

Phuket Gazette

January 2 - 8, 2016

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'TOURISTS DON'T CARE ABOUT POLITICS'

Tourism resilience: the mark of 2015

Island adapts to shifting markets, shrugs off smog, terrorist concerns

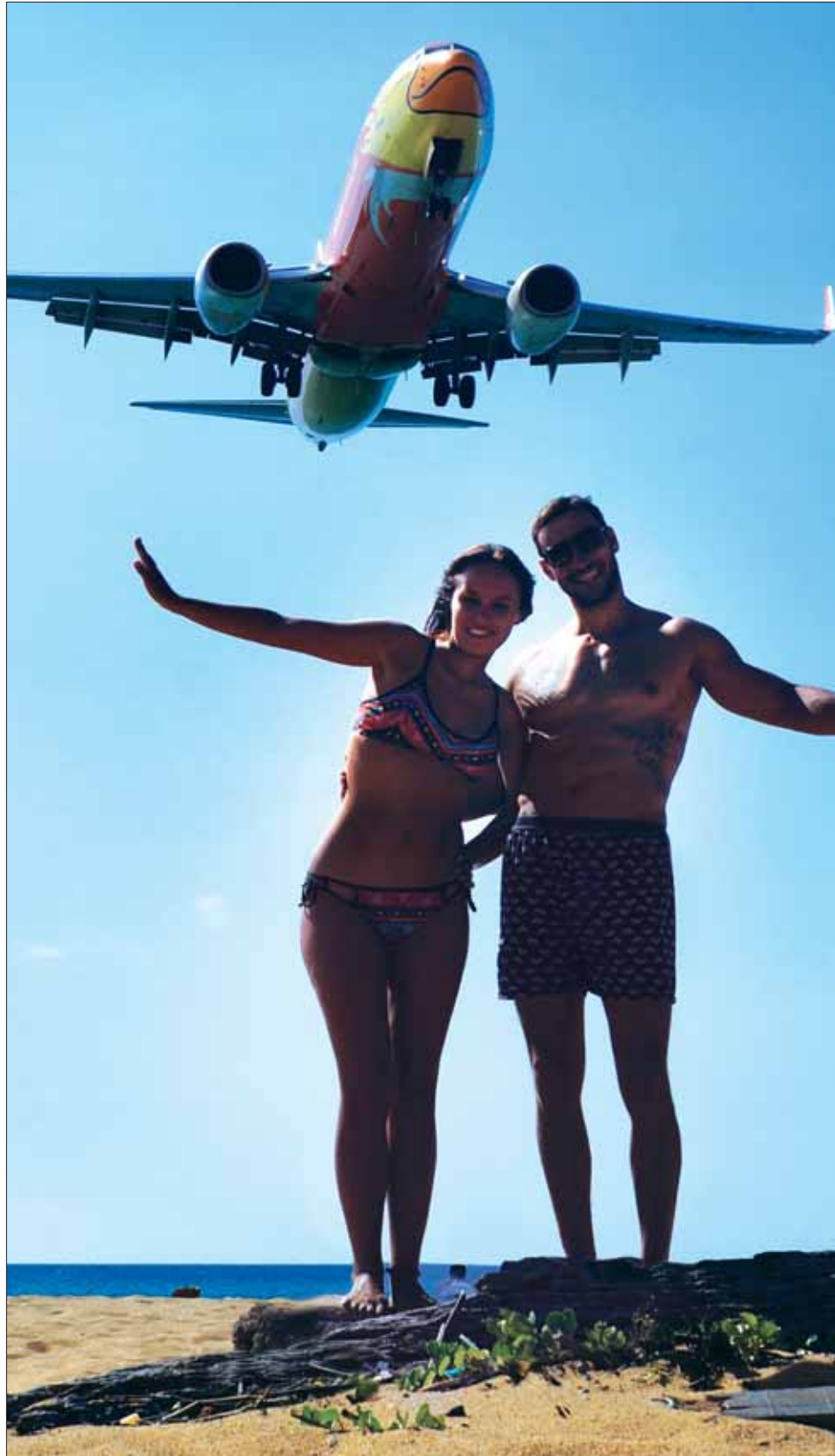
By Somchai Huasaikul

THE year 2015 marked yet another solar orbit during which the Phuket tourism industry continued to change and grow – despite unexpected developments that some feared would herald its death knell.

POLITICS ASIDE

The year 2015 was notable because it was the first full calendar year in modern-Thai history under an unelected, military government – that of Prime Minister Gen Prayuth Chan-o-cha and fellow members of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). The NCPO took power, after years of political unrest, with the solemn promise to...

Continued on Pages 4-5



FIT: Russian tourists pose on Mai Khao Beach as another plane load of tourists prepare to land in Phuket, making 2015 a record-breaking year for arrivals, despite numerous local and national events that were anticipated to ruin the season. Photo: Isaac Stone Simonelli

Angelina Jolie's son injured in jet-ski accident

LOCAL jet-ski operators were quick to confirm that a jet-ski accident that left Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's son injured had nothing to do with their rental vehicles.

However, earlier in the week, two tourists were rushed to hospital after they crash their jet-skis off Patong.

Story on Page 3

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Son of a Pitt: Jet-ski operators say, 'Not us'

By Kongleaphy Keam

PHUKET Marine Office Chief Panya Chaichana confirmed that no changes will be made to jet-ski regulations after two Chinese tourists and the son of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt were injured in two separate jet-ski accidents on the island this week.

"Jet-ski accidents happen, just as road accidents happen," Lt Col Panya said. "We have very strict regulations in place for the jet-ski operators, and in the case of the two Chinese tourists, all regulations were being followed."

"As far as the incident regarding Ms Jolie's son, we believe that it was a privately owned jet-ski, as we have no reports of the accident."

Jet-ski operators, Phuket Marine Police and international hospital staff have been unable to confirm the *US Weekly* report that Ms Jolie's 12-year-old son, Pax, broke his leg while jet-skiing in Phuket.

Though no photos were provided, 'a source' told *US Weekly* that Pax 'is on the mend and hobbling around on crutches'. However, *People.com* reported



Jet-ski operators are on the defensive after reports surfaced that the son of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt was injured in a jet-ski accident on Phuket. Photo: Chrisa Hickey

that their source had confirmed that the 12-year-old had not broken his leg, but had merely injured it.

"I am confident that our members were not involved in an incident where Angelina Jolie's son was injured," said Phuket Jet-Ski Club President

Nucha Petchvimol. "Even if the news is true, I want tourists to be confident that we are taking the very best care of those who are renting jet-skis; we are following all Marine Office regulations."

Chinese tourists Zhao Peuie, 25, and Su Han, 26, were in a

collision about 400 meters off of Patong Beach on December 27 after denying accompaniment with an experienced operator.

Each tourist broke a leg in the incident.

"The pair rented the jet-skis from us. And though they were

inexperienced, they refused to allow one of our team members to join them on the jet-skis," said Mr Nucha. "We made sure that they filled out all of the paperwork, which was available in Chinese. Additionally, the jet-skis were insured, so we did everything required of us by the Phuket Marine Office and the Provincial Government."

"After the collision, we pulled them onto our jet-skis and took them to shore. They were then transported to Patong Hospital," Mr Nucha told the *Gazette*.

Mr Nucha pointed out that the Phuket Marine Office does not require jet-ski operators to demand proof of a captain's licence. However, by law, jet-ski operators are required to have a Thai captain's licence.

Col Panya pointed out that much of the responsibility for ensuring their own safety relies on the tourists themselves, as they must listen to the operators' instructions in order to prevent accidents from occurring.

Additional reporting by Chutharat Plerin.

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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

American killed in single-vehicle motorbike crash

AN AMERICAN died in a single motorbike accident on the coastal road connecting Patong and Karon on December 27.

Jeffrey Earl Patterson, 54, was rushed to Patong Hospital and then transferred to the Vachira Phuket Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Police think that Mr Patterson lost control of his bike and crashed into a metal fence.

Mr Patterson's cause of death was listed as head trauma. Police believe he wasn't wearing a helmet at the time of the accident.

– Winai Sarot

Pakistani expat killed in Kathu motorbike crash

A PAKISTANI expat was killed after he was run over by a six-wheeled truck in Kathu on December 24.

Experts claim 70 per cent of island hotel rooms illegal



The director of the Thai Hotels Association Southern Chapter led a group of affected hoteliers and business owners to Phuket Provincial Hall to file a complaint to Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada on December 29. The complaint claimed that more than 70 per cent of hotel rooms in Phuket are illegal. For the full story, visit PhuketGazette.net. Photo: Isaac Stone Simonelli

Witnesses said that Aamir Hussain, 43, lost control of his bike and crashed, before he was run over.

Mr Hussain was not wearing a helmet at the time of the crash.

Police have yet to charge the truck driver.

– Chutharat Plerin

Officials aim for zero deaths in '7 days of danger'

DEPUTY Prime Minister Gen Prawit Wongsuwan confirmed Phuket's zero road deaths goal for the New Year's 'Seven Days of Danger' campaign.

The increased efforts to prevent dangerous driving is part of a nationwide campaign running from December 29 to January 4.

"We will do everything we can to ensure the safety of motorists," said Lt Col Rungrit Rattanapagdee of the Phuket City Traffic Police.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Hat Yai-Phuket railway project tabled by Gov

PHUKET Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada tabled a project on December 24 that would see the construction of a railway between Hat Yai and Phuket.

The move to promote tourism for the Asean community with the project was prompted by the opening of railway tracks for Hat Yai-Padang Besar, Malaysia, on December 21.

The proposed railway project, for which an esti-

mated budget was not announced, will have stops in Phang Nga, Krabi, Satun and Trang.

– Sukawin Tanthavanich

Nurses' aides busted for illegal checkups

OFFICERS arrested five people for illegally providing medical checkups at the Big C Super Center near Rajabhat University Phuket on December 24.

Officers declined to name the suspects, who had only completed a six-month nursing assistant training course and were not qualified provide medical checkups without a certified doctor on hand.

The suspects were charged for illegally providing a medical service, illegally performing x-rays and conducting medical checkups without the necessary licence.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Body found in Chalong Bay wrongly named

THE body of a drug dealer was found floating in Chalong Bay

on December 25.

Singha Tongyuan, 37, had ditched a pile of drugs and evaded arrest by leaping off the pier into the water the evening before.

Officer's originally reported the suspect as Somkit Pakdeesuvann, 31, as that was the name on the identification card found with the body. However, Mr Singha's parents were able to confirm his identity.

Police are now investigating why the identification card of Mr Somkit was in Mr Singha's possession, along with 5,195 *ya ba* (methamphetamine) pills.

Doctors confirmed the cause of Mr Singha's death as drowning.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Blind man killed by brother at father's funeral

A BLIND masseuse was gunned down by his brother at their father's funeral in Krabi on December 24.

Police arrived to find the body of Thawee Kongrueng, 54 on the ground as his brother, Seree Kongrueng, 47, stood nearby.

Mr Thawee allegedly sold a 30-rai rubber plantation that his brother had been living on and then used a court order to force Mr Seree to vacate the property.

Mr Seree was charged for the murder of his brother and for the illegal possession of a firearm.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Army officer transferred after threatening Lt

LT SOMPHOP Kamkana of the Royal Thai Navy Third Area Command confirmed that the Army colonel who was recorded allegedly threatening him earlier this month has been transferred to Bangkok during the investigation.

Lt Somphop was one of the Navy officers who aided in a gambling den raid that saw more than 40 suspects apprehended in Chalong on December 6. Army officer 'Col Phaek' was then allegedly recorded threatening to transfer Lt Somphop if he refused to let the suspects go.

– Kongleaphy Keam

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Cherng Talay boss takes over Phuket FC after relegation

CHERNG TALAY Administration Organization (*OrBorTor*) President Ma-ann Samran announced his appointment as president of the Phuket Football Club (Phuket FC) on Tuesday.

The announcement follows the resignation of former president Pramookpisitt Achariyachai and other key management members of Phuket FC after the team was relegated to Division 2.

"I had the chance to meet with Mr Pramookpisitt yesterday; we reached an agreement that I would take over the team," Mr Ma-ann said.

Mr Ma-ann aims to use the opportunity to promote sport tourism on the island.

"We fly out to watch major football matches in other provinces. I want to see people flying to Phuket to watch our matches, stay in our hotels,



Mr Ma-ann is excited to promote sport tourism. Photo: Facebook

enjoy the beauty of our island and experience our delicious cuisine," Mr Ma-ann said.

"I have confidence in Phuket. We will appoint a new management team and also hold a competition to decide our new theme and slogan next month, along with a concert to raise funds in February."

The controversial, elected

head of the Cherng Talay *OrBorTor* vowed earlier this month to end his political career with the return of the beaches in his jurisdiction to their natural state.

"If I do something, I do it big and put all of my energy into it. I prefer to do my best or do nothing at all," he said.

- Chutharat Plerin

A Year In

Continued from page 1

... 'restore happiness to the people'.

In a poll released late in the year to coincide with an NCPO announcement of its triumphs, the government said that the goal had been achieved: some 99 per cent of the populace reported themselves as 'happy' to government pollsters.

Earlier this month, Thais and expats alike were sufficiently happy to celebrate annual Constitution Day, albeit without a Constitution. The draft charter drawn up by the NCPO's first appointed charter drafting committee was shot down by the NCPO-appointed National Reform Council in early September.

Soon after the first draft was rejected, veteran Phuket tourism industry analyst Bhuritt Maswongssa, of the Phuket Tourist Association, correctly predicted that the rejection would have no impact on the island's tourism.

"Tourists simply don't care about Thai politics," Mr Bhuritt said. It turns out he was right.

RECORD NUMBERS

Through all the camouflage, khaki and constitution talk, the endless appeal of the Land of Smiles continued unabated - or at least that is what the tourist arrival figures tell us.

As 2015 drew to a close, the Kingdom was preparing to welcome its 29 millionth visitor at Suvarnabhumi Airport, a new record that exceeded the country's official target of 28.8 million visits for the year. A large number of these visitors - roughly a third by official estimates - paid a visit to Phuket. In November alone, the num-

ber of passengers transiting through Phuket International Airport once again surpassed the one million mark. With Phuket hotel occupancy rates in the 90% range for December 2015, total traffic should have easily surpassed 13 million by year's end. This will not only be another record, but also an indication that the opening of the airport's new international terminal, scheduled for a soft opening on February 14, is coming none too soon.

The 5.7-billion-baht airport expansion project is intended to almost double traffic capacity overall, from 6.5 million to 12.5 million. The project, originally scheduled for completion in mid-2015, had to be pushed back due to heavy monsoon rains and other factors that delayed construction. There is already talk of yet another mega-budget airport expansion.

Much of the increase in air-passenger traffic was from domestic flights to the island, which increased almost 20% year-on-year through November. Though most of these flights were from Don Muang and Suvarnabhumi airports in Bangkok, there was also a long-overdue resumption of services linking Phuket and Hat Yai, the two busiest airports in the southern region.

An increase in international traffic of just over 2% was led by a number of new flights to the island from cities in Mainland China, which, for better or worse, continues to flex its muscles as the vast, final frontier among inbound source markets.

DOMESTIC TERROR

For years, analysts had been saying that an international-

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Review: island resilience

style terror attack anywhere in Thailand would be a 'game changer' for tourism.

That fear was realized in 2015.

As the sun was setting on August 17, a bomb exploded at the popular Erawan Shrine in Bangkok, killing 20 people – mostly ethnic Chinese tourists – and leaving scores more injured.

By far the worst incident of international terrorism in Thai history, industry analysts braced for a major downturn in tourist arrivals to Phuket, and Thailand in general. But, as the above numbers indicate, Phuket, and Thai tourism in general, proved to be just as resistant to a terrorist attack as it has been to political turmoil, Indonesian smog, increasing traffic congestion, tsunamis, global economic downturns, international health pandemics, tourist murders, accidental deaths, jet-ski scamming... the list just seems to get longer and longer with each passing year.

Here on the Pearl of the Andaman, fears of a similar terrorist attack came early in December, when the country was put on high alert after a memo was leaked, revealing a Russian warning of possible Islamic State (IS) attacks against Russian interests inside Thailand.

Fortunately, Christmas passed with no further terrorist incidents – except if one chooses to include the endless chain of incidents related to the insurgency in the Deep South, which has claimed the lives of over 6,200 since it flared up in 2006. However, even these figures have had little impact on the overall tourism picture, not only here in Phuket, but also in Hat Yai, the gateway city to the Deep South.



The island's tourism industry is as resilient and persistent as the beach morning glory native to the land.

BOYS IN BROWN

The Royal Thai Police placing increased importance on tourist safety in Phuket was perhaps best reflected by the opening of the new Police Region 8 Headquarters near the Tah Chat Chai Checkpoint in Thalang in August. The shift makes Phuket home to the new regional police headquarters, which was previously based in Surat Thani.

Unfortunately, the need for a greater police presence on the island became abundantly clear to all on the night of October 9. Thai numerologists unanimously agree that 9/9 is an auspicious date, but it was anything but lucky for the Thalang Police that night.

Their station was set upon by an angry mob who burned six vehicles in their parking lot and blockaded Thepkrasattri Road. The alleged catalyst for the riot was two motorcycle-borne local youths dying in a crash with a squad car while trying to avoid a police checkpoint. However, police have maintained that those responsible for the violence, teens

involved in other criminal activity, were merely using the deaths as an excuse to lash out at the police force.

Police eventually made a handful of arrests connected to the attacks. However, the vast majority of the 83 arrest

warrants issued for the case remain unserved. The roadblock of Thepkrasattri was the first since the NCPO took power.

SHARK ATTACK

Another unwelcome first for

the island came on September 1, when pregnant Australian tourist Jane Neame had the unfortunate distinction of becoming the first-ever recorded shark bite victim in the waters off Phuket.

The so-called 'attack' came in the waters off Karon Beach. Ms Neame suffered torn tendons on one foot and was bleeding profusely when she made it to shore. An expert brought in to determine what kind of creature had bitten Ms Neame confirmed from tooth marks and other evidence that the bite must have been that of a juvenile Bull Shark that the unfortunate Aussie accidentally stepped on while in shallow water. Local marine biologists confirmed that it was the first recorded shark bite on a human in local waters.

For more on tourism development issues see page 8.



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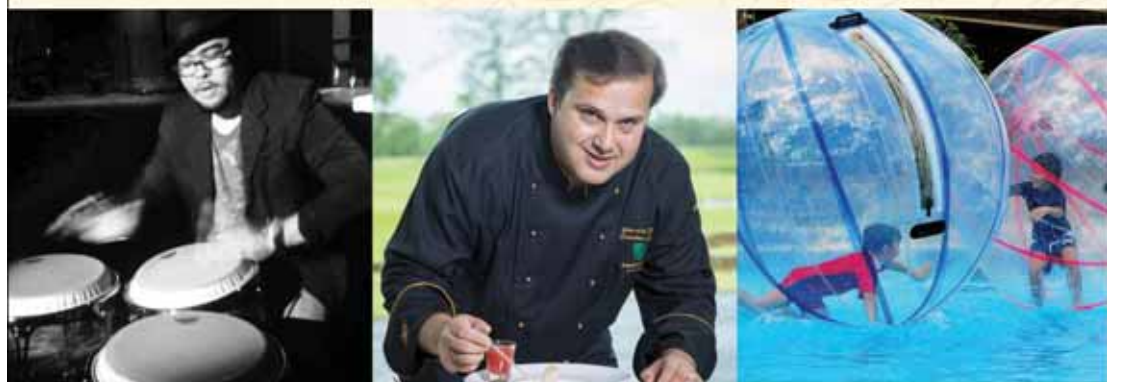
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ON AN island accustomed to horrific, devastating and dumbfoundingly absurd news, the page one lead story that captured the hearts of *Gazette* readers a decade ago was one of recovery and love – who says good news can't sell?

With uncharacteristic typographical enthusiasm (underlined and accompanied by an exclamation mark), the headline in the December 31, 2005 - January 6, 2006 issue of the *Gazette* read, 'SHE SAID YES! Tsunami victim to wed doctor who looked after him'. Though born in the same town in Israel – Ramat Gan – Rom Bombiger didn't meet Dorit Nitzan until she started helping him recover from the trauma of the tsunami at Bangkok Hospital Phuket – one year later he proposed.

Similar to the issue of the *Gazette* you're holding right now, the Dec 31-Jan 6 issue ten years ago paused to reflect on a year past; a year that was fraught with the pains of recovering from the tsunami:

"The news in 2005 was dominated by the tsunami and its

aftermath. The main headline in the first edition of the *Gazette* in January said, 'Relief effort begins'. Businesses nationwide donated goods and services to the giant waves' victims, bringing much needed relief. Meanwhile, the arduous task of identifying the dead began... The government pumped 20 million baht into the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) coffers in order to provide assistance to tourists in the six tsunami-affected provinces... Despite the catastrophe, tentative optimism emerged in early January, with bold government claims of being able to set up a disaster warning center by the end of the month – as well as the TAT's proclamations that it would send teams to Europe, publicizing Phuket's recovery."

Though the promise of the warning system being online within a month fell short of reality by several years, the tourism sector did miraculously recover. As explored in this issue of the *Gazette*, the island's resilience seems to be second to none. Military rule, travel warnings, threats of possible terrorist attacks, shark

The gift of hindsight

bites and other sensational news that would appear to be capable of dealing a crippling blow to the province rolled off its protective bubble like a drop of water on a rain jacket this year.

Surprisingly, in-tune with the future needs of the island, then-Phuket Governor Udomsak Uswarangkura spoke to the *Gazette* about what he would like to see happen in 2006. He called for the island to better coordinate the many facets of development into a single concept in order to propel the province forward.

"There are many separate and different aspects, such as tourism, health tourism, Phuket's marinas and the island's overall development. We need to combine all these concepts and link them so that Phuket becomes a top-class destination and one in which people will invest," he said.

Though officials are still juggling numerous projects as they continue to deal with the province's growing pains, this year has seen a unified push – with strong backing from Bangkok – toward a single image of what Phuket will be as we enter the Asean Economic Com-

munity. The strong focus in the marine tourism sector is expected to deliver fruits to those that have been patiently tending to it, especially now that the government-backed Thailand Yacht Show prepares to set sail in early 2016.

What the editors of the *Gazette* will think of our current predicament with 10 years of hindsight, is hard to say. Of course, if we jump into the *Gazette*'s 'The Time Machine', a backward glance from a decade ago – giving ourselves double-bump back to 2000, we find a headline that seems as if it could have been written any time within the last 20 years: Patong's allure fades as many problems grow unchecked.

And though the concerns are familiar – parking, road safety, flooding and touts – only a few of those expats that can recall in their mind's eye images of the rice paddies and wandering water buffalo that once dominated Patong, will be able to truly recall how drastically different the magnitude of problems being tabled at the turn of the millennium were from those we face today. – Isaac Stone Simonelli

Court sentences Myanmar men to death for Koh Tao killings

A THAI COURT sentenced two migrant workers from Myanmar to death on December 24 after finding them guilty of the 2014 murders of two British tourists on the holiday island of Koh Tao.

The verdict follows an investigation and trial that was mired in controversy, including allegations of police incompetence, mishandling of evidence and torture of the suspects.

Backpackers Hannah Witheridge and David Miller were found dead on a beach in Koh Tao in September 2014.

Following weeks of pressure to solve the case, police arrested Myanmar migrant workers Zaw Lin and Win Zaw Tun, saying the two had confessed to the crimes. Both later retracted their confessions, claiming that their statements had been made under duress.

Mixed response from grieving families of slain British tourists

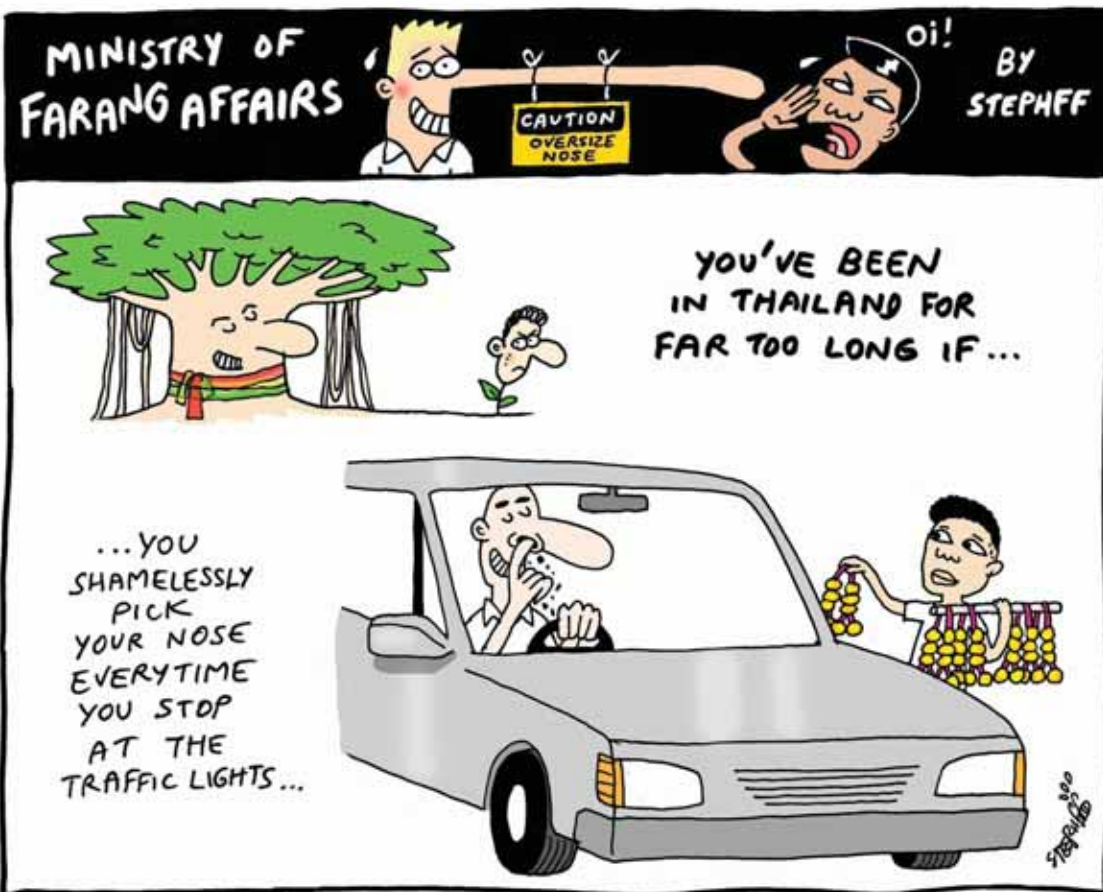
THE families of the Koh Tao murder victims David Miller and Hannah Witheridge reacted differently to the December 24 court ruling in the case.

Mr Miller's family welcomed the death penalty for the two Myanmar migrant workers, who were found guilty of murdering the young British tourists and raping Ms Witheridge in 2014. Ms Witheridge's family said they would focus on their memories of her.

"As the trial concludes and the verdict is delivered, our family, once again, find ourselves in the path of a whirlwind of emotions and difficulties. In these challenging times, we try to concentrate our efforts on remembering our beautiful Hannah for the fun, vibrant and incredible young woman that she was," her family said in a statement.

Ms Witheridge's family, which had attended an earlier part of the trial, did not return to Thailand for the verdict by the Koh Samui Provincial Court.

Mr Miller's brother Michael



said that the family was impressed by the workings of the Thai justice system.

"Over the last few months, we have attended many of the court sittings and we have gained real respect for this court," he said. "The judges have been invariably diligent, attentive, fair and extraordinarily hard-working. This has been a comfort to us."

"We believe what happened [in court] represents justice for Hannah and David. The Royal Thai Police conducted a thorough and methodical investigation... evidence against the two was overwhelming."

Military chief weighs in on murder case

MYANMAR'S military commander-in-chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, on December 27 called for a review of the verdict in the murder of two British backpackers in Koh Tao.

"The commander expressed his respect for Thailand's judicial process, while stressing the need to avoid a situation in which the innocent, rather than the convicted, were wrongly punished," the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar reported.

Gen Min Aung Hlaing also expressed a belief that justice would be assured because of the mutual respect and friendly relations between the two countries, the Myanmar paper reported.

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

Protesters take to streets of Yangon over death sentence

THE governments of Thailand and Myanmar tried to calm the anger and dismay that led to protests outside the Thai Embassy in Yangon on December 25 after a court sentenced Zaw Lin and Win Zaw Tun to death for the brutal murder and rape of Hannah Witheridge, 23, as well as the murder of David Miller, 24, on Koh Tao.

More than 1,000 Yangon residents showed up outside the Royal Thai Embassy from about 10:30am on Christmas Day to protest and voice their dissatisfaction over the verdict.

Ruling against webmaster puts online publishers on high alert

LEADING websites in Thailand reacted quickly on December 24 after the Supreme Court upheld a ruling against a webmaster for failing to remove lese majeste comments posted on her site.

The Supreme Court on December 23 upheld the lower court's sentence of a suspended eight-month jail term and a fine of 20,000 baht against Chiranuch Premchaiporn, the director of Prachatai online newspaper.

This case will have an impact on most online service providers, such as commercial and social media websites, as well as web-boards, because they will have to closely monitor to see if any comments are violating Thai law, especially Article 112.

Licences taken after deadly tour bus crash

THE Land Transport Department on December 23 cancelled bus driver Somporn Bualuang's driving licence and suspended his boss's tour bus licence following the deadly accident in Chiang Mai's Doi Saket district that killed 14 people on December 20.

Mr Somporn faces the charge of reckless driving causing injury and death after he crashed the bus into another car, hit a power pole and veered the bus off of the mountainous road.

Thai-Vietnam MoU on labor to take effect

AN AGREEMENT between Thailand and Vietnam on migrant labor is expected to take effect early next year.

Thailand is also preparing to take workers from Cambodia and Myanmar under memorandums of understanding (MoUs) for the upcoming Asean Economic Community.

"The MoUs will focus on ensuring that migrants come to work in Thailand legally, receive legal protection and stay immune to human trafficking," Labor Minister General Sirichai Dithakul said.



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AEC has arrived

WITH 2015 behind us and the Asean Economic Community (AEC) integration measures now ostensibly in effect, it is time for Phuket and its all-important tourism industry to map out strategies for continued growth in 2016.

The past year certainly tested the island's resilience. But despite Thailand's first major international terror attack in Bangkok, the ongoing insurgency in the Deep South, fears of an Islamic State attack locally, a riot at Thalang Police Station and the international implications of spending a full calendar year under military rule, the tourism industry continued to find ways to grow.

Much of the growth, of course, is attributable to strong demand from the emerging mainland Chinese market.

Mainland Chinese arrival figures to Phuket continued to grow in 2015 despite the bombing of the Erawan Shrine in Bangkok, which was allegedly carried out by terrorists aligned with the Uighur independence movement in western China.

Arrival figures from China were also surprisingly resilient given the fact that the island spent a number of weeks blanketed by a thick smog, courtesy of the reprehensible environmental practices of our AEC brethren Indonesia.

Asked about the smog, a number of Chinese tourists told the *Gazette* it was not that off-putting because it did not differ much from what they were used to back home. That fact noted, imagine how much more enticing the island would be to visiting Chinese tourists with the clear blue skies we are now enjoying.

Like many emerging markets that preceded it, the mainland Chinese sector continues to make the transition from predominantly package-deal tourism to a more mature, free independent tourist (FIT) profile.

To accommodate this, the past year saw a number of new scheduled flights from Chinese cities launched to Phuket and other destinations in Thailand. At the same time, the Chinese inbound market continues to undergo the same growing pains felt by so many other emergent source markets that came before it: a backlash against unregistered foreign guides and a growing number of needless injuries and deaths from road and marine accidents.

Moving forward, Phuket needs to continue to adapt to meet the demands of the Chinese market, while continuing to maintain its appeal to visitors from more traditional source markets. The island's developing cosmopolitan vibe might be its greatest selling point to Chinese tourists.



There are two sides to every mat

Re: Officers seize illegal umbrellas, mats from Phuket beach, December 22

You know, it's odd how I see people complain no matter what.

It is possible that there are two sides.

However, in this case, the government has made it very clear what the law is. They have also been clear that they will put a stop to those who are bullying others (I wish they would shut down the jet-skis as well).

I say good. That is the way to gain respect – do what you say you will do.

Now, if the vendors will respect the government, then the government will allow them to do business in the designated areas. Everyone can win, and I do like how the government continues to encourage dialogue.

Personally, we liked the clear beaches with the chairs up above – I know others disagree and that's okay too.

*William Moynihan
Facebook*

No expense should be too high for safety

Re: Heavy drinking blamed for Brit's fatal tuk-tuk tumble, December 24

The accident follows recent complaints from tuk-tuk drivers that to be legal under Ministry of Transport regulations, all tuk-tuks must have access to the rear cab from the side of the vehicle, not the rear of the vehicle.

A representative of one tuk-

Letters to the Editor

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

tuk co-operative complained that it was too expensive to modify tuk-tuks that were in operation before the regulation was introduced, citing prices as high as 100,000 baht.

*Bjorn Ronningen
Gazette forum*

Motorbike to blame for u-turn accident

Re: Video: Phuket crash victim pummeled by oncoming truck, December 22

Mr Kan appears to be the one who caused this accident – cutting across traffic that close to the u-turn was just asking for trouble.

It appears the truck driver was attempting to stop, given where he came to a halt, and Mr Kan staggered across the lane into him, difficult for the driver to have done much else. At least the truck driver stopped on this occasion.

*Mister Ree
Gazette forum*

The untrained brain is too slow to react

Re: Video: Phuket crash victim pummeled by oncoming truck, December 22

The vehicle will always go where the driver's eyes focus.

If the driver had focused anywhere but the man, he would have steered around him, and probably this would have resulted in a different outcome.

This 'brain freeze' is a typical stress reaction like a deer [sic] in the car headlights. This is why most people get into accidents; all they can think is 'stop', rather than avoid the collision.

The untrained brain is too slow.

*Anon
Gazette forum*

Hoping for the best for asylum seekers

Re: Law and Order: Seeking asylum in Thailand, December 25

Thailand is, for me, very livable and also simple. It gets frustrating sometimes, but I always accept it.

Living in Thailand is great and affordable. I have lived here for many years and am always more comfortable [sic]. Good for them, and I hope they have a happy life here too.

*Alexi Airplane
Facebook*

Encouraging to see so much progress

I am continually impressed by the progress being made at the Bang Kho underpass construction site and their efforts to ease traffic. Kudos!

*Kathy Samuelson
Koh Kaew*

Phuket Gazette

In association with The Nation Multimedia Group PCL

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Volume 23 Issue 1

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Rapid problem resolution

FIRST PERSON

IN PHUKET, there are several different places where you can file a complaint to the Damrongdharma Center. Many people are unaware that Damrongdharma officers actually work in the three district offices, as well as the 19 sub-district offices. However, most complaints are lodged at the main office at Phuket Provincial Hall.

Because of this, many of the complaints are not tended to as quickly as they should. Some take priority over others, while others get passed on to relevant government offices or to the district and subdistrict offices in which the issue is located. In addition, before we are able to take action, the governor must sign off on each case and make sure that the correct officials are involved.

In the event of an arrest, we need to involve the concerned police force. This also takes a lot of time to coordinate, as the police are very busy with their own work.

All of these factors combined slow things down immensely. This process is not the most efficient way to solve residents' issues.

This is why Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada recently launched the 'Rapid Damrongdharma Unit'.

The mobile unit is available 24 hours a day with officers on standby to deal with urgent issues. Additionally, we now have about 20 civil defence volunteers on standby in the event that arrests need to be made.

It is more efficient because now all relevant officers can



Prapan Kanprasang has been the chief of the Damrongdharma Center (ombudsman's office) since 2011. He earned his master's degree in public administration from The National Institute of Development Administration.

Here he addresses how the newly launched 'Rapid Damrongdharma Unit' will help improve efficiency, as well as other ways to make the Damrongdharma Center more effective.

show up in one van. Previously there were times when we would get lost, or some officers would show up before the others and have to re-brief everyone on the situation.

Another improvement in the process is that now, in very urgent situations, we do not need the governor to sign off on the case. We are able to move forward with a verbal confirmation or inform the vice governor in charge.

However, we still need to be careful and give priority to those cases that are more time sensitive. I think, therefore, that in order to make the Damrongdharma Center run as smoothly as possible, we need the district and subdistrict officers to put themselves out there to help decentralize the bulk of the work.

For example, many people have complaints about waste discharge issues in their district. This type of complaint could easily be filed at the district office and solved by the municipality. But for some reason, people feel like they don't get results when they complain locally, so they come and complain at the Provincial Office.

I understand that a lot of this has to do with local government offices' budgets, so they should request more money in order to hire more people and have more resources.

It's not that we don't welcome small complaints at the Provincial Office – we welcome all complaints. But, people must understand that there is a queue. If the complainant files their issue with their district or subdistrict office, and it is solved in a reasonable amount of time, that would give us more room to deal with bigger issues at the provincial level.

The more problems we can solve, the more we can improve Phuket and the lives of those who live here.

We really do appreciate people sending in complaints, reporting illegal activities and being good citizens. We will continue to find ways to solve these issues quickly and appropriately, so that together we can enhance the quality of life on our island.

The Damrongdharma Center and Rapid Unit can be reached at 1567 or 076-213 203.



Is checking your smartphone worth your life? Photo: Lord Jim

'Like' before you drive

HAVING a mobile phone in Thailand has been the norm for about 10 years.

When the phones were first introduced, it was a big deal to be able to call anyone, anytime, anywhere. However, because of this, people were causing more traffic accidents from using their phones while driving.

This is why the government implemented a law prohibiting people from talking on the phone while behind the wheel, unless they were using a hands-free device.

But now, traditional mobile phones have been replaced with smartphones, which for the most part, require you to use your hands for their touchscreen.

The popularization of smartphones has also ushered in 'phubbing'.

Phubbing is when you are snubbing your friends, family or any other person who is trying to converse or spend time with you, by continually checking your phone – though rude, it's not a dangerous habit.

Though I notice people constantly phubbing each other at bars, restaurants and work, what worries me is when people are on the road. Is it worth risking your, or someone else's, life just to see how many 'likes' your Facebook profile picture has?

Recently, I saw a news story that had a video of a bus driver

Island View

By Pruth Kulprasit

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

talking on his phone while 25 other people's lives were in his hands, not to mention the other drivers on the road.

It really made me think about the number of times that I look at my phone while in the car.

Granted, I have a habit of looking at my phone while at a stoplight, but I notice that sometimes when the light is green, I am still looking at my phone, which is unacceptable. I know I'm not alone in doing this, and I'm sure many drivers take it a step further and check their phones while they are actually in motion.

There have been times when I am driving at night that I think that the person in front of me is drunk, because they are driving slowly and swerving. However, when I go to pass them, I can see the light of a phone in their hand.

I would like to thank those who don't look at or use their phones while driving. As for me, I will make it my New Year's resolution to stop this bad habit in order to do my part in helping everyone have a safe and happy 2016.

Words from the Wise

"Novelists have always had complete freedom to pretty much tell their story any way they saw fit. And that's what I'm trying to do."

– *Quentin Tarantino*

"Surprises are foolish things. The pleasure is not enhanced, and the inconvenience is often considerable."

– *Jane Austen*

Issues & Answers

Why are there red-painted lines in the road?

I'VE spotted large patches of Thepkrasattri Road painted red and some places painted with red lines.

I have also noticed this in some areas in Patong and Kathu.

What are they for?

*Sara Jenkins
Phuket Town*

Lt Col Rungrit Rattanapagdee of the Phuket City Traffic Police replies:

Thank you for submitting

your inquiry.

The red paint on the road is called anti-slip paint. It's there to prevent accidents along danger-

ous bends or slippery corners.

The texture of the paint has a high viscosity, which means that it is more resistant to water flow and produces less vibration when cars, trucks or other vehicles drive on it.

The long and short patches use the same kind of paint, but the short lines are used for less dangerous curves, while the longer patches are used for sharp corners or areas that are known to be extra dangerous when wet.

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

Submit your issue at:

www.PhuketGazette.net/IssuesAnswers

Keep calm, and invest on



Finance

By Don Freeman

STOCK market corrections don't come often; but when they do, they tend to come on fast and cause investors (along with the media) to panic. After all, it's not uncommon to experience a double digit portfolio loss in the matter of weeks, or even over the course of just a few trading days.

However, taking the following things into consideration will help you survive a stock market correction.

ASSESS YOUR PORTFOLIO AND YOUR RISK

All investments come with some form of risk but if you have a long term time horizon, you will be able to weather any stock market correction. Nevertheless, you will want to make sure that your portfolio is not over-exposed to any sector or asset class that might be falling more than the market average.

AVOID MAKING HASTY DECISIONS

Stock market corrections, along with crashes and bull markets, are all part of the normal market cycle and there is little that you as an individual investor can do to avoid them – short of exiting the market all together. A well-constructed portfolio that's periodically rebalanced will help you counteract most downturns in the market – meaning you can take a deep breath, sit back and largely do nothing until the market correction is over.



A stock market correction is no reason to panic, but take heed of this advice. Photo: Johan Larsson

IT'S OKAY NOT TO BE FULLY INVESTED ALL THE TIME

Many investors, even professional money managers, wrongly believe that you need to be 'fully invested' at all times to avoid missing out on a bull market, or a sudden market rally. This is simply not true as cash is the best protection against a market correction. Moreover, you need to ensure that you have adequate cash reserves and overall liquidity to take advantage of the profitable opportunities that will inevitably appear during market

corrections when high quality stocks become available at bargain prices.

HAVE A STOCK SHOPPING LIST READY

Except for stock market crashes, market corrections are the next best time to buy high-priced stocks as they come on sale. This means you need to have a ready list of high quality stocks along with acceptable price levels at which to buy them should their share prices fall to, or below, those prices. Right now, my market correction stock

list contains several tech or Internet growth stock names like Alphabet Inc (NASDAQ: GOOGL), salesforce.com, Inc (NYSE: CRM), Palo Alto Networks Inc (NYSE: PANW) and Facebook Inc (NASDAQ: FB) as these types of stocks tend to trade at high P/E ratios in raging bull markets.

KNOW WHEN TO BUY

A stock market correction will not necessarily end overnight in another bull market (as the market may move sideways for a while) and so you do not

want to rush right back in. Instead, let the correction settle a bit while the media continues to sow panic as that will be the best time to start to slowly move back into the market. Moreover, keep an eye on any buying data, or news about institutional investors and their market moves, as they tend to look at market corrections as buying opportunities and are likely to get back in when retail investors are still selling.

LISTEN TO THE MEDIA WITHOUT FOLLOWING THEIR ADVICE

While many financial advisors tell anxious investors to turn off the news during a market correction, a counterargument would be that the more doom and gloom predictions you hear could be a sign of a market that's bottoming. Again, institutional investors who are managing pension funds, endowments and other large pools of money, rather than trading the market, are not basing their investment decisions on what some 'talking head' on CNBC or Bloomberg is saying about the market.

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.



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Asean to gain competitive edge as AEC: poll

ASEAN will be more competitive once the Asean Economic Community (AEC) is a reality, but the results of a region-wide poll show that people remain circumspect about the gains made so far and sceptical about how fast matters can progress on regional integration, given current realities.

According to the survey, which was conducted by *The Straits Times* and covered all 10 Asean nations, businesses will do better, work opportunities will grow and lives will improve. Many respondents expect to travel a lot more in the coming years.

In the poll, few responded with a 'yes' to whether Asean is close to becoming a community.

The Straits Times embarked on this poll on October 20 to gauge sentiment across Asean as

the region nears this historic moment.

"The result of the poll clearly shows that there is general acceptance that working together as 10 countries will yield a better outcome for everyone in Asean," said Ong Keng Yong, Singapore's ambassador-at-large. "Unfortunately, there is still insufficient awareness of how the 10 countries can operate the Asean Community into a regional system which provides benefits for the Asean citizens."

The poll by *The Strait Times*, together with the Asia News Network, elicited a range of responses from citizens of Asean on the formation of the AEC, which came into being on December 31. The poll was hosted online from October 20 to December 9, and 655 people took part in the survey.

– *The Nation*

Get off to an online start



WELCOME to Business Buzz 2016! This year we have moved to a monthly format so that we can cover the topics we want in more depth and provide you with more useful information.

By now you will have made (and hopefully not broken) your new year's resolutions. It is generally a pretty safe assumption that people with an entrepreneurial spirit will have at least one resolution about a more successful 2016.

There is no doubt that one of the main themes this year will be how your social media presence and your website will perform, especially with video and how it will present on mobile devices. Social media is becoming the most important and efficient method of customer lead generation, so it can no longer be avoided if you want to stay competitive.

So, there is no better time to review your social media and online presence and to plan a strategy that will put you ahead of your competitors.

The sooner you start, the quicker you will get results and the less your opportunity



It is important to build an online presence that puts you ahead of competitors. Photo: StockSnap

cost will be.

For most businesses this is the busiest time of year, and therefore it's important to capture the interest of your potential customers. You can outsource this work, which means that it doesn't take up your time, but also that you can get a professional in the area to do it for you. This is normally a time when busi-

nesses have a good cash flow, so you can afford to do it right now, and later when the money may not be flowing as readily, you will be kicking yourself if you did not do it.

The first task is to take a step back and look at your online presence and sales funnel. By this, I mean how do your customers get from see-

ing you in social media, or on your website, to becoming a satisfied, happy customer? How does your branding appear? What message are you sending to your potential customers, and is it in line with what you want? Is it consistent across all platforms? Are your different platforms integrated with each other?

The two most common re-

quirements of a business for its online strategy are customer acquisition and branding.

So the steps needed are common to most:

1. Build a system/sales funnel that works. Create a consistent message and quality brand
2. Drive traffic, both organic and paid
3. Build your database
4. Convert leads to sales
5. Rinse and repeat

Make sure that you are getting the maximum results from people that engage with you. This can easily lead to a 30-40 per cent increase in profitability.

So what are you waiting for?

Go and get that mobile-friendly website, learn how to get killer content that engages people, upgrade your website and create a social media presence that kills the opposition.

And don't forget about video, your future may literally depend on it!

Simon Wetherell is a social media expert and lawyer. He trains businesses and individuals on how to profit from the social media industry. For more information, visit: PhuketOnlineMarketingSchool.com or call 095-085 3355.

IBM launches solution for cognitive businesses

IBM Thailand has launched the computing industry's first consulting practice dedicated to realizing the transformative value of cognitive business. Cognitive computing is defined as the stimulation of human thought processes in a computerized model.



Cognitive business heralds a new era of technology. Image: geralt

The company is now working with retailers and banks to adopt cognitive business solutions on the IBM Watson cloud-based platform.

Pansiree Amatayakul, managing director of IBM Thailand, said there had been transformational progress with the proliferating adoption of the cloud, analytics and social media.

The model offers deeper human engagement, elevated expertise, cognitive products and services, cognitive processes and operations, as well as intelligent exploration and discovery.

"Clients know they are collecting and analyzing more data than ever before, but 80 per cent of all the available data – images, voice, literature, chemical formulas, social expressions – remains out of reach for traditional computing systems. We're scaling expertise to close that gap and help our clients become cognitive banks, retailers, automakers, insurers or healthcare providers," Ms Pansiree said.

– The Nation



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Getting festive with friends

In the spirit of the holiday season, the Gazette was surprised and grateful for the lovely gifts from members of Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort and the Phuket Regional Blood Center on December 21.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS: Netchanok Wongkraphan (2nd right), sales manager of Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort, and Yaowaluk Kitipattapoomikul (1st left), commercial sales specialist, hand New Year's gifts to Natthira Susangrat (1st right), Phuket Gazette GM, and Isaac Stone Simonelli (2nd left), managing editor.



Vathu Oart (1st left), Regional Blood Center PR, and Pornthip Rattajak (center), Phuket Regional Blood Center chief, hand a gift basket to Phuket Gazette GM Natthira Susangrat.

Time to start treating your skin like royalty

Korean cosmetics and skin care merchandiser JSM Korea in Thailand Royal Haven Co Ltd recently opened its doors in Chalong.



BEING BEAUTEOUS: (From L-R) Park Young Suk, owner of Royal Haven Co Ltd; Park Ok Joo, beautician; and Lee Young Ae, beautician.

The great Tu Kab Khao

Tu Kab Khao restaurant held its grand opening on December 12 with the theme 'The Great Gatsby'. In attendance were government officials, Phuket celebrities and local media to help celebrate the momentous occasion.



Kim Phonngarm, owner of Tu Kab Khao restaurant. Photo: Southern Life Style



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Events in Paradise

Amari makes waves

Amari Phuket was awarded the Kuoni Water Champion Award on December 15. The award represents Amari Phuket's efforts toward its Corporate Social Responsibility project, that was organized to uphold the hotel's water management system and reduce water consumption in 2015.



DOING THEIR PART: (From L-R) Michael Lynden-Bell, destination service manager of GTA, a subsidiary of the Kuoni Group; Chonnanan Prakarn, director of Amari Phuket Human Resources; Aran Thongrak, Amari Phuket's manager of engineering; Tipaporn Koonphol, Amari Phuket deputy general manager; and Nicolas Dubrocard, consultant from LightBlue Consulting.

Phuket gets healthy with International Symposium

Bangkok Hospital Phuket, along with eight domestic and international organizations, hosted the 'Second Phuket International Symposium in Colorectal Disease' at the Hilton Phuket Arcadia Resort & Spa on December 6. In attendance were specialists, as well as domestic and international medical professors. An MoU was signed with China-ASEAN Innovative Medical Technology Training Base to develop medical technology related to colorectal cancer operations.



Dr Kongkiat Kespechara, managing director and CEO of Southern Group of Bangkok Dusit Medical Services (PLC), speaks to symposium attendees.



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Menu changes mark new 'season'

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

THE soft sounds of warm hands playing on a baby grand in the bar area of Mom Tri's Villa Royale rise gently above the sound of the waves splashing onto the rocks at the north end of Kata Noi Beach.

It's already high season, so the waves, catching the light of a three-quarter moon, are rolling in small and steady against the empty beach nestled between the rock outcroppings of one of the many stunning shores on the island. Though the atmosphere itself inspires the desire to at least return for a cocktail, the changes in the menu at Mom Tri's Villa Royale are in fact what brings the *Gazette* back to a restaurant we know so well.

Changes in restaurant menus are, for a foodie, like the changing of seasons in temperate zones: they build on the base of a much loved place, offering new smells, feelings and tastes – but remaining, in essence, something we are delightedly familiar with.

For Chef Darren Wiper, who has 20 years' experience working in gourmet restaurants, hotels and cruise ships, the change in the menu for this high season is about giving classic dishes a light twist and focusing on presentation – creating a fresh experience for guests.

"People want change. People come back sometimes a couple times a year for anniversaries, birthdays and other special events: that's why we have daily specials," Chef Wiper says as he presents the Tuna Trio: a beautifully plated selection of seared tuna sashimi, tuna spring roll and



If only the 'Trio of Creme Brulee' wasn't the last threesome of the night. Photo: Mom Tri's Villa Royale PR

tuna tartar.

Without a doubt, the 'daily special' has for time immemorial been the testing grounds for new dishes. It allows for customer feedback to help morph a chefs' creativity into something that is in line with his guests' pallets. Then, once a dish has proven itself, it has the opportunity to join the ranks of numerous classic dishes that have already been well established on the menu and in the hearts of diners.

One such classic that is being plated up this season with some modern flare is the prawn cocktail, which takes advantage of the monstrous fresh-water crustaceans found in Thailand.

Sipping on a well-paired wine, selected by one of the restaurant's sommeliers, it's easy to become lost in the pace of life set by the ocean below. Ebbing in and out of your awareness are the attentive servers, who ensure the meal

flows forward without unnecessary interruption.

Following an exquisite surf appetizer and a cleansing of the palate with cold sorbet, the turf arrives.

Tonight, it's a classic – not something from the new menu, a truly established, rustic dish: slow cooked veal cheek in red wine with porcini mushrooms and herbs. However, one could hardly go wrong with any other signature dish on the menu: Gung

Ravioli (rock lobster ravioli in a fresh herb, morel and white wine cream sauce); Kata Noi Crab Cake (Andaman fish, blue crab and buffalo mozzarella cake, sun-dried tomato aioli, mango and coriander relish); or one of the chef's Thai-menu suggestions, such as lamb *krapao* (marinated grilled Australian lamb chops with a spicy, garlic, Thai hot basil sauce served with green vegetables).

No matter which entree does the lion's share of the work at Mom Tri's Villa Royale, the finishing touches are essential. This particular evening ends with a simple Americano and desert, Trio of Creme Brulee – if only the threesomes carried further into the night.

Of the three flavors – traditional, citrus and Thai basil – it was the sweetness and herbal complexity of the basil contained in the smooth, rich custard that lingers not only on the tongue, but in the mind.

Quietly eating the beautifully enhanced traditional dish, and once again becoming aware of the waves playing on the rocks, it was clear that despite the extraordinary dishes served that night, it was this trio that would be remembered long after deep flavors of the slow-cooked veal cheek dissipated.

And in that lingering moment, one that could be so easily returned to, there's the realization that too often we, expats, forget how easy and cheap it is to bathe in the beauty and atmosphere that brings high-end tourists from around the world to our island; there is nothing wrong with just settling in for dessert.

Mom Tri Villa Royale to host Pro Musica Ensemble

AS PART of the Baan Kata Arts Festival, Mom Tri's Villa Royale will be hosting a performance by the Pro Musica Ensemble on January 18.

The trio of musicians will perform pieces by renowned composers such as Mozart, Beethoven and Bach, featuring solos, duets and group performances.

Comprising violin, viola and flute, the Pro Musica Ensemble is made up of Tasana Nagavajara, Roland Baldini and Worapon Kanweerayothin.

As director of the ensemble, Mr Nagavajara, a graduate of the prestigious Menuhin Academy in Switzerland, is known for his rich and

dynamic performances as one of South-east Asia's leading violinists.

Violist Mr Baldini studied at the Academy of Music in Vienna and Salzburg. Since 1994 he has been the professor of violin and chamber music at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Leipzig, Germany.

Flutist Mr Worapon teaches flute at Silpakorn University and has been a long-time principal flutist for the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra.

Tickets for the event are 500 baht with limited seating available.

Performances will start at 7pm, preceded by a reception at 6pm.

– *Phuket Gazette*



Violist Roland Baldini will be performing at Mom Tri's Villa Royale. Photo: PR

Making new year revolutions fun



MAKING (and often immediately breaking) New Year resolutions is an age-old tradition all over the world. Hope, and its close cousin self-delusion, are abundant at this time of year, as we promise to be better and brighter versions of ourselves. In Thailand, you get not just one, but three clear chances to make, and then try to keep, your resolutions, as we munificently celebrate three separate New Years – Gregorian, Chinese and Thai.

As we enter the New Year, it's time to take stock and set goals for the future.

It has been a mixed year, with the recent outpouring of support for 'Bike for Mom' and 'Bike for Dad' events tapping into a rich and growing vein of enthusiasm for the sport. Sadly, the raft of well-publicized ac-



Research shows that cycling with others improves your performance.

cidents, deaths and injuries to cyclists, often the result of dangerous and/or inebriated driving, have continued to shock us all. To remedy this, the government needs to develop and fund a well-planned program of cycling infrastructure, particularly a network of cycleways that are separated

from general traffic.

For us Lycra Louts in Phuket, here are five simple resolutions to help you get fitter and increase your cycling enjoyment.

1) Cycle on at least three occasions for a total of 75 plus kilometers each week.

2) Cycle with a group of

other enthusiasts, some of whom are better and stronger than you. Research shows that athletic performance improves through association and imitation of those who are better than we are.

3) Cycle before breakfast at least twice each week. This will make you go to bed earlier the

night before. Soon you'll find that you want to be outside, enjoying Phuket's gorgeous sunrises and experiencing the best part of the day.

4) Set a specific cycling objective for the future and publish it to all your friends and family. "I will cycle my age in kilometers in one hour on my next birthday" is a good example. Tailor your own personal commitment to be a challenging, but attainable, goal that can be met with perseverance.

5) Book a challenging cycling holiday or event, such as cycling from Bangkok to Phuket with Martin Brot's Siam Bike Tours. Give yourself plenty of time to train so you can not only complete, but enjoy the ride.

Resolutions like these will make your 2016 pedaling revolutions not only abundant, but also fun. Happy New Year and stay safe!

Four days, three countries



The group visited many historic sites during the tour. Photo: The Nation

LOW-COST airline Nok Air organized its last bike trip of the year, taking a group of some 80 travellers on a tour that stretched over Thailand's borders into Myanmar and Laos.

The journey was entertaining and scenic, as participants visited various historic sites on the way.

Passing the Thai-Myanmar Border Gate into Tachilek, the participants cycled 3.5 kilometers to the Shwedagon Pagoda and Rakang Temple, paid their respects there, and then visited the market before cycling back into Thailand.

Part of their journey took the group from Mae Sai to Chiang Saen, a distance of 30 kilometers, where they stopped at the Golden Triangle viewpoint and looked out over fields once planted with opium poppies. The group then paid its respects to Phra Buddha Nawa Lan Tue,

a massive bronze Buddha image that weighs about 69 tons and measures 9.99 meters in width and 15.99 meters in height.

Participants were treated to traditional lunches and dinners; entertained by traditional Isaan performances of 'mor lam' and 'mor khaen'; witnessed a weaving demonstration; and visited plantations growing passion fruit and Inca peanuts.

They also visited a Luellaikham textile and fabric museum in Chiang Khong.

Loading their bikes on long-tailed boats and crossing the river to Laos, they pedaled to Fort Carnot, which was built by the French at the beginning of the last century.

Bad weather forced the group to abandon the journey earlier than planned, but the initiative by Nok Air was entertaining and well-received by everyone. – The Nation

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Bangkok for the holidays raises

By Anand Singh

PEOPLE who live in Bangkok are probably familiar with the Victory Monument. For those visiting, there is a good chance you may have spent some time stuck in traffic in this famous traffic circle, which is equally infamous for its traffic jams.

One of Bangkok's iconic landmarks, the Victory Monument is located at the intersection of Phahonyothin Road, Phaya Thai Road and Ratchawithi Road.

The design of the monument is strange at first sight. It looks like an Egyptian obelisk, pointing sharply into the sky. But it was actually designed to look like five bayonets clasped together, as a symbol of military victory. Four military figures, representing the army, navy, air force and police, guard the four sides of the monument.

Most Bangkok residents know the monument well. They know to avoid it because of the horrendous traffic in the roundabout. BTS sky train passengers traveling towards Mo Chit will see a clear view of the monument as their sky train approaches the BTS station named after it. Victory Monument – everyone knows its name, but few know the victory it commemorates.

To understand why the Vic-



Four military figures guard the four sides of the monument. Photo: Sayompoo Setabrahmana

tority Monument was built requires a bit of background history. During the reign of King Rama V, toward the end of the 19th century, Thailand, then known as Siam, was severely threatened by French colonial ambitions in Indo-China. The French had already annexed Vietnam and large parts of Cambodia.

In the year 1892, the French

demanding that Laos, a region west of the Mekong River then under Siamese territory, be handed over to French control. They sent an envoy to the Siamese court in order to negotiate the handover. The Siamese, believing that the British would help them in resisting French colonial ambitions, refused to cede Laos to the French.

Tension continued to rise and skirmishes between Siamese and French troops on the Laotian border escalated the conflict further. On June 5, 1893, Siamese troops ambushed a Vietnamese militia commanded by French Inspector Groscurin, who at the time was confined to his sick bed in Kien Ket village. The ambush resulted in the razing of Kien

Ket village, the killing of Groscurin and the death of 17 Vietnamese soldiers.

The death of Groscurin further soured Franco-Siamese relations to an all-new low. In France, political leaders called for hard action against the Siamese and reparations. In July 1893, the French sent two of their warships, the *Inconstant* and the gunboat *Compte*, up the Chao Phraya River toward Bangkok. When the French vessels reached Paknam Fort, the Siamese fired their guns. The French returned fire and managed to break through the fort's defences unharmed. They sailed into Bangkok and stopped in front of the Grand Palace, the residence of King Rama V, guns aimed at the palace interior.

The French delivered their ultimatum to the Siamese on July 20, 1893. Hand over the Laotian territory west of the Mekong River, withdraw all Siamese garrisons from Laos, pay the French an equivalent amount of two million francs as reparation for the Paknam incident, and punish the officers involved in the earlier incidents that resulted in French deaths.

When the Siamese did not immediately comply with the demands, the French proceeded to blockade the mouth of the Chao Phraya River. At this point it seemed unlikely that the







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query about Victory Monument

British were going to intervene to help Siam. On October 3, 1893, the Siamese agreed to the Franco-Siamese Treaty, in which they accepted all of France's terms unconditionally. In doing so, Siam lost almost 40 per cent of its territory overnight.

Fast forward to the year 1940, the French still controlled Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam but back home the fate of the French nation was in danger. In Europe, France and Great Britain declared war with Nazi Germany in 1939 when the Nazis invaded Poland. In 1940, the Nazis invaded France and won with surprising speed. In a matter of months Hitler was in Paris and the French government had collapsed.

The Nazis realized however that although France was captured and under Nazi control, a vast overseas empire could join Britain in the war effort, if the French government were completely dissolved. Hitler therefore set up Vichy France, a puppet French government that nominally controlled the south of France, a part that was not formally annexed by the Germans.

In Thailand, Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkram, the prime minister, was well aware of how weak the French had become. In the



BTS sky train provides a clear view of the monument, which is a site of much traffic congestion during rush hours. Photo: Marisa DeMeglio

eastern theater of the Second World War, the Thai government under Field Marshal Phibun had grown to become quite friendly with the Japanese. The French foreign forces in Indo-China on the other hand were cut off from their home government, ill equipped and demoralized.

Phibun used this as an opportunity to invade Laos and reclaim land that only a few decades ago rightly belonged to Thailand. The Royal Thai Air Force began con-

ducting bombing raids over Vientiane, Phnom Penh, Sisophon and Battambang. The conflict quickly escalated with clashes on land and at sea. In January 1941, Japan stepped in to mediate in the conflict. An armistice was signed and negotiations began. The Japanese, favoring Thailand, coerced the French to relinquish their hold on the disputed territories. As a result, the French ceded Battambang, Pailin, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear and parts of Luang

Prabang to Thai control.

At home this was seen as a great triumph for the country and a personal victory for Prime Minister Phibun. Nationalist fervor was at an all-time high. Finally, Thais had won against the French colonialists and had managed to reclaim the lands it had lost many years ago. Amidst the national celebrations, Phibun commissioned the building of the Victory Monument in order to commemorate this great victory.

The Second World War would not end well for Japan. In August 1945, with Nazi Germany defeated, the Japanese surrender followed. The British and French resumed their control of territories in south east Asia as they had before the war.

In October of 1946, Thailand was again forced to return the territories it had gained during the war of 1941 to French Indo-China. Today these territories remain parts of Laos and Cambodia.

Youth pitch in to support art

Crowdfunding websites have been around for the best part of a decade, but only now is Thailand getting its very own online platform that has been designed to support creative artists.

The new platform recently presented its ideas via www.Asiola.com, a website run by a team that includes a diverse group of youths.

Spread across four key categories of music, food, fashion and art, Asiola gives fans the opportunity to have a closer connection with the artists they admire. By contributing toward the funding goal, they can also earn exclusive rewards. Asiola has entered into partnership with Kasikorn Bank to create a safe, fast and easy online payment platform known as K-Payment Gateway, which makes the online payment process more effective and practical.



Artist Alex Face's campaign is part of the project. Photo: The Nation

Khanngoen Nuanual of leading Thai hip-hop ensemble Thaitanium says his aim is to crowdfund an educational workshop that will allow the band members to share their extensive knowledge and skills with the next generation of Thai rappers.

Heading up the socially responsible campaign is Duangrit Bunnagm who wants to bring

his design of a modular house for the 2004 tsunami victims to fruition.

Artist Alex Face aims to promote civic consciousness and unity among young citizens via his campaign 'Peace for Bangkok', a symbolic bronze sculpture, which he hopes will instill peace in the heart and minds of children as they climb on it. - The Nation

Off-plan vs completed property



By The Book

Kevin Hodges

WITH high season well under way, many visitors to Phuket over the next few months will also be property buyers. There are many different considerations for buyers to think about when making a purchase: one of the first decisions to be made is whether to buy an off-plan property or a completed one.

Both options come with benefits and drawbacks and a lot will depend on the buyer's risk preference.

Purchasing a property off-plan brings the benefits of being able to choose the best units. By the time a condo or villa development is completed, it is certain that the best units will have already been sold.

When buying a condo in Phuket, the highest demand is for Foreign Freehold units. Under Thailand's Condominium Act 2008, only 49 per cent of a condo can be freehold owned by foreigners. Therefore, delaying a purchase until the condo is completed will almost certainly mean missing out on the Foreign Freehold quota.

One major reason for buying off-plan is to generate a larger capital gain through the asset's appreciation once the develop-



Investing in off-plan or completed properties depends on buyers' risk preferences. Photo: www.torange.us

ment is completed. Capital appreciation in Phuket when buying during the pre-sale period is typically 30 per cent, and five to 10 per cent when buying during the construction phase.

Speculators and investors seek to buy into a new project as early as possible, taking advantage of pre-launch prices. During this period, the developer will still be in the process of obtaining building permits, confirming plans and getting an Environmental Impact Assessment. Developers want to start generating income through sales as early as possible, so they will offer buyers pre-launch incentives usually in the

form of large discounts, guaranteed rental returns, finance options and more. At this point, buyers will get the lowest prices and achieve the largest capital gains upon completion.

Another advantage of buying off-plan is that payments for the property can be spread out over the construction period. For condominiums this can be up to two years and for villas it can be 10 to 18 months.

Additionally, buying off-plan gives buyers greater input into the design of their property, particularly structural changes to the floor plan. Also, buyers can make decisions on decor, furnishings, bathrooms, kitchens and appli-

ances at this early stage.

Obviously, buying off-plan also has potential downsides.

There is always a risk that the project might be delayed, or not completed at all, so that buying off-plan is not for the risk-averse buyer.

Unless the developer has a show unit, or an earlier-completed development, buyers will be unsure of the quality that they can expect from the final product. When purchasing a completed property, buyers can see, touch and feel the finished product, so they know exactly what they are buying.

For property investors who are buying to generate an in-

come through rentals, off-plan properties cannot start producing an income until completion.

If a development is completed, but not sold out, developers will often offer promotions such as: free furniture packages or free transfer fees. This can be a good option for buyers, although they will not receive the same capital gain in asset value as buying off-plan.

One of the downsides with resale properties is that they will usually require some re-decorating or renovation work, in line with the potential buyer's tastes. Although a lot of re-decorating and renovation work can be done for a relatively low cost in Thailand, it still requires time and effort.

Normally when buying a resale property, you would miss out on much of the capital appreciation that could be generated by buying off-plan. However, once the market has recovered, there will be plenty of opportunities that will generate an equal capital gain on both options.

Kevin Hodges, the North Branch and Investments Manager for Siam Real Estate (SRE) in Phuket, has more than seven years' experience in Phuket's real estate market. For more information contact him at 076-324042 Email: kevin@siamrealestate.com or visit www.siamrealestate.com

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Sansiri to set aside B27bn for new projects next year

SANSIRI PLC announced that the company will allocate 27 billion baht for 21 new home projects next year.

Half of its capital expenditure budget will come from internal cashflows and half from borrowing from banks and issuing debentures, said Wanchak Buranasiri, Sansiri PLC chief operating officer, on December 24.

The company is also studying overseas opportunities with a focus on buying residences in the UK and New York valued at less than 1 billion baht, for re-sell to Thai buyers who want a home abroad.

This plan follows in the wake of the company's success in selling its residential projects in the UK over the past two years.



One of Sansiri's upcoming projects includes luxury condominiums in Bangkok, said Sansiri CEO. Photo: Mark Fischer

The company targets total presales growth of up to 40 per cent next year. It is aiming to boost net profit margin to 15 per cent in 2018 from 9-10 per cent this year by cutting expenses.

Sansiri will develop 70 per cent of the 21 new projects by itself, while 30 per cent will be

developed by its joint venture with BTS Group Holdings PLC. Three of the new projects will be located in Chiang Mai, Udon Thani and Phuket.

The company suspended six residential projects worth 8bn baht, after it saw demand diminishing in the second half.

- The Nation

Starwood, Grand Bay team up

Sheraton Phuket Grand Bay Resort to be launched in 2019

Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide Inc recently announced an agreement made with Grand Bay Hotel Co Ltd, owned by Apex Development Public Co Ltd, to unveil their joint collaboration on the Sheraton Phuket Grand Bay Resort, slated to open in January 2019.

The newest resort will support Sheraton's 2020 goal of adding 150 hotels to its franchise in the next five years.

"We look forward to partnering with Grand Bay Hotel Co Ltd to expand Starwood's robust footprint in Thailand," said Starwood Hotels and Resorts Rajit Sukumaran, senior vice president for acquisitions and development. "With its

idyllic beaches and lush rainforests, Phuket draws an unwavering number of inbound and domestic travellers, making it a strategic market for Sheraton and further driving formidable growth for Starwood in Asia Pacific."

Boasting a beachfront and hillside location with unobstructed views of the sparkling Andaman Sea, the 200-room resort will feature all of the

Sheraton brand's signature offerings, ranging from a premium sleep experience and rejuvenating bath amenities to a grandiose lobby. On-site facilities will include three distinctive dining venues, 1,326 square meters of meeting and event space, a luxurious spa, a fully-

With its idyllic beaches and lush rainforests, Phuket draws an unwavering number of international and domestic travellers, making it a strategic market for Sheraton.



Starwood hotels announced an agreement to collaborate with Grand Bay Hotel Co Ltd. Photo: Travelarz

equipped fitness center and a picturesque outdoor swimming pool.

"We are delighted to partner with Starwood Hotels and Resorts, and we are confident that our respective strengths will steer this project toward success, elevating the hospitality

offerings in Phuket with the iconic and globally renowned Sheraton brand," said Pongphan Sampawakoo, the chief executive officer of Grand Bay Hotel Co Ltd.

Sheraton Phuket Grand Bay Resort is located in northeast Phuket, in the Grand Bay

area, home to the Ao Po Grand Marina. The hotel will be an approximate 25-minute drive from Phuket International Airport and an hour's drive to Patong, the well-known hub of entertainment on the island.

- Phuket Gazette

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On the 3rd floor at the Central Festival. It is an Oculus 5D attraction of simulation of virtual reality! Moving platform and special effects allow customers to feel the rapid movement, jumping, shaking, flying and falling. Profit from 30,000 to 100,000 baht per month. Tel: 088-447 9900 (English). Email: anasty@outlook.com

RESTAURANT / BAR FOR SALE - KAMALA
Big kitchen, pizza oven, fryer, 4 refrigerators, 2 bedrooms, living room, aircons, 3 Flat TVs, fully furnished. Sale: 290,000 baht or rent: 13,000 baht per month. Contact Johann. Tel: 085-477 5935.



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PERSONALS

DIVORCE PROCEEDINGS
Of the marriage of Gary Andrew Turner and Jintana Turner (Nee Chanin) take notice that the petitioner, Gary Andrew Turner, has commenced divorce proceedings in England, UK. A copy of the petition can be obtained by the respondent from LHT Solicitors, 298 Clifton Drive South, St Annes On Sea, Lancashire FY8 1LL United Kingdom. Tel: 0044 1253 782 808 (Reference AT/Turner 21508.1). Email: gat61@btopenworld.com

CLUB MEMBERSHIP AVAILABLE

PHUKET COUNTRY CLUB
Golf life membership. 470,000 baht, everything included. Negotiable. Tel: 081-089 1407.

BLUE CANYON GOLF MEMBERSHIP
Golf membership for sale. 650,000 baht + transfer fee. Tel: 081-271 7701 (English). Email: hemalegdr@hotmail.com



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Sales Manager - Red Planet Patong, Phuket

Qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree in Business Administration or related fields
- At least 2-3 year experience as Sales Manager in the hotel
- Very good command of English communication skills
- Energetic and proactive
- Able to work competently in administrative work
- Ability to work independently, resourceful and keen to learn

Responsibility:

- Identifies and analyzes competitor and to be able to generate revenue
- Organize periodic sales calls to achieve the target
- Coordinate with regional team in order to obtain local and international business to hotel

This position will be based at Red Planet Hotel Patong in Phuket.

Please apply *via email* including a detailed resume to: tassaneeya@redplanethotels.com

KRABI BOAT LAGOON URGENT
1 Marina Manager. 2 GSAs. All positions require good English command and service minded. Tel: 075-818 765. Email: sornkom.k@holidayinnkrabi.com

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BOUTIQUE RESORT MANAGER
Boutique Resort and Spa located in the north of the island, is seeking a vibrant and experienced General Manager. Layan, Phuket. Please send your CV via email. Tel: 086-004 3008. Email: angius@villasuksan.com

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Phuket's leading real estate agency is looking for an experienced property management manager who will oversee all our properties and deliver property management to our existing clients. You will be responsible for the entire department. High earnings and benefits are expected for the right candidate. Experience in property management is required. Both foreign and Thai nationals are welcome to apply. Tel: 076-341045, 081-459 0152. Please send your resume to info@propertyinphuket.com, www.propertyinphuket.com

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Nanny and cleaner needed. Contact Michael. Rawai. Tel: 081-893 7720.

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International Villas Phuket is looking for a female receptionist / secretary for our new ultra modern luxury offices at Rawai.

Successful applicant needs to:

- Speak, read and write English and Thai
- Computer skills including word processing and basic accounting
- Have a pleasant telephone voice and pleasant personality
- Office duties
- Has driver licence both car and motorbike

Please contact Nina. Tel: 089-729 6244. Send resume to ninaphuket@hotmail.com or Nina.Neale@InternationalVillasPhuket.com

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On sale brand new 2015 Sea-Doo RXP-X 260. 260hp/1,500cc + supercharge. Promotion on this New Year Festival. Price: 478,000 baht (normally 560,000 baht). Samutsakorn. Tel: 081-754 7599 (English & Thai), 092-269 6099 (Thai). Email: csutivas@gmail.com



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BENETEAU EVASION 34



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2004 TOYOTA AVANZA 240,000 BAHT

Excellent condition 66,500km. 7 seats in gold w/black interior. Automatic. Tel: 076-385909, 087-277 5216 (English). Email: curlyphyl@yahoo.com

SUZUKI SWIFT GLX

Suzuki Swift GLX 2014 with additional parking assistant. 4,600km. 420,000 baht. Kamala. Please call 089-729 9009. Email: ksenia.kukonos@gmail.com

FORD EVEREST 4WD

2004 manual great condition. Urgent sale: 395,000 baht. First to drive will buy. Chalong. Tel: 081-895 7908 (English & Thai), 081-892 6710 (English). Email: peterh@asianwind.biz

PAJERO SPORT 2011

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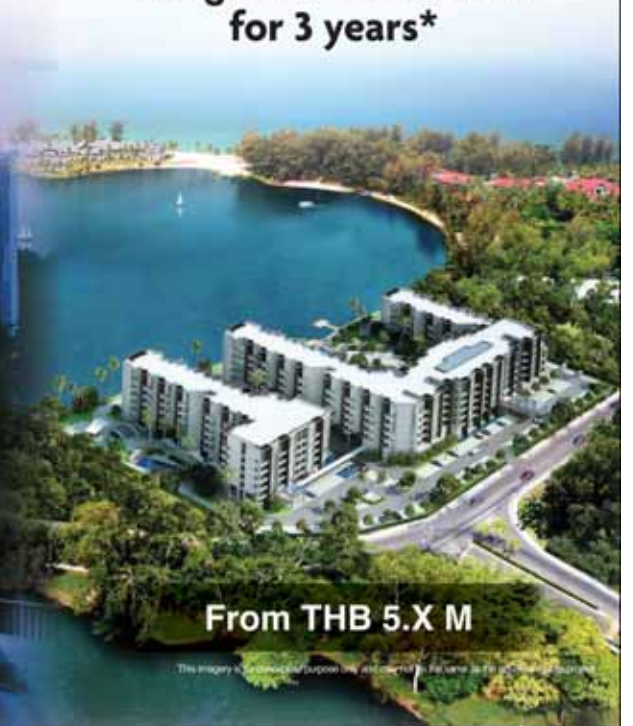
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ISSN 1905 - 8268