

Phuket Gazette

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‘NO ONE HAS APPEARED TO CLAIM OWNERSHIP OF THESE BOATS’

FISHY BOATS

■ Crew members aboard the seized vessels are awaiting cash settlements

By Kongleaphy Keam

THE Royal Thai Navy and the Illegal Fishing Suppression unit are trying to locate the owners of seven fishing vessels that faked nationality documents to enter Phuket in November last year.

The vessels, with 10 crew members on board, were denied entry into Phuket's waters when officials checked the ownership documents – they stated Bolivian ownership that turned out to be forged.

A joint task force – led by Radm Wannapol Glormgeao, secretary-general of the committee on illegal fishing suppression, and Surapol Kuptaphan, commander of the RTN Third Area Command – is investigating the issue following a special order issued by Deputy PM Prawit Wongsuwan in Bangkok.

“No one has appeared to claim ownership of these boats. The problem is that there are 10 crew members who are stuck here without any resources,” said Radm Wannapol.

All ten – nine Indonesians and one Filipino – said they are owed between five to 19 months of wages, and earn about 12,000 baht a month on average.

“They have legal documentation for working in Thailand. We have not detained them; they just do not have the money to fly back home. However, they're also important witnesses who can help us to catch whoever is behind the operation,” said Radm Wannapol.

Officials have provided food and temporary accommodations to the crew members while they are trying to locate the owners of the Illegal Unreported Unregulated (IUU) vessels.

“We know that the owners are Taiwanese, possibly with Thai shareholders. We know their names and some personal details, but we are collecting more evidence to be sure,” he added.

The boat owners are not only wanted



An officer looks over one of the seven IUU vessels that were seized in Phuket in November last year and prevented from docking at Rassada Pier. Photo: Gazette file

for faking nationality, but for illegally trying to sell fish in Phuket.

“All they have is fishing permission from Myanmar, so they have to port and sell the fish there,” said Radm Wannapol.

“The crew members say this is not the first time they have been to Phuket – each boat has been here at least three times before. Therefore, we have to take strong action against this,” he added.

Radm Wannapol said that this will impact the future of IUU fishing in Thailand.

“We are doing our best to improve the international ranking of Thailand by getting rid of illegal fishing. If the fish exported overseas are acquired through illegal means, it will have dire consequences

in the international community. We want to make an example of this case and pursue it relentlessly until we get positive results,” said Radm Wannapol.

One of the crew members, named as Reynaldo Prado Meneses, 65, told the *Gazette* that they are not victims of human trafficking, but are in dire circumstances because of the lack of money.

“I trust the Thai government and believe that they can help us. I have been working for more than seven months without receiving any payments. I am happy to cooperate and answer all their questions, but we are all innocent and legal crew members who have worked hard for their money. We just want our money to go back home,” he said.

Two dead in this year's ‘Seven days of danger’

The seven days of danger campaign has, at the end of day 6, yielded two deaths and 76 injuries on the roads of Phuket. Police have been working to keep the death toll under control as the campaign comes to a close.

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BUSINESS



Thailand's airports are getting overhauled to accommodate international travellers.

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PROPERTY



Banyan Tree unveils new five-bedroom villa designs located at Bang Tao.

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LIFE&STYLE



An insider's take on how best to make the entry of superyachts into the country more convenient.

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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

Drug dealers busted with B1mn meth

FOUR suspects, including a minor, were arrested in Rassada on December 28 with more than 4,000 pills of *ya bah* (methamphetamine) and 200 grams of *ya ice* (crystal methamphetamine) worth about one million baht.

“Our sources informed us that a drug shipment would be delivered from Bangkok to Phuket via a logistics company named Somchai Speed Transport Partnership. We went to the company’s office to check and found three boxes sent by a company named ‘PenPenz Shop’,” said Phuket Tourist Police Chief Naruewat Puttawiro.

The first suspect came in to collect the first box and was caught by the police. The second suspect was also nabbed, after which a third showed up with a minor to collect the last box. All were arrested.

The arrests were made as an enhanced security campaign has been implemented throughout the holiday season, during which police are keeping a close eye on airports, bus stations and popular attractions to ensure the safety and security of locals and tourists.

All four suspects were charged with possession of a category 1 drug with intent to sell and were taken to Phuket City Police Station for further legal processing.

– *Kongleaphy Keam*

Croc show goes wrong in Chalong

A CROCODILE show in Chalong went wrong on December 30 when one of the crocodiles attacked a performer.

The reptile, measuring more than 6 feet in length, snapped its jaws around the wrist of the man and twisted its body. He, in turn, managed to spin in the same direction and saved his wrist from a possible fracture. He is being treated at Mission Hospital for minor injuries.

Monks punish fishermen by shaving their heads



Two Isaan men had their hair shaved off as punishment for fishing in a pond at a temple in Chalong on new Year’s morning. The two were then made to listen to a sermon regarding sin, and told that they would die within 7 days (by divine intervention) if they do so ever again. Photo: Winai Sarot

Large crowds of tourists frequent these shows every year, during which crocodiles are taunted by handlers to get them to snap their jaws as they perform dangerous tricks, such as putting their head and arms inside the crocodiles’ mouths and pulling out just in time.

Several tourists captured the incident on video and uploaded the footage to YouTube – one such video has so far received well over a thousand views.

– *Winai Sarot*

Tourist dies during swim in hotel pool

A CHINESE tourist died while swimming early morning of December 30 after a late night out in Kamala.

Captain Prasert Thongprom of Kamala Police received the report about 3am and officers found 28-year-old Jian Dong’s body lying by the pool of the hotel where he was staying.

Mr Dong was part of a Phuket tour group, and had gone out with nine friends at about 9pm for dinner and drinks. He reportedly had two large beers and returned to the

hotel about 2:40am.

“His friend, named as Jin Tu, told us that he was sitting by the pool while Mr Dong was swimming. He said Mr Dong swam for 30 minutes and then suddenly stopped moving. Mr Tu called out to his friend three times without receiving a response, so he jumped in and pulled him out of the water,” Capt Prasert told the *Gazette*.

“Mr Tu said he attempted to resuscitate his friend before rescue workers arrived, but without success. We have been told that he had had rib surgery before his trip, and it’s possible that there were some complications from this that led to his death,” Capt Prasert added.

The embassy was informed and his body has been sent to Patong Hospital for further investigation.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Cabaret show employee nicks sunglasses

A CABARET show employee was caught on video while expertly stealing a pair of sunglasses from a woman’s bag on the night of January 1.

The 32-second clip shows an employee of the Aphrodite Cabaret Show in Kathu pretending to pose with a tourist while digging his hand into her bag to extract the glasses – it soon went viral on social media.

The show’s general manager, Thummaros Sukapirom, apologized for the incident. “An employee named Chan-on Jumongkit, who plays a supporting character in the show, stole the glasses,” he explained.

“After the show, all our staff came out to the front of the venue to take photos with tourists as usual, which is when the incident occurred. As soon as we saw the video, we confronted him and he confessed,” Mr Thummaros added.

Mr Chanon was fired and handed over to the police for legal processing. The sunglasses were returned to their owner.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Patong hotel blaze put out after 6 hours

FIRE-FIGHTERS spent more than six hours putting out a blaze in a Patong hotel basement. It started on the night of

January 2 and continued into the early hours of January 3.

Guests dining at a restaurant adjacent to Beyond Hotel Patong, noticed smoke wafting out of it at about 8pm and alerted the hotel’s staff.

Patong Police officers, rescue workers and fire-fighters arrived at the scene to find the basement of the hotel engulfed in flames, with burning PVC pipes and electric wires putting out a pungent odor.

At least eight fire trucks were needed to put out the flames, which were reported to be so thick that no one could enter the floor for several hours afterward.

Officials visited the location the next day to investigate the cause of the fire.

“We think it was caused by an electrical short circuit, but have to investigate further to confirm that,” said Col Witton Kongsukjai of Phuket Police.

The hotel is owned by the local Kata Group, whose CEO Mookpisit Autcharyachai said the fire impacted the construction warehouse, and that the hotel building itself is undamaged.

“We still plan to open in July this year,” Mr Mookpisit announced.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Teens rob cops of guns, bullets

A GANG of seven was arrested for attacking and robbing two undercover police officers in Phuket Town on January 1.

The Phuket City Police officers went straight to their station to report the crime and worked together with Col Kamol Osiri in order to locate the suspects via CCTV footage.

“The teens had robbed the officers of two guns, bullets and a necklace. We spotted 5 of them on CCTV, heading to Patong on three motorbikes. We ran one of the number plates and found the owner, who told us that his son-in-law was using his motorbike. He then gave us the address to a house where he believed the suspect could be hiding,” said Col Kamol.

The suspects surrendered on the spot and the guns, bullets and necklace were recovered.

“They provided us with location of the other two. In all, seven gang members were arrested, of whom five were men and two were women. Two were underage boys,” said Col Kamol.

All suspects were charged with theft. Police said additional charges may be filed.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Locals protest against coral theft by tourists

LOCALS in Koh Racha are raising concerns about coral theft after an Asian tourist was caught taking a bag full of coral on a boat bound for Phuket earlier this week.

"I was shocked and unhappy to see her carrying our precious coral in a plastic bag, so I tried to talk to her and asked her to return it. However, she pretended like she didn't understand what I was talking about," said one of the villagers, who asked not to be named.

"It was very crowded at the time, with hundreds of tourists rushing to get back to their boats. I was unable to stop her and she left for Phuket with the coral."

Locals say this is not the first time they have witnessed this.

"Incidents like this happen daily – visitors grab coral, shells and even stones. Do tour guides issue any warnings to their groups? These people need a lesson in 'ethics' and to be told what they can and can't do," said the villager.



A Koh Racha villager snapped a picture of a woman taking coral in a plastic bag on a boat bound for Phuket. Photo: Winai Sarot

The island residents are now asking concerned authorities to step forward, as they say they cannot stand up to so many tourists alone.

"If immediate steps are not taken, the beauty of Koh Racha will be ruined forever," the villager pleaded.

Local 'conservationists' say they are planing to put pressure on business operators, tour companies and guides to be more

aware and take action if they see any 'unsuitable' behavior.

In December, a piece of coral with a Korean name etched into it was discovered in the waters off Mu Koh Similan National Park.

Officials from Mu Koh Similan National Park have yet to release a statement and could not be reached for comment.

– Winai Sarot

Day 4 yields two deaths on the road



Officers check riders for valid licences. Photo: Gazette file

AT THE end of day 6 of the 'Seven Days of Danger' road-safety campaign, Phuket's death toll stood at two, with deaths in accidents on Phuket's roads.

The first incident occurred at 2:10am on January 1, when 24-year-old Patcharin Taosanit crashed her motorbike into a power pole in Rawai.

The second incident occurred about 5pm the same day when 26-year-old Chalermkluck Ongwimonkarn crashed into a taxi while 'ghost riding' in Srisoonthorn. He was reportedly not wearing a helmet and under the influence of alcohol.

A total of 76 injuries in 67 accidents have been reported so far – 10, 9, 16 and 18, 14 and 9 from days one to six, respectively, according to the official statistics provided by the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM) Phuket Office.

Additionally, hundreds of riders were arrested for related thefts, including riding a motorbike without wearing a helmet, driving under the influence of alcohol, failing to wear seat belts, driving without [carrying] a valid driving licence, and speeding, among other offences.

– Kongleaphy Keam



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Buses, trains full as holidays come to an end

BUS and train terminals were full with passengers heading back to Bangkok on January 3 as the New Year holidays came to an end.

The main bus terminal in Chiang Rai Province expected more than 10,000 travellers per day travelling to Bangkok and had over 30 spare buses ready to transport those who had not purchased tickets in advance.

Officials are screening bus drivers for alcohol abuse before departures, with two drivers alternating every four hours for journeys over 400 kilometres.

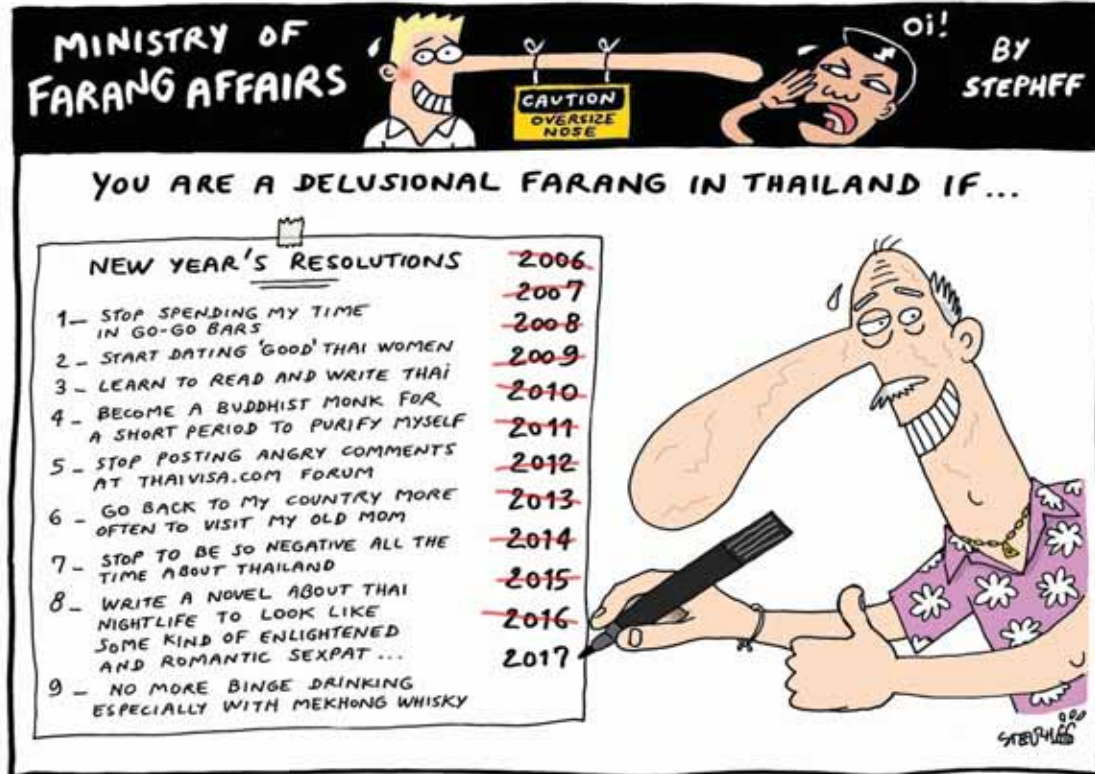
The bus terminal in Uthai Thani was also flooded with passengers waiting to depart to Bangkok. The terminal did not allow advanced bookings, but expected to accommodate all passengers by 8pm. Vehicles underwent inspection, while alcohol tests were conducted on drivers prior to departure.

Passengers were encouraged to report reckless driving via the 1584 hotline.

Many residents originally from Yala Province also made their way back to work in other provinces, after spending the New Year holidays in their hometowns.

A large number of passengers were seen boarding trains at Yala Railway Station to return to other provinces, especially Bangkok, returning either to work or school. As the New Year celebrations came to an end, every train leaving for the capital was reportedly full.

Local media also reported holiday-makers boarding trains with gifts for friends, colleagues and loved ones in Bangkok. Many tourists who left Yala during the break also returned to the province, as most businesses return to normal operating hours.



Security officials at Yala Railway Station remained on duty to ensure safety for holidaymakers and facilitate their trips out of the province.

— *The Nation*

Chonburi van crash spurs new talks

THE Transport Ministry plans to control passenger vans and replace them with buses after the fiery accident in Chon Buri on January 2 caused 25 fatalities.

The Bangkok-bound minivan from Chanthaburi ran into a pickup truck loaded with passengers and both vehicles burst into flames, killing 14 people in the van and 11 in the pickup. Two passengers survived the crash.

Transport Minister Arkhom Termpitayapaisith said on January 3 that exhaustion might have been a major factor in the accident, as it was reported that the

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

64-year-old van driver had had only one hour of rest after returning from a trip to Bangkok.

“From the preliminary examination of the case, we found that the van had just passed inspection last September and there was no problem with the engine and gas tanks,” Mr Arkhom said.

“So the accident might have been caused by the driver’s fatigue or speeding, but this has to be confirmed by investigators.” Mr Arkhom added that tighter regulations will be issued.

“The number of passenger vans crossing provincial borders will be reduced by 2019 and replaced with buses,” he said. “Drivers will have to comply with a rule to rest one hour after every four hours on the road and attend a traffic course every six months to ensure that they remember traffic rules and exercise good driving etiquette.”

“In other countries, vans are used to carry items, not people, so if our country uses vans to transport passengers, we must ensure that it is safe to do so,” Mr Arkhom said. “The Transport Ministry is now campaigning to get van operators to install GPS in their vehicles, so we can track and regulate the drivers.”

The van had been equipped with three NGV [natural Gas for Vehicles] tanks, which exploded after the collision.

“To prevent such a tragic accident, we must ensure that the transport vehicle driver has a proper rest before driving, the

vans must be installed with safety equipment and the vans should not run on NGV,” said Siwakorn Buapong, chief of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Office, Chon Buri.

Eight of the victims were men, 13 women, one boy and one girl. The gender of the remaining two corpses is still unknown. Most bodies were covered with serious burns, so relatives were urged to provide details about their family members and DNA samples.

The Justice Ministry said they would provide legal assistance to relatives to get compensation from insurance companies as well as financial support incurred in legal expenses in court.

— *The Nation*

Samui expats save tourists

TWO Russian tourists luckily escaped drowning on New Year’s Day when a group of expats dove in to rescue them from ferocious waves at Chaweng Noi Beach in Koh Samui.

A man and woman, both believed to be in their early 30s, reportedly ignored the signs and went ahead anyway.

Numerous sunbathers watched in horror as the two were being swept out to sea. Longtime Koh Samui resident Cord Biggs, who was playing beach volleyball with three friends about 40 meters from the shore, quickly jumped in to rescue them.

“We spotted the couple being swept out but no one on the crowded beach was taking ac-

tion, so my friends and I ran down from the court and started swimming toward them,” said Mr Biggs.

“I went for the girl first as she appeared to be in greater danger. My friend Andre joined me, but while we were trying to bring her back, the other tourist was getting swept out further, so I swam out to him. While I was bringing him back, however, Andre and the girl started going out further, so I had to go back out and get them,” said Mr Biggs.

“A surfer came to us as I was struggling and he was able to get her on to his board. It was very difficult for me and I ended up tossing the buoys away and fighting the rips to make it back.”

All four rescuers and both tourists reached the shore safely. The couple was transported to Thai International Hospital and made a full recovery. Mr Biggs and his friends are being hailed as ‘authentic heroes’.

“Please watch out for the red flags on any beach and if you see those, do not swim. Thanks to my volleyball boys for having my back, and [I wish] good karma for all of us as we start the new year,” he concluded.

— *Phuket Gazette*

Krabi prisoners released

PRISONERS walked out of Krabi Prison on December 30 as the Royal pardon instated to commemorate the beginning of the reign of His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun came into motion.

Friends and families waited outside the prison walls to be reunited with the 157 released inmates.

Somsak Tiengtrakulthong, Krabi prison commander, told the *Gazette* that each of those being released made vows in front of a picture of His Majesty. “And they promised to do good things for family, the public and the Kingdom. They also promised to follow Thai law and work hard,” he said.

“Of the total number, 128 are men and 29 are women. They have all shown considerable progress in their behavior at the prison. They are ready to return to their families and should be a positive addition to society,” Mr Somsak added.

Krabi Prison currently holds 1,887 prisoners – 1,652 men and 235 women.

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*



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Major airport projects planned

AS AUTHORITIES anticipate 34 million foreign-tourist arrivals and 150 million domestic air travellers in 2017, major airports including Phuket International, Suvarnabhumi, Don Mueang International, U-tapao Rayong-Pattaya International, Krabi International and Chiang Rai Mae Fah Luang International are undergoing renovation or expansion.

Meanwhile, there have been calls for some small airports upcountry such as in Roi-et, Nakhon Ratchasima and Hua Hin to be upgraded to international status in order to attract more foreign airlines and tourists. The Transport Ministry also plans a new airport in Yala Province.

Wandee Tiansawakit, a tourism expert and former president of the Professional Tourist Guide Association in Buriram Province, said businesses such as hotels and travel companies wanted the government to make Buri Ram Airport an international facility as well as adding a new cargo terminal.

The province has become a famous sport destination thanks to the success of the Buriram United Football Club. If Buriram Airport could gain international status and a customs office, and have its cargo-handling ability upgraded, it should attract more domestic



Phang Nga airport is one of many undergoing major changes to increase efficiency. Photo: Gazette file

and foreign airlines into lower part of the Northeast region and boost tourism.

The private sector in Nakhon Ratchasima is urging the government to develop its airport as the city is growing.

The Thai Hotels Association has urged the development of Hua Hin Airport to link with neighboring countries, especially Singapore and Malaysia, as well as other provinces in Thailand. Therefore, the airport needs to expand its runway and aviation facilities to meet with international standards.

Representatives from the Department of Airports, which

owns Krabi Airport, says it plans to expand capacity to serve the increasing number of flights by low-cost airlines. The airport was originally designed to handle 3 million passengers a year, but the numbers keep rising. The department is also planning a new airport in Yala's Betong district, and the Transport Ministry has taken responsibility for that plan.

Airports of Thailand (AOT), which operates Phuket International Airport, said the airport's capacity had been increased from 6.5 million passengers per year to 12.5 million after completion of a new interna-

tional passenger terminal.

AOT aims to push Phuket International Airport as the new gateway into southern Thailand, particularly the Andaman Coast, covering five provinces – Phuket, Krabi, Ranong, Phang Nga and Trang.

Meanwhile at Bangkok's main airport, Suvarnabhumi, Prime Minister Gen Prayuth Chan-o-cha visited sites of its second-phase expansion in September and was reassured that annual passenger capacity would be increased from the current 45 million to 60 million by 2019.

“The government is under-

taking a 20-year development plan including airport expansion and logistics that have been lined up to link Thailand with [the rest of] Southeast Asia,” Gen Prayuth said.

Earlier, AOT announced multibillion-baht plans for further development at Don Mueang International Airport to serve increasing of tourist arrivals and domestic flights.

In Chiang Rai Province, AOT said it would spend 6.2 billion baht for a three-phase expansion project that began last year.

Rear Admiral Worapol Tongpricha, director of Rayong U-tapao Pattaya International Airport, said a further 400 million baht would be spent on the airport's expansion after 600 million baht was spent last year.

The government earlier granted a budget of 800 million baht to build a new passenger terminal at U-tapao Airport in order to meet demand and increasing tourism in the Eastern region. The airport currently accommodates 4,000 passengers per day, with a maximum capacity of 800,000 passengers per year. Once the new terminal is completed, it should be able to serve up to 3 million passengers per year and increase capacity to 60,000 flights per year.

– *The Nation*

Luring ‘big spenders’ to the Kingdom

AFTER THE government crackdown on illegal businesses in Phuket and other provinces, and its preparation of a new four-year draft to tackle changes in travel sentiment, the country will have more of chance to lure ‘quality’ (big-spending) tourists, according to experts.

However, Supawan Thanomkiatphum, president of the Thai Hotels Association (THA), said it might take years to transform the hospitality industry from mass tourism to a quality-tourism destination as problems needed to be tackled through cooperation by stakeholders.

“Major problems include illegal hotels and other businesses in the sector, zero-dollar tours from China, and low competitiveness in the industry,” Mr Supawan said.

However, he believes that cracking down on unregistered



A popular night market in Chiang Mai, sprawling with tourists haggling for even the cheapest items on sale. Photo: Zohaib Sikander

hotels and zero-dollar tours would help operators in Phuket, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya and Hua Hin.

Anthony Lark, president of the Phuket Hotels Association, said there were plans to promote Phuket as a truly world-class destination by leveraging its strength as a great

place to visit with warm touch of Thai hospitality – not just a beach, bar, and water-sports location.

“Thailand is a great place to visit and the best place to do hotel business due to unique Thai hospitality. The association and government bodies are trying to build a positive image

in order to lure more quality tourists as the island now offers many high-end products such as medical services, yachting, private jets, luxury hotels, cruises, and sports,” he said.

“Tourism business in 2017 will be stable rather than enjoy rapid growth because the sector is very difficult to predict as a long-term prospect,” Supawan said. According to THA, the average room rate at hotels in Bangkok in 2016 was US\$150 (5,250 baht) per night.

The program aims to provide training to over 107,020 people, with more than 10,000 tourism operators expected to get a quality certification. The training program is part of national tourism policy that aims to enhance the sector's competitiveness as the government wants to shift up from mass to quality tourism.

– *The Nation*



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Phuket Gazette

IUU troubles

THE hunt for the Taiwanese owner of a fleet of seven fishing vessels currently impounded in Rassada [see page 1] is a test of the willingness and ability of Thai authorities to tackle Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing vessels that port in Phuket.

Taiwanese tuna fishing vessels have a long history of using Phuket as a base of operations, which became increasingly important to the Taiwanese when migration routes of some tuna species were observed to have moved north in the Indian Ocean in the late 1990s. Typically in close cooperation with Thai shareholders, many Taiwanese investors have Thai spouses and maintain homes on the island. This might be a good starting point if investigators are serious about tracking them down – and they have good reason to be.

While Thailand's issuance of a 'yellow card' by the EU in April 2015 made headline news in the Thai media, it is locally lesser known that Taiwan received a similar warning in October of the same year for its 'distant water' fishing industry, for which Phuket serves as an important base. As the name implies, the yellow cards serve as 'last chance' warnings to countries that allow their fleets to engage in IUU practices.

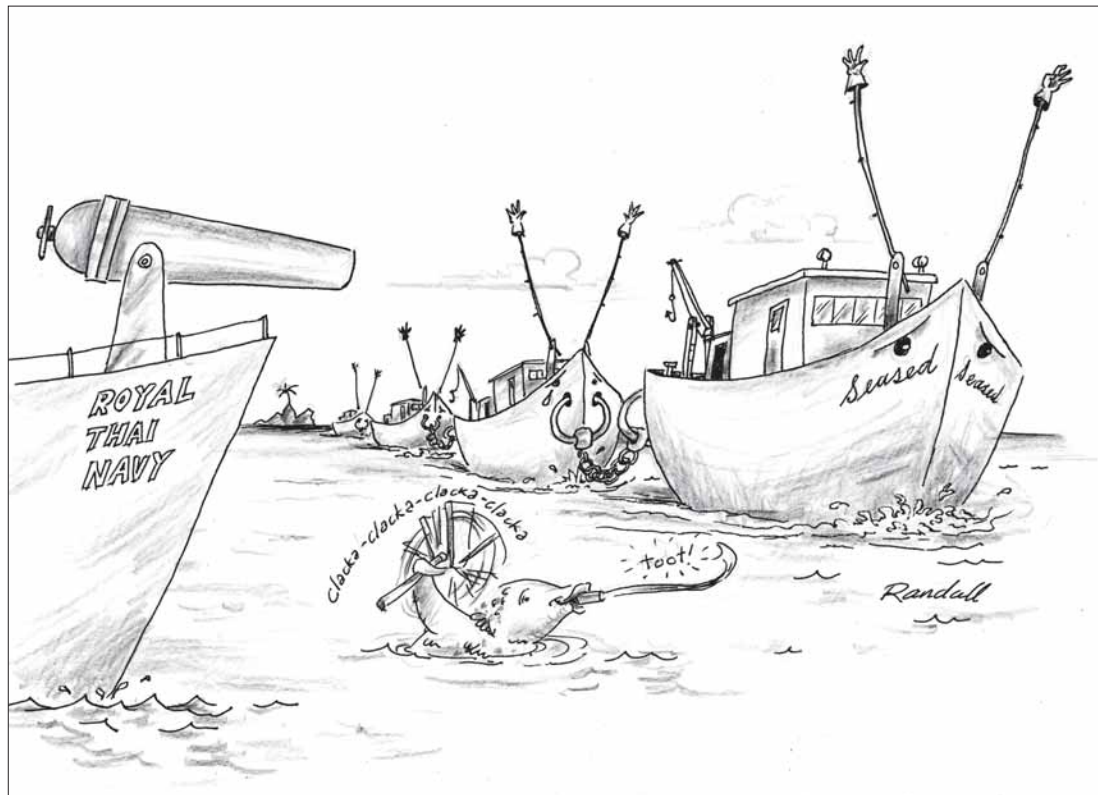
Failure to take better measures to reel in offenders could result in both countries being issued the dreaded 'red card', banning them from exports to the EU.

As a result, the government of Thailand imposed strict measures when setting up its 'port-in, port out' monitoring system in 2014. This was apparently enough for the EU to extend Thailand's 'yellow card' status a year later, but it comes as little surprise that the recent seizure took place just a few months before the next EU ruling.

Taiwan issued a statement in November last year that it had established "a cabinet-level task force to combat IUU in order to complement global efforts to prevent IUU fishing and prohibit IUU fish or fisheries products from entering into market."

The sad reality is, of course, that bureaucrats in Brussels, Bangkok and Taipei are about as far removed as imaginable from the situations they seek to impact.

The seized tuna fishing vessels had been regular visitors to Phuket, despite having been fraudulently-registered as 'Bolivian-owned'. This says a lot about the pre-existing situation because, after all, Bolivia is a mountainous, land-locked country more known for cocaine than cod or king crab.



Further decline until action taken

Re: Shorter peak season expected in Phuket, Jan 2

The large decline in western tourists has been continually reported for over two years.

Five years ago, high season was Nov 1 through Songkran in Mid April. Now, it's Dec 15 through Jan 15, and it's much less than before.

It will continually decline until something is actually done to make Phuket a world class tourist destination.

Foot
Gazette forum

Number of deaths from jumping off

Re: New Zealand man falls to his death in Phuket, Dec 29

I want to know the number of deaths this year from falling off high rise buildings.

I think Thailand would be number one in the world at this cause of death.

Graham Tone
Facebook

Not difficult to locate the perpetrator

Re: Similan coral defaced with Korean name, Dec 30

So, it may be easy with the Korean name Park Yong-Soo to find the diver with Immigration and the dive boat operator, who must register with the Similan National Park Rangers to pay the entry fee.

They must prosecute him and ban him from coming back

Letters
to the Editor

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

to Thailand, investigate the dive boat operator for negligence, and check if they had an official Thai guide aboard as well as the professional Thai Divemasters required to guide divers in Thailand.

Foreigners are banned from work as divemasters, and any other work they do must only be for the company cited in their work permit, and in the province which is written in that work permit.

Asterix
Gazette forum

Wish we could have the old Patong back

For 16 years, my friends and I have spent our winter holidays at Patong Beach and liked it very much. The two last years, this has been a very painful experience since we spend the whole day at the beach on a beach chair with two umbrellas.

For two people in their 60's, it is impossible to lay directly on the beach. We understand that it is important to keep a major part of the beach in its natural state, but to remove beach beds and umbrellas is something that no other tourist place has done.

Comfort is as important as the nature of the beach. Since Patong is a rather big town, the beach will never return to its original state so why try to make it what it never can be. We are going this year to Vietnam instead to try and find a new hotspot, but we still hope the leaders of Thailand find a compromise so we can return to our beloved Patong Beach."

Bo Nilsson
Letter to the editor

Pay money to watch someone suffering

Re: Phuket crocodile show goes wrong, Dec 31

These people actually pay money in hopes of seeing an uneducated and unfortunate Thai guy eaten alive. So sick and sorry for the Thai pawns in the game, and of course the imprisoned crocodiles as well. Barbaric behavior all round.

Disgusted
Gazette forum

No remedy in sight for teen criminals

Re: Gang of seven rob undercover officers, charged with theft, Jan 3

Today's teen-crimes are tomorrow's hardened crimes. Irresponsible parents, poor education, disinterested teachers, easy access to drugs – what is the remedy?

Michael Pohl
Facebook

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Banyan Tree redefines grandeur



Overlooking a tropical lagoon, the villas are situated in a private, security controlled estate within 1,000 acres of parkland overlooking Bang Tao Beach. Photo: Banyan Tree Group

Advertorial

THE Banyan Tree Group has unveiled designs for a selection of five-bedroom villas adjacent to Bang Tao Beach on the west coast of Phuket. With the infrastructure already complete, the Group is inviting interested parties to make appointments for private viewings of the newly-launched 'Banyan Tree Grand Residences'.

"The Banyan Tree Group is renowned around the world for selecting destinations of extraordinary natural beauty, and creating resorts, hotels and exclusive properties that enhance these special places even further," says Stuart Reading, Head of Banyan Tree Group Property.

"These Grand waterfront residences meet the discerning demands for those looking to combine a sophisticated, yet relaxed lifestyle with the ultimate in luxury resort living in an exclusive area next to Banyan Tree Phuket resort within Laguna Phuket."

Based on the Group's experience and expertise, this extends a time-tested design philosophy into shaping the ideal home. Banyan Tree Grand Residences is a collection of 19 homes with architecture influenced by traditional Thai design and enhanced by the latest technologies, giving astute buyers the chance to select a villa that is uniquely placed to capitalize on the allure of this part of the

world.

Overlooking a tropical lagoon, these grand villas are situated in a private, security controlled, gated estate set within 1,000 acres of parkland that opens up onto Bang Tao Beach and the waters of the Andaman Sea, alongside the infrastructure and amenities of Laguna Phuket, Asia's preeminent resort destination combining deluxe hotels, affluent residential areas and a full spectrum of entertainment and leisure options and facilities.

Each villa features five bedrooms with en suite bathrooms, a grand living room, an entertainment room, a dining room and a modern, fully-equipped designer

kitchen, as well as maid's quarters. The villas are centered around an internal courtyard, as well as an outdoor entertainment deck to a large private infinity pool with its own integrated Jacuzzi.

Ownership includes exclusive access to the Sanctuary Club, a global network with more than 40 resorts and hotels, featuring more than 60 spas and 80 retail galleries, as well as a membership to the championship Laguna Phuket Golf Club.

Owners are also entitled to experience the Banyan Tree Private Collection with a range of holiday experiences including five years of free holidays in a global selection of locations, access to luxury hideaways and

an array of discounts and priority access benefits.

Banyan Tree provides dedicated villa management, with services and amenities including a 24-hour concierge, cleaning, gardening, pool servicing, and grounds and villa maintenance. Villa owners also have the option of renting the villas on a short or long-term basis.

Interested investors can visit the display units on site to explore the investment potential of the luxury lifestyles afforded by these exclusive properties.

For further information or to arrange a private viewing, please contact Laguna Property on 076 362 333, or email residences@banyantree.com

– *Phuket Gazette*

Hoteliers adjust to peak season changes

PHUKET is bound to experience a shorter peak season this year due to a change in the market, and it is a matter of concern for hospitality firms when it comes to the low season, says Bill Barnett, managing director of C9 Hotelworks.

"In previous peak seasons, rates or surcharges had benefited many hotels in Phuket, but this year the period will be shorter – in most cases ending after just the first few days of January," warns Mr Barnett.

"Looking to Chinese New Year and the first quarter in general, trading is looking strong, but three months will not make up an entire year and low seasons are a cause for concern. What is evident, however,

is that other Thai beach destinations like Krabi and Khao Lak, as well as some locations in Vietnam, are honing up to take on local destinations in an evolving tourism market, so competition 'is heating up out there'," he adds.

According to a survey by C9 Hotelworks, there continue to be many questions about the impact of Thailand's crackdown on zero-dollar tourism.

Feedback on China's cheap packages resulted in a downturn in the fourth quarter as the rapid collapse in Chinese tour groups forced hotels into other segments.

This new year, however, looks brighter with the new international terminal and

renovations to the domestic terminal, which will be completed during the course of the year, with some progress on other infrastructure projects, Mr Barnett said.

Patong's oversupply is affecting guest quality, with certain higher-end segments shifting into Kata and Karon. The increasing supply of off-beach properties is becoming a toxic mix for hoteliers, he warned.

"In 2017, we'd expect the hotels in Kata and Karon to improve trading and Patong to experience a possible slide in rates and demand. Chinese, Koreans and the Middle East segments are strong supports for the area," he said.

– *The Nation*

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Two voices are louder than one



On Deck

By Duncan Worthington

RECENT comments from Weerasak Kowsurat of the Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) caught my eye, and they could have profound repercussions for Thailand's yacht charter industry. Following is excerpted from a December 23 article in *The Nation*:

"TCEB chairman of the board Weerasak Kowsurat said ... providing MICE visas and MICE work permits to business travellers ... could attract more events, including huge exhibitions from overseas. Currently, many MICE travellers are required to submit documents to get a work permit before being allowed to enter the Kingdom to participate in an event."

At first glance this was a tourism story, another idea from a well-meaning government agency, but after deeper thought this could set the foundation for something akin to a crew visa for international sailors.

In previous columns I've written about the Thai Government's drive to attract more superyachts and specifically the 12-month superyacht charter licence. In brief: the owner of a foreign-flagged superyacht of 30 meters or more in length can purchase a 12-month licence and with that can legally charter in Thai waters (note: without the licence, foreign-flagged vessels cannot



Superyachts chartering in Thai waters legally – vision of the future. Photo: Phuket Best Group

charter in Thai waters). This licence has already been introduced, however, one sticking point that remains is the need for 7 per cent VAT to be paid on the value of the boat before it can charter.

We'll revisit that in a future column. Right now I'm interested in another problem, that of visas for the crew. Crew who arrive without a visa can generally get a 30-day tourist visa on arrival and extend it in country, before having to leave the country and re-enter. If you purchase a visa overseas then you may be eligible for a 60-day tourist visa.

Of course, tourist visas are not work visas and it's not possible to get any kind of Business Class (that is 'work') visa as that requires sponsorship from a company, supporting company documents and so on, none of which a visiting foreign-flagged superyacht can supply.

The problem for crew on foreign-flagged superyachts wishing to charter in Thai waters is two-fold: the length of visa and type of visa.

While the Marine Department is behind the superyacht licence and are aware of this issue, it is the responsibility of immigration, and I doubt it's on

their priority list.

With TCEB raising concerns about the same issue – the need for some type of visa that allows foreigners to legally visit in a working capacity – perhaps there is some light the end of this tunnel.

If, for example, you're a top music star from overseas that comes to perform in Thailand, legally, you will need an appropriate visa. The same for a specialist foreign doctor, foreign policeman/woman, foreign detective and so on. TCEB's murmurings, therefore, are on-point and timely for Thailand's yachting industry.

Even more interesting, in my opinion, is TCEB's reference to work permits. This is something that has not (publicly at least) been talked about by the Marine Department. Any foreigner working in Thailand must have a work permit – it's the law. Work permits are the responsibility of the Labor Department and much like a Business Class visa, there needs to be a company sponsoring the person in question, a suitable (Business Class) visa and a whole raft of supporting documents just in order to apply for one.

This is the elephant in the room regarding the superyacht charter licence. While the Marine Department has openly acknowledged the visa issues and is genuinely attempting to find a solution, nothing has been said about work permit issues yet.

Let's hope the powers-that-be open inter-departmental dialogue. Perhaps it's time the Ministry of Tourism and Sports takes a strategic view and looks at the big picture. Rather than cherry picking a few big ticket items and some low-hanging fruit (like the superyacht licence), a more holistic view could help generate more far-reaching benefits for all.

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

Laguna Golf bags 11 trophies at Asia Golf Awards

LAGUNA Golf Group clinched a total of 11 awards at the prestigious Asia Golf Awards 2016 in Hua Hin, Thailand, World Golf Awards 2016 in Algarve, Portugal and IAGTO Awards 2017 in Mallorca, Spain.

Presented only for the 3rd time by Asia Golf Awards, the group was crowned 'Asia Pacific Custodian of the Environment', in recognition of its global outlook and stewardship in sustainability care and environmental maintenance at its three courses.

Laguna Golf LangCô was voted for the first time as '2017 IAGTO Golf Resort of the Year', cast by 640 IAGTO



Hole 17 at Laguna Golf Bintan. Photo: Laguna Golf Group

member golf tour operators in 66 countries.

Laguna Golf Phuket won 'Asia's Best Golf Course' by

World Golf Awards 2016, 'Asia Pacific Business Initiative Award' by Asia Golf Awards 2016 and '2017 IAGTO Sustainability Award for Community Value', in recognition of the Club's in-house initiative of undertaking the "New Look New Experience" renovation program.

Winning its very first award after an extensive 12-month upgrade project, Laguna Golf Bintan was voted as 'Best Renovated Course of the Year' by Asia Golf Awards 2016 with its emphasis of restoring green complexes, enhancing natural surroundings, and aligning facilities with top international golf destinations.

Paul Wilson, Laguna Golf assistant vice president and group golf director said, "Laguna Golf, part of the Banyan Tree Group, is proud to be recognized by established awards organizers with these prestigious accolades.

"Echoing the group's ethos of Asian-inspired hospitality and sustainability, winning these awards are testaments to the team's passion and dedication.

"We will strive to continually raise the bar for service excellence and be forward-thinking in sustainability to create exceptional golf experiences."

– *Phuket Gazette*

Returning to the scene of the crime



Gardening

By Patrick Campbell

I WAS recently asked to return to the scene of a crime. Well, not an actual one, but an on-site consultation, at which I was asked how the neglected common parts of an estate might be given – literally – a new lease on life. This is a high-end residential estate, with spectacular villas perched on a precipitous hillside overlooking the sea. Many of their secluded gardens, set behind high retaining walls were, and are, immaculately maintained. My brief concerned the steep roadside areas flanked by high gray walls that effectively shut out much of the sunshine that most tropical plants require.

The chairman of the residents' committee asked me for a detailed chart. In it, I suggested specific plants for areas in deep shade, filtered shade and even



Palms provided a fark, dramatic background, with two varieties of polycias in front. Photo: Patrick Campbell

full sun. The soil was another consideration. As is so often the way in Phuket, it was poor, as struggling *heliconias* and *costus* demonstrated. It needed both enriching topsoil, and the addition of amendments such as compost, to give it a more friable structure. Contained in narrow, roadside troughs – with many fronting existing walls and with

perhaps 18 inches of soil – new arrivals would require plenty of nutrients.

Our scheme, put into practical effect by property management company CBRE, has been a conspicuous success, thanks to appropriate shrubs and trees, and conscientious daily maintenance. Most were chosen for their value as attractive, evergreen foliage

cover and adaptability in variable conditions. One wall now has a metal trellis with garlic vines already spreading their tendrils everywhere. Assuredly, the wall will soon vanish beneath green foliage and masses of pink blooms. Higher up, the scheme incorporates layered plantings: low-growing plants at the edge, with taller ones behind, and substantial trees or shrubs forming a screen at the rear.

The principle of graduated beds was developed long ago by Gertrude Jekyll in the UK, but unlike her choice of herbaceous flowering plants, this scheme employs different textures and shades of green. At the front are ever-reliable *polycias guilfolei* with variegated, dentate leaves; behind, vivid sap-green *polycias fruticosa* with narrow crinkly foliage, to provide a contrasting, colorful screen. And finally, as a dramatic, darker background, rows of lady palms (*rhapis*). In some places, elegant foxtail

palms have been added to create a fourth dimension. Elsewhere, ubiquitous Korean banyans, popular screening plants already clipped into shape, are masking walls with their dense, glossy, evergreen foliage.

Nearby lies a vivid clump of purple *dracaenas*. Hanging plants festoon gray walls, softening harsh outlines. And peace lilies (*spathiphyllum*) enhance a gloomy stretch of road, along with massive *alocasias*, which sprout from the jungle-like background.

The prospect is inviting. Instead of dull grey walls and patches of straggly shrubs, lush verdant avenues now welcome residents and visitors alike.

If you have gardening or environmental concerns, contact Patrick at drpaccampbell@gmail.com. Many of his creative and academic publications can be found at his website: GreenGardening.com.

Locals call for action against daily burning of rubbish



Above: Smoke rising from burning piles of rubbish. Below: A Google maps snapshot indicating where trash is being burnt. Photos: Facebook

LOCALS and expats are raising concern about the daily burning of rubbish near Kathu Waterfall Road.

A Facebook user posted pictures of smoke rising from the area and said that this was a daily occurrence, with the pu-

trid smell of burning plastic and rubbish spreading to nearby areas.

Residents are calling out to local authorities to investigate and alleviate the situation as soon as possible.

– *Phuket Gazette*





— X —

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THE VIEW

Position: Chief Engineer

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- Assures that basic mechanical and/or electrical equipment, machinery and/or circuitry of the property are kept in good working order
- A complete understanding of all building related systems -- Electrical, HVAC, Plumbing, Life Safety, IT, etc
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Position: Sales Representative

- Listening to customer requirements and presenting appropriately to make a sale
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Position: Executive Assistant General Manager

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Responsibilities include the following:

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- Ad the view projects will be assigned as necessary
- Maintain and order office supplies
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Qualifications:

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- Must be fully versed in Microsoft Office applications including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint
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Peace of mind, body and soul

By Zohaib Sikander

KANOKWAN Borunphan, 26, is a yoga instructor in Phuket. Although she started out in the field just two years ago, she already has her hands full with classes and students of various ages, shapes and sizes.

"I love yoga and practice it every chance I get. When I first started out, I took classes in Phuket Town for two months, but it was very inconvenient to travel there so I took it up on my own. I watched videos and tutorials to perfect my craft and pretty much taught myself to do it," says Ms Kanokwan.

"I used to have a lot of health problems before, including allergies to dust, trouble breathing because of lung issues, back pain and shoulder pain. Once I started practicing deep breathing with yoga, all my health issues just disappeared."

Originally from Chiang Mai, Ms Kanokwan first moved to Patumthani

to study Management Sciences at Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University, where she received a full scholarship and trained for the Thailand National Athletic Team as well. She then moved to Phuket to work as a stewardess on a private yacht.

Although she says she enjoyed both aspects of her professional life, yoga was her true passion and she did what was needed to make a full-time move as an instructor. She now teaches yoga at gyms, private hotels and villas, and also at her own studio.

"In order to provide a quality service, I teach a maximum of five people in one class. I want to accommodate everyone, but if the classes are too big I won't be able to give everyone individual attention. In bigger classes, people sometimes feel afraid to ask if they're doing something wrong, whereas in smaller settings and with individual attention, people feel more comfortable speaking up and asking for

help," says Ms Kanokwan.

"I'm there to guide people as best as I can and help them find the style that suits them best. There are a lot of instructors and everyone has their own style, so it's never about right or wrong. It depends on what style suits you."

Ms Kanokwan says that one of the best aspects of her job is helping people manage pain.

"The most common problem with my students is lower back and shoulder pain. It takes two to three months to see a real improvement, but when my students and tell me how

good they feel, it's the best feeling in the world for me," she says.

Her students vary widely in age, with the youngest being six and the oldest being 52.

"Yoga helps you connect with yourself. I teach people how to maintain their bodies and focus on themselves, but there also has to be a commitment from them. For instance, if you want to lose weight, you must focus on your diet as well. If my clients need help in preparing meal plans and portions, I guide them in that aspect as well," says Ms Kanokwan.

"People always find excuses not to do something. They say they want to do yoga, but they're not flexible. If you're flexible to begin with, why join a class? Other times they say 'I really want to do it, but I don't have the time'.

"I feel that if they substitute an hour of television with something like yoga, it will be much more beneficial for their mind and body."

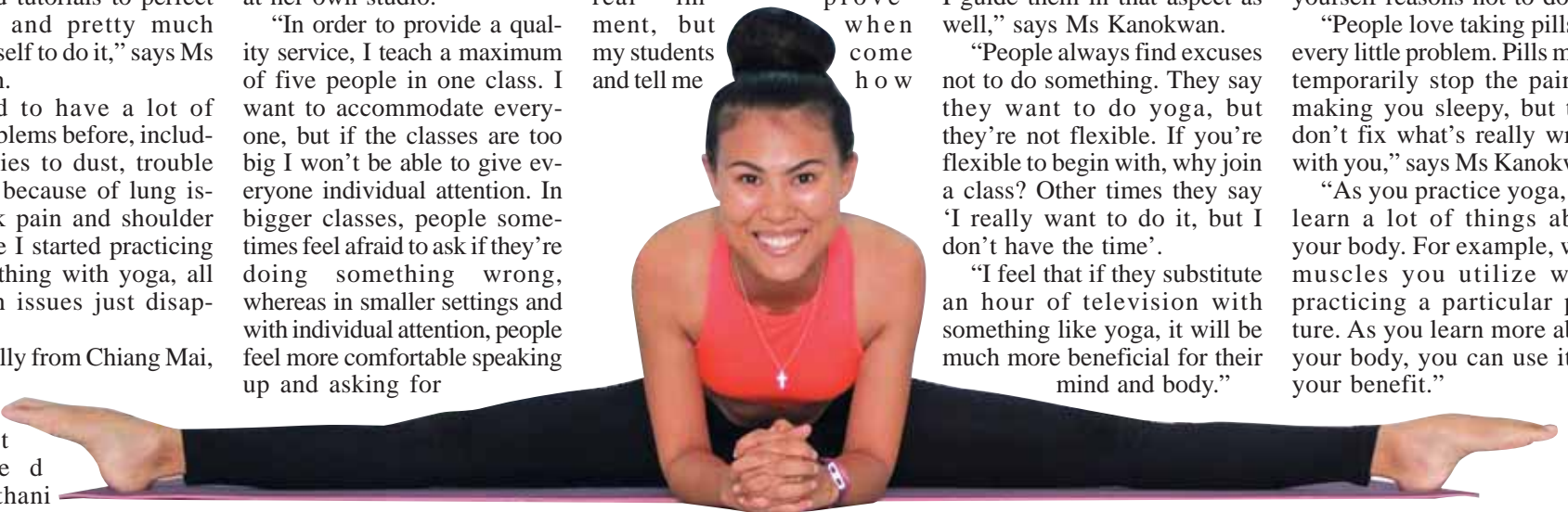
Despite her busy schedule, Ms Kanokwan finds time to travel, which is one of her passions.

"Other than Phuket, I have also worked in Singapore and Barcelona. I love travelling – in Europe, I've been to Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, France and Spain. In Asia I've been to Korea, Japan, Malaysia and Burma. I'm headed to Vietnam soon," she says.

Her advice to anyone who wishes to try yoga, or anything new in life, is to stop giving yourself reasons not to do it.

"People love taking pills for every little problem. Pills might temporarily stop the pain by making you sleepy, but they don't fix what's really wrong with you," says Ms Kanokwan.

"As you practice yoga, you learn a lot of things about your body. For example, what muscles you utilize when practicing a particular posture. As you learn more about your body, you can use it for your benefit."



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