



'Wat's going on in Chiang Mai?

By Tyler Hiller
Scribe Staff

Part two

A week into Thailand, our beds actually were finally getting used to the time difference of 15 hours. The beds in our hotel were nice but by no means could they have rearranged our individual circadian rhythms to the point we would have liked them to.

Sadly, just as soon as the sleep patterns were acclimated, half our group had to leave: one to Seoul, South Korea and the other to Cambodia. So the remaining two of us decided to go somewhere besides Bangkok. It's a nice city and all, but there's only so much to see before it all seems to blur together. Amy and I decided upon round trip train tickets (around \$20) to Chiang Mai because everybody we talked to said it was a must-see. And we were not let down.

We took the early morning train so that we could see eleven hours worth of Thai countryside. It was amazing to see the farmlands and the basic livelihoods of the laborers. The clash of the simple farm life with the small engine motorcycles (not to mention the train itself) amplified the growing Western presence.

A long time and a sore butt later we arrived at the Chiang Mai station to a welcome of taxi drivers and tuk-tuk (three wheeled taxi-like vehicles) but not to the friend of a friend who we would hope to stay with. So finding a tuk-tuk driver we packed our things onto his cart and looked in our tour book for a possible place to stay. I chose a place called Daret's known for its status among backpackers from around the world. The joint was jumping even as we showed up as late as it

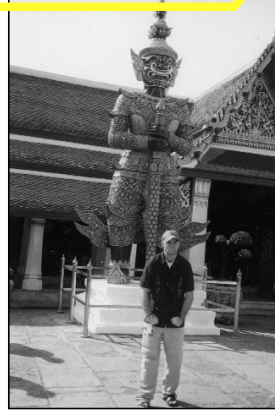
was. (Chiang Mai is about 100 miles from Bangkok.) Springs in that almost everything closes up around 10:30 or 11 p.m.)

As a legendary guesthouse might, the place was decked out for those just passing through. Nothing fancy about the restaurant that made up the front patio, nothing fancy about the 10 Internet ready computers, and nothing fancy about the rooms. We each got our own room that provided two beds and a warm shower for four dollars a night. Can you say, "Like a glove"?

Our first goal the next day was finding the people we were supposed to meet. It turned out that the lady runs a Canadian-style coffee shop in a happening part of town, so we took an easy stroll on over. That done, we headed for the hospital to get Amy's bandages changed. She had stubbed her toe our first night in Bangkok and had to get her big toenail taken off and we were still needing hospital-fresh bandies. We walked from one end of town to the other in about an hour, passing through neighborhoods, past women's prisons and many of the 300+ wats Chiang Mai is known for.

Wats are Buddhist monuments associated with temples as reminders of major Buddhist tenets. The influences of the many cultures that make up the Thai people are seen in the different architectural styles of the Buddhas and temples.

After new gauze, plenty of pain for Amy, and one adventure down for the day, we left the hospital (which, I will add, was faster, cheaper, and easier than any American hospital will ever be) to walk around the perimeter of the town. The modern governments have replicated the five gates, four corners and moats surrounding the original city as they were when



(Above) Tyler attempts to intimidate the average passer-by by imitating Chiang Mai sculptures. (Below) One of the many modes of transportation in Thailand. (Photos by Tyler Hiller)



first built at the time of the city's founding in 1296 A.D. That night consisted of navigating the maze of sidewalk vendors for the amazing deals on cheesy souvenirs and clothes.

The following morning greeted us early so as not to miss our van for the day-long trek we signed up for. Joining up with three Germans, two Dutch, two Aussies and a Brit from guest houses

around town promised us an interesting day.

We started off with an elephant ride, and this time it was for real. Through the jungle, trees and streams we rode on the back of a pachyderm under the guidance of a mahout, or elephant driver who steered with a language of grunts and "haaaa"s, similar to those of an equestrian and far more nasal. At one point the mahout hopped off the driver's seat that doubled as an elephant head and told Amy to get off the backpack-like bench we were on and drive the massive beast. This went on for another kilometer or so until we had to disembark and feed the elephants by placing entire bunches of bananas on the top of the head so they could swallow them up without a second thought.

A short hike later, we came to the first of two native hill tribes. Both tribes we visited were actually descendants of migrants from lands east of current Thailand. Again, the juxtaposition of their normal lives and ours was astonishing.

After some more hiking (duh, it's a trek) we began a bamboo raft ride down a Class I river (a.k.a. super easy) that would present more fun than anticipated. Our guide was apparently feeling rather saucy that day, so he decided to try some rapids no other guide would venture. As life would have it, we got stuck on a rock and everybody fell off the raft into the not-so-clean-yet-fun-anyway water.

Worn out from that day's events we went back to Daret's fell asleep, and awoke just in time to catch our night train back to Bangkok. A day of rest and packing later, our flight for Tokyo, and eventually back home, took off all too quickly ending our adventure into Thailand.

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