

Alex Coverdale



Thailand

27 Days of Sin

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By Alex Coverdale

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Introduction

Thailand, that not-so-little outpost in Southeast Asia bordered by Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia, is widely known for its sun-kissed beaches, tropical climate, ornate palaces, thriving nightlife, affordable economy and wonderful cuisine. Well established on the backpacker trail and regularly cited one of the world's top tourist destinations, it draws visitors from all over the world. Over 32 million of them in 2016 alone, according to the Tourist Authority of Thailand (TAT).

While the climate and the beaches have considerable pulling power, it's no secret that another main attraction, especially for western men, is Thai women. Over the years, the sex industry has attained almost mythical status, and Thailand has gained a well-earned reputation for being a place where dreams come true, and literally anything can happen. According to the French scholar Georges Coedes, the word 'Thai' actually means 'free man,' and who doesn't want to be free?

After a 5-year stint rampaging through China like a latter-day Genghis Khan with an erection (documented in my book *Yellow Fever: Love & Sex in China*) I moved back to the UK, where I held a regular job and all the trappings that came with it. The daily grind, the office politics, the struggle to make ends meet, the long commute, the perpetually grey skies, the wanting too much and never having enough. If you're reading this, then you probably know exactly what I'm talking about so I won't bore you with the details. The bottom line is, I'd had enough.

Luckily for me, I was in a position to take some time out. I don't have a family or kids, I am self-employed, and I rent an apartment. My life is transient, not static. I like things that way. I guess I should grow up and show some commitment, but something about being tied to one place, one person, one situation, frightens the shit out of me. I value freedom too much. So I move around a lot. Job to job, country to country. I've moved house thirteen times in as many years.

But there is a price to pay for everything. I have to make sacrifices to maintain the lifestyle I want. Forming lasting, meaningful relationships is difficult. Inconvenient. I'm never in one place long enough. Sometimes I think I could drop off the face of the earth and nobody would even notice. I try to leave my mark in other ways, mainly through my work and various philanthropic projects.

Kidding. I'm not a philanthropist. I'm a philanderer. And proud of it. I have a deep love of Asia, and an even deeper love of Asian women.

Why?

I love everything about them. I could wax lyrical about being attracted to their warm hearts, or soft, often vulnerable, emotional side, but that would be bullshit. The attraction is primarily physical. The dark hair and eyes, the lightly tanned skin, the svelte, slender figures.

As much as some of us try to disguise the fact, or pretend otherwise, men are simple creatures and we like pretty things. I was also curious. Some Asian women, especially Thai women, get a lot of bad press. I wanted to see how much of it was justified, and what better way than to jump right in?

Please note: All currency conversions in the text are approximations based on the current conversion rates (June 2017)

Bangkok Calling

I've never been a fan of winter. As far as I'm concerned, nobody in their right mind is. I'm a sun-worshipper, and the sun is very short supply in the UK in the depths of January. It was mainly for this reason, and the fact that my love life had deteriorated into a barren wasteland, that I decided to head to Thailand for an extended holiday.

This is quite an undertaking, and involves much more than simply jumping on a plane. Priority one is timing.

Thailand has three seasons. Hot, cool and wet. When they say hot, they mean hot. From March through to June or July most of the country is like an oven with temperatures regularly hitting 35C, though the northern areas are generally slightly cooler. Monsoon season runs from May to November, and as you would expect, it gets pretty fucking wet. Many places are hit by floods, making travelling not only inconvenient but dangerous. Therefore, the optimum time to visit Thailand is during the 'cool' season, which handily enough for me falls between November and March.

Another thing I had to consider was the cost. I'm not made of money, and I intended to do it 'on the cheap.' Luckily, being self-employed I was flexible with dates and able to take some time off work.

As a general guide, not just in this situation but most others, it's usually much cheaper to travel on Tuesdays or Wednesdays. Avoid the weekend, and Mondays and Fridays, when people are travelling FOR the weekend. That way you avoid most holiday makers. Bonus.

When I first looked at flights from the UK to Thailand in late November, they were £412 return. I always travel from the major airports in London, as it's invariably more convenient and cheaper than travelling from regional airports, even when you factor in any additional travel costs. I set up a price alert on Skyscanner which updated me on any price fluctuations, and waited to see what would happen.

At first, nothing happened. The price would perhaps rise or fall by a few pounds a day. Never by much. But then, about a month later, the price dropped by almost a hundred pounds overnight. I have no idea why. Lots of factors help determine the price of flights, but in the end it all comes down to supply and demand. I guess I just got lucky.

After that the price slowly started creeping back up, so I took the plunge and booked a return ticket from London Heathrow to Bangkok Suvarnabhumi (one of two airports in Bangkok) via Abu Dhabi with Etihad airways for a very reasonable £345, taxes and fees inclusive.

I must have checked a dozen sites, and found that some unscrupulous bastards advertise very cheap fares, but when you try to book them you get a message saying, 'That price is no longer available. Please search again.' When you do that, you get a much higher price. My guess is they do it just to drive traffic to their site, either in the hope that you'll take a more expensive option, or to impress advertisers with the amount of hits they get. Fucktards.

Next, I needed to book somewhere to stay. Whatever evils the internet has brought into the world or facilitated, one of the positives has to be hotel price comparison sites. Trivago and Booking.com and are both great resources, enabling you to search for rooms by budget, location, on-site facilities, and any number of other criteria.

I used the former exclusively for a number of years, until the time I booked a room on it in Changsha, China, and arrived to find that although they had taken my payment, they hadn't actually passed it on to the hotel and I therefore didn't have a reservation. They refunded my money, after I produced a receipt from the hotel I was forced to use as an alternative, but it was still a massive ball ache. Since then, I've been a Booking.com man. Not that it makes much difference as I think they're both owned by the same people, anyway.

I planned on travelling around Thailand a little, rather than staying in one place for the duration, staying mainly at mid-range two or three-star hotels, which are available for an average of 380-560 baht (£9-12) per night meaning you can expect to pay £300-400 on accommodation for a month. Obviously, if you want to stretch your budget still further and aren't too fussy about where you sleep, you can get a bed in a mixed dorm room for around half that amount. Maybe even less.

I'd been living in north London until then, and paying £780 a month rent on a tiny two-room studio apartment. My return flights and hotel bills amounted to a little over £700, meaning that fucking off to Thailand for a month of fun in the sun was literally cheaper than staying on a dodgy East Finchley council estate in the depths of winter. It's a crazy world.

There are basically two kinds of traveller. One meticulously plans every detail, and the other just wings it. I believe too much planning detracts from the excitement and spontaneity of it all, so I instinctively lean more toward the latter. That said, I hate surprises and it would be exceedingly dumb to get on a plane to another continent without any forward planning whatsoever. So in the weeks leading up to my departure date, I did a little online research,

watched some YouTube videos, and downloaded a couple of free books from Amazon, none of which were very informative.

I also made sure I got some decent travel insurance. Incidentally, an expensive insurance policy doesn't necessarily equate to a good insurance policy. I was going to go with the Post Office, but an online search uncovered several worthy alternatives offering the same benefits for a fraction of the price.

As much of a free spirit you think you are, take my advice and always book a hotel for at least the first few nights of a trip. Some countries make it a necessity in order to get a visa. Thailand isn't quite that strict but trust me, after travelling for 24-hours or more, the last thing you want to be doing is traipsing around a strange city looking for a room before you can have a rest.

My plan was to spend a couple of days in Bangkok, where I would meet up with a friend. Then we would travel to Pattaya on the east coast together, where we would spend another few nights, then get a night bus north to Chiang Mai. From there, my friend would fly back to China, and I would visit some other, undetermined place, before heading back to Bangkok for a last hurrah then getting my flight home.

I should have known all my ideas would be blown to pieces in record time. This is another reason why I don't waste my time making plans. It only takes one unforeseen incident to render all your efforts meaningless. It's like the Butterfly Effect.

Because I was intending to move around a little I travelled light, taking only a backpack containing a change of clothes, toiletries, books, various sundries like phone chargers and notepads plus my money and travel documents, and a small suitcase with the rest of my clothes. My research had led me to believe that I would get a better exchange rate after I arrived, so I took only Sterling with me and my debit card for emergencies.

I made sure I called my bank to tell them I was going out of the country, because I tried to use an ATM in Beijing once and the damn thing kept my card as a 'security measure' leaving me temporarily broke. They said to make sure I informed them next time I was going out of the country. However, when I called my bank and told them I was going to Thailand they asked me why I was telling them, so that was a big waste of time.

So on a rainy, windy January night, I got a coach to London's Victoria station where I dug in to wait for my connection to Heathrow. Victoria station is sketchy as fuck at the best of times, and even more so in the middle

of the night. It's full of dodgy-looking characters. In my experience, the best way to survive such situations is to become one of those dodgy characters. Perhaps everyone was thinking the same thing. My situation wasn't helped by the on-site Starbucks closing and turning everyone out onto the street between midnight and 1 am.

I generally find coaches slightly less of a rip-off than trains, especially if you book online a couple of weeks in advance. My advice is to look at several different options and compare prices. I was travelling from Wales and for some reason, buying two separate tickets, from Cardiff to Victoria, then Victoria to Heathrow, worked out cheaper than getting both journeys on the same ticket.

I was at the airport by 4 am, in plenty of time for a 9:30 am flight. After checking in my luggage and stocking up on reading material (I love the fact that departure lounges are often full of free magazines and newspapers), there was only one thing left to do. Go to the pub. When you're going on holiday is possibly the only time it can be considered socially acceptable to start drinking at six in the morning. I didn't overdo it. Three pints of London Pride was my limit. I hoped it would help me sleep on the next leg of the journey, a six-hour light to Abu Dhabi. And it did.

This was to be the first time I'd ever flown with Etihad. I travel long-haul a lot. At least, I did when I worked as an English teacher in China. I usually used British Airways. They are slightly more expensive, but that wasn't an issue when my school was paying for it. The in-flight entertainment isn't as good with Etihad, but everything else is about the same standard. After a stop-over of a couple of hours in Abu Dhabi, during which I had to get a \$3 cup of coffee on my debit card because they didn't accept Sterling, I boarded a second plane for another six-hour flight, landing in Bangkok early in the morning.

After retrieving my baggage, I had a list of things I needed to do before I could find my hotel. Firstly, I had to clear immigration. You can apply for one beforehand if you want, but as a UK citizen you can get a 30-day visa on arrival and the process is quite painless. It's just a matter of queuing up and filling out a card.

As I stood in line, I noticed a few people looking at me and giggling. Even more worryingly, a few others looked at me and shook their heads. After a while, I realised why. I was wearing a vintage French Connection sweatshirt sporting the slogan FCUK YOU across the front. I'd forgotten how

fundamentally reserved most countries in Asia are. And with English being their second or third language, the not-so-subtle play on words was completely lost on them. But with nowhere to change, I had to stick with the offensive-though-not-really sweatshirt for the time being.

Next, I had to change some money. True enough, as expected the exchange rate was slightly higher at Bangkok airport than what was being offered back in the UK, but not by much. I should have known that the rate would be lower in the airports. The mistake I made was changing the bulk of my spending money there in one transaction thinking it would be more convenient in the long run. I should have changed a little, and then changed the rest somewhere else that offered better rates. You live and learn.

That done, I had to get a SIM card for my smartphone. This, too, is easily achieved. There are kiosks in the arrivals lounge of Suvarnabhumi airport specifically for tourists. The staff all speak English, and will change the SIM over and set up your phone for you if you ask nicely. They even tape your old SIM card to your phone so you won't lose it. All you have to do is remember to get your phone unlocked before you come, and choose a package. The one I chose lasted for a month, offered a generous allowance of calls, texts and data, and cost just over 500 baht (about £12).

Finally, I could find a taxi and make my way to my hotel.

Airports are quite good for getting taxis, just remember to always use marked cabs and insist they turn on the meter. A lot of drivers in Thailand, especially at night, will avoid doing so and try to haggle a price with you instead. Don't let them. If they refuse to turn on the meter, just get another cab. Even in licensed cabs with the meter running, on airport runs you can expect to pay road tolls as well as the fare, but these don't usually amount to much.

Now my phone was working, I could show the driver the address of the hotel in Thai, a very helpful function of the Booking.com app. Forty minutes later, I was checking in to The Mix in Phrom Phong. Or trying to. I was told my room wouldn't be ready for another two hours, so I dropped my bags off and went for a walk.

My first impression of Bangkok was that it was hot, and busy. Very busy. That didn't come as much of a shock considering the city is home to over eight million people. The sois (the local name for the multitude of side streets branching off the main thoroughfares) are full of bars, restaurants, 7 Elevens and massage parlours. Lots and lots of massage parlours. That little

indulgence would come later. At this point, I just wanted to grab a beer and try some local food, so I found a little eatery with tables and a big open front, and made myself comfortable. The waitress came over, and I asked for beer.

“Singha or Chang?”

I had no idea, but I knew Singha was the more popular brand so I opted for that. I was taken aback when the waitress returned a short while later with a little glass full of ice and a straw. What the fuck? That's how the locals drink beer, apparently. It sounds odd to our western palate, but it was surprisingly refreshing, and I was immediately converted. Not that I would dream of asking for a glass of ice and a straw with a beer at home, obviously. I'd get laughed off the premises.

The beer itself is typical of Asian beverages. Light, gassy and weak. Not weak by alcohol content, it's 5% abv, but weak tasting.

I ordered a bowl of noodles to eat, and made the mistake of telling the owner I liked coriander (phakchi in Thai). It was a mistake because he gave me a plate full of the stuff. When I said I liked it, I should have specified I liked a small amount mixed in with my noodles. Not a big pile of it. After eating that lot, I didn't like it as much.

Suitably invigorated, I paid my bill, which came to 130 baht (about £3), and resumed my walk. Still functioning in a jet-lag and alcohol-induced daze, it wasn't long before I got lost and it took me another hour or so to find my hotel again. You would think GPS mapping would help. One of the benefits of having a smartphone. But for some inexplicable reason, Google Maps wanted to send me on a seven-mile detour. I eventually found a friendly security guard, showed him the address on my phone, and sure enough the place was a ten-minute walk away. Fuck you, Google Maps.

The hotel wasn't exactly the Hilton. Which was just as well, because the Bangkok Hilton is another name for Bang Kwang jail, one of the worst prisons in the world. Though there is an actual Bangkok Hilton too, allegedly. The Mix was supposed to offer three-star accommodation, but as you can probably imagine, that doesn't mean much in Southeast Asia. My room was barely big enough to house a double bed, and someone had written, 'THIS PLACE IS HAUNTED,' 'FUCK' and, 'GET OUT,' on the walls, which were painted an awful shade of lime green. All very encouraging.

The only real plus points were the location, and the fact that it had a private en-suite bathroom. There were loose electrical wires hanging in the shower but again, that's par for the course in low-budget Asian hotels. I

figured if it was dangerous, the person in the room before me would have been electrocuted and someone would have been forced to solve the problem already. Come to think of it, if that was the case, it might explain why a previous tenant had thought the place was haunted. Anyway...

I love the feeling of arriving somewhere new. It's fresh and exciting, and you get a sense that anything can happen. The possibilities are endless. That said, the down side is that you don't know much and there's a decent chance you'll get robbed, scammed, or lost, even with Google Maps. I love the second day somewhere new even more, because though you still don't know much and there's still a decent chance you'll get robbed, scammed, or lost, even with Google Maps, things aren't quite so daunting or overwhelming.

My body clock was still crying, so other than venturing out for more food, I opted to stay in the hotel that night. Out of curiosity, I turned on the 'people nearby' function of WeChat, a social networking app I got into the habit of using in China which has served me well in my near-constant pursuit of women, and within minutes I was chatting to a call girl and a ladyboy. A polite 'Thanks but no thanks' to both.

I formulated a plan for Day Two.

Thai massage.

My first taste of decadence.

Thailand is famous for its massages, and you can find massage parlours in virtually every street, especially where I was staying in Sukhumvit district. In fact, there are entire streets that consist of nothing *but* massage parlours.

It's often assumed that 'massage parlour' is a by-word for 'brothel.' Therefore, a lot of visitors would be disappointed to find that the vast majority of massage parlours are just that. Massage parlours. Apparently, a lot of them don't even offer 'happy endings' (a hand job), but if there is a gaggle of heavily-made up girls outside wearing miniskirts, calling you, and beckoning you in, it's probably a safe bet that they do.

You usually find the places offering sexual services in clusters off the main roads, and the names of the establishments (Passion House, Private Heaven, Sexy Massage, etc) are often dead giveaways.

What I did was walk around for a while until I found somewhere I liked the look of, and then had a sneaky look through the window to gauge the calibre of girl. They say if you want a good massage, find an older, less-attractive woman. If you are there for the extras and choose a younger, better-looking girl, don't expect a good massage. I was more interested in the extras

than the massage, and I had no intention of paying an ugly girl to wank me off, you can get a wank off an ugly girl any day of the week.

I'd been told that when you go to these places, you should be sure to ask for an oil massage. That way you are guaranteed a private room and the girls are more likely to offer extras. Remember, though, that whatever happens is entirely at the girl's discretion. You can't go in there making demands.

At this particular place there were five or six girls to choose from, all draped on sofas and smiling, much like the girls in the brothels I used to frequent when I lived in china. I chose a girl I liked, and went with her upstairs to a private room where she told me to strip. What followed was a pretty average massage, to be fair, not that I'm an expert. She left my chest and the insides of my thighs until last, and made sure to glide her hands within centimetres of my dick and balls. By the time she finished, I was rock hard. This was obviously more by design than accident on her part. When I was fully erect, she fixed me with a pair of huge almond eyes and said, "Do you want special massage?"

"What's that? Exactly?" I asked. Of course, I had a fair idea, but I wanted to be certain, and was very aware that I was at that vulnerable time when guys are liable to agree to absolutely anything.

"Hand job. Make sir shoot."

"Will you suck it?"

"No."

"Can I touch your boobs?"

"No."

"Just a hand job?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"1000 baht more."

"On top of the 250 for the regular massage?"

"Yes."

"500 extra."

"Okay."

It wasn't quite what I'd been hoping for, and I couldn't help thinking I could have got the 'extras' a little cheaper. But 750 baht (about £17) seemed reasonable enough considering I was with the girl for over an hour and to be fair, it was one of the best wanks I've ever had.

After she finished, I paid her the 500, which went straight into her pocket,

then I went downstairs to pay the 250 for the regular massage. It's clear that's how the massage girls make the bulk of their money, and they probably don't declare it to either the tax man or the establishment which employs them.

Alive in the City of Angels

The City of Angels, or Krung Thep in Thai, is what the locals call Bangkok. Some people also call it the Venice of the East, but that unofficial title is shared by at least 30 other cities throughout Asia including Basra, Hiroshima, Manila, Hanoi and about a dozen in China alone, so it probably isn't the best accolade. I'm not even convinced such a fancy schmancy moniker is warranted. Sure, there are canals in Bangkok, but there are also canals in Rochdale in the industrial north of England, and nobody likens that place to Venice.

As well as a bunch of travel guides, I'd started reading *The Beach* by Alex Garland. A little contrived, I know. But I'd seen the film years earlier and it's something that stayed with me. After watching it I vowed to one day visit Thailand one day, and here I was.

In case you're wondering, the book is nowhere near as good as the film. Intentionally or not, Leonardo DiCaprio's character in the book is the most vain, narcissistic, and downright unlikeable character I've ever come across. Even worse than Jack Torrance in *The Shining*. He swans through life doing what he wants, and is deluded into thinking that every woman wants him and every man wants to be like him. My background reading suggested that far from being a backpacker's bible, the book was meant as a satirical attack on backpacker culture, and Garland never felt 'comfortable' with the way it was perceived by the general public. More's the pity, because it made the cunt an absolute fortune. He was never able to replicate its success, though, and had a couple of flops before later moving into screenwriting with *28 Days Later* and *Ex Machina*.

Not wanting to stay in my shitty hotel room any more than I had to, I spent a lot of time sitting around in coffee shops reading *The Beach* while I waited for my date to show up. Well, maybe 'date' is the wrong word. Lucy, a 23-year old student from Wenzhou, China, and I had been talking online for a year or more, and over the past few months had grown closer and closer. In fact, she was the main reason I took the trip. It's relatively easy for Chinese nationals to travel to Thailand compared to most countries.

Nothing was set in stone relationship-wise, but I felt a bond with Lucy. I liked her a lot, and thought my feelings were reciprocated. I had been single for a long time, and she'd broken up with her last boyfriend a few months previously. The timing couldn't have been better. We spent hours chatting every day, and on a few occasions the conversations turned sexual. I had high hopes.

She arrived a day late, having missed her flight out. Luckily, we had the room in Bangkok for three nights, so we were still able to hook up as arranged. We met at the hotel around lunch time. She was smaller than I expected, but even more beautiful in real life than she was in pictures, and was positively buzzing with a bubbly, vivacious kind of energy. It felt so good to finally meet her in the flesh. We went straight to a nearby noodle place and then for a long walk around the neighbourhood, ending the evening drinking cold beers at a local bar.

The bars in Bangkok were all full of chubby, pale, desperate-looking older white guys forlornly nursing bottles of beer. Some had female company, either in the form of Thai wives or girlfriends or bar girls, others were hanging out with other desperate-looking older white guys, but a large percentage were alone. They not only look sad, but also somewhat predatory. There's nothing wrong with going to Bangkok as a sex tourist, but try not to make it so obvious. Right then, my worst fear was becoming one of them.

I'd been so excited to finally meet Lucy that I'd brought her a shopping bag full of gifts from England. Books, perfume, chocolate, which by then had obviously melted into a squidgy shapeless mass. I knew that would happen. But girls love chocolate, and British chocolate is the best in the world, so what was I supposed to do?

She gave me a lingering hug and for the briefest moment we paused, our lips inches away from each other's. Then we made awkward small talk for an hour and went to sleep. There was no sex. Not even any kissing or touching. I didn't want to come on too strong and mess things up. After a year of ultra-long distance courtship, I was prepared to wait a few more days if that was what it took.

The next day, we took a bus to Pattaya from the east bus station. Pattaya, on the east coast of the Gulf of Thailand, is home to just over 107,000 people. Like most coastal towns it was once a fishing village. In fact, it stayed one until the 1960's, when it became a favourite downtime destination of American GI's serving in the Vietnam War. That was when it's seedy reputation was born.

The story goes that the name evolved from the march of Phraya Tak (later King Taksin or Taksin the Great) and his army from Ayutthaya to Chanthaburi, which took place before the fall of the former capital to Burmese invaders in 1767. When the army arrived in what is now Pattaya, Phraya Tak encountered the troops of a local leader named Nai Klom. The

two faced off, and Nai Klom was so impressed by Phraya Tak's dignified manner that the two joined forces. The place the armies first confronted each other was thereafter known as “Thap Phraya,” which literally means the “Army of the Phraya.” This later became shortened to Pattaya.

The journey only took a couple of hours and the bus was air conditioned, so it was no major chore. On arrival, we took an open flat-bed taxi to the hotel. This was supposed to be the jewel in the crown. Elsewhere on the trip I booked more modest, cost-effective accommodation, but I splashed out a little on the hotel in Pattaya. I wanted a little taste of luxury, and I had a feeling this would be where any magic with Lucy would happen. Even the name of the place seemed to be prophetic. It was called Lucky inn.

Problem was, the taxi took us to the wrong hotel. Despite our protestations that it was the wrong address, and the name of the place was different, the driver was adamant and after a while virtually kicked us out of the cab. Thanks, pal.

Lucy and I then dragged our luggage around for almost an hour in the baking hot afternoon sun until we found the real Lucky Inn. It turned out to be owned by a lovely Indian guy called Mohammed, who met us in reception. Because I used booking.com so often, they upgraded my account to that of a 'Genius' member, which meant very little other than the fact that I became eligible for perks at some establishments. Usually free early check-in or late check-out. Here, the perk was a free drink on arrival. I was optimistic of getting a nice cocktail at the hotel bar. At least a refreshing chilled bottle of Singha or Chang. But nope, the 'free drink on arrival' was a bottle of fucking water.

Anyway, as advertised, the room was absolutely stunning. It was a good size, there was air-con, a balcony, a widescreen TV, a fridge, a kettle with free coffee, and a huge, luxurious king-sized bed. There were even two pristine bath towels laid out, each fashioned into the shape of a swan. We couldn't have asked for anything more romantic.

Lucy and I both wanted to go to the beach, about a ten-minute walk away. We strolled down just as it was getting dark and found a nice-looking restaurant on the sea front. As you can probably imagine, seafood is the order of the day in Pattaya, so we ordered Tom Yum soup, a spicy but delicious concoction containing mushrooms, prawns, and a whole load of herbs along with things like ginger and chilli peppers, and a couple of other dishes.

I'd heard a lot of naughty stories about Pattaya. And the moment the sun

went down, they were all proved true. The place is sleaze central. There were prostitutes and massage parlours all over, and everywhere we went old western guys leered unashamedly at Lucy. She didn't seem to mind, or even notice most of the time. I don't think she realized how dangerous it was. But it drove me crazy.

After dinner, we went for a romantic moonlit walk along the beach, where I was approached by a suspicious-looking barefooted local. "Wanna buy some marijuana?"

I stopped. I used to be a heavy user of marijuana. I'd given up a couple of years earlier, but this was a holiday, right? I was in one of the weed capitals of the world. Plus, Lucy and I had talked about it a little and she said she wanted to try it. For a Chinese girl she was, or at least tried to be, more open-minded than the stereotype suggests. It was like finally, things were coming together.

I ended up buying a couple of grams for 300 baht (£7). I didn't want to spend too much in case it wasn't very good, and I didn't want to be carrying chunks of the stuff all over the country for the next three weeks.

One thing to remember is that if you are caught with marijuana in Thailand, the cops treat you as if they'd caught you with heroin. Drugs are drugs. Apparently things are a bit more lax out on the islands, but we weren't on the islands, we were on the mainland, and due to its shady reputation there's a heavy police presence in Pattaya making things even more risky.

Apparently, it's quite common for locals to sell foreigners weed, then immediately call the police (or people masquerading as police) who show up and threaten you with jail time unless you pay them off. They also take the weed you just bought off you and give it back to the dealer to sell on to the next unsuspecting tourist. It's a foolproof scam because who are the wronged tourists going to complain to?

Another common Pattaya scam involves Jet Skis. When you rent them, you naturally give them a once-over and everything looks fine. But what you don't know is that a small, non-essential component is only stuck on with tape or chewing gum, and it falls off the moment you get in the water. When you bring the Jet Ski back, someone points out that it's damaged and, of course, you are liable. You are coerced into paying an extortionate sum of money, and if you argue about it the police are called. Incidentally, Thai police have a reputation for being bent. It's the same in most Asian countries, the problem stemming from the fact that they are on comparatively low

salaries and are always looking for ways they can bump them up. Clueless tourists are easy marks.

Back at our lush hotel room, I rolled a couple of joints and smoked them on the balcony. Lucy wasn't interested, so there was more for me. Afterwards, we watched TV for a while, and then went to sleep. When I dropped off, Lucy was still watching podcasts on her iPad.

Things weren't going as well as I'd hoped between us. During our Internet chats we discussed everything from politics to food to religion to travel, yet when we were actually together we didn't have much to say to each other. There were a lot of awkward silences. I was nervous, and terrified of saying or doing the wrong thing, and maybe she was too. I decided not to force the issue and let nature take its course.

That plan was brutally curtailed when I awoke the next morning to find her on her iPad again, this time searching for somewhere else to stay.

"Why are you leaving? Did I snore during the night or something?"

"No."

"Fart in my sleep?"

"No."

"Then why?"

"I'm used to being on my own. I just don't want to rush into another relationship."

Then came the killer line...

"You're just like an older brother to me."

That was the moment I knew our 'relationship' was doomed. Apart from the fact that she already had an older brother and hated him, girls only said that to guys they have absolutely no intention of ever sleeping with. It's not a compliment, it's not endearing. It's hugely dismissive.

We were at different stages in our lives. I was almost middle-aged. When you arrive at that juncture, you tend to avoid taking risks. She, on the other hand, was in her early-twenties, and wanted to do everything. At least, that's what she said. The fact she spent all her time plugged into her iPad suggested anything but a fun-loving free spirit, but hey ho. She maintained that she wanted to go skydiving, bungee jumping and scuba diving, while I just wanted to lie on the beach drinking cocktails.

I'm not a fan of putting myself in danger. The novelty of that wears off pretty fast. When I was younger, I thought I was invincible. But that phase soon passes, and the older you get the less risks you take. You become

acutely aware of your own mortality and self-preservation becomes paramount.

Then there are indisputable facts to consider. Everything in the sea hates us, and if people were meant to soar through the air we'd all have fucking wings. Do you know why we don't have wings? Because we aren't supposed to fly. Simple. Daredevils put themselves in precarious situations then complain when it all goes tits up and they find themselves in a foreign hospital.

True, the chances of anything disastrous happening during any of these touristy exercises are pretty small, but the only statistic that matters is, '0% of people who didn't go scuba diving in Pattaya have ever been eaten by sharks.'

I tried to convince Lucy not to leave, but stopped short of begging. Just. I could tell her mind was made up. If she didn't want to be with me, I couldn't force her. She was in such a hurry to leave she even left behind the chocolate I'd brought all the way from England for her. That was the final insult.

I felt like absolute shit. Lucy was the main reason I'd even travelled all the way to Thailand. What was I going to do now? We'd made a travel plan together, and I really didn't want to spend the next three weeks on my own.

Balls.

Pattaya Heartbreak

After Lucy left, I went to the beach to cheer myself up. It was a glorious sunny day, edging toward 28C. While I was sitting on the sand amongst the holiday makers, an old lady came around selling pendants, wristbands, and other assorted tat 'for luck.' Luck being in particularly short supply around then, I called her over. Now, sometimes, when you ask a Thai seller how much something costs, they will often reverse the situation and ask how much you want to pay. The question invariably takes me by surprise, and I always feel like saying, "I don't know. How about nothing?"

I'm always caught between two opposing mindsets. I want to give the seller a fair price, but at the same time I don't want to get ripped off. In most cases it's probably safe to assume that a 25-30% discount on the originally stated figure isn't too unreasonable. I ended up buying a string necklace with a yin yang pendant and a leather wristband for a combined 200 baht (£4.60), mainly because the old woman was so smiley and nice.

Thai smiles. There's something I haven't mentioned yet. Thai people have a reputation for being friendly. And true, most of them are. In my experience, anyway. Some visitors even refer to the place as 'The Land of Smiles' due to Thai people's uncanny ability to smile through every situation. It can be disarming, and a little disconcerting at times. One article I read convincingly claimed there are no less than thirteen distinct Thai smiles, which locals can utilise at will with flawless accuracy. These include the yim thak thaai ('polite' smile reeled out when meeting a new face), the yim thak thaen ('you can go ahead and propose your idea but I'm going to disagree with it' smile), and the yim cheua-cheuan (gloating 'Ha-ha, I'm the winner' smile given to a losing competitor).

Whichever variation you encounter, they will all have one thing in common; every Thai smile has teeth. Beneath the cheerful veneer lies a hard edge. That isn't to say Thai people aren't sincere. But they are definitely not to be fucked with, and they want you to know it.

As I was sitting there admiring my new purchases, I was approached by someone else. Another foreigner. He was in his early twenties, wearing clean cut traveller's attire, and looked easy-going enough.

Despite his wholesome image, I was instantly on the defensive and immediately assumed he either wanted to scam me, sell me something, or mug me. It turned out he didn't want to do any of those things. He introduced himself as Jan, said he was a missionary from South Africa, and asked me what was wrong. He said he wanted to pray for me.

That was probably a low point in my life. I reeked so much of misery and despondency that strangers were actually coming up and praying for me.

Immediately after being prayed over by Jan, in rare a moment of clarity, I entered into a short period of extreme self-analysis. This is something I usually avoid at all costs. I don't believe it leads to anything else than sorrow and self-pity. But there, on that beach, it was time to face some harsh truths.

I was almost middle-aged, I had no kids, had never been married, and had fetishes for dirty talk, cyber sex, and young Asian girls. Not too young, you understand. Definitely 18-plus. But that was a lot younger than me. I smoked and drank too much, I had a gambling addiction, couldn't hold a job for more than a couple of years, and loved metal and punk music, none of which probably endeared me to God very much. In fact, despite Jan's efforts, the Big Man probably thought I was a complete waste of fucking space.

After that weird experience I decided I had to get over Lucy, and fast. One of the things she said about me was that I was too negative. I prefer to think of myself as dry. Maybe sarcastic. Certainly blessed with a dark sense of humour. But she may have had a point. Either way, I was in a tropical paradise, and there I was moping around like a lovesick teenager. It had to stop. And what better way to get her out of my system than to fuck someone else?

The problem was, I was leaving Pattaya in two days, which left very little time to pursue any kind of meaningful relationship, and I wasn't quite ready for the bar girl experience. There had to be another way.

I once had a long conversation with the rock journalist Mick Wall. He told me of a sex hex Dave Mustaine from Megadeth swore by, designed to get specific girls to sleep with him using supernatural means. It seemed straight-forward enough. First, you get something personal belonging to the object of your affection. Lucy's hair was all over my pillow, so that wasn't a problem. Then you get something of your own. I plucked out a few of my pubic hairs. Not recommended. Next, you draw a vagina and a cock on a piece of paper, along with some arcane symbols. The idea was probably to use specific arcane symbols, but Mick Wall couldn't remember which ones. As it happened, the only ones I knew off-hand were a yin yang and a swastika. They would have to do. As a final flourish, you wrap the whole thing up and burn it while thinking intensely about you and the girl of your dreams having sex.

I performed the 'ritual' on the balcony, then sat back to await the results.

Obviously, I couldn't rely solely on magic to satisfy my sexual urges so I decided to employ some more traditional methods, too.

WeChat.

On the dating scene, both in China and the UK, I'd had far more success on this Chinese social networking app than I had during a short-lived flirtation with Tinder, the dedicated dating platform. The hooker and the ladyboy who hit me up in Bangkok suggested that it could also be a viable alternative here in Thailand.

I used the 'people nearby' function to see if there were any hot girls around me, and sure enough there were at least a couple of dozen within a few kilometres of the hotel. I sent out some tentative friend requests, then settled in with a fridge full of beer and a couple of spliffs to see what would happen.

I didn't have to wait long. Within minutes, I had a whole bunch of new 'friends.' I was under no illusions. I knew most, if not all of them, were hookers looking for business. The thing was, they were also ordinary, hard-working girls. They just happened to work in the sex industry.

A pattern soon emerged. They would accept my friend request, introduce themselves, and we would chat for a while about the usual stuff. Our families, hobbies and interests, where we were from, etcetera. The girls were very attentive and quick to reply. The chat would get increasingly naughty, we might exchange some photos, and things would progress to the point where, an hour or so later, and probably after I'd convinced the girl I wasn't a pornographer or a serial killer, she would say something like, "So, do you want to meet me tonight?"

It was like your ultimate teenage fantasy. But there lay the watershed moment. If the girl was a hooker, and she invariably was, she knew that her cover was now blown. Until then, you'd both been playing a game of subterfuge. She was pretending to be a 'normal' girl who just wanted to be friends, and you were being the clueless foreigner who wanted to 'meet' local girls. You were both going through the motions and sussing each other out until such a time as one of you felt comfortable enough to make your true intentions clear. Once the cat was out of the bag, there was no turning back so then we discussed price. Most wanted 1-2000 baht (£23-46) to come to my hotel room.

Weirdly, if I said I wasn't interested, most of the girls still wanted to talk. Not to try to change my mind, but I assume just because they were bored.

One girl said she was with her foreign 'boyfriend' right at that moment, but he didn't keep much of a leash on her and didn't care what she did, as long as she was available when he wanted her.

I'm a journalist by trade, so I am always curious about other people's lives. I wanted to know about these girls, so I asked a lot of questions. Most of them had basically the same kind of back story you hear all over the world. They were in their early-twenties or older, were from the poorer provinces, and lived the way they did because the money was good. Some seemed to actually enjoy the lifestyle. A lot of them had kids, who were being looked after by family in their hometowns.

No doubt, these family members didn't know what the girls actually did for a living.

Mindful of the preconception most people have of prostitution in the west, I asked if it was dangerous, or if the girls ever felt threatened. Some laughed at that, and all said no, not at all. They were perfectly happy doing what they did. They chose who they slept with carefully, and weren't forced to do anything by sketchy, money-grabbing pimps or madams. From what I could gather, they were simply embracing the Thai lifestyle and having a great time doing it. It was all smiles and freedom.

After much deliberation, I eventually settled on a girl called Peach and gave her my hotel address. She wanted 1000 baht (£24), which was quite reasonable, and said she would arrive within the hour. I wasn't worried about anyone at the hotel caring about my clandestine visitor. This was pretty normal behaviour for Pattaya. What were they going to do? Kick me out? I was leaving soon, anyway.

Prostitution as a whole is a grey area in Thailand. Certain complex solicitation and public decency laws are sometimes affected, which means people can kick up a storm about it should they wish, but for the most part the practice is tolerated and even partly regulated. Discretion is key.

There are basically two ways you can go about it. You can get a bar girl, or find a freelancer. Bar girls operate slightly differently. You go to a bar, and if you are single or with other male company, you'll probably soon find yourself surrounded by young, attractive local girls. They chat to you, usually in very good English (it's a job requirement), vying for your attention, and ask you to buy them drinks.

Here's the clever part.

They'll probably order an expensive cocktail, and go off to the bar to

order it, along with whatever you want. The establishment will obviously charge you for the cocktail, but won't actually put any alcohol in it. You'll be paying top whack for what amounts to a glass of fruit juice or a soft drink. You might have to buy two or three of these fake cocktails before one of the girls you are talking to touches your leg or something and suggests you take her back to your hotel.

She'll then ask you to pay her 'bar fee' (usually 500 baht/£12 or so, non-negotiable) which will release her from her duties for the rest of the evening. At some point, you'll also discuss how much money you will give her for going home with you. Just like getting a 'happy ending' at a massage parlour, the precise figure is down to the girl's discretion, but 2000 baht seems to be pretty standard.

Conversely, I've heard of girls going with guys for nothing because they found the guy attractive, and similarly I've heard about guys paying a girl's bar fee every night so she won't go home with anyone else.

The girl will probably give you two options, 'short time' or 'long time.' Short time is one shot, long time can be, well, as long as you want. I've heard of guys paying girls to stay at their sides for weeks on end. Or at least the duration of their holiday.

You've probably heard the horror stories, about dumb foreigners being taken for a ride then getting their hearts broken by Thai girls. What usually happens is guys go to Thailand on holiday, or meet girls online, and fall for the girl's sob story. They need money to care for a sick relative, or to pay a debt, or school fees. The dumb foreigners, at the mercy of their heart strings and hormones, fall for the chat and end up sending the girl money.

Some guys send money every month, thinking that as long as they keep paying the retainer, the girl will stay out of the bar scene. Of course, she doesn't. What the guy doesn't realise is that the girl probably has a network of guys all over the world, and probably a Thai boyfriend or husband, too. It's how they get by. They don't even see it as dishonest. To them, it's just what they do.

If the foreign 'boyfriend' ever visits, they will indeed play the part of the doting girlfriend for fear of getting cut off if they don't, so in a sense they are doing what's expected of them. They just don't tell the guy the full story. But does anyone?

Like I said, the smiles have teeth.

The other kind of prostitutes are freelance. They often have other jobs,

and moonlight as call girls in the evenings. They are cheaper, because you don't have to buy the expensive cocktails or the bar fee, but they tend to be older and not as good looking. There is also slightly more risk involved with these encounters. The vast majority of Thai girls wouldn't dream of going through your belongings and relieving you of a few bank notes when you're not looking but some would, and they would probably be of the freelance hooker variety. If a bar girl did it, you could just go back to the bar she works at and make a fuss. With freelance girls, once they leave, you have no way of tracing them.

So, Peach was freelance. Not because I relish danger, but mainly through sheer laziness and because I was looking for the cheaper option. I invited her over, cracked open a beer and waited nervously.

Barely an hour later, there was a knock on my door. I opened it to find a small, petite girl, in her late-twenties, with dark skin and long hair. The first thing I noticed was that while she wasn't unattractive, she looked very little like her profile picture.

I'd gone to see a prostitute in London a couple of years earlier. When I arrived at the address she gave me, a very plush apartment in Mayfair, no less, I discovered it was a completely different girl and the photos she posted online were fake. Feeling cheated, I turned around and left, leaving the girl shouting and swearing after me. London prostitutes charge £100 or more per hour, four or five times what you'd pay in Thailand, and for that kind of money you expect a good service.

This wasn't quite the same. The pictures Peach showed me weren't fake, but she had obviously used old ones and maybe a filter or two to make them look better.

She walked in, took off her dress and padded bra to reveal a pair of saggy stretch-marked boobs with big sticky-outy nipples, and asked me what I wanted.

"Um, I don't know," I replied. "Start with a massage?"

She looked confused. "Massage?"

"Yeah."

"Okay..."

She obviously didn't get asked for massages often, and was pretty clueless. In fact, she gave up after a minute or so, and just started playing with my cock. Maybe it was the beer, or the weed, or the general vibe, but I wasn't feeling it and my cock remained stubbornly flaccid. The attention it

was receiving was mechanical and functional, and not in the least bit erotic. As soon as the cold rubber of the condom touched my bare skin, I would go soft again. I've always hated using condoms.

She asked me why my 'little man' was dead. I told her he wasn't dead, he was just sleeping, and as she was the professional, it was up to her to wake him up. After huffing and puffing for a few more minutes, we had a rest and talked for a while. Peach told me she worked in a beauty salon by day, and sent all her money home to care for her two kids. The father was a Thai who she said used to beat her, so she left him. She said it was one of her kid's birthdays the next day, and she was waiting to pick up her salary so she could buy him a new bike in the morning.

After a few minutes, the weirdness passed, I got a legitimate erection and stuffed it inside her. If I was paying for it, I wanted to get my money's worth.

The sex was unremarkable, but Peach made all the right sounds and seemed to enjoy it. When I was finished she did that thing where the girl wraps her legs tightly around your waist and holds you in place a little longer than necessary, which was slightly awkward. After you climax, especially with a prostitute, you just want to get off and have a wash. Then I paid her, she got dressed and left.

The next morning, Peach sent me a message. She was upset. The beauty salon didn't pay her salary on time, so she couldn't get her son the bike he wanted for his birthday. I said how terrible that was, and if she came around to collect it, I would be happy to give her the 3000 baht she needed.

No I didn't. As if. I knew it was a scam. Something she probably threw out to all her customers the next morning. Maybe once or twice she got lucky and picked up a little extra money. If she did, all power to her. But she wasn't squeezing anything more out of me. I'd given her a fair price for a fair service and our business relationship ended there.

Lucy and I had arranged to leave Pattaya and head north to Chiang Mai the next day. I sent her a message to ask if the old plan was still viable. She replied saying she'd made some new friends, and would be staying in Pattaya. It didn't feel right leaving her there with all the sexual predators, but what else could I do? I couldn't force her to come with me. With a heavy heart, I went without her. We still talk from time to time, but that was the last nail in the coffin of our almost-relationship.

Oh, and in case you were wondering, as far as I know she never did go skydiving, bungee jumping or scuba diving, and the sex hex ritual? That

didn't work, either. Thanks for nothing, Dave Mustaine.

Up North

After breakfast the next morning, I checked out of the lush Lucky Inn in Pattaya and, with the help of a note from the receptionist written in Thai, made my way to the long-distance bus station. There, you have a choice of buses of varying standards and prices. It's over 800 km from Pattaya to Chiang Mai, so I chose the VIP (Gold bus) option, which promised to be slightly comfortable, bought a 750 baht ticket, and settled down to wait for a couple of hours.

While I waited, I started chatting to a very excitable local guy who was waiting there with his wife and kids. Or as much as it's possible to chat to someone when neither of you knows the other's language. The guy showed me pictures on his phone, gave me cigarettes, and then wanted his picture taken with me. Being naturally suspicious, I smelled a rat. I'm British. People just aren't that nice in the UK. Or probably anywhere outside Thailand. At one point, I'm pretty sure he tried setting me up with his sister. When my bus finally pulled in and we had to say goodbye, we did so with a very awkward (from my end, anyway) man hug. I swear there were tears in his eyes.

The Gold bus. Wow. I wasn't expecting anything better than a National express coach. How wrong I was. Obviously, there were a lot of similarities with both being buses and all, but the interior of the Gold bus was more like that of an airplane. There was even a hot dolly bird, whose job it was to walk up and down the aisle handing things out to the passengers. First, there was a packet of cheese puffs and an orange drink. Then a blanket. Then a polystyrene box containing cold boiled rice with chicken, and a bottle of water.

After meal time, the hot hostess came around again and collected all the rubbish, then the other passengers and I dug in for the 13-hour drive north to Chiang Mai.

It wasn't actually as bad as it probably sounds. There was air-conditioning and the seats reclined, so it wasn't much different from being in a hotel. In fact, sleeping on the bus was probably more comfortable than the first hotel I had stayed at in Bangkok.

However, I didn't sleep the whole night. It was more of a succession of short naps. At one point, I convinced myself my phone had been stolen. It wasn't in the pocket where I usually keep it, which was enough to send me into meltdown. When you travel, or even when you don't travel, it's surprising how important your phone becomes. Without that, I didn't even have the address of the next hotel I was supposed to be staying in.

Thankfully, it was a false alarm. I found my phone in one of the pockets of my rucksack. I still don't know how it came to be there.

The bus arrived at Chiang Mai just before 7:30 the next morning. I knew I wouldn't be able to check into my room for a few hours, so with time to kill I decided to walk there. My GPS said it would take about an hour. The morning was cool and clear, and the walk pleasant. The only down side was that I had to carry all my luggage with me. About half way, I stopped at a coffee shop and had a latte before resuming my journey.

Even before I even got to my hotel, a prostitute was messaging me on WeChat. My arrival must have triggered some kind of early warning system amongst the working girl community.

"I come your hotel now. Give you special massage. 1500 baht."

"I haven't actually reached my hotel yet."

"I come now."

"I haven't arrived yet."

"Where is it?"

"Not sure. I HAVEN'T ARRIVED YET."

"You tell me where it is."

"Um... I'm tired. I think I'll have a rest."

"Call me."

"Okay."

I didn't call her. She sent more messages later that day. In fact, she sent a steady stream for the next few hours, then got annoyed when I wouldn't answer and deleted me. I just didn't like the way she went about her business. Too pushy. It was almost as if she planned to bombard me with messages until I wilted and fucked her just so she would leave me alone. It soon became clear that even if I had fucked her, she probably still wouldn't have left me alone. One of the great things about Asia is the fact that you are never under pressure to go with a particular prostitute because if you don't like one, you can be pretty sure another will come along soon enough.

I arrived at the place I was staying, a nice little boutique hotel called Zz House in the Old Quarter just outside the city centre at around 9:30. Still too early to check in. I met the owner, a larger than life Thai guy who looked to be in his mid-thirties called Boyd, and he agreed to let me leave my luggage there while I went for another cup of coffee. Even at this early stage, I could tell that staying in Chiang Mai was going to be a completely different experience to both the hustle and bustle of Bangkok and the sleaze of Pattaya.

Chiang Mai, in the far north of Thailand, is a well-known stop on the backpacker tour. There is an airport there, but no direct flights from the UK, so what most people do is fly into Bangkok, stay there a few days, then either get an internal flight or a coach to Chiang Mai.

The name means 'New City,' and it is the former capital of the Kingdom of Lan Na, an Indian state from the 13th to the 18th. It is one of only two locations in Thailand currently in Trip Advisor's Top 25 places to visit in the world. With a population of only around 16,000, it's quite a small city by Asian standards and the pace of life is noticeably different. There's no subway system, and no ultra-modern skyscrapers, though it has all the things you would hope for; a National Park, a zoo, several museums, parks, temples and a thriving night life. I had arranged to spend five nights there, before moving on to some as yet undecided destination then making my way back down to Bangkok.

Zz House was just a few minutes walk from the Ping river, which unofficially but neatly separated the touristy area full of massage parlours, bars and restaurants, from the Old Quarter, which was mainly residential but also featured its fair share of restaurants and low-key coffee shops. In time, I learned that it was generally much cheaper to stay the Zz House side of the river. There, you could get a meal for 40 baht (£1) or less, depending on what you had. The same thing, though still relatively cheap, would routinely cost two or three times that across the river.

My room wasn't as nice as the one I had at Lucky Inn in Pattaya, but had all the main amenities like an en suite, a fridge and air-con, and was a lot cheaper.

After finally checking in, I grabbed a quick power nap then went exploring. My first impression was that Chiang Mai was a lot more low key than both Bangkok and Pattaya, which suited me fine. I needed somewhere to chill out and lick my wounds for a little while. It was pretty, with the river and lots of classical temples. Even the architecture was beautiful. This was how I'd always imagined Thailand to be.

I spent the afternoon walking around aimlessly and popping in and out of bars when I got thirsty. In one of them, I saw a flyer for a Muay Thai event that evening. There are a lot of Muay Thai events in Thailand, on pretty much a nightly basis. However, this one promised to be something special. Team Thailand versus Team USA. If there's one Muay Thai event you see, I guess it should be a good one.

Tickets were 400 baht (£9), not bad for an evening's entertainment. I've always been fascinated with martial arts, and won a brown belt in Shotokan karate in my younger years. I'd also studied Sanda in Beijing and Krav Maga in London. The clincher was the fact that the event was being held at Kawila Boxing Stadium which, according to my GPS, was just minutes away from where I was staying.

I arrived to find a few hundred people sitting in stalls around a square ring (there's a contradiction that needs to be addressed). Like conventional boxing rings, the ringside seats were reserved for VIP's, and behind them were very excitable groups of locals who would lose their minds during the fights. I thought they were the hardcore supporters, but it didn't take long to figure out they were, in fact, dedicated gamblers.

I sat with a group of Canadian tourists, and the bookmakers rounded upon us immediately. To make things interesting, most of us had a flutter or two. Always 100 baht (£2.30) at a time on even spreads, which is barely the price of a beer in the UK, but is a tidy sum to the average Thai. Predictably, we always lost. Probably because the bookmakers knew what they were doing and we didn't. They would come over and say something like, "Red corner mine. You blue corner. Okay?"

After a while we got wise to it and started trying to turn it around and asking for the other corner, which invariably led to the bookmaker walking away shaking his head and looking for another mug.

I'm not sure who won the tournament. All the PA announcing was in Thai. Team Thailand (in the red corner) seemed to win the vast majority of fights, but at the end Team USA was presented with all the silverware. It was all very confusing.

My confusion was compounded when the main card finished and two ripped and heavily-tattooed pre-pubescent kids came out and started hitting seven shades of shit out of each other while groups of men cheered them on and threw money around. That would probably be illegal in most countries, but here in Thailand it's an institution. Boys and girls as young as five are training and then competing for money in prize fights.

At some point, in the early days of my stay in Chiang Mai I switched from Singha to Chang beer. They taste virtually identical, but the latter is slightly cheaper meaning you can drink more. Unfortunately, if you drink too much of the stuff it gives you an awful hangover, dubbed a 'changover.'

When I got back to Zz House around midnight, I was surprised to find a

small group of people sitting at a glass-topped table in the common area outside smoking and drinking. There was an elderly self-proclaimed 'Refugee of the winter' from Holland called Fred, a lone bearded Scot called Charlie, a young English guy called Chris, and a Polish woman called Alice. I stayed for a couple of sociable beers, then hit the sack. I had been a long day.

The next morning, after a quick breakfast I decided to go for a walk along the river. I ended up walking seven or eight miles and getting blisters on my feet the size of tangerines. That put me out of commission for the next couple of days and I spent most of the time limping about Zz House, reading and chilling. Also, having splurged a little in Pattaya, I wanted to save some money and work out a sensible budget.

When your accommodation is paid for, you can live happily on 2-300 baht (£5-7) a day, especially if you avoid beer. A good tip wherever you go is to eat where the locals eat. They know more than you. They have to live there, so usually gravitate toward the best all-round places, both in terms of food quality and price. Of course, the bigger your budget the more you can do in the way of entertainment.

I didn't want to spend my entire time in Chiang Mai lying in bed with sore feet, so as soon as I was able to walk unaided, I hobbled to the nearest travel agent and booked myself on a couple of trips. Up until then, all I had done in Thailand was eat, drink, walk and indulge my sexual desires. Don't get me wrong, I was having a great time, apart from the getting brutally rejected by Lucy part, but I wanted to take more away with me when I left than memories of getting drunk and getting laid. I wanted some of those once-in-a-lifetime experiences, so I signed up to go trekking through the jungle and Big Game fishing.

The Thais are deeply spiritual people, and pray most days. They believe in spreading positive energy, under the impression that the more they spread, the more they will get back and ultimately, the happier they will be. You could argue that their motives are fundamentally selfish, as the only reason they are so giving is because they expect the universe to reward them somehow. The smiles have teeth, remember? But that would be a very callous and cynical way of looking at things.

In Chiang Mai, I saw a schoolboy run after a robed monk who happened to be passing on the other side of the street. The schoolboy put a carton of milk and what looked like a bread roll in a basket the monk was carrying, then got on his knees. The monk gave the schoolboy a quick blessing, and

away he went.

It was a strange sight. Certainly not something you would expect to see on the streets of London or any other British city. Milk and bread is a common breakfast in Asia, and only when I was thinking about it later did I realise the schoolboy had probably given the monk his own breakfast. On the surface, a nice thing to do. But did he do it out of the goodness of his heart? Nope. To him, it was a kind of investment, or a trade off. I give you my breakfast, you give me a helping of good luck. More than likely, the student was on his way to a test he hadn't studied for and was in need of some divine intervention.

The next day, it was time for my jungle expedition. Until then, my only experience of a jungle had been watching I'm a Celebrity, Get me Out of Here. It was an early start, so I was tucked up in bed at a reasonable hour the night before and made sure I got a decent sleep. At the crack of dawn, a jeep came to Zz House to pick me up, and I got in the back with a handful of other travellers including a couple of French lesbians. Going to a jungle with some French lesbians? I had to pinch myself a couple of times to make sure I wasn't still asleep and dreaming.

After a three-hour drive, we finally arrived at our destination. The jungle. I couldn't tell you which one. I don't even think it had a name. We then proceeded to hack our way through the undergrowth for a round-trip distance of around ten miles.

It was hard going. By mid-afternoon, I wasn't even sure if I would be able to finish it. It wasn't just the distance involved, but the terrain. We had to scramble over rocks and down steep embankments. At one point, an old English lady in our group called Judith fell off a path and landed in the river below. She must have fallen 20 feet. I felt sure she was dead, or it would at least be a hospital case. But the guides went into rescue her, and a few minutes later she emerged from the water battered, bruised and embarrassed, but giggling like a schoolgirl.

Around the area were lots of isolated villages, most without electricity or running water, which are home to various ethnic minorities like the Kayan people (also known as the Padaung) who fled Myanmar after clashing with the military regime there. The Kayan look like something straight out of National Geographic magazine. The women wear decorative brass neck coils and invite groups of tourists, ferried there by the coach load, into the villages to sell them trinkets. They also charge money for photo opportunities.

Most visitors think they are having a genuine cultural experience, but the reality is quite different. The traditional-looking hilltop residences are artificial, the people only having been there since the 1980's, and the only reason the villages don't have electricity or running water is because the Thai authorities refuse to grant them citizenship, limiting the amount of utilities they can legitimately lay claim to. Furthermore, Thai authorities refuse to allow them to resettle outside the tourist villages, claiming they are economic migrants and not real refugees, thereby effectively pushing them into a corner.

At one point I was chatting with one of the guides, who was also from Myanmar, but had brilliant English. He said he and his sister both worked in Chiang Mai. His sister worked in a massage parlour. I couldn't resist asking him if he ever went for massages.

"Sure!" he replied with a grin. "It nice!"

"Every day?"

"Not every day. Expensive for me. I go once a month, after I get paid."

"And do you get a happy ending?" I asked. I was curious as to whether the locals indulged, or if it was purely a tourist thing.

He gave me a cheeky smile and nodded before strutting off. I thought asking him whether or not he went to his sister's place would be impolite

My next excursion was Big Game fishing at a place called Bo Sang fishing park, which turned out to be a huge picturesque lake. I'd been a keen fisherman when I was a kid, but hadn't actually been for years. I could only ever remember catching one fish before. A baby trout near where I lived. I shit myself. This was turning out to be a voyage of self discovery, and self re-discovery.

As with the jungle trek, I was picked up outside Zz House at the crack of dawn by a bunch of strangers in a jeep. The other people on the trip were a Dutch couple who kept talking about growing weed, and an American couple who kept talking about shooting stuff. He was a retired cop. Apparently, where they lived on Florida, he and his wife both walked around with concealed automatic weapons. You don't even need a permit to carry rifles or shotguns.

It turned out to be the easiest thing in the world to catch giant Mekong catfish. You just needed a rod, some bread, and a big fuck off hook. This was because the lake had thousands of the fuckers living in it, but the owners never fed them. Therefore, when a bunch of tourists turned up and threw bait

in the water, even with big fuck off hooks embedded in it, the fish were sent into a feeding frenzy. The first one I caught easily weighed 25 kg, and by the end of the day I could barely move my arms enough to cast out.

Jungle trekking and Big Game fishing might not be everybody's cup of tea, but in my eyes it definitely beat sky diving, bungee jumping and scuba diving.

Finding Real Thailand
And Myself

It turned out Boyd, the owner of Zz House, was quite a character. He was usually dressed only in Bermuda shorts; his wiry, tattooed torso scorched a deep brown by the sun. His collection of catchphrases included, "Fuck you!" and, "You will die!" which he threw around with reckless abandon. His biggest cause of stress was finding rooms for everyone, because every single person I met there ended up staying at Zz House longer than they planned. The place was like Hotel California.

In the afternoons, Boyd could usually be found in the communal area staring at a bunch of green bananas.

"Why don't you eat one?" I asked one day.

"Not yellow. Not ready," he replied, eyes never moving from the fruit as if the weight of his stare would speed up the ripening process.

"Why didn't you buy yellow ones?"

"Because the longer you have to wait, the sweeter the taste."

I realised afterwards that he wasn't just talking about the bananas. This was a working example of some typical Thai philosophy. All good things, etc.

I originally planned to stay in Chiang Mai for five days, then move on to somewhere else. But I was already thinking about staying longer. The place had a strange charm, the people were nice, and to be honest I didn't fancy the upheaval of moving on again so soon. It sounds like a cliché to say I was finding myself, but it was true. For the first time in a long time, I was doing exactly what I wanted. Walking, fishing, drinking, exploring, meeting interesting people, all under a blazing sun.

After all the fishing and jungle trekking, I decided a day of pampering was in order. There was an open-fronted barber shop near where I was staying manned by a slightly creepy guy with a very pronounced nervous tick wearing a surgical mask. I don't know if you've ever seen the Japanese torture porn flick *Grotesque*, but he looked just like the mad doctor from that. I went there after a quick lunch one afternoon and looked at pictures he'd ripped out of magazines and stuck on the wall until I found one that loosely resembled how I wanted him to cut my hair and pointed at it. It was a gamble, but I figured what's the worst thing that could happen? It was hair. It would grow back. As long as I didn't ask him for a shave with a cut-throat razor, I should be okay.

As it turned out, my suspicions were unfounded. The guy gave me one of the best haircuts I've ever had, and even with a tip, it cost less than one

fifteenth of what I was paying for a trim in London. Bargain.

Next on my agenda was finding a massage parlour. As I already admitted, in my book actual legitimate massaging skills generally take a back seat to looks. I'm really that shallow. So my search for a suitable masseuse took me on a long trek around the city looking in windows and smiling at various groups of girls. I eventually found one I liked, and asked for an oil massage. It was much the same deal as Bangkok. You pay for the massage, then when it's over the girl asks for more money to give you a hand job.

Weirdly, the girl in Chiang Mai initially wanted more money than the girl in Bangkok, even though everything else was cheaper there. I assume it was because there are more massage parlours competing for customers in Bangkok, and that drives the prices down. Still, I got lunch, a haircut, a massage and a posh wank all for the equivalent of about £15. Result.

That evening I walked back to Zz House across the Iron Bridge traversing the Ping River. There were no cars or bikes, and only a few couples and small groups of teenagers hanging out there drinking and smoking. A young Thai guy was walking a few paces ahead of me. I'd eaten and drank quite a bit by that point and could feel a massive fart working its way through my system. It was going to come out. That much was certain. Not a problem, you might think. And under normal circumstances it wouldn't be. What I didn't factor in was the volume and sheer velocity of said fart. It didn't even sound like a fart, it sounded more like a loud, aggressive grunt.

On hearing it, the young Thai guy walking in front of me whirled around, put up his fists, and dropped into a Muay Thai fighting stance. The noise of my fart must have frightened the crap out of him. I showed him my palms and edged my way around him, apologising profusely for my flatulence. I don't think he understood what I was saying, but seemed happy just to not be attacked.

In the beginning, I felt very much like the new kid at school at Zz House. Most of the people staying there already knew each other, and I was having to fit into the pre-existing social scene. Fred, Charlie, Chris and Alice hung out a lot and did everything together. How do you penetrate the cool gang?

It was easier to just avoid them, so I did. But obviously, staying at the same place, I saw them around quite a bit. Not just at Zz House, but in the city. Whenever it happened we would make awkward small talk between us for a few minutes then Charlie, the young Scotsman, who seemed to have taken on the role of unofficial team leader, would announce, "Okay, let's go,"

and off they would all troop, leaving me standing in the same place wondering where they were going.

I didn't feel any kind of bond with him, and more than that it seemed like he wasn't even making an effort.

I know what you're thinking. Why should he, right?

I probably shouldn't have done this, but one night after a brutal group whisky session, one of Boyd's vices, I confronted him and asked him what his problem with me was. Obviously, there was no problem. At least, not outside my own hyper-sensitive mind.

After that embarrassing episode I began spending more time with the Groovy Gang, and found them to be one of the warmest yet most disparate groups of characters ever thrown together in the history of forced friendships, even in the travelling community.

Fred, the sixty five year-old Dutch 'refugee of the winter' had a penchant for the old crooners like Frank Sinatra and Frankie Avalon, and could often be heard singing along, rather badly as it turned out. He claimed to be some kind of accountant, but I suspect he was either a hit man or an international playboy. Maybe both. Chris was a twenty-something Londoner bored of working in a call centre in the Big Smoke who was training to be an English teacher. Alice, the Polish girl, had recently quit her job in finance and decided to travel around Asia until her money ran out. Respect. The aforementioned Charlie was an ex-steeplejack, spending a few weeks in Thailand en route to Australia where he was starting a new job as an abseiling instructor. Probably beats living in Edinburgh. And would undoubtedly be a lot less dangerous, too.

We usually went for lunch together, and would then go off somewhere on an Uber excursion. Most cities have a collection of Uber drivers, and Chiang Mai was no exception. We visited Doi Suthep-Pui National Park, various temples and waterfalls scattered around the outskirts of the city, splitting the Uber cost between us. Evenings were spent sitting around the big glass-covered table in the communal area of Zz House, chatting, drinking, taking turns to play music on our phones, and watching the Gecko's running up and down the walls.

These sessions often turned into cultural exchanges. We would share stories about our travels and home towns, or the people we knew. As we were all from different countries it was an eye-opening experience. In addition to the hardcore group, there were also people from Croatia, Singapore,

Germany, France and Russia coming and going, all of which contributed to the eclectic mix.

In Thai tradition, the emphasis was firmly on selflessness, rather than selfishness, and doing things for others instead of exclusively for yourself. Having recently exited from the rat race in London, this philosophy was completely at odds with my natural state of being. It sounds corny, and maybe it was, but it promoted a good atmosphere. I did my bit by donating to the group my well-thumbed copy of *The Breach* and the chocolate Lucy had left behind, at the same time exorcising her ghost.

During my stay in Chiang Mai, Chinese New Year rolled around, and with it a lavish festival in Chinatown. Having lived there for six years, I have a deep affiliation with China, but had never been involved in New Year celebrations on quite this scale before. The streets were crammed full of people, who only parted to allow through a succession of massive dancing dragons. Powered by tourists and a sizeable Chinese contingent, the festival lasts a full three days. We went on a Saturday night, when the moon was at its fullest.

As in most Asian countries, in Thailand you find market stalls selling some of the most exotic and bizarre 'foods' you can imagine. At the festival there were numerous stalls selling deep-fried scorpions, big black beetles, grasshoppers, bamboo worms and various other small creatures one wouldn't normally consider food. Some of these things are considered local delicacies, but the vast majority are just gimmicks designed to part daring tourists from their cash. Very few locals indulge. There's probably a good reason for that. One thing that is common, though, are little packets of crickets which you can pick up for 15 baht (35p) from 7-Eleven.

One night, we decided to forsake the communal area of Zz House in favour of the bars. Fred and Alice soon bailed, probably because they could see the way the night was going, leaving Charlie, Chris and I. Chris was a connoisseur of bar girls, having been around the scene for a while, and knew where to take us.

At least, that was the theory.

There was one notorious place which we had to avoid because if we went there, Chris would feel obligated to go with a girl he'd met there before, and who still sent him messages. Instead, we tried a different bar. There was nobody in this place except us and a small group of Thai girls. We thought we'd be able to take our pick and take them home with the minimum of

effort. However, a few awkward pleasantries later, it became obvious they weren't working girls. And so, with the night wearing on and options becoming more and more limited, it was to the 'notorious' place we went.

The moment we walked in, the girl he'd met before made a beeline for Chris, and one of her friends, who happened to be one of the hottest girls I'd ever seen (at least with beer goggles on) came over and started stroking my leg. She was in her early twenties, and had platinum dyed blonde hair. I called her Lisa because I couldn't pronounce her real name. She didn't seem to mind. As we swigged beer, with me paying for the drinks, obviously, she told me she was a member of the Shan ethnic minority, predominantly from Myanmar but also to be found in China (some historians believe they originally migrated from Yunnan province), Laos and, yes, Thailand. Especially Chiang Mai.

For the next two hours, Lisa was the perfect companion. She was attentive, charming, funny. She laughed at my jokes and went to the bar to get my beer whenever my bottle ran empty. She didn't ask for any expensive cocktails. She did ask me to buy her a beer, but then she gave it to me anyway.

At some point, she asked me if I would like to take her home. I absolutely did, but I needed to check something first. I told her that I was wary of ladyboys. "You think I'm a guy?" she asked, plucked, shaped eyebrows arching in surprise. She looked a little offended, which made me feel bad.

"You can never be too careful," I said. I'd seen some very impressive-looking dudes during my time in Thailand. My fears were allayed when Lisa took my hand and put it up her skirt. There was no penis. The only thing hiding in her underwear was a deliciously shaven pussy, and it was already wet.

When the bar closed at midnight, we went for a meal with some of her colleagues, a ladyboy and a lesbian. It was possibly the most bizarre supper I've ever had, but they were good people. They even offered to pay for my meal. When we finished, Lisa and I walked back to Zz House. The place was quiet, the communal area deserted. Thankfully, everyone was in bed. There was no shame in taking home a bar girl. It's pretty much accepted, and I made no secret of my intentions that night. I just prefer being discreet.

My room was on the ground floor. We went inside, sat on the bed, talked for a while, then she took off her dress. Her body was flawless. Soft, silky, slender and smooth. I put on a condom and pulled her on top of me so I could

penetrate her from the bottom. She had large, pert breasts for an Asian girl, and I wanted to take full advantage of them.

Unusually for a working girl, it seemed she genuinely enjoyed it. Especially when I put her on her hands and knees and did her from behind. Believe it or not, I've fucked a lot of girls, including a fair amount of hookers, and I can tell when the moans are real and when they are fake. It felt like we had a genuine bond, which fit in with what other working girls in Thailand I'd talked to said about picking and choosing their clients.

At one point, I opened up and told her about the Lucy situation, and she said, "What do you expect? We have a saying in Thailand. If you date a Chinese or Japanese girl, you have a baby."

I could see her point.

The whole experience with Lisa was like the perfect one night stand, from meeting an attractive girl in a bar, buying her drinks and making small talk all evening, then taking her home and fucking her brains out.

When we finished, she asked if she could stay the night because she was tired. I'd already hidden my passport, credit card, and cash, just in case, so I agreed, and we curled up naked and sweaty in each other's arms.

About an hour later, her phone rang. She went into the bathroom to answer it, but I overheard a heated conversation with an English-speaking dude, who sounded irate and blind drunk. Obviously, one of her regulars, who probably paid her a retainer, wanted to meet her. Lisa said she was tired and didn't want to go, but she was either obligated or wanted to pick up some extra money. She asked me to go for a walk to help her find a taxi. It was late, and she was alone, so I agreed. When we found one, we swapped contact numbers and said goodbye.

Despite 'making friends' at Zz House, I was still a loner at heart. I suppose I always will be, and my natural inclination usually gravitates toward doing things by myself. I find that in groups you tend to be swept along with the tide, and join in the consensus too often. As a result you end up doing things you might not really want to do. Making compromises, in other words. In a way it's easier than functioning alone, when you always have to be alert and are forced to think for yourself.

Both states of being have their merits, so I ended up flitting between the two modes of existence as my mood took me. To their eternal credit, the Groovy Gang let me do what I wanted.

One afternoon, I went to change some money (by the way, to elaborate on

an earlier point, you'll find a much better exchange rate in Chiang Mai than either the airport or Bangkok) and then when I was walking back to Zz House decided to stop in a small bar for a beer. The place was empty apart from several people who worked there, one of whom was playing pool on his own. I do like a game of pool, so I asked if I could play with him.

The guy smiled, showing his teeth, and agreed. He suggested playing for money. Next thing I know, there was another worker lining up to play the winner, also for money.

"Here we go," I thought.

Pool sharks don't just exist in the movies. They also exist in virtually every town and city in the world. They don't all make a living from it like Paul Newman in the Hustler, but they are ruthlessly opportunistic, preying on drunks and tourists out for a good time with money in their pockets.

Luckily, these guys weren't pool sharks. Or if they were, they would be the worst pool sharks who ever lived. It was a 20 baht wager (47p) by each party on each game, so me and the guy I was playing would both put a 20-baht note in a mug and the winner took the money. This was actually a good deal, because just to play a game in London, win or lose, is £1. I can hold my own on a pool table, but I lost slightly more games than I won against the Thai guys, thereby boosting their pay packets a little. All things considered, it cost me literally a couple of pounds for an entire afternoon's entertainment.

Speaking of which, there was some drama when I tried to pay my bar bill as I was leaving. The cute little barmaid asked me for my copy of the receipts. I bought a few beers while I was playing pool, and every time she would bring over the beer and put the receipt in a mug on my table. I didn't think they were important, so didn't keep track of where the receipts went. However, it turned out the girl needed them back before she could process my payment, and if I didn't have them her boss would blame her and make her pay a 500 baht (£12) fine, which was probably a day's pay, if not more.

My first thought was that it must be some kind of scam. Perhaps the barmaid or someone else in the bar had taken the receipts off my table when I'd been busy playing pool, and now she was trying to guilt me into paying her 'fine.' You can say I'm cynical and mistrusting, but that's the way you have to think when you're travelling alone. It's self-preservation.

I was especially wary because I'd just had a wad of currency exchanged. Of course, there should have been no way the people in the bar could have known that, but you can never be certain. Maybe one of them had seen me

come out of the exchange place, or glimpsed the envelope about my person. As careful as you might be, you can never be *too* careful, and your guard naturally slips after a few beers.

I changed my mind about the scam when the girl started crying. Thinking about it, knowing how a lot of bars in Asia operate, her story wasn't beyond the realms of possibility. I had one last look through my pockets. No receipts. Then, as a last resort, I went through my rucksack. I'd been sitting at a table reading for a while, and when I packed up my book, cigarettes and other bits and pieces, thought I might have put the receipts 'somewhere safe' at the same time without fully realising.

I was right. The receipts were tucked into a side pocket of my rucksack. I've never seen anyone so relieved as that barmaid when I lay them on the bar and eventually paid my bill. I felt so guilty, I even left her a tip.

All too soon, it was time for me to leave beautiful Chiang Mai. I've been fortunate enough to visit some wonderful places on this big blue planet of ours, and the one thing every place had in common was the fact that for one reason or another, I had to leave.

Goodbye's sucks. The saying 'People make a place' is true. Whether you enjoy being somewhere or not largely depends on the kind of people you meet when you are there. I was lucky to meet Boyd and the Groovy Gang, and will be eternally grateful to them for making Chiang Mai what it was.

On my last day I thought it only right that I have a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I still wasn't up for going skydiving, bungee jumping or scuba diving, so the Groovy Gang and I decided to visit Doi Inthanon instead.

Doi Inthanon (once known, imaginatively enough, as Doi Luang, which means 'Big Mountain') situated in the Chom Thong district of Chiang Mai, is the highest peak in Thailand. It is part of a mountain range in the middle of a massive National Park covering no less than 4,824 square kilometres (300 square miles), and at its highest point is 2,565 m (8,415 feet). By comparison, the highest peak in the UK is Ben Nevis, which stands a much more modest 1,345 m (4,409 feet).

On the road to the summit are two beautiful, elaborate temples, Naphamethinidon and Naphaphonphumisiri, built to honour King Bhumibol Adulyadej and his Queen Sirikit respectively. It is a truly spectacular sight which has always been popular with foreign tourists, and experienced a huge upturn in tourism following the king's death in October 2016, with many Thais being drawn there to pay their respects. It was a fitting way to spend

my last hours in Chiang Mai.

One Last Ride

After the wide, open expanses of Doi Inthanon, came the limited confines of another long-distance bus journey. Chiang Mai to Bangkok this time, 685 km at a cost of 565 baht (£13). The journey would take around nine hours. After settling the bill for my extended stay at Zz House and sinking a few farewell beers with the guys in the communal area, it was time to go.

I got a tuk tuk to the bus station, underwent a torturous wait, and finally boarded the bus at around ten pm. I'd come to realise that in Thailand, the buses were always late, but the tickets you buy are not interchangeable. If your ticket says it's for the ten pm bus, that's the one you have to get. Even if the nine pm bus arrives at ten and the ten pm bus arrives at midnight. It can all be very confusing. As before, I paid slightly more and got the 'Gold standard' luxury bus, with the free snacks and cute dolly bird.

The journey was going as well as could be expected. Until about the half-way point, when the coach was pulled over by the police. All of a sudden, four or five cops with guns got on and started asking all the passengers for ID.

It reminded me of the time when I was on a coach from Rotterdam to Cardiff which got spot checked by over-zealous French border police. That time, they took us all into a little cold room and strip searched us one-by-one. Weirdly, 33 people got off the coach but only 31 got back on. On this occasion, I got off relatively unscathed. There was no strip-searching, and they didn't even ask me for ID. The head honcho just gave me a dirty look and picked on the young Thai guy next to me instead. I never found out whether I was the unwitting victim of another random spot check, or if they were looking for someone in particular.

After a very long night punctuated only by a few fitful naps, we arrived in Bangkok at dawn. After getting caught short a few times and being stuck with hours to kill before being able to check into my room, this time I'd booked the night I arrived, too. The extra cost was only around 400 baht (£9) and the peace of mind was worth it.

I was staying on Sukhumvit Road again, because of its close proximity to both the bus station and the airport, at a place called VX (The Fifty), and was given a room on the top floor which opened directly onto a roof terrace. I went straight to the room and took a nap, while I mulled over my latest conundrum. This was my last couple of nights in Thailand, and I was in Bangkok, one of the most happening cities in the world. Should I take it easy, do a bit of reflecting and have a few relaxing (cheap) days? Or should I

change some more money and go on one last, booze-fuelled bender?

As it happened, I did both.

I had aspirations of seeing a few of the main tourists sites in Bangkok, some of the places I'd missed last time. But Bangkok isn't an easy city to navigate, and much of it is continually grid-locked. Plus, that nine-hour bus journey had wiped me out, so when I woke up I just went for a walk around the neighbourhood. There were a few small restaurants filled with locals, and one 7-Eleven. That was enough for my needs, and I took the opportunity to grab some lunch and stock up on beer and snacks.

Back at the hostel, I moved operations to the roof terrace and thought about what to do. There was always the massage option. In fact, there were two parlours just across the street. But I'd done the massage thing a couple of times already.

I checked the news on my phone, as I did most days, and realized the Six Nations rugby tournament was starting. That night's game (afternoon in Europe) was Italy v Wales. Being a proud Welshman, my mind was made-up. I would find somewhere to watch the rugby. How hard could it be?

It wasn't hard at all. Google told me there was a well-known sports bar only a few kilometres away. These places tend to be expensive. They have a lot of licenses and stuff to pay for. So I decided to load up before I went. I put away about four bottles of Chang and finished off what little dope I had left from Pattaya and the next thing I know, I'm sprawled on the roof terrace absolutely wasted. It's never a good idea to get in that shape when you are alone abroad. Anything could happen. I was reminded of the time I discovered a great little tapas bar in Granada, Spain. I loved the place so much I didn't want to leave, and ended up falling asleep in a pissy alley between there and my hostel. What a night.

While I was lying on the roof terrace wasted, I started chatting to a Japanese couple who were on a round-the-world trip. I only started chatting to them because the girl was hot, and I had vague hopes of them not being together. The girl was wearing a vest, and had what I thought was some cool body art on the top of her arm. Little dots laid out in a grid. It looked like tribal scarring or something. I complimented her on it, only to find out they were inoculation scars. I can only assume they get a lot of inoculations in Japan.

I would bump into the Japanese couple frequently over the next couple of days, and whenever I did, they would always look at me and giggle. They

probably knew me as the drunken British guy from the roof terrace who didn't know an inoculation scar when he saw one.

Kick off was at nine pm Bangkok time, but I fell into a funk and let time get away from me. When I realised I was only supposed to be warming up for the main event it was a quarter to and I hadn't even left the hostel. Without further a-do I grabbed a fist full of money and ran outside into the street to hail a taxi. Naturally, when you really need one, there are none to be found, and when I eventually did find one the driver took a ridiculous amount of time to get there.

I arrived at the sports bar at half-time, but until then the game had been a scrappy, low-scoring affair so it didn't look like I had missed much. It was a huge place, set over three floors with each showing a different event on big screens. I followed the noise to the 'rugby floor' to find it full of drunken Welshmen. If there's one thing guaranteed to bring Welshmen abroad together, it's rugby. It seemed as though every Welsh person in Bangkok had turned up to that bar.

As expected the beer was comparatively expensive, 100 baht (£2.30) a pint, which isn't much cheaper than Wales. Waitresses come around, ask what you want, take your money, then come back with your drink and change. So I watched a storming second half of rugby then stuck around for a while drinking and chatting, until I realised the bar girl hadn't brought back my change from the first beer. I'd paid with 1000 baht, so it was a tidy sum. I'd just been too wrapped up in the rugby to even notice.

I complained to the English bar manager, and he asked the waitress who'd served me whether she'd given me my change. Of course she said yes. So then I was hamstrung. Nothing I could do about it. The manager insisted I was mistaken, and maybe he was right. Either way, I was out of pocket and left the place with a bad feeling. Still, Wales won.

I spent most of the next day in bed recovering from a particularly gruesome 'hangover,' and when I finally emerged was faced with the fact that this was my last day in Thailand, and in less than 24-hours I was going to be making the long journey back to reality. I was filled with remorse, and spent a large chunk of the day reflecting on all that had happened over the past few weeks. Lucy, massage parlours, Lucky Inn, Jan the praying missionary, giant catfish, the beautiful Ping River, the Groovy Gang.

When I felt able, I went for a walk around the neighbourhood and a last lunch, and then went back to my room to pack. My flight was leaving at

07:30, so I had to be at the airport a couple of hours before. Factoring in the hour or so car ride, and an hour 'Emergency time' I usually add to long journeys as a buffer for any unforeseen circumstances, meant that I should leave The Fifty at 03:30. I wasn't planning on going to bed, hoping to sleep en route. I just had a few hours to kill. After a quick inventory I decided I had just enough baht left for one more adventure.

I didn't have enough money for the bar girl experience, so it was either going to be a house call or a sad, lonely wank. Going by past experience, I figured arranging a visit by a local freelance hooker shouldn't be too expensive, or difficult. So I fired up WeChat, put out some feelers, and sat back with a bottle of Chang to see what delights the evening would bring.

And I waited.

Nothing happened.

I did another search and sent out a few more feelers, and still nothing happened.

I couldn't understand what was wrong. Was there a call girl strike in Bangkok that night? If it had been the weekend then perhaps you could say that the girls were all just busy, but this was a Monday night. I would have thought it would be a quiet evening in the sex industry. Unless, of course, it was a designated rest day. I ended up having that sad, lonely wank after all.

At 3.30 I carried my stuff down to the foyer and checked out. As luck would have it, a German couple were leaving for the airport at the same time, so we shared a taxi. Everything went smoothly and on schedule, I made all my connections, and arrived back in England the next day with absolutely nothing to show for a month in Thailand except memories.

Would I do it again? Hell yes!

In conclusion, Thai women are no better or worse than women of any other nationality. Everyone wants the same things in life, we just have different ways and means of getting them.

About the Author

Alex Coverdale a London-based journalist, editor and dark fiction writer. He uses a pseudonym, rather than his real name, to protect the guilty as well as the innocent. And also because he doesn't want his friends and family to know what he really gets up to when he travels. He spent almost six years living and working in China and has visited over 20 other countries, all of which shaped him both as a person and as a writer. His work has appeared in over 60 publications worldwide, and he is the author of the #1 Amazon bestseller [Yellow Fever: Love & Sex in China](#), which is available now on paperback and eBook:

<https://www.amazon.com/Yellow-Fever-Love-Sex-China-ebook/dp/B01N6PYFUW>

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Yellow Fever:
Love and Sex in China

By Alex Coverdale

On a quest for enlightenment and adventure, British journalist Alex Coverdale spent almost six years as an English teacher in China. During that time he lived in Beijing, Tianjin, Changsha and Xiangtan, and travelled from Inner Mongolia to Hong Kong. Along the way he dug for dinosaur eggs in the Gobi desert, ate snakes, had dealings with Chinese gangsters, and found himself under room arrest at a Moscow hotel. He saw things he never thought he would see, and did things he never thought he would do, developing a deep affinity for China and its people. Over time, he fell in love with the unique culture, the colourful history, and the country's vibrant, infectious energy. Most of all, however, he fell in love with the women.

This book charts his adventures and misadventures as he explores the Chinese dating scene with surprising and often hilarious results. If you have any interest in China, teaching English abroad, or the dynamics of cross-cultural relationships, this book is for you.

#1 Amazon Bestseller!

Exclusive Extract

There was more apprehension when September rolled around and the time came to fly out to Xiangtan. It was a change of circumstance, a change of life, in a place I didn't know and where I had few friends. I still knew people in Changsha, about two hours away, so that was my safety net, even though I was embarrassed to see them again after the whole Diana episode.

I made arrangements to meet Ava the day I arrived. We'd stayed in touch through the summer, and she was keen to continue her role as my unofficial personal assistant. There was a problem with my apartment, so the university put me in a hotel on campus for the first few nights. Ava traveled from Changsha to Xiangtan, and decided to stay the weekend to help me settle in.

In the hotel that first night we ate grapes, played music, and talked. At some point, seemingly out of the blue, she said the words every man loves to hear.

"Let's make love."

"Ava, are you sure?"

"Yes."

I'd kinda known she liked me for a while. Some girls find broken-hearted fuck-ups irresistible. They think they can fix you. She'd stayed at my apartment in Changsha a few times before I left. We'd even shared the same bed a couple of times. But, stung by Nina's rejection and what happened with Cherry Pie, I didn't make any moves. During our summer-long internet chats, the topic often turned to sex so I knew she was curious, and not a virgin. I just never thought she would be so forward about it.

That night, I needed no second invitation. I took off her clothes and, well, tried my level best to fuck her. But she had the smallest vagina I've ever had the good fortune to encounter, and it was impossible to put a fully engorged penis into her. It was like trying to force a finger inside a clenched fist. So we kissed and played for a while, and eventually I succeeded in penetrating her. When I did, it actually hurt me. I was red raw for days. I can only imagine how beaten up and bruised her pussy was.

My new apartment was on the third floor, in a block inhabited mainly by other teachers and foreign students. It was the usual deal; living room, bathroom, kitchen, bedroom and balcony. I got chatting to a French teacher soon after I arrived, who told me that he'd woken up on his first day to find he'd been burgled during the night. Someone had climbed the balconies to his open window, crept in, and cleaned him out while he slept. They took his money, camera, phone, documents, everything. That was a worry, and I made

a mental note to never leave the window open at night, which you are tempted to do because it gets so hot in Hunan province during summer. Leaving a window open is much cheaper (and less noisy) than running the air-con all night.

It didn't matter either way, because I came home from class a couple of days later to find the university had put bars on all my windows and built a huge metal cage around my balcony. From then on, it was like living in a zoo.

Being a comparatively big fish in a smaller pond, Xiangtan University had more resources than HMMC. Therefore, the facilities were much better. That year, instead of using chalkboards I taught in classrooms where every student was hooked up to a computer terminal, with me controlling them from my master dashboard. We used headphones and microphones to communicate. It made teaching easy, and with me taking the time to prepare classes the way I should always have done and focusing on one job instead of five or six, things went smoothly. I tried hard to keep my wandering thoughts on the job, and even succeeded. For a while. Then I met Fan Fan. Or more accurately, then I began to notice Fan Fan.

The first thing that caught my attention was her smile; wide and innocent, but a little wicked. She didn't have an English name so I gave her one, Ebony (it was during my porn star phase), because she had beautiful, dark skin. After class, I asked her for her QQ number, which she readily gave me. I added her, and one of the first things she said to me via chat was, "Why are you interested in me? I not a good girl."

If anything is guaranteed to arrest a man's attention, it's that. "Because you have a beautiful smile," I replied. "And besides, who wants a good girl?"

We talked a little via text and QQ, during which she disclosed that she was twenty three years-old, from a small city in Hunan called Shaoyang, liked computer games, and had a boyfriend. Things were ticking along nicely, all things considered, then she stopped coming to class. For a month or more, she didn't set foot inside my classroom. I remember seeing her around once or twice during this period. I would ask why she'd been absent from my class, and she would just flash me one of those killer smiles and walk off. After a while, she started coming again. Probably because it was nearing exam time.

I took Ebony and a few other students out for meals a couple of times. I just liked having her around. But she generally ignored me and would spend

the entire time playing with her phone. If she messaged me at all, it would be late at night. Once or twice, she even *called* late at night and spoke Chinese at me, knowing I couldn't understand 90% of what she was saying. She did that partly to be mysterious, I think, and partly because her English was so bad that she had no choice. Those were the first signs that her hard exterior may be cracking.

I didn't deceive Ava. I thought too much of her to do that. She had been my rock for a long time and helped me out of so many dicey situations. I just didn't want to rush into another relationship so soon after Diana, and had always made that clear. It wasn't something I suddenly decided after I'd fucked her a few times. Because she still studied at HMMC in Changsha she wouldn't be able to live with me, but it did put us in the perfect 'fuck buddy' situation. At twenty-two she wasn't very sexually experienced, and was eager to experiment. She loved cunnilingus. I only had to put my tongue within six inches of her pussy and she would have a screaming, quivering orgasm.

For the rest of the year she would come over one or two weekends a month, and I would pop over to Changsha for a night or two when the mood took me. I didn't always tell Ava when I was in town. I didn't feel the need. I went mainly to score dope off Eric the French dealer, but I loved getting drunk with my old friends when I could, and making new ones.

During the summer, Eric's girlfriend Izzy had introduced me to her cousin Becky, who was also from Xinjiang. Becky was eighteen years-old, tall, very slim, and had the biggest eyes you'll ever see. She looked like a porcelain doll. We got on well, despite her limited English. She seemed like a nice girl, though she had a few issues stemming from the fact that when she was a child her mother had been killed in a car crash and her father had murdered someone and been on the run ever since. In fairness, that's probably enough to fuck anybody up.

I told Becky the next time she visited Izzy and Eric, we should hook up. And we did. We went out, got drunk, then got lost in a part of town I wasn't familiar with and ended up staying at a grimy 50 RMB a night hotel. What made it worse was the fact that I'd already paid for a nice one, we just couldn't find it. Despite being younger than most of my partners, Becky was much more experienced. I was the third or fourth guy she'd had sex with, but the first foreigner. To say she was enthusiastic would be an understatement.

During another of our liaisons, there were mass demonstrations all over the city with thousands of (mainly) students protesting against what they

saw as unfair treatment by the Japanese government regarding some disputed fishing islands in the South China Sea. The Chinese are always disputing islands in the South China Sea. In retaliation, they rampaged through the city, and other cities in China, setting fire to Japanese-made cars and smashing up Japanese-owned shops and businesses. It all got a bit hairy at one stage, and I was very glad I wasn't Japanese.

The problem with situations like that is that the unrest spreads, other factors come into play, and pretty soon the locals begin to hate all foreigners, not just the Japanese. It quickly becomes China versus The World. Added to that, the authorities come down hard on any kind of public demonstrations.

I decided it would be wise to stay indoors and keep a low profile until the fuss died down. But Becky was bored, and hungry. She wanted to go out to eat. I said with me being western and her being from Xinjiang, I wasn't sure if it would be safe. "Sure it's safe," she said, in all seriousness. "They've been breaking things since this morning. They'll be tired by now."

A few weeks after I started the job in Xiangtan, Cathy, one of my post-graduates, waited behind after class and asked me to walk her to her car, which conveniently enough was parked near my apartment. She was in her mid-twenties, slim, well-dressed and more talkative and outgoing than many of her classmates. As I said before, a lot of students try to befriend their foreign teachers, usually in the hope that it will net them a few extra marks. You take it with a pinch of salt. But nothing could have prepared me for what Cathy proposed during that walk.

"What do I have to do to pass your course?"

"Not much. Just come to class, work hard, and do an oral exam at the end."

"Is it difficult?"

"Not at all."

"Do I have to come to every class?"

"Not every class. But the more time you miss, the lower your final mark will be. I keep an attendance record. It's the fairest way to do things."

"I want to suggest an alternative."

"What alternative?" I asked, knowing a lot of post-graduate students had jobs, families or other responsibilities, I was always willing to accommodate.

"How about we make love, I come to class when I feel like it, and you give me a good mark at the end of the semester."

I was stunned. "Are you being serious?"

“Yes.”

“I'm not sure if that's ethical,” I stammered. “What if someone finds out? We'd both get in big trouble.”

“I'm not going to tell anyone. Besides, we're both adults. We can do what we want. Think about it, and I'll ask you again next week.”

I did think about it. In fact, it was pretty much all I thought about until the next time I saw her. I wondered if it ethical, I wondered how much it happened, and I wondered if it would be worth the risk. But most of all, I wondered what Cathy was like in bed.

The following week, as promised, she lingered around after class and together we walked across the campus again to where her car was parked. We stopped outside my apartment, and she asked if I'd come to a decision yet. I said yes, I had. I thought her proposal was a great idea. I considered myself morally bankrupt by that point, anyway. If there is such a thing, I was already going to hell. And I had to admire her initiative.

A couple of nights later she came to my apartment after a night out with her friends. She was drunk. We didn't talk much. There was no need; we both knew why she was there. I led her to the bedroom and took off her dress.

More freaky nipples. But not like Juliet's saucers. These were freaky in a different way. You know the expression, 'You can hang a coat on them?' Well, you literally could. In fact, you could probably swing from them if you wanted to. So we did our thing, then she got dressed and left.

I thought that would be the end of the matter. I should have known it wouldn't be that simple.

After we had sex she started acting strangely. She told me she'd broken up with her boyfriend of several years, and started sending me pictures of houses she wanted me to buy in France. I tactfully explained that a house in France wasn't part of the deal, and she backed off for a while only to come at me again from a different angle.

The second wave of attack consisted of her telling me she was pregnant, and it was my baby. After what Diana and I had gone through, that struck a nerve and I lost my cool a little. I had no reason to doubt that she was pregnant. But we'd only had sex the one time and I'd used a condom, so it was highly unlikely to be mine. A lot of girls... well, not even just girls, people in general, use manipulation tactics to get what they want. But Chinese girls take it to a whole new level. When they decide what they want, they will use any means necessary to get it.

By this time, I was getting the distinct impression Cathy was batshit crazy. I told her if and when the baby came, I would be happy to take a paternity test to find out definitively whether or not it was mine. If it was, I would marry her and maybe even buy that house in France she wanted. But until then, I wanted nothing more to do with her. That was the end of the weirdness. She came to the odd class, and just sat in the back of the room glaring at me. At the end of the semester I gave her 96%, based mostly on her sexual performance. I've never given 100% because I believe nobody is perfect, but she definitely lost a couple of marks for the fake baby story.

Something even more bizarre happened in Xiangtan. One day I walked out of my classroom at the end of the morning session to find a young, well-dressed Chinese guy waiting for me. He introduced himself as 'Lawrence,' and asked if he could practice English with me. I was exhausted and explained, as politely as I could, that I was just on my way home but he was welcome to walk with me and chat for a while. He asked all the usual questions; where are you from? Are you married? Do you like Chinese food?

When we arrived at my block, I said it was nice talking to him, wished him a good day, and turned to leave.

"Aren't you going to ask me inside?"

"I wasn't planning on it," I replied. "I'm a little busy right now. I have some things to do."

"What things?"

"Just... stuff."

"You insult me."

"How?"

"I thought we made friends. I walk all this way for nothing."

Now I was losing my patience. "What are you talking about? You said you wanted to practice English. I told you I was on my way home, but I still practiced with you as much as I could. What do you want from me?"

"I want to go inside."

"Sorry. Not today."

"Tomorrow?"

"No. See you."

I buzzed myself into the building, and when I got to my apartment and looked out of the barred window. Lawrence was still outside. Waiting. I made some lunch and had an afternoon nap, as is traditional in China, and when I woke up he'd gone. I found the whole thing a little weird, so the next day I

mentioned it to one of my colleagues, an older guy from England called John. Mid-way through my story, he burst out laughing. "Ah, you met Lawrence!"

"You know him?"

"Yeah, everyone does. He goes to a different university, and comes here on his days off to follow the foreign teachers around."

"Why?"

"He's a Potato Queen."

"He's a what?"

"A Potato Queen."

"What's that?"

"A gay Asian who likes white guys. We are the potatoes."

This was all new to me, a sub-culture I had no idea had even existed. But thinking about it logically, if I was a straight white guy attracted to Oriental girls, it wasn't all that unusual to learn that the same principal applied to other groups. The mind boggles at what might have happened had I let Lawrence into my apartment.

John, the Englishman who told me all this, was a classic example of how good foreigners can have it in China. He was well into his sixties, short, balding, divorced, yet he still had a constant procession of beautiful women marching in and out of his life. He preferred them slightly older, mainly divorcees in their thirties and forties. Being divorced is a big turn-off for the majority of traditionally-minded Chinese men, so these women often find themselves stuck on the shelf. John was cleaning up. He'd been in China for years, and was full of good stories. One of the first things he told me was 'Watch out for the holes.' The previous Christmas, he'd been walking home from the pub drunk when he fell down a hole on the university campus. It was too deep for him to get out of in his drunken state, and nobody was there to help, so that was where he spent Christmas night. In a fucking hole in China. From then on, I was especially paranoid about falling down holes.

The rest of my colleagues were the usual assortment of misfits. One, a forty-something Indian guy called Babu was a royal pain in the ass, and a borderline sex offender to boot. When I first met him, he seemed friendly enough. He'd worked at the university for almost ten years, and married a local woman. One of my students saw me talking to him one day, and later warned me that Babu was 'not a good guy' and I should stay away from him. Apparently, he had a reputation for being too touchy-feely with some of the female students, to whom he constantly offered free massages to 'help them

relax.'

One day, he went to class with a stitched cut on his forehead. I asked him what happened, thinking he may have fallen down John's hole or something. He explained he'd been attacked by 'some drunk Chinese racists.' The more believable alternative version of events I heard later from someone else was that he'd asked a female student to meet him in a park. Why she agreed to meet him I don't know, but she did. 'Something' happened, she screamed, and a group of Chinese guys came to her aid. I don't know if they were either drunk or racist. Probably not.

Babu wanted my help. A lot. In the space of a couple of months, I re-wrote his resume for him, wrote a cover letter, and proof-read all his job applications. He'd applied for a job at an American university, but they'd said they only hired US nationals, so Babu enlisted my help to 'write some beautiful words' to convince them otherwise. I explained that whatever I or anyone else said, the university in question was unlikely to change its policy. I tried anyway, and his application was rejected again. This made Babu angry. 'Why is everyone racist?' he asked. I told him I didn't know.

Babu hinted that he would feel much better if I had a 'small party' in my apartment, inviting just him and a group of my female students. I said that was never going to happen. Then he suggested he and I take said group of female students out to a local bar and get them drunk instead. I told him that was never going to happen, either. The majority of Chinese university students are so naïve you can't help but feel a little protective, and there was no way I was letting Babu get his slimy hands on any of them.

So there was John the Ageing Casanova, Babu the Pervert, and then there was Kemble the Freeloader. He was a Canadian of Korean descent and regularly got mistaken for a native Chinese, something which drove him nuts. The first time I met him was in a club. We found out we worked at the same place, so I bought him a beer as a goodwill gesture. When it was his turn to reciprocate, he disappeared. I hate that. You can always tell if these things are intentional. He reappeared again later when it was time to leave, and we shared a cab home. The fare was 20 RMB, and Kem asked me to pay half. I refused on the basis that I'd just bought him a 30 RMB beer so, he could cover my share of the taxi fare and we'll call it quits. Splitting hairs at this point, I know, but there's a principle involved. If you let freeloaders get the upper hand early in your relationship, they'll see you as a soft touch. You don't want that.

I didn't see Kem again for a couple of weeks. Then, one quiet Saturday afternoon, there was a knock at my door. Kem. He wanted to 'hang.' I hate it when people turn up at your door unannounced and expect you to entertain them, but as it happened, I was just on my way out to meet a representative from one of the training schools I did a some moonlighting for. I said he could come along if he wanted. His response was 'who's paying for the food?' I said I didn't know, the training school, I guess. So he came. The representative gave me the salary I had accumulated that month. Kem saw me count it, then loudly proclaimed, "I'm your new best friend! And I'm not leaving your side until you've spent all that money!"

Erm, ok. I took it as a tongue-in-cheek remark. Surely, nobody can be that rude, right? Wrong.

During the day he must have mentioned the words 'free' and 'meal' together at least a dozen times. Apparently he was in the habit of letting his students 'treat' him, every day. They soon got wise to that and cut him off, then he couldn't work out why nobody invited him out for dinner anymore. I suggested that maybe it was because the students didn't have much money, and asked him if he'd ever paid for a meal in all the time he'd been in the city. 'Never!' He exclaimed, proudly. What an asshole.

The very next day, he called me. "Do you want a VPN on your computer? One of my students can install one for you. He's with me now."

"Sure, why not?"

"Great. We'll be over soon. It'll cost you lunch and some beers. Cool?"

I knew Kemble's game by this point, so I said, "Let me guess, the free beer and food is for you, right?"

"Of course! You can call it a finder's fee, if you want to be like that."

"No thanks. And forget about the VPN. I'll manage."

Next day. Phone rings. Kem again, who is by now seriously beginning to piss me off. "What do you want?"

"Let's hang."

"I'm busy."

"No you're not. You're just sitting there. I can see through your window."

"You're spying on me?"

"It's not spying. I just thought we could go out for dinner."

"And I'll be paying, right?"

"If you insist."

"Nah. Like I said, I'm busy."

“Okay,” he said. “Let me put it another way. If you don't want the university to find out about your second job with the training school, you'll take me out for dinner and drinks.”

That was when I lost it. I told him I didn't care who knew about the second job, and if he knew what was good for him he'd stop calling me, stop knocking my door, and above all, stop spying on me like some fucking creepy stalker. After that, I put as much distance between us as I could.

To find out what happens next, get the book!

<https://www.amazon.com/Yellow-Fever-Love-Sex-China-ebook/dp/B01N6PYFUW>



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