



BBQ & Blitz at the Bangkok Chess Club

By Chris Swanicke

“IT’S LOOKING VERY BAD FOR YOU,” PROCLAIMS PATRICK, A CLUB REGULAR, to Poom, his Thai opponent, as he hovers over the board eagerly awaiting checkmate. A few moves later, Poom is beaten, and the two share a laugh over a table at Roadhouse Barbecue restaurant in Bangkok, where tables are prepared with chess mats and signs let patrons know this area is reserved for the Bangkok Chess Club.

The group had begun filtering in around 7 p.m., a mix of regulars and visitors, foreigners and Thais.

The atmosphere is laid back as players wait for more to arrive for the tournament. Patrick, a pianist who has played with the Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra, uses the last of his iPhone battery to show everyone some piano humor from the piano comedy duo Igudesman & Joo. Reviews at the table are mixed and before long players have moved over to a long table for blitz.

The mood is light before the matches begin, but once the tournament starts up the room quiets down. Players focus intently on their matches and a serious blitz session is underway.

Eric, a professor from Vancouver, watches over his son, Max, as he makes his way through the tournament. The duo is in town for a few days and decided to stop in to

find a few matches. Eric found the club online and in his second visit, Max is kept busy with a constant stream of matches.

Kai Tuorila, a Finnish expatriate and entrepreneur, founded the club in 1999 after having trouble finding matches in town. His mission was to create a regular meetup where regulars and travelers could stop by twice a week for a friendly game.

The club also hosts an annual tournament, the Bangkok Chess Club (BCC) Open, in April. “For us,” Kai explains, “it’s a combined vacation and chess.” The event is held in Bangkok every other year, and a new location otherwise, to give players a new experience in Thailand. This year’s tournament is in the beach town of Pattaya at the five-star Dusit Thani resort. The event boasts over 200 registered participants including some of the top players in the world.

Nearer to the BCC Open, some big names tend to stop by the weekly meetups. Nigel Short, last year’s champion, has been known to walk in unannounced to warm up in the days leading up to the event.

As the tournament has grown through word of mouth, Tuorila searches for bigger and bigger names. He talks wistfully as he remembers how close he came to attracting Magnus Carlsen and Garry Kasparov, who were looking for a place to train. They seemed headed for Thailand, and maybe a few appearances at the tournament, until a last minute schedule change sent the two to Hawaii.

The club, like chess, is a hobby for Tuorila. He’s built connections with players around the world and the club continues to grow through word of mouth.

Visitors to Bangkok of all skill levels are welcome to join the club every Tuesday at Roadhouse BBQ or Friday at Queen Victoria Pub. ♣

If You Go

From travel.state.gov:

If you are a U.S. citizen tourist staying for fewer than 30 days, you do not require a visa, but your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond the date of your entry into Thailand. Thai Immigration officials may ask for your onward/return ticket, and airlines may ask for this information when you book or check in.

Thailand is a popular travel destination with tourist facilities available throughout much of the country. Political and civil unrest has at times been a problem affecting travel to Thailand, and political demonstrations take place with some frequency. Please review the Department of State’s Fact Sheet on U.S.-Thailand relations for additional information.