

# fahthai



**INTO THE APOTHECARY**  
THE ART OF SCENT IN SINGAPORE

+ AN ARCHITECTURAL TOUR OF DANANG / THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES OF PHNOM PENH / HANDMADE IN BANGKOK + FASHION, TEXTILES & TAXIS

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# The enterprising traveller

*The founder of an award-winning social enterprise on why his tours make a difference*



**T**ravel was the best career advisor for Somsak “Pai” Boontam – trips he took served as the springboard for him to co-found a community-based tourism company.

## What rural communities are you collaborating with now?

We work with 18 different communities and have around 36 different tours. The communities are in Chiang Rai up north, in Trat province in the east, in some southern communities like Nakhon Si Thammarat and the mostly Muslim village of Koh Yao Noi. We have a few tours around Bangkok, too, like “A Day as a Fisherman”, where you visit the district of Bang Khun Thian to learn about fishing or tie-dyeing with natural dye, riding kayaks on the canals and trying local food.

## How did the company get off the ground?

I worked in Germany and then travelled in rural India, Myanmar and Laos, where I realised that tourism could be an important force for employment and income, and a source of hope for communities.

Coming from a poor village in Thailand and growing up without electricity, I could relate to the people and their struggles.

## Your business model was a little strange, wasn't it?

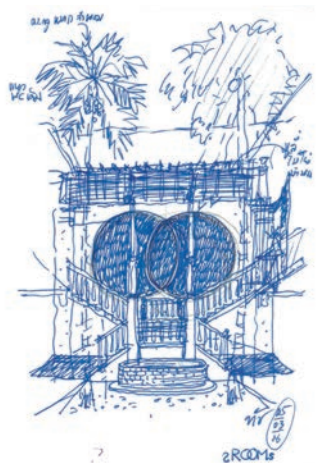
We tried to get investors interested without success. So I came up with the competition plan. We won a few competitions for social enterprises in Thailand from the British Council and AIS. In Singapore we won the Young Entrepreneur Award. The awards helped us raise money and get publicity. After that investors came to us.

## How did you win over the judges at these contests?

It's because we work really hard on the ground and embody the ideals of a social enterprise. We also have successful case studies from the villages to prove that they really make money from these tours. The villages get 70% of the net price of the tour, and another slice of the profit gets put into their community fund. Having visitors and making money also helps to keep families together and makes them proud of their cultures. [localalike.com](http://localalike.com)

# Keeping it cool

*This Phuket architectural firm is embracing the historical concept of tropical indoor-outdoor living*



As Phuket heats up, it's a little ironic that Chom and Taj Shivapakwajjanalert, the husband-and-wife team behind the island's rising architecture firm Dhamarchitects, consider the most important part of any design to be how it embraces the open air. “There shouldn't be any air conditioning, ever,” declares Chom. “After all, we live in the tropics!”

The interview is taking place in the upstairs room of their repurposed, century-old Sino-Colonial shophouse at the heart of Phuket's Old Town, the distinctive area home to the island's most traditional architecture. Combining a belief in upcycling materials, and a “limited budget”, the high-ceilinged space has light fixtures made from old door frames hanging over a row of designers sitting at iMacs.

They recently completed work on an award-winning project that allowed them to project many of their core design principles. “The key word that best describes our architecture is ‘blend’,” says Chom. “Whether it be light, culture, past or present, we try to make the new one old, and the old one new.” This

approach is exemplified at the Little Nyonya Hotel.

“We started with the smallest unit in the building, the breeze block,” explains Chom, “which became the DNA of the building – blending [Phuket's] historical Chinese, Thai and Arabic influences.” The owner, a project manager by trade, had a warehouse full of old material – wood, metal, window frames – which became the inspiration for the design.

Back in their office, the couple talk about how they love the historic Old Town, and want to help its residents understand its value. “Some people don't really care about the buildings,” says Chom, “and too many don't belong to locals anymore. But if anyone wants advice on how to look after them, we offer our help for free.” Their other big passion is nature. You enter their second-floor studio office via a “moon gate”, passing through a sculptured open-air garden, before ascending into their enclosed office. Chom describes this as a transition space. “You have the outside then the inside. We like how you come in, go out, then in again.” [facebook.com/dhamarchitects](https://facebook.com/dhamarchitects)