THAI GUYS

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BOYZTOWN
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TARNTAWAN PLACE
HOTEL
What’s Love Got to Do with It?

By Mark Arar

"Khun sabai dee mai?" asked the waiter, even though he must already have known the answer from the downcast expression on my face. "Ma! sa bai!" I replied, trying to elicit some sympathy and test at the same time. Why was I so "blue down deep inside" as the song goes? The short answer is that I a middle-aged gay farang had just had my Thai boyfriend of four months bought away from me by a higher (female!) bidder; the more complete answer is that I had certain realities of the farang-Thai go-go boy scene thrust in my face with implications for my future happiness that went well beyond my feelings for the particular boy in question.

Even though we all know that go-go bars are about prostitution, and that prostitution is not about love but about sex in exchange for money, the typical Thai go-go boy is so warm and affectionate that it is easy to believe that it is actually possible to build something lasting and mutual on a foundation that begins (and endure) largely on the basis of a cash exchange. Of course, many of the boys will tell you that they hate being prostitute and who want to exit the scene as soon as someone they like enough comes along to rescue them. What they mean is they want to graduate from being common prostitutes (forced to go with anyone who comes along by a greedy mamasan) to being a high-class prostitute or "kept boy" with a monthly income sufficient to keep them provided with all the latest toys and enough spending power to buy their way around the stigma of being gay and/or of being a prostitute.

Many farangs (and some prosperous Thais as well) spend a lot of money and emotion, first trying to rescue their favorite boy (or boys) from "the Life" and then trying to keep them happy after they have been removed from the meat market. Sometimes this "works" for the couple in question, but more likely than not it will fail, causing pain and disillusionment all around. (Yes, the boy suffers too.)

One solution is to avoid the meat market altogether, but this may be difficult or dangerous for farangs who are not highly attractive or who have no easy entry into Thai society. An alternative is to look at the decidedly unromantic facts squarely in the face before entering the arena and to keep reminding yourself that as your feelings may become, you cannot permit yourself to get carried away without risking a painful crash landing at some point.

Sadder but wiser after my recent experience, I expect to return to Thailand with a different perspective, one that allows me to sample the pleasure on offer but still be able to honestly say, "Sabai dee" if anyone cares to ask.
People that shape Phuket

Khun Daeng at the Boat Bar in Patong Beach

Boat Bar opened in 1994 as a small open-air bar in the Royal Paradise Complex on Patong Beach, Phuket Island. It has since grown and evolved into a leading gay venue in Thailand, and certainly the high water mark for gay entertainment in the South. It is operated by Khun Daeng, the original owner.

TG: Khun Daeng, how do you feel about being the most easily identifiable individual in the gay area of Patong, since Boat Bar has been on top?

· I never went after that. It has been like an accident, actually. If that is how it is, then I want to put my hand to supporting positive things, and try to improve how the gay people in Patong are looked at.

TG: The original Boat Bar was a smaller open air bar, with a great show. You were forced to move because of demolition plans for the outdoor bars in the Royal Paradise Hotel Complex. Did you ever think of quitting, when the original property was taken down?

· No, never. I would have fought to keep Boat Bar.

TG: Did you ever think of leaving the Paradise, at that time?

· No to that, also. It was the home for us, so we stayed, no question.

TG: The current Boat Bar location is well designed, and frequent upgrades and changes are made. Who did the original design? Who is responsible for most of the design changes and design decisions?

· Tiki, or Turk, has been running most things from the beginning. Now, Prom from Bangkok, is also involved in the design and planning of the shows. We grow, and we need fresh ideas. So we do.
The Phuket Gay Festival News is at: www.gayphuket.com

TG: The music is a big item at Boat Bar as a disco. You have had several DJ's, as most disco's do change from time to time. Who is doing the great music currently and where did he come from?

- Johnny has been our DJ for six months, coming from Bangkok. He is popular because he plays good music that people want to hear and new music they are happy to learn. The DJ is so important for any success in a club like Boat Bar.

TG: Some people criticize you for having too many events, and big, successful events, that take business from other local businesses. How do you feel about that?

- I cannot worry about that too much. Our events are usually successful, and I think often we are a model for other clubs. I hope so, that I will be creative, and the other clubs will also be creative, so all of it draws new visitors to Phuket and Patong.

TG: You are recognized as the leader of the Gay Community in Patong Beach, certainly for your role as an early founder of the Phuket Gay Festival. How does this affect what you do in your business?

- I would like to keep a low profile in the gay leadership role. This year, Khun Bon from My Way is a co-chairman for the festival, so the leadership role is being taken by other people. While the festival is still young and growing, I will do what is necessary to make things work okay. In my opinion, the festival is still sort of small compared to what it will be, and it is growing every week. So, I just try to help make sure the things that need to get done are done, no matter who does it.

TG: What is your relationship with the organizers of the Bangkok Gay Festival, and how do you see the relationship between the two? How are the two festivals different, as you see it?

- First, we can only thank the Bangkok Festival leaders for helping us start last year. They are the ones who gave us the idea. Our relationship is good. The big difference is that Bangkok is a big city, with a big city atmosphere, and I think it is exciting for so many tourists. The festival leaders have a lot more to do to get permits and permission for everything. Lots of people in a big city, very exciting like only Bangkok can be. Phuket is a small island with beaches and mountains, but now very fine roads and communications, a good infrastructure all around, our good luck. We have a very large tourist population in November, so we have the visitors. We only go 100 meters to go to the Mayor or the Police for permits and permission for events, and they know first hand what we are doing. We are a small and very beautiful location, very different from the city.

TG: You travel a great deal, generally to Europe. What are you doing with all this travel?

- I have my own holidays and some small business, but really, I am always promoting Phuket as a tropical holiday destination.
I believe in Phuket, and I pay back what it has given me.

TG: Any comments about other Patong gay entertainment businesses?

- Many different choices for tourists. Phuket and Patong just get better with experience, as the competition keeps going and really raises the level for good things to happen. One thing I am so happy about is the good relations between the business owners, many good friends.

TG: The normal question must be: What is the future for Khun Daeng and what is the future for the Boat Bar?

- I will be in Boat Bar until I find Dan Number Two. Then, maybe then I will start something new. Many people say Boat Bar is an anchor for the clubs in the Paradise and I will keep it like that.

TG: You like to change anything if you could do it over?

- Seven years in the scene. I learned a lot, and I learn you cannot change things and opinions very fast. Boat Bar has changed as it has needed to change, we have never been afraid to make changes. The past history is what it is, so I can be happy with it. No big changes, my life has been good and I just say thank you to my friends and people I work with, for what they give me.

TG: Thanks, Khun Daeng.

Boat Bar, with a disco and two floor shows every night, is located in Patong Beach on Phuket Island, in the Royal Paradise Complex, open every night until late. Visit them at www.boatbar.com.
There’s a Bee in her Bonnet

by Connie Lingus

Bee was born in Yorkshire in the north of England. He was given the nickname Bee by his mother because a few days before he was born she was stung by a bee. He spent most of his teenage years in London, hanging out in the clubs and made music with Strawberry Switchblade, Brorski Beat and the Cult.

During this time he was approached by a bunch of Japanese businessmen who offered to make him a big star in Japan. All he had to do was sell his soul and mime in a Teeny glam band who were so cheesy they made Duran Duran look avant-garde. Being young and easily impressed he accepted and within months had his face splattered all over the Japanese press.

Around about the same time that his Mum asked him to stop sending press dippings, the sugary sound of Japanese pop had finally fermented and gone sour. He came to Thailand for a visit on his way to New York. That visit lasted two months and he fell in love with the place as so many of us do. But he had already made a personal commitment to the Big Apple and felt duty-bound to leave his new found love affair with the Big Mango for another day. He then moved to New York where he found the city’s street and club culture very stimulating. But he soon grew bored with the uptight attitude he encountered and had never erased the memory of Thailand and Thais from his memory.
He remembered Bangkok as fast but more chilled out and decided to take the plunge. Immediately smitten by the clash of cultures, the organised chaos, he spent the first two years falling deeper in love with the country, hopping from pillar to post, travelling extensively, soaking up the culture and learning to speak Thai.

Back in the city, Bee joined Bangkok's leading English language radio station, 95.5 FMX, producing and presenting his own show. Bee's 'In the Hive' program is a weekly three-hour show (Saturdays) which features alternative rock and dance, from hip hop to trip hop and jungle to indie rock.

Bee also writes a column in The Nation. In that capacity he has interviewed an impressive roll call of pop stars: The Manics after they played a gig they claim was one of the most stressful of their career; Bjork after she'd belted a Bangkok journalist; Brett from Suede with his ever-expanding ego; and Sporty Spice the week after Gerri Halliwell left the Spice Girls.

All of the above I read in Bee's bio, as I flew on a Thai Guys funded, all-expense paid trip to Soi Twilight. We were to rendezvous in Dick's Café. I arrived slightly late, having had to make a last minute change to my eyeliner to make it more punky. I had also applied a heavy dusting of white powder to cheeks, hoping this would give me a wan and moody look. As usual my Swiss publisher was her reticent self about giving me anything informative. "Just do a profile," she said peevishly at my confusion. Was this a person, a thing, a Thai or an insect? I was truly hoping the insect, so that I could do my own version of Kafka's "The Metamorphosis".

I made arrangements over the phone, and was greeted by a distinctly British accent introducing itself as 'Bee'. But those wily Thais who've spent their formative years in England could easily have cobbled together that accent, so I really didn't know what to expect.

I recognized Bee immediately because someone had whispered he had extensive tattoos. This proved tres vrai as revealed on back and shoulders beneath a dark
singlet. I thought of the image I presented to Bee's eye, a sort macabre combination of Boy George and Quentin Crispette. We launched immediately into a discussion of survival techniques in Bangkok. He has now been here six years and visits mummy in England every year. What about life in Bangkok? Does he miss England? Musically, “England is where it's at,” he mused. “But I also want to write and some of the great writers I admire were expats. Being an expat is good for character-building.” I caught his eye and he turned it to me, sitting there in our room at Club Bamboo.

“You know what I hate the worst here,” he said, “I took a glance at myself in the window. Was it my lip-gloss that wasn’t right? “Farangs who have lived here for one year or twenty and who never stop complaining about the Thais and Thailand. I just say ‘leave’ if you don’t like it and if you stay, stop the bitching. Even in six years things have changed a lot for the better. The gay scene is getting more heart. There even seems sort of a community. The Gay Festival. Magazines like Thai Guys. I even hear there is a new gay-lesbian band starting up. The Internet made a big difference in getting music and information I need. I love the food and I find it works better with the Thais. They are very easy to deal with.” I was going to ask if he’d ever worked with the Swiss, but then I realized that really wasn’t on point. And Bee had finished his iced tea, so we were both off to “meet friends”. Tah, tah for now.
A new and different Cocobanana

The only place in town where, when you book a table for dinner, you can take it home with you

Ever wonder what happened to the name of the old Cocobanana, the gay pub that used to keep a benign eye over the goings on of Pattayaland Soi 11? Be at ease, it has been born again in Soi 6/1. It has achieved beneficial reincarnation as a tastefully ethnic restaurant and bar under the 40 year-old Wild Mango tree in Soi 6/1 (sometimes called Soi Yodsak), near Beach Road between North and Central Pattaya.

This grand old tree has seen Pattaya grow from a small fishing village to the largest beach resort in Asia, and now shelters a very special place. The Cocobanana, is a Bar, a Restaurant and a Gallery—the restaurant includes the original Wild Mango Restaurant plus a recently constructed large wooden sala, based on the original antique teakwood walls of a northern Thai traditional home. This building houses the gallery part of the restaurant where, apart from the wealth of original oil paintings and watercolours, most of the furnishings and artefacts are antique or reproduction and, whilst many of them are in use, they are also for sale. Yes, you can take home the table you sat at and the cabinet that stored your crockery, not to mention the picture you fancied hanging on the wall!

The menu has a fine range of Thai dishes from all over the country, plus some Cocobanana creations and a few international dishes. A carefully chosen wine list compliments the menu, including a very palatable and inexpensive house wine. The writer, not usually a Thai food
aficionado, was delighted with the choice made for him by the amiable host, Simon Rolstone of Coco Golf fame.

If you too are a daunted by long Thai menus, you cannot go wrong if you ask for what we ate—but you will find the staff very helpful if you would like some other favourite. We started with Khanom-Phung Nhar Moo, fried bread topped with ground pork (or shrimp) and Po-Pla Thord, or spring rolls, which make a very tasty starter. Followed with Khai Look Khoey (which, with a mildly vulgar connotation, means son-in-law eggs!). In Thai fashion, all the dishes came together with several types of plain and fried rice and the ubiquitous Tom Yum Gai, a chicken soup to warm the heart of the most finicky Jewish mama. Amongst them were Gai Pad Med Ma-muang fried chicken with cashew nuts; Massaman Nua, beef curry and, a house specialty, Gaeng Ka Ree Gai, or chicken curry with potatoes and onions. The seafood menu is extensive and we enjoyed Yum Pla Dook Foo, a crispy fried catfish with a delicious green mango dressing.

Whilst we were so replete after this lot that we could not face dessert, you may order fresh fruit in season or Khaoneow Mamuan, sweet mango with sticky rice or Issacreme, which we forbear to translate. The food, we were told, is prepared from fresh produce bought from the market daily, some of the herbs come from the restaurants own kitchen garden and you can ask for hot and spicy or mild and tasty to suit your preference.

The bar stocks all of the best locally produced beers plus a wide selection of cocktails, spirits and soft drinks. Prices are kept remarkably low considering the standard and it is bound to become a happy hour venue for those not wanting to travel all the way to South Pattaya.

Apart from the two seated restaurant areas and bar there is an open beer garden area with stage, the ideal place for a party and buffet barbeque. Any area of the Cocobanana can be booked for private functions. Hours, 4pm to midnight. You can park your car to the rear and in front of the premises.

The Cocobanana is a truly gay friendly hideaway haven with the atmosphere of times gone by.

Cocobanana at 437/67 Soi 6/1, Beach Road, North Pattaya. Tel. (038) 361 511. Checkout at www.cocobanana.com
A Traditionally Sanctified Orgy

by John Goss

There is a remote village in Northeastern Thailand that is famous for being haunted. Abundant evidence for this claim exists—phantoms float from walls in Thai restaurants, leer out of luridly coloured travel posters, and leap from shadowy margins of tourist guidebooks—yet few outsiders have witnessed the dazzling demon denizens of Dansai. In this village, during the Siamese “day of the dead,” naughty ghouls roam the streets freely and actually enjoy posing for photographs. They materialize for the annual Phi Ta Khon (ghosts with human eyes) festival, which is usually observed in June or July. The exact date is divined not far in advance by the most revered and feared member of the village, Jao Paw Guan, a male maw duu (seer) and leader of the sacred portions of an otherwise profane party.

The easiest way to get to Dansai is to fly to Udon Thani and set off by car down country roads to the nearby province of Loei. The scenery along the way is clean and green; an enchanting landscape of farms, limestone karsts in misty distance, and rolling hills bordering Laos. The cool mountain air there is home to Thailand’s famous (only) winery, Chateau de Loei. You can drive through the rolling vineyards for free, but you may be spooked to learn that there isn’t any wine tasting, or even a Chateau (a phantom of marketing). There is a small resort next to the winery offering basic accommodation and Dansai is only about 30 minutes farther up to road.

Book a room early, because it fills with busloads of Thai tourists who journey here for Halloween, Thai-style.

Before dawn, in the dead of upcountry morning (about 3:30am), village elders march with Jao Paw Guan to the Muan River. There, they perform a sacrificial rite to awaken Pra Ub-pa-kud. This supernaturally adept monk spends the entire year meditating peacefully beneath the flowing waters in the form of a white marble orb. With his advanced magical abilities, he is the only homeboy who is strong enough to protect the ‘hood from the evil army set to descend upon them. While most of the village is still asleep, fearsome entities are clawing their way across the divide between life and eternal twilight. The river bubbles and Pra Ub-pa-kud is awakened. Flashes of an albino sphere shimmer under the liquid surface of dreams.

By 7am the procession has moved from the river to Phon-Chat temple in the center of town. Food is offered to monks as worshipper’s circle a whitewashed stupa rising from a red dirt courtyard. Overly amplified announcements echo from speakers hung from a tilting, teakwood seminary.

The littlest ghosts are the first to show themselves, pursued by a throng of Thai press photographers. These ghouls tykes, modelling their hand-made masks and riotously coloured costumes, are destined to appear on covers of in-flight magazines and tourist promotional brochures around the world. What follows, during the next two days of drunken excess, is hardly sort of wholesome family event that gets promoted. The children are charming enough for the press corps, even as their elder siblings are behind closed doors.
doors, stripping down and covering each other with mud and soot, and arming themselves with penis-shaped weapons of monstrous proportions.

At 9am, the centre of activity shifts to Jao Paw Guan's house along the main road. Here, he sits for the next few hours, the centre of a swirling whirlpool of village elders and devotees who move slowly forward to crouch down and tie string amulets around his raised wrists. By the end of this ceremony both of his arms will be wound tightly with thick bracelets of magical white threads to protect him with the communal power of the village. Men and women, dressed in their finest outfits of white linen and silk, dance around in a circle, gesturing to the beat of drums, cymbals and bamboo harmonicas.

At noon, Jao Paw Guan exits his home and strides to the centre of town trailing an euphoric entourage of newly deputized spirit mediums. His countenance is serious, aware that while the rest of the village becomes possessed with demonic frolic, he and his charmed circle of assistants must remain ever vigilant lest forces of nature tip in favour of the assembling conflagration of spirits.

The streets of Dansai village are suddenly filled with leg demons. Roving bands of adolescent ghosts chase teenage girls, and the odd foreigner, with ingeniously designed balab kék (phallic charms). There is an endless variety of styles, shapes and sizes of these tormenting toys. Most possess a crimson crown swollen out of proportion to the human variety. Some are hinged and jiggle on springs, bringing shrieks from the girls (and the odd foreigner) who try to hide in the gathering crowd of spectators. Many of the demonic dicks are inscribed with Chinese characters referring to “the Big Man”. There are zombies with fishing poles strung with penis bait. There are swords whose arcing handles have cleanly dispensed with Freudian interpretation. One ghoul dressed as a reporter approaches bystanders as if to interview them. The “TV camera” resting on his shoulders captures shots of hilarious public humiliation as a big, red schlong jumps out from behind the lens.

Once the streets have been secured by the spooks, a macabre procession begins, lead by two towering ghost puppets, made from bamboo lattice and scraps of cloth and coconut tree, that giggle comically as they walk. The arrival of these male and female fertility totems (their once-private parts are animated with day-glo exaggeration) announces that bawdy banchees have conquered Dansai.

A great din echoes down the street as ghosts stream into town from all over the province. Even though they don’t speak a word, there is plenty of chatter from the mark-ka-lang (cowbells) tied to their waists and the playful screams that their antics inspire. Each costume is unique, crafted by the men and women who wear them. Bodies are fully covered in ragged suits of shredded fabric, usually in a rainbow of bright colours. Masks are made from sticky-rice steamer baskets that serve as crowns, with coconut husk faces fitted with carved wooden noses and horns. Individualized patterns and painting techniques are on display. Some crafty ghosts have vanished their creations plain to highlight the natural materials and the artistry of their masterpieces. Product logos are worked into the designs (Harley Davidson is a favourite). There are colour-coordinated teams of boogiemen. There are monochrome phantoms-of-the-rice-fields. There are glitter-gangster-monstrosities, and florescent-butterfly-Venus Flytrap-raptors. And, there are... much.

A column of shadows advances down the avenue, stomping bamboo clubs onto the asphalt in a booming rhythm. Stark white

Continued on page 54
Studio Group targets dominance

The "one-stop-shop" shop for gays visiting Pattaya, and for residents.

The owner of the Studio Group are well on the way to achieving a leading position amongst the gay venues in Pattaya. Long a favourite with those who prefer a lighter mood and fresher faces, the Studio Group's clubs in Soi Day-Night have and will be expanding to include several styles of GoGo clubs, a Turkish hamam (Turkish bath), massage parlours, a French restaurant and last, but very much not least, a hotel with rooms ranging from comfortable ordinary to penthouse suites with all (we paraphrase) "gay cons" - all with short time to monthly rate).

Recent visitors to Soi Day-Night have watched with fascination as the huge sign, rivalling or, perhaps, transcending that erected over Boyz Town in South Pattaya, was erected over recent weeks, and young bodies. A fairly constant influx of new and handsome talent provides titillation for the most jaded palate. Not only new but lively - whether it is the good training in "customer relations" given by the owners, or perhaps an enthusiasm instilled during the auditioning process? All the boys seem to take a delight in their job and are delighted to make others happy as they often have the opportunity to do.

Unusual for GoGo bars, Boys Studio offers comfortale seating. Broad upholstered sofas around the walls facing the usual catwalk (tomwalk?) allow a comfortable view of the normal, and sometimes abnormally exciting and revealing, gyrations. A bar is useful for stand-up contact and the Baht 100 drinks arrive with pleasing promptitude and frequency. An added attraction is the adjacency of Studio Suites, the previously mentioned hotel.

Studio Suites, a room for all occasions

Running almost the length of the soi and connected at the first floor (where the boys live), is a charming hotel, with 21 rooms of all sizes and shapes at several levels, but all fitted with the obligatory TV and fridge, and most with full size tub for that special bath experience. The fittings, whilst all new and smart, differ according to the luxury of the accommodation, which ranges from a small front room at Baht 450 a day (250 for two hours) to a VIP suite at Baht 1,500 (1,000 for 2 hours). Whilst some of the wallpaper in the corridors is a bit psychedelic, that in the rooms is tasteful enough. The large double bed provided in all rooms (large enough, one insatiable customer has found, to take 12 boys) allows room for relaxed or otherwise cavorting around - if that is your pleasure.

Differing from most hotels, Studio Suites' checkout time takes account of the prob-
able strenuous activities of the night, being at 1 pm, and even that may be extended if post coital exhaustion has set in. And as if this were not enough, take out price for residents of Studio Suites is discounted by 50%. Room service is, of course, 24 hours and, another departure from normal hotel practice, dalliance with the room boys and waiters is not discouraged-and a tasty bunch they are indeed.

A tasty dish of another sort
By the time you read this, La Casserole, a French restaurant serving French food will be open. In tasteful surroundings French food will be served by the French chef, and Thai food by a Thai chef. Khun Sanong, who owned a restaurant in Belgium for ten years and so appreciates the European culinary taste. What could be better? A tasty entree at a fine restaurant followed by a few hours of libido reinforcement in the enticing atmosphere of one of the adjacent clubs and then pop upstairs to your bower of bliss in Studio Suites with your dessert!

Jacques Zaza, the chef, says, "I have never worked in surroundings quite like these. It will be an inspiration to me!" So do not miss it.

As part of the Group's service, attached to the hotel, is a Limousine and tour service with smart modern saloons. Not only for trips to and from the airport, but why not tour Thailand in comfort with a smart and handsome gay driver who understands what you wish to do and where you want to go? Take your Studio boy or boys with you if you like.

The prettiest boys
Tucked into a suite of rooms on the top floor of Studio Suites, is a smaller club of a different sort. Jolly Boys caters to the man of more refined tastes, one who does not welcome the hury burly of the other clubs. Quiter, elegantly decorated and staffed by 30 of the, reputedly, "prettiest" boys. Jolly Boys is the place for the discriminating male who appreciates discretion (and the hotel rooms are just along the corridor).

Turkish Delight
For those of you who have not yet enjoyed the delights of a hamam in Turkey, Morocco or Tunis, cry your heart out no longer. Believe, across the road from Boys Studio, is now to open soon!

Sated with the night's wantonness? Take a "Turkish bath (or use the steam room) at Believe. Follow this with a shower helped by one of the 30 handsome masseurs-privately in a VIP suite if you like-then have your aches massaged away. If a few hours of this treatment has not awakened your appetite, then... take a few more hours of it. Open from 1pm to 2 am, happy hour with drinks at 50% is from 1 pm to 7 pm.

Coming of Age
With all the sophisticated attractions of the Studio Group in Soi Day Night, off South Pattaya Road added to those already on offer elsewhere, Pattaya comes of age in the gay world scene. What is the betting that this one-stop-shopping street soon becomes the centre of activities in Pattaya?

Beguiling Web Site.
Check out the attractions of all the clubs, interactive bookings for the hotel, all the action on movie clips and a super gallery, plus a useful map if you still don't know the way. www.gaypattaya.com

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Le Café Royale

Like a mellow port that has taken on a fine flavour with the years, Le Café Royale remains, after 10 years in Soi Pattaya land III, ready to expand the palate and imbue a resonant feeling of well-being in all its habitués and new visitors.

For those unlucky enough not yet to have enjoyed the hospitality of Le Café Royale, it is a Hotel, restaurant and bar situated in the heart of Boyz Town—a strategic position adjacent to the highest concentration of gay venues on Pattaya.

The Piano Bar

Le Café Royale offers, apart from the hotel and restaurant, a comfortable bar with, after 6pm to midnight, Khun Ter tinkling on the ivories of a well tuned piano accompanying a lady singer.

Its elegant decor, well laid tables, smart (and attractive) service and fine food have made it a favourite for denizens of Boyz Town, it is worth stepping out of the way for.

The Hotel

The recently refurbished hotel, has rooms to suit all tastes from standard to superior de luxe and some suites, all at reasonable rates for what is offered. Just a short walk from the beach or shopping centres in Pattaya. Completely equipped with mini bars, room safes, in house movie channel and offering 24 hour service, nothing could be more convenient if you like living where you play.

Anniversary

Founded 10 years ago next month by Ian Read and Robert Ruitter, it is set to celebrate this anniversary with a spectacular occasion on 19 November. For this, the entrance façade will take on the appearance of a Roman edifice, the interior will change to resemble ancient Rome and the theme of the night will be Roman throughout—the waiters and staff dressed as Roman soldiers, gladiators, citizens or senators, depending on their rank (or preference). It is to be admitted that there are one or two of the senior staff who the writer would prefer to see in the guise of a soldier than a senator!

I asked Ian Read, on what period of Roman history it would be based, Julius or the ultimately decadent Caligula. He paused before answering, “More like Nero, I guess.”

Celebrants can look forward to a good party with a sumptuous 5 course buffet dinner. Watch the press for details.

Le Café Royale. Soi 3, Pattaya land, South Pattaya. Tel: + (0389) 423 515; Fax: 424 579 and e mail info@caferyoale-pattaya.com. Web site: www.caferyoale-pattaya.com

Ian Read with Noon one of the waiters or simply while those sleepless hours away in pleasant surroundings amongst good company. The accomplished bartender has become famous for his cocktails. Try the Savaede for a tasty greeting to which, like Thailand, you will return!

The Restaurant

Long a favourite of those who prefer a drink on the pavement with a view of multitudinous and peripatetic traffic in the soi, the pavement café serves as an adjunct to the restaurant and coffee shop, remaining open to serve 24 hours a day, and pleasant service it is too, with the attractive waiters dressed in pink shirts and diminutive white shorts. Jet or revelry lagged and fancying breakfast a 4 pm, or dinner at 2 am? Le café Royale is the place to get it in Boyz town or if you are anywhere in the environs of Pattayaland.

HOUSE OF MALE

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Phuket Girds its Loins for the Gay Festival 2000

New Purposes and New Goals

The Phuket Gay festival in 2000 will be a good time to be on Phuket Island, this coming November 9-10-11-12, with events planned non-stop for the weekend, including major Loi Krathong Parties on Saturday night, November 11.

The 1999 Festival proved to be more than just a big party but also a valuable experience for the community. People that had been busy working in their bars and restaurants and guest houses actually took time to celebrate and party together, not always possible with their unusual hours and the fast paced schedules.

Pre-Festival Parties leading up to the 1999 Festival had the usually competing venues working together and enjoying it. The Parade itself tied the knot for mutual cooperation.

The festival tee shirts provided a common logo and instant recognition of "the festival". Items like these served to identify the gay community here, possibly for the first time. For the Festival 2000, some new plans and directions are on target.

An observation made by Joel Martinson from James Dean Bar was that the 1999 Festival served as a catalyst to bring the gay community together, bringing it to a point of launching new directions for the Festival 2000. Martinson said, "Putting AIDS Awareness and AIDS Support on the front burners here in Phuket is what is necessary. Just like everywhere on the planet, we have lost our share of people, and it is time to work together."

Ivan Polson, a Festival contributor and recent resident of Phuket, strongly commented at several planning meetings that the Festival needs to be clearly identified as a benefit for much needed AIDS support here on Phuket. Polson said, "There simply aren't any clearly identified methods that will guarantee that the funds will be accurately and honestly used for HIV, other than the AIDS Babies events that have been promoted in the past. The babies are surely not the only people worthy of support in Phuket."

A touring couple from Queensland in Australia made a comment that if they were confident that a donation would go to an AIDS Charity or AIDS Support function, rather than be misplaced in some other direction, they would be happy to leave a significant donation. This has been a key project for GayPhuket.com-finding a clearing house that could ensure oversight of any funds, and see that they are clearly directed to one of the very needy AIDS organizations here on Phuket Island. A system is being completed to identify the exact placement of the funds that will be generated by the festival.

Khun Beer, the Thai owner and manager of the Spartacus Club in Patong, made a serious comment that the Phuket Gay Festival needs to have more of a purpose than just a big party. Beer said, "Last year we learned that we can be very successful with this kind of an event. It was a great party and a great time. Now we need to make it useful and valuable for good reasons, like charities for sick people in Phuket."

Given comments like these, the Phuket Gay Festival is digging in, preparing for lots of people arriving on the island, and in turn preparing to show the visitors and guests a compassionate face for the AIDS issues.

The island, as well as so many other major tourist venues worldwide, rarely addresses an issue that might interfere with the good times and the party atmosphere that almost always exists in Patong. The green
mountains and blue ocean never fail to provide a beautiful backdrop for great holidays in a tropical paradise. But with this Festival 2000, the underlying theme will be promoting the awareness of AIDS and the need for AIDS prevention strategies, particularly in carefree holiday locations like Phuket.

The Festival is November 9, 10, 11, 12 on Phuket Island, and will have worldwide visitors. The festival announcements can be found at www.gayphuket.com/ Khun Daeng of Boat Bar and Khun Bon of My Way Patong are the co-chairmen of the Phuket Gay Festival 2000.
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Body Art in Bangkok

By Daniel B Haber

Bangkokians got a treat in September with the weekend Body Art Asia show, billed, or rather hyped, as “Asia’s First Body Art Festival—after a media barrage, mostly on UBC, one of the sponsors.

It was supposed to be a mixed, eclectic presentation of various “body-arts” ranging from tattoos and piercing but some of the chief attractions, the Maori dancers and Fiji Islanders never showed up, and the main dance event turned out to be the icon dancers in their undies. The beary Clark Hatch guys also gave a credible performance of “Tee Bo” aerobic Thai boxing to a disco beat.

Trying to appeal to a broad audience—exhibitors, included a dentistry display, hardcore porn mags (with a wide range of S&M) and ladies handbags along with the tattoo and piercing—there was, surprise, surprise, a strong gay presence, no doubt due to the icon participation.

The press preview at Icon with a body painting performance—models in swimsuits using their bodies as giant “paintbrushes” was also a Happening worthy of its 1960s antecedents. But aside from the free samples of Mon Joli wine, there was no area to sit down for coffee klatsch or other refreshments. Doesn’t Asia have any health drinks, aside from wine?

Anyway, we congratulate Khun Christian Frei for his efforts and, if it’s to be an annual event, we hope that next year’s will have less hype and more substance.

For more information on next year’s event:
E-mail: info@bodyartasia.com
Silom comments

Aqua Spa (41)

Balcony Club (4)
Lowest price drinks and food in Silom Soi 4. Early evening and late night happy hours every day. Bar, Restaurant and Karaoke with large street terrace. Talent nights 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month and lucky draw every Tuesday. Very popular.

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

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

DJ Station (13)

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

Icon (22)
The well-known Icon Club from Pattaya has taken over Rome Club. Fabulous shows, a real asset to Silom Soi 4.

Phraoch's (38)
Popular gay Karaoke in Silom Soi 4.

Surinwongse Hotel & Coffee Shop (21)
The Coffee Shop of the Surinwong Hotel is a popular meeting place before and after hours. Open 24 hours.

Tarnawan 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 Tarnawan Place Hotel.

Via Convent (5)

Blue Star (25)
Funny sexy shows. Totally renovated.

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Sukhumvit Map Legend

Albury 3
Big Boy 2
Colony 20
Crepes & Co 5
Damriamak Mae Sai 9
Dhony 14
Hero 21
Jet Set 8
Jet Set 4
Le Bordeaux Restaurant 22
Mambo 16
Mam's Club 1
Mercury 13
Nice Guy's 7
No Body 6
Rainbow 15
Rasil Love 10
Smart Fashion 19
Turning Point 11
Uda's executive hotel 18
Zone 22 17

Sukhumvit Comments

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.

Hero (21)
The brand new venue with restaurant, massage, dark room, jail, tropic garden bar, cruising area and sauna.

Le Bordeaux (22)
Excellent French cuisine an a stylish atmosphere.

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Adam's Apple Club (16)
Biggest bar in town with karaoke, pub, restaurant and somewhat raunchy shows.

Night Bazaars (21-26)
Great central location. A row of drinks bars frequented by freelancers and a very young clientele. A favorite with out-of-towners and resident farangs.

House of Male (2)
Popular, very friendly sauna. Centrally located in a renovated Thai mansion. Pool, garden, gym and other amenities.

Spa Roma (18)
Luxurious sauna popular with young professionals. The ambiance and tasteful decor of Bangkok's famed Babylon sauna. Recently opened at a new location at beyond the airport.

Fan Club (9)
Serene, host boys and “special” show.

The Circle (8)
Congenial “off” bar with imaginative nightly non-ladyboy shows and a friendly ambiance.
Phuket
Patong Beach

Map of Phuket

1 Uncle Charlie's Boys
2 Super Boys
3 Passport
4 Bingo
5 Club Bamboo
6 Patong A Go-go
7 James Dean
8 Young Shark's Club
9 My Way
10 Boot Bar
11 Sea Hag
12 Heaven
13 Climax
14 Black and White
15 David's
16 Monte Carlo Guesthouse
17 Pink Cadillac Cabaret
18 Akazoo Garden Boys
19 Connect
20 Gay World
21 Tanga Club
22 Body Touch
23 New Rendezvous Hotel
24 Young Shark's Guesthouse 1 & 2
25 World Gems
26 Bicycle
27 Jochen's Guest House & Restaurant

Phuket Comments

Jochen's (27)
A clean and contemporary appearing bar on Soi 5 in the Paradise, across from Thiphaluck and Connect. It has several luxurious guest rooms upstairs, and a small restaurant with various paintings on the walls of the bar. It is attractive and is on the way up.

Boat Bar (10)
Continues to be absolutely the No.1 in-place for the gay crowd on Phuket Island, and will increase its popularity with the high season. It remains the gay anchor for Phuket, with great shows, professionally presented. Stylish, friendly, reasonable prices for the drinks.

Sea Hag (11)
The flagship for high Thai cuisine in Patong with a broad based crowd, and the strongest gay following. Khun Kenny has become a legend and the food speaks for itself. Makes it easy to spend a long evening with great food. So very, very popular, upstairs and downstairs.

Club Bamboo (5)
A very gay-friendly resort type setting 800 meters from the beach. It has fine rooms in a small intimate hotel and separate bungalows, a larger pool and restaurant. An excellent place to get away from the town, sitting in the foothills, and still be minutes away from Patong.
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**Pattaya comments**

**Ambiance (53)**
The first gay hotel in 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)**

**Panorama (9)**
(Formerly Coco Banana) Open-air pub with many tables to sit with friends and watch the world go by. Newly renovated, the seating highly improved. Game Room upstairs.

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

**Rainbow Int'l Gay Pub (51)**
By Butcher Hans. Clean, healthy, affordable. Traditional food still available. Feel like home.

**Le Café Royale (3)**
A popular gay hotel located in the heart of Boyz Town. Rooms recently renovated and all fully equipped. Open 24 hours. Coffee shop, restaurant and Terrasse bar-restaurant open 24 hours for breakfast, lunch and dinner. A wide range of European and Thai dishes available.

**Piano Bar & Restaurant (3)**
Piano Bar opens 7:00 pm daily at Le Café Royale, with full range of drinks and food. Live entertainment with pianist to midnight, a singer and group to 4:00 am or later (exclude Sundays).

**Charlie Boys (21)**
Cozy, music and air-conditioning at a bearable level.

**Crazy Pub (44)**
The first to open in Sunee Plaza. Famous for its shows.

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

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

**Boy Café Boy, Joe Massage (43)**
New gay complex and the only male place in Naklua. Thai, foot, oil and cream massage by handsome boys, a café bar on terrace. A Go-Go dancing starting 21st of October.

**Splash (52)**
The newest venue in Soi Boyz Boyz Boyz. Swimmers in a glass pool. Drop in!

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

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- Saturday: Roast Leg of Lamb

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http://www.iconasia.com
eyeballs glare from smudged faces and blinding flashes of teenage grins burst from the menacing marchers. Blackened from bandanas to tootsties, these near-naked gangs resemble distant aboriginal ancestors. Stone-aged punk rocker or tribal initiates lining up for the mysteries of manhood. Throughout the day, men in grass skirts and a coating of mud stumble drunkenly, all too eager to shake hands and swipe stains onto your smiling face or too-clean shirt.

Slowly the ghosts and goblins make their way to the schoolyard at the centre of town where judging of costumed contingents takes place. The nearby market has taken on the carnival atmosphere of an upcountry fair whose spook house has been turned inside out. There is every chance you will be hailed up onto a passing float and offered a plastic cup full of rice wine, several cans of beer and countless swigs from bottles of local rum proffered by over-friendly, penis-wielding partiers at this Mardi Gras from hell.

At about 2pm another parade commences, this time an unholy mix of the forces of good and evil; stately pageantry versus perverse pixies. Handsome young men and beautiful girls in traditional costume, bearing sacred offerings, cleanse the pathway. A throng of bare-chested slave boys pulls a golden chariot bearing a prince and princess garbed in jewels and finery. Lines of young women dancing in unison follow. Red Cross nurses and village farmers mingle with mud-slung hoards. The combined effects of withering heat and free-flowing liquor begin to take their toll on the ghostly minions who retreat into the shadows to sleep it off until the cool of evening revives their ghoulish foolishness.

Day two of the festival continues with dance contests, sporting events, and an afternoon procession of giant bang fai bamboo rockets which are launched into the hot season skies hopes of appeasing the spirits and attracting rain.

Day three of the festival finds Jao Paw Guan summoning all of his powers, with the divine assistance of the mystical monk Ub-pa-laud, to drive the demons back to their underworld for yet another year. Festival participants throw their ghost masks into the river to rid themselves of misfortune (entrepreneurial penitents gain a small fortune by selling their masks and phallic weapons to visitors as souvenirs). The Big Man's private parts are stowed modestly away again and this final festival day is spent reflecting on Buddhist sermon, to make merit and take a step closer to Nirvana.

Despite the overlay of more recent Buddhist beliefs, Phi Ta Khon retains the earthy flavour of its origins in agrarian fertility rites. Dansai's Ghost Festival is certainly one of Thailand's most creative and lively traditional folk festivals. Don't be shy to try your hand at bargaining a rather lewd saber or magical mask off one of the apparitions—it will make quite a conversation piece in years to come and a fitting souvenir of your encounters in regions beyond.

*John is a director of Utopia Tours and is fond of visiting the hell-and-paradise folk sculpture gardens of Southeast Asia.*
Bangkok Gay Festival 2000 Art Exhibition

Player #1. Khun Pakorn Pimion (or Khun Odd to his friends) is best known as the founder and Artistic Director of the Bangkok Gay Festival.

Player #2. Dick's Café, well known amongst the Gay community as a haven of calm, an oasis on hectic Soi Pratunachai, serving some of the best food and drinks in Gay Bangkok and also a place where amateur and professional gay artists can display their talent.

So, for the Bangkok Gay Festival 2000 Art Exhibition at Dick's Café who better to display one of his many other talents than Khun Odd—and it's a display of artistic talent the type of which we have not been privileged to view before. Previous displays have been mainly portraits, still life, and photographs—pretty conventional stuff but nevertheless all good. This new display for the Gay Festival is abstract art in its purest form, paintings from the heart, the feelings of one whose talent is expressed in outbursts of emotion and explosions of vitality and strong colour.

Influenced by their father's artistic work, Pakorn's whole family is aesthetically gifted and Odd started painting at an early age. He uses the full spectrum of artistic media—oils, watercolours, poster paints, canvas, card, charcoal on paper, etc. As with most abstract artists his disposition must be right for the muses to allow his talent to perform. Once the thoughts have coalesced it takes a short time (usually less than an hour) for the work to be complete. However, don't think that Pakorn's talent is limited to abstract spluges—he is also a gifted portraitist and his graphic talents match most conventional artists.

His best work is currently hanging in the executive offices of the Emporium Suites, which doesn't mean that these masterpieces come with a hefty price tag. Pakorn usually paints for friends and typically presents his work as a gift; not for sale. This is his first public exhibition and as such his prices start from as low as Baht 2000. Characteristically modest, Pakorn says that his only hope is that those who buy his work will be able to experience the feelings he felt during their composition and that they will be happy with their purchases.

The exhibition is on at Dick's Café from 6 October to 6 November (12:00 midday-0500 am) and is sure to be one of the enduring highlights of this year's Bangkok Gay Festival.
Seven Inches in Tibet

by Durian Gray

Forget Lost Horizon—it’s more like Lost Weekend for the lost generation in Lhasa. “Are you ready?” blasts the sound system promptly at 10 pm—and the crowd of young twenty-somethings shouts in unison, “Yo! Hey! Disco! Disco!”. Benny, the beaming DJ from Chengdu cranks up the sound, the strobe lights flash and the dance floor fills up.

It’s Friday night in Lhasa at the Top End Disco. The crowd is about 60% male, peach-fuzz faces and slant eyes, cuteness to die for. It’s a nice-queen’s wet dream—although strictly speaking Tibetans do not eat much rice, but subsist on yak meat, potatoes, noodles and tsampa (roasted barley flour). Like their peers anywhere else in the world, these guys and girls (there are even a few drag queens), just wanna have fun.

You be the man!

There are virtually no foreigners—and being the only “European” in the hall, guys come up to invite me to join them—drinks (Pabst Blue Ribbon, Lhasa Beer or Coca-Colas) are on them. I’m dragged to the dance floor to join their little circle, pay for my cab fare back to the hotel—and if you’re lucky, sometimes you might get someone to go back with you after hand-holding, cuddling and dancing in the dark. One well-built Tibetan student, on holiday from the University of Beijing, asked me to do a slow dance with him—pressing me up against his sweaty, barrel chest, and whispered, “You be the man.”

Gay readers of Heinrich Harrer’s Seven Years in Tibet must have been heartened by the author’s disclosure that in Tibet “homosexuality is very common. It is even condoned as giving proof that women play no part in the life of those monks that indulge in it.” The former SS Austrian Alpinist (portrayed by Brad Pitt on the screen) who fled to Tibet from a British WWII internment camp in India, also admitted finding the Dalai Lama’s brother an “attractive youth”. So just as Harrer doesn’t like to talk about his Nazi past, he may also have had other secrets in the closet. In any case, gay travellers will
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From Kathmandu to Lhasa

From Nepal you have to join a group travelling from Kathmandu to Lhasa, by air or overland, as individual travel is not allowed. Even in a Land Cruiser it is an arduous journey that could take three to five days. Crossing the Friendship Bridge from the Nepalese border into Tibet and climbing steep cliffs into what appears to be a Chinese landscape painting with pagodas and cascading waterfalls, I have to pinch myself to make sure I’m not dreaming. Is this really Tibet—or is it a matte backdrop for Lost Horizon?

On our first night out, our Tibetan guide and cars had not yet arrived from Lhasa, so we were obliged to spend the night in the seedy border town of Zhangmu which, with its vice and (female) prostitution, has earned itself the reputation of being the Tijuana of Tibet. However, that could mean fun for some. We spent the night at the Gang Gyen hotel with its cute, friendly and obliging Nepalese staff. There is even a disco on the premises and a public bath. The Tibetan bath attendant was happy to show off his large tap in the shower stall and was more than generous with the copious amounts of shower cream.

On the third day we detoured off the main road past lunar landscape to the Sakya Monastery where the fifty non-celibate monks challenge a visitor to arm-wrestling with their bare muscular arms. Unlike Thai monks, these guys didn’t seem to mind an arm around the waist. By evening we reach Shigatse, the second largest city in Tibet and which resembles generic Central Asia with his broad poplar lined boulevards and bazaars tended by Muslim merchants.

Practising English Tibetan style

We share a hotel with a troupe of equestrian acrobats who perform in a field the next day. The well-built, young horsemen are very friendly and surprisingly a few speak some English. One shows me their

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of PLA soldiers stationed there, Lhasa has more (female) sex-workers per capita than Bangkok!

If you want to make friends in Lhasa, it's probably a good idea to start out with your guide whose English skills and knowledge of Lhasa would be pretty good. Many of the guides—mostly young men in their early 20s—were schooled in India, and after graduation returned to Tibet to find employment, but the Chinese authorities are now clamping down on the Indian-educated returnees who are loyal to the DL (Dalai Lama), considered a “splitist” by Beijing.

As you circumambulate around the Barkhor, you'll also find a few merchants who also speak English. The public billiard tables are good places to find guys (though they won't speak English) and the blaring videotheque cafes are also good for cuddling and pick-ups. One guy came back with me to my room from one of these video joints and another followed me upstairs to the toilet for some hanky-panky.

On the fifth day we finally reach Lhasa. Aside from the fabulous, looming Potala Palace, considered one of the wonders of the world, Lhasa looks uniformly un-exotic until we reach the old Tibetan “quarter”. Signs are in Chinese and the little English signage that appears everywhere is “OK”, indicating karaoke. Across from the Potala a neon sign blinks “JJ Disco” a reminder that distractions such as discos, karaoke, bowling, brothels and roller rinks are omnipresent in Lhasa.

In contrast to South Asian countries, Tibet, as the rest of China, there is little social restriction against male and female mixing in public—and the barbers giving men's haircuts are all female, and many double as “masseuses”. With the large contingent
Free show in the locker room
Another venue to meet Tibetan guys is the indoor public swimming pool. You can get a free show in the male locker room where guys undress without covering themselves and shower naked in the open stalls. I couldn’t help noticing a couple of well-hung Tibetans, and a muscular, off-duty Chinese cop. The cops in Lhasa are recruited young, and many look like Boy Scouts in uniform and are not averse to snuggling. Inside the pool, it is easy to make new friends, and phone numbers are exchanged beside tables where food and drink is served. Swimsuits and towels can be hired, if you don’t bring your own.

One thing not to bring is pictures of the DL. Photos of the Nobel Peace Laureate are, of course, forbidden by the Chinese in Tibet. A few years ago, His Holiness made a disparaging comment about homosexuality in San Francisco, of all places. But the insensitive comment coming from a man known as an apostle of peace caused such an uproar in the international gay community that it was “retracted for further review”.

Buddhism, particularly in Tibet and Japan, has a long homosexual tradition in the monasteries. Nevertheless, despite the more open-mindedness of Buddhism compared to most religions, homosexuality is not one of the twelve steps, “unless,” as Boy George commented (having dabbed in Buddhism himself) “you’re going backwards in high-heeled stilettos.”

If you go to Tibet
The politically correct who boycott Burma may also balk at visiting Tibet. However, few Tibetans would discourage tourists from visiting their homeland. It is relatively easy to join a group from Kathmandu for the one hour flight to Lhasa or 3-5 day overland journey—either way it will...
cost you about $300 to get there. One reliable Kathmandu travel agency that organizes groups or can put you in touch with one is Adventure Tibet, e-mail: advtibet@wlink.com.np

It is also possible to fly to Lhasa from Bangkok via Chengdu with a special Tibet

permit. From Chengdu the airfare is $150, but you still need to join a group.

Tourist infrastructure is very basic. Tibet is not for hypochondriacs or those finicky about cleanliness and hygiene. It takes a few days to adjust to the altitude of Lhasa (3,650m; 11,970 ft) with its atmosphere of only 68% oxygen. If you have a history of heart or breathing problems, consult your physician before departure. English is not widely understood. In Lhasa, Mandarin is the lingua franca.

Although politically part of China, Lhasa is a far cry from Beijing or Shanghai where gay activity is now coming openly out of the closet, and is tolerated by the authorities. The tourist infrastructure is still very primitive outside Lhasa, which boasts a few 3-star hotels. There are also a number of backpacker hotels that offer budget accommodation.

The best places to stay are the Tibetan, family-owned hotels near the Jokhang (the so-called Tibetan Quarter), and the Hotel Kyichu where one can find recent copies of Genre and Men's Health in the lobby is a particular favourite of the writer, and no problem with visitors.

**Cruising**

The park and open-air market across from the Potala Palace could be cruisey around late afternoon to sunset. Hang out around the pool tables, you'll be sure to make some new friends. Look for the martial and nomadic Khampas, brawny hunks in red-tasselled braids which they wrap around their head. Tibetans, like other Mongolian races, are generally hairless and beardless, if that turns you on.

Monasteries are, naturally, the logical place to meet those queer monks that Harrer writes about, although times (and mores) have changed since the Chinese occupation. The large monasteries are now tourist traps and you'll probably be herded through by your guide after paying $5.00 admission. If you want to meet Tibetan monks, you'd be better off going to India or Nepal.
Furniture

Living in Style

Did you mourn the fact that you could not live in Pattaya in the style to which you have (or wish you had) become accustomed or, perhaps, to which you were born? Whatever the case may be, Decorum, a stimulating showcase with furniture ranging from classical reproto to the latest avant garde styles has, for the past 14 months, been ready to satisfy the most discriminating decorator.

Say goodbye to your rattan and teak veneered chipboards, in with the hand crafted rosewood and suede upholstered sofas of unsurpassed luxury. Out with the heavy old furniture with rock-hard seats and in with a modern classic recliner in soft calfskin. And all, thanks to the unique taste of the French proprietor Georges Razon, of the best possible taste.

Not only is the furniture on display distinctive, attractive and comfortable, but, thanks to Georges Razon’s years of experience and valuable contacts in the furniture business, many of the pieces are the unique creations of artists commissioned by Decorum. Wardrobes of fine wood with inlaid figures appearing to caress the doors created by a German artist are reminiscent of the Art Nouveau period. Striking mirrors in decorative frames with inset crystal and other material created by a Swedish artist bring back memories of Edwardian Art Deco. The exuberance of seventeenth century France’s Baroque period is also represented in intricately carved and painted cabinets as is Rococo, perhaps the most dazzling decorative style the world has ever known which originated in France in the eighteenth century.

Many examples of the finest of modern styles are also represented. Work resembling that of Mies van der Rohe and Charles Rennie Mackintosh can be seen, as can chairs whose elegant form could have been styled by Eero Saarinen or Geo Ponti as well as the more modern stylists. Much of the furniture is made in Thailand.

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Not only are lounge dining suites, cabinets and armchairs stocked, but also custom made carpets and a enormous range of artefacts to complement the décor of a room-from bass relief wall carvings to statues from small to nearly man sized in wood, bronze and ceramic. Vases and crystal galore, table, standard and goose-neck lamps to suit any taste abound.

Truly a collection which could satisfy the most discriminating interior designer, amateur or professional and, if it doesn't, tell Decorum what you want and they will have it made for you. Do you need a room divider to act as a bar on one side and a dresser the other? No problem. Three metre tall bookshelves with a mobile circular stair à la Chippendale to reach the highest shelves? Turn it over to their designer and soon you'll be presented with a visual representation and, after a while, the finished product employing craftsmanship rivalling that of Hepplewhite at his greatest, will be assembled in your premises.

Georges Razon told Thai Guys that, whilst the bulk of his clientele are farangs from the burgeoning industrial estates of the area, he has a significant proportion of discerning Thai customers too. Not only from the region do people admire this outstanding collection. Many of the customers are from Bangkok who cannot find the same quality of design or manufacture as that displayed at Decorum. Go and see for yourself, you will be surprised, delighted and perhaps a little lighter of pocket when you leave!

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