

BOOK REVIEW

Thailand Handbook, 1997 (Second Edition)

by Carl Parkes

Moon Travel Handbooks, PO Box 3040, Chico, CA
95927-3040

Review by Georgia Lee

Another Moon travel book has appeared, this one for Thailand. An exhaustive handbook, this guide includes everything you ever wanted to know about the exotic country that, before 1939, we knew as Siam. In its 834 pages you will find over 150 maps, more than 125 charts plus special topics, eight color pages, and all kinds of logistics for traveling to this complex and fascinating country. There is a Glossary and Index plus a welcome addition: electronic sources of travel information about the country.

The author is clearly enthusiastic about Thailand, citing an array of attractions from pristine beaches and islands to festivals, to exotic religious architecture with its fantasy of color and shapes, to archaeological sites and museums. Parkes tells us where to find local massage parlors, remote hill tribes, kick boxing, transvestite shows, scenic highways, live sex shows, or crocodile farms . . . along with, of course, the more mundane information on ways to travel around the country, and hotel options. The latter includes everything from cheap rooms with a family to luxurious suites in world-class hotels.

Parkes has a focus on conservation and non-destructive tourism but it seems that the country is its own worst enemy: Thailand has a population explosion; air pollution in Bangkok is the worst in Asia with carbon monoxide levels 50% above the standard; and pollution is killing rivers. Many animal species are endangered, and coral beds are disappearing. In 1961, 54% of Thailand was covered with forest; by 1988, logging and development reduced this figure to 28%. A monstrous catfish of the Mekong called *pla bak* that can grow to 3 meters long and weigh more than 300 kg is now—due to over-fishing—on the endangered list (the thought of a 300 kg catfish staggers the imagination!). Parkes states that trends are now underway to try to reverse some of these environmental problems.

The book includes an extensive section on history and has a great 'time-line' that begins with the Hoabinhian culture in 3500 BC and ends in 1993 with the banning of rock star Madonna from Thailand.

Travel tips are categorized by interest: i.e., history/architecture; performing arts; beaches, etc. Parkes provides options for sports and recreation, caving, rock climbing, river trips, diving, golf, festivals (which seem to occur throughout the year), food and drink. There are tips on staying healthy.

I particularly enjoyed Parkes' mini-essays dealing with "weird trivia" that are sprinkled throughout the book. For example, he includes one on Siamese Cats (which he claims are all "born Buddhist and never convert to Christianity, no matter what they tell their American owners"); the Dreaded Chili (did you know there is a chili made from what is called "rat shit peppers"?); an essay on Meditation; and one on a

monastery devoted to helping addicts to kick the drug habit. There is one about the Elephant Fair in Northeast Thailand, which includes elephant dancing, elephant soccer, and a tug-of-war between an elephant and 70 men (the elephant always wins).

Of course, the book is not all funny and funky things about the country: it also is a serious guide to getting around. Bangkok and environs alone cover 179 pages; there are sections for Central Thailand, Northern Thailand, Northeast Thailand, and Southern Thailand. Eight pages of Suggested Reading include everything from history to Conrad and Maugham. Parkes has done a great job of covering all aspects of this complex and colorful country, which clearly is close to his heart.

CONFERENCES

16th Congress of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association (IPPA), Malaysia, tentatively scheduled for 4-10 January 1998. Expressions of interest should be sent to Dr. Peter Bellwood, Dept of Archaeology and Anthropology, Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200, Australia. Fax: 61 6 249 2711; email: Peter.Bellwood@anu.edu.au

Islands V, The International Small Islands Association Conference will be held on the island of Mauritius from July 2-5, 1998. Contact Grant McCall at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of New South Wales. Fax (61+2) 9312-7859; Email: G.McCall@unsw.edu.au

The IX Pacific Science Inter-Congress, "Sustainable Development in the Pacific: Conservation, Population, Resources, and Environment." December 1998, at Taipei, Taiwan. Information can be had by contacting Prof. Chang-Hung Chou, Institute of Botany, Academia Sinica, 128 Sec.2; Yuan-Chiu Road, Taipei, Taiwan, China; email: chou@gate.sinica.ed.tw

XIX Pacific Science Congress, June 1999. University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. Information can be had by contacting Dr William O'Sullivan, Dean, Faculty of Biological and Behavioural Science, The University of New South Wales, Sydney 2052, Australia. Email: W.OSullivan@unsw.edu.au

