

EXPAT DAYS

Making a life in Thailand



by **Steve Rosse**

EXPAT DAYS: MAKING A LIFE IN THAILAND

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For Mom, Mandy, and Andy

PREFACE

In 1988 a bank holiday stranded me for three days in a grubby guesthouse in Chiang Mai. I could eat on the tab but I had only enough cash to buy two packs of cigarettes and nothing else. Desperate for something to do, I found in the small bookshelves that occupied a corner of the dining room a copy of *Venusburg Revisited*, by John Cadet. I spent that long weekend reading in my room and taking slow walks around the ancient city walls, thinking about Mr. Cadet's amazing stories of Thailand. In 1993 it was my great pleasure to track down Mr. Cadet and tell him what a joy it was to have read his book.

The stories collected in *Expat Days: Making a Life in Thailand* were written for *Phuket* magazine and *The Nation* newspaper between 1989 and 1997. The years they span, and the events they describe, were the most important in my life. I have done my best to make these stories shed light on a place that millions of tourists every year find fascinating, puzzling, and infuriating, but I'm not very concerned that a reader should learn anything from this book. I just hope the book can brighten up a rainy weekend for some traveler stuck in one of those places we all seem to get stuck in

whenever we pack a bag and buy a ticket. If you like these stories, you don't have to track me down and tell me so. Just leave the book behind in the dining room for the next weary pilgrim.

My publisher is a kind, generous, and patient man, but not so patient that he'll suffer an author who encourages readers to find their books instead of buying them. So if you found this book in some out-of-the-way place, out of my deep respect for my publisher, I encourage you to buy a *new* copy of *Expat Days: Making a Life in Thailand* at your nearest bookstore. Heck, buy two or three. Books make wonderful gifts.

Steve Rosse

Iowa City, April 10, 2006

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MY LIFE AS A DOG

The most popular man on Phuket is the New Boy. Any tourist fresh off the plane, clutching a wad of purple notes and a receipt from the currency exchange bearing this morning's date, will be greeted on a red carpet and handed the key to the city by a phalanx of smiling citizens. If his skin has yet to tan and his tongue has never known curry, his friends will number more than the grains of sand on Patong Beach.

He is the beloved of the bar girl, the delight of the desk clerk, and the patron of the policeman. *Tuk-tuk* drivers will call him Brother, renters of jeeps and motorcycles will sing his praises, and Immigration will extend his visa with a nudge and a wink. *Somtam* vendors will leave the black crabs out of his salad without being asked, and massage girls will actually give him a massage first.

Farang who speak Thai, on the other hand, are received by the island folk in one of two ways. The first is with brusque disdain, as summed up by the common expression "*farang ru mahk mai dee*" or "a *farang* (foreigner) who knows a lot is no good." In this case, "knowing a lot" means knowing what things should cost, or knowing the phone number of the local police station and the name of the night duty officer, or knowing what