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TRAVEL TIPS

Train service across the Mekong

KARNJANA KARNJANATAWE



Schoolgirls in Vientiane. Tourists can travel to the Lao capital by train soon

A rail link between Thailand and Laos is scheduled to open this May.

Thirty per cent of the total project costs of 197 million baht was covered by the Thai government with the remainder funded by a "soft" government-to-government loan.

Three-and-a half kilometres of tracks will connect the town of Nong Khai to Tha Na Laeng, across the border in the Lao PDR. The work is now around 80 per cent complete, said Nong Khai Governor Jadej Musikwong, adding that the State Railway of Thailand (SRT) has undertaken to train Laotian officials how to operate the service.

The French government has put up two million baht to fund a study into the feasibility of extending the tracks a further nine kilometres to reach the Laotian capital of Vientiane, according to the SRT.

Boosting tourism to Isan

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) wants to recruit 49 amateur photographers from Europe and the Middle East to take pictures of the Northeast for a project dubbed "Amazing Thailand through the Lens".

Due to be launched on March 18, it is part of a long-term plan to boost tourism to Isan between 2008 and 2010, said TAT Deputy Governor

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Jutaporn Reungronasa, adding that seven overseas TAT offices will each be given the responsibility of hiring seven photographers and flying them to the Northeast. The images will be entered for a contest and later published to promote tourism in the region, she said.

TAT will also be launching an "Amazing Taste of Thailand" campaign in August to encourage Europeans to sample Thai cuisine. It plans to work with some 100 restaurants in Europe, offering customers the chance to win 100 free air tickets to the Kingdom, and will also be collaborating with various hotels to organise Thai food festivals.

To attract more visitors from Europe in the rainy season, the time of year when tourist arrivals from that continent are at their lowest, TAT will be sweetening package-tour deals to the Kingdom during this period with special offers such as free tickets to Thai kick-boxing matches.

Wacky holiday reading

Looking for something unusual to read on your next journey? You could do that by checking out the first "World's Top 10 Weirdest Travel Books", a list selected by 891 visitors to online retailer AbeBooks.com:

- Travel by Cargo Ship by Hugo Verlomme (1995);

- Other People's Business: A Guidebook to 87 Company and Industrial Tours in and Near Ohio by Jane Ware (1993);

- The Complete Medical Tourist by David Hancock (2006);

- Mini-Trips for Maxi-Fun by McDonalds Staff (1970);

- Round Ireland with a Fridge by Tony Hawks (2001);

- Flattened Fauna by Roger M. Knutson (1987);

- Biking to the Arctic Circle by Allen L. Johnson (1997);

- Laid to Rest in California: A Guide to the Cemeteries and Grave Sites of the Rich and Famous by Patricia Brooks (2006);

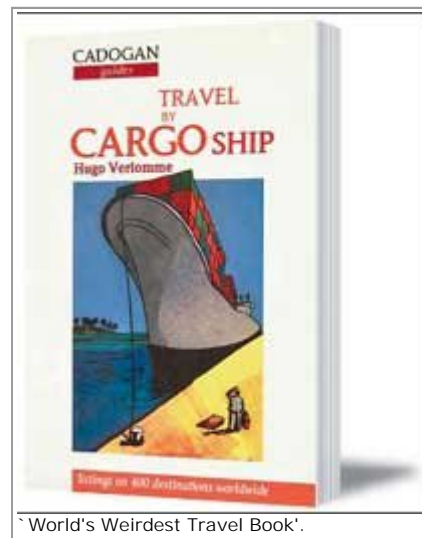
- Up Sh*t Creek: a collection of horrifyingly true wilderness toilet misadventures by Joe Lindsay (1997); and

- The Space Tourist's Handbook by Eric Anderson (2005).

- or more information, visit <http://www.abebooks.com>.

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New stamps celebrate culture



Thailand Post has joined hands with the TAT to issue a set of 10 commemorative postage stamps depicting traditional Thai ways of life.

Part of the "Amazing Thailand" campaign, the stamps bear illustrations of typical everyday scenes like people giving food to Buddhist monks on their morning alms round and a street-side vendor with portable noodle stall.

The stamps have a face value of three baht and are available at post offices nationwide.

For more information, phone Thailand Post on 1545.

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Easier connections

Thai Airways International has signed an agreement with Australian domestic airline Virgin Blue to offer smoother connections for travellers flying between and within Australia and Thailand.

Virgin Blue currently flies to 13 destinations: Adelaide; Canberra; Broome; Mackay; Rockhampton; Maroochydore; Cairns; Townsville; Hobart; Launceston; Ballina; Coffs Harbour; and the Gold Coast (in Queensland). THAI operates regular flights from Bangkok and Phuket to Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth.

Our national carrier is the first interline partner for Virgin Blue, according to that company's CEO, Brett Godfrey.

"This will be a benefit to travellers and gives Virgin Blue a well-established partner airline to operate services to a new and popular destination," he said, adding that his firm is drawing up plans to introduce an e-ticketing service.

If you have any comments or news to share, email karnjanak@bangkokpost.co.th.

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