

# CENTRO

**LOOKING BACK**

 Norfolk's  
 punk connections

*Chris Page*

The in-depth features section at the heart of the Eastern Daily Press

## On the Thai trail...

A Norwich couple has left the rat race to run a gourmet guesthouse in the mountains of Northern Thailand.

**ROY HAMRIC**  
paid a visit.

**S**tuart Cavallero had worked at a Norfolk record shop for years. But when he made his first trip on a year-long mount-the-world tour it changed his life.

Stuart grew up in North Walsingham and studied in management at Virginia Magazine in Norwich.

In Thailand he met Wika, who became his wife. The couple lived on a Thai island for a year before returning to Norwich, where Wika started a culinary arts at City College. She then worked as a chef in well-known city restaurants, including Tuckers and St Bonifacio.

They then ran a craft, leather-and-furniture purchase in the Chiang Dao Mountains of northern Thailand, and went of Wika's gourmet western food has spread far and wide.

The Chiang Dao Mountains rise straight up from a valley floor - a calm, soothing scene, resembling the mountains painted on Chinese scrolls.

Two miles east, and the mountains, about 75 km north of Chiang Mai, are one reason tourists flock to the area. Another is to escape Wika's food.

Chiang Dao park, the third highest in Thailand at 2,177m, offers visitors stunning hikes and stark beauty in relative isolation.

As the rain dropped behind the mountains' long shadows one evening, we visited Wika and Stuart's Chiang Dao Nest guesthouse - a group of seven old-style, wattle-bamboo cottages set amid lush tropical greenery.

It's probably one of the few guesthouses in Thailand where you'll find pan-fried duck breast and caramelised pineapple with cracked pepper cream served with mashed potatoes on the menu.

Wika's dishes also include pan-fried mountain chicken fillet with pine nut crust and roasted vegetable salad served with hand-cut chips and salmon steak with saffron and white wine sauce, along with sautéed new potatoes and vegetables.

And Stuart doesn't forget the fruit - chocolate cake with hot chocolate sauce and orange brulée.

Each Thursday night she serves a special outdoor barbecue of chicken, buffalo meat, salmon steak, fresh vegetables and salads.

As a background in marketing, Stuart created a website



### CENTRO FACTFILE

**GETTING THERE:** Chiang Dao is 75 km north of Chiang Mai. Rates at Chiang Dao Nest bungalows start at £65 for a two-bed bungalow. Breakfast, lunch and drink menu prices vary from \$1 to \$9. For information, contact [www.chiangdao.org](http://www.chiangdao.org) or [info@chiangdao.com](mailto:info@chiangdao.com).

([www.chiangdao.com](http://www.chiangdao.com)) to serve as an information resource for the area. His eyes gave him space to his competition, leaving everyone well served as the mountains become better known as an outdoor retreat and recreation destination.

"I took a while for the business to take off, but now Stuart's website is busy with new, trekking, rafting and elephant riding bookings.

"It's really evolved so that we're almost becoming a travel agency for northern Thailand," Stuart said.

"Tour trekking - that's what we do most."

The couple clearly work hard to provide jobs for local residents and to give back to the community.

Stuart works each week as a volunteer English teacher at the local school, and they recently donated money to build a school library so

**ATTUNED TO NATURE:** Former Norwich man Stuart Cavallero in the Chiang Dao Mountains of northern Thailand. Inset, a chedi at a Buddhist monastery offers one of the best birdwatching sites in country. Visitors to Chiang Dao Nest are offered mountain trekking, river rafting, elephant rides and world class birdwatching.

all tribe students could sleep over. I met an Australian couple who had just returned from a three-day mountain trek, arranged by Stuart's guide service.

"Our guide took us through four local villages," said Sharron Chaffield of Perth, Australia.

"The trail was up and down, but not too bad. Later, we walked to a waterfall where we saw a cobra and we saw leeches when we walked through a stream."

She recommended the three-day trek. An estimated 2000 hill tribe members are scattered throughout the mountain range, mostly engaged in raising rabbits, corn, rice, maize, peanuts and fruit. In the past, opium was also grown in the village, which are usually made up of 20 to 30 families.

The area boasts an estimated 200

bird species, a large and varied butterfly population and large numbers of indigenous snakes.

I also met Lisa Thompson and Alex Fisher of Austin, Texas, who had just returned from trekking, rafting and riding elephants.

"The couple sampled our whisky one night. 'I must have had four then,' said Lisa. 'I didn't get tipsy, but the golden did and the more they drank the more English they speak.' We decided to sign up for that trek and ask for the same guides."

Wika said she and her husband don't want to use English-speaking guides.

"It's better for us to see hill tribe villagers who speak a few English words. They can also communicate by hand. It's working historically," she said.

Two wats (Buddhist monasteries) near the village are well worth a visit. Wat Phra Prang is a rare shrine, attended to daily by a Korean monk who worked at the wat during a pilgrimage.

Norally, the magnificent Wat Than Phra Phing, which is reached by climbing 200 steps, offers one of the best bird watching sites in Thailand.

However, you may stay one of the monasteries and take part in meditation sessions with the monks.

"In some ways, we're pushing ourselves to the limit, and we're finding what our limits are," Stuart said of his new life. "But it's a privilege to live here. Our appreciation for nature has grown. We're very attached to nature here."

■ Roy Hamric is a freelance writer who lives in Chiang Mai.

