

EXPAT LIFE

August/September 2020

IN THAILAND

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**The Canadian,
Swiss and
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Ambassadors
interviewed**

**Back to School
Dr. Teerakiat
Jareonsettasin
– his thoughts on
COVID-19**

**Catamaran
sailing on the
Andaman Sea

China: every
mile a memory**

**Bhutan: Tranquility
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*Pu Chi Fa:
Golden sunrise in
a sea of mist*

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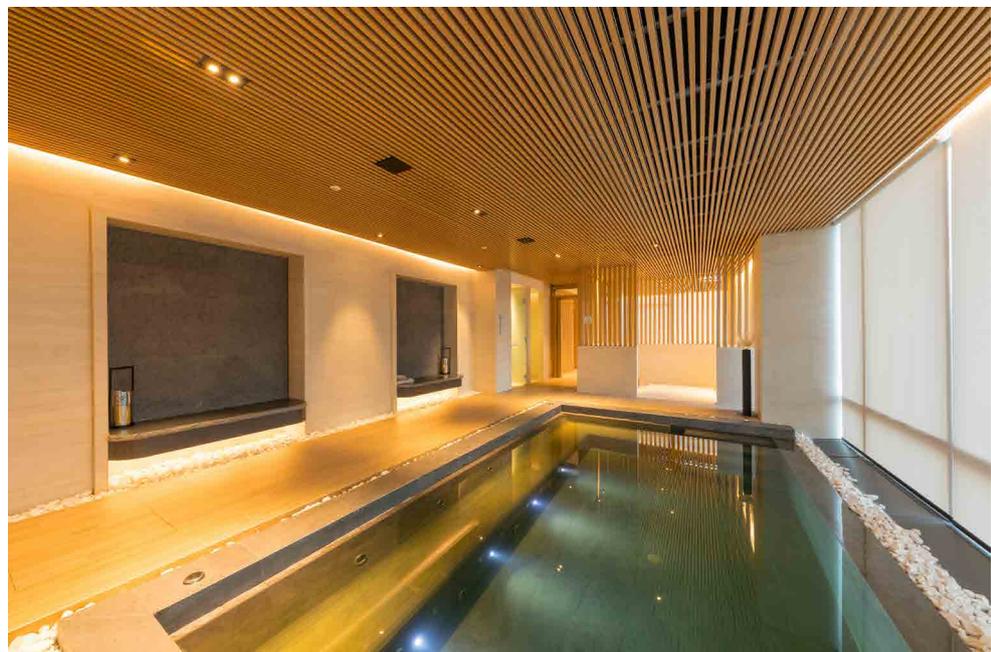
The Bangkok Thonglor

THE LIMITLESS RESIDENCE OF INFINITE VALUE

Located in Bangkok's internationally acclaimed high end neighbourhood of Thonglor, one of the fastest growing areas in Bangkok for several years. This area is recognised as the most sought after neighbourhood for luxury residential condominiums.

It is respected as the only district that manifests itself as the pinnacle of the best living area in the region, where a surge of locals and expats are taking advantage of its high quality lifestyle of the finest cuisine and leisure.

Through the advantage of this precious location comes The Bangkok Thonglor, the 31 storied high-end luxury residence by Land and Houses is the union between the best location and lifestyle solution. The location of 350m walking distance from the vibrant BTS Thonglor BTS Station sets The Bangkok Thonglor as the most convenient estate to Bangkok's best shopping and entertainment district. The complex itself is an architectural masterpiece that expresses in a clear language of a sparkling crystallised jewel that crowns on this gem of a property. The timeless language



of the exterior is only matched by the sovereign lifestyle it offers through the facilities, from the grand facilities at the top of the crown with the unobstructed Sky 360° swimming pool, the Sky Onsen with separate facilities for both ladies and gentlemen, the Sky reading lounge and the fitness facilities and personal retreats with panoramic views, to the reconnection with nature as an oasis of private garden and multiple sky terraces in the midst of the Bangkok's metropolitan jungle. The Bangkok Thonglor is also offering more green space than any other residential neighbourhood in the Thonglor area, with over 800sqm across the three lush gardens.

The original concept of "Best in Life" is reflected in every aspect of the exclusively limited 148 spacious units of the 1 and 2 bedroom types that crafted in details to the highest standard of the specification. The impressive interior shows a clever usage of space from the featured 'double-skin' balcony design approach that harmonises the balance between the indoor and outdoor space. The often over sighted issue of interior air quality in the vertical living community has been resolved with the eminence of the new innovative 'Monsoon' system that ensures the constant distribution of air ventilation and daylight to the corridor space.

The exceptional attention to the ease of living is reflected through the home automation system that empowered by wireless control for a smart living lifestyle. The Air Post system that conveniently delivers mail and parcels directly



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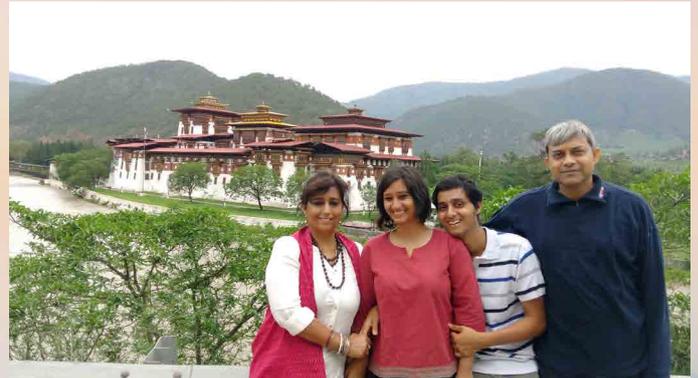
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TAVI:

A Minimally Invasive Solution for Aortic Valvular Stenosis

Life expectancy is increasing worldwide due to factors such as improved hygiene and advanced medical care. Nevertheless, age related health concerns are increasing alongside the growing population of elderly citizens, with cardiovascular diseases playing a major part.

Valvular stenosis is a heart condition in which a heart's valve becomes narrower than normal. The most common heart valve disease is aortic valvular stenosis, which causes symptoms that include fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath, chest pain, and syncope (fainting). Aortic valvular stenosis is a dangerous condition that can increase the risk of heart failure and sudden death.

Aging is a common cause for aortic valvular stenosis; other contributing factors include high cholesterol, obesity, inactivity, smoking, and diabetes. Developing healthy lifestyle habits as early as possible may help towards preventing the condition.

TAVI May Be the Answer

Traditional aortic valve replacement involves removing the narrowed aortic valve and replacing it with a prosthetic one through open heart surgery. TAVI, short for Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation, is a modern, effective procedure, with fewer potential risks, used to correct a dysfunctional aortic valve without the need for its removal through open heart surgery.

The TAVI Procedure

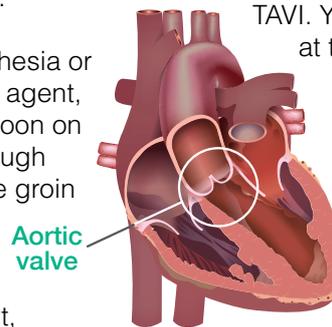
At Bumrungrad International Hospital, the TAVI procedure is performed by a highly skilled heart specialist, with support from a team of specialized nurses, cardiothoracic technologists, and anesthesiologist.

Under general anesthesia or intravenous sedative agent, a catheter with a balloon on its tip is inserted through a small incision in the groin area into an artery. The catheter is guided through the artery to the heart, positioning itself at the opening of the aortic valve. The balloon is then inflated allowing for the new TAVI valve to be set in place. The valve is balloon-expanded or self-expanded inside of the damaged valve leaving it wrapped around the TAVI valve without requiring its removal. The balloon and catheter are then removed leaving only a small scar.

Being a minimally-invasive procedure, recovery time is shorter than for open heart surgery, and reduces the risk of infection and other complications.

Consult a Doctor

People deemed high risk for traditional aortic valve replacement surgery can look to TAVI as an alternative option; however, not everyone is eligible for TAVI. You can consult a cardiologist at the Bumrungrad International Heart Center for more information on TAVI and aortic valve disease. Physicians and nurses at the Heart Center are able to help anyone worried about their heart health and concerned family members may also consult a doctor on their behalf.



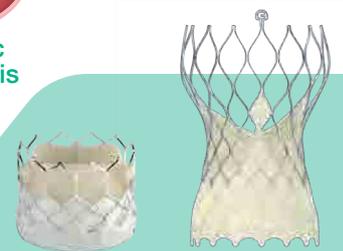
Aortic valve



Normal heart valve



Aortic stenosis



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H.E. Dr. Sarah Taylor, Canadian Ambassador to Thailand

by *Kathleen Pokrud President of the
Hong Kong Women's Group*

Expat Life in Thailand was grateful for the opportunity to connect with Dr. Sarah Taylor, Ambassador to Thailand, to ask her about her posting to Thailand in what has to be one of the most difficult periods in recent years – the COVID-19 virus.

How long have you been the Ambassador to Thailand?

I was named as Ambassador-designate to Thailand, Laos and Cambodia in November 2019, and arrived in Thailand with my husband and son on 9 January 2020.

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

We came from Ottawa, Canada's capital, where we had been for four years; before that, we were posted in Beijing from 2011-2015. I have also previously been posted in Beijing on one other occasion, as well as in Hong Kong and in Jakarta.



Dr. Sarah Taylor, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Canada to the Kingdom of Thailand, Kingdom of Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic

May we ask where are you born and brought up?

I was born in Ottawa and spent about half my childhood there. My father was also a diplomat, so we travelled abroad a lot when I was young. As a child, I lived with my parents in Paris twice and in Moscow.

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

Despite my family background, I didn't initially want to become a diplomat. I studied archaeology at university, and was also quite involved in university politics. It was only as I was completing my graduate studies that I started to think about going in a different direction. So I decided to take a chance and sit the Canadian foreign service exam. It was open to university graduates in all fields, and luckily for me, I passed it.

Do you have more diplomats in your family?

Both my father and my mother were diplomats, my father in the Canadian foreign service and my mother in the British Commonwealth office. They met when they were posted to India,



Ambassador and family at the Official Residence.



Speech at CanCham's Women in Leadership Forum 26 February 2020.

and were married in New Delhi. One of my sisters is also a diplomat at our foreign ministry, Global Affairs Canada, specialising in the Middle East. So you could say that we are a real diplomatic family.

How do you look at Thailand today? Have you had many obstacles in your way since you arrived?

Actually, I have found my arrival here easy. Everyone has been kind and helpful, and we have settled in well. It did take a bit of adapting going from January in Ottawa, with temperatures of -10 to -20 degrees, to +30-degree weather in Bangkok. I am also a little frustrated in my efforts to learn Thai. It's a tough language, and so many people in Bangkok speak excellent English.

But of course the biggest obstacle is one we all face together, that of grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the most important tasks for a diplomat newly arrived at post is to meet people and build networks – something that has become much more difficult in this time of social distancing. It has also meant that I have to connect with many of my staff virtually, and to delay our travel plans.

I have learned how much can be done reasonably well at a distance and I am really proud of the Embassy staff for the way they have risen to the challenge. But, like many others, I do miss the human contact, and appreciate well that some of the most valuable parts of diplomacy aren't meant

to be done from a desktop. When meeting with Thai officials, sitting face-to-face with Canadian companies, visiting community projects supported by Canada – the understanding, appreciation, and the impact that comes with direct human contact cannot be reproduced virtually. So I am looking forward to a time when I can do all of those things.

With the current COVID-19 pandemic, how has Canada been affected?

Because of our open borders and extensive links with Asia and Europe, Canada began to record COVID-19 infections relatively early. Like Thailand, we had experience and systems that were strengthened through dealing with the 2002 SARS outbreak, but I think we were all taken aback by the severity and speed of this new virus.

In some ways, our experience has been similar to that of Thailand. Our less populated, less connected provinces were able to limit infections relatively quickly. Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver – our biggest cities with the most international connections – have been hardest hit, just like Bangkok and Phuket. Many Canadians are suffering economically.

Our response is also similar to that of Thailand. Our provincial governments have a lot of space to determine how best to respond to local outbreaks, with our federal government helping to frame national objectives and coordinate efforts. I am happy to say that, for the most part, this has been successful, with different parts of the country responding to their local conditions, and with a sense of unity across the country in facing the crisis together.



Meeting with the President of the Thai Canadian Alumni Association at the Embassy of Canada, 1 June 2020.



Magna facility visit in Rayong, 18 January 2020.

Outbreaks in elder care facilities have been a particularly devastating challenge – one area where Canada and many other countries need to do much better.

We have started to turn the corner in Canada, but we still have a long way to go. Our economy was hit hard. Much as in Thailand, the sheer amount of fiscal stimulus has been unprecedented. We also need to remain vigilant to avoid – or at least minimise – a second wave. That’s a challenge for Canada, for Thailand and for all countries, that we will have to face together, on a global scale.

As both Canada and Thailand gradually reopen the economies, how will this affect the relations between the two countries?

Canada and Thailand have close and good bilateral relations – the pandemic did not change that. As we reopen on both sides, I am hoping that it will present further opportunities to bring our people and countries closer together.

Canada and Thailand have both temporarily halted the arrival of foreigners unless they fall within clearly defined categories. This has disrupted the plans of many people from both our countries – for example, Thai students who were eager to start their studies in Canada. The progressive reopening means that many people will be able to continue with previous plans – with adaptations, of course – including business travel and reunions with loved ones.

Besides people-to-people ties, our countries are strong trading partners. In ASEAN, Thailand is Canada’s second largest trading partner and has been for quite some time. Before the pandemic, 2020 was shaping up to be a great year

for Canada-Thailand trade. For 2019, two-way trade between Canada and Thailand increased to \$4.6 billion, up 7% from 2018. 2020 will be a difficult year for global trade, but I am determined not only to get bilateral trade back on track but to see it grow even more.

Despite the pandemic, Canadian companies based in Thailand have told me and my trade team that they are maintaining operations at close to normal levels. This is positive, and means that fewer workers are losing jobs. I see the post-pandemic

recovery phase bringing new opportunities to enhance our relations. For instance, we are both agricultural producers for specific commodities; exports could help to strengthen food security amidst disrupted supply chains. Canada has many advanced e-learning institutions. As the world shifts to allow for remote work and learning, this is another area that holds great potential.

Do you see any similarities between your country and Thailand?

At first glance, I think it’s easy to overlook the similarities between our countries, but Thais and Canadians actually have a lot in common. Canada and Thailand are both multi-ethnic, pluralist countries and constitutional monarchies. We are both proud of our high-quality universal health care systems and our tradition of harbouring refugees fleeing conflict. Both are leaders in recognising LGBTIQI rights. While our climates are very different, Canada and Thailand are both blessed with great bio-diversity, but are also both quite vulnerable to climate change.



Ambassador’s visit to Lertlah School 3 February 2020.



Inauguration of the new office of the Federation of Thai Industries 27 January 2020.

As a diplomat I am particularly struck by our similarities as middle powers committed to multilateralism. Our countries have similar orientations internationally on a range of global issues, whether it be advancing free trade, combatting climate change, or promoting gender equality. We are important stakeholders in the multilateral system and in the institutions that underpin it, including the United Nations, ASEAN, the WTO, and international financial institutions. We are also each geographically located near one of the world's two big powers, the United States for Canada and China for Thailand. We both appreciate the need for balance and the importance of supporting multilateral approaches that ensure that our voices and interests are considered.

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

I have a daughter, who is 18 and just finishing her last year of high school in Ottawa. As she only had one semester of school left to complete, she stayed behind in Canada when we came to Thailand – but we hope she will be able to join us here once international travel becomes possible again. My son is 16, and just completed Grade 10 at ISB. He only had a short time on campus before shifting over to distance learning due to the pandemic, so we very much hope he will be able to get to know the campus, teachers and students better in the coming school year.

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

It's hard to say what my "average" day is, especially with the impact of the pandemic. Following the announcement of the state of emergency, I have been working from home much more than usual, and of course I haven't been able to travel outside Bangkok. The pandemic also saw a pause

in diplomatic social events, including evening dinners and receptions. Despite that, my days are long, starting early to avoid traffic en route to the office, and often ending with evening phone calls to my headquarters in Ottawa. It has been a nice change to have more quiet evenings to spend at home with my family.

Even if I cannot speak of an average day, there are a few core elements to most days: working with my staff to making sure the Embassy is running smoothly and is serving Canadians; making and meeting outside contacts in many sectors; learning about and understanding Thailand; and advancing Canada-Thai relations, including through media, social media and public events.

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

I have some specific goals, such as successfully celebrating the 60th anniversary of Thai-Canada relations next year, increasing bilateral trade and investment, and enhancing cooperation with Thailand on global challenges like sustainable development, climate change, gender equality and regional security in the post-pandemic world. Ultimately, though, for me the biggest success will be if I have managed to make Thais more aware of Canada during my time here. Canada is not that well-known in Thailand, and I would like to change that.

Have you travelled to Thailand in the past?

I had visited Thailand several times before this posting, as a student and as a tourist. Since I arrived as Ambassador, I managed two short trips before the pandemic lockdown. One was to Chiang Mai, where Canada has an Honorary Consul. The other was to Sa Kaeo province, near the border with Cambodia, to watch an exercise to safely clear landmines.



CanCham's Great Canadian Barbeque at the Official Residence 29 February 2020.

Do you have a favourite destination in Thailand?

It's too hard to choose! I love Chiang Mai, and have happy memories as a student of visiting Koh Phang Nan and also the Erawan Falls before many tourists went there – we had the falls to ourselves the whole time.

I also enjoy exploring parts of Bangkok that have preserved some old buildings and neighbourhoods, like Chinatown. I am sure I will have many new favourites as I travel around the country more.

When you have a day off, what do you prefer to do?

Do you have any special hobby?

Reading and swimming are my favourite forms of relaxation, along with Thai massage of course. My husband and son are more homebodies than I am. During the lockdown we spent a lot of time at home, but now I am itching to get out and see museums and interesting neighbourhoods in Bangkok.

How many of your countryfolk are living in Thailand?

When and why did Thailand become a desirable destination for your people?

There were about 14,000 Canadians living or working in Thailand in 2019. According to the Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports, there were over 274,000 visits by Canadians to Thailand in 2019 – quite a lot when you consider that Canada's population is 37 million.

Given its welcoming culture, historical and culinary richness, its geographic diversity and temperate climate, and its location in a dynamic region in the world, Thailand has understandably been a popular destination for Canadians for many years. Perhaps the main limitation is its distance from

Canada – it takes several flights and a long time to get here! My sense is that the diversity of Canadians in Thailand has increased over time, with globalisation and wider awareness of all that Thailand has to offer.

Certainly, an important part of the credit for attracting Canadians to Thailand goes to the Tourism Authority of Thailand, which opened an office in Toronto several years ago. They identified Canada as a high potential market for tourists, with a long average length of stay and strong purchasing power. It is also interesting to note that they see the tolerance and progressive elements of Thailand as something that potentially appeals to people who are conscious of where they travel and how their money is spent – be it ecotourists, those concerned with corporate responsibility or those from the LGBTQI community in Canada.

Does your country and Thailand have an exchange programme for students today?

Our regional development cooperation programme with ASEAN has a strong focus on education. Our Scholarships for Education Exchanges and Development initiative – the SEED programme – entered its second year in 2019, and saw significant growth in numbers. For Thailand, the first year saw 18 students come to Canada, and that rose to 24 students in 2019. The programme works through partnerships between Canadian and ASEAN post-secondary institutions; in 2019, between 49 ASEAN and 33 Canadian institutions.

With each round of the SEED programme, we try to make improvements to ensure that all ASEAN countries are able to participate equally and fully. At the end of 2019, we launched the third round of the scholarships, including a mid-career component for the first time, reflecting the importance of lifelong learning. We are excited about this new opportunity for young professionals from Thailand and other

ASEAN countries to experience professional training in Canada.

My own first experiences of Asia were as a student – on exchanges to China, Japan and Korea, as well as fieldwork in Thailand. I can attest personally to the importance of such exchanges. They not only teach you about another country, they give you deep personal connections to those countries, and make you friends for life.

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

I feel like only just arrived, so it is too early to say. For now I want to focus all my attention on Thailand, as well as Cambodia and Laos, where I am also accredited.

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

My first time in Thailand was in the 1980s, when I spent five months here as a student, working on two archaeological excavations. One was in a small village near Kanchanaburi, and the other on the grounds of a monastery near Phanat Nikhom. They were both fascinating sites, and it was also an incredible opportunity to experience ordinary life in Thailand, away from the tourist sites. I remember heading out from Bangkok soon after I arrived, to the village of Ban Don Ta Phet. I had to get there on my own, taking a long-distance bus, a local bus and then a motorcycle taxi, speaking no Thai at all. It was a bit scary, but such a fantastic experience



Ambassador and family at the Official Residence with the family cat Mo.

once I made it to the site. I have never forgotten those first impressions of Thailand.

Do you regularly meet up with your community?

The short answer is yes, and it is certainly one of the most enjoyable parts of my job.

When I arrived in Thailand, one of my first meetings was with the Executive of the Thai-Canadian Chamber of Commerce. Soon after, I participated in two major CanCham events: a seminar on women in leadership, and the CanCham annual “Great Canadian BBQ”, held at the official residence. I was delighted to address the seminar, because the subject of women in leadership is close to my heart – from 2016 to 2019 I was “Champion for Women” at Canada’s foreign ministry. The BBQ was another early opportunity to meet fellow Canadians and Thais who are friends of Canada. It was a pleasure to welcome everyone to the residence for such a fun event.

Another great early opportunity was presenting graduation certificates to Canadian Bachelor of Education graduates from the University of Winnipeg who completed their degree through an internship at the Lertlah Schools here in Bangkok. Of course, the pandemic has limited in-person meetings, but I have continued to meet with members of the business and larger Canadian community virtually and, more recently, in person again (with appropriate physical distancing). I also try to reach out to Thais with connections to Canada – for example, by meeting recently with the Thai-Canada Alumni Association – and I plan to continue my outreach to both them and the Canadian community in the weeks ahead.



Private time in Chiang Mai.

Photos courtesy of Lertlah School, FTI, CanCham, and Magna.

KING'S COLLEGE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL BANGKOK

- CREATING A COMMUNITY OF KINDNESS

Expat Life went to visit King's Bangkok last week and spoke to their Headmaster, Thomas Banyard, and Helen Searle who will lead the Pre-prep when they open in August for students aged 2-11 years old. They have already started work on admissions for Years 7-9 who will join the school from August 2021. In fact, they were incredibly happy to confirm that Matthew Gibson, one of the most popular teachers among students at King's Wimbledon, will be joining and leading the senior school. Matthew is currently a leader at King's Wimbledon responsible for preparing the students to get into the world's best universities, as he has been doing at King's Wimbledon since 2011.

I arrived just after midday on Friday July 3rd and the school was a hive of activity. There were dozens of contractors on site who were putting the finishing touches to the grounds sitting on 23 rai of land in the prestigious Rama III area of Bangkok: completing the FIFA standard playing fields in the centre of the school and finishing the driveway with granite to allow parents to drop off directly outside the school turnstiles.

I parked and walked to the impressive centre concourse that opens up the King's complex and walked into the reception with the receptionists already in place getting everything in order. The Headmaster arrived at the reception behind a face mask with a Thai couple with their little boy, a new student at King's. Thomas smiled a confident and relaxed smile, entered the reception with his guests and said hello to me. I will be with you soon, he said.

We sat down in a meeting room off the reception. He looked every bit the Headmaster of a top British public school. White shirt, red tie and blue suit trousers. He welcomed me just as he had the 150 parent tours that he had completed



over the past week. He told me that the parents have all been very enthusiastic to see the school. He also said that they were all lovely people, "We are very lucky. You do not get that at every school".

I asked the Headmaster what was going to make King's Bangkok different to the other 200 international schools in Thailand and if I was a parent why would I choose King's Bangkok.

He and Mrs Searle both answered the question separately in exactly the same way. They said that King's Bangkok would concentrate on a broad education which

builds a 'great heart' just as much as a 'great mind'. Kindness, good manners and wisdom with the underlying hard work, aspiration and courtesy were the solid foundations that the school would be based on. They want to produce well-rounded, balanced students, who will have inquisitive minds, live their ways happily, and give back to their societies when they grow older.

They want parents to come and visit the school because they feel confident that they will like what they see. "There will be no hard sell," Thomas said, "our team will all impart the same message. From the teachers, to the receptionists, the cleaners, everyone has been recruited to be of the same mind. To go out of their way to be well-mannered and be as helpful as they can, both to each other, our students and our guests". I found it





a charming ethos. “If you go to the reception and ask for the Early Years Centre, we expect the receptionist to get up and take you there. Not just direct you”.

They want parents to know that the school is going to support their child be a good person. “Whether they have the best music teacher in the country or a world level badminton coach is not important. If they are not kind and considerate people, and they come home and expect someone else to carry their bags or to clear up after them, that is not what we want. What we do here is try to encourage our children to be well-mannered and thoughtful in all respects.

Kindness is vital for students to be successful here: we are kind to the cleaners by not leaving rubbish everywhere; we are kind to our teachers because we respect what they say; we are kind to our friends because we look out for them and offer support if they need help. We are going to speak English, because there are people in our group that will not understand us if we speak Thai, so we will involve them in our conversation. Kindness underpins everything that we do”.

Through developing kind students who have a range of interests and hobbies, Thomas and Helen told me that King’s Bangkok will naturally prepare the students for the best universities around the world. At King’s Wimbledon they are proud that 90% of the students get their first-choice university wherever that is in the world. Emulating this is something that they are excited to do through careers guidance beginning in Year 9 of the senior school.

“The issue that we face is that we do not have alumni yet. We do have alumni from King’s Wimbledon and we understand that our parents want to see their children come through us and then go to university. However, we are not rushing. We could have opened more year groups, but we feel that the longer we have our students the better.



Instead of opening all the year groups and going straight to GCSEs and A levels, we have gone for Year 7, 8 and 9 which is basically the lowest number of years you can get to make the senior school work with friendship groups and leadership opportunities. This does mean that we will take longer to get our first sets of GCSE and A level results, and the first set of students getting into

top universities, but we are lucky to have so many parents that trust the expertise of King’s Wimbledon. With both the Headmaster and the leader of the senior school coming from the sister campus in London, many parents feel assured that their sons and daughters will be in good hands with King’s Bangkok.”

When I left King’s Bangkok the staff all smiled at me and wished me well. I do believe that Thomas and Helen have already laid strong foundations for establishing a kind and happy community fully supported by King’s College School, Wimbledon. It will be an exciting few years for the team here as they welcome families to join them and I look forward to seeing the school flourish for years to come.

Thomas Banyard | Founding Head | King’s College International School Bangkok | Tel 02 481 9955 | kingsbangkok.com



Empower your health and ditch the diet

‘Ditch the diet’, is a great hashtag I follow on Instagram and I was drawn to it, because I truly believe that dieting to become healthy is not always the answer.

I am a nutritionist and I do not actually put clients on diets. It is not just my own experience that has brought me to the conclusion that dieting is not always the most effective form of bettering our health, but the many clients I worked with when I first started out. I watched these clients successfully lose weight on a restrictive diet and then they would return a year later. They usually had gained back more weight than they had lost and, in the process, they developed other health problems like, lowered metabolism, imbalanced hormones, and strong cravings.

First, I would like to help you understand why I think dieting is not the answer. Second, I would like to give you the correct answer on exactly what you need to do to get healthy. But to be honest, the latter statement is very difficult to determine, I think that is why dieting was invented. Human beings are complicated. We come in all shapes and sizes and not one other human being is like another. So how is a low carb diet the answer for everyone? If we are all so different, then one diet will not fit all. We all know that the diet industry is a massive money-making machine. The influencers we follow on social media are posting their amazing results regarding their incredible body transformation,

and they have usually been paid, or they do it for a living and make money promoting it. I cannot say there has never been a successful person on a diet, but the percentage of failing is much higher than the percentage of success. We cannot forget to mention that our diets and our culture value a thin body. A body type that only a small portion of the population can obtain, it is truly exhausting, for many to have to work towards a goal that they will never be able to achieve.

Now, do not get me wrong. I am vegetarian and I eat healthy, so I follow a diet of sorts. But for me, being a vegetarian is not a chore. I actually feel better. I listen to my body and I try not to obsess about what is happening in the fast paced world of diet culture. That is not to say I think fasting is a horrible diet or that paleo is wrong. No, I think they are great ways of eating healthier but also, we need to find a balance. The following are some steps to use in taking on diet culture, and using it to your advantage.



Educate yourself:

Most of our dietary habits have been handed down to us from our family and our culture. 'You can't leave the table until you clean your plate' 'Milk helps you grow' 'Three meals a day is very important'. We have been misinformed and when we realise that, some of us turn to the internet or social media. This can also lead us down the path of misinformation, misunderstanding and an overwhelming amount of it. My recommendation to you is to take an online course in nutrition from a reputable school or certification programme or meet with a nutritionist and have them guide you. Find a healthy cooking class to take that teaches you how to use whole foods to create meals and snacks that are beneficial to the body.

Goals:

Instead of taking on a diet like keto, which can be very restrictive, try to take some ideas from certain diets and incorporate them slowly into your lifestyle. For example, try to switch to keto bread for a week instead of regular bread. While you are at it, take a tip from the paleo diet and instead of pretzels or chips for a snack, try a handful of nuts. Find your own rhythm, with foods. Instead of taking on one restrictive diet, take a few ideas from all the different diets and create your own personal healthy lifestyle.

Intuition:

Intuition, it is an incredible thing. They should teach us how to use our intuition in school, like they teach us maths. If we listened more to what our body was telling us, instead of social media, family members, and/or friends we might be on the right track to taking care of ourselves. I would start with



trying some different scenarios. Keep a food journal and try to track how your food is making you feel, emotionally and physically. Sit down and eat your meals. Make an effort to not eat meals in front of the computer or in the car. Enjoy your food, think about what you are eating and why you chose to eat it.

Working on our emotional health:

We are all emotionally attached to food at some level. We all have some level of disordered eating. Sometimes we might eat because it soothes us or it makes us feel better. Stress eating is not uncommon at all. Eating because we deserve it or we have earned it is another form of unhealthy eating that we frequently give into. Working on our own mental health whether it is seeing a therapist, taking a course in EFT or Reiki, or learning to meditate are all important steps to balancing out your mind and body. Taking the time out to work on your mental health can help you recognise faulty food patterns. Once you decide what those patterns are and how they are impacting your eating habits, you can slowly make the changes you need and build a positive relationship with food.

Most importantly remember that you are unique from the inside out. Diet culture is a one solution answer to a very complicated problem. Once you realise that you can relax and discover your own personalised healthy eating plan that works just for you.

Tara Conrad
Nutritionist and Diet Consultant at Verita Life

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Swiss Ambassador to Thailand Ambassador H.E. Helene Budliger Artieda

Expat Life had the pleasure of interviewing the Swiss Ambassador to Thailand Ambassador H.E. Helene Budliger Artieda.



How long have you been the Ambassador to Thailand?

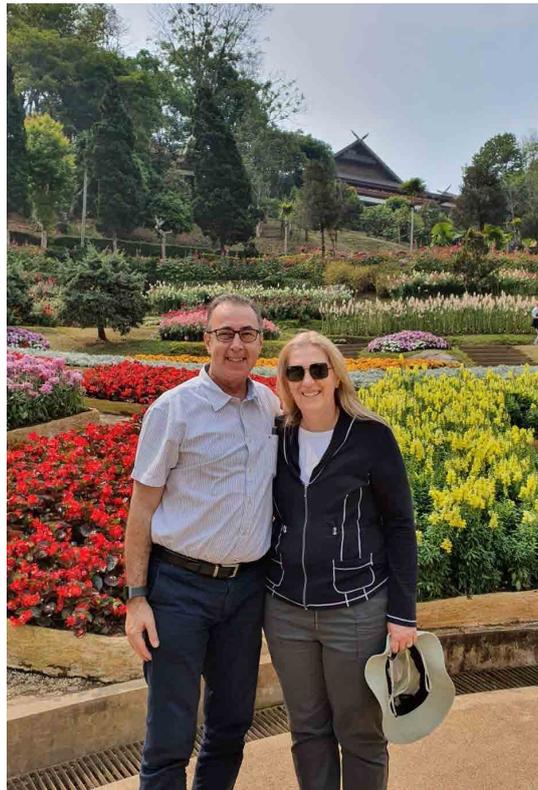
I arrived in Thailand at the beginning of October 2019 and experienced thankfully a bit more than five months of normal diplomatic activity before my Embassy like many others had to enter into crisis modus operation to tackle the situation created by the spread of COVID-19.

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

Previously, I was posted for four years to beautiful South Africa where I also represented Switzerland in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mauritius and Namibia and served as the Swiss Special Representative to the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

Where are you born and brought up?

I was born in Zurich and grew up in the suburbs of my



hometown. In Switzerland, it is equally important to know where your family originates from. My canton of origin is Lucerne.

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

Already in my late teens, I had hopes for an international career because I enjoyed travelling and discovering new cultures from a young age onwards. First, my eyes were set on one of the many Swiss hotel schools. It was more of a coincidence that I ended up with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs instead.

Do you have other diplomats in your family?

No. My father worked in banking, and so did two of my uncles. My mother stayed at home to educate and take care of us.

As for my sister, she has a great position at the Swiss National TV station. All my extended family members love to travel internationally. However, I am the only one that pursued an international career.

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

Thailand, the Thai authorities and people have been wonderfully welcoming. Bangkok is a safe, during normal times, lively city with lots of opportunities. Today, Thailand, like every country in the world, is facing great difficulties with regards to the current global health and economic crisis. It worries me that millions of Thai people have lost their jobs in recent weeks. This global recession will mean that we will have to lock hands in solidarity among friendly nations and work together to find a way back to what is perceived as a good life worth living. As

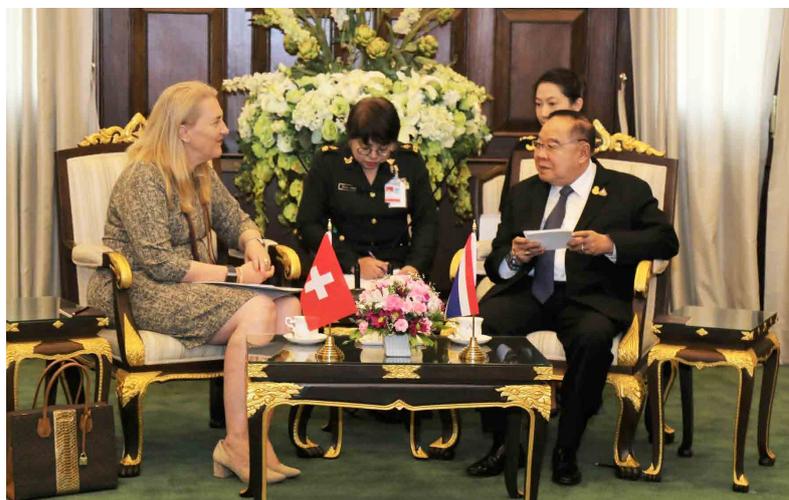




an obstacle, or rather a regret on my side, I would consider the lack of understanding and speaking of the Thai language. Without any prior knowledge or affinity, I find it difficult to learn the language during my mission in Thailand.

Do you see any similarities between your country and Thailand?

Between Thailand and Switzerland, I would think it is more that opposites attract. Swiss tourists flock to Thailand because of the beautiful beaches, the distinctively different food, to visit the colourful markets, chill on the famous rooftop terraces in Bangkok and for many other experiences which Thailand offers plentiful.



Thai people tell me that they enjoy Switzerland for its nature, good air, historic cities and villages, cheese and chocolate, snow, mountains and so forth. There are also aspects, which make for a strong bond between the two countries. Swiss people most often stem from farming ancestry. Although quite urban nowadays, this love for the land unites us. There are many intercultural marriages, which to me build the strongest bond possible. Diplomacy is a people-to-people business. It immediately

creates a closeness when I meet a representative of Thailand who tells me that he or she has Swiss relatives in the family. Last but certainly not least, there are many historic ties between the Thai Royal Family and Switzerland. Most Thai people are aware, that their beloved late King Rama IX spent crucial years in Lausanne before returning home.

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

We do not have children, but I am married, and my husband and I enjoy the company of three dogs who travel everywhere with us. No substitute for children, but we nevertheless consider them as part of the pack.

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

As many of my colleagues must have told you, Bangkok is a remarkably busy post. For Switzerland, the Embassy also plays a regional role with side accreditations to Cambodia and Laos and with a regional consular centre for some of the Mekong region. It is an immensely popular post, which regularly attracts great interest when openings are advertised within the Ministry. So, I feel very privileged to serve in Bangkok. There is not much routine, and my days never look the same and the topics I deal with vary greatly.

I looked randomly at one of my weeks back in December, and this is what I found: I hosted a dinner in honour of a visiting business executive at the Swiss Residence; paid a Thai official at MoFA a courtesy call; attended a National Day of a European friend; travelled to Hua Hin to meet with the Swiss community; hosted the Swiss Thai Chamber of Commerce for a joint networking event at the Residence; lunched with a former Swiss Ambassador; held bilateral meetings with a Thai entrepreneur, with a representative of a social impact fund and with an international NGO; attended several Embassy internal meetings. To round things up, that week the Embassy hosted a Swiss delegation from its headquarters and the region. I could have picked any other week and it would have been equally busy, diverse and interesting.



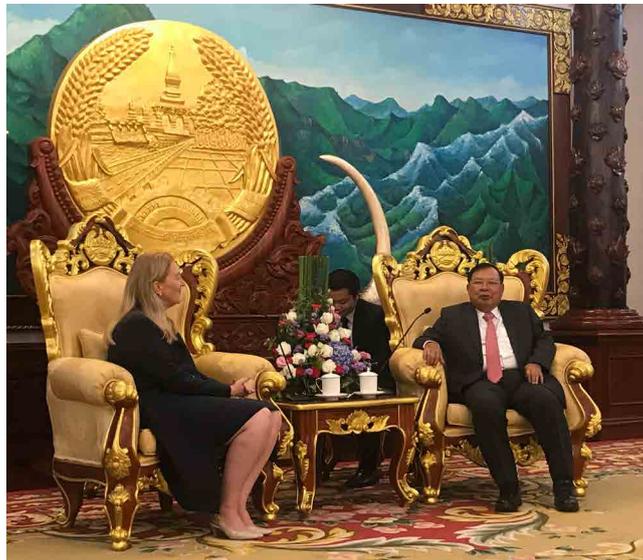


As every Ambassador, I assume you have some goals you really would like to reach/fulfil before you leave Thailand. What are they?

There are three main interests: (1) To further foster economic relations between Thailand and Switzerland. Switzerland is a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and EFTA has signalled to Thailand that there is interest to resume talks about a free trade agreement. I am eager to support Swiss companies here in Thailand and win Thai investors for Switzerland. (2) Bangkok is an important consular post. Offering the best possible service to Swiss citizens, living or visiting Thailand has high priority for me. Thailand is also our biggest source market for tourism to Switzerland and the number of visitors were very elevated before the COVID-crisis. Our visa team is dedicated to offer a smooth and where possible client centred process. (3) I am the face of official Switzerland in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos and as such, I aim to attend as many functions as possible.

Have you been travelling around in Thailand?

Yes, I had the opportunity to travel both for business and for pleasure. The Swiss clubs in Hua Hin, Chiang Mai and Phuket invited me to their Christmas festivities. Her Royal Highness Princess Sirindhorn very kindly invited the diplomatic corps for a study tour to Chiang Rai where we learned about the Royal projects. For us, visiting the Doi Tung Royal Villa, which was inspired by the Swiss mountains, was one of the highlights. Privately, we managed to squeeze in an extended weekend in Phuket. When my family visited, we took a tour of historic Ayutthaya and returned by boat to Bangkok.



As of early March, all our travel plans have been grounded.

Until now may I ask what is your favourite destination in Thailand?

It is honestly too early to speak of a favourite destination. So far, we enjoyed everything we have seen and experienced.

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

There is not much free time as Ambassador since my husband and I often attend events at the weekend. I enjoy spending time with my dogs, am an avid reader and I love jigsaw puzzles! Ever since we have been in lockdown, my husband and I have started to play table tennis and discover new cooking recipes during the weekend.

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

There are roughly 10,000 Swiss citizens living in Thailand and before the COVID-crisis, over 200,000 Swiss tourists visited the country every year. The mutual appreciation between Thailand and Switzerland started quite traditionally with tourism. In the 80s and 90s, Swiss people discovered Thailand as a touristic destination, liked what they saw and decided to settle. Age-

wise, the oldest Swiss community abroad resides in Thailand. Many older Swiss decide to spend their much-deserved retirement in sunny Thailand. Love quite often also plays a decisive role.

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

Switzerland and Thailand's universities, institutes and schools of applied sciences cooperate in numerous domains, which include exchange of students. Some Thai students also benefit from the annual Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships programme, which promotes international exchange and research cooperation.

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



As a diplomat, there is an important life lesson. Think and act in the moment and enjoy your current posting. Life goes by way too fast, especially when you rotate every four years, like we do. My husband and I have just arrived in Thailand. So I really try not to think of what will be in roughly three years.

Any memory from Thailand that you would like to share with us, an awkward situation, a fun moment etc.?

I might be among very few people who attended two trainings of the momentous and beautiful royal barge proceedings.

When I arrived in Thailand, I was unsure if I would receive my royal permission to act as Ambassador on time. Therefore, my husband and I decided to attend a training. We were smitten by it. Returning to the office and gushing about it, my staff asked if we could organise our annual team outing by attending yet another training. So we did. In December, my husband and I attended the most memorable real barge proceedings. My husband in his white tie tailor made suit and I in a long evening gown in over 30 degrees Celsius. Friends back home in republican Switzerland were quite impressed with how glamorous our life can be.



Do you regularly meet up with your community?

Absolutely, it is a very important part of my work. There are several Swiss clubs in the region, and I intend to pay them all a visit. I enjoy close working relationships with the Swiss Thai Chamber of Commerce and regularly attend events at the Swiss School Bangkok. I enjoy speaking to community members, listen to their experiences and circumstance and eating Swiss food.

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

To be a worthy representative of my country.

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

Modern time Ambassadors are approachable, hardworking, and active members of communities. I personally do not enjoy alcohol too much. So please do not picture me sipping Champagne at cocktails and travelling first class. This is cliché and an outdated perception. There is however one cliché that I can fully confirm: Swiss chocolate does make one happy!



The Coffee Club at the Hyatt Regency on Sukhumvit



On sunny mornings in Bangkok most people need that special taste of quality coffee to get energised for the rest of the day. For me in central Bangkok my coffee fix came from The Coffee Club at the Hyatt Regency Sukhumvit. Linked by elevated walkway just two minutes walk from Nana BTS in Bangkok.

As soon as we stepped into the classy interior the staff dispensed with the COVID regulations, checking our temperatures to ensure that we and their other customers were all safe and healthy.

The branding and the exterior decor of the restaurant is the same across all their... branches in Thailand although this branch has seating outside as it is in a covered mall. Inside the soft lighting, clean lines and the delicious smell of fresh coffee was an instant pick me up. As we walked in a waitress, smartly dressed in a black uniform,

welcomed us to the Coffee Club and showed us to an area behind the main counter where there were larger booths where my guests and I chose to sit.

The pleasant greeting and the smile of the restaurant manager as she asked what we would like to order from the extensive menu. The food looked so good so being from the region I chose the Asian breakfast Khao Tom Set – rice soup with four side dishes; tiny pork goulash, sour egg salad, healthy green mustard with onion, and simple omelette.

My guests opted for western fare - one had poached eggs Benedict with salmon with a butter croissant. The other a ‘big breakfast’ - three pork sausages, rashers of bacon, hash brown, toast, two poached eggs, rocket salad, button mushrooms, cherry tomatoes.

The menu was so varied and the food when it came looked every bit as good as it did on the menu.

I looked around the restaurant at the other customers. There were two middle aged

Japanese businessmen talking business over their food in one corner. A couple of young Thai girls chatting excitedly as they ate sharing their phone screens. A western family – parents and their two children had a table full of food and tall cold drinks. I saw a burger piled high that looked delicious, a spicy spaghetti dish that I heard the father compliment. Two ladies were trying their best to keep a young child entertained and restrained to his high chair. Two or three lone diners sat taking coffee starting their day. There seemed to be a wide range of clientele and something available for every palate at any time of the day.

Coffees were promptly ordered, delivered and dealt with quickly – tall latte, short espresso and an iced cappuccino. Frozen drinks soon followed Lychee Rose tea cold brew, coconut frappe and a passion mango frappe. The waitress explained that the brand originated from Australia and that now there are over 400 branches of The Coffee Club across 9 countries.

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H.E. MR. NASHIDA KAZUYA THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR TO THAILAND

by Kathleen Pokrud

Japan the “Land of Rising Sun” has always had a reputation for its distinctive culture and unique traditions. As an island nation with a long history, Japan developed its distinctive culture through adopting outside influences and making these uniquely their own. Modern Japan is well organised and a busy country. The Japanese people are well known for their politeness and exceptionally good manners. Strong work ethics are instilled to the young generation from an early age. The Japanese “Kaizen” (continuous improvement) business philosophy has been widely adopted globally for management improvement and competitiveness.



Ambassador posing with H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai Minister of Foreign Affairs Thailand

Renowned worldwide as a nation steeped in a culture that combines both tradition and modernity, Japanese culture has astounded the world with the blend of traditional concepts over the use of the latest technology and art. Pristine natural scenery, tantalising Japanese cuisine and a shoppers’ paradise are amongst the many reasons that Japan is now a favourable and popular tourist destination.

Since his arrival in December 2019, the new Japanese Ambassador to Thailand H.E. Mr. Nashida Kazuya still eagerly awaits to present his credentials to King Maha Vajiralongkorn Phra Vajiraklaochaoyuhua. As Thailand slowly eases itself from the COVID-19 lockdown, Expat Life took the opportunity to sit down with Ambassador Nashida at their monumental and pristine embassy located on Witthayu Road for his plans and visions with the new role.

Career diplomat

With over 36 years of experience in the Foreign Service, Ambassador Nashida took the entry exams in 1984 and is a formidable career diplomat who has served the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan with diverse capacities such as international trade, economic policy, aid policy, financial affairs and management. In 2002, he was the Counsellor in the Embassy of Japan in Washington D.C. in the United States where he served for 2 years. His Excellency then served as Ambassador for three years in Iraq between 2013-2015.

I asked Ambassador Nashida on his experience as Ambassador in Iraq. “I was Ambassador in Iraq during the time of strong IS Islamic State insurgents



Ambassador attending a Japanese prefectural promotion event in Bangkok, with the Governor of Ehime & Ehime’s mascot “Mican” (Tangerine themed puppy)



Ambassador posing with Mrs Kathleen Pokrud (in front of a cabinet full of memorial items of Royal and Imperial friendship between the two countries) at the Embassy

often with daily casualties in excess of 100. The situation then was a battlefield. The Embassy was located in the relatively safer “Green Zone”, I was only allowed to leave the Embassy for official engagements. Three vehicles in a convoy and armed bodyguards escorted every venture outside. We were required to wear helmets with bulletproof Kevlar vests and had wireless jammers on every patrol to protect us from remote controlled explosions.”

The family of the Ambassador, his wife and three grown up sons could not join him then and are sadly not with him now in his current posting in Thailand. He said “my wife has a job and my three sons 28, 25 and 20 are employed or in university” he added proudly.

Ambassador Nashida was born and educated in Tokyo. His aspiration to join the Foreign Service came during his years at the University of Tokyo to fulfil the desire to work in an international environment.

Strong bilateral relations between Japan and Thailand

Japan is still the largest foreign investor in Thailand, accounting for 36.2% of total FDI by year-end 2016, followed by Singapore and the EU representing 14.8 and 14.3% respectively, according to Bank of Thailand data. It is still the third largest economy in the world. It is amongst Thailand’s oldest allies.

This diplomatic friendship celebrated its 130th year in 2017. Ambassador Nashida explained the rationale behind the enduring relationship, “Japanese companies have long regarded Thailand as a favourable destination for foreign investment not only because of the cultural affinity between the two peoples but also due to labour costs and availability and the geographical closeness between the two countries.

Also, Thailand as the centre of Mekong region offers a relatively stable political environment with constitutional democracy. Currently, there are over 5,500 Japanese companies operating in Thailand. Our official count of Japanese nationals surpasses 75,000 but we believe the figure to be more like 100/120,000 people in all.”

In terms of cultural exchange and tourism aspects, Ambassador Nashida pointed out, “There are continuously sharp increases for visiting tourists amongst the two countries, in both ways. I found the quality of Japanese cuisine in Thailand is no different from what we are offered in Japan.” He added that another attribute to the amicable rapport is closely linked to the solid bond between the two Royal families, especially the special friendship shared by the two previous monarchs of both dynasties. The current Princesses are frequent visitors to Japan.

Dealing with COVID19

Prior to the lockdown situation due to v-19, his typical day was packed with numerous official and internal meetings, delegations, and lunches. “With the social distancing measure, our embassy has adopted alternative work days between two teams.”



Ambassador paying a courtesy call on H. E. Mr. Ittipol Khunpluem Minister of Culture Thailand



Ambassador in a bulletproof vest posing with his then staff at the Embassy of Japan in Iraq

Ambassador Nashida believes in people to people contact, and he is earnest to continue his work to maintain and further enhance the large-scale Japanese presence in Thailand by meeting and networking with local and foreign governments and businesses, as well as their communities here.

Students exchange programme

The Japanese government, in cooperation with the Thai government, implements four main projects according to the Japan Information Service from the Embassy of Japan.

1. Ship for SE Asia youth

Implemented since *FY1974. SE Asian countries and Japanese youths will take a boat for about a month to visit each country and deepen exchanges *FY: Japan's fiscal year begins April 1st, ends March 31st next year. i.e. FY2020 begins from April 1st, 2020 ends March 31, 2021.

Results so far (the number of participants from Thailand)
 FY2017: 28 people
 FY2018: 28 people FY2019:
 28 people
 * Total up to FY2019: 1,520 people

2. JENESYS programme

Implemented from FY2007. Asian youths (high school students, university students and working people) are invited to Japan for 1-2 weeks by theme. The theme is Japanese culture, science and technology, sports exchange, etc.

Results so far (the number of participants from Thailand)
 FY2015: 161 people
 FY2016: 345 people
 FY2017: 161 people
 FY2018: 163 people
 FY2019: 76 people
 * Total up to FY2019: 940 people

3. ASIA KAKEHASHI Project

Implemented from FY2018. 1,000 high school students from Asia were invited to Japan over 5 years. They lived in Japan as high school students for 10 months.

Results so far (the number of participants from Thailand)
 FY 2019: 16 people
 FY 2020: 13 people
 *Total up to FY 2019: 29 people



Ambassador receiving a gift from H.E. Mr. Chuan Leekpai, President of the National Assembly after paying a courtesy call



Ambassador, a keen football fan and the international committee member of Japan Football Association, posing with Mr. Akira Nishino, head coach of Thai National Football team

4. MEXT Scholarship (Japanese Government Scholarship)

Those are: Graduate school (master/doctor), undergraduate, technical college, vocational school, Japanese language/ Japanese culture training (1 year), teacher training (1 year), Young Leaders Programme (for government agency staff).
*About 60 Thai people pass each year.

In addition, there are other exchange programmes by the Japan Foundation, short-term exchange programmes conducted by each university, short-term dispatch programmes conducted by public interest groups are also offered to potential students.

Exploring Thailand

Since arriving in Thailand just five months ago, Ambassador Nashida has had limited opportunity to explore the rest of Thailand due to the heavy workload in managing a large embassy compliment of 60 Japanese and over 100 Thai staff members.

Not unfamiliar with Bangkok, he has travelled to Thailand on many occasions previously as Director-General of SE and SW Asian Affairs Department.

At his leisure, Ambassador Nashida enjoys daily exercise in the garden of his residence during the lockdown.

New objectives

As our interview is drawing to a close, Expat Life enquires what the new plans and visions Ambassador Nashida for his term in Thailand. Promote 'win/win' situations for mutual benefit in many top aspects of our relationships between the two countries. On the economic front, he understands that Thailand expects Japan to invest more so he will be seeking opportunities to put forward.

However, the COVID19 situation has taught us all a significant lesson to review the production supply chain and the way that we work. Corona virus may suggest valuable fresh start opportunities to assess new production processes utilising newly available technologies. Thailand has requested Japan to assist and support the training of highly skilled labour and Japan is ready to do so and help achieve Thailand 4.0 which is even more relevant after the COVID-19."

To sum up, Ambassador Nashida has mapped out three key objectives. He hopes to achieve more mutually beneficial business relationships between the two countries. The second vision is to offer a safe, fruitful and happier life for the many Japanese nationals in Thailand.

His last objective is to continue the trend in the increase of visitors from Japan to Thailand and to Japan from the Thais so that two countries keep solidifying the bases of amicable relations though people to people exchanges.



Ambassador standing in front of the "Zen" style stone garden at his residence in Bangkok

Wellington College's Astonishing Senior School: The Difference is Everything



Having landed in Bangkok just two years ago, and already reaching the gold standard for Junior School design and pedagogy, Wellington College is now about to turn the Senior School world upside down, with the most remarkable marriage of design and educational philosophy you are likely to see anywhere in the region.

With very successful sister schools in the Chinese cities of Shanghai, Hangzhou and Tianjin, not to mention the groundbreaking original, in Berkshire, UK (founded by Queen Victoria), Wellington College Bangkok has an undoubtedly impressive pedigree.

But name value, ultimately, is not enough. You can find a '100% genuine' Patek Philippe on Lazada for 1,200B – but it won't be long before you see what's missing. It's easy to open a new school with a fancy name, but it's not at all easy to make it genuinely great.

That's why the next phase of Wellington's development here in Bangkok is so exciting. The Senior School is truly one of a kind. The curriculum is the English National Curriculum, IGCSE and, at least initially, A-Levels (inventing an alternative

curriculum would be folly – snake oil for the gullible). So, in that case, how is it different from all the other British Curriculum schools in this city?

'Start with what you really want to achieve, rather than what you think you're supposed to do, then work out how to achieve it,' says Chris Nicholls, the visionary Founding Master of the College.

We are sitting in his study, a remarkably pleasant place to spend time, with comfortable chairs, sophisticated lighting, a Persian rug that really ties the room together. 'If you start with a wish list of classrooms, corridors, canteens and so forth, you're going to end up with a typical school. If that's what you want, there's already enough of them. This city doesn't need another.

'So I wanted academic excellence – of course – but also I wanted our students, all of them, to feel inspired at school, to enjoy the intellectual world, to develop real independence of mind, to understand themselves as individuals, and still, with all that, to be inclusive enough to recognise everyone's value, not just the value of their friends or relations. The question was how to make that happen.'

As we pore over the Senior School plans Chris has laid out on the coffee table, the



vision becomes clear. There isn't a corridor to be seen. Floor after floor, staircases curve grandly up from sweeping, airy, beautifully-designed learning spaces towards a glorious skylight in the top floor roof. Wide classroom doors open directly into the library area, linking what is studied formally to anything that can be studied, or thought about, in the world.

There are touches everywhere in these plans of the unique attention



demurs. 'I don't know what that one will be like. We aren't pre-judging at this stage. After a couple of years in this first building,' he says, casually indicating the papers strewn across the table, eyes betraying the passion and excitement he evidently feels about the whole massive project, 'then we'll have some idea of how to design the next bit. I'd be letting everyone down if I did it now. How can we tell what the world will be like, what our students will need, what our teachers will want? The school has to create itself first – then I'll design it.'

There's no doubt about it: Wellington College Bangkok is a school of the highest quality, and one that should be considered seriously by any parent who wants the best for their child.

As they say, the difference really is everything.

For more information about Wellington College Bangkok, please contact +66(0)2-087-8888 or info@wellingtoncollege.ac.th

to detail which is already the hallmark of Wellington's Junior School – witness the cheeky mid-century design of the Exeter Harkness Room, the pure fun of the Library slide, the extraordinary sophistication of the Learning Studios. The Senior Dining Hall (which sounds as if it might be a stuffy, wood panelled relic) will look very much like the breakfast room of a sumptuous resort hotel. Complete with charming lakeside views and indoor/outdoor flexibility (useful when the occasional seasonal downpour lashes in from the adjacent Unico Grande Golf Course – the College's 'home course').

With the very recent opening of the 600 seat grand Theatre, completion of the delightful Lagoon area of the campus, and the laying of another outstanding sports field, the Centre Court, Wellington is quite clearly developing into a most extraordinary school. And the pace does not slacken: the Senior School will undoubtedly cement their reputation as one of Asia's most exceptional academic institutions.

When I ask him what's next, he grins wryly. 'There's another building, that will go next to this one,' he says. I suggest that twin buildings along these lines would be an extraordinary statement, but he



DR. TEERAKIAT JAREONSETTASIN – his thoughts on COVID-19

by Jocelyn Pollak

For months, families across the world have been coping with a new normal when it comes to education. Thailand, and particularly Bangkok, as a major Asian hub for international education, will have some unique challenges pressing forward during these Covid-19 times.

Dr. Teerakiat Jareonsettasin, former Minister of Education and current Headmaster of Newton Sixth Form was kind enough to take some time to share his opinions, predictions and advice in regard to the education landscape in Thailand given our current and likely future circumstances. The overarching theme of our discussion was the recurring thought from Dr. T that, “No one really knows how this will pan out. There will not be an aftermath of Covid-19... the virus will be with us for a long time, possibly forever. So, we should not think of this as a ‘back to normal situation’. We need to think of what the new normal is going to be”.

Dr. T outlined five pieces of advice for how to approach this new normal in a cautious, responsible way.



1. Each international school should appoint a Covid-19 coordinator. Unless somebody is keeping up with what is going on and is capable of moving fast, schools could endanger people very quickly. There is so much information changing so rapidly that we cannot just leave it to the head of the school to monitor. This coordinator should report directly to the headmaster, the board of governors and the school owners.

2. We are going to live with this, simply put. When the schools re-open, we already know the public health measures and best practices; schools should get all of their personnel tested. Thailand has the capacity to test. The staff should be tested to reassure both the parents/students but also the other teachers/staff. Not only that, but it's good practice because teachers are front liners.

3. Schools should have safety procedures on entrance and exit. It seems like upon entrance, the kids have lots of precautions but on exit, there are very few. We need to think about kids going home, especially since many of the Thai kids will be going home to large families that include grandparents and possibly other vulnerable people.

4. Schools should have a system that triggers an alarm very quickly. If we have learned anything from this, time between identifying a case or symptoms and taking action is absolutely critical. With a Covid-19 coordinator in place, schools they will not waste valuable time in protecting the student body and staff from any further spread.

5. While privacy is of course important, the school needs to know the living conditions at home so they can especially protect the kids who have higher risk families. If one of the children has someone who is immunocompromised or lives with many elderly people, it's not a bad idea to keep extra tabs on those kids. Schools are a community and





A lot of older students are not sending their outputs (homework etc.). Teachers cannot look at them in the face and assess motivation to learn. They cannot sense their affects change or their body language; they cannot gauge if the kids fully understand. So online learning has clear limitations.”

The risk that Dr. T sees to the international school system if online learning persists for an extended period is that, “parents see online teaching as inferior to face-to-face. Parents default and do not want to pay higher tuition fees for this. The dilemma is that teachers do not want to make up for the time unless they are paid, which is absolutely fair, teachers are not a charity. Then the school heads say they do not have the money to pay the teachers. That begs the deeper question of, what are international schools for?” It is a question that he did not offer an answer to, but more as something for parents and educators to consider as they move forward and create new expectations.

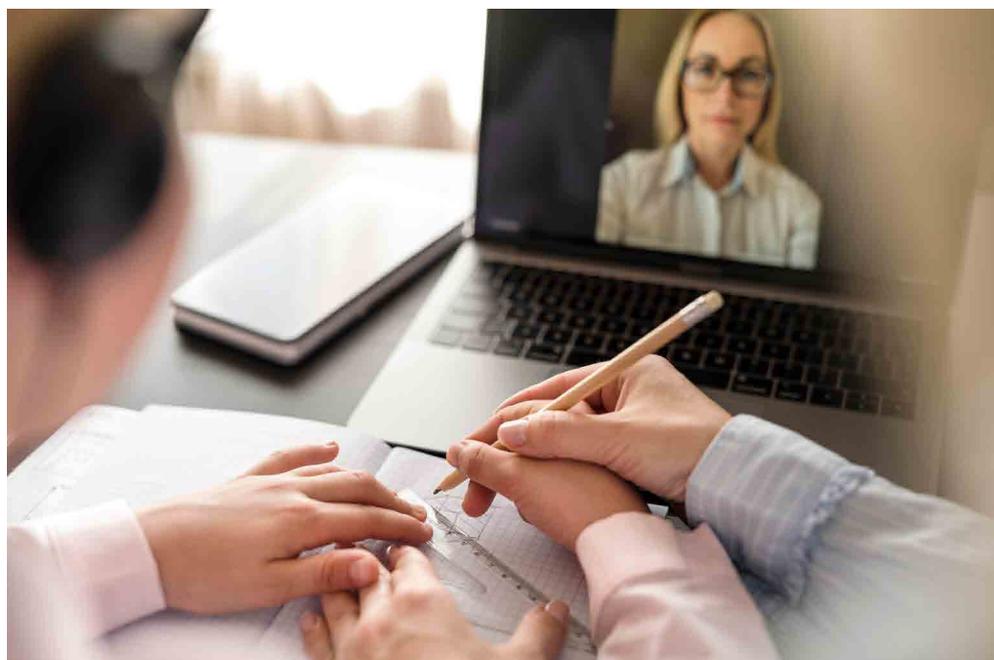
In terms of the business side of international schools and the soaring tuition fees, there are clearly some major concerns.

taking extra care to protect the most vulnerable among us is an important community action.

Dr. T also shared some of his thoughts on an activity that has become familiar and valuable in recent weeks: online education. Whether parents have taken the reins and are homeschooling their kids, or relying on their children’s international schoolteachers, or even taking this time as a special once in a lifetime break from the grind, doing new things online has become much more common.

Dr. T pointed out, “This is probably the first time that the strengths of online teaching have been highlighted. However, I have not heard a single parent say they want online teaching to replace in-person, especially at the younger age group.”

Dr. T believes that online teaching is important as a supplement or a temporary replacement when necessary. At his own school, Newton Sixth Form, they incorporate online teaching into their curriculum as the norm, so he is familiar with striking the balance. “In education there are a few things that we can disrupt; we can disrupt the input. But the output, that means the things kids produce and the teachers’ feedback, is almost impossible to disrupt.



On the plus side, Dr. T believes that schools in Thailand can learn from similar economic crises of the past to create a more realistic reopening business plan even if they will be taking some financial hits. “If you look at the lessons from Tom Yum Kung in 1997, and again 10 years ago, a lot of Thai people suddenly became poor. At the moment, the wealthy Thais are also being hit hard. They will not be able to afford the fees for international schools. I think one likely possibility is there will be an attrition and students will go back to government schools.”

However, he does see a light in the tunnel when it comes to enrolment. “It is likely there will also be a repatriation of students who had been abroad or were considering going abroad for school. Now, physical travel is going to become very difficult so these Thai international students will have a tough time going abroad.



Now we cannot send our own students abroad so maybe they will be going to our domestic international schools. It is quite possible that students who would have gone abroad will replace some of the demand of departed students, at least in the short term, which may keep schools afloat.”

This restriction of travel leads into his next thoughts on staffing and how it will likely result in some major changes not only to the instruction but also to the businesses. While some classes at international schools are taught by Thais, the majority are taught by native English speakers, which are quickly becoming in short supply. “Recruiting staff from abroad was already challenging and will become basically impossible if the travel bans hold. Will the parents pay the same tuition for non-native English speakers to teach these classes?” Assuming non-native speakers will fill these roles, Dr. T sees a solution to the problem in how the curriculum is delivered.

“The thing we need to do creatively is improve the delivery of the curriculum. We have to ask the question, is a native speaker necessary? International schools need to look at the businesses and their fees. This is going to reorient the international schools’ businesses in a big way.”

As this is all still fresh, it is going to require some juggling for the schools because “not all international schools can hire Thai nationals to do some of these jobs. The law for international schools has been set to protect consumers. There are teachers’ unions, associations, teaching licenses etc. that need to be abided by.” Dr. T does not anticipate the Ministry of Education relaxing these rules either. They

are typically quite rigid when it comes to protecting the consumers which means schools will be faced with the challenge of some creative curriculum delivery.

Dr. T concluded our conversation by saying that “These are not my definitive thoughts, but this is what I can see right now. And I think everyone else can see this too. In time, we will know so much more.”

The 2020/2021 school year will certainly be like nothing we have ever seen before but he is optimistic that the changes it will spur, however uncomfortable they may be at first, necessary alterations to the system to make it better for all involved.



A New International School Driven By Design

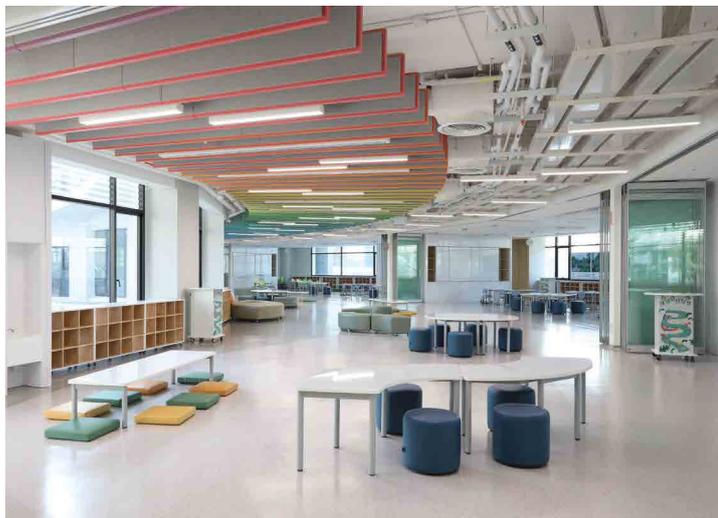
VERSO is the first international school in the world to be conceptually designed by IDEO, the world-famous design and innovation company from San Francisco. Driven by design, VERSO delivers a highly creative, student-centered education in a stunning state-of-the-art campus.

INNOVATIVE TEACHING APPROACH

Moving beyond the traditional 'one-size-fits-all' curriculum, VERSO places each student at the center of their own learning. Students are organized into mixed-age groups and work with a team of learning designers. We value curiosity, self-direction, and independence and help students to think like designers. We have redesigned the school day so we can give students more time to dig deep into learning that truly engages them.

AGILE LEARNING SPACES

VERSO's iconic 'Loops' are designed to bring a sense of fun, flow, movement, and interconnectedness to our learning. Traditional classrooms have been replaced by contemporary learning spaces that are flexible, agile, and adaptive to the needs of our learners. We consider our whole campus as a learning space with frequent opportunities to play and learn beyond the walls.



A PASSIONATE LEARNING DESIGN TEAM

At VERSO, we believe in the creative capacity of our educational teams. We intentionally call our teachers Learning Designers. They are highly-skilled educators who work closely with our students to design deeply engaging learning experiences. At VERSO we are passionate about working in a highly collaborative and creative project-based environment that inspires learning for everyone.

CONNECTED TO NATURE

VERSO's impressive campus was designed to complement the rich bio-diversity of its natural surroundings. Working closely with environmental and landscape specialists VERSO's campus has been designed to support a thriving eco-system that allows us to connect with nature on a daily basis. We have a responsibility to help students develop a deeper understanding of the natural world and what we all need to do to protect it.

VERSO's innovative learning architecture has been designed using American curriculum standards. Learning is interdisciplinary, project-based, and personalized. VERSO will be fully accredited by WASC, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

POST PANDEMIC EDUCATION

by *Waleska Nascimento*

It doesn't seem that the world we are going to disembark after the pandemic is the same world we left. The virus originating in the interior of China shook the planet and quarantined the population. The virus arrived leaving the future behind, with plans, works, commitments and projects suspended. Since March 11th, when WHO declared the new coronavirus pandemic, life has changed dramatically.

Suddenly, we face one of the greatest crises in recent human history. There are thousands of victims, a collapse in the health systems, a legion of unemployed, closed borders, children without classes, remote working from home, a melted economy and stopped industries. The global crisis will have numerous negative impacts. Besides the deaths, we risk a generalised recession that will increase social inequality and leave vulnerable people in even more critical situations, and others in aggravating circumstances.

While humanity waits for a vaccine against the disease, we begin to experience a "new normal" – which seems to have nothing normal. The pandemic is reshaping the way we relate



to the world, to others and to ourselves. It is the moment to try to put a face on that future that awaits us – and scares. However, is important realise opportunities can also arise.

Regarding the education area, with the pandemic, millions of people are being educated thanks to the digital breach that has allowed develop new pedagogical approaches with the use of technologies. This involuntary situation brought innovation to a sector that is resistant to the winds of change. Ultimately, education will have to reinvent itself. The use of technology in the classroom and including the adoption of hybrid education. Perhaps, less expository classes and the student being at the centre of the learning process.

Undoubtedly, the appreciation for the teachers who were transformers agents needed to reinvent themselves during this challenging process. Allied to remote classes, the teachers followed a training course, where the students were encouraged to reflect, awake critical thinking, evaluate the results indeed. The teachers became cognitive architects and preachers of collective intelligence, after the period of isolation



Still, it is up to governments to provide investments and technologies to increase the reach of education through the digital platform. From now on onwards, the combination will be face-to-face teaching with remote learning. Never one will cancel out the other because in-person education is the basis of solid teaching. The teacher is the learning reference for the student always. Nothing may substitute it. It is paramount. As the diary interaction with the schoolmates as well. The beings have to socialise to build social bonds. The school environment is important for socio-emotional development. To communicate and express with others, to live with differences, to work in groups, to expose ideas and arguments, to be reliant to face problems. Digital education should work like a complementary tool.

Making part of continuous education, themes such as technology and affectivity, work, science, food, cities, new economies, spirituality, environment, behaviour, health, politic, a post-pandemic civilisation certainly will be more aware for the conscious choices can contribute to build a path to a more desirable future. Considering educational adaptation is the key for transforming the education system, the trend that has come to settle down and attend to the changes brought by the pandemic will be a watershed.

The essential relationships are more empathic and we will have the chance to create new narratives for the concept of humanity. It is possible to see beauty in the midst of chaos.

in which parents were able to follow the process of educating their children, these are changes that remain in the post-Covid-19 future.

It needs a world educational community that trains analytical skills from childhood, exercising a new way of thinking. Some schools already have dynamics to exercise data visualisation in their initial grades, making children develop critical and analytical sense from an early age. Without working on this analytical mentality, we will continue to repeat old protocols that lead us to already known errors. We will emerge from this crisis more analytically, using science and data as strong allies for the future.

The background of analytical culture is still incipient in the academic environment. Such a deficiency does not prepare students to think systematically, analyse the data, make decisions and monitor the metrics of the impact of actions. Usually students do this empirically, based on previous beliefs and experiences, but not on data. Analytical culture does not compete with creativity. Humanised decisions are enhanced through data guidance. It is a reality of almost all countries of the globe.



The name of this is hope and education is a great startup to multiply it. This moment makes me remember a speech of the youngest Nobel Prize winner, when she was 17 years old: "I will get my education – if it is in home, school, or anyplace." – Malala Yousafzai. This determination is inspiring.

Apparently, the storm will pass. When it passes, of course it will be different. Far being pessimistic, we have to be prepared for the next pandemic or any other break of the world. Yet, a valuable insight would be continuous motivating and developing of tools into educational methodology applied during the pandemic.

Nurturing global leaders at Denla British School DBS

With the Principal: Mr Mark McVeigh

What is the ethos of DBS?

DBS is dedicated to the development of an inspiring and nurturing environment in which students fulfil their unique potential. The DBS motto '*Always to Greater Things*' reflects the DBS commitment to continuous improvement, observed by the whole community; students, staff and parents.

Our vision is to Nurture Global Leaders through the 4 DBS Pillars:

1. An enhanced British curriculum
2. Academic excellence for all
3. Entrepreneurship and creative thinking
4. Community and global perspectives

The DBS vision is expressed in our core values: excellence, integrity, perseverance, respect, creativity, well-being, independence and leadership.

How do you measure the DBS success?

Having already successfully gained membership of CIS in February 2019, DBS had an excellent follow up CIS evaluation in February 2020.



DBS's success relies on the support of the entire community – teachers, students and parents. We work with all of the school's stakeholders to provide a school distinguished by academic excellence, co-curricular strength, creativity, global perspective and well-being. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge effect on the lives of students, staff and parents, but the community has adapted impressively to the changing economic and social tapestry.

What are the academic pathways at DBS?

Teachers' knowledge of individual students, inside and outside the classroom, has been a notable strength at DBS. We focus on tailored programmes that reinforce the teacher-student relationship in order to meet the individual needs of the students best. We support the academically ambitious by the development of a scholarship enrichment programme, and we also cater for students who are talented in other areas, to develop their strengths.

The IGCSE and A level route serves DBS students well. Certain universities are better suited to individual students, depending on courses on offer and threshold grades required. Effective preparation includes attribute testing, staff training, university tours, and interview guidance.

Why is well-being so important at DBS?

Well-being for students is a focus at all levels, building upon the already strong reputation of DBS in this area. At DBS, we recognise the importance



of equipping our students with the tools to cope with difficult situations in later life.

A focus on mindfulness, yoga, gratitude, kindness and reflection is a vital part of the strategy to support our students throughout the school, and to help them to become resilient.

What about education outside the classroom?

Modern physical education programmes, including co-curricular activities, are incorporated into the curriculum to meet the needs and interests of all students. DBS regards sport as a vital means of instilling leadership, teamwork and communication skills.

It is widely recognised that the Performing Arts offer students key life skills, too. We already have a strong Music provision at DBS, and we are developing the provision of Drama, so that performance opportunities will increase across the school, with a goal being the effective use of the terrific future 668 seat auditorium.

We and our students are very fortunate, and we have a responsibility to give something back. So, we challenge them to reach out to sections of our community through service.

What do you look for in teachers?

DBS is committed to recruiting, developing, and retaining the finest individuals to teach and challenge our students. We look for at least two years' teaching experience, a bachelor's degree and a teaching qualification, usually from the UK. Most teachers are from the UK, except our Thai and Mandarin teachers.

We recruit people who believe in the DBS vision and will promote it. Teacher retention is good, and staff well-being



is already seen as a strength at DBS. Continuing professional development is excellent, and is used to keep our teachers at the leading edge of educational theory.

How do you develop parental engagement?

The Friends of DBS committee is well established, and this group of parent representatives is a most useful communication conduit, and means of support for the school. Continuing regular communication with parents is vital, so that a meaningful partnership between home and school promotes the best education for the students.

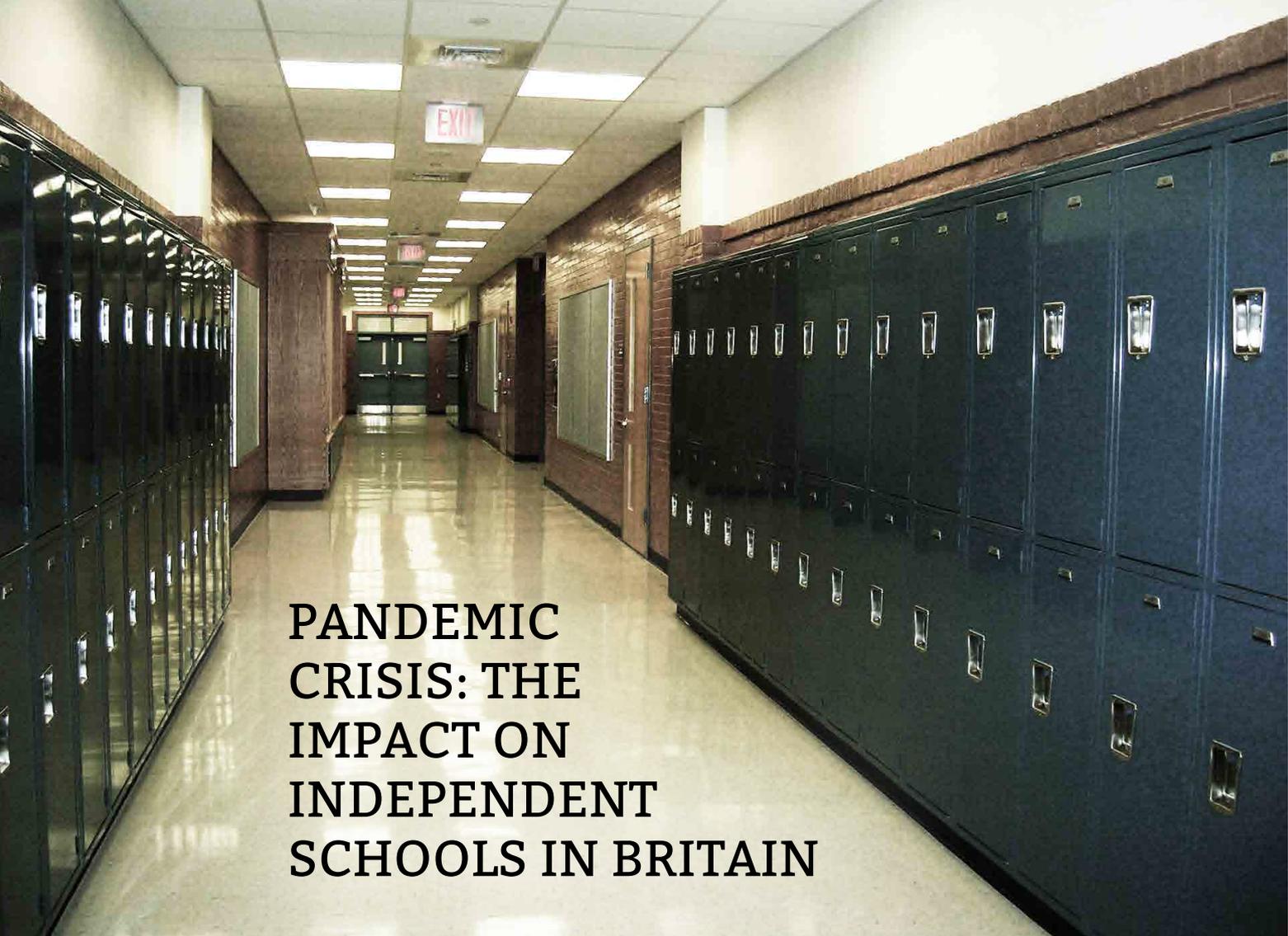
The DBS community has a distinctive ethos that is strong in character and welcoming to all. We are known for our inclusivity and nurturing environment. Our signature events like Denla Fest, Loy Krathong and Chinese New Year are opportunities for the whole community to come together in celebration of creativity.

And what of the future?

This year, we will start the building of a state of the art auditorium, with other performance spaces and practice rooms, and a designated senior school, with more teaching spaces and a sixth form centre.

We are establishing DBS as one of the best schools in SE Asia, delivering first class education, and enriched by effective collaboration with all stakeholders. I hope that readers will consider joining the DBS community, to share in our unique and ambitious vision. If you would like to see the school in action, you would be most welcome at one of our Open Days!





PANDEMIC CRISIS: THE IMPACT ON INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN BRITAIN

by *Hugh Cocke*

According to the Office for Budget Responsibility (the UK Government's independent economic watchdog), education will be the sector hardest hit by the coronavirus crisis. Whilst all schools are under enormous pressure as a direct result of Covid-19, the lockdown presents a formidable challenge to the financial sustainability of the Independent Schools' sector in the UK.

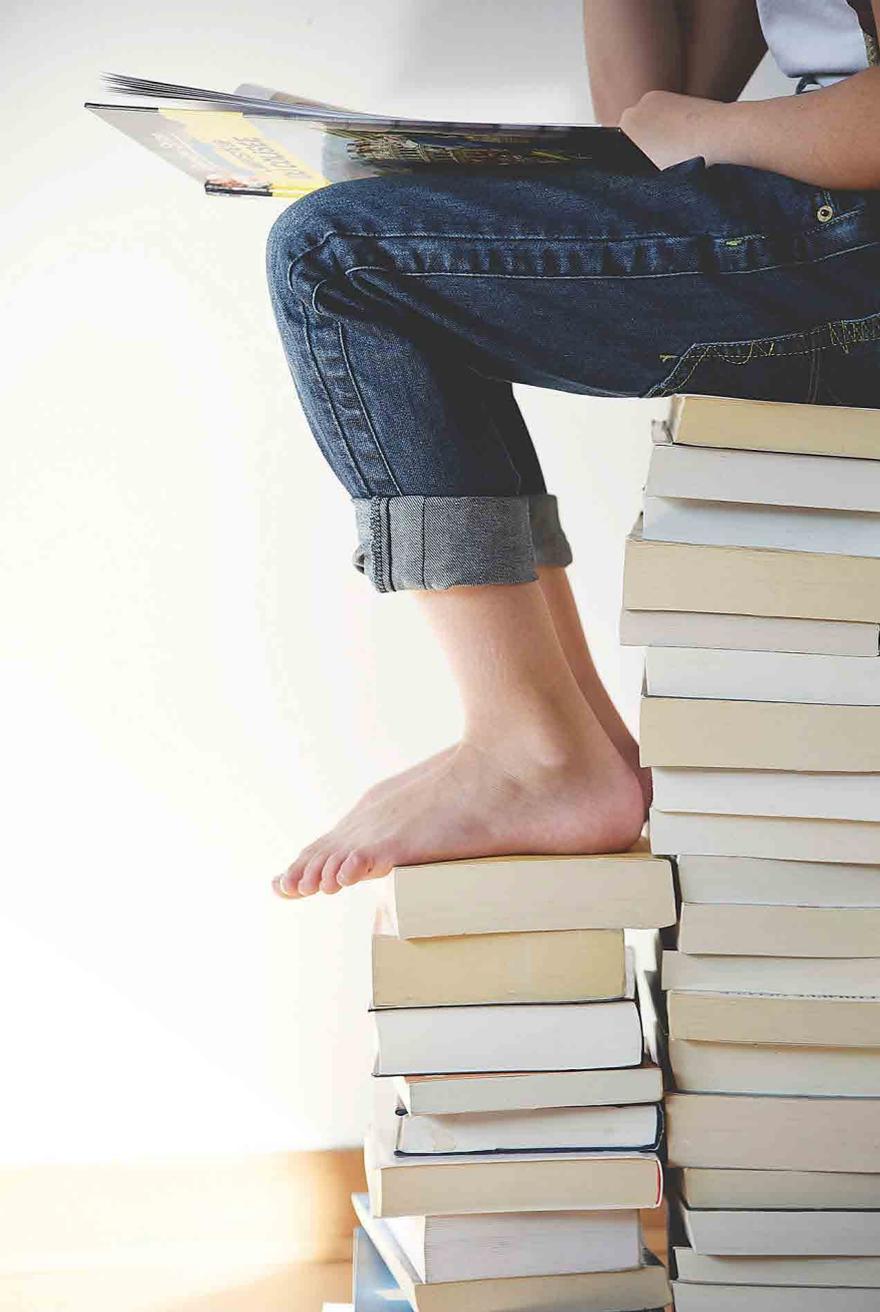
Before the advent of the pandemic, ever rising expenses in the sector were creating difficulties, which came to a head last year when the Teachers' Pension Scheme imposed a 40% increase in employers' contributions. The nationwide lockdown in March then brought about further problems, with pupils working from home and teaching staff switching to online teaching. This has resulted in schools facing a further financial squeeze from reduced fees from existing pupils, and a serious concern about pupil numbers for the start of the new academic year in September.

With the introduction of a home learning programme for the Summer Term (T3), the vast majority of Independent Schools have cut their fees, with c.10% the average reduction for day schools, and 30% for boarding. Loath to add to the financial strain on their fee paying families, the majority of whom are dual-income couples with their own financial pressures to consider, schools are also offering financial aid, extended credit, and many have also announced fee freezes

for next September. Such measures have been well received by parents but they will in turn create an additional squeeze on cashflow at a time when there is already great anxiety over future pupil numbers for the new academic year. There is increasing speculation that some British families will switch to the state sector to save money as their income falls, and boarding pupils from outside the UK are also likely to drop, with travel restrictions already undermining overseas marketing efforts.

International Schools throughout the world are facing identical challenges. The Board at Denla British School led the way in Bangkok offering their parents a 30% discount for their children throughout the school. The discount, which stands amongst the highest offered in Thailand, has been warmly received by the school's parent body who, as Dr. Temyos Pandejpong emphasises, did not sign up their children for a home learning programme – 'we decided to go ahead with the discount because we felt strongly it was the right thing to do. Online learning is not exactly what the parents signed their children up for and we understand that most parents are currently facing economic hardship and uncertainty, so we wanted to offer help where we could.'

With the postponement of non-urgent maintenance and refurbishment work, along with the furloughing of some employees whose work is not required while a campus is largely empty, schools have explored all possible ways in which they can mitigate the financial risks of the crisis, but in



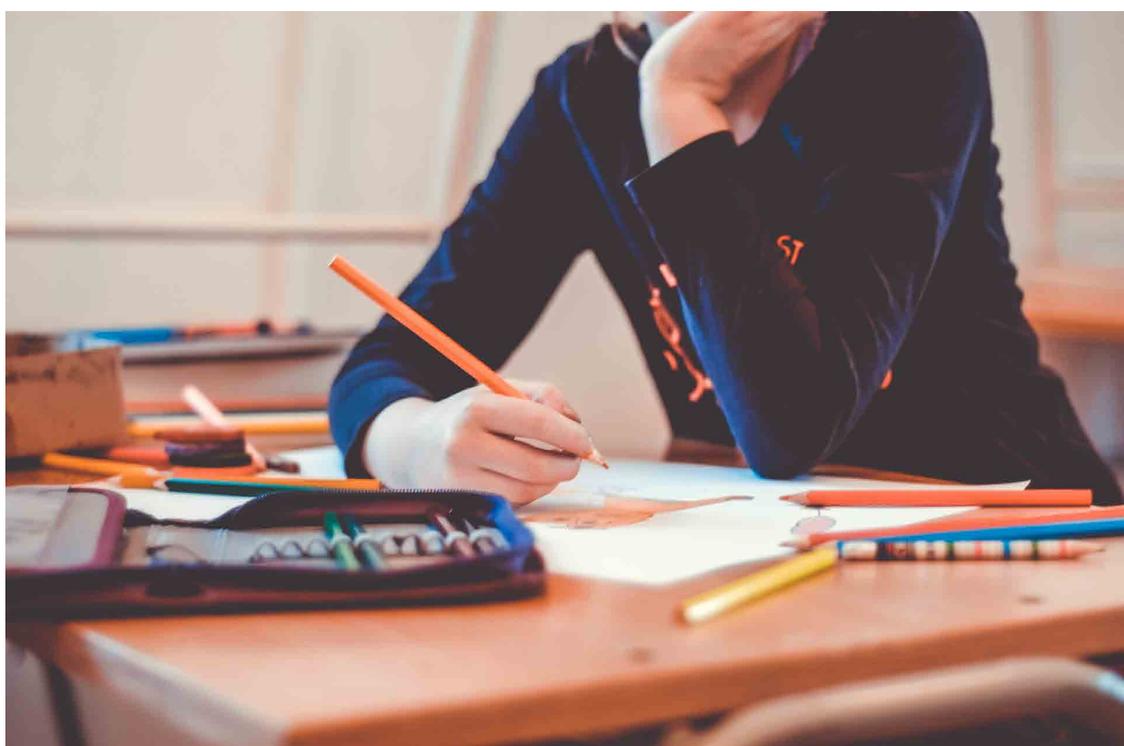
embarking 'on a road without maps'.

For all teachers, the Easter holiday simply did not happen as they prepared to transform both radically and rapidly their teaching programme in order to deliver a timetable of lessons online, whilst at the same time running to all intents and purposes, a reasonable co-curricular programme including music, activities, fitness and strength, and conditioning classes. As the term has progressed, parents have become more and more concerned about their children's mental health. Schools have responded by providing pastoral and wellbeing support for their pupils. In some cases, this has included tutoring across all year groups in both small groups, and for pupils in the Sixth Form, on a 1-1 basis. Regular House Meetings have taken place, and pupils have also been offered a number of mental health and wellbeing opportunities including remote access to their schools' counsellors.

There is clear evidence that the lockdown and school closure have been effective in reducing the transmission of the virus between families. The big debate in the UK now is how to manage the reopening of schools. While the majority of private school pupils will not see any significant lasting harm from the crisis and their academic progress will continue, the same cannot be said for pupils from less advantaged and more vulnerable backgrounds whose progress will more than likely regress if they have not attended school for many months. A Norwegian study has shown that for every week that a child from a low socio-economic background misses school, there is a permanent loss to their future earnings. It has been known from studies of the summer holidays that the children of less wealthy families suffer more from their absence from school than their wealthier counterparts.

reality margins are already very tight due to high fixed costs. Schools' anxiety over the financial impact of the pandemic is matched by some parents' frustrations concerning the provision of teaching remotely, discovering a discrepancy in what is being offered - a virtual duplication of the full day at one extreme and minimal contact or support at the other.

Independent Schools have been under pressure to justify their fees and keep parents onside, but the quality of the provision is often down to the schools' prior grasp of technology. With no collective memory of best practice, no historical evidence of the most effective techniques and no bank of psychological research, for many schools and their teachers it has meant





The reading ability of the wealthiest children continues to improve over the summer holidays. Literacy for the poorest falls and their numeracy declines even faster. Returning to school has therefore become a matter of social justice. The reopening of schools would also kick start the country's economy by allowing parents to return to work. For schools, however, the management of their pupils is anything but straightforward with numerous key issues to overcome including the retaining of social distancing of pupils and their teachers, not to mention the parents and grandparents who twice a day drop off and collect their children. Gavin Williamson, the Education Secretary, has made it very clear that he does not want schools to reopen until it is 'safe' and there are many parents who are alarmed at the health risk if children return too soon. There is therefore a wide belief that schools will not open until scientific advice indicates it is the right time and that could well be at the end of the summer holidays in September.

As a result, the virus will continue to have an enormous impact on all schools in both the short and long term. Views have changed rapidly over the last few months. Pupils have reported some benefits of the lockdown, including the opportunity for independent learning and being able to work at their own pace. There have been many examples of pupils' selflessness throughout the crisis: pupils have been keen to play their part in the local community by raising considerable funds for the NHS, making face masks and visors for local hospitals and care homes, and looking out for their elderly neighbours, providing groceries, medicines, company-albeit from a socially safe distance – and other essentials to folk they may never have met before.

For many teachers, the crisis has resulted in the opportunity to learn more about 'edtech' and to being more creative and inventive in their lesson planning and problem solving. Having been fully involved in their children's home learning programme, parents' respect for the teaching profession will have increased. But there is no getting away from the unprecedented scale of the challenge facing the Independent Sector - their lowest ebb since 1940 when the war brought several schools to their knees. A full scrutiny will need to take place when a clearer picture develops at the start of the new academic year. With a potential drop in pupil numbers in September, the subsequent loss of revenue could have a debilitating blow on the sector. Like all businesses, schools are having to adapt to a new world. A robust strategy will be required, along with a thorough and painstaking review of resources, in order to move forward as an economically sustainable business, driven ultimately by the strong desire to continue to deliver a high quality education – an education programme which is respected and envied throughout the world.

About the author: Hugh Cocke taught in UK Independent Schools throughout his teaching career. He was Headmaster for twenty-one years of two leading boarding Preparatory Schools in Suffolk and West Sussex. During his final year at Brambletye, he won the prestigious 'Tatler Award for Best Head of a Prep School 2011'. On retirement, he was invited by the Pandejpong family to become an Advisory Board Member for the Denla British School, Ratchaphruek Road, Nonthaburi, Bangkok www.dbsbangkok.ac.th



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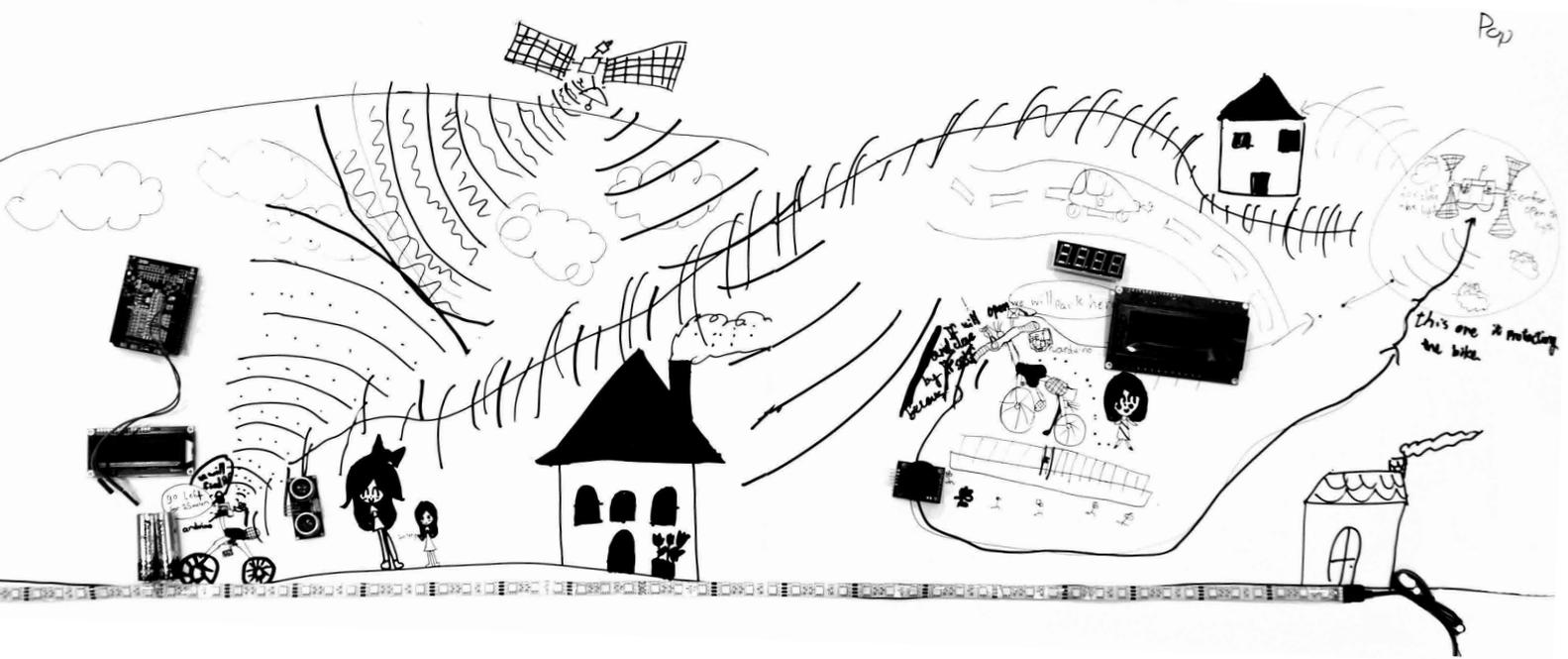


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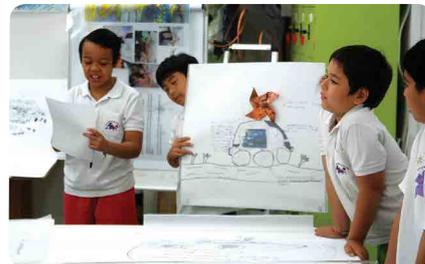
DESIGN FUTURES

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
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elc international schools

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The Purple Elephant 55
Ages 18 – 36 months

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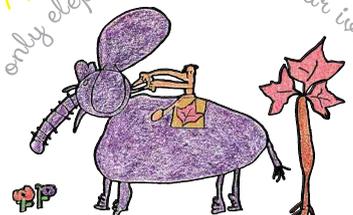
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only elephants should wear ivory



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by *Bea Toews*

I live near the ocean, about eighty kilometres from the city of Melbourne where my son and his family live. I have not seen my son and his family (except on messenger) since March 16. Neither have I seen my sister in law and her family who also live in Melbourne.

That's not a long time: I am often abroad for much longer than that.

However, there is a grandson, just 80km away and I can't reach him. He has just decided, to become a naturalist. The first animal on his list since he decided on his career, two days ago, is a possum.

He has the equipment – a bag, a torch and a water bottle (and a beanie, as the nights are chilly here as winter approaches). He has a notebook and pencil just in case anything needs writing down. He is ready to go. He really does not mind the lockdown and being out of school, as he is the centre of his family's attention and that is always wonderful for a six year old! I would like to go exploring with him.

It's pitiful for me that he is so close and he is as far away as if I was in Bangkok. Could I sneak into town to see him? Apparently, we are not to be driving out of our postal zones and the fine is 1,600AUD. The Aussie dollar is very weak right now, but still?



And when/if I reached their home in Melbourne, would my son and his wife let me in? I'm in the over 70 bracket and another older grandson has contact with the public. They sent the photos I have included and they phone often and we FaceTime: but it is still not the same.

Not only that, but as an ex teacher I could be teaching the child while his parents work. But no, I am here alone with a list of things to do to keep me occupied.

Not far from my grandson's home is the home of my sister in law. She and I walk the beach near me, do jigsaw puzzles and play Sudoku, cook and eat, talk about family – do all the family things for women of our age, in short. I am very fond of her, initially because she reminded me of her brother

(my husband): now for herself. Her husband had his 86th birthday and I could not be there. His visitors came one at a time and sat 2 metres from him. He had a cake for two. Quite unlike the other family birthdays for which this family is famous.

One of her grandchildren is my goddaughter. She cannot drive out here and I cannot get into the city to see her. We had a conference WhatsApp call on Easter Sunday but that is as close as we have been sadly.

Would I have been better sheltering in place elsewhere? Perhaps. If it was a warm place, certainly. Would I have been as safe? Perhaps. If I was self-isolating, certainly.

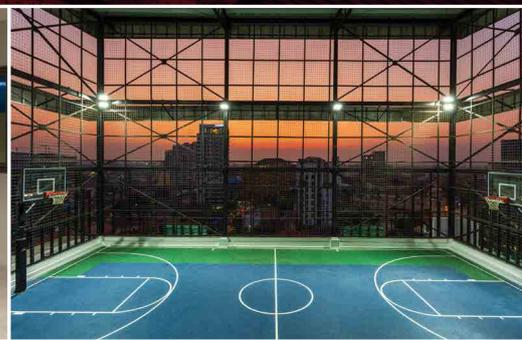
But here I am! So near, and yet so far from some of the ones I love.





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China: every mile a memory

by Arlene Rafiq



It is during this time of the pandemic that I thought of writing about China as I remembered. So many negative stories have been in the news about China that I feel it is going out of hand. I worked for the Chinese for 21 years in my youth and I have the most memorable time with them. Whatever I know in business administration came from my previous employers and not from the four years of college education. It is to their credit what I have become today whether in the field of business, entertainment and even writing skill. So it is not surprising why I chose to visit China for the first time.

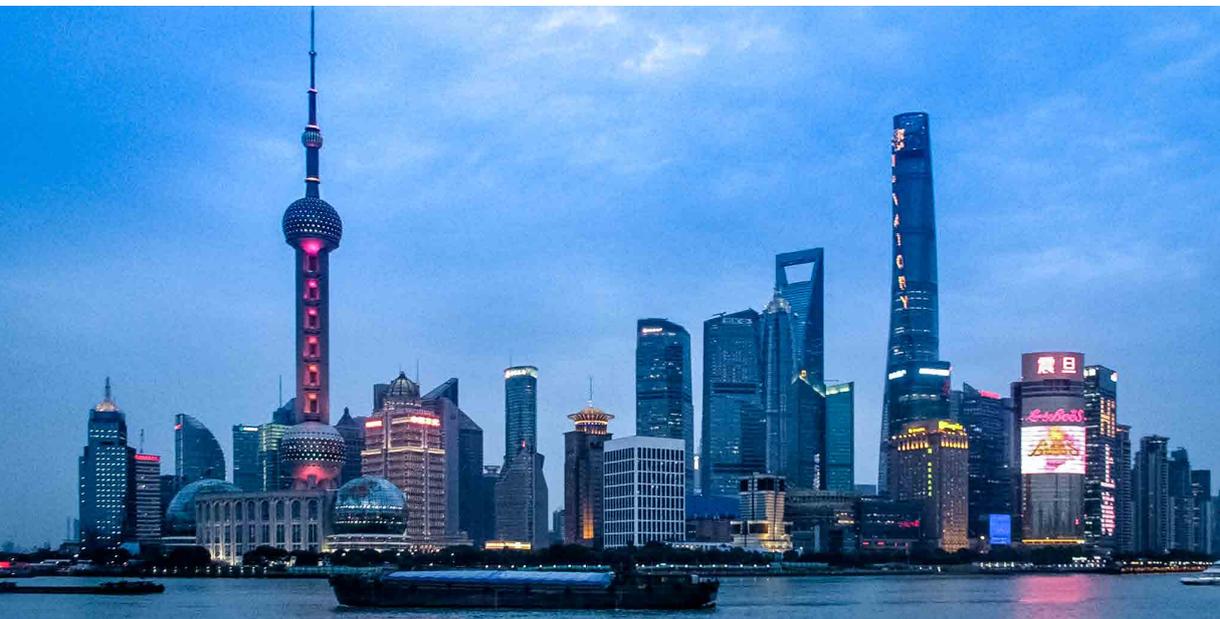
My China trip gave me an opportunity to explore one of the oldest civilisations and one of the greatest travel destinations in the world. The humongous population of over a billion inhabitants invites culturally curious visitors like me with so much enthusiasm. The spring (April-May) and Autumn (September-October) are indeed beautiful times of the year to visit China. While there are a thousand images that come to mind those images often include sunshine,

people in the park doing tai-chi, blue skies or just people sitting outside watching others or looking to kill time.

Our first stop was Shanghai. Everything around me is impressive. There are so many wonderful things to see in Shanghai, an extremely walkable city. It is modern and can be likened to Paris or New York in terms of modernity and impressive skylines. It's a perfect place to stroll and explore some of the historic remnants of the city or just watch the world go by as you sit in one of the parks. Shanghai is truly one of the most beautiful and unique cities in the world. I especially enjoyed the waterfront promenade lined with colonial era buildings. Looking at the futuristic skyline, it's hard to believe that just about a little over thirty years ago, this place used to be all farmland. I was like a child in fairyland enjoying the fantastic lightshow at sunset and the amazing tower illuminated with "I (heart) Shanghai" messages.

On our second day, we explored Shanghai's famed Nanjing Road. It is the main shopping road in Shanghai and the busiest. Walking this packed pedestrian only road is like

total madness. It is a huge place with everything and anything. It's like Bangkok's Chatuchak Market in terms of size and crowd but uncovered. There are hundreds of businesses on the road offering superior quality products and new fashions. Traditional stores and specialty





a must see attraction in Huangpu district. This exquisite garden with a beautiful layout and stunning scenery made it one of the highlights of my visit. The location has a wonderful mix of things to make you happy. We also visited Jing'an Si Temple which means tranquil and peaceful temple. Apparently, this is one of the most famous temples in Shanghai. Jing'an Temple is a holy place for both Buddhism and Taoism, boasting the largest jade Buddha in China. If you want to see a glimpse of China during the olden times, this is the place to be.

shops selling silk goods, jade, embroidered slippers, wool and even hardware products. Looking around, they also have a variety of snacks like wantons, traditional cakes like meat filled mooncakes, sticky sweet rice dessert. There is something for everyone whether food, clothes, knick-knacks or whatever you fancy. Truly a shoppers' paradise.

It was past noon when we decided to take a bite and we thought what better way to see the real culture but to go where the locals eat. We found this hole in a wall restaurant that had all the food that I am familiar with. We sat and ordered food and that is when



confusion started. Everything of course is written in Chinese so we relied on pointing out the food pictured on the menu. It wasn't bad at all... we actually thoroughly enjoyed our lunch.

There is an abundance of parks and squares to discover in Shanghai. Many of which you will stumble upon when trying to find something else. If you are a first timer in Shanghai and still trying to figure out, keep an eye on Yuyuan Garden. A place not to be missed. It has an interesting ambiance of typical pagoda structures, bright red lanterns, beautiful landscape and a Dynasty teahouse. YuYuan Garden means Garden of Happiness and it is easy to see why. It is

Five days is really not enough when visiting China. You will hardly scratch the surface. We had to make the most of our visit because you will never know when the next one would be or if indeed there is going to be any future visits.

Lucky to have the chance to include Beijing in this

visit. I had to see three of China's widely recognised places of great interest like the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and Tiananmen Square, otherwise it does not seem complete. Off to Beijing!

The Great Wall has an incomparable symbolic significance in

the history of China. Its purpose was to protect China from outside aggression, but also to preserve its culture from the customs of foreign barbarians because its construction implied suffering. Our 24 year old guide, Roma Lammar, said that at least 1 million workers died whilst constructing, and were buried in the Great Wall. The Great Wall has been rebuilt, maintained, and enhanced; the majority of the existing wall is from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). I could only reach up to the first tower. The uneven stairs and laid stones make it very difficult to climb. I was short of breath, to say the least.





But to set foot on this magnificent wonder of the world was to me a great 'once in a lifetime' experience.

The entrance to the Forbidden City is through Tiananmen but Tiananmen and Tiananmen Square are two different structures. Tiananmen is the front entrance to the Forbidden City, and the entrance to the Imperial City, where the Forbidden City is located. Separated from Tiananmen just across the street is the Tiananmen Square. The square contains the Monument to the People's Heroes, the Great Hall of the People, the National Museum of China, and the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong. But perhaps it is best remembered by most of us as the venue of the 1989 protests where hundreds of protesters died.

The Forbidden City was also built during the Ming Dynasty – actually in 1407 and completed in 1420. It covers an area of approximately 780,000 square kilometres. It is the biggest and best preserved imperial palace in China. The huge complex has four gates but visitors most of the time enter through



the Tiananmen area or the Gate of Heavenly Peace. In the outer court are three huge buildings. This is where the Emperor conducts his state affairs or official ceremonies. The first hall is the most important and largest structure in the Forbidden City. The second hall was the resting place of the Emperor before a scheduled grand event where he rehearses his speeches or presentations. The last hall or known as Hall of Preserving Harmony is reserved for banquets. There are more to see in this humongous complex such as the beautiful Imperial Garden and even more magnificent buildings in the inner court. It needs far more than a day to complete a proper tour of the Forbidden City.

humongous complex such as the beautiful Imperial Garden and even more magnificent buildings in the inner court. It needs far more than a day to complete a proper tour of the Forbidden City.

The food experience in China is not exactly what I heard from other people. They may have gone to very remote parts of China. To me, it was interesting to say the least. If you are a street food lover and relish the experience of new food tastes, try different kinds of food when you visit China. Let me just remind you that I have noticed that they do not believe in an additional sauce for dipping fried foods or dim sum. That gives me a big thumb's down. What I had enjoyed very much though was the



Hot Pot and of course the famous Peking Duck.

The day went by smoothly. With my sister, we explored the city which to us was the China that I had seen and remembered from the many historical books I had read. It is ancient and it felt eerie at the same time but to my amazement, no one bothers anyone else.

In every corner there is a map of the area although written mostly in Chinese. One has to review the illustration to see where you are, where you came from and where you are going. It is actually a very efficient map, that despite the fact that you do not read Chinese, you will understand the whole thing. Walking aimlessly, we decided to try the food at this very simple restaurant. Food here must be good because it had so many customers. The restaurant was like a museum because they had restored the ancient structure and décor of Old China.



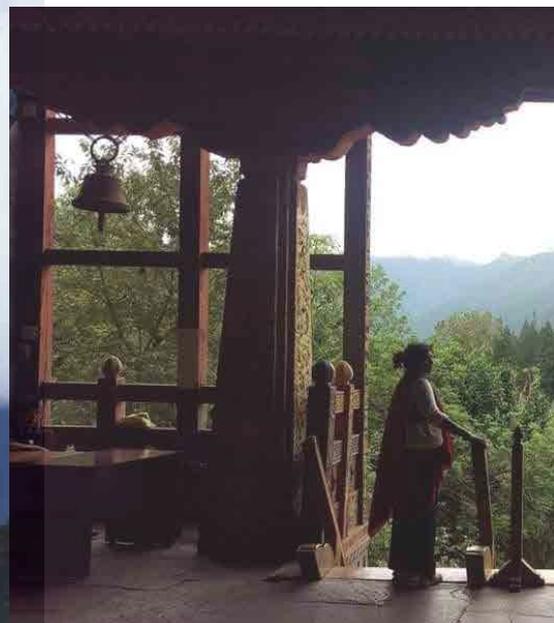
As the saying goes, "All good things must come to an end" and so my wonderful trip to China had to come to an end to but I promise to visit again and next time to the remote part of China to explore the neighbouring villages hopefully free from the deadly virus. We ended our trip having a nice Hot Pot dinner.

感謝您度過美好的時光，中國

Visiting Chinese, especially the seniors, had tears in their eyes because what they saw reminded them of their hard life in the past. There are private rooms that showed the sleeping area of the old people and their little kitchen which brought back old memories. The food was excellent as I expected.



Bhutan: Tranquility on floating clouds



by Kamalini Natesan

We start off on a good note – abundant joy. A rhythmic beat to our step and a song in the heart; we are en route to the airport to catch a Druk Air flight to Paro, in the land of mystical mountains, Bhutan. Splendour awaited us, we were told.

Our excitement is palpable and quickly transfers to each member. We are airborne.

As usual, I have done no homework and left it all to destiny. I so firmly subscribe to travelling to a place fresh, unstudied, and ready for the newness of it all. It works sometimes, and occasionally it doesn't. Drukpa Kagyu (Mahayana) Buddhism is the state religion, I have known. As an ism, it has always drawn me, and my philosophies have meandered around karma, Sutras propagated by Lord Buddha, and the allure of timelessness has fascinated me. My noble thoughts are rudely broken as a child prods me hard. I turn and view the snowcapped ranges. I stare at Divinity, my heart pounding. I automatically fish out my mobile. And yes,

I manage a few blurred shots which are good enough to put a spring to my already overworked heart. They pass by all too soon, and I resettle I am a huge sharer – I like sharing it all. Bhutan beckoned.

We land. We emerge from the airport - fresh enough to trek. At the airport we are greeted by Tashi Delek everywhere, hands folded, meaning – may your coming be auspicious to our country – welcome. Quaint! Thereafter greeting us is a burly Bhutanese driver come guide, even as he stands, hands folded, beside a plush car. He is Campchu, attired in his country's costume to boot, it is the Gho, a knee-length robe some sort of a kimono that is tied at the waist by a traditional belt known as Kera. The pouch in front was used to carrying a dagger, and food bowls. Campchu is carrying his wallet and mobile in it now, and some betel nut, Doma, he enjoys chewing it he informs us. We don't conceal our delight, and set off to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. His smiling mien, and an impressive array of Hindi words, the songs he plays on his car stereo – all wrap us up in a genteel manner. Within minutes of our drive, we are gasping at the clouds that chase.

The air is fresh and unsullied. We hold our breath at every turn of a hill, witnessing the magical wispieness. There is absolute quiet within the interiors of our vehicle, a rare occurrence during a car ride en famille.

Once in Thimphu, we are ushered into a simple hotel. The gateway is embellished, like most gates seem to be, we later observe. The ladies at the reception, yet again, are in traditional attire the Kira, a long, ankle-length dress accompanied by a light outer jacket known as a Tego with an inner layer known as a Wonju. This elegance we witness, we wish to own.

Inside the hotel, we are made





Shabalay juma (Bhutanese sausages marinated in spices), and noodles are some favoured snacks. The buttered tea is a great way to wash it all down. We savour their food, again and again, as our taste buds are tickled, teased and taken.

The hillsides, I had observed during our first drive, host a series of fluttering white flags on tall poles, in lots of twenties, even fifties. They flutter wildly, with the winds, almost ceaselessly. Later Campchu explains their meaning – whenever someone dies, these flags are planted on the hillsides as a mark of respect for the

captured in photographs, relics, and reams of written wisdom in calligraphic beauty. You name it, we find it – the Bhutanese culture aesthetically presented in a building that is not very large, much like everything else in this neat country. The size of the museum belies the magnitude of all that it houses. Whatever we actually envision is perhaps a minuscule of what is represented, centuries of trial and error, decade upon decade of sentinels against predators - against the onslaught of mankind itself. The Bhutanese are custodians of what we witness as their happiness in present day. We walk around dazed, taken in, aware that the four of us are separated by our individual fascinations. Once we have scoured the three floors, we come away knowing that Bhutanese Royalty lives well, humbly and enjoys the generosity of the bounty of nature. The people sure know how to respect and preserve it nature, as it was meant to be. We stand quietly and view the royal palace from a hilltop, admiring its ramparts.

In Thimphu all day, we grasp the meaning of Dzong, a word that resounds. There are many Dzongs in every town of Bhutan and the word conjures up the image of a pagoda-like building meant for quietude and prayer. The word literally means "the palace of great happiness or bliss". It means being fully immersed in the present, breathing in every moment and counting each as a blessing. As I look around me, I see a play of harmony, and warmth in their countenance.

Clouds afloat, with the sun, as playmate, in a perpetual game of hide-n-seek.



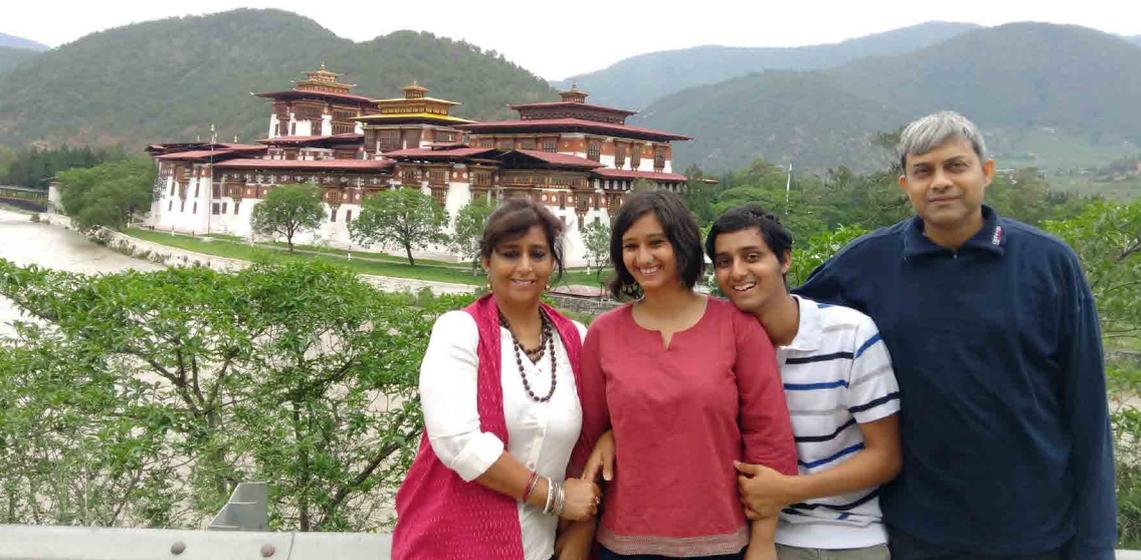
to walk up three flights of stairs, and they are steep. The frivolous play of clouds continues outside the glass windows. Far away an imposing Statue of Buddha, beckons. By dinnertime, we are impatient to sample Bhutanese fare. However the Indian food served in our hotel buffet is severely disappointing.

By the end of our trip though, we are addicted to Bhutanese food – Ema Datshi (chillies and cheese) and many different varieties of the same, momos (very different from those sampled in India) and red rice, often buttered, with a pleasant nutty taste, unlike brown rice. Cheese is made from cow's milk called datshi and is never eaten raw, and infuses the sauces with strong flavours. Zow shungo is a rice dish mixed with leftover vegetables, and a lot of stews are at our disposal. Chicken and pork are favourite meats.

dead, be it man, woman or child. I am humbled. I view them with much reverence. The hills are dotted with many such groupings of fluttering whites.

Our first morning is a lineup of unhurried activities: we are driven to the National Library and Archives of Bhutan, with the Royal family –





To our delight, we are driven to the Royal Textile Academy of Bhutan next. Daughter Ambika and I are completely taken up by the array of displayed looms. We could perhaps have just sat and meditated upon the weaves of silks and cotton threads, intertwined sophisticatedly. We have entered a world of impossible patterns, unique to Bhutan. Our minds plough through a labyrinth of motifs. The Bhutanese display at the museum of

folk art shows off their creative brilliance.

The Bhutanese skies seem to excel at this frolic.

Our next stop at the National Folk Heritage Museum takes us back in time. We hear huntsmen, as we hear the plodding of horses carrying them; we witness women pounding the millet and jowar, just as we observe many wooden mortars and pestles of varying sizes, some massive. The museum itself is maintained for real feel – no embellishments, no fuss over giving it a fancy makeover for tourists.

Our appetites are whetted, and we are ready to go shopping. We want to adorn ourselves with that which was on display. But our chauffeur insists that we await the morrow. He tells us that the township of Paro, and not Punakha town, our next stop, is a far better city, attuned to shoppers.

The narrow and dark staircases, with creaking boards, ensure that you are seized by the past. Garlands of garlic and red chillies adorn the entrance to the museum. We are walking through war zones as well, and see the crude weaponry then employed to slay the enemy. The tapestries are fine and the crafts, even finer. We see how looms were used to their maximum potential because there was in fact nothing else to clothe the tribes. Sheaths of handloom, designed aesthetically, are still loomed by the Bhutanese people. They proudly don their traditional attire handed down the ages, stunning and intricate as they are.

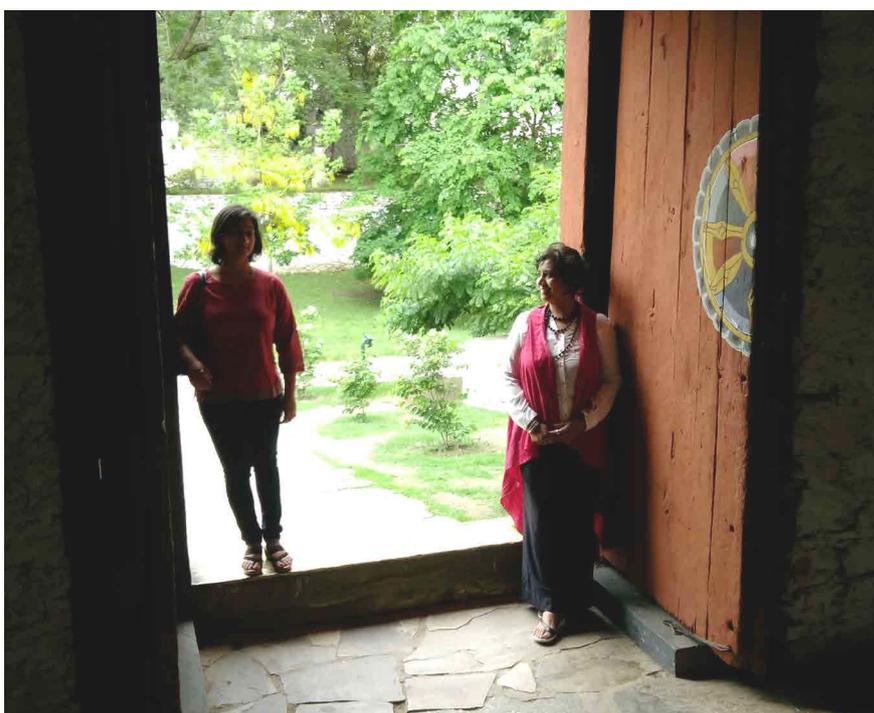
Our drive to Punakha, on the following morning, takes us on a winding path up the mountains – frenzied delights – clouds as travel mates. They are all around us, as we ride the Bhutanese mountains, tasting of pleasures unknown. However, not the entire journey is smooth, since the rains have left their footprints in broken bits. It also continues to rain in fragments. We arrive at the highest point of our journey, and pause to take it in. It is suddenly wintry cold, as biting winds come at us.

We are at Dochula Pass, lined with stupas, in their monastic hierarchy, en route to Punakha town. This little halt gifts us a quaint café, offering cookies with its strong coffee, made in modern coffee grinders, while you are regaled by the lush greens, and resident cloud cover. Mesmerised as we walk up to the Stupas, and look across green heaven, we are dazed into a kind of trance. For a moment time is suspended between heaven and earth. You are still even as the chilly wind blows your hair about your face and threatens to knock the air out of your lungs.

Oh, the magic of it!

En route to the Punakha valley, during our gradual descent, we are encouraged to stop at the botanical gardens by our guide. The dense garden swallows us - we meander around, admiring the flora, getting deeper and deeper, sucked in by the magic of it all. It is luscious and very damp. We sing, and allow ourselves the time to resonate with the spirit of the place. The limitless greens are different from what we've known. Bewitched, we return to our onward journey.

At Punakha, we find ourselves in a homely hotel with a vision of wondrous mountains facing



us from every open window. It drizzles on. We spend a quiet evening on the benches that dot the hotel's garden. Mystical strains of a flute-players magic keep up the magic. The air is drenched with more than the drizzle. We immerse ourselves in the experience.

Punakha is a sweet little valley town where we visit the Punakha Dzong. It is a truly handsome edifice.



Again, we lose ourselves and each other in its entrails. Colours resound and lend to its being a photographer's delight. The bridge that carries us to the Dzong is in itself a well-preserved Bhutanese 'relic'. We are told that this Dzong, where their King was wed, had been restored in 1994. It was the administrative centre and seat of the Government of Bhutan until 1955. We appreciate the information gathered, but prefer silence. The Dzong also houses the sacred relics of the southern Drukpa Lineage of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, a piece of information that excites me. The knowledge that I am so close to so much wisdom, is terribly enthralling.

Later we watch rafters on the

flowing river. The Dzong is located at the confluence of the Pho Chhu (father) and Mo Chhu (mother) rivers in the Punakha–Wangdue valley. The ambience permeates our pores.

Later we feast on momos, fried tomatoes and dried, roasted beans in Bhutanese style. The night is restful.

Next stop on our Bhutanese trail is the town of Paro, and the ride continues to be as exquisite as ever. We have driven there via Thimphu. Paro is where we had landed. Paro is where we will shop, and Paro is where we visit the Rinpung Dzong, a fortress-monastery overlooking the Paro valley. This monastery, built at first by Padma Sambhava at the beginning of the tenth century, conceals a long and hard history.

Paro is also where we make the tenuous climb to Paro Taktsang (also known as Tiger's Nest) a prominent Himalayan Buddhist sacred site and temple complex, located in the cliffside of the upper Paro valley.

Paro is the climax of our sojourn, and a heightened sense of adventure overcomes us.

Again, like Punakha, in this valley town, dotted with Dzongs and such like, our night halt is at a sweet little boutique hotel. The food is a superb blend of western, Indian and Bhutanese fare. An early start is a visit to Paro's National Museum, and as promised, we are dropped off to shop to our heart's content. Like lost cattle, we roam the main shopping street,



and feast our senses. We shop joyously, fingering all objects of Bhutanese origin, then imagining it adorning our home. We willingly empty our purses on Bhutanese fabric, artefacts such as brass teapots, a turtle in golden stone, wooden beads, prayer flags, metal prayer bowls with carved mantras, and embroidered bags. The most befitting memento is a Prayer Wheel in Jade, which is a true prize.

We turn in early since we are told that there is an arduous climb up to the Tiger's Nest very early the following morning.





There is a certain reverence that overcomes a person, when one achieves what one considers the impossible. The air is awash with gratitude. It is crowded, and yet one feels the triumph as one's own. I am alone. The arduousness of the climb bespeaks the tenacity of the monks. What inspires one to abandon 'normal' life and undertake such a life of solitude and hardship, I wonder aloud. We wish to spend the entire day up there, after all we had invested all of ourselves to get up here. The exhilaration of the experience lasts up until one has to take up the descent.

There are many legends that surround this Himalayan monastery, and Clint, a traveller writes, "The temple complex was first built in 1692 around a cave but it dates back to the 8th century as a mediation site. This cave is where it is said Guru Padmasambhava meditated for three years, three months, three weeks, three days and three hours in the 8th century. According to legend, Padmasambhava flew to the cave on the back of a tiger."

We are to begin the trek at 6am in the morning, armed with but our willpower and eager souls. Our guide tells us that it should not take us more than two hours to get up there, and less to climb down. What we find, leaves us speechless.

We start our climb rather merrily, with songs upon our lips. After an hour's climb with great energy, we are breathless. Our guide is losing patience and wants us to speed up I suspect, such as he demonstrates. It is only halfway up, he reminds us. I am scared – will I make it up at all? By this time, we should have at least had a glimpse of the Nest. The children do not complain, but they aren't skirting up either. The weather keeps up and doesn't add to my anxiety. There is no path drawn, and it is rough. I watch people pass me by, some far older, and many on horseback. My pride doesn't permit me to choose a ride. I power on, but with increasing difficulty. We finally arrive at a point whence a meandering staircase reveals itself, as does the monastery, the Tiger's Nest, hanging off a cliffside. It is the most unbelievable sight! It hits my gut, in a momentum that steals my breath away, even as I am forced to breathe harder. The exhaustion vanishes, and I stretch myself toward it, giving it my all. The green mountains behind it, in front of it, around it... they all add to the mystique on display. It is ethereal. Cemented to my spot as I behold the Nest. Heaven! I cannot for the life of me imagine how one would have built it, but that is all logic. This Monastery defies gravity.



After just over one wonderstruck hour we venture to undertake the descent.

We make it down with difficulty. It begins to rain, and the mud beneath our feet glistens unsteadily. We take over three hours to return to our car, where awaits us our sulky driver come guide. One look at my limp and my husband's crackling knees and he is all empathy.

We leave Bhutan with a plethora of experiences, peace and many unanswered questions. Yet when we arrive

at our city dwelling, the questions go up in smoke, leaving a profound sense of harmony in its place. We sense Paro, Thimphu and Punakha embedded within us, and Tiger's Nest, that has made its home within our collective soul.



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Pu Chi Fa: Golden sunrise in a sea of mist

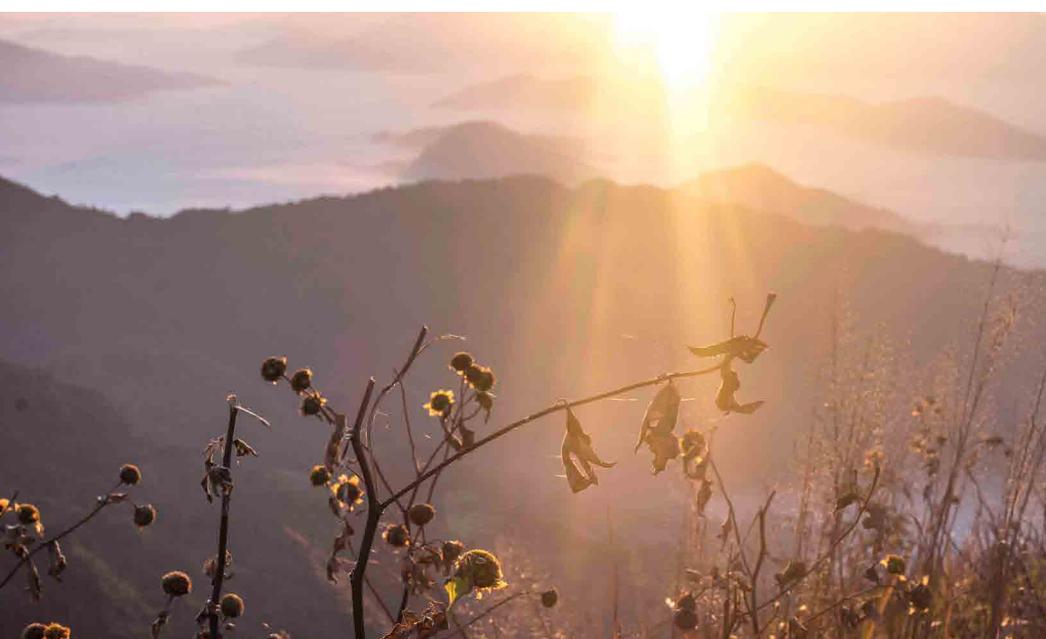
by Aparna Sharma

*"We do not inherit the earth
from our ancestors, we borrow
it from our children"*

While I was standing on the summit of Phu Chi fa waiting for the sun to rise, I could not help looking at this amazingly beautiful planet and it pained me immensely to think about the rate at which we are destroying it. It felt surreal to stand so close to a mist of floating clouds and watch the beautiful sun turn the earth into shades of orange with her gold droplets.

This beautiful hill station is located in northern Thailand near the border of Laos. I was told that it is still considered an undiscovered place so I was super excited but when I climbed the summit at 5.30am, there were so many people there. It is a popular destination amongst locals and I saw some foreign visitors too so I would not really call this destination unexplored but that should not be a big concern if you really want to visit. It is easy to get there by car from Chiang Rai, I stayed there overnight to ensure I was on time for the sunrise. Standing and watching the sun rise over the misty mountain was such a surreal experience, it was one of the most glorious displays of nature I have witnessed. My pictures can never do justice to what I witnessed with my own eyes.

I was told that the name Pu Chi Fa translates to, "The mountain that points to the sky" and it definitely lives up to its name. When you are viewing the sunrise from the top of the summit, it literally feels like you are in a dream. I spent some time there after sunrise too, a lot of people start leaving after the sunrise but I really enjoyed staying there and clicking pictures. You can walk around the summit and discover different paths, I walked down one path and tried clicking some pictures. This is a dream destination for landscape photographers and if you can get there very early, it is possible to set up a tripod right in the front. The change in colours and the way the clouds come out after the sunrise is interesting to watch.





The best way to go there is by car from Chiang Rai, it's roughly 2.5 hours. If you want to watch the sky turning from dark purple to pinkish orange, it is recommended to reach there as early as possible depending on the time of the year. You can get this information through local people or websites, I went there in December and the weather was a little chilly. I stayed at a local hotel, there are lots of options for tents too if you are interested in camping overnight.

My schedule to visit Phu Chi Fah in mid-December looked like this:

4.45am: wake up

5:15am: Leave our guesthouse in a songthaew for the summit, the guesthouse owner had her own songthaew. It took 10 mins.

5:25am: Begin the 760 metre hike up the Phu Chi Fa Forest Park trail (15 to 20 minutes)

5:40am: Reach the summit, wait for the sunrise and click photos of the summit's silhouette





6:55am: Sunrise is complete!

7:00am: Stay and watch the mist clear up around the mountain tops

8:00am: Start walking down the summit (20 minutes)

8:20am: Take a songthaew ride back

My biggest disappointment was that there is still so much single use plastic being used by all the resorts there. It is important for travellers and travel makers to protect the environment, it pains me to see the lack of education and understanding that nature needs to be loved and cared for by human beings.

I carried my own water bottle and strongly recommend to avoid single use plastic when you travel to the mountains.





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ASEAN MEKONG INTEGRATION

by Jeremy King

The “Association of South-East Asian Nations” or “ASEAN” was formed from the ASEAN Declaration in Bangkok on 8th August 1967 (as a successor to the Association of SE Asia, “ASA” in 1961), and is just four years younger than the EEC (now the EU). ASEAN is now a grouping of ten geographically, culturally and politically diverse countries, although initially consisted only of those countries which avoided any socialist experimentation: Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia.



The likelihood is that ASEAN will narrow the gap between its nominal and PPP GDP over the next few years, generating substantial gains for investors.

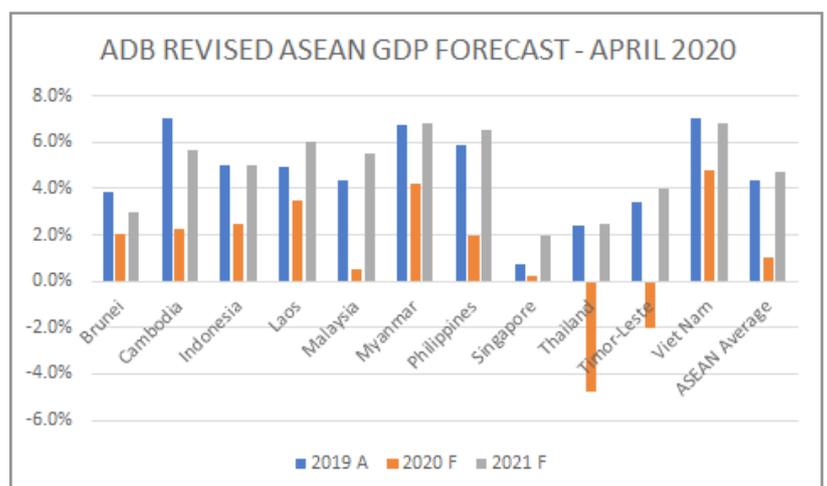
What is common to all ASEAN countries is the agricultural economic base (except for Singapore & Brunei) and their consequently more manageable workforces, their Chinese (mostly Fujian) diaspora business culture, and their Japanese/Taiwanese/ Korean led industrial investment. The Mekong countries share a common Buddhist heritage, but are a mixture quasi-democratic, and factional 1-Party States.

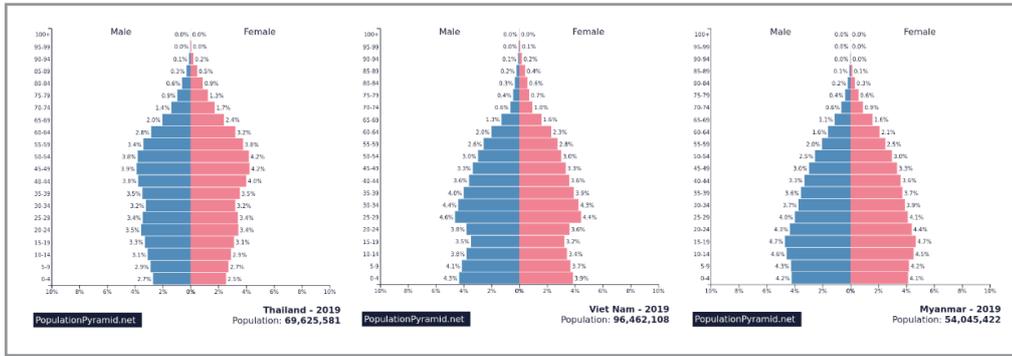
The oldest cultures in ASEAN, the Mekong countries are the least developed, due to their proximity to China and its socialist sphere of influence from 1950-1980. That proximity is now a positive as China embarks

KEY ECONOMIC DATA FOR GREATER MEKONG REGION							
	Cambodia	Laos	Myanmar	Thailand	Vietnam	Guangxi	Yunnan
Pop (mn)	16.2	7.0	53.7	69.4	95.5	46.0	45.9
Land Area (sq km)	181,000	236,000	678,000	513,000	331,000	237,600	394,000
Median Age (yrs)	24.0	21.4	28.0	37.0	30.0	37.0	37.0
GDP PPP (USD)	4,354	7,441	6,634	19,017	5,612	6,270	5,612
Market Cap (USD bn)	6.0	0.9	1.0	500.0	132.0	302.0	245.0
MCap as % of GDP	25.0%	5.0%	1.5%	99.0%	54.0%	-	-
GDP Growth (% pa)	7.0%	6.7%	6.3%	2.3%	6.8%	6.6%	8.9%

Most of the Mekong countries joined later: Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos.

ASEAN has 651 million people and a land mass of 4.5 million sq kms (50% larger than India and one-half the size of China), and a nominal GDP of US\$3 trillion (on a PPP basis 4x higher at \$13 trillion) and US\$ 4,600 nominal GDP per capita. By comparison, the EU has twenty-eight countries, 513 million people, and an almost identical land area of 4.48 million sq kms, but it has a nominal GDP that is 7X higher than ASEAN at US\$19 trillion (or \$23 trillion translating to just 2X on a PPP basis), and a US\$37,300 nominal GDP per capita.





on its “Belt & Road” initiative and its manufacturers rush to avoid rising labour costs and US/China trade friction, diversifying production to Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. Currently the former closed countries, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos, “continental ASEAN” or the old Indochina, are now leading ASEAN in growth from their lower economic bases, and after a temporary lapse in 2020, are all expected to be back to 6-7% growth rates in 2021.

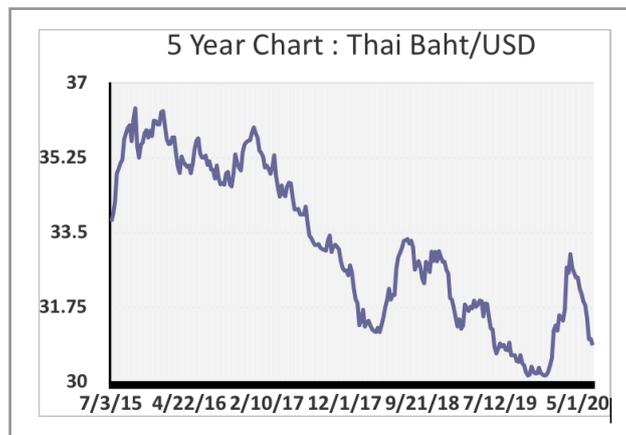
Demographics is a key determinant of economic activity, with Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia with consumption rich median 35-45 year old population pyramids; Philippines and Vietnam progressing 25-35 year median; Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia 15-25 years, still too young to consume but sources of abundant labour. As the general populace becomes more demanding, all political leaders must turn to somewhat populist policies. This will ensure many decades of growth ahead.

Mekong countries are generally emulating the successful Thai economic model, beginning with agriculture and food processing, then moving on to increased tourism, export driven manufacturing, and finally domestic

its excellent infrastructure and human resources, has a good chance to maintain its lead in the service sector, as a hub for tourism, entertainment, retail and healthcare, together with having numerous international schools and services for regional headquarters.

However, given Thailand’s legacy exchange controls, Singapore and Hong Kong will likely retain the crown

for financial services and banking for the region. Due to their large foreign exchange reserves and surpluses, the Thai Baht and Singapore Dollar will likely remain strong as haven currencies. Also, Chinese initiatives like RCEP, Belt & Road, and the Asian Infrastructure Bank will encourage more transactions to be done in regional currencies. US Dollar dependence may gradually wane.

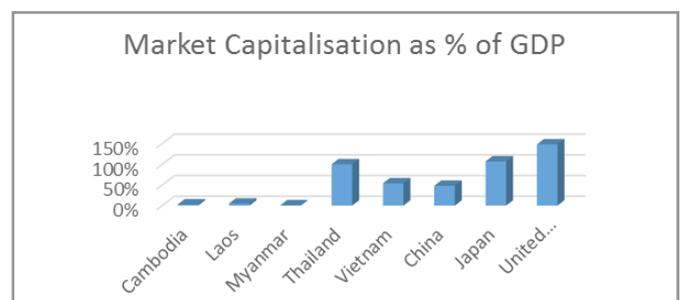


The extraordinary global political reaction to COVID has reinforced existing trends towards a tri-polar world: Asia dominated by China/Japan; Europe/Middle East/Africa; and North America (+South America). Given the extremely low incidence of COVID in SE Asia in particular, governments will likely soon form sub-bubbles, starting with the Mekong Region “bubble” (CLMV in Thai speak). Thailand ranks 94th in the COVID table, Myanmar 182nd, Laos 187th, Vietnam 188th, and Cambodia 189th. Border trade (already 20% of Thailand’s total trade), and intra-regional services will enjoy a quick resurgence.

The core ASEAN countries have long established stock markets, with Indonesia’s founded in 1912, Philippines 1927, Thailand in 1962, Malaysia 1964, and Singapore opening in 1973. As with the new Mekong markets today, these markets started slowly and it took many decades for them to reach a true representation of their underlying national economies.

Intra-ASEAN Trade 2018 (% of Total)			
	Exports	Imports	Total Trade
Brunei Darussalam	31%	33%	32%
Cambodia	6%	56%	33%
Indonesia	23%	27%	25%
Lao PDR	47%	68%	58%
Malaysia	27%	29%	28%
Myanmar	31%	38%	35%
Philippines	16%	22%	20%
Singapore	29%	22%	26%
Thailand	26%	22%	24%
Viet Nam	8%	15%	11%
ASEAN	22%	24%	23%

Source: oec.world



**Total Return of ASEAN & MSCI Indices :
2010-2020**

	Currency	Total Return (%)
SET Index	USD	151.4%
VNINDEX Index	USD	91.2%
HSI Index	USD	71.5%
MXASJ Index	USD	80.2%
MISO Index	USD	33.3%

Source: Bloomberg - 24 June 2020

Many of the richest business families preferred to keep a low profile and investment in the capital markets were left to their second or third generation scions, who are now officially in charge.

The same pattern may follow in Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. Although we expect Myanmar to enjoy an accelerated progression due to its private sector need for capital, provided the appropriate incentives can be put in place.

A question I am often asked, is “Why do ASEAN stock markets tend to underperform their underlying economies?” For instance in the last 10 years from 2010-2020, ASEAN economies have averaged over +5% per annum GDP growth, but their stock markets increased just +3% per annum, with the Morgan Stanley total return MLSO Index gaining +33% in ten years. Over the same period Hong Kong’s HSI gained +71%. However the Mekong Indices have done much better, with Thailand’s SET Index +151% and Vietnam’s VNI Index +91%, so it is not true that all parts of ASEAN are perennial under-performers. In fact, ASEAN Index performance has mainly been dragged down by Indonesian and Malaysian currencies. Meanwhile, healthy surpluses have kept the Thai Baht and Singapore Dollar strong, with The Cambodia Riel, Laos Kip, and Vietnamese Dong essentially pegged to the US\$.

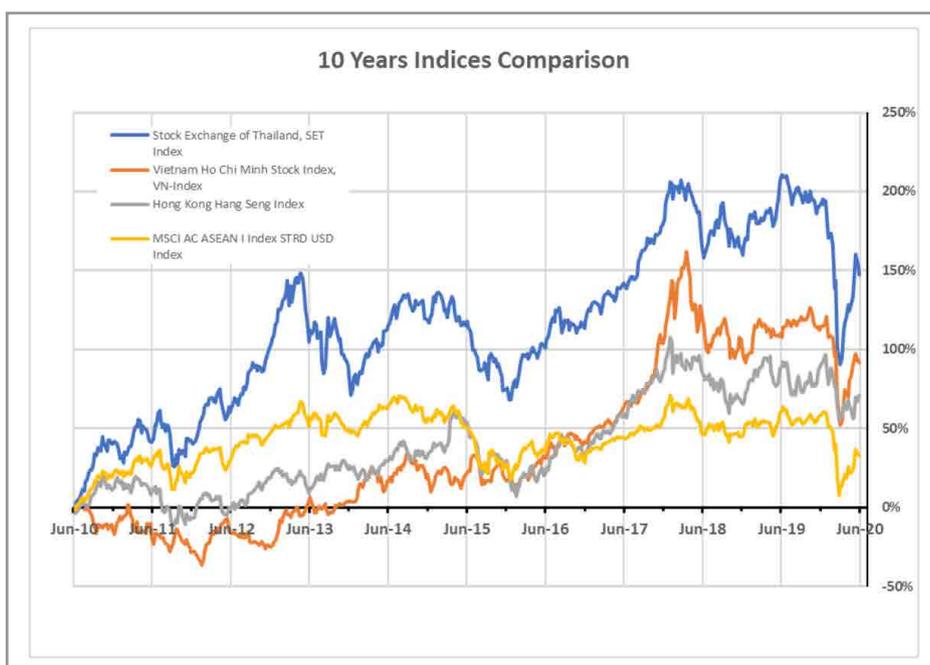
We should differentiate between corporate earnings growth and share price performance. Listed company earnings have grown +9% per annum for the last 10 years, easily outpacing the underlying 5% GDP growth. The fact that equity indices have only gained +33% in the same period, is an indication of valuation fluctuation on the back of global capital flows, local liquidity, impact of foreign exchange rates on these export driven economies and investor sentiment. Corporate earnings may themselves swing widely depending on the corporate discipline, leakage and accounting within particular companies.

The cyclicity of ASEAN in the past has meant that returns would be massively skewed by the timing of entry. The 1996-98 Asian Crisis and the 2008 global financial crisis amounted to major value resets, and the 2020 COVID shut-down created a fantastic buying opportunity in the midst of a financial panic and temporary economic dislocation. In SE Asia we do not expect the economic turbulence to be protracted, since government balance sheets are much stronger than ever before. Average government debt to GDP in ASEAN is less than 60% versus 100% in the UK and 108% in the US. In addition, foreign exchange reserves in ASEAN are over US\$ 1 trillion or 1/3 of total regional GDP versus China at 3 trillion or 25% of GDP. Similarly, total ASEAN debt (combined government and private) stands at a manageable 101% of GDP versus 203% in Germany, 303% in China and 310% in the US.

In the face of all these factors, a buy and hold or index/basket investment approach does not work as well as it does in more mature markets. ETFs are well established in Asia, but trading the swings has proved to be the best way to generate returns. The bargain levels of March 2020 may be gone, but the value opportunity and growth story remain intact.

A more active investment approach is required in ASEAN as in other parts of emerging Asia. The combination of diverse cultures, imperfect economic statistics, and varied levels of corporate integrity, means that qualitative as well as quantitative inputs need to be updated on a continuing basis from a mix of formal and informal sources.

Understanding the cultures and politics of these countries, knowing who the players are and applying ones own assumptions based on direct observation of the individual economies is vital.



Contrarian timing must also be applied in order to benefit from the market cycles, and individual companies' ever fluctuating popularities.

As institutions and regulators worldwide seek to progressively turn all investment professionals towards process rather than performance, they are in danger of being replaced by artificial intelligence (AI).

ASEAN stands as one of the last bastions of common sense investing. Core ASEAN is not yet AI dominated, and not yet efficient in providing accurate information to all investors at the same time, so it likely has around ten or more years of alpha-active investing remaining, and the Mekong region at least 20 years or more.

Choosing managers in this environment should also be a qualitative process, not solely a quantitative process. Managers should be favoured who have a proven track record of managing volatility and stress analysis, and performance led rather than simply a bureaucratic "checklist" process.

In more mature developed markets alpha generation tends to be confined to investment banking proprietary trading desks and hedge funds. Within ASEAN, retail investors still predominate as a counterweight to the passive investment approach of the large institutions.

Conclusions:

1. The Macro arguments for investing in the Mekong Region are clear: Shifting manufacturing from China; regional tourism; food demand and infrastructure linkage; and rising domestic consumption.



2. Getting the right exposure is the hard part. Broad ASEAN ETF/Index Funds may not capture the growth. Country specific ETFs are more effective for those willing to trade the highs and lows, deciding the country allocation themselves reflecting their knowledge of the social, political and economic drivers of those countries.
3. The logical way is to invest with independent and active managers' offshore funds, avoiding process driven onshore index enhanced funds where flexibility tends to be lost and performance defeated.
4. Experienced boutique managers with real experience are best placed to access the right opportunities in the Mekong region. and
5. Investors who take a medium to long-term view will be able to ride out the cycles, especially if they are contrarian and add to exposure on any major downturn. Currently, markets are in middle ground, off their lows, but still good value compared to end 2019.

Jeremy King is Trustee of the Knight Foundation





Pondicherry... cultivated elegance

by Margaret Elizabeth Johnstone

Pondicherry, even the name sounds “upscale boutique” for India, and it is! Last I wrote I was in Old Saigon (Ho Chi Minh), another one of these “cultivated, sophisticated” gems, I see a pattern here! This is the second time I have been to Pondicherry, the first time was to go to nearby Auroville, a collective conscious community from around the world that started in the 1950s and has since become an Ashram of sorts attracting the new age community. There is so much to say about this place I have inserted a weblink here if anyone is interested to learn about this fascinating place <https://www.auroville.org/> I have been there for a few weeks before and I will leave that for another time. Pondicherry has enough wonderful things to say about it alone!

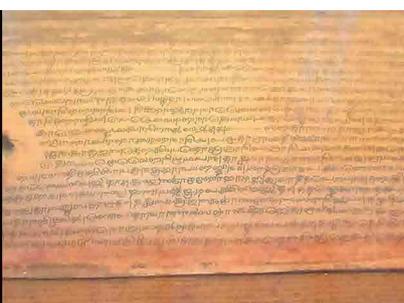
Pondicherry is a pleasant bubble of existence in India and I was fortunate enough to have been here when the intense six week lockdown started. Being of a gentile nature, there was no violence on the street or police brutality as there is in some other areas of India, and the world for that matter. Granted, I was asked to leave three guesthouses when the lockdown got more intense with police checking hotels, guesthouse and home stays but fate was on my side and I



landed in a beautiful guesthouse right next to White Town, the main “centre” of the tourist area of Pondi.

Previously, I had been here for three weeks enjoying the coffee and café culture. I had spent six weeks in Goa on the beach and was well and truly ready for some lazy boutique shopping, pretty coffee-café time, going to a few museums, learning about the Tamil culture here and enjoying the elegant traditional clothing the Indian women here wear. Such a lovely change from bikini clad bodies with nothing but flip-flops for evening wear! There is a beachfront promenade that

every sunrise is the exercise fanatics stomping ground and the evening sunset time becomes the place to stroll, see and be seen. Coromandel Café was a place I discover two years ago when I was here before and befriended the head chef, Jay Adams from the UK. She has made that restaurant tops and it rates number 35 in all of India which is



some feat! I have enclosed some pics of this café in collage style, I hope you can get the idea of the elegance this place displays! Palm fronds alongside pink walls, white wicker patio tables and chairs, inner old-style French elegance and the food is absolutely top-of-the-line divine!

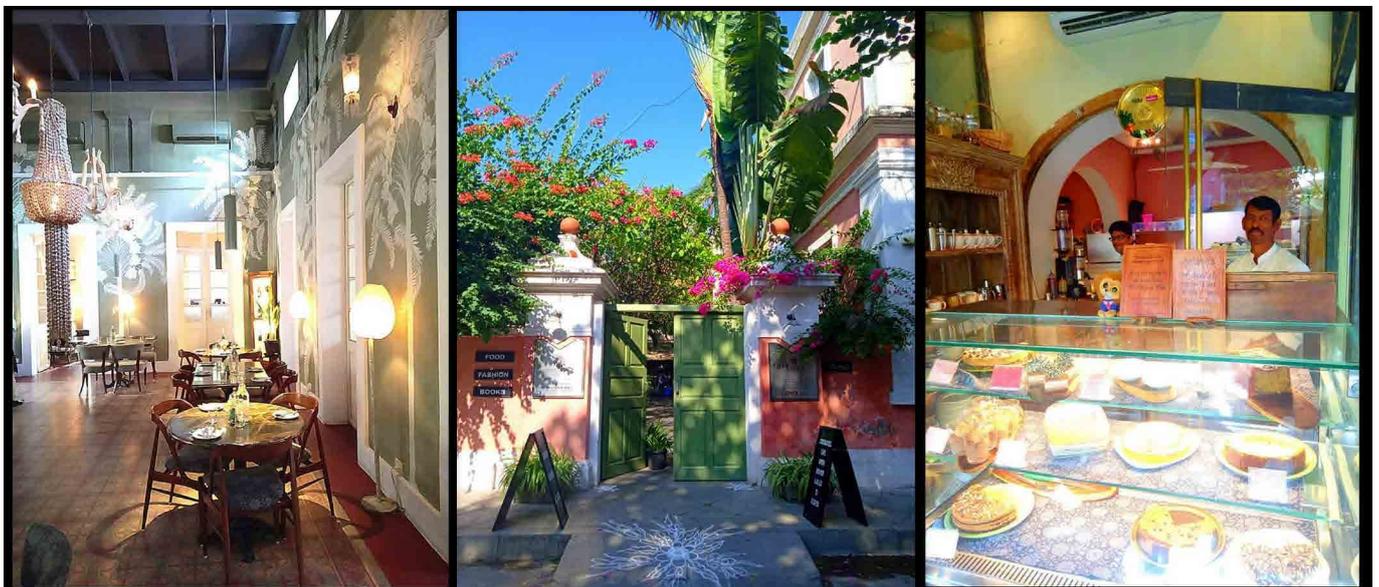
Being an old French colonial town, the architecture here has many a photographer roaming around, up and down the quiet white town streets among the bougainvillea and drifting pan-au-chocolat croissant scents. The terrain is flat so renting one of those Amsterdam-style bicycle beach cruisers is the thing to do with a basket and a bell. One can easily spend the days cycling around stopping here and there for pics, coffee and cake, browsing the shops and meeting fresh faces that are interested in art and culture. There is a marvellous theatre here, Indianostrum Theatre, I went to it twice. I was so impressed with the quality and learnt that it is a well know French theatre that accommodates various visiting theatre tours from around Europe and some of the “fringe” establishments in the older French colonies of Asia.

Pondicherry was, in a nutshell, invaded by the Dutch, the French, destroyed by the British, the French took over



again, now it is back in the hands of the Indians. When I went to The French Institute of Pondicherry I saw the architectural drawings and thought that the proposed city planning after the British destroyed it were very creative. I have them placed in the article here for interest. The bottom right is the plan that was approved. They also had one of the oldest Vedic scriptures encased in the Institute along with a fabulous geology dept full of gems, rocks and sandstone artefacts. There is also a Museum of Pondicherry, which is an absolute treasure trove. It houses some excellent Chola sculptures. The Imperial Cholas in the South of India was an age of constant improvement of art and architecture. Stone temples and bronze sculptures were dedicated to an extensive Hindu culture. It also has a French section on the first floor which has a push-push, a carriage where the “natives” would push the French colonials. The rooms have French furniture, a typically set dining room, a typical bedroom and a section of French food products with their names. It was quite fascinating to see the French speaking Tamilians soaking it in.

If you don't feel like going the 15 minute drive to Auroville, you can visit the Sri Aurobino Ashram in the town itself. There is also a paper making industry that is sponsored by this Ashram.





longest allowed time - a six months stint. If India is somewhere you would like to visit or be able to continue to visit in later years, I recommend keeping your eye on getting this visa in your passport so that you are set to come here as a nice trip anytime in the next five years worry free. It took three days from time of application to receiving the visa online. Enjoy India, enjoy life!

About the author: Margaret provides us with a variety of articles covering medicinal plants, healthy ways to eat, artistic articles featuring some of her watercolours and travelogs. Last we heard she was coming to Bangkok in May to enjoy some city time and refresh her ties with some Bangkok connections.

"I love Bangkok as my go-to city in Asia.

It is a place I can really feed my soul with museums, galleries, food, refresh my clothing options, renew my art supplies and reconnect with some good friends I have made there over the years. I am happy to know Thailand will be reopened in May so that the economy can recover as soon as possible!" You can follow Margaret on her website blogs at www.mejcreations.com

I went there and was entranced with the paper made with all kinds of flowers, leaves, confetti and tree bark! How wonderful it would be for me to paint some of my botanical watercolours on some of this paper.

I was able to stock up on wonderful books at some of the many used bookstores that cater to the European mind. I do travel with a Kindle which I never use and still lug books around! I guess a paper book, sticking to old school, is something I just enjoy more with my afternoon tea at one of the many tea houses here. There are quite a few old heritage furniture shops that have dazzling carved wooden swings that I was drawn to. Pondicherry has a unique blend of not two but three cultures: the native Tamil style, the Muslim influence and later the French colonial touch. Many of the restored houses in and around Pondicherry are great examples of this blend of cultures. Tasmai; A centre for the arts and culture, was a place that I definitely did not want to miss. On display are various potteries, jewelry, handmade arts, paintings and various handicrafts within the local Tamil Folk Traditions. There are also some art workshops going on if one feels inspired to have some "hands-on" experience.

All in all, I feel along with Goa, Rajasthan, dharmasala (Mc Leon Ganj/Little Lhasa) and Rishikesh, Pondicherry will always be a place I come to visit on my Indian rounds I tend to do once every few years. India is such a large and diverse country, I thoroughly enjoy visiting different states here feeling the significant difference of the places India has to offer. From the dress, food to the architecture, the hill folk farming techniques and the variety of transportation, India vitalises me in every way. I'm not sure what the restrictions will be after this lockdown time in the world loosens up, but it was only a few months ago I got my multiple entry five year Indian visa online for a mere \$80,



BANGKOK MADAM CHAPTER 7: SHOPPING SPREE

by *Minami*

Saturday, 4pm, Mahboonkrong Shopping Centre (MBK). MBK is a big, older shopping mall, off \ Siam Square, consisting of thousands of little shops selling cheap clothing, bags, and shoes and all kinds of electronics like mobile phones, game-players, CDs, and DVDs - authentic or non-authentic. It even has a movie theatre, beauty salons, and food vendors. MBK is like a toy box crammed with junk and treasures. You would be surprised what you can find in there.

Mitsuko has never been alone at MBK at this time of a weekend. In fact, she has never been alone at this time on any weekend. The weekend is family time. Well, weekend or not, her time is always for family. But Yuichi tries to spend time with his family on the weekend, so the weekend is “special” family time.

But today, little Mina went to sleep over at a friend’s house (first time in her life!) and Yuichi took Kota for an overnight fishing trip. Fishing is not really Yuichi’s sport, but one of his work-related friends, Kojima-san, has a boat in Pattaya, a beach town not far from Bangkok, and he invited them down for the weekend. At first, with Japanese customary politeness, Yuichi was hesitant to bring a child. But Kojima-

san has a son around Kota’s age and assured it would be more fun and easier for Kota to come along.

Mitsuko was a little worried about the two men managing the two boys at sea, but the boys were not babies any more. Plus, Kota was so eager to go on his first “men-only” trip. Seeing his pleading face, Mitsuko reckoned this would be a great experience for them.

And so, she was alone on a weekend. First, she felt a tinge of emptiness. Could this be what an empty nest feels like? But she instantly denied it. Time alone overnight was a surprise gift.

“Freedom!”

She spoke the word aloud, stretching it out, as she stood alone in her empty living room with her arms outstretched. The cheerful sound of her own voice worked better than she had expected. She felt much better.

She didn’t know why she thought about MBK. She could have gone somewhere fancier, even a luxurious spa at a five-star hotel. That was very tempting indeed, but it felt like maybe too big a jump for this little bit of freedom. She could have gone shopping at a department store like Emporium or Central Chit Lom, but they were customary among the expats. She was in no mood to bump into familiar faces. She wanted to do something different to savour this unique moment.

MBK is definitely not a place regularly visited by the Japanese expat wives. They all know about it, but it is not in their territory, even though MBK is conveniently located with a skytrain station, only six stops from Phrom Phong (a station of the Japanese ghetto). Five stops to Siam Paragon is “in” the wives’ territory, but six stops to MBK is “out.”

So MBK. Alone on the weekend. It was Mitsuko’s little adventure.

From the moment she stepped inside, she was overwhelmed by the people, many people, the locals and tourists, men and women, young and old, couples and friends and families. She felt there was hardly any air left for her to breathe. She felt that if she stopped moving, she might be taken over by the throng, swallowed as if by a tidal wave.

And the smell! The odour was a mixture of garlic and something fishy. Maybe nampla, fish sauce? Mitsuko guessed. It was definitely not the classy smell of expensive perfumes that graced the air of Emporium or Siam Paragon.

And the noise! Some kind of rock music was being broadcast over speakers. It was so loud that Mitsuko could feel it throbbing inside her skull. Am I getting old or what?

Despite the assault on her senses, or perhaps because of it, Mitsuko couldn’t help but feel excited.





The exhilaration of the place reminded her of the festivals of her childhood. The shrine near her home had held festivals a few times a year, according to the Shinto rituals. Mitsuko didn't understand the religious meaning of them, except the worship of ancestors, but the festivals were fun. There were children's games like goldfish scooping and shooting at targets. And lots of vendors opened up their temporary little shops, selling special treats like cotton candy, caramelised-sugar-coated tangerines and apples artificially coloured in bright orange and red, barbecued squid with soy sauce, deep fried corndogs, and takoyaki (octopus dumplings fried on a hotplate with sweet and spicy sauce). They were cheap, simple, street snacks, and yummy!

Mitsuko used to like watching an old candy man who made various animal shapes out of hot sugar. After rolling a small ball of caramel-like sugar with his thumb and forefinger (Mitsuko still wondered how he didn't burn himself), he attached it to the end of a short straw, blew air into it like a balloon, and used little scissors to snip here and there so that, in a few seconds, he produced a small rabbit, chicken, or cat. It was like magic! Mitsuko's mother didn't allow her to buy one because she thought it was not hygienic, but little Mitsuko's secret wish was to buy a little candy elephant.

MBK had a similar allure. Indecent but captivating.

Mitsuko didn't know what to buy. She wasn't really looking for anything. But she started walking, hoping to find something like a little candy elephant.

Soon she saw a bright, grass-green belt, and she was drawn to it like a fish to bait. It was hanging with a bunch of other belts of different colors with a sign saying 199B. It was not leather of course, but shiny vinyl with a silver buckle. Mitsuko held it against her waist and wondered if it looked too cheap. Her mother used to say that she should wear decent accessories as she got older; otherwise she would look poor.

But only 199B, Mitsuko thought. It wouldn't be much to waste, and it's such a pretty green. The design is simple, so it won't stand out too much, and the colour will give a good accent. It will go well with my navy-blue linen shirt and with jeans and a white shirt as well. And only 199B.

Mitsuko handed the money to a skinny young girl who was eating Som Tum (green papaya salad) out of a styrofoam

box with a plastic fork. Strong smell of fresh garlic, nampla (fish sauce) and lime juice dressing floated over as she stood to get the belt.

"Kob Phun Kaa (thank you)," said the girl, as she handed Mitsuko the shiny green belt in a cheap plastic bag. When she smiled, her white teeth shined in contrast to her dark skin.

Pleased with her small purchase, she went on to the next floor which was a maze. The shops were all very small, probably 2 by 3 metres square, with a narrow walkway between. They all looked the same, displaying similar electronic gadgets and tech accessories. Mitsuko knew she would never find her way back to the same shop once she passed it.

A phone cover with neon-colored spangles caught her eye. It was similar to the one Mika was using. Mika had been excited with her latest purchase (she was always excited about everything anyway), saying the same cover was very popular in Japan and cost three times more there. She had joked that maybe she should start an export business online. Mitsuko did not pay too much attention to Mika's talk. Mitsuko was neither interested in a spangled phone cover nor an online enterprise. Mitsuko thought the phone cover looked too girlish for any woman except Mika, who had a kind of Peter-Pan-never-grew-up style. But soon after Mika showed up with it, Mitsuko saw other women her own age with them and realised it was indeed popular among the Japanese ladies. She still didn't like it, though, and that had made her feel a little outdated.

Now, at MBK, she wondered if she should get one, but then her head was turned by the tablet covers on the next rack. Just two weeks before, Yuichi had bought an iPad for their children.

Mitsuko was not so sure if a six year old, or even a ten year old, needed an iPad, but she didn't say anything against Yuichi's decision. She made it a rule to follow her husband unless she had a very strong reason to oppose, unless it was something she could never compromise. So far, there was nothing Mitsuko could not compromise. To be honest, she was opposed to the iPad. She didn't want her children playing computer games all day. But she didn't want to spoil their joy, and she hoped Yuichi would find some good educational apps. When Yuichi showed them the iPad, Mitsuko just gave

them a motherly smile as if to say, “It’s your lucky day, isn’t it?” as she began to plot how she would control the game time.

The kids had wanted to buy a cover case for it, but Emporium had only red, black, and white, and Kota and Mina couldn’t agree. Now here at MBK, Mitsuko saw cases in yellow, purple, blue, orange, and pink, plus patterns like polka-dots, stars, and hearts. Amazed with the selection, Mitsuko asked “Taw Rai Ka (how much)?” as she tried to remember the price at Emporium.

“Six hundred ninety nine Baht, Oku-san.” the older sales lady replied.

Oku-san means “madam” in Japanese, and Mitsuko was a bit taken aback, actually disappointed, by the acknowledgment. She knew she couldn’t fake being Thai, but how did the lady know she was Japanese? Mitsuko had to admit she looked Japanese. If there was a typical Japanese expat wife look, she definitely had it. Asako or Mika often laughingly reported being mistaken for Singaporean, or Filipino, or even Spanish in this cosmopolitan city. But that never happened to Mitsuko.

As she held the tablet cover, sealed in a plastic bag, she was surprised at the price. At the Emporium, she was sure a similar case had cost more than 2,000B, almost three times more. She tried to study the case through the plastic, wondering if the quality was that much different. She couldn’t tell any significant difference.

The sales lady interpreted Mitsuko’s silence as hesitation about the price and said, “OK, Oku-san, five-hundred-ninety-nine Baht, Piset (the Thai word for special) for you!” In one short sentence, the lady had mixed up three languages, English, Thai and Japanese.

Mitsuko was suddenly reminded that bargaining was a common practice in Thailand’s local markets, where she had never shopped. But you never bargain at Emporium, Mitsuko thought, and this is a shopping mall, is it not?

Mitsuko tried to remember the details of how and where to bargain. She had learned this a long time ago in a welcome seminar by the Mitsumaru Club, but the memory was blur. Still it seemed quite clear that MBK was a place to bargain. Gingerly, she tried a phrase she had never used before. “Rot iik dai mai ka (Can you discount more)?”

“Mai dai (cannot), Oku-san! It is already very cheap.” She gave Mitsuko an “Oh-my-God-give-me-mercy!” face.

The lady had a short tightly permed hairdo, and Mitsuko thought she could name several aunties back in Japan who had the exact same hair style. Mitsuko was instantly embarrassed for bargaining about an already cheap price. I don’t want to look like an arrogant, stingy foreigner giving a hard time to a poor, elderly lady.

She wanted to leave the store immediately, but when she looked around for a way out, the lady shouted, “OK, Oku-san, 550B. Final price!” She gave Mitsuko an “I-cannot-win-over-you” face.

In a way, Mitsuko felt saved. She didn’t particularly want the case, but relieved from a guilty conscience, she smiled and picked up a light blue case which she hoped both Kota and Mina would like.

As Mitsuko handed over the money, the sales lady was quick to change her mode, briskly opening the plastic bag to show Mitsuko the case and explaining how to use it. Mitsuko still didn’t see any difference from the one at the Emporium. The lady then handed it over in a cheap shopping bag with a cheerful “Kob phun ka.”

Mitsuko felt much better and repeated the phrase with a smile.

After that, she strolled around, picking up some silver jewelry and hair accessories for a few hundred Baht, as she worked her way toward the skytrain station, so that she could head home.

The section near the station was a fashion floor with lots of bags and shoes. She loved bags and shoes, or rather she used to. When she had been an OL (office lady), she owned dozens of pair of shoes, all sorts of colours and styles. Her father used to joke, “How many feet you’ve got?” She had also bought a couple of brand-name bags from Chanel and Louis Vuitton (just like any other OL who went through the bubble of the 1980s Japanese economy). She still kept the bags in her closet, although she rarely used them now.

But bags and shoes were not the top of her list anymore. With a husband and children, her shopping priorities had changed. It was not because they were financially tight, but because shopping for Yuichi, Kota, and Mina brought a different kind of shopping pleasure. It reinforced her sense of herself as a devoted wife and mother, running her household diligently, making her family feel good and look neat, and bringing her a new kind of fulfillment.





English. She knew this shop was used to dealing with foreigners.

“Forty thousand Baht.”

What? That’s like \$1300!

Mitsuko was certain the shock registered on her face. She thought perhaps she had misheard it. The girl took out a calculator and tapped 4-0-0-0-0.

How could it be so expensive? This is the MBK, famous for cheap stuff. That’s not even in the price range of the Emporium. Mitsuko still thought maybe the girl had made a mistake in the number of zeros. If it was 4,000 Baht (which was still expensive for MBK), she would snatch it. It was such a beautiful bag with such quality.

And actually, as for bags and shoes, functionality had become more important than style since the children had come. She needed bags that she could hang on her shoulder so that both hands were available for the kids, and the bags had to be big enough for diapers, bottles, extra clothes, wet tissues, etc. And she needed shoes with flat soles, so she could carry them and run and chase if necessary. She didn’t want to admit it, but as she got older, comfort became an important factor as well.

As Mitsuko passed the window displays of stylish bags and shoes, she remembered that her children were growing up. She didn’t have to wear a flat sole anymore or carry diapers around. And tonight, she didn’t even have to hurry home to make a dinner. She could enjoy shopping all evening if she wanted.

She walked into a rather fancy looking shop (for MBK), which could easily be somewhere in Tokyo. Maybe not in Ginza, but Harajyuku or Shimokitazawa. The shop displayed just one or two bags on each shelf, so unlike the other MBK shops which piled bags from the floor to the ceiling. The elegant bags looked somehow familiar, though she couldn’t remember where she had seen them. She reached out and touched a beautiful cobalt blue handbag, which felt surprisingly soft and supple.

This is a very good quality leather, Mitsuko thought, and very well made. And it’s so chic. It doesn’t look mass-produced for low cost, but rather handmade for exquisite customers. Very unlike MBK.

Mitsuko couldn’t resist holding the bag in one hand and looking at herself in a tall mirror.

Ta-da! It was that magical moment of shopping when you see someone else in the mirror. Mitsuko hadn’t felt that in a long time. In her black dress, the cobalt blue bag made her look elegant with a touch of mystery - and maybe even a few years younger.

The salesgirl was quick to catch the moment. “Suay ka (Beautiful).”

Though she recognised it as sales talk, Mitsuko couldn’t resist smiling. “How much?” Somehow, her words came out in

Mitsuko looked around the shop to see if this particular bag was the only expensive one. She saw an azalea pink bag with narrow leather strips woven like a basket. It was such a sweet colour. If she had been twenty years younger, she would have loved it. The girl followed Mitsuko’s gaze and said, “That’s 42,000 Baht.” Again, she tapped it out: 4-2-0-0-0.

Even more expensive! Five figures seemed to be the price range of this shop.

All of a sudden it hit her that this was a shop designer brand knockoffs. That was why they looked familiar. These were copies of Bottega Veneta, Hermes, Gucci, Chanel. Mitsuko had not followed the latest collections of these brands, but she had recognised the brands’ distinctive designs. Maybe she had seen them in an exclusive women’s magazine. If they had been genuine, they would cost twice or three times as much. This most-MBK-unlike shop was, it seems, a most-MBK-like shop after all.

“I can discount for you.” The girl said as she pushed the calculator forward, tapping some numbers.

Yes, this is a very-MBK-like shop.

Mitsuko smiled and spoke, this time in Thai, “Mai pen rai ka, kob phun ka (Never mind, thank you),” and left the shop.

Still heading toward the station, she walked through more MBK-like shops, impossibly stuffed bags and shoes and signs of “199 Baht” or “399 Baht.” Then she found a small shop which looked neither MBK like nor MBK-unlike-but-actually-very-MBK-like. This one just looked like an ordinary, nice store. When she walked in, a long-haired woman who looked to be in her late thirties stood up courteously. She wore no makeup which added to Mitsuko’s sense that the woman was not about to put on a pushy sales show.

These handbags were all made of similar soft leather in brown and black only but in a variety of styles. The bags were tagged as a brand Mitsuko had never heard of. It seemed to be an original Thai local brand. Mitsuko looked at one bag after another carefully. The idea of owning a locally handmade bag that no other woman would have was something that would

appeal to any woman.

Her eyes settled on a small brown handbag which could also hang off the shoulder since the straps were a little longer. The leather was not like Italian, but a tanned leather that could shine if polished. The sewing was neat; not as fine as the designer brand look-alikes, but an accent of the bag, giving it a sporty touch. Casual but chic. Not very flashy, but versatile. She could wear it with both jeans and dresses. Also, the bag was much more spacious than it looked.

“How much is this?”

“Two thousand nine hundred Baht ka.”

Her English was decent, and her tone was calm. There was nothing aggressive about her attitude unlike most salespeople who spoke good English. She had been standing quietly while Mitsuko examined the bag. Mitsuko liked her, as well as the bag. And after hearing forty-thousand Baht, two thousand nine hundred sounded unreasonably cheap.

I will take it, she thought. But this was the MBK, so she should at least try to bargain, shouldn't she?

“Rot tow rai ka?” she asked, practicing her request for a discount.

The lady hesitated but gave a calm smile. “Two thousand five hundred. OK mai ka (is it OK)?”

More than OK! Mitsuko exclaimed silently. But she nodded and smiled.

As she left the store with her new handbag, she thought, What a shopping spree! Bag and belt and other finds, and I didn't even spend 5,000 Baht.

She felt almost like a long-time Bangkok resident,

bargaining at MBK. But that was enough. She had fun. Time to go.

She was feeling hungry but eating at MBK would be too much of an experience. She was not quite ready for the food court. She pictured herself, a middle-aged Japanese expat wife eating alone at MBK on the weekend, and that didn't look very pretty. There should be some decent restaurants at Siam Paragon where I could comfortably eat alone. Or I could stop at the Gourmet Market for a ready-made take-home meal. A lazy dinner on the couch was quite appealing after a couple hours of walking.

On her way out of MBK and into the station, she passed a small vendor's sign: “iPad case, Special, 499 Baht!!” The sign was handwritten on a piece of paper. Mitsuko froze and stared at the vendor's inventory. Isn't this the same thing I bought for 550 Baht as a special price? The cases looked exactly the same. “Oh!” She covered her opened mouth and started laughing. Some passers-by looked at her curiously, but she couldn't help it.

You got me, Auntie!

Mitsuko had feared she'd given “Auntie” a hard time with her bargaining, but now she knew that lady was much smarter than Mitsuko.

She didn't think she would come back to MBK soon. But when she did, she was determined to come back as a much more skilled MBK shopper.

To contact the author and find out more about Bangkok Madam please write to: minamilove00@gmail.com



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STEP BACK PLEASE

by Neil Brook

Covid-19 has crushed the world and as we seem to be heading out the other side with countries opening borders and relaxing social distancing rules, the past few months have been an experience many would care to forget. As countries around the world moved to protect their own, I became a Corona refugee, as my friends have affectionately labelled me, unable to return home to Vietnam as I've quite literally been stranded in the UK. In these uncertain times when we were confined, almost by invisible chains that allowed exercise, essential shopping and travel for key workers, my one walk a day has turned into an adventure where exploring my local neighbourhood has revealed a hidden treasure trove of sights and sounds, architectural delights and newly discovered gems. I have been blessed to have found an amazing house just metres from the beach in Brighton on the English coast.

While here I have jumped at an opportunity to help out with a local Ambulance service and have used this opportunity to learn new skills and explore new horizons.

A key takeaway from the turmoil is that you should manage the things you have control over and mitigate the damage from the things you don't.

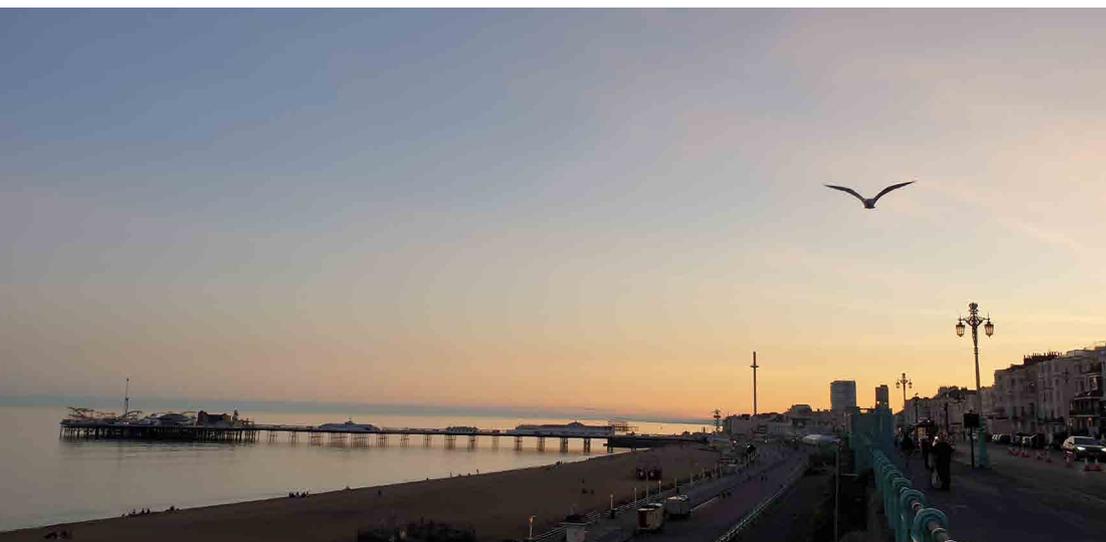
As a key worker I am blessed to have been welcomed into the NHS family in the UK and now more than ever appreciate the dedication, commitment and loyalty the staff have in providing essential services to the community. The social



interaction and new friendships have also provided a lifeline that has cushioned the effect of lockdown.

I've taken to walking a different path each day. So often as we were once filling our days in between work and play we missed the beauty around us and failed to realise the wonders in our own backyards. Now, taking the time I've marvelled at the architecture a block away. Ornate doors of different styles and colours where homeowners take pride and care, grand mansions and Art Deco council blocks that blend to form historical patchworks and a kaleidoscope of colour and design. I've noticed the intricacies of each uniquely painted beach hut lined up along the shore, which open up to reveal the personality of their owners who will again flock to the seaside in the coming months. Whilst the timing of a pandemic is never the right time, spring has certainly made it more bearable as gardens are in bloom, daylight savings allows longer days and squirrels frolic in the trees. When the sun shines on the English coast its magical. In fact, when it rains and the seas are choppy, there's still a quality that entices wanderers to brave the elements and walk along well constructed paths along the shore.

On my one walk a day as we hear stories of company collapse and business uncertainty, small local entrepreneurs have endeavoured to keep the cash flowing, serving essential food items and some treats, sourced locally and have turned the economy cashless. If we take something else away, it's that there are things we can do





street and parents with small children say thank you as you walk out onto the street to allow social distancing. It's become a habit where no one gives it a second thought. On steps heading down to the beach people wait while others pass before continuing their journeys. On the foreshore there's plenty of room guided along paths hugging chalk cliffs and rock pools or you may prefer to crunch the pebbles that construct the

beaches that are synonymous with the British seaside. I'd love to think society has rediscovered the art of courtesy and the importance of personal space. Again, we'll see. As I turn the corner I come across a park, actually a manor house garden and a cathedral a block away, with another in the distance looming tall above the rooftops. Relics of history have allowed us to intertwine with the modern day capturing a history that dates back over hundreds of years.

Gradually the wheels are beginning to turn and wind up the economy and from an absolute standstill months ago shutters are coming off. On the corner a local bread shop has reopened. The line winds around the block people stand two metres apart patiently waiting for freshly baked croissants and pork and fennel sausage rolls. The new essentials or luxuries because we don't have to cook them ourselves. In the park the squirrels gather at my feet as crumbs are snatched and nibbled.

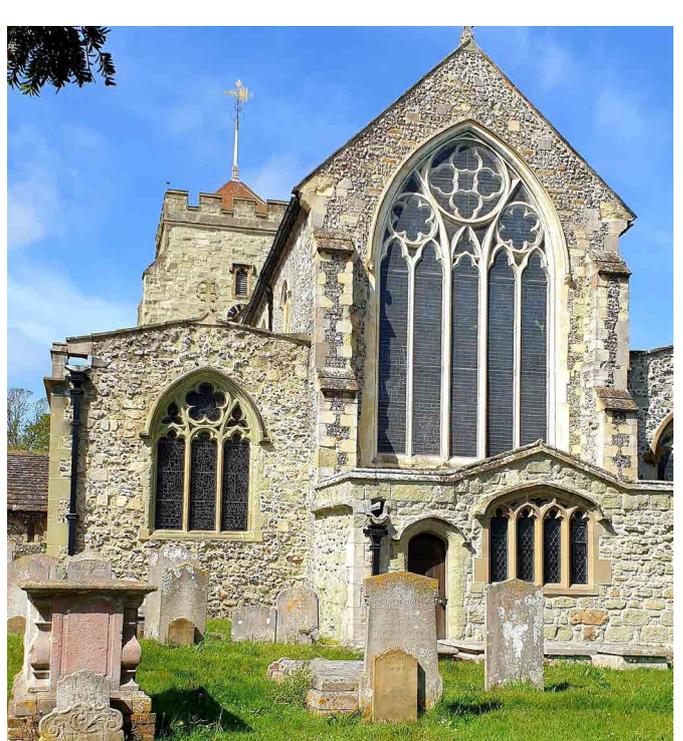
I love to travel. It's a passion that both excites and delights however recent events have got me to thinking... What will the future of travel look like? While the joy of discovery will never fade, is it really necessary to travel hours to find the perfect restaurant or beach when the ones in your own town serve some of the best food and the beach at the end of the road is uncrowded.



without and essentials are no longer essential. I've been living out of a suitcase that's well packed with interchangeable clothes and easily maintained colour palettes and in all honesty I could probably live quite comfortably out of it forever. Neither my friends nor myself care that things have been worn more than a few times before. Priorities have changed and coming out of this on the other side, life for me will be simpler and less cluttered. Hopefully the world will wake up and see the clean seas and the blue skies and realise disposable is a thing of the past and conspicuous consumption is passé. New and old money could be spent wisely not frivolously. We'll see...

There's a new level of respect as walkers pass each other in the





During this crisis, mostly out of necessity, people have become flexible, taking opportunities whenever they can and businesses have redesigned the working week. There are new ways of working and the nine to five, five days a week may be relegated to history. There is joy to be had swimming in the sea on a Tuesday and eating at a delicious seafood restaurant on a Wednesday while others clamour for reservations months in advance on a Saturday night. Fish and chips taste better on the English Coast, they really do. Soft serve ice cream with chocolate flakes sticking out of them are the ideal dessert. Just watch out for the seagulls the size of albatrosses. I still don't know how one swooped down from behind me and snatched mine from my hands. I had only just started licking it, so I bought another and was more guarded this time.

I have been to Brighton before, however now, initially driven out of a daily routine, I have peeled away the layers to reveal the intricacies of a local community where small boutiques, bakeries and craft brewers form the glue that binds the area together, and who by nature are tucked away behind small shop fronts or doorways, accessible to in the know locals or passers by who stumble upon them. Now more than ever it has become



essential to support local enterprises in an effort to stem the erosion that may wash them away for ever as chains and supermarkets weather the storm with higher cash reserves and minimum wages. The coffee is always better in the cafe with two tables or with room only to stand at the counter and where the brownies are homemade and the sandwiches are freshly made. It's a choice we need to make in order to protect diversity or risk

turning every city into something akin to 'Stepford Wives'. There is reward to be had by walking the streets and not recognising the names above doorways for both yourself and the community.

As the memories fade and people begin to reappear in the streets, it would seem reaching for the bananas across your shoulder in the market is again acceptable. Or was it ever and did we just put up with it? I still find myself asking people to step back...





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This term, Primrose is excited to spend her weekends wakeboarding, sailing, zip-lining, visiting the elephant sanctuary and taking cooking classes. She loves being immersed in such a diverse boarding community and is looking forward to having her friends help her improve her foreign language skills.

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Catamaran Sailing on the Andaman Sea

by Lori Blackburn

“YES! I’m IN” screamed my enthusiastic reply to Amy and Juan’s question: Will you go sailing with us? Does a pirate like rum? Do fish swim in the sea? Sign me up, baby! Next stop: heaven on a catamaran.

Over the last year, I had followed Amy and Juan’s exceptional sailing trips. They would invite a lucky group of friends to explore Thailand by sailboat. I’d seen pictures showcasing carefree grins as they lounged on deck while their boat cut across the waves. They walked windswept shores covered in Jurassic boulders and climbed palm trees on deserted beaches. Once they traded street clothes for bikinis and board shorts, their days became balmy breezes and exotic locations. Take me there.

If you have the heart for sailing, then the world becomes magic. Everyday life disappears the further you get from land. Once you board a boat, your perspective changes to nature, weather, teamwork, and adventure.

Ten years ago, I joined my first sailing trip. I arrived at work on a Monday and impulsively booked a sailing trip in Greece. I’d already visited Greece twice, but sailing the Cyclades Islands changed my life. There was a certain skip in my walk after Greece. Now, I always find time for sailing whether it’s an afternoon aboard a historical schooner in San Francisco, a week on a luxury catamaran in the British Virgin Islands, or a sunset sail in Redondo Beach with a racing team.

This time it was Thailand. Amy and Captain Juan planned our week-long sailing trip like clockwork. I received the itinerary, packing list, and details. The week before





departure, Juan started sending us breathtaking photos of our destinations. Wow – what a way to build excitement!

Our crew of eight people met in Phuket on a Saturday. Everyone was fun, outdoorsy, efficient, and laidback. The perfect group. Amy booked a villa and organised rental cars, which were important for airport transfers, grocery shopping, logistical tasks, and transportation.

On Sunday, we split the grocery shopping and marina check-in duties. Two rental cars were handy! Afterwards, we left the rental cars at the marina where the car service collected them. Easy breezy. Our boat was a 2016 Catamaran Nautitech-40 Open. It had a kayak and motorised dingy for exploring.

Life is different aboard a sailboat. Our mornings began at sunrise near a beautiful cove or island where we had moored overnight. Some people slept outdoors on deck. Others took the cabins. What a beautiful way to start the day! Captain Juan prepared for departure. Tom made coffee with his fancy coffee pot which we nicknamed Alicia (pronounced with an Italian accent!). Jak and Tabbi competed to make perfect pancakes. Jan kayaked while Natalie jumped overboard for a swim. Amy set the table while I scurried around taking pictures. After breakfast, we set off for new places - coves, caves, deserted beaches, hidden lagoons, and popular sites. We'd drop anchor offshore then pile into the dingy where we'd arrive like windswept bohemians. There is such a rakish beauty to travelling by sailboat. You feel alive.

Sailing is about teamwork and group dynamics. Your crewmates create the trip just as much as the destinations. Everyone has a story to tell. These are our stories...

Juan Estrada: Spanish/Architect

Cooking. Photography

(IG: @juancarlosstradagomez). Gardening.

I grew-up by the seaside in Malaga, Spain. My father, a yacht captain, introduced me to sailing. I eventually got my skipper's license. I love hosting friends and creating experiences, whether that happens at home or at sea. I'm lucky to spend several weeks each year on sailing trips. In Europe, it was mainly in the Mediterranean Sea, including Balearic

Islands (Spain), Ionian Islands, Saronic Islands (Greece), and Dalmatian Islands (Croatia).

Since moving to Thailand in 2017, Amy and I have organised three sailing trips around Koh Samui and Phuket. Unlike Spain in the summer, Thailand doesn't have busy boat traffic. Thailand's boat density per beach is low making it ideal for sailing. When you travel by boat, you can access secluded spots. Paradise becomes exclusively for you.

For this trip, I based our route upon meteorological conditions, seasonal weather, and a progressive wow-factor. We started by visiting caves in Ao Phang Nga National Park, limestone formations in Krabi, snorkelling in Koh Phi Phi Islands, and more. I engaged the crew in daily destination decisions and added flexibility for group choices.

When planning a sailing trip, I recommend securing a crew first. Most people like the idea of a sailing trip, but few can commit. Next, contact several yacht charters for boat options and prices. If you don't have a skipper's license, then hire a bareboat with skipper. The skipper facilitates the boat and route so you can relax. Need someone to buy groceries and cook meals? Then hire a hostess. For our trip, we preferred to do everything ourselves, but it's nice to have options.

Juan's Tips

1. Provisioning: Don't over-buy groceries. Schedule both onshore dining and onboard meals.
2. Avoid heavy luggage. Include a headlamp and nautical footwear. (i.e. anti-slip aqua shoes for rocky coastlines)
3. Respect the sea. Be conscious of obstacles in the boat and outside. For example, be aware of currents when you swim, rocks, sea urchins, jellyfish, and waves when approaching the beach in a dingy.

Amy Patcharaporn Anantasuk:

Thai/Real Estate

Travel. Photography. Movies.

This is my third sailing trip with Juan. I feel happy seeing people enjoy their first sailing experience, especially because most people are as excited as me!





warnings, destination tips, and onshore dining guide. They are a great resource.

Jak Drinnan:
British/Architect
Kitesurfing, Sculptural Art, Sailing

This was my second sailing trip with Captain Juan and Amy. I joined the previous trip to Koh Samui, Koh Phangan, and Koh Tao in June 2019. They were both incredible trips, however I felt more prepared for the experience this time around. We also had a bigger crew which brought a better dynamic. The boat was fantastic. Everything was provided. The hardest part was leaving at the end!

When planning the trips, Juan's expertise is chartering and managing the boat. I handle everything else from securing flights, rental cars, villas, and crew members to planning groceries and meals. In addition to managing the group's accounting and expenses, I'm also the boat's DJ with my playlist.

Sailing is lots of fun, but it's important to act responsibly. At the beginning of each trip, we brief everyone on proper protocol. This crew had solid sailing and outdoor experience which made it easy. We discuss topics such as conserving the boat's limited water supply and acting safely. Sailing is not a joke. If you get injured, we are far from land. We also train the crew on launching and driving the dingy. It makes them feel integrated in daily tasks and gives them freedom to go ashore.

I love each trip especially because I'm building my sailing skills. I'm on a learning curve and I'm more aware of everything. I've learned sailing essentials such as driving the dingy and manoeuvres like setting-up sails, pulling ropes, dropping anchor, and securing the boat to a mooring buoy. I plan to study for my skipper's license soon. When I'm on a boat, my mind shuts off from the everyday world. I recharge in the open air. It's a special time where I see my life from a different perspective. I feel free.

Amy's Tips

1. Enjoy each moment to the fullest! Savour the freedom and fun because these trips fly by.
2. Choose a smart combination of crew members. Teamwork is essential. Make sure that personalities match otherwise, it could be explosive.
3. Most charter boats have a Cruising Guide with reference maps, nautical

I would encourage others to join a sailing trip because it's a unique way to experience a destination. You have the ultimate freedom to come and go on your own time, you can also avoid the crowds. Thailand is beautiful. There are pristine beaches and exceptional ocean landscapes where vertical limestone cliffs emerge from tropical blue sea. It is quite special waking-up in the morning surrounded by nature. We were usually alone in stunning national parks before the tour boats arrived.

My favourite place was Monkey Beach in Koh Phi Phi. It's the closest thing I've ever seen to a perfect beach. Koh Racha Noi is located just south of Phuket. It had the best snorkelling I've experienced in Thailand. I plan to return for scuba diving later this year.

Jak's Tips:

1. Pack your bag as normal, then remove 80% of your stuff because you won't need any of it!



2. Cover-up during peak daytime hours. It's easy to burn, especially when the sun reflects off the ocean.
3. Wear proper footwear. A few barefoot days working on the boat can absolutely ruin your feet!

Vasinee "Tabbi" Sukumwattanakij:
Thai/Executive Secretary
Wakeboarding. Travelling.
Aerial yoga. Baking.

Sailing is a wonderful way to spend time with friends, explore different places, and escape daily life. You can savour the carefree feeling of sitting on a boat, gazing at the sea, and just enjoying the moment. This was my first sailing trip. It did not disappoint. The crew was the main factor I joined because I knew we'd have a great time. We were always smiling and laughing.

In addition to an amazing trip, Amy and Juan's organisation of pre-sailing details in Phuket was top notch. The rental cars saved us from booking expensive taxis. Our spacious villa was well-located near the supermarket for groceries and Catch Beach Club (www.catchbeachclub.com) for a chic welcome happy hour. It was the perfect start to our trip.

Our catamaran, Jetset, was lovely. I slept outside on the large net that extended over the ocean between the two hulls. It was wonderful waking-up in remote areas surrounded by nature. One of my favourite places was visiting Pak Bia Island after the tourists left. At sunset, I kayaked around the neighbouring island and watched the birds. It felt incredible



having it to myself.

I had an awesome time despite some initial motion sickness on the first evening. Luckily, that didn't last long. One thing that also surprised me was feeling land-sick for two days after I returned home. It felt like I was still aboard a swaying boat. Of course, this is all part of the adventure and getting my sea legs. In fact, I am ready to sign-up for the next trip whenever Captain Juan and Amy set the dates.

Tabbi's Tips:

1. Only pack essentials. All you need is swimwear, sun protection, and smart shoes.
2. Be mindful of nature. Don't litter. Avoid touching coral. Bring a refillable water bottle.
3. Prepare for motion sickness by packing Dramamine, headache medicine, and homeopathic remedies.

Andrew James:
British/Property
Swimming. Chess. Sailing

This is my second trip with Captain Juan and Amy. Last year, I joined their trip around Koh Samui. This trip had better landscape, easier sailing conditions, and calmer sea. On our previous trip, the sea was rougher with the occasional storm which added to the excitement.

If you're interested in entry-level sailing, then Thailand is the best in the region. It offers excellent routes, marinas, and charter sailing. I enjoy these trips because I can practice my sailing skills.





3. Buy full-length UV-protective clothing. The sun is merciless.

**Natalie Chelliah: British/
Architect & Interior Architect
Fitness. Yoga. Baking.**

Last summer I joined my first catamaran trip with Captain Juan and Amy. That trip was amazing because we explored off-the-beaten-track islands and even squeezed in a diving trip. However, this recent trip around Phang-Nga Bay and beyond blew me away.

We had a bigger group, better boat, and more jaw-dropping scenery. I wanted to stay longer! I appreciated the

I assisted with various manoeuvres such as helping navigate through marinas, raising sails, mooring to buoys, and anchoring. Catamarans are fun cruiser boats. One perk was that Jetset had a water-maker meaning we didn't need to re-fill our water tanks at marinas. That was great because the only floating pontoon along our route was at Koh Phi Phi which wasn't convenient to reach.

One of my favourite places was Koh Racha Noi where I snorkelled in the clearest water I've ever seen. Alternatively, my least favourite place was a creepy bat cave we explored by dingy and kayak. We tried to reach a hidden lagoon through a sea cave with a colony of bats perched above us. It's important to be open-minded when experiencing nature, but I was glad to leave that cave! I encourage others to go sailing. In addition to great times, any beach you've ever visited feels completely different when you arrive by boat. There is always something new to discover.

Tom's Tips:

1. Don't get drunk the night before boarding a boat, otherwise you'll surely get seasick.
2. The day-to-day jobs on the boat are great exercise, so don't be afraid to jump in and help.



variety of places and our fun, adventurous group. The beaches were paradise. Everywhere was quiet. We had many places to ourselves.

This trip was full of highlights. We explored islands by dingy, kayak, and snorkeling. Relaxing on the empty beaches was priceless. It was my first time to visit beautiful Krabi and Railay Beach. Next time, I'll trek to Railay's viewpoint. We also moored at Phi Phi Islands' Monkey Beach – a secluded beach that is empty except for day-trippers. Once everyone left, the beach was ours. We didn't see any monkeys, but it had the softest sand. We swam in crystal clear water with towering karst cliffs as our backdrop. I'll never forget it.

If you join a sailing trip, remember to be flexible because things can change. For example, our catamaran's power system was broken resulting in no air conditioning. The first night I couldn't sleep because it was too hot below deck, but once we adjusted



the fans and cabin's natural air flow, it was fine. Despite the air-conditioning, this boat was an upgrade from our last catamaran. It was newer, more spacious, and had a better floorplan. It was very comfortable! Now, the only way is up, so I hope we get the best boat for our next trip!

Natalie's Tips:

1. Pack light! You'll wear less outfits than you think. Most of the time you wear a bikini and shorts.
2. Bring a couple card games for the evenings. We enjoyed Code Name.
3. Bring a drone if you have one! Captain Juan captured many scenic moments with his drone.

**Jan Hempel: German/Project Manager
Timber Construction**

Travelling. Hiking. Skiing. Sailing

Sailing in Thailand is wonderful because of the warm, sunny weather. You can stay outside all night. Even the rain is warm! There is diverse scenery with rocks for snorkelling, lonely beaches to relax, shady forests for a walk, and busy cities to go out.

Although this trip had almost no wind which limited our ability to use the sails, it had the most sightseeing, activities, and fun. I really enjoyed it! This trip also had the biggest and best crew I've joined so far. We had a good mixture of interesting, easy going, and funny people. I appreciated how nicely everyone fit together and got along.

I've been sailing for about ten years. In Germany, I co-own a vintage sailboat, a 1972 Hallberg Mistral 33 named Elouise. I've enjoyed regular sailing in the Baltic Sea, Netherlands, and Croatia. The mixture of planning, action, and calm moments is exciting. I love the silence and freedom. This was my first time onboard a catamaran, which are more spacious and steadier than monohull boats. Jetset was perfect for eight people.

I loved the variety of places along our route. We explored sea caves with interesting rock formations and



hidden lagoons. We visited Koh Phi Phi's party beach where we drank buckets of gin and tonic. We even had James Bond Island to ourselves between tourist boats. Another fun moment was our catamaran day party. The weather was perfect. Jak made Cuba Libres and Mojitos. We hung out, listened to music, and laughed. Life was great. We were grateful for this experience.

Jan's Tips:

1. If you are new to sailing, start with short trips and slow wind. This helps you adjust to the movements in calmer conditions.
1. Be flexible with your crew because you are a team. You'll share small spaces, cooking duties, bathrooms, and decision-making.
2. If your boat has a galley or indoor area, stay outside to avoid sea sickness. Look at the horizon to help your body adjust to the swaying.

Our Sailing Itinerary

Sunday

Phuket – Phang-Nga Bay. Explore caves and hong.

Monday

Phang-Nga Bay: James Bond Island – Koh Roi – Koh Yao Noi – Koh Pak Bia

Tuesday

Hong Island - Railay Beach. Party in Ao Nang

Wednesday

Koh Pu - Bamboo Island. Party in Koh Phi Phi

Thursday

Koh Phi Phi - Phiphi Lae (Maya Bay)

Friday

Racha Noi - Racha Yai for snorkelling

Saturday

Koh Rang Yai Kai - Koh Naka

Sunday

Return to Phuket Heaven Marina



Cryonics



Expat Life sat down with Cliff Brown from the UK who has devoted his life for the last 20 years researching and developing a platform on Cryonics (the practice or technique of deep freezing the bodies of people who have just died, in the hope that scientific advances may allow them to be revived in the future). We caught up with him at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Bangkok.

How did you first hear about Cryonics?

I was in the automobile supply business in London in the late 90s and started research online for any way to extend life as we know it, Cryonics was and still is the most reasonable alternative to death.

Do you think this technology can actually work?

Yes! It is not something we can do today or tomorrow, however there are positive signs in nature with small animals such as squirrels and frogs that do manage this process every year in cold weather.

If this already occurs naturally with these animals, we should be able to improve the technology and be able to do this with people.

How did you start this business?

I have always had an active business mind and gathered information working on various businesses including finance and real estate. I organised a number of major events – in Cannes, London, Ibiza, Macau and the South of Thailand. Having social knowledge has also been a key in preparing for such a big project. Now with a growth of network companies such as Facebook, and with an expensive product (Cryonics) there is potential for the largest possible revenue stream.

Do you think Thailand can be important for Cryonics and why?

SE Asia is a booming part of the world. Thailand is a hub for tourism and healthcare, an ideal base for international projects, and close to



Cliff Brown with Aaron Drake the Alcor (USA Facility) medical response director

China. Thai people are friendly and understanding and I am hoping they will welcome such a change that will boost their economy. There has been a number of viral Cryonics news articles that spark lots of interest in Thailand. The healthcare and the banks here are amongst the best in the world and with these end-of-life healthcare and life insurance products should allow Cryonics life extension business to flourish.

What will happen in the future if Cryonics works and we come back in say 100 years from now?

I think life won't be much different for us, as we know it, granted there will be some extra new technologies for us to learn, it will be a bit like going back to school, learning about the changes that have happened since.





discover medicine that will cure ageing like a disease. This will allow us to cure most diseases recognised today, most of them get worse when we age. I think Cryonics is the first step for us to find ways to stay forever young. When we don't grow old anymore, we will only need Cryonics in case of emergency in an accident or if an incurable disease to allow extra time to recover.

How will it be possible to make this a globally recognised product and brand name?

I started with a Life Conference in 2018 and 2019, and this year's Life Conference (2020) will be on 4th December at the Park Hyatt Hotel in Bangkok. We are planning a world tour to gain publicity and awareness.

Cryonics4U Co Ltd is a portal for customers to

join us from around the world and we are looking at having our own Cryonics facility in SE Asia.

Multi-level marketing tools will allow us to grow the business and collaborate with all kinds of businesses along the way. Life insurance will make Cryonics affordable and ultimately it will be a product for everyone.

For more information please contact mail@cryonics4u.com or visit www.cryonics4u.com

I'm also looking forward to the benefits of better medicine and technology to help us live a longer and healthier lifestyle, and also the possibility of space exploration and colonising some other planets. We really need to be educated on the power of this change and the potential of what we can achieve from it, rather than dying and losing it all.

Do you believe in Cryonics yourself?

Yes! I do. I also believe in anti-ageing: I believe we will

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Dr. Osama Rajkhan, Professor of Bioethics and Integrative Health

by Leonard Le Blanc

We speak today to Dr. Osama Rajkhan, Professor of Bioethics and Integrative Health, American University of Sovereign Nations (AUSN), a new online U.S. based institute of higher education. He is one of the world's leading experts on Bioethics, public health, political economy and demographics.

What brought you to Thailand the first time?

I was transferred on a promotion from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok.

That was in June 2000 and my assignment was to work with the Programme Management team at UN ESCAP.

What changes have you seen over the decades?

A lot has changed. When I arrived in mid 2000, there were a handful of skyscrapers in Bangkok, like the Banyan Tree and the DTAC tower, dotting its business district. But when I moved to Kazakhstan 18 years later, Bangkok was in the Guinness Book of Records for the city with more than a 1,000 skyscrapers.

What has stayed the same?

The temples. Their golden spires are unique, timeless, and unchanging. The Thai people are religious and family oriented and Buddhism ties them together.

What are the most enjoyable things here for you?

Bangkok is a really great city with an amazing nightlife. Everyone smiles and there is always a party to go to with lots



of locals and expats. There is always a new shopping mall, theatre, restaurant, café, art gallery or an exhibition to visit. So you are never lonely for company and excitement. Safe and affordable, the city is accessible as you can move easily by the BTS or taxi, or commute with a bicycle as I did most of the time and go out and return home anytime of the day or night.

You keep an impressive schedule of daily exercise. What philosophy are you using?

Movement decreases entropy (heat death) is my philosophy of mind. My grandmother; God bless her soul, used to tell me “movement is a blessing” and my experience confirmed this insight.

This stayed with me during the growing years and the more I walked, ran, swam, bicycled, skied, and hiked, the more I understood the true essence of this insight and its importance for maintaining immune functions, especially since I lost my spleen at the age of 13.



May I ask your favourite places to visit?

Hua Hin with a friend or Koh Samet Island when solo. Thailand offers tourists a million places to visit to meet all budgets and passions, and experience said you can go anywhere and be safe while travelling alone or with a friend. After riding my bicycle solo over the highways



and through city alleyways (Sois) from top to bottom and from ocean to ocean, I got to know the country and its people pretty well, and if I had to rate anyone place for the top marks, I would struggle.

You have travelled extensively and lived abroad for a long time. What have you learned that you can share?

Humanism. I feel that nothing opens your heart and mind like foreign travel. As a child of the first global civilisation the world has ever seen, indeed, I feel grateful for the travel opportunities. In spite of the stress that comes with travel, it would be easy for me now to do it all over again because from my scientific observations I learned that part of staying youthful is to revert back mentally or physically, to your juvenile stage of maturing from time to time.

In what ways has Thailand changed you?

In many ways. Commuting to work by bicycle is perhaps my biggest lifestyle change compared to my previous duty station. Bicycles and cars travel at different speeds but in Bangkok traffic, two wheels actually has an advantage (22kph for a bicycle compared to 12kph for a car, according to the Royal Thai Department of Transportation). With a bicycle I cut my morning work commute from 45 to 15 minutes.

What have you learned about living here that you can share?

A lot. For one, the social scene is as important as one's career prospects, after all, why do we work if it were not for a good life. Like me, every expat I met in Thailand paid attention to social life. And Bangkok's social life potential is surprisingly good compared to many capitals.



What advice would you offer to anyone that wants to live here?

Life begins when you start to live it. So, I would say, start living in Thailand. However, Covid-19 transformed many things. Pre-Covid-19, I would say do what the Thais do – say sorry when you make a mistake and smile. However, SARS-Cov2 nudged our evolutionary path more towards entropy, probably to correct that path. Thus, from this perspective, I think the biggest challenge for

all of us now is how to co-exist with the virus, and try to make a difference in how we can help the world reduce its collateral damage.

50 YEARS OF PASSION: PHOTOGRAPHY

by Kathleen Pokrud, President of
Hong Kong Ladies' Group in Thailand

A hobby is defined as 'an activity or interest pursued for pleasure or relaxation but not as a main occupation.' If the hobby continues for over half a lifetime, it can only be interpreted as passion. Long time resident in Bangkok, Hong Kong-born world-renowned David Lau has persistently honed his skills in photography for over 50 years. As owner of Thai Scala Restaurant at Siam Paragon and various other catering businesses, I asked him to explain his love of photography.

"I cannot describe it, photography has always been my passion since I was young". Being a naughty and unruly child, David was sent to boarding school at the age of 8, where he discovered the art. In the dark room for film processing, he found his sanctuary.

Learning from the best

David Lau attended Mary Knox College in Hong Kong. He learned photography from the famous Hong Kong photography guru Mr. Tang Shu Fung, who took David under his wings. At the age of 13, he entered a public competition in the name of the school, and won the award for Best Photo. Consequently, he helped to set up the dark room in his school, and started to share his knowledge with other students.

For more than five decades, David collected numerous awards and trophies of photography along the way, namely FPSEA, ARPS, APSHK, FYMCAPC, HON. FBPS ARPST, HON. YMCAPC, SE35MMPS, and T1-PPD (C). Many of the accreditations were professional photography titles through



proper examinations. In 1981, the Photographic Society of America (PSA) credited him as the "7th world ranked photographer" for colour print section.

David's photography portfolios and skills can rival any professional photographers. I candidly asked him why he did not pursue it as a career, "Growing up with an authoritarian father, I was not allowed to contemplate my own career. My Dad would joke that a poorly paid artist cannot feed a family. As the eldest son, I was destined to carry on the family business". Luckily, David continued his passion on the sideline to create images to keep all those "Aha" moments to share with the community.

Serving the community

"Taking photography is an easy hobby, but how do use the photographs we take to serve the community?" a question David thought to himself. He found the answer by holding photo exhibitions of his work in Bangkok, to encourage cultural exchange. His objective is to share the eye catching images of all the exotic and exquisite places of the world to other people, who may not financially or physically able to experience them in real life.

Since 2011 to present, David Lau held 25 country photo exhibitions in co-operation with many Embassies in Thailand at Siam Paragon. The first exhibition titled "Treasure of Sichuan" was coordinated with the Embassy of the People's Republic of China. Throughout the nine years to follow, countries such as India, Indonesia, Kenya, Maldives, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Russia, and Tanzania were shared with the Thai public.

In parallel with the photo exhibitions, David published books on some of the countries photos. His second photography book, Tibet:



Road to Heaven, published in 2011, is the image collection of Tibet. The book gathers together 110 selections, representing the finest images of his experience in the Road to Heaven. This book offers a significant impression of the vast, peaceful, and exuberant land with the mystical cultural heritage. It takes the readers on the spectacular journey in Tibet. Meanwhile, all the proceeds from the book sale would be donated to the V. Vajiramedhi Charitable Fund for the purpose of constructing its Forest Temple.

During the Nepal earthquake in 2015, a photo exhibition Save Nepal was quickly organised to raise funds by selling photos and T-shirts during the event. In 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees invited David Lau to the refugee camps and resulted in an exhibition titled *For refugees around the world*.

Photo exhibitions are perfect channel to commemorate many significant occasions. In 2015, The Celebrations on the Auspicious Occasion of HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's 5th Cycle Birthday Anniversary was held in cooperation with Thai-Chinese Cultural & Relationship Council in Thailand. The following year, The 70th Anniversary Celebrations of his Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej's (Rama

What's New



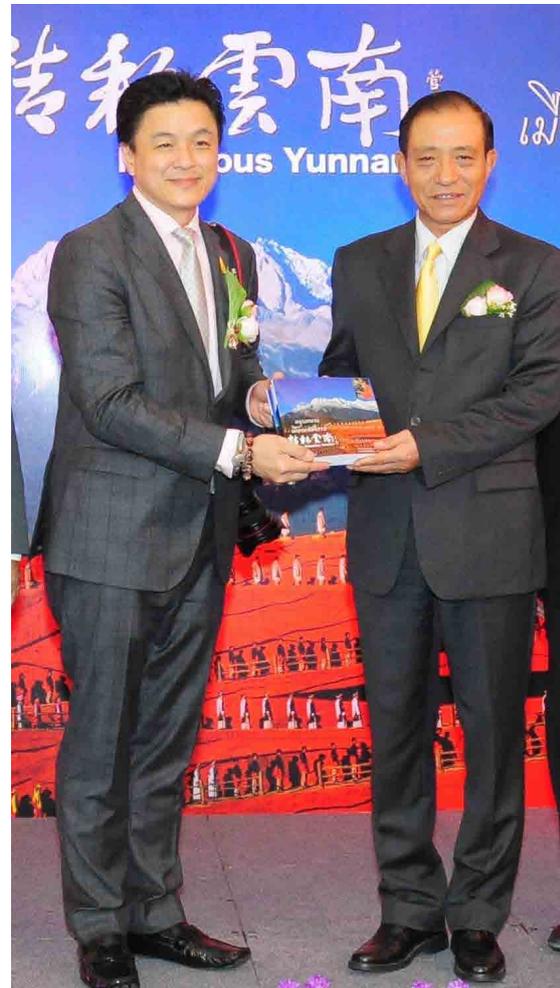
Magical KENYA

มนต์ขลังแห่งเคนยา หนังสือภาพซึ่งเป็นผลงานจากความประทับใจของเดวิด เล้า นักธุรกิจชื่อดังและช่างภาพระดับมืออาชีพ ที่รวบรวมภาพถ่ายสัตว์ป่า นานาชาติจากอุทยานแห่งชาติกว่า 65 แห่งในประเทศเคนยา เข้ากับธรรมเนียมประเพณีที่งดงามโดยพระมหากษัตริย์ วชิรมณี (ว. วชิรมณี) ได้อย่างลงตัว ถ่ายทอดผ่าน 3 ภาษา ทั้งไทย อังกฤษ และจีน วางจำหน่ายตามร้านหนังสือชั้นนำทั่วไปในราคา 170 บาท หรือสอบถามรายละเอียดเพิ่มเติมได้ที่ บริษัท อมรินทร์พริ้นติ้งแอนด์คอมมูนิเคชัน จำกัด โทร. 0-2423-9999

IX) Accession to the Throne was organised through the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in 2016.

Vision for the future generation

I openly asked David, "Can photography skills be learned or honed to perfection?" Impartially he replied, "Photography is an art in which all basics can surely be learned. It is also a gift that requires actual talent." Further explained, "To take a perfect photo, there are three components.



First is planning, you need to have a plan in your head. Second factor is composition, the process of producing your image. The final part is lighting and shadow. A good example on the importance of lighting is the best time to take outdoors photos is before 10am or after 4pm. Sunset photos, with the correct brightness offer certain special aura on the images." With all these new gadget phones such as Huawei that come with outstanding built-in camera, it is not a challenge to take good photos.

"What is your vision for the new generation?" I inquired the grandfather of two, "For the young generation, I would like to encourage children to take up a good hobby and pursue them with focus. It does not necessarily be photography, but a craft will give the kids a sense of value."



English café in Bangkok

by Robin Westley Martin

These were the thought processes early in the New Year of 2020, of my daughter Sara, my partner Noi, and myself. I had recently returned from a trip back to the UK with Sara, and we had visited the quaint and historical city of Bath. We explored this spot extensively (very popular with Thai and Asian visitors) and to rest our tired tourist toes we had plonked ourselves down in one of the many cafes offering a traditional English afternoon tea. Sara and myself stayed there rather longer than we had intended, sampling several of their cake offerings, and Ye Olde English Scones. My daughter was enamoured with the homemade cakes and the whole cafe atmosphere, and it had planted a seed of an idea in both our minds. Last Christmas, over a family meal, we discussed our trip to Bath, and we decided that to offer a similar experience in the heart of Bangkok would be a good idea.

Sara began scouting locations, and Noi, myself and she

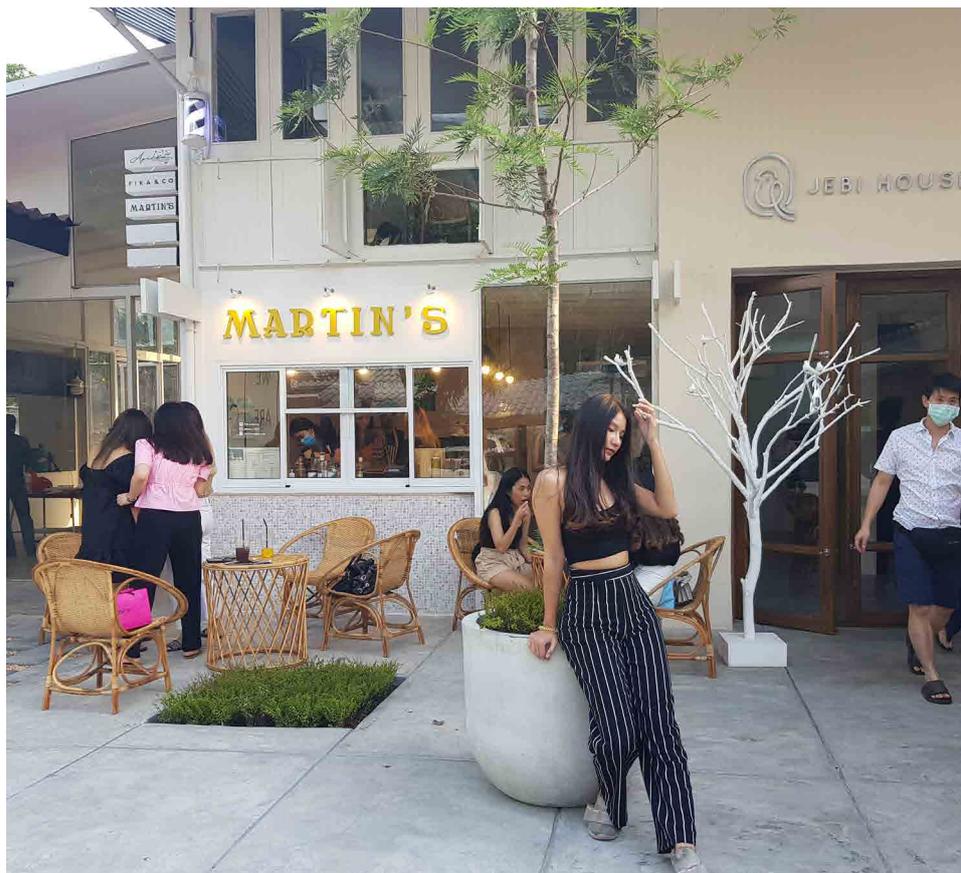


eventually decided upon the Ari district, a very popular area in which to hangout. We found a site, premises, and set about making our dream of an English café in Bangkok come true. Our research had discovered that Bangkok, over the last few years, has been the most visited city in the world, with 22.7 million international visitors per year. The next closest cities were London and Paris, with about 19 million.

All these plans, of course, predated the onset of the Corona virus pandemic that bombed out international air travel, and devastated the hospitality and service industries worldwide. But we had made our bed, had begun fitting out the café, signed contracts, and made heavy investments already. There was no going back.

The first problem we encountered was the supply chain for our fixtures and fittings, that we had carefully chosen for the restaurant, much of which was going to be shipped from China. Uh oh! The epicentre of the outbreak. However, it did not turn out as badly as we expected. China was the first to suffer the consequences of the deadly spread of Covid-19, but was also the first to start its recovery. The lockdown in China began to ease in April, and shipments out of the country once more resumed.

When we had initially signed our contracts with the owners of the complex in which our café was to be located, the opening date had been set for April 1st. Bangkok was deep in the throes of lockdown, and the city was as quiet as a teashop in an English country village might be. There was no traffic on the roads or on the pavements, and hotels, pubs, restaurants, and cafes had all been told to





shut their doors by the Thai government. Opening in April was a no no.

For us budding restaurateurs this was a very worrying time. The first of April approached and receded. The first of May approached and receded. When were we going to be able to open our restaurant that we had sunk all our money into, and how would the business fare in the 'new (ab)normal'.

We were looking closely at the effect this global disaster was having on businesses, and people's lives in general. Millions of small to medium businesses around the world are not likely to survive the losses they have made during the enforced closure of their premises, which was enforced to avoid the contact spread of the virus.

And the further burdens placed upon them, such as the restrictions on inner city mass transit systems means that footfall will likely be reduced. Places that rely on customers will also suffer from a reduction in clientele within their premises due to social distancing rules, resulting in less seating and table space. The extra costs of regular cleaning of their public and private spaces, and the cost of hand gel, etc, etc all have to be taken into account. All of this is going to eat into the profit margins, even of those establishments that survive and are able to reopen.

So, is this a good time to be opening a new place, without even the benefit of having created a name for itself, and having loyal

customers. Errrrmmm ... no, I think not. But never say die, mai pen rai (never mind), forge on and let's see what happens.

The Thai government, halfway through May, announced that restaurants and cafes would be allowed to open their doors again on June 1st, and we breathed a sigh of relief. At last we could open, and hopefully begin to recoup some of the money we had invested in creating this little corner of England in one of SE Asia's greatest cities. The extra time we had been given had allowed us to refine the décor, and get all the equipment fitted. The stuff from China had finally arrived, the freezer and chilled display cabinet had been delivered, the sink, ice machine and fridge had all turned up. And the Thai contractors had quickly completed installation of these essential café requirements. The interior décor, lighting, and seating was taken care of by the two ladies on the team.





As we readied ourselves for 'go' we set about sorting out our food and beverage deliveries and supplies. Our vision was of a little piece of England transported to Thailand, and our menu had to support this vision. I wanted to go the 'homemade' route, as I am not a fan of factory made mass produced food... I wanted our café to be special. Luckily, Bangkok is a cosmopolitan city, with a large expat presence, and many foreigners have made Thailand their home. In my work as a freelance journalist, I have been a gadabout in the city when times were more normal. I have had to attend numerous different types of function, and at them have made many contacts and friends, from just about every sector. Some of the English people I have met are in the restaurant business and when I had told them about my café project they were more than willing to help. Thus it is, that my new café has on its menu traditional English cakes, biscuits, pastries... and of course that essentially English favourite, freshly baked scones with homemade strawberry jam.

The complex in which my café is located was due to have seven different outlets within it, but as of June 1st, only my place and a full service restaurant had opened. Governments and landlords all around the world, to greater or lesser success, have been doing their bit to lessen the adverse effect of the economic downturn caused by the strictures that have been put in place due to the Covid-19 virus. Many landlords have waived or reduced their rents, and I am grateful that the landlord of my property followed suit.

We found two Thai staff who had previous restaurant or café experience, and on the first of June we nervously opened up for business, not knowing what to expect, as Bangkok was still nothing like as busy as it had been pre-Covid. The first two customers we had were two well-known bloggers in Bangkok, which proved fortuitous. A few more people trickled in during the morning, and by the afternoon more were coming, possibly having seen the review by the Bangkok bloggers. Over the next few days more customers and bloggers came, including some photographers and writers from magazines, for which I thank my friends in the media industry. The café is also proving very popular with the young crowd who are busily taking photos of the café and our food, which they post straight to the two most well-known social media sites, Instagram and Facebook... thanks!

I hope other places that are struggling with their new or



established mode of business can do well for themselves and flourish during these difficult and challenging times. I extend a welcome to you all to come and chill out at my place...

MARTIN'S English Café can be found on both Instagram and Facebook.

About the author: Robin Westley Martin

Robin has been living in Thailand and SE Asia for over 30 years. He first worked as News Editor for Business in Thailand magazine, before moving on to edit and write for the Thai Airways domestic inflight magazine, and also Hotel & Travel, amongst others. He continues to work in SE Asia and Thailand as a freelance writer or editor for several magazines, covering a wide range of genres.



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Facebook: Robin Westley Martin

Line: robinsiam555





All the time in the world

by Bea Toews

Some people are fortunate enough to have a safe home, enough good food, some form of transportation and enough friends to help them weather the storm of Covid-19. I am one of those. I live in a small ocean side town in southern Australia, and it is beautiful, clean and relatively quiet after the tourist season. I count myself very lucky.

I like to be busy, to use my time productively. I retired reluctantly and set about learning Thai, building a house in Hua Hin and travelling extensively to use the time I suddenly found on my hands. My idea of bliss is to do three different things in one day. When I travel I actually make a chart and at the end of the day, fill in the parts of the day. Maybe that is the teacher in me. No, not maybe. It is the teacher who makes the schedules.

Most of my life I have been lucky and productive and active. Not so now. Now I am suddenly not busy at all. My physical movements have been “cabined, cribbed, confined” not through any choice of my own. All the time I want and then some.

“Life is not a dress rehearsal.” Is what I think. I have created a three part isolation day. It is not for everybody but it is for me, and it seems to be working fine. As you will see, there are actually four parts and one is optional.

In the morning I exercise. I do XBX – an old Canadian air force series of exercises; I do a walk or run tape and I have a few other exercises. Some days I do Pilates as well. Then a leisurely shower and equally leisurely breakfast, I tidy whatever needs to be tidied in either the garden or the house. That is my morning, part 1 done. (I have to confess the house

and the garden are quite small: so, it is not an onerous task. Both the house and garden are tidier than they have ever been). This part is not optional.

In the afternoon I exercise my brain. Part 2 is learning a language on DuoLingo, I think there are better online platforms for learning a language and when I have finished DuoLingo. I will switch to another. Hopefully the world will be open to travel again, and the language learnt will be useful.

I am also studying one of thousands of courses offered on Coursera. It is on Modern Art and my aim is to try to understand it. As soon as I have finished this one, I will go on to another. I also read for an hour an afternoon just to keep new information coming in.

A very important part of the day is connecting with people. I consider that to be Part 3. I make at least three calls on WhatsApp or FaceTime or some other visual platform and write at least three emails to people. It is important to reach out to people in the way they feel most comfortable. I even make phone calls! This is also the time that I do any paperwork for the house or myself.

The optional part is the projects, and I have many. A collection of poems I have loved, sorting through years of memorabilia and digitising it, sorting out the cookbooks and taking out the good recipes, watching programmes streamed to air as all audiences are in their homes.

I finish the day writing in a diary to record who I spoke with and what my thoughts were for the day. With the best will in the world the days seem very much the same, even with the parts, and I want to be able to look back on this time with some knowledge as to what I did.

That is my three part day with extras. The physical, the mental, the social and the optional of the day. It is not my usual day, but it is the best I can do.

Maybe a schedule will be useful when I can get out of the house. But then I will be able to hang out with my family and friends.

As my Russian friends say “We shall see” what I do when I no longer have all the time in the world.



COVID: the God of Love

by *Little Wandering Wren*

So how did you fare, thrust into lockdown with your loved one 24/7? Was it a dream come true to be able to fall into each others arms over coffee, enjoy a passionate kiss at lunch break, or share a sundowner drink together as dusk falls on Bangkok? Oh, the excitement of having your partner home early and not stuck in Bangkok's commuter traffic jams.

Or were you ready to throttle Corona and whichever bat, laboratory or civet who instigated the worldwide pandemic and forced you to live inharmoniously in such unnaturally close confines?

Have you written a personal letter to the CEO of your partner's company imploring them to file for special consideration and reopen the Bangkok office to all staff, before you start divorce proceedings?

Lockdown: For better, for worse

Mr Wren is a restless soul at the best of times. The idea of going into a potential lockdown with no ability to run in Lumpini Park filled him with horror. The thought of weeks on end without Premier League soccer, beer and Soi Eleven, tennis, golf or Aussie rules football brought deep, deep despair. Thank goodness he had no idea of the alcohol ban at this time.

Moi on the other hand was quite up for the challenge, I mean how hard can it be? All I had to do was be better than office smoothie maid, and let him put the last piece of jigsaw in...

Working from home.

Hmmm, it turned out this was quite a challenge.

Let's be honest, any of us worth our salt as seasoned internationals will not have got where we are today without a high degree of independence. We expat partners develop highly sophisticated coping mechanisms to deal with whatever sh*t the world, the company or our situation throws at us. So we are not used to having our partners under our feet all day long. Certainly not in our space and never with their 'what's for lunch' comments.

Even worse if you are homeschooling children as well in this scenario. Give us all strength.

Or, if you had any Gen Y in your household. You can take solace in the fact that this is the generation coping least well in a lockdown, socially isolated and home working situation. So ignore their sulking or weird Xbox dependency habits.

Researchers are saying that the average home working executive needs to work at 150% to provide the output they normally do in a regular workplace environment.

I dispute this! If the partner, can supply the support, the distraction and the meals needed harmony can be found. We found out early on, that success can be achieved but most appreciation seems to be gained through food.

A domestic goddess: Goddess yes, domestic no!

Since our lockdown days, I have gone out of my way to be the domestic goddess that he has always wanted and I never felt was important. Sure, he married badly. This is no easy task when you have told your maid she can take the rest of the month off on full pay. A quick risk assessment for Covid-19 identified our one morning a week maid who cleaned endless homes was a potential weak link in the whole social distancing scenario. She had to be furloughed, sob, sob -from all parties!

I have cooked. I have cleaned and I have made the



world's best protein smoothies for lunchtime all in an attempt to smooth the way and ace it on the marital bliss front. Who knew that apparently the office has a maid who makes all the men (they are mostly all men!) a protein smoothie every lunchtime? It sounds a bit suss to be, but not to be beaten I can do this.

Life is a piece of cake!

I even made a cake (once) which was nearly the undoing of me. Confession time... so I might have lost it completely once, or maybe twice in the Central Food Hall in Central Chidlom. In my defence I was brought up in the country where queuing and politeness are the order of the day, alcohol ban or no alcohol ban.

I will say it now, I am sorry to the Thai lady who when leaning over me in the cake ingredients aisle got the full brunt of my Covid-19 I'm not coping wrath. I am socially distancing, I told her and you are in my cake flour personal space! She looked at me blankly, as if I was the bang out of order farang that I was.

I only did the cake thing once. I mean at some stage life has to return to normal doesn't it? I'm not setting myself up for failure. I might be able to carry off the domestic goddess malarkey for a few weeks, months at a stretch, but I fully intend to hop, skip and jump back into my old Bangkok ways at some point.

The Jigsaw Puzzle – it is always the small pieces that make the big picture

C'mon how many of you have been driven to jigsaw puzzles to alleviate a boring couples evening? Oh yes, I'm hearing many of us are searching for marital bliss by piecing together 1,000 tiny disconnected pieces. Have you tried it? It works!

Either through a vain attempt to gain some semblance of marital order, or dispel the threat of having to sit with your partner through yet another repeat of the third round of the 2019 Malaysian Golf Open - won by Scott Hend of Australia by the way. God bless True Sport.

It turns out jigsaws are like some weird form of meditation. I mean it is absolutely impossible not to be fully in the moment when attempting to recreate Monet's Garden, New York Central Park or Winter Wonderland.

I have learnt so much about my husband during lockdown. One of the best examples of how men and women operate differently was

the jigsaw. We both agree the starting point must be the edge pieces but from here on we differ.

I go for all the sky pieces and work logically down top to bottom. He goes immediately for glory and gather all the pieces for the truck in the middle. What? The truck wasn't even connected to anything. The male brain works in mysterious ways...

Women scan and colour match. While men carry out a forensic analysis of the piece, the box and them triumphantly place it in the exact G spot in the puzzle. With a self satisfied look.

The nightly TV dramas

We are not a household that ever watch the telly much but we had more drama over the nightly 'can I watch the news?' discussion, than in season two of Fleabag.

I know I'm not alone in saying most women (mass generalisation perhaps) are over the depths of despair of the CNN or BBC World News coverage of Covid-19 by 9pm at night. We want to relax and unwind without the never ending dose of tragedy.

Men however, devoid of any sport to watch, have an insatiable appetite for every horror statistic going. Enough said.

Sleep tight

Some people seemed lucky and make comments on how well they have caught up with their sleep since they went into lockdown. Not here in this household.

Video conferencing may have become easily the way of the business world, but needing to cover all time zones has meant we've (that's the royal we) started VC days at 7am and up to three times per week are finishing near 10pm.

Add in the wind down and the row over the TV News above and no one is getting to the Land of Nod, until late in the day. 10pm curfew or not!

The Headspace App and Downward Dog yoga Apps have been our nightly calm down.

Evening entertainment

It was pretty obvious to us early on how much our social life revolved around other people. We looked at each other and wondered how we would get through weeks, potentially months of social distancing.

We managed to include friends fairly easily through Zoom, Houseparty and soon our virtual Locktail Mocktail evenings on the balcony became a thing. Even better when we had the frisson of excitement of prohibition when Thailand's alcohol ban came into effect.

Very early on we each came up with 10 evening activities which were to spice up a dull lockdown evening. We would look to draw out a folded up piece of red paper containing the activity for any evening which looked particularly uneventful - weren't they all? Massage, disco dancing in the dark, contacting long lost friends, movie nights, body scrubs and facials, Thai language lesson, learning bridge and a few 'who put that one in?', become our way of life.

Rediscovering your relationship

There is no doubt that this has been an amazing opportunity to rediscover ourselves and our relationship. We found early on that we needed to change the way we talked to each other. Responding not reacting to issues became important, even when all you wanted to do was scream WTF at each other.

We found a lockdown situation amplifies the faults or points of tension in a marriage but some simple techniques were helpful at times of high stress.

In 'How to improve your marriage without talking about it' by Patricia Love and Steven Stosny (available at Kinokuniya EmQuartier) gives lots of helpful advice:

Six second hug

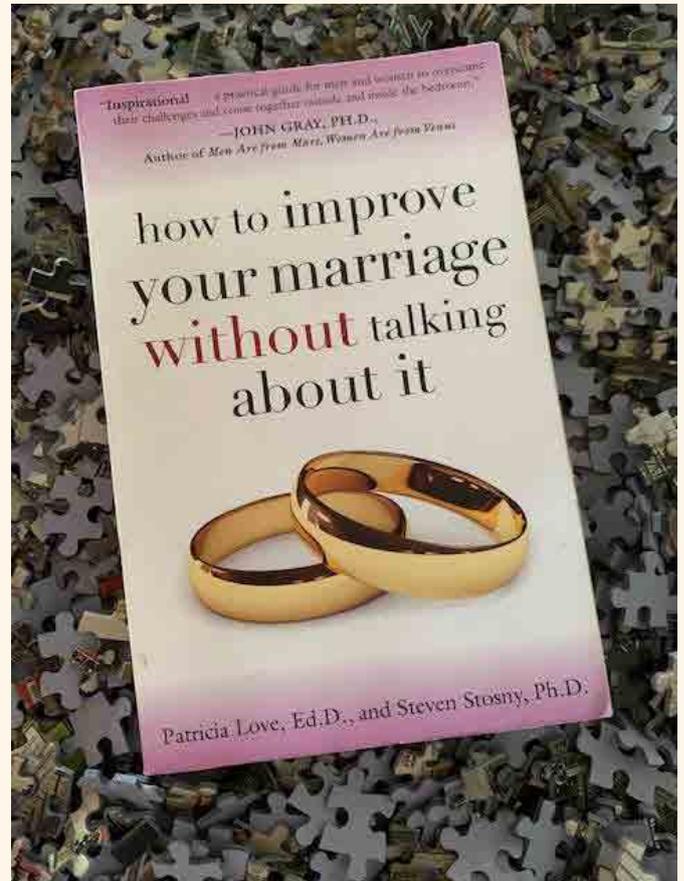
Hug your partner six times a day for six seconds. Try it! Six seconds is a long time, thirty-six seconds will facilitate a new level of closeness. It is impossible to maintain resentment whilst hugging, we would always end up laughing!

Hold positive thoughts about your relationship:

At some point in the day, as often as you can, stop for 10 seconds to think positive thoughts about your partner.

Appreciate your partner

Every night before going to sleep tell your partner the things they did during the day that you appreciated. Initially the



things I was being appreciated for all seemed to revolve about food – I loved it when you baked me that cake!

Change the way you talk to each other

Whilst a lot of the book emphasises building a deep emotional connection we found living in such close quarters to each other, no-one ever had the cooling-off time when things got annoying. The old keep calm and carry on quote became quite helpful and we strived to always respond not react when things drove us crazy.

New pleasures discovered

After thirty-five years together, no times has been more challenging than the past three months of Covid-19 life. Honestly give me "I've accepted a new job, we're moving Friday" conversation any day over I'm working from home for weeks on end and a two month Thailand government emergency decree.

We survived! We are hugging more, appreciating each other more (and knowing exactly what drives each other bananas in close living situations) We now understand each other more and have just graduated onto working together to finish the next 1,000 piece jigsaw.

Life's good!

About the author: Little Wandering Wren is an International Travel Writer currently with her nest in Thailand. This Bangkok Blogger can be found at www.littlewanderingwren.com and on Instagram and Twitter @littlewanderingwren

The “New Normal” at Phyathai 1 Hospital

“Safe & Clean Hospital” During this new normal, Phyathai 1 Hospital has enhanced its preventive measures and upgraded standard guidelines to maintain a sterilised and infection controlled environment through proper air ventilation and water purification system.

so you can feel comfortable while receiving the medical attention that you need.

Once the coronavirus pandemic will come to an end, we all have to expect and prepare ourselves for the “New Normal” that will soon reshape society. This focuses on increasing our awareness on taking good care of our personal health and hygiene and adapting to the behavioural changes on physical or “Social Distancing”.

As a healthcare provider, Phyathai 1 Hospital has come up with options in extending essential healthcare services and reassures a safe and clean hospital concept at home. These services include:

Clinic Connect Services

- Consulting with our specialist via video call
- Drug delivery
- Medical Services (Homecare Delivery) which include:
 1. Blood collecting services
 2. Vaccination
 3. Physical Therapy
 4. Wound dressing, assist in changing intravenous lines/catheters/medical equipment for bedridden patients

Phyathai 1 Hospital also provides special care services for established patients with the following conditions;

- Chronic diseases such as:
 - Cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, SLE disease, hepatitis and cancer
- Patient who need to receive continuous medication treatment
- Patients with a scheduled follow up appointment
- Paediatric patients who require an ongoing treatment or vaccination

At Phyathai1 Hospital, your care and safety is our priority.

For further information and appointment, please contact Phyathai call center at 1772 or (+66)2 201 4646 (8 A.M.–5 P.M.)



Phyathai 1 International Phyathai 1 Cambodia

Air Disinfection

Producing clean air with the use of the HEPA FILTER air purification system that eliminates bacteria through UVC light every 30 minutes. Facilitate acceptable indoor air quality through ventilation and filtration system

Water Purification

International standardisation of water purification through reverse osmosis (RO) system.

Isolation Room

Aseptic controlled environment with the use of UVC light projector.

“Safe Surgery” at Phyathai 1 Hospital, we are committed in keeping you safe and worry-free during your surgery and treatment care. We prioritise your safety through enhanced preventive measures and maintain a sterilised controlled environment instituted in all medical facilities and procedures



7 NATURAL WAYS TO PREVENT MOSQUITO BITES

by Deniz Sahinturk

Medically Reviewed by Ross Radusky, MD

As if we did not have enough to worry about we are coming into the mosquito season and have to be wary of Dengue fever. Please follow this sage advice from our American colleagues and stay safe from yet another plague.

When it comes to fending off itchy mosquito bites, synthetic repellents are not your only option. Find out what else works to ward off pesky mosquitoes.

Citronella candles and fans are two ways to keep mosquitoes away. Warmer weather means revelling in outdoor activities like hiking, sunbathing, and barbecues. Along with these plusses comes one tiny nuisance: mosquitos. These pesky pests, which thrive in warm weather, can put a damper on anyone's summer fun. But there are ways to deter mosquitos, so you can enjoy the sunshine.

The most common method used to repel mosquitoes is Deet spray, according to a survey published in July 2018 in Peer J — The Journal of Life and Environmental Sciences. Deet spray has the longest lasting effect against mosquitos, but there have been some concerns over potential side effects of the spray, including skin irritation, redness, rash, swelling.

Joseph Conlon, a retired US Navy entomologist and technical adviser for the American Mosquito Control Association, says there is no need to worry, though.

“Deet is a product registered by the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], and poses no unreasonable risk,” Conlon says. “If you use it judiciously there should be no problem — I mean, don't drink it.” Listen up Mr. Trump! But there are other ways to thwart mosquitoes if you don't want to use a synthetic repellent. In fact, according to the survey, 36% of people prefer to use natural repellents.

“The results show that in the future, there won't just be a marketplace for synthetic repellents, but for natural repellents

as well,” says Immo Hansen, PhD, who worked on the survey.

When using natural repellents that are applied directly to the skin, it's important to use EPA registered ones and always check the labels, reminds Conlon. If you have sensitive skin or known skin allergies, it's a good idea to test your skin first by applying a small drop of essential oil on the inside of your forearm.

Here are 7 natural ways to prevent mosquito bites:

1. Lemon eucalyptus

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has classified lemon eucalyptus, an EPA registered repellent, as an active ingredient in mosquito repellent. In a study published in June 2014 in the journal *Fitoterapia*, lemon eucalyptus essential oil was found to provide 100% protection against mosquitoes for up to 12 hours.

“It is a very good repellent,” says Conlon. “Just do not use it on kids younger than three years old; it hasn't been approved for them.”

Bonus: Lemon eucalyptus also helps relieve the symptoms of the common cold, like congestion and coughing.

2. Catnip oil

What most people know about catnip is its effect on cats. But it can also be used as a culinary herb or smoked like a cigarette. Research shows that it can be used to repel mosquitos, too. Yet this does not mean that catnip oil, which is acquired from catnip by steam distillation, will make you suddenly attractive to cats, according to Stephanie Maslow-Blackman, wellness advocate and essential oils instructor.

“The difference between the oil and the plant is that when you extract the oil from the plant, the oil won't have the side effects the plant might have. For example, if you're allergic to trees and use cedar wood oil, you won't be experiencing an allergic reaction,” Maslow-Blackman says.



So if you want to have more cat friends, you'll have to find another way. But this oil is EPA approved and will give you seven hours of protection from mosquitos, according to Conlon.

3. Peppermint oil

Peppermint oil is a natural insecticide and a mosquito repellent, according to the American College of Healthcare Sciences, based in Portland, Oregon. You can mix this oil with other scents, like lemon, and rub them onto your skin for a minty scent. But, Maslow-Blackman stresses, "Peppermint oil is a hot oil," which means it can cause a warm sensation when applied directly to your skin and might cause a skin rash. To prevent this, she suggests diluting the peppermint oil with a carrier oil, like canola oil.



4. Lemongrass oil

According to a study published in July 2016 in the World Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, lemongrass oil is comparable to commercial mosquito repellents. According to Maslow-Blackman, combining lemongrass oil with another essential oil (like cinnamon bark oil) will make its repelling effect stronger.

5. IR3535

IR3535, a synthetic amino acid, is one of the most common active ingredients in insect repellents. Repellents containing IR3535 come mostly in cream form, and are available in most drugstores. The amino acid messes with the insects' sense of smell and is an excellent repellent, according to Conlon. "It has no toxicity and gives you eight hours of protection," he says.

6. Use a fan

David Shetlar, an Ohio State University professor of urban landscape entomology, told Cleveland.com that mosquitos are bad fliers. So if you're sitting outside on a summer day, bring an electric fan with you to keep the mosquitoes away.

7. Eliminate standing water

Any pools or puddles around your home or yard can quickly become a mosquito breeding ground, according to the Mayo Clinic.

Tips to keep the area around your home free from these insects include:

- Unclogging roof gutters
- Emptying kids' pools
- Changing the water in bird baths weekly
- Making sure rain is not accumulating in trash can lids
- Storing flowerpots or any other unused containers upside down



NO OBSTACLES IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

Sukumvit Hospital continues to provide quality care for all patients by implementing new hygiene and safety measures

February marked the beginning of Thailand's fight against COVID-19. However, whilst at Sukumvit Hospital, medical professionals continued to treat patients suffering from different ailments every day, whilst bearing in mind the danger that the novel coronavirus posed. Overall, the number of hospital visits remained low while COVID-19 infection numbers were high. However, after two months, citizens across the country witnessed the true potential of our 'white-robed heroes,' who were able to control the situation. This successful response has eased the worries of many, who will no longer let the threat of COVID-19 stop them from seeking the medical help they need.

This fear of the virus has created obstacles for both out-patients and in-patients, especially those requiring surgery. However, thanks to the protective measures in place throughout Sukumvit Hospital, these concerns can be eased. Dr. Poonsak Artamnuayvipas, an Orthopaedics, Spine Surgery specialist at the Sukumvit Spine Center, explains in more depth about the thorough practices in place.

"Sukumvit Hospital has added precautionary measures for protection against COVID-19 that start from the

entrance of the hospital. Here, a screening takes place to separate at-risk patients so they can be treated appropriately. All medical personnel wear the necessary PPE, including masks, face shields, and gloves while interacting with patients. After screening, lifts are separated for at-risk patients and are equipped with an automatic sterilisation system that runs every 30 minutes. Social distanced seating is also in place to quell any close contact.

Each patient who requires surgery is first examined for COVID-19. If the virus is undetected, the patient will be receive normal treatment. However, if the patient tests positive, they will be treated according to guidelines from the Department of Disease Control and the Ministry of Public Health. Moreover, cleaning procedures for rooms are also performed to specific



standards: all surfaces are cleaned with disinfectants, and UV and Ozone sterilisation systems are used to ensure that floating particles are destroyed. As all medical professionals have happily complied with these stringent measures, the hospital is pleased to report no infections caught.

Dr. Poonsak, continues to explain that for in-patient care, rooms are arranged by zones to separate high-risk patients, and the engineering team have adjusted the ventilation systems





to prevent any spread of infection. Each room is cleaned and left vacant for a minimum of one hour before receiving the next person to ensure the safety of incoming patients.

Addressing necessary concerns...

During the COVID-19 outbreak, Sukumvit Hospital continued in its mission to provide comprehensive care, with all personnel reporting to work with confidence in the hospital's prevention systems. The Sukumvit Spine Center saw several patients of both working and old-age, many of whom sought minimally invasive surgery. Unlike traditional methods, these procedures require small incisions with no need to cut the surrounding muscles, subsequently leaving less injury and requiring minimal recovery time. These minimally invasive methods are currently going through an evolution. For example, Epidural Adhesiolysis, Endoscopic Spinal Surgery, and others, are constantly being improved so they pose minimal risk of infection and complications.

At the Sukumvit Joint Replacement Center, patients who have to undergo surgery are sometimes as old as 80. Luckily, Sukumvit Hospital offers a minimally invasive alternative to full knee replacement surgery that preserves the majority of the knee so that patients can return to life as normal, while being able to walk faster, sit crossed-legged, and walk upstairs. As the hospital has seen many success stories, it is evident that preventative measures, technology, and medical experience are all contributors to effectively treating patients.

Strengthening confidence...

Dr. Pavinee Imkong, Anaesthesiologist, is one of many professionals treating patients during this time, and she states why it remains important for additional measures to stay in place...

“It is the hospital's utmost responsibility to make sure everyone is protected against COVID-19. Sukumvit Hospital is one of Bangkok's only hospitals certified by the Department of Medical Sciences as equipped to test for COVID-19 using Real Time RT- PCR, a technique now accepted worldwide. This is beneficial, as minimising the need for outsourced testing makes getting results easy and fast.”

Moreover, Sukumvit Hospital has also increased its capacity for influenza vaccines, so patients do not have to exit their vehicles for convenience. Moreover, for urgent situations, patients can call 02 391 0011 to consult beforehand about whether it is necessary to come and see a doctor. These preventative measures have been implemented to protect patients and staff, and they will continue to be in place so we can continue to provide quality care to all patients in the near future.”



Sukumvit Hospital began operations in 1977, recently completed a major makeover. Not only have they built a new building, but the entire team of doctors, specialists, nurses and assistants have all been trained with the singular aim of helping their patients maintain optimum health. Then there are the equipment, state-of-the-art MRIs, Cath labs and myriad of others, so that their specialists have the best available tools for diagnosis and treatment. Conveniently located on Sukhumvit Road with English speaking staff, Sukumvit Hospital is now ready for any emergencies or treatments.

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Alcohol, fitness, and our health

by *Rishi Haria*

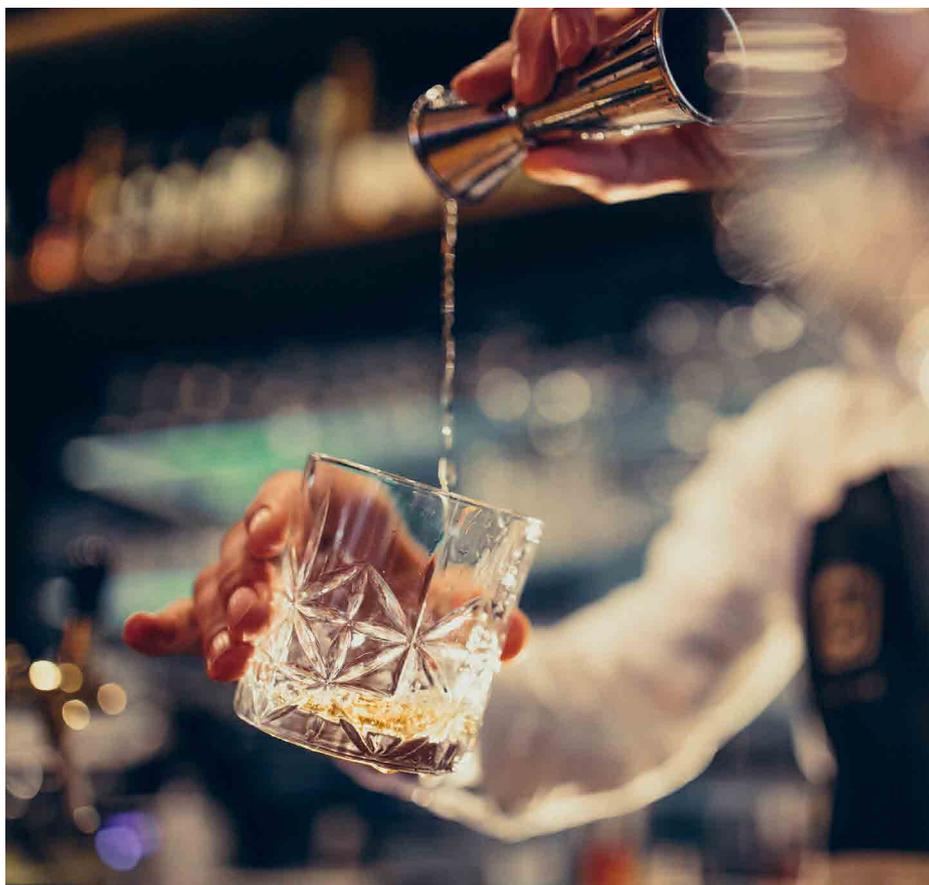
The recent ban on alcohol has hit many people hard during this lockdown era. Being stuck at home all day leaves us with very little to do in our free time except binge watching TV shows. So I can understand a bit of escapism with a few drinks at home from time to time. Is there a silver lining to this ban for our health, at a time where keeping our immune systems strong can be the difference between life and death for some people? I believe it should be our own choice as to whether or not we drink, even during the coronavirus outbreak.

Optimal health has never been as important as it is now for my generation. Although I am not a doctor, I know what it takes for most people to improve their health. Seeing a daily coronavirus death toll every morning on social media has become the norm for us all. Nobody wants to be under lockdown, but we all understand and necessarily agree with the logic behind it. The silver lining is that the extra time spent at home can enable us to reevaluate certain areas of our lives, including keeping ourselves healthy. If any of us are unfortunate enough to catch the virus it is important that we make sure we are as healthy as possible in order to fight it off. Not everyone has obvious underlying health conditions, but the average person is under exercised, eats badly and fails to keep their immune system in a peak state.

Part of the fight against Covid-19 should start with taking care of ourselves. Eat nutritious foods, exercise regularly, sleep well, control stress levels, and live a healthy lifestyle.

Alcohol has barely been a part of my life for many years now. I have been drunk just once in the past 12 months. I have become such a lightweight that my tab was as small as my muscles are becoming due to the closure of the gyms, and I couldn't even make it to midnight... Having kids definitely changes things. I cannot say that I miss it much at all. I started to feel healthier and more energetic once I put those heavy party days of my youth behind me. Not that I am exactly old, but after reaching the end of my 20s (I am 33 now) I felt that it was the right time to say goodbye to hangovers. Some might call me boring. Others might call me very boring!

Apart from feeling terrible, what are the actual negative effects on our health and fitness? It is a question that would



be relevant to a lot of people that try to keep a healthy lifestyle but also like to enjoy a drink or two... or three. The biggest concern from chronic alcohol consumption during a virus pandemic is that it can hinder our immune system's ability to fight off infections. Most people that drink alcohol are likely to do so socially as opposed to being a full on alcoholic. So let's discuss the other less depressing but still important ramifications from alcohol consumption.

There are 7 calories per gramme of alcohol, 4 calories per gramme of carbohydrate, 4 calories per gramme of protein, and 9 calories per gramme of fat. When you consume too many calories it can result in weight gain regardless of where these surplus calories come from. The alcohol calories themselves do not directly convert to body fat. The alcohol gets absorbed by the bloodstream and then goes to the liver. Our body will start to use the alcohol as its primary energy source because we cannot store alcohol in the body. The problem is that alcohol slows down fat oxidation. Carbs and dietary fats are now directed to storage rather than being burned off. More often than not we tend to choose less healthy/higher calorie options when our inhibitions are lowered. Not only are we eating too much because of the alcohol, our ability to burn off the extra calories is reduced while there is alcohol in our system. This is why eating high fat junk foods is such a bad idea when you drink alcohol. A chicken breast salad with no dressing anyone?

There is no real physiological benefit of drinking more than a glass of wine in one sitting. It is the least satiating nutrient that you can grab your hands on. It even makes you feel hungrier in most cases. 200 calories that you get from a beer will not suppress your appetite more than 200 calories worth of a tuna steak. If you use up too much of your daily

keep improving your health and fitness then excessive drinking should be avoided.

When we train it's important for our recovery that we are able to rebuild and build muscle effectively. This takes place within the process of protein synthesis. Protein synthesis is strongly reduced when you consume a lot of alcohol. Although adequate protein consumption can help offset some of the negative effects

from alcohol, protein synthesis will still be affected. Cutting down on alcohol from my life made it much easier to take my training to the next level.

The hangover from drinking will always make training the next day an arduous task. I would recommend planning a rest day after a night out drinking. It is hard to get a quality night's rest because our rapid eye movement sleep (REM) sleep gets shortchanged with alcohol in our system. REM is the period of sleep where people dream and rejuvenates us mentally. Some people use a late night drink as a sleeping aid. While this can potentially help you fall asleep, the quality of your sleep will be disturbed. This is the reason why we wake up feeling groggy after drinking the day before. Marijuana also reduces REM sleep interestingly enough.

The purpose of this article is not to try put people off from drinking. Far from it. It is just important to know how it can affect our health and fitness goals. Moderation is key and when we want to truly maximise our fitness and health progress, it's probably better to cut down our alcohol intake as much as possible.

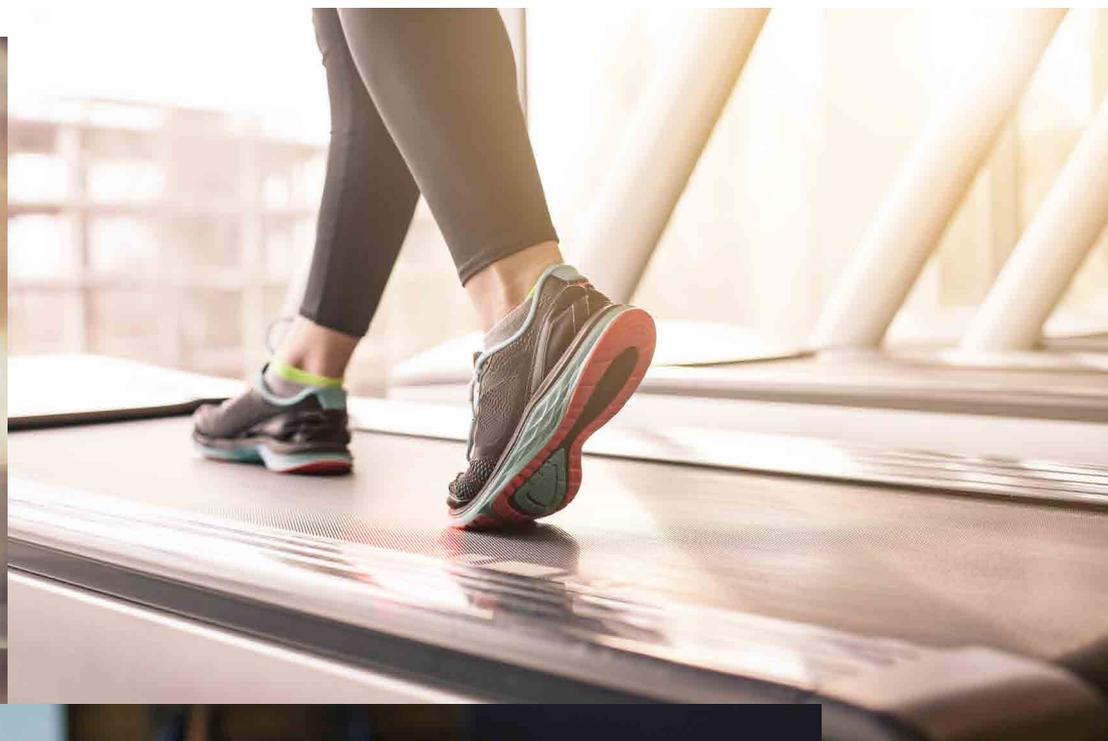
A couple glasses of wine on the occasional date night with my wife still has its appeal, even to me!

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calories on alcohol then it leaves little room for real nutritious food, unless you're willing to exceed your normal calorie intake. Of course this will lead to weight gain based on the reasons discussed on the first point. On the plus side, a glass of red wine a day is said to improve heart health by reducing blood clots and lowering blood sugar.

Excessive alcohol consumption over a long period of time can reduce testosterone in men by up to 45%. Reduced testosterone has a terrible effect of metabolism, ability to build muscle, libido, and overall energy levels. Effects on testosterone is less of an issue for women. The negative effects on your liver health should be a concern for both genders when it comes to binge drinking. If you want to



The future after Covid-19 or the future of Covid-19: a pandemic or something more?

by Alex Peters

2020 has been undoubtedly been an unprecedented year so far. The start of a new decade was for many a sign of new hope, beginnings and opportunities. The chances however are looking slim. With some analysts predicting international travel not to rebound until 2022, its left many wondering if it will ever return to the same again. This fear hasn't come out of a vacuum, the United Nation's Framework Response seems to encapsulate the consensus amongst us all. 'The COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis: it is affecting societies and economies at their core... it will most likely increase poverty and inequalities at a global scale.' The International Monetary Fund has already predicted a minus 3% global growth in April of this year which is an even worse recession than the Global Financial Crisis back in 2009. And dolphins have been seen swimming through the canals of Venice. It has most certainly been an unprecedented year to say the least. I am Alex, an MA student with studies cut short and resumed online due to the outbreak, with the intention of starting a career in Thailand after the pandemic recedes and international flights can start back. I have travelled intermittently through China, Vietnam and Thailand over the past two years, but now back in the UK, I wonder what the state of international travel, and even trade, with expensive tariffs imposed on commerce due to limited cargo in and out of countries, will come of over the next few months. My desire

to travel the world started back when I was in Beijing, as a second year student enrolled on a two week summer camp created to showcase the innovation China had to offer, from the latest technology put in place for research purposes in universities, which included virtual and augmented reality devices, golf simulators, and a twenty minute video telling us why Beijing is so great. The guided tour of course seemed another propaganda mission, but nevertheless come off inspiring to me, who until then had not travelled any farther than Spain. The prospect of this new world in another country sparked an interest I never knew existed. Just crossing the street was a mammoth task, where I was told traffic never stops, and the humidity so intense I could barely breath. But it was great, I started a relationship, and for the first time found a meaning and a use for my degree, post-graduation. I sensed that a life in Asia was at some point in time going to be inevitable.

It wasn't another year until I reached Asia again, this time further south to Hanoi and Bangkok where I met a friend back from the UK who had lived there for some time. We met, had some drinks in Khaosan Road and talked about our plans. Having travelled around Vietnam for the past few weeks and eventually making it back down to Bangkok, I showed him some of the negatives of my trip, and yes shooting on film in 2019 might seem strange but as a serious photographer I cannot help resist the warm textures that film offers, and mixing that with such vibrant Asian street life is sublime. It's my intention to discover the rest of Asia too and quite possibly the world. Everything today is documented and remembered, making material more rewritten than ever original, but one should not be daunted, we should learn as creatives to enjoy the tools of the digital age accordingly. Learning to synchronise old media with new technologies could and is already in many aspects here.

But it does make one wonder the future after Covid-19,

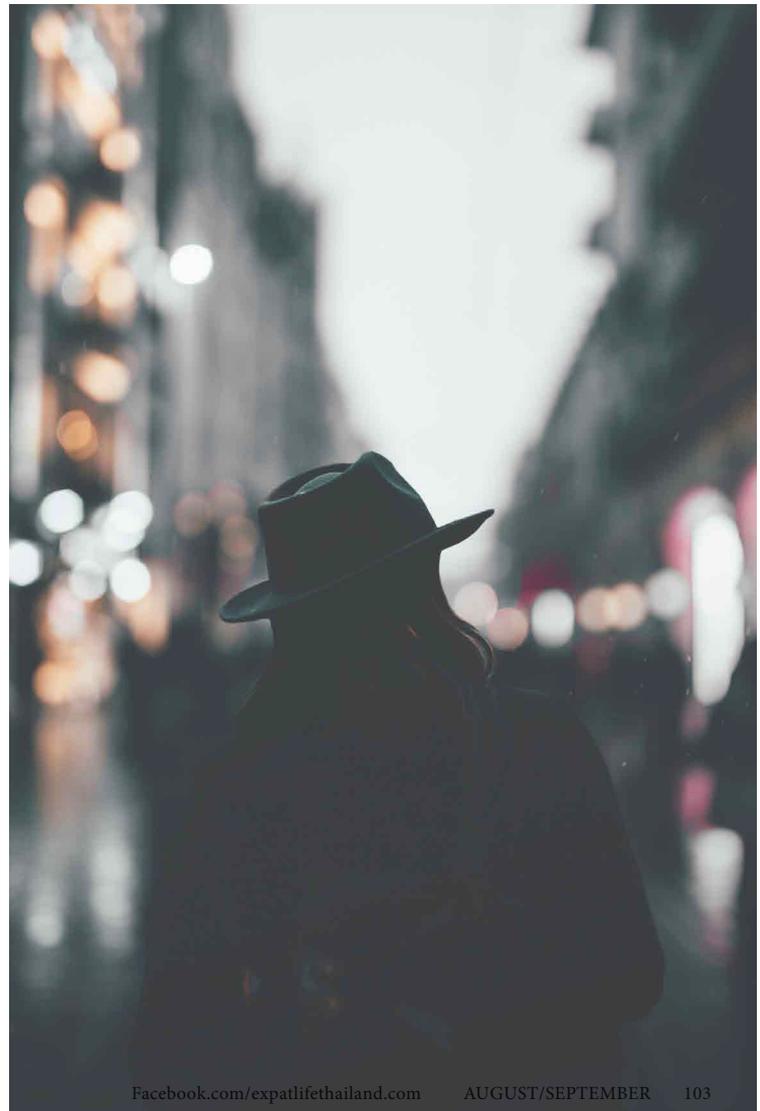
or, the future of Covid-19 if we must face living with it. Whilst the lockdown has brought a halt to life as we know it, it all doesn't seem to appear doom and gloom. New research published by Department of Education claims 47% of young people have learned a new skill or brushed up on an old one since the lockdown began. With another 44% becoming more affiliated with family and friends, though I do not see much else there is to do. But even so, 71% are still worried about their stake within academia and 46% are concerned about mental health issues. Being closer to the people we are fond with what has appeared to reinforce solidarity and communal strength, readjusting again to a time where migration wasn't so popular, and globalisation seemed futuristic.

We have come to understand family again, cherishing the small moments of opportunity to meet loved ones and friends in between the gaps of restrictions. Andy Haldane, chief economist has even recognised a 'surge in small neighbourly acts of generosity', with Bronwen Maddox claiming 'British people will come out of this with an even greater desire for better health services and care for the elderly.' This is sourced from an article published by Alex Brummer in the Daily Mail who likens the Covid-19 crisis as that to the Second World War (WWII), as Churchill and his coalition aimed to find a way to restore and find 'social and economic settlement'. The Beveridge Report was subsequently founded to try and conquer what was thought of at the time as five main goals; 'idleness, Ignorance, disease, squalor and want'. And as Alex states that more casualties have resulted from Covid-19 than even the Blitz, he stresses that 'Post-Covid Britain deserves nothing less'. In a statement published on 23rd June 2020, a similar scheme can be seen, this time in the manifestation of 'task forces', setup by the government in order to establish safe and 'COVID Secure' measures to allow the hospitality industry to reopen and try to 'restore' the economy. Many have flirted with the term 'anthropause', meaning a sudden and widespread pause in the mobility of people around the world. But whilst we may be concerned about the cultural and economical fallout of the crisis, it has led researchers to an 'unprecedented' opportunity to 'build a global picture of animal responses by pooling large number of datasets'. Usual methods of research to determine animal behaviour include two main approaches, spatial and temporal changes. The spatial aspect involves looking at the differences of human activity in areas like unprotected and protected areas, and the difference in gradient too, among a species.



The second, looks at documenting these changes, whether it be long or short term. In relation to COVID-19, these two approaches can be intertwined to examine the effects of areas which vary in restrictions, and therefore the result of frequent or infrequent human activity over a certain period. With this advantage being given to researchers, conspiracy theorists nevertheless claim Covid-19 as being an intentional ploy, to trap and enslave the world's population as part of a new world order, being peddled by elites such as Bill Gates, due to his close alignment with organisations such as WHO. All of that to say, I think we have witnessed a reset, globally, as was the case with 9/11,

when security measures were increased for good, war was declared, and new laws passed. For the future anyway, I think we are entering a new tier of corporate surveillance unlike anything before.



Let's boost and rejuvenate

by Margaret Elizabeth Johnston

I hope by the time you read this information most of us are out of lockdown. Boosting the immune system has been my highest priority during these times; I am currently in lockdown in Pondicherry, India. I have written about Pondicherry in another article I have submitted for this month, it is a sweet French colonial town and the fruit/veg markets are open along with cows roaming the streets of course! I count myself lucky to be able to go out to the markets in the mornings for my daily walks. Below are two examples of what I am doing, have done to stay on top of my health regime. It is a positive experience during these times to be learning a new skill so I've been putting my health blogs together for a complimentary e-book, Health, happiness and harmony, it will come in handy as the years pass! I have put the link in the bio at end. Staying mentally active during these suppressed times is just as important as keeping the body strong, fit, flexible and calm. Below I will explain my morning just do it blast!

First thing; Just do it!

Most people that are into cleansing/immune boosting know about fresh lemon juice but I like to take it a step further and add grated ginger root, turmeric and mash up a few garlic cloves. Garlic has biological affects; the sulphuric compounds of raw garlic are antibacterial, anti-parasitic, modifies the immune response, helps the lipid metabolism and is a protector for the cardiovascular system. The main active ingredient of garlic is allicin, released by crushing or chewing fresh garlic, this produces other compounds, including ajoene, allyl sulphides, and vinylthiols. Modifying the immune response should catch some people's attention if you have heard about some of the discussions going around right now regarding people with healthy immune systems overreacting to the Corona virus which causes something similar to an auto-immune disease... it is just that, being "not at ease" in the body, so regulating the immunity responses whether you have low or high immunity can benefit with this simple trick to mash up and chew some raw garlic every day. If you just can't hack it, chop it up and shallow using spoon chased with water, but honestly, it can become addictive... it is really quite yummy on its own and your body doesn't take on the garlic odour if you integrate this daily. I also use it when fasting, for some reason it really curbs any hunger that I might have.



Maybe my body thinks it has eaten a meal or something?!
But whatever the case, it works!

Ginger fights infections, good for the immune system, helps with digestion, revitalises the metabolism, regulates blood sugar helps with a natural detox and plain just feels buzzy and warm in your body!

I have written an extensive blog on the magical qualities of turmeric: <https://www.mejcreations.com/ArticleDetail/4698>

Using lemons in detox and immune boosting regimens is quite common, the reason being they protect the body from immune deficiencies, has loads of vitamin C which can help fight infections, cleanses the liver, it is anti-inflammatory, provides electrolytes, aids in digestion and skin rejuvenation.

I find that by starting my day with this, it boosts my moral, helps me tune into my body, know I am giving myself good quality natural medicine and curbs the desire to destroy the awesome path I am on during these times with "munchy" foods that might not be so good for me. By helping yourself you are helping the neighbour, lets stay strong together!

It is best to give the body 15-20 min after this for the medicine to activate the body into cleaning/boosting mode, and



then one can indulge in their coffee/tea programmes for the morning! Switching to nut milks is best if you're going to do this however due to the lemon in the concoction, we don't want to curdle milk in the belly first thing in morning if you are a latte/cappuccino person! I have switched to Americano for my caffeine blasts in the morning these days along with programmes of no coffee switching to green tea instead. Change is always a good thing in the diet, mixing things up as we go along.

Time for the master cleanse

I do the master cleanse about twice a year, once before summer and once after the holidays. It is based on Stanley Burroughs, author of Master Cleanse, recipe and conscious programme to detoxify the body with lemons, cayenne and water along with real maple syrup for nutrients (along with the nutrients from the lemons and cayenne of

course). So, It is usually a 10 day process but I go for about 3-7 days. It isn't my first time so I don't feel I have so much toxic build-up in the first place but usually first timers should do the full 10 days.

I usually fill a 6 cup jug with pure water, use 3/4cp fresh lemon juice just pressed and then 3/4 cp maple syrup. Grade B is recommended but it is expensive and just because it is darker does not mean it had more nutrients.

All maple syrup that is real is made the same way and the colour is based on the time of year the tree was tapped. Pure maple syrup contains many beneficial nutrients including potassium, magnesium and iron. Cayenne soothes digestion, reduces inflammation and is a stimulant and an all over body tonic. There is more vitamin C than in oranges, there is iron, calcium, phosphorus and B complex vitamins. It relieves stiffness and pain in the body also. Lemons raise the level of citrate in the body which help to fight kidney stones, they are a great source of vitamin C and have positive effects on the liver, bile and digestion.

I add about 1 heaped tsp to the concoction and make two of these jugs a day. There is about 700 calories in this concoction so that's about 1,400 a day which is normal caloric intake for me. It isn't about losing weight but I do have a nice flat stomach and feel full of energy after even just 2 days! When our bodies aren't spending so much time constantly digesting and dealing with what we

put into it, our body naturally starts to cleanse itself and go into "energy" mode. Skin becomes more clear, eyes more bright, less sleep is needed and we feel good about life!

Use organic ingredients if possible and go for some nice yoga or swimming, very good for the mind, body and soul! Early to bed, early to rise!

About the author: Margaret has been travelling around SE Asia since 2015 beginning with Thailand and pops into Bangkok for visa runs from Bali which she has made it her main base. She has been a health

educator for 23 years on holistic health and achieved her Doctor of Naturopathy in 2010, sharing with us with her decade of experience. Portraying medicinal plants with watercolours is a way she spends her time while travelling. Her stories come from far and wide, and quite unique. One can follow her on her website blogs and/or sign up for her monthly newsletter. During lockdown she put her health blogs into a complimentary e-book *Health, Happiness and Harmony* you can download from her website under e-books.

<https://www.mejcreations.com/page/23380/e-books-art-health-and-travel>



OWNERSHIP in the workplace

by *Waleska Berquño*

Regardless of the segment and size of companies, a company with a well defined corporate culture, notably gives a great value on employees expected performance.

Even employees from a hierarchical level, who treat work as if it were their own business, who have a sense of ownership. In order, to figure out an employee who has a sense of ownership: be an employee who has the feeling of the act, state, or right of possessing something. Companies want everybody to feel and act like an owner, at the most different levels. The owner of the machine. The owner of the Finance area. The owner of that project. The owner of Production Line. People who work well in this inspiring, positive and energetic workplace environment indeed have been searched unremitting by cultures of high performance and well planned demand. Every organisation needs build a culture of ownership. Ownership isn't assigned or given. Ownership is taken. I can't appoint ownership. Because owner is owner.

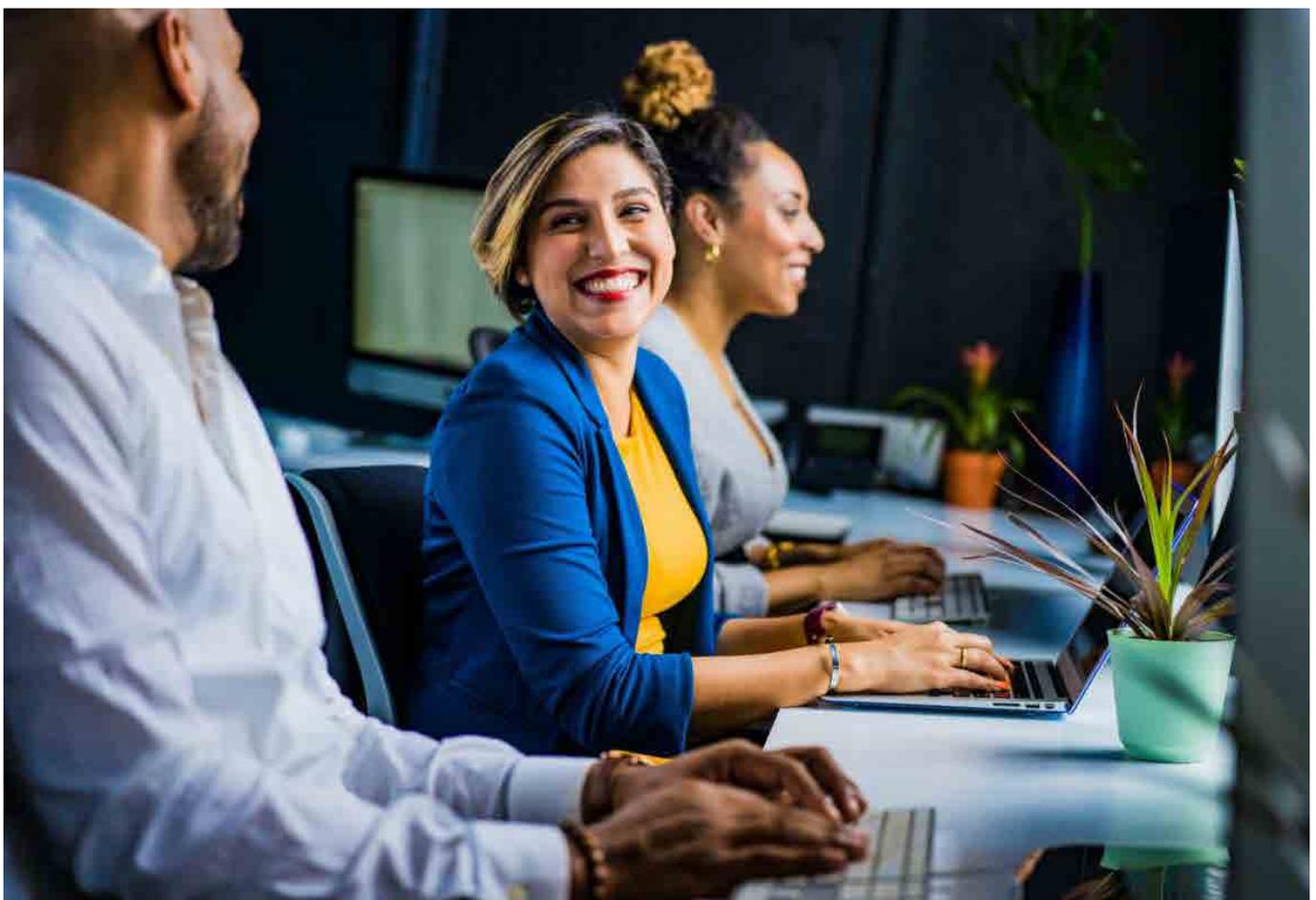
The employees have to assimilate about the importance of get a good motivating and engaging organisational behaviour through goal setting, workplace improvements,

positive reinforcement and performance recognition. These mechanisms contribute to create a healthily challenging work environment. The leaders can provide recognition for employees through newsletters, interoffice emails and at company events throughout the year or consider quarterly and yearly bonuses for employees who meet predetermined productivity levels. The recognition policy can be an ally. The politic of good example can works very well like reference to others employers of the company

Arguably, people who are recognised for various achievements are more motivated to continue and expand their efforts, no afraid to expose their ideas or take the ownership attitude. When the people feel confident in the workplace, inevitably they perform better. Undoubtedly they may become more creative, independent and happy to work well even under a high pressure productive environment.

Certainly the comfort zone is the main enemy of all professionals who wish to grow in their careers. When the employees remain comfortable and relaxed positions in the workplace, while what really is needing to achieve new goals is a state of relative anxiety, stress and discomfort. Finally, resilience at work, that is essential develop to get a human and empathic look of that need to deal with adversities, conflicts in the environment of pressure. The companies would like the employees to proactively improve the role, continually increase output, and increase overall efficiency but taking the ownership of improving the task would take away from that comfort zone facing few people look for discomfort. Once people stop making excuses, stop blaming others and take responsibility for everything in their lives, they are compelled to act and solve their problems.

In business, as in life, prevention is better than cure.





favour of carrying out a project or task, with different resources and in different ways.

Another skill needs to be experimentation, not to be afraid of making mistakes and building improvements on top of the mistakes or successes that happen throughout the process. Take that incremental look at ideas.

A sense of ownership is the differentiated mentality of people who want to see their company thrive, ensuring stability, profits and growth. When the leaders foster a culture of ownership, they don't need to be involved in every detail. That precious time

can focus attention elsewhere, secure in the knowledge that owners will always come when they have problems or need help. Imagine if every one of your company's employees and managers had this same mentality?

Do not allow complacency to occur. The most important actions should be taken by leaders are keep people engaged and motivated to act and encourage both continuous learning and training. The leaders have to let employees see their own potential, stimulate them with their career prospects and foster their talents also. The success ownership is built on individual excellence aiming the accomplishments of teamwork. Is important know positive result is possible by great leadership at all levels.

Valuing this ownership feeling, organisations try to maximise the dedication of employees, aligning business interests and facilitating the coordination of activities. The example and practice of company employees speaks louder and can be replicated at all levels through inspiration toward continuous improvement to achieve the needed results.

Great leaders ensure there's a sound planning process that includes mission clarity, evaluation of options and risks, engagement of all levels, post-action debrief, and systematisation of the planning process..The employees take the ownership over their work invest first in your ability to take responsibility for the results of your team, that is, to assume the risks of an operational and strategic change in

The employees have the ownership mind are driven by their own desire to succeed, surely they fully understand and believe in a mission, before they can convince others to embrace it and lead them to do what's needed to succeed.

Great leaders prioritise the wider mission over their personal ego. They're willing to learn, accept good ideas from others, and own up to their mistakes. They also of manage their team members' egos to keep everyone focused on the team mission.

Keep in mind that the motivation is inside of you. Change. You can have the best work tools, the best work team, the best leader, but if you don't decide to change by yourself, nothing will happen. You are not a tree, you can move.

Are you ready to develop your owner's profile in your work?



HOW WILLPOWER HELPS YOU BE SUCCESSFUL WITH WEIGHT LOSS

by Saree Jitta

Someday, I am very motivated to do the workout, nail my diet, and stick to my routines. But sometimes I do not feel like doing exercise at all, I eat junk food, and I feel like crap. What is happening to me? Maybe I have used up all my willpower?

I am sure most of you have heard of this word before “willpower” but what does it really mean? What has to do with the power we got to be a success on weight loss and the next we might lose it all and fall off the wagon?

Let me introduce you to your own superpower (aka willpower). Think of willpower as our drive, determination, self-discipline, self-control, self-regulation, effortful control.

How do we refuse that chocolate cake after dinner? What about we go out for a walk instead of watching Netflix all day? And how do we keep being strong when we want to light up that cigarette?

Or we say no to our colleague about after work drink? That is your willpower!

I know it is not easy for all the things we have tested or experienced before and that were so good. It is those sweet temptations that we wanted to give ourselves in because it is easier to do that. But we have to say no because we have this big goal. However, sometimes it is easier to say no but sometimes I just say yes without thinking twice. How come?

Well because our willpower is limited just like the energy in our body if you have used them all up, you might still have some left within you, but it is going to be much harder for a very difficult task. Also, if you are tired, lack of sleep you tend to lose to those temptations easily.

Therefore you should use your willpower for the most important task first, for example, it might be work on your project first thing in the morning before you check your social media because you know that once you start to scroll down you will get sucked in for hours and by the time you realise you probably do not have this creativity anymore. Or in the evening put on your sneakers and just go outside for a walk before you sit down on a couch and turn on your Netflix because you know if you do that, you will be lazy for the rest of the evening.

“Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.”
– Mahatma Gandhi

In a classic willpower study, Walter Mischel, now a psychologist at Columbia University set out to study self-control in children, with a simple yet effective test.

Known as the marshmallow test (another good book recommended), Mischel and colleagues presented preschoolers with a plate of marshmallows. Each child was then told that the researcher had to leave the room for a few minutes and if they waited until his return, the child could have two marshmallows. If the child couldn't wait, he could ring a bell, the researcher would immediately return, but he could only eat one marshmallow.

Years later, the research team followed up with these kids and found that the children who waited for the second candy were generally faring better in life scoring higher SAT's and lower body mass index (BMI), 30 years after the initial test.

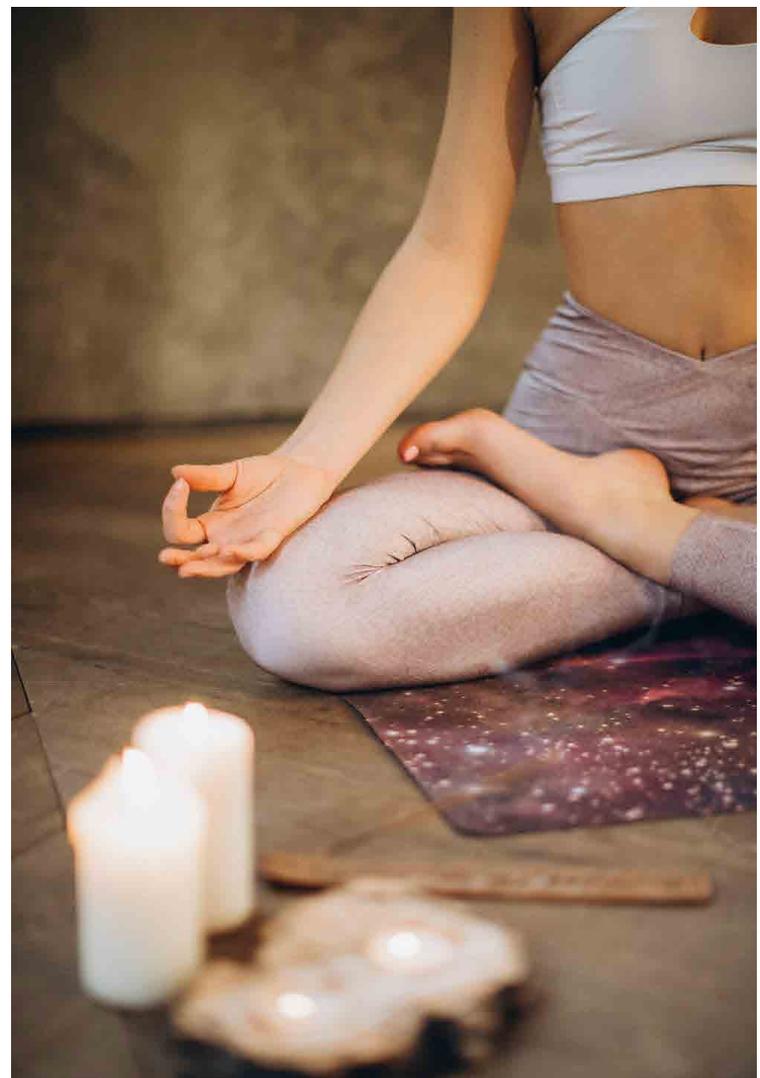
What is this telling us? Well if you have more self-control or self-discipline you tend to have more willpower, and those with will power will be more successful in their lives, career, financial, health, relationship.

Let me give you a few tips you can do to help strengthen your willpower;

Improve your self-awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to recognise what we are doing as we're doing it. Our thought processes, emotions, and reasons for acting are an important part of making better choices.

For example, next time you caught yourself about to reach for a snack. Pause for a second and be honest with





to ourselves. If you feel bad about yourself or keep telling yourself negative things, you will weaken your own willpower. As human beings, it is normal to lose out to temptation sometimes. But try thinking of what your long-term goal is. If you lose it today to the temptation (because it is much easier) it will take you further away from your long-term goal.

Take home message: Be kind to yourself because in someday you might not have much of willpower and that is ok. Tell yourself it is ok and I will try again tomorrow because you will have the willpower back. Everyone got the superpower within them. Sometimes we might use it all up, use the few tips above to recharge.

Some people do not even know they have

got the willpower inside of them. I suggest

starting with choosing one thing that you always say yes to but today just say no for once, break that pattern. Trust me, once you can say no to the things that you think you cannot do without it feels so good. When you get the taste of your own willpower then it will be easier for you. Your willpower is like a muscle, same as when you are lifting weights you train your muscle to get stronger.

yourself. The essence is to train your brain to pause before you act. Am I truly hungry? Am I bored or upset about anything? Find the root of the problem and fix it; if you're just thirsty then you might be dehydrated, if you are bored or upset then shift your focus to reading a book or find a hobby to do, but if you are upset then find out what causes or trigger that then see if you can fix it because those snacks might just give you just a quick fix but it isn't going to nourish or heal you in a long term.

Meditate

Meditation can be as simple as shift your focus to your breathing. Next time you are angry or upset before snapping at your partner or finishing a whole tub of ice cream just take a deep breath in 3 times; in through your nose and out through your mouth (if 3 times are not enough in this case, I recommend 5 times.) Practicing meditation will help you bring your awareness back to self.

Get your sleep in

A minimum of 8-10 hours. I could go on for an hour for a benefit of sleep but one of it would be it will help with your willpower. If we lack sleep, not only is our body tired but our willpower is weak. We will not be able to say no to the sweets because our brain cannot function well.

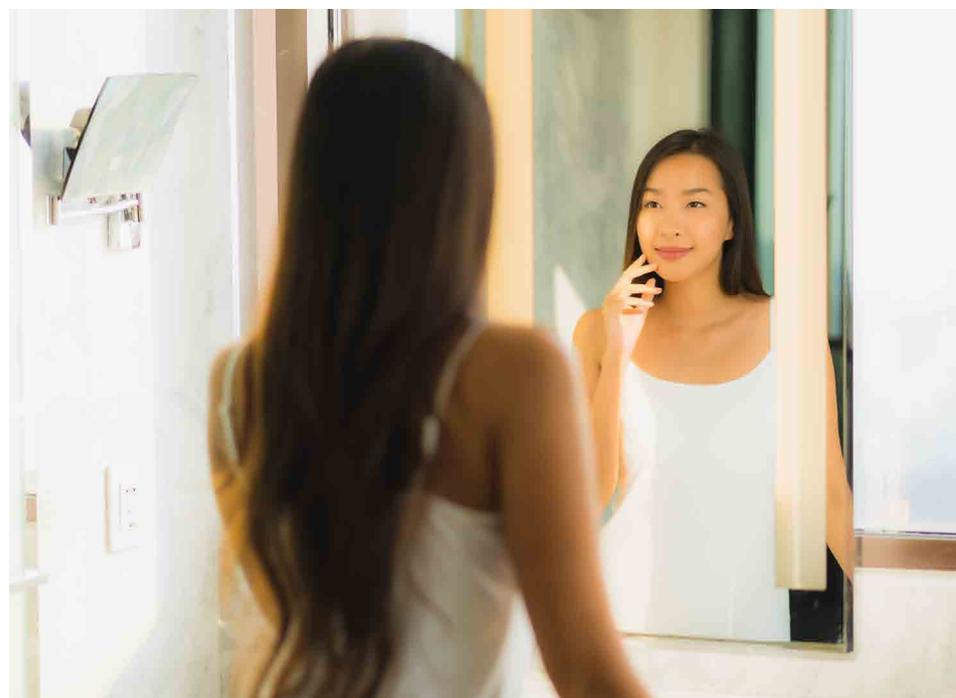
Exercise

Go for a walk or choose an activity that you like. It is good for your lungs and heart. Plus, exercise will increase your willpower.

Stop self-criticism

No one can hurt your feeling unless you allow them. Yet from time to time we do this

About the author: Saree Jitta is known to help hundreds of women regain self-love and self-confidence through her popular "SUPERWOMEN" Wellness System. Her inspiration came from her struggle and triumph over emotional eating and trauma which now has allowed her to help others transform. Schedule in for a complimentary consultation via contact@sareejitta.com or find out more at www.sareejitta.com



Ms. Pissara Umavijani



Ms. Pissara Umavijani Thai actress and perfumer from Thailand and founder of Parfums Dusita sat down with Leonard Le Blanc from Expat Life in Thailand to talk about her life and her business.

Crafting perfumes is one of the more exotic businesses in the world you are recognised as one of the most glamorous denizens purveying high end perfumes these days:

What got you into the perfumery business?

I always dreamed of creating something of my own and I believe it was my passion that drove me to perfumery. I really love perfume and I love how we are able to express and translate emotions into scents.

Where and what did you study?

I studied Communication and Social Psychology at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. Then I studied fashion for one year and got an MBA in Luxury Brand Management at the Institut Supérieur de Marketing du Luxe in Paris.

How did you learn to make perfumes?

I had a friend that was truly knowledgeable in perfumery and we used to study together. I also studied a lot by myself and eventually I developed my own method to blend my perfumes. I would not say this learning is over. As a perfumer you never stop learning because you always have new materials to get to know and new combinations to test.

What have been your biggest challenges personally and professionally?

I would say that my biggest challenge was keeping the focus and the right mindset to overcome obstacles and reach my goals. It is both about perseverance and patience to go after the skills you need, one day at a time, keeping the focus on what you are trying to achieve.

What advice would you have for someone starting out in the business?

Build your business on passion and keep in mind that the quality of your products is your first priority. In niche perfumery, customers are looking for exclusivity and identity based brands, therefore, your product must be unique and tell a story. Always respect your clients and deliver good customer service that builds trust and loyalty.

You travel a lot. What are your favourite places?

The beautiful sun kissed beaches of Krabi, in the South of Thailand, where I can enjoy the sun, sand and sea in perfect peace and tranquility. I really love nature. Another place that I love is a secluded lake in the heart of Brittany, France. It was very pure and isolated. That is where the inspiration for Le Pavillon d'Or came from.

What is the most enjoyable part of your job?

Definitely it is being able to have freedom to create my perfumes and translate my memories, dreams, and aspirations



My mother influenced me in many ways. She wrote a groundbreaking book *Life and Knowing Oneself*. I learned a lot from her, but I would say the most important thing that she taught me was to understand oneself and find my own path. She always stimulated me to find my passion and discover meaningful things in life by travelling and being open minded.

What wisdom have you gained since you started in business?

Starting a business is like becoming the captain of a ship. You are steering the wheel and you have to be confident about the direction that you are going, but you have a crew. So you have to believe in your business with everything you got, move forward despite any challenges and work with your team. Having the right people in your corner is essential, so argue if you need to and do not be afraid of thinking out of the box.

How have your experiences shaped you?

I used to be more optimistic about life and now I became also realistic without losing the positive views. I got more focused and driven with my personal goals and learned that time is a very precious commodity. It is something that cannot be recuperated, you need to make the most of it at all times.

What do you see the future is for you?

I see myself creating more fragrances and maybe living closer to nature with my family. Being in nature inspires me in many aspects. Of course, I see Parfums Dusita growing organically in the international sphere.

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into scents. It is such a blissful moment for me that I lose all track of time. Creating a scent out of pure passion is what I enjoy to do.

And the least enjoyable?

The hectic time schedule. I work a lot and sometimes I have no time for myself.

Your Mother, Professor Chutatip is one of the world's leading experts on meditation. What did you learn from her?

Quarantine life



by Saree Jitta

Just want to check in with you if you still stay sane and strong at home? At least we're still allowed to go buy food in the supermarket, have the internet at home. And if you still have food in your fridge and a roof over your head, safe and healthy at home. It's a blessing!

If you're like me, who's into health and fitness. I am sure that there might have been some thoughts run into your head – how am I going to lose my gain, and will I get fat at this time. Some of us get used to going to the gym (where we can let it all out and make it up for the food we ate on the weekend) but now the gym is closed and I have to stay home where I can get access to my fridge and kitchen cabinet whenever I want. Sounds scary right? I feel for you. That's why I make sure to stick to my workout, journal and meditate to keep me grounded and sane.

One morning I was having breakfast and watching my mom take all her medicines out. I thought to myself, does she normally have so many different medicines? Maybe I just do not know because I was always rushing to work or busy doing my own thing. Then it's kind of a self-realisation for me in a way to slow down a bit and look around. Perhaps it's a time for us all to slow down and look after ourselves and our loved ones.

To be honest this is the first time in my life I get to witness a crisis like this. I mean there have been many crises in the past, but I think this is probably the one that I feel the most. I was driving home the other day; the road was quite empty, and I have never seen Bangkok this quiet before, except on holiday (it feels like a holiday because you can stay home and not go to work but not really) I asked myself. Are we really in a crisis or have we been in a crisis all along, but we just wake up to a reality for the first time that we all need to change and do something for ourselves, for the environment, and for global mankind?



Anyway, today I am not here to tell you to think big right now or think way too much about the future because worrying too much for something that we can't see or hasn't happened yet, takes away today's peace. This is the only moment we have now. Just try and take it one day at a time.

So, let me give you 5 tips to help you all stay fit and healthy at home.

Look after your physical health.

As we know this virus can damage the lungs, so you better get your exercise (resistance training and cardio) regularly 3-4 times a week. I mean in general; you should do exercise regularly anyway but at this time we want to make sure we're strong and healthy. Once our immune system is weak chances

you might get sick.

If you're a fitness freak or gym junky like me you need to work on your mindset that you're not going to lose your gain or get fat, as long as you still put stress (stimulate) on your muscles. This is the time you pay attention to how your body moves; bodyweight exercise is a great way for you to work on your mind-muscle connection. Watch your tempo or time under tension, you can do the eccentric movement. Strengthen the part on your body that you've neglected, if you've been doing heavy lifting take this time to rest and recover. When you go back to the gym again, you'll feel much better and can lift heavy again (maybe not the first week but slowly you'll gain your all strength back if not more).

Look after your mental health.

You can journal or meditate. If you're stressed or have anxiety about the situation. I want you to feel it. How does it feel? Do you feel scared? Does it feel like you are in darkness?

Now, close your eyes and think of the opposite feelings of calm and peace. How does it feel if you have nothing to worry about? Do you feel light? What colour do you see? Bright and colourful? Do you see the sunshine or rainbow in front of you?

You do have a choice to choose any of those feelings. It is up to you how you want to feel. You can't control what's happening, but you can control how you perceive it, you can control how you react to it. I know we are all scared (myself included) but if you live in scarcity or survival mode you won't find peace within yourself. Human beings are resilient, we adapt to any situation. We were in a worse crisis before and we got through it. We are in this together and we'll get through this together.

Look after your nutrition.

Now that we are at home some of us might eat too much. There is nothing wrong with food or enjoy eating food (myself included) but too much of anything is not good, it is about balance. Make sure you stick to whole food: natural food that we have to cook like good quality meat, rice, eggs, etc. Get enough good nutrients into your body. Eat your fruits and veggies and avoid processed food as has lots of calories with little nutrients. Make sure you hit 25g of fibre a day for women and 38g for men. Remember – healthy gut happy you.

Most of us were super busy before, no breakfast, no time to cook. Hey! Now you don't have to get up early and rushing to work, more time to make a hearty breakfast, enjoy a cup of tea or coffee in your favourite mug in the morning.



Get plenty of sleep in.

You should get a minimum of 8-10 hours of sleep. Sleep helps with your stress and craving for sweets and carbs. Try going to bed at the same time and waking up at the same time. Most people set an alarm clock to wake up but not for bedtime. On my daily schedule I write down what time I wake up and what time I go sleep but if you don't have a schedule. I recommend you do a daily and weekly schedule at the moment. Avoid waking up and have nothing to do during a day. Because most people are used to having a set routine at work, but now there is no work at the moment, so you don't need to go anywhere. Time can go very slowly and drive you crazy if you got nothing to do, so set an alarm clock for bedtime!

Learn new things.

I am sure you must have a book that you bought ages ago but have never started it. This is the time to get it off the shelf and go down the rabbit hole. Have you always wanted to learn how to cook? Or maybe you to try some painting? There are many online courses out there that you can follow.

Last but not least I do not know what situation you are in right now, but my heart is with you. I know it is not easy to wake up one day and some of you may have lost your jobs or loved ones. But I want you to find just at least one thing to be grateful for. It could be you are reading this article that uplifts your spirit or you wake up to the loved one next to you, you still have the internet at home, food and water in your fridge.

This is a transmission for all of us but it is such an opportunity for you to change, try new things and be creative.

“Once you have a blank canvas in front of your eyes, you can think about how you want to paint it.”

Dr.TATTOF MEDICAL LASER SOLUTIONS

Expat Life sat down with Dr. Nattapong Jirurawong principal of Dr.TATTOF in one of his 6 clinics (5 in Bangkok, 1 in Pattaya) to find out more about the medical laser solutions that he offers to his Thai and international patients.

Dr. Nattapong's father established his own dermatology practice over 30 years ago in Chonburi, he became popular quickly and treated a wide range of common skin diseases like psoriasis and eczema. He built a good business and was the first specialist of his type on the Eastern Seaboard.

When Dr. Nattapong finished his graduation, his father wanted him to follow his footsteps and become a dermatologist. So, he completed his education at the The Institute of Dermatology in Thailand. After he had finished, he joined his father's clinic as a full time dermatologist. By then the business had evolved and the trend across the world was for cosmetic procedure made famous by treating celebrities in beauty clinics. His Thai clientele were interested in tattoo removal as is the fashion in Thailand and his international clients utilised his medical laser solution skills such as hair, scar, stretch mark and fat removal.

He expanded and opened his first branch in Bangkok in Silom which was the very first clinic that specialised in tattoo removal and grew the range of services that he offers today.

He continued to expand his other services; hair, stretch mark and scar removal but not through medical treatment, but specialising in using lasers and the latest technology available. I asked Dr Nattapong the percentage of his clinic's customers

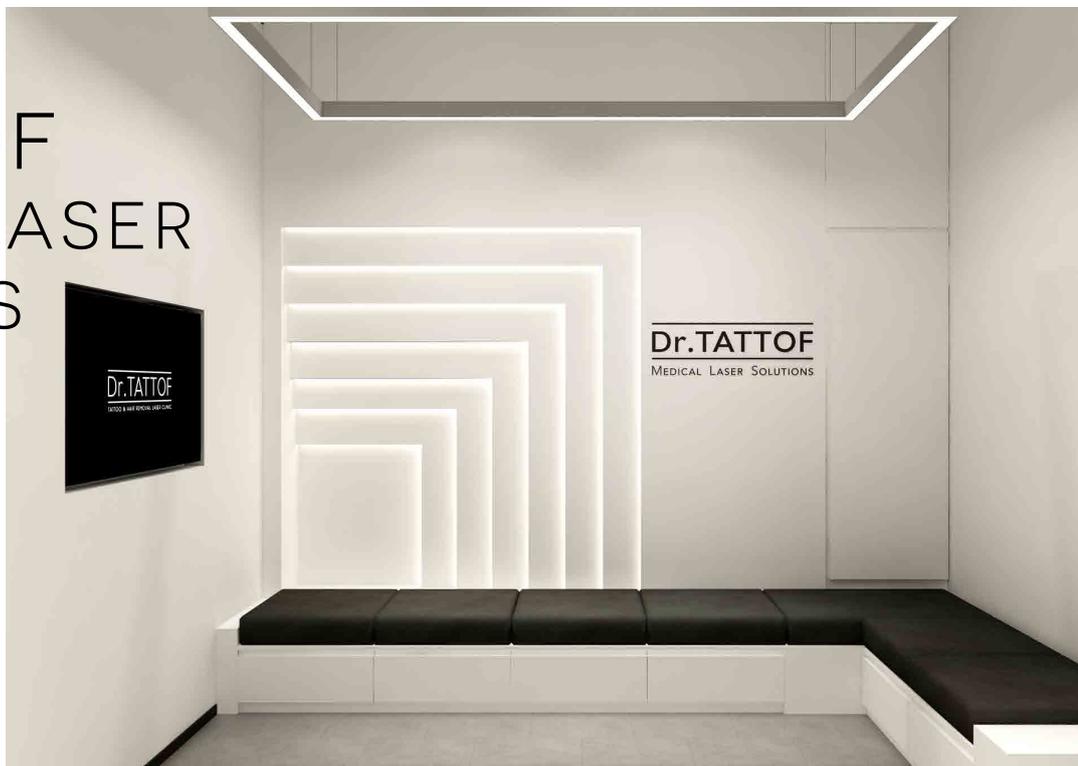
requiring which service and he said that roughly 50% come for the removal of tattoos, next for scar removal, the third service would be for the removal of stretch marks and then for the removal of fat. Cosmetic procedure is important for giving women back their self-confidence he said, other people may not notice these scars but they themselves do. He says that after the removal of such scars women leave the clinic feeling much happier in themselves and very pleased with the results. Men utilise his services to – it is not just for women.

All 6 branches of Dr. Tattof clinics are in department stores because he feels that it is easy for his clients to access, they always have good parking facilities and other shops and stores to visit.

The clinics are all designed under the concept of black and white minimalism with optimal functionality in mind. The modern, minimalistic design aligns with the fast and simply effective treatments received by all our patients.

So much is the demand for his services that he planned on open 2 branches per year.

Dr.TATTOF treatments start from just 1,000B. The technology that they use is from the US and is approved for use both there and in Thailand. Their equipment has been thoroughly tested and researched and has been in use for more than 20 years.



Their services

1. Tattoo removal
2. Scar removal
3. Stretch marks removal
4. Acne redness, birthmark and keloid removal
5. Permanent hair removal
6. Sagging belly removal
7. Fat removal



beams penetrate into the deeper layer of the skin, effectively removing hair at its root with no permanent side effects.

6. Transform your sagging belly into a flat and sexier one with Gentle YAG Pro-U

Those with loose/sagging skin from ageing, pregnancy or losing weight too quickly can recover firmness with this non-invasive treatment. When used by experts, Gentle YAG Pro-U also tightens and rejuvenates the skin by stimulating the new collagen without side effects or downtime.

7. Redefine your shape in just 25 minutes

With 100% patient satisfaction rating in clinical studies, feathering of heat spread to ensure natural looking results, and versatile applicators to perfectly fit a variety of body types and sizes, SculpSure is the best non-invasive body perfecting assistant in the market. Award winning SculpSure is a body contouring treatment that permanently removes up to 24% of stubborn fat after 1 treatment at the highest comfort without surgery or downtime.

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

Call to book a consultation with a dermatologist.

5th Silom Complex Shopping Plaza
02-632-0079 / 090-546-2424

3rd CentralPlaza Ladprao
02-541 1922 / 095 428 9424

2nd CentralMarina Pattaya
033 640 424 / 097 428 2424

1st Eight Thonglor Shopping
02 297 0810 / 099 614 2424

3rd Futurepark Rangsit
02 150 9285 / 083 535 2424

3rd CentralPlaza Pinklao
02 005 5284 / 064 679 2424

Dr. TATTOF
MEDICAL LASER SOLUTIONS



under the skin to treat scars and imperfections without overheating the skin. This advanced technology ensures great results at the highest comfort with no downtime or permanent side effects.

3. Remove your stretch marks to regain unwavering confidence with PicoWay Resolve

This breakthrough technology effectively removes stretch marks without causing the outer layer of the skin to break, so patients report high satisfaction, enjoy low to no downtime after the treatment, and experience no scarring or permanent side effects. With PicoWay Resolve, incredible skin transformations are inevitable. It takes a few sessions to completely remove stretch marks, but improvements can be seen after the first treatment.

4. Discover a new you with VBeam

VBeam laser removes marks and redness caused by acne with no permanent side effects. The cooling system minimises any discomfort from the lasers heat.

5. Permanently remove unwanted hair with Gentle YAG Pro-U

Recommended by dermatologists worldwide, Gentle YAG Pro-U is comfortable, quick, and suitable for all skin types and complexions without harming the pores. Its high-intensity

1. PicoWay – The best way to remove tattoos

The latest, most revolutionary innovation from the USA to remove tattoos and eliminate dark spots such as freckles, melanoma, black birthmarks, etc. Unlike traditional tattoo removal methods, PicoWay works on all skin types, completely removing all colours of tattoos faster and with fewer treatments. PicoWay developed for and by the world's best dermatologists for over 20 years.

2. Remove your scars and reveal flawless skin with PicoWay Resolve

Delivers high impact energy at a trillionth of a second, reaching



THAILAND'S BATTLE WITH PLASTIC:

Is it making a difference?

by Sami Reed Cleaver

Walking around a floating market on the outskirts of Bangkok, I was spending the day with a Thai friend and a few of his work colleagues. While we were buying food for a shared lunch, I noticed his colleague accepting a plastic bag with every single item of food she bought. She started to look like the main character from the movie 'Confessions of a Shopaholic' with bags quickly filling up space on her tiny lower arms.

As she went to buy pomelo slices, I pulled out my reusable cotton bag and expressed 'Mai ow tuung plastic naka' (no plastic bag) to the market vendor and motioned for him to put the newly purchased pomelo in my cotton bag. The market vendor smiled and lightly chuckled as he gently teased me about whether he should take off the plastic wrapping too.

It happened once again as I bought a coconut and whipped out my reusable straw. The market lady cackled with laughter and expressed "Dii maak farang!" (very good) as she put a plastic straw back into its box.

"Why is there such a cultural difference between westerners and Thai people when it comes to the environment and using plastic?" I curiously asked my Thai friend.

"Thai people are conscious about the environment too, they're just not as serious as farangs," he replied. "It's more common amongst the younger generation as it's seen as a 'modern' thing to do. I guess it's too much of a culture shift for older people who aren't used to carrying their own bags, straws, and cups. But people are trying. There's more awareness now from the government on the news and social media."

Despite this eco-conscious way of living becoming a seemingly 'new' way of living for most of the Thai population, Thailand has been making small ripples in a more environmentally-aware world.

Environmental consciousness has been gaining attention worldwide over the past decade. In 2019, we saw widespread media reporting of environmental problems such as natural disasters and the largest climate strike in history, led by Greta Thunberg, which grabbed the attention of global citizens worldwide.

But where does Thailand stand in this global movement?

Where does Thailand rank with eco-consciousness?

Over the past three decades, Thailand has made remarkable progress and advances in economic progress. But this is not without costs to the environment. Industrial power plants, urban architecture, an increase in vehicles and seasonal agricultural burning have all led to the destruction of forests, overuse of the land and water and shocking air pollution levels.

Air pollution

Anyone who has stayed or visited Chiang Mai during the 'burning season' will have experienced the awful air quality firsthand. In March 2020, Chiang Mai was given the top spot for having the worst air pollution in the world. Bangkok came in at 18th place. Air pollution is responsible for five million deaths each year on a global scale.

Ocean pollution

According to WWF, more than 310 million tons of plastic were generated in 2016 - one-third of that plastic ended up in the ocean. They diagnosed the issue as being 'uncontrollable' and warned the global population that unless change happens, the plastic pollution of our oceans could double and impose severe threats to marine life, our economy, and our health. The last global research report in 2010 identified the top polluting nations - Thailand was ranked at number seven, with a contribution of 1.03 million tonnes of plastic waste to the ocean.

In summary, the Sustainable Cities Index 2018 report, which explores city sustainability, ranked Bangkok 80 of out of 100 major cities around the world (1 – best; 100 – worst).

What is Thailand doing about reducing the use of plastic?

Saying no to plastic bags

From the 2 million tonnes of plastic waste generated by Thailand per year, most of the waste is single-use plastic bags from malls, supermarkets, convenience stores, local markets, and street vendors.

In September 2019, Varawut Silpa-Archa, the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment announced a public campaign banning the use of plastic bags in a public campaign to encourage shoppers to use reusable bags from January 2020. They even went as far as pixelating plastic bags in commercials and TV shows.

Many big-name companies such as 7/11, Big C, Tesco Lotus, and Villa Market were onboard and made the necessary changes to support this campaign. However, disappointingly, many locals and expats (including myself) are still being given unbranded plastic bags in our local 7/11s without asking for them.



Saying no to plastic straws

Along with the plastic bag ban movement at the beginning of 2020, Starbucks took the lead in saying ‘no’ to plastic straws. A global commitment, the food and beverage retailer started to provide strawless lids and eco-friendly straws to their customers. They are committed to eliminating more than one billion plastic straws from their stores per year. This hasn’t gone unnoticed by Thai coffee brands. Cafe Amazon now provides biodegradable straws and compostable cups and Inthanon Coffee uses cups made from 100% plant biomass.

In response, Thailand has promised to ban all plastic

straws, cups and styrofoam containers by 2022. Government Spokesman Athisit Chainuwat added that the goal is for Thailand to only use recycled plastics by 2027.

Annual trash collection events

For those of us who have lived near beaches, we are already familiar with beach cleanup programmes led by the government and local organisations on an annual or quarterly basis.





In Bangkok, a professor at Thammasat University has organised the biggest river cleaning campaign called 'Kayaking for Chao Praya'. Every year, volunteers kayak along the Chao Praya river, collecting trash and debris along the way. Volunteers cover 400 kilometres of the river in approximately 10 days.

Sustainability programmes in schools

International and public Thai schools are getting onboard with sustainability and plastic reduction programmes, whether they are internal or external. Programmes such as the Traidhos Three-Generation Community for Learning Barge Programme offer field trips for students around Bangkok and within surrounding National Parks.

In 2019, the programme successfully engaged 1,331 students in service environmental projects: from tree planting (560 trees planted) beach and river clean-ups, and litter picks.

Kirsty Shakespeare, Head of the Barge Programme states, "Students who take part in service activities can see firsthand the problems caused by plastic waste and unsustainable living. The programme gives them the platform to take positive and direct action which is very empowering for young people."



What can we do to help?

Invest in reusable bags, bottles, straws, cutlery, cups and boxes

Having a reusable collection can drop your plastic usage dramatically. It puts an end to the plastic bag hoarding and the number of plastic juice cups clogging up your bin. Farmers' markets are a great place to find these commodities. Ecotopia in Siam Tower and The eco shop in BACC also stock reusable products.

Go to a refill station

Instead of continually buying products that come in plastic

packaging (haircare products, body products, cleaning products), take your empty bottles to a refill station. I regularly visit Better Moon Cafe On Nut. It's simple, cheap and very environmentally friendly.

At Better Moon, you can also get cupboard staples such as pasta, tea, lentils, nuts, and dried fruit as well as reusable products available for purchase. It's heaven for eco-conscious people.

They also have a small refill station in the middle of the Ekkamai BTS.

Use your reusable products

Once you've invested in your products - use them! Put them in your bag and take them wherever you go. Ordering coffee? Give them your refill coffee cup to use. Buying fresh fruit from the street vendor? Ask them to put the fruit in your reusable Tupperware box. Decline plastic cutlery at the street food market and use your own.

Some people feel 'stupid' doing this and fear that they will be laughed at. I can't guarantee some people won't tease or joke with you, but it will be with good intention and maybe they will feel encouraged to make some changes themselves.

Use water refill stations

The amount of plastic water bottles I see in my condo trash area makes me shudder. Especially when most condos have water refill stations installed. They are literally everywhere. Walk down your soi and I guarantee you will see one. Buy a 45B gallon from 7/11 and keep refilling it for 5B a time! Think of all the money and plastic you'll be saving!

Go to a clothing swap

Along with plastic, the fashion industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world. Globally, we produce 13 million tonnes of textile waste each year 95% of which could be reused or recycled.

In a mission to combat this, Jessica Teal, a long-time Bangkok expat came up with the initiative 'Swap 'Til You Drop' – a clothes swapping platform based in The Home BKK, Sukhumvit 23, Bangkok. The swap is normally hosted once a month and the concept is pretty simple. You bring any clothes you no longer want and swap them for something you do want!

Jess can see the difference this is making to people's attitudes towards fashion waste. "When people come to swap, they are becoming more aware of the positive impact they are having on waste reduction," Jess states, "I think Thailand has great potential to be more sustainable and eco-friendly. People don't really realise how one small action can make waves globally."

Along with the rest of the world, there is still a lot to be done to tackle climate change. However, regardless of whether you think Thailand is doing enough or not, they are trying. We can all take some social responsibility and do what we can to limit our own use of plastic and reduce waste.



About the author: Sami has lived in Thailand for four years and is living in Bangkok. With a background in education and social work, Sami is passionate about sustainability, psychology, and lifelong learning. She is currently working on social and emotional learning projects that promote emotional intelligence and leaving a positive impact on our world.



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A love letter to the hoteliers of Bangkok



by *Little Wandering Wren*

As we start to emerge from the coronavirus pandemic here in Thailand, some of us might have the confidence to consider a limited form of domestic travel. But before you look to escape our City of Angels, have you thought of a Bangkok staycation?

I would love to highlight our experiences in Bangkok hotels over the past few months. A handful of hoteliers, often because of their long term guests, remained steadfastly committed to keeping their hotels open, at this difficult time.

This letter is a testament and a thank you to the hotel industry staff from Housekeeping to the General Managers who, when their livelihoods were put at risk, turned up day after day, to greet a handful of guests. Their determination to 'keep calm and carry on,' and to provide an outstanding guest experience, when the majority of hotels were forced to close their doors, has been a bright light in our coronavirus days here in Bangkok.

Thailand's Emergency Decree (20 March – 31 May)

When the Thai government issued the emergency decree on 25 March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, we respected this decision. Home working has become the norm, and I have not walked outside my condo building for six weeks. I drive to the supermarket once per week and I support local food establishments for the delivery of takeaway food.

Every Saturday night however, we switched our social distancing life inside our condo, for a well chosen and safe retreat. The criteria was to find forward thinking hotels who had embraced the challenges of operating in such times. We wanted to see how they would rise to the occasion, how they would think creatively in terms of guest experience. In short, how they could turn the negatives of the pandemic into a learning experience for their staff and potentially develop any valued guests into life long ambassadors.

The list of Bangkok hotels remaining open was small and became an ever decreasing list. As March and April turned into May, more smaller boutique hotel closures followed.

Health and wellbeing of guests and staff.

Our first priority was our personal wellbeing. We needed hotels who could demonstrate extraordinary attention to detail with regard to the health and safety of their staff and guests.

I looked for hotels that had a clear COVID-19 policy for both guests and employees. I checked my trusted Trip Advisor for those who scored highly for cleanliness. We welcomed knowing that some hotels worked to an alternative staff roster and allocated rooms for staff onsite. This reduced the risk to staff, through keeping them onsite and off public transport and away from any potential external COVID-19 exposure.

For any hotels that I felt I needed extra clarification on their cover protection I arranged for a spot check to see how I was treated on arrival. Was I let onto the premises without having my temperature checked? Was I offered hand sanitiser on arrival? I politely declined any cooling towel that was not disposable. Did all staff wear masks and most importantly of



all how were the other guests operating? Were they vigilant wearing masks to/from the dining area for instance?

The importance of the hotel room: bathrooms, balconies, gardens and great views!

As we were to remain respectful of the Government's request to 'stay home' we looked for resort hotels, or hotels which offered an away from it all feel, with some form of outdoor (inside the hotel) experience. Having our own balcony became important! We wanted to gain a different (social distancing) view of Bangkok.

Normally I am not one to care much for what we see outside the window, give me a lovely interior any day. We are not usually the types to stay put in a hotel room. During these stays, the view was a deal breaker. Oh, and as we travelled everywhere with our yoga mats, we needed a room large enough to set up our zen calm.

Most hotels seemed to be offering upgraded rooms, and often we found ourselves skipping round the room in delight.

The Anantara Siam Bangkok offered us a corner suite room overlooking the Royal Bangkok Sports Club which was one particular highlight.

Oh and a huge bathroom with a gorgeous big bathtub was important too. When you staying in your room virtually 24/7 you use all the facilities!

We looked for staycation hotels with an urban resort experience and large grounds and garden areas and found we particularly loved watching an unusually calm life down on the Chao Phraya River. How good is that river without the noisy disco boats that normally pulsate up and down? You could seriously perform a whole meditation sequence watching the humungous loads being pulled along the Chao Phraya River by the tiny tug boats.

Our staycation survival kit

On arrival we performed an extra clean of rooms ourselves. In short there was no point switching our careful social distancing condo life, only to contract COVID-19 on a Saturday night.

My staycation survival kit starts with my anti bacterial spray, my plastic gloves, my alcohol wipes and my hand sanitiser and ends with my harmony chakra balancing spray, massage oil, face packs, body scrubs and scented candles!

Dining options

Whilst in-room dining was in offer at every establishment, we took the view that dining in a restaurant would be a highlight. Oh the joys of sitting at a table together that was not our home dining table and not eating takeaway. So part of the pre-stay check involved seeing what the dining arrangements would be.

When we stayed at the Shangri-La it was post a tropical storm, there was a cool breeze alongside the Chao Phraya



River that night and we had a magical evening enjoying 'mocktails' and hors d'oeuvres. We overlooked The Peninsula. A solemn sight, closed but lit up with a love heart. Oh how things had quickly changed in such a few weeks. It had only been a few weeks prior that we had my birthday dinner there.

Our rooms at the Anantara Siam and Shangri-La came with an early morning wake-up call and a pot of English Breakfast tea delivered with the Bangkok Post and pastries on a tea tray with a starched white serviette. Picture us in our bathrobes with masks! It seemed a world away from our lockdown life and I will be forever grateful.

Social distancing at a hotel

Our aim was a sanity break from apartment confinement, to support local hotels, and to put some money back into Thai tourism at a time where we felt this would be most appreciated.

We never left the hotel grounds and found social distancing was way easier because of low hotel occupancy rates, than at home in our congested lobby or garden. We were only ever part of a handful of guests within hotels some of which had 500 plus rooms.

I will never forget driving up to the front doors of the Anantara Siam and the Siam Kempinski and leaving the car at the front door as no one else would be arriving by car. We felt like movie stars.





the future for the Thai hotel profession and the ambitions for their hotels and their industry.

Let's support our Bangkok hotels

I hope you to will consider supporting your local hotels wherever in Thailand you are reading this. We certainly found that you do not have to leave Bangkok to have a good time, or indeed to feel like you are at one with nature. You will find

The benefits of supporting Thai tourism

Without exception the hotels that we have supported offered us the most incredible hotel experiences that we will ever have.

So grateful for our attendance, we have found that If you are brave enough to offer your support we were rewarded by suite rooms outside our financial budgets, Champagne chilling in the room, and more importantly than all of this, the grateful welcoming smiles behind masks, of the reception staff.

However for us, it was without doubt the simple things that we once took for granted, that we loved and will remain with us for ever. A cup of coffee together beside the Chao Phraya River, where we could actually sit down at a table! A moonlit rooftop bubble bath Jacuzzi overlooking Wat Arun at Riva Arun. The outdoor exercise bike set up in the grounds of the Siam Kempinski, or the entire staff at the Avani Pattaya – our last getaway before the emergency decree was announced, singing happy birthday to me. Even the excitement of getting the dry cleaning done when everything was closed.

I have absolutely adored having these hotels virtually all to ourselves. Of course we welcome, for their sakes, when they will be able to fully reopen and the tourists gradually return. But boy has it been great being home alone in these fine establishments, to get to know them better, to get to know how they operate, what makes them special.

Shout out to the staff

We have found that the staff chosen, or in many cases those who had volunteered to work, were exceptional in their customer service orientation. There was a high degree of English spoken. From Housekeeping to the General Managers we applaud their efforts

We felt so privileged to have been able to support these hotels and to have seen firsthand the appreciation and commitment of their staff. Through this time we have had access to some of the top hotel's executives, where we have enjoyed some fabulous conversations about

these city resort hotels can offer a lot in these circumstances.

This letter is a shameless plug for those hotels who have kept going during the weeks of Thailand's emergency decree.

These are some of the unforgettable moments.

Anantara Siam Bangkok's luxurious city retreat

There is a reason that the locals love the Anantara Siam. It simply never fails to deliver what everyone wants, a beautiful hotel with effortless customer service. We loved our amazing Thai heritage room overlooking the Royal Bangkok Sports Club. The staff went to an incredible effort for my husband's birthday with lots of in-room treats. We had a fabulous social distancing breakfast at Mocha and Muffins and a lovely evening of snacks and drinks in the vast and elegant lobby.

Hotel Riva Arun's boutique Thai charm

For a sheer spectacular, pinch me, I'm loving life in Bangkok, you will do no better than one of three stylish rooftop Jacuzzi suites at Riva Arun (Room 403 is the best). The views from these rooms and the Above Riva restaurant overlooking Wat Arun, the Chao Phraya River and the rooftops of the Grand Palace are unforgettable. Our moonlight Jacuzzi on our private terrace and dawn yoga overlooking Wat Arun were



magical. There was a reason we went there twice!

Siam Kempinski Hotel Bangkok's world of serenity

Our Stay in Luxury package for Thai's and expat residents offered the epitome of modern Thai elegance and luxury. A beautiful relaxing garden was indeed a sanctuary, we loved this swimming pool area. This hotel went above and beyond in regard to thoughtful guest experiences. With their gym closed, yoga mats and gym equipment were available on request in the room, an outdoor cabana had been set up with an exercise bike. An evening foot bath was provided with bath salts in the room. We were even given anti Covid-19 personal protection head visors.

An excellent three course dinner at ALATi restaurant was included and breakfast was outstanding.

The Peninsula Bangkok's urban oasis on the River of Kings'

My birthday celebration weekend was held in Peninsula style before its closure. The magnificent suite room with stunning views of the Chao Phraya River and the city beyond never fails to impress and was full of birthday treats and surprises.

Breakfast and dinner at the River Cafe and Terrace and the riverside swimming pool and private cabanas are always a highlight.

Shangri-La Hotel Bangkok's tropical city resort

Our executive river suite here was utterly gorgeous, love the Thai design of this room looking out over the Chao Phraya River. We took a package with the Horizon Club benefits. All meals were served outside at the Next2 Cafe Terrace. We loved this riverside retreat, sitting enjoying the evening 'mocktails' and exceptional hors d'oeuvres was fantastic and the conversations with the staff about their future plans that makes us keen for a return visit when more is open.

The Athenee Hotel Bangkok's Dine'cation package

Dine in a stunning restaurant and make The Athenee your home and they will look after you extremely well. From the enthusiastic welcome from all the staff to the three course dinner at The Allium Bangkok this



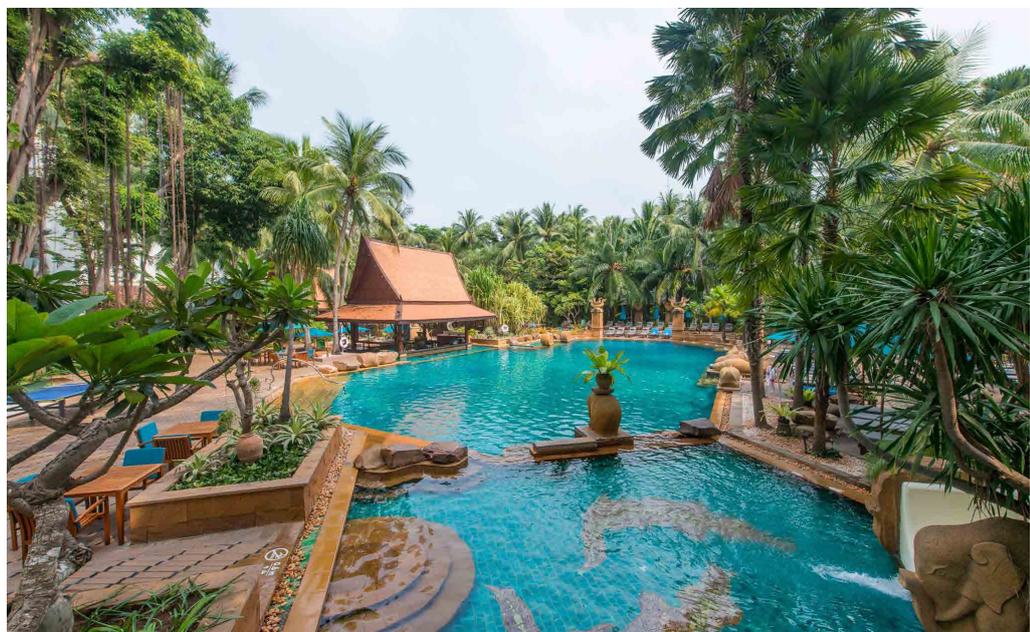
is the best value stay we had. It included exclusive Royal Club benefits of afternoon tea, and evening 'mocktails' and hors d'oeuvres.

Avani Pattaya Resort's stylish seaside stay

Our trip to Pattaya was on the last weekend before Thailand's emergency decree, compared to previous visits to Pattaya, the city was unusually quiet. We enjoyed the central Pattaya location and the grounds with the lovely lush gardens. The spa is to be recommended. We had no idea how special this last weekend away was going to be and would suggest this hotel for its tranquility and peace. The staff were lovely and on hearing it had been my birthday the previous weekend all gathered to sing happy birthday.

As the Tourism Council of Thailand is preparing to start the "We love Thailand" campaign to stimulate domestic tourism after the COVID-19 situation normalises. We shall continue on our support of the Thai tourism Industry. I thank the above hotels for our amazing weekends.

About the author: Little Wandering Wren is an International Travel Writer currently with her nest in Thailand. This Bangkok Blogger can be found at www.littlewanderingwren.com and on Instagram and Twitter @littlewanderingwren





Fashion as an ally

by Waleska Berquño

Fashion emerged in the middle of 15th century at the beginning of the European renaissance. The word fashion means custom and comes from the Latin *modus*. The variation in the characteristic of the garments arose to differentiate what was previously the same, a style of clothing was used from childhood to death.

From the Middle Ages onwards, clothes were different following a pattern that increased according to social class, there were even laws that restricted fabrics and colours only to nobles.

The bourgeoisie society, which was not noble, but was rich, began to imitate the noble style of clothing, initiating a process of great work to the tailors, who from then on, were obliged to produce different styles to differentiate the nobles from the bourgeois. With the industrial revolution in the 18th century, the cost of fabrics decreased significantly, in 1850 with the invention of sewing machines the cost of fabrics fell further. From then on, even the most humble were able to buy better clothes. Even after the ease of clothing, women were still deprived of modernity and continued to wear tailored clothing. From this difficulty, haute couture emerged that produced different styles through stylists who invented trends.

Fashion has to work as an ally of women at all times of life. Not all trends will work for every consumer, so common sense, routine and social participation will be the thermometer of the presentation, so that they to face their

modern day-to-day life. Think smart when dressing. Value the best points and hide the points that bother you.

The modern woman consumer, has to seek clothing items that match her attitudes, routine and image. Fashion is not only visual, it is also behavioral.

A current woman shouldn't be longer interested in what does not truly represent her. Thus, the smart consumer is for brands that manage to combine design, practicality, durability and wellbeing. It is important to keep in mind that clothing is the first business card for the opportunity. Whether or not you want, in a professional interview, the first impression and what remains, then, is important to invest in clothes with quality of raw materials, smells, textures, finishes, the production process, softness, comfort, usability, beauty and common sense.

Human beings are visual. The vision is the sensorial that will describe the candidate for the position, the loving suitor, because unconsciously we are all critics of fashion, without realising it, often involuntarily, we judge the style of the other in a positive or negative way, through the intervention of trends not always consistent with reality.

Boldness and joy should be worn when you have a mastery of fashion. When in doubt, do not use. Always in this situation the less is more. Functional clothing works as an ally especially when the situation is compromising. Another fashion reminder: the set of opera is harmony, singing and accompaniment.

An Australian world traveller

by Bea Toews

For three weeks while in Alamos Mexico, I wore my friend's hat. I loved that hat and I know she would have given it to me except that it was a souvenir from her best friend from Seattle. I wore that hat to lunch, to the beach and on walks. It was light, versatile and comfortable with an adjustable rim. It was, perhaps, a little too cream to hide the dirt!

The name of the hat was The Victorian Petit. It was made by the Wallaroo Hat Company. I was convinced that the hat was made in Australia (I'm from Victoria, Australia and a Wallaroo is an Australian marsupial that is half way between a wallaby and a kangaroo.)

When I returned to Australia, I looked up the company website. I found the hat, and I ordered two. (I really, really, liked the hat!). Imagine my horror when I found that the company was based in Boulder, Colorado, that the prices were in US dollars and that they did not ship to Australia.

Crestfallen, I sent a sad email to the company and asked if they would make an exception to their not shipping to Australia. I said:

"... your checkout cart indicates that you do not ship to Australia. I was so excited: one camel and one black and all my travelling hat problems would

have been over.

No chance of sending them out here? Where the name originates from? "

The next day Wallaroo replied. They said:

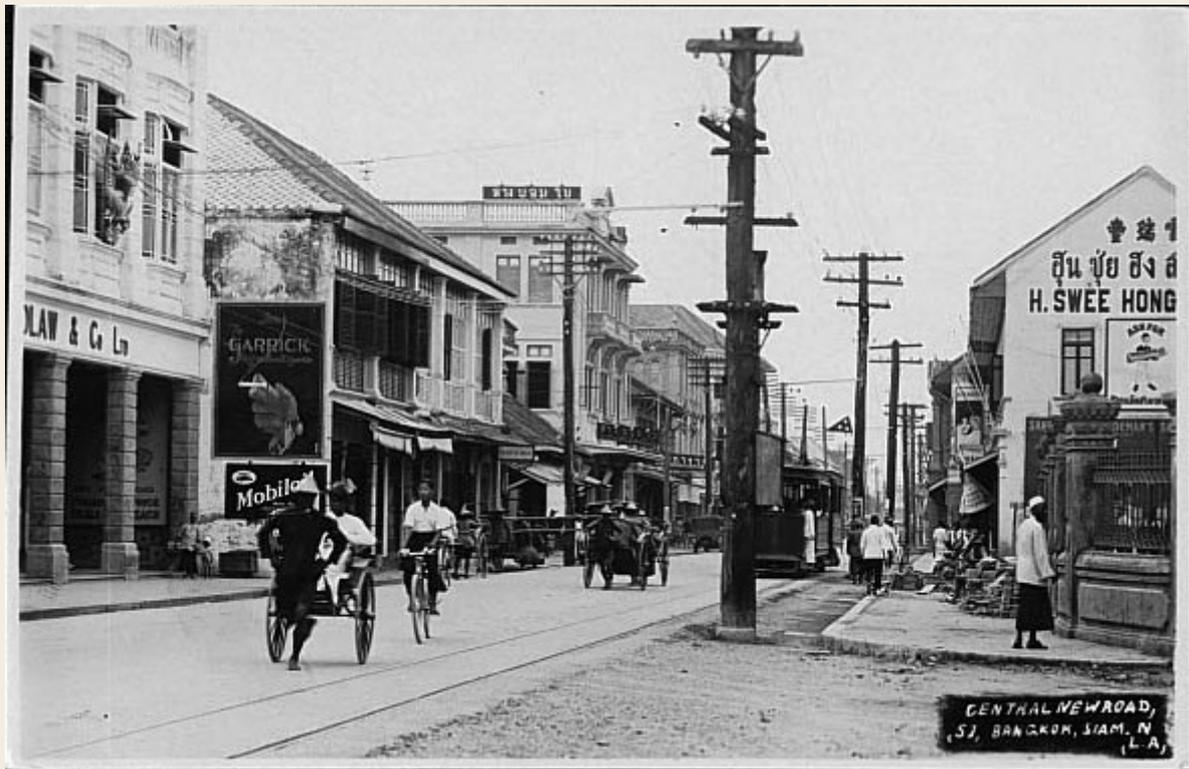
"Our designer is Australian and has his own hat company in Australia. We prefer to refer Australian customers to him so that they can save on shipping. Please check their website, as they have the same and more hats as we do. <https://rigonheadwear.com.au/>

How cool is that? I looked at the Rigon website. And no Petit Victoria was to be found. Foiled again. So I wrote to Rigon and asked if the Breton was the same as the Petit Victoria. It is.

I ordered it, paid the same price for it in Australian dollars: it was promptly dispatched and posted free of charge and now I have my own Petit Victoria/Breton hat from Wallaroo/Rigon. It's a taupe and I'm wearing it here with the brim turned up.

I love it and will be ordering more colours as soon as summer is near. The idea of that little hat has travelled over continents and oceans: and now the real thing is mine.





NEW ROAD – CHAREON KRUNG

by Leonard H. Le Blanc III

It is both amusing and ironic that the oldest river in the U.S.A. is named 'New River' and the oldest road in Bangkok is named 'New Road' or 'Charoen Krung'.

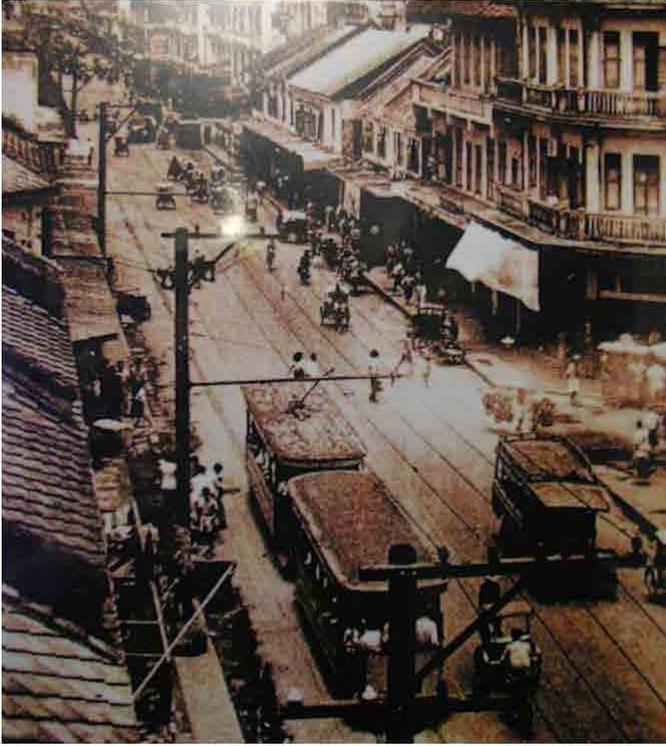
Although many things in Thailand are purely Thai, 'New Road' – along with other imports like Thai classical dance (borrowed from Cambodia), the Thai alphabet (derived from Mon and Khmer), 'Foi Thong' (sweet dessert brought over by the Portuguese), and 'Prik khee nus' (hot chilli peppers directly from Mexico through the Philippines) - originated with a request from the local resident expats over 150 years ago.

Back then the quickly growing number of 'farangs' in Bangkok wanted a place where they could 'promenade'. This is where they just simply went out in horse drawn carriages, riding on horseback, or walking along the street, taking in some fresh air and to socialise in public as they did in Europe daily or on the weekends during the early evening hours. They firmly believed this activity was very important for their pleasure, health and mental wellbeing. They claimed they were growing ill without going out for a daily stroll. All the foreign ambassadors and counsels presented an unanimously signed petition to King Mongkut (Rama V) in 1861. The

King reflected that the expats had made a valid point and that Thai roads in the city were not the best. He agreed that a new system of roads should be built. Construction was commenced in 1862. Charoen Krung was the first one.

It is a common misperception that Charoen Krung Road was the first road ever built in Bangkok. Actually, there were unpaved roads from the beginning of the city. But they were little more than rough pathways or alleyways. All these unpaved roads were not much to look at, especially during the rainy season. Charoen Krung was the first major paved road in the city. What also marks the roadway as different it was the first road built using modern construction methods. Another common misperception is 'Charoen Krung' means 'New Road' in Thai. At that time all the streets or roads were officially unnamed. This new thoroughfare was first called 'Thanon Mai' by the Thais or 'New Road'. Later King Mongkut (Rama IV) named it Charoen Krung which means 'Prosperous City' or 'Prosperity of the City'.

As a transportation landmark, Charoen Krung also marked the shift away from waterborne transportation around the city. It started the eastward urban development of Bangkok. It also signified the time when roads were to become the most important means of travel since the city proper then closely hugged the Chao Phaya River. All the embassies, important businesses and trading companies, major residencies and warehouses were all set up facing the riverside. As expats started moving to Thailand in greater numbers each year after the commercial Bowring Treaty was signed in 1855 there needed to be more transportation development. Charoen Krung was built behind the embassies,



warehouses and residences in two phases roughly paralleling the Chao Phaya River. During this time it also marked the start of foreign ideas and modernisation being introduced into the country as the Thai government was interested to westernise the country as a counterbalance to regional foreign encroachments in Indo-China and Burma.

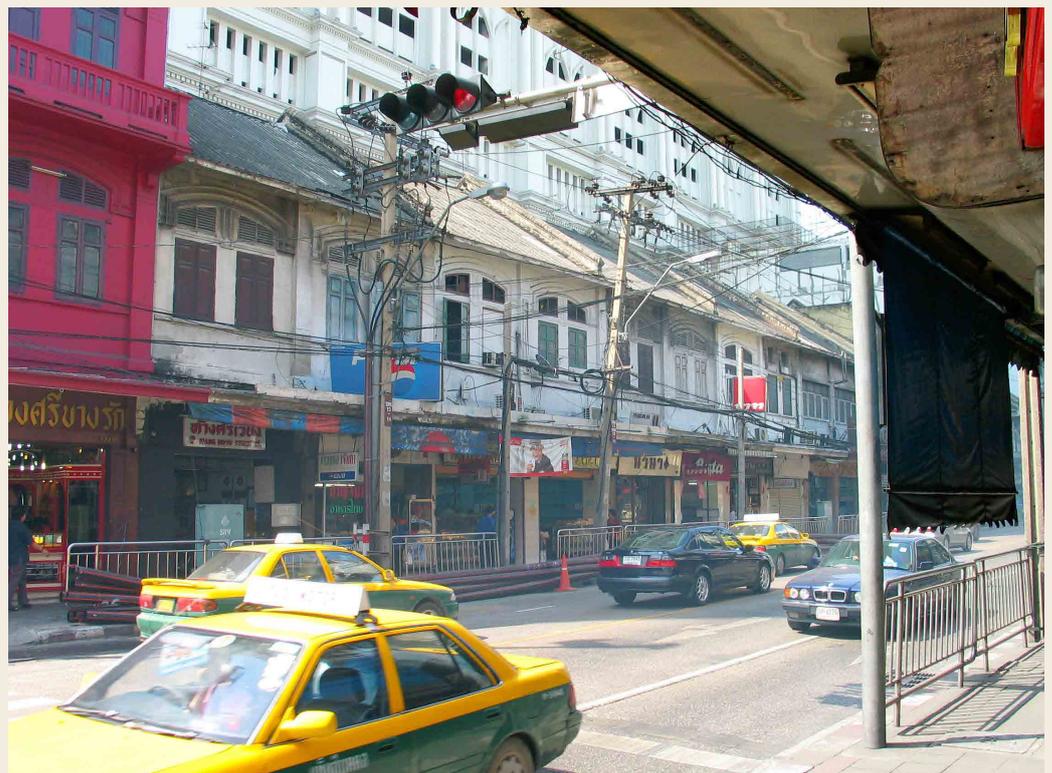
When the road was first opened on 16 March 1864, the Thais remarked they had never seen anything like it before. They commented there just weren't enough people to walk on such large a street due to its size and width. The other roads were narrow and unpaved in comparison. In fact, only one side of the road was used regularly. In 1922 Charoen Krung was renovated with asphalt. It remained the city's largest thoroughfare and main roadway into the early 20th century.

In another important transportation development for the city, Charoen Krung Road saw the first horse drawn tram start operation in 1888. The tram line was electrified in 1894 and soon expanded to other parts of the city. The service was finally discontinued in 1963.

Although since the start of the 20th century, Charoen Krung has declined in relative commercial importance

or prominence as embassies and consulates moved away from the area and new businesses were founded elsewhere. However, the area still retains many colourful neighbourhoods and interesting buildings as Charoen Krung has remarkably not changed for the most part.

Charoen Krung remains an important historical area for local residents and tourists. It represents an important link to Thailand's past and hopefully part of the future.



It's not new that in recent months everyone's life has been unexpectedly interrupted. One of the biggest changes many of us face has been working from home. We have had to build offices in the middle of our living rooms and adapt the routines and schedules of the whole family, not to mention those who have had to transform their living rooms into schools for children.

Now that quarantine has been relaxed in Thailand and part of the world is gradually emerging from confinement and returning to social settings and activities I began to believe that we have evolved to a new emotional and creative level. Almost five months have passed since much of the world stopped in a very tragic way, the hugs, the outdoor activities, the comforting encounters with those we love, everything. At the same time we learned that to take care of the rest and ourselves we had to take a different step and stay at home. This pause in our lives allowed us to value everything that we had before and even in our daily

lives we end up taking for granted thousands of things that to this day we long for intensely.

It's important that during this time many of us learned to be a chef, study, sport, paint, design and even soak up technology. During this time in confinement the need to learn has arisen. I am sure that these learnings will transform our future. I have decided to dust off all my outfits and resume my days normally (of course, always taking into account hygiene and care measures) I have taken the time to reflect on what suits my body and my mind well, and I have decided to show them my masterpiece... yes! I have called it that.

Have you ever wondered why colours are so important? It's because it allows us to express states of mind, it allows us to make ourselves known and show our personality, thoughts, it serves to distinguish. It is the perception of life! And now that we are out of confinement, I see the colours much brighter. You need to know these colours that you will definitely love:

1. Long live the neon colours!

They are here to stay, predominant and unique. Highlight with any clothes, makeup and even nails. Perhaps they are preferred for their citrus hue, for their joy and overflowing vitality or for being the colours that most enhance the tan. We will see them in orange, yellow, cyan or turquoise and of course the favourite, green.

We can also see colours such as mosaic blue, heritage blue, storm, scarlet flame, brown rose, bloom, purple beet, grape compote. You can use them both day and night, they will always make you stand out.



2. Choose your tracksuit

We know that it is an essential garment for practicing sports, but they have become a key element for our sporty and casual looks. We can see it in the evolution of trends, they are a key piece in the best Instagram photos of our favourite celebrities. It is a multifaceted garment, we know that sometimes the temperature does not allow us to use them, but you can choose an oversized one. You can wear it with neutral colours or pastel colours.



3. Tennis skirts

Are you surprised with this trend? Get ready! Because we will begin to see this trend both on the streets and on Instagram, they will become fashionable in different patterns and colours. In addition to being super comfortable, they combine with everything.



4. Is it the return of the shorts?

It's time to show your little legs, some pants in particular have starred in one of the most unexpected returns of recent times. We saw them in the 90s and now they have returned to the streets, the favourites of 'street style'. We have also seen them with an overlay with long pants. Highlighting comforts are versatile garments in which you can lean to elevate your clothing to a greater degree.

5. The bra top: protagonist

It is a clothes of Gods that awakens in you the sensuality and elegance in your outfits, underwear reaches the most modern external exposure of clothing. It is a celebration without femininity complexes, body positivity. I love the great influence that streetwear has had in the world of fashion, this combination is perfect because it has boldness and originality that helps us express our personal and unique style. You can combine it with low or high waist jeans.



6. Bare back

The necklines on the back have become the sexiest proposal, it is still a sign of sophistication and elegance on large occasions. Cuts and shapes are becoming more ingenious, ranging from the classic open neckline, to halter, cut-outs or oval shapes. Would you wear these necklines on the back?

7. Bucket hat

It has been the great hit of the summer we saw in winter and it is still present to this day. This bucket hat has been updated and we can see it in different textures, we have a thousand versions to use, but I leave you my favourites.



8. Slip dress (silk nightgown type)

The variety of options we have is immense, between colours and cuts, there is no fresher and more versatile clothing and easy to combine. You can combine them with sports shoes, with mini-bags, with minimalist sandals, you can add blazers. Overlapping is the key. Keep in mind that this dress is a good item to match almost all trends (even wearing it over pants is an excellent option).



9. Tie dye

We can see it very strongly on Instagram. Our favourite influencers wear it in any garment, but especially in tracksuits. A comfy and stylish look, 'instagramers' are not the only ones who have fallen in love with the bleached effect, the top fashion brands have also started creating specialised campaigns in the tie dye to welcome. We have seen it in sneakers like those of Louis Vuitton, in bikinis and even on the nails.



10. We love Prada!

Who has seen this little nylon bag? There are several versions of this bag. We can see that 90s, small, shoulder bags are in fashion. I leave you my favourite colours:



11. Little flowers

We know the options are endless and you won't have any trouble finding the pattern. The fewer flowers the better. That is, tiny flowers are a trend, the less is the better. I leave you some images, but remember that you should use what suits your personal style. Take note!

12. Firm steps:

There is no such thing as simplicity to look radiant and elegant at the same time. These sandals with minimalist designs inspired by the 90s, will come with everything next year, especially the most mentioned in recent weeks as the mules of The Attico, Bottega and Amina Muaddi. They are open at the tip, in addition to being very comfortable, they will make you look spectacular. You can choose an extensive palette of colours that you like the most, even in animal print. I must also mention that the sneakers are back to stay (they accompanied us during the quarantine), you can give it a new touch with neon touches, which will fascinate you.



13. Sunglasses:

We know that they are not a simple complement and accessory, they have a fundamental role in our visual health. But do you know which is the perfect lens for your face? Whether the person has a rounded face or rather elongated features will depend on the type of colour and shape of the lens. But I'm convinced that the glasses are much more than a complement, they are a statement of style and personality. So I don't think there is an absolute truth about which glasses are ideal or perfect for each face since choosing a lens is a very personal matter.



14. Accessories to complement:

Elegance is in the DNA of most women. In almost all cultures and since the origin of time, accessories have been an indisputable ally of feminine beauty. Among thick link necklaces, up to XL trends, although they seem a bit exaggerated I can say that they look simple and neutral colours, so try not to overload your outfits. And if it's about elegance, we have trends with layers, multi-chain necklaces, boho style, in gold and rose gold. Among the earrings that will be a 'must' are the pearl earrings, with geometric figures, with rhinestones and the favorites for this season: long earrings.



15. Masks: something we should live:

Did you think I wouldn't talk about this? Apparently, in different countries this has become a normality, beyond an indispensable element to face the health crisis that we are experiencing, the masks have captured the interest of fashion brands that have already opted to launch their most popular versions. We know that fashion is nothing more than a reflection of what happens every day, we have turned a need for differentiation and the need for personalisation, they have become something necessary and practical. I show you some of the trends:



For many, the quarantine has led to a rethink of the way in which fast fashion is consumed and perhaps, leads to a new, more sustainable way of shopping. As I mentioned before, this time has led us to connect with ourselves, social isolation seems to have opened the discussion: femininity. It has to do with how we adapt so that the other means us and accepts us, many times it involves the way we dress. Clothing should be a mechanism to express ourselves, to know ourselves and not a compliment that makes society accept us. During this time in quarantine we rethought this whole process, I saw

women flourish and meet again during this confinement.

Anna Wintour has stated that the world is rethinking the value that fashion has in their lives and now the question remains whether we want more to keep the casual and casual style. I would like to have your opinion on this topic, so follow me on instagram.

With nothing more to say, I hope we read in a new edition :)
xoxo
@talarz
@be_a_starlette



Talar Zambakjian

Successful fashion stylist with a Master Degree in Business Administration. Despite her Lebanese and Armenian origins, this entrepreneurial woman has extensive experience in the Thai market thanks to her 10 years living in the Kingdom. She currently writes for Expat Life in Thailand under her personal brand Be A Starlette. She is one of the most important fashion and empowerment influencers for the women of 30 years old and up in the country.

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HOW TO GET HAPPIER AND HEALTHIER DESPITE ADVERSITY

by Judith Coulson-Geissmann

Especially when times are getting tough, and the world is bombarded with bad news, it is essential to keep a positive outlook. The Science of Positive Psychology is addressing the human mindset and behaviour that can lead people to recover, grow, and flourish despite adversity.

There is power in positive thinking. Positive emotions are linked with better health, longer life, and greater wellbeing.

On the other hand, chronic anger, worry, and hostility increase the risk of developing heart disease.

Simple steps to get happier and healthier

Being grateful, doing things for others, and improving your health will pay off.

The New Year usually brings the resolve to eat better and exercise more. But here's another resolution for the list: improve your wellbeing. That's your overall emotional and physical health. Here are some tips to help you boost both.

Get happy

About 40% of what determines happiness is under your control, according to Dr. Ronald D. Siegel, assistant clinical professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School and faculty editor of Positive Psychology, a Special Health Report from Harvard Medical School. In contrast, only about 10% has to do with good and bad fortune. "It's not events, but our responses to events that determine our level of wellbeing," says Dr. Siegel.



He offers several steps you can take to improve your emotional wellbeing:

1. **Live in the moment.**
When you're fully engaged in activities, you will enjoy them more and be less preoccupied with concerns about the past and the future. While your life is restricted, enjoy the small things in life like quality time with the people that exercise social distancing with you.
2. **Be grateful.**
Keeping a daily gratitude journal promotes positive feelings, optimism, life satisfaction, and connectedness with others. Even when things fall apart around you, you can be grateful for what you have.
3. **Do things for others.**
Happiness comes most reliably from connecting with others and not being overly self-focused. Try to do things that benefit someone or something other than yourself. Check on your neighbours, does anyone need help with shopping or some household chores.
4. **Take inventory of your strengths,**



Get healthy

In the last couple of months, we have seen how important your health and the strength of your immune system is in protecting you from viruses. Overall wellbeing also includes physical health. If poor health or unhealthy behaviours are dragging down your wellbeing, addressing these issues will improve your wellbeing. That may seem daunting, but it doesn't have to be.

"Two-thirds of all illness is the result of our lifestyle choices," says Dr. Edward Phillips, founder and director of the Institute of Lifestyle Medicine at Harvard Medical School.



1. Apply your personal strengths to your health.

For example, if you're creative, come up with a healthy menu that won't bore you. If you're adventurous, try a new exercise such as tai chi or yoga.

2. Come up with reasonable and small first goals.

"Find something that's a small change, like walking 10 minutes a day. Go for a walk at lunch, walk while you're talking on the phone. What's the smallest change you can make and be confident you can do it?"

3. Be accountable for your changes.

You'll do much better if you track and report your progress to a loved one or friend, or a website or smartphone app. You'll accept your effort as something you must do, not something optional.

4. Pay attention to the benefits.

The value of the change, such as sleeping better from exercising, can become the motivation to continue that change and make others. When you see that change is possible, you'll be encouraged to make more changes.

then apply them in new ways in your daily life.

For example, if you count curiosity as a strength, read about a new subject. If you consider yourself brave, try something that makes you nervous, such as public speaking.

5. Don't know what your strengths are?

Try the free VIA Character strength survey:

<https://go.shr.lc/2xxQnDi> You will get your top five strengths and some explanation to it for free.

6. Savour pleasure.

Reminisce about good times; celebrate good moments with others (online at the moment); be happy when you accomplish something. If you are confined in your home, savour the ability to read some of the books you left for later finally, sign up for that online course you wanted to do or listen to the podcast or webinar you had not time for so far.

How to stay motivated

Want to make a change but wondering how to stay motivated? Dr. Srinii Pillay talks about the things that can impact personal motivation and the power of a sense of meaning to help you stick with your goals.

See video here: <https://youtu.be/gFoJtJLqaJo>

(Adapted from Harvard Health Publishing 2020)

About the author: Judith Coulson-Geissmann is a Positive Psychologist and Coach, Certified Corporate Wellness Specialist and the Head of Learning & Development for Hirslanden Group of Clinics in Switzerland. She is specialised in positive people development and organisational flourishing.

IT'S 'DÉJÀ VU' ALL OVER AGAIN!

by Leonard H. Le Blanc III

This year marks 45 years since I first came to Thailand. There have been a few changes over the decades. But remarkably there have been more than a few things that haven't changed at all. Some random thoughts.

I instantly fell in love with the country as soon as I got off the plane. I was mesmerised with the people, the lush scenery, the exotic scents, the warm weather and warmer hospitality, the gilded temples, the ancient history, the charming customs, and the delicious food. I knew this was place where I wanted to spend the rest of my life. I have been in over 70 countries since I arrived here. I have not changed my opinion. Bangkok has been my permanent base of operations since 1991 when not doing U.S. government contracts in the hottest of hot spots including Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kuwait, Nigeria and Houston.

The exchange rate then was steady 1 U.S. dollar to 20 Baht. Gold was USD\$35.00 per ounce. A handmade, finely crafted, personally fitted Italian pair of leather dress shoes were USD\$20. A whole closet full of top quality European styled designer suits were a few hundred dollars. I had a steak dinner one evening back then at the Chokchai Steak House. At the time the restaurant was in the Chokchai Building - the tallest skyscraper in Thailand at 26 stories. It had a spectacular view on the 23rd floor. You could look out and only see a few dim houselights to the southern and western horizons and nothing else of note. Most of the scenery was just trees.

The place to shop back then was the newly opened the Siam Center. But I noted with dismay over the years that there was a growing gap between the lowest step of the entrance on the street and the pavement. All due to subsidence caused by underground water pumping. So they periodically kept adding wooden steps each time to close the growing gap. Behind the Siam Center was the elegant, shaded



Intercontinental Hotel. The lobby was the perfect place to have some tea while teams of handsome pilots and glamorous stewardesses from Pan-Am, SAS, British Airways, Lufthansa and other international airlines that housed their crews there on layovers waltzed through the lobby area.

Bangkok's roads were all literally parking lots. Hiring a taxi cab was all hard bargaining. They were always not in the best of condition, mainly rusty jalopies ready for the scrapyard. Now as then tuk-tuks were too expensive for a 'farang' to use. Most of the city's landscape has changed radically. But certain areas of the city, like Charoen Krung Road, the residential areas of Huay Kwang and Din Daeng and right around the Grand Palace, seem not to have changed at all (except for a few hundred thousand 7-11s stores). Patpong existed, but not Soi Cowboy.

The highway to Pattaya was just a two lane road with heavy traffic. During the rainy season the roadway washed out several times and had to be repaired each time. If you got caught behind a slow-moving lorry it might be some time before an open spot between oncoming traffic let you safely pass, but that opportunity seldom came. South Pattaya Beach Road was just an unpaved track through the jungle with a few scattered ramshackle thatch covered wooden houses. If you wanted any entertainment you had to bring it along with you. Pattaya was the beach road and the back road and nothing more. A bungalow on the beach could be rented for 120B month. The road to Jomtien was also an unpaved track over the hill from Pattaya. It was a pristine stretch of beach and jungle foliage as a backdrop. Few people cared to venture over there. If they did they had the whole beach to themselves.

Unlike some other East Asian nations that long barred 'farangs', Thailand rolled the red carpet out since the first European visitors arrived over five centuries ago. Thailand has been described as a 'crossroads'. What I like about Thailand most is if you want to have fun then there will always be Thais around to help you do exactly that. If you want to be left alone then the Thais will do that too. Thailand is what you make of it. The world keeps giving me new reasons every day to stay here. As long as the proverbial welcome mat remains out for myself and my family we will.



Events

What's been happening

...the Empress of Japan



Japanese Emperor birthday celebration





CLB Luncheon
- May 2020





CLB Luncheon
- June 2020





IWC Luncheon
- June 2020





YSL





Suriyanchandra Trip





Pink ladies



Hong Kong Ladies' Group and friends from visit to West Sumatra group bid their official farewell to H.E. Ambassador Ahmad Rusdi and Madame Anita Rusdi from the Republic of Indonesia to Thailand.



'Cap for Life' Soroptimists Project, lead by Khun Elina Pancheva and members. All caps collected is one step closer to donating an Infant Incubator to the North of Thailand



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