

BACKYARD BLITZ

Thailand Special



The intrepid Blitz team lifted the bar again, travelling to Thailand to tackle the largest garden they have ever attempted. Responding to the tsunami devastation that swept this region, they landscaped the grounds of a Buddhist temple. Joining them were almost 200 enthusiastic Aussies, taking a holiday on one of South East Asia's most beautiful islands. United in our aim of supporting Thailand during this time, we assisted a local community and took some time to enjoy the best that Phuket has to offer.



Background

Thai neighbourhoods revolve around their local temple, which serves as the religious and social centre for the community. The temple provides a place for worship, festivals, public meetings, weddings and school functions. It is really the church, town hall, community centre and a park all rolled into one!

Kamala was without question the Phuket village most affected by the tsunami. Sixty-four locals were killed, 3 foreigners confirmed dead, 107 homes completely destroyed, 192 homes partially destroyed. The entire beach front road area, including all shops, restaurants, guest houses as well as the homes of the local beach front residents, was destroyed.

The local school and temple, Wat Baan Kamala, situated across from the beach, were both severely damaged. The Temple lost three of their monks. Their Abbot was washed 1 km down the beach but, remarkably, survived. There are currently 4 monks who live at this Temple, although they regularly have visiting monks staying for extended periods.

The monks lived in makeshift accommodation while the temple buildings and grounds were slowly restored.



Temple Project

After the tsunami, a group of expat and local business people banded together to try and raise funds and resources to re-build the temple. Australian architect Peter Harper donated his expertise and time to drafting a "master plan" for the site, while New Zealander John Clarke, a Kamala resident, oversaw the construction. They could only progress as funds allowed. So far, they have been able to repair the main shrine and build the monks' "hermitage". The Blitz team came on board to landscape around the temple.

Garden Concept

The space the team were working with was approximately nine times the size of an average Blitz garden. Since the tsunami, the quadrangle had been a dust bowl – just a massive expanse of dirt, not one blade of grass.

Jamie Durie designed the space, and was conscious of maintaining its public role and function. It needed to be practical, durable, allowing for ease of movement even with large numbers. Materials were selected for their durability, and plants were chosen that thrived locally and were readily available.

Jamie was also mindful of including elements of religious significance, and incorporated a number of plants that are commonly used in temple grounds. These include the Bodhi tree, frangipani and lotus flowers.

Buddhist symbolism is reflected in the 'story rings' that hang in the centre of the space – intricately carved sculptures depicting the life story of Buddha. While they are not traditional elements of a temple, they are common decorative items used in Thai architecture.

Project preparation:

The Backyard Blitz team first travelled to Phuket in May 2005 to assess the location and establish local suppliers and available plants and materials. We were greatly assisted with this task by the local businesses ClarkeFreeman, Harper Architecture and DCM Solutions.

Back on home turf, Qantas Holidays, the Tourism Authority of Thailand and Wizard Home Loans generously committed their support and made the project possible. Kingcrome and Makita both kindly donated tools (lots of them!), which were freighted over and left with the Temple.



Construction: Our first job was to install a considerable drainage system under the proposed area. Situated so close to the beach, and subject to heavy seasonal rains, it was imperative that the space was adequately prepared against flooding.

Paving: The pavers we used came from Chang Mai in the north and were very thin. If using a thin paver, lay it on a wet bed of sand and cement as this is much more stable and will avoid any cracking of the paver. The sand and cement should be mixed to a firm consistency and prior to laying the paver, a wet paste of pure cement should be applied to the back of the paver. This will ensure good adhesion. If using sandstone which is quite porous, it is a good idea to pre-seal the sandstone before laying.

Sacred rings: Scottie built the structure for the sacred rings from rose hardwood. If you wanted to build a similar structure there are any number of suitable Australian hardwoods. Talk to your local timber supplier for advice.



Meditation platform: Scottie constructed this from treated pine timber. The legs were 6 x H4 treated round pine logs (150mm diameter). A frame of 90x45mm timber was fixed to the outer side of the posts with galvanized screws. Joists were attached to either side of the posts for further strengthening of the structure and the sides and tops were clad with decking boards.

The Garden: We were lucky to have been working with a crumbly granite based soil on this job. The challenge of mastering what the locals used to dig with was a hard one. Instead of a shovel, a hoe is used with ease by the local landscapers and gardeners to turn soil over and chip away at the soil to dig holes.

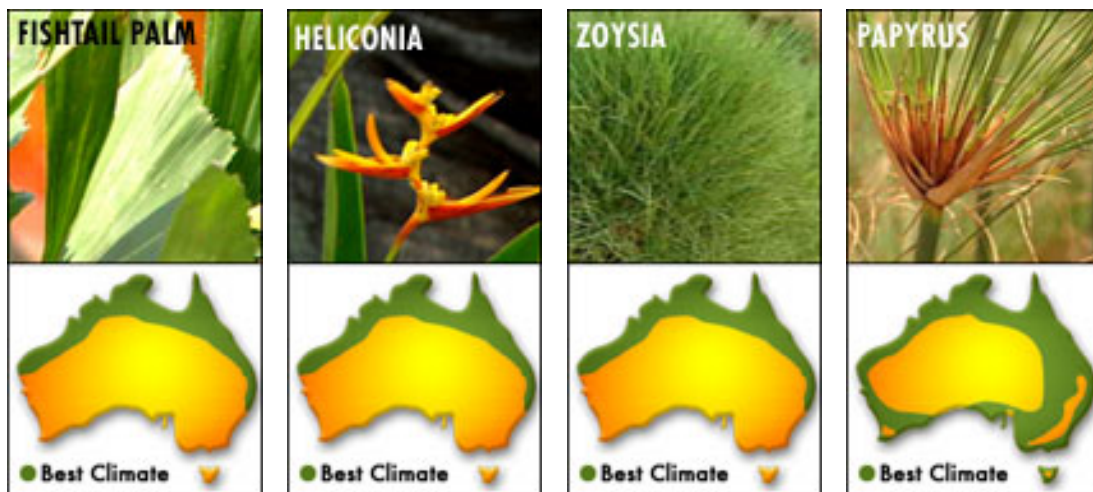
Because the soil is so free draining, coir or coconut fibre is commonly incorporated into the beds and larger planting holes for its water holding capacity and this is what we did on this job.

Jamie scoured local nurseries for larger specimen trees like the central bhodi tree and assorted frangipanis for the bones of the garden and bold feature plants like cycads and heliconias created meandering swathes of texture and form. Block plantings of coloured tradescantia and alternanthera livened the garden and masses of flowers were introduced with the many warmer colours of the canna lilies and cliveas. To soften the main pathways, sunken bog beds were planted out with papyrus and elephant's ears, whilst large feature water bowls contained the sacred flowering lotus.

Trees and palms: crimson frangipani (*Plumeria rubra*), Bodhi tree (*Ficus religiosa*), Clustered fishtail palm (*Caryota mitis*), sago palm (*Cycas revolute*).

Shrubs and groundcovers: clivia (*Clivia miniata*), canna lily (*Canna x generalis*), elephant's ear (*Colocasia esculenta*), heliconia (*Heliconia psittacorum*), spider lily (*Hymenocallis littoralis*), Ixora (*Ixora chinensis*), alternanthera (*Alternanthera dentata*), tradescantia (*Tradescantia* 'Purple Heart'), bloodleaf (*Iresine herbstii*), papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*), lotus (*nelumbo nucifera*).

Turf: zoysia (*zoysia* sp.)



Thailand at a Glance

Thailand is one of South East Asia's most popular holiday destinations, and for good reason! An exotic, tropical country, full of friendly people and wonderful food, it is a holiday that can suit any age group, and any budget.

Capital City - Bangkok

Population – 65.5 million

Thailand is land locked on three sides by Laos, Cambodia and Burma, with a long, narrow curving peninsula sitting out into the Indian Ocean.

Language – there are four regional dialects, the "central dialect" being recognised as the national language.

Religion – Thailand is predominantly (95%) Buddhist

The temperature doesn't vary much through the year (mid 30s), but humidity and rainfall change dramatically depending on the season. Thailand's monsoon patterns create three seasons in the north of the country and two seasons in the southern region.

Travelling Information

Distance from Australia – 9 hours flying time from East Coast (3 hours behind EST).

Visas – unless you are planning on working or an extended stay, you will not require a visa. Tourist/holiday visas are issued to Australian citizens on entry to the country.

Vaccinations – dependent on your medical and vaccination history, and should be discussed with your GP. Website for further information: www.welltogo.com.au

Time to Travel – because of the variation in monsoon seasons across the country, the best time to travel depends on where you wish to go. Generally, the mildest, driest times are between November and March.

Tourism Authority of Thailand – is an invaluable resource for all your travel and holiday questions. Web: www.thailand.net.au

Recommended Travel Agents: Qantas Holidays choose to facilitate all domestic bookings, transfers and holiday activities through Tour East. And we couldn't recommend them highly enough! Their website is an

excellent source of travel and holiday information. Web: www.toureast.net

Recommended Travel Guides:

Lonely Planet Thailand
Insight Guide to Thailand
Eyewitness Travel Guides – Thailand

Current Advice from DFAT – While it is generally considered a safe holiday destination, it is recommended you check with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade before commencing a holiday in Thailand.

Current advice for Australian travellers can be found on the DFAT website on: www.dfat.gov.au. Click on "Countries" and scroll through to "Thailand".

There is also valuable general travel information on this website.

Phuket

Part of the beautiful Phang Nga province, Phuket is located at the southern tip of Thailand. It is Thailand's largest island, and is a 1 1/2 hr flight from Bangkok.

There are many attractions and activities available, including:

- Shopping!
- Boat tours – including island visits, cave canoeing, snorkelling and diving.
- Water sports – including speed boating, water skiing, jet skis
- Elephant jungle treks
- Food Markets and Gourmet tours
- Temple tours and walking tours of historical districts
- Traditional dancing performances, cabaret and culture shows
- Golf - four courses available
- Thai Boxing tournaments
- Phuket Zoo, Aquarium and Butterfly Farm
- Crocodile Farm
- Gibbon Sanctuary
- Bird Watching / Eco tours

Good websites for further information

Web: www.phuket.com

Web: www.phukettourism.org

How to Find Wat Baan Kamala

Kamala is a quiet coastal village directly north of Patong. The Temple sits directly in front of the beach, on Rim Haad Road, Kamala Beach. From Patong, it is approx a 20 minute drive. A local taxi should be able to take you there for approx 400 Baht return.

For more information on the temple restoration project, take a look at:

Web: www.watbaankamala.org

Backyard Blitz in Thailand
dedicated to the loving
memory
of John Clarke 1967-2005



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