SECOND ACT ABROAD



DALE'S THAI MASSAGE & NIGHTLIFE SURVIVAL GUIDE

How it really works, what it costs, and how not to get played

PATTAYA & BANGKOK 2026

From the Second Act Abroad YouTube channel

Contents

Before you go out Read this first

1 How the scene really works

2 Massage: reading the street

3 Bars and gogos: how not to get milked

4 The girls: how they think, and the plays they run

5 A girlfriend for the trip

6 Money and safety

7 Health

8 Cheat sheets: Pattaya and Bangkok

9 Back home

READ THIS FIRST

My buddy Ray has been coming to Pattaya for eleven years. On his first trip he paid 2,000 baht for a 300 baht massage, bought a girl's whole bar a round of drinks before he'd learned her name, and walked out of a gogo with a bill he didn't understand. He laughs about it now. He didn't laugh then.

This guide is the trip Ray wishes he'd had a manual for.

It covers the side of Thailand that every man who lands here is curious about: the massage shops, the bars, the gogos, the girls who work them, and the "girlfriend for the week" that so many guys end up with. It tells you how each one really works, what it costs, where the traps are, and how to come home with your money, your health and your dignity.

What this guide is not. It isn't a menu. It doesn't tell you what to do with your evenings. Thailand is a grown-up country and you're a grown-up man. It's here so that whatever you choose, you choose it with your eyes open.

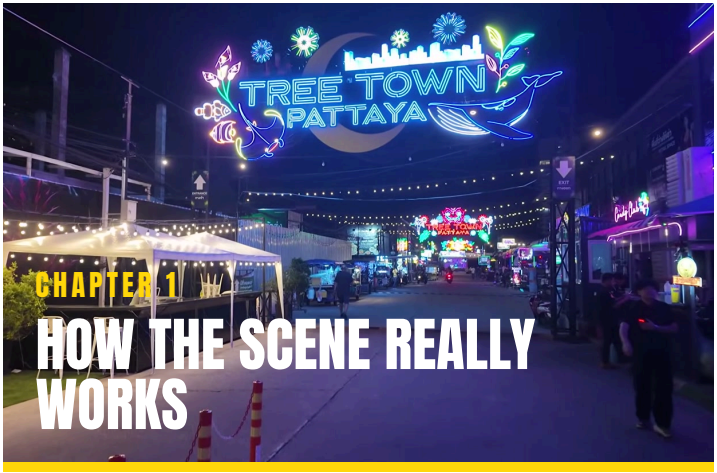
About the prices. Every number in here is what men were paying in 2026, in Thai baht. Prices move with the season, the street and the exchange rate. Where I give a range, the low end is a quiet bar off the main

drag and the high end is the busiest tourist strip. Everything is priced in here, the extras included, because a man who knows the number doesn't get robbed.

A word on the women. Most of the women you'll meet in these places are working to support a family somewhere in Isaan, often a child. They're not villains and they're not victims. They're doing a job, usually well, and they deserve the respect you'd give anyone doing a job. You'll get better service, better prices and better nights if you treat them that way.

Let's get you ready.

Dale



CHAPTER 1

HOW THE SCENE REALLY WORKS

Walk down any tourist strip in Pattaya or Bangkok after dark and it looks like chaos: neon, music, women calling "hello handsome man", motorbikes, touts with laminated menus. It isn't chaos. It's a handful of very different businesses sitting side by side, and once you can tell them apart, nobody can play you.

The six kinds of place

1. The real spa. Clean, calm, staff in proper uniforms, a printed price list by the door, a cup of tea at the end. You go in sore and come out fixed. Nothing else is on offer, and hinting otherwise will get you a polite smile and a hard no.

2. The massage shop. Often right next door to the real spa. Women sitting outside on plastic stools, waving. The massage is genuine, but the menu can quietly

expand once you're in the room. Chapter 2 is all about these.

3. The soapy or nuru house. A bigger, glossier venue with themed rooms and an all-in package paid at the desk. It's a different business from a massage shop, and much more expensive.

4. The beer bar. Open to the street, a horseshoe of stools, pool tables, Connect Four, cheap beer. The women working there are hostesses: they earn from the drinks you buy them. If one leaves with you, the bar charges a fee for her time, the bar fine.

5. The gogo bar. Indoors, loud, dark, a stage with dancers in bikinis or costumes. Drinks cost three times what they do on the street. The same bar-fine system applies, at a higher price.

6. The freelancers. Women working independently, in discos, on Beach Road, in some bars that let them in. No bar fine, no mamasan, no rules except the ones you agree between you. Cheaper, and riskier.

Who's who inside

- **The mamasan** runs the girls in a bar. She knows everything, decides a lot, and a 100 baht tip early on is the best money you'll spend all night.
- **The cashier** keeps your "check bin", the little cup of receipts on the bar. Look in it. Every drink you buy goes in there, including the ones you didn't notice you bought.
- **The touts** work for a venue and get paid per customer. Whatever they promise, the price inside is higher.
- **The girls** are paid a small base wage, a cut of every lady drink, and whatever they earn when they leave with a customer. Your lady drinks are her income. That's why she wants another one.

How you get milked

Most men don't lose money in one big hit. They lose it in a dozen small ones:

- Lady drinks that keep coming while you're talking.
- "A drink for my friend", then her other friend.
- A bar game you play "for drinks". She plays it eight hours a night. You don't.
- Ringing the bell: a round for the whole bar, 5,000 to 7,000 baht, gone in a minute.

- Prices that change after the fact because nobody agreed them before.

Dale's rule: look at the check bin every two drinks, agree every price before it happens, and decide your night's budget before you leave the hotel.



CHAPTER 2

MASSAGE: READING THE STREET

Thai massage is one of the best things about this country. A good one costs less than a beer back home and fixes a back that forty years of work broke. The trouble is that two very different businesses sit on the same street, use the same word, and look almost the same to a new arrival.

Reading the shop from outside

It's a real spa if:

- There's a clear price board by the door: Thai massage, oil massage, foot massage, with prices.
- The staff wear proper uniforms and look like they're about to do some work.
- The windows are clear, the lights are bright and the music is calm.

It's a different kind of shop if:

- Young women sit outside on stools in short dresses, waving and calling to you.
- There's no price board, or only a vague one.
- The windows are tinted or curtained, and the light inside is red or very low.
- Inside, there's a lineup: five or ten women and you're asked to choose.

Neither is a secret. Everyone who lives here can tell them apart at fifty yards. Now so can you.

What happens in a massage shop

You choose a woman, or she chooses you. You pay the house fee at the counter. That covers the room, the towels and the massage. You're led to a small room with a curtain or a thin door, you change, and she starts with a real massage: shoulders, back, legs. Twenty to forty minutes of genuine work.

Then she taps your shoulder and asks you to turn over. If you're interested, she'll name her prices for the extras right there. They're agreed in the room and paid to her in cash, separate from the house fee. If you're not interested, say so politely and enjoy the rest of your massage.

What it costs

	Pattaya	Bangkok
Thai or oil massage, the house fee	200–400	300–600
Hand finish	300–500	500–800
Oral	600–1,200	600–1,200
Full service	1,000–1,800	2,000+
Tip for a good massage	**100–200**	**100–200**

Oil massage is a little more than dry Thai massage, and it's the usual way in to the extras. Tourist strips run 50 to 100 percent higher than a shop two streets back.

Soapy and nuru houses

The bigger, glossier venues: a bath, a mattress, themed rooms, usually 90 minutes to two hours, and one all-in price paid at the desk. You choose from a lineup behind glass or a photo menu.

	Pattaya	Bangkok
Soapy or nuru, all-in package	2,000–6,000	2,700–10,000
VIP rooms (jacuzzi, mirrors)	**3,000–5,000+**	**higher**

The price follows the girl: the top "model" tier costs the most. Photos flatter, so look at the lineup before you pay.

The rookie mistakes

Hinting in the wrong place. Walk into a grandmother-run spa and start winking, and you'll get laughed at or shown the door, and the whole staff will talk about the clueless farang for a week. Read the shop first.

Choosing a foot massage and hoping. The feet stay the feet. No private room, nothing else.

Not agreeing the money first. Whatever you agree to, agree the number before it starts. "Up to you" is how a 500 baht evening turns into 2,000.

The desperate look. Sweating, staring at the lineup, waving cash. Prices jump the second they see it.

Ignoring hygiene. If the sheets look used, the room smells wrong, or the girl seems out of it, leave. You aren't saving money; you're risking a souvenir you'll have to explain to a doctor. One man I heard about lay on a dirty table and spent six months back home clearing up what he caught.

The traps

- **Mid-session upsells.** "Special oil, 500 more." "Longer time, more money." Lock the full deal at the start.
- **The bait and switch.** A tout promises "model girls" and you get someone else. Look before you pay.
- **The main-drag markup.** The flashiest shop on Walking Street or Sukhumvit is the most expensive version of the same thing.

Dale's rule: read the shop, pay the house, agree everything before it happens, tip if she worked hard, and walk out if your gut says no. There are thousands of shops. Don't settle for a bad one.



CHAPTER 3

BARS AND GOGOS: HOW NOT TO GET MILKED

Ray's first night on Walking Street cost him 6,000 baht, and he can't tell you what he spent it on. That's the bar business working perfectly. Here's how to enjoy it without being its best customer.

What things cost

	Central (Walking Street, Beach Road)	Inland (Soi Buakhao, Tree Town, Soi 6 late)
Beer	120–220	55–80
Beer inside a gogo	200+	—
Lady drink	180–250	100–140
Bar fine, most beer bars	500–700	500–700
Tip for the mamasan	**about 100**	**about 100**

Gogos and the big-name strips charge more on every line. A street-stall beer is about 60.

The lady drink

When a girl sits with you, she'll ask for a drink. It costs about three times a normal drink, she gets a cut, and the rest goes to the bar. That's her wage. It's fair to buy her one or two if you're enjoying her company. It's foolish to buy ten for a girl who's never leaving with you.

Ask before you sit down: some central bars now expect five to ten lady drinks before anything else happens. If the answer is ten, finish your beer and walk on.

The bar fine

If a girl leaves the bar with you, the bar charges a fee for her time away: the bar fine. It goes to the bar, not to her. What she charges for her own time is separate, paid to her.

	Typical
Her price, short time	1,000–3,000
Her price, long time / overnight	**2,000–5,000**

Gogo girls sit at the top of those ranges, beer-bar girls in the middle, and the quiet inland bars at the bottom.

Three rules:

1. **Agree everything before you leave the bar.** The bar fine, her price, and how long. Not at the hotel door.
2. **Pay the bar fine at the bar.** Get the receipt.
3. **Don't haggle like you're buying a carpet.** Ask, agree, or politely walk on.

Gogo bars

Gogos are a show, and you pay for the seat. Drinks are 200 baht and up, lady drinks more, and the bar fine is higher than a beer bar. The girls on stage wear numbers; the mamasan will bring one to sit with you if you ask.

Watch out for:

- Being seated in a "VIP" corner you didn't ask for, with a minimum spend you weren't told about.
- Drinks you didn't order appearing in your check bin.
- The bell. Never ring the bell.

Freelancers

Freelancers work for themselves, in discos, on Beach Road and in some bars that let them in. No bar fine and no mamasan, which makes them cheaper: on Beach Road they often open at 1,000 baht short time, and some will take 700. It also means nobody vouches for them.

- Meet in public first. Have a drink. See if she's sober and straight with you.
- Agree everything, clearly, before you go anywhere.
- Your hotel may ask for her ID card at reception and charge a "joiner fee" for a guest who isn't booked in. Ask your hotel before your first night, not at midnight.
- Lock your phone, wallet and passport in the safe before she comes up.

The rookie mistakes

- **Flashing cash.** Prices go up the moment they see a fat wallet.
- **Buying the room.** "A drink for my friend" is how a 300 baht round becomes 3,000.
- **Believing it's personal on night one.** It can become personal. It doesn't start that way.
- **Drinking past your judgement.** The bills that hurt are the ones you sign after midnight.

Dale's rule: set the night's budget before you leave the hotel, check the bin every two drinks, and agree every price before it happens.



CHAPTER 4

THE GIRLS: HOW THEY THINK, AND THE PLAYS THEY RUN

Most men get the money side wrong because they get the people side wrong. They either think every girl is out to rob them, or they think the one sitting with them is different. Neither is true. Here's how it actually looks from her side of the bar.

Why she's here

Most of the women working the bars, the massage shops and the beach come from Isaan, the poor rice-growing northeast. Many have a child being raised by her mother back in the village. She sends money home every month, often more than she keeps. A good month in Pattaya can earn what her family makes in half a year.

That doesn't make her a saint or a schemer. It makes her a woman with a job, a family that depends on it, and a very short time to make her money. You're not her boyfriend. You're her best customer this week. That's fine, as long as you know it.

How she earns

- **A small base wage** from the bar or shop, often tied to hitting a drinks target.
- **Her cut of every lady drink** you buy.
- **What she earns when she leaves with a customer.**
- **Tips, gifts and "help"** from men who come back, or keep sending money from home.

The last one is where men lose real money. More on that in a moment.

The plays

None of these are crimes. Most of them aren't even lies. They're just how the business works, and you should recognise them when they start.

"You're different from the other men." You may well be. She still says it to most of them.

The sad story. A sick mother, a broken motorbike, school fees, a buffalo that died. Often true. Almost always timed for the night before you fly home.

The drinks game. Connect Four, dice, pool, "for a drink". She's played it eight hours a night for three years. You'll lose, and you'll pay.

The friend at dinner. You take her for dinner. Her friend turns up. Then two friends. You pay, of course.

The jealous girlfriend. On day three she's upset that you looked at another girl. It's flattering. It also keeps you from shopping around.

The long-distance girlfriend. You go home. She messages every morning: "miss you, did you eat?" Then the problems begin, and the money starts to flow, every month.

The red flags

- A money problem before you've known her a week.
- A story that changes every time she tells it.
- "Send to my sister's account."
- She won't video call, or the video never quite works.
- An emergency that always lands just after you've been paid.

If you see two or more, slow right down. My free checklist on spotting a real woman from a working one is at **thaiplaybook.com**.

Dale's rule: enjoy her company, pay what you agreed, tip if she earned it, and never send money home for a woman you've known less than a season. If it's real, it'll still be real in six months.



CHAPTER 5

A GIRLFRIEND FOR THE TRIP

Sooner or later most men try it: one girl for the whole week instead of a new bar every night. It's simpler, it's cheaper than it sounds if you run it right, and it's a lot more fun with a local who knows where the good noodles are. It's also where the most money goes missing.

How it usually starts

You meet her in a bar. You pay the bar fine. You have a good night, and in the morning she doesn't leave. Lunch, the beach, dinner, the next night. By day three she's your girlfriend for the trip, and nobody ever said it out loud.

Say it out loud. The men who end up out of pocket are the ones who never agreed anything.

Agree a daily figure on day one

Not "up to you". Not "whatever you think". A number, per day, that covers her time, said plainly and agreed. Some girls prefer a weekly figure. Either way, agree it before the week starts.

What's normal: a single overnight is 2,000–5,000 baht. A girl who stays the whole week should come in below that per day, not at the overnight rate times seven. If she opens there, she's testing you. Counter politely.

Then budget the rest, because the daily figure is never the whole bill:

	Who usually pays
Her bar fine, the first night	You
Her meals, all of them	You
Taxis and Grab	You
Her friends at dinner	You, unless you say otherwise
Shopping, phones, gold	You, if you let it start
"Helping out" at home	**Your call, and a big one**

In my Playbook I added up two weeks of extras and it came to $4,800, not counting the flight. Most of it went on things I never decided to pay for. They just happened, one at a time.

Ground rules that save money

1. **One daily figure, agreed on day one.** Paid daily, not up front for the week.
2. **Her friends are welcome to dinner once.** After that, they pay their own.
3. **No shopping trips.** A small gift at the end, if you want, is yours to choose.
4. **No gold.** Thai gold is nearly pure and easy to sell. That's why it's the most-asked-for gift.
5. **No "help" for home during the trip.** If you want to help after you've gone home and it's still going well in a few months, that's a different decision, made sober.

The scams that land on day five

- **The sick buffalo.** Or mother, or motorbike, or school fees. Real or not, it arrives right on schedule.
- **The lost phone.** She needs a new one. Today.
- **The landlord.** Rent is due, or she'll lose her room.
- **The visa run, the debt, the brother in trouble.**

You don't have to call her a liar. Just say: "I'm sorry, I can't help with that on this trip." Watch what happens. If she's still sweet the next morning, she's a good one.

Protecting yourself

- Lock your phone, cards and passport in the hotel safe. Every night, every time.
- Don't hand over your PIN, your phone code or your card "to get some cash for us".
- Keep a little cash in your pocket and the rest in the safe.

Dale's rule: it's a holiday arrangement, and she understands that better than you do. Enjoy it, agree the money, and fly home with no promises you'll regret making.



CHAPTER 6

MONEY AND SAFETY

Most bad nights in Thailand aren't dangerous. They're expensive. A few are dangerous, and they almost all start the same way: too much to drink, too much cash, and nobody who knows where you are.

Cash

- **Every ATM withdrawal costs about 250 baht** in fees. Six on a two-week trip is 1,500 baht gone for nothing. Take out larger amounts less often and keep most of it in the hotel safe.
- **Carry tonight's budget, not the trip's.** Decide the number before you leave the hotel. When it's gone, the night is over.
- **Small notes are your friend.** A 1,000 baht note for a 120 baht beer invites "no change".
- **Count your change** and check the bill. Mistakes always seem to go one way.

Your room

- **Ask about joiner fees before your first night.** Some hotels charge a fee and want the guest's ID at reception. Better to know at noon than argue at midnight.
- **Use the safe.** Phone, passport, cards, the bulk of your cash. Every night, every time.
- **Keep your phone locked** and don't hand it over to "find a song" or "call my friend".

Drinks

- **Watch your drink being poured** and keep it in your hand.
- **If you feel suddenly much drunker than you should, stop and go home.** Spiked drinks are rare, but they happen, and the men they happen to wake up without a wallet.
- **Set your own pace.** The bar's job is to sell you drinks. Yours is to remember the night.

The police

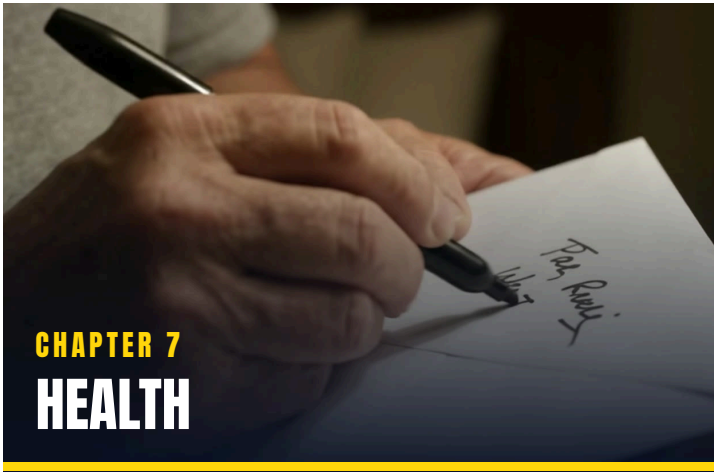
Thai police are generally fine with tourists who are polite and sober. Keep a photocopy of your passport photo page on you; the original stays in the safe. If something goes wrong, the Tourist Police speak English.

Never get into an argument over a bill in a bar at 2am. Pay, take a photo of the bill, and deal with it in daylight. Bars have friends. You don't.

Motorbikes and taxis

- **Use Grab or Bolt** after a night out. A short ride at peak time runs 80 to 200 baht.
- **Don't ride a motorbike after drinking.** The hospitals in Pattaya are full of men who thought they were fine.
- **Agree the fare first** if you take a baht bus or a motorbike taxi.

Dale's rule: a budget before you leave, cash in the safe, drinks in your hand, and a Grab home. Do those four things and the worst thing that happens to you is a hangover.



CHAPTER 7

HEALTH

I'm not your doctor, and nothing in this chapter replaces one. But I've seen enough men fly home with a problem they could have avoided that I'd be letting you down if I skipped it.

Hygiene red flags

Walk out, without apology, if:

- The sheets or towels look used.
- The room smells wrong, or the shower doesn't work.
- The place is grubby in a way that a 300 baht massage shouldn't be.
- She seems drunk, high, or simply not there.

You're not saving money in a dirty place. You're risking something you'll be paying for long after the trip. One man I heard about caught a skin infection from a dirty massage table and spent six months back home getting rid of it.

Stick to mid-range places that look clean and busy. Busy means the girls are there by choice and the owner cares about repeat customers.

Protection

Always. Every time. With everyone. No exceptions for "she's clean", "she's my girlfriend this week" or "just this once".

Most places provide it. Bring your own anyway, so the question never comes up.

After the trip

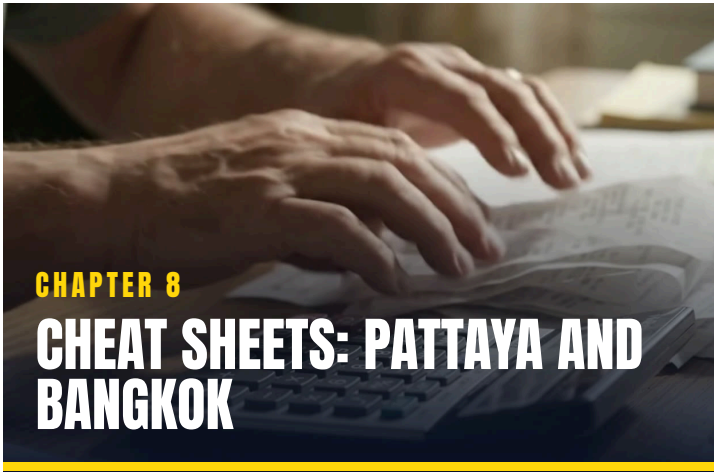
If anything at all seems wrong when you get home, see a doctor and tell them where you've been. It's a routine conversation for them, and early is always easier.

Many men also get a routine check-up after a trip as a matter of habit. It costs little and settles the mind.

Clinics in Thailand

Thailand has good private hospitals and clinics, especially in Bangkok and Pattaya, and they're used to foreign patients. If you need one during your trip, ask your hotel for the nearest private hospital. Keep your travel insurance details on your phone.

Dale's rule: clean places, protection every time, and a doctor's visit if anything feels off. Your health is the one thing you can't buy back.



CHAPTER 8

CHEAT SHEETS: PATTAYA AND BANGKOK

Tear these out, screenshot them, keep them on your phone.

Pattaya

Area	What it's like	Price level
Walking Street	The famous one. Gogos, loud, crowded, built for tourists.	Highest
Beach Road	The seafront walk. Freelancers at night, beach bars by day.	Varies
Soi 6	A short street of small bars, busy in the afternoon and early evening.	Mid
Soi Buakhao and Tree Town	Inland, where the long-stay guys drink. Cheap beer, friendly bars.	Low
Jomtien	**Quieter, south of the city. Beach bars and a calmer crowd.**	**Low to mid**

What a night costs (rough, before anything private):

	Inland night	Central night
6 beers	~420	~1,000
2–4 lady drinks	~240	~880
Two meals	~200	~550
Taxis	~240	~300
Total	**≈ 1,100**	**≈ 2,700**

Same kind of night, less than half the price, two streets inland.

Bangkok

Area	What it's like	Price level
Nana Plaza	Three floors of gogos and bars off Sukhumvit Soi 4.	High
Soi Cowboy	One neon street of gogos off Sukhumvit Soi 23.	High
Sukhumvit	The main road through it all. Massage shops every hundred yards.	Mid to high
Silom and Patpong	**Night market and bars. More tourists, more touts.**	**High**

Bangkok runs a bit higher than Pattaya on almost everything, and the city is big: plan your Grab home before you start.

The private side, at a glance

	Pattaya	Bangkok
Massage house fee	200–400	300–600
Hand finish	300–500	500–800
Oral	600–1,200	600–1,200
Full service in a massage shop	1,000–1,800	2,000+
Soapy or nuru package	2,000–6,000	2,700–10,000
Bar fine	500–700	500–700+
Short time (her price)	1,000–3,000	1,000–3,000
Long time / overnight (her price)	2,000–5,000	2,000–5,000
Beach Road freelancer, short time	**700–1,000**	**—**

Agree it before it happens, cash, to her. Hotels may add a joiner fee at reception: ask before your first night.

The one-line rules

- **Budget before you leave the hotel.**
- **Agree every price before it happens.**
- **Check the bill every two drinks.**
- **Cash, phone and passport in the safe.**
- **Protection, every time.**
- **Never ring the bell.**
- **Grab home.**



CHAPTER 9

BACK HOME

Here's something nobody tells you about Thailand: the trip ends. You fly home to Ohio, or Manchester, or Toronto, and the neon is eleven hours and a thousand dollars away.

A lot of men sit at home for months waiting for the next trip. You don't have to.

Meeting women where you live

The apps that get men over 40 real dates where they live aren't the ones you see on TV. My **Wingman** asks where you are and shows you the ones that actually work in your country, and why.

thaiplaybook.com/wingman

Being the man she remembers

The best thing I learned late in life wasn't in Thailand at all. It was how to please a woman properly, the things most men have never been taught and most women wish they had. It changed more than my nights.

The Wingman shows you that too, step by step.

If you're thinking about something real

If somewhere along the way a Thai woman has become more than a holiday, that's a different road, and a good one if you walk it carefully. My **Thailand Playbook** is about exactly that: winning her heart, her family, the real costs and the red flags, for men over 50.

Whatever you choose, choose it with your eyes open. That's all this guide was ever for.

See you on the next one.

Dale

*Photo credits: the street photos in chapters 1 to 3 are stills from videos by **Bangkok For You** (youtube.com/channel/UCeZQoFiEY4rWQg6lMZamFaQ) and **JolanCnu** (youtube.com/channel/UCtPHUYQkNT4TFUynOuprKQQ), used under the Creative Commons Attribution licence.*