

READY FOR A COVID CHRISTMAS? PLAY THE GAME! > PAGE 13

CONNECTED



AIS workers check the installation of a 5G signal station in Phuket. Photo: AIS

HIGH HOPES FOR 5G ROLLOUT TO BROADEN PHUKET'S ECONOMIC BASE

Tanyaluk Sakoot
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5G coverage across the island is already nearing 100% with only lesser populated areas remaining to be connected, as hopes run high that the new level of connectivity will help lure many different types of businesses not dependent on tourism to start up on the island.

Full 100% coverage is expected to be completed by the middle of next year, explained Pracha Asawateera, Southern Area Manager of Digital Economy Promotion Agency (DEPA)

based in Phuket. As such, Mr Pracha is the DEPA Area Manager for all of Southern Thailand.

"Presently, the 5G network coverage is nearly 100% on Phuket island. We plan to complete 100% coverage in the middle of 2021," he said.

Mr Pracha expects the rollout of 5G to have a much more pronounced effect on Phuket, far beyond the commercial push of faster connection speeds for mobile phones accessing the internet.

"The 5G network will allow for much greater transfer data, and will have great influence in four key areas:

tourism, safety, environment and the digital industry," he said.

"High-speed connections will help develop existing industries, and allow new enterprises to develop entirely new industries on the island," he added.

"For example, 5G will affect the education industry, medical care and public venues. The users who will come to depend on high-speed connections will grow over the coming years," Mr Pracha said.

Phuket Chamber of Commerce President Thanusak Phungdet said that 5G has the potential to become a "game-changer" for the island.

"The 5G network is a huge part of Phuket's selling point, and a game changer in Phuket," Mr Thanusak told *The Phuket News*.

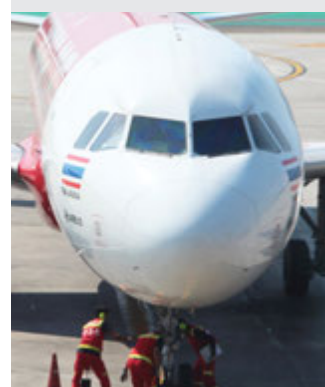
"5G is an essential addition for Phuket. We want 5G access to be among the top reasons for businesses to choose Phuket as a base in the whole country," he said.

"5G can persuade global companies such as Amazon and other big start-ups to establish their regional bases here. With 5G, companies can now consider Phuket as a place to invest and set up a new base here," Mr Thanusak added.

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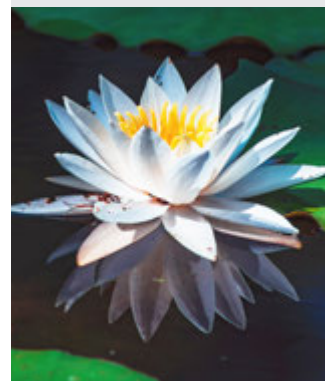
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News



Phuket to get own official Monopoly > p4

Local elections bring alcohol ban

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

The sale of alcohol will be banned in Phuket from 6pm Saturday night through to 6pm Sunday night (Dec 19-20) as the island heads to the polls for its first local election since the coup of May 2014.

The alcohol ban is required under election laws, Phuket Election Commission (PEC) Director-General Passakon Siripakayapon explained.

“So are the COVID-19 protection measures. People at the polling stations will be required to wear face masks and maintain social distancing,” he added.

“Bars, nightclubs and other entertainment venues are not ordered to close,” Mr Passakon said.

“They can close, that is up to them – but the sale of alcohol is prohibited. Remember, the penalty is up to six



Phuket Election Commission (PEC) Director-General Passakon Siripakayapon urged people to cast their votes this Sunday (Dec 20). Photo: PR Dept

months in prison or a fine up to B10,000, or both,” he added.

The consumption of alcohol at private homes is allowed, as long as no alcohol is sold, he added.

“Please do not break the law. If any one sees this behaviour, inform the police by calling 191 or send photos and/

make their votes count this Sunday, as every province in the country elects its own Provincial Administration Organisation (PAO) – meaning the ban on the sale of alcohol will be nationwide.

There will be 496 polling stations across the island open from 8am to 5pm, he noted.

Voting is compulsory in Thailand. However, there is no fine for not voting, but people must submit an official reason for not voting or stand to lose up to six citizen’s rights.

Unlike with national elections, there has been no advance voting.

This year the number of polling stations has been increased from 390 set up for the last local election held six years ago to reduce the number of people visiting each venue as part of the COVID-19 protection measures.

The extra efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has doubled the budget required

in Phuket to hold the election to B26 million.

Registration for election candidates closed on Nov 6, with five candidates entering the race to be elected Phuket PAO President, including popular local politicians Jirayut Songyot of the Khon Baan Rao Party, Rewat Areerob of the Phuket Yatai Party and Sorawut Palimapunt of the Phuket Progressive Movement Party.

In total, 77 people registered their candidacy for being elected to the PPAO Council.

Incumbent PPAO Acting Chief Mr Watcharin has already announced that he will not register his candidacy to contest the position of PPAO President in the upcoming PPAO election.

“So please come to exercise your rights, as people have not voted in any local elections for six years. It is a Thai democratic right to vote,” Mr Passakon said.

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5G hoped to attract investors

Continued from page 1

Although Phuket is relatively more expensive than other parts of Thailand, the island still held a strong attraction for investors now that high-speed connections are available, Mr Thanusak explained.

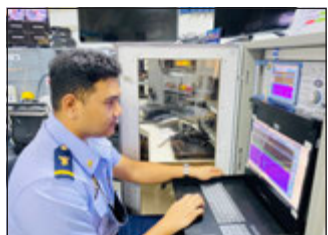
“Anyone who wants to run a business looks for high-end communication infrastructure, and the cost of running an operation in Phuket is cheaper than other cities or areas in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore, Penang, Hong Kong and Manila,” he said.

The rollout of 5G will also help Phuket property businesses and hotels to develop their businesses, he added.

“Once Phuket is able to provide fully dependable 5G connection speeds, this will be one of the key factors to be presented to businesses looking to invest in Phuket, and businesses will come to invest when Phuket is ready,” Mr Thanusak said.

Mr Thanusak noted that promotion of 5G access in Phuket has yet to be rolled in full to the public.

“Next year, AIS will explain more information about the 5G network for the business community,” he said.



An officer from the NBTC checks a 5G connection in Phuket. Photo: NBTC

Wirit Boon-Erb, Southern District Manager (Engineering) at Advanced Wireless Network Co Ltd, a subsidiary of AIS, explained that there are currently 260 5G signal stations set up across the island.

“Currently, in terms of full area coverage, we can confirm that 80% of the geographic area of Phuket has 5G access. The only areas where there is currently no 5G coverage are forests, mountains, rural roads and some small islands.

“But the network already covers the famous beaches, such as Patong Beach, where people can connect to the 5G network quickly and easily,” Mr Wirit said.

“The 5G network also extends to areas offshore, so people on boats, such as dive tour operators and other people operating boating activities, will have access,” Mr Wirit noted.

The 5G stations in Phuket are connected to large data centres of Content Delivery Network (CDN) servers located in Hat Yat and Surat Thani, Mr Wirit added.

The 5G network does not affect and is not affected by any other networks (4G, 3G, 2G), Mr Wirit explained, as they operate at different frequencies.

“There is no speed impact on another network. The networks on 700MHz, 2,600MHz and 26GHz don’t disturb each other, they work very well,” he said.

“Once people become familiar with 5G, they will stop using the other networks,” he added.

Wikorn Kongrit, Director of Enterprise Sales Upper South of Advanced Wireless Network Co Ltd, told *The Phuket News* that corporate packages for 5G connectivity are designed specifically for each customer.

“The 5G package offered is a specific package to suit the operator. So that means the price of the 5G package will have different service charges. It is hard to explain all the details without talking with the customer,” Mr Wikorn added.

Expensive taxis hit limelight

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

No action will be taken against the Phuket taxi driver who found himself at the centre of a media storm last week after a social media post by a Thai tourist went viral after reporting that the taxi fare amounted to B200 per kilometre.

"Is it the normal rate. I thought I was in a taxi in a foreign country," the woman wrote in a social media post on Dec 7.

The post went viral and prompted Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew last Friday (Dec 11) to order local transport officials to respond.

Prapai Sounkul, Chief Policy Specialist at the Phuket Land Transportation Office (PLTO), told *The Phuket News* on Tuesday (Dec 15) that a team of officers was assembled after Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew ordered an investigation into the incident.

The officers located the driver near the Limelight shopping mall in Phuket Town on Dec 8, Mr Prapai explained.

The taxi involved was a "green plate" taxi, which does not use a meter, he added.

Under Land Transport regulations, such taxis are called "chartered taxis", for which only maximum fares have been set.



The taxi driver involved speaks with Phuket Land Transportation Office (PLTO) Chief Policy Specialist Prapai Sounkul on Dec 8. Photo: PLTO

Mr Prapai declined to name the taxi driver involved, but confirmed that the driver was a man, about 60 years old.

"The officers asked the taxi driver to come to our office to discuss the incident, and I spoke with him directly," Mr Prapai said.

"The driver confirmed that on Dec 7 at about 2pm he was called by a motorbike taxi driver informing him that three passengers from

Krabi wanted to take a taxi from the Limelight mall.

"The fare agreed was B200 to take the three passengers and their luggage to a hotel in Phuket Town, a distance of not more than one kilometre," Mr Prapai explained.

"He took them to the hotel and unloaded their bags for them and left. The driver said there was no argument and no bad words spoken," he said.

The PLTO officers contacted the

person who posted the complaint that went viral to ask further about the incident, Mr Prapai added.

"The woman said she posted her comments because she felt it was too expensive for the distance," Mr Prapai said.

"She admitted that her post was more out of emotion, and that she did not intend to shame the taxi driver and did not want to harm Phuket's reputation," he added.

"She also pointed out that she posted her comments only on her own Facebook page. She did not post it anywhere else. Other people did that," he said.

"There will be no action taken against the taxi driver. The fare was negotiated and agreed before the passengers entered the vehicle, and the fare charged did not break the law," Mr Prapai confirmed.

Regardless, the post struck many raw nerves about the high fares charged by Phuket taxi drivers, often openly called ripoffs, and raised the ugly memory of two Australian tourists filing complaints with the Karon Police in July last year after a passenger van driver charged them B3,000 to take them from Phuket airport to a hotel in Kata, about 50km away.

Speaking to the press last Friday, PLTO Chief Banyat Kantha urged travellers to use the mobile app named "Hello Phuket" to look for taxis and public transport.

Phuket Provincial Police launched the "Hello Phuket" mobile application in August, with 300 taxis joining. It was created to standardise the fares and provide safe public transport services in Phuket.

Mr Banyat said that public transport fees in Phuket should be cheaper during the COVID-19 pandemic because local operators agreed to give a 20% discount to travellers.

Former Thalang Police Chief has corruption sentence reduced

A FORMER THALANG Police Chief has had his nine-year sentence reduced after pleading guilty to illegally releasing three foreigners detained at Thalang Police Station before they were to be handed over to Immigration for deportation.

Thammanoon Phaiju, who was Thalang Police Chief in Phuket in 2010, was initially sentenced to nine years' imprisonment for wrongful exercise of duties charges brought under Section 157 of the Criminal Code, reported anti-corruption watchdog Isra News.

The charges were brought against Thammanoon by the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC), the report noted.

The Criminal Court for Corruption and Misconduct, Region 8, handed down its initial sentence of three years' imprisonment for each foreigner released, noting that together they represented three counts of breach of Section 157.

Breach of Section 157 of the Criminal Code may incur



Thalang Police Station in Phuket. Screenshot: Google Maps

imprisonment of one to 10 years, or a fine of B20,000 to B200,000, or both.

The court handed down its sentence on Sept 26, 2019, the report noted, citing a release from the NACC.

However, as Thammanoon confessed to the charges, his sentence was reduced to half the sentence handed down, in accordance with Section 78 of the Criminal Code, the Isra report explained.

However, the NACC now has announced that Thammanoon's sentence was reduced further by order of the Appeals Court, which on May 22 this year ruled that Thammanoon's sentence be reduced to two years' imprisonment for each count.

The court then reduced

his prison term further, to three years in total, as the defendant already confessed, Isra explained, again citing another release by the NACC.

At a meeting on Oct 6 this year, the NACC together with the Office of the Attorney General agreed to not petition the judgement of the Appeal Court, said the Isra report.

Col Thammanoon was previously well-known as 'Khai Mook Buster' after he arrested notorious kidnapper Cherm 'Khai Mook' Seng-iad a decade ago, the report also noted.

He also ended up involved in many high-profile cases that gained a lot of public attention, the report said. *The Phuket News*

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MON DEC 21



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Low: +25°

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Wind 11 m/s

THU DEC 24



High: +30°

Low: +25°

Wind 11 m/s

Phuket to get its own Monopoly

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

With over a billion players worldwide and editions in 114 countries, Monopoly has long been a family favourite around the globe. Now, for the first time, Phuket will be getting its own edition of the world-famous board game, announces Winning Moves, who will be producing Phuket Monopoly under official license from Hasbro.

UK-based Winning Moves say that the game will be sold exclusively through local businesses in Phuket from August next year.

Residents of Phuket will now have the opportunity to help produce this customised version of the world-famous game, the game organiser also announced.

Each of the Monopoly spaces (28 in all) will be replaced with familiar locations around Phuket. Many of the Chance and Community Chest cards will also be getting a Phuket-themed makeover, the company said in a press release made public on Dec 10.

"From today, suggestions will be welcomed on which

locations people would like to see featured through the Phuket Monopoly Facebook page," the release added.

Jennifer Lau from Winning Moves UK, who is producing the game under official license from Hasbro, who own Monopoly, commented, "There are so many beautiful locations around Phuket that we want to fit on the board. We want this to be an accurate representation of Phuket, so we would love everyone to send their recommendations

for what they would like to see included."

Siripakorn Cheawsamoot, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Deputy Governor for International Marketing (Europe, Africa, Middle East & Americas), added, "We are so excited to see Phuket as the first Asian destination to feature on the famous Monopoly board.

"Phuket is a world-class holiday destination and one of Thailand's most popular islands, so we can't wait to see it brought to life through one of

the world's best-loved games.

"Phuket Monopoly is a fun way to showcase the variety the island has to offer from its beautiful beaches, historic old town, temples, night markets and restaurants to national parks, spas, golf courses and luxury hotels. It's not just a great keepsake to remind travellers of their amazing holiday but an entertaining way to plan a trip to Thailand too!" he said.

The game itself will be colour-themed in different

sets, from tourism to culture, shopping to business, to the most iconic attractions.

"Anything and everything will be considered, from the National Park to Patong Beach, Island boat tours through to the fantastic restaurants in the area," said the release.

Suggestions can also be sent via email to phuket@winningmoves.co.uk as well as the Phuket Monopoly Facebook page (Facebook: phuketmonopoly).



The official Phuket Monopoly game will be sold through local stores from mid-next year. Image: Winning Moves

Patong blaze destroys unused beach mats, umbrella store

NO PEOPLE WERE INJURED in a fire that broke out at a building being used to store unused beach mats and umbrellas in Patong last week.

An officer at the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation office at Patong Municipality (DDPM-Patong) reported that firefighters on Dec 8 were informed of the fire at about 6:44pm.

By the time firefighters arrived at the scene, at the southern end of Ha Sip Pi Rd (50 Years Rd), the whole building was engulfed in flames, the officer said.

"There was a lot of smoke and flames coming out of the building. A fire truck and three water trucks were dispatched to the scene. We spent 15 minutes to stop the fire. Thankfully, no people were injured," the officer added.

Firefighters returned to inspect the building the next morning, the officer explained.

The owner of the building was



The building was engulfed by flames when firefighters arrived. Photo: DDPM-Patong

present, the officer noted.

"The fire had gutted the store-room and the roof had been destroyed completely. There were still some beach umbrellas and other items in the room that had been damaged by the fire," he added.

"At this stage we are not sure what started the fire. We are waiting for police investigators to inspect the scene and estimate the cost of the damage caused by the fire," he added. The Phuket News

Kamala death linked to depression

THE DEATH OF A MAN FOUND hanged in a rented room in Kamala on Monday morning (Dec 14) has been accepted by his family as suicide due to depression, Kamala Police have reported.

Lt Col Watcharapol Kanjanakuntorn of the Kamala Police was informed at 9am that the man's body had been found in the rented room, in Moo 1 Kamala.

Kamala Police with the rescue workers arrived at the scene to find the body of Chaiwat Wongsansuk, 26, originally from Ubon Ratchathani, hanged by a rope tied to a roof beam in front of the bathroom.

Police estimate that Mr Chaiwat died at least five hours before his body was found.

Officers at the scene found no signs that Mr Chaiwat had been involved in any form of a struggle, Lt Col Watcharapol reported.

The body was taken to Patong Hospital for further examination, where doctors also confirmed that Mr Chaiwat had not been in any form of altercation, he added.

Officers spoke with Mr Chaiwat's



Rescue workers at the scene. Photo: Rescuers 8105

mother, Banjai Pohpuet, 51, who said that her son had suffered bouts of depression, Lt Col Watcharapol also noted in his report.

Ms Banjai did not contest the police's understanding that her son had died of suicide, he added.

Mr Chaiwat's body will be handed over to the family so that funeral preparations could be made, Lt Col Watcharapol added.

If you or anyone you know is in emotional distress, please contact the Samaritans of Thailand at their 24-hour hotline 02-713-6791 (English), 02713-6793 (Thai) or Thai Mental Health Hotline at 1323 (Thai).

Eakkapop Thongtub

Deputy PM Jurin opens Patong seafood festival

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Deputy Prime Minister Jurin Laksanawisit, who also serves as the Minister of Commerce, arrived in Phuket last Friday (Dec 11) to officiate the opening of the “Fah Thong on the Beach & Seafood Festival, Rim Lay @ Patong”, held on Patong Beach from Dec 11-13.

The festival is supported by the Ministry of Commerce as one of its “Blue Flag” events, renowned throughout the country for supporting local vendors in order to sell goods and produce at cheap prices to help boost the economy.

Present for the occasion, which also drew a large crowd to the beach, were Phuket Vice Governor Phichet Panaphong and Patong Mayor Chalermkluck Kebsup.

Mr Jurin explained that the event was to help local vendors and stimulate the local economy, and hopefully attract more tourists to Patong, whose tourism industry has been devastated by the economic crisis.

“The government’s policy is to stimulate and mobilise the country’s economy to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic as soon as possible. Phuket is a province that relies on tourism from tourists both in the country and foreign countries, therefore we have a need to stimulate the economy to restore tourism destinations and help increase the incomes of local operators and the community,” he said.



Deputy Prime Minister Jurin Laksanawisit led the official opening of the seafood festival on Patong Beach last Friday (Dec 11). Photo: PR Phuket

The Ministry of Commerce will continue its efforts, which he called “mission critical”, to create business opportunities and develop distribution channels for goods and services, for farmers, small-to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as community enterprises (OTOP) through the organisation of trade fair activities.

“At the same time, it is convenient for people and tourists to buy good-quality products at low prices,” he said.

Mr Jurin pointed out that before the outbreak of COVID-19, Thailand was one of the world’s leading tourist destinations and food hubs.

“In 2019, Thailand was voted the No. 2 country for Best Travel Destination in the World and earned more than B2 trillion in income from foreign tourists. Thailand is also a ‘Kitchen of the World’, with Thai food accepted by foodies around the world as the most delicious,” he said.

Deputy PM Jurin pointed out that the “Fah Thong on the Beach & Seafood Festival” exemplified all these core issues in the one event.

The festival was organised by the Ministry of Commerce’s Department of Internal Trade, Mr Jurin noted.

Previously, the Ministry of Commerce has held five seafood events in Bangkok, Chonburi, Phuket, Phang Nga and Songkhla, he added.

“These events received a lot of attention from the public and tourists as well,” he said.

Phuket Red Cross steps up with ‘survival bags’

THE PHUKET CHAPTER of the Red Cross Society last week donated more than 800 bags of essential supplies, which they called “survival bags”, to representatives of local administrators across the island so they could be distributed to people suffering amid the ongoing economic crisis.

Wandee Woonciew, who as the wife of Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew serves as President of the Phuket chapter of the Thai Red Cross Society, presided over the handover on Dec 7, held at Baan Sapam School in Rassada.

Present at the ceremony to receive the “survival bags” were community leaders, village leaders, and officials from local municipalities and tambon administration organisations (OrBorTor).

Mrs Wandee explained that the Phuket Red Cross realised how people were suffering from the economic crisis, as some people have become unemployed and lacked any form of income.

“In total, we will give 2,123 survival bags to people in the three districts on the island. The bags contain instant noodles, rice, canned foods, bottled water and other items essential for living,” Mrs Wandee said.



More than 800 ‘survival bags’ were handed out on Dec 7. Photo: PR Dept

“Today, 808 bags were given to community leaders from every tambon [subdistrict] who will later distribute them to people in their areas,” Mrs Wandee said.

“We will later give survival bags to people in Kathu and Thalung, respectively,” Mrs Wandee added.

“People said they were happy to receive help from officials,” Mrs Wandee noted.

“Additionally, they are willing to cooperate with officials to help protect against a second wave of [COVID-19] infections,” she added. *The Phuket News*

Arriving yachts granted 30-day extension for applying for Special Tourist Visa

THE CABINET HAS APPROVED a 30-day extension for people arriving on visiting yachts to apply for a Special Tourist Visa (STV).

The news was announced by the Thai Yachting Business Association (TYBA), based in Phuket, through a notice posted on their official Facebook page last Thursday (Dec 10).

The Cabinet approved the extension for arriving yachts to apply for STV entry on Dec 9, the TYBA explained.

“The Thai Yachting Business Association (TYBA) submitted the extension request to the Thai Government to provide more time for visiting yachts to enter Thailand under this special visa promotion. This will make it more convenient for visiting yachts to enter Thailand without having to obtain a Certificate of Entry application with the Royal Thai Embassy,” the TYBA said in its notice today.

The Special Tourist Visa provides visitors up to 270 days stay in the Kingdom, the TYBA noted.

The announcement by Cabinet also removed prohibition of visitors from high-risk



Health workers test new arrivals on yachts at the designated mooring area off Phuket’s east coast. Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

nations to enter Thailand, the TYBA noted.

However, the TYBA stressed that yacht visitors will have to undertake quarantine on board in accordance with Alternative Yacht Quarantine (AYQ) measures.

“The TYBA submitted a request to the Thai Government to allow visiting yachts to enter Thailand back in September 2020. This was to support the yachting industry that has suffered from prohibition of international passenger vessel arrivals since the Emergency Decree announcement,” the TYBA notice explained.

To enter Thailand, visiting yachts will have to submit an application through an approved agent which currently include Porntip Logistics Co Ltd, Asia Pacific Superyachts,

Asia Yacht Agency, Yacht Concierge, the TYBA advised.

“Any member that wishes to become an AYQ approved yacht agent or wants to know more about AYQ, can contact TYBA for a list of requirements,” the TYBA added.

Meanwhile, the Royal Thai Navy Third Area Command, which is overseeing all boat arrivals in Phuket, on Dec 9 reported that there were six yachts with nine people on board observing the 14-day quarantine in the designated mooring area off Phuket’s east coast.

The Navy stressed that all people arriving on boats must stay on board for the full duration of the mandatory 14-day quarantine, during which health officers test all arrivals for COVID-19 by using RT-PCR tests.

The COVID-19 protection measures applied to all vessels arriving in Phuket, the Navy stressed, noting that the five on board the Thai merchant ship ‘Jasmine’ who arrived from Malaysia on Dec 9 all tested negative for the virus. All five were serving a 14-day quarantine, the Navy noted.

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ALCOHOL MAY BE A HEALTH HAZARD!

United push for cheaper airfares

Governor leads delegation seeking direct international flights

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew and Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Phuket office Director Nanthasiri Ronnasiri last week led a delegation to Bangkok to plea for THAI Airways International to arrange direct international passenger flights to Phuket and for its domestic carrier subsidiary THAI Smile to reduce airfares to Phuket to help boost the number of domestic tourists visiting the island.

Joining the delegation from Phuket were Phuket Tourist Association (PTA) President Bhummitkitti Ruktaengam and PTA Vice President of Meeting & Special Activities Thaneth Tantipiriyakij, as well as Kongsak Kuupongsakorn, President of Southern Thai Hotels Association and Thaneth Tantipiriyakij, PTA's Vice President of Meeting & Special Activities.

TAT Deputy Governor Sirikorn Chiewsamut was



The meeting was held in Bangkok. Photo: PTA

present for the talks, held at the head office of Thai Airways International in Bangkok, as was Chaturon Chaiyakam, Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department of Consular Affairs (DCA).

The meeting was dubbed by the PTA as a way to join

forces to help save Phuket tourism.

Mr Bhummitkitti said that Phuket's tourism industry could be saved if international flights started flying directly to Phuket before continuing on to Bangkok, and if domestic flights to and from Phuket were cheaper

to encourage more domestic tourists to visit the island.

Mr Bhummitkitti called for those present to help make direct international flights to Phuket from main cities in Europe, and notably Scandinavia, to respond to demand from tourists in those source markets.

"For four months already we have had private jets coming to Phuket and now we have private yachts. A lot more people want to come but they cannot because there are too many limitations," he said.

"So we want THAI Airways to operate direct international flights to Phuket as they did before.

"From previous statistics, a lot of passengers preferred to come to Phuket first before travelling to Bangkok," he explained.

"If we can make this happen, a lot of tourists will come," Mr Bhummitkitti noted.

"We now have a lot of ALQ hotels with thou-

sands of rooms available [in Phuket], but at this stage we have not more than 20 rooms that have been used," he pointed out.

As of Monday (Dec 14), the Phuket Provincial Health Office reported that 21 hotels in Phuket had now been ratified to operate as ALQ venues, altogether offering 2,554 rooms available.

The rooms are currently empty of guests as no international tourists are allowed to land directly in Phuket.

The PTA will file an urgent request to the economic adviser to the prime minister and to the CAAT [Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand] to have a meeting to set maximum rates for ticket prices, a statement by the PTA quoted Mr Bhummitkitti as saying.

"The PTA also proposes that THAI Smile have charter flights from northern and northeastern Thailand to the South," the statement added, presumably so that tourists could be brought to other tourism destinations in the South without any risk to domestic passengers travelling on regular scheduled domestic flights.

BALANCE NEEDED

Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew told the meeting a balance must be struck between quarantine restrictions and allowing the economy to recover.

Stimulating domestic tourism to offset the loss of revenue from foreign visitors had produced satisfactory results with about 200,000 visitors arriving in Phuket last month, according to the local estimates, he added.

Domestic visitors have been keeping Phuket's tourism industry afloat, but there would have been more tourists

if airfares, particularly during long weekends, were not so expensive, Governor Narong explained.

Gov Narong added that airlines should add more flights with the expectation that it could lower the ticket prices.

However, for the tourism industry to survive and thrive again, more international visitors were needed, Governor Narong said.

The meeting discussed reinstating direct flights from European countries whose nationals make up the traditional mainstay of long-stay visitors to Phuket.

The air links which should be given priority are those from Frankfurt and Copenhagen to Phuket with onward flights to Bangkok.

TAT Deputy Governor Sirikorn Chiewsamut said travel demand for Phuket remains strong in some international tourist segments despite the 14-day mandatory quarantine regulation.

Although international arrivals are nowhere near the pre-COVID level at the start of the year, a return of direct commercial flights will help revive flagging tourism, the meeting was told.

Department of Consular Affairs (DCA) Deputy Director-General Chaturon Chaiyakam said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has relaxed restrictions in granting tourist visas. Previously, tight restrictions were in place for visa applications sought by people from countries with widespread infections.

Jesada Chandrema, THAI's Acting Vice-President for Sales, said the airline has taken note of the calls for resumption of direct scheduled flights to Phuket from Europe. He described the proposal as "interesting and possible".



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ALCOHOL MAY BE A HEALTH HAZARD!

New Year celebrations, events get green light

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

All provinces are COVID-safe for tourists and people can enjoy the New Year celebrations, with local infections at a Bangkok hospital and imported cases from Tachilek all under control, the Disease Control Department announced on Tuesday (Dec 15).

"Today there is no outbreak area in Thailand. So, celebration activities can go ahead as long as organisers and attendees obey preventive measures," director-general Dr Opas Kankawinpong said.

He advised event organisers to screen visitors' health, provide alcohol gel, disinfect surfaces and ensure social distancing is followed, and that visitors wear face masks and use the Thaichana check-in and checkout app.

"New Year countdown events can be held. Visits to performances can be arranged in groups of about 10, with distancing between them. So, even if the disease is transmitted, health officials



Dancers in Santa Claus costumes invite people to a New Year event in Bangkok. Photo: Chanat Katanyu.

can handle that effectively on a group-by-group basis," Dr Opas said.

Addressing concerns about COVID-19 among returnees from Myanmar, the director-general said there not been a local infection for about 10 days in the provinces where Tachilek-related COVID-19 cases had been reported.

"These provinces have returned to normal. There is not a concern. These provinces are safe, but officials must continue to be strict in doing

their duty," Dr Opas said.

All provinces were safe for tourists, he said. No visitors to any province would be quarantined on their return.

PRAYUT THREAT

The announcement came a day after Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha threatened to enforce the emergency decree and prohibit the assembly of more than five people should the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the country get any worse.

Speaking to media after the controversy surrounding attempts by authorities to bring the curtain down early on the Big Mountain Music Festival last weekend, Gen Prayut refused to rule out once again using the sweeping powers afforded to him by the decree to curtail or prevent large public gatherings.

When asked if a ban on social gatherings would be necessary, Gen Prayut said it might be if there were an outbreak. Currently, the COVID-19 situation did not warrant such a ban, said the prime minister.

Social gatherings of more than five people have been prohibited to curb the spread following the outbreak in March, he said.

"What should we do if we have an outbreak after the concert in Nakhon Ratchasima? Or an outbreak after a concert in Bangkok. What should we do? It's all back to lockdown. So, every one needs to help. The emergency decree is needed when necessary," he said.



TAT received a number of complaints about fraud in the 'We Travel Together' scheme. Photo: Chakkrapan Natanri.

Fraud charges taint travel scheme

PHIPHAT RATCHAKIT prakarn, the Tourism and Sports Minister, said on Monday (Dec 14) the ministry received a number of complaints about fraud in the "We Travel Together" scheme that started on July 18 and offered 5 million hotel room nights.

On Dec 9, the real-time tracking system on the website showed 225,922 room nights were left, with 1.68 million air tickets available. On Dec 11, the air tickets remained unchanged, but the available rooms were listed as zero.

"Extraordinarily fast bookings might be driven by high demand in high season, but we have to scrutinise transactions for wrongdoing," he said.

Mr Phiphat said fraudulent schemes were consistently found in many previous tourism stimulus campaigns.

Financial policy adviser Pornchai Thiraveja said fraudulent activities could be discov-

ered by checking physical facts, such as examining check-in activities and water or electric consumption in suspected hotels and resorts, which should match bookings and hotel sizes.

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Governor Yuthasak Supasorn said there are at least 500 unusual transactions that TAT received from the operator of this project. He said if any hotels or individual users are found guilty, they have to be punished, such as being black-listed and forced to compensate all losses.

The B22.4-billion stimulus campaign saw a slow response in the first 50 days as only 851,000 registrants booked hotel rooms using privileges, prompting the government to revamp many rules, such as allowing people to choose hotels in their home provinces and increasing the e-voucher value for weekday travel to B900.

Bangkok Post

Thailand now open to the whole world

TOURISTS FROM EVERYWHERE are now welcome to visit Thailand, irrespective of their countries' COVID-19 situation, under a newly amended Special Tourist Visa (STV) long-stay programme, reports the Bangkok Post.

However, these travellers still need to comply with Thailand's 14-day mandatory quarantine, deputy government spokeswoman Rachada Dhnadirek said last Tuesday (Dec 8). The more liberal policy



Visitors at Saphan Mon in Kanchanaburi. Photo: Bangkok Post

represents a government U-turn and is designed to help the ailing tourism industry. STVs were previously

only available to people from low risk-countries but that stringent condition was blamed for the low number of tourists taking advantage of the programme, with only 825 people from 29 countries and only six luxury yachts using it, said Ms Rachada. The Cabinet has also resolved to extend the stay period for yacht visitors holding an STV for another 30 days, or 60 days in total, she said (see page 5).

Chatrudee Theparat

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The price for the evening will be 2,450 Baht per person with a complimentary buffet for children below 12 years.

Christmas Day

The celebration continues on Friday December 25th, with our annual 'Chilli & Grill' Christmas Day BBQ Lunch Buffet. Perfect for the casual Christmas lover. Find a place by the pool, on the lawn or in the restaurant as we continue the tropical festivities with a lunch buffet, carnival games and DJ Q Nongwate providing the soundtrack.

The price for the Christmas Day lunch will be 1,250 Baht per person with a complimentary buffet for children below 12 years.

All prices listed are inclusive of 10% service charge and 7% value added tax.

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Lilies: A Rainbow Nation



GREEN THOUGHTS

Patrick Campbell

To expats, the water lily is a familiar and reassuring presence; indeed, there must be few goldfish ponds in Europe or America without a complement of nymphaeas. If that means they lack the sheer exoticism of the Asian-based lotus, they do possess the advantage of coming in a spectacular range of colours. That characteristic alone makes the water lily among the most popular of all cultivated plants.

While the classic cup or star-shaped flowers are a clue to the fact that they are among the earliest examples of flowering angiosperms, most garden specimens are relatively recent cultivars. A Thai book devoted entirely to the species contains images of no fewer than 150 hybrids. Such ubiquity means that water lilies surface - literally - in both temperate and tropical environments all around the globe.

Moreover, they are immortalised for art lovers in the paintings of French Impressionist Claude Monet; he created more than 200 paintings based on the water lilies in his garden at Giverny.

I myself have grown magenta, blue and violet varieties, but there are also



Photo: Alvin Matthews / Unsplash



Photo: Sohil Laad / Unsplash

showy white, red, pink and yellow ones to choose from. While most are single, some are double – for example, Gladstonia and Gonnere, both of which sport white flowers. To complete the visual appeal, most cultivars have contrasting yellow stamens.

To grow water lilies, root the fleshy rhizomes in saturated soil at the bottom of ponds or pots: once established, both leaves and flowers will seek the sun by rising to the surface. They can be grown here already established in shallow waterproof pots with plenty of surface area. But although they are sold in this way at most garden cen-



Photo: Camilla Bundgaard / Unsplash



Photo: Jeffrey Hamilton / Unsplash

tres, they look better in fish ponds in company with other aquatic plants, where their circular, floating pads have plenty of room for manoeuvre, and where their exotic blooms illuminate the watery setting.

The leaves, which grow from the root stock on long hollow stems or petioles, can be as much as 12 inches across, and make ideal hiding places for small fish. They also provide shade, which helps both to reduce algae and to prevent over-heating of the watery environment.

Where the water lily wins over the lotus is in its rainbow-like range

of hues; on the other hand, the lotus scores both because it is fragrant and because it is much longer lived. Moreover, since its huge, peony-like flowers and emerald leaves hover well above the water on long stems, the lotus needs a much smaller surface area.

Both need plenty of sun; the water lily in particular will not thrive and bloom unless it is in a sunny position. Both can be propagated by seed or, more reliably, by root (rhizome) division. The only downside is that nymphaeas can become invasive in stagnant or slow-moving water, though that is hardly a matter of concern for the tropical gardener.

While these aquatics are low-maintenance, remember to remove discoloured leaves and spent flowers. And locate them in a sunny position: thus situated, they will reward you for years with a brilliant and oft-repeated display.

Dr Patrick Campbell can be contacted at his home Camelot, located at 59/84 Soi Saiyuan 13; Rawai; Phuket 83130. Tel: 66 076613227 (landline), 0655012326 or 0857827551 (mobile). His book "The Tropic Gardener", an indispensable guide to plants and their cultivation in Thailand, is available from Seng Ho bookshop in Phuket Town or Delish in Rawai, or arrange a copy to be delivered by emailing him at drpaccampbell@gmail.com.



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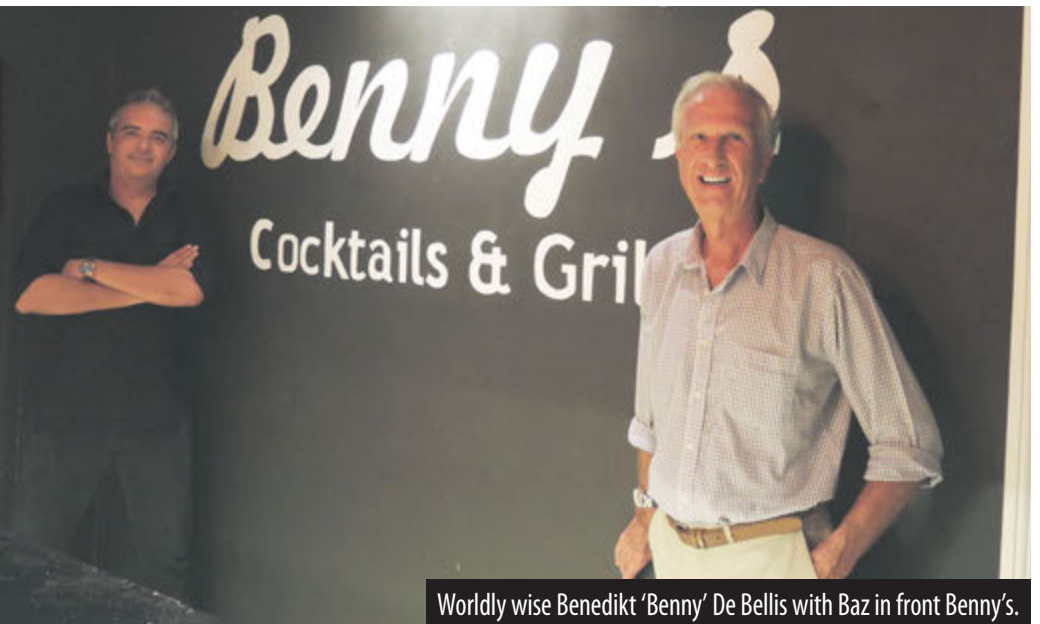
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Gaining good posture at 'Benny's'



Worldly wise Benedikt 'Benny' De Bellis with Baz in front Benny's.



A MEAL WITH...

Baz Daniel
baz_gunner2000@yahoo.com

Welcoming bolt-holes in which to hunker down, cheering glass in hand, and enjoy tasty, mood-boosting cuisine within a buzzy, sociable environment are undoubtedly a major way in which to tackle the travails that menace us all in these harried times.

One such iconic restaurant in the Surin-Bang Tao area is Benny's Cocktails and Grill, which has gained a reputation for fine food, great cocktails and drinks served in a friendly welcoming ambience... exactly the sort of hide-away in which to ride out present challenges.

I decided to head over there to have a sit-down with the eponymous owner Benedikt "Benny" De Bellis to learn how he had managed to gain his enviable reputation and what his thoughts were about the future of our island.

Benny's restaurant was inspired by the American bars of London which flourished in the golden age of travel in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – an unabashed temple to hedonism and good taste serving classic cocktails and fresh-grilled meats in a convivial setting where you can let your hair down and enjoy yourself. It's the sort of place you might expect to see the Great Gatsby and Papa Hemingway propping up the bar late at night, holding court.

This may seem strange as Benny was born in Germany and grew up in Puglia in southeast Italy, so I asked him why this type of restaurant?

"I felt that the area was well served with outlets serving Italian cuisine and I wanted to bring a new concept and offering to this corner of Phuket," he said.

Benny founded his eponymous restaurant and bar in 2015 and by then he was already a well-known and seasoned professional on the Phuket hospitality and restaurant circuit. Following hotel school in Italy, he had spent several years working in major hotels and restaurants in Europe, including the iconic Ritz Hotel in London.

He arrived in Phuket in 2007 from Singapore when his then boss opened a restaurant here and needed a manager. He fell in love with the Phuket lifestyle and went on to work at such stellar island venues as Sean Power's Supper Club, Opus One in Surin Plaza and then Catch Beach Club from 2012 to 2015.

After enjoying cocktails, Benny and I segued into a delicious supper to talk at length about the fascinating insights which running high-end restaurants in Phuket had given him.

"You develop a sort of sixth-sense for profiling your customers. There's often a fair amount of posturing and 'face' being projected, so when they ask you which wine you'd recommend, you know the right level and price to suggest!"

I asked him about various different types of customer he'd regularly encountered: "There's the businessman, usually in property, often trying to impress a client or prospect, and then there's the party animals hell-bent on a good time while they're here in the tropics, and of course the western expat male with their Asian girlfriends are a classic type. In all of them there's a fair bit of acting and

posturing going on, and so you could liken these up-market restaurants to theatre sets!"

Of course, the world has now totally changed post-COVID and so I asked Benny about his perspectives on the future, both personal and for Phuket as a whole.

"Benny's seems to be doing OK and we are surviving financially and I have been able to keep all our terrific team of staff on. I think we have benefited from a strong local following and good word-of-mouth which has kept our domestic business flowing.

"In future, I think it's vital for Phuket to recalibrate its tourist targeting and strategies to higher-end F.I.T.'s [free independent travellers], rather than the mass market, low-yield model which had become our island's default survival mode pre-COVID," Benny noted.

"Also adopting a longer-term plan and execution of efficient infrastructure such as an effective mass transit system are vital to the island's continuing success," he added.

Benny's thoughts and ideas about Phuket's future are undeniably very wise, but their implementation may be a long way off with the virus spreading worldwide. So, if you are in need of a warm welcoming home-away-from-home in which to enjoy great cuisine, fun times and a boost to your mental resilience, I heartily suggest calling in at Benny's for yourself.

Benny's is located at: 5/6 Had Bang Tao, Moo 3, Cherng Talay, Thalang, Phuket 83110. Visit bennysphuket.com or Facebook: [bennysphuket](https://www.facebook.com/bennysphuket). Bookings accepted. +66 (0) 80 700 1509, book@bennysphuket.com.

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<p>THB 1,100** for adult</p> <p>THB 600** for *children</p>	<p>THB 2,000** for adult</p>	
31 DEC 2020	New Years Eve Buffet Dinner	New Years Eve Set Dinner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charm Thai Restaurant Asian and International Buffet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sam's Steaks and Grill 4 Course Set Menu 	
<p>THB 1,600** for adult</p> <p>THB 800** for *children</p>	<p>THB 2,500** for adult</p>	

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Scan for menu

POP QUIZ

1. In which year did the American Civil War end?

2. Thai national Lisa of world-famous K Pop band 'Blackpink' is from which province?

3. What was the world's first perforated postage stamp called?

4. Which sugar substitute is derived from coal tar?

5. What can a polyglot do?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Easy

2			4		6			3
			1		3			
	9	1				6	8	
6			9	1				5
	2						6	
4			2		8			9
	7	4				1	2	
			8		2			
9			5		7			6

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

Across

1. Body governing TV

4. Vet

7. Slangy assent

10. Norwegian king

12. Protein-producing substance

13. World Series winners of 1986

14. Jean material

16. Slippery long sea creature

17. Nut-producing trees

18. Where you can learn the samba

21. Beethoven's Third

22. Specialized vocabularies

25. Letters after Q

26. Percentage rate

28. Apple picker

29. "Educated insolence," to Aristotle

30. They have to dance well

33. Drink from a dish

35. Ring org.

36. Miff

37. Dancing ____ : where you can see Cheryl Burke

42. Follower meaning follower

43. Bloodshot

44. Golden time

45. Einstein's birthplace

48. Hammer user

50. Slow musical piece

52. Bolshoi offering

56. Successes

58. Scramble for

59. Worker's demand

60. Big jerk

61. Actor Harris and others

62. Diamond of note

63. Cosmo or GQ

64. Thus far

65. IV league?

Down

1. Silo contents

2. Profits

3. Defeatist's word

4. Remnant

5. People

6. Math class, for short

7. More lemony

8. Time of arrival, for short

9. 2nd letter

11. "Veni, vidi, __"

13. ____ synthesizer

15. Book before Nahum

17. Divided land

19. Part of the neck

20. Hold title to

23. Bore

24. City roads: Abbr.

27. Married again

28. Cheer up

30. Copenhagen airport code

31. NFL ball carriers

32. Bad-mouth

33. Bart's sis

34. Dressing for success

37. Acquire

38. Part of Rapunzel's "ladder"

39. Pronoun

40. Middle Easterner

41. Control tower tracking device

45. More unattractive

46. ____ wait (prepares an ambush)

47. Roadside stops

49. Blockhead

51. First American in space, first name

53. Actress Judith of "The Devil's Advocate"

54. Man Friday

55. Nuthatch home

56. Sporting facility

57. Car club

1	2	3		4	5	6		7	8	9		
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48			49				50		51			
			52			53	54	55				
56	57					58			59			
60						61				62		
63						64					65	

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

1) 1865; 2) Buriram; 3) Penny Red; 4) Saccharin; 5) Speak multiple languages

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

P	R	E	V		S	E	M	I		S	A	C	H	E	
H	O	V	E		S	L	E	D		P	I	E	C	E	
O	L	E	S		E	L	S	A		A	N	N	A	L	
B	E	R	M	U	D	A	S	H	O	R	T	S			
E	S	T	A	B		Y	O	U	S		O	K	S		
N	O	A	H		T	E	A	R	A	T					
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G	O	T	O		T	O	M	M	Y		B	A	H	A	M
E	T	T	O		M	E	E	T	O		L	A	D		
E	M	E	R	G	E		R	U	S	T					
S	E	N		E	T	A	L			A	I	O	L	I	
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D	E	N	I	M		T	R	E	E		R	A	R	E	
L	O	T	T	E		R	E	D	O		S	E	E	S	

1	9	6	3	8	4	5	2	7
7	2	8	1	9	5	3	6	4
4	3	5	2	6	7	9	1	8
5	8	1	9	2	6	7	4	3
6	4	3	7	1	8	2	5	9
9	7	2	5	4	3	1	8	6
2	1	4	6	7	9	8	3	5
8	5	7	4	3	2	6	9	1
3	6	9	8	5	1	4	7	2

GOT YOUR NUMBER

1

in every five US households has zero or negative wealth... They owe more than they own.

26

cycles per second is the frequency at which domestic cats purr, about the same as an idling diesel engine.

3,075

pounds (about 1,394kg) of cocaine is how much drugs the pit bull Popsicle helped seize as a US Customs dog.

500,000

US dollars is how much in royalties Mariah Carey earns each Christmas for her classic song "All I Want for Christmas Is You".

385 million

Walkman portable cassette players were sold by Sony between 1979 and 2010.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW



The sun sets on Patong. Photo: Michael Lee

Got an unusual or particularly beautiful picture of Phuket? Email it to exeditor@classactmedia.co.th

This week in history

Dec 18, 1271

Kublai Khan renames his empire "Yuan", officially marking the start of the Yuan dynasty of Mongolia and China.

Dec 19, 1606

Delhi replaces Calcutta as the capital of India.

Dec 13, 1577

The *Susan Constant*, the *God-speed*, and the *Discovery* depart England carrying settlers

who founded, at Jamestown, Virginia, the first of the 13 colonies that became the United States.

Dec 20, 1955

Cardiff is proclaimed the capital city of Wales, United Kingdom.

Dec 21, 1913

Arthur Wynne's "word-cross", the first crossword puzzle, is published in the New York World.

Dec 22, 1769


Sino-Burmese War: The war ends with an uneasy truce.

Dec 23, 1972

The 16 survivors of the Andes flight disaster are rescued after 73 days, surviving by cannibalism. When the plane crashed it was carrying 45 passengers and crew, including 19 members of the Old Christians Club rugby union team, along with their families, supporters and friends.

Dec 24, 1974

Cyclone Tracy devastates Darwin, Australia. Source: Wikipedia



The Fokker aircraft used in the 1993 film 'Alive', recreating the crash in the Andes in 1972.

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FRI

18 DEC



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SAT

19 DEC



All you can eat BBQ night

6pm – 11pm: Beef, Pork, Chicken, Burgers, Sausages, Prawns and Squid, Salad buffet, Choice of potatoes and sauces, bread, buns and garlic bread. Reservation recommended. B395 P/P. shakersphuket@gmail.com 081 891 4381.



Christmas Market & Family Fun Day at Outrigger Laguna

The Good Shepherd Phuket Christmas Market offers a fantastic day out for all the family. Discover some of your local businesses at the event, enjoy great food and beverage and live entertainment while the younger guests can enjoy the pool slide, fun games, activities and make a special visit to Santa's grotto. Entry: THB 500/person, THB 400/student with student ID, kids 5 yr and under for free. Program: 10am: pool access. 2pm: market opens. 2:30pm: live music. 3:30pm Children's choir from Banya school. 6pm market closes



Angel Market is back at Cassia Laguna Phuket

Angel Market is back at Cassia Laguna Phuket!!

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SUN

20 DEC



All you can eat Sunday Roast Buffet

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MON

21 DEC



All you can eat BBQ Ribs night

6pm – 11pm: All you can eat BBQ Ribs served with salad buffet, potato salad & choice of sauces. Reservation recommended. 295 baht P/P. shakersphuket@gmail.com, 081 891 4381.

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THU

24 DEC



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THU

31 DEC



New Years Eve Dinner & Party @ Friendship Beach Resort

Friendship Beach Waterfront Resort Welcomes you to join us for our New Years Eve Dinner Party & Celebration. Featuring : Great Fireworks , Live D.J., Fire Show, Welcome Cocktail . International Appetizer , Salad , B.B.Q. and Dessert Buffet with choice of Main Courses - Filet of Beef w/Cognac Pepper Cream, Grilled Salmon & Prawns with Citrus Caper Beurre Blanc or Crispy Duck Leg with Orange Jus & Aromatics. Adults THB1,300++ Children under 12 yrs. THB 400++ For Bookings call (66) 89 728 5304 or (66) 84 689 4566 or email to chef@friendshipbeach.com Chef Charlie, 27/1 Soi Mittrapap , Rawai Phuket 83130, chef@friendshipbeach.com, (66) 89 728 5304

FRI

8 JAN



The Grow Boating Networking Evening for January 2021

The Grow Boating Networking Evening for January 2021 will be held at The Hardstand Cafe at the Phuket Boat Lagoon Marina on Friday the 8th of January 2021 from 5pm onward. There will be a light buffet sponsored by The Hardstand Cafe and as always all of your favourite beverages will be available from the bar. Please contact us if you would like to be our drinks sponsor for the evening. Sponsors receive a generous media package from the Phuket News and can display their products and services on the evening and give a presentation on their company. Come and join in the fun, everyone is welcome. There is no entry fee, just drop your business card or register at the bar. We hope to see you there and if you know anyone you think would be interested in coming please invite them along. To join our mailing list please send an email to growboatingphuket@gmail.com The Grow Boating Networking Evening is organised by the Thai Yachting Business Association. Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/growboating or our Website https://www.thaiyachtingbusinessassociation.com/grow-boating Grow Boating is kindly supported by our media partner The Phuket News, Live 89.5 radio and Phuket News TV. See www.thepuketnews.com

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The end of an unlikely F1 season

Formula One looks forward to next season after a brutal 2020

FORMULA ONE

Michael Lamonato
michael@boxofneutrals.com

The Abu Dhabi Grand Prix was no classic, but it marked the end of an unlikely 2020 season.

You could almost hear the Formula One paddock collectively sigh with relief when Max Verstappen took the chequered flag at the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix in a comfortable victory for Red Bull Racing.

After a gruelling 17 races crammed into just 24 weeks, for most of which teams, drivers and administrators were isolated from friends and family to ensure the integrity of the travelling COVID-19 bubble, the end of the season was pure relief.

"I enjoyed that I won," Verstappen said. "I'm going to enjoy the podium and then I'm going to enjoy going home."

"I'm just glad it's over," said Lewis Hamilton in his record-equalling seventh championship-winning season.

After so much racing it's easy to forget how badly this global sport was affected as the coro-



Having survived in unlikely circumstances in 2020, F1 will be bullish it can thrive in the new season. Photo: AFP

navirus shuttered the world in its first wave.

It was only nine months ago the Australian Grand Prix was called off without a wheel being turned after a McLaren mechanic tested positive to the virus.

The sport was rightly criticised for its lack of preparedness and its farcical mishandling of the first race's cancellation in the face of the virus, and by the time Formula One limped back to its European base, its tail between its legs, most

of the rest of the season had been suspended indefinitely.

Much soul-searching ensued. Abandonment was contemplated. But not racing not only would be existentially unacceptable but would risk the livelihoods of the tens of thousands of people directly and indirectly employed by the sport at an already economically precarious time.

LOGISTICAL TRIUMPH

So in the depths of the European

lockdown Formula One regrouped and delicately constructed an ambitious calendar.

Logistical contingencies were built in. The season started with three triple-header weekends to ensure the minimum eight races to qualify for championship status. Only five grands prix would take place outside Europe to minimise travel. Several circuits hosted two races to reduce the logistical burden.

Health was prioritised. Regular

full-paddock testing was conducted, and teams were thinned to the minimum numbers and divided into bubbles comprising handfuls of people to prevent virus spread.

The strategy worked. Just 93 positive tests, including three drivers, were recorded from 84,663 tests with no mass breakout. Even in the European second wave the sport proved it could cross international boundaries without transmitting – and largely without contracting – the virus.

Formula One is a logistical triumph in any ordinary season, but this was the most brutally taxing challenge in the sport's history. Yet F1 got it done. And for a sport so often criticised for its fractious internal politics, the way it pulled together to ambitiously and determinedly deliver a season is commendable.

The 2021 season is far from assured despite the announcement of an optimistic pre-COVID-style calendar. More challenges sit beyond the horizon as the world grapples with this virus.

But having survived in unlikely circumstances in 2020, Formula One will be bullish it can thrive in the new season.

EPL bosses wary of Christmas sack

FOOTBALL

THE PREMIER LEAGUE is about to enter a jam-packed festive period where games come thick and fast, injuries and suspensions pile up and club owners get nervous.

In a 'normal' season it is safe to say that at least one manager would have lost his job by now. But, of course, very little has been 'normal' of late which may explain why the axe has yet to fall on any of the 20 incumbents.

That's not to say, however, that several managers are not under intense scrutiny and feeling the pressure as performances and results fall below par.

The notion of Chris Wilder being axed would have seemed farcical even a month ago but as Sheffield United, at time of press, have registered only a solitary point from 12 games he finds himself under real pressure.

He has vast amounts of goodwill in reserve given what he's achieved and should survive but it's tight.



Praying for time: Arteta. Photo: AFP

Slaven Bilic at West Brom also appears at risk as his team struggle on their return to the top-flight although the Baggies seem happy to accept their plight as a 'yo-yo' side which may be enough to save the Croat.

The dark cloud of dismissal seems to have followed Ole Gunnar Solskjær since he walked through the door at Manchester United although he always seems to pull out a result to save his skin when it counts.

It is Mikel Arteta at Arsenal who appears to be under the most pressure as his team have endured their worst start since 1959 and things look very much in disarray. He should be afforded time but in this high-pressure arena that is a luxury that is in short supply and he is in trouble.

It could turn out to be a season very much lacking any sort of cheer for Arteta unless results improve quickly for the Gunners.

Ben Tirebuck



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The Phuket Power and the Thailand Tigers. Photo: Wannapa Senawong (Nueng)

Aussie Rules comes to Phuket

Phuket Power debut in inaugural Thai Expat AFL Andaman Cup

AFL

The Phuket News
editor3@classactmedia.co.th

Aussie Rules Football returned to Phuket on Saturday, Dec 5 when the rearranged Thai Expat Club 2020 AFL Andaman Cup took place between the Thailand Tigers and local side the Phuket Power.

The island's inaugural AFL Asia match was played in warm conditions with fantastic local support at the Alan Cooke Ground (ACG) in Thalang where the vastly experienced Tigers ran out winners against the Power, who were making their debut.

The home side, who had 13 players participating in their first ever AFL match, didn't look out of place in a competitive first quarter aside from some wayward accuracy

in front of the goals. Phuket kicked three behinds from good scoring positions while the Tigers kicked three goals.

The wind favoured the Tigers in the second quarter and their experience and ascendancy in the Ruck shone through. They were able to consistently win the ball out of the middle and went on to kick six unanswered goals for the quarter.

The home side had the wind in their favour after the halftime break and moved one of the many debutants Shad Wahid into the middle of the park where his efforts subsequently created several opportunities for the Power to hit the scoreboard.

It wasn't until late in the quarter that Neil Quail kicked the Power's first goal after marking directly in front from a Chris McLoughlin pass; a historic moment as this was the first goal ever scored by the Power.

However, unfortunately the goal wasn't a sign of things to come.

The Power wilted in the punishing heat against the more athletic and experienced Tigers side who kicked nine straight goals in the last quarter to make it a comprehensive victory and claim the trophy.

The final score was 1.5 (11) v 22.11 (143) in favour of the Tigers.

David "Dude" McCormack was awarded Player of the Tournament with the Leading Goal Kicker award going to Jake McIntosh (J-Mac) who kicked 5 goals on the day, largely thanks to the great work from man of the match Niall Geraghty.

There were many players of note and great first game efforts for the Power which bodes well for future encounters.

Australian Consulate-General Matthew Barclay was in attendance for the match and awarded



Shad Wahid a medallion from the Australian embassy for being the best Phuket Power player and also best first game player.

The Phuket Power would like to thank their principal sponsor Legends Bar of Soi Eden in Patong. They would also like to extend

thanks to matchday sponsors Bench Fitness, AustCham and LadyPie and media sponsors *The Phuket News*.

For further information on the Phuket Power, future events and on how to get involved please visit their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/PhuketPowerAFL/>

It's a family affair at the Laguna Phuket Marathon

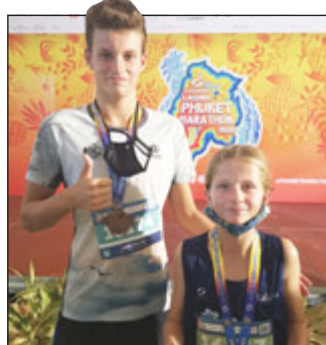
MARATHON

THE RECENT 15TH SUPER-sports Laguna Phuket Marathon, held over the weekend of Dec 5-6, saw over 8,000 Thai and expat runners enjoy a scenic course which took participants past local villages and the beaches of Nai Yang, Layan and Bang Tao.

With the new normal health protocol in place and expertly adhered to by all, the occasion was a resounding success.

One stand-out story from the weekend was the very impressive display of brother and sister Hunter and Siena Milgate, who both achieved podium finishes in their runs.

Both competed in the 5km fun run, with Hunter crossing the line in first place in the male 12-16 age category, as



Hunter and Siena Milgate.
Photo: Toni-Maree Milgate

well as fourth place overall with a super speedy time of 18.27.

Younger sister Siena came in second place in the female 12-16 age group with a stellar time of 23.13, just behind winner Chiara Egger who clocked a time of 21.13.

A big congrats to the Milgate family and to all those who competed in the Laguna Phuket Marathon 2020.

The Phuket News

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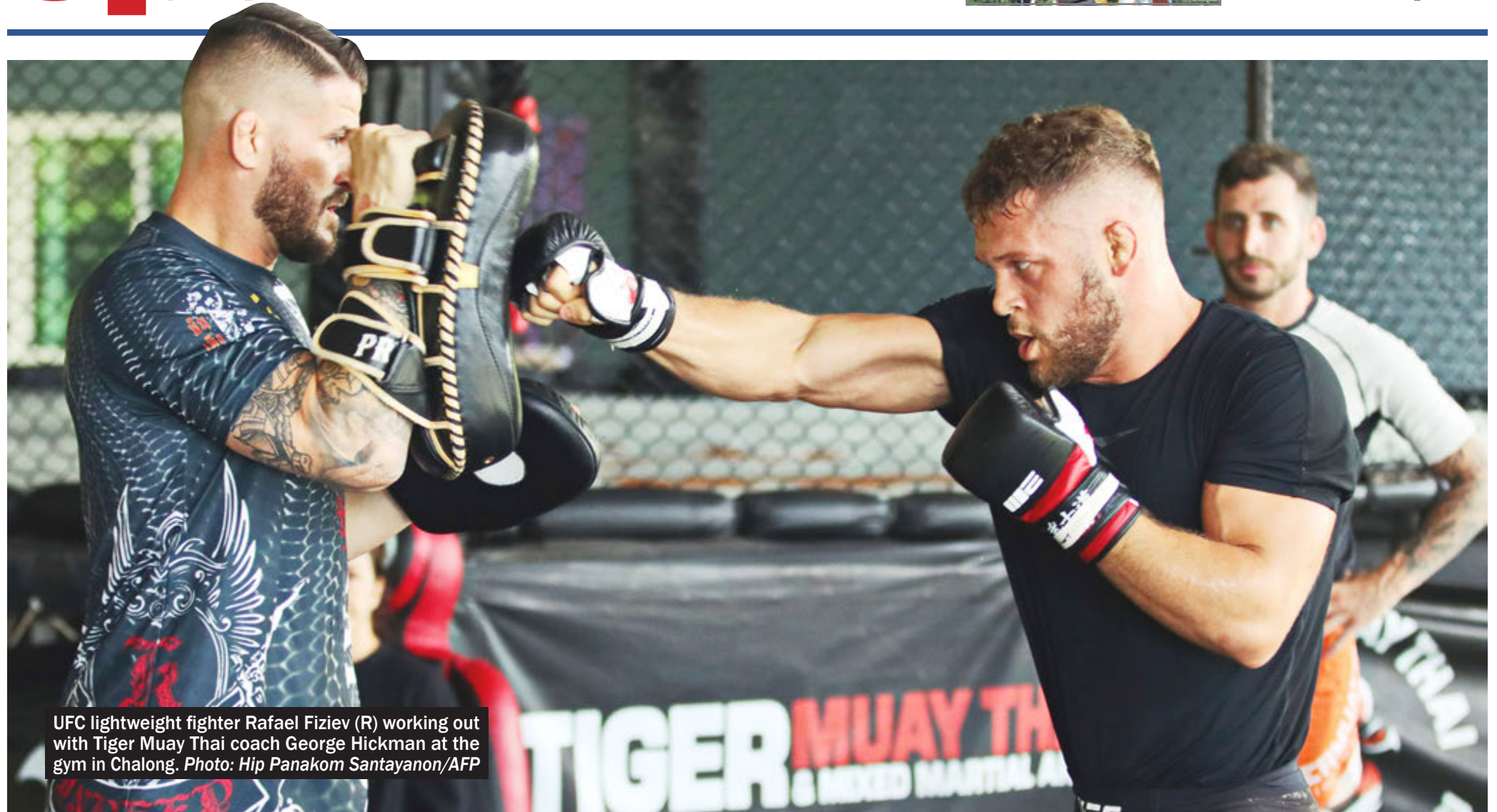
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Sport



Aussie Rules showdown at the ACG > p15



UFC lightweight fighter Rafael Fiziev (R) working out with Tiger Muay Thai coach George Hickman at the gym in Chalong. Photo: Hip Panakom Santayanan/AFP

RAFA FIZZES IN VEGAS

MMA

Matthew Scott

Rafael Fiziev became the latest fighter to join a production line of MMA champions from Tiger Muay Thai gym in Chalong after he defeated Renato Moicano at UFC 256 last Saturday evening (Dec 12).

Fiziev dropped his opponent with a right hand followed by a perfectly placed left hook in the first round of the lightweight bout in Las Vegas to claim his third consecutive UFC win.

"I want to say to everyone in my division, train more. Train hard... I'm coming," Fiziev told Joe Rogan in his post-fight interview.

Fiziev trains at Tiger Muay Thai gym which was, before the coronavirus pandemic, attracting

fighters from all over the globe lured by world-class training, an idyllic tropical beach lifestyle and a growing reputation.

It has produced a string of fighters progressing into the UFC with several going on to become world champions.

"Before lockdown we were seeing many fighters from Tiger Muay Thai sign with the UFC. It was like a wave," said Fiziev, who is from Kyrgyzstan and has an MMA record of nine wins with just one defeat.

"The lockdown has kept people away but our fighters are winning and the wave will come again."

'ART OF EIGHT LIMBS'

MMA was one of the first sports to restart after the pandemic shutdown, with UFC staging events in bio-secure bubbles since May

and Asia's ONE Championship welcoming back limited crowds in Singapore since the end of October.

Though quarantine and travel restrictions have hit international fighters hard, the success of UFC champions who use Tiger Muay Thai for pre-fight camps, such as bantamweight Petr Yan of Russia and Kyrgyzstan's fearsome flyweight Valentina Shevchenko, is continuing to inspire the next generation.

"The fighters we have coming through help to breed success. Seeing them train inspires everyone," said George Hickman, MMA coach at Tiger Muay Thai gym.

One of the most explosive UFC talents, middleweight champ Israel Adesanya of New Zealand, has also tapped into the gym as has Australian featherweight king Alexander Volkanovski.

And Thailand's first UFC star,

strawweight Loma Lookboonmee, has caused an explosion of interest in MMA in her home country, encouraging fighters to make the move from traditional forms of combat such as kickboxing or Muay Thai.

In her recent UFC win over American Jinh Yu Frey, Loma's Muay Thai heritage clearly gave her an advantage.

"When I train with other MMA fighters I like to show them how to use elbows, and how to clinch like Muay Thai, but in a way that has been adapted to MMA," said Loma.

"Muay Thai is very special and has its own personality. It's the art of eight limbs and has a full range of weapons that can be used. But it also has its own flow and rhythm," she added.

'HOTBED FOR MMA'

Former wrestler Hickman turned to

coaching and helped to popularise MMA after arriving in Phuket in 2014.

"The first couple of years here I think a lot of the locals just didn't understand the sport of MMA," said Hickman.

"There hadn't been any education on it. But that has changed. There are MMA events in Thailand and now Loma has been signed (to UFC) that's helped Thailand become a hotbed for MMA training."

Fiziev, 27, who also coaches kickboxing at Tiger Muay Thai added, "We are able to offer grappling, kickboxing, boxing and then our Muay Thai adds an edge."

"Some Fridays we have about 100 people sparring and everyone is strong, with different talents."

"The Muay Thai fighters can mix it with the best," he added. *AFP*

Clean sweep for Jiu-Jitsu champ Valentine

JIU-JITSU

STUDENT VALENTINE Khetagourov-Surduk is the toast of the British International School, Phuket after he recently became a Thailand Jiu-Jitsu champion with a four-gold medal clean sweep.

The Year 9 student com-

peted last month at the Thailand Jiu-Jitsu Championships at Rangsit University in Bangkok, where he took home gold medals in all four categories – Newaza GI, No GI, Fighting and Dual.

The three-day tournament was held between Nov 13-15 with different weight and age categories under the supervi-

sion of the Thailand Jiu-Jitsu Federation.

Valentine, who is just 13-years-old, competed in the advanced Under 15 category with athletes over 73kg.

Back in October, Valentine was also awarded an official black belt (1st Dan) from the Thailand Jiu-Jitsu Federation after completing his promotion

test. He is among just three athletes in Thailand under the age of 18 to be awarded this honour.

Congratulations Valentine on these fantastic achievements!

For more information on British International School, Phuket, please contact info@bisphuket.ac.th

Lee Blake, BISP



BISP's Jiu-Jitsu champion Valentine Khetagourov-Surduk. Photo: BISP Media