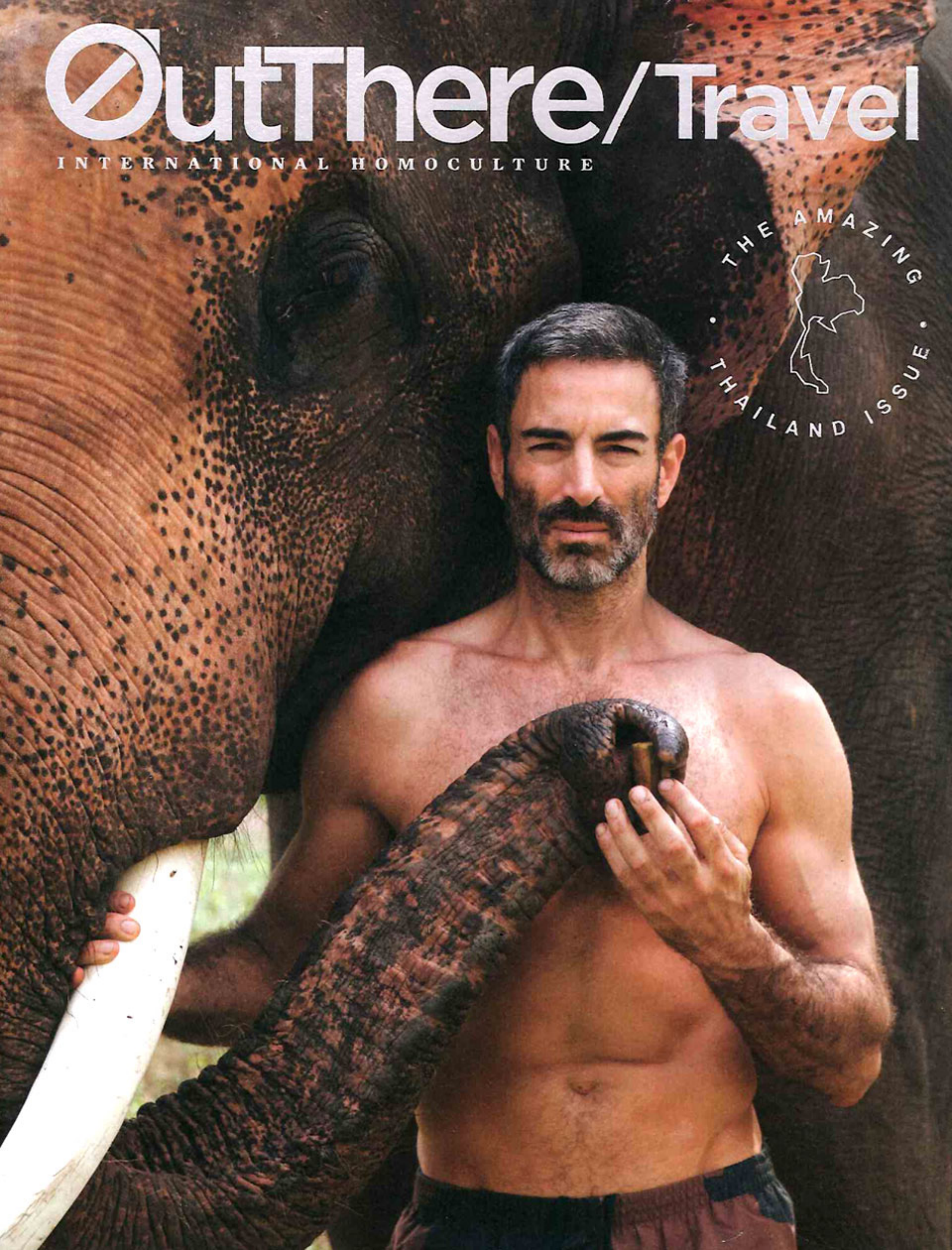


# OutThere/Travel

INTERNATIONAL HOMOCULTURE

THE AMAZING  
THAILAND ISSUE



# THE INSIDE TRACK

DO zone out on Tonsai bay. The eye candy is insane

DON'T miss the sunset. You may think it's a cliché, but it is really quite spectacular

DO celebrate your climb at the Grotto at the Rayavadee - a unique 'natural' bar set in an ancient limestone cliff

DON'T miss the Phra Nang Shrine housing a collection of phalluses carved by fishermen

DO go for a late night dip. On dark nights, the brilliant-blue bio-luminescence of the water is breathtaking

DON'T look down

task. I come face to face with this on day two when I realize how poorly 15 years of gym training has prepared me for rock climbing. My upper back is in pieces. It hammers home the flaws in my technique – your hands should secure you to the rock face while your legs do the heavy lifting. I had been trying to chin-up my way to the top.

Climbing is utterly engrossing, to the point of being a meditative act. As much as we talk abstractly of living 'in the moment', we rarely do. Too often our minds are occupied with anxieties about the future or regrets of the past. Meditation alone is great, but it's a challenge to shut off the higher conscious processes, the constant thinking about thinking. Climbing doesn't give you that option – you're in the moment, or you fall off. Without conscious effort you find yourself at peace. For all the physical effort of the sport, rock climbing is a shortcut to serenity.

As a thank you to Ghop and Sue, our climbing instructors, we bring them for lunch at our hotel. Ghop tells us how he got into rock climbing in the early nineties before it exploded as a tourist industry (remember those playful climbing route names? Well the first one was called 'The Money Maker' when Thai locals worked out they could charge tourists to climb it).

Climbing hooked Ghop utterly. He spent five years living on the beach doing nothing else. Climbing, thinking about climbing, discussing the minutiae of routes, turning them over in his head, solving the puzzle.

After lunch we tackle our greatest challenge yet, an endurance testing climb-hike-climb with the promise of the best

view on the island as our reward. At the summit the greenery falls away, the rock flattens out and our weariness evaporates as the view reveals itself to us. To call it spectacular would be to completely undersell it. Let's just say the sense of achievement, the perfect blue skies and the kind of tropical landscape you expect King Kong to burst from at any minute create a truly perfect moment. I begin to understand why those climbers quit their jobs to come here.

Travel wouldn't be travel without at least one moment of existential crisis, where you wonder just what the hell you're working so hard for back home. I'm not saying I'm ready to hand in my notice, I still love the urban scramble back home. Cabs and cocktails, ambition and avarice. But there are lessons here if I want them and can believe they won't be eroded when I return home.

The lesson is the same as ever – focus on the wall in front of you. On where your hands and feet are right now. Not the summit above or the ground below. When you solve the puzzles, enjoy the dopamine hit, and then reach for the next ledge. ☺



Zack stayed at the beautiful Rayavadee resort, an exclusive, secluded getaway hidden among tropical foliage in Railay. The trip was in partnership with AdventureTemples.com who specialize in luxury holidays, packed with inspired experiences, offering

something truly inspirational for the body, mind and spirit; accessible whether you're 25 or 75 and is always based from one of the world's best boutique hotels or lodges. It's all about taking one step out of your comfort zone, in effortless style, supported by real-life experts. The

company actually started from an online forum of luxury adventure travelers, quickly growing to have members in over 20 countries, but all sharing one key mission – to locate the very best, no compromise, luxury adventure vacations. All this aside, getting to have

a conversation with the super knowledgeable Rob Pendleton on what to expect from this trip and how to prepare was invaluable. The climb itself was led by the fantastic Ghop and Sue from King Climbers in Railay. [www.rayavadee.com](http://www.rayavadee.com) [www.adventuretemples.com](http://www.adventuretemples.com)



# RAYAVADEE

## KRABI

Our first clue that this is no ordinary resort comes when a speed-boat pulls up and a call goes out in our names. We slip through the crowded deck, feeling a hundred jealous looks burning into the back of our skulls and jump aboard in the single most Bond-like moment of our lives. On arrival at this immaculate, luxurious village, we're driven through tropical flora while monkeys leap

overhead. The most breathtaking of it all is The Grotto, a bar and restaurant set in the recess of a cliff face and opening onto a movie location scout's wet dream of a beach. Another highlight was the deep blue infinity pool that literally melted into the Andaman sea.

The accommodation ranges from the merely luxurious (two story chalets with outdoor hot tubs) to the truly spectacular

(moat, drawbridge and koi carp included).

One incident encapsulates the impeccable level of service you get here. We're out reading by the beach, taking in the sunset and just as the light dips, out of nowhere a staff member appears, attaches a tiny reading light to our books and before we can mispronounce "korp khun kap" to her, she's disappeared again. Pure, unadulterated luxury.

214 Moo 2, Tambon Ao-Nang Amphoe Maung, Krabi [www.rayavadee.com](http://www.rayavadee.com)