

# EXPAT LIFE

## IN THAILAND

April / May 2019

lifestyle . travel . education . nutrition . health . tourism . retirement . relationships

The EU and French  
Ambassadors to  
Thailand on record

Sri Lanka uncovered  
Malta – Crossroad to history

The Cameron Highlands in  
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Bangkok  
air

Meet the  
Principal  
I love  
Singapore

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP  
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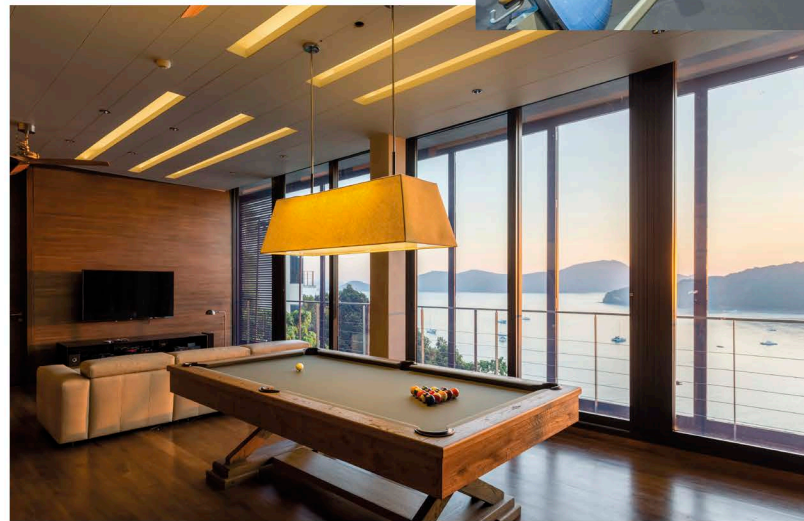
# Sports Engineering And Recreation Asia (Seara)

Sports Engineering And Recreation Asia (Seara) has been playing an important support role to the hospitality and real estate sectors for two decades. Seara specialises in the planning, supply, and installation of international standard sports, recreation, and fitness amenities to resorts, real estate projects, and home buyers.

Beginning in 1991 from its Bangkok base, Seara now has nine offices in seven countries in Indo-China and South Asia in order to be close to customers and provide unrivalled customer service. Technical support, design, repairs, and warranty service is also available for acrylic, grass and clay tennis, futsal, indoor and outdoor multi-purpose courts, putting greens, landscape grass, squash courts, playgrounds, jogging trails and home and commercial fitness and specialty surfacing.

In the hospitality business recreation and fitness amenities are important capital assets and are also must haves to create guest satisfaction. Branded properties especially require international standard indoor and outdoor products that meet specific athletic association certifications. Seara uses world class athletic surfacing brands such as Plexipave, ACTGlobal, Prestige, Rephouse, coupled with proven localised construction and installation techniques. Fitness in particular is now especially integrated into many concepts with near unlimited design possibilities.

One particular area in which the technology for hospitality installations has been changing rapidly is in synthetic rubber based fitness flooring. The utilisation of laminated manufacturing and computer aided design and cutting techniques from Rephouse coupled with a mix of new and used coloured EPDM rubber has proven to be a vastly superior looking and wearing solution over older, flammable, odour prone, SBR rubber floor tiles. The new

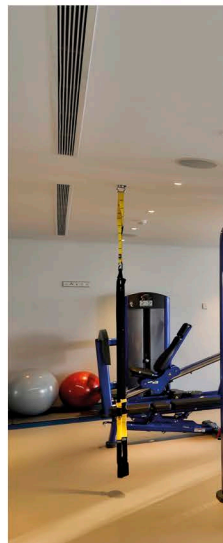


designs are near seamless, easy to install, allow for endless design possibilities and clean easily.

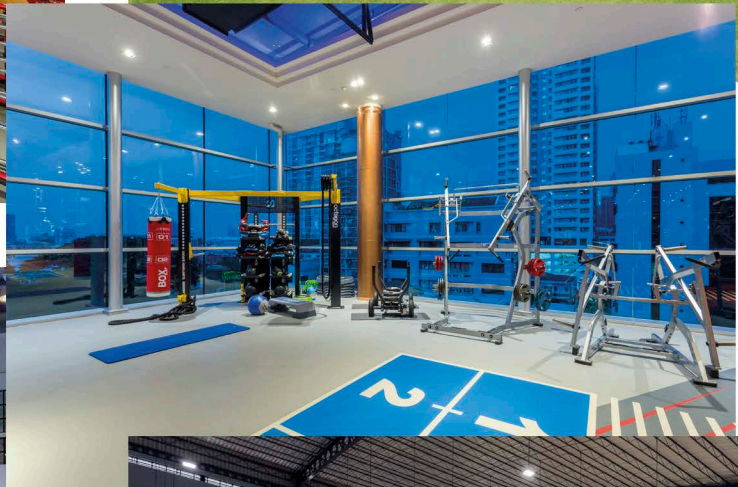
Seara is the authorised distributor of Life Fitness, Hammer Strength, Escape, Octane, Balanced Body, Power Plate, Sci Fit, Torque, Impulse, Stex, and other leading brands of fitness equipment. Seara stocks spare parts for everything it sells. Its technicians are fully trained to repair and maintain the brands it sells.

Life Fitness is the largest fitness brand in the world. The company is a division of Brunswick Corporation and includes brands like Hammer Strength, Sci Fit, and the Brunswick Active Recreation products of Brunswick Pool tables, shuffle board, Foosball, Ping Pong, golf putting greens and other premium products that make a family games room, man cave, high end lounge or restaurant truly unique. Brunswick tables are synonymous with the precision and craftsmanship a lifetime guaranteed piece of furniture requires.

Seara is a trusted amenity planner, supplier, and installer that stands by its work to provide the best in customer satisfaction.









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BANYAN TREE  
BANGKOK

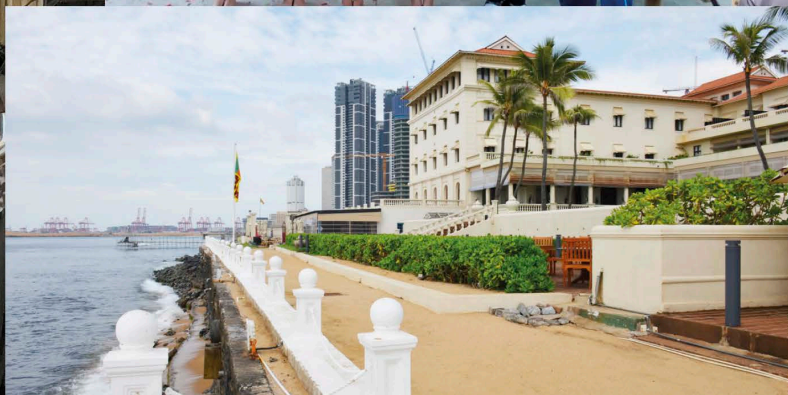
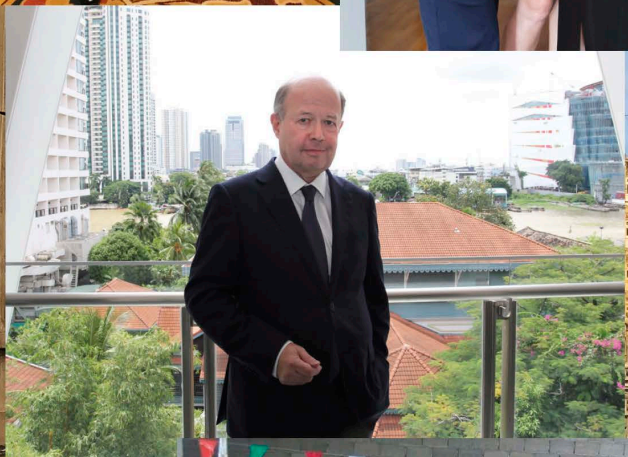
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# CONTENTS

## FEATURE

- 8 The French Ambassador
- 14 The EU Ambassador
- 20 Women in Leadership
- 26 Meet Inés Caldeira
- 120 Life in a Soap Opera
- 142 Soccer player to Chef de cuisine
- 144 The Poi Yai Baan
- 160 April Fools Day

## TRAVEL

- 34 Malta – Crossroads to history
- 42 The Cameron Highlands in Malaysia
- 46 A very 'Langhe' week
- 50 Hiking in the Caucasus
- 54 Sri Lanka Central
- 62 Will Sri Lanka be a colony again?
- 66 I love Singapore
- 70 My orchid fever
- 126 Destination wedding
- 138 The road to Khe Sanh

## EDUCATION

- 76 Meet the Principal
- 82 Teaching in Thailand

## NGO

- 88 Inspiring child led change

## MEDICAL TOURISM

- 162 Medical tourism in Thailand

## HEALTH

- 94 Bangkok air
- 98 Yoga – an ancient remedy
- 101 Detoxing your way through the Land of Smiles
- 110 Travel and your gut
- 112 Mind/body healing
- 117 Hope and inspiration

## FICTION

- 106 Bangkok Madam

## EXPAT LIFE

- 114 Five tips for networking
- 156 6 years and still counting

## WOMEN'S GROUP

- 130 SWEA
- 134 Lights... camera... action!
- 136 In the spirit of the season
- 162 IWC

## FASHION

- 148 Fashion with Talar

## RETIRING TO THAILAND

- 152 Life in Thailand is a balancing act

## EVENTS

- 164 Social pictures





# The finest quality beef

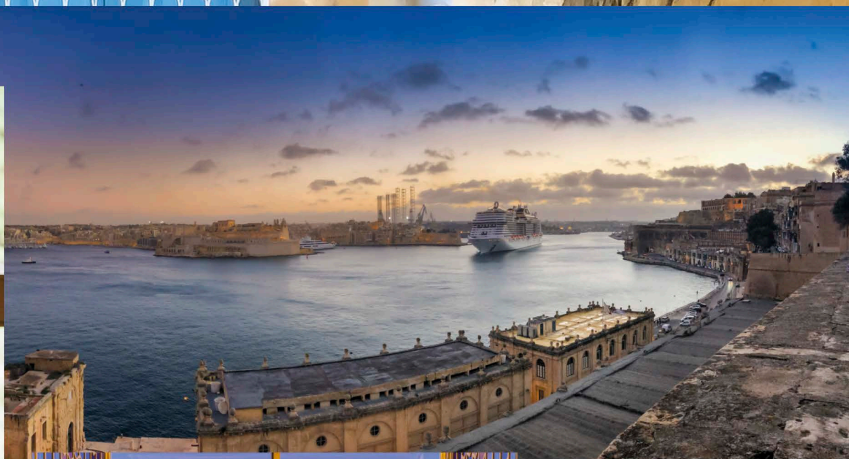
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# The French Ambassador to Thailand: H.E. Mr Jacques Lapouge

*by Jocelyn Pollak*

33 years, the number of years ago that King Narai of Siam sent an Embassy to France. 33,000 people, the number of estimated French nationals residing in Thailand. 3 months, since Monsieur Jacques Lapouge became officially the French Ambassador to Thailand. It would seem that the number 3 was quite the theme of my March meeting with the French Ambassador to Thailand. From the wellbeing of the French community in Thailand, to education, to economic diplomacy, our conversation ran the gamut. 2019 is poised to be a very exciting anniversary year for relations between these two regional leaders.



Mr Lapouge began his career in diplomacy in 1983. After completing a year of military service, some time in business school and then moving on to the National School of Administration in France, he "...chose to pursue foreign affairs and has never regretted it."

After his first posting in Ethiopia, the Ambassador served France in countries like Malaysia, South Africa and Sweden, and worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as at the President and the Prime Minister

offices back home in Paris. This is his first appointment to Thailand. The Ambassador is excited about this assignment for several reasons. "I'm looking forward to this posting, of course, for the most obvious reasons. Thailand is a beautiful country in so many ways. The people are welcoming and friendly and the rich culture is wonderful." But more importantly, as he said, "many people don't realise the economic power of Thailand. People often think it's all about tourism but Thailand is the 26<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world." 2019 will also prove to be an exciting year for all Ambassadors as Thailand will experience some major political events including an election and the coronation. Add to that the ASEAN chairmanship rotating to Thailand this year and it's certain to be a year to remember for all in the diplomatic sphere.

With so many French people making Thailand their permanent or temporary home and nearly 800,000 French tourists visiting the Kingdom each year, it's the responsibility of the Embassy and the Ambassador to look out for the wellbeing of their







in Thailand. After arriving in Thailand 6 months ago, he did what he does in all countries that he's posted to; he got a (hybrid) car and went on a 10 day road trip to get to know his adoptive home. In December of last year, Mr Lapouge took a self-driven trip and visited several provinces in the centre of

citizens while they reside or travel in Thailand. There are currently 13,000 French nationals registered with the Embassy, only about a third of all

legal residents. While it is completely up to each individual citizen to decide whether they would like to register or not (it's by no means a question of legality), the Ambassador encourages people to do so in case of emergency. In the event of, for example, a natural disaster such as a flood or tsunami, the Embassy will be able to assist its citizens with much greater ease if they are registered. "Thailand is a safe

country which is one reason why it's so attractive for French people. Registering with the Embassy is free and easy and it allows us to help our expats and their families more if something goes wrong."

Promotion of tourism between these two nations is also on the agenda of the current Ambassador. Interestingly, Thailand and France are about the same size in both population and area. Plus, as Mr Lapouge pointed out, "Thailand also has one of the great cuisines of the world, like France." Thailand is a very attractive location for tourists worldwide, nearly 40 million in 2018, and with 800,000 of them being French, it's no surprise that the Embassy has tourism on their radar. Even the Ambassador has had a taste of tourism

Thailand. The Ambassador would also like to promote travel to France for Thai people. Right now, there are about 70,000 Thai people who travel to France every year and through various efforts, the French Embassy hopes to increase that number.

Both France and Thailand are known for having very rich, albeit very different, cultures. The French embassy is doing a lot to encourage Thai people to learn and experience more with regards to French culture. Food festivals and art gallery exhibits are just some of the many opportunities for people in the Kingdom to learn more about France.



*Courtesy of The French embassy*





exchange is very important for the future of Franco-Thai relations.

Besides all the human elements that touch the day to day lives of French citizens residing or travelling to Thailand, the Ambassador was eager to discuss France's close economic relationship with Thailand and his goals for economic diplomacy during his Ambassadorship. Both countries are economic strong holds located in the

"We want to be one of the players in the field of culture", said Mr Lapouge. There's a beautiful book titled *Made by Thai* which was supported and organised by a French team to feature contemporary Thai artists. Released in February, it's a fantastic example of cultural collaboration between these two nations.

The team at the Embassy takes this cultural initiative seriously and goes so far as to open the architecturally stunning Ambassador's private residency on the Chao Phraya river once a year for the public to see. As one of the oldest diplomatic residences in Thailand, the shuttered house, which was constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, is an enduring reminder of the Franco-Thai relationship.

One of the most well-known outlets for French culture is the Alliance Française, which the Ambassador explained just opened a brand-new building in Bangkok not far from Lumpini Park. AF has been operating in Thailand since 1912 and is currently under the patronage of H.R.H. Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. With branches around the country in Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, they are continuing to promote not only French culture but also language and history. In the new 4000 square metre building, there is a cinema, café, library and bookshop. Parking is free and for those who aren't driving, the location is quite convenient near the Lumpini MRT station on Witthayu Road. AF has over 100 years of experience teaching French and welcomes nearly 5,000 students each year in Thailand.

Continuing on the topic of education, Mr Lapouge discussed a bit about the educational ties between his home country and Thailand. Outside of learning French language, there are many opportunities for Thai students to study abroad in France. There are currently around 600 Thai students in France, 100 of whom are attending universities on some form of scholarship from either the French institutions themselves or various other sources. There are also quite a few French students attending classes at the top universities in Thailand. The opportunity for shared academics and cultural

centre of their respective regions and as such, have many possible areas for collaboration.

Last June, before Mr Lapouge was appointed, General Prayut Chan-ocha travelled to France to meet the French President Emmanuel Macron and discuss economic relations. General Prayut returned to France again in November to observe Armistice Day. An invite has also been extended to President Macron to visit the Kingdom. One of the Ambassador's aims is to continue the positive momentum that these meetings have generated for the economic benefit of both nations.

"Most great French companies have operations in Thailand", commented Mr Lapouge. Whether its consumer goods, agriculture, manufacturing, transportation or technology, French companies have found a stable and prosperous adoptive home in Thailand. If you look in any high-end mall, you can see French luxury goods. Go to a nice restaurant and the menu will boast some great French wines. Even the cheese section of your local grocery store is evidence of the strong trade relations. Supporting the continued growth of imports and exports is a high priority for the Ambassador.

Soon, there will likely be even greater collaboration between these nations as the French are bidding on several large-scale infrastructure projects that will change the face of the Kingdom. One such project on which a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed by Airbus and Thai Airways is a joint maintenance and repair centre at U-tapao airport outside of Pattaya for all types of wide body aircraft. Upon its completion, it will be the most advanced maintenance repair and overhaul centre in Asia Pacific and one of the most efficient in the world.

Mr Lapouge and his team have a lot to look forward to in the upcoming years as the new Ambassador settles in to his post. With so many social, educational, diplomatic and economic projects on the horizon, may this 333<sup>rd</sup> anniversary year of Franco-Thai relations be auspicious for all involved!



## Nadi Shodhana Pranayama (alternate nostril breath)



thumb. Inhale slowly and deeply without force only through the left nostril. Cover the left nostril with your ring finger and pause for a second. Release the right nostril and exhale slowly and completely through the right nostril. Cover the right nostril, pause for a second, then release the left

always healthier than mouth breathing.

Neti (nasal cleansing), is one of the six Hatha yogic purification techniques, which are essential in maintaining a healthy body and mind. For Neti you need a special neti pot. Use lukewarm saline water to clean the nasal passage and the sinus cavity to prevent viral infections and to help cure chronic sinus problems. This practice has instant benefits. It is very effective for people who suffer from allergies, stuffy nose, sinusitis, and asthma. It not only cleans your facial muscles and gives your face a glowing and radiant skin, it also clears your mind and smoothes away mental stress. It can be done, in the morning or evening according to your need. Neti is a safe and simple practice and extremely beneficial to your overall health and has no side effects. For the first time it is recommended to do it under the guidance of an experienced yoga teacher. Afterwards it is safe and you can do it alone at home.

by Sanjiv Chaturvedi, Co-founder  
and Director of Divine Yoga  
[www.divine-yoga.com](http://www.divine-yoga.com)

**Precaution:**  
People with high blood pressure, reactive quick temper, heart problems, acidity, ulcer, hyperthyroid and post-surgery patients must refrain from this practice.

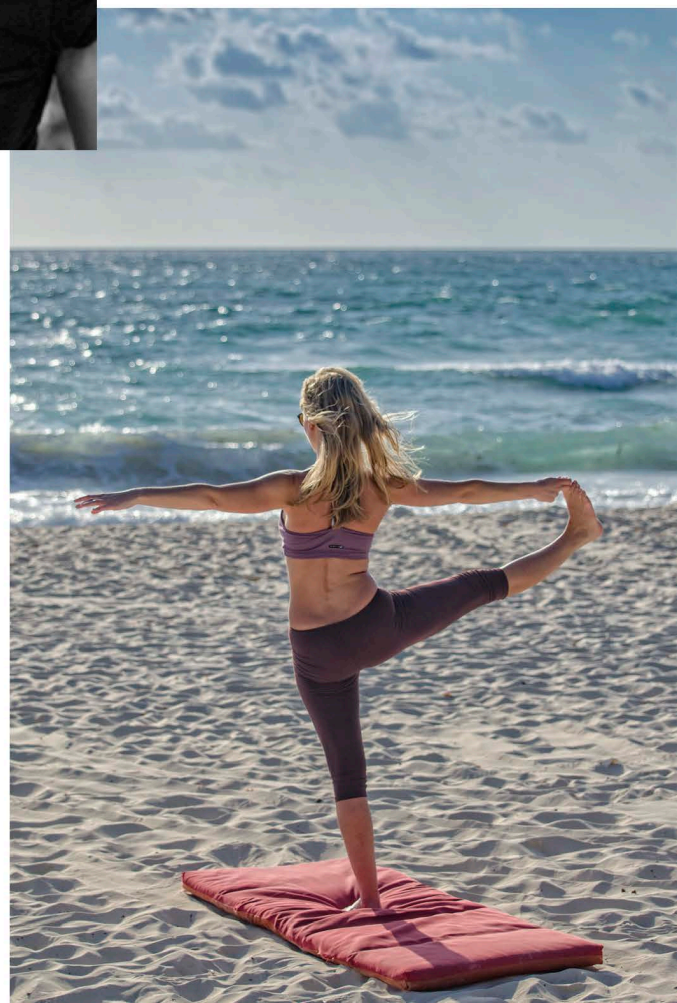
**Practice**  
*Nadi Shodana* (alternate nostril breathing). This is the most effective and important yoga practice among all. The whole purpose of yoga is to perfect this practice. To perfect means to make our breathing slow, smooth, rhythmic and long. This practice also recharges each and every cell including the brain cells. It cleans our nerve passages as well. 'Nadi' means nerves through which prana and the blood flow and 'Shoda' means cleaning. It works like a vacuum cleaner, cleans our nerve passages and removes blockages from our bloodstream and heart. This practice is not only instant but also has long-term effects. Through this practice you can slow down your breathing to 6-7 breaths permanently. The less dirty air you inhale the better.

Sit upright and close your eyes. Place your right index and middle fingers at your eyebrow centre and cover your right nostril with your right



nostril and exhale slowly and completely. This constitutes one complete breath. Practice for 5 to 10 minutes in the morning prior to breakfast or before going to bed but not right after meals. Precaution: There is no precaution. Everyone can do this practice even if you have some other health issues.

Every day before going to bed do abdominal breathing long and deep with the help of your abdominal muscles to improve your lungs capacity for better respiration. Remember in general nasal breathing is





# Detoxing your way through the land of smiles

By Katherine Kiviat, MS, HC

**L**iving as an expat in Thailand one can feel like they are living in the lap of luxury with the large variety of cuisine, inexpensive massages and facials, and easy access to some of the finest beaches in the world. But it can also feel claustrophobic at times, particularly when the pollution levels are at their highest. Bangkok being the concrete jungle that it is, we are exposed to both manmade and natural toxins on a daily basis – regularly sprayed pesticides, exhaust fumes, old copper pipes, plastic water bottles, to name a few. On top of this, our senses are constantly being over stimulated by video screens in the BTS and on bulletin boards, loud noises from endless construction, wifi, and the smells/fumes from street food stalls. Many of the chemicals we are exposed to both inside our homes and outdoors contain endocrine disruptors – meaning that they can interfere with our hormones leaving us feeling less than our optimal selves.

## Love your liver!

Constant exposure to nasty chemicals such as endocrine disruptors, make it harder for our livers to do their jobs and can wreak havoc on our bodies. Everything we eat, drink, breath or apply to our hair and bodies goes through our liver. Any substances the body deems as toxic will be managed by our livers and not without consequence. In order for our bodies to filter out the toxins we are exposed to daily, our liver needs to be in tip top shape. The liver



is an amazing organ! Think of it like the captain of a ship. The liver rules all metabolic processes in the body and helps us convert the food we eat into energy. It aids digestion and hormone health, removes toxins from the body, is our storage tank for vitamins and minerals, helps us fight off infections in the body, helps regulate our blood sugar and plays a key role in the regulation of blood clotting. It helps us process all the alcohol we drank the night before and it helps us break down all the toxins from the pollution in the air. Taking care of your liver helps to prevent disease in the future.

## What is your toxic load?

Exposure to endocrine disruptors (mentioned above) are found both inside and outside of our homes and can cause a wide array of symptoms one might not expect such as weight gain, insulin resistance, and headaches. Exposure to such toxins both internally internal and externally, our genetics, and nutritional status all affect our toxic load.

Toxins can affect us in many forms:

- Medications
- Heavy metals
- Pesticides
- Cosmetics & toiletries

- Carpets & furniture
- Stress
- Parasites
- Unhealthy mental states
- Not spending enough time outdoors in nature (think about taking walks in the park or hiking in the woods).
- Isolation
- Overstimulation from screens

Signs and symptoms that your liver needs some attention:

- Fatigue with sleep disruption
- Mood disturbance (depression, anxiety, anger)
- Muscle aches and joint pains
- Weight gain & water retention
- Infertility
- Lack of libido
- Headaches with neck and shoulder pain
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)
- Bloating and/or gas after eating
- Body odour or bad breath
- Canker sores and/or acne

## But what can we do to protect ourselves?

The fact of the matter is that most of us spend the majority of our time inside, primarily in our homes where we actually have the most control over our environment.





The air we breath, what we clean our homes with and what we choose to put in and on our bodies is our choice. “Metabolic detoxification” is a term used to describe the physiological process of making chemical compounds, hormones, and toxicants less harmful. There are certain foods and nutrient sources you can incorporate into your diet to make sure that you’re helping your liver to function at its best. A little help now will go a long way. Give your liver a break by eating organic foods when possible, drinking filtered water, using glass instead of plastic to store food, and choosing safer personal products and house cleaning items. Your pets will benefit too!

The liver detoxifies your body through two phases and it is important to support both phases equally. Otherwise it is possible to do more harm than good. During phase one, free radicals are generated which can damage the liver cells if there are insufficient levels of antioxidants present. Consuming sulphur-rich foods such as garlic, onions, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, and eggs can help your body produce the master antioxidant, glutathione. And that will help protect your liver from free radical

production. Lemon zest can support detoxification enzymes here as well.

During phase two of liver detoxification, toxins bind to amino acids and other compounds converting them into a form that allows them to be gathered and discarded safely through urine and the small intestine. Foods that can help with this part of the process include cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, bok choy, cabbage and Brussel sprouts. Eating fibre rich foods will assist in detoxing your liver by binding to toxins and escorting them out of your system. Flax seeds are a wonderful source of soluble fibre that are beneficial for removing unwanted oestrogen as well. Chia seeds, beans, quinoa, oats, and sweet potatoes are all great choices for adding more fibre to your diet. It is important to detox slowly and carefully as to not do more damage than good. A nutritionist can help you do this successfully.

## Eat organic!

Although the choices are limited in Bangkok and eating organic is definitely more expensive, research shows that eating organic when you can definitely helps. There have been several studies on the effects of eating organic foods verses non-organic.

One study shows that after eating a diet of mostly organic foods for only one week, the levels of pesticides found in urine samples went down by 90%! Finding authentic organic food in Bangkok can be a challenge, so I find it best to try and follow the Clean 15 and Dirty Dozen list which is updated annually by EWG. Information can be found on this website: <https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/dirty-dozen.php>.





## Eat a good quality protein but not too much

We all need adequate protein, but eating too much of it or poor quality meat and fish can put more strain on the liver. Choose wild-caught fish or grass-fed meats and stick to about a palm size amount with each meal instead of making it the larger portion on your plate. Eating organic liver (beef, chicken, goose and duck are all great choices) can actually help your own liver in the detoxification process as well. Paleo Robbie is the best online source I have found for grass fed meats and wild fish. El Mercado also sells their meats and seafood outside of the restaurant.

## Glorious greens

Eating a diet rich in bitter greens such as arugula, kale, watercress, dandelion root, collard greens, Swiss chard, and mustard greens is extremely beneficial to helping detox your liver.

Adding in herbs and spices such as cilantro, dill, parsley, ginger, turmeric, and rosemary are also a great addition to your detox plan!

Beets and globe artichokes can be used for both liver protection and regeneration, so don't forget these colourful additions to your diet. Eat

the rainbow! The more colours you can include in your diet, the happier your body will be.

## Useful supplements:

- Vitamin C
- B Complex
- Zinc
- Magnesium
- Selenium
- Glutamine
- Vitamin A
- Vitamin E

## Botanicals:

- Milk thistle
- Curcumin
- Dandelion root

\* It is important to work with a professional when supplementing with vitamins and minerals to make sure that you are taking the right dosage. Treating yourself by guessing or looking at the internet can be harmful to your health.

## Foods to limit:

We all know that we should be avoiding these foods, but starting slow with small steps can bring the biggest changes to our health.

Coffee – can be replaced or mixed with Teechino or Dandy Blend. I love

Teechino's dark roast tea – it tastes like coffee and can actually be combined with coffee while weaning yourself off of caffeine or just to help reduce the amount of caffeine daily. You can buy it from iHerb.com

Alcohol – try reducing your intake to one glass less each night or having a drink only 3 times a week if you drink every day now and see how you feel. If you normally only drink at the weekends, have 2 glasses of alcohol instead of 3. Your liver will thank you!

## Fried foods – limit to once a week

- High fructose corn syrup
- Processed and refined carbohydrates – hello Dunkin Donuts!
- Foods with preservatives (usually found on the shelves in the middle of the supermarket)
- Artificial sweeteners such as Equal

Choose to buy organic cleaning products for your home – Sustaina has quite a few to choose from that are affordable. You can find dish soap, laundry detergent, hand soap, shampoos and conditioners, and even natural feminine products are sold here. They are also a great source for organic vegetables.







## Use natural skin products:

Oxybenzone and methoxycinnamate are some of the common endocrine disruptors found in sunscreens. A safer choice would be a sunscreen made with either Titanium dioxide or Zinc oxide. Other nasty ingredients to watch out for are lead – found in hair dyes and lipsticks, DEA (diethanolamine)- found in shampoos and cleansers as foaming agent, Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLES) – another foaming agent used in shower gels and cleansers, and parabens which have been found to contain endocrine disrupting properties – commonly used preservatives for cosmetics and personal care products. This is a great source for choosing safe personal care products: The Dirty Dozen – Cosmetic Chemicals to Avoid <https://davidsuzuki.org/queen-of-green/dirty-dozen-cosmetic-chemicals-avoid/>

## Other things that can help rid our body of unwanted toxins:

**Saunas, exercise** – breaking a sweat will help to rid your body of unwanted toxins

**Mind body connection** – yoga, being out in fresh air (if possible) can lower levels of stress and in turn help your liver to focus on its main job.

**Epsom salt baths** – these are great to use both for relaxing before bed at night and to help draw out toxins.

**Air filters** – placing one in each bedroom is usually necessary because of the small area covered by one unit.

When it comes to what you put on your skin – be fussy! This is just as important as what you are putting in your mouths. Bangkok Soap Opera and Siam Botanicals are my favourite local vendors for face wash, face oils, scrubs, serums, essential oils, perfumes and body lotion. They smell good and feel amazing on your skin.

## Takeaways:

### Food

- Eat organic foods when possible – follow Dirty Dozen list by EWG
- Foods to always purchase organic: tree fruits, leafy greens, berries & dairy
- Limit/avoid shark, swordfish, king mackerel, or tilefish as they contain high levels of Mercury.
- Avoid charred foods – less bbq marks on those grass fed burgers!
- Do not heat foods in plastic containers in the microwave.

### Water

- Home water source – ask the water company for testing results or if you have a well, test your water. Additional filtration may be needed.
- Carry water in a stainless steel or glass bottle.
- Do not reuse disposable plastic water bottles.

## Every day toxins

- Cosmetics
- Toiletries
- Cleaning supplies
- Gardening chemicals
- Furniture, clothing, carpeting
- Gasoline
- Car exhausts

## Anti-nutrients

- Medications
- Heavy metals
- Stress
- Chemicals
- Parasites
- Yeast
- Unhealthy mental states
- Isolation
- Nature deprivation
- Negative emotions

## Other lifestyle recommendations:

Adding plants to your home and office: spider plants, philodendron, and golden pothos are great for removing formaldehyde (commonly found in facial tissues, grocery bags and paper towels), while gerber daisies, peace lilies, bamboo palm and chrysanthemums are useful in removing benzene (emitted from burning of coal, oil and car exhaust) and Trichloroethylene (TCE) used in laquers, varnishes, adhesives and dry cleaning products.





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## Recipe for detox pesto

### INGREDIENTS

- ¾ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 bunch fresh cilantro, washed and dried, ends clipped
- 1 bunch fresh basil, washed and dried
- 2 tablespoons watercress
- ¼-1/3 pine nuts, cashews or walnuts (optional)
- 1 fresh lime, juiced
- 1-2 garlic cloves, minced
- Sea salt to taste

### DIRECTIONS

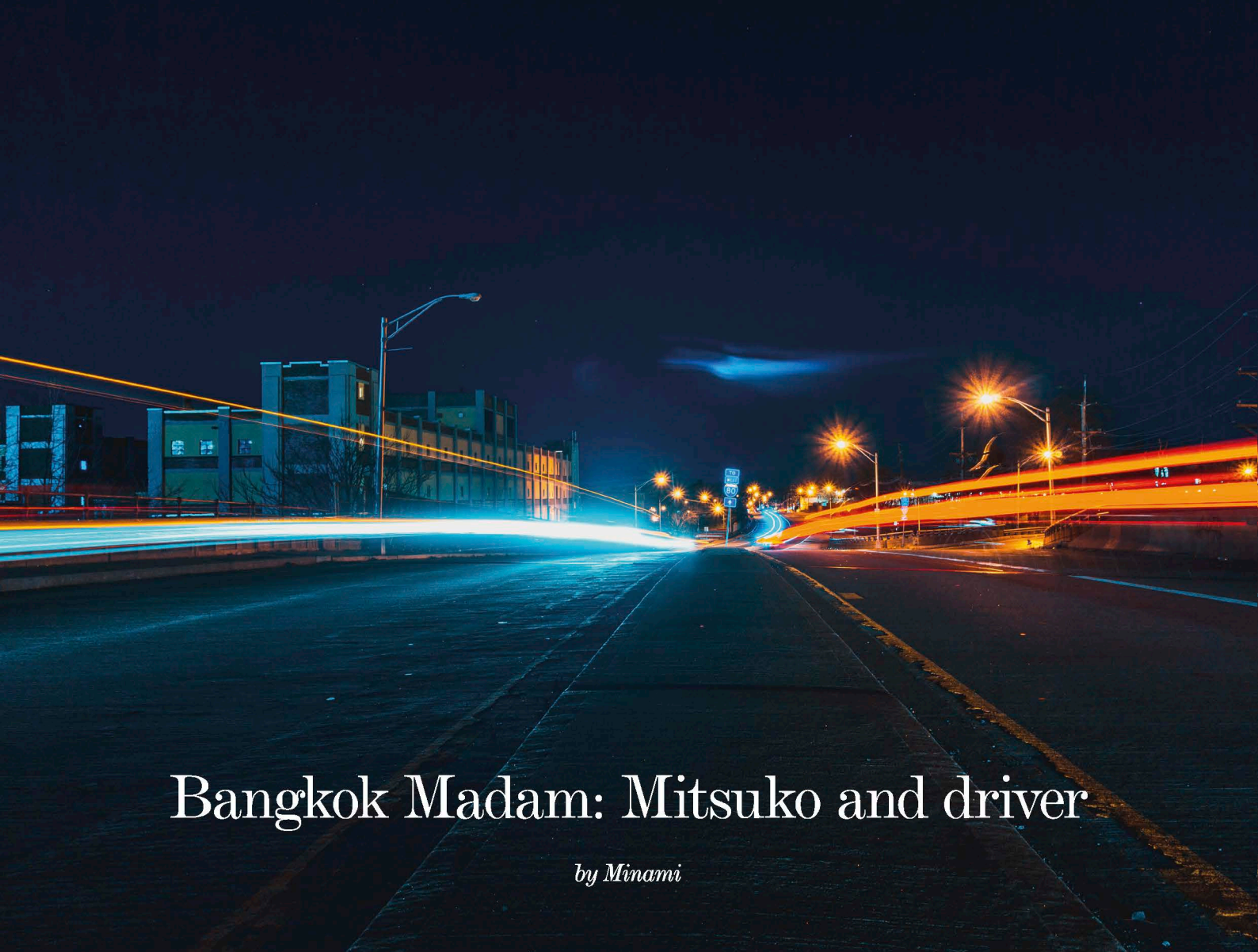
Blend all the ingredients together. I find it easier to start with the olive oil at the bottom and then add all the other ingredients. This pesto can be used as a spread on toast, a veggie dip or as a sauce for cooked chicken or fish.

\*This pesto is a perfect addition to your meals. It is both immune boosting and cleansing! The cilantro will help escort heavy metals out of your body and the garlic, a natural anti-viral and anti-bacterial will help your boost immune system.

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*About the author: Katherine Kiviat is a clinical and integrative nutritionist with a masters of science in clinical nutrition and integrative health from Maryland University of Integrative Health in The United States. She is also a certified health coach with the Institute of Integrative Nutrition in NYC and has completed 200 hours of teacher training with the world renown yoga centre Laughing Lotus in NYC. She is currently based in Bangkok where she has lived with her family for the last 6 years. Katherine can be contacted through Facebook and Instagram @ Healthy Xpat*





# Bangkok Madam: Mitsuko and driver

by Minami

Mitsuko could see the left side of Sompong's face from her place in the backseat. He was just sitting there. She counted one, two, three, in silence, as slow as she could. Still he didn't move. With a small sigh and pang in her heart, she got out of the car.

*Opening the door yourself is no big deal*, she told herself.

Until she came to Bangkok one and half years ago, Mitsuko was driving her little Toyota on her own, chauffeuring kids around, carrying all the groceries by herself. She had even washed and polished her car occasionally, wearing bulky yellow rubber gloves. That was normal. Very normal.

She did not have a driver in Japan. No one did. Well, at least nobody Mitsuko knew did. *No big deal*, she told herself again.

What annoyed her was that Sompong opened the door for Mitsuko when she was with her husband.

Yuichi worked for Mitsumaru, a fairly well-known trading company. They had sent him to Thailand. It was a promotion for Yuichi. Not a traditional elite track to the US or Europe, but Bangkok was not a bad posting. His company was shifting its emphasis to a growing Asian market and Bangkok was regarded as one of the major hubs of its operation. Yuichi was vice president of the Thailand office, the No 2

position. For a forty-two year old, it was not astonishingly impressive, but not bad, either. Indeed, not bad at all for a graduate of a private university in a company where the University of Tokyo graduates occupy more than half the senior executive positions.

Yuichi had his own car and driver provided, but occasionally he used Sompong - their family chauffeur - for evening functions where he needed his wife to accompany him. Then Sompong came around swiftly to Mitsuko's door, before she even had time to count.

Mitsuko wondered why he behaved differently when they were alone. *Is it because Sompong thinks nothing of me? He shows respect when I am travelling as the wife of the No 2 guy, but am I not worth his respect otherwise? Am I no one by myself?*

For the hundredth time, she told herself that she was thinking too much about too small a thing.

She wouldn't dare ask Sompong to explain his behaviour. She didn't want to appear that she minded such a trivial slight. Yet above all, she didn't want anyone to know that he didn't open the door for Mitsuko. Not even Yuichi. He had no idea that Sompong didn't open the door for Mitsuko when he wasn't around.

She tried to avoid this inconsistent treatment by not





using Sompong for those evening occasions with Yuichi. In that way, Sompong was simply a driver who did not open the door for a woman.

One evening, as they were dressing for one such function, Mitsuko asked Yuichi, "Shall we use your driver tonight?" She tried to sound casual, like the idea had just occurred to her.

Yuichi looked a little puzzled. "Why?" Mitsuko only shrugged, trying to look like she really didn't care. Yuichi said, "Sompong will not mind some extra overtime."

Mitsuko couldn't argue with that point. Compared to Yuichi's driver, the drivers of family cars didn't get much overtime, which was a significant portion of their salaries. She walked into her closet to let the conversation drop.

Like Yuichi's personal driver, Sompong was hired by Yuichi's company, which provided a car with a driver for use by the expats' families. At first, Mitsuko was quite impressed with the company's benefits package for the expats. She thought it was a wonderful example of the Japanese company's paternal care, providing free and safe transportation in appreciation to families who were forced to live in a country where they do not speak the language or understand the customs.

But then, Mitsuko was naïve. She always was. Later she learned that the company started providing family cars some time ago when an employee's wife got in a nasty accident.

She was driving her car with two friends after enjoying a last round of golf before moving away from Bangkok. Her husband had been assigned a new post in Japan, and they were scheduled to return in a week. On the way home from the golf course, her car went over the centre line, crashing into an oncoming car. She was gone instantly, and so was the Thai driver in the other car.

The news was reported widely, with the company's name always mentioned. The cause of the accident was unknown, but rumours flew: she was quite drunk, she was going way over the speed limit, she went to a cheap repair shop to fix the brakes despite the advice to use the proper dealer, etc. Her two friends survived, but soon after the accident, they went back to Japan. Their husbands didn't work for Mitsumaru, but somehow both of those families were transferred back to Japan swiftly.

"Since then, our company graciously provides a family car to us, so that we will not make any trouble or ruin the name of our company," said Asako, who told the story to Mitsuko. Asako had dropped by Mitsuko's apartment to deliver a souvenir from a recent trip to Bali. They were enjoying a quiet afternoon chat over fragrant, strong Bali coffee before the children came home.

"But the accident was not the company's fault," Mitsuko said. She did not get out the rest of what she was

thinking: *The wife drove her own car, and played golf for her leisure. It had nothing to do with the company. It was a tragedy all right, but a private matter.* She couldn't say this aloud because it would sound like she was being cruel and heartless to the lost soul.

Asako cut into her thoughts. "That is not the point." She was looking straight into Mitsuko's eyes. Asako was the wife of the youngest Mitsumaru employee at the Thailand office. She was probably more than 10 years younger than Mitsuko, yet she was not afraid to say anything to Mitsuko, or to anyone.

"This is Asia, Mitsuko-san. No logic; only feelings matter. Of course the accident had nothing to do with Mitsumaru, but the important thing is, no negative image should be associated with the company's name whatsoever." It was a true statement, but not something normally spoken aloud. Asako said it as-matter-of-factly as saying "black is black." Mitsuko was glad they were alone in her apartment so that no one could hear their conversation.

"Otherwise," Asako continued, "why else, should the company make an internal rule that no expats or their wives are allowed to drive themselves in Thailand?"

Asako was very outspoken. It astonished Mitsuko, but she recalled that Asako had grown up mostly overseas. Her father was one of the executives of Mitsumaru, trading mostly in the US and Europe. Mitsuko wished she could be a little more straightforward like Asako. But Yukari, wife of the president of the Mitsumaru Thailand office, often seemed put off by Asako's candour, although she never said as much. Mitsuko had seen Yukari look away or change the subject when Asako seemed to be getting too bold.

Asako took another sip of her black coffee. "So, our merciful Mitsumaru took care of the family of the lost Thai driver. And the poor deserted Mitsumaru employee who lost his love in the tragedy was demoted."

Mitsuko opened her mouth to say "that cannot be true!" and then stopped. It could be. After all, Asako's father worked for Mitsumaru for forty years. He might have witnessed those decisions being made. And Mitsuko understood the unspoken company policy that a wife's misbehaviour was considered a lack of management by her husband. As long as it didn't surface, the company overlooked it, but otherwise, it could affect his promotion.

"So, Mitsuko-san, you shouldn't feel so awkward to have a driver. We are only cooperating to protect the name of our company."

Mitsuko gaped at Asako, who was smiling with shiny white teeth which matched her white linen shirt and glittering diamond earrings. Simple yet stunning. *How does she know I feel awkward to have a driver?*

Mitsuko never mentioned anything about her driver to anyone. She deliberately avoided talking about how she felt about having a driver, having a maid, and living in a 200 square metre apartment with a pool and a Jacuzzi.

She knew this was luxury that no ordinary Japanese families could afford at home, not even elite Mitsumaru expats in the US or Europe. In Tokyo, Mitsumaru wives furtively called it *Bangkok Madam Package*, temporary luxury that you could enjoy only in a developing country.



She had also heard someone in Japan say that Bangkok was “not a bad posting for the wives, either” in an envying yet sneering tone. Some wives blissfully enjoyed the package. Asako was one. Or at least she seemed to be. She openly said, “Oh, lucky to have all these privileges of *Bangkok Madam*. I’m gonna make the most of it while it lasts!”

Asako didn’t seem to worry what others would think of her. But then, she had feared little in her life, having an executive Mitsumaru father, growing up overseas, graduating from UCLA. Mitsuko felt a pang of jealousy; she wished she had Asako’s candour and confidence, and the kind of upbringing that had created it. Mitsuko grew up in a small town, where her father was a small company’s accountant, and she graduated from junior college. It was not like she was ashamed of her background. But then, there was nothing to show off. Having a driver and a maid was beyond her parents’ imagination. Unthinkable for their humble, ordinary lives.

Mitsuko would never openly say she enjoyed the benefits package. She was afraid that it would make her look shallow and cheap, like a self-made man boasting a gold tooth. She could hear that sneering laugh of Tokyo wives behind her back.

And, in fact, she didn’t enjoy the privileges. Despite all the convenience, she was uncomfortable. She didn’t know how to treat Sompong. She didn’t know how to talk to him or how to give tips. She didn’t know how she was supposed to *deal* with him. Worse, she didn’t know how to act herself, being served by a driver her father’s age.

That was the last thing she wanted anyone to know. Not even her husband, let alone the other Mitsumaru wives. It was humiliating to show that she couldn’t handle the *Bangkok Madam Package*. Mitsuko had seen some expats’ wives at a parking lot at Fuji Supermarket, an exclusive Japanese grocery store, carrying all their own grocery bags and bowing like woodpeckers to their drivers, obviously intimidated by this luxury. On the other end, she saw some ladies bossing their drivers around in an arrogant, superior manner. Either way sickened Mitsuko. They were both painful to watch. She wanted to appear natural, not intimidated, but not arrogant. She had been very careful not to show her chagrin, and she thought she managed well.

But how did Asako know she felt awkward to have a driver? Then Mitsuko had another thought, one even more mortifying: *Does she know Sompong doesn’t open the door for me?* She could feel heat rising up from her neck as she blushed merely at the thought of it.

“Oh, I wish I had a driver every day!” Asako went on, apparently oblivious to Mitsuko’s discomfort. “Only twice a week is not enough. Maybe next time I meet Fujioka-san, I will threaten him by saying I want to play golf at least three times a week.” She laughed with a sweet innocent smile. *If she knows about Sompong*, Mitsuko thought, *she is an Academy-award-winning actress*.

The wives’ use of a family car was arranged by the company according to the rank of their husbands. Yukari, Fujioka-san’s wife, had use of a car and driver every day. Mitsuko, as wife of the No. 2 man, got a driver three times a week. The rest got a driver twice a week. Mitsuko felt this

was not a well balanced ratio, not necessarily for Asako, but for herself. Perhaps four days a week for Mitsuko was more fair, she thought. Yet she didn’t dare say anything. Even if Yukari were to suggest more use of a family car for Mitsuko and the other wives – which Mitsuko was quite certain would never happen (Yukari was not unkind, but she was not one to make an effort to extend benefits to others) – Mitsuko would probably smile vaguely and keep silent. Mitsuko didn’t actually want to increase her days of a family car; she just didn’t like the imbalance. An unfair ratio of family car use was one thing. Whether Mitsuko wanted to use a family car or not was a totally different matter.

Sompong was one of five family car drivers at Mitsumaru. Pratoon was Yukari’s designated driver. Sompong and the others drove the rest of the wives, but Sompong seemed to be the only one assigned to Mitsuko. Asako got Sompong and Arthit in turn for her days.

Mitsuko wanted to ask if Sompong or Arthit opened the door for Asako, but she was too proud to ask such a stupid question of the wife of a junior staff. *Opening the door was no big deal*, Mitsuko told herself. But she knew that Pratoon opened the door for Yukari. Last time the Mitsumaru wives got together for a regular quarterly luncheon, Mitsuko watched through the restaurant window as Pratoon trotted around to open the door for Yukari. He even bowed to her.

Mitsuko gave her best big-sister smile to Asako. “Tomorrow is my family car day. If you like, we could go shopping at the newly opened mall on Thonglor or go golfing if you insist.”

Asako was clearly delighted by the offer. She was not one to hide her feelings. “Wow! That sounds wonderful. Thank you, Mitsuko-san. I want to check out that Korean nail salon and try that Californian seafood place.”

At least Asako was discerning enough not to ask for golfing. She knew Mitsuko was not so keen on golf. Her excitement made Mitsuko smile. It was refreshing to see her offer accepted without any hesitation or the Japanese customary polite exchange of “oh, no, no, are you really sure this is not too much trouble for you?”

Mitsuko wanted to see if Sompong would open the door for Mitsuko, or Asako, on that day. *If he doesn’t open the door for me, he would surely not open the door for Asako. Or would he? Would he open the door for me, to save face for me in front of the young wife of a junior staff? Maybe Pratoon opened the door for Yukari only in front of the other Mitsumaru wives?*

Mitsuko was quiet in the car on the way to pick up Asako at her apartment. She was always quiet in the car, but that day, there was no pleasant exchange of even “how are you?” and “fine.” Actually, she was nervous. *This is ridiculous*, she told herself. *I’m just going for lunch. Opening the door is surely no big deal*.

She stared out the window, avoiding the eyes of Sompong in the rearview mirror.

When Sompong stopped the car in front of Asako’s apartment, Asako slipped in like a breeze. “Good morning, Mitsuko-san. Sawadii-ka (hello), Khun Sompong. Another nice and warm day in Bangkok!” Asako’s cheerful greeting brightened up the atmosphere in the car. She was wearing a



beautiful sea-green dress, layers of fine cotton draped from her delicate shoulder. "I dressed up for today. I found a new dressmaker. This is her first dress for me. She is excellent, isn't she? You cannot ask her to design, but if you show her a picture, she will make exactly the same one for you."

Asako went on happily, like a teenager going to prom, and Mitsuko was thankful she didn't have to talk. She simply smiled a sisterly smile and nodded with an occasional "Is that so?" She was afraid that if she spoke, she might say something utterly odd like, "Should I give lunch money to Sompong to eat while we dine?" As the car neared a trendy, glass-shield restaurant on Thonglor, Mitsuko could feel her body tighten a bit. But Asako was entirely at ease. "Oh, we are already here! Mmm, it looks yummy. I hope you didn't hear the grumbling in my tummy." With that, Asako gave her a wink. Mitsuko blinked. Japanese don't wink. Or at least, not to their seniors, never to the wife of your husband's boss.

Taken off guard, Mitsuko mumbled to instruct Sompong where to stop. "Aw, hmm, Sompong..."

Then Asako took over. "Khun Sompong! Please stop in front of the entrance.

I do not want to step in those muddy puddles. I'm wearing brand new white high heels." She instructed him briskly and in Thai. Asako didn't take the half a year of Thai lessons like everyone else at Mitsumaru, yet her Thai sounded more fluent than anyone else's at the company. Mitsuko knew Asako's Thai was not necessarily correct, but she showed no awkward hesitation when speaking the unfamiliar language. In her confident way, she somehow communicated much better than anyone else.

Sompong smiled in a way that said "who can resist that charming request?" It was a smile he had never shown Mitsuko. She watched them, interacting almost like an uncle and niece, with a sting in her heart. Unable to speak, she just cleared her throat.

The car stopped in front of the restaurant. Before Mitsuko started counting, Asako opened the door herself, and with her body half out, she looked

back with that shining smile and said, "*Kopkhun-ka* (Thank you), Khun Sompong." Then, "Let's go, Mitsuko-san."

Mitsuko hurried to get herself out of the car. Asako was already walking into the restaurant. When Mitsuko closed the car door, Sompong moved away from the curb as if nothing had happened.

Mitsuko was left alone, standing in the piercing sunshine of the tropical city. She saw a woman in the tall glass window. *Bangkok Madam*... Forty years old, pretty, elegant in a simple beige dress.

She stood there for a moment longer, hoping to see more of her. But there was nothing else to see in her own reflection, except a woman desperately pretending to be someone she really isn't.

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# Travel and your gut – how to keep things moving

by Monique Jhington

One of the advantages of living in Asia is the ease with which you can travel to diverse and exotic locations. Within a couple of hours you can be in tropical rainforests, on remote beaches, in the mountains or in a bustling city, ready to enjoy new cultures, food and outdoor adventures.

The thing with travel is that while your mind is enjoying new experiences, your gut is busy adjusting to a different environment, routine, climate and often a whole different type of cuisine. And depending on your constitution, that digestive adjustment process can either be pretty uneventful or involve some irritating digestive hiccups.

One common complaint is a complete halt in the bowel movement department. Which can be very annoying, especially when you're trying to squeeze your ever-growing tummy into your best beachwear.

Jokes apart, constipation while travelling can throw a wrench into your travel enjoyment. It's not just the realisation that you are quite literally full of s@#t but also the bloating, feeling full and the general discomfort that affects your state of mind.

What contributes to travel constipation are a number of different factors: a change in routine, time zone, a different eating pattern with often less fresh vegetables and fruits that usually provide the necessary fibre to move



things along. Flying can be dehydrating and insufficient water intake while you are on the move may play a role too. If sunset cocktails by the beach is your thing: alcohol may add to dehydration too. Your microbiome (the 100 trillions microbes in your gut) adjust to different environmental factors too, which can result in a change in digestive patterns.

Fortunately, there are a couple of things that you can put in place to support your gut and your regularity while travelling:

## 1. Hydrate

Start with a glass of warm water first thing when you get up (squeeze some lemon juice into it for an extra digestive kickstart) and continue to drink water throughout the day – somewhere around 8 glasses or more, depending on your activities and the climate.

## 2. Fibre

Find ways to include fibre. Granted, most hotel and restaurant menus lack variety in terms of fresh fruits and vegetables and you may want to be careful eating raw salads, depending on where you are. There are other ways to

include fibre: choose wholegrain toast instead of a croissant (except of course when you are gluten free), or eat some freshly cut fruit topped with nuts and seeds. Most buffets will have prunes too! I just came back from a trip to Oman where I enjoyed a daily serving of hummus (chickpeas are high in fibre) and fresh tabouleh. Work with what you have. To make things easy, consider bringing a greens powder (like Amazing Grass, which I usually carry) to get your daily quota of fruits, vegetables and fibre during a trip.

## 3. Move

Moving your body helps to move your bowels. Certain types of holidays involve a lot of movement, like sightseeing trips but if you're parking your behind on the beach, you may need to make some extra effort to include exercise. Take a walk on the beach, or practice a few constipation busting yoga moves before you head for breakfast.





#### 4. Added support

There are a couple of tricks that you can include in your travelling bowel toolbox:

- **Magnesium citrate** can help relieve constipation by creating an osmotic effect and drawing water into the colon. Take 1 tablet at bedtime and bump that up to bowel tolerance.
- **Triphala** is a wonderful Indian herbal digestive supplement that can help support regularity as well. Again, take 1-2 capsules at bedtime.
- **Psyllium** husk adds bulk to your stool, which can help to stimulate intestinal peristalsis and move stool along more quickly. You want to take it with plenty of water or it may make matters worse.
- Even though I am not a fan of using **senna** on a long-term basis for constipation, during a trip it may come in handy. I like the Smooth Move senna based tea for a gentle constipation relief.

In general, it helps to have a healthy gut and so supporting your digestive system and microbiome on a consistent basis will set you up for success in the long run and even while travelling. You can find the steps involved in digestive health building on my website.


Be, and travel 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)



A hand with pink nail polish holds a blank white Polaroid photo. The background is a soft-focus sunset over the ocean, with warm orange and yellow light transitioning into a blue sky. The title text is centered over the Polaroid photo.

# Mind/body healing – what's it all about?

*by Barbara Lewis*

I have been struggling with different aspects of my health now for quite some time and the answers from western medicine; when they have the answer or a type of answer, is usually medication. Lately I have been questioning all this medication because it seems to me that I am on much too much. Plus if I am to be truthful I am not sure how much it is helping.

I recently have been having a great deal of gastroenterology problems and I finally decided I needed to seek help for them. The doctor could find nothing as usual but sat across from me and my husband, who never comes with me to appointments and said “I guess this is the best we can hope for.” I tried not to breakdown but I was about to travel for Christmas to Canada and Mexico to my daughter’s wedding and I said “what is we, we don’t have to deal with this problem I do. I am the one who can’t go somewhere unless I know where the closest bathroom is. I am the one who can’t travel for fear I won’t be near enough to a toilet. It is me who is in pain all the time not you and certainly not anyone else.” Of course by this time I am saying this through tears and I am considered irrational. He did give me a drug that effectively shut my system down. Needless to say this caused its own

pain and side effects so I had to weigh one against the other.

You will be happy to know I made it through the trip virtually unscathed, pain yes but I can handle that. We were gone for so long that I ran out of almost every medication I was on. So I naturally weaned my way off them all. This caused me some problems and I did go back on a few of them but it also made me think. When I got back I thought there has to be another way than all these drugs and my constant reliance on them.

Miraculously or maybe not so, I was searching for something to watch and saw a documentary called ‘Healing’ on Netflix. I recommend it highly. In essence the documentarian looks at mind/body healing to see if it is real or not. She interviews one woman on death’s door with lymphoma. The woman states that she was in a coma and went to another state or plane and spoke to her dead father who she had always had a contentious relationship in life and she said all she felt from him when she met him was unconditional love. She came back to her body and made a conscious decision to heal her tumours and cancer. She was out of her coma in a week and the tumours had



shrunk and well enough to go home in five weeks with no presence of tumours or cancer in ten weeks.

The movie gives other example and talks to scientific experts and medical doctors who use mind/body healing to heal themselves and their patients, everything from severe neck and back trauma to cancer and other chronic pain conditions. It is miraculous and at the same time presented that it must be something that anyone can access if they wish. These people practice certain skills to develop the muscles of their minds so that they become strong and therefore are prepared but open (by this I mean their brain is flexible to different ideas and concepts) to their mind/brain/soul/spirit healing of the disease within the body.

I have a friend who's mother had breast cancer and she had a lumpectomy but refused chemotherapy because she didn't want her body to be ravaged by the poison. Instead she meditated that a pure white light was around her tumour and consuming it. She no longer has breast cancer. This same friend has a mother-in-law with stage four cancer but she is going about her life actively like she has always done and the cancer is staying at bay.

My husband as a young boy had a wart on his thumb that was inoperable and couldn't be removed. The doctor decided to X-ray it and Ken's young mind thought that the X-ray was going to fix it. This is what he believed. The wart went away within days of it being X-rayed. The power of the mind is proven again.

Recently, to add more into this subject, I have been listening to a podcast called "The Holistic Human Optimisation Show" by Ron Landis. In one of the podcasts he talks about how he had a serious knee problem for seven years. He is active in martial arts at an Olympic level so he is extremely fit but the knee problem was causing him no end of problems. He decided, after much investigation and the discovery he was on a highly processed food diet, to go on a living food (raw) vegan green diet. He only ate fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and legumes, etc. After 30 days he said he had no pain in his knees. He went out to do his usual run that was a bit of a challenge and he realised

that he literally could bounce around with no pain, meaning the inflammation in his body was gone.

Most of these people first use meditation as a way to build their mind skills and get quiet inside. Some use nutrition and diet as well because most of our diets are full of processed foods that have toxins and byproducts that block our body's natural function and cause disease. Many practitioners use both and a variety of other methods to help unblock the channels of the body so it can do what is natural and heal itself. Stress is also a major cause of much illness so learning to manage it is a useful tool that can only help the body to function better.

I have tried western medicine and it hasn't completely failed me but it certainly hasn't been wholly successful. Recently I looked into stem cell replacement therapy as a possible solution to my knee problems. It is a costly endeavour and the chances of it actually helping seem marginal at best. I am now on a quest to find more information and to see if my body can heal itself. I won't instantly stop all of my medication but I am going to start meditating daily; I used to I don't know why I ever stopped. If others have had the strength of mind to heal themselves then the possibility for me to heal myself is there too and my heart is open and willing to try. If through our circumstances we can put our bodies into disease then we must be able to take the disease out of it as well.





# Five tips for networking and meeting new people in your new expat assignment

by Isabel Valle



also provide valuable friendship and be there for you in times of need.

So, what can we do to feel the love in our new country? In this month of April, and in remembering and emphasising how important love is in our lives, I want to share with you some easy to implement tips to help you develop a network of friends in a stress free way. You never know, you may even have some fun in the process!

**Start networking before your move**

In most cases, being an expat in a country far away from our family and loved ones means that we either go out and create some more love in our new life, or we spend most of our time longing for our loved ones back home.

One of the toughest challenges that expats find in moving to a new country is meeting new people. It is a well-known fact that many expats feel lonely when trying to settle in abroad. We may assume that we know how to make friends, but making good friends abroad is very different to how we used to create friendships back home.

If you want to succeed at creating a happy new life in your new country and make the most out of it, it is essential that you create a reliable network of people. This sounds simple enough, however the prospect of having to put ourselves out there and attempting to make friends with new people can be a really daunting experience for many of us. Because of

this, many people don't even try, and somehow wait for the right people to appear miraculously. As you can imagine, this approach is doomed to fail, and will often leave many expats feeling lonely and lacking the joy that a new life in a new country can bring. Not only will a strong network of friendships offer you an ideal source of information and advice, they can

Go online and research for online expat groups and communities that allow you to interact with other fellow expats. These can be helpful at the time to finding out critical information you may need when you move, as well as finding out about groups and communities of people like you, who get together to





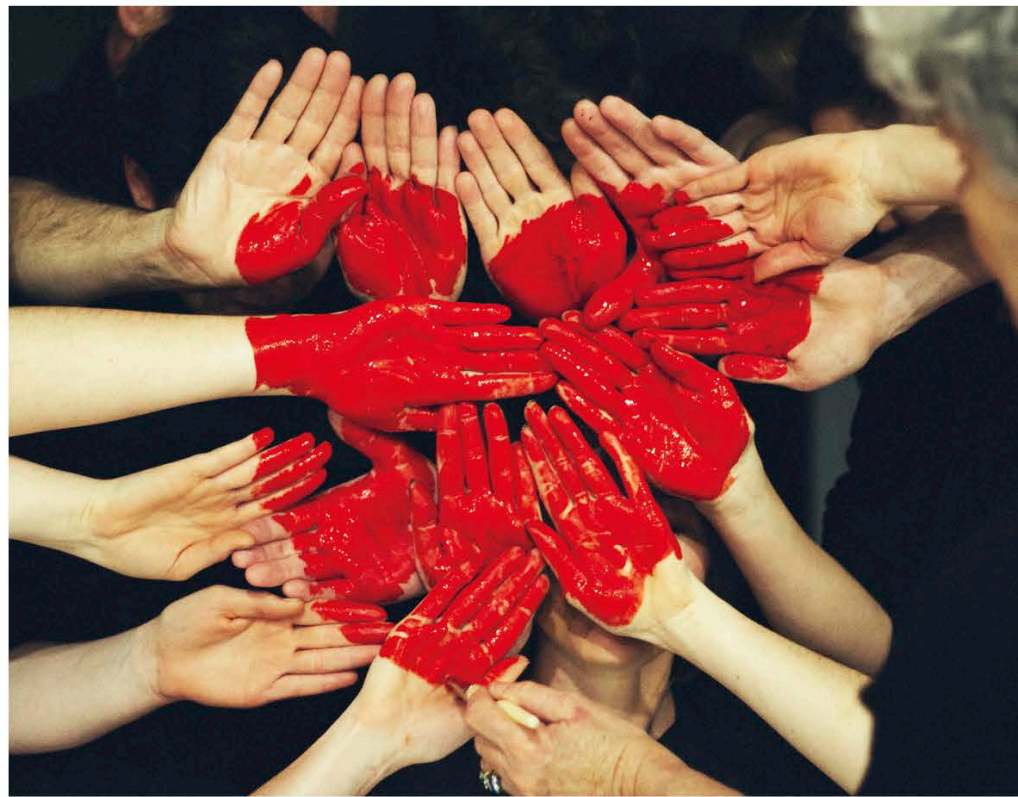
meet and create new friendships abroad. I have personally seen some great advice being given in those platforms, helping you go straight to the active groups that are making it happen. There are always new people in your location actively looking to make friends and hang out with other fellow expats, and if you intentionally look out for these people, they won't be hard to find.

You can research for expat groups in Facebook, *meet ups* in your chosen city, country related groups, relocation or international school guides, etc. You can also find out if you are connected to anyone already living in your new city by asking friends to let you know who they know already living there.

### Know where to look for great friendships

You can find friendships in many different places. Starting a new hobby is a sure way of meeting new people. You can continue with a hobby that you love or find a new one altogether. From yoga, to dancing, to cooking, to learning a new language, etc. Likewise, you can join an activity or sport you love, like running, or become an active member of your religion in your hosting city.

Common faith helps transcend cultural differences and brings people from all over the world together. You can also change your outlook and be open to find local friends by getting involved with the local community, which in my experience will provide you with some of the most rewarding friendships abroad. Of course, if you happen to be working in your new destination, socialising



with work colleagues that you get along with will be a great way of building a new network of friends.

### Pick up your place to live wisely

High on the list of priorities for new expats is to find a home which is close to schooling, place of work, close to transport, with plenty of amenities nearby. But it is just as important to pick a home close to where people you may like to connect with live. If you have children, finding a building or a street where lots of families live will definitely help. When you are looking for a place to live, make sure you are not just looking at the place's commodities, but also the people living in it. Don't just move to a place because you fall in love with it; make sure that the demographics in your area will provide you with opportunities to meet new people and build some great friendships. I know many expats who ended up having to move homes because of this very reason.

### Develop a thick skin

If you want to make friends abroad, you are going to have to put yourself

out there more than you would in your normal life back home. This is not a time to be shy. Remember that every single expat you meet in your new country would have been new themselves at some point, and that expats come and go, always creating more room for new friendships to be developed. So don't be afraid to approach others and start a conversation. Even if you get asked to participate in something you don't particularly know or like, become a yes person and find new opportunities outside of your comfort zone, saying yes to every invitation that comes your way.

### Don't give up

Making friends in a new place won't be easy. When you first start putting yourself out there attending social events you will probably come across people who you have nothing in common with, and people that you won't get along with. This is a perfectly normal part of the process. Don't settle and don't let this get you down. It may not be easy, and you may have to show up alone to events, and hope for the best.





*About the author: Isabel is a Peak Performance Strategist and the Founder of Global Room. She is an experienced ICF Coach with over 20 years of international work experience holding senior positions within the hospitality industry in countries around the world, as well as Executive and Leadership coaching, mentoring and training. Isabel specialises in high performance strategy, leadership development and building organisational culture.*

*More available on:  
[www.isabelvalle.com](http://www.isabelvalle.com)*

Keep participating with different groups until you find the type of people that you want to hang out with. You are going to meet great people in the most unexpected of places and situations, so make sure that when you do, you get their contact details and arrange a *meetup*. Persistency here is key! Someone doesn't magically become a friend overnight, you need to follow up.

Building a circle of friends as an expat in a new location abroad can take time and effort, but it is certainly a very achievable and rewarding quest.

Unfortunately, we can't expect great friends to fall into our laps without any work. The key is putting yourself out there and finding and creating opportunities to meet like-minded people. So dedicate some time and effort into creating a new social circle, and enjoy the incredible benefits of making great friends who can share the love in your new location.

Here's to your success!  
With love, Isabel x





# Hope and inspiration

by Karla Walter



**T**he New Year parties are long finished and many people made resolutions which are going strong, while others have fallen by the wayside. Neither is right or wrong, good or bad. Life is a day to day experience and things change. I'm not good at resolutions for the New Year as I look at life a little differently.

*One of the considerations when deciding to make a change is what drives the decision? There always seems to be a little "hope" involved. What is hope? The noun of hope is: a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen. The verb of hope is: want something to happen or be the case.*

So, it starts by wanting something that is not happening. What triggers something in our lives to want change? The list can be long and complex or an exact idea of what a person needs to do.

Let me explain something that happened last year. I was at a nutrition health conference in London. It was a wonderful conference with excellent speakers and the subjects surrounding nutrition were very informative. One of the speakers started to talk about how much information is out there in the world of Google, books, the web and how some information is excellent and some literature (books he named) were wacky and should be disregarded. I sat and thought about this comment for quite some time. I did not think some of the books that were described as wacky were harmful in any way.

During the conference, I had an opportunity to speak with this person and conveyed my idea that describing information as wacky is a bit harsh and, yes, I agreed that some information may not have the substance which many would feel was appropriate. I said that in some instances even if a book had some rather unusual descriptions of being healthy it may be the starting point for that person and give them hope on their quest for better health. Therefore, they may investigate more options for healing. Everyone requires a starting point. The next comment from this person was, "Hope cannot be measured scientifically and therefore that is not taken into consideration for a person's health or discussion".

I absolutely understand where this person was coming from.



When you have a clear scientific mind, working outside the confines of data is difficult.

I write this article for you to see whether hope can be a starting point. I wear the scientific hat and wear the hat for hope. When one has hope with intention for something greater, an opening is made for something to show up. People, jobs, changes in accommodation, a stranger, a partner. I'm not saying it's a magic wand, but there are occasions when we just cannot explain what caused the changes to happen. When people change, they give others hope and show how much love they have for their new lease on life, or their new direction.

Let's just say that this new lease of life, which they now love, shows them a greater purpose for themselves and may even become the inspiration that the person is looking for. What would that look like in everyone's life?

We have all heard the line, "When strange things happen". I'm not so sure some things that happen in life are that strange. We can make choices to bring out the best in us or the worst in us and that will have consequences for things that take place from that point onwards. With a

little hope not only for ourselves but for others, who knows where it will lead.

*"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."*  
Eleanor Roosevelt

One more item to share is how the connection of yoga can change your mood or outlook. I'm not actually talking about a yoga class, I'm talking about a conversation I had with a stranger.

I was at my yearly physical, just having a checkup and mentioned that I was looking to get back into yoga as I had recently moved. The medical practitioner who I was dealing with started to get very excited and then explained how they were going to the best yoga teacher, that they had been going for years and they could highly recommend them. Their face lit up and they had such a huge smile. Just as I was about to leave the practitioner, they gave me a card which was for a free yoga class at this particular studio.

I was most grateful and left with a smile and a sense of gratitude along with how I had said to myself, "I hope I find a good yoga class". This is not a flippant or wishful thought. It's not something that happens every day. Not everything you hope for is going to materialise, what I am saying is take

these moments and continue to be of service and be positive. You do not know whose life you will change. Every action like this has a positive effect on our health. What someone does for you and what you can do for someone else.

The poet Emily Dickinson wrote this poem describing hope as a bird.

*"Hope is the thing with feathers –  
That perches in the soul –  
And sings the tune without the words –  
And never stops – at all –*

*And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –  
And sore must be the storm –  
That could abash the little Bird –  
That kept so many warm –*

*I've heard it in the chilliest land –  
And on the strangest Sea –  
Yet – never – in Extremity,  
It asked a crumb – of me"*

May your days be filled with health and happiness

**Karla Walter**

**5 seasons**

**[livingkarla.walter@me.com](mailto:livingkarla.walter@me.com)**





# Three signs you need to consult with the fertility specialist now!

*Patsama Vichinsartvichai, MD., MClinEmbryol.  
Fertility specialist, INSPIRE IVF*

**R**ecently many reproductive-challenged couples have jumped directly into IVF cycles without accurate evaluation for the correctable causes. In many cases, embryos are transferred into suboptimal wombs, this causes unnecessary emotional distress, loss of embryos and a burning hole in your pocket!

At INSPIRE IVF, patient-centred fertility care is our speciality. You will get the least invasive and the most advanced treatment at an affordable price. So you can be sure that you are ready for a new family member as effectively as possible.

You should consult with your fertility specialist if you can relate to the following as your chances of success might be impossible if left untreated.

## 1. If at first you don't succeed, dust yourself off and try again

In a fertile couple, a maximum chance of natural conception is achieved when the intercourse occurred between two days before ovulation and the day of ovulation. Cumulatively, 80% of couples will conceive after 12 months of regular unprotected intercourse. The limitation of natural conception is women's age which determine the age-related fertility decline. After 32 years, ovarian follicles begin to die through a process called 'atresia' at an accelerated pace. The atresia accelerates further after the age of 37.

If you are younger than 35 years, twelve months of failure to conceive is when you should contact INSPIRE IVF.

## How long should the wait (to conceive naturally) be over?



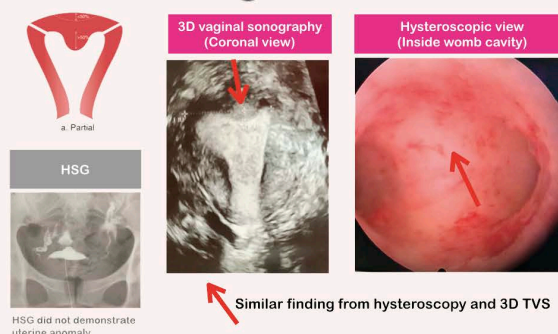
After 35 years, 6 months are enough, and you should call now if you're over 40 years of age, since your chance has been lowered for some time.

## 2. Your period is light....

If your menstrual period is always light you might have some anomaly of uterus. We discover the congenital anomalies of the uterus are higher in infertile women - especially those with recurrent miscarriage (where it can be 1 in 4). Currently, the accurate diagnosis of anomaly of uterus still relies on the invasive combination of diagnostic laparoscopy simultaneously with diagnostic hysteroscopy. The emerging technology in this area is 3D ultrasonography which is regarded as the "gold standard" because it can diagnose anomalies with almost similar accuracy with much less time, invasiveness, and cost.

At INSPIRE IVF, we integrate 3D ultrasonography as the first step of your evaluation by expert gynaecologists. Your embryo won't be mistakenly placed into the anomalous womb and waste the chance for you to bring home a baby.

## 3D vaginal ultrasound is the **NEW** gold standard



## 3. Recurrent miscarriage

The miscarriage might reflect underlying issues such as autoimmunity, poor endometrium receptivity, and abnormal chromosomes of embryos. Another spectrum of uterine anomaly can cause miscarriage as well. With some types of anomaly, the uterus can't expand to accommodate a full-term baby. Hence, gestational sac constriction and foetal demise followed by miscarriage may occur.

*"On your most important journey, our inspiration will guide your way"*

**Special offer for expat life in Thailand readers:**

We are offering a free medical consultation with one of our Fertility Specialist Clinicians for Expat Life in Thailand readers. Please mention this article when you make an appointment with our clinic.

[www.inspireivf.com](http://www.inspireivf.com) [info@inspireivf.com](mailto:info@inspireivf.com) +66 2251 8666





## Sprouting the Future

*Did you know that each Pad Thai you order at The Coffee Club pays for English classes for hundreds of students?*

The Coffee Club is part of Minor International, one of Thailand's biggest companies, whose focus is mainly on hospitality. Minor's sustainability framework comprises of many different aspects. By means of education, Minor aims to contribute to people development in Thailand.

The Minor Sustainability Education Development initiative covers different steps in a Thai student's development journey from early educational building blocks to starting their own careers. Programmes include Minor School Projects, that work with school kids throughout Thailand in several aspects like the Minor Book Club and Good Deeds in Your Birth Month. The Heinecke Foundation, one arm of Minor's, offers scholarships to students in need. Further down the road, the Minor Corporate University Programme where internship and training are offered to students in both vocational studies and universities. Opportunities extend to 1-2 year student trainee programmes where students can either work on a full-time or part-time basis. The growth in their careers does not stop there, doors are open at Minor for future industry leaders with programmes including Store Management, Chef Academy, Minor Hotel Explorer Programme and Area Coach University Programme.

The Teacher Bean Sprouts project by The Coffee Club is one of the Minor school projects. Working with Wat Sao Thong Kao school in Ayutthaya and the local agricultural community in the neighbouring province Ang Thong, the aim of this initiative is to both foster better English education for students and to create a sustainable business that involves trustworthy local producers. The cycle starts when the Ang Thong community teaches students how to grow beansprouts and maintain the quality up to The Coffee Club's exacting standards. In turn, The Coffee Club places a fix order of 160kg a week for this producer and collects the order every Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Being the refreshing and crunchy part of Pad Thai, fresh beansprouts contribute to countless plates of the renowned Thai dish. When customers taste our Pad Thai, they taste the well-rounded flavours that each ingredient offers. However, not only does it deliver a tasty meal, but knowing that



each serving helps Thai kids learn better English is deeply satisfying for the soul.

The revenue from selling bean sprouts goes straight to hiring professional, high-quality English teachers for the students in Wat Sao Thong Kao school. Who would have thought that bean sprouts could pay for better education? Minor International strongly believes that by providing better teaching in English, they are also opening more doors of opportunities for the hard-working children in the future.

The project was started in 2018 and, with its success, will be growing into more schools and local communities in Thailand. The way Minor International chose to give back to the society resonates with its sustainable philosophy: not only giving out money and stopping when it runs out, but creating ways for the students and schools to make their contribution to better education. So what about a delicious pad Thai on your next visit to The Coffee Club?



# Superwoman – Living in a Soap Opera

by Ravit El-Bachar Daniel

**M**aria Kalita could be your pet's vet, doctor, or treat your back with physiotherapy, or even cure your illness with traditional Tibetan medicine, but a few years ago the 'alchemist' in her soul got hooked with a new passion - of natural soap and beauty care making. Through her shop "Bangkok Soap Opera" and her shining personality – she promotes green ideology and healthy sustainable lifestyle. And she definitely loves life!

Upon entering Maria's shop, the good appetising aroma hits you, with cinnamon, vanilla and fruits notes – it smells better than patisserie. It looks a



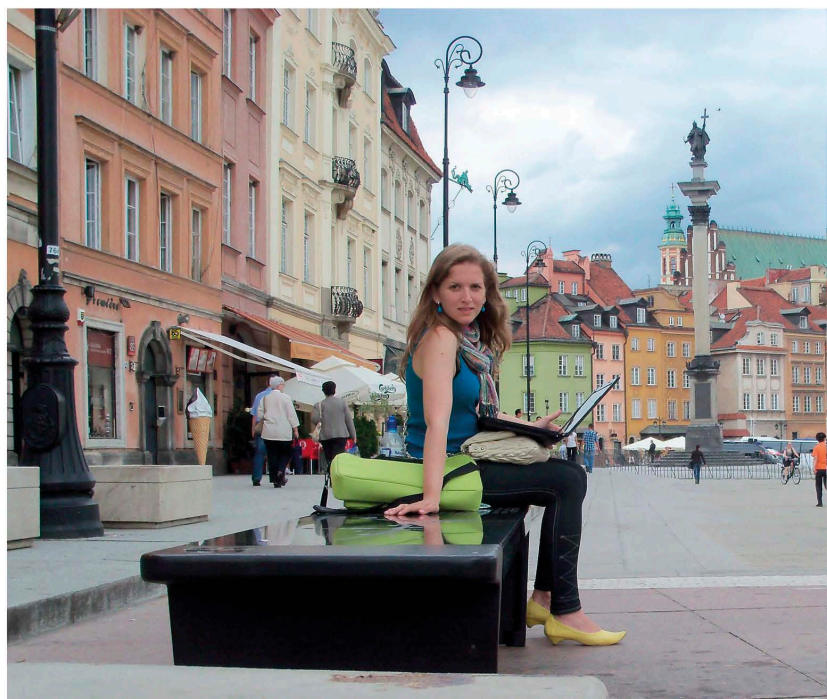
bit like a kitchen rather than 'cosmetics' shop. Maria, 30, Ukrainian, moved to Thailand 5 years ago following her husband's work at Muay Thai World Federation. Her love for new places and adventures allowed her to fully take advantage of this opportunity. Prior to Thailand Maria and her husband, whom she has known since she was 16, had a meaningful chapter in Poland, where her professional journey took off.

Ukraine and a breath of fresh European air. With all its beautiful stability, care for citizens and possibilities to grow. I came to Poland with an academic degree from Ukraine in Veterinarian medicine and certification in Tibetan therapy. I wanted to shift my focus more towards treating people rather than animals. So we moved to Krakow Poland to study in the university, and I started my 2<sup>nd</sup> degree in physiotherapy.

We lived in an old building in the centre of Oldtown with a ceramic stove to heat up the apartment during the winter. We had a black cat and old Dutch bicycles to explore the city. We studied in the mornings and after our lectures we would work. Very soon we became the best students in

**You had busy life in Poland, tell me about it.**

**Maria:** Poland was for us a spot to escape from our hometown in





our faculties, were engaged in many activities in university, and got spotted for local magazines and television.

Hearing we are only in our early 20s and already married, people in Poland would ask if we had a proper wedding. We surely had, but not in a church as in our society it's not obligatory. "Oh, then your marriage doesn't count", was usually the reaction. Since we felt it counted, after a while we stopped highlighting we were married and presented ourselves as a couple of two hard working students, always together.

### **Conventional medical studies and holistic medicine – how did you make it work**

**Maria:** In Poland, I was focusing on my physiotherapy studies in the days, and was working as a certified Tibetan therapist after university hours - working with patients using old-fashioned technics of diagnosis: pulse and urine, and teaching courses on Tibetan medicine in Poland, Czech Republic, Russia and Germany. During my first year in Poland I was invited to join the international academy of Tibetan medicine led by a famous Tibetan teacher Dr Nida Chenagsang. (I had read his books when I was just 16 and that influenced me to go to Paris and take a course to become a certified instructor on Tibetan Massage Kunye). My aim during those years was to get official diploma in physiotherapy and to complete a diploma in Tibetan Massage.

It sounded impossible in every classic system of medical studies i.e European Union. But I succeed earning both diplomas.

### **When did you start developing your interest in soap making, how has it evolved to the shop you have today?**

**Maria:** It all started with the moment I held in my hands handmade soap with oats and calendula, that was gifted to me by my chemistry teacher, who later on insisted I join a course on Natural Beauty Care at the faculty of Cosmetology. I somehow follow teachers that inspire me. I learned how to make my first ever soap which was not a successful batch. But it got me engaged and curious. Very soon I prepared my first tools and made my first soap with turmeric, which took me 4 hours to cook.

I was always a bit of alchemist. Loving the magic of turning steel to gold. Soap making is just that. Mixture of cooking/chemistry and magic.

Soap making became my hobby and I started investing in it every free moment I had. Within 4 months I was offered to host my first soap making workshop in a far away little village near the mountains. We made soap using herbs from the garden, while reindeers were picking apples just in front of our house. I believe it was the real start of the future Bangkok Soap Opera. I understood if I wanted to

share my knowledge on natural soap making 1 I needed to infuse beauty care formulas with my knowledge on holistic old-fashion medicine. 2 Use simple edible ingredients which are easy to get. 3 Treat people as grownups and show them all the secrets from A to Z, showing that everyone can make soaps for their families at home.

Moving to Bangkok I planned to start soap and beauty care production on an everyday basis. I never planned it to be a business project, though. We started as an online store and once a month I would hold workshops on natural soap making.







Then we started hosting classes more often and going offline as a pop up store at Bangkok Farmers Market, Gateway Ekkamai. When I just joined the market we heard about a bakery that started as well with Farmers Market and then opened a store in the heart of Bangkok. It all sounded impossible and miracles. But I kept this story in mind. 3 years later here we are. We have our own store not far from BTS Phrakanong. We have no time to join the markets anymore as our store and workshops are so busy.



We now teach more than 20 topics of beauty natural care, soap making and perfumery. We have students coming to us from all around the world. We travel around Asia teaching classes and we enjoy having amazing people visiting us at our store. Bangkok Soap Opera was never my business project. It's my soul. For me it is a simple way to share my knowledge on holistic medicine in everyday life with my community and motivate them to start a healthy sustainable lifestyle.

#### **In what way your brand is different**

**Maria:** Our aim is to reduce the amount of chemicals used by our society when buying beauty care, as it impacts our health and the environment. To lead a real change we do it by 2 actions: we produce good quality natural beauty care and we teach the community to make their own cosmetics at home, based on long experience and knowledge. We focus on beauty care that will be practical and of high grade, avoiding any chemicals, using edible local ingredients that we can find at home. That helps us control quality of products from A to Z. We do not seem to be green, we are green.

#### **I heard you are an environmental activist. What projects are you involved with these days**

**Maria:** As a kid I always dreamt of working with marine animals. In Thailand I managed to make it happen, and became engaged with wildlife organisation, leading eco-friendly tours to whale watching in the gulf of Thailand.

With Bangkok Soap Opera we started a community project: we hold educational sessions for business owners and individuals on a green way to recycle their waste oil, instead of

pouring it to the city drains, (it affects floods during rainy season and lower drastically quality of city water). As oil is main ingredient in soap making, we turn waste oil into soap. We work as a full cycle business model with restaurants and hotels – they donate oil to us and we make soap for their facility. We also collect oil from individuals and turn it into solid soap and donate it to charity.

#### **What type of childhood did you have?**

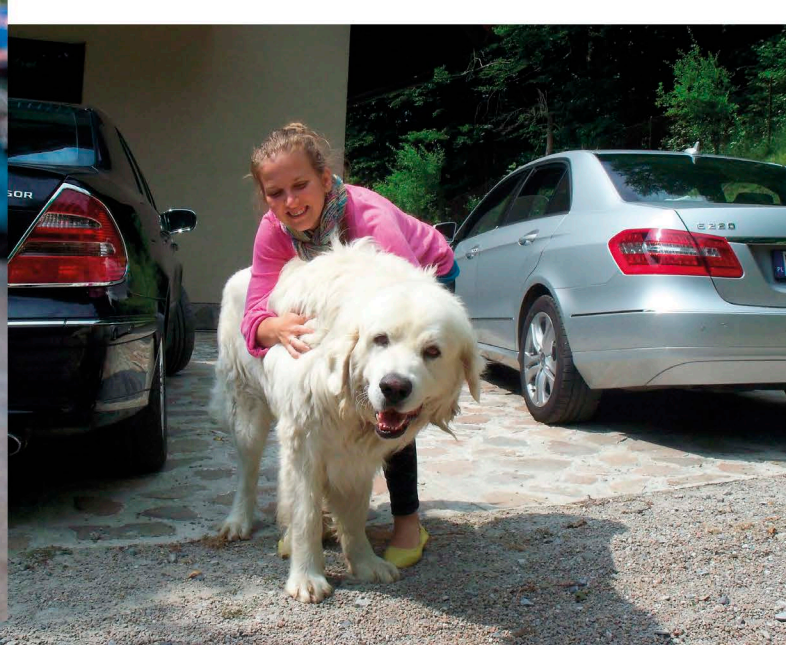
**Maria:** When I was 7 my family moved to Cyprus and I spent 2 happy years there, enjoying more possibilities, different than Ukraine (where there were only 2 types of sweaters for winter sold in the stores – green for boys and white for girls). I came back to Ukraine with good spoken English, that helps me today.

I was always in love with animals, plants and music. Since I was 5 I played various instruments, and I loved singing. My mom introduced me to the guitar, saying all the big stars play guitar and sing. I started my own band at the age of 14: me playing a big heavy bass guitar, with two 16 year old boys. My mom was right - I became a star and was at one with my guitar. It was my heart.

I was always shy and a bit lonely, but my friends thought I was confident and active. When something happened in a kids group or in class, my friends would say 'oh Maria, go, you can do it. No one will, but you can'. I actually never felt myself good enough for the job but was always surprised to discover how strong I am indeed.

As a teenager I was romantic and delicate. writing poems, songs and rollerblading non stop, jumping from stairs making turns in the air. Always loved speed and freedom. When I was still a teenager, I met my future husband. I was 16, he was 19. He looked so grownup to me and wonderful. He waited for me while I took my university exams and years later I waited for him for 9 months while he worked for an airline travelling the world. I am really lucky to be married to my best ever friend.





**What do you like to do when you take time off and how do you pamper yourself?**

**Maria:** Almost 100% of my time is focused on Bangkok Soap Opera. To pamper myself I keep it simple: 15 minutes morning yoga routine; 30 minutes cooking healthy food for the day; I always have fresh flowers at my working table; I watch the night sky while sitting in hammock at my roof garden; and I like giving myself gifts – such as jewellery – when I do a great job or finish a project.

My pets are also a great way to pamper myself – I have a lovely small dog called Kiwi who travelled the world with me, we have Maria the cat (her name was the main attraction for us to adopt her), and we have rabbits and a hedgehog in the garden.

**Who are you? Who is Maria that not everyone knows?**

**Maria:** I believe even now everyone thinks of me as an extremely active person that enjoys being in front of audience. But in reality I suffer every single time when I need to do that. I feel like I am going to the cage with tigers. I want to hide under the bed. On the other hand, if I see someone else in front of an audience – I really envy and want to be there.

I am considered gentle when dealing with people, so people get confused when they later see how quickly I make decisions, and how quickly I bring my plans to life.

**What drives you?**

**Maria:** Will to life. I never take my life for granted. Every day I feel thankful for what I have.

**What or who inspires you?**

**Maria:** Scents and textures of nature inspires me at my work and give me joy, whether it's a beautiful blossom or delicate dry leaves falling from a mango tree. My grandmother was - and is - my best inspiration. She taught me the secret of life: to enjoy the small things, to enjoy every day. And then wow – you are actually enjoying all your life.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years from now?**

**Maria:** In 10 years I wish to be still happily married with my husband. Definitely living in Bangkok. Still wild with silver short hair. 5 kids, 2 big dogs, minimum 3 cats and I badly need a white horse. I plan to have Bangkok Soap Opera stores opened in Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and maybe New York? Why not?

Dream big and work hard.

**Your top tip to inspire other expats women in a foreign city?**

**Maria:** In any situation or country you move to, never lose yourself. People change, cities change, but you need something to hold on to. It seems the only really stable thing in life we can predict and control is ourselves. So take care of yourself in good and bad times and be brave. Every change is a good change. Everything you lose is a new thing to find soon.





# The Royal Cliff Hotels Group – more than just a hotel

*An icon of Pattaya*



Situated in the prime position on the headland of Pratumnak Hill of parkland overlooking the eastern shore of the Gulf of Thailand towards Koh Lan is the Royal Cliff Hotels Group.

More than just a hotel, as it is actually four hotels on one 64 acre site of prime real estate. The family friendly, four hotels give the guest the illusion of staying in a boutique hotel, whilst offering all of the amenities and facilities associated with the industry's finest resorts.

In 1973, the Royal Cliff Beach Terrace opened with 106 rooms offering excellent sea views for the leisure guest and it has been constantly upgraded and now offers accommodation for 89 guests.

The Royal Cliff Beach Hotel built in 1974 comfortably accommodates 574 guests and has just completed an extensive refurbishment bringing it up to date to compete with the branded chains.

The grand entrance with the road leading past the conference and exhibition halls, the central fountain as you arrive, the entranceway, the main foyer and ground floor have all been refurbished and levelled making it a much cleaner, spacious and easy way to move around the ground floor of the building seamlessly.

I was checked in efficiently by the reception staff who explained the necessary and I was shown to the elevators. My room was an ocean deluxe at 36 square metres which had also just been completely refurbished and was

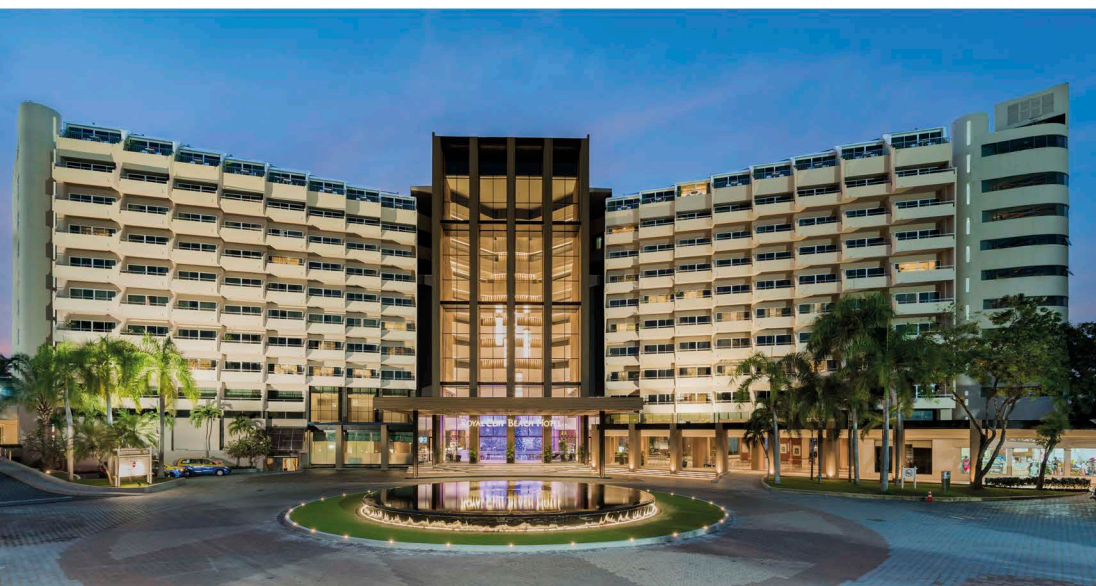
finished to a high 5 star standard. The glass walled bathroom had a large bath tub, marbled sink and separate frosted glass WC and shower cubicles.

It was equipped with everything one would need for a safe and happy holiday - flat screen TV, desk and writing table, sofa and sitting area, oversized bed with crisp white linen, combination safe, fridge and mini bar and finished with light wood throughout and on the floor with all the modern amenities.

I spent a very comfortable weekend at the hotel. The buffet breakfast had everything that you could possibly wish for regardless from where you came, your nationality or dietary requirements. There were plenty of staff who provided an efficient and comforting service.

The Royal Cliffs Royal Wing Suites and Spa was opened in 1986 by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, now the current King of Thailand. This 5-star-plus accommodation is the hotels group's flagship hotel and offers the finest degree of personal service known to man.

The last hotel on site is the Royal Cliff Grand hotel completed in 1992 which accommodates 372 people all rooms with sea views and balconies and this building also houses the Cliff Spa which







offers guests an extensive range of body treatments and massages guaranteed to pamper and release the most demanding and stressed out clients.

There was a first class health club and fitness facility called the Fitz Club. With two swimming pools, 7 championship tennis courts, 2 squash courts, a fitness suite with all manner of machines, steam and sauna for both men and women.

The onsite Pattaya Exhibition and Convention Hall (PEACH) with a capacity of 10,000 people is perfect for corporate events and conferences and also holds a full calendar of events throughout the year. It has its own private helipad on the roof to receive special guests.

The hotel has won the prestigious TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice Award 7 times in the luxury category and always ranks high on the review site. It is also winner of more than 200 prestigious travel industry awards and the first hotel group in Asia Pacific to be in TTG Travel Hall of Fame.

For more information on the Royal Cliff Hotels Group, please visit: [www.royalcliff.com](http://www.royalcliff.com)







# Destination wedding

by Barbara Lewis

The title has several connotations depending on how you say it but needless to say it involved a wedding and not just any wedding, the wedding of my only daughter. This was a much anticipated event; in fact she made a vow that if her husband had not asked her to marry him by the time she was thirty years old she was going to move on.

Well that came and went and still we waited for another two years. When she had made that statement I truly believed her as she is a very determined young woman. They were together for six years before the blessed event

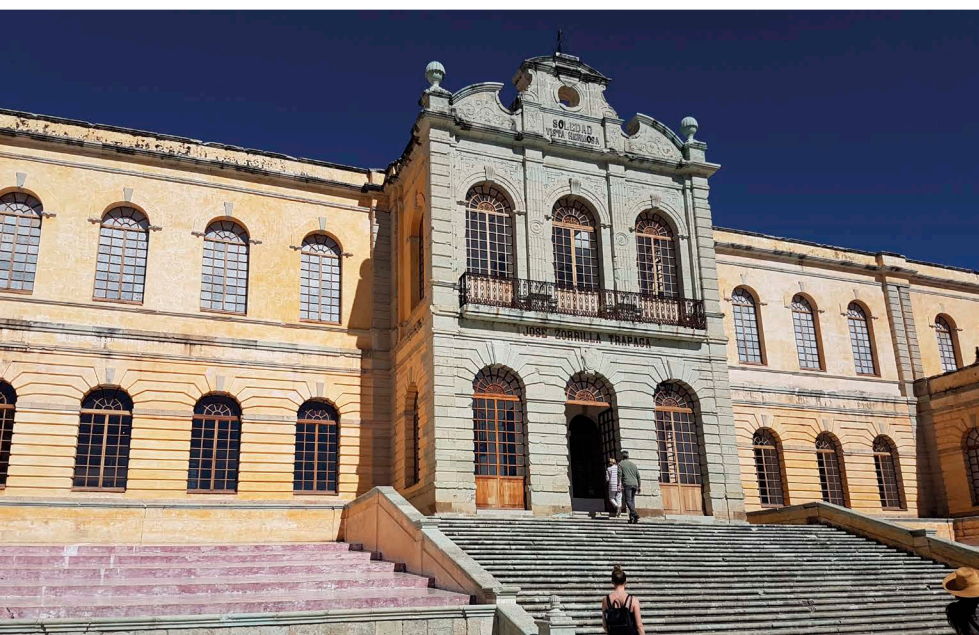
and yes it was an actual destination wedding, so starts the tale.

They lived together for six years and to be truthful there were points in time that I didn't think they would marry at all because for them as a couple it didn't seem like it was something they believed in and then we finally heard they were engaged with a ring to prove it. This ring she had chosen the stone and had it specially designed for her. It is very minimalistic and he has a Danish background so it has that kind of sparse design flare. When I got engaged we never had an engagement party because we were very young when we got married and I don't think it was done, so my husband



and I wanted to throw an engagement party for my daughter and her fiancé.

Unexpectedly, even though she was super busy, my daughter planned and executed the most beautiful detailed catered engagement party for approximately 25-30 people in their home in Lion's Bay, Canada. We flew in to attend it. We had to do nothing except minimally help with the final preparations and bring out two cases of wine that we had bought in Burgundy France in 2010 especially for an occasion like this. My daughter did an absolutely brilliant job of this event, so much so that the caterer asked if they were open to rent their home for other events.

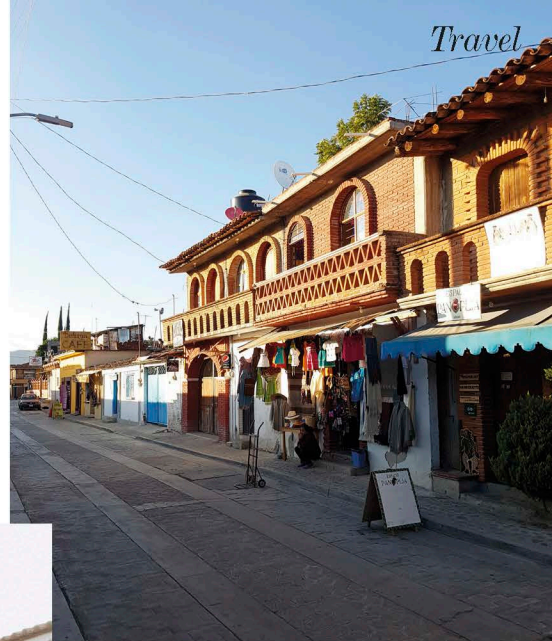




So next, the wedding and the couple quickly decided on a destination wedding in Oaxaca, Mexico. They had visited this area a few years previous and fell in love with it. Oaxaca is one of the poorest parts of Mexico and at one time it was riddled with drug lords because these people could ply their trade and support the community. It has since been cleaned up but is still a very poor area of Mexico. They

venue confirmation yet) to the time of the wedding was about 10 weeks to plan.

My daughter is a designer and very detail oriented. A destination wedding meant it was going to be a small mostly family affair, about the same size as the engagement party with a number of twists. Since we knew little about the area and were in Bangkok there was very little we could do from



find out until we were down in Mexico that they consider this time holiday time, until about the middle of January and that all of the vendors put an additional tax of 30% on their goods, so of course this was parlayed on to our bill through the florist and caterer. Mexico also likes to use PayPal, which just is not something we use, for one thing because we live in Thailand and have our bank in Canada we can't, plus we have never found it particularly successful or safe. You might have already gathered that making payments was not easy and did cause a great deal of stress.



our end except pay. My daughter in her brilliance planned the wedding, reception dinner and flowers, arranged for cultural excursions, found places for people to stay, bought her wedding gown and completely had it reconstructed and did this in the allotted time in another language, which she did not know, Spanish and in another country.

We left to go to Mexico on December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and the time leading up to that was of course Christmas, which has its own stresses and joys but added to this was all the plans and payments that needed to be completed for the wedding. We definitely had the lag time of the holidays to contend with and that seemed to be more of an issue in Mexico than it did in Canada. Additionally we did not

knew of a hacienda that hosted events outside the city and only the availability determined when it would take place, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019. From the time of the engagement party (we did not have







completely changes the arrangements as it may reduce the group to half its size. My daughter had made all the arrangements and when people complained whether it was directed at her or not she felt it, this upset her and it did me as well because she was upset.

The wedding ceremony and reception were at the hacienda. The florist set up an arch of flowers where the bride and groom stood for the ceremony, which was officiated by his sister, reciting their own vows.

Oaxaca is known for its Mezcal; a kind of alcohol made out of different agave plants.

As is quite often the case a few personalities can be a major cause of strain and in a small destination wedding like ours when certain members of the group keep changing their mind about whether they want to participate in an excursion or not it

It is quite different than Tequila much stronger. It is normally drunk straight not in a cocktail but for the wedding my daughter wanted to only have Mezcal and beer (small beers called Coronitas) and some cocktails at the beginning of the evening made from Mezcal. We convinced her that we also needed wine for dinner and for those who can't drink Mezcal. We had purchased the Mezcal from local artisan producers on our Mezcal tour a few days previous to the wedding.

After the ceremony a band started playing outside the hacienda and we gathered everyone to come outside to see what was going on. Two giant dancing puppet effigies of the bride and groom were dancing around. The band and the puppets danced into the hacienda and we all followed. The band stayed and played music while



we danced with the puppets, bride and groom. The puppets were delightfully fun and they are a particular cultural practice of the people from Oaxaca.

The reception dinner consisted of a number of Oaxacan specialties, different kinds of mole. They had the traditional cutting of the cake, however, in Oaxaca it is done with a sword.

Later, at about 11pm, they stopped the dancing and a man came to trumpet in fireworks, another glorious Oaxacan tradition for weddings. The crowd danced and drank until 2am when we had buses take them back to where they were staying. For most of us this meant over an hour's drive.







*The late afternoon and evening of wedding were absolutely magical. Just like the weather where it went from the heat of the afternoon to coolness of evening to the night chill. My daughter and her husband said it was everything that they dreamed it would be and forever etched their memories; in ours as well, not always easy but definitely worth it.*



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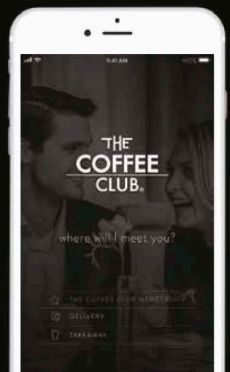


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events are organised during after office hours.

In Sweden my experience is that often people socialise with friends who are from the same working environment. Lawyers associate and enjoy the company of other lawyers and colleagues. Doctors with other friends with a medical background and teachers gladly become friends with school colleagues etc. But in the expat world the experience itself being abroad and moving to another country brings us close together no matter what your

## SWEA the Swedish organisation - a global network

by *Monica Nilsson and  
Anna Frummerin*

*Photographs by Monica Nilsson,  
Camilla Davidsson, Pang  
Varaporn, Thomas Engström*

quite busy of course with all the activities happening around the school, sports, etc. Helping out with the load of homework. Some of us are a bit older and have grown

up children at home and maybe even grandchildren and you are a spouse to your working husband here in Bangkok. Some work here at the Embassy e.g. but get involved in SWEA still for the friendships and also for yearly parties or festivities and also now for the sake of SWEA professionals where different



profession is in your home country and that I believe is so rewarding and fun. You listen and learn from each other and we all have different stories and experiences from "back home" or from another country that you have lived in. The similarities and the differences meet.

**W**hen moving abroad to a new country, be it the first time or the fourth, the importance of meeting new friends and socialising, experiencing things together with your fellow countrymen or in this case women, is so important. I would say it is almost a must. You could be extremely lonely I believe if you didn't have the associations that connect and bind us tighter together when we no longer have a job to go to every morning. We are all in the same boat so to speak.

Some of us have children in international schools and that keeps you





When my husband and I came to Bangkok in January 2015 I immediately got involved in SWEA, The "Swedish Women Educational Association" and for two years I was engaged in the Board and the second year I was elected as the President (2016) or Chairwoman. It was two fun years and I got so many new contacts and friends, not only here in Bangkok, but as the President you also get to meet and talk to your peers of the countries in the rest of SE Asia that has a SWEA Chapter and also in Australia. Every month you have meetings via "Got to Meeting"/Skype.

There are SWEA Bangkok / SWEA Asia / SWEA International.



can possibly be better? The SWEA group responsible for activities is doing a great job coming up with new ideas all the time. No one will get bored here. Not for long anyway.

SWEA Bangkok just recently held its AGM (January) the Annual General Meeting at the Rembrandt Hotel as the venue for many years back. SWEA Bangkok

her involvement in SWEA in 2016 responsible for sponsorship etc. She now enters her second year as the President. SWEA Bangkok ended year 2018 with 73 members.

SWEA donates either money or other contributions/material to different organisations but it always has to have a Swedish link of some sort. e.g. this year the contribution went to the family Bergqvist in Huay Yang who help Thai

7000 members globally in 72 countries and it started already 1979 by Agneta Nilsson in California so this year 2019 SWEA celebrates 40 years. A year filled with festivities. I am positive that Agneta Nilsson is very proud of what the organisation has achieved and that it is still very active and means so much for Swedish speaking women living abroad.

As activities SWEA Bangkok has a full schedule every month. Something fun and interesting happens almost every week. It may be just a coffee morning, a lunch with a lecture on different subjects or a visit to some interesting venue, maybe a museum or a visit to a company. It can be a course in photography perhaps, or to learn about life coaching. We have fun and learn something at the same time. What

started in the year 2000 as an independent chapter but the organisation was active even before that, but belonged then, to SWEA Singapore. The very first President was Susanne Rapp, but since then there have been quite a few names such as Agneta Bekassy de Bekas, author of many articles, Berit Carlekrantz, Maria Mellblom (2008-2015), Monica Nilsson (2016) Simone Westergård (2017), and now Anna Frummerin since early 2018. Anna started







children to swim.

In Sweden every child learns to swim at an early age, but that is not the case in Thailand where it is quite common that children and young people drown. They just haven't learned how to swim. To ride a bike and to learn how to swim is as natural for Swedish children as learning how to walk when they are 1 years old.

Other donations in the past



have gone to the children in Klong Toey slum, I remember we had an Easter Party for the children and it was so much

fun to see the children and how happy they were. *Hang on Hangers*, which started by Mrs Annika Jonasson many years ago, is another receiver of SWEA donations. There are different ways you can help the families and women in the less fortunate areas to get a better life. Annika has moved back to Sweden but *Hang on Hangers* is still active today selling its products

at The Hope Fair e.g. It feels good to help the needy and SWEA is just one of many organisations here, doing just that. Another part of SWEA is SWEA Professionals. Here comes some words directly from Mrs Anna Frummerin:

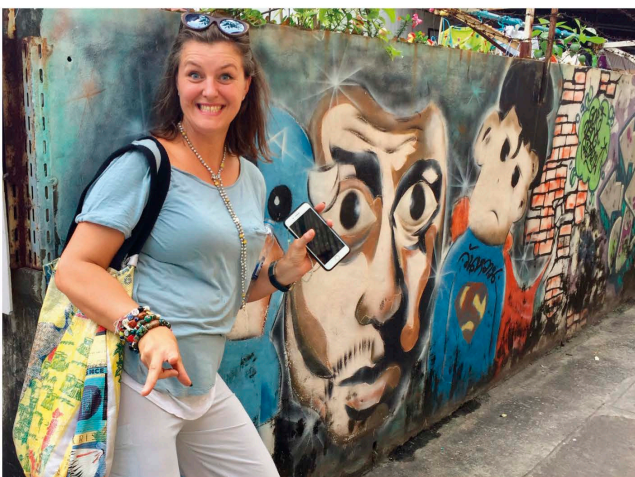
*"SWEA Professional started in San Francisco 2010 and is by now represented in many SWEA departments all over the world. For us in Bangkok it was our former treasurer Birgitta Leveen that got it started back in November 2017. Birgitta is unfortunately not living in*





Bangkok anymore but when she was, she was a full time working SWEA member, a type of member that is becoming increasingly common and a strong reason why SWEA Professional is needed.

SWEA Professional is a group for everyone within SWEA who is curious about business activities and interested in working life and professional issues. This means that you do not need to be employed today to be involved – it is interest and commitment to the issues that are important.



With Birgitta no longer in Bangkok and the large SWEA Regional Meeting (RM) project taking most of our resources forced us to take a break with SWEA Professional during the autumn 2018. With the successful RM behind us and, even more important, a new enthusiastic project owner in Charlotte Haentzel to drive the project we are however now very happy to be able to restart SWEA Professional activities again. SWEA Bangkok is working to achieve better results that in the end can benefit our members. Last year we started to work with surveys in order to get all input, feedback and suggestion what we can do to meet our members' wishes and needs. We selected and analysed the responses and took action. At the moment we are working with the plan for 2019 and we will have a workshop so we can see what actions need to be done, in order to challenge ourselves to the next step.

This year is a new important year for SWEA globally, celebrating its 40th anniversary. SWEA Bangkok will mark this event in early May with a big white glamorous party, a party no SWEA member with spouses and friends want to miss. Additionally the SWEA International Board is coming to Bangkok having its AGM and will start celebrating the 40th anniversary on March the 30th.

SWEA Asia consists of 9 so-called chapters or departments; Bangkok, Beijing, Seoul, Melbourne, Perth, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Japan and Singapore. Every second year we meet in one of the chapters and every second year a global meeting is being organised. 2018 was a year with a regional meeting that took place here in Bangkok as mentioned earlier,

which means that this year will be a year of a global meeting. I participated at the last regional meeting, which took place in Perth. This year a global meeting will be held in Dubai. Many of us are looking forward to this meeting and are planning to go, says Anna the current President of SWEA.

As for myself I will move back to home to Sweden in May after 4.5 years in Bangkok and almost 13 years in total



abroad. I will truly miss all my SWEA friends and hope this organisation will continue with their good, fun, important and inspiring work. I have no doubt that SWEA will continue to grow and has an interesting future to come.







# Lights... camera... action!

by Laura Bagin



*What is more exciting and glamorous than the Hollywood red carpet? Glitz and Glam abound. Designer fashion and exquisite jewels were on display in Los Angeles and Bangkok last month.*

**T**he American Women's Club of Thailand hosted their 17<sup>th</sup> annual **Breakfast at the Oscars** early in the morning on February 25<sup>th</sup>. More than 250,000B was raised to benefit the AWC Scholarship Programme that helps underprivileged girls complete high school.

Pretty in Pearls was this year's theme to honour the 91<sup>st</sup> showing of Hollywood's ultimate awards show and the Bangkok ladies did not disappoint. They showed up in their designer finery just like the show business elite. Some wore Asian designer Ambre Jolie, others

wore their closets' best. All were clad in pearls of all shapes, sizes and lengths.

AWC's guests walked down their own red carpet to the awaiting array of raffle prizes, silent auction items and elite award raffle prizes for Best Picture, Actor, Actress, Song, and Supporting Actor and Actress. A variety of hotel stays, restaurant vouchers, personal wellness packages and custom tailoring were amongst some of the coveted gifts. Platinum Level sponsor Intercontinental Phuket stole the prize show by offering two 2 night stays in their newest resort in southern Thailand. Citibank Thailand and Samitivej Esthetic's Institute helped out as Gold Level sponsors.

Attendees watched the star-studded event via a live feed from Los Angeles while they enjoyed a scrumptious breakfast buffet along with glasses of "bubbles" to make the occasion more festive and certainly more fun. Raffle prize winners were drawn during the commercial breaks. Over 50 prizes and silent auction items were given away and added significantly to the bottom line proceeds that went to support the American Women's Club Scholarship Programme.

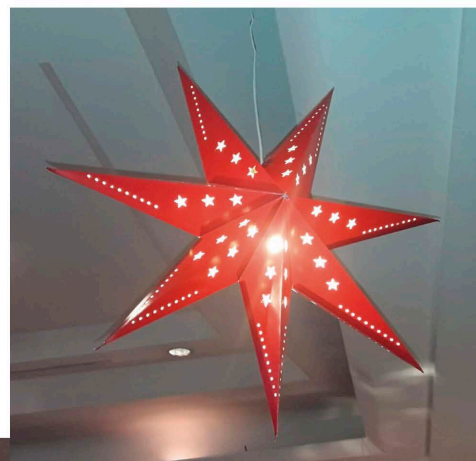
The AWC raises funds to help less fortunate girls in rural Thailand complete their last three years of high

school. The scholarships provide money for transportation, meals, school supplies and any other ancillary fees that may arise. They are currently fundraising for the 2019-2020 school year.

**For more information on AWC Scholarship go to:**  
<https://awcthailand.org/scholarship>.











## In the spirit of the season

*by Niru Narula*

On December 10, 2018, Soroptimist International Club of Bangkok (SIB) hosted its annual holiday bash, with several special guests including Dato Anusha Santhirasthipam, President of Soroptimist International Federation of the Southwest Pacific, of which SIB has been a long-time member; and Rosaline Miller, SWP Membership Convenor.

We were also honoured by the presence of Her Excellency, H.E. Mrs Kshenuka Dhireni Senewiratne, Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand and Mr. Surendra Gerald Joseph Senewiratne, H.E. Mr Tshewang Chopel Dorji, Bhutan's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand and Madame Karma Tsering, H.E. Mr Tugsbilguun Tumurkhuleg, Mongolia's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand and Madame Doljinsuren Tsend-Ayush, H.E. Mr Dato Jojie Samuel, Malaysia's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand and Datin Catherina Christine Cherrian.

The venue was the Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit Hotel, which was decked out in glorious Christmas finery, setting the scene for a wonderfully festive celebration.

Guests mingled and enjoyed seasonal drinks and wines before tucking into an array of delicious international foods, which were very much in tune with the global roster of guests, including tantalising starters like Dum Saunfia Tikka and corn and asparagus Tikka; grilled Norwegian salmon, scallion whipped potatoes, sauté vegetable in a marron bisque sauce; and homemade ravioli ricotta cheese and spinach in tomato sauce. The meal ended with an exquisite Gianduja chocolate



tart artfully served with berry sherbet.

During dinner, SIB President Niru Narula briefed the guests on the club's programmes and charitable endeavours, including fundraising projects, networking opportunities among professional women and guest speakers. Also, throughout its four decades of existence, SIB has focused on education, funding scholarships, building dormitories and toilets in rural schools, and supporting vocational training for poor women and women prisoners.

In addition, the club provides scholarships to student nurses studying under the Queen Mother's Foundation nursing programme; hires nannies to care for disabled children at Baan Fueng Fah, part of the Pakkret welfare



homes; supports a Siriraj project, funding boarding for low-income families with gravely ill children under palliative care; provides aid during times of natural disasters and humanitarian crises; and, under President Niru's helm, focuses on how we can improve our immediate environment through eliminating single-use plastics and planting more trees.

As the evening progressed and bellies became full, the programme included fun bonding games such



as a pop culture quiz and an engineering challenge that consisted of building the tallest possible structure from marshmallows and wooden skewers (it was much harder than it seemed)! The talented winners were H.E. Mr Tshewang Chopel Dorji, Bhutan's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand and Madame Karma Tsering, David Lyman's nephew Dave from Sydney, Australia, and Sara Waramontri, a founding member of SIB.

The festivities continued long into the night, with a rousing sing-a-long of beloved pop songs and



Christmas carols. Dato Anusha and H.E. Kshenuka Dhireni Senewiratne among other guests wowed the audience with their renditions of the classics. As the drinks continued to flow and holiday spirits soared, the celebration exemplified the very best of SI Bangkok: friendship and service to and amongst peoples of the world.'

The Soroptimist International Club of Bangkok (SIB) is part of Soroptimist International, a worldwide organisation for professional women who volunteer their time to work on projects that promote human rights and raise the status of women.

Chartered in 1977, our mandate is to inspire action and create opportunities for women and children through advocating for equality, promoting safe and healthy

environments, increasing access to education, and developing skills for a sustainable future.

Please visit [www.sibangkok.org](http://www.sibangkok.org) or follow Soroptimist International Club of Bangkok on Facebook for more information.





# The road to Khe Sanh

by Meghan Lynch



I'm sitting in an SUV, driving through the rain, flooded roads, tunnels that travel through mountains that seem to never end. I look out the window, I see rice paddies and cemeteries and I wonder just how old they are. I see children sitting on the curb by their homes, that look more to me like storefronts than living rooms, but they are in fact, living rooms. We stop at our version of a gas station, I am used to adapting to whatever those versions are in every country I have visited in the last few years. This one though has a limited selection, three choices of drinks and a Vietnamese snack I wouldn't ordinarily dare try but this is what severe hunger and no options does to a person, pushes them, stretches them not knowing it was preparing me for the next stop, prawn wrapped in a banana leaf inside of a jelly like substance. Anyway, that first snack, well I wish I had bought more.

We woke early this morning, our second full day in Da Nang. Today is the day of our tour. The tour we booked to see where my Dad was based for a good amount of his time here in Vietnam during the war, as a Combat Marine.

My brother and I, feeling like today was the day we had come here for. Today was the day we could see, and feel and experience just a sliver of what is the backbone of my Father's existence.

It was raining when we woke. I am, I must say use to Bangkok rainy



season. I didn't think too much into it, crazy right, I just assumed it would be a quick shower. So much to learn... still so much to learn. As I ate breakfast and the rain was pouring down I was still assuming (yep, you know what they say about that) that the car was waiting outside to take us on our 3 to 4 hour journey, that the rain would have no impact on. That thought erased as a hotel staff came over to our table and said "Your tour guide called, they have cancelled the tour today due to flooding. There will be no tours in that area today."

My heart sank as I took in this in. I looked up at my little brother Russ, in mid conversation with a Vietnam Vet, an American from Tennessee, on this fifth trip here. He was praising my brother and I for honouring our Dad and







his experience in this way. He asked us to friend him on Facebook and if he could take a photo with us, we obliged. He shared a part of his story, where he went to Boot Camp, seeing if he and our father had crossed paths, they hadn't, although the paths were different, they were similar. He shared his plan this trip, to plant a Christmas tree over the ridge, just nearby the hotel we were standing in. He was in combat on that ridge and lost a friend and fellow soldier there due to enemy fire. We said goodbye, me with tears in my eyes, and in Russ's admiration.

Our new friend left us and Russ and I looked at each other. He also has the talent of being able to hear two conversations at once. Immediately we got on our phones and tried to come up with Plan B. We looked at flights to Hue, not possible with the days we had left of our trip and flight times. We looked at extending only Russ's stay, knowing I had a better chance of returning one day

more than he did. We then went to Guest Services and pleaded with them to offer us another solution. We are sorry, no tours. It's not safe for our guests.

Russ handled the outcome better than I did. I was in shock at his peace and understanding. The hours he'd sat with my Dad, listening, embracing and supporting him as he opened up to his son over the years of the challenges, the camaraderie, the life lessons he took in during his time in the Corps and time in Vietnam.

I've lived in Thailand for nearly 5 years. Vietnam is a popular destination for those living here or on holiday in Bangkok. For years, when people asked me if we visited yet or planned to, I'd say no, continue with my prepared elevator speech... "My Dad was there when he was 19, he fought in the Vietnam War... it doesn't feel like somewhere I want to take the boys or go on a relaxing beach holiday." That was until my brother came to visit in November last year, on a last minute trip, this is where he chose to escape Bangkok for. I believe in the power of the universe, signs being sent our way, and paths taken when they didn't seem clear before.

Suddenly the idea of going with Russ made perfect sense, albeit missing our fearless leader, our older sister

Heather, the path looked attainable, and a supportive and shocking "I am overwhelmed you would want to go there," from our Dad, and "I support you." This was divinely meant to be.

Now, how? How could I possibly take no for an answer due to rain and some flooding on our tour day?

Russ and I went back to our hotel room and sat in silence. He laid back down and again I was wishing I had his peace and acceptance. I did what I do most days to cope with decisions to make, emotions I want to sort out or move past, I run. During the run, as it usually does, a lightbulb flashes on, an idea. I decided to text the woman at the airport who so kindly arranged a car to take us to the hotel a few days earlier. She said if we needed anything to let her know. I messaged her, mid stride and shared what was going on.





# The Ambassador of the European Union to Thailand H.E. Mr Pirkka Tapiola



## **H**ow long have you been the Ambassador to Thailand?

I arrived in Thailand in the autumn of 2017 and received Royal Permission to exercise my duties as the Ambassador of the European Union to the Kingdom of Thailand in early December 2017.

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

Before coming to Thailand, I served as Ambassador of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova, from 2013 until August 2017.

## **Where were you born and brought up?**

I was born in Helsinki, in the northern part of the European Union, in Finland.

After that, I had an international childhood, involving not just Helsinki, but also in Paris and New York.

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

I cannot really recall; I think I always wanted to be a diplomat. It felt natural, as I come from a family with some diplomats.

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

My grandfather was a career diplomat, and my father is a retired senior UN official. My mother, however, became a politician.

## **How do you look at Thailand today, have you had many obstacles in your way since you arrived?**

I love this country very much. As you may know, I was first posted here 20 years ago, from 1998 to 2001. Thus, I knew the Kingdom before coming here in 2017 as Ambassador. Of course, the country has changed a lot in the past two decades. It has for one, certainly become much wealthier, which I am happy to note. You can see how Bangkok has become a rich city.

When I arrived, I would say we were still in a "rather calm" period in our political relationship, following the 2014 military takeover. Our relationship



had become less intense. However, in December 2017 we adjusted the implementation of our policy to reflect changes in the situation on the ground, especially as Thailand was now moving towards parliamentary elections. My ambition is to see the relationship move to a completely new level after the elections.

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

I represent the European Union, which is a culturally varied political union. Thailand then again is a much more unified state. So you could talk about big differences. However, there is much more in common than meets the eye. Thailand lies geographically at the crossroads of different cultures. While the Thai nation is very prominently present, you have many people coming from neighbouring countries, and many subcultures from Chinese to Malay. You also have a history and a present characterised by migration. This is a positive thing. You have increasing diversity and you too are 'United in Diversity', which is the motto of the European Union.





Her reply was the weather was poor and the area was flooded, and if we did go, there was no guarantee any of the sites would have staff there to show us around. My reply, "I don't mind, we are here for this tour and only have one day to try, we want to try." She replied "20 minutes, someone will pick you up."

This all sounds a little irrational and extreme. I had this realisation that all the travelling I've done before this, the language barriers, food and health concerns, travelling on sides of mountains for hours that shoot straight down to nothing... a boat taken over by wild monkeys with a Captain who didn't speak English, a remote island where it was just our family and natives and their machetes? This, was within my boundaries, I felt safe with the elements of the wind and rain and the random driver they were sending us to drive 10 hours in total, that oddly felt safe too. I was brought up to never give up.

When we got into the car the driver spoke little to no English and he had no idea where he was taking us. This is when I got nervous for the first and only time, thinking, does he not know what he said yes to? It would be 10 hours of driving us today! Through Google Maps and Google Translator we worked through it and showed him where we wanted to go. He said "I go get my brother, we share the drive." Russ and I glanced at each other, with mixed emotions, fear, anxiety and nervous laughter.

With his brother now in the car, the rain pouring down we were on our way. Russ put on his ear buds and kept quiet for most of the journey. He was more nervous than I, and I respected how he had to work himself through it. I've coped

listening to music, taking in the landscape and thinking of my Father and writing when the windy roads and my belly would allow it.

We spoke on and off to our brother team of drivers. They asked us why we wanted to go where we were headed. Russ took the phone and spoke and shared that our Father had been here, during the War. We both held our breath not knowing what they'd say. They both smiled and laughed and said their Father had fought too, and they called us in Vietnamese, brothers bonded by Fathers who fought in the Vietnam War. That universe again... tears and an overwhelming feeling that these two boys who had no experience as tour guides were maybe just what we were meant to have guiding us.

As we drove through Hue along Rt 9, to Khe Sanh where the lovely lady at the airport said we could absolutely try to get to today. That was where my Dad served with his brother Marines, for a brief period, Khe Sanh, and other Marine outposts along the DMZ,



initially set up to stop infiltration from North Vietnam along Rt. 9. It became a massive battleground over many years.

It was rainy and windy, we took our umbrellas and set feet down again where we knew our Dad's had been. A museum was there now, filled with photographs and maps hanging on the wall. There were cases filled with old weapons and bombs, uniforms, radios.



The photos captioned in Vietnamese and English easy to read, and yet not, as it was graphic and one sided and yet captivating. Russ and I quietly walked through and when finished went outside to meet our poncho covered tour guides.

They told us what certain places were on the land years ago... now full of green grass, re-dug trenches and to my surprise tiny flowers. There was a piece of the airstrip and rebuilt bunkers that we stood in to give the tourists the "feeling" of what the Marines were facing. I don't think any type of rebuilt anything can help us understand and feel what they felt. I hung back, let Russ and the guides go on. I turned my phone onto video mode, I began talking to my Dad. It felt natural, if he wasn't able to be by my side then this was the next best option. I showed him where we were, put Russ in view as he looked around. I panned to Tiger Hill and let him see the planes they dropped in from Saigon years ago for the purpose of sightseeing the battleground. I told him how I loved him and how brave he was, I swallowed my tears as I spoke, still not knowing all of the knowing he knew.

After the tour was over we sat down and Russ had a coffee, now to me, that was crazy. A shop setup to buy souvenirs and have a snack. Our mouths quiet and our minds racing to take in what we'd seen and the emotions we were hiding inside. I know my brother all too well and again let him sit in silence and process, he like my Father speaks with only meaning and purpose.



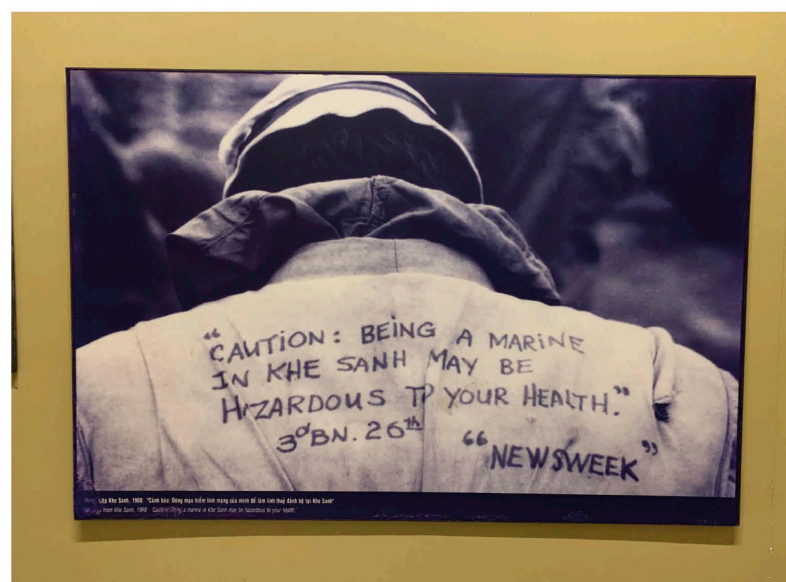
The road to Khe Sanh was that. A road, bumpy, windy, flooded, with horns beeping, dark tunnels and no real understanding of where we would get to, how long it would take and if we could see what we came to see and feel in respect and honour for not only our Dad but the other soldiers fighting a battle that remains in history as one of the most deadly and controversial wars.

My Dad's 19 year old feet landed in Da Nang airport and his shiny boots went onto a helicopter and landed him in "living hell," as he says. Those boots lost their shine and he took everything they had prepared him for and used it, along with his inner strength that carried him home to safety, 13 months later.

Our journeys, although impossible to really compare, were filled in their own way with struggles, worry, defeat and defying the odds against us.

*"Build me a son, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak, and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid, one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat, and humble and gentle in victory."*

– Douglas MacArthur







# Nikolas Ramirez: Soccer player to Chef de cuisine



**M**y culinary journey was anything but typical. Growing up in Hawaii, I fully embraced my father's advice: "Love what you do and never work a day in your life", wise words that I follow to this day. So, I embarked on creating a life around my first love, soccer, which led an innocent island boy to, of all places, Eastern Europe.

I landed in strange, unfamiliar surroundings that could be 'oh so cold' (at least to me!), but with warm people who accepted me through our shared love of soccer. Unfortunately, I discovered the politics of sport, which made me doubt my path. I still loved soccer, but the confusion from pursuing a professional sports career left me at a crossroads, so I realised I would have to continue my search.

I left the Romanian countryside to find what I love. Sweeping parking lots was not the first thing that came to mind, but it was part of the process. And then, one night while I was preparing a meal in the kitchen, the seed was planted by the mother of my girlfriend at that time, "You should go to culinary school!"

The seed sprouted inspiration and a motivation that filled me with joy. I remember it like yesterday – I pursued my cooking classes like a high school kid only happy with straight A's. I guess we are all nerds when it comes to the things we love! So, with that drive and the discipline I learned from my time in pro sports, I dove into my culinary arts courses at Santa Barbara City College.

Six months out of culinary schools, my dedication was rewarded with the position of sous chef at Wine Cask in Santa Barbara. A young buck now a boss, it was definitely a trial by fire. Push or die became a motto, pain and suffering a norm. But it really wasn't, because I found what I loved. The intense heat and pressure created a diamond in the rough that I was determined to make a sparkling gem. The work paid off – when the time came, I became Chef de Cuisine there, and like my father said, I loved what I did so I never worked.

The culinary world is full of adrenaline junkies and masochists, pushing themselves to prove a point, competitive to the extreme – they tend to burn out fast. After over a decade in the business, I've only met a handful of cooks who are truly at home in the kitchen, and one of







them is my mother. She tried to teach me, and I eventually learned, that to create truly interesting and appealing food requires love. Cooking with love is the key to success and happiness for me. From Gaggan to 22 Kitchen & Bar at Dusit Thani Bangkok, I continued to find success and happiness in the kitchen!

To find others who share your passion is so important when pursuing what you love – it's something unspoken, but when the connection is made, it's magic. With enthusiasm and a little blind trust, I rode the waves, letting them guide me to my destination, from Hawaii to Romania to California and now to Bangkok, which is becoming more and more a perfect fit for me. It is my sanctuary and my workshop, where my creativity is encouraged with enthusiasm.

If you told me all those years ago that I would end up as Chef de Cuisine at one of IHG's hottest properties, Hotel Indigo Bangkok Wireless Road, I would have never believed you. But here I am, creating menus inspired by premium organic wines from around the world and astoundingly fresh ingredients. Here at CHAR, I can continue to pursue my culinary vision of enhancing fundamental flavours using contemporary grilling techniques. This way, every component in each dish shines. I've been able to hone my preparations and techniques at CHAR's amazing grills, sharing these delicious innovations with my colleagues and diners. All of them love these fantastic flavours from my modern grill concept as much as I do!

The team here at Hotel Indigo Bangkok Wireless Road shares my vision – they understand how important it is to source the best ingredients. Not just the most expensive or the most sought after, but ingredients that have the best flavours, which are usually organic and sustainably cultivated. Claudio Russo, our new F&B manager, understands this, and I was thrilled that he has joined us with his creativity and flair – so now, like the Three Musketeers, Claudio, Michiel de Kleer (our GM), and I will create the most exceptional culinary events for Bangkok!

Reservations: [charbangkok@ihg.com](mailto:charbangkok@ihg.com) and 02 207 4999





# The Poo Yai Baan in our village

by Jackie Jeane

Growing up in the United States I had the great fortune of a loving grandmother who took pride in the good old American constitution and political system. She was active in local government and made sure that, even as a youngster, I knew what the political world was all about. I enjoyed going to press conferences and meetings with her because it made me feel important to be the cute young girl with an opinion on gun rights and such. A few politicians took note of me and even started to groom me for a political career as early as 11 years old. I worked in the capitol as a page for both the House of Representatives and the Senate and was even invited into backdoor caucus meetings. Eating a \$2,000 per plate charity breakfast sitting next to, then presidential candidate, Bob Dole was an unforgettable experience.

Fortunately, I was young enough to spot the double speak and straight out lies that were all around me in that world. Before I could sell my soul, I walked away. My short political career

was over by the time I turned 15 years old. That was when Fox news came out in the US and I gave up all hope in the media as well. I literally tuned out, gave my TV away and decided to live a life true to my own inner callings. I do believe that experience set the stage for me to eventually move to Canada and abroad which brings me to here and now (my favourite place to be).

I have moved around and felt at home in many different parts of the world. I do feel that I am settled, at least for the time being, in Thailand. It's funny how feeling settled has brought out parts of me that I had long since left in the past. It's easy to be aloof about politics and policies while travelling but once I feel at home, I start to become more aware of and involved in my community. My political roots are still deep down inside me and have crept up from time to time in Thailand. I love to keep things simple by focusing on my immediate family and village around

me. Therefore, I have decided to get to know my Poo Yai Baan or head of my village and share the experience with you. Many expats are aware of their village head but may not know exactly what they do. My past has left me inclined to find out. On a slightly chilly evening in Huai Kood, Den Chai, Thailand I sat down to learn about our Poo Yai Baan, Khun Putiset Sootamsupajalern, and this is what he had to say.





### Where are you from?

I was born in Lampang, but I have been living in Den Chai for about 40 years. As a young child I went back and forth a lot. I went to school in Lampang until 4<sup>th</sup> grade when I finally moved to school in Den Chai full time.

### How many people live in Huai Kood village?

Now we have about 2,050 people.

### How long have you been the head of Huai Kood?

Over 6 years. I began my term in 2012.



### How does one get to be Poo Yai Baan?

The people of the village vote.

### Does your family work with you?

Yes, they help a lot. Everyone here helps a lot. We all must work together to do everything needed. One person simply cannot do it alone. Many people think it is easy money to be Poo Yai Baan. The truth is that I must work as well as being Poo Yai Baan because the salary is very little. I am lucky because I have other work on my farm as well. I plan to continue my farm and start another business that will provide jobs for the people of Huai Kood when I retire.

### What does your family help with?

My daughter helps to do all the paperwork needed for official government business. My wife does everything from cooking for many people, when we have big meetings, to organising festivals. They both go with me to meetings, parades, funerals and many other events to help make sure everything runs smoothly.

### Do you enjoy your work?

When everyone is working together, I feel very happy and enjoy the work. We also work with government offices and other agencies in the province. Sometimes we have different ideas on how to get things done. I would like to see these ideas brought to the people in the village to allow everyone to vote. I believe this will ensure that the people's voices are heard and will help to get more things accomplished.

### What do you do on a normal day?

The focus for myself and all the people of Huai Kood is to take care of the homes, schools and temples. Day to day that can mean doing many different things.



### How long is your term?

I will serve until I am 60 years old. In the past the position was re-elected every 5 years but at this point I hold the position until I want to stop, or I am 60 years old. This is because there is no need to hold a big government election for this position. The government realised that it is very easy to change the village head and they can quickly and easily hold an election as needed.





Every day I work on the farm where we raise chickens, cattle and fish as well as grow fruits and vegetables. After work I do whatever is needed that day in the village. Some days I attend events that are put on by the government to teach us skills which we then bring back to the village to share with the people. Skills such as how to compost or grow mushrooms etc. are shared with other Poo Yai Baans and we teach each other what is working well in our villages.

I also attend to any problems in our village that may have come up. I make myself available 24 hours a day. With normal jobs people go home at 5:00pm and they are finished for the day. I cannot do that because we never know when problems will arise. Water pipes break, power goes out, floods

Anyone that has any problems can call me for anything, so my days are different each day.

### **Am I the first foreigner to live here?**

We have had two farang (foreign) men live here before. They have passed away already. They lived here about 25 years ago. One of them had a child here but he also moved away. You and your daughter are the first farang girls to live here.



### **How do you think it affects the town having farang living here?**

Good, as well. If farang come, they help with the village and the people in the village. Farang that live here are part of the village and need to participate in the same ways as the rest of the people here. They do not think of the farang as a foreigner but rather as an older or younger sister or brother, as one of them.

### **What do you think about having a farang living in your village?**

It is good! Because we have the opportunity to share ideas together and make some changes. Each country has its own style and it is nice when we can learn from each other. The ideas that

### **What do you think I can do to be part of this community?**

You already know how to help here. You look around and think about what can be done to help and you do it. For example, painting old signs and taking care of your street as well as walking



come and we cannot control when that will happen. I have even brought blankets and food to people in the middle of the night because of floods. Sometimes I get a message at 12am or 1am and I must go right away.

It's very important to remember that the Poo Yai Baan is not the head of the people and does not control the people. Poo Yai Baan is the person at the bottom who helps all the people. It is also my job to listen to the people of Huai Kood. When we have meetings, everyone can feel safe to voice their opinions. I am responsible to bring those opinions to the government meetings and share them.

are useful here we can share them with all the people in our village. For example, I have learned about a project from Japan. They built a water factory to provide clean drinking water and they allowed only the retired people in their community to buy shares of the business. That way each month they get some money back from their investment. This helps to take care of their needs as they can no longer work. The factory also provides work for the village. I plan to start the same here in the future.





in parades and participating in events. Remember, we have the Songkran Festival coming for you to be part of too. We would like you to walk in the parade with the rest of the mothers from the village.

### What do you think expats can do to help small villages like this?

Thai people and farang are the same. Everyone would like to help in the small villages. The best way to start is to go make contacts in the village. Talk to the people in the hospital, government or local schools and see what they need then make a plan based on that.

### Do you have paid people who help you with Poo Yai Baan responsibilities?

Really, everyone in the village helps but do we have three paid positions for helpers. Two people who check on everything in general and one person for safety issues.

### Anything else you would like to say?

I am doing my best to help create jobs for people here. We are teaching people how to look after cattle, chickens and eggs, as well as fish. We will continue to work on the clean drinking water project when we have time. Now we focus on what we can do to make our beef and eggs the best possible. I will continue to build the farm and would

like to open it as an official educational centre for the local people to learn about farming. We would also like to offer rooms for people to stay and learn about farming. We plan to keep it fun and Thai style with karaoke and big rooms for eating together. Everyone is welcome.

This experience not only opened my eyes to how welcomed I am but also touched my heart by the sheer selflessness of this position. I am a very practical person when it comes to community and life in general. I love that most of what our Poo Yai Baan does is the practical day to day stuff. If he sees something that needs to be done, he knows how to get it done. That is a great value to any community. I am not sure in other countries I have lived in what government official has the ability to be so hands on and in touch with the people they work for. The political games that I ran away from leave the representatives of the people either dismayed by their inability to make change or hardened by the whole system.

I saw many bright-eyed young politicians who, in a few short years, sold out to the idea that if they wanted to stay, they had to play the game. My old school roots are watered by this concept of a Poo Yai Baan who knows my name and cares about what happens to me and my family.



*I am left inspired and ready to stand side by side with my neighbours as a member of this community.*





## Be a Starlette

Wondering where to start for this Spring Summer 2019? These months I have decoded each catwalk of Spring Summer 2019 and I bring a complete guide with the lasting tendencies of this new season. We are going to give a different flavour our wardrobes!

Stand out the silhouettes of marked waist, folds, animal prints, fringes, fishnets, leather, 80s, fluorescent colours, sequins. These fashion proposals that are presented in the international catwalks confirm many trends that perhaps we have already taken these last months.

### 2. Loved by many and hated by others: Animal Prints

We saw it accompanied by fluorescent colours. You will not go unnoticed! And if you do not dare to wear neon colours, you can wear it in a classic way. You can take it in some garment or accessories.



### 3. One of my favourite and innovative: Fishnets

You can play with transparencies and overlays! The handmade work is not left behind, fringes, crochet, knots that have a prestige for the houses of fashion, they are natural and traditional materials.



### 1. Romantics like Valentino, our beloved Pleats

We can call it, elegant and sophisticated. We can wear it in dresses, skirts, baggy jersey. You can combine it in pastel colours, with belts, add a blazer or white shirt.





## 4. Who does not like Polka Dots

For me it is a classic that I love, it never goes out of style. For free souls who dare with this pieces, we can play with chromatic tendencies, it is not necessary to conform to the polka dots version in black and white.



## 5. Love of Beige

On the one hand the neon and on the other the neutral colours! Between pleated skirts, trench coats, pants, blazer and more, the big Italian fashion houses showed us the power of this colour. Brands like Balmain that are not usually associated with neutral tones surprised the public with earth colours.

## 6. Forever Denim

An enduring fashion, involved in the eighties. The denim returned to integrate to the catwalks, faded, washed with acid or dyed knotted style, with patches in different tonalities. Many styles to just want to resist one!

You can use it in loose high-waisted pants, shirts, skirts, jackets and even dresses. It is as colourful as it is creative, combining different textures, contrast to achieve a striking design. Do not limit yourself to playing with denim, combine it with simple clothes and accessories.



## 7. Relaxed and comfortable.

Comfortable and professional, high-waisted pants are definitely for the street, for an outing with friends or family and also for office clothes. It allows you to wear a tight silhouette that highlights the waist, you can combine them with maxi belts that will allow you to look stylised.

## 8. You have to pedal harder!

Cycling shorts were a trend perhaps with more street style, shown on the catwalks of last year and ready to join us in the new season. Our favourite designers showed their love for the Lycra. This latest trend is so elegant and you want to know why? They are capable of being combined with blazers. Do not be afraid to try it for yourself, combine sports with tailoring.







and assistance, just to mention a few fields. In addition to our political role, while I am Ambassador only to the Kingdom of Thailand, there are parts of the EU mission here which are accredited to other counties.

We host a number of regional hubs. That brings another element to my work, which is also very much about management. I need to look at management standards and ensure that the entire diplomatic mission works in a smooth manner, with a rational use of resources. I am one of those people who enjoy management. On the diplomatic side, there is also a lot of social interaction, from meetings to receptions, to dinners. It is work, but in a very pleasant manner, even though I must admit that sometimes the schedule does get awfully busy.

So there is no average day, and one of the reasons I became a diplomat was that there would never be one.

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

I came to Thailand with the high level of ambition and personal objectives. As I explained earlier, our political relationship was in a calm period after the military takeover, but the building blocks for a stronger relationship were always there. Admittedly, some of them were on the shelf, some were being used.

We have a long-standing relationship between the European Union and Thailand and an even longer relationship between Europe and Thailand.

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

I have sixteen year old twin girls, Isabella and Naomi, who turn seventeen this summer. They go to the European school in Brussels. My son, Samuel, lives with my wife, Olga, and I, here in Bangkok. He is 14, and attends the Lycée Français International de Bangkok.

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

I am one of those very lucky people who can genuinely say that they truly love their job. I enjoy engaging with different societies, cultures, and countries. I like the wide variety that my work entails and I am proud to represent the European Union, which is a truly global player. We are a global player in politics, security, trade





## 9. All-in-one: Boiler Suits

They were the favourites for the fall and are ready for spring. You just have to choose the cut and the colour that suits you best, this garment looks good with any body. This piece historically known as a garment to protect, it has received a fashionable twist and is destined to be worn on any occasion of the day-to-day!



## 10. For Karl: Plastic Coats

What Karl Lagerfeld has given to the world of fashion throughout his career is not summarised in a piece. From his sketches that define this season to the reality that is seen later on the catwalks, he was brilliant and successful. If the traditional raincoat bores you, you'll be glad to know that plastic coats are also a key part of this season. Even many designers adopted this idea. You can use it with coloured plastic or transparent as the proposal Karl gave to Fendi.



## 11. Big shoulders

Who wants to end the obsession of the 80s? Powerful shoulders that dominate the tailoring, many designers once again created jackets and shirts with big shoulders. They are so iconic for brands, you can combine them with modern pastel tones, warm, sober tones. Let your imagination fly, just make sure you keep the rest of your appearance tenuous, so that it does not overshadow the top.



## 12. Coloured Tartan

A great variety of options when it comes to a good pantsuit. It is caused a great popular impression, it has even been seen in the streets of New York and Milan. Do you want to try this look? You just have to choose a trouser suit and play with bold colours like blue, green, yellow, orange and red.



### 13. 80s futurists

Bikini tops and bright matching backgrounds, dresses, skirts and more accessories. We remain faithful to the aesthetics of the 1980s. Many designers presented fabrics and metal skins. Short jackets appeared Balmain giving it a futuristic effect, dare to use this style.



### 14. Transparencies

Like all custom for warm seasons, garments that highlight the skin are included. Lightweight and tight dress, long dresses and individual garments including transparent fabrics. We know that it is a daring garment, it's little used, so we recommend to combine it with another type of garments, blazers, jackets, denim, T shirts. Do not limit yourself in wanting to use this trend.

What are you going to take? It's usually a very frequent question to which corresponds an incredible number of very varied tendencies that can sometimes be the most overwhelming. Women's empowerment was an important theme for this season, the designers brought to light collections that aim to improve femininity, in addition to inclusive, comfortable and elegant.

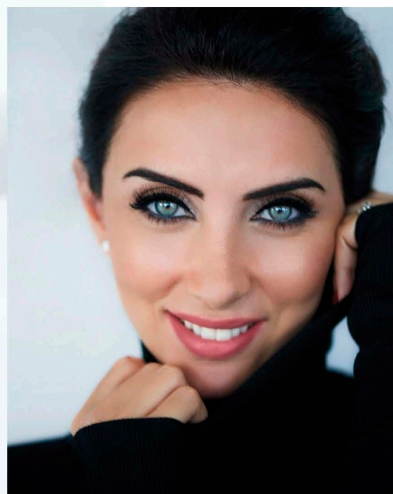
After an exhaustive analysis of the main fashion shows, I can say that these 15 trends of Spring Summer 2019 are special for our daily life and I know that many of us will be starting today. Many will test your style, the fact that there are tendencies that are extinguished and come to an end means the birth of many others, among which are the key proposals that will mark the coming months and the change of the year. Don't be afraid to experiment, let fashion be fun!



### 15. Belt bag

Every season has an essential bag. This bag is distinguished by its size and weight, maybe only make space for a lipstick and a phone.

This is one of the most luxurious bags, style on function. They are super comfortable for a sporty look and it is even combined with every type of garment.



#### 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.

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# Life in Thailand is a balancing act

*by Shane Irvine*

I didn't come to Thailand to escape the United States and I didn't come here to get married. I came here on a whim. I ended up getting married and living here nonetheless. My life in Thailand's 'land of smiles' has been a balancing act. I've had to examine and consider the benefits of living in Thailand compared to the drawbacks of living here. One has to weigh both the positive and the negative.

While living and trekking in Nepal for several months, I had been introduced to a Thai woman online through a good friend that knew her. After messaging back and forth for several months I decided to meet her during a visit to Thailand. I came with the intent of spending a few days in Bangkok and thereafter going to Pia. One thing leads to another and a year and a half later I'm married and living in Bangkok. Still haven't made it to Pia, yet.

Sometimes we build visions in our mind of what a place is going to look like and we have mental fantasies about what's going to happen. Daydreams can be the *joie de vivre* that give us hope for happiness and ultimately becoming content with our lives. But, we know in the back of our minds that there is a difference between our fantasies and our realities. Nonetheless, I love living in Thailand and I want to stay here, at least for now. Thai people tend to live for the moment. That is a trait I've learned to appreciate since coming here.

As I say, I didn't intentionally come here to escape the United States, but in reality, I have. I don't like the direction my country is headed and I don't like seeing old friends

become politically adversarial. Every BBQ or social gathering becomes a breeding ground for contempt and disdain when politics are inevitably brought up. I've been back to California a couple of times and whilst there, in some ways I felt like I had never left and in other ways, I felt like I was in the twilight zone. Upon returning to Thailand I've felt a sense of rejuvenation, a sense of tranquility, adventure and a feeling that I'm truly living in the moment.

Thailand has its flaws and I don't deny that. No place is perfect, except where you've been and where you're going, of course. But for me, life in Thailand is a balancing act. I've grown tired of the opulence and grandiosity of the United States where everybody is expected to be wealthy and successful. Where people are basically judged by the clothes they wear, the car they drive or the neighbourhood they live in. I'm learning to accept the laid back lifestyle Thailand has to offer and I now appreciate being mediocre. I wear shorts, aloha shirts, and sandals. We have a 125cc scooter and I live in a 2 bedroom, 2 bathroom townhouse in a moderate neighbourhood. This is all we need. If we want to travel we either take a bus or hire a driver.

My wife and I were married in our local Catholic church and are members of the church community. Instead of travelling around Thailand on commercial tour excursions, we go on church excursions all over central Thailand. It's like being a member of a yacht club or a country club, except the people aren't so snooty. Several times we have been up north



to Ban Tok to visit with her relatives. I get to see Thailand from a perspective most tourists never get to see.

Living in Thailand means that learning the Thai language is a priority. If you don't learn the language, you are dependent on others to interpret for you. This, in turn, can foster feelings of isolation. Unlike Thailand's next door neighbours, such as Malaysia, Thailand has proudly never been dominated by a western government. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were previously colonised by France.

Malaysia, Myanmar and Singapore were colonised by the British. In SE Asia, Thailand has had the least exposure to the European culture and has only in recent decades started teaching English in its schools. One can go to Malaysia and find that almost 90% of the population speak English. Not so in Thailand.

I have learned a vocabulary of several hundred words so far. I have also learned to read Thai on a limited basis. I can at least look at a Thai word and decipher the sounds. But, trying to understand replies in Thai has been my biggest obstacle. In English, we speak differently than we write. When we speak English to others who speak English, we tend to use phrasal verbs and clichés that don't seem to make sense if you were to look at just the words themselves. When we say, "go for it, dude," it's in English but it doesn't make sense unless you understand American slang. Even an Englishman might ask, "Aye? Go for what? And, my name is Charles, not Dude."

Thai people are the same way. They use phrases that they understand, but those phrases can be confusing when just looking at the words. In English, we have declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory sentence structures. In Thai, a sentence is structured starting with the subject followed by the object and finished with the verb. They do not use tenses the way we do. Therefore, if you try to translate a sentence from Thai to English or visa versa, it just becomes a word salad.

One has to balance the qualities of living in Thailand with the drawbacks. Bangkok is known to be the hottest major city in the world by mean temperatures. It doesn't cool off significantly at night. Drivers are less disciplined than in most western cultures. The language barrier is momentous and can cause many lone foreigners to feel isolated.

When juxtaposing these negative factors to Thailand's tropical easy lifestyle, low prices and beautiful venues, it becomes obvious that there are significant offsetting factors. This tells me that there is no one true answer to the question of balance.

The balance will be different for each individual depending on each person's values and personal preferences.

Having lived in Nepal for a few months before coming to Thailand gave me a comparison of living in one of the poorest counties in the world and having been raised in one of the richest nations in the world. I view Thailand as somewhere in between. They have fairly modern highways, people drive recent model cars and they have huge shopping malls that have everything. Bangkok pretty much has everything one would expect in a major metropolitan city.

Like most normal people, I don't feel like I'm normal. I sometimes feel like a pariah. I've felt that way all my life. Because this is the way I've always felt, I'm good with being a foreigner in a foreign land. I sometimes think of the song by the Doors, *People are Strange*.







I just replace some of the words with farang (the Thai word for foreigner);

*People are strange when you're a farang. Faces look ugly when you're a farang. Women seem wicked when you're a farang. Streets are uneven when you're down... Boom, boom, boom, boom. When you're farang. Faces come out of the rain...*

Different cities around Thailand have different atmospheres. In areas where tourism is minimal, I find people to be more genuine in how they perceive foreigners. In tourist areas, they smile a lot but they have a pretty good idea of how foreigners can be. Being American, English or Australian gives you no special love from the Thai people. I hear horror stories about how some of my countrymen have rudely treated people here and I can see why foreigners are viewed with a certain amount of reserve. Fortunately, Thai people are generally quite friendly and I believe that a big part of this is their Buddhist upbringing. They tend to be philosophical and respectful of others. In areas where tourists are seldom seen, they tend to look you in the eye and greet you with a genuine smile.

I spent time in a northern community during a funeral for my mother-in-law. The Buddhist funerals last for several days and involve a lot of communal gatherings at a temple and a lot of food. By the time the funeral is over, people seem to be more at ease with the passing of their loved one. I could walk through the village and people would come out of their homes to greet me and let me know that they knew my mother-in-law many years ago. Because I was her son-in-law and married to her daughter, they did not look at me as an outsider. If I stumbled on my words, they would laugh and help me out. I didn't get that same feeling of camaraderie in Bangkok. People are friendly in Bangkok, but not to the same degree.

In the balance, I think it helps if you're a little bit different. I've met westerners from all walks of life here. Some have lived here for years and say they're okay with the lifestyle, others not so much. It's a mixed bag and each person is going to view life here, differently depending on various external factors. As I say, Thailand's not for everyone. You have to balance the positive with the negative.

In my case, as long as I'm not looking for normal, Thailand's my kind of place.

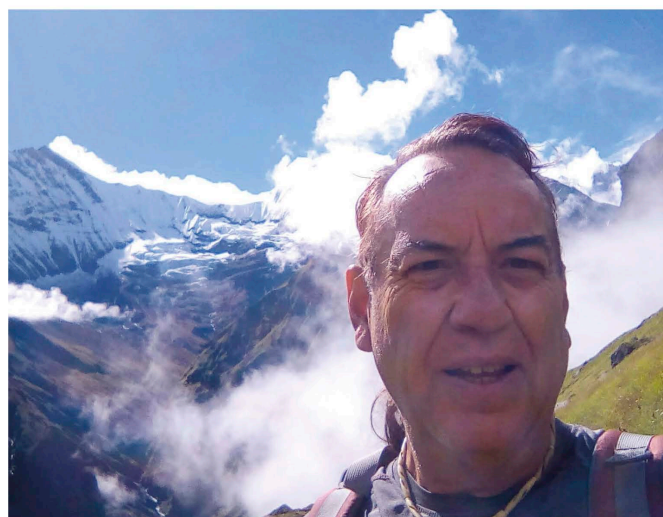
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#### **About the author: Shane Irvine**

*I'm a renaissance man 64 years in the making. As a world travelled adventurer, artisan, craftsman, musician, writer and story teller, I feel fortunate to walk in my own shoes.*

*I look at the toilet as being just half full, no worries.*

*I wouldn't have it any other way. Namaste*







## A global celebrity living in Bangkok

**C**herie Carter-Scott, Ph.D., “The mother of life coaching,” Master Certified ICF Coach (MCC), Mentor, Trainer and Executive Coach has been living a quiet life in Bangkok for the last 9 years.

*She is the #1 New York Times Bestselling Author of, If Life Is a Game, These Are the Rules: 10 Rules for being Human, translated into 40 languages. She trains and licenses coaches globally; if you resonate with her message and style, you can reach out to her to seek support in topics related to: Expat happy lifestyle, Transitions, Career, Motivation, Executive Coaching, Relationships, and even Time-Life Balance.*

Oprah Winfrey endorsed her on her show and keeps inviting her back with her newest books. She has also been featured on CNN, The Today Show, O'Reilly, Politically Incorrect along with over 400 TV, print, talk radio, press conferences and countless social media platforms. If you go to You Tube, you can see her up close and personal. Her website is: [www.drcherie.com](http://www.drcherie.com)

Dr Cherie has 19 published book titles, will be producing her first musical in May in Bangkok!

Dr Cherie is actively working, giving lectures, training coaches in Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore and coaching clients.

A dream Cherie has had over the years is to produce a musical, and this dream will become a reality. Her first production, *The Workshop, A Dress Rehearsal for Life!* will have its world premiere in May in Bangkok. The story is about 11 individuals searching for something that is missing or that they cannot resolve on their own; they come together with the workshop leader to find their answers.

They learn to create boundaries, to speak up and stand up for themselves, to take risks, to confront their challenges, and to fulfil their heart's desires. The story was written by Dr Cherie in cooperation with Lynn U Stewart, MCC. Dr Cherie wrote the lyrics and composed the music.

It will be fun to see them perform on the stage in May. The performance dates are: May 18, 19, 29, 30, 31, and June 1<sup>st</sup> 2019.

In the meantime, you can research Dr Cherie Carter-Scott on YouTube, FB, and social media. On LinkedIn you can read the article “Are you willing to be flexible? Or visit [www.theworkshopmusical.com](http://www.theworkshopmusical.com)

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

[email: cs@thaiticketmajor.com](mailto:cs@thaiticketmajor.com)

Tel: 02 262 3838





# 6 years and still counting

by Zydrune Juceviciute

parts, smart bus stations, and so many modern things going on! I guess, that's natural.

Recently I decided to stop for a while and reflect on my life. It's been so hectic filled with education, career changes, and everyday errands. Living in a foreign country has taught some of the most valuable lessons that have helped me challenge myself, achieve who I want to be, and open my mind. I might have never discovered this in my home country, where most of the time we're just sitting in our comfort zones.

So here I'd like to share the 6 important life lessons that I've gained from living in Bangkok as the years flew by.

**I**t's crazy how fast time passes! One day I was just a high school graduate, the other an adventurous soul seeking new experiences and building life in a country located 7,745 kilometres away from Lithuania.

This year I'm celebrating my 6 year anniversary of living in Bangkok, a tropical metropolis filled with everlasting sunshine, mouthwatering street food and multinational communities.

I can't believe I'm already here for 6 years. I still clearly recall, there I was at the airport of the 2013 winter, pulling 2 huge suitcases behind and waving goodbye to my parents who stood there in tears waving back.

On the other hand, it doesn't feel like this all has happened just yesterday. Living in Bangkok suits me very well and my mind accepted it easily. Sometimes I don't even remember how life was back home before now. When I flew back recently for a short holiday I couldn't believe how many things have changed. New bike lanes connecting different city

## 2013 – the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence

Back in 2013 I was quite naïve. I thought everyone is nicer and friendlier abroad and making friends in Thailand is going to be simple. After all, 'hey, I'm a student at a prestigious international university'. However, life slapped me hard when I had learned the truth. Friends don't come easy especially good ones. As anywhere else in the world people tend to stay surrounded by the likeminded. Don't get me wrong, I have met a few great friends but it was my



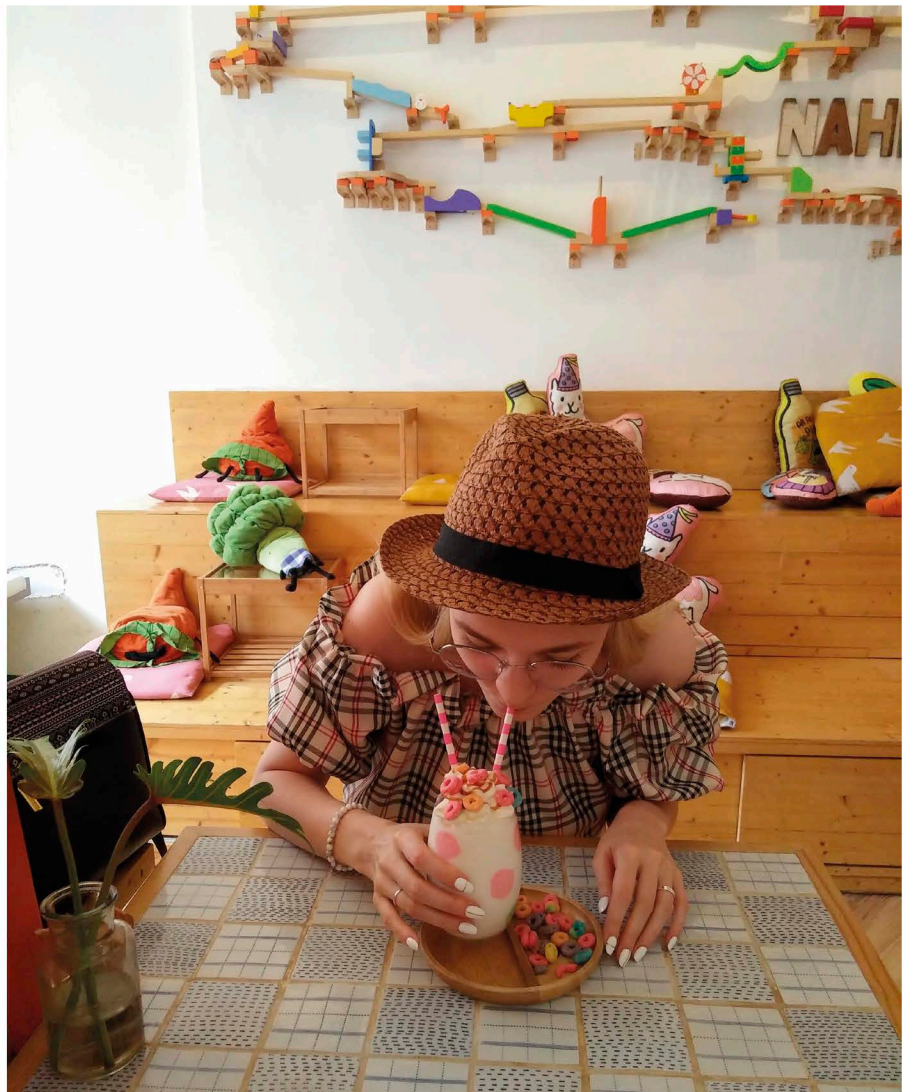
first lesson learned – the grass always looks greener on the other side of the fence. Humans in general are very similar around the world and there's most likely no place where everyone can become a sincere friend. Bangkok's multinational universities included.

## 2015 – Learning about myself

Living here by myself surrounded by foreigners only, has significantly impacted my personal development. Various encounters in the last 6 years allowed me to find out what kind of person I want to become what my dreams and priorities are. I became more responsible, caring about the environment and filled with ideas waiting to be realised. I began to question things and open up views. My current personality has been created from thousands of different pieces shaped by unique people I met through the years.

## 2014 – Loving the little things of everyday life

Going solo made me stay alert of the surroundings. I began to pay attention to many little things. Like



when a street vendor gives a smile handing the purchase, 7 Eleven baristas remembering what type of drink I'm about to order highlight in a the "mai wan" part. Or people never rushing to cut the line in front of me. If sometimes this happens they either apologise or someone else apologises to me on their behalf. I cherish such encounters.

## 2015 – Being proud of my origins

To tell the truth, I didn't like Lithuania as much as I do now. I used to wish to be born somewhere in a big country where life buzzes around the clock. But the longer I live far

away from homeland, the more my love towards it grows – lush green forests, four seasons, fresh air, apples and berries growing at the back of the house. That seems to come alive only in fairytales here and I'm so proud of it.

## 2016 – Growing with every experience

I learned to take risks and face obstacles with less worrying. We all know that life in Thailand isn't always easy. Living in a country that's still developing and doesn't speak English widely can be worrying. What will happen after my graduation? Will I find a nice job? What will happen with regards to my visa? These were the thoughts often spinning in head. I had many things to map out, research to do, professionals to talk and find the way around in every situation. Shaky life made me a quick thinker, finding a solution to every situation.



## 2017 – Travelling differently

In the past I thought that real travelling requires lots of savings and a long holiday. However, I proved this to be a wrong concept of mind by discovering a different type of travelling: joining meet-ups for a day trip, going for a bike ride to the green lungs of Bangkok or even visiting cool boutique cafes randomly picked from the map. That's fun and gives the same being-on-holiday feeling, really. As long as you have a great time in a new place, it counts as travelling. To add, Bangkok is huge and can never be fully explored!

## 2018 – Understanding the importance of family

Spending years exploring Bangkok, studying in a university overseas and just simply enjoying good life made me feel especially thankful to my family as without them none of this would have been possible and you wouldn't be reading this article. First of all, I became thankful for a simple thing such as financing my life and allowing me to freely choose where I want to go and what I want to do. Secondly, for always trusting me and believing in my actions.

It's been an extraordinary 6 year journey and now I'm especially thrilled to keep on taking what future has to offer. How many more anniversaries left to go? Who knows. For now, it's still counting. I let life flow and leave all my future plans tucked in at the bottom of the drawer.

*This article helped me process and recap my life's journey in Bangkok. Thank you for taking time to read it. I believe you also have a story about living in Thailand to tell.*

*Have you ever thought about putting it on paper and sending it to [nick@elbkk.com](mailto:nick@elbkk.com)*











The Kingdom is a key regional player, and a natural ally in defending a rules-based international multilateral order, something which is increasingly under threat. Based on this, I, of course, hope that by the time I eventually leave Bangkok at the end of my mandate, our relationship will be at a completely new level. I came with the personal goal of contributing to taking the EU-Thailand relationship and the EU-ASEAN relationship to another level.

We have a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement which has been initialed but not signed, pending democratic elections. Its signing will take us to a new level of institutional co-operation. We started negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement, but have not been able to continue them because of political realities on the ground. Here too, I hope that after the elections, we will be able to resume the negotiations based on the preparatory work that has been done.

We have many common interests. The EU is Thailand's third largest trading partner. So, we do have a mutual interest to bring our trade relations forward. We are also the third largest investor in Thailand. Furthermore, we are Thailand's second



largest investment destination. For instance in retail, a major Thai group runs upmarket department stores all over Europe.

Over 200,000 EU citizens live in Thailand and almost five million Europeans visit every year. All of this demonstrates just how closely we are interlinked.

My objective therefore, is that we would get our relationship to that next level, where it really belongs.

This also implies that we would get our relationship between the

European Union and ASEAN to a new level. At the EU-ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting in Brussels, in January, the sides agreed in principle to raise our relations to a Strategic Partnership, with the timing and details still to be worked out.

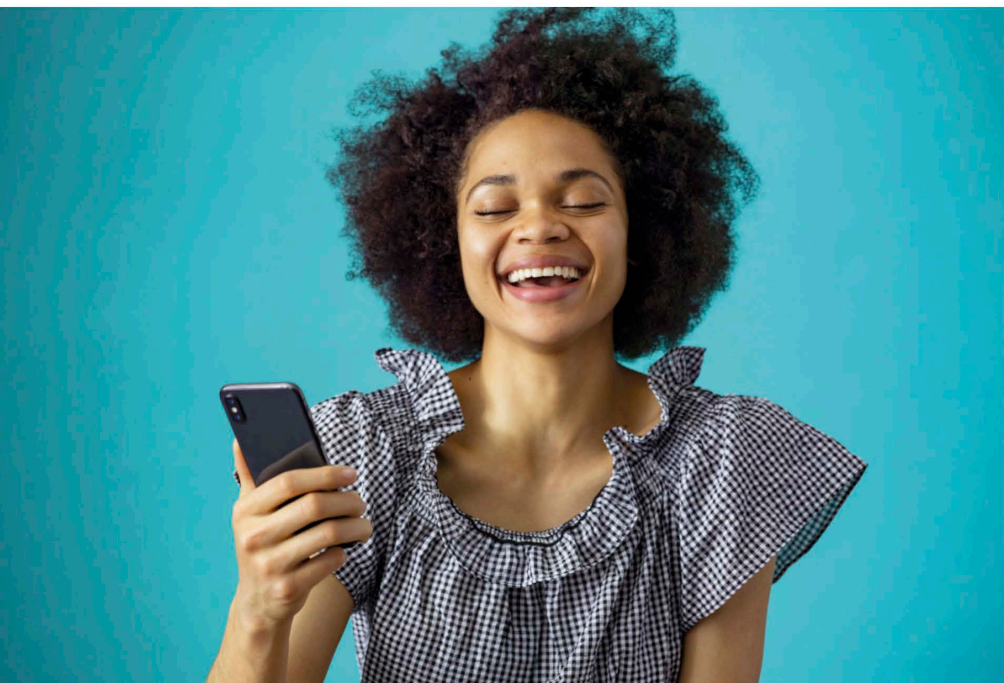
#### **Have you been travelling around in Thailand?**

Yes, I have travelled throughout Thailand. Much of this was already 20 years ago, but I am still continuing



# April Fools' Day

by Daniel Sencier



Probably the largest non-religious festival celebrated in the western world, yet its origins are as uncertain, as whether you'll fall victim in April this year. The earliest mention of April Fools' Day or All Fools' Day came in 1686 England when biographer John Aubrey described April 1st as a "Fools Holy Day." Way before that, the Roman spring festival of Hilaria, the vernal (spring) equinox paved the way for similar events through the centuries. Held around the 25<sup>th</sup> March in honour of the first day of the year that was longer than the night, it included festivities, games, processions and masquerades, during which disguised commoners could imitate nobility to devious ends.

Back to today, you're gifted an opportunity once a year to get your own back on 'the boss' under the protection of "April Fool" but make sure they really do have a sense of humour, or you could end up toast! This is not a practice restricted to individuals but taken up by many large organisations over recent

years, perhaps most famously in 1957 when the BBC reported on Italians harvesting spaghetti from special trees. This resulted in several hundred asking for information on how to cultivate the 'spaghetti tree,' followed by complaints of being humiliated when the truth came out! So, whatever prank you line up, before you cause too much anxiety, make sure you shout, "April Fool!" which will hopefully bring you some forgiveness.

With an Irish background, I grew up drowning in jokes; it was April Fools' Day every day! My conversations were so peppered with similes, metaphors and sarcasm that foreigners could barely understand me. However, none of those jokes were designed to hurt, just to make others laugh, which encouraged me to learn even more. Irish jokes were something I could live with, in part because I could relate to an element of personal reflection! My mother, born and bred in the Republic, used to say

things intended as serious, but we would all fall about laughing.

*"Our Daniel has one of those new 'sat lav' things in his car now," or "I'm too scared to ask Google, they might think I'm stupid."* She once saw a rabbit hopping by the side of the road and remarked, *"Daniel, do you think that's a real rabbit?"* Stunned, I replied jokingly, *"No Mum, it's one of those new hi-tech ones."* She explained with a straight face how she'd never heard of those things, but what a good idea they were! She would always start a scolding with, *"Look at me, this is no joking matter!"* We'd all freeze, trying to look petrified, but the slightest twitch from one of us and we'd all crack up, scattering to avoid the far-reaching (low-tech) broom!

There are the thousands of great jokes that you learn and memorise, stored in a giant 'Gatling gun' that you release without warning when the time's right... *Sean and Mick are walking down the road and Sean has a bag of doughnuts in his hand. Sean says to Mick, "If you can guess how many doughnuts are in my bag, you can have them both."* Would that offend you? Maybe if you were Irish? Unlikely though!

Travelling the world, I recognised that in some cultures, jokes don't exist.

SO THIS IRISHMAN  
WALKS OUT  
OF A BAR...

NO. REALLY, IT CAN HAPPEN



When living in Johannesburg, our TV reception was poor, so I informed our friend Freedom that I'd wait for nightfall and go steal the satellite dish from our neighbour's roof. He was shocked and explained that it was illegal to do such a thing. When I explained that I was joking, he was even more confused. "So, it was a lie?" he said. I replied, "Yes, sometimes a joke can be a lie, but that's OK because it's a joke." The following morning, he came to tell me that he was going into town, and I wished him a safe journey. He said, "No, I'm *not* going to town, it was a joke." I forced a laugh but failed miserably, then sat with him to try and clarify, and we had endless fun practising.

So, what is a joke? "A 'joke' is a display of humour in which words are used within a specific and well-defined narrative structure to make people laugh and is not meant to be taken seriously." (Wikipedia) Does that do it for you?

with anything that occurs around the world. Why? Maybe that's the way some of us handle things when they get so bad! "Death smiles at us all, all we can do is smile back." (Gladiator)

Then there are the camouflaged jokes; these are the worst kind because they're always aimed at individuals or minority sections of society. A joke designed to hurt or offend, maybe not intentionally, but under the guise of "it was just a joke," but often doesn't feel that way to the receiver! *Did you hear about the bulimic stag party? The cake came out of the girl!*

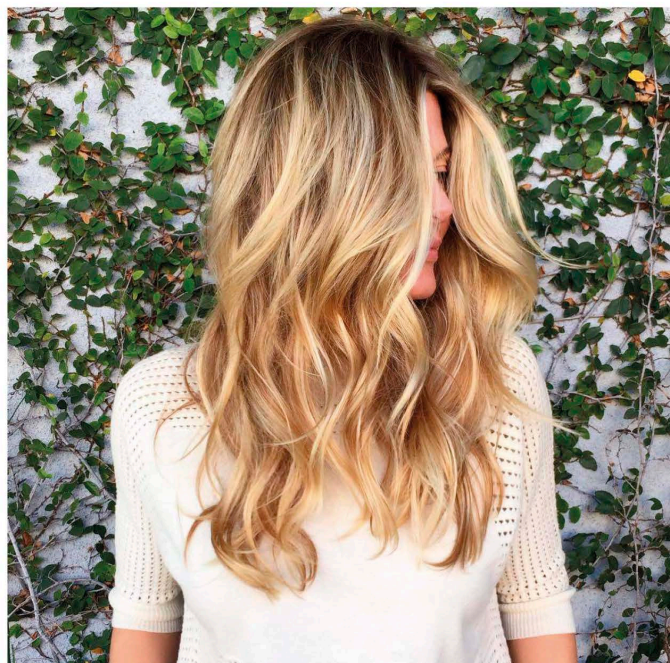
*How do you make a blonde laugh on Saturday? Tell her a joke on Wednesday.* Not so good for bulimic blondes!

*My mother-in-law and I were happy for 20 years; then we met each other.*

*Why don't ducks tell jokes when they fly? Because they would quack up!* A bit more general, so less offensive unless you're a well-read mallard!

Having had a cancer scare recently, I can relate to this one... *An old soldier went to a clinic for an MRI and was put into the machine by an attractive, young technician. Sometime later, after snoozing to music, the examination was over, and he was helped from the device by an older guy. The veteran gasped, "Wow! How long was I in there for?"*

Tell your joke, but be aware of your audience. What may seem very funny to some could be offensive to others, and if your amongst strangers, you should be doubly careful. Billy Connolly, a master of the profession, said, "I've always been fascinated by the difference between jokes you can tell your friends, but you can't tell to an audience. There's a fine line you must tread because you don't know who is out there in the auditorium. A lot of people are too easily offended."



The older you get, the more jokes you'll have heard, sometimes the same ones coming around incessantly, like Jehovah Witnesses. Still laugh out loud, it's good for you! I even laugh at jokes when I don't get them, it seems fair on the teller! If you've got a joke that would make me *cry laughing*, please send it because I haven't done that in years!

Laughter is a wonderful medicine, it improves your health, and it's free, fun and easy to do. It triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural 'feel-good' chemicals, allowing you a greater sense of wellbeing. Laughter burns calories, improves circulation, makes you more popular, inspires hope and one day, if you're lucky, you may even die laughing! *Monday 1<sup>st</sup> April, beware, it could be you!*



*Why did the chicken cross the road? In Bangkok? Undoubtedly suicide with a guaranteed outcome!*

*Knock! Knock! Who's there? Cash! Cash who? No thanks, but I'd love some peanuts!* Don't worry, my wife took four takes on that one!

Jewish, Catholic, vegetarian, football, Essex girl, mother-in-law, race, sex, disability, tragedy, any subject now becomes ammo for jokes. After 9/11 the first jokes came out the same day on social media, and I've seen it happen



Testing whether laughter IS the best medicine



## IWC Chinese New Year celebration

On February 28th at the Bangkok Lotus Hotel Sukhumvit the IWC hosted over 80 members and guests for a Chinese New Year luncheon.

The highlight was a fashion show by 9 of the IWC Past President's and the current President Rani Narula dressed in historic Chinese costumes. The fashion show was opened with Past President Sukanya's captivating grandsons aged nine and seven. Past President Ramiah as emcee brought to life the various royal characters portrayed.

The afternoon was complete with Chinese songs, food, music raffle and ample entertainment. The guests of honour include Madame Pan Peng, wife of the Chinese Ambassador. Datin Catherine Samuel, wife of the Malaysian Ambassador and Madame Anita Rudi, wife of the Indonesian Ambassador.









Soroptimist International  
Dusit dinner at Grand Hyatt  
Erawan, 12th Feb



  
Soroptimist International Dusit Club  
Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> February 2019  
Our speaker this evening is Monisha Bajaj  
The subject of her talk this evening is:-  
Hidden Roots: Re-examining how communities  
can respond to Interpersonal Violence

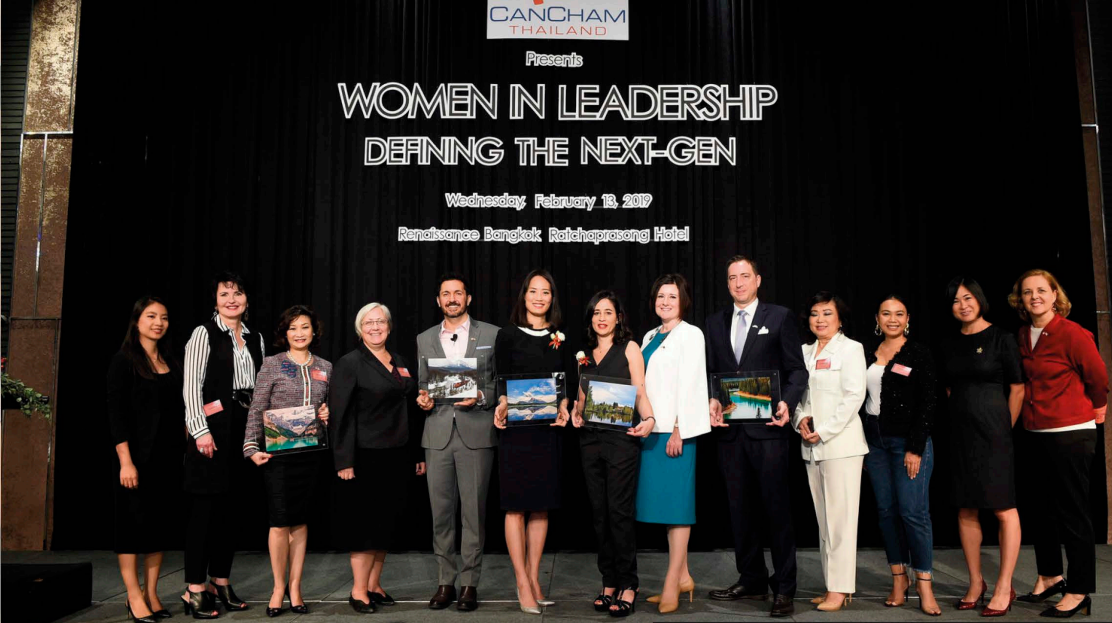
  
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"Women in Leadership" by CamCham  
Thailand, Renaissance Bangkok  
Ratchaprasong Hotel, 13th Feb







# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP DEFINING THE NEXT-GEN

Presents  
Wednesday, February 13, 2019  
Renaissance Bangkok Ratchaprasong Hotel



"Women in Leadership" by CamCham Thailand, Renaissance Bangkok Ratchaprasong Hotel, 13th Feb





Pink Ladies' Valentine  
Eve party to raise  
funds for the Pink Park  
Village





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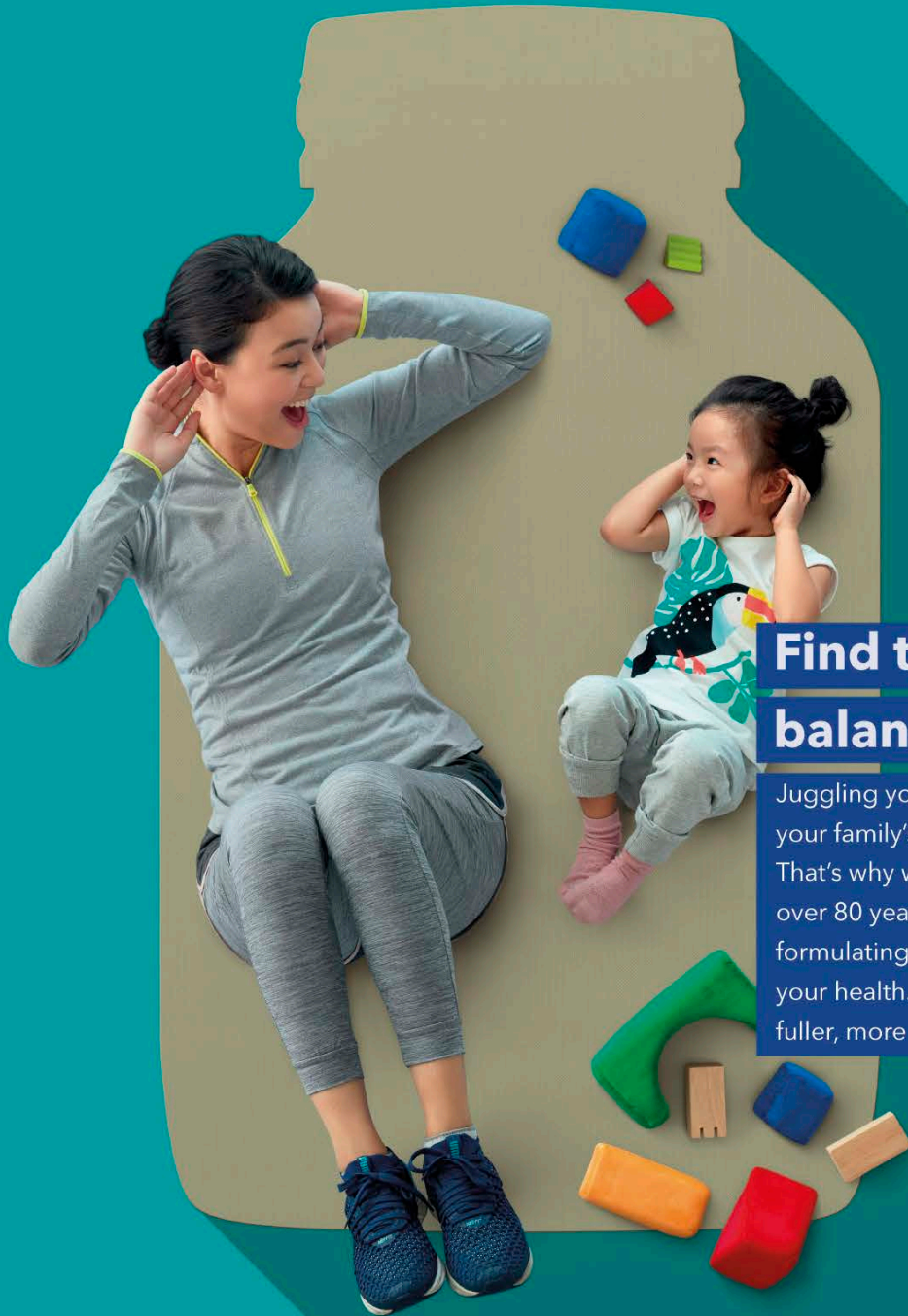
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Better  
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#ReachForBetter



to explore this beautiful country now that I have returned to Thailand.

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

I love the North and I love Chiang Mai. Of course, there are many other fabulous destinations as well, but if I have to name my absolute favourite, it would be Chiang Mai.

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

One of the things I try to do regularly is to go to the gym and keep myself healthy because you do end up sitting quite a lot on a daily basis. I have many hobbies, from cooking, which I try to do over the weekend for the family, not always successfully. I also read a lot, visiting antique stores, wandering around Chatuchak Market. Despite the heat, we like walking in Bangkok. We also love to find new restaurants to have dinner. Bangkok has become such an exciting dining destination in general, there is Thai cuisine and a lot of other options as well. It is no surprise as a diplomat that I am an avid traveller.

**How many of the EU community are living in Thailand? When and why did Thailand become a desirable destination for Europeans?**

As I mentioned earlier, the estimate is more than 200,000 EU citizens. Thailand is an attractive destination to live, due to its climate, resorts, lovely people and good services. It is also a regional hub making it easy to move in and out. There are people who live here permanently for work and also those who retire here. It's a very comfortable destination.



**Does the European Union and Thailand have an exchange programme for students today?**

Yes, we offer the Erasmus scholarship – an exchange programme offering a range of opportunities for higher education students, doctoral candidates, staff and institutions from around the world.

In 2017, we celebrated 30 years of Erasmus. There is strong consensus inside the Union that Erasmus is one of Europe's success stories and must be continued. Not only should it be continued, but we should make it bigger, so that it can reach more people.

Outside Europe too, there was great support for continuing both the mobility and the co-operation projects that Erasmus Plus supports.

So in autumn 2018, the European Commission proposed a new

programme from 2021-2027. It will have a larger budget, and will continue with a strong international dimension that will allow Thai students, staff and universities to benefit from an experience in Europe or from a cooperation project with European and other Asian partner universities.

Two current opportunities for Thai students will continue under the new programme.

Under the current programme (2014-2020), Erasmus Plus funds student and mobility of academic staff between Europe and Asia. For example, in 2018 we selected 48 partnerships that are busy sending

190 Thai students and staff to Europe, where Thai institutions will host 145 Europeans. Every year the EU selects a similar number of partnerships for Thailand. We're looking at ways to make this opportunity work even better in the new programme. This will probably also include traineeships as well as the classic academic study period.







Our Erasmus Mundus joint master degree programmes offer EU financed scholarships to students worldwide. Thai applicants are very successful. These joint master degree programmes – which include study at two or more different European universities – will also continue in the new programme.

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

I am very happy with my current job enjoying my return to Thailand at the moment, so I do not want to look to my next destination yet.

**Any memory from Thailand that you would like to tell us, an awkward situation, a real fun moment, etc?**

I recall many beautiful moments sitting by the Chao Phraya, looking at the sunset. As for a real fun moment, let us just say that when you come from a region where languages have fundamentally different structures, you sometimes get into trouble even when

you try to speak the same language, either me trying to speak Thai or some others trying to speak English.

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

The European community here is very large and of course we have much cooperation with Ambassadors of the other EU Member States.

Let me note that I am really keen on helping to build a unified voice for European business, working together with the European Association for Business and Commerce – or EABC – which is basically our European Chamber of Commerce

here in Thailand. I meet regularly with the EABC.

**Which is the most important task you want to reach/fulfil before you end your time in Thailand?**

I think that every Ambassador arrives full of ambitions: At the same time, much of your job is really about tending to a relationship, keeping it going.



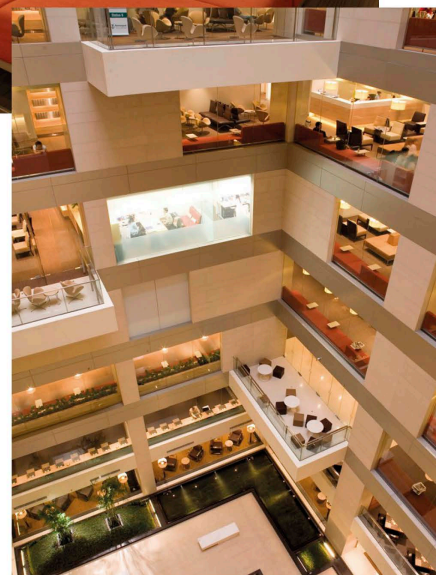
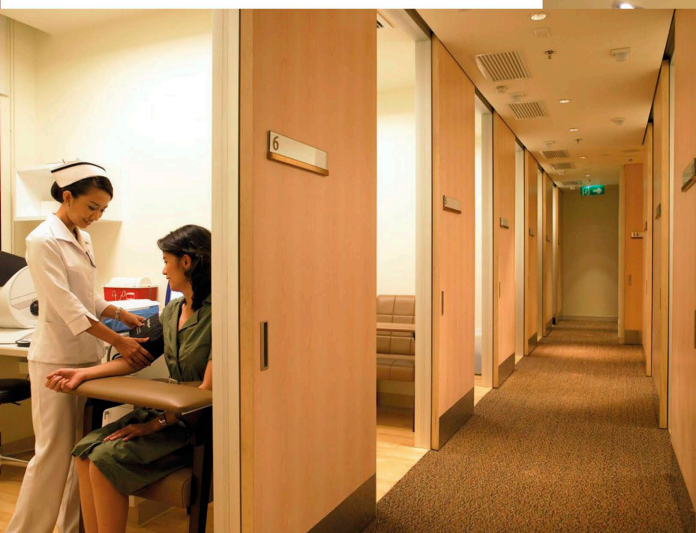
In this context, you are truly lucky when you are in a situation where new beginnings are possible.

I already talked about wanting to see our relationship going in the right direction with negotiations with the Free Trade Agreement, and of our political partnership. So, I would like to see this relationship rise to a new level. This does not just depend on me, but is determined by a combination of the right circumstances, teamwork in both Thailand and the EU and political will.

I hope that the stars will be aligned in an auspicious manner for us to get to that new level in our relations.







## Annual health checkup

Being an expat in my early 60s living in Thailand I have been listening to my, far more sensible friends, who have annual checkups with the hospitals here to monitor their health.

I even have friends that come from our home country for a holiday every year in the winter and one of their disciplined tasks, is to report to the hospital for a well man MOT (a hospital checkup). They say that should get a checkup every year from 40 years old!

So this year as many of my vital organs are showing signs of wear and I am starting to feel my age (plus 10 years!) just getting up every day to go to work is getting tough, common sense took over, and I researched the options.

Now, I am not lucky enough to have a top of the range Mercedes Benz, but if I did I wouldn't take it to the garage round the corner behind the industrial estate to have it repaired. I would take it to a main dealer because I trust and know that they are the experts in this field.

So I decided to put my health into the capable hands of the best in town – Bumrungrad. I read the options online and decided that the Comprehensive Advance was probably the best choice for me and made the appointment. Fast for 12 hours before was their advice – that was tough enough!

I reported at 10:40am on Saturday and was surprised to find that the registration department was very busy – must be for other things as well I thought. I thought wrong! All of the men and women in that department were there to report for the same procedure – obviously common sense prevails.

I was checked in, given a wristband, with my name and age on it, and off I went. A detailed questionnaire about my past health and all the necessary info.

Then off with a nurse for blood pressure, weight, height, heart rate, temperature:

- A physical examination
- Vital signs, BMI
- Complete blood count
- Fasting blood sugar
- Lipid profile: Cholesterol, HDL, LDL, triglyceride
- Kidney function: creatinine
- Kidney function: BUN/Uric acid
- Liver function: SGOT (AST) and SGPT
- Urine exam
- Stool exam with occult blood
- Chest X-ray
- Electrocardiogram: they wired me up, put my heart under stress whilst walking on a tilted treadmill, and I was given the good news – your heart is ok.

I didn't know what half of these were and had to use the internet to find out what was what and I have probably missed several important tests out but I was kept on the go whilst I was there for the 4-5 hours.

I was taken from one department to the next and was worn out by the time I was introduced to the doctor who went through the results and discussed the areas for concern.

Prostrate slightly enlarged, fatty liver, blood sugars slightly high (especially as I am diabetic), keep an eye on your cholesterol, overweight – need to lose 10kgs! Do more exercise, watch your diet.

The 25 page detailed report arrived in my inbox 3 days later. I shall report next year at the end of February – from now on it will be my birthday present to myself.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.bumrungrad.com/en/health-check-up-bangkok-thailand/check-up-packages>



# Women in Leadership: Defining the next generation

by Isabel Valle

**O**n Wednesday 13th February, I was honoured to participate in the Women in Leadership (WIL) 2019 event, organised by the Thai-Canadian Chamber of Commerce, CanCham Thailand. The event, held at the Renaissance Bangkok Hotel, in the heart of the city, was attended by over 340 participants, and it was a resounding success.

The event was attended by many business leaders, diplomats, key influencers and CEOs active in Thailand, as well as SME's and corporate representatives, all coming together to encourage and define the Next Generation of Women in Leadership.

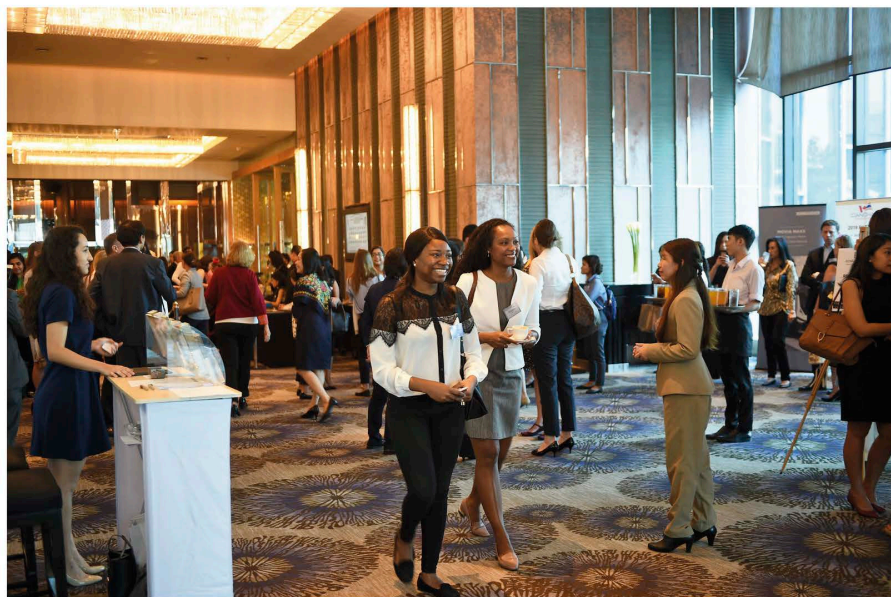
*Women have an increasingly important role to play in contributing to the economy and society as leaders. The WIL 2019 "Defining the next gen" event examined the next generation of women in leadership, by identifying the key values and leadership qualities required to operate in a disruptive and ever-changing world and sharing ideas and tips on how to develop and nurture those qualities to help shape successful careers for the next generation.*

Yvonne Chin, cofounder of Women in Leadership (WIL), has held a pivotal role in developing the concept and bringing this idea into reality, which has resulted in sold-out events, and a cornerstone event for CanCham ever since.



In creating this event, CanCham Thailand wants to seize the opportunity to explore and learn from the line of distinguished and inspirational guest speakers who led the topics of discussion, on what are the essential ingredients to grow as a woman leader, the x factor which is critical to their success, and how to foster these qualities for our next generation of leaders.

We were welcomed with a message by Caroline Kwan, event Chair, Director of CanCham Thailand and Vice President of the MBMG Group. Ms Kwan emphasised the importance of recognising women leaders within global conglomerates. She elaborated on the reasons why women in leadership roles display great qualities, such as being more sensitive to the needs of others and being more inclusive and transparent in their communication and information. In her message, Ms Kwan brought her welcome to a wrap with one key message: Leadership has no gender.





The audience was treated to very inspiring and insightful talks by four highly accomplished speakers. Rob Candelino, CEO of Unilever Thailand, delivered a talk on **“Leading with Purpose”**. Unilever has been a vocal, active and engaged voice in promoting women’s rights and are gender balanced advocates. Rob emphasised that the single greatest economic catalyst is through the growth of women. He also shared that the best next-gen leaders will be driven by something much stronger than a title. They will have a strong moral compass, and will be driven by their own personal why and purpose.

The following speaker was Sirinya (Cindy) Bishop, actress, supermodel, TV host and activist. Cindy’s talk was named **“Embracing authenticity to empower the next generation”**, and she shared great wisdom and tips through her own personal story on finding your authentic self and speaking your truth. Cindy’s raw vulnerability brought a very humble tone to the room, and most women in the audience resonated with the many struggles and inadequacies that she shared. Her underpinning message was to embrace who you are, embracing all of your qualities, both good and bad.

The third speaker was April Srivikorn, Head of Industry for

Google Thailand. April’s speech was on **“Resilience as a leader and learning to swerve”**. Her impressive acumen and success in her career were accredited to her adaptability, social skills and resilience. Her advice to anyone wanting to access a leadership role was to develop a resilience leadership posture. April highlighted the fact that the true measure of a leader comes from how they show up through the difficult times, not the good ones. Throughout the many successes that April has encountered in her career, shaping a strong positive team spirit of resilience was critical.

The final speaker was Inés Caldeira, Managing Director of L’Oreal in Thailand. Ines treated the room to a very moving talk on the subject **“I’m worth it”**. A very touching presentation by an incredibly successful woman who suffered great self-doubt and a persistent fear of failure throughout her career, often



unable to see the clear potential that everyone else saw in her. She spoke about suffering from impostor syndrome, and the steps she went through in order to turn that voice off. She encouraged all women to ask themselves **“Why am I worth it?”** to help you tap into your greatness. Ines is now committed to telling all women in her team that they are worth it.

CanCham also introduced the launch of a new initiative to support women entrepreneurs to advance their business objectives: **We-CAN**. This programme will provide women entrepreneurs with networking, peer-learning and group coaching by experts from the CanCham community. For more information on this programme please contact [info@canchamthailand.com](mailto:info@canchamthailand.com).

For those participants in the event who wanted to show how they value the role future women leaders in business, they also had the opportunity to buy one extra event ticket to sponsor a young leader/student to attend the Women in Leadership event and steer them on an inspired path to success.







Thanks to this initiative, 50 young leaders/students had the opportunity to attend the event, and they also had the opportunity to be mentored by the panel of speakers afterwards.

This was without a doubt a very enjoyable, successful event and one of many more to come in Thailand, in the hope that we continue to strengthen the conversation on women's empowerment.

On a personal note, being a Leadership Coach, I feel very passionate about helping women become exceptional leaders and reach the top roles, and witnessing the participation and engagement in the room provided me with much enthusiasm and I hope that together, we can continue to advance on women's issues. It was also very encouraging to see how more and more men are joining the conversation,

supporting their female peers and actively contributing to creating gender balance across all levels of the organisation.

Women mean business, and continuing to organise and participate in these events will help women be empowered to fully be part in the economic life across all sectors, which is essential to building stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families and communities.

Feeling inspired by all the women who put themselves out there to have a voice and to make an impact.

Here's to your success!  
Isabel



*About the author: Isabel is a Peak Performance Strategist and the Founder of Global Room. She is an experienced ICF Coach with over 20 years of international work experience holding senior positions within the hospitality industry in countries around the world, as well as Executive and Leadership coaching, mentoring and training. Isabel specialises in high performance strategy, leadership development and building organisational culture.*

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# Meet Inés Caldeira: A force to be reckoned with

by Isabel Valle



After seeing Inés Caldeira speak to a room of over 340 attendees at the “Women in Leadership” event organised by CanCham in February, I was captivated by her presence, humility and openness with her talk “I am worth it”. Following the event, I wanted to find out more about who she really is, the woman behind the role, and this is what I found.

Inés assumed her position as Managing Director of L'Oréal Thailand last September and brings with her an impressive career accolade of over 17 years working with L'Oréal Europe. Prior to moving to Thailand, she spent the last four years as the Country Manager for L'Oréal Portugal, the youngest female Country Manager in the company's history at just 35 years old.

From her early beginnings as a marketing trainee, Inés has enjoyed three international assignments, played a developmental role at headquarters, and directed operations in Spain. There she put her strong business and leadership skills to good use in increasing turnover and profitability,

launching new products and developing iconic brands.

Yet her impressive list of achievements doesn't stop here. Forbes Portugal named Inés Caldeira among the top 10 most powerful Portuguese in the business world, with her being the youngest in the list. Despite her impressive list of professional successes, Inés just turned 40 years old in February. So who is the woman behind the role? Very early in the conversation, I discovered that Inés is very much in touch with herself, and often reflects about who she is and what she wants out of life. She explained that above anything else, she is a daughter, a sister, a mum, and a friend and only after that, she is the CEO of L'Oréal Thailand.

She sees herself in very different dimensions. The professional part is one which is very important, but there is also so much more. That's attributed she says to coming

from a very humble background in Portugal, where her family ran a restaurant. Her sister in law and her were the first to have a university degree, and she is still very much in the mindset that you need to pay back your family and your generation – a common practice in Thailand still.

Inés never dreamt about being a CEO or even having an international career, but she always wanted to excel in whatever she did. Her family played a critical role in shaping who she is today. From a very young age, she was given the advice that whatever she did, she needed to be the best. It didn't matter what that may be, but she needed to be proud of it, be respectful of others and be professional. That advice conditioned the person that she is today. Her perspective on what allowed her to become successful – and have the energy and motivation to do it all – is, according to her, an insatiable need to “eat up the world”. Since she was a child, she's felt a curiosity that drives her to want to know the world and discover new things. Her father, to whom she speaks with daily, also provides her with the energy boost that she needs to stay on course, whilst also staying away from people who put her down or drain her energy.

In wondering whether her success comes as a result of vision and ambition, she is quick to correct me.







In life, she was never driven by ambition per se. In fact, she eventually came to manifest much more than she ever wished for. At 15, she imagined she'd be married by 21, just after university, having a kid. But she never considered that she'd be where she is today. Throughout her life, she never made specific plans. Driven by her desire to better herself, any opportunity that came along, she went for it and trusted in the natural flow of life. She also acknowledges L'Oréal for the way in which they manage careers long-term, and the way they saw her potential throughout the years, which enabled her to go through a path that was much higher and much further than she would have expected.

Rather than ambition, Inés attributes her success to her innate qualities such as courage, drive, curiosity and a longing for overcoming herself. Externally, she emphasises on the sponsoring and mentoring that she received throughout her career, which allowed her to seize the opportunities that came her way.

Whilst talking to her, it is not hard to identify some of the key values that drive her forward, such as a great sense of responsibility, a love for her family and friends, and a constant desire for wanting to grow. She possesses very high moral and ethical markers which motivate her to be and do her best with integrity and transparency. Pair this

with a person who has the courage to stand up for her ideas and her beliefs, and you have an unstoppable force to be reckoned with.

The best advice she was ever given came from her grandmother, a simple person who couldn't read or write, yet had incredible wisdom. She told her: "Don't judge yourself at 30. When you are 80, you can always go back, and do so; but now it is too soon, and you still have much living to do." She's always carried a perspective of long-term ever since.

When asked what her greatest accomplishment to date has been, she doesn't hesitate: her teams. In fact, she has built quite a reputation in the company for being a people person. She considers the development of talent, her belief in people, and the long-term relationships that she's built in the company among her best outcomes. She is also very quick to point out the fact that everything that she's accomplished wouldn't have been possible without the talented people working together with her towards a common goal.

This sense of collaboration is so

important to her that she has made it her legacy, where she would like for anyone who ever worked with her, to want to work with her again. Because to her that's the reflection of long-term actions, strategies and presence.

Of course, she's also very grateful for being the youngest female Country Manager in the world, still up to today. That's also important to her, because it means that whatever she's done, it's paid off.

In discussing mistakes that provided Inés with learning opportunities in her career, she related about moments where she was compensating too much for the under-performance of certain parts of the organisation, and the problem with that, and what she's learned, is that the day you're gone, the whole structure breaks apart.

Even though she possesses a strong belief in people, she's also learnt that sometimes people are just not up to the expectations. That in itself is not a problem. The problem arises when you systematically compensate for that, because in that instance the foundations are not as strong. So now she tends to see people and teams for their real value.

She explained that when you grow in an organisation very fast, you tend to like the pace. But since her last two assignments, she's found a different pleasure in staying for longer periods of time, something she says comes naturally with age and experience.







Rather than being a sprinter, she's now more focused on becoming a marathoner, and taking the time to build good solid foundations and her legacy, not just achieving results short-term.

In hearing her speak, knowing that she is the mother of a one year old baby, I am curious to know how she is able to balance it all. She claims to be at a stage in her career where she has found an equilibrium, and reached a point where she can now have time for them. She goes onto elaborating that women need to be very clear about the fact that they have a family, and in wanting to spend time with them, they must set boundaries to be effective in both domains. She explained that if your priorities are very clear, you'll find your balance. But she doesn't have time for everything. She pointed out the need to accept the fact that you won't be perfect. She's bi-dimensional, she's a professional and she is a mum – that's it. Other than that, she doesn't practise sport as much as she'd like to, and she doesn't have as much time to dedicate to her friends as she used to. She cannot deal with more than 2 dimensions, so she stays with the two that are most important to her.

Something else I wanted to ask Inés for all of those women out there who want to both pursue a successful career and be mums. Can it be done, and can it be done in a fulfilling and rewarding way?

She believes that companies have a responsibility to those women. This

is a challenging balancing act; however, she believes there are ways to help women and mums to make this choice. Inés also pointed out the fact that this is no longer a women's issue alone; it's also an issue for those dads who want to be more present and want to participate more in their children's lives.

As examples to validate her point, she explained how L'Oréal has supported her – and other employees across all levels – in terms of creating initiatives such as “work from anywhere”, “equal pay”, “family care leave” and even “paternity leave”. In doing so, the company has found ways to accommodate mums and dads, and to make the balance more manageable.

Inés also made a point to highlight that it's not just about what companies can do, but also the responsibility for more women who want to do it, to want to come forward and sit at the table.

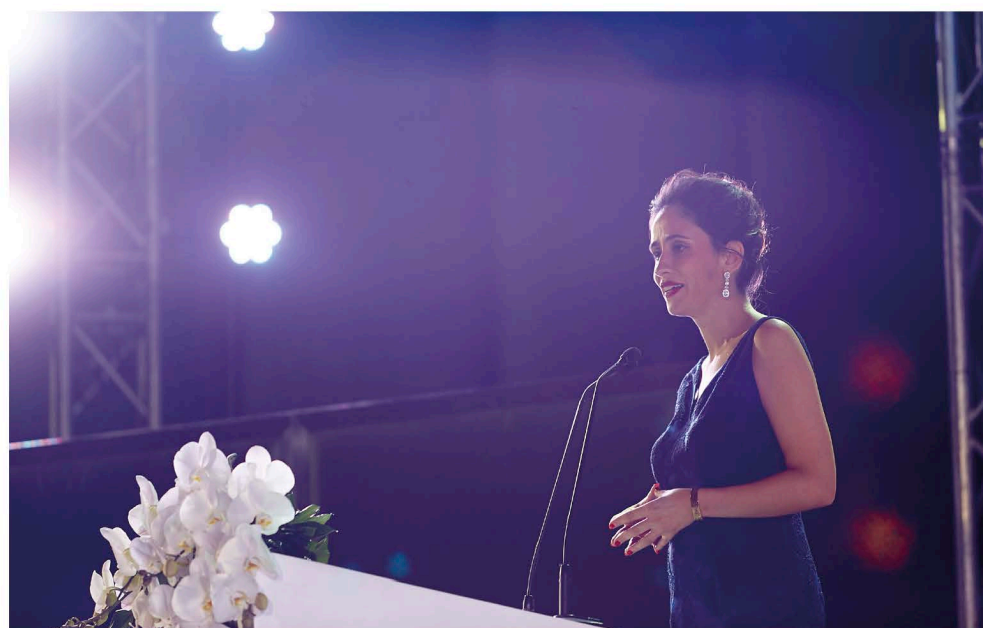
So what does she enjoy doing outside her work and mum duties? For someone who's only lived in Thailand for a few months, she's had the opportunity to travel to many locations, her favourites being Sukhothai for its historical sites, its spiritual and historic heritage, and Koh Samet, the perfect relaxing getaway in such proximity to Bangkok. She also enjoys going out to restaurants, rooftops and can even be found eating street food in Soi Ari on weekends.

We are fortunate to host in Bangkok such an accomplished woman and role model. May Thailand continue to bring you much success, you are an inspiration to us all!

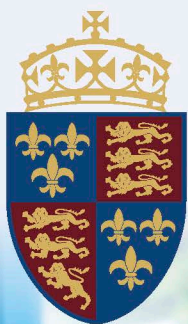


**About the author:**  
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# We have not regretted our choice for a second...

by Richard Green



we moved to Bangkok to run this new business. So far it has been a difficult but exciting challenge although we are determined to make this work.

*Choosing a school for your early years child is a big responsibility. If you also throw into the mix moving to a new and unfamiliar city for some families it could be overwhelming. Thankfully, good advice and having a practical can-do attitude meant that new arrivals to Bangkok, Michael and Magalie Tytgadt, have chosen the best fit school for them and their children.*

## Where are you from?

We are originally Belgian; we grew up in the Flemish lowlands near the North Sea.

## What brought you to Thailand?

Our family business manufactures industrial laundry equipment and systems. You would see our machines in the laundries of luxury hotels, hospitals, airlines, railway companies, factories and independent industrial laundries that cater for these organisations.

In the second half of 2016, we began to look for potential new partnerships for our business to reduce manufacturing costs and open up new markets. This led to us acquiring a German competitor, a manufacturer based in Pathum Thani, North Bangkok in 2017. In August 2018

## Why did you choose Harrow Bangkok for your children?

We have three young children: Louis who is 10 months, so not yet at school, Henry who is 3 and in Nursery class and Elisa who is 5 and in Reception.

We visited lots of schools in early 2018 and quickly realised how congested Bangkok can be. It was clear that we needed to live close to the school or the children would have a long commute on a school bus. It would also make our day to day life simpler.

We also need to be at our factory every day so didn't want our commute to be a burden. This meant that, ideally, we needed to be close to Pathum Thani.

*Given our European roots we were inclined towards a French or British school so searched for these kinds of schools in the North of Bangkok. We found Harrow International School Bangkok which seemed to fit the bill; in the right area, British curriculum, Early Years right through to Sixth Form and well established.*

At first, I did wonder how my children would fit in with the Thai population at Harrow Bangkok but it's been fine. The housing community where we could live adjacent to the





very understanding of our wishes as Europeans as well as them adapting to the Thai context. We are also very happy to be living in the compound near the school as the children can cycle safely to and from school.

The Tytgadt family are fully integrated into their home and school community; Henry and Elisa are thriving in their 'school-within-a-school' mixing with expat and Thai students and Louis can soon join too. The outstanding exam grades and top worldwide university destinations of Harrow Bangkok graduates mean it is the ideal place for them for the long haul.

All teachers and staff in the Early Years Centre – the EYC – at Harrow Bangkok are highly qualified, experienced and passionate about providing the very best for every child. The EYC is a purpose-built centre designed for learners aged 18 months to 5 years old. Their

state-of-the-art facilities include 3 playgrounds, numerous outdoor shared learning spaces, a soft play room, a music room, dining room, Thai Studies room, adventure playground and splash play areas. The school's 35 acre garden campus gives children room to grow and soon getting there will be even easier with Harrow Bangkok's private access road.

school seemed a little quiet but the extensive and candid experiences of existing Harrovians who live there convinced us it would be the right choice for us. Also, we realised that we are different from most expats as we are not planning to be here short term - our stay in Thailand is open-ended - and we intend to integrate with the Thai communities. We have not regretted our choice for a second.

### What do you like about Harrow Bangkok?

We like the 'British spirit' at Harrow Bangkok. Anchored in European values, the British have the highest sense of public spirit. We are impressed by the engagement and organisation of activities during and after school hours and, especially for us, those that involve parents. It gives us the opportunity to see how our children are being integrated into the class.

The school lake is also a great bonus for the school where they do some water sports like sailing and kayaking. Hopefully, soon there'll be more activities on it like windsurfing...

We have also appreciated the patient and respectful attitude of the teachers towards our children and us. They are

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## Re-emergence of traditional medicine

**T**hai traditional medicine is one the most precious heritages that has been passed down since the beginning of Thai history.

It is crucial in that it incorporates not only the indigenous medicinal sources of Thailand but also the principles of Buddhism and traditional philosophies. In that sense, Thai traditional medicine, like other similar traditional practices in other parts of the world, is centred upon a holistic approach, encircling the physical (body), mental (mind) and spiritual aspects (energy) of an individual, as a whole. Thus, the “heart” of Thai traditional medicine is aimed at preserving the balance between these three essential aspects.

The diminution of the popularity of Thai traditional medicine can be dated back to the loss of traditional practitioners on account of Ayutthaya’s loss to the Burmese invasion. It later started to be devalued when it was removed from school curriculum during the reign of King Rama VI, coupled with the xenophobia where the medical masters did not want to adapt the change, kept the art secret to themselves and only passed the techniques through trusted apprentices, leading to fewer capable practitioners. Additionally, the plunge was further affected by the introduction of the “prominent” western medicine.

Despite all these, Thai traditional medicine was still widely practised in many local communities across the country. Medicinal herbs were used to treat various symptoms and illness. Many Thais preferred using traditional home remedies to treat ailments. For example, using mint to relieve headaches and cold symptoms or aloe vera to treat burns.

Thai traditional herbs have been found useful in treating various kinds of diseases; most importantly, it has been found

that many of them have synergistic actions against cancer. A few examples are:

Triphala, a Thai herb traditionally used to increase appetite, was found to have myriads of therapeutic benefits, including inhibition of cancer cell growths, as well as its role as an anti-oxidant. Pra-sa-prao-yai, originally used as an antiemetic drug, has been found to have anti-cancer activity in patients with Cholangiocarcinoma. Indian gooseberry, which was once used to treat patients who suffer from coughs, has also been found to be able to inhibit cancer cell growth in many research studies.

In the past decade, with an increase of doubts in western medicine efficacy, side effects and limitations, Thai traditional medicine has re-emerged. The Thai government and private organisations have worked together in restoring Thai traditional medicine and making adaptations, so they can be applied alongside western medicine-based treatments.

Similarly, across the world, medicinal herbs have been developed into different forms such as infusions, capsules or tablets, ointments, essential oils and topical creams. Traditional medicine has become more prominent and is increasingly being used together with conventional medicine and cutting-edge technologies to address one’s health holistically in Integrative Medicine. According to WHO, health is defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”<sup>1</sup> So, by using a holistic approach, integrative medicine completes WHO’s definition of health.

Many hospitals and private practices are gradually starting to integrate the traditional therapies into their routine treatment protocols to enhance the treatment outcome.

*“Traditional Medicine: Definitions”. World Health Organisation. 2008-12-01.*



Whilst modern medicine only focuses on the treatment of the disease, traditional treatment helps to improve the patient's quality of life, which modern medicine often fail to address.

In integrative cancer treatment, herbal therapy has an important role in boosting the body's immune system and impacting cancer cells in various ways. It is also used in combination with chemotherapy to reduce its side effects on the patient's body and to enhance its efficacy on cancer cells. One example is the use of curcumin which is an active form of turmeric, a native plant of SE Asia. Curcumin acts as an anti-inflammatory and has the ability to inhibit the growth of cancer cells.

The integration of both modern and herbal medicine, the nearly-forgotten gem, may yield better results than using either one of them alone. By approaching health and illness holistically, medical treatment can become more diverse and effective for disease treatment and prevention, as well as promotion of the patient's health and wellbeing in today's healthcare system.



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# Malta: Crossroad to history

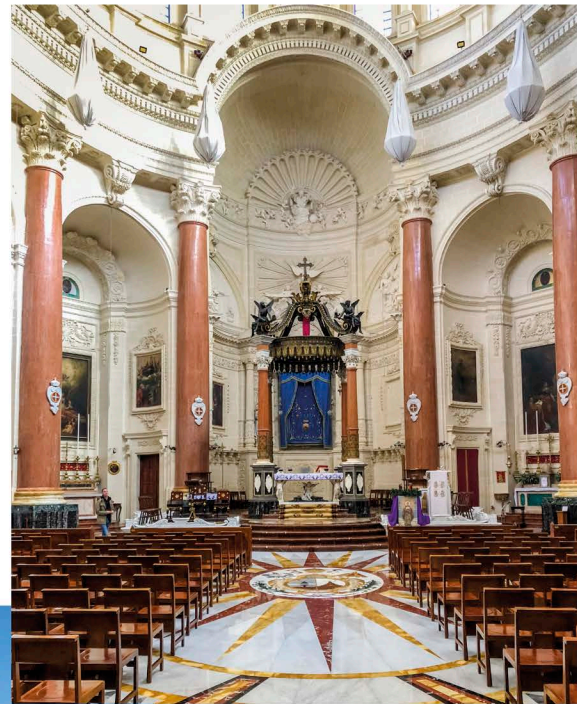
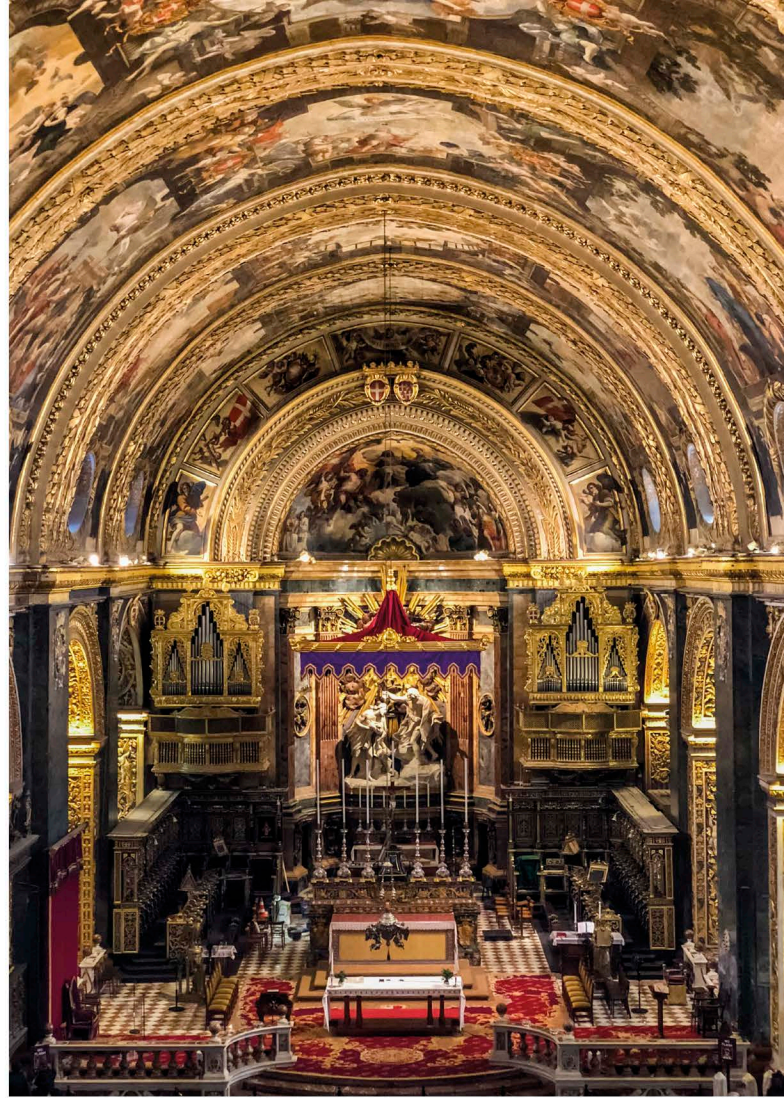
by Arlene Rafiq

Malta is often described as a one big open air museum. This is not only a museum with trendy cafes and shops but also an impressive entrance. With some of the nicest windows and doors around. With its capital city of Valetta, with calm and peaceful surroundings. Then you have Mdina, dating back four thousand years. The walled city has a timeless atmosphere where getting lost in small alleys may be a lot of fun for others but could be scary for some but then stumbling into a great dessert may not be too bad after all.

Join me in my short but delightful escape to Valleta and Mdina. I will try to guide you about my time here, the places I have visited and a few places

that I missed that maybe you should explore. My companion and I arrived early in the capital city at 10:30 in the morning. We would have a few days here so we wanted a mixture of exploring, sightseeing and possibly writing about this place.

It is for this last reason that we chose an apartment just across the water and walking distance to almost everything so I can cover as much in a short time. What we did not anticipate was the road leading to the apartment. I thought it was a joke but no, we had to climb at least 50 cobblestone steps to reach the main entrance to the apartment building carrying our heavy luggage and another four floors of winding steps to our main apartment. It was torture! Catching our breath, we sat on the terrace for a short while and completely forget what we had gone through after seeing what we saw. We immediately dumped our bags and headed out to explore the place.



I already loved it! From our terrace, we could see the Forts, the beautiful body of water, the port and school of birds flying above us. It was breathtaking to say the least.

Climbing up and down the stairs was momentarily





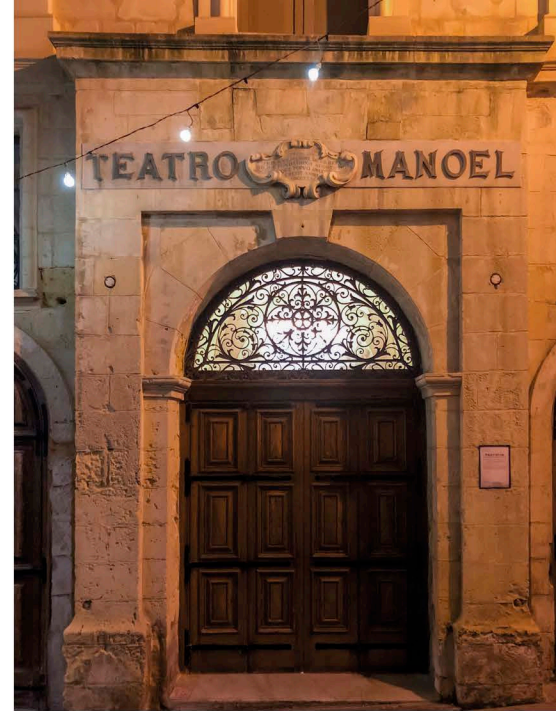
forgotten. I love the neighbourhood, just across from our apartment is the Basilica of Mount Carmel, a Roman Catholic Church, one of the most famous churches and is part of UNESCO Heritage Site which includes the whole city. Passing the Basilica is a very old building called Manoel Theatre, an important performing arts venue. It is a very old building built in 1731 but still being used. It was closed the whole time we were in Valletta so we did not get the chance to see inside

or watch anything as we had planned. Walking past several restaurants and bars... examining some front doors along the way, we wandered through the quiet picturesque until we got to the city centre.

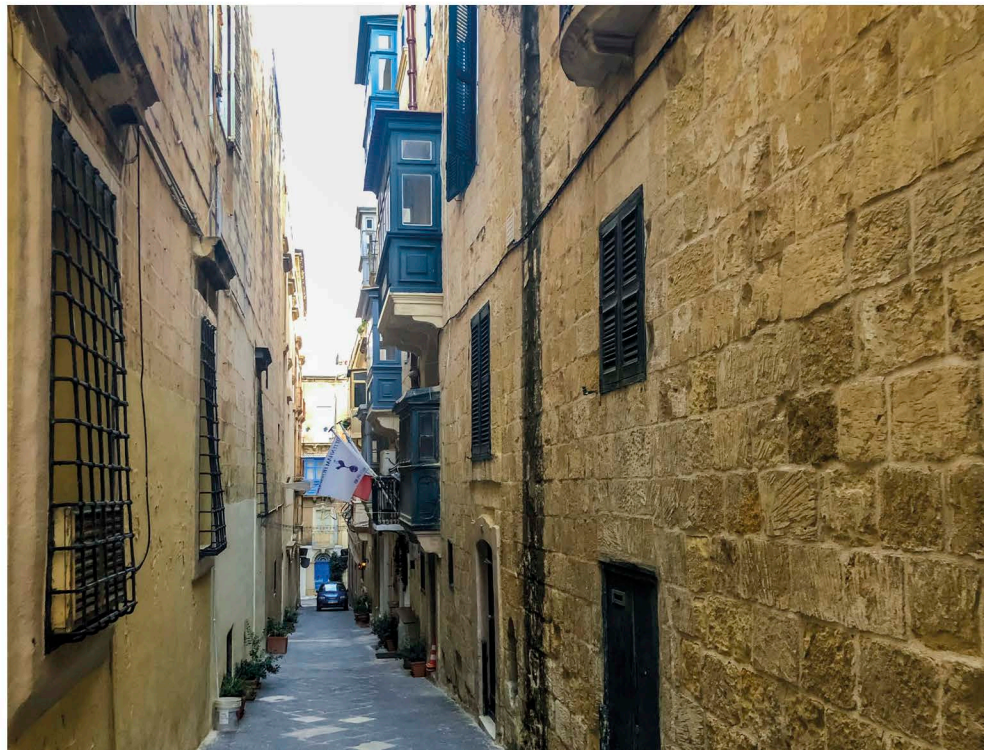
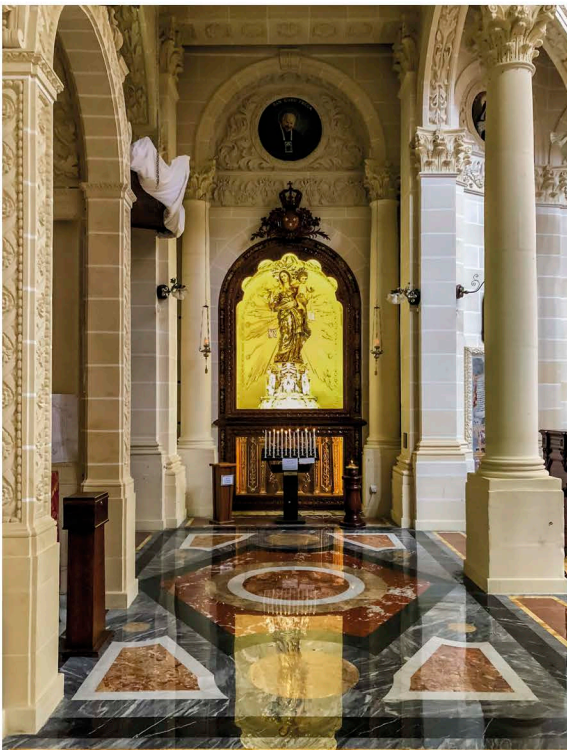
Valletta is Europe's smallest capital city so it's perfect for walking. Hidden streets and views appear around almost every corner so it was great just admiring. The architecture alone, especially with the sun setting, added to its glow. This small island with a population of 439,000 is perhaps the safest

place in the world. You can walk in a dimly lit alleys without being bothered. People are friendly and will go out of their way to assist anyone. My companion and I walked at least a total of 40 hours during the 5 days of stay in Valletta excluding the 2 hours a day of break for lunch, coffee or touring the many heritage sites... well, the whole of Malta is heritage. You have got to see it, to believe it.

Malta gained independence from a dwindling British Empire in 1964.



History can be seen throughout the city however, with Valletta's roots on display, over the last two thousand years, Malta's timeline reads like a who's, who of conquerors. Naming a handful, the Romans, the Normans, the Turkish, the Spanish, the French and the British. Even as the recent Second World War, the Maltese islands were a highly prized base being fought over. Due to the bravery and courage shown by the Maltese people during the prolonged invasion, they are the only country awarded with the George Cross. The George Cross is typically handed to individuals, it is the second highest award in the United Kingdom's honour system and is even part of the nation's flag.







establishment with a two hundred year old history and considered a minor landmark within the bustling streets of Malta's stunning capital, Valleta.

After a long full day, we struggled through cobblestone steps to our apartment and caught up with a much needed rest. I sat in front of my laptop and started planning for the next day. It would be another exploration day with a mixture of Cathedral hopping, trying out Maltese food. I will definitely go for a taste of Aljotta, a fish soup and some other renowned Maltese food.

The following day, the sun was shining brightly and the cool breeze energised me. I had latte macchiato and chocolate croissant for breakfast overlooking the Grandmaster Palace now known as the Palace which was built between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as the Palace of the Grandmaster of the Order of St. John who ruled Malta.

Had a quick visit to the Grand Masters Palace to view the Armoury Collection dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the Palace State Rooms and corridors which displays the glory of



the Order of St. John. As per the manual given to guests, it says that this Palace was one of the first buildings in the city of Valleta founded by Grandmaster Jean de Vallete a few months after the Great Siege of Malta in 1565. The Palace was then enlarged and developed by successive Grand Masters to serve as their residence. It became the seat of Malta's first constitutional parliament in 1921. It is now the seat of the Office of the President of Malta. Close to the

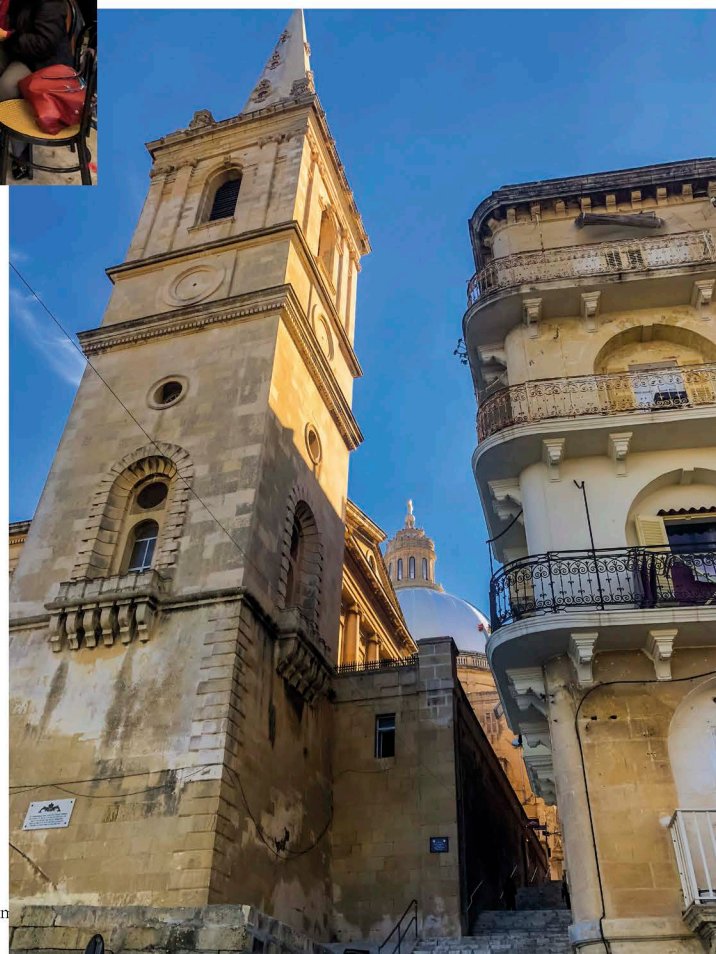
Grand Masters Palace was the house of Nobility, Casa Rocco Piccola a 16<sup>th</sup> century Palace, home of the Noble de Piro family. We were asked to sit in the courtyard whilst waiting for the guide and while being entertained by a parrot, named Kuku. I tried to talk to Kuku but the only word he knew was "hello" so we exchanged hellos several times until the guide came to show us the interior of the Palace.

The Palace is a living museum. A privately owned and much loved home of the Marquis and Marchioness de Piro. They were actually home that time but were



Built following the siege of Malta, was the Barakka Gardens, which unfortunately we've missed, overlooking the great harbour.

We continued walking until we reached Republic Street. Feeling a bit hungry, we found a nice, cosy coffee shop, Caffè Cordina. We sat outside for a while to view the statue of Queen Victoria. I thought this is more than just a coffee shop. My conversation with one of the owners, Luca Cordina, revealed that it is a famed







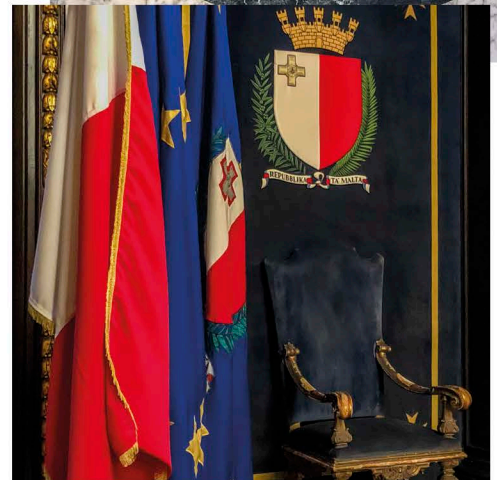
entertaining guests so we were not able to meet them but apparently, they do oblige whenever possible. The Palace is open to the public from 10am to 4pm every day except Sundays and holidays. It is a beautiful home full of antiquities and collections from the past. Not only did we see the important rooms inside the Palace but also the underground passages and tunnels which were used as a safe place during the war. We missed going to the restaurant located in the Palace's old kitchen as we had made reservations for a nearby Maltese

restaurant. It was a delightful visit to this nobility's home.

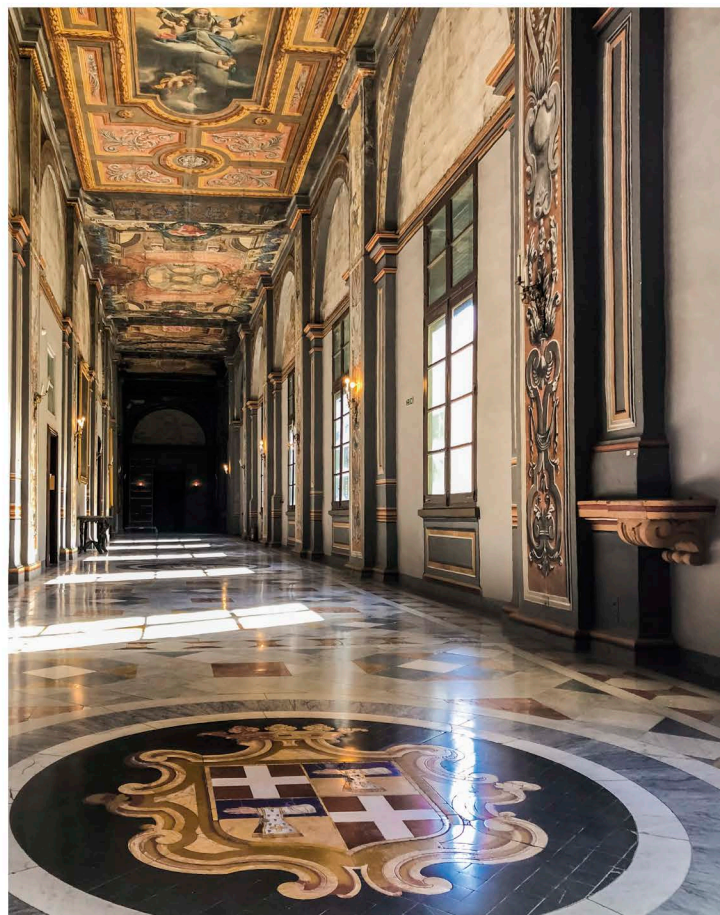
Our next stop was the St. John Co Cathedral. I wouldn't miss this Roman Catholic Church as it has always been mentioned by my Humanities professor in college and for some reason I didn't pay much attention then, as I had no idea where Malta was at that time, and had no interest in knights except for Sir Lancelot of the Round Table.

The queue was long and it was already four in the afternoon and the Cathedral is about

to close. Luckily, we had pulled some strings and were able to enter the back side of the Cathedral. I stood in front of the altar with mouth open and eyes so wide totally mesmerised. It had me dumbfounded as it dwarfed all the churches and Basilicas that I have visited in this trip. There are no adjectives to describe the magnificence of this church interior. It is Baroque all the way. I was awed at the style, design and particular attention to detail. It was an overwhelming feeling of respect and admiration. St. John Co Cathedral is dedicated to St. John the Baptist and built by the Order of St. John between 1572-1577. It is one if not the most beautiful Cathedral's that I have ever seen. From ceiling to walls, including the floorings, are decorated with inlaid colourful marbles creating a beautiful



tapestry. Photographs just would do it justice to its beauty, but viewing it yourself will give you a feeling of wonderment, just as I felt.







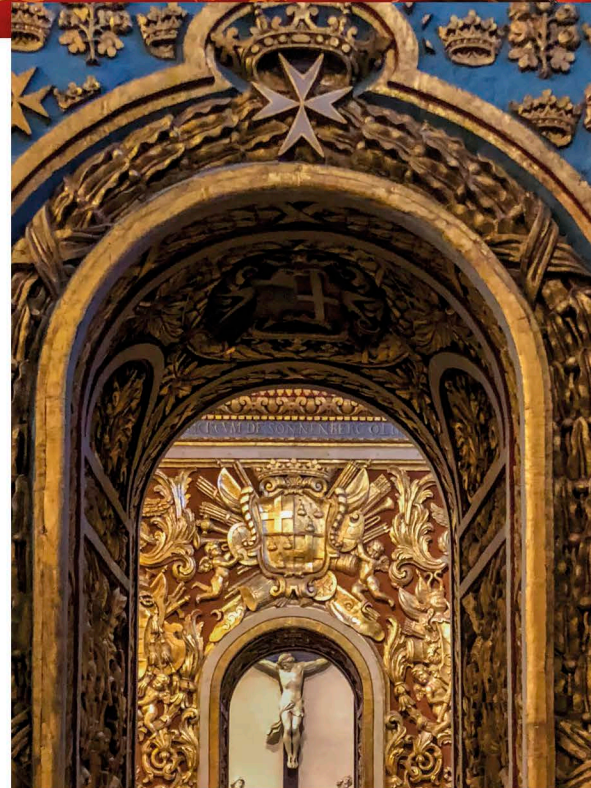
Our next visit is the St. Elmo Fort which became the location site for my companion's photography project. The Fort is huge and to walk inside the fort in the late afternoon is doubly tiring and even more so if you had been a subject in a photography project. In between modelling and looking around, I was reading a brochure about the Fort. Fort St. Elmo is considered Malta's five-star Fort as it protected the main ports of Malta during the Great Siege in 1565.

Inside the Fort is a War Museum

with collections of various items from prehistoric times starting from the early Bronze Age of 2500BC to present time. There are several videos to watch to better understand the history and greater appreciation of Malta. With Fort St. Elmo as the setting of Malta's historical episodes so it is a must see place. Give yourself at least two hours inside the Fort. You will be surprised at the historical value of the place and be proud of the courage and bravery of the Maltese

people. The sun had set and whilst I could see our apartment building from a distance, it took us at least an hour and a half to reach the area, because most of the streets are like in San Francisco, USA. Fatigue caught us so we just decided to buy cold cuts and bread and make a sandwich for dinner and called it a night.

Not really surprising, the days went by so quickly. As they say time seem to move faster when you are having fun. I have now fallen in love with Valleta. I have documented on a daily basis my trip and posted them on Facebook so a good friend of mine, a Maltese Knight of the Order of St. John suggested that I should visit Mdina. That's exactly what my companion and I did. Mdina is a walled city with a history spanning four thousand years, it's named the "Silent City" and it speaks for itself. At the lone entrance, I was totally stunned by the medieval look and feel of the place. The town was the old capital of Malta, and with



its narrow streets, few inhabitants and beautiful views it is truly a magical town. There are no cars allowed in the walled city except those of a limited number of residents who have permission to enter Mdina. The town provides a relaxing atmosphere among the visitors walking its narrow streets and alleyways. Horse drawn carriages are available at 35Euro for an hour of sightseeing inside Mdina.

The medieval town is a mixture of Norman and Baroque architecture

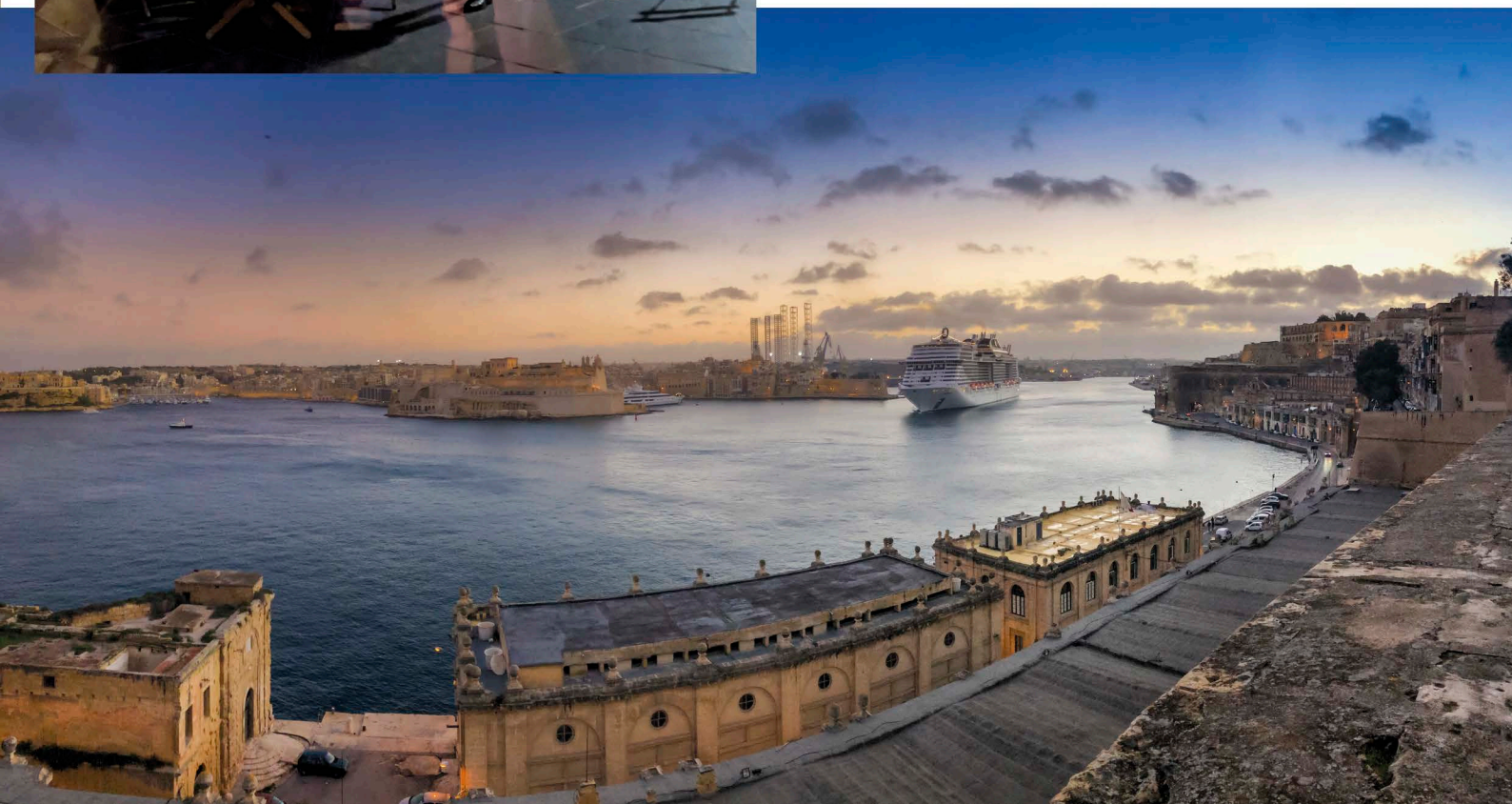


and is home too many Palaces, most of which today serve as private homes. We went around the narrow, winding roads on foot stopping by boutique shops selling glass jewellery and various souvenir items while appreciating the Baroque buildings the knights have left for humanity to appreciate. Mdina is a sight to behold.



Our last day were spent tasting food, walking the narrow alleys, taking photographs of the amazing buildings, chatting friendly with the locals and expatriates alike. We walked for hours hoping to find a real market where the locals went but unfortunately what we saw was an establishment with a sign Market but it was just a small supermarket not the kind that I was looking for. It was getting late so we just watched the sunset and walked back the cobblestoned steps to our apartment. It was a wonderful visit to a magical place... something that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

Thank you, Malta for a memorable insight of your country... whilst we only scratched the surface, what we have seen so far definitely left a strong impact on me and I will definitely come back again.





# Villa Market

Villa Market recognises that the world is changing so fast and that they need to be agile in order to adapt to their customer's needs.

For a supermarket that has been operating in Thailand for more than 44 years, Villa Market really is quite progressive with several recent initiatives highlighting their focus on being responsible members of the community and making life easier for their customers.

## Protecting the environment

Villa Market believes that we all have a responsibility to support the environment as best we can in order to protect our future generations. By working together with their staff, suppliers and customers, Villa Market is taking steps to change what they do today.

Like most supermarkets in Thailand, Villa Market agreed to participate in the Thai government's "No Plastic Bag" day on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of every month. Realising that more needed to be done, Villa Market initially extended this to the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> day of each month and now tries to be plastic bag free **every day**. Villa Market recognises that customers still need the convenience that bags offer so they



have recently introduced paper bags to supplement the different ways customers can choose to carry their groceries home:

- Cardboard boxes (provided to customers free of charge)
- Reusable cloth bags (different types available for a nominal fee in store)

Paper bags will be available in all Villa Market stores for free on "No Plastic Bag" days and for a nominal charge on all other days.

Villa Market also offers customers who choose not to take a plastic bag 5 extra Vplus points on top of their normal points.

Villa Market is committed to doing all that they can to minimise their impact on the environment and reducing the use of plastic bags used in their stores is one of a number of initiatives they are undertaking.

## Vplus Digital App

The Vplus Digital App provides Vplus members with everything they need to manage their Villa Market Vplus account. The app has a number of features:

- Easy access to your current Vplus points balance
- Keep up to date with the latest Vplus and Villa Market promotions and offers





**Vplus DIAMOND**

Accumulate **15,000 points** with in 1 year **Upgrade to Diamond Card**

๕,๐๐๐ 15,000 point ภายใน 1 ปี สามารถอัพเกรดเป็น Diamond Card

**20 THB = 1 POINT**

**Earn reward discount points**  
Spend 20 Baht Get 1 Point  
Redeem Discount 500 Points For 100 Baht  
การแลกส่วนลดด้วยบัตร 20 บาท = 1 point  
๕,๐๐๐ 500 point ใช้ส่วนลดมูลค่า 100 บาท

**Earn ROP miles**  
4 Points = 1 Royal Orchid plus mile  
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**4 POINTS = 1 ROP**

- Convert your Vplus points to Thai Airways Royal Orchid Plus air miles
- Locate your nearest Villa Market store wherever you are
- Collect your Vplus promotional stamps digitally
- Use the optional Vplus Wallet to make payments faster
- Allow family members to access your Vplus Wallet to make payments in Villa Market stores (Request to Pay feature)

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### Villa Market Shop Online

In order to support their customer's busy lifestyles, Villa Market provides customers with more ways to shop – their Shop Online service is now available in the following areas:

- Bangkok
- Phuket
- Hua Hin
- Pattaya

Villa Market Shop Online offers all of your Villa Market favourites delivered to your door with same day delivery available. Please note that delivery zones vary in each location so please enter your address at [shoponline.villamarket.com](http://shoponline.villamarket.com) to check service availability to your address.

When you become a registered Villa Market Shop Online member you also get the following benefits:

- Save your favourite items for faster ordering in the future
- Save multiple delivery addresses in your address book

Vplus members can also earn Vplus points by shopping online – simply add your Vplus member number to your profile and your Vplus points will be automatically be added to your account.

### Healthy store

Villa Market recognises that health and wellbeing is extremely important to their customers. In association with the BDMS group, they have recently launched a new "Healthy" concept store located in the BDMS Wellness Clinic on Wireless Road, in Bangkok. The Villa Market BDMS store provides a showcase of many of the healthy products that Villa Market has available across all of its 35 stores nationwide. Their buyers are constantly on the look out for the latest new products launches from around the world.

If there's a product you would like to see available in Villa Market then please let them know at:

[online@villamarket.com](mailto:online@villamarket.com)

**VILLA MARKET**  
**Healthy Store**  
at BDMS WELLNESS CLINIC



### Exclusive ranges

Villa Market has built a reputation for having products available that are not available elsewhere. They continue to be the leaders and innovators when it comes to new products. Here's some recent new product introductions:

Daiya Foods is a range of products which are all dairy, soy or gluten free which makes them safe for vegans and people who have food allergy problems. They offer a range of cheese alternatives that taste and cook just like the real thing.



Villa Market's Monoprix products are a range of very high quality, French products that represent extremely good value for money.







# The Cameron Highlands in Malaysia – a fantastic nature experience

by Monica Nilsson (*Expat Life* covergirl Feb/March 2019)

Three friends and I had planned this “girl’s trip” together and wanted to combine a visit to Kuala Lumpur where our host friend now lived after a year in Bangkok, with

a few days in the Cameron Highlands. We were really looking forward to some fresh air after the recent smog in Bangkok but also to see this amazing nature with the tea plantation landscape.

In KL we stayed close to the Petronas Twin Towers where she lives and went out for a nice evening at the Marini’s on 57 skybar overlooking the magnificent skyscrapers and all the evening lightning.

The day after we had hired a driver who came at 9am in the morning and the journey began. It takes under 4 hours to drive from KL to Cameron Highland. The first 2 hours are on highways but then the last 70kms can be a real challenge if, like one of our friends, you become car sick easily. The road is like in the Alps in Europe, very crooked and here and there quite narrow. Truck drivers seem fearless and to us drove way too fast considering



the road conditions and situation. I guess that they are used to it but also live according to the Arabic Muslim saying – Inshallah (“If Allah wants”) it will be OK, even today.

When we finally arrived we were more than pleased to see both the surroundings but also the nice hotel we choose Highland Resort, which is a colonial hotel from the 1930s. The Cameron Highlands was first discovered in 1883 by William Cameron during a British expedition, hence the name. At that time the British Army and Allied Forces found







the cool climate good for resting. They also discovered the climate was good for growing fruit, strawberries and also the quality tea. We went on a tour the following day and we learned that the owner of this land since 1929 was from Great Britain, the Russel family. They still live today on top of a fantastic hill in a very British looking large house, overlooking the plantation. The hotel served high tea of course according to British-Malay customs in the old days. Another famous hotel in the area is The Smokehouse, a charming guesthouse/hotel surrounded with flowers. It looked very pretty. There is a golf course and as a golfer I must admit I was very tempted to play golf with



this perfect temperature of 23-24C degrees and splendid green and lush environment.

We had booked a bus tour one afternoon with Viator and were picked up at 2pm sharp outside the hotel lobby. The first stop was to the BOH tea plantation. [http://www.cameronhighlandsinfo.com/attraction/BOH\\_Tea\\_Plantations/](http://www.cameronhighlandsinfo.com/attraction/BOH_Tea_Plantations/)

BOH tea is apparently a famous and popular brand in Malaysia. We visited the tea factory and admired

the amazing environment and of course like everyone else, took lots of photos from all different angles. Our smartphone photo apps suddenly became very GREEN. The rest of the tour (a few hours) was a bit wasted for us, since it was not really meeting our likings; "rose garden" in a greenhouse, bee and honey farm, butterfly garden (very small) and some small market place along the way. However the tour was still worthwhile because of

the BOH tea plantation and it was an inexpensive tour. You could also probably just book a separate private drive to take you there or to the other plantation named Cameron Valley that you actually will pass on the way up. There are only these two that rule the area. The population in the three cities in Cameron Highlands is 40,000. There were a number of hotels being built and we guessed that an invasion of Chinese tourists was expected in the near future. There is everywhere else in the world so why not here. Thailand and the TAT seem totally obsessed with the prospect of Chinese visitors to the exception of all other countries. As for us we were happy, and maybe lucky, that we choose the week before Chinese New Year to go here.





It was peaceful and calm and not many people at all at the hotel or even on the road. No tourist buses yet. Thank goodness.

The flora and fauna at this high altitude reminded us of some plants back home in Sweden - it was a mix between the tropical climate, e.g. wild orchids but also the Christmas flowers we have in our homes back home.

Amaryllis and Poinsettia were growing like big beautiful bushes. We had a fantastic walk up hill to Jim Thompson Cottage which used to be a hotel but is now a privately owned property only rented out for special occasions. We were not allowed to get too close since there were preparations for a wedding later that day.

The history about Jim Thompson and what happened to him after he disappeared is still a mystery today. The house is on a steep hill with magnificent views overlooking the valley.

I am very grateful for this trip and to finally have seen Cameron Highlands, which was on our bucket list already when we lived in Singapore during 1999-2005, but we never went during these years. There were just so many other places at that time with two teenaged daughters we wanted to visit instead: China, Australia, New Zealand, Bali, etc.

There are just so many magical places to visit in this great world of ours, aren't there?





# The new Amari Pattaya



*The Amari Pattaya has long been heralded as one of the premier destinations in Pattaya, Chonburi for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE).*

**I**t is perfectly situated with an ideal beachfront location at the northern end of Beach Road in Pattaya. Easy to access from the expressway to Sukhumvit Rd, Pattaya Na-Klua Rd, it is just down from the dolphin roundabout where Pattaya's newest shopping mall Terminal 21 is situated.

Easy to exit too, guests do not need to go all along Beach Rd, they can exit via Pattaya Soi 1.

The hotel has just been rebuilt and stands again in lush green, verdant, tropical paradise gardens. With mature healthy trees, well kept shrubs and flowers, the hotels grounds present the most desirable surroundings for all events and presentations.

The brand new ballroom with state of the art technology and all new meeting facilities present a perfect venue and backdrop for meetings, conferences, weddings and or social gatherings. The hotel employs a full team of highly trained experts to be able to deliver your event with panache and style. Your guests cannot help but be impressed which will

reflect upon you and your company.

Naturally the hotel's banquet and catering services are available for all events and the four smaller meeting rooms, the ballroom, lawn and gardens and offer a full service whether you are catering for a select group of 10 or up to 1,000 people. This is what Amari and their staff are famous for.

The pillar-less new ballroom is 620sqm and suitable for all MICE events and weddings. The lawn area outside is the centrepiece of the gardens and is ideal for open air film screenings and presentations, weddings and pop up events and even holds weekend Farmers Markets if there are no clashing events.

The hotel can accommodate 700 plus guests in absolute luxury and its excellent kitchens can provide the freshest and most extensive menus that any event could want. Why not give the hotel and their management the opportunity to present their recently refreshed, resort destination to you and your team.

If you take the children rest assured. With the brand new waterpark, Kids Club, children of all ages can enjoy the hotel's special full-day programme, the 'Kids Journey of Experience', every day from arrival to departure. Fully supervised with fun filled moments with mascots at kids' check-in counter, Kids' Hunting Map and special dance events, throughout their stay.

**Contact the Amari Pattaya events, conference and exhibition team on +66 (0)38 41 8418 or by email on:**  
[karina.b@amari.com](mailto:karina.b@amari.com)

[www.amari.com/pattaya](http://www.amari.com/pattaya)





# A very "Langhe" week

by Scott and Nori Brixen

"Dad, can we go wine-tasting again?" Logan asked, his eyes wide with anticipation. I knew what he was really asking.

"Oh, don't worry. There will be a lot of wine-tasting," I replied.

Travelling with four young, energetic boys, the hardest thing for Nori and I to find was 'downtime'. We never got to sleep in. We rarely went to sleep before midnight. At least one of the boys was awake by 7am, and boys are genetically incapable of being awake and quiet simultaneously. Soon all four would be stomping around, hungry and peevish, quarrelling about ridiculous issues in their somewhat considerate whisper-shouts. For us adults, breakfast marked the beginning of a 14 hour day "on the clock" at the world's most demanding and diverse unpaid job: chef, butler, teacher, travel agent, police, judge, chauffeur, cleaner, psychologist, storyteller.

So whenever we were in wine country, we threw out the rules on 'screen time.' Normally, we were niggardly; we might allocate 15 iPad minutes each for a full day of good behaviour, with an additional two minutes per page of school work completed. The scarcity of available minutes made them extremely valuable. As Logan frequently said, "I'll do almost anything for iPad minutes." To the boys,

"wine-tasting" was code for unlimited iPad time and unlimited iPad time was boy paradise.

We would park them just outside the winery, or in a quiet corner of the tasting room. Somewhere close enough to see but not hear them. Depending on their behaviour over the previous few days, we would allocate 0-20 minutes per kid per rotation, with the best-behaved going first. Sympathetic employees would usually bring the boys water and snacks like nuts, crackers or grissini. Meanwhile, Nori and I would find two seats at the counter, taste wonderful wines, hold hands and – for a few hours at least – remember the sophisticated and serene pleasures of a childless existence.

"Are those your children sitting outside?" winery staff often asked. "They are all so handsome and well-behaved!"

"Oh thank you!" we'd reply proudly while thinking 'You should have seen the little monsters this morning!'

This wasn't just any old wine-tasting, either. Barolo and Barbaresco are







my favourite wines in the world, which makes the Langhe my favourite wine region in the world. Though I had savoured many Barolo's over the years, I had never seen the Nebbiolo vineyards or the hilltop villages with my own eyes. I know it sounds ridiculous – especially coming from someone from Idaho – but I don't believe you can truly understand a wine until you've seen the soil it springs from. As we drove from Lake Como towards the Langhe hills, I felt like a pilgrim approaching a sacred site: Barololand.

Located in southwest Piedmont (Italian for 'at the foot of the mountains,') the Langhe is a roughly circular district occupying the transition zone between the flat farmland of central Lombardy and the piercing peaks of the western Alps. It's a stunning, rippled landscape, the hills carpeted with grapevines and surmounted by medieval villages whose names were like poetry: Barolo, Castiglione Falletto, Diano d'Alba, La Morra, Monforte d'Alba, Serralunga d'Alba.

When we were doing research, it had been hard to decide which village to stay in. But we needn't have worried. All the villages in Barololand are within 20 minutes' drive of each other. All the drives in Barololand are beautiful. That said, we both felt lucky to have chosen the village of La Morra. It was large enough to have a variety of shops and restaurants, small enough to explore on foot and didn't feel like tourist town the way Barolo itself did.

La Morra's semicircular old town occupied the highest ridge in Barololand. From viewpoints along the

cobbled Via Garibaldi or on the Piazza Castello, a sea of serried green vines spread to the horizon. La Morra's loftiness also made it easy to spot from almost anywhere in Barololand, useful when our sense of direction had been dulled by multiple wine-tastings. Nori found us a wonderful apartment to rent just below the old town. It was small, but sufficient, and furnished in a modern style. There was also a bakery across the street, a smart cafe up the road and the vineyards were steps away.

Nebbiolo grapes make expressive, but expensive, wines. Most Italians couldn't afford to drink a bottle of Barolo or Barbaresco with dinner every evening. The majority of Barolo is exported to markets like the USA, Germany and, increasingly China. Instead, Piedmontese prefer to drink the lighter and cheaper Barbera or Dolcetto. Though the name is confusingly similar to Barbaresco, Barbera is not made with Nebbiolo but Barbera grapes.







We fell into a wonderful schedule: a run in the morning, homemade breakfast (the most amazing eggs!), a homeschooling session for the boys and then out for a drive and wine-tasting (maximum two wineries). We made dinner at home (penne carbonara with guanciale for the boys, and fresh ravioli with sage butter for us) and then a walk through the old town of La Morra just before the enotecas and osterias closed. Our favourite spot was Enoteca St Giorgio, a tiny wine shop-cum-restaurant with traditional desserts and an extraordinary selection of Barolo, Barbaresco and Barbera wines.

Barolo is known (in Italy, anyway) as “the king of wines and the wine of kings.” But Barolo are not ‘huge’ wines. They are not dark purple and opaque like an Aussie Shiraz or ultra-rich like a Chateaufort-du-Pape. Instead, the wine often looks like a Pinot Noir – a semi-transparent garnet colour, perhaps with light brown at the edges. The nose is of cherries, quince, cedar and Christmas spice. And the taste builds slowly in the mouth, a crescendo of fruit, tannin, acidity and wood. While some ‘modern’ winemakers are making Barolo’s that taste delicious upon release, the high tannin levels in most ‘traditional’ Barolo’s require at least five years of age before the tannins soften and wine comes into balance. It’s well worth waiting for.

Wine-tasting in Barololand is more like Bordeaux than Napa Valley. Most wineries do not have ‘cellar doors’ open daily for walk-ins. A few have wine shops in the villages with tastings for a fee (Marcarini in La Morra, Damilano in Barolo etc.). But it’s relatively easy to arrange a tasting or winery tour with a call or email. And many villages have their own “cantina comunale” where most local wines can be sampled. Plus, there are enotecas (wine shops) everywhere. You will not be short of opportunities to drink delicious wine in Barololand.

But Barololand’s gourmet pleasures don’t stop at wine. This too is the land of wild boar, veal, venison, white Alba truffles and agnolotti pasta. Food and wine matching has few axioms, but there are two I trust. First, that the weights should match: a light wine works with light food and vice versa. Second, that ‘what grows together, goes together’: there is a natural affinity between products made in the same area, and the locals figured out what combinations sing long ago. Both rules apply here: a rich, tannic wine like Barolo tastes heavenly with the meaty, buttery, earthy food of Piedmont.

We planned four nights in Barololand. This was extended to five and later six. Had we stayed much longer, I was afraid that we might never leave. A new life in the Langhe? We could learn Italian and Piedmontese, Nori could help local apartment owners manage their foreign guests and I could become a winemakers apprentice. The boys could attend an international school in Turin or Milan. We’d join truffle hunts and learn to make agnolotti by hand. Not bad at all. On second thought, perhaps we shouldn’t have opened that second bottle of Barolo.

“Where are we going next?” Tai asked.





Nori and I had begun packing up. We had a long drive planned tomorrow: over the mountains into France, a brief tour of Monaco and back along the Italian riviera to Genoa.

"We'll be spending a few days in Liguria and then we're driving to Umbria," I replied. "Do they have wine-tasting?" he asked hopefully.

"Son, almost everywhere in Italy has wine-tasting."

"I love Italy," he gushed.

"Yes, so do I."

**About the author:**

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Scott & Nori are

avid travellers and

knowledge seekers

who have travelled

to 110 plus countries

across all 7 continents.

Now they're sharing

their wanderlust

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twinboys, Tai, Logan, Drake and Kiva.

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# Hiking in the Caucasus

*by Scott and Nori Brixen*

that it? Could it really be that close?

I ambled down the narrow road past unlit houses, trying to avoid the rain-splattered cow pies. I had only a vague idea where the trail began. Providentially, my path intersected with two stereotypical female German hikers: well-prepared, tall, fit and standoffish. They knew the way and permitted me to follow them but conversation wasn't part of the deal. Ten minutes later we reached the trailhead and began to climb through a forest of pine and birch. Lord were they fast! I was nearly running to match their giraffe strides. But I wanted to walk on my own, as I knew they did. I could have just slowed down and let them disappear up the trail, but I'm too dumb male for that. Instead, I darted up a shortcut between the trail's long switchbacks.

I had intended to spend a few days hiking in Stepantsminda, Georgia's de facto trekking centre. But Nori and the boys had been shocked by the temperature drop from Tbilisi. Logan was still recovering from a very high fever and the other boys were all sniffing and shivering in our unheated room. After months on the move, Nori had reached her limit and had tears in her eyes.

I quietly donned my warmest clothes and stepped out onto the balcony. It was 5am. The black sky was softening, but it was still very cold and rain fell on my outstretched hand. No matter; I had already resolved to go. More than a decade ago, an image in a travel magazine had captivated me: a mysterious church poised at the edge of an alpine meadow and dwarfed by foreboding peaks rising perpendicular behind it. That was the Georgia I longed to see, and dumb luck had deposited me a short hike away!

The drive north from Tbilisi had been long and wet but beautiful. This was the main route to Georgia's highest mountains and to Russia. Wooden stalls lined the road, proffering souvenirs of fruit, honey, bread, wine and beer to returning Russian tourists. We paused at Ananuri to roam inside the old castle walls, admiring the almost Celtic braided cross and dense Georgian inscriptions on the walls of the 17th century Church of the Mother of God. From there, the highway ascended to the ski resort town of Gaudari before cresting the pass at Jvari.

This was fiercely beautiful country. The Caucasus mountains crowded around us, range upon range severe, treeless peaks riven by plunging, green valleys. We reached Stepantsminda at dusk. As we hunted for our homestay, the clouds briefly parted. High above the valley, the silhouette of a church hunched eerily beneath the big, yellow moon. Was





"This isn't fun! Moving every day. Staying in places like this. We are not equipped for cold weather at all. It wasn't a good idea to come all the way up here with sick kids. We should have stayed in Tbilisi!" I thought she was being overdramatic. It wasn't that cold and she knows how much I love hiking. If she didn't like the homestay, we could shift to a nicer hotel. But she thought I was being selfish, and to a certain extent, I was. I had a visceral need to get up in the mountains. We withdrew to separate corners of the room. Frustrated, I eventually agreed to leave by noon the next day. So I had the morning to hike. Better start early.

Once Nori had pulled herself together, we drove back into the little town and found a delightful little family-run restaurant. We ordered sliced sausages, mushrooms stuffed with salty cheese and giant *kinkali* (Georgian xiao long bao). The boys ate very well, and the fruity house red was surprisingly delicious. By the end of the meal, Nori's spirits had improved so much that she suggested we watch the World Cup at Shorena's Bar across the street. But they hadn't improved enough to let me stay another day.

What a pleasure it was to walk through the cool, misty woods on my own! I walked briskly, challenging myself to maintain the German speed-walkers' pace for the rest of the climb. By now the sun's rays were lancing over the mountains that ringed Stepantsminda. Patches of blue sky appeared and disappeared behind the scudding clouds. The rain had stopped completely. My chest was heaving, my muscles were full of blood and I felt incredibly happy. Then, rounding what turned out to be the last switchback, a huge mountain appeared, solitary and swaddled in glaciers.



This was Mount Kazbek (5,047m), the country's third-highest mountain. Its Georgian name, Mkinvartsveri, means Glacier Peak. Georgian traditions claim that this was the "rock in the Caucasus" where Greek legends say the titan Prometheus was shackled for bringing fire to man. Every day, an eagle would appear to munch on Prometheus' liver; each night it, would grow back. Punishments were fairly severe those days.

Twenty minutes later, the trail emerged from the trees and a fierce wind had me scrambling for my jacket. A skein of boggy SUV tracks weaved down through a broad meadow filled with wildflowers. There, sat Gergeti Trinity Church atop a green knoll, a simple Georgian Orthodox structure made magical by its setting. As I walked towards it, I kept stopping to take photos of the church, the wall of mountains behind it and of Mount Kazbek. But it was impossible to capture the scale and majesty of the place on film. Wait! Who were those two ladies I saw walking across the church's stone-paved courtyard? Could the German Olympians have beaten me to the top?

No, they were two affable Austrians who happily chatted while we took turns snapping photos of each other. The taller one had flown into Tbilisi to meet the shorter one, who had cycled here from Istanbul! I was amazed by her fearlessness: she had crossed the whole of Turkey and most of Georgia alone, unaided and seemingly without much planning.





But she wasn't done yet.

"My plan is to continue through Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, but I'm really worried about the heat!"

I remembered well the searing temperatures we endured on the desert highway between Bukhara, Khiva (inspiration for our fourth son's name) and Nukus in western Uzbekistan. And we had been in a car, not pedalling a bike.

After a very quick tour of the church and its adjoining bell tower (most of the doors were closed and the gruff, black-robed priest took no interest in us) I started back down the mountain via a steeper trail. Far below, the metal-roofed homes of Stepantsminda were clearly visible; I was even able to pick out our guesthouse. As I descended, I did something I normally never do on a hike: I used my mobile phone. My parents were delighted to hear from me. I described the area and recounted our first week in Georgia. I also talked about Nori's flagging morale. My Mom had Nori's back:

"Remember son, she's the one bearing most of the burden of looking after the sick boys. It's a lot of work to always be moving from place to place. Men never think about those things. I know, because I've lived with your father for fifty years. You guys have been travelling for five months, and not to easy places either. I understand how she could be exhausted!"

My family was still asleep when I returned to the homestay at 7am though I was still disappointed to be leaving Stepantsminda so soon, I knew it was the right thing to do. The weather was beautiful on the drive back, so we stopped frequently to take photos of the glorious mountains. However instead of continuing onto Yerevan, Armenia – a further five hours south – we returned to Tbilisi, let the boys have McDonald's for dinner and got to bed early.



**About the author:**  
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# Sri Lanka's Central and South-West: Wanderlust in the land of serendipity

by Lori Blackburn

**A**re you ready for adventure? Do ancient ruins, balmy beaches, and misty mountains catch your eye? Perhaps you fancy cosmopolitan glamour or an off-the-beaten-track destination? Well, Sri Lanka has something to show you.

This tiny, but mighty destination is nestled off the coast of SE India. It earned the moniker "Pearl of the Indian Ocean" thanks to the bounty of natural beauty packed into its small island nation. As ultra-explorer Marco Polo once proclaimed, "(It is) undoubtedly the finest island of its size in the world." Once upon a time it was called Serendip, then later Ceylon, but these days it is called Sri Lanka... and it is having a moment.



For years, travel magazines highlighted Sri Lanka as an 'Emerging destination to watch.' Now, this previously hidden gem is hitting the spotlight. If you get the chance, go before the crowds arrive. Word has gotten out.

*Lonely Planet* dubbed Sri Lanka 'The Top 2019 Destination' while *Conde Nast Traveler* called it one of the 'Best islands in the world'. Sri Lanka hosts eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites making it rich in both culture and nature. In addition to diverse landscapes, friendly people, tasty food, and oodles of attractions, Sri Lanka stands out because whether you are a budget-traveller or a big-time-budget-blower, there are options galore. If you have the heart for it, then Sri Lanka invites you to play.

Your biggest problem within this action-packed island might be fitting everything into one trip. Location hop to maximise experiences. There is a lot to see! Sri Lanka has twenty-two national parks; an impressive tally considering that it is smaller than the size of Ireland.





(Comparatively, Ireland boasts six national parks.) If you are exploring various areas, then pack for different climates. One morning you might be on a sunrise trek through chilly mountains, but by afternoon you could be lounging on a beach.

Your main entry point is most likely **Colombo**. Settle in by learning about Sri Lanka's history at the **National Museum** [www.museum.gov.lk/](http://www.museum.gov.lk/) or visiting heritage sites such as **Gangaramaya Buddhist Temple and Museum** <http://gangaramaya.com/>. Take a sunset seaside stroll along **Galle Fort Green** for a look at local life. Explore **Colombo Fort** which is full of notable colonial buildings such as the 400 year old **Dutch Hospital** where beautiful architecture houses cool cafes and shops. Colombo bursts with tasty street food and small eateries, but should you want a mainstream option, bring your appetite to **Ministry of Crab (MOC)** <http://www.ministryofcrab.com/> for fresh, ginormous Sri Lankan seafood. These award-winning dishes live up to names such as OMG Prawn and Crabzilla.

Once you've had your fill of Colombo, then travel to wider regions. You can get around by public transportation or by hiring a private car and driver through websites such as **Sri Lanka Car and Driver** [www.srilankacaranddriverhire.com](http://www.srilankacaranddriverhire.com) If you have the money and inclination, a private car will cost about 1800B per day and provide a convenient, flexible, and streamlined option.

So, where do you go and what do you do? Rather than race around the country trying to fit everything in, spend time exploring specific regions. Sri Lanka is full of amazing experiences. For an introductory trip, many people focus upon the central and south-west regions which host a concentration of accessible activities. Here are some ideas to get you started...

### Charming mountain provinces and tea plantations (Central Sri Lanka):

Come take a walk in the clouds through picturesque plateaus steeped in old English charm. Depart from Colombo via Sri Lanka's iconic train journey which traverses the tea districts of Kandy, Nuwara Eliya and Ella. This famous train ride is one of the world's most beautiful railway trips, but it isn't your only option. Buses and cars will get you there, too.

The bustling city of **Kandy**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was once the ancient capital of kings. It is also known for important Buddhist sites. Walk around **Kandy Lake** to reach **The Temple of the Tooth Relic** (Sri Dalada Maligawa) which is considered one of the Buddhist world's most sacred places. Keep an eye out for Kandyan drummers during temple *puja* (prayers).

Long ago the **Peradeniya Botanic Gardens** [www.botanicgardens.gov.lk/](http://www.botanicgardens.gov.lk/) were reserved for royalty, but these days you can amble through the lovely park, too.

Enchanting **Nuwara Eliya** is a land of sprawling tea plantations and scenic waterfalls. This hillside retreat offers the country's highest altitude and coolest climate. The weather is



reminiscent of England, which made it an ideal retreat for 19<sup>th</sup> Century colonial Brits to kickback in rural grandeur. Fox hunting, anyone? Expect rain showers in this "little England," but a raincoat is perfect for exploring sites such as Lover's Leap Waterfall, Hakgala Botanical Garden, Seetha Amman Temple, or a boat ride around Lake Gregory. Drop by historic **Pedro Tea Estate** to enjoy a guided factory tour and learn about the region's tea legacy. For a romantic getaway, find your way to the elegant and inviting **Scottish Planter Glendevon Bungalow** [www.themerestorts.com/scottishplanter/](http://www.themerestorts.com/scottishplanter/) where colonial design honours this secluded estate's past. Yes, a real Scottish planter once lived here.







Just east of Horton Plains sits **Ella**, a small mountain town defined by its backpacker vibe, happening main street, and nature-infused activities. Fragrant tea plantations create the perfect backdrop. Nightlife bumps at spots like **Café Chill** or **Café One Love**. Climb **Little Adam's Peak**, the smaller version of the sacred, steep Adam's Peak. If you don't go for sunrise, then start hiking Little Adam's Peak at 7am to avoid crowds. The trail starts at **Ella Flower Garden** [www.ellaresort.com](http://www.ellaresort.com) where views and a rambling garden create a sweet spot to enjoy a post-hike ice cream. From there, the trail up to Little Adam's Peak passes through a local village and tea plantations. On the way down, stop at sky-high **98 Acres Resort** [www.resort98acres.com](http://www.resort98acres.com) which welcomes visitors to its stunning hillside restaurant. Two words: That view!

Later, just across from Ella Flower Garden is a trailhead that offers a 30 minute hike to the world-famous **Nine Arches Bridge**. Walk across this railway bridge for memorable moments and photo opps. It truly is an architectural marvel! Time your visit to see a passing train. Afterwards, take a quick drive to **Ravana Falls** for a refreshing dip. Another highlight is **Lipton's Seat** in nearby Haputale. Drop by to see the viewpoint where 19<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish tea baron, Sir Thomas Lipton, once surveyed his vast tea empire.

### Southern coastline: Safaris, surf, sailing and scuba (Southern Sri Lanka)

Drive 110km south from Ella to reach **Yala National Park** – the country's most visited and second largest national park. The main attraction is jeep safaris. This wildlife-rich area hosts the world's highest density of leopards. It also provides opportunities to encounter elephants, monkeys, water buffalo and crocodiles. It's brilliant for bird watching, too. There are numerous national parks and wildlife

Peruse its 19<sup>th</sup> Century history through memorabilia displayed in the airy front room.

You'll feel like the lord of a grand manor with breakfast in the gardens and dinner in a formal dining room. End the day nestled by a crackling fireplace planning the next adventure

while sipping Scottish whiskey. Cheers!

Want to see the world's end... or at least Sri Lanka's version of it? Then, plan a day trip to **Horton Plains National Park**, a UNESCO Heritage Centre and biodiversity hotspot. Nuwara Eliya or Ella make ideal jumping points. This

super-scenic, moderately difficult 10km loop trail travels along billowing grasslands, cloud forests, waterfalls, and the sheer precipice of **World's End** cliff. Pack lunch and water. Arrive by 7am to beat the crowds.



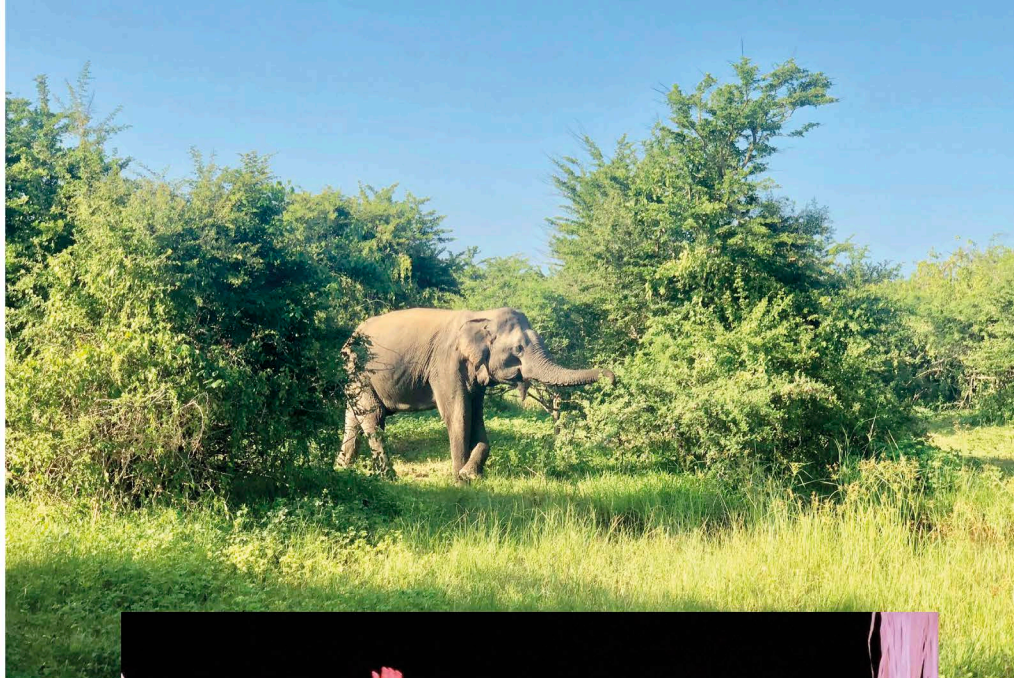


sanctuaries around here. The main thing is to manage expectations: This is not an African safari. You will most likely be part of a jeep queue all jostling for a glimpse of the elusive leopard or the perfect peacock photo. Just keep that in mind and enjoy the ride. There is still plenty to see. Oh, and watch your lunch during rest stops because cheeky monkeys are afoot.

Those wanting to splurge can check into the eco-conscious **Wild Coast Tented Safari** [www.resplendentceylon.com/wildcoastlodge-yala/](http://www.resplendentceylon.com/wildcoastlodge-yala/) where the jungle meets the sea in safari splendour. Kick back in cocoon suites that blend “colonial expedition chic” with natural landscapes. Take a dip in your private plunge pool before a beachfront happy hour set against a bonfire and candlelit lanterns. Stays include naturalist-led safaris where guests explore the nature parks’ quietest corners.

For family-friendly accommodation, try the newly renovated **Cinnamon Wild** [www.cinnamonhotels.com/en/cinnamonwildyala/](http://www.cinnamonhotels.com/en/cinnamonwildyala/) where, thanks to its location bordering Yala National Park and a lake where animals congregate, you can see various safari animals. Try to spot the sunning crocs and don’t be surprised if a family of wild boars walks by your lunch table.

Ready to hit the beach? Beach bums and mermaids can revel in the vast shoreline stretching along Sri Lanka’s southern coasts. Options abound, so here are some highlights. Those eager to see blue whales (the largest creatures on earth!), surf, or enjoy catamaran sailing should head to **Mirissa** – a quaint seaside town with a happening beach bar scene. Budget accommodation is available at **Poppies Guesthouse** [www.poppiesmirissa.com/](http://www.poppiesmirissa.com/) where rooms are nestled within a charming garden and it’s just a short stroll to the beach. A ten minute drive takes you to **Weligama**, a popular surf spot where surf schools and rental shops cater to

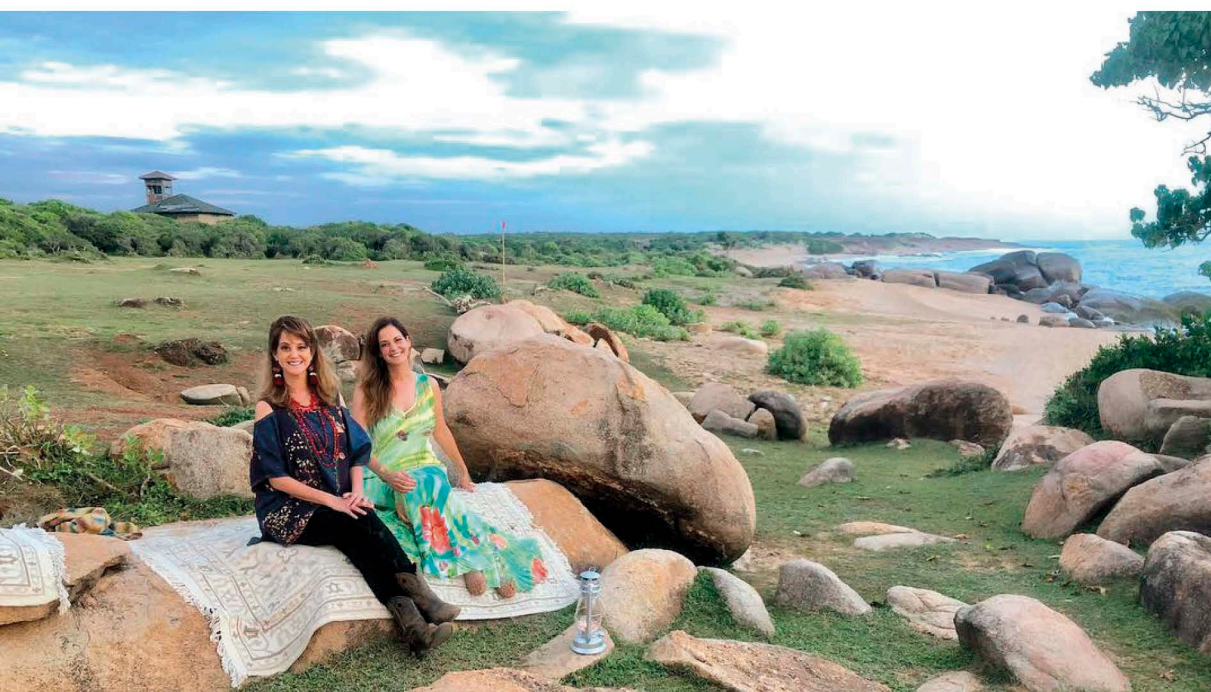


beginner and intermediate surfers.

For a high-end hang out, head to **W15** [www.w15.lk/](http://www.w15.lk/). This modern beachfront resort overlooks a jamming surf spot and welcomes non-hotel guests. Pay the consumable dining fee and relax on giant bean bags while topping-up your tan. If you’re looking for live-music with a surf party vibe, then drop by **The Doctor’s House** <https://thedoctorshouse.lk/>. This chill hang-out is situated within a 200 year old former Dutch and Ayurvedic hospital. Grab a seat in the funky palm tree garden.

Wood-fired pizza and beers go great with the cerulean sea. Cruising along the coast, you are sure to see stilt fisherman demonstrating a traditional way of fishing in shallow water.

These days it’s mainly a tourist attraction, so expect to pay to see these guys “fish”. Once you’ve explored the surface, come dive beneath the sea. Scuba divers can explore wrecks (around 200 shipwrecks are suitable for diving), reefs, pinnacles, walls, and more. **Hikkaduwa** and **Unawatuna** are popular spots, but Sri Lanka offers many quality options.







### History, Culture, & Architecture: Fort Galle (South-West Sri Lanka)

Step back in time at the interesting and impressive **Fort Galle**, a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Portuguese and Dutch influenced UNSECO World Heritage Site. There is an undeniable charm about Fort Galle's breezy lanes and crumbling colonial facades. These days, rather than warding off foreign invasion, this fortress embraces it. From cobblestone streets to historic monuments, the fortified old town showcases European influence blended with South Asian tradition. History comes alive in walkways full of sites such as the **Clock Tower** and **Mansion Museum**. There is a Buddhist temple, Anglican Church, and Muslim mosque so if you've indulged in too much revelry the previous night, you have several options for repenting that last shot of arrack.

Wander along streets whose names reflect Fort Galle's

history. You will pass bohemian boutiques, historic hotels ensconced within 300 year old homes, and colourful cafés. When you reach the intersection of Pedlar Street (referring to the Muslim retailers that once resided here) and Lighthouse Street (named after a lighthouse destroyed in a fire) then you have arrived at the **Heritage Café** [www.heritagecafeandbistro.com/](http://www.heritagecafeandbistro.com/) – the perfect combination of history, hospitality, and hipness. This funky café-and-art-space was recently recommended by *Condé Nast Traveler* as a must-see spot for those exploring Southern Sri Lanka. Good thing we are in the right place! Just enter past the eye-catching, brass elephant tuk tuk created by artist Prageeth Monohandasa.

Art and artefacts are everywhere. There is everything from a 19th Century *Ceylon News* printing press to contemporary art by a local graffiti artist to fierce lion sculptures that

once guarded a Jaffna temple. Yup, that couch is made from burlap dahl sacks from the local market. Owners, Dale and Sabrina Rennie created a unique space that blends Sri Lanka's vivid past with its vibrant present. To get a sense-of-place, The Heritage Café is a historical landmark nestled within the UNESCO Heritage Site of Fort Galle. The café was once the national bakery for Fort Galle's community. It gets even cooler when you realise that within Heritage Café's courtyard is a giant 200 year old oven which once baked over 1,000 loaves per day for the area's residents. Wow.

These days, this bustling café serves up specialties such as curry hoppers – a staple Sri Lankan street food similar to rice and coconut crepes. The Heritage Café is the fort's only restaurant making traditional hoppers. In fact, the 'hopper lady' arrives each morning to freshly prepare them







in the classic style. You can also nosh on seafood sourced from local fisherman, handmade pasta, and an array of international flavours created with local ingredients. If you need to cool down, their handcrafted lemonade does the trick. They are created daily from pure ingredients that showcase Sri Lankan flavours such as Cinnamon Orange or Ginger Lemonade. Heritage Café is the perfect place to nourish both your body and mind. This creative space welcomes art talks, design exhibits, and cultural interactions.

If your taste buds tingle for home-style Sri Lankan dishes, then head to **Lucky Fort** [www.facebook.com/luckyfortmama/](https://www.facebook.com/luckyfortmama/). Mama Lucky makes everyone feel at home in her cosy establishment. Come hungry for the set menu of ten curries or join a cooking class to create a few of your own. Once your belly is full, walk off the calories by exploring the fort's seaside ramparts. You can literally walk on these walls.



During sunset, **Triton Bastion** makes a great viewpoint. Lookout for the cliff jumpers at **Flag Rock**. These daredevil locals defy danger by leaping into the rocky ocean for tips.

Whew! Sri Lanka is one cool country. It may be tiny in size, but it is mighty in offerings. This is a land throbbing with life, beauty, culture, landscapes, diversity, and endless possibilities. It is a place with heart where visitors are welcomed with friendly smiles and hospitality. The warmth of this nation reflects Sri Lanka's signature island style. Perhaps paradise isn't lost after all.



# Unicompartmental Knee Arthroplasty (UKA)

A minimally invasive procedure that helps preserve natural knee function by repairing only the damaged parts of the knee.

**S**ukumvit Hospital gifts patients with chronic knee conditions a new lease on life by employing new technology that allows doctors to fix only the damaged parts of the knee without replacing it entirely. This is advantageous in contrast to a Total Knee Replacement (TKR) as the patient will benefit from a shorter recovery time, suffer less tissue damage and will heal with the majority of their natural functioning knee in place.

During a recent visit to Sukumvit Hospital, patient Ian Leslie Raeburn disclosed to doctors that he was suffering from severe knee pain and his symptoms were causing recurring difficulties in his day-to-day life. He was advised to seek help at the hospital's **Orthopaedic Department**, where he was diagnosed and treated by orthopaedic specialist, **Dr Ekapong Komolhirun**.

Once the patient explained that he had been suffering from a long history of chronic knee pain, Dr Ekapong ordered an X-ray and used Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) to further understand the root cause of the problem. After running both tests as well as a physical examination, he observed that the patient's knee had deteriorated as a result of an underlying

condition called osteoarthritis.

As the condition had been left for a long time, the damage had become so severe that Mr Raeburn was also suffering from a Lateral Meniscus Tear, which is a tear in the specialised structure that aids in cushioning the knee joint.

After the diagnosis, the patient was given some medication and put through an initial few sessions of physiotherapy. Unfortunately, he showed no signs of improvement because of the severity of the tears and damage. Dr Ekapong was then forced to reevaluate the situation.

It is fortunate that Sukumvit Hospital is up-to-date on the latest developments in the medical field as they had begun implementing newsurgical technologies such as the Unicompartmental Knee Arthroplasty (UKA) that relies on assistance from computers to make the surgical process more efficient. The procedure is a minimally invasive option that involves replacing only the damaged parts of the knee, making it most appropriate for patients who

suffer with forms of arthritis that affects the knee's medial or lateral compartments.

*"If an individual who suffers from chronic osteoarthritis does not seek treatment as swiftly as possible, the knee will continue to deteriorate and cause serious pain that will hinder their daily life routine."*

According to Dr Ekapong, this computer-assisted procedure requires smaller incisions, causes less tissue damage and requires less recovery time.







replaced. This is greatly beneficial as the patient will recover with the majority of their natural functioning knee in place, including the essential Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL). As a result, a patient will only have to wait a short while before feeling the positive results. They will also be able to exercise and use their knee more naturally and effectively in comparison to those who opted for a Total Knee Replacement (TKR).

In a concluding statement, Dr Ekapong states that “if an individual who suffers from chronic

osteoarthritis does not seek treatment as swiftly as possible, the knee will continue to deteriorate and cause serious pain that will hinder their daily life routine. Many patients will turn to medication and steroid injections to relieve pain, but it is imperative to understand that these are only short-term solutions

that will require continuous or additional amounts as time goes by. Furthermore, damage in certain compartments of the knee often spreads and leads to more severe degeneration. Once this becomes too severe then the opportunity to have a Unicompartmental Knee Arthroplasty (UKA) becomes lost and the patient will have to opt for alternatives.

It is also recommended that overweight patients and individuals with irregularly shaped knees such as knocked-knees, knees prone to buckling and crooked knees, should avoid this procedure altogether.”



**Mr. Ian Leslie  
Raeburn**

This is especially true in comparison to a Total Knee Replacement (TKR), where doctors are forced to completely remove both the good and worn out tissue from the knee before putting in a new joint replacement. Moreover, the process requires a large incision which results in the patient losing a substantial amount of blood and being forced to spend several weeks recuperating. It also impacts an individual's ability to perform normal activities at full capacity, and can make activities like squatting, running or other similar exercises very difficult.

In contrast, during a computer-assisted Unicompartmental Knee Arthroplasty (UKA), only the worn out tissue from the knee is removed and



**Dr. Ekapong Komolhirun,  
Orthopaedic Specialist**



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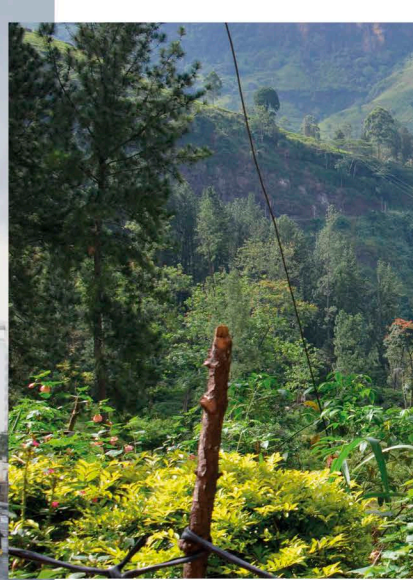
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# Will Sri Lanka be a colony again?

by Monica Nilsson



in the country, many workers have left already seeking work elsewhere so now China brings their own people to

**M**y husband and I spent 7 days in Sri Lanka for the first time in beginning of December 2018. I had put together the itinerary myself and was for the first time a little bit anxious how it was going to be. Will it work? Would the contacts be reliable and was it silly not using an agency. I have travelled in 63 countries over the last 30 years and only a handful of these travels we have used an agency, so why wouldn't even this one work. Luckily it did, almost perfect and according to the schedule and plan.



We started in Colombo and had booked us for at the colonial classic nice hotel Galle Face Hotel by the sea, which is a wonderful hotel and I looked forward to this stay very much. <https://gallefacehotel.com/> What I didn't expect was to see when we arrived that this beautiful hotel is now surrounded by sky scrapers, landfill, a new harbour and extreme exploitation.

All of this mentioned is owned by China in one way or the other. Hotels and condos, the new harbour owned by China. They are even planning and construction a new "island" made of landfill from the sea, which looks like a new Marina Bay in Singapore, or Pudong in Shanghai, if you look at the drawings for this 5 year plan. China has also done the new highway and major other roads. OK, at least it is good for the labour and that people after all these years with war now have work. We thought. What we learned is that since the economy for many years during the civil war was so bad

work on the constructions. This is quite sad. You get the feeling even more that China with the country's even stronger economy is ruling ports, roads and hotels in Sri Lanka and also in Africa.

Anyway lets not talk more about politics. The people in this country we found to be very friendly and helpful and of course they good speak English (as it used to be a British colony). We had a great time and took a 2 hour tuk tuk ride in the city, went out walking by our own and enjoyed the hotel's fantastic restaurants the first few days.

After spending 2 days in Colombo we had hired a driver who came punctual to pick us up at the hotel and drive us down the coastline to Galle Fort. It is very nice there and along the way we saw some touristic resorts and beaches and we made a stop at a turtle sanctuary. A man took care







of turtles that he found on the beach that was injured from fishing boats or other accidents. He kept them in pools. It was a very simple place and sometimes you have doubts about places like that in poor countries, because people do everything for money and to get entrance fees but I truly hope all of it was true and real and that no turtle was purposely harmed.

We came back after a full day to the hotel and enjoyed the nice Mexican restaurant by the beach that belonged to Galle Face Hotel. A very cool place with great interior and we just loved it.

Next adventure. Day 3 was to go by train from Colombo to Kandy. We went to the train station a bit early with our pre booked tickets that was delivered to the hotel from this company <https://visitsrilankatours.co.uk/> This train ride was in first class and had air conditioning and the journey took around 3.5 hrs. The schedule was exactly on time. Amazing and we said to each other: *How often does this happen nowadays in our home country Sweden?* Unfortunately many would agree with me – not so often.

In Kandy we had a 2 hour walk in the late afternoon after arriving to our hotel Mahaweli Reach. <https://www.mahaweli.com/>

We could see along our walk that many people were about to build new houses and renovation new homes for

themselves, right by the rice terraces.

Kandy is a lovely little place by a river and we had just a one night stop here to avoid travelling on the train for more than 6 hours. The final destination and goal for this train journey was in fact *Nuwara Eliya* and to see and live close to the tea plantations. Many friends told me that Ella is even more beautiful but that would have been another 2-3 hours on the road or tracks.

We felt that what we did was more than enough actually. I had found this great place called Luxe Wilderness <https://www.booking.com/hotel/lk/luxe-wilderness.en-gb.html> and we had 1/2 of the house to ourselves. This yellow, 1.5 year old house, sits on top of a hill overlooking the highest peak in Sri Lanka and it was a new experience. The manager greeted us when we arrived and showed us around the house, he was very helpful and service minded.

In the evening we had to go down to the village to a restaurant and the man suggested Grand Hotel, which was a good choice. Grand Hotel was Christmas decorated almost like in the Chevy Chase movie. There were lights and trees and Santas everywhere. It looked like most tourist groups stay here.

The only thing that was a bit negative (our own fault) about Nuwara Eliya was that we now faced 15 degrees inside and outside. To freeze outside is one thing (you can exercise and walk yourself warm at least) but to feel cold indoors is another thing. It was very cold and to come from Thailand from 30 to 15 degrees is a big sudden change in temperature. Bring warm clothes if you're going is our advice.







Following day we headed for a tour at Pedro's Tea factory [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g608524-d6599638-Reviews-Pedro Tea Factory-Nuwara Eliya Central Province.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g608524-d6599638-Reviews-Pedro_Tea_Factory-Nuwara_Eliya_Central_Province.html) and it was very interesting to learn how it all works of course with the tea industry in every step from picking the leaves to the different procedure in the factory and how they later sell to traders who then add the flavours significant for their individual brands.

I think all production is very interesting to learn about and to see in real life. You take so many things and products for granted when you see them on the shelf in the supermarket and don't really think so much about all that needs to happen before it ends up there. Every kid should experience more of this I believe. How it all works, how people struggle etc., before we all can go and just buy things and food in the store.

The journey back to Colombo we choose to do by a private hired car and it took about 6.5 hours. The first hour along the beautiful tea plantations is magnificent and just amazing. The roads are very good almost everywhere. Better than most in Thailand in fact. Whatever and whoever made them (in this case China) the people of Sri Lanka I think are grateful for.

The one thing that concerned me was – again – pollution. You are in the most beautiful of nature you can find in this part of the world and yet the air feels polluted. Diesel trucks and buses use cheap fuel, which give back smoke and exhaust and everywhere in the evenings or early mornings fires are to be seen. Individuals burn all household garbage and the air gets very polluted. It is really sad to see when infrastructure and community service not work properly in poorer countries.

The other thing that was annoying and in this part Thailand is way better. Everyone out on the roads is

constantly on the horn. The buses are the worst. Biggest vehicle wants to be ahead even if it is obvious traffic jam and not much to do about it more than to be patient; they still give you this very long and very loud, angry honking. *Leave the way, I have to pass you!* Like the buses were an ambulance or an emergency vehicle.

In some way and at the same time we started to laugh about this because it seemed so silly and meaningless. No one can really move much in traffic jam situations unless someone is dying and needs to pass. In Thailand you seldom hear this noise and in Sweden it is banned unless there is a real danger situation. We have other noise in Thailand that we feel annoying, e.g. motorbikes. Cars are usually quiet and drivers are patient and tolerant towards each other.

Silence and unspoiled nature is more and more luxury nowadays and when you find that peaceful feeling you just want to close your eyes and "be in the moment".

We will not forget Sri Lanka as one of many places on earth to be grateful for having experienced – if only for a week.

We finished this week just like we started with the last night at Galle Face Hotel. The nice man who drove us there 6 days earlier came on the spot to pick us up also. All worked very fine. Reliability, honesty and trustworthiness are a must in the tourist business and I can say that our experience here was 10/10 in feedback. Well done and good for you and the Sri Lanka people and for all of us visiting you.

May your country forever from now on live in peace and harmony!





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# I love Singapore

*by Rie Atagi*

**L**iving in Bangkok for over 20 years, I have been to Singapore more than ten times. But never on a sightseeing trip. I mean, I've never been there for the sake of taking a photo with Merlion. It was either a visa run or watching our kids' sports tournament, which happened to be in Singapore.

*Visiting Singapore was never the primary purpose for a trip, but being in Singapore was always a treat.*

For example, a visa trip. Popular destinations are Vientiane in Laos and Penang in Malaysia because of the cost. My husband usually suggested these destinations half-heartedly, knowing

my answer would be reluctant: But then, what do I do whilst waiting for the visa to be issued? How do I go around? Is it safe to walk around alone? I would go there if I have to, but I have to be mentally prepared. But going to Singapore eliminates this anxiety. I know there will be English signs everywhere and the people speak English or Singlish. The Thai Embassy is conveniently located at the middle of Orchard Road. I can easily spend a few hours in Takashimaya which is one block away (I am Japanese and Takashimaya is an old Japanese department store) and I feel very safe walking alone even at night. If I need to go for a visa run, Singapore is therefore my first preference.

Another reason I have visited Singapore several times is to watch my kids' sports tournaments. My children (and their father) love playing

sports and have joined various tournaments in the region over the last few years: Hanoi, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Seoul, Taipei and of course Singapore, which hosts the tournaments most frequently. My spoilt son once said "Singapore again. I wish I could go somewhere I haven't been."

These "sports-watching" trips usually follow a routine of shuttling between the airport, hotel and tournament venue. This schedule doesn't give us much opportunity to explore the city. The timetable depends on how the team progresses and we cannot plan ahead to do any sightseeing. Sometimes we get a half day off, but the tournament venue is not always conveniently located near a tourist spot and we often end up lounging at the hotel poolside. We eat out but not necessarily at a



must-go restaurant in the guidebook. We usually eat at a nearby restaurant which looks hygienic enough (once the whole team was food-poisoned!) simply for convenience. If you ask me “How was Manila?”, my memory is a blur. I remember the airport was very hot and crowded (I almost fainted), which is not a very comprehensive observation of the city. But I cannot share with you a colourful attractive travel guide when the city stands simply as a host of a tournament. So I don’t expect to enjoy the city much as a traveller whilst I am on a sports-watching trip.

But when the tournament is held in Singapore, I feel lucky and look forward to the trip in addition to

watching the games. It is not because I want to go to the Marina Bay Sands or Universal Studios. It is more because I feel very comfortable being in an organised functional system: Ease of travel, efficiency of services, and safety of the city. Singapore is one of a few developed countries in the region and there is “order” in every aspect of this country. I am almost certain “things work” as planned. This is a blessing after living in Thailand for a while. In Thailand, you only hope things work, and get impressed “if” they do. You never know until it happens. This uncertainty is more or less common in developing countries. Whether Hanoi, Manila or Jakarta, you always carry a

sense of apprehension while you are there: Once in Manila, the bus taking us to the airport stalled on the slope to the entrance. The driver tried to start the engine several times and every time the bus rolled backwards a bit. We had to get out and carry our luggage, heavy with bats, helmets and catchers’ gear, to the airport. But we felt fortunate and thankful it had happened when we were almost there. The probability of this kind of thing happens in Singapore is, I believe, close to zero.

I went to Singapore last week to watch our son’s basketball tournament. My husband thinks Singapore is “too clean”, hence boring. Yet when the air quality index was signalling red in

Bangkok, the smell of disinfectant at Changi Airport was welcoming. It was refreshing to see the blue sky and green trees in the city. I had not seen their original colours for some time. I think toddlers in Bangkok would paint the sky yellowish-grey these days.

When my husband tried to catch a ride by “Grab” at the airport, I had almost screamed “No!” because my memory of “Grab Thailand” flashed: waiting for a ride for more than half an hour while the App originally said 10 minutes, watching a car going further away on App’s map (God knows why), trying to explain where I am with my broken Thai and finally giving up. But then, I realised we were in Singapore, I could trust the system. Indeed, the car came swiftly and we were at a hotel on Orchard Road within 30 minutes. No problem.







reservation online, which was of course registered. (In Thailand, online reservations work sometimes, but not always.) The Chilli Crab, a signature Singaporean dish was heavenly, as delicious as Poo-Pat-Pong-Garee, Thai's crab curry, if not better. Eating crab is a lot of work: cracking the shell, poking and pulling tiny pieces of meat with sticky fingers coated with sweet chilli sauce didn't make it easy, but it was well

The next morning whilst eating breakfast at the hotel's cafeteria, I felt as if I was in Tokyo. The blue-glass building I was looking out of the window was very clean and shining in the morning sun. The view was nothing particularly unique to Singapore or Tokyo.

*But its modern-ness and cleanliness reflects two countries where "things work" as planned. I felt at home and it was very pleasant to start a day with an easy, calm feeling. As a matter of fact, things worked as planned, smoothly and efficiently, for the next three days of tournament.*

The internet was fast. The Grab taxi came within the App's estimated time, and we arrived at the venue in time. Traffic was nothing compared to the stand-still jams in Bangkok. The game started on time and finished as per schedule. Everything worked out as

expected, except our team lost the game.

Losing is always hard to take, especially when we have had a close game. Useless "we could have..." thoughts come and go, and we spend the pocket of time idly, trying to tame our thoughts. However, when it happens in Singapore, I have to admit, I get mixed feelings: Sad to lose, but happy to have spare time. Singapore is a small country with efficient systems. Given some unexpected free time, we can plan to do something special and it should work.

On the way back to the hotel, we were talking about eating "Chilli Crab" in the backseat of the Grab. The driver politely asked "Would you like to eat Chilli Crab? I recommend the Little Red House. It is very close to your hotel. We would not eat Chilli Crab anywhere else. I recommend making a reservation though." In normal circumstances, I listen to the words of people in the service industry with some caution. But this was Singapore and things were working well so I accepted his words obediently. As you expect, the restaurant was only a 7-minute ride from our hotel. The place was packed and we couldn't have been accommodated unless we had made a

worth the effort. We were disappointed in our team's loss (we were expecting to go to the championship game!) but the Chilli Crab made it up for us. This kind of last-minute-decision-works-out-well makes the trip delightful and I give a credit to Singapore's efficient system.

Don't get me wrong. I love Thailand. "Amazing Thailand" does not stop me being amazed even after twenty-plus-years of residency. I think you can call this full-of-surprises life "exciting" or at least "interesting" for better or worse. It may be boring, as my husband says, when things work as you have planned all the time. And probably that is the reason that I have never visited Singapore for the sake of visiting Singapore: You know you get what you expect. That is not exotic. However, being an expat in Thailand, you live with constant uncertainty. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's tiring. Singapore gives you a short break from the chaos.

Yes, I look forward to my next visa-trip or sports-watching trip to be in Singapore again.





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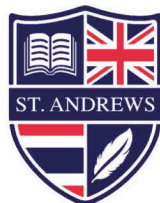
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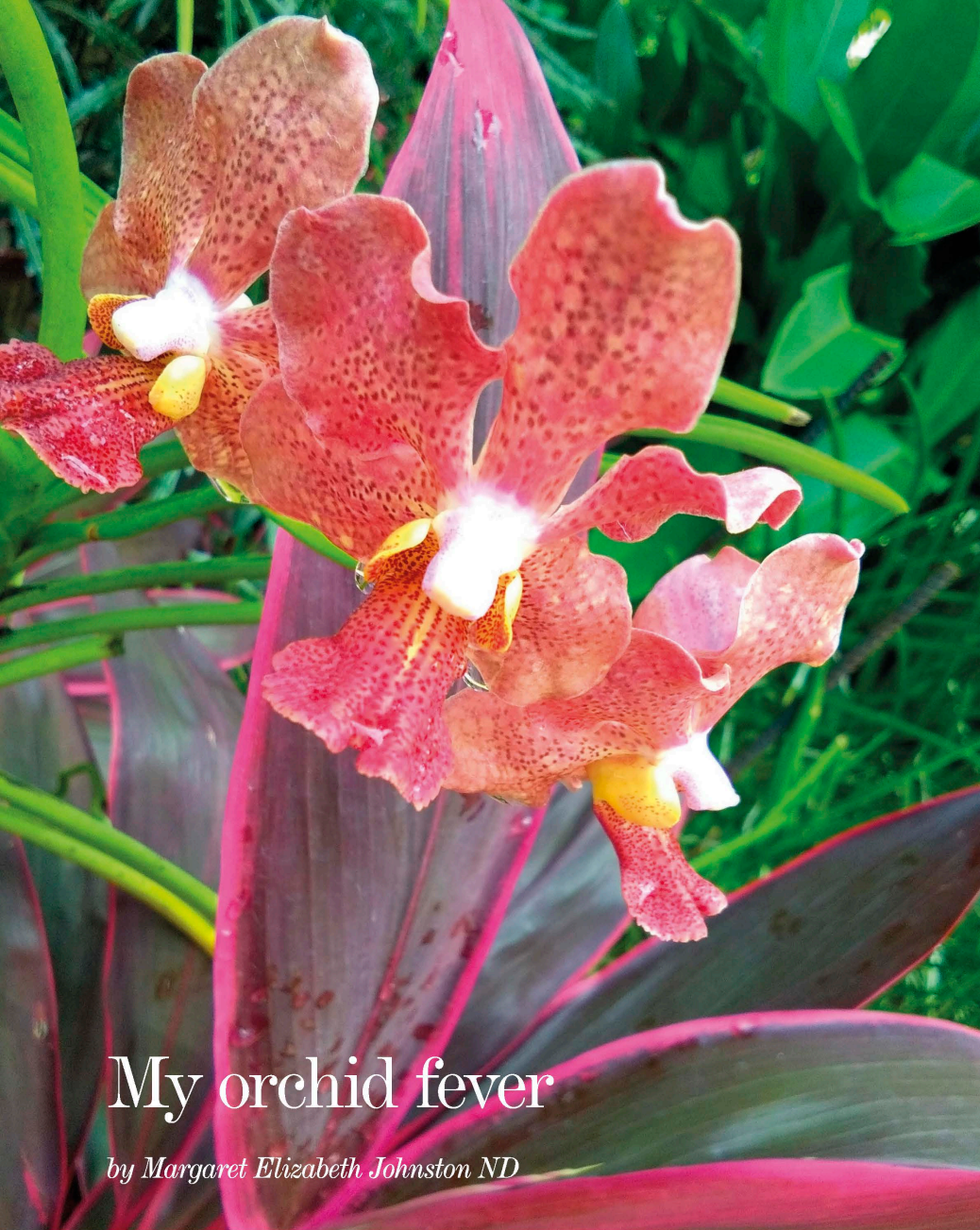
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# My orchid fever

by Margaret Elizabeth Johnston ND

an M at the end, not an N! But, that was back in 2009, like I said, I was not raised with orchids in my life but now that I live in Asia, a decade on, they are much more in my daily eyesight! What a faux pas for me after all that work! Hence, now I have some beautiful pictures to stimulate me again. Now for some enlightening orchid information!

One can find wild orchids in the jungles of Thailand still clinging to old growth in places like Khao Sok National Park, but the vast majority of orchids are to be found in flower markets and specialty farms in the countryside. Thailand is known as the “Land of the orchids” or, “Gluay Mhai”. There are over 25,000 species of orchid flowers known to exist thriving in a number of environments. Some grow underground, in the soil and on rocks but the majority grow on other plants and trees. Some orchids are parasitic obtaining food from fungi that lives inside its roots. Asia has the largest and widest variety of orchids in the world so has the greatest potential for creating modern hybrids.

I love orchids! I was never raised in the world of orchid appreciation, but over the years I have come to understand how amazing they are, the many varieties, colours and the push/pull of wild orchids vs the extreme hybrids. As this is an April/May edition of Expat Life in Thailand and as the theme of “culture” swarms us throughout many of the various festivals of spring on the way, I am sure there will be plenty of orchids decorating floats, cakes, parties and tables. The official botanical name of the National Flower of Thailand is the *Cassia fistula* and is known as Ratchaphruek, which means royal tree, a gorgeous array of bright yellow orchids hanging from the stem.

As I am still carousing Asia and in and out of Thailand, I had the pleasure of renewing my visa in Singapore, however after once you’ve exhausted the few tourist attractions like Gardens on the Bay and the Light and Sound Show in the same area, done your specialty shopping of items one might only be able to get in London or high priced cities like Singapore, then the Botanical Gardens is the place I usually end up. This time I took specific care to peruse the National Orchid Garden to get some great shots to share with you and to save for future painting possibilities. Since the time I painted the botanical painting in this article, the *Paphiopedilum*, I have learned how to spell it right, with





Some orchid flowers survive only a few hours while others can survive up to 6 months. The world's largest orchid is the *Grammatophyllum speciosum* and can grow to be 2.5m in length and weigh up to one ton. The world's smallest orchid is the *Platystele* genus and is just over 2 millimetres and was found hiding amongst the roots of another flower in Ecuador in 2009. More and more hybrids are being created all the time and sometimes up to 5 different parents are used to create a new designer orchid! It is an incredible process of hand pollination, and one to be admired with the consistency and dedication of orchid lovers (and botanical institution employees), however with this hybridisation, the insects that used to be needed for the wild orchids have less use with all the hand pollination occurring in which case, insect extinction can occur. Many insects and birds have evolved for specific pollination purposes, both the pollinator and the pollinated evolving together over time. This is why at the beginning of this article I mention my push/pull of admiration between both the wild and the hybrid orchid.



Orchids are known to represent friendship, elegance and nobility. The earliest documented time of orchid acknowledgment is traced back to the 28<sup>th</sup> century BC. The term, 'orchid' comes from a Greek word that means testicle, due to the way in which the roots can hang. Orchids come in all colours of the rainbow, mostly in whites, purples and hot pinks but yellows and creams, golds, maroons and even blues and greens can be found. There are also spotted and mixed coloured orchids and too huge an array of various shapes and sizes to even calculate. I saw all these colours at the National Orchid Garden in Singapore, the displays were out of this world, impressing my mind even as now, these

days, I am an avid orchid seeker. I've seen orchids in the UK, USA, Cape Town, Hawaii and all over Asia, but, as a restless tourist awaiting my visa, these colourful orchids at the gardens brightened my time! The Singapore Botanical Gardens are free and there is a SGD5 cover charge for the orchid area, it is well worth it!

Other than just suffusing our surroundings with gorgeous flowers and vibrancy, there are also a few traditional medicinal ways orchids have been used over the centuries throughout the world. Since the stems and bulbs are designed to keep the plant alive during dry season, this is the part of the plant rich in nutritive substances. Local indigenous and ethnic communities around the world have used these parts to speed recovery after an illness and immune system buildup, gastrointestinal issues, sexual improvement for men's stamina and recovery after sex. Aphrodisiacs and love potions have been created with the dried flowers although I don't know what kind of real research is done within this type of assumptions, but there are some orchids that produce a divine scent when fresh. There is a science in the fact that scent can stimulate memory, attraction and disgust!





In the past, eyesight and bowel issues were attended to with boiled and mashed roots as in a poultice.

Recent research is discovering ways to help a patient with cancer recovery after chemotherapy use the roots of an orchid as a medicinal tea. As a Thai tradition and custom, the locals dip the *Dendrobium* flowers in batter and deep fry them adding that to their delicious creations and in India, some orchids are added to curries. It does seem that indigenous knowledge keeps coming to the forefront even as we progress with science. This is perhaps once again, a reason to recognise the importance of not only appreciating the intense beauty and fabulous creations of hybrids, but to keep the wild orchids alive and safe also. Over collecting them out of the wild forests and deforestation in general, as we know, is something to be concerned about these days.

I was reminded of one of my favourite orchids while strolling through the gardens, vanilla! Many people don't know vanilla, *V. planifolia*, is an orchid. The Aztecs discovered the plant in Mexico in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and used the seed pods (vanilla beans) to aid digestion, counteract poisons and as an aromatic exotic flavouring. Of course we know they also used chocolate, *Theobroma cacao*, and mixing these two, vanilla and cacao, was believed to give power and strength. Both chocolate and vanilla is a large industry in consumerism (and yumminess!) yet the original indigenous ways of cacao and pure vanilla pod stems from a medicinal value. My next painting is of the Cacao plant and I am working on it in Bali, Indonesia, as I write this.

A few words about the orchid cultivation in Thailand, it is confined mostly to the central plain, mainly in Bangkok and the nearby provinces. There are 3 main farms scattered about including Bangkok, Samut Sakhon and Nakhon Pathom. In the north closer to Chaing Mai, I can recommend Sainamphung Orchid Farm. All orchid species are protected by CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, which requires certification of plants crossing international borders. If you would

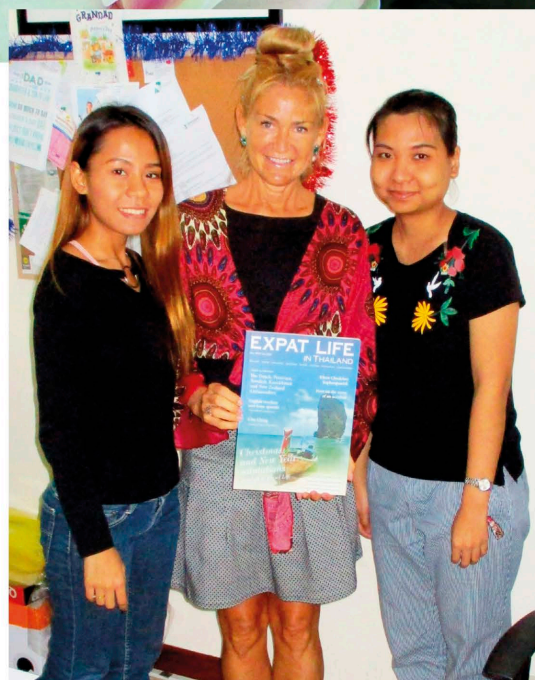


like a fun read about the hilarity of orchid growers around the world and their mindset, please find yourself a copy of *Orchid Fever* by Eric Hansen. I hope you enjoy the coming season in our SE Asian lifestyle and that Thailand brings you much colour, scent and variation as the beautiful orchids of our world do!

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**About the author:**

*Margaret has been travelling in and around the edges of Thailand since 2015. As a holistic health educator and botanical illustrator, she is finding plenty of activities to keep her busy. She recently called in to the Expat Life office on her*



*last Bangkok visit. One can admire her other paintings, read the educational health blog or follow her travels on her website at [www.mejcreations.com](http://www.mejcreations.com)*



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# Education matters

## The world is changing and education should too

by Dr Andrew Davies, Head of School, International School Bangkok (ISB)

Perhaps now more than ever more, our schools need to carefully consider how they can remain relevant to the rapidly changing needs of our society and our students. The world is changing at a faster pace than ever before, while the world of education with all of its traditions often remains inward looking and at times out of touch with societal and job market changes.

Educating for the unknown is now an imperative for schools. Many of us will not have predicted the impact of the smartphone, the disruption inherent in many traditional industries (think Uber, Airbnb, digital photography, etc), and the potentially addictive and self-esteem harming effects of social media. Many more of us will not be able to predict the exponential change that awaits and the inevitable mix of positive and negative impacts on our lives as AI and other technological developments occur.

In the world of work, Klaus Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum, makes the claim that we are on the brink of a “fourth industrial revolution.” The first industrial revolution involved water and steam to run production, the second utilised electricity for mass production, and the third resulted from electronics and information technology that provided greater automation. The fourth industrial revolution will see technological innovations such as virtual reality, augmented reality, the internet of things, automation, advanced robotics, and so on impacting our lives in exponential ways.

In the World Economic Forum’s, *5 things to know about the future of jobs* (Ratcheva & Leopold, September 2018) we are told that, “High-speed mobile internet, artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and cloud technology are set to spearhead companies’ adoption of new technologies between 2018 and 2022” and this will herald quite a shift in the world of work and the skills that schools, colleges and workplaces need to teach.

Within 4 years, “newly emerging occupations are set to grow from 16% to 27% of the employee base of large firms globally, while job roles currently affected by technological obsolescence are set to decrease from 31% to 21%. In purely quantitative terms, 75 million current job roles may be displaced by the shift in the division of labour between humans, machines and algorithms.”

Despite fears that automation will result in fewer jobs, fortunately the opposite is predicted to be true with 133 million new jobs expected to emerge in the technological fields of Data Analysts, Software and Applications Developers and E-commerce and Social Media Specialists. Jobs are also anticipated to grow in the more human oriented roles of customer service, sales and marketing, training, organisational development, and innovation specialists.

### The Jobs Landscape in 2022

(Source: Future of Jobs Report 2018 World Economic Forum)

#### Top 10 Emerging (133 million Jobs)

1. Data Analysts and Scientists
2. AI and Machine Learning Specialists
3. General and Operations Managers
4. Software and Applications Developers and Analysts
5. Sales and Marketing Professionals
6. Big Data Specialists
7. Digital Transformation Specialists
8. New Technology Specialists
9. Organisational Development Specialists
10. Information Technology Services

#### Top 10 Declining (75 million Jobs)

1. Data Entry Clerks
2. Accounting, Bookkeeping and Payroll Clerks
3. Administrative and Executive Secretaries
4. Assembly and Factory Workers
5. Client Information and Customer Service Workers
6. Business Services and Administration Managers
7. Accountants and Auditors
8. Material-Recording and Stock-Keeping Clerks
9. General and Operations Managers
10. Postal Service Clerks

So what will students of today need to learn to be prepared for what will be quite a significant shift in the short term? Students will, of course, need to be technologically literate and have the skills to compete in an increasingly technological marketplace. Yet, as you will see from the 2022 Skills Outlook table, the ability to think analytically is ranked first, while the very human skills of creativity, critical thinking, innovation, resilience and adaptability are also significant. Importantly, “Emotional intelligence, leadership and social influence as well as service orientation are also set to see particular increase in demand relative to their current prominence today.”



## 2022 Skills Outlook

(Source: Future of Jobs Report 2018 World Economic Forum)

### Growing

1. Analytical thinking and innovation
2. Active learning and learning strategies
3. Creativity, originality and initiative
4. Technology design and programming
5. Critical thinking and analysis
6. Complex problem-solving
7. Leadership and social influence
8. Emotional intelligence
9. Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation
10. Systems analysis and evaluation

### Declining

1. Manual dexterity, endurance and precision
2. Memory, verbal, auditory and spatial abilities
3. Management of financial, material resources
4. Technology installation and maintenance
5. Reading, writing, math and active listening
6. Management of personnel
7. Quality control and safety awareness
8. Coordination and time management
9. Visual, auditory and speech abilities
10. Technology use, monitoring and control

Schools such as the International School Bangkok (ISB) have taken significant steps to make education more relevant to students' needs of today. Education in technology is of course now more prominent, even among our younger students, but developing technological skills is nowhere near as challenging or as helpful as developing students that can think critically, be creative, innovate, adapt to changing circumstances, make ethical decisions, contribute to a global society, self manage, and reach a high level of social intelligence.

In his work, *Future Wise: Educating our Children for a Changing World*, Professor David Perkins (Harvard Graduate School of Education) argues that schools should focus more

on what he terms "life worthy learning" – learning that is relevant to students now and in the uncertain future that they face. The most important learning should be about equipping students with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they will need in all the important aspects of their lives. Once students graduate from school, they need to know how to live healthy lives, how to make the right ethical decisions, how to contribute to society, how to collaborate well with people from around the globe, how to self manage, and how to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

In part inspired by Perkin's work, ISB adopted a brand new Vision, a set of 6 Learner Attributes, and 8 Values that we wish to instil in our students. Our Vision compels us to "enrich communities", our Values help guide students to make ethical decisions throughout their lives, and our Learner Attributes enable students to become more Creative, Globally Minded, Adaptable, Value Driven, Socially Intelligent, and Self-Managing. These provide the framework for students to be fulfilled and successful at school, college, work and beyond. Importantly, the values and attributes are timeless and will stand students in good stead as society and work change.

ISB has always offered a very strong academic programme and our students are well prepared academically for college. Our students need more than this, however, and thanks to the dedication and inspiration of our research and development teams, ISB continuously develops and adapts to ensure we provide "life worthy learning" to our students.

In the words of Professor Perkins, "We teach a lot that isn't going to matter, in a significant way, in students' lives. There's also so much we aren't teaching that would be a better return on investment." We firmly believe that ISB is now investing its time and resources in the right ways to help our children be better prepared for the challenges and successes that await them and we believe this should be the practice of education institutions around the world.





# Meet the Principal Sarah Osborne-James Regents International School Pattaya

I grew up in Birmingham, England and was the first person in my family to go to university. My role model was my best friend's Dad, who believed in me and taught me that anything was possible and this is a philosophy I have carried with me throughout my life.

I was drawn to teaching as I found school a challenge. It was my teachers who shaped my future and I wanted to do the same. I was always fascinated as to why some people excelled at school and others didn't. I couldn't understand why children were given labels from an early age and I wanted to challenge these stereotypes.

I started on my leadership journey as a Head of Primary, progressed to Head of Middle School, Assistant Head of School and became a School Principal when I was 38. This is my third Headship, prior to Regents Pattaya I worked in another Nord Anglia School; Northbridge International School Cambodia as School Principal.

*My educational beliefs are centred on these four words: Empowerment. Passion. Integrity. Intelligence.*

*If you can't figure out your purpose, figure out your passion. For your passion will lead you directly to your purpose.*

I have always had an overwhelming desire to have a positive impact in the world and I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. A particular adult believed in me as a child and it



is because of him that I am the person I am today. He believed in me, encouraged me and gave me the strength to pursue my dreams. He never gave up on me. I feel the overwhelming need to be that person for both my students and my teachers. I strongly believe in empowerment and enjoy coaching people and helping people grow.

I am a naturally positive person and feel very lucky to have found my passion in life. It is my desire to guarantee a safe learning environment in which anyone and everyone can find his or her passion, flourish and fulfil his or her full potential. This desire is also translated to adults within the school learning community and the need to empower teachers to take calculated risks with cutting edge innovative teaching and learning methodologies. I believe it is my obligation to inspire teachers; make sure that teachers do not lose their passion and make sure that learning is fun and meaningful for both students and teachers.

Integrity is a non-negotiable for me; dispositions of honesty, truth and honour are fundamental and essential if we really want to see a change in the world. I believe that we all need to experience some kind of failure in order to experience success. Our world is very competitive, I believe students need to learn how to win and lose gracefully. Any failure in life has to be viewed as an opportunity for reflection and will lead to personal







top universities are looking for. It helps them to develop stronger interpersonal skills, broaden their experience, become critical thinkers and become far more aware of the world around them and the positive impact they can make. That means for university or job interviews in the future IBDP students have far more experiences that they can actively

determination and purpose. From an early age, I identified different kinds of intelligence and grew up in a culturally diverse city. Academic success at school was a challenge for me, I found school difficult. Looking back, I can see that my success was a result of failure, combined with continuous opportunities and feedback.

Students need to have interpersonal awareness, have empathy, commitment and self-esteem. I believe in providing opportunities for children, teachers and parents to facilitate aggression into assertiveness, demanding into ambitious, impulsive into persuasive and aim for my students to be good people, humble, balanced and stable. I know that emotional quotient (EQ) or emotional intelligence (EI) combined is the key to success.

For me the benefits of an international education are clear. Our students not only have a great academic education, they also develop the characteristics and attributes of emotional intelligence that will help them to be happy and successful in the future. They are given many opportunities to develop their leadership skills, often on a global scale since we are a Nord Anglia school. In our multi-cultural community, the old stereotypes are destroyed. Learning

new languages and discovering different cultures truly prepares our children for life in an ever changing and challenging world.

Regents is a truly international school with over 50 different nationalities in our community. We are based on the British Curriculum but this is modified to suit an international school. Our senior students (aged 16-18) study the prestigious International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. We have successfully delivered this for the past 16 years with our students attaining above the world average to give them access to leading universities around the world. What sets the DP apart from other qualifications is that it provides students with so many of the additional skills that the

demonstrate than their counterparts from other programmes.

We gain many strengths from being part of the NAE family of schools including the collaborations that we have established with The Juilliard School in New York for our Performing Arts curriculum and MIT for our STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and maths) programme.

The Performing Arts are creative keys that can unlock our students' imagination and significantly transform their education. They contribute to the development of the skills our students will need in the future both in terms of employment and their personal success and happiness.







Research clearly links the study of the Performing Arts to improvements in creativity and innovation, self-confidence and presentation skills, self-expression, empathy and compassion, cultural awareness and appreciation, physical and personal development and higher academic achievement. For these reasons Dance, Drama and Music are all included in our mainstream curriculum.

To succeed in the future our children must learn how to think, not what to think. Our collaboration with MIT is designed to prepare students for our rapidly evolving world, equipping them with the skills and techniques to thrive. Through hands-on, interdisciplinary learning of STEAM subjects, our students develop the transferable skills needed to invent the future they will ultimately inherit.

Regents is also a Round Square school and we are passionate about developing the Round Square IDEALS in our students. To be a Round Square school we must demonstrate how the six IDEALS (internationalism, democracy, environmental awareness, adventure, leadership and service to the community) are offered to our students

through different areas of educational practice. As the only Round Square and Nord Anglia School in the area, we are privileged to have an extensive outdoor education programme with both national and international expeditions for our children. We are extremely proud of the life changing opportunities these provide. They challenge our students to take learning outside of the classroom, open their eyes to world issues and give them the hands-on opportunities to make a difference and positive contribution to our world.

As a boarding and day school we have a caring and supportive community, away from the pollution of the big cities, with fantastic facilities, friends to be made and times to enjoy. The outstanding range of learning opportunities and new environments to discover in Thailand and in SE Asia make the boarding experience here so much richer and better value-for-money when compared with boarding schools in the UK, Western Europe or North America. Our boarders are encouraged to work hard and to play hard – whilst they will be encouraged towards independence they will also know that they have our staff's full support as they grow.

Boarding is available for students from Year 3 and the options are very flexible with occasional boarding, part-time boarding and full-time boarding. There is an extensive range of activities arranged for our boarders, at weekends and evenings, giving them the opportunity for new experiences and building life-long friendships. Academic support is also provided each day with supervised study sessions part of the daily routine, one of the biggest advantages of boarding for your child.







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A NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION SCHOOL



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beyond the ordinary

Established reputation for  
*academic  
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- ✓ **Your child** will have the best teachers who encourage them to be ambitious in their learning.
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*No limits*  
to what your child  
can achieve

Find out more – [www.regents-pattaya.co.th](http://www.regents-pattaya.co.th) / Follow us on

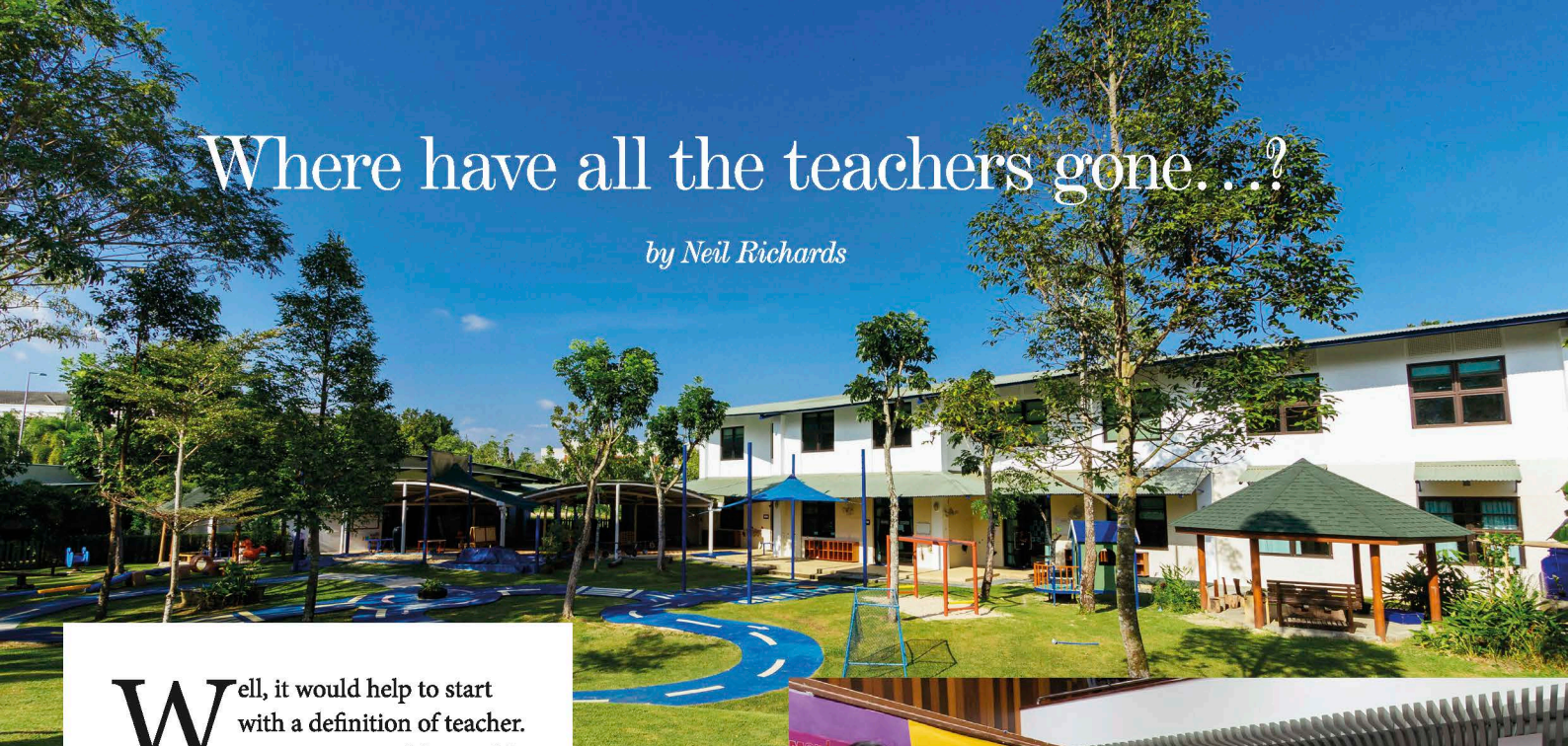


*Be Ambitious*



# Where have all the teachers gone...?

by Neil Richards



**W**ell, it would help to start with a definition of teacher. In some parts of the world, it is sufficient to have a degree, while in others an actual teacher's qualification earned through a specific education degree, diploma or post-graduate programme is necessary. This is an important consideration because the world may be fast running out of appropriately qualified international schoolteachers.

So why is there a problem? Well, let's do the mathematics: it is predicted that the total number of international schools is set to double over the next decade (80% of them in SE Asia).<sup>\*</sup> If this is a close estimate – and is averaged out – then *each year for the next ten years* the world of international education may require an additional 800 Headteachers, 4,000 senior administrators and 32,000 teachers. They will, of course, need to speak English, but do they really need to be qualified as teachers?

The answer, as ever, lies with the consumer, but it is becoming increasingly important that parents are able to base decisions about their children's education upon honest information from schools.

## Rising costs...

International schools will be competing over a seemingly ever-shrinking pool of qualified teachers and will have to offer better and better packages to attract and keep them. These rising costs, or a major portion of them, will be

passed on to the consumer – the parents. Since staff costs in an international school typically range from between 60 and 75% of total expenditure, it is all but impossible to absorb rising staff costs by making cuts in other parts of a school's annual budget.

If basic economic principles of supply and demand are applied to the current situation, the cost of education will rise steadily – if not dramatically.

Despite the fact that some international schools are finding it increasingly difficult to attract a full quota of qualified teachers to run their programmes, international schools are still proliferating like there is no tomorrow. Unless there is a corresponding increase in the number of qualified teachers willing to join the overseas market, it will certainly all end in tears. We may have reached the tipping point.

## Endangered species?

But perhaps there is light at the end of the tunnel – perhaps teachers *will* leave their national systems to work overseas, making up for the shortfall.



Indeed, to an extent this has already happened – Sir Michael Wilshaw (the former Chief Inspector of Schools and head of OFSTED, UK) complained in 2015 that more teachers were leaving the UK national system to work overseas than were being qualified in that year (ironically, perhaps, and despite his former protestations, Sir Michael is now an advisor for the GEMS group, a major player in international education). But to make matters worse, all the indications are that far fewer young people view teaching as a worthwhile profession, with serious stress and depression being acknowledged as a major problem for serving teachers in UK schools – not a healthy advertisement for a vocation. The situation may be different in other parts of





the English-speaking world, but this does not alter the fact that no national system sets out to train teachers to serve overseas.

So, perhaps international schools will be able to squeeze by for a year or two, but the relentless need for additional teachers and the application of simple laws of supply and demand will eventually push the cost of an international school education ever higher (without solving the inherent problem). This is the potential reality of the next decade.

### Where do all the good teachers go?

The staffing scenario will also require a much more nuanced approach to quality assessment of our international schools. I smile every time I see the claim by a school that its teachers are highly selected and amongst the best in the world. The reality is that each school appoints the best teachers possible, but this depends upon each teacher's consideration of such things as the contractual package being offered, the local environment of the school, the school's perceived status in terms of career development, and the state of the recruitment market. The pool of teachers is the same for all international schools wherever they are in the world. All schools fight over the best, and obviously cannot win every time (although those able to offer high salaries may do well most often).

*The quality of a school rests upon a foundation of strong positive relationships, and this can best be developed in a stable environment. Education is not just about passing an examination it is about nurturing human beings and preparing them for a life worth living. Relationships that are built over years are essential for this to be most effective.*

### So what should parents look for?

Above all, stability – the stability of the administration and the staff as a whole will speak volumes about a school. There are generally good reasons why a school has to recruit an excessive number of teachers each year. Annual staff turnover is an important statistic, rarely made available to parents.

Schools should be retaining the service of good teachers for as long as possible. Certainly some teachers like to experience life in a broad variety of different countries and different schools, but settled school communities are advantageous for many reasons.

Schools should aim for a stable core of *experienced* teachers (and not just administrators), to ensure that young teachers as well as the students are able to

learn from their peers and grow as professionals.

It should go without saying that all teachers should be fully qualified to teach the age group and subjects for which they have been hired. This does not always happen, often for the best of reasons, but the general situation is likely to get much worse in the years ahead.

Business interests are now driving the development of international education, but the construction of magnificent palaces of education – as indeed many of them now are – should not detract from the central premise that it is good, stable teacher relationships that will matter most for the positive development of the children in our care.

Unlike bricks, mortar and investment opportunities the supply of teachers is not unlimited.

*(For the record: the average 'full-time staff' turnover at BISP for the past three years has been less than 12%; the current average length of BISP service is 7.16 years, and the average years of experience of the teaching staff is 17.05. All 120 teachers are fully qualified.)*

*\*ISC Research*







# Teaching in Thailand

by Jocelyn Pollak

*Tropical vibes, wild nature, fantastic shopping, incredible food and fun-loving people are some of the things you can expect to discover in amazing Thailand.*

With over 35 million tourists visiting (up from just 10 million 15 years ago), English is becoming more and more important for this SE Asian Kingdom. The Land of Smiles is one of the most popular and attractive places in the world to teach English for many reasons.

I am veteran English teacher (7 years in Thailand) and have also worked closely with the Thai Ministry of Education and NGOs to train and place foreign teachers in schools all over the country. I own a TEFL (Teach English as a Foreign Language) certification company – TEFLPros – and partner with schools around the world to put our course grads into great jobs.

This article will give you a few tips, requirements and cautions if you're thinking about teaching English in Thailand.

## Why teach in Thailand?

People come to teach in Thailand for so many reasons, it's hard to name just a few. One of the most common reasons English teachers cite is the quality of life. While salaries are typically lower than those in Japan or Korea, the cost of living is very affordable, reducing some of the daily stresses of life. The work life balance is typically very reasonable also. Thai students know how to work hard and play hard which makes teaching a fun activity, assuming you are properly prepared.

With some of the most breathtaking places in the world

all within a three-hour plane ride, it's a great place to be if you want to do some travelling. SE Asia has a well-travelled tourist path and it's generally pretty safe for men and women alike if you follow normal common-sense travel tips. Hotels and hostels are easy to book and with close to half a million expats living in the Kingdom, finding a travel buddy or someone to give you advice isn't difficult.

Thailand has traditionally been a country that is open to foreigners and considering tourism is such a major part of their economy, foreigners are welcomed. Thai people are kind, fun and will always help you if you're in a bind. The culture is so rich and there's a lot to learn. Plus, Thai people, whilst perhaps a little shy at first, are happy to have you around.

## Who can teach in Thailand?

We always advise to go the legal route when it comes to visas and work permits. While you may know someone who doesn't fit these requirements and somehow is still working in Thailand, it's likely under a very specific circumstance or more likely, illegally. To teach English in Thailand, a Bachelor's degree from an accredited university and a clean background check is required. While many schools prefer native English speakers, it's not a visa requirement like it is in China, Korea and Japan. TEFL is not required legally, but any school worth working at will require one. Make sure you have original copies of your TEFL and your university diploma, you'll need them for your visa.

## What's the hiring process like?

This is very circumstantial but there's a typical process that probably 70%+ of English teachers go through to "get legal". Most schools want to see you before they formally hire you. With so many people floating around in Thailand, there are a lot of unqualified "teachers" here so schools are a bit





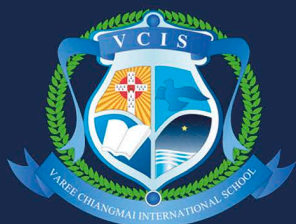
typically to Laos (there are hundreds of people who do this every day so there are a lot of companies who coordinate the whole thing for you). While in the other country, you will take all of your documents to the consulate, apply for the visa and return to Thailand the next day with your new stamp. That is for a 3 month single entry visa.

After that, you can go to the immigration office in Thailand and

skeptical to hire someone off the internet. People usually come in on a 30 or 60 day tourist visa; most passports get 30 days on arrival. You can apply for a 60 day tourist visa at the Thai consulate in your home country or at a Thai consulate in another country if you'd like to take your time.

After getting hired, your school will prepare the proper documents for you to get your Non B visa; this is the work visa. You will then have to leave the country on a visa run,

extend your 3 month visa to a year. Contingent on having your work visa sorted out, your school will give you all the proper paperwork for your work permit. Some schools pay for all of this, many do not. It comes to be a couple of hundred dollars, plus the cost of your trip out of the country to get your visa.



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You should never accept a position teaching on a tourist visa unless you want to risk fines, deportation and blacklisting. If you are a trailing spouse or retired and on a non-O visa, you cannot work, which means no teaching unless you change your visa.

### What should I be concerned about?

First and foremost, teaching English is a job, a very real job. You will not be just playing with kids and taking cute selfies while spending your days lounging on the beach. There are a handful of “jobs” like that, but the majority are teaching all day in a government school. You’re not going to be sitting on a beach, riding an elephant to work and partying all night long. While you can definitely experience all of these things, the rudest awakening for a lot of teachers is that you are expected to look and act like a professional when you are at your job; this isn’t just a big vacation. Kids will cry and be disengaged, parents will hound you and your boss may ask you to work extra hours.

But, most teachers who come prepared will tell you that it’s all worth it.

Second, homesickness is a very real thing, especially if you’re in a rural area. Thai people will do their best to make you feel welcome and at home, but nothing can stop your craving for real pizza or a special holiday with family. Read about homesickness before you go so that you can at least mentally prepare. Along the same lines, culture shock is tough for a lot of people. After the honeymoon phase wears off and you realise you live in Thailand now, you may struggle to connect. Make yourself aware of the phases you will go through before you depart.

Last, don’t be surprised when no-one speaks English. Thailand is consistently ranked at the bottom of SE Asia and the world in their

English abilities. While this does make for a very “cultural” experience, it can cause a lot of frustration for a new teacher trying to get by. Thai people are the first to admit that they are afraid to speak English (which ties back to a deeply rooted cultural fear of losing face) but if you need something, they will try their best to help you by running to get a friend, pointing and gesturing until the problem is solved. You may also want to try to pick up some common Thai words before you leave. The language barrier can be frustrating but most teachers will tell you that with a little effort, they can get problems sorted out.

If the Land of Smiles is calling you, answer! It’s a fantastic place to teach English. Join TEFLPros 120 hour course and upon graduation, we can connect you with jobs all over the country (assuming you meet the visa requirements) and get you in to a Thai classroom ASAP!

Feel free to contact us at [contact@teflpros.com](mailto:contact@teflpros.com) and we can answer any questions you may have.





# The Good Place

"The Good Place." A TV programme with a simple premise. Do something good in your life and you will earn points. Do something bad and points will be subtracted. The total number of points that you have accumulated by the time you die will determine whether you make it into "The Good Place" or "The Bad Place."

Not so simple it turns out. In series three when it is revealed that absolutely no one makes it to "The Good Place" we find out that a lot of what we do actually has a negative effect on our community. From buying our groceries (plastic bags); going on holiday (increasing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and possibly funding corrupt governments); posting a comment on social media (damage someone's reputation) to accepting a job (possibly sanctioning unequal pay for men and women).

That is why at St. Stephen's International School we help students understand the consequences of their actions and make social responsibility as much a part of our DNA as academic rigour. In fact, in a recent accreditation visit from The Education Development Trust and British Schools Overseas, our commitment to social responsibility alongside our sense of community and superb pastoral care was praised as "Outstanding".

Why outstanding? Because we teach all of our students to understand the needs of our local and global community, to do something to make that community a better place, to understand complex moral issues, and learn to consider the perspectives of others.

Our youngest students, ages 2–5, are introduced to the idea of charity work through a love of animals. Last term they set up an animal rescue centre for a week and hosted a "Tape the teacher to a wall" event to raise money for animal welfare. Much fun was had by those doing the taping; I am not quite sure how much fun those being taped to the wall actually had. But, all in a good cause!

In the Primary and Secondary Schools, we introduce business and leadership skills to design, make and sell products to raise the money we donate. Our students are also learning to make a difference through communication. They are raising awareness of a number of issues from the effects of single-use plastic to the problems surrounding the use of antibiotics.

St. Stephen's students show compassion towards others, they demonstrate tolerance of diversity and they speak articulately and eloquently about subjects that really matter. These traits are a clear indication that our students will be a successful and compassionate generation of future leaders who will influence the world in a positive way.







## 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.

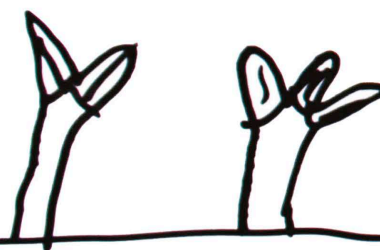
In the daily life of elc schools, we can perceive a pronounced increase in children's creativity, the quality of their research, and their ability to access information. This facilitates the development of complex digital projects and products of knowledge, which are elaborated between children and between 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**  
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391-5901, 712-5338

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**THE PURPLE ELEPHANT @39**  
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Bangkok 10110  
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662-4571, 662-4572

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Tel: (662) 116-2394, 116-2395

**THE PURPLE ELEPHANT @49**  
#99 Soi 49/13 Sukhumvit Road  
Bangkok 10110  
Tel: (662) 392-3190, 392-3191







# Inspiring child led change

by Ewen McLeish

**B**angkok's international schools, grassroots sustainability groups and green businesses unite to inspire child led change.

Term started with a special event for children at Bangkok's international schools when 120, 7 to 11 year olds attended the city's first 'EcoBEASTs Community Action Day.' This educational event put children and teachers in touch with social enterprises, ethical businesses and NGOs. The aim was to learn about and inspire actions on the environmental and sustainability problems we face today.

The beast in EcoBEASTs stands for Bangkok Education for Action on Sustainability Team, a passionate group of teachers hoping to create links between international schools and Thailand's wider environmental

community. The accompanying website will allow schools and local organisations to connect and work together on sustainability.

Spearheading the 'EcoBEASTs' are Helen Mullan and Katy Waring, primary school teachers at St Andrews International School (Sukhumvit 71 campus) and Shrewsbury City School respectively. The online element has been developed by Glyn Hupalo from Amnuay Silpa School. 'We believe that

trying to bring about change. By developing awareness of both problems and solutions we hope to spark discussion at home. Our students have the support and contacts to drive forward positive change,' explained Waring.

'Educators must address sustainability as it's now a significant part of the culture our students are growing up in, and children are increasingly interested in it,' enthused

Paul Schofield, headteacher of St Andrews International School on Sukhumvit 71, which hosted the event. 'If schools don't get this right, where will we be in 15 or 20 years' time?' he asked.

## Getting it right

One approach is to put young people themselves in charge, and student led NGO 'Grin Green International' is

an example of this. 'Students are responsible for all the work in our organisation and all achievements are credited to them,' explained 18 year old director Donggeon Yun. The group focuses on single use plastic.

'We are promoting cultural change in Thailand. We believe that in order to ban single use plastics we must change the mindset of the people, and we do this through events and campaigns,' added Thiti Usanakul, 17, a keynote speaker at the event, who will take over as director when Yun graduates.



educating the children of today will help solve the problems of tomorrow,' said Mullan, 'and hope to highlight honestly what's happening to our planet and introduce children to those trying to tackle these problems.'

## Teachers to act

'The natural world is in crisis and we've got growing inequalities. But there's a huge grassroots movement





# Student Centered Approach Toward Environmental Issues

Paul Usanakul (Paul)



the fact that his students can confidently conduct a press interview unsupported by him as an example: 'I feel they should be gaining experience of the real world and aim to instil a professional mindset. Acting on single-use plastic is a way to do this.'

**Just 11 years old**

But it's not just the older students at work here: 11 year old Lilly Smittipatana, also a keynote speaker, has been campaigning against single-use plastic since she was eight after being shocked by a visit to a litter strewn Thai beach. Smittipatana met with many retail business leaders and explained her concerns about plastic bags. As a result, she won agreement from a whole host of them to go 'plastic bag free' on certain days of the month. She is now supported by a band of equally concerned school friends.

## Plastic bag monster:

In 2018, Grin Green International created their own plastic bag monster. 'It's a full suit made of 700 plastic bags, equivalent to the number of plastic bags a Bangkokian uses in three months. Along with signs, posters and a petition to present to government, we toured around Bangkok for 13 hours,' recounted Yun. 'The resulting video had 29,000 views over social networks in a single day.'



Geoff Baker, social studies teacher and founder of 'Grin Green International' wore the costume originally: 'as teachers we should set an example, I wanted to show the students not to be afraid of doing something embarrassing, and they have worn it themselves at all events since,' the teacher said.

Baker sees the educational aspect of 'Grin Green International' as running deeper than environmentalism, citing

## Hands-on learning

A key part of the community day was giving youngsters the chance to take part in workshops provided by 15 environmental organisations, covering areas such as air pollution, wildlife and soil conservation, and making soap from recycled cooking oil.

One example, 'Precious Plastic Bangkok,' showcased a fully functioning plastic recycling machine.

'We are a community-based plastic recycling solution. Our machines, designed in the Netherlands, are simple to construct, so any community can build them and tackle the plastic pollution that's

affecting them,' explained Dominic Chakrabongse who ran the workshop. The children saw the machine shred, melt and eventually turn a pile of plastic bottle caps into a brand-new bowl.

'I want to inspire children to see plastic in a different light.'



It can be collected and turned into something useful – depending on the mould used. I hope to see our machine in school design and technology workshops, allowing students to use their imaginations to create their own moulds,' Chakrabongse said. The youngsters suggested making toy turtles and whales to illustrate the problem of plastics in our oceans.







shopping bags. Their company, called 'Eco-struction,' would 'build stuff out of what other people think is waste. We will use donated clothes to create eco-bags,' the girls said.

'We will sell them and use the money to buy a 'Precious Plastic' machine to make bowls out of bottle caps. We can sell these too' they went on. 'The eco-bags will also help reduce the use of plastic bags at the same time,' Mneme added.

The girls' scheme shows a clear understanding of what the day was about. It is now the work of the teachers and adults in their lives to guide them towards making their ambitious plans a reality. Ultimately, creating real change makers for the future.

### Connecting with business

Socially conscious businesses also ran workshops. Luke James runs a company called 'Bambew,' which manufactures bamboo straws creating employment in an economically disadvantaged rural part of Vietnam. The straws are then exported around the world.

James' workshop focused on the length of time single-use plastic products will remain on our earth, and tips for how to curb personal use of plastic. Each child received their own, specially branded EcoBEASTs bamboo straw.

gardeners with school fees and medical bills,' he added.

### Plans for the future

After the workshops the pupils were asked to write action plans to take back to their schools. The room buzzed with ideas. St Andrews' pupils Mneme, Shana, Sophie and Rio were inspired by a workshop about turning old clothes into



### Parental support

Interested parents also attended: Yuka Hart, mother of two daughters aged 7 and 11 was enthusiastic about the importance of the event: 'many children around the world already know the world is suffering. We shouldn't ignore their small voices. They should learn and take actions for their own future,' she said.

'Parents are hugely interested in this area. It was parents who first pushed us to implement a school wide recycling system at St. Andrews,' recalled headteacher Schofield, 'we're putting the money raised from selling the materials collected aside to create a fund to support our maids and







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# What you should know about Thai medical tourism

by Maria Satana Reyes



Today, Thailand is one of the most popular medical tourism destinations in the world. With over 2.4 million foreign patients visiting the Kingdom for medical reasons annually, Thailand is not merely a regional medical tourism leader, but a world leader as well.

**A**nd it's not without good reason. In fact, there are several reasons that make Thailand a medical tourism hotspot, any of which would be more than enough for most people. But taken together, it's clear why the SE Asian nation is a veritable juggernaut in the industry.

Here are just a few things you should know about Thai medical tourism.

## **1. It has an extremely well-developed and advanced medical infrastructure**

While there are blind spots in Thailand's healthcare system, especially in terms of public health services and providing basic care to citizens, it's a completely different story as far as the private sector is concerned. The Thai private medical sector certainly ranks among the most advanced in the world, and is certainly the best in the region, barring perhaps Singapore in some areas.

Notable are Bumrungrad, Sukumvit and BDMS which includes the Bangkok Hospitals Group and Phyathai Hospitals, which are

internationally renowned and certainly compare with the best hospitals in the US and the UK, as far as facilities and expertise are concerned. Several other private hospitals and specialised medical centres also operate throughout the country providing all kinds of best-in-class medical care for everything from open heart surgery to advanced dental care.

## **2. International accreditation**

Many private hospitals in Thailand, including the ones previously mentioned, are ISO and JCI-accredited, which means patients can expect a certain level of care comparable to similar accredited facilities in the western world. This not only includes hospitals but convalescent homes and similar facilities as well.

## **3. Top-notch 'regular' tourism destinations**

Many international patients opt to go to Thailand for medical care because the country also offers some of

the most interesting tourist spots in the world. It has some of the world's top beaches, incredible street food, a thriving international bohemian community, tropical jungles, and of course, ancient archaeological sites and elephants.

Not only does Thailand have those attractions, but there are also well-developed facilities and services to allow tourists and even recovering patients to access them. This feature alone makes Thailand one of the top spots for tourists who need all sorts of medical procedures. Why stay at a hospital or convalescent home when you can dig your toes into a white sand beach?





#### 4. A wide range of expertly-delivered medical treatments

We all know that Thailand is a world leader when it comes to cosmetic and sex-reassignment surgery, so there's not much need to elaborate on that. However,

it's incredibly unfair to characterise Thailand's medical tourism industry solely by those procedures.

Thailand is also a world leader in cardiology, reproductive medicine, orthodontics, and orthopaedics, attracting millions the world over for procedures related to those fields. Some treatments that are not typically available in the US or Europe, such as some types of stem cell and fertility treatments, are also readily available in Thailand.

The doctors and other medical experts that perform these procedures are also typically incredibly experienced, as many of them are used to seeing a large number of patients and thus many are able to work faster and at the same level or better than their western counterparts. Many of these doctors are trained at top medical schools in the US and Europe, with most regularly attending

international conventions to keep up-to-date on the latest techniques and technologies.

#### 5. Lower treatment costs

This is really the biggest reason many foreigners from North America and Europe go to Thailand for different medical procedures. Some procedures, such as orthodontic surgery, may cost as little as a tenth of what it might in the US or Europe, and even at the most expensive hospitals for the most expensive procedures, you can expect to only pay a third or half at the most, as is the case with some cardiology cases.

Given that not everyone's insurance covers certain types of procedures, the cost savings of having something done in Thailand makes it attractive for certain procedures. For many patients, getting a procedure done in Thailand is the only option they have. Thankfully, Thai doctors are generally at par with their western colleagues in terms of expertise.

Regardless of the availability of low cost of treatment or your reasons for travelling to Thailand, its best to invest in international insurance from one of the many international healthcare providers available. This will give you protection from any unforeseen events that may happen during your stay, as your expenses can quickly go out of control should something out of the ordinary happen.







# Bangkok air: How pollution affects our health and what to do about it

by *Tina Haskins Chadha*

Expat. Wife. Mother. Writer. Yoga enthusiast. Clean air awareness advocate and NGO co-founder. The last one I never could have predicted when I took a hiatus from my career in branding and corporate communications to focus on my young family and our move from New York City to New Delhi and then years later on to Bangkok.

Air pollution only consciously entered my life a decade ago. When one lives in a place where the air is clean, or appears to be so, air pollution doesn't cross the mind. It was 2009, the year we moved to India that I first took notice and gave consideration to the air we breathe. I soon learned a new language, the acronyms and lingo of air pollution. PM 2.5 and nanoparticles. AQI, VOC's, NOx and ozone. True HEPA versus HEPA Type. Prior to that I thought of air pollution only perhaps when stuck in traffic behind a truck expelling dark exhaust. Soon clean air, or the lack of, began to consume my thoughts year-round. The sky was often a murky haze. Clouds never appeared distinct or sharply formed. The media buzzed about the colloquially-dubbed "winter fog" as if the smog didn't exist at all. But the facts seemed indisputable. The air we were breathing somehow tasted metallic on the tongue, caused cancelled flights and delayed trains and left city residents with endless weeks of dull headaches and eyes so irritated it was impossible to wear a single contact lens.

Eventually, every member of our family of five had persistent, season-arching coughs. Then it was shortness of breath and finally the inhaler for our eldest. Some days the problem was very apparent, the pollution causing poor visibility that made road signs a hazy mirage. Other times, it was invisible,

the air seemed ok, crisper, yet local air quality monitors revealed unhealthy numbers far above international guidelines. The government launched a series of half-hearted attempts to reduce the problem. Odd-even license plate driving initiatives for a few days at a time. Street cleaning programmes. Schools created air pollution protocols around student outdoor activity. Pollution masks should be worn if children want outdoor recess time when the air quality index (AQI) hit certain numbers. No wait! AQI numbers suddenly spiked exceeding those thresholds, schools would declare - no outdoor time at all! Dinner party talk no longer buzzed about local gossip and cultural events, but what to do - stay inside all weekend? Leave town every holiday for clean air breaks? Football games, on or off? Air pollution masks, home filters and car air filters became such coveted, must have items they were perpetually sold out. It was worrying and exhausting.

When we had the opportunity to relocate to Bangkok by 2016, we were thrilled. After years of a dance that toggled between denial, awareness and advocacy, plus makeshift coping measures, we relocated from arguably the world's worst ranked city for air pollution to another Asian mega-city. Of course, Bangkok's air, along with much of Thailand, is far from ideal, especially during the months

of December to February when meteorological conditions curtail the dispersion of air pollutants. A Lancet report found that people in 90% of the world's cities breathe polluted air that is toxic to their cardiovascular and respiratory health. In 2016, seven million people died from diseases caused by air pollution - 600,000 of them were children. Seven million people: That's three times the number of people who die each year from AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined.

Bangkok, and Thailand in general, fall above World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended levels for exposure to particulate matter (PM) air pollution deemed safe. PM refers to tiny solid and liquid particles - 1/300<sup>th</sup> the size of a human hair. They come from many sources vehicular exhaust, industrial, biomass burning and others. The smaller they are, the more dangerous to human health. These invisible pollution particles don't just settle to the ground, they can travel hundreds of miles from pollution sources first. They enter our respiratory system and have long and short-term health impact affecting the body in nearly every area. Bangkok's air exceeds the "safe" levels set by the WHO, and sadly we are not alone as we see high levels of air pollution in nearly every corner of the globe. Yet, the burden of air pollution is not shared equally by everyone around the world. Developing



and industrialising Asian countries are impacted the most by particulate pollution. The Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) produced by the Energy Policy Institute by the University of Chicago converts air pollution concentrations into their impact on life expectancy. AQLI notes that 347 million people in Asia would live 5-7 years longer on average if WHO air pollution guidelines on particulate matter (PM 2.5) were met. Michael Greenstone of the University of Chicago states, "Particulate air pollution shortens lives globally, even more than cigarettes. There is no greater risk to human health."

A recent air pollution forum hosted by the esteemed International School of Bangkok featured an expert speaker who stated, "This year air pollution is not worse, it's better than last year." Ordinary residents of Bangkok might disagree. It feels worse. It looks worse. For the first time in known history, the government shuttered more than 400 schools for several days across greater Bangkok in late January. Airplanes were sent into the sky to make artificial rain, streets were cleaned around construction sites, citizens were encouraged to spray water guns on city streets to in an attempt to bring particulate matter to the ground. No matter that spraying water has little to no effect, as the tiny pollution particles won't adhere to the quickly evaporating water droplets.

Even gorgeous Chiang Mai's reputation suffered recently as the northern province was featured on the global "worst air" list in mid-February. It was ranked as having the third most polluted air in the world after Delhi and

Lahore when PM 2.5 spiked over 100 microns per cubic metre.

### So, what is going on with Bangkok's air?

The cooler months from December to late February aggravate the situation. Cooler temperatures and changing meteorological conditions "trap" air pollution preventing easier dispersal. But what is causing the unhealthy air conditions? Particulate matter, specifically PM 2.5, in Bangkok come from a few sources. The two largest contributors: Emissions and the open burning of biomass. According figures provided by Dr Supat Wangwongwatana of Thammasat

of PM 2.5 in Bangkok at an 29%. Air pollution from open biomass burning comes from the burning of solid waste and agricultural activities, such as crop burning (rice, sugar cane, maize), and forest fires.

### Why it matters – the impact on our health

Clean air is essential for our health and longevity. PM 2.5 puts our entire bodies at risk of major health issues. When these tiny particles are inhaled through the nose or mouth they enter the respiratory system and bloodstream. The smaller the particle, the farther into the body they penetrate. Given PM 2.5 particles are only a tiny fraction

of the width of a human hair, they are invisible to the eye and capable of being small enough to pass through the hairs of the nose. The adverse effects of air pollution can be seen quickly or over many years from extended exposure: shortness of breath, asthma, throat irritation, pneumonia, stroke, heart disease, lung disease, cancer and more. Studies even link air



University vehicle emissions account for an estimated 36% of PM 2.5. With more than 10 million registered vehicles on the 1,600kms of Bangkok roads – and over 37 million vehicles across the country – fuel matters. **Currently, vehicles in Thailand use Euro IV fuel, rather than the far less polluting Euro VI which debuted in Europe in 2014.** This in conjunction with the lack of diesel particulate filters in the most exhaust pipes, along with regular city traffic congestion, and ever more cars on the road year of year, create a troubling situation. Biomass burning is attributed as the other major generator

pollutions impact on cognitive function, brain development, and the list goes on. According to Unicef, early exposure to toxic air has lifelong consequences. Children are especially vulnerable given small body size and their developing lungs and brains. Children breathe more air per kilo of bodyweight, that means more harmful particles wreaking havoc. The Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) translates long-term exposure to particulate pollution into life expectancy and finds that sustained exposure to just an additional 10 micrograms per cubic metre of PM 2.5 reduces life expectancy by 0.98 years.



## What can you do on a day-to-day basis to lessen exposure?

Can we even protect our family's health from the most ubiquitous of elements – air? It is possible to take several measures to reduce exposure, especially on the bad air days. First recognising the problem is a major positive step. This enables us to look at the options, at ways to mitigate the damage unhealthy air can have on our family. A combination of lifestyle changes and protective intervention measures can make a big difference.

### 1. Monitor and be aware!

Check air quality apps to see current pollution levels via sites like AirVisual on a daily basis. Many Bangkok schools also have recently installed their own air quality monitor systems with data available online. Be aware, however, most of these type of monitors – low cost monitors that use light-scattering technology to estimate PM 2.5 numbers – can best be thought of as “detectors” of air pollution. Readings may not be 100% accurate especially when machines are not maintained and calibrated correctly, but they still give a range of data on pollution hot spots or “peaks” in unhealthy air.

### 2. Reduce exposure on “bad” air days and at peak times.

For example, rush hour rides in tuk tuks and long walks along Sukhumvit are best avoided, if possible, during days of high pollution. Curb side pollution, thanks to close proximity to vehicular emissions, can be 2-3 times higher than current readings from city monitors. Rethink routines for outside time and sports to avoid direct exposure to air pollution during “peak” hours. And avoid outdoor aerobic activity during rush hours.

### 3. Talk to your child's school.

The parents of many Bangkok city schools have voiced alarm about air pollution, petitioned for air monitoring systems on campus and asked about what can be done to improve

conditions. Parents can ask their schools to monitor air quality both inside the classroom and the outside facilities. They can encourage coaches to adjust outdoor sports and activity timing to help limit exposure during peak unhealthy air times. This may mean reduced aerobic activities during early morning and evening times, especially during the winter months. Ask schools to work on creating “idle-free zones” on the streets outside the school gates to reduce “pollution hot spots” in the places where the children walk and wait on a daily basis.

### 4. Make your home a “clean air” sanctuary.

Indoor air can be as unhealthy as outdoor air. Exterior air pollution combined with indoor pollution sources from furniture varnish, paint, carpets, home printers and more can result in shockingly poor indoor air quality. To improve conditions, evaluate doors and windows to reduce drafts and leakage. Consider investing in air filtration machines for the home. Be sure to invest in only those that have True HEPA filters as only they can remove PM 2.5 particles from the air. These units can be costly, so start with the bedrooms. By using a high quality air filtration system in the bedroom, you can ensure 8-10 hours of sleeping time with cleaner air. There are a range of brands on the market and even DIY methods using HEPA filters and a common household fan.

### 5. Consider an anti-pollution mask, with caution.

To mask or not to mask? Filtering the air you breathe would seem to decrease exposure, yet a mask must fit properly to be effective at all. Masks need to be NIOSH approved, as in 3M masks, and worn correctly. The fit must be snug, no gaps. Any gaps would negate the

positive benefit and protection from the mask by allowing pollution particles back in. Masks for children are really not ideal or recommended, since they do not fit well.

Air pollution is bad for the environment, bad for our health and a drain on economic development. I wonder when we will take more substantive measures to tackle the problem. Let's change that. If not for our own health, for the children.

*Tina Haskins Chadha – Clean air advocate and co-founder of Care for Air ([www.careforair.org](http://www.careforair.org)), an independent awareness and advocacy organisation based in India. Tina originally hails from New York City where she lived and worked before moving to SE Asia. She spent 15 years as a communication and brand strategist for some of the world's most respected consumer brands. In 2009, she began expat life, first in New Delhi, India, by 2016 in Bangkok. She has felt the impact of air pollution within her own family and was struck by the lack of awareness and constructive data available to the general public. She believes the air we breathe is the ultimate democratiser and that clean air must be accessible to all. Through her work with Care for Air, an independent, not for profit awareness and advocacy organisation, the power of many came together to make a difference in growing community awareness and engagement on this critical issue.*





# British Columbia International School Bangkok



**H**ave you ever wanted your child to attend an affordable international school in Bangkok but thought their English skills were not good enough? Perhaps you thought they really needed a programme just for them but did not know how to access this.

In September 2019, British Columbia International School Bangkok is excited to announce that they will introduce their new Transition Programme to raise students' English language skills while preparing them to enter our Canadian programme.

Students will be admitted to BCISB at their own grade level with their peers and attend most subjects in the Canadian programme. English and Social Studies will be replaced with small, intensive English support classes.

As the programme continues, there will be ongoing assessment, up to and until the student is ready to join the Canadian programme.

**We asked Ryan Silverthorne, Principal of BCISB, how this would wonderful innovation will work at BCISB. Who is this programme open to?**

BCISB's Transition Programme is open to all Middle School aged students who want to attend an international school, but are not currently at the required level of English proficiency.

**What are the benefits of this programme for Thai students from other schools? How is it different?**

This programme is incredibly beneficial for Thai students who have primarily learned in a non-English environment.

While many English programmes in Thai schools

provide good instruction, we often find that the absence of a fully immersive English environment can produce gaps in English comprehension and expression. This makes entrance into an international setting a difficult transition.

At BCISB we understand the importance of placing students in the best possible position for success. The Transition Programme provides this as students are able to learn side by side with other international BCISB students, while taking integrated language classes designed to raise their comprehension and writing skills and using content and vocabulary that ties into the other subjects.

In short, the Transition Programme provides an opportunity for students to enter into an environment designed with the sole purpose of preparing them for success in our international graduation programme. This, in turn, gives them the opportunity to attend university anywhere in the world.

## Who is running the programme?

The individualised Middle School programme was developed and is run by a native English speaking Australian teacher (and previous Head of School in schools across Australia) with over 30 years' experience.

Ian has worked throughout the 2018-2019 academic year, alongside Middle School teachers, crafting the Transition Programme for the 2019-2020 academic year.

## Is there an extra cost for the programme?

There is no extra cost for the Transition Programme. Accepted students will pay the same fees as other BCISB international students.

## If I am interested in this programme, what do I do?

Please contact our Admissions Officer, Ms Fern via email: [admissions@bcisb.ac.th](mailto:admissions@bcisb.ac.th)

Ms Fern will book a time that you may visit the school, talk to our staff and book an admissions test for your child.



# Yoga – an ancient remedy and protection from inhaling polluted air

by Sanjiv Chaturvedi

Every human society nowadays, be it rural or urban, industrial or technologically developed, is affected by polluted air (through dust, fumes and chemicals). Worldwide we experience an increase of polluted air in the last decade which leads to severe respiratory ailments like:

- **Asthma**, a chronic disease with recurrent attacks of breathlessness and wheeze.
- **COPD = Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease**, (better known as Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema) makes it hard to breathe and usually accompanied by a long-term cough with mucus.
- **Pulmonary Hypertension**, a condition in which there is high blood pressure in the lung arteries. The lung arteries become narrow and there is less room for the blood and energy to flow.
- **Allergic Rhinitis** or hay fever happens with breathing in something to which you are allergic. The inside of your nose becomes inflamed and swollen.
- **Sinusitis**, an inflammation of the sinuses. Sinuses are small, air-filled cavities behind the cheekbones and

forehead. When sinuses become blocked, they get inflamed and make breathing difficult.

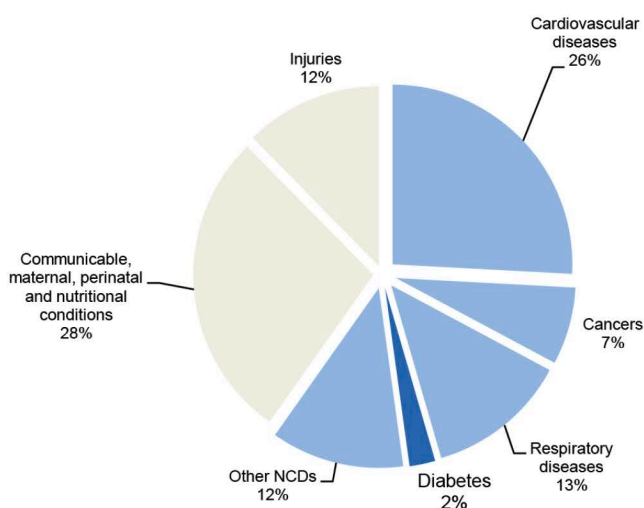
- **Obstructive Sleep Apnea Syndrome** marked by frequent pauses in breathing during sleep usually accompanied by loud snoring. These pauses are dangerous as they may cut off the oxygen supply to your body for seconds.

Millions of people suffer every day from chronic respiratory diseases. According to the latest WHO Global Asthma Report (2018), currently 339 million people have asthma, 251 million people have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), while millions have allergic rhinitis and other chronic respiratory diseases. Thailand, India and worldwide, respiratory diseases are the 3<sup>rd</sup> biggest cause of premature death.

Anything that causes a lack of oxygen in the respiratory system has adversely effects and in the worst case leads to premature death. That shows how important it is to breathe correctly and to keep our respiratory system healthy, clean and remove pollutants from it.

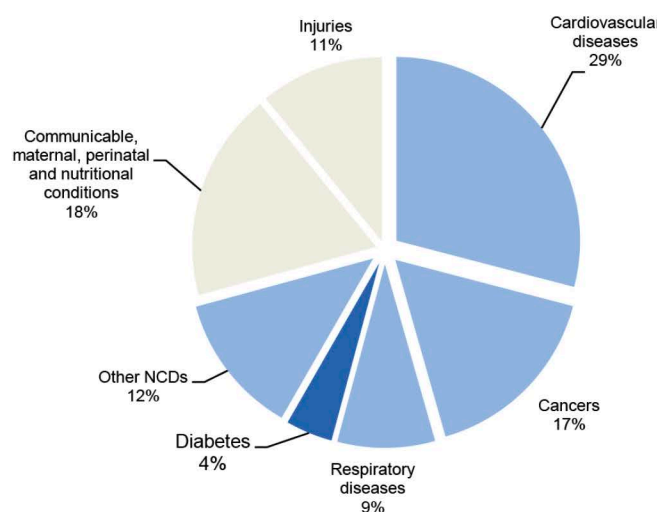
## India

Proportional mortality (% of total deaths, all ages)



## Thailand

Proportional mortality (% of total deaths, all ages)





### Symptoms of pollution in the respiratory system are...

- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Asthma and breathing problems
- Cough and congestion
- Sinuses

But how can we as individuals protect us from respiratory ailments due to polluted air? We cannot stay the whole time indoors. We still have to go out and inhale air.

Practices which do not raise the respiratory rate and yet help to increase oxygen levels in the blood, remove toxins (carbon dioxide) from the lungs, provide relaxation techniques to control our mind and emotions and allow to breathe easier, are necessary. Yoga is a group of physical, mental, and spiritual practices and disciplines which originated in ancient India and is the only system eminently meeting all these requirements.

Yoga provides us with good health, wellbeing and a strong immunity against pollution. Regular yoga practitioners, especially the ones who do daily pranayama (breathing practices) are comparably more protected from respiratory diseases and will maintain their healthy respiratory system than people who do not at all,

or do less yoga and pranayama. The majority of the yoga practitioners still believe and practice yoga mainly as a physical exercise. Of course, there are asanas (yoga postures) which move the spine in all directions, expanding the lungs, giving them space to breathe, stretching and strengthen the muscles around your upper body. All these asanas are great and will help to support your respiratory system and enhance airflow. Through sweating, some toxins come out as well but not all. The best way to remove toxins from your body and the respiratory system is through pranayama.

### How does pranayama work?

Pranayama is an amazing technique to purify your respiratory system. When you learn to breathe correctly, you get a rich supply of oxygen to your body and at the same time you clean your lungs from the pollutants in the air and make the cells healthy again. When we exercise and inhale polluted air, we cannot remove all pollutants in our lungs through normal (subconscious) breathing. Pranayama, (conscious) breathing is the most powerful, natural and effective method to throw out inner pollutants from our respiratory system and decrease the toxin deposits in our body.

Generally, people breathe out 30-50 breath per minute or even more. But those who practice yoga and in particular pranayama can reduce their breathing speed 6-7 breath per minute, or even less. Due to more pollutants in the air, breathing becomes more difficult, thus faster and shallow. Toxins stay in the lungs and the volume of toxin deposits in the body raises up. When you decrease your carbon dioxide level in your body, through effective breathing, your breathing can become slow and naturally, you feel calm, quiet and peaceful.

### Four yoga practices helpful to keep your respiratory system healthy

Practice *Kapalabhati* (forceful exhalation breath) a breathing technique that cleanses and detoxifies your lungs and forehead (sinuses). To make it more effective, use the abdominal muscles. With inhalation the belly goes out, with exhalation the belly goes in. Practice by sitting upright, inhale normally and exhale forcefully. Inhalation and exhalation are one breath. Beginners can do one by one breathing with slow speed; regular practitioners can do it with medium speed. Morning time is always the best for Kapalabhati. This practice has instant benefits.

Recommended amount: 50-100 breaths in one round, do 3-5 rounds. If you spend a lot of time outdoors, you can do 10-20 breaths every hour.

