

REVIVAL – PHUKET AND OUR REVIVAL MENTALITY ROLE IN IT

Despite concentrated pockets of negativity, the usual set of unwelcome criminal acts and road traffic accident and congestion woes, Phuket remains a shining star in the context of attractive places to live or be. That is still my thinking after 23 years of ever increasingly connecting with Phuket as my home.

I just listened to an audiobook 'The World Without Us' by Alan Weisman. This incredible piece of literature describes how the world would continue if humans became extinct. It addresses the disintegration of buildings over time, the changes to the animal kingdom, the bursting of dams and flooding. It goes on to describe the destruction and radiation from nuclear production facilities – and in such a level of detail that there is even projection on how mosquito behaviours would change without our presence in the ecosystem.

This gave rise to thoughts about how Phuket would look without all the investment and development that some carelessly complain about 'at will'. During COVID, the place was generally bereft of significant numbers of visitors, beaches were cleaner but not, I hasten to add, pristine. Many residents were financially on their knees and – whether we humans like it or not – we have created a society in which money talks. Phuket is more successful and attractive with people busily spending money, building things, creating things and weaving webs of new communities.

Phuket would not do well if it were to retract into a clichéd beach-only destination with longtails and songthaews being the primary mode of transport – such as we see in some of the idyllic now-AI generated Phuket landscape artworks and promotions. Like us humans, Phuket has evolved, been through some fairly tough times, will continue its rollercoaster path and with some collective input from those who care, will also go into 'revival' mode.

A good friend of mine is creating in Bangkok one of the most beautifully designed sauna, steam, spa, rejuvenation/recovery and workspace centres I have ever seen – and it is to be called 'Revival'. This fits very nicely into the direction that I believe



Phuket's trajectory could be on – provided the majority retain a 'revival mentality'.

How can we revive ourselves and a passion for Phuket which can inspire us and others? Part of the answer may be to identify the big positives that we enjoy as Phuket natives or residents and to magnify them to be more significant than the negatives – without engaging in overly aggressive superficial positivity.

We can be the ones who let a family or individual cross a pedestrian crossing on a busy highway or in the 'Supercar VIP only' section of Central shopping mall's car park. We could create sporting events and communities for the younger generation, instead of allowing the private international schools to exert their unnaturally concentrated power in the market to collect the perceived most talented youth and stick them into elitist, sometimes closed shop, academies.

We can celebrate those that make life choices that might not be the 'average' and meet their needs – such as increasing the range and volume of vegan and plant-based products in both supermarkets and restaurants. We could take some time to invite the less socially adept, or more socially awkward, persons to non-intimidating social events and not expect them to chug down beer, wine and cocktails in order to 'fit in' to the 'party vibe' whilst watching the saxophonist and fire show performers.

Non-Thais could make stronger efforts to mix with Thais, and vice versa, to avoid non-integrated 'enclaves' of foreigners in mini-luxury ghettos designed to ostentatiously provoke neighbour envy (adopt whiney comedic voice: "My garden is bigger than yours, my panaroamic sunset is more vivid than yours, my paint job is more bespoke than yours, I ordered more champagne than the next table… ").

If the Government won't put in place good planning and development practices, then the private sector can instead take on the burden, and the moral social obligation, to make good choices about what to build/develop – and where. Think sufficient car parking at shopping malls and places where events are regularly planned, aesthetically pleasing exteriors and not just window dressing to 'green'.

With the new planning regulations for Phuket, published in 2024, allowing for taller buildings in specific zones, including in Phuket Town, it is important for the private sector to try and protect the 'jewels in the crown' of Phuket and not eat its own golden goose through over- or ugly- development practices.

Phuket Town has seen a relatively recent beautiful revival resulting in a world-famous night market, amazing festivals and eateries and a vibrant non-seedy nightlife counteracting the debauchery of red light districts. This very special beast should be taken care of, protected from a heritage perspective, and preserved as a wonder of the world without extractive tourism practices.

One constant irk of the non-Thai investment community in Phuket, invested in economic terms, family terms or attachment terms, is the uncertainty that can infect the choices for property investment and 'settling in' to the island beyond renting and being transitional. With 99 year leases on the horizon in a manner visible enough to have even been tabled for a Cabinet meeting, there is some strong hope that the usual pros and cons choices between short leases, long leases, poorly constructed 'investment entities' and the like, will be supplanted by a 'standard uniform go-to' investment choice of a 99 year lease. If this landmark investment route is made available, then much more positivity will follow, for example commitment to the island's revival beyond the transitional and investment for the long term in community building and integration – safe in the knowledge that existing and future generations will have some certainty of the right to reside and own a derivative right in property and land without actually 'owning' the land.

Whilst the graffiti-spewed side panels erected on land sites under development are disturbing, and the predictably regular flooding of roads and newly built 'underpasses' is grating, let's all look up, slightly above the horizon to see the mountains of 'Phuket' and the glistening sea, while we listen to the beautiful echo of a padel tennis ball slicing off the textured surface of a newly purchased pro-line padel racket – embracing and cultivating the …. Phuket revival !



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By Desmond Hughes, Senior Partner of Hughes Krupica.
Hughes Krupica is a law firm which specialises in Real Estate; Construction; Hospitality; Corporate; Commercial; Tech; Dispute Resolution; and Litigation, operating from Phuket, servicing clients in relation to their business activities in Thailand and in other regions of Asia.
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