



NO FAKIN' IT

The Museum of Counterfeit Goods

By Dave Stamboulis

Like it or not, Bangkok tends to get a pretty bad rap as a city of fakes. Lady Gaga's Rolex quips aside, a stroll down Sukhumvit, Silom, and numerous other market areas about town will reveal a motley collection of not-so-genuine goods, whether they be watches, perfume, Viagra and other pick-me-ups, plenty of designer shoes and clothing, and of course the tens of thousands copied DVDs. Most tourists head back home with at least one 'bargain' purchase or two, and even most locals, no matter how hard pressed they are to admit it, likely own a copy of something that's not real (and you are working on your computer with what kind of software?). There is more than meets the eye to all of this copycatting, and the uniquely named Museum of Counterfeit Goods is out to set the record straight and inform the public as to just how damaging this huge industry is.

Made up of a collection of over 4,000 items that have infringed upon trademarks, copyrights, and patents, the Museum of Counterfeit Goods is a one-of-a-kind place. The small museum, which is located on the 26th floor of the Supalai Grand Tower on Rama III Road, is housed in the offices of Tilleke & Gibbins, one of the leading law firms in Thailand and Vietnam, an enterprise that has been at the forefront of patent protection and litigation for the past several decades.

The museum got its start in 1989 when the firm began wondering what to do with the huge pool of seized counterfeit goods they were accumulating





over the years as evidence in court cases that had been seized in police raids. Tilleke & Gibbins decided that an informative display might make for a great public educational tool to create awareness for consumers about intellectual property infringement, and thus, the museum was born.

The law firm focuses on three different areas; copyright, trademark, and patent infringement, and displays from their various cases are shown in different forms and products. There are copyrighted works like *Lonely Planet* guidebooks that have been reprinted page for page, drugs and medical items ranging from Viagra to very common medications that have been replicated, and, of course, all the trademark logos that have been altered or spun off from designer t-shirts to sunglasses to tennis shoes. However, further inspection reveals just how in depth the counterfeiting industry goes, as there are also fake mobile phone batteries, high-end automobile parts, calculators, and even a few signature guitar brands that have been imitated.

While one could argue that many consumers of fake sunglasses or bags might not shell out for a real one if they had to pay the price, the counterfeiting industry goes far deeper than just hurting the manufacturer, designer, or brand company. Fake medication can cause irreparable damage, products like fake phone batteries have been known to explode during use, and it is pretty scary to think about driving a car or motorcycle that has been outfitted with copied parts that have not gone through any system of safety checks or quality control.

As there are no regulations on the pirating industry, the makers of the fake goods have no rights and may be illegal or underage. Additionally, as no tax gets paid by the copycats, the government ends up having less money to use for any kind of social or consumer programs. And as one of the attorneys explained, original artists have less reason to be innovative and creative, knowing that their work is being mass produced and that the overall market is stuck in a cycle of copying as opposed to creating.

Despite its reputation, Thailand actually has done a decent job of slowing down the industry. A guide at the museum pointed out that a decade ago, many of the pirate manufacturers were based here in Thailand, whereas now they tend to be in other countries in the region, and use Thailand as a transport and sales hub, which makes capturing and processing the big fish all the more challenging. The law firm works with Thai customs and police to seize shipments of illegal products, and to help their clients win claims and try to minimize the effects of an industry that impacts everyone.

The Museum of Counterfeit Goods is most insightful as to the width and depth of the copied products and trademarks industry here. It is quite an eye-opener to see just how pervasive the industry is, ranging from rebottled shampoo products to knockoff products like drinks, snacks, or cigarettes that bear a logo created to look like a famous name brand.

As a photographer, I really had to pause and reflect when I came to the case displaying a set of fake Canon battery grips; the difference between the genuine and the fake, other than a bit of off-colored packaging for the fraudulent one, was very hard to tell.

The attorneys at Tilleke & Gibbins will inform you about ways you can sort out fake goods, using place, packaging, and pricing to help determine if an item is real, and they also leave consumers with a hotline number to call if they come across fake products.

The Museum of Counterfeit Goods is open for viewing on Mondays at 2 p.m. and Thursdays at 10 a.m., and you must make an appointment at least 24 hours in advance to make sure one of the attorneys will be available to show you around. Contact Ms Pinta Punsoni for an appointment at pinta.p@tilleke.com or 02-653-5546.

Museum of Counterfeit Goods – www.tilleke.com – Tilleke & Gibbins, Supalai Grand Tower, 26th Fl., 1011 Rama 3 Rd. Tel. 02 653 5546. [bt](#)

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