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Public Transportation Finally Comes to Cambodia

Phnom Penh is probably the only city of its size in the world that doesn't have a public bus system, but finally a start has been made. The city has managed to live without a public system, but that has resulted in hardship for some and excessive traffic congestion for all.

There has been a single line operating on Monivong Blvd. since March of this year which in the beginning of September was



extended to the outskirts of town in both directions. Two additional lines were inaugurated in the middle of September. One goes from the Night Market on the riverside to Takmau town about 9 km south of the city. The other goes from the Night Market to Cham Chao in the east, presumably passing right by the airport, so if you've got the time and you're not too burdened with luggage you'll be able to go airport to town for 1500 riel – 37 cents – a bargain.

There still are lots of scoffers, people who will never take one and think it's a waste of energy. In response to a facebook post about the expansion, one fellow insisted that the current system of relying on motodops (motorbike taxis in the local lingo) and tuk-tuks, (3-wheel taxis) works just fine. They're cheap, fast and convenient, he said, so why bother with buses. I and another fellow pointed out that they're cheap for a 'rich' expat but for many locals going any distance it's prohibitively expensive.

For instance, I knew a young Khmer college grad quite a few years ago who spent a short time working in the office of a garment factory about 5 kilometers south of the city center. With the cost of a motodop 6000 riel (\$1.50) each way she was spending 60% of her income on transportation. What she had left of her salary after transportation costs was so minimal that she quit after a short time.

The high price of going anywhere outside the neighborhood does two things. It limits people's mobility and therefore their economic opportunities; one of the great advantages of living in a city. It also encourages those of slightly higher means to get their own transportation since the out-of-pocket cost of fuel is minimal. Many times when people are displaced by develop-

ment they're given small plots of land just outside the city, but with no jobs out there and transportation costs so high, they soon wind up back in the city center where they can earn their minimum \$2 to \$4 a day. So the biggest losers of the city not having public transportation are the city's poorest.

In some ways it works the same in an American city. With the exception of the biggest cities, most people who ride the bus outside of commuter hours either don't drive, can't drive – think of the young, old and infirm - or can't afford to own a car. Without public transit they're screwed. Thus one of the two primary reasons why public transit in the US is heavily subsidized. Farebox revenue typically covers only a third of operating costs. The other factor is traffic; a full bus takes up far less street space than the equivalent number of cars needed to carry the same load, especially since most cars carry only a single person. It works the same way here in Cambodia. Even though motorbikes take up only a small fraction of the space of cars, when you add it up a full bus uses much less street space than the equivalent motorbikes to move the same number of people.

Motorbike taxis have two great advantages: time and convenience. Nothing could be quicker or easier, especially in Phnom Penh where there's a motodop waiting on every corner and in front of every business ready to whisk you on your way. They are very maneuverable and are able to get you there as quickly as possible.

Using public transportation, on the other hand, is very time consuming. First you have to walk to the bus stop, then wait for it. Once aboard, it goes relatively slowly and has to stop often to pick up and drop off passengers and when you get off there's still the walk to your final destination. A less than 10 minute door-to-door ride on a motorbike could easily take half an hour or longer



using the bus. For that reason most Phnom Penhers would not immediately sell or park their bikes if presented with a bus alternative. Still, many in fact would save the money and use the bus. With the extra time, students for instance, could use it to study or just diddle with their smart phones. Most importantly, every per-

son who opted for public transit would help ease traffic problems, reduce the need for parking, cut pollution and save energy. Bus transportation would not put most motodops be out of a job, in fact, many people going long distances on the bus would hop on a motorbike taxi for the short hop to get them from the bus stop to their final destination. It's mostly for the long haul that people would use public transportation.



On the other hand, buses have some great advantages. Probably most important is that they are 1000 times safer than riding a motorbike in Phnom Penh's traffic. And nothing beats the comfort of proper seat in an air-con bus when Cambodia is brutally hot or in the middle of a tropical downpour. There's also the pollution you breath in to consider when you're on the street in an open vehicle.

The capital had a short-lived bus system back in 2001 that was financed by Japan; it even had proper bus shelters. I've heard conflicting reports about the experiment. One was that people weren't riding it; the other that the city didn't want to continue the subsidy after the six-month trial period. I believe time would've solved the first problem. Traffic wasn't so bad then and people needed time to get used to the bus. The other problem is the need for public subsidies; big bus systems almost always need public money. If you try to pay for it through the farebox, it'll cost too much and people won't use it in sufficient numbers, which defeats the purpose of getting as many people as possible to use it for its traffic reduction aspect.

The government has been trying for years to get a private company to run the buses, hoping to relieve itself of the burden – the Cambodian government is hardly noted for its efficiency - and avoid the subsidy regime, but has not had any takers. Even the company that ran the single line since March quit after the city wouldn't grant a tax break on its other operations. After six months of operation, the government just couldn't close it down and has pledged to keep it going regardless of the cost.

For a system to be successful it needs to offer wide coverage: there aren't that many people moving around the city who have a starting point and destination on the same street. The fact that the single line was showing progress bodes well for the system as a whole. For best results there also needs to be free transfers between lines since a significant percentage will need more than one line. Even after the complete system is up and running traffic will seem just as bad. The city is growing so fast the bus system will only keep congestion from getting much worse, a worthy enough goal.

Ultimately, large cities need rail transport in the form of sky

trains or subways or at minimum dedicated bus lanes to get beyond street congestion. It's only then that public transit can begin to compete timewise and provide a reasonable alternative to the comfort of a private vehicle. Either way, the cost of those systems is far beyond the government's finances so they'll not be happening anytime soon.

Meanwhile, Siem Reap is about to have a solar bus system, one of only 3 or 4 in the world. Star8, an Australian company, will be building and running the system. They'll be exclusively solar-electric, no back up combustion engines needed. The buses will have solar panels on their roofs to help provide power and there'll be solar charging stations on the routes where extra batteries will be charged. The batteries will be able to take the bus 90 kms on a charge and when they get low, they'll be able to make a quick change en route. There are other ways to charge batteries without removing them: microwave chargers can be placed in the road so they can be juiced up at stops, but that's probably a pretty spendy option at this point.

There are great advantages to electric transportation, in this case one of the most important will be the reduction of pollution at the temples. With more than a million tourists visiting every year, all on combustion engine vehicles, the pollution has become a threat to the temples.

Electric vehicles are far superior to combustion driven ones even if the power comes from central generating stations. Electric motors are more than 90% efficient compared to combustion engines in which half the fuel expended is lost in waste heat. They are nearly silent, which in fact has resulted in problems for blind people as they can't hear them coming. There's talk of adding sounds to electric vehicles to protect those people: that applies mostly to small vehicles. They're pollution free in the cities, where it counts most. Besides, it's easier to control and limit pollution from a single large point source than spread amongst large numbers of small engines.

They are super efficient, especially in urban use as they don't



idle; that is, they expend no energy while stopped, except for accessories. When I lived in Bangkok in 1993, traffic would come to a complete stop for an hour in many places. All those vehicles were chugging away for an hour, wasting energy and creating pollution while going nowhere.

They also have what's called regenerative braking. When the brakes are applied, the motor helps to slow the vehicle down: it turns into a generator. It sounds complicated but it's really very simple. Motor and generator, when wired properly, are fundamentally the same machine. If you put electricity in one direction it does work. If you put work into the other direction it generates electricity. In this case the work is helping to stop the vehicle. In

the case of a bus that makes many stops, regenerative braking reduces energy use by about 30%. Electric vehicles actually get better mileage in town than on the road for that reason. Also they accelerate faster than diesel and the motors last longer and require less maintenance.

Up until now, with solar cells becoming so cheap, electric buses required overhead lines or lots of very heavy batteries. The Australian company that's building and will be running the solar bus system currently has a solar cell factory in Phnom Penh and is now building one in Siem Reap. It's truly gratifying to think that our lowly Cambodia will soon pioneer with one of only 3 or 4 totally solar bus systems in the world.

But it's also depressing and dispiriting to think that conversion to solar could've happened long ago. Back in the 70s during the OPEC oil embargo and resultant turmoil the Pentagon did a study that showed if \$5 billion were spent buying solar cells for their remote locations, the ramping up of production would've made the cost of solar competitive with fossil fuels, and that's when gas was 50 cents a gallon. In response to the crisis, Jimmy Carter called the need to switch to renewables the Moral

Equivalent of War. He proposed a drastic change in priorities and did his little part by putting solar hot water on the White House roof. The people didn't want to hear about it so they elected Ronald Reagan. When Reagan came into office in 1981 he removed the solar water apparatus from the White House, ended Carter's solar tax credits and trashed everything environmental. He insisted there was plenty

of fossil fuel and environmentalists were just a bunch of do-gooder hippies who wanted everybody to live in caves (I'm paraphrasing, of course). His first Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, said the environment didn't matter because the End Times were coming soon and the world would be de-

stroyed anyway so why bother trying to save it.

Now we're at the brink of irreversible change and the world continues to increase CO2 production; last year saw the largest increase ever. That's in spite of great successes like Germany where one day last spring they got 100% of their power from renewables. There is also one district there with 100,000 people that now not only gets all of its power without burning fossil fuels but often sends another 100% back into the grid. Texas and Iowa now get 25% of their power from wind, something that could've happened decades ago. Yet, in the height of folly and insanity, the US government still subsidizes the oil giants, some of the richest corporations in the world, to the tune of \$8 billion a year. America consistently provides more in subsidies to old technologies than renewables.

China is making great strides developing renewables, and is the world's biggest exporter of solar panels, but still builds a new coal fired plant every week, that in spite of many of its cities having the worst air pollution in the world. How can we go forward if we're still going backward?

Even Cambodia is joining the death march to destruction with a

new coal fired power plant being built in Sihanoukville... just what a tourist town needs, air pollution.

Not a penny should be going into new fossil fuel facilities, not when we know renewables can work just fine. If we stopped right now, we might have a stab at mitigating the worst impacts of climate change, we might be able to just barely make it without totally crashing the planet. But we won't because there's lots of money to be made in not giving a shit. At least it'll be

an exciting ride, a race against reality, a true extravaganza of extraordinary events. Which I expect to witness in my lifetime, which at 73, isn't all that long.

Of course, I've been wrong before.

Cambostan



CAMBODIA FOOD TOUR

I remember stealing my first potato.

Our guide, Mr Lee, takes off his glasses and rubs the bridge of his nose. He is small and smiley. Even in the midday heat, a crisp crease runs down his khaki trousers.

We are standing at the exit to Choeng Ek, the most famous of the Killing Fields, south of Phnom Penh, after our official tour. "The Khmer Rouge had moved us to our final village," says Lee. We ate watery rice in the evening. They pretended they ate the same, but we knew they had food after dark. It was all you could think of. Everything became edible."

It is a legacy that lives on, perhaps, in Cambodia's cuisine, where seemingly few things are off the menu. As a food enthusiast, I have come with an open mind and an empty stomach, keen to get to grips with the country's unusual fare. My journey starts with me joining the intriguingly named Ducky and Mr Smiley (an animated Australian ex-pat and a toothy tuk-tuk driver) from Urban Forage for a food tour of the night markets of the capital.

In a fug of alien noise and smells we pass neat pyramids of tiny glistening brains, huge papillated curly tongues and duck-egg fetuses (pong tia koon). The latter, boiled and eaten with pepper and lime juice, supposedly give strength to the consumer. Holding the smooth white eggs up to the stall's strip lighting reveals a fluffy silhouette curled inside, beak and feet tucked in tightly. It's a bit too "out there" for me but some locals seem to be enjoying it.

I spend too long inspecting a spiky green rugby ball, which I find out is a jackfruit. The stall-keeper smiles, takes the knife she has been decapitating prawns with, and scoops out a bright yellow section. It tastes of bubblegum. And, of course, prawns.

Sleepy children sit atop piles of shiny vegetables while mopeds carve non-existent routes between tightly packed stalls. Trays of deep-fried grasshoppers are frozen in tableaux mid-leap. A man inspects a basket of black "thousand-year" eggs: duck eggs that have been stored in ash and salt until the shells blacken, the whites turn to a brown fetid jelly and the yolks to a gentle green slime. Nearby, a purple-edged crab scuttles past my toes as it escapes from a bucket and makes a bid for free-

packaging.

The next morning we join a cookery class run by Frizz restaurant (half-day course £10, full-day course £14). Together with a dozen other inept barang (foreigners), we are coaxed through the basics of making fish amok: coconut fish curry steamed in a boat of banana leaves. Pummelling spices in a huge wooden pestle and mortar takes its toll on three American ladies, who opt instead for a seat and a cold Angkor beer. A small serious-faced Cambodian boy quietly takes over, swiftly producing perfect curry paste for each of them. In a nod to bushcraft specialist Ray Mears, we are encouraged to make a vessel for the steaming curry using only a banana leaf and two toothpicks. My husband tests his banana boat



by filling it with curry and holding it over my head.

That evening we have dinner at Romdeng, a training restaurant for former street children housed in a handsome colonial villa. Our waiter's trousers are two inches too long for him and he introduces himself timidly. His face beams when we order the deep-fried tarantula. "Scary, but very tasty, yes?"

When they arrive, the arachnids have been arranged as if they are chasing each other around the plate. Their legs crunch like hairy Twiglets; their abdomens are full of nondescript bitter brown sludge. I can't imagine developing a taste for them.

Our waiter's face beams when we order the deep-fried tarantula. 'Scary, but very tasty,' he says

The next morning we board the bus to Siem Reap where we are welcomed by a rotund lady with goody bags containing a plain baguette and a bottle of water. She informs us over the PA that we are "about to travel a very bumbly road" and advises that seatbelts must be worn at all time. She subsequently unfolds a battered red deckchair and sits in the middle of the aisle, eating crisps and watching Spiderman on the DVD player.

We spend our days exploring the incredible sights of Angkor Wat and our evenings exploring the vast choice of local restaurants. On our last night, we treat ourselves to the six-course tasting menu at Cuisine Wat Damnak. We sit in a cool, quiet courtyard drinking dry French wine. Heavy cutlery clinks politely and impeccably observant waiters anticipate our needs. But even here, in the most renowned of the city's restaurants, there is still no ingredient that is out of bounds. The menu includes crispy beef tongue, stir-fried frog meat, and a salad of lotus: lotus roots, lotus stem and fresh lotus seeds.

The cooking may be fancy but the flavours are strong, proud and true. We are a world away from a stolen potato, but even here, in the long shadow of the regime, food serves as a reminder that everything is precious and nothing should be taken for granted.



dom, only to find itself square in a moped's path.

Ducky encourages us to try the offerings from the stalls surrounding the market. We start with kaw sach tru, wobbly pork belly oozing over hot coals, followed by muscular frogs' legs dipped in lime, salt and pepper – both surprisingly delicious. We drink sharp pomelo juice from a plastic bag with straws and round off our Cambodian canapés with a handful of rambutans: delicately perfumed fruits encased in hairy, scrotum-like



So the wrangling begins

Kem Sokha first deputy presidency of parliament said that he would rally lawmakers to move votes of no confidence against corrupt and long-serving CPP ministers .

The PM then threatened to boot him out.

A reminder that that this can now work both ways seems to have calmed things down with the PM now supporting the summoning of government ministers for questioning by National Assembly commissions proposal.

However National Assembly President Heng Samrin stepped in and issued a circular essentially taking the commissions

powers away. The opposition is of course crying foul that the circular had not been approved by the standing committee of parliament as per their political agreement.

This one will run and run until a certain person truly understands the meaning of power sharing!

Done deal

By the time you read this Australia will have signed a deal with Cambodia for the resettlement of refugees!

Can't really think of anything more absurd.

So the three choices a refugee has are:

1. Stay on Naru
2. Accept money and fly back to your home country.
3. Be resettled in Cambodia.

Taking into account Cambodia doesn't have the policies or resources to protect them and a less than stellar record on human rights They are probably going to use the third as some kind of deterrent!

True to their word

A friend decided to try the new "Rouge" taxis on a primo job.

"Take me to the airport in 40min



please."

"Ok sir."

He waited outside the house at the due time and saw two of them sail past. After a few minutes he rang the office to ask where his taxi was and was told they would ring back in five minutes.

They did. Only to tell him his booking was now cancelled!

Last time he uses the Khmer Rouge service. But as the advert says they want you to ring them again and again!

Just for the wrong reasons!

A bullshitting war criminal

On NPR's Weekend Edition, Henry Kissinger told host Scott Simon that the ISIS problem could be fixed by thwarting the group's goals with "superior air

power." Sound familiar? That was the plan President Nixon undertook—in Southeast Asia more than 40 years ago—with the help of Kissinger, his then-national security adviser. The policy not only failed, it left tens of thousands of civilians dead. And that's a conservative estimate. Nevertheless, he asserted: *"I bet if one did an honest account, there were fewer civilian casualties in Cambodia than there have been from American drone attacks."*

Reliable estimates put deaths due to drone attacks at just over 1000..

The estimates of deaths in the US bombing of Cambodia put the number between 50,000 and 100,000.

Phnom Penh Pub Page

First some updates.

Actually to get this out of the way – Skirts!!

Last month I was fascinated with 179 Bar (or at least the way the real name was being hidden) – so of course it has now closed or at least it is being heavily renovated at writing.

I was also interested in following up on how 104 Bar would look under the new regime – been there a couple of times since it reopened – I actually miss the big tables in the front (there are some relatively minor (to me) aesthetic changes but the tables and loss of foosball are what I noticed most) and am curious what they are going to do with the space between the main bar and the washrooms. However, the new couches out front do add a different feel to the place and as you would expect from the owners of Xanadu and Oasis, the club seems to be running smoothly and I will be back.

The Pub Page rarely gets any feedback; although I guess it is possible that the hunchback is hiding and doing horrible things with all my fan mail – so I am frequently left wondering whether anyone actually reads the page, let alone those worthy bar owners that graciously put up with my pathetic excuse for investigative reporting. So you can imagine I was really thrilled to get actual written evidence that someone had read their review. A couple of months ago I hit Angry Bird Bar – while I enjoyed the renovated space itself, I sent a clear message to Rovio to debug quickly unless they wanted to turn the place into some kind of red bird mini card game. Angry Bird's reply was particularly noteworthy and even led to the evil Publisher launching into a maniacal laugh when he read it. I have some notable excerpts below:

“Rovio (Cambodian hostess bar expansion unit) has taken your honest and forthright comments fully on board and the screaming ladies card club has been banished forever.

The Angry Birds staff have also been re-programmed by launching them from catapults into nearby buildings to remind them of the Angry Birds culture and theme.

They have emerged fully re-energised, enthusiastic and ready to welcome future visits by you and other customers.”

While the Pub Page does not actually recommend launching bar stuff from catapults, I have to appreciate the effect it had. Given that the Cambodian hostess bar expansion unit had put such care into its retraining and filing its report, I felt the need to revisit it and test the efficacy of Rovio's innovative training methodologies. The bar was busier – on a night when most bars I went to were far emptier – the staff was friendly without getting annoying – music was still at a very reasonable level – and the expansion pack has arrived (there seemed to be an increased number of staff). IGN (Intoxicated Gropers Network - not to be confused

with the famous gaming review site) gives the update two thumbs up (and maybe a little more as well). Thanks to the HBEU for reporting in and even more thanks for retraining – it seems to have stuck (much as the staff probably did after the catapulting).

On to some new bars – first up was Oh La La at the corner of 136 St. and Sisowath. I have been waiting for quite a while to see what would happen to this space. While the construction hoarding seems to have stayed up for quite a while, I was really happy with the results. The space comes off as simple but had a good open feel. We ended up planting ourselves on the patio which gave a great view of the riverfront street life as well as (thanks to some impressive scheduling) a nice view of staff coming to work along 136 St. Good service but we were not hungry so could not really evaluate the food but there was a reasonable selection. The drinks were quite reasonable given the appearance of the place –

draft beer was \$1.5 with a jug for \$5.5; cans of Cambodia beer were \$2, most mixed drinks were \$2.5-3 with cocktails coming in at \$4. For those with a more refined palate, house wines were \$4. Not the cheapest place in town, but a nice relaxing place for some people watching and a few quiet drinks before, during or after a hostess bar crawl.

Walking down 136 St., I noticed Heart Attack Bar for the first time. Was very impressed with the place – particularly as they managed to stay hidden from me for 2-3 months. The bar felt spacious and the music was at a good volume. Staff was very friendly and kept us amused. To be honest, I was a bit too drunk to remember how much things cost but I am pretty sure we had a good time here and I will make it back – ok – not my most detailed review but at least it was positive. I also seem to recall some explanation about renovations being done to the upstairs but I was lucky to remember that much so have no idea what they are doing up



there.

Next on the tour was the immodestly named Simply the Best Bar on 130 St. The bar is about six weeks old according to the staff who chatted me up. I was about to turn left on 130 St but happened to glance over and catch this place out of the corner of my eye. On the plus side, the bar is open from noon until 3 am or later – more importantly, it runs a happy hour from opening until 8 pm at night with buy one get one free for beer and spirits. If I was able to decipher things properly, the second shift starts around 6 and the first shift leaves around 8 so there appears to be an extra happy hour when they bar has two times the staff and the drinks are half the price – now that makes me happy. Pretty simple place – felt roomy in the main section with a pool table in the back. Not sure how accurate the name is but it was a worthwhile stop and I will be back.

A Phnom Penh Prison Diary 5

It's been a week since my arrival at the brothpital, just enough time to get an idea of the routine and in between tricks, I have spent this week getting to know my new neighbours.

Cambodia's very first terrorist is a friendly and witty Bangladeshi named Bob. The right side of his body is affected by a previous stroke but he maintains his pride and sense of humour. Today his wife has brought a terrorisingly good curry for us all to share and after serving, mid-meal she casually mentions that she has had to sell their baby, in order to pay the requested \$500 prison medical costs. The awkward silence is broken as I crunch another excellent poppadom.

Clearly Bobs case is a big misunderstanding. While going about his normal business of buying and selling old watches, he somehow got confused with a group plotting to blow up a number of embassies - well, who hasn't?

The thing is, I really think he is just a nice old man. Yes, he prays five times a day, and he certainly knows his curries - but surely a terrorist would be a bit more aggressive? Then there is the evidence; bombs? No. Encrypted jihad emails? No. Guns? No. Just old watches.

After a week, I finally decide that his case is purely political and that Cambodia is now elevated to the list of those top nations which have been targeted by international terrorist organisations; it is therefore now a real country. Hopefully, this will mean membership to some ineffective organisation, an annual dinner and dance, plus, of course, more NGO funding.

The neighbour to my right is a quiet, blind Vietnamese man who's physical condition has deteriorated so much during imprisonment, that as well as his sight, he has also lost most of the use of his arms and legs. Sleeping on the floor, he is constantly bitten by bugs and mosquitoes and has taken to itching these with a razor blade. As a result, he is covered in bites and cuts.

He speaks only a few words that I can understand; coffee, cigarette and Dung - which is his name. I imagine his situation as a kind of torture; he is in darkness, on the floor in a room full of foreign voices and Khmer karaoke.

The sister of my girlfriend takes the kind initiative of cleaning his bedding, possibly for the first time in months, emptying his piss bottle and his bottle of dog-ends.

Every day, I make sure he gets some coffee and cigarettes, and despite the torture, I see this once handsome man offer a friendly smile.

The doctor arrives for his daily rounds, which is a standard 5 minute show, to convince somebody, somewhere, that this is a hospital, he is a doctor and therefore deserves a salary. I am not convinced.

In the hour before, a young, epileptic prisoner has taken everybody's blood pressure and in between his own seizures, recorded the results in a small school

notebook with a picture of a cucumber on the front.

The doctor pretends to read the results as he hooks up an IV bottle containing a fluorescent yellow liquid, which is either radioactive waste or the blind man's piss bottle.

Next, he administers a daily "vitamin injection", into the bare arses of the younger Khmer patients. This puzzles me as I try to work out if; a - he is a pervert, b - a sadist, c - he is conducting secret drug tests or d - he has some huge stock pile of old military or NGO drugs.

Finally, he hands out some paracetamol tablets and leaves after 4minutes 20 seconds - his best time this week.

The men's ward is separated from the woman's by a corridor which also lead to the communal showers and toilets. One of the odd benefits of this is that the women often visit with their newborn babies.

Personally I find the sight of over-swollen glands and the smell of milky vomit quite disturbing, however the young mums carrying their miniature motorbike thieves, together seem to bring a ray of sunshine into the ward.

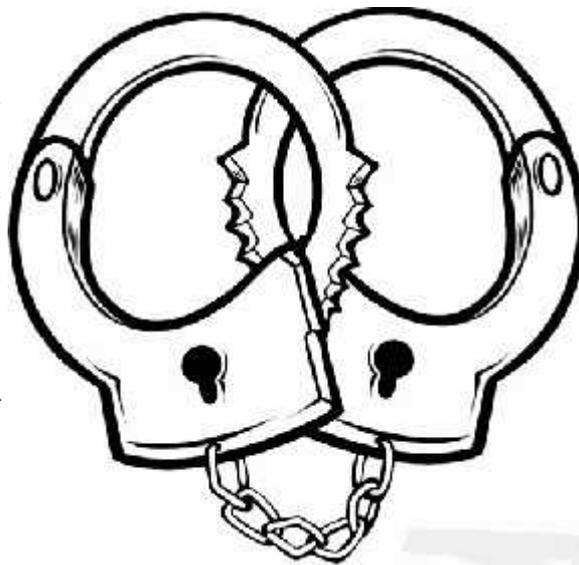
The oldest guy in the ward is a Chinese man who is aged around 90, he lights up at the sight of the young visitors and performs a wobbly jig pulling a face which brings welcome laughter all around.

It is genuinely appalling that children can still be born into punishment and imprisonment but these young mothers do what they can to provide for their kids and the guys in our ward offer all the support they can.

One of the young mothers is believed to be a fortune teller, who clearly failed to predict or avoid her own incarceration, while pregnant. She is now reading my girlfriends palm and speaking in tongues.

My girlfriend listens intently, looks at the baby, the swollen breasts and then at me - I get the trafficked feeling that she is about to spend another \$20on a quiet night in.

And this is about the limits of the "brothpital" routine, by day a respectable medical facility, a doctor, glow in the dark medi-



cines and family friendly visiting hours - by night, a sleazy, alcohol fuelled knocking shop.

Prisoners are not permitted to exercise outside as there is no security beyond the corridor. Despite the benefits; the cost of food, transport and conjugal visits (the payments for my own trafficking) are well above my now limited budget.

After a month and having made the vig, I way the pros and cons of the brothpital and then request a move back to Prey Sar in the hope that the Don will cancel the contract and restore my VIP privileges.

On the return journey to Prey Sar, I start to wonder if I have made the right decision, but this time, I am not handcuffed and there is only one guard armed with an AK47 - rather than five.

I sense that the Don is pleased with my earnings as a prostitute and that I have been accepted back into his VIP family.

I arrive back at Prey Sar and I am admitted to the on-site prison hospital, which

is a collection of six filthy, infested wards with a slightly different class of sick and wealthy prisoners.

The toilets are blocked with human waste and the water tanks empty but a friendly Taiwanese man named Meng finds me a bed between a TB patient and another guy with a serious pornography addiction. But the big difference for me is that once more, I can get outside into the prison gardens.

It appears that the hit has been called off.

After a month of being a prostitute, at an off site prison hospital, now dubbed the "brothpital", I have returned to the squalor of the Prey Sar prison hospital.

The cell is around 6m square, with 18 rusty metal beds which look like they were stolen from the set of M*A*S*H. There are three main problems with the sleeping arrangements; first, 28 prisoners share the 18 beds and its only after the first night listening to my neighbour coughing his lungs up, that I am told he has ebola.

The second problem is that the beds are too short for your average big nosed white man. The metal beds have a tubular steel head and foot frame. As a result, you cannot lay flat or straighten your legs, which is very uncomfortable.

And third, there is no bedding. Just a base of rusty metal slats which serve the dual purpose of allowing the easy drainage of vomit and other bodily excreta, while providing an ideal environment - and easy access to flesh - for swarms of mosquitos.

The bathroom consists of two squat toilets with a small brick



tank of swamp water for flushing, which is carried in daily from a ditch in the hospital grounds. There is no electric light and no sunlight reaches the bathroom - as a result, it is filthy and rarely cleaned.

Once again, I will have to pay for clean water for showering, drinking, cooking etc. This amounts to my biggest single expense of \$35 a month. Together with a charge of \$15 for using an electric fan, around half of my now very limited budget is spent paying for my prison stay.

My hospital cell mates are another mixed bunch of super-contagious coughers, spitters and vomiters, plus mid-level VIPs who have paid the \$500 change for a "comfortable" hospital bed - the alternative being the bare concrete floor in the block.

For the \$500 charge, those who have declared themselves more important are allowed the privilege of being let out for exercise before the sick people, who are generally considered an unsightly nuisance and who are just getting in the way of further business.

This discrimination results in frequent bundles and fights at the doors, the authorities have respond by appointing a group of Khmer prisoners as doormen, giving licence to use violence against any non-paying sick person.

My immediate neighbours include the ebola patient zero on one side and yet another victim of the much more serious Prey Sar pornography addiction syndrome. His treatment includes a 14inch TV and a DVD player, which he somehow manages to fit in his bed.

Bits from the Beach

The 7th annual poker run took place this past month. Many of the old organisers had left or are otherwise engaged and it took a new team to get it up and running. An event that has proven to be the most popular event in the calendar a great way for the expats to meet new & old friends.

The 7th run started downtown at possibly downtowns most popular venue Charlie Harpers the first cards given out and the first beers down. Next stop still in town was Rebels MC just off the main road Sihanoukville's favourite biker hang out. Mobbed with over a 100 people drinking beer and hoping for a good card. A hop skip & a jump to Snookys and a bite to eat. Washed down with Bruntys cider on special offer.

Cards are looking good as we head towards the beach & Kong bar where we are entertained with some live music the mix of cider & beer is making the head buzz and the card at Kong was s***.

On to the beach Martini bar the breeze is brisk and a better card



gives me renewed hope for that \$100 first prize.

From beach to Ochheuteal GH the penultimate bar I think we are going to make it to the end but my hand is ruined by another awful card.

The final beers were drunk at the (can't be mentioned for legal reasons) The winner announced & congratulations to those that made it the end a truly great day out and thanks to all that helped organise & sponsor my favourite day of the year All in all a fun day and it raised \$921 which was donated to Romduol Ream River School.

It has been a bit wet down here recently. But when the sun comes out it is truly splendid.

The huge building site on the second road back from Occheuteal beach will be called The White Sand Palace Hotel (see pic). It will also feature a large water park adjacent to it. Apparently it will be open in December.



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"We accept anybody's ravings—we often print them!"

As for the photo below?

Who the hell knows what is going on but I am not ringing the number to find out!



THE BAR STOOL RANT

DARK BRIDGE THE MOVIE by Frisco Tony

Film director Marcelo Von Schwartz is gracing the fair city of Phnom Pehn, to promote his feature film, Dark Bridge, and to immerse himself in the cultural milieu. The film is a sexy thriller featuring local Neo-Beat poet Antonio Pineda as the character, Dr. Marquez. Von Schwartz is an Argentine, long domiciled in Barcelona, and possesses dual citizenship. His academic background is as an architect, and he backed into cinema as an award winning short film director in Spain. Von Schwartz agreed to engage in Q & A .

Q. Who are your influences in art and cinema?

.A. I am influenced by the dark side of things. Filmmakers like Fritz Lang, Friedrich Murnau, Joseph Von Sternberg

and Roman Polanski.

Q. Cinema seems influenced by painters as well.

A. Nightmarish and dreamlike artists like Francis Bacon, Otto Dix, and George Grosz are profound influences.

Q. Dark Bridge features the music of Depeche Mode member Alan Wilder. How did this collaboration come about?

A. I am a fan of Recoil, formed by Alan. The music of Recoil is more experimental. It is less pop oriented, and more avant garde, synthpop, electronica, hip hop. I contacted Alan online. I expressed my admiration for his work, and my desire to use it in my film, despite being on a micro budget as a first time feature film maker. To my surprise, Alan consented as long as he could feature footage from the film on his world tour as part of the light show.

Q. You are also a co-author of a cinema book about the film, entitled, Dark Cabaret. How did this play out.

A. It was a project with poet Antonio Pineda. In the spirit of the Nouvelle Vague, the book is a collaboration of poetic text by the lysergic pen of Pineda, and my favourite frames from the movie.

Q. Does Phnom Pehn entertain any cinematic possibilities for you ?

A. It is an amazing city. The art scene here is fabulous. Meta House, where the film is to be screened is unique as a cultural venue. The city is ripe for a film about the sexed up, politically free wheeling, atmosphere that is electric and the most culturally viable center in South East Asia. It is an oasis of sin ready made for cinema.

Now it is time to cut back to the past. The venue is the Texas Bar, now defunct and gone, but once a center for old Asian hands in Bangkok. Washington Square once housed this venue, a hangout for pirates, smugglers, adventurers, and C.I.A. spooks. The shoot that inspired Dark Cabaret took place here.

The star of this segment of the film is exotic dancer Keysha Monique Mabra. She is a jazz and blues singer of some stature. She was also a featured principal in the touring show of, The Rocky Horror Show. The director sets up the shoot. The bar is studded with background players. The tables are full up with punters and babes. Although most film productions disallow alcoholic beverages on the set, Von Schwartz encourages the players to consume modest amounts to enhance reality.

Keysha awaits in the wings as Von Schwartz inspects the final details of the scene. At last the director sings out the words all have been waiting to hear. LIGHTS-CAMERA-ACTION.

The cameras roll. Like a lysergic hallucination, Keysha strides into the shot, pollinating desire like a smouldering forest fire. She is attired in

bondage leather that exposes her nubile body. She carries a whip as a symbol of authority and dominance over her subjects.

The music by Alan Wilder and Recoil blasts as pheromones mix with cigarette smoke. Behold Salome, Queen of the Damned. The beautiful and the damned mix and match as she cracks the whip to the floor. There is no mercy, no respite, for all who enter the Texas Bar for this extraordinary shoot.

Queen of the Underworld, her whip flails in the air, as her subjects prostrate themselves before her. Et Dieu.. crea la femme- and God

created woman. The literary She of Rider Haggard, Queen of Sword and Sorcery. As diety of pagan rites, she rules paisley nights and sweet delights. Frisson makes its demands on the soul. Desire is a fire down below Desire is the mortal enemy of neo fascism and the New World Order. Desire and love call out for a Brave New World devoid of land grabs, oil, precious stones and mineral hijacks by the globalist shackles of Illuminist conspiracies. Love desires a world ruled not by Mars but Aphrodite.

Wine and lust sings in the veins of the hero. He longs to plunge his sword in the sheath of the sybarite. The high priestess of the house of love quenches the fire of love inherent in the beast. Her ivory bosoms heave, inciting lust, inflaming marble genitalia, for she is legend, and none can stand before her and resist the ethereal music that plays from her lips.

The dancer is to the mythic born. Her girdle of Venus conquers men with lies. Beauty is her moment of truth. La petit mort, the moment all men crave, when they become the wantons slave. So she dances in hells fyres, ephemeral and divine as is the pleasure of release and orgasm. She beloved of Dionysius dances an eternal fandango, while gypsies clap and sing in the pale moonlight, as the god Pan plays upon his flute construed of ancient reeds. Amanita muscaria her secret treasure, for she worships the holy mushroom and the cross.

The flowers of evil court and tempt the actors. Nothing is sacred. Phallic fleurs dance in the vapours of the night. Chansons celebrate

the mystery of life and death. Keysha lap dances with an actor. She grabs the tie of poet Pineda and teases him with her whip, causing him to drink deep from his bottle of beer. She dances in a perfumed garden. Sex has no beginning and no end. She who is the beloved of Apollo, the immortal wood nymph who causes men to dream and love, to thrust and win, to partake of

forbidden desires and throbbing thighs. Von Schwartz nods his head sagely and yells--Cut, Thats a wrap, Thank you ladies and gentlemen. Dark Cabaret is a book of photographs and text that is a complement to the motion picture, Dark Bridge. It is in the tradition of Film Noir and Nouvelle Vague. These artifacts hark back to a time when filmmakers sought a confluence of images, emotions and intellect. The images of the book and motion picture are erotic and exotic, the text poetic yet cinematic. Dark Cabaret conspires to weld cinema and poetry in a savage cocktail to be consumed by the cineaste or reader. The film is available on Amazon in the U.S.A. Vimeo makes the film available to fans globally. The music is available from Alan Wilder and Recoil. The book is available via Manifesto Films. An actor in the aforementioned film quipped the film should be retitled, Stripper With A Whip. Who dear reader am I to say yea or nay.



NIGHT PROWL: THE LEGENDARY LECHERY OF BERNARD 'NITE OWL' TRINK

By Barbara Woolsey

NIGHT PROWLER — “I was curious, so said I’ll have the 10 baht. She had a towel wrapped around her hand, and after the deed was done, I pulled it off. She had leprosy.”

That’s not an anecdote one can find in a daily newspaper, but for decades it was the kind of frank report you’d get from the hardest working man on the commercial coitus beat, Bernard Trink.

A little over a year ago, I slipped into Bangkok’s nightlife scene for this investigative column you’re reading now. I trolled S&M and go-go bars, chatted up DJs and generally tried to stir up a little controversy.

But I’ll be the first to tell you it doesn’t come close to the league Trink played in as Bangkok’s original nightlife reporter.

Trink’s weekly column, “Nite Owl,” to which “Night Prowl” pays homage, ran for nearly 40 years first in Bangkok World, then the Bangkok Post. This hotshot farang writer was the recognized expert on the city’s go-go bars, massage parlours and girls, idolized by expats and American GIs stationed during the Vietnam War. The birth of Bangkok’s prostitution playground was a pivotal time, ultimately paving the way for Thailand’s contemporary sex-tourism industry. Trink saw it all. He even coined the term “Soi Cowboy” and enduring catchphrases such as the verbal shrug of “This is Thailand” or “TIT.”

Despite this, the man behind the black-and-white type is still something of a mystery. His last interview was a decade ago and he’s pushing 83 now. The new generation of expats probably wouldn’t recognize the name, and some of the older ones are still trying to forget him.

But Trink’s accomplishments are impossible to deny. “Nite Owl” was one of the longest-running columns in the world. He was a successful gonzo journalist from the Freak Power days of Hunter S. Thompson.

I knew I would have to track down the owl to bring my own column full-circle. I wanted to know if he was a charmer or a scoundrel. After a 40-year career in writing, perhaps he would even have some wisdom to bestow.

So, here’s what happened.

In a different time, Trink complete with his pendulous amulet and signature trousers.

The Nite Owl’s Nest

I knew that to find Bernard Trink, I would have to start at the Bangkok Post. Eleven years ago, Nite Owl was dropped without an announcement or even a farewell party from the newspaper. Trink retired, but continued writing book reviews.

He was still at the office two days a week, I remembered from my time as an intern at the Post in 2010. I would see him across the room, hunched over at a typewriter clanking away, sitting next to a stack of hardcovers with plastic slippers on his feet.

One day recently, I bumped into him as he was on his way out of the building. Trink is impossible to miss even in a crowd, thanks to his token attire: suspenders over a tucked-in button-up shirt and pants pulled up high by a belt. An older Thai woman, with a kind face and hair pulled-back in a bun, was helping him carefully down the stairs.

I hurried over to give them a hand and introduced myself. The woman turned out to be his wife, and she quickly excused herself so we could chat. I told Trink about “Night Prowl” and that it would be an honor to interview him.

He spoke very slowly, with a lilt and slight stutter that’s typical of someone his age.

“But you know what I used to write about, right?”

I assured him that I did, and although I don’t write about prostitution in my column I understood it was a big part of his work. I wanted to know about the history



The Night Prowler meets her spiritual predecessor, Bernard Trink, grandfather of gonzo smut journalism.

of nightlife in Bangkok.

“Are you a virgin?”

Well, I wasn’t expecting that. But I just laughed and told him I didn’t know an expat who was in this sinful city. That seemed to satisfy him and he told me to come by next week at the same time. He would be picking up the new Clive Cussler and Jackie Collins to review.

An Opportune Time



There he was, this time in a button-up printed with little multi-coloured penguins and green suspenders holding up a pair of crisp, white trousers. I noticed a large metal amulet now slung from his neck. An engraved owl looked out from it. He said it was given to him by a Filipino nightclub singer 30 years ago.

“It makes me feel good,” the eccentric journalist explained, turning it over in his leathery fingers. “I don’t like ties. Ties are like nooses. I have them at

home but I never wear them.”

Originally from New York, Trink came to Thailand first as a back-packer in 1962. Before that, he traveled to over 50 countries teaching English and dabbled in journalism in India, Hong Kong and Japan. He returned in 1965 with his wife, one of his students in Japan. She was having their first child and wanted to live close to her family.

Trink went into the Bangkok World with a scrapbook of clippings, and it just so happened that they were looking for an entertainment editor. The column “Nite Owl” was already underway, but “the guy didn’t know what he was doing,” Trink said. “I didn’t know about entertainment either, but I was resolved I was going to find out.”

He didn’t consider himself a partygoer. In fact, he would rather drink orange juice with maraschino cherries than beer or wine any day. But it turned out, Trink did have a lot in common with Bangkok’s nightlife scene: he really liked prostitutes.

That's when he told me the leprosy story, which I think sums it up nicely.

"When I first came in 1962, the girls in the suburbs cost only 35 baht," he explained. "Then it went down if they weren't that good-looking to 20 baht. They had even cheaper, some girls for only 10 baht. I was curious, so said I'll have the 10 baht. She had a towel wrapped around her hand, and after the deed was done, I pulled it off. She had leprosy."

Of course it turned back to his own immortal fame.

"So many men have had sex with women with leprosy, and they have no idea because it takes seven years to incubate, and then you've got it. As it turned out, I didn't have it."

How could he argue?

Trink really seemed to be on a lucky streak. He arrived in what he calls an "opportune time" and had landed what could only be described as a libertine's dream job. New go-go bars, nightclubs and massage parlours opened every day by American men (under their Thai wives' names, of course), and they were all hungry for publicity. Soon enough, Trink was getting orange juice with maraschino cherries and free quickies all over Bangkok.

His first assignment was going to a string of sailor bars in Khlong Toei, on the suggestion of another American expat.

"The ages of the girls, average age was 13," he said. "The point was they were all prostitutes. They would open your trousers. I wasn't used to this. Sex is one thing, but not that age and not that aggressive. Yes, that was my introduction to bars."

To this day, Trink still maintains there's a big difference between brothels and bars – the former selling women who don't have a choice in whom they end up with.

Trink really doesn't like brothels, but man, does he love bars.

"None of them knew how to give a massage but after they finished squeezing you, you couldn't stand up for days!" he chuckled. "It was sex. They played the game, and I couldn't argue."

Trink was truly excited to regale me the old days, going off on gleeful tangents about judging wet T-shirt contests, his favorite mama-san, Ladda and his photographer who was later murdered by a katoey. His favorite nightclub was on New Petchaburi road, a small space with 200 hostesses that felt like "being crushed by 400 breasts." As the World's entertainment editor, he even got to interview Marlon Brando, Sean Connery and The Three Stooges.

Interviewing Trink, it was pretty hard to get a word in edge-wise. But I could see he was enjoying himself, and there was something warm and fuzzy about listening to a wizened, octogenarian hedonist joyfully recount his youth. But then he would go and say something like, "I'm not a great lover, but you do it as often as you can, but not for as long as you can" and that really grossed me out.

You can say anything about Trink, but the readership numbers don't lie. "Nite Owl" had a cult following, and he always had more letters than he could ever hope to publish.

He would give advice to readers and recommend his favourite bars and the best girls by their assigned numbers. It wasn't only about getting off (although that was a lot of it), but he was known for also warning expat men to watch out for women who would just take the money and run.

He's gotten all kinds of flack over the years, and is still slammed

on online message boards to this day. In the 2004 interview, he tried to explain his stance on the sex industry.

"I didn't try to reform these prostitutes," he said. "I didn't say they should become dressmakers or something like that. That is not my function as I see it. Just to describe what they are."

I asked about his wife and how, over the years, she handled the truth about his profession.

"She knew, but I didn't throw it in her face," he said. "Only one time did she help me on an assignment was once as a translator."

And his wife seemed lovely. She was also a teacher, but now volunteers regularly at the Thai Red Cross blood center.

"That must have been very difficult for her," I said, leading him.

"Raising kids and knowing what you were out doing all night."

"I remembered the name," he replied, in his own stream. "The name of the bar with 200 hostesses. It was called Thai Heaven."

Bird in Flight

The Bangkok Post tried to cut Trink's column in the late '90s, but it was met by a letter-writing campaign from angry fans. So they reduced "Nite Owl" from one page to a half. Up until the mid-'80s, it was three pages every week.

But in 2003, "Nite Owl" ended suddenly and spontaneously. Trink is still rather tense about it.

"They said it was a family newspaper, and in a family newspaper you cannot give the numbers of massage girls," he said. "The editor said I was encouraging prostitution with the column, and encouraging AIDs. Back then everybody thought if you just look at a girl you get AIDS. But there I was among all these prostitutes, in Patpong, Cowboy and Nana Plaza..."

He did restaurant reviews for a while, but it didn't work out.

"I wrote an honest review about a place and the restaurant owner called and said, 'We're going to take out all the advertising,' and the editor caved in," Trink explained. "That got me out of restaurants."

So he continued with just the book reviews, which you can still see sometimes in the Bangkok Post to this day. I asked him if he could start "Nite Owl" again, would he do it? He said yes.

"I didn't want to retire," he said. "Years passed, and I reached an age where I should retire. But why retire? I didn't save any money. And there's nothing out there I enjoy more than what I'm doing here, writing."

That's when Mrs. Trink arrived, carrying a new bag of books for the die-hard journalist to review. Our time was up. The couple had to catch the songtaew back to their modest home on the outskirts of Bangkok.

I gave him my arm and helped him down the stairs, one-by-one. We waited outside of the building.

"So," I said. "What are you going to do the rest of the day?"

"I'll go to an Internet café," he said. "Check emails from my kids and watch porn. They don't like me sitting in the office watching porn. I don't think it's very nice of them."

You can take the Nite Owl out of the go-go bar, but 50 years later he'll still be a dirty, old scoundrel.

His obvious reply? I'll let the tagline from his column answer that: "I don't give a hoot!"