

# Death Railway

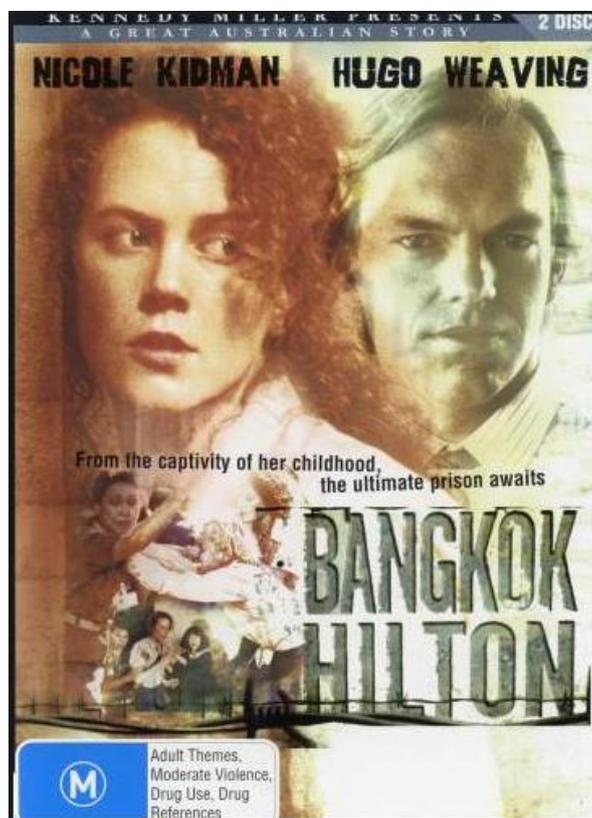
## T O U R S

### **The Bangkok Hilton Mini-Series** **(& Bangkwang Men's Prison)**

The Bangkok Hilton (1989) with Nicole Kidman, Denholm Elliot, Hugo Weaving and Noah Taylor et al.

The mini-series by Kennedy Miller is a long film and was set over a few nights back in the late eighties. The locations set in the film vary from Australia (Sydney and the outback), London, Goa India and Bangkok Thailand.

There is plenty of backstory before Kat Stanton (Nicole Kidman) even reaches Thailand. Her father (played by Denholm Elliot) is an exPOW in Changi and other places (not disclosed) – he his court martialled after the war for informing on fellow POWs who were planning to escape. We even see a glimpse of a George Aspinall photo of three POWs at the beginning of the film. A picture featured in his book 'Changi Photographer' and was taken at the notorious Shimo Songkurai POW Camp on the railway.



Movie Poster

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The film shows its age with some of the acting scenes and also has some cringe worthy plot developments, as a wooden key 'just shows up' to one of the cell doors and Kat escapes through tunnels dug by the same POWs that Stanton had dobed in many years before; because they just happened to be in the same gaol. Hmmm.



Picture from Google images

The mini-series came out only a couple of years after the duo Barlow and Chambers were executed in Pudu Prison Malaysia for drug smuggling. A decade after the pair were hung, in 1997 I did the Pudu Prison tour whilst in the capital Kuala Lumpur. I visited the Execution Chamber where the Australians were executed; the joking tour guide wanted me to put a noose around my neck to which I politely declined. He advised they 'retire' the rope after three uses.

See the movie trailer here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqapLYpMvM>

In the film one of the actresses (Joy Smithers) plays a heroin user; in the series she is injecting with a home-made 'needle'; it is a Biro insert from a pen.

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I visited an Australian in Bangkwang Prison many years ago; he described to me the process in using heroin on the inside; he said they use a 'Bic' brand pen; remove the ink cartridge (and of course the ink) and insert that into their arm; they then blow the liquid into their veins. Ouch.

Whilst I was there; he requested we contact his family back home and further requested we ask them to post to him Baking Powder. Now coming from a Police background I knew he wasn't a Baker in prison; the Baking Powder cuts the heroin making it last longer and go further.

Also in the film Kidman is pictured when she is first in prison in a cell with seven other inmates and the many fluorescent lights emanating the drab cell. The inmate I visited said he was going blind from the 24/7 battering of the fluoro lights; I don't suppose the drug habit helped either.



Picture from Google images

We purchased him a present for seeing us and being candid with our questions. I bought him a large container of Nescafe Coffee from the Prison Shop which he would have received after we left. He may have used the coffee himself or traded it to people he owed money; to stave off

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a shank until he paid up some of his prison debts (which he said he owed).

This particular inmate was apprehended with 40 plus grams of heroin that initially labelled him a trafficker. He received the death penalty but later commuted to 50 years in prison. He ended up serving around 12 years and was released on medical grounds.



Picture from Google images

Bangkwang Prison is a maximum security prison; so it's an eye opener when you walk in. It was built in the 1930's and holds inmates who have sentences greater than 25 years. Prisoners on Death Row are also held here and those whose appeals are subject to the Appeal and Supreme Courts. Check out the following short docco on Bangkwang available on You Tube, it's worth a look:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISiGyGS6u8M&list=PLixWJqEwJF2I2DL4Rkf00Tpmfoet7nh8d>

The trip to get to the prison is entertaining; we caught the Chao Phraya River Taxi to Nonthaburi and then took a short walk to the prison from the dock. We viewed the prisoner lists and chose one at random. We arrived early so we didn't have to hurry or rush, we checked in at a waiting centre with our passports prior to entering the main prison.

Visiting hours start from 0900 hours and last around 40 minutes; we met our Aussie Prisoner who was chained with leg irons as he sat opposite us with mesh type wire separating us. We had to raise our voices to be

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heard over the other prisoners and visitors, through not only the mesh but the walkway that separated us. Visits are Monday to Thursdays only.

I thought it was a good experience to visit an Australian on serious hard times half way round the world; and I hope he got something out of it too (apart from the Coffee); yes these folks have done the wrong thing but I believe the visit was productive for both parties. If you want to visit an Australian in prison; please review the following pages:

<http://www.usp.com.au/fpss/l-bangkwang.html>

Whilst this activity won't appeal to every tourist in sunny Thailand it is a unique experience, something where you can gain a greater understanding of the prison system there, find out about another Australian and maybe, just maybe brightening his day somewhat.

A fantastic read is Warren Fellows book; 'The Damage Done', his tale of his 12 years in 'The Big Tiger' (Bangkwang Prison).

<http://www.amazon.com.au/The-Damage-Done-Warren-Fellows-ebook/dp/B007TS0T7A>

Back to the movie; 'The Bangkok Hilton' is somewhat dated; but still worth a look; it seems some Australians should watch this film (like the Bali 9 etc) because some of the themes of this movie play out in real life over and over again.

Some youngsters could learn some valuable lessons on scams, drugs and trafficking not only from the movie but a visit to an Australian doing time at Bangkwang.

## References:

Google Images

Amazon

You Tube and Journey Man Pictures

<http://www.phaseoop.com/foreignprisoners/l-bangkwang.html>