



Thailand Remembrance Tour Blog – 2015

Day 1 – Cabbages and Condoms Restaurant

Today is officially the first day of the tour (even though our clients have been in town for a few days already).

I met Charlie at his office and we headed by Taxi to Hua Lam Phong Train Station - the main station in Bangkok. We took the Subway (28 baht) to the Sukhumvit Underground Station and walked over to Soi 18 to meet in reception.

Off by Park Plaza Tuk Tuk to the end of the Soi and we walked the remainder to Soi 12 and down to the Cabbages and Condoms Restaurant. We took a few pictures of the memorabilia and things hanging around the place.

Dinner was a variety of dishes from prawn crackers; Tom Yam Goong (Prawn); Green Curry Chicken; Grouper (fish) with Sweet and Sour; Jasmine Rice (white), Jasmine Rice (red), stir fried rice with chicken with a variety of other vegetables. Dessert was fried banana with honey followed by a nice milky Latte.

A good introduction to Thai food as we got to try many different things. Overall a good start to the tour and pleasant night out.

Had a look about the gift shop; and took some pictures along the way.

Said horray to the boys and Charlie and I took the BTS to Phaya Thai; then hopped in a Taxi and got back to Ko San Road (Taxi - THB60).

I went into his shop and met his wife and we shared a long neck of Leo - just what the doctor ordered.

Day 1 down and many to go.

The Bangkok Blogger,

Andrew

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Day 2 – Bangkok Tour

Up early at 0600 hours and met up with Charlie at his shop. Impressed by our large Toyota Van for the duration of the trip - very spacious with leather seats and arm rests; Esky; spacious and quite new.

Went over to the Park Plaza and we had a meeting with the Sales Manager who showed us about the hotel; later over breakfast met with our clients.

Off on the Bangkok City Tour our first stop was the Bangkok Palace where we visited several halls including the Coronation Hall along with the Emerald Buddha - the most sacred Buddha image of all of Thailand. We visited the hall of Emerald Buddhas where they have seasonal clothing as well.

Charlie knew his stuff when touring the Palace and we ventured about taking a zillion pictures.

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Grand Palace Bangkok

The firearms and blade museums were pretty cool; as was the 4 barrel shotgun; some very old Flintlock longarms and some special German Mausers handmade for Thai Kings over time.

We spend several hours battling the Chinese tourists as Scott wanted to suplex one or 20; heading out of the Palace we observed a modern Thai Military Vehicle that we all took pics of.

Over to the Riverside Boat (permanently moored) on the Chao Praya River; we had a buffet lunch which was very filling and good value. Many dishes to choose from including a nice fish sweet and sour and a number of desserts to select.

Directly from the portside of the restaurant we boarded a long tail boat with In-line diesel outboard motor and we cruised along the Klongs of Bangkok for around an hour. We were most interested in the sleepy Monitor Lizards taking a nap in the sun on the concrete steps of people's homes or on adjacent areas; they appeared to be quite portly and well nourished. (They reminded me of my dog at home).

We arrived back at the restaurant and alighted back to our comfy air-conditioned Van - it has arm rests and you can recline - now this is how it's done.

(For the coming days it also has a microphone - insert giggle).

We did get stuck in the afternoon rush heading back to the Park Plaza and our adept driver did manage to U bolt in the traffic and head down some tricky back streets probably designed for one way traffic; very skilful driving and well managed to get back to the hotel without battling the main carriageways of pesky Sukhumvit as it was at a stand-still.

On the way Scott was eyeing off a local Thai Ice-Cream Vendor who was following our Van in the slow traffic selling what appeared to be a Hot Dog Bun filled with Ice-Cream (that was what we saw him serving to others); so Scott decamped the bus; bought his THB20 ice-cream (in Hot Dog

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Bun) and got back in the bus scoffing his face. The driver ripped around his head when he heard the door opening wondering what the hell was going on - I explained in Thai he was heading for the Vendor for a snack and the driver was fine with my explanation.

Checked into the hotel and straight up to the room. Unpacked a few things and ventured down for a late afternoon swim with the clients - beautifully tempered pool in a great rooftop setting; even better at night when the pool lights come on.

The room is a fantastic set up with comfy bed; plenty of room and massive pillows. The bathroom has a lot of 5 star type potions and lotions and there is a wallet of remote controls to control TV and gadgets etc. The nightstand has a multitude of buttons to control lights etc once you are in bed. A great hotel with great rooms - it is impressive.

All Death Railway Tours clients got bumped up to an Executive Room (including me - yippee) and loving it - so we have extra square meterage - find me a cat to swing.

A big day out in the Thai capital today with lots to see, do and take in. The sign of more to come.

The City Touring Writer;

Andrew



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Day 3 – Kanchanaburi Touring

Up early around 0530 and sorted my bags and luggage out. Headed down and checked out.

Back up to the Mezza Restaurant on Level 2 and had a very early brekky. Had bacon and some yogurt; caught up with Scotty over brekkie who has just found the yogurt bottles.

Down to reception and met up with Brad and Mick who were already down and ready to go.

In the bus (Charlie was 5 mins late) and we headed out on the Expressway NW bound towards Kanchanaburi.

Thirty minutes later down the freeway we stopped at what seems a popular Thai stopping area for coffee.



Park Plaza Hotel

Our first stop was the Rod Fa Train Station where trains come through the market and the vendors have to move their items as they pass through; it's mostly fresh fruit and vegetables at the market but an interesting way to sell fresh produce. The market is situated at the MaeKlong Train Station and its very rainy.

Next on the agenda or itinerarie was the Coconut and Sugar Palm Factory Outlet (Thai Style); we visited the area where they make these condiments and then visited a stilted farm house. We took off our shoes and headed upstairs to the second level where the family lives; we checked out the lounge and kitchen areas. Down through their souvenir shop on the way out was of course mandatory; didnt see much really to buy.

Continued up the main road to Kanburi and we stopped at a floating restaurant for lunch; a buffet style lunch that was pretty nice, even with the other Europeans that were pouring in by the bus loads. Luckily we got first course in before the hoardes rolled in. Overall a good standard of buffet fare and very filling.

JEATH Museum was next on our agenda (an acronym for Japan, England, Australia/America, Thailand and Holland); set out in Atap style POW Hospital Hut style with period photographs on the walls.

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Train Market Bangkok

The museum is very dated and opened in the early 70's; some of the photos are starting to deteriorate. At the back and facing the river is the statue of Takishasi Nagase the Kempetai (Military Police) Interpreter who was featured in two films on the railway:

- a. the 2001 movie with Kieffer Sutherland and Robert Carlise: To End All Wars and
- b. the recent Colin Friels and Nicole Kidman flick: The Railway Man based on ExPOW Eric Lomax's book of the same name.

Down to Pak Prak Street in Old Kanchanaburi Town and we visited Khun Boon Pong's House who was an official trader with the Japanese during WW2; he also smuggled much needed Emetine (drugs for Dysentery) to Weary Dunlop during the much needy days at Hintok. After the war he was recognised (not until the middle 1980's with the UKs George Cross and the Dutch Orange Nassau; Sir Edward Dunlop mentioned him at a Kanchanaburi War Cemetery ANZAC day speech and then he became more represented for his good deeds.

We were allowed entry to the Boon Pong Shop by the family and had a look at the small tribute section to the elder statement of the Pong Family.



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Next we visited the former HQ for the Japanese on the railway in the area.

We walked down the road and had a gander at the local Kanchanaburi market that sells meat; fresh fish and prawns (THB350 a kilo for Tiger Prawns fresh from the River Kwai) and loads of fresh vegetables. Some interesting smells and odours from the market and a very slushy floor.

Another Thai Coffee from a local street vendor and we were on our way.

Kanchanaburi War Cemetery was our last visit on the agenda for the day. There are 1362 Australians buried in the cemetery with mainly Dutch; British and Aussies there.

We walked about the cemetery visiting soldiers; our client's adopted Diggers including several Australian troops who were murdered along with one Dutchman (Billie) and six Englishman that were also all murdered by the Japanese. The writer wrote a poem about one of the Pommie troops about his bravery and self sacrifice and his ultimate measure of mateship.



Thai Coffee Shop

He is an Argyll and Sutherland Highlander and forever a legend.

Over to the Felix Hotel and we checked in. I later gathered the information about the WIFI and passed it onto our clients. Very spacious and comfortable rooms with large beds and clean features. Did some washing and headed down to the pool to meet up with Scott, Brad and Mick. Large pool and very refreshing.

Your Kanchanaburi Krooner,

Andrew

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Day 4 – Chungkai Cutting/Cemetery to Wampho Viaduct

We had brekkie buffet style in the Felix Restaurant; a nice selection of western and Thai food.

Met in the Lobby in the aircon and then headed over to the Felix Pier where we discussed the history of the Bridge Over the River Kwai (the film Producer changed the name of the bridge; it really should be the Bridge over the River MaeKlong – as that's the river it crosses – he didn't think that sounded very good and used the other smaller river - the Kwai Noi. (Kwai meaning Buffalo as that animal is found in these parts).

Into a Long tail boat and we ventured up river under the River Kwai Bridge where we got out at Chungkai War Cemetery. We passed a great example of a Spirit House and had a discussion re what they represent and how the Thai's believe the houses to work



Floating Restaurant River Kwai Bridge

Next we walked up to the cemetery and observed both the Cross of Sacrifice and Stone of Remembrance – inscribed with Rudyard Kipling's verse.

We visit several soldiers of the 1,740 men (and one woman) buried in the cemetery; we visit a 22 year old who died from Diphtheria; his brother survived the war and wrote a poem about him – so we visited his grave and Scott James read the poem at the young Private's grave. The brothers joined up together from the same recruiter's office and had sequential service numbers.

Our next lads are the 'Chungkai Four'; the lads I call that as they were all executed by Colonel Sato (of Chungkai POW Camp) after they were caught escaping. Next we visit a lad who died from dysentery and polyavitaminosis who had served on the Prince of Wales and survived the sinking of that vessel in the Battle of Kuantan (off the coast of Malaya).

We spoke of Capt Markowitz, Weary Dunlop and some Japanese Engineers that were said to be brutal at this camp; I pointed out where the WW2 Accommodation Huts were situated and the Cookhouse.

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Felix Pier for a Long Tail Boat

We then got out of the oppressive heat and humidity into the Toyota's awesome aircon and headed north where we stopped in at Takilen Railway Station; it was here the Kanburi Four escaped from and were subsequently caught and executed. I have had many conversations with one of the victims nephews and we have traded stories and photographs. We visited those lads at the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery yesterday.

My logo is made up of the Kanburi Four and the Chungkai Four – 8 sleepers in my logo representing a life for every sleeper – also it represents the 'Tavoy 8' – the eight Australians who fled the Railway who were subsequently caught and executed.

We got the Thai 'Coke in a Bag' and slurped that down as we took refuge in the shade at Takilen.

A quick visit to the external fence of Prasat Muang Singh and we decided we would head to Wampho Viaduct; so we could witness the train crossing the duct and get some great pics.



A British Lad we visit at Chungkai

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We were dropped at the Wampho end and walked the 400m across the bridge; dodging other tourists and side-stepping where required; with the vista of the Kwai Noi River and wartime POW Camp on the other side.

We got to the ThamKrasae Restaurant where I had a week earlier secured a great table and had our name plate reservation already on the table – buffet style we munched down and enjoyed the local food and produce.

The train came as expected and we got some great photos; it runs about 5KPH across the bridge as tourists get out of its way.

We went to wait for its return journey and whilst killing time did some window shopping and had a small taste test of some local Kanchanaburi Wine. Lots of varieties of different fruits; with alcoholic content around the 10% mark so about 25% less alcohol than our standard bottles back home.

The rain came down without the cats and dogs but with gusto; we waited about 45 mins and our train came. We boarded and got good seats so we could take pics crossing the Wampho Viaduct.



Chungkai War Cemetery 1

We chugged along clickety-clack as we were served coffee and afternoon tea on board.

Down to the Bridge Over the River Kwai (BRK) and we alighted the train. We visited the USA Memorial; the Japanese Memorial and the former Tamarkan POW Camp. Over at one of the shops I showed Charlie a pic of the 'Two Kings'; a photo of Elvis Presley and the current King in 1960.

A little bit of light shopping in the area and we went back over the BRK dodging tourists and vendors alike. We made a few purchases of Onyx at a local shop and then broke ranks back to our rooms in order to have some

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R&R and refresh the batteries for a night out back at the BRK.

Out to dinner at the Floating Restaurant adjacent the BRK. We had the five of us plus an esteemed guest – a Corporal who died of Dysentery in the Tamarkan POW Camp. We had his photo on the table and we toasted him along with his nearly 3,000 other Aussie mates that had worked on the railway and never came home.

About 100 metres diagonally from where we were situated was the POW Camp and that's where 40 year old Jock died of a preventable illness had the Japanese supplied Emetine and other much needed medicines.



Chungkai War Cemetery 2

We discussed the origins and etiquette of Mess traditions and the evolution of toasting across the centuries including the 'Man of War' Ships, the 100 year's war between the UK and France among other things. We again returned to old Jock and toasted him. He was a Manly Rugby Union bloke who would have been well known in the beach area of Sydney prior to the war years.

Over to the Farang Road where we had a foot massage for an hour; we had a few laughs (and so did ticklish Mick). Over to a bar for a few big Changs (Scott had a Mai Tai) and we did a bit of people watching on the Soi. We tried a guessing game of one young lady's age and all lost – Mick thought she was 18; I said 20 – she was indeed 28. 'Jabba' was energetic.

Called it a night after a few Chang long necks and back to the Felix.

Your 'Coke in a bag' specialist;

Andrew

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Day 5 – Hellfire Pass and Hintok POW Camps

Headed out along Highway 323 for Hellfire Pass – we stopped at Sai Yok and stocked up on some supplies.

Showed our clients Malay Hamlet (Konyu 2) and Konyu 3 POW Camps that serviced the general Hellfire Pass area – pointed out the Australian Lines; the British, Tamil and Japanese.

We had a good look about the Hellfire Pass Museum and I said hello to the Assistant Manager – Khun Ayr; our clients bought a few items and we headed off down the ramps towards to the rail trace. (Talking some water with us; Aeroguard; a Walkie Talkie from the Museum and our clients had the earphones with talking prompts for the walk along the way).

Through Hellfire Pass Cutting itself we bumped into some amateur film makers creating a small docco for university; said a few things on film and explained the reason why Australians come to visit



Also discussed Sir Edward Dunlop with them; showed them his ashes spot and of course the hospital staff plaques at the end of the pass.

We walked towards Hintok and down through the first few Trestle Bridge sites. Up to Hammer and Tap Cutting where we discussed Scott's Adopted Soldier and how he came to get bashed – he suffered head injuries and ultimately died of cardiac arrest in Hintok Mountain Camp.

On though the Kwai Noi Valley Look out we visited the 7m Embankment, the Three Tier Bridge and saw the bomb craters left by USAF B24 Bombers – Hintok Cutting was our last port of call as Mr Sami was waiting diligently for us at the end. The last set of stairs is a cardio killer but we all made it to the relief of the Toyota aircon.

Down to the Konyu River Camp where we discussed a few things about the camp (and a camp doctor) and we ventured over the Suspension Bridge for a good look at the Kwai Noi River. Back over the bridge dodging motorbikes with side cars we drove up river and into Hintok Mountain Camp.

This site was the former British POW Camp with cemetery at the rear of the property.

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Start of the 2nd and largest Cutting of HFP

We had a great lunch being the only ones in the restaurant made it a pleasant change from the buffet lunches with bus-loads of Europeans. Down to the Mountain Rock Pool where we chilled out and enjoyed the cool water watching the current of the Kwai Noi flow past as a back drop. Great spot to bathe and the water was slightly chilled.

Out of the resort and up to Hintok Mountain Camp we discussed the area; the Cholera outbreaks and re looked at the photos of the Aussies that we visited back at the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery.

Checked into Home Phu Toey and we were immediately upgraded to Deluxe Rooms – awesome and large. Straight down to the Natural Spring (Horizon) Pool which was very hot and soothing. A nice contrasting dip into the pool to cool down. Couple of times of hot spring and then cool water dip was great for reinvigorating the muscles walked earlier in the day through the Hellfire to Hintok trek.

The Pack of Cards Bridge and Compressor Cutting have been closed for many years – as the Thai Army flexes its muscle and does not allow access anymore.



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Dinner was a great set menu starting with Tom Kha Chicken Soup; chicken and Cashew Nut; beef, Kale in Oyster Sauce and another plate of vegies. Delish. Finished off with fruit (pineapple and watermelon) and enjoyed with a couple of Changs (Scott had a Mai Tai).

Down to reception where the internet is good and going well. The mozzies are out to feast and I left the Aeroguard in the Van; got some local Lemon Grass Spray from Charlie which is keeping the Mozzies at bay.

Your Rail Trace Trekker,

Andrew