

Café Europa - 17 years in Krabi

By [Joakim Persson](#)

Thai locals eating the 'Nordic Sushi' and drinking Akvavit is a rare sight but common at Café Europa in downtown Krabi, where guests are, which is also noteworthy, being served by the Scandinavian restaurant's two Danish owners. Café Europa, believe it or not, has been open since 1990 and thereby before the real tourism boom started in Krabi. It could thereby grow slowly and build a reputation along with the growing number of visitors.

"Today many guests come from the nearby beach resort An Nang to dine. We have a high season of course during which up to ninety per cent of our guests are from there. Then, in addition, we have Thais coming here to eat. We try to get a mix, of course mainly targeting tourists but gradually we try to build more on Thais," says co-owner Henrik Enevoldsen.

Finn Rasmussen launched the restaurant and then Henrik joined after going back and forth between Thailand and Denmark. Finn new the Thai lady who became Henrik's so the two Danes met in Krabi.

They were pioneers at that time, to say the least, with water buffalos in the vicinity and a muddy unpaved road to Ao Nang and very few Scandinavians around. But the forecast was that it would grow," says Henrik. "There was potential." At that time there was only backpackers and what is appreciated by them soon enough becomes noticed by the charter operators. "It's always like that. They are coming first and find the great places. And then the big charter companies arrive."

Today, before the latest high season, Krabi, which includes Phi Phi Island and Koh Lanta, had over 300 hotels and resorts, with several new five star establishments just opened. Krabi will also get several new golf courses in the coming years and two marinas for yachts. Ambitious property developments are also launched, the new international airport was recently opened and the big supermarkets are on their way.

"In the beginning, up to year 2000 there were a lot of backpackers coming. Today, looking at our sales, we have only twenty-five per cent income from backpackers. For them Krabi is becoming too expensive."

Tourism took off ten years ago when the tour operators entered the market and today Krabi is very popular among Scandinavians. From Finland they fly here directly and Henrik says that within years direct flights will start from Copenhagen and Stockholm.

Visitors to Krabi town are they not only passing through?
"No, we're in fact seeing increasingly visitors staying in Krabi town. First of all, prices of hotels are lower. Secondly they use it as base, and do day tours. Krabi is not only beaches but also nature and lots of history. There are many exciting things to see."

Krabi is the place to be

Finn and Henrik also stays put in the town, even though they had the chance to reap the benefits from tourism in Ao Nang. "We would never open business there," states Henrik. "Living here is convenient. You can easily get to all the places from here and when staying in town you experience the local Thai life versus Ao Nang which is like the Canary Islands! We have an oasis here and it's very nice." However, they did open a branch recently, 'Nyhavn' – across the street. "We started it after the tsunami and people said: 'You're crazy.' It's typical for us, to be pioneers. We're not afraid to take chances."



Finn and Henrik



Looking from outside...

But they don't wish to be bigger than now: "We don't see that as a must, or success to be a huge restaurant with seats for perhaps two hundred people. We like to be 'you' with the guests. We are happy to give help and suggestions. You couldn't do that in a large place. Then it becomes impersonal. Here you are coming into a Scandinavian feeling you recognize from back home, an atmosphere that you cannot find in a large place."

One fairly soon notices this cosy feeling brought about by the presence of the two Danes. And yes they serve their guests and have permission to do it, being aware of that they are a special case in Thailand. "We know, it's not normal, but it is written in our work permits that we are allowed to work in the restaurant."

Community helpers

They have made themselves very useful for the municipality and the authorities throughout the years and made very good friends with the Governor. Immigration use them for translation needs, the police come to them when they have problems with some foreigner, and so on.

"As we are involved in many things here, we know we are respected. We are 'you' with authorities and all. We have all our papers in order and have always paid our taxes."

"This also prevents us from leaving. Everything we have built up is here in town. Say if we moved to Lanta, where we are not known, when we would have to start from zero again."

What to order?

Their menu has developed over the years along with the network to source various produce. "It's an art in itself; for example Beetroot is flown here from Chiang Mai, which we use for 'Pytt-i-panna'. But it's not a big problem; we have a huge network after so many years. In principal we can get everything we need from Denmark and Sweden. But we try to use local produce as much as possible."

They are the only one serving Smørrebrød in the whole of Krabi. "We try to increase it on the menu because Denmark is known for it. It is hard work to make the ingredients but it is profitable."

"We have found a niche that has become popular also among Thais. Most of them come here to eat Danish herring; our Nordic version of sushi."

The Governor for Krabi is a good ambassador as a regular guest who comes to eat pepper steak with baked potato at Café Europa, sometimes also holding municipality meetings there with herring and schnapps as food and drinks.

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Send mail to gregers@scandasia.com with questions or comments about this web site. Or contact us by:

Phone: (+66) 2 943 7166 / Fax: (+66) 2 943 7169 / Mobile: (+66) 81 629 0117 (Gregers Moller)