

FILM IN THAILAND

Volume 1 Issue 7



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What's News ?

Film Events in Bangkok September- November 2009

If you never thought of Bangkok as a film oriented locale, think again. September through November are chock full of film events, something for all film lovers.

First up is the Tourism Authority of Thailand and Federation of National Film Associations of Thailand hosted Bangkok International Film Festival which runs September 24 – 30 2009.



Bangkok International Film Festival Poster

Using the theme of "Old Hollywood Glamour", reflecting a golden era of both Thai and international films, there will be approximately 80 movies presented in the festival with two competition sections: the main competition and the Southeast Asian competition.

Running concurrent with the Bangkok Festival, Sept 25-30th is the first Bangkok International Animation Film Festival hosted by the Software Industry Promotion Agency (SIPA), in corporation with the Federation of National Film Associations of Thailand. It is hoped the Festival will be a meeting place for talented members in creative industries to further build on their businesses, creating employment, promoting 'Thailand' as a movie location, while seeking for international cooperation to enhance computer



Bangkok International Animation Film Festival

graphic and animation businesses to further build the film industry in Thailand to a success level as seen in France and Korea.

Next up, from September 25-30, SF Cinema City, one of Thailand's largest exhibitors, will hold a Chinese Film Festival in line with China's October 1st celebration of the establishment of the People's Republic of China and the 100th anniversary of Chinese Film.

And last but not least is the 7th World Film Festival of Bangkok running Nov 6 – 15, hosted by The Nation and Thailand's largest exhibitor, Major Cineplex. The objective of the Festival is to introduce quality, non-mainstream films from all over the world. It aims to become a showcase for independent films and new work from rising talents to cinema masters to show the continuity from generation to generation as a vital component in the development of the film industry. More than 80 international films are screened at the festival each year.

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Meet Some of Our Coordinators

By now you know when foreign production crews shoot in Thailand they must hire a coordinator to help them through the process of securing permits and taking care of all ground arrangements.

We thought it would be helpful if we featured some of the best performing coordinators of 2008. We have a top ten list of performers to which a letter was sent asking them to answer a series of questions. In this and in the next couple of FIT we will feature answers of the coordinators that responded to our letters. We present them in no particular order.



Chris Lowenstein and Panyawadee Sangchai of Living Films

In today's FIT meet Chris Lowenstein and Panyawadee Sangchai of **Living Films**

(all photos this section courtesy Living Films)

FIT: What qualities have made you (your company) successful as a film location coordinator?

LF: Hard and endless work. We have a clear and concise budgeting progress. No matter the size and budget of a given project, we treat the money being spent as if it were our own and make every effort to stay under budget.

We also look after the Thai freelance crew, making sure that their effort feels appreciated thus gaining their trust and loyalty. To top it off, we provide good food and fun while we work.

FIT: What characteristics should a foreign producer look for when seeking a coordinator to work with in Thailand?

LF: A Coordinator should have responsiveness, transparency and the ability to admit if they can or cannot pull something off.

FIT: How does a foreign production find the most qualified coordinators to work with? Sometimes just looking in a directory does not tell much.

LF: The best way for foreign production to find the most qualified coordinators is to ask overseas producers who have shot in Thailand before for their experience and suggestions. Prospective producers should ask producers who've worked here before what went right and what went wrong, what to be careful about and what to expect. This is also a great way to check the background of any local coordinating company.

FIT: What are some of the more interesting locations you have shot in Thailand?

LF: For "The Cave" we were the first team to ever shoot a major feature film in the city of Mae Sot. We had huge crowds of onlookers and created a giant market in the main parking lot in town.

For "Sniper 3", we shot in a huge cave North of Chiang Rai where giant cobras would climb onto the rocks each evening to catch bats.

For "Mysterious Island" we filmed in a lake inside of a cave in Krabi and built our version of Nemo's famous submarine inside the cave.

For "Blackbeard" we had to find beaches, roads and jungle with no electricity of telephone lines so that they would be appropriate for a period film set in 1717. We found the perfect locations in Nakhorn Sri Thammarat and were the first company to shoot a big feature there.



For "Bangkok Dangerous" we used some of Bangkok's oldest river front warehouses as an action set- some of the warehouses are over 100 years old.

For "Shanghai" we recreated parts of 1939 Shanghai in an old section of Chachoengsao and we were the first major feature film to shoot there.

For "Marine 2" we shot an amazing action sequence on the floating island called "Panyee" in Phang Nga province where we were asked to take over a 5 star resort and blow it up! We ended up pulling it all off without almost any damage to the hotel.



FIT: What are some classic situations (problems) foreign productions have when filming in Thailand and how have you solved these situations?

LF: We had an international production that wanted to shoot in the Vertigo bar on top of the Banyon Tree Hotel in Bangkok. However, we couldn't get the permission to shoot there in time and it was very expensive. With our incredible Thai art team, in six days we amazingly built a replica restaurant/ bar on top of another building. The amazing thing was that the entire restaurant set with 100 extras was on wheels so that we could turn the set to get the best Bangkok skyline in each and every shot. When we were done shooting, the Producers admitted that not only could we never have pulled this off anywhere else, we were also able to get shots with the restaurant on wheels that they would never have gotten at the actual location they originally wanted.



What's Up Private Sector ?

Need an Animal Wrangler?

While Thailand does not have animal wranglers per se (a wrangler is someone employed to handle animals professionally), we do have a number of excellent "Adjarn" (teachers or animal trainers) that specialize in various species of animal, dog, monkey, elephant, bird etc.

Your Thai production coordinator should be able to put you in touch with some of Thailand's best animal handlers.

But to start you off, we offer you a couple of suggestions:

Dogs

One of the more well known animal trainers specializing in dogs used in film & TV is Wanchai Jiamphakdee. Among Wanchai's many credits are Danny and Oxide Pang's Hong Kong feature "Gin gwai" ("The Eye 2002) and Pantham Thongsang's Thai hit, "Ma mha 4 khaa khrap" ("Mid Road Gang" 2007).

Thailand has its own ancient breed of dogs, the Thai Ridgeback. The breed was formerly unknown outside of Thailand, but is gaining notice in the western world. The breed is still very rare outside of Thailand. The Thai Ridgeback is one of only three breeds that has a ridge of hair that runs along its back in the opposite direction to the rest of the coat (the others are Rhodesian Ridgeback and Phu Quoc Ridgeback from Vietnam).

thailandfilmdogs@gmail.com



Wanchai and Tryke, a Thai Ridgeback
photos courtesy of AMW International

Elephants

Elephants have always played an integral part in Thai culture and Thai history. All Thai kings had a stable of white elephants and the animals once decorated the national flag and currency.

Only ten years ago Thailand still had 4000 elephants. Nowadays only approximately 2500 remain.

Mr. Laithongrien Meepan is a qualified zoologist with a Masters Degree in Community Development. He is the Founder and Director of the Ayutthaya Elephant Palace and Royal Elephant

Kraal Village and the PhraKochabaan Foundation. He is one of the world's foremost experts on Thai elephant history and culture.

Mr. Meepan (standing)

Meepan is the largest private elephant owner in the world with over 150 elephants. He specializes in training elephants for films, including work with Jackie Chan and Oliver Stone. In addition he trains elephants for theatre productions that include re-enacting elephant fighting during war time.



Oliver Stone's production of "Alexander" (2004) was an incredible time for 20 of the Kraal's elephants.

During the production of "Around the World in 80 Days" (2004), Jackie Chan loved feeding the elephant actors.



Director Stone and Meepan discuss a scene from "Alexander"

Photos courtesy Elephant Home stay



Fit: What should foreign production companies know BEFORE coming to Thailand to shoot?

LF: They should know that they don't have to bring many crew or any equipment, all of which we can provide here in Thailand. They also should know that there are some great world class sound stages in Bangkok.



Film Me Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai is blessed with pristine natural resources of mountains, waterfalls, and other nature-based tourist attractions. At the same time, Chiang Mai residents are warm, gracious and congenial providing authentic hospitality making visits memorable and meaningful.

The Past

Chiang Mai literally means new city and has retained the name despite having celebrated its 700th anniversary in 1996. King Meng Rai founded the city as the capital of the Lanna (A Million Rice Fields) Kingdom on Thursday, 12th April 1296 during the same period of time as the establishment of the Sukhothai Kingdom. King Meng Rai the Great conferred with his friends, King Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai and King Ngam Muang of Phayao before choosing the site where the capital of the Lanna Kingdom was to be founded.

From then, Chiang Mai not only became the capital and cultural core of the Lanna Kingdom, it was also the centre of Buddhism in northern Thailand. King Meng Rai himself was very religious and founded many of the city's temples, which are still important today.



photo Wat Phra That Doi Suthep courtesy of Kan Win at [website](#)

At the height of its power, the Lanna Kingdom extended its territory far into Burma and Laos, and southwards to Kamphaeng Phet a province above Sukhothai.

The Burmese conquered the Lanna Kingdom in 1556 ending the dynasty founded by King Meng Rai that lasted over 250 years. As Burma had occupied Chiang Mai for nearly 200 years, Burmese architectural influences are visible in many temples. At the end of the 18th century, King Taksin the Great regrouped the Thais in the south and finally drove the Burmese out with the help of King Kawila of Lampang thereby regaining Thai independence from Burma. Chiang Mai was then governed by a succession of princes

who ruled the north as a Siamese protectorate under the Chakri dynasty. In the late 19th century, King Rama V appointed a high commissioner in Chiang Mai and it was only in 1939 that Chiang Mai finally came under the direct control of the central government in Bangkok the same time the country was renamed Thailand.

In the past, Chiang Mai was only accessible by river and elephants. More convenient access was achieved only when the railway line was completed in the late 1920's. Moreover, the

The Setting

Chiang Mai, with an altitude of approximately 310 meters above sea level, is situated approximately 700 kilometers from Bangkok on the Mae Ping River basin.



photo courtesy Tourism Authority of Thailand Photo Gallery

Surrounded by high mountain ranges, the city covers an area of approximately 20,107 square kilometers and is the country's second largest province. Chiang Mai borders Myanmar on the north, Lamphun and Tak Provinces on the south, Chiang Rai, Lampang and Lamphun Provinces on the east and Mae Hong Son Province on the west. The terrain is mainly comprised of jungles and mountains, which are home to the hill tribes. In addition, wildlife and exotic flora may be found in the national parks.

Most of Chiang Mai's mountains are oriented from north to south. Together they create a multitude of streams and tributaries including Mae Chaem, Mae Ngat and Mae Klang. One of Chiang Mai's distinctive features is Doi Inthanon, Thailand's highest peak, which is 2,575 meters above sea level. In addition, the province boasts flat, fertile valleys, which spread along the banks of the largest and most important river in Chiang Mai Mae Nam Ping (Ping River) which originates from the Chiang Dao mountain range.



photo courtesy of Kan Win at [website](#)



Pitch It to Me

15th Century Chiang Mai Tales of Muay Thai Champions

In 1411 King Sen Muang Ma died leaving two sons and two claims to the throne - one too many. The sons Yi Kumkan and Fang Ken started a grueling war for the throne. Neither could get the upper hand and the war dragged on inconclusively. Fang Ken suggested that they follow the traditions of the past and that the succession issue be settled by a single Muay Thai combat. Yi Kumkan agreed. Both princes stated that the fight would be to first blood.

According to the annals, the bout lasted several hours. The fight looked about even - just like the war - but then Fang Ken's fighter got a small cut on the foot. First blood, Yi Kumkan became the king.

Some of the legendary champions of Muay Thai have been kings. The most famous of these was the 'Tiger King', Phra Chao Sri Sanpetch VIII, the 29th King of Krung Sri Ayutthaya. Khun Luang Serasak, as he was known before he was crowned, was the son of Phra Petraja the founder of the Ban Plu Luan Dynasty. His son became known as Phra Buddha Chao Sua or the 'Tiger King' because of his ferocity as a Muay Thai fighter.



Ong bak 2 produced by Sahamongkol Film Co.

King had a problem - did he win his Muay Thai bouts because he was King or because he was a great fighter?

His test came when one in his Court mentioned that there was a temple fair at Ban Pajanta in the Viset Chaichan district. Whenever there was a celebration, there would be boxing matches.

The next morning, the King took his entourage and travelling by river, went to the fair. From Tambon Kruad, he went on foot in disguise to the village. The King was a visiting boxer from the city accompanied by his aides, manager and trainer.

The 'Tiger King' soon spotted the boxing ground and sent an aide there to arrange a fight. The promoter wanted the visiting boxer to weigh in so that he could create a good, even match. But the King refused saying that he would fight any boxer regardless of weight and size. He wanted, he said, to fight the local champion. Records say that the fight that ensued was an exciting and skilful contest between two talented fighters. The 'Tiger King' though, soon struck the blow that led to the local champion's defeat.

The 'Tiger King' continued to fight and beat the Kingdom's best, an unknown fighter from the city who pitted his skills against all comers.

Foreigners also feature in Muay Thai history. In 1778, during the reign of King Rama 1, two French brothers arrived in the Kingdom of Siam. They were boxers who had made a reputation for themselves by defeating local boxers across Indo-China. They came to challenge the Thais, who accepted. The purse was high at 50 chang, about 4000 Baht.

The Thai Crown Prince undertook to find a defender of Thai honor and the sport. He chose a member of the palace Royal Guard - Muen Plan.

The contest was staged in the grounds of the Grand Palace; Muen Plan wore full battle regalia to protect him. When the fight began, the foreigner, larger than the Thai, went for the neck and collarbone. Muen Plan defended with a wall of arms, elbows, knees and legs that are still used in the sport today.

The other foreigner, frustrated at his brother's inability to break through the defense, interfered in the fight. The breach in etiquette, an insult to the sport, brought a palace guard, Muay Thai trained, to his feet and after a brief skirmish, the foreigners were carried to their boat.

There are modern legendary figures of Muay Thai as well as those from the past. Like Pol Prapradang - the 'Wild Boar'. His boxing record speaks for itself; 350 bouts, both international and Muay Thai styles. He was never knocked out during his extraordinary fighting career.

This record is even more spectacular since it was built by often fighting in weight classes much heavier than his own. He was a bantamweight but to find a fight, he often fought in the welterweight division.

The "Wild Boar" was also a fabled figure for his ceremonial dance before each fight. 'Hanuman Tob Yoong' - which means 'The Monkey God slapping the mosquito' - boxing dance had no equal. To add to this record, Pol Prapradang was also the first ever Thai Boxer to be internationally ranked in the bantamweight division of international boxing.

Other modern figures become legends because of a particular skill in the Muay Thai art. Like Apidej Sit-Hirun, known as 'The Champion of Seven Titles', the most fearful kicker that Muay Thai may ever have seen, he once broke his opponent's arm with his kick strike.

His kick arsenal made him famous as he set a record by holding, at one time, seven welterweight titles of both Muay Thai and international boxing, a historic record that still stands.

Another celebrated modern fighter was 'The Sky Piercing Knee Kicker', the fighter that in the end, no-one dared fight - Dieselnoi Chor Thanasukarn. He was the knee expert, producing knockout after knockout with his stunning knee attacks.



He became what is called a 'spinster' fighter - one who nobody dared challenge and gave up one of his championships simply because no-one could be found who was willing to fight him for it.

Muay Thai continues to be a sport of legends, of legendary fighters, legendary acts. The greatest legend, the one that the world finds hard to believe, is the simple truth of the sport **"it can't be beaten"**

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Now you know so write the script and come to Thailand and Film It!

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