make May 10th into a party, be aware that alcohol is not sold on this day, as it is a Buddhist holiday. Take note also that the date for **Coronation Day**, previously observed on May 5th—the day the late **King Bhumibol Adulyadej** was crowned—has been changed.

MUCHOS MEXICANO

May 5

Mexican-style bars and restaurants around Bangkok will be even livelier than normal on **Cinco de Mayo** (the 5th of May). This raucous annual tradition commemorates the Mexican army's unlikely victory over French forces at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862, under the leadership of General Ignacio Zaragoza.

And for millions of Mexicans, and friends of Mexico worldwide, that's more than enough reason enough to make a few tequila toasts and order a second round of margaritas.



MAY'S HOTTEST TICKETS



May 7

The *Singha Light Live Series* presents **Mew**, an alternative rock band from Denmark. Now 20 years into their career, the group still brings to their music and performances the same energy they had from day one. These dynamic Danes will be performing live

at **Voice Space** (197 BBD Building Viphavadi Rangsit Rd), and tickets at the door are priced at B1,900.
www.ticketmelon.com



May 9

Renowned French dance-pop group **Yelle** is coming to town—their first Thailand appearance—performing at **Live RCA Bangkok** (23/92-94 RCA Alley). The group enjoys a significant following in many non-French-speaking countries, and is one of the rare French acts to have played at Coachella three times. Showtime is 9pm, and pre-sale tickets are B750 (B900 at the door).
www.ticketmelon.com

May 17

The concert dubbed 'The Road to Golden Axe Music Festival' will feature former chart-topper **Nelly**. This Texas-born American rapper and singer is best known for his hits including "Hot in Here", "Dilemma", and "Work It". He'll be taking the stage at **GMM Live House** (8/F, CentralWorld, Rama 1 Rd), and tickets are priced at B1,500, B2,500, and B45,000 (which gets you a table of 5 to 8 persons, with complimentary drinks).
www.thaiticketmajor.com



May 20

Formed back in 2003, in Toronto, Canada, **Crystal Castles** is the brainchild of songwriter and producer **Ethan Kath** (it wasn't until 2006 that he recruited vocalist **Alice Glass**). Their debut album was released in 2008, and appeared on NME's *Top 100 Greatest Albums of the Decade* list (at No. 39). Known for their chaotic live shows and lo-fi melancholic tunes, they will be bringing their unique stagecraft to **Live RCA Bangkok** (23/92-94 RCA Alley) for a 10pm show. Tickets are B1,190.
www.ticketmelon.com

May 25

Armando Christian Perez, better known to the world as **Pitbull**, is a musician, fashion icon, and actor, whose career sales have exceeded 5 million albums. His only previous Bangkok performance—at the Sonic Bang music festival in 2013—had the sellout crowd dancing from the first song to the last. This time he's back with a full show, which takes place at **Impact Exhibition Halls 3-4** (Muangthong Thani). Ticket prices range from B2,500 to B3,500, and gates open at 7:30pm.
www.thaiticketmajor.com



ITALIAN FESTIVAL IN THAILAND



Danza/Monica Casadei dance company. The show will take place at the **Chulalongkorn University, Music Hall** (254 Phaya Thai Rd). Start time is 7pm, and admission is free.

MAY 9

The newly opened **137 Pillars Suites & Residences Bangkok** (59/1, Sukhumvit Soi 39) presents **Accademia Italiana: Sfilata di Moda**, in which young designers from **Accademia Italiana Bangkok**—the most famous fashion design school in Thailand—will come together showcasing their designs in a vibrant and colourful fashion show. Admission is free.

MAY 12-14

As part of its 'Italian Grand Weekend' **Siam Paragon** (991 Rama 1 Rd) presents three days of live music by **Olen Cesari & the International Clandestine Orchestra**. Taking place on the Fashion Hall, 1st floor, these mini-concerts are designed to accompany your shopping experience, as you enjoy living "the Italian way", with a great combination of music, food, wine and drinks. Admission is free.



MAY 23-24

For an astounding mix of nu-soul and reggae jazz, be sure to catch the **Serena Brancale Jazz Quartet** at either one (or both) of their two Bangkok appearances this month. The group's sound is predominantly soul, funk, and R&B, with a mix of originals in Italian and English—as well as covers by Pink Martini, Joshua Redman, Charles Mingus and more. They will be at the **Living**



Room, the jazz bar at the **Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit** (250 Sukhumvit Rd), on May 23rd at 9pm, or see them the following evening at the **Bangkok Art and Culture Centre** (939 Rama 1 Rd) at 7pm. Admission is free.

MAY 27

The **Siam Ratchada Auditorium** (GF, Fortune Town, New Ratchadapisek Rd) is the place to be for the **Bangkok International Piano Festival**, this year featuring the Italian contingent of **Mario Tonda** and **Alberto Firrincieli**. Start time is 7pm, and tickets can be purchased at the venue.

For more information about upcoming **Italian Festival in Thailand 2017** events visit the official Facebook page. www.facebook.com/italianfestivalthailand

MAY 2

The first **Italian Festival in Thailand** event this month is **Tosca X: Omaggio a Giacomo Puccini**, an exciting contemporary dance performance by the **Artemis**



SOCIETY BALL

May 27

The 55th annual **Bangkok St George's Society Ball** will be held this year at the **Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel** (2 Charoen Krung Rd, Soi 30). Tickets are B3,500 each and admission includes a sparkling reception at 6:30pm, a gourmet 5-course English dinner (with free flow drinks), a traditional flag-waving sing-a-long with the **Royal Thai Army Orchestra**, and dancing till 2am. For reservations or more details, send an email to: president@bangkokstgeorgesoc.org

RUNNING EVENTS

May 20

The **Bangkok Midnight Marathon 2017** gets underway at the stroke of 12, when racers assembled at the **Rama VIII Bridge** set off for a night time run through several old town districts. Runs include the full 42 km marathon, a 21 km half-marathon, a 10 km mini-marathon, and a 5 km micro-marathon. Details about the route, and all registration fees, can be found on the website. www.bangkokmidnightmarathon.com

May 28

The **Samsung Galaxy Thailand Championship 2017** race is touted as the most prestige 10K race in Thailand. Participants will run through the heart of Bangkok's business district, and finish the race where it begins—at **Suphachalasai Stadium**, the oldest national stadium of Thailand (located Bangkok's Pathum Wan District). Registration info is available on the website. www.10kthailandchampionship.com

Benjawan Wisootsat

Born in Thonburi, Benjawan Wisootsat began her career working with an international exhibition contractor company in Thailand. Eventually she migrated to open Optimum, an event management company providing turnkey services for MICE events. However, a love of fine wine, and life's other pleasures, led to the establishment of FIN Wine.

FIN stands for "fabulous is needed". Why did you choose that name?

In my travels around the world I discovered many fabulous things, and I believe that in future people will be more and more looking for more individuality and exclusivity, rather than the mass supplied items—which is why "fabulous is needed". FIN was founded in 2003, and even though wines are not intrinsically part of Thai culture, we have FIN Wine as part of our FIN Collection— FIN Event, FIN Decor, FIN Catering, and FIN Deluxe Travel—and bring them to the market as part of a "fabulous" lifestyle.

What do you look for when choosing a wine to distribute?

FIN is all about exclusivity, therefore we carefully select from the small artisanal boutique wineries around the world. I meet the producers, and taste the wines, and choose what I like. My selections are not just about the tasting notes, but also the dishes that come to mind, and the occasions, climate, and seasons when one might drink the wines. I decide which wines best fit into the FIN wine collection, keeping in mind the clientele in Thailand. We dare to bring wines from unusual countries, and grapes which are not familiar to Thais, into Thailand. In this way we're building up a new culture of wine appreciation for the Thai market, uplifting the wine scene to international levels, in terms of selection.

What do you think of Thailand's consumer wine scene in general?

Looking back over the 14 years since I started my company, I see that I was something of a pioneer. I had to educate the market, explaining that



the wine world is not just red, but also white and rosé, that Austria is not Australia, and that Germany is also famous for wines, not just beer. I see now that the wine scene has grown, and it's especially developed a lot over the past five years.

Are you a fan of natural, organic and bio-dynamic wines?

I would say I have happily indulged myself with these types of wines, hence our selection revolves around these farming philosophies. And when we started our business, the first collection was mostly organic and bio-dynamic. Today, all our range is natural—sustainable, organic, and/or bio-dynamic—and they are grouped under the umbrella of 'FIN Naturally'. However, although these wines might be trendy nowadays, it doesn't mean that all organic, bio-dynamic, or natural wines are good. It's actually not that easy to do nice natural wines.

Who do you think has the best wine cellar in Bangkok?

I would say that there are many interesting wine lists in BKK nowadays.

You can count on wide-ranging, well-curated selections at Mandarin Oriental and L'Atelier de Joel Robuchon, while restaurants like Sühring have an extensive wine list to specifically pair with their cuisine (in this case wines from Germanic countries). For something more friendly and comfortably priced, with an interesting variety of both noble and native grapes, there's Karmakamet diner on Sukhumvit Soi 24 (next to the Emporium).

What are some of your favourite Thai food and wine pairings?

The wine list at Bo.Lan is one to pay attention to, as it is adjusted and changed according to the restaurant's ever-changing food menus. They aren't afraid to offer unusual wines to complement their unique Thai dishes. Customers can feel at ease with the friendly and uncomplicated explanations the serving staff give concerning the food and wines, as the restaurant endeavours to create wonderful new dining experiences.

What are some of your personal favourite hangouts in Bangkok?

Bangkok has many things to offer and I would say there is something new all the time to try. Personally, I love to go to the flower market and work on my flower creations at home. I also love going to some authentic old establishment like Yim Yim, the old Chinese restaurant in Yarawat, or make a trip to Above 11 on Sukhumvit Soi 11, or even catch some live music at Saxophone at Victory Monument. Above all, I like to be spontaneous.

INTERVIEW BY BRUCE SCOTT

www.fin-wine.com



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The Glamorous Life

Business is booming for companies catering to Bangkok's bevy of billionaires



The Ritz-Carlton Residences

While it's true that Bangkok is still a place where you can get noodle soup for a buck, it's also the kind of a place where you can get imported foie gras and Dom Perignon champagne at the drop of a dime (err, well... maybe a tad more than a dime). As more and more money filters through this manic metropolis, more and more businesses see their own profits rising by catering to this growing population of millionaires, and even billionaires.

Basically, if you want it we got it. Interested in the new *Wraith Black Badge* limited edition all-black **Rolls-Royce** (below) which will only set you back a mere B34.9 million? Well, they just arrived in March at the Rolls-Royce showroom on Rama 3 Rd, which is located right next to the **Aston Martin** showroom. Or maybe your tastes veer towards private jets and luxury yachts. Don't worry you'll find those here too—although securing a parking spot may prove difficult.

Bangkok is also home to some of the top-rated restaurants in the world—**Gaggan** and **Nahm** were both recently awarded spots on the 2017 World's 50 Best Restaurants list (see pg. 79)—but rest assured that as your belly fills your wallet will empty. Fine dining establishments that tempt foodies with imported European ingredients and guest appearance by chefs from Michelin-starred restaurants are not letting their fabulous fare go cheaply, as all those truffles and cuts of Wagyu beef don't come cheap.

Visitors to Bangkok will also notice that 5-star premium hotels are in no short supply, and it seems more keep popping up every lunar cycle. The newest kid on the block is the spectacular **Park Hyatt** (1031 Ploenchit Rd), a gleaming glass and steel



Capella Residences

masterpiece of design, with a swooping, sloping, futuristic outer façade. However, even more über-upscale hotels are due to come, including a **Waldorf Astoria** (scheduled to open in 2018).

For the rich residing full-time in Bangkok, luxury living quarters are another steadily growing market. **The Ritz-Carlton** residences at the **MahaNakhon Tower** are some of the most sought after real estate buys in town, but if you can wait until next year that's when **Capella**, one of the world's most prestigious luxury hotel brands, is scheduled to launch a development known as **The Chao Phraya Estate** on the east bank of the city's legendary River of Kings. Promising a whole new level of personalized facilities and upscale services, this will be Bangkok's first Capella property, with 101 guest suites and riverview villas.

Of course, if you're not one of the lucky few to have made millions on tech stocks, or if you weren't born with a silver spoon in your mouth, there's still plenty of affordable pleasures here that a much more meagre amount of money can buy. However, if you've got the cash then make the splash, cuz this town is made for having fun! ■





The Lap of Luxury

If money was truly no object, how would you “spend” a fantasy weekend in Bangkok?

Words by **Dave Stamboulis**

Most months of the year the heat, humidity, traffic, and general chaos of Bangkok make living (or visiting) here a challenge. Yes it’s a great city, and there’s never a dull moment, but cramped living quarters, overheated public transit, and general rising prices, can really wear one down.

Face it, whether you live here or are just passing through, you most likely would—if you could afford it—be relaxing on a scorching hot Bangkok afternoon in an ice cube filled swimming pool while a private butler serves you frozen gin tonics. And while this particular fantasy might not be available in Bangkok (yet), plenty of other luxurious indulgences are, which is why we’ve compiled a list of the most catered, relaxing, and chilled out VIP services this town has to offer. Forget about price tags for once and imagine that money is no object... just take a weekend to pamper yourself, and your significant other, silly.

SATURDAY MORNING: Whether you’ve just arrived at the airport from out of town, or you live here on a regular basis, make navigating Bangkok’s endless traffic snarls a little more pleasant by contacting **Prestige Car Rental**. They can arrange to pick you up in a stretch limousine, equipped with complimentary SIM cards and free WiFi, all for a paltry B30,000 for 24 hour service.

If you think that limo service is too passé, opt instead to drive your own *Porsche Cayman* (B13,000 per day), or heck, go for broke and splurge on a *Lamborghini LP 560* (B50,000 per day), the fanciest steed in Prestige’s fleet.



Lamborghini LP 560



Limousine interior

However, don’t expect to get away with just a few hundred baht fine should you be pulled over for driving in the wrong lane.

www.prestigecarrentalbangkok.com

Next up, hop in your vehicle of choice and drive over to **The Siam Hotel**, Bangkok’s most exclusive lodging. Or, if you’re taking the limo, have them drop you off at the Chao Phraya River (Saphan Taksin bridge) and let the Siam do all the work, ferrying you up the lifeline of old Bangkok on their private shuttle boat, which really lets you appreciate the moniker “Venice of the East,” as well as the hotel itself, which is situated on lush grounds along the river bank in Dusit, far from the chaos and congestion of downtown. Check in to a suave *Pool Villa Riverview* private villa (B41,000 per night, plus another B7,000 in taxes), which comes with its own garden, open-air roof terrace, and private swimming pool. You’ve also got a choice of either Art-Deco, Chinese, Colonial, or Thai decor, depending on which of these four top-end villas you select. www.thesiamhotel.com

Don’t linger too long in your regal quarters though, as you’ve got a busy day ahead, starting off with a bit of wardrobe shopping. First off, ladies will want to get



The Siam's Pool Villa Riverview



dropped off at the glitzy **Central Embassy Mall** to visit the flagship store of **Stretsis**. Now a major player in the world high fashion industry, Stretsis (which is “sisters” spelled backwards) was started by a trio of Thai sisters who brought overseas fashion design school and haute couture internship experiences back home to rock the Thailand design scene, creating dreamy girlish print dresses and other women’s wear that merge retro with modern twists. Fit yourself into a *Cheetah Flamenco dress* (B16,500) from their new 2017 Summer Collection, and top it off with a *Cisco Blazer* (B15,500) for those frigid air-con moments Bangkok is famous for.

www.stretsis.com



Button Up

Meanwhile, gentleman will want to head over to trendy Thonglor (Sukhumvit Soi 55) to pay a visit to **Button Up**, Bangkok’s premier tailor. Their 20 stitch per inch shirts and suits, made with *Loro Piana* and other high end European fabrics (over 100 fabrics to choose from here), ensure you’ll be the best dressed fella in town. The Thonglor flagship store features a dressing room hidden behind a bookcase, with wall to wall mirrors to admire yourself in private. In addition, the personalized fitting and measurement attention is Bangkok’s best, although you will pay for it—with tailored suits running from B20,000 all the way up to B100,000 for the *creme de la creme*.

www.facebook.com/thebuttonup

Despite the fact that you’ve just completely swathed yourself in the finest designer fashions money can buy, you’re going to have to take them all off, because your next stop is one where you won’t even need your wallet, at least while your clothes are off. **Theta State Float** is one of Bangkok’s few floatation tank centres, also known as “sensory relief” tanks (a contrast to their early beginnings back when they were known as “sensory deprivation” tanks, brought to public attention by William Hurt in the classic sci-fi film *Altered States*). Float tanks are soundproof chambers filled with epsom salt water that is heated to body temperature, allowing users to relax and have a peaceful meditative experience. These days, they are one of your few chances to get away from Facebook, smartphones, and any of the stress inducers that come with the daily urban grind. Research has shown that float tank experiences combat jet lag, provide pain relief, and are especially beneficial for pregnant women. They’re even used by professional athletes as tools for positive imaging. Unfortunately, you won’t be able to share this experience with your honey, at least not until after the session. Theta State Float offers both pod style tanks as well as larger rectangular ones with doors, but both are all about the solo experience and letting go. A two-hour float here—B2,800 for a 120 minute session—may be a mere pittance compared to your rental Lamborghini, but the peace of mind is priceless.

www.thetastatefloat.com



Theta State Float

After all this shopping, and meditative reflecting on shopping you must be getting hungry. However, sunsets always take priority over appetite, and besides, you can actually kill two birds with one sky high stone at our next stop, the new **CRU Champagne Bar**. Those with a head for heights have long been making the pilgrimage up to one of Bangkok's top rooftop bars, **Red Sky**, located on the 55th floor of the **Centara Grand Hotel at CentralWorld**, but only those with wallets and an appreciation of the high life are getting three floors higher, taking the private elevator up to CRU, where you can toast the city that stretches out beneath you, cooling down with an array of signature cocktails. Try the *Passion Lady*, with Beefeater gin, mint,



CRU Champagne Bar

lime, passion fruit, and vanilla foam, or the *GH Mumm No.1 Pink Edition* champagne, which is only available in Thailand at CRU.

Or, if you really want your wallet to have a workout, indulge in a bottle of *Bollinger James Bond 007 Spectre Limited Edition* (B29,000), and feast on Yakitori chicken skewers, oysters on the half shell, and Royal Beluga caviar (B7,800), which should tide you both over until dinner. The views here are absolutely jaw dropping, 360° panoramas that take in the entire city—and you won't be getting any higher until the MahaNakhon Tower opens its observatory. www.champagnecru.com

Once the sun has gone down, it's time to sup. View lovers will say that nothing beats dining atop Bangkok rooftops, but hey, you've already been there done that with your drinks, not to mention that joining all the foodies at **Gaggan** and **Nahm** just isn't intimate enough for this truly special weekend. Instead, it's time to head over to **The Table by Chef Pam**, where you are going to be served a themed private dining menu created by Chef Pam, an acclaimed chef, food consultant, and television personality. **Pichaya 'Pam' Uthartharm** is a Le Cordon Bleu graduate who worked for years at Jean Georges, the 3-starred Michelin restaurant in New York, and has regularly featured on the *Top Chef Masters* television series. Smoked meats are a big part of the dining



Table by Chef Pam

experience, and you can choose from 20-hour smoked Wagyu brisket, or 6-hour smoked pork belly and jowl, to go with all of the other courses that Pam dreams up and painstakingly creates. Dinner here runs a minimum of B2,500 a head here, going up to B10,000 depending on what ingredients are used, but hey, this really is a private party and we want only the best. www.bychefpam.com/the-table



It's been a busy day and it's almost time for bed, but this living in style is pretty seductive, so we've got one more stop for a wind-down nightcap. The **ChindAsia Club** is an exclusive gentleman's cigar and networking club (don't worry, it isn't that kind of gentlemen's club, and women



ChindAsia Club

are welcome as well) which features a fully-fitted bar, lounge, library, and cellar, where you can drink single cask whiskies, smoke a Cuban cigar, and enjoy the plush leather furniture. You won't be able to buy entrance for just a night, but you can get a one year membership, either B80,000 for a gold card if you live here (plus B3,200 a month in maintenance fees), or else B16,000 (plus B9,600) if you are coming from out of town. There is a formal dress code here, but with your earlier clothier fittings you will both be the image of perfection. www.chindasiacub.com



Couple's room at Elemis Spa

SUNDAY MORNING: Sleep in and enjoy your villa's private pool, as well as the riverside views and the charms of the Siam. However, skip breakfast because your first stop today is at the lavish **Brasserie Europa**, set in the grandiose **Siam Kempinski Hotel**, boasting an interior of fine European décor with polished marble floors and velvet armchairs. The brasserie is home to the longest Sunday brunch in town, stretching all the way until 5pm. There's free-flow *Louis Roederer Brut Premier* champagne, a stellar assortment of oysters and seafood, the best cold cuts in town, and a dessert room that features a giant chocolate fountain. With free flow champagne and other alcohol, it goes for B3,500 per head. www.kempinski.com



Brasserie Europa

After brunch you'll most likely be too sated to move, but don't worry, there's nothing strenuous ahead. Just make the short walk into the adjoining Siam Paragon shopping mall and head upstairs to the ultracool **Enigma Cinema**. It will cost B3,500 for the two of you to get in here, a fee which certainly isn't based on the movie you are seeing. Rather, it's for the adjustable sofa-bed seating (yes you can fully recline and sleep), the private butler service, the

glass of wine and meal that is served along with the film (a meal which you may or may not have room for), and the massage chairs in the elegant candlelit lounge. www.majorcineplex.com



Enigma Cinema

Your weekend is coming to a close, but don't stop fantasizing yet... you've got one final epic wind-down activity to enjoy, and this one you also get to do together, and without any effort. Head over to the luxurious **St. Regis Hotel** and pop into the **Elemis Spa**, where there is a private couple's treatment suite. Here you can avail yourself of a *Rasul* chamber, where you can enjoy an ancient Arabian bathing ritual that incorporates clay, heat, and steam to help cleanse and exfoliate toxins. The *Anti-Ageing Journey* treatment (B15,800) is one of the city's best—lasting four hours—and includes a lime and ginger salt glow, body sculpting therapy, deep tissue massage, and an anti-ageing facial. www.elemisspabangkok.com

You've got to be positively woozy after all this—cosseted and coddled beyond belief—but you ought to be in superb shape for dealing with Monday. As your fantasy weekend winds down, it's either back to work, or perhaps, if you've really got money to burn, onto another equally lavish destination somewhere else! ■

Aldo's Bistro

A Reflection of your Lifestyle

Renowned French Chef and author Herve Frerard brings his tantalizing cuisine that has been reserved for Thailand's crème de la crème for year to Aldo's Bistro.

Aldo's is a perfect dining venue where French food is accompanied by fine wine selected just for you.

Aldo's
Bistro



The Cascade Club, 7th Floor, 7 Ascott Sathorn Building, South Sathorn Road, Bangkok 10120

RSVP : 02 676 6982 and 02 676 6969

www.cascadeclubandspa.com

  [aldosbistro](https://www.facebook.com/aldosbistro)

Pachyderm Pageant

Bangkok's annual Elephant Polo Tournament is a "big" deal in every way

By **Robin Westley Martin**



From March 9th to 12th this year the 15th edition of the prestigious **King's Cup Elephant Polo Tournament** was held at the **Anantara Riverside Resort**. The annual event—in aid of elephant related charities—is overseen by the **World Elephant Polo Association** (WEPA), which was formed in 1982, in Nepal, at Tiger Tops (where the first elephant polo matches were played). WEPA has strict rules concerning the welfare and care of any of the elephants competing under its auspices, and oversee all polo matches played in both Thailand and Nepal.

The sport was first brought to Thailand by long-term Thai resident **Chris Stafford**, from Sweden, while he was working for Anantara in Hua Hin (where the first King's Cup was staged back in 2001). The Anantara group, who also founded the **Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation** charity, has developed this event over the last 16 years, and today it is one of the most successful charitable pageants in the Kingdom, as well as one of the highlights of Bangkok's social calendar.

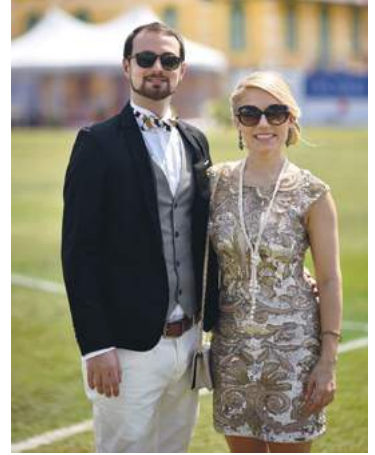
For the last two years the fun and games have been held in Bangkok, on land adjoining the Anantara Riverside Resort, on the banks of the Chao Phraya River. Marquees, tents, entertainment areas, and food stalls spring

magically up to create a carnival-like atmosphere that attendees new and old never fail to enjoy—wining, dining, and cheering on your chosen team.

On day one the event kicks off with a Brahmin blessing ceremony of the elephants, and a traditional Thai dance performance by beautiful young Thai women. This is followed by a gigantic fruit buffet for the elephants, where tons of fruit and veg—laid out on trestle tables—are happily gobbled up by the munching pachyderms.

An elephant eats about 250 kg of food per day, and over the course of the four days the 25 elephants that came down to Bangkok by truck from Surin consumed 7,200 bunches of pineapples, 600 bunches of bananas, 9,000 sticks of sugar cane, and 12 tonnes of elephant grass! Trucks were continually arriving throughout the four days to the private compound of the elephants, away from the noise and crowds. This compound was where the team of vets, and an elephant osteopath from the UK, **Tony Nevin**, took care of all their jumbo needs.

In the afternoon of the first day the first matches are played. The *mahouts* (elephant handlers), do not speak English for the most part, and the players do not speak Thai, but there is an innovative way that they communicate with each other. The mahout wears a shirt



with phonetically printed Thai written on the back so that the players can instruct him to take the elephant forwards, or backwards, and turn left or right.

Day two this year was 'Kid's Day', wherein parties of schoolchildren from Bangkok and further afield came to learn all about elephants at special classes, and had the opportunity to get up close to them. The young visitors included disabled and autistic kids, who were thrilled to meet the gentle giants face to face. Meanwhile, matches continued throughout the day, and the party atmosphere was in full swing.

The third day was 'Ladies Day', informally known as the Thai Ascot. As you might imagine, Bangkok's fairest were in attendance, bedecked in their finery, and showing off their stunning headwear. The dazzle they created outshone even the bright sun that day. And while polo matches again continued throughout the day, there was just as much of a competitive mood leading up to the announcement of the 'Best Dressed (and Hatted) Lady', which was revealed after that evening's fashion show.

The fourth and final day featured live jazz performances, as well as the finalist teams battling it out to be crowned the 2017 champions. There had been 10 teams in the competition, but of course there could have been only one winner. Some of the teams were not really expected to win, especially when going up against experienced powerhouse clubs like *King Power* (champions of the previous two years), and teams such as *Casillero del Diablo*, who had help from Argentine experts, and team *Mekhong*, who had polo playing superstars **Uday** and **Adang Kalaan** playing for them.

But all teams, without fail, gave their best, especially the fiercely competitive *All Blacks* team of Price Waterhouse Coopers, featuring **Olo Brown** and **Charlie 'Don Juan' Riechelmann**. The ten teams comprised 40 players in total, coming from all walks of life—sportsmen, supermodels, celebrities, businessmen, and so on. They come to Thailand once a year to meet up at the King's Cup, and have become much like an extended family, or an exclusive club. They give of their time for free, and are bewildered how they can have so much fun whilst still raising so much money for elephant charities. This year B4,000,000 was raised by the sponsors and the spectators (attendance reached the 5,000 mark). The overall grand total raised, since the tournaments began, now stands at US\$1.4 million, and it has all gone towards helping elephants living in Thailand, and other nearby Asian countries.

Finally, after intense competition, the four day sporting event came to its nail-biting conclusion... a showdown between King Power and Mekhong. It was an exciting final match, and in the last two minutes of the final *chukka* the Kalaan brothers—Uday and Adang—scored three times, thereby winning it 11 to 10 for team Mekhong. The new champions were presented with their winning trophy by Royal Representative Privy Councillor HE Air Chief Marshal **Chalit Pukbhasuk**, and the CEO of the Minor Corporation **William Heinecke**, along with his wife **Kathy**.

The spectacular King's Cup Elephant Polo Tournament is now firmly entrenched as a 'must see' in Thailand. Clear space in your calendar now for next year—same elephant time, same elephant place! ■

Bangkok's Best Baubles

A dazzling demonstration of rich Thai heritage can be found at the newly opened Siam Heritage Gems Museum

By **Gary Anthony Rutland**



For most of us, buying a Premier League team, or flying our Lear Jet to Nova Scotia to see the total eclipse of the sun, is never going to be an option. But for many of us a touch of luxury is most often found in a few select pieces of jewellery, whether they be made of treasured gold or silver, or feature precious gemstones.

Thailand has a long history with jewellery, including gold-crafting and goldsmith techniques originally introduced by Hindu settlers some 2,000 years ago, and one of the most vibrant gem markets in the world, a market which continues up to the present day. In addition to locally sourced gems—like the famous dazzling red rubies from Chanthaburi known as ‘Siamese Rubies’, and sapphires sourced from Khanchanaburi, Phetchabun and Sukhothai (among other locales)—Thailand’s centralized location in Southeast Asia has made it an ideal gateway for gemstone trading.

However, it can all seem a bit of a murky world to outsiders, full of frauds, fakes and forgeries, so a visit to the **Siam Heritage Gems Interactive Edutainment Museum** presents an ideal opportunity to shine some light on what is one of Thailand’s largest and most glamorous

export earners. Opened to the general public on the 15th February this year, the museum’s principal purpose is to preserve and promote the Kingdom’s jewellery-related heritage and craftsmanship.

This rich history is fittingly represented by a state-of-the-art 21st century building that is a gem in its own right; starting with its space age exterior that grabs the eye, and continuing throughout the entire interior. The humungous 5 million baht golden elephant sculpture that greets you as you enter the glittering spacious atrium is based on a style from the early Ayutthaya kingdom, and depicts two elephants walking in Thailand’s main river—the Chao Phraya—and symbolizes eternal fortune and prosperity.

As a visitor, your tour begins with a visit into the almost, but not quite as impressive 15m-diameter cinema dome to experience a 360-degree surround-sound short film. This movie takes you through the story of the natural creation of gold and precious gems, the often back-breaking labour involved in finding them, and on to the craftsmanship that goes into the end product (including the part such jewellery plays in Thai historical culture—both royal and theatrical). It’s a fitting and



obvious place to begin a journey that winds through the museum's five themed rooms, each of which adds to the complete story.

Room 1 recounts the **History of Jewellery**, from the Bead Age to the Bronze Age and on to the Gold Age—some 6,000 years B.C.—when Thailand became known as *Suvarnabhumi* or “land of gold”. This period was followed by the Gemstone Age, when gems became the “new gold”, which leads us into the current Refining Age, where manufacturing and polishing techniques have reached a new level of perfection (Thailand's craftsmen, famous throughout the world, excel at both these skills).

Room 2 is the **Reflection Room**, which uses holograms to help demonstrate the different types of cuts and shapes into which a gemstone can be fashioned. There are numerous styles, including brilliant, emerald, and cabochon cuts, as well as round, heart and pear shapes. Examples of these, and many other types, are shown and explained in detail.

Room 3 is called the **Chamber of Virtue** and focuses on the Nopparat belief system which Thai people have subscribed to for aeons. The nine gemstones—ruby, moonstone, zircon, emerald, yellow sapphire, diamond, blue sapphire, garnet, and chrysoberyl—are the symbol of the nine celestial beings, and are believed to bestow great fortune on their owners. Thus they are frequently used for religious and royal celebrations, decorations, and insignias.

Room 4 showcases the stunningly beautiful **Siamgems Tiara of the Lady**, featuring the luminous scarlet Siamese

Rubies highly regarded as a royal adornment of Queens around the world. After viewing the tiara, screens on either side of the showcase are drawn back to reveal several workers busy cleaning, repairing, and making various other pieces of jewellery.

The fifth and final room is a comprehensive history and journey through every aspect of jewellery making—from the initial design, to cutting, framing, and mounting. Here you can read the historical timelines detailing the evolution of design, along with the changes in fashions that have taken place down the ages. You can also see the tools used at every stage of the design and manufacturing process and, at the end, use an interactive screen that allows you to design your own piece of jewellery and send it to your home e-mail.

Although it's located quite far from the downtown core, this museum is still a glittering addition to Bangkok's cultural landscape, and one that sheds an interesting and informative light on a glamorous part of Thailand's multi-faceted heritage—both past and present. It's well worth an afternoon of anyone's time, especially for those who have a keen interest in Thai culture and history. ■

Siam Heritage Gems Interactive Edutainment Museum

234 Pradithmanutham Rd.

Open daily: noon-5pm (last entry 4pm)

Tel: 02 949 9500

www.siamgemsheritage.com

Affordable Luxury

Below Eleven ice cream keeps the quality high and the prices reasonable

By Julia Offenberger

A tasteful example of how luxury doesn't necessarily have to be expensive comes in the form of the locally produced French artisan ice cream brand **Below Eleven**, whose quality product is not just reserved for a small elite.

Unsatisfied with this city's ice cream options, almost all of which are highly processed, **Hervé Mouly**—a long-term Bangkok resident, loving father, passionate foodie, and self-confessed sweet tooth—set out on a quest to produce his own, better, version of this cool creamy dessert (at first it was just for the benefit of his two children).

With an admirable determination, the French native equipped himself with the best ice cream machine, the best teachers—he appointed some of France's most



Hervé Mouly

prestigious chefs—and of course, the best ingredients. All these "bests", mixed with Hervé's perfectionist tendencies, resulted in some pretty delicious ice cream. In the beginning he produced five kilograms of vanilla ice cream every day for 400 days, in order to achieve the perfect taste, optimal texture, and longest shelf life. His delicious

experiments quickly made their way around the city and, encouraged by positive feedback, Hervé eventually turned his passion into a business, which led to the birth of Below Eleven in 2014.

The name is a reference to the ideal temperature to eat ice cream—at minus 11 degrees Celsius (which coincidentally equals 11 degrees Fahrenheit). But it's not just a serving suggestion temperature that makes Hervé's ice cream so special. As opposed to most ice creams on the market nowadays—including popular Italian gelatos, which use powder as the main flavour agent—Below Eleven is completely natural, and made of only real and high-quality ingredients, such as Valrhona dark chocolate from France, and fresh French Tahitian vanilla beans (which sell for about 600 Euro per kilo). It's also free from any artificial additives, food colouring and preservatives, and the brand's sorbets contain up to 70 percent of fresh fruits, reducing the sugar and water portion to a minimum.



Of course, using only the best ingredients makes pricing a challenge, but Chef Hervé is determined to keep his product affordable for a majority of people. "I want to be the Ferrari of ice cream," he says. "Of course it's not cheap, but for the quality we deliver it's very inexpensive. We want to do a luxury product, but at a very reasonable price."

And, dare we say, it succeeds on both counts. Private customers have the option of purchasing an 85 ml single serve cup for B129, or the 473 ml pint, priced at B489. Offering both ice creams and sorbets, there's a selection of about 10 regular flavours, as well as certain special editions. The general flavour palette revolves around classic French style, such as the signature vanilla ice cream, whereas certain other flavours have been adapted to local palettes. One such example is the March special edition of *Coeur de Guanaja* chocolate sorbet.

"Thai people seem to love dark chocolate [ice cream]," explains Chef Hervé, "so we make a chocolate sorbet which is extra strength. For me personally, it's not what I prefer because I like sweeter things, but people here seem to love it!"

The ice creams are produced at a factory in Samut Prakan, and available at various gourmet markets across Bangkok, including Siam Paragon, EmQuartier, and Central Food Hall Chitlom (and select locations outside of the city as well). At the end of last year, Below Eleven also launched a free express home delivery throughout Bangkok, and this more direct sales approach also helps to inform and educate customers about quality ice cream, while making sure the cooling chain is not broken (you should never thaw then refreeze ice cream). In addition, the brand is also available at several hotels, gourmet shops, cafés, and restaurants, including **Aldo's Bistro** on Sathorn Rd—which makes sense as that restaurant's recently returned partner-chef **Hervé Frerard** is also Below Eleven's official brand ambassador. ■

www.below11.com



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MARRIOTT RESORT
HUA HIN

Trendy Thong Lor

A walk through one Bangkok's hippest upscale neighbourhoods

By Julia Offenberger

Officially called Sukhumvit Soi 55, the stretch of road connecting Sukhumvit and Phetchaburi Roads is commonly known as **Soi Thong Lor**, and it serves as the main thoroughfare for one of Bangkok's trendiest neighbourhoods. It's a densely packed mix of cool cafés, chic restaurants, stylish bars, hi-end community malls, upscale hotels, and luxury condo developments. And with all this choice at their fingertips, it's not hard to see why this area is so popular with the city's young urban elite. Unfortunately, for those who are living and/or working in this area and struggling to get by, the recent announcement that the government would shut down most of the street food stalls on this strip comes as sad news. But for those on the opposite side of the monetary spectrum, the growth in and around this posh enclave just promises more and more opportunity for expensive indulgence.

The area is best reached by SkyTrain, getting off at the **Thong Lo** station of the Sukhumvit BTS line. But before heading onto Soi Thonglor itself, there are a couple of places close by which are worth a visit. If you're looking



Octave Rooftop Lounge & Bar

for an upscale hotel to stay, walk over to Sukhumvit Soi 57 where the **Bangkok Marriott Hotel Sukhumvit** offers both luxurious long- and short-term accommodation. But even if you're not checking in, the hotel's beautiful 45th floor **Octave Rooftop Lounge & Bar** makes a fantastic spot to watch the sunset, as it boasts 360 degree vistas of the neighbourhood. Another gem in this area is the French restaurant **The Gardens of Dinsor**, which sits in a beautiful mansion amidst an oasis of lush greenery (located between Sukhumvit Sois 59 and 61).

To the west of Soi Thong Lor sits **Bo.Lan**, another exceptional eatery. Located a short walk up Sukhumvit Soi 53, this gourmet Thai restaurant puts a focus on seasonal and local ingredients, some of which they grow on-site. Of course, Thai restaurants are also plentiful on Soi Thong



Bo.Lan

Lor itself, and some notable must-try venues near the foot of this strip include **SoulFood Mahanakorn**, a hip eatery serving authentic Thai food with some imaginative twists, and **Supanniga Eating Room**, a family restaurant offering hard-to-find dishes from the provinces of Trat and Chantaburi.

International dining options are also on offer along this southern part of Soi Thong Lor, namely the French bakery **Maison Eric Kayser**, famous for its croissants and baguettes, and the Japanese restaurant **Kitaohji**, which specializes in *Kaseki* cuisine—meticulously prepared and beautifully presented multi-course meals, the Japanese equivalent of "*haute cuisine*".

Those in need of a rest while sauntering up this thoroughfare should stop by the recently opened **Grande Centre Point Sukhumvit 55** for some pampering treatment at the hotel's **Let's Relax** spa. In addition to numerous soothing treatments, the spa is also home to Thailand's largest onsen, boasting five mineral pools, four hot pools, and one cold pool. Art lovers, meanwhile, can pop into **Ardel's Third Place Gallery**—on the corner of Thong Lor Soi 10—a sleek contemporary art space, showcasing a

variety of established and emerging local artists alike.

This Soi 10 junction area is also a place where night owls can find almost limitless nightlife options—from the fairytale-themed jazz bar **The Iron Fairies**, to the cocktail bar/shisha lounge fusion at **Glam**, to the mix-and-match drink-and-dine selections at the recently opened **Society Fair**



The Iron Fairies



Touche Hombre

complex. There's also a couple of perpetually busy dance clubs nearby, including **Demo**, and **Do Not Disturb (DND)**, or you can make a trip down the significantly quieter Thong Lor Soi 13 and seek out the fabulous French-American gastropub **Little Beast**.

This neighbourhood is also home to several community malls and lifestyle complexes, the two most currently popular being **The Commons** and **72 Courtyard**. Both offer an array of food and drink venues, and among the most popular at The Commons are brunch favourite



Little Bao

Roast, craft beer bar **Beer Cap**, rib masters **Meat & Bones**, and cocktail bar **Track 17**, whose interior resembles a vintage train cabin. Meanwhile, 72 Courtyard boasts **Lady Brett**, a casual tavern focused on simple and quality comfort food, and **Little Bao**, the Bangkok outlet of Hong Kong-based Chinese burger restaurant and brainchild of Chef **May Chow** (recently named

Asia's Best Female Chef). There's also some specialized drink spot of note, including **Touche Hombre**, a Mexican bar and restaurant with a large selection of tequila and mezcals, and **Evil Man Blues**, offering craft cocktails in a jazzy setting.

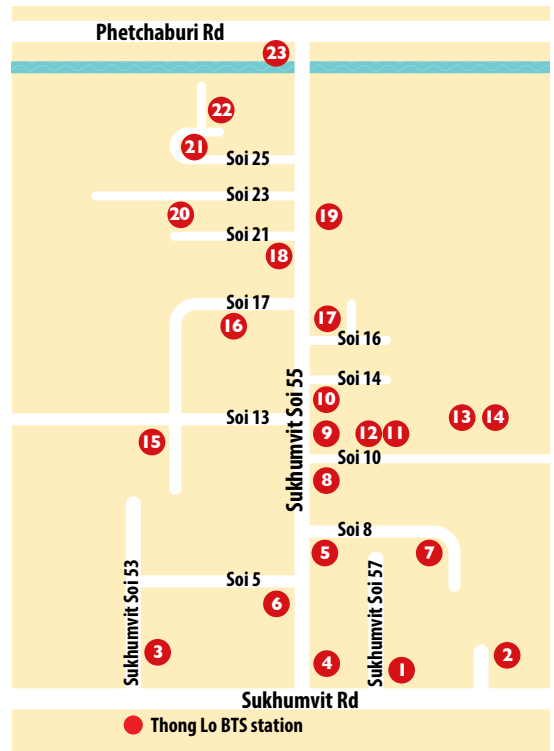
Continuing further north along Sukhumvit Soi 55 be sure to drop in at **Viva 21** (just south of Thong Lor Soi 21), an understated hipster hangout brought to you by the team behind Viva 8 at Chatuchak Market. If you cross the road and walk a little ways up you'll reach **Bottoms Up**, a wine and beer bistro bar serving an array of European-style dishes, but if you stay on the west side of the street and walk down Thong Lor Soi 23 you'll come across **Honmono Sushi**, a high-end Japanese restaurant which sources its fish directly from the Tsukiji fish market in Japan. Meanwhile, the next alley up—Thong Lor Soi 25—is home to **Bronx Liquid Parlour**, a cooler-than-thou cocktail bar, and **Pacamara Specialty Coffee Lab**, a café and coffee academy of the boutique coffee roasters.

Upon reaching the Petchaburi end of Soi Thong Lor, you'll find—just over the canal—the beautiful **Metropole Hotel**, home to the independently run on-site spa **Prim Nature Retreat**, as well as the bar and restaurant **Chow**.

It's another ideal accommodation location if you want to stay close to this happening district and do another entirely different walking tour the next day. ■



Metropole Hotel



- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Bangkok Marriott Hotel Sukhumvit | 12. Society Fair |
| 2. The Gardens of Dinsor | 13. Demo |
| 3. Bo.Lan | 14. Do Not Disturb |
| 4. SoulFood Mahanakorn | 15. Little Beast |
| 5. Supanniga Eating Room | 16. The Commons |
| 6. Maison Eric Kayser | 17. 72 Courtyard |
| 7. Kitahoji | 18. Viva 21 |
| 8. Grande Centre Point Sukhumvit 55 | 19. Bottoms Up |
| 9. Ardel's Third Place Gallery | 20. Honmono Sushi |
| 10. The Iron Fairies | 21. Bronx Liquid Parlour |
| 11. Glam | 22. Pacamara Specialty Coffee Lab |
| | 23. Metropole Hotel |



High-Class Castaway

Unplug and unwind on Koh Munnork private island

Words and photos by **Bruce Scott**

Beautiful beaches in Thailand are not hard to find, but beautiful beaches without hordes of souvenir hawkers, jet ski operators, and loads of beer-swilling sunburnt tourists are a little harder to come by. That's where **Epikurean Hotels and Resorts** enters the picture. The company takes its name from Epicurus, an ancient Greek philosopher who believed that a life lived in pleasure was equal to that of the gods. With this pampering protocol in mind the group has set up several tropical vacation getaway spots in Thailand, but for Bangkok city dwellers it's their long-running **Koh Munnork Private Island** resort in nearby Rayong province that's easiest to get to.

The island itself is tiny—less than a square kilometer in size—and the resort property encompasses 18 acres, or about one fifth of the island (leaving the remaining area untouched). There are a total of 22 bungalow accommodations to choose from, starting with seven 40 sq.m *Beachfront Bungalows*, which are decorated in a fun and funky style and provide direct beach access. There are also 12 *Garden View Bungalows*, measuring 45 sq.m, which are perfect for families with young children, and three *Garden Cottages* (also 45 sq.m) decorated in a fisherman's cottage style.

The rooms all come with luxury amenities, including private balcony or terrace, queen size beds, drinking water, air conditioning, hot and cold running water, toiletries, hair dryer, beach towels, umbrellas, and much, much more. However, be aware that there are no mini-fridges or flatscreen TVs in the rooms, and Wi-Fi is only available in the restaurant area, although that's about as close to "roughing it" as you'll get here. But if you do want some in-room entertainment, come prepared by

downloading some movies to your laptop, and bring a set of portable speakers too.

Of course, the absence of distractions such as TVs and in-room Wi-Fi is part of the resort's general philosophy to create a natural place for guests to truly get away from it all, leaving all gadgets and gizmos behind and becoming one with the environment. And it's hard not to embrace that idea once you get your first glimpse of the crystal clear waters and white sand beaches that ring the resort. This is a place that's custom made for taking it easy, and although the kind and courteous resort staff can organize activities for guests—including snorkeling, kayaking, and trekking around the island—it's just as tempting to spend the entire afternoon relaxing on a shaded sala or in one of the many hammocks, simply reading a book or watching the waves roll in.

Once you've booked your stay at the resort you just need to get yourself to the pier at **Laem Tan** (about 30 minutes east of the Koh Samet pier, and just over three hours travel from Bangkok) in time for the afternoon ferry. It takes about 45 minutes to travel across **Klaeng Bay**, and once the ferryboat reaches the waters surrounding Koh Munnork, a smaller passenger dinghy pulls up alongside the big boat to shuttle passengers onto the beachfront landing point. Here guests are greeted with a cold drink and a warm smile, and the reception staff dutifully makes sure everyone gets escorted to their proper chambers.

We had booked ourselves in as 'full-boarders' (a room package inclusive of breakfast, lunch, and dinner), and once we unpacked and settled in it was just past 3pm—meaning we still had a few hours to kill before the evening meal service began at 6:30pm. It was easy to while away the time by simply wandering the beach, wading into the



A perfect landing



Beachfront bungalows



American breakfast



Prancing peacock

cool waters, or trying to get a fabulous photo of one of the island's magnificent peacocks. These dazzling birds, a favourite of the island's owner, were brought here years ago and are allowed to wander the island at will. And while their multi-coloured plumage may be one of nature's most spectacular works of art, their bizarre, high-pitched screeching warble—half-way between a cat in heat and a baby crying—is absolutely startling the first time you hear it. It's also worth noting that peacocks aren't the only critters on the island, as visitors are allowed to bring pets (although dog owners are required to keep their pets leashed and pick up after them as well).

By the time dinner rolled around we found ourselves, along with the resort's numerous other guests, seated on an outdoor wooden deck overlooking the ocean, preparing to tuck into our set menu meal (although guests can also opt to purchase individual seafood specialties made to order from a daily rotating menu). The food did not disappoint, and our meal of Thai specialties—BBQ shrimp, pork with green beans, spicy seafood salad, chicken soup, fried fish, and white rice—was as delicious as it was filling. And as we walked back to our cozy beachfront cabin on that warm and breezy evening, it was easy to see why this little slice of heaven has become such a popular hideaway.

As the sun rose on our second day in paradise we started things off with an early morning swim, followed by a set breakfast—served from 8:30am till 10am—back at the resort's oceanfront restaurant. Overnight guests can choose the American style eggs-and-bacon brekkie, or opt for the Asian style rice porridge morning meal. There's also serve yourself coffee, tea, and fresh fruit juices available.

After breakfast we did some more swimming—both in the ocean and in the swimming pool—and also took advantage of the complimentary snorkelling gear provided by the resort (there's some coral formations just off shore). We also toyed with the idea of doing a trek around the island, but the mid-day heat made reading and relaxing in one of the shaded outdoor salas much more inviting.

By 1pm we were ready for our final meal, the set lunch which that day consisted of chicken soup, stir-fried vegetables, a wonderful red curry with pork, and a Thai omelette with shrimp. It was a lovely finish to a fabulous weekend.

After returning to our room to pack up and get our bags ready for transport back to the waiting ferry, due to leave at 3pm, we made one last trip to the restaurant lounge for a final celebratory cocktail (alcoholic drinks, fruit juices, coffee, and other beverages are available throughout the day for purchase). We toasted a weekend well spent, and began planning for a possible return. ■

ABOUT EPIKUREAN

EpiKurean Hotels & Lifestyle offers consultancy, development, and project management services for high-end city hotels, resorts and residential villa projects. The group is currently managing three properties in Thailand, including Koh Munnork Private Island, and the Chantaramas resort and Sunset Hill Boutique Resort (both in Koh Phangan). www.epikureanresorts.com

On the Right Track

An ultra-lavish rail journey aboard the Eastern & Oriental Express

Words by **Joe Cummings/CPA Media** Photos by **Megan Rogers**

Railroad stations in Southeast Asia are often exciting and mysterious, or at the very least historic. The one in Singapore, however, is none of these. Established at Singapore's northern tip in 2011, Woodlands Train Checkpoint is little more than a transit facility for rail travelers who need to complete Malaysian and Singaporean immigration and customs formalities before boarding a shuttle across Johor–Singapore Causeway, a kilometer-long bridge spanning Johor Strait between Singapore and peninsular Malaysia.

For today's international passengers on KTM, Malaysia's state railway, any train journey begins or ends at JB Sentral, an ultra-modern terminal at the southernmost point of the KTM West Coast Line in Malaysia's Johor Baru. There is one exception, however, one international passenger rail service that still operates out of Singapore. It's also the only service that travels between all three nations—Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand—without a change of train. Woodlands may not be the most historic or atmospheric rail facility in the region, but it plays host to the **Eastern & Oriental Express**, the most lavish and well-appointed train anywhere in Southeast Asia.

When I arrive on the platform after passing through dual-country customs and immigration, I'm the only passenger in sight, since I've taxied directly from Singapore's Changi Airport after my brief flight from Bangkok. Other E&O passengers will arrive by bus from the 1887-vintage Raffles Singapore, a decidedly more historic gathering point, but because my flight arrived a half hour later than scheduled, I've skipped the planned check-in at the hotel so as not to risk missing the train's 3pm departure.

I take the opportunity to admire the gleaming, green-and-gold-painted carriages, majestically aligned along on the tracks behind an idling KTM engine. The exterior of two cars in the middle exhibit a stunning rolling canvas called *The Koi Pond*, hand-painted by Singaporean street artist **Rajesh Kumar**. The whimsical collection of brightly colored koi fish encompasses the roofs as well as the sides of the train (the cars were returned to their original color scheme at the end of April).

Soon my fellow passengers arrive, and the smiling uniformed E&O staff escort us onto the waiting train. Each car has its own 24-hour carriage attendant. Mine is a young Thai man named Monthian, who suggests I call him by his nickname Monty.

Monty leads me up the train steps and down the narrow corridors—when I meet someone coming from the opposite direction, we have to press our bodies to the



carriage walls to pass more easily—to my *Pullman Twin* cabin. It's a veritable jewel box, paneled in cherrywood and elm burr, with intricate marquetry and fine upholstery commissioned from **Jim Thompson Fabrics**. The hand-tufted carpets, I later learn, come from Thai rugmakers, while the tasseled window treatments are crafted by Malaysian embroiderers. The en-suite bathroom is large enough for two not-too-large adults to navigate between toilet, sink, and shower, and amply supplied with fluffy white towels and Bulgari toiletries.

Luggage storage is limited to a small overhead rack, while a half-meter-wide wardrobe can hang four to five outfits at most. My only dilemma is where to put my acoustic guitar. It won't fit on the rack or in the wardrobe, so I lean it against a built-in table beneath the window, leaving just enough room to open the bathroom door.

Two other cabin classes are available, the larger *State Cabin* and larger-still *Presidential Cabin*, both of which offer two single beds at floor level. For solo passengers, the *Pullman Single* offers a single bed at floor level.

Monty explains that he'll personally deliver breakfast to my cabin each morning, and a high tea set in the late afternoon. Lunch and dinner, he says, will be taken in the dining cars, of which there are two on this journey.

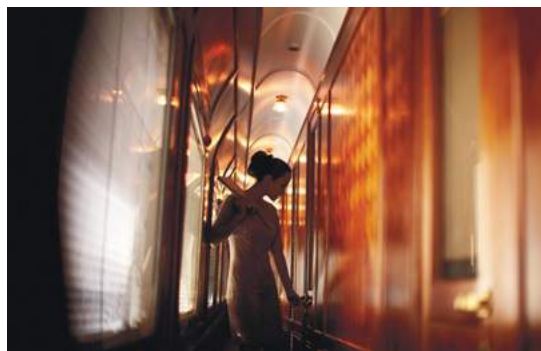
After Monty leaves and I've unpacked, I make my way to the *Observation Car* at the back of the train. The forward section of the car is outfitted with a spacious wood-paneled bar, conveniently open day and night and offering the only Wi-Fi on the train. I opt for the open-air, teak-floored verandah in the rear to take in the scenery while fully enveloped in the tropical air.

Only a few kilometers north of JB Sentral, the Malaysian cityscape gives way to an uninterrupted wall of greenery. I've chosen to do the E&O trip from Singapore to Bangkok rather than vice versa so that I can experience the southern reach of the Malay Peninsula during daylight hours, and I'm not disappointed. Natural rainforest alternates with the ordered patterns of rubber and oil palm

plantations, and from the platform of the fast-moving train, the landscape takes on the flickering character of 1930s cinema, accompanied by a rhythmic wheels-on-rail score which combined together evoke a strongly hypnotic effect. Somehow I feel like Lord Greystoke, vacillating between civilization and the call of primitive urges.

After a spectacular sunset, I break the spell to walk from car to car till I reach the two dining carriages. Passengers alternate from one to the other over the two-night Singapore-Bangkok journey, while in the three-night Bangkok-Singapore trip, a third dining car is added. For my first evening, I'm seated in the colonial-themed *Adisorn*, which features elegant elm paneling bordered with exquisite inlaid marquetry.

Chef de cuisine **Yannis Martineau** has helmed the 12-square-meter E&O galley for nine years, combining local ingredients and flavors with techniques from his French fine dining background. I enjoy a starter of prawn



and green mango salad with chilled tomato soup, followed by braised beef cheeks with bak kut teh herbs, sauteed apricot bao mushrooms, light potato mousseline, and bok choy, accompanied by a well-balanced Côtes du Rhône recommended by the *maitre d'*. The meal is served on distinctive chinaware, silver cutlery and fine European crystal, and as a dining experience it's equal to just about anything I've had at five-star standalone restaurants in Bangkok or Singapore. I write in my notes, "Worth the trip for the food alone."

Before heading back to my cabin I stop off at the *Bar Car*, where 75-year-old Chinese-Italian pianist **Peter Consigliere** is entertaining passengers with his thousand-song repertoire. Pete has been playing piano on the E&O for the last two decades, clocking in well over 1,800,000 kilometers.

Although Pete later tells me he's classically trained, most of the music he plays dates from the 50s and 60s. He's extremely adept at fielding requests, one minute playing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" for British passengers, the next "I Yoh Yoh Samy", a Tamil song, for an Indian couple. On the second evening, Pete graciously invites me to join him on guitar for a brief blues and jazz jam. Naturally we play Robert Johnson's "Love in Vain", featuring the enigmatic line "The blue light was my baby, and the red light was my mind."

When I finally get back to my cabin after two or three too many Manhattans, I find that Monty has magically transformed the library-like cubicle into a cozy bedroom, complete with fluffed pillows and fresh flowers. As sleeping goes, nothing beats spending the night on a moving train, and my soul quickly hits the astral rails.

The following morning the train stops in **Kuala Kangsar**, in northern Malaysia, for a guided excursion of **Ubudiah Mosque**, the **Royal Museum of Perak**, and the **Sultan Shah Gallery**. It's my first time in this historic town, and I thoroughly enjoy learning about the local sultanate and taking in the alluring fusion of Malay vernacular and British colonial architecture found at all three attractions.

After cruising up the tracks through Thailand—a landscape I'm already familiar with, so I spend much of the day reading and napping in my cabin—we stop in **Kanchanaburi** at the iconic **Death Railway Bridge**, also known as the **Bridge on the River Kwai**, after the 1952 Pierre Boulle novel and 1957 film of the same name. The bridge was one of hundreds of such spans along the Thailand-Burma Railway, which ran 415 km from Ban Pong in Thailand to Thanbyuzayat in Burma, and was built by the Imperial Japanese Army during the second World War using Allied prisoners of war and Asian forced labour. Tens of thousands of them died building a railway that was never used by the Japanese before their 1945 defeat.





After snapping pics of the bridge from the riverbank, we board a barge to cruise beneath the span while historian **Rod Beattie** from the Thailand-Burma Railway Centre delivers a brief and highly informative lecture on the bridge-related events of World War II. We dock at the center, where we spend an hour appreciating the educational, and at times quite moving, interactive displays.

Before re-boarding the train, our hired tour bus takes us to one of two Allied war cemeteries to walk amid the hundreds of graves, each marked by a simple brass plaque engraved with the name, rank, and regiment of the deceased, his age and date of death, and a brief individualized message from surviving family. One that gets to me reads, "A vacant chair, an empty place, how we miss his loving face."

I'm glad when the train is moving again. Kanchanburi's ubiquitous sugarcane fields giving way to tacky provincial Thai towns. Finally, the increasing density of modern buildings interspersed with tattered slums signals our Bangkok entry.

I sigh as the elegant bubble of luxury sidles into chaotic, century-old **Hua Lamphong Railway Station**, said to host an average of 60,000 people a day. Would it be OK if I stayed on the train when it takes off in the opposite direction? ■

Trips aboard the luxurious Eastern & Oriental Express start from US\$2,410 per person, including all meals and scheduled excursions.

www.belmond.com/luxury-trains



Stupa for keeping the holy ashes of Buddha at Kakuouzan Nittai-ji (Japan-Thailand Temple), Nagoya

On the Japanese

In recent decades the **Japanese** have descended in droves to visit, live, and work Thailand. Japanese enclaves have been founded by businessmen, salary men, housewives, and students all over the country—from their mega-companies and factories to golf courses, the *izakaya* (gastropubs), and the pleasure parlours along Thaniya and Sukhumvit Roads. However, the first Japanese ‘Floating World’ landed on Thai shores long ago, establishing a history through diplomatic, commercial, military, and romantic liaisons for centuries.

In the late 16th century, when the Japanese government permitted the Japanese to trade overseas, the ‘Red Seal’ ships—Japanese armed merchant sailing ships with red-sealed letters issued by the early Tokugawa shogunate—came and fostered commerce in Ayutthaya. The bonds between Siam and Japan were strengthened through these trade ties, and communications between the kings and the shoguns. Siamese exports consisted of lead, tin, ceramics, sappan wood for using as dye, and forest products. The Siamese would exchange for Japanese silver and handicrafts such as swords, lacquered boxes, and paper.

Like other foreigners, Ayutthayan kings allowed the Japanese to settle

outside the city wall. Thus a Japanese community of merchants, mercenaries, and Catholic convert exiles thrived in **Baan Yiipun**, the Japanese settlement, situated in Koh Rian sub-district on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River. At its peak, in the early 17th century, the inhabitants numbered around 1,500.

The Japanese were also accepted into a small army of **King Songtham’s** personal bodyguards because of their martial expertise and quality swords. They were organized under *Krom Asaa Yiipun*, a ‘Department of Japanese Volunteers’. One of them was **Yamada Nagamasa**, who lived in Siam for over 15 years. Born in 1590 in Shizuoka, Japan, the adventurous Yamada arrived in Ayutthaya and established himself as a trustworthy trader, warrior, and eventual leader of the Japanese community.

Yamada also supported King Songtham’s military campaigns by heading a Japanese army flying the Japanese flag. He rose to prominence from the rank of *Kuhn*, low Thai nobility, to *Ok-ya*, a senior noble. He was eventually titled *Ok-ya Senaphimuk* and became the governor of Nakhon Sri Thammarat. He travelled back to Japan a few times and died in Siam in 1630, from being poisoned by **King Prasart Thong’s** emissary.

After Yamada’s death, King Prasart Thong (who usurped the throne) and the authorities in Ayutthaya were worried that the Japanese had become too involved in the Siamese economy and gained too much influence. They ordered the Japanese to be expelled or killed. The colony went through an upheaval but was not allowed to return to Japan on penalty of death because of *Sokaku*, the period of national isolation. Most were killed while some, along with the survivors of Yamada’s army, escaped to Cambodia. Upon hearing the news, **Tokugawa Iemitsu**, shogun of Japan, cut off relations with Siam. In the end, however, the Japanese who remained in Ayutthaya and were not killed were given tracts of land.

The next interesting yet harrowing episode of Japanese-Thai relationship came during **World War II**. Thailand

officially adopted a neutral position until it was invaded and occupied by Japan in 1941. In the beginning, the Japanese Empire pressured the Thai government to allow the passage of Japanese troops to invade British-held Malaya and Burma. Despite fierce fighting in Southern Thailand, the resistance lasted only a matter of hours before ending in a ceasefire. The Thai government under **General Plaek Phibunsongkhram** considered it preferable to co-operate with the Japanese.

A mutual offensive-defensive alliance pact between the two countries was signed. The agreement gave the Japanese full access to Thai weaponry, railways, roads, airfields, naval bases, barracks, warehouses, and communication systems. To promote greater military and economic co-operation, Japan stationed 150,000 troops on Thai soil and built the infamous ‘Death Railway’, or **Thailand-Burma Railway**, using Asian labourers and Allied prisoners of war.

The legacy of war not only spawned traumatic remnants of the railway—the ‘Bridge over the River Kwai’, and the war cemetery in Kanchanaburi—but also a famous Thai novel *Khu Karma* (The Ill-Fated Couple). The book portrays Angsumalin, a proudly patriotic Thai woman, in a conflicting relationship with Kobori, an Imperial Japanese navy officer during the period. Akin to *Madam Butterfly* with a twist, it was adapted into TV series and films numerous times.

After the dust of battles had settled, commerce took over. Loving foreign things, Thais happily consume and adopt all things Japanese—from sushi to anime. We admire Japanese discipline, order, courteous manners, and deference for traditions and society. Nowadays Thai tourists flock to Japan and gawk over sakura blossoms while Japanese tourists in Thailand are amazed at the charming chaos. Neither country seems to be encumbered by historical baggage. Buddhism has influenced both countries, perhaps playing a more overt role in Thailand than Japan. Both royal families also hold great respect in each society, thus the mutual admiration and fascination never seems to end. ■

Tom’s Two Satang



Join Bangkok-born but internationally bred aesthete Dr. Tom Vitayakul as he gives his own unique take on Thailand and its capital. Each month he tackles a different aspect of the local culture—from art and festivals to 21st-century trends—in a lighthearted yet learned manner.

Second Chances

A clutch of massage centers in Chiang Mai are staffed by ex-convicts who are like real life Thai versions of the Orange Is the New Black characters

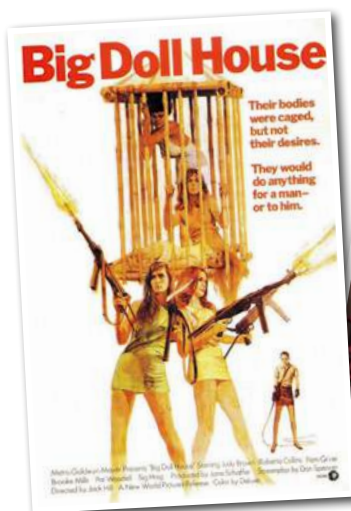
By Jim Algie

When my hormones began running riot in the late 1970s and early 1980s, women-in-prison movies were still a sub-genre of sexploitation (read: softcore porn) cinema. Movies like *Chained Heat* and *Reform School Girls* (starring **Wendy O. Williams**, the late singer of the Plasmatics) epitomized a genre where the jailbirds lounged around in lingerie, so they could tear them off each other in catfights and lesbian encounters. Adding insults and injuries to this volatile mix was another stock character: the sadistic female warden dressed to chill as a Nazi dominatrix.

In these films, the plots were as flimsy as the inmates' lingerie, and the women's main desire was less for freedom than to be ravaged by men, as typified on a movie poster for *The Big Doll House*: "Their bodies were caged but not their desires. They would do anything for a man, or to him."

Much more recently, the Netflix series, *Orange Is the New Black*, created by female producer **Jenji Kohan**—based on the memoir of a female ex-con, **Piper Kerman**, and predominantly starring a female cast—has trashed and mocked many of these stereotypes. Still, the first episode of season one begins with a steamy sex scene in the shower between the lesbian couple Piper (**Taylor Schilling**) and Alex (**Laura Prepon**).

Upon seeing the sign for the **Chiang Mai Women's Prison Massage Centre**, a montage of images from the TV series and some of those old films began projecting onto my mind's movie screen, though the only words that sprang to mind were, quite frankly, one of the worst lines of dialogue in any movie I've ever seen, snarled by Wendy O to the nasty warden: "You're the shit stains on the panties of life."



Surely these massage centers in Chiang Mai were no joke, and no softcore fantasy designed to tease and titillate. These women had done hard time. They'd committed serious crimes. They were real jailbirds. However, the thought of getting a traditional Thai massage from a murderess was more scary than sexy. Where had those hands been? Wrapped around the shaft of a knife or another woman's throat?

Lila Thai Massage (127/13 Prapokkloa Rd) is one such venture in Chiang Mai, staffed by former inmates. At first glance it seemed much like any other traditional Thai massage parlour. The place was clean, the receptionist congenial, and the masseuses were dressed in old-fashioned uniforms of shapeless tops and bottoms.

The managers had taken great pains to address some of the safety concerns bound to arise in such an establishment. Every room had a box with a lock to secure your valuables. That was a relief. I didn't enjoy the thought that I was in a den of potential

thieves, but old stereotypes stick like jailhouse tattoos. Unless directly faced with our prejudices, most of us would probably think of ourselves as reasonably open-minded and not too judgmental. The reality is that we are all prisoners of those prejudices, which have been conceived out of ignorance and nurtured by the mass media, so that you think you know something about crime but have never met a convicted criminal or spent time with anyone who's actually been in jail.



All over the world, former inmates face rampant discrimination and society's scorn. Because of the laws of karma in Thai society, and the lack of rehabilitation programs in Thai jails, the Kingdom is a hard place for ex-convicts to make a fresh start. For those reasons, the former director of Chiang Mai Women's Prison, **Naowarat Thanasrisutharat**, came up with a plan for the jail to collaborate with the Institute of Skill Development on a massage course that would help the ladies find gainful employment after they'd finished their sentences.

In 2008, Naowarat helped to open the first Lila Thai Massage Center in the old part of Chiang Mai. The novelty of a massage parlour staffed almost entirely by ex-convicts provided plenty of publicity in the short term, but over the long haul, the well-trained and friendly masseuses have built up a loyal following. So much so that Lila is now in the top 20 of all Chiang Mai's many spas and wellness centers on

TripAdvisor, and in June of 2016 they opened their sixth center right in the city's historic mid-section (the Chiang Mai Women's Massage Center also enjoys a high ranking on the world's most visited travel website).

My masseuse looked like the kind of normal woman—somewhere in her 30s—you might see cutting hair in a beauty salon or working as a cashier, but I couldn't picture her in a cell somehow or imagine how she had gotten there. Before entertaining even the barest semblance of a sketchy softcore scene from one of those wanton-women-in-prison movies, I saw another sign on the wall that read, "To protect women's rights and dignity, Sexual harassing behaviour is very serious offence, either physical or verbal. Offender will be acted and punished by the laws under the Criminal Code Amendment Act. (sic)"

Clearly a few old stereotypes of exploitation cinema, like the wayward woman, had persisted, or some customers thought this was a front for

the more unseemly services offered at certain establishments in Thailand.

That was not the case. This was a very professional and competent massage for a reasonable rate.

The most interesting part of the experience came afterwards, when I finally mustered the courage to ask her, "Excuse me, but umm, I don't mean to be impolite but... were you really in prison?"

She smiled with embarrassment. "Yes, three years."

It would not be fair to her to reveal the contents of what was one of the most interesting conversations I've ever had with a former inmate, and I've interviewed quite a few of them (mostly foreigners) over the years, but I came to the conclusion that this was a very likable young woman who had gotten caught up in a tragic turn of events, for which she expressed great remorse and had promised to make amends. Everybody deserves a second chance, don't they?

Us travelers and road warriors always get criticized for this or that, for despoiling the environment, or contaminating the culture, or taking advantage of locals. But here's a detour on the travel trail that's not a potential guilt trip but an opportunity to help a former convict escape the vicious circle of poverty that breeds crime. At these massage centers in Chiang Mai that's the best kind of 'happy ending' on offer. ■

Bizarre Thailand



*Jim Algie has parlayed his experiences living in Thailand into books like the non-fiction collection, **Bizarre Thailand: Tales of Crime, Sex and Black Magic (2010)** and **On the Night Joey Ramone Died: Twin Tales of Rock 'n' Punk from Bangkok, New York, Cambodia and Norway (2016)**. Check out www.jimalgie.club for more.*



This tale and many others come from the author of **Bizarre Thailand: Tales of Crime, Sex and Black Magic**, which chronicles the strange, surreal and supernatural sides of Thailand, as well as the country's weirdest museums and tourist attractions.



Old Customs House

Bang Rak on Foot

A stroll along the river uncovers charm and history nearly obscured by high-rise hotels

By Joe Cummings/CPA Media

In 19th century Bangkok, when trade between Siam and the outside world grew precipitously, most imports and exports came and left by ship from a cluster of moorings at **Bang Rak**. Originally settled by Indian immigrants in the 1860s, the area attracted hotels, trading companies, embassies, warehouses, and several key government offices, including the original **Central Post Office** and **Customs House**—both now defunct—simply for the convenience of docking ships.

Nowadays, ocean-going freighters dock at Khlong Toey, well south of here, but The Oriental, a modest hotel built in 1876 to accommodate ship crews, has expanded and upgraded over the years to become today's **Mandarin Oriental Bangkok**, one of the world's most esteemed lodgings.

It has been joined by two other posh hostelries in the neighbourhood—the **Shangri-La Bangkok** and, just across the river, **The Peninsula Bangkok**.

The presence of these grand dames, along with luxury boutiques, antique shops, restaurants, and galleries targeting the well-heeled guests, tends to obscure the history and local charm of Bang Rak. But take a stroll from Saphan Taksin BTS station north, along sois leading to the river from Charoen Krung Road, and you'll re-discover at least some of Bang Rak's original nature.

Coming from the westernmost exits of Saphan Taksin BTS (or from **Saphan Taksin Pier**), walk away from the river and take the first left, a back lane which leads to the Shangri-La Bangkok. On the way, you'll pass the back end of bustling **Bang Rak Market**

on the right (open morning to night), a reliable stopover for cheap Thai eats, and at night for cold beer and snacks.

Further along on the right you'll come to diminutive **Ban Ou Mosque**. Built by Javanese Muslim immigrants in the 19th century, it's the oldest registered mosque in Thailand. Nowadays the congregation includes many other nationalities, and every Friday morning a cluster of food vendors offer tasty halal dishes hailing from several different ethnic origins.

Continue past the Shangri-La on your right until the soi ends at Charoen Krung Soi 42/1, more commonly known as Soi Wat Suan Phlu. A jog to the right along this soi takes you to **Wat Suan Phlu**, one of the most charming smaller monasteries in Bangkok. All buildings except the ordination chapel are built of either

teak or Asian rosewood, including the two-story, yellow-and-maroon monks' quarters—a splendid example of Bangkok's post-colonial tropical architecture—which features lacy gingerbread trim under the eaves and ventilator panels carved in floral patterns over the doors.

Back in the other direction, past Wat Suan Phlu, make a left to reach the main soi leading to the legendary Mandarin Oriental Bangkok. The original Victorian-style structure, now called the *Authors' Wing* in reference to the many celebrated authors who lodged here in the 19th and early 20th centuries, underwent a \$14 million facelift last year, so it's well worth a visit if you haven't been in a while. The wing's **Authors' Lounge**, open to the public, has expanded to include four separate rooms containing historical exhibits dedicated to Noël Coward, James Michener, Somerset Maugham, and Joseph Conrad.

Walk back along the soi away from the river and turn left to arrive at Charoen Krung Soi 36, re-christened **Rue de Brest** in 2013 in honor of Brest, the French port city where Siamese emissaries arrived in 1686 to visit King Louis XIV. At the river end of the soi is the majestic colonial-style French ambassador's residence, originally built around 1830. Entry is by invitation only, except for the third

Joe's Bangkok



Award-winning writer Joe Cummings was born in New Orleans but became one of Lonely Planet's first guidebook authors, creating the seminal Lonely Planet Thailand guide, as well as several other titles and updates for the region. Each month, he picks out his favourite cultural gems throughout Bangkok.



Haroon Mosque



Ban Ou Mosque

Sunday in September every year, when the grounds and some rooms are open to the public.

Just around the corner from the ambassador's residence, heading along the river, is the aforementioned former Customs House, a set of three grand neo-Palladian buildings built in 1888 to collect import and export duties on all goods coming in or out of Siam by ship. **Joachim Grassi** (1837-1904), the first Italian architect to work for the Siamese crown, designed the edifice (considered one of his finest achievements). Its patina of advanced decay makes it a favorite location for fashion photographers. It also famously appears in several scenes in Hong Kong director Wong Kar Wai's film *In the Mood for Love*.

Back up the soi towards Charoen Krung Road is the alley entrance to **Haroon Mosque**, one of city's oldest places of Muslim worship. It is also the heart of a spirited neighborhood of more than 500 residents, most of whose forebearers immigrated



Wat Suan Phlu



Central Post Office



The Peninsula Bangkok

to the city from Southern Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. A one-story wooden mosque established here in 1828 was replaced by a larger brick building in 1934. Some of the wood salvaged from the old building was used in the construction of a second story, which today is the most beautiful section of the mosque with its arched windows topped with delicately carved ventilators. As with the aforementioned Ban Ou Mosque, the best time visit the neighborhood is on Friday, when vendors fill the adjacent alleyways from early morning till early afternoon, offering everything from rich Muslim curries to rose-scented rice pudding.

If you haven't eaten by this point, stop at **Home Cuisine Islamic Restaurant**, located between the French ambassador's residence and Haroon mosque. It serves some of the best *khao mok kai*—a Thai-Indian biryani of spice-infused rice baked with chicken, beef, or mutton—in Bangkok. ■

Hi-So

Inside high society—famous families and new money

The most important thing in Thailand is to gain and save face. The higher the status, the greater the stakes.

One echelon goes further—the ambitious **hi-so** (which is short for High Society, but more New Money than Old Money). Hi-sos actively seek face, invent face, even leverage borrowed face (by borrowing gems) to enter exclusive events, or bask in reflected face by joining the famous in photos. Critics say hi-sos buy face; fact is, the upwardly mobile can't afford not to.

Old Money requires the establishment criteria of birth and breeding, inheritance and honours. The real aristocracy, with its understated taste and good family name, shudders at being classified in the hi-so label. Hi-so has become shorthand slang for anyone rich or famous, whether the nouveau riche, their trend-literate heirs, and waves of wannabe hangers-on.

A true hi-so compensates for their lack of heritage through sheer visibility—namedropping their connections, showing their wealth, and presenting themselves in public, in the press, and at parties. This lifestyle of fabulous engagements fills the front of all Thai glossy magazines, from women's monthlies and fashion bibles, to *Thailand Tatler's* society pages.

The tenor of hi-so life changed with the launch of *www.HiSoParty.com*. Run by the socialite brother and sister **Inthira** and **Patpong Thanavisuth**, the e-zine flourished and helped hi-so go mainstream. Partygoers can coo over snaps from last night's party online—or on their phone.

Few websites spawn a print edition, but the subject—showing off social connections—explains the success of the glossy *HiSoParty* magazine. Print has display cachet. It's a prop. It remains long in circulation at salons and spas. Print provides documentary substance for arrivistes who lack family history.

Some celebrities resent the media pronouncing them suddenly hi-so, associating the term with vulgar swank.

Also, the merely famous may lack the funds or skills to glide through elite circles. The press, too, can fall for self-publicity. Though manners can't be simulated, there's no limit on imported labels, or trips to the nail spa, for ladies determined to "arrive". Dolled up in look-at-me outfits or gimmicks like mane hair, themed hats, or logoed glasses, most newbies still play the part through looks and charm. Those with less to offer try to befriend or stand next to a "somebody". The pretender may even rent her gown, gems, or handbag from a shop.

"Photographers, seeing this diamond-studded woman, assume she must be a VIP," says Thai Rath

newspaper's **Apiradee Pinthong**. "Eventually her photo appears in several magazines and bingo, she's a hi-so."

Not just charity galas, couture catwalks, and anniversaries attract such red carpet coverage. Every launch of a beauty cream, gadget or accessory jostles with junior hi-so in training.

"Too many people are being called hi-so, which I don't think is right. They're more high-sociality," muses



Inthira, who recalls how until the late-1990s functions required a ticket, a table booking, or at least an invitation. "Now sponsorship comes in a lot and it's become an insult to sell tickets." Today, anyone can walk in—and frequently does—so bar openings, 'thank you parties' and even embassy receptions throng with low-rent hangers-on subsisting on a diet of buffet grazing, freebies, and watered-down whisky soda.

"Door policies will never happen in Thailand, believe me," Inthira insists. "Thai people cannot lose face. If you're not invited, they'll let you in anyway, but maybe talk behind your back."

Hi-so also symbolizes Bangkok's dominance, since the scene ignores the provincial elite. And not all see such glamour as a role model. The hi-so meme has spawned spin-offs and spoofs like mo-so (moderation society), and lo-so (low society). ■



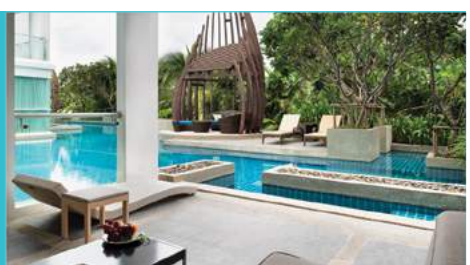
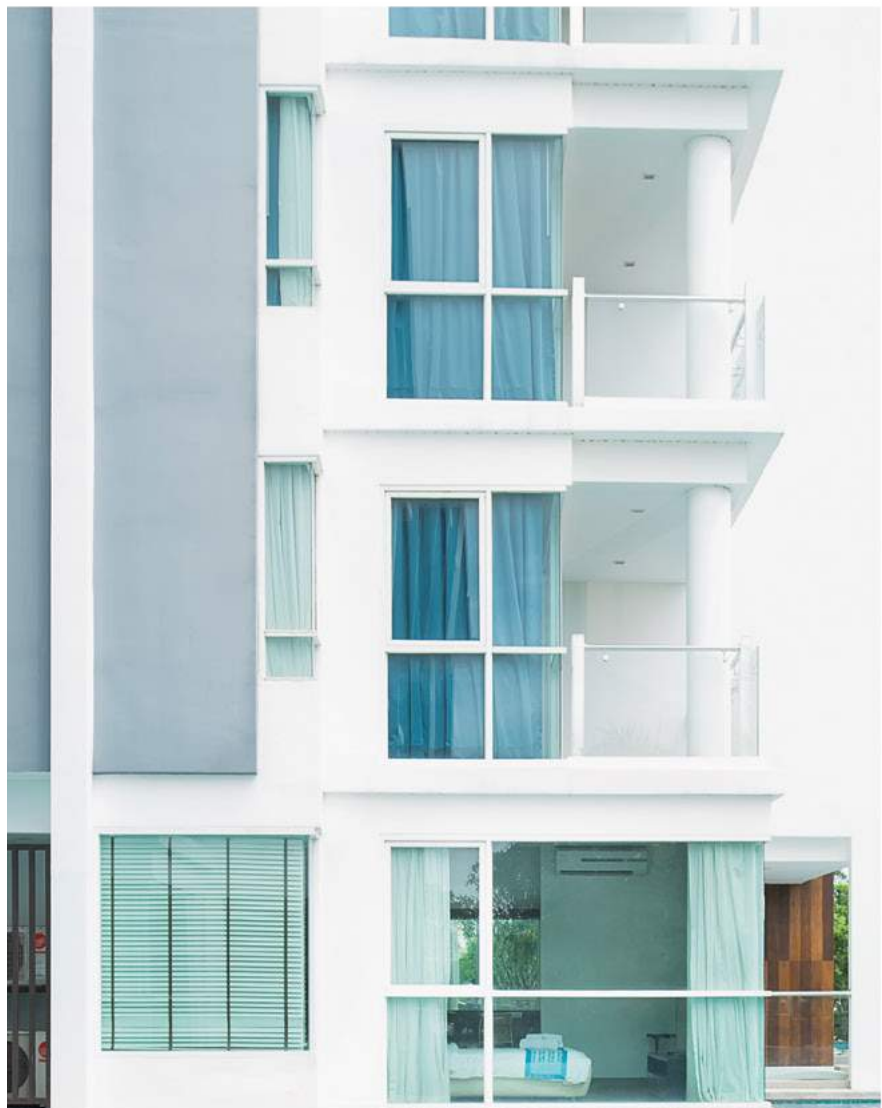
► Very Thai

River Books
by Philip Cornwel-Smith
with photos by John Goss
and Philip Cornwel-Smith
B995

Now in its expanded, updated 2nd edition, "Very Thai: Everyday Popular Culture" is a virtual bible on Thai pop culture, and an influential must-read among foreigners and many Thais. Its 70 chapters and 590 photographs guide you on an unconventional Technicolor tour of the quirky things that make Thailand truly Thai. This column is based on different chapter every month. Prepare yourself for the sideways logic in what seems exotic, and buy a copy of the new edition at any good bookshop.

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MIDA
HOTELS AND RESORTS



The Bank of Thailand

Stately European patchwork of Italian baroque and German Jugendstil

Words and photos by **Luc Citrinot**

Bangkok is the Southeast Asian city offering the largest number of historic stately mansions and palaces, and most of them have arisen either via the will of the Thai Royal family, or from the wealth of hundreds of mighty noblemen who worked with the Monarchy in the past. Many are not open to the public whatsoever, but many others have been converted into ministries, and even hospitals—most often visible to casual observers only from the outside.

However, one of the most intriguing royal structures open to, but often ignored by the public, is **Bang Khun Phrom Palace**. Its

location on the northern outskirts of Dusit and Phra Nakhon districts might explain the relative absence of visitors, but travellers going by boat up the Chao Phraya River may at least notice some monumental mansions facing the river.

Just past King Rama VIII Bridge, in the district of Bang Lamphu, a large meadow opens up in front of the Chao Phraya with a couple of magnificent European style structures, which seem to emerge directly from a fairy tale book (they are especially beautiful at sunset when the sun turns the yellowish façades of the three mansions dark gold).

Originally, the Bang Khun Phrom Palace was built—on orders from **King Rama V**—to serve as the palatial residence of one of his sons, **Prince Paribatra Sukhumband** (not a bad deal for a lad who was only 33rd in line to the throne). Today, however, it is part of the **Bank of Thailand** complex.

In contrast to other royal palaces, Bang Khun Prom Palace is a unique blend of many European styles as two different architects contributed to its creation. Three buildings were constructed on the grounds, the main mansion being *Tamnak Yai*. Designed in 1906 by Bangkok's most prolific architect, Italian **Mario Tamagno**, the

palace's design harkens back to the eras of baroque, rococo and classical European style. Its large windows, underscored with elegant stucco accents, give the building its specific charm.

The interior here offers viewers an extravagant abundance of stucco ceiling designs, velvet curtains, frescos—painted by another Italian, **Carlo Rigoli**—and crystal chandeliers. The main showpiece of the palace is a majestic grand staircase in the middle of the mansion, which is reminiscent, on a smaller scale, of the opulence of the rococo palaces in Austria or Southern Germany, with their grandiose marble stairs, statues and chandeliers.

Next to Thamnak Yai, stands another mansion, crafted in a complete different style. The building known as *Tamnak Somdej* is the masterwork of another architect, German **Karl Döhring**, a fervent adept of *Jugendstil* (the popular artistic style in Germany between 1890 and 1910). This second residence was built as a complement to the main mansion, but it is certainly as majestic and imposing as its counterpart,



especially with its huge symmetrical façade. The mansion was offered by Prince Paribatra in 1913 to his mother, **Queen Sukhumala Marasri**.

A third palace, *Thamnak Tamnak Ho Residential Hall*—conceived as a wooden pavilion—was also built in 1903 on the occasion of the marriage of Prince Paribatra and **Princess Prasongsom Chaiyant**. Nicknamed the 'Newlyweds Residential Hall', it was a temporarily structure that met a sad fate. The charming pavilion was dismantled and rebuilt at the **Vinmanmek Mansion** complex at **Dusit Palace** in 1998. It is unfortunately now surrounded by parking lots and looks lost, far from the splendours that it probably witnessed a century ago.

A fourth grand mansion, *Devavesm Palace*, was built by British architect **Edward Healey** and served as the residence of King Rama V's younger brother, **Prince Devawongvaropphakarn**. It stands opposite Tamnak Yai, across the Bank of Thailand's compound. It's neo-classical in style, with Greek columns characterizing its façade, however it is only occasionally opened to the public.

After the Constitutional Revolution of 1932, Prince Paribatra left Thailand and the complex was used by the new government. Finally, in 1945, Khun Phrom Palace finally became the headquarters of the Bank of Thailand.

Today both Tamnak Yai and Tamnak Somdej host the collections of the Bank of Thailand. A museum was inaugurated back in 1993 by the late **King Bhumibol Adulyadej**, and visitors can see displays of ancient Chinese coins, Siam's first currencies (made of sea shells), along with the currencies used in the old kingdoms of Dvaravati and Srivijaya, as well as the first modern coins and notes, dating back to the 19th century. There are also special rooms dedicated to the legacy of Prince Paribatra Sukhumband and the palace's musical activities. Bang Khun Prom Palace was once a well-known place for music, just like at the Royal courts in Europe.

VISITOR INFO: The **Bank of Thailand Museum** on Samsen Road (next to King Rama VIII Bridge) is best accessed using the Chao Phraya Express Boats, with the closest piers being Rama VIII Bridge and Thewes. The museum is open weekdays (except bank holidays) from 9:30am till noon, and from 1:30pm until 4pm. Visitors are allowed inside the museum in groups only and admission is free. Contact at least one week before to reserve a visit. Email museum@bot.or.th or call 02 228 5353. Taking photographs inside is strictly forbidden, and is only allowed at a few designated areas outside. ■

Historic Bangkok



Paris native Luc Citrinot has lived in Southeast Asia for the past 12 years, first in Kuala Lumpur and more recently in Bangkok. A seasoned traveller, he writes about tourism, culture, and architecture. He was instrumental on a recent EU-endorsed project to establish the European Heritage Map of Bangkok and subsequent app covering all of Thailand. Luc still travels extensively in Southeast Asia, looking particularly for new architectural gems related to colonial and European history.



View overlooking the Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui (see pg. 60)

Photo by Vincent Sung

KOH SAMUI 101

Picturesque and profoundly popular, **KOH SAMUI** is one of the jewels in Thailand's tourism crown. It is the second largest island in the Kingdom, after Phuket, and it sits peacefully within the protected confines of the Gulf of Thailand—just below Koh Phangan and just above the provincial capital of Surit Thani. The island is known for its palm-fringed beaches, coconut groves, and dense, mountainous rainforest, as well as an ever-growing selection of luxury resorts and posh spas. Many seasoned travelers lament the undeniable over-development of Koh Samui, but it's worth noting that the central part of the island is still mostly unspoiled tropical jungle. Here you'll find **KHAO POM**, the island's largest mountain, which measures 635 meters. Another vertically impressive landmark—this time man-made—is the 12-meter-high golden **BIG BUDDHA** statue at **WAT PHRA YAI TEMPLE**.

One of the island's main tourism hubs is **CHAWENG BEACH**, a 7 km stretch of white sand located on the island's eastern side, not far from the main airport. There are loads of accommodation options here, as well as a colourful nightlife scene that offers everything from ladyboys letting loose at the **STARZ CABARET** show at the Chaweng Hotel, to fierce Muay Thai boxing bouts at **PHETCH BUNCHA STADIUM**. Another popular evening attraction is the **LAMAI NIGHT MARKET** at **LAMAI BEACH**.

Samui is also full of attractions offering exotic thrills, many involving wild animals. If you're ethically opposed to things like riding an elephant through the jungle on a pseudo-tropical safari, or posing for photos with overly languid tigers, then stick to fun at the beach. But if you do want to seek out some wild wildlife, there are carnivalesque thrills and chills a-plenty at places like the **SAMUI SNAKE FARM**, a freaky, old-school, off-the-beaten-track roadside attraction located near **TALING NGAM BEACH**, on the southwest end of the island. The guys here look like they've had one too many snake and scorpion bites, but they still dutifully put on shows every hour, starting at 11am. For a more involved wildlife adventure, try soaring through the jungle interior with **CANOPY ZIP LINE ADVENTURES**—featuring six different cable rides—and see the secret waterfalls and lush rainforests from above. Or, make a trip to the serenely beautiful **SAMUI BUTTERFLY GARDEN**, where you can get up close to hundreds of these colourful insects. Basically, keeping tourists entertained is a growth industry here, and there's pretty much something for everyone, young and old (see pg. XX for more).

Samui is also a great launch point for people wishing to visit the **ANGTHONG MARINE PARK**, a fascinating archipelago made up of dozens of tiny islands. Organized speedboat day-trip tours zip past dramatic rock cliffs and bizarre rock formations, making occasional stops at caves, hidden lagoons, and white sand beaches. Park entrance fee is B300 adults, and B150 for children.

Of course, Samui also has some tamer, more culturally significant attractions, including the Muslim community of **HUA THANON**—a small but lively traditional fishing village—and annual events such as the **BUFFALO FIGHTING FESTIVAL**, held on New Year's Day and Songkran, where bucking bovines are decorated with ribbons and gold-painted leaves. But for many, Samui is synonymous with nothing more complicated than umbrella drinks, sun drenched vistas, and pure pleasurable indulgence.

Plan Your Trip

COCO SPLASH WATERPARK

This popular and colourful attraction in Lamai Beach lets kids of all ages have fun beating the heat with 7 water slides, a Jacuzzi, a splash pool, a regular sized swimming pool, bungee trampoline, a mini-golf area, and an inflatable castle. There's also a restaurant—open till 10pm daily—serving yummy snacks and drinks. Basic admission for kids is B329, which includes a t-shirt, and for adults it's B349, which includes a cocktail (the park is run by a fabulous French couple so that explains that intriguing deal). Open daily: 10:30am-5:30pm
www.samuiwaterpark.com



EASY-KART & EASY-FLY

With four different go-kart models to choose from, as well as a 350 metre beginner's track and an 800 metre racing track, speed demons young and old can enjoy *EasyKart*, an outdoor funpark located at Chaweng lake, (close to Chaweng Beach Rd). Race packages—about 10 laps—are B600 for adults and B500 for kids, while a couple of 8-minute sessions on the big track will run you

B1,300. However, if you want a more “uplifting” experience try *EasyFly* indoor skydiving, at the only indoor wind tunnel in Thailand. As 200 km/h winds blow upwards, you float safely on a cushion of air in your specially designed flying suit. There's no parachute, no airplane, and no experience needed to make flying a reality. Of course, this isn't just something you can “jump” into. First-time flyers go through a brief training session before getting properly suited up, and an experienced instructor is in the wind tunnel with you for your first two attempts, making sure you get the positioning right—and it's harder than it looks, trust us! The initial cost is B1,800 for adults (B1,400 for kids under 1.4 m. tall) and after your first two flights each additional extra attempt is B600. Finally, after you've conquered these two daredevil diversions, relax with drinks and finger food, and perhaps a game of pool, at the facility's outdoor terraced restaurant. Open daily: 10am-1am (flying from 1pm-9pm)
www.easykart.net/koh-samui

GOURMET CHEF EVENT: MAY 18-20

If you love amazing dining experiences, and you happen to be in Koh Samui sometime between Thursday May 18th and Saturday May 20th, be sure to make your way to the **W Retreat Koh Samui** (4/1 Moo 1 Tambol Maenam Maenam Rd) where Master Chef **Tim Butler** will be the man of the hour at an unforgettable series of gourmet events. It's all part of the ongoing S.Pellegrino & Acqua Panna Fine Dining Lovers series.

Those familiar with Tim Butler (right) know that he is the mastermind behind the long-standing Bangkok restaurant Eat Me. He is also involved with Bangkok's much lauded Bunker restaurant, and just recently he opened Esenzi, at Iniala Beach House in Phuket.

For more information, or to make your reservations for this special event, please contact the W Retreat at 07 791 5999.
www.wretreatkohsamui.com

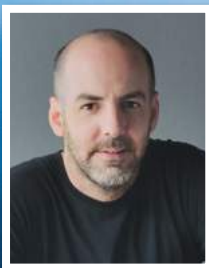


Photo of W Retreat by Vincent Sung

A Taste of the South

Fiery flavours and spicy specialties at Kiree



Diners curious to experience authentic southern Thai cuisine, in an upscale environment, will feel right at home at **Kiree** restaurant, at the luxurious **Vana Belle Resort**. Perched on the upper part of the vast property, the restaurant is located on a quiet beach, amidst a hillside forest, on the Eastern coast of Koh Samui island. It's comprised of an elegantly furnished dining room, featuring cream-coloured, comfortable sofa seating and opulent decorations, as well as a large alfresco terrace overlooking the lush green surroundings and the waters of the Gulf of Thailand. It offers an extensive breakfast buffet—available for in-room, as well as outside guests—and a lavish Saturday brunch, but it's the restaurant's unique dinner menu that best showcases Chef de Cuisine **Nattanan Deeruangs**' expertise with seafood and Southern Thai specialties, known for their spiciness.

A perfect first step in this culinary journey is the resort's signature drink, Golden Storm (B390), inspired by the fishermen who sailed these coasts

many centuries ago. This refreshing cocktail contains a syrup base of fresh ginger and vanilla, as well as Mekhong whisky and lime, all garnished with delicate gold leaf.

An array of appetizers—made-to-share in traditional Thai fashion—begin the meal. These included Deep-fried Thai *polyscias* (green shrub leaves) and crab meat fritters (B400), and a Wild fern salad with minced pork (B520) served with grated mature coconut. The crispy cakes were flavoured with curry paste, and added texture to the refreshing, coconut-y salad. The highlight, however, of the trio of starters, was the Asiatic pennyworth leaf salad with poached prawns (B520), boasting humongous, meaty crustaceans on a bed of slightly bitter greens, crisp, sweet coconut chips, and speckles of chili sauce, which gave the dish a bit of a spicy and sour tang.

This was followed by the Garcinia leaf flavoured pork ribs soup (B400), a fragrant, clear broth with meat so tender it was falling off the bone. This dish, despite being packed with flavour, also served as a sort of palate cleanser for the next course to come.

After this refreshment, we were ready for the famous Southern Thai spiciness, and one of our four mains—again served-to-share—was the pungent Alaskan crab curry with wild betel leaves (B900).

Meanwhile, carnivores will be impressed with the Deep-fried turmeric marinated chicken (B525) with fresh coriander leaves, and the Koh Samui-bred Wild boar (B490), which is stir-fried with Thai Southern herbs and curry paste. Another entrée highlight was the Southern specialty of Stir-fried *liang* leaves (B400) with egg and lots of crispy garlic.

If you still have room for dessert, a trio of Rice dumplings (B320), stuffed with coconut caramel and served in coconut milk, make a perfect ending to this culinary journey into Thailand's southern realm. **BY JULIA OFFENBERGER**

Kiree

Vana Belle Resort, Koh Samui
9/99, Moo 3, Chaweng Noi Beach
Tel: 07 791 5555
Open daily: 6pm-11pm
www.vanabellekohsamui.com

The Coffee Club

Hot coffee, cool drinks, and amazing all-day dining



For the early afternoon brunch crowd there are three types of Eggs Benedict to choose from, all with the requisite perfectly poached eggs. The Bangkok eggs Benedict (B320) served on sourdough with bacon slices, also has a special Hollandaise sauce with a chili paste kick. Meanwhile, the Roasted salmon eggs Benedict (B350) boasts chunks of delicious salmon, along with sautéed spinach, sourdough bread, Hollandaise sauce, and pistachio crumbs. There's also a veg-friendly mushroom and spinach version (B290) with feta cheese and sautéed spinach.

For meatier mains, try the lip-smackingly wonderful Spicy pork chop (B455), in which a thick, French cut, expertly grilled chop arrives at the table smothered in a spicy Thai basil sauce with plenty of garlic and green peppercorns. Served with a side of jasmine rice it's like a high-end *Pad Krapow Moo*. Or, if you're feeling extra grand, opt for the Petite mignon surf and turf (B625). Here a nicely seared medallion of imported beef—medium rare recommended—arrives stacked on a bed of crushed roast potatoes, and topped with grilled prawns. Add some broccolini on the side and you've got quite a well-balanced meal.

Desserts, whether enjoyed after a meal or just on their own alongside tea or coffee, are definitely a draw here. The Passion (B230) is a colourful combination plate which includes a tasty mango/passionfruit tart, a creamy coconut panna cotta, and a delightful dollop of tangy mango/passion sorbet.

Of course, if you just want a hot Latte or Cappuccino (B115 each), you'll be pleased to know that Coffee Club uses UTZ certified coffee—a program that supports sustainable farming practices. **BY BRUCE SCOTT**



Daily life up and down the main drag of Chaweng Beach Road is a fairly chaotic and cacophonous affair, but **The Coffee Club**, which opened along this strip six years ago, offers a friendly and flavourful oasis of calm—whether you just want a latte and some Wi-Fi, or a full and fortifying meal.

The Coffee Club is an Australian company (started in 1989) that has expanded internationally over the past few decades. There are two branches in Koh Samui alone—the other being located in the nearby CentralFestival shopping complex—but the one on the beach road, which was renovated back

in January of this year, is the original. It offers comfortable indoor and outdoor seating (37 pax), and a menu that includes brunch favourites, Thai specialties, and plenty of sweets—in both dessert and drink form.

If you start with any of the restaurant's signature Super Shakes (B220 each) get your camera ready for some colourful concoctions. Served in oversize jugs, these mammoth milkshakes are desserts in a glass. The Chocolate version comes with hearty brownie chunks resting on the whipped cream topping, while the Raspberry version sports a slice of cheesecake laid across the top.

The Coffee Club, Koh Samui
166/71-72, Moo 2, Chaweng Beach Rd.
Tel: 07 730 0563
Open daily: 7am-midnight
www.coffeeclub.com.au/thailand/

A Wealth of Wellness

Behold the future of health-conscious, soul-seeking travel

By **Jim Algie**

As a yogi connected to an ashram at the foot of the Himalayas, **John Stewart** and his cohorts spent seven years hauling rocks to build plots of land for vegetable gardens and fruit orchards on reclaimed riverbed. All the work was done by hand. His guru and taskmaster, Babaji, said, “We don’t wait for miracles. We create them.”

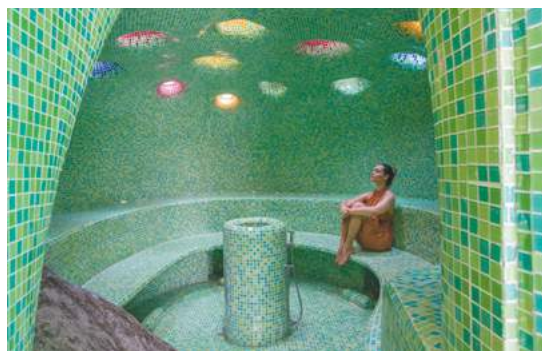
Those experiences in India, where John also met his wife and business partner **Karina Stewart**, provided much of the heft behind the **Kamalaya Wellness Sanctuary & Holistic Spa** on Koh Samui. Set among the boulders and palm trees of the sparsely inhabited southeast corner of the island, Kamalaya’s construction was a Herculean undertaking that dwarfed even Stewart’s previous endeavours at the ashram.

The result illustrates the founders’ desire to create a nature retreat with upmarket designer smarts. In my villa, an enormous boulder crouched behind the bed and merged with the wall. In the semi-al fresco bathroom, hemmed in by brick walls like the skeletons of Thai temple ruins, the shower nozzle gushed from inside a tree trunk while flowers and fronds sprouted from below. The alcoves look like a hybrid of a temple roof and a silhouetted tree. This motif—partly earthy, partly otherworldly—is repeated throughout the property.

Even the tiniest details at the sanctuary—the menus made from mulberry bark, the light-bearing fish traps that illuminate the restaurant at night—have been rendered in earth tones for visitors who not only want to reconnect with nature but, what Steve Jobs would call, their “core values.” Guests can do that by choosing from a plethora of programs, grouped together under such categories as *Healthy Lifestyle*, *Detox*, *Yoga*, and *Stress & Burnout*, or *Tailor-made Programs* that you can design yourself.

For Amy Grossman, the owner of a real estate agency in Denver, Colorado, her Kamalaya stay was revelatory because, “We live in such a fast-paced world it’s difficult to take time out for yourself. I can’t believe that I could actually take a week like this away from my business and husband and kids to focus on such a personal and emotional experience.”

Anecdotes like that are commonplace around the “community table” in the wooden restaurant, perched at the height of a hornbill’s nest in the middle of the jungle. Here guests form an ad hoc support group every night and, believe it or not, nobody fiddles with their phones. (The rules are not



rigidly enforced but guests are discouraged from using their cellphones and laptops in the public areas. Frankly, most visitors find this to be a great relief and stress remover.) In this way, Kamalaya allows you the pleasurable opportunity to reconnect with other people, which is highly unusual in this digital day and computer age.

Since around 70 percent of the clientele are women, I found it entertaining to feign listening to the boys talk about their hedge funds and ab workouts while pricking up an ear in the direction of the female posse as they related their beach hammock fantasies of erotic encounters with celebrity Casanovas. The sanctuary may strive for purity in its organic menu and programs, but the atmosphere is far from strict or puritanical.

Overall, the Kamalaya concept is so vast and far-reaching, combining all the different programs with all sorts of other activities—from the age-old disciplines of tai chi and meditation, to new-age esoterica like Tibetan singing bowls and mandala art—juxtaposed against all the latest breakthroughs in science, nutrition, and bio impedance analysis, that it defies any attempts to sum it up in slogan-sized summaries or full-length features.

Far easier to grasp is that the retreat has few peers in the world of wellness and seems destined to become a prototype for the future of health-conscious, soul-seeking travel. It’s the kind of place that lives up to the vision of its founders by giving you means to create, if not miracles, then at least a few personal revelations that can create a fuller, healthier and more satisfying life. ■



www.kamalaya.com

Art & Culture

Photo Feature



Through the Lens of a Local

Photos and captions
by **Martyn Goodacre**



Sunset at Nathon Beach, taken with my iPhone

As a professional photographer in the UK, **Martyn Goodacre** spent a great deal of his long and prosperous career taking photos of some of the biggest names in rock'n'roll. His portfolio includes iconic shots of Kurt Cobain, Ozzy Osbourne, and Beck, to name just a few. Now retired, and living in Koh Samui, Martyn still has a love of photography and finds plenty of inspiration in his newly adopted homeland.

"My first ever trip to Thailand was in the 1990," he explains. "The editor of *Loaded* magazine had recently been and told me if I could find a cheap flight then I should go and photograph the 'Full Moon Party'. I think the writer and I did the whole trip—London, Uzbekistan, Bangkok, Samui, Koh Phangan, and back—in about 5 days. When we landed in Bangkok it was Songkran and all the flights were booked, so we had no choice but to get a taxi to Surat Thani which cost us £40 in those days of good exchange rates. And we just about made it to the Full Moon Party. At that time this monthly event was still relatively unknown, and not really on every backpacker's bucket list. In fact, it was only attended by about 300 people—nothing in comparison to today's events.

"A year later I went back to Thailand on holiday," Martyn goes on to say, "and had the greatest time ever... and ended up staying for 6 weeks! A friend I went with didn't go back for two years and we sent his video resignation from up in a tree on Koh Phangan.

After that second trip I would visit Samui every year, until 2002 when I met a Japanese girl named Aki and we ended up having a beautiful daughter, who was born on Koh Samui. I've since retired from photography and just shoot for fun now. I've been on Samui full time for nearly 15 years and there have been a lot of changes—some for the worse, but mainly just good infrastructure advances. For a time Samui developed a bad rep, because it grew and developed so incredibly fast. But you can still find deserted beaches and amazing landscapes to devour if you get out of the tourist centers.

"Lately that bad reputation has been forgotten," he adds. "I even notice a reemergence of the backpackers that put Samui on the map 35 years ago. I call it home now, and love the fact I live in a small but vibrant village with lots of great friends. It's hot all the time and the beach is a 5 minute walk away, so I'm not thinking of relocating quite yet."





One of the many waterfalls in Samui. I like the way the people are camouflaged.



A Muslim fisherman in Nathon.



The Maenam tattoo artist known as Dragon Man.



This rather odd statue is just by the Big Buddah in Banrak. I just like the boobs.



This guy looked so happy in his green pond I just couldn't resist taking a photo.



Sunsets like this happen most nights on Samui during the dry season.



Fire jugglers are easy to take shots of, and you always get amazing results.



My favourite subject—my daughter Jade—chilling in Lamai.



One of my favourite shots I've taken on Samui... so tranquil.



I used to shoot the Samui regatta. These keystone cops ran aground, much to our amusement.



Backstage at a Chaweng ladyboy show. I was doing a story for a UK magazine at the time.

Conrad Koh Samui

Glamorous getaway offers sophistication and seclusion in equal parts

You know you're moving up in the world when you find yourself on the road that leads to the **Conrad Koh Samui**. And that statement can be taken quite literally, as the reception lobby of the resort is perched high atop a sloping oceanfront hillside and getting there involves driving up some pretty steep inclines. But once you arrive, the panoramic hilltop vista that presents itself—looking out over an endless expanse of clear, blue-green waters—is jaw-dropping. It's also just a small taste of the pleasures that lie in store at this glamorous getaway.

In the hotel world, Conrad is a name synonymous with luxury, elegance, and style, so it's no surprise that even at this beachfront locale an air of sophistication prevails,

even if sandals and bare feet have replaced brogues and pumps. And although the resort boasts 81 free-standing villas, all with private balconies, swimming pools, and commanding ocean views, it stills feels immensely private and secluded.

The property is situated on the Southwestern tip of the island, which makes for amazing sunset views, as the villas are all built on the ocean-facing slope of this dramatic hillside. This vertical positioning also means more steeply inclined paved paths for guests to travel up and down when going to or from the beach, restaurant, or spa, but thankfully the resort's 24-hour on-call electric golf cart service can do all the work for you.

The guest accommodations here consist mainly of *One Bedroom Pool Villas* (65 in all), but there are also 14 *Oceanview Two-Bedroom Pool Villas*, and one *Oceanview Three-Bedroom Pool Villa* for larger groups. However, it's a real treat if you can snag the one-and-only *Conrad Royal Oceanview Pool Villa*, which is slightly larger than the other one-bedroom units, and comes with many unique features. Like all the units it features drop-dead gorgeous contemporary Thai-inspired décor, original artwork, a bathroom with a rainshower and an oversized circular bathtub, and state-of-the-art technology (including satellite television, Apple-based TV, iPod dock, and high-speed internet access). However, it also delivers a whopping 434 sq.m of indoor and outdoor space (over two levels), a full kitchenette, a dining table that can seat six, and 24-hour butler service.

Another unique feature is the extra-long 22.5 meter infinity edge pool that extends from one end of the villa to the other, with three access points—living room, bedroom, and bathroom—and a groovy sunken lounge area with cushioned bench seats and a table. There's also a super sexy king-sized circular mattress in the bedroom, something found only in the master bedrooms of the larger units. In short, it's a majestic suite, suitable for a royal rendezvous.

And although it's tempting to never leave a suite as beautiful as this, a trip down to the beach is a must. Here



Bedroom in the Royal Oceanview Pool Villa

guests can take advantage of the main swimming pool, numerous sala-style curtained day beds, beachfront hammocks, sun loungers, and two small wooden floating rafts that are docked in the shallow beach waters. From the main pool it's also easy access to the fitness center, and two of the resort's restaurants—the **Azure Bar & Grill**, and **The Cellar**, an eight seat private dining area offering unique culinary experiences and interactive wine sessions.

Higher up the slope sits the award-winning **Conrad Spa**, which features 10 spa treatment suites, a private spa plunge pool, and more. There's even a compact sauna room with a view, as one wall is a full-length window looking out over the Gulf of Thailand.



Pool Villa views

Finally, the resort's all day dining venue is the 86-seat **Zest**, which offers casual indoor and outdoor dining options. This is also where the fabulous breakfasts are served, at which guests can pick and choose from the delicious buffet items and/or order one of the four tempting eggs Benedict variations available on the morning menu. And yes, once again the outdoor deck offers a stunning panoramic view. In fact, the only dining spot here that might have a better view is **Jahn** (see sidebar).

BY BRUCE SCOTT

Conrad Koh Samui

49/8-9 Moo 4, Hillcrest Rd, Taling-Ngam
Tel: 07 791 5888
conradhotels3.hilton.com

A MOONLIT DINING JOURNEY

When you have dinner at **Jahn**, the Conrad Koh Samui's exclusive 28-seat candle-lit dining room, you'll learn a lot about Thai culture—including the fact that *jahn* means “moon” in Thai. However, the first thing you'll probably notice is that this beautifully decorated, high-ceilinged restaurant sits an incredible 130 meters above sea level, and the wraparound windows offer unforgettable bird's-eye views of the setting sun and the moonlit



waters (depending on when you begin your meal).

The menu at Jahn offers a tantalizing selection of Thai and Thai-influenced starters, mains, and desserts, but for those who love sumptuous surprises, the restaurant's two special set menus are a recommended indulgence.

Both sets can be ordered with

or without wine pairings, and diners can even request vegetarian versions.

The first set menu, entitled **Tasting of Jahn** (B3,299/B5,499 with wine pairing), is a 7-course feast that begins with a trio of beautifully presented bite-sized Thai *hors d'oeuvres*. This is followed by a delicate tower of green papaya salad served alongside deep fried chicken morsels wrapped in pandanus leaves. And although several of these items are familiar to those who know about Thai cuisine, here they are given an extra level of flair—both in presentation and taste. However, when the *Tom Yum Goong* (spicy soup with shrimp) arrives the “theatre” begins, as a bright red broth is prepared and steeped at the table in a clear glass teapot before being poured gracefully over the tiger prawns. After a palate cleansing rosella sorbet the Massaman of Wagyu beef arrives, with the juicy medallion of meat being given an extra searing at the table by an old-fashioned metal iron. Finally, after a pre-dessert of Thai melon ice cream and midori, the sweet potato tart, with apple compote, passion fruit coulis, and guava sorbet arrives to cap an amazing culinary voyage.



If you're dining as a pair, then one person should opt for the equally exquisite **Journey of Jahn** set menu (B2,999/B5,199 with wine pairing), which lasts the same number of courses but is entirely different from start to finish. Highlights include: the artfully presented *Toong Thong* (chicken in a pastry wrap that looks like a tiny golden bag); the *Plaa Pla Bai Bua* (seared red tuna, lotus seed, and avocado purée, dramatically served on a spectacular green lotus leaf); and *Kai Oob Fang* (sous-vide chicken breast with herbs, served with a shot of smoky single malt whisky).

After sampling from both these culinary journeys, it's clear that Executive Chef **Amporn Choeng-Ngam**, is a significant talent. He brings an inspirational, innovative approach to the dining experience at Jahn, and diners are not likely to forget his mouth-watering creations. It's also worth noting that the wine pairings—which are also unique to each set menu, course for course—were excellent. Encompassing labels from Australia, New Zealand, Austria, Germany, France, and even Thailand, the wines are a fantastic international voyage unto themselves.

Jahn is open daily from 6pm till 11pm

Beach Republic

Fun in the sun (and under the stars)



One Bedroom Modern Pool Villa

If you arrange to be picked up from the airport or boat pier, then the fun starts right away during your **Beach Republic** holiday getaway. The music playing inside the resort's VIP luxury van (the CD player reads 'Beach Republic House Sessions Vol. 2') is a perfect mix of mid-tempo chill-out beats, and the driver even has some soft drinks and beer on ice, which will quench your thirst and soothe your soul as you make the short trip to the Northern end of **Lamai Beach**.

The resort is located just off the main road, but once you enter the grounds you are transported into a world unto itself—a playful, yet peaceful party zone where guests are referred to as "citizens" of the Beach Republic.

The accommodations consist of 42 units, ranging from 55 sq.m *Club Suites* to the lavish four-bedroom *State House*, which measures over 1,000 sq.m and includes kitchen, dining room, living room, and swimming pool. Of the options in-between these two extremes, the 160 sq.m *One Bedroom Modern Pool Villa* is perfect for vacationing couples looking for a little extra luxury. This tastefully decorated, and very private villa offers the resort's standard room features—comfortable king-sized bed, air conditioning, bathrobes, coffee/tea maker, flatscreen TV, iPod dock, and more—but it also includes

a full kitchenette, Jacuzzi bathtub, outdoor rainshower, L-shaped living room couch, lounge chairs (both by the pool and on the second storey terrace) and, last but not least, a swimming pool that can be accessed from the patio or directly from the bedroom.

Another nice touch here is that the living room has been built with a round-arc'd roof, covered on the outside with palm frond thatching that gives it that tropical island look. What this means inside is high ceilings and a sense of airy openness. Also impressive is the attention to detail in the kitchenette. The full-sized fridge is stocked with the usual soft drinks, beer, and water, but also offers a selection of imported chocolates, a bottle of champagne, and three wines—including two bottles of *McGuigan Private Bin* from Australia. Finally, the daily 4-page *Manifest* newsletter in each room reminds guests of the range of activities and promotions at the resort (many involving drink specials and pool parties).

The beachfront area, referred to as the **Ocean Club**, offers guests a restaurant, bar, two swimming pools, plenty of reclining sun loungers, and a row of inviting shaded day bed salas overlooking the ocean—the latter two items featuring bright red cushions, the resort's signature colour. If you opt for the oceanview day beds



Ocean Club

(and trust me, you should), the view of the beach—a beautifully curved stretch of white sand—is suitably impressive. Meanwhile, the water, which is quite shallow even at high tide, is dotted with several large, dome-shaped rocks, which sit well above the surface and are big enough to climb onto.

While the hypnotic afternoon grooves set the tone—the music here is all wonderfully curated by resident DJ **Dave Devoted**, from the UK—the bar serves up refreshing cocktails, even offering a daily ‘Sundown Salute’, two-for-one happy hour on select drinks from 5pm to 7pm. There’s also a shady beachfront massage area if you’re looking to completely unwind, or you can get a full spa treatment at the resort’s **Asian Fusion Spa**. Then again, if you want to explore the surroundings a bit, the resort also offers guests complimentary shuttle service, three times daily, to Lamai and Chaweng Beaches.



Beachfront dining

Finally, it’s worth noting that the spacious beachfront restaurant—which offers both covered and open-air dining areas—has delicious all-day dining. The breakfast buffet is quite nice, while the à la carte menu offers everything from tacos to Thai food. The Caprese salad, the roast fillet of black cod, and the Castricum Australian lamb cutlets were all stand out dinner dishes, while the signature cocktails definitely did not disappoint (try the hilariously named ‘Porn Star’). And after dinner, why not relax and gaze at the star speckled night skies while enjoying a single malt whisky and a fine cigar from **Whisgars**? There’s a small on-site outlet of this popular cigar bar located directly across from the Beach Republic’s restaurant entrance. **BY BRUCE SCOTT**

STAY AND PLAY

In-house guests have access to all the fun and games Beach Republic has to offer, but daytime visitors are also welcome to join in. For a “minimum spend” of B1,000 per person, non-guests can enjoy all the resort’s amenities (with the exception of the front row of oceanview sun loungers, beds and salas). So, as long as you spend a bit on food and drink the pools, deck chairs, and the beach are all yours.



DJ Dave Devoted

The resort also entices hipsters-on-holiday with an ever evolving line-up of weekly events. Every Saturday, for instance, there’s an all-day pool party featuring a live DJ and two-for-one shots, while the ‘Ultimate Sunday Brunch Club’ tempts guests with free flow wine and “bubbly” for three hours—anytime between 11:30am till 3:30pm—for just B1,300. In fact, there’s something fun going on literally every day of the week, so don’t worry about which day you sign up for “citizenship”.

On-site fun can also be had at the resort’s own **Escape Break**, the real-life escape game where you and up to five friends are locked within a themed game room and must work together to find hidden objects, uncover the clues, and solve the puzzles to earn your freedom. Four mind-bending games



are offered here, and if you’ve visited the Escape Break location in Bangkok (on Silom Soi 1) you already know how exciting and challenging it can be.

Beach Republic

176/34, Moo 4, Tambon Maret

Tel: 07 745 8100

www.beachrepublic.com



Photo by Vincent Sung

Four Seasons Resort

Celebrating 10 years of providing tranquil tropical retreats

Perhaps the true test of a holiday resort comes when the weather turns from sun to rain, and the question arises: “Is this place still any good?” Well, in the case of the **Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui**—currently celebrating its 10th year of operation—the answer is a resounding “yes”. On a recent visit we were met with one glorious afternoon of sunshine, but later the skies clouded over and the downpour began. However, lying comfortably on a wide cushioned daybed, under the sheltered patio of our *One Bedroom Pool Villa*, we didn’t mind at all. In fact, the raindrops gently tapping the surrounding lush foliage made for the most soothing background sound ever.

There are 22 of these particular romantic villas at the resort, all beautifully furnished and situated on a lush



Exquisite interiors

tropical hillside that faces north to the sea, giving guests glorious elevated views overlooking the Gulf of Thailand. The units offer 60 sq.m of high-ceilinged indoor

space, a spacious 43 sq.m outdoor hardwood deck, and a 15 sq.m private infinity pool with decorative fountain, as well as all the luxury amenities you’d expect in a 5-star property (flatscreen TV, Wi-Fi, premium toiletries, bathrobes, etc). Meanwhile, the lush forest greenery that surrounds the villa, coupled with the overall tropical design scheme, makes it feel like you’re in the fanciest treehouse ever—a treehouse with *Tattinger* champagne in the mini-bar.

The property’s interior designer, architect, and landscape designer is none other than **Bill Bensley**, and his masterful touch is evident throughout. Being a massive fan of his work—I guessed he was the resort’s designer within seconds of stepping into our villa—it was a joy to stay in yet another of his gorgeous creations. His playful use of aquamarine colours in the décor was especially delightful, and his Midas touch is evident in all the units, which also include family-friendly *Beachfront Pool Villas* and the lavish multi-bedroom *Residence Villas with Pool*.



Pool Villa view

The overall property is quite large, but a squadron of on-call electric buggies is always available to take you up and down the steep slopes. Our first stop—while the weather was good—was the beach, a gently curved stretch of white sand with shallow water perfect for swimming, kayaking, or upright paddling. Overlooking the beach is **Pla Pla** (meaning “many fish” in Thai), an 80-seat lunch and dinner restaurant with a fan-cooled deck and open-air terrace. And although the atmosphere here is casual, the chefs take their jobs very seriously. Lunch favourites include the tomato gazpacho with prawns, the yellow fin tuna tartare with wild rocket, and a veg friendly eggplant parmigiana with confit tomatoes, parmesan, mozzarella, and pesto. For dinner mains, try the dry-aged Wagyu rib-eye with Dauphinoise potatoes and assorted vegetables, and if you happen to be there on a Sunday evening make a reservation for their amazing outdoor beach BBQ buffet dinner.



Rum tastings

Another venue overlooking the beach, as well as the beachfront swimming pool, is **Coco Rum**. This fun and funky covered cocktail bar keeps things lively during the day, with seating that consists mainly of colourful daybeds and cushioned rattan wingback chairs built for two. If you get a chance, try their expertly curated rum tasting workshop (additional fee applies).

Also of note for diners is **Koh Thai Kitchen and Bar**, the hilltop restaurant which doubles as the breakfast dining area. From here the views are as spectacular as the morning pastries—all made on the premises—and although the breakfast buffet selections are divine, you can also order custom-made items from the specialty menu. On a whim I tried the spirulina pancakes with roasted coconut and it was an absolute treat.

If you read the resort’s daily activities list, it’s clear there’s no end of things to do here, rain or shine. However, if all you want is to chill in your tree-top hideaway—gazing out over the horizon, or taking a soothing bath in the custom designed stone bathtub—that choice is entirely yours. This is a place that’s definitely made for ultimate relaxation (see sidebar).

BY BRUCE SCOTT

Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui

219, Moo 5 Anghthong Koh Samui
Tel: 07 724 3000
www.fourseasons.com/KohSamui

GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS

While it’s true that almost all 4- and 5-star resorts these days have on-site spa facilities, there are certain properties that take their spas to the next level. At The Four Season Resort Koh Samui you’ll find just such an elevated experience when you enter **The Secret Garden Spa**.



Herbal compresses

Living up to its name, the spa consists of five freestanding treatment villas (two with steam rooms), all surrounded by lush forest greenery and accessed by sauntering along a series of undulating garden paths. The oils and massage lotions used are handcrafted using organic ingredients, most being made by an English woman living on the Thai mainland.

The spa menu, which was revamped in December of 2016, includes so many tempting treatments you could spend each day getting a new one. We opted for the 60-minute *Relaxing* package (B4,800) which we enjoyed as a couple, as the treatment room had twin massage tables. After a lemongrass footbath we were asked to choose our preferred oil—I went for eucalyptus—after which we lay face down, our mugs supported by the softest massage pillow I’ve ever experienced. The attendant then gently struck the Tibetan singing bowl, the mystic resonating tone signaling that the massage had begun. What followed was a series of firm yet flowing strokes designed to ease muscle stiffness, but the treatment also included the use of soothing heated herbal compresses, applied to the back, neck, and palms. It was, in a word, heavenly.

The soft background music, and the sound of gentle rain on the wooden roof, made the experience pure pleasure. Needless to say the hour was over far too soon, but we left feeling quite rejuvenated. Before leaving we spoke at length with Spa Manager **Stephanie Arveux**, who discussed her desire to bring new and unique elements to the spa experience (there’s even a display in the spa reception room selling beautiful “chakra” jewellery pieces).

As an overall health and wellness centre the facility also includes a beauty parlour, as well as organizing yoga classes twice a week and Tai Chi on the beach every Wednesday. In-villa massages, and beach massages, are also available.

The Secret Garden Spa is open daily from 9am till 9pm.

GUIDE TO KOH SAMUI

HOTELS & RESIDENCES

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1 Four Seasons Resort | 2 Beach Republic |
| 3 Conrad Koh Samui | 4 Kamalaya |
| 5 Vana Belle | 6 Azure Samui |

ATTRACTIONS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 NaThon Pier | 2 Khao Pom |
| 3 Big Buddha | 4 Chaweng Beach |
| 5 Starz Cabaret | 6 Phetch Buncha Stadium |
| 7 Samui Snake Farm | 8 Taling Ngam Beach |
| 9 Canopy Zipline Adventures | 10 Samui Butterfly Garden |
| 11 Hua Thanon | 12 Buffalo Fights arena |
| 13 Coco Splash Waterpark | 14 Samui Aquarium & Tiger Zoo |
| 15 Easy-Kart Koh Samui | 16 Samui Crocodile Farm |
| 17 Lamai Beach | 18 Lamai Night Market |

RESTAURANTS

- 1 The Coffee Club

OFFMAP

- Angthong Marine Park



GETTING THERE

Although Koh Samui does have its own private airport, there are several equally convenient (and much less expensive) **Fly'n'Ferry** services from Bangkok that will have you there in no time.

NokAir, one of Thailand's best low-cost airlines, offers up to seven Fly'n'Ferry packages daily, originating from Bangkok's **Don Mueang International Airport** and arriving in either **Surat Thani** or **Nakhon Si Thammarat**, depending on the flight time. Both of these Southern airports are equidistant to the **Don Sak Pier**, which is where the **Lomprayah Hi-speed Catamaran** whisks passengers across the Gulf of Thailand to Koh Samui's **NaThon Pier** (located on the Western side of the island).

While on board your NokAir flight—to or from Bangkok—you'll enjoy friendly service, including a snack meal and tea or coffee service, before touching down approximately one hour later at your end destination. For an additional B300 passengers can request a *Nok Premium Seat*, which puts you in the front few rows in a long-leg seat. And, for those travelling with lots of holiday gear, if you pre-book your extra baggage allowance online you can increase your baggage allowance by 5kg, 10kg, 15kg, 20kg, and even 25kg (see website for details).

For those arriving in Nakhon Si Thammarat, a VIP transport awaits you at the airport. For small groups expect a luxury 8-seat Toyota premium van, while larger groups will be driven to Don Sak pier in a comfortable coach bus. It's just over an hour's ride, following pleasant, well-paved country roads, and it's timed perfectly to make sure you arrive at the ferry dock right on time.



The roomy Lomprayah Hi-speed Catamaran—the fastest sea crossing in the Gulf of

Thailand—then departs and arrives at the NaThon Pier on Koh Samui approximately 40 minutes later, allowing you time to enjoy the ocean breezes, have a snack on board, or perhaps change into your beachwear before stepping off the vessel. As a final consideration, NokAir allows you to pre-book your transfer to/from the Koh Samui ferry pier—from B200 one way per person—which provides a smooth connection to/from your place of stay on the island.



Lomprayah Hi-speed Catamaran

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TOP OF THE GULF REGATTA

May 4-8

The annual **Top of the Gulf Regatta International** takes place at Ocean Marina Yacht Club, located at Jomtien Beach, just south of Pattaya City. This yacht club has, over the years, grown to become the largest by boat number, and has helped establish this area in the Gulf of Thailand as one of the centers of boat racing in Asia (while helping to promote tourism in greater Pattaya at the same time). This international boat race and competition attracts various participants from various countries, who bring with them an array of sailing craft that include Keel Boat and Multihulls, beach catamarans, dinghies, and Optimists.



ELEPHANT BACK ORDINATION PARADE

May 8-9

In the Kui village of **Baan Ta Klang**, Surin, home to Thailand's largest mahout community, the annual ordination of the local young men about to enter the monkhood is marked with a grand parade on elephant back. This year's procession—in the afternoon of the 14th waxing moon—promises more than 100 elephants travelling from Wat Chaeng Sawang to Don Buat (Talu Palace), negotiating the water of the Chi River along the way. The elephants are each groomed and exquisitely painted by their *mahout* (handler), and parade majestically from the village all the way to the temple.

YASOTHON BUN BANG FAI FESTIVAL

May 12-14

The annual **Bun Bang Fai Festival**—held this year at the **Phaya Thaen Park**, in Yasothon province—is an ancient local festival in which the gods are asked to deliver rain for the rice crops. The belief is that the gods will hear the entreaties of the villagers if they make rockets, or *Bang Fai*, and send them zooming towards the heavens. On the festival day, many beautiful rockets are paraded to the launch site and fired one by one. The one that reaches the greatest height is declared the winner. This very “noisy” festival also incorporates lots of drinking, singing, dancing, colourful parades, and general mayhem.



RIVER KWAI ADVENTURE RACE

May 27

Head to Kanchanaburi later this month for the 2017 **Singha River Kwai International Trophy Adventure Race**. This competition is the largest and most exciting race in Southeast Asia, and is a part of the *Amazing Thailand Adventure Race Championship* series. This marks the 12th edition of the race, which will start and finish near the world famous Bridge Over the River Kwai—with an expected attendance of 200 teams from around the world to mark this special occasion. Get ready for intense wilderness adventure, where teams of two will compete in mountain biking, swimming, and kayaking races.

CUISINE



ART



Earth: Fertility, Foliage, and Fortune

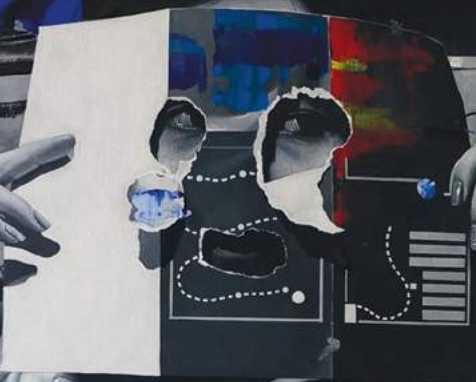
Ruen Urai's Thai gourmet journey explores the natural elements that represent significant meanings in Thai food and customs. Phra Mae Thoranee, "The Mother Earth", the country's fertile soils, provide both produce and traditional symbols. In lush tropical gardens and orchards, several types of vegetables, medicinal herbs, fragrant flowers, and fruit trees are grown for food ingredients, decorative arrangements, and good fortune. Each bear different meanings and many imply good luck. Cultivating the right trees in the right directions is believed to be auspicious for the household. Spicy roasted duck salad on betel leaves mixes robust flavours of earthly delights. Experience fine Thai culinary arts in the oasis that is Ruen Urai, "The House of Gold." Open from noon to 11 p.m.



RUEN URAI

FINE THAI CUISINE

Ruen Urai at the Rose Hotel
118 Soi Na Wat Hualumphong, Surawongse Road
Tel. (66) 2 266 8268-72 www.ruen-urai.com



Chapman

ART

The Concept of Self: On Power, Identity and Labels

*A group show featuring nine artists
from both Thailand and Indonesia*

The upcoming exhibition entitled **THE CONCEPT OF SELF: ON POWER, IDENTITY AND LABELS** is a dissection of contemporary cultures and how they mold and alter individual lives, gender, social power, and the ideologies of class structures. It draws upon sociological theories and analyzes the processes through which societies as a whole, and groups within them, can deal with the challenges associated with membership and interaction within a culture.

Social issues in contemporary Thailand and Indonesia are moved by a similar current of cultural transitions: redefining what it means to be a Southeast Asian. Introspection into the ever-changing society is prompting questions of “who decides what is normal?”, and “how long does a cultural moment matter?” On the verge of a new regional structure, Thai and Indonesian societies are still finding and asserting what roles their cultures will play in the ASEAN community. While historically collectivist, both nations are seeing rises in the development of artistic individualism and social critiques. Artists are embracing their inner muses, and confronting the order of the communal culture.

The nine artists in this show include **ALISA CHUNCHUE, ANON PAIROT, CHAYANIN KWANGKAEW, CHULAYARNNON SIRIPHOL,** and **KITIKUN MANKIT** (all from Thailand), alongside **ANTONIO S. SINAGA, PATRIOT MUKMIN, THEO FRIDS HUTABARAT,** and **REGA AYUNDYA PUTRI** (the Indonesian contingent). Using various media, such as photography, oil painting, video art, and installation, the artists explore the nuances in the expressions of identity and social interactions—touching upon politics, superstitions, voyeurism, and self-analysis.

THE CONCEPT OF SELF: ON POWER, IDENTITY & LABELS runs from **MAY 13** to **JUNE 17** at the **SUBHASHOK ARTS CENTRE** (160/3, Soi Sukhumvit 33). Viewing hours are Tuesday to Saturday, from 10am to 5:30pm, and Sunday from noon to 6pm. For more information, call 02 662 0299.

www.facebook.com/sacbangkok



facebook.com/bangkokartmap



MAY 9-JUNE 10

Still On My Mind**Ardel's Third Place Gallery**

Thong Lor Soi 10, Sukhumvit Soi 55

Viewing hours: Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm

Tel: 02 714 7929 | www.thirdplacebangkok.com/gallery

This unique exhibition presents a series of pictures of **His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej**, the beloved father of Thai people. For this particular show, artist **Jakkee Kongkaew** has selected the 37th royal song as the title of his presentation (the titular song was also His Majesty's first attempt at composing lyrics). The artist has painstakingly created the prints on display by using traditional woodcut technique. They utilize an intricate cross-hatching style that adds a special dimension to the images. It is his aim that this technique will help express his gratitude as he reminisces about the late King, who will always remain in every Thai's heart.



MAY 6-JUNE 24

Dryopes**Kathmandu Photo Gallery**

87 Pan Rd.

Viewing hours: Tue-Sat, 10am-6pm

Tel: 02 234 6700 | www.kathmanduphotobkk.com

When viewed with sensitivity and an open heart, the potency of this photographic series—the work of photographer and independent filmmaker **Shane Bunnag**—grows all-absorbing, revealing a soul ever in touch with the elemental spirits of place. In this instance they are the nature entities of the *Mani*, the fabled peninsular of Greece, which had been the artist's childhood home. Shane captures the soul of each site through long exposure shots of his model dancing in worship of the local Greek gods. The resulting images are hallucinatory, like the sacred mushroom visions celebrated in ancient religious rites.

MAY 18-JUNE 25

Thriller & Horror**Ardel Gallery**

99/45 Moo. 18, Boromratchonnane Rd.

Viewing hours: Tue-Sat, 10:30am-7pm, Sun, 10:30am-5:30pm

Tel: 02 242 2092 | www.ardelgallery.com

This latest exhibition by **Anchalee Arayapongpanich** presents a series of bold and fanciful paintings inspired by thriller and horror movies. The artist appears in every painting, imitating various portrayals of famous actors in her favorite Hollywood blockbusters. The series depicts the artist's urge for something that would spice up life's mundane routine. Impersonating characters brings her excitement, adventures, death-defying missions, and all the things that ordinary people never have a chance to experience. Through her skillful hand and extraordinary brushwork, we are drawn into a new and imaginative dimension.



UNTIL MAY 22

Defendant of Love**Tentacles**

2198/10-11, Soi Narathiwat 22

Viewing hours: Wed-Sun, 12pm-8pm

Tel: 061 941 6555 | www.tentaclesgallery.com

This group exhibition by four young Thai female artists—**Chomphupak Poonpol, Napatsakorn Nikornsaen, Nuttinan Phukama, and Athapha Rattanaphongthara**—questions the state of being the “defendant of love”. It asks, “Why we have to surrender?” We silently press the pain in ourselves and try to change the pain to be something acceptable which is very ironic. So here we are, always the defendant of love, like the female protagonist in Thai rape-culture TV drama. Expressing their own thoughts and feelings they develop their art pieces by exploring the feelings of pain and oppression that are thrown to them.



UNTIL JUNE 30

The Sheltering Place**Most Gallery**

672/63 Charoen Krung Rd.

Viewing hours: open by appointment only

Tel: 02 639 6582 | www.mostgallery.com

Ao Kim Ngân (aka: Yatender) is a Saigon based image-maker. She was discovered by Vietnam-based artist **Richard Streitmatter-Tran** who introduced her to 1PROJECTS. Her work reminds many of photography of Ren Hang, who recently passed away at the age of 29. In this exhibition, the people in Yatender’s photos are contorted and in uncomfortable positions. Strangeness intrigues her. She focuses on each scar and bruise—interested in the sensitivity and vulnerability of human beings. She wants to capture feelings, and in the process, learn how to accept them as a part of the body.

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The Cappuccino Chronicles

Local author Pashmina P's debut novel follows the stories of four multi-cultural women trying to "find" themselves



Pashmina P.

She's of Indian origin, was born in Thailand, grew up in Hong Kong, lived in the UK and the US, is married to a Brazilian, has a step-father who is Chinese, and recently released her first book in Bangkok (with a Canadian publisher). And if that isn't international enough, wait till you read local author **Pashmina P's** debut novel, *The Cappuccino Chronicles*, which deals with four women, of various multi-cultural backgrounds, who flit from one country to another trying to "belong".

A recent book launch, held at **Indus** restaurant (see pg. XX), was attended by the hoi polloi of Bangkok's Indian society, with many well-heeled Thais and foreigners there as well.

"They're all amazing creatures of the world," proclaimed Pashmina, using the same airy generality with which she describes herself: "I'm a global citizen of the world, who lived in Asia for many years, taught theatre for 16 years, and has so much to thank the universe for."

She does not believe in specifics, which is why it is difficult to identify the four female protagonists in her book, except to know that they belong to the upper crust of society (like the writer herself). There is a vagueness about them, which can appear obtuse to the reader, but it's part of the writer's chosen perspective. Even the chapters have no titles, except for the names of the cities or regions—"South

East Asia" for example— where the characters dash in and out of.

It's a stretch to believe that the book is truly an "international bestseller", as proclaimed on the website and by the Amazon sticker on the book jacket, but nevertheless the author has already announced not one, but *two*, sequels to the novel.

So, do you love coffee as much the women in your book?

Not at all, I'm totally a tea-drinker.

Are the characters based on women you know?

They are complete fiction, but every one of them is a part of me. I always hear the song *I'm Every Woman* in my head!

They seem to be yearning for love.

Love comes from within. You have to love yourself wholeheartedly for anyone else to love you. Ultimately, it is self-love that heals the women. The theme of the various stories focuses on simple spirituality through multi-cultural ideals.

How long did it take you to write?

I finished the whole manuscript in 2003, when I was pregnant with my first child, but I got so caught up in my new life that I put it away and only re-visited it again in 2016. I then wrote the final version in eight months.

What did you do before you became a writer?

I was a teacher for 16 years, and prior to that, I worked in the PR industry. After I left the PR industry, I went into theater arts. Now I'm a writer, and I also hold writing workshops.

Can you tell us a bit about these writing workshops?

My workshops are designed to inspire writers to pursue their dreams. I am part of a coaching program called

'Thinking Into Results', which helped me unlock my desire to become an international bestseller. A good writer writes to, and from, the heart.

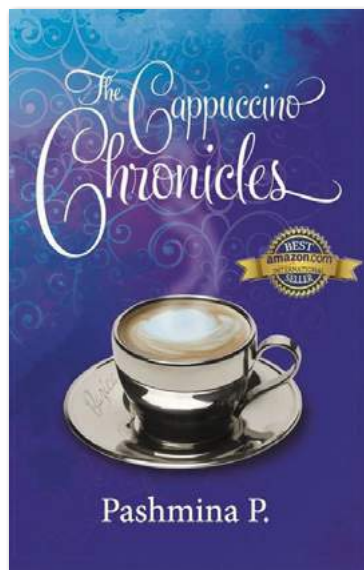
It seems odd that you are an 'international bestseller', when you have just launched your book.

My publishing company, *Hasmark Publishing*, channeled my book to different parts of the world, and told me that my book was an "international bestseller" in seven countries!

Why does Bangkok, the city where you now live not figure in the book?

This book is part of a trilogy, and Bangkok will probably appear in the forthcoming books. Four generations of my family live here. When I was, younger Bangkok was our Christmas, summer, and Easter home. Whilst my grandparents looked after their 13 grandchildren, their own children would travel the world to exotic places. **INTERVIEW BY LEKHA SHANKAR**

www.thecappuccinochronicles.com



Star on the Rise

Alex Sypsomos climbs the charts with his hit single “Four Walls”

By **Rianka Mohan**



Musician **Alex Sypsomos** is trying to be healthy, but *It Happened to Be a Closet*, the restaurant where we meet, has a menu laden with sugary delicacies. He vacillates between crepes and eggs before settling on the latter. Baseball cap on backwards, wearing a t-shirt and shorts, Sypsomos looks the picture of ease, and when I point it out his brown eyes twinkle with amusement.

“I’m on vocal rest now so I’ve been taking it slow, travelling, accompanying my girlfriend to her events.” He says it casually but his girlfriend is **Da Endorphine**, one of the most popular recording artists in Thailand, and facing her worshipping public sounds anything but relaxing. Sypsomos concedes the frenzied attention but he doesn’t mind hanging back from the spotlight for now. He has his sights set on the world stage and with his trademark vocals, sterling songwriting, and natural charisma, it’s only a matter of time.

A prolific musician who grew up in Bangkok (his family moved to the city when he was seven), Sypsomos has been a staple on the music scene here for a few years now. He’s a bona fide local talent who refined his musical chops playing at *Soul Bar*, as well as *The Alchemist* and *The Overground* (both now defunct).

He recently released his first single, “Four Walls”, under his new moniker **SYPS**, and it has quickly become a hit—reaching #6 on Spotify UK Viral 50 charts, and gaining acclaim with its catchy feel-good vibes and endearing music video starring **Da** and **Sypsomos**.

The singer is thrilled with the reception. “As the first step in the arc of my art, I couldn’t have asked for a more positive, collaborative experience; getting to co-write the song with two great musicians, **Richard Craker** and **Femke**

Weidema, both of whom I met at Karma Sound Studios. Then my best friends came in from LA to shoot the video, which my girl’s in, so it’s fantastic. I’m grateful for the people in my life and the song’s success.”

Managed by multi-Grammy nominated producer **Chris Craker**, Sypsomos is looking forward to releasing more music. He has several songs in the pipeline, one of which he says is particularly meaningful to him about looking at a past relationship with positivity.

“I’m a firm believer that you enter a relationship with love and there’s no reason to leave without, even if it doesn’t work,” he explains. “This song is about wishing someone from your past the best. It may not be a popular sentiment but it’s what I feel. I consider myself a student in the studio but I’m also coming into my own and learning to trust my instincts about the music I make. It takes me a while to get a song right as I try to put as much of the truth of me into it as possible.”

The decision to use SYPS as his stage name is also similarly motivated. “It’s been my nickname forever with my friends, my football team. In college in Boston (he studied at the prestigious Berklee College of Music), we’d throw parties and when I visited another campus for a game, I’d hear kids I didn’t know yelling ‘Yo Syps, sick party last weekend!’ It definitely feels most me.

And I’d like to hold onto that—allow the person I’ve been all my life to be in the driving seat, not a version of myself I’m trying to project or aspire to.”

It’s this remarkably confident approach to his music, along with a soulful, raspy voice most singers would kill for, that sets him apart. 2017, for him, will be about shuttling between London and LA to meet various music labels, showcase his music catalogue, and perform at shows there to widen his audience. He also hopes to gig here in Thailand soon, so keep an eye out for his next live appearance and be sure to check him out. ■



Check out SYPS at: www.facebook.com/sypsmusicofficial

Film News & Screenings

By **Bruce Scott**



Tokyo Fiancée



Les Chevaliers Blanc



Big Boss



The World's Smallest Army



Citizenfour



Wait Until Dark

The big news for film fans this month is the return of the **EU Film Festival**, which kicks off on May 18th and continues till the 28th (before moving onwards to Chiang Mai and later Khon Kaen). Screenings will be held at the **SF World Cinema**, Central World, and tickets are B120 each. The scheduled line-up includes: *Tokyo Fiancée* (Belgium); *The Paradise Suite* (Netherlands); *Horse Money* (Portugal); *Les Chevaliers Blanc* (France); *The Happiest Day in the Life of Olli Maki* (Finland); *Tour de Force* (Germany); *Nice People* (Sweden); *Spain in a Day* (Spain); and *Kills on Wheels* (Hungary). www.facebook.com/euinthailand

In other film news, Bangkok's historic **Scala Cinema** will be showing *Big Boss*, the classic 1971 martial arts film starring **Bruce Lee**, on Sunday May 14th. The screening is part of the ongoing 'World Class Cinema' series, which presents a different classic film each month. Showtime is 12 noon, and tickets are B100. Call 02 251 2861 for more information.

Meanwhile, this month's documentary series at the **Foreign Correspondent's Club of Thailand** (FCCT) begins on May 2nd at 7pm with *Going Clear: Scientology and the*

Prison of Belief, which profiles eight former members of the famous American cult. On May 8th the documentary film night includes food and wine as the Swiss Embassy presents *The World's Smallest Army*, a film about the infamous Swiss Guards during the papacy of Pope Francis by Gianfranco. Finally, on May 15th, don't miss *Citizenfour*, a chilling profile of whistleblower **Edward Snowden** and his battles with the NSA. Admission is B150 for FCCT non-members (free for members).

www.fccthai.com

Finally, the **Bangkok Screening Room** has several interesting films coming up in May, including US director **Devin Leisher's** 2016 film *Weaving Shibusa*, which explores the fascination with Japanese denim. Other highlights include the excellent 2016 Cambodian film *Diamond Island*, directed and co-written by **Davy Chou**, as well as the 2006 Canadian film *Water*, directed by **Deepa Metha**. And, as a special surprise, the "classic" film for May is the 1967 thriller *Wait Until Dark*, starring **Audrey Hepburn**, screening at a reduced ticket price of B200 for adults, or B160 for Bangkok Screening Room members. ■ www.bkksr.com



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SINCE 2007

 BANGKOKARTMAP



Fashion Freeze Frame

Glamour galore at the Bangkok International Fashion Week 2017

Words by **Millie Ho** Photos by **Vincent Sung / lefluxasia.com**

The clicking of cameras, cocktails in every hand, live DJs and music and, of course, a glittery, polished, and designer brand-sporting crowd... welcome to the 2017 **Bangkok International Fashion Week** (BIFW), which this year ran from March 21st to 26th at **Siam Paragon**, **Siam Center**, and **Siam Discovery** simultaneously. It was a visual feast, celebrating the creativity of new and established Thai and international designers. Attendees—ranging from fashionistas, aspiring designers, fashion editors, sponsors, and more—gathered in a waiting area surrounded by brand boutiques from the likes of Chanel and Louis Vuitton, enjoying interviews with fashion heavyweights such as Chinese-born **Guo Pei** and Thailand's **Polpat Asavaprapha** (Asava), snapping photos of themselves with industry celebrities at the press wall, and viewing the rotating fashion collections on display in search of inspiration.

Predictably, some of the runway shows held at Parc Paragon were fashionably late. It was not uncommon to wait for half-an-hour in long lineups where attendees stood decked out with statement handbags, colourful jumpsuits, and floral print blazers—choices that mirrored the pieces unveiled on the runway. This year, it was all about looking distinguished yet sophisticated, as Thai designers mixed classic pieces, like pantsuits and evening gowns, with bold textiles and tropical prints, drawing on design elements from Asian and European culture, and creating narratives influenced by the designers' own travels and the ever-evolving Thai fashion landscape.

The capacity crowds were charged with anticipation for each new show, each new model trotting down the runway, and each new dimming of the lights or



change of rhythm in the largely hip hop, electronic, and traditional-based runway soundtracks. The pieces modelled by Thai celebrities got the most reception, which speaks to the strong influence of celebrity culture in Thailand's fashion scene. Here a photo or two of someone famous wearing a piece from a designer's new collection can spark fashion trends overnight.

"They still dress more formally compared to Europe or North America," remarked an international attendee from Russia. Perhaps this is due to the strong influence of Western design aesthetics, which translated into a lot of formalwear bases, which Thai designers have made unique through the use of Thai silk, symbols from Asian folklore, and traditional embroideries and design elements. But this is just one opinion. Other international attendees, such as the woman in a white, gold-buckled Asava dress, who came specifically to support her favourite designer. Asava's "feminine design" and "quality materials" are closet staples that can be worn year-round, dressed up or down with accessories to stand out in a refined way—a welcome break from the fast fashion trends abroad.

The fashion industry in Thailand is thriving, and rising Thai designers were given the extra push at this year's event. In Siam Center, young Thai designers displayed their work, which was described by attendees as "fresh" and "unique", with some even preferring the designs of these up-and-comers to those of existing brands.

Bangkok International Fashion Week is only in its 10th year, but growth has been impressive, with more diversity amongst attendees, more innovations (BIFW 2017 could be viewed worldwide through 360° live broadcasts), and more progressive, dynamic designs that tell the stories of a traditional, modern, and future Thailand.



Guo Pei (CH)



Guo Pei (CH)



Asava (TH)



Asava (TH)



Vatanika (UK)



Vatanika (UK)



Nagara (TH)



Nagara (TH)





*Royal oscietra caviar with green apple sorbet and oyster veloute,
part of the innovative new tasting menu at Water Library Chamchuri*

A R O Y

water you waitin' for?

CHEF MIRCO KELLER recently launched a new 8-course tasting menu at the **WATER LIBRARY CHAMCHURI** restaurant (2F, 317 Chamchuri Square). Since 2011 Micro has been leading the kitchen at Water Library's flagship location, and he continually impresses guests with his creative and contemporary approach to fine dining. The tasting menu—available for lunch and dinner—is priced at B2,800 per person, and highlights include: royal oscietra caviar on top of a base of apple sorbet and oyster veloute; pork belly with green pea dumpling and ginger sauce; and a special dessert using *mayongchit*, a seasonal Thai fruit, as its star ingredient. Several of the chef's set menu dishes are also available à la carte, including the artfully presented prawn sashimi with beetroot, wasabi and parmesan.

bangkok's best on the world stage

At the **2017 WORLD'S 50 BEST RESTAURANTS** awards, sponsored by S. Pellegrino & Acqua Panna, two Bangkok-based restaurants made it onto the list, proving that this town is a hot commodity in foodie circles. The ceremony, held in Melbourne, Australia, in early April, awarded **GAGGAN**—named the best restaurant in Asia for the 3rd consecutive year back in February—the No. 7 spot (the highest spot any Bangkok restaurant has achieved since the awards were launched in 2002). Meanwhile, David Thompson's **NAHM**, moved up impressively, from No. 37 to No. 28. However, the No. 1 spot was snatched by New York City's **ELEVEN MADISON**, becoming the first U.S. establishment to win the top spot since 2004.

prodigal daughter

Open since the beginning of last month, **GAA** is the newest addition to the pantheon of eateries that bask in the reflected glow of Bangkok's celebrity chef extraordinaire, **GAGGAN ANAND** (see above). This latest offering is the brainchild of Gaggan's ex-sous chef **GARIMA ARORA**, and offers diners exquisite tasting set menus of 8 or 12 courses. The dishes, lovingly prepared from scratch, combine modern techniques and traditional cooking methods, with Thai, Indian, and international influences throughout. The desserts are showstoppers as well, and in addition to a fine selection of wines, the restaurant also offers fresh-pressed juice pairings. Yum!

brasserie in bangkok

Last month saw the grand opening of **ALEX BRASSERIE**, an innovative French-style eating and drinking hotspot set in a 600 sq.m industrial loft style space on Sukhumvit Soi 11. Inspired by French art-de-vivre, the venue features indoor and outdoor seating—offering about 170 seats, as well as majestic bar that overlooks the central room—and is being managed by French chef **ARNAUD DROUVILLÉ** (most recently the Executive Chef at Morimoto). His new menu goes from vibrant French cuisine to creative fusion, with an array of interesting dishes. Don't miss his beef short ribs, which consists of a 1.5kg piece of juicy red meat slowly vacuum cooked for 48 hours. The bar, meanwhile, tempts tipplers with signatures cocktails and sensibly priced spirits, while nightly DJs keep thing rocking.



Sushi and Sapporo Beer at Shintaro Restaurant

Anantara Siam Bangkok Hotel | 155 Rajadamri Rd.
Tel: 02 126 8866 | siam-bangkok.anantara.com

Lovers of seafood and suds should come enjoy the Sushi and Sapporo beer promotion running every Wednesday night throughout the month of May at Shintaro restaurant. With a wide selection of Nigiri sushi and rolls, prepared by the restaurant's Executive Sous Chef Satoshi Sawada, guests can select their favourite dishes. Choose from Uni sushi, O-Toro sushi, Hotategai sushi, Shimaaji sushi, Red Dragon Rolls, and many more. The à la carte sushi items start at B90++ each, and the free-flow Sapporo package is B750++ per person. This promotion is available for dinner only, from 5pm to 10:30pm.



The Best of Spanish Tapas at Tapas Y Vino Restaurant

Pullman Bangkok Grande Sukhumvit | 30, Sukhumvit Soi 21
Tel: 02 204 4161 | www.pullmanbangkokgrandesukhumvit.com

In the cozy confines of Tapas Y Vino's Spanish home ambience, executive Chef Pedro Carillo will show diners what "tapas" really means, and what it tastes like in the country of its origin. Enjoy a large platter selection of regional Spanish cuisine served up on an almost one-meter-long wooden board—ideal for up to four persons sharing a meal. Nibble on Jamon Iberico, Catalan calamari sautéed with chorizo, tiger mussels with spicy sauce, and many more tantalizing favourites. Each set is priced at B2,100++, and available from 6pm to 11pm daily.



Chu Toro at Elements

Okura Prestige Bangkok | Park Ventures Ecoplex, 57 Wireless Rd.
Tel: 02 687 9000 | www.okurabangkok.com

Throughout the month of May at Elements, Executive Chef Antony Scholtmeyer is offering a menu based around 'Chu Toro', a medium fatty tuna known for its unique taste and texture. The mouthwatering dishes, can be enjoyed à la carte or as part of specially prepared 4- and 5-course Chu Toro set menus with dessert. The promotion is available from Tuesday to Saturday, running from 6pm to 10:30pm. The 4-course menu is priced at B3,900++ per person, while the 5-course menu is B5,9000++ per person (à la carte dishes prices start from B8000++).



Summer Barbeque Combo Promotion at Bistro M

Marriott Executive Apartments | 90, Sukhumvit Soi 24
Tel: 02 302 5555 | www.bistrombangkok.com

Bistro M is all set for summer, bringing diners a menu sure to beat the heat. Their special BBQ combo offers a delectable variety of grilled meat and seafood, along with up to eight sauce flavours. Highlights include Australian beef sirloin, Australian lamb chops, Italian sausage, Hokkaido scallops, tuna steaks, and more. The promotion is offered from 6:30pm to 10pm every Wednesday until June 30th, and priced at B899 net per set (comprising two choices of meat or seafood barbeque, two choices of side dish, and a glass of Singha or Chang beer).



Special Oyster Feast at Panorama

Crowne Plaza Bangkok Lumpini Park | 952 Rama IV Rd.
Tel: 02 632 9000 | bangkoklumpinipark.crowneplaza.com

Every Saturday throughout May at Panorama, diners can enjoy a truly indulgent dining experience with the finest varieties of oysters from around the world. Savour freshly shipped delicacies such as France's premium Fine de Claire and Tsarskaya oysters, Australian oysters from Coffin Bay, and fresh new season Irish oysters. There's also a wide range of delectable desserts to top things off. The promotion is priced B1,899 net, and is available for dinner only, from 6pm to 10pm. Discover a new appreciation of taste and temptation when you dine "fresh from the ocean".



Teppanyaki Unlimited at Taihei

Banyan Tree Bangkok | 21/100 South Sathorn Rd.
Tel: 02 679 1200 | www.banyantree.com

Located on the 53rd and 54th floors of the Banyan Tree Bangkok, Taihei has an extensive sake and shochu selection as well as many Japanese signature dishes. During the month of May, get ready for the "grill of a lifetime". Enjoy famous Japanese grill delicacies to your heart's content at the restaurant's special All-You-Can Enjoy Teppanyaki dinner. This promotion is priced at B1,499++ per person, including choice of one soft drink or one glass of local beer, and runs daily from 6pm to 10:30pm, and during Sunday brunch (from noon to 3pm).

Le Cochon Blanc

A celebration of wood, fire, smoke and—of course—meat



Carnivores, who can attest to the primal allure of meat on a barbecue, are advised to follow the smoke wafting from **Le Cochon Blanc**, a new eatery on Sukhumvit Soi 31. Though the name translates to “the white pig”, the restaurant is decorated with a black interior, bisected at the entrance by a large open barbecue pit. Guests will likely see the sweat dripping off the brow of Chef **Chandler Schultz** upon entry, as he toils away in this fiery furnace. In the eating areas, flamingo wallpaper and flying pigs feature in one dining room while plush magenta upholstery takes pride of place in the other.

Adit Vansoh, part of the Issaya Siamese Club team that manages the eatery, says it opts for simplicity in the food and beverage menus. The concept is dishes diners are familiar with, but prepared with ingredients in a way that will wow them.

Le Cochon Blanc is a celebration of smoke—even the romaine leaves in the salad with homemade bacon (B320) are grilled. Meanwhile, the Beef tartare (B690 for large)

provides an ideal foil to play with the homemade Sriracha sauce, adjusting things to your chosen heat level.

The hand-cut Homemade sausages (B490) from French artisan **Emmanuel Chavassieux** were so subtly herbed they could make a whole meal by themselves. One of the three sausage options available is made with hand-picked wild *herbes de Provence*, including a variety of thyme and *calamant*, a member of the mint family.

The grain-fed Black angus hangar steak (B1,000) is barbecued to a bloody pink, so tender it requires no accompaniment other than salt and pepper. The dish is a perfect example of the restaurant’s philosophy of simple items expertly prepared.

But the star of the show was the Black angus short rib (B1,250), which is rubbed with molasses and salt, barbecued, then cooked sous vide for two days! The result is a soft, velvety, fatty, smoky masterpiece that will have the drool dripping down your chin.

The Mashed potatoes (B190) best represent the eatery’s attitude toward

butter. These are made with Bordier butter, with an almost one-to-one ratio of butter to potatoes, and are hand-pressed through sieves to enhance their creaminess. The grilled corn (B190) also helps complement the meat, with coriander, chili powder, lime juice, butter, and fish sauce adding smoke and heat to the meal.

Save room for dessert, as the crème caramel (B290), a custard speckled with vanilla bean and a salted caramel sauce, has a supple consistency and continues the emphasis on salt.

All this meat deserved a full-bodied wine, and the 2014 *Sileni Estates Pinot Noir Hawke’s Bay* (B2,250) did the trick, even offering a slight metallic finish that left the palate hungering for more.

BY ROBIN BANKS

Le Cochon Blanc

26, Sukhumvit Soi 31

Tel: 02 662 3814

Open daily: 6pm-midnight

www.lecochonblanc.com

Indus

New Tasting Menu offers a contemporary approach to Indian fine dining



With a name like **Indus**—a title that pays homage to one of the oldest and greatest civilizations in India—one can't but expect a great meal in the grandest of Indian traditions. And this well-known restaurant, with its art deco style, old world charm, and elegant atmospherics, does not disappoint.

However, with a new awareness of customer profiles, changing tastes, and contemporary trends, the new 'Tasting Menu' at Indus adds a modern dimension to an establishment already well noted for its traditional dishes and authentic flavours.

Since it opened in 2005, I've visited this restaurant often, so I was curious and excited to try this new approach. The 7-course meal (priced

at B1,600, and B2,600 with wine pairings), was created after much planning and discussion between Chef **Nitin Kumar** and a reputed sommelier. The result is a phenomenal feast that offers the best of the restaurant's famed *Mughlai* cuisine.

An important point to keep in mind, for anyone trying this unique multi-course meal, is that it's a long, drawn-out affair that gives diners plenty of time to savour the tastes and admire the style and design of a highly creative dining experience.

We started with a delicate, melt-in-the-mouth semolina puff, accented with a sprinkle of kaffir lime dust and mango cream, and paired with a fruity Italian Prosecco. That was followed by a superb *makai-pudina* soup, which had dashes of corn, mint,

and cinnamon, and a juicy spice-marinated tiger prawn with cream fenugreek, smoked broccoli purée, and tiny frills of buttermilk froth. Both were accompanied by a delightful 2014 Australian Chardonnay.

Next up, chicken breast spiced with brown onion and fresh ginger, all surrounded artistically by a beetroot spread, then onto a tangy, piquant, scallop dish, spiced with crushed peppercorns and garlic chutney. The accompanying wine was a 2015 New Zealand Riesling.

Just when we thought we were satiated, out came a pair of outstanding but diversely different dishes—a juicy and tangy lamb chop accompanied by a unique truffle naan, and finally, the 'mother' of all Indian *biryanis*... the marinated and sealed *Dum Biryani*. We were bursting at the seams, but a lovely Australian Shiraz kept things together.

The dessert platter was the proverbial "icing" on the cake. The innovatively flavored *kulfi* ice cream and *kheer* were outshone by the *kalakand* sweet, which was served as a cheesecake. Being a mad lover of Indian desserts, this is one dish I would have preferred to have in its original incarnation, without the innovative flavourings. And you can bet we needed *masala chai* after this mega meal, which took nearly three hours to complete.

The Tasting Menu is made for foodies with large appetites, a penchant for innovation, and plenty of time on their hands (also the food items will be changed on a regular basis). Of course, Indus also has its sumptuous and superb à la carte Indian fare to choose from as well.

BY LEKHA SHANKAR

Indus, Contemporary Indian
71, Sukumvit Soi 26
Tel: 02 258 4900
Open daily: 11am-2:30pm, 6pm-11pm
www.indusbangkok.com

Sri Trat

Eastern fare with a Bangkok flair



The cuisine of most regions of Thailand all get equal play in Bangkok, with tasty Northern sausage, spicy Isaan delicacies, and fiery Southern curries almost always within easy reach. However, the cuisine of Eastern Thailand—and in particular Trat province—is not nearly so well represented, which is just one of the reasons why a visit to the recently opened **Sri Trat** is so worthwhile.

Located up at the top end of Sukhumvit Soi 33, this beautifully remodeled house-turned-restaurant is immediately recognizable by its iconic emblem—the B&W face of a woman wearing a stylized crown. The woman in question is none other than owner **Wongwich Sripinyoo's** mother (a former Miss Trat beauty contest winner), and it's also mom's recipes that pop up throughout the diverse menu.

For those unfamiliar with Eastern Thai cuisine, it's notable for its abundance of seafood, and the use of fresh fruits and rare herbs. Our first dish is the fabulous Whole mud crab with creamy roe (B540), served in a blue ceramic pot accompanied by a bevy of

vegetables (for dipping). It's spicy but not overpowering, and the crunchy fresh vegetables make it a deliciously healthy starter for sharing. Next up is a very unique item off the salad menu, namely the Thai herbal salad with ceviche-style barracuda (B220), served with a special "house secret sauce". This dish is a true standout! The fish flesh is citrus-cured to a perfect firmness, and the sauce—made with peanut brittle—adds an extra dimension of sweet and smoky flavour.

Moving from seafood delights to terrestrial treats, we first sample the Sweet and sour pork cha muang curry (B220), which sees tender pork belly chunks immersed in a tangy herbal stew, with *chamuang* leaves providing the uniquely aromatic taste. A second curry follows, this time the Massaman chicken curry with young durian (B280). Here the chewy chunks of sweet durian take the place of potato—normally found in Massaman curries—and the combination is superb. This dish is also a nod to the fact that Trat province is one of Thailand's most renowned producers of durian.

To finish off we sample the Signature assorted dessert selection (B350) which is enough for at least two, and includes: "turtle eggs" (mung bean centered sweets in warm coconut milk); soft crepes with green bean and coconut filling; and coconut centered dumplings dipped in warm coconut milk.

It's also worth noting that the warm and welcoming bar area—which doubles as the entrance—serves up some cleverly concocted cocktails. At the mixologist's suggestion we sample the Ruang Thong (B340), a pleasantly potent mix of tequila reposado, Laphroig single malt scotch, Licor43, and rice flavoured tea, and the significantly sweeter Tang May (B340), which combines Monkey Shoulder whisky, condensed milk, cinnamon syrup, sweet vermouth, Benedictine, bitters, and a few other yummy surprises. **BY BRUCE SCOTT**

Sri Trat

90, Sukhumvit Soi 33

Open: Wed-Mon, noon-11pm

Tel: 02 088 0968

www.facebook.com/sritrat

La Bottega di Luca

Italian fine dining attracts a loyal foodie following



One of the great pleasures of dining at **La Bottega di Luca** is chatting with **Luca Appino**, the namesake of the restaurant and a veteran of the Thai dining scene. He's had a hand in Enoteca, Vesper Bar, Il Fumo and Pizza Massilia, all the while observing food trends with a wary eye.

The local food movement, fusion, fancy plating... Appino is not opposed to them, he just has an abiding belief in sourcing the best ingredients, from Italy in the case of La Bottega, and on this point he will not waver—importing over 80 percent of the ingredients used in the restaurant. He's also especially eager to find items one cannot find elsewhere in Bangkok.

His eatery serves over 15 kinds of pasta and imports flour from several different regions in Italy. Appino insists customers get a different taste experience at La Bottega and they appear to be a loyal bunch, as the restaurant has been operating since 2008.

The Beetroot salad (B520) was an unusual jumble of flavours, with diced beets and a beetroot sorbet

adding tang to goat cheese balls rolled in pistachios from Bronte, which when combined with olive oil contributed saltiness to the bitter mixed greens.

The homemade Angel hair pasta (B590)—with clams, calamari and its ink, green peas and sauce, all topped with fresh sea urchin—was a mixed bag. The seafood was clearly fresh and the peas helped round out the mouthfeel, but the dish was a tad too salty, even for *frutti di mare*.

However, the Kamut spaghetti (B590) with cherry tomato sauce, Burrata cheese, mullet roe bottarga and lemon zest is probably an example of why patrons love La Bottega. Chef **Andrea Ortu** uses an ancient type of wheat, known as *kamut*, to bring out a nutty flavour to the *al dente* pasta, which interplays with the acidity of the tomatoes, the hint of sweetness from the Burrata (from Puglia), and the salty kick from the bottarga (from Sardinia). It's a statement of intent for the restaurant's ethos, and it succeeds on every level.

Next up was Slow-roasted suckling pig from Sardinia (B990), with potato croquettes, braised leeks and red wine sauce. This was a rustic dish, with the leeks and pork skin providing a satisfying crunch, the pig salty, fatty and heavily herbed with rosemary. All this hearty food required a robust wine to wash it down, and the *8 Desteffanis Barbera D'Alba Rosina* (B1,200) hit just the right tannic note.

The sweet was crêpes brûlée lemon curd, red fruit sauce, and crumbled mint (B380). While the crepe proved a spongy container for the curd, the strawberry coulis was a sweet complement to the citrus.

If you get a chance, pull up a chair and bend Luca's ear over an espresso. It's become a true Bangkok experience. **BY ROBIN BANKS**

La Bottega di Luca

2F, Terrace 49 Building, Sukhumvit Soi 49
Tel: 02 204 1731
Open: Tue-Sun, 11am-3pm, 5-11pm,
Mon, 5-11pm
www.labottega.name/restaurant

Amari's Sunday Brunch

Weekend feast at Amaya Food Gallery, Amari Watergate Hotel



The **Amari Watergate's** newly opened **Amaya Food Gallery** is featuring a Sunday Brunch inspired by the alluring flavours of Asian street food, with a tantalizing touch of Western cuisine—all at prices that are easy to swallow (from B1,800 for food only to B3,500 with free-flow champagne).

The product of an extensive recent makeover, the Amaya Food Gallery is defined aesthetically as much by the understated elegance of the décor as by its spaciousness: Not merely *located* on the fourth floor—it is the fourth floor.

An expansive, wide-open layout is punctuated by distantly spaced cooking and serving stations, with a towering glass front wall giving out onto bustling Petchaburi Road. Strolling around the vast floor space

gives one the sensation of wandering through a foodie wonderland, with each cooking station like a wee quaint village.

Diners will always find a standing selection of premium highlight dishes, such as mountains of iced seafood including rock lobster and Alaskan king crab—all conveniently segmented. Similarly plate-ready, the imported mussels, oysters and clams are absolutely shucked. Meanwhile, generous slabs of French foie gras are grilled to perfection and served on toasted brioche with fruit coulis.

It can be said that at the heart of any brunch outing is the social element—breaking bread with friends and sharing new culinary experiences is nourishment for the soul. But catering to a plurality of individual tastes and preferences can

be tricky. Not so, here. The bountiful, ever-changing menu of supporting-cast international dishes makes for carefree hob-noshery that will sate the most discerning palate.

Setting out to explore the delicacy-laden landscape of salads, uncountable cold dishes, legions of dim sum, BBQs, omelettes, grills, smoked fish, noodles, sushi, soups, tempura, and Thai specialties, we also encountered a number of unspeakably seductive nibbles like seafood gratin, prime rib-roast, eggs Benedict and chicken à la king. Meanwhile, divinely pungent aromas lead to a dedicated cheese populated with curds of such superb pedigree as Taleggio, Fontal, Camembert and Samsøe.

Then a shift in ambient fragrance brings to attention a fine selection of sub-continental favourites like chicken biryani and *murgh malai tikka*, plus succulent tandoori-baked mains, created by Amari's resident Indian chef. Fans of Italian fare are well catered for, with a live pasta station featuring oodles of the traditional noodles and sauces, along with antipasti, cured meats and flatbread *piadinas*. And those with a penchant for a fine, traditional-style crust will appreciate the artisanship and real-deal authenticity of Amari's oven-fresh breads—from Indian rotis to Italian focaccia, ciabatta and sun-dried tomato loaves.

Finally, a suite of tongue-lolling desserts mercilessly beckons, including fresh crêpes, warm pies, cakes and a cascading chocolate fountain, as traditional Thai treats and creamy-rich chocolate truffles provide a satisfying conclusion to this sumptuous, whirlwind buffet affair.

BY CHRIS MICHAEL

Amaya Food Gallery
Amari Watergate Hotel
847 Petchburi Rd,
Tel: 02 653 9000
www.amari.com/watergate

Red Sky

Red sky at night, diner's delight



For Bangkok's sky bar aficionados there is one rooftop wonder that, with its spectacular 55th floor setting and 360-degree vistas, arguably impresses more than any other. Looking out from higher than the incredible skyline horizon, you can almost reach the sky at **Centara Grand's Red Sky**, and the impact has all the hallmarks of a glamorous, hip and Hollywoodesque hangout. It's an extraordinary venue for diners and cocktail lovers that celebrates the beauty of Bangkok's cityscapes in all their brilliance.

With *al fresco* dining and a bar above, Red Sky boasts a refreshingly straightforward menu of mainly meat and seafood dishes. The lasting flavour of the restaurant is of classic tastes and well-presented dishes. There is no attempt to reinvent or redefine menu items which, at times, can be comforting while at others perhaps a little unimaginative (given the setting it might be expected for the menu here to go a little beyond traditional limits).

The Red Sky surf and turf tower (B5,955) is an iconic signature dish for

pairs to share. The two tiers of luxury seafood and gourmet meaty morsels create an extravagant, theatrical centrepiece. Perfect to order as a romantic gesture, it possibly looks more ravishing than it tastes, although the Australian Wagyu ribeye and lamb chops are succulently served with grilled Maine lobster, giant Andaman prawns, US scallops and Alaskan king crab.

The truffle-infused Wagyu beef tenderloin "Rossini" (B2,155)—the meat imported from Australia—is served with foie gras, wild mushrooms and Madeira sauce. This is a good and tasty choice for beef lovers who do not want to pay the higher prices demanded for Japanese Wagyu. Meanwhile, the Dover sole "Meunière" (B1,655) is roasted with a caper, shallot, and parsley butter, and is a lovely dish that is beautifully cooked and a wonderful complement to the beef course. For dessert, the Warm apple crumble (B355) with vanilla ice cream is pleasant enough, whilst the Dark chocolate sphere (B395) is velvety and rich.

With food quick to cool down due to the breeze on high, there is temptation to finish up dishes quickly. However, an exhilarating glass elevator ride up two floors leads to the funky beats of the **CRU Champagne Bar** and its stunning cocktails. One of these made-to-order Instagram stars is served in an iron cage, whilst another green concoction comes with a floating rubber duck, and another with an ice nest filled with pomegranate-seed 'eggs' inside.

The menu at Red Sky enshrines it as a member of Bangkok's exclusive gourmet restaurants club, but it is the skyline, the quirky cocktails at CRU, and the fun atmosphere that make it soar sky high. Red Sky at night is a sensory delight, and dinner simply adds to an already spectacular experience. **BY NADIA WILLAN**

Red Sky

56F, Centara Grand at CentralWorld
99/ 999 Rama I Rd.

Open daily: 4pm-1am

Tel: 02 100 6255

www.centarahotelsresorts.com/redsky



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Breaking Bread with Pawel Viktorrek

Zuma's menu reveals the art of Japanese Shibui

There are chefs who have done the rounds of high-end restaurants, crafting their skills, and then there are people like **Pawel Viktorrek**. Spending time with Pawel, **Zuma Bangkok's** newish Head Chef, is like taking an inspiring masterclass in the art of Japanese cuisine. It's a foodie experience that encompasses art; the art of living—and eating, of course, which are in essence one and the same—and the concept of *shibui*.

To those uninitiated in this allusive term, "*shibui*" is about creating balance

between simplicity and complexity, of letting purity shine through; an expression of the essence of quality. The stunning menu at Zuma is *shibui* on a plate, and the experience, at times, resonates with your whole being.

Pawel headed to England in 2002, just as Asian food was really taking off in London. Applying for a chef job at a Japanese restaurant, Pawel failed to cut spring onions to the native chef's strict standards, but his enthusiasm paid off and he was given a chance. That chance turned into an opportunity

of a lifetime and a whole new world of culinary adventure. The jobbing cook turned into a passionate chef.

"I was hooked," he admits. "I carried a notebook and jotted down all the names of the fish in English and Japanese, and how you could prepare and eat them. I totally and unexpectedly fell in love with Japanese food. I was sent on trips to learn about food in Japan and discovered things you only get on the ground from the chefs and suppliers. I am just so passionate about Japanese



food and seafood. I know everything about tuna. I have even been swimming with them!

“Real Japanese food is about pure, simple ingredients cooked in the best way to keep the natural flavours with some sophisticated techniques too of course,” he adds with a smile. “You need to take care with the ingredients, just as you would with a person. Japanese cooking is an attitude and an approach. I used to get really frustrated when I was asked to make the simplest tempura again and again because it wasn’t good enough. I didn’t understand at first, and then I did. Perfect tempura should look like seaweed moving in the water—an aesthetic, a piece of art. There is one school that teaches how to plate food only, and the course lasts four years!”

With branches around the world, the concept behind the Zuma brand is informal *izakaya*-style Japanese dining, and the contemporary Japanese plates are perfect for sharing. An open robata grill kitchen and large open seafood counter creates an element of uplifting activity at Zuma too that goes beyond the bland of some upmarket restaurants.

However, whilst it may be the fashion for Bangkok dining to be an immersive experience, it is the sheer quality of the dishes at Zuma that astound. Pawel’s impassioned understanding of Japanese ingredients and dishes, combined with an innate, down-to-earth flavour appreciation, skilfully creates what must be some of the city’s finest Japanese dishes. Even the cocktail menu gets a Japanese infusion. The *Japanese Smoked Whisky Sour* includes a touch of theatre as the giant ice-cube is branded at the table with the Zuma logo—a deliciously aromatic start. However, whilst the wine list is extensive, a sommelier suggesting special notes to elevate the menu would work well (as the house wine, while decent, does not necessarily add to the senses in the way a specially paired wine could).

A taste of the tomato ginger dressing and roasted eggplant features those strong Asian flavours that are so beloved, while the sashimi yellowtail sliced with green chili relish, ponzu, picked garlic is subtle, soft, and sophisticated.

So far, so good. Then something unexpected happens with the arrival

of two pieces of seared *O-Toro*, special sushi with fresh wasabi and bonito flakes. Zuma zooms up to another level and never, ever has one bite of Japanese sushi ever tasted so good! It is so outstanding that the experience is almost emotional and there is more to follow. The black cod marinated with saikyo miso wrapped in hoba leaf is unbelievable, so much so that flakes of fish are eaten delicately just so the dish can last longer.

The 80 gram Japanese Wagyu sirloin—A4 grade with signature sauces and fresh wasabi—is simply extraordinary, and excels beyond the level of many high-end steak restaurants following the Wagyu trail. Finally, the Zuma signature Hokkaido style cheese tart, strawberry sorbet is light with a wonderfully balanced sweetness and matches the high quality of Zuma’s ever-so-special menu.

In a city that is far too often fixated on the latest trendy eatery, Zuma is, some six years after first opening in the high-profile **St Regis Hotel**, an experience that creates a foodie feeling that needs to be personally rediscovered to be truly appreciated.

INTERVIEW BY NADIA WILLAN

Jay Fai: Dancing with Fire

I'm breaking a promise; the promise that I made to my friends that I wouldn't tell anybody about eating at our secret beloved restaurant. The promise didn't come from my being selfish, and wanting to keep this woman's graceful cooking and service to myself alone, but rather because I don't want her to get too popular and have to work too hard, because she is so sacred to me.

Jay Fai is the woman in question, and she makes me feel like I am the luckiest person in the world. She is a ballerina of fire. She is a rare master, and is still cooking her food with charcoal. At her cooking station in the alleyway, on the side of her shophouse, she has two charcoal braziers that are constantly aflame. She controls the fire with a fan, and her four accompanying woks are on stand-by. With each dish she prepares, and each movement she makes, it seems like she is in a trance! And when Jay Fai has her workman's goggles on it means she is ready for some real action!

Any dish she makes comes with a lovely "wokky" smell, the smell of the bottom of a well-seasoned wok. Her renowned crab curry, *puu pad pongkari*, is the best in the universe



and it is on the top of my list. The fresh chunks of crab meat, big as a *farang's* thumb, lay in the orange curry egg-creamy sauce alongside the crescent-moon shapes of crunchy sweet onions. It looks like orange lava over edible rocks! No friend of mine who has sampled Jay Fai's food well will bother with any dinner table conversation before tossing the first bite into their mouths. Their complete attention on the fullness of flavour, and the textures and aromas.

I told my close friends that if I could choose the last dish of my life it would be Jay Fai's *tom yum haeng* (dry tom yum). It's like tom yum soup in an enhanced dimension. All the tom yum ingredients are fresh cut, for the aroma to release its strongest fragrance. Then, instead of cooking a normal tum yum soup in the wok, she cooks the soup down until it's almost gone before adding giant shrimps, squid, and fresh fish fillets for the final seconds of full heat. To me, the difference between tom yum soup and tom yum haeng is like the difference of cologne versus perfume. This tom yum haeng version is more aromatic, but

delicately so, and more nuanced in its taste. Seriously, I feel that this dish is in love with itself—it's like consuming an impressive piece of art in which your taste buds keep discovering layer after layer of the beauty of taste.

In fact, it's not an exaggeration to say that Jay Fai IS an artist. She cooks every single dish by herself. No matter who you are, she will treat you with grace, and with great food. The love she puts into her food makes me just simply love her all the more in return. And you know what... this is only the beginning of what she has to offer (but I have to stop this column somewhere). ■

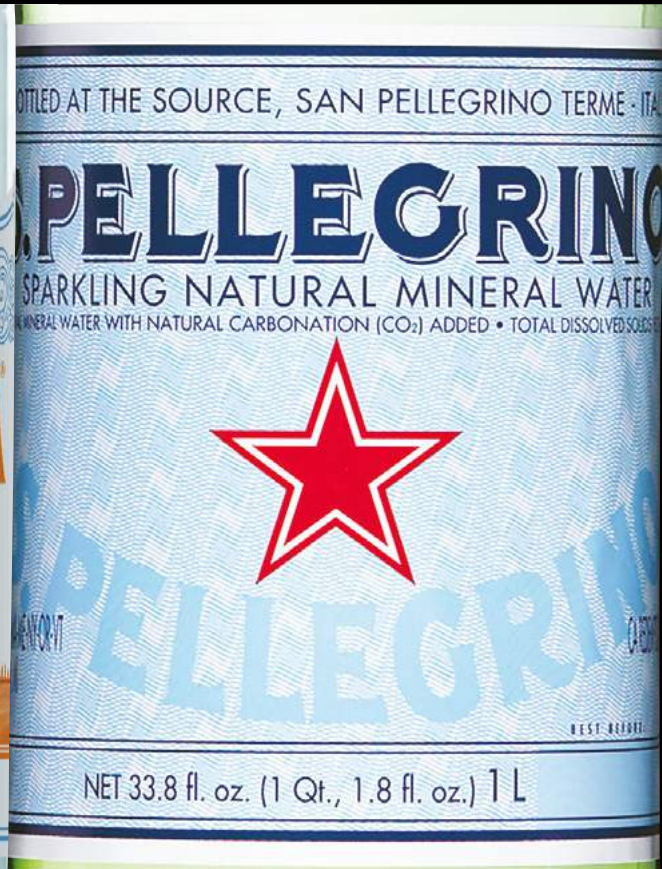
eat like
Nym



Our roving roadside gourmand Nym knows her local grub inside-out and thrives on the stories behind the dishes. Each month, she takes an offbeat tour in search of the city's next delectable morsel.



Address: Jay Fai is on Mahachai Road, the same street as Padthai Thipsamai, about 20 meters south of the giant queue for padthai. It's a shophouse, with a little alleyway on the side, where you will see fiery flames dancing all the time. She's open from 3pm till 2am, every day except Sunday.



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CHINESE

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59F, Banyan Tree Bangkok

21/100 South Sathorn Rd.

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Liu

A traditional place that offers all the understated grandeur of Cantonese fine dining while executing food full of contemporary notes.

3F, Conrad Bangkok,

87 Wireless Rd.

Tel: 02 690 9999

Open daily: 11:30am-2:30pm, 6pm-10:30pm

www.conradhotels3.hilton.com

FRENCH

J'Aime by Jean-Michel Lorain

This restaurant's classic French haute cuisine definitely lives up to its lofty expectations, even rising above, thanks to the vibrancy in taste and colour of the dishes. You'll no doubt find yourself thinking about certain menu items well into the next day.

U Sathorn Bangkok,

105, 105/1 Soi Ngam Duphli

Tel: 02 119 4899

Open daily: 12pm-2:30pm, 6pm-10:30pm

www.jaime-bangkok.com

L'Appart

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189 Sukhumvit Rd.

Tel: 02 126 9999

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Lounge, 5pm-1am

www.sofitel-bangkok-sukhumvit.com



La Vie

La Vie

French creative cuisine takes centre stage at this elegant restaurant on the 11th floor of VIE Hotel Bangkok. The fine dining venue aims to leverage the hotel's growing reputation as a top local culinary destination.

11F, VIE Hotel Bangkok, Phaya Thai Rd.

Tel: 02 309 3939

Open daily: 6:30pm-10:30pm,

Lunch, Mon-Sat, noon-3pm

www.viehotelbangkok.com

GREEK

Avra Greek Restaurant

Rising from the mid-Sukhumvit culinary clutter like a Parthenon of Hellenic delights, this charming eatery offers an impressively expansive menu that includes all the perennial favourites prepared with thoughtful touches.

GF, Bangkok Hotel Lotus Sukhumvit

1 Soi Daengudom, Sukhumvit Soi 33

Open: Tue-Fri, noon-3pm, 6pm-11pm,

Sat-Sun, noon-11pm, Mon, 6pm-11pm

Tel: 02 258 2877

www.avrabkk.com

INTERNATIONAL

Bunker

Classically trained in French cuisine, and committed to the Slow Food movement, Chef Arnie—a new devotee of Thai cuisine—is a one-man melting pot. Take cover from ho-hum cuisine.

118/2, Soi Suksa (Sathorn Soi 12)

Tel: 02 234 7749

Open daily: 6pm-midnight

www.bunkerbkk.com

Dine in the Dark

The title says it all. Guests experience an exercise in coping by entering a world of total darkness—which both accentuates the flavours of the delicious food, but also gives diners a taste of what it's like for their visually-impaired servers, who deal with blindness as an everyday fact of life.

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GF, Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit
250 Sukhumvit Rd.
Tel: 02 649-8358
Open: Mon-Sat, 6:30pm-9:30pm
www.dineinthedarkbangkok.com



Eat Me

Eat Me

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Soi Pipat 2, Silom Rd.
Tel: 02 238 0931
Open daily: 3pm-1am
www.eatmerestaurant.com

Park Society

Excite both your taste buds and eyes with a cutting-edge, elegant dinner overlooking Lumpini Park and the amazing skyline of Bangkok. Perfect for a romantic evening or a friendly get-together.
SO Sofitel Bangkok, 2 North Sathorn Rd.
Tel: 02 624 0000
Open daily: Kitchen, 6pm-10:30pm,
www.so-sofitel-bangkok.com

Red Oven

Styled as a World Food Market, this 7th-floor all-day dining venue puts a contemporary twist on buffet spreads. On weekends, the restaurant offers an irresistible scrumptious, free-flow wine brunch buffet.
7F, SO Sofitel Bangkok, 2 North Sathorn Rd.
Tel: 02 624 0000
Open daily: 6:30pm-10:30pm,
Sat-Sun Wine Brunch, noon-3pm
www.so-sofitel-bangkok.com

Up & Above

This 24th floor restaurant in the five star Okura Prestige Bangkok hotel boasts a brunch to rival all others—delivering a buffet of luxurious proportions.

24F, Okura Prestige Bangkok
57 Witthayu Rd.
Tel: 02 687 9000
Open daily: noon-10:30pm
Sunday Brunch: noon-3pm
www.okurabangkok.com

ITALIAN



Don Giovanni

Don Giovanni

The menu is full of home-style recipes, the concept rarely straying from traditional Italian. Along with neo-classical décor, the culinary approach lends this restaurant a decorous air befitting its operatic name.



Tables Grill

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Open: Mon-Sat, 11:30am-2:30pm, 8pm-10:30pm
www.centarahotelsresorts.com

JAPANESE

Shintori

If you're looking for a dinner that will impress on all fronts, the combination here of a thrilling setting and equally exciting food, is hard to beat. 18F, Zen World@Central World
Tel: 02 100 9000
Open daily: 5:30pm-11:30pm
www.shintoribangkok.com

Ten-Sui

High-end Japanese restaurants abound in Bangkok, but it's hard to imagine a more authentic experience than you'll find at this elegant eatery. 33, Sukhumvit Soi 16
Tel: 088 540 1001
Open daily: 11:30am-2pm, 5:30pm-10pm
www.tensui.co

Yuutaro

Sushi and sashimi purists take note, a staggering 90 percent of the seafood is selected from Tsukiji Market in Tokyo. 5F, Central Embassy, 1031 Phloenchit Rd.
Tel: 02 160 5880-1
Open daily: 11am-10.30pm
www.yuutaro.com

MEXICAN



La Monita Taqueria

La Monita Taqueria

If you're looking for classic, affordable, Mexican fare that still packs some serious fireworks, then check out any

of La Monita's three downtown locales. Load up on guacamole, burritos, fajitas, quesadillas, and soft corn tacos, all washed down with some wonderfully potent margaritas. Mahatun Plaza, Tel: 02 650 9581 GF, Siam Paragon, Tel: 02 650 9581 7F, EmQuartier, Tel: 02 003 6238
www.lamonita.com

Méjico

The menu tackles traditions long ignored, giving local diners a style of cuisine that many haven't ever tried, proving that Mexican food has more to offer. 2F, Groove@Central World
Tel: 02 252 6660
Open daily: 11am-late
www.facebook.com/MejicoThailand

Slanted Taco

Owner Jorge Bernal brings the authentic flavours of the Mexican street to Bangkok, with many original recipes and handmade Mexican chorizo. Sukhumvit Soi 23
Tel: 02 258 0546
Open: Mon-Fri, 4pm-1am, Sat-Sun, 2pm-1am
www.slantedtaco.com



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24/05/16

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SEAFOOD



Crab and Claw

Crab and Claw

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7F, Helix Bldg, EmQuartier

Tel: 096 197 5769

Open daily: 10am-10pm

www.facebook.com/crabandclaw

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Offering a wide range of yummy seafood delicacies—all straight from the sea—this seafood restaurant has been

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4F, Siam Paragon, 991 Rama 1 Rd.

Tel: 02 610 9244

Open daily: 10am-10pm

www.laemcharoenseafood.com

THAI

80/20

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1052-1054, Charoen Krung 26

Tel: 087 593 1936

Open: Wed-Mon, 5pm-11:45pm

www.facebook.com/8020bkk

Backyard By Baan

Like Baan, this place serves authentic Thai comfort food and local ingredients, albeit with a few contemporary twists. A variety of drinks are offered as well, including wine, craft beer, and Thai cocktails.

GF, Jas Urban Mall, Sri Nakarin Soi 46/1

Tel: 02 386 7339

Open daily: 11:30am-11pm

facebook.com/backyardbybaan



Blue Elephant

Blue Elephant

A wildly successful brand since it was first established in 1980, this restaurant (and cooking school) sits in a gorgeous historic mansion. On the menu, Chef Nooror takes a riff on the Thai food of tomorrow, but also shares her heritage with every dish.

233 South Sathorn Rd.

Tel: 02 673 9353

Open daily: 11:30am-2:30pm,

6:30pm-10:30pm

www.blueelephant.com

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Email : training@coffeeworks.co.th

[Facebook.com/myCoffeeWORKS](https://www.facebook.com/myCoffeeWORKS)

Find us on Google maps : CoffeeWORKS Bangkok

Erawan Tea Room

Known for its amazing high tea, this place also serves traditional Thai cuisine in a nostalgic setting that overlooks the consistently crowded Erawan Shrine. Packaged products and a wide selection of teas from India, China, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are also available. 2F, Erawan Bangkok Mall 494 Rajadamri Rd. Tel: 02 254 6250 Open daily: 10am-10pm,



Ruen Urai

Ruen Urai

Set in the former residence of the herbal medical doctor to King Rama V, Ruen Urai uses herbs and spices with medicinal qualities, while delivering refined Thai fare using the finest fresh ingredients. The Rose Hotel 118 Surawongse Rd. Tel: 02 266 8268-72 Open daily: noon-11pm www.ruen-urai.com

Suan Bua

Located in the busy North end of Bangkok, this Thai restaurant offers a

comfortable and relaxing atmosphere with a focus on natural and organic ingredients. It encompasses traditional dishes from all over Thailand. LLF, Centara Grand, Ladprao 1695 Phahonyothin Rd. Tel: 02 541 1234 ext. 4068 Open daily: 11:30am-2:30pm; 6pm-10:30pm www.centarahotelsresorts.com

CAFÉ

Dean & Deluca

This New York based brand cleaves to its highbred beginnings with an approachable composite of American comfort food, spiced to local levels with the aid of local ingredients. GF, MahaNakhon Cube, Tel: 02 023 1616 2F, Central Embassy, Tel: 02 160 5956 GF, EmQuartier, The Waterfall Quartier, Tel: 02 261 0464 1F, Park Ventures Ecoplex 57 Wireless Rd. Tel: 02 108 2200 www.deandeluca.com/thailand

Kiosk Café

Located in The Barkyard Bangkok Complex, this dog-friendly boite is a fetching choice for an exceptional meal, a friendly cake-and-chat, or a delicious hot coffee. 65, Sukhumvit Soi 26 Tel: 02 259 4089 Open: Tue-Thu, 10:30am-9pm, Fri-Sun, 10:30am-11pm www.kiosk-cafe.com



Quaint

Quaint

Combining an international kitchen with a few Thai twists, this charming day or evening venue is everything at once—café, bar, restaurant, and function venue— with a huge selection of food and drinks. 23, Sukhumvit Soi 61 Tel: 02 714 1998 Open daily: 8am-midnight www.facebook.com/QuaintBangkok

VEGETARIAN

Broccoli Revolution

The brick-walled warehouse turned veg-friendly restaurant features a menu full of bright veggie bites that could pull in even the most stubborn carnivore. 899 Sukhumvit Rd (at Soi 49) Tel: 02 662 5001 Open daily: 7am-10pm Facebook: Broccoli Revolution

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The Bespoke line of premium cigars, now available at Whisgars

NIGHTLIFE

roll with it

Nothing says luxury lifestyle like fine cigars, so it's worth noting that **WHISGARS**—Bangkok's beloved whisky and cigar bar chain—recently announced the addition of **BESPOKE CIGARS** to its extensive line of premium hand rolled cigars. Bespoke is one of the top-rated brands in the world, and the tobacco leaves they use are sourced from private plantations throughout the Americas and aged between 3 and 11 years, making these beauties a 'must-try' for any serious stogie aficionado. Light one up at any of Whisgars' three downtown locations, and be reminded that the Sukhumvit Soi 23 and Silom Road branches now have live music every Wednesday night, and Friday to Sunday nights. www.whisgars.com

ice cream with a kick

The folks who brought you Seven Spoons, Sheepshank, and Mad Moa recently decided to open an ice cream shop, albeit one with a decidedly different twist. **HAZEL'S ICE CREAM PARLOR & FINE DRINKS** (171 Chakkrapatipong Rd) is a dessert spot that specializes in "boozy ice cream", with menu highlights that include *The Green Fairy Sundae*, made with absinthe ice cream, and the *Great Grandpa's Sunday Sundae*, made with bourbon vanilla and stout beer ice creams. There's also equally tempting non-boozy offerings as well, including the All American Apple Pie Sundae and *Granny's Lavender Ice Cream* with almond brittle and candied orange. Meanwhile, the rustic interior is dominated by a still-working Heidelberg printing press, a nod to the old printing houses of this historic Old Town street. Open daily from 5pm to 11pm. www.facebook.com/hazelsparlor

from down under to way up top

Iconic Australian beer brand **LITTLE CREATURES** has brought their award-winning range of premium artisan beers to **BREWSKI**, the rooftop watering hole located on the 29th floor of the **RADISSON BLU PLAZA BANGKOK** (489 Sukhumvit Rd). The brand is the brainchild of three mates who, way back in the 90s, decided to join forces and create an American Pale Ale which placed the hops at center stage. Since then the company has grown, adding Amber Ale, Pilsner, IPA, and something they call 'Bright Ale', to the mix. Try a taste of down under while looking out from above. www.venuesbkk.com/brewski.php

more choice in chinatown

Chinatown's hipster quarter just got a cozy new drink spot with the recent opening of **BA HAO** (8 Soi Nana, Maitri Chit Rd). The bar's street level interior is warm and inviting, beautifully decorated and bathed in a red glow the colour of Chinese lanterns, while the food menu offers delicious Oriental-inspired dishes—try the delicious duck wonton—to go along with the beer and cocktail menu. However, this classic Bangkok shophouse also offers customers a "living space" up on the second floor where you can, according to the owners, "get the whole experience of living here." There's also a pair of guestrooms, on the 3rd and 4th floors, that are now posted on AirBnb, making the whole immersive experience complete. www.facebook.com/8bahao

8 on Eleven

Fresh destination in Bangkok's legendary late-night playground



The sands are shifting on Sukhumvit Soi 11. The sidewalks have been cleared, businesses are changing hands, and major development is underway. While the closure ages ago of stalwarts Bed and Q Bar ostensibly threatened the soi's vibrant, offbeat late-night culture, its demise was greatly exaggerated. And if the opening of a venue like **8 on Eleven** is any indication, even in the throes of urban expansion, the city's clubbing capital might be getting stronger than ever.

Part gastrobar, part nightclub, 8 on Eleven promises unexpected twists

to late nights in Nana. The venue is stripped down, spacious, and cool. Heavy metal chairs and dark VIP sofas sit on burnished concrete floors on both the first and second floors. The décor is minimal, the interior design industrial. The only contrasts in colour come from the glowing green Chinese characters on the walls encouraging "fa," or prosperity, and the splashes of light that rain down on the floor when the DJs hit the decks. It's not unlike a warehouse club in the UK, though on a more intimate level.

The music leans toward deep and tropical house, a shift away from the

more mainstream and EDM-centred soundtracks that caught fire in the city in recent years. In the short time it's been open, 8 on Eleven has brought in some pretty interesting acts, too, including Australian DJ **Juliet Fox** and **Juany Bravo**, who champions the thumping, 808-driven ghetto house sound that emerged in Chicago in the early 90s. And special events like speed dating, Latin dancing, and LGBT nights headlined by **Pangina Heals**, keep the weekly schedule fresh.

But it isn't all dance tracks and dating games. The patio and first floor are set up quite nicely for casual dinners. With Western bistro fare, Japanese classics, and even Singaporean favourites, the menu offers a range of well-executed dishes. Start with light bites to share, like a tangy Quinoa salad (B330) that bursts with acidity, and a tender Tuna carpaccio (B280) topped with salmon roe. But don't miss some of the standout mains, especially the Tuna capellini (B390)—angel hair pasta speckled with chunks of fresh tuna—and *Nasi Lemak* (B230), the mix-and-match plate of coconut rice, chilli, chicken, and peanuts so popular in Singapore.

The patio is also a fine place to enjoy a cocktail, like the Bite the Bulleit (B380), a mix of rye, peach schnapps, orange bitters and orange and cranberry juice. Or, for something less aggressive, try the Kingpin (B280), which blends Pampero rum with Martini Bianci, blue Curaçao, and vanilla, and gets smoothed out with egg white in the shaker.

From the looks of it, the dynamic 8 on Eleven is primed to leave an impression on the new blueprint of Sukhumvit Soi 11's nightlife scene.

BY CRAIG SAUERS

8 on Eleven

14, Sukhumvit Soi 11

Open daily: 5pm-late

Tel: 093 421 1991

www.facebook.com/8oneleven

Bangkok Heightz

Taking the streets to the skies



It's fair to say that Bangkok's street culture now stands at the precipice of a tipping point. Food vendors have been swept off popular sidewalks—from the footpaths in front of Pak Khlong Talad to the central stretches of Sukhumvit Road—and nightlife hasn't been spared the axe, either. Even the love-'em-or-loathe-'em streetside haunts and van bars on Soi 11 have long since served their last. The upheaval at ground level hasn't just threatened the institutions, though. At risk of disappearing are the city's unique culinary traditions and its drinking culture.

But **The Continent Hotel** has devised a novel solution to the matter at hand. **Bangkok Heightz**, a semi-alfresco lounge that takes over the rooftop alcove where one half of **Axis & Spin** once stood, offers upscale takes on street food and a menu full of cocktails inspired by Thai culture—from Muay Thai, to *khan thong*, to creamsicle-coloured Thai tea. While the lounge isn't a surrogate for the metal tables, plastic stools, and battered tarps on the sidewalks, it's hard to find fault with a venue so

devoted to the blue-blood spirit of the Kingdom.

Upon first impression, Bangkok Heightz just looks like a comfortable, low-key lounge—it's filled out with dark wood and metal accents and is the very definition of low-lit. A closer look, however, reveals faux powerlines and circuit breakers, as well as a mural of the street serving as a feature wall. And this isn't the only proof they've done their homework.

A narrated history of Bangkok (including a self-referential guide to the highest heritage sites in this pancake-flat city—the Golden Mount, Wat Arun, Victory Monument) prefaces the food menu. Page after page provides interesting factoids about life in the city before finally ceding way to street-inspired dishes. Of these, the tender prawn cakes known as *Tod man goong* (B290), Snowfish *gaprao* (B590), and Lamb Massaman curry (B690) stand out. Well-executed and -presented, not to mention significantly larger than the versions found at street stalls, the food here makes for great date-night fodder for those looking for an authentic taste of Thailand.

The cocktails (all B320) offer a more interesting take on traditions. Try the Muay Thai Mule, a mix of chilli-infused gin, lime, and galangal. The lime leavens the spiciness but doesn't knock it out completely, leaving the drink with a pleasant kick. Brighter flavours make up the Mai Ya Rap, a riff on the whisky sour that blends Thai whisky with Cointreau, fresh lychee, and kaffir lime zest and leaf. For a mellower option, try the easy-drinking Khan Thong, a fusion of rum, homemade jasmine syrup, strawberry, lime, and egg white served in its namesake metal bowl.

While Bangkok Heightz might not singlehandedly save the city's street culture, it makes for a fun evening steeped in the city's folklore—and in a more fashionable atmosphere.

BY CRAIG SAUERS

Bangkok Heightz

39F, The Continent Hotel
413 Sukhumvit Rd.

Open daily: 6pm-1am

Tel: 02 867 7000

www.facebook.com/bangkokheightz

BARS

3 Bears Craft Brewery

This craft beer bar is a collaborative project by an architect, a sound engineer, and a renowned local chef. Alongside the great locally made suds, diners can order brewpub favorites like fried chicken wings and gourmet snacks such as piquant tempura-fried calamari. 1154, Sukhumvit Soi 22
Open: Mon-Fri, 4pm-midnight
Sat-Sun 11am-midnight
Tel: 095 456 8298
facebook.com/3bearsch

Bronx Liquid Parlour

This half-hidden tippling spot brings something of a higher class of cocktail culture to the Thong Lor strip. Stylish interiors and exotic cocktail menus make it even more distinctive—a perfect combination of Tokyo, New York, and London in one bar. 8, Thonglor Soi 25
Tel: 02 036 6071
Open: Tue-Sun, 7pm-2am
www.bronxbkk.com

Duke

Although it's in a mall, this high-end whisky and cigar lounge—full to bursting with paintings and sculptures—feels more like a SoHo warehouse loft space owned by an eccentric millionaire. 1F, Gaysorn Village, 999 Phloen Chit Rd.
Tel: 094 647 8888
Open daily: 11am-midnight
facebook.com/pg/duke.gaysorn



Goldencoins Taproom

Goldencoins Taproom

Wood and brick loom large in the low-lit interiors, chalkboard menus list the kitchen's comfort food, and an ample selection of craft beers—all made by the owner—tempt Thai craft beer connoisseurs of all kinds. Ekkamai Mall, Ekamai Soi 10
Open daily: 5pm-midnight
Tel: 082 675 9673
facebook.com/goldencoinstaproom

Inblu Bar

Located on the hotel's lobby level, this stylish drink spot offers an extensive selection of beers, whiskies, cocktails, and wines, plus tasty nibbles and great live music seven days a week. Pullman Bangkok Grande Sukhumvit 30, Sukhumvit Soi 21
Tel: 02 204 4000
Open daily: 5pm-1am
www.pullmanbankokgrandesukhumvit.com

Rabbit Hole

A proper cocktail bar, run by industry insiders, where the drinks come first and the cool interior just tops it off. What's more, the personable bartenders really know their spirits. 125, Sukhumvit Soi 55
Tel: 081 822 3392
Open daily: 7pm-2am
www.facebook.com/rabbitholebkk

The Living Room

Home to one of the finest live jazz venues in Bangkok, this hotspot is tastefully decorated, and includes a sweeping bar, comfortable armchairs and sofas, and subdued lighting—not to mention fine whiskies, cocktails, and cognacs. Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit 1F, 250 Sukhumvit Rd.
Open daily: 9am-midnight
Tel: 02 649 8353
www.thelivingroomatbangkok.com

ROOFTOP SKY BAR

Char

Located on the 26th floor of the Hotel Indigo, visitors here can enjoy a beautiful view of Bangkok's lively downtown core. The breezes are gentle, the chairs and couches are comfortable, and the cocktails are delicious. 26F, Hotel Indigo Bangkok 81 Wireless Rd.
Tel: 02 207 4999
Open daily: 6pm-11:30pm
www.hotelindigo.com/bangkok

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7th Fl., The Emquartier, Sukhumvit
open 10.00-22.00, Tel. 02 003 6267

4th Fl., The Emporium, Sukhumvit
open 10.00-22.00, Tel. 02 664 7525

e-mail: ledalat@ledalatk.com www.ledalatk.com
 Le Dalat Restaurant @Le_Dalat ledalatrestaurant

Long Table

Although known for its massive communal dining table, you can also glug signature cocktails or new latitude wines while enjoying the view from the 25th floor. 25F, 48 Column Building, Sukhumvit Soi 16
Tel: 02 302 2557
Open daily: 11am-2am
www.longtablebangkok.com



Sky On 20

Sky On 20

At this new, and very stylish rooftop venue, the food and drink prices don't rise higher as the floors ascend. Instead, they stay within the realm of the reasonable, making it a great spot to watch the sun go down over downtown Bangkok.

Novotel Bangkok Sukhumvit 20
26F, 19/9, Sukhumvit Soi 20
Open: Mon-Sat, 5pm-2am, Sun, 4pm-2am
Tel: 02 009 4999
www.facebook.com/skyon20bangkok

ThreeSixty Lounge

Go sky high in style above the Chao Phraya River at Millennium Hilton Bangkok's grand rooftop venue. With 360° panorama vistas of the city, this lounge spot truly stands out from other sky bars in the city. 31-32F, Millennium Hilton Bangkok 123 Charoennakorn Rd.
Tel: 02 442 2000
Open daily: 5pm-1am
www.bangkok.hilton.com

Zest Bar and Terrace

Recently refurbished, this tippling spot entices guests with an all-new drink menu, featuring expertly crafted cocktails, and a range of gastronomic delights such as beer battered fish and chips. 7F, Westin Grande Sukhumvit, Bangkok 259 Sukhumvit Rd.
Tel: 02 207 8000
Open daily: 7am-1am
www.westingrandesukhumvit.com

CLUB



Cé La Vi

Cé La Vi

Cé La Vi Bangkok (formerly Ku De Ta Bangkok) is one of Bangkok's top nightlife venues, a vast and glittering club with skyscraper ceilings and a long window that affords an exceptional view. 39-40F, Sathorn Square Complex 98 North Sathorn Rd.
Tel: 02 108 2000
Open daily: 12pm-late
www.celavi.com

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PUBS



The Drunken Leprechaun

The Drunken Leprechaun

This heavily Irish-themed establishment offers delicious pub grub and drinks from the Emerald Isle and beyond. The nightly entertainment includes weekly pub quizzes, generous happy hours, and complimentary snacks.

Four Points by Sheraton, 4, Sukhumvit Soi 15
Tel: 02 309 3255

Open daily: 10am-1am
www.thedrunkenleprechaun.com

The Penalty Spot

The crowds that form here come mostly to check out live sports on TV, drink beer on draft, and watch the passing parade from the front window of this cozy pub.

507-511 Sukhumvit Rd. (near Soi 29)
Tel: 02 661 6164

Open daily: 3pm-2am
www.facebook.com/thepenaltyspot

LIVE MUSIC

Bamboo Bar

A small and busy landmark of the East's past glories that is, nevertheless, romantic and intimate, thanks to the legendary jazz band that plays each night. Ideal for a boozy night out or a romantic special occasion.

The Mandarin Oriental Bangkok
48 Oriental Ave (riverfront)
Tel: 02 659 9000

Open daily: Sun-Thu, 11am-1am,
Fri-Sat, 11am-2am
www.mandarinoriental.com

Brown Sugar

Bangkok's oldest, cosiest jazz venue. A restaurant and coffee house by day that morphs into a world-class jazz haunt where renditions of bebop and ragtime tunes draw crowds by night.

469 Phra Sumen Rd.
Tel: 089 499 1378
Open daily: 6pm-1am
www.brownsugarbangkok.com

Queen Bee

A great place to hang out and meet up with friends while enjoying great live music. Come play some pool and check out some of Bangkok's best rock'n'roll and blues cover bands.

25/9, Sukumvit Soi 26
Tel: 092 446 4234

Open: 10:30am-2am
www.facebook.com/QueenBeeBangkok

SoulBar

Metalwork, modern art, and live Motown, funk, blues, and soul form the backbone of this stark, yet cool, shophouse turned small bar on the edge of Chinatown's art district.

945 Charoenkrung Rd.
Tel: 083 092 2266
Open daily: 6pm-1am
www.facebook.com/livesoulbarbangkok



SpeakerBox

SpeakerBox

The city's latest bar to enjoy local and rotating imported craft beers as well as some cool cocktails and snacks while kicking back and checking out some of Bangkok's best local indie bands and artists at this compact, casual semi-open air venue.

Ratchada Train Market (Esplanade Ratchada)
Tel: 084 662 6642
Open: Tue-Sun, 6:30pm-2am
www.facebook.com/speakerboxbkk

The Zuk Bar

The ideal place for aperitifs or after-dinner drinks, which can be savoured alongside a selection of tapas items. Chill out while admiring the fabulous garden view, and enjoy live jazz by Coco, every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night.

The Sukhothai Bangkok
13/3 South Sathorn Rd.
Tel: 02 344 8888
Open daily: 5pm-1am
www.sukhothai.com

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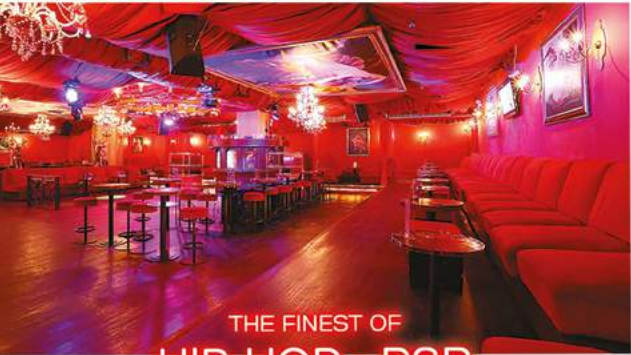
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The interiors at the über-luxe 98 Wireless residences

LIFE + STYLE

posh digs

The **RITZ-CARLTON RESIDENCES** at the landmark **MAHANAKHON TOWER** may be some of the city's most talked about real estate properties, they're not actually the most expensive. Turns out **98 WIRELESS**, Sansiri's most iconic and lavish development yet, has 120 sq.m units starting at B70 million (5 million baht more than at the Ritz). And if you can believe it, they're selling fast! Just more proof that Bangkok is becoming the playground for the world's wealthy elite. All that the rest of us can do is dream...

www.sansiri.com/condominium/98wireless

show 'em what ya got

The recently opened **SHOW DC MALL** (located on Jaturatid Rd, near RCA) offers plenty of shopping possibilities—from luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, Chanel, and Hermes, to mainstream chains such as H&M and Uniqlo. But there's also two entertainment complexes to draw in visitors. One is a live stage show that brings to life the famous Thai martial art movie **ONG BAK**, and the other is a 5,000 sq.m complex that is home to **HIMMAPAN AVATAR**, a 4D immersive theatre of holographic images depicting scenes from Buddhist mythology. Other highlights include the **BANGKOK TOURIST LOUNGE**, a chill out zone with library that can hold up to 400 persons, and the **THAI THAI MARKET**, featuring artisanal foods, souvenirs, and handicrafts.

www.showdc.co.th

city socializing

The **CENTRAL EMBASSY** mall continues to try and redefine itself, and April saw the launch of the 5th floor **SIWILAI CITY CLUB**, described as “a Thai social club for everyone”. The 1,200 sq.m lifestyle concept space is comprised of seven unique sections: Eatery; Deli; Terrace; The Grill; City Lounge; Sports Bar; and Souvenir Shop. Each section bears its own distinctive character, but all share the overall design view handcrafted by the team of **YABU PUSHLEBERG**, the Toronto-based design firm responsible for the look and feel of some of the most recognized hotel and retail shops in the world. So, you know it's gonna look great at least!

www.centralembassy.com

round-the-clock reading

Although it's suffered some delays **THE BANGKOK CITY LIBRARY**, Bangkok's first 24-hour library, has arrived (however, it will only open from 8am to midnight during its first few months, in order to see if there's truly a demand for round-the-clock reading materials). The structure itself is a three-story, 4,950 sq.m neo-classical designed building located in the city's Old Town. The space promises something for everyone, including plenty of open-floor reading space and sections devoted to Thai culture, Asian literature, world literature, and more—an estimated 30,000 books in all. In addition, there will be an education center, a film and letters archive, an on-site cafe, and computers for searching e-books. Admission is free.

Luxurious Lotions and Lifestyle Lighting

Pañpuri is a 100% natural and organic wellness lifestyle brand, inspired by ancient Asian spiritual and physical well-being remedies. By seeking out the finest efficacious natural and organic ingredients they, in turn, create a luxurious range of high-quality skincare, haircare, and body care products as well as home ambiance essentials.

PAÑPURI CANDLE BURNING ESSENTIALS

Designed for an enhanced candle experience, this newly launched product sets out to complement Pañpuri's extensive candle range. The new 'Art of Candle Burning Essentials' ensures a clean, consistent, and longer burning, which lets one more fully enjoy the ambiance created. This set of candle burning essentials comes in a classic white box, and features wick trimmer, snuffer and matches. This product line is made from eco-friendly materials, and is free from dangerous heavy metals that may cause toxins in the air. Priced at B1,290, this set is available at all Pañpuri stores throughout Bangkok. For more information, visit the company website.

www.panpuri.com



As a brand that creates natural skincare and aromatherapy products, using the finest resources and modern dermatological science, **Thann** products are certified by international skin institutes, using dermatologist tests to determine quality and efficacy.

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www.thann.info

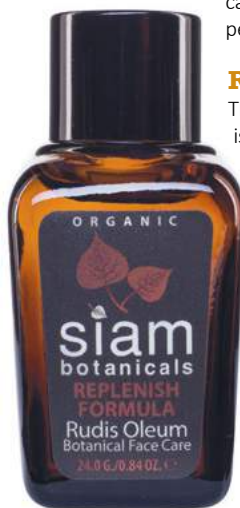


By harnessing the healing powers of nature, **Siam Botanicals** is able to offer a wide range of the finest quality natural products, including premium face care, massage and body oils, balms, bath salts, solid perfumes, soaps, and shampoos.

RUDIS OLEUM REPLENISH FORMULA

This newest addition to the brand's Rudis Oleum range is a light but highly effective replenishing serum that restores vitality to a tired complexion. Nutrient- and antioxidant-rich moringa and argan oils help to repair and reverse aging and damaged skin, while jojoba oil offers superior moisturizing and skin-balancing properties, making this formula particularly recommended for combination and pimple-prone complexions. Juniper berry and grapefruit essential oils, both rich antioxidants, cleanse congested skin of the effects of pollution. Priced at B890 for a 24 gram bottle, this face care formula is available at leading department stores throughout Bangkok, or can be ordered online.

www.siambotanicals.com





The Oasis Spa

I too often hear the word “oasis” used to describe spas, but with Bangkok’s **The Oasis Spa** on Sukhumvit Soi 31, I discover the true meaning. My day begins being chauffeur driven from the Phrom Phong BTS station, to arrive at one of a collection of exquisite day-spas (housed in a former VIP residence, hidden away on Subsoi 4). As I approach the entrance I am met by the gracious Khun Paptawan, who warmly welcomes me into this historic haven.

I’m served up sweet ginger tea that warms from the inside-out as I name my personal pampering preferences. I’ve chosen *The Coco Mango Treatment* (B3,900), which lasts a luxurious 2.5 hours (until May 31st, 2017, bring a companion and get a second *Coco Mango Treatment* at 50 percent off).

As I recline on one of many stylish sofas arranged in the lounge, the vibe is understated luxe meets colonial-chic; from the deep-green silks fashioned by staff, to the grassy gardens outside. The décor is traditional Lanna style, derived from the North of Thailand, with design details and a level of discretion reserved for high-end boutique hotels and spas.

Outside, lawns and landscaped pools please the eye, relax the soul, and lead me to one of twelve chalk white villas which are private sanctuaries. Each villa is framed by lotus ponds, with landscapes leading to antique wooden doors decorated with oriental tassels. Inside the villa twin massage beds await. A carved wooden box for storing precious items under lock and key sits on one, while infinite cream cushions are laid on sofas. Each villa also leads onto an alfresco bathing area, complete with oversize spa tub and hot sauna.

My treatment begins with an indulgent body scrub of Shea butter, coconut butter, mango, coconut beads, and rice grains. The tropical scented ingredients are swept over my skin leaving me invigorated, polished and smooth. I am then wrapped up in a fragrant cocooning body wrap as the oil—hypnotic and sweet to my senses—soaks in. After my body is buffed, I’m invited to bathe under a hot shower in my private garden. This is followed by the *Guinot* facial treatment, which is suitable for sensitive skin types. I am deeply lulled as the therapist lays a hot cloth over my temples and pumices pressure points. I am told the staff undergoes training for several months, and they

certainly know their pressure points from their meridians.

The last delicious course on the pampering menu is the coconut oil body massage. The hot oil is warmed in a burner before application—deeply soothing skin and soul, not to mention melting knotted muscles. The treatment is tailored to my requirements, meeting and exceeding my needs. The therapist completes the treatment with me sitting and stretching, I am buffed, beautiful, relaxed, and rejuvenated. I step off the bed with a pep in my step and bathe outside. Back in the lounge, refreshing tea and cubed fruit canapés are served up. And as I step up and step out, as a finishing touch the chauffeur drives me back to Sukhumvit Road, complements of the spa.

This secret oasis offers retreat and restoration for a day. I can step into this world anytime and experience head to toe pampering, all without having to leave the city. It truly is a hidden gem. **BY SARA HONEYBELL**

The Oasis Spa
64 Soi Sawasdee, Sukhumvit Soi 31
Open daily: 10am-10pm
Tel: 02 262 2122
www.oasisspa.net

Did You Know?...

Did you know that you can bypass being stuck in Bangkok's notorious traffic jams by renting a helicopter to take you to and from select destinations in and around the city? **Advance Aviation** is the largest helicopter charter company in Thailand and they have a fleet of four top-of-the-line helicopters—a pair of 5-seat twin-engine EC 135s, and two 6-seat single-engine EC 130s—stationed in Bangkok, Phuket, and Chiang Mai. Meanwhile, the on-board amenities to make your pad-to-pad journey more agreeable include on-board beverage compartment, air-conditioned cabin, leather seats, *Bose* noise-cancellation headsets, and a 40 cubic ft. storage compartment.

You also get two highly experienced captains flying the vehicle, as well as the highest safety standards possible. While aloft you'll cruise at a maximum speed of 256 kph, with a service ceiling altitude of 10,000 ft (3,045 m).

All airports countrywide (including airports for ultra-light aircrafts) are considered licensed helipads where helicopters are able to land, so you have the

option of starting your journey to or from one of these sites. As for spots within the city to land, the list includes: the Charn Issara II Tower on New Petchburi Rd, close to Sukhumvit Soi 55; the UBC II Tower on Sukhumvit Soi 33; the riverfront Peninsula Bangkok Hotel on Charoen Nakhon Rd; the Radisson Hotel Bangkok on Rama 9 Rd; the Bangkok City Tower on Sathon Rd; and the Amari Atrium Hotel on New Petchburi Rd (close to the Asoke intersection). There are also three hospitals in town with landing pads—Smitvej Hospital, Bumrungrad Hospital and Bangkok Hospital—but those helipads are for patients only.

So what's the cost of this time saving solution? The company charters their Bangkok-based EC-135 at the rate of B87,500 per flight/hour. And if that doesn't sound lavish enough, the company also charters luxurious Gulfstream G200 private jets.

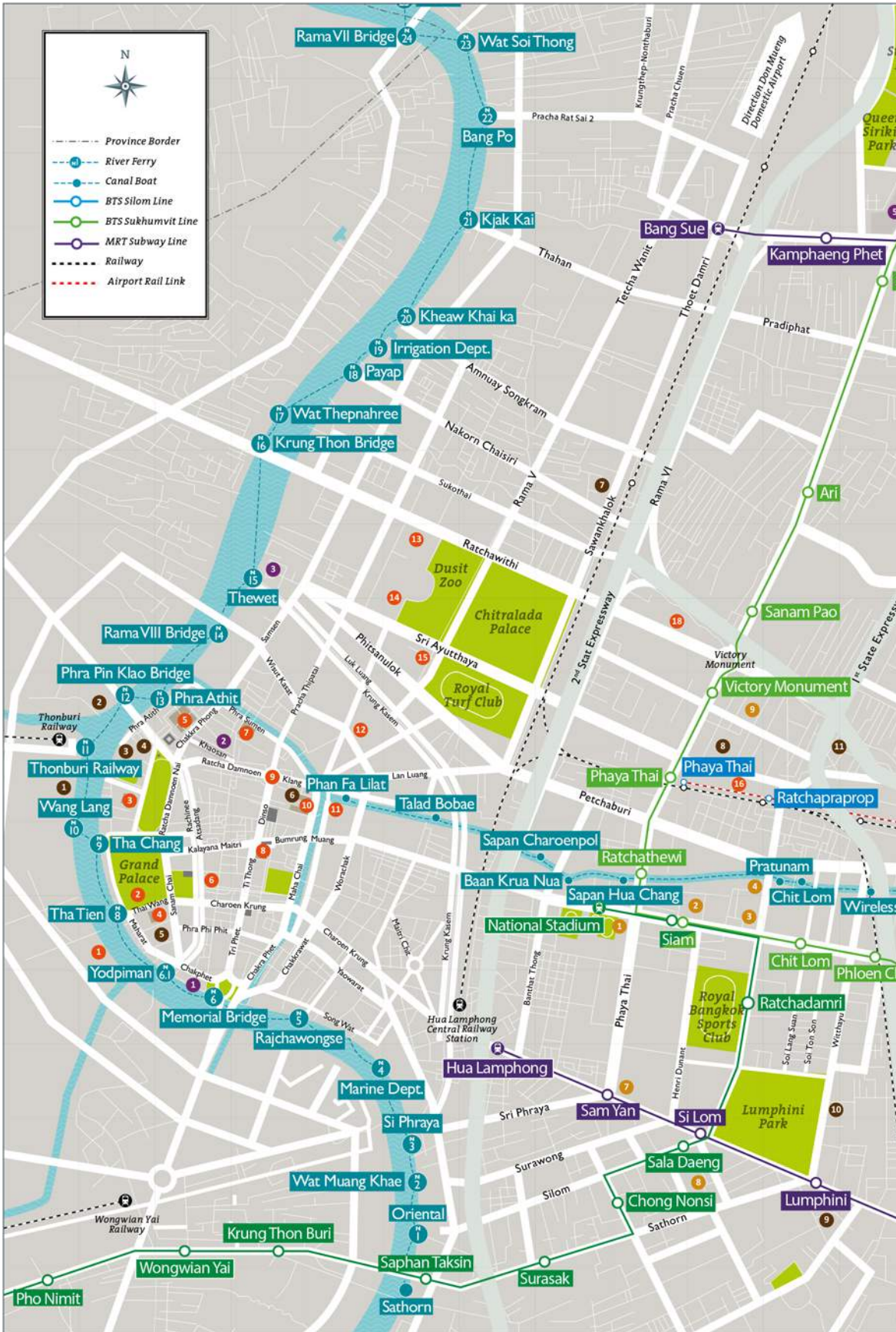
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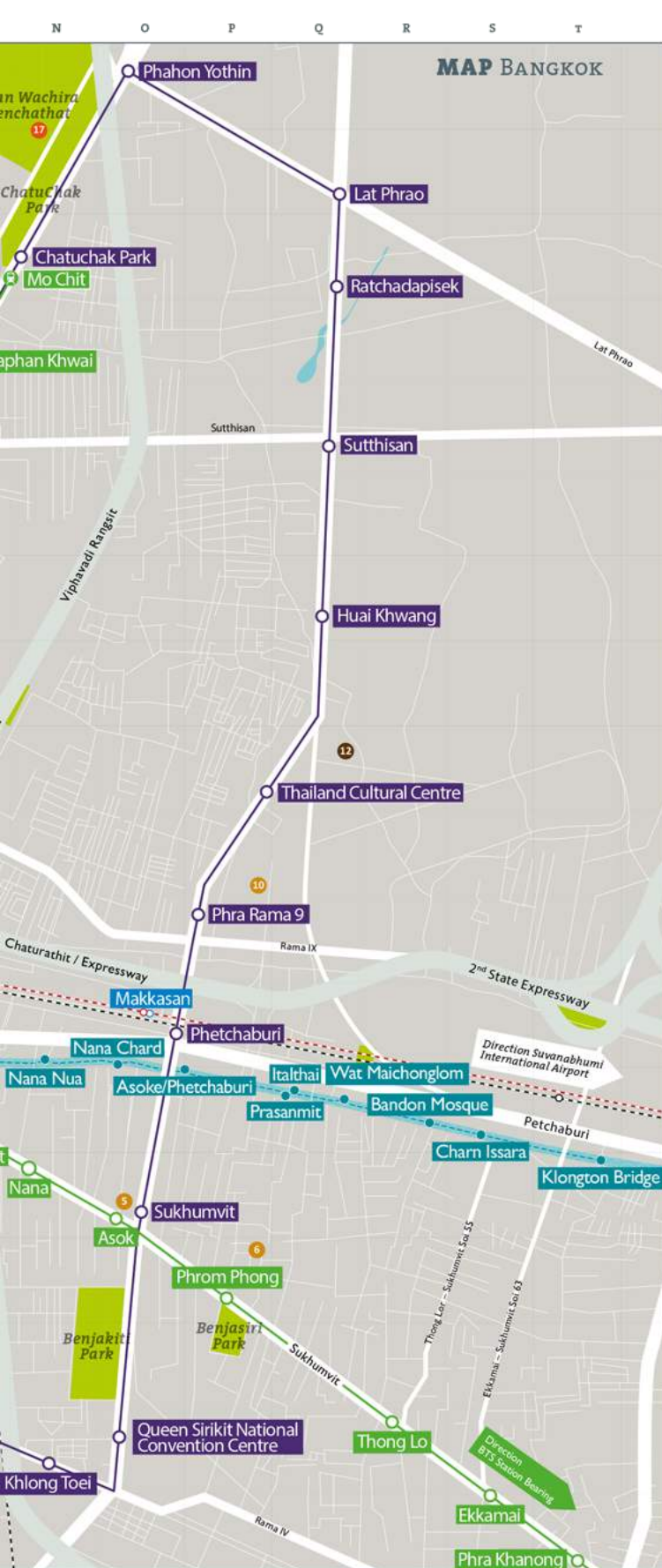
To read more about how Bangkok's rich and fabulous "spend" their time, check out this month's luxury lifestyles cover feature, starting on page 14.



Legend

- Province Border
- River Ferry
- Canal Boat
- BTS Silom Line
- BTS Sukhumvit Line
- MRT Subway Line
- Railway
- Airport Rail Link





- SIGHTSEEING**
- 1 Wat Arun
 - 2 Grand Palace
 - 3 Wat Mahathat
 - 4 Wat Pho
 - 5 Wat Chana Songkhram
 - 6 Wat Ratchabopit
 - 7 Wat Bowornniwet Viharn
 - 8 Wat Suthat & Giant Swing
 - 9 Democracy Monument
 - 10 Wat Ratchanatda
 - 11 Wat Saket
 - 12 Ratchadamnoen Boxing Stadium
 - 13 Vimanmek Mansion
 - 14 Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall
 - 15 Wat Benchamabopit
 - 16 Suan Pakkad Palace
 - 17 Bangkok Butterfly Garden
 - 18 Phaya Thai Palace
- ARTS & CULTURE**
- 1 Siriraj Medical Museum
 - 2 Royal Barges Museum
 - 3 National Museum
 - 4 National Theatre
 - 5 Museum of Siam
 - 6 Rattanakosin Exhibiton Hall
 - 7 Numthong Gallery
 - 8 Aksra Theatre
 - 9 Goethe Institut
 - 10 Galerie N
 - 11 Bangkok Doll Museum
 - 12 Siam Niramit
- MARKETS**
- 1 Pak Khlong Talad
 - 2 Khao San Road
 - 3 Thewet
 - 4 Ratchada Night Market
 - 5 Chatuchak Weekend Market
- SHOPPING**
- 1 MBK Center
 - 2 Siam Paragon
 - 3 CentralWorld
 - 4 Platinum Fashion Mall
 - 5 Terminal 21
 - 6 EmQuartier
 - 7 Charmchuri Square
 - 8 Silom Complex
 - 9 Century Mall
 - 10 Central Plaza Grand Rama 9



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