

December 1, 2005

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**Authors respond to the recent banning
in Thailand of their book, *Bangkok Inside Out***

We are surprised and deeply saddened by the sudden focus in the Thai press and by the Thai Ministry of Culture on our book, "Bangkok Inside Out". For the past 10 months it has sat prominently on the shelves of bookshops across Thailand and overseas, has sold briskly and has earned rave reviews from numerous respected publications such as the *Asian Wall Street Journal* and Thailand's *The Nation* and *Bangkok Post*.

On November 22, Thailand's prominent daily newspaper *Kom Chad Luek* ran a front page story quoting a senior Thai government official, Ms Ladda Tangsuphachai, Director of Cultural Monitoring at the Thai Ministry of Culture, alleging that *Bangkok Inside Out* taints the image of Thailand and its people. The article states that our book "discusses negative subjects such as fake goods, gambling, gay performances, touts and scams, and places such as Patpong, Nana, and Khaosan Road," and singles out a photograph that shows a bar girl on a *farang's* (foreigner's) lap. Ms Ladda is quoted as saying that "According to the Constitution, the press has freedom to publish. So, all we can do is to take the problematic books off the shelf."

Ms Ladda submitted our book to the Royal Thai Police for further investigation and has asked them to consider whether there is a case for legal action against us. *Kom Chad Luek* has continued running follow-up stories on our book and on 'critical foreigners' in general.

Meanwhile, *Bangkok Inside Out* has de facto been banned in Thailand, yet we have not received any notice from the authorities to this effect. Asia Books and Bookazine, the two largest English-language book chains in Thailand, have removed our books from their shelves after being informed that anyone caught selling our book was subject to a fine and/or imprisonment.

Bangkok Inside Out has clearly been misunderstood. It oozes enthusiasm for Bangkok and Thailand, and repeatedly encourages readers to visit and explore the city. It depicts Bangkok as a hip, trendy place that has shed much of its seedier side and become far more attractive and cosmopolitan than most other travel books suggest. What mystifies us is that bookshops in Thailand are packed with publications devoted in their entirety to bar girls and prostitution. Our book - for all its humor and playful banter - is consistently respectful and thoughtful towards the Thai people and their culture, and written out of almost unconditional admiration.

Our book actually criticizes and mocks foreigners who glamorize Thailand's sex industry, and repeatedly makes the point that there is far more to Thailand than the negative stereotypes so often used by others. The book also includes many sections on traditional topics like alms giving, fortunetelling, amulets, traditional markets, dining, Lumpini Park, the Sky Train, and shopping. As journalists who take their trade and their subject - Bangkok - seriously, we saw fit to also address everyday urban phenomena like pollution, street dogs, gambling and piracy. All of these topics, for better or for worse, are realistic parts of Bangkok's landscape, and do not reflect in any negative way on the Thai people or on Thai culture.

Despite the criticism directed at our book, we, as writers and as individuals, are quite the opposite of culturally insensitive foreigners. We both hold Master's Degrees in Southeast Asian Studies and Languages from one of the top universities in this field, are fluent in Thai and Indonesian, and have devoted much of our careers so far to understanding and documenting life in Thailand and Southeast Asia. We've often felt, through our work, like unofficial cultural ambassadors for Thailand, and have always harbored a deep respect for Thailand and its people.

We regret that *Bangkok Inside Out* been misunderstood and misinterpreted, and we sincerely apologize for any offense inadvertently caused to anyone in Thailand due to different interpretations of the book's

contents. Nevertheless, we stand by the concept, editorial style and content of *Bangkok Inside Out*, and consider it to be a fair and very enthusiastic tribute to Thailand's wonderful capital city.

We kindly ask the Thai Ministry of Culture to formally advise us about specific sections of our book that they consider direct insults to Thai culture or the Thai people, so that we can understand their concerns and consider revising such sections for subsequent editions.

Meanwhile, we respectfully request the Thai government to allow the sale of our book in Thailand, and to ensure that bookshops in Thailand cease to be discouraged, officially or otherwise, from carrying *Bangkok Inside Out*.

We'd also like to take this opportunity to publicly thank our many Thai friends – journalists, businessmen, academics, students and neighbors - who have expressed their strong support for us and for our book.

Daniel Ziv & Guy Sharett
Authors, *Bangkok Inside Out*



**For further book information, excerpts and full media reviews,
please see publisher link to *Bangkok Inside Out*:**

<http://www.equinoxpublishing.com/bio/default.htm>

Amazon.com link: http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/9799796466/qid=1133347843/sr=8-1/ref=pd_bbs_1/002-1940729-2043232?n=507846&s=books&v=glance

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Critical praise for *Bangkok Inside Out*

“[*Bangkok Inside Out* is] a strikingly original approach to this bewildering behemoth of a city and the two young writers pull it off brilliantly... the two writers are obviously in love with the city.”

- *The Nation*

“*Bangkok Inside Out* isn’t just cheeky fun. Like those shaded boxes found in travel guides *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide*, the essays in *Inside Out* shed light on cultural quirks and traditions, thus bringing the larger picture in focus. *Bangkok Inside Out* also contains a sensitive voice, highlighting the typical lives of taxi drivers, Chao Isaan and other more marginalized groups who comprise the city.” – *The Bangkok Post*

“Required reading for visitors, longtime residents and anyone anywhere interested in what makes Thailand tick.” - *The Asian Wall Street Journal*

“The authors don't claim to be ‘insiders’ or experts on the city, an impossible task according to many, but it's obvious they've done their research...[readers] pulled into the pages of this book are sure to be charmed by the urban experience the City of Angels has to offer, whether or not those gleaming temples of the popular imagination appear.” - *Asia Times*

Excellent...Witty, incisive writing combined with outstanding photography...Ziv and Sharett are the kind of jack-of-all-trades media types who simultaneously display enough affection for their subject – Bangkok – to endear themselves, and enough cynical detachment to avoid sycophancy. The writing is fresh, informal, personal and consistently entertaining.”

– *Citylife Magazine*, Chiang Mai

“Bangkok is an amazingly complex and contradictory city, and Ziv and Sharett are ideal guides. They don't just know the city inside and out, they are also simultaneously insiders and outsiders. Overall, this book is a must-read for anyone wanting to understand the urban megapolis that is Bangkok.” - *The Jakarta Post*