

# CHIANG MAI *uncovered*



NUMBER FOUR

We would like to offer our belated condolences  
to the Thai people on the death of their revered  
**King Bhumibol Adulyadej**

# Contents



- 8 Dining Delights
- 9 Cafe Capers
- 20 Off the bookshelf
- 21 This is Thailand



## Happy Birthday to Me!

This first anniversary issue is being digitally dispatched from the Spanish Island of Tenerife, the first leg in an eight-country tour that also covers England, Switzerland, Turkey, Morocco and Portugal. Fourteen flights in forty-six days, nine of which will be spent travelling, two of them just sat at airports. Hopefully the trip will lead to another magazine, so keep your eye out for it.

In this issue we visit the weirdly wonderful Ganesh Museum, part religious centre, part an amazing display of the elephant-headed god in many of his godly permutations, and where ladies get to sashay in saris like Bollywood divas; step out of Chiang Mai for a brief visit to Chiang Rai, possibly the kitschiest city in Thailand; visit

one of Chiang Mai's most popular markets where the aroma gives it its nickname; take a short bike ride along the Ping River, easy for even the least experienced of riders; and take a stroll around the city's most popular park. As usual there are book reviews, Café Capers (although this time minus complaints!) *et al.*

As ever, I look forward to hearing from you with suggestions and comments.

So *bon viaje* from Tenerife, as I wander off on the next stage of my trip.

Until next time.

Derek Workman

Drop us a line for information  
and to **contact the editor**



Editor's note: This magazine is totally self-funded, receives no payment or incentives for any articles and pays every expense from its own pocket. It does not and will not sell advertising or look for financial support in any way whatsoever. Any publicity offered is done free of charge on a reciprocal basis to promote the magazine.



# Lord of Success, God of Magnificent Manifestations

He may have an elephant's head with a curved trunk, big ears, and the huge pot-bellied body of a human, but despite his physical curiosities Ganesh is the Lord of success and destroyer of evils and obstacles. He is also worshipped as the god of education, knowledge, wisdom and wealth, the destroyer of vanity, selfishness and pride, the personification of the material universe in all its various magnificent manifestations. I particularly like the 'magnificent manifestations.'

Set amongst rice paddies and the longan orchards in what might seem a patch of land way out in the sticks, 35km from Chiang Mai, the site for the Ganesh Himal Museum was specifically chosen by its owner, Pandara Theerakanond. Doi Ithanon, in whose shadow the museum sits, is the last tip of the Himalayan range that connects to India, linking the place of worship and education to the country where the elephant-headed god is one of the best-known and most worshipped deities in the Hindu pantheon.

You enter the complex through a narrow gate, welcomed by the smell of incense wafting through the air and the occasional melodious 'bongggg' of a deep-toned bell. The busily attractive courtyard, with its worshiping hall, shrines, pools and gardens, is a melange of Asian architectural styles; Mogul from the north of India, Lanna from northern Thailand, Apsara wall reliefs from Hindu mythology, outside of which is a whole building devoted to the ornate architecture of Islam. For many people it is a place of worship, for others it's a chance to see effigies of the most famous Hindu god in all of his thirty-two combinations, each having a different significance.

The onset of Mr. Theerakanond's obsession with all things Ganesh began when his father made him a gift of a small statue of the god – a curious gift for a 19-

year old you might think. Thirty-six years later his collection now stands at around two thousand pieces, with half the collection on display in two buildings just outside the main devotional complex. Images of the god in all shapes and sizes crowd the space, from one of the rarest in private hands, Ganesh with a female body, full bosomed with nipped-in waist worshiped by ladies praying for a baby, to the whimsically cheap, chubbily cheerful pottery versions in gaudy colours, the likes of which would have been given away as



prizes at an Indian country fair. Masks, puppets with hinged hands, head, feet and trunk, porcelain figurines, bronze castings, elegantly carved wood sculptures, the collection is diverse and extensive to say the least.

Each combination of one to five heads and between two and sixteen arms has a different meaning and is worshipped by a different strata of society, need or occupation. In many representations each hand will carry a weapon, which probably accounts for the sixteen-armed version being the idol of choice of soldiers and policemen, while his masculine image sat on a lion is worshipped by those who wish

to wield power over their many subordinates. The most popular form is with five heads and ten arms, although at one time only people of the highest position could own one.

As interesting and attractive as the courtyard and buildings are, it is the newly-built, two-storey building in peach and ochre that provides the entertainment value. Just inside the entrance is a small café and a larger gift shop, outside of which one of the better quality wax models of a monk sits. Totally realistic, including the mug of tea on the bench beside him, the only obviously noticeable discrepancy between fact and fiction is that his feet hover an inch above the fake grass his bench rests on.

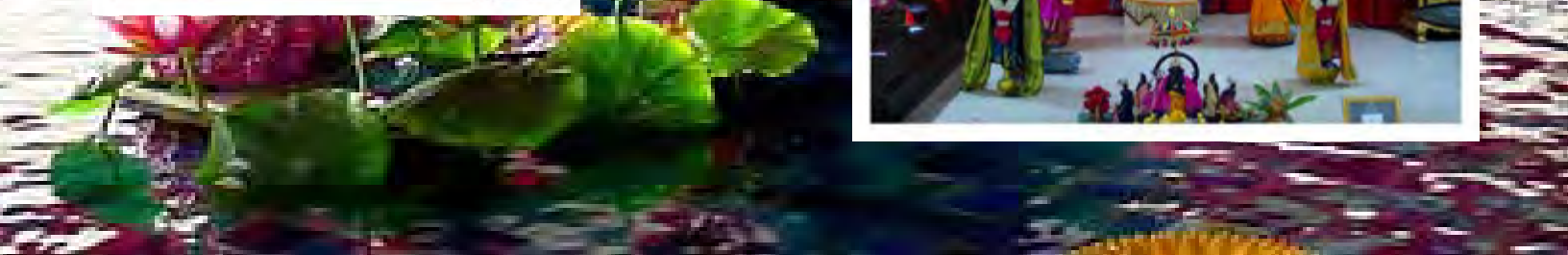
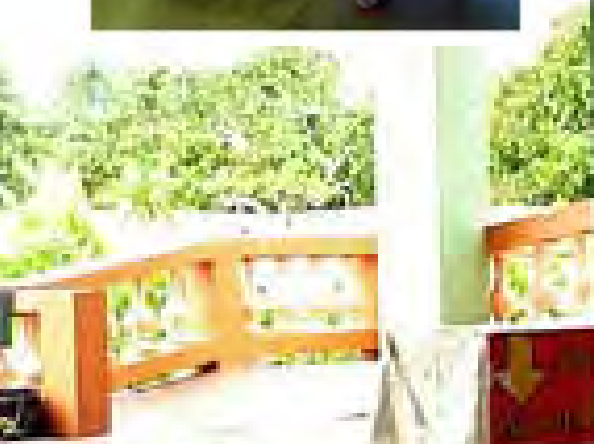
The kitschiness begins with a pool with the goddess Lakshmi as its focal point (painted blue, as are a number of Hindu deities, apparently to indicate all-inclusiveness). A recorded loop tells us that “Lakshmi is the angel of prosperity, riches and happiness; she emerges from the mouth of Vishnu who has transformed himself into a turtle to allow her to stand on water.” And she does indeed have a turtle as a water-borne platform. Circulating languidly around the goddess, gold plastic plates with a candle in the centre of a circle of lotus blossoms carry prayers and wishes in much the same way as a krathong carries away your troubles. Light the candle, place the plate on two golden hands, pray and then put the plate in the water (which circulates thanks to a pump in the corner of the pool), carrying the plate/candle/flowers in a clockwise direction, some to continue their loop indefinitely, others to arrive at the feet of the goddess.

An external walkway takes you to a room above with a different version of Lakshmi, once again standing in a pool with blossoms circulating around her, but it's the smaller space at the rear of the building that attracts the ladies. It's here, for the princely donation of 20baht, that they can drape themselves in beautifully coloured saris and jewelled accoutrement, prior to mounting the elegantly curved stairway, stopping halfway to be photographed under the stained glass window before arriving at the spacious upper floor where Indian dance music fills the air and the sari-clad maids twirl in imitation of Bollywood actresses, occasionally accompanied by young men in turbans and long coats decorated in gilded embroidery, as they snap selfies to their heart's content.

What appear to be elegantly ornate, hand-painted arches are actually covered in wallpaper, a sort-of updated version of the flock wallpaper seen in every Indian restaurant of the mid-20th century. Displayed in this large, open space is an almost life-size waxworks of the marriage of Ganesh to Riddhi (representing prosperity) and Siddhi (intellectual and spiritual power), two maids created by Lord Brahma to cheer Ganesh up because he couldn't find an inamorata who didn't care for his trunk and was causing major disruptions at the wedding of demi-gods because of it. They complained to Lord Brahma who agreed to help them, giving Ganesh his own pair of life's partners. The guests have the appearance of a jolly crowd looking for a good time, decked out in all their party finery; bearded brahmas, multi-coloured, multi-headed and multiple-limbed major and minor deities, male and female alike looking at you from provocative kohl-highlighted eyes.

277, Moo 10 T.Yang, Yang Kram, Chiang Mai 50160  
GPS: 18.560171, 98.825453







## Currying favour

It's a common experience that the worst of life's backhanders

can set you on the road to success where your heart most wants to go. For Praneet Bain, scion of the famous Bain family of Chiang Mai, and her husband, Pongsak, it was the closure of their international ceramics business that led to the establishment of one of Chiang Mai's most delightful curry restaurants, Hinlay Curry.

The menu is small but beautiful, and you can choose either individual dishes or a selection of sets. My companion and I chose two sets, the restaurant's signature dish of Hinlay Pork Curry with saffron rice and garlic naan, and Lamb Rogan Josh, accompanied by saffron rice, roti and a samosa, to which we added *dahl* and *allo gobi*, a mix of potatoes and cauliflower.

Each has its own attractive flavour which works individually and collectively. The lamb in the rojan josh was particularly well slow-cooked and had no trace of stringiness, which can be a problem if done in a rush. 'Rush' doesn't seem to be a word in use at this restaurant. I've loved yellow split peas since my mother first served me pease pudding, the wonderful pate-like accompaniment to boiled ham hock served in the north of England, and those in the dahl were cooked to perfection, tender but not too soft.

In mid-September Hinlay added a small bakery and café, creating a perfect contrast and compliment to their excellent restaurant.

**8/1 Na Watket Road. Tel. 053 24 26 21**



## The Zen of dining

When I was reviewing restaurants as part of my job as an itinerant writer in Spain the food might only form around 40-50% of a review; service, ambience, friendliness of the staff are equally important. Seldom did I come across a restaurant that combined the peaceful ambience combined with excellent food that I found at Zen, a ramshackle-looking place sat on the side of fishing hole just off the old Chiang Mai to Lamphun road, south of Saraphi.

I order three dishes to share with a friend, always the best way to eat any meal; fried fish with herbs, kafir lime leaves, roast peanuts and sesame seed, accompanied by a wonderful knock-your-socks-off spicy secret sauce made by Nim, owner Oi's wife, who says that even her mother can't get it as good. The fish looks like pieces of artfully arranged pork scratchings sprinkled with sesame seeds but here the similarity ends as the crisp exterior hides perfectly cooked, soft white fish. Alongside I'm served *tom ka gai*, coconut milk and chicken soup with mushrooms, flavoured with galangal, lemongrass, lime, kafir lime leaf



a



and tomatoes, and boy, are the flavours good, creamy and spicy at the same time. A cucumber salad freshens the mouth between spicy bites.

A delightful place as peaceful as peaceful can be.

*Centre Fishing Park*  
GPS. 18.6676756 99.03447121



I've never understood how some of the cafes in Chiang Mai can get away with charging extortionate prices for a basic latte, other than that they can, simply because there are always enough mugs to pay the price because they think they look good or can even tell the difference. They usually can't. Coffee pomposity has become as prevalent as wine pomposity, probably more-so in Chiang Mai, which, as I read recently, has become the 'café capital of Asia', another way of saying there are far too many of them.

I'm not saying that a fourteen-baht coffee from 7/11 will taste the same as a decent, well-made coffee from an espresso machine, but it's horses for courses and I'm perfectly happy to have a plastic cup of the 7/11 version when I'm out for a ride on my

bike, and there have been plenty of occasions when it has surpassed the dirty-water muck that I've paid four times the price for.

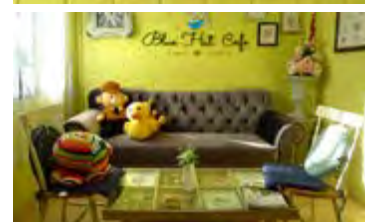
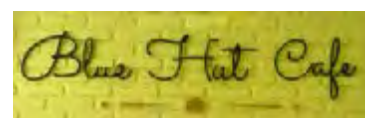
You don't need to go far to find a decent coffee at a decent price in Chiang Mai, and here are a few that I visit regularly, as much as anything for the well-priced coffee as a pleasing ambience.



Despite my dislike of it being self-service with those awful beeping discs, **Xym** has become one of my favourite places for both working and meeting friends. Deep leather sofas and wing-back chairs for lounging; good-sized tables to work at; a range of cakes and iced drinks if you are that way inclined and a larger-than-normal excellent latte for 55 baht all combine to make it a very popular café for people of all ages. And the music's good too! **222 Wualai Road**



Light, bright and airy, this tall skinny café with its white, white paintwork and plain wood and metal furnishings is mainly popular with young people, as you can tell by the music. **Juice Street** has small menu of basic food but a big one of fancy juices and cakes, although my reason for regular visits, apart from a good latte for 38 baht, is its ambience of freshness. **1/4 Wualai Road Soi 3**



**The Blue Hut Café** might look as twee as the witch's barly sugar cottage in Hansel and Gretel, but it's about my favourite place to get out of the city and relax, either sitting on the veranda or working at one of the small tables by the window. Comfy chairs and sofas if you want them, pleasant music, charming service. I'm often the only one there. Good latte for 50 baht, usually three for the price of two. **115 Moo 2, Soi Photaram 2**

With its cakes and pastries under glass domes **Ombra Café**, part of Pyur o'tel, has the air of an Olde English Tea Shoppe, in total contrast to its décor. A melange of bric-a-brac is artfully displayed, looking more like an avid collectors' home than a



café. Furnishings are equally diverse, rocking chairs, stout wood plank tables, benches, *et al*, that combine to make a very popular place to work in a peaceful environment, with a pretty good latte at 45 baht. **21/8 Ratchaphuek Rd**

*To receive future issues of Chiang Mai Uncovered, click here.*

# Stinky Market



# A rose by any other name

**I** sit on a weathered bench overlooking the Ping River. In front of me a traditional-style wooden building of modern construction is protected from closer inspection by a high hedge of deep purple bougainvillea, its glowing blossom reflected in the murky brown of the river. The property to the left, a grand house of porticoes, pillars and shaded balconies, has an even higher hedge, its top manicured into crenellations, behind which carefully trimmed cypress trees stand, tapering to the top like a row of green carrots stood on their fat ends.

This bucolic riverside scene is in total contrast to the raucousness of Muang Mai, the wholesale vegetable market behind me, for which the phrase hustle-and-bustle could have been invented and which makes every other market seem as sedate as a Sunday stroll in the park.

From well before dawn until late at night the market buzzes, with a brief respite during the heat of the afternoon. When I arrived in the early hours I saw a day labourer curled up in a floral duvet in the large hooped two-wheel trolley he'll use for work, undisturbed by the changing coloured lights of Narawat Bridge as they cycle through red, yellow, blue and green behind him. He'll spend his day trolleying produce from trucks to small pickups and motorcycles.

On the footpaths along the river on either side of the road small traders, mainly women, sit under parasols and garden marquees wrapped in thick coats and scarves, chatting and laughing with the other ladies going about their business in a way that men never



seem to, taking companionship in the cold and dark and the tedium of long hours waiting for buyers for their five kilo bags of tomatoes for 50 baht, small eggplant at 40 baht a bag, fish packed in twos and threes, film-wrapped over polystyrene trays, tiny garlic the size of a fingernail, bundles of lemongrass, snow peas at 60 baht a kilo. Cabbages and onions, cucumber and kohlrabi line the roadside, packed in clear plastic bags; red, green and yellow bell pepper laid in mounds alongside each other, winter vegetables brought from the north to serve the restaurants and tables of Chiang Mai.



In the main market movement is constant. Porters wait by the entrance with their looped iron panniers, hovering hopefully as pick-ups loaded to the gunnels with fruit and veg arrive. Large green umbrellas shading the small external stalls that ring the market are raised and lowered so the high-barred sides of the pick-ups don't knock them over. Hangar after hanger of pick-ups piled to the top with veg stacked in rows or seemingly thrown on, sorted into large plastic bags on the tailgate. Almost any vegetable I can name and many I can't. For 30 baht I can buy five kilos of tomatoes, tiny cherry toms will cost 10 baht more for 500 grams, 70 baht gets me 5 kilos of courgette.

While some trucks unload a single product others load up with a market garden assortment of vegetables, as kids scuttle around the rough stone floor as if they were in the school playground. Bundles and bags are pitched up to catchers in the body of a the pick-up as it slowly fills with a Technicolor display of veg, tight packed for the onward journey to smaller markets in out-lying villages. Mopeds with sidecars shuttle larger orders than the porters can carry in their trollies.

Creamy white cauliflower, limes of all sizes, purple shallots, pumpkins by the hundred, chopped open to show their deep orange flesh, a rainbow of peppers, tomatoes and chilies, lemongrass and galangal, holy basil and ginger. Bundles of morning glory wrapped in newspaper (ubiquitous in Thai cooking, banned in the US) are hand-balled from the back of a pick-up and stacked beside a stall. As they are being off-loaded on one side the stall-holder is selling them in bundles of

five and six on the other. In the bed of a pick-up a lady sporting a purple T-shirt with the message 'I'm not perfect, never have been, never will be' rapidly selects chilies in a bamboo tray while laughing and chattering with the lady on the truck next door who's sorting bunches of yard-long bean. She looks up at me and her big wide grin turns on light a lighthouse beam.

An impatient driver backs up at speed, screamed at by customers buying their half-kilo of mushrooms and vendors selling a sack-full of lettuce. At a T-junction at the back of the market he does a 16-point turn to line himself up with the exit into a narrow alley, barely wing mirror-wide. But he's still having no luck because there's a heavily laden vehicle coming toward him. There's so little clearance that porters stack up behind him, inhaling his exhaust fumes, so it's no surprise that they are almost all wearing face masks. Bottle-neck it may be, but within minutes everyone's on the move again.

Keep moving and you come to the spice stalls, packets or fresh blended scooped out of large aluminum bowls. On the periphery of the produce stalls are those selling household goods – ladles, pans and plastic containers, a single toy stall to keep the kids entertained, food stalls to keep the workers fed, mixed grocery stalls with jars of pickles, bottles of soy sauce, packets of noodles, and the ubiquitous Carnation condensed milk; a tiny coffee stall made of sheets of chipboard, so narrow that the young girl has to shuffle in sideways, but with a professional level coffee machine any barista would be proud of.



Further into the market you come to the fish and meat stalls. Choose your live fish from a red plastic box of oxygenated water the size of a small bath and it's scooped out for you, thrown on the scales, its fins still flapping, then bonked on the head and gutted before it has time to realise it's dead and the temperature has suddenly got warmer than it's cool, fish flavoured water. Chicken, pork, mince – mounds of them being prepared in the heat of mid-day, the fans with a tassel of thin plastic strips being the only thing to keep the flies away, but nothing keeps the heat away from fermenting the piles of meat. This probably accounts for Muang Mai's nickname of 'Stinky Market'.

I watch a couple of ladies strip and clean slippery sections of beef, and by the look of them I'd rather not hazard a guess at which part of the animal they came from and the fat to meat ration must be around 4:1. A porter arrives with a trolley filled with plastic bags, opens three and upends the contents on the aluminium counter. The ladies barely break stride in their cutting. We banter a bit and a couple of other stall holders join in. The meat vendor points to her assistant, a short lady with an amazing array of buck teeth and says 'nice Thai wife', although given the way she's handling her carving knife I'd have been wary of

her even if she was the gracious epitome of the marketer's ideal of the 'Thai smile'.

Muang Mai market is a health inspector's worst nightmare when compared with western standards, but western food markets bear no comparison to the 'stinky' market, with their sanitised services and 'nanny state' rules, something we should all rejoice in – while probably avoiding the fermenting chicken, pork and mince.



Muang Mai wholesale market  
Muang Samut Rd, Chiang Mai,  
18.7962915 98.997504



The house of your dreams - or maybe that should be the house of your *nightmares!*

Everyone should try the *Love Boat* at least once in their life!



# Chiang Rai

## Capital of *Kitsch*

The Thai way of life can be described in two words (or more strictly speaking, three), *sabai sabai*, meaning relax, enjoy yourself, have a good time, and *sanuk*, fun. This easy going acceptance of most things spreads to many aspects of Thai culture, even seeping into the decoration of their temples. Fat laughing ladies, Mickey Mouse clocks, miniature farms of the phantasmagorical sit happily alongside gilded effigies of Buddha in any one of his hundred-plus personifications. To a western mind it can appear to be verging on the kitsch at times, but if it is then it's kitsch with feeling, a sense of joyfulness. Chiang Rai is undoubtedly one of the kitchest places in Thailand.

### White Kitsch



Wat Rong Khun, The White Temple, the ultimate wedding cake architecture with outrageous sculptures covering every square inch and internal murals that feature such unquestionably religious figures as Elvis Presley and Michael Jackson, a panoply of superheroes, the New York skyline, rockets coiled in the tentacles of enormous monsters and robots galore. At various times a few Buddhist traditionalists have voiced their displeasure at the sacrilege but everyone else regards it with a bemused smile.

### Black Kitsch

As counterpoint to the lightness and spirituality of the White Temple, the Black House (Baan Dam) is said to represent the darkness inside man, and the preponderance of cow and buffalo skulls, horns and bones, many made into uncomfortable-looking chairs draped in snake skins and leopard pelts, makes it pretty clear that Thawan Duchanee, a nationally renowned artist who conceived of the museum, had a fairly dour nature tucked away inside. Darkness aside, the park is a rambling array of lovely wooden buildings with the appearance of traditional homes built around a shady village green. They are filled with an eclectic collection of object d'art, ninety-five per cent of it in wood; enormous plank tables, African masks, huge ceremonial drums on wooden-wheeled carts, dug-out canoes, intricately woven bamboo and basket ware, with not a single label to explain why, what or where from. It is a movie-makers dream emporium for gothic set dressing.



## Colourful Kitsch



One of the lesser known temples of Chiang Rai but to my mind probably the most gaudily delightful, Wat Huay Sai Khao is a twenty-kilometre drive south of the city but worth driving every one of them for its sheer visual delight. It may seem like a Disneyesque playground in Burmese, Hindu and Islamic styles, but this is also a functioning temple, designed to illustrate that all religions can peacefully co-exist, open to everyone to celebrate their individual faith. But where many religious edifices demand dignity and solemnity, Wat Huay Sai Khao draws out the playful, the joyful, the sense of *sanuk*.

Bright and colourful, with a gigantic statue of Dvarapala bearing his fearsome scowl guarding the entrance, gaping sheep with welcome signs hung around their necks to counter the guardian's grimace, gods on rockets, axe-waving hunters on buffalo – children have a wonderful time here, treating it as a large playground more than a religious edifice – and no-one minds at all.

## Clock Kitsch

Whatever else you do in Chiang Rai you must get yourself to the golden clock tower at the junction of Jet Yot and Baanpa Pragarn streets at seven, eight or nine on any evening. Hoh Nalika Chalerm Prakiat, to give it its formal name, was designed by Chalermchai Kositpipat, he of the White Temple fame, and the ornate structure has all the curlicues and embellishments to be found on said temple. But as impressive as the clock might be, it's the nightly *son et lumière* that brings on the smile.

As the hour strikes the clock tower begins to change colour, washing through red, blue, yellow, pink and purple light accompanied by Thai orchestral music. After five minutes a moment of stillness occurs before suddenly bursting into life once more with a rousing solo from a full-voiced lady, with the lights continuing their colourful cascade. The whole show lasts for ten minutes, which makes you think that some of the locals would much prefer the traditional bong, bong, bong to chime the passing hours.



---

# BACK



# ISSUES

# SUBSCRIBE



A new style of digital magazine

# CON-



# TACT



*A short jaunt up one side of the Ping River and down the other, this ride is a pleasant way to stretch the legs for a couple of hours.*

Your ride begins and ends beside the flower stalls on the river side of Wararot Market. Follow the traffic flow to Narawat Bridge (the first bridge you come to), and turn left to cross the river, where you turn left again at the traffic lights. Immediately on your right is the Church of Christ in Thailand, the first Protestant church in Chiang Mai, founded in 1868, although this isn't the original building.

Continue up this road (returning at some time in the future to visit the wonderful Wat Gate Musum. See Issue 3 *A Passion for Everything*.) Go straight through at the next traffic lights. After a couple of minutes you see a sign for the Scorpion Tail River Cruise that points you down a small lane to the river. Another place to return to for an English-language explanation of life along the river bank. Runs daily but need to make reservation. Price 500 baht per person, min 2 people. Email [scorpionrivercruise@gmail.com](mailto:scorpionrivercruise@gmail.com).

Go through the next traffic lights at the eastern end of Rama 9 bridge and the road becomes semi-rural quite quickly. It can be busy during rush hour but fairly quiet at other times.

Just after the lights you arrive at the extraordinary pillared and gilded archway of the Faham estate (although you won't recognise it as such because it's written in Thai) that houses, amongst other things, the Consulate of the Republic of Peru and the Chaingmai Ballet Academy. Take away the cables, the black stains of humidity and awful ground-floor architecture and the parade at the entrance to the estate

would grace the grand arcades of any European city, with gracious pediments supported by fluted doric columns. At the bottom of the street a statue of an angel, arms outstretched, stands atop a similar column which has relatively recently had a bright coat of white paint, although the angel itself has been left to weather a dirty, mottled grey. A few minutes' meander through the quiet streets gives you an idea of how the 'other half' of Chiang Mai live, and judging by some of the houses, they live very well indeed.

Back to the road and head in the same direction as previously. If you feel the need for a coffee there is no shortage at all on this road. You soon see the super-highway crossing in front of you; turn left, go under the flyover and take the first left.

You slide into suburbia Thai-style with roadside shops and markets. I usually stop off at a market on the ride either to eat at one of the stalls or just to have a look-see at what's going on. On Valentine's day this year I stopped at the market of green corrugated sheets you pass on your right and bought a half-dozen red roses, only to catch them in the door when I got home, snapping the heads off four of them. Fortunately, my lady was happy with the romantic notion of a pair, which I told her represented we two, and laughed when I told her what had really happened.

Continue on this road for the next few kilometres, enjoying the easy country ride. Your next reference point is a patch of overgrown land on your right with an outdoor restaurant of five thatched-roof tables in the top corner near a delightfully dilapidated old





wooden house. Just after this you can return to CM by turning left over the bridge but if you fancy an extra hour or so's ride go straight ahead. The scenery differs little – shops, houses, fields, with the occasional view of the murky brown Ping on your left but it's a pleasant ride and a bit of exercise away from the city.

A few minutes after the bridge you see a row of cream painted terraced houses on your right with, for some strange reason, the mock-Tudor wood cladding popular in 1950s England. For a few moments diversion, turn right and directly in front of you is a gated community of (fake) clapboard houses with neat gardens and picket fences, for all the world as if a piece of small-town USA had been dropped in the suburbs of Chiang Mai. As you approach the gate a small sign politely asks you to 'Wait after a little while', while another whose suggestion that you 'Be careful of the car from straight away' was obviously ignored because it lies battered and dumped in the hedgerow. Back to the road.....

A few moments later you come to another dip under a flyover and once again take a first left as you come out of the bend, by the Sibsan Luxury Hotel Rimping and a sign with a wheelchair logo for

**To receive all future issues of  
CHIANG MAI *uncovered*  
click here.**

Cheshire homes. The latter's peaceful gardens, bungalows and workshops are one of 240 residential homes worldwide – five in Thailand – affiliated to Leonard Cheshire Disability, whose philosophy is 'to encourage and move disabled individuals toward independent living and with the freedom to live life their way'.

Shortly after Baan Suan (which surely must be one of the most elegant restaurants in or around Chiang Mai) the road becomes more rural, ambling along through tree plantations and chi-chi resorts interspaced with ordinary semi-suburban, rustic life. Crossing the next junction (with a local market on our left) is a bit like taking your life in your hands, but there's usually a bunch of traffic waiting to cross so when they see a break follow their lead.

Amble along this road until you see a sign for Chanctonbury Tea and Garden, (the same road as the better-signed Chic 39) and follow the signs (a teapot pouring into a cup) for a delightful garden, more kitsch than horticultural but a pleasing place to take a coffee before retracing your way to the bridge mentioned earlier. When you get there turn right over the bridge and left again at the traffic lights, heading back to Chiang Mai on the other side of the river. This is an easy ride back to the city, ducking once again under the super highway. Exercise caution when you cross the road at Rama 9 bridge on its western side as the traffic tends to set off at a surge. Keep to the river road and a few minutes later you arrive at Muang Mai produce market, sometimes known, affectionately or otherwise, as 'Stinky Market', one of the most fascinating markets in Chiang Mai. (See page 10 of this issue.) You can stop for a wander or continue past the white stupa at the bottom of the market and through the next traffic lights at Nakorn Ping bridge to end your ride back at Wararot Market.



You can download a Word document to print and follow the route [HERE](#)

# Sunday in the Park



The notes for the articles in **CHIANG MAI *uncovered*** are often gathered over a period of months, giving the opportunity to see changes occurring over the seasons, but they are always checked by a final visit before the article is written. A lot can change in a few short weeks. This is the case with Sunday in the Park. Since my previous visits the charmingly rickety old bamboo drinks stands and massage parlour have been replaced by concrete sheds with all the charm of a military bunker. I decided to stay with the original story as it can be used as a perfect example for an article that will be appearing in the next issue of the magazine, ***Sanitising the City.***

**D**uring the three days of the Flower Festival in February Buak Haad Park is awash with floral displays, the colour and atmosphere enlivened by the visiting groups of school kids in their bright uniforms. For the rest of the year it is a pleasant mix of families picnicking on woven straw mats, couples canoodling on the grass, strollers strolling, carefully trying to avoid the joggers in their endless circumnavigation of the lake, high speed walkers with arms swinging across their chest – why do they do that? I’ve always thought it looked too comic to be taken seriously, but apparently its much less high-impact than jogging; I prefer low-impact sitting still.

While most of the Thai visitors seem to prefer the standard forms of park sports, badminton included, there are usually a few groups of young farang practicing rope walking (which is only ever interesting if it is done fifteen metres in the air instead of fifteen inches which is the case with these performers) and other so-called ‘circus skills’, which fortunately don’t include mime or clowning; martial arts practiced (usually while someone is taking a photo with their smart phone) that appear cumbersome when com-

pared to the more leisurely tai-chi forms. Meanwhile, kids get dangerously near the edge of the lake, or plague their parents for an ice cream. Same-old, same-old the world over.

A group of Thai ladies take part in an exercise class led by a camp instructor who has them side-stepping, arm-stretching and knee-lifting to 32-count BPM power music (whatever that might mean) especially designed for fitness professionals. At least most of them. While the majority have the timing and rhythm of the well-practiced, I watch one lady so out of step and rhythmically incoherent that whatever the instructor and the other girlies are doing, her movements are left-step, right-step, arms bend ever so slightly inward at the elbow, repeat. And they keep this up for an hour. What impresses me most are the big smiles on almost every face at their instructor’s shenanigans. This is fun!

All cash-strapped councils look to wealthy companies and organisations to fund projects, and if it wasn’t for AIA Life Insurance there would be no open-

air gym for park-goers to peddle, push and lift their way to fitness, although despite all the fancy equipment I watch a young man use a set of weights made from an iron bar and a cement-filled can on either end, like a child given an expensive Christmas present, only to



spend hours playing with the box. Kids seem to have as good a time using the equipment as adults do trying to hone their physiques. I observe a little girl of about three watching the world go by from the saddle of a bike as her sister peddles frenetically, except that it's a static exercise bike and she's going nowhere. Still, she seems to enjoy the view.

What's little more than an open-fronted bamboo shed with a few black plasticised armchairs and thin mattresses on the ground acts as a relief station to ease the aches and pains with a massage. The foot version usually has a few people dozing as their tootsies are manipulated. Next to the massage parlour is a spirit house guarded by four elephants where joggers and striders make a twist of their upper body to make a quick *wai* at the deities within without breaking step.

At the end of the row of small stands at the back of the park selling soft drinks and coconuts, packets of brown pellets to feed the fish and renting woven mats for 20 baht, an elderly lady has a stall. When times are quiet she'll give you a massage, tell your fortune (in Thai only) sell you a nip of local whiskey and maybe allow you to duck down behind her stall and take a quick drag on a cigarette, both the latter of which are forbidden in the park but she somehow seems to get away with it.

To supplement the meagre selection available at most of the stalls, a lady in red shirt and cap carries two shallow baskets slung at either end of a bamboo pole. In the front basket a small charcoal brazier is covered by a wire grill with about 20 eggs cooking. She stops at each rubbish bin and picks out the plastic bottles and put them in her rear basket, a supplemental income

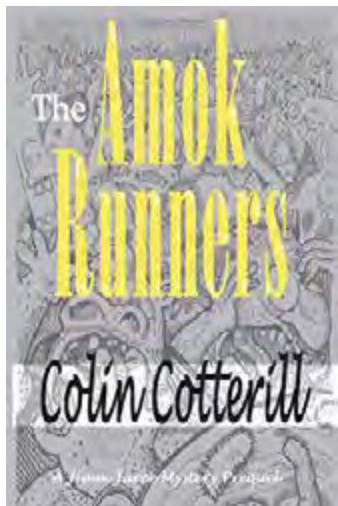
to the eggs I presume, which don't exactly seem to be flying off the griddles.

The ice-cream man, other the other hand, is doing good business, his tinkling bell heralding his arrival. Business has obviously been good, the deep pan almost empty by the time I stop him. He slides in a desertspoon-sized scoop and puts three each of vanilla and coconut into a cone, squeezes on a dribble from a bottle of strawberry syrup (what we used to call 'monkey's blood' as kids) and a squirt of Carnation milk, drops on a sprinkling of peanuts and jelly-bean stuff that is almost flavourless, *et voilà*. I've yet to try the ice cream sandwich where the scoops are put between two slices of white bread.

I see a photo session with a young girl in a mortar board and gown posing with her certificate. Obviously it's graduation time, and photographers are looking to find the strangest places to photograph their clients. A few days earlier I saw a young couple, robed and gowned, being photographed with some ancient rolling stock at Chaing Mai railway station. In this instance, though, the photographer, and presumably his client, had opted for the park with its raised platform sat in the centre of the small lake. The photographer's assistant throws a handful of seed to the flock of ever-present pigeons to encourage them nearer to the camera, then claps her hands and jumps up and down to force them take off to provide a romantic background for the student's graduation photo. Unfortunately, the pigeons are having none of it, and simply scuttle a bit further away, with a couple of the more timid ones taking to flight and dropping to the ground again when they realise their palls are scoffing all the goodies.



# Off the book shelf



No apologies made for including two of Colin Cotterill's books in these reviews as each shows a different side of this excellent writer, probably the best writing about Asia at the moment.

In *The Amok Runners*, Jimm Juree is back. As a prequel to the highly acclaimed three previous Juree novels we are taken back to the time when she was the intrepid head crime reporter for the Chiang Mai Mail. Jimm, her brother/sister Sissy, muscle-bound but timid brother (definitely brother!) Army and Burmese friend, Khin, her of the stratospheric intellect, become embroiled in in the murder and mayhem of movie making. But how can they report their suspicions to the police when it's the police themselves who are causing the murder and mayhem!

Detective John Jessel is good at his job working paedophile cases in Surrey, England, but he's on a downhill slide as booze claims his body and lonely life. A series of postcards signed 'The Paw' take credit for the murders of several children, but 'The Paw' also knows too much about John and his family. His search for the vicious killer begins in Kenya but eventually lands him in Burma, in the Karen homeland of Kawthoolei, where he meets Dr. Shirley Heigh, a Karen intern returning from the US to work on the Burmese border, but whose intentions are not wholly ethical.

*Evil in the Land Without* is a brilliant study of an evil mind bent on revenge.

Award-winning writer and long-time Thailand resident, Jim Algie brings his years of experience unearthing the strange, the extraordinary and the cross-over between Thai and farang culture to life in *The Phantom Lover and Other Thrilling Tales of Thailand*.

Seen through the eyes of a snake handler scared by his work, both physically and emotionally; the last official executioner in Thailand, who is far removed from the image of the callous *persona* his work would seem to require; a photojournalist literally haunted by the images of everyone he ever failed or exploited while getting a story; the lives of a group of *tsunami* survivors who try to make a difference after the tragic event of Christmas, 2004. The characters interweave between stories and it's impossible to read them without thinking that they are the story of Algie himself and his life in the outer reaches of Thai experience.

Keep up-to-date with what's going on in Chiang Mai with Steve Yarnold at [charityrooftopparty@gmail.com](mailto:charityrooftopparty@gmail.com)

**BoredBreaker**  
Chiang Mai's Most Complete Events Calendar

To make sure you receive all future issues of CHIANG MAI *uncovered*, [click here.](#)

# This is Thailand

*When we are asked why we live in a particular place it's often difficult to give a definitive answer; it's usually a wide variety of things, often extending far beyond the obvious. One of the things that endears me on almost a daily basis is a throwback to Britain in the 50's and 60's, an item of ladies apparel rarely seen in Europe these days.*

There are many reasons to like Thailand; spicy food, almost year-round warmth, glorious countryside, the Thai smile – sadly often as transient as a light bulb switched rapidly on and off in a darkened room. For me it includes the delight in seeing a lady in a frock, it's skirts swaying with her sashaying movement as she saunters down a soi.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary has two definitions for 'frock'

- : a woman's or girl's dress
- : a long outer garment worn by some Christian monks and friars.

I'll pass on the latter; I can't say I've ever been drawn to the sashaying of a monk or seen one sauntering the sois of Chiang Mai.

A frock is so much more than simply a dress. A dress is the catch-all word for a piece of ladies' apparel that isn't a skirt, trousers or shorts of one variety or another.

Firstly, frocks have waistlines – or should have in my opinion – belted, bowed or be-ribboned to accentuate the beauties of the lower and upper body. And beauties they are, equal in their eloquence whether the lady is small-bosomed or statuesque. The former are able to show their svelte figures off with pleasing undulations that hint at the sensual, while the latter can be delight-

fully provocative with a nipped-in waistline cinched by a narrow belt that accentuates the hour-glass figure so yearned for in the mid-20th century, epitomised by Christina Hendricks, the voluptuous Mad Men actress. A frock is a friend to all, it's cascading folds formed by the nipping in of the waistline swaying with the movement of the hips. In most cases Thai ladies carry the frock well, their small stature made for the petit visual pleasures a frock provides.

A frock is made for summer lawns, it's flared skirt spread around a lady's legs as she sits on the edge of a picnic blanket. Tea in proper china cups, little finger keeked, (never in plastic beakers!), trays of scones and small pots of strawberry jam and Devon cream, tiny sandwiches, (their crusts trimmed), light laughter and teasingly amorous glances.

A frock is for flouncing – you can't flounce in a short skirt or shorts – striding along confidently, a small bag over mid-arm or swung nonchalantly from the hand. A tiny shoulder bag on a thin strap would get away with it but it's difficult to carry off a flounce of when carrying shopping bags.

A frock is the epitome of femininity. It is cheeky and prim at one and the same time, the clothing equivalent of a twinkle in the eye.

---

## In the next issue...



### Sanitising the city

Sometimes change can be good, but at others it's best to just leave well alone.



### Royal Garden

Rajapuek Royal Garden project is also a tour of architecture and garden styles in Asia.



### On Two Wheels

An intriguing ride that takes you along Canal road to visit one of Chiang Mai's loveliest temples and a beautiful garden.



Click on the logo to make sure you don't  
miss a single issue of

CHIANG  
MAI *uncovered*