

Think Again - Take me to Jewish Thailand

Miri and I just spent an amazing nine days in Thailand. Our Holiday was a mixture of business and pleasure. Our primary reason was to officiate at the wedding of **Lana Susman (Sydney, daughter of Alex and Louise) and Rob Davis (London)**. The wedding took place at Koh Samui a resort Island off the coast of Thailand on the Hotels private beach. The wedding had a magical touch with an atmosphere from the Garden of Eden with the background sounds of the crashing of waves. Thailand likes to express its Buddhist ethnicity, and the indigenous Thais gave the wedding an added exotic touch with its culture of modesty humility and esoteric ambience.

Weddings are made in heaven, Lana's grandparents on her fathers side came from Koshenko-Shanowitz in Poland; I guess they must have been thinking about their granddaughters wedding at Koh-Samui way back then, you see both places begin with K & S! From all reports the wedding was beautiful, the bride and groom enchanting and we were joined by our friends **Alex Janine Romy and Guy Susman** who we bumped into every day, they complained that they were never out of range from Rabbinic supervision; I let them get away with blue murder. Well known members of the community **Michael and Janet Newstein** were also guests. The groom's best man was a chazzan from Finchley London so I did not have to do any of the singing.

Thailand has a population of 70 million, 85% Thai Buddhists, 10% Muslim, and 5% others. Of the others most of them are Israelis or at least they make the most noise, wherever you go you bump into Israelis; Harry Susman believed that the Bat Yam Convention was taking place in Thailand in fact he thought that the Mossad was trailing him. Most Thais believe that the biggest country in the world is Israel. I did not want to deflate them by advising them that Israel was only a country of 7 million. To service Jewish Thailand there are 2 Chabad houses in Bangkok, 1 each in Koh Samui, Phuket and Chang Mai. The Rabbi and Rebetzin at Koh Samui are Mendy and Sarah Goldschmiedt. He is 28 and was a classmate of Mottels in Israel; I was also good friends of his eldest brother who now lives in Texas. We got on famously and they were sad to see us go, as there is no real community for them. They work with a very transient group of Israelis backpacker's honeymooners; and many who are just travelling through and find Thai partners. They very much miss the cohesion of a community, especially for their two young children aged 3 and 2. At every chance they came to visit at our Hotel. The Chabad House has an Israeli restaurant which it runs as a source of income, Miri and I could have a schnitzel meal for \$15.00, so food was no problem. Each night we went to the Chabad House to eat and to celebrate Channuka with over 100 Israelis. On Friday night there was over 300 Israelis. I was able to send regards in broken Ivrit to all, on the Friday night from Coogee Synagogue; they did not want to believe that Coogee beach is a lot nicer than Koh Samui.

Thai culture is highly incongruous in my view; on the one hand Buddhist culture is full of humility and acceptance, they acknowledge and say hallo to people by putting two hands together and bowing, on the other hand prostitution is legal, and massage parlours and dance clubs abound and are found on every street right next to a golden alter to Buddha and next to the Bet Chabad.

Shopping is the favourite pastime of the tourists and I did buy two tailor made suits for \$158 each and they do fit. I trust that the sleeve won't fall off after two weeks. I forgot to mention that every year-12 Australian was in Koh Samui for the biggest New Years party in the world.

If anybody is contemplating getting married in the near future, may I suggest Koh Samui as a divine location to celebrate the nuptials and please invite your Rabbi as well. I would like to wish Mazal tov to Ilan Gutman who just announced his engagement to Tali Fisher, may I suggest Ilan, Koh Samui for the wedding both your grandmother's Yutzi Gutman and Rai Moskowitz will love it there don't worry it is only a nine hour flight and you can get kosher meals on the airline. Your dad Tom and Maria will have loads of fun - so next year in

Jerusalem or Koh Samui. From what I have seen the largest population of Israelis is in Thailand/ Koh Samui anyway.

As always see you in shule

Good Shabbos

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