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Thailand: Fakery, enshrined

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BANGKOK, THAILAND

It turns out the phony Ferrari, that tour de force of fakery whipped up recently in a Thai backstreet garage (with a Subaru engine, alas), isn't here. But there's a counterfeit Yamaha scooter in mint condition propped up on its stand.

Bangkok's Museum of Counterfeit Goods has plenty of other eye-openers, arousing a deep curiosity in fakes.

Et tu, Toblerone, almond nougats and all? And you two, Cheetos cheese curls and Doritos tortilla chips, surely not! Jars of Nutella hazelnut spread. Boxes of Ligo California Raisins. Ferrero Rocher chocolate balls. Even 12 baht (35 cent) MAMA instant noodles. They're all bogus.

Foodstuffs are just one of the 20 categories of counterfeit goods on display – some 1,500 items in all. There are fake brand-name clothing and leather goods, perfumes, household and electrical appliances, vehicle and machine parts.

"Before, it was mostly fake T-shirts, now it's pretty much everything," notes Clemence Gautier, an attorney at Tilleke & Gibbins, a Bangkok-based international law firm specializing in intellectual property theft. The firm's museum, one of the largest of its kind in Asia, houses counterfeits seized during myriad raids by Tilleke's agents to be used as evidence in court. Tourists, students, law enforcement officials – they all come here to marvel and learn.

"Statistically, 1 out of every 10 products on sale is a fake," says David Lyman, the firm's American chairman. And that's globally. Thailand, along with China and Russia, is a world leader in counterfeits. Helpfully, museum exhibits are labeled with an F for fakes, which often look identical to the genuine articles. "We're losing the war against greed and corruption," Mr. Lyman laments.

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