

# A meeting of 'The Marked'



**T**attoos and Pattaya ... somehow they just go together. Even if you've never had a tattoo, you owe it to yourself to attend at least one tattoo show in your lifetime. One doesn't need to be a member of a sub-culture to enjoy it. Come to people watch ... come to learn ... prepare to be amazed.

Late in August, Pattaya hosted its 3rd International Tattoo Convention since 2009. The event was held at The Hard Rock Hotel in Pattaya Beach and sponsored by AIM Global Service Company, The Pattaya Technician Association and the Pattaya Tattoo club. Corporate sponsors also included Bloodline Tattoo Inks and Cam tattoo equipment.

## Perfect backdrop

The event was actually held in the 'Hall of Fame Room', the museum-like ballroom adjacent to the hotel itself. The room was a little cramped, and the exhibitions spilled over into the foyer, but I had to admit, it was the perfect backdrop for such an event.

You see a lot of surreal stuff at a tattoo convention and none more so that the opening ceremony hosted by the Guest of Honour Pattaya's Deputy Mayor Ronnakit

Aegasing. He talked about the goal of this event being to change the perception of tattoos as low class art and raise awareness about cleanliness and safety. It seemed odd to see such a mainstream establishment person (from any country) embracing the culture and enjoying the show.

What goes on at a tattoo convention you ask?

Well, as you might expect, tattoo artists from all over the region come to make customer contacts and actually demonstrate their skills as convention attendees look on. That's right you can stand there and watch someone getting tattooed.

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And, as you might expect, there are a series of tattoo contests with winners chosen in categories like: small tattoo, traditional or 'Old School' tattoo, Tribal, Realistic, Japanese, black & grey, colour, Neo Thai, Large Tattoos, Tattoo Girl, and of course Best of the Day.

As I mentioned, the people-watching at these events is spectacular. What's more, most

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participants don't mind if you take their picture. In fact, they rather enjoy it.

Most of the artists on display were from either Pattaya or Bangkok. What struck me as different about this convention was the number of female artists and all-girl shops. I spoke with some of the young ladies at shops with names like Tattoo Girl M, Law Birdy and Bubble Brain. They said their primary customers were women who wanted a feminine touch to their body art. Well, if it is possible to make a flaming skull lady-like, these girls could pull it off.

## Foreign artists

Not all the artists at this event were Thai. I saw several foreign artists, one in particular with most of his bald head tattooed. I couldn't stop looking at the writhing creature inked indelibly on his cranium; and I think that's the whole point. Walking away I wondered, 'h-m-m-m, maybe he could tattoo me some hair!'

The most compelling artists I found at this show has a shop in Koh Phangan called Tiki Tattoo. The artists introduced himself as Jay and explained that he is of Maori and Dutch ancestry and lived in New Zealand before moving to



Holland. His designs are 100 per cent Maori tribal and extremely intricate. He also does other styles to please his clientele, but the Maori tribal work is his claim to fame.

Besides the style and story behind the Maori artwork, there is another difference you'll experience with this artist. He doesn't use an electric tattoo gun ... he accomplishes his complex and detailed design in the traditional way, with a bamboo stick.

## Natural feeling

According to Jay, 'The bamboo tattoo is a completely different experience compared to the machine. It is slower to complete but it hurts less and the feeling is more natural as it is handwork.'

I found that 'it hurts less' part hard to believe as I watched him poke away on the back of a young

Aussie sporting an elaborate Japanese mural across his entire back. What amazed me the most was that this artist uses no stencil. All tattoos are accomplished pretty much freehand. When I mentioned that to Jay, he looked up from his customer for a moment and said: 'Only in this way can you ensure your body art is one of a kind'.

This is a fact I find hard to argue. The brilliant colours and balance etched onto the back of the young Aussie was breathtaking. According to Jay, they had 150 hours of work into the piece already. All I could think was, 'And it's on your back where you can't see it?' I still can't decide whether I consider that stupidity or total commitment. It's a 'fine' line I suppose.

I spent most of the afternoon taking pictures of heavily tattooed Thai ladies. Some were menacing,

“Some were menacing, some were spooky, but mostly they were sweet and revelling in the opportunity to get their picture taken.”

some were spooky, but mostly they were sweet and revelling in the opportunity to get their picture taken. Apparently tattooed Thai girls are still Thai girls.

## Always want more

When I ask one vivacious tattooette why she'd gotten inked she told me the first time was on a dare. 'And then,' she confided, 'the ink just kind of gets in your blood you know? You'll always want another one.'

Rolling up my sleeves as I responded, 'Yes, as a matter of fact, I do know.' Show-and-tell ensued for the next 30 minutes ... and so goes the mating ritual for those of us who are marked.

**Bart Walters**

For more information visit, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CC2YjBAKxk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CC2YjBAKxk)

