

Phuket Gazette

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‘I DON’T WANT TO BE BLAMED FOR MORE DEAD DIVERS’

Move to regulate diving industry

MOTS steps in following spat of deaths, accidents

By Chutharat Plerin

INDEPENDENT diving excursions have been banned in Phuket and Phang Nga following a government move to tighten regulations and increase accountability in the previously self-regulated industry.

The move comes in the wake of a number of dive-related deaths and serious accidents in the region.

“Though the diving industry does have its own regulations, we need to take a greater responsibility in ensuring that divers are safe. The recent accidents have shown that the only responsible government agency is ours,” said Santi Pawai, director of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) Phuket Office. “However, due to a misunderstanding about the roles diving agencies, such as PADI, CMAS and SSI, play in the industry, we did not step in to ensure diving businesses are being run safely.”

Previously, MOTS simply followed the standard procedures for approving diving companies like any other...



Continued on Pages 4-5

Mr Santi hopes the regulations will eventually go national. Photo: Isaac Stone Simonelli

Freak accident on superyacht kills sailor

A SAILOR on the superyacht *Ocean Victory* was fatally injured in a freak accident as the ship was weighing anchor in the Similan Islands archipelago. The man was reportedly caught up in a chain mechanism.

Full story Page 3

BUSINESS



GET with the flow and generate passive income streams, says David Mayes.

PROPERTY



GRACE Kang provides an insight into how Phuket hotels can be sustainable.

LIFE&STYLE



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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

Taxi passengers recovering after fatal car crash

THREE passengers travelling in a taxi that collided with a crane on the bypass road on March 12 are recovering in hospital and expected to be discharged later this week.

Police are still investigating the circumstances of the collision, which resulted in the death of the taxi driver.

The three Chinese passengers, each of them aged 25 years old, were on their way to the airport when the collision occurred.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Guard returns cash to tourist at Jungceylon

A FORGETFUL tourist in Patong was lucky to have a big wad of cash returned to him on March 14 after leaving an envelope containing 350,000 baht at the Jungceylon shopping center.

The cash was found by security guard Madae Mateha.

Ms Madae found the envelope in a shopping cart near the elevator and brought it to the loss prevention office.

The owner of the money wished to remain anonymous, but was overjoyed at being re-

Petition launched against wild animal exploitation



More than 2,900 people have signed a petition by the Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand (WFFT), under the recently launched campaign 'Stop the Killing and Exploitation of Wild Animals for Tourism', in order to get the Prime Minister's backing to put an end to wild animals being used in the tourist trade at popular tourist destinations throughout Thailand. For the full story, visit PhuketGazette.net. Photo: WFFT

united with his cash when he returned to the mall.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

Speedboat taxi idea tabled for Chalong-airport

THE honorary consul to Phuket from Norway proposed on March 9 that a speedboat taxi

service be put in place along the island's east coast, connecting Phuket International Airport with Chalong.

Phuket Vice Governor Prajiad Aksornthammakul noted that initial research done last year revealed that a boat taxi from Chalong to Rassada would not cut travel time, but will look into the use of marine transport for the island's east coast.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

Suspect flees scene of fatal hit-and-run

POLICE are hunting a truck driver who ran over two men on a motorcycle, killing one and critically injuring the other, near the underpass at the Central Festival Phuket intersection in the early morning hours of March 15.

Witnesses told officers that the 18-wheeled truck continued northbound without stopping after colliding with the motorbike.

Neither victim had any form of identification on them.

Police hope CCTV footage will help identify the truck and its driver, as well as the victims.

– *Chutharat Plerin*

Disrobed monk busted while collecting alms

POLICE arrested a disrobed monk for donning sacred attire and collecting alms in Phuket on March 11.

Police were alerted to Somsak Donlakorn, 54, by local abbot Phra Kru Mettapirom.

Mr Somsak was taken to Wat Mongkhon Nimit to be questioned by the abbot.

Mr Somsak left the island for his hometown, but returned to Phuket about three weeks ago to collect alms.

He was taken to Phuket City Police Station and charged with impersonating a monk.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Dengue claims life of Krabi girl

A NINE-YEAR-OLD Krabi girl died from dengue fever on March 12 after being hospitalized for four days.

Krabi Provincial Public Health Office Chief Paisan Kue-Aroon said he was unaware of the case.

Kanyanat Noochaikaew's parents said that she didn't respond to treatment.

The Krabi Provincial Public Health Office will investigate the matter to help with preventative measures in the future.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Four busted for smoking heroin

FOUR men were arrested for smoking heroin in Phuket on March 10.

The men were found in a bamboo shack in Thalang with 40.2 grams of heroin, confirmed Capt Suchart Luecha of the Thalang Police.

After testing positive for drugs, three of the suspects told officers that the drugs belonged to the fourth suspect, Sanong Ngankaeng, 46.

All four men were charged with possession of a Category 1 drug with intent to sell.

– *Chutharat Plerin*

'God of the Sun' prophet goes on violent rampage

A MAN who claimed to be a prophet of the 'God of the Sun' was taken to Vachira Phuket Hospital on March 9 after turning violent at a lottery shop in Phuket Town.

Suktiporn Onsuwan, 45, claimed that the God of the Sun had divulged to him the winning lottery numbers. However, when he went to buy the tickets, the shopkeeper refused to sell them to him.

Mr Suktiporn then became enraged, attacking the shopkeeper and punching nearby motorcyclists as they drove by.

Officers learned from locals that Mr Suktiporn lived in the area and suffers from epilepsy.

– *Winai Sarot*

Acting marine chief welcomed

THE new acting chief of the Phuket Marine Office has been named as Surachai Burapanontachai.

Mr Surachai was transferred from the Samut Songkhram Marine Office where he served as its chief, to fill the position left open by former Phuket Marine Chief Phuripat Theerakulpisut.

Mr Surachai aims to focus on marine safety and jet-ski management.

– *Kongleaphy Keam*

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Estonian's death prompts shooting range safety review

SAFETY regulations at shooting ranges in Phuket are to be tightened following two deaths at ranges in the province in the past 12 months.

In March last year, a 21-year-old British man killed himself at Thalang Shooting Range.

Last week, 38-year-old Estonian Andres Podra turned a gun on himself

at Patong Hill Shooting Range and died from a single shot to the head.

Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada vowed to tighten safety procedures at all four of Phuket's shooting ranges.

"I will meet with all the operators of the shooting ranges on the island to discuss what can be done to improve safety

measures and prevent any incidents like this from happening again," said Governor Chamroen.

The secretary of the Phuket Rifle Shooting Association, Narund Koisomboon said he was ready to discuss safety regulations with the governor and other shooting range operators.

- *Kritsada Mueanhawong*



The Governor vowed to tighten safety regulations. Photo: Kongleaphy Keam

Superyacht crew member killed in anchoring mishap

By Winai Sarot

A CREW member on the superyacht *Ocean Victory* was fatally injured on March 13 in a freak accident as the ship was anchoring off Koh Tachai in the Similan Islands archipelago.

The Bulgarian national was reportedly caught up in a chain mechanism while the 140-meter superyacht was weighing anchor at about 2pm.

The 33-year-old man sustained massive injuries to both his legs, causing severe blood loss.

"He was rushed to Thaplamu Pier in Phang Nga on a small craft dispatched from the superyacht and then transported overland by ambulance to Bangkok Phuket Hospital, where he was pronounced dead on arrival," said Royal Thai Navy Chief Petty Officer Watcharin Promruang of the Third Naval Area Command.

Measuring 459.32 feet in length, the *Ocean Victory*, cur-



The Bulgarian national was a crew member on board the 459.32 foot superyacht *Ocean Victory* owned by politician Viktor Rashnikov and one of the 10 largest superyachts in the world. Photo: Espen Oeino

rently sailing under the flag of Cayman Islands, is one of the 10 largest superyachts in the world. The vessel was launched

in 2014 and is owned by Russian steel magnate and politician, Viktor Rashnikov.

The *Gazette* is withholding

the name of the deceased until it has been confirmed that the victim's relatives have been informed of the incident.

German tourist attacked by motorbike gang



Mr Kiesl was followed back to his hotel. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

POLICE are hunting for a motorbike gang member who attacked a German tourist and a Thai woman in Rawai on March 10.

Siegfried Kiesl, 58, told police that he was crossing the Rawai beachfront road with three friends when a young man racing on a motorbike crashed into him.

The man and a gang of others on motorbikes followed the truck Mr Kiesl was driving back to his hotel.

The woman, who police declined to name, was allegedly kicked and thrown against the truck when trying to speak to the group of motorbike drivers.

- *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

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Charging tourists to keep Mai Khao Beach clean

EXASPERATED officials at Mai Khao Beach are urging the public to help maintain cleanliness in the area. They are even threatening to implement a visitors' fee to contribute toward trash management, if flagrant littering continues.

"We are putting together a plan to collect a fee from the public and use that money to hire staff to collect trash," Sarawut Sisakukam, president of the Mai Khao Administration Organization (*OrBorTor*), told the *Gazette*.

Visitors often come to Mai Khao Beach to take pictures with low airplanes taking off or landing at Phuket International Airport. However, a different sort of picture from the beach was also being shared on social media. The *Gazette* forwarded pictures of trash littering the sands to Mai Khao *OrBorTor*



To avoid fees beachgoers need to stop littering. Photo: Pom Siambud

officials.

"We have already placed rubbish bins at the entrance. Even though there isn't one on the beach, people should have enough common sense not to litter," Mr Sarawut said.

"We have yet to erect 'no littering' signs, but no matter how much effort we make, people still behave irresponsibly."

Rubbish trucks are unable to access the area, as the road leading to the beach is too narrow. Currently, maintenance workers have to empty the bins and carry them to the truck, Mr Sarawut explained.

"If visitors do not want to pay the fee, we strongly urge them to properly dispose of their own trash," Mr Sarawut added.

— *Kongleaphy Keam*

Hope dive

Continued from Page 1

...tour companies, with no special checks on equipment or the quality of the dive boats, Mr Santi explained.

"The first step to creating greater accountability within the industry is banning private diving. It doesn't matter how qualified you are or if you're diving with a buddy; it's necessary for your diving excursion to be linked to a recognized dive business," he said.

Mr Santi explained that responsibility needed to go beyond the individual responsibility each diver shoulders when being certified in the activity. He noted that if a dive accident occurred and the diver was not connected to a dive company, the boat owner would be investigated for possible negligence.

The MOTS has contacted representatives from PADI and CMAS in hopes of using their expertise to help with equipment and boat inspections. Both have reportedly been more than willing to assist the government.

"Diving businesses will still have to obtain the usual tour operator licence, which is valid for two years. However, we will also do an annual

equipment and safety check," Mr Santi noted. "Additionally, there will be pop-up, on-water inspections, where we will check whether or not diving instructors on board are qualified."

On New Year's Eve, patrolling Krabi Marine Police put seven Phuket dive instructors behind bars for illegally working in the province.

"All seven suspects were certified dive instructors with work permits. However, the work permits were for Phuket, not Krabi," Krabi Marine Police Chief Anurak Parinyasathiragul told the *Gazette* at the time. "The boat they were working on, *Aragon*, was taking tourists to dive sites around Phi Phi,

which is in Krabi."

Though Krabi is outside of his jurisdiction, Mr Santi explained that he would be co-ordinating with Phuket Marine Police to run similar investigations.

Also co-ordinating with MOTS and the dive agencies will be the Association of Thailand for Underwater Sports (ATUS), which became actively involved in the Phuket dive industry after 20 instructors were rounded up at Chalong Pier and allegedly extorted in 2014.

"What appears to be the problem is what is written in the dive instructors' work permits. The work is listed as 'diving instructor' and under this definition dive instructors are not allowed to do anything else, not even carry their own dive equipment," a legal representative at the time said.

Now, ATUS is stepping in to help co-ordinate efforts between the MOTS and diving certifying agencies. Two ATUS representatives joined a PADI meeting in Kata on March 8 that reiterated the need for dive professionals to adhere to all safety regulations.

About 50 dive professionals, representing a strong cross section of certification levels and nationalities, were in attendance.

"What we'd like to do is re-emphasize a few points. The reason we have the system and get you to use the system is because the system has been tried, tested and proven – and it works," explained Robert J Scammell, a PADI instructor examiner, at the presentation. "It's there to support you, and the student learns in a nice easy way."

Both Mr Scammell and PADI Regional Manager Andy Auer pointed out that deviations from the rules and regulations not only opened up professionals to criminal charges if something happened on the dive, but also could lead



Once we start enforcing these new regulations, we will do it uniformly. We will not pick on anyone.

— Santi Pawai, director MOTS Phuket Office

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regulations become model

to being expelled from PADI – though that would be the least of the instructors’ worries, they noted.

“People dying while diving is not just a private issue to be dealt with by the company and those involved. It has greater ramifications, effecting the entire reputation of the country. Therefore, we have to help each other solve the problems,” said ATUS President Secretary Ratanaporn Promchoo, who attended the PADI meeting.

“PADI has expressed a determination to motivate their members to put a greater emphasis on diver safety and happiness than on money. This shows that PADI taking the necessary responsibility for what happens in Phuket and the rest of Thailand.”

Ms Ratanaporn confirmed that her office would be looking to work with Dive Supply, as well as PADI and SSI, to help train officers, so that they have a better understanding of the industry.

“Such training will help ensure that we all have the same idea and are able to move forward together,” she said.

A number of widely-used self-regulated guidelines in the industry will now fall within government regulations, confirmed Mr Santi.



There is nothing wrong with goofing around underwater, but following safety regulations established by dive certifying agencies is of utmost importance. Photo: Scott

“There must be at least one dive instructor per boat and at least one tour guide per boat; There must be a maximum ratio of five divers to one professional at any time,” Mr Santi said.

Within the industry, the underlying rule for all certified dive professionals is whether or not the actions were in line with those of a ‘prudent’ professional.

One measure that Mr Santi is considering implementing that goes beyond the current

industry standards revolves around medical check-ups. Currently, dive companies have participants fill out and sign a medical waiver. Only if the participant is flagged for potential health risks, are they required to get signed approval to dive from a medical professional.

“I would like to see all divers have a bill of good health on file with the company they are diving with,” Mr Santi said. “I have gotten a lot of negative feedback about this idea,

mostly with regards to the barriers it raises that might prevent healthy individuals from participating in the activity.”

Nonetheless, Mr Santi explained that ensuring everyone was seen by a doctor prior to diving would increase safety within the industry.

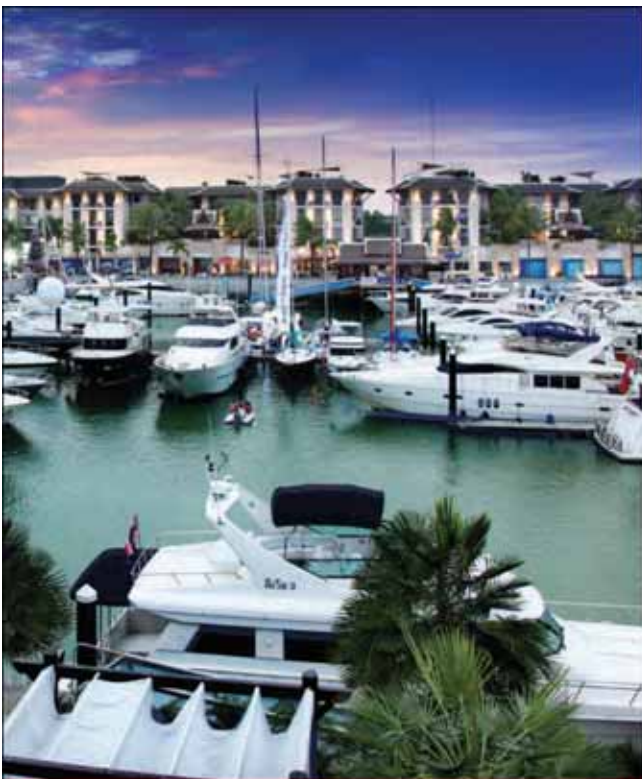
“If it’s too much of an issue to have tourists go to a local doctor to get certified, perhaps dive companies could consider having their own medical staff,” he said.

Mr Santi explained that he hoped the success of his move to ensure diver safety and professionals adhering to regulations would allow Phuket and Phang Nga to become model provinces for the rest of Thailand.

“I will present the plan to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, so it can later be pushed out nationally,” Mr Santi said. “We need to establish a system that will serve us well in the long term. As part of this campaign, we will encourage companies to take better care of our coral reefs and other marine treasures. Failure to do so will result in their licences being revoked.”

Despite Mr Santi’s statement, the operator of a boat that was filmed anchored on fragile coral off Koh Racha Yai on February 16 escaped a hefty fine and possible prison time after apologizing for the incident.

“We want tour operators to take 100 per cent care and responsibility for their guests. I do not want to be blamed for any more divers lost at sea or killed, simply because it is a tourism activity,” Mr Santi said. “Once we start enforcing these new regulations, we will do it uniformly. We will not pick on anyone.”



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FEARS that beach vendors' consistent attempts to retake the beaches will eventually wear down Phuket officials' willingness to enforce the 10 per cent zone and virgin beach regulations is well warranted. Ten years ago, in the March 18-24 edition of the *Gazette*, we documented rental operators reneging on a deal – struck after the tsunami – between their representative organization and the Patong Municipality.

Ruling kingpin at the time, Pian Keesin, who passed away while under investigation for alleged mafia activity in 2014, explained that the agreement had been for a total of 2,300 beach sets, each consisting of an umbrella and two loungers, to be set out in two rows. However, due to the 'unexpectedly large number of tourists coming to Phuket' he agreed to be flexible and allow a third row.

"The government didn't want to have any beach chairs at all. But we proposed 2,300 sets because we thought that the tourists wouldn't come back for at least three years. But they're back in far larger numbers than we expected," explained a beach chair representative at the time.

Nonetheless, Mr Pian slammed

the vendors for the disorderly setup, which was, in fact, blocking some tsunami evacuation routes just a year after thousands were lost to the waves. Clearly, Mr Pian's battle did not end up resulting in orderly beach chairs catering to the needs of tourists. Only a few years ago, the *Gazette* documented thousands of empty beach chairs dominating west coast sands and preventing tourists from setting out blankets as the vendors staked out 'their' territory.

Only time will tell whether or not the National Council for Peace and Order's campaign to 'clean up' Phuket's beaches will stick, or if it too will be worn away by the ever crashing waves of beach operators greed.

The lead story of the issue, however, wasn't beach chair chaos. It was: Fire guts Crocodile – Forensics experts probe cause of B40mn blaze. What leaps to mind faster than a flame to petrol is a much more devastating Patong disco blaze that occurred six years after the Crocodile was ashed. Unlike the Crocodile Disco fire, in which nobody was reported injured, the Tiger Disco inferno claimed four lives. The key difference between the blazes

The gift of hindsight

gutting of Crocodile were clearly not heeded. We can only hope that the deaths of the four people at Tiger Disco has led those in charge of fire regulations at these night-life venues to make real changes, so we are unable to draw new parallels ten years from now.

Now, one industry that is teeing us up for parallel drives into water hazards is the dive industry. Recent diving deaths and serious injuries has led officials to consider what regulations, if any, should be set in place in addition to those already established by PADI, SSI, CMAS and other diving certification agencies. As a preemptive measure – to show the government that there are regulations in place and to push dive professionals to adhere to them – PADI held a seminar last week. Ten years ago though, it wasn't diver safety that had the industry in hot water, it was tax evasion and Thai nominee shareholders.

Phuket's Chief Administrative Officer at the time, Nivit Aroonrat, complained that most of the Thais listed as owners of

the 106 dive companies registered in the province are mere proxies and accused the real owners of denying Thais the right to work in the industry.

Some in the industry welcomed the crackdown, saying, "Dive companies should work harder at being good corporate citizens. There are still some dive shops that employ foreigners without work permits and there are many dive boats that are not up to Western safety standards."

Such concerns remain in the dive industry today – the Russian diving instructor who was maimed along with a fellow national under his care was charged for working without a work permit earlier this year. However, that isn't the government's central concern with the companies at the moment.

Where the dive industry, and Phuket's corals for that matter, will be in a decade is hard to tell. We can only get down on our knees and pray that there is better enforcement of regulations within the industry and better enforcement of laws to protect the coastal marine environment by the government.

It would be nice not to lose the industry's revenue stream to the coral bombies of Myanmar.

– Isaac Stone Simonelli

Deal offered to mafia men who mend ways

DEPUTY Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan has offered to conditionally let off mafia-style figures with 'dark influence' in cases where evidence is weak. However, he warned that they will have to mend their ways.

Hundreds of police and military officers are on the lists of 'dark', influential figures who are being targeted in the government's ongoing crackdown.

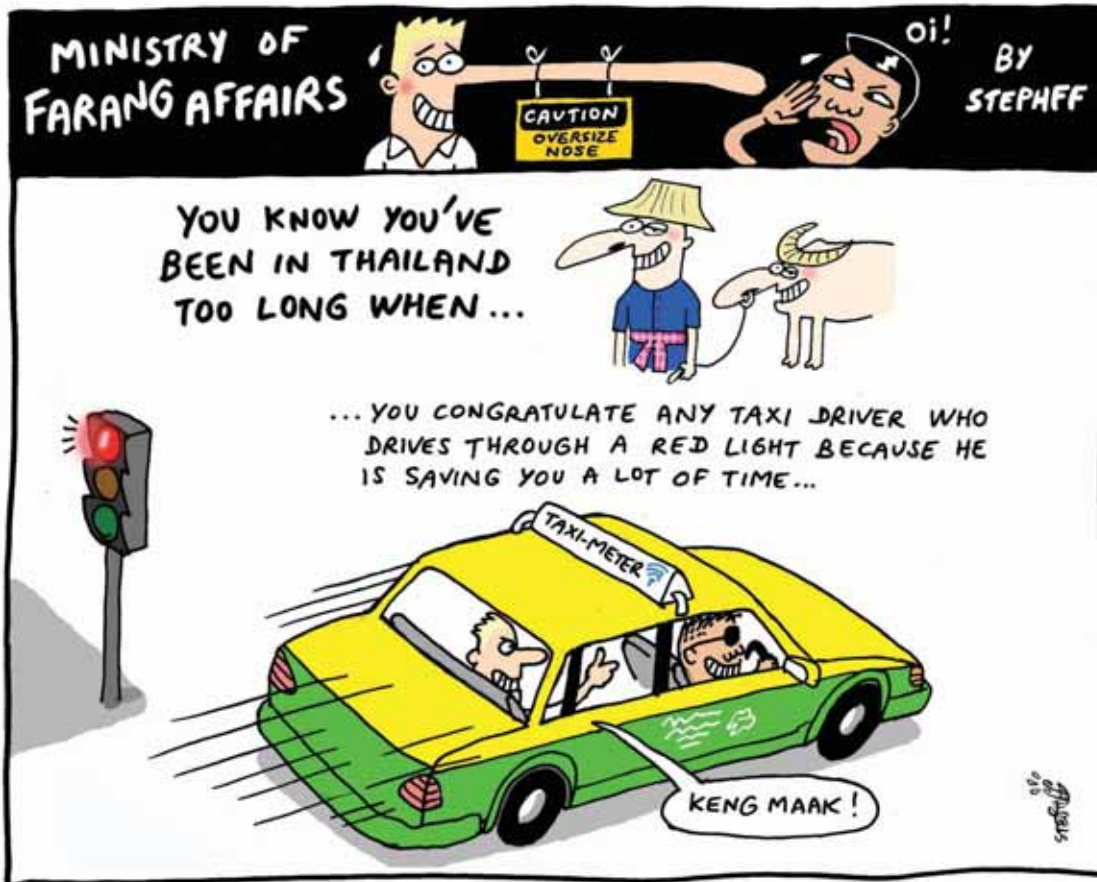
"If there is solid evidence for prosecution, they will face legal action," Gen Prawit, who is also the defence minister, said on March 11.

He said that if the evidence was not good enough, the suspects would be asked to sign an undertaking to desist from illegal activities.

Rohingya kept in squalid cells, says report

IT HAS been 10 months since the crackdown of human traffickers began but many Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar before being caught in Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia are still suffering hardship.

An 18-page report released



by Fortify Rights and the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) on March 11, claims that at least 40 Rohingya refugees are being kept in squalid conditions at the Songkhla Immigration Detention Centre, including a dozen or more boys under the age of 18. All of the children are unaccompanied, the human rights groups said.

Changes in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees's (UNHCR) registration practices in Malaysia

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

have considerably narrowed access to asylum procedures for Rohingya refugees, the report said, leaving many without any documents and at risk of serious security abuses, which could include the very real possibility of indefinite detention.

Prime Minister boosts security after hospital attack in South

THE NATIONAL Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on March 14 condemned the seizure of a Narathiwat hospital and taking of hostages during an attack by suspected insurgents on Sunday night.

In response to the hospital

attack and other violence over the weekend, Prime Minister Gen Prayuth Chan-ocha told the army on March 14 to increase security in the southern provinces.

SCB deaths linked to system for fire suppression

THE death of eight people at the Siam Commercial Bank headquarters in Bangkok on March 13 night is suspected to have been caused by a high-tech fire suppression system that became lethal.

SCB reported to the Stock Exchange that the incident did not involve a fire or explosion, as previously reported. Bank officials cited an initial police probe suggesting negligence on the part of the contractor hired to improve the building's fire protection system.

Woman praised for generosity

A 70-YEAR-OLD woman who has received much praise for donating her land to an education center is happy to lead a simple life in the northeastern province of Sakon Nakhon.

Thongsawan Wongrattana said that she did not want anything in return for donating the 12 rai plot, that is valued at more than 100 million baht.

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Out of the cage

THE online petition by the Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand (WFFT) calling for an end to the illegal use of protected animal species as photo props by touts working in tourist destinations in Thailand deserves the full support of locals, expats and tourists.

Coupled with the demand by zoos and collectors, animal photo touting continues to support a vast illegal industry involved in the capture, import, sale, trade – and eventual disposal – of protected species. It also condemns these young animals to unnatural lives in human captivity, often drugged up and with little or no chance for interaction with members of their own species. All too often, when they reach maturity and are no longer cute or controllable enough to profitably serve as photo props, these animals are forced to spend the rest of their lives locked up in cramped enclosures – that is if they are not executed to save on feeding and cleaning expenses. Then, it is time for the tout to acquire a replacement.

It is time to end this inhumane, greed-driven cycle.

According to the WFFT and its partner groups, the exploitation of protected wild animals in Thailand is at its highest point in the last 20 years. Despite Thailand joining the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1983, the real factors behind this national embarrassment are the country's never-ending tourism boom, poor law enforcement and woefully inadequate legal protection for non-native CITES-listed species.

The key piece of legislation is the Wildlife Reservation and Protection Act of 1992, which divides animals with special conservation status into either a 'protected' (less stringent) or 'reserved' (very stringent) category. Only CITES-listed animals native to Thailand enjoy full CITES protection under Thailand's Criminal Code. Sadly, it is thought that some of the 15 animals that do have 'reserved' status in Thailand are already extinct.

However, animals like chimps and other monkeys or apes that are not native to Thailand are not listed, which means they have no formal protection under Thai law. The only exception is the African Elephant. This is a loophole that needs to be closed as soon as possible in order to better prevent illegal import and smuggling of non-native protected species. Thankfully, legislating is now being drafted to add all CITES-listed animals to the protected list, which is a major step forward.



Licence requirements make a difference

Re: On Deck: Proposing a jet-ski solution, March 10

No problem with privately owned jet-skis, the owners will know how to use them and probably have a licence.

Rental? You need a licence for a car and a bike, and jet-skis are just as dangerous. By law, a licence is required.

Patong Beach is like a war zone – drunken aggressive operators, dangerous jet-skis and parasails. I limit my visits to high tide, when the thug activities are reduced.

It should not be this way!

*Sand Shores
Gazette forum*

Ao Nang OrBorTor knows how to do it

Re: Phuket beach officials plan to charge for trash management, March 10

In Krabi, the Ao Nang OrBorTor has had volunteer cleanups each month – cleaning the beaches and cleaning the community.

This monthly cleanup involves businesses, schools, the housewives association and many others – raising awareness directly in the villages.

*JD Gruen
Gazette forum*

Kamala needs better traffic enforcement

Re: Tighter traffic law enforcement in Phuket for Songkran, March 11

They must have forgotten to

Letters to the Editor

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Email Editor@PhuketGazette.net*

inform the Kamala Police.

The man stationed at the lights plays with his phone while several vehicles go through the red light, motorcyclists that actually stop, sit there a meter away with no helmet and try to avoid others coming around the corner on the wrong side, then have to weave in and out of double and triple parked vehicles.

*Frustrated
Gazette forum*

Care about yourself and other drivers

Re: One dead, three injured in Phuket taxi crash, March 12

Don't endanger correct driving motorists and yourself.

As long as their reckless driving and traffic rules are ignored, motorists will continue to be at risk on the road and there will be continued chaos and traffic jams.

*Drive Safe
Gazette forum*

What about the stalled construction?

Re: B4bn Phuket land seizure not to impact Big Buddha, March 11

What about the ever halted construction sites on the way to Karon Viewpoint?

I remember when they were

running double-paged adverts in the Bangkok Post and huge billboards opposite Tesco, in the location of 'Billions Plaza'.

These half-finished buildings are absolutely ugly.

*Fritz Pinguin
Gazette forum*

Money talks, the rest is just lip service

Re: Phuket road-safety campaign continues after initial success, March 11

Simple problem, simple solution. 2,000 baht on-the-spot fine or chain the bike until paid.

Police it and the problem will go away. Money talks; the rest is just lip service.

Unfortunately this will never happen and people will continue to die needlessly from head injuries sustained from not wearing a helmet.

Even the cheap, crappy helmets do make a small difference.

*Skip
Gazette forum*

Thankful for the courage to speak up

Re: Get tested: Phuket cancer survivor says you could be next, March 12

Thank you for having the courage to speak up about your experience.

Your message is important and it is so critical that all women have regular Paps and breast exams.

*Jessica Lee Hugi Nori
Facebook*

Phuket Gazette

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Putting up with golf prices

FIRST PERSON

GOLF is renowned for being the long-time sport of privileged, rich people around the world.

With Phuket being a world class destination, it is no wonder that the island has some of the greatest courses in the Kingdom.

Although golf fees here are the highest of anywhere in Thailand, it does not really affect us, as we have a very specific target market – privileged millionaires from around the world.

Even so, most golfers who come to Phuket are not too concerned with the price, as it is usually much cheaper than where they are from. It is only the Thai players who find the cost to be too high.

Golf course fees in Thailand, in general, are much cheaper than in other countries in Asia and Europe – particularly in Bangkok, which has the cheapest golf fees in the nation.

During high season – between November and March – a large number of foreigners come to Phuket to play golf, especially from countries with severe winters.

These kinds of tourists do not particularly mind the fees, as they have the purchasing power to pay for them.

Phuket undoubtedly attracts more people with its beautiful beaches, sands and relaxing environment than other holiday destinations like Pattaya,



Terayout Prasertphol is the recently appointed chief of the Phuket Golf Association and former chief of the Phuket Land Transportation Office. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Law from Ramkhamhaeng University and a Master's degree in

Public Administration from the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA).

Here he talks about how Phuket's expensive golf industry thrives with high-end tourists.

Hua Hin or even Samui.

Because of this, other businesses such as hotels, resorts, restaurants as well as other tourist attractions are drawing in more revenue and wealthier visitors.

With a choice of five world-class courses at Red Mountain Golf Club Phuket, Loch Palm Golf Club Phuket, Blue Canyon Country Club, Laguna Phuket Golf Club and Mission Hills Phuket Golf Resort,

high-end tourists can have their pick.

However, Laguna Phuket Golf Club and Mission Hills Phuket Golf Resort are not open for membership, as they belong to resorts and have more specific customers. Therefore, it is not popular for people living in Phuket to play at these courses.

However, in terms of international golf competitions, most events are not held in

Phuket, but instead held in and around Bangkok.

Pattaya and Chonburi have several kinds of international industrial factories, so they too are popular and suitable for competitions.

Chonburi alone has about 20 standard courses, as it's easily accessible to many foreign workers and people in Bangkok.

Although there has been a large influx of Chinese tourists coming into Phuket, there are only a few who play golf. Currently, most golf players in Phuket are from Japan, Korea, Australia and Europe.

Though golf is not a huge sector in Phuket, it still provides a lot of income to the economy due to the high-end tourists who pay to play and stay here.

The golf industry is doing well here and I don't think that Phuket needs to worry about prices or markets – just focusing on the quality of our courses and continuing to offer a unique experience to those who play is enough.



Companies do put people in the sea who can't swim. Photo: Scott Hughes

Freedom to be stupid

Island View

By Alexander Maycock

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

WE ARE all capable of stupidity, for some it is easy, for others – myself included – the stupid starts when the dawn breaks.

Whether it's walking into doors, tripping over cats, sticking the car in reverse instead of drive, none of us intend to do these obviously stupid things – but stupid still happens.

Which makes me wonder why Phuket officials appear to be attempting to outlaw stupid.

Phuket's Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) is threatening to ban private scuba diving, forcing anyone who's into this sport to go through a well-insured tour agent.

Beyond the obvious impossibility of enforcing a private scuba ban, what will happen if someone does get themselves into a stupid situation while committing underwater stupidity while not on a well-insured tour? Will the authorities refuse to rescue them?

Tour companies do, however, put people in the sea who cannot swim (or cannot swim as well as they think they can) thereby enabling stupid. Last year alone at least 16 Chinese tourists drowned while snorkeling, most in tour groups, most of whom should not have even been in the water. This year unfortunately looks likely

to beat that ignominious record.

MOTS is making moves to better regulate Phuket's tour companies, but penalizing the small groups of visitors who enjoy independent adventures because stupidity might occur, further damages the island's already weakened FIT tourism base. Not only does it unfairly penalize small tourism-reliant businesses, such as longtail drivers, local restaurants, bars and guesthouses, it also diminishes officials' capacity to properly administer the rules that need to be enforced.

There is a miserably small number of officials – including just ten volunteers – to enforce the new MOTS rules on tour operators. How can they take care of tens of thousands of tourists, if they are busy running around after a few dozen scuba enthusiasts?

The park officials and the MOTS would serve the island's tourism industry better by focusing on the stupid that can be controlled, not the stupid that has not even happened yet.

Words from the Wise

“Most people treat the present moment as if it were an obstacle that they need to overcome. Since the present moment is life itself, it is an insane way to live.”

– Eckhart Tolle

“We are more often frightened than hurt; and we suffer more from imagination than from reality.”

– Lucius Annaeus Seneca

Issues & Answers

Why are there no rubbish bins on Soi Bangla?

I FREQUENTLY walk down Bangla Road in Patong and find that there is often garbage thrown near electric poles. How can such a world-class tourist destination have this problem? Where are all the rubbish bins?

Patong Mayor Chalermkluk Ketsup replies:

Please understand that it has been a long-standing policy not to have rubbish bins along Soi Bangla. Restaurant and bar owners do not want the bins in



front of their businesses and the smell emanating from them would become very unappealing to visitors.

All tourists and locals are advised to dispose their rubbish just off of Soi Bangla, or to ask a business owner to use their bin.

In regards to the photo, if it was taken after 2am, that's when business owners dispose of their rubbish for the trucks to pick up. However, if the photo was taken before 2am, I will talk about proper waste management with business operators again, in order to prevent tourists and locals from littering.

Thai money now chasing Vietnam's plastic biz

THAI investors are increasingly investing in Vietnam's plastic industry, with many of them keen to fully acquire the government's stakes in state-owned companies.

SCG Group alone has invested in 20 companies. Last year it acquired 80 per cent stakes in Tin Thanh Packing Joint Stock Co.

Tran Viet Anh, chairman and general manager of Nam Thai Son Co and deputy chairman of the HCM City Rubber - Plastic Manufacturers Association, said the country has nearly 3,000 plastics companies, 99.8 per cent of them private.

Lacking the confidence to take on the new rivals, in many cases showing signs of declining production and business capacity, many domestic firms agree to sell out when foreign investors offer high prices for their stakes, he said.

Ho Duc Lam, chairman of the Vietnam Plastics Association, said by increasing investment in the country's plastic industry, Thai firms hope to both exploit the lucrative domestic market and take advantage of free trade agreements that Vietnam has signed.

— *The Nation*

Get passive income streams

Finance

By David Mayes

I AM often contacted by people without massive amounts of cash asking me what they can do to prepare for the future. Early in my career, I tended to take the approach most people in the industry do, which is to focus on the rich and let everyone else know that you are sorry about not being able to help them.

I have written many times that I believe that insurance-based savings plans are rubbish, so I typically advised people on small incomes to set up a separate account and save cash there, or get a discount brokerage and dollar cost average into index exchange traded funds (ETFs).

The problem with this approach, however, is that unless someone can develop a large enough income, saving peanuts year after year will still result in nothing but a bigger bag of peanuts. The real solution to building wealth is to build a large enough income stream. Many people are too afraid to step outside of their comfort zone when it comes to building wealth, but if you manage the risks correctly anybody can end up with multiple streams of income. Of course, if you can build passive

income streams, what you can achieve becomes unlimited.

A good book to start thinking about building income streams is *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* by Robert Kiyosaki, the single best selling personal finance book in the world.

Distressed income property is a good place to start for many people with limited means. When a buyer needs to sell quickly, you can often get a substantial discount in a property's price, which means you can arrange financing with a bank with less capital tied up. You also may be able to arrange financing directly with the seller. Many developed countries will allow foreigners to buy properties with no money down if the price is right, and then you can get your tenants to pay off the mortgage for you. This is just one of the examples of the many different ways Mr Kiyosaki built his own wealth. I would read up on the subject and seek the advice of some people who have actually done it, before taking the plunge yourself.

I love coaching people on starting new small businesses, or helping them develop income streams. It is far more exciting than helping the rich save taxes. I often tell people I am a health and money coach, because to me health is our greatest wealth. If we really want to be wealthy, we need to



Income should be passive; lifestyle should be active. What are you doing to create passive income streams? Photo: Tiago Fernandes

learn how to systematize the way we make a living so we can spend our time with our loved ones and taking care of our health by maintaining a physically active lifestyle. Income should be passive; lifestyle should be active.

There are many ways to build up passive income streams. Some are relatively quick, others are slower. It isn't that it is difficult to do, it is just that most people aren't willing to educate themselves and step outside their comfort zones. If you are, there are endless opportunities to build long lasting

wealth that you can pass on to future generations. The key is to start now. It doesn't matter how small you start, just take some form of action, even if it is simply buying the book mentioned above.

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

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LifeCo: The business of healing

By Katie P Arnold

ONE doesn't have to look far to find a spa in Phuket, but recent years have seen a marked shift in this trend, as new and established businesses are looking to cash in on wellness, as opposed to opulence and luxury.

LifeCo Phuket Well-Being Center, based in the Thalang district, is the company's first center outside of Turkey and its largest yet.

Launched in Phuket in October last year, LifeCo brings ten years of wellness experience to the island. The company offers not only detox for the body, but rejuvenation for the mind, with special mental wellness programs that are geared toward helping with stress, depression and anxiety-related disorders.

LifeCo aims at providing the encouragement and know-how of creating a sustainable, healthy lifestyle, as opposed to a quick-fix weight loss.

"It's a little scary for people to come to a detox retreat," said Anjeza Aksu, LifeCo Phuket's health program manager. "But now detox retreats have changed. It's not just a camp where you go and lock yourself in, it's more relaxing."

Six dietary options have been carefully planned according to the center's programs and will be chosen specifically



Daily yoga classes are offered and scheduled into clients' personalized detox programs. Photo: LifeCo

for each client after an initial evaluation.

"On the first day we get the first measurements – body weight, blood sugar, blood pressure and talk one-on-one with the person to find out what their expectations are," Ms Aksu said. "We try and figure out why they joined the program – whether to lose weight, to feel younger, or if they have a health condition."

On offer are two different juice cleanses aimed at cleaning the digestive tract and promot-

ing a chemically balanced body.

However, also offered is a Green Salad Diet consisting of healthy salads and nuts; a Low Calorie Diet, with 1200 calorie intake per day; the Anti-aging Diet, which combines intermittent fasting with sleep, relaxation and exercise; and the ketogenic diet, geared toward people with chronic disease, which includes 70% healthy plant-based fats, 20-25% protein and the remaining consisting of complex carbs.

Each program consists of an

organic, raw, vegan diet with additional vitamin and enzyme supplements – such as the plant-based protein spirulina.

But it is not just all salad and juices. LifeCo makes detox easy with organic 'pasta' made from zucchini and even vegan, organic lasagna and desserts.

Each meal is especially prepared for individual clients, who have a choice to partake in the program at the 40 room, 20 private villa and 14 luxury room estate, or from the comfort of their own home.

"We provide everything here, so there is no need to find anything outside," said Ms Aksu. "If they are living outside of the center, we pack everything, we write the time they need to eat, we give a copy of their program to them and we are always in contact."

To make the program sustainable, LifeCo offers lectures on supplements and nutrition, provides information through health-related documentaries and offers food workshops, such as how to prepare almond milk smoothies and meals.

However, diet is just one aspect of what LifeCo offers its clients.

Included in clients' personally mapped out program schedules are daily massage therapy, body wraps, as well as time in steam and infrared saunas.

Daily yoga classes are on offer, as well as morning walks, three pools, a trampoline and an inversion table.

Clinically, the retreat includes mineral injections and hormone testing from on staff nurses and doctors, and self-administered colon cleansing.

When walking through the vast, yet intimate complex of LifeCo, it is easy to see what has made the company so successful – integrating relaxation and knowledge while promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Robot concierge to serve Hilton guests

HILTON Worldwide and IBM announced a collaboration to pilot 'Connie' on March 14 – the first Watson-enabled robot concierge in the hospitality industry, tasked to inform guests on local tourist attractions, dining recommendations and hotel features and amenities.

Connie, named for Hilton's founder Conrad Hilton, marks the first time IBM has developed a Watson-enabled robot for the hospitality market. Connie will work side-by-side with Hilton's Team Members to assist with visitor requests, personalize the guest experience and empower travelers with more information to help them plan their trips.

Currently stationed near reception at the Hilton McLean in Virginia, Connie is learning to interact with guests and respond to their questions in a friendly and informative man-



'Connie' marks the first time that IBM has developed a Watson-enabled robot for the hospitality market. Photo: The Nation

ner. Connie uses a combination of Watson APIs, including Dialog, Speech to Text, Text to Speech and Natural Language Classifier, to enable it to greet guests upon arrival and to answer questions about hotel amenities, services and hours of operation. By tapping into WayBlazer's extensive travel domain knowledge powered by

Watson, Connie can also suggest local attractions outside the hotel.

"This project with Hilton and WayBlazer represents an important shift in human-machine interaction, enabled by the embodiment of Watson's cognitive computing," said Rob High, IBM fellow and vice president and chief technology

officer of IBM Watson. "Watson helps Connie understand and respond naturally to the needs and interests of Hilton's guests – which is an experience that's particularly powerful in a hospitality setting, where it can lead to deeper guest engagement."

The more guests interact with Connie, the more it learns, adapts and improves its recommendations. The hotel will also have access to a log of the questions asked and Connie's answers, which can enable improvements to guests' experiences before, during and after their stays.

Connie is powered by Watson, a cognitive computing technology platform that represents a new era in computing where systems understand the world in the way that humans do - through senses, learning and experience.

– The Nation



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Phuket reporters wrap up for chilly Japan trip



Phuket reporters and media professionals pose in front of Osaka Castle.

Developer Sansiri PCL took media reps from Phuket on a 4-day trip to Japan last week (March 9-14), giving them a break from the tropical heat and the chance to wrap up in colorful woollies in temperatures of around 10 degrees. Shopping, sight-seeing and sampling the local delicacies were all part of the itinerary, which included stop offs in Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe. Sansiri is one of the largest real estate developers in Thailand offering a full range of housing units; single-detached houses, semi-detached houses, townhouses, and condominiums. The developer's projects in Phuket include trendy mid-range residential developments, such as The Base, dCondo and The Deck.



Sansiri Superhost: Uthai Uthaisangsuk, senior executive vice president, business development and project development division (condominiums), Sansiri PCL ensured everyone enjoyed the experience.



Sunny but chilly outside a shopping center in Kobe.

Olympic athletes warm up with winter training at Thanyapura

Olympic athletes in winter training for the Rio 2016 Olympics have been taking advantage of the fine weather and top-class sport facilities at Thanyapura Phuket this high season. Asia's leading sports resort, which boasts one of the finest aquatics facilities in the world, hosted a number of the competing international swimming teams between December and February, including the national Czech, Hungarian, Dutch, German, and French teams, as well as the British National Paralympics Swim Team and Canadian National Youth Swimming Team.



The 15-member strong British National Paralympics Swim Team

Events in Paradise

Live at Lighthouse Market while you eat, chill & shop

Live music and movies were among the entertainment on the dockside for the Boat Lagoon Lighthouse Weekend Market, March 4-5. Held every month, the Lighthouse Market offers eating, chilling and shopping for all ages and tastes, including fantastic local and imported food, souvenirs, organic cosmetics, toys, traditional handicrafts and more.



Musicians from Mezzo Forte Music Academy performed at the market.

Handover for Thailand's National Reporter's Day

The Phuket Reporter Club celebrated Thailand's National Reporter's Day on March 5 with a party and ceremony to officially hand over the club's presidency. Former Reporter Club President Boonrat Apiwantanakorn handed over the reins to Janjira Sittabutr at the event held at the White House, Boat Lagoon Phuket.



Former Reporter Club President Boonrat Apiwantanakorn (right) welcomes new club president Janjira Sittabutr.

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F1H2O World Championship got underway in Dubai. Photo: F1H2O

F1 boat race to inject B350mn, slated for island

PHUKET is in the running to host its first Formula 1 Powerboat race in November, which would inject more than 350 million baht into the local economy, said event organizer Lucky Triple T.

The UIM F1H2O World Championship is the flagship international series of single-seater, inshore circuit Formula 1 Powerboat Racing.

“We will do everything we can to help ensure Phuket is able to facilitate their needs, allowing us to start a long-lasting partnership as a host for this incredible event,” said Phuket Vice Governor Prajiad Aksornthammakul. “However, the final call will come down to Lucky Triple T.”

This year, nine teams and 18 drivers from 11 countries will compete at the Grand Prix in Europe, the Middle East and Asia for the coveted world title. The prestigious number 1 plate will be carried by the defending two-time World Champion, Philippe Chiappe, driving for the CTIC China Team.

The Phuket race, which will be part of the UIM F1H2O World Championship circuit, is slated to be the seventh of the nine races this year.

The series kicked off on March 4 with Chiappe grabbing the lead from the start and holding it for the entire 48 laps to win the inaugural Grand Prix of Dubai.

– *Kongleaphy Keam*

Our man in Phuket

By Colin Mackay

OUR MAN IN PHUKET is the autobiography by Alan Cooke, a former British Honorary Consul to Phuket. Alan is a man who has done much for the island. He introduced the Hash House Harriers and British Businessman’s association. He helped build the deepwater port and create the PIMEX Boat Show. As consul, he was instrumental in getting the high tax on leisure craft reduced to zero and, more recently, he built the Alan Cooke Cricket Ground.

His book is a good read, not smothered by the author’s ego, but written in a functional, fast-moving and often amusing way. Alan has lived and worked in many countries including Libya, Ghana, Sumatra, Seychelles, Cyprus, Kuwait, Bahamas, Dubai and Thailand, and regales us with many expat adventures in these exotic destinations.

These adventures are as diverse as Alan himself: leading a convoy of fleeing civilians across the desert during Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait; losing his virginity for a pound to a whore in a taxi that drove round and round Leicester Square; jumping from a plane to find his parachute malfunctioning; being lost in the jungles of Sumatra; swimming to rescue his sinking boat at night during a storm in the Indian Ocean; fleeing an Indonesian mob trying to put him in a looney bin; searching for decomposing corpses underwater in zero visibility; and being awarded a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in Buckingham Palace.

Alan grew up in London during the blitz in World War II, and joined the Royal Engineers at the age of 17. He also became a qualified navy diver



Mr Cooke pens his adventures as an expat in Phuket and many other exotic locations. Photo: Alan Cooke

– in the heavy-brass helmet dive suit era.

On leaving the army in the late 1950s, he realized his only real skill was his ability “to put his head underwater”, so he started his career as an international construction diver, working all over the world as he raised a family.

He finished his career as an underwater concrete specialist, having worked on some mega structures, such as the Dubai Dry Docks, the Channel Tunnel and the Phuket deep water port.

When he retired in 1994, aged 57, Alan move back to Phuket, as he knew more

people here than anywhere else. It was a decision he tells us he has never regretted. He also separated from his wife after “a good marriage” of 38 years.

On Phuket, we hear of his schemes to find himself a bit of decent local totty and why he decided to set up his company Island Furniture and build The Courtyard, Phuket’s first showroom and office complex.

In 2001, he became the British Honorary Consul for Phuket. He tells us about various murderers and the other low-life driftwood of British society that he had to assist during his seven years as consul.

He also describes his role coordinating with the British government’s response to the 2004 tsunami and the 2007 One-Two-Go plane crash at Phuket Airport, which together claimed the lives of more than 150 Brits.

All in all, *Our Man in Phuket* is a straightforward and entertaining read. It’s a short walk down memory lane through a colorful, one may almost say worthy, expat life, and a nice memoir of Phuket round the turn of the millennium. It is published by Kriss Books, a new local expatriate publishing company on Phuket, and is on sale for 800 baht.

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.

The *Phuket Gazette* and PGTV’s ‘Phuket Today’ show, the island’s only nationally broadcast television program (aired daily on True Visions MCOT and all major local cable networks) are proud

to sponsor this event.

April 6. Chakri Memorial Day

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

April 13-15. Songkran Festival

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

The word Songkran literally means

WHAT'S ON in Phuket

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.

Meka Sky Lounge above the rest

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

OUR golf cart weaves through the The Naka Phuket resort estate, going ever higher on the hill as we approach The Meka Sky Lounge. The building is a monolith with clean, modern cement walls rising up toward the vast tropical sky; a guard tower overlooking the enchanting and daringly-designed villa development by Duangrit Bunnag.

On an island where stunning sea views are served up by even some of the mom-and-pop restaurants set up, legally or illegally, along the coastline, The Meka Sky Lounge rises above the rest.

“The Meka Sky Lounge offers extraordinary value given the quality of the cuisine, décor and ambiance. Chef Mark and his team expertly prepare each dish with a great deal of care before it is served to guests with the genuine Thai warmth that last long after the sun sets,” explains Warodom Kanmaen, The Naka food and beverage director.

As evening creeps in with wave after wave of ever darkening blues, the lights of Patong begin to sparkle in the distance, creating a tiny cityscape nestled into the hills. However, it’s not Patong’s glimmer that sells the view of the sky lounge, which is one of best places on the island for an affordable cocktail or bottle of wine, it’s the resort itself. The matchbox-styled villas, unobtrusively molded into the hilly terrain, glow softly in the secluded landscape, appearing to only be lit by candlelight;



Enjoy any number of The Meka’s fusion-style dishes while taking in one of the top views on Phuket. Photo: The Naka Phuket



there has been no view on the island that so perfectly matches the magic of an artist’s rendering of what a resort ‘will look like’.

An entire evening can be swept away in the magic of the setting and a few cocktails. However, the food – no matter how magical a restaurant is, the food matters – is well taken care of by Chef Mark Web.

The appetizer list delves

deep into the fusion world as Chef Mark serves up ‘Laab Tuna and Smoke Salmon Tartar’, playing off the traditional Issan dish with the inclusion of avocado, mixed greens, sesame tuile, cucumber and plenty of Thai spices.

Though the ‘Sweet Mango and Avocado Tower’ salad, ‘Hot and Sour Salmon Soup’ and ‘Chicken Consomme’ with foie gras wonton are all worth

a taste, the main courses rule the roost at The Meka.

For those feeling truly decadent, or perhaps just a couple bottles into the night already, the succulent ‘Pepper Crusted Wagyu Beef Tenderloin’ is not to be missed, as it is served with foie gras medallions, red wine reduction, white truffle risotto and organic vegetables. And if turf isn’t in your flow that evening, settling in with the

rich, creamy ‘Khao Soi Curry’ – a traditional Chiang Mai dish with Udon noodles and rock lobster tempura – might be the right fix.

Then again, if you’re wanting to woo a potential partner, make up for a poorly planned Valentine’s Day or just want to kick back with friends and enjoy the view, you can always contact The Meka and see what the drink specials are.

Juicing in the morning

JUICING is a refreshing way to start the day and will wake you up with a fresh buzz just as much as a morning tea or coffee, and keep the hunger pangs at bay until it’s time that mid-morning snack.

Juicing raw fruits and vegetables is the way to go for the best health benefits.

Here’s an easy recipe to make with Phuket ingredients.

Ingredients:

- Fresh ginger (about 1 inch)
- Fresh galangal (about 1 inch)
- 1 lime
- One or two ripe mangoes to make 1/2 cup of mango juice
- One pineapple to make 1 1/2 cups of fresh pineapple juice
- 2 tablespoons of full-fat



Start juicing. Photo: Lauren Rothman
coconut milk

Directions:

Peel the lime and get rid of the pips. The other ingredients can be chopped and thrown in the juicer in the order listed. Mix all juices together in a glass with the coconut milk.

– Phuket Gazette

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Safety is the most important service



On Deck

By Duncan Worthington

THE hospitality industry is built on the foundations of service. Hotels are more than rooms and restaurants; the guest experience is ultimately determined by the level of service. In my opinion you can have a five-star experience in a three-star hotel, if the service is really excellent.

Phuket's hotels and resorts on the whole spend a lot of time and money on staff training. This is not only to ensure thorough product knowledge, but also so that staff understand the needs of customers.

The customer rules, so we are told, and customers today are not uniform. Cultural differences play a huge part in individual customer expectations and those in the service industry need to understand this, and much more.

Enter from stage right: The marine industry.

If you read the websites, the newspapers and magazines you'll quickly come to the conclusion that Phuket's marine industry is all superyachts, regattas and money, money and money.

However, the average visitor to this spectacular island rarely gets to see that.

Phuket's marine industry – read marine tourism – to the average visitor is speedboats and ferries. That is what most will get to experience at some point during their stay. Over



Most visitors' marine tourism experience in Phuket will not be aboard a luxury superyacht. It will be on a speedboat or ferry, where safety must be made a priority. Photo: Gazette file

Phuket's high season I estimate there are more than 50,000 tourists a month out on the water visiting islands and beaches off Phuket by speedboat alone. Add to that daily ferries to Koh Phi Phi and Krabi, and the numbers could be much more.

This is marine tourism to the average Phuket visitor and the question is, how does the service stack up?

We'll come to safety in a minute. First consider a recent news story describing how a tour speedboat with 63 passen-

gers on board sank near the Similan Islands. A single speedboat carrying 63 passengers – how can there be any level of service there?

While the Tourism Authority of Thailand is talking about quality over quantity again, in reality it's not quite the case, yet.

On the safety front, the former Phuket Marine Chief, Phuripat Theerakulpisut, introduced the rule that all speedboats and ferries must have enough life-jackets on board for the number of passen-

gers carried, and that people had to wear them. This was (and still is) a huge step in the right direction and it can be argued that with the increasingly regular boat accidents and sinkings off Phuket, this life jacket rule is likely to have saved a life or two. However, is this really service, or is it simply a basic requirement of marine tourism?

No need to answer, that's a rhetorical question.

Herding tourists onto speedboats to maximize revenue, with barely basic attention paid

to safety, is simply not good enough, and the same goes for ferries. Meeting the basic legal requirements (and in some cases perhaps not even that) doesn't cut it.

We're 15 years into the 21st century and Phuket authorities are quick to tout the island as a "world-class tourism destination". Well, it's time those words are backed up with more than smiles. It's time Phuket's authorities paid more attention to the safety and service standards of tour operators.

While the "top end" of Phuket's marine tourism is in the spotlight and being showcased around the world right now, more attention needs to be paid to the service standards of the day tour speedboats and ferries, as they currently represent the lion's share of visitor experiences.

Attention by authorities should not be seen as penalizing those in that sector, but as a way to improve service so Phuket can truly hold its head high and with hand on heart claim to be a world-class marine tourism destination in the future.

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

Borneo deemed safe for visiting yachts

GREAT news from Borneo for visiting yachts – North Borneo and East Coast Borneo and Southern Philippines are now considered completely safe and peaceful.

"These areas are now deemed as safe, based on the new JWC insurance underwriter's committee issuing of the updated JWLA 022 bulletin as of Dec. 10, 2015 (superseding JWLA 021)", said Asia Pacific Superyachts Borneo GM, Alvin Teh.

North Borneo / East Coast Borneo and Southern Philippines area are no longer listed as dangerous water perils and special permission by insurance underwriters to operate a vessel in this area is no longer required.

"Vessels no longer need to seek special approval from insurance underwriters to enter, operate and stopover at any port listed in these areas. Also, they no longer have to pay additional and costly premiums for this purpose. This news is also a strong statement in recognizing that these areas are considered safe and peaceful to visit and no longer pose a danger, or are a high risk area, as in the past," reports Alvin Teh.

JWC Insurance is the widely recognized body regulating insurance underwriting rulings for vessels operating around the world. Prior to the positive changes from the underwriter's committee of insurance underwriters, as many as 80 per cent



Add Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park to your cruising destinations list. Photo: Asia Pacific Superyachts

of APS potential clients turned away from Borneo due to restrictions by the insurance underwriters.

The updated bulletin

changes all of that and is well timed as the cruising season starts soon, notes Alvin.

Captains and owners may contact

Alvin Teh at borneo@asia-pacific-superyachts.com for more information of a voyage around North Borneo and the East coast – Asia Pacific Superyachts

Orangutans to marauding ants

We must take necessary steps to protect our precious wildlife



THE recent brouhaha about Phuket Zoo's 'missing' orangutan highlights – as every high profile incident does – Thailand's patchy record with regard to wildlife conservation and care. The facts of Milo's case are all too familiar to naturalists. Suffice to say that when the primate's presence in Phuket Zoo was questioned by animal-rights activist Vicki Kiely, the 13-year-old female orangutan abruptly disappeared before any official and redemptive action could take place. According to the zoo spokesman, she had been released in "the wild" in a non-hunting zone. The next day, police officers discovered her, locked in a tiny cage in the jungle and almost too weak to walk. Happily, Milo is now headed to a sanctuary in Ratcha Buri. Unhappily, the zoo has disclaimed any responsibility.

The case draws attention to the treatment of captive animals held in unnatural conditions everywhere, but especially here in Thailand. Orangutans, critically endangered, have long been a matter for concern in South East Asia, where the recent man-induced bush fires in Sumatra and Borneo destroyed much of the creatures'



Milo was quick to start making friends after she was rescued. Photo: Boonyawat Saelim

habitat, and with it the lives of affected individuals. Add to that poaching and the depletion of rainforest due to monoculture crops such as oil

palm, and the estimated population of 70,000 in the wild is probably far too high. Apart from loss of territory, the principal reason for the

disappearance of wildlife, especially in Asia, is the insatiable demand for their flesh and organs, both as pointless aphrodisiacs and as

exotic additions to restaurant menus. It is a melancholy catalogue: many millions of sharks every year for shark-fin soup, the extirpation of the Sumatran tiger, the massive decline of Thailand's population of pangolins and tokay geckos, all destined for Chinese dinner-tables, or the dwindling numbers of many bird species, from majestic vultures and eagles to dainty baya weaver birds.

Even further down the chain of being, is *apis florum*, the dwarf honey bee. A tiny bee found in Thailand, it constructs a wondrous, single comb oval nest that is literally suspended from a tree branch. Key pollinators and crucial to the region's horticultural industry, these bees need all our TLC. But they rarely get any protection. Either the fragile nests are raided by the predatory weaver ant – as happened recently to the colony in my mango tree - or, if spotted by locals, they are knocked to the ground and the entire colony destroyed – all for the sake of a few ounces of honey.

Nothing, it seems, is either too big or too small for man, the arch-predator, to victimize.

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

Dugong numbers on the rise

THAILAND'S dugong population is growing, with at least 15 more sea cows counted in the Trang Sea, according to an annual aerial survey that concluded on Wednesday.

Twelve pairs of dugong mothers and calves were found – a positive sign that efforts to conserve the last and largest dugong herd in Thailand have made progress.

This year's survey, led by Kongkiat Kittiwattanawong of the Phuket Marine Biological Center, was made up of 10 gyroplane trips – which counted rare marine life including sea turtles, dolphins, whales and dugongs.

"This latest survey was very successful. We found at least 150 dugongs in total, an in-



Dugongs are also known as sea cows. Photo: Wikipedia

crease from the previous year's 135 sea cows. We also found baby dugongs in the area, which indicated the dugongs' better reproduction conditions. The oldest dugong is believed to be about 70 years old," Mr Kongkiat said. "Plus, Trang's 35,000 rai of seagrass appeared to be healthy."

– The Nation

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Is Airbnb part of Phuket hospitality?

Across the Land
By Amy Koh

FOR those not so active in the online community, Airbnb may sound completely alien, and you may well ask what they are selling. According to San Francisco-based Airbnb, it is a trusted community marketplace for people to go online and list, discover, and book unique accommodation around the world, using a computer, mobile phone, or tablet. And, whether you own an apartment, villa, or castle, you can also use Airbnb to rent it out for a night, a week, or any length of time.

The listing of a property is free, although Airbnb takes three per cent commission off every booking from the property owner or host (as defined by Airbnb), and between six and 12 per cent from the guests. The host can then promote their property on the website by uploading as many photographs with detailed descriptions as they wish. The site also allows the potential guests to get to know their host by asking them questions directly online and via Skype. Guests are able to access a calendar of the property to check for availability, as well as rates over the requested periods. A detailed search function includes services such as maids, wireless internet, cable TV, swimming pool and



Airbnb charges commission from both hosts and guests for providing its services. Photo: Kevin Krejci

bed configurations.

Airbnb started out as an alternative for budget travellers, but today boasts 1.5 million listings of rental accommodation in 34,000 cities and 190 countries. Airbnb is currently very popular in Phuket due to high hotel and resort rates, so the accommodation offered by the website is a good alternative to these.

An interesting feature of Airbnb is that guests can offer reviews of the properties that they stayed in and hosts can also offer reviews of the guests, enabling potential guests to

read reviews of the property as well as their hosts before booking. Potential guests get a better understanding of the property from the view of another guest who has stayed there, and the hosts are able to assess if the guests are good clients who will not destroy their property.

Property owners who like to actively rent out their property and meet people enjoy the flexibility that Airbnb provides to do just that. Property owners who do not have the time or ability to rent out their property on their own, or through Airbnb, can enlist the assistance of real estate agents to

source rental clients, and also a management company to assist in managing the property including cleaning, maintenance, and checking in and out clients.

With the growing followers of Airbnb, it is no wonder that the hotels are starting to feel the impact on their bookings. However, properties rented out for less than 30 days in Thailand through Airbnb may actually be in violation of the Hotel Act as a hotel license is required. At the moment it is not clear if Airbnb in Thailand violates any law and until then Airbnb will no doubt continue to thrive.

MBK looks to construct more hotels



Red Mountain Golf Club is one of MBK's eight current properties. Photo: Michael MK Khor

Starting next year, MBK Hotel and Tourism Co plans to take over hotels, both inside and outside Thailand, in order to achieve annual revenue of 2 billion baht by 2020.

"We plan to open three new hotels this year in Phuket, Krabi and Ranong worth up to 230 million baht," deputy managing director Arthorn Vana-santakul said, adding that overseas investments will focus on Asia and Europe, she said.

At present, MBK Hotel and Tourism Co owns eight hotel properties, including Pathumwan Princess Hotel, Dusit Thani Krabi Beach Resort, Tinidee Golf Resort @ Phuket, Loch Palm Golf Club, Phuket and Red Mountain Golf Club, Phuket.

- The Nation

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Trends in sustainable hospitality

Grace Kang provides an insight into how Phuket hotels can be sustainable

By Sahar Aftab Paliwala

GRACE Kang is a managing partner at Greenview, a Singapore-based sustainability advisory company that specializes in tracking and measuring sustainability performance for hotels, convention centers and commercial buildings.

Ms Kang shared some pearls of wisdom on sustainable practices with local industry specialists at the recent American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM) meeting at the Keemala Resort, Phuket.

During her talk on 'Trends in Sustainable Hospitality' Ms Kang discussed the impacts on hoteliers when implementing 'green policies'.

One of the biggest issues, it seems, is the debilitating cost and time required to undertake long-term, cumbersome sustainability initiatives. The *Gazette* caught up with her to discuss some zero-to-low-cost options to enable hotels to implement sustainability in their day-to-day operations.

GREEN TEAM

Having a 'green team' is one of the most important things at any hotel recognized for sustainable practices, Ms



Simply replacing the use of plastic bottles with glass ones makes a positive impact. Photo: www.pexels.com

Kang says.

A small team of volunteers can make up the green team and designate a 'green champion' – a go-to person who will help to co-ordinate efforts between employees and engage others in practicing sustainability.

The team should meet on a regular basis to discuss best practices and track progress on past initiatives. They may also be allocated a small budget for funding sustainability projects. Greenview research also suggests that employees who are proud of their organization's corporate responsibility are more engaged, confident and likely to stay much longer with

the company.

TRIMMING FRILLS

There are several easy and practical ways to preserve resources. One such initiative is having a designated employee making a nightly tour of the premises to ensure no unnecessary lights or thermostats are left on, and that all unused equipment is unplugged; as things left plugged into their sockets still use power.

The employee can also check for other issues such as water leaks on the premises. This doesn't take much time or effort, nor does it add to the

operational costs, but it does go a long way to developing good practices and conserving resources.

Eliminating the use of plastic water bottles in a hotel by replacing them with glass pitchers at conveniently-placed water filling stations is another simple yet effective change that has significant impact in reducing waste and costs.

GUEST ENGAGEMENT

Guest engagement has recently garnered more attention as more travellers make choices about where to stay based on the property's environmental

policies and practices.

A 2014 Nielsen survey suggested that about 64 per cent of Asia Pacific consumers were willing to pay extra for services from companies committed to making a positive social and environmental impact.

Similarly, a 2015 Hotel News Now survey showed that even the choice of destination is impacted by the social and environmental conditions there.

With that in mind there are some simple measures to make a little go a long way. For instance, making towel and linen changes optional can help conserve water and electricity. However, do avoid guilt tripping your guests with ominous messages such as 'Save water because Mother Earth is dying'. Instead, companies would find it much more productive to offer real incentives, such as loyalty points or food and beverage vouchers in exchange.

These are just a few low-cost and hassle-free methods to get started on the right track. There are plenty of other ways to implement better sustainability practices, depending on commitment and investment capability.

Property management firm shrugs off 'military threats'

UNHAPPY foreign tenants will be filing an official letter of complaint with the Department of Special Investigations (DSI) and the Army as they battle a property management company on the island. The move follows the tenants allegedly bringing representatives of the DSI and Army onto the property to 'resolve' the dispute with the company.

"If we were to receive a formal letter from either the DSI or the Army, we would fully comply. The man who claimed to be an officer with the Army said that if we failed to agree to turn the electricity back on in the two units, we would be forced to take a trip to the Royal Thai Army's Region 4 base in Nakhon Sri Thammarat to talk with the commander there," said a legal representa-



V/Gov Prajiad had earlier told the tenants to settle their dispute in court. Photo: Kongleaphy Keam

tive for The Aspasia Phuket, who declined to be named.

"Since the incident, which we have video of, the issue has been handled by one of Phuket's vice governors. So, at this point, we are just following all legal procedures. We have yet to be contacted again by any individuals claiming to represent the Army or DSI."

The legal representative also

confirmed with the DSI head office in Bangkok that no such intervention orders had been given.

The dispute, which is now headed outside of the province for resolution, revolves around an alleged lack of transparency with how the management company is spending the tenants' maintenance fees.

The foreigners, led by Jan Cornelis van Zuilekom, told the *Gazette* that they were preparing to file an official complaint with the Army and the DSI, following the provincial government's request that they proceed with the case through the normal judicial process.

"We understand that we have to wait for the court. However, I believe the military can help us," Mr Zuilekom said.

– Kongleaphy Keam

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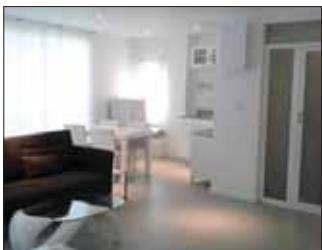
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Knight from the wrong side of the tracks

By Nick Davies

THE last thing on the mind of 14-year-old Nick Faldo, when he was on his knees rummaging around in bushes looking for lost golf balls so he could practice his swing, was to one day be kneeling in front of the Queen of England to receive a knighthood.

Hailing from 'the wrong side of the tracks' in Hertfordshire, England, Sir Nicholas Alexander Faldo MBE was awarded his title for his services to the sport of golf in 1998 after unprecedented success with 40 professional wins, including 30 victories on the European Tour and six Major championships.

Since then, he has become a television pundit on CBS Sports and the BBC for major golf championships, and has even launched his own brand of fine wine bearing the distinctive Faldo shield of six vertical stripes in claret and green that represent his career wins.

The technology of today is helping golfers, and is a far cry from the way Sir Nick began; hitting foraged balls all day, every day in all weathers. Even the freezing snow and rain of Britain's horrid winters were no

deterrent for the determined teenage Faldo, who had to hide his passion for golf through fear of ridicule, but by 15 years old he had made the firm decision to make a career out of golf and began taking on the pros. After leaving school at 16, it wasn't long before he was competing against top golfers such as Jack Nicklaus and Tom Watson.

Since retiring from the championship circuit, Sir Nick has been on a mission to make golf more accessible to the general public, especially to young people. In 1996 he launched the Faldo Series; a not-for-profit organization that offers opportunities to young people through golf and to help identify and nurture the next generation of champions.

The Faldo Series now comprises 40 annual tournaments in 30 countries in Europe, the Middle East, North and South America, and Asia with more than 7,000 young golfers aged 12 to 21 taking part at the last count.

His most recent role as Laguna Golf's Brand Ambassador brought him back to Phuket, recently hosting an exclusive golf weekend at Laguna Phuket, which included a golf clinic and

sunset cocktails on the green of Laguna Golf's 18th hole.

Sir Nick's affiliation with Banyan Tree and Laguna Golf has been instrumental in the growth of golf in Asia, which has seen the sport's popularity and accessibility grow steadily in the region over the past few years.

To achieve a more widespread acceptance of golf, Sir Nick is working with Banyan Tree to design smaller, more family-friendly golf courses, such as 12-hole, nine-hole and par-three courses, which make the sport a more sociable affair, rather than the man of the house disappearing all day to play 18 holes.

Television has also helped bring tournament golf to the masses. There are about 25 million people in United States that are interested in golf but don't know what to do next, and that's the market Sir Nick aims to penetrate with his more accessible and sociable course designs.

Now working with Banyan Tree, the biggest supporter of young golfers in the region, Sir Nick is back to helping other youngsters get into golf at a grassroots level.

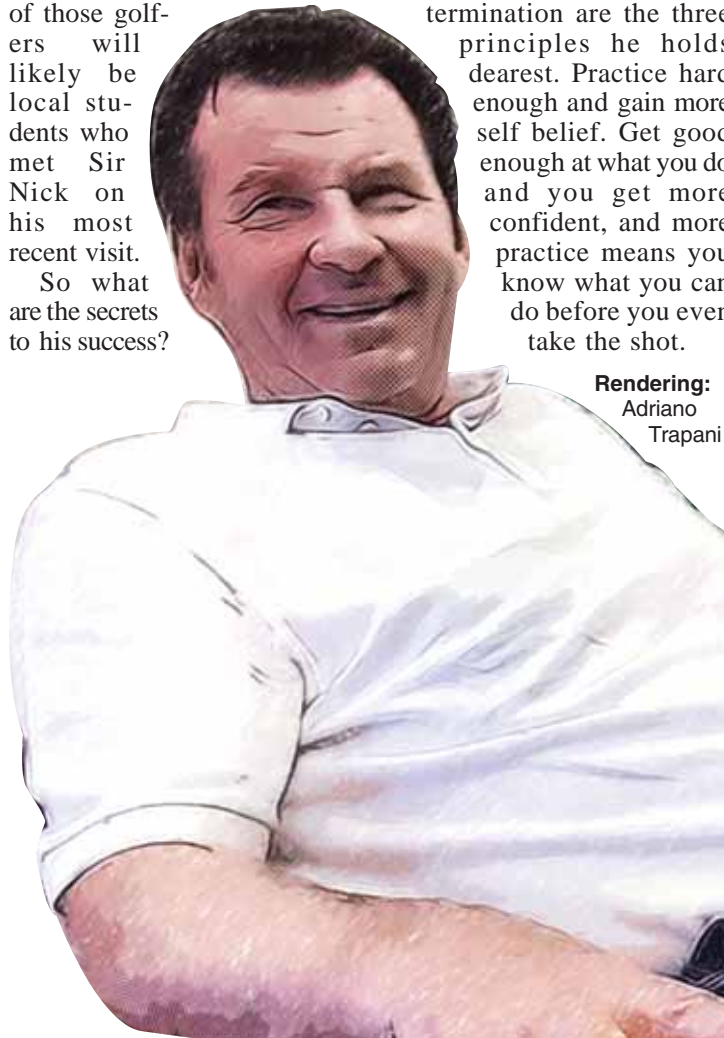
Banyan Tree Phuket is hosting the Faldo Series qualifying

tournaments. Some of those golfers will likely be local students who met Sir Nick on his most recent visit.

So what are the secrets to his success?

Practice, self belief and determination are the three principles he holds dearest. Practice hard enough and gain more self belief. Get good enough at what you do and you get more confident, and more practice means you know what you can do before you even take the shot.

Rendering: Adriano Trapani



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