

URBAN AFFAIRS

B A N G K O K

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Things We Have in 'Commons'



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Editor's Letter

The freelance world is booming. We can see it everywhere. Coworking spaces are proliferating in Bangkok and Chiang Mai like mushrooms. Take a stroll down Bangkok's Sukhumvit Road or through Chiang Mai's Nimman neighborhood and you'll see throngs of young freelancers and digital nomads (both local and foreign) taking refuge in places like coffee shops and coworking spaces tapping away on their laptops while idly sipping at their coffee or tea.

Platforms for freelancers are also gaining traction. Now competing with the ancient-yet-reliable Craigslist are websites such as Fiverr, Upwork, Bangkok-based Fastwork, and Vcliq, a soon-to-launch platform for freelance photographers. These are designed to match clients with freelancers or those looking for short-term contracts and projects.

One of the reasons why the younger generation – the millennials and Gen Z (and perhaps many late Gen Y'ers included) – are going freelance is that they are less tolerant to what David Graeber, an anthropologist at the London School of Economics, calls “bullshit jobs.” Graeber, who's the author of *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, explains that bullshit jobs are jobs that can't really justify their very existence, even by the person doing the jobs themselves, but have to pretend that there's some reason for them to exist.

Many corporate newbies and those on the bottom rung of the corporate ladder know this by heart, spending hours of their life doing bullshit jobs such as churning out reports no one reads, laboring over piles of data and details of PowerPoint slides so that their boss could flip through each one within seconds, or having to deal with managers with no real utility but the sole purpose of creating just another layer of bureaucracy and making everyone else's life a tad harder (also another example of a bullshit job).

Well, I've been there, done that. Every morning I woke up asking myself, “Is this it? Is this what I really want to spend the rest of my life doing?” Finally, I decided that life was too short to waste on bullshit jobs.

So here we are, a bunch of freelancers spending our time toiling away at producing something that we hope would entertain, relax, or even a tiny bit, enlighten our readers, who are, in turn, spending their precious time reading our publication. This is by no means a bullshit job for us, and we hope you feel the same way, too.

So, we thank you for taking the time to pick up this magazine for your reading pleasure. We are truly grateful for your support. Have a merry Christmas and happy New Year!

-VT

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Based in Bangkok, **Ploylada Sirachadapong** started her writing career as a food critic, and after eight years of visiting restaurants around Bangkok she now expands her writing genre to include travel, fashion and architecture.



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English-born **Christopher Scott Dixon**, based in Bangkok, is an experienced writer and ex-BBC radio reporter/presenter. He has contributed many features to a variety of publications in Thailand and in the UK. He has also written 17 books across different genres and is a qualified teacher.



Swisa Ariyapruchya was born in Switzerland and spent her childhood growing up in Belgium, Poland, Thailand and the USA. She is multilingual and speaks four languages. Apart from her work as a central banker, she began her lifestyle blog *Having “Me” Time* in 2010 and has since continued to write in her spare time. She is also co-founder of Booster Education Co., Ltd. and Booster Analytics Co., Ltd.



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PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF THE COMMONS



'The Commons' Touch

BY PLOYLADA SIRACHADAPONG



I'm pretty good at doling out advice on the perfect spot for a dinner party, proposing marriage, a date, or even a baby shower. But I found it a bit challenging when my family asked for recommendations for a cool place to just enjoy a quality time together over Christmas. For we are a range of personalities with individual tastes and preferences. But what we have in common is that we love chilling out somewhere outdoor. Which is why "The Commons" comes along as a perfect option for our family gatherings during this holiday season.

The Commons – the community mall on Soi Thonglor 17 – has an open living space that can simply satisfy CBD Bangkokians' needs for greenery and the outdoor life.

There are four main areas at The Commons: the "Market" that's filled with an array of restaurants offering specialized food and drinks; "Village" or an open-air deck area where visitors can breeze through shops and beauty salons; "Play Yard" with tutorial schools and gyms; and "Top Yard" where shoppers can find a green space for relaxation and enjoying a cup of coffee.

"It's our intention to build first a community, then a mall. We wanted The Commons to become Thonglor's backyard and a stomping ground for specialized producers and their customers. We hope to promote wholesome living and a true sense of community," said founders Vicharee and Varatt Vichit-Vadakan.

After founding the renowned “Roots” coffee shop and “Roast” café, the siblings spent years developing this community mall and bringing their concept to life. Eventually, they came up with a thoughtful design for The Commons, envisioning it as a space where everyone can share not just things, but also values and memories.

A number of design and architecture collaborators, all experts in their respective fields, worked hard to create The Commons. Its outstanding architecture is the work of Department of Architecture Co. The firm created a multi-storied structure that consists of steps, ramps, platforms, and seating all shaded by the third and fourth floors above to fight off Bangkok’s horrid heat.

The vertical and horizontal open sides enhance air circulation throughout the premises, allowing the cool breeze to blow in and cool down the place, making it a perfect place for my father keen on chilling out and people watching.

With *béton brut* (raw concrete) walls that’s left seemingly unfinished, this gigantic four-story, loft-style building is a palette of warm earth tones when viewed together with the wooden ground floor platform and steps leading out to the entrance.

To top it all off, the place has a variety of lively signage and environmentally themed graphics designed by

be>our>friend Studio on display throughout for an artistic vibe.

My sister, who loves to dine in fancy restaurants, will love to visit the indoor Market zone where all the great food outlets are located. The Market is air conditioned, but still provides guests with a gauzy feeling with floor-to-ceiling glass walls and a cozy dining area.

The ramps act as walkways, a well-thought-out design that provides easy mobility for wheelchair-bound visitors and access to just about anywhere in this living space.

The top floor’s landscape, designed by Wabi-Sabi Studio, is one of my favorite spots. Here visitors can relax by walking through the green lawn and herb garden or enjoy a coffee break or a hearty meal at the “Roast”, a casual all-day dining restaurant.

If you’re in the area, drop by The Commons, you’ll find something for everyone – a communal ground for all of your loved ones to share a good time together.

The Commons

335 Soi Thonglor 17

Tel. 02 712 5400

www.thecommonsbkk.com

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF THE COMMONS





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1

Unseen Lumpini

BY NAAM SOMBATANANTAKORN

When it comes to a place ideal for recreational activities in Bangkok, most would think of shopping malls and parks. Lumpini Park, the “lung of Bangkok,” is a perfect spot for a picnic, exercise, jogging, paddling a boat, or enjoying a music festival during the current holiday season. Relatively less known is the park’s learning center that organizes a series of free vocational training courses open to members of the public.

Lumpini, or “Suan Lum” as Thais call the park, is Bangkok’s first public park that was established in the 1920s as one of the royal projects of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI). The park was originally designed to host a fair similar to the famous World Fair held in Paris and London during those times.

However, it was decided that an agricultural fair would be held at the park and that exhibitors and visitors from around the country (and hopefully the world) would be provided accommodation at Phaya Thai Palace and shuttled between the palace and the park by tram. There were plans to turn the venue into a public botanical garden after the fair. But the fair project was shelved following the demise of King Vajiravudh.

The park was given a new lease on life during the reign of King Prajadhipok (Rama VII). The king appointed the government to supervise the park’s management. In 1942 a statue of King Vajiravudh was built to commemorate the creation of Lumpini Park.

The park has hosted many events and served as one of the largest recreational facilities for almost a century. Now under the supervision of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), the park has an array of recreational and educational facilities including a library, youth center, elder citizen club and playground for children.

Located behind Gate 8 but seemingly hidden from sight is the BMA Vocational Training Center that provides vocational training in different areas including handicrafts, electronics repair and cooking. The workshops – open to the general public without prior knowledge or skills – are facilitated by experts in different professional fields, some of whom have been teaching here for over a decade.

The center attracts trainees from all walks of life. When school is out, many high students turn up to take summer courses. On weekdays, housewives and retirees predominate and are keen on learning new skills while forging new friendships along the way. Some of the senior citizens attending workshops have been doing so for a decade or so, counting the center as a safe refuge to exercise the brain after a workout in the park.

On weekends, the center attracts lots of salaried employees who have become disillusioned with their 9-to-5 jobs and want to chase their dreams or carve out a new career as entrepreneurs. Many have gone on to start and manage successful SMEs.



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PHOTOGRAPHS: TEERARAT YAEMNGAMLUEA

3

- 1 The statue of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) in front of Lumpini Park's main entrance.
- 2 The Lumpini Park Public Library is Bangkok's first public library.
- 3 Joggers of all ages enjoy a morning run under the tree shades.

Workshops on offer are as follows:

Drawing and Painting – Basic to advanced drawing, oil and watercolor painting, and batik painting.

Floristry – Students learn how to decorate and arrange flowers as hanging pots and bouquets.

Sculpture – Focuses on how to create sculptures and models from various materials.

Sewing – Covers different elements including making patterns, operating a sewing machine and types of tailor-made clothes.

Making Amulet Frames – A subset of jewelry making, this class is crucial for jewelers who need to help their customers frame their Buddhist amulets.

Hair Styling – Consists of two classes: male grooming and women’s hair styling.

Makeup – Ideal for anyone interested in venturing into cosmetics, becoming a makeup artist or putting on makeup the right way.

Gastronomy – Covers drinks, dessert, appetizers, main courses, snacks and baked foods.

While trainees are mostly Thais, there’s a sprinkling of foreigners as well. But they will need to be well versed in Thai. Workshops run from 9am to 3pm on weekdays and weekends.

The duration of each course varies, depending on the subject. Besides the subjects already on offer, workshops on other professional areas are occasionally held, subject to demand and availability.

Trainees will be examined at the end of each course. On successful completion of each workshop, trainees will receive a certificate from the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration that would be useful for securing a business licence in Thailand and many other countries.

More than just a school, the Park Vocational Training Center provides the opportunity for people to develop an occupation, look into alternative career choices, and occasionally, find new friends, too!

BMA Vocational Training Center, Lumpini Park
 192 Wireless Rd., Lumpini
 Tel. 084 278 3494
www.facebook.com/suanluntrain

PHOTOGRAPHS: NAAM SOMBATANANTAKORN





5



6

- 4 A typical gastronomy class in full action.
- 5 An experienced barber coaching a student.
- 6 Students complete a baking course with hands-on experience.



Sustaining Tourism's Future

BY DAVE STAMBOULIS

This year hasn't exactly been a bed full of roses. The Lido, one of Bangkok's oldest and best arthouse cinemas, was razed by the developer's sword, the longstanding Dusit Zoo closed its doors as well (although there are plans to open a new and larger zoo in Pathum Thani in three years), and my favorite Vogue Lounge, home to the city's best happy hour combined with well mixed drinks (and an air-conditioned outdoor terrace to boot), also fell victim to new developments in the ritzy MahaNakhon Tower (bought out by King Power).

You definitely can't win 'em all, but the year wasn't necessarily all bust. Phuket, a place that is often in the news for all the wrong reasons, played host to one of Asia's largest sustainable tourism events, with a host of hotels and resorts leading the way for what hopefully will carry over into 2019 as more than just a feel-good story, and one which we'll hopefully be reading about come the end of next year. Tourism continues to be one of the

world's leading growth industries, and yet all our wanderlust leads to some pretty rough realities. Garbage caused by massive overconsumption often mars many a holiday, and has forced governments and other institutions to take drastic steps to try and preserve their national heritage locations, both cultural and physical.

On a recent trip to India's mountain kingdom of Ladakh, I visited the beautiful Pangong Lake, located at an altitude of 4,300 meters, is a sublime deep blue lake set against a backdrop of snowy mountains. Luckily, I got to see the Pangong of old, as due to a Bollywood hit film the year before, thousands of tourists had descended on the lake, with tour operators opening hundreds of lakeside camps to accommodate them, eventually turning the lake into a dump. The Indian government finally stepped in and removed all the camps, limiting tourists to a smaller number of homestays or else just day trips in an effort to cut down on effluvia.

Southeast Asia has been no stranger to the pandemic, with Thailand forced to close Maya Bay in Koh Phi Phi, and the Philippines shutting down Boracay due to the environmental destruction created by too much tourism.

Thus, it was a welcome change in September in Phuket, when leading hotels and tourism groups signed the "Phuket Pledge" at the Phuket Hotels for Islands Sustaining Tourism Forum 2018 (PHIST), establishing a model for the future development of islands throughout Asia that embraced sustainability as a core strategy and set goals for long-term change.

The Phuket Pledge is a commitment to reducing, reusing and recycling single-use plastic in Phuket with the aim to eradicate it in all hotels and resorts. The stakeholders also vowed to undertake youth community education programs to ensure grassroots awareness of the critical problems surrounding plastic usage on the island.

This was the largest hospitality event in Asia dedicated to sustainable tourism, and was host to 550 delegates from Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and Hong Kong amongst others, all of whom came to debate ideas over a unifying crucial issue.

Six Senses Hotels President Bernhard Bohnenberger said, “The industry is finally waking up to this issue, but we need coordination and action to make tangible change and see results, and this is what we hope PHIST will go a long way to achieving.”

While Anthony Lark, Managing Director of Trisara Resort and President of Phuket Hotel Association added, “We have worked to build an inclusive coalition of public and private sector tourism groups who understand the critical need to act and think long term. We hope the Phuket Pledge will be a start and ultimately become a model for us and other islands regionally to come together for the sake of sustainable island tourism in Asia.”

It might be difficult for resort managers to come clean when it comes to inconveniencing guests, but as Lark says,

“Hotels unchecked are huge consumers and users of single-use plastics. Every resort in Southeast Asia has a plastic problem. Until we all make a change, it’s going to get worse and worse.” About five years ago, Lark’s own resort with about 40 villas used to dump into landfill about 2,500,000 plastic water bottles annually. It has now switched to reusable glass bottles.

While a lot of conferences with initiatives end up being just hot air, PHIST has some serious commitments and plans laid out. All of PHIST’s hotels are committed to phase out, or put plans in place to stop using plastic water bottles and plastic drinking straws by 2019.

Hotel employees and local children will now take part in regular beach clean-ups. Additionally, the organization has teamed up with the documentary makers of *A Plastic Ocean*, a film about waste in the seas, to show an edited version with Thai subtitles for future hotel staff training.

“The association is involved in good and inclusive community-based action, rather than just hotel general managers

getting together for a drink,” Lark said.

It’s a common sight at Asian beach resorts to see staff raking the sand out front each morning to get rid of the debris that has washed up from the beach, which is not surprising given that between eight million and 15 million tons of plastic are dumped in the ocean every year. Yet the same plastic often ends up getting buried or burned, which really isn’t much of a solution.

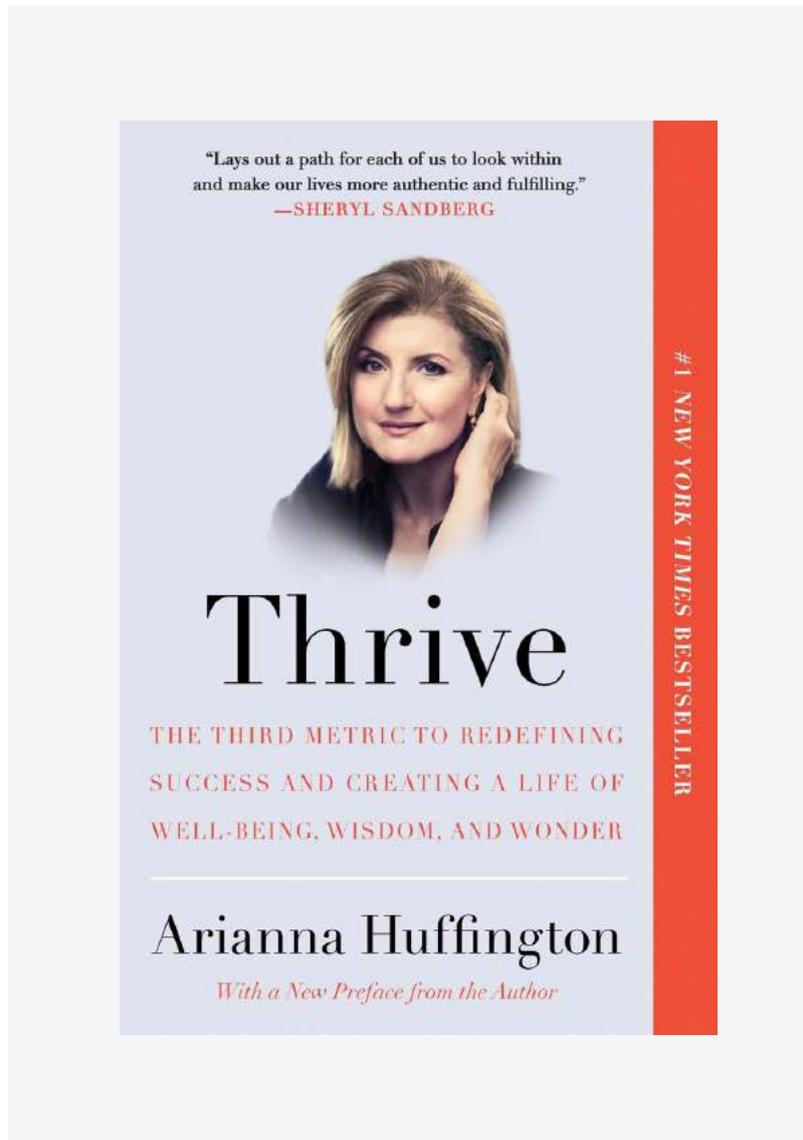
Far better would be eliminating the plastic altogether, and with estimates of plastic packaging accounting for up to 40% of an establishment’s waste stream, getting rid of plastic water bottles, shampoo bottles, toothbrushes, and even plastics used to deliver room service food would be a great start.

In the end, it’s all about education. As Lark points out, “If the 20,000 staff in our hotels go home and educate mum and dad about recycling or reusing, it’s going to make a big difference.”

All in all, a pretty good idea for a New Year’s resolution and a very positive note to end the year on.

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF PHIST





*Thrive: The Third Metric
to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of
Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder*
By Arianna Huffington

Available at Asia Books, Kinokuniya and leading bookstores.

Disconnect and Thrive

BY SWISA ARIYAPRUCHYA

You know yearend has arrived in Bangkok when you wake up to cool mornings and the sun shines a different light. The cool breeze lashes at your hair and a little dance finds its way into your walk. For many, yearend is a time for resolutions and self-reflection. Yearend is also a time for holidays and reconnecting with friends and families. Personal connections that offer best results when we disconnect from our smartphones and work culture of 24/7.

In cosmopolitan Bangkok, as in other big cities around the world, we have embraced the smartphone and a work culture of always being connected. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we are reachable. We are “always on” and addicted to messaging and social media. We send messages and almost always expect instantaneous replies. As observed by my husband, messaging has now evolved into the silent phone call. Boundaries between personal time and work time are blurring much like the boundaries between businesses of technology and traditional firms.

This work culture means we answer work-related questions even after leaving the office and bring work home to read on weekends and holidays. I am guilty of this and find myself checking my work email or

replying to messages first thing in the morning. I send out messages during the wee hours of the day in an attempt to reduce my daytime workload and to make sure I do not forget anything. Technology is not only enabling us to work faster but it is now being misused to exacerbate this work culture of being “always on.”

It’s not surprising that in response to these longer work hours that last year France passed a new labor law giving its citizens the “Right to Disconnect.” Other European countries are considering similar actions and many companies have been ordered to stop work mail being delivered after hours. The trend has not yet reached Asia but it highlights an important discussion that we humans need to disconnect to reconnect.

Ariana Huffington, chair, president and editor-in-chief of the Huffington Post Media Group, talks about her own personal experience in her book *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder*. As an accomplished woman being selected by *Time* as one of the 100 most influential people you would think she had it all under control. Successful and hard-working, she was the embodiment of success.

Despite this, one day she collapsed from exhaustion in front of her computer. She broke her cheek and required stitches.

Ordered by her doctor to rest and recuperate, she realized that there was more to life than wealth and power. Having quality time with family and loved ones should not and need not be compromised for success. Ariana recommends we should all sleep more, learn how to meditate, and disconnect from our mobile devices.

Ariana says we need a “Third Metric,” a third measure of success that consists of well-being, wisdom, wonder, and giving, that goes beyond the two metrics of money and power. A well-rested soul would recharge both our mental and emotional batteries. Though simple and intuitive, Ariana’s advice is one that we know but often forget in the rush of life.

As the New Year approaches, let’s take a step back, breathe in deeply and disconnect from our mobiles and connected states. Feel the cool breeze as it flows through your hair and reconnect with your inner soul and those around you. Disconnect to thrive and create what Ariana calls that “Third Metric” of well-being, wisdom and wonder.



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PHOTOGRAPHS: TEERARAT YAEMNGAMLUEA

3

- 1 Pratunam Market with Baiyoke I and II in the background.
- 2 Goods are refilled throughout the day by trolleys.
- 3 Every type of clothing are all here.

Pratunam Market

BY CHRISTOPHER SCOTT DIXON

Nestling under the imposing structures of Baiyoke Tower I & II, two of Thailand's tallest buildings, is Pratunam Market, which is not only a market, but the largest clothing venue of its type in the country. Pratunam in Thai means "water gate" and geographically it covers the areas of Victory Monument, Makkasan and Ratchatewi in the city.

The market itself evolved from the southern boundary of Pratunam bordered by the Saen Saep canal. The canal was dug during the reign of King Nangklao (Rama III) in the mid-nineteenth century to connect the Chao Phraya river with the Bang Pakong river to the east and then the subsequent linking Saen Saep to two other canals. A gate was needed to control the water levels between all three, hence the construction of "Pratunam."

Where there was once a focus on local fresh produce, the market has developed over the years to become a clothing cornucopia. Its sprawling nature means there is easy access from a number of directions and transportation points. It is located on the intersection between Phetchaburi and Ratchaprarop roads. Get off at Ratchatewi BTS Station and it is only a 15-minute walk to the center of the market.

You can also take a canal boat to the Saen Saep terminal and you will be only a few minutes away from the market. Alight at Pratunam Pier and follow the crowds. Many buses also operate in the area and pass the various market entrances. It is officially open 24 hours but retail shops will trade from around 10am-9pm.

Although it is a wholesale market and prices are generally very cheap, vendors will usually be amenable to sell single pieces. I have been here on numerous occasions, yet I never fail to get lost in the wonderful maze of small alleys and crowded narrow streets packed with shoes and fashion accessories as well as clothes.

A true kaleidoscope of colors and a vibrant atmosphere with merchants clattering noisily on their venerable

sewing machines, orders being packed and unpacked and trolleys pushing through the mix of locals and tourists in the tight aisles. Here is a trip back into how shopping used to be, prior to the sometimes anodyne air-conditioned and repetitively similar modern shopping malls which abound elsewhere in Bangkok.

I would defy anyone not to find something of interest here. Think every type of clothing from shorts, T-shirts, formal evening dresses, winter jackets, suits, swimwear, to more bizarre outfits and everything you need for a fancy-dress party. There are also many traditional Thai-style garments, too. As you walk, savor the rich diversity of embroidered costumes, feathers, sequins, beads, stylish, crazy and funky hats, bags and shoes, patterns and styles in a veritable rainbow of hues.

Some points to note when buying though. There is no exchange or refund or trying on items. When your eyes light up at the sight of brand-name goods, expect them at best to be copies. It is very cramped and can get very stuffy, so bring some drinking water or even a battery-operated fan. Wear light clothes and I would not recommend dragging young children around. Felines also seem to be everywhere, so much so I almost want to call the market "Catunam." As with most markets, some knowledge of Thai can help and do not be shy to haggle with the vendors.

Pratunam market has a different atmosphere early morning as the locals arrive to do their wholesale shopping. Proceedings are much calmer and more business-like until around 8am when the tourists arrive and the environment becomes more chaotic. The mood changes again in the evening with the night version. There are really great vibes with the streets around the nearby Palladium World Shopping complex crammed with a myriad of stalls selling clothes and souvenirs. Scores of food sellers offer tasty treats for visitors, too.

For fashionistas this is a recommended market of unique appeal and charm. It is certainly a place to immerse yourself in an authentic Thai shopping experience!

A Natural New Year

BY DAVE STAMBOULIS



Bangkok actually can be pretty chilled at this time of year. Half of the city has gone home or on vacation, traffic is light, and you can actually get a seat on the BTS. But why not head up or down country and have a quiet celebration communing with nature? The views are certainly spectacular, the weather most likely good, and you might see a spot of Thailand you never knew looked so nice. Here are two of my favorites at polar opposites of the kingdom.

Phu Chi Fa

A lot of Bangkokians head north for the New Year, as the temperatures are actually cold at night, the air is clear, and the northern mountains come into their own. There are plenty of spots to choose from around Chiang Mai, although the closer you stay to the Lanna capital, the more crowded it gets, with legions of souped-up 4WD vehicles laden down with the kitchen sink

making their way to every viewpoint and campground available. Head a bit further north up past Chiang Rai, and then make your way east towards Nan. Up here overlooking the Lao border you'll find Phu Chi Fa (also Phu Chee Fah), popular with Thai crowds, although well off the beaten path for foreign visitors.

Meaning "mountain pointing to the sky," an appropriate nickname given that the high point of the 1,628-meter peak located here sticks out like a finger pointing upwards to the heavens, this magical spot overlooks the Mekong River valleys, with views of endless jungle clad peaks jutting up in the distance. The big attraction here is the sunrise, made all the more magnificent during the cool season months by the entire valley below being filled with a dense sea of mist, which is caused by cold air draining down the mountain slopes, which reduces the air temperature in the valley to condensation point.

You'll have to forego the usual late-night party and hangover, as well as brave the cold temperatures (yes, it actually can get down to freezing up here) and make a dawn start to do the short hike up from the parking lot to the mountain top, but the rewards are epic. The first sun of the New Year rises up from the mountains of Laos, and lights up the sea of clouds that amass like snow far below you.

Travelers can stay in the small village of Rom Fah Thai about 15-minutes below the mountain, or else spend the night camping just below the peak. An added plus here is the fact that Phu Chi Fa is a Forest Park and not a National Park, so you don't have to pay an entry fee, which is a rarity when it comes to viewing natural wonders like this up north. To get here, head east from Chiang Rai on Highway 1020, turning off at the town of Thoeng, where there is also public transport up to Rom Fah Thai.

Koh Tarutao

If you don't like the cold, and really fancy being a Robinson Crusoe and having a New Year's beach escape almost all to yourself, far from the maddening crowds of Samui and Phuket, head for Thailand's last best kept secret. Large and mysterious, Koh Tarutao has a history of being an island of captivity. In the early 1930s, Tarutao was chosen by the Thai Department of Corrections as the top spot for a penal colony, and by the end of the decade, was home to thousands of prisoners. While those days may be long gone, the captivity factor still remains though, only this time it's intrepid island lovers who are stuck on Tarutao, and a journey to one of Thailand's last undeveloped jungle and beach paradises has a way of making it hard to leave.

In 1940, there were over 3,000 prisoners incarcerated along Tarutao's east coast at Ao Talo Wow (Ao means bay). There were crocodile and shark-infested waters, getting off the island was pretty much impossible, and when

Tarutao stopped receiving food and medical supplies from the mainland during WWII, both prisoners and wardens turned to piracy in the Straits of Malacca as a way of survival.

Today, Ao Talo Wow can be reached by mountain bike, and boasts a newly built and informative museum detailing the history of the penal colony years, along with the ruins of the old prison camp. The west side of the island is home to some of the most pristine white sand beaches in the country, and while there are national park bungalows (the only developed accommodation allowed on the island) located at Ao Phante Malacca where the boats dock and Ao Mole a bit further south.

If you want to really get away from it all, head down to Ao Son, a campsite reached on foot through the jungle. There's a cafeteria here to keep you sated, and your final sunset of 2018 promises to be memorable, shared with perhaps just a handful of other seekers of solitude.

The famed television series *Survivor* shot its 2002 seasonal series here, and it's easy to see why, as much of the island is untamed jungle, home to commonly seen dusky langurs and hornbills, as well as pythons, and sea turtles at the right time of year.

The name "Koh Tarutao" comes from the Malay *pulau tertua*, which means old and mysterious island. With its dense forests, high peaks, and large swathes of unexplored jungle it indeed lives up to its name, and you might find yourself captive to its charms far past your departure date. It's certainly Thailand's most unique spot to ring in the new.

Koh Tarutao can be reached by daily speedboat from the Pak Bara pier in Satun Province. Minivans run to Pak Bara from Hat Yai taking 3-4 hours. Hat Yai is also the nearest airport, with plenty of daily flights from Bangkok. Bungalows at Ao Phante Malacca and Ao Mole can be booked via the Thailand National Parks website, www.dnp.go.th.

PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVE STAMBOULIS



PHOTOGRAPH: KIATTIPONG / SHUTTERSTOCK



Herbs of Versatility

BY J. PAKCHUEN

Apart from *pad thai*, the spicy *tom yum kung* soup is another world-renowned Thai dish, usually served with prawns. Those who know how to cook this scrumptious comfort food would know that three main herbal ingredients are indispensable in the *tom yum* recipe: galangal, lemongrass and kaffir lime leaves. These herbal plants work a treat in Thai cooking as well as folk medicine.

Galangal

Many people who are not familiar with Asian cuisine can easily mistake galangal (*kha* in Thai) for ginger (*khing*). Even though galangal is from the ginger family (*Zingiberaceae*), it looks, smells and tastes differently from ginger. The outside appearance of galangal root is smoother and the color inside is milder than ginger's bright yellow color. Young galangal has a very unique aromatic and citrusy scent and can be mildly spicy. It is used in famous Thai sweet and sour coconut light soup with chicken called *tom kha gai*, while old galangal is used in many types of Thai curry pastes such as green curry, red curry, *panang* curry, and *massaman*, thanks to its primary role in warding off the smell of gamey meat. Galangal is also used in Vietnamese and Indonesian cooking.

Just like ginger, galangal is known to help promote a healthy digestive system. It may help alleviate diarrheal symptoms, like vomiting, and is also known for its antibacterial and antifungal properties. Many people grind it and apply it to the skin to cure some skin diseases such as tinea versicolor and ringworm. Similar to ginger, galangal can be used as a tonic to help heal a cold and other respiratory conditions. Boil slices of galangal in water and mix it with lime juice, honey and a bit of salt for a better taste.

To top it all off, a study published by the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) in 2014 has shown that galangal has antioxidant effects and suggested that a high concentration of *Alpinia Galanga* (Thai galangal) extract can significantly reduce gastric cancer cells in humans.

Lemongrass

One of the best-known herbal ingredients in Asian cuisine, lemongrass (*ta-krai*) gives off a strong lemon-like scent that could enhance the flavor of any dish. While having very sharp long leaves, the part used in cooking is mostly its stalks. Apart from being one of the main ingredients for different chili pastes used in Thai curries, sliced young lemongrass is the main ingredient for making spicy salad, such as shrimp spicy salad or *plar kung*, mackerel salad or *yum pla too*, or grilled pork marinated in lemongrass paste or *moo yang ta-krai*. Similar to galangal, lemongrass is known to tame the overpowering smell of meat. Therefore, they're both used to make spicy fish soup or chicken spicy clear soup as well. Lemongrass is also a necessary ingredient in many Vietnamese, Indonesian and Cambodian dishes.

Lemongrass contains natural oil called citronella. When crushed, a lemongrass stalk gives off a heady scent that can easily repel insects such as mosquitos. Lemongrass oil extract or lotion is widely sold at many Thai local markets or department stores. But if you can't find one, simply crush a bunch of stalks, tie it up and leave it in any corner of your house. Lemongrass is used as a folk remedy as it's rich in antioxidant vitamins such as vitamins A and C. It can also help relieve stomach pains due to colitis, indigestion or diarrhea.

The unique scent of the plant can also reduce stress and is widely used in the spa industry as massage oil. For home therapy, you can also use up to 12 drops of lemongrass essential oil with coconut or jojoba oil in your bathtub for a relaxing bathing experience. Research findings also confirm that lemongrass oil may help lower your cholesterol levels. To make easy lemongrass tea, simply crush lemongrass stalks, put them along with its leaves in the boiling water along with pandan leaves, and add some honey to enhance the taste.

Kaffir Lime

Just like ginger and galangal, many people who are not familiar with these plants would

probably mix kaffir lime with lime. Kaffir (*makrut*) comes in a bit darker green in color and has a rough and knotty surface while lime usually has a smoother skin. Like galangal and lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves are used in many Thai dishes apart from *tom yum* soup. Thinly sliced kaffir leaves are used to garnish many dishes including *panang* curry and crispy whole snakehead fish served with spicy and sour sauce or *pla chon lui suan*. Sliced kaffir leaves are part of curry mixtures such as one that's used to make the Thai popular fish cake or *tod mun pla*.

Kaffir lime juice can also be added to different dishes to lift up the aroma and add a tang of sourness. These include fermented rice vermicelli served with sweet nutty sauce or *khanomchin nam prik*, pork belly curry with morning glory or *kaeng moo tepho*, or orange sour soup with mixed vegetables or *kaeng som*.

Kaffir lime has numerous health benefits. Its juice is often mixed in shampoo or used on its own to help reduce scalp itchiness and dandruff, while helping to promote strong and shiny hair. To get the concentrated juice, try boiling the fruit before squeezing the juice out. Similar to galangal and lemongrass, kaffir lime can reduce stress, helps with stomach ache and other types of inflammation.

Its acidic quality can get rid of foot odor. Simply mix kaffir lime juice with some sliced ginger and salt in lukewarm water. Soak your feet in it for 15 minutes and repeat a few days or weekly. An essential oil from kaffir lime leaves can also help promote oral health. You can rub the leaves against your gums directly but softly, to prevent bacteria from building up on the gums and teeth. You can add the oil to your mouthwash for the same effect as well.

These three herbal ingredients are part of a plethora of natural and healthy ingredients in Thai cooking. Thai dishes sometimes can be a bit complex to make, yet they're highly sophisticated in taste. It's no surprise that Thai food remains one of the world's most favorite choices.

Le Cochon Blanc Launches a New 'Revamped Fire Pit' Menu

BY PEKKY THE ANGEL

One of the best steakhouses in town, Le Cochon Blanc on Sukhumvit 33 has rolled out its new menu following renovations to its grill pit. The new fireplace, with a steel plancha on top, is bigger and better, bringing greater levels of adjustability to slow cooking and maneuverability to charcoal heat control.

The open fire pit is located right in the center of the restaurant to showcase the eye-popping theatricals of the chefs serving as a rousing prelude to every meal here. With different fruits and vegetables dangling from the ceiling, every dish, from the main course to dessert, has something coming from the grill.

Standout delights on the new menu include oyster and mussel velouté, tomato and smoked mackerel, and grilled corn salad tossed with homemade smoked chili paste and served with lime, coriander and crispy shallots. Main dishes include pork jowl (from Nan province) served with pomegranate molasses and sunchoke crumbs, and three options of grilled beef: Black Angus hanger steak, Australian wagyu striploin and prime rib, all served with barbecued vegetables and condiments of the day.

Check out www.lecochonblanc.com or call 02 662 3814 to make arrangements.



PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF LE COCHON BLANC

NYX Welcomes the Holiday Season with the Cutest Sugar Trip Collections

BY PEKKY THE ANGEL

NYX Professional Makeup has launched its latest and cutest 2018 holiday collection to excite Thai makeup junkies! From palettes to eyeshadows to dazzling highlighters to exotic shades of lips, this dynamic cosmetic brand is about to make all your makeup dreams come true. These are some of the cutest gifts to give your friends (or girlfriend) this coming Christmas!



The NYX Sugar Advent Calendar features fan-fave formulas in 24 new shades, stunning lippies – like the Soft Matte Lip Cream and Butter Gloss, as well as velvety eyeshadows, highlighters and blush. It comes with ten blendable powders to 14 mid-size lip colors, an amazing assortment for all. Price: THB 2,300.



Achieve sequin-like levels of shine with NYX Sugar Trip Glitter Vault. This limited-edition collection features ten brilliant glitters for those full-on glam days. Prep with the included Glitter Primer to help your sparkles stay put. Price: THB 2,300.



Lastly, the NYX Sugar Trip Lippie Vault, an epic 36-pieces set that features NYX's most-coveted matte formulas in new colors. The set comes with six Soft Matte Lip Cream, six Liquid Suede Cream Lipstick and six Lip Lingerie shades. Each plush lippie also comes with a made-to-match Suede Matte Lip Liner to really sweeten the deal. Colors range from peachy beige to hot pink and forest green. Price: THB 2,300.

Check out all of the candy-inspired offerings at NYX Professional Makeup shops or online at Konvy, Lazada, Central Online, and Looksi.

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF NYX PROFESSIONAL MAKEUP

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BodyConscious

A Wellness Center for the Health-conscious

BY PEKKY THE ANGEL



Let's face it, maintaining a healthy lifestyle is easier said than done. Sticking to an exercise regime, cutting down on carbohydrates, having a healthy, balanced diet and getting a good eight hours' sleep a night can be all but impossible for many of us normal humans. A New Year's resolution alone isn't enough, too – never was, never will be. That's where health and wellness coaches come in as useful guides on our journey to a healthy life.

Earlier this year, "BodyConscious" opened its doors as a holistic, multidisciplinary wellness center located on the seventh floor of the Column Bangkok Hotel on Sukhumvit Soi 16. The center comprises a team of experts – a naturopathic physician, acupuncturist, physiotherapist, wellness advisor, holistic nurse and a fitness trainer – to help clients improve their overall health and keep in good shape through a range of alternative medical treatments and therapies.

Although offering several interesting wellness and weight-loss packages with catchy titles such as "Shrink Me", "Tone Me", "Fix Me", and "Renew Me", BodyConscious clients are given personal attention to make sure that they receive the most effective course of treatment.

"Yes, we have our set programs, but we also personalize them," explains Dr Yinhsu Liu, the center's clinic director and naturopathic physician. "In our wellness consultations, we can recommend one of our signature programs, or we can create a whole personalized program for you. Or we can take it step by step – take it one appointment at a time and see how you feel after the treatments to see what works best for you."

If a client comes in without a package in mind, the center's wellness consultant and Dr Liu will co-create a plan for a wellness journey that fits the budget and health goals.

"Every client's visit starts with a session with a wellness consultant who acts as their 'wellness concierge', helping the client figure out which process, which appointment, which therapy, and perhaps even what order of treatments best suits their needs and condition.

"Personalization and listening are the most important elements in what we do. Imagine that you come in wanting 'fat-loss' (I use the word 'fat-loss' not 'weight-loss' because fat is the real concern) but from our conversation I learn that the root of your problem is toxicity, whether physical or emotional...we will then tailor your treatments around detox and supporting the healing process. For someone else, the cause may be nutrition, or hormones, or psychological factors such as stress. Different people need different approaches – that's the human-centric touch that differentiates us," she says.

The team here are all experts in their respective fields, very friendly and knowledgeable. They have a passion for what they do, so serving clients and making sure they walk out better and healthier than when they came in is not just a "job" for them; it's a mission.

"We're here to support each individual through his or her wellness journey. The human-to-human contact is something so precious nowadays," says Dr Liu.

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF BODYCONSCIOUS



For example, Chatyodsakon “Guy” Rajatanavin, the center’s traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) doctor, combines acupuncture with several natural healing techniques such as singing bowls and tuning forks, to heal the body and mind. With years of experience in TCM working at hospitals in Bangkok and China, and fluency in English, Thai and Chinese, Chatyodsakon is passionate about finding appropriate options to help his clients heal and relax.

“The needles are the starting point for energy flow, but when used with the sound therapy tools, the process facilitates a much deeper and smoother whole-body experience through all the senses,” explains Dr Liu, adding: “Other practitioners may be doing TCM or sound therapy, but we believe that our delivery is different: our clients feel well taken care of in a very supportive way.”

Another favorite practitioner at the center is physiotherapist Pachara “Mac” Punnatornurarin, known for his attention to detail and interpersonal skills.

“Mac’s gentle humility belies his tremendous knowledge, but it shines through in his way of taking care of the client and really explaining things. He is very nourishing and supportive, and very clear about what he’s going to do. He wants to make sure you understand what’s going to happen during the treatment, and that has been very well received by our clients,” says Dr Liu.

BodyConscious takes a multidisciplinary, holistic approach to providing health solutions to clients.

“We work together as a team, so if someone is receiving acupuncture – for example – and we may feel that the client would also benefit from improved posture, we would arrange a complimentary analysis with our physiotherapist in order to help the client heal faster. It’s not like a normal clinic or hospital where departments compete against each other. As a team we support whoever comes through the door,” Dr Liu explains.

It is this “human-to-human, heart-to-heart” mindset that keeps the center busy, with locals, expats and even medical tourists flying in just for treatments. For those looking for alternative medical therapies to help maintain a healthy lifestyle, keep fit in shape, or heal faster from certain sickness, BodyConscious is certainly well worth visiting. After all, the best gift that you can give to yourself is a healthy you.

BodyConscious

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December

HM the King to grace 'Bike Un Ai Rak'

Over 8,000 people have registered to join the "Bike Un Ai Rak" cycling event initiated by His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn. All Bangkokians are invited to take part in the historic event that will be held nationwide on **Dec 9**. The King will lead the event, pedaling a total of 39 km from the Royal Plaza to Lat Pho Park in Samut Prakan's Phra Pradaeng district. Check out www.bikeunairak2018.com for more information.



'Hugo & Friends: Live on Bangkok Island'

Come see the one and only "Hugo" perform a gig aboard the Bangkok Island and enjoy a relaxing cruise up the Chao Phraya River on **Dec 8**, from 8 pm to midnight. The cruiser makes frequent stops along the way to let people get on and off. A talented musician with Jay-Z's Roc Nation label, Hugo Chakrabongse Levy has quite a few infectious hit numbers including "99 Problems", "Hailstorms", and "Ban Dai Si Deng", a Thai smash hit. The boat has a seating capacity of 320. Early booking is recommended. Tickets start at THB 1,400 and can be booked via www.ticketmelon.com.

Music artists converging on Big Mountain Music Festival

This year's Big Mountain Music Festival is bigger and better to celebrate the festive season with an extensive line-up of artists. The music festival will be held from **Dec 8 to 9** at The Ocean Khao Yai, Nakhon Ratchasima province. With nine main stages, over 200 musicians and bands from various genres will stage performances, including such acclaimed bands as Bodyslam, Potato, The Toys and Zeal, to name just a few. Tickets starts from THB 2,500 and are available at 7-11 stores and www.allticket.com. For more information, visit www.bigmountainmusicfestival.com.



'WONDERFRUIT' celebrating environmental sustainability

The fifth edition of "Wonderfruit", a four-day celebration of the arts and sustainable living to catalyze positive impact, is being held from **Dec 13 to 16** at the Siam Country Club in Pattaya. This year's event features international live music acts and DJs, perspective-shifting talks and workshops, world-class cuisine, cutting-edge architecture, and much more. Visit www.wonderfruit.co to find out more.

Siam Sinfonietta to perform Disney classics

A new concert by youth orchestra Siam Sinfonietta, "The Princess Concert" will enchant families and children with the world's greatest hits including theme songs from our favorite Walt Disney films and fairy tales about princesses, from Snow White, Elsa and the Sleeping Beauty to Mu Lan, the Little Mermaid and Moana. The concert is on **Dec 16** at 4pm and **Dec 17** at 7:30pm. Children are encouraged to turn up decked out in fancy costumes of their favorite prince or princess. There will be lots of prizes, toys, games, and photo-ops. Tickets from THB 500 and are available at www.ticketmelon.com.



Dance 2018 away at 'Knock Knock Pattaya Countdown'

Bid farewell to 2018 and ring in the new year by dancing the night away on **New Year's Eve** at "Knock Knock Pattaya Countdown 2019", Pattaya's largest EDM countdown party. The lineup includes world-class DJs such as Martin Garrix, Dimitri Vegas & Like Mike, and Lost Frequencies. The venue is MAYA Space, Pattaya. For more information, visit www.knockknockfestival.com.

*Submit news, updates and press releases to: info@urbanaffairsmagazine.com.

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