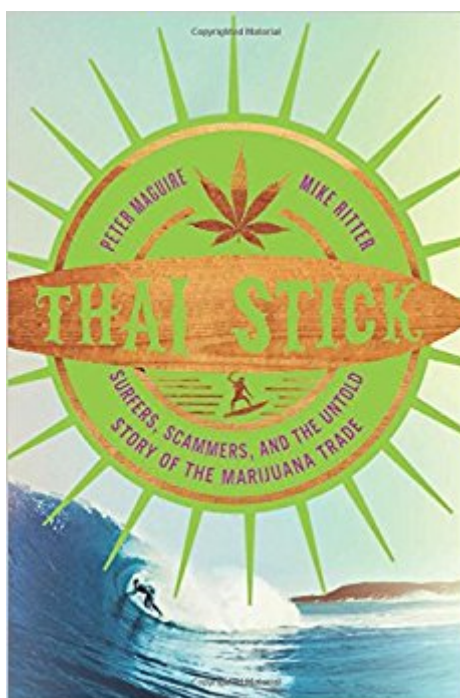


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# Thai Stick: Surfers, Scammers, And The Untold Story Of The Marijuana Trade



## Synopsis

Located on the left bank of the Chao Phya River, Thailand's capital, Krungthep, known as Bangkok to Westerners and "the City of Angels" to Thais, has been home to smugglers and adventurers since the late eighteenth century. During the 1970s, it became a modern Casablanca to a new generation of treasure seekers, from surfers looking to finance their endless summers to wide-eyed hippie true believers and lethal marauders left over from the Vietnam War. Moving a shipment of Thai sticks from northeast Thailand farms to American consumers meant navigating one of the most complex smuggling channels in the history of the drug trade. Many forget that until the mid-1970s, the vast majority of marijuana consumed in the United States was imported, and there was little to no domestic production. Peter Maguire and Mike Ritter are the first historians to document this underground industry, the only record of its existence rooted in the fading memories of its elusive participants. Drawing on hundreds of interviews with smugglers and law enforcement agents, the authors recount the buy, delivery, voyage home, and product offload. They capture the eccentric personalities of the men and women who transformed the Thai marijuana trade from a GI cottage industry into a professionalized business moving the world's most lucrative commodities, unraveling a rare history from the smugglers' perspective.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Historian Maguire (Law and War) and former drug smuggler Ritter delve into the world of the international marijuana trade of the 1960s and 1970s, tracing its quasi-utopian roots to its suppression during the War on Drugs. Utilizing hundreds of interviews, the authors reveal how early

entrepreneurs bringing high-quality marijuana into the United States sincerely believed that these drugs could provide epiphanies otherwise inaccessible; making fortunes by supplying illicit drugs was, for them, a case of doing well while doing good. Such sums of money attracted genuine predators, from ruthless drug lords to brutal pirates. In addition, the hapless transcendental entrepreneurs found themselves faced with an American government marching grimly towards an enforced prohibition on all illegal drugs, hard and soft. The authors are sympathetic to the loftier goals of the soft drug pioneers while acknowledging the realities of uninhibited capitalism; grand ambitions often led to a dank prison cell or an unmarked grave. (Nov.) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

A remarkable story, rich in untold details about a vastly lucrative yet little known trade. (Anne McClintock, University of Wisconsin-Madison) An extraordinary work, at once a participatory anthropology, detached sociology, cultural history, remarkable example of oral history, series of smuggling stories, and many other things to boot. (Anders Stephanson, Columbia University) At once cutting-edge research and candid autobiography, this globe-straddling tale rolls from Southern California surf shops to the beaches of Baja, from Maui to seedy bars in Thailand and the jungles of Laos, and from communist extermination camps in Cambodia to DEA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Along the way, the authors introduce a cast of real-life characters stranger than fiction, who earned their place in the annals of American crime by chasing their own dreams across the high seas and back again, creating a billion-dollar black market industry in the process, sometimes at the cost of their freedom and sometimes at the cost of their lives. (Craig Etcheson, war crimes investigator) From the dank highlands of Siam to the sage-blown point breaks of Alta California, *Thai Stick* explores the relationship between surf culture and the 'funny business.' Maguire is grounded in law, history, and the surfing life and is exactly the right author for this street-level breakdown of smuggling in the 1970s. (Scott Hulet, *The Surfer's Journal*) *Thai Stick* is a brilliant story of the surfers and watermen who pioneered the trans-Pacific pot trade. Adventurous and often hilarious, the book's narrative blows open one of the last remaining secrets of the hippie era. It also exposes the dark side of the business and its occasionally tragic consequences. *Thai Stick* is at once an authoritative work of history and an intense, highly entertaining read. (Nicholas Schou, author of *The Weed Runners: Travels with the Outlaw Capitalists of America's Medical Marijuana Trade*) *Thai Stick* is a rare, heart-stopping story about California surfers, hippies and straight out druggies who smuggled potent marijuana from Thailand to the United States and changed the shape of the American drug culture. Based on interviews with the modern day pirates, *Thai Stick* captures the wild

aura of the 1970s and 1980s dope trade and the U.S. War on Drugs that tried to stop it. (Elizabeth Becker)A rattling good yarn. (Bradley Winterton Taipei Times)

This book is a great read and I wasn't able to put it down. I felt the author did an excellent job of combining voluminous research and interviews along with recollections of his own youthful dalliance with smuggling, thereby personalizing and investing the story with a sort of authenticity that many historians can't muster. The "scammers" featured here are cast in a sympathetic but still honest and critical light. Although the author doesn't explicitly make the point, you can see a tragic arc in each of the stories: they got interested in illicit trade to help finance their surfing / hippie lifestyle, but ultimately each one of them was consumed by the trade and most set surfing aside to focus on making their scores and living the high life (literally and figuratively). This led to predictable consequences, but even though you can pretty much guess what's coming, the stories and ingenuity of the protagonists is truly fine entertainment. This is a great story told well.

It was a quick read and answered many of the questions I had pondered during the later part of the Thai scam era. These scammers were getting leading edge MBAs in Intl business out of SE Asia, by virtue of pulling these complex deals off. Classic personalities, risky operations, rickety boats, bribes, losses, deaths and lavish spending for some. I loved the "code" and those who wouldn't break it. There were names familiar to me from those times, and I do vividly remember when it all unraveled and hit the media \$#!@ fan.

This book is the real deal. A few names have been changed but I know a lot of these people. Very interesting and pretty damned accurate

Living on Maui in 1970, I was a naïve young girl from Newport Beach who had no idea that all these guys were smugglers and transporters on such a huge level. Of course we knew "someone was bringing in weed" but who knew the extent of the massive amounts and the ocean going bravery it took. My heart was pounding while reading some of the stories, couldn't put it down. Have told everyone I know about this excellently documented book.

Interesting read. These stories filled in some details about the Thai smuggling business. But, most of the book seemed to focus a little too much on the scams and scammers that went awry and not enough about the loads that made it, the scammers that succeeded and then went on to other

things without legal ramifications. I suppose there wouldn't be much documentation when things went well. There were a lot of important stories untold, which may be for the best.

Excellent read. Well worth the time.

Wonderful history of SE Asia in the 70's and 80's; the surfing part wasn't of interest to me, but the rest was a fantastic glimpse into the world of cannabis smuggling. It was a bit repetitive at times, but overall I rate it as a must-read for anyone interested in global drug policy and reminiscent of times much simpler than these we live in today.

Very interesting read. I recommend reading it if your into stuff like this.

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