Is Thailand Really so Dangerous for Foreigners?

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Besides being home to countless noodle-soup carts, coyote dancers and moaning air-hostesses, Thailand is also home to some of the most sensational rumours east of the White House - mostly spread by Westerners over a few too many glasses of the intoxicating type, and by a sensationalist foreign media.

Let's start with some barstool rumours so terrifying that if you were sane enough, you'd be packing your bags for safer destinations like the Gaza Strip.

Thailand is a country so berserk that if you are cheesed-off with your neighbour, you can, with the assistance of one of Thailand's professional gunmen have him instantly shot into his next life. That menacing-looking tuk-tuk driver who hangs around outside your favourite bar: never get into any kind of conflict with that guy. Take extreme care and caution, as he's probably part of a ruthless criminal gang.

Watch out too for every murdering ex-police officer who is supposed to be serving life behind bars: he has been swapped for a look-alike and is out roaming the streets again. And don't forget those petite Thai women in Pattaya who are extremely skilled at lifting their tall, overweight rich foreign lovers and tossing them over a hotel balcony.

Geez, Thailand must be one of the most dangerous places in the world! But it really is (for Brits anyway) according to a leading UK tabloid, whose headline read: "With so many Britons murdered in Thailand, why does our government not warn of the dangers faced there?" The article stated that "Thailand may be friendly and engaging, yet its dark side is clearly visible".

And as for the Thais themselves: "they tend to separate the persona they present to the world from their interior character". The article argues its point by offering the statistic of at least 17 Brits being murdered since 2003 - except for Iraq, the highest percentage of any country in the world for Brits brutally slain.

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Of course, most foreigners reading this would be quick to point the finger of guilt at Thais. But after doing a bit of research and obtaining the names of those supposedly horrifically murdered, I found the following: there was no news coverage whatsoever for two of the murdered; another two seemed to be obvious cases of manslaughter; and another five were actually murdered by other foreigners. The original statistic for Thai culprits is therefore slashed by half.

I can't say that Thailand doesn't see a high number of Westerners getting knocked-off, because it does. But for a change, I'd like the Western media, when reporting these kind of statistics, to mention the quite obvious fact that Thailand doesn't always attract the nicest kind of foreigners. It attracts a lot of foreign criminals. Perhaps the British government ought to put out a warning stating that, too.

One murder case (which could legally be considered manslaughter) was the much publicised recent shooting by a police officer of two North American tourists in Mae Hong Son province. One tourist died while the other survived. Even though it was later confirmed by tens of foreign witnesses living in the area that the