

Post



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# Today? Switzerland, Italy and France - March 7, 2023

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After breakfast we drive off towards the border with Myanmar. At one point the western powers adjusted the borders here, so some of what used to be Myanmar, near here, is now Thailand. Where we park has a sign which announces this is the end of Thailand. We take that to mean it is the border, or pretty close to it.

Again there are lots of shops, selling all kinds of touristy food stuffs and alcohol, restaurants, and there is a big pond with flat bottom boats being rowed around for recreation. We take advantage of the facilities and then sample some fruit wine. Not to our tastes. In the US, for sure in the Portland area, they have what are called 'drinking vinegars'. That's what these tasted like.

Again, the local people are a special tribe that came here from somewhere else. But they have been here for a very long time. This is the Baan Rak Thai Village. Baan meaning city and Rak meaning love. We are told the people love it here.

Our second stop is called the Switzerland of Thailand (Pang Ung, 1,750 meters in elevation). There is a beautiful little lake in the hills, lots of trees, grassy meadows and cows with bells, clanging as they meander around to eat the grass. We are the only Anglos in town. Apparently this is a popular Thai people tourist destination. We can see lots of tent camping going on in the distance.

Of course, there is a Buddhist monastery and temple, or Wat. The Wat (Ruam Thai) has eight sides, one for each day of the week. Wednesday, we guess being full of woe, has both a morning and evening, (which is how you get an eight-sided building from a seven-day week). Thus it is important that you know on what day of the week you were born and (if you were born on Wednesday) at what time. There is a specific Buddha pose and purpose for your day of the week (and of course, two on Wednesday).

We are fairly high (in altitude) and there is a breeze so the temple's bells make a lovely tinkling sound. Nearby is a Buddhist monastery, essentially one very large raised room with a huge gold Buddha seated inside. This is where the monks live and eat and everything. Two monks live here and we meet one of them. He, of course, has on his orange robe. We ask and are told there is only one color orange. The monk can choose to fashion his robe in one of a few different ways (depending on how formal the situation is or the temperature). A big end result is whether any shoulders are visible or not.

Nat arranges for us to receive a Buddhist monk chant to recall loved ones who have passed. We are kneeling. The monk wants to make sure we get our moneys worth ahead so it is a fairly long chant. Our toes and knees are wishing for it to be a shorter chant.

Afterwards, we're out front putting on our shoes. Nat tells us that we can ask the monk any questions. We do and in response to one of the questions the monk snatches the phone from my hands and manipulates Apple Maps to show me some region. Apparently Buddhist monks know a lot about iPhone apps.

Afterwards we drive to the longest all bamboo bridge in Thailand. It is half a kilometer long and was built by the local farmers over the rice patties so the monks can get to and from their monastery. The surface of the bridge is made of big bamboo, which has been opened up and pounded flat then woven like a basket. It's a long walk across the bridge and the temperature is very warm.

In the temple, we again pray, and admire all of the thousands of bamboo prayer sticks dangling there. Most are written in Thai, but a few are in English and some are in French. We can see what their wishes are, and when they were written (earlier this year).

At our lunch stop, we admire some brightly colored birds. They are speaking bird language (not Thai nor English). At lunch again, among other things, we order green papaya salad. It is ordered to the normal spice level for somebody from Thailand (since being from Texas we claim that we can handle spicy foods). We find it very, very spicy. Our eyes and noses are running. We get both regular and sticky rice. The latter is served in a small plastic bag which is in a small woven basket with a woven lid. The rice is not excited to come out, but it sure is tasty!

The after-lunch plan is to go see two more Wats and a ruin. We beg off and instead go back to the hotel and lounge beside the pool. Closer to dinner time a shuttle takes us into town (Mae Hong Son) and we get to see the Wats anyway. There is also a walking street which is having a night market. There are many food booths offering all kinds of delicacies. Much of it is proteins that we cannot identify.

We hike to an Italian restaurant that we found online. The proprietor is a funny old Irishman. He loves jazz. He talks us into a delicious bottle of Sicilian red wine which we enjoy with our pizza. Needless to say we drained the bottle dry.

As we hike back to the pickup point for the van back to our resort (The Fern), we see an older French couple we had noticed earlier. We strike up a conversation and learn they are from the center of France, in the Clermont Ferrand district. This is the home of the Michelin tire factory. Most of France is beautiful, but areas close to tire factories typically are not. Clermont Ferrand sadly is no exception.

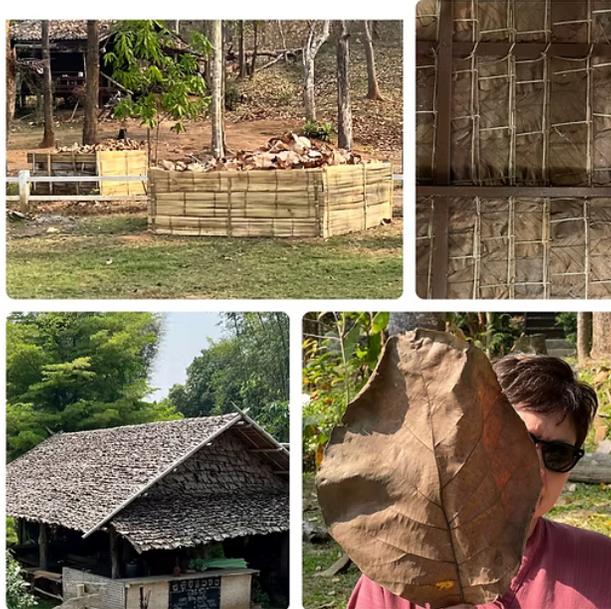
We chat with them, explain where we're from and gush about our luck at getting to live in France for a few years. They complement our French but attribute it — of course — to the fact that we were obviously born there! (That's the first time we've ever heard that one, but flattery will get you everywhere).

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## Photos



Leaving our resort in the morning: The Fern Resort. For a blog called Fernsniente, er, well OK, Farnsniente, it seems pretty "on the nose"!



Teak trees are everywhere around here. They're revered, but maybe not for the reason you think. Most roofs are made of Teak leaves!



This sign reads "The End Of Thailand", but it's not as ominous as it sounds. We're almost in Myanmar (but won't go there).



Always shopping to be done.



Baan Rak Thai Village... City of love.



Karen and Nat looking at Baan Rak Thai Village.



The Switzerland of Thailand. Who knew?  
(Actually, Baan Ruam Thai, aka Pang Oung.  
Mooooo.)



The eight sided temple at Pang Oung.  
One side for every day of the week (and  
one to spare).



The Long Necked Karens. We will NOT be going there. No human zoos for us, thank you!



The longest bamboo bridge in Thailand!



Wax figures of monks at the monastery at the other end of the Su Tong Pae bridge.  
Creepily realistic.



Bamboo wish sticks. Very cool. So many.  
Not encrypted.



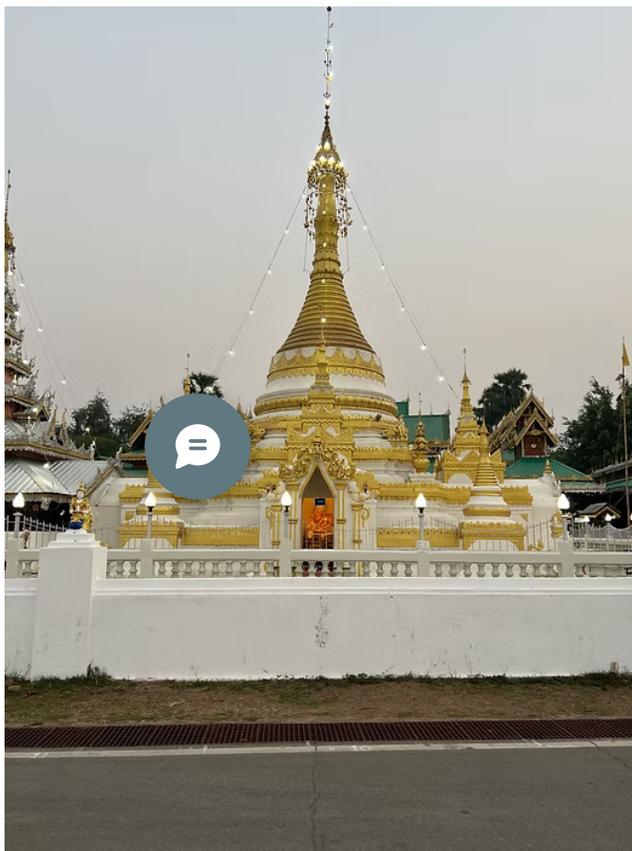
If Polly wants a cracker, she's not indicating such in either English nor Thai.



FARNSNIENTE 



Lunch. Dang that Papaya salad was spicy!!



The Wat in Mae Hong Son.



The night market in Mae Hong Son. So much on offer!



Part of our Italian dinner. Burrata salad with roasted veggies and pesto.

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