

TTO | EMIGRE

Bernard Collin

By Roxanne De Lacroix



Why did you decide to come to Thailand?

At first it was a personal motivation then it became a business reason...

I was based in Sydney and my roots were in France and Belgium, and I really felt that Sydney was at the end of the world. I was missing our French culture and not many friends or family would visit us so far. I thought I should make a move to get back closer to my origins.

At about the same time, I had visited some friends in Bangkok and met top executives in the Loxley group, and it became evident that our expertise was needed in Asia. Thailand was very welcoming, Loxley offered us a potential Joint Venture and we took the chance. I arrived on June 6th 2003 and on the 11th, I was delivering together with CISCO, my first seminar on Network Security with an audience of 80+ people at the Grand Hyatt.

What is it that made you stay?

As a family, we immediately felt at home, it was the most amazing thing. Coming from Sydney where despite being fairly fluent in English I never found it easy to integrate, I found myself immediately immersed in the network of expats in Bangkok. The multicultural environment was so welcoming and so pleasant to mix in that we fell in love with the place.

As a business, it became obvious that it would be more difficult. Internet was far from what it is today, Thai companies don't have the same views on software or internet security and we had lots of convincing to do. But we felt that the market was about ready for us and it would not take long before we could be having a real impact on the business scene.

What do you like best about living in Thailand?

Life is easy. It is fantastic how easy things are in Thailand. From renting a place, to relaxing or starting a business and getting things moving, it all is so simple compared to France or even Australia. You get so much help from everywhere and everyone that any venture is a pleasure to tackle. There are so many businesses, charity or hobby clubs that anybody can find what he/she wants very quickly.

The friendliness of the people here, their smiles and shyness, the warmth of the expat community and the myriad of possibilities offered by the country is just overwhelming. There is so much to discover about the country and it's people that taking a day off work can also turn into a great adventure if you explore the places around. I found myself walking in areas of Bangkok that I never knew existed and felt like I was entirely in another country or part of the world.

The quality of life is also definitely higher than most other European places as well, however coming originally from the south of France or just then from Sydney, this would not have been my strongest motivation at the time.

Can you give us a description of your ideal weekend?

Pack up the car, get a map and off we go. We have been exploring the back roads of Thailand and went by car all around Bangkok. When we have more time, we travelled up north, to Sukhothai, and even Chiang Mai and the province, visited a few islands, like Koh Samet and Koh Chang. Roads are not bad and if you are not in a hurry, there are so many great places to explore along the way.

Without having any real plans, just on the spur of the moment and we are off to explore...

Any special "Thai experience" you would like to share with our readers?

One of our first trips took us to the area of Chiang Mai, and we ended up in a small village where we found a huge open air restaurant, where over 500 people were eating. It looked like a major local event but we were told later that it was a normal weekend meal for people from the area. We got a table in the middle of it and we had no idea what was on the menu as we did not read Thai and there was no waiter who could speak any English nor did we see any other foreigners around either.

Eventually I looked around at other tables and got the waiter to show us different dishes, this resulted in a lot of laughing and then some people offering us some of their dish so we could taste and choose. It was an amazing experience to be mixed up with so many strangers who treated us like family for the whole evening. There was food and drinks coming from everywhere, and the bill was amazingly reasonable and low.

Do you collect any items or have a time consuming hobby?

I remain an Engineer at heart and one of my hobbies is playing with programming languages. I know it can sound like a strange hobby but it is fascinating for those who like it. I am also a keen photographer, and I spend a fair amount of time when I travel to take photos of people in their environments. I like food and I collect photos of street vendors who are cooking and selling food on the streets.

Tell us about the Thai personality that appeals the most to you and why?

I feel Thai people have a very big heart, and I am always amazed at how easy it is for them to give money to poor people in the street or take care of those in need even when they themselves don't have much.

I am a member of the Rotary of Bangkok-South and once a year, we have a big one day event on Silom road, called Coins on Silom (www.coinsonsilom.org) where we sell fake coins to stick on a long red ribbon that we affix on both footpaths on Silom road (5 KM). All of us stand in the street with our trays to collect and lots of people donate money for our charities. So much come from the street vendors that it keeps amazing me. They all chip in happily and thank us for doing this for Thai kids. Last year we collected together with our sponsors 1.8 Million baht. This year we want to exceed 2 MB, if you want to help, please see our website.

Your company is called "Safecom" can you explain the name?

Easy, safe from safety and Coms from communications. Our company is specialised in network and communication over Internet. We are experts in protecting data and computers, and we have expanded in Thailand with total outsourcing of IT solutions, like backup of computers, anti SPAM and antivirus, groupware solutions for email, calendar, address book etc... We secure our customers' computers and help them save money.

Do you have any tips for our readers on how they can more effectively protect their IT systems?

Practice safe computing, and not only in Thailand... don't open what you do not expect to receive, even from a friend. The rule of the game today is for « Gangster » to infect a few 100,000 of computers who will become their « Bots » (waiting to respond to order). Once a computer is infected, it will try discreetly to infect another one and they will all be sitting there waiting for orders. Then one day their "master" will blackmail a company and threaten to take them off-line if they don't wire a substantial amount of money using western union or other mechanisms and if they refuse, all the bots at the same time will attempt to log or access that company's server non stop for days...

The traffic will be so huge that the company won't be able to proceed with their business until the bots stop. And because the bots can be anywhere in the world, nobody can stop them... They will do this on any business that perform transactions online, if the business can not transact, the company loses money, so they usually end up paying...

Last week Skype was off line for a few days. There has been no company statement, no explanation either. Skype said they would inform their clients after concluding an enquiry. Skype certainly is a serious target for this kind of attack, without the internet Skype loses lots of money every minute, and their credibility suffers.

Were they under attack? did they pay up? we will never know, I am sure the company will have a valid technical explanation. What you can be sure of is that this kind of scenario is happening every day against online services, and most of them pay to be left in peace.

Computer crime is now exceeding the total amount of money collected from the various criminal organisations worldwide in the drug trade, and computer crime is a lot less risky, this is why it won't decrease until people understand that they can and must do something about it. Education is key... and it begins with protecting every single PC connected to the internet.

Can you tell us about your future dreams and ambitions?

I guess like every business man, my dream is to have a company well organised where things happen in a sort of natural way. I want to run a business where people feel good about coming to work in the morning, where we all collaborate in creating ingenious solutions to help our customers be better at their jobs. I want a place where people feel that they are contributing to something useful, and that by working here they make a difference in someone else's life.