

Phuket Gazette

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‘EVERY YEAR TWO TO FIVE PER CENT OF ENDANGERED SPECIES DIE’

CASH FOR TRASH

■ B800K yearly budget set aside to clean up the southern provinces of Thailand

By Kongleaphy Keam

COASTAL provinces in Thailand have been given a budget for marine debris management after Thailand was ranked as the sixth worst marine polluter in the world by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

The UNEP is an agency of the United Nations that coordinates its environmental activities and assists developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and practices.

Region 6 of the Marine and Coastal Resources Department (DMCR) received an 800,000-baht budget from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment for marine trash collection in Phuket, Phang Nga and Ranong.

Laem Sai Beach in Phuket was the first to see action. On February 25, 156 officers, volunteer divers, fishermen, hotel staff, boat operators and students collected nearly 382 kilograms of wood, fishing nets, plastic and other types of trash from the beach (about 100kg) and the rest from the sea.

According to UNEP, about 1,800 tonnes of trash is added to the sea every year, of which 38 per cent is plastic. Thailand is believed to contribute at least a ton of marine trash to the worldwide total, of which 66 per cent is generated from man-made activities, such as tourism.

“Marine debris affects the whole ecosystem, including marine life and particularly endangered species. Every year, about 2 to 5 per cent of endangered species die from consuming trash,” said Suchat Rattana-ruengsri, head of DMCR region 6.

“If the sea is polluted, the fish will also be affected. This will lead to a reduction in the number of fish caught and negatively impact the fishing industry.

“Additionally, it impacts tourism – if the sea is not pristine and all the coral is dead, tourists will not want to visit anymore. Thailand generates more than 100 billion baht



Officials have vowed to closely monitor the cleaning project, and also follow up after two months to gauge its success and reinforce rules if needed. Photo: Gazette file

per year from marine tourism, so this would be a huge loss for the economy,” he added.

The environmental ministry has announced that all coastal provinces will be provided an annual budget for at least five years, in order to boost enforcement of trash management and improve the dismal status of Thailand as a polluter of the sea.

DMCR Region 6 is currently focusing on two projects. The first is a proactive project to reduce the amount of marine debris by preventing littering, and the second will focus on the collection and proper disposal of marine debris that already exists.

The trash reduction project will focus on three islands: Koh Kai Nai, Koh Kai Nok and Koh Kai Nui in Phang Nga.

At present, businesses and visitors at Koh Kai collectively consume 500 foam boxes, 700 plastic bottles, 600 glass bottles, 2,000 plastic cups and 400 cans on a daily

basis, weighing about 40kg in total.

“We will start the project with 45 shops and educate them about substituting plastic and other pollutants with more environmentally friendly, reusable materials,” said Mr Suchat. “The project started on March 1. We will closely monitor it and follow up two months later to gauge success and reinforce the rules if need be.”

Pru Nai Municipality in Phang Nga has issued new laws regarding trash management, with a fine of 1,000-2,000 baht for those who do not comply. A certificate of recognition will be given to those who successfully participate in the project.

After the clean up efforts at Laem Sai, the next activities scheduled for Phuket, Phang Nga and Ranong are March 9 at Koh Racha Noi, March 16 at Baan Som Chong Thai in Phang Nga, and April 9 at Sai Dam Beach in Ranong.

British thief nabbed after a two-year looting spree

A SERIAL British burglar who had made a living stealing from locals and foreigners alike on the island has finally landed himself behind bars. Police have asked his victims to come forward and collect their valuables.

Story on Page 3

BUSINESS



Saving 10 per cent of your monthly income will make for a brighter future.

Page 5

PROPERTY



A look at the latest trends and statistics in Phuket's hospitality industry.

Page 7

LIFE&STYLE



Neem is known in India as the ‘village pharmacy’, due to its wide range of medicinal properties.

Page 9

LOCAL NEWS
Briefly

Teen has to pay up for road rage incident

AN 'ANGRY teen' seen kicking, screaming and pointing at a Honda Jazz on a video last week in Kamala was charged and ordered to compensate the car owner.

Gazette reporters contacted Capt Prasert Thongprom of Kamala Police to follow up on the ugly incident that took place on February 25.

The parents of the teen brought their son in to the Kamala Police Station to face the consequences of his actions.

"Negotiations between the car owner and the teen have led to a compromise – neither will be filing any charges against the other. The teen, however, will be paying for the damages to the car," confirmed the captain.

He was charged with reckless driving and fined for not wearing a helmet and not carrying a driver's licence.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Six-wheeler collides with tour bus

THE driver of a tour bus in Phuket was injured after the front of his vehicle was ripped

Cement mixer gets entangled in wirey web



A cement truck passing through a soi in Rawai became entangled in a web of overhead electric cables on February 27. The 51-year-old driver, Manot Sorkun, reportedly did not notice what had happened and kept on driving, uprooting two power poles, one of which landed on a pick-up truck parked nearby. The pick-up driver, Kojanat Pitakwongsorn, had only just parked when the second pole landed on his vehicle. He narrowly escaped and was a bit shaken up due to the incident. The cement truck driver was charged with reckless driving and causing damage to public and other property. A significant part of Rawai also suffered at least a two-hour blackout due to the incident. Photo: Winai Sarot

off in a head-on collision with a six-wheeler on February 27.

Capt Ekkarat Chatpai of Wichit Police arrived at about 2:30pm at the rain-drenched Muang Thong junction with Kusoldharm Foundation rescue workers.

"Rescue workers used Jaws-of-Life to pull Saman Pansee out from the wreckage as his

legs were stuck under the console inside the bus. He was taken to Vachira Phuket Hospital," Capt Ekkarat told the *Gazette*.

The bus was heavily damaged from the front, while the truck, damaged on its rear end, careened to the side of the road. The truck driver sustained minor injuries. – *Winai Sarot*

Brit dies on snorkeling trip

A BRITISH man died on a chartered yacht anchored near Koh Racha on February 26.

Lt Chanat Hongstichaiyakul of Chalong Police received a call from the yacht at about 1:30pm.

"Graham Weds lay unconscious on the floor. He had a wound on his head and was not breathing," said Lt Chanat.

Rescue workers arrived by boat and administered CPR, but the man remained unresponsive. He was pronounced dead at about 2:30pm.

"He and his friends stopped at Plub Pla Beach for snorkeling," said Lt Chanat. "Mr Weds went back to the yacht while everyone else was still in the water and was later discovered on the yacht floor," he added.

He is believed to have fainted due to the heat and suffered a head injury when he hit the floor.

– *Winai Sarot*

Elderly local found hanged

A LOCAL man was found hanging by a nylon rope in his house in Thalang on February 23.

Pracha Kruepanich, 96, had been discharged from Vachira Phuket Hospital six days prior to the incident and was believed to have been stressed by health issues.

"We found Mr Pracha's body hanging by a rope tied to a metal hook at the back of his home in Baan Muang Mai, Thepkrasattri sub-district," said Capt Chatree Choowichein of Thalang Police.

Mr Pracha's wife, Waraporn Kruepanich, said that she was in the front of the house while her husband was in the back.

"Ms Waraporn said her husband had suffered through many illnesses, which may have caused him to end his life," said the captain. "She had no suspicions of foul play."

– *Winai Sarot*

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British burglar arrested

By Kritsada Mueanhawong

AN ELUSIVE British serial burglar, who has been on the run from police for at least two years, was arrested on February 23 in connection with another series of burglaries in Phuket.

Charlie Machin, 54, was apprehended at his rental house in Cherng Talay, with 67 items stolen from at least three homes. He was previously wanted for robbing a Swedish man's home in Kata of about 200,000 baht in valuables, in March 2015.

At that time, police had collected CCTV footage from cameras at the victim's house, which showed Mr Machin breaking into the house. However, the Phuket Immigration Office could find no record of anyone with that name having arrived in Phuket.

"On February 22, a Belarus national Andrei Kruhlik filed a complaint regarding a robbery at his house in Cherng Talay," said Cherng Talay Police Superintendent Serm Kwannimit.

"We checked the house and questioned others to find more evidence. One of the neighbors told us that they had seen a sus-



Machin (left) eluded police for two years. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

picious looking foreigner on a black and red bike parked in front of Mr Kruhlik's house. Police used CCTV footage and GPS location on one of the stolen iPhones to find him at his home," he added.

Police initially seized two iPhones, an Ipad, a Canon camera, a Macbook, two wallets, four passports, a pack of keys, a buffalo drive, a bag and a Yamaha bike, as well as the equipment he used to break into homes.

A further search of his house revealed 53 other stolen items, including watches, laptops,

phones, cameras, jewelry and glasses, among other items.

Mr Machin confessed to breaking into Mr Kruhlik's house as well as several others in Kamala, Thalang and Sakoo. He said that he stored the items in his house until they were sold off one by one. He was charged with theft and taken to Cherng Talay Police Station.

"We have already informed the British Embassy about this. We have also informed all other police stations so other victims can contact us to check for their belongings," said Col Serm.

Sea gypsies prevent house demolition



About 50-100 officials were present there. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

OFFICIALS plan to file complaints of land encroachment against Rawai sea gypsies after more than 200 of them gathered to prevent the demolition of two houses in Rawai on February 23.

"Suthep and Thawee Mookdee hold a chanote for this land," said Legal Execution Department officer Chanothai Sukpen.

Mr Suthep says the land belonged to his ancestors and they had originally rented it out to the sea gypsies, who built their houses there.

"We wished to stop renting to them after they were not maintaining it well, but they would not leave. We filed a court case and followed all the legal pro-

cesses to remove them from the land. After an eight-year court case, we were finally granted victory," said Mr Suthep.

In July last year, Legal Execution Department officers put a court notice here, but no action had been taken until now.

At least 50-100 officers from Chalong Police and Civil Defense Volunteers were also present at the scene to prevent any unexpected violence.

"This is a court order, but they have no regard for that. We have filed two other complaints against them for land encroachment and for preventing officers from performing their duty," said Mr Suthep.

- Kritsada Mueanhawong

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Important steps to financial freedom

Finance

By David Mayes

IT REALLY doesn't matter if you make a little money or tonnes. If you can't master this very important step you will never achieve financial freedom. It sounds all too simple in theory, yet in practice so many people have trouble staying disciplined.

The step I am talking about is committing to setting aside a minimum of 10 per cent of all income you make and putting it into long term savings.

Today's discussion is not about what you do with this money, but simply getting you to understand how crucial it is to your future and those of your loved ones. Most people have no idea how big the trade-off is when they squander money in 'today's currency', or what an economist would call the opportunity cost of consuming non-essentials in lieu of investing. Because of the effects of compounding, an apple eaten today has cost you the equivalent of many apples in the future. This effect gets exponential, and over longer time frames the apples eaten today becomes holidays and luxury cars foregone in the future.

Let's use coffee as an example since I don't want you to go and



Simply replacing a daily 'fancy' cup of coffee with a store-bought bag of coffee beans could have a remarkable long-term impact on your present and future finances. Photo: Pexels

skip that apple. It's best to keep the doctor away, although that's a discussion for another day. Let's assume you have a 100 baht coffee at a fancy coffee shop on the way into work every day so you don't have to wake up a half an hour early to make your own at home.

If you buy a bag from the shop it might cost you 10 baht per cup, saving you 90 baht per working day. Let's call this US\$3. Multiply this by 20 working days and we can say it is US\$60 per month or rounded off to US\$700 per year. Now let's assume a 5

per cent average annual return per year, which could be guaranteed if you were paying down debts like a mortgage or student loan at this rate.

If you skipped your fancy coffee and used the savings to pay down your mortgage over its 30-year term, we are talking about US\$50,000 gained from a very small effort every day. Keep in mind less than half of this was the actual dollar amount of what you forewent in short term consumption, the rest is the magical effect of compounding.

Now you don't need to skip

luxuries like fancy coffee if you can be disciplined to save 10% or more of our income every month, but the example just goes to show how very small changes in our daily habits can add up to significant chunks of cash. If you can save even more, what you get back in the future is even greater, or you can achieve financial freedom and stop working even sooner.

Now we shouldn't live like paupers either since we could be hit by a tuk-tuk and die tomorrow, so we need to find a balance that works for us in this trade-

off. Most people err on the side of over-consuming now, so a systematic percentage followed with strict discipline is the best approach. This way if your income goes up or down you just keep it in the same percentage and adjust your lifestyle accordingly.

Sadly, most people adjust their lifestyle to increase to 100 per cent of any additional income earned, despite the fact that we quickly adjust to new lifestyle levels and our overall happiness reverts to where it previously was.

We usually even increase our stress as the thought of going back to a previous lifestyle that we once were happy with creates a fear that didn't exist when we were there in the first place. It's much better to increase our means greatly first and then slowly increase our lifestyle. By committing to saving a fixed percentage of your income, you will do this automatically as long as you can stay disciplined. Do your future self a favor. Trust me, you will thank yourself.

David Mayes, MBA, lives in Phuket and provides health, wealth, and life coaching to expatriates around the globe. He has been involved in financial markets for 15 years and specializes in tax efficiency and UK pension transfers. He can be reached at lifeisamazingthailand@gmail.com

EGCO funds seven new power projects

ELECTRICITY Generating (EGCO) Group has budgeted more than 30 billion baht this year for seven power projects both in Thailand and overseas, according to company president Chanin Chaonirattisai.

Six of the projects are under construction and scheduled to start operations between this year and 2019, including three small power producer projects – Xayaburi in Laos and San Buenaventura and Masinloc Unit 3 in the Philippines.

Share transfers for the Salak and Darajat geothermal power plants in Indonesia are also in progress and expected to be complete this quarter. The budget does not include new projects EGCO Group is attempting to acquire or four other overseas projects under development.

– *The Nation*



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Phuket Gazette

To 'protect' and to 'serve'

THE recent incarceration of a Russian tourist for the heinous crime of feeding breadcrumbs to fish is just the latest in a long line of embarrassments for Thai law enforcement and our tourism industry.

The story made some international headlines, with such mass media heavyweights as TASS and the UK-based tabloid the *Daily Mail* re-reporting after it was first reported by the *Gazette*.

While reports created a feeding frenzy of their own in social media, it is perhaps fortunate that international reporting of the incident was limited.

The tale of Ms Smirnova's travails in Thailand certainly has the "that could have been anyone – including me" narrative that is known to attract readers. How many among us have not engaged in similar behavior in the past?

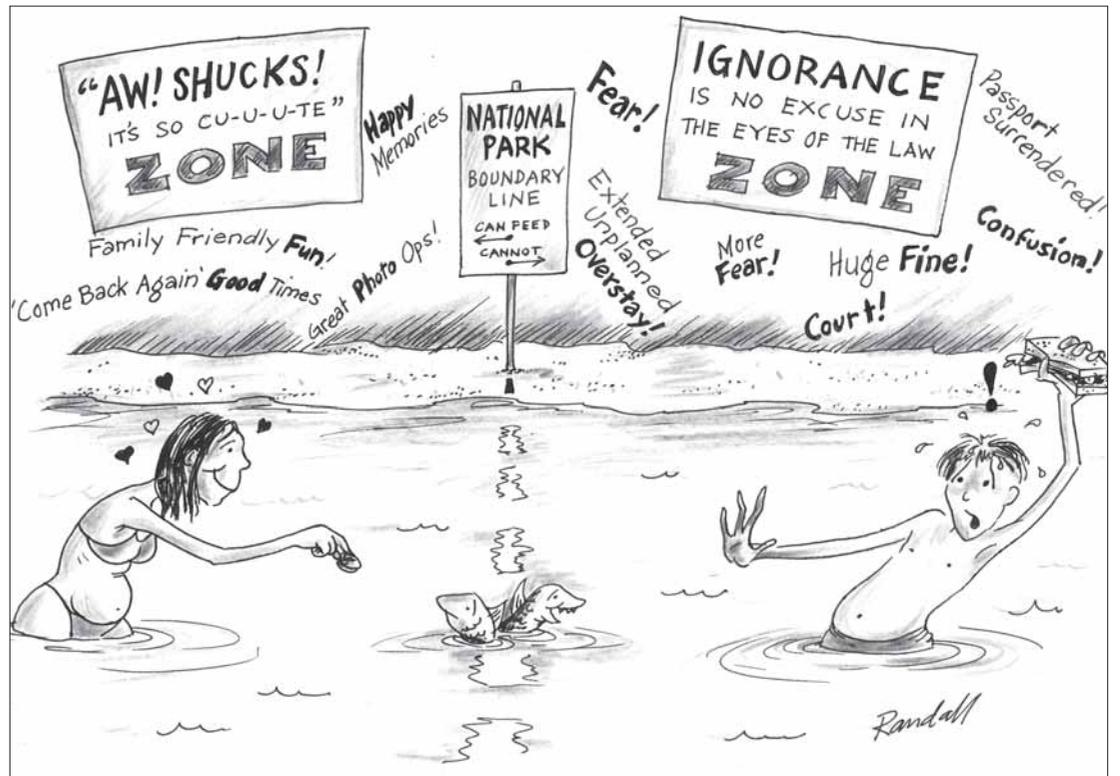
Perhaps this report was lost in the expanding universe of propaganda, as well as more eyebrow-raising official announcements, such as the recent proclamation by a law enforcement official in Pattaya that there is no prostitution in that seaside town. How's that for an alternative fact?

Coming back to the issue at hand, officials at the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) need to do a much better job of ensuring that tourists, and especially tour operators, are aware of existing laws that have been put into effect to help save what little remains of our once-abundant coral reef ecosystems.

Most tourists who feed fish are not only unaware that the practice is harmful to fish populations in the long run, but are also clueless to the fact that they are putting themselves at serious legal risk. The fact that other foreign tourists have faced similar treatment by DMCR officials and police indicates the start of a worrying trend.

If the intention was to 'set an example', the arrest is a failure because it will not be noticed by the vast majority of future package tourist who might be tempted into similar behavior.

If the intention was to needlessly humiliate a random foreign tourist, spoil her vacation, elicit scorn and put yet another brown stain on our reputation as a tourist destination, then it was a resounding success.



Well done to the men in brown

Re: British expat burglar arrested in Phuket, Feb 24

Well done the Men in Brown. Hopefully he has fish head soup and a nice air-con room coming his way for a couple of years.

Oh, and I was joking about the air-con.

Denver Owens
Facebook

Racist entry fees are not acceptable

Re: Tourists stranded for hours as tour operators demand reduced park fees, Feb 23

What is finally being understood by tourists is the racist based entry fees are no longer acceptable.

How would Thais like to be charged 10 times the entry fee for say the CN tower in Toronto which would be approximately US\$150?

David Crammond
Facebook

Important to make sure you're legal

Re: Thai expats in America fear Trump, Feb 23

Round them up and send them home.

I'm here legally and I keep all in order to be here. Same in any country I go to.

I make sure I'm legal and abide by the laws of the host country.

Oh, and as far as the 'Sanctuary Cities' in America are concerned, I wouldn't count on

Letters to the Editor

Do you have an opinion to voice?
Email Editor@PhuketGazette.net

those either for much longer.

Mike Bergeron
Facebook

Not enough to save the environment

Re: Phuket receives B800k for marine debris management, Feb 27

They waste billions destroying the island with over building, pathetic road building etc, but can only spend a paltry 800k on recovering their marine environment on which much of their faltering tourism depends. Pathetic.

James H Miller
Facebook

Chiang Mai much more polluted than Phuket

Re: Opinion: Rethinking the power generation strategy, Feb 26

The Mae Moh coal burning power plant near Chiang Mai produces 1.6 million tonnes of sulfur dioxide yearly.

Some of this fills the Chiang Mai valley when the wind is coming from the east.

After 3 years in Chiang Mai, this is the reason we are mov-

ing to Phuket.

Alan
Gazette forum

Easily preventable, but sad ending

Re: Rescued black bear falls to death from chopper, Feb 27

A sad ending. Could easily have been prevented if there were qualified people who followed the correct procedures.

Harry
Gazette forum

Teens deserve severe punishment

Re: Video: Angry teens terrorize family after a 'beep', Feb 25

And what penalty, if any, will be handed out? When tourists are thrown in jail for giving bread to a fish? This surely warrants a more severe punishment, but let's wait and see what happens with this.

Sharky
Gazette forum

Best wishes for Phi Phi park chief

Re: Phi Phi national park chief resigns, Feb 23

Looks like he was too successful in trying to wipe out the rampant graft. As always, no prosecutions though. Get well soon.

Mister Ree
Gazette forum

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Trends in Phuket hospitality



Across the Land

By Amy Koh

BASED on C9 Hotelworks' Phuket Hotel Market Update of February 2017, total inbound passengers through Phuket International Airport in 2016 was 7,549,346, with 54 per cent from international flights and 46 per cent from domestic arrivals. This is an 18 per cent growth rate in 2016 year on year compared to 13 per cent in 2015.

Another very interesting fact is that the top five geographic source market are Mainland China, Russia, South Korea, Australia and the UK. Even though Mainland China is the top overseas source market, it has actually dropped 2 per cent in 2016 as it has been affected by a nationwide crackdown by the Thai government on zero baht tourism last year. This, however, is expected to recover in late 2017 with increased government initiative to draw in higher quality tourists from China.

Based on the figures above, have the dynamics in Phuket



Many Australian travellers have shown a preference for Bali over Phuket. Photo: Thomas Depenbusch

changed again? Are the Russians back in Phuket? The Russian ruble has recovered and strengthened against the Thai baht and that has helped the recovery with more Russians returning to Phuket (an increase of 13 per cent in 2016). The popular luxury villa rental market, where Russian clients hold the biggest segment, has yet to return to its

high since the crash of the ruble, but is slowly making its way back. A decline in European & Nordic countries arrival due to the weak Euro has also hurt the luxury villa rental market where a stay of one to three months was the norm, especially over the winter season in Europe.

Phuket used to be the choice honeymoon location for most

South Korean newlyweds and that trend seems to be making a return with an increase of 21 per cent in passenger arrivals. Australian arrivals have remained constant for the past three years, with many Australians still picking Bali over Phuket due to flight connections and heavy promotions to the island. Arrivals from the UK have increased 20 per cent

(even though the British pound has taken a dive against the Thai baht) where Phuket remains a destination of choice for many semi-retired or retired Brits fleeing the English weather for the hot, sunny weather Phuket has to offer.

In terms of global beach destinations, Phuket is third in the top five beach destinations, with Bali and Honolulu at the top and Ibiza and Maldives taking the other two spots. This is based on passenger arrivals to each of the five individual beach destinations.

'Brand Phuket' – initiated by the Phuket Hotels Association and created by global branding agency QUO – is focusing on the island's breadth of experiences, its majestic natural beauty and culturally diverse communities. The first concerted effort to define and express the island's identity as a tourist destination is welcomed not only by hoteliers, but by all businesses on the island.

Amy Koh is the sales manager of Engel & Voelkers Phuket. To contact Amy or for more information, visit www.engelvoelkers.com/en/phuket



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Unprecedented boom in ocean waste



On Deck

By Duncan Worthington

I'VE written on the topic of ocean waste before. In fact, I first wrote on the topic over 18 months ago, but it appears that little has changed.

Ocean waste is everyone's responsibility – not just divers, sailors, or swimmers, but everyone who in some way makes a living from the island of Phuket.

Phuket's lifeblood is tourism, its key assets the beaches and Andaman Sea. When they are threatened, people should sit up and take note, and more importantly, take action.

Readers have no doubt heard of the floating waste pile heading through the Gulf of Thailand. At 10km long, it's a monster and hard to ignore. Thailand's Marine Department has been out there on the high seas doing their best to break it down and clean it up. Located approximately 8km offshore, it has been no small effort from the Marine Department and they deserve credit.

But is this really the responsibility of one government department?

No doubt some will point to the fact that this 10km waste trail has come from somewhere else to Thailand, and they are, in part, right. The fact conveniently overlooked is the movements of the ocean.



A recently published report suggests that Thailand, along with four other Asian countries, generates 60 per cent of all plastic waste found in oceans today. Photo: Gerry & Bonni

For those who are unaware of this fact, oceans do move. Additionally, they are all linked. To those people blaming Thailand's waste problem on someone else, stop and look in the mirror.

Ocean Conservancy recently reported that 60 per cent of the plastic waste in the oceans comes from just five countries: China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand.

Thais live a throw away lifestyle. Food Panda, UberEats and Line Man are just some of the food delivery services available in Bangkok. Add to that

regular vendor stalls you can find anywhere in the country where a fried rice comes with three plastic bags and a polystyrene box, and that too for free.

But it's not free. There's a cost – it's called waste and it needs to be addressed at source. This requires central government and local government buy-in. Not lip service, but genuine change and leadership is required.

Ocean waste is a problem for everyone, however, with regards to the island's marine tourism, day trip tour boats, diving tours

and charter yachts are likely the most immediate source of waste into the Andaman Sea. More often than not, it's an accident – a customer knocks a plastic bottle off a table and it falls into the water; a plastic bag blows away in the wind.

Here are three simple ideas how the marine industry can help make a difference.

BAN WATER BOTTLES ON BOATS

Water bottles are a curse for the marine environment. Tour operators must provide refillable

water containers for customers. It's become a fashion statement in gyms the world over to bring your own refillable container. We must make it fashionable for marine tourists too.

BAN PLASTIC BAGS

Check tourists when they arrive and don't allow any plastic bags on the boat. This already happens in some national parks in Thailand – I have experienced it in Krabi. The same must be done for the Andaman Sea.

EDUCATE CUSTOMERS

Educate guests to throw their garbage in the relevant containers on the boat and then the boat crew dispose onshore appropriately. Have crew proactively walk around the boat asking for garbage. This is common practice on airlines, make it so on boats.

None of the above requires significant cost, they require an investment of will and time, as well as buy-in from both private and public sectors.

Duncan Worthington is a long time Phuket resident and through Infinity Communications (www.infinity-comms.com) consults to leading consumer brands, hospitality and marine clients in Thailand. In his 'spare time' he runs the marine portal www.MarineScene.asia. #OnDeckPhuket

On again, off again sun loungers on Phuket beaches

THE decision to ban or allow sun loungers on Phuket beaches has changed thrice in as many months. The Royal Thai Army on February 27 declared that sun loungers are allowed in the 10 percent zone at Patong Beach.

Army and beach management committee officials reversed of the Royal Thai Navy's ruling declaring the beds to be illegal in December last year, which itself was a reversal of Patong Mayor Chalermkluck Kebsup's decision allowing the loungers on beaches.

The same outcome is expected for other Phuket beaches, but no timeline has yet been announced.

Following the announcement, vendors at Patong Beach immediately brought dozens of loungers and other furniture down to the beach.



To be or not to be: Army allows sun loungers allowed on Patong Beach. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

Army Region 4 Deputy Commander Pornsak Poon-sawat and other officers patrolled Patong Beach to en-

sure order and safety, and also to follow up on decades-old rental bike management and parking issues along the beach

road that they had attempted to rectify earlier last month.

"We had initially decided to ban sun beds, even in the 10 per

cent zone, and only allow mattresses and umbrellas. However, that 'seems to be' posing problems for tourists, particularly older ones," said Maj Gen Pornsak.

"From what we have observed, both tourists and vendors are satisfied with this decision," he added.

The beach management committee will continue to monitor the situation and if 'all goes well', the loungers will once again become a permanent fixture on the sand.

"We have not set a limit on the number of loungers allowed. This can vary depending on the demand, but vendors have to ensure that they are placed in an orderly and appropriate fashion. Local authorities also have to keep an eye on them," said Gen Pornsak.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

The benefits of the neem plant

Gardening
By Patrick Campbell

I HAVE written in these columns before about the sadao tree, or *azadirachta indica*, which we gardeners in Thailand know as neem. But my interest was re-kindled by a reader from Hua Hin who wrote to say he was “looking for a supplier of neem from the sadao tree”. I presume he wants to use it as an organic pesticide or maybe a specific against mosquitoes.

Neem has long been used by Thais, even though in 2009 there was a totally misguided attempt by authorities to ban its use as one of thirteen so-called hazardous plants. Since it was a traditional and cheap alternative to synthetic and often toxic chemicals, there was an outcry by small farmers and environmentalists. Nowadays, you can find it as an ingredient in natural insecticides, or since the tree is common in Thailand, you can prepare your own concoction.

The neem grows readily in tropical areas with a minimum temperature of 20 degrees. Hardy and shallow rooted, it



Neem plants have powerful antiseptic and healing properties. Photo: Thendral Muthusami

needs little attention. The one in my garden is so vigorous that it needs pruning to keep it manageable. Its leaves are attractively pinnate and rarely drop unless there is a sudden cessation of the water supply. A member of the mahogany genus, it is a valuable timber, fodder and shade tree. Sprays of flowers on the tips of branches and fruits which ripen to yellow make it ornamental as well as utilitarian.

More importantly, and since they are bitter and astringent to the taste, the flowers, foliage and seeds have powerful antiseptic and healing properties. In parts of Southeast Asia, they are used in cooking, both to impart a distinctive flavor and to cleanse the digestive system. Traditionally, the plant has been used as a remedy for diabetes, as a natural worming agent, and even to treat diseases with vi-

ral, bacterial or fungal origins. I recently had an Ayurvedic massage in which the leaves were used as a skin emollient.

Known in India as the ‘village pharmacy’ because of its range of properties, the sadao tree is also employed as a powerful and entirely safe source of insecticides. Thais grind up the flowers or seeds, or even boil the leaves, though boiling is likely to reduce the plants powerful

prophylactic action. Mixed with water and sprayed on crops, the liquid makes the leaves inedible to predatory insects and prevents their eggs from hatching. Since the tree is common in gardens and grows wild throughout Thailand, our readers should have no problem in finding a specimen. Neem trees can also be tracked down on Monkey Mountain in Hua Hin.

If not, all parts are available in fresh markets. And if you want to grow one, saplings are often sold in plant nurseries. It takes readily from cuttings. The oil, extracted from the seeds, and sometimes used in cosmetics, may be a more expensive proposition. But even the residue from this process, known as neem cake, is a valuable fertilizer.

What other trees, apart perhaps from the coconut, can match the neem’s value and functionality?

If you have gardening or environmental concerns, contact Patrick at drpaccampbell@gmail.com. Many of his creative and academic publications can be found at his website: [GreenGaloshes WordPress](http://GreenGaloshesWordPress.com).



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Giving it everything you've got

By Sahar Aftab Paliwala

SOPHON Pol Kaew In, or Pol, as he is better known to his friends and customers, is currently a taxi and tuk-tuk driver in Phuket and somewhat of a favorite with foreigners. Originally from Krabi, he moved to Phuket at the age of 18 more than 25 years ago.

"I came to Phuket as a young, carefree boy. I didn't know many people at the time and there weren't many foreigners here either. My first job was at Savoy Seafood restaurant near Bangla Road, which was the top-ranked seafood place in Patong. I started working as a server and stayed there for three years, before moving to Patong Merlin Hotel," says Mr Pol.

At Patong Merlin, the staff were offered an English language class, something Mr Pol took advantage of and would prove useful to him in his later years. He started out as a bus-boy and steadily moved up the ranks over the next 15 years to become a restaurant manager.

It was while working at Savoy Seafood Restaurant that Mr Pol met his wife Nattaporn.

The two got married and soon started a family together.

"After I moved to Patong Merlin and became a manager, poor work-life balance began to drastically affect my life. Even though I was doing well in my career, I didn't have much time for my family. I decided it was time to re-evaluate my life and career. It didn't seem worth it to spend all my time at work and have none left for my family," says Mr Pol.

With two young daughters and a young wife, Mr Pol searched for other jobs in hospitality, but faced the same problem each time. A chance meeting with a friend who drove a tuk-tuk planted the idea of doing the same in his mind.

"I had just bought a house and could not afford to purchase a tuk-tuk, so I refinanced my house and took out a loan to purchase one. One of my first customers were some Australians I knew from my days at the Patong Merlin. Aussies are the friendliest people I have ever worked with," he says.

"I promoted myself on Facebook and other social media platforms and also offered

tours. My customer base grew and soon, I was able to purchase a better tuk-tuk and then a car for my wife."

Ms Nattaporn supports her husband in the business and manages her schedule in a way that she is able to find time to take the kids to school and bring them back at the end of the day. Both husband and wife have a reputation of being friendly, helpful and punctual, with rave reviews and thank you notes on their Facebook pages from both tourists and expats alike.

Mr Pol does not concern himself with any 'mafia' associations or activities.

"There are both good drivers and bad drivers in Phuket. One of the biggest problems in this business is the language barrier. Sometimes customers don't understand what we're trying to say and they become confused and even angry. Other times, drivers are unable to explain the situation and this leads to conflict," he says.

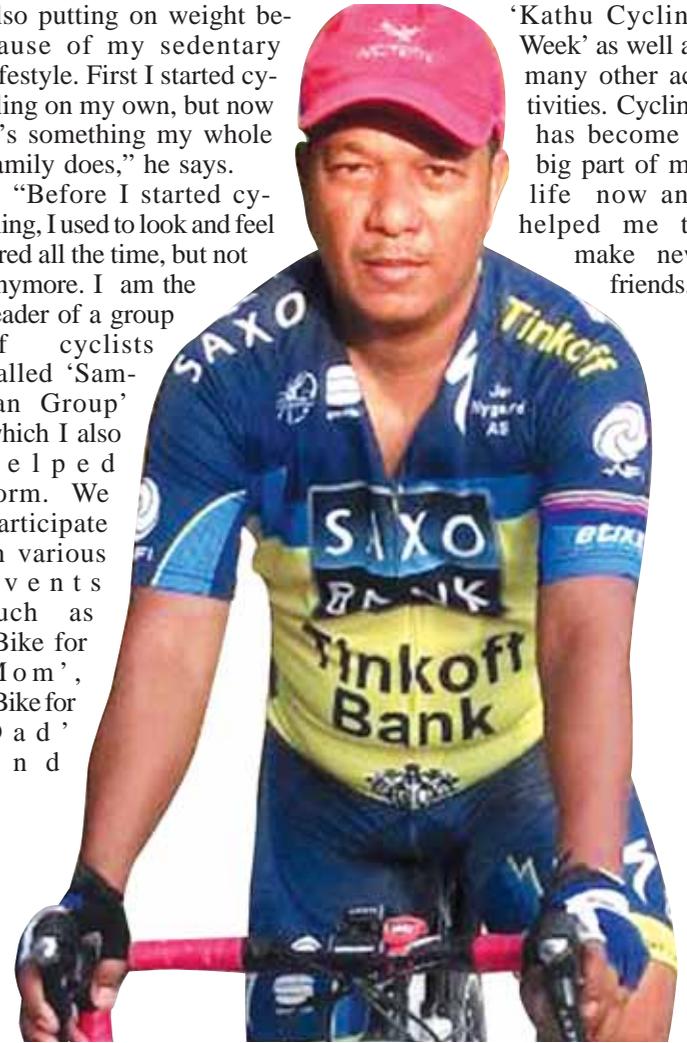
Mr Pol and his entire family are cycling enthusiasts.

"I first started cycling after a friend suggested it. I was having trouble sleeping at night and

also putting on weight because of my sedentary lifestyle. First I started cycling on my own, but now it's something my whole family does," he says.

"Before I started cycling, I used to look and feel tired all the time, but not anymore. I am the leader of a group of cyclists called 'Samran Group' which I also helped form. We participate in various events such as 'Bike for Mom', 'Bike for Dad' and

'Kathu Cycling Week' as well as many other activities. Cycling has become a big part of my life now and helped me to make new friends."





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