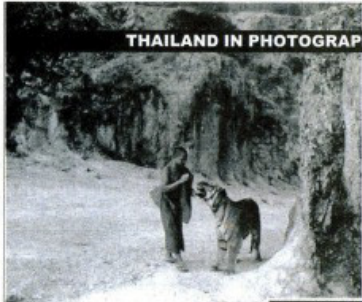
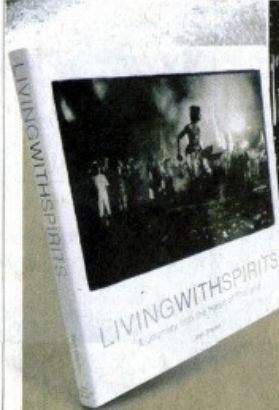


THAILAND IN PHOTOGRAPHS



LEFT A monk and a tiger in the forest monastery of Wat Pa Luang.

BELOW Lhai Khai, a 100-year-old spirit doctor from the Shan hills.



LIVING WITH SPIRITS: A Journey into the Heart of Thailand
Ben Davies
Luna Publications, 132 pp., \$42
ISBN 978-6167277028

A lens into the spirit world

EZRA

Most of us have made an offering. We've prayed at Erawan Shrine, worn an amulet, asked a monk for good fortune, read the horoscope. We count on lucky numbers, auspicious days, and at the same time we're too caught up in the daily routine to devote much time to meditation, monastic ordination or merit-making. The spirits therefore become very appealing, as they provide an easier or quicker alternative, and sometimes it does seem that they appreciate our attention and reward us with good fortune.

In this photographic collection, Ben Davies journeys with his camera into the Kingdom's superstitious heartland. Over five years he photographs astrologers, palm readers, mediums, tattoo artists, spirit doctors, monks and a floating nun, in areas as far-ranging as the northern border with Burma to the Vegetarian Festival in Phuket. Though a trace of his Western scepticism remains, he is respectful of what the diviners say of the future, and how they provide hope and meaning for those who rely on them.

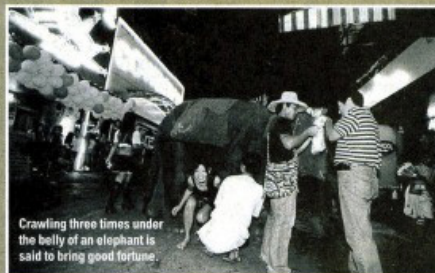
Through sections on sacrifice, trance, spirits and enlightenment, Davies' choice of black-and-white rather than colour photography is appropriate. These pictures are atmospheric, personal and poignant, and collectively shed some light on Thailand's spiritual heartland.



A man's face is pierced by six swords outside the Tsui Tsui Shrine in Phuket town.



Nai Bichu, a Lisu shaman.



Crawling three times under the belly of an elephant is said to bring good fortune.