

Phuket Gazette

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AEC FEARS

Ignorance continues to rule opinions, fears as the Asean Economic Community takes effect

By Kongleaphy Keam

THE feared impact the Asean Economic Community (AEC) will have on Thais in Phuket's tourism industry is unwarranted, said AEC Information Center Director Thitipasook Jaratjessada.

After years of anticipation, and some delays, the AEC was officially launched on January 1, 2016. However, there are no changes to visa requirements or labor laws for citizens of member nations seeking employment in Thailand.

"At this stage, the opening of the AEC does not mean that Asean people can move to whatever country they want and start working without a visa or work permit. What we have now is a Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) of Asean," Ms Thitipasook said. "I'm aware that there is a lot of misunderstanding about this. We have held seminars and done our best to inform Thai citizens, but they simply won't listen to us."

MRA only applies to a number of selected positions within eight professional fields, which were named as: engineering services...

Continued on Pages 4-5



Many jobs in Thailand will remain protected, despite the AEC. Images: Gazette graphics

Navy rescues 4 foreigners adrift in yacht

THE Royal Thai Navy on Sunday assisted with the rescue of four foreigners – three Canadians and one Brit – who had been adrift for five days on damaged sailing yacht *Kiss* after the engine stopped, the mast broke and the sail ripped.

Full story Page 3

BUSINESS



Bill Barnett investigates the growth potential for Phuket's medical tourism.

PROPERTY



Accorhotels teams up with Avista Resort to manage three Phuket properties.

LIFE&STYLE



Aussie joins team rowing across the Atlantic to raise cash for cancer foundation.



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Light rail plans revised amid safety concerns

PLANS for Phuket's multi-billion-baht light rail project are being revised, again, to ensure better safety for motorists using the roads running alongside the proposed track routes.

The Highways Department, under the Ministry of Transport, has requested that the Office of Transport and Traffic Policy and Planning (OTPP) modify the numerous level crossings planned along the route to reduce accidents at intersections.

Initial plans for level crossings with barriers along the route were subsequently scrapped, forcing the OTPP to come up with new plans involving underpasses.

– Chutharat Plerin

Allegedly high driver flips bus, students injured

A BUS driver transporting tour guide students is suspected of being high on drugs when he lost control of his vehicle, flipping it on February 27.

The bus was carrying 35 students from Far Eastern University in Chiang Rai on their way to participate in a training course for tour guides in Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi.

'Jet-ski Champion' gets transferred from island



Long-standing champion of jet-skis, former Phuket Marine Office Chief Phuripat Theerakulpisut, left the province on February 26 after being transferred to landlocked Nonthaburi. The transfer comes fast on the heels of the February 18 arrests of 28 jet-ski operators during a Central Investigation Bureau raid. For the full story, visit PhuketGazette.net. Photo: Chutharat Plerin

The accident occurred at the Khok Kloi T-junction in Phang Nga. Twenty of the students suffered minor injuries and were taken to Takua Thung Hospital.

The driver, Tanapon Prakobmit, 32, tested positive for illegal drugs.

– Winai Sarot

LOCAL NEWS Briefly

Tourist drowns at Karon Beach

LIFEGUARDS pulled the body of a tourist from the waters off Karon on February 28.

Though the man was found with no identification on him, which is often the case in water-related fatalities, police were later able to identify him as Chinese national Huanying Zhang, 27.

Mr Zhang's body was taken to Vachira Phuket Hospital to determine the cause of death.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Bull elephant kills mahout at trekking camp

AN ENRAGED bull elephant stomped his mahout to death at a trekking camp in Ao Nang on February 27.

The 12-year-old male elephant named 'Plai Sridor Nakorn' was in musth – an annual period of heightened testosterone levels – and had

been chained up after becoming highly aggressive.

The animal killed Anantamek Thongtae, 21, when the mahout attempted to unchain him.

Mr Anantamek was pronounced dead on arrival at Krabi Hospital.

Officials stated that Plai Srido Nakorn will remain chained until musth passes. He will then be allowed to return to work.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Bridge players need not worry, say officials

POLICE have confirmed that playing bridge in Phuket is not illegal, as long as no gambling is involved.

The confirmation follows reports of police and military officers raiding a bridge club in Pattaya, which led to the arrest of 32 foreigners earlier this month.

Even though money did not change hands in Pattaya, players were charged under a 1935 Thai law that states that no one can possess more than 120 playing cards at a time. Another alleged offence was that the card boxes did not possess an official government seal.

Many people have since voiced concerns over what they say is a 'lack of evidence' to warrant the arrests, as bridge is considered a sport, not gambling in Thailand.

Officials assured that there was no need for bridge players in Phuket to panic.

– Chutharat Plerin

'Not mafia' say Phuket cabbies

PHUKET taxi drivers denied any association with any mafia organizations during a meeting with Dussadee Arayawuthi, deputy permanent secretary for the Justice Ministry, on February 26.

Kata-Karon taxi drivers joined beach vendors and other locals airing their grievances at the meeting at Phuket Provincial Hall.

Col Dussadee told those at the meeting that the ministry aimed to provide fairness on matters that affected the public and would consider whether taxi mafia related charges filed in 2014 against high-ranking officials were appropriate.

Phuket's chief public prosecutor, Pisitpol Phumsawat, said that the taxi mafia cases were still being investigated by the Region 8 Public Prosecution Office in Surat Thani.

– Sukawin Tanthavanich

Indian man dies in hit-and-run on bypass road

POLICE hunted the driver of a fuel-transport truck who fled the scene after killing an Indian man on February 24.

Cheriya Parambil Johi, 40, sustained a fatal head injury in the crash on bypass road.

Nearby, police found an Ital-Thai Construction Company truck that was allegedly involved in the accident.

Inside the truck, police found the business card of Ital-Thai employee Samran Janput, 56.

Mr Janput surrendered himself to police hours after the accident. He has been charged with reckless driving causing death.

Representatives from Ital-Thai Construction Company have already visited Mr Veera in hospital and are in compensation negotiations with the family of Mr Johi.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Phuket Zoo stonewalls orangutan investigators

PHUKET Zoo management is stonewalling officials investigating the case of Milo, a 13-year-old orangutan.

“The Zoo manager, Surapong Chanthaweewong, has refused to answer any questions with regard to how the orangutan was obtained, cared for, or ‘released into

the wild’,” said Piyawat Sukhon, chief of the Khao Phra Thaeo Non-hunting Zone. “He simply told us that we should continue with the legal process.”

When contacted by the *Gazette*, the Phuket Zoo employee who answered the call declined to comment and

denied having any contact information for the Zoo manager.

“We are still collecting evidence, which we plan on handing over to police. We will also be submitting a letter to Phuket Provincial Police Commander Teeraphol Thipjaroen,” said Mr Piyawat. “Anyone with

information that might be used in the case, please submit it to us.”

Information can be delivered to the Khao Phra Thaeo Non-hunting Zone Office near the Thanyapura training center or emailed to piyawat_forest@hotmail.com.

– *Kongleaphy Keam*

Phuket flyover project to open this month



Gov Chamroen (left) inspects the flyover. Photo: Phuket PR

AFTER suffering months of daily 200,000-baht fines, the construction company of the highly anticipated Klong Koh Pee Flyover will have the project ready to present to be open for use midway through this month, while the grand opening is on April 6.

The flyover connects Sakdidet Road Soi 7 directly to Saphan Hin. Ground was broken for the project in 2013.

Work on the project began 19 years ago, but was held up after the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment ruled that the final stretch could not be built through mangroves in the area.

The project was approved by Cabinet under the Yingluck Administration in 2012, following a series of special legal amendments during the administration of the Abhisit government.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

Five days adrift: foreigners rescued from stranded yacht

By Chutharat Plerin

THE Royal Thai Navy (RTN) on February 28 assisted with the rescue of four foreigners who had been adrift at sea on a damaged sailing yacht for five days.

The Canadian and British sailors were aboard the Malaysian-flagged yacht *Kiss* when the engine stopped working.

Shortly thereafter, the lead mast on the boat cracked, followed by the sail ripping after it was hoisted up a secondary mast, explained a member of the RTN Third Area Command, who declined to be named.

Maryse Doyer, 68; Jaques Doyer, 63; Andre Belzile, 73; and Colin David Osmond, 37, were rescued and brought on board the cargo ship *MV Kota*



The four foreigners were given first aid on their rescuers' cargo ship. Photo: Royal Thai Navy

Teguh. Crew provided them food and water, and radioed the RTN for assistance.

“We received a report that an 11-meter-long yacht with four

people was adrift just 52 nautical miles south of Phuket,” the RTN source said. “We immediately dispatched a rescue team.”

Kiss was towed back to the

Navy port in Cape Panwa on February 28.

The rescued sailors were taken to Vachira Phuket Hospital for recovery.



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Officials fear motorhomes will damage island tourism

NEARLY a dozen motor homes and recreational vehicles (RVs) recently spotted on the island prompted officials to rethink regulations for such vehicles entering Thailand.

"I was told that these vehicles stay over night in public places, such as Saphan Hin, Ya Nui and Nai Yang beaches," said Phuket Vice Governor Prajiad Aksornthammakul at a meeting on February 24.

"I'm worried that if we ignore this matter, it may affect the island's tourism," he said.

The RVs in question entered Thailand via the R3A route, which is part of the North-South Economic Corridor that links Thailand with Laos and China.

Nearly 3,000 trailers entered Thailand via the Chiang Rai-Lao border during the recent Chinese New Year holiday alone.

"The vehicles may be able to cross the border and comply with



An RV in Phuket. Photo: The Nation

customs laws. However, they are not necessarily complying with land transport laws," Phuket Provincial Police Deputy Commander Saman Chainarong.

Phuket Land and Transport (PLTO) Chief Policy Adviser Jaturong Kaewkasi explained that most of the RVs in question were breaking the law.

"Some of these motor homes are illegal because they have failed to be registered with the Land and Transport Office be-

fore entering the country. Additionally, it is possible that some of the drivers are not carrying the necessary driver's licence," Mr Jaturong said.

Though there are concerns about the legality of the RVs, Thailand does already have a number of fees in place with regards to the vehicles entering the Kingdom.

Santi Pawai, chief of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports Phuket Office, stated that he will be working with the Land Transport Office and Customs Department to reconcile differences in their regulations to help clarify what needs to be done.

V/Gov Prajiad noted that until solid regulations are put in place, local authorities would be in charge of accommodating mobile homes in their areas, as well as confirming that the vehicles and their occupants are legal. - Chutharat Plerin

Understand

From page 1

...nursing services, architectural services, surveying qualifications, accountancy services, dental practitioners, medical practitioners and tourism professionals. There are 32 job titles listed within the tourism professionals category, which includes positions in the hospitality industry.

Previously, there were only three ways in which a foreigner was legally allowed to work in Thailand: having up to 49 per cent investment in a company; being transferred from the headquarters of an international company; or being in a high-demand profession that was not reserved for Thais.

"The MRA is simply the recognition and standardization of certifications within these professional fields, among all Asean members. However, each country's individual laws and additional requirements for employment within their borders remain," said Ms Thitipasook.

Those wanting to work in a fellow Asean member nation must apply to the necessary government body, such as the Thailand Ministry of Tourism and Sports. The applicant will then have to obtain an 'MRA' certification, explained Ms Thitipasook.

Within the tourism professionals category there are three types of certifications, which are applicable for entry level positions, mid-level management or upper-level management accordingly.

"For example, in the past, Singapore might not have recognized a degree in engineering issued in Thailand. However, an applicant armed with the degree and the relevant MRA certificate will be recognized as a qualified professional there," Ms Thitipasook said.

However, not all of the eight professional categories have MRAs established yet.

"Please contact the relevant office for your profession to get further information," Ms Thitipasook said.

Phuket Tourism Association (PTA) Vice President Bhurit Maswongsa supported Ms Thitipasook's claims that Thais working in the hospitality industry had nothing to worry about.

"Free flow labor is just an ideological concept at this stage. It sounds beautiful. However, there are still numerous additional requirements put in place by each country to protect their citizens' jobs," said Mr Bhurit.



It is hard to see any negative impact the AEC will have on Thailand at this stage. Each country has laws to protect its workforce. The only negative impact that we are now facing is that Thai people are not willing to learn about the AEC.

to say Thais should stop trying to improve themselves and develop important skill sets, such as English-language skills.

However, even if those with better English-speaking abilities do

come to Thailand for work, they do not have local knowledge, Thai-language skills or the Thai-service mentality. There is nothing to be afraid of."

Nonetheless, a number of people the *Gazette* spoke to within the hospitality industry, or preparing to graduate from local universities, were worried.

"Even though I am studying in an international program, I am very worried about the AEC," said Sirikwan Apichatrakul, a third year hospitality management student at Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Phuket Campus. "I am afraid that labor from other countries will come and steal my job."

Another PSU hospitality student, Benjawan Chaichana, 21, shared Ms Sirikwan's concerns.

"I am especially worried about the Filipino people, who

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what AEC means for Phuket

look Thai, but speak better English than us. If they come to Phuket, hotels will choose to employ them over us," she said. "However, I also have the opportunity to work in other countries. I am studying in an international program, so I am quite confident about my ability to work abroad."

Surin Pitsuwan, former secretary-general of ASEAN, affirmed that students such as Ms Benjawan had nothing to worry about.

"The AEC is an opportunity, not a disaster. We have opened up the labor market. Inside Thailand the market is 67 million jobs-strong. Now, the market is more than 600 million – there are many more options and opportunities," Dr Surin said.

Some in the hospitality industry showed less concern about how the opening of the AEC might affect them, even though they were unaware of exactly what it meant for Thailand.

"I don't know much about the AEC and free-flow labor. However, I'm not worried," said Puttida Thanviset, a front office employee at Kata Rocks Resort & Residences. "Why should I be worried? I am a local. I know more about my country and province than a foreigner. My English is not that bad and I have almost two



Members look to develop economical might, but there's not much change on the ground yet. Photo: Wikipedia

years of experience working in the hotel business. I think no one can steal my job."

Gochaporn Thongsrichan, a 23-year-old guest assistance

service employee at Royal Paradise Hotel and Spa Patong, concurred.

"We are Thai. We live in Thailand. There is no reason for

us to be scared; the Thai government will protect us," she told the *Gazette*.

Phuket Employment Office Chief Pitool Dumsakorn

pointed out that it was not a battle between foreign laborers and Thais.

"The AEC does not create competition; it allows the talents of nationals from other Asean nations to complement what is already here," Mr Pitool said.

"Thai people are always worried that foreigners will steal their jobs, but the foreigners just come to fill voids in the workforce.

"Most of the foreign workers coming here are skilled workers that are needed in Thailand so we can continue to improve as a nation."

Mr Pitool suggested that those who were concerned should focus on personal and professional development, especially with regards to learning English.

"It is hard to see any negative impact the AEC will have on Thailand at this stage. Each country has laws to protect its workforce. The only negative impact that we are now facing is that Thai people are not willing to learn about the AEC. They panic without knowing what the facts are," he said.

"Please remain calm, read, learn and improve yourself. Focus on improving yourself, and let the government continue to work hard to protect you."



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HUGE REEF DISCOVERED

Four square kilometers of coral 'unique in Thailand'

By Sylvie Yaffe



PHANG NGA: Marine scientists discovered coral reefs along the coast. The discovery follows a report in January this year that about 13% of reefs inspected were damaged. "We never thought the reef would be so large," said K. Songpol, a local Nea native.

Plan to relax license rules for yacht skippers
Special visas for pregnant foreigners?
Huge reef discovered
Are boats barred from Kata?
Phuket gears up for polls
THE TIME machine
News from the past
Not driving

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Tsunami tower test causes consternation

Back to bedlam in Patong
Do non-Buddhists have to convert on marriage?
Suwat pushes for fast action on Phi Phi

Employers threaten strike over labor crackdown

AS THE *Gazette* scuba diving columnist for the last four years, I was dumbfounded when I was flipping through the publication's vast archives and stumbled over the headline screaming from page one of the 2006 March 4-10 issue: **HUGE REEF DISCOVERED**.

A unique swath of biodiversity for Thailand that consumed at least four square kilometers of seabed off Tai Muang in Phang Nga was the biggest such reef in the region. The discovery followed a report in January stating that about 50 per cent of reefs inspected along the Andaman coast after the tsunami were destroyed.

"It was great - very big and healthy. It is in good condition and only about one per cent was damaged by the tsunami," said the head of the Thailand Marine Coastal Conservation Unit at the time. "It is completely different from the [reefs at] the Similans, Surin or Richelieu it is not

sloping, and it is home to species never before seen in Thai waters, as well as species [that before were] only seen in the Similans.

Researchers were sure that the reef had the capacity to boost tourism in the region, but only once a good management plan was put in place... Has it taken more than 10 years to establish a plan? What happened to the mysterious reef that was considered 'both a bombshell and a cause for joy' by members of the dive industry? Those are perhaps questions for some of the old sea dogs at your local dive.

However, coral reef damage wasn't the only troublesome legacy of the tsunami found in the March 4-10 issue. Though officials declared a test of 12 tsunami warning towers on February 22 a success, residents told the *Gazette* that they were terrified during the



process, as they had received no warning of the trial. During the test, full emergency messages were broadcast all this a little more than a year after the horrific waves crushed the coastline. In fact only a few years ago, similar failures to inform tourists and locals of emergency drills led a number of people to panic and this was without recently having witnessed or dealt with the loss of loved ones and friends to the waves.

The warning, broadcast in English, simply said: "Attention please! Attention please! There are tidal waves from storm winds. Please leave the beach as far as possible for higher ground urgently."

That is, without a doubt, one way to incite panic in a crowd of tourists - those tourists bold enough to be the foundation necessary to promote the

regrowth of the industry on the island.

Also causing a stench on the beach was an old friend that even newer expats are familiar with: Cladophora.

The blooming bay, which has taken page one a number of times throughout the years, had signs of 'high organic content that comes from wastewater, a marine biologist at the Phuket Marine Biological Center explained in 2006. A similar explanation has been printed in the *Gazette's* pages almost annually since.

Though the extraordinary Phang Nga reef and unique ecosystem that was associated with it has become buried in the bowels of history, recalling the stench of unprocessed wastewater crossing popular beaches and throwing a party in the bay does not take an elephant's memory.

- Isaac Stone Simonelli

Two foreigners allegedly raped by fishermen

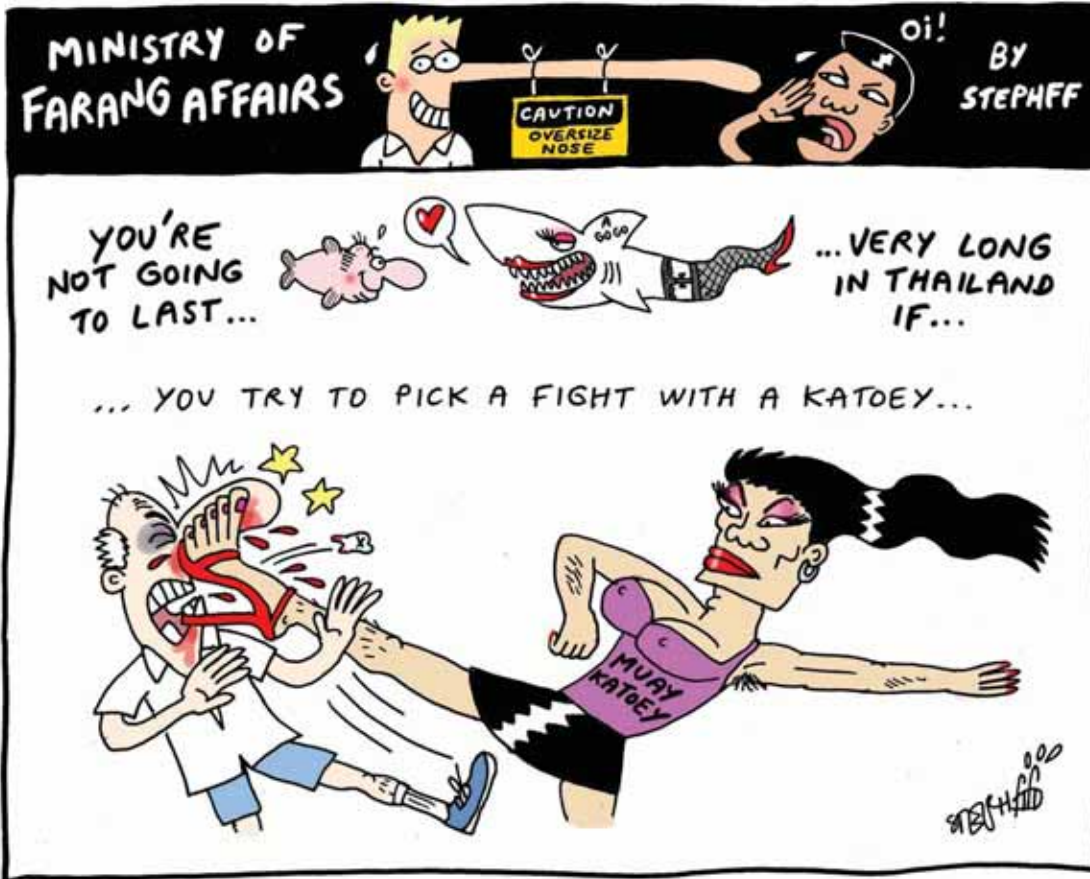
A KOH KOOD tourist police inspector has been transferred to an inactive post for allegedly failing to immediately inform supervisors about the alleged assault and rape of foreign tourists over the weekend, police chief Pol General Chakthip Chaijinda said February 29.

Five Cambodian fishermen have been charged for raping and assaulting foreign tourists near a Koh Kood hotel, Deputy Police Spokesman Krissana Pattanacharoen said.

Police said the Cambodian suspects had been working on a fishing boat and swam ashore to drink alcohol. They then allegedly surprised four French tourists in a dark, isolated area behind the hotel, assaulted all four with knives and sticks, and raped the two women. One of the men escaped and alerted hotel staff, while the other three were seriously injured and taken to hospital.

Dengue fever cases double

THE first two months of this year have seen the number of dengue fever patients in Thailand double from the same period last year, said Sapon Mekthon, permanent secretary at the Public Health Ministry.



The first two months of 2016 saw 8,651 dengue fever cases and one death – compared to 4,263 cases over the first two months of 2015.

PM to put stop to Songkran water wars

THE government wants the famed Songkran Festival toned down to 'rod nam dam hua' – pouring a small amount of wa-

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

ter on the hands of revered elders to ask for blessings – in the face of the country's drought problem this year.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has asked for public cooperation in saving water, while waterworks authorities are controlling water supplies.

Plea extension sought for Koh Tao convicts

THE legal defence team for the two Myanmar suspects in the Koh Tao murder case has requested approval from Surat Thani's Samui Provincial Court for a second 30-day extension period of appeal until March 24.

Nakhon Chompoochart, one of the lawyers assigned to work on the Koh Tao murder case by

the Lawyers Council of Thailand, on February 24 said his team was still gathering evidence that would be used in the appeal, as the reason for seeking the extension.

New wave of hackers behind website attacks

BURMESE hackers say they have attacked Thai government websites since early January and stolen data as part of a long-running, broader campaign against those critical of Myanmar's government.

The Blink Hacker Group said in Facebook posts and in an email interview that its attacks were in retaliation for Thailand sentencing two Burmese to death for the murder of two British backpackers late last year, reported Reuters.

The group said it posted online data it took from websites of the Thai prison agency and justice ministry, saying databases from any government websites it hacked 'should be made public'.

Thai police said that they had yet to determine who was behind the attacks, but denied those responsible were from Myanmar.

The attacks do, though, mark an escalation in computer hacking since Myanmar opened up to foreign investment and ended decades of military rule in 2011, researchers say.



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Jet-ski-free Phuket

THE *Gazette* applauds the Central Investigation Bureau's recent crackdown on illegal jet-ski rental operators and the coincidental transfer of the industry's long-time 'champion' to a relatively inactive post.

We hope whoever is assigned to replace former Phuket Marine Office Chief Phuripat Theerakulpisut will make tourist safety a real priority and begin to clamp down. The problems that the jet-ski rental industry brings with it has done much damage to Phuket's image as a safe and attractive tourist destination over the years.

News of Mr Phuripat's transfer to landlocked Nonthaburi province came as a surprise to many, especially given the fact that his star appeared to be on the rise when he was promoted to the lofty position of acting director of the Marine Office Region 5 on October 1 last year, the beginning of fiscal year 2016. That role empowered him to oversee marine safety issues, not only here in Phuket, but also the other five Andaman coast provinces of Phang Nga, Krabi, Trang, Ranong and Satun.

Mr Phuripat's transfer to Nonthaburi, through which the Chao Phraya River flows on its way to the capital, can hardly be seen as a lateral move. It does, however, fall far short of the thorough investigation into his personal finances called for in this space during his six-year reign as Phuket marine chief.

Regardless of the trajectory of Mr Phuripat's future career path, the good news is that Phuket now enjoys a long-overdue opportunity to begin better enforcement of safety measures on rented jet-skis that were blatantly disregarded during the former chief's tenure, sometimes with tragic or even fatal results.

The list of jet-ski transgressions that have been carried out with impunity in recent years is simply too lengthy to be comprehensively listed in this space.

The *Gazette* would also like to extend our thanks to the many foreign diplomatic missions that helped keep up the pressure and continued to lobby the central government to do something about Phuket's notorious jet-ski scams after the National Council for Peace and Order took power in May 2016.

In particular, we would like to pay our last respects to the late Honorary Consul from Germany Dirk Naumann, who passed away last month from cancer. Mr Naumann was among the most vocal critics of the jet-ski rental industry in Phuket, calling on numerous provincial governors to do something about the sorry situation.



Sorry is not good enough for cowardly acts

Re: *Hit-and-run driver kills Indian man in Phuket, February 25*

To flee the scene of an accident is a crime in most countries, but obviously not here; otherwise, the driver would face additional charges.

It's a cowardly act and he may have something to hide. A wai and a sorry is not good enough. He could have helped the victim and saved a life.

Condolences to the deceased's family.

Harry
Gazette forum

Gateway would be perfect for RV park

Re: *Phuket fears motor home stampede, February 26*

So, it's okay to buy food from a restaurant but not a market?

Maybe we should close all the markets then. Other countries have thriving RV tourism. An ideal location to create a controlled area for RVs would be the Phuket Gateway – that White Elephant provides no other purpose at present.

As for the legality of RVs, let's start at home and ban samlors, songtaews, clapped out buses and all other illegal vehicles.

Mister Ree
Gazette forum

Moving on to a better marine industry

Re: *'Jet-ski Champion' transferred out of Phuket, February 26*

Well now, is this the start of a move to clean things up a bit?

Letters to the Editor

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

This character was regularly quoted giving his controversial opinions, a la 'jet-skis are under control' and 'accidents happen', with regards to the multiple deaths already this year on the waters of Phuket.

It is a good thing for Phuket that he is being moved on.

Geoff
Gazette forum

Rules are useless unless enforced

Re: *Officials investigate Kamala Beach encroachment allegations, February 27*

Why would anyone bother to make rules that are not enforced?

5,000 baht for riding on a path; jet-ski and longtail rental vendors operating outside the zones; car park taken over by vendors who think they now own it; cars and motorcycles blocking footpaths. Nothing is ever enforced in Kamala.

Frustrated
Gazette forum

Congrats on another courageous article

Re: *Opinion: Orchestrating freedom for orangutans, February 28*

Bravo PG! Another coura-

geous article on behalf of the voiceless animals.

I hope it will motivate the relevant authorities to uncover the possibly inconvenient truth of how these abuses can go on so long, right under their noses.

TopcatHKT
Gazette forum

Condoning behavior by accommodating

Re: *'We're not mafia,' say Phuket taxi drivers, February 29*

Anyone who has lived in the area for any amount of time can attest to the brazen thug-like attitude of these creeps. They monopolize most prime parking spaces and threaten anyone who might consider parking within their turf.

The municipality tacitly condones their monopoly by creating taxi-only parking spaces along roads that are only wide enough for 2-lane traffic, and they allow the taxis to take over the public roadside salas.

Buster
Gazette forum

Respect the country you choose to be in

Re: *Foreigners suspected of vandalizing iconic Phuket locations, March 1*

There seem to be some stupid people in this world who have no respect whatsoever.

Respect the country, you are a guest in it. Shame on them.

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Cops and canines

FIRST PERSON

CURRENTLY, Phuket doesn't have any police dogs on the force. Every time we are in need of one, we borrow them from the Border Patrol Police Region 42 in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province.

As Phuket is growing, the need for police dogs is increasing as well. They can more accurately detect drugs. They are also unbiased – a dog can never be corrupt.

It's my dream to see each district have at least one police dog working with them. The cost to acquire them is relatively low, and the payoff for the amount of drug arrests we can detect with them greatly exceeds what we could do on our own.

The only issues we really run into is when we must enter an Islamic community or household, as dogs are considered unclean and are generally not allowed in homes or buildings.

A lot of people wonder why we don't set up a training center on the island, but it's just not necessary. The dogs do not need to be trained continuously. Once they have been trained, they can work for many years and live with the officer who works with them. So, the training center would be empty most of the time.

There is, however, a private training center in Phuket that actually trained our last two dogs, which retired from service in 2013. There is also the option of having the dogs trained in Nakhon Si Thammarat.

The governor has recently offered us a budget to hire dogs for the force. However,



Suthee Sirianun is the assistant chief of the Phuket Drug Prevention and Suppression Center. He is originally from Phatthalung Province and graduated from Ramkhamhaeng University with a double Masters in Law and Art.

Here he talks about the island's need for police dogs and the issues associated with being able to care for them.



Police dogs used on Phuket are currently borrowed from Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. Photo: Suthee Sirianun

the issue lies in having an officer able and willing to not only work with the dog, but live with it and take care of it as well.

Officers on the island are often transferred, leaving the dog with a new officer it is not used to working with or living with. We have actually had some dogs get sick and die when this happened.

The alternative at this point would be to hire staff to take care of the dogs at a facility. However, this is also risky, as staff can also be transferred or change jobs. Additionally, these employees are not al-

lowed to have confidential data of drug arrests. Just them knowing when we take the dogs and bring them back can be a great risk to our job.

At this point we have yet to reach a conclusion with the government, as not only will we need a budget for the dogs, but also for the employees who will take care of them.

Until then, we will keep borrowing dogs from Nakhon Si Thammarat and I will continue to support our government's initiative to bring police dogs to Phuket in order to keep the island safe and clear of drugs.



Travelling can be a great adventure if done responsibly. Photo: skeeze

Travelling responsibly

Island View

By Sahar Aftab Paliwala

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

THE recent incident involving Grace Taylor, a British backpacker in Krabi who made a frantic phone call to her family alleging that people were 'trying to hurt her', sparked a lot of debate on social media about the ethics of travelling responsibly. Fortunately, Ms Taylor's family was able to get to her in time and she was soon in safe hands. However, this may not always be the case.

My intent is certainly not to blame the victim in these situations, but there are numerous instances where teenagers and young adults visit Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and the like, completely unprepared for what to expect, or how to fend for themselves. I feel that most parents in such situations think that having adequate finances is enough to ensure that their offspring will have a safe and comfortable journey. However, this is quite far from the truth.

The first and most imperative aspect of preparing to travel is getting travel insurance. Most people think insurance is about as necessary as having estranged long-distance relatives stay with you for a month. Admittedly, nobody believes (or wants to believe) that they may be victims of a freak accident. However, such accidents, when they do occur, come without warning and are sometimes se-

vere enough to mar you for life.

Next – research, research, research. Taking an adventurous, spontaneous holiday is all well until you actually get there and realize you are completely unfamiliar with the customs and language of the place. Being culturally aware is important if you are planning to spend anywhere from one to six months living in a country where customs and traditions are drastically different from your own. This is as much for your own convenience as it is out of respect for the people who will 'host' you for that period of time.

Finally, families must ensure that their children have had enough exposure or street smarts to handle themselves in unfamiliar situations when sending them out to face the world, so to speak.

I know that part of the charm of backpacking is to experience unfamiliar and exciting situations, but there is a fine line between 'finding yourself' and being found on the side of a road as the victim of an unfortunate accident.

Words from the Wise

“Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living, it's a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope, and that enables you to laugh at life's realities.”

– Dr Seuss

“I realise that I do not change the course of history. I am an actor, I do a movie, that's the end of it. You have to realise we are just clowns for hire.”

– Leonardo DiCaprio

Issues & Answers

Where can I acquire a captain's licence?

I AM planning on buying a yacht and I would like to know how I go about getting a licence to operate the boat myself.

Mr Sakorn Pukham of the Phuket Marine Office replies:

You can come take a test at the Phuket Marine Office located at the Deep Sea Port near Cape Panwa.

You will be given an interview and written test. You have

to be the owner of the boat in order to get a captain's licence.

There are many documents

that you will need to submit in order to register for the test, namely: your boat ownership documents, boat details and other relevant documents, your passport with a valid visa and proof of address.

Once issued, the licence is valid for five years, after which you can renew it for another five years.

For more information contact the Phuket Marine Office at 076-391 174.

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

Submit your issue at:

www.PhuketGazette.net/IssuesAnswers

Tech stocks are still dangerous

Finance

By David Mayes

YOU would think the lessons learned in the dotcom bubble and subsequent crash would not be so quickly forgotten, but last year's purchase by Facebook of the free smartphone app Whatsapp for 22 billion dollars was a very good reminder of how quickly we forget.

There is no reason to put your life savings at risk with individual stocks in the modern era of ETFs (exchange traded funds) and more specifically unless you are using money with which you can afford to gamble, you should always avoid technology stocks.

Whatsapp charges its users nothing. It has no real defensive competitive advantage other than 'first mover's advantage'. Yet, even in that, it really isn't a first mover. Skype, Line and even Facebook allow you to do everything that Whatsapp does. They all do it for free. How is this a business model worth 22 billion dollars?

I can download the app for free and use it for free. I have never given Whatsapp a penny. Is this starting to sound like the dotcom era yet?

Now, a more important question is, 'are we near the end of



WARNING SIGNS: Here's an example of how dangerous and unpredictable social media stocks can be. In one day, the LinkedIn share price dropped nearly 50 per cent.

the hysteria over social media and apps?

A very big warning sign, and a very good example of how dangerous these stocks are, occurred recently with a name you surely all have heard of. LinkedIn is a social media company for professional networking.

Take a quick look at the chart above.

If you are not an expert at chart reading, I will summarize: in one day the LinkedIn share price dropped nearly 50 per cent, and at the time of writing it has continued to drop.

Imagine having a sizeable position in this stock in your portfolio because, "social media is the future."

One could argue that you should have been aware of the risk because its price to earn-

ings ratio was even more out of touch with reality than the rest of the sector, but it's all relative when we talk about overpriced companies.

Even though everybody knew e-commerce was going to revolutionize the way business is done, the money thrown into the companies in the late nineties and early 2000s went into companies with business models that did not justify investment.

New technology will always be like this. People see the future value of the technology, but cannot distinguish between a good investment or good business model and a bad one.

The difference leaves you exposed to drops like the one you see in the chart. The broad

market may crash, but when it recovers you will recover with it. Many of the dotcom businesses that were high flyers no longer exist.

What this would mean is your investment declined to zero and then didn't go on to recover and reach new highs along with the broader market.

Investing in the stock market is risky enough even if you are diversified. There is no reason to add company-specific risk unless you truly have some risk capital to allocate.

Risk capital by definition is money that you can afford to lose in its entirety without your overall financial situation being altered significantly.

Warren Buffet is the best investor in modern times based on the only metric that matters – his cumulative long-term performance.

I don't think it is a coincidence that he avoids technology stocks. I would do yourself a favor and follow his lead.

David Mayes, MBA, resides in Phuket and provides wealth management services to expatriates around the globe, focusing on UK pension transfers. He can be reached at david.m@faramond.com or 085-335-8573. Faramond UK is regulated by the FCA and provides advice on pensions and taxation.

McThai to double in size by 2020



McThai CEO Hester Chew.
Photo: The Nation

THE number of McDonald's fast food joints in Thailand is set to almost double over the next four years with a capital injection of five billion baht.

McThai Co, the licenced operator of McDonalds outlets in Thailand, plans to increase the number of restaurants from 227 to 400 by 2020.

McThai currently employs 9,000 staff across the country and plans to recruit 1,000 new staff every year over the next five years as the burger behemoth builds between 20 and 25 new McDonald's restaurants per year.

The fast food giant's CEO Hester Chew, said the company would invest at least 1 billion baht with the aim of doubling last year's sales figures by 2020.

– *The Nation*

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Building a medical tourism hub

By Bill Barnett

PHUKET has the potential to become a leading regional hub for medical tourism, an industry that is well positioned for exponential growth primarily led by the demand for aesthetic treatments. Investment opportunities in medical facilities and premises are increasingly attractive amidst the backdrop of a global economic slowdown.

Despite the diminishing legacy market for Gender Reassignment Surgery, the market has continued to flourish by focusing on the global movement for beauty enhancement. Mergers and acquisition activity is high in Thailand's medical sector, seeking to develop quality centers and facilities to cope with increasing demand from the growing Asian middle-class, and a broader international audience.

The island's major existing medical institutions include Phuket International Hospital and Bangkok Phuket Hospital, while on the wellness side there is Thanyapura Integrative Health Center, Dr Orawan and Radiant Medical Clinic among a growing list of new arrivals.

With Phuket's high growth over the last decade, existing facilities have had a hard time coping with demand and now Australians and Chinese are beginning to consume more of



Phuket International Hospital (PIH) has expanded in anticipation of market growth. Image: PIH

the products and services of these medical institutions.

Nearly half of the medical tourists to Phuket come for cosmetic operations, such as breast augmentation, which is the most popular procedure offered. Recently, there has been a surge in demand for anti-aging treatment driven by the influx of female patients from Mainland China.

The gloom surrounding the global economy has not altered the growth trajectory of the industry. The number of medical tourist arrivals has risen consistently at an annual

rate of over 20 per cent in recent years.

According to the findings presented in C9 Hotelworks' recent Phuket Medical Tourism Market report, Australia has become the top nationality making up close to half of all patients in the market and 70 per cent of cosmetic surgery clients. In light of the large number of appointment cancellations triggered by the Australian dollar to Thai baht devaluation in 2015, we may see some shifts in geographic segments in 2016.

Competitive pricing is a sig-

nificant advantage for Phuket in attracting travellers worldwide. The average expenditure per cosmetic surgery patient amounts to 150,000 baht while the average spend on anti-aging treatments is about 80,000 baht in Phuket. These price points are attractive to the quality-conscious, yet price-sensitive visitors.

The formation of the Asean Economic Community will in part catalyze intra-Asean cross-border investments. Healthcare services in many Asean countries will not be able to serve the needs of their rising middle-

class population. Therefore, more consumers from these countries, especially neighboring Vietnam and Myanmar, are expected to come to Phuket.

Expanding market demand for aesthetic treatments is expected to lead the way for more investment in the medical industry. However, as the competition intensifies, there will be a development of non-aesthetic medical service segments, such as disease treatments, with more hospital and clinics venturing into this area to diversify their businesses and gain a competitive edge.

Today's wave of investment is just one of the trends enabling the market's evolution. Besides the opportunities in greenfield and brownfield projects across the industry, simultaneously we are seeing significant convergence across different industry sectors. Medical institutions are venturing into providing quality recuperation accommodation to patients, and similarly hotel groups are investing in healthcare services that will blur the lines between medical service providers and facilities owners.

Bill Barnett is the Founder and Managing Director of C9 Hotelworks (C9Hotelworks.com), a leading Thailand-based hospitality and real estate consulting firm.

Myanmar prices 'need to be more competitive'

TOURISM operators in Myanmar have been urged to focus on more competitive prices and reforming products.

Myanmar has some 2,000 travel companies and over 1,400 registered hotels with about 50,000 rooms.

At a seminar entitled 'Myanmar Tourism Outlook 2016', Thet Lwin Toh, chairman of the Union of Myanmar Travel Association and the boss of Myanmar Voyages International Tourism Co, said that hotel, airfare and package tour fees must be competitive.

Tin Tun Aung, managing director of Thingazar Travels and Tours, noted that room rates were 50-70 per cent higher than other countries in Asean, despite an overall lower room quality in Myanmar.

"We need to train all kinds of staff in the industry and increase their capacity to be world class. This will be the biggest challenge for the tour-



Travellers are dreaming of the wonders of Myanmar. However, prices are still comparatively high for the region. Photo: KX Studio

ism industry in 2016," he said.

He noted that opportunities were high, as 4.5 million visitors arrived in the country last year, although the number was low compared to Thailand (30 million), Vietnam (9 million) and Cambodia (7 million). Laos recorded about 5 million visitors.

Tin Tun Aung stressed the need to focus on attracting both new and repeat visitors by im-

proving interfaced industries and through the use of e-commerce.

He was optimistic about the outlook for the industry, as more investment is expected and this would attract more visitors. He was confident that Myanmar could catch up with Thailand in the next few years and become a world tourism leader, thanks largely to a vari-

ety of breathtaking landscapes and friendly people.

"First, Myanmar needs to increase construction work. You need to build more hotels while maintaining your cultural heritage," said Hugo Schleicher, managing director of Jovago Myanmar, an online hotel booking service founded by the Asia Pacific Internet Group.

"Most Myanmar people cannot afford to stay at hotels. So you need to make hotel prices competitive. You also need to address the issue of traffic in Yangon, as it is very bad. You also need to upgrade roads, because it takes a long time to go from one place to another."

There have also been calls for a greater focus on four major destinations – Bagan, Inle, Yangon and Ngapali – while it was thought Hpa-an, Dawei, Myeik, Mawlamyaing, Putao and Chin State could be attractive 'new' destinations.

– *The Nation*



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Classic cocktail twist wins top place for Angsana



Angsana Laguna Phuket hosted the southern region heats for the World Class Cocktail Competition on February 27, which had mixologists competing from Phuket's top resorts, including Tu Kab Khao, Twin Palms and many more. Angsana's assistant beverage manager was awarded top place for his classic Clover Club creation with a trendy twist and will go on to compete in the finals in Bangkok in March.

Angsana Laguna Phuket's Assistant Beverage Manager Peerayoth Rattanathitibovorn.

Hands-on art for kids

Kids had hands-on fun making creatures out of modelling clay at Phuket International Hospital with activities organized by the Hands On Art Center on February 13. The aim of the day was to stimulate and bolster early development.



A child gets a helping hand with hands-on fun playing with modelling clay.

Septuplet winning streak for Amari Phuket Resort

The management team at Amari Phuket Resort threw a special party on February 16 to celebrate a remarkable year of achievement, receiving a total of seven international industry awards for 2015.



(From L-R) Amari Phuket Resort's Finance Director Piraphol Hayeechema; Marketing Communications Manager Penprapa Chooklin; Hotel Manager Richard Margo; Vice President & Area General Manager, South Thailand, Pierre-Andre Pelletier; Deputy General Manager Tipaporn Koonphol; Revenue Management Director Orawan Suphanphong; and Director of Human Resources Chonnanan Prakarn.

Happy birthday Karon Beach Square

White and gold was the theme for Karon Beach Square's first birthday on February 20. The "White Sensation A Touch of Gold" evening of classy entertainment was a spectacular fiesta for the senses with amazing food and drink, live entertainment plus lucky draws and prize giveaways all night long.



Models flank Movenpick Resort & Spa Karon Beach Phuket's Marketing Communications Manager Stefano Colombo (middle left) and General Manager Nick Porter.

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Events in Paradise

Sax on the beach under a full moon

Paradise Beach Phuket threw a full moon party 'Spin on Paradise' on February 20 with live DJ and saxophone vibes from the Soul Brothers from sundown onwards for an exotic encounter.



Exotic Encounters: Vibrant party-goers enjoy sax on the beach.



Full-on fun for the full moon with the Soul Brothers.



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Don't miss the night glow. Photo: Th Zimmermann

Hot air balloons coming to island

HOT air balloons will be filling the sky above the island during the Songkran holiday this April for the very first 'Phuket Thailand Balloon Music Festival'.

At least 20 hot air balloons are expected to take part in the national balloon fiesta, to be held April 14-17 at Phuket Paradise Park, near the British International School Phuket.

Balloon fiestas have recently become a new and popular way of boosting tourism in the country.

Promoter and organizer Kritpanat Patwarasit met with Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada and other local officials to outline initial plans for the event.

One of the event's highlights will be a colorful 'night glow' light and sound spectacle.

Visitors will be able to take rides in the balloons on tethered flights, as well as on free-flying sightseeing tours, weather permitting.

Entry fees will be 200 baht each for adults and 100 baht for students. There is no charge for children 11 years old or younger.

– Sukawin Tanthavanich

Aussie expat joins challenge to row across Atlantic Ocean

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

AUSSIE head coach at Phuket's Unit 27 – a weight loss and conditioning facility on the island – Luke Richmond, has joined a team of three extraordinary adventurers as they attempt to set a Guinness World Record by rowing across more than 6,000km of open sea, travelling from Portugal to Brazil.

Mr Richmond – already in peak condition from incorporating a NeuroPhysics training program from Ken Ware into his weekly schedule of crossfit, climbing and adventure training – was invited to join the rowing challenge after one of the team members was struck with appendicitis just two weeks from their scheduled departure. Without hesitation, Mr Richmond jumped on a plane to meet with Susannah Cass from Ireland, Mel Parker from the UK, and Jake Heath, also from the UK.

"I have used the term, ready for anything, many times while coaching classes in fitness. If the world economy collapsed tomorrow, or if an environmental disaster struck are you capable of physically and mentally surviving. I have always prided myself on being ready, and above all else ready for adventure," Mr Richmond wrote on his Facebook.

"In the past five years, I have climbed the biggest mountains on six continents, been held captive in West Papua, have trained



Luke Richmond is the head coach at Unit 27. Photo: Row2Rio

at my absolute best, endured many suffer-fests on expeditions around the world and have loved every moment of it.

"Adventure has been a big part of my life and I am about to embark on my biggest challenge so far. I am very grateful to the team for giving me an opportunity to attempt this row with them."

Originally set to depart on February 21, the team's two month journey was delayed due to a large, inbound weather system. Fortunately for Mr Richmond, the delay gave him invaluable additional training time as he dives into the deep end with no previous outdoor rowing experience.

"The hardest part will be what I call the 'suffer-fest'. Constant pain from sea sores and chaffing with little sleep. It will be a mental battle. Two hours rowing with two hours rest for 24 hours, about 50-60 days."

The team departed on Monday, with rations for 75 days.

The suffer-fest is timed to coincide with the Olympic venue making its crossing from London to Rio de Janeiro. The Row2Rio team created the challenge to honor the Olympics. The team intends to follow the Olympic journey using sheer human power through a combination

of rowing and cycling. The team will first cycle from London to Portugal, then rest up and prepare for the sea leg. Once they touch shore in Rio, the three original team members will be saddling up for the last leg of the journey to Rio.

The route itself has never before been completed. With full backing from the Ocean Rowing Society and support from ocean rowing experts, they have plotted a route that will allow them to complete the journey using only an ocean rowing boat, bicycles and the four team members' determination.

Though the challenge is set to pay tribute to the athletic feats of man, it is also raising funds for Macmillan Cancer Support – an entirely different kind of battle and test of the human mind and body.

"We fully support their ethos that no one should face cancer alone, currently one in four people are isolated facing cancer. Our target is £200,000 of which £75,000 will be to fund the boat (which we'll sell at the end and donate the proceeds to Macmillan) and £125,000 for the charity, which is enough to fund two Macmillan Nurses for two years," explains the Row2Rio website.

Follow the team's journey on Facebook at Row2Rio or support their efforts to raise money for Macmillan Cancer Support by going to the Row2Rio website.

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March 4-5. Lighthouse Weekend Market

Eat, chill and shop along the dockside at Phuket Boat Lagoon's Lighthouse Market. Two evenings of live music, food and fun for all the family at one of Phuket's signature outdoor events.

Find out more on Facebook: lighthousemarketphuket, or call 081-8103 328.

This event is sponsored by the *Phuket Gazette*.

March 4-11. 18:30-22:30, The Culinary Journey continues with Master Chef Degan

Join us for the next installment in our Culinary Journey with Indonesia's Master Chef celebrity judge Chef Degan Septoadji. Experience expertly crafted artistic twists on traditional dishes. Enjoy mouth-wa-

WHAT'S ON in Phuket

tering a la carte offerings, or simply let Chef Degan take you on a voyage of discovery with his delectable set menu. For more information email: bhatara.a@marriotthotels.com.

March 26. Thailand Beach Volley Fest

The International Amateur Beach Volley Tournament at Karon Beach will feature teams from Asia, Australia, Europe and the Americas. Classes are: Men's 2 x 2, Women's 2 x 2 and Mixed 4 x 4. Players of all levels are welcome to compete. The entry fee is 2,000 baht. There is no

admission charge for spectators.

This event is proudly sponsored by the *Phuket Gazette*.

April 6. Chakri Memorial Day

Chakri Day commemorates the origins of the Chakri dynasty founded by Rama I who established Bangkok as the nation's capital. HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej is the ninth monarch of the Chakri dynasty.

April 13-15. Songkran Festival

Songkran is the Thai New Year Festival also known as the Water Festival. The festival includes waterfights, parades, pageants and paying homage to one's ancestors, among other celebrations.

#Phuket rules Instagram food

By Kongleaphy Keam

THOUGH the sultans of Instagram selfies reign in London, it's Phuket food that gets the most publicity on the social media giant, according to research by airport transfer company Hoppa.

"In the modern era, the holiday experience doesn't just live in the moment and in the memory, it isn't even resigned only to traditional photo albums... Because now, the holiday experience lives and breathes through Instagram," Hoppa explained on its website. "If you have an account, it'll be one of the first places your holiday photos will probably go. Filters, hashtags and captions all seizing your holiday snaps and turning them into the envy of your friends."

During a one-month period, Hoppa collected 1,000 photos from the top 50 most-travelled-to destinations in the world.



PICTURE THIS: Phuket people love food photos. Image: Hoppa

Though that offered some basic trending information, the company did some significant further data mining, breaking down the types of photos posted into the following categories: selfies, scenery,

couples, food, shopping, group, wildlife, alcohol, sexual and marketing.

When it came to food photos, Asia nearly swept the top-ten list with only Las Vegas sneaking in at number six to represent the western world.

And the cherry on top of the foodie photo buffet: Phuket. The island province was followed by Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing and Pattaya.

Adding more yeast to the rising trend of food photography on Phuket is United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) dubbing Phuket a 'City of Gastronomy', honoring the island's rich culinary history and unique cuisine.

"Phuket Baba food combines recipes from Royal Thai Cuisine, common Thai dishes, Hokkien Chinese food and Malay cuisine, which together create a unique blend of delicate flavors that are not too spicy, not too sweet and not too salty," Dr Kosol Tang-Uthai, president of the Thai Peranakan Association, told the *Gazette*.

Among the dishes included in the application were the

Baba recipes for *moo hong*, *oh-aw*, *mee hokkien*, *mee hun*, *nam chub yam* and *bue tord*.

Phuket is the fifth 'City of Gastronomy' as it joins Popayan City in Colombia, Ostersund in Sweden, Chengdu in China and Jeonju in South Korea.

Despite its luxury pool villas and stunning beaches, Phuket didn't make the top ten when it came to sexually suggestive posts or any of the other sub-categories used by Hoppa.

In total, about 2,788,000 Instagram photos were given #Phuket in 2015, making it the 34th most tagged destination in the world.

Of course, those just wanting to generate some social media envy by garnering the most 'likes' on their photos should head to Los Angeles or Bangkok. But even then, Phuket isn't a terrible choice, as it landed in 12th place, just behind Barcelona.

Hilton F&B Masters go toe-to-toe in the kitchen

HILTON Worldwide held its F&B Masters regional grand final last month, bringing together the group's world-class talents, who demonstrated skill, innovation and flair while paying culinary homage to the gastronomic heritage of the cities they represent.

Hailing from 20 countries and territories in the sub-regions of Australasia, Southeast Asia, India, Greater China and Mongolia, Japan, Korea and Micronesia, the finalists delivered food and beverage masterpieces to a panel of experts that included chef Jammong Nirangsan, president of Thai Chef Association and Ivan Froissard of Pernod Ricard.

"The grand finalists of the Southeast Asia and India F&B Masters this year have raised their game for the honour of being hailed the best of the best, displaying bolder creativity, more finesse and a deeper knowledge in their disciplines. This competition has definitely put a spotlight on their hard work, passion and commitment for food and beverage excellence and innovation," noted William Costley, vice president for operations, Southeast Asia &



A number of awards were handed out at the event. Photo: The Nation

India of Hilton Worldwide.

This year's Southeast Asia & India masters challenge saw a greater level of participation with 65 per cent more contestants across 36 properties, up from more than 430 participants from 19 hotels last year.

The Culinary Cup prize went to Abdul Halim Jahari of Double Tree by Hilton Kuala Lumpur while Md Shahanwaz Qureshi of Hilton Mumbai picked up the Pastry Cup award.

"Guests don't just dine at our restaurants because they stay at our hotels," explained Markus Schueller, vice president, F&B Operations, Asia Pacific, Hilton Worldwide. — *The Nation*



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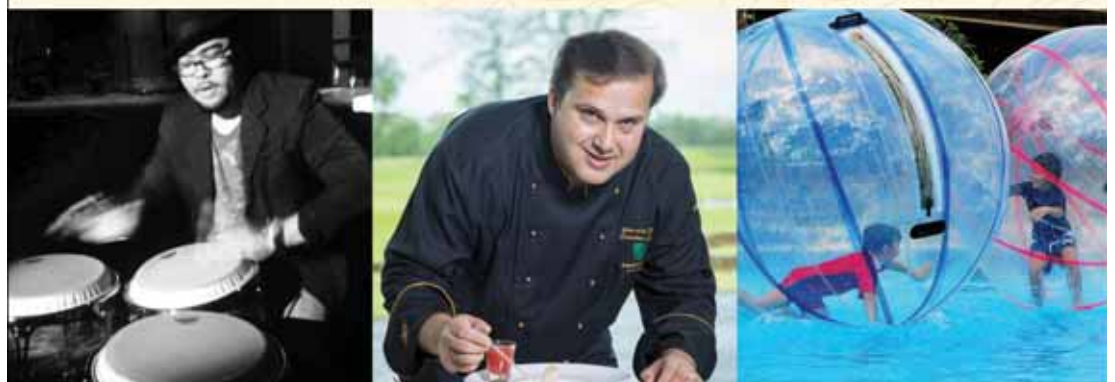
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Moving pageant in your garden



WE ALL know how denuded of mammals Thailand is. Most have long since been hunted down for food. And while the same is not true of most insects or reptiles, it is still the case that anything remotely edible will probably end up fried or barbecued on someone's dinner plate.

Insects such as water scorpions, crickets and locusts, tokay geckos and agamid lizards, even some snakes, are part of the national obsession with food. "If it moves, kill it and eat it" is a principle most of rural Thailand observes.

Luckily, butterflies are an exception – at least as far as this commentator is aware. While it may have something to do with the creepy crawly caterpillars from which butterflies metamorphose – and many of these are poisonous or can create painful rashes if handled – I suspect it is because there is so little protein in an adult butterfly.

My garden, where I have counted more than forty species, is testimony to the fact that the Kingdom teems with these beautiful and fragile creatures. In fact, there are no fewer than 1100 recorded species. Butterfly watching is becoming



Thailand is home to numerous stunning butterflies, so invite them into the garden. Photo: Martin Woffle

increasingly popular as an activity, while butterfly farms have been established nationwide.

What people tend to forget though is that butterflies are important pollinators. Of course they are only seeking food in the form of nectar, but incidentally they are helping plants to reproduce. More than 90 per cent of all plants need a pollinator to set fruit and seeds.

While bees buzz their way from flower to flower, butter-

flies glide and flit in what seems a much more random fashion. Because they have long legs and a coiled extensible proboscis, they tend to perch on blooms with a landing platform and collect less pollen on their bodies than bees. But they possess a better color perception and can even detect ultra-violet light.

As bees decline catastrophically – and they are victims of pesticides, mites and a global pandemic called colony col-

lapse syndrome – butterflies will assume an ever-greater significance in crop production.

As responsible gardeners, we should assist Mother Nature by encouraging them. One way is by cultivating a butterfly friendly garden replete with the kind of nectar-rich plants that attract butterflies. Buddleias are especial favorites, but many annuals such as brightly hued zinnias, marigolds, sunflowers and daisies as well as lantanas, bauhinias, ixoras and cone-

flowers are popular.

And though we may not enjoy the sight of caterpillars munching away at our prized plants, it is unlikely that any damage will be permanent. Probably the most important host shrub for this purpose is calotropis (Indian milkweed). An interesting and durable shrub in its own right and found everywhere in Phuket, its grey-green leaves is the sole food of the monarch and queen butterfly larvae. Moreover, the distinctive and fragrant clusters of white or mauve florets are rich in nectar and attract not only adult monarchs but other species as well.

Passion vines, ruellias, sunflowers, asters, hamelias (firebush), custard apples, and verbenas are visited by a range of butterflies including zebras for the purpose of laying eggs. My orange jasmine hosts the larvae of swallowtails, while the jatropha attracts caterpillars of zebras and julias.

Call me crazy, but I am willing to pay the price of lost leaves for the moving pageant that is a butterfly garden.

If you have gardening or environmental concerns, contact Patrick at drpaccampbell@gmail.com. Many of his creative and academic publications can be found at his website: [GreenGaloshes Wordpress](http://GreenGaloshes.wordpress.com).

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Full-moon sleeping pen to 'restore happiness'

YOUNG foreign tourists have always been puzzled by the National Council for Peace and Order's determination to 'return happiness' to the country.

Almost a year ago, *Bloomberg* was listing the Thailand as the world's happiest place to live (and play) on its annual 'misery index' and, for young visitors, a significant factor in that had to be the full-moon parties on Pha Ngan Island.

Well, generals generally don't go in for dancing on the sand half-naked all night, but someone on Koh Pha Ngan has boosted the happiness quotient there by offering the cheap drunks a cheap place to sleep.

Yes, some full-moon party people do sleep – typically face down in the sand under a picnic table. Now there's a proper place where they can crash for a while.

"The problem is solved now,"



Sleeping area. Photo: The Nation

the Fullmoon Party fan page on Facebook has announced, providing photographic proof. 'Sleep Area – Free' says the sign near the security center on Haad Rin Beach.

It's basically a wooden deck with a perimeter of poles supporting a screen of mesh far too thin to offer any privacy, but it's apparently better than nothing.

– *The Nation*

Proposing a jet-ski solution

On Deck
By Duncan Worthington

JET-SKIS are back in the news again. Rarely a week passes without some issue, complaint or accident involving the marine craft. The skeptic in me thinks it could be a PR ploy to keep jet-skis in the public eye, yet that would only be true if you subscribe to the adage, 'All PR is good PR.' And I don't.

After issuing another clampdown the Phuket authorities recently acknowledged that jet-skis must sit at anchor (not on the beach) and that tourists must understand and accept the beach chaos morning and evening when the jet-ski operators are delivering and collecting their machines.

There are strong opinions about jet-skis and many surveys about whether residents and tourists want them, and

whether they should be controlled, separated into special zones or simply banned.

The number of tourists coming to Phuket who don't rent a jet-ski most definitely outweigh those who do. The same is true for local residents. On this basis, jet-skis should be banned. Few would probably disagree. However, it's not that simple.

The primary problem, when you stand back and think about it, is jet-skis being rented at the beach. These are responsible for the complaints, scams, accidents, injuries and more. However, what about a privately owned jet-ski? One that an owner uses off a launch, from a marina or from their own boat?

Jet-skis are used all over the world. Are they universally a bad thing? To ride one is fun and if kept well away from others and driven properly, then what is the issue?

Comments by individuals on



Are jet-skis inately 'bad'? Duncan says, no. Photo: Asia Beach Games

social media, forums and various surveys often conclude that the majority of people want jet-skis banned. But I would argue that should not be the case.

If I bought a jet-ski for my boat and drove it around and then put it back onboard, what

harm have I done?

There needs to be clarification in statements by authorities, public and media. Jet-skis by default are not evil things, nor are all users.

There has from time-to-time been reference to the need for

the rider to have a license. Is that really practical?

Obviously, enforcing that rule would be impossible.

The answer, in my opinion, isn't an outright ban on jet-skis. The aim isn't to curtail tourist fun or ban a private owner from using their toy, but is to ensure safety and avoid nuisance.

Thailand needs to sensibly address the jet-ski issue on a national level and back it up with appropriate regulations which are enforced, while taking all parties' considerations into account.

Duncan Worthington is a long time Phuket resident and through Infinity Communications (www.infinity-comms.com) consults to leading consumer brands, hospitality and marine clients in Thailand. In his 'spare time' he runs the marine portal www.MarineScene.asia. #OnDeckPhuket

Formula 1 powerboat race bound for island



Tourism officials hope powerboat racing off Phuket will boost the island's reputation as a water sport destination. Photo: Rennbootarchiv

THE Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) has good news for water-sport enthusiasts as Phuket plans to host a Formula 1 powerboat race in November to promote the island as an international tourist and water-sport destination.

"This is a joint venture between Thailand and Singapore. The expected date of the event is November 4-6," MOTS Phuket Office Director Santi Pawai told the *Gazette*.

"We have yet to finalize a

location but Karon, Cherng Talay and Laguna are under consideration. A team from Singapore came here to inspect potential locations."

As of Tuesday, no location for the event had been confirmed.

Earlier this month, Phuket hosted the first government-sponsored Thailand Yacht Show, which attracted almost 5,000 visitors in four days and was hailed as a resounding success by the organizers.

- Kongleaphy Keam

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Realities of a dream clubhouse



Property Watch
Desmond Hughes

WHEN we think of a clubhouse, many of us start to dream. Sipping cocktails overlooking the hills, or even facing the sandy beaches and sea. A place where an agreed set of rules are adhered to by all with a sense of what is right and proper.

Ladies wear comfortable but appropriate attire and the gentlemen will be similarly respectful in their choices. Gym wear will be left in the locker of the gym. Fresh coffee will be served by well-trained staff incentivized to please the residents who invested heavily in this real estate and pay handsome fees for the benefits of the common areas and clubhouse.

This dream is often sold to buyers. More often than not, a clubhouse is delivered, but many times the reality isn't quite the same as the dream, for a variety of reasons.

In order to assess the value of investing in a clubhouse, a breakdown of its component parts and relevance to a project is necessary. A dream simply isn't good enough and isn't going to pay the bills.

If a developer or group of owners create a clubhouse with a swimming pool – it has to be serviced and the electric bills paid with the acceptance



A clubhouse is usually delivered, but often the reality isn't the same as the dream. Photo: 1950s Unlimited

they will be high. If there is any food and beverage facility connected to a clubhouse, it is highly likely that it will have to be subsidized if it is not open to the public, unless it is within a mega-project where residential customers will be attracted to it by the forces of convenience.

If you are looking at potentially investing into a project and you believe the amenities and clubhouse are critical to

your decision, then here are some key factors to consider:

- Is the facility part of the construction permit and does it comply with the permit?

- Post-construction who owns the clubhouse – the developer, or an entity controlled by co-owners?

- Who paid for the furniture, fixtures and equipment and who will renovate and upgrade them?

- Is there a rental program

under which the control of rentals is linked to the clubhouse, but if you do not participate in that rental program you lose essential rights that could affect your private rental yield?

- Can the rules of the clubhouse and the entire format be changed?

- If there is a restaurant, how will it secure enough business to maintain viability?

In the development bro-

chures, you will see 'hanging' gyms; infinity-edged pools with beach clubs, kids' clubs and the like. Who is going to develop these and will they do it free, or require some kind of return? These may seem like obvious questions, but I have seen litigation relating to clubhouses escalate to the extent that law enforcement officers were somehow procured to turn up and arrest certain co-owners for misuse of equipment and the like.

Clubhouses require a different skillset to construction and design. Asset management and a long-term view of amenities, such as food and beverage and convenience, are essential to add value to a well-planned real estate development.

If you believe you couldn't manage the clubhouse, food and beverage, and other amenities in a financially viable manner, then you shouldn't expect a developer to be able to do so either. A commercial sanity check must always be conducted when presented with the idea of a clubhouse and amenity dream.

Desmond Hughes has been an owner and operator of his law firm in Thailand for 12 years, and is a Senior Partner at Hughes Krupica law firm www.hugheskrupica.com

Hilton Worldwide sets eyes on Bangkok, Phuket

WILLIAM Costley, Hilton's vice president for Southeast Asia operations at the US-based company, told *The Nation* recently that Thailand had many things to offer both international visitors and investors.

In addition, recent growth in tourist arrivals appeared to be an impressive statement for Thai hospitality, he said.

According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the country welcomed more than 29 million international tourists last year, a sharp increase from 25 million in 2014.

Hilton Worldwide believes that the number of international visitors will rise again this year to more than 30 million.

"Given this potential, we are now planning to introduce five Hilton Garden Inn properties in the near future, and this brand will be the first of its kind in Thailand," Mr Costley said.

Categorized as a focused-service hotel brand alongside Hampton, Tru, Homewood Suites and Home 2 Suites by

Hilton, the first Thai Hilton Garden Inn location is expected to be in Bangkok, opening in the next couple of years.

"We hope to have three Hilton Garden Inns in Bangkok, one in Phuket and another in Pattaya. The properties will be operated under management agreements with the property owners.

"So, we are now looking for the right locations and partners," Mr Costley said.

The Hilton Garden Inn brand has nearly 600 properties around the world.

Apart from this new development, Hilton Worldwide is planning to open a new luxury hotel under the Waldorf Astoria brand, which will be the first of its kind in Bangkok.

Located on Ratchadamri Road in the heart of the business district, the 170-key upscale hotel is scheduled to open early next year under a management contract with Magnolia Finest Corp, he said.

Moreover, to strengthen its position in the resort destination of Phuket, the company is adding a new five-star ho-



Hilton Garden Inn hopes to expand in Phuket, Bangkok and Pattaya. Photo: Mighty Travels

tel brand to Patong Beach.

The 300-room Hilton Phuket Patong, which is set to open in the first quarter of 2018, will be operated under a management contract with Q Hospitality Development.

In preparation for this expansion, Hilton Worldwide hotels in Thailand are placing emphasis on a number of train-

ing programs.

Mr Costley suggested that with two upcoming hotels in Bangkok and Phuket, his company needed at least 1,000 new employees to be available for the new properties.

The company is currently hiring around 3,300 employees in Thailand.

- *The Nation*

AccorHotels spreads its wings

By Gazette editors

ACCORHOTELS has teamed up with Avista Resort and Spa Patong Co Ltd to manage three resort properties in Phuket.

The newly-inked agreement brings two existing Phuket properties in Kata and Patong under the new brand and management, and paves the way for the building of a brand new hotel in Karon.

One of the two resorts will be rebranded as Novotel Phuket Kata Avista Resort and Spa, the other as Avista Hideaway Phuket Patong, MGallery by Sofitel, which is set to relaunch on April 1.

Another newly-built Avista Grande Phuket Karon, MGallery by Sofitel is scheduled to open in 2018.

AccorHotels presently manages 16 hotels and resorts across Southern Thailand. The announcement brings the group's upcoming pipeline in the area to 10 properties and reaffirms its commitment to meeting growing demand in the region.

"AccorHotels is proud to partner with Avista to manage three hotels in Phuket. As more



The Avista Hideaway Phuket Patong offers many amenities, including a spa and three pools. Photo: AccorHotels

guests visit the ever-popular island, they increasingly seek choice and consistency," said Patrick Basset, AccorHotels' chief operating officer for upper Southeast and Northeast Asia.

"Each MGallery by Sofitel luxury hotel features a unique identity and story through its architecture, interior design and services. Novotel is well-

known for its spacious rooms and service standards that stand apart in the mid-scale segment," said Mr Basset.

"Both brands are well positioned to cater to Phuket's diverse guests, particularly as the island further develops its infrastructure and attractions," he said.

The AccorHotels group op-

erates properties in 92 countries. MGallery by Sofitel is just one of the 13 brands under the AccorHotels umbrella, ranging from economy establishments under the Ibis brand to mid-scale brands such as Novotel and Mercure, and luxury establishments including Sofitel Pullman, Grand Mercure and The Sebel.

Transport links see increase in property prices



Property prices near the BTS have risen. Photo: Karl Baron

PROPERTY prices continue to rise in Southeast Asia, driven largely by plans to develop these countries' infrastructure to link transportation systems and serve demand under the Asean Economic Community.

In Thailand, land prices close to the mass-transit system in Bangkok have risen over the past five years around the existing BTS Skytrain and MRT underground rail routes, as well as along the new mass-transit routes that will be completed this year and next.

In the latest appraisal by the Treasury Department, effective for the 2016-2020 period, land prices across the Kingdom are on average 27.27 per cent higher than under its previous appraisal, which expired in December.

- The Nation



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Drifting from Australia to Asia

ANTHONY Cameron, originally from Melbourne, Australia has led an interesting life compared to most.

Escaping from Melbourne in his early twenties to central Victoria, he designed and built a sustainable house and raised two sustainable children, before finally settling in Phuket in 2012. Over the years, Tony has worked as a sound engineer, fruit picker, tour manager, teacher, factory worker, artist and most recently has published his second book, *Butterfly on Bangla*.

As a creative person, Tony has always managed to find a way to record his experiences, whether in journals or on scraps of paper found at sound gigs. His habit formed in a very organic way when he was young.

"I used to play sport a lot when I was a kid and when I was about 13 or 14, I stopped playing all that and took up surfing... Problem was, I lived 200km from the beach, so I started trekking there and hanging out in the sand dunes and writing about my experiences," he says.

"It was an incredibly long trip to get there – three trains; you

had to run between the trains to get to each one."

Whilst in hospital in late 1989, and faced with losing his right arm, he wrote his first short story, *The Raffle*, with his left hand. This became one of the threads he would later weave into *Driftwood*, his first full-length novel.

"I was pretty isolated for about three or four weeks, because I had a staph (bacterial) infection. When I wasn't watching movies, I would tilt the TV screen around so I could see underneath the door, and watch the shadows of the people's feet moving. So I realized I was probably going a bit insane and I started writing," he recalls.

When the pain was too bad for him to write, he recorded what he called his 'stir crazy hospital ramblings' onto a Sony Walkman.

After the accident, Tony began working as a freelance sound technician, which took him all over Australia.

"I guess I was looking for a place after my accident where I could combine something creative and also something physical," he says.

"That industry is full of people that don't fit in... I love that sort of short connection – no kind of obligations. When you meet someone doing a show, you work with them for one or two days, or maybe even a week and then it's over, so you kind of make the best of that moment."

Tony also makes this parallel about living in Phuket with the ever-flowing stream of expats and tourists.

For Tony, making the best of this moment, means lots of writing. His first novel, *Driftwood*, was loosely autobiographical:

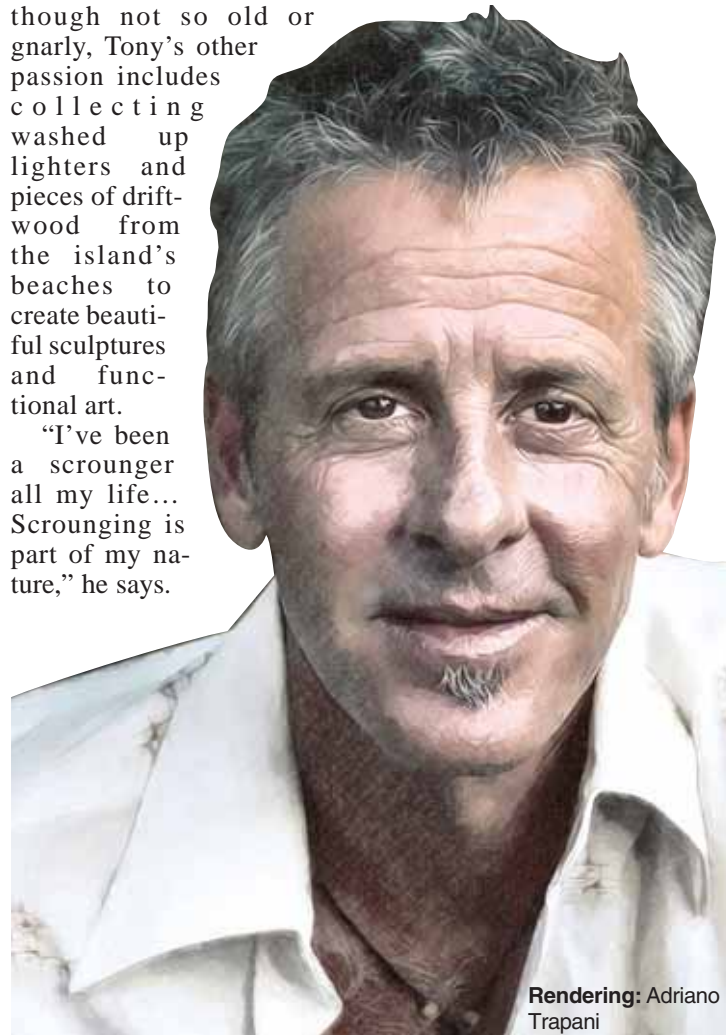
"It was written in three-months, but it took me 40 years to live," he laughs.

His newest novel, *Butterfly on Bangla*, is set in Patong and Castlemaine, the small town of his early adult years. It follows a troubled man, Tyson, running from a past he can barely remember; one that killed everyone he loved and everything he was. He meets a gnarly old sculptor on a beach, and together they begin a journey that both of them, unbeknown to the other, have waited half a life time for.

Not too far removed,

though not so old or gnarly, Tony's other passion includes collecting washed up lighters and pieces of driftwood from the island's beaches to create beautiful sculptures and functional art.

"I've been a scrounger all my life... Scrounging is part of my nature," he says.



Rendering: Adriano Trapani





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