

Phuket Gazette

March 12-18, 2016

Now inside **THE NATION** every Saturday

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‘MAJORITY OF SEXUALLY ACTIVE PEOPLE HAVE CONTRACTED HPV’

Get tested

■ Young expat beats cervical cancer and speaks out about ‘taboo’ epidemic

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

THE months leading up to July 2015 were the self-described happiest times of Nora Galgoczy's life. The 29-year-old Hungarian expat was freediving, climbing and in love. She also had cervical cancer, but she didn't know it.

“I expected that I would feel something: something odd, something bad or just something. I thought cancer didn't attack people like me,” Ms Galgoczy explained the *Gazette*, just weeks after being given the ‘all clear’ by doctors – following six months of physical, mental and emotional trauma.

Worldwide, cervical cancer is the fourth most frequent cancer in women, with an estimated 530,000 new cases in 2012. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are more than 270,000 deaths from cervical cancer every year, reported.

In 2012, the mortality rate from cervical cancer was 52 per cent; that's worse odds than a coin flip. It didn't take long for Ms Galgoczy and her partner to recognize this fact; though coming to terms with it took much longer.

“We [Ms Galgoczy and her partner] were just sitting on the balcony, and trying to figure out what to do today...

Continued on Pages 4-5



Nora Galgoczy contracted a strand of HPV that led to cervical cancer. By chance she caught it in time, but even then she had about a 50 per cent chance of dying from it. Photo: Richard Wonka

‘Teens’ attack French expat

POLICE are hunting for two men who mugged a 70-year-old French woman as she was riding a bicycle along Lay Pang Beach this week.

Martine Delaloy was riding her bicycle along the beach when two suspects drove past her on a motorbike and snatched her bag, causing her to fall.

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BUSINESS



Feadship's growth in Asia is a positive sign for region's yachting industry.

PROPERTY



Governor tells disgruntled long-term tenants to take their problem to court.

LIFE&STYLE



Are discover scuba divers put at risk by negligent instructors on the island?



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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

Navy officer charged with armed robbery

POLICE arrested a Royal Thai Navy officer on March 2 for the armed robbery of a Phuket Town bank.

The suspect, petty officer Sahapracha Chadawong, allegedly made off with about 470,000 baht from the Krungthai Bank branch on Sakdidet Road on February 26.

After threatening a bank teller with a firearm and exiting the building, the suspect fired one shot into the air, then fled on a motorbike.

Mr Sahapracha was hit with a slew of charges: theft with a firearm, illegal possession of a firearm and ammunition, carrying a firearm in public without permission, discharging a firearm in public without permission and using a vehicle to evade arrest.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Gunman's SIM card prompts arrest in Phuket

POLICE apprehended a Chinese man in Phuket in connection with the attempted robbery of a gun shop in Bangkok on March 4.

Police tracked down Su Su, 29, at a residence in Paklok on March 5 after it was revealed that he had registered a SIM card found on one of the robbery suspects in Bangkok.

Police did not immediately confirm whether he has any direct involvement in the matter.

Mr Su was handed over to Tourist Police and Immigration Police officers, who escorted him to Bangkok for further

Daily flow of untreated sewage pollutes Phi Phi



A stink about Phi Phi Don's untreated wastewater was raised after it was revealed that about 1,800 cubic meters of wastewater was produced on the island each day, but only 300 cubic meters could be handled by the Wastewater Collection and Constructed Wetland System in place. About 83 per cent of wastewater on the popular tourist island is flowing directly into the ocean untreated. For the full story, visit PhuketGazette.net. Photo: Jeremie Schatz.

questioning.

Mr Su's visa has been cancelled and he is awaiting deportation.

– *Chutharat Plerin*

American man found dead in Patong room

POLICE are looking into the authenticity of a handwritten letter found in the room of a Patong hotel where the body of a 26-year-old American man was discovered on March 5.

The body of Nathan D House was discovered by the hotel's housekeeping staff.

The letter, placed on a table in the room, requested that he

not be resuscitated and mentioned that there was no foul play in his death.

Police said they found no signs of a struggle or evidence that the room had been ransacked, but continue to investigate the case while they attempt to determine the authenticity of the note.

Mr House's body was taken to Patong Hospital for further examination and to determine the cause of death.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Social media not reliable for tsunami alerts

OFFICIALS are warning the public not to rely too heavily on social media when it comes to earthquake and tsunami warnings.

There are currently 40 seismometers throughout the Kingdom, which alert the National Disaster Warning Center (NDWC) in Bangkok of any seismic activity in the area, confirmed Deputy Director-General of the Meteorological Department Burin Wechbunthung.

Mr Burin spoke on the subject in Phuket on March 4 during

a seminar on how to handle tsunami and earthquake warnings in the Andaman provinces.

Those who wish to keep informed on local seismic activity, or have general questions, can contact the NDWC hotline at 192 or the Meteorological Department at 076-225 974.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

Chikungunya virus found in Krabi monkey

KRABI officials are asking the public not to panic after a monkey at a popular tourist area was found to be infected with the dengue-like virus Chikungunya.

The discovery of the infected primates was made after standard testing was done by the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, which routinely tests sample populations to monitor the monkeys' health.

The virus is not able to be transmitted from monkeys to humans and can only be contracted via a mosquito bite.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Marine experts unable to ID jellyfish species

A PHUKET diver photographed what he believed to be a box jellyfish while diving off of Kata Beach on February 28.

The photo was supplied to the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) Region 5. However, experts have yet to confirm the exact species.

Jellyfish stings can be extremely painful and potentially deadly. Of the 36 different box jellyfish species, nine are poisonous to varying degrees.

– *Chutharat Plerin*

Phuripat's boat to plane project passes EIA

THE proposed project to offer a speedboat shuttle service from Phuket International Airport to Patong has passed the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), confirmed the governor on March 2.

In November last year, a 25-million-baht budget was approved for the airport pier project, which will allow tourists to take boats along the west coast to Patong. The budget for the project was tabled in 2013 by then-Phuket Marine Office Chief Phuripat Theerakulpisut. Mr Phuripat was transferred off the island to Nonthaburi Province on February 26.

– *Chutharat Plerin*

Governor cracks down on Kathu drug pushers

DRUG dealers and users in Kathu are feeling the heat with the latest crackdown ordered by the Phuket governor.

There are drug dealers at large and addicts that need to be cured, said Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada at the Kathu District Office on March 1.

Governor Chamroen said drug abuse is spreading like a disease through society and needs to be nipped in the bud by focusing the campaign on youngsters.

The crackdown includes more surveillance of parks, and other places – such as liquor stores – suspected by authorities of being drug-supply points.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

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French pensioner mugged riding bike along Lay Pang

By Winai Sarot

PHUKET police are hunting for two men who mugged a 70-year-old French woman as she was riding a bicycle along Lay Pang Beach on March 7.

Martine Delaloy was riding her bicycle at about 5pm from Bang Tao to Lay Pang, back to Layan where she was staying, when two suspects, thought to be teenagers, drove past her on a motorbike and snatched her bag, causing her to fall.

“When we arrived, we found locals giving first aid to Ms Delaloy, who suffered injuries to her face and leg,” said Capt Virot Choomkaew of the Cherng Talay Police. “The two suspects were able to flee the scene.”

Ms Delaloy, who is on her fifth visit to Phuket in the last five years, was taken to Thalang Hospital for treatment of minor injuries.

The thieves escaped with about 500 baht cash, a mobile



Ms Delaloy was riding her bicycle back to her hotel in Layan when she was mugged. Photo: Winai Sarot

phone and other items in her bag. Police have checked CCTV cameras in the area and have been unable to clearly identify the suspects.

They will continue with their investigation by questioning locals or any other witnesses to the crime, as well as check CCTV cameras in

surrounding areas. “We are working very diligently to capture the suspects as soon as possible,” said Capt Virot.

Teacher saved by O-negative blood donors



Ms Cleary was badly injured in a car collision. Photo: Winai Sarot

THANKS to the generosity of nearly 20 blood donors in Phuket, an American teacher is now out of danger and recovering from a second operation.

Chonita Michelle Cleary, 24, and two of her friends were involved in a collision with a taxi on February 29.

The Phuket Regional Blood Center issued an urgent call for O-negative blood so that doctors at Bangkok Hospital Phuket could perform emergency surgery on Ms Cleary’s pelvis.

“Ms Cleary had her second surgery on Monday and she is now recovering. She is fully conscious but in pain after the operation,” said a Bangkok Hospital Phuket staffer, who preferred not to be named.

– Chutharat Plerin





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Phuket lawyers, accountants to be targeted for enabling nominees

OFFICIALS will be investigating legal firms and accounting offices connected with businesses suspected of using Thai nominee shareholders to circumvent laws prohibiting foreigners from owning more than 49 per cent of a company within the Kingdom.

“We will be looking at whether or not certain lawyers and accountants are providing transparent services for foreign investors. Foreigners are not able to set up Thai nominee companies on their own – there are without a doubt complicit professionals,” Tourism and Sports Minister Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul said during a meeting in Phuket on Monday. “This is something we must look into, in addition to the regular reviews of companies’ finances.”

In November, the Phuket Business Development Office (BDO) identified more than



Minister Kobkarn speaks to the press. Photo: Phuket PR

3,000 companies that failed to submit their annual financial report. The majority of them had foreign shareholders, which raised the question of whether or not they were illegally using Thai citizens as ‘fake’ shareholders.

“Though we have yet to make any arrests following the identification of the companies, it does not mean that there are no nominee businesses operating on the island,” said

Phuket BDO Chief Nimit Kangkajit.

“Foreign investment is a very good thing for Phuket. It promotes higher employment rates, financial development and economic flow. However, these investors must comply with Thai law.”

The majority of investment in Phuket is currently coming from the British Virgin Islands. The amount of cash flowing in from the well-known tax haven is followed by investment from England, Hong Kong, Russia, Malaysia and China respectively.

Ms Kobkarn confirmed to meeting attendees that a committee has been set up to strictly monitor the behavior of both existing and new businesses regarding the use of Thai nominees. However, she did not reveal any details on exactly how this was being done.

– *Kongleaphy Keam*

Talking

From page 1

...And I remembered that there was the health checkup packages at the hospital and said, ‘let’s do that’. It would be fun to have a paper stating that we were both healthy. It was not necessarily a joke, but it wasn’t entirely serious. It was about STDs [sexually transmitted diseases] and stuff,” Ms Galgoczy said.

It was a fairly new relationship and the couple hadn’t had ‘the’ conversation about STDs yet. They headed to Phuket International Hospital for the routine checkup.

While figuring out which checkup to get, Ms Galgoczy spotted one that included some tests that would also check for cancers. She thought, why not?

“It was basically just to get that out of the way. I had no idea or anticipated results coming back positive,” Ms Galgoczy said. However, the tests came back with markers for the STD Human papillomavirus (HPV), which is the cause of 70 per cent of all cases of cervical cancer.

“I was concerned when I got the blood test, but my partner quickly did the research, and said that basically everyone has it,” said Ms Galgoczy. “I was nervous, but thought it [getting cancer] couldn’t happen to me. It could happen to other people, but not me. I was just going to go back, get more tests done and find out that it was just a scare.” It wasn’t.

“The doctor had worry on his face, and I saw it. We sat down and he came up with all these pictures. ‘This is what is happening to you,’ he explained. Then he said the word ‘cancer’ and I blanked a bit,” Ms Galgoczy said.

After further testing, the doctor informed Ms Galgoczy that she very likely had Stage 3 cervical cancer.

“I thought I might die. Not for a long time, but I did think I might die. Then I thought I’ll live. I knew it will be a hell of a ride, but I will live. Then I thought I won’t die, but I won’t really live either... I thought of chemo, surgeries, hospital life, always on drugs and so on,” Ms Galgoczy said in a post on Facebook that was, in fact, a call for action. “There is an epidemic of cervical cancer in women and very few people are talking about it.”

There are more than 100 strains of HPV, with two types (16 and 18) of the STD being linked directly with cervical cancer. The virus itself is as common as the common cold. If you’re sexually active, you most likely have it or have had it, but that hasn’t stopped the stigma.

HPV is mainly transmitted through sexual contact and most people are infected with HPV shortly after the onset of sexual activity, reports WHO. However, it could take up to 15 to 20 years for an HPV-16 or HPV-18 infected individual with a healthy immune system to develop cervical cancer. Strains of HPV are also connected to cancers of the anus, vulva, vagina and penis.

“People are ashamed to talk about it. First of all, I had cervical cancer. That’s your female parts; that’s not something you want to talk about in any kind of setting, not in the sense that my female parts are so unhealthy that they have to be removed. It’s not a nice thing to admit to yourself, to go through with your partner and then to talk about,” Ms Galgoczy said. “But it is important to talk about it, because people still think it can’t happen to them, like I did.”

Every time you hear someone’s story, it gives you a little nudge in the right direction and maybe this time someone hears it, and it



People are ashamed to talk about it... But it is important to talk about it, because people still think it can’t happen to them, like I did.

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taboo: cervical cancer

will be the last final push to get them checked.”

The stigma surrounding cervical cancer isn't just the fact that it is about a part of the body not discussed by 'polite society', it's also the direct connection to an STD, and the general public's ignorance about the commonness of HPV.

Adding to the stigma is the fact that the contraction of an STD comes with the assumption that an individual failed to have 'safe sex'. However, HPV is so common because there are no fool-proof, safe-sex options. The proper use of a condom isn't totally effective. In fact, penetration isn't necessary for the transmission of the virus.

“The root of the STD stigma is the gender-based, double standard of sexual morality: male social status typically increases as their number of sexual partners increases, whereas female social status typically decreases. As a society, we still place a high value on female virginity/chastity and on male sexual conquests,” Adina Nack, a senior research fellow for the Council on Contemporary Families and author of *Damaged Goods? Women Living with Incurable STDs*, explained in an email to *The Daily Beast* back in 2014. “My research found that infected women most often used the word 'dirty' to describe how they felt after receiving an STD diagnosis.”

All forms of sexual activity

Prevent Cervical Cancer
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Screening tests can find abnormal cells so they can be treated before they turn into cancer.

- ① The Pap test looks for changes in cells on the cervix that could turn into cancer if left untreated.
- ① The human papillomavirus (HPV) test looks for the virus that causes these cell changes.

The only cancer the Pap test screens for is cervical.

HPV causes 70 per cent of cervical cancer cases. Photo (left): Richard Wonka. Above: CDC.gov

have risk of HPV, which is something that needs to be embraced by both genders, explained Mildred Chernofsky, gynecologic oncologist at the Sibley Center for Gynecologic Oncology and Advanced Pelvic Surgery.

“Thus the message is for women to get regular checkups and co-testing with the Pap [Papanicolaou] and HPV tests for

women 30 and over every five years,” Dr Chernofsky told *A Woman's Health*. “Girls and boys, ages 9 to 11 should get the HPV vaccine, as well as men and women up to age 26. The vaccine has greater efficacy when received at an early age when sexual activity has not yet begun, but there is still some benefit in people up to age 26, even if sexual activity

has started.”

The need to get tested is exactly what made Ms Galgoczy face fears of being ostracized due the stigma surround HPV and cervical cancer.

“I hated people seeing me like that [incredibly weak]. I felt pitied. People came around to sympathize, but they didn't get it. They didn't get checked,” said Ms Galgoczy.

“When they came around, they thought, 'poor thing'. But they thought they were different.”

On February 18, Ms Galgoczy was declared cancer free. However, she didn't do anything special to beat cancer. She got lucky, which made the process all that much harder.

“A coincidental check-up saved my life and I am really sad that it was not a conscious decision from being aware of the dangers. It was pure luck and nothing else. I was totally stupid. And I am aware that there are other stupid people around me and around you,” Ms Galgoczy said.

“So, please take a moment to remind your friends, family and loved ones to get their tests done and get the vaccination, if there is one, without delay and talk loudly about their cases if they were diagnosed, as there is no shame in this, only responsibility to raise awareness so others can avoid making mistakes.

“I became a hero because I beat cancer; I was an inspiration for those still fighting cancer, giving them hope. But that's not the point. It's about prevention. It's about people realizing they aren't different. Even if they don't smoke, that doesn't mean it can't happen. It's about people taking preventative measures and not waiting until it's too late. Had I waited two more months, it could have been too late for me.”

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Unless bald or in the military, most people have changed their haircuts over the span of a decade. Not 'Phuket's Jet-ski Champion' former-Phuket Marine Office Chief Phuripat Theerakulpisut. However, he did change his name. In the March 11-17, 2006 issue of the *Phuket Gazette*, Mr Phuripat was still using the name Surin Theerakulpisut as he questioned whether or not regulations to allow people with foreign captains' licenses to skipper Thai-registered sailboats under 16 meters was really what was best for Thais and Thailand.

"The government has done enough to support foreigners in the marine industry: taxes on yachts have been cut to zero per cent. Maybe the government believes that the marine industry boosts employment or enhances economic growth. I doubt that it does," Mr Phuripat said, long before he stepped aboard the superyacht chartering licence bandwagon. "I don't hate foreigners and I am not against a free and open economy. Nor do I oppose commerce, but the Thai government

ought to prioritize what is of real benefit to Thai people."

Mr Phuripat was transferred out of Phuket to landlocked Nonthaburi Province Marine Office late last month. Whether or not this will change the direction of the Phuket Marine Office, which is also in charge of regulations for the island's jet-skis, is still unclear, as a new chief has yet to take up the mantle.

Not surprisingly, Mr Surin's haircut was not page-one quality news back in 2006 and though it is a classy look, it still hasn't made the cut. Taking the front page of the *Gazette* in the March 11-17 issue was the survival of an Australian woman who was adrift at sea in a dingy for four days.

Dominique Courteille, 57, was heading back on her yacht when her dinghy ran out of fuel. A combination of high winds and abnormally-strong currents swept the boat out to sea. Her fellow sailors were still on shore, leaving no one to call to as the current pushed her past the yacht; she wasn't

The gift of hindsight

It was an accident with the engine that sent me off into the blue. I am very sad to die because I would have loved to see you live. I'm astonished that no one has come looking for me, because I'm three miles from the island and, after that, nothing. I love you all. Think of me from time to time while dropping flowers in the water."

Ms Courteille's survival of such an ordeal – alone in just a dingy without provisions or shelter from the sun – is incredible. Though less incredible, but staggeringly coincidental, four foreigners, who were adrift in their sailing yacht for five days last month, were rescued – almost 10 years later, on the dot.

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

strong enough to paddle to safety.

Contemplating death, Ms Courteille wrote on the dinghy's sides, "I did not commit suicide!

Help finally arrived on March 6 in the form of an Indonesian fishing boat from the island a while ago. I went straight past the yacht and tried to row as best as I could, but I'm not the strongest of rowers," said Ms Courteille. "I then tried to signal to other yachts with my oars and I shouted for help, but no one was around to see."

Ms Courteille went on to explain that each day of her ordeal she tied a rope around herself and allowed it to drift away.

the sail ripping after it was hoisted up a secondary mast. Such a series of mishaps is significantly worse luck than your dingy simply running out of fuel. However, at least they were together and had provisions and shelter.

Jumping into the Phuket 'Time Machine' we dive even further into the history books of the island, finding ourselves in a time when dragons still romped across the tropical paradise.

Patana Saelim brought a reporter from *Siang Tai Daily* to witness evidence of the footprint that a dragon left on the roof of a friend's pickup truck, reported the *Gazette*. The abbot of Wat Naka, Pra Boonsri, when consulted about the mythical appearance, refused to rule out a dragon. The man with the dragon-footprint truck vowed to not wash the vehicle until all traces of the dragon's presence were gone from it naturally.

Now, 10 years later, it is safe to assume that the man has gotten around to washing his truck, just as the man formally known as Mr Surin has finally been swept from our shores.

– Isaac Stone Simonelli

Police charge engineer for commuter boat blast in capital

POLICE have charged an engineer over the Klong Saen Saeb commuter boat blast in Bangkok that injured 71 people on March 5.

Kawin Sakaojit, 42, was charged with recklessness leading to the serious injury of others.

Police charged Mr Kawin because he installed the liquefied natural gas (LNG) system suspected of causing the explosion.

Kawin denied responsibility. "I have provided such installations for boats for more than eight years already. I am not in charge of procuring the LNG tanks. I am just in charge of the installations of the system," he said.



nounced the facts of the investigation to protect consumers' rights, including people who bought memberships at CAWOW branches that subsequently closed, explained Col Sihanart.

CAWOW founder and former chief executive Eric Levine claimed in a declaration that the Securities and Exchange Commission didn't find any evidence of wrongdoings and the fact that the Department of Special Investigation dropped the investigation request by AMLO as proof of innocence.

Hospitals hit for wrongly charging for emergency care

A PRIVATE hospital that demanded 170,000 baht deposit before treating a critically ill patient was in violation of a policy that requires the hospital to provide free emergency medical services for all healthcare plans, the Network of Medical Malpractice Victims revealed on March 1.

Network chairwoman Preeyanan Lorsermwattana said her group had received complaints from patients' relatives about hospitals demanding money despite the Emergency Claim Online (EMCO) policy requirement that the first 72 hours of emergency medical treatment must be free.

Four shot dead in 24 hours of violence in south

FOUR people have been gunned down in Thailand's southernmost provinces in 24-hours of violence that included the murder of a Buddhist rubber tapper whose corpse was then set alight on March 3.

The deaths come during a recent uptick in violence after months of relative calm in a region where more than 6,500

people – the majority civilians – have been killed since a rebellion against Thai rule reignited in 2004.

Germany backs child protection in Pattaya

THE German government has donated about 2.4 million baht to a children's rights non-government group in Pattaya.

German Ambassador Peter

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

Prugel handed the check to Human Help Network Foundation Thailand to help fund its 'Promotion and Protection of Children's Rights' project. The foundation, which opened in 2008, aims to fight trafficking and abuse, as well as help children in desperate need.

Fitness club sues AMLO for B100mn

ANTI-MONEY Laundering Office (AMLO) Chief Sihanart Prayoonrat says the 100 million baht defamation lawsuit filed against the office and himself will not affect the agency's investigation into California WOW Xperience (CAWOW) fitness clubs.

The AMLO publicly an-



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Pushing Phuket for preventative care

WE HOPE that Nora Galgoczy speaking openly about contracting the incredibly common sexually transmitted disease Human papillomavirus (HPV) and her subsequent battle with cervical cancer will inspire at least some of our readers to take a more proactive approach in preventing the life-threatening or debilitating medical conditions out there that are largely preventable, thanks to modern medicine.

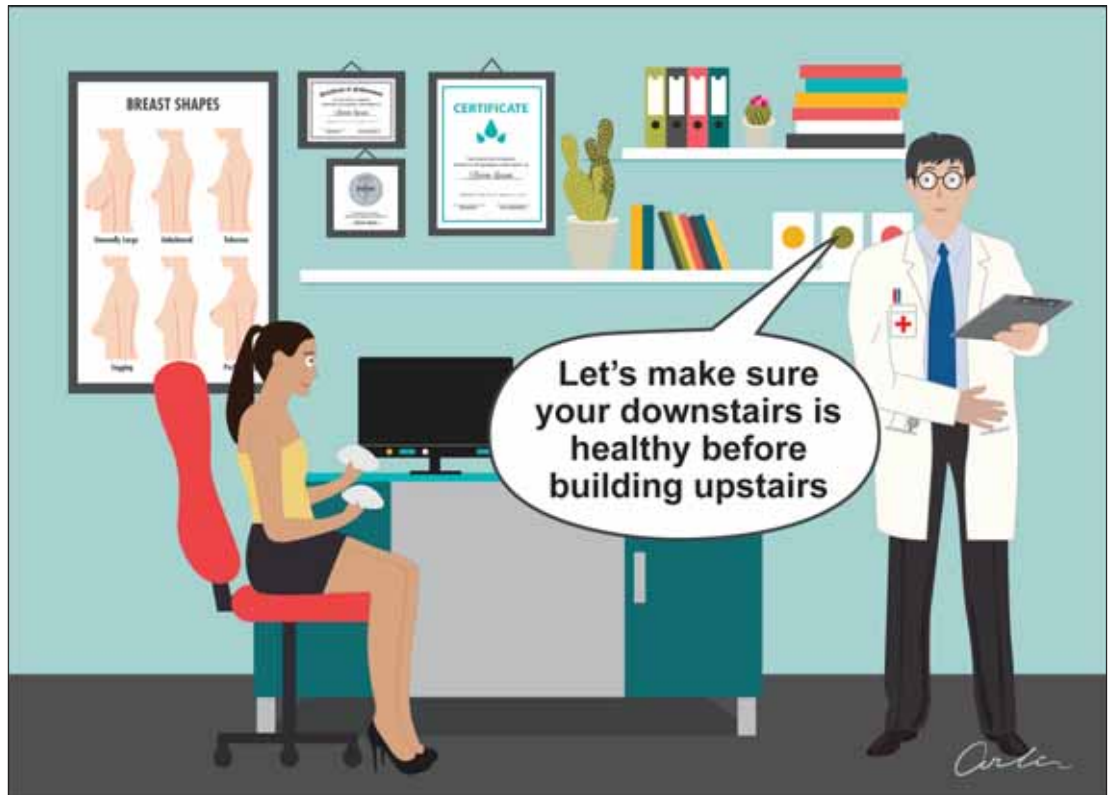
Ms Galgoczy's case is an example of how Phuket's relatively low-cost preventative medical services can also help save the lives of young and middle-aged people, at least those who are wise enough to make a modest investment in screening packages and other preventative measures available on the island.

Ms Galgoczy's sensible decision to get tested for the HPV virus at the age of 29 was the single act that led to her beating cervical cancer. In about 70 per cent of cervical cancer cases, the cause is HPV, which can be contracted despite using condoms or avoiding penetration during sexual encounters. Most people reading this will have contracted HPV at least at one point if not many times during their lives.

The good news is that an effective childhood vaccine against HPV is available at very a reasonable cost. Sadly, many parents fail to immunize their children before the onset of puberty, when it is most effective. Rather, many choose to buy their children electronic gadgets and high-sugar treats that put their kids' future health and well-being at risk in ways we can only begin to imagine.

Even sadder are parents who fall for pseudoscientific conspiracy theories, such as the completely discounted notion that 'vaccines cause autism', and put their children at risk by failing to immunize them against not only HPV, but a host of other potentially fatal diseases. Like any medical procedure, immunizations are not completely without risk. However, the benefits of getting children vaccinated against HPV far outweigh the risks and offer this young generation the possibility of a lifetime free of HPV and all the serious health risks that go with it.

We hope more Phuket residents and tourists will take better advantage of the preventative medical procedures on offer on the island, for as the old adage goes: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.



Technology is not always reliable

Re: Public asked not to rely on social media for tsunami warnings, March 5

Having 40 seismometers is one thing, but are they all working? And even if they are operative, how does the message get across to the people who need to hear it, as the authorities readily admitted that their reaction was slow – therefore: social media is the only way – unless you can reliably and more predictably better it.

It's all very nice to sit in his cozy office and dish out redundant advise, but Mr Burin seems to ignore that there are many repeat tourists here who witnessed the Indian Ocean Tsunami.

And, since then, nothing was done to instill confidence that the next tsunami warning would be more professionally managed, though they've had plenty of time and resources.

*Michael Pohl
Facebook*

No money for what seems to be crucial

Re: Phi Phi Island releases 83% of wastewater untreated, March 3

There is something very seriously wrong with the role in financing projects in Phuket and the surrounding area for the government.

No money for cleaning up Phi Phi island, corruption in the daily takings in the national park, whilst spending 40 million baht on a concrete box full of photos and wanting to spend

Letters to the Editor

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

25mn baht on a speed boat from the airport to Patong?

*Harry
Gazette forum*

Herding people like cattle to safety zones

Re: Opinion: Time for a jet-ski-free Phuket, March 6

The sooner they (jet-skis) are gone, then the sooner the beaches will be safer for all.

Herding people like cattle into safe zones; all this does is make it easy for the criminals, as all the people are crowded together.

The sea is dangerous for all. Everyone has been saying this for years. The only people that want them are the pirates that run them and the people they pay to stay there.

*Simon Lomas
Facebook*

Anchoring on coral a yearly occurrence

Re: Boat owner gets warning for coral damage, March 7

Did a lot of diving at Nai Harn Beach, Yacht Club end, and every now and then in the high season, a yachting would set his anchor right on top of the corals

even though the seabed is clearly visible from a boat's bow at only about 8-12 meters of water.

And there is a lot of space along this beach with good holding sandy ground.

*Ernst Ruetimann – Trang
Gazette forum*

Coral thrives where laws are enforced

Re: Krabi police scoop up reef thieves, March 5

Can coral be returned quickly to the sea?

I was very sad when scuba diving around Phuket to see all of the destruction of the coral beds by boat anchors and was very surprised by the beautiful water, but ugly torn up (and stolen) sea floor.

In the Red Sea in Israel, there are beautiful coral beds because you will go to prison if you damage them!

*William Moynihan
Facebook*

No longer feeling safe after 20 years

Re: French pensioner mugged by Phuket 'teenage' thugs, March 8

My mother at age 83 has finally decided that Phuket is too risky for her after spending two, four-week holidays on average for the past 20 years.

She still goes to Chiang Mai once per year and feels more safe there.

*James H Miller
Facebook*

Phuket Gazette

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Managing Editor: Isaac Stone Simonelli

Managing Director: Oranee Hildebrand

General Manager: Natthira Susangrat

Publisher: The Phuket Gazette Co Ltd

Contact us:

Editorial: news@phuketgazette.net

Advertising Sales: adsales@phuketgazette.net

Classified Advertising: classads@phuketgazette.net

Website services: anna@phuketgazette.net

Gazette Guide: guide@phuketgazette.net

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General: info@phuketgazette.net

Telephone: 076 273555 (10 lines) **Fax** 076 615240

79/94 Moo 4, Thepkasattri Rd, T. Koh Kaew, A. Muang, Phuket

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Travelling at light speed

FIRST PERSON

PHUKET'S light rail system will be the first of its kind outside of the Greater Bangkok area.

During construction, there will certainly be some bottlenecks as far as traffic is concerned. However, we have already prepared plans to lessen or avoid potential traffic congestion as much as we can.

Some people are concerned about rumors that we will be using existing lanes to build the light rail, causing more traffic than necessary. However, there are no lane closures proposed at all.

The light rail system is set to be situated on medians. Nonetheless, in some areas it will be necessary for the rail to run alongside the road lanes.

For areas like Thalang, there is no need for concern where the light rail will run. Though it will have to cross lanes at some sections, we have very carefully decided at which locations it will do so, and will construct barriers and crossing arms to avoid accidents.

Recently we have been asked to reconsider the crossings and to build underpasses for vehicles, so as to avoid crossing accidents. We are currently revising plans on that front.

Nevertheless, in town, I realize it will require careful management to avoid accidents during the initial phases, as Phuket is the first province to have public rail transportation that runs alongside traffic in Thailand.



Sirigate Apirat is the project secretary of the Office of Transport and Traffic Policy and Planning (OTPP). He earned his Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Ramkhamhaeng University and has been serving as an analyst at

the OTPP since 1995.

Here he talks about the issues and benefits of the proposed light rail system on Phuket.

However, it is not impossible to manage – many countries use this system already. It is also much more environmentally friendly.

The OTPP aims to provide locals and expats knowledge of the light rail's benefits by holding a conference or community meeting, as well as to try and change the behavior of people on the roads.

We have researched tram technology in cities like Amsterdam where it has been successfully implemented. But, due to the large numbers of motorbikes in Phuket, which is not like many other cities abroad, we have to adapt the technology to the local environment.

For example, during the initial phases of light rail usage, there will be many barriers along the road to avoid accidents. However, locals could adapt the way that they travel to work, either by taking public transportation, or by using alternate routes.

We eventually would like to see vehicles banned from parking along the roadside in some areas, such as the Heroines' Monument and the proposed

Koh Kaew Station, which is one of the most traffic-heavy areas along the route.

We also plan on building more parking spaces at places like the airport and Chalong Circle.

The reason we chose to build a light rail instead of something similar to the Bangkok Transit System is because Phuket is a holiday destination with scenery and old town heritage, and to have the public rail system highly visible would not be suitable for the island.

The OTPP is now awaiting the finalized plans of the new road crossings, after which we will submit all documents for the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). We expect all of that to be done by April.

Once the EIA has been submitted, it will take about one year to be approved. Once this happens, construction can begin.

So we ask the people of Phuket to please be patient throughout the entire process, because in the end, it will bring several advantages such as a better quality of life and a cleaner environment for everyone.



Never be afraid to reach out and ask for help. Photo: Sabbian Paine

Island of lost souls

THE recent death of American national Nathan D House is just one of many incidents in which people travel to this tropical paradise to end their lives.

Though the death of Mr House is still under investigation, the note he supposedly left behind, as well as a website under his name detailing his well-articulated thoughts surrounding the topic of the right to die, left little to the imagination.

Mr House's death comes two weeks before the one-year-mark of the death of 21-year-old British national Liam Colven, who hired a taxi to take him from his hotel in Bang Tao to the Thalang Shooting Range last year, where he turned a gun on himself less than 24-hours after his arrival on the island.

It is hard to imagine why anyone would want to end their life, unless you are in their situation – not to mention that mental illness is severely overlooked in most cultures and cases.

To lose someone is devastating. To lose someone via suicide even more so. However, to lose someone via suicide while they are in a different country must be absolutely excruciating.

Not only do family members have to grieve the death of their loved one, they are also forced

Island View

By Debbie Adams

to deal with embassies, police and body expropriation, all through a country that most likely speaks another language and has different customs and legal issues to deal with.

Recently the *Gazette* published an article that highlighted the need for families to make sure that their children are mentally prepared to travel alone.

"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. If your child has never seen the outside of his or her college or home town before an adventure in Thailand, is it a wild leap of the imagination to say that there is a chance they may not fare well," the article says.

Therefore, if there are signs that a loved one may be depressed or contemplating suicide, or is just not mature enough to travel solo, it may be a cause for concern if they plan a trip abroad alone.

In the meantime, be safe, be alert and never be afraid to reach out to someone and ask for help.

Words from the Wise

"There's a big, wonderful world out there for you. It belongs to you. It's exciting and stimulating and rewarding. Don't cheat yourselves out of this promise."

– Nancy Reagan

"Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add color to my sunset sky."

– Rabindranath Tagore

Issues & Answers

Who's responsible for Koh Sireh construction?

THE construction of drainage holes on the way from Phuket Town to Koh Sireh is very dangerous. There are no clear signs showing there is construction ahead, and at night, the area is not very well lit at all. I believe it's the law to have these things in place.

I think there have been at least four deaths in the area. We need help from those who are responsible for signage and lighting at the construction site.



Rassada Mayor Phudit Raksarat replies:

We are very sorry about the

inconvenience.

We were informed about the accidents and have just cleared the area to fill in the holes and put up lights and warning signs.

We have been having land issues and local protests; the matter of whether construction can continue is under consideration.

If you have any additional questions or complaints, please contact us at the Rassada Municipality Office.

Will 2016 be the year of the bear?



Finance

By Don Freeman

THERE'S an old saying on Wall Street that might unnerve investors: "As goes January, so goes the year." Unfortunately, January 2016 was a very bad opening for stock markets. In fact, it was one of the worst openings in one hundred years, as the Dow Jones industrial average fell about 5.5 per cent while the NASDAQ fell almost eight per cent.

Of course, there are the usual financial analysts and talking heads who are trying to calm investor fears by saying we can't be heading into a bear market because they only happen when the economy is in recession. Unfortunately for the perpetual bulls, the research findings of Standard & Poor's Sam Stovall show that every time there has been a recession in the US since 1948, the stock market had plunged months before the recession occurred.

Specifically, Stovall found that a stock market plunge of at least ten per cent predicted trouble brewing in the overall economy, with the fall starting on average seven and a half months before the actual start of the next recession. And when stock market declines prior to a recession are combined with the actual declines during one, stocks dropped an average of

nearly thirty per cent.

My overall take on the stock market right now is that risk is rising due to bad news out of China, credit problems, and the lack of real economic growth. I also believe that investors are worried about the US Fed and its inability to come to the rescue by cutting interest rates if a recession does begin.

For those reasons, my own and my client's accounts have been in cash since mid-December 2015 - avoiding the big losses so far this year. Until the market shows more technical signs of hitting a bottom, it's going to be better to just be in cash. Protecting cash and your ability to make decisions is important during bear markets or corrections.

Looking at the S&P 500's technical chart, one can draw a floor line at the 1,900 level. If that level cannot hold (so far and as of the end of January, it has held), the S&P 500 is likely to move down to the 1,600 level. On the other hand, if a decisive upswing can move the S&P 500 back above the 2,100 level, I will be interested in moving cash back into stocks.

However, I am waiting until the market downtrend clearly turns into a market uptrend before buying any stocks. An uptrend may not occur right away though, if the price of oil continues to plunge, or if the market rolls over again to be-



Is the Year of the Monkey going to 'bear' down on investors? Photo: Magnus Johansson

low January lows.

I am expecting a short term rally off the panic lows of late January, but I also expect this rally to likely fail in the weeks and months ahead, unless the market develops some leadership stocks. Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and Google were holding the market up, but have begun to be sold and enter corrections. Without leadership any market rally is vulnerable, meaning investors will need to be patient.

When that next uptrend does occur, growth stocks with

strong earnings and sales and technically sound charts will again lead the market! Otherwise and as of the end of January, leadership stocks remain largely nonexistent, albeit many technology and health care stocks were holding up well.

Finally, it's important to remember that you should not be worried about what the markets are doing right now or will do in the future. Instead, you need to focus on what you can control, i.e. your exposure to risk, portfolio al-

location, entry/exit positions, stop loss orders and the like.

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

Chinese firms seek part in Dawei

ITALIAN-THAI Development (ITD) is forming a consortium with Chinese companies to pour investment into new infrastructure projects in Dawei Special Economic Zone (DSEZ), as land lease in the initial phase kicks off.

According to Somjetn Tinnapong, managing director of Myanmar Industrial Estate - an ITD subsidiary responsible for the development of the 27-square kilometer initial phase - the con-

sortium will consist of private and state-owned Chinese companies. Their focus will be on the 132-kilometer, four-lane road, which will require an investment of 13.5 billion baht, as well as three ports that will cost 14bn baht.

He said the Chinese companies include King Trillion and China Railway Engineering Corp, a key player in China's ambitious One Belt One Road project. - *The Nation*

BOT plans SME matchmaking fairs

THAILAND'S Board of Trade (BOT) is inviting newly established businesses across the country to join a 'Business Matching' event in Bangkok. The event is aimed at giving SMEs the opportunity to meet consumer giants such as department stores and retailers.

The event will take place at the Bangkok Convention Center in Lat Prao on April 26.

Board of Trade Chairman Isara Vongkusolkrit said that the event aims to help local businesses sell their products and give Thai entrepreneurs the chance to expand into Southeast Asia, particularly the CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam) markets.

The business-matching event is part of the government's 'Pracha Rath Project' launched in January this year to stimulate domestic consumption and to strengthen



The Bangkok Convention Center is the venue for the 'Business Matching' event in April. Photo: TICA

the country's economy, as slow global economic recovery is expected to hurt the Thai economy this year.

A 'Start-up Fair' is also in

the pipeline as part of the Pracha Rath Project initiative, for which the date and venue is expected to be finalized shortly.

- *The Nation*

Feadship Asian market blooming

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

WELL ahead of the incredibly successful inaugural Thailand Yacht Show (TYS), Feadship Royal Dutch Shipbuilders were making superyacht waves while expanding into the Asian region.

“At this moment Feadship is building multiple yachts in different sizes and in different models for Asian and Asia-based clients. The product and the brand appeals to the most discerning yachtsmen in the region, most of them having already owned yachts and/or chartered Feadships,” Feadship Commercial Director Bas Nederpelt said.

Though Asian buyers knew how to find Feadship more than 20 years ago, Mr Nederpelt confessed that there was now a ‘significant’ number of orders ‘well spread’ in the Asian region. The company declined to disclose the exact number of orders handled over the last five years.

However, a number of Feadship clients do live in Phuket or spend their holidays cruising the waters, often also visiting the Andaman Islands and Indonesia as well.

“Phuket is becoming one of the yachting hubs where we certainly want to be present,” Mr Nederpelt said. “There are several existing super yacht owners already and many potential clients who can move up to Feadship.”

The company has been involved in the growth of the superyachting community’s awareness of Phuket as a cruising destination, having supported the Asia Superyacht Rendezvous in Phuket since the event’s early days.

“Thailand, and Phuket in particular, functions as a hub for superyachts. Over



The world’s first hybrid super-motoryacht, the phenomenal 83.50-meter Savannah was created by Feadship in partnership with CG Design. Photo: Feadship

the years Feadships – yachts which travel the world more than any other brand – have visited Phuket regularly, both for the beautiful waters, but certainly also for the good infrastructure and great hospitality. Phuket has the best position to be the main yachting hub in Asia,” Mr Nederpelt said.

However, in general, the company is noticing that those yachts being used in Asian waters, such as Phuket, tend to be a little smaller than the yachts built for other regions.

Nonetheless, Mr Nederpelt pointed out that, “All our yachts, from under 40

meters to over 100 meters, have in common that they are of the same quality irrespective of the size.”

The government is continuing to build on this legacy of stunning cruising grounds and good infrastructure, Tourism and Sports Minister Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul told the *Gazette*. This goal was a major factor in the government’s backing of the TYS.

“The event [TYS] aims to support the government’s move to promote Thailand as the ‘Marina Hub of ASEAN’, as well as to stimulate Thailand’s economy and further develop its marine

tourism industry,” Ms Kobkarn said.

When asked about the impacts the Asean Economic Community would have on Feadship, if any, Mr Nederpelt pointed out that all initiatives that open up markets, as well as reduce barriers and taxation, will be of help.

The long-term success of Thailand’s push to develop the marine industry and better cater to superyachts will come down to legislation, concurred Transport Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith.

“We have recently announced the regulations and requirements for the new superyacht charter licence that will allow foreign-flagged superyachts to stay and operate in Thai waters for one year at a time. So far, three superyachts have been presented with the licence,” Minister Arkhom said. “In addition, we will collaborate with the Immigration Bureau to facilitate extending the length of stay for crew working on board superyachts to one year, or equal to the yacht’s cruising duration. Meanwhile, the tax issue is being discussed among relevant agencies such as the Revenue Department.”

In addition to changes in legislation, Phuket marinas continue to develop the necessary infrastructure to cater to the larger recreational vessels.

“The new charter rules (tax reduction), yacht and charter shows and improvement of the infrastructure for yachting will give this [market growth in Phuket and Thailand] a push,” Mr Nederpelt said. “Phuket, and Thailand as a whole, deserve to become one of the top yachting destinations. With joint efforts from the government and yachting community, this position can be claimed.”

Vietnamese laborers heading for Thailand

THOUSANDS OF laborers from the central Vietnam provinces of Nghe An and Ha Tinh have flocked to Thailand and Laos to look for higher-paying jobs after Tet (Lunar New Year).

Geographical advantages, easy-to-find jobs and a high percentage of overseas Vietnamese in these countries are reasons for the free flow of labor into Thailand and Laos, insiders said.

Vietnamese workers normally enter Thailand on tourist visas and then stay on to work as hired laborers without permits, they said.

Most Vietnamese laborers in Thailand work as household helpers, food servers, and employees in the fishery industry or on construction sites, according to *Nguoi Lao Dong*.

On average, a worker there



Many are working on construction sites. Photo: Randy Adams

can earn between 9,500 baht and 12,700 baht a month. Considerably more than the average monthly salary of a Vietnamese worker last year, which was 6,000 baht.

Statistics from Nghe An province’s police showed that about 378 people had worked illegally in Thailand in 2014, while the province’s Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs Department office estimated the figure was 800.

– *The Nation*



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Celebrating Phuket's UNESCO 'City of Gastronomy' status

The Banyan Tree Phuket resort gave special guests a taste of the flavorful fare and culinary creations that have recently earned the province a UNESCO award as a 'City of Gastronomy' on March 2.



(From L-R) Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts Phuket Area Director, Sales & Marketing Ludovic Gallerne; Hotel Manager Hery Kuswoyo; Phuket Provincial Public Relations head Budasaya Jaipium; TAT Phuket Marketing executive Monri Manator; and Banyan Tree Phuket Area General Manager Sriram Kailasam.

Filling the skies in 2016

Bangkok Airways announced the launch of three new flight routes this year: Chiang Mai – Mae Hong Son; Bangkok – Danang (Vietnam); and Samui – Guangzhou. Seven new aircraft arriving in 2016 will add flights to existing routes: Bangkok – Phnom Penh; Bangkok – Chiang Mai; and Chiang Mai – Samui, as well as two flights a day during the high season from Samui to Singapore.



Bangkok Airways hostesses accompany airline and tourism executives (from L-R) Bangkok Airways Vice President-Sales, Varong Israsena Na Ayudhya; Bangkok Airways President Puttipong Prasarttong-osoht; TAT Governor Yuthasak Supasorn; and Bangkok Airways Vice President-Marketing Prote Setsuwan.

Helping build a cool school

Associates of the Angsana Laguna Phuket resort handed over a donation to Phuket Panyanukul School on February 24 to help fund the installation of air conditioning in the learning center's classrooms. The donation, handed over by General Manager Brian Connelly and department heads, was part of the hotel's 1st Charity Program.



Angsana Laguna Phuket General Manager Brian Connelly (2nd right), together with Angsana associates, hands over a donation to Phuket Panyanukul School Assistant Director Sanya Surabun.

Rehab residence opens

Premium property developer Villa Medica Phuket Co and Panacee Medical Center threw a party on Feb 26 for the grand opening of Villa Medica Phuket – a residential estate and rehabilitation center offering holistic medical services.



Panacee Medical Center executive Siriya Thepcharoen (left) and Villa Medica Phuket CEO & Managing Director Jirawat Phuttitraisin (right) flank Mr Jirawat's mother and father, Khamtan Botmath and Athong Phuttitraisin.

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Moustaches for all at the Monkey House



SPIFFING PARTY: 'Jolly good show', said an unidentified guest and his anonymous partner.

Men, women and even kids got moustachioed up for an evening of clandestine fun at the Monkey House restaurant in Kamala. Hairy Hungarian, imperial whiskers, handlebar, pencil and walrus were among the fancy lip-hairdos sported by diners and guests for the trendy venue's Hat & Moustache Party on February 27.



Monkey House proprietors Kanjana (left) and Thibault Salaun. Photos by Monkey House



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Ladyboys must be at least 18 years old and living in Phuket. Photo: Jungceylon PR

Ladyboys to compete in diversity competition

ANDAMAN Power is celebrating sexual diversity and spreading sexual health awareness with its upcoming competition 'Miss Andaman Power 2016' to be held at various locations from March 25-30.

However, the real fun for the public won't be until the finalists take the stage at Jungceylon for the beauty pageant part of the event, which will include a fashion show, as well as swimsuit modeling, on March 28.

"This is the fourth event of its kind since 2012. During the event, ladyboys are able to express their abilities and be honored for promoting awareness of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases," said event organizer Chirapas Apinantan. "In the first round, contestants will partake in a short sex education seminar, followed by an exam on sexual health."

— Sukawin Tanthavanich

Open your heart and home to a soi puppy, kitten or cat

START sorting out your documents and make some more room in that big heart, because the Soi Dog Foundation is holding an adoptions event at its shelter in Mai Khao between 9am-noon on March 19. The event will focus on puppies, kittens and cats.

"Right now the shelter is bursting at the seams with puppies and cats. There are so many animals who would make great pets, and we're really keen to find them safe and loving homes," Adoptions Manager Teresa Colman said.

Re-homing dogs and cats is a major part of Soi Dog's work. The foundation re-homed around 500 dogs and cats in 2015, both locally and overseas. All animals are sterilized and vaccinated prior to adoption.

Potential adopters need to complete a short interview on the day with a member of the Adoptions Team, which includes a Thai speaker.

"The interview is to ensure we match the right pet with the right home. The interview includes questions about the adopters' home and any existing pets. There are also some other things that potential adopters need to consider when adopting a Soi Dog or Cat. For example, our dogs can only go to homes where the garden has a fully enclosed fence, so it would be really helpful if adopters could bring along some photos of their garden on



The event will run from 9am to noon on March 19. Photo: Soi Dog

the day," said Ms Colman.

Where possible, adopters will be able to take their chosen pet home on the day. However, some adoptions may require a follow up visit to the shelter to collect their pet. Adopters need to plan for their new pet's arrival, by bringing a suitable harness and lead (puppies) or travel basket (kit-

tens and cats) when they pick up their pet.

Soi Dog Foundation is the leading street dog and cat welfare organization in Asia, helping around 100,000 with sterilization, vaccination, medical treatment and adoption.

It also runs a comprehensive education program in schools

on animal welfare.

The foundation is also leading the fight to end Thailand's illegal dog meat trade, and is currently setting up operations in Vietnam.

For more information about the event, contact teresa@soidog.org.

— Phuket Gazette

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076-600-148

March 23-27. 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.

WHAT'S ON in Phuket

April 13-15. Songkran Festival

Songkran is the Thai New Year Festival also known as the Water Festival.

The word Songkran literally means transformation or change. Held during the driest month in Thailand, Songkran is full of symbolic traditions such as pouring water on other people to wish them good luck for the New Year.

The festival also includes parades, pageants and paying homage to one's ancestors, among other celebrations.

May 1. Labor Day

Public holiday for all commercial workers, but government offices will remain open.

May 5. Coronation Day

Coronation Day commemorates the accession to the throne of HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej on May 5, 1950.

May 20. Visakha Bucha Day

Visakha Bucha Day is observed on the day of the full moon during the 6th lunar month, which usually falls in either May or early June.

It is a day to commemorate three important incidents: the birth, the enlightenment and the passing away of the Buddha. Miraculously, these events fell in the same month and on the same date in the Buddhist era.

Phuket-Hat Yai: truly boutique flights



BANGKOK Airways daily flights connecting Southern Thailand's two busiest airports – Phuket (HKT) and Hat Yai International – are currently experiencing average load factors ranging from 60 to 70 per cent, with the overwhelming majority of passengers being Thai nationals, an airline executive has revealed.

Pannaphorn Preechachan, Bangkok Airways chief of regional corporate communications for Southern Thailand, said the current load factor was rising as public awareness of the flights has been increasing since the service was introduced in October 2015.

"There's growing awareness that our new service is available on this route, and many people have even requested additional flights be added in the afternoon or evening," she said.

"About 98 per cent of the passengers are Thai nationals, with foreign tourist making up the other two per cent," she said.

The trend is perhaps not surprising given the huge numbers

of Thais from other southern Thai provinces who work, or have business interests, in Phuket.

The failure to tap into the huge foreign tourist market in the Thai lower south seems to be a problem endemic to many Thai domestic carriers, however.

Last year, a Nok Air vice president said that they were behind rival Thai AirAsia in the Phuket market due to their failure to tap into the huge numbers of foreign tourists transiting through Phuket, which make up more than half of all travellers disembarking at the airport.

Ms Pannaphorn said that the Phuket – Hat Yai service has been promoted in both markets through billboards, radio advertising, magazine advertisements and special promotions at selected local events.

However, a look at Bangkok Airways' Facebook and Twitter pages reveals that the carrier's social media content is geared almost exclusively to the domestic market.

The slogans may be in English, but the body copy that actually explains what is on offer is almost invariably in Thai language only.

In Songkhla Town and Hat Yai City, for example, hundreds if not thousands of tuk-tuks bear ads introducing the all-in-



About 98 per cent of passengers on the Phuket-Hat Yai route are Thai nationals. Photo: Shankar S

clusive, one-way 1,490 baht flights, but these go unnoticed by the vast majority of tourists who are unable to read Thai.

Songkhla province, where Haad Yai is located, is a major tourist destination for visiting Malaysian tourists, including its large population of ethnic Chinese.

Unbeknownst to many, Malaysia is Thailand's second

largest tourist source market, after mainland China. Many of these visitors arrive by tour bus to visit destinations in Songkhla. However, the vast majority of Malaysian tourists remain unaware that a flight service to Phuket is available.

The Phuket to Hat Yai service would also draw the interest of the many thousands of expat residents of Phuket

who need to do "visa runs" or conduct business trips to neighboring Malaysia.

On the topic of expanding flight services in the south of Thailand, Ms Pannaphorn said that Bangkok Airways had no immediate plans to expand services to Narathiwat International Airport or any other international airports in the region.

NokAir back on schedule

AFTER the cancellation of more than 100 flights since February 23, Nok Air has confirmed that all flight routes will be back on schedule starting March 11.

February 23 saw the airline cancel 20 flights, which has been followed by the cancellation of 10 flights per day since, reported The Nation.

The airline has been in the process of rearranging internal structures, as it strives to put new pilots in place after last month's strike.

The strike was due to Nok Air pilots protesting against new policies – which the company had implemented in compliance with European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) standards – that deemed them unqualified to fly, confirmed Rajawish Seehawaree, Nok Air corporate communications manager.

"Nok Air is also continuously working with all



Nok Air flights to Phuket should be back on schedule. Photo: Isaac Stone Simonelli

passengers who have been impacted by the announced flight cancellations. The airline is constantly reaching out to and assisting all those passengers whose travel has been affected and will continue to do so until all are fully taken care of," said Mr Rajawish.

Protect our new divers

Diving

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

COUNTLESS instructors have posted stunning images of the ocean with a phrase similar to: 'Welcome to my office.' Such romantic, well-promoted image on social media, of course, resonate with us restless office junkies, drawing us out of our cubicles to the wonders of the open waters.

However, a series of small neglectful actions and breaches in standards will not result in a death or serious injury at our workplace – staple punctures and paper cuts are as bad as it get at the *Gazette*. That is not the case for a dive professional.

The foremost job of a dive professional is to ensure the safety of those under their care, and no diver is more vulnerable or important to the industry as a whole than a discover scuba diver (DSD).

A DSD course is not a certifying diving experience. However, it is the most common way someone is introduced to diving. These divers are brought into a truly alien world – yet, most DSD students usually get handed over to junior instructors who, though qualified, have limited experience and probably less confidence than an instructor with a decade of professional diving experience. Additionally, a student's first experience with their DSD instructor is most likely the defining factor in whether or not they go on to get their licence, or book a diving holiday for their next vacation.

Unfortunately, the only place that there is probably more tea bagging of students than in a DSD experience is in an American fraternity. It is, of course, a slightly different experience, but both are usually undesirable. In diving, 'tea bag-

ging' means holding students by the tank, dunking them underwater and dragging them around before taking them back to the surface, where, given the quality of the experience, they will probably never return to diving. How often do you re-use a tea bag?

There are plenty of damaging dive-industry videos of divers – especially Chinese nationals – being dragged around underwater by their 'instructor'. Many well-known and once-respected instructors are doing this, often relying on the excuse that they are experienced, so it's okay for them to violate regulations and manage multiple students at a time. For a few thousand more baht a month, they are risking the lives of others and damaging the reputation of the industry as a whole.

"The PADI Discover Scuba Diving program introduces people to scuba diving in a highly supervised, controlled and relaxed manner. It dispels common misconceptions about scuba by letting individuals try it for themselves," states PADI's Guide to Teaching. "These participants need and deserve a high-level of patience, attention and sensitivity, both for their safety and for their enjoyment of the program. The real reward for the PADI Professional offering the Discover Scuba Diving program is the day-to-day opportunity to guide people through, and share with them, a truly remarkable experience in discovering diving."

This, of course, sounds like an entirely different experience than tea-bagging services offered by a number of agencies on the island.

To help combat violations in regulations and to provide positive reinforcement to those with good practices within the Phuket diving industry, PADI held a seminar on March 8. About 50



The DSD introduces people to scuba diving in a highly supervised, controlled and relaxed manner, or at least is supposed to. Is that how you handle your DSDs? Photo: Adam Kahtava (above); Brian Omura (cover)

dive professionals, representing a strong cross section of certification levels and nationalities, were in attendance. Of course, those that truly needed to be guided back onto the tracks of complying with safety regulations weren't there.

It hardly seems coincidental that the seminar comes after a series of diving deaths and injuries in the Andaman.

In November last year, Zhang Lin, 23, was found floating unresponsive at a depth of about 11.9 meters by divers from another dive company. She was later pronounced dead. Then, on February 3, two Russian divers were maimed by a speedboat in Phi Phi. Later that month, a first-time Chinese diver was recovered unconscious near Koh Poda while diving with Ao Nang-based company Scuba Addicts. Those incidents provide perfect case studies for discussions on regulations, but because the cases are still in court, we won't dig into what regulations

may have been violated.

However, during the PADI discussion, two major issues with regards to how to 'bend' regulations surfaced: the use of cameras while teaching DSD courses and 'confined water environments' for DSD courses. Though the bottom line is simple, the discussion will be picked apart in our next dive column.

So what is that quick and dirty bottom line: did the instructor act as a prudent instructor would? If something terrible did happen because you escorted one DSD to the surface because they were throwing up through their regulator, leaving another alone below you, what would appear in the ensuing police report?

It is easy to justify stretching or bending regulations to fit our needs. However, a police report that may back criminal negligence charges will not be colored by the intricate fluctuations of life. A police report is in black and white.

When an expert witness takes

the stand for the prosecution, they will pull apart an instructor's performance brick by brick. They may note that clearly a part of the medical waiver was erased and re-marked to prevent a simple trip to the doctor. They will note regulation infractions – the student failed to perform skills necessary for certifying requirements; the instructor was taking photos, and so on. They won't weigh in the fact that the night before was when your Dive Master candidates completed their course, so you took them out for some drinks to celebrate. They will note, however, that you were drinking the night before.

Ask yourself this when a person who was under your care is brought to the surface unconscious and is later pronounced dead: will your reasoning for making the decisions and compromises hold water with the deceased's loved ones, with the courts or with your conscience, if you get a 'free' stay in Thailand, as an inmate?

Sea hares do like bunnies do: millions found dead after mass spawning

THE millions of sea hares that washed onto a Phuket beach on Monday were part of a mass spawning due to a slight increase in the temperature of the sea.

"It is normal during warmer months for the temperature to rise just enough to trigger a spawning response in sea hares. The animals die shortly after spawning, which is why they washed up on Kamala Beach," explained Somkiat Khokiattiwong, director of Phuket Marine Biological Center.

"These animals are not a health hazard to tourists, though the spawning has been known to give the sea a pink tint."

This is not the first time a mass spawning of sea hares has occurred in Thailand. A similar occurrence was recorded in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province in 2009, prior to the coral bleaching outbreak in 2010.

However, the increase in temperature at this point is part of a normal annual cycle that will see the temperature ris-

ing until May, confirmed Dr Somkiat.

"Nonetheless, we are still concerned about the rising temperature, as it is higher due to the effects of El Nino in the Pacific last year, which is impacting Southeast Asia during the hot season," Dr Somkiat said.

Dr Somkiat noted that mass sea hare spawning has also been previously documented by the Philippines and Indonesia.



– Kongleaphy Keam Sea hares on Kamala. Photo: Niruj Kamala

Beware of double taxation

Law & Order
By Robert Virasin

FOR foreign nationals living in Thailand, Thai tax laws and forms are written in a language that they cannot read. While there are Thai accountants who can assist them with Thai tax filings, this issue is not readily solved when individuals have business dealings in multiple countries.

For individuals and companies that operate in multiple countries, double taxation can place them in financial peril. Juridical double taxation is when multiple jurisdictions tax the same income, assets, or financial transactions.

In most countries, a company is taxed at the place where it is registered or has its headquarters and also upon any worldwide income. So, if a Thai company had a branch in a foreign country, the company would possibly have to pay tax on income in that foreign country and on the same income in Thailand. This will mean that they are taxed twice on the same income. Unless there is an agreement between the two countries, this could be a large financial impediment to the Thai company.

In Thailand, there are many methods of avoiding the double taxation. A combination of these various methods can be implemented to provide taxpayers double tax relief, such as the Foreign Tax Credit Exemption Method, or the Deduction Method.

A Foreign Tax Credit is offered by



Various methods can be used to provide double tax relief. Photo: Nick Lee

the income tax system to mitigate the potential for double taxation. The credit can be granted in those systems that taxes residents on income that have been taxed in another jurisdiction. This reduces the amount of domestic taxes due by the amount of the foreign tax as a credit of tax already paid.

Exemption Method usually happens when a country taxes its residents on their domestic-sourced income and provides an exemption to them from domestic taxes on their foreign-sourced income. Jurisdiction to tax rests exclusively with the country of source.

The Deduction Method allows taxpayers in their country of residence to ask for deduction of taxes, which have been paid to a foreign government in

respect of foreign sourced income. The deduction method is different from a Foreign Tax Credit in that a deduction reduces the taxpayer's taxable income, while a credit provides a full credit on the taxes that are owed.

When deciding to enter into international business transactions, it is prudent to consult someone who understands the tax laws in both jurisdictions.

Mitrabhorn Lekbonwonwong is a licensed Thai attorney with an LL.M in Finance and Tax Law from Chulalongkorn University. She is currently obtaining an LL.M Taxation at Northwestern University Law School in Chicago, IL. Robert Virasin is managing director of Virasin & Partners and resides in Bangkok, Thailand and can be reached at info@virasin.com.

Amnesty shares words with Govt on human rights



Amnesty in Thailand met with officials on Monday. Photo: Richard Potts

THE government must not prosecute people who express views it does not agree with or who hold rallies, Amnesty International said after a meeting on Monday with Government Deputy Spokesman Major General Weerachon Sukhonthapatipak.

Chamnan Chanruang, the chairman of Amnesty in Thailand, said the administration defended its actions that restrict people's rights by citing the country's troubled political divide.

"The government insisted that it acts in accordance with [appropriate] standards," Mr Chamnan said. "We did not argue whether it is right or wrong, but we told the government that we carry out our duty to protect human rights."

Gen Weerachon said the government's objective was to seek a sustainable democracy for the country.

"We explained our actions, citing our circumstances and the context of the country," he said. "We want Thais to understand that they do not only have rights and liberties, but they also cannot violate the rights of others."

- *The Nation*

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Less is more for Koh Samui



Property Watch

By Bill Barnett

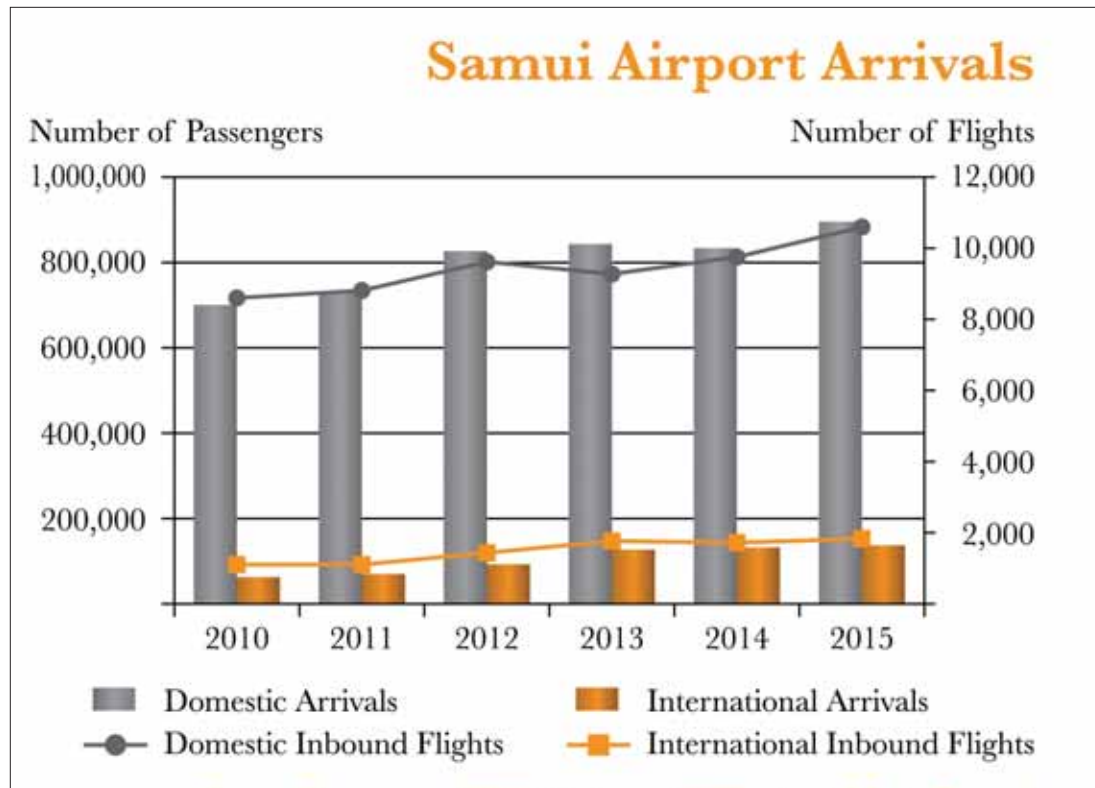
WE LIVE in a world where percentages seem to matter and growth dominates our horizon. I still recall growing up and marking off on a wall in our house how tall I was. I could not wait to be older, and the irony today is how I wish that I could instead roll back the clock.

In Phuket's crowded market, hoteliers are increasingly griping about our high volume and low room rate business. Yet, on the island of Samui in the Gulf of Thailand, owners and operators are for the most part grinning about a sustained increase in room rates.

Without a doubt airlift has a profound impact on tourism fortunes, and a decade-long feeding frenzy by proliferating low-cost carriers (LCCs) has changed our island's landscape forever. Yes, everyone can now fly and fly they do. Even the legacy airlines like Thai International are now under the gun and facing an uncertain future as the low cost disruptors have flown into town.

Last year Samui hit the one million mark for airport passenger arrivals, as Phuket edges closer to six million. The key difference is that while Phuket has a public airport under the Airport Authority of Thailand (AoT), Samui has a private airport effectively controlled by Bangkok Airways. Also Samui has a long term environmental control restriction limiting flights at 36 a day due to noise concerns.

So, airfares to Samui are in



Samui airport arrivals between 2010-2015. Image: Department of Civil Aviation and C9 Hotelworks Market Research

fact more expensive, and there are no LCCs in that market. But last year, the ceiling of flights to Samui increased to 50 a day. Compounding the surge in capacity was Bangkok Airways shifting away from ATR-72 aircraft and using more Airbus A-319s, which kicked in more seats. Passenger arrivals were up seven per cent year-on-year.

But where the key highlight of the Samui hotel market comes into focus is on room rates. Hotels were able to increase rates across the market by 12 per cent, which has a positive domino effect of increasing RevPAR (revenue per available room) by 15 per cent. Phuket, by contrast, has had to rely on volume to drive RevPAR and players in the local market are

worried about whether or not this approach is sustainable for Phuket's hospitality industry in the long term.

Investor sentiment has always favored Phuket which now has close to 40 new hotels in the development pipeline. In Samui the number is 14 with only 1,400 new keys, as properties tend to be smaller in Samui. However, famous international brands such as Ritz-Carlton, Sofitel and Holiday Inn will make up part of the growth.

From our research on Samui, one impact that is apparent is the performance imbalance of branded properties compared to independent ones. In a head-to-head comparison, the brands registered higher average rates by 24 per cent and premium RevPAR's of 28 per cent. Over in Phuket

we have witnessed a spate of new conversions to chain management by existing properties as well.

Moving forward, Samui is not without challenges given a limited road network, stretched infrastructure and a booming China market that is using nearby Surat Thani airport with low-cost carriers as an entry point.

Yet fundamentals in supply and demand remain strong. While in the past the airport limitation was viewed as a weakness, in the end it's been a blessing in disguise for Samui hoteliers.

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

TCC Land set to build new hotels



TCC Land CEO (right) and Deputy CEO (middle) with the vice president of Marriott International. Photo: The Nation

TCC Land Asset World Co, the property arm of beverage tycoon Charoen Sirivadhanabhakdi, plans to invest more than 74.2 billion baht to develop new hotels in Thailand until 2022, CEO Soammapat Traisorat said.

He said TCC Land plans to invest aggressively in hospitality business as it foresees Thailand becoming more of a regional travel hub now that the Asean Economic Community is in effect, especially for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (the MICE market).

Up to 14.2bn will be spent to develop four new hotels to be managed by Marriott International Group, and 60bn for more than 10 hotels nationwide managed by other chains, deputy CEO Wallapa Traisorat said.

Karl Hudson, Marriott International's vice president for Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Japan, said Thailand had a lot of potential for the company's business expansion in Asean. He said Marriott planned to increase the number of rooms in Thailand from 3,500 this year to 6,500 by 2018. – *The Nation*



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Akaryn Group to make overseas debut

THAI hotel chain Akaryn Hotel Group will manage its first overseas property when The President by Akaryn opens in Vientiane, Laos in June.

The hotel will consist of 30 guestrooms, two presidential suites and seven food and beverage outlets. It is being renovated by the Thai firm, Rocklike Company.

"The hotel will be the most luxurious hotel in Vientiane as well as in Laos," said Anchalika Kijkanakorn, founder and managing director of Akaryn.



The President by Akaryn is set to open in June. Photo: The Nation

The average room rate will be US\$500 (18,000 baht) while the presidential suite will cost a minimum of \$1,500

(54,000 baht). The hotel's target market is high end travellers, such as diplomats.

– *The Nation*

Tenants told to go to court

By Kongleaphy Keam

A GROUP of tenants living at The Aspasia Phuket, a luxury resort in Kata, who were hoping to have issues about the property's management ironed out by the governor, have been told to go to court to settle their disputes.

The group of ten expat tenants led by Dutch national Jan Cornelis van Zuilekom were told by Vice Governor Prajiad Aksornthammakul on March 7 that they would have to go through standard legal channels to address their complaints over conditions related to their leasehold contracts.

The contingent had met with Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtida on March 4, asking him to mediate their dispute. Mr Zuilekom complained that he and other tenants had been locked out of their rooms and had their electricity and water cut off.

A legal representative for The Aspasia Phuket, who declined to be named, told the *Gazette* that only two rooms have had water and electricity shut off as a result of breaches in lease agreements. They said that they would consider the governor's request to temporarily turn on the water and power for the two affected



Vice Governor Prajiad Aksornthammakul talks to the press after his meeting with the contingent of tenants. Photo: Kongleaphy Keam

rooms. However, the management had every right to cut off the power and water according to the contract.

Vice Governor Prajiad explained that after Governor Chamroen met with Aspasia Phuket representatives to hear their side of the story, it became clear that the dispute was a matter between private individuals – the lease holders and the management team.

“We want to help mediate as much as we can, but ultimately the court must decide. It is the

fairest solution,” said V/Gov Prajiad.

Mr Zuilekom agreed to wait for a response from Aspasia's legal advisers. He told the governor that he and the other tenants wanted to see how the management company was spending money from their maintenance fees.

“We just want to see the financial report on how the money has been spent, but the management company has refused to show us,” Mr Zuilekom said. “It seems like

the expenses are not transparent. We want to change management companies.”

Aspasia's legal representatives said that their client was acting in accordance with the agreements.

“At this stage, we can only say that this is a contractual dispute relating to the rental agreement. The rental agreements are between our client as the building owner and mostly foreign corporate entities as tenants. These lessees entered into long-term rental agreements.

The documents clearly indicate the status of the lessees as tenants,” the representative said.

“This rental agreement requires that a management fee on a fixed-fee basis is charged to the lessees. For this fee, our client is providing specific defined services. There are no complaints from the lessees when it comes to the quality of the services they receive. However, some of the lessees are insisting on being informed on the details of how our client provides such services and how much they pay in detail for those.”

The legal representative added that the lessees have allegedly requested all payment records, including confidential information, such as staff salaries.

“In the meantime, the lessees making the complaints are still benefiting from the services provided [paid for by other paying lessees] and are refusing to contribute as required in the lease agreements,” the representative said.

Mr Zuilekom, who refers to himself as an owner, expressed confidence in the legal process.

“We bought the place for 90 years – there is a lot of money involved,” he said. “We just want to live there in peace and have transparent management.”

BHMA plans zealous expansion

BESPOKE Hospitality Management Asia (BHMA) plans to sign 20 management contracts per year with hotels domestically and overseas to cash in on the growth of the tourism industry.

Meanwhile, the group will focus more on non-core business including yachts, private cruises, private jets, limousines and spas. Revenue from non-hotel ventures is still small, but is expected to increase to 20 per cent over the next three to four years.

Anthony McDonald, group chief executive officer, said BHMA expected to sign 20 management contracts this year and about the same number over each of the next three years.

Currently, the group operates hotels under four brands, namely X2, X2 Vibe, Away, and Golden Tulip. There are 11 X2 hotels and another 14



Private cruises are one of the non-core business aspects that BHMA is looking to focus on. Photo: Serge Melki

planned, one X2 Vibe and eight planned. The number of Golden Tulips is to double from the current three. Within three years there are to be 44 properties in total, consisting of more than 3,000 rooms.

Some of hotels signing management contracts are abroad, including in Vietnam and Indonesia. The expansion will be mostly in the form of manage-

ment contracts, while some may be joint ventures.

Mr McDonald said the group would expand into Myanmar, Luang Prabang in Laos, and Seam Reap in Cambodia this year to manage hotels there. The group is also looking into opportunities in other regions, such as Europe, the Middle East and Japan.

– *The Nation*

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Address: 110 Chalermphrakiat R.9 Road., Rassada, Muang, Phuket 83000

NATIVE TRANSLATOR WANTED

To assist our Media Manager in translating our media releases. Must be able to communicate well and be social media savvy. Can work from home, native speakers in the following languages required. Japanese, Korean, Chinese, French, Italian, German and Spanish. Must be also able to read and speak English. Kathu. Tel: 095-036 0336 (English). Email: bodymaximiser@gmail.com, <http://maximizer.zone>

ACCOUNTANT (2 POSITIONS)

Urgently needed! Bachelor's degree. Good analytical and interpersonal skills. Proficient in MS office (word, excel and outlook). Fluent in English (written and spoken). Detail oriented, organized, able to work independently and multitask. Office located at Patong. Great opportunity, high salary and benefits will be given to the right candidate. Tel: 076-341045, 081-459 0152 (English). Email: Info@propertyinphuket.com

GRAPHIC DESIGNER WANTED

A graphic designer required to assist our media manager, permanent position available, to start as soon as possible. Kathu. Tel: 095-036 0336 (English). Email: chris.moore@maximizer.zone, <http://maximizer.zone>

TEACHER WANTED

Home schooling, native English, female, Monday-Friday, 9.00-2.00pm, 4 children, 7-9 years old. Salary: 40,000 baht. Tel: 081-343 0777. Email: montha_phuket@yahoo.com

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Please send a short letter of application, Curriculum Vitae, recent photograph by email/fax and telephone contacts of referees to
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Best loved pies under Thai skies

By Baz Daniels

THE Aussie meat pie has an almost iconic status within the Pantheon of Australian idiosyncrasies, right up there with kangaroos (flying and earth-bound) and Pom-bashing.

How endearingly quirky it is then to find the quotidian Aussie meat pie well established here in Phuket, acting as an exotic taste of distant parts for some, while for others providing a comforting echo of home.

The creator of this unique link between pie and Thai is none other than vivacious Susan Usher, Lady Pie herself.

How did this strange alignment of pie in the Siamese sky arise?

In many ways it all happened as a matter of sheer chance, she says. "I grew up on the border between New South Wales and Victoria, where my father worked on the famous Snowie Mountain hydro development in the 1950s. Pies were a standard part of the workers diets and I witnessed how seminal a role they played in the Aussie working man's life

from a young age.

Like so many other Aussies, my husband Harry and I fulfilled a dream by taking off to discover the world from the deck of a sailing boat. When we sailed into Phuket we immediately appreciated its laid-back charms, and so decided to put up here for a while.

We used to hang out at the Chalong Yacht Club and I started making Aussie meat pies for the boys there, which led to pie and beer nights. The pies seemed to gain a sort of fame among the 'grottie-yachtie' crowd, largely by word of mouth, and I started getting more and more requests for them, particularly for events like the Melbourne Cup, or the Aussie Rules Grand Final. I thought, why not give pie-making a real go, and so 12 years ago, in early 2004, I started producing and selling the pies commercially."

Susan's initial foray was dashed asunder by the 2004 tsunami, but she girded her loins and re-opened a new shop and eventually her pie factory in Cherng Talay in December 2005, and from

there has built Thailand's premier pie empire.

Lady Pie's adventures in the heady world of commercial pie production have proved to be an astounding success and her fame began to spread across Thailand and later the region.

Airline pilots based in Hong Kong and Singapore started taking consignments of pies back to base with them to be consumed after Hash House Harrier meets, or during the annual bacchanal of the Hong Rugby Sevens.

Today you will find Lady Pie's produce in 25 Villa Markets country-wide, and comments on Trip Advisor rate her pies as 'better than those back in Aussie' – high praise indeed from such a discerning audience.

The pies today range from the traditional minced beef and onion variety, to chicken and veggie, sausage rolls or the famous pasty cousins that originated in England's Cornish tin mines in the early 18th century. Not content with conquering the world of pies, Susan also produces apple

crumbles, vanilla slices, quiches and even those strange, sweet, Aussie desserts known as Lamingtons.

All of Susan's pies boast signature flaky puff-pastry tops with short crust bottoms, yet never a molecule of trans-fat, colorant, preservative, or MSG will you find despoiling the healthfulness and good taste of her produce.

At the time of writing, Susan is preparing her usual vast consignment of thousands of pies which will be heading off to the Hong Kong Rugby Sevens, and taking orders for Easter hot-crossed buns.

The Life

of Pie is a happy one indeed.

Lady Pie Co Ltd is located at 32 Srisoonthorn Road, Cherng Talay, Phuket.

Tel: 076-271 049

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