

# LETTER FROM PATTAYA

*This is a new column aimed at providing a viewpoint on what is currently happening around Pattaya. No, it will not tell you which bars have topless girls at what times, nor will it say where all the free birthday drinks and food are to be had. For those still reading, the column will give a current feel of the Pattaya and around - including Jomtien and other beaches. We welcome comments and in particular, any topical items that we have missed - including your own experiences, whether a resident or a visitor.*

## Of Men and Dreams

Well, we are moving closer to the forthcoming high season here in Extreme City. Thankfully, many of the Euro soccer louts are back on their home terraces for now, kicking the stuffing out of opposing supporters in Munich, Manchester or Macclesfield rather than a Baht bus or two down Soi Post Office. Maybe they are even working, but more likely, saving up their dole money their next foray to the delights of Pattaya.

But Pattaya remains full of Westerners, many of whom have converged here from Europe, Asia or from other parts of Thailand with bank accounts stuffed with cash. They are here to buy a slice of real estate in this burgeoning market as retirees, even though some may even be under 40 years old.

The range of new properties now available is quite staggering. We have moved away from cell-like condos and simple bungalows in a rice field to full-blown palaces in condos and new housing estates - many featuring "Thaibali" designs. Sweeping tiled roofs, salas and pools abound. Kitchens and bathrooms are the very latest and security gizmos extend to fingerprint access and automatic garage doors.

We seem to have taken the best of the designs from Phuket and Koh Samui and

planted them here at a much cheaper cost. We also seem to have got many of their buyers as the recent tsunami has blighted the market on those islands. Buyers are happily handing over upwards of 10 million Baht for their new place, even if it will not be completed for many months to come.

So, we have lots of real estate agents and developers driving around in big cars and living in the best places. The buyers themselves have standards to keep up.

Most buyers seem to have traded their European wives in for a younger local model. These new appendages may be spotted in brand-new SUVs or deluxe pick-ups wearing short skirts, gold-laden new bosoms and high heels. The money machine is always the driver, closely following directions to the best furniture showrooms and supermarkets.

Expensive restaurants, banks and gold shops also feature on the chauffeurs' daily itinerary, not forgetting endless presents for the children and family that the money machine is also now responsible for. Jealousy aside, the shift in property quality is quite staggering.

The locals are also well into the real estate frenzy. Wherever you go from Naklua to Bang Saray, there is new building going on. This is by no means the seasonal low season spurt of new buildings, but an almighty redevelopment that has been running for the past two years.

They are now even knocking-down never-occupied buildings to build something new. A lot of roadworks complete the picture and the whole place is one big building site. Like Hong Kong, "it will be good when it is finished".

One small snag with the new utopia is that of water supply. The annual lack of it is much more of a major problem this dry season. Not only are many housing estates devoid of water supply for increasingly large periods, but many industries are now having to take emergency steps. Water supply truckers have been flooded with business, almost swamped.

There is talk in the press of desalination plants, pipelines linking reservoirs and more. Maybe we will have to switch to seawater for our toilets and swimming pools. But there is a surprising lack of

government direction such as appeals for less showers, bricks in toilet flushes and limiting garden irrigation. We are just not attuned to taking our own initiatives to help the situation. Such as a common sign of advice in Canadian toilets reads - "If its yellow, let it mellow. If its brown, flush it down".

However, our city fathers have not been inactive. We now have a public bus service - the second in (very) recent memory. This new service is much more comprehensive than the last, eventually comprising three routes that will cover down to almost the end of Jomtien Beach. The buses will be air-conditioned and cost 30 Baht per trip. Hold it right there. We all know that locals pay just 5 Baht per trip for a Baht Bus, irrespective of distance. Do they expect locals to use the new service? Certainly some will, but no way will most. So that leaves just the foreigners and visitors as potential customers.

Now most who live here have a car, or at the very least, a motorbike. There is also a growing number who often cycle about. Bangkok visitors invariably arrive for weekends and holidays by car or coach. That leaves the overseas visitors. Indeed there are brand new (huge) bus stop signs which will presumably have maps on them. We can also expect publicity of the new service - hopefully in hotels, newspapers and tourist offices. But it is going to take a huge effort to get enough of these foreign passengers on board. Let's face it, all visitors are attuned to Baht Buses and being on holiday, will be reluctant to use a new bus service in a city they do not know.

One of the main sources of income for thousands of locals is either driving a Baht Bus or a motorbike taxi. It does look as if their livelihoods are not going to be threatened by this new service. The only way to break the existing monopoly would be to charge say 10 Baht a trip for a bus ticket. Then the demand from locals would be strong and many more buses start plying the roads.

But what would happen to all the Baht Bus drivers?

*Kindly Provided by Phil from the Pattaya Trader Magazine*