

# Paradise Lust

An Erotic Travelogue

Kit McCann

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## PARADISE LUST

Two bewitching teenage girls shimmered up beside me, both with rather coy smiles, quite an achievement for ones so worldly. We drank, smiled, uncertainly placed hands on knees, with beguiling Thai modesty, for Thais frown on public displays of emotion, especially the obnoxious slobbering, kissing and groping so beloved of hairy-backs. For all the world like kids on a blind date, they were playing a well-rehearsed part, though I wasn't. They were both the standard centrefold: long, shiny dark hair, slim, quite big-breasted, with nicely rounded bottoms and smooth, svelte bare legs, under black miniskirts, agreeably skin-hugging, and the soft maternal curves of bare shoulder and breast beckoning to delights within.

Mentally, I licked my lips, delighted at the youth and freshness of it all. No sleaze, no bedraggled, lipstick-smudged, cigarette-dangling hustlers, no large minders called Vinnie. Just fresh, organic country girls, giving a dutiful impression that they were reasonably pleased to see me.

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## 1. PROLOGUE

*There is a just man that perished in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness. Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise; why shouldst thou destroy thyself?*

Frankly, like most single males, I went to Thailand in a quest for sex. No, wait a minute: the ultimate sexual experience. Sounds almost spiritual. That's what Thailand is famous for, and foreign tourism (i.e. sex) is its biggest industry, although there is a wealth of culture: the gold and red Buddhist temples, the mysterious, charming festivals involving flowers and floats, which materialise without warning. Then there is the fabulous food – when not sleeping, Thais are usually eating. As well as the mountains of pineapples, mangos, papaya, and other fruit, some of which we occasionally recognise, there are the sublime dishes and soups with basil, garlic, ginger, and coriander, lemon grass, coconut milk, and lots of chillis and nam-pla ('fish water'), the stinky sauce of fermented anchovies. From street stalls you can buy duck or fish soup, succulent barbecued chicken or pork, spring rolls, freshly grilled fish, yellow ants or ants' eggs in lime and chillies, deep-fried maggots and baby frogs in batter (yum!), king scorpion, crickets, spiders, grasshoppers, locusts ...

You have the mountains, the islands, the rain forest, all bathed in this miraculous pearly light under a baking sun. (Orwell wrote that all novels set in the Far East are really about the landscape.) But most of the millions of visitors a year come for sex, if not to do it, then to look, and bask in the naughty ambience. And a lot of it, indeed most of it, is naughty. Many travel writers avoid mentioning any night-time activities of the lubricious class, I suspect because they know that the wife will one day read their script. Unhampered by any such inhibitions, I can present this place as it really is. I tell you things I do, and things other people do.

It is possible to tell you about Thailand without writing about sex at all. You can talk about Buddhist monks in saffron robes, paper lanterns, spicy food, and happy, smiling water buffaloes, and the colourful cuisine. Or you can describe drug barons, gang warfare, the golden triangle, jail horrors. However, most visitors pay scant attention to these things. They see free-wheeling, dusky love goddesses, and that is why the tourists come here: to have their hearts broken, and their jollies jollied, in an unending pursuit of pleasures either unavailable at home, or available only sordidly, or with difficulty.

It is wrongly averred that the tourist resorts Patong and Pattaya (official motto 'The Extreme City') are 'not Thailand', just as New York is 'not America', and London is 'not England'. They are Thailand, seen through a prism. Those tourist Meccas are what every Thai village dreams of becoming, honey traps awash with lustful foreigners ready to pour the cash from their pockets on to the fingers of Thai ladies. Thailand is a living demonstration of the desire and heartbreak inspired by an entire population of ravishing girls, who cheerfully have sex with anybody, all day and night, for what they need most, money, and then have more sex with anybody else.

A grown man, weeping into his beer over a fickle and absent Thai girl half his age, just before his plane leaves, is a strange and forbidding sight. Thai women deserve respect, as funny and enchanting sex goddesses, and inexhaustible sources of

those vital fossil fuels, grief and ecstasy. In defiance of purists who insist there is a difference between ‘ladies’, ‘women’ and ‘bar girls’, I use these terms as appropriate, often preferring the highly accurate *demi-mondaine*, or *midgette*. Like most things in Thailand, these terms are at the same time perfectly clear yet indistinct.

The way to stay sane, if stuck here, is: if in doubt, don’t ask. Thailand is a dream come true, or the death of dreams, Disneyland run by Machine Gun Kelly. Of course, it’s hot and cheap, but that applies to any number of countries where, however, teenage girls are oddly averse to falling in love with complete strangers in the time it takes to guzzle a beer. Whatever foreigners tell you about beaches, shopping and the ubiquitous scuba-diving, most of them are in Thailand for its unique mixture of charm, innocence, and sleaze, with golf, gormandising, and drinking, to pass the time between sex, or even during it. There was a golfer in Pattaya who used to hire glamorous girls as caddies, so that he could ... oh, well, why not read the book? It spans the course of some years, but, Thailand being Thailand, it could as well be some minutes. Everything in it is true.

NOTE. Currency amounts are generally stated in Thai baht, or US dollars, which most of us understand. Rough equivalents at the time of writing were:

£1 sterling = 70 baht

1 euro = 50 baht

\$1 = 40 baht

## 2. THE GARDEN OF EDEN

The southwestern island Phuket is the richest province in Thailand, and made its fortune with tin mines. They switched to planting rubber, when it was discovered this material made a more agreeable condom. Now its biggest industry is sex tourism, its airport is the country's second largest, and the most expensive town in Phuket, and in all Thailand, is glittering Patong Beach, across the green-girt mountain from Phuket City. Recently, there was tragic loss of life in a tsunami, engulfing the place somewhat, but business picked smartly up, and carries on with the usual urgency. Sex business.

The first sign you see, as you wind down the hairpins through the tropical greenery towards the turquoise Andaman Sea, is:

WELCOME TO PATONG BEACH  
REMEMBER TO DRIVE ON THE LEFT  
PLEASE USE A CONDOM

This is a puzzle. Suppose you have rented a car and driven



the 45 minutes from the airport, have you already forgotten to drive on the left? Surely it is a little late, after the hair-raising dash, or crawl, through the drenched green hills, the magical flowers and trees and the militaristic rubber plantations of Phuket island, past wheezing buses, cars, trucks, heedless mopeds with three loose-limbed beauties straddling the pillion, and all seeming to drive everywhere but on the left?

It takes about a week in Thailand to realise that there is a rule about which side of the road you are supposed to drive on. Mainly, you drive on whatever side seems 'lucky', and Thais figure they are always left of somewhere – Burma, say, or Indonesia. You do not rely on silly traffic lights – which are indistinguishable, in the glitter of neon – but on luck. Say you wish to turn right.

What is the point of wearing out your engine by lengthening your journey to make the turn at the road junction itself, like some neurotic westerner? Far more sensible to streamline your approach, and start your turn on the other side of the road, a good six or seven kilometres before the actual manoeuvre.

You might imagine that wearing a condom is mysteriously connected with this strange ritual of driving on the left. Are you supposed to wear a condom while driving? Or at all times? Most puzzling of all, this notice is only in English. Has this something to do with the accident statistics? Six hundred thousand motorcyclists a year hospitalised after road accidents, a third of them while using cell phones, half without obligatory safety helmets, and motorcycle fatalities (possibly sans condom) the largest share of road deaths, with one motorcyclist dying on the road every hour of every year.

It is assumed that all cash-stuffed farangs are mysteriously able to speak English. Perhaps Thais themselves are not required to drive on the left, wear condoms, and are not particularly welcome in Patong Beach, as there are quite enough of them already, mining the pot of gold. The smiles of smiling Thailand are biggest for those endowed with a pale skin, and a wad of currency, as evidence of their spiritual goodness in past

lives. Thais are remarkably tolerant of sexual outrageousness, as long as the plastic cards shine, and the paper stuff crinkles satisfactorily as it leaves your pocket for theirs.

And you, the middle-aged foreigner – farang (from ‘Frank’, which is what the Saracens called the French crusaders) – with the pink visible scalp, pale skin, beer paunch and wad of real money, with the ex-wife and ungrateful children back in freezing Birmingham, Bremen or Buffalo, are delighted to let them extract the fruits of your lifetime’s labours in the dungeons of the western economy, because look what you get in return: Thai ladies. They are the reward of your thankless toil, your endurance of cold weather, nerves and heart attacks and boredom and ugliness. The moment a Thai lady smiles at you, you know that there is a heaven and it is here in Thailand; the turquoise sea, the bougainvillea flowering everywhere, the pineapple and banana plants, the smells of duck and fried chilli and dried squid and lemon grass soup – you know that everything else, all the western money and cars and houses and things with fatuous brand names are worth nothing compared to a Thai lady’s smile, and the promise of more.

And they all smile at you. Right from the moment you get off the plane: the immigration girl smiles at you, the customs girl smiles at you, the lady aimlessly sweeping dust from point A to point B and back again smiles at you, as if your arrival here, alone amongst the arrival of the million (or billion) farangs who arrive each minute, is somehow the culmination of their lifetime’s dreams, the juiciest, most tempting thing that has happened to them all day – or at least since the arrival of the last planeload of sexually frustrated, cash-flush, predatory paleskins. Oddly, the Japanese and Korean tourists, who outnumber the Europeans, are not called farangs, they are nippon, and they travel in boxes – the bus, the hotel, the shopping centre, the Japanese-only karaoke – protected and directed by tour guides with whistles.

You wipe your brow, as the heat instantly flattens you, and you start to pour with sweat; Thai ladies giggle, as if you

have provided them with the most marvellous fun. You are directed to a taxi – the most expensive, least air-conditioned, most roundabout taxi in all Asia – and they smile in genuine delight because it is all such fun, and you, as you part with huge piles of banknotes, smile back, because it is. You order an iced coffee and the lady, whose sole job is selling iced coffee, beams at you as though you have just enchanted her with a startling novelty. Why? Because, as you sink into Thailand, the sultry heat makes all your worries melt, as your shirt and socks stick to you in a swamp of sweat. Because the air is full of flowers and perfume, and the musk of women; the smells of fried chicken gizzards, locusts and squid waft temptingly from a million street vendors. And there is no female too old, wizened, crippled or broke to smile at you.

You feel, suddenly, that this is real life, far from the grey world of work and money-making, where the only way out of the grisly dump you are stuck in is to put in an eighteen-hour day, to make more and more money to spend on things, to help you forget the squalor of your toiling existence, whose sole purpose is to enable you to afford things, possession of which justifies the squalor of your toiling existence. You breathe Thailand and, perhaps for the first time, you breathe real life. It never gets cold; nobody starves; there is always rice in the paddies and mangos on the trees and prawns in the ocean. And if you fancy a plate of spaghetti alle vongole, why, you just go and dig a bucket of clams from the beach. If you need an injection of culture, why, you go to Bangkok, where there will undoubtedly be an Elton John concert. There is no Christianity to make you sinful, no psychiatrists to make you uneasy, only the Buddha, smiling at everyone whether they are rich or poor, chaste or unchaste. And Thai ladies...

Everywhere you look, for heaven's sake, there are ladies. Never mind for heaven's sake, this is heaven. It is the Garden of Eden, where you are allowed to eat all the apples you want. The air itself is sexy. A Thai lady is firm, compact, brown, silky, funny, welcoming. Every flash of her eye, or shift of her

haunches, every flicker of her tongue-tip, every crunch of a deep-fried chicken intestine between her sultry lips, says 'enjoy me'. Never mind the Michelin guide, with its meanderings on hill tribes and Buddhist temple architecture; never mind the inane backpackers' guides which burble about meditation and mantras, and issue dire warnings about 'prostitutes' and 'the sex industry'.

There are no prostitutes in Thailand, for prostitution is illegal, and there is no Thai 'sex industry'. Yet there are regulations governing sex workers, who officially do not exist. In adjacent countries there may very well be (most of the bar girls in Singapore are Thai); in Hamburg's Reeperbahn or Amsterdam's Oude Zijds Achterburgwaal, in Old Compton Street, or the Rue St Denis, in Sydney's King's Cross and in Las Vegas, there are hints of a 'sex industry', but not in Thailand. There is sex, like air, everywhere; air is not an industry. Thailand has so many beautiful and willing ladies that a sex industry is a contradiction in terms.

And that is why you have come here. Not for temples or meditation, or even recreational drugs. You are a man with ample leisure time (your cement factory in Trondheim will look after itself in your absence), with money in your pocket, and you have come for the ladies. Because they do it.

We have been obliged to avoid a common yet curiously distasteful Anglo-Saxon word which, alas, is the best thing the English language has to offer, to describe the gymnastic exchange of money and body fluids (but please use a condom), which is Thailand's main activity. Thai ladies do it all the time, every day, without qualm or hiccup or a whisper of the dread words 'commitment', 'relationship', 'I thought we were just good friends', 'I need time to think', and other western mantras. Thai ladies do not need time to think. Unkind souls suggest they do not have much to think with. They have sex, the way they eat noodles, brush their teeth or iron their panties: it is what a good girl does to stay happy and healthy, to get money to lose at cards, buy fake designer dresses, or water buffaloes,

and donate for tambun – ‘merit’ – so that celibate, vowed-to-poverty monks can buy Marlboros and Benzes. After satisfying these needs, they can get down to their most pleasurable activities, eating and sleeping. Sex comes an honourable third. This is not the oriental paradise of free love that some romantics imagine, and nothing is free, because food and cars aren’t free. You pay for what you get, and you get what you pay for.

Languages reveal their differences most when describing l’acte sexuel. English is po-faced, crude, vaguely coy, and often taking refuge in the glacial modesty of Latin: pudenda, cunnilingus; German, grotesque; Italian, absurd; Spanish, homicidal; French, elegant. (The word ‘jazz’ comes from the brothels of old New Orleans, where musicians accompanied the flirtations. *Jaser* is French for ‘chat’ and was the euphemism employed by ladies, who would invite gents upstairs ‘for a chat’. So jazz music is really doing-it-music.) Happily, the simplified vocabulary of Thai creates a blend of pidgin English, known as Thaispeak.

There are various Thai euphemisms for sex, like the robust ‘boom-boom’, accompanied by appropriate gestures, and the more refined ‘bouncing’, pronounced boon-sing, which sounds like an oriental art of flower arrangement. There is also the basic ‘You want short time?’ and the equally vivid greeting ‘I go with you?’ Thus has English euphemism been incorporated into Thaispeak. (When we say a couple are ‘going out together’ we mean that they are staying in together. When we say they are sleeping together, it means that sleeping is coincidental.) These are not the only things a Thai lady will say to you. Many have an extended vocabulary, mostly involving sums of money, but no matter what the topic of conversation – soap opera, game show, or the cost of silicone enlargement of nose, breast and bottom – bouncing, and its expected financial reward, is never far away.

Foolish farangs cannot understand the equation between sex and reward, and imagine love is on a loftier plane than money. They do not understand how a girl can adore sex, but also expect to be paid for it. Love should be its own reward ...!

Now, sailors generally like sailing, and soldiers like soldiering. But if the captain suddenly announced that, since they were all having such fun, they would in future get no pay, there would be a mutiny. Thai ladies like sex, but try keeping your bankroll in your pocket, and find out what a mutiny feels like.

A Thai lady – and one always calls them Thai ladies, because that is what they superbly, stunningly, and deliciously are – knows the score. She knows what she wants, and what you want, and it is usually the same thing. She knows what her body is for, and what yours is for, too. She knows that for some strange farang reason you adore her lovely brown skin. (Thai ladies do not like being dragged to the beach, for they do not want to turn ‘black’.) Unlike western women, she does what she wants, not what others persuade her she ought to do. There is no agony aunt looking over her shoulder. She is not confused. If she accepts an invitation to dinner, it is not in order to have a headache after you have paid the bill. If she does not fancy you, she will say politely ‘I have boyfriend.’

Of course, if bouncing does ensue, it does not mean she has no boyfriend, or even several, but rather that he is drinking Thai rice whiskey with his mates, or other girlfriend, wondering how much cash can be extracted from you. She, for her part, will give you the impression that meeting you has made her see the sun shine for the first time, and that it emerges solely from your cash-crammed fundament. After a few weeks, you may glimpse your photo, jostling in an album with all her other fatuously grinning true loves, and room for plenty more, as the jets roar in from London and Stockholm and Frankfurt, laden with dreams and loot. Then, you will either weep, and return to the cold canyons of Mammon, to make even more money for your next heartbreak in paradise – or else, after a while in the Kingdom of Smiles, you will learn to shrug, like all wisened-up farangs, and say ‘T.I.T.’ This is Thailand. Please remember to use a condom.

### 3. ET TU BRUTE

The reason I came to Thailand was simple: a woman told me. It was when I was living in Turkey. She was English, and worked for a travel company. When I enthused about the cheapness and charm of Turkey, she said that she had just come back from Thailand, and it was even cheaper and more charming. Moreover, unlike Turkey, it never got cold. There were red light areas such as Patpong, Patong Beach, and Pattaya, but you could easily avoid them. I made a mental note of all the places to avoid. She said that Thailand had no downside. That, of course, was wishful thinking. So I got on the next plane to Thailand.

Thailand and Turkey are opposite poles. The Turks do not ogle their luscious women, as they are unavailable; the Thais do not ogle theirs, as they are totally available. The Turks are broke, because they keep their money under the mattress, peasant-style. Most Turkish women never even get to handle cash. That is why they are broke. Most Thai women do little but handle cash. That is why they are broke.

Ninety per cent of purchasing in western economies is done by, or for, women, which is why we are rich. Our money moves round the economy like lifeblood, because women spend it on things they don't need. Thai women spend money all the time, when not asleep, and when they have no money, which is most of the time, they borrow. They cram supermarket baskets with skin-whitening cream, things for their nails, innards, hair, or skin; creams to make their bottoms tighter or their breasts bigger ('Bust-firming Mud, with Extract of Horse Tail'), creams for bright brown eyes and red lips, creams for good luck ... then they buy dresses and shoes exactly the same as the million dresses and shoes they already possess. They buy tablets and potions 'for good body'; they buy statues of the Buddha, or fluffy toys, or ... anything. They buy each other gifts, and they are really buying friendship, for they are terrified of being friendless. Thailand has a thriving economy, because the money flows like blood. And sometimes vice versa.

The modest English lady admitted that she had briefly, nose-up, toured the red light district of Phuket Island. However distasteful, it did seem such ... jolly good fun. She did not add that the red lights occupy not a district, but the whole town of Patong. So, after eleven hours in a tin can in the sky, I disembarked at Bangkok's Don Muang Airport. My fellow passengers seemed mostly hairy-backs intent on adult pleasures (et tu, brute), and I decided that they were not here for the temples and hill-trekking. The beauty of cheap long-haul travel! John Ruskin, complaining about railways, remarked: 'Now, every fool in Buxton can be in Bakewell in half an hour, and every fool in Bakewell in Buxton.' There was no inspection; there was a sign saying 'Welcome to the Land of Smiles'. The air was hot, sticky, perfumed with lust. The women, especially in uniform, were ravishing. Their brown uniforms clung to their brown bodies. I sensed serenity. I decided Thailand was probably a Good Thing.

'T.I.T.', the phrase we farangs use, is the verbal equivalent of a shrug, often accompanied by a roll of the eyeballs: 'This is



Thailand. (What can you do?) ...' My first taste of T.I.T. was trying to find the airport rail station, which offers the quickest and cheapest way into Bangkok. Outside, traffic jams the smog-shrouded freeways. Obviously, a rail link was a logical part of the airport planning. Avoiding the (mere) tourists arguing with taxi touts, I went in search of the rail link. Now, in most first world airports, everything is admirably signposted, so that it is practically impossible to avoid getting a train of some kind. In Bangkok Airport, there were no signs, and it took a dozen enquiries before I found anyone who knew there was a train station. At last, I learned that you headed to the airport hotel, on a walkway over the hurtling freeway, where a derisive sign invited the deranged or poverty-stricken to go down the steps to the rail halt, rather than mess up the glamorous hotel.

When you got to ground level, you had to walk over the tracks to the platform – which sleeping Thais shared with their chickens, etc., just as in some village upcountry – sandwiched between the glittering airport hotel and the roaring motor traffic. I was enchanted. Thailand felt homely. It was so ... weird! Of course, it is not the airport rail halt. It has nothing to do with the airport, which is embarrassed, and deprived of revenue, by this relic. If you take the train, you are not spending money on taxis or coaches, and nobody at the airport gets a cut. The railway is out of the money loop, which Thais just hate. I woke up the ticketseller and bought a ticket for the forty-minute journey to Bangkok. It cost 10 baht, a fiftieth of a taxi ride. I stumbled over the tracks – again – and the pleasant, fan-cooled Bangkok train sped me past the taxis stuck on the clogged freeway alongside. I felt smug. T.I.T!