

Post



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Thailand's ancient capital - March 13, 2023

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SUMMARY

Another Buddha-ful day! Ha! Did you see what I did there? We spent the day in one of Thailand's former capitals, Ayutthaya, seeing an enormous seated bronze Buddha, a very large open-air reclining Buddha and a small, seated gold one. Toured the UNESCO World Heritage ruins of the old palace and the beautiful grounds of the Summer Palace. "Boat noodles" for lunch (they're a thing) and coconut ice cream in a hot dog bun (also a thing, don't knock it 'til you've tried it)! - Karen

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DETAIL

If yesterday was our time to visit Thailand's current capital, today we will visit one of the previous capitals of this nation: Ayutthaya. It was founded in 1,350 AD (in the year 1,893 using the Thai calendar, which counts from the death of the Buddha). Back then the country was called Siam. The city is about 42 miles north of Bangkok. Ayutthaya, a UNESCO world heritage center, was Siam's second capital and it remained so until the Burmese pretty much flattened it in 1,767 AD. The city now has a very modern part, but we'll be touring its ancient ruins and the monastery, etc.

We first stop and say 'Hi' to the Phra Mongkhon BoPhit, one of the largest bronze Buddha in the world. This one has no costumes, but he's big and in excellent shape. This one is seated in his customary "I'm just one of the regular people" pose, with one hand in his lap, facing skyward, and the other draped over his knee. Nan said you can also tell when Buddha is trying to be 'just one of the people' when the statue has him "not thin, like this one". His BMI looks pretty dang low to us!

Next door we see the old palace grounds. They're mostly in ruins, but there are partial walls, some rebuilt windows, and a number of beautiful bell-shaped Prang (reliquary towers). These are built to commemorate (and house the remains of) a particular Thai king of yore. The palace was just for the royal family. Outside the palace walls, but inside the next set of walls, were the staff and friends of the King. Outside that was everyone else. Today, part of that is where tourists can ride around on elephants with gold cloth draped on them and fancy umbrellas keeping the riders shaded. They look silly, we think, and we're told it's really unhealthy for the poor pachyderms.

We leave the palace grounds and walk a short way to check out another Buddha. This one is reclining (with eyes open, meaning he's just resting). He's outside, uncovered. This is Phra Buddha Pai Yat. Karen compares the relative lengths of his toes, and I check for finger prints on the bottoms of his toes. After that we're off to the market to go shopping. The next stop on our trip is to Bali and much of our itinerary, on our tour, involves beach visits. We're instructed to bring towels, which we don't have. Karen's also looking for socks.

The stores, er, stalls that Nan takes us to have some towels. Full size but very thin and light weight. Not a lot of cotton went into the making of these towels. We get a price break since we're buying in volume (two towels) and we're not haggling. The socks Karen is shown are each sealed in a crinkly plastic bag. Karen is looking for lady's ankle socks. What she is shown, it seems peering through the sealed plastic bag, appear to be men's dress socks. Nan is given permission to unpackage the socks and indeed a gentleman would be proud to wear these. Not what Karen is looking for.

We eventually find the right socks, in the 'schoolgirl' section, and head to our next stop. It's for coconut ice cream served in a hot dog bun with toppings! The combination sounds strange but it tastes really good. The toppings included sticky rice, candied sweet potato tapioca, and chopped peanuts. Yum.

We visit one more hugely tall Prang which we climb up. It's massive and the stairs are steep. Thank Buddha for the hand rails! Soon it's time for lunch. We're having 'Boat noodles'. They are not made from boat, but traditionally prepared (made, cooked, served) on the narrow river boats. As such they're served in smaller bowls. Nan gets each of us an assortment of broths, noodles and proteins. We add fresh basil, bean sprouts and oh too many crispy wantons. We liked most of it but found we're not fans of the egg noodles and the seasoning with which they're made.

Post-lunch, after a short drive, we're at the local royal palace, the . At the entrance there's a list of what you may wear to tour the grounds (a very short list) and what you may not wear (a quite long list with addenda added later). It's confusing and funny.

The palace landscaping and buildings are in good looking European style. They were built under the direction of Rama IV or V. The grounds are beautifully manicured, there's lots of trees, and the royals never come. No one lives here. They're in Bavaria, Paris, or Bangkok (if they must). We see many Komodo dragons, including a couple of rather large ones. They're waddling across the grass or slithering through the water. They pose no danger to humans, but be happy you're not a rat.

Nan treats us to another delicious iced Thai red tea with milk, yum! While we down that delicious coldness we learn some of our ABCs (or the Thai equivalent thereof). We're also told a sad story of the King Rama V's queen and daughter. It was time to come from Bangkok to here, the summer palace. The king was busy, of course, and so the Queen and daughter went ahead, by boat, with a pilot and lots of servants. The weather was bad and there was an accident. At this point some conflicting instructions come into play. The punishment for anyone (other than the king) touching the Queen or any of his daughters, is death. The boat goes down and since no one can touch the queen or daughter, they drown. Short, sad story.

The hour-long drive back to our hotel is made even longer by the rush hour traffic. We later take a Tuk-Tuk to dinner at a very fancy French restaurant. We meet, and get to 'Parlez-vous Francais', with Remi, the chef who is from Anenncy, France. For our Tuk-Tuk back to our hotel the two doormen argue with the driver as to how much we should pay, they felt we were being over-charged. We stood by grinning. The eventual Tuk-Tuk ride was fun, but they have way too much traffic here.

Photos



The Phra Mongkhon BoPhit, wherein sits one of the largest bronze Buddha in the world



Said Buddha



Does this position make Buddha's butt look fat?



A scale model of what the Ayutthaya Siam Royal Palace grounds looked like, pre-Burmese destruction.



Scott, Karen, and the final resting place of
a couple of Siamese Kings



Some VIP riding an elephant (at least he'd
like to think so)



"Shopping for textiles in the Orient" (it didn't feel that exotic)



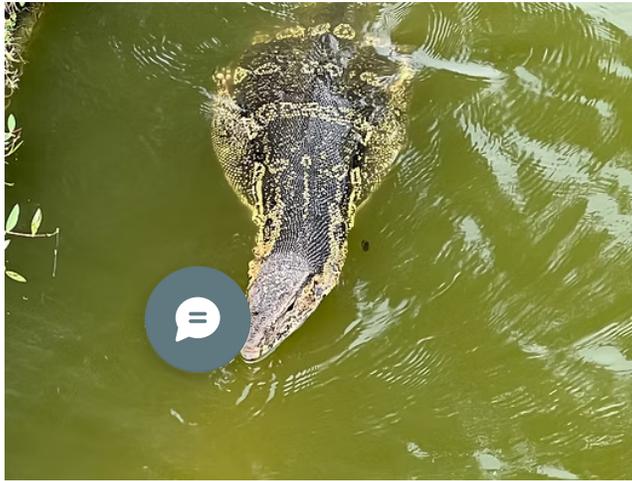
A local delicacy: Coconut ice cream on a hot dog bun. No. Really.



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Karen's brush with these officials was quickly resolved and there is no record of what happened



Here there be dragons (well, of the Komodo variety)



On the royal grounds of the Thai King's summer palace



going-going to dinner-dinner in a tuk-tuk



At Allium, a very fancy French restaurant at
the Anthonée Hotel

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