Thai guys

- Gay art from Chonburi
- 1st Bangkok Gay Festival
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Thai guys
the gay newsletter

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months and distributed in all major
gay venues in Thailand.
Next issue will appear
10 December 1999.
We are happy and, (dare we say it?), proud, to bring you this first issue of Thai Guys. We have had, admittedly, a useful kick-start with the Bangkok Gay Festival, but we are already preparing a host of exciting new news and features for the next edition—so don’t miss it!

If you have thumbed through our newsletter already you will notice that whilst we have lots of pictures of good-looking guys, there is no porn, nor are there any prurient articles. Gay, as you already know, is not “dirty” and we intend to do nothing to reinforce the existing misconceptions of us as a community.

Yes, community is the key word, for that is what we are—engaging in and enjoying our community activities and indulging in no more sex and so on than our straight counterparts. We are here to reinforce the kinship of the gay community in Thailand and to provide a source of news and information for and about gay guys and their goings-on in Thailand, principally Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket.

Enjoy! And if you do (or don’t), let us hear about it. We hope in our next issue to provide a forum for our readers to present their views on our efforts and any gay related subject—and other fascinating features.

Editorial Staff
Thai artist succeeds in American gay world

About 35 years ago a young Chinese Thai schoolboy drew a picture of Superman for a friend on whom he had a crush. The picture was, happily, admired and since then he has not looked back. Now Tiwa Napa-ampon has a large circle of those who admire his work and is able to make a living by teaching art and selling his fine watercolours; besides being a regular subscriber to American gay magazines.

This happy state of affairs did not come about without a struggle. His fiercely traditional Chinese family were not among the admirers of his growing talents. ‘An artist is not a substantial person,’ his father told him whilst persuading him to become a lawyer. Reluctantly the young Tiwa did—and some years later struck the customary pose in full graduating regalia, tasselled mortar board on head and degree scroll in hand, at a
Ramkamhaeng University ceremony under the admiring gaze of his proud parents and beaming relatives. Nevertheless, denied special training, he pursued his then hobby on his own des- pite a distinct lack of encouragement, perhaps active discouragement, from his family.

Today Tiwa laughs about it, 'I cannot imagine myself standing up in court and pleading a case—I'd be too busy sketching the judge,' he quipped. Nevertheless he trod a lonely path, as so many like him do, until he was finally able to win his independence and live in the way he wished—doing what he always wanted to do.

After graduation he worked as a cultural liaison officer with the renowned and recently deceased Thai philanthropist, Dr Puie, in his efforts to assist the needy of Thailand. 'That was a satisfying and rewarding pe-

desperation' lived by the poor of this land.' During these years he was gradually developing his art and perfecting his style. His early watercolours reflect the rural landscape he visited at that time and practice gave him the fluid technique he has now developed—whatever his subject, the poverty, the heat, the low'ring clouds, the stormy sea or the proud assurance of an historical building, emerges with force from the sheet. In much of his work the repressed power in the muscles of a reclining youth or the tested strength of an older man expresses pride and con-fidence.

A period running a guesthouse in Pattaya (the Victoria, on the site of the present Classic Boys) earned him a wide circle of foreign friends and provided a host of models. He is still fond of the vital city and visits frequently.

Some five years ago, an eighteen-month spell visiting a relative living in New Zealand ('a lovely place'), broadened his outlook and he was able to further develop his technique amongst the rolling hills and quiet towns of this antipodean country. 'The people are so friendly, so relaxed, laid back and welcoming' Tiwa

A stormy seascape, underwater world, quiet rural landscape or the bursting muscles and proud manhood of the male form, it is all meat and drink to Tiwa.

Tiwra Napaampon lives in Chonburi (53/129 Moo3, T. Bansuan, Muang, Chonburi 20000 Thailand). Telephone and Fax: +66 (0)38 274 271, email: tiwa@mail.city (or for Thais: tiwa@chaiyo.com).

He is happy to receive visitors to look at his work (perhaps to buy!), and will accept commissions for ordinary paintings or a portrait or caricature of you or your special friend. A number of "interestingly" illustrated greeting cards are available.
recalls with nostalgia, I was able to exercise my interest in comparative culture to the full.'

Tiwa is, in his way, a purist. Presently living in Chonburi (in which province he was born) he teaches art to young Thai students, of which there are 'so many very talented boys and girls in this area,' he told us. However, no facile technique or repeated theme for him. His students are confronted with the need to master line, and form, composition and draughtsmanship, before being permitted to forge ahead and develop their own style. He has, as a result of the growing number of students who choose to come to him because of his disciplined approach, earned the envy of other, less sincerely motivated teachers. This does not deter him, 'I am not interested in turning out a lot of painters who can draw Mickey Mouse or paint a palm tree. Out there is a world with many people and I want them to see it in all its diversity and paint or draw it as they see it, not as their teachers once—long ago—did,' he declared with some, uncharacteristic, heat.

Tiwa's caricatures too, have earned him some fame. Accurate, if a trifle derogatory, depictions of local characters have become popular collector' pieces. 'I need to know a person before caricaturing them,' said the talented artist, 'their backgrounds, desires and sometimes hidden personalities.' He is not averse to making fun of himself either, as the illustration to this article shows.

However much he enjoys teaching, painting landscapes or sketching caricatures, his true love is the male form. In his watercolours, meticulously executed pencil drawings or pen and ink illustrations, his knowledge and interest is evident. Some time ago, in Pattaya, Tiwa met the publisher of an American gay magazine for mature men, they spoke of his interest and soon after illustrations by Tiwa graced the pages of Daddy, CR and other mags. 'The market is inexhaustible,' he says, 'they take all I can
produce and I have trouble keeping up. His watercolour sketches have also been reproduced in the form of greeting cards and are available from the artist.

Happily paired with his long time friend, Roy Cone, an ex performer who moved to Thailand in 1990, Tiwa is now content with his life. His love of teaching is satisfied by his many students, his art has matured and he often gets commissions—a large underwater scene hangs in the lobby of the Mercure Hotel, Chonburi—and his exhibitions draw admiring crowds. His interest in depicting the male form is satisfied by the illustrations he produces for magazines and the watercolour and pencil sketches he prolifically produces. At the age of forty-two, contentedly paired and at the peak of his powers, he is one of those rare bodies, a happy and satisfied man.

Tiwa with his domestic partner

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Boat anchors Phuket gay community

It is late afternoon and the steamy heat of the Patong Beach day is being dispersed by the first few zephyrs that will cool the evening air. The avenues of the Paradise Complex are relatively empty. A few good-looking youths wander around chatting to others of their kind as they head for the bars, where they will spend a strenuous evening dancing—for their pleasure and that of the tourists who will later throng these streets.

On the pavement outside the Boat Bar, two mature men sit in earnest conversation. They are discussing tactics and arrangements for the forthcoming Gay Festival in Phuket, one of the “happenings” that will culminate in the Bangkok Gay Festival on 31 October in Bangkok. Daeng of Boat Bar and Jim Corti are joint organizers of the Festival events in Phuket. (See Bangkok Gay Festival story—this issue.)

Daeng, (Dan, as many call him), the ruggedly handsome Thai-Japanese co-owner of Boat Bar is not only interested in the event for the custom it will bring to his bar, but because it will act as another hawser tied to the anchor of the gay community in Phuket that Boat Bar has become.

Quietly (in a manner of speaking!) Daeng has been working since the Boat Bar opened in 1993 to change the attitude to and of the elements of the gay community represented by the gay bars clustered in the area of the Paradise Complex off Song Roi Pee Road. The change, to old hands, is quite perceptible. Less of the “Hey mister!” stridency of earlier years, increasing emphasis on entertainment and companionship.

This approach has worked well for Boat Bar. From its opening in 1993 it has become more popular every year—now it can be considered a prime “destination” in Phuket, for gays and with-it straights alike. “Many people have got into the habit of booking into their hotels and coming immediately to Boat to see what’s going on,” remarks Jim. As he spoke, a young foreign couple arrived and settled down expectantly—far too early for the show (it was still dusk), but avid to get the Phuket gossip anyway.

While Daeng listens modestly, Jim extols the efforts he has made to bring about the success of his vision. “Even in 1993 this was a good place to come to,” he recalls. Jim particularly admires Daeng’s indifference to cash heavy tourists. “If some arsehole is making a nuisance of himself or bothering the boys, out he goes. Daeng doesn’t give a shit how much money he is waving about.” An attitude sadly lacking in many other similar establishments, where cash is king.
Khun Daeng and his Boat Bar

By this time, still early "pre-customer time" the performers have arrived and are rehearsing for the nightly show that has become so popular in Phuket. All in casual clothes bearing no resemblance to the glittering gowns and elegant tunics they will wear later, they shashay around the stage—led unobtrusively by the incomparable (if a trifle robust) Tiki of DJ Station (Bangkok) fame and proud possessor of many credits. Later, with lights down and strobes flashing, dressed in all their finery—which sometimes includes, happily, an element of undress—they will present a very polished performance to the expectant crowd, by then almost shoulder to shoulder.

Jim again exclaims, 'This show has driven up the standard of every show on the street—they used to be a real drag, but now they all have to try and match the excellence of Boat's show.' And it is truly excellent. We asked about the audience. 'Because of the show, and of course Daeng's particular style of hospitality, I would say 25% straights,' Jim estimated. 'They come here to be entertained by the show, by the boys and by the wit and charm of the customers too. It is truly "the place".'

Daeng explains his vision. 'I used to visit many bars and didn't like any of them very much. I was looking for something less clamorous, less pushy, more cosmopolitan. Eventually I decided that the only way was to open one myself—so I did!' From the beginning it was a success, and increasingly so. 'This is my hobby; I do it because I enjoy it, not for the money. Perhaps that is why it is so successful and makes so much,' he quipped. With a successfully operating travel agency and import-export business, Daeng is fortunate not to be dependent on the income from Boat Bar and can commit himself, as he does, to improving his popular venue without the considerations of commercialism—thus, happily but coincidentally, making it more profitable.

Travelling often to Europe and once or twice a year to Japan, Daeng cases many clubs and bars and can glean the best from all and avoid the worst. 'I'm even thinking of opening a place in Zurich,' he tells us. When we express doubt about staid and stuffy Zurich, he says confidently, 'I will start with having more friendly waiters, something much lacking there—and of course we will serve kwee teaw (fast food) Thai noodles and suchlike. That they will like.'

By now night has fallen and the bar has taken on the look of a sophisticated nightspot. The music still allows conversation, but this will change later when the show starts and the blare of disco speakers the world over will take over. Smart young men, foreign couples and gays of all ages start to crowd the club. Attentive waiters with drinks move dexterously amongst the throng—some dancing on the tiny floor—and Daeng becomes a trifle distracted as he keeps a weather eye on what is happening. A nod of his head or twitch of finger will cause a graceful waiter to scurry to serve a customer whose drink is finished or who looks lost and lonely—the perfect, unobtrusive host.

Before things get too busy (noisy!) we return to the subject of the Gay Festival. Yes, there will be a parade, but the details of the route have not yet been worked out. It will probably start on Taiwee Wong Road, move up through the perambulating tourists in Soi Bang La, then into Song Roi Pee Road and end up at the Boat Bar in Paradise Complex. Crowd control? 'No problem,' says Daeng, 'the police are very gay-friendly—although they can be tough when required.' He added, We also have considerable support from the authorities, particularly the mayor.' In a sardonic aside Jim whispers, 'They know where the money is. Gays worldwide have more spending power.
than straights and, anyway, the straights will like the show, as they do the Sydney Mardi Gras and other similar occasions.’ All bars will also stage their own parties and other festival related events—a quiet enthusiasm pervades the street. All Thais love a party and the gays, with a rare chance to dress up, more than most.

We ask about the extortion of the gay venues that goes on in other places in Thailand. ‘This is not Pattaya,’ states Daeng emphatically,

‘There is no godfather here and the police don’t take tribute . . . . well, only a little, sometimes!’

By now the show had started, the noise level had risen to deafening and the crowd is thick, and enjoying it. Jim provides a fitting final comment as he divests into the hazy interior. ‘By God, you can have more fun here than you can anywhere on the planet!’ We don’t know about that as we haven’t travelled as much as he, but we surely did have fun. Sanuk ching ching!

The happy Boat Bar crowd
TALENT NIGHT
at The Balcony

The celebration to mark The Balcony’s sixth month of life climax ed with a staff party for which the staff had secretly planned a show put on by themselves and some friends. Tables were pushed together to make an impromptu stage, frocks were donned, make-up towled on and trainers replaced with the obligatory stiletto heels. Within a few minutes the private party had become a public spectacle and at 2:00am the remaining inhabitants of Silom Soi 4 were subjected to renditions of Tina Turner, Shirley Bassey, Dolly Parton and the full repertoire of any decent (or preferably indecent) Katoey show. This was the spawn which created Talent Night at The Balcony.

Two weeks later after constructing a prefab stage and fitting a handful of spotlights the premiere of The Balcony’s version of ‘Opportunity Knocks’ hit town with eight contestants vying for a selection of prizes donated by local gay businesses. It now happens on the first and third Wednesday of every month and nearly one year on, the sponsors for the evening offer a dazzling selection of prizes so that anyone who enters is guaranteed to go home with something. The Tanawan Place Hotel donates the "Star Prize" with a double room for the night; Absolut gives a bottle of Vodka; Summer Rain Hair Salon – free styling, The Sanctuary Bar – a bottle of Johnnie Walker; Heaven Sauna – some free entrance tickets; Pizza Haven in Convent Road give Home Delivery Pizzas and The Long Yang Club give their club T Shirts to every contestant.

The Rules for Talent Night are simple: anyone can enter; just turn up on the night, bring your own costumes, make up and music and you can have up to five minutes of potential stardom in Silom Soi 4. Any act is acceptable – singers, dancers, strippers, muscle men, contortionists you name it; then wait your turn and flaunt it on the stage in front of the ‘International’ panel of judges selected from the audience.

And, who knows, later on you might even get to appear on television or in the press; there have been film crews, photographers and reporters amongst the spectators.

Over the months, there have been some superb performances and admittedly some embarrassingly dreadful efforts. However, one of the most gratifying aspects of The Balcony’s Amateur Talent Night is that all competitors try remarkably hard but no one really takes it seriously – it’s just a bit of fun and everyone gets a chance to do their party piece in front of friends and a sympathetic audience. Indeed, some ‘Stars of the Future’ have been born from their first appearance at The Balcony. Two contestants went on to get jobs at one of Silom’s disco cabaret shows and several of them have appeared at the Bangkok Gay Festival parties. New performers are always gladly received and those who have performed before are always keenly welcomed back. Nevertheless, Balcony is still waiting for, maybe even hoping for its first Farang contestant – Will it be you?
## Bangkok Gay Venues

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## Phuket Gay Venues

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**Thai guys**

Next issue: 10 December 1999
NEIL GORDON LEES IS
A FUN KINDA GUY

AND EAT ME, A FUN KINDA PLACE

"As a boy, I always had this awful feeling that I just didn't fit in. That there was something wrong with me." says Neil Gordon Lees, recalling his childhood in a small community north of Toronto. Neil, 43, has been a resident of Bangkok since 1997. He's Canadian, but has lived in the United States and Europe for years. For ten years he lived in Denmark. As well as being peripatetic, Neil is an artist and a fun guy. He believes in putting his art into his life.

"We create ourselves every morning. Just by deciding what to wear, we define our roles. I promise that if you put on a black and white polka dot suit, instead of a black and white pinstriped one, you will have a very different day at the office." He says with a sly wink.

Neil studied art in New York where his professor dubbed him insane "...but a good kind of insanity, the kind that means you're good at making people happy by adding fun to their daily lives."

He recalls the strange looks he got when he went around Bangkok salvaging portions of discarded concrete he found around skytrain construction sites. The results from this one person salvage operation: functional sculptures in concrete, everything from toothpicks, and vases to business card holders.

His latest artistic efforts have been on display since September at Eat Me restaurant and gallery on Soi Phipat 2, just off Convent Road. The exhibition of kaleidoscopic images are abstracts created by meticulously assembling collages from photographs he took in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Osaka. As Neil says of this new form of expression, "I find this art form eclectic, entrancing and fresh. The results look three dimensional." Photos used are of details like pebbles, bamboo roofs and high rise buildings. Neil has taken a portion of a photo and reproduced the same portion over and over to achieve the effect of a kaleidoscope of coloured fragments all assembled to form a general image. On the opening night on Sept. 5th, an enthusiastic crowd enjoyed a martini party with some delectable nibbly like salmon mousse supplied by Neil. The exhibition "Neil's Trip to Wonderland", will run through October into November.

Eat Me is a gay friendly place which has an outdoor area for drinks and conversation. Sunday nights will feature Japanese jazz pianist Yuko Arai and if anyone out there fancies singing to her skilled accompaniment, she begins to tinkle on the keyboard about 7:45 PM and runs until 10:45. The music covers the golden oldies of the jazz era: Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Cole Porter, Stan Getz. There is no cover charge. The atmosphere is casual and relaxed and food and drinks are available from the regular menu. The restaurant has plans to expand to the floor above which will be furnished completely in Burmese antiques.

Each month or so, a new exhibition is planned which will be blasted off by a Party like the one which opened Neil's exhibition.

Eat Me: 7/6 Soi Phipat 2, Convent Rd., Bangrak, Bangkok 10500; Tel.238-0931 or 233-1767; e-mail: eatme.bangkok@bigfoot.com
Canadian Court Comes Out Strongly for Gay Rights

In a landmark case, a Court in Ontario declared that all the laws of that Province had to be equalised to include benefits for same-sex spousal relationships. The specific case involved an alimony suit by the partner in a lesbian relationship. It now is being said that Canadian laws are becoming among the most liberal in the world in according same-sex relationships with the legitimacy long enjoyed by heterosexual relationships.

Banana Sent to Jail for Sodomy

Zimbabwe’s former president, Canaan Banana was sentenced to one year with labour on sodomy and unnatural sex charges. Banana’s case was peeled before the courts when a former presidential aide spilled the beans while defending himself on a murder charge. The hapless aide had murdered another employee who had referred to him as “Banana’s wife”. Mr. Banana has apparently, since his conviction, issued a number of homophobic public statements to court public opinion.

Gay Ban on Thai Television

Recently, Thailand’s vaunted live-and-let-live philosophy proved that it did not wholly extend to “alternate lifestyles” as the government ordered a ban on transvestite and gay performers on state-owned television stations. Long a popular feature of prime time sitcoms and soap operas, gay and transvestite characters are now seen as threatening public decency and family values. The order was issued in the wake of public complaints to the Prime Minister made through the Internet. A particular point was that children were being exposed to “harmful” influences and might (horrors!) even want to imitate gay lifestyles. The controversial ban spawned a noisy protest by actors and activists and was the hot topic of TV talk shows and letters to the editor. The Nation, one of Bangkok’s English dailies, chimed in with opinions from the person on the street by carefully choosing six individuals in their twenties who all objected to seeing gay lifestyles on TV. Among comments was that the transvestites weren’t too bad but that showing men “fancying” other men was repugnant. The issue has not disappeared and continues to occasion lively debate in the Thai media.

Bangkok Gay Festival 1999

The long awaited Bangkok Gay Festival (BGF) will finally take place on Sunday 31st October with a fantasy parade along Silom Road and a tremendous party at Factory Disco — but the festivities have actually been underway for the last six months and the planning for much longer. A Gay Festival for Bangkok was conceived by Pakorn Pimton, the festival’s creative director, whose original idea was a huge gay Halloween party. Then he saw the Sydney Mardigras on TV and thought — “Why not in Bangkok?” So, after discussing it with friends and planning with some gay business owners, the project was born.
The Official Press Launch for the Bangkok Gay Festival took place on Wednesday 31 March at The Balcony in Silom Soi 4 with a party the like of which had not been seen in the Soi for many years. Perhaps most surprised were the guys at The Balcony who had said nonchalantly, 'Sure you can use this place for a press conference,' and left it at that. On the day, their bar, karaoke, terrace and a large part of the Soi was commandeered as mountains of equipment, paraphernalia, balloons, about fifty performers, three TV crews, countless other local and international media reps and about 500 spectators descended. The top shows, dancers and singers from all of Bangkok's gay venues plus the (then new) ICON boys performed for the assembled crowd and there were guest appearances from local gay celebrities, favourites amongst whom included Thai boxing champion Parinya Kiatbusaba "Nong Tum" and video star Somoo. The party lasted over 2 hours. The Festival was not born — it was ordained; the party wasn't thrown; it was hurled at the assembled masses with great force and considerable pride.

The next month, April, saw the first of the pre-festival parties; this time at the Bayon Disco in Khao San Road. Not particularly well known as a gay area, this started as a street party with bemused backpackers and local stallholders wondering what was going on. Soon a throng of several hundred onlookers had massed outside the disco and the police moved in politely to let the traffic through. In some respects it was fortunate that they all had to move inside the disco because the rain had started.

The appreciative crowd was thrilled by the dance routines of the ICON boys, the fantastic costumes of the 'girls' and the patter of MC's Od and Yai. With more foreign media interviews taking place after the show; publicity and goodwill for the Bangkok Gay Festival burgeoned.

May's party was at DJ Station — the home ground for many of the BGF dancers. The place was packed with partygoers and the stage filled with professional performers — but this time accompanied by a large number of extras made up from previous audiences who just wanted to join in. The routines choreographed by Khun Pakorn were marvelling at, the assembly was electrified by the ICON boys, the performers' costumes were stunning. In June the party was back in Silom Soi 4 at the Telephone where the crowds squeezed in, jostling to see the show. For the first time, wearing little more than their massage oil and Speedos, BGF was entertained by some muscle men with a routine of bicep tweaking. The salacious farang round the bar were agog. Again the ICON dancers and the DJ Station
Bangkok gay festival 1999

crew gave stunning performances; all this, plus the practised spiel of the MCs, made it another success for the BGF.

The event in July coincided with the opening night of the Factory Disco. This was the first time that regulars to BGF events had a chance to see the venue for the 'Grand Finale'. It was huge, it was spectacular, it wasn’t quite finished — but what the hell. Factory’s management had worked like slaves against the clock to get the place ready in time and they made a splendid show. The dancers had a mammoth stage, the crowd was bewitched by their performance, the sound and light systems were the best in Bangkok and, unlike many previous venues, there was enough room for the audience to move about.

Dick’s Café in Soi Pratoochai was billed as the meeting point for the August gala but it turned into a street party with all the bars in the Soi gathering as family to help out. The Soi beyond the stage outside Dick’s became a ‘catwalk’ for the performers to strut their stuff — and what magnificent strutting it turned out to be. Not only were the ICON boys and the DJ station company on their best form but we were treated to guest appearances by the Singaporean Mardi Gras team and, a special treat, 'Tamara’ the Swiss cabaret star had flown in to be with and perform at the Dick’s party. The audience packed the Soi and many regulars said that it was the best party so far.

A change to the routine was seen on 5th September when the BGF got its balls out — and went bowling in aid of Gay Charities in Thailand. The other people in the Cosmo Bowling Alley were more than a little perplexed at first when 20 teams in Drag strolled in bring with them an entourage of lights, microphones, high heels, feather boas and boozo. Teams from V Club, Dick’s Café, Twilight, Balcony, The Long Yang Club, Once Upon a Time, Factory, Summer Rain Hair Salon and many, many more were all out to have fun — and there were some pretty professional bowlers amongst the teams. The highlight of the evening came when the lights suddenly went off, the spotlight came on and Khun Bin from DJ Station danced across the lanes in full regalia.

So in the next few, short weeks until the Festival Day what is on the calendar:

23 Oct Cocktail Reception with exhibition artists — Tanawan Hotel Lobby
26 Oct Balcony Bingo Bonanza — The Balcony, Silom Soi 4 — Win HUGE prizes
29 Oct Festival Pub Crawl — Find all the gay places around Silom, starts 8:00 PM,
30 Oct Discussion on Gay Issues with Prof. Douglas Sanders — Dick’s Cafe, at 2:00 PM
30 Oct Dress Rehearsal for Party — The Factory, Silom Rd, Bangkok
31 Oct Parade and Party at Factory, Silom Rd from 7:00 PM till midnight (including Fashion show and awards) followed by a dance party till late.

Tickets for the final Party are Baht 500, include one drink and are on sale at: The Tanawan Place Hotel, Dick’s Café, The Balcony, Factory Disco and ICON Pattaya.

All Proceeds will go to Gay Charities in Thailand.

You can find all the latest details on the Bangkok Gay Festival by checking the web site at: http://www.khsnet.com/bgf/ or by asking at any of the BGF ticket outlets.
Two new and updated gay travel guides on the shelves.


These two travel guides offer practical, up-to-date, and detailed information for the gay traveller.

The first updates “Men of Thailand,” a well-known guide to the kingdom’s locales for “sanuk” (fun). Pocket-sized, it lists gay venues in the major cities—both north and south—and the major beach resorts, and includes listings and comments on bars, hotels, restaurants, and saunas. There is general practical information (with addresses in Thai script), and a useful section on survival Thai that includes gay slang. The accompanying “fun maps” are the bare bones of the commentary. Altogether a useful resource for the tourist or resident.

“Men of Vietnam” offers a comprehensive introduction to a country where the gay scene is not very visible and the gay lifestyle officially disapproved of. The first part offers general advice to the traveller new to the country of the “don’t take pornography, do take sunscreen” kind. The book goes on to discuss the gay scene generally and then to take in Saigon, Hanoi, “and beyond.” Hotels, points of interest, hints on getting around, and possibilities for the gay traveller are the major features. Maps and website locations close the book and add to its user-friendliness as do five pages about AIDS in Vietnamese to help inform friends in a country that is lax on sexual education.

This is a sympathetic, culturally sensitive account by someone who knows and clearly enjoys the country. Some of the descriptions are a bit on the rosy side—anyone believing the statement that cruising around Hanoi’s main lake is very active . . . all hours” is bound for disappointment—but this mainly balanced compilation will prove helpful to the first timer and provide surprises for the old Vietnam hand.

Both guides are available through Bookazine in Thailand.

by Vanessa Vogue


For those seeking a serious read about a not-widely-discussed topic, you can’t go wrong with this collection of well-researched essays on this fascinating subject. Most if not all the writers are academics and they approach their topic with all the esoteric tools that academia demands: footnotes, bibliography and for some, the arcane language of social research. Having said that, the book is a worthwhile discussion of the language and lifestyles of hustlers the world over. The section on Thailand was written by Graeme Storer. Titled, Bar Talk: Thai Male Sex Workers and their Customers, it was drawn from material gathered during the authors travels around the bars of Bangkok interviewing bar-boys. The author was engaged in collecting language patterns of the men he interviewed as material for his doctoral dissertation in Applied Linguistics. There are fifteen articles in all. They cover such diverse locales as Morocco, Brazil, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Canada, Britain, France, Costa Rica, Peru and the Dominican Republic. Definitely worth a read, especially if you are seeking a serious look at a serious subject. Available at all Bookazines in Thailand.

Healthy Men/Healthy Attitudes

Martin’s Foreman’s “Aids and Men: Taking Risks or Taking Responsibilities” (London: PANOS/ Zed, 1999) consists of two very distinct parts. The first section takes on general health issues in the context of concepts of maleness and male power over sex and reproduction.

The second offers an overview of the consequences of AIDS in eleven developing countries with essays by journalists based in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Russia.

The country surveys include a chapter on Thailand by Satya Silvaraman, a Chiang Mai-based journalist. The chapter explores the Thai family and cultural responses to HIV infection, glances at issues of awareness and prevention, and the context of Buddhism. Like the book’s other chapters, it focuses on how real people cope in their daily lives in their communities.

Although most of the chapters passingly mention “men who have sex with men,” those specifically tackling the issue are on Kenya and Brazil. The first focuses on homophobia and self-image as well as the possibilities of health care and preventive measures in a traditionalist society where homosexual activity is illegal. The second—“Hell on Earth”—is a searing look at the behavior of men in prison.

Foreman’s volume isn’t a light read and also suffers from some superficiality because of its journalistic approach. Anyone seeking some perspective on the current situation in developing countries will nonetheless find it useful and interesting. The book is available at Bookazines in Thailand at the price of 775 baht.

All book reviews of this issue have first been published by www.telephonepub.com
Visit their interesting site.
REPORT FROM
CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh's (PNP) gay scene is just emerging. Particularly during the last year or so. It is now easy to meet Cambodian men. Well, it was never too difficult really, but nowadays supply seems to exceed demand. And you may even meet some passionate lovers, even ones who seem to know what they want. In the old days, a common complaint was that Cambodian men behaved like matresses in bed. Well, those days seem to be over.

The salient feature of the Phnom Penh scene is cruising. There is hardly any place resembling the "gay bar" we are so accustomed to in the West. Attempts have been made to create such an environment, but have failed. The reason is always the same: Cambodians do not go to such places, at least not yet. So, unless you want to meet other Westerners (inevitably, "rice queens") to exchange hunting stories, you will learn quickly to avoid such places. No problem! You won't need them anyway. At best, they qualify as "mixed", where the presence of straight couples is heavily evident. Nothing wrong with straights of course, just the kind of freedom to kick up your heels and let your knickers show will not be found in PNP.

Despite the violent reputation of Cambodia, gay guys in PNP seem a very peaceful lot. Not necessarily honest, mind you (don't leave your jewels unattended on the table!), and they invariably expect you to pay a "fee" of USD 10.-, but stabbings or shoot outs have never been recorded in connection with gay contacts. Some may ask for more money than the usual, but if you are not forthcoming they will exit without trouble.

Cruising Tips

The areas where your cruising is most likely to yield results are the following:

1) The Riverfront (Quai Sisowath). This is the city's prime promenade. Gay cruising is more apparent after 20.00 hours in the evening, but by 23.00 hours everything dies down. This is also the safest site in the city, although certain precautions should be taken after 21.00 hours.

2) The park in front of Hong Kong centre (Sothearas Street). The side of the park facing Hong Kong centre operates as a supplementary cruising area to the adjacent Riverfront, during the same hours (and, usually, with the same kind of people). This area is recommended only if you have access to a car: you just stop somewhere, and within no time somebody will appear in front of your window. Pedestrians should concentrate on the Riverfront. The back side of the park, which is in front of a pagoda, is a relatively safe cruising area in the late afternoon hours (17.00 - 19.00 hours). It may be interesting to enter the pagoda itself: the compound is full of students, often very willing to offer their services. (The same goes for many other pagodas in the centre of the city).

3) Hun Sen Park, near the Independence Monument is crowded and relatively safe in the afternoon, but should be avoided at night, unless you have access to a car.

4) During the very late hours, many guys are waiting to meet foreigners at the parking lot in front of Martini Bar. Avoid going there without a car,
Until recently Cambodia had a bad press but now the situation is calm.

though. It is not the guys themselves who are dangerous, but you have to cross a dark street in order to access Martini, and armed robberies have happened there before.

Other venues

Flamingo is probably the only institutionalized and clearly gay place in Phnom Penh (it operates under the guise of a massage parlor), where you can go, select a masseur, and receive the same type of post-massage services you receive at a Thai go-go bar. The fees, all-inclusive, amount to approx. USD 20.- The boys there are excellent.

La Casa is a disco, ostensibly straight, where you often meet young gay Cambodians seeking contact with Westerners (unless you prefer some of the guards). La Casa is located inside the Sharanon Hotel (not to be confused with Sheraton...) near Wat Phnom.

Wangdome is a Thai restaurant on Street 240, owned by a gay Thai and frequented by a young gay crowd (Thai and Khmer). Next door you have the Tamarind, owned by a gay Khmer. However, that is about where gayness ends. The place is frequented by young straight couples, mostly of French extraction.

The Heart of Darkness is a rather crowded bar at night, owned by another gay Khmer. The clientele are primarily straight, but it is worthwhile to talk to the owner about local gossip. And interesting activities do happen on the street in front or near the bar.

If you are the "gym" and the "sauna" type, you should pay a visit to the gym at Parkway (Mao Tse Tung Street). In the late afternoon hours, amazing things happen there. - Another such venue, although not very comfortable and without any modern equipment, is the swimming pool at the Olympic Stadium.

Codes of Conduct: Cultural Do's and Don'ts

Cambodian men are all smiles (more than the Thais!) and sensuality. Many people find them to be the sexiest in the region, thanks to their "primitive" touch, in addition to their excellent looks. You should not expect too much though. Interesting conversation is rarely possible (and this is not solely because of language problems). Neither is genuine friend-

ship, nor passionate love affairs.

A Cambodian will easily tell you that he loves you but this is more or less a politesse. They are too preoccupied with their own survival to indulge in such luxurious concepts as romantic love. A relationship with a man to most Cambodian gays means having a wealthy Barang (=a Westerner, a foreigner) take care of them, sponsor their education, etc., and act as a kind of "Godfather". The expression "sugar daddy" comes to mind.

If you decide to stay together with a Cambodian man, believing that this is a love relationship, you could be in for a big disappointment. Their superego, the collective consciousness, flowing from the all-encompassing national culture, is so strong it crushes individual egos. Personal

There are certainly a lot of sugar palms in Cambodia, many more than there are sugar daddies...
preferences are not a priority. Cambodian culture is very ancient, probably the oldest in the region, but it has yet to evolve into the 20th century much less the 21st. It is based on the oral traditions and values of an agrarian society. The country lacks a literature, so Cambodians are not exposed to the world of ideas and choices found in the written word. It is their culture that tells them in detail what to do in social situations: how to behave, what to eat, what to say, what time to go to bed, etc. Their culture tells them also what is different is wrong (in Khmer, koh means both different AND wrong), and that foreigners are basically walking wallets. You may also find the Khmers extreme slow learners: just teaching them how to use the bathroom without flooding the entire house is almost an impossibility. This is not due to stupidity, for sure. It seems to be a kind of “civil disobedience”. They only learn what they want to learn, and it is their culture that tells them what is desirable to learn and what can be ignored. Who cares about the Barangs’ silly obsession with clean bathrooms, or their strange insistence on eating with a closed mouth? Just pay your respects when they nag about these things, say a “yes” or two, and then just ignore them. By the way, never take a “yes” for a “yes” in Cambodia.
They reply “yes” to everything. It is just their way of providing a convenient answer; it should never be taken as a commitment.

You will find Khmers soft-spoken and respectful. Their thinking is very hierarchical. They may be less respectful of their peers, but they do place Barangs quite high up in the hierarchy. On the other hand, such things as privacy do not exist at all in their culture. The Khmers may mean to be polite, but the kind of questions they ask may sound intrusive. And, one thing that you must take for granted: there are no secrets in Khmer society. If you sleep with a Cambodian man, all his friends and neighbors will know about it. What is worse, the information may be seriously distorted, because nobody in Cambodia wants to lose face or to appear as “different” in the eyes of his peers. Therefore, instead of telling friends about the nice time you had together, he will probably say that you gave him USD 10.- for the privilege of touching his genitals.

This total lack of discretion, coupled with the smallness of the place and the activities of many moralist NGOs, has made the scene for those who like the very young extremely dangerous. So said, very young boys (sometimes even under ten) are very much in evidence at the Riverfront and some may chase you quite actively, but several foreigners have faced arrest and trial (both in Cambodia and in their home countries) because of alleged pedophilia. It is definitely better to stay away from small children. Nowadays even an innocent interest in children can be misunderstood.

Another problem caused by intrusion and indiscretion is that whenever you speak with somebody in the street (while cruising, of course), others will come uninvited and join the conversation. This can be very frustrating, and it is not at all easy to get rid of the intruders. Cambodian men are rather shy when they act on their own. You may even have to make the initial approach, after establishing eye contact, otherwise you may never meet anybody. However, when a group (i.e., at least two) has already formed, others see it as almost a duty to join. When you tell them to buzz off, they will not seem to understand why, so they will just smile and stay on. There is no easy recipe for solving this problem, but firmness certainly helps.

Cambodian culture has its own standards on hygiene, quite incompatible with Western ones. Using the same rag to clean the floor and immediately thereafter a plate is perfectly O.K., but blowing your nose and then keeping the mucus preciously in a handkerchief, deep in your pocket, is considered disgusting. Equally disgusting is saliva. Many Cambodians have a problem with deep kisses for this reason. If you kiss a Cambodian on the mouth and then see him trying to clean his lips, this does not mean he dislikes you. It is simply his culture that telling him to get rid of any trace of saliva. Therefore, never try to use saliva as a lubricant, unless you want to see your Cambodian friend leaping out of bed and throwing up in disgust!

Touching people in the most sensitive parts of the body is a very common feature of same sex interaction in Cambodia. The Khmers do it all the time. Some of their affectionate gestures may look erotic to Westerners. It is even O.K. for two male friends to touch each other’s buttocks or genitals quite openly. So, if somebody suddenly fondles your bottom, you should not immediately assume he wants sex. Normally, this is equivalent to tapping someone on the shoulder in the West. It means nothing more than that.

It is, of course, possible for a Westerner to let this physical tenderness escalate to a point where it becomes clearly erotic. In such cases, however, the Khmer counterpart will probably know what’s going on and cooperate but be too shy to say openly what he wants. In all other cases you have to be cautious. It would be a mistake to assume that foreigners can start touching people’s buttocks with gay abandon, the moment their plane touches down at Phnom Penh airport. Just because they are doing it themselves doesn’t mean they don’t know that Westerners differ on this point (since 1992 they have become accustomed to seeing Barangs keep themselves apart by at least a meter). They also have their own small unwritten rules and conventions on how, when, and where to touch each other. You do not know this “system”, so you will inevitably act in an clumsy manner which will only serve to embarrass your Cambodian friends. At best they will start laughing. At worst they will run away, or even claim you attempted to assault them sexually.

Conclusion

Do visit Cambodia, by all means. You will find it relatively easy to meet extremely handsome young men. For those interested in older ages, things can be more difficult. After all, this a country where half the population is under 20.

Cambodia will offer you pleasant memories of sexy men, mostly at a price of USD 10.- per contact, but do not have more expectations than that. This is not going to be the place to meet the prince of your life.

One last thing: Cambodian soldiers, policemen, and, particularly, military policemen are gorgeous and often available. They are not dangerous, however, keep in mind that this is the single most HIV-exposed group in Cambodia.
At Table 22, in Telephone Pub on Soi 4, Silom Road, a young foreigner looks out at the passing throng along the soi. There is something in his look that betrays a newcomer to Bangkok, a bit of culture shock, discomfort. He looks back into the bar and squints at the unfamiliar faces, the wild laughter and talk in a language he can't comprehend. Suddenly the telephone on his table begins to ring wildly. He grabs at the receiver to shut up the noise, not wanting to draw attention to himself.

"Hello," he says seeing some eyes peer in his direction as he presses the receiver to his ear.

"Hello, you come alone?" a voice intones as he scans the crowd to try and spy the person who has just called him from afar in the bar. But the mass is too dense and he can't locate the caller.

"Yes I come alone. I am new to Bangkok."

"Oh you new la." the voice shrieks through the smoke. "I from Pattaya. Can come join you?"

The rest is history. And when Telephone Pub opened in the late Eighties the telephones on each table became a part of its history too. But sadly because many of the units were vintage phones from many a bygone era, they lapsed into disuse, the old switchboard went on the blink and the phones became unique reminders of the fun that once was had.

Well, in September after many years gathering dust the phones are again ringing at Telephone Pub. Telephone Pub was the brainchild of a long time Bangkok resident who had, before his sojourn began in Thailand, spent many years in Germany. He had never forgotten cafes and bars in Berlin that sported telephones on every table. In fact there is a scene set in Berlin in the movie "Cabaret", where the star is sitting at her table; a gentleman caller rings her up to make a date. She does just what our fictitious patron at the outset did; she scans the faces around the club trying to pick out the man calling her table.

The originator of Telephone said in an interview with the Bangkok Post just after the initial opening, that there was a more serious reason for the phones: culture. He felt that Thais, especially gay men are shy with farang especially in making the initial contact and they are shy about their English. He thought the phones operated as a great cross-cultural icebreaker.

Not that Telephone Pub suffered much from the decade or so that the phones became non-functional. It is probably the busiest pub on the soi and it doesn't seem to matter what day of the week, there always seems to be a crowd of mixed Thais and farang with mixed couples (i.e. men with women) favouring the outside terrace. Mixed is also the operative word for the inside crowd. It is indeed amazing the variety of people the pub seems to attract. On any given night, one is almost
certain to strike up a conversation with someone, from whatever
country, because Telephone Pub now en-
joys—without a word of exaggera-
tion—a truly international reputation.
It has established its own website:
www.telephonepub.com which is
updated monthly. It is probably the
first gay bar in Bangkok to start up
a program to solicit donations from
guests to assist AIDS organisations
in the city. In short it has tried to
become more than a bar and instead
wants to establish itself as the true
meeting place for the independent
traveller. For those who like a throng
around them but want to be left
alone, they can gaze without hassle.
And for those of a more extraverted
bent, who like to travel in
packs, they can dive right in and
share in the hustle.
The upstairs level seems to attract
a more sedate crowd of couples or
foursomes, who eat dinner and whis-
per sweet nothings over candlelight.
The menu combines both Thai and
foreign dishes. While it is easy to sit
at the bar and act like an ostrich,
with head in sand, the staff are atten-
tive to the newcomer and likewise
the Thai clientele. So be
warned. But the hard sell is not in
the cards in Telephone. And now that
the phones are up and running, an-
other medium of introduction is in
operation so the bedroom eyes winking
at you from across the bar can be put on hold if another gentleman
caller strikes your fancy.
Map of Bangkok (Sukhumvit area)

1. Man's Club
2. Big Boy
3. Albury
4. Inter Mustache's House
5. Crepes & Co
6. No Body
7. Nice Guy's
8. Jet Set
9. Damnsak Mae Sai
10. Rasi Sayam
11. Turning Point
12. Utopia
13. Mercury
15. Cat
16. Mambo
17. Zone 22
18. Utopia's executive hotel
19. Smart Fashion
20. Colony

Silom comments

Some highlights amongst the gay venues in Sukhumvit.

Albury (3)
Well-managed and fashionable men's club, gym and restaurant. A wide choice of muscle-bound masseurs.

Big Boy (2)
A bit sleazy but check it out yourself.

Colony (20)
Well-established sauna and bar set in a villa with a fine garden. Massage available.

Crêpes & Co (5)
Specialising in savoury and sweet pancakes of all types. Gay-friendly.

No Body (6)
Massage of all types.

Smart Fashion (19)

Utopia (12)
Shop, gallery and café. Frequently stage art shows. Active community based venue.
We have a large selection of “desirable” properties

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<td>Aqua Spa</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Utopia Tours</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Map of Bangkok (Silom area)
Silom comments

Some highlights amongst the gay venues in Silom.

Aqua Spa (41)
The newest sauna in town, massage available. Offer accurate fortune telling.

Balcony Club (4)

Boys of Bangkok (24)
One of the boldest shows in town.

Dick’s Café (20)
Stylish bar and café with European style sandwiches and Thai snacks. Very pleasant for an afternoon coffee or a late night snack and nightcap.

DJ Station (13)

Factory (8)
New, large disco.

Freeman (7)
New place with cruising area upstairs and good show. Already very popular.

Le Bouchon (33)
Cosy, gay-friendly little restaurant with tasty French cuisine. Located in Patpong 2.

Pharaoh’s (38)
Popular gay Karaoke in Silom Soi 4.

Sphinx (3)
Located deep down in Soi 4. Famous and popular.

Tarntawan Place Hotel (31)
The stylish, comfortable, gay friendly hotel—not noisy although right in the heart of the action.

Tawan (32)
Recently doubled in size in a place where size matters! Very popular.

Telephone (1)
Stylish, newly decorated telephone contact bar. See someone you fancy? Just dial the table number. For years, one of the most popular bars in Silom Soi 4.

Utopia Tours (42)
The first gay travel agent in Bangkok; individual and group tours throughout Thailand and the region. Located at the Tarntawan Place Hotel.
### Map of Phuket

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Place 1</th>
<th>Place 2</th>
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<td>Alkazar Garden Boys</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Super Boys</td>
<td>Asia Pub</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Passport</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Bicycle</td>
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Next issue: 10 December 1999
Phuket comments

Some highlights amongst the gay venues in Phuket.

Alkazar Garden Boys
Massage.

Black and White
One of the first go-go bars in Patong. Large bar with many boys.

Boat Bar
The in-place for the with-it gay and straight crowd. Great show professionally presented. Stylish, friendly, reasonable prices.

Charlie’s Boys (Uncle Charlie’s)
Large bar with many unnumbered but friendly boys.

James Dean
Includes guesthouse. Friendly bar on pavement. Drinks very reasonably priced.

My Way
Also one of the first go-go bars in Patong. Large with attentive hosts and friendly boys. Sister club to My Way in Bangkok.

New Rendezvous Hotel
First gay hotel in Patong. French owner. Just opened at new location in Paradise Complex.

Passport
Narrow bar with corner dancing stage and friendly boys.

Q Bar
Gay-friendly bar on front terrace of Ocean Plaza, Bangla Road.

Seahag
Thai seafood cuisine prepared and presented by an artist. Khun Kenya’s restaurant was recently renovated and remains as popular as ever a gourmet venue.

Thipaluck
Coffee shop/bar with tables on pavement. Casual meeting place.

Young Shark’s Club
Large bar with many friendly boys. Centre catwalk. A bit noisy.
Pattaya comments

Some highlights amongst the gay venues in Pattaya.

Adam and Eve (30)
Recently moved to new location.

Ambiance
The first gay hotel of Pattaya. Well decorated rooms with all necessary amenities. Conveniently located in the heart of Boyz Town.

Boyz Boyz Boyz (1)
One of the first go-go bars in "Boyztown". Still in same location and thriving. Very popular as a night cruising venue for beachboys.

Bruno's (8)

Butcher Hans Pub (51)

Charlie Boys (21)
Cosy, music and air conditioning at a bearable level.

Coco Banana (9)
Open air pub with many tables to sit with friends and watch the world go by.

Duilio's (11)
Gay-friendly restaurant conveniently located beside Foodland on Pattaya Central Road. Pleasant ambience in outdoor (and indoor) dining. Italian food "as mama used to make". Reasonable prices.

Filou (39)
Fun pub in Sunnee Plaza with cheerful boys.

Icon, The Club (24)
Stylish club with popular singer and show.

Mandate Comeback (52)
The former Mandate resurrected in a new location on South Pattaya Road. Worth checking out—check the map.

Music Café (6)
Friendly pub/restaurant with fabulous view over Soi Boyztown. Good food (try the cheesecake).

Royal House (31)
Stylish massage parlour with a wide variety of masseurs. Try the VIP rooms with video and music.

Throb (2)
Go-go with style right in the heart of Boyztown. Great show.

Top Man (36)
The new venue of the former owner of the famous Cockpit.
Boat Bar

your Crazy Bar

in Phuket

Showtime: Midnight

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