

Post



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Don't touch the monkeys! - March 2, 2023

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For the most part, while we're in Asia, we'll be on organized tours and cruises. That makes this part of the trip a bit unique. We're currently on our own and nothing happens on a given day unless we arrange it. Yesterday we signed up for a six-hour boat ride to several islands/beaches and today's that adventure. They're due to pick us up around eight so we wake early, complain about our quality of sleep and plan to have breakfast here at the hotel. We've not had the breakfast here so far and back home we normally don't eat until after noon. But, hey, we're on vacation and those calories don't count, right?

Despite our trepidation about the cost of hotel breakfasts we show up when they open. We're the only guests there. It's a very complete spread, including garlic chicken with vegetables and sticky rice, spicy noodles, fruits, breads, 'pork' bacon, chicken sausage, and more. We have a bit of everything (minus the lettuce and raw crudites). Everything is tasty and upon leaving we calculate the per person cost. US\$7.10. That's do-able. (Hey, save us a table for tomorrow!)

Our ride to the pickup point shows early, and the driver, who looks no older than 14, gives us the traditional palms-together Thai greeting. Along the way we pick up Colin, from Toronto, at another hotel. He's traveling alone. We note that he's the "Firth" Colin we've met today, so with that mnemonic we should be able to remember his name. He's fine with any mnemonic as long as it's not colon. In Bangkok Colin recommends the Wat Po Thai Traditional Massage School. Everyone agrees on a couple of things about Thai Massage: It's not pleasant and you have to do it. "It feels great afterwards." Mmm, maybe not.

At the meeting point we check in and get our Livestrong-style colored rubber bracelet. We're on Team Yellow. There are four or five tour destinations, and different ways of traveling: slower, cheaper, long-tail boat or the speed boat we'll be on. More time at your destinations. As such there are many different wrist band colors.

On the boat we're a bit crowded together. We gather where everyone's from, pretty much. After our next pick-up spot we're really packed in. With a little bit of adjustment and wriggling everyone fits. We speed off and experience the wind and noise of the two 250-horsepower motors. In no time we're at our first stop: Dang Island, so named for its reddish colored sandstone and Dang is Thai for red. We doff our shirts and grab mask and snorkel and hop into the water. It's the perfect temperature and soon we're gazing down at fish and coral. Above water we can marvel at the red cliffs of the island and the bright colored streamers on the long-tail boats bobbing close by.

Soon were back on the boat, shaking the water out of our ears and dabbing ourselves off with our damp towels. We zoom on to Hong Island, the main event of our tour. It's big and we'll be here for over an hour. Given it's size it has lots of beautiful cliffs to marvel at and a huge, natural swimming area protected by some big rock islets. The protection draws the swimmers and snorkelers, but also the fish. On shore the girls are all dolled up and are busy taking Tik-Tok selfies, or having their friends take the perfect Instagram picture for them. It took all their time and they presumably don't care how many pictures end up on their smart phones. There is the inevitable wood swing with paradise in the background and there's a line of girls and women (and some guys) awaiting their turn.

There's a snack bar, but it's not too busy. It offers different coffees, teas, fruit drinks, and smoothies. (But no beer or water. What??) We hang out on the island, relaxing and swimming, for an hour. We forgo the 490 steps up to the 360-degree viewing platform. Our feet are too wet and sandals too sandy. We've already had enough dermal abrasion between our toes for one day.

Before long we're shoe-horned back onto the boat and are motoring around to the back side of Hong Island, to the lagoon. As the tide is out our boat nearly gets stuck in the mud. We marvel at the stalactites on the cliff walls nearby and each group is ushered to the bow of the boat where we get our picture taken at the entrance to the lagoon. This involves a good bit of human shuffling on our crowded, pitching boat.

Many of the island's sandstone rock seemingly pop skyward out of the water. There's the Bond (James Bond) island (that we don't go to). It is the quintessential 'jutting out of the water' rock. The waves slowly erode the rock at the island's base which makes it smaller where it enters the water. This fittingly makes it look like a big exclamation point.

On we motor the short distance to Lading Island. This is where we'll be having lunch. We're told that we may see monkeys, and the number one rule is... "Don't touch the monkeys!" We're amused they'd have to even say that, but it takes all kinds. We slay ourselves by admonishing each other to not to touch the monkeys!!

It's the standard Thai tour lunch of spicy chicken and vegetables with sticky rice and fresh fruit (pineapple) accompaniment. It's fine. We talk to a family on vacation while their boys' school is on holiday. They'd driven here, eight hours, from Malaysia. I think of these parts of the world being so many islands, but this is the mainland and it connects to many other countries.

We see more of the monkeys and clamber back aboard for another quick trip to Paradise Island. It, of course, has another swing for pictures. It really is idyllic. The vertical rocks protect a smallish patch of soil, er, sand. There are trees and a soft island breeze winding its way through the brief island canyons. The tranquility is interrupted by a sign warning of possible falling coconuts. Judging from the height they'd be coming, that would really hurt. (Maybe that's from whence the Thai's got the idea for how to do their massages!)

Pictures taken, islands checked off, we're whisked back to Raylei Beach. We're deaf from the engine noise and our hair is standing from the wind of traveling so fast. We deposit some of our group, and are finally back home in Ao Nang. Before long we're off the boat, once again with wet, sandy feet in our sandals. The chaffing quickly leads me to doff mine, and I walk through town like a barefoot beach bum.

After chilling and showering in the room we catch the shuttle back downtown at seven for dinner. We puff our chests in pride at being out so late. Installed at our table at Crazy Gringos, a loud TexMex place on the main drag, we sip our Sangria and resume our people watching.

One thing we've been noticing now and again are groups of young women (or men) obviously on a 'event' trip, such as for a birthday or bachelorette party. With that in mind we're not surprised to see a number of very tall, young, beautiful girls in the most fashionable of sparkly evening gowns walking down the street. After another sip of sangria, I say "Wait a minute... those aren't girls!" and sure enough they aren't. They are transvestites from the local cabaret giving out flyers to their show.

Crazy Gringo's menu explains TexMex cuisine and after splitting an order of Chicken Fajitas and a pitcher of Sangria we agree, or at least we no longer care. As our hotel shuttles run only on the odd hours we rode back 'home' just after 9pm and were up until after 10. We may finally be getting on local time!

Photos



Karen ready for our first hotel breakfast here. On the table catchup, chili sauce, and something whose only English reads "Simply good"



The fruit course. We are tickled by the small (but oh so tasty) bananas. Maybe not Cavendish? Also by the watermelon slices each with it's own handle.



Our driver to our island tour. Is he even of legal driving age??



The various island tour options. Ours is the Yellow "Hong Island" tour (on the right).



On the boat before we've picked up our second group of passengers. Our captain asking if we're OK or telling us the score of a soccer match. Over the engine noise we can't tell.



Where we parked gave us a good view of some long-tail boat engines. Obviously water cooled. Do they have transmissions?



Two Yamaha outboards soon have us zipping northward.



Karen checking out the contrasting calm and quiet of the Hong Island natural swim area. Lot to explore.



Some kind Japanese girl kindly paused her Instagram photography long enough to offer to take our picture.



Life is good at the mouth of the Hong Island lagoon on the bow of our boat.



Near by are many stalactites, interesting if not overly pretty.



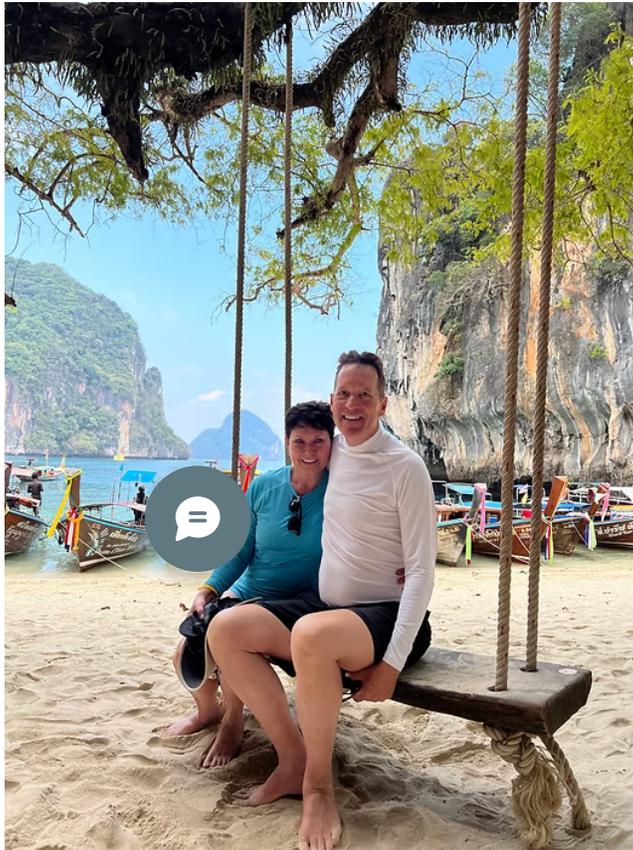
One of the Lading Island monkeys offering its tongue, unsolicited.



FARNSNIENTE 



On the beach of Paradise Island, so named by the tour company's marketing department.



The photo swing on Paradise Island.



Words to live by!



Just when you think they're no more room,
one more long-tail boat arrives.



Some of the rocks show their 'at the
waterline erosion' more than others.



Bond (James Bond) Island, to which we
didn't get.

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