

ASSIGNMENT:



BANGKOK

• *Courtyard of the Australian Embassy in Bangkok.*

BANGKOK has earned a reputation as the City of Smiles. People living in the Thai capital rarely display any of the resentment that foreigners find in other great cities of the world.

For the three AFP Liaison Officers stationed there, the genial atmosphere provides a pleasant relief in the demanding role they are called on to perform.

Bangkok is a vital post in the network of AFP stations around the world whose task it is to provide timely intelligence on the narcotics trade and to liaise closely with local police and authorities on organised crime.

Thailand shares borders with Laos and Kampuchea in the east, Burma in the west, and with Malaysia in the south. Because of its position, Bangkok Liaison Office covers these surrounding countries as well. About 90 per cent of its work is drug related.

Thailand, with a population of 50 million, became a constitutional monarchy in 1932. The Government apparatus is centralised in Bangkok and all power emanates from there. Some 5 million of the population live in the city.

Until recently, the country had one of the highest birth rates in the world — at more than 3 per cent a year. This now has been reduced to 2.1 per cent, with a target of 1.5 per cent by 1986.

Language

The Thai language contains little formal grammar, and natural speech depends on an acquaintance with idiomatic arrangement which can be derived only from experience. Sufficient knowledge of the alphabet can easily be acquired to read public signs and notices, and to keep in touch with the extensive vernacular press.

Thailand's tropical climate varies considerably. Bangkok's average temperature is 29 degrees Celsius and in the cool dry season, from about November to February, it rarely falls below 10 degrees or rises above 29 degrees. From March to May, temperatures can vary from about 27 degrees at dawn to 35 in the afternoon. The rainy season, between June and October, brings some relief but with a humidity of some 90 per cent.

The title Liaison Officer is a well deserved one where the Bangkok office is concerned. The officer stationed there must be able to work with a wide variety of units. Firstly he deals with the Royal Thai Police Force, which has a strength of about 150,000. As the national police force, it has the responsibility for crime prevention and suppression; alleviation of public grievances and maintenance of public peace and order.

He also liaises with the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) which is the central co-ordinating agency in Thailand for all narcotic prevention and suppression matters. The Liaison Officer works most closely with drug-related units such as the Crime Suppression Centre, Metropolitan Narcotics Unit, ONCB Enforcement Division (both in Bangkok and regional offices throughout Thailand), and the Royal Thai Customs at both the air and shipping ports.

He also has a very close relationship with representatives of international police/enforcement units from 11 countries and Interpol. The majority of these representatives hold the rank of Chief Inspector or above.

The combined representation has formed a community called Foreign Anti Narcotics Community (FANC), to co-operate with the Kingdom of Thailand against international trafficking in drugs. It is also committed to maintaining a close association with members of the Government of Thailand involved in the suppression of illicit drugs. The AFP has demonstrated strong support for the FANC and has a member on the Executive Committee as Vice-Chairman and as Acting Chairman since the death of the Chairman last December.

For Bangkok, an officer should possess a sound or above-average investigation skill which is in no way solely drug related. The ability to work alone also is important. Much of the work is mundane administration — increasingly becoming a necessity in the life of all policemen.

Social commitments are an important part in the life, with frequent official functions attended as representative of the FAP or the Embassy. Personalities also play a big part, often meaning the difference between getting a job done or not.

Work is governed by the 'three Ts' — Time, Traffic and Telephone. There is never enough time, either for officers or families. Traffic snarls can lengthen the working day. As for the telephone, getting through to a number can be a long process.

Such handicaps can be compounded by the monsoon season which slows life even further.

However, both working and living conditions for the AFP are excellent. Office accommodation is provided in what has been described as the best designed, most comfortable and attractive Embassy in Bangkok.

Most of the Embassy's private accommodation is in apartments, usually comprising three bedrooms, of excellent standard and fully air conditioned. Post allowances are commensurate with those of a tropical post in Asia and are considered to be fair and generally in line with other countries. They provide for the employment of domestic assistance, including maids and cooks, but well-trained staff can be difficult to find.

Social life

Clublife is a feature of expatriate activity in Bangkok. Besides the prestigious Royal Bangkok Sports Club, the long-established British Club provides a good swimming pool, tennis, squash and billiards.

There is ample opportunity to play golf and most other sports.

The Australia and New Zealand Women's Group (previously the Australian Women's Group) meets monthly and arranges various functions. There is also an International Women's Club, for which sponsorship and a short waiting period are required for membership.

The Embassy has an active social club with regular activities at the Bunyip Bar, in the Chancery. The city's night clubs and bars, of which there are a large number, vary from first class to dingy. Some cater for a mixed Thai and foreign clientele, while others tend to be more exclusively Thai.

There is a great variety in Bangkok night life, with many internationally known performers appearing.

The city has one of the world's best selections of eating establishments, providing an excellent range of European food as well as Asian. Food prices vary considerably, depending on the type of establishment chosen (Thai food is generally cheapest), but liquor prices are universally very expensive.

Education

A choice of schools is available to Embassy children. The International School has facilities for years 1-6 in the elementary section, and 7-12 in the high school. Its physical facilities are good by international standards and the student-teacher ratios are generally better than in Australian Schools.

Nearly half the students and the curriculum are American,

but consideration is given during subject selection to those students who may be returning to foreign schools and universities.

Discipline is generally good and teaching methods and standards are similar to Australian schools. Teaching staff are well-qualified and are recruited mainly from the U.S. and Europe.

Bangkok Patana School follows an English curriculum for children from ages 4-14, but is mainly aimed at primary education. Although most of the teaching staff are wives of expatriates in Bangkok, they are usually well qualified and the school maintains a high standard.

The entry and lower levels of primary schooling conform more closely with similar levels in Australia than do the same levels at the International School, but the physical facilities do not compare.

There are a number of kindergartens run by both Thais and Europeans in Bangkok.

Travel

Ample opportunities are available for members and their families to travel both within Thailand and to other countries. There are relatively inexpensive deals to popular centres such as Hong Kong or Singapore, and package tours to many other places are available from the many travel agencies in Bangkok. The city itself has many interesting sights, from the markets — where you can buy almost anything — to the canal trip which takes you to the scenic (and not so scenic) areas in a longtail boat via the Chao Phya River.

At the Rose Garden, there are a number of attractions including ordination into the monkhood, fingernail dance, Thai boxing, hill tribe dancing, sword fighting, elephants at work and folk dancing. Other places to see are the Ancient City Ayuthaya, City Temple tour, River Kwai, Crocodile Farm.

The Embassy leases a number of self-contained and fully equipped holiday cottages near Pattaya, about 150kms south-east of Bangkok and these are allocated on a roster basis to members of the Embassy for weekend use. Use on weekends while on holidays, or separately by spouses and children is welcomed.

For the AFP officer stationed in Bangkok, the work experience gained stands him in good stead, both from personal career points of view.

Bangkok for the family unit is basically what is made of it. It can vary to the extremes of good and bad, and what one is prepared to put into living and working there is what one will get out of it.



• The Commissioner and AFP Liaison Officers pictured at an informal gathering during a regional conference in Bangkok. From left: Denis Craft (Manila), Brian Bennett (Hong Kong), Commissioner Grey, Kerry Hill (Islamabad), David Schramm (Kuala Lumpur), Bill Stoll (Staff Officer), and Mick Lacey (Jakarta).