

Post



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# Thai underground caves and rivers, hm - March 8, 2023

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After two lovely nights at The Fern Resort, we're pulling up stakes and heading to Pai. Our initial morning drive is through smoke filled valleys on very windy, narrow roads. So: business as usual. The advice for not getting carsick is to watch the horizon. With this much haze, there frequently is no horizon. Oh well. [We later learn it's not burning in Thailand, but rather Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam.]

We recently saw a poster for a local tourist program. The slogan is "4,088 Curves". We're told that's how many curves we've been driving through. Apparently we can go register on a website and receive a certificate stating that we have done that many curves here. We can believe it.

Our first stop today, after a good bit of driving, is Ban Ja Bo village. We use the toilet and get a coffee, but the main reason we're here is to tour the village and see how they live. As we wander around we see animals: chickens, pigs, and many dogs. Most of the chickens roam free, scratching the earth for insects and bugs. Under one large woven basket is a mother chicken and a large clutch of small chicks. The basket is to keep the chicks safe and together with their mum.

Walking around, we see the material of which the houses are made, and how they're put together. It is teak joists, and studs, with bamboo rolled out for the flooring, and walls. The "houses" are elevated, and there is storage underneath. From below, you can see the underside of the bamboo roll flooring. They have electricity and a small plastic box where they're supposed to display proof that they have paid for their electricity. Many of the small houses have satellite dishes.

These communities allow us to wander around, as tourists, sometimes for a fee, and sometimes, like here, just to get us in town to shop and eat. Some communities are considered human zoos. Not too far from where we are they have what are called "long-necked Karens", where they have used metal bands to lengthen the women's necks. We will not be going there!

We see various fruits, vegetables and coffee growing, randomly planted around, or perhaps volunteers, but they are cultivated and used for food. It is truly fascinating getting to see how these people live so up close. We appreciate them allowing us to tour their village.

After more driving, we get to our next stop, Tham Lod underground caves and river. We can't help but think of the boys soccer team who were temporary trapped. We check the weather for the remainder of the day. It seems we'll be safe.

Our guides have pump kerosene lanterns (what we would call Coleman lanterns). We have fish food. It hardly sounds like an equitable distribution of useful stuff. At the entrance to the cave, we see the river and a tremendous number of dark carp of varying size. We throw a little bit of food and the fish go crazy.

Before long we have walked into the cave and are in pitch darkness (other than the lanterns). We see untold numbers of stalactites and stalagmites, and hear bats twittering far overhead. We climb innumerable very steep ladder-type wooden staircases. Thank goodness they have handrails! We follow our guide and use the light from her lamp (when it's available). We encounter various rooms and see different rock formations supposedly in the shape of this or that. It's explain to us how these were formed over thousands of years.

Eventually, we get to the edge of an underground lake and climb onto a long, semi-stable bamboo boat about 2 feet wide. After we sit down the oarsman pushes us off and down the river we glide. We can see shadows of fish in the water around us. Piranhas? Again they are very appreciative of any food I throw. I throw it as far as possible from the boat, so as not to have them rock the boat, so to speak.

We get to the end of the cave and finally see light again, and our rickety, narrow boat is beached. We get out and climb more stairs and see more stalactites and stalagmites. We also see coffins. Ominous sign? Actually, these are from thousands of years ago for local tribe elders. After more of that, we head back to the boat (what?? we're not done??) and gingerly climb back on. The oarsman takes us back up the river (Styx?), back to the starting point. We retrace our steps (well, many of them) back to the true opening of the cave. We are happy to be done and safe. Karen mildly twists her ankle on the very last step! She's OK.

We drive to a lovely outdoor restaurant for lunch. We have hot pot with broth and vegetables and various proteins. We are given a variety of noodles and put all of them together in our bowls to make lunch. It is quite tasty.

After lunch we drive on an hour or so. Our next stop is an overlook viewpoint off into a famous valley. We have to take their word for it. It is so hazy, we can't see anything! We continue on to our destination city: Pai.

Our hotel (alas for just a single night) is the absolutely amazing Reverie Siam. We are taken to our room and it's as if we are transported back in time. It's all the luxury and look of the 1930s for this part of the world. Humphrey Bogart would feel right at home here. There are two pools and a river with a sitting area next to it. It is heavenly. We sit by the pool and order glasses of wine. Later we have drinks and dinner at the outdoor restaurant, by one of the pools. We could easily be in a movie. Good day, good evening!

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## Photos



We love the little people symbols for Les Toilettes. And you can see how flattened bamboo is used for the walls.



Nat and Karen enjoying coffee and the view. Well, at least there's coffee.



Our host at the coffee house and son. I think he has a nicer iPhone than I.



You can see how the houses are built, the floors and the walls. Teak and bamboo.



Under the safety of a bamboo basket, a mother hen and her excite clutch.



Everyone is working in the fields.



Time to enter the cave.



The iPhone can do an amazing job at illuminating a totally dark scene.



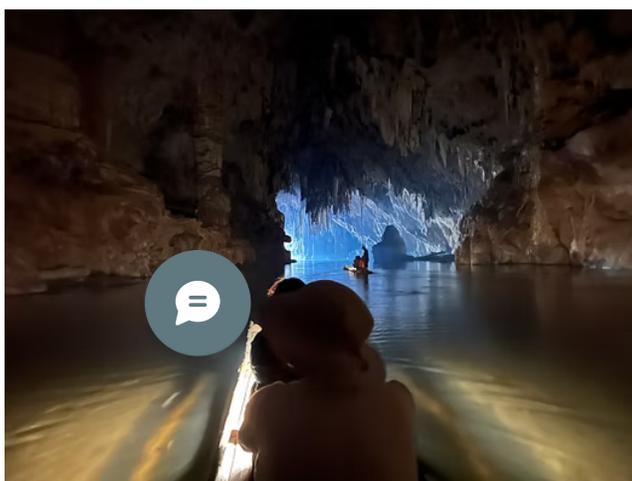
Amazing rock formations.

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Our 'stable' boat and the fish waiting to eat us.



Headed once again for daylight.



Lunch: Hotpot. Yum.



The dining room at the Reverie Siam. Sigh.

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