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New website shows beachfront hotels that really are on the beach

He used to make hotels look far closer to the sea than they were. Now a Thailand-based photographer is mapping out the world's true beachfront properties and putting them online

By Richard S. Ehrlich 4 February, 2011



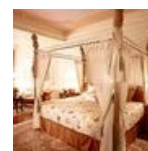
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Is that hotel really on the beach? According to John Everingham, you're more likely to find a true beachfront hotel on Koh Samui than anywhere else in the world.

A guilt-ridden photographer who regrets fooling countless travelers by creating pictures of hotels that appeared to be right on the sand -- but were actually on busy streets -- is now trying to make amends, and a little money, by enabling everyone to find true beachfront hotels for free.

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"Perhaps my being a founder of [The Beachfront Club](#) is a way for me to expunge my subconscious guilt and complicity in this unfair game," John Everingham wrote in a surprising public confession while announcing his new website.

Describing his deceptive work in Phuket's Patong beach in 1993, Everingham admitted, "Everyone who has been to this famous resort beach knows that a very busy road cuts a prominent swathe between beach and the hotels here.

"Without a vehicle in view, and me on the beach just below road level, my camera saw beach, trees and hotel. The road had effectively disappeared. Click. Again, the perfect shot.

"I'll never know how much disappointment my photo of that Patong hotel 'right on the beach' caused. And I did many other shots like it for other hotels," he wrote.

"Does omitting all references to a busy, noisy road between a hotel and the beach constitute 'misleading advertising?' Many of those who get fooled by it believe it is misleading or worse. During 20 years of publishing magazines in Phuket, I heard uncountable complaints from disappointed, sometimes angry, tourists, about it. More seeds for The Beachfront Club."

To correct all that, Everingham's Beachfront Club website allows seekers to examine photographs, satellite images, maps, written descriptions, and other data that obey his new criteria that "the hotel must have direct access to the beach or waterfront, with no road or traffic whatsoever in between."

The website guarantees hotels and resorts with the sea in your face, in countries scattered all over the planet, and generously adds places that do not offer an easy swim.

"Headland" locations include the spectacular Pacific Ocean view seen from Lucia Lodge in Big Sur, California, which is perched on a high cliff, overlooking dramatic, dangerous waves smashing on jagged rocks below.

Some hotels at ground level in urban settings, such as the elegant Galle Face in Colombo, Sri Lanka, also overlook a potentially lethal, rocky waterfront.

A beta work in progress



A screen grab from Thebeachclub.com's map of Waikiki Beach.

Travelers dream of relaxing while water laps in front of their hotel doorstep, but Everingham appears to be slaving around the clock, tweaking his beta website, stuffing it with "coming soon" features, arranging for it to be translated into Russian, and hunting for photographers, reviewers, bloggers, and other assistants throughout the world.

Photographers who contribute stunning pictures for free that are deemed worthy by the club's "Photo Guru," can market their own work via the website, and possibly receive junket assignments to shoot beachfront hotels.

The Beachfront Club "may create a partially restricted 'sensitive' zone in which some beach nudity is displayed. You must guarantee that you are at least 18 years of age, or meet the minimum age requirement of your country of residence, before accessing this area of the website," the club advises.



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Hoteliers can splash their building's flashiest features, boast about their beach front, and list their website address and other information, for free.

If hotels pay The Beachfront Club about US\$200 a month, they get to link their own booking system to the website's hotel pages, and enjoy higher visibility on the website's beach maps.

"Our other revenue stream will come through affiliate partnerships with the standard global booking engines, for they pay for traffic that sites like ours send to them," says Everingham.

Originally from Australia, he has worked extensively as a photographer in Southeast Asia during the past few decades, and teamed up to create The Beachfront Club with another Australian, Chris Ryan, who has wide experience as a hotelier in the region.

Thailand shines, Australia slumps



"We have mapped, in great detail, over 7,000 of the estimated 10,000 accommodations that meet our strict criteria for 'true beachfront'," says Everingham.

"In Thailand, we have mapped over 1,100 true beachfront hotels, from small bungalows on remote islands to the large and fancy international beach resorts of Phuket and Samui. Thailand has a score of islands in two oceans, with many hundreds of qualified hotels, giving it surely the widest variety of beach environments and experiences in the world.

"Beach destinations around the world are booming, and the number of hotels expanding rapidly. True beachfront land is either all gone, or very expensive in many countries, so more hotels are building away from the beach. And many of those will then use deceptive advertising to pretend they are either very close to, or right on the beach," he said.



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Among the sandy statistics, Thailand shines, but Australia slumps.

"Koh Samui has over 230 qualified hotels, making it the single 'biggest' true beachfront destination in the world," Everingham says.

"Australia, which has vast coastlines, fares very poorly in the 'true beachfront' stakes, because roads were built right along most of its famous beaches long ago."

Australia's fabled Bondi Beach has zero qualifying hotels. Even tiny Tunisia has more beachfront hotels than Australia.

Numerous beachfront hotels can be found in Spain, Majorca, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Florida, Mexico, Maldives, Egypt and Brazil.

Everingham hopes people will visit his website to see where the surf's really up, and learn why misleading photographs of beachside hotels appear in glossy magazines including, for example, another controversial photo he shot in 1991 of Phuket Palace hotel.

"My photo came to cause grief and financial loss for many people in the following years, it turned out. That photo ended up in a court of law, used as evidence in a bitter legal dispute, as evidence of the developer's calculated intent to deceive," he wrote in a release announcing The Beachfront Club.

Everingham's 1991 photo appeared in an advertisement, "on the back cover of Phuket Magazine, a high-end tourism publication of which I was the publisher. Though I was both the photographer of the image, and the publisher of the magazine helping to sell this out-of-place high-rise as 'beachfront', I did not think it was such a big deal at the time.

"And, I believe, I pushed aside the publisher's eternal struggle between money and conscience with simplistic justifications, telling myself that 'people would not really be fooled.' Yet many were fooled, and the developer ended up in that bitter court struggle, lost it, and fled Thailand forever."

The Beachfront Club is at www.thebeachfrontclub.com.



Richard S. Ehrlich is from San Francisco, California. He has reported news for international media from Asia since 1978, based in Hong Kong, New Delhi and now Bangkok.

Read more about [Richard S. Ehrlich](#)

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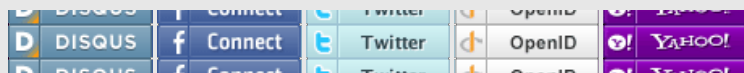
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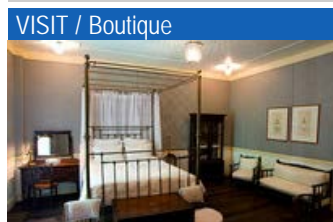


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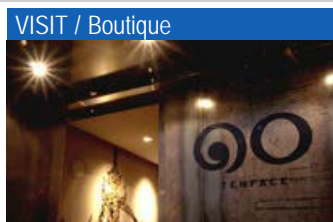
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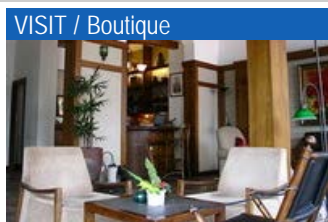
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