

# INHALERS

## Aromatherapy becomes a daily habit

very thai

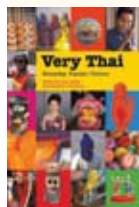
Philip Cornwel-Smith



Forget Fendi bags, mobile phones and coloured tooth braces, the commonest Thai accessory is *yaa dom* – the nasal inhaler. The little white nozzle plugs into both the nose and the national psyche. Should the temperature drop beneath 30°C and the nation plunge into sniffles, a dab of menthol or *yaa mong* (a fragrant fatty ointment, like Tiger Balm) rubbed under the nose should suffice. But even when not suffering a cold, half the population habitually pops open a plastic tube of *yaa dom* and sniffs.

Fashion, tradition and hypochondria may play a part, but a breathing problem exists. The way the Thai now live traumatises the nasal passages, causes constant chills and dulls the immune system. Constant ducking in and out of ice-cold air-conditioning isn't the sole culprit; millions wake up wind-dried from sleeping through the gusts of a fan. Then throughout the day, stress-induced over-breathing gets the chairbound urbanite panting through his mouth. Respiratory illness is gagging Thailand. The capital's fumes and cement dust permeate the Central Plains, while smoke from burning forest and fields choke Northern valleys throughout the hot season.

Traditions support the vapour fetish. Today's inhalers continue an indigenous healing culture of aromatherapy and a delight in things perfumed. Aside from morphing into today's lipstick-shaped plastic inhalers, how did *yaa dom* stay hip? Toted like any other cosmetic, it serves as a socially accepted prop. *Yaa dom* plays nose-crutch in the manner of that mouth-crutch, the cigarette. Freud would have a field day.



**Very Thai: Everyday Popular Culture** is a book that almost every foreigner living in Bangkok has on their bookshelf, a virtual bible on Thailand's pop culture. For page after colourful page, author Philip Cornwel-Smith guides readers on an unconventional tour of the quirky everyday things that make Thailand truly Thai. From the 60-plus mini-chapters, we present a different excerpt each month. Prepare yourself for the sideways logic in what seems exotic. Snap up a copy at any good book shop.

Very Thai – River Books I B995 I hardcover, with photos by John Goss and Philip Cornwel-Smith