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**BROTHERS ARRESTED AFTER DEADLY GOA NIGHTCLUB FIRE > PAGE 3**

# THE CRAWL



Patong Hill traffic last week. Photo: Aomamm Charinkorn

## TRAFFIC WOES TO WORSEN AS PHUKET ENTERS HIGH SEASON

**Natnaree Likidwatanasakun**  
reporter1@classactmedia.co.th

Motorists should brace for delays and long traffic tailbacks as Phuket officials have confirmed they have no specific strategy to combat over-congested main roads this tourism high season.

In Cherng Talay, which in recent years has become home to some of the worst ongoing traffic jams during the tourism peak season, police have no strategy for coping with heavy traffic – except for the three days from Jan 16-18 that the Electric Music Carnival (EDC Thailand) is being held at

Rhythm Park on the Baan Don Road.

Six island-wide pick-up and drop-off points will be established to disperse traffic flow and reduce congestion, while queuing systems and shuttle bus services are to be streamlined to cope with peak demand, Cherng Talay Police Chief Pol Col Ekkarat Plaiduang confirmed.

Traffic routes, diversions and access maps will be released before the event to help motorists avoid congestion hotspots, while more than 250 police officers, supported by an additional 300 security personnel from the event organisers, will be deployed for the event.

In total, 102 traffic police officers joined by 60 regular police officers and two companies of crowd control police have been assigned special assignments to control traffic and assist security for the event

Event attendees are encouraged to use designated parking areas, including Coconut Grove next to PTT Pasak, accommodating up to 2,500 cars, and Blue Tree Water Park, with space for 500 cars (parking fees may apply).

The police have advised non-attendees to avoid traveling through event-adjacent routes during the festival period to minimise traffic congestion, was

the best Cherng Talay Police could offer, while naming the affected areas as including the Baan Don-Cherng Talay Road, Soi Cherng Talay 4, Soi Cherng Talay 6, Srisoonthorn Rd and “nearby areas”.

The worst congestion point in the area remains at the main intersection in Cherng Talay, right in front of Cherng Talay Police Station, Cherng Talay Police Chief Pol Col Ekkarat admitted.

“This is where traffic from Patong and other routes converge,” he said. “Peak hours are bad enough, but traffic jams become worse when there is an accident.”

Officers rely heavily on CCTV...

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**Endangered leopard sharks return to wild**



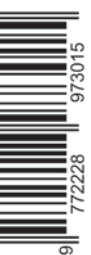
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**Phuket's Anni wins gold at SEA Games**



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PHUKET'S QUALITY TILE BOUTIQUE



exeditor@classactmedia.co.th

# News



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## High season traffic crunch coming

Continued from page 1

...to monitor traffic volume, allowing officers to slow, manage or release traffic in real time, Pol Col Ekkarat explained.

“However, there is still no long-term solution to permanently ease congestion. At this stage, we can only monitor conditions and make real-time adjustments manually,” he said.

Temporary stopping and parking restrictions are enforced to prevent obstruction, while more officers will be deployed to maintain flow, he said.

“Residents have repeatedly complained about heavy trucks worsening congestion during peak hours,” he said.

“The Cherng Talay Traffic Police order banning trucks during rush hour remains in effect, and we have warned operators of high fines for violations. I believe the measure will help ease congestion to some extent,” he noted.

However, Pol Col Ekkarat did not give any examples of any truck operators actually fined.

### HEROINES

While Cherng Talay continues to suffer traffic congestion, Thalang Traffic Police Chief Pol Lt Col Surisak Leewijit stands strong in his opinion that Phuket’s most severe bottleneck remains the Heroines Monument.

“Daily vehicle volume typically ranges from 30,000 in low season and reaches to 40,000 cars during the high season, far



Traffic at the Heroines Monument.  
Photo: Natnaree Likidwatanasakun

exceeding the road’s design capacity,” Pol Lt Col Surisak said.

“During the rush hour in the morning, we have improved access to schools along Thepkrasattri Rd to help alleviate traffic from the main road, and traffic from Pa Khlok must turn left. They cannot enter the roundabout directly,” he added.

“In the evening, heavy traffic from Cherng Talay arrives around 5:30pm. Officers use turn-by-turn control, giving most of the time to north-south traffic, but then a dedicated period of time for traffic to directly cross the intersection to head to Pa Khlok.”

Even the traffic lights at Koh Kaew are timed to ease congestion at the heroines monument, Pol Lt Col Surisak said.

Pol Lt Col Surisak noted the recent improvements to secondary roads were valuable in alleviating congestion, including the widening of the road behind Wat Tha Ruea – a shortcut linking Thepkrasattri rd to Srisoonthorn Rd, near GWM showroom.

“Without this road, traffic congestion would be even worse,” he said.

### PATONG

Patong is its own special animal, often with huge traffic tailbacks on the main roads leading to and from the busy tourism town – and traffic within the town grinding along at a snail’s pace.

Lt Col Chamnan Sapsin of the Patong Traffic Police identified heavy congestion each day, particularly around Patong Hill, Rat-U-Thit 200 Pi Rd, Phra Metta Rd and Thaweewong Rd (the Patong Beach road).

In the mornings, congestion builds rapidly along Phra Metta Rd and around Wat Suwankhirikhet School. In the evenings, traffic toward Kathu slows to a crawl, with vehicles backing up from the foot of Patong Hill all the way back along Rat-U-Thit 200 Pi to Bangla Rd, he said.

While officers are deployed to key points to help direct traffic

Lt Col Chamnan noted that pedestrians constantly crossing the main roads pose a major obstacle.

“The biggest problem in Patong is uncontrolled pedestrian crossings,” he said. “Tourists cross anywhere they want, at any time. When one person crosses, cars stop, and suddenly a long queue forms. This happens all day.”

Push-button red lights installed near Jungceylon and Patong Hospital have also worsened peak-hour delays. “During busy times, tourists keep pressing the button even if they cross alone. Every press stops traffic for about 15 seconds, and then the next red light stops them again,” he said.

Vehicle breakdowns on Patong Hill remain a daily occurrence and a major reason for severe congestion. “Most breakdowns happen because vans or buses limit fuel to save costs. When they climb the hill, fuel cuts off and the engine stalls. Once one vehicle stops, everything behind collapses,” Lt Col Chamnan explained.

“Officers stationed on Phra Barami Rd now keep emergency fuel cans and ropes ready to tow vehicles off the hill quickly. Lime is also kept on hand for frequent oil spills that make the downhill stretch extremely slippery,” he said.

Lt Col Chamnan lamented that all officers can do about traffic is reactionary. “We can only enforce

the law and respond quickly. The structural problems – narrow roads, red-light timing, pedestrian management – must be solved by the municipality and the Highways Department,” he said.

### CHALONG

In Chalong, long tailbacks at Chalong Circle, especially from Kata to Chalong, are already becoming normal. Pol Lt Col Siriphong Suriyan, Deputy Chief of Chalong Police, told *The Phuket News* that almost all major traffic issues in the area stem from the busy “five-ways roundabout”.

“The primary issue is the small size of the roundabout and the heavy volume of vehicles entering from five directions,” Pol Lt Col Siriphong said.

“This often leads to drivers blocking the roundabout, and this is made even worse by the high number of tour buses and trucks during the high season.

“Traffic from 8-9am slows as tour buses begin arriving, while morning flows toward Chalong Pier remain steady and generally manageable, but evening rush hour sees the worst congestion, particularly for motorists coming from Kata,” he added.

Pol Lt Col Siriphong also highlighted how traffic police are limited in what they can do to ease traffic jams. “Long-term solutions,” he stressed, “must come through provincial-level engineering decisions rather than police intervention.”

## Officials ramps up road safety strategy for New Year holidays

PHUKET AUTHORITIES have moved to finalise an integrated road accident prevention and reduction plan for 2026, with a strong focus on enforcing safe driving and reducing speed during the New Year and Songkran holiday periods, traditionally the most dangerous times on the province’s roads.

The plan was discussed at the 2nd National Road Accident Prevention and Reduction Policy Committee meeting for 2025, held last Friday (Dec 12) at the Phuket Provincial Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Office (DDPM Phuket) and chaired by Vice Governor Adul Chuthong.

The meeting brought together representatives from road safety agencies, partner networks and



Photo: Thalang Traffic Police

relevant government offices, with some participants joining via electronic media. The key agenda was consideration of a draft integrated plan for preventing and reducing road accidents during the New Year and Songkran festivals in 2026.

Officials agreed on the concept ‘Safe Driving, Reduce Speed, Reduce Accidents’, aimed at reinforcing the government’s road safety policy

and fostering a stronger safety culture across society. The plan sets out joint operational guidelines for all sectors, with particular emphasis on reducing high-risk behaviours such as speeding, drink driving and failure to wear helmets.

According to the meeting, integrated management will be central to the strategy, including the establishment of road safety command centres at all levels. Community-based

measures will include family and village checkpoints, door-to-door safety visits, an increase in rapid response teams and improved collection of accident data involving tourists and foreign nationals to support analysis and targeted prevention.

Infrastructure safety was also highlighted, with agencies instructed to accelerate upgrades to local roads, address accident-prone intersections and urgently resolve hazards along irrigation canals that may contribute to serious crashes.

In parallel, stricter inspections of public transport vehicles and drivers will be enforced, alongside an expansion of speed checkpoints and public awareness campaigns targeting unsafe

or poorly maintained vehicles. Authorities reiterated that the Department of Land Transport hotline 1584 remains open for the public to report unsafe buses and trucks.

Measures directed at road users will focus on stricter enforcement of traffic laws, application of a misconduct points system, closer monitoring of risky behaviour within communities and early warnings for repeat offenders. Special outreach will also target elderly drivers, encouraging cautious driving and the use of safe, road-worthy vehicles.

The meeting also acknowledged preparations for National Road Safety Day on Jan 21, 2026, and progress on implementing the \*\*Marrakech Declara-

tion\*\*, aimed at raising Thailand’s road safety standards to align with international benchmarks.

Authorities confirmed that the Road Safety Operations Centre will be activated during the 2026 New Year holiday period, from Dec 30, 2025 to Jan 5, 2026, and again during Songkran, from Apr 10-16, 2026, when intensive enforcement and monitoring will be in place.

Vice Governor Adul stressed that preventing and reducing road accidents requires cooperation from all sectors, and called on relevant agencies to strictly implement agreed measures to protect both residents and tourists during Phuket’s busiest and most high-risk travel periods.

The Phuket News

# Vendors brawl for Surin sand

The Phuket News  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Five people were arrested for illegally encroaching on Surin Beach during a coordinated enforcement operation on Monday (Dec 15) after a brawl between vendors that drew widespread public attention.

The arrests were made during an inspection carried out from 10am to 2pm, led by Thalang District Chief Siwat Rawangkul. Officials said the five individuals were found occupying public beachfront land by setting up umbrellas and beach chairs and selling goods in a manner deemed to constitute illegal encroachment.

According to the Thalang District Office, the operation involved a large, multi-agency team, including district officials, members of the Volunteer Defence Corps (OrSor), village headmen and assistant village headmen, medical personnel, police officers, village security volunteers from Cherng Talay, officers from Cherng Talay Police Station, municipal officers from the Cherng Talay Subdistrict Administrative Organisation (OrBorTor), and forestry officers from the Thalang Forest Protection Unit.

Thalang District officials



Main photo: Thalang District Office. Inset: Screenshot by Sulaimarn Kaewngamdee / Facebook

reported that the Cherng Talay OrBorTor has been assigned to formally file complaints against the five suspects and submit the cases to investigating officers at Cherng Talay Police Station for legal proceedings.

The inspection followed repeated reports of beach encroachment by umbrella and sunbed operators at Surin Beach, an issue that has come under renewed scrutiny after a video showing vendors brawling over

operating areas circulated widely on social media over the weekend.

The viral video, filmed and posted online last Saturday (Dec 13), showed groups of beach vendors arguing and fighting on the beachfront, triggering criticism from residents and raising fresh questions about enforcement and management of the popular tourist beach.

District officials said yesterday's crackdown was part

of a broader effort to restore order, prevent public nuisance and ensure Surin Beach remains accessible to the public.

In a statement, the Thalang District Office confirmed that from today (Dec 16) onwards it will integrate the deployment of OrSor personnel with municipal officers, village leaders, medical personnel, police and community security volunteers to jointly monitor and control beach umbrella and sunbed operations along the beachfront.

"These measures are aimed at preventing further encroachment, reducing conflict among operators, and maintaining public access to the beach," the district office said.

Officials added that the monitoring and enforcement operations will continue until a "sustainable solution and clear operational framework" for managing beach umbrella and sunbed activities at Surin Beach is formally established.

The district office also stressed that further legal action will be taken against any individuals found violating regulations governing the use of public beachfront land.

Surin Beach has long been a focal point of tension between authorities and informal operat-

ors, particularly during peak tourism periods, with disputes often arising over selling space, umbrella placement and access to prime beachfront areas.

While previous enforcement campaigns have cleared large sections of the beach, complaints from residents and visitors have persisted, with critics alleging that encroachment gradually returns once inspections ease.

The arrests marked the first confirmed enforcement action publicly announced since the brawl video began circulating, addressing earlier concerns that no official response had been taken.

As of publication, police had not released details on the specific charges faced by the five suspects, nor confirmed whether additional arrests or inspections were planned in the coming days.

Officials reiterated that Surin Beach is public land and warned that any unauthorised commercial use, including the placement of umbrellas, sunbeds or stalls without permission, will be subject to prosecution under relevant laws.

The Thalang District Office said further announcements will be made once longer-term management measures for Surin Beach had been finalised.

## Immigration silent on arrests over deadly Goa nightclub fire

PHUKET POLICE AND PHUKET Immigration have remained silent on the arrests of brothers Gaurav and Saurabh Luthra, who are wanted by Indian authorities over a nightclub fire in Goa that killed 25 people.

Requests by *The Phuket News* for any public statement regarding the arrests have been met with silence, with Thai officials declining to comment. The lack of official confirmation has also seen Thai media largely avoid reporting on the case.

The most direct response obtained by *The Phuket News* from Phuket Immigration as of Monday (Dec 15) was a flat refusal to comment.

Indian authorities confirmed last week that the Luthra brothers fled to Phuket within hours of the deadly fire at the 'Birch By Romeo Lane' nightclub in Goa. Indian media, quoting the PTI news agency, reported that the brothers left Goa on Dec 7, believed to have travelled on IndiGo flight 6E1073. Photos of the pair at Phuket International Airport later circulated widely on social media.

India's ambassador to Thailand, Nagesh Singh, confirmed to the BBC on Dec 11 that the brothers had been detained in Thailand. "They will be sent back [to India]," Mr Singh said, a day after a Delhi court refused the brothers protection from arrest and the Goa government moved to have their passports revoked.

According to *The Federal*, Thai Immigration officials have since begun



Photos: NDTV

deportation proceedings against the brothers. The BBC reported that the Luthras said they "never intended to evade" the law and would cooperate with authorities upon their return to India.

The fire broke out early Sunday morning at the nightclub, located in a busy nightlife district in Goa. Investigators believe fireworks set off inside the venue sparked the blaze, which rapidly spread through the crowded club. Most of the victims were staff members, while five were tourists.

Indian police said they raided the brothers' home in Delhi within hours of the fire but found they had already fled the country, prompting a request for Interpol assistance.

The brothers later issued a statement through their lawyer, saying they would return to India and submit themselves to police and judicial authorities. Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant confirmed that six people have been arrested so far, warning that more arrests are expected.

*The Phuket News*



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The Phuket News

## CONTACT US

editor@classactmedia.co.th 076 612 550

PURIYA BEAVAN  
EditorCHRIS HUSTED  
Executive Editor  
084 307 7408  
execeditor@classactmedia.co.thBEN TIREBUCK  
News / Sport Editor  
061 806 8132  
editor3@classactmedia.co.thCHUTHARAT 'UM'  
PLERIN  
Thai Editor  
088 766 1615  
thai@classactmedia.co.thNATNAREE 'MILD'  
LIKIDWANASAKUN  
Reporter / Translator  
062 295 3244  
reporter1@classactmedia.co.thJASON BEAVAN  
General Manager  
086 479 7471  
gm@classactmedia.co.thSIRIPORN (NOK)  
SEANGMAS  
Sales Support  
086 479 7470  
sales@classactmedia.co.thNIRAVIT 'MOS' VORAVANITCHA  
Graphic designerThe Phuket News  
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## PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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High: +36°  
Low: +29°

Wind 11 m/s

SAT DECEMBER 20

High: +36°  
Low: +28°

Wind 11 m/s

SUN DECEMBER 21

High: +35°  
Low: +28°

Wind 11 m/s

MON DECEMBER 22

High: +35°  
Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

TUE DECEMBER 23

High: +35°  
Low: +28°

Wind 4 m/s

WED DECEMBER 24

High: +37°  
Low: +28°

Wind 4 m/s

THU DECEMBER 25

High: +36°  
Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s



Screenshot: via Karon Police

## Aussie tourists crashes through glass door, dies

AN AUSTRALIAN tourist died from severe blood loss after crashing through a glass door at a restaurant in Karon.

Karon Police reported that the incident occurred at around 10:30pm on Dec 11 at the Cappadocia restaurant in Karon.

Officers arrived to find glass shattered all across the front of the restaurant and a large amount of blood on the floor.

CCTV footage reviewed by police showed that the man, later identified as Donald James Varcoe, was sitting at a table in an obvious state of distress. Then, without any warning, he suddenly jumped up and ran head-first into the glass door, shattering it and injuring himself.

He collapsed on the ground outside the premises with heavy

bleeding from his right leg, where glass shards had severed a major blood vessel.

Shocked bystanders immediately called an ambulance, and the man was rushed to Chalong Hospital. Despite medical efforts, he was pronounced dead a short time later due to massive blood loss.

Police said an investigation was underway to determine the circumstances that led to the man's erratic behaviour prior to the incident.

*If you or anyone you know is in need of emotional support and counselling, please contact the Samaritans of Thailand at 02-113-6789 (English & Thai) or the Mental Health Hotline at 1323 (Thai).*

Eakkapop Thongtub

## Social media star dies in Patong fall

The Phuket News  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

A Mexican-Canadian woman who died after falling from a ninth-floor balcony at the Patong Tower condominium last week has been identified as surgery-focused social media personality known online as 'Mary Magdalene'.

Her identity was confirmed by the UK's *Daily Mail* in a report published on Dec 12. The 33-year-old, whose real name was Denise Ivonne Jarvis Gongora, died just hours after checking into the Patong Tower high-rise on Dec 9 for a one-night stay.

*The Daily Mail* reported it had reviewed information from Patong Police confirming her identity and independently verified her death with sources close to her family.

Pol Capt Channarong Prakongkuea of Patong Police Station said the woman's body was discovered by condominium staff in the parking area shortly after 1:30pm. Her



Photos: Instagram / via Daily Mail

name was initially withheld from local reporting until relatives had been notified.

Shortly before her death, Mary posted the closing scene of the 1998 film *The Truman Show* to one of her Instagram accounts, alongside a childhood photo of herself. The scene features Jim Carrey's character saying, "And in case I don't see ya, good afternoon, good evening and good night." She also changed the username of another account to 'MaryMagdaleneDied'.

*The Daily Mail* said it contacted the Mexican Embassy, Patong Police and Phuket Tourist Police for comment. Mary had entered Thailand using her Mexican passport.

Tributes have since been shared by friends and fellow influencers, including US rapper Kreyashawn, 'RuPaul's Drag Race' star Plane Jane and influencer 'Eden the Doll'. Her brother Ivan also posted a message expressing love and regret at not spending more time together.

Mary had around half a million followers and was widely known for documenting extreme cosmetic surgeries online. She was also an artist with a following for her psychedelic paintings. In interviews, she spoke openly about her upbringing, substance abuse struggles and health complications arising from repeated procedures.

## Russian arrested over illegal hookahs

POLICE HAVE ARRESTED a 41-year-old Russian national and seized hundreds of illegal hookah products during a raid in Thalang District.

The operation was carried out on Dec 9 by the Special Operations Unit of Investigation Bureau Region 8 (Phuket Unit).

The team was led by Pol Lt Apirat Yanarat, Deputy Inspector (Investigation) at Investigation Division 1, under Investigation Bureau Region 8.

Police arrested Maksim Shalygin, a Russian national, inside a room at Soi Hua Tiao, Cherng Talay. Officers seized 361 illegal items, including 296 pieces of hookah tobacco and 65 items of hookah smoking equipment and related accessories.

Authorities said the suspect was charged with multiple offences, including possession of unstamped tobacco for sale in



Photo: Region 8 Police

violation of the Tobacco Act B.E. 2509 (1966), and offences under the Customs Act B.E. 2560 (2017) and related Ministry of Commerce regulations designating hookahs, electric hookahs and e-cigarette products as prohibited goods.

He was also charged with importing and selling prohibited hookah and e-cigarette products in violation of orders issued by the Consumer Protection Committee, which ban the production, sale and servicing of hookah and e-cigarette products in Thailand.

Shalygin was handed over to investigating officers at Cherng Talay Police Station for further legal proceedings. *The Phuket News*

## Volkswagen van destroyed in blaze

A VOLKSWAGEN VAN WAS completely destroyed by fire in Thalang last week, with the driver narrowly escaping without injury.

Thalang Police were notified of the incident at about 1am on Dec 10 after reports of a vehicle fire on the northbound side of Thepkrasatri Rd in Moo 5, Srisoonthorn.

Officers arrived at the scene to find a Phuket-registered Volkswagen van engulfed in flames. Local firefighters arrived with a fire truck and worked for about 10 minutes to bring the blaze under control.

The driver and owner, Phongsaphan Suksawat, 50, told police he was driving along Thepkrasatri Rd when he noticed a burning smell coming from the vehicle.

He said he pulled over to investigate and saw heavy smoke coming from the engine compartment, followed by sparks that quickly ignited into flames.

The fire spread rapidly and destroyed the entire vehicle before



Photo: Thalang Police

emergency services could fully extinguish it. No injuries were reported and traffic was able to continue normally after the fire was brought under control.

Police noted that the van had been in use for about 19 years and had been modified with a LNG fuel system. The owner reported that the vehicle did not have voluntary insurance cover.

Phuket Forensic Science officers have been contacted to examine the burned-out vehicle and determine the exact cause of the fire. An official report is being prepared by Thalang Police as the investigation continues.

Eakkapop Thongtub

# Waste crisis brings health hazards

**Natnaree Likidwatanasakun**  
reporter1@classactmedia.co.th

A deepening waste crisis at Saphan Hin is now being blamed for serious and worsening health problems among nearby residents, as overflowing garbage, a failing incinerator and persistent foul odours push the landfill to breaking point.

Residents living beside the waste site say the stench from decomposing organic waste has become unbearable and is increasingly linked to respiratory illnesses, skin conditions and a rise in cancer cases in the community.

Phuket MP Chalermpong Saengdee told a meeting last Friday (Dec 12) chaired by Governor Nirat Phongsitthaworn that organic waste, which makes up about 60% of all garbage at Saphan Hin, is the main source of the odour.

He said residents are already suffering the consequences, noting that several people are battling cancer and allergies, with four cancer-related deaths reported in the community over the past two months.

MP Chalermpong warned that the existing incinerator is incapable of handling the volume of waste generated, allowing rubbish to accumulate unchecked. During



Photo: Chalermpong Saengdee / Facebook

rainfall, polluted runoff and odours are carried into nearby residential areas, further worsening living conditions.

A local village headman described the situation as critical, saying garbage has piled up "like a mountain". He said Phuket produces about 1,300 tonnes of waste per day, but the incinerator can process only around 700 tonnes, leaving hundreds of tonnes to spill into surrounding areas.

Earlier this month, Phuket City Mayor Supachok La-ongphet warned Governor Nirat Phongsitthaworn that waste generation could reach 1,400-1,500 tonnes a day in the coming weeks, with organic waste accounting for much of the increase.

However, he said the centre's incinerator can process only 500 tonnes a day, forcing the re-

mainder into landfills, which he said was becoming increasingly difficult to manage.

MP Chalermpong last Friday urged local administrative organisations to take immediate action, stressing that residents cannot wait until a new incinerator, scheduled for completion in 2026.

He said people are already suffering from breathing difficulties and skin disorders, yet local authorities currently lack the legal authority to conduct widespread health checkups on their own.

He proposed accelerating solutions to reduce organic waste, such as converting it into fertiliser or energy, but said the existing eight-day composting process is far too slow to address the scale of the crisis. He also highlighted secondary impacts, including heavy traffic from garbage trucks,

constant foul smells and overturned trucks spilling waste onto public roads.

At the meeting, the Phuket Public Health Office (PPHO) confirmed that health screening can be carried out using funds allocated by Wichit Municipality. Initial screening costs about B300 for an X-ray, with further examinations depending on symptoms. More serious cases may require referral to specialists at Vachira Phuket Hospital.

Governor Nirat called the meeting after formal complaints were lodged by residents of the Saphan Hin community, where about 1,100 people live adjacent to the waste site.

Residents said the smell had intensified, particularly between 3am and 4am, prompting them to file a complaint with the Damrongtham Center (Complaint No. 9912569).

Their demands include comprehensive health screening, consideration of relocating waste disposal operations, and compensation from the Electricity Development Fund.

Governor Nirat acknowledged the severity of the situation, describing health screening as an urgent priority. He instructed the PPHO, Phuket City Municipality and the Electricity Development Fund to jointly cover initial health

checkup costs of about B1,500 per person. Screening will begin with 50 high-risk residents before expanding to the remaining 1,000 people in the area. Anyone found to have health issues will be referred directly to the PPHO for treatment.

He also ordered Phuket City Municipality to urgently improve waste sorting, explore biogas technology to ease pressure on the incinerator, and continue reviewing potential new waste disposal sites.

Municipal officials admitted the landfill is now in a state of crisis. Immediate measures include upgrading garbage trucks to prevent leaks and using microorganisms to reduce odours. The municipality is awaiting test results from Rajamangala University of Technology Srivijaya to determine which microorganisms are safe and effective.

Governor Nirat instructed all relevant agencies to form a joint action plan covering public health, environmental management and community assistance.

Teams from the PPHO, Phuket Natural Resources and Environment Office, Phuket City Municipality, Wichit Municipality and other agencies were ordered to inspect the site immediately, assess the risks and provide urgent support.

## 54 construction projects under NACC scrutiny for corruption

NACC PHUKET DIRECTOR SUWAT Saowaran has confirmed to *The Phuket News* that an investigation into alleged corruption linked to major condominium developments in Bang Tao will cover several large projects, not only the previously identified One World development.



NACC Phuket Director Suwat Saowaran. Photo: NACC Phuket

Mr Suwat said the scope of the probe extends far beyond the One World project, which was earlier confirmed as being under investigation. Preliminary findings monitored by the NACC Phuket office indicate 35 cases involving local administrative organisations.

He did not specify how many cases relate to each area, but said the complaints fall into several categories. Thirteen cases involve procurement issues, 25 relate to misconduct or corruption, two concern bribery, 12 involve land or natural resources, and two relate to "human resource management", bringing the total number of cases under review to 54.

Mr Suwat highlighted two recent cases. The first dates back to Sept 10, when excavation and earthworks were carried out at the Supalai housing project adjacent to the Khao Phra Thaeo Wildlife Sanctuary in Pa Khlok. The second involved a Sept 11 inspection at a luxury villa construction site on Soi Kumlai Thong 1 in Wichit, where excavation and soil filling were found.

A more recent case forwarded by the Public Sector Anti-Corruption Commission (PACC) Region 8 involves Soi Cherng Talay 14, where multiple projects are now

under scrutiny over alleged irregularities in environmental impact assessment (EIA) approvals, permit processes and environmental compliance.

Mr Suwat confirmed the investigation is not limited to One World, adding that other developments, including The Modeva and The Title Legendary Bang-Tao, are also being examined. "Soi Cherng Talay 14 was thoroughly inspected last week following a rapid boom in construction in the Bang Tao area, which has caused impacts to residents such as noise, pollution and construction waste," he said.

The inspections form part of a formal NACC probe triggered by allegations of corruption in EIA approvals, permit issuance and breaches of EIA conditions.

Meanwhile, the developer of One World One Home has denied all allegations, insisting the project is fully legal, holds a valid EIA and passed joint government inspections that found only minor administrative issues.

Phuket Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment Director Natthakrit Phonphet confirmed the One World project is now compliant with the law. *The Phuket News*



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# Infrastructure-Focused Development Shapes Layan Verde Project

## ADVERTORIAL

As development continues across the Bang Tao and Layan areas, infrastructure capacity and environmental management remain central concerns for residents, authorities and developers alike.

Layan Verde, a residential development currently under construction in the Layan area is being developed by Layan Best View Company, which says its focus is on delivering the project in accordance with approved permits and environmental requirements, while coordinating with relevant agencies on infrastructure elements directly connected to the site.

According to the developer, the project's approach centres on integrating new construction with existing systems, rather than expanding responsibility beyond its approved scope.

"Responsible development means complying with the law, working transparently with authorities, and ensuring that our project integrates properly with existing infrastructure," said Paul Crosio, Director of Layan Best View Company.

## ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Project representatives say environmental management forms part of daily site operations. Alongside construction works, Layan Verde staff and partners have taken part in periodic beach clean-up activities at Layan Beach, together with local residents and volunteers.

The developer also supported improvements to a beach access area where informal parking and a deteriorated road surface had caused congestion. With the agreement of relevant stakeholders, a designated parking area was organised and basic road repairs were carried out to improve access for beach users.



Waste separation practices are also in place at the construction site and project office, with plans to provide information and facilities for future residents aimed at promoting responsible waste management.

According to the developer, Layan Verde is being implemented using green-building principles and is subject to ongoing assessment under the international EDGE (Excellence in Design for Greater Efficiencies) standard, according to the developer. Monitoring of energy use, water consumption and material efficiency is conducted on a regular basis.

Layan Best View Company is part of the VillaCarte Group, which previously applied similar standards at Layan Green Park, a separate project in the area that now operates as La Green Hotel.

"Sustainable development depends on engineering discipline, measurable standards and continuous monitoring," said Vadym Bukhkalov, representing the developer.

## INFRASTRUCTURE CONNECTIONS

Rapid growth in Layan in recent

years has placed pressure on drainage systems, utilities and access roads, issues that affect both new and long-established developments.

A local community representative noted that private investment, when coordinated with public authorities, has played an increasing role in addressing infrastructure capacity as the area develops.

Within this context, Layan Best View Company states that it has funded engineering works related to the project's connection to public systems, in line with approved technical specifications and in coordination with relevant authorities. The developer emphasised that each project in the area operates independently, under its own ownership, permits, engineering teams and environmental approvals.

Among the works associated with the project is the installation of a large-diameter collector designed to interface with existing stormwater and wastewater systems serving nearby properties. The installation involved drilling beneath an active municipal road using a steel pipe with a diameter of 1.9 metres, a



method intended to minimise surface disruption and support drainage performance during the rainy season.

The developer has also secured agreements for connection to the central water supply, with capacity of up to 1,800 cubic metres per day, and has obtained technical specifications from the Provincial Electrical Authority for the required electrical capacity, including planned upgrades to elements of the local high-voltage network.

To reduce impacts during construction, access roads are maintained in cooperation with local authorities, dust-suppression measures are applied, and nearby residents are informed in advance about construction schedules and activities.

Environmental protection measures within the project include a stormwater drainage system and a retention pond designed to manage runoff from the site and reduce the risk of contamination of local water resources, in accordance with approved designs.

The Layan Verde project also includes an underground parking facility with around 700 spaces, which the developer says is

intended to ease pressure on surrounding roads and improve traffic organisation.

As Layan continues to change, infrastructure and environmental decisions remain closely watched by residents and regulators alike. Despite the natural beauty and proximity to popular beaches, the area lacked basic infrastructure, including proper roads and organized public spaces. Layan Verde is created as a full-fledged ecosystem: two five-star hotels, 65 infrastructure facilities for locals and tourists, and more than 400 permanent jobs in the hotel segment alone. The project will attract a stable flow of investments and tourists with check above average, which will allow to boost the economy of the area through tax revenues, development of small businesses, and increase the income of local families.

Developers say that careful coordination, regulatory compliance, and clearly defined project responsibilities are key to balancing growth with environmental and community considerations.

For more information on Layan Verde visit - <https://layanverde.com/en>

# Thai civilian killed in ongoing border clash with Cambodia

## BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

The Royal Thai Army and the Thai government have strongly condemned Cambodia for firing rockets into Thai communities after an attack that killed a Thai civilian last Sunday (Dec 14).

The army said Cambodia fired BM-21 multiple rocket launchers at tambon Sao Thong Chai in Kantharak district of Si Sa Ket province at 11:50am, striking an area that includes residential communities and schools.

According to the army, the attack killed 63-year-old Don Patchapan, who was struck by shrapnel. One house was set on fire during the barrage.

The army condemned Cambodia for repeatedly firing shells into civilian areas in Thailand for a second consecutive day, resulting in civilian deaths.

“This incident is clear evidence of Cambodia’s intent to violate human rights and international humanitarian law, causing



A house damaged by a Cambodian rocket in Si Sa Ket on Sunday. Photo: Royal Thai Army

severe harm to the lives and property of innocent people,” the army said.

### ‘INHUMANE’

“The government condemns the brutal and inhumane act by Cambodia which fired BM-21 rockets at Thai civilian areas, killed a citizen, damaged houses and properties and frightened people,” said government spokesman Siripong Angkasakulkiat.

“The affected citizens and communities have nothing to do with military operations. The use of weapons against civilian areas is intolerable when it comes to international principles. This is an intention, not an accident

as Cambodia frequently claimed,” Mr Siripong added.

The Ministry of Defence on Monday urged further evacuations and extended curfews in affected provinces.

More than 10,000 residents of border villages in Buriram have been living in a temporary shelter in Muang district of this northeastern province for more than a week.

While authorities, private organisations and volunteers continue to provide three daily meals and other necessities, most say their greatest wish is to return home and resume normal life, calling on the government to urgently resolve the border conflict

before the New Year as a “gift” to those most affected.

“We’ve left our homes and livelihoods behind for over a week now, and no one can tell us when the fighting will stop. We just want peace so we can go back and earn a living,” one evacuee said on Monday, asking not to be named.

### VIOLATIONS

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Monday submitted a formal letter to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights over the Cambodian missile attacks targeting Thai civilians.

Spokesman Nikorndej Balankura said the letter had been sent to Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, condemning the attacks and raising concerns over violations of international law.

Mr Nikorndej added that Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow had also submitted a separate letter to Mr Türk on Dec 13 expressing concerns over Cambodia’s human rights violations.

# Hat Yai recovery expected in time for Songkran

## SONGKHLA

FLOOD-DEVASTATED Hat Yai city will bounce back quickly and should be 60-70% recovered by April next year, in time for Songkran, according to the Songkhla Tourism Association.

Tourism association chairman Songchai Mungprasitchai, a tour operator in Hat Yai, made the forecast on Monday (Dec 15).

He said although the tourist city suffered badly from the massive flooding last month, it was recovering quickly.

In the three months from February to April, Hat Yai was expected to recover by 60-70%. He said the tourist city had shown resilience in the past after being hit by floods, unrest and the pandemic.

The annual Songkran festival is in mid-April.

However, Hat Yai was unlikely to be fully ready for the 2026 New Year period, as many hotels, restaurants, shops, shopping plazas and entertainment venues have yet to complete restoration work.



The Hat Yai clean-up. Photo: Bangkok Post

“The largest hotels in the downtown commercial centre have not yet finished cleaning the lower floor. Only some medium-sized hotels have reopened.

“Recovery will depend on whether businesses have enough potential, particularly the SME-level businesses that suffered heavy losses and require significant capital, unlike large hotels that have substantial funding,” Mr Songchai said.

Annat Phruksapikun, a tour guide in Songkhla province, said many Malaysians had been enquiring about the situation.

They were advised to come by private vehicle, rather than on a tour, Mr Annat said. *Bangkok Post*

# General election set for Feb 8

## BANGKOK

THE ELECTION COMMISSION (EC) has officially set the next general election on Feb 8, following the Royal Decree dissolving the House of Representatives that took effect on Dec 12.

A draft election management plan had been submitted for consideration and was approved on Monday (Dec 15), according to the EC announcement.

Under the official schedule, Feb 8, 2026, is designated as the general election day for Members of House of Representatives (MPs).

The advance voting day, both in- and out-of-constituency, will take place on Feb 1, as well as voting at polling stations for citizens with disabilities or the elderly.

For constituency MP candidates, the registration period is set from Dec 27-31, 2025, at locations announced by each constituency’s election director.

For party-list MP candidates – limited to parties that have fielded constituency candidates –



Anutin. Photo: Bangkok Post

and prime ministerial candidate lists from each party, the registration period is between Dec 28 and 31. The submitting location is at the Centara Life Government Complex Hotel and Convention Centre on Chaeng Watthana Road, Lak Si district of Bangkok.

Voters who want to cast ballots in advance, including inside and outside their constituency or overseas, may register between Dec 20 and Jan 5.

Those unable to vote on the scheduled date may file a notification between Feb 1 and 7 and Feb 9 and 15.

The full announcement will be published in the Royal Gazette accordingly, the EC said.

The upcoming election followed the Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul’s announcement to return the power to the people on the night of Dec 11, coinciding with the joint sitting of parliament voting on a condition for the passage of a constitutional amendment bill.

The Royal Gazette published a royal decree announcing the dissolution on Dec 12.

Following Monday’s announcement Anutin, in his role as leader of the Bhumjaithai Party (BJT), stated that the party is prepared to become the country’s leading political force in the upcoming election. *Bangkok Post*

# Thai airports tighten passenger screening

## BANGKOK

THAI AIRPORTS HAVE BEEN ordered to strictly screen all Cambodian nationals entering Thailand under the visa-free scheme and to also tighten checks against foreign mercenaries entering the country amid the escalating border conflict.

Enhanced security measures apply mainly at Suvarnabhumi, Don Mueang, Chiang Mai, Phuket and Hat Yai airports, Immigration Bureau spokesman Pol Maj Gen Choengron Rimpadee said on Monday (Dec 15).

Senior police were closely monitoring the situation he said, citing growing concern in the face of renewed and intense clashes between Thai and Cambodian forces.

There was a possibility that foreigners might exploit the visa-free entry scheme to carry out operations that threaten Thai security, and it was unlikely that Cambodians would visit for tourism at this time, Pol Maj Gen Choengron said.

Cambodian nationals entering for valid business purposes are required to obtain proper visas from the Thai embassy.

The waiting time at immigration control queues could be extended from the usual 20 minutes to around 45 minutes but would not affect Thai travellers, while commercial flights between Thailand and Cambodia were



Suvarnabhumi airport. Photo: Supplied

still operating as usual.

Another focus group is passengers from eastern Europe and northern Asia, who might be hired as mercenaries, or even as spies.

On Monday all police stations in the Muang district of Nakhon Ratchasima were ordered to closely monitor Russian nationals staying in the area, amid concerns they could be mercenaries hired to sabotage military sites and key economic areas in the province.

It followed a Facebook post from Phon Krung police station stating a report had been received that a Russian national had been hired by Cambodia to use drones to attack strategic sites.

Provincial police chief Pol Maj Gen Narongsak Phromtha said all 32 district stations in the province were monitoring and inspecting hotels, resorts, guest-houses and rental homes.

The public were encouraged to report any suspicious individuals seen in the area although nothing suspicious had been detected so far, he said.

*Bangkok Post*

# Endangered leopard sharks released in Phuket waters

The Phuket News  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

**F**our juvenile Indo-Pacific leopard sharks fitted with acoustic tracking devices were released into the wild off Koh Maiton on Dec 8, marking the latest milestone in Thailand's first endangered shark rewilding programme.

The release, carried out at Maiton Resort about nine kilometres southeast of Cape Panwa, brings the total number of sharks released this year under the StAR Project Thailand to seven, following the earlier release of three sharks in September.

The sharks – named Maiton, Hope, Spot and Toty – were bred by aquarists from Aquaria Phuket and are now almost two years old, measuring between 100 and 140cm in length. Each was implanted with an acoustic transmitter to allow scientists to track their movements and survival in the wild.

Before the sharks were released, project partners held a symbolic blessing ceremony, pouring flower-adorned seawater back into the sea to wish the animals a safe return to their natural habitat.

The StAR Project Thailand (Stegostoma tigrinum Augmentation and Recovery Project) is the country's first initiative to reintroduce endangered sharks into the wild. It was initiated by ReShark and officially launched in Phuket earlier this year.

The project brings together government agencies, private organisations and conservation groups, including the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR), Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP), Department of Fisheries (DoF), Aquaria Phuket, Maiton Resort, WildAid, Ocean Blue Tree and Thai Sharks and Rays.

DMCR Director-General Pinsak Suraswadi said leopard sharks play a vital role in coral reef ecosystems and are important not only for ecological balance but also for sustainable marine tourism.



Photo: Sirachai Arunrugstichai / WildAid

He said the project involves rearing juvenile sharks, training them to hunt natural prey inside a sea pen at Koh Maiton, conducting health checks and implanting acoustic tags in collaboration with veterinary teams from Ocean Park Hong Kong. Underwater receivers have been installed across Phang Nga Bay to monitor the sharks' movements and survival after release.

Once common in Thai waters, Indo-Pacific leopard sharks have suffered dramatic declines due to fisheries bycatch and coral reef degradation. According to the latest Population Viability Analysis by the IUCN Species Survival Commission, the remaining population in the Andaman Sea is estimated at just 57 to 172 individuals, far below the area's potential carrying capacity of around 1,000 sharks.

Metavee Chuangcharoendee, Project Manager of StAR Project Thailand at WildAid, said scientific modelling shows that structured, science-based releases can significantly reduce extinction risk and slow the loss of genetic diversity.

Aquaria Phuket Chief Executive Officer Daryl Foong said the aquarium is proud to be the first institution in Thailand to successfully breed leopard sharks and return them to the wild.

Before release, the sharks were housed in a sea pen at Koh Maiton, where aquarists helped them acclimatise to tides and currents and encouraged natural foraging behaviour by scattering and hiding food.

Veterinarians from the DMCR carried out full health assessments before release. The implanted acoustic tags have an expected battery life of about five years and can be detected by a network of 20 underwater receivers deployed across the waters of Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi.

Data retrieved in November confirmed that the three sharks released earlier this year – Maya, Similan and Ginger – were detected up to 50 days after release and within 16km of the release site. Sightings were recorded around Koh Dok Mai in Phuket, Koh Khai Nok in Phang Nga and Hin Musang (Shark Point) near Phi Phi, indicating the sharks are actively exploring suitable habitats.

DNP Director of the National Parks Office Saysudchai Chunchaowarit said marine parks such as Mu Ko Similan and Hat Noppharat Thara–Mu Ko Phi Phi are critical habitats and that the department will continue supporting tracking and research efforts.

The Department of Fisheries said the project supports Thailand's National Plan of Action for Sharks and could serve as a model for future marine species restoration programmes.

The project team is urging divers and boat operators to continue submitting photos and videos of leopard sharks through the 'Spot the Leopard Shark – Thailand' citizen science platform, and to avoid disturbing underwater receiver devices used for tracking.

Officials said the releases represent a major step toward restoring shark populations and strengthening the long-term health of Thailand's marine ecosystems.



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# Is AI still going to take over the world, or what?



## THE AI EDGE

Joe Smith

**A** shock recent finding from the Census Bureau showed that the number of Americans daily using AI at work ticked down to a meagre-sounding 11% and has fallen most sharply among the biggest firms.

That's alarming since adoption has to soar for AI firms to justify their eye-watering valuations. It's not just shareholders who need this. Big tech firms, all of whose fortunes depend on AI, accounted in 2025 for 39% of the S&P 500's capitalisation, and for 49% of US GDP growth. A tech crash would wipe out trillions of dollars in value and very likely precipitate recessions in real economies.

The Census Bureau's findings reinforce a McKinsey report that only about a third of enterprises have moved beyond AI pilots to meaningfully incorporate them in business functions, and less than 5% are making money from them. Research shows that public trust and optimism about AI have also fallen.

We have to ask, then, just how transformative is this technology? Three years after ChatGPT 3 exploded onto the world, the threatened jobs apocalypse hasn't happened – unemployment is near historic lows in most rich countries. Productivity



Image: Joe Smith

growth is flat. The chatbot on your phone seems no more likely to take over the world than your cat. Has it all been hype?

Conversation around AI has so far been dominated by “Boomers” and “Doomers”. The former argue that AI will solve everything from climate change to cancer, and the latter that AI will bring about our redundancy and eventual extinction. Both views treat AI as unprecedented in human history. Findings like the Census Bureau's puncture this exceptionalism. AI is behaving less like a deity and more like a utility; a run-of-the-mill technology constrained by organizational inertia and the long grind of adoption.

### Glacial pace

Narayanan and Kapoor of Princeton diagnose this as a category error: we've

confused the exponential speed of AI innovation with the glacial pace of diffusion. They draw a parallel to electrification which took 40 years to show up in productivity stats because it required factories to be physically torn up and redesigned.

There's a case, though, that surveys like the Census Bureau's are asking the wrong question. When pressed on adoption, tech firms point to the volume of tokens – the units of text AI models read and generate – that the world is consuming. In early 2023, reports *The Economist*, global usage was about 5 trillion tokens a month. Today it exceeds 100trn, a 20-fold increase. Token consumption captures the volume of work AI is doing, not just how many people touch it.

Focus on the pockets of the economy where AI adoption has been fast and

it's harder to maintain that AI is business as usual. In software development, Google reports that over 25% of its new code is machine-generated, and industry data suggests the figure is as high as 41% across some teams. In customer service, *The Economist* reports that fintech firm Klarna's AI now handles two-thirds of customer chats – doing the work of 700 full-time agents – while slashing resolution times from 11 minutes to two.

AI's most important advances may be happening largely out of the office. DeepMind's AlphaFold2 has predicted the structure of nearly every known protein, vastly accelerating drug discovery. AI has revolutionised materials science, designing new alloys, batteries and catalysts decades faster than human researchers could. In automated labs, AIs analyse data, propose experiments, then instruct robotic systems to pipette, mix chemicals, grow cells, or run assays without human intervention. The results are fed back into the AI, which updates its predictions and designs the next round of tests. None of this shows up in the Census, but it may matter far more than any chatbot ever will.

*Joe Smith is Founder of the AI consultancy 2Sigma Consultants. He studied AI at Imperial College Business School and is researching AI's effects on cognition at Chulalongkorn University. He is author of The Optimized Marketer, a book on how to use AI to promote your business and yourself. Contact joe@2Sigmaconsultants.com.*

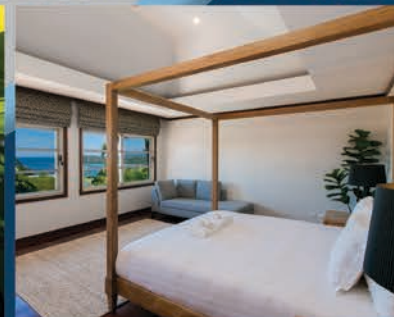
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**WED 24 DEC**



**Christmas Beach Market**

Celebrate Christmas Eve in tropical style at our Christmas Beach Market. Join us at XANA Beach Lawn on 24 December 2025 for an enchanting evening by Bang Tao Beach. Stroll beneath the stars and discover festive delicacies, tropical Thai favourites, artisanal gifts and sparkling drinks. Enjoy live music, DJ beats and timeless carols carried by the Andaman breeze. Share the moment to your families with fun-filled activities including face painting, balloon artist, wish-writing to Santa and a cozy Christmas movie corner. Capture joyful memories at the Santa meet-and-greet and take part in exciting lucky draws for luxurious prizes. Wednesday, 24 December 2025 | 18:00 - 00:00 hrs. At Xana Beach Lawn Free Entrance for all. A selection of free-flow food and drinks will also be available for your enjoyment.

**THU 25 DEC**



**Italian Christmas Feast**

Savour the spirit of Christmas at Azzurra, Phuket's authentic Italian beachfront restaurant. Enjoy an intimate Italian Christmas Feast where the warmth of Italy meets the beauty of Bang Tao Beach. Delight in artisanal Vitello Tonnato, Gratinated Sea Scallop, Roasted Capon with Rosemary Potatoes, Pork Cotichino with Lentils, Stewed Salt Cod, Cep Mushroom Risotto and Pumpkin Ravioli with Brown Butter Sage Sauce, finishing with Panettone and Hazelnut Ice Cream. With live entertainment and Italian festive melodies, the evening unfolds as a symphony of flavours and togetherness, offering a truly unforgettable Christmas dinner in Phuket. Thursday, 25 December 2025 | 18:00 - 22:30 hrs. At Azzurra Restaurant THB 1,250++ per guest THB 2,400++ per couple Kids under 12 years charged at half price

**TUE 23 DEC**



**Rotary Club of Patong Beach**

The only English-speaking Rotary Club in Phuket, we welcome Rotarians from around the world! With members from 18 nationalities, we are a diverse, dynamic, and well-known club in Thailand. 1<sup>st</sup> Tue each month - Fellowship dinner at different locations in Phuket, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tue each month - dinner meeting at Four Points by Sheraton Phuket Patong. Join us! if you are passionate about making a difference. More info - [www.facebook.com/RCoPB](http://www.facebook.com/RCoPB)



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**SAT 27 DEC**



**Swimming Competition: New Year Starts with Jumanji Swim**

The BangBang Aquatics swimming pool (Chalong) will host the open swimming competition "New Year Starts with Jumanji Swim Center", organised by Jumanji Swim Center. Children born 2018–2020, juniors born

2008–2017, and adult categories including Masters are invited to participate. The competition aims to develop physical fitness, strength, endurance, and to promote a healthy lifestyle. Participants will compete in individual races over 25m and 50m in all swimming styles. The event program includes an opening ceremony, medals, certificates, sweet gifts, and prizes from sponsors. Age Categories: — 2020 (Special) — 2019-2018 — 2017-2016 — 2015-2014 — 2013-2012 — 2011-2010 — 2009-2008 — Adults I (18-28) — Adults II (29-38) — Masters (39+) The 2020 category participates without ranking or prize places. All other categories receive awards for 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> places. Application deadline: December 20, 2025 Late applications will not be accepted. Venue: BangBang Aquatics, 9/134 Luang Pho Chaem Road, Chalong, Phuket. Time: 9:00–13:00. WhatsApp: +66 965 187 358. Email: [jumanjiswimcenter.manager@gmail.com](mailto:jumanjiswimcenter.manager@gmail.com), [jumanjiswimcenter.manager@gmail.com](mailto:jumanjiswimcenter.manager@gmail.com), +66 965 187 358

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December/January 2026 issue

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### SKÅL PHUKET DECEMBER DINNER

The final Skål Phuket dinner of the year, held on December 11, saw over 40 members and guests come together to celebrate the festive season in true Phuket style. A wonderful evening hosted by Julian Lowry at the iconic Le Méridien Phuket Beach Resort. The evening began with networking drinks followed by dinner featuring a selection of tasty treats from the various outlets at the resort, showcasing the wide range of offerings available at their Japanese, Thai, Indian and Italian outlets. For more info on Skål Phuket visit [facebook.com/skalphuket](https://facebook.com/skalphuket)



### LIVING IN PHUKET 2025

Another successful Living in Phuket event with over 60 exhibitors and hundreds of people attending. This free yearly event, organised by UFE Phuket, Bangkok Hospital Phuket, M. Biz Webdesign & SEO and The Phuket News, was held on December 14 at the Courtyard by Marriott Phuket Town. The event showcased a number of different business on the island to help make life easier for expats and focused on introducing people to social and voluntary opportunities, lifestyle, travel and hospitality services, education, networking and more.

# Thailand dominate SEA Games

## SEA GAMES

The Phuket News  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Their Majesties The King and Queen opened the 33<sup>rd</sup> Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) in Bangkok on Dec 9 as 33,000 fans descended on Rajamangala National Stadium for a colourful ceremony that blended high tech and Thai tradition.

In his opening remarks, His Majesty the King welcomed athletes and representatives of the participating nations. He said he wished the Games, which represent unity among Southeast Asian nations, would be staged successfully and fairly and strengthen friendship across the region.

It did not take the hosts long to secure their first gold medal as Watcharakul Limjittakorn emerged victorious in the women's individual freestyle taekwondo poomsae event on Dec 10. Shortly afterwards, Thailand's women's hoop takraw team struck gold in the final against Myanmar



Thailand's women's hoop takraw team struck gold in record-breaking fashion on Dec 10. Photo: Ministry of Sports & Tourism Facebook

with a record-setting 1,000 points, a new world record.

Further gold medals were won later that day by Lalita ChiaoChan in Women's Shooting, while the men's water polo team delivered an outstanding performance to secure Thailand's first ever SEA Games gold medal in the sport after defeating Brunei 8.5 to 0.

In swimming Kamonchanok Kwanmuang claimed double gold by winning the Women's 200 metre Butterfly and the 400m individual medley, as the Thai men's team defeated Indonesia to win gold

in chess. Paris 2024 Olympic silver medalist Theerapong Silachai broke a world record and picked up a gold medal in the men's clean and jerk weightlifting with a lift of 173kg, while the women's hockey team won their first gold medal in 30 years after they hammered local rivals Malaysia 7-1.

### COMMANDING

Puripol Boonson underlined his status as the region's outstanding sprinter with another commanding display on Saturday, storming to the 200 metre title in a time of 20.07 seconds, beat-

ing both his own personal best and the Games record.

It completed a memorable sprint double at the tournament for "Angel Bew" after he won the 100m final in 9.99secs two days previous.

Thailand's track-and-field charge was boosted further when Kieran Tuntivate won the men's 1,500m and Kittipong Boonmawan won gold in the men's hammer throw crown with a best effort of 63.11 metres, while Jariya Wichaidit's threw 55.64 metres to win the women's javelin title.

More gold medals were won by Yutthakan Chaidet

in the men's canoe single slalom, Jaruan Niamthong in the women's kayak single slalom, and the men's kayak double 200m and men's canoe double 200m races.

Building on Watcharakul's opening day success, further medals were claimed in taekwondo by Chareewan Piyachutrutai in the women's over 62kg, Cho Chaichon in the men's over 80kg and Patcharakan Poolkerd in the women's under 46kg final.

Elsewhere, the women's snooker team defeated Indonesia to win gold, while in boxing Chutikan Jongkolrattanawattana won the women's 53kg title and Sasikarn Tongchan won the women's 62kg title, before Thanapoom Fuangnoi won the men's 63kg final.

### GLITTERING

By Sunday the hosts had passed the 100-gold medal mark as veteran badminton star Ratchanok Intanon won the women's singles final to finally capture the one title missing from her glittering career, while Ruttanapak Oupthong and Jhenicha Sudjaipraparat upset defeating compatriots

Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Supissara Paewsampran to win the mixed doubles gold.

Thailand's golfers swept top honours in the men's and women's singles and team competitions, while the hosts also claimed the inaugural SEA Games gold in baseball after defeating Indonesia in the final.

Cyclist Jutapit Maneephan claimed her third consecutive SEA Games gold in the women's criterium, while the Thai Equestrian team swept both individual and team golds before claiming the top prize in team dressage.

At time of press Thailand had won 291 medals overall, comprising 145 gold, 87 silver and 59 bronze.

The only real negative was the stunning defeat to arch-rivals Malaysia in the men's sepak takraw team final last Saturday, a result that abruptly ended the hosts' 34-year stranglehold on the sport and sent a jolt through the nation's SEA Games celebrations.

Additional reporting by Bangkok Post

## Tsunoda vows F1 return after Red Bull axing

### FORMULA ONE

JAPAN'S YUKI TSUNODA HAS said it was "incredibly tough" to lose his Red Bull seat for next season but has vowed to return to the Formula One grid.

The 25-year-old was replaced by French rookie Isack Hadjar as Max Verstappen's partner at Red Bull for 2026 on Dec 3.

Having also been overlooked for a return to sister team Racing Bulls, Tsunoda will become a Red Bull test and reserve driver.

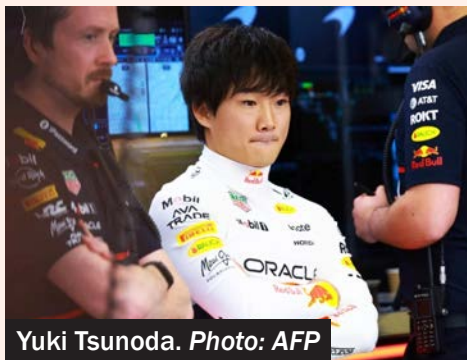
"I'm not finished yet," he wrote on social media.

"Finding out I won't have a race seat in 2026 was incredibly tough, but I'm determined to work harder than ever with Red Bull as test and reserve driver, and prove I deserve a place on the grid."

Tsunoda replaced New Zealand's Liam Lawson at Red Bull two races into last season, stepping up from Racing Bulls.

Since then, however, Tsunoda scored just 33 points in the world championship compared with Verstappen's 396.

The Japanese driver, who has been with the team since joining the junior programme in 2019, has competed in more than 100 grands prix but never made the podium.



Yuki Tsunoda. Photo: AFP

"Life's full of setbacks, and this is mine," said Tsunoda, who made his F1 race debut in 2021.

"It's not going to deter me from being the best F1 driver I can be."

Meanwhile, Red Bull Racing motorsport advisor Helmut Marko has decided to step down from his role. The 82-year-old was one of the key architects of Red Bull's era in F1, also heading up the Red Bull Junior Program.

"I have been involved in motorsport for six decades now, and the past 20-plus years at Red Bull have been an extraordinary and extremely successful journey," he said.

"Everything we have built and achieved together fills me with pride. I wish the entire team continued success and am convinced that they will be fighting for both world championship titles again next year." AFP

## Double delight for Phuket cricketers at the ACG

### CRICKET

Continued from page 16

...to the crease and the former Namibian U19 international wasted little time in showing his class with some exquisite cover-drives. Following the drinks-break the left hander brought up the self-imposed retirement score with a classy run-a-ball 30.

There would be little let-up for the visitors however as Sajal Gaur (30\*), Mayur Deuskar (30\*) and Andrew Langston (33\*) all successively hit their retirement score in rapid time as the score motored along to 191-2 by the end of the 25<sup>th</sup> over.

With just 5 overs remaining skipper Sampant cleaned up his counterpart Curt Livermore (5) cheaply before youngsters Bowry (9) and Raju (12\*) bolstered the hosts' score to a healthy 217/4 from the allotted 30 overs.

### TRICKY

A swift start was required from Hertfordshire openers Patel (7\*) and Oliver (9\*) if the visitors were to chase down the lofty 218 target.



Hertfordshire Seniors CCC. Photo: Supplied

However, a fiery (albeit wicket-less) fast bowling spell from both Raju and Waqar Aziz restricted the tourists early as the score nudged along to 37 without loss at the 10-over drinks-break.

Post-drinks saw both openers retire after seeing their side through a tricky early period before a defiant 24-run stand between Anonthy Ali (3) and Samuel Newall (15) was ended as Bowry removed the former in the 15<sup>th</sup> over and a sharp Myburgh run-out saw Newall depart.

Suwarneraj (14) and Pether (12) reached double figures before Wetherell removed both and Sampant (6) and Smith (6\*) dug in valiantly to ensure their side

at least batted out the allotted 30 overs.

Although disappointed not to pick up 10 wickets, the home side still left the field satisfied as they rounded out the weekend with a convincing 86-run win to go along with Friday's success.

Myburgh edged out Wetherell for the Man of the Match award for his high-quality knock with the bat, while Langston's 33 from 19 deliveries stood out amongst the host's retirees and Sam delivered a tidy performance (2-15) with the ball on his Penguins debut.

A special mention to both umpires Raju and Neil Quail for their efforts over the course of a weekend which, incredibly, included a total of 126 extras!

# Black cats pounce on Magpies

## FOOTBALL

AFP

Sunderland boss Regis Le Bris said that last Sunday's (Dec 14) memorable victory against Newcastle in the first Premier League Tyne-Wear derby for nearly a decade would not go to their heads.

The 1-0 win over their local northeast rivals at the Stadium of Light lifted the promoted Black Cats to seventh place in the table, on 26 points.

The victory came courtesy of an own goal from Newcastle's record signing Nick Woltemade, moments after the start of the second half.

"We have to stay smart and respectful. It's a game and when you win, you're happy," said Le Bris.

"After that, obviously, we have players who were here for a long time, so they probably know better than the new ones how important this derby is, especially when you lost the previous one.

"Now it's a question of just being composed. I



Sunderland players celebrate their goal with fans during the 1-0 win over bitter rivals Newcastle last Sunday (Dec 14). Photo: AFP

repeat: you can enjoy and then reset because we have another tough challenge in a week."

Sunderland dominated possession before the break and then, as the Magpies launched an ultimately unsuccessful fightback after conceding the goal, defended stoically.

The last time the teams faced each other in the Premier League was in March 2016, a match that ended in a 1-1 draw.

### RECORD

Meanwhile, Mohamed Salah played a key role in Liverpool's vital win 2-0 against Brighton on Saturday after an explosive interview raised questions over his future at the club.

Salah came off the substitutes' bench to huge cheers in the first half before setting up Hugo Ekitike to score his second of the game with half an hour to go.

The Egyptian superstar

now has 277 goal involvements for Liverpool in the Premier League – 188 goals and 89 assists – a new record by a player for a single club in the competition, overtaking Wayne Rooney's mark for Manchester United.

Saturday marked a dramatic change of mood around Salah, who last week accused Liverpool of throwing him "under the bus" after he was left on the bench for the 3-3 draw at

Leeds, the third match in a row that he had been named among the replacements.

Despite the 33-year-old winger claiming he had no relationship with manager Arne Slot the Dutchman said after Saturday's win there was "no issue to resolve" with Salah, though uncertainty remains over his long-term future at the club.

### VITAL POINTS

Arsenal narrowly avoided dropping vital points against bottom side Wolves courtesy of two own goals in a 2-1 win.

Arsenal went head when the ball rebounded off Wolves goalkeeper Sam Johnstone and into his own net.

Astonishingly, Wolves pulled level in the 90th minute but just as the home fans contemplated a damaging draw, the Gunners benefited from a second own goal when Bukayo Saka's cross was diverted into his own net by Wolves defender Yerson Mosquera in the 94th minute.

Manchester City remain two points behind league leaders Arsenal after a 3-0

win at Crystal Palace, with Erling Haaland (2) and Phil Foden on target, while Aston Villa remain third after staging a spirited comeback to beat West Ham 3-2 at The London Stadium, with Morgan Rogers on target twice.

Cole Palmer, whose season has been badly disrupted by a groin injury, scored his first goal since September, as Chelsea beat Everton 2-0 to move back into the top four, as Nottingham Forest beat Tottenham 3-0 to heap more misery onto Spurs boss Thomas Frank.

Harry Wilson was the star with a goal and two assists as Fulham beat relegation-threatened Burnley 3-2, while Brentford and Leeds United drew 1-1.

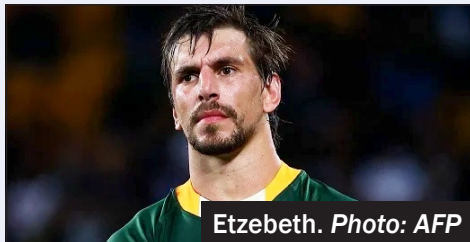
On Monday Manchester United blew the lead three times to miss out on moving up to fifth as Bournemouth would not be beaten in a thrilling 4-4 draw at Old Trafford.

Bournemouth's winless run stretches to seven games but a point edges them up to 13th, while United move ahead of Liverpool on goal difference into sixth.

## Etzebeth gouging ban a poke in the eye for global rugby



### THE GLOBAL RUGBY COACH



Etzebeth. Photo: AFP

MUCH INTEREST SURROUNDED the outcome of the Eben Etzebeth eye-gouging incident in the Wales versus South Africa rugby international match on Nov 29. And the resulting decision by World Rugby has raised more than a few eyebrows.

The incident came in the 79th minute when giant South African second row Etzebeth used his thumb to gouge the eye of Wales flanker Alex Mann.

It was clear to all and even the acerbic South African coach, Rassie Erasmus, when asked what he made of the action, stated, "I don't know what I can say that isn't controversial. It didn't look good. It was a justified red card."

The penalty could have ranged from 12 weeks to four years. (I know players in their 60s who have problems with an eye that was gouged during their playing careers.)

World Rugby agreed it was an intentional act and the decision was a 12-week ban. So, Etzebeth can sit on the beach in Durban for three months and recuperate.

At a time when concussion legal action is moving towards the courts, with over 1,300 plaintiffs, World Rugby's

decision is unbelievable. What are Sunday morning game parents going to think?

Elsewhere, the scuffle between England flanker Tom Curry and Argentinian coach Felipe Contepomi in the tunnel at Allianz Stadium after their Nov 22 clash resulted in a no case to answer.

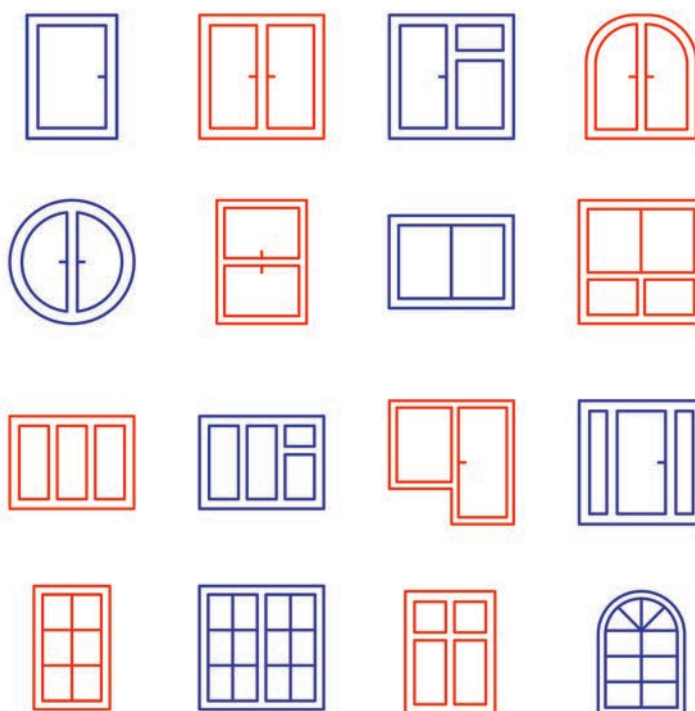
A nationwide survey organised by the Rugby Union in England identified that fewer schools are playing rugby and numbers attending mini and junior sessions on Sunday morning are declining. That will continue if ill discipline is treated so lightly.

Wherever you live, enjoy your rugby.

*The Global Rugby Coach, Mike Penistone, is a globally renowned professional rugby coach based in Phuket who is also an ambassador for the Asia Center Foundation, a charity for disadvantaged children. For more information visit: www.rugbycoaching-consultancy.com.*



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# Sport



**SEA Games  
Thai gold  
rush > p14**

# SMASHING

## Phuket select side see off Hertfordshire Seniors at ACG



Action from the ACG clash between a Phuket select side and the Hertfordshire Seniors CCC. Photo: Supplied

### CRICKET

**Curt Livermore**

Last month saw the return of cricket to the island as first-time visitors Hertfordshire Seniors took on Phuket's finest in a pair of 30-over matches held at the Alan Cooke Ground (ACG) in Thalang.

It would be the hosts who would come out on top over the course of the weekend as a 6-wicket victory by a Phuket XI on Friday (Nov 28) was followed up by an emphatic 86-run win by local side Patong Penguins two days later to clinch the series 2-0.

After a lengthy off-season, Phuket's cricketers were eager to kickstart their season in earnest as a combined team from the island's domestic sides came together to take on the visitors in Friday's 30-over clash.

Hertfordshire captain Sheylesh Sampant won the toss and elected to bat first on a scorching morning at the ACG. However, the tourists were reduced to 20/2 by the end of the 8-over power-play following excellent opening spells from spin duo and Right said Fred lookalikes Simon Wetherell and Adrain Lai. Dipan Suwarneraj (9) and Dileep Patel (5) provided an 11-run stand before Mohammed Umar ended the pairs stubborn resistance with two wickets in the 12<sup>th</sup> over, helped by a rare Sunny Bowry catch.

With batters struggling to adapt to conditions, wickets continued to tumble with regularity as an early finish looked on the cards with the score a lowly 42/7 at the half-way stage. Fortunately for the visitors Phuket's skipper Bowry had other ideas as he brought himself into the attack only to bowl five

consecutive no-balls, much to the delight of the opposition and on-lookers alike.

Stephen Baker (5) and Martin Pether (24) gratefully added a 23-run partnership before the former was removed in the 22<sup>nd</sup> over as Rana Chetan picked up his second scalp. Bowry's persistence finally paid off as he picked up the penultimate wicket before the innings was wrapped up by Yasir Sami in the 29<sup>th</sup> over as the visitors posted a sub-par 90 all out.

### SMOOTH

Chasing a modest target, the hosts hoped for a smooth run-chase to seal victory. Determined to make things as difficult as possible, Hertfordshire skipper Sampant led from the front in removing opener Yasir (0) for a duck in the second over. John Smith maintained the squeeze in the following over as Usman Khaleeqe (1)

failed to make an impact. Abu Bakar (4) was the next Phuket wicket to fall as the hosts were put under pressure for the first time. However, with wickets falling around him, Shakeel Raja (39) provided the perfect counter-punching knock before he was adjudged LBW in the 9<sup>th</sup> over as Smith claimed his second wicket of the match.

With the score 64/4 at the drinks break, the visitors continued to push for an unlikely victory. Unfortunately it would be in vain as Umar (16\*) and Lai (20\*) consolidated the innings with a 27-run stand to clinch victory for the Phuket XI.

Umar won the Man of the Match award for his contribution with both bat and ball, while other performances of note included Chetan's 2-17 from his 5 overs whilst Raja's explosive 39 from 27 proved crucial in breaking the

back of the run chase.

In defeat, Hertfordshire's wicket-keeper batsman Pether was the shining light with the bat whilst Smith's spirited spell of 2-24 ensured his side went down fighting.

### STALWARTS

With batting conditions expected to ease following pitch and outfield repairs during the days rest in-between matches, local stalwarts Patong Penguins looked to take advantage of such conditions in electing to bat first.

The decision seemed like the correct one, as openers Wetherell (26) and debutant Sam (9) galloped along early before the latter was removed in the 4<sup>th</sup> over following some sharp work behind the stumps from Pether.

Fellow debutant Pelham Myburgh was the next man...

*Continued on page 14*

# Local favourite Anni wins wakesurf gold at SEA Games

### SEA GAMES

PHUKET RESIDENT Annissa Tita Flynn was among the early medal winners as Thailand got off to a flying start at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Southeast Asia Games (SEA Games).

Annissa, affectionately known as Anni, was a member of the four-person Thai wakesurf team, which also included Songkrod Jomboon, Patrick Wongwut MacArthur and Kantita Chayliam.

The team delivered an outstanding performance on Dec 11 at Rabbit Lake in Bangkok to claim gold with a total score of 240 points to finish ahead of silver medalists Indonesia, who scored 144 points, and Malaysia, who amassed 128 points.

The gold medal success was one of the earliest medals won by Thailand in any sport after competition got underway on Dec 9. Since then the kingdom has excelled to amass an impressive overall medal haul (see overview on page 14).



Anni (second left) and her teammates. Photo: Ministry of Sports & Tourism

The success of Anni and her teammates in the wakesurf competition was

made even sweeter given the fact it was the first ever gold medal at any SEA Games tournament for Thailand's Extreme Sports Association, who are responsible for overseeing athlete development in high-risk, high-intensity sports such as skateboarding, snowboarding, BMX, skydiving surfing and wakesurfing.

Keen readers of *The Phuket News* over recent years will be more than familiar with Anni and her success story in numerous

water-based sports including surfing, flowboarding and wakesurfing. Fluent in Thai and English, Anni resides in Phuket and holds dual citizenship with Australia, giving her the perfect playgrounds to develop her surfing skills from the early age of 8 years old.

Her most prominent success to date was when she won a silver medal in the women's short board competition at the SEA Games in the Philippines in Dec, 2019. She dominated a

range of local and regional competitions in subsequent years and has also been very competitive on the World Flowboarding tour, winning three world championships between 2017 and 2019.

In 2022 Anni entered into a partnership with NSP, a Thailand-based watersports company with roots grounded in surfing for over 20 plus years, ahead of joining the International Women's team to compete on the World Surfing League (WSL) tour.

*The Phuket News*