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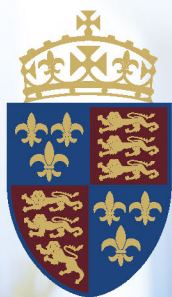
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or those who are closer to friends than family. For individuals who lack emotional support from their parents, support groups might play a significant role on the patients psychologically; hence, this group of patients might consider the support groups as “their family” instead, since support groups could relate more to their problems.

Research also revealed that the rate of depression in patients with cancers are up to three times

## Fighting through cancer with your family

Family plays a pivotal role in our daily life by being with us through thick and thin: going shopping, spending Christmas or festive events together, as well as crying together.

**N**onetheless, the moment when we need our family most is when we fall ill, either physically or mentally. This is applicable especially to most cancer patients who are experiencing profound emotional stress, either from recent cancer diagnosis or from disease progression due to the failure of previous treatments. Cancers can be found in various range of age groups: some might be grandparents who are waiting to see their grandchildren grow into adolescents, some might be fathers who need to take care of the whole family or single mothers who are solely responsible for their young children, while others might be young boys or girls who have yet to “live their lives like there is no tomorrow”. Since cancers can typically occur in any age group, emotional support to each cancer patient should be personalised.

Family, like every social organisation, comes in various forms. Therefore, the word family should not be restricted to groups of individuals who are related by blood. While some cancer patients are more fortunate to have been born with parents, receiving full emotional support, other cases might involve individuals who were born without parents

higher than that of the general population. Depression could result in poorer quality of life (QOL), compromising the patients’ outcomes. Studies also disclosed that depression could lead to higher percentage of mortality in cancer. Minor and major depressions were also known to increase mortality rates by up to 39%, based on a meta-analysis, and patients who exhibit even minimal symptoms of depression might have an increased risk of mortality by 25%. The significance of mood and mental wellbeing on the progression of cancer was also underscored by both physicians and patients, where more than 70% of oncologists and 85% of cancer patients considered that mood plays a part in cancer progression.

Physical deformations and pain associated with cancers might also lead to emotional stress that may require extensive family support. Some types of cancer such as breast cancer involving the skin may lead to skin ulcerations, which may affect female patients emotionally and physically, especially the younger ones. Other types of cancer, which affect the visible part of the body, could also lead to profound mental stress for the patients. Moreover, cancer-associated pain could also result in psychological stress. According to studies, higher levels of depression have been shown to be correlated with metastases and pain associated with cancer. High pain level, when compared to low pain level, has also been associated with higher prevalence of depression in cancer patients, where it was found in one study that depression was observed in 33% and 13% of patients with high and low levels of pain, respectively. Since cancers can drain patients emotionally and also physically, as previously mentioned, family support is of paramount importance in order to help patients cope with their problems.

Development in the healthcare system have also led to a switch of cancer care to involve more home hospitalisations than in-patient hospitalisations. This deviation towards home-care settings has further resulted in increased family



engagement in the patient's day-to-day care. Aside from emotional support, patients with cancer also have multiple needs, such as monitoring of disease and treatment, administration of medications, management of symptoms and personal assistance. These require massive responsibility from the caregivers, where they also have to be well-informed of the given tasks, including information related to the disease and treatment, along with care and technical guidance. Furthermore, it could also never be overemphasised that the current roles and responsibilities of the caregivers must be balanced with their new duties. Since family caregivers also have emotional reactions to the diagnosis and prognosis of the patients, they may also need coaching and emotional support.

All in all, family plays a crucial role in the lives of cancer patients. It could be anyone close to the patient or anyone the patient can rely on mentally and physically.



Due to the tasks that are placed upon the caregivers and depending on the patients' conditions, family caregivers might also be affected psychologically and physically; therefore, the caregivers might also require emotional support. Even though cancer patients might feel like they are walking alone on their paths, there will always be someone out there, blood-related or not, who is willing to walk with them on their journey.

#### Reference:

Given, B. A., Given, C. W., & Kozachik, S. (2001). Family Support in Advanced Cancer. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*, 51(4), 213–231. doi:10.3322/canjclin.51.4.213

Smith, H. R. (2015). Depression in cancer patients: Pathogenesis, implications and treatment (Review). *Oncology Letters*, 9(4), 1509–1514. doi:10.3892/ol.2015.2944

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# THE SRI LANKAN AMBASSADOR *to Thailand*

by Kathleen Pokrud

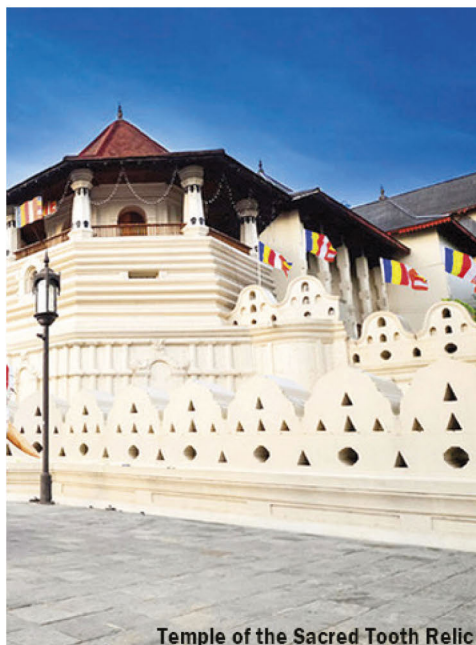
**T**he new Sri Lankan Ambassador to Thailand H.E. Mrs. Samantha K. Jayasuriya still eagerly awaits to receive her credentials from the King Maha Vajiralongkorn Phra Vajiraklaochaoyuhua. But as Sri Lanka celebrates its Independence Day on Tuesday, February 4th 2020 we managed to convince her to sit and talk to us where she told us of the great honour that had been bestowed upon her to represent Sri Lanka in the dream destination for any Ambassador, the Kingdom of Thailand.

**Did you arrive to Thailand from home, or were you posted somewhere else before?**

Coming to Thailand directly from Geneva, Switzerland as a result of the promotion to Ambassador.

**Where are you born and brought up?**

I was born in a suburban area 22km away from Colombo city. It was very much a village atmosphere in Kottawa when I was a child – today it is a transport hub, much changed in all aspects and simplicity.



Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic and cultural pageant





**At which age did you decide you wanted to become a diplomat?**

I had no plans to be a diplomat. It was the wish of my parents to see I become a Doctor of Medicine and I did study bio science. The patients were lucky! – I did not reach there, but ended up as a graduate in Agriculture Economics, from the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka. So when I was an Assistant Lecturer at the Faculty together with a few friends we applied for the open competitive exam for the Sri Lanka Foreign Service (SLFS) - it was on the last day of closing applications we did so. I passed the examination and a subsequent interview and was approved for initial training at the diplomatic academy in Sri Lanka. There is no one in my family or extended family who are diplomats.

**How do you look at Thailand today? Have you had any obstacles since you arrived?**



It is now four months since I arrived in Thailand and I am still in the process of settling in. This was my first time to visit Thailand. I look at the country as a land filled with positive lessons to learn and explore.

**Do you see any similarities between your country and Thailand?**

Thailand appears a home away from home in many fronts. The most fundamental fact is the way of life of people, the

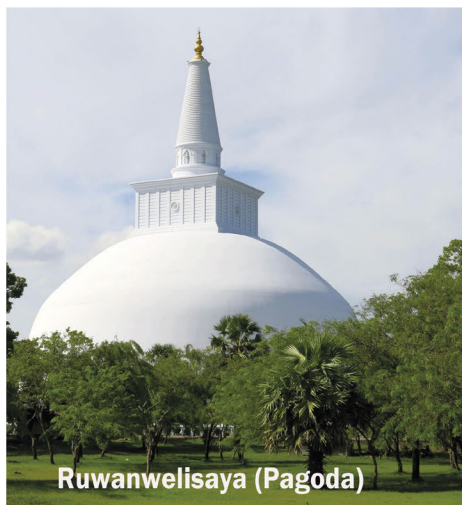
family bonds – extended family centred society. The Theravada Buddhist tradition has been the foundation of relations between our two countries. It dates back to 800 years when the Theravada Buddhist tradition practiced in Sri Lanka was introduced to Thailand. That is why you have a chapter called “Lankawamsa” here in Thailand. Similarly in 1753 when Sri Lanka (Ceylon) was under colonial occupation. It was from Thailand

(Siam) that ordination was reestablished by Phra Upali Thero. Today the Buddhist chapter in Sri Lanka is called ‘Shaymopali Nikaya’ – or Siam Chapter. Since then there have been many exchanges through Buddhist monks. The Temple Wat Bowonniwet for example has specific buildings allocated for the monks who then visited from Sri Lanka, called ‘Lankawasa’. If you consider the architecture of some bell-shaped ‘stupas’ or ‘chedi’ in places like Nakhon Si Thammarat, they were inspired by Sri Lankan Buddhist culture. As does the white temple in Chiang Rai.

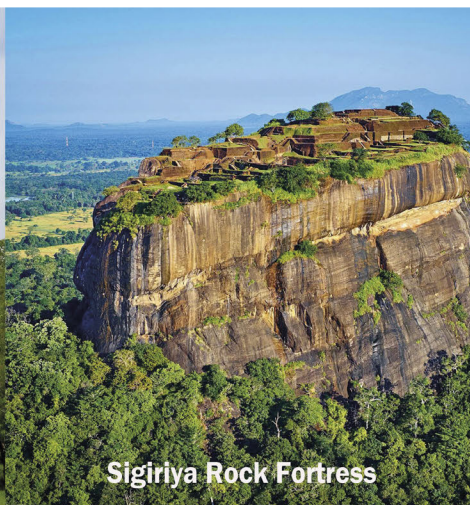
There are many socio-cultural similarities like the common celebrations such as the New Year in April. Here in Thailand you will call it ‘Songkran Festival’, visit the family and friends, temples, pay gratitude. In Sri Lanka people would pay gratitude to parents, elders, use it a period to reconcile and move on. The specific period where there is no auspicious time or the Sankranthi/Nonagatha people go to temples.



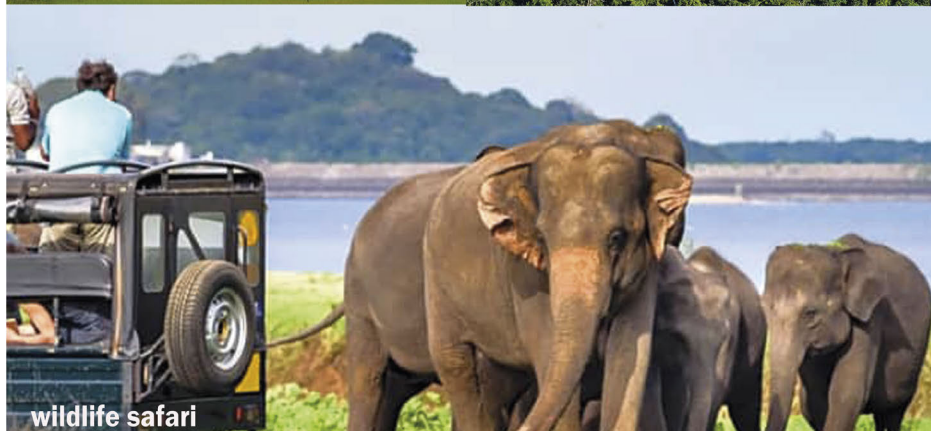




**Ruwanwelisaya (Pagoda)**



**Sigiriya Rock Fortress**



**wildlife safari**

the morning newspapers, listen to the radio news, check my emails and browse through Sri Lankan news on the web. I am normally in my office by 8.30am if I do not have any specific appointment early morning outside the office. As I have both bilateral and multilateral responsibilities, no two days is ever the same, it is exiting and opens up new connections each passing day.

**As every Ambassador, I assume you have some goals you really would like to reach/fulfil before you leave Thailand. What are they?**

We first established diplomatic relations way back in 1955 and as any new Ambassador, my first objective is to build on the good relations that has so happily co-exist and see ways of galvanising it further in every front, political, socio-economic, cultural and more importantly to enhance awareness about Sri Lanka amongst the Thai people.

As a new envoy, I am taking every opportunity to get myself acquainted with new knowledge in Thailand, the region, and to spread the message of Thai-Sri Lanka connections and the opportunities available to bring them closer and our ties stronger. Following the end of a 30 years of armed conflict against terrorism, Sri Lanka has made considerable efforts and investment to ensure sustainable peace and reconciliation amongst all communities. Sri Lanka has risen as an attractive destination for investments and trade opportunities. We have also shared our experiences between the security forces on combating marine drug trafficking through naval training.

Due to the influence of Sanskrit there are similar expressions, we greet by clasping the two hands together close to the heart and say 'Ayu-bo-wan' (may you have long life), Thais say 'Sawadee' giving a similar greeting.

Sri Lankans value family relations, respects for elders and priests. I wonder whether you know that we have two specific pali verses to worship our parents.

**Do you have children? What age and where do they go to school?**

We have one daughter who is 10 years and she is now attending KIS International School in Bangkok.

**How do you look upon your work here? What does an average day look like?**

It is very difficult to say there are average days, as each day brings new experiences. However, there are few things that I do as a routine each day.

I take my daughter to school, so I wake up by 5.30am and leave home by latest 6.45am to beat the Bangkok traffic. So, on my way, I normally finish reading



**Train Ride Through Sri Lanka's Tea Plantations**

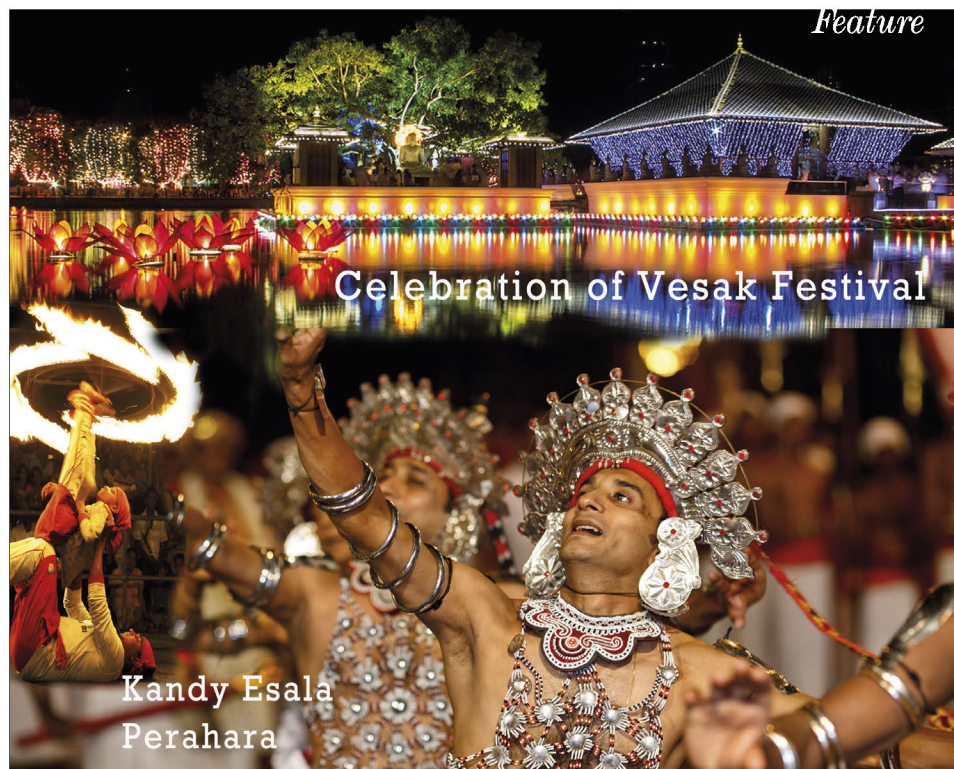


Thailand has offered us many programmes on capacity building particularly in agriculture, fisheries, rainmaking, etc.

Trade between our two countries can be expanded and these are some of the areas that I wish to look at and expand during my tenure. Also, on the multilateral sphere, we have already exchanged views on partnering with the UN agencies particularly with the UNESCAP in sustainable development, preventing marine plastic pollution, migration, macroeconomic policies and financing for development.

I also try to meet and engage with all experts that come to Bangkok representing Sri Lanka so we could identify areas which the Mission can follow up and work on. The other important area is promoting Sri Lankan tourism or bringing it to the attention of Thai travellers. Sri Lanka is a diverse and beautiful destination beyond that of just a cultural and the many Buddhist religious sites. To the small size of 65,000sq km, Sri Lanka already has 8 UNESCO Heritage sites, it is a bio diversity hot spot, in a few hours you could see the giants on land – the elephants, as well as in the sea, blue whales. Adventures, eco tourism, train rides across sweeping lush green tea gardens in the hill country, pristine beaches, stunning architecture and salubrious climates in the hills, spiritual practices including meditation and Ayurveda or Hela osu treatments that satisfy the mind and body are all out there to explore. It has been twice named as the best travel destination by Lonely Planet and most recently as one of the best warm weather destinations. I hope to make everyone here familiar with the Temple of Tooth relic and the Sigiriya Rock Fortress and its 1st Century frescoes, as must see places.

I am sure that anyone from Thailand or overseas would be interested in experiencing the food wherever they visit Sri Lanka. There is much similarity in some cuisine particularly coconut milk based curries and here in Thailand the famous



Kandy Esala  
Perahara

Sri Lankan Ministry of Crab opened their restaurant last month in Soi 30 Sukhumvit following a long wait.

There are many places of interest on my wish list that I want to see in Thailand, particularly to explore the roots of the centuries old Thai-Sri Lanka relations. I am looking forward to connect with the people and the venerable monks to share this experience. Sri Lanka and Thailand are well connected by air through the daily flights operating between Colombo and Bangkok by Sri Lanka's flag carrier 'Sri Lankan Airlines', and the national carrier of Thailand 'Thai Airways', and a budget airline 'Thai Lion Air'. The Hambantota Port Sri Lanka and the Ranong Port in Thailand has also established a business contract through a MoU.

**When you have a day off, what do you prefer to do? Do you have any special hobbies?**

A day off is precious, and if I can afford, I would prefer to stay at home and be lazy, read a good book or an article. Listen to some music, I love experimenting with cooking by going through some new recipes. Also, whenever I can, I scribble my free thoughts.

**How many of your countryfolk are living in Thailand? When and why did Thailand become a desirable destination for your people?**

There is a small Sri Lankan community, mainly long term residents doing business and working. I had my first meeting with them as a group when we celebrated the 'Diwali-the Festival of Lights' at the Embassy.





We all join in as a tradition on all important national events.

We also play host to between 60/80,000 Sri Lankans that travel to Thailand for travel and business annually.

**Do your country and Thailand have any exchange programmes for students today?**

Compared to the numbers several decades ago, we do have a smaller number of student community mainly with AIT, Thammasat,



the key person associated with the development of Sri Lanka's first satellite known as Raavana 1. I was particularly pleased to learn that the students are working on projects that address important issues useful to Thailand.

**What do you believe is your most important task as Ambassador?**

As this is my first time to be in Thailand what fascinated me in the first place was the discipline of people and service oriented nature. Their loyalty to the monarchy, religion and hierarchy are some of the indelible memories I would attach to describe Thailand.

To do my best to make Sri Lanka as one of the 'wish list destinations' for Thai and expat travellers. To see both countries concluding a FTA and benefitting from it by expanding trade, services and investment, To do my part during my three year tenure to add value to our multi-faceted relationship.

Chulalongkorn, Mahidol Universities and Sri Lankan Buddhist monks who are studying at Maha Chulalongkorn University as well as academics serving as lecturers. I visited AIT and spent time with them getting to know with them and their respective areas of studies and projects, they are mainly post graduate students. I think it is worth a reference to Ms. Dulani Chamika Withanage, an alumna of the Mechatronics programme at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), who is



*Port City Colombo*





# Why is a co-curricular programme so important in a school?

*by Mr. Thomas Banyard, Founding Head of King's College International School Bangkok*

I went to a school with one football team, one basketball team and one rugby team for around 800 students. I was never involved in drama or music and the art teaching I received gave me the clear message that I was no good and should not be allowed within ten metres of a paintbrush. I had some excellent teachers who inspired me to academic excellence, but I had to find other opportunities to develop myself away from school. This made me feel that my education was about exam results and nothing else. For me, school was simply a means to get to university, something we all had to do whether we liked it or not. I loved school, but if it wasn't for the support of my family who drove me around to endless clubs and matches, I would have been a very bored and unhappy young person.

It was only once I started working in some of the UK's best private schools that I realised what a true education involved. Having world-class facilities and outstanding teachers who taught both inside and outside their classrooms meant that so much more was possible. School musicals and plays, house events, choir practices, art and sport that focussed on participation and not just the elite sportspeople. My eyes were opened to the fact that everyone could enjoy school whether they were academic or not. A large part of this is a commitment to a co-curricular programme which works alongside the academic curriculum to help the students enjoy their time at school.

There are two reasons why the co-curricular programme is so important: it gives every student a large number of opportunities to achieve success and it gives them a variety of experiences that open their eyes and engage them in new interests.

We want students to leave school with a long list of things that they have achieved. We want students to feel that

they have been successful, that they have learnt new skills and developed in many different areas. Without the co-curricular programme, the main way for students to achieve success is through tests and exam results. With a school full of ambitious and motivated students, there has to be a top and bottom half of the class and students often find it hard to see themselves as successful if they are not near the top of their peer group. However, because co-curricular activities can be about skills such as teamwork, collaboration and leadership, there needn't be a 'best' or 'worst' student. Suddenly, it becomes much easier for students to see themselves as successful. With success comes pride, with pride, wellbeing and with wellbeing, we have achieved success for our students.

Top schools are about much more than exam results. At King's Bangkok, we have a huge amount of support from King's College School, Wimbledon to set up our co-curricular programme in order to mirror their successes. Our students will be given wonderful experiences which will allow them to leave us with interests outside of their passion for academic work. However, more important for us is that they will leave us happy and confident. This will give them the platform to make meaningful differences to the communities which they find themselves in. For us, the co-curricular programme is the springboard that propels our students to be leaders and is one of the reasons why parents will choose our school for their children.

*For us, the co-curricular programme is the key to everything we do. It is the journey of a school from being just 'a means to getting to university' to becoming a happy learning community fit for the best students in Bangkok.*





## MY LOCAL COFFEE CLUB – AT ON NUT BTS

*Comfort food – that's how  
I can best describe it!*

**E**xcellent coffee, good service – the staff all know my name and a varied menu full of international favourites, from an all day breakfast to full three course options – not that you could ever eat it all – as the portions are so generous.

Situated at the end of the Century shopping mall adjoining an Avani Hotel it is located alongside On Nut BTS. Most of their 63 branches in Thailand are at key destinations – shopping malls, tourist attractions, BTS/MRT intersections, piers, etc.

The beauty of the chain is its consistency. The staff are always happy and pleased to greet you, dressed smartly in black with a cheery 'Coffee Club good afternoon'. The decor, inside and out, is easy on the eye and the food is always top-notch.

My favourites include the all day breakfast: 3 pork sausages, rashers of streaky bacon, cherry tomatoes, a slice of toast, hash brown, fresh mushrooms, poached/scrambled or fried eggs and rocket to add that touch of greenery. That and a couple of tall lattes and bottle of iced water set me up for the day!

Or the salads (Grilled Chicken with Quinoa, Caesar or Power Bowl), Smashed Avocado Open Toast (with poached eggs and bacon or smoked salmon). Pastas (Carbonara, Spicy Grilled Pork or Shrimp). Spicy Pork Ribs or if I really want to let go the Strong Arm Angus Hamburger with Cheese and Bacon. Ummmm...

They seem to attract a nice genteel type of client too. Young couples or families and a lot of singles as the place is always welcoming and easy to make light conversation should you feel the need.

Unlike Starbucks, although there are always people working on computers, it doesn't seem to attract the type that buy a coffee or one drink and then stay all day working on their computers. There is always a healthy turnover of tables so you do not feel you are in a co working space.



The staff are first class. Always welcoming and constantly walking round the restaurant at hand if you need anything else. Never standing immersed in their mobile phones as you see so often in restaurants and retail outlets nowadays. The Coffee Club obviously pays, trains and looks after them well as they are always pleasant, well-mannered and very happy to serve you. That counts for a lot in my book.

Because of the light, airy interior and varied menu I arrange a lot of my business meetings there. I find it the ideal extension to my office. Easy to find for my guests and the menu suits all tastes at all times of the day and night.

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# Abdelilah El Housni the Moroccan Ambassador to Thailand



**E**xpat Life recently attended a Climate Change debate that was organised by the Ambassador of Morocco and the Dean of Chulalongkorn University Dr. Ake Tangsupvattana.

It was of so much interest to so many of our readers that we decided to feature the subject and devote this issue to it and similar subjects. We managed to get some of the speakers that day to write in this issue but it is a subject very dear to the heart of the King Mohammed VI of Morocco, the Moroccan Ambassador and the people of his country.

## How long have you been the Ambassador to Thailand?

I arrived in Thailand for the first time in April 2013 and presented my credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of His Majesty the King Mohammed VI of

Morocco to the Kingdom of Thailand in December 2013 to His Majesty King Rama X at that time His Royal Highness Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn. I am also accredited as Ambassador concurrently to the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

It is an honour and a privilege to be appointed as the Moroccan Ambassador to Thailand. I do believe that my appointment reflects the strength of Morocco and Thailand relations at their highest level. I was very pleased as I have always been interested in SE Asia and how I can contribute to building bridges between the two kingdoms.

## Did you arrive to Thailand from home, or were you posted somewhere else before?

This is my first assignment as Ambassador after serving as Deputy Chief of Mission at the Moroccan Embassy in Tokyo from 1998 to 2004.

I came from the capital city Rabat where I was Director-General of Human Resources Department, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and the Moroccan Expatriates in Rabat. Since joining the Ministry in 1981, I have held a number of positions in Rabat including Chief of Managing Human Resources Services, Counsellor, Minister Counsellor, Chief of Diplomas Recognition and Exams Division, Chief of Regulation and Litigation Services and Chief of Regulation and Planning Division.

## Where are you born and brought up?

I was born, raised and received my education in Rabat, the capital of Morocco. In 1981, I got my Bachelor Degree







from the National School of Administration in Rabat and in 1991, I obtained my Masters Degree in Public Administration from the University of Maine in the United States of America.

**At which age did you decide you wanted to become a diplomat?**

At quite a young age, I dreamed of being a diplomat who could serve his country. I recall I realised that I was fascinated by abroad, by foreign affairs, and by diplomacy in general. I love interacting with people, exchanging ideas and reaching out to others. I decided quite early on that I was going to become a diplomat.

**Do you have more diplomats in your family?**

No.

**How do you look at Thailand today? Have you had any obstacles since you arrived?**

Thailand is one of the great development success stories with sustained strong growth and impressive poverty reduction



and I do believe that Thailand is moving forward in all aspects towards. Thailand is the land of smiles and smiling means optimism and believing in a promising future. Over the long term Thailand will continue to move forward and grow, and with the ambitious 4.0 plan, it is set to become a developed hub in this region.

To answer the second part of the question, I have to say that it's not my first posting in Asia, actually I served as a Deputy Head of Mission in Tokyo as I said. So in Bangkok, it's been an easy adjustment to life. Also, my wife is from Japan and it does help, as does an understanding of culture and history of Asia and SE Asia. So there is a sense of belonging in returning to Asia, especially that I'm also Ambassador to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar, I feel very much at home in SE Asia.

**Do you see any similarities between your country and Thailand?**

Let me say that Morocco and Thailand are similar in various areas particularly both are ancient rooted kingdoms. At a crossroads of the African and the European continents, the Kingdom of Morocco has been, for centuries, a meeting point for the arabo-islamic culture and civilisation as well as a land of tolerance, dialogue and openness. Morocco is a land of spiritual diversity and fraternity respecting differences and I can say that Thailand is in a similar situation.







It's located in the heart of SE Asia, and is a mosaic of diversity and culture, with rich heritage and tradition, but it has also adapted and embraced the rapid change brought about by globalisation.

**Do you have children? What age and where do they go to school?**

I'm married to Akiko a Japanese national since 1990. We have two sons: Ryan 27 and Kenzo 12 years old. Kenzo was here in Bangkok until January 2019. Now he's in Tokyo. When he was in Bangkok, he attended Regent's International School Bangkok. Ryan studied at the University of Waseda and now whilst he is working he is pursuing a MBA in Tokyo.

**How do you look upon your work here? What does an average day look like?**

Morocco and Thailand established diplomatic relations in 1985. The two kingdoms have continuously developed and strengthened their cordial and constructive ties in the various fields of mutual interest, namely political, economic and socio-cultural areas. There are many challenges that we are facing, but there is much more opportunities for our people, and I am confident that the future is better.

In 2020, we will celebrate the 35th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Kingdom of Thailand. A series of celebration events will be organised both in Morocco and in Thailand throughout this year.

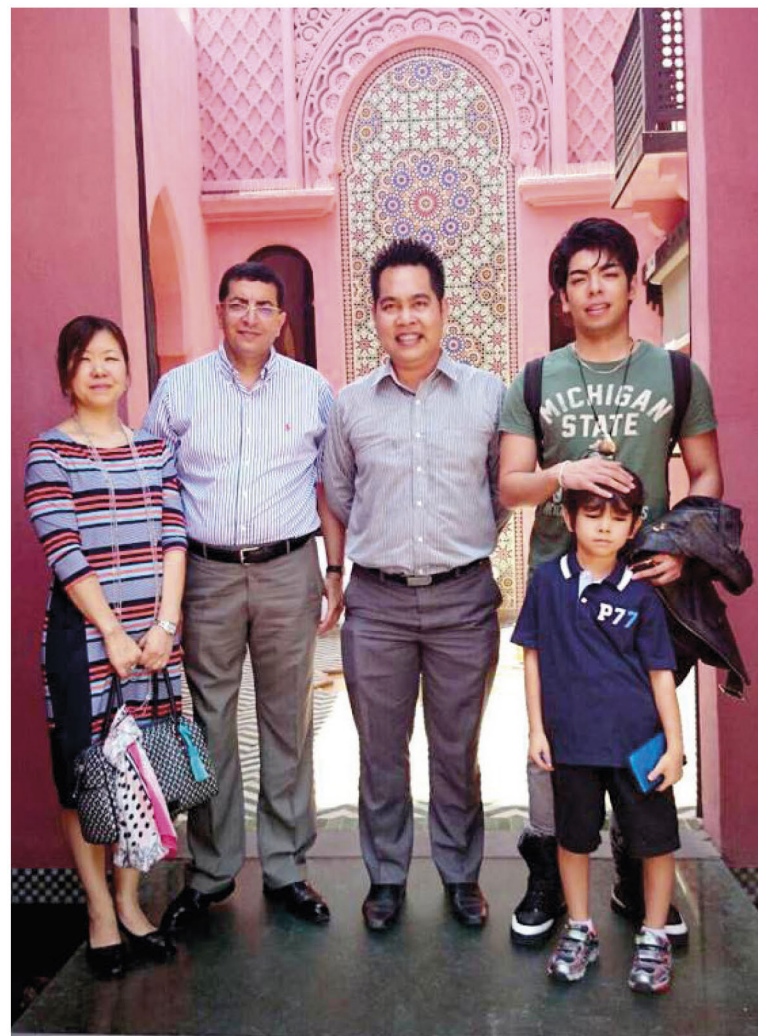
As I always say, there is no normal day for an Ambassador but my primary duties are keeping a close daily direct contact with leaders and officials from the four countries I am accredited to for the purpose of developing and maintaining positive and good relations. Each day is very different to the other. The first thing when I arrive at my office is to meet with my team. The diplomats at the Embassy are multi-skilled, polyvalent and interchangeable. We share information and work together closely. We get together to discuss and exchange views on political, economic and

cultural events, how far we are in implementing our action plan, what we have to do in the coming days, what are our assignments, if there are any functions we should attend and so on. Our motto is 'the impossible should be done in the day, miracles may take a little more time'.

**As every Ambassador, I assume you have some goals you really would like to reach/fulfil before you leave Thailand. What are they?**

My main priority is to maximise the trade and investment opportunities between Morocco and Thailand. We have already had some good results over the last six years, but there's significant scope to enhance our bilateral services and investment relationship. Morocco is encouraging direct maritime lines, and building a strong logistics chain between Morocco and Thailand as a platform for exports to

Africa which would allow partners from Thailand to benefit from the legal arsenal between Morocco and Africa, but also with countries linked by FTAs. I have to say also that we are making a favourable business climate, providing a legal framework for the protection of competition, consumers and intellectual property, and finally we are promoting partnerships and exchanges between the Moroccan and Thai business communities, through visits and participation in sectorial and commercial conferences and exhibitions.







### Have you travelled around Thailand?

I have already visited many parts of the kingdom but I want to explore more of Thailand's rural regions, especially to understand Thailand's rich history and culture. I am really fascinated by His late Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's "sufficiency economy philosophy" and the royal projects he initiated. Each time I travel I am impressed by the hospitality and generosity of the local people and I am struck by how much fun everyone seems to be having here in Thailand. Of course, people have fun everywhere. But in Thailand it seems to be different. The Thais have elevated fun to a philosophy, a way of life. I intend to travel as much as possible to discover more the countless islands in the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand.

### Until now, what is your favourite destination in Thailand?

My favourite destination is Thailand as a whole. The country offers a large choice of destinations. I am lucky, I have visited

provinces from the North to the South and from the East to the West. After more than six years, I am still impressed by the diversity of landscapes and the warm welcome of the Thai people.

### When you have a day off, what do you prefer to do? Do you have any special hobbies?

My hobbies and my passion are to worthily represent and serve my country, connect and bring our people together.

### How many of your country folk are living in Thailand?

We don't have a large community compared to our other countries living in Europe, Africa, North America or in the Middle East, but we have highly skilled profiles bringing their contribution to the development of the Kingdom of Thailand.

### Why did Morocco become one of the favourite destinations for the Thai people?

With an area of 710,850km<sup>2</sup>, bordered by 3,500 kilometres of coastline and crossed by various mountain ranges, Morocco is characterised by an incredible diversity of people and landscapes. Situated between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea in North Africa, Morocco is cut by the various fingers of the Atlas Mountains and the lone range of the Rif Mountains in the North and the Sahara desert in the South. These characteristics give Morocco an aerial fingerprint unlike any other in Africa. Morocco has become one of the preferred destination for Thais, thanks to on one hand to the 2020 tourism vision initiated by His Majesty King Mohammed VI which set, amongst others, an objective of making Morocco one of the top 20 touristic destinations in the world.







This is also on the other hand thanks to the contribution of the Thailand Travel Agents Association (TTAA), which is linked, since September 2016, by a Memorandum of Understanding with the Moroccan National Tourist Office. Together we are implementing the necessary measures to encourage the National Tourist Offices, Transport Companies and tourism professionals in Morocco and the ASEAN countries, to cooperate more and to make travel to Morocco a wonderful experience for the ASEAN people. By the way, Morocco offers a wide range of options for a variety of travellers, whether budget, middle-range, or luxury oriented.

I can say that hospitality in Morocco is legendary and people are more open-minded than ever, besides the Kingdom of Morocco is a safe place to visit characterised by its coexistence, openness and tolerance. I can mention a handful of regions that make Morocco such an attractive destination: Marrakech, Fez, Tangier, Chefchaouen, Rabat, Dakhla, Laayoune, Merzouga, Agadir, Ifrane, Oujda, Casablanca etc.

#### **Do your country and Thailand have any exchange programmes for students today?**

Every year Morocco grants several scholarships to Thai students to enable them to pursue their studies in the kingdom. I am very pleased to note that on 12th July 2018, Morocco and Thailand signed in Rabat a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at strengthening cooperation and partnership in education, higher education and scientific research. The signing of this first memorandum is part of the consolidation of the excellent and distinguished bilateral relations between Morocco and Thailand. This will allow young Thais to study in Morocco thanks

to the scholarships offered by the Moroccan government in several fields. The Memorandum of Understanding included several programmes such as the exchange of information and publications on issues related to education, including pedagogies, teaching methods, the exchange of teachers, students, and experts.

Moreover, recently and for the first time in SE Asia region, His Majesty the King Mohammed VI, graciously offered the opportunity for six preachers from Thailand to study and train in the The Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Morchidines and Morchidates (Religious Preachers).

#### **If you could choose your next destination, where would you like to go?**

My focus now is my duties here in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar. My next destinations are any parts of these countries that I have not yet got a chance to visit.

#### **Any memory from Thailand that you'd like to tell us, and awkward situation, a fun moment, etc.?**

I was going to attend a farewell reception of a departing CEO, my plane took off but after 15 minutes, one of the engines blew out and we had to return. I took another plane and could arrive on time. During my speech I said to the audience that today we nearly had two farewells - one for the CEO and one for me if the worst-case scenario had happened.

#### **Do you regularly meet up with your community?**

Frequently, we gather at various occasions, like the celebration of our Throne Day on 30th July or during the cultural events that we organise here in Bangkok. We are in constant contact with our community to defend, protect their rights and interests and provide assistance if needed.

#### **What do you believe is your most important task as Ambassador?**





My important task is to represent, defend and ensure the interests of my country and the Moroccan community and promote people-to-people oriented diplomacy. With my team, for example, we are working to increase the number of scholarships for students from Thailand and ASEAN countries, we are promoting academic cooperation between Moroccan universities and their counterparts from Thailand as well as encouraging exchange programmes for Moroccan and Thai students. Another aspect is also to promote people-to-people connectivity through tourism, culture, trade and investments.

**What else should you like the expat community to know about your efforts?**

I believe we should definitely make ourselves better known in Thailand and in SE Asia. One of our great assets is stability: political stability, security, as well as a sound and open economy. All these are important and not necessarily sufficiently known. In 2016, Morocco acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) of ASEAN. In this regard, let me say that The Kingdom of Morocco and ASEAN member states share the same values and principles, based on peace, moderation, tolerance,

mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of states. The Kingdom of Morocco under the wise guidance of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, is keen to establish even stronger, solid, effective and solidarity-based South-South and win-win cooperation with the ASEAN community.

This comprehensive approach for partnership through South-South cooperation demonstrates Morocco's commitment to enhance regional engagement with the ASEAN countries

as stated by His Majesty. Conscious of the active and constructive role that both Morocco and ASEAN play in their respective regions, the Kingdom of Morocco is willing to make the ASEAN benefit from its accumulated experience and solid ties with African partners and to further enhance these relations based on potentials offered within their geographic strategic neighbourhood.

It is a great opportunity to Moroccan and Thai investors. Especially, in sectors such as renewable energy, agriculture, fisheries, health, tourism and industry. Morocco has

become a gateway for investment in Africa and Thai companies should benefit from its position and role in Africa. Morocco's banks and financial institutions are present throughout Africa. The banking system is a way to build partnerships and joint ventures, and we can work together in this field. Also, Morocco's automobile and aeronautics industries are doing well and there is a huge potential in these fields for Thai and ASEAN investors.

Last, but not least I would like to seize this opportunity to wish the Thai people and readers of Expat Life in Thailand albeit it belatedly a very happy and prosperous new year in 2020.

I hope that together we start to appreciate the planet and enjoy the simple things in life.





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# Meet the headmaster



**E**xpat Life in Thailand sat down with Mr Jon Standen the genial Head Master of Harrow International School Bangkok to find out about his history and beliefs and the world-class education that his school delivers.

It is fitting that Mr Standen, a history graduate, should find himself leading this particular international school in Bangkok: its distinguished namesake, located just outside London, was founded in 1572 under a Royal Charter granted by Queen Elizabeth I. The school in Thailand now has its own impressive pedigree of 22 years of creating future leaders.

## How did you end up at Harrow Bangkok?

I've been a headmaster for 12 years. This is my third headship, my first two were in the UK.

I was head of a selective state grammar school in the West of England, where I had a fabulous 8 years at a really great school. During my time there, the number of students increased by 20%, and the percentage of A\*-A grades achieved doubled. I don't believe that A\* and A grades are the only or the most important measure – we valued every pupil – but it was wonderful to double the number of top grades.

I then moved to become head of an independent school in southwest England. A school where three quarters of students were day pupils and one quarter were boarders, this was an exciting new challenge for me. Reported as having 'Extremely successful... happy and knowledgeable young adults', where students achieved excellent exam grades, it was also possibly the best swimming school in the world! There aren't many schools who have a Year 10 girl who goes on to win an Olympic gold medal. During my headship we had 11 students and former students competing at the Rio Olympics – impressive stuff! I was headmaster there for 4 years and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

But one of the things my wife Suzie and I always talked about was that if the right school in Asia had a headmaster position become available, how about we take it on? Very fortunately, 2 years ago Harrow Bangkok had a vacancy as the previous head was moving on and that definitely was, and is, the right school.







### What's your educational background?

I grew up in Kent. From an independent prep school, I was accepted to the Judd School, a top state grammar school. I later went to Nottingham University to study history and ancient history. After graduating I took a job in the civil service. I didn't feel passionate about this career though so I thought hard about what I love doing and could I make it a career. I concluded that I really loved history; on days off I thoroughly enjoyed going to castles. I decided to find a job where I could use my history skills so I moved into teaching. I really enjoy being around young people, helping them learn, helping them grow and seeing them mature. I ended up in a career that I'm passionate about and one that has a real purpose.

### What do you think about parents' roles with students?

I firmly believe that parents are the first teachers. My mum and dad were perfect role models for me. One of the challenges in society today, when everyone is so busy, is to put the time into home life. I look back at my mum and dad and they put a lot of time, care and effort into giving my sister and me a great upbringing and childhood. They were hardworking people, both then HM tax inspectors, one of those 'boo-hiss' sorts of jobs! I think the way I grew up profoundly shaped my view of parental roles in school.

### What would you tell a teacher in the UK who is thinking about moving abroad?

There are many options available to UK teachers, with lots of international schools to choose from but it doesn't get much better than Thailand with its rich culture. I love the variety of this country and the friendliness of its people.

### With the large number of international schools in Thailand now, how is Harrow Bangkok different?

Fundamentally, it's what we believe in – 'leadership for a better world'. We passionately strive to help our boys and girls grow into men and women who go on to make a difference in the world, to lead us in the world. That's a key aim of ours and one that gives us a really strong purpose. It's not just about students being leaders and getting excellent grades, which of course they do, but more specifically about being leaders for a better world imbued with a moral compass.

### For a historian, you couldn't have picked a better school than Harrow Bangkok. What's the school history?

With nearly 450 years of history and heritage, Harrow is a name that is synonymous with quality, at the forefront in the UK but now also in Asia through its family of schools.

Harrow was the first school to expand into Southeast Asia, opening in 1998. We've got Harrow on the Hill's prominent reputation behind us, a very close relationship with them, but we have an impressive 22 year history of our own, our own record of excellence.







have to be genuine and authentic – a wonderful situation to be in as headmaster – and make sure we stay one of the best schools in Asia.

### **What are the benefits of an international school education?**

I believe an international education has so many benefits for helping our boys and girls understand different cultures in today's connected world. We provide a wonderful combination – a British education in a Thai setting. All nationalities get to know about each other, everyone has a balanced and fair perspective which enhances their education.

I would love for UK parents to send their children to board for two years at an international school to get them to see a different part of the

I think that's important for parents to acknowledge when they are investing in their children's education. Alumni are the measure of how successful a school is and we are very proud of our inspirational alumni.

### **How do you get the word out about Harrow Bangkok?**

We hear time and again, 'I heard from a friend how good your school is, how friendly your school is.' Which is a fabulous position to be in – honest, glowing endorsements – that we are so grateful for.

The website is important too and I believe ours gives a fair and accurate view of our school. In many cases it's the first impression people get so we work hard to show people the quality in everything we do.

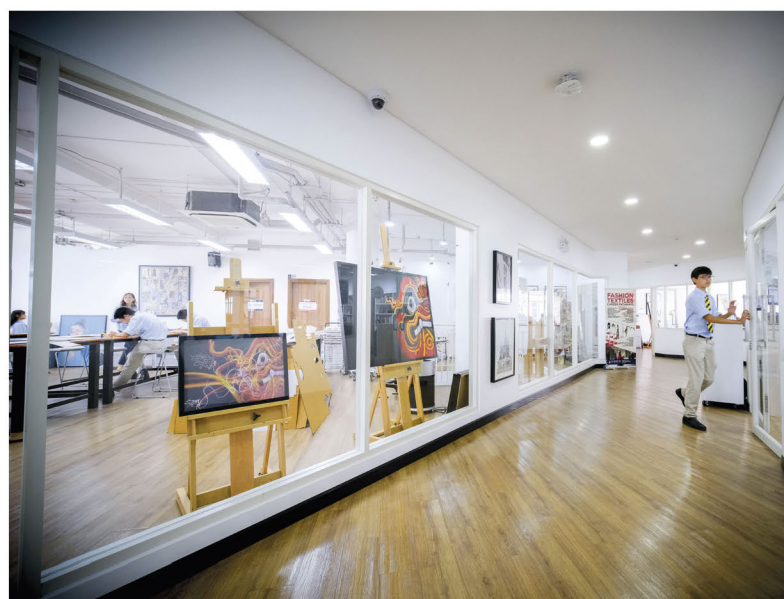
I don't feel that I'm in a position where I have to actively sell Harrow Bangkok. Our students and parents do that through the positive experiences they have, the wide range of activities on offer through our Leadership in Action extracurricular programme, and of course through the excellent academic education; the school sells itself. I just

world. Here at Harrow Bangkok, it's about that richness of the cultures coming together. It's not just about a great academic education, it's the holistic education – sports, music, business, speakers, cultural trips.

### **How important is your school's first-class campus?**

The facilities here are world-class. We have been in Don Mueang for 16 years and in the last 3 years, we have invested over 1 billion baht in our facilities to make sure everything we have is of the highest possible standard. Classrooms, arts, design and technology, music, sport, boarding are state-of-the-art facilities.

These facilities helped our F1 in Schools team to do so well in the World Finals in Abu Dhabi recently. F1 in Schools is a competition where groups of students build a miniature racing car powered by compressed air. The team have to call on all their science, technology, engineering and maths, STEAM, knowledge and skills to create the fastest car possible in the World Finals. Students also have to get sponsorship and promote and present their design. Our team won the







Sustainability Award because all of their car's plastic components, and the team's uniforms, were made from recycled plastic. Which is particularly pleasing as we were recently awarded an Eco-school Silver Flag for our environmental efforts and progress.

We have the most amazing facilities but I believe buildings alone are empty vessels. The truly unique selling-point any organisation has is their people and that's what I think helps parents place their trust in us. I hope I come across as enthusiastic, passionate, warm and engaging and that I truly want the absolute best for every boy and girl in the school. My entire team model those aspirations and values and show that we are a friendly place and that parents feel that they can be part of a community here.

### How many students do you have?

The school has continually grown to around 1,650 students, nearly our desired capacity. Class size is of greater importance though. Classes generally have a maximum of 20-22 pupils, with Sixth Form classes a maximum of 16, optimum sizes for quality teaching and learning I believe. We keep growing every year which I think is because parents trust us.

### How many teachers and staff do you employ?

We have around 200 teachers, 100 academic support staff and another 100 admin staff. Then we have contracts for around another 150 staff doing catering, gardening and security. We provide employment for nearly 550 people.

### HPL – High Performance Learning, can you explain what this is?

High performance learning is a programme based on the principle that all pupils have the potential to be high performers. That it's possible to teach



students how to be 'intelligent'. Decades of academic and scientific research and the practical experience of educators has led to a framework of the ways of thinking and the ways of behaving that students need to develop to be successful at school and in their future.

Harrow Bangkok are the first HPL school in Thailand and are systematically turning the HPL philosophy into classroom activity which will, over time, build on the high standards we already have. All good schools constantly strive to evolve and improve, to make those marginal gains, and HPL is one way that Harrow Bangkok will.





## Why and how are you introducing entrepreneurship to the school?

Surveys show that globally 77% of teenagers think about starting a business and about 25% of them will start a business. Perhaps more importantly, our entrepreneurship programme aims to instil in students an entrepreneurial mindset of curiosity, creativity and innovation. The future world of work is unknown so we hope these traits will give students a skill set that will be valuable for the rest of their lives.



## Tell us about your school governance.

I think we've got a great model of school governance here. We have local governors and governors from Harrow London, some have been involved in the school for many years, and others who represent AISL (the holding company for all Harrow International Schools). They have a broad skillset which I find energising and a very valuable resource. Plus they keep me on my toes! Which is absolutely what they should do.

## What do you like to do in your free time?

Outside school life, my wife Suzie and I love the outdoors and our two dogs. We love sports, we ski, I play golf, we try to keep fit.



An entrepreneurial mindset is entirely in keeping with the HPL mindset and all the values we believe in at Harrow Bangkok.

Entrepreneurship will be led by the school's Director of Entrepreneurship, David Harkin, also the CEO of British ideation company 7billionideas. There will be lessons, activities and workshops that deliver age-appropriate entrepreneurship skills to students from Early Years right up to Sixth Form.







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# Outdoor education for families visiting Kanchanaburi

by Troy Wells

*If you live in Bangkok, Kanchanaburi is on your doorstep. It's stunningly picturesque, relatively inexpensive, easily accessible and has the most amazing clean and beautiful rivers running through its heart.*

**I** have a particular reason for knowing the water's clean, since I work on the rivers most days and we check the water quality frequently for our water sports

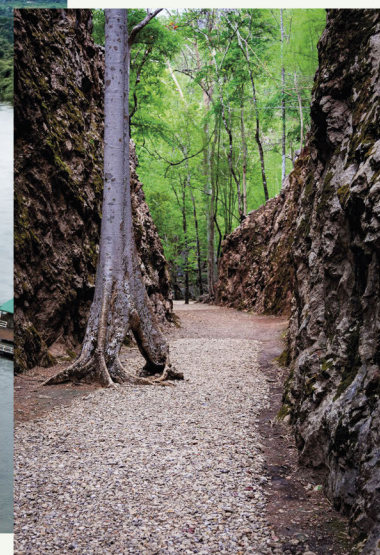
education business. The rivers and surrounding rural lands lend themselves to some wonderful outdoor education opportunities for the young and the young at heart. The River Kwai Yai offers all the benefits of outdoor education, from learning responsibility and building confidence through water sports, to the chance to soak up Kanchanaburi's natural rural environment, and enjoy the flora and fauna all along the river. Water sports and stand up paddle-boarding, in particular, engage children and adults in a unique way. Children, especially, love the feeling of control and responsibility that comes with journeying in a river environment.

If you look around, you'll also find some amazing accommodation at very, very competitive prices, and none more amazing that the stunning Royal River Kwai Resort and Spa. There is plenty of evidence available that points to

the positive mental benefits of spending time close to water and this resort absolutely checks those boxes, being right on the riverside, and offering elegant and comfortable rooms set amongst delicate Thai garden sculptures, all surrounded by local trees, shrubs and flowers. The pool is perfect, whether you







like a morning exercise regime, a midday tanning session or a cooling late afternoon dip, while the food is exquisite. Going by its longevity, the owners of this resort seem fastidious about maintenance, keeping the resort's appearance and functionality at a very high standard. It's a location that's synonymous with romance and tranquility.

Kanchanaburi is full of places to visit and things to do, but one of the gems in plain sight is the natural world of rural Kanchanaburi itself and the River Kwai Yai, where the terrible Russian roulette scene was filmed in classic movie *The Deerhunter*. Reading one of the myriad books about the wartime history, or *The Railway Man* by Eric Lomax to get a feeling for what the PoWs went through is recommended during your stay. The Hellfire Pass Interpretive Centre is another must for those with an interest in such history and a poignant reminder that for every PoW who suffered, many more Asian workers lived and died constructing the notorious Burma-Siam Railway.

Hellfire Pass Interpretive Centre and Memorial Walking Trail is dedicated to all allied prisoners of war and civilian Asian labourers (Romusha) who suffered and died during the construction of the Thai-Burma railway during the Second World War. Funded and maintained by the Australian Government, the interpretive centre tells the story of the railway, the construction and attempts to convey the hardship and suffering of those who were forced to work in extremely harsh conditions.

Apart from the centre and its exhibition, visitors are encouraged to

proceed to the memorial walking trail. An audio tour guide is available to enhance the experience as you walk along the railway bed and cuttings.

History aside, outdoor education can be as simple as taking your children away from the city and traffic to enjoy the peace and serenity of a location, just enjoying pointing out things of interest and, crucially, unplugging from tech for a while. It can be as simple as hiring a bike to go for an early morning rural jaunt, riding out somewhere for lunch, or reading a book in the shade with nothing but birdsong around you. Kanchanaburi can get ferociously hot: late March to early May sees daytime temperature getting close to or even higher than 40°, so a nice pool or the pristine river offer important means to cool down. Beyond this period, temperatures throughout the rest of the year are very reasonable. Kanchanaburi 'winter' which starts around November and ends around the end of February, is very pleasant indeed – and campsites and 'glamping' sites spring up all around the region and especially up towards Erawan along the 3199 road (I advise getting in early before the hordes learn about this!)







## Stand up paddle-boarding in Kanchanaburi

Schools, parents, organisations, and companies are increasingly using the outdoors as a means of team building and providing leadership opportunities. Stand up paddle-boarding is a great example of this, giving children and adults opportunities to engage with the process of becoming a leader, firstly simply by taking responsibility for oneself in ways that modern life doesn't always require, through maintaining proper hydration, sun protection, and

Don't be put off, either, by the 'rainy' season, typically from around June to October. In my own experience here, it seems rare that it rains for days at a time – the rain appears more inclined to be a brief 30–60 minute downpour, as humidity builds during the heat of the day and the clouds burst in the cooler evening air, whilst pleasant temperatures mean you won't freeze in the rain! In fact, the great benefit of the rainy season is that the clouds offer a degree of protection from the direct sunlight, though of course, you are still at risk of sun damage, so it's important to take care, cover up and/or apply sunscreen, even on cloudy days. If you do choose to do something on the river, wildlife abounds: with diverse bird, mammalian or reptilian life, there is always lots to see on a journey downriver.

There are plenty of options for renting a bicycle in Kanchanaburi too. Go for it! Take care, check the bike over, but don't limit yourself to the city. Try to get out into the rural areas. Cycle a few kilometres out of the city and you'll find yourself amongst stunning scenery, with iconic mountain backdrops. Wonderful birdlife flits between the crops of rice, sweetcorn, sugarcane and lemongrass and more. Look out for the Asian Openbill Storks standing like sentinels awaiting frogs and Golden Apple Snails to appear – since these snails are both non-indigenous and consume the rice crops, the farmers welcome these graceful protectors of the rice fields.

considering one's own mental health and mindset, for example being self-motivated and optimistic about learning a new outdoors skill or through being determined when learning new skills or facing new challenges like paddling in a new or difficult environment and pushing through tiredness.

The next level of growth for leadership skills is through paddle board based expeditions, like Duke of Edinburgh (DoE) International Award Adventurous Journeys, is through rotation of roles of team responsibility like team leader, navigator, and safety lookout, with each requiring taking on different responsibilities for group progress and safety, while also taking responsibility for one's own safety on the water,





being aware of danger and one's own capabilities.

Finally, leadership is cultivated through being part of a team, showing thoughtfulness, empathy or learning to appreciate and work with others, for example, communicating a skill effectively to others and encouraging them through an empathetic approach, particularly those who might not be as enthusiastic or skilled as oneself. Children and adults often paddle alongside less confident swimmers who might be a little anxious, watching out for them, building effective communication in games on and off the water or helping others onto the board or guiding them to make the 'right' decision. Team leaders may need to practise effective delegation during longer paddles (for example, rotating navigation duties or asking someone to look after the first aid kit) or simply learning to listen during opportunities for communication and compromise (for example for routes and safety). Everyone needs to practise selflessness (for example, patience with young children) and recognition of safety and rescue techniques as being as important as games, skills and general fun.

Perhaps most of all, participants all experience commitment and passion as they learn a new sport, whilst being

accountable (for example, for one's own safety, especially valid for youngsters) and making choices and decisions, all with the guidance of an instructor present.

We try to hit the mark with a mix of skills and nature-based activities along the river or out on rural bike rides. We offer a range of activities for all ages and abilities. Most people that try stand up paddle-boarding for the first time are surprised at how easy it is. We prioritise knowledge of safety, rescue, equipment and above all, respecting nature and the river while on the water. A large number of companies have come to us for team-building and we welcome students from many new and established Thai and international schools in the region. We are delighted to give everyone a break from technology and being 'connected' – the only connection you'll experience is with the board, the river, those around you and with nature. It's a very contemplative experience that engages your whole body and it's open to old and young alike.

The benefits are not just mental and social. Physical improvements start with an improvement in balance, which has a knock-on effect on activities outside the water. Stand up paddle-boarding also provides the

paddler with a full body workout because almost every muscle in the body is used at some point during paddle boarding. If you are weak or healing from an injury to your muscles and joints, paddle-boarding is an excellent exercise to increase strength gently. You'll also have improved cardiovascular health and better endurance. After spending a day out on a paddle-board, you might feel tired but you'll sleep well. Above all, being out on the water is calming: engaging with nature can have a positive effect on your mental health and attitude, and getting some extra vitamin D from the sun is good for you too, providing you take it in moderation.

With that in mind, we offer various adventurous journeys and expeditions along the River Kwai Yai or Kwai Noi, which under controlled guidelines can count toward the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award. Our team can provide Bronze, Silver or Gold level Adventurous Journeys, along with Bronze level hikes in stunning rural Kanchanaburi. Our team is flexible, meticulous and dedicated to providing you with a lifelong memory of beautiful rural Thailand.



On our carefully planned routes, we try to show you the best of what Kanchanaburi has to offer, from rural cycling along farm tracks to paddle-boarding along its incredible rivers, no matter what your level is.

SUP Hire (Thailand),  
Co., Ltd

[www.supkanchanaburi.com](http://www.supkanchanaburi.com)





## VERSO FOUNDING HEAD CAMERON FOX

**V**ERSO International School opens in August 2020 and Expat Life was honoured to be able to interview the Founding Head Cameron Fox.

In a bold departure from the traditional school design process, VERSO is a school unlike any other. In a groundbreaking partnership with IDEO, the San Francisco based global design and innovation company, VERSO gives Bangkok, a compelling and inspirational vision for the future of international education.

Using human-centred design, they are creating a unique architectural environment offering operational structures, physical spaces and a learning culture to produce innovative, entrepreneurial lifelong learners prepared for a dynamically shifting future.

VERSO values and responds to the uniqueness of each child to develop a strong sense of personal and cultural identity, an ability to engage with the world and the confidence to lead their own journey.

### **Where are you from and what is your educational background?**

I'm originally from Scotland and I did my undergraduate studies at the University of Strathclyde where I studied Politics and Industrial Relations. I was the first person in my family to go to university. I moved to Hong Kong in 1993 and then did

a master's degree through the University of York in the UK in Teaching English to Young Learners, which was the first distance learning programme introduced by the university. I then did a post graduate diploma in Education at the University of Hong Kong, where I got my full teaching qualification.

### **What attracted you to teaching?**

When I went to university, I didn't foresee a career in education. That came later. When I finished

university and was looking for my next step, at that time, the opportunities in the UK were quite limited. It was a time when jobs were difficult to find, so Hong Kong was an attractive place to go because there were lots of opportunities there. I initially got a job at a language institute and that's where I really started my teaching career and developed a good rapport with students and found that I enjoyed it.

### **When did you first become a headmaster?**

When I joined the American International School (AIS) in Hong Kong in 2000, I went in as one of the founding teachers in their new middle school. Shortly after I joined the person who was in charge of the middle school left, so there was a leadership opportunity available.

I was invited to step into the position. It happened quite quickly when I joined AIS. I became a Vice Principal and then a Principal before becoming the Head of School. I spent 19 years as an administrator at AIS.

### **Are you teaching at VERSO?**

I won't be so much involved in the day to day learning and teaching. A headmaster's role is a much wider role nowadays. It's about building the team. I feel my strength as a school leader is being able to develop a highly capable and confident team, and working closely with them to push the school forward.

### **Do you have a core team on board?**

We recognised early on in this project







*VERSO's iconic looped buildings and architecture was inspired by up-to-date research in learning space design*

how critical it would be to have people who understood what we were trying to do, or at least willing to go with us on this incredible journey. I approached a few people I trusted and asked if they wanted to be part of the project. We started small but now have 12 full time educators from around the world who are part of the leadership team. Together we are recruiting VERSO's founding faculty.

**When you open in August, how many teachers will you begin with?**

We will probably have about 30-35 staff, in terms of faculty.

**What are the benefits of an international education?**

I see so many advantages. It is so rich in its diversity and gives families and students a much broader vision of the

world. Families invest in their children's education, so we have a huge responsibility to deliver a high quality school experience. Standards and expectations are high and that attracts great teachers. Why wouldn't you want to work in an environment where you have this level of resources and support? International education is a highly dynamic and attractive sector to be in. The end result for the students is that they're working with really high quality teachers in wonderful facilities and are getting an incredible experience. Everyone is in this together, it's a partnership. There's a sense of investment that merits high quality. It puts the onus on us to deliver and that's what's exciting about international schools.

**Tell us about your facilities, everyone is talking about the architecture.**

The architecture of the school is inspired by our research into the design of learning spaces. Today we understand so much more about the critical role our physical environment plays in the way we behave and learn. Our unique looped buildings are intentionally designed to promote a sense of flow and movement. The architecture is actually quite simple. It's bright, spacious and allows us to be highly adaptive and responsive to the learning needs of our students. It's an integrated and interdependent network of zones, levels and spaces where learning is limitless. The campus has been designed as an ecosystem that interconnects buildings and spaces with the natural landscape.

I think facilities are important and they must have a purpose and function. Function over form is important and at VERSO, it is all driven with learning in mind.



*Learning spaces at VERSO is an integrated and interdependent network of zones, levels, and spaces where learning is limitless*



### What are the challenges of third culture kid syndrome?

I have two daughters and my wife is from Hong Kong so they grew up in a bicultural environment. It's been a very interesting journey as a head of school and a parent in the same school as my kids. I think where my daughters have benefited enormously is that they had a solid foot in the culture they were living. Hong Kong was their city even though their Dad was not from Hong Kong and they were at an international school. A lot of international school kids sense they exist in a bubble. They don't quite know where they are or who they are. Our research showed that it was common for international school students to feel disconnected to the world beyond their school's walls. The ability to transition, to build a community and understand what's going on outside, is an essential skill for students who will probably remain internationally mobile way beyond their school years. Through our conversations with families, we realised that many schools don't place a big enough emphasis on connecting deeply to the people, and issues in the communities where the school is situated. The school shouldn't be a bubble. It needs to be porous, where ideas and influences flow in and out.

### You talk a lot about connection, how will you foster that at VERSO?

VERSO places a huge emphasis on connections and developing networks. We are deeply committed to connecting the life of the school to the world around it and 'popping the bubble'. As much as CEOs are very important players in networking, we are also interested in talking with small businesses and local entrepreneurs. We want to connect our learning to the outside world. It's about finding new pathways and building opportunities for students to see how the work we do in school is relevant for their future. We want our students to see learning as meaningful, purposeful and how their work at school can be applied to the real world. We are training solution finders and problem solvers, and kids need to learn what this actually means. An important benefit for the businesses we partner with, is the insights they get from working with our students. It's a really symbiotic relationship that we see as being a hallmark of a VERSO education.



*VERSO's arena which will consist of a basketball court, gym, climbing wall, yoga, stretching area and more*

### Tell me a bit about VERSO? What is unique?

VERSO is a really unique opportunity. There aren't many of us who have been given the task of building a school from scratch to the scale that is expected here and with the resources we have been given. I have colleagues who have been involved in smaller start-up schools, but never with something as big as this.

The starting point for VERSO was a simple question: How can we design a new international school that will truly prepare its students for a world that is changing faster than at any other time in human history?

As experienced educators, we wanted all the good things we typically have in an international school, with the creative freedom to remove some of the unnecessary constraints that often restrict students from reaching their potential. If we were going to redesign a school, then I felt we should try to avoid the things that typically 'trip us up', and prevent us from delivering the school experience we believe kids should have.

So, we asked this question to people whose job is to innovate, create, and look at things from a different angle. As educators, this can be a challenge because we're also conditioned by years of being in traditional schools. That's why we invited IDEO, one of the world's leading design and innovation firms from San Francisco to help us. IDEO is famous for their ability to create positive impact through design. They are recognised globally for pioneering design thinking and using their human-centred design process to find innovative solutions for their clients. They were intrigued when we asked them if they would be interested in designing a new kind of international school. So, from the outset, VERSO is completely unique in terms of how it was conceived and designed. We didn't go down the traditional route. We intentionally went outside of education to get a different perspective about what a future school could be like. That was in 2015.

We are not competing in the same space as traditional international schools. VERSO has been designed knowing





Thailand's only 50m climate-controlled Olympic standard indoor swimming pool

that there is heavy competition in that market. We are simply thrilled and excited to be able to offer parents and students another choice, which we feel delivers a refreshing alternative to the very narrow academic funnel we traditionally push students through. VERSO is designed to give students a much more meaningful and personalised school experience that will actually give them more choices when they complete high school.

#### **Where does the name VERSO come from?**

VERSO is the Latin word for the left-hand page of an open book. It's the page that's been turned. Our innovative approach to school design, from our work with IDEO to the re-engineered curriculum, fits well with this idea of 'turning the page' and delivering something new and exciting.

#### **What curriculum are you following?**

VERSO delivers a re-engineered American curriculum that's aligned with New York State's Education Standards. We chose an American framework because it gives us greater flexibility to design powerful learning experiences that are interdisciplinary, project-based and skills-focussed.

Since we don't believe in a one-size-fits-all approach to the curriculum, learning at VERSO will be increasingly personalised. We chose the New York State Education Standards because they're comprehensive, research-based and internationally recognised. They also provide clear learning progressions for all students, outlining what learners should know and be able to do.

#### **Is there a target student number?**

The school has been designed for a maximum of 1,800 students with 600 students in the Lower Loop, the Middle Loop and the Upper Loop. During the school day, students will work in a variety of spaces and in a variety of groupings.

We are using a model that combines two traditional grade levels into one cohort with a team of dedicated teachers for each cohort. Students will typically work in both smaller groups and bigger project teams. Our daily schedule also includes community time for large group gatherings and celebrations, as well as individual time with a dedicated teacher.

#### **Why has VERSO not announced a boarding programme?**

In our initial phase, we wanted to focus on delivering an exceptional day school programme.



Cameron Fox: We want students to see learning as meaningful and purposeful





We have the space allocated for boarding and this will be part of the second phase of the school.

### **What is a 'future-ready' curriculum at VERSO and what do you believe children need to learn?**

When we did our field research with IDEO we visited 25 innovative schools in the US, Singapore, Hong Kong and Thailand. We spoke with students, educators and parents and listened carefully to their thoughts on the school. The insights we gathered were eventually synthesised into VERSO's DNA and our 3 Purpose Pillars. These 3 simple beliefs reflect our vision for what the graduates of tomorrow will need. This is the bedrock for our 'future-ready' curriculum.

First, an international school has to be rooted in a strong sense of personal and cultural identity. We know that an international education exposes students to a rich, intercultural environment. To navigate that environment with authenticity and confidence, we will support our students as they seek to understand where they come from, how they are connected to the cultures around them, and where they will go next.

Second, kids need to be able to actively engage with the world around them. While our passports and flags define one facet of our citizenship, how we choose to interact and contribute defines another. Beyond just absorbing and retaining knowledge, our students will have a passion for applying what they learn to the world around them.

Our third pillar is having the confidence to lead your own journey. Once students graduate from school, they are asked to make choices that shape their own paths, and the experiences of those around them. It takes years to develop the skills of decision making and self-guidance, and so we believe it's important to start early.

### **How about the arts and culture, how will you include these?**

Our curriculum is project-based and interdisciplinary, so the arts will play an important role in a lot of what our

students do. Of course we also have wonderful facilities, which include art rooms, exhibition spaces, multimedia production and large recording studios, a black-box theatre, dance studio, game design studio, and multiple maker-spaces throughout the school.

### **How do you incorporate the wellness aspect into your programme?**

We have designed VERSO to give students a holistic education. Health and wellness are key components to this. We want students to understand that their mental and physical wellbeing is just as important as their academics, and that school is a place for kids to learn how to be healthy, happy and connected. Wellness and physical activity combined with strong social and emotional support will be part of the daily life at school for all students. If you look at the school in terms of its facilities, the emphasis on sports alone tells you how important the physical wellbeing of our students is. Wellness is a key design principle for us.

### **Why VERSO?**

VERSO offers a fresh choice for families. The entire school experience will be deeply personal for every student and we will have the flexibility to remove a lot of the constraints that traditional schools can't change. Our goal is to give students a world-class international school education that empowers them to achieve their full potential. We see VERSO as offering students and teachers a highly creative, collaborative environment where kids are active participants because learning has relevance and purpose. At the end of their time here, they will come out ready for the world.

*They will be confident young men and women who understand how to navigate the world around them, and that's really what VERSO is all about.*



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## Denla British School (DBS) and a rigorous academic focus

**A**cademic excellence and acquisition of leadership skills are the heart of a successful educational foundation for students. DBS will enable students to shine academically with many special programmes, including preparations for IGCSE and A Level examinations to get into world's top universities.

Mr Mark McVeigh, Principal of Denla British School (DBS), a leading international school in Thailand, is an expert in education who has all-round teaching experience of over 30 years. He leads provision of education at DBS along with the team of expert teachers, so students have developed academically at a fast rate.

This academic year, DBS has launched 5 special programmes:

- 1) **Beacon Core & Aspire, and Cartesian programmes** – for the brightest and most engaged students to stretch them intellectually. Students are invited to join the programmes, based on their academic performance and attitude to their studies.
- 2) **Comprehensive ESL programme** – to ensure that every DBS student is able to access the British curriculum, encouraging a good mastery of the English language for all.
- 3) **Accelerated Reader programme** – to enable students to make excellent progress in their English language reading. Books are selected at an appropriate level for the individual, students answer questions to show that they have understood,



and they can then move on to the next level at their own rate.

4) **Y10 and IGCSEs plans** – to ensure that the school has the right teaching team in place for the start of the IGCSEs, and that the curriculum reflects the necessary IGCSE course specifications. Plans will be put in place so that individual students receive guidance on which of the optional subjects to choose, apart from the core English, Maths and Science.

5) **GL performance** – At DBS, there are assessments for English, Maths, and Science called GL Assessments to measure against the world's average. The Progress Test Series (PT Series) assesses students' comprehension of the core subjects to identify which students need extra support and which will rise to more challenging targets. Results from GL Assessments help teachers to accurately plan for each student's academic excellence.

Other than a rigorous academic focus, DBS is determined to nurture students as global leaders with versatile skills. In this academic year, the co-curricular programme will be enhanced with Model United Nations, an advanced learning model based on the procedures at the United Nations, giving students the opportunity to debate, discuss, analyse ideas, and





present to large groups of people. This is all very important in instilling global leadership skills in accordance with the school's vision, "Nurturing Global Leaders."

DBS Principal says, "The British curriculum is the most popular curriculum in the world. A distinctive characteristic of the UK curriculum is the focus on students as individuals. The curriculum is designed to encourage a child's potential in the most precise and effective way. It offers skills-based learning, so that children can think and question at a deeper level to pursue individual enquiry and be aware of global contexts. It prepares them for a future where education is more than the sum of examination results."

The UK curriculum is delivered by two sectors in the UK: independent schools, and state schools. The UK curriculum for independent schools is very intense and it is considered the best curriculum in the UK. DBS implements an enhanced UK curriculum from the best practice of independent schools in the UK, where all teachers are native English-speakers (apart from Thai and Mandarin teachers) and they are very experienced. The uniqueness of DBS's enhanced UK curriculum includes its approach to Personalised Learning that concentrates on encouragement, and adapting the teaching method to each student, according to their skills and preferences. Approaches vary from specific teaching for each individual, to teaching in small groups, with teachers and

their assistants supervising the entire process. The school is not only known for its academic excellence, but also encourages a well-rounded education so that children can explore and discover their own talents. Another characteristic of DBS is the additional learning period in the Extended Day system. DBS students will have 1.5 hours per day more school time than students in other schools, adding up to nearly 8 hours per week, for which parents don't have to pay an extra fee.

Students will be encouraged to choose from over 60 courses and activities per week, including English language, literature, art, music, dance, sport, robotics, cooking and leadership activities. They can focus on what they like, they can join clubs and also use this period for homework groups to prepare themselves for the next school day. All students will be looked after by expert teachers and without an extra fee. This is enormously worthwhile and hugely beneficial to students' development.



#DBS #DenlaBritishSchool  
#DBSBangkok #InternationalSchool  
#BritishSchool  
#NurturingGlobalLeaders







## DESIGN FUTURES

**ELC international schools** are places where children are active protagonists in their own learning. They comprise a family of unique schools where students base their research, discovery, and experimentation within the context of contemporary culture and learning. Those within strive to resolve dilemmas of individual and shared importance in their quest for knowledge and understanding but most importantly, imagine possibilities for a better future.

In the daily life of ELC schools, we can perceive a pronounced increase in children's creativity, the quality of their research, and their ability to access information. This facilitates the development of complex digital projects and products of knowledge, which are elaborated between children and between children and adults.



*digital bicycles for enjoyment in the park using arduino technology designed by Pop and Anna (ages 8 to 9 years)*



*automated solar and wind-powered street cleaner using arduino technology designed by Caden, Fabian and India (ages 10 to 11 years)*

# elc international schools

**The City School**  
Ages 3-11 years  
Area: Thonglor  
18 Soi Sukhumvit 49/4  
Bangkok 10110  
+66 (0)2 381 2919  
info@elc.ac.th

**The Purple Elephant 39**  
Ages 18 - 36 months  
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61 Soi Phrom Mit  
Bangkok 10110  
+66 (0)2 662 4570  
purpleelephant@elc.ac.th

**The Purple Elephant 49**  
Ages 18 - 36 months  
Area: Phrom Phong  
99 Soi Sukhumvit 49/13  
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+66 (0)2 392 3190  
purpleelephant@elc.ac.th

**The Purple Elephant 55**  
Ages 18 - 36 months  
Area: Thonglor  
79 Soi Thong Lo 8  
Bangkok 10110  
+66 (0)2 116 2394  
purpleelephant@elc.ac.th

**The Country School**  
Ages 18 months - 5 yrs  
Area: Nonthaburi  
44 Soi Samakkee 20  
Nonthaburi 11000  
+66 (0)2 588 1063  
countryschool@elc.ac.th









# Celebration of Thai Silk

by Kathleen Pokrud

*The final curtain of the whole week of 9th Celebration of Thai Silk came with the Grand Fashion Extravaganza on November 23, 2019 at the Royal Thai Navy Convention Hall.*

The event was a great success and credit to Mr. Edward Kiti, President and Founder of the Tourist Assistance Foundation, and his team who had been working incessantly on the project. They pulled off an amazing experience for everyone involved and attended the weeklong episodes of fashion shows, and excellently promoted Thailand to the world.

Every year since 2010, the Thai Tourist Assistance Foundation, in collaboration with members of the

foreign diplomatic corps in Bangkok, has organised the Celebration of Silk project to exhibit traditional and modern Thai silk and design. 2019 showcased the 9th annual celebration to commemorate Her Majesty's 87th Birthday. In honour of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, the Queen Mother, the Celebration of Silk project ran for an entire week (from November 18–22), with design seminars, university lectures, commercial displays and an extraordinary nationally televised fashion show each year.

## Great expectations met at 9th Celebration of Thai Silk

In 2019, a total of 71 countries participated in the project. Last year marked the biggest Thai Silk Fashion event ever held in Thailand. Different country designers created Royal Thai Silk costumes for their respective Ambassador, Spouse of Ambassador or Embassy representative. The Grand Opening Fashion Show was an extravaganza affair which was officiated by the Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha in front of an audience

of over 5,000 media personalities, designers, celebrities, government officials, diplomats, buyers, business and industry leaders.

Last year observed the participation of 33 Ambassadors, 30 Spouses of Ambassadors, 8 Deputy Chief of Missions, and 26 Embassy representatives. With the 2019 project, the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Thai Silk Fashion Week was held for five full days at Eden Zone, CentralWorld. It successfully showcased 24 full fashion shows by 43 fashion designers. During the weeklong event, each designer exhibited a collection of Thai Silk costumes and also their own latest collections. The Next Big Designer Contest, its first on Fashion TV was launched at the Finale.

One of the highlights of the Grand Opening show was the participation of Celebrity Models such as renowned fashion designer, Professor Datuk Jimmy Choo, Dato' Aziz Bakar (Director of Air Asia Berhad.) and Datin Norma Norell (fashion and textile designer).













Beauty Queens from 13 countries around the world participated in last year's fashion shows wearing Thai Silk dress designed by either a designer from their own countries or Thai designers. Their appearance helped to promote the use of Thai Silk and Thai culture, through their fan clubs and social media followers around the world.

*The design concept for last year was "The Land of Smiles".*

Thailand is known as the Land of Smiles, Thai people do smile a lot. It is Thai culture to be kindhearted, friendly and helpful. A Thai smile can mean happiness, amusement, embarrassment and or apology. This unique culture makes Thailand welcoming to the world.

Number of participating countries: 71

Number of participating Ambassadors: 33

Number of participating Spouses of Heads of Missions: 30

Number of participating Deputy Chief's of Missions: 8

Number of participating Embassy representatives: 26

Number of international designers: 43

Number of Thai designers: 12

Number of celebrity models: 15





# WHEN YOUR CHILD LEAVES HOME

by Carolyn Whitehouse

Every year, thousands of expatriate parents “launch” their child off to university and like most moms I didn’t think much about it, until it happened to me.

*Watching my daughter fighting back the tears from the car park outside her university halls, the memories flooded back of her first day at kindergarten. Where had the time gone?*

The tears streamed down my face as I glanced over to my mother who was also crying, whilst the muffled noises from the back of the car informed me that my mother in law had also succumbed. Shocked I glanced from one to the other “I don’t know why you’re crying” I said angrily. “It’s me that’s going to be thousands of miles away”.



The weeks that followed were a whirlwind of emotions; sadness at her empty space at mealtimes, happiness at her first friendship, anxiety over her first night out and constant frustration at our poor internet connection. Her ups and downs were my ups and downs, which together with the midnight phone calls and the growing voice in my head that kept shouting “what do I do now”, left me





physically and mentally exhausted. Why did no-one tell me it would be like this?

Whilst domestic research often portrays the “launch” of a child to university as a positive transition for parents, there is virtually no research on the experiences of expatriate families and the specific challenges that arise when your child is thousands of miles away. Fast forward three years and the completion of my Masters in Psychology dissertation research. This is what I discovered about the experiences of a group of expatriate mothers living in Thailand:

Before you “launch” your child to university mothering is all about “caring for” them. You cook their meals, wash their clothes and check their homework but once they leave that role transitions to “caring about” your child. Your role becomes that of supporting your child; listening, guiding and advising when necessary (even if they choose to ignore it).

The transition experience is unique to you and can influence your feelings in unexpected ways. Photos, songs, empty spaces and family shared activities can initiate strong emotional reactions, which may begin well before your child leaves and continue (hopefully with less frequency and intensity), for up to two years afterwards.

The most common emotional response you may experience is sadness and loss followed by feelings of isolation. Mothers who are not working, may find the transition to a supporting role more difficult because of the lack of alternative roles (eg.

work) to take the place of mothering.

How fathers respond to their child leaving home has not been researched, but evidence suggests that your partner may find it difficult to cope if they see you struggling. Fathers who are older and have a close relationship with their child are particularly vulnerable during this transition.

#### **Before your child leaves:**

The impact of reverse culture shock (moving back to the child’s country of birth) is under researched but evidence suggests that academic problems, isolation, depression, anxiety and difficulty making friends can be experiences faced at university. Discussing these challenges with your child before they leave can help prepare them and you in advance.

Do research with your child regarding the availability of local support services and how to access them.





University services are often under resourced and waiting lists can be long. Knowing what is available can help you to support your child and give you peace of mind.

*Start thinking about how to fill the time. Research new hobbies, online courses or other activities where you can meet new friends and develop a new purpose for your life.*

Discuss as a family how you will manage the transition. Daily contact and more holidays together are important coping strategies for mothers and remaining siblings.

Having extended family in the country where your child is going to university can provide reassurance and is important during times of crisis and holidays.

#### **Once your child has left:**

Expanding your friendships and having a network of parents whose children are also leaving, helps to “normalise” your feelings and provide support.

Your cultural expectations and the distance involved will influence how you adjust to your child leaving. In cultures where parents usually live close to their child’s university, being unable to “pop over” to see them can result in higher levels of anxiety and grief for mothers.

Significant events such as relocation, divorce, the death of a parent or the loss of a pet, if close to or during the “launch” of your child to university, may increase your feelings of guilt, anger and loss and can result in a delayed grieving process. Remember to access psychological support for yourself as well as helping your child adjust.

If your feelings of anger or loss continue for a long period after your child has left, reach out to trusted friends or seek out a professional therapist. Accessing online psychological services through sites such as Talkspace and Better Help can help you make sense of your experiences.

Be aware that whilst having an “empty nest” is traditionally viewed as a positive experience for parents, research suggests that this is not always the case when living an expatriate lifestyle. The mother’s lack of purpose, feelings of isolation and reduced support network can continue to strain marital relationships long after all the children have left home.

This research highlights the unique challenges faced by expatriate mothers and illustrates the importance of education and psychological support services in helping expatriate families make this challenging transition.

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*About the author: Carolyn Whitehouse is a Coaching Psychologist based in Pattaya, Thailand. Any further questions or comments regarding this research can be sent to [crwhitehouse@gmail.com](mailto:crwhitehouse@gmail.com)*







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# Eco Beasts goes from strength to strength

*International recognition for efforts to promote child-led environmental change.*

**I**nspirational young people have brought concerns about our damaged planet into the mainstream. And youngsters are leading calls for more sustainable lifestyles, greener approaches to business and government action across the world. International schools are challenging themselves to tailor the education they offer to prepare their students to tackle the environmental problems we face.

"Educators must make all young people aware about sustainability as it's now a significant part of the culture students are growing up in. Moreover, children are increasingly interested in it," said Paul Scholfield, the headteacher of St. Andrews International School Bangkok, a Nord Anglia Education School. "If schools do not get this right, where will we be in 15 or 20 years time?" he asks.

Enter the Eco Beasts initiative. The 'BEAST' standing for Bangkok Education for Action on Sustainability Team.

The Eco Beasts Project, the brainchild of environmental educators Helen Mullan and Katy Waring, started

life at St. Andrews. It aims to connect Bangkok's international schools with local environmental organisations and green businesses, as well as support teachers in delivering sustainability in the curriculum.

The initiative led the members of 'Eco Beasts STA' to develop an action plan focusing on the changes they would like to see implemented at St. Andrews. The 7 to 11 year olds worked tirelessly during after-school club time to put their plans into practice and had quite an impact.

For example, after learning about the environmental effects of animal agriculture, children met with the school's catering company to discuss lowering meat consumption. The Eco Beasts explained their reasoning to fellow pupils, teachers and parents during assemblies and events. All children provided feedback on the new menu and St. Andrews became the first school in Thailand to implement Meat Free Monday.

The children were also fully involved in the launch of the country's first school-based zero waste shop. Members of the community can now buy snacks, toiletries and household cleaning products in refillable and reusable containers eliminating the need for single-use plastic. The students submitted designs for the layout of the shop, helped choose the shop's name ('Little Steps to Zero Waste'), and created an instructional video for parents showing how to purchase items in this special shop.

St. Andrews is delighted to have

been shortlisted in the International School Awards 'Environmental Initiative' category for both its support from the outset of Eco Beasts and for running an impactful after school programme. Over 250 initiatives were nominated this year in a range of categories to highlight some of the best practices in international school learning, teaching and leadership. The awards ceremony will take place in London on 20th January 2020.

Fingers crossed for recognition at the awards ceremony later in the month!

*Ewen Mcleish is a teacher and writer with an Msc. in Education for Sustainability. He helps run the extracurricular Eco Beasts club at St. Andrews 71.*

*More stories about sustainability in Thailand and beyond can be found at <https://ewenmcleish.blogspot.com>*



# LIVING MORE SUSTAINABLY

by Aparna Sharma and  
Helena Hoffmann

Expat Life in Thailand sat down with  
Fiona Lemaire (founder of Zero Waste  
Thailand).

*"Individually, we are one drop.  
Together, we are an ocean." by  
Ryunosuke Saoro (Japanese  
philosopher and writer)*

We were reminded of this quote when we met Fiona from Zero Waste Thailand. She made us believe that each one of us has the potential to make a difference. Her story is extremely inspiring and her determination and belief that she could make a difference really touched us deeply.

We asked her if there was any particular incident which led her to build her company, Zero Waste Thailand. She told us that she loves the ocean and when she went diving a few years back in Phuket, she saw a huge amount of plastic floating around her and she literally saw the marine life suffering. Each time we use a single use plastic item and throw it away, it is going into our oceans and landfills and it is harming and polluting our planet.

It was very disturbing to hear about her diving experience in Thailand and Bali; she saw more plastic than fish and she mentioned that it was extremely irritating to have her diving mask covered by the plastic bags floating in the ocean. The very thought of that sight was so difficult to

comprehend, it must have been painful for her to witness all the beautiful corals suffering because of our actions.

She imagined the amount of plastic floating into the wide-open mouth of a manta ray. Her unforgettable diving experience made her really want to take responsible action towards sustainable living and that is why she founded her company, Zero Waste Thailand. She said that she had absolutely no idea if it would succeed but she knew that she had to try and do something after witnessing those nightmare scenes underwater. When she started two years back, she produced 1,000 stainless steel reusable straws and she was unsure if they would sell but fortunately, they sold quickly which pushed her to produce more.

Today, her company sell many more sustainable and plastic free items. Zero Waste Thailand supplies many restaurants, hotels, schools and even weddings in Bangkok with their plastic free products. She mentioned that her margins are extremely low, so she does not supply to any







of the supermarkets yet. (A shopping guide and places in Bangkok where you can find plastic free products, sustainable service will be published online on our website).

<https://www.facebook.com/th.zerowaste/>

She has also been focusing on making people aware of reducing plastic in their daily life's or businesses and is a strong advocate on changing people through kindness and education. She has been trying to conduct various events and seminars to inform and share with people the importance of going sustainable over convenience. She was the main host of an event at K Village last August called "Zero Waste Weekend" together with other local companies to give options and ideas to consumers and business owners of eco-friendly products and packages.

She is visiting many international schools in Bangkok and offers seminars and talks to the children about being more mindful and aware of our daily habits in using plastic items. Definitely Zero Waste Thailand and their customers make quite an impact here in Thailand.

At the end of our interview we were brainstorming on the little changes each one of us can make towards a more sustainable and eco friendly lifestyle. Every effort to reduce wastefulness is important, therefore...

## Go #PlasticFree as much as possible

Previous generations didn't have single-use razors, forks, cups, bags and food storage containers, but these days, we can find a plastic version of almost every item and then just throw that object carelessly away after its use. Every item is nowadays available in plastic or is wrapped in plastic. Substitute and investigate in products which aren't made of plastic e.g. bamboo toothbrushes, soap bars, bamboo cotton buds, cotton bags, glass storage containers in the kitchen or if it is reusable plastic it is okay, too.

Plastic never goes away. Every year thousands of

seabirds, sea turtles, and other marine mammals suffer and die after ingesting plastic or getting tangled up in it. You can cut down with your plastic waste with just a few simple steps:

- ☺ Minimise the single-use plastic bags.
- ☺ Use reusable bags when you shop. There are many of these very small foldable bags which don't take so much space in your handbag. Have some of them in your car trunk as well.
- ☺ Avoid single-use water bottles, bags, cutlery and straws.
- ☺ Replace disposables wherever you can. Use reusable water bottles and mugs, bags, stainless-steel or bamboo cutlery and straws. Invest in shops who support your sustainable effort and support them back. (Bring your personal cup and get 5B discount e.g. Be Organic. More will follow with this good example).
- ☺ Avoid products packed in plastic whenever possible.
- ☺ Take your own Tupperware or re-usable food/drink container from home with you when you go to work and stop at a street stall to buy your breakfast. Store some of your Tupperware or re-usable container in your car trunk.
- ☺ Cut down on online shopping and on home deliveries, especially when it comes wrapped heavily with plastic.
- ☺ Shop local, carry your own bag with you and support local farmers and vendors.
- ☺ Investigate in restaurants and companies that use eco friendly packages. Next time you buy at a place return your previous packages, save points and get some discounts. (e.g. Veggiology)
- ☺ Buy fewer plastic toys, especially not the cheap ones from Chinatown, they don't even last long. When you purchase item's, consider their life expectancy.





☺ Invest in wooden, textiles or other natural toys.

☺ Don't throw everything in one bin! Start separating dry and wet waste.

☺ Even better: start separating your waste at home, in your apartment complex or in your compound. Ask your landlord to provide different waste bins, for paper and cardboard boxes, for glass, for plastic and for food waste. You will realise quickly you need less waste bin bags if you start separating. If you have an own garden, start composting.

#### **Set goals – Reduce energy consumption**

☺ Turn off the AC more often

☺ Use more fans instead of the AC

☺ Open windows to allow a breeze

☺ Instead of using a tumble dryer

☺ Hang your clothes outside to dry

☺ Rely less on your car

☺ Car pool with your friends, your kids' friends (to sports events) and colleagues.

☺ Use more public transportation like BTS, MRT, buses and khlong boats. (Yes, the two last ones are questionable due to emitting heavily black fumes. Nevertheless, they can be used by many people and they are affordable for the majority of people with low income.

It is still a better and safer than when everyone takes a motorsai or taxi and clog the streets.)

☺ Walk more, not only good for the environment, probably for your physical wellbeing, too.

#### **General changes**

Think twice before shopping.

Every product you purchase has an environmental footprint, therefore before you buy, ask yourself if you really need it.

☺ Buy more used products possible, join secondhand book sales, flea markets.

☺ Share with friends (books, magazines, games)

☺ Resell or donate items (clothes, toys) to charity organisations.

☺ Eat ice-cream out of cones instead of cups.

☺ Refuse "free" promotional plastic products/giveaways.

☺ Get your whole family involved by asking for specific changes in everyone's habits.

Encourage people's efforts. Not everyone is perfect or 100% sustainable, and that's okay. Surely there are many more ways how we can live more sustainable and environmentally, but this is a beginning. Every single person

who tries to make a serious effort in the direction of a more sustainable lifestyle is a win.

We know that not all suggestions and ideas suits everyone and that some find it hard to change. Giving up on habits or changing a convenient lifestyle completely is not easy. However, do you want to continue using more indestructible plastic items? Or do you care about the environment and the creatures living on it? What are the values you want to give your children?

Start today, change consciously one or two of your habits at a time. Don't go from hundred to zero, that is neither realistic nor practicable.

Finally some practical help for you when you out in the streets. Let the local vendors know you don't want and need the plastic stuff.

No plastic straw please. Thank you.

ไม่รับหลอดพลาสติก ขอบคุณ

Mai rab lod plastic (ka/krab).

No plastic bag please. Thank you.

ไม่รับถุงพลาสติก ขอบคุณ

Mai rab thuung plastic (ka/krab).

No plastic please. Thank you.

ไม่รับพลาสติก ขอบคุณ

Mai rab plastic (ka/krab).





# AIR POLLUTION:

## Health effects and tips during the haze

### Unhealthy air quality returns to Bangkok

**S**easonal dry conditions without much rain in Bangkok have resulted in higher accumulations of particulate matter over the last month, with high pollution levels expected to continue in the near term. Especially since particulate matter (specifically PM10 and PM2.5) is composed of extremely small particles that are more likely to remain airborne without rain. The accumulation of these fine particles thus increases the likelihood of exposure to airborne irritants and allergens. For more detailed information about the threat of particulates check out Air Pollution: What you should know about the particle pollution threat.

Combining the constant traffic in Bangkok with seasonal field burning by farmers for the next crop (Smoky Season) and an unhealthy AQI or air quality index becomes an issue for not only sensitive groups, but for everyone.

### Air pollution effects

Maintaining an active lifestyle with regular exercise can get complicated when air pollution smothers the Bangkok landscape. And people with pre-existing conditions are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution. Individuals with sinusitis, emphysema, allergies, COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), and other respiratory system issues often will be the first to notice the changes, but anyone can start to feel the effects of air pollution.

### Serious air pollution symptoms

For years, some studies have linked air pollution to chronic illnesses including asthma, cancer. Even more frightening, recent studies indicate that unhealthy air quality can contribute to changes in the brain linked to dementia and even strokes.

- Do not ignore the body's own warning signs. Some of these may include:
- Excessive or increased fatigue
- Coughing or sore throat which may indicate more severe lung damage

- Decreased ability to fight off infections
- Exacerbation of respiratory diseases like emphysema, bronchitis, sinusitis and asthma

### Air pollution solutions

Having a specific allergy is one thing - but avoid the cause of the allergy. But what can be done when the air around us is the source of wheezing or when high temperatures combined with air pollution contribute to temperature fluctuation induced asthma? While there are medications like Ventolin (albuterol) to help those with COPD and asthma symptoms, other steps can be taken to reduce harmful exposure to poor air quality.

### Prevention and avoidance

Tips for living with air pollution:

- While it may not always be feasible, try to stay indoors and avoid prolonged exposure outside during days when air pollution is at its peak
- Avoid peak times and places for exhaust
- Use in-home air filters, like a HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter
- Wear a respirator mask which filters out 95-99% of the particulate matter

### Diagnosis and treatment

Shortness of breath, excessive fatigue, persistent coughing and wheezing are especially disconcerting. If you are experiencing a specific pulmonary or lung issues related to air pollution contact the Pulmonary Center by phone at 02 011 2222, request an appointment online, or send us your inquiry. Or if you are experiencing a broader issue, start the process for a comprehensive evaluation at our Health Screening Center with customised care.







# MARCH 21 INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS

by *Little Wandering Wren*

**I**nternational Forest Day was established, by the United Nations following International Year of the Forests in 2011.

*It was established 'to celebrate and raise awareness of the importance of trees and forests our lives and for those in future generations.'*

Let's join in the spirit of the day by enjoying some Forest Bathing. I'll taking you for a wander to one of my most joyful Bangkok escapes to the country, Little Tree Garden Cafe in Nakhon Pathom. Come for a lovely lunch and let's return to our roots.

## What is Forest Bathing?

When I heard of Forest Bathing, I was intrigued. It hails from Japan where it is known as "Shinrin-yoku" which literally means forest bath... but without the water!

One of my favourite books at the moment is called *Into the Forest: How trees can help you find Health and Happiness* by Dr Qing Li

In this book Dr Li describes forest-bathing to mean *'bathing in the forest atmosphere or connecting with nature through all our senses'*. In his native Japan he shows us where you can go to connect with the world through forests.

Across the world Forest Bathing is becoming popular. It is generally free, anyone can participate, you just need a forest or at least some trees, and it is good, clean wholesome boost for the soul!

## Why I am a tree hugger!

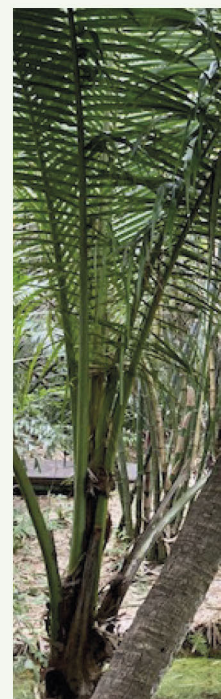
It maybe the little Wren in me, but I have always had serious tree hugging tendencies. I just adore trees. In fact, reflecting on all my favourite homes across the years, they all had one thing in common, a garden where I could hear the little birds sing.

These gardens were special because of the trees. We had horse chestnut trees in England's green and pleasant land. These majestic trees produced huge shiny conkers of treasure. Each autumn as a young child, I would unwrap these precious nuts, hidden inside prickly green shells.

We would play a game of conkers. A champion emerged with the strongest conker as the tree leaves turned golden and fell from the trees. Without knowing it, I had my first forest bathing experience.

In Melbourne, Australia we have elegant silver birch trees which grace the front garden of our Aussie home. These trees are a safe haven for the raucous rainbow lorikeets and ring-tailed possums who take up residence in our suburban tree lined street.

Here in Thailand, I work hard at feeling less removed from nature. I even have a rescue tree in a pot in my current Bangkok condo.







Readers of my Little Wandering Wren blog will remember the joy of moving this tree from my much loved (now sadly knocked down sob, sob)

Embassy Place Apartment, to its current Sukhumvit home. My tree high above, on the thirtieth floor balcony makes me happy each day, and ecstatic when I was joined by a pair a nesting noisy sunbirds.

Bless, their amazing endeavours building a home at such dizzy heights. That's the power of trees for you.

Seriously if you see some weird happenings on a Sukhumvit balcony, it's just Wren hugging her skinny little Thai balcony tree!

#### What's in it for me?

Forest Bathing or 'shinrin-yoku' was first developed in Japan in the 1980s, following scientific studies conducted by the government. It is catching on.



Britain's Woodland Trust suggests Forest Bathing should be among a range of non medical therapies recommended by GPs surgeries to boost patients' boost wellbeing.

In America there is an Association of Nature and Forest Therapy with Forest Therapy Guide training programmes on offer across the globe.

Studies show two hours of mindful exploration in a forest could reduce blood pressure, lower cortisol (stress hormone) levels and improve concentration and memory.

Trees releases chemicals called phytoncides, which have an anti-microbial effect on human bodies, boosting the immune system.

#### Don't you agree nature and trees makes us feel good?

Go on try it! A woodland wander is rejuvenating and reinvigorating. Being in nature restores our mood, it gives us energy.

*'When we are in harmony with the natural world we can begin to heal. Forest Bathing takes us home to our true selves'. 'When we open up our senses, we begin to connect with the natural world.'*





*In doing so, our health improves when we are in nature and suffers when we are divorced from it’.*

The list in Dr Qing Li’s book of possible benefits is impressive and continues to include reducing blood pressure, boosting the immune system and even helps in losing weight. I’m so there. Let’s go!

#### How can I experience Forest Bathing?

You can make your own forest bathing experience. Dr Qing Li suggests you are looking for a venue where you ‘*can smell the flowers, taste the fresh air, listen to the little birds sing, see the changing colours of the trees, and feel the clammy heat of the day on our skin*’

Good news. Feeling the clammy heat of the day is never too hard to find, here in Thailand. I generally find the little birds of the world like to sing. Fresh air? Hmmm, sadly we may have to work at finding that some days here.

#### Top tips for authentic Forest Bathing:

*‘Let nature enter through your ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hands and feet’*

- Wander aimlessly, there is nowhere to go other than where your body wants to take you. I love this; ‘go without the thought of return’.
- Be guided by your sense of smell and smell the fragrance of the forest.

- Take your time. Place your hands on the trunk of a tree. What do you feel? Can you feel the tree’s strength? Do you feel its support? Do you feel grounded, connected to this earth. If not, go find another tree!
- Walk for about 5km
- Leave your phone at home.
- Just try to be, the true you.

#### Where can I go for some forest bathing?

A forest bath is soothing for the soul and accessible to all at some level. You just need to find the rhythm of nature through a forest walk. Sure you can go the whole hog, barefooted and literally ground yourself in nature or you can connect in which ever way you want.

You can find your own space where ever you takes your fancy. It might be in your local Lumpini Park. Or how about a trip out to Pa Nai Krung, Bangkok’s Forest in the City near to Suvarnabhumi airport?

#### Pa Nai Krung:

8/6 Sukhaphiban 2 Rd, Bangkok

A short taxi ride from Ladkrabang Station on the Airport Rail Link.

#### Little Tree Garden Cafe:

43 Moo 5 Banmai, Sapran, Nakhon Pathom, 73110

[www.littletreegarden.com](http://www.littletreegarden.com)

If you’ve not been to Little Tree Garden Cafe you’re in for a treat. It is tucked away, just over an hours drive from Bangkok. Here you’ll find a beautiful countryside setting with some lovely Thai food and drinks, and let’s give a special mention to the coffee and cake treats.

There is a bamboo grove and lots of quirky things to see including a load of crockery at Emily’s tearoom. I like it.







It's cute, it's charming and if you're all about the 'gram, you'll not be putting your camera away. Ever.

Last August I used the venue to share the concept of Forest Bathing as part of a birthday treat for two very special friends here in Thailand. Us Gals are called Hats on Adventures so we did have a giggle when we found these hats there.

In the bamboo grove, overlooking the stream we had our own version of Forest Bathing. My instructions were pretty simple. Go find a tree that speaks to you! Reach out, re energise and reset your batteries for the coming year. Happy Birthday!

And the sign says 'here's to love and laughter and happy ever after' which is pretty much spot on what I was hoping for and what we found.

Thank you Little Tree Cafe for a lovely lunch.

### *Happy International Forest Day folks!*

I find my Bangkok life has me craving and seeking a connection with nature, more than compared with the other major cities I have lived around the world.



If you too need to escaping the density of life in Bangkok then perhaps consider some forest-bathing? It might just be a feel good walk in Lumpini Park, or perhaps a full Thai Forest bathing experience.

Who cares if you get a funny look. Although once the word gets out about this, we will all be forest bathing. Enjoy!

**Little Wandering Wren**

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<https://littlewanderingwren.com>







# THE BURNING AMAZON FOREST IS NOT JUST FUELLED BY BOLSONARO — IT'S ALL OF US

by Nanticha Ocharoenchai (Lynn)

**H**ello. I know the Amazon forest is burning and the glaciers in Iceland are melting. I know how you feel hopeless and fearful for the future, and at the same time, angry with our world leaders. I know from the Facebook posts and Instagram stories you share, that you care and you're scared. But before you click that post button, I want you ask yourself: "Am I really doing my best to help?"

Before you type in #PrayForAmazon, is there something you could Do For Amazon? The rainforest isn't just burning because some evil men like Bolsonaro (and Trump) think it'd be a great idea to burn down an entire ecosystem to piss off the world. They do it for the money. And we drive that money.

Agribusiness and deforestation is one of the main reasons this forest is dying. These fires are being fuelled by an industry pushed to overharvest by our needy demands as consumers who are hungry for beef steaks, and as ordinary people who use toilet paper. We are just as much part of the underlying problem, the driving factor, the motivating stakeholder.

Before you complain about the shameless greed of politicians and corporate giants, think about what motivates their environmentally-damaging decisions. Are you on a plant-based diet, or are you one of those people who think bacon is "too good" to give up? The only people who should be allowed to complain about anything are babies, because they are literally incapable of making any decisions about what they choose to consume. In fact, they're not even capable

of complaining, they just cry because that's literally all they can do.

But if you're reading this right now, you know you're not a baby. You're also probably not a victim of poverty and starvation, living in a war-torn zone or a broken home, lucky to have whatever's there (and if you are, I am sorry). You, my friend, probably have the luxury of buying a cup of coffee from Starbucks and watching some movies from your MacBook. You probably had that free time to scroll through your Twitter feed and repost a picture of a starving polar bear. So I want you to ask yourself again: "Am I really doing my best to help?"

When you blame presidents and environmental ministers for their lack of commitment in lowering carbon emissions, are there ways you could be making it easier for them to do so? Are you driving less and taking public transportation, going on less flights and taking more trains, to help them shift to an economy less dependent on fossil fuels? Are you carrying a reusable water bottle and using less plastic, to help reduce petroleum extraction (used to make plastic) and prevent ocean waste?

Are you shopping local, to help them avoid overseas logistics and transportation (again, reducing fossil fuel consumption)? Are you buying less sneakers and reusing more clothes, to cut back the latest trends that drive unsustainable fast fashion and unethical labour? Are you switching off the lights when you leave the room, or turning down the faucet for just the amount of water you need? Are you supporting small businesses instead of conglomerate



brands, to help build a sustainable supply chain of consumer goods and services? Are you donating to non-profits and promoting social enterprises that research and implement environmentally-friendly materials and production? Are you planting any trees or growing a vegetable garden, building a compost or installing solar panels?

There are 7.5 billion humans on this planet, and whatever governments and corporations do, they do to sustain all of us. Sure, some of them want more money than the others, but we all have to understand that we are the ones buying into it and giving them that money. The people with the most decision-making power and money-making abilities tend to become consumed by greed, but we can't deny all individuals like us are, too, consumed by desire. Desire for new clothes, fast cars, and quick calls. Desire for entertaining content, the latest smartphone, and the coolest selfie. Desire for more accessories, pretty scenery, and easy delivery. Until we can say no to these desires, it'd be contradictory to pressure polluters to pollute and produce less, given the market demands they're pressured to fulfil.

Youth strikers strike for climate action because we know we're not in the position to make those big policy changes that need to be made to create the quickest, most efficient impacts for the environment. We put that pressure onto governments and multi-national organisations, because, yes, technically they should be responsible for those duties. But I think we also strike because we don't know anything better about how to achieve those targets and goals – we don't understand the complexities of the political and financial systems that have been put in place for our societies to function like they do today, centuries leading up to the very ones that get food

delivered to our local supermarkets and bring the internet onto each of our mobile phones today (carbon footprint from data systems are not often discussed). We don't understand the limitations of certain decisions made in international agreements and why adults can't just tear down coal-fired power plants overnight and shift to renewable energy. We don't understand what it takes just to keep a community of 7.5 billion people alive and well, what it takes just to keep 195 nations from dropping bombs on each other and on a mutual agreement.

Since I started diving into environmental conservation about four years ago - working my way into it mainly by creating awareness through writing and eventually activism – I've constantly sought ways to make the biggest impact I could. I wrote articles about the carbon footprint produced by the meat industry hoping to turn my readers into vegetarians, and I wrote articles about my country's energy market wanting to point out a flaw our power development plan has. But as months flew by, I learned more about all the obstacles that lie between environmentalism and capitalism, as well as the ones posed by technological advancement like renewable sources and battery storage. I learned more about my own stance in our big, big world, and about what I actually contribute to it.

I learned more about how difficult it was to make an impact on such a big scale as a young individual with no scientific or engineering knowledge. And it depressed me everyday, flicking past a continuous flow of bad environmental news and walking through a city of polluting production and consumption.







So I moved those ambitions of saving the planet and placed it as my aspiration, and instead focused on the little solutions-oriented changes I could actually do in everyday life. I can't say I'm doing the best - everyone's best at this point, in order to save our planet and live the most low-carbon lifestyle possible, is probably live like cavemen - but I'm trying my best.

I still live in a city and depend on money for survival. I still use the air-conditioning for when it gets too hot and have a fridge so my leftovers don't spoil. I still make garbage each day and share posts about the burning Amazon forest which I can't seem to actually do anything about.

But I try my best to help. I've been vegetarian for a few years now, and I rarely drive. I now snack less because they're wrapped in so much plastic, drink less iced cocoa from cafes because they come in single-use cups and only quench my thirst when necessary because I don't want to buy a bottle of water. I haven't bought new clothes in a few months now, and whenever I do I try to thrift. I use bar soap now and use both sides of the paper. It's not enough to change the world, and honestly most likely barely anything at all to make a dent in our global carbon emissions, but at least it's something.

Look, I am a climate activist, but I don't really know what to tell you. I'm not an environmental expert, a sustainability guru, or a zero-waste idol. I don't know if the most polluting industries and the most environmentally-challenged governments will ever prioritise our survival and nature's wellbeing over revenue and GDP. A lot of my friends tell me about how devastating the outlooks of climate change seems. I'm sick, too, of listening to the same speeches about "spreading awareness" and "acting now". Let's be honest,

straightforward and constructive, don't turn this into another UN meeting. What do we do actually to "act now", and who is going to do it? Are you going to "act now"? Or are you just going to wait for the government to do it, like the rest of the internet seems to be?

But what I can say is, human-driven climate change is wired into every part of our modern lifestyle, and as individuals living those lifestyles, there are actually plenty of ways you could be creating a positive change, big or small, through what and how you consume. There are probably millions of tips on leading a sustainable lifestyle on the internet and have been out there for years - you just need to take them seriously enough and do it, rather than wait for someone else like your friends or the government to do it, regardless of how great of an impact that leaves. Once you do it, hopefully someone else will follow. And hopefully, it ripples out across our big, big world.

The dying Amazon forest isn't just about negligent governance or unsustainable business - it's about the way individuals choose to go about their daily lives, about how much water and electricity we use and burn, how much material goods we buy and throw away, and how much convenience and luxury we demand.

We are as much part of the problem, just as we can be part of the solution.





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# THE FORESTIAS BRINGS BANGKOK BACK TO NATURE

*The Forestias will reconnect Bangkokians with nature at a 158 acre forested neighbourhood in Bangna, wedding high tech with deep forest for sustainable well-being.*

Imagine waking to the dawn chorus of a forest. You throw the curtains wide. The woodland stretches invitingly before you. You have time a run before hopping on the eco-friendly shuttle to work.

Outside, the morning air is as fresh as iced water. A shady pathway leads you to the heart of the forest. You jog on past the creek.

Yet you are still in Bangkok. A nearby Skytrain station can whisk you to the city centre. Highways put the airport and other cities in easy reach. Every amenity for upscale living is onsite, from shops to offices, restaurants, entertainment, and healthcare.

## For All Well-Being

This vision of eco-friendly well-being is The Forestias, a 158 acre green district that MQDC aims to complete at Bangna in 2022.

Joyful mornings are part of a much wider goal in well-being, says Ms. Natenapis Sookbang, President of The Estate, the international developer's resale and rental specialist.

"MQDC is founded on a concept 'For All Well-Being', which means well-being for all – residents, nearby communities, wider society, and nature," she says. "There will even be a 6,000sqm reserve of deep forest. Here no one will set foot except rangers, offering a haven for the shyest creatures."

MQDC is aiming, above all, for humankind and the rest of nature to live again as one.

## The Miyawaki Method

To rebuild that link, The Forestias is drawing on the work of Akira Miyawaki. The Japanese botanist's discoveries are claimed to speed up reforestation 10 times.

In Japan, he had studied the trees around shrines. Why was the mix of species so different from other woodland? He realised these trees were relics of ancient forest. Other species viewed as native were, in fact, interlopers. A series of stunning reclamations followed at 1,300 sites in Japan and other tropical countries.

Building on this knowledge, The Forestias aims for a tall trees within 3 years and a fully restored ecosystem within 10.







### Applying 'sustainnovation'

Sustaining this ecosystems also calls for innovative design and technology, a strategy MQDC terms 'sustainnovation'.

"The Forestias brings to bear the work of MQDC's Research & Innovation for Sustainability Centre (RISC)," says Ms. Renu Thanomkul, Vice President for Overseas Markets at The Estate.

"RISC applies 'For All Well-Being' by examining society's pain points and finding solutions that move the property sector forward. The centre curates public resources like a library of 400 eco-materials. It also funds research in vertical farming, upcycling waste, and even 'nanobionics' for plants that glow in the dark."

The enticing outdoors at The Forestias applies several new principles. The district, above all, reverses the dreaded 'urban heat island effect' that can hike peak temperatures in Bangkok by 7°C.

Trees shade surfaces like tarmac. A centralised utility plant (CUP) and district cooling system dispense with AC compressors, which otherwise sit on your balcony pumping out 1.4 tons of heat for each 1 tonne of cooling they give your homes.

The landscape is moulded into a 'cooling basin'. A 'bioswale' provides nighttime cooling, while recycling water. A forested valley will help maintain a fresh ambiance throughout the day.



### Biophilia: well-being from nature

So how much will all this greenery boost our well-being? The precise answer, in figures, will come from the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health. The school has taken The Forestias as a testbed to study how nature improves sleep and reduces stress.

But the evidence is mounting worldwide. Leafy surroundings bring many benefits. Large-scale studies have found gains from heart disease to homework.

Forests are especially beneficial. In Japan, shinrin-yoku, or 'forest bathing', is prescribed for almost every ailment. Foliage also filters out fine particulates like PM2.5 that regularly afflict Bangkok.

The 'biophilia' theory suggests humans are, at core, programmed to thrive around nature.

### Building community

Outdoor leisure will further nurture a strong sense of community, says Ms. Sookbang.

"The Forestias is a community district where residents can meet everyday needs onsite," she says. "Green transport links you to shops, cafés, offices, markets, healthcare, and public spaces."

Eye-catching features to bring people together include a 1.6km skywalk, running over the forest canopy to link residential areas.

### 'Intergeneration' living

With an 'intergeneration' concept, The Forestias has both public and private spaces for all generations.

The Aspen Tree residences will cater for older adults with full-spectrum services, design, and programmes for 'ageing in place'. Whizdom is tailored for young families. Mulberry Grove offers innovative villas and condominiums for extended families.

The Forestias will also have residences from the famous hospitality group Six Senses, alongside a hotel and spa.

"The Forestias is intended to revolutionise how we see human communities and natural ecosystems," says Ms. Sookbang. "This is first district of its kind. But we are confident it will spark new approaches around the world."

The Forestias is open for booking now. To find out more about life there, please visit [www.theforestias.com](http://www.theforestias.com) or contact The Estate at: +66 (0)2 012 4555 #3 or [consultant@theestate-thailand.com](mailto:consultant@theestate-thailand.com).







# The climate crisis

## The reality, the challenges and indeed the ways forward

by Niall O'Connor

Given the season that's in it, let's start with a nice tune! "Oh the weather outside is frightful, but the fire is so delightful, and since we've no place to go, let it snow, let it snow, man it doesn't show signs of stopping..." Indeed the weather is frightful. With over 400 climate records broken in 30 countries in 2019, and 6 of the ten hottest years on record since 2010, we are sadly now seeing the changes in the climate systems that will impact our world for generations to come. Bangkok itself, in the 1970s once had a more pleasant climate, with an average of 20 days above 35C per year, however, recent years are averaging over 120 days a year over 35C, its real, it's here, and it's not going away!

Working through the IPCC report (Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change), the vast majority of the scientists of the world now agree that we are on course for a higher temperature that the targets agreed under the Paris Climate agreement in 2017, which aspired to maintain us below a rise of 1.5C. Today, most scientists believe that we are destined for a minimum of +3C and maybe as much as +5C by 2100. While that seems far away from us today, trust me, the change has started and is impacting every one of us already. The weather patterns are changing, with warming greater than the global averages in many regions around the work, some already averaging above

1.5C (figure 1), with extreme events becoming unfortunately less extreme and more regular! (think of the excessive fires in Australia, in California, even in 2019 in the Arctic region in Sweden).

Global air temperatures are predicated to rise by as much as 4C by 2100, global sea surface temperatures by up to 3C, while marine heatwave days may increase tenfold (destroying all coral reefs, major fisheries and impacting global food security). The Arctic, Antarctic and Greenland ice sheet melt rates are all increasing, reaching tipping points that will see mean sea levels rise for sure by 1 metre by 2100, (but more likely and more frighteningly by as much as 7m). Think of Venice with even 1 more metre of sea water. Then think of Bangkok, Ho Chi Min city, the Mekong Delta, Yangon, and many other low lying areas of the SE Asia region, where

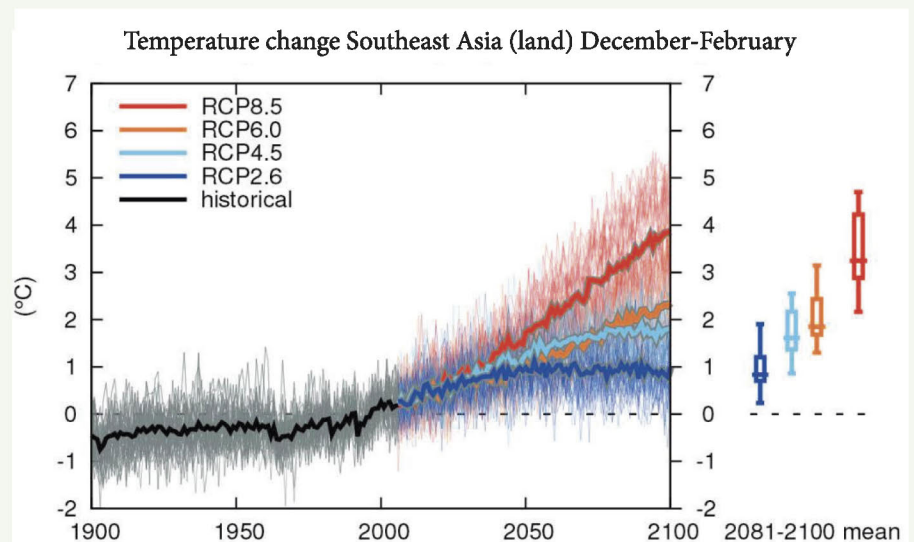


Figure 1: Temperature reaches 1.5C, soon!



with even a 1m sea level rise, this is what it will look like! (Figure 2: Bangkok predicted Annual Flood levels in 2050.)

Now it gets very real. With annual flood levels by 2050 alone covering the whole city region of Bangkok, worse than the 2011 floods that caused extensive damage to local and indeed, international trade for years to come. How can a city cope with annual floods like this! Venice of the South, is not the tourist attraction you think! It is estimated that in the SE Asia region alone, up to 250 million people may have to relocate as sea levels rise. Are we ready for this? Where will they go, what infrastructure is needed to support this, and what pays for that! I'll come back to that later!

On top of this, the shifting climate patterns continue to cause more natural disasters (figure 3). Asia is one of the most disaster-prone regions of the world with frequent occurrence of many types of natural hazard-based disasters: (meteorological; hydrological; climatological), leaving many parts of Asia, and its many people, experiencing increasing exposure and consequently at risk from disaster. UNESCAP estimated that in 2014, within 17 SE Asian cities alone, an estimated 46 million vulnerable people were exposed to extreme risk from multiple hazards, and projects that the number at extreme risk could increase to 66 million people by 2030. Sadly, this shift in risks unfortunately land on the most vulnerable in our communities, the old, the disabled, on migrants and ethnic communities, who lack the support needed to redress these growing threats.

In my mind, whilst clearly fossil fuel use is the key factor behind the climate change crisis, we also have to reflect on the increasing trends in global urbanisation, which continue to consume vast amounts of concrete, a fossil fuel dependent material, and energy, also heavily reliant on fossil fuel production in this region. We expect that by 2050, over 70% of people will live in cities. To cater for this, we will triple the urban infrastructure needed to house, transport and cater for this rapid growth (to imagine this, currently we develop an area the size of Manhattan every

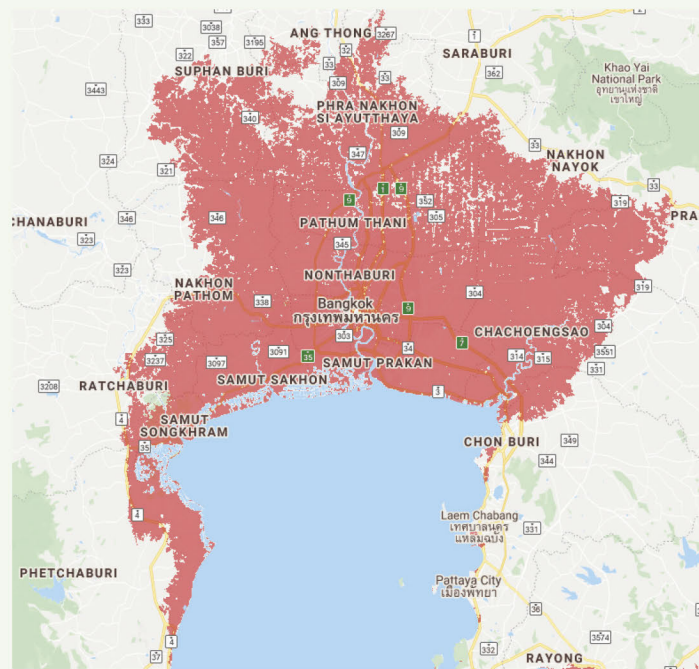


Figure 2 Bangkok, Annual Flood projection by 2050.

urban growth to create cities that are economically dynamic, vibrant and healthy, especially for air quality! Such cities are more productive, socially inclusive and resilient, as well as cleaner, quieter and safer. It is a win-win for the economy, the people and the environment. Investing in public transport, building efficiency and better waste management could save cities around US\$17 trillion globally by 2050 (based on energy savings alone) and further reduce emissions and build resilience. Change is possible, solutions are known, we just have to break with tradition, climb out of the comfort zone of business as usual, and look. Otherwise we destine our lives and those of our loved children, and generations to come to a rather grim future.

Yet, we are not changing fast enough, as we are sadly entrenched in fossil fuel growth pathways. Countries, not all, measure success on GDP, yet it's very clear as GDP rises, fossil fuel use rises and CO2 emissions rise alongside, exacerbating the whole climate crisis. SE Asia increased energy demands sevenfold between 1970 and today, fuelled by fossil-based carbon. With increasing demands for energy throughout the region, supported mainly by coal, oil and gas, the ASEAN region alone shall increase emissions by over 61% by 2025. Where is this change we so badly need?

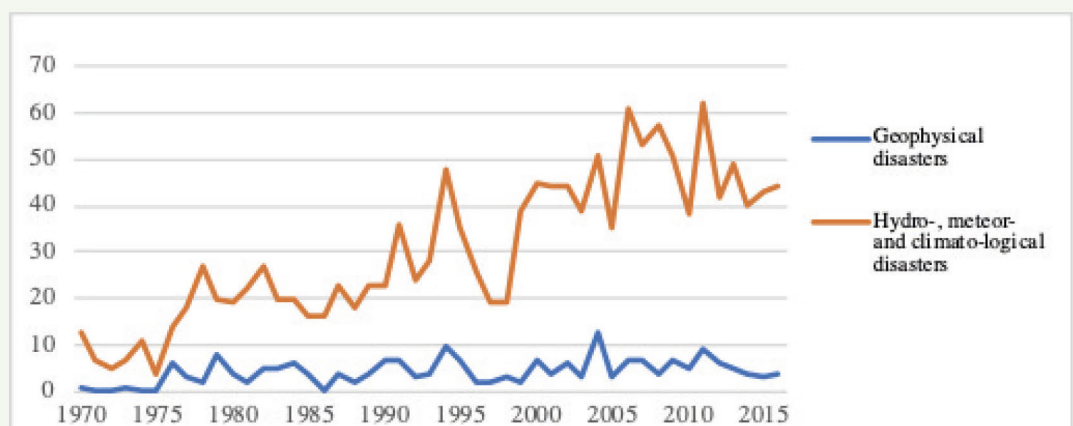


Figure 3: Total number of disasters in SE Asia, 1970-2016



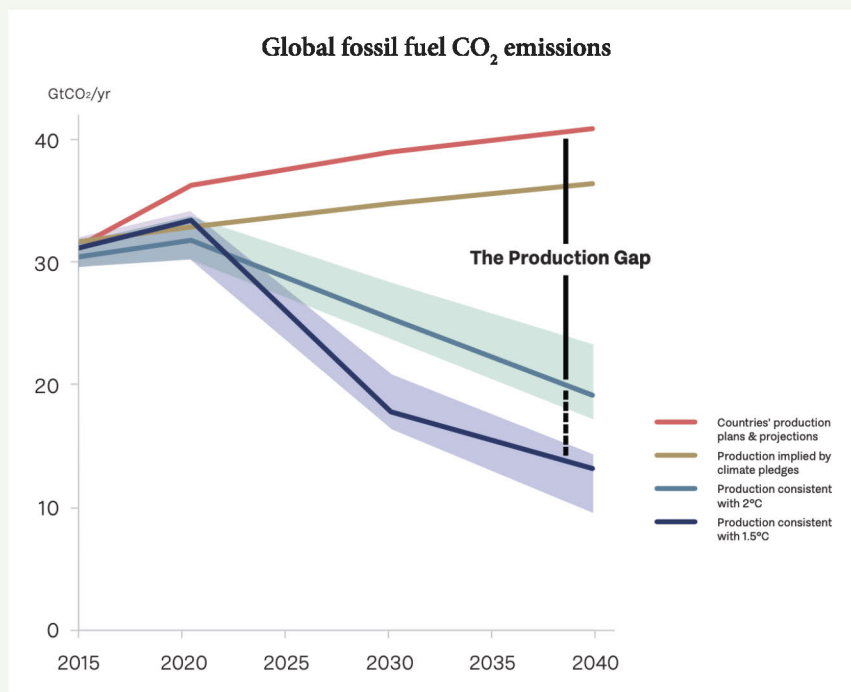


Figure 4: Production Gap Report, 2019

We also know that renewable energy production costs have dropped and are now in line with fossil-based fuel prices. Why not simply make the shift. Why not move subsidies away from coal or oil, and support renewables, slowly and with well thought out plans to ensure a just transition for everyone. Why continue this political economy of carbon. We have 5 years, under current emission levels, before we hit the 1.5C global average temperature increase, only 5, and yet we see infrastructure and energy still consume carbon-based energy as if tomorrow doesn't matter. We need more Greta's, more home-grown youth leaders like Nanticha Ocharoenchai, more people to listen to the science and take heed. We need more change, and thanks to them, it's happening.

In November the European Investment Bank became the world's first public lender to commit to ending funding for coal, oil and gas. In a major boost for climate action and the EU's green credentials, it agreed to stop providing loans to fossil fuel projects by 2021. How quickly can we get others to follow suit, and shift the need to renewables.

Sadly though, a recent report by SEI, The Production Gap Report (see figure 4), 2019 shows clearly, we are a long way off. While many countries hail the great efforts to reduce climate impacts, with strong political speeches, behind the scenes we see many more simply ratcheting up their plans for coal, oil and gas consumption. We see countries working tirelessly to develop "National Determined Contributions" plans to fight against climate change, tasking everyone to make a change. In many cases some great commitments have been made, and more is needed. But behind this, governments hide the reality. The Production Gap report (see figure X) clearly shows that governments are planning to produce about 50% more fossil fuels by 2030 than would be consistent with a 2°C pathway and 120% more than would be consistent with a 1.5°C pathway. The continued expansion of fossil fuel production – and the widening of the global production gap – is underpinned by a combination of ambitious national

growth plans, government subsidies to producers, and other forms of public finance to the industry. We can see from records that our emissions continue to rise despite all our attempts to slow it down, with 2018 recording the highest carbon emissions ever. How does this add up with plans for NDC's? Who is behind this? How can this be allowed I wonder!

Let us not forget other critical impacts of this carbon and economic growth based pathway we find ourselves on. Just read the latest AQI (Air Quality Index) on your phone for the town you are in. I guess it's not too low! For PM2.5, which causes deadly respiratory issues for many, anything over 25 µg/m<sup>3</sup>, according to WHO guidelines, is bad for your health. Readings over the past weeks in Bangkok alone have been in excess of 70, while AQI readings are well over 170.

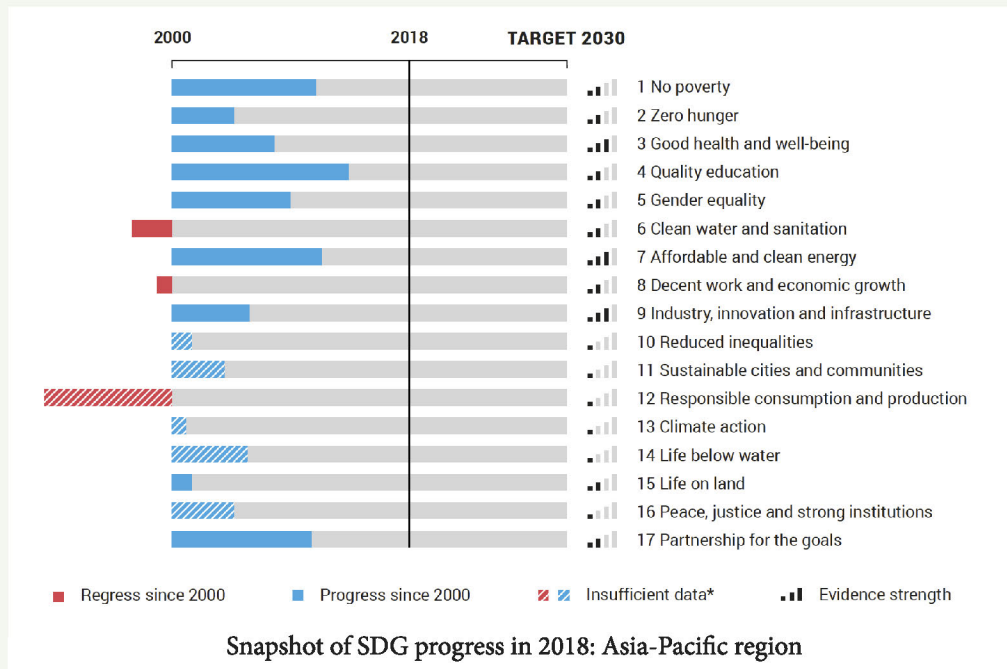
Chiang Mai last year reached 800, Mumbai

over 1000. We know the worst is yet to come. Air quality is directly related to a combination of energy and infrastructural production, along with fires (natural and manmade) and causes up to 4.2 million premature deaths globally, annually. Shifting to renewables will have a major impact on this.

Further, as temperatures rise, the phenomenon of urban heat islands is on the increase. Cities, because of the concrete infrastructure increase temperatures well above ambient levels. In Paris for example in 2017, the urban heatwave alone was responsible for over 15,000 deaths, mainly among the older generations, the vulnerable and marginalised communities. The health system couldn't cope with the numbers of admissions for heat related illness. This phenomenon will continue to increase globally, with fears that with increased natural disasters, increased heat waves in Asian cities (and think of street vendors, of informal settlements, or the ageing society across Asia), that countries may not be able to cope with the numbers, and the health systems may crack under the pressure. Again, we see that this is sadly fuelled by the ongoing desire for carbon based economic growth. We clearly need a major mind shift to steer us away from the doom that our current path leads us towards.

However, we should remain optimistic, as we see several governments adopting policies to restrict fossil fuel production, providing momentum and important lessons for broader adoption, with policies that aim to boost renewable energy, energy efficiency, and other low-carbon technologies. We see huge shifts in climate and sustainability financing, driving the change and opening amazing avenues to create new low-carbon opportunities. It is estimated that in ASEAN alone, US\$ 7-8 trillion will be needed for new infrastructure over the next 2 decades, an increase of 5-6 times the current investment levels. The new types of finance and low carbon infrastructure creates tremendous opportunities to design, finance and manage a more sustainable future and links to the New Climate Economy plans to help us develop truly resilient and sustainable cities. It is not impossible; it is a time for us





all. It is firmly within our hands, if we want it. While we may have already passed the point where we simply cannot continue with the old patterns of economic development, the climate crisis that is confronting humanity, is an opportunity for innovation and community action. Evidence based-science is critical to influence decision-makers and needs to be used to positively influence the decisions being made to chart a low-carbon sustainable future for all.

Figure 5: SDG Achievements in Asia pacific, below target, but making progress!

to believe in science and react to the facts that stare us in the face. Climate is changing, based on human induced growth, and as such it is our responsibility to change, and we all know we can!

The times, they are a changing. We see societies striving for a better life, a quality of life, not driven by over consumption, but looking towards sustainable living. We see the world coming together to agree on sustainable development goals (though not all are reaching the desired targets as yet, see Figure 5), we see global media, driven by the youth movements around the work, leading news on climate impacts. Momentum for climate action is gearing up, whether within governments, in business and society – we all want a better future. Fossil fuel is seeing the end of the line, for sure, slowly but for sure, with divestments happening more and more, banks being stricter on investments and renewables now competing on price. We see change coming from every angle, and that can only be good for us. However, we need to direct it, manage the change and ensure all are brought along this journey with gender equality and social equity, and that truly we leave no one behind.

So, while we see that as the weather outside is changing, based on rapid urban developments, on fossil fuel based economic growth, a skewed system of subsidies, a political economy of carbon, if you like, change is coming, and there is reason to hope. If we take the right approach, and seek to address the issues we have created, we have an historic opportunity now to continue to deliver inclusive economic growth, eliminate poverty from the face of the earth, and reduce the risks of climate change for

After all, at SEI, as an evidence-based science institution that bridges science, policy and practice, we believe and strive for, a more prosperous future for all.

*About the author: Niall O'Connor serves as Centre Director, Stockholm Environment Institute, Asia (SEI). For over 20 years, he has worked with NGOs, governments and in academia, in senior leadership and management positions, working in development and conservation for both Concern Universal (international NGO), and WWF Director of Performance and Development, for WWF Africa and as Regional Director for WWF Eastern and Southern Africa. Niall holds a M.Sc. in Biodiversity Conservation from Imperial College London, a M.Sc. in AgroForestry and B.Sc. in Forestry, both from University College Dublin. Email him at: [niall.oconnor@sei.org](mailto:niall.oconnor@sei.org)*

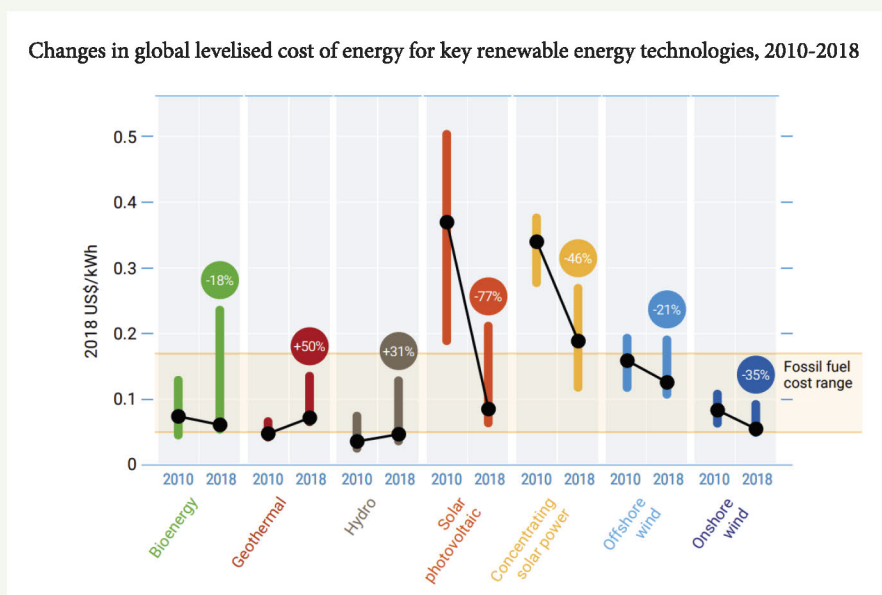


Figure 6: Renewable energy price comparison





# CLIMATE CHANGE AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR THAILAND

*Arvind Mungur, Advisor,  
Office of the United Nations  
Resident Coordinator in Thailand*

*2019 is the year in which climate change fully broke into the mainstream and public consciousness. The campaigning of Greta Thunberg, the teenage Swedish environmental activist on climate change, gained international recognition.*

**I**n September at a Climate Action Summit in New York, the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, called on all the world's leaders to develop concrete, realistic plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45% over the next decade, and to net zero emissions by 2050, to avoid the climate catastrophe that will come with rising temperatures, rising sea-levels and coastal flooding.

70% of the global population most at risk of rising sea-levels are within the Asia-Pacific region. Four of the 10 countries most affected by climate change are members of the Association of SE Asian Nations (ASEAN). This region

is highly vulnerable, particularly to rising sea-levels, with catastrophic consequences for low-lying communities. Thailand is one of the four countries.

Thailand was at No 10 on the list of countries affected by climate change in 2017 due to extreme rainfall and heavy floods that occurred that year that affected 1.6 million people, caused 176 lost lives and damaged 1,500 schools. Losses totalled US\$4.37 billion (0.35% of GDP).

Of Thailand's total land area 87% is prone to extreme heat, 39% prone to droughts, 7.5% prone to floods and 25% prone to landslides. 47% of Thailand's land area is made up of agricultural land. 60% of agricultural land is prone to droughts and/or floods – the majority in unirrigated areas. Recently published research has illustrated that more than 10% percent of Thai citizens now live on land that is likely to be inundated by 2050. Bangkok is particularly at risk.

Thailand was the 20th highest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world in 2017. In response the Royal Thai Government has developed a Climate Change Master Plan (2015-2050) and is making progress in reducing its greenhouse emissions by up to 25% by 2030 compared to employing little or no effort to limit carbon dioxide emissions (known as the business as usual scenario). However much more ambition is required if Thailand is to meet the 45% target by 2030 set by the United Nations.

Thailand's national strategy is underpinned by its aspiration to reach developed country status by 2036 as set out in the Thailand 4.0 economic model to improve transportation and infrastructure, expand new industries, create jobs, and raise incomes and increase GDP as





exemplified by the Eastern Economic Corridor to develop its eastern provinces into a leading ASEAN economic zone. But as Thailand implements its 4.0 agenda it faces a rise in energy demand by 78% by 2036. This is likely to have a negative impact on emissions as the evidence shows that carbon dioxide emissions increase as GDP rises. The challenge for Thailand - and other countries around the world - is how to increase economic growth and meet or exceed the 2030 target.

The solutions to this emergency are available and well known. They involve putting a price on carbon and passing the cost of emitting on to emitters and therefore incentivising investment in renewable energy. They involve stopping subsidies for fossil fuels and stopping the building of new power plants based on coal in the future. This will require sustained political will, public engagement and support to succeed.

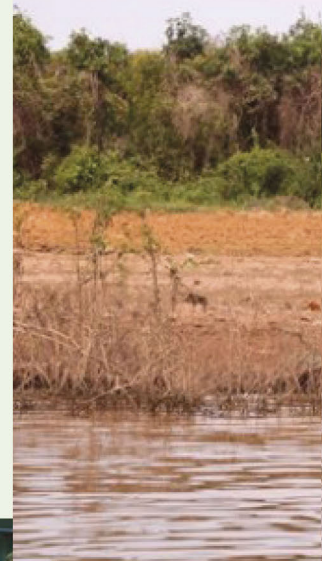
In November the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres was in Bangkok to attend the ASEAN Summit. During his stay he visited Bangkok's Centenary Park at Chulalongkorn University. The park is the first piece of green infrastructure designed to address the climate change issues facing Bangkok. Agricultural land that once absorbed seasonal flooding and cycles of monsoon rain has been paved over by rapid urban development and construction. As a result, Bangkok experiences increased flooding and rising temperatures and struggles with water management. The park is designed to absorb millions of gallons of rainwater and help mitigate floods. It is well worth visiting.



*Centenary Park (source: UN)*

*Antonio Guterres's tweet after visiting the Centenary Park (source: UN)*





# PLASTIC BUFFET – ALL YOU CAN EAT

*Douglas Woodring  
Founder and Managing Director  
Ocean Recovery Alliance  
December 2019*

**A**fter working globally on the issue of plastic pollution for over 10 years, motivated by plenty of time in the water as a competitive swimmer, outrigger paddler, and event organiser, the much needed tipping point for awareness on this issue has finally been reached. Now comes the hard part – fixing it.

Working in Asia for over 25 years has given broad and unique insight on this problem, driving home the fact that in order to be solved, programmes need to be social in nature and structure, not simply easy technological fixes with little human touchpoint or interactions. With over 40,000 different variations in the way plastic and products are made, all within seven main “families”, it can be argued that solving plastic pollution is more complicated than bringing resolution to climate change. It does not mean that the impacts are necessarily greater, but it means that the solutions are extremely varied, and need to be sized according to populations, consumption and dispersed aggregations of waste resources, all of which assumes relatively easy and pure material collection.

This brings up an important focus on plastic circularity, which many have not addressed yet in full. In fact, the proposed Basel Amendments suggest that in fact, much of



the world has yet to digest the meaning and importance of a circular economy, and whether circularity in resource reincarnation is it meant to be “local and domestic” only, or whether it should be global in nature, benefitting from competitive advantages which each country can contribute, either via processing or second-life consumption. Today’s trade in products is global, with exports of goods and packaging going across borders, yet without concern for the capacities of importing countries to handle advance, varied polymer types, when products become waste.

Poor recycling and waste management infrastructure, due to decades of insufficient investment in the sector, and reliance on the “competitive advantages” of other countries to absorb materials for circularity (recycling), has meant that most of the world is ill-equipped to create independent circular economies of their own. Why should countries be allowed to import products from others, but then be expected to have the resources to take care of the resultant waste within their often constrained geographic confines?

Although much of the global community celebrated with broad agreement to classify plastic waste as a harmful substance within the new recent amendments to the 1989 Basel Convention, the devil is in the details. I believe this is





potentially the biggest mistake the world has made on the road to reduced plastic pollution, as it has a strong chance of backfiring, and leading to even more illegal dumping and open burning than we have today. Extensive press coverage of “illegal” and contaminated shipments of plastic destined for recycling have caused a whiplash effect, bringing broad-based bans on all types of plastic resources, regardless of their quality and commodity values. Even though the amendments have not yet been legally implemented among the signatory countries, many governments have taken it upon themselves to show engagement on the topic, with headline actions that have mainly come without consideration for long term consequences. These impacts include domestic loss of recycling industry jobs, and more importantly, the loss of capacity to help grow domestic recycling which is mandatory if circular economies need to be independently operated (per country). Of course large countries may be able to weather this storm, both because they have land available for the containment of waste (legal or otherwise), or at least its storage, but many smaller, less financially capable countries, do not have this option. Forcing domestic-circularity on countries in terms of recycling is like asking all countries to grow their own food, such as Iceland growing its own bananas, and Fiji its own apples.

In terms of ecosystem impact that plastic presents, it is also important to remember that every land animal or bird that can fit plastic in its mouth can also be in danger, and virtually every species of wildlife can be assumed to have been impacted by ingesting plastic, having mistaken it for food because of its colour, shape or smell of “food.” The

ocean itself, though garnering all of the press around plastic pollution, itself plays little role in helping to solve the plastic pollution issue – it is merely the recipient of all of our poorly managed activities upstream.

On the positive side, the issue of marine litter has finally become “household” discussion around the world, helped by images of all types of ocean wildlife being impacted by plastic of different sizes. This means that we no longer need to explain “why” it matters, but instead, we can go directly into discussions of how they (as a company or government) can make a difference in reducing their plastic footprint. In this case, the use of our Plastic Disclosure Project (PDP) as a methodology for baseline footprint analysis is one of the strongest programmes in the world, if used by all, as it is much like carbon and water reporting. If you don’t measure what you have, recover and use as recycled content or new materials, you have little chance of knowing how to properly move into a circular economy with your products or the communities you serve.

I do not believe the flow of plastic going into the ocean has slowed much yet, simply because of population growth and increased consumption which is outpacing all of the good initiatives and new programmes (many of which have not really kicked into high gear and scale yet) which have been announced in the recent two years. This is compounded with lack of recycling and proper waste management, which is outstripped by new greenfield production of plastic polymers with “fracked plastic” and relatively cheap virgin petroleum based feedstocks. Without comprehensive extended producer responsibility programmes (EPR), both domestic, and internationally (which few talk about today), it is not likely that there will be money in the system to effectively incentivise both waste reduction, and the improved capacities for collection and reincarnation of those products put into the market. Exporting something that is “recyclable” in one country does not help other countries who import that same item, but have no local capacity to handle the material in its 2nd life.







world, many of whom are not in the target area of focus for plastic pollution remediation, are able to get needed, early stage funding, as they are often plagued with domestic approvals of their new solutions, while having to contend with the capital market mindsets of short-term or large-scale gains, while not getting the social credit for the solutions they are able to provide. The philanthropical world is one of the only possible saviours in this space in terms of speed and scale, yet they have their own historical issues which also slow them from making the needed environmental and social impacts that they purport to empower. Catalytic Philanthropy is a much needed new influence in this space to fill the gap between small and large projects, with the smaller ones constituting more than 80% of the market needs.

Sadly, recycling for plastic today is often getting a bad image, partly because trust is lost in most

One way that communities can become engaged on this issue, with direct focus on their own watersheds, is to use our Global Alert app/platform, again potentially one of the most powerful tools available if used by stakeholders in a conscious and collective manner. Global Alert is in Spanish and English, and allows people to report trash hotspots anywhere in the world's waterways and coastlines. It is then up to people who care for those waters (NGOs, governments, universities, Rotary Clubs, schools, businesses) to create better management, prevention and ongoing cleanup programmes with booms, nets and catchment devices upstream. This will then lead to cleaner waters, as they think of where the material comes from, how it can be recycled if caught, and how to stop it from flowing.

The increased public engagement of the plastic industry around the world has been an improvement in showing that there is real money available for programmes, projects and infrastructure implementation, mainly within SE Asia and India. This engagement by the industry is expected to grow, both as good examples for others to replicate are created and proven, and because of the billions of dollars also being spent on greenfield, virgin material production, which will simply mean that there is more material to remediate within our communities.

The big question on funding is whether entrepreneurs and innovators around the

communities, because governments are often seen mixing sorted materials with normal waste, and lack transparency in where and how recycling is taking place. The ban on recyclables from China helped drive this issue home for many countries in the West, including Japan and Hong Kong, many of whom all sent their domestically collected "recyclables" (which local communities assumed were being treated domestically), to China and other parts of Asia. Though in reality this should be allowed to happen with the right quality controls in place, the effect of this off-shoring of processing is that none of the exporting countries now have the capacity





to recycle well on their own shores. This is a big loss of jobs and circular economy revenue, but with improved sorting programmes at source, i.e. “Wet and Dry” sorting only, which we encouragingly promote anywhere we speak, and not via coloured bins with many choices, communities would be able to recover higher volumes of material, at higher values, and thus re-installing trust in the system.

We are proud to have just released a report “Crafting High-Impact Voluntary Commitments to Prevent and Reduce Marine Litter,” which was made possible by funding support from UN Environment. This entailed the scoring of 580 global commitments the past five years (through October 2018), with results showing that many commitments did not produce the scale of positive impacts as expected, partly because they were not implemented properly with funding, resources or will of stakeholders. The report allowed us to create a new scorecard methodology for evaluating commitments, which is enhanced with a toolkit of 11 topics, both of which can be used for crafting “Commitments V2.0,” which can be made stronger and more effective for everyone.

This includes the Magnitude of the commitment, and how much impact it can make, as well as replicability and scalability. It also includes measures of Velocity, in terms of how fast commitments can be implemented or activated. These can be used by entities of any type (public, private, government), and entities or organisations big or small, all to help engaged, thoughtful focus on the complex topic of plastic pollution.

Growing populations and increased weather incidences will continue to mean that plastic pollution remains a topical issue in the years to come, but there are also some great opportunities for new models of waste management, collection, recovery, job creation and innovations that are all needed to help solve these challenges. Once we have a few of the new large-scale models and programmes showcased, it should be easier for other countries, large and small, to create their own versions of these successes, modified for the size of the communities they are meant to improve.

### About Ocean Recovery Alliance:

Ocean Recovery Alliance is an NGO based in Hong Kong and California, and is the founder of the Plasticity Forums, and organiser of the “Skyscraper’s” Asia Tour, a huge 11m tall whale sculpture now on display in front of the Art Science Museum in Singapore, made from plastic recovered



from the Pacific Ocean. The group uses environmental entrepreneurship to bring awareness, education, innovations and solutions to reduce plastic pollution on a global scale, which can be replicated across communities in any country. It has worked with the World Bank, UN Environment and Clinton Global Initiative, and was awarded the 2018 Prince’s Award from Prince Albert of Monaco for its work for the ocean across a broad spectrum of users, from youth, to companies and governments. Its programmes include the Global Alert app (available to everyone), to report trash hotspots in the world’s waterways and coastlines, the Plastic Disclosure Project (PDP) – a methodology for businesses and governments to measure their plastic footprints, and the Plasticity Forum on innovations for plastic in its second life. It has recently released “Plastic Pollution Commitments 2.0” in a report with funding support from UN Environment, which offers a new scorecard and toolkit methodology so that the private sector, governments and the general community can make more effective, high-impact V2.0 commitments.







# HEALTHCARE IN THAILAND FOR THE OVER 60S

by Dr Donna Robinson

The medical care provided in Thailand has always been of exceptional quality. Thailand has high quality hospitals in every single province, public and private, especially in Bangkok. All of these hospitals and other medical clinics are easily accessible; most of them have 24 hour services, or are open for up to 10 or 12 hours and are in convenient locations all around Thailand. Some even provide special after hours services, home treatment services, and emergency hotlines. Simply calling into the hospital will allow one to book an appointment with ease. When one reaches the age of 60, they worry about health insurance and ensuring that they get the best healthcare possible. In other countries, it may be that healthcare is expensive or inaccessible. However, in Thailand the standard of healthcare and its price as well as accessibility is of great quality and convenience to the patient.

Depending on one's income and the standard of treatment required, one can choose their hospital according to their needs. However, the standard of medical care in local and regional government hospitals are of high quality, providing services at a high standard at an affordable price. Government hospitals like Chulalongkorn, Ramathibodi, and Siriraj can provide exceptional care and are some of the best hospitals in the world. For example Chulalongkorn Hospital has an evening clinic that opens at 16:30 hours which generally has significantly less waiting time and Siriraj also has introduced a new private hospital called Siriraj



Piyamaharajkarun, which can fulfil every medical need.

Thailand is the leading country in SE Asia for JCI accredited hospitals with 66 of them and is fourth leading in the world. JCI (Joint Commission International) accreditation is only given to hospitals with performance, structures, and functions with high quality standards. Hence, JCI certified hospitals will provide the best medical care and protocol. This allows all people: young and old to be able to receive the best quality of healthcare.

The concerns that come with being over 60 is that one is at risk for many illnesses, and taking precautionary and preventative steps as well as treating illnesses so that the patient is living a healthy life is essential.

The following aspects in the Thai medical system ensure that people over 60 are given the best possible medical care.





enquire as well as almost all pharmacies have both options.

### **Vaccinations**

Many people come to Thailand for easier access to medicines and vaccinations and for their low-cost. Cost of vaccines in Thailand are generally much cheaper, such as a rabies shot in US could be around \$200 but be as low as \$11 here. We encourage people to take their vaccines in Thailand unless they can get them for free of charge in their home country. This can allow people over 60 to save a significant amount on their medical bill.

### **Laboratories in Thailand**

The quality of laboratories and testing is excellent as well, with most of the labs being ISO certified, such as N health lab, whose testing passes every possible international quality standard. With almost every lab, medical test reports are emailed or sent to you electronically, but with government hospitals you may have to go retrieve it. This is beneficial as you can get your results quicker electronically, even if you are overseas or travelling.

### **Health insurance**

Given that you can pay for many aspects of your own healthcare when in Thailand then insuring for high risk in patient is important so that you have the health cover when you need it.

### **Availability of generic drugs**

Generic drugs are widely available in Thailand. Generic drugs are duplicates of brand-name drugs that have exactly the same dosage, intended use, effects, side effects, risks, and strength as the original drug. Their pharmacological effects are exactly the same as their brand-name equivalents. They automatically inherit approvals as well as the original drug has already been approved for certain treatments or diseases, hence it is much cheaper to manufacture generic drugs and the cost is lower as well. When buying medication, it can be cheaper to opt for the generic drug option and can reduce the medical bill by a significant amount. Many pharmacies even ask if you would like to buy the generic drug or brand name, otherwise one can





## *An integrated senior care solutions for the community*

A living community that answers all needs of modern seniors, Jin Wellbeing County is an integrative healthcare community supported by Thonburi Burana Hospital, ready to care for you or your loved ones with sincere understanding.

**T**he venue adopts designs that are elderly friendly, excellent community, and enjoyable activities crafted with the elderly in mind for. They blend it all into one to meet all your ageing necessities.

Jin Wellbeing County delivers integrative healthcare and personalised medical supervision tailored specifically for senior and their grown children members of the community. The project covers 55.34 acres of land area with 5 buildings of 7 storey, low rise residential space.

Within the project there's Thonburi Burana Hospital, part of the Thonburi Healthcare Group (THG), a leading centre for geriatric healthcare in Thailand.

### **Alzheimer and Stroke**

- Stroke
- Whole body balance, heart, Parkinsons disease, high blood pressure, diabetes...

This rehabilitation hospital will provide comprehensive geriatric healthcare services. They specialise in general holistic prevention, enhance body, mind and soul and rehabilitating healthcare for patients and the elderly. Delivered by a



Rehabilitation Center

professional and experienced medical team of doctors, nurses, physical therapists, and multidisciplinary professionals. They have expertise in various fields of geriatric care, supported by a full range of medical equipment, and services, meeting international standards which include the following:

Skilled nursing care and IPD services provide fully integrated services of physical and mental care for the elderly and patients, encouraging healthcare in forms of “customised health programmes”. Treatments led by teams of experienced specialists enable the services to be performed effectively and comprehensively. For outpatients, inpatients, short and long term rehabilitation patients, whilst providing safe, intimate consultancies and health assessments. Furthermore, they offer in-home nursing services for the elderly, providing full option physical nursing services such as daily care, fundamental physical therapy, care for patients with partial and/or full paralysis. This includes mental, mind and soul and emotional rehabilitation by hosting therapy activities specifically for the elderly.





## 2. Consultancy and health promotion

- Consultation on managing multi-morbidity conditions including long term health plans for elderly and their family.
- Consultation for elderly patients with monitoring medication intake, those with medication intake problems, or those unable to take medications properly as prescribed.
- Consultation on lack of nutrition, anorexia, weight gain or weight loss.
- Support families or caretakers of elderly patients with Alzheimer's disease.
- Consultation on elderly patients' other health conditions such as osteoporosis, bedsores, or insomnia.
- Vaccination services according to individual needs and conditions.
- Pre-surgical examination and post-surgical care.
- Providing palliative care.

### Home health services package consists of 3 type of services:

- 1. Home Health Care:** Home service for patient on a daily or monthly basis. The services include nursing procedures from registered nurse or daily basic care with day shift and night shift type.
- 2. Home Health Visit:** Doctor visit out of location or Jin's 24 hours rehabilitation activity programme.

**3. Continued Home Health:** offers home health services, specially designed for patients who need day-to-day assistance and care in a home-like or resort environment. Enhance body, mind, and soul for both senior and grown children. An attentive multidisciplinary geriatric care team of doctors, nurses, and therapists from Thonburi Healthcare Group will be ready to care for you with 2 room types; 1 bedroom (43/46sqm) and 1 bedroom plus (63/66sqm).



They offer General Medicine Clinic by health assessment, advising, and providing a comprehensive treatment by teams of doctors and nurses specialised in their verticals i.e. screening health risks, diagnose severe illness in general patients, chronic diseases, seasonal epidemics, assessing emotional and depression conditions, and providing nutritional consultancies.

### Rehabilitation clinic

- Geriatric rehabilitation
- Neurological rehabilitation
- Orthopaedic rehabilitation
- Cardiac rehabilitation

#### 1. Health assessment and comprehensive treatment

- General health condition assessment.
- Memory and brain function assessment.
- Safety medication utility assessment.
- Emotional and depression condition assessment.
- Nutritional assessment.
- Balance and risk of fall assessment.
- Self-care ability assessment.
- Sight and hearing assessment.

### Rehabilitation centre

Geriatric rehabilitation provides fully integrated services of physical and mental care for patients, encouraging healthcare in forms of "customised health programmes".

Neurological rehabilitation provides competency assessment services and designing fully integrated rehabilitation programmes.

Orthopaedic rehabilitation provides treatments by orthopaedic specialists since the beginning to surgical stage with advanced tools and technologies.

Cardiac rehabilitation provide comprehensive cardiac rehabilitation treatment services for your quality of life along with appropriate daily activities.





## Brain health and the foods you eat (part one)

by Karla Walter

*When you think about your health and your body, do you think about the health of your brain? It is possibly the most powerful and important organ we have in our body.*

There are endless diets, detox programmes, gym workouts, so many steps per day for our organs, however do you think of your brain as an organ? The brain controls our thoughts, memory and speech, movement of the arms and legs, and the function of many organs within our body. The central nervous system (CNS) is composed of the brain and the spinal cord. What we eat, what we think, how we relax, what we watch on TV or our phones, computers, books we read, conversations we have, the words we speak. All of this has a cause and effect on our brain which in turn has a cause and effect on our health.

Around the world there appears to be increasing



problems with mental health, from anger, sadness, social recoil, anxiety, mood swings, depression, etc., Many of these conditions can be prevented or reversed with changes to our food consumption, lifestyle and choices that we make on a day to day level.

If we think about our brain as one of the three vital organs in our body that we cannot live without, why is it that we pay it very little attention. Are you feeding your brain with information that can stimulate your ideas and help to broaden your horizons? What are the useless thoughts that you have each day that do nothing to help your brain be healthy?

What brain food do you eat each day to help combat memory loss, anger, distraction, drifting thoughts etc.,

There are a few restaurants in the USA and UK that are now asking customers to place their phones in little buckets or a vase placed in the centre of the table while they have dinner. You are only able to retrieve the phone when you leave the restaurant. This is one way of feeding the brain and keeping it healthy with conversation.

All the technology and distractions collectively have an effect on our brain and not always for the better. A small caveat, there are times when being able to access information from a handheld device takes a lot of stress out of a situation.



For example, finding where you want to go with the least amount of effort with “maps”.

We require a healthy brain for the millions of functions that happen in our bodies, most without us being truly aware of them. We must not become complacent about the many automatic processes that the body moves through each and every day. The internal balance is one that never switches off. It is always doing its best to maintain its balance if we feed it.

Eating certain foods have shown that our memory function and concentration can improve. Around the world certain spices, herbs, plants are being tested and researched for answers in Dementia and Alzheimer's.

The list below is only the beginning of many wonderful foods that can help to keep our brains functioning in the best possible way.

**Green leafy vegetables** – The variety around the world is exceptional, from kale, spinach, collards, bok choy, pad choy, Choy sum, broccoli, bad po, Phak bung, Phak kat honge, Phak kat khao, Phat kat khiao also known as Mustard Greens, (by far my favourite green vegetable). There has been research (published in Neurology US and the study was done over 5 years), to show that these vegetables help to slow cognitive decline. Broccoli contains Vitamin K and other compounds that give it anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects, which may help protect the brain against damage.



**Fatty fish** – the source of Omega 3 fatty acids and healthy unsaturated fats we now know are linked to lowering the protein that forms clumps in the brain of people with Alzheimers. These proteins are called beta-amyloid. Once or twice a week is better to help your brain with salmon, trout and sardines. One study found that people who ate baked or broiled fish regularly had more grey matter in their brains. Grey matter contains most of the nerve cells that control decision making, memory and emotion. Avocado is a fatty fruit, is a monounsaturated fat, which contributes to healthy blood flow. Our blood is our lifeline, healthy blood flow means a healthy brain.

**Berries** – also called super fruits. I think all food is super, however, in a study in 2012 berries were shown to not only help improve memory but slow memory loss down in another study group. Strawberries, blueberries, raspberries which are full of antioxidants (which means reduce oxidative stress on cells) and flavonoids. They improve blood sugar levels, insulin and are high in vitamin C, vitamin K1 and Manganese.

**Walnuts** – excellent protein and healthy fat for your brain. Walnuts are high in a type of Omega-3 fatty acid called alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), which helps lower blood pressure and protects arteries. That's good for both the heart and brain.







Some foods look like what they are good for. This is called Doctor of Signatures. If you look at the nut of the walnut it looks just like the two halves of the brain.

**Tea and coffee** – in excess to stay up all night to crunch for exams, I would not be recommending it. However, looking at properties of caffeine in studies your morning cup of coffee or tea might offer more than just a short-term concentration boost. In a 2014 study published in The Journal of Nutrition, participants with higher caffeine consumption scored better on tests of mental function. Caffeine might also help solidify new memories, according to other research. Investigators at Johns Hopkins University asked participants to study a series of images and then take either a placebo or a 200-milligram caffeine tablet. More members of the caffeine group were able to correctly identify the images on the following day. Just as there is no magic pill to prevent cognitive decline, no single almighty brain food can ensure a sharp brain as you age.

As a nutritionist the first place to start is with a strategy of a healthy balanced eating pattern. Always include a variety of vegetables (daily) along with fruit. Next on your dietary plan is legumes and whole grains plus protein. Never skip protein. Do your best to eat protein from plant sources along with fish. Choose healthy fats, such

as olive oil, canola, peanut, flaxseed, sesame seed, sunflower or walnut to name a few rather than saturated fats. Feed your brain and cherish this amazing organ (to be continued).

*'The brain is wider than the sky  
by Emily Dickinson'*

Health and Happiness

Karla Walter

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# Dr. TATTOF

**F**ollowing in the footsteps of his father, Thailand's first US trained dermatologist, Dr. Nattapong Jirurawong founded Dr. TATTOF to erase unwanted memories by removing tattoos and scars. Being the first in Thailand to treat patients with the latest, most advanced technology such as PicoWay was only the beginning. Today, Dr. TATTOF has 5 locations and leads the local market as an expert in non-invasive medical laser solutions. We caught up with Dr. Nattapong at his clinic in Thonglor to learn more about the most popular beauty procedures in Bangkok and the secret to ageing gracefully.

## **Non-invasive medical laser solutions. Tell us more about that.**

Dr. Nattapong: All of our treatments are non-surgical, require no downtime, and take less than 30 minutes. Some patients drop by during their lunch break, before going to the gym, or before picking up their kids from school. We use only the highest-performing technology approved by the FDA in the United States of America, all of which are tried and tested to work effectively with the most comfortable experience.

## **What are the main concerns of your patients?**

Dr. Nattapong: Currently, most of our patients want to slim up and/or become more toned with more defined muscles.

Both men and women who lead fairly active, healthy lifestyles have benefited from SculpSure, a diode laser which targets stubborn fat in problem areas such as the stomach and arms. Each treatment permanently removes up to 24% of fat and the best results are seen within 12 weeks. For women between thirty and forty years old, the most sought-after treatments remove sagging belly and stretch marks/scarring caused by the rapid stretching of the skin during pregnancy. We usually recommend Gentle YAG Pro-U and PicoWay Resolve, and a few patients choose to speed up the results of the laser using MyCELL or PRP (Platelet-Rich Plasma), which is basically using the patient's own blood cells to help the skin heal faster.

## **Why do you think some choose laser beauty treatments over "natural" methods such as diet and exercise?**

Dr. Nattapong: Apart from the fact that it's quite difficult to stick to a diet and exercise plan, some people say - and I definitely agree - that sometimes it's just not enough. Most of us have fat and wrinkly skin in areas that are nearly impossible to naturally treat, the areas we call "trouble spots", and a quick and painless treatment can go a long way in improving confidence and bringing excitement back into life.

## **Some view age-altering procedures negatively, perhaps as a sign of insecurity or a lack of acceptance in oneself. What do you think about that?**

Dr. Nattapong: Improving your appearance is a form of self-care. It's like going to the spa for a massage, putting on makeup, or eating healthy. Most of my patients are successful, attractive, and confident people who choose to become a better version of themselves through many ways: travelling, spirituality,

exercise, and the cosmetic procedures we've mentioned. It's not just for looking better, because when you take the steps to look better, you're empowered and end up feel better.

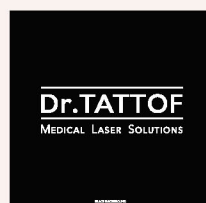
## **As an experienced dermatologist, what would you say is the secret to ageing gracefully?**

Dr. Nattapong: Regular exercise, a nutritious diet, and constant hydration is obviously important. What I think is rarely mentioned, but vital to ageing happily and gracefully is living with purpose, doing new, meaningful things that keep life exciting, constant self-care, and never stop improving.

For more information on what you can do to look and feel better today, visit [www.dr.tattof.com/en](http://www.dr.tattof.com/en), call +66(0)99-614-2424 or send a Facebook message to [www.facebook.com/dr.tattof/](https://www.facebook.com/dr.tattof/).

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# 5 common dieting mistakes

by Rishi Haria

**A**fter you've included regular workouts into your daily routine, the only thing left to nail down is your diet. The training aspect for some people is mentally easier than adhering to the nutrition plan needed to achieve their physique goal. It's a cliché to say that it's 80% nutrition and 20% training but I would have to agree with it.

I spent years of trial and error to nail down what was needed to sculpt my body in the way I desired. I've tried everything from low carb diets, excessive amounts of cardio, carb cycling, and the list goes on and on. In hindsight it was quite obvious where I was going wrong and many people are following the same path that I used to take.

Often people are held back by their lack of understanding of the dieting process. I've listed below some common dieting mistakes.

## Simply eating clean will get you shredded

Foods that are generally considered clean are often high in satiety for relatively low calories. Satiety here refers to the feeling of being full after eating a particular food. Think of lean proteins sources, salads, vegetables etc. When you switch from a diet consisting of high calorie junk foods, which are lower in satiety for relatively higher calories, you will automatically reduce your calorie intake to an extent. Eating in a calorie deficit is what's needed to reduce your body fat levels. So by switching to clean foods, you will experience some success but generally only to a certain point. To maximise results you have to learn about calories.

The majority of people that have had issues with their weight will generally have problems with appetite control. Even clean foods have calories and you can easily overeat with clean goods, albeit a more difficult task due to the satiety. Unless you intuitively understand how much food you should be eating for your goal, it's essential to understand the importance of quantity control and energy balance. It's not

just about what you eat, it's about how much.

## Not learning how to track calories and macro nutrients

The very first time I could see my abs was when I figured out how to track my calories/macros. Without this skill it's hard to truly establish if you're in a calorie deficit and whether or not you're eating the right types of food for your goal. I won't go into too much detail here but macro nutrients refer to the proteins, fats, and carbohydrates that are in the foods you consume. This was a huge breakthrough for me, not only on a personal level, but as a trainer you don't have much credibility with your clients if you don't even have the knowledge and ability to get yourself into shape. Prior to this breakthrough I was able to get reasonably lean but never as lean as I wanted to be. It might seem like a daunting task to learn how to use apps such as MyFitnessPal but once you master it, it will give you the tools to achieve the body you're striving for.

## Eating too much early in the day

This might not apply to everyone but by having a huge breakfast and consuming over half of your target calories in one meal, it leaves you less calories for the rest of the day. If this happens then the likelihood of giving into hunger cravings will increase, thus resulting in overeating. I like to fast for the first few hours after waking up so that I have more calories banked for the rest of the day. It's easier to not eat after waking up, than going to sleep hungry from my experience. It's a false myth that eating after 6pm increases fat gain. It's simply a matter of calories in vs calories out and timing your mealtimes that suit your lifestyle, leading to better adherence to your planned diet.

## Going too extreme

Ideally you should try to eat as much as possible and still manage to lose fat. Anyone can get leaner by eating 500







calories a day. But this wouldn't be healthy as you would be lacking nutrients and your metabolism would slow down. Not to mention, that you would most likely rebound and

gain all the weight back because it would be too hard to eat so little in the long term. Fat loss should be slow and steady so that you can mentally adapt and keep making progress in the long term. You want your progress to be sustainable. Extreme dieting can even lead you down the path of an eating disorder. Gradually decrease your food intake and slowly increase your activity level. Trust the process, stay consistent, and be patient.

#### Eating out too often

It's easier to accurately track your food intake if you weigh everything out yourself with home cooked food. If you're serious about making proper progress you should be willing to do this during a fat loss phase. I'm not saying that you have to be this meticulous forever or for every single meal. But it's definitely the most effective way of controlling your food intake according to your goal. Once you get a good grasp of food measurements at home, it makes it easier to estimate food quantities when you eat out later down the line. Eventually you should be able to intuitively eat according to your goals once you have a better understanding of food quantities. You can always use clean food delivery services that do the calorie/macro calculations for you if time is a problem. The choice is yours.

Dieting is just as much a mental challenge as it is a physical one. It's important to manage your expectation of how much you're willing to dedicate yourself to versus your expected results. Everyone can dramatically improve their body shape if they really want to. With the right guidance you can get there much faster.



# DIET CHOICES

## - are you making the right one?

by Monique Jhington

**A**bout 15 years ago, when I was struggling with some really frustrating health issues that I was not able to resolve through conventional medicine, I turned to nutrition to find answers. I had always been interested in food and ate what I considered a fairly healthy diet. Despite this my body wasn't cooperating: my skin was breaking out, my digestive system was out of order, I was fatigued all the time and I felt "toxic".

My natural response was to try and cleanse and detox my system, which I did through adopting a purely raw, vegan diet for a period of time. I don't deny that it felt really clean, light and healthy to eat a colourful plant-based diet. After the initial "honeymoon" period, however, I noticed my digestive system had become worse, I had lost more weight than I could afford to and I started noticing other symptoms, like feeling light-headed and dizzy.

In hindsight, the toxicity I was feeling was due to an inflammatory response triggered by gut issues. If I had to do it all again, knowing what I know now, I would most certainly not choose a vegan diet to try and quench the internal inflammation. The diet I was eating may have been loaded with minerals and vitamins and other plant-based nutrients, but it was also full of problematic plant proteins and fibres that further irritated my gut lining, fuelled the inflammation and interfered with my ability to absorb vital nutrients.

### Why am I telling you this?

Because I see too many people blindly jumping on the latest diet trends without any regard for their bio-individual needs. Which is fine when you are just playing around with your diet to try and optimise your performance, lose some weight and you have no health issues as such. But when you are feeling flat, fat, unfocused, fatigued, you have been diagnosed with a health condition or are dealing with other, mysterious symptoms you may end up making things worse.

I know it's compelling to shift your diet based on a trending documentary that touts the enormous health benefits of eating a certain way, trending articles that speak about this wonderful

new "fix-all" diet approach, or a friend's amazing weight loss results. You could get lucky.

*But what 15 years of studying nutrition and working with clients has shown me is that resolving health challenges more often than not requires a very systematic and personalised approach that takes into account your unique health history, your current health status, your age, gender, genetics, environment, and lifestyle.*







### Here's what I urge you to consider:

Make well-informed decisions about what to eat. We're talking health here: your ability to live a long and illness-free life because of choices that you make today. Therefore, would you not want to base your decisions on facts and consider all the angles? Approach documentaries and articles and success stories with an open yet critical mind and question what you hear. Just because someone says something is true, it does not have to be so, in general or for you in particular.

Reading and analysing scientific studies and reviewing all the evidence is time consuming and you may therefore need to rely on people to do it for you. Find reliable and reputable resources that provide reviews that are as unbiased as possible and that acknowledge the importance of bio-individuality. Question those that have a one-fit-for-all approach; there is no such thing.

Despite modern technology and all the recent scientific advances, we are still far from knowing it all. New body parts and signalling pathways are still being discovered and we are only beginning to understand the role of the microbiome in health and disease, just to name an example. Staying abreast of what we do know is key but simultaneously developing a deep sense of awareness and an ability to tune in to your body and read its signs and signals is going to be the most important success factor in optimising your health.

Whatever your chosen diet approach, quality matters. Certain things are bad across the board and those include processed, refined foods and sugar. Aim for a whole food diet, animal protein from sustainably and humanely raised, grass-fed, and free-range animals, poultry and eggs, wild and sustainably caught fish, organic fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Also, don't overeat: our bodies are simply not made for that.

Diet matters. But so do many other things such as movement, a positive mindset, joy, inner balance, love and relationships, rest, a connection to a higher power. True health and wellness require a holistic approach so make sure you periodically examine all these areas in your life and address any imbalances.

I recognise that nutrition can be quite confusing. There are such diametrically opposing views out there and how do you figure out what is right for you? If you are struggling to make sense of it all, to resolve health challenges or to optimise your health consider having a chat with me to see if I can help. You can set that up by booking a free nutrition breakthrough session on my website.

Be well.

Monique

*Monique Jhington is a Functional Nutrition & Lifestyle Practitioner who offers select private coaching to expats whose health and digestion has been compromised as a result of transitioning into new environments, cultures, climates and foods.*



You can read more on her website and sign up for a free nutrition breakthrough session here:

[www.moniquejhington.com](http://www.moniquejhington.com)





# How exercise affects your brain

by Saree Jitta

**F**our years ago I lost my dad, it's the first time I truly lost a loved one. At the same time my seven year relationship ended, it was a big hit for me. If it's the old me I probably went back to drinking and smoking but I've changed for the better.

I didn't want to just eat all day and felt guilty after it either, I wanted to get out of this miserable, depressed state. So, I started weight training. I was doing exercise here and there but not really as a lifestyle. I've noticed that after I sweat it out, I feel so much better. I thought this was amazing! Not only I feel good about myself, but my body started to look better as well.

In our modern society these days, people stress a lot about their life, relationships, financial situation, work etc. I believe exercise is the easiest and cheapest way to help you reduce stress so, I have started to study more how exercise can make you happy.

Have you ever noticed why after you exercise, sweat it out at the gym, you feel better afterwards? That's because exercise is good for your brain, not just for your body. Let's say if you want to build your glutes, you have to flex them. Believe it or not getting busy working your glutes will also train your brain to get stronger.

It increases your heart rate, which pumps more oxygen to the brain. When you exercise, your body releases chemicals called endorphins. These endorphins interact with the receptors in your brain that reduce your perception of pain.

The University of California says that exercise increases growth factors in the brain which makes it easier for the brain to grow new neuronal connections. Yes, there are billions of neurones in our brain like a spiders web and they can keep growing! Sounds very scientific? Let me explain to you in a very simple way.

Some days you feel like you could kill someone at work. Sometimes you think your world is collapsing, or you can't seem to stop eating. But then the next day you feel like you're on top of the world, then you ask yourself – what's happening? You don't seem to understand yourself sometimes, well that might be because of the chemicals in your brain (hormones) are playing games with you.

These are chemicals in your brain that can make you happy or not so, if you have less.

## Dopamine

It releases during pleasurable situation, it motivates you, when you feel unmotivated that's because the dopamine level is very low. There's this experiment, they switch off brain receptors in rats which reduce their dopamine levels, slowly the rats stop moving and just want to eat cheese. So next time you lose motivation and just want to sit in front of TV and eat your favourite ice cream, put on your sneakers and go for a walk. Because exercise can increase your dopamine level, so you can get your motivation back.



## Serotonin

Serotonin is the key hormone that stabilises our mood, feelings of wellbeing, and happiness. This hormone impacts your entire body. Serotonin also helps with sleeping, eating, and digestion. When you feel sad, depressed or frustrated that might be because your serotonin is low that's why anti depression medicine focus to help you increase serotonin. Studies have shown that exercise can help you increase serotonin.



## Norepinephrine (or noradrenaline)

Helps with your attention, focus.  
High norepinephrine = sharp focus,  
low norepinephrine = dull and blah.  
Sometimes when I'm blocked, instead  
of sitting in front of my laptop, I'll go to  
the gym and sweat it out. When I come  
back I can be more creative.

## Endorphins

When you exercise, your body releases  
chemicals called endorphins. These  
endorphins interact with the receptors  
in your brain that reduce our perception  
of pain. Endorphins trigger a positive  
feeling in the body similar to morphine  
(work as painkiller.)

## The magic pill is exercise

A few examples why I say exercise cures  
everything.

- **Exercise boots memory**  
The part of the brain that responds  
strongly to aerobic exercise is  
called the hippocampus. Since  
the hippocampus is at the core of  
the brain's learning and memory  
systems, it explains the memory-



- boosting effects of improved  
cardiovascular fitness.
- **Exercise increases concentration**
- **Exercise help you focus and  
stay on task longer.** Better at  
multitasking, ignoring distractions,  
and processing complex  
information.
- **Exercise improves mental health**  
Studies have shown that  
exercise seemed as effective  
as antidepressant drugs and  
psychological treatment to  
overcome depression.
- **Exercises enhances with creativity**  
Next time you can't think of the  
idea for your new project.

Try go for a walk or on  
treadmill, surprisingly you  
might be able to surprise  
your boss and colleagues  
with these crazy ideas.

- **Exercise slows  
cognitive decline**
- You don't need to be  
a rat race at the gym to get  
this benefit, workouts don't  
even need to be extreme, as  
long as you get your heart  
rate up a bit. Could be  
walking 30-45 minutes or  
weightlifting twice a week  
can have a good impact on  
your health.
- **Exercise improves  
circulation**
- **Exercise increases  
heart rate,** so it helps deliver  
more oxygen and glucose to  
the brain to help with blood  
circulation.

- **Exercise helps learning and  
memory**  
You don't need to kill yourself at  
the gym, just moderate physical  
exercise like walking your dog in  
the park boosts memory functions  
and learning.
- **Exercise builds more brain cells**
- **Exercise prevents diseases**

If you want to start exercise. I'd  
recommend two days strength  
training combined with 150 minutes  
of moderate intensity exercise like  
walking, dancing or 75 minutes of  
vigorous-intensity exercise like hiking,  
running, cycling.

Bottom line any exercise is  
better than none exercise at  
all. Choose what you enjoy to  
develop an active living for a  
healthier lifestyle.

### About the author:

*Saree Jitta has helped women love  
themselves again and gain their  
confidence back. You'll learn to have  
discipline in exercise and have a balance  
diet. At the same time you'll get connect  
with your mind, body, and spirit.  
Through her coaching service hundred of  
women are truly transformed inside out.  
Get stronger psychically and mentally. If  
you want to become a better version of  
yourself. Visit [sareefitness.com](https://sareefitness.com) contact  
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inspiration on IG [@sareejitta](https://www.instagram.com/sareejitta)*







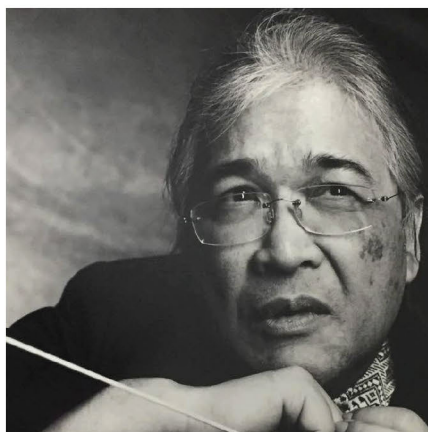
# THE THAI OPERA MASTER: An interview with Maestro Somtow

by Ema Naito-Bhakdi

*February 8th is World Opera Day. What better way to commemorate it than by interviewing Thailand's most eclectic opera composer/conductor/writer/director, Somtow Sucharitkul?*

If you search for “opera in Thailand,” you will inevitably come across the name Somtow Sucharitkul. Distinguished Silpathorn Artist of Thailand, award-winning novelist, and composer of operas, Maestro Somtow is a man who defies definition.

Born in Bangkok, Somtow grew up in Europe and was educated at Eton and Cambridge. In the 1970s he acquired a reputation in Thailand as



a revolutionary composer, the first to combine Thai and Western instruments. Following a major burnout, however, Somtow emigrated to the United States and reinvented himself as a novelist. Under the name S.P. Somtow, he published over 60 books, including *Vampire Junction* and the semi-autobiographical *Jasmine Nights*, spanning science fiction, horror, and fantasy genres.

In 2001, Somtow decided to refocus his attention on the country of his birth, founding Bangkok's first international opera company Opera Siam (originally the Bangkok Opera) and returning to music, “where he again reinvented himself, this time as a neo-Asian neo-Romantic composer.”\*

According to London's Opera magazine, “in just five years, Somtow has made Bangkok into the operatic hub of SE Asia.” His operas on Thai themes, *Madana*, *Mae Naak*, *Ayodhya*, and *The Silent Prince* have been well received by international critics. The



Japanese-inspired *Dan no Ura* and the fantasy opera *The Snow Dragon* have gained him acceptance as “one of the most intriguing of contemporary opera composers” (Auditorium magazine).

He is currently working on an ambitious ten-opera cycle, *Dasjati – The Ten Lives of the Buddha* – which, when completed, will be the classical music work with the largest time span and scope in history (for more information, see [www.dasjati.com](http://www.dasjati.com)).

**How did you get into opera?  
Where does opera stand for you  
among your vast area of work?**

I first tried to compose an opera when I was about 10. With typical childish overreach, I decided it would be based on Goethe's *Faust*, not knowing that





there are over sixty operas based on it. I wrote it on paper created with a stencil pen and copied on a mimeograph. I only managed a couple of pages. At 15, I wrote another opera, getting all the way to the end, but it too was somewhat “beyond my means” – it was an adaptation of Ibsen’s *Brand*. In my 20s I tried again with a bio-opera about Michelangelo, which went into rehearsal at Cambridge but ran out of money. Then there was the 7 opera science fiction cycle “*Interfaces*,” which I started in 1975, but somehow only finished two or three scenes, plus the complete libretti of the first three in the series.

I was in my late 40s before I managed to get an opera produced – *Madana* – after having a whole career as a novelist in between. I’ve now written nineteen stage works, mostly operas, making me a member of a very small club – living composers whose work is primarily opera.

**Is there any particular opera(s) with special emotional significance for you?**

I think that they are all special, in that I try to create a completely different sound-world for each one. *The Dasjati series – the ten lives of the Buddha* – is of course notorious for its gigantism – it will be one of the largest works in the history of classical music if I live to complete it. But the opera I’ve just completed, *Helena Citronová*, is very special to me. It is about the Holocaust.

**For those of us who have no idea: How do you write an opera? Music first or libretto (do you also write the libretto)? Do you start off with a structure in mind?**

I think the standard answer would be “very carefully.”

Opera is about the music, not the words. Nevertheless, a well-crafted libretto is essential. The libretto is like a closet, and the music is the wardrobe. If the closet is dirty, shoddy, the clothes will get creased, fall off the hangers, and generally not reflect the acme of

your taste. The composer’s skill is in hanging up the right combination of clothes, with the right colour scheme and materials. Most librettists don’t get this – unless they are professional librettists, which are even rarer than professional opera composers – they will always resent the fact that the words must be the faithful handmaiden of the music.

I take care of this problem by writing the libretto myself. Since I have an independent career as a novelist, I don’t need the libretto to prove what a “fine writer” I am. I construct the libretto to give as much room as possible for the music to breathe. I decide in advance on how the music is going to advance as a musical structure – i.e. I need a big ensemble before the end of such and such a scene, I’ll have a long solo to establish a character here, and so on. Then I develop the libretto. While composing the music, I end up cutting 30% of the libretto because anything that the music says, the words do not have to say as well.

**You often incorporate Thai elements into Western operas. Why?**

That speaks to the question “What is a western opera?” I’m an Asian composer who happens to have spent most of his life in the West. I don’t think of Buddhist mythology as something exotic and “other” and I also feel that the Holocaust is as much “my” history as the history of Europeans. It’s not about incorporating one into the other, it’s about utilising all the raw material of one’s experience.

**Please tell us a bit about your *Life of Buddha* opera cycle. What inspired you to embark on composing such a huge work? How far are you towards completion?**

There’s a TedX Talk (see “*Riding the Lightning*,” TEDxChiangMai, 30 January 2016) about how I came to write this – if I regurgitated it, it would be longer than this interview. Sure, composing the “biggest integrated classical music work of all time” is a bit scary. I have finished No. 7, but No. 10 will be the next one to premiere, in December 2020.

**Your remarkable youth orchestra, Siam Sinfonietta, has been playing for your operas lately. How is working with the young musicians different from conducting a “grown-up” orchestra?**





Owing to a financial crunch in 2016, our Siam Philharmonic was placed on hold and so the youth orchestra has been playing in the productions. This situation will not last as the Opera slowly moves back into better times.

How is it different? It's different. But they have incredible passion, and sometimes they are easier to train from not yet having picked up any bad habits.

**We've seen a remarkable growth of talented young Thai musicians in the last two decades. Any names that we should be looking out for?**

Running a youth orchestra that only accepts the best young players in the country means that pretty much the entirety of the "creme de la creme" passes through my life at one time or another. Every seven years we go through a cycle – it takes about seven years to "grow" one of these brilliant people. So, I've been here for 20 years and am now seeing the third "class" emerge.

The first group to emerge were led by the incredible Trisdee na Patalung and included Ekachai Maskulrat, who is Thailand's truly world-class cellist. "Gen Two" is in a way the one that's closest to me because they've all spent so much time at my house or going on tour with us – string players like Chote Buasuwan and Wishwin Sureeratanakorn, and incredible woodwind and brass players. The Third Gen is shaping up nicely.

**It must be exhausting to run these organisations, conduct and direct rehearsals and performances, compose, edit, promote, travel, develop projects... How do you manage it? Who helps you?**

I need help. Operas are not cheap to produce – performers and musicians, venue, publicity, costumes, sets, makeup and hair, crew, transportation... that's not even a complete list of the costs. How do you finance these major undertakings?

Through corporate sponsorship, government, and private donors – the three pillars of our opera company. There are ups and downs. When one pillar is weak, the structure doesn't hold so we are working hard on this.

**Where can we see past performances? Do you still have DVDs (I don't think mine work anymore!).**

Opera Siam has YouTube and Vimeo channels. Some of our operas are available for sale on amazon.com – search for "samtow."

**How can we support Opera Siam and the Sinfonietta? Where can we find upcoming performances and buy tickets?**

Supporting the Opera: for information, write to us at [intendant@bangkokopera.com](mailto:intendant@bangkokopera.com), consider purchasing a season ticket, and subscribing to our mailing list. We always need support. It's our audience that keeps classical music and opera alive.

Thank you for sharing all this with us, Maestro. Your contribution to Western classical music in Thailand – not to mention regionally and globally – is phenomenal and we are grateful for all you have done and continue to do.

P.S. For those of you who haven't seen an Opera Siam production in over 10 years: consider it time to see how it's grown!

#### 2019/2020 Season: Remaining performances

The Love Concert (February 2020), Salome (March 2020)  
International Choir Festival: Beethoven's Missa Solemnis (July 2020), Epic Symphony Festival (August 2020)

#### To get the latest info:

Follow Opera Siam ([www.facebook.com/OperaSiam](https://www.facebook.com/OperaSiam)) and Siam Sinfonietta ([www.facebook.com/SiamSinfonietta/](https://www.facebook.com/SiamSinfonietta/)) on Facebook

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Note:

\* Samtow's biography has been excerpted from [www.operasiam.com/samtow](http://www.operasiam.com/samtow).

*About the interviewer: Ema Naito-Bhakdi is an independent English editor ([www.theclarityeditor.com](http://www.theclarityeditor.com)). She has been singing in choirs and as an occasional soloist for much of her life and with Opera Siam and the Orpheus Choir since 2002. Ema is mom to three kids and blogs at [www.crossculturalfamily.com](http://www.crossculturalfamily.com).*





## Moms that make the opera sing

This World Opera Day, we take a peek behind the scenes and talk to a group of moms who supported their children's passion to perform opera.

by Ema Naito-Bhakdi

**B**ackstage, Thailand Cultural Centre Big Hall. It's three hours to curtain. Shilpa Patil is seated with a full makeup box balanced on her hand, putting the finishing touches on daughter Chantal's lips. Nearby, Kumiko Suito keeps an eye on the makeup artists as they dab foundation on daughter Ruby's cheeks, while Rieko Nishijima checks in on Rom, Emm, and Rit and sees to it that they are in costume, have had enough to drink, and are not horsing around.

These are the "opera moms" – honorary members of the chorus and beloved by the choristers.

Today, the children – ranging from 14 to 21 years in age – are seasoned opera veterans, having performed all together



over 15 operas within a span of 7 or 8 years, primarily with Opera Siam led by Maestro Somtow Sucharitkul.

Being in an opera is a wild fantasy for most of us; an impossibility – which it would indeed be in the West. But the still-growing opera scene in Thailand offers many possibilities, even for the youngest of singers. Rit was just 5 years old when he joined. When brother Rom (then 13) and sister Emm (then 11) went to audition for the children's choir, they asked Somtow if Rit may also join. "Maestro asked Rit's age. Rit answered 'I'm almost 6' (he was only 5 and a half or so)" laughs mom Rieko. But the episode convinced her that her children were serious about singing.

The moms emphasise it was their child's choice to take part. Shilpa says her daughter leaped at the opportunity to audition. "She assured me she would be okay even if she didn't get in because she just wanted to meet Somtow in person."

While being an opera parent involves many hours of chaperoning, that's not all. "Maintaining health was our biggest concern," says Kumiko. As rehearsals and performances ran late hours, ensuring the children got proper nutrition and enough sleep was a major concern. Shilpa helped her daughter manage chronic anaemia, while Rieko prepared boxed meals and herbal drinks for her children's 1.5 hour ride to rehearsals. "They couldn't wait to get the box





have their way," says Shilpa.

Asked what kept them going, Kumiko confessed that "After going through all the tiredness and madness of each production, I'd always think that was the last time we would join - but always when the next opera was announced, we'd end up joining again - almost like an addiction to the excitement!"

The children enjoyed themselves despite the exhaustion.

The rehearsals

energised them: "They couldn't stop singing in the car going home," says Rieko. Shilpa notes "It was possible only because my daughter was interested and dealt with challenges in her own way. I still remember how animatedly we would chat on our way home over whatever new we learned or noticed."

Through the experience, the children "learned not only music, but about how many people are involved backstage and how professionals take care of themselves. They got into the habit of managing their time - otherwise they couldn't do their homework," says Rieko. Kumiko agrees: "My daughter learned not only singing, acting, and how to move around on the stage but also time

management. The big stage experience gave her confidence for any kind of presentation. Despite the hours of rehearsals and practice before the shows, it was all worthwhile at the end of the day."

The moms gained something as well. Coming from an Indian classical background, Shilpa enjoyed "being part of rehearsal - indirectly! For me this was all new. I grew up with Indian classical music, where the structure is loose and open to interpretation, while Western classical is followed mostly to the T. I would get to chat with Somtow about operas, music, his writing, and use of certain instruments. It was fascinating!"

Best of all, they forged lifelong friendships with each other (including one other opera pair, Carolina Tapia-Ruano Ferrand and daughter Thalassa). "One of the best parts was making new friends - our mom group was special: apart from gossiping, we shared our worries about our children and solutions. It was our support group," says Shilpa.



meals provided by the opera!"

Most parents want to support their children's passions, but it's not always sweet and rosy. "I believe that if (my children) have true interest and passion and make the effort without being forced, they will know what they need to do," says Rieko. "Otherwise, I would stop them from performing. I kept telling them, 'Remember you are incredibly lucky to be on the same stage with serious performers and professional staff!' - because my three kids were always having too much fun!"

Shilpa concurs. "It was hard in the beginning - the 3 hour rehearsals were long and tiring." But she would remind her daughter "what a privilege it was to get this opportunity. To learn and work with outstanding performers and professionals."

Of course, the children were still children. "There were ups and downs, tears and tantrums... but then they were just kids working on an adult schedule. As moms, we just had to float through 'crisis', sometimes by giving in and letting them





*Rieko agrees. “We were on the same team, creating one stage. Opera Siam’s moms are awesome and amazing great mothers. My children kept going despite the tough schedule thanks to their opera siblings.”*

This World Opera Day, we toast these lovely moms!

#### **What was your proudest or most memorable moment?**

“When Somtow brought the cast of the opera Brundibar to Nation TV. They were on TV and introduced themselves. Ruby was so excited.” – Kumiko

“I got upset when my two boys were horsing around backstage on performance day. I told them that the others were serious about their work. ‘Performance starts from backstage and the gods of the stage will punish you if you misbehave. You will never be allowed to join again.’ After that, they would pay their respects at the backstage shrine before each performance.” – Rieko

“After watching Chantal’s Indian classical dance performance at school, Somtow wrote a small part of wedding dancer in his next opera, Suwana Sama, in 2017.” – Shilpa

#### **Something surprising about opera in Thailand?**

“One time, a chorus member just showed up on the performance day without joining any rehearsals and he managed to take part! I thought, wow this is Thailand!”

– Kumiko

“Maestro Somtow would give incredible opportunities to young children – a bit like throwing a puppy into a pond and letting it swim by itself. As Master Yoda said, ‘Do. Or do not. There is no try.’ It was always thrilling!” – Rieko

#### **The Moms**

Kumiko Suito is a Japanese national married to a Malaysian Chinese and living in Bangkok for over 25 years.

Rieko Nishijima is a Japanese musician married to a Thai, living in Pathum Thani for 22 years.

Shilpa Patil lived in Bangkok 2006-2018. She works in the public health field through consultancies and online counselling.

*About the author: Ema Naito-Bhakdi is an independent English editor ([www.theclarityeditor.com](http://www.theclarityeditor.com)) who has been singing throughout her life. She performed with Chantal, Emm, Rit, Rom, and Ruby, and loves and admires their remarkable moms. Ema is mom to three (non-opera performing) kids and blogs at [www.crossculturalfamily.com](http://www.crossculturalfamily.com).*



# Pink Polo for Breast Cancer

**B** Grimm hosting the Queen's Cup Pink Polo 2020. Taking place on Saturday February 22, at the Thai Polo and Equestrian Club Pattaya, this marks the twelfth return of the annual charity tournament.

While the pink theme and all-ladies ensemble make for a unmissable affair, the Pink Polo holds special significance for its charitable cause. This year, all proceeds from the event will be donated to The Queen Sirikit Centre for Breast Cancer Foundation, aimed towards supporting women in their fight against Breast Cancer, as well as raising awareness of the importance of breast cancer screening.

The main highlight of the event are undoubtedly the heated matches between the participating teams, the Pink Polo is also known for providing spectators with a fun and eventful Saturday. Donations of 1,000B gets you a wristband, covering lunch and drinks during the event, along with a Pink Polo limited edition gift.

The Queen's Cup Pink Polo 2019 takes place from 12-6pm, February 22 at The Thai Polo and Equestrian Club Pattaya. To find out more, call 02 6514 081-5 or email [thaipoloclub.lbg.co.th](mailto:thaipoloclub.lbg.co.th). You can also stay tuned for more updates on FB @thaipolo.equestrianclub.





FUNDRAISING FOR THE QUEEN SIRIKIT CENTRE FOR BREAST CANCER



# QUEEN'S CUP PINK POLO 2020



## Invitation

Saturday 22 February 2020 12.00 pm - 6.00 pm  
at Thai Polo & Equestrian Club Pattaya

**Donation 1,000B**

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# BE EMPOWERED

by Talar Artinian

*“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make”.*  
– Jane Goodall

In my experience the definition of empowerment, is a concept circulating around the notion of an “awakening for each other.” Every woman is indeed unique and by inspiring one another we assist in refreshing our values and become united. I believe that we all have the power to awaken to our pure potential. When you feel true empowerment, people around you can feel the vibration of your cause.

From my humble beginnings in war torn Lebanon, I learnt from an early age that it was my inner resilience which honed in on my power to create. As a child, my family and I were forced to flee Lebanon for a year and start over. My siblings and I migrated to Paris with my parents, and we were forced to make a life that was unknown to us. The only constant was our ability to remain a family. Our steadfast unity is what held us together, no matter what our outside circumstances entailed. It was during this time that I learnt about empowering myself.

When we moved back to Lebanon, I felt a sense of relief and understood that my situation was much better than a lot of people in our community who didn’t make it out of the war. My parents believed that we should produce a life for ourselves through education and ultimately finding a career that would sustain us even during times of turmoil. I studied at the American University of Lebanon and obtained an MBA in finance and banking. I was set, I embarked on my career as a banker for 3 years. This sustained me as I learnt about the world of finance, investment and customer service. My mission was to create a portfolio for myself in order to become a global citizen.

My interest in fashion didn’t have a peak; I think I was already born with an instinctual love for dressing and showing up. Doing this made me feel strong, worthy and gave me an inclination of how I was feeling on the inside. I truly believe that if we don’t make the conscious effort to look



good, we will never feel good on the inside. To me, dressing up is a state of mind. It is our heart that tells us what is right and wrong and intuition that gives us the key to success.

When I moved to Thailand, I felt disempowered, because I was a stay at home mom who didn’t have work and I was living a very different life. I have to admit that I missed my life as a productive career woman. I was suddenly branded as just my husband’s pretty wife. It was one of the most crucial times of my life and after I had my third child, I knew something had to shift. Feeling disempowered was one of the greatest learning curves in my life. I knew I had to come out of this slump and enrolled in a life coaching course, which helped me unveil why I was feeling this way.

I knew that I was more than just a pretty face, and I wasn’t just content to have this label on me. I began to associate myself with people who encouraged me to be the best version of myself. These people showed interest in my life and wanted to know more about how I maintain myself, even after having three children. The secret I would tell them is making the effort to look after yourself. Going to the gym, taking care of your skin, eating healthy and dressing up were some of the techniques I used to begin to empower myself. I set goals and followed through with motivation, commitment and discipline.



As an entrepreneur and founder of BE A STARLETTE, it is my mission to give women the tools to empower themselves when they are feeling less, overworked, unappreciated and overwhelmed. And this is how my company was born. To date, hundreds of women have asked me for advice about how I do it all, and I reply, "with perseverance and setting reasonable as well as achievable targets for yourself." Everyday, wake up and commit to yourself first before anyone else. It is with inner strength that we can provide for those around us. Also, a little bit of red lipstick never hurt anyone.

My blog, BE A STARLETTE [www.beastarlette.com](http://www.beastarlette.com) is an ongoing journey for my readers and viewers, where people can learn daily, weekly and monthly tips while advocating a healthy lifestyle, skincare, body care, mindfulness, motherhood tips and living life from the inside out. Fashion is something I discuss in detail, because I believe that clothes definitely give us a sense of meaning and character. I always remind my readers that it is okay to be and feel flawed, because that is what makes us unique. Imperfections are what give us character and helps strive to make us better. My biggest quest is to tell people "that we are all unique, and I pinpoint their superpower – call it my sixth sense. And if they focus on their strengths, that makes the journey more enjoyable." I have come across a variety of different people in my life who have inspired me to know my worth and act upon what I believe is worthy.

BE A STARLETTE is also a place where my viewers can relate and learn about my journey and findings, and what products and techniques I use to sustain a happy and healthy lifestyle. I provide a roadmap for people to follow a life of self-empowerment. I spend time with women while constructing a personal plan for them to follow. It starts with taking the first step, and that's what I'm here for, to mentor people through the process of feeling beautiful and fulfilled.

As fashion editor for Expat Life, for more than 2 years, I can say that this part of my writing career has been an enjoyable process. My articles focus on fashion, trends and what is current on a global scale. You will find information about London Fashion Week, Paris Fashion Week and a host of other runway styles from Milan, Lebanon and across the world. I hope you enjoy reading my work, and please feel free to comment and let me know your thoughts.

Next year in 2020, BE A STARLETTE is hosting an event in March for women's international day. My message is to tell women, that together we can rise, and when we uplift each other we exude confidence and a feeling of security towards each other. Be A Starlette, will have some professionals at the event to give women – and men – some tips to living a healthy, sustainable and empowered life. We all deserve to shine and we are all stars; when you feel it, you just know it. Stay tuned for upcoming details of our event in March 2020.



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## *New beginnings in Nang Loeng*

*From food rescue to plastic recycling, Ford's fifth global community centre brings together diverse nonprofits to benefit Bangkok*

by Todd Nissen

It's 3pm on a steamy Saturday in Bangkok, and there is something new happening in Nang Loeng, a teeming historic neighbourhood not far from the Royal Palace.

Eclectic doesn't begin to describe the scene at the opening of the latest Ford Resource and Engagement Center (FREC), where nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) collaborate in unconventional ways for community benefit.

There's a composting class at the outdoor soil bar. A five star chef from Marriott Hotels is teaching a sustainable cooking class. People are chatting while sitting on furniture made by architecture students and Ford Motor Company employees using recycled plastic and spare car parts from Ford's factory in Rayong, Thailand.

On the second floor, guests learn how to rescue birds and school children play hopscotch and make maps, one creative way for them to learn and practice English.

Across the alley from the FREC, a 92 year old woman in elaborately beaded clothes performs a traditional Chakrit dance. Nearby, visitors in an indigo dyeing class dunk white cloths in vats of soupy blue water.

Later on opening day, there will be an outdoor movie, flanked by two Ford Mustangs. Swing dancing, storytelling and karaoke are also planned for the celebration.

### **Unifying nonprofits to meet resident needs**

Ford Motor Company Fund, the automaker's philanthropic arm, launched its first FREC in Detroit in 2013. FRECs bring together several nonprofits offering different services so local residents can get the help they need in a single location to address the community's concerns.







The concept has proven successful: At the inaugural FREC, located in Southwest Detroit, residents and neighbours receive \$3 in services for every \$1 Ford and its 10 nonprofit partners invest.

FREC Bangkok has eight partners providing everything from food rescue services to wildlife conservation to an artist in residence. It is the fifth centre in a \$15 million global network of FRECs that the Ford Fund runs.

Ford Fund chose the Bangkok location, in part, because of Ford Motor Company's large employee and manufacturing presence in Thailand: 14,000 employees and more than 100 dealers. Thailand also was the first country to hold community service projects after Executive Chairman Bill Ford launched the Ford Volunteer Corps in 2005. What's more, the Ford team saw the city's underserved populations and growing environmental movement needed assistance.

### Putting experience to work

For Scott Chang, Ford Fund's lead in Asia, this marks the culmination of two years of work.

When Ford decided to expand its FREC concept to Asia, Chang brought to bear not only his own professional knowledge of for profit and nonprofit organisations but also a personal history of working across Asian cultures.

Raised in Kansas and California, Chang was raised by Taiwanese immigrants. For his first five years, he spoke only in Mandarin. As the family story goes, Chang didn't know a word of English when he started kindergarten. For the first month, he didn't speak in class. Then, suddenly, he joined the



other kids in speaking fluent English.

After graduating from the University of California at Berkeley, Chang found his way to China to work for Business for Social Responsibility, a non-profit focused on sustainability.

Chang joined Ford in 2011 to manage its sustainability communications in China. In 2015, he shifted to the Ford Fund as part of the foundation's global expansion. He moved to Bangkok in 2016 when his husband, Brian Davidson, became the British Ambassador to Thailand.

### Building on promise

After touring several potential FREC sites, Nang Loeng stood out because of what it has in common with Detroit, Ford's birth place - potential, Chang said.





to lay out our city, neighbourhood and what would make us happy as a community.

"We have a chance to remember our past and then assist in a really nice way that feels very similar to that vibe in Detroit," said Chang.

To do that, Chang tapped his international and nonprofit connections to pull together a unique group of eight NGOs, the likes of which are not found anywhere else. The organisations' leaders are passionate about their work and several also have dual US-Thai citizenship and links into Thai political and diplomatic circles.

The eight NGOs he looked for needed to offer different services but be willing to collaborate – and bring a new

Nang Loeng once was a thriving series of neighbourhoods with rich cultural traditions. Bangkok's first book was published in Nang Loeng; the first cinema in Thailand opened in there in 1918; and Bangkok 1899, a historic nearby house, was one of the first homes in the city to get electricity.

But in recent decades, Nang Loeng had slipped behind as businesses went elsewhere and the population declined. Today, the area is primarily known for its multicultural food market, which draws visitors looking for authentic street fare.

Yet, changes are on the horizon.

"There's something cool about this neighbourhood that's going to shift," Chang said. "And by having us here, we get to help the neighbourhood remember how great it is, and then do things like bring new technologies, environmental protection, active citizenship and think about how we want

way of thinking.

This is critical as Thailand begins to promote social enterprises, businesses and other organisations that work toward social good. In March 2019, the Thai government approved legislation that gives tax breaks and other incentives to registered ventures that aim to deliver a positive social impact while turning a profit.

Chang believes he found the right partners.

"They're young; they're innovative; they're entrepreneurs; they're upstarts," he said.

One example of that is the Na Cafe, located next to FREC's building in Bangkok 1899, a cultural and civic hub that is also a FREC partner. The Cafe is staffed by at-risk youth as part of a vocational training programme. Na Cafe also has connections to Gaa, a five star restaurant that works





with Scholars of Sustenance, another FREC partner, to hand out free food to refugees.

Saks Rouypirom, founder of the SATI Foundation that runs Na Cafe, believes the FREC ecosystem model has potential.

"I've travelled all over," Rouypirom said. "And, honestly, I've seen very few places like this in the world."

**Ford Resource and Engagement Centre (FREC) Bangkok** is a hub for some of Thailand's most innovative nongovernmental organisations and social enterprises. Opened in October 2019 and located at the Satri Julanak school in the city's historic Pomprapsattruphai district, FREC Bangkok brings new resources and initiatives to one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the capital. Designed to be a shared public space for the neighbourhood to enjoy, FREC Bangkok is home to eight nongovernmental organisations that run programmes focused on food, environmental conservation, art and technology. Learn more at [www.facebook.com/frecbkk](https://www.facebook.com/frecbkk)

### Stewards of the Bangkok Ford Resource and Engagement Centre

*Diverse backgrounds bring unique talents to the residents of Bangkok and nonprofit community*

**Ford Motor Company Foundation, Scott Chang** is a native of California who has worked in Asia for 15 years. He started his career working for a sustainability NGO based in San Francisco before moving to China to help the organisation open its Guangzhou and Beijing offices. Following that, he joined Ford in Shanghai before joining his husband and family in Bangkok three years ago. Outside of Ford, Scott serves as Chair to the AmCham CSR committee, Patron of the British Women's Group, and is father to three young children.

Nature Inc., Nancy Gibson, a Thai-American from Texas, wears three hats: Executive Director of Bangkok's

oldest conservation NGO Bird Conservation Society of Thailand; founder of Love Wildlife; and lead for Nature Inc., a co-working space which will be home to up to four other green NGOs operating out of her space in FREC. After starting her professional life as a veterinary tech in Texas, she moved to Thailand to take what she thought would be a temporary job in a zoo. Then she rescued her first slow loris, a nocturnal primate, and was hooked on working with wildlife in Thailand.

### Scholars of Sustenance (SOS) Foundation, Bo Holmgreen. SOS founder Bo

is based in North Carolina and Bali, Indonesia. Prior to SOS, Bo founded a software company which helped banks more efficiently allocate cash for their bank and ATM networks. After selling the company, he continued to try his hand at improving logistics to reduce waste – this time in the food industry through the SOS Foundation. SOS trucks visit hotels, restaurants, and grocery stores to pick up, inspect, and then deliver food to communities in need. The SOS Foundation seeks to transform the food industry from the inside - helping the industry lower its environmental impact while also redistributing food to communities that need it.

**Urban Studies Lab, Pongpisit Huyakorn. Pongpisit** is an architecture and urban planning professor at Thammasat University, one of the leading academic institutions in Thailand. He and a team of researchers have worked with FREC to connect with local community leaders and politically-important stakeholders. He is the lead author of the FREC community study. Pongpisit is a co-founder of Urban Studies Lab (USL), a cross-disciplinary research group founded in



2018 whose core mission is to advance the field of urban development through collaborative, data-driven processes. USL is based at FREC Bangkok, where it will continue its work in Nang Loeng.

Creative Migration Founder/ Executive Director, Susannah Tantemsapya. Susannah is a cultural producer based in Los Angeles and Bangkok. Her career has spanned music, art, film, journalism and design. It includes working at Capitol Records, as a production assistant for avant-garde theatre director Robert Wilson, and managing mid-century modern architect Richard Neutra's Wirin House. In 2005, Susannah founded the arts nonprofit Creative Migration. Its mission is to advance cultural diplomacy through art, public engagement and sustainability. This year, Creative Migration established Bangkok 1899, a new cultural and civic hub that is associated with FREC Bangkok. Bangkok 1899 is located next to the FREC and strives to be a living model of sustainability, incorporating zero waste practices throughout its day-to-day operations.





cafe run out of Bangkok 1899. The cafe is a platform through which SATI, Asylum Access Thailand (AAT) and several other NGOs work to improve the lives of disadvantaged communities in Bangkok. Saks has used FREC to run three soup kitchens, as well as skills and hobby training for the kids that SATI serves. Saks prides himself on keeping busy and striking a close balance between work and sleeping his optimal six hours and one minute a night. "Efficiency is my big thing," he says.

### **Precious Plastic Bangkok, Dominic Puwasawat Chakrabongse.**

Puwasawat has worked in the environmental sector for five years, mainly on fighting illegal fishing and human rights abuses. More recently, he has begun working to address the impact of plastics and marine debris across SE Asia. In 2018, he helped launch the Bangkok-based chapter of Precious Plastic Bangkok (PPB) – part of a global movement of community-based plastic recycling workshops. PPB works to recycle plastic trash into new products using a line of open-sourced designed and cheap to build machines. PPB has its office and machines based at FREC Bangkok. It plans to have a network of workshops established in communities across the city so that they can tackle plastic pollution.

### **Creative Migration Programme Director, Abigail Smith.**

Abigail has a diverse background, spanning from a degree in the arts from the University of Buffalo to a hospitality career in New York, Alaska, and Bangkok. Abigail spent three years as chief operating officer for SOS Thailand. Abigail left that role to join Susannah Tantemsapya to grow arts programming at Bangkok 1899 in August 2019. Relentlessly energetic and with a penchant for fearlessly riding scooters through Bangkok traffic, she has been a driving force, helping to bring together all our partners and shape the FREC concept in Bangkok.

**SATI Foundation, Sakson "Saks" Rouypirom.** Born in the US to Thai parents, Saks was educated in New York, eventually training and qualifying as a medical doctor before returning to Bangkok with both business and social objectives in mind. On the business side, Saks is an owner of one of Bangkok's leading health food restaurants, Broccoli Revolution. On the social side, he founded and runs SATI Foundation, helping underserved youth find opportunities to escape poverty, drug addiction and prostitution through vocational training opportunities.

Saks was featured in 2018 as a top entrepreneur to watch by the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE). In 2019, Saks helped launch Na Cafe, a social impact

**FabCafe Bangkok, Jane Kalaya Kovidvisith.** Jane originally set up FabLab at Thammasat University in 2008 "to explore how digital technology can change the way we design, build and live in." FabLab Thailand was funded by MTEC and Faculty of Architecture and Planning, Thammarat University. During the maker movement when 3D printing became more affordable, she reopened the organisation under the

brand of FabCafe. Today there are eleven FabCafes around the world, organising workshops for adults and kids as young as three years of age. As Jane puts it: "We are a network of friends in different countries passionate about technology and using available technology to improve everyday life."



*Khun Wichit Wongwatthanakan, MD*



*Jim Vella, president, Ford Motor Company Fund*



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Darrell and Randy Lovernich first came to Thailand more than 15 years ago and absolutely fell in love with the country and the people. Rather than just touring through for a couple days and enjoying the bubble of luxurious resorts and private beaches, they spent time getting to know people, families and communities. They decided to buy property in the Land of Smiles and make it a home away from home.

As they got to know more people and visit more areas in Thailand, they noticed that there were communities that lacked fundamental necessities for life: food, water, suitable shelter, basic sanitation, education... Both professionally successful and young retirees, they are not shy to the idea of taking action when action needs to be taken. They began looking into the steps to form a legal foundation so that they could spend their time doing what they could to help out in their adoptive home.

For those unfamiliar with setting up a foundation in Thailand, it's a gruelling, two-year minimum process. There aren't many foundations and to survive the gauntlet of paperwork, financial checks, credibility checks, etc. to just get the title of "Foundation", only the strong survive. But Darrell and Randy were determined to do it right and set up something that would be sustainable in the long term. They credit the tireless work of their lawyer Supaporn Sara Persson and her legal team for making the tree come to life.

# TREE OF LIFE FOUNDATION

by Jocelyn Pollak

Imagine you didn't have shoes to wear to school, or your family didn't have enough food to give you more than one small meal per day, or you didn't have soap to wash your hands. For many kids in small hill tribe villages in the North of Thailand, they don't need to imagine these scenarios, it's just what they call normal.

*But thanks to the Tree of Life Foundation, this is becoming less of a reality for more and more kids every year.*

**The Tree of Life Foundation has several main objectives:**

- Provide textbooks, teachers' manuals, casual reading books and dictionaries to impoverished children in remote rural areas without sufficient funding
- Create scholarships for impoverished students to enhance educational opportunity
- Provide basic necessities such as toiletries, clothing, food, kitchen equipment, medical supplies
- Build libraries in remote rural areas
- Improve school sanitary conditions for the children in the remote rural schools
- Support HIV infected children

Right now, the foundation focuses on two schools in the Mae Rim/Maetaeng District about three hours North of Chiang Mai. Darrell and Randy believe strongly in sustainability and that focusing on a couple schools and really doing it properly is better than spreading themselves too thin over many schools. The foundation supports 68 students at Ban Na Gu School and Ban Mae Maem school.

So far, the Tree of Life Foundation has donated 1,400 new books, classroom supplies, boots, clothing, towels,





blankets, pillows, hair clippers, 300kg of rice, fish sauce, cooking oil, sugar, noodles, sardines, snacks, and even some footballs for fun! They also worked with Marriott to refit the kitchen at one of the schools so that they can prepare meals cleanly and safely for the students.

They are constantly doing creative fundraisers to raise money and awareness for their efforts. 100% of all money raised goes to the foundation; the operating expenses are a running gift from Randy and Darrell and until the fundraising is sufficient, they are self-funding everything. They are truly working out of the kindness of their hearts. You may have seen Randy dressed up as Santa at the US Ambassador's Holiday Party or at one of the big Bangkok hotels over the holiday season. All money from the events was donated to the foundation.

Moving forward, Darrell and Randy have big plans for The Tree of Life. They have already started the ball rolling on a couple major projects at each school in addition to their regular supplement of food and supplies. At Ban Na Gu, they plan to help bolster one of the school buildings to prevent it from collapse. They are also working on bringing water filtration systems to the school and doing a major renovation of the bathrooms so that the kids have a sanitary, functional space. At Ban Mae Maem, they are working specifically on bringing healthier food options to the kids. Again, partnering with Marriott, they brought boxed lunches to the kids which much to their delight, included an apple.

Randy and Darrell are no strangers at the schools, they are planning to head back up North in February to deliver the next round of supplies and to continue working on the larger infrastructure projects. If you'd like more information about how you can help the Tree of Life Foundation or you would like to support them financially or with supplies, visit their website at [www.tree-of-life-thailand.com](http://www.tree-of-life-thailand.com) or email them at [TheTOLFoundation@gmail.com](mailto:TheTOLFoundation@gmail.com).

*Best of luck to this foundation as it continues to make real impact on the daily lives of these children.*







## *Pink pyjamas in Old Saigon*

*by Margaret Elizabeth Johnston*

**O**ld Saigon, Ho Chi Minh, the name itself makes me feel like a romance novel from Humphrey Bogart days in *The Quiet American*. As a reminder, if you haven't seen it in a while:

"In Saigon in 1952, as Vietnamese insurgents are delivering major strikes against the French colonial rulers, an innocent and enigmatic young American economist (Audie Murphy), who is working for an international aid organisation, gets caught between the Communists and the colonialists as he tries to win the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people. By promising marriage, he steals away a young Vietnamese woman (Giorgia Moll) from an embittered and cynical English newspaperman (Michael Redgrave), who retaliates by spreading the word that the American is actually covertly selling arms to the anti-Communists."

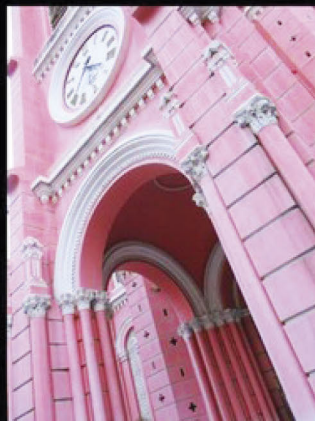
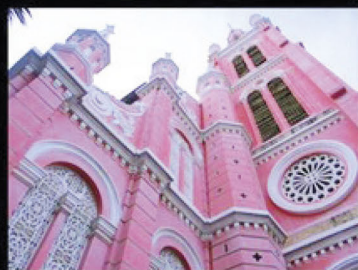
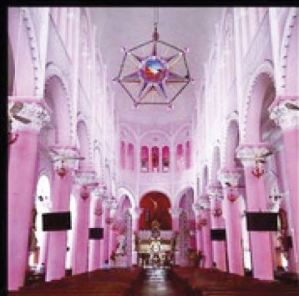
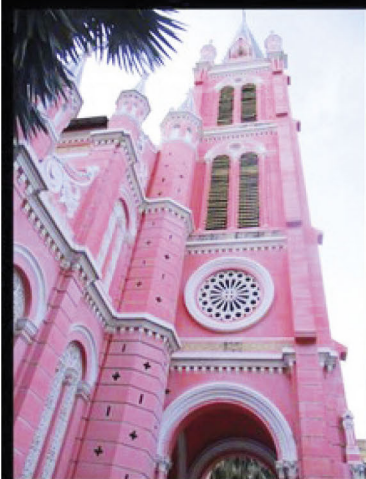
This film has stuck in my head, I think I saw it in my early teens way before I could ever of imagined I would be living in this part of the world. Going on a 5 day visa run to continue a few more months in Bali allowed me time to run around like a heroine "back in the day" enjoying a theatrical musical in the Opera House, learning about the lacquer painting techniques that the Vietnamese specialise in at the Museum of Fine Arts, seeing a beautiful array of Buddha's at the History Museum in the Botanical Gardens from all the various Asian countries, sipping the delicious green tea frappuccino's with cubes of green jelly at the local chain Highlands, having an elegant lunch in the lobby of the 5 star Majestic Saigon Hotel and enjoying a riverboat ride down the Saigon River, not to mention the elegant shopping street Dong Khoi. I enjoyed a pop-up live fashion show at the Ho Chi Minh City Museum and one day I walked a street that was nothing but bookshops, new and used and coffee cafes.

Later that day I enjoyed a peach tea in a gorgeous boutique shop with home furnishings to die for just before a rooftop sunset swim at Liberty Central City Point on the 19th floor of this luxurious hotel for the evening Saigon nightlight views. All the beautiful French colonial architecture was so photogenic and I also enjoyed lots of divine sushi every night in the old Chinese quarter that seemed more like a small intimate Japan town. Whew, it was a marvellous 5 days and most people warned me how crazy Ho Chi Minh is but I feel since I went with the attitude of "I'm going to Old Saigon in a romance novel" it made me approach the city in a different way; just doing the best of the best, elegant things, sophisticated things, things that make me feel like buying silk pyjamas! My goodness, there is even a very pink church, inside and out, Tan Dinh Church, seeing is believing! The best I can do to show all the wondrous things and places I saw was to put some of them in collage form.

Being an artist myself, the first port of call on day one was the Saigon Museum of Fine Arts. There are two buildings next to each other; sculpture, oil







first looked at the pieces on display I thought they had used petrified wood and abalone sea shells somehow but after speaking with the artists at hand, I learned it was crushed eggshells! The intricacy and beauty was astounding. There are many thick layers of lacquer combined with colour and eggshells.

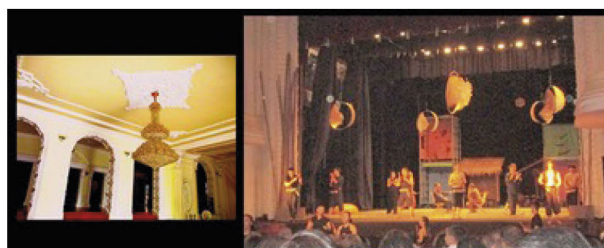
After the art indulgence, which lasted for hours, I decided to make it a point to check out some more of the French architecture that abounds in the city. Two of the main buildings are close to each other, one is the

and silk works are shown along with a specialised kind of art that was new to me, lacquer art. The main building was constructed by French architect Rivera between 1929 and 1934 as a villa for the Hua family. Hui Bon Hoa, a Chinese immigrant, moved to Saigon in the late 19th century. A penniless man when he arrived, he went on to become one of the city's wealthiest men. He discovered precious antiques and traded them and there are some controversial stories surrounding this. However he accumulated his wealth, he became Saigon's "king of real estate" and his business boomed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. By 1975, the entire Hui Bon Hoa family had left Saigon. Following the end of the war, the newly installed government took over the Hui Bon Hoa complex, turning it into an information and cultural centre at first before opening the Fine Arts Museum in 1987 and permitting visitors inside in 1992. Under the 1996 Vietnam War Convention, French citizens who owned property in Saigon prior to 1975 were eligible for some compensation, so the family also received some money from the French government for the Hui Bon Hoa complex.

I got lucky because the group Son Mai Bac (Northern Lacquer Art) was having an exhibition and most of the artists were "in house"! The group's focus was on "a clear spirit of creation" based on traditional materials and techniques of Son Ta (traditional lacquer art of Vietnam) in the Northern Delta. Since the establishment of the Indochina Fine Art Collage, the Son Mai technique has changed a lot in the direction of diversity and closer to painting. The technology which Son Mai painting as well as Vietnamese art has found is a very unique voice but challenging in the flow of world art and globalisation. There were 8 Son Mai artists that came from different directions. The artist's ideal was to bring light stories portrayed through art as a gift for a friend, colleagues and art lovers in Saigon. When I

Saigon Central Post Office which offers visitors a chance to imagine life in Vietnam during the times of the Indo-Chinese Empire. The building was designed by Alfred Foulhoux and features arched windows and wooden shutters, just as it would have in its heyday in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Notre Dame is nearby as is the Saigon Opera House. The Opera House was custom built in 1897 by French architect Eugene Ferret. I ended up buying a ticket at the box office for that evening's performance, the A O Show; a unique blend of bamboo cirque, acrobatic acts, and theatrical visual drama, which depicts the beauty of Vietnam lives in villages and cities. My Highland green tea frappuccino coffee chain is right behind it also so I was able to enjoy a delectable treat before the show without the stress of trying to find where to go. The show was incredible, the performers full of vitality and joy. After the show they all come together on steps and allow people to take photos with them. They came out of the woodwork from various corners of the theatre during the show surprising us as an audience. I found it to be a top-notch experience, well worth the \$30.

On another day I decided to have a riverboat ride down the Saigon River, it cost about \$2 and one can catch the boat from Bach Danh Water station. I only went a few stops, got off, walked around, had a coconut then came back. It is enough to get the feeling of being back in Bangkok with the high rises all around.







Right across the street is the 5 star Majestic Saigon Hotel with their gorgeous lobby and salads available. There is also a rooftop café however the lobby was full of Art Deco windows and ceiling lights that I decided to enjoy as I had my fresh greens for the day.

After lunch I sought out The Hidden Elephant book shop and came upon a street, Duong Nguyen Van Binh Street, full of new and used books along with all kinds of bookshop style coffee cafes. There are plenty of English books to be had and some interesting history sections along with professional photographic displays of the city. I was able to walk the city the whole time, even heading to the Botanical Gardens and the History Museum. The gardens have a small zoo with some elephants and other animals however that is never a happy story in my book. We can only hope they are leading a life better than being abused. I did however find the gardens full of lovely orchids blooming in various stages and the museum intrigued me with the large display of Buddha's and the way they are depicted closer to the race in which country they are found. There are two main areas in the museum. Section 1: A display of Vietnamese history from the prehistoric period to the Nguyen dynasty which includes 8 rooms and section 2: a display of cultures from the Southern provinces and various Asian countries including 10 rooms.

There is a small city park with a musical light and water fountain show every evening near the French Colonial City Hall building built in the early 1900s, now the headquarters of the People's Committee running parallel to the elegant shopping street Dong Khoi full of the top of the line Westernised shops; Prada, Louis Vuitton etc. There is a large air-conditioned Starbucks if you just need a normal tuna wholewheat sandwich which is positioned next to the Rex Hotel if you fancy a cool break. Saigon Square and Saigon Centre are the two main large glitzy shopping malls which are nearby. Frankly, I found Saigon to be a very easy walkable city. I just threw on my trainers every day and along with Google Maps toured myself around. I have learned to look at the Google Maps on my phone in a quiet shaded area and say the instructions to myself (turn right at 2nd corner, 1st left, 2 blocks, 3rd light right) and then put phone in bag so as to not be walking around holding a phone out in front of my face,



not only being too focused on the screen and not taking in my surroundings, but also to deter possible theft right out of my hand as a scooter goes by, and this can happen.

Old Saigon is a fabulous city I will go to again and again, over the years now that I feel I know it. It is a good option for me other than Singapore and Kuala Lumpur for the invariably much needed visa runs if I don't have the time or pleasure to go to Bangkok for my ever needed city fixes. I'd recommend a decent hotel with soundproofing though, there are lots of karaoke bars that go on into the night, however, being in a SE Asian country already, I am sure most are aware of that. Please go and enjoy a "Back in the Day Romantic Old Saigon" experience and remember to bring your silk pyjamas!



**About the author:**  
Margaret is an avid traveller of SE Asia, India and Nepal, usually bringing her watercolour supplies and camera with her. Studying medicinal plants is part of her naturopathic profession and

portraying them in an educational way to reach people about holistic health is the norm, creating elegance in her life is always a plus. "I'm thrilled to of found another city that I feel has that sophistication I love. Bangkok has so much to offer also, as does both Luang Prabang and Vientiane in Laos. I'm always on the lookout for a potential city I can call home along with a combination of island life. Bali for me is that island at the moment; the city remains to be seen."





## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S CLUB MEMBERS CELEBRATE MEANINGFUL CHRISTMAS PRESENT 2019 DONATIONS TO THE CLUB'S CHARITIES

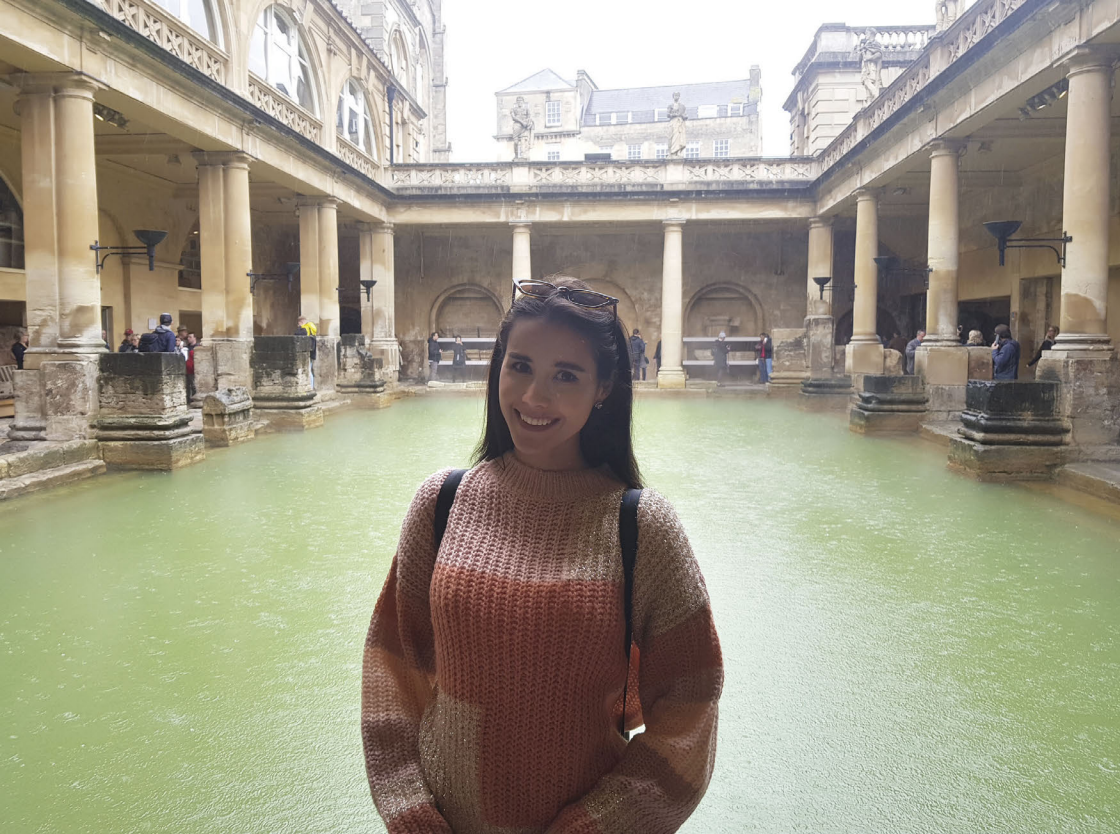
Members of the International Women's Club of Thailand (IWC), led by President Rani Narula (6th from left), staged a Christmas celebration luncheon where the 2019 donations and scholarships were handed to the Club's charities at Lotus Bangkok Sukhumvit Hotel recently.

Pictured from left are: Catharina Wieke Larasati, Suree Kositamongkol, Victoria Wong, Annie Suwanvanichkij, Ramiah Nena Thamavithya, IWC President Rani Narula, Rita Indhewat, Sukanya Thavikulwat, Duangkamol Vianelli, Usha Mutreja, and Manjit Kaur Walia.

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a century before to take advantage of the natural hot springs, and an earth rampart was erected. It probably had a wooden palisade on top. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, this was replaced by a stone wall and other ornate constructions, during the heights of the Roman Civilisation. This, then, was the ancient origin, but let's jump forward in time to the 1800s.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Bath became a much more genteel and fashionable place. It boomed in size. This was largely due to the efforts of Richard 'Beau' Nash 1674-1762 who was granted the title Royal Master

# And did those feet... treading the ancient pathways of the Royal Bath Spa

*by Robin Westley Martin*

A few days after the long flight from Bangkok to Birmingham two pairs of feet had sufficiently recovered to venture out again – my own, and those of my Thai daughter. Thailand is fortunate to have beautiful islands, beaches and delicious food, that combines well with the hundreds of beautiful golden temples and other exotic architecture and lifestyle to attract just under 40 million tourists a year, from all parts of the world. But the reverse is also true... while the West does not have the wonderful weather of the tropics, what it does have is history, artefacts, and ancient buildings in abundance – something that travellers from Thailand and the Far East find fascinating.

On the flight over my daughter, Anchalee Sara, told me that one of her friends had visited Royal Bath on a trip to England, and Sara begged me to take her there on our trip. Bath is a place I had missed out on whilst I was living in the UK so I was more than happy to agree.

The town grew up during Roman times, on the site of Bath, in about 60 to 70AD, which was then known as Aquae Sulis (the waters of Sul, a Celtic deity). In the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century a ditch was dug around the Roman Baths, that had been built



of Ceremonies. Many of the finest buildings in Britain were erected in Bath during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. A Pump Room was built in 1706 (although the present one was built in 1795).

Architect John Wood the Elder 1704-1754 built Queen Square in 1728-1739. He built The Circus in 1754 - 60. His son John Wood the Younger was born in 1727. He built Royal Crescent in 1767-1774. He also built the Assembly Rooms in 1769-71. The Octagon was built in 1767 and Margaret Chapel was built in 1773. Pulteney Bridge was built in 1774. It was named after William Pulteney the first Earl of Bath and it was designed by Robert Adam. The legacy of the Wood family is what now draws tourists to visit Bath, and they come from around the world.



In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century wellness has become a fashionable buzzword, and pre-occupation, but ancient Bath has been doing it for nearly two millennia. Constructed in around 70AD as a grand bathing and socialising complex, the Roman Baths is one of the best-preserved Roman remains in the world, where 1,170,000 litres of steaming spring water, reaching 46°C, still fills the bathing site every single day.

The Roman Baths is the site of extensive ruins and an interactive museum, that is filled with many treasures and visual snippets that transport

you back to Roman times and the lives of the Aquae Sulis people. You can walk on the same ancient pavements as the Romans did 2,000 years ago, and explore ancient chambers, changing rooms, and warm plunge pools. While my daughter and I were visiting the Roman Baths (on a somewhat cooler day than we are used to in Bangkok) we were both awed by the beauty of the ancient building, and fascinated by the lucid green waters, with steam gently rising from the surface. Sara also felt quite at home, as she had soon found a bunch of people visiting from Thailand... in fact, I was quite surprised to find I was one of the few western tourists... well outnumbered by the Chinese, Thai, Korean and Japanese visitors!

The Roman Baths are not the only thing that draw people to Bath, by any means; the iconic Royal Crescent has just turned 250 years old, Jane Austen set two of her novels in Bath, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*. You really should try the Jane Austen Centre, Bath played a huge part in Jane's life, one of the Georgian ladies there will give you a great overview to Jane's time in Bath, and a highlight is to use their wardrobe to dress up in character and perhaps proposition Mr. Darcy!

Head down to the water to Pulteney Bridge. This covered bridge was built in the 18th Century for William Pulteney to connect Bath to land on the other side of the River Avon to help drive up land prices. It's one of few bridges in the world which have shops built into the sides and the facade is still really well preserved. Though if you take a look around the back it's a bit more DIY as extra windows and extensions have been added over the years.

Bath definitely has a deserved reputation for history, architecture and literature – but there's more to it than that. There are gorgeous views everywhere for your Instagram selfies, plenty of great foodie spots, cool boutiques and plenty more, as you walk through the historic streets and 18th Century shopping arcades.



A good way to end this wee introduction to Bath is with the way my daughter and myself also ended our trip there – with a traditional English afternoon cream tea. There are many places in Bath to have such... the Regal Pump Room of the Roman Baths, for example, but we chose to go more intimate, and found a little place about 10 minutes walk from the train station, Sweet Little Things. This place was chosen by my daughter, as she loved the look of the place, and its pink flowers everywhere you looked.

I am more of a black or brown guy myself, but as it turned out her choice was perfect. The delicious tea came in an ornate teapot, with china teacups, but the accompanying freshly made, still warm crumbly scones with sweet strawberry jam, topped with clotted cream were to die for.







It was the perfect end to a day we will long remember. You could do a lot worse than to follow in our footsteps.

## Royal Bath – upcoming in 2020

Great Western Railway super-fast London to Bath train route will be added to off-peak hours from 15th December 2019

The new route will make rail travel for visitors to Bath quicker than ever in the new year. On certain peak-hour trains it will take 1 hour 11 minutes to travel from London Paddington to Bath Spa, calling at Chippenham only.

## New attractions, projects and restaurants

### The Roman Baths' Archway Project 2020

The Archway project will convert former Victorian spa buildings close to the Roman Baths into a new learning and visitor centre with cutting-edge facilities. Due to open in 2020, the project will transform the learning programme, offering more activities and events for visitors, and create stimulating spaces for schools and groups, providing a hands-on and accessible learning experience set among Roman remains.

### Sanditon

Airing in autumn 2019/early 2020. The TV adaptation of Jane Austen's unfinished final novel will air on the BBC in autumn 2019 in the UK and early 2020 on PBS in the US.

## Upcoming anniversaries

### 20th anniversary of Bath Christmas Market

In addition to the usual festivities, there will be lots of celebratory activities taking place to mark Bath Christmas Market's 20th year. November–December 2020.



## Major events

### Bath Bach Festival (March and May 2020)

Bath is joining in with the global celebrations in 2020 for the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. Bath Festivals will present the entire cycle of all 16 of Beethoven's string quartets. There will be 3 concerts in March (27–29th March) and 3 in May (22nd–24th May) put on by two quartets.

### Bath Comedy Festival (31st March–19th April 2020)

Bath Comedy Festival presents household names in the world of comedy and promotes the big names of tomorrow while encouraging young hopefuls in the form of the New





Act Competition, plus events involving children, women's comedy and disabled performers.

**The Bath Festival (15th–24th May 2020)**

Multi-arts festival bringing together some of the world's leading writers, musicians and cultural figures.

**An evening with Michael Bubl  at The Royal Crescent – 24/25th July 2020**

**Jane Austen Festival, (11th–20th September 2020)**

Celebrating all things Jane Austen including a regency costumed promenade.

**Bathscape Walking Festival (September 2020)** offers 50 free walks covering a variety of themes and distances, led by knowledgeable leaders and supported by volunteers. Walks start at various locations around the city and explore Bath and its surrounding countryside.

**Bath Children's Literature Festival (September 2020)**

The largest dedicated children's literature festival in Europe, always offers a vibrant array of talks and activities for children.

**Bath Digital Festival (October 2020)**

The Bath Digital Festival brings people and technology together, allowing everyone to explore the thriving digital scene in Bath and get hands on experience with the latest projects.



**FilmBath Festival (November 2020)**

Previews, special events and question and answer sessions with filmmakers, screenings of world cinema, LGBT films, documentaries make up the diverse and vibrant programme.

**Bath Mozart Festival (November 2020)**

Bath 'Bachfest's' counterpart, 'Mozartfest' showcases the eminent Austrian composer through nine days of classical concerts, often recognised as one of the country's best celebrations of classical music.

**Bath Christmas Market (beginning of Dec 2020)**

**20th year anniversary!**

The award-winning Bath Christmas Market will be back for 18 days of magical merriment!







With over 180 twinkling chalets spread out across Bath's picturesque Georgian streets, it's the perfect place to do a spot of Christmas shopping.

## Exhibitions

### **Peter Brown: Bath Is It**

30th Nov 2019–9th Feb 2020

The Victoria Art Gallery

### **Sally Muir: The Dog Show**

30th Nov 2019–9th Feb 2020

The Victoria Art Gallery

### **Glove Stories**

2nd Mar 2019–1st Mar 2020

The Fashion Museum Bath

Browse one of the best collections of gloves in the world.

Woven throughout A History of Fashion in 100 Objects.

Glove Stories will showcase exquisite examples of historical gloves from the past 400 years, many of which have never been displayed to the public before.

### **Grayson Perry: The Pre-Therapy Years**

24th Jan–25th May 2020

The Holburne Museum

The first exhibition to survey Grayson Perry's earliest forays into the art world will reintroduce the explosive and creative works he made between 1982 and 1994. These groundbreaking 'lost' pots will be reunited for the first time to focus on the formative years of one of Britain's most recognisable artists. Many of the 70 items on display have

been crowdsourced from across the UK following a hugely successful appeal to the public in 2018.

### **Canaletto – Painting Venice**

12 June to 20 September 2020

The Holburne Museum

The Woburn Abbey Canaletto paintings were commissioned by Lord John Russell (who became 4th Duke of Bedford in 1732), after he had visited Venice while on his Grand Tour in 1731. It is thought that he had met with Canaletto's agent Joseph Smith, and requested a series of views of the city, as a souvenir of his time there. These paintings will leave Woburn Abbey for the first time to make a stunning display in the Holburne's Roper Gallery.

### **Toulouse-Lautrec and the Masters of Montmartre**

15th Feb–27th May 2020

The Victoria Art Gallery





HKLG AGM Luncheon



HKLG Coffee Morning with H.E. Ambassador Evren Dagdelen Akgun







*“Enjoy two seasons on the same day – skiing and swimming; touch and feel human history, go officially to “zero point in time” in the land of two continents, a delightful mixture of past and present, grand splendour and modern beauty.*

Anatolia, the land of modern Turkey, has been settled since Paleolithic Age and consequently became home to many civilisations and empires throughout history. This land was home to the earliest temple, in Göbeklitepe, built 11,600 years ago, 4,000 years older than the pyramids and predating Stonehenge by 7,000 years; saw the signing of the first ever peace treaty, Kadesh, in 1269BC between the Hittites and ancient Egyptians; hosted two of the three libraries of the antiquity in Ephesus and Pergamon, as well as two of the Seven Wonders of the World – the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus and the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus and many other amazing sites.

In addition to this rich historical and cultural background, with such

wondrous natural beauties as Cappadocia, or the white snow-like travertines of Pamukkale and many others, and thanks to its highly developed tourism sector, Turkey continues to attract tourists from all around the world. It was the 6th tourism destination in the world in 2018 with 46 million tourists visiting. Antalya, ranking 10<sup>th</sup> most visited city in the world with nearly 12.5 million tourists and İstanbul ranking 8<sup>th</sup> with nearly 13.5 million tourists, tourism figures of 2019 promise to be even higher.

In Turkey, you will discover the Ancient City of Troy, the site of Trojan War in Homer’s epic poem “The Iliad”; visit the capital of the Hittite Empire and visit the Great Temple devoted to the Storm God Teşup and the Sun Goddess of Arinna City, see the splendid collections of Zeugma Mosaic Museum in Gaziantep, the second largest of its kind in the world, with late Antiquity Church Mosaics and early Chaldean and Christian iconography; get introduced to magnificent Seljuk art and architecture of 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries; admire Bursa, the first capital of the Ottoman Empire, and perhaps after a most amazing cultural tour of this beautiful city, go for skiing in the nearby Uludağ Mountain’s slopes in winter.

İstanbul, straddling two continents, alone impressed so many. According to Napoleon Bonaparte, “If the earth were a single state, İstanbul would be its capital”. Alphonse de Lamartine made a similar remark: “If one had but a single glance to give the world, one should gaze on İstanbul”. Pierre Loti and Edmondo de Amicis were among those who wrote their memoirs about İstanbul. İstanbul is not only an imperial city of 1500 years but is today an international centre for arts and culture with a rich tradition in opera and ballet, theatres performing both Turkish and international works.

İstanbul, my hometown, is an international city, a financial and economic centre where international conferences and congresses; festivals, fairs, fashion shows, sports and

art performances, concerts and, of course, many richly endowed modern museums continuously recreate and highlight the city’s unique assets.

With 18 sites inscribed on the List of UNESCO World Heritage List and another 17 elements on the List of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, blending East and West, old and new, traditional and modern, last but not least with its worldwide known cuisine, Turkey keeps attracting travellers who wish to find diverse tastes and experiences. So much so that, I urge you to enjoy two seasons on the same day; go to Saklıkent an ideal winter sports resort at an altitude of 1750-1900m on the Northern slopes of Bakırlı Mountain, 50km from Antalya in the Mediterranean. In March and April you can ski there in the morning, eat a delicious lunch of fresh fish at Antalya’s marina and then go on to sunbathe, swim and windsurf in the afternoon, literally living in two seasons within the same day.

Gastronomical delights, multitude of shops – sophisticated or cosy – offering all types of products, handicrafts and designer items around the country are not to be missed. But what you will always remember and cherish from a trip to Turkey will be the world-known Turkish hospitality and warmth of the people, the friendships you will forge around each corner each day during your stay.

Come visit Turkey on one of the world’s best airlines, Turkish Airlines (THY) – the airline that flies to most destinations in the world and enjoy the state of the art new İstanbul Airport with an initial capacity of 90 million passengers to go up to 200 million passengers. Turkey and Thailand are connected by THY through three direct daily flights to Bangkok and one daily direct flight to Phuket. A great opportunity to experience and discover Turkey.

Kathleen Pokrud is one of the modern times travellers appreciating “the beauties of Turkey” and I hope that readers will enjoy her article and her photos as much as she enjoyed travelling in Turkey.”





# The beauties of Turkey

by Kathleen Pokrud

Turkey has always been a favourite country destination for foreign tourists. Istanbul with its rich history as Constantinople, adventurous ballroom rides in Cappadocia, or beautiful coastline of Bodrum. Due to the visa-free requirements for Thai passports, many of my local friends have joined package tours to Turkey. Last October, my husband and I also chose Turkey for our annual vacation. We decided to venture out by ourselves despite the forthcoming language barriers. Having our own itinerary offers the opportunity to blend in with the local people and experience the real side of Turkey.

## Ankara

Ankara is the capital of Turkey and the heart of administrative and policymaking of the government. It is also home to many foreign embassies, international institutions and companies. We took the road less travelled from most tourists to Turkey, and spent a couple of days there. We thoroughly enjoyed our stay, and explored a few fascinating places.

## Ankara Castle

Ankara Castle is one of the Turkish capital's oldest sights, dating back to the Roman, Seljuk, and Ottoman Empires.



Tablet belonging to Sargon of Akkad (2334-2279BC)

It is quite a high point of the city. Even though the exact date of its initial construction is unknown, some people believe the Hittites (an ancient empire that ruled over North-central Anatolia in 1600BC), who had a military garrison in Ankara, built the Ankara Castle. The place is full of souvenir shops and cafes around.

## The Anatolian Civilisations Museum

Located in two Ottoman buildings located near Ankara Castle is the Anatolian Civilisations Museum. It was elected as the "Museum of the Year in Europe" in 1997. The museum, being among exceptional museums with its unique collection, has Anatolian archaeological artefacts and some from the Palaeolithic Age to the present. We benefitted from a great history lesson.

## Anıtkabir

Anıtkabir, the eternal resting place of the Great Leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Republic of Turkey, is located in the heart of Ankara. The Ataturk Mausoleum is a massive compound, comprising of four main parts: the Road of Lions, the Ceremonial Plaza, the Hall of Honour (location of Atatürk's tomb) and the Peace Park that surrounds the monument.







### Kocatepe Mosque

Kocatepe Mosque is one of the largest mosques in Ankara. The commanding mosque is an impressive combination of contemporary and traditional Ottoman architecture. It was built during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with a specific 16<sup>th</sup> Century touch. During our visit to the inside, we felt such peace and tranquility observing the devout worshippers at their prayers.

### Ethnography Museum of Ankara

Ethnography Museum of Ankara is a small museum but very intriguing with rich displays of folkloric artefacts.



Most of the collections are donated objects and they give a strong idea about Anatolian life.

It was also the first resting place of Atatürk until the completion of his mausoleum in 1953.

### Roman Baths

The Roman Baths of Ankara are the ruined remains of an ancient Roman Bath complex in Ankara, Turkey, dated back to 3<sup>rd</sup> Century. The remains were uncovered by excavations carried out in 1937-1944, and have subsequently been opened to the public as an open-air museum.

### Golbasi Lake



The Lake Mogan (Golbasi) Lake is located near the city of Ankara. The natural lake is a favourite place for domestic tourists to spend leisure time at this natural park. The area is under natural conservation and environmental protection. After a relaxing lunch by the lake, we took a long stroll along the wooden lane, breathing the crisp fresh air like the locals.

### Istanbul

How does one set about conquering a city that is approximately three thousand years old? Istanbul straddles between Asia and Europe with the stretching





Bosphorus Straits. With its ancient history, colourful culture, grandiose architecture and spectacular scenery, Istanbul is truly a world-class city. Following the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the old city name “Constantinople” was officially changed to Istanbul in 1930. It is impossible to cover all the “must-see” places in Istanbul, but here we attempt to render a few commanding highlights.

### The Mosque of Sultanahmet

One of the remarkable landmarks in Istanbul is Sultan Ahmed Mosque. A historic mosque constructed between 1609 and 1616 during the rule of Ahmed I. It remains a functioning mosque, while attracting large numbers of tourist visitors on a daily basis. Commonly known as “Blue Mosque” by foreign tourists because of its hand-

painted blue tiles adorning the interior walls. At night, the mosque is bathed in blue lights. In 2006, it received the papal visit by Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to Turkey.

### Hagia Sophia

Hagia Sophia is the former Greek Orthodox Christian patriarchal cathedral, later an Ottoman imperial mosque and now a museum in Istanbul. The Emperor Justinian built the new Hagia Sophia, meaning “Holy Wisdom” as the world’s largest cathedral. The construction began in AD532 and completed in 537, a period of five years. It was famous in particular of its massive dome. We were impressed with the magnificent interior, and could not agree more that it is one of the most important monuments of the history to have survived today.



### Topkapi Palace

Constructed between 1460 and 1478, the Topkapi Palace was built by Sultan Mehmed II, the conqueror of Constantinople, and expanded upon and altered many times throughout its long history. In addition to being the residence of the Ottoman sultans, it served as the administrative and educational centre of the state. The compound is huge with various courtyards and gardens. Topkapi Palace Museum houses numerous displays of artefacts.

### Hagia Irene Church

Hagia Irene Church is located in the first courtyard of the Topkapi Palace, behind Hagia Sophia. Hagia Irene means “Divine Peace” in Greek. The first church, believed to be built in the 4th century with wood structure. Burnt in AD532, it was restored several times through earthquakes and fire. Although

now serves as a museum, there is no much remained from the original mosaics.

### Basilica Cistern

Basilica Cistern is the largest surviving Byzantine cistern that is beneath Istanbul city. Built in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century during the reign of Byzantine Emperor Justinian I as big underground water reservoir. Historical text claims that 7,000 slaves were involved with its construction.







A forest of 336 columns, with height of 9m each, supported the dome. The underground area is massive with an area of 9,800 square metres. It was featured in the famous old school James Bond movie *"From Russia with Love"*. It was also referred in Dan Brown book *"Inferno"*.

### The Turkish and Islamic Art Museum

The Museum is in a palace that was built for Ibrahim Aga in 1524, who was the grand vizier of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent. Our most admired collections are the Damascus Documents and Sacred Relics displayed at the Turkish and Islamic Art Museum. Other collections include notable examples of Islamic calligraphy, tiles and rugs, together with ethnographic displays on various cultures in Turkey, in particular nomad groups. The displays separate dwellings from different time periods and regions.

### Grand Bazaar

The Grand Bazaar Istanbul is one of the largest and oldest covered markets in the world, with over 60 covered streets



and 5,000 shops in a total area of 30,700 square metres. With the long history of Istanbul, the Grand Bazaar is often regarded as one of the first shopping malls of the world. Despite it no longer being the commercial centre of the city, it nonetheless offers visitors a taste of life in the Ottoman-era Turkey. Products cover from jewellery, carpets, ceramics, spices, scents, coffee, tea, Turkish delight, souvenirs... the list goes on. Many shoppers probably are like me who enjoy the thrill to bargain.

### Bosphorus Straits

The first thing my close friend recommended me to do in Istanbul is to enjoy the night cruise. The Bosphorus, which connects Marmara and Black Seas, is one of the most exquisite places in the world. It was a very valuable advice.

On the cruise, we were treated with delicious Turkish cuisine and entertained by folkloric and traditional dance from Turkey; whilst admiring the beautiful Ottoman architecture lit up in radiant light offered some bewitching sights. The







### Turkish cuisine

Turkish cuisine offers a variety of healthy options for both meat-lovers and vegetarians, as they are the hot and trendy way of food indulgence. Istanbul is more cosmopolitan and international, single plates are more common. In Ankara, by looking up online recommendations, we stumbled on a huge local restaurant for an incredible feast of kebabs with a handful of different compliments and fresh salad for 40 Turkish Lira (7USD). There are so many different

daytime cruise offers an opportunity to get away from the main city and see how residents live along the river, from the humble to the ultra-rich.

### New Istanbul airport

Turkey has built an impressive new airport in a bid to compete with the other Middle Eastern countries as a stopover point and transport hub. I could feel the vision that it is built to last for the next two decades or more and I am sure that it will attract many more tourists to the country. The hall in the international transit lounge is filled with numerous shops and restaurants. The business lounge was spacious with high ceilings, luxuriously furnished and equipped with dining facilities and bars.

Often people who have visited Istanbul often share that once you arrive Istanbul, you do not want to leave. I totally echo this sentiment. There are so many amazing places and experiences there we have yet to cover with this trip, namely Dolmabahçe and Beylerbeyi Palaces, The Mosque of Süleymaniye, the Turkish baths and so on.

I cannot wait for our next visit!

kinds of mezes ("hors d'oeuvres" or appetisers), meat (in form of kebabs or doner kebabs), vegetarian dishes, and soups. Turkish tea and coffee are the most popular national drinks often taken with Turkish delights.



### Turkish hospitality

I found the Turkish people very friendly and hospitable. Two incidents that left me filled with genuine warmth and friendship. On one occasion, I was at a national park in Ankara. When I asked permission to take a photo of a local family enjoying their simple home-packed picnic by the lake with fishing gear, the father offered us to share their food. Another occasion was my first night ride on the metro in Istanbul; the husband of a Turkish couple offered his seat to me with a big smile, under the approving glance of his wife.

With the long-standing history and rich culture of the Ottoman Empire, the Turks are very proud of their country. Everywhere I go, especially in Ankara, I see their national flags draping from buildings. As a foreign visitor, I found it entirely endearing!







Mrs. Kathleen and Dr. Boonyarit Pokrud

## SECOND, THIRD HONEYMOON and many more to come....

by Kathleen Pokrud

*The month of February arrives and everyone is getting excited about Valentine's Day. There is nothing quite like travelling together to put any couple relationship to the test.*



I have previously written articles on "Survival tips for a fun girls' trip" and "Building long-lasting friendships". I am not a marriage counsellor, but having been married for 28 years and adding 5 years of courtship, my husband and I have gone on countless trips together. At times, the weeks' long annual vacation feels like a "full endurance test". On the home front, we all have our own space. During vacations, we are confined to each others company for a full 24 hours as long as the days last.

I took the opportunity to ask a few on their views about couples trips. Marriage is a lifelong journey. It will be interesting to find out the various stages, so here we are shared with newlyweds, couples having had young children, and a pair that have celebrated Ruby Wedding Anniversary.

### **Mrs. Pat Pibulsonggram and Mr. Teddy Spha Palasthira**

This happy couple are newly married in June 2019 but they have been good friends for over 40 years. They have travelled together with their late spouses before, and enjoyed each other's company for years. I am thrilled that they have become companions in their latter years

Pat revealed candidly, "We like the same things: culture (the theatre, culture and the arts), nature (out in natural surroundings, trekking, etc.), no rushing from place to place or organised group tours (we have never been on one), good quality food, and being with friends and family on the trips or visiting them."

### **Mrs. Joey and Mr. Marlin Brown**

Joey and Marlin have been married for three years and have a beautiful two year old princess Charlotte. As all parents with young toddlers, they travel together with their daughter for long trips twice a year, and short weekend breaks as well.

On how to make their trips enjoyable, Joey expressed, "We plan ahead before we go, make sure that there will be days we do what my husband likes to do, but Marlin will also





accommodate time for my shopping."

*"We do not get uptight if we cannot complete our planned itinerary."*

As all responsible parents with young children, there are bound to be some sacrifices despite the enormous joy our children give. Joey shared one of her fond memories; "We went to Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and so looking forward to see all the masterpieces. Before we started, Charlotte (was six months then) ran into a 'sticky situation'. By the time we cleaned her up, we were hungry and ended up queuing for seats at the café. Finally, when we were all cleaned and fed, the museum announced that it would be closed in 15 minutes. We did, however, manage to view one painting." I echoed Joey's sentiment as I have my fair share during my son's early years.

Joey's final notes were, "Always bring your phone and make sure it works. From my experience, I learn to be aware on the opening and closing time of museums. Bring a nanny to take care of the little ones. Don't get uptight on the travel plan, but just enjoy on what you are about to see."

**Mrs. Nisanart (Gift) Dharmageisirattana and Mr. Christopher Chongstitvathana**

Gift and Chris have been married for 13 years with three beautiful children, Lukie (12), Luna (10), and Lee-El (8). Balancing their couple and parent lives, they travel three times a year as a couple, and with their children as a family for another three times in a year.

I asked Gift what makes their couple trips enjoyable.

Her straight answer was, "We find good restaurants to enjoy fine meals or explore local cuisine that we cannot experience in Bangkok." Gift further added, "Chris allows me to shop with some budgetary limits, I guess this is what makes every woman happy." I totally agreed with her on this point.

The most memorable trip for them is their visit to India, where Gift found the country as a land of mysticism, culture and spirituality. As India is a new culture to them, the two enjoyed the spirit of adventure, tasting different cuisines to bargaining at local souvenir markets. Although at times Chris might have felt annoyed with Gift's non-stop photo taking, she cherished all the photos they took together.

On sharing the Do's and Don'ts on couple trips, "Follow your wife's wish all the way, spend time together, bring a camera, prepare medicine, and plan your activity loosely. If things do not work out as planned, just roll with the situation, ask what each person wants to do," Gift shared.

On the Don'ts, "Don't overspend on meals or shopping because it will ruin the fun of the trip. Try not to cross each other's boundaries, or to take fast pace because it may get your partner to lose their temper. Don't be together all the time, and find space to be alone at some point during the trip."







**Mrs. Radha and Mr. Akash Rathke**

Radha and Akash moved to Bangkok from Hong Kong almost two years ago. They have been happily married for 26 years with one son (25 years old) and a daughter of 22 years. Radha described, "Both of us are impulsive travellers who make last minute decisions. We love to dig quaint places. If our schedules allow, we will make time to travel together as couple twice a year." She shared excited, "Travelling turns you speechless and then turns you into a storyteller."

On making their couple trips enjoyable, Radha jokingly said, "We travel individually! Very early on, we have marked our domains. I will plan our itinerary regarding sightseeing and hotel accommodation. Akash's responsibilities are researching on the travel dates and hunting down the best places for local cuisine. This keeps us in a fight-free zone!" On the countless trips that they have shared throughout the years as avid travellers, Radha hesitantly admitted that they had lost each other so many times while sightseeing. She referred it, "It is such a recurring episode..."

From their own journey, Radha

advised, "It is fun being away from home together, jobs and other mundane routine responsibilities. From very early on with our marriage, we realised and respected each other's strengths and weaknesses as fellow travellers. The only thing that we cannot synchronise is our mornings. One is an early riser while the other is the totally opposite. Our fight happens first thing in the morning and then we both enjoy the peacefulness for the rest of the day. The truth is no one is talking anymore... Lol... Radha pointed out further, "It is really important to accept that there are times when individual trips work better than couple ones, and vice versa. We love history and architecture, so we will focus on

travelling together to places that we have common interests in. Our hobbies complement each other with our love for art and artefacts. We truly believe in living our best life one plane ticket at a time."

**Mrs. Martina and Mr. Mitya New**

Martina and Mitya are new arrivals to Bangkok, moving from Hong Kong to Bangkok. They have been married for 27 years since 1992. They adopted Hannah, their daughter during a posting in Budapest. The couple generally goes on holiday at least twice a year, and always loves to experience travelling together to new places.

"We always try to stay in atmospheric, colonial-style hotels so that we always have an oasis to come back to at the end of the day. In particular, we like to travel off the beaten track and in ways that allow us to experience people and life in the place we

are visiting. We find travelling by train or road a lot of fun and have crossed Russia, Mongolia, China, Europe, Uzbekistan, India, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand in this way," Martina commented.

She added, "We have found that travel works well if both of us keep a good sense of humour, remain flexible, enjoy at least one good meal in a nice restaurant every day and stay in a hotel that you feel completely comfortable in."

**Mrs. Teresa and Mr. Gary Biesty**

This lovely couple has reached a milestone with 31 years of marriage. With two grown-up daughters, they travel several times a year together to their homes in Hong Kong and London. Teresa shared, "Our trips to Hong Kong often become not really a holiday because we are catching up with family obligations. We then have one or two nice holidays a year in Europe visiting old cities. We enjoy skiing and our favourite destination is Whistler in Canada."







I asked Teresa on her tips, “We discuss beforehand where we both want to go to visit before any booking is made. Take Barcelona as an example, we both want to visit so we will plan to do things together, while leaving time for each other to go about activities that we enjoy individually. I love shopping, so Gary will always be patiently reading a newspaper in a wine bar waiting for me!!”

With her most memorable incidents, Teresa imparted, “We were at The Temple of Poseidon in Greece for the sunset where no one else was around. Oh and I attempted to getting to the bottom of my first “black ski run” after my husband assuredly promised it would be a “blue” run. Luckily I survived and Gary’s only excuse was his poor eyesight!”

On advising the Do’s and Don’ts, “I think it is important that couples discuss beforehand where both wish to visit. Before booking any hotels or sightseeing tours, make sure your spouse is happy in particular accommodation arrangement. Planning for the journey should be as much fun as the trip itself.” Teresa further added, “Share the responsibilities and tasks during the trip such as researching and booking of local attractions and restaurants. Remember to arrange the

flight itinerary at convenient time to avoid stress. Our own preference is to fly around midday. Do consider to visit popular destinations at off-peak seasons such as Athens in winter is peaceful and beautiful. Give each other space each day during the trip.” On the Don’ts, Teresa added, “Avoid forcing your spouse to go anywhere he/she does not want to go. I prefer not to go on holidays with other couples unless you are sure friendship will endure during the whole trip.”

#### **Mrs. Annabelle and Mr. Cherdasak Daokaew**

This wonderful couple celebrated their Ruby Anniversary four years ago, which is 44 years of marriage with three grown-up children. A true milestone! Although both are hardworking professionals, they still find time to travel at least twice or thrice a year as a couple. The family will match everyone’s schedule to travel together once a year abroad, and domestically in Thailand once or twice a year.

To make their couple trips enjoyable, Annabelle commented, “We plan way ahead to make sure our schedules match, and we explore various destinations we agree upon. We schedule our own itinerary to enjoy the sightseeing at our own pace, eat whatever we want, dine at both local and fancy restaurants. We choose comfortable hotels with good location, facilities, and services. Visit interesting historical and cultural places including museums.”

A memorable experience Annabelle shared, “In Bali, we queued for hours to grab the chance for a good table at a hilltop restaurant. While watching the beautiful sunset with a glass of wine, we expressed our

gratitude together to our creator with the amazing nature that he has blessed for everyone to experience.”

With their long matrimonial journey, Annabelle advised, “Apart from the usual Do’s and Don’ts, I like to add to friends and readers that do plan your trip but make sure that you leave some time for unexpected places or restaurants that locals may recommend. Bond with relatives and friends if you happen to have some time in that country as you may end up joining a traditional ceremony or event that no tourist can otherwise experience. Note down the full address and contact details of your Embassy in the visiting country for any emergency such as loss of passport.” For the Don’t, Annabelle has only one advice, “Don’t stop travelling, explore the world...”

Couple trips can recharge and rekindle a relationship as we take the opportunity to focus on one another. After talking to the few who have wonderfully worked them out countless time, we learn that it comes down to planning and sharing responsibilities on new exciting adventures together. At the same time, we need to be relax and easy to “go with the flow”, and allow time and space for another.

*Happy travelling everyone... treat every trip with your better half as the next “honeymoon”!*





# WHAT AN ADVENTURE

by Erik Bohm

## *Joining a multi-stage running extravaganza underprepared and overpacked*

Running takes you places. The local park, a nearby trail, exploring the surroundings of a holiday destination or, in this particular instance, a destination race in the middle of the Ica desert in Peru.

Not your everyday destination, the organisers of the HMDS - Half Marathon Des Sables – chose a wild, inhospitable, remote location in one of the harshest environments on the planet to stage a four day self-sufficient footrace.

“Want to join this race?”, the email in my inbox read early November. “...not really”, a sane person’s reaction would be. I had some lingering endorphins from my latest ultra-marathon in beautiful Nan province in my system and as a result, my brain somehow went: “Yeah sure, why not?”

Jumping into the unknown and embracing the experience is what life is all about, right? I emailed back to the organisers who also organise the

famous ultra-event through the Sahara desert (the original Marathon des Sables). I told them I would happily join the ‘little brother’ of the iconic MDS race. “But what exactly am I signing up for?”, I asked.

The reply was a light-hearted email stating that this adventure was: “Just four days of fun in the desert with friends and like-minded spirits”. Sounds like fun. “What about the running bit?”

“As for the race distances, it will be around 120km of sand running (think Phuket beach style but just a little bit longer) and self-sufficiency.” Awesome. Wait, what?





“Self-sufficiency?”, what does that mean?

Turns out that being self-sufficient means that you pack everything you need for four days of survival - all your food - and necessities (sleeping bag, change of clothes, toothbrush) and strap it to your back as you are attempting to navigate the desert sand in the blistering heat.

I was about to learn a few new lessons...

Giddy with race excitement, I arrived in Lima, Peru on November 30. Spending a day in Lima is no hardship. Beautiful views, amazing people and a fair share of Inca heritage excavation sites. Overnight, we were bussed to the Ica desert, about seven hours South of Lima. When I woke up, civilisation had disappeared.

“We are here”, the bus driver told us cheerfully. And with ‘here’ he apparently meant smack in the middle of an uninviting landscape that resembles the moon’s surface for as far as the eye could see. There was not a tree, plant or even a blade of grass in sight. Nor were there any manmade structures anywhere. Disorientated and still somewhat jet lagged, I stumbled off the bus. Moments later I heard the



engine of a Peruvian military transport truck approach from behind one of the infinite sand dunes surrounding us.

“This truck will take you to the race start, an orange vest-wearing host told us. An hour of forbidding terrain later, we arrived at what would be our camp for the next four days.

A one-person pop-up tent became home for the next couple of days. It sheltered us from the sun during the day and from the winds during the night. Staged in pods of six tents each, around 500 equally mentally deranged people poured into the campsite, leaving behind all luxury and relying only on what you could carry for the coming days. The comparison with a happy type of mental institution was quickly made by some of my fellow runners.







Participating in the HMDS race was nothing short of amazing and other-worldly! Starting early morning after our first night's bivouac we set off for 30km plus of ploughing through sand, sand and then a little more sand. On my back rested a backpack that contained enough food to last me a full week if needed.

With this being the very first multi-stage, self-sufficient desert race I was competing in, I had hastily put together my newly purchased gear and brought ample food to sustain me for the duration of the event.

I quickly learned that my calculations regarding the amount of food I was carrying had been far too generous. 4000 calories of food per day sounded like a good number but realistically was too much for me to stomach. Now all of that food was weighing me down as I was trying to scale the biggest sand dune I had seen in my life!

I finished the first day scooping what felt like a decent-sized sandpit worth of sand out of my shoes and vowing to burn a hole in my food storage just to make my second day more bearable. In our small tent group of six, we shared our stories of the day as we munched on our granola, porridge, nuts and freeze-dried instant foods. A steady stream of competitors found their way to the medical services to take care of blisters and other discomforts from the first day.

Day two started early because this was the longest stage of the race. Approximately 55km of stunning scenery and of course more sand awaited us. The highlight of this day was that we would now descend the giant sand dune we scaled the day before. Taking in all the scenery throughout the day, I excitedly leapt over the edge of that dune and let myself fall

down that monster for more than a kilometre. An endless descent that brought back childhood memories of smiling ear-to-ear as you raced your sister down the dunes towards the beach.

Finishing day two with that feeling was fantastic! Having a lighter backpack made running a lot more comfortable. I grew more confident in my soft-sand running skills. While most of my fellow runners were struggling with the midday heat, I thanked the Thai weather gods for acclimatising me to this type of heat. Finishing well before sundown meant that I would have more than enough time to get my affairs in order for the next day.

Day three was a rest day. The last competitor had arrived just before midnight of the previous day so many welcomed the opportunity of not having to run on this day. It was a day of socialising and with nowhere to go and no desire to move very much, many conversations were very in-depth and people's life stories were fascinating.

I spent a long time chatting with my tent pod partner Amy Winters. Amy had to endure all that the other runners had to with the addition of doing it on one leg only. She is an amputee and runs endurance races to show that we are all limitless. Running with her prosthetic limb was a real chore as it would dig into the sand with every step. Needless to say that when she arrived back at the camp the day before, the entire group of people present at the time stopped to applaud and salute a fantastic woman and inspiration to us all.

Day four was a short 22km to the finish of the HMDS 2019. With very little weight in the backpack (the food stocks were empty now), running felt effortless again. The terrain on this final day was a lot more bearing sand as well so it made for what felt like a mad dash to the finish line. But being out in the Ica desert for this long does take its toll. Even though





this was a short-and-sweet little stage, the final kilometres were still hard as the legs grew heavy from the work in the previous days. After 2 hours, I crossed the finish line for the day and sat down knowing I completed the Half Marathon Des Sables, Peru edition of 2019.


All who crossed that final finish line were relieved to have completed this adventure. Tired and exhausted, we were bussed back to civilisation to be greeted by the staff of the DoubleTree luxury hotel in Paracas where we enjoyed a wonderful evening banquet and the comforts of a normal bed.

*The HMDS 2019 was a fantastic adventure and an incredible opportunity to enjoy the vast and endless beauty of the Ica desert. Sharing it with other running adventure enthusiasts was an absolute privilege.*

On the flight back to Thailand, I caught myself thinking: "I wonder what the real Marathon Des Sables would be like?" ... some people just never learn.

Many thanks to the organisers of the HMDS and the sponsor WAA to bring potential brand ambassadors to this event. I am grateful for your generosity and our shared passion for running.

Visit <https://peru.halfmarathondessables.com/en/half-marathon-des-sables-peru> for more information on this race. The 2020 version is accepting early bird applications.



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# PUSHKAR

## *Trip of the International Women's Group*

*by Manjit Walia*

**A**fter a successful trip of Delhi, Punjab and Kashmir in February 2019 my group of friendly ladies asked me to organise another trip.

Rajasthan was chosen along with Agra and Delhi. In Rajasthan, Jaipur and Udaipur are very well known but Pushkar is not known so well.

The trip started on the 1st of the 11th month of the year with 11 ladies for 11 days. The two best days were the days in Pushkar hence I chose to share some brief details on our wonderful trip.

Pushkar is a town bordering the Thar Desert, in the Northeastern Indian state of Rajasthan. It's set on Pushkar Lake, a sacred Hindu site with 52 stone staircases where pilgrims bathe. The town has hundreds of temples, including 14<sup>th</sup> Century Jagatpita Brahma Mandir, dedicated to the God of creation, which has a distinctive red spire and walls inlaid with pilgrims' silver coins.

Lake Pushkar is also known as Pushkar Sarovar. It is believed that God Brahma dropped a lotus flower from heaven and the flowers fell down at the location of the lake and spring water came. Thereafter it is believed that the water is holy and the location became known as Lake Pushkar. The best time to be at the lake is on the first day of the Camel Festival. It is the most spectacular and mesmerising time of the evening just to sit around the lake. The entire perimeter of the lake was lit up.

Being a holy city, everyone from Pushkar are vegetarians and you cannot find any restaurant who will serve meat.

They encourage visitors to stay in tents to experience a different feeling as in hotels. Our stay in "Aagman Glamping" was just beyond expectation. We never imagine that staying in tents could be so comfortable. It was almost like a five star hotel. Amazing service and all purely vegetarian meals provided, we did not complain at all for going vegetarian for 2 days because the food provided were so delicious.











One does not have to go out to shop, there are few shops in around the tents. "Happy hours" drinks available on sale in the evenings to enjoy while watching dancers and fire shows.

The Camel Festival is the main attraction of Pushkar. Spending 2 days is sufficient though to experience the festival although the festival runs for 9 days. Hundreds of camels all over the city with highlight of camel's decoration and camel dancing competitions.

In the evening you watch the Kalbeliya dance on the sand dunes whilst watching the sunset is a must.



*Thanks to Paradise Holidays India, Mr. KK Gupta and Aagman Aircon Super Luxury Tents, Mr. Rajesh Tanwar – all of us had the most wonderful time of our lives.*







### Jinee Russell – Thai/American

Travelling with friends for me is always a treat. Whether it is a small or large group, weekend or for a longer period. To travel for me is to learn new cultures, traditions, foods, interests or trends, etc.

I am a visual person so taking pictures is one of my favourite pastimes and to see others and share their photos always intrigues me. Sometimes we see the same things and sometimes they see more beauty in the things that I missed. It is always fascinating to find out how we are in the same location but we each have our own interpretation through our lens. I just love that... I always look for something new... when I was younger and I used to carry a heavy and complicated camera but now an smartphone will do.

Simplicity is the key. Before each trip not only do I physically prepare myself but I make a point mentality to ignore the personal characteristics of others as long as we can be on time for our departure or to be ready for our next destination. Personally I think to travel is an opportunity to get out of your comfort zone, to learn to adapt to a new environment and to cultivate new experiences. Travelling with women only, does have more issues than with mixed genders, since shopping is always a key interest and I have to be careful not to bow to peer pressure and buy things I do not need.

But then again to travel with only intellectually academics can also be stressful... so far I have been lucky to have travelled with many different combinations and so far we are all still talking to each other! As I am getting

older I treasure my time and take the opportunity to travel any time I can!

### by Manjit Walia – Singaporean

I have travelled so many times with different groups of people, and I have made many new friends during the trips. Travelling and sharing rooms with girlfriends is always full of fun. It is always most important to remember to respect each other in every way.

My travelling girlfriends are all mostly in their 50s and 60s (as I am) so in this period of our lives, your tolerances can be really low.

You need to stay calm and accept whatever comes along, enjoy the positive experiences and ignore the negative ones.

### by Jeed Kastner – Thai

I like travelling in a group of friends and I am used to it having done it many times before. However I also know that if we all could stay together without any arguments or disagreements then we have passed the test! For our latest trip to India some of the group are new to me and of course I am new to them too. We all need to have positive thinking and as in Thai we say "Chang Mon" or "Mai pen rai - never mind". I enjoyed seeing and experiencing 'Incredible India' every day, never mind if every single thing did not go as we had all expected!

### by Ronelle Stoessel – South Africa

My travelling life has been a mosaic of fantastic experiences...

Travelling with old and new friends on incredible adventures has wrapped, physically invigorated, mentally rejuvenated, spiritually elevated and culturally enriched me.

Few things can have such a huge impact on happiness, enjoyment, the depth and fun of life as the friendships that we have formed.

I like to think of my friends as a big, beautiful patchwork blanket. Each of us so different, yet we are stitched together by love and understanding. Although we tend to unravel at times... each one can be sewn back together with deep care and respect for each other.

We are all shapeless and diverse in composition, each and every piece is an original with beauty all of its own. With threads of warmth and happiness, it is tightly held together and can last in love for one another throughout the years. The patchwork blanket of my life is made of imperfect pieces, lovingly fitted together by our Master Craftsman to form a beautiful pattern... there are no mistakes. Friends can be, and hopefully will be, forever.

### by Jean Yew – Singaporean

I have always enjoyed travelling around the world, make new friends along the way. Getting to places unseen, taste the things that I have never heard of. My recent trip to 'Incredible India' allowed me to do just that, I have learned about a new culture and I have come to respect the people and its motherland.





# TRAVEL BY DART

by Harris Woodman

Expat Life were lucky to catch up with Sorin Mihailovici a Romanian TV producer now hailing from Canada over New Year as he was in Thailand filming his latest episode of Travel by Dart a TV show that he created with a friend.

Born and raised in Romania he became a sports reporter. He told me that "I was sent to various countries to cover sports events. At the Olympics in Sydney, I interviewed Mohammed Ali, Evander Holyfield and a number of other famous athletes, then he moved to Canada 20 years ago. "My passions then were TV and travel" now it seems he has found something that combines the two.

The Travel by Dart concept was dreamed up by him when a friend asked him, "how do you define success, if you were rich beyond your wildest dreams what would you do"?

He thought about it for a few moments and said "I would like to wake up one morning with my wife and kids and say "where would you like to go today what would you like to do? My passion was to travel the world, experience new cultures, destinations and meet interesting people".

"Where would you go" his friend asked him?

"I don't know, I would throw a dart at a world map and go wherever it landed. To me that would define success as you need financial independence, a job that allowed you to do what you want, when you want. If I could do that I would consider myself happy".

His friend said "that's crazy – why wait until you are married and have responsibilities, why don't you do it now"? He said "if you do it now I will come with you".

So this 42 year old, good looking, single man and his friend took it to the next stage. They went to Walmart bought a map of The World and a cheap set of plastic darts put the map on the wall. They were with another friend who was filming them on his iPhone 3. His friend blindfolded him and he threw the dart!

Now when I first heard this, I thought - sounds like a good story, but presumably you chose certain dream destinations and then decided where to go?

"No", he insisted and when you hear of some of the destinations so far you may agree. The first destination was the North Pole – or the icy masses nearby and the nearest habitable life was the Norwegian town of Longyearbyen,







which is located in the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard and has 2,400 citizens. Longyearbyen is around 650 miles from the North Pole, making it the nearest town to it. It's dark for four months a year and light for another four months, you can only get there from Bergen. Via a small light plane to Svalbard.

When they realised that it was one of the most expensive places in the world to get too - they brainstormed and thought how they could raise funds to help finance the trip but at the same time do something meaningful to help people or the environment.

What's at the North Pole they thought? Polar bears - and on researching they read that polar bears are only expected to last the next 75 years so they decided that 50% of all monies donated would go to WWF for the protection of polar bears. Being two small independent chaps with no company attached they raised just 2,500USD.

But word got out and Canadian Goose, the extreme weather gear manufacturer, heard

about the stunt and kitted them out with warm weather gear.

Then they announced where they were going and set about looking for 5 individual sponsors at 1,000USD each so that they could hold signs with their brandnames up at the North Pole. They would take a videographer with them, film a blog for them to put on their websites and social media. They found the 5 sponsors and then had a total of 7,500USD and bought 3 return tickets donating the deficit to WWF for the protection of polar bears.

Off they went, filmed it and when they returned to Canada they posted the trip on social media and the national press heard about it. Word spread and they were covered and invited on to media shows, newspapers, interviewed on radio and TV as people thought it was a crazy stunt.

Throwing a dart at a map, going wherever it landed, raising funds for worthy causes, whatever next?

They made a 20 minute videotape and circulated it - two crazy guys throwing a dart and then going to where it lands. They submitted the film to a local film festival and raised the most votes when put to a poll.







In Thailand, Sorin and his team spent a week or so in Bangkok, then moved on to Samui where he spent a week at a resort talking about Thai food, Thai people, the culture, tourist attractions, and so on. He ends the Thai episode in Kanchanaburi on the river Kwai.

"We haven't hit China or Australia yet but hope to one day"!

I said that it sounded a great way to see the world and that helping this less fortunate on the way was obviously a smart move, as you can get people to

dig deep, and it is not just a jolly. He said "if I can do any good on the way then it makes it all worthwhile to me".

I asked how old he was and he said "I am 42 years old". "Married now?" I asked. "No still single – travelling is

People started asking were they going to do it again. So they organised an event in Edmonton the city where they lived 200 people invited to a suit and tie event, live and silent auction, drinks and canapés, threw the dart at the map and hit Russia!

They chose an orphanage at a nearby city, publicised it and took the kids clothes, toys, gifts, came back home and created a pilot TV show Travel by Dart Russia which you can find it online if you Google it. The first one too – Travel by Dart to the North Pole.

This was about 5 years ago. "Then my friend moved to the US and we parted company but eventually a Canadian TV station company called Omni Television contacted me and said "if you provide us with 12 episodes we will support and commission you, edit and air it nationally, give you advertising slots so that is what I have been doing for the last 18 months around the world".

Different people asked me if they could do a trip with me as it sounds like "a cool experience".

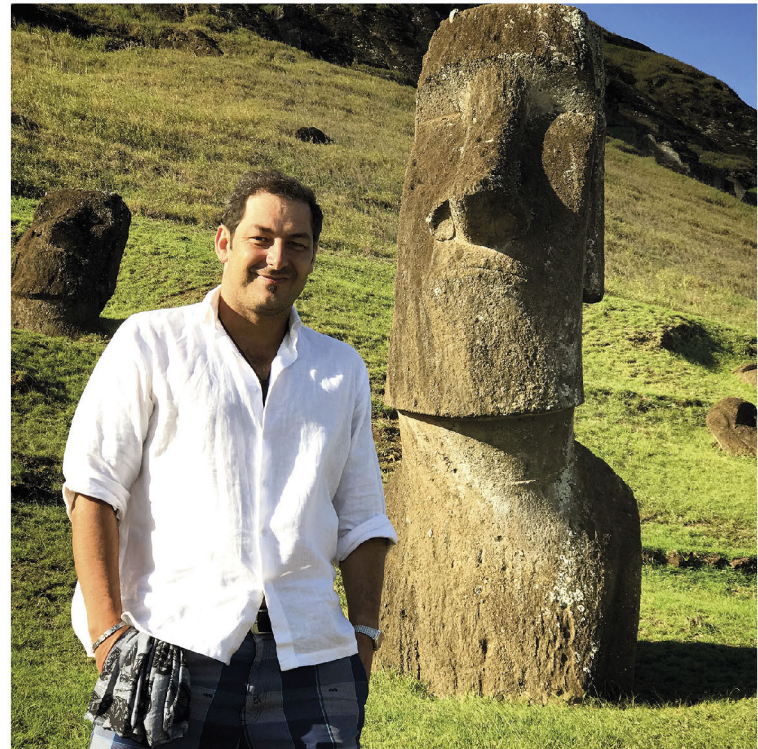
I asked what other venues he had been to and said that as 70% of the world is covered by oceans how does that work and he said the nearest land mass and city.

"I have been the North Pole, Russia, Easter Islands – to see the stone heads famed across the world, Italy, Bermuda, Argentina, Brazil, The Maldives, Uruguay, going to Cuba on January 13th after Thailand.

Where will you go in Cuba I asked. "Havana, Santiago, Sin Fuego,. The 7th biggest island in the world. The classic cars, Cuban cigars, everyone swaying along with the music, highly educated I understand".

Russia being one of the largest land masses in the world we hit again – but having been there already we threw the dart again.

We decided not to go to the US or Canada as we were from North America and so it randomly hits any other country. There are also certain countries that perhaps because of personal safety it would not make sense to visit.





not conducive with married life. When I am filming I cannot take care of people. Friends started asking could they accompany me so I thought could I take it a stage further”?

So he started another idea where he could take a group of selected applicants to go back to that country and do bucket-list items.

*He started that recently and called it a ‘The Spark Experience’ .” A balloon ride over Tuscany, the Amazon jungle in Brazil, tango in Argentina – that will be my next project to keep the theme rolling. One idea always leads to another”*

[www.TheSparkExperience.com](http://www.TheSparkExperience.com).

Omni TV has the TV rights September – December 2020 and after that Sorin will be selling the series on to independent TV broadcasters.

The official trailer is:

<https://vimeo.com/195165207>

The TV show's official website is:

[www.travelbydart.com](http://www.travelbydart.com).

His personal website is: [www.sorin.tv](http://www.sorin.tv).







# CEDARS AND CANYONS

by Scott and Nori Brixen

At the base of the mountains, near a shabby army camp, three young boys loped alongside our car until we had mercy and bought them a couple of watermelons. We passed no other cars during the long, hot drive back out of the Bekaa Valley and over the Lebanon Mountains. Halfway up, I left the car with the hazard lights flashing while Logan and I crossed the road and had a glorious, father-and-son pee looking East over the valley toward Syria. As we climbed, I heard thunder and saw a grey plume rising from a distant brown slope – heavy artillery practice.

An ageing lorry sat atop the pass. Its bonnet was up, the engine cooling. The driver was slumped on the steering wheel napping, until the boys rushed out of the car and started a shouty rock-throwing contest. The saddle was in the middle of a long, scalloped arc of desolate, tan mountains. When rain fell, or snow melted, all the water from an enormous catchment area flowed, mingled, gained force and gouged the parched ground. Through a haze of heat and dust, we could just discern the Kadisha Valley – Lebanon’s “Grand Canyon” – to the West.

In stark contrast to the monochrome brown mountains surrounding us, a broccoli-like burst of green spread below

us. The Cedars of Lebanon! These slow-growing, uniquely branching trees used to dominate Lebanon’s highlands. But after thousands of years of logging, disease, infestations and climate change, *cedrus libani* survives today only in isolated groves.

*Protecting this tree, the symbol of Lebanon’s long history, strength and resilience, is one thing that an otherwise deeply divided country can agree on.*

To reach the Cedars of God reserve, we had to pass through a gauntlet of souvenir stalls selling mostly wood carvings: swords, bendy snakes and the best-seller, cedar-shaped family trees with your names etched with a wood-burning tool into the branches. Surely, these weren’t made of cedar wood? Even if they weren’t, it was beyond bizarre, like selling imitation-ivory carvings outside an elephant sanctuary. The boys were starving, so we ordered a couple of pizzas and sat on a rooftop terrace overlooking the grove.

As we started down the trail that looped through the grove, I came to an abrupt stop. Improbably, I recognised the trees in front of me. But how? With a jolt, I remembered: the Bible given to me by First Lutheran Church for my





Confirmation in 1982 had several pages of colour photographs. Later, I confirmed that the inside cover photo of my Bible was of this very spot – a cluster of four cedars with a hazy ridge of tan mountains behind it. How much my life had changed in thirty six years! But this was but a moment in the Methuselah-like lives of the cedars.

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. – Psalm 92:12.

A few miles down the road, I spied a promontory uglified by the concrete cube of an unfinished building. It took some time to locate a road that led there. While the boys watched another Pokemon episode in the car, Nori and I walked out to the point. The concrete pillars were wrapped in barbed wire; had this been an artillery site? Just below us, the land collapsed into a tremendous, concertinaed, grey and green chasm. This was the Kadisha Valley, with the pretty town of Bcharre spilling right down to the edge of the canyon.

I don't read self-help books, despise motivational quotes and I am skeptical of anyone claiming an elevated spirituality. I read *The Prophet* purely because Khalil Gibrain was the most famous Lebanese author I could find. The Lebanon section at Daunt Books in London comprised but a few, overwhelmingly political, volumes in the Middle East section downstairs.







However, I decided to make an exception. I pulled off the road just above Bcharre and used our car to conceal the launch.

So steep was the hillside that just by flying straight, the drone was soon hundreds of metres above the city, looking down on the twin spires and central dome of the Mar Saba Cathedral, a stone's throw from the cliffs of the Kadisha Gorge.

I would have loved to do a hike into the gorge, but it had already been a long day of driving and we were all looking forward to a shower and a decent night of sleep back in Beirut. While my family slept, I followed the Bcharre-Tannourine Road around to the Southern side of the gorge and spent an hour trying to contain my amazement as the road followed the squiggly edge of the abyssal gorge.

Surprisingly, I adored *The Prophet*. A beloved seer is leaving his city; the citizens have but a few hours to seek his counsel before he boards a ship bound for the horizon. With delight, I read and reread the tiny chapters, each built around a single question from the crowd and the prophet's lyrical, universal response. Was he Jesus, Mohammed or John Smith? None of them and all of them. The message was about love.

Gibrain was born in Bcharre. In the 1920s he lived and wrote *The Prophet* in New York. Upon his death, his remains were returned to Bcharre and the old monastery he had bought and renovated was eventually turned into the Gibrain Museum.

I rarely fly my drone over cities. I'm terrified by the prospect of a rotor snapping and the 1kg device braining someone as it plunges. Drones aren't like airplanes. As I had seen in Koh Kradan, Thailand, the loss of even one rotor sends the drone into a dive that the software can't correct for.







US Embassy Christmas party



CLB - Christmas lunch & dinner







## *Skye and sea monsters*

*by Scott and Nori Brixen*

**T**he most ludicrous leg of our ridiculous UK road trip was at hand.

*I thought it would be a great idea to drive from Edinburgh to the Isle of Skye in one day, spend one night there and then drive back the next morning. Why? The truth is that I wanted my wife and kids to see the Scottish Highlands, a landscape that had moved me powerfully.*

Google Maps informed me that the drive would take five hours. That's nothing! If we left early enough, we could make it to Kyle of Lochalsh (on the Isle of Skye) in time for a late lunch! Instead, we left Edinburgh around 10am and the drive

took ten hours – all in the rain.

Beyond Dalwhinnie was the landscape I had wanted my family to see – the Highlands! Indescribably majestic mountains, bare of trees but covered in low vegetation in a thousand shades of green, brown and gold. We drove alongside empty lochs and down steep-sided valleys pierced with waterfalls. Only in New Zealand (on the drive to Milford Sound) had I seen a wilderness so starkly beautiful.

The Skye Bridge shimmered in the late afternoon light. I flew the drone over Loch Alsh, retrieving it just before the rain started again. Nori had booked two rooms for us at Saucy Mary's Lodge in Kyleakin, just over the bridge. With great relief, we got out of the car and checked-in.

It was 7pm the sun wouldn't drop until 10pm and the weather seemed to be clearing. Despite massive protests from the boys, we decided to drive up the East coast of Skye to see the Old Man of Storr – a dagger of grey rock bursting from the mountains. To lift the boys' spirits a bit, we stopped at the Broadford Co-op and let them choose a bag of crisps and a can of soda each. This was a real treat!



Skye didn't disappoint. Rainbows leapt over the sound and water gushed out of high cliffs and roared down to the sea. I loved this lonely, forbidding landscape when I first saw it, and I adored it still. We reached The Storr just as the light began to fade. The boys and I climbed a fence and walked up a sodden hillside to see if we could get a better view. Wrapped in cloud, the pinnacles drifted in and out of sight. About the best you could expect.

We had no choice but to wake early; hopeful hikers began moving about and rummaging in their backpacks at 5:30am. The whole building squeaked and creaked with their clumsy preparations. I felt shattered. After driving nearly twelve hours the day before, I wasn't ready to climb back into the car for the return journey. I did, however, have a little mischief planned that I was looking forward to.

It isn't well known, and it isn't obvious on a map unless you zoom in, but Scotland is neatly bisected from the Southwest (Fort William) to the Northeast (Inverness) by an arrow-straight geological rift. Loch Ness is the largest and longest of the four, eel-shaped lakes that filled the gap known as Glen Mor in Gaelic – the Great Valley.

In the early 1800s, Scottish engineer Thomas Telford surveyed and began construction on what would become known as the Caledonian Canal – Caledonia having been the Roman name for what

is now Scotland (Britannia for England and Wales; Hibernia for Ireland.) Only one-third of the canal was manmade; most of the journey transits the lakes. In my original itinerary for The Big Twip, I envisioned renting a canal boat and sailing Glen Mor's length, staying in waterside cabins along the route.

Loch Ness is not particularly deep (755 feet). It isn't even the deepest lake in Scotland (Loch Morar at 1,074 feet). Nor does Loch Ness present a particularly sinister aspect. Gently humped mountains, rather than ominous craggy peaks, cradle its 40km length. All in, it seems an unlikely location for the last refuge of a plesiosaur. But I hoped to play my part in keeping the legend alive.

I pulled over at a narrow turnout 30 feet above the lake. After skidding down a steep, beer bottle-strewn trail, I shed all my clothes and stepped into the lake. The water was cold, but certainly no colder than Lake Pend O'Reille in the spring, when snowmelt rushes out of the Selkirk Mountains. I picked my way over the sharp, slimy rocks until the water was deep enough and dove right in. Skinny-dipping in Loch Ness!

Nori had made her way down to the shoreline and had my smartphone ready. I submerged, swimming with one forearm extended out of the water, wrist cocked. My goal was to replicate the grainy, 1934 "surgeon's photograph" of the Loch Ness Monster that had propelled the apocryphal beast to international fame.







Back and forth I swam, attempting to mimic the pulsing movement of a horse's head and neck when galloping.

"Boys! Boys!" I screamed, sprinting up the slope in my half-wet clothes. "You've gotta see this! Your Mom and I just saw Nessie!"

I played the video for them. It had turned out even better than I had hoped. The grey skies and dark lake had cast my arm in silhouette, and I had somehow managed to keep my shoulders, legs and very buoyant posterior below water.

Kiva and Drake looked amazed and confused; Logan and Tai, skeptical.

"Dad, that's you. It's definitely you," Tai stated.

"It's your arm. By the way, how did your hair get so wet?"

I had forgotten about that. Damn kid was getting smart!

"If that's me, then how did I get the video with my phone, smarty-pants?"

"You gave your phone to Mom, duh!!!" he shot back.

A few months later, we watched *The Water Horse* on Netflix.

It's set during World War II, and the protagonist is a young boy who finds the egg of the Loch Ness monster while fossicking along the rocky shoreline.

It was a wonderful movie.

"And you boys have all been there!" I shouted.

"How cool is that? And even more amazing: your Dad actually saw Nessie!"

They all groaned. It didn't matter that they hadn't fallen for my ruse. What was important was that Loch Ness – and their Dad's silly stunt – would never be forgotten.







IWC lunch

International Women's Club of Thailand  
Annual General Meeting & 55th Anniversary Celebration Luncheon  
November 28th, 2019  
Hyatt Regency Bangkok Summit





## WHY DO HERNIATED DISCS POSE SO MUCH RISK?

Professionals at Sukumvit Hospital can now treat painful herniated discs using minimally-invasive surgical technology.

**I**n a recent case, a 40 year old patient visited Sukumvit Hospital with a serious case of a herniated spinal disc. As he had been a worker in a factory in Prachinburi for years, he often experienced forms of back pain but he did not take it too seriously. However, as of six months ago, the pain became unbearable to deal with as it began referring pain around his back and down his leg.

Before paying a visit to Sukumvit Hospital, he visited another doctor who suggested he start taking painkillers and doing some physical therapy. However, despite the medication the pain continued to get worse. It got to the point where it was difficult to walk due to limb weakness and as a result he could no longer go to work or remain mobile for too long. Worried, his wife decided to take him to Sukumvit Hospital for treatment.

At the hospital he was under the care of Dr. Poonsak Artamnuayvipas, a spinal surgeon from the hospital's Spine Surgery Centre, who diagnosed that the patient was suffering from a severe case of a herniated disc from the symptoms he was experiencing. Dr. Poonsak explained that a herniated disc will go through many stages and continue to deteriorate if left untreated. This leaves the disc at risk of becoming severely



damaged beyond repair.

The first symptom a patient experiences is often severe sharp pain that can cause a lot of suffering and discomfort. If left for too long, and the disc moves too far out of place, the patient is at risk for permanent nerve damage and other long-term complications. These include functional limb weakness and bladder and bowel dysfunction due to the disruption of nerves.

One misconception is that herniated discs usually occur in elderly patients. However, Dr. Poonsak explains that younger patients can also have herniated discs as a result of an accident or injury. In this particular case, many factors contributed to the condition, including having





**Dr Poonsak Artamnuayvipas**  
– Spine Surgeon

to continuously lift heavy weights. But because the patient had left the disc untreated over time, it began substantially affecting his nervous system and ability to walk.

Spinal discs act like shock absorbers in the spine, they act as ligaments that hold the spine together, and they allow for mobility. When too much pressure is put on these discs, there is a chance that the disc will slip out of place and cause complications. In elderly patients, the reason for herniated discs are often different as with age these discs naturally become less strong.

After an initial diagnosis, the patient was put through a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) that allowed the doctor to see the displacement of the disc, to which he said “a herniated disc goes through many stages. During the first stage when it is minor, patients can use a combination of physical therapy, exercise, and avoiding having to lift heavy objects to control the condition. If the displacement is between 25% and 50% there are other options, such as using a combination of laser treatment and physical therapy to alleviate some symptoms.

However, in this case because the disc is severely displaced, surgery is required. In the past, fixing a condition like this would require making a large wound, cutting through layers of muscle tissue and bone, and moving the spinal nerve before being able to remove the



damaged disc. This is a very painful procedure that requires a lot of recovery time.

Thanks to new technological developments, patients suffering from herniated discs now have the option of a minimally-invasive procedure called a Full Endoscope Discectomy. The procedure involves making a small incision (approximately one centimetre in size) in which a camera emitting pictures and video to a monitor is inserted. Using this, the surgeon then applies various surgical instruments to remove the herniated disc with precision, minimising the damage done to the surrounding nerves, bone and muscle tissue.

There are many advantages to using this cutting edge procedure. Considering it requires only a small wound and no major loss of blood, the recovery time is much faster in comparison to other surgical techniques. After one to two weeks patients can return to work as normal just as long as they refrain from lifting heavy objects and sitting in the car for too long. Patients are also recommended to use physical therapy and exercise to rehabilitate the muscles and strengthen the body to minimise the chance of injury in the future.



**โรงพยาบาลสุกุมวิท**  
**SUKUMVIT HOSPITAL**



**Sukumvit Hospital** began operations in 1977, recently completed a major makeover. Not only have they built a new building, but the entire team of doctors, specialists, nurses and assistants have all been trained with the singular aim of helping their patients maintain optimum health. Then there are the equipment, state-of-the-art MRIs, Cath labs and myriad of others, so that their specialists have the best available tools for diagnosis and treatment. Conveniently located on Sukhumvit Road with English speaking staff, Sukumvit Hospital is now ready for any emergencies or treatments.

#### ***Sukumvit Hospital***

***1411 Sukhumvit Road, (Ekkamai BTS)  
Phraknong Nua, Wattana, Bangkok,  
Thailand 10110***

***02 391 0011***

***[www.sukumvithospital.com](http://www.sukumvithospital.com)***

***Facebook: @sukumvithospital***



# SUPERFOODS THAT DETOX YOUR LIVER

by Christine Woodman

In our modern age and especially in industrialised societies, we have produced many over-processed livers. In fact, every time you overeat, consume processed or fried foods, or are exposed to stress or pollution, your liver suffers from being overworked and overloaded. This organ will not be able to process toxins and fat in an efficient way if it is taxed. Even though liver cleanses itself, we still believe that it is beneficial to give a cleanse boost. Here, we have compiled a list which focuses on foods that can help cleanse your liver naturally.

It's simple; follow these easy steps to help your liver go back to its normal healthy state. Consider taking liver supplements, in addition to at least two liver and gallbladder cleanses per year.



## GARLIC

If you eat a fresh bulb of raw garlic, it works as an aid to have the liver produce enzymes that can flush out toxins. Allicin and selenium are the major components that serve in liver cleansing. This herb can make blood thinner which is great for improving cardiac health.

Garlic also contains sulphur which is necessary for supporting the liver. The best way to have garlic daily is to add it to your cooking since cooked garlic adds delicious flavour and has a pleasant aroma. Feel free to add a few cloves to your smoothies.

If the taste is too strong for you, odourless garlic supplements are also a great alternative.

## GRAPEFRUIT

Grapefruit is rich in both vitamin C and antioxidants, both are powerful in cleansing your liver. Grapefruit, oranges, limes, and lemons are all fruits that support the natural cleansing abilities of the liver. Show some love to your dear liver by having a glass of grapefruit juice in the morning. It will help those enzymes to flush out carcinogens



and other toxins.

In addition, grapefruit has pectin which tends to lower cholesterol and lastly, remember to read the notice in your medications because grapefruit interferes with certain drugs and may result in a lot of side effects.

## BEETS AND CARROTS

We have always believed that beets and carrots are good for flushing out toxins from our bodies. Coincidentally, beets have proved themselves to be great for purifying our blood. Their rich red-purplish colour is actually a way nature is telling us to use them for this very purpose.

Also, both carrots and beets are full of plant-flavonoids and beta-carotene which are great for your livers' overall well-being. Remember to include a daily portion of carrots and beets and you will have your liver loving you.



## GREEN TEA

This drink is the liver's favourite because it is full of plant-based antioxidants commonly known as catechin's. These compounds help the liver function better. Most of us love to drink tea either in the morning or in the

evening to relax.

So, it would be easy to incorporate it into our daily dose of healthy habits. It would be a delight for everyone to enjoy sipping tea while thinking that your liver is excited to tell you how much she loves it. Keep in mind that I am talking about green tea and not green tea extract, which research suggest that it may affect your liver negatively.

## LEAFY GREEN VEGETABLES

Granted, everyone is talking about how leafy green vegetables are good for you. But really this is the easiest way to flush out those cluttered toxins. Greens are everywhere so you have no





excuse for treating your liver to a natural cleanse.

They are very powerful allies in detoxifying the liver. Well, this is my favourite part, leafy greens can be eaten raw (great if you don't have time or just lazy like myself), cooked, or juiced. These green friends are extremely high in chlorophyll, they also soak up environmental toxins from the bloodstream, leaving you with a perfectly clean blood...

Another benefit is that they have a distinct ability to neutralise heavy metals, chemicals, and pesticides, these foods generously offer an unbeatable mechanism for the liver.

Try to add leafy greens into your diet, remember the bitter the better like gourd, arugula, dandelion greens, spinach, mustard greens, and chicory. This will help secrete the flow of bile which removes waste from the organs and blood.

## AVOCADOS

Avocado is a nutrient-dense fruit that can help your body produce a type of antioxidant referred to as glutathione, this compound is necessary for the liver to filter out those harmful toxins.

In addition to glutathione, avocados are very high in essential Vitamins like Vitamin E and C, these two nutrients can put an end to cellular inflammation.

It should be noted that fats in avocado are the healthy sort so if you suffer from high cholesterol level, this fruit will do the job for you. Start incorporating Avocados in your diet to have an ultimate cleanse and healthy liver.



## APPLES

An apple a day keeps the doctor away, a quote that we were raised repeating and it is especially true when it comes to the most hardworking organ in our body, apples are very high in pectin which helps cleanse and releases toxins from our bodies.

Green or red apples just pick your favourite because all

of them are equally good for your liver. Don't forget that you should eat the peel, simply because most apples' nutrients are concentrated there. So try to include one apple per breakfast starting today! I guess there isn't a better and healthier option.

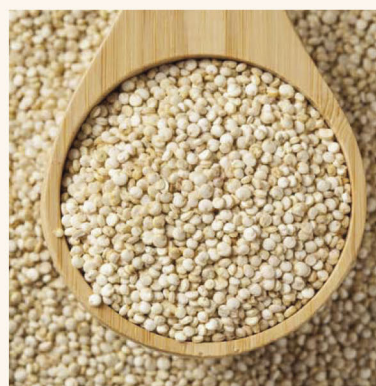


## OLIVE OIL

Olive oil has been used for decades in natural remedies as well as cooking savoury meals. This oil has many health benefits, and it is considered as one of the best all-natural solutions out there to detox the liver.

It is believed that drinking large amounts of olive oil sends signals to the liver which consequently, opens the bile ducts. When these bile ducts open up to process the surfeit quantities of oil, anything that was formerly stuck will easily flush out.

Once you follow the oil cleanse, expect mostly to see bile coming out of the liver during this process, but some people see liver and gallbladder stones discharged from their system.



## ALTERNATIVE GRAINS

Although wholegrain wheat is supposed to be healthy, it contains gluten, which makes it hard for your digestive system to work it through. Consider replacing wheat, flour, or other standard

grains with quinoa, millet, and buckwheat.

These alternatives help in reducing the toxic load on the liver and considering it is the organ that filters your body's toxins, it is best to give it a hand and stop complicating her already tedious job. According to a study, those who are gluten sensitive may develop abnormal liver enzyme.

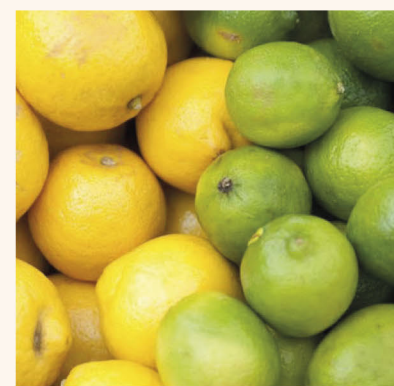
## LEMONS AND LIMES

Lemons are high in vitamin C and your liver loves them. They are a natural cleansing food that is versatile. It will help you get things going in all over your body.

Lemons are also full of antioxidants which will help your liver produce enough enzymes that will boost your energy level. These loves are also great with digestion.

In addition, lemons can be a natural replacement for salt since they are rich in electrolytes, this liquid will assist your body without dehydrating your cells like sodium does.

As a matter of fact, lemons are recommended for people on a liver disease diet, they use it instead of salt. Even though lemons are acidic, once they are inside the body, they neutralise toxins and excrete waste.







*by Kathleen Pokrud, President  
of Hong Kong Ladies' Group  
in Thailand*

### **The popularity of Chinese cuisine**

**B**ased on the long geographical history of China for over 5,000 years, the country offers one of the oldest culinary traditions in the world. As a huge country, it offers distinctive regional haute cuisines. Due to a differing climate, diverse resources and disparate local cultures, the tastes and food traditions in the regions are very varied.

Chinese cuisine is one of the most popular around the world today, due to the mass immigrations from China in the past few decades. Chinese dishes that are most commonly known include roasted pork, Peking duck, stir-fried noodles, and dim sum. In truth, the culinary scene in China is sophisticated and conventional. Here, we shall explore a glimpse of the long traditional heritage of Chinese cuisine. Cooking is science, a form of art and also culture.

### **Four major regions of Chinese cuisine**

For a long time in history, the taste for Chinese cuisine was simply divided between northern and southern China. The southerners prefer sweeter food while the northern regional taste is saltier. In the south, more seafood is available where the diets in the north are based on meat.

In the Qing dynasty, the "Four major cuisines in China" took their official places. They are Guangdong, Huaiyang, Shandong and Sichuan cuisines. They influenced the styles and

made a distinction in Chinese cooking. As the food culture in China developed further, the regions gradually showed their own divergence. Finally, the "Eight regional cuisines in China" was categorised in the gastronomic scene.

Chinese cuisine is generally divided into eight regional cuisines based on their geographic location. They are Anhui, Fujian, Guangdong, Hunan, Jiangsu, Shandong, Sichuan and Zhejiang. The regional cooking styles are as diverse as the terrain and its people. Naturally, they are also strongly influenced by the staple crops that grow in each specific region.

### **Epicure of the "Eight Great"**

The development of different regional cooking styles is strongly influenced by the staple crops and resources that are available in each region. The

diverse traditions in preparation and presentation are result of the contrasting customs of the people in each province.

Even among the eight elite members, there are rankings in the ladder. Shandong cuisine invokes the feel of strong northern emperors. Sichuan and Hunan cuisines are rich and elaborate; they represent the prosperous court officials.

Guangdong and Fujian cuisines remind the handsome and pleasing gentlemen. Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui cuisines are compared to the innocent and gentle ladies.

Everyone agrees that taste is subjective. The majority views have ranked as follows, Sichuan, Shandong, Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Hunan, and Anhui.







Sichuan Fish

### 1. Sichuan (nickname “Chuan”) cuisine 川菜

Sichuan reigns as the crown jewel of the major regional cuisine of China. It has a long history, with the cities of Chengdu and Chongqing as the authentic representation. Sichuan province is the birthplace of many Chinese dishes. Sichuan cooking incorporates a vast array of ingredients and seasonings. The assortment of preparation styles result in “one dish with one flavour, and one hundred dishes come hundred flavours.” The dishes are known for their hot and spicy taste, with the use of Sichuan peppercorns to enhance the deep and rich flavour. Many of their dishes are so spicy that may cause numbness in the taste buds. The mountainous terrains require people live in the area the needs to eat hot peppers for dehumidify.

The cooking methods vary according to the specific taste of each dish, including baking, braising, fast frying, steaming, and stir-frying. It is known that Sichuan cuisine offers an array of 23 unique tastes. Popular seasonings are Sichuan peppercorns, black pepper, broad bean paste, chilli, garlic, ginger, and shallots.

Renowned Sichuan dishes include: Bang Bang Chicken, Mapo Tofu, Kung Pao Chicken, and Twice Cooked Pork.

### 2. Shandong (nickname “Lu”) cuisine 鲁菜

The history of Shandong cuisine is long established in Chinese dynasties as imperial dishes. The region covers mountainous area and the coast, in turn offer significant affluent ingredients.

The cuisine of the eastern coastal province is strongly influenced by the Jinan and Jiaodong styles of cooking. Tastes are delicious with sharp contrast of sweet and sour, crisp and tender flavours.

The most popular ingredients are meat and poultry, aquatic products and vegetables. Methods used include braising, deep-fried, roasting, and stir-fried with the heavy use of onions and garlic. Clear and milk soup is another feature of Shandong cuisine.

The Typical Shangdong dishes include: Braised Sea Cucumber, Dezhou Stewed Chicken, Braised Prawns, and Four Happy Meatballs.



Jinhua Unicorn Chicken

### 3. Guangdong (nickname “Yue”) cuisine 粤菜

Guangdong cuisine (also known as Cantonese cuisine in Hong Kong, China) is one of the “Four major cuisines of China” due to its unique cooking style. Its development is based on the long history of the area. Its influence has now stretched all around the world. Blessed with a favourable and

mild climate, this coastal province produces a vast variety of resources of seafood, meat, poultry, fruits and vegetables. People from the southern province of Guangdong are often teased that they will eat almost anything that walks, crawls, flies or swims.

Popular ingredients used are oyster sauce, clam oil, red wine vinegar, fish sauce. Other flavoured condiments include star anise, Chinese cinnamon root, liquorice bark, dried tangerine peel and ginger powder.



Sweet and Sour Fish



Apart from traditional styles of grilling, pan-fried, sauté, stewing, stir-frying, other unconventional methods include slow cooking, steaming and roasting with salt. Influenced by Western cooking style, the new generation of Guangdong cuisine is evolving into new fusion trends.

The most famous Guangdong dishes include: The Dragon and Tiger Fight, Five-Snake Soup, Shark Fin Soup, Winter Melon Soup, and Cantonese Dim Sum.

#### 4. Fujian (nickname “Min”) cuisine 闽菜

Although as one of the eight main cuisines in China, Fujian cuisine is considered as a latecomer. The main hubs of this southern regional are based in the cities of Fuzhou, Guangzhou, and Xiamen. Fujian dishes are slightly sweet and sour, and less salty. Most dishes are seafood based so the sweetness creates more flavour while the acidity removes the seafood smell.

As coastal region, vast varieties of fresh fish and crustaceans products are widely available. The local cuisine is heavily based on broths, soups and stews. The cutting skill in Fujian is famous. The ingredients are chopped finely to be stir-fry or quick-boiled and added to the main soup.

The most famous Fujian dishes include: Buddha Jumping Over the Wall, Lychee Glazed Meatballs, Drunken Chicken, and Jade Pearl Abalone.

#### 5. Jiangsu (nickname “Su”) cuisine 苏菜

Jiangsu cuisine is originated in the Jiangsu province of China, and comprises of the subcategory styles of Nanjing, Suzhou, Yangzhou and Zhenjiang. The taste and textures are light and tender. Common to other regions, fresh aquatic products are popular ingredients.

With its unique and skilled craftsmanship, Jiangsu cuisine is famous for its carving techniques, which are delicate and precise. The dishes are well known for elaborate display and matching colour to present the visual impact. Most popular cooking methods include braising, quick frying, pickling, stewing,

The most popular Jiangsu dishes include: Squirrel-Shaped Mandarin Fish, Nanjing Salted Duck, Lion's Head, and Farewell My Concubine (Stewed Tortoise and Chicken).



*Lion's Head*

#### 6. Zhejiang (nickname “Zhe”) cuisine 浙菜

Zhejiang province is located south of Shanghai and centred on Hangzhou, a historical Chinese capital renowned of its wealth. Being the richest province in China, Zhejiang is often refers as the “land of milk and honey”. The local people demand extra sophistication in their food taste. Food is often served raw with the seasonal fresh ingredients available.

Zhejiang cuisine is often subcategorised into three styles, namely Hangzhou, Ningbo, and Shaoxing. Most of Hangzhou dishes are served with bamboo shoots, as this southern province is a bamboo county; dishes are mostly



*Dongpo Pork*



## 8. Anhui (nickname “Hui”) cuisine 徽菜

Anhui cuisine is derived from the native cooking styles of the Huangshan region in the southern Anhui province. With history of 800 years, the reason why it becomes China's major cuisine is because of its important role in the Chinese history. Located in the poor mountainous areas, the Huizhou merchants brought their hometown flavour to other corners of China with their trade travels.

The main feature in Anhui cuisine is heating where special attention is paid to the temperature, colouring and the taste of each dish. It has incorporated the practice of traditional Chinese

herbal medicine. The cooking method is characterised by an ample use of bamboo shoots, berries, fresh herbs, mushrooms, tealeaves, and other wild edible plants found in the region. Braising and stewing are the common methods, to preserve the nutrients of the dishes.

The most famous traditional dishes include: Ham and Bamboo Stew, Fat King Fish in Milk Soup, Snowy Winter Roast Chicken, and Stewed Horse Roof Turtle in Light Soup.

### Stir-fried Pork

stir-fried or soup with seafood. Ningbo is generally described to be saltier, and well known for their sweet confectionaries. Shaoxing is inland so their dishes are geared towards freshwater fish and poultry.

The most popular Zhejiang dishes include: Dongpo Pork, Beggar's Chicken, Splendid Fish, and Sliced Fried Eel.

## 7. Hunan (nickname “Xiang”) cuisine 湘菜

Hunan cuisine consists of the cuisines of the Xiang River region, Dongting Lake and the western Hunan province in China. Beautiful valleys and roaring mountains dominate the area. The fertile ground provides a rich variety of crops, especially rice. It is known as “The Hometown of Fish and Rice (The Land of Plenty)”. Hunan cuisine is famous for its spiciness, deep colours and fresh aromas. Chairman Mao Zedong who was born in Hunan province once said, “You can't be a revolutionary if you don't eat chillies.”

Contrast to their Sichuan counterparts with the tongue-numbness with all kinds of spicy-sweet-savoury combinations, Hunanese food tends to go for bold savoury, chilli-hot, and sour-hot tastes.

*There is a common saying, “Sichuan people don't fear hot food, Hunan people don't fear any degree of spiciness at all, and Guizhou people fear to eat food that isn't spicy.”*

The main cooking techniques include baking, braising, sauté, smoking, steaming, stewing, stir-fry. Fermentation and pickling are commonly applied with pepper and vinegar.

The well-known Hunan dishes include: Money Fish, Spicy Chicken, Steamed Ham, and Sugar Candy Lotus.



Ham and Bamboo Stew



## Interviews with two top restaurateurs

Given the majority of Thais have family linkage from mainland China; Chinese cuisine has been one of the most popular choices for family dinners and gatherings. I spoke with two long time expatriate residents in Bangkok who have opened well-known establishments in Bangkok for decades. Introducing David Lau, owner of Thai Scala and Man Wai Yin, Chief Executive Officer of Chef Man to learn about their views on the “8 regional cuisine of China.”

**The first question was “How do you feel about the rankings of the Chinese cuisine?”**

**David:** “Taste and preference in food is very subjective. Part of the reason that Sichuan cuisine is considered number one is because many of their dishes have long history in China. Sichuan is strategically located in the central plains of the “Middle Kingdom” (China) and reigned as capital city for decades.” He further commented, “People are often influenced by their own culture. I believe Guangdong cuisine is sophisticated and cultural. Our responsibilities are to sell what customers want.”

**Man Wai Yin:** “I echoed the same sentiment. The fact that Guangdong cuisine may in fact be more well known on the international arena is because of the continuous migration and transit via Hong Kong. Many dishes are refined with long preparation hours. People tend to prefer their provincial dishes, in short, the cooking that they grow up with.”

**Second question was “How contemporary haute cuisine influences the development of our traditions?”**

**David:** “I continuously push my staff to be innovative with new dishes creation. With the global change in environment, eating is culture and it should be open to adaptations and reshaping. The responsibilities as restaurateurs are to sell dishes that are commercially viable.”

**Man Wai Yin:** “With modernisation and reshaping of avant-garde cuisine, it is important not to lose sight that Chinese cuisine must remain with our main essence and traditions,



Menu tasting at Chef Man Chinese Restaurant

and not to be too westernised. I quote an example, our contemporary experiment may use western ingredients such as red wine or cheese, but we will not lose sight that the new dish is after all, based on traditional Chinese cooking methods.”

*Note: All the dishes shown in the article were masterwork from the kitchens of Chef Man, under the management guidance of Man Wai Yin, CEO.*

*Photos credited by David Lau, owner of Thai Scala.*

**“East meets West”  
Food & Tourism  
Fair 2020**

For centuries, people have found that breaking bread together is the best way to foster friendships. Hong Kong Ladies’ Group is a Bangkok-based, non-profit making



Man Wai Yin, CEO of Chef Man





David Lau, owner of Thai Scala

social group founded in 1991. Our objective is to assist newly arriving lady-expatriates from Hong Kong to adjust to their new environment and to meet new friends through the monthly luncheons and activities. Apart from promoting friendship, unity and mutual support among members during their residence in Thailand, HKLG has also established a charity trust, funds from which

are used to help the needy throughout the country.

One of our key missions of HKLG this year is "global friendship". The "East meets West" Food & Tourism Fair, hosted by HKLG is a friendship luncheon to foster cultural exchange between our Hong Kong group with international expatriates and Thai communities. With the new era of making friends in social media, a virtual hug cannot overshadow physical connections in person.

March 8 is the International Women's Day. The event provides a platform as part of the month of March to celebrate women empowerment. In addition, we hope the event will be a fundraising opportunity to provide financial resources for charitable organisations benefitting education.



## "EAST meets WEST" Food & Tourism Fair 2020

The event signifies March celebrations of "International Women's Day on March 8."  
"Proceeds from the event will be donated to projects for women empowerment."

VIP

2,500 THB

Standard

1,200 THB

Date: 25 March 2020

Time: Registration starts at 10:30 a.m.

Vendor tables 10:00 a.m.

Lunch 12 noon

Venue: Swissotel Bangkok Ratchada

For information, please contact email: [hkladiesgroupthailand@hotmail.com](mailto:hkladiesgroupthailand@hotmail.com)



# Bangkok Madam

## Chapter 5:

### The Mitsumaru luncheon

by Minami

**W**here should it be? Where should it be?

The same question had been going around in Mitsuko's mind for the last three days. As she sat at her dressing table, brushing her long black hair, it came to her again. She had to choose a restaurant for the next gathering of the "Mitsumaru Club," and now she had only two days left.

Mitsumaru Club is the regular quarterly luncheon for the twenty-something wives of Mitsumaru expats, and it was Mitsuko's turn to organise it. To be exact, it was her group's turn. The Mitsumaru ladies were divided into four groups (senior and junior wives randomly mixed) so that their duty to arrange the luncheon was only once a year. Since Mitsuko was the most senior member of her group – not necessarily by her age but by her husband's rank in the office – she had to make a decision, or at least a suggestion, so that the other wives in her group could follow up with making a reservation, deciding the menu, and so on. Since two weeks' advance notice was the rule, she had to decide the restaurant by Thursday at the latest.

*Where should it be? Where should it be?*

Mitsuko let out a long, deep sigh. Mitsumaru Club is a pain. She knew no one looked forward to this luncheon. No one expected to enjoy the food or the occasion, though no one dared to suggest stopping it, including Mitsuko. The club was meant to be a support group for wives who knew nothing about Thailand or living in a foreign country, and Mitsuko admitted it was a help when she first came to Thailand. Yet... Once every three months was too often.

Mitsuko heard that the Mitsumaru Club started when there had been very few Japanese expats in Bangkok. Accordingly, there were very few Japanese grocery shops or bookshops. In those days, the Mitsumaru wives were very close, or had to be, to survive the unfamiliar surroundings and inconveniences. They got together more often than quarterly and shared recipes for Japanese meals using Thai ingredients, circulated out-of-date but precious Japanese books and magazines, and organised Japanese cultural events for their children so they would have some idea what their peers at home were experiencing. More than anything, those early Mitsumaru wives relished the opportunity to talk in Japanese, to express themselves without stopping to think what to say, unlike most of the time when they struggled to speak Thai or English.

But that was the past. The good old days for the Mitsumaru Club. Mitsuko had once heard a senior executive from Mitsumaru headquarters reminisce about life when he had first set up the Bangkok office. "When I was here forty years ago, there was nothing. No skytrain, no subways, no department store. Sukhumvit was often flooded. At those



times, we couldn't get home and used to sleep in the office. Oh, the old maid in the office would cook Tom Yam soup for us. Very spicy but delicious... What was her name? She was a big chatty lady, laughing at us crying over that extremely spicy soup. We had nothing, but we were like a family... It was the good old days indeed." Mitsuko had listened to him as if he was telling a fairytale.

Living in the heart of downtown, Mitsuko found Bangkok as urbanised as Tokyo. There were some reminders that it was still a developing country, such as temporary electricity cut-offs and flooding after a violent squall, but in everyday life, she enjoyed all the conveniences of the urban city and its cosmopolitan atmosphere.

The area where Mitsuko lived was full of foreign residents. All kinds of international cuisine catered to diverse nationalities of expats. Italian homemade pasta and pizza freshly baked in brick-built ovens, Korean barbecue grilled over charcoal fires, a French bakery with crispy baguettes, melting Belgian chocolate, and thick, creamy New Zealand ice cream, all within walking distance of her apartment.

And, of course, Japanese cuisine. It was available on every block. Mitsuko and her family could hop in anywhere nearby and satisfy themselves with authentic Japanese meals, some of them better than her own cooking, Mitsuko admitted, although she was secretly quite proud of her cooking skills. And the Japanese meals were affordable. Lunch ranged from





300B to 500B (\$9-\$15) for Japanese rice (though grown in Thailand), miso soup, a main dish of meat or fish, and several vegetable dishes with Japanese seasonings such as gomaae (sesame and soy sauce dressing) or sumisoae (miso and rice vinegar dressing). Or if she was feeling very lazy, she could just pick up the phone and order the delivery of Japanese bento (a set meal in a box) for an even more affordable price.

By the time Mitsuko arrived in Thailand, the Japanese had become the biggest foreign investors in the country. In Bangkok alone, there were more than 35,000 Japanese residents, even more if you included unofficial residents. There were apartments where 100% of the tenants were Japanese. Japanese bookshops were in all the major shopping complexes, and if you did not want to pay the high price with import tax, you could go to secondhand bookshops on the street and buy a Japanese paperback for 50B.

Several Japanese-language free-papers offered know-how for living in Bangkok: where to visit, where to shop, where to eat, hobby groups to join, how to handle trouble with a Thai, how to find good schools for your children, and on and on. NHK, Japan's national broadcasting channel, was available for your TV, although it cost 1,200B (\$36) per month to add it to your cable bill, far more than a premier package of 50 channels. Even the Japanese radio station could be heard in Bangkok, although Mitsuko didn't know anyone who listened to it regularly.

The upshot of Bangkok's transformation was that, if you liked, you could speak only Japanese all day long and live the same life, well almost, as life in Japan.

Another result was that Mitsumaru wives did not have to depend on the company's network any longer to make them feel comfortable as expats. Enough information and social networks now existed for Japanese women to find their way with or without the help of other Mitsumaru wives. Thanks to the digital age, you could search for anything using the internet, even friends.

Mitsuko was not a techie type, but she could use the internet to locate Japanese businesses in Bangkok and to chat with her friends in Japan. Although meeting someone through the internet sounded laughable to her, it was not totally alien. She actually had a young friend who married someone she met online. Mitsuko also knew that Mika spent a couple of hours a day on the internet, chatting with strangers who were members of some volunteer group; Mika sometimes met up with them, not for romance (Mitsuko assumed) but to become better acquainted around whatever volunteer thing they have in common. Not many Japanese wives were as active as Mika in social networking, but after a while, they somehow found their own friends, often through their children's activities or through shared hobbies. And the truth was, Mitsuko wasn't the only wife who preferred to go out with women who had nothing to do with her husband's company.

*Why do we have to do this Mitsumaru Club when it is not really necessary?*

Mitsuko already knew the answer: because no one wants to be the one to break the rule. Obviously, Yukari, wife of the top man at Mitsumaru Bangkok, did not seem willing to end the tradition. And Mitsuko could hardly criticise, since she did not want to be the one, either. It was much easier to go through the ordeal with a quiet smile rather than stand for a change or make a ripple in the still water. Mitsuko heaved another sigh.

*No time for grumbling, she chastised herself. If you have to do it, just do it. Do not make any noise that will get you noticed. Just get it done as if it was nothing...*

Maybe she could ask Yurie for a suggestion, but she did that last time. Mika? No, her mother-in-law was staying over. She should not bother her. Or rather, she didn't want to be bothered listening to Mika complain about her mother-in-law. Asako? She knew lots of restaurants. But no. Definitely not.

When Mitsuko had asked Asako for a suggestion before, she nonchalantly said, "Mitusko-san, it's not a big deal, just choose one. We do this every three months. No one cares where we eat."

But Mitsuko didn't think that was true. She knew no one cared what they ate, but they would judge you by your choice of restaurant.

*It shows your lifestyle, your personality, and your background. It shows your taste. It should be not too expensive, but not too cheap. Not too posh, but not too casual...*

Mitusko couldn't help laughing aloud at the memory of the last time Asako organised the luncheon. It was bizarre. Totally "out there" for the Mitsumaru Club.





Asako chose (or her group chose, but it was obviously Asako's idea) an Arabic restaurant on a shady street of Little Arab Town near the corner of Sukhumvit and Soi Nana. It was a wonder that no one in Asako's group objected when she named the location, but Asako's father was still an executive of Mitsumaru, so maybe they felt it better to keep quiet. The luncheon was very exotic, perhaps too exotic. Even Asako later admitted it.

Sukhumvit and Nana were major streets in Bangkok. Everyone drove those streets almost every day, one way or another. However, very few Japanese businessmen, let alone their wives, stepped into the narrow side streets off the corner. Somehow the mixture of Arabs and Africans made it seem too foreign even for expats. From her car window, Mitsuko had seen African ladies, quite glamorous wrapped in bright colours of cotton fabric, and Arabic men in long white tunics with red and white checked turbans, crossing Nana street. But she had never ventured into their neighbourhood. It was just a different world she never thought of stepping into.

Asako advised the Mitsumaru Club not to come by car, as there were no parking spaces at the restaurant she'd chosen. Mitsuko walked the maze of narrow streets congested with small shops in three-storey buildings; signs were written with letters Mitsuko didn't recognise. The only Thais she saw were obviously employees of local businesses. Japanese ladies, neatly dressed, walking by in groups of three and five, were an odd sight indeed. Mitsuko felt the gaze of Arab men with their dark, thick eyebrows, as she passed them sitting in outside terraces. She saw almost no women at all. The few she glimpsed were wearing veils and all black cover-ups showing only their eyes in Cleopatra-like makeup.

As Mitsuko caught up with other Mitsumaru wives near the restaurant, she sensed that some seemed very uncomfortable while others seemed to be enjoying the unusual situation with mischievous smiles. No one said much, afraid of saying something inappropriate one way or another.

The restaurant was tiny. In essence, the Mitsumaru Club's reservation had rented out the whole place. It was dark with metallic decorations which made it look more cheap than modern. Asako, trying to break the ice, cheerfully said, "Let's enjoy something different this time and pass around the water tobacco!" She held up a glass pipe which, Mitsuko thought, resembled something from a picture of the Chinese Opium War in a history textbook.

Yukari, who up to that moment had been sitting quietly with a stern face, practically shouted, "Perhaps next time!" She gave Asako a shocked and disapproving glance.

The air froze. No one said anything.

Even the ones who seemed to be enjoying the situation sobered up their faces. Once they got the message that Yukari was upset by the inappropriateness of the setting, they knew they better temper their own curiosity. Certainly, passing the water tobacco would not happen at the Mitsumaru Club luncheon.

A painful silence prolonged the discomfort. Mitsuko, as the Number 2 wife, felt she should say something to lighten things up. But the right words weren't coming to mind. Even Asako didn't respond with her usual cheek, or at least a change of subject. Just as Mitsuko was about to cry from helplessness, the manager appeared with a big smile and a tray of food and began to explain the dishes, which saved Mitsuko and everyone else.



Asako later complained to Mitsuko, “That old lady is so stone-headed! In the tea ceremony of which she is so proud, they pass around a bowl.” All the wives knew that Yukari had a teaching certificate in tea ceremony. “It’s the same thing,” Asako persisted. “How come it is okay to pass around the green tea bowl, but not the water pipe?” Mitsuko was glad that Asako had not started such an argument on the spot.

At least Asako had done her homework and ordered the food in advance. The wives did not have to try to figure out the menu, and the food was served swiftly.

“This is hummus,” said the manager, smiling under a big moustache. “Cooked chickpeas pureed with sesame paste and a hint of lime juice. Baba-ganuj is baked eggplants puree. These are both dips that you scoop up with the pita bread. Please enjoy.”

The manager extended a basket of pita bread toward Yukari with a gesture full of grace. He was quick to know who was most important at the table, and Yukari, knowing her outburst had nearly upset the luncheon, managed to accept the basket with a faint smile of “Thank you.” She kept the fixed smile as she turned to the table of wives and nodded, as if to say “Shall we start?” Her effort to refresh the air was clear, and everyone seemed to ease a bit.

Despite the disastrous start, Mitsuko enjoyed the food. She’d never before tasted Arabic food, and she was surprised to find that it was delicious. She had somehow expected it to be greasy and spicy, which it was not. It was exotic – she couldn’t figure out what most of the dishes were even made of – but the flavour was pleasant and not alien to her.

Following the appetisers, they had lamb kabob and shawarma chicken and fatouche – a green leaf salad tossed with toasted bits of pita bread. The crunchy bread contrasted with the soft lettuce covered in lime juice, olive oil, and some unknown purple sprinkle. It was a simple but stunning mix of textures and flavours.

By the time they had sipped a refreshing mint tea, Mitsuko felt quite relaxed. She was thinking the hummus was her favourite. She could not tell what it was made of. (*Did the manager say chickpeas? What is chickpeas?*) Hummus did not grab her attention at the first bite, but as she chewed it with pita bread, its simple and earthy flavour made her feel at home. She felt she could eat it every day.

Mitsuko thought of coming back to this restaurant with Yuichi some time. Yuichi liked to try foreign cuisine when he was not entertaining business clients, which was always at expensive Japanese or Thai restaurants. Mitsuko was sure that Yuichi would like it. She was not sure about trying the water tobacco with him, though.

Then the idea of coming with Yurie, Mika, and Asako hit her. *That could be fun.*

Mitsuko imagined flamboyant Asako and Mika passing around the water tobacco as if they had done so all their lives. Asako would feel vindicated. Mitsuko actually smiled at the image when Yoko, sitting next to her, asked, “What are you laughing at?” Yoko was the wife of the Number 3 officer at Mitsumaru Bangkok.

Taken aback, Mitsuko mumbled, “Oh, no, nothing. Nothing really.”

Mitsuko tensed a bit. She was not good with Yoko. It was not that she disliked her, but she never felt at ease with her. Yoko was smart, too smart for Mitsuko’s liking. Yoko paid attention to all the details “behind the curtain” – which universities the husbands and their wives had attended, who was senior or junior, who was close to whom, where their children were admitted to school, even everyone’s golf handicaps, let alone the ranks of the husbands in the company.

“You sit by the order of your husband’s rank in the company?” Mika had asked incredulously when she and Mitsuko had talked about the Mitsumaru Club luncheons. Mika, whose husband worked for the United Nations, was quite curious about the Japanese corporate wives’ social relations. She said the United Nations had social gatherings for the wives, but it was totally voluntary, and she had never attended any occasions.

“So the seats are named? No? Then how do you know where to sit? What if you don’t know exactly how your husband is ranked?”

“They know.”

“How?”

“They just know.”

“Gosh, that’s hilarious.”

*Hilarious, indeed.*

Actually, Mitsuko didn’t know. She knew Yukari was the wife of the top man and Yoko was the wife of Number 3, but the rest of them were a blur.

*How could I know the exact ranking when there are more than twenty expats?*

But Yoko knew. Occasionally a junior expat’s wife did not know where to sit, but Yoko swiftly guided her to the appropriate seat. It was amazing. Unnerving, actually.

All of this came back to mind as Mitsuko sat at her dressing table. The thought of sitting next to Yukari and Yoko again made Mitsuko’s heart sink. The Mitsumaru Club was a pain because she had to play a certain role. She had to present herself as a pleasant, polite, yet respectable wife appropriate to her husband’s rank. Actually Mitsuko had no idea what was appropriate for the wife of the No.2 man. But she felt pressured to act as such, especially when someone like Yoko tried to outsmart her. She was always careful what she said so that she did not appear too humble or too proud. She tried to appear helpful and kind to the lower-ranked wives but not too friendly, lest they think she is their equal.

The Mitsumaru Club was a pain, Mitsuko realised, because the wives were placed in the hierarchy of their husbands, regardless of who they actually were.

Yet it was a tradition. It was an obligation. It was the official duty of the wife of a Mitsumaru employee.

Mitsuko exhaled another deep, long sigh.

*Where should it be?*

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Welcome to the second month of 2020! Each beginning of the year is a great opportunity to start working on those projects or improvement purposes postponed in previous months.

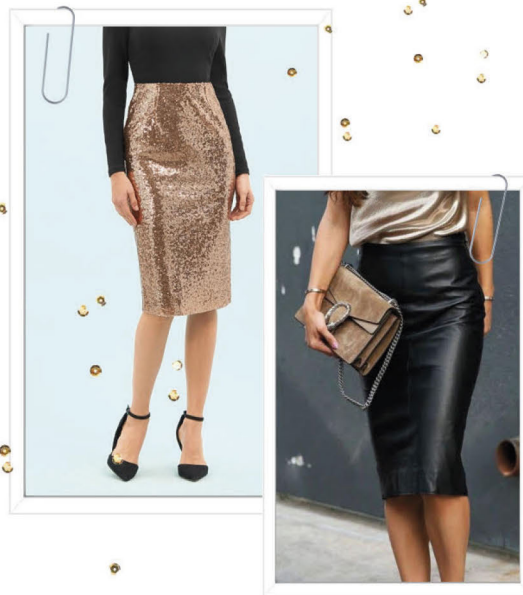
2019 is a memory that left us some scars, some nice and others not so much. The important thing is that life gives us a new opportunity to live it, in 366 stages (Yes! This year you have an additional day). We are looking forward to 2020 with great enthusiasm: may it be a blessed year, we will do whatever it takes to make it better.

We appreciate what life has given us, but we don't settle because I know we can get much more. My best wishes for this New Year to all who strive every day to achieve a more just world!

And now... After the excesses of December (with so much shine and velvet), in these first months we will need a fashion detox. Of course, with the arrival of a new year, new trends are also added. I give you 12 functional tips for this new beginning, we will not discard the old trends, but transform them. Take note of what represents you the most!

## 2. Leather in all forms and colours:

As for textures, the main representative of this 2020 will be leather or leatherette. Leather transcends all borders. It is played with the different variants that can be worked, from the stiffness, the level of brightness or opacity, the colours. Now they come with a new variation, these will not be worn in the typical colours such as black and brown, it will change your palette to any colour, especially if it is striking. We will also see them in few common garments such as pants, blouses, oversizes and much more.



## 1. Pencil skirts:

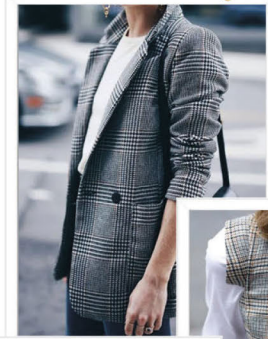
They were invented by Christian Dior in the 50s, he wanted to create a line of skirts that fit the woman's body and bring out the curves of the woman. The pencil skirt is characteristic for its length. Some measure below the knee, which don't make it too long or too short because otherwise it would lose its glamour. They can be used with a formal or informal look. This skirt can be seen with a more modern, completely reinvented air. First we must take into account the place where we are going to attend with her, so that in this way she determines our outfit and accessories.





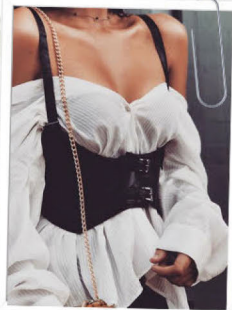
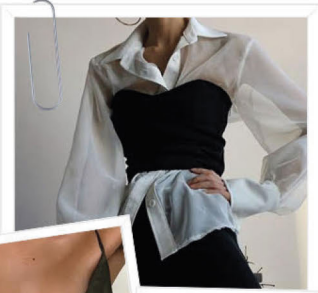
### 3. Prints:

Less traditional structures appear, combine with each other in the same garment or equipment, change the usual directionality of the lines and, in bicolour or unexpected colours, assume disruptive pretentious styles that generate a new discourse. We cannot leave logo mania behind, there are two ways to use it; in a single logo as it has been doing Balenciaga or in monogram as the double "F" of Fendi. Logo mania will not necessarily be seen as a status symbol as couture brands, but also in others as personal choice, such as Adidas, Row, or Nike sports brands.



### 4. Corset:

The sexiest and most chic trend. Together with the lace and gloves, they include pockets or ruffles, they emphasise eroticism and are used as a second skin, but also as a third (in overlap with other garments, on blouses and dresses). The effects of this garment are miraculous, it helps to maintain a good posture, lifts the bust and refines the waistband. It has multiple styles and you can recreate the look that best suits you: steampunk corset, pin up corset, under bust corset, brocade corset... it all depends on choosing the accessories, the combination with other garments and, in addition, taking into account the colour you are going to look that best suits you: steampunk corset, pin up corset, underbust corset, brocade corset... everything will depend on choosing the accessories, the combination with other garments and, in addition, taking into account the colour what do you want to wear.



### 5. Slouchy jeans:

Maybe at some point this summer the word "slouchy" has reached your ears. They are jeans of high shot but wide in the part of the hips, they become more tight towards the ankles. There is a basic rule to use it: mark waist. It is the key to success and the only way for such pants to favour. So use it with a belt that you like and wear it tightly. The second golden rule is to teach ankle. The good thing about

slouchy pants, is that you can wear it from morning to night and once you try it, its comfort, its versatility and how good they feel will eventually be conquered.



### 6. Padded textures:

Trends come and go and quilted garments for this season will be a must that will mark your style even to go to work. We will not only see it in coats and jackets as we are used to, but also in accessories. They will return strongly this fall! I must say that padded textures can give an air of elegance and sobriety.



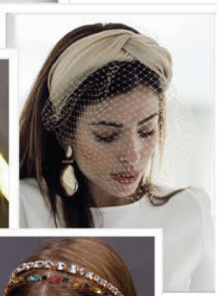
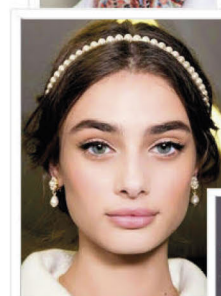


## 7. Ties:

In your neck, as a complement, in your hair (they will be the best accessory to decorate your ponytail can be worn simple or make a bun), in dresses, shirts, pants and even in shoes. The ties slip into our closet this fall 2020, imposing as one of the star trends of the season. Bet on them!

## 8. Headbands:

Accessories are a fundamental part of a good look, as they can help turn a simple hairstyle into a much more sophisticated and elegant one that you can wear to any event and look flawless. The headbands don't go out of style and in this year the voluptuous figures of velvet or fabric will be the ideal style. We also have the jewellery headbands, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Chanel, Valentino... they have taken this hair accessory making it a jewel and making us dream of princess looks, we will not stop seeing it in the street-style!



## 9. Feathers will invade us:

In suits, dresses, coats, pants, blouses, in a variety of accessories, from footwear to other smaller accessories such as jewellery, you can not only wear it in formal looks, now you can use it at any time, day or night. The most popular influencers and 'instagramers' already show off all these fashion trends in their social media, 'viralising' every garment and accessory that you will want to add to your closet. There is no excuse to run away from this trend!



## 10. Combat boots:

This type of footwear, which had its peak in the 90s, is worn both in winter and in summer. One of the options to combine it with long dresses, midi, maxi and even with shorts. The boots that coordinate perfectly with all the casual styling options of your closet, the greatest advantage of this shoe is its versatility.



## 11. Innovative metallised:

The silver metallic looks were protagonists in different proposals, the metallic fabric expands its colour palette with greens, blues and other shades that can be worn both day and night. A bold and fun proposal that comes from the hand of Céline or Chanel in garments such as skirts, shirts and dresses. Metallic accessories are a basic that resists being in time, a classic that looks great with different garments, you can use them with total looks, neutral clothes, pastel colours, with a sporty look and try to avoid prints.



## 12. Fashion berets:

They are the accessory of Parisian aesthetics, elegant, versatile and with a bohemian spirit and a little androgynous, the beret is a type of cap with not a few years of history. And although the beret was a symbol of revolutionary ideologies, they were identity and key piece for the icons of the 70s. In our days, the berets have become an object of desire and is an accessory capable of adding sophistication and style. A few simple jeans. There are many types of berets for women in the market. The knitted beret of wool or thick knit, embroidered, leather or crocheted and can be found in infinite colours. The trend has moved to the streets and promises to become a must have this season.

Some additional ones that you should take into account:

- The sleeves add volume and shapes.
- The overlays are worn in skirts that grant different modular lengths.
- Dotted prints achieve volumes and depths in the morphology of the clothes.

Change of look, renew the wardrobe, bet on a different haircut or incorporate an innovative colour are some of the customs to renew the image every next year. Many people choose

for a renovation, not only of interior and work objectives, but also of their external image to face the new year.

Encouraging to change the image and bet on a new look can be a fun exploration of the fashionista universe, also a good opportunity to get to know each other a good image is not only to look better but to feel more free, it allows us to find ourselves and be more comfortable with who you are. Style is something that you discover in yourself and that helps you dress your personality and show it to the world.

Remember that honesty with ourselves is one of the important points, so that "what you wear outside has a coincidence with what you have inside", seeing ourselves well makes us feel better. Your personal image is related to your way of be, your way of expressing yourself and your essence. Enjoy these first months, I'm sure they will be full of blessings and resounding success!

Xoxo... Be a Starlette  
Talar Artinian  
Be a Starlette



### Talar Zambakjian

Successful fashion stylist with a Master Degree in Business Administration. Despite her Lebanese and Armenian origins, this entrepreneurial woman has extensive experience in the Thai market thanks to her 10 years living in the Kingdom. She currently writes for Expat Life in Thailand under her personal brand Be A Starlette. She is one of the most important fashion and empowerment influencers for the women of 30 years old and up in the country.

For enquiries and for getting the stylist advice please contact her [@talarz](https://www.instagram.com/talarz) [@be\\_a\\_starlette](https://www.instagram.com/be_a_starlette) or email: [talar.beastarlette@gmail.com](mailto:talar.beastarlette@gmail.com)





# FEI ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP PATTAYA 2019

The Thailand Equestrian Federation makes history as host of Asia's first ever equestrian championship. The Federation Equestrian Internationale (FEI) Asian Championships Pattaya 2019 raised the bar of equestrian competition in Asia.

The grand opening ceremony was conducted at the stunning iconic field 1 of the Thai Polo & Equestrian Club, Pattaya. "FEI has set the highest standard for equestrian competition and we are proud to be given this opportunity to host the first FEI dedicated championships in Asia. It

is a privilege to be asked to organise this joyous event on the same level as the Asian Games featuring all three Olympic disciplines of dressage, show jumping and eventing.

This is an event we hope will be repeated on a regularly basis to bring the equestrian communities of Asia closer together and provide opportunities for our riders to shine and excel," said Dr. Harald Link, president of the Thailand Equestrian Federation.

An accomplished polo player, Dr. Link added, "FEI Championships Pattaya 2019 not only positions Thailand as a world-class equestrian destination and helps to elevate the standards of Thai equestrians to an international level, it also showcases our world-class event organisation and presents a great opportunity for riders to gain more experience, to prove themselves to the world and prepare for the 2020 Olympics."

Teams from 13 nations in Asia competed in the

tournament, which was held from December 1st-8th at the Thai Polo & Equestrian Club in Pattaya, a world-class competition venue and equestrian centre which upgraded its five main riding arenas and facilities such as a fully functioning horse hospital with attendant vets for the 9 day event. In addition, sponsor B. Grimm put up over US\$1 million to fly in over 60 horses from Belgium especially for the event. To get the competitive juices flowing, drummers







performed the traditional Thai drum battle at the opening ceremony. This was followed by a graceful national flag dance. The excitement continued as the athletes representing their nations rode in on dedicated BMW cars in a fantastic parade. The evening culminated with a gala dinner at which teams mingled and relaxed before the gruelling competition the following day.

H.R.H. Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya lent her kind support by gracing the opening ceremony and leading the Thai team in the competition. The princess then competed in the dressage category and clinched the first gold medal in the competition, an auspicious moment for Thailand and the FEI Asian Championships. "More than anything, I'm honoured that I got to witness the graceful performance of H.R.H. Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya in the dressage discipline. For any rider, participating in this championship is considered very prestigious," said Ingmar De Vos, president of FEI.

The tournament's finale was the jumping event on the afternoon of December 8 with Japanese Olympic show jumper Taizo Sugitani eventually winning the top prize. "I am very pleased to win at this historic tournament for us Asians," he said. "The FEI Asian Championships is a good opportunity for Asian athletes to develop and compete in the global arena. By participating in more events, riders get to hone the necessary skills that can propel them to win at major international events."

"Now that the event has come to an end, I can heave a sigh of relief," smiled Dr. Link. He also took the opportunity to thank his long-time supporter and co-founder of the Thai Polo & Equestrian Club, Mrs. Nunthinee Tanner, who is also vice president of the Thailand Equestrian Federation. "I would like to thank Khun Nunthinee for her support through the years. We started with a small piece of land and one polo field."

*"Now we have made history together. Also a heartfelt thanks to all our sponsors, who helped us achieve this wonderful goal."*







## THE AUSTRALIAN NEW ZEALAND WOMEN'S GROUP (ANZWG)

### Melbourne Cup 2019

On the 5th of November, no wind blew in Bangkok, except for a huge blast erupting from the Amari Watergate Hotel, as over 400 people joined together for the annual Melbourne Cup (MC) celebrations.

This year's amazing MC team was led by Khun Jentana Ngamkhiaw and Chona Broadman, along with Khun Neung's team from the Amari. Together they made this charity luncheon another success story for 2019.

*Proceeds from the MC will continue to go to ANZWG's scholarship and education projects, where every year over 100 young Thais, mainly from the rural sector are enabled to fulfil their dreams of improving their lives and those around them.*

None of this would be possible without all the generous and caring sponsors, including: 'Blackmores' Australia, 'Shrewsbury International School' Bangkok Riverside, 'Absolute You', 'Akala Villa', 'Capella' Bangkok, 'Cotton House Bangkok', 'Idsmed', 'Mandarin Oriental Bangkok', 'Thai Airways' and the many others who contributed to the hundreds of prizes that were won throughout the day.

The day officially begins at 9.30am. A flourish of amazing women arrive, along with a token of lovely men. Hats galore, outfits to die for, with the







air buzzing with excitement, elevators and escalators pour in the troops for one amazing day. This is seriously one day of partying in Bangkok.

On entering the Amari Ballroom, the all-girl band, "Unicorn" sets the tone, timbre and decibel level for the day. They are an amazing group, and people were dancing, before even settling at their places. The waiters dressed as jockeys are ready. The atmosphere is electric.

Things go quiet for the respective anthems, led by Thailand's national anthem, after which the two MCs, the Dibbayawan Brothers, Gary and Paul, get the ball rolling. The ANZWG President, Theresa Rayfield, welcomes the honoured guests, H.E. Australian Ambassador, Allan McKinnon, along with our co-patron Makiko Morita and plus our ANZWG co-patron from New Zealand, Christina MacPherson. Amid all the buzz everyone is welcomed.







The guests make the day... yes, they are wined and dined for hours, but they all exude fun. This year there we even had two tables of expats returning to join in the fun. As everyone arrive, bubbles and canapés are served, once in the ballroom, a succulent lunch is served (NZ lamb for the meat eaters), a selection of deserts followed by cheese, dried fruits and nuts... meanwhile the wines are flowing, as are the spectacles of the 'fashion on the field' beings paraded in front of us.

*The ambiance, noise, (DJ George and Unicorn) pageantry continue, along with the prizes, photos, dancing, all combining to make this a day to remember.*





# *Hong Kong Ladies' Group celebration*



*28 years is a milestone! Hong Kong Ladies' Group celebrated their birthday since its foundation in 1991.*







## *The pluses and minuses of having 50 dates in 2 weeks*

*by Stella*

*10 lessons learned from 50 dates (with 50 different people) in 2 weeks.*

I've been engaged twice. But I hadn't found the formula for true love. So I downloaded 5 dating apps and went on 50 dates in 2 weeks with many funny and sometimes scary incidences (including being given hash cookies and being limousine driven 2.5 hours to a private vineyard on a first date).

**Below are some of the lessons I learned and the stories behind them.**

But first of all, you might ask, how did I do it? And why?

It was 2013 when I broke off my 2nd engagement. I was freaked out because I didn't know who I really was. After reading *Eat Pray Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert (who had done something similar to go on a spiritual quest), I decided to go to Thailand and ended up staying 5 years; starting a business,

becoming an ambassador for Lorna Jane, having my products promoted by the Princess of Abu Dhabi and my business eventually sold to a private equity firm in Hong Kong for 7 figures.

So after a successful career and being single by choice, I returned to the dating game, I felt a bit more whole than I did when I broke off my engagement with my former doctor fiancé.

Except I wasn't.

My friends were all 'coupled' and I found myself eating dinner by myself most nights.

So I decided to do something about it. I downloaded 5 dating apps and went on a dating spree.

**This is what I learned in 10 lessons (5 positives and 5 negatives).**

### **Positives**

#### **1. Everyone you date is a teacher**

When you learn more about another, you learn more about yourself.

Have you been ever criticised by your mother about something and then found that you did it on someone else? You don't know that (and can't correct for it) until actually have someone else to do it on. And not everyone will tell you. The quiet boyfriend might just put up with it until they can't take anymore. But on the 48th date, I found someone who took me up on some of my 'mother issues' – i.e. doing



what my mother did which I ended up doing on others. How many 'potential husbands' did I scare off because I was doing my mother?

On the other hand, I dated lawyers, investment bankers, English, Brazilian's, Chilean's, German's, and even strippers and even writing this I feel a 'stereotype' of each in my head. But I found the stripper very business smart, people you expect to be boring were funny, some cultures shocking and some very spontaneous. It's like living many lives in many countries – even it for a short time.

## **2. Being yourself is not always the right thing – on a first date.**

One a first date with a German  
– I mentioned that I once had a gun put to my head (one of the later sagas involving my business life in South of Thailand). Being of a conservative type  
– it was a bit too much imagery to share

for him. Not that it would bother too many people, but one should be able to read their date and not just blurt things out because you are naturally a 'sharing' person.

Other times include sharing that you stayed at a friend's house just to see what it's like to live with a baby and being able to live out of one suitcase for 5 years to a high flying investment banker.

At least be wary of what you share until they really get to know you. First date impressions count and you want to be able to decide if there should be a second date.

## **3. Have a system to the dating process (which will help with any rejection).**

This sounds really unromantic, but there is a numbers game involved.

The reality is most people won't match. Sometimes you know on the first date. Sometimes the second or the fifth. I didn't find someone I really liked

until the forty-eighth date (and I didn't know until I dated them for 2 weeks). And I almost scared them away by putting drops of essential oils in his beer on the first date (to help him with the flu).

Would have some earlier dates been a match if we went to a third or fifth? I'll never know. But it didn't matter as there was the next fish to catch.

## **4. End the date well.**

Some strange things can happen on a date. For example:

- You got interrogated.
- One of you takes offence at something.
- You go for a drive and ending up at someone's private vineyard more than two hours away (with the obvious expectation from them

of something more on a first date).

- You find your date doesn't remember your previous 'chat' because they actually had a virtual dating assistant who converses for them online.
- You get fed 'hash cookies' and end up having to be saved by a friend because you are hallucinating.

Most men are well-intentioned (even if it seems a bit strange) but the ending shows respect but also allows you to cherish the moment. It allows you to open up for the next date without carrying any baggage over.

## **5. One can choose. Not just settle for someone because they are lonely.**

It's a "Hell yes!" Not a "Hell no!" If you don't feel it early, you won't ever feel it. You'll just justify.

I know I seem to contradict myself a little as you might not know till some dates. But you know whether you 'might' feel it later. So you give yourself the chance. But there are some people who are 'nice' but somehow you know you won't ever feel it with. And some people keep going and end up settling because it's better than being alone.

But for women, it is not difficult to get a date. So let's just go on and see.

## **6. Don't put them in the centre of your universe.**

Men don't like this. This is needy, clingy.

Think about cats and dogs. Cats don't need you, but if you're they'll take your affection. But they have their own priorities and life. You are not the centre of their universe. But they do love you too.

Dogs pine every minute you aren't there and make you feel guilty that you've neglected them. Many women are like this to men they are interested in. The man has his own priorities and jobs too. You are part of that, but not the only part. Don't make them feel guilty you aren't giving every bit of attention every minute of the day like a dog that wants a walk.







## 7. Assume they're into you.

Do you ever create the negative by thinking negatively? The slight frown, hesitancy, words which reflect doubt and decrease your attractiveness.

Assuming you are not attractive and they are not into you, will only make you less attractive and less likely to have good chemistry.

Assume they are into you until proven otherwise. And then, give them a bit more of a chance. You never know. Men often need more time to open up and process. For women, it can seem like a sprint (to find a soul mate), for men it might be a marathon.

## Negatives:

You will be disappointed. But be selective about what is a red flag and not. Disappoints are not always – “no never’s”. But some red flags include:

1. **Man-child.** Anyone who can't seem to get over 6-year-old dramas and behaviours and see everything as against them. By definition, this is a child. Not a man.
2. **He tells you upfront that “he doesn’t do relationships”, “I’m a loner” or “not looking to commit to anything”.** You can't change this man – even if you like him. Trust me, I've tried.
3. **Assume you're not the only one they're dating.** This is a tricky one. Men and women get this wrong. Until there's a conversation about being exclusive, assume you're not the only one they're seeing. Otherwise, you will not only be disappointed, but you might also be devastated.

4. **If you're not their top priority, your appointments are a ‘maybe’.** This is the same for girls and guys. It's an indication of their interest. This can be difficult if you're more into them than they are into you. But it gives you a guide.

5. **Stalkers exist, even if they aren't that scary.** You'll get texts from people you've broken from, they'll try to add you on Facebook, you'll get people who really want to get together with you even if you don't. For example, there was someone with whom I didn't feel any chemistry with but he kept calling me. I blocked him. Facebook. Blocked him. Instagram messages. Flowers at your house. Some people don't get it that you're not into them. There aren't really that many bad people out there and these types are actually mostly harmless, but don't be afraid to be direct and block them if needs be.

Eventually, after all, the dating and numbering and ranking and carrying on have its saturation point, you will have to decide which suitor fits you best. Determining which is right. How will you decide?

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*About the author: Stella trained as a radiographer in Sydney before deciding to quit and buying a one way ticket to Thailand. With some soul searching started a factory manufacturing natural skin care, growing the business and eventually selling it for a 7 figure sum.*

*She is now Managing Partner of Altru Group managing the day-to-day operations. While she is not working, she is in nature trekking the mountains, kayaking the oceans, getting stretchy on a yoga mat or cooking in the kitchen.*





Adrian Borg Cardona and Sathu Surasak hosted a fabulous Christmas party.





# DEVELOPING A MOVEABLE IDENTITY

by Carolyn Whitehouse

From the outside expatriate life can seem like a modern-day fairy tale. Weekends spend exploring foreign and exotic lands, living in large comfortable houses or apartments and being released from the chores of cleaning, can seem like paradise.

If you look closer though, the reality of expatriate life and relocating to a new country every few years is filled with uncertainty, self-doubt and vulnerability.

Interacting with a new culture or reintegrating into your home culture involves taking on new roles, building new relationships quickly and managing a whole range of emotions from tears to anger, fear to excitement and sometimes all of them in the space of a day. Building a new identity in a new location can be a daunting task but it's a skill that if mastered will enable you to make friends easily, become more self-assured and create a confident personal identity from which to navigate a constantly changing life, no matter where you are.

## Who are you?

How would you describe yourself? Are you young or old? Female or male? When questioned most people struggle to describe themselves. Some define themselves through their roles "I am an engineer", "I am a mother". Others describe how they feel about themselves through their relationships with other people, perhaps saying "I am a good friend". How we define ourselves, our "self", involves four key elements:

- The way we see ourselves
- The way others see us
- The roles we occupy
- Our relationships with significant others



In Bryson and Hoge's book "*A Portable Identity*" they suggest visually drawing your "self", in order to understand the balance of your roles and relationships. Are all your roles and relationships heavily work focused? Do you have a limited social network outside of work? How close or distant are these relationships?

## Moving on

Taking the time to complete this picture of your "self" before you relocate can provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities available to you in your new destination. Reflecting on your roles and relationships will help you identify what challenges you face in your new home? How will the culture of your new home be different from where you are now and from your "home" culture? Will there be differences in how people are valued? What is the etiquette around making new friends? What will stay the same? Doing research into the culture of your new home and then reflecting on the similarities and differences will help you identify any new challenges that you may want to be prepared for once you arrive. Being prepared for the new "norms" of your new home will allow you to develop strategies for managing them ahead of time. If for example the city you are moving to has serious traffic problems, then making the



decision to have your work, school and home close together will save a lot of frustration and possibly another move.

How will you maintain your close relationships with family back in your home country? Do you need to visit more often? What barriers will there be in maintaining the roles you currently have? Will you be able to work? Is your profession available? Will you need to retrain or perhaps up-skill yourself with a new language? What values are important to you? How will you ensure that you maintain those values in your new home? What issues might that raise for your children and for you as a parent? Thinking this topic through ahead of time helps to maintain the stability and security of your family even though your external environment is changing.

Does this relocation offer you the chance to discover a new culture and places? Could the culture teach you new ways of perceiving your being? What exciting new adventures can you have with your children? Looking for the positive experiences which you can have in your new home can keep you buoyant when the excitement of a new location is wearing thin, whilst advanced planning for activities and days out, can give you motivation to leave the unpacking and go explore!

What additional support will you need without the social network you have enjoyed up until now? Which charities, schools or community organisations do you need to access to find new friends? Where will you find your favourite



pastime? Do you need to develop a new hobby? Reflecting and planning for your relocation before you move will ensure that you make the most of the time in your new home so that at the end of your assignment you will leave with incredible memories rather than a suitcase full of regrets.

### A new you

As well as reflecting on the challenges and opportunities in your new roles and relationships, use your “self” diagram to reflect on who you want to be in your new home. Knowing who you are, your strengths and weaknesses, talents and needs can help you mentally prepare for the changes to come and give you a personal development plan, so you make the most of the opportunity to build a more secure, open and confident “self”.

### On your marks

Do you want to be more confident or have more friends? Sports personalities, coaches and performance psychologists know that mentally preparing beforehand for a race, speech or test improves a person’s performance on the day and the same is true for anything you want to change about yourself.





Your subconscious cannot distinguish between what is real and what is imagined, so using your imagination to “test drive” yourself in your new environment enables you to start the process of developing a “new you”. The great thing about doing this before you relocate is that your new friends or colleagues won’t know the “old” you, they will just see the confident person you are now.

Try this exercise to get the motivation to change. Close your eyes and sit comfortably in a chair, imagine a typical day where you are now. Imagine yourself getting up in the morning and going through your day. Notice how you feel at

different times in your day. Are you excited and happy to get out of bed? Do you look forward to meeting new people? Do you get curious or angry when things don’t happen the way you want them to? How do you feel at the end of your day? Now open your eyes and reflect on what you’ve noticed about yourself and how you feel. Write down anything you would like to change.

Now close your eyes again and this time imagine yourself in your new location. See, hear, taste, smell and touch as many new sensations as you can from your new home. Imagine yourself going through the same day but this time feeling and acting in the way that you want to. If you want more confidence, imagine yourself approaching new people with a big friendly smile, feel the confidence and relaxation in your body, see your new friends smiling at you as they listen to your confident introduction. Whatever it is that you want to change in your new home, imagine yourself doing it and really feel those emotions in your body. Repeat this as many times as you can every day until you relocate.

Relocating with families is a stressful experience but the more you can anticipate and prepare for what is to come the more confident you will feel, knowing that whatever comes your way, you can handle it!

*About the author: Carolyn Whitehouse (MSc, MBPsS) is a Coaching Psychologist based in Pattaya, Thailand. Any further questions or comments regarding this article can be sent to [crwhitehouse@gmail.com](mailto:crwhitehouse@gmail.com)*

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A Portable Identity: Park Publications, TX 78627







IWC lunch

International Women's Club of Thailand  
Annual General Meeting & 55th Anniversary Celebration Luncheon  
November 28th 2019  
Hyatt Regency Bangkok





# How journaling and meditation keep you sane

by Saree Jitta

**W**hen I said the word “journaling” people think of a princess diary, some sort of teen girls writing about her crush love story. In fact, it is a form of self-expression that can lift and empower people to understand they’re complex feelings and find humour with it. I never thought I could write, I mean I can write, but not like a blogger or like a writer. Then I started reading *The Five Minute Journal* from Tim Ferriss (recommended if you’re new to journaling) for over the past 3 years and it’s changed my life.

Let me give you a quick intro about what *The Five Minute Journal* look like. You start with;

## I am grateful for...

Write down 3 things that you’re grateful for in your life. Believe it or not when I first started writing this, I couldn’t think of one thing I am grateful for in my life. It took me a while to be able to think of what I’m grateful for. Most people might think of a big thing to be grateful for, but it could be as small as a smell of a coffee in the morning, or when you wake up today, you’re still breathing. Because there’re many people out there that have to sleep on a street with no clean food or water, even the roof over their head, or dying people in a hospital. Trust me there’re people out there who’s fighting to be where you’re right now. Working on your gratitude will

help you look at life in another perspective and being grateful for what you have in your life right now.

## What would make today great?

Write down 3 things that you want it to happen or could be any tasks that you want to get it done. Again, it doesn’t have to be big, it could as small as I’m not going to put any sugar in my coffee today, I’m just going to smile at my colleague. You want to set the tone of your day, what you want your day look like.

## Daily affirmations, I am...

Writing in a present moment as if it’s already happened. For example, I am exercising every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Or I am peaceful and grounded. When you say the word “I am” out loud every day, eventually it’ll get into your subconscious mind which is more powerful than our conscious mind. What you’re repeating to yourself every single day, eventually it’ll become automatic and it’ll happens.

## 3 amazing things that happened today...

Write down 3 things that you’re proud of or achieved. For example, I didn’t put sugar in my coffee today. Next week you’ll be more confidence to do a bigger task. Or I got a new project because I had the guts to talk to my boss. You need to be able to celebrate your small wins. The more you do that, the more you’re strengthen your brave muscle.

## How could I have made today even better?

Your day isn’t going to be perfect every day, that’s life. What matters is you’ve done your best and you can try again next day. Don’t beat yourself up if things don’t go your way, ask





yourself what have I missed here? How can I make it better tomorrow? It could be I'm going to add more veggies in my diet, or I'm going to watch my tones when I speak to my partner.

*"Whether you're keeping a journal or writing as a meditation, it's the same thing. What's important is you're having a relationship with your mind."*

– Natalie Goldberg

Journaling is another way of express your feelings. We're all have feelings and emotions as human beings. Emotions; E = Energy in motion. It's ok to have anger, fear or sadness. You just have to find a place to dump those emotions instead of bomb it at your partner or people around you. Try not to suppress it either, it's not healthy, eventually it's going to explode! Journaling allows me to express my feelings and emotions in a healthier way.

**However, if you're not good at writing, why not try meditation?**

I've started to meditate since I was little. I'm so grateful that I've been raised in a family who's shown me how to quiet my mind by meditation

practice. There're many different ways to meditate. Sometimes I just do breathing meditation, if I just want to be calm or being in a present moment. If I'm seeking for the answer, or I might do visualisation meditation.

Today I'll show you a simple and easy technique to kick start on your meditation.

1. Choose your mantra. A mantra is a word or phrase that you silently repeat to yourself during meditation. The purpose of the mantra is to give you something to put your attention on other than your thoughts. I like to use the words "Breathe in" when I inhale through my nose, feel my tummy swollen. "Breathe out" exhale through my nose, feel my tummy flatten.
2. Find a comfortable place to sit. It's best to find a quiet location where you won't be disturbed.
3. Gently close your eyes and begin by taking some deep breaths. Try taking a few "cleansing breaths" by inhaling slowly through your nose and then exhaling out through your mouth. After a few cleansing breaths, continue breathing at a normal relaxed pace through your

- nose with your lips gently closed.
4. Begin repeating your mantra silently to yourself without moving your tongue or lips. Focus on your breath.
5. Do not try to stop your thoughts or empty your mind. As a human being we have millions of thoughts all day long, running around nonstop. It's what we called "The monkey mind" it's normal for our mind to wander. Don't give your energy to the thoughts, simply bring your awareness back to your breathing.

If you're new to meditation try 5 minutes first. It's like you're training your muscles in the gym, it takes time, same thing as training you mind. But the more you practice the more you get better at it. My favourite free app to help you start your journey on meditation: Insight Timer. Headspace.

*"For him who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends; but for the one who has failed to do so, his mind will remain the greatest enemy."*





## TEMPLE RESPECTS *and gallery tours*

by Bea Toews

Over the past week I've revisited places I've enjoyed in Bangkok. One lovely day – temperature in the low 30's with a breeze and light cloud cover – a friend and I visited six different Wat's. That same week I visited two favourite art exhibitions and one new exhibition. In returns of time, energy and money, the galleries were more rewarding to me.

There is a Thai belief that it's good fortune to visit and pay respect in nine different temples in one day.

We planned to do that, starting at Wat Phra Kaeow and ending at the temple on the golden mount. There are over 70,000 Thai Wat's – more than banks which is some consolation to me – so finding nine near the most important Wat in Thailand was not hard.

With traffic being what it is, and crowds being what they are, we managed only six – three near Sanam Luang and three near Hua Lamphong. Wat Phra Kaeow was swarmed with tourists and costs a foreigner 500B to enter. No time to contemplate the stunning art work or carving. Shepherded through for money. Wat Pho was 200B and nearly as full and uninspiring, though I always love the Buddha's feet and the meditation walk dropping coins in bowls. Wat Arun was under construction again/still and as we couldn't climb it, we didn't go in. It would have been another cost in Baht. The ceramic insets are intricate and artistic but I've seen them before and didn't feel the need to go in, though my friend paid respect at a smaller shrine there.

On to the river ferry to Saphan Taksin, BTS to Sala Daeng and MRT to Hua Lamphong. The new metro lines were open so we went to the end of the line and returned to Mongorn Station and walked 200 metres to Wat Mongorn.

Very red, very Chinese and free to enter. Wonderful roof line. Back to the MRT to Hua Lamphong and a short hike to Wat Traimit of the famous golden Buddha. 50B, a steep climb and a museum to which entry was 200B. No thanks as I know the story of the hiding and discovery of the Buddha image. Back to the MRT to Sam Yan and again, 40B to enter the Wat Hua Lamphong Wat. No too many tourists as they are all busy feeding the cows there. And then I went home. I'm not Buddhist but my friend is. So she paid respects and I paid money to enter.

Compare this to the art forays. To BACC which houses at least three exhibitions at any time. It's free to enter. I saw a world class print exhibition and something called Brutal Art. The latter is interesting and not to my taste. Another day spent at MOCA which though difficult to reach, is spacious and cool and has a coffee shop and an eclectic selection of art when you get there. And the price of entry is the same for all nationalities. I am not too keen on the surrealists but the rest of the collection is food for thought.

And finally, the Bangkok Sculpture Centre. Again, a long hike but worth it. A private historical collection. It's a walk though the evolution of Thai sculpture. The classics are there but so are the moderns and it's free and empty except for a hushed groups of students.

I'm not for a minute suggesting that the average tourist would or should visit so many Wat's in a day: or try to visit three galleries.

What I am suggesting is that for peace, cool, quiet and calm, an art gallery might sometimes be a better bet than a Wat.

Happy travels – whichever you choose.





## WHY GRAB A GRAB?

by Bea Toews

**Y**ou live here. You have a bank account from which money can be drawn. You're tired of being told it's 500B to get to Silom – and the metre doesn't work. You're sick of a taxi pulling up, rolling down the window, considering your destination and saying “mai di”. You don't like taxis that smell of tobacco and beer. You don't like taxi drivers who take the long way around to gain an increased fare – and you don't know the city well enough to tell. You don't have impeccable Thai and can give muddled addresses. You don't have small change.

Are those not enough reasons to grab a Grab? It took me two minutes to set download the free App, another two minutes to link my savings bank account to Grab. Then two minutes to set up my home destination. Then I called Grab. Five minutes later, a car pulled up and my ride was waiting and off I went.

How did I know it was the car for me? I knew the license plate number. I watched his car approaching my address. Not only that, I knew how much the fare would be and I didn't have to have correct change.

The driver has GPS and a map on his phone. I have the same map on mine. He has my destination. I can sit back

watch the world go by, use my phone, chat to a friend and relax.

A few minutes after arriving at my destination, my phone pinged with a receipt for the amount of the fare that I had been quoted. I know, if it's heavy traffic, that there will be a surcharge. I know that before I get in the car and I am happy with that. Brilliant.

The most important thing is that the driver is accountable - and he knows it and he therefore behaves accordingly and is a credit to his company, his country and himself.

Why the Thai authorities do not enforce the fact that all taxi drivers are registered with Grab I do not know. Surely it would be good for the tourist industry in Thailand. This is supposed to be the Land of Smiles after all.

It may be more authentic to deal with recalcitrant and surly drivers, to muddle your way through a ride, especially if you are a tourist and have no idea where you are going, distances involved, the correct pronunciation, confident and at ease with the currency.

*But to arrive at your destination cool, calm and collected, grab a Grab.*





# Soi Nana

by Rie Atagi

Have you ever been to Sukhumvit Soi Nana?

The even-number side that leads to the dead-end of the Tobacco Monopoly. If you do not have a particular errand, it is not a street you would be likely to stroll along. However, that doesn't mean it is a quiet Soi (street). Rather this is a famous Soi (or infamous, should I say?) where one of major red-light districts in Bangkok exists near the Pak Soi (entrance of the street).

There is not much going on during daytime at Soi Nana. Street vendors are selling fruit and vegetables and people are eating noodles and one-plate dish at food stalls. A little busy but not that much different from other streets of Sukhumvit. Things gradually start moving in early evening for Soi Nana to become Soi Nana. Ladies in tight T-shirts and Thai woven salon skirts, presumably the uniform for massage parlours, are having Kao niyao (sticky rice) and Somtum (green papaya salad), soul food of Esan (Northeast region of Thailand), on the side street, getting ready for work. Vendors are now selling revealing dresses (I guess they are for



the ladies working on this street?), a single stem of roses (for customers to give a worker? Or someone waiting at home?) and big teddy bears (not sure who are the target customers for this one).

Most customers are men. Sometimes you see a couple but it is very rare to see a lady customer. On the other hand, workers are mostly ladies, or lady-look-like persons who are the entertainers. Men workers seem to





I haven't really walked around Sukhumvit past midnight, but certainly this must be one of the busiest soi's at this time.

I don't know what time Soi Nana goes to sleep, but it seems the Soi still hasn't woken up at nine o'clock in the morning. It is the street's cleanest time, after early-morning sanitation vehicle collecting last night's mess. Nylon-woven coasters are hung to dry on the side-street until they get wet again tonight. It is still morning, but there are some farang (foreigner) guys sitting on a bar stool at the counter facing to the street, with half-drunk beer bottles on their side getting lukewarm. There is not much to see on the street, but they seem to be fine with it. I have no idea if they are tourists or expats, and if the latter make a living. A couple of ladies leaning on their elbows idly, no intention of entertaining customers at this time, looking at their small screens of their smartphones. There is not much sound at this time, only the occasional engine sound of motorcycle going up and down the street.

take supporting roles such as cooking and carrying drinks.

Soi Nana doesn't sleep at night. It's busiest time is around midnight, 11 pm to 2 am. Traffic is heavy with people coming and going at Soi Nana. There is always traffic in Bangkok, but at this particular time zone, there shouldn't be any traffic. But you have to wait and miss the signal at least five times in order to turn into the Soi. Because people get out of taxis near the Pak Soi and an empty taxi trawls the sidewalk trying to find new customers. Also, drunken men or women cross the street randomly and you have got to be careful of not running them over. The music is on in full volume and you can feel the sound vibrate in the air. Animated laughter and screams are heard here and there. Neon is brighter than daylight. Ladies or ladyboys are standing a few feet apart on a shady part of the street, giving a meaningful look at potential customers. Street vendors are busy selling late night snacks for both customers and workers, including deep-fried insects with a sign in English "Do not take a photograph."

Boredom and decadence in drowsy morning sunshine. That's what it is. This is the street we had lived in for fifteen years. We raised our children for most of their lives on this street.

We didn't live in the middle of red-light district. Our apartment was nearly at the end of Soi, which was a quiet residential area, at least when we lived there. There was a small nursery across from our apartment where our two children attended for a few years. It took less than five minutes for even toddlers to walk to the nursery from our apartment. The nursery started at 8:30am, which was late compared to many schools' 7:30am start. We were not early risers and it was such a relief that we didn't have to rush in the morning. My husband's office was at the Southside of Asok and when you drove through the Tobacco Monopoly, you could get there within 10 minutes, rush hour or not.

You didn't have to worry about the traffic jam in commuting, which was bliss and luxury in Bangkok. So the apartment was an ideal location for us.





shouted, “why there are children here?”

Yes, I totally agreed that they looked out of place. But we lived there, simply going home at the back of the street. I shouted back at him in silence, “Why are you here where children shouldn’t be?”

When my daughter was around six year old, we were driving home after dinner. Watching ladies at work on the street, she exclaimed happily, “Mom, they were going to a party! I wish I had those sexy dresses.” (Yes, “sexy” was already in her vocabulary.) I lost it. I don’t want to write here how I reacted at her innocent but appalling comment. She was a very observant kid and before she turned to be ten, she was proud she could tell if a lady was a transgender or not. She explained to me in detail which body part to look at. What a great skill she had developed at such an early stage.

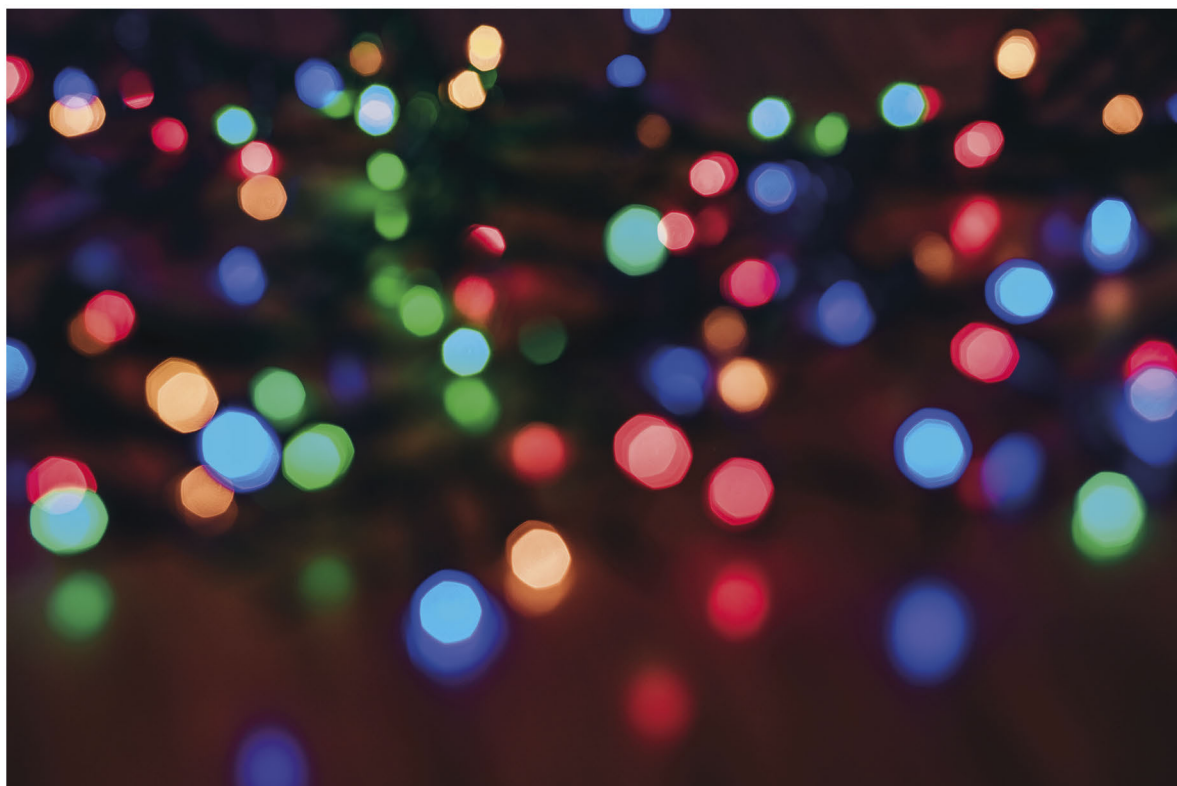
My son grew fast and he got taller than I when he was twelve. One day he was walking a few steps ahead of me and the ladies sitting on the bar stools called him in. “You wanna drink?” “You wanna come in?” To my relief, he didn’t respond or go in. Later he told me that happened all the time. I guess that’s why he kept on walking. He’s used to it. He’s got a headstart in that aspect of education.

We moved out Soi Nana a year ago. Not necessarily because of all the reasons

Well, at least in terms of commuting.

When we went out for shopping, restaurants, movies, playdates, hospitals, basically for everything other than commuting to school/ work, we passed through the red-light district of Pak Soi and every time I told myself that “this is not a street I should raise my kids, this is not a street they should grow up.”

One late afternoon, I was taking home a string of children, including my own. They were first or second graders. A young American in T-shirt and short pants, already tipsy,







I described above, but for a different reason. Where we live now is totally opposite to Soi Nana in characters. The residents call themselves “living in the bubble”. It is a gated community, clean with pavement and roadside trees. It is quiet and you hear the birds singing as a part of your life.

I think the density of population of joggers and dog-walkers is the highest in Thailand. A pair of trainers is a norm of footwear here, while Soi Nana presents a fusion of diversity, with a major trend of flip-flops and high heels. I should be happy now that my kids are growing up at a clean, decent and healthy street. And I am happy to see my son is having an age-appropriate (?) fun in this community.

But you know what? I miss Soi Nana.

I miss the drama it presents: People indulge in pleasure, real or empty, for a night. You know you will wake up sometime and once you wake up, you are bored, sliding into decadence again. You repeat this over and over, like it or not. It is not a story you learn in the textbook. It is the other side of story you may or may not learn in real life.



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# MINDSET

by Saree Jitta

**W**hen was the last time you attempted to lose weight (again), but it didn't work? "I've done everything all those experts tell me to do, go to the gym everyday but I still can't lose weight." "I've tried all the diets out there, but nothing seems to work." "I exercise hard and watch what I eat but I'm still fat, what did I do wrong here?" Any of those familiar with you? What if I told you that maybe it has nothing to do with you exercise and diet at all. None of those external factors, maybe it's your internal factors that have been holding you back.

I believe everything starts from the mind. If you have the right mindset, you can achieve anything in life not just in fitness.

*"What you think you become." – Buddha*

According to Carol Dweck (if you want to know more about fixed and growth mindset. I recommend a book from Carol titled *Mindset*) we can differentiate the fixed and growth mindsets across these traits.

**Fixed mindset** – creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over. You attach yourself to the outcome, if I don't

succeed people will look at me as if I'm stupid, therefore I'm a failure. I mean it's good that you have a goal. You need to know why you have to wake up at 5am every day to go to the gym, if not then what's the point of doing it anyway? You can eat anything in front of you, because that's probably doesn't matter right? But try not to attach yourself to the outcome, instead focus on the process, the learning part. It's more about a journey, not a destination. A few phrases of fixed mindset will be like;

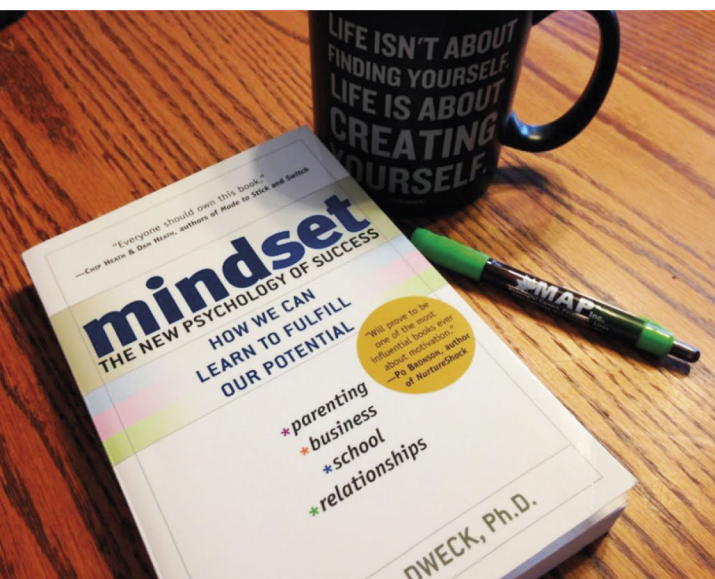
- Failure is the limit of my abilities.
- I'm either good or I'm not.
- When I'm frustrated, I give up.
- I stick to what I know.
- I can't do it; this is too hard.

**Growth mindset** – everyone can change and grow through learning. If I don't become success, I can always learn from it so I can better myself next time. Have a practice mindset which is don't get high or low on results. Even though you don't live up to your standard is just another practice at you developing a better version of yourself. A few phrases of growth

mindset will be like;

- Failure is an opportunity to grow.
- I can change and I can learn anything I want.
- I'm inspired by the success of others.
- I like to try new things.
- Look at challenges as opportunities.

Now if you want to give it a go again on weight loss, try these few approaches. Follow these 3 simple steps to help you achieve on your fitness goal, or any goal in your life.







prepping meal day, because when you're busy and tired, cooking would be the last thing on your mind. And we know that when we're tired and hungry, we can just grab anything in front of us.

### 3. Find someone who can keep your accountability.

It could be your partner, friends, a community or a coach. Because in some days you're going to want give up and your friends will help push you a little bit and trust me the journey is more fun when you have someone doing with you or support you. Because when you reach your goals, you guys can celebrate it together.

Remember it doesn't take you overnight to gain weight, it takes weeks, months, even years to put on weight. Same thing, you're not going to lose weight overnight. There's a process, it takes time but I promise once you develop a good habit and consistency, you'll live a happier and healthier life in a long run.

### 1. Find out your why?

What is your WHY? Why do you want to lose weight? And I'm not talking on a surface here, I'm talking on a deeper level. I want you to sit with yourself and dig deep. But if you're looking for a quick fix, I'm sure you can look online anywhere on exercise and diet tips. The reason I want you to find your WHY, because along your journey you're going to fail and your WHY will get you back up, it'll remind you why

you've started this journey on the first place.

### 2. Now you have a goal and your why, that's great! However, without strategies or actions, you won't reach your goal.

Let's say you want to lose 5lbs. in 4 weeks. How are you going to do that? You might have to go to the gym 3 times a week, mark on your calendar! You might have to eat outside less and start doing your meal prep. Maybe take Sunday as your

#### About the author:

*Saree Jitta has helped women love themselves again and gain their confidence back. You'll learn to have discipline in exercise and have a balance diet. At the same time you'll get connect with your mind, body, and spirit. Through her coaching service hundred of women are truly transformed inside out. Get stronger psychically and mentally. If you want to become a better version of yourself. Visit [sareefitness.com](https://sareefitness.com) contact [@sareefitness.com](https://sareefitness.com) or follow her inspiration on IG [@sareejitta](https://sareejitta)*





# A small room in the corner of Bangkok

by Nina Wibowo

I cannot shake one particular thought out of my mind. Last night my friends and I discussed about the concept of home. A simple sounding word yet it has a deep meaning. For some people, home is where they grow up. One particular place that's been there witnessing every step of their journey. Some others think that home is a place they discover themselves. A place they feel belong.

I shake my head. Both concepts are not quite the same as I feel. Suddenly I feel "homeless".

My mind tries to find another concept.

Some people say home is a person. Parents, family, loved ones, pets. But no, not for me. I learned the hard way when I lost my "home" years ago.

Ah, I have to have a home. I need to know now.

In despair, I force my mind to go back to where it all began. A small village on the slope of a mountain in a SE Asian country was my first stop. I was born and grew up there. It witnessed my every step until I hit eighteen and it was time to leave the nest. I smile remembering my childhood and all the shenanigans I did. The troubles I caused. I was very happy. Not a single care of the world. Yes, maybe that place really was my home.

Then my mind train stops in the next destination: a small island surrounded by beautiful beaches. The first time I lived on my own and where I found out that life was not always rainbows and unicorns. It built me into becoming the person that I am today. Oh wait, this was home too.

Even more confused, I run and run through my



memory lane.

I left my country and arrived in Bangkok for my new job almost two years ago. Ah, it felt like only yesterday I stood in line nervously waiting for the immigration officer to stamp on my brand new passport.

Ever since, my journey has been amazing. I rented a small studio apartment far away from where I work. A safe beacon in the corner of a concrete jungle. And every second of it is amazing.

How come I have so many homes? What do these places have in common? The realisation hits me. It is me. Home is where I am because I make myself at home wherever I go.

I feel at home when I travel. When I sleep overnight at airports because of long connecting flights. When I visit

my family. When I stay in a budget hostel in a foreign country. Or when I sit on a bench in Lumpini Park on sunny days.

And when I get back from my travels, the small room in the corner of Bangkok awaits me.

*About the author: Nina is a new member of Bangkok Women's Writers Group and a new expat in Bangkok.*





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Tarica Phung, Class of 1997, Owner Kinn Home, Texas



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