

**Making it
as an expat**

**Destination
Bohol**

**Crazy over
Cuppa?**

**Bangkok's
Finest**

**Survivor
Thailand**

*How did you handle
culture shock?*

CHARICE
**A STAR
IS BORN!**

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Story by: Ces Orquiola
Photos by: Jose Tan

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03



13



12

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 03 *Messages on EXL's maiden issue*
- 04 *Message of Ambassador Linglingay F. Lacanlale*
Publisher's Note
- 05 **IN FOCUS**
*Korat educator bares key to success:
What takes a teacher, an expat at that, to be a success in Thailand?*
- 07-08 **ICON**
Charice: A Star is born!

*Bangkok's Finest: Meet 3 of Bangkok's finest in
the entertainment industry.*

*A Thai Chaster speaks out: A fan from the north
of Thailand speaks about her love for her idol, Charice.*
- 09 **LIFE BYTES**
Making it as an expat – a personal view

Survivor Thailand: How did you survive cultural shock?
- 10 **X SPOT**
*Bohol: The Philippine province known for being a tourist destination for
its beaches and resorts, and home to the world's smallest monkey, the
Tarsier.*
- 11 **MY TAGS**
Photos of various expat events and groups in Thailand

*Crazy over cuppa?: Meet up with other coffee lovers for a taste of
the world's best brews - and friendship!*
- 12 *Service beyond duty or self: The OFEST serves the community in
the southern provinces of Thailand.*

Events



05



07



10

13 BUHAY THAI (LIFE IN THAILAND)

*You've got a friend: A monthly message from
Fr. John Tamayo S.D.B.*

What they say about EXL

Sometimes, we need something to reconnect us with our friends, our identity, our country. This magazine could provide us a link to build that connection. My greatest wishes to the EXL team for coming up with this magazine. You have been of great service to the Filipino community in Thailand. Congratulations, once again.

Manuel "Manny" Librodo Jr.
http://www.pbase.com/manny_librodo
"A portrait is a landscape of emotions."

My congratulations to Siam Pinoy Co. Ltd. for producing and publishing EXL. This is a very significant contribution to Filipino expatriates living in Thailand. This is a milestone for us to be proud of and celebrate.

Rufino Seva
NGO/Humanitarian
Worker for 13 years in
Bangkok, Thailand

A great idea. It should be most welcome by the community, both as a valuable source of information and as a showcase for all things Filipino. I wish you every success and look forward to seeing your first hard-copy issue.

Ruby Navarro Hoskin
Emporium Suites
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www.chatrium.com

Congratulations on the inaugural issue of EXL. You deserve high praise for coming up with a publication that Filipinos could be proud of. Wishing you success and looking forward to more issues of EXL with informative and interesting articles.

Heidi Sirirangsi
President, Association of Filipinos
in Thailand (AFT) 2008-2009

In behalf of the Association of Filipinos in Thailand-Isan Chapter, I would like to congratulate EXL for this very first issue. We are very fortunate for having people like you who keep on working to promote Filipinos here in Thailand and in S.E Asia as well. We wish you good luck for more issues to come, rest assured that we are always here to support you in everything we can. To the EXL team, we salute you for a job well done. Keep the Faith! More power to EXL!

Renald P. Villaluz
President
Association of Filipinos in Thailand- Isan Chapter
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As the biggest and most successful organization of Filipinos in Thailand, SIAM PINOY is truly an inspiration! With the publication of its first magazine that wraps up its long list of achievements, it is with great pleasure to wish all the members more success and blessings in the

many years to come. Congratulations, Siam Pinoy! We, P'LOK PINOYZ, are so proud of you! GOD BLESS!

P'Lok Pinoyz
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An excellent way of reaching out to the Expat community and our host country is creating a magazine that will showcase relevant information about them. EXL Magazine defying all odds in this tumultuous time deserves accolade in this endeavor.

Congratulations to you and your team for creating a magazine that will cater to the Expat community in Thailand.

I do hope that you continue to maintain an interesting, entertaining, and high quality magazine.

Bernadette (Baranee) Kongswasdi
Director
BRK Consultant Co., Ltd.
brkcon@yahoo.com

I wish the magazine all success. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to the Philippines, I have some great Filipino friends in Bangkok, and I hope this magazine will connect the people of two wonderful countries-!

Warm Regards
Lekha Shankar
Journalist & Film Coordinator
(India/Thailand)

It is with great pleasure that I congratulate EXL Magazine on its maiden issue. In the midst of many uncertainties in our world today, including the still shaky global economy, it takes some kind of courage to come out with any kind of publication, let alone one exclusively geared for a sector that is so diverse, so complex, and so disparate as the expat community.

Indeed, there is a need for a magazine that would truly mirror the varied lifestyles of the Bangkok expats: their wants and interests, their dreams and aspirations, their talents and ambitions.

I expect EXL Magazine to become a vibrant forum where their separate voices will be heard; where their individually unique cultures and traditions will be showcased; and where their contributions to a country they call second home will be duly highlighted and given due significance.

Not the least, I am sure that EXL will become a useful vehicle in fostering better, meaningful understanding between expats and Thais, our ever-hospitable hosts. The Chinese has a great proverb: "A journey of a thousand miles begin with a single step." Let me take liberty in rephrasing that to "All great journeys begin with a single small step." May EXL be the right first step for the greater leap that the Pinoy commu-

nity needs, while striving to be also of benefit to the entire expat community in Thailand.

Let me commend your valiant initiative, and wish your magazine all the success it certainly deserves.

Percy Roxas
Editor-in-Chief
Lookeast Magazine
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Very best wishes to everyone at EXL magazine. I look forward to future editions of this exciting new magazine. I wish you every success in this new venture. Mabuhay ang Pinoy!

Dr. Chai Mahithiphark
Head Executive Health Care Centre
Certified Aero Medical Examiner
Vejjhathi Hospital

Today marks another milestone of progress in the Filipino's community spirit. It's another demonstration of the people's determination to not only show the beauty of the Philippines and Filipinos but make it even better through the birth of a new magazine EXL. Congratulations to the dynamic men and women behind EXL and more power to you!

M. Arlene Rafiq
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A warm congratulations to Siam Pinoy on the launch of its new magazine, EXL. This publication is very timely indeed considering the continuous growth of the Filipinos and other expatriates that have now moved to reside or work in Thailand.

I hope that this publication will become a medium to unite all of us, Filipinos, in our quest to promote our culture and country to both locals and expatriates in Thailand. We have a lot to be proud of and I for one have been pleased by the response from colleagues and staff to visit Philippines during their holidays.

To all expatriates in Thailand, we are all blessed to be in this wonderful country. I hope that you find the contents of EXL magazine both informative and entertaining. I applaud the efforts of the publishers and wish them all the success they deserve in the months and years to come.

With my very best wishes,

Riza Sripetchvande
Director
Bromsgrove International School
riza@bromsgrove.ac.th

Message

Mabuhay!

I wish to congratulate Siam Pinoy for coming up with an initiative like EXL Magazine.

As a monthly publication, I believe that EXL will serve as an excellent medium to promote better understanding between and among the Filipino community, the Thais and the expatriate community in Thailand.

The publication will also contribute to a better appreciation of the cultures and peoples of both countries. I sincerely hope that EXL Magazine's vision to become a positive contributor to the Thai society and to the overall harmonious relations between Thailand and the Philippines would be realized through the positive and encouraging articles that EXL Magazine would publish in all its issues.

It is my sincere wish that this publication would highlight the good news happening in the Philippines and the Filipino community in Thailand, and the many achievements of our people particularly in Thailand and everywhere else.

Again, I congratulate Siam Pinoy for this maiden issue of EXL Magazine.

Sawasdee Ka!

H.E. Ambassador Linglingay F. Lacanlale



Publisher's Note

Exciting and challenging – those are the two words that define the expat's life in Thailand. Apart from the rich local culture and language, there's the equally rich communities of other expats who live and work in this part of the world.

From the corporate world, to the educational field, to the vibrant society of business and enterprise, there is so much to highlight, market, record, photograph and write about.

And all these are part of the reasons why we are excited about the EXL magazine!

Join us in celebrating EXL's maiden issue, and watch out for more stories in the months to come!

Enjoy reading!

Jose Tan
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EXL

Voice of Expat Living Maiden Issue March 2011

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An invitation to our readers

We welcome articles, news, story ideas and/or photographs from our readers. Send them to webmaster@siampinoy.com and to exleditor@gmail.com. Your submissions are subject to approval by the EXL editorial team.

You can download an e-version of our magazine at www.exlmagazine.com



Korat educator bares key to success

by Hedda Tan

What takes a teacher, an expat at that, to be a success in Thailand?

For Monalisa, founder of the 22-year-old Liza's School of Languages in Nakhon Ratchasima, in the northeast of Thailand – it is not that plain and simple. She points to a serendipitous mix of reasons behind “success.”

For one, being married to a Thai is a definite advantage. “My husband (whom she met in the Philippines when they studied at the same university) helps me with the intricacies of Thai culture,” she said. “I learned a lot from him and this makes me suitably equipped to better understand and socially approach my students and their parents.” When asked how many students have enrolled in her school over the years, she said, “Probably by the thousands.”

Monalisa was also fortunate to experience extensive training from a well-known Catholic school in Korat (former name of Nakhon Ratchasima), where she first worked for 13 years. Coming from quite a different set of culture in Dumalag, Capiz in the Philippines, she was introduced to a new environment when she first set foot in Korat. “It was there that I gained exposure and understanding of the local culture and blossomed with inspiration,” she said. “It was there that I realized teaching was not simply the imparting of knowledge to students; it is an art – delicate and complex at the same time. Adjustments have to be made to best suit the student's needs.”

As a school proprietor, Monalisa also believes that the predominantly Filipino teachers at her school are part of her success. Why? “They (the Filipinos) have the potential to be outstanding in their respective fields once they have gone through the

rigors of teacher training,” she explained. “Give them a chance and they blossom. I can rest easy and know that they are responsible and well grounded in their outlook in life. They know from whence they came from. I have a very high regard for them.” Monalisa used to employ teachers from Britain, Germany and America. Now she has 6 teachers and all are from the Philippines.

When asked what her major challenge was when she started her school, Monalisa points to that of keeping students who enroll. She says the key is simple – “you have to make sure that the quality of teaching is high. Students will stay as long as they are learning.”

Monalisa herself, who is now 60, is a formidable force in maintaining the high respect enjoyed by Filipinos in Korat. Purposeful in her demeanor, Monalisa epitomizes professionalism to the highest degree. She believes those who remember their humble beginnings in life, prosper, and her life is a testament to it.

When she first came to start a home and a family with her husband in Korat, there were very few Filipinos to socialize with. Monalisa took it upon herself to befriend every Filipino who came after her, even going to lengths of visiting them at places outside Korat. Her efforts paid off because when she started an informal group of Filipinos in Korat, she got all the support of the then growing Filipino community there. That loose and informal group she initiated years back became the founding community now known as the Association of Filipinos – Isan Chapter.

Monalisa, who is instrumental in the establishment of a successful school in Korat, as well as in the organization of the Association of Filipinos there, is a voice of wisdom for other expats who also wish to have a taste of success in this part of the world.

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CHARICE

A STAR IS BORN!

by Ces Orquiola

The diminutive teen diva from the Philippines, now a certified international pop star, was in Thailand twice last year to the delight of her ever-growing legion of fans.

The phrase, “A star is born,” is by now almost a worn-out cliché. And yet, when David Foster called Charice – the petite Filipina who rose from being a YouTube sensation in 2007 into becoming a bona-fide international singing phenomenon today -- just that, it carried a refreshing breath of fresh air that exhilarated and thrilled millions from around the world.

“The most talented girl in the world,” Oprah Winfrey described her. “The youngest international diva,” a Philippine television host called her. “The first true Asian pop music superstar,” said a lifestyle magazine editor in Bangkok. “Another pride of the Philippines,” said many of her compatriots around the world.

Indeed, when she sings, the diminutive 18-year-old looms larger than life, bigger than she really is; a true-blue show-stopper who merits endless standing ovations and

non-stop applause; a real celebrity to adore and enjoy watching.

The life story of Charmaine Clarice Pempengco, young as she is, is the very stuff of legends. Or, at least, of fairy tales. When her several amateur videos received 13 million hits on YouTube back then, few could have imagined how her story would unfold. Thanks to a certain Dave, a.k.a. FalseVoice -- a registered nurse who first uploaded and promoted her viral videos online -- this self-effacing teenager is now on an epic adventure to worldwide fame; her promising career finally shattering the proverbial glass ceiling not only for Filipinos but also for other Asians aspiring for success in the international music industry.

Charice started singing when she was 6 years old. At 8, she has been winning amateur singing contests already, including those on Philippine television. A story goes around how one talent scout turned her down for an audition one time, saying she doesn't have the “look” they want for a singing champion. It was even reported that in 2006, Charice became fed up playing

second fiddle to other singing champions and how her singing career was progressing. She wanted to call it quits.

Fortunately, her mother isn't one who gives up so easily. Mom Raquel, as she is now more fondly called, is willing to fight for her daughter and defend her against those who would say she isn't singing star material. Then that fateful Korean show came up where she sang, “And I'm Telling You I'm not Leaving” with such depth, range, and raw vocal prowess. She brought the house down, and as they say, the rest is history.

This video caught the attention of American daytime show host Ellen DeGeneres, who featured it in her show. As DeGeneres herself recalled, she went to great lengths looking for Charice. After finding her, she flew the teen and her mother to the U.S., straight to the Warner Brothers' studios in Burbank, California, to guest in her program.

To make the story short, she came, she sang, she conquered. She got a standing

A Thai Chaster speaks out

Jangy is an entrepreneur based in Chiang Rai. But the two times her idol was here in Bangkok for a performance, Jangy did not let distance nor time deter her from showing her support to her idol, Charice. EXL asked Jangy what inspires this strong support for the artist.

What do you like about Charice?

Charice is a wonderful girl for her mother. She was able to support her family at such a young age with her singing. Joining 80+ singing competitions was not easy. That means she had to sacrifice a lot.

But she was willing to do it herself so I admire her for this.

What song/s of hers do you like most?

If I really have to choose, I go for ‘In this Song’, which is in her international debut album. And also because this song tells all her life story and shows how talented she is in singing big songs.

What is she like, as an idol, now that you have seen her twice when she came to Bangkok, and that you have become even quite close to



ovation from a gobsmacked audience. Not once but twice. And this was DeGeneres' prophetic words: "Remember this moment." DeGeneres was proud to announce that the particular episode was 'the beginning of this girl's career.' She told her audience not to forget that they saw her first on her show. "You can almost smell the star in her", were DeGeneres' very words!

Indeed, the DeGeneres show plunged the door open for the then 15-year-old Charice's international career. But that door plunged even wider when the girl was invited to guest in the Oprah Winfrey show, "Oprah," totally riveting the audience again with her jaw-dropping, powerful voice.

The "Queen of Talk" was to become her fairy godmother shortly after that. Charice and her mom were already on a plane bound for Manila when suddenly somebody stopped the plane. Mother and daughter were instructed to get off and asked to return to Harpo Studios (Winfrey's Chicago headquarters). There, Winfrey interviewed them. Then she got on the phone, pushed some buttons in a manner of speaking, and Charice was on her way to singing stardom. As Foster – that Grammy Award winning music producer, writer, and composer ("Theme from St. Elmo's Fire," "Winter Games," "The Prayer," etc, etc...) told his audience during the first "David Foster and Friends" concert in the States before she introduced Charice: "Oprah called me and asked if I can in any way help this girl with a great, golden voice. And you know, when Oprah calls you and asks you something, you don't say no." Foster had since been known as the other big godparent of Charice.

Charice debuted in the luxurious Mandalay Bay Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas as part of Foster's international touring show. She held her own on a stage shared with musical icons such as Andrea Bocelli, Josh Groban, Alicia Keys, Kenny G, Babyface, Peter Cetera, and Boyz n the Band; and later with divas and legends such as Patti LaBelle and Celine Dion. The only Asian, amateur, teen girl singing to a largely American audience did so to roaring standing ovations. Speaking of Bocelli, it was also Winfrey who arranged a phonecall between the two, which

led to the teen singing "The Prayer" in a duet with the famous Italian tenor at the Teatro di Silenzio in Tuscany. Bocelli is Charice's favorite male singer.

From there, one performance led to another. And one success led to a string more. Soon, Charice was making cameos in movies and TV guest appearances, most notably on 20th Century Fox's TV sensation, "Glee." She has opened sports events, earnestly and solemnly singing "The Star Spangled Banner" like a native, and has performed thrice in Barack Obama's inaugural ball, along with singing heavyweights Stevie Wonder, Bono; and R&B singers, Mary J. Blige and Beyonce.

In early March 2010, Charice released her first single, "Pyramid," which shot to No. 1 on the US Billboard chart, prompting the New York Post to dub her the "newly crowned pop princess."

Charice didn't miss a beat and headed for the "Land of Smiles" in July 2010 to promote her debut single at the Siam Discovery Hall. An estimated 2,000 people packed the place to the rafters, cheered after every song, and raised their hands in unison to photograph or video her show. Her Bangkok fans, devoted to the golden girl, also call themselves "Chasters", as the rest of her adoring fans in other parts of the world. The stint was a roaring success and Charice returned again in the fall of that same year, mesmerizing audiences at the Impact Theater in Muang Thong Thani during the Bangkok leg of the "David Foster and Friends" tour, as she did audiences in other parts of the region.

That Charice created quite a stir in the international music industry is probably an understatement, given her continuing rapid zoom to success. It is probably still too soon to tell if this girl with the sonic boom voice with a certified large worldwide following has the lasting power that all true superstars possess. "I still have a long way to go," Charice said in an interview in Bangkok. But isn't that all the more reason to keep watching her?

She's just 18, remember!

nal popularity, especially in the USA. Charice is doing a great job in representing all Asians. She's been working so hard to prove that Asians also got talent to show to the world and it's like she opened the door for any other Asian to get to know worldwide fame in the future.

Jangy now keeps tabs on Charice through the latter's facebook page. She looks forward to the artist's solo tour in the not so distant future.

her during her last visit?

As an idol, Charice conducts herself so properly with any situation. She is mature with her thoughts. When it comes to her performance, Charice always gives her best. She is the most down to earth celebrity I've ever met.

As the only Asian, so far, who has the potential to become a superstar, how do you, as an Asian, feel about her popularity?

It's not easy for an Asian to be able to get internatio-

Bangkok's Finest

Bangkok, one of the few cities on earth where all the cultures of the world seems to converge, boasts of a vibrant music and entertainment industry. Here is just a sampling of the flavors the city offers.



"Yes Indeed's!" Janice Javier

First up, 'Yes Indeed's' Janice Javier at Chaeng Watthana Road. A favorite opener to many big names in the local Thai music and entertainment industry, she is best known for her vibrant and energetic presence on the stage, the ease at which she infuses humor into her performance and, the voice. If there is a word that better describes Janice Javier's voice (and overall performance), it has to be better than "wow", "awesome", "great", and all other vocabulary in the English language which connotes excellence to the core! So catch her at "Yes Indeed!" from Monday to Saturday nights from 9pm to 1am, and enjoy your favorite latest R & B, hip hop, and other pop songs, and prepare to be enthralled!



Jameson Pub's "RJ" Javier

Very few artists, in Bangkok or elsewhere, can compete with RJ's breadth in music – he plays songs from the 60's, 70's, Motown up to the 80's and 90's, and the current hits. He even raps! Whether part of his 4-piece band (he plays the guitar), The Merchant Band at Mai Izakaya every Saturday, or just him, the artiste at the Holiday Inn's Jameson Pub in Silom Road every Thursday and Friday nights (10pm -1am), Rollie or "RJ" Javier will entertain you, especially if you're fond of hits by Barry White, Lou Rawls, Nat King Cole, Joe Cocker, Neil Diamonds and more. So go check out RJ's gigs, and you will not be disappointed!



Lord's Jay R

The Lord Hotel and Spa at Rachada Soi 7, is yet another premier entertainment stop an expat should not miss! Here, you will find Renato Riparip Jr. or Jay R, singing all types of songs – from Jazz, standard pub/club music, pop, ballads, R&B, etc. He is known for improvising his style of singing popular songs, much to his audience's enjoyment. Jay R has made the rounds in Asia, singing in 5-star hotels in Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia and now, Thailand. Don't miss this wonderful singer and artist from 8:00pm to midnight, Mondays to Saturdays at the Lord Hotel and Spa!

His guests at the Lord Hotel and Spa recently boasted of big names like Van Damme, Paul Anka in Nov. 2010 and The Eagles in Feb.

Making it as an expat - a personal view

By Daisy Mendiola

Is overseas employment truly worth it? The desire for better work conditions and the rewards of living in exotic places are just some of the great reasons for traveling, and the upsides too. But there are downsides as well. While working abroad in general widens our experiences, develops our personalities, improves our attitudes toward life and others, they can also result in some emotional struggles. It's not easy being away from your friends, family and loved ones. Being overseas brings with it some deep, good old-fashioned soul-searching.

Can we really stand the separation from our loved ones? Can we truly adjust to strange, new environments? What about culture shock – the food, the people, the mores and values, all the different ways of living that we were not accustomed to? What about medical care, social security, and other work benefits? Are we really sure the move will be good for our respective families? Such were my questions.

My first opportunity to work overseas was an easy decision. I had two work offers in 1996: in New York and Bangladesh. When I chose Bangladesh, my decision raised a lot of eyebrows. Why indeed would I choose to work in Dhaka, in underdeveloped Bangladesh – then known as East Pakistan – instead of going to The Big Apple, the land of dreams and prosperity, in Mother America?



My friends describe my choice as – “a sojourn to the end of the world” – as if I'm Julius Verne embarking on a journey into the unknown. But it wasn't just that I could take my children with me, or that I had a full expatriate package. It was beyond that.

Of course the package was attractive. It included the entire family – partner and children – or in my case, my sister, as I did not have a spouse to take along. Being with my children meant more to me than being a Carrie Fischer in the Big Apple hoping to meet Mr. Big. That made the choice easy.

In fact, it was also because the job offer was such a big professional challenge. Curiously, the lyrics of a famous Frank Sinatra song -- which goes “If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere” -- kept ringing in my head. (How true indeed, even if that was for Dhaka, Dhaka, not for New York, New York!)

Never mind that I had to pack kilos of food and toiletries to bring with me to the poor country of my destination. Never mind if I were constantly on bended knees at the airport for Thai Airways to allow me extra kilos of goodies to bring to the deprived little country of my choice. I still considered myself lucky choosing Dhaka where I made new friends with other expatriates with whom today, I still keep in touch.

Thanks to these people-- the CEO of a foreign

bank who gave me a business perspective of the country, his wife who gave me valuable domestic tips and personal advices – among the many other expats who also went through the same process of adjustments -- I made it in Dhaka. I'm not sure I would have done it without them, my global family.

EXPATS HELPING EXPATS

From personal experience, I learned how expatriates are usually helpful to newcomers, especially if they are from the same culture or country. They are always ready to provide important leads regarding housing or work, and always happy to give useful tips and assistance for everyday life. Even that one local adviser -- who by all counts considered himself a gift to humanity – is indispensable and helpful. This guy straightforwardly once said to me, “Someone has to take care of my biological needs,” to which I replied, “Divine Intervention is always the best resolution on impossible cases” and “Tolerance is a Virtue.”

Most expatriates would initially prefer to be in the company of people with the same cultural background as theirs before gradually establishing contact with the locals. This is especially true with newcomers who don't speak the local language and therefore have difficulty communicating with the locals, although it was not so difficult in Dhaka, where English is the lingua franca. Expats would meet informally in local café or pubs or they may host frequent get-togethers, sharing first impressions and experiences to help ease the period of others' adjustment and lighten the daily rigmarole of living abroad.

In Dhaka, Thursday was the last working day of the week (equivalent to the TGIF). The expat community there was tightly knit. We practically knew each other pretty quickly. In larger cities like Bangkok, one needs to pursue many channels to make social contacts. It could be through their respective consulates, chambers of commerce, or English-speaking social clubs. Looking into local magazines and newspapers to see what's going on: the services and opportunities as well as the other relevant information for the expat community help a lot.

It is important to note that many foreigners commit the mistake of escaping getting one's self involved with the locals. Some make numerous friends with their compatriots but often, they interact very little with locals. This is a missed opportunity. It is safe haven for many of us to remain in the confines of our own expat community, but making local friends is a pleasant way to get better integrated into the society and life of your host country.

My eldest son made the most of it by hanging around with friends with both expatriate and local personalities. With local friendship and support, one will be able to get an insider's view of the host country, and gain a better perspective of the people, their culture, and customs, which should not only be enlightening but also very enriching.

Also, local advice is also often more informative and reliable than those of foreigners. Learning from the locals is a great way to adjust quickly to living in the host country (I have always wondered what a good meal I have when dining with the locals; when they order food for us, the pairings and choices are always fantastic).

In our next issue, Ms. Daisy Mendiola will give you her insights to some questions you need to ask before deciding on an overseas job.

Survivor Thailand

How did you handle culture shock?

By: Ces Orquiola

So, you've made a firm decision to come to Thailand and live an expat life. Whether you arrived in the Land of Smiles to work or retire, alone or with your significant other or family in tow, you went through the usual settling in phase before buckling down to work or play.

Do you remember what it was like to come face to face with the sounds, sights, smells and system of daily life in the country for the first time? We asked and expats eagerly responded to this query with a note of triumph with the way they managed culture shock. Names may have been changed to protect the not so innocent!

Thom:

We would go to Starbucks on Silom from time to time. Starbucks anywhere is Starbucks everywhere. Clutching Veinti mugs of the coffee-of-the-day, soaking in the familiar music of Billy Holiday helped me in time to adjust to Thai culture and society, and until I had no more need for Starbucks' crisis intervention.

Mike:

I must admit that I still haven't gotten over the culture shock, but initially the love of computers, basketball and photography helped me to adjust to my new life here.

Jose:

I dared to eat Thai street food: bugs, crickets, worms and all. It was quite an experience and helped me get over resistance to street food.

Elise:

Knowledge is power. I read up on the culture well in advance to learn about just how life would be different for me here. You will find expat forums of all stripes in any country, and I found the Thai visa forum. I studied maps to know the general layout of the city.

Colin:

I survived on Tesco, Carrefour, and 7-11 food for a bit before I could eat regular Thai fare.

Michel:

The wai-ing took some getting used to. The need to bow or duck as I walked across anyone's path was annoying to me at first but now these are automatic reflexes.

Sarah:

When I got here, I spoke no Thai and no one spoke English, which was a disaster at first. I lived in Minburi at a time when neither the sky-train nor MRT existed yet; I traveled by bus to Silom, where I worked, which took me four hours (on a good day).

Heidi:

Surviving in a new place is a matter of living, adjusting, learning and adapting to your new home, one day at a time. Perhaps we can say that by adding one chili pepper at a time to your dish every year you spend living here you will eventually be eating like a true “esarn” citizen.

Mindy:

I was shocked to discover street food hawkers handling my order with their bare hands. I didn't quite know how to tell them ‘No, I don't want it anymore!’. These days I watch how food sellers operate first before I say a word to them.

Carina:

I've had to learn how to make work sanuk, sabai, and saduak because locals prefer this work atmosphere over our stressful deadlines and nose to the grindstone nonsense.



Bohol

Words and photos by Jeremy Villasis

Bohol does not disappoint. For such a small island, it gives 1-2 punches of attractions and activities that will certainly leave your senses begging for more. Early Spanish colonization has provided it with a rich cultural heritage, while Mother Nature has blessed it with her abundance and artistry.

The island's main attraction, the Chocolate Hills, is touted as a geographical oddity. With more than a thousand almost symmetrical mounds spread over three towns, the grass-covered limestone hills turn brown during the dry season, hence the nomenclature.

Speaking of oddities, another one is Bohol's own bushbaby - the tarsier. Small and docile, it claims to be the world's smallest primate and undeniably has the biggest pair of eyes among all land mammals. The tarsier has somewhat become the unofficial mascot of the Philippines and a local icon for conservation efforts due to its endangered status. It is best to view them at their actual natural reserve, the Philippine Tarsier Sanctuary in the town of Corella.

In and around Bohol's capital, Tagbilaran, are other attractions that will keep everyone busy for a day or two. The Clarin Ancestral Home, once home to the provincial governor, Don Aniceto Velez Clarin, now stands as a museum boasting of family treasures that dates back to the mid-19th century.

Near the city is Baclayon Church, reputedly one of the best-preserved Jesuit-built churches in the region and one of the oldest in the country. A few minutes away is another landmark, the Blood Compact Site. Although humble in size, it is one of the most visited monuments due to its historical importance as it commemorates the first international treaty between the Filipinos and the Spanish.

Aside from chocolate mounds, strange creatures and old-stone churches, Bohol also boasts of gentle coves and white-sand beaches. For divers, snorkelers and sun-worshippers, the island of Panglao is quite the paradise. Between March to June, dolphin and whale watching is a popular activity among residents and tourists alike, and should not be missed.

A picture tells a thousand words. So here are a few thousand words for our readers to enjoy from various activities all over Thailand. Find your friends here and tell them they have been tagged in EXL. Join us in www.facebook.com/exlmagazine.



Neil Robbirt's 50th!



American Women's Club Charity Fashion Show



"Parol" Lighting Ceremony at the Philippine Embassy



"Parol" Lighting Ceremony



Organizing Team of the Valentine Event for Camillian Home

Crazy over cuppa?

Meet up with other coffee lovers for a taste of the world's best brews – and friendship!

by Cheri Yamaguchi

I always get excited when it comes to coffee. If you ask me why, well, who doesn't love coffee? As most of us probably know, coffee is the most popular beverage in the world. My day isn't complete without drinking even a single cup, whether it's homemade or from my favorite coffee shops. It has become part of my daily system.

Coffee changed my life in Bangkok, and I'll tell you how. I was once a newbie here; a housewife with no kids and no friends, but with plenty of time. It was sad and frustrating when I wanted to do things but there was no one to hang out with.

Being home alone when my husband goes to work wasn't fun. My days were spent just browsing the Net -- until I came across a website that instantly caught my attention – the "Bangkok Coffee and Movie Meet-up"! It is a group of people who share a common interest in coffee!! There was no second thought. From that moment on, I knew I'd be a part of this group.

That changed everything.

Let me share with you something about The "Bangkok Coffee and Movie Meet-up" (BCMM) group. It started in January 10, 2007. It was founded by a guy named Art, who's an expat and coffee lover as well. With 729 members to date -- both Thais and expats from all over the world -- it is now the largest meet-up group in Bangkok, consisting of different people meeting at least twice a month over a cup of coffee and having a nice conversation. What more can you ask for?

And if you are a movie fanatic, you can also join them after coffee. It was mid-2008 when I first joined the group for coffee and a movie. The organizer was very accommodating and members who were there were very friendly. I thought joining a group like this was the best way to socialize and make new friends, and indeed, it worked! I did make new friends!!

It wasn't hard to find the meeting place because the organizer sent me detailed information and directions on how to get there. BCMM usually meets at TRUE COFFEE (the old shop) on Siam Square Soi 3, which is accessible via the BTS skytrain and very close to many movie houses around the area.

The place is huge; having three floors. It can accommodate big groups. They provide lots of reading materials and offer internet booths on each floor and wifi service, too, so no wonder, they are very popular with students. TRUE COFFEE serves hot beverages with prices ranging from Bt60 to Bt100 while cold and blended beverages are from Bt80 to Bt125 baht. But don't expect too much pastry offering.

That first meeting whet my inner desire to be adventurous. I began exploring the world through coffee, whether alone or with a bunch of friends. Yes through coffee. You don't have to travel far if you want to try a taste of the world. All you have to do is to search for a perfect place and experience it.

Because I missed Figaro, Deli-France, and Seattle's Best in the Philippines, here's a list of some must-try coffee shops around Bangkok for you and your friends to enjoy and relax.

STARBUCKS

No need for an introduction on this one because it is the most internationally famous coffee shop with thousands of franchises the world over. They have great places to enjoy a cup of freshly brewed coffee of your choice. I can't resist the classic café latte but there is a wide variety to choose from, coffee espresso to classics. And you can also chill-out with their other blended beverages, cold comforts, and pastry offerings, although they're a little bit pricey compared to local coffee shops. A Starbucks branch at the Emporium Tower is recommended when meeting friends. Just sit, chat, and relax. And if you want coffee before watching a movie, then the one at the 5th floor of Siam Paragon is the best. What I love the most, though, is the Starbucks Card, which provides a fast and easy way to pay for your coffee.

LE NOTRE Paris

Explore French gourmet foods with a sip of coffee! Located at the ground floor of Siam Paragon with 30 indoor seats and 10 outdoor seats available (favorable for those who smoke like some friends of mine), Le Notre has a wide range of pastries to choose from to match a cup of coffee or a drink of your choice. You don't have to line up at the counter, the staff will come at your table, and hand you their menu, and take your order. Most of the staff speak English, so communication isn't a problem. They are gracious and very attentive to customer needs. Service is not limited to pastries and coffee. They also serve food: soups, salad, pasta, and risotto. A very satisfying experience indeed!! Just don't be surprised when you pay your bill because prices are inclusive of 10% service charge and 7% VAT.



UCC (Ueshima Coffee Company)

Founded in Japan in 1933 with several branches in Thailand, UCC is a must try Asian brand. Located at Siam Center, they serve strong and bitter coffee. Many people don't like strong and bitter coffee, but I do! I used to work in a Japanese company in the Philippines where strong, bitter coffee was one of the privileges, so I got used to it.

It happened to be a COFFEE SHOP

If you're craving for Italian coffee, then this is the coffee shop for you. I discovered this place by accident. Walking in the food court area of Siam Paragon, I saw this "COFFEE SHOP" sign. For some reasons, when I first saw the place, it never occurred to me that it was a coffee shop. But the name itself answered my question. Yes, "It happened to be a COFFEE SHOP" indeed!

A small spot that serves Lavazza coffee, (with "Italy's Favorite Coffee" on its marketing label), is No. 1 when it comes to Italian quality coffee. I just love the fresh aroma of an Italian espresso, which is quite hard to find in some Asian countries.

COFFEE WORLD

This one has many branches selling affordable drinks: coffee, juices, and smoothies, with prices ranging from Bt70-115. Me and a Japanese friend whom I became acquainted with in my meet-up group used to hang out at the Coffee World in Siam Paragon. Most Coffee World shops anywhere in Bangkok are open, friendly, and relaxing places to hang out in.

Now, who says too much coffee is bad? (Definitely not for me!) It opened the gate of friendship for me, and it's been continuously expanding my network and making me new friends while discovering the world! It doesn't matter where you come from, as long as you share a common interest and love a cuppa, you can enjoy the company of others (other coffee lovers), even those you meet for the first time.

Anybody want to meet for coffee?



Service Beyond Duty or Self

by Heather Craig

The locals appreciate them, their members celebrate them, and the Thai students they serve can't get enough of learning English from them.

That's the only way to describe the OFEST (Organization of Filipinos in the South of Thailand). Serving the Filipino community in the southern provinces of Yala, Pattani, Naratiwat, Songkhla and near by provinces, this community does out-reach programs to their local host by teaching Thai kids English for several days during school breaks.

Phylis May Clomata, the OFEST President, says the Thais are very happy that there is a group of people who takes time to offer English lessons through songs and games to the local kids in the south. Not only are the activities enjoyable for the kids, the parents also appreciate that their children learn, and that it's totally free!

And so while past OFEST activities and projects were successful, such as these free English camps, the organization realizes a need to be self-sufficient and produce its own resources. And so it was decided that OFEST would initiate a cooperative.

The group plans to operate through members' stocks, where active members can become stock-holders and avail of loan privileges. Other details and proposals are close to gaining approval by the group's deciding body and the organization looks forward to the cooperative's speedy start.

Despite concerns on safety for the teachers in the south, the local Thai government and the Filipino communities shall continue to enjoy OFEST's efforts and passion to help and make a difference. They are in the south to stay, this writer believes, befitting their motto: "It is not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit!"



Events

23 March

DRINK AND SMILE

Experience the ultimate sophistication and pampering with sipping signature cocktails created by master mixologist at the Glaz Bar. Discover exciting flavors of cutting-edge canapés, Thai Tapas and exclusive Swiss Movenpick ice-cream cones while you enjoy your cocktails. The entry is 500 Baht/person which will be donated to Operation Smile Thailand Foundation supporting the under-privileged children in Thailand.

Where: The Glaz Bar, Plaza Athenee Hotel, Bangkok
Contact: 02 6508800 ext. 4302

25-27 March

Mekong River International Multi-sport ITU Asian Cup 2011

The town of Nong Khai once again hosts the annual Mekong River International Multi-sport ITU Asian Cup this year in tandem with the Triathlon Association of Thailand and TAT. Athletes compete for top prizes in this annual event that aims to strengthen ties between countries along the Greater Mekong Sub-region. Spectators are free to watch the event. **Contact:** 02.250.5500

1-31 March

Pattaya International Music Festival 2011

It's that time of year again as Pattaya hosts its annual International Music Festival at the Pattaya Beach; nightly from 6-12mn. **Contact:** 03.842.8750

March-April

King's Cup Elephant Polo Tourney 2011

Trained elephants play polo at the grounds of Anantara Golden Triangle Resort, Chiang Rai. The King's Cup Elephant Polo Tournament raises funds to benefit Thailand's elephants. Head on up to the Golden Triangle located at the northernmost tip of Thailand **Contact:** 05 3784084

Sweet Grape and Best of Damnoen Saduak Fair

Thailand's world-famous floating market hosts the annual Best of Damnoen Saduak Fair in Ratchaburi province. Shop and buy goods, enjoy a boat procession, various food and fruit contests, eating competitions and other native sports at Wat Chotikaram Pier. **Contact:** 02.250.5500

TRADE SHOWS & EXHIBITIONS

15 December – 3 April

THE BODY SHOW

Enjoy this unique family experience that educates through more than 50 fascinating exhibits and 500 scientific specimens of the body. It is an eye opening journey that allows every member of the family to better understand the body's form and function.

Where: The President Park Club **Contact:** 02 8335555.

9 February – 10 April

LA FÊTE 2011

LA FÊTE 2011 promises to be exciting and offer much to discover, opening with a free outdoor exhibition titled "Portraits of Asia". This year, in line with previous exhibitions "Earth from above", by Yann Artus-Bertrand, and "Planet Ocean", by Laurent Ballesta, the exhibition will showcase our intangible heritage. The beautiful photography of French photographer Eric Lafforgue will highlight the cultural diversity of Asian populations: 88 "Portraits of Asia". There are everything for everyone – for those who love modern dance, there are shows by "Compagnie Révolution" as well as "Compagnie A'corps"; for fans of contemporary innovation there is the "ice juggler" and a "theatre of objects" to interest them; for the food lovers, there will be "Dinner in the Dark" held; and last but not least, for the music lovers, they can meet at the Thailand Cultural Center for a closing event on 30 March with the French conductor Roberto Benzi, the mezzo-soprano Isabelle Quéguiner and the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra's 60 musicians. There is much more to draw your attention. Check out what's there on www.lafete-bangkok.com.



You've got a friend

A monthly inspirational message from Fr. John Tamayo S.D.B.
Photos by Mel Cabillada

Good News is always life-giving. Like a fisherman out there all alone in the sea, to know that a friend is passing by gives a ray of hope. "I am not alone anymore ... I have a friend" - is a comforting thought. And this may well be all that we need.

This is the purpose of our monthly encounter - to let you know that I am close by - at your side even.

All of us have been brought together to this wonderful land of charms, Thailand. Some are here because they have found love and have decided to build their nests. Many have come to seek work and subsistence; others have simply, by mere curiosity, been fascinated by the goodness of the people and dared to stay. Like this last group, I am one of these adventure-loving folks eager to see new vistas.



All of us, however, in one way or another, are interconnected. We are all guests of this beloved Kingdom, which we may now call home. And while here, we may have realized that we are gifted and have many talents. So some of us have struck it rich, while others are enjoying simple yet fulfilling jobs. But for many, life remains a three-meals-a-day daily grind, nothing special in existence. Perhaps this may not be true for you but for those whom you left in the motherland.

Since we have been uprooted from our original shores and relocated to our new home, we feel the need to adjust, to orientate, to set our bearings



anew so as not to lose our brand new rootedness. For this, I hope to be your friend, accompanying you as we traverse this land of our adoption.

Along this road of striving for survival, no one is a stranger. We are all brothers and sisters. Your joy is my joy, your success is my success; your pain, I share with you. You may ask, "How can you possibly reach out to all by yourself, especially to the needy, to those who need your help most?" Well, this is where I will need your help. Just let me know. Share this magazine with your friends and acquaintances and it will tell them "you've got a friend". That's what friends are for. Hopefully, reading this article, you and I can recharge our spirits, lift our heads high and embark

on in life once again. "It only takes a spark to keep the fire burning."

Fr. John Tamayo is the parish priest of Mary Help for the Christian Church at Krungthep Kriitha Road. He started as a missionary in the south of Thailand nearly 30 years ago. Months back, he started to say mass in Tagalog to a small group of Filipino mass goers.

As word spread out, more people came from as far as Rattana-tibet or Nonthaburi, and recently, some Thai parishioners have joined the 5:00pm mass in Tagalog, saying that they appreciate the passion and fervor of the Tagalog mass. With this initiative, Fr. Tamayo hopes to forge a much stronger relationship between his Filipino and local Thai mass goers.



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