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FEATURE

Doctor Thailand Lures the Jet-Set Patients

By Ellen Boonstra

First-class facilities, competitive rates, and the conspicuous absence of waiting lists have sparked a boom in medical tourism in Thailand.

Weekender's correspondent in Thailand, Ellen Boonstra, consults the country's two largest players—Bangkok Hospital and Bumrungrad International—about their special appeal to their Japanese clientele.

A couple of years ago while my mother was visiting Thailand, she was diagnosed with an Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm—a large and potentially life-threatening one. I was horrified to learn that if left untreated for too long, the condition could result in a rupture of the aorta, often with fatal results. As unfamiliar as I was with the disease, I was very familiar with the notoriously long waiting lists back home in the Netherlands and decided to have her admitted to one of Bangkok's international hospitals as soon as possible.

Like most people I'm no big fan of hospitals, but I was duly impressed by its luxury hotel-style facilities. My mother's hospital room easily rivaled a smart studio apartment in Hiroo: a DVD-equipped TV, comfortable sofa for visitors, bathroom as well as mini kitchen with microwave. Not that she was expected to cook her own food of course—an extensive room service menu provided a choice of Thai, Chinese, Japanese and Western fare. There was even a Starbucks in the hotel-like lobby.

"If we didn't offer the best medical services available while treating patients as 'guests,' we'd go bankrupt."

Besides 'accidental tourists' like my mother, a rising number of Westerners are finding their way to Thailand for medical treatment. Japanese tourists have discovered that Thailand is not only for sun and sand, but for cosmetic surgery as well. Moreover, plane loads of patients from the Gulf States, who once would have traveled to the US and Europe, are arriving every month due to both the pathological condition of Western medical services and the unfavorable political climate.

Up until three years ago Singapore and Malaysia were the preferred destinations, but now Thailand is the leader in Asian medical tourism.



Consultation Number One

In terms of sheer quantity of their foreign patients, there is one single organization that can call itself the world's number one destination for healthcare: Bumrungrad International. Located in Bangkok's bustling business, entertainment and shopping district, this medical institution serves over a million patients annually, of which close to 400,000 are international.

"There's no other hospital which attracts more international patients than we do," says Ruben Toral, Bumrungrad's Group Marketing Director.

Indeed, walking around the facilities one could be excused for thinking you were at the United Nations. The hospital draws patients from over 190 countries, including both resident expatriates as well as medical tourists. Classified by country, the United States occupies the first place and for several years Japan ranked second. Lately, however, it has been surpassed by Europe and the Middle East. "Especially in our Middle Eastern markets we've seen phenomenal growth," Toral says.

The number of Japanese patients seeking treatment at Bumrungrad remains a steady 40,000 to 42,000 a year. Most are local expatriates from Thailand's thriving Japanese community, while others are regional Japanese expats from neighboring countries Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar, where medical facilities are inadequate or substandard.

Southeast Asia's largest private hospital has made ample provisions to accommodate their Japanese clients and ensure all communication can be done in their native tongue—from a special Japanese patient counter and translators, to Japanese-speaking doctors. Interpreters can be

Thai nationals who've majored in Japanese at one of Bangkok's universities, while several of the Japanese speaking doctors have graduated from medical schools in Japan.

The number of overseas Japanese who travel specifically to Thailand for its medical healthcare is relatively modest for now. Yuko Tamura, Director of Japanese Services at Bumrungrad, explains why: 70 percent of medical expenses are covered by national insurance, making it financially unattractive for Japanese to seek medical treatment abroad.

However, there is one exception—cosmetic surgery. Unable to find the same level of expertise or value for money back home, patients are heading en masse to Bumrungrad. "Our growth in this area is about 35 percent a year," says Toral. The cosmetic operation most in demand by Japanese patients is liposuction. Other popular elective procedures include Lasik laser eye surgery and dental treatments.

Tamura expects the number of overseas Japanese

Left: The staff at the world's number one medical tourism destination: Bumrungrad International. Bottom left and right: Bangkok Hospital, Thailand's most technologically advanced facility.





Patients from all over the globe take advantage of Thailand's medical services.

patients to rise. Like many Western countries the aging population is increasingly becoming a burden on the national scheme, and "this will be an opportunity for us to gain more Japanese patients".

A Second Opinion

Over to Bangkok Hospital for a second opinion, where we spoke with marketing executive Kotaro Tanaka and Ralf Krewer, Marketing Director of the International Medical Center.

Bangkok Hospital ranks among the Asia Pacific region's top medical institutions and is touted as the most technologically advanced facility in Thailand. Part of a conglomerate of 14 hospitals, Bangkok Hospital alone consists of 16 specialty centers, offering every medical treatment imaginable.

They are the first private hospital in Asia to employ a PET/SC Scan for cancer screening, heart disease assessment and brain-tumor imaging. A 360-degree scan of the whole body is taken, enabling a physician to detect cancerous cells within an astounding 20 minutes. The Gamma Knife, also used in the treatment of brain tumors, is yet another state-of-the-art technology at patient's disposal. These ultra-modern marvels don't come cheap, but the expenditure is cut by saving on costly, lengthy hospital stays.

"There's no doubt we have the best equipment in Southeast Asia, that's our strategy," says Ralf Krewer. It's not surprising that patients from all around the globe flock to this hospital to take advantage of its high-tech facilities. Japanese medical tourists are making their way over for the hospital's state-of-the-art heart surgery and cancer treatment.

Thanks to its world-class facilities, Bangkok General is the number one choice for Japanese companies for their employees' annual medical check-up. By law, Japanese companies are required to have their employees medically examined once a year and Singapore was previously the country of choice. "Our Check-up Center is the best of all the hospitals in Bangkok," Tanaka says. Last year, 4,500 Japanese from 38 corporations were examined there.

Whether the patient's hospital visit is for a regular check-up or for a medical consultation, they need not worry about language or cultural barriers. Bangkok Hospital's slogan is 'We speak your language'. In 1997, it decided to establish an International Medical Center to cater to the large influx of non-Thai patients. The



Center has nationals from about 70 countries. Combined, they speak 30 different languages. This includes eight Japanese-speaking coordinators and interpreters, plus 16 doctors with medical licenses in both Thailand and Japan.

Tanaka has a few interesting comments on the widely held belief of his fellow countrymen that everything is better back home. He disagrees with

Japanese tourists have discovered that Thailand is not only for sun and sand, but for cosmetic surgery as well.

the perception that Japan has the best medical care system in the world. "Perhaps the average level of care is high if you include the state-run hospitals in the countryside," he says. "But nothing beats a privately operated hospital in Thailand. If we didn't offer the best medical services available while treating patients as 'guests,' we'd go bankrupt."

The prognosis for Thailand's medical tourism is excellent. High-tech facilities, attention to detail, and affordable health care will soon see many more visitors leaving the kingdom in the pink. In Thailand, medicine has taken a global step forward. They've transformed the annual check-up into a five-star check-in. Even my mother was impressed.

The Japanese community in Thailand

Thailand boasts a thriving Japanese community. According to information supplied by the Embassy of Japan, there were 36,327 Japanese citizens registered in Thailand in 2005. The unofficial figure is estimated to be considerably higher, with the number of Japanese residents rising at a rate of 10-15 percent per year.

About the writer

Ellen Boonstra (ellen@2-mag.com) was happily living in Tokyo in the late 80s and early 90s when the economic bubble burst. She traded the Land of the Rising Sun for the canals of her native Amsterdam until she could no longer stand the depressingly cold winters and rude waiters. She successfully plotted her escape to the Land of Smiles, where she now spends her days (and nights and weekends) in bustling Bangkok as the editor of a lifestyle magazine. In her hectic schedule she manages to find time to write the occasional article for *Weekender*.

PHOTO RIGHT: Bangkok, Sep. 21, 2006, one day after Thailand's bloodless military coup—The writer inspecting the troops at Government House.



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BUSINESS

Secret Weapon

Weekender's foreign correspondent in Thailand, Ellen Boonstra, pays a visit to Dr. Nantapat, arguably South-East Asia's top dermatologist. Her large client base includes a fair share of local Japanese expats.

As American cosmetics tycoon Estée Lauder once put it, "Time's not on your side, but we are." Thailand has its own warrior in the ongoing battle in the signs of aging, although not everyone is equally willing to acknowledge this fact...

"You don't know me!" is what many a client will furtively whisper into Dr. Nantapat's ear when accidentally running into her at a social event, party or shopping mall. We all want to look good, but without divulging to others what lengths or costs we've gone to achieve this: Botox injections, liposuction, a hair transplant or laser skin tightening.

Yet these types of 'covert operations' are daily business for Dr. Nantapat Supapannachart, Thailand's—if not South-East Asia's—number one dermatologist and founder of APEX Profound Beauty skin clinics. Fortunately the doctor takes such denials in her stride, recounting laughingly how she was once invited as a guest speaker in the suburbs of Bangkok only to find at least 20 of her clients facing her in the lecture hall. "I had to pretend that I didn't know any of them!"

Dr. Nantapat does not expect the taboo surrounding cosmetic procedures to change anytime soon, but this has not stopped her from building a thriving private practice in Bumrungrad International Hospital, the world's leading destination for medical tourism, as well as establishing a slew—six in total—of successful skin clinics in Thailand: four in the Bangkok area, one in the seaside town of Pattaya and one on the popular island of Phuket.

One of her Sukhumvit—Bangkok's commercial and shopping district—clinics caters predominantly to the local Japanese expat community. The center has gone to great lengths to accommodate these clients—from dispatching Thai staff to study in Tokyo and hiring interpreters, to translating brochures and the company website into Japanese. "Patients can do everything in their own language here," the doctor says.

How did it all start? A straight 'A' student in high school, Dr. Nantapat was quickly steered towards an academic career, the pinnacle of which was considered medical school. "In those days, if you were a good student you automatically had to become a doctor," she says. After her graduation—with honors—from Thailand's oldest and most prestigious Mahidol University, she was asked to join the Intensive Care Unit team at the University Hospital. Although she enjoyed her work, it was there that she found her true calling: dermatology. She decided to advance her studies in this medical field in the United States, obtaining her master's degree in Dermatology and becoming American Board Certified.

In the US she became acquainted with a range of dermatological specializations at that time not available at universities in Thailand such as laser technology, liposuction and several other cosmetic procedures which have recently become commonplace. With great zeal she

elected to study as many of these as possible and when she returned to her home country, she was one of the first to bring this cutting-edge technology to Thailand.

Dr. Nantapat is considered South-East Asia's leading specialist in 'non-invasive rejuvenation,' i.e. procedures enhancing a person's appearance without resorting to the sharp knives and scalpels of surgery. "If a person comes to me and says 'I want to look five years younger in one week,' I can achieve this by giving her [or him] Botox injections, fillers and reshape her face a little bit, all in a relatively short time."

Needless to say the doctor herself is the poster girl for beautiful, glowing skin, belying her mature age of



Dr. Nantapat and APEX Profound Beauty.

48. She explains the unattractive forms in which the aging process exhibits itself on our face: there are fine lines and wrinkles, blemishes, moles, redness, pigmentation, discoloration, enlarged pores, sagging... Not particularly 'uplifting' to hear, but the good news is that with today's rapid and ongoing advancements in cosmetic dermatology, each of these imperfections can be combated with a specific treatment.

Dr. Nantapat explains that the most recent and exciting discoveries in cosmetic dermatology are taking place in laser

technology. "Just like with computers, every time you blink, there's a new machine or technological development, that's what keeps my work so challenging."

Granted, these laser and other cosmetic treatments don't come cheap. The fact remains that no price is too high for looking good, as testified by the many clients who say Dr. Nantapat has changed their lives. The doctor proceeds to share a few colorful stories: the psychiatrist who had a hair transplant and claims to perform better at his job because his patients view him differently; the high society Thai lady who used to spend large sums of money on diamond necklaces and designer clothes but after laser treatment says a simple t-shirt is all she needs to look great; or the divorcee who credits the doctor for being able to attract a new husband.

But for those earning Japanese yen, the price may be just right. "Thermage is about one third of the price here compared to Japan," the doctor estimates, adding that "some of my patients fly in especially from Tokyo twice a year for Botox injections and fillers."

Besides treating patients six days a week, Dr. Nantapat lectures at her alma mater Mahidol University as well as conducting training courses to fellow dermatologists on her free Sundays.

Admittedly this extremely hectic schedule does not leave much room for a social life. Her limited free time is spent with her pediatrician husband and her 13-year old daughter and 12-year old son. Years ago, when the doctor asked her then five year old daughter what she wanted to be when she grew up, the girl answered "a pediatrician, just like daddy, because he saves lives." Dr. Nantapat quickly set the record straight: "Daddy may save lives, but mommy saves souls!"



More information on Dr. Nantapat and APEX Profound Beauty at www.apexprofoundbeauty.com

TRAVEL

Thailand's Charms

Karin Ling goes shopping for a miracle.

During my visit to Thailand, I kept peeking down men's necklines. In the deeply Buddhist country, amulets are worn for their power to bring financial success, enhance fertility, and all around protection. Specific charms even exist protecting crooks from cops and cops from bullets. If you understand the symbol a person is wearing, you just might get a glimpse into his soul.

Signs of the culture's spiritual identity are hard to miss with the omnipresence of spirit houses, mini-shrines, even altars hanging from the rear-view mirrors of cars. The more dented the vehicle, the more lavish the altar. This is a culture that has faith.

Having faith and living righteously all pay off in the next life, when the virtuous one gets reincarnated in a higher form, one step closer to Nirvana. To keep in touch with the spiritual world, folks have taken to wearing sacred symbols, literally close to the heart.

Spirituality as an Industry

The amulet market I visited was a strip of sidewalk by the temple complex, Wat Mahathat. I was planning on souvenir shopping because after all, who doesn't need a little help in the areas of health, wealth, and general success?

One stand had back issues of amulet magazines for collectors keeping up with the industry. A few issues were opened to bloody photos of accidents next to close ups of the amulet responsible for the miraculous survival. I quickly realized that my lack of Thai language skills and relative ignorance meant I was out of my league. Unless I wanted to walk home with a bunch of overpriced fakes and made up miracle stories, I was better off leaving the spiritual shopping to the professionals.

Most of the browsing was at the stands of freelance dealers with their offerings spread out, picnic blanket style. On the shopfront side of the street were passageways made up of permanent stalls with locked glass counters and certificates of authenticity. Collectors peered through microscopes at the tainted, dusty surfaces of trinkets for...well, here's what they might be looking for...

First of all, an authentic amulet must be made of the right material, the most traditional being bronze, clay, plaster, or gold. (Plastic is considered incapable of transmitting spirituality.) For an extra dose of power, ashes from holy texts are mixed into the formula.

Secondly, a monk needs to activate the amulet with spells. Pieces blessed by a true guru monk with a history of putting out miraculous charms are worth more than the output of a young, unproven monk.

But what really gives an amulet value is a history of miracles and other protective feats. On that matter, Thai-



land-based writer, Philip Cornwell-Smith pointed out an irony: the lucky survivor profiled in an amulet magazine would be reported in the daily papers as simply a victim of terrible injuries. It's all a matter of perspective.

What would Buddha think?

The use of charms flourished during a period in Thailand when warfare and mass migrations were a constant threat. Mass produced images of the Buddha in portable form helped keep his teachings from dying out. Unfortunately, the trend today sees amulets losing touch with the teachings of Dharma and gaining an "all-in-one" magic charm status.

More optimistic Buddhist teachers see it this way: amulets could serve as crutches for the spiritually underdeveloped. After all, if wearing an amulet helps you remember to behave virtuously, who's to say that good things wouldn't happen? (Certainly not the laws of karma.) Why not use an amulet to get into the righteous frame of mind until that frame of mind becomes natural?

Deciding to go with the "amulets as a spiritual crutch" approach, I bought a handful of assorted deities at 3 bhat a piece. Picking them out of a pile of new, yet identically worn down pieces, I couldn't tell if they were of plastic or clay.

In the days that followed, I stopped looking down the shirts of men and started asking about their charms directly. What might amulets mean to people on a personal level, away from the hard sell of the market dealers?

The bellhop at the hotel was shy about pulling his out. His pendant was a symbol and of a material from his mother's village. He said he wore it for a sense of security.

The owner of a foreign bookstore willingly showed me his but waved aside my questions of magic spells and religious significance. "I don't wear this image because it has a meaning. I wear it for me. I wear it for my mind." He tapped his temples and waved his hands in the air above his head. Though he downplayed the significance of holy symbolism, his gesture suggested that a connection between him and a greater power somehow exists after all.

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IT

Turn On, Tune In, and Zune Out

The Zune gets social in the crowded MP3 market. By Robert Estel

I'm sure you've noticed the somewhat subtle, yet colorful change from the standard MD player to MP3 player. When visiting any electronic store, you're bound to notice how the music player line up runs the gamut from Toshiba to Panasonic to Sony MP3 players. Of course, they are all competing against one player, the iPod. That is about to change however, if Microsoft has anything to say about it.

Microsoft, the eternal enemy of Apple in the PC and software industries, is stepping into the MP3 player ring, taking on all contenders with their new player, the Zune. As zany as the name sounds, Microsoft is banking on this to take the market share back from Apple. Whether they get to take a bite out of the big one, however, remains to be seen. Microsoft has added the tagline "Welcome to the Social," to signify that music on their player doesn't have to be locked down to one computer, or even one player. The Zune comes not only with a 30-gigabyte hard drive, built in radio FM-tuner, and a three inch color screen, but also comes with wireless networking, or Wi-Fi—and the ability to share songs with other players around you.

The Zune also plays your videos and pictures, and con-

nects to your Xbox 360 for music, video, and photo streaming. Playable formats at this point include MP3, aac, wma, wmv, avi, mpeg4, and jpg, with a battery playback time of roughly 14 hours. The initial colors include white, black, and brown. Not quite as colorful as the other players, but it gets the business done.

Sounds good, but what are the downsides? Well for starters, it's from Microsoft, which is more than enough for some people. While designed well, Wi-Fi limits you to sharing a song with someone for a maximum of three plays, or three days, whichever comes first. Also, after sharing a song with someone, you can't send it again. While this wouldn't be too bad of a limitation if it were limited to songs from the Zune store (Microsoft's answer to Apples Music Store), it is actual-

ly limited to anything you put on a Zune. Secondly, not all the features promoted are actually available out of the box, prompting users to wait for software or firmware updates. Lastly? There are currently no release plans for Japan.

Those wanting to get social will have to find someone to ship it from home. For the time being, I think I'll rock on with my sushi-shaped MP3 player. **W**



INVESTMENTS

The Property Market in Thailand

From hippie trail hangout to luxury international property market in a decade: Thailand obviously has a lot going for it. It's become the most popular South Asian country for holidaymakers, and even the recent military coup and the 2004 tsunami's devastating blow has not dented the public's fondness for this beautiful and incredibly hospitable country.

Quotes like: "Thailand property market promising," "Thailand's real-estate market records significant gains" and "Thai property market likely to grow 10 percent this year" are increasingly seen.

Tourism figures are very near the level they were pre-tsunami and overseas investors have treated Thailand as they would any other market—that is on its own merits and prospects for investment returns. The Thai government however doesn't make it easy for foreigners to own a property on its shores.

Except in exceptional circumstances, foreigners (*farangs*) are prohibited from owning land—but there are various tried-and-tested ways around the ruling. One of the most popular is to form a limited company with a group of Thai nationals—although a foreign investor must always have a minority stake, he or she is made the sole director, with 100 percent control of the company.

You could also nominate a Thai to obtain a mortgage and lease his purchase to you; a legally binding clause in the contract can extend the lease for up to 90 years. A variation on this is the 'lease with option to buy,' which gives the lessee the right to buy the property outright should a future change in Thai law permit it.

The rationale behind the ownership rules is to avoid free-market speculation that could drive prices up too high for the domestic market. The no-hassle

way to own a property in your own name is to buy into a condominium development where Thai nationals own the majority of the units.

Main Reasons Why Thailand is a Desirable Investment Location

Thailand has recently attracted significant foreign investment and is one of the fastest-growing economies in the region. An exotic long haul destination, Thailand has great universal appeal boasting beautiful mountains, dense forests and stunning beaches and a tropical climate with cities teeming with culture and colour.

Thailand has good schools, an efficient health care system and is seen as a friendly country in which to live or visit. Retirement visas are available for foreigners over 50 years of age subject to status. Property prices remain far below those in more established Asian countries, although they are growing quickly and strongly.

The completion of the Suvarnabhumi-Bangkok International Airport (SBIA) has spurred growth in commercial property markets in eastern Bangkok and has made Thailand even more accessible by air. The country has strong business links with China and an excellent infrastructure as well as world-class facilities in many resort towns.

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Making A Point

Stuart Larman finds out why alternative medicine is making its way into mainstream sports.

It seems that the stakes in professional sports are much higher than ever before. No longer can an athlete rely on natural ability alone as their bodies are pushed far beyond what many can imagine. As these demands create an ever-expanding list of career-stuttering injuries, Western medicine has gradually been accompanied with alternative forms of rehabilitation. From osteopathy to herbal medicine, an increasing acceptance of alternative medicine, which not only deals with the damage itself but treatment of the whole body, has assisted in the ever-changing face of sports.

Such cross-cultural exchanges of knowledge are the next progression in the continuous advancement of professional sports.

One field that has become increasingly common on the treatment tables is acupuncture. "The main focus of acupuncture is to deal with the source of the problem and not just the problem itself," explains experienced acupuncturist Hirotaka Itoh, "which means it's especially good as treatment for muscle treatment, ligament injuries and surgery recovery."

Itoh's own experience in dealing with athletes started when a student at university. "In sports acupuncture terms I had the best possible introduction," he beams with a wry smile, "at university I was treating members of the American football team...they had all sorts of problems!"

It is certainly true that acupuncture has an important role to play in contact sports but it is just as vital in overcoming wear and tear on the body in sports that rely less on brawn.

Many familiar baseball names rely on acupuncture. New Boston Red Sox pitcher Daisuke Matsuzaka is a regular patient, while Ichiro Suzuki's private physio is

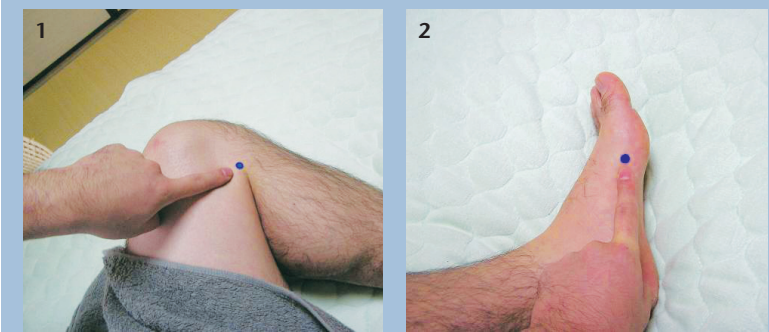
well-accustomed to supplementing preparations with acupuncture. Even in Europe where skepticism towards acupuncture is still common, the true benefits have been discovered in a number of sports. A surprising number of top professional football clubs in Europe have physiotherapists that are trained to use the alternative treatment. One standout example comes from Scotland where national team player Steven Pressley has become a big fan after acupuncture assisted his quick recovery from a dead leg in time to play for the national team a few days later. He was widely quoted

as saying "I picked up a knock (that) made for a really uncomfortable 25 minutes until the end of the match. I had another course (of acupuncture) and there has been definite improvement in the injury over the last couple of days."

This has caught the attention of others, and Itoh has been invited to join another top Scottish soccer club, "it's a fantastic opportunity, as while I will be offering guidance on acupuncture I will be learning equally as much about how acupuncture can be used with top athletes in Europe," he says.

Such cross-cultural exchanges of knowledge are the next progression in the continuous advancement of professional sports. With acupuncture leading the way, expect the next generation of athletes to be supported in a manner that puts them one step closer to perfection.

Hirotaka Itoh is the owner of Hiro Acupuncture Clinic in Saginuma, 20 minutes from Shibuya. Itoh is a student of world-renowned acupuncturist Kiko Matsumoto and has been practicing for over five years. To make an appointment at Hiro Acupuncture Clinic call Hirotaka on 090-2847-7523 or email hari-kyuu-hiro@h.vodafone.ne.jp. For further information check www.acp-hiro.com.



Do-It-Yourself Sports Injury Treatment

The treatment should not be exclusive to the professional. Here, Hirotaka Itoh explains how the pain from a twisted ankle can be relieved with a simple technique.

"Bend your knee so that a line appears (1). Identify the "line end point" (2) and massage that area firmly for around five minutes. If the problem persists repeat the treatment."

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SPECIAL FEATURE

New Year's Resolution Special!

Expert tips on how to keep your resolutions. By Cat Stewart



If you're anything like me, the beginning of the year is the perfect time to set yourself some unrealistic goals. You start dreaming of the perfect you; the you that you really wish you could be—tall, fit, and smart, with the perfect job and the perfect family. Oh, the possibilities. And then reality kicks in and you're back on your unhealthy, imperfect routine.

But not this year. This year, thanks to this handy guide, you will keep your resolutions. Read on for what the experts have to say.

Resolution 1:

Keeping Your House Clean

This is a big one. You're busy, you're family is busy, and the housework gets neglected. The neighbours don't

contained, these necessities become easier to look at, and easier to find.

These small steps can go a long way to making your life more comfortable. And if you do fall behind with the housekeeping, help is at hand:

www.chezvous.co.jp.

Resolution 2:

Finding Fulfilment at Work and Improving Yourself

More often than not, we find ourselves not where we want to be, professionally. When it comes to our careers, we may find ourselves unfulfilled, yet unsure of how to proceed, and insecure about our potential. Not this year, however. This year you will be all that you

know you can be, and get the qualifications and skills to have the job of your dream. Philip O'Neill from McGill MBA University, however, suggests that we follow our heart for the road to success.

In work and in life, do what you are good at and what you enjoy doing: don't try to fill in weaknesses, instead uncover your strengths and run with them.

know it, but behind closed doors your home is a complete disaster zone in between weekend cleaning binges. Never fear, Chez Vous, the top, foreigner-friendly maid and babysitting service provider, have some great tips for a clean start in 2007!

EXPERT TIPS:

- Tip number one: open the windows in the morning and during the cleaning. Let the air circulate and bring some positive energy to your home. Even the Tokyo air is fresher than your shoe closet!
- Tip number two: shine those metallic taps and mirrors. Don't let a layer of dust get in the way of your hair styling in the morning! This household chore is one of the easiest to take care of.
- Tip number three: buy a tray. This is a great little trick for dealing with all the loose coins from your pockets, the receipts from your wallet, the keys you would otherwise be looking for every morning. When

EXPERT TIPS:

- In work and in life, do what you are good at and what you enjoy doing: don't try to fill in weaknesses, instead uncover your strengths and run with them.
- To develop as a manager or businessperson and move up in your career, study while you are working with experienced people with a wide range of backgrounds. This allows you to reflect on the concepts that you are learning and apply what is appropriate in your work. You could find such an opportunity in the McGill MBA Japan program.
- If you have been thinking about starting a program of study, make this year the starting point. Go ahead and do it. Check out www.mcgillmbajapan.com.

Resolution 3:

Be a more well-rounded person... or make it a goal.

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the past for lack of time, but spreading your wings in different directions could be just the thing for reevaluating your priorities and direction. For inspiration, we turned to a Jack Nicklaus Golf Center professional golf instructor, Yukiko Fukawa for her thoughts. She gave us advice on improving your life through your golf swing—because in the game of life, the same rules apply.

EXPERT ADVICE

- New motto: “I will think positively.” You must commit to a positive attitude that will allow you to mentally improve your golf game. Making a habit of repeating a positive statement a few times a day, every day, 365 days a year will help your golf.

Consider telling yourself: “I am healthy and strong, I’m thinking positively. I will become a better golfer because I know I can do it. When I really make an effort to do something, I have always succeeded. I can see myself in the future with a smile on my face because I accomplished my goal!”

- Pick a pro-golfer the same age as you and study his/her swing. Look at swing sequences everyday. Have copies of that swing on your bathroom mirror, fridge, desk, car, anywhere. Just having an image of a good swing will help you improve your own swing.

- Decide on goals to commit to: break 100, 90, 80, or play 50 more rounds this year, take 10, 20, 30, lessons, etc. A concrete number will make your resolution more REAL and clear. So take a good look at your skills and priorities and set a decisive goal for yourself!

Resolution 4:

Making your Child a Genius

Now, you yourself may not be the brightest star in the sky. But we all want our kids to be better than ourselves. You may love you children just the way they are, but wouldn’t it be cool if they turned out to be little geniuses as well?

All joking aside, there are lots of things that can be done to ensure your child is nurtured in the best educational environment for his or her needs. So without further ado, here are some expert tips from Gymboree instructors on how to do this.

EXPERT TIPS:

- Relationships and experiences children have in their first three years of life have a profound impact on their future. Gymboree focuses on helping children acquire the key ingredients—motor skills, social skills and self-esteem—they need to grow into confident, happy and successful people.
- Opportunities to play are really opportunities to learn. During play children learn and practice social skills, develop cognitive abilities like problem solving, and refine language skills.
- Kids love to move and need to move! During classes, children should learn good sportsmanship skills in a fun, non-competitive environment that emphasizes cooperative play and movement. Your child should learn how to take turns, communicate in a group atmosphere and collaborate with peers.

Resolution 5:

Improve your Japanese (finally)

In Japan, lack of language skills makes everything more difficult. You envy the foreigners who tackled the *nihongo* hurdle face on and survived. We de-

cided to pick the brain of Ben, once a “Japanese as a second language” learner, today a bilingual sales professional. His main suggestion was to focus and decide what you really want to study, be it conversation, business, kanji, etc. Is your purpose to function at work or do you just need everyday phrases for getting by?

EXPERT TIPS:

- For conversation there are many good classes and even some free at your local municipal office, but nothing beats a one on one language exchange. Try language exchange cafés or look for a potential language partner through classifieds in the free magazines.
- For business Japanese it’s best to choose a reputable language school (recognized by the Association for the Promotion of Japanese Language Education). If you are a working professional, try to get classes

So take a good look at your skills and priorities and set a decisive goal for yourself!

before work when your mind can focus more easily. Plus you can try out what you have learned with your Japanese colleagues.

Goal-wise, always look towards the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) as your would-be employers would look at this to measure your level of proficiency.

- Problem sticking with the books? Try alternative approaches to learning such as flashcards (good for kanji), online tutorials, even a great cell phone service called Tango Town <http://tangotown.jp> with phrase books, and daily mini lessons.

With these tips, you too could become a fully functioning, literate, even integrated member of Japanese society.

Resolution 6:

Improving your health and fitness

Maybe you’ve yo-yoed through every diet out there or perhaps you just need to freshen up after a season of holiday feasting. Either way, resolutions to keep fit are usually the hardest to keep. Luckily, Yuomi Kikuchi, manager of the Grand Hyatt Hotel Roppongi’s Nagomi Spa and Fitness Club, has manageable advice for keeping your body healthy.

EXPERT TIPS

- Start your day by eating fruits in the morning with yogurt. The sugars and vitamins will give essential energy for starting the day and a boost to your immune system.
- When breathing, take deep breaths in and out for stabilization of the mind. This will increase the oxygen level in the blood, helping you relax, while at the same time increasing brain activity.
- Implement a small amount of exercise on a daily basis, even just five minutes of cardio a day (think taking the stairs at work). These short sessions of activity will go a long way to improving your health.

So, what are you waiting for?

A big thank you to all the experts for providing us with their tips, and now it’s up to you to keep those New Year’s resolutions. I know I’ll make a sincere effort to. See you this time next year, and I’ll introduce you to the new and improved me.

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KIDS (AND PARENTS!)

Running toward the future in Ethiopia

Melissa Feineman interviews Tesfaye Gelaye about his inspirational project.

Name: Tesfaye Gelaye
Time in Japan: 31 years
Hometown: Wallo, Ethiopia

What is your relationship to Japan?

I originally came here on a UNESCO scholarship in 1975. At that time I began studying ceramics (*yakimono*). Throughout my time in Japan, I've had the honor of displaying my work in various locations and to many esteemed visitors, including several generations of Ethiopian Ambassadors.

What is the name of your school?

I have been thinking to call it Abebe Bekla Agricultural School. Abebe Bekla is a well-known Ethiopian in Japan. He ran in the Olympics in Rome in 1960—barefoot. He also won the marathon in Tokyo in 1964. For this reason I want to incorporate running in the curriculum. The students will wake up in the morning, go running, eat breakfast, and then go to school.

Where is the school located?

It is in Yaya Gulele Woreda which is about 90 kilometers from Addis Ababa, on Kajima Road, which was built by a Japanese company.

What age group will the students be?

They will be high school graduates, which means that they will have completed through the 10th grade. They will be around 18 years old when they start the program, and the schooling will last for two years.

How is Japan involved in the project?

The project is actually a triangle, formed by my NPO, Ethiopian Future Children, JICA (who will provide the funding), and the Ethiopian government who is providing the land.

When do you expect the school to open?

In fall 2008.

What will the curriculum include?

Students will learn farming (using techniques such as irrigation and water management), running, health and family planning, and crafts. We will start out with 30 students and each year add more. The idea is that this school will be self-supporting. The students will produce fruits and vegetables (mostly indigenous to Ethiopia such as avocado, tomato, flowers, eggs, and chickens, but with some input from the Japanese farm-



Teifaye Gelaye exhibits his ceramics.

ers) and their crafts which they will take to the capital to sell and use the profits to fund the school.

What are your plans for the future?

In addition to building the school, I would like to focus on my artwork, my *yakimono*.

If you are interested in contributing to Ethiopian Future Children, please contact Tesfaye Gelaye, 769 Tegoshi Kasama-shi, Ibaraki-ken 309-1621, or email: tesfayegelaye@hotmail.com.



SCHOOLS' NEWS

Zoo-riffic Learning!

What is Zoophonics? It doesn't involve any elephants or giraffes, but it does make learning to read a fun and exciting activity for young children. The Zoophonics method incorporates a combination of phonetic sounds and arm signals, which means that children are using their bodies and ears as well as their minds. If you've ever spent much time around a toddler, you know that this type of activity is great for their wiggly bodies and inquisitive minds.

At the Kinshicho branch of Zoophonics Academy, children aged two to three (the Missy Mouse class) learn about subjects ranging from early reading and writing to math, music, and art from this California-based curriculum. The focus is on phonics, but the material is presented in a fun and meaningful way for each age group. Some of the entertaining phonics-based activities include letter egg hunts and musical letters.

In addition to the preschool program described above, Zoophonics Kinshicho offers after-school classes for kindergarten and elementary school students from age three to twelve.

While developing independent readers and writers is an important part of the Zoophonics curriculum, there is also room for fun as students participate in special activities throughout the year including a yearly field trip with parents, Christmas and Halloween parties, and Spring and Summer camps (open to anyone who would like to get a short glimpse of the full-time program). For more information, please contact Connie Wright on 03-5610-7056 or email kinshicho@zoo-phonics.jp.



KIDS (AND PARENTS!)

Big Toys for the Little Boys...and Girlies to Boot!

By Samantha Zoe Cairney

Tucked away under Kasai Station on the Tozai Line rests the Tokyo Metro Subway Museum. A treasure train trove of delights where Dad or Mum's trainspotter ego can escape out of the closet, don the dusty duffle coat, stand next to the kids dribbling with delight and still not look out of place. A life size platform greets you at the entrance, complete with an original Ginza and a Marunouchi subway car. Absolutely guaranteed to get your kids squealing with glee as they race on ahead to investigate the interiors. And if that doesn't get you and yours clutching your pencils so hard that you end up snapping them, just wait until you see the simulator section! Three simulators where you can sit, press levers, apply brakes, honk the horn and pretend to drive around the many subways in Tokyo. No insurance needed, or a uniform (apart from your duffle coat that is), and your safety is assured. The only snag is when the time comes for your little one to finish...because it's Daddy's go now....which has been known to prompt a kind of screeching, thrashing wildly about on the floor type of response! But that's okay because it means you can have more time to do the "virtual" tour whilst your little diamond calms down.

Lots of exhibits detailing the history of the Tokyo Subway System and models of the trains. The large scale model of Tokyo showing all the trains lit up, traveling around on their daily routes was especially popular with kids of all ages. Fifty pairs of eyeballs, heads all moving in the same direction, little hands and noses suckered (not too flatteringly I may add) onto the glass screen, totally en-

grossed in all the comings and goings!! A little shop sells souvenirs and you can buy little stamp books for your kids. They can then enjoy rampaging around the museum and collecting the many stamp designs in their books...or on their limbs, the walls, other folks' limbs, clothing, etc. There are two types of stamp books. One costs ¥100, the other ¥200. If you buy the ¥200 one and collect all the stamps in the museum, you are then entitled to a free gift when you leave.

The museum is on one level so it's pram/wheelchair friendly. Changing facilities are available for babies and toddlers. There is a room with tables and chairs if you need to graze. It's perfect for packed lunches. Drink and snack type vending machines are also there if you so desire. There's even a small selection of books to entertain your child or for you to hide behind if your little rugrat is playing up!

I highly recommend visiting this place. My little girl and boy adored it! I had to drag them out and for a mere ¥400 we had a few hours of fun on an overcast day. What more could you ask for?

Open from 10am-5pm. Last entrance 4:30pm. Closed Mondays. When Monday is a national holiday, the museum is closed on Tuesdays.



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FUN FACTS

Happy Year of the Wild Boar!

Here are some fun facts about this sign from the Chinese horoscope.

- The name for wild boar in Japanese is *inoshisi*, and the kanji is 亥.
- According to Japanese astrology, the 12th sign of the zodiac is the wild boar, but Chinese astrology considers the 12th animal to be a pig. This is why this sign is sometimes



referred to as wild boar, and sometimes as pig.

- Wild boars were born in 1995, 1983, 1971, and 1959.
- People born in the year of the wild boar are generous and kind to a fault, perfectionist, and love living in luxury. They also have hearts of gold and will truly be friends for life.
- The major flaw of wild boars is their quick temper, and they can also seem snobbish at times.
- 2007 is the year of the Fire Pig. Those born this year (or in 1947) are known as fire pigs, and have a clever wit and well-rounded talents, and will be lucky in love and life.
- Suggested careers for wild boars include artist, entertainer, and lawyer.



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FINE DINING: L'ATELIER DE JOËL ROBUCHON

An Old, Reliable Friend

By Christine Cunanan-Miki

With so many world-class restaurants in Tokyo, it's hard to name a favorite. When my husband and I want a great dinner with a particular set of good friends (a French-Filipino couple, to be exact), however, you'll probably find us on a Saturday night at one of the window tables at the L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon in Roppongi Hills.

I've long been a fan of the master chef since his days at Jamin, his Parisian restaurant, and all through his various endeavors in Tokyo including the Taillevent Robuchon and most recently the Restaurant Joël Robuchon and La Table de Joël Robuchon in Ebisu.

them to tears. Another time, my husband and I came just for plates of spaghetti with tomato and basil (one of the best I've had!) and ended up participating in a discussion started by a young New Yorker who announced that she had played a bit part in the US sitcom *Sex and the City*. In New York, I lunched with a passionate gourmet who was probably one of the restaurant's best clients, because we kept getting all these freebies courtesy of the chef (and still my bill for two courses and half of a dessert came up to \$120), while all around us men and women who looked like they had stepped out of *Vogue* nibbled on tapas.

LJR in Tokyo is just as fun and expensive, unless you take advantage of the lunch set menus or are prepared to eat very little. The food is dished up with the same French verve, although somehow the taste and presentation are much more refined—perhaps because this is Japan.

Our most recent meal, a multi-course tasting menu (*Decouverte*, ¥12,600), began with two divine palate-teasers (and artery-busters): a glass of smokey foie gras flan topped with foam of parmesan cheese, followed by the fattiest and most delectable slices of Iberico ham I have had in recent memory. Interestingly, this very same foie

gras flan was served to me in LJR in New York a week later, and it had a stronger, punchier flavor perhaps to suit the aggressiveness of the city and its residents. The Iberico ham and I also encountered each other again in New York, but it was definitely Tokyo's version that got my heart thumping.

Because this is not really fine dining, the rest of the *Decouverte* menu was hit-and-miss, but many were scrumptious and the others were at least enjoyable. Standouts included Robuchon's take on *Coquilles St. Jacques* (and in this case, fresh scallops were seared to perfection and then left to sizzle with herb butter in their shells, rather than served with cream); a thick marron soup with shaved truffles, chunky bits of bacon and very discernible pieces of boiled chestnut; and a fatty, juicy entrecote of beef that came covered with truffles and served with garlic-mashed potatoes. I am not a potato person but even I found myself scraping the bottom of my little pot.

One thing's for sure, though—apart from excellent food and wine, you'll never know what to expect at an LJR. I recently sat through a five-course lunch in Paris by myself, desperate for a last proper French meal before 12 hours on the plane back to Tokyo, sandwiched in-between a Portuguese banker in town for the day who wanted to retire and design dresses instead, and an elderly French couple who said they ate here once a week because otherwise life bored

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Christine Miki spends most of her time in restaurants and airplanes, indulging her two great passions (food and travel). To keep up her credit card payments, she does market research for investment firms. To humor herself, she wrote *Tokyo Stories* (www.tokyostories.net), a novel on expatriate life. Someday, she is actually going to finish her second novel. Email her at: christine.cunanan-miki@weekenderjapan.com.

WHAT TO EAT

The Menu *Decouverte* (¥12,600) is a great way to sample Joël Robuchon's specialties. Also, this is a French restaurant but so far I've never had spaghetti I didn't like in an LJR anywhere in the world. The sauce changes with the seasons, but right now they may still have spaghetti with regular truffles (¥3,600) or with the famous Alba truffles (¥11,500).

and never without his fashionable pair of Alexander McQueen glasses, is the chief sommelier. Look for him, mention the name "Bertrand" and ask for unusual, good-value wines that will complement your orders. He only orders small lots from France and has many interesting options in his cave.

WHERE TO SIT

We like the tables for four by the window and can sit here all evening. Book in advance if you can.

WHAT TO DRINK

Diego Requena, newly-arrived from Paris

HOW MUCH DID IT COST?

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DIVERSIONS BY OWEN SCHAEFER

Pianos, prizes and praise

Israeli piano duo Sivan Silver and Gil Garburg started out by winning awards as solo pianists. Then, in 1997, they came together to form a duo, calling themselves (logically enough) the Silver-Garburg Piano Duo. The alliance was a solid one, and to no one's surprise, led to even more awards. A lot more.

Silver and Garburg have taken top prizes at more than a dozen competitions, including the *Brahms International Competition, Hamburg*, the *Hannover Musikhochschule Wettbewerb* in Germany, the *Franco Gulli Prix*, the *IBLA Grand Prize*, and...well, you get the idea. The list, and perhaps the Liszt, goes on and on.

Performing on two pianos, or four-handed at a

single keyboard, the duo claim a wide repertoire of pieces, including plenty of requisite classics but also branching into lesser-known contemporary composers.



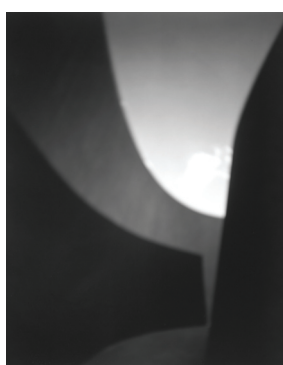
Silver-Garburg Piano Duo (Jan. 18) Tsuda Hall. Sendagaya JR Station. ¥3,800 (¥2,000 for students) 2pm. Tel. 03-5465-1233. E-mail: aro-k@arion-edo.org. www.arion-edo.org/ticket

Not your Average Joe

It could be that you're familiar with Hiroshi Sugimoto's work, and just don't know it. Tokyoites were treated to an enormous selection of the photographer's work at the Mori Art Museum earlier this year, and the resultant advertising campaign saw his well-known polar bear diorama and film screen photos plastered all over subway stations and billboards.

While the Koyanagi show seems like a mere snack by comparison, it would take more space than I have to try to explain the depth of ideas behind *Art Capturing*. But to keep it simple: each of the blurry black and white prints is a shot taken from within a large sculpture titled *Joe*, which itself sits within the courtyard of the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts building, which

in turn was designed by Tadao Ando. As with all of Sugimoto's work, there is a deep pool of concept beneath the surface of each image, but they are mesmerizing regardless, as foreground and background flip-flop and the narrow spaces of *Joe* become cavernous and labyrinthine. As an added bonus, two of Sugimoto's trigonometric form sculptures, which he used for his conceptual form series, stand enigmatically among the prints, adding a further layer to the palimpsest.



(left) Conceptual Form 009 Surface of revolution with constant negative curvature 2006 (right) Conceptual Form 008 Generalized helicoids developable surface on an ellipsoid of revolution 2006



Hiroshi Sugimoto: Art Capturing (to Jan. 27) Gallery Koyanagi. Ginza Station (JR, Metro). Free. 11am-7pm (Closed Sun. & Mon.) Tel. 03-3561-1896. www.gallerykoyanagi.com

Waking up the New National Theatre



Tchaikovsky's ballets were received with little more than a murmur in his own day. He produced only three, and *Sleeping Beauty* is the longest, and arguably the grandest, of them all. Based on a mixture of the Grimm and Perrault versions of the famous folk tale, Tchaikovsky's work has become a classic version unto itself.

What could be better to open a new season of ballet and contemporary dance at the New National Theatre than a fairy tale of awakenings? The cast is headed by Russian dancer Anastasiya Chernenko from the Kiev Ballet and this season's special guest dancer from the Bolshoi Theatre, Denys Matviyenko, who took last year's grand prize at the International Ballet Competition and Contest of Choreographers in Moscow. Be sure to get your own beauty sleep before you attend. Tchaikovsky isn't one to let you nod off lightly.

Sleeping Beauty (Feb. 1-Feb. 4) New National Theatre. Hatsudai Station (Keio Line). ¥1,500-¥9,450. Various times. Tel. 03-5351-3011. www.nntt.jac.go.jp/English

Listings:

- **Jason Teraoka: Neighbors** (to Jan. 13) Series of unsettling characters from the Hawaiian painter. Hara Museum of Contemporary Art. Shinagawa Station. ¥1,000. 11am-5pm (Wed. to 8pm). Closed Mon. Tel. 03-3445-0651. www.haramuseum.or.jp
- **Boroboro Dorodoro** (to Jan. 28) Cardboard and painting works from New York artist Taylor Mckimens, and local Misaki Kawai. Watari Museum. Gaienmae Metro Station. ¥1,000. 11am-7pm (Tue. to 9pm). Closed Mon. Tel. 03-3402-3001. www.watarium.co.jp
- **From Impressionism to Twentieth-Century Art** (to Apr. 8) Like the title says: a wide-reaching overview from the museum vaults. Bridgestone Museum of Art. Tokyo Station (JR, Metro). ¥800. 10am-8pm (Sun. to 6pm). Tel. 03-3563-0241. www.bridgestone-museum.gr.jp
- **Mummy: The Inside Story** (Oct. 7-Feb. 18) Documentary (dubbed in Japanese) and 3-D computer models studying the inside of a sealed Egyptian mummy. National Science Museum. Ueno Station (JR, Metro). ¥1,200. 9am-5pm. Closed Mon. Tel. 03-3822-0111. www.kahaku.go.jp

- **Las Vegas Illusion** (to Jan. 28) Magic on tour with illusionist Peter Gossamer. Shinagawa Prince Hotel. Shinagawa Station (JR). ¥4,000-5,000. Various times. Tel. 03-3498-9999. www.princehotels.co.jp/shinagawa/
- **Cirque du Soleil "Dralion"** (Feb. 7-May. 6) World-renowned Canadian acrobat troupe combines East and West in their latest show. Harajuku New Big Top. Harajuku Station (JR). ¥7,500-¥11,500. Various times. Tel. 03-3498-9999. www.alegria2.jp
- **Chicago** (Feb. 8-Mar. 4) Tour of the Broadway musical. Get it while it's hot. Nissay Theatre. Yurakucho Station (JR, Metro). ¥9,000-¥13,000. Various times. Tel. 03-5815-5452. www.chicago2007.jp

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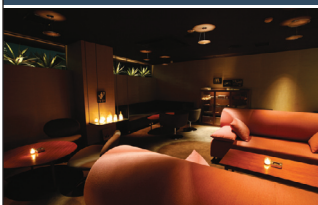


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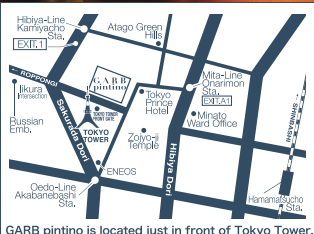
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MOVIE PLUS WITH BILL HERSEY

Movie News



Here for Sony Picture's *Casino Royale* promotion, Director Martin Campbell, Eva Green, producer Barbara Broccoli, executive producer Callum McDougall.



Eva Green charmed the audience.



The Haitian Ambassador Jean Claude with Adogony, the actor from Benin (*Miracle Banana*).



Steve Haynes and US actress Brittany Murphy for the movie *Ramen Girl*.



Director of *Ramen Girl* Robert A. Ackerman and Steve Haynes.

If you keep up with the cinema scene here, you know that Korean films have really been doing good box office business. Korean stars, especially the actors, have almost caused riots when they made public appearances in Roppongi Hills and some of the theaters around town. Lots of young—as well as not so young—women waited hours and sometimes all night to see, and try to get a photo of stars such as Bae Youngjun, Jang Donggeon, etc.

Asian Airlines is so impressed with the popularity of Korean films overseas, they've decorated some of their aircraft with film clips of Korea's best-known actors, actresses and rock stars.

Korea's government has committed big bucks to the country's film business with high hopes of getting a bigger share of the international film market.

With trendier films, and more and more state of the art theaters, admissions soared up about 30 percent in Korea last year. The Japanese are a fickle market, constantly looking for something new. Unfortunately many of the Korean films that were shown here recently did not bring in the money distributors had anticipated. The same thing can be said about Chinese films. It'll be interesting seeing how this all develops in 2007.

British actress Helen Mirren has always been one of my favorites, (*Calendar Girls* etc.) and really happy for all the acclaim she's receiving (even Oscar talk) for her portrayal of Queen Elizabeth in the film *The Queen*. She really looks the part, and from all reports really gets into the Queen's personality during the days before and after Princess Diana's tragic death.

I got to know Helen when she was here for the Tokyo International Film Festival with her then-boyfriend, later husband, Director Taylor Hackford (*La*

Bamba, *Blood In Blood Out*, *Delores Clairbourne*). Helen and Taylor are very special people.

In addition to all the great plays and musicals in London's West End, the British are really making it big on the movie and TV scene. Stars like Clive Owen, Daniel Craig, Jude Law, Judith Dench, and, as I said, Helen Mirren are fast gaining popularity the world over in everything from heavy historical dramas to unbeatable English comedy.

I love historical stuff and just finished the HBO series *Rome*. Even though there was talk of some censorship in Liberal London, I thought it was one of the best mini-series ever. Talk about a small world. About 20 years ago, I went to then-Yugoslavia to do publicity on a film *Kabuto*. Sho Kosugi (the Black Ninja) was shooting on location there. Both Sho and his son Kane starred in the film. Sho had also brought several actors including Christopher Lee and a young actress Polly Walker from London to be in the film. Frankly, I hadn't heard anything about Polly until I watched *Rome*. She has been highly acclaimed for her acting as Caesar's niece Atia in the series. It was also interesting to see producer Alan Paul in the mini series' credits. Alan spent some time in Japan with Director Paul Schrader when they did the controversial film *Mishima*. He's also producer for the popular American TV series *Six Feet Under*.

Kane Kosugi, by the way, has become a pop idol here. He, dressed like Johnny Depp's character Jack Sparrow, flew over the audience at Buena Vista's premiere *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*. You can also see him in security system Secom's TV commercial.

A star was born. You'll be seeing Tokyo's most popular foreign entertainer, Steve Haynes this February in the American film *Ramen Girl*. More on this later. **W**

NOW SHOWING



Charlotte's Web

The children's classic makes it to the big screen. Julia Roberts lends her voice to the role of Charlotte.



Letters from Iwo Jima

Truly moving story from the Japanese perspective. Directed by Clint Eastwood.



Casino Royale

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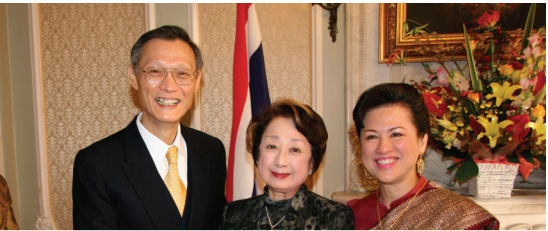


Nacho Libre

Sometimes, a man has to wear stretchy pants. Jack Black wears them thin in this less-than hilarious film.

PARTYLINE WITH BILL HERSEY

Simaskul's reception for H.M. King Bhumibol's birthday



Thai Ambassador Suvidhya Simaskul, his wife Boontipa, former popular actress and President, House of Councillors Chikage Oogi.



Group Captain and Mrs. Charnrit.



Moroccan Ambassador Abdelkader Lecheheb, Yemen Ambassador Ali Al-Sakkaf.



Jordan Ambassador Samir Naouri, his wife Shizuko, Lebanese Charge D'Affaires Toufic Jaber.



Thai Minister Pichai Israbhakdi, his wife Chiravattana.



Thai Ambassador Simaskul, Lilo Maruyama, Boontipa, Mitsuo Maruyama.



Malaysian Chief of Mission Ramlan Kimin, Omani First Secretary Humaid Al-Alawi.



Thai Army Attache Colonel Khitipob Guntasin, Canadian forces attache Stephen Eric King, Colonel Dan Melton, US Marine Corps-Marine Attache, US Embassy.



Sri Lankan Ambassador and Mrs. B.G. Ranjith Uyangoda, Croatian Ambassador Drago Stambuk.

Nov. 28, and starting my first Partyline copy at a "Malaysia 2007" tourism promotion press conference/reception at Hilton Tokyo. It brought back some great memories of my seven visits to that beautiful country, which is celebrating 50 years of nationhood. It's a truly fantastic place, and hope you'll be able to experience the country's many wonders at least once while you're in this part of the world.

Incredible India

If you've seen those incredible "Incredible India" commercials on CNN and BBC, I'm sure, you want to pack your bag, hop on Air India and take off for that beautiful, exotic, colorful and diverse country. Thanks to Taj Enterprise, I had an invitation to do just that. They were kind and generous enough to include me in a fashion group to India Dec. 6. They were going to show jewelry designer Kazuo Ogawa's latest creations, as well as Yumi Katsura's fashions in Bangalore and Mumbai. Long time friend African American supermodel Terri Coleman was also going, who I traveled to both India and China with for the late and great designer Ichiro Kimijima. Unfortunately, I got caught up in a lot of special happenings here and just couldn't get away. It was another of those times I wish I could have had a clone.

Flew to Honolulu on the 17th for what I knew would be a great holiday season (my fourth) with Bill and Charo Ireton, Bill's mom Kiko and their five children who I've really enjoyed watching grow up. More on this later.

One of my resolutions for 2007 is to travel even more than I already do. Priority first-time destinations include Argentina, Mongolia and Oman. Also want to revisit Tunisia, Vienna, New York city and Thailand.

Another resolution is to catch up on the column, and keep it more up-to-date. Let's get started on that now.

Philippine Celebration at the Hilton

As one of the many special events to celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Japan, Philippines Ambassador Domingo Saizon Jr. and his wife Kazuko (Kay) hosted a gala dinner in the Hilton Tokyo's Kiku Ballroom. Special guests included visiting Secretary of Tourism and Mrs. Joseph H. Durano and TIH Prince and Princess Hitachi. The superb dinner, the lively and colorful

Philippines folk dance show and interesting people there, all added up to a very special evening, perfect for the occasion.

Hilton Renovated

Still at the Hilton, General Manager Christian Baudat hosted a ribbon cutting followed by a reception on the occasion of the opening of their newly renovated executive lounge and guest rooms. The 173 guest rooms and suites as well as the lounge offer the best of everything (décor, ambience, comfort, service, etc.) for today's discerning business and leisure travelers.

Qatar National Day

On the occasion of their 35th national day, Qatar Ambassador Reyad Al-Ansari and his wife Muna hosted a well-attended reception at the New Otani. For the occasion, the Ambassador wore national costume. Muna was high fashion at its best—a long black dress and a beautiful pearl necklace and accessories. Their daughter Maha, who's really growing up, also looked great in a fashionable black dress.

I enjoyed introducing one of the world's top diabetes doctors, Kempei Matsuoka, to Bahrain Ambassador Khalil bin Ibrahim Hassan and his wife Salwa Almahroos. They're both doctors—he specializes in pediatrics, her specialty is diabetes. It's always fun introducing nice people to nice people, and happy to see they've become good friends.

Thai Celebration

It was cold and sort of gloomy when I got up the morning of Dec. 5—that was the day Thai Ambassador Suvidhya Simaskul, his wife Boontipa and their staff were hosting an 11am-2pm reception in their classically beautiful home and spacious garden. The occasion was to celebrate their highly respected and much loved King Bhumibol's Alulyady's birthday anniversary. This year also celebrate his majesty's 60th anniversary of ascension to the throne.

The many people there included top Japanese government officials, diplomats, and business leaders, other friends of Suvidhya and Boontipa, and members of the Thai community here. Everyone enjoyed the food, the live performance of traditional Thai music, and the ambience.

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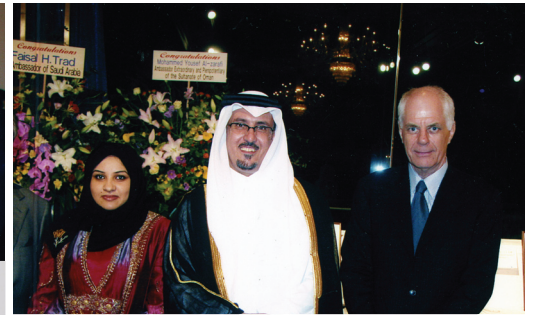
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PARTYLINE WITH BILL HERSEY

Qatar National Day Reception



UAE Ambassador Saeed Ali Al-Nowais, Iraqi Ambassador Ghanim Al-Jumaili, US Ambassador John Thomas Schieffer, his wife Susanne, Haiti Ambassador Jean Claude Bordes, Palestinian Ambassador Waleed Siam.



Qatar Minister Khalid Al-Baker, his wife Fawziya, Paul Jeffers.



Qatar Ambassador Reyad Al-Ansari, his wife Muna, US Ambassador Thomas Schieffer, his wife Susanne.



Julieta Osella (Argentina), Maya Daver Massion (Germany, India), Maha Al-Ansari (Qatar), Jennifer Kelley (America-Japan), Dima Siam (Palestine).

Philippines Gala Dinner



Hilton Tokyo General Manager Christian R. Baudat, Philippine Ambassador Domingo L. Siazon Jr., his wife Kazuko (Kay), ASEAN-Japan Center Secretary Gen. Nobutoshi Akao, Philippine Airlines General Manager Japan Danny Lim.



Nuzhat Niaz (Pakistan), Mori Art Museum Director Yoshiko Mori, Susanne Schieffer.



Lilo Maruyama, Lydia (Zsa Zsa) Carriedo (Spain), Fumiko Tottori.



Philippines Tourism Attache Benito (Bong) Bengzon, PAL General Manager (Japan, Korea) Danny Lim.



Popular Politician Yasuo and Mrs. Fukuda, US Ambassador Thomas Schieffer, Luz Stella Sierra (Columbia).



Philippines Secretary of Tourism Joseph Durano, TIH Prince and Princess Hitachi, Philippines Ambassador Domingo Siazon Jr., his wife Kazuko.

lers from all over the world. It's a marvelous blend of classic and contemporary culture that has so much to offer. It's best known for its beautiful beaches but you should travel to the north for the mountains, jungles, mountain tribes, golden triangle, and wonderful elephants. All this, plus the good, hospitable, friendly people.

I remember when Suvithya told me his wife Boontipa could do anything. She's constantly proving him right with her painting, singing, dancing and involvement in so many worthwhile projects. She's currently very busy as chairperson of the Ikebana International Fair, which will be held Mar. 4 at Tokyo Prince Hotel. For information on this call 03-3295-0720.

Sorry I Missed

As always (especially this time of year) had to miss several interesting and worthwhile events. These included a reception hosted by Portuguese Ambassador Joao Pedro Leone Zanatti and his wife Madalena at their home on the occasion of the visit of the Fado music group Madreus. The orchestra/vocalist presented a concert *Un Amor Infinito* at Bunkamura on Dec. 7.

Parties and Events

One of Tokyo's legendary Philanthropists, "Tokyo Grace" chairwoman Grace M. Saito presented another of her charity concerts. This one, which was to

help world eradication of polio, was one of the main events to celebrate Tokyo Grace's 15th anniversary. Both the Rotary Foundation Polio Plus Partner Committee and Tokyo Niki Kai Opera Foundation supported the project.

Internationally renowned art gallery owner Normal Tolman just never slows down. Tolman Collection Gallery's recent special happenings here in Tokyo included the *Color Your Life* exhibition of the work of six Chinese artists at Shinsei Bank's magnificent venue. For ten days in December there was an exhibition of Clifton Karhu's works at the Tolman Gallery. In addition to the artists' prints, they, of course, had his much sought-after calendars.

People

Just talked with former Tokyoites Ron and Marie Anderson. They live in New York city now, and keep as busy as they did here. In November, they spent three busy weeks in Korean, China, and Vietnam, and loved every minute of it.

A bit late on this, but they asked me to wish their many friends here all the best in 2007.

St. Mary's graduate John Ken Nuzzo, who's become well-known as an international opera singer, was here recently to perform in world-star Milva's concerts.



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Segafredo Zanetti President/Managing Director Asia Mitsuru Sakuraba with a group of his friends and business associates Ford Representative Director/President Korea Jae H. Jung, Jeweler Vanessa UHM, Segafredo Korea President/CEO Joo-Hyun Lee, Doctor UHM.



Ronna Fujisawa, Joe Mathews and Joe's great canine companion "Showtime."



One of Tokyo's top magic men, magician Dave Letendre.

Hilton Newly Renovated Executive Lounge Rooms Suites



Nippon Hilton Co. President Masahiro Nakajima, Hilton Tokyo General Manager Christian R. Baudat, Tokyo Urban Development Co. President Kazunori Kawakita.



Hilton Osaka General Manager Heinz J. Schwander, Markus Schueller Area Director of Food of Food and Beverage Hilton International.



Hilton Guam Resort and Spa General Manager Manfred Pieper, Hilton Tokyo Food and Beverage Manager Kuni Ogura.

In and Around



Bill Hersey and surfer/actor Claude Maki at the Sri Lankan Gala at Hilton.



Julian Cih (Brown University), Alok Parekh (Northwest University, Chicago), at home for the holidays.



The Okura's Kyoko Fujimoto, Hotel Okura Advisor Masahiko Maiya, baseball legend Wally Yonimine and his wife Jane at US Embassy Party.

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Tokyo Flashback to the Eurythmics

How Bill was Out-Fashioned in the Crazy 80s

Now everyone knows (or maybe they don't) that Bill Hersey is one style icon. When it comes to outfits, he definitely marches to the beat of his own idiosyncratic drum. But if there is anyone that can give him a run for his money in the fashion department, it's the Divine Diva herself, Ms. Annie Lennox. Understandably, Bill has nothing but praise for this style icon.



Laid back at the Lex (notice how cool Bill was back in the day).



That's fake fur!

The first time I met her, she came in with Dave Stewart, and she was dressed very strangely with that weird dress and wrap around her head. Dave's outfit on the other hand left no impression in comparison. But looking at the photo now, all these years later, he is actually dressed quite interestingly (see photo above).

They were both very nice. Of course we put them in the VIP corner, and I just loved her style. All her plaid stuff—I was really impressed. Somehow, we got to talking about kids and orphanages. She told me, even at that time, how interested she was in so many causes. I know that whenever there's any cause or event she's right there ready to help (charities supported by Annie Lennox include Make Trade Fair and Oxfam, among many others). She was really laid back, very laid back and cool.

Now, the first night Dave and Annie were in, Michael Hutchence was also there and they got along beautifully. More on that in a later Flashback.

The second time Annie Lennox came in with her, I guess, manager.

Not a bad looking guy (see photo above) she had on this fabulous huge fake leopard skin coat. She was just as sweet and as nice as could be, and she gave me her office contact number in case I wanted to work with her on anything. I never took her up on the offer though, she's got enough to do.

Now, Dave Stewart was married to that girl from Bananarama (Siobhan Fahey)—now those girls were a lot of fun! They were always hanging out at the Lex having fun and dancing around. They really lived up to their image. But it seemed like every time they came there was a new one and they'd gotten rid of another. They were changing all the time. You know, you'd be surprised at how much those groups change.

Anyway, Annie's still got a great voice, and she always looks great. And as I said earlier, Dave Stewart and Michael Hutchence—poor guy—became good friends too. But I'll tell you, Dave Stewart liked the models, I mean all those British rockers did.

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