

## Newsletter No. 1

G'day G'day, friends north and south of the Equator.

Leaving UK early Jan in some of the worst weather possible, soon turned to peace and tranquillity over the North Sea. Another faultless flight on Thai Air saw yours truly land at the new Suvarnabhomi (pronounced Suwannaphum) Airport, Bangkok. Jeez, what a huge place !!! There's plenty of walking to be done and even more standing about in queues at the Immigration desks. Loads of useless Poms failing to fill in their Landing/Departure forms caused time wasting on a typical scale. On to the baggage retrieval and wait for the non-existent arrival of my worldly goods. By this stage, a kindly passing local decided a wheelchair was needed. None to be found with sufficient girth to contain the large, very sweaty Farang, who by now had managed to split his trousers !! Not a pretty sight.

Eventually, all was found, loaded onto a trolley and pushed a further kilometer to the exit area. The narrowness of the exit created a chicane with a sea of people attempting to get through. Then a friendly face - Khun Tony to the rescue. Managing to park within feet of the escape doors, I clambered aboard, being towelled down by the lovely Paa. From plane to car took a fraction under two hours. Perhaps it was due to several Jumbos landing within a few minutes of each other. What it will be like when the giant A380 gets into service is anybody's guess.

Arriving at the Silom Serene again saw many familiar faces and broad smiles. Now ensconced in a magnificent suite on the seventh floor, I am able to set up my little office and maintain international communication. Thank you all for your kind words during this difficult period, its very greatly appreciated.

First few days are generally the same - trot round to the Madrid for some chicken wings and Johnnie Deng. Struggle over to the Crown Royal for some more Deng and a welcome knee massage. When all feeling has left the legs, get Paa to summon a taxi and get it to drive me the 346 yards back to the hotel. All for 37 baht (52 pence). Having seen all the usual suspects and checked for those who had fallen off the perch, it is pleasing to know that only a couple of our old ex-pats didn't make it through Christmas. At least I was luckier than them.

Without making any comment about the cricket down under, it was still important to find a suitable venue to watch the dreadful performance by England, catch the Premiership Football, view the tennis candy in Melbourne and enjoy the major golf tourneys. A new sports bar, The Duke of Wellington, has conveniently opened as a half way staging post to Patpong. Decent beer, wine and Johnnie Deng and plenty of widescreen tvs covering all types of sport. In fact Phil 'the Power' was getting beaten by Hamilton yesterday and Gronholm was winning the Rally of Sweden. Beware the chicken satay - it had drains written all over it !!! In fact the chef needs to go otherwise there will be no future there. The management have been alerted !!

Lord Hall arrived from Chiang Mai and we met him and his entourage for an excellent lunch at the Oriental. My God, they must be paying him well at M & G !!! Great to see Hally again and get round a few of the local haunts. The Lady Noot, her sister Ning and their aunt followed the Pied Piper around like some mystical Maharajah. Wonderful stuff.

Visits by the Earl of Wombatshire, Chris and Cyndy and the ancient Pikester all made for an entertaining first month. With the arrival of Cyndy and Chris, the air pollution increased dramatically in Bangkok. All local hospitals had been put on standby, including the Bumrungrad Hospital near Sukhumvit which is one of the best in Asia. Also settled into the Serene for three days, it was necessary to show them the sights in the time honoured way. Patpong 1, Patpong 2, Sukhumvit Road, soi 33 etc etc - you get the idea !! Anyway, after 48 hours Chris failed to make it far from the toilet leaving Cyndy to soldier on. An extra day in Bkk for recovery and it was off to

Jomtien and the Lakeside Lodge. This was the oasis of peace and tranquility with exceptional views and good hospitality. Or was it ?? On arrival, it was quite clear that this might not be ideal - a new property was being constructed next door. Hmmm. Certainly no mention by resident Burgermeister, Herr Wilhelm von Giblet.

A pleasant dinner and some excellent Johnnie Deng ( I failed to bring my own so when the Bill arrived the cost was x5 what it would have cost from Tesco's) and the party retired at around 01.00am. Come 07.00am and the evidence of building works became clear. Whirring noises, banging, crashing, drilling and general chaos - it resembled a scene out of Carry On Abroad. The Burgermeister seemed oblivious to all this as he was extremely deaf, and lived furthest away from the works. The television didn't work and there was no Internet. The next day the Chef and Handiman went on holiday to Chiang Mai. By now Cyndy had disintegrated and never left the room for two days. The Great Escape was already being planned. Fortunately I had a basket weaving competition to attend in Bangkok, and Tony was required to seek alternative accom in Jomtien. Job done !!! The invalids were transferred to convalesce at the Jomtien Garden Hotel on the beach. In the meantime Uberleutnant von Givusyermuny insisted on frogmarching us to Tesco's ATM for cash payment without discount. Vee haf vays ov emptying your wallet !!! You may think Thai crumpet is extremely adept at wallet extraction, but they are complete amateurs when it comes to dealing with von Giblet.

Anyway, its back to Bangkok for more R & R. The experience of Lakeside Lodge means a good few nights in to recoup some of the excess expenditure. Not a bad thing even though the lovely Paa has had to return North to spend time with her very sick father, or so I'm told. Still, its a good time to check if this totty magnet has the charm of a coiled cobra or the allure of a walking ATM. Yes, its the allure of a walking ATM. Oh well, nothing like delusions of grandeur, even if it only lasts a few seconds !!!! Back to the DoW to watch the cricket, and check if the chef has changed. No he hasnt, so its liquid only again and plenty of it as the match unravels. Khun Peter Hollibone joins up and attempts some cottage pie. Going for safety first, the garlic cheese bread and French fries seem free of e-coli but still need copious supplies of Deng to sterilise it.

Today, Tony and I go to Jomtien to retrieve C & C for a final couple of days in Bkk. Promise to take it easy on them this time. There is nothing worse than having a long flight when feeling Tom and Dick !!!!!

That's about it for now. Hope the above has entertained a little, and has given an insight into life on the edge !!!! Many thanks for all the support and kind words, there will be more later.

Johnny B