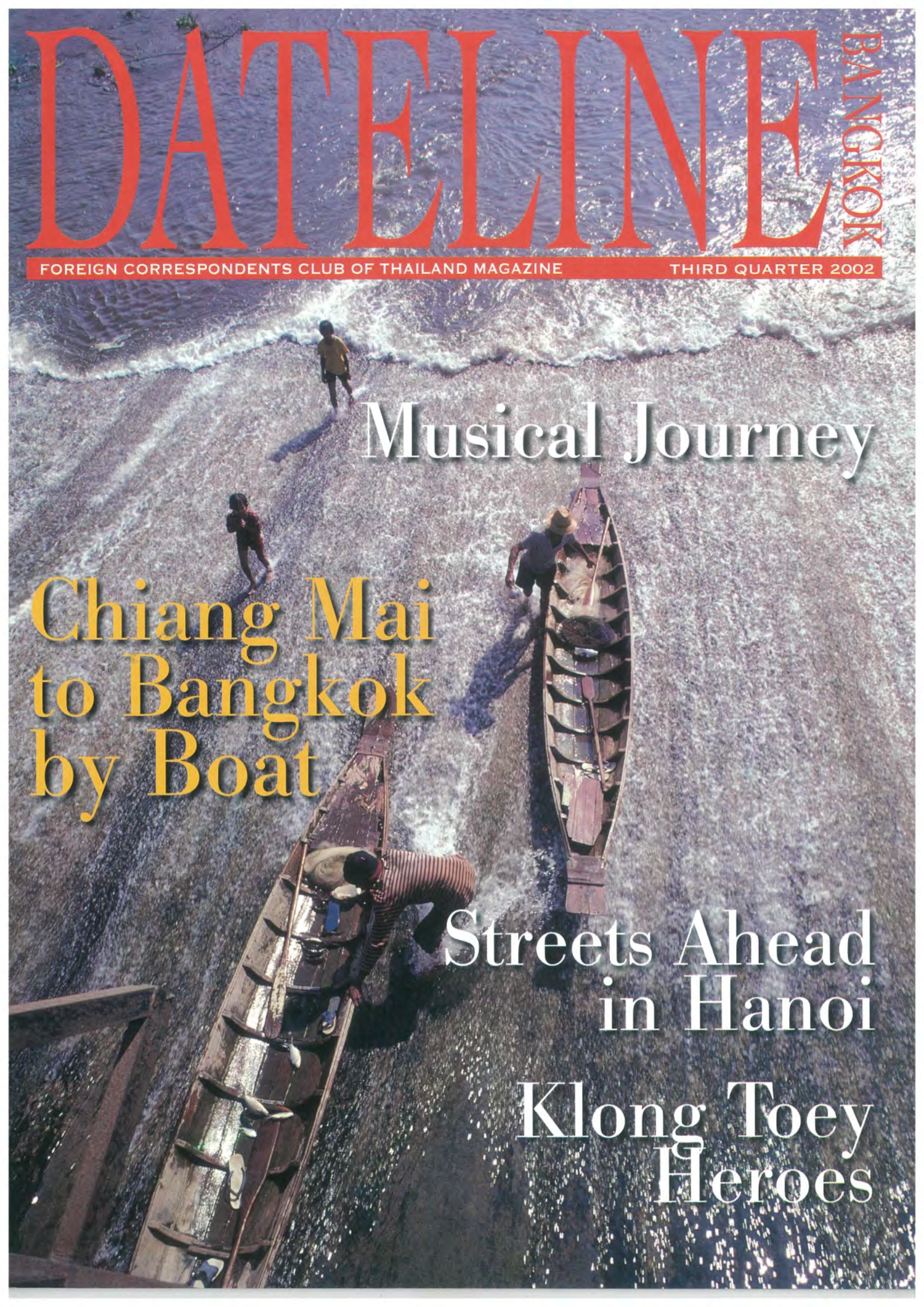


DATELINE



BANGKOK

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS CLUB OF THAILAND MAGAZINE

THIRD QUARTER 2002

Musical Journey

Chiang Mai
to Bangkok
by Boat

Streets Ahead
in Hanoi

Klong Toey
Heroes

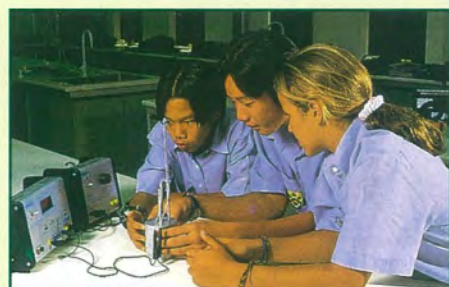


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Steve Van Beek describes
his 720-mile odyssey

Cover Picture: Steve Van Beek

Join Us

You don't have to be foreign and you don't need to be a correspondent to become a member of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand. Membership has its privileges: The club frequently hosts breaking news panel discussions with the leaders of government, private sector and non-governmental organizations. Each month the club exhibits work from a different photographer or artist, and the last Friday of each month there is live jazz music at the bar. Each member also gets a subscription to this magazine for absolutely free. So why aren't you a member? Don't forget that the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand is one of Bangkok's most prestigious addresses for press conferences, social gatherings and product launches. The club is outfitted with all the latest techno-gizmos, from wireless microphones to remote control television cameras, and can provide all types of catering, from light snacks to full meals. Impress your guests with the well known hospitality of the Foreign Correspondents Club.

Got a tale to tell?

This is your club's magazine and we welcome letters to the editor, articles, photographs, drawings, poetry or just about anything to help us fill up each issue. Submissions should address journalism or the story behind getting the story. All ideas considered, but please contact Mick Elmore before doing too much work. Submissions are paid for with glory and bar coupons.

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More Value for Members

Some members thought my last Dateline message was a bit too gloomy. Those paid-up members, that is. Others, many in fact, think there is little benefit in being a member, when non-members get charged the same for food and drinks, except for programme nights.

A good point, and one considered by the Executive Committee at our last meeting. After a debate, it was decided unanimously in principle to allow members to pay lower charges for their food and drinks in the clubhouse than non-members. So members will benefit financially. Or, at least, they will pay less than non-members.

It seems pretty fair, and it also strengthens the incentive to join. Which takes us back to what I said in the last Dateline – we need more members, badly.

The new system is being worked out by Manager Khun Noi, and may take a while to implement. For sure, it will mean members

will have to carry their membership cards with them all the time. That's hardly a big imposition, and one required by most clubs. Also for sure, there will be teething problems with such situations as members buying non-members drinks, for instance.

But I hope you agree with the principle and back the Executive Committee on this. Essentially, members will have a better deal. It means they will enjoy an added advantage. But please bear with us as we work out a feasible way to put this into operation.

We are not penalizing people, or driving out those without membership cards. We are just trying to bring about a bit of order, and adding a good reason for people to join up, rather than treating the clubhouse as a social venue where anything goes.

Meanwhile, the club continues to fill up nicely for programme nights, held at least once a week. And Friday night jazz, which is open to all, is often packed out. It would be nice to see



more faces around the bar and in the dining area on other evenings – not to mention members choosing to have lunch in the clubhouse.

Everyone seems to agree Khun Dhum and her staff deliver a good cuisine. So let's show her we appreciate it.

Rodney Tasker



Bangkok, Thailand

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Visits Welcome

Help Children Make Camp

Your chance to help poor kids stuck in the city

It's camping time again for the kids from Klong Toey. In November, AsiaWorks and assorted friends will be organising the annual trip to Rayong but this year we need eight new tents.

For just 5,200 Baht you or your company could sponsor a ten-person tent. The tents would be used for camping trips by Father-Joe's Human Development Foundation, the Teenage Girls Home, the Foster Girls Home (including AIDS orphans) and the Mercy Center.

Even though your name or company logo can be placed on the flysheet of your sponsored tent, your reward will be far greater, knowing that your contribution towards these tents will guarantee some fun outings for some very deserving boys and girls. If you can't afford a whole tent then why not contribute a smaller sum to help cover the costs of this year's Rayong camping trip.



Contact: Peter Charlesworth at AsiaWorks Photography. Tel: 02-255-6850. E-mail: pchworth@loxinfo.co.th.

Obituary: Rob Burrows

A Compassionate Man Remembered

Rob Burrows – a reporter, United Nations official and friend to many at the FCCT – has passed away at the age of 56. His body was found September 1 on a beach in Rayong. An autopsy showed that he had drowned.

Rob was born in Long Island, New York, and grew up in Connecticut. He first came to Thailand in the Peace Corps in the 1960s and remained in Southeast Asia virtually ever since. He worked as a reporter in Vietnam, Thailand and Laos during the Indochina War and fell in love with Laos. While working as a stringer for the Associated Press, he and his wife Loraine also opened a vegetarian restaurant in Vientiane.

After the Communist take-over of Laos, Rob and Loraine moved to Thailand, into which hundreds of thousands of refugees were streaming from neighboring Indochinese nations. Rob became an information officer at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and later an official of the U.N. Border Relief Operation (UNBRO), from which he retired last year.



Rob: humanitarian who helped refugees.

It was in those years that many FCCT members came to know Rob not only as a valuable source but a man of great empathy for the underprivileged and a human being full of warmth and good humor. In many ways, he was the perfect model for a much maligned species – the U.N. information officer.

He had not been in good health in recent years, following an operation on a brain tumor. But his interest in the region continued. Most recently he took on an assignment to coordinate the publication of journalism manuals in five languages for the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation.

He and Loraine, long active in a number of humanitarian organizations, had planned to spend the rest of their lives in Thailand. – *Denis Gray, Associated Press*

Rob was so difficult to encapsulate – except to say that he was one of the most compassionate, intelligent, diligent, and funny people I've been privileged to call "friend". The crux of Rob's humor was a mordant, self-deprecating wit that could maintain a grasp of the serious element, but see the whimsical or absurd in it. – *Steve Van Beek*

Festive Season at the FCCT

With the year-end fast approaching, plans are already afoot for the Christmas and New Year party. Following last year's highly successful evening in the romantic setting of the Marriott Riverside, a return visit is planned for early December. Watch the Bulletin for further details.

In a bid to end the year on a high note for the Club's finances, we will be holding a grand prize draw as one of the highlights of the party. If each FCCT member – yes, that includes you – sells just one book of prize draw tickets to friends, colleagues, enemies, whoever, the Club will be able to start 2003 on a firm financial footing. (It's what Santa would want.)

Tickets will be distributed to all members in November, and will be on sale at the office and at all FCCT events. Take this opportunity to do something completely painless to help the Club and you'll end up benefiting from comfier chairs, more barstools, smiling staff and board members, in short, a festive Club.



The United States' Ambassador to Thailand, Darryl Johnson, was kind enough to be the FCCT's guest of honor on August 21. He gave a brief talk, mainly about relations between the U.S. and Thailand, as well as the region. He also answered a number of questions on a wide variety of issues from the audience in a packed clubhouse.

Assessing the State of Our Journalism

Associated Press Bureau Chief **Denis Gray** has been based in Thailand since 1975. As an active member of the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation, which trains journalists in the region, including Thais, he describes some of the changes in journalistic practices he has seen down the years.

How has journalism in Thailand changed since you first arrived here in 1975?

There have been dramatic changes in journalism here. There are the sheer numbers – far more journalists, far more outlets. And I think the profession has gained more respect from the general public. Being a journalist earlier on did not exactly carry a lot of status.

Are journalism skill levels getting better or worse?

On the whole journalism skills are getting better. People entering the field are, I believe, better educated than was earlier the case and some editors – although not all – put a premium on more training of their staffers while they are on the job. But it should be stated that some Thai editors complain that the journalism schools could be far more effective in turning out competent graduates. They say reform is needed in the approach of journalism schools. As in all countries, there is shoddy journalism around. But I think there are more outstanding Thai journalists today than there were in the 1970s when I first came and they are

going into fields like environment and social issues with a vengeance. There have been some superb examples of investigative journalism.

Has there been a shift in focus regarding the kind of assignments foreign correspondents are expected to write these days?

There are all species of foreign correspondents doing all sorts of different things. Speaking for the AP, we are expected to do more business news than was earlier the case. In fact, if you look around the foreign press community in Bangkok there is a fairly large percentage of reporters doing exclusively business and economics reporting.

What changes would you like to see in order to bolster the quality of journalism in Thailand for the next 20 years?

The Thai editors are probably right when they say that university faculties could be turning out better products. There should also be more emphasis on on-the-job training, not just in the usual skills but in journalistic ethics and the role of the journalist in society as a whole.

The View from the Bar

Forget flash cars and jewelry, the way to really impress people in Bangkok is to have your own seat at the bar of our Club. For a modest 5,000 baht, you can have your name, or your company's name, immortalized in a plaque fixed to the snazzy new stool. If you are interested, simply call Khun Noi on 02-652-0580/1 for details. Any requests to see "stool samples" first will be looked upon dimly.

Book Deal for Members

"Politics and The Press in Thailand" by Duncan McCargo is available now at the FCCT. A senior lecturer at Leeds University in England, McCargo had access to the editorial meetings and newsrooms of Thailand's leading newspapers.

Here he discusses the factors that

lead to a passive attitude towards news gathering and reporting. A leading Thai editor described the publication as "indispensable for anyone who wants to understand the real Thai vernacular press and internal working mechanisms." Limited copies available at 300 baht each.

SOI WHISPERS

As most of you will know by now, longtime editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* **Derek Davies** died in France after a long illness on September 15. Derek, a larger-than-life figure despite his small stature, was a frequent visitor to Thailand, normally to interview government leaders and the like. He used to love the country, but he reckoned his hardest trip was in 1984, when he was granted a semi-audience with His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The "audience" meant accompanying the King on hilly treks inspecting irrigation and other projects in the Chiang Mai area. The somewhat corpulent Davies had a lot of trouble keeping up with a monarch who was a few years older than him. Davies was constantly bathed in sweat before being driven back to his hotel in a royal vehicle with ice-cold air-conditioning. So when Davies arrived back in Bangkok he was very hoarse and feverish -- and in typical fashion blamed members of the *Review's* Bangkok bureau for fixing him such a grueling trip. ■ Club President **Rodney Tasker** was happy with the backslapping he received after scoring the press team's only goal in a 3-1 defeat during an elephant polo promotion match in Hua Hin on September 14. But when told it must have been fun, he was heard to reply: "Actually, it was bloody hairy and hard work." He was referring to the difficulty clinging to a two-tonne bare-back elephant when it sometimes reached 15 kmh, and then doing battle with other players in the middle of a herd of elephants to capture the ball. He also thought it was best the opposing side won, because they were Thais. And celebrities. Incidentally, captain of the press-team was AP Bangkok Bureau Chief **Denis Gray** -- sadly one of only two or three FCCT members among AP's recently enlarged editorial squad in Bangkok. And even Denis is a non-paying honorary life member. ■ **Brigid and Romen Bose** are expecting their first baby early next year. They are asking for suggested baby names. They are having a baby naming contest, with a December 15 deadline for suggestions. Keep an eye on the weekly Bulletin for competition details. Prizes for best names have not been announced, but the worse suggestions will receive wet nappies courtesy of the little one. ■ If you read Thai, have a look at the Thai GM magazine interview with author, *Nation* sub-editor and sometime-FCCT member **James Eckardt**. With more than 20 years smiling in Thailand he is never short of something to say. If only we could read it. ■ Cambodia Prince **Norodom Ranariddh** screened his first movie *Raja Bori* – a movie he wrote, directed and produced – at the Club on September 18. If you missed it he was kind enough to leave a DVD copy with the FCCT. You can have a look at the Club.

Musical Journey

On your next Southeast Asian trip open your ears and sample the local music

Story & Photos by John Clewley

The soundtrack that follows you as you travel around Southeast Asia is as diverse as the flora and fauna in the forest. It's the background music you hear on the bus, in the back of a taxi or at the local market or temple fair.

As well mainstream pop and rock, most countries have funky local styles, from folk to modern urban. In fact some styles of music, like *mor lam* from Northeast Thailand and Laos, exist in traditional and electrified modern versions. So if you hear a catchy sound, track it down at the local cassette vendors or music store.

Bangkok, as one of the region's music capitals, is an excellent gateway. It has its famed nightlife, dance scene, vibrant youth culture and pop and rock music. But how many people head upcountry or to a temple fair in Bangkok (usually around national holidays)?

Luk thung – Thai Country music

Pity, because they will have missed a *luk thung* (Thai country music) show. This is a costume extravaganza with the star singer, seven or eight back-up singers, a comedy team, an MC and a female chorus line that may change its garb from Superman to Marie Antoinette or a watermelon in the course of several hours.

Catch a show by one of the genre's big names like Got Chakrapand (the young set's darling) or Monsit Khamsoi, Arpaporn Nakornsawan or Sunaree Rat-chasima and you'll be amazed at the soulful singing.

And if you can't get to a show, ask your friendly music vendor. Soon you'll find your way to some of

the legends such as late Surapon Sombatchareon and Pompuang Duangjan. Try any of the vendors at the major markets and the Bangkok Cassette Co stores (great for old *luk thung*) and in shopping malls such as MBK (ground floor opposite Santa's fast food store).

Mor lam – funky Lao music: NE Thailand and Laos

Go to any village fair in the Northeast and you'll see performing on a small stage in a rice field, two singers (*mor lam*) accompanied by a *khaen* (bamboo reed mouth organ). The singers rap and verbally joust all night long with the vamping *khaen* behind. These days you usually get the electrified (plus bass and drums) version called *mor lam sing*.

Across the Mekong river, the *mor lam* beat goes on. The typical temple fair in Laos is called a *boun* and is more "down home" than in Thailand. For sure you will find a *mor lam* group. Nearly all the many ethnic groups in Laos have their own form of *lam*, be it singing or reciting poetry. *Ram wong*, the circle dance popularized in Thailand in the 1930s, is still a big feature of social events.

A favorite spot to find traditional *mor lam*, folk styles from Laos' many ethnic groups and the Lao version of *mor lam sing* is at the daily Talat Sow (Morning Market) in Vientiane.

Kantrum – Cambodian beat

In Thailand's lower Northeast, mainly around Surin, Buriram and Roi Et and in Northwest Cambodia you

can find a funky beat called *kantrum*. This is based around wailing vocals, earthy congo-like drums and a fiddle. It has really taken off in recent years, led by the powerfully-voiced Surin star Darkie. Across the border in Cambodia, in Siam Reap (nearest town to the Angkor Wat complex), you might catch the great Payponggrath, who also sings in *kantrum* style. Hunting for cassettes in the main market is a wonderful way to spend a couple of hours. There are many kinds of Cambodian popular music – check out wedding songs.

Jakarta – Dangdut capital

I'm having a meal on Pecenenan street in downtown Jakarta, an area famous for seafood, and along comes the Rosita Group, a mobile *dangdut* band. *Dangdut* is the pan-Indonesian pop music that gets its name from the distinctive drum sound from Indian *tabla* hand drums.

The band sets up ready for some *dangdut* in moments with bamboo flute, *tabla* and, of course, the singer. We agree a price and the singer launches into a stirring rendition of "Satu Pandok Dua Cinta" (One House, Two Loves). When the band finishes and moves on we head off for some *dangdut* bars where we try to learn the *dangdut* shimmy to live bands.

Cassette hunting for Indonesian music is a magical mystery tour – there are so many styles to explore, from *dangdut* to *jaipongan* to *kroncong* and *minang*, to one of my own favorites, *sundanese* (West Javan) popular music. Necessary artists would include: *Dangdut King* Rhoma Irama, and Queen Elvy Sukhaisih. See how many cover versions of "Denpasar Moon" you can find!

There are always headphones around and you can listen to anything before you buy. I've spent many happy hours – and rupiah – in these stores.

Vietnam – Cai Luong in Saigon

Not many troupes perform the operetta style called *cai luong* these days, but if there's a show going on at the fading theatre at the back of the electronics market in Saigon, check it out. Based on *hat boi* classical theatre of the 1920s, the style features classi-



Cai luong music, Vietnam

cal tales set to music from an orchestra that has both Western and Vietnamese traditional sections. These are led by an emotive guitar style used as an accompaniment to the narrative and played on an octaviana, an electric guitar which has had the wood scalloped out from between the frets in order to bend the notes.

The Sape – the sound of the jungle

If you get the chance to go to Borneo during the annual July World Music Rainforest Festival, held just outside Kuching in Sarawak, Malaysia, make an effort to find players of a lilting soft local lute called the *sape*. This is a solid hardwood instrument that seems to spin the melodies of the wind in the jungle. When the indigenous groups of the forest get together in a longhouse with a couple of sapes, bamboo mouth organs, zithers and pounding drums, the music seems to hum in harmony with the sounds of the jungle. These days, local artists such as Jerry Kamin and modern bands such as Tuku Kame have electrified the music to great effect. Look out for cassettes of these and other bands at the Cultural Village just outside Kuching.

Jerry Kamin plays the Sape like Jimi Hendrix

John Clewley is a Bangkok-based music writer who regularly appears in the Bangkok Post. He was a major contributor to the Rough Guide to World Music.

Detty Kurnia, Indonesia





Steve Van Beek

One man's boat journey through a Thailand that no longer exists

Shoveling Water

IN 1988 when **Steve Van Beek** was 43 years old he paddled an unwieldy teak boat from the headwaters of the Ping river in Chiang Mai to the mouth of the Chao Phaya river in Bangkok. The 720-mile journey took 58 days, a triumph for a man who had never rowed a boat beyond the length of a pond before.

His account of the journey in his book *Slithering South* describes rural Thailand by the backdoor, a country beautiful yet abused, an often lawless superstition-ridden rural domain inhabited by villagers witnessing the social fabric disintegrate all around them.

In remote backwaters there were vestiges of serene beauty. But with isolation came danger. In his nine-day journey through the rugged wilderness behind the

Bhumiphol Dam, Van Beek was hunted by lawless renegades, surviving only because he out-tricked them.

"I wanted it to be a clean journey with no outside help, my success or failure hinging on my ability to use my wits. As much as possible, I wanted to travel like early Thai river men, sleeping in the jungles or villages, eating local food."

In the end the journey became about the kindness of rural people, their willingness, despite their physical poverty, to enrich an outsider's unlikely journey through a changing landscape which has since disappeared for ever.

Here, Van Beek describes the journey to **Ken Scott**.

KS: Why did you choose the Chao Phaya river?

SVB: I had a house on stilts over it in Bangkok. I had watched it flow by my doorstep and over often across my floor during the monsoon for 11 years. It was also a time of my life when I wanted something of my own and to own an experience and try something which would push me and give me a challenge and spur me to discover other parts of myself.

KS: You wanted to be tested?

SVB: It was simply that when I looked back at the previous week I could remember virtually nothing of what had happened...and I began to think, why am I doing this if I'm not getting any satisfaction out of it. Maybe it's time to try something new.

KS: The boat you had built for you for the trip, turned out to be a disaster.

SVB: It was beautifully built as a craft to which you'd attach a large engine. I wanted it to handle three different types of water – fast, flat and the swells of the lower Chao Phaya. It failed on all three counts. On the upper part it whacked into rocks. It swamped on the downstream and it had no maneuverability on flat water. It was like paddling a freighter. But the workmanship on it was fantastic.

KS: What was the most memorable section of the whole journey?

SVB: Being hunted at night leaves a few indelible memories. It certainly jacks your adrenaline levels to unprecedented levels.

KS: The hunters approached you by daytime, disappeared, and then came again at night. But you managed to elude them. How?

SVB: I noticed that there were reeds growing along the bank which extended into the water about 20 meters or so; I thought I could hide in them with my boat – but I realized if I cut a path straight in from the water they'd see the broken weeds and go after me. They'd figure out something was in there. So I found a break where the beach was exposed, so I went into that and cut parallel to the beach so that I was hidden in the reeds. These fishermen and hunters all carried very powerful search lights. Even when I was in there and they were shining at these fairly thick reeds, I could see the light even though they were a good 10 meters away. Had I crushed these reeds on the way in, they would definitely have found me.

KS: Along the river, people seemed to be oblivious to the fact they had a river on their back doorstep. When you emerged from the river at dusk they seemed to be surprised. The river seemed to have no economic or meaningful role in their lives anymore.

SVB: I think roads had taken over. But most of the people I met were farmers. They were dependent on the river and dependent on the new layers of silt laid down in the monsoon...They fished in it. They swam in it. They washed their clothes in it. They bathed in it. And in the flat section they used their boats to go from one side to the other.



STEVE VAN BEEK

KS: You seem to have had a relatively low opinion of Thai men. They were drinkers, lazy, not much to contribute to society. Is that a fair assessment?

SVB: No. I think they were just the ones I singled out for mention in the book. Yes, there were a tremendous number of drinkers, and I was always being invited to drink, but I think the ones I was wary of were the younger ones who really had no attachments, no job. They posed a threat. They tended to be dismissive. They were kind of caught in this transition from rural existence to industrialized Thailand. Remember, this was just at the cusp of 1988, just at the beginning of the great [economic] leap forward which Thailand experienced and which absorbed a lot of these people in construction and other city jobs. But at that time they didn't want to be farmers and they didn't want to go to the city. They were afraid of the city. The people who were more settled, the family men, they were wonderful. I had no problems with them.

KS: To what extent were villagers living in fear? They always seemed to be scared of the dark or scared of the next stretch of river further south where the people were supposedly 'hostile' and you'd have a problem there.

SVB: Thais at village level are superstition-ridden. They see ghosts and spirits in everything. There is often a deep distrust of anyone who is an outsider.

KS: Have you been back to the Chao Phaya since then?

SVB: Yes. The principle change is that I would not be able to do this trip today because there has been a tremendous amount of damming of the small rivers – dam after dam after dam. Not big dams, but small holding dams.

KS: You could not do this trip again even if you wished?

SVB: I reckon it would take twice the amount of time due to all the portage around obstacles.

KS: In 1988 what were the main sources of degradation of the river?

SVB: Intense deforestation in the north. People were deforesting huge sections of the watershed. Big farming complexes were hiring hilltribes to till the land and plant cabbages etc. They were using pesticides and fertilizers... There was no enforcement of any regulation along it. The downstream end of town was always the garbage dump. It was like, 'Once the problem is out of my sight, then it doesn't exist anymore.' As high as people live along the river there's pollution, whether it's phosphates or phosphate-based laundry soap, or just a long-established habit of throwing away anything. There is no garbage collection in the hills. And let's not ignore dead dogs. There's a tremendous number of those out there.

KS: Having completed the journey, what in retrospect, did you find out about yourself?

SVB: That I'm somewhat obsessive. Maybe it was my own experience in the past that when I had thrown up my hands at something that further down the line it got to the point where I said, 'With a bit more perseverance, you might have prevailed, but you'll never know now.' I kind of tossed in the towel, but experience teaches you that it is really in the disasters that you dine out later. These are the things you remember. If it goes like clockwork and it's a seamless journey, what do you talk about when you get back? But by halfway through the journey I thought, 'Yeh, I'm going to make it. Most of the time I'm enjoying myself' and the downsides you can usually blame on the heat or on the fact you're extremely tired and you've just got to keep shoveling water.

- * Van Beek estimates the journey cost him 15,000 baht, of which 5,500 baht was for the boat.
- ** *Slithering South* by Steve van Beek is available in paperback in Asia Books for 495 baht.

Streets Ahead in Hanoi

Story by Richard S. Ehrlich
Photos by Mick Elmore

Trendy shops packed with illegal compact disks by Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, Sarah McLachlan and other popular singers are doing a roaring black market business. Thousands of ornate, arm-length, Vietnamese opium pipes, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, bone, etched dragons and other decorative flourishes, are produced in such quantity that they are sold in souvenir shops throughout Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and elsewhere.

"Hanoi's latest culinary attraction" is The Suzie Wong Bar with its politically incorrect slogan: "Don't Wing when you could be Wong...delicious Chinese food...ambient bar atmosphere [and the] daughter of Suzie Wong."

Hanoi is the capital of one of the world's few remaining communist regimes, but it is trying to cash in. The upside to Vietnam's market strategy is a blossoming renaissance among artisans making

"My father was a soldier fighting against the Americans, but now all that is in the past."

high quality silk clothing, hand-painted lacquerware, diverse silver jewelry and other handicrafts.

Countless small shops have been turned into galleries offering modern paintings, albeit mostly bland derivatives of European works. The paintings rarely, if ever, include Vietnam's darker side, such as the war or poverty. Nevertheless, some works fetch high prices among buyers in Paris and New York.

Elsewhere in Hanoi, cute boutiques display eccentric, witty or daring styles of clothing, sculpture and other items. Family-run hotels and restaurants line many streets. The startlingly low prices for merchandise and services is indicative of the low wages paid to workers who underpin Vietnam's patchwork attempt

Urban jobs, or return to the country



The trading instinct

to embrace capitalism.

Many foreign investors who rushed into Vietnam during boom years a decade ago have since gone bust, or drastically scaled down in a struggle to survive. Bank of America, which arrived in Vietnam in 1993, pulled out earlier this year.

Foreign investors cite corruption, red tape and a lack of infrastructure as the main reasons why Vietnam remains one of the poorest nations on earth. The downside includes pirated goods openly advertised in prime-location shops which sell nothing else.

For example, the "Space CD, VCD, DVD" shop on touristy Bao Khanh Street near the exquisite Lake of the Restored Sword, is a well-lit room displaying three walls papered with reprints of foreign compact disc covers. A young saleswoman politely hands all customers a thick, loose-leaf binder alphabetically listing hundreds of titles, including the Grateful Dead's "American Beauty" and Tom Waits "Mule Variations." Music CDs come individually wrapped in a clear plastic sleeve behind a color photocopy of the original CD's artwork. Price: 10,000 dong, or 66 U.S. cents.

"I've been looking all over for this CD," exclaimed a delighted Australian tourist, who bought a handful of music discs, including one by Blur. While she was paying, an emaciated, elderly man stood in the shop's door, vainly gesturing for spare change. Across the street, other shops offered the same CD covers on their walls, and the same loose-leaf binders full of CD titles. The scene is repeated all over Hanoi and other main cities. Freedom of piracy, however, has its limits.

Hanoi proudly displays communism's hammer and sickle on the streets, in government offices and at official venues. For many citizens, those symbols mean a relentless hammering out of turgid propaganda and a smothering of political dissent. The print and broadcast media is tightly controlled. Sanitized, mundane reportage about local and national events deaden the newspapers and airwaves. Sensational tabloids fill the remaining vacuum.

In-depth analysis of world events is sketchy, though Vietnamese reporters did show up in Pakistan to report the beginning of the U.S.-led bombardment of Afghanistan. A tamer version of that war appeared on Hanoi's sidewalks in the form of a cheap, GameBoy-style computer toy called "Laden vs. USA," which came illustrated with a photo of the World Trade Center exploding in flames.

The hand-held game, made in China, also shows a photograph of a smiling, white-turbaned Osama bin Laden and a scowling U.S. President George W. Bush. A similar shallow fixation on celebrities appears in local publications. A grinning Britney Spears, clad in a tight red dress, adorned the recent magazine cover of Tiep Thi and Gia Dinh — or Marketing and Family — which is read by parents and others seeking advice about what products are worth purchasing.

The Vietnam News, meanwhile, reported how Jane Fonda helped dedicate a home for unwed mothers in the U.S. state of Georgia in mid-April. Ms. Fonda is warmly remembered by many Vietnamese communists. In August, 1972, during the U.S.-Vietnam War, she arrived in the capital and, in a Radio Hanoi broadcast, hailed Vietnamese "who, when American planes are bombing their city, become such good fighters".

Today, most discussion of the U.S.-Vietnam War is muted in Hanoi. But in a surprising outburst in mid-April, the foreign ministry said former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was responsible for



A story of mixed fortunes

the death and destruction which occurred in the war which ended 27 years ago.

"We hold that as a key official who played an important role in the U.S. power apparatus at the time the United States was carrying out its invasive war in Vietnam, Mr. Kissinger has to take responsibility for the suffering and losses brought by this war



upon the Vietnamese people," the foreign ministry said in a statement without elaborating.

Colonial past apparent

Hanoi's radio and television usually beam a more peaceful message. In a recent TV programme, five young Vietnamese men dressed entirely in white sang Backstreet Boys' songs in their best English. Young women sang Celine Dion. The TV also broadcast Vietnamese singing plaintive Russian tunes translated into Vietnamese, to entertain families watching at supper time.

"Russia was a good friend of Vietnam, and is still a good friend," said a boat owner enjoying the show. "Russia helped us during the war against America and then helped us with business and trade. I graduated in Russian language at Hanoi University in 1981.

"My father was a soldier fighting against the Americans, but now all that is in the past."

Communist solidarity between Hanoi and Moscow collapsed along with the Soviet Union. During the 1990s, Russian aid dwindled to a trickle. A statue of the late Russian leader Vladimir Lenin stands in a park overlooking Hanoi's Dien Bien Phu Street, across from a military garrison.

But Hanoi's younger generation is more interested in studying English and finding an Internet cafe than debating dialectics. In response, the authorities erected firewalls to block the country's 150,000 Internet users from accessing various e-mail addresses and web sites — especially sites run by U.S.-based groups demanding democracy in Vietnam.

"I'm studying computers," said a young waitress, holding out a plate of grilled fish in a middle-class restaurant. "I work here during the day and study in the evening. But I don't know if I can find computer work because Vietnam is very poor. 'If I don't find work with computers here soon, I'll have to go back to my family's home in the countryside."

Richard S. Ehrlich is a Bangkok-based special correspondent for The Washington Times and international media who first went to Vietnam in 1989. He has reported from Asia for the past 24 years. His web site is ehrllich.tripod.com/news.html

Imtiaz Muqbil assesses how 9/11 impacted travel flows based on the latest arrival figures from the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA)

How the Travel World Changed Post 9/11

The events of 9/11 have turned travel flows to and within the Pacific Asia region inside out. An analysis of visitor arrival trends in the first half of 2002 over the same period of 2001 shows such sharp shifts and turns that virtually no visitor arrival target or marketing plan could have met expectations, with the possible exception of markets such as Russia, China, India and Korea.

There is little doubt that travel patterns are set to become much more short-haul and intra-regional as people stay closer to home, reduce their advance booking periods and the number of days spent abroad.

A clearly emerging pattern is that countries most affected by declines were those related to 'image problems'. Countries and territories least affected are Thai-

land, China, New Zealand and Hong Kong. Other countries such as Australia are being affected by airline access and visa requirements.

With another war looming in the Middle East, further swings in travel patterns can be expected. Marketing planners are set to face major problems especially because there is no certainty which airline routes will be discontinued at short notice. Other related problems like visa requirements will further impact marketing campaigns.

Here is an analysis of inbound and outbound trends in the first half of 2002 over the same period of 2001.

Outbound to the Pacific Asia region
US departures to Pacific Asia were badly affected as a result of 9/11. However, arriv-

als to China were up 30% and New Zealand 7.3%, indicating that destinations perceived as 'safe' are getting topmost priority. Nepal was also badly affected, possibly due to the Maoist insurgency.

German departures were down by 8% with Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Nepal and the Maldives being among the worst affected.

French departures were down nearly 5% with more or less the same countries being affected.

Russian departures were up 5% with the big winners being Cambodia, Maldives and Thailand, the latter two primarily because of the increased Russian charter business in the winter season. In fact, the Russian market is up nearly 19% over 2000 figures, showing great resilience.

The Chinese outbound market grew

Thailand's image as a stable destination free of internal political strife has served it well.



Mekong-region destinations are doing well

by a strong 37.2%. Big volumes are being generated across the board, with the only declines being to Nepal, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, Cambodia and Indonesia. The decline to Indonesia might change with the announcement that Garuda Indonesia is to launch new flights to Shanghai in November.

Inbound into the Pacific Asia region
China is the clear winner with a 13.8% increase in arrivals excluding those from Hong Kong and Macau. Major growth markets have been Japan, Korea and the US.

Malaysia is hurting, with a 8.4% decline in arrivals total after a 32% increase in the first half of 2001 over 2000. The only markets that grew were Saudi Arabia, India, China (PRC), Russia, Bangladesh and Kuwait.

Singapore's visitor arrivals were down 1.8%. Its major saving grace was China, which generated both volume and growth, up 43% to 336,057.

Thailand's image as a stable destina-

tion free of internal political strife has served it well with a 6.4% increase. While a few important markets such as the US and Japan have declined, others such as Russia, Vietnam, China and Malaysia are growing strongly. Thailand is one of the few Pacific Asia destinations reporting continuing increases year on year.

Within the Mekong region, Cambodia and Myanmar are reporting nearly identical increases in arrivals of 1.2%. Although Myanmar had an earlier start in tourism promotion, Cambodia has overtaken it in number of arrivals (144,069 vs 105,315).

Forecasts and conclusions

Everything now depends on whether or not another war breaks out in the Middle East. Assuming that it does, everything will depend on how long it lasts and the subsequent impact on oil prices, currencies, stock markets, exports and other indicators of economic conditions.

The impact on the airline industry will be carefully watched, especially on the many emerging secondary airlines. Divided by large tracts of water, the Pacific Asia region relies on airlines to carry up to 80% of visitor traffic.

Overall, it would be safe to assume that travel flows to the Pacific Asia region from the Middle East, Europe and North America will be affected. The Chinese, Indian and Korean markets should continue to generate volume, compensating for what is expected to be a continued decline in Japanese outbound.

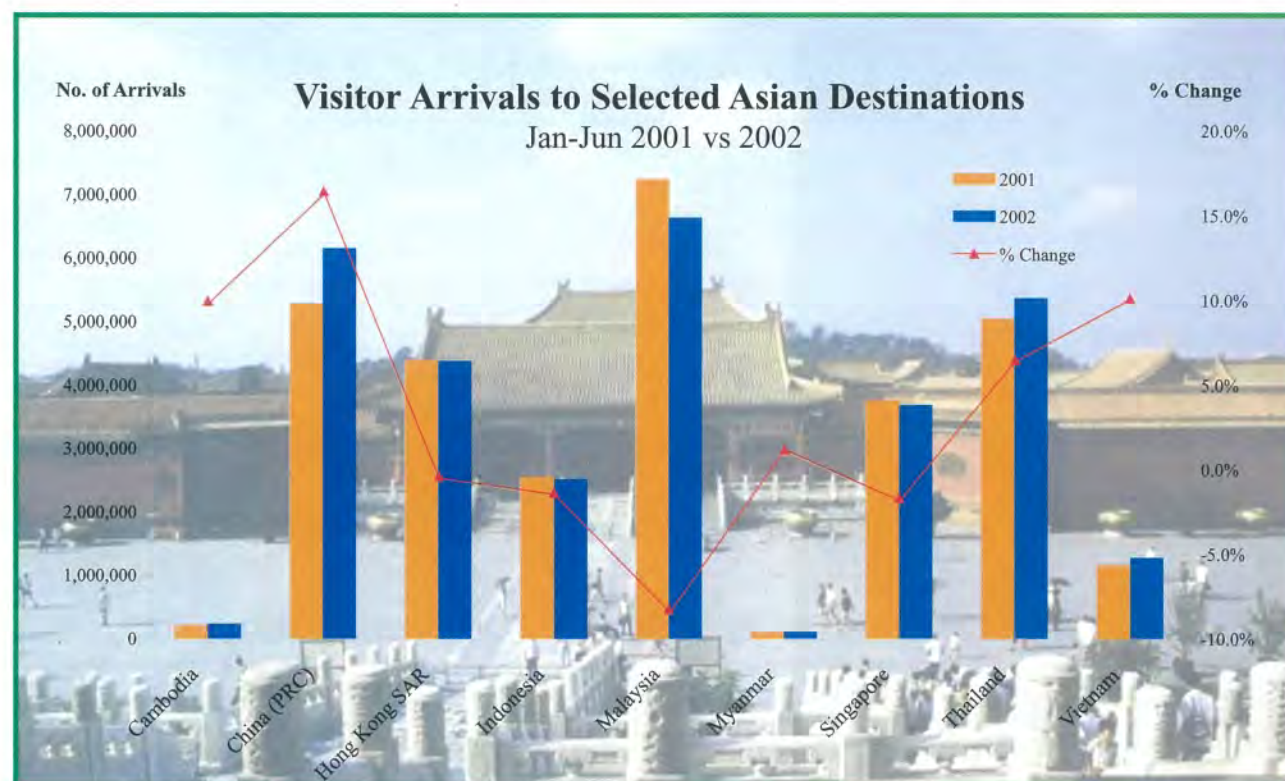
Journalists can receive a full version of this report by contacting the Pacific Asia Travel Association's Strategic Information Centre.
E-mail: johnk@pata.th.com.



The 51-year old Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), headquartered in Bangkok, is the recognized authority on Pacific Asia travel and tourism. PATA provides marketing, research and educational opportunities to a membership of government tourist offices, airlines, hotels, travel agencies, tour operators and related companies. PATA's mission is to enhance the growth, value and quality of Pacific Asia travel and tourism for the benefit of its membership. For further information visit www.pata.org. Or e-mail communications@pata.th.com.

TEN HOT TRAVEL TRENDS

- 1) Cut-price, late bookings online
- 2) More frequent but shorter holidays
- 3) Growth of trendy hotels for the under 40s - Hard Rock, "M"
- 4) Paperless airline tickets and visas
- 5) Soft adventure by day; comfortable hotel by night
- 6) Thriftier corporate travelers
- 7) Demand for low-cost, no-frills airlines
- 8) Ecotourism, scuba, adventure, health tourism
- 9) Expedia, Priceline and Travelocity to expand Asia Pacific presence
- 10) Destinations to watch: Thailand, Vietnam, China. Markets to watch: Korea, China, India.



Eight Days in Ho Chi Minh

In January 2002, the Rex Hotel in Ho Chi Minh City was the venue for the first IMMF Photojournalism Workshop in Vietnam.



TRAN VU NGHI

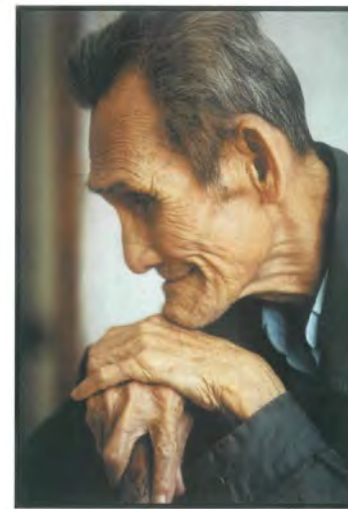


TRAN TIEN DUNG

Funds raised at a highly successful London auction of donated photographs had made the Workshop possible. Associated Press, Canon and Epson (Dong Nam) provided a range of equipment. Kodak donated film and covered processing costs, and Coca Cola (South East Asia) gave funds, refreshments and photographers' jackets.

The cast list was impressive. The tutors were Tim Page, Horst Faas, James Nachtwey, Gary Knight, and Charles Dharapak. Under the direction of Elizabeth Gallin as managing editor, 28 Vietnamese students, representing print media from across Vietnam, produced a photographic record of 'Eight Days in Ho Chi Minh City.' Individual assignments included such diverse topics as mentally handicapped children, FIFA World Cup Arrival, and malaria. The resulting 14,500 photographs, plus some 10,000 digital images, constitute a fascinating insight on the city from the Vietnamese perspective.

The tutors, with their collective wealth of experience, added their own insights. It was rewarding to see the students' progress as they absorbed new ideas. For most of the photographers it was their first opportunity to experiment with long or zoom lenses and digital cameras. However it was not just techni-



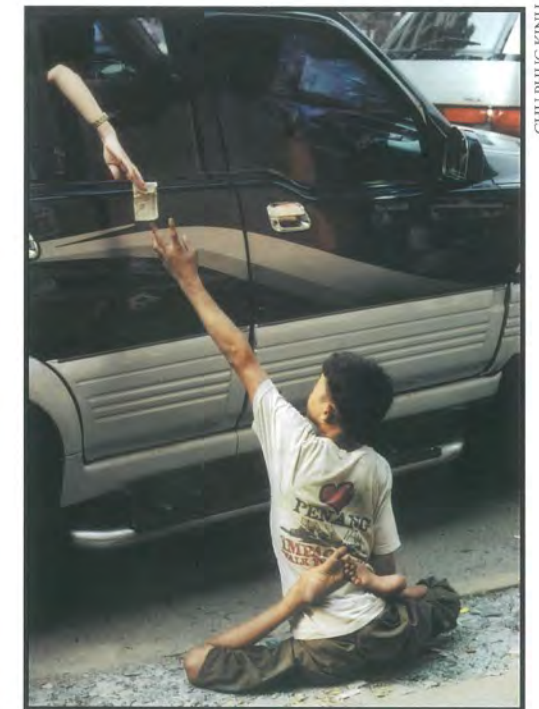
NGUYEN VIET THANH



NGUYEN HOAI LINH



PHAM HOAI NAM



CHU PHUC KINH

cal issues such as lenses, light and composition that presented a challenge. The students were encouraged to experiment with angles rather than just take a simple 'head on' shot, and to penetrate the meaning of their subject. "Think with your head. Take with your heart. Always follow your subject" advised James Nachtwey.

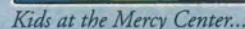
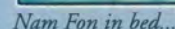
The Workshop was a gratifying experience for the tutors, each of whom did a presentation on various aspects of photojournalism. "It was a great reward for me to see how, within a few days, photographers who had initially produced dull and unimaginative pictures picked up our ideas and suggestions, and came back with attractive or meaningful images" said Horst Faas.

Furthermore, it was an enriching experience for the students. In a thank-you speech at the end, Nguyen Hoai Linh said "These eight days will play an important part in our careers." Tran Duc Tai wrote that he and many of his colleagues considered the Workshop to have been "an historic event of Vietnamese photojournalism."

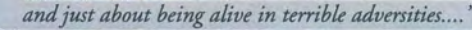
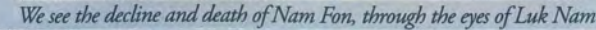
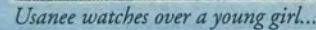
The IMMF plan to run further Workshops in the region. — Sheila Brown, IMMF Trustee. E-mail: immf@loxinfo.co.th



DINH THI THU THUY



Nam Fon at the funeral of a little girl called Sarai...



Auction to Help Aids Kids

Paintings by Indian artist Rupali will be on display at the Club from November 1. Some of the paintings will be auctioned with proceedings going to the Support the Children Foundation, an NGO working with children affected by HIV and AIDS.



Artist Rupali, says of her home country, India: "It is a country that has a romantic, musical, and poetic side to it... it rubbed off on me. I began by writing poetry when I was 13 years old, and sometimes to give it life I would sketch the contents of that poem."

"My idea of creating life on the canvas is triggered by any ordinary sight, which touches me in an extraordinary way. I use strokes of bold and vibrant colors, which gives the theme energy."

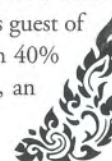
The exhibition will be in two phases: "AIDS" and "TRANCE." Rupali says of the Aids disaster: "There is hope for light, a sight of better life...through proper education we can begin to solve this situation...everyone just needs a hand to point out the right direction."

Of the "TRANCE" collection she says: "This exhibition portrays human moods and emotions through musicians and dancers depicted in vivacious, vibrant oil paintings...music and dance seem to be with us throughout our lives in some way or another."

"In different cultures there are sayings such as: 'When scared - sing!' or 'Let's celebrate - let's dance and sing.' Rupali says her artistic principle is 'seize the day!'"

"AIDS" and "TRANCE" opens on November 1 at 7:30pm at the Club with Dr. Prakong Vithayasai of Support the Children Foundation as guest of honor. Paintings from the "AIDS" collection will be auctioned with 40% of the proceedings going to the Support the Children Foundation, an NGO working with children affected by HIV and Aids.

Rupali can be contacted at rupali@loxinfo.co.th.



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my point of view

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