

## ***THAI Croatia Retreat a Great Success***

*By Cristina Muñoz Gándara, RTT*

The 2009 International Thai Massage Retreat & Conference was held from June 24-28, 2009 on the beautiful island of Iz, Croatia. For the first time in Europe, students, practitioners and teachers from different lineages gathered to share the healing spirit of *nuad boran*. Thai massage therapists from eight different countries attended the conference. The nearby village of Veli Iz was a popular destination for morning and evening shopping, restaurants and cafes. Morning yoga, meditation and tai chi were available; swimming was popular after class, and sunrise and sunset walks along the beach were a real treat. There were two main workshops each day, plus one group presentation, discussion or meeting.

Ralf Marzen (Germany, UK) taught specialized techniques for using the feet in Thai Massage. Soon, everyone was using soles and heels to apply pressure, while stretching our partners and working sen lines with our feet. Ralf led another workshop on the last day, taking the group back to the essence of *nuad boran* as a meditative process and listening experience. This allowed the group to rediscover Thai massage as a true gift of connection and loving kindness, not merely as a series of postures and techniques.

Noam Tyroler (Israel) taught two workshops dealing with Thai pressure point therapy. One targeted lower back pain and another featured acupressure for headache, jaw and neck pain. His precise illustrations, excerpted from his new book, as well as his knowledge and thorough instruction, helped to expand and deepen our familiarity with Thai pressure point work and point therapy routines.

D'vorah Swarzman and Bob Haddad, (USA) led a shared presentation on the use of body weight and breath work in *nuad boran*. Bob demonstrated practical ways to work with both the therapist's and the receiver's breathing patterns, and D'vorah led us in surrendering our body weight to our partners and demonstrated flowing, dancing Thai body-work.

Danko Lara Radic (Serbia) offered "Specialized Grips and Holding Techniques", a workshop that gave us a view of his personal approach to Thai massage. His full body torsion was serious fun! His second workshop focused on ways to work with our elbows in as an alternative to thumbs and palms.

Danko's sense of humor and generous spirit were a blessing, and his fire dancing at night on the pier in front of the hotel was fabulous.

Davor Haber (Croatia) led an expert class on spinal twists. In addition to teaching us some completely new twists, he brought a new awareness to the classic Thai spinal twists by showing variations and refinements using precise placement of feet and hands, and bringing more attention to the breath. Davor also led a group discussion on The State of Thai Massage in Europe, which sparked an interesting discussion and led to the formation of a European committee for THAI.



*Above: D'vorah Swarzman gracefully works the upper torso of Ralf Marzen while compressing one of his legs.*

Niclaire Skye Mann (England) offered a presentation called "Improving General Delivery Techniques", and spoke about the importance of maintaining clients in a para-sympathetic state. Geoff Pritchatt (Scotland) led a workshop on Royal Style Thai Massage. We learned the formalities and protocol of working in Royal style, while at the same time working important pressure points used in this type of Thai massage.

Hans Lutz (Germany) and Bob Haddad (USA) co-taught a workshop called "Lifts and Suspensions in Nuad Boran", in which we learned various ways to suspend arms, legs and back. We also learned and practiced full-body suspensions, which sometimes led to falling over each other and occasional bursts of laughter.

The Korinjak Hotel sits right on the shores of calm Adriatic waters, and many rooms had direct views of the sea from the balcony. Meals were served in the hotel's covered outdoor dining room. After the first day, relaxed by island life, just about everyone was leaping into the sea during free time, and running off to town for coffee in the morning and dinner and drinks at night. The good energy continued throughout the 4 days and nights, and the closing ceremony on Sunday afternoon was a testimony to the true community spirit that was generated on the island.

Because of the beautiful natural surroundings, centralized location, and success of this event, THAI is planning to hold another Conference on Veli Iz in 2010. With the help of THAI Director Bob Haddad, and local coordinators Danko Lara Radic (Serbia) and Davor Haber (Croatia), the 2010 event should be a wonderful opportunity for continued study and growth in Thai massage. Remember June 23-27, 2010 on the island of Iz, Croatia!

To view photos and commentary from the 2009 Croatia Retreat, visit:

<http://thaihealingallianceuropeangathe.shutterfly.com>

**Photos from The THAI Retreat & Conference, 2009 - photos by Arnold van Winkel, RTT**



*Top left:* The combined altars at the Retreat, with offerings, photographs, personal and spiritual items.  
*Top right:* The five main teachers at the 2009 Conference - from left to right, Davor, Bob, Danko, Noam and Ralf.  
*Center left:* Bob demonstrates a full body suspension. *Center right:* Participants gather for the twice daily chanting of the Om Namō.  
*Bottom left:* D'vorah works Ralf's neck with her toes as she opens his shoulder area with her hands.  
*Bottom right:* Davor demonstrates "the tango", a playful and graceful spinal twist.