

My First Trip To Thailand

by Irma Kackert

I worked at a hospital in Saudi Arabia between 1980 and 1985, and took a 7 day trip to Thailand, on one of my "leave" times. These were paid vacation days, I would obtain a visa to another country, and travel. This is a journal I wrote at that time.

SATURDAY, JUNE 26, 1982

I left Taif, Saudi Arabia, at 6:30 p.m. on a plane to Riyadh, where I would change planes en route to Bangkok. It was an hour flight, on arrival at Riyadh I had to pick up my suitcase from the baggage carousel, and re-check it to Bangkok, did not know that it was not checked through, from Taif. It is sometimes difficult to travel in foreign countries, because often the ticket agent does not describe thoroughly, the entire details of your trip, and if they do, it is often hard to understand them.

It was very interesting sitting in the Riyadh airport terminal, awaiting my next flight, and enjoying the air conditioning, for it was extremely hot outside. I watched people from different eastern countries, noting the variety of garments they wore. Men and women from Africa wear loose, flowing robes. A plane from Karachi, Pakistan arrived, bringing a large group of men, to work in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia – their suits were the baggy pants and long tunic top, each had on a white cotton sailor hat with the company symbol on it. Some of them wore the brim down, some up, some slanted / I thought it told their character a bit, as they walked along. I got on my plane about 9:30 p.m. after going through immigration check, etc. I had a window seat, and the two other seats next to me were empty, so I had plenty of room. A meal was served soon after we were in flight, and then I stretched out, was able to sleep well during the night.

SUNDAY JUNE 27

I awoke to daylight, felt very good, was not stiff or sore. In a short time we started descending, I could see flat rectangles of fields below me, I was over Thailand!!! Some of the fields had water on them, they were the rice paddies. There were also canals leading from a very broad river, the city of Bangkok spread out on both sides of it.

As we landed I made my way to baggage area, picked mine up, and cleared customs, then bought a ticket for the bus into the city. I was ushered into a mini-bus by a man in uniform, speaking English, was very courteous. He showed me a pamphlet of tours available to the interesting places in Bangkok area, so I booked with him for a temple tour this afternoon, and a dinner with cultural dancing at night. I told him that I wanted to go immediately to the Oriental Hotel, to see the cultural dancing show on the lawn there, at 11:00 a.m.. put on by the Kodak company. It was now about 10:00 a.m. So he told the driver to take me to the Oriental, said I would be met by a female guide who would escort me to the show on the lawn, then would find me a hotel. Bangkok is like any other big city, full of traffic, motorcycles, autos, tuk-tuks (the three wheeled motorcycle type vehicle, with a broad seat in back for two people, and a roof over all) and pedestrians making their way amid traffic. The tuk-tuks are local transportation, cheaper than a taxi, the local people use them a great deal. People on bicycles also moved along, darting in and out of lanes of traffic.

The Oriental Hotel is called the “best hotel in the world” and is a beautiful white building, built years ago in Colonial style with lawns around it, extensive porches, is set on the river bank. It has rather old style elegance, and is very expensive. Since I travel on a budget, I stay in less expensive places. As I departed the mini-bus there, a bellboy took my luggage, tagged it, to hold it for me until after the show. A young lady stepped up as I talked with the bellboy, introduced herself as “Misimpex”, said she would be my guide, escort me to the Kodak show on the lawn here, and then take me to a nice hotel, but less expensive than the Oriental.

The show took place on a side lawn, next to the river, and was very lovely. Guests sat on chairs, in a semi circle. The air was pleasant, warm and a little humid, but not too hot. There was a nice breeze occasionally from the river. The ticket was only 80 baht, about \$4.00. I had changed American dollars for Thailand money at the airport, one baht was equal to about four and a half cents, U.S. For \$700.00 I received 15,900 baht. The dancers were male and female, and were presenting authentic old Thai culture. The costumes were beautiful and dancers were very graceful in their slow, rhythmic motions. The hands play an important part in their expressive movements, the fingers extend fully and seem to curve backward. In one dance, artificial, extremely long, gold colored fingernails were fixed to each finger. There was a sword dance, and a boxer dance, both performed by men. The sparks flew when the swords clashed, as the men went through the ritual. The boxers used legs and feet, in addition to gloved hands, were lithe, quick, and also very graceful. Next to me sat a young doctor, from Colorado, who is working in a hospital in Sudan, Africa. He was a tourist, like myself, was friendly, and we enjoyed conversation about our jobs in the far- east countries.

After the show, Misimpex appeared, as I was taking pictures by the river / she escorted me to the mini bus, the driver secured my luggage from the bellboy, and drove us to my hotel, the Bangkok Palace, they had reserved the room for me. This was a large, first class hotel, there was a swim pool and patio just below my room, which cost about \$58.00. I unpacked a few things, then took a swim (in a light rain shower that was falling) in the comfortably warm water. There were three fountains flowing, in the swim pool, so the rain shower just added a few more sprinkles, as I swam back and forth.

At 2:30 p.m. Misimpex called for me, and the driver took us, in a private car, on the Temple tour in Bangkok, and also to the Grand Palace, consisting of the royal residences and government buildings. The walls surrounding this area were built in 1783, the country was then called Siam. The buildings were unbelievably beautiful, as were the entire grounds, the bonsai trees, and gardens. The roofs of buildings curve up at the ends, on the roof are colored ceramic tiles, often solid blue with a bright green border, and red accent in places. There were thin gold lines between the different colored tiles. Mosaic work, of bits of colored glass, mirror, and semiprecious stones cover the entire outside of some buildings. Gold painting, on black lacquer, cover the inside of the huge doors. There are many different sized temples, large administration, or government buildings, and places where the Buddhist monks live. The largest building was designed by an English architect, who was commissioned by a ruler in the last century. He used grey stone for the structure, but Siamese architecture for the roof, combining western and eastern styles. There are huge

figures of old Siamese characters, all covered with the mosaic, standing guard at some entrances. Around one building were many gold-covered statues of bird-like creatures, as big as a man, and other strange creatures, with long tails.

At an altar, in a fenced area containing a statue of the sacred cow, people were bringing lotus flowers, laying them in the enclosed area, then lighting a candle and also a stick of incense. They stood a few minutes, then stuck the incense stick into a large jar of sand, placed the candle in a holder, folded their hands with fingers pointing upward, touched forehead with fingertips and knelt down, prayed to Buddha. Young monks, clothed in bright orange togas, were noted in groups, in and around the temples. These young men spend three months learning to be a Buddhist monk, live their religion, are supported by the population. People give alms for this purpose. This area was fantastic, each building was beautiful. One contained the Emerald Buddha, which was carved from one large piece of green jade, the semi-precious jewel found in Thailand and Burma. This was done 1000 years ago, is held sacred by the whole population. We could go into this temple, after taking off our shoes, but could not take any pictures inside. Many people were kneeling on the floor here, praying. Monks were chanting prayers.

After this temple, we went to another, called "Wat Po", temple of the Reclining Buddha. This place was not as elegant as the others, and needed some repairing of stone walls, building steps, etc. The Buddha here is lying on his side, is 46 meters long, 14 meters high, is all covered with gold leaf! He is huge – on the bottoms of his feet are inlaid pieces of mother of pearl, clearly visible because of his recumbent position. 90% of the people in Thailand are of the Buddhist religion and they come to the temples to pray. On some mornings the monks hold a service, but people come in at any hour to offer their prayers. At the Emerald Temple, there is a sign saying not to turn the soles of your feet to the Buddha, as you sit, that is an offense. Women must be dressed properly to enter, no shorts are allowed. In the yards of homes, and also outside businesses, are placed small replicas of a temple, brightly colored. These are called "spirit houses", and sit up on a post about 6 feet high, offerings of flowers, pieces of bright orange cloth, and sometimes small figures of animals, and fresh fruit are placed here as offerings, or when asking Buddha for a favor. The temple tour was most interesting, I did not expect such beauty.

Returning to the hotel I showered, changed clothes, rested a bit, and was ready to be picked up at 7:00 p.m., to go to the restaurant (or night club) for dinner and Thai classical dancing. Misimpix took us to the night club, with driver and private car. She and I entered, took off our shoes, went upstairs on carpeted floors, sat at long tables on slightly elevated areas, so our feet went down underneath the tables. After I was seated, Misimpix left me, saying the driver would pick me up following the completion of the program. Next to me were a family from Canada, the man had been working in Malaysia, they conversed with me, as we both spoke English. The food, Thai cuisine, was served in 6 small bowls: curried meat, rice, salad (2 varieties), a seasoned sauce, shrimp with a hot sauce, and a toasted coconut dish – everything was very good and I ate it all. I ordered white wine with my meal, it was brought in a small brown bottle. A plate of fresh fruit, papaya, rambutan and pineapple, was served last. The dancing was very nice, and practically the same as I had seen in the morning, at the Oriental hotel. The musical instruments used were explained to us: there were two xylophone-like instruments, made of wood, two thin,

straight horns, drums, and people held small brass cymbal-like pieces in their hands, these made a tinkling sound. I enjoyed their music. The performance concluded with the female dancers all clad in beautiful evening gowns, in the colors of the precious stones found in Thailand: blue and white sapphires, jade, diamonds, rubies, opals, garnets are all found here. The dancers performed in slow rhythm, as we were escorted from the tables.

The driver was waiting in the lobby for me, escorted me to the car, and drove me to the Bangkok Palace hotel, I felt the service of the tour people was excellent. All this care was included in the price of the tour that one selected. In the morning, he will pick me up at 6:45 a.m., to go to the floating market, after breakfast in the hotel, which is included in the room price. I heard music in the cocktail lounge, on the main floor, as I passed by, so went in and ordered a glass of wine – the area was beautifully done in dark wood. It was practically deserted, only one couple was seated there. A 4 piece musical group was playing American popular songs, the girl singer was performing them in English, she sang very well. I listened for a while, then complimented all of them for a nice presentation and left. I retired to my room, for a good night's rest – felt I had a wonderful day here.

MONDAY JUNE 28

At 6:00 a.m. I received a phone call from the front desk, as I had requested a wake-up message, a pleasant feminine voice said “Good morning, this is your wake-up call, have a beautiful day in the land of smiles”. What a nice greeting!! I arose right away, sleepy eyed, showered and dressed in light clothing. The weather here is warm, but not terribly hot, it rains lightly off and on, but not enough to bother people. I finished breakfast of fresh tropical fruits, including mangosteen, juice, toast and coffee. The driver came to the lobby for me and drove to the boat landing next to the Oriental hotel, Misimpex was awaiting me there. She escorted me to the boat for the floating market tour, there were several of them waiting, flat bottomed boats each carrying about 15 people. We rode on the wide Cho Praya river a long way, passing large wooden barges that people live on, also houses of wood that are supported on posts right in the river. After leaving the business area, the riverbanks were lined with houses, all open in front to the water, some had wood shutters that could be dropped down, for protection from heavy rains. One could look directly into the houses, I observed babies or small children in almost each one, often attended by an older child while the mother or father scrubbed clothing, on a step that led right into the water. Every porch facing the water had several large earthen vats, where they collected rain water from the roof, when it rains. This is used for cooking, drinking and washing clothes, especially white things. River water is also collected, it is brown and muddy, putting alum into the vat makes the mud particles settle to the bottom, and water usable for washing colored clothing. The Thai people are very clean, scrub their cooking pots very thoroughly. Clothing is dried on lines strung on the porches, or on poles extending out from the houses. The temperature is always warm here, so houses are quite open. Often we saw a house where the open front part was a store, stocked with household needs, boxes of soap, bags of rice, canned goods, fresh fruit, eggs and vegetables, people come by in small boats and purchase their needs. I took a lot of pictures, it reminded me of Venice and the canals there, but on a peasant type scale.

It took about 45 minutes to reach the area called the “floating market”, and here were parked many small boats, oared mainly by women, and selling all sorts of fresh vegetables and fruit: bananas, pineapple, mango, durian and rambutan, the local fruit that looks something like a large strawberry. The hairy outer covering is removed, and a white nut-like center is the delicious fruit to be eaten. There were also sales spots on the land, people displayed baskets of grains, vegetables and fruits, umbrellas on poles protected them from the hot sun. Our guide bought bananas and rambutan, offered them to us, we all ate and enjoyed local food. Our next stop was at a large gift shop on the riverbank, displaying beautiful hand crafted items made by residents here. Behind the shop a baby elephant was tethered, for everyone to view. I bought a coconut drink here, a local treat. They take a coconut, remove the green husk, and the hard brown shell, shape the coconut so it is wider at the top and narrower at the bottom, cut a small hole in the top, insert a straw, and you drink the sweet coconut water inside. Delicious!! It cost 10 baht – quite a different treat

Getting back on the boat, we rode further, past houses where I could see a hammock swaying gently inside, rocking a baby. At a couple of places I could see small boys swimming in the river, and also saw a man standing in it, washing his hair. They bathe in the river. The sight of people living in such primitive conditions was interesting. I took particular note of the fact that everyone was very polite and courteous. Our next stop was at the “snake farm”, a large, round, open sided platform (but with 3 foot high fence around it) where young men brought out a snake, teased a cobra to strike, but evaded it; next a long thin poisonous one, and then a huge python. It took 3 men to hold it, as it was stretched out, to keep it from coiling and squeezing a person. The lead man, holding the head, then milked the venom from the fangs, came very close to me, so I could get a good photo of the process. There are snakes all over the canal areas, and people often are bitten, quoted our guide.

Following this, we returned to Bangkok and our dock, happy with this cultural experience. The driver was waiting with the car, and on the way back to the hotel, stopped at the temple of the Golden Buddha. He is huge, completely covered with gold, so beautiful, stares at you with his mother-of-pearl eyes!! I am seeing artistry everywhere, people have created wonderful objects, for hundreds of years. I was dropped at my hotel, took a swim, then packed my suitcase and checked out. I had made arrangements for a trip to the north part of the country, Cheng Mai, would be picked up at 4:00 p.m. I had time to walk a bit on the nearby streets, and go through the Metro Department Store, right next to the hotel. It was large, had much American made clothing, and local things for sale, I looked at bathing suits, but none suited me here. It was very modern. On the street, I bought roasted bananas from a stall, and ate them – that was a different taste, and good

At 4:00 p.m. I was taken to the airport, by the tour service, they procured my airline ticket, booked my room at a hotel, transport service there when I arrived in Cheng Mai, and bus trip back to Bangkok when visit was finished. I have been happily impressed with the service received here in Thailand. I’ve traveled in Europe and Asia, tour guides are not always this good. The flight was only an hour, a meal was served on the way. It was dark on arrival at Cheng Mai airport, I was met by a female guide: I had a yellow sticker on my jacket, she also had one on, so I would know this was my escort. I was driven to the

Pomping Hotel, a large one, in a rural setting, not a large city like Bangkok. After getting settled in my room, I walked to the night market, which I had heard of. These were stalls, nearby, made of bamboo, and filled with lovely hand-made things from this area: dresses, materials, pieces of hand embroidery, children's clothes, shirts, bamboo baskets, lacquer ware, and jewelry. It was fabulous. I bought a cotton dress (they have very fine cotton fabric in Thailand), an opium pipe, a jade piece, a blouse and a shirt. I ate at a stall serving food, had 14 very thin pieces of pork on a bamboo stick, that had been cooked over charcoal, a salad and small bottle of beer. It was delicious, the cost was 52 baht for all. Going back to the hotel, I wrote in the journal, then retired. I am surely glad I came to this mountainous, rural part of the country.

TUESDAY JUNE 29

Awoke at 6:00 a.m., looked out the hotel window at lush greenery below, there were many palm trees, also other kinds, bushes, and flower gardens. A large spirit house was displayed near the front entrance, showing devotion to Buddha. Pretty clouds floated around in the sky, the entire scene was pleasant, made me feel happy I came here. I showered, dressed, went down to the dining room at 7:30 a.m. for breakfast, which was provided with the room rate. I had 2 eggs, cooked with spiced ham, bread, juice, coffee and fresh fruit, all very tasty.

I had booked a tour up the mountain, to a village of the Mao tribe, primitive people who do not come down into the town of Cheng Mai. A small group of tourists, including myself, left the hotel at 8:30 a.m. in a mini van, 9 people and a female guide. Part way up the mountain we left the van, and got into a tuk tuk truck, with bench type seats along each side in the open back. This was really rustic! The narrow road was terrible, of dirt and mud, we churned through ruts so deep, I thought we would never make it to the top. Once we had to get out, so the weight of the truck would be less and it could go through a very wet place, then got in again, jarred and jolted along. We finally reached the village, found it to be very primitive. The men and women wear black clothing, with bands of colorful embroidery at neck, or on front, dresses for women, calf length pants and jacket for men. They do beautiful hand embroidery work, make other items, sell things in stalls. There were only a few old wooden houses, very poorly made, never painted. There were small children playing around, often naked or with just a tee shirt on, small pigs and a couple of dogs wandered freely. Children over age 5 were in a weathered building, never had been painted, it was the school. The ladies had long black hair, which was wound up in a large knot on top of their heads. In almost every stall, where they sold items such as dresses and fancy work, there was a small baby lying in a box under a table, or held by a small child. They were wrapped tightly in a blanket; one girl probably just about age 5, had a baby strapped to her back, as she walked around.

At the end of the stalls, at a very poor house, an elderly lady squatted on the front stoop. She was very fat, smiled at us pleasantly. Our guide described their way of living to us, they prefer to stay almost isolated from society, up here on the mountain. The men go out and hunt in the forest, with a wooden crossbow and arrows, which they make themselves, killing large birds, small mammals and snakes. The money from items sold to tourists is their income. The lady let us take pictures of her, also let us go inside the dwelling of

weathered boards, cracks of light came through the walls, the roof was of branches covered with some sort of large leaves. The floor was dirt. On a bed of sorts, there was a baby 19 days old, snuggled under blankets, it had a tiny red knit cap on it's head, the young mother (a beautiful girl) was nearby. She sat on the bed next to the baby, let me take a picture, I used sign language to let her know what I wanted. Outside, chickens and ducks wandered around, a dog lay sleeping, three little children, naked except for a small shirt, rolled over and over, down a slope of hard-packed dirt. I guess this was the way they played.

Now a man appeared from the woods behind the house, dressed in the black pants and jacket with a colorful trim, carrying a large bow and bag of arrows over his shoulder. I took his picture, he spoke English, described his weapons and the type hunting he did, then asked me to look at some gems he had in a small bag. They were garnets, sapphires, and aquamarine semi-precious stones, which he said he gets by going over the border into Burma. In past history this area did belong to Burma, 220 years ago as a result of a war between the two countries, it was won by Thailand. He showed me the stones were authentic gems, by cutting a piece of glass with them. I knew I was taking a chance on the authenticity, but liked a red garnet, and bought it. He asked \$40, I offered less, finally bought it for 600 baht, less than \$30. It is lovely, my souvenir of Thailand.

Now we drove down the mountain again, in terrible ruts, curves, steep grades, a scary ride. About half-way down, we again changed back into the van, which probably never would have made it up to the village. At this location there was a huge temple, on the side of the mountain, to reach it we had to walk up a beautiful wide, open stairway of tiles, 301 steps! On each side a solid railing held a long dragon, made of colorful ceramic tiles, was all very impressive. Arriving at the temple we saw a huge gold covered tower, in the center, and umbrella-like metal standards with a pierced design, stood at the four corners. Many things were covered with gold leaf, they were all very beautiful. People of the Buddhist faith were giving their offerings of flowers, incense, candles, and praying before the different Buddha statues. It was a treat to see this temple. Near the long stairs were a couple of stalls, and people selling hand made items. I bought a lovely hand crocheted, peach colored coat and hat for my little granddaughter, Shannon.

Leaving this area, we were driven back to Cheng Mai, were taken to a Chinese restaurant, our meal consisted of several small dishes of different foods, rice and soup. I ate it all with chopsticks (except the soup, we had a spoon for that) and I felt quite proud I could do that. No knife or fork was provided. Fresh fruit on a bamboo spear, for each person, completed the meal, it was all very tasty, a good lunch. Next we were taken back to our hotels, to rest, and then be picked up at 2:00 p.m. for a tour of "factories" in the area, where people made hand crafted items.

When I went down to the lobby at the appointed time, the guide told me that I was the only person scheduled to go on the tour, and asked if I would go tomorrow afternoon. I preferred to go today, so the same female guide we had before, and a driver, took me to several places in Cheng Mai. First we went to the silversmiths. Here young men sat on the dirt floor of a large warehouse, one heated a round disc of silver in a fire burning, right on the floor, holding it with a long metal forceps. When it was red hot, he started pounding it

with a heavy hammer, on a piece of metal. By doing this in stages, the disc is pounded, and rounded, into a small bowl, different men do each portion of the task. A design is etched on it by another person; a woman sitting on the floor, washed the bowl in water, with some solution added, to take off the dark color of the silver, and clean it. This is hand crafted silver, and a variety of beautiful objects were for sale in the show room. The small bowl, about 4 or 5 inches across the top, sold for 400 baht. In a nearby area, several men were working on 3 dimensional, pictures on metal. They pounded metal, pencil-like tools with rounded ends, against aluminum, to make figures.

Next we drove to the umbrella factory, rode through a rural area on the way, saw the Brahma cattle, of grey color, working in the rice fields. The guide said next month these animals will work very hard, in heavy rains, getting the fields ready for the rice plants. Some of the rice paddies we passed had nice green, growing plants in them, they get 2 crops of rice a year here. At the umbrella factory women were seated on the ground of an open sided shed, some were chopping large pieces of bamboo into small, narrow strips, others took these, notched, and shaped them. A man cut pieces for the wooden, round ring of the umbrella, that pushes it open or closed. Next, 2 ladies glued the slender ribs on the handle, tied cotton string to the pieces, to space them evenly at the top, and at outer edge. Then a lady sponged glue all over the wood ribs and placed 2 layers of the covering for the umbrella, on the ribs. The covering is made from the bark of the native Sa tree, it is boiled in water to soften it, then pounded until it is a pulp. The pulp is dropped in a tub of water, then stirred around, a screen is dipped in the tub, bringing up the Sa pulp, which is spread out very thin, and set out in the sun to dry. The finished product is a rectangular, thin, waterproof, sheet. This is glued to the ribs, and trimmed to a circle, and again set out to dry, the umbrella is almost finished. Sometimes the umbrellas are covered with silk, and designs painted on them. We saw this being done, in an adjoining area, each umbrella painted with a different design. These umbrellas are used by the local population, to protect them from sun, and also rain. A large, regular sized one sold for 45 baht. I could not carry a large one, on my journey, bought a small sample size, for 5 baht.

The third stop was at the silk shop. Here trays of silkworms were displayed, they were fed mulberry leaves, from the trees outside, this is their food. The worm will eventually spin a cocoon around itself, mature into a butterfly. It will emerge from the cocoon, lay it's eggs, and die. The empty cocoons are boiled in water, a young woman sat on a very low bench in front of a wood fire, over this a black iron pot hung, with water in it. She gently stirred the cocoons, then she caught a fiber from one. She carefully unwound it, stretched it up to a small metal reel, and wound it on the reel. She repeated the process with each cocoon, how tedious! The natural color of the fiber was yellow, it is made a light cream color by adding alum (or a soda) to the water. It later is dyed into different colors, and the thread is made into silk cloth. We did not see this process, it is done in a different place, but saw some looms, where women were weaving, sending the shuttle back and forth with a foot pedal. This was all very interesting, a unique experience. I bought some silk material, and a cotton dress, at the little shop here. Cheng Mai is famous for it's silk, fine cotton, and embroidery.

Next we went to a work place where people were making beautiful furniture of teak wood, doing hand carving with sharp tools, on desks, chests, secretaries, tables, beds, dining

sets, and also statues. A chest, with elaborate carving, could be bought for \$500, delivered to the U.S. I was tempted to buy one!! Young men and women were sitting on the floor, working with chisel and hammer, to create the decoration. The teak tree grows in Thailand, it is resistant to moisture, is used to make ships, in addition to furniture. This now concluded our afternoon, we were driven back to the hotel. The female guide was a very lovely girl, spoke English well, had knowledge of all the different activities we had seen, gave personal attention so I understood everything, did it to please, and not just for a tip. How different than when traveling in Egypt, where “baksheesh” is demanded. In the evening I rested, then walked to the market place again, had some local food, chicken and rice, and sweet pancake with ice cream on top. This was different! I really felt pleased with this day, had seen so much, and been taken care of very well. The people here are very pleasant and want to make you comfortable.

WEDNESDAY JUNE 30

Awoke at 6:30 a.m., showered, dressed and went to the dining room, where I had American type food for breakfast. Today I had arranged for the tour to see elephants at work in the forest, we left at 8:30 a.m. A nice couple I had met here, were also along: David and Penny Watier, from Canada, but working in Madagascar for a couple of years. Riding in a mini bus, we drove out of the city, passing rice fields, and then to a mountainous area with many trees and bushes. Stopping here, we walked quite a way, crossed a small stream on a foot bridge made of bamboo, then to an open area bordering a wide river. Here a herd of elephants, a dozen or more, were being ridden into the stream, a young boy trainer, called a mahout, sat on the elephant's head and directed it. Then he got off and started scrubbing the elephant, which lay down in the water, seemed to enjoy it, sometimes sprayed water through its trunk, onto its body, and showering the attendant also. They rolled on one side, then the other. There were several baby elephants in the group. Our guide told us the animals have been “in school” for 4 years, being trained to respond to commands, learning how to pull huge logs from the forest, and pile them up. Soon they had some of the animals do this task for us: a chain placed around the body of the elephant is fastened to the end of a log, the animal walks and drags the log to the desired spot, the mahout unhooks the chain and gets back on the elephant's head. Now, by body movement, commands, and a short spiked pole, he gets the animal to roll the logs, one on top of the other. Two elephants worked together, I was able to get photos of this process – it was very interesting. They used trunks, feet and heads to lift and roll those big logs. Following this we bought bananas (they grow all over in this area) to feed the elephants. The adults could eat skin and all, but we were told to peel the banana, for the baby elephants. All took the banana in their trunk, put it in their mouth, ate it. The skin of these animals is wrinkled and tough. They worked hard and piled up a great stack of logs, sometimes working together side by side, or one in front of the other. It was great to be so close to them. Next we were offered a ride on their backs, paid 20 baht to do this. A wooden framework seat, called a houda, was put on the back of one animal, two people could ride at one time, I was happy to do this and have a ride around the area. It was quite smooth, but your body swayed back and forth as the animal walked. My first elephant ride!!!

After this experience we left this place, rode back toward town, passed a beautiful waterfall on the way, and stopped at a food stall, had local salad and beer. The salad had unripened mango, chopped, cooked meat, tomato, green peppers and a spicy vinegar sauce poured over it – spicy, but good. The last stop was at the orchid ranch, here we saw the seed sperm growing on a gel, in closed bottles. No dirt is used, new tiny plants were sprouting, rooting on a charcoal base or coconut fiber; in the next part of the greenhouse, were rows of larger plants, this was a business of growing orchids, and we were given one to wear, that was such a nice thought. We had lunch here, of local Thai food, soup, beef, rice, fish with vegetables on top as it was baked, and last, fresh pineapple wedges which were very sweet. The fruit here is so good!. What wonderful experiences I had here, with these tours. We then went back to Cheng Mai, and I packed up to leave here, as I return tonight on the bus to Bangkok. I had to check out of my room by 2:30 p.m., and the Canadian couple invited me to rest in their room, with them, until time for departure, that was very nice. I have met pleasant people, in my travels.

I went to the hotel lobby at 5:30 p.m., Dave Watier and Mismeow, our guide today, sat with me, discussed all we had seen today. At departure time she walked me to the bus, got my ticket validated, made sure I was all set for the trip, was very courteous, friendly. We rode across the city, to another larger bus, that would take me on the all night ride back to Bangkok. I surely am glad I came to Cheng Mai.

THURSDAY JULY 1

The all night ride on the bus was not too bad. Penny Watier, who had ridden it before, told me the air-conditioning was quite cool, so I had a sweater with me: they also gave you a large towel-like cover. A young man sat next to me, but got off at the 11:00 p.m. stop for food and rest rooms, Asian style, a hole in the floor, porcelain tiles where feet are placed, and a large vat of water with a dipper. Having lived several years in this part of the world, I was used to them. There was a faucet outside for hand washing. The young man changed buses here, and then I had extra room for myself. I slept fairly well, didn't feel bad when we reached Bangkok at 5:00 a.m. We passed by the fresh vegetable market, a large one, our guide had told us the farmers start coming into town after 3:30 a.m., bringing their produce. Very few have refrigeration here, so foods must be purchased daily. I was the only non-Thai person on the bus, which let us off at a narrow street intersection, there was no bus station, or office. Everyone else knew where they were going and walked off. I stood in the dark, feeling a bit lost. The female hostess on the bus offered to get a taxi for me, she procured a tuk-tuk and driver, spoke in Thai language to him, saying Bangkok Palace hotel. I asked the price, he answered 50 baht, we agreed, I got in, with my suitcase. So we drove off through the dark streets, amidst heavy traffic of trucks, autos and tuk-tuks, horns honked, cars swerved, I bounced along with hair blowing and feeling disheveled, but happy. He stopped at a building, said "Bangkok", and was ready to assist me out - I said "No, this is not Bangkok Palace". A man stepped out from the building, spoke English, heard my complaint and said "This is the Bangkok Center". He explained this to the driver, said I needed Bangkok Palace hotel, so he drove there. As I was ready to alight, the driver said "need 100 baht". I said no, the mistake was not mine, but offered him 60 baht, all I had left in small bills. He was going to drive off with my luggage, I argued with him, he resisted. Then the young man in charge of transportation at the hotel stepped out, I explained the

situation, he spoke in Thai language to the driver, who then accepted the 60 baht, and drove off after giving me my suitcase. This was the only bad feeling I had, with all my tours and travels in Thailand, everyone else was extremely pleasant and courteous. The transportation man tagged my suitcase, put it storage room for me, would hold it until 11:00 a.m., when I expected to take a bus to Pattaya island.

I wanted to observe early morning street life in the city, so wandered a bit in streets near the hotel. I had left film to be developed, at the Metro Department store, but they don't open until 10:00 a.m. There were many street stalls of fresh vegetables, all well cleaned, and a huge pile of pineapple, a couple of boys were peeling and coring them, slices were sold, along with a small bamboo spear to hold them, while you ate. There were sellers of fresh meat, the butchers were men or ladies, one man was very fat, had a chef hat on, but bare to the waist, looked kind of comical. I asked to take his picture, but he shook his head "no". I did get a picture at a nearby stall. Dressed chickens were displayed, and all kinds of sea food, but being so early, there weren't many customers yet. Children, dressed in white shirts and blue skirts or pants, were walking to school. I heard some chanting a little way down the block, looked, and approaching me were a large group of people, ladies in front, dancing and singing, followed by an orderly procession of men. Several of them had a platform on their shoulders, a canopy above it, under which sat an old, old man who was probably a head monk. It appeared they were honoring him, carrying him in this procession. Many ladies had flower arrangements as they walked. A large crowd of people followed, they probably were headed for a temple; I was very happy to observe this, did take photos. I always like to observe cultural events as I travel, and bring back the pictures to share in my lectures.

Now I walked to the Metro Dep't. store, waited for it to open. Shortly before 9:00 a.m. some clerks were entering, in the back way, I asked one if she spoke English, she did. I told her I wanted to go to the manager's office, hoping he might get my developed film to me, before the store opened, and not have to wait. She led me to an office inside, a man speaking English, was courteous, told me to sit down and wait a bit. At 9:30 a.m. he went, with another man, to the film department and secured my pictures. They were all very good, the price was only 220 baht. I was so happy, thanked him, I wanted them developed before I returned to Saudi Arabia, sometimes the quality of developing is poor. I went back to the Bangkok Palace, the baggage man produced my suitcase, also contacted the Diamond Bus Line. I was picked up and taken to their office, where I got on a bus soon, going to Pattaya Beach. I wanted to spend time at a nice beach resort, in the Gulf of Thailand, while I was here. The girl who made out my ticket, gave me a letter to take to the Regent Marina resort, her girl friend there was the daughter of the owner, said they would treat me very well. How nice, a special favor! The ride took 2 ½ hours, I was given a lovely room in the very large resort hotel, and a friendly welcome, by the daughter of the owner, when I presented the letter.

The country between Bangkok and Pattya is flat, planted rice fields were noted along the banks of many canals. Water is diverted from them, to the rice plants. Nearing Pattya the landscape changed, more coconut palm trees were noted, and other tropical plants seen. The Regent marina is a huge, very beautiful, first-class hotel, but it is off season now and hardly any people present. My room rate was only 450 baht now, compared to 1200 baht

at the Bangkok Palace hotel (\$60). There was a big, beautiful swim pool at one side, with a lounging area, with tables, chairs, lounges, lovely plants and other décor. . My room is very large, faces the beach and sea beyond, providing a lovely view. I immediately changed into a bathing suit and walked down the entrance road to the beach, entered the warm sea. It was windy and the water was choppy, but I enjoyed it greatly, the bottom was sandy, there was no coral here. I was told there is an island about 45 minutes from shore, and there is a coral reef there. If I could stay here one day longer, I would go out there, with a boat tour, but don't have the time to do it. I used my mask and snorkel while I was swimming here, it kept the waves from my eyes and mouth.. I sat on the beach for a while, after swimming, it was cloudy and warm, there were a few sprinkles now and then, not enough to even get wet. There were a group of people doing parasailing, that is, being pulled behind a motor boat, a parachute is strapped to a person standing at the water's edge, as the boat goes out, the person is lifted into the air, and floats along behind the boat. It was interesting to watch them, I would have liked to do it. The cost was 250 baht, one of the boat owners told me, I said "no", he offered to drop the price to 200 baht. I only had 100 baht with me, so could not try it. I had only brought a little money with me, as I had to let my camera and money lay on the beach with my towel while I was in the water. When returning to the hotel, I took another short swim in the lovely pool, then showered and dressed. After a short rest, I left the hotel, stopped a tuk-tuk going by, and rode for 5 baht, to the far end of the business district, all along the beach. I shopped a bit, bought a bathing suit and ate steamed seafood and rice dinner, in a restaurant. There were a lot of people strolling along, in this area, I walked along, all the way back to the hotel. Now, I am sitting near the corner windows overlooking the sea, the breeze is blowing in strongly, as I write in this journal. What a pleasant place this is, wish I could stay longer.````

FRIDAY JULY 2

HAPPY GOOD FORTUNE GO WITH YOU ALWAYS

(A sign I saw along the highway)

I slept very well in the big king-size bed, though the pillows were too hard, and I used a large folded towel under my head, instead. It was pure luxury for me to awaken in this beautiful room, and be able to stay in bed until 7:30 a.m.. Then I arose, put on bathing suit with shorts and shirt over it, and went down to the dining room at 8:00 a.m. It was a beautiful room, overlooking the swim pool, had dark wood tables and chairs, and deep rose tablecloths and napkins. The room was so large, I estimated it could seat 350 people, maybe more - and I was the only person eating. The service was elegant and the food delicious. I had an array of fresh: fruit: watermelon, papaya, pineapple, all so sweet and delicious, then toast, jam and coffee. The price was 60 baht. Afterward I went into the pool for a bit; now there were two people in it, the only other guests I have seen here. The sun was starting to come from behind clouds, the air was lovely and warm, not hot. After the swim I went inside, asked at the desk, for reservation on the bus that comes at noon, and will take me back to Bangkok. Everyone was so friendly, the girl to whom I took the letter greeted me warmly, talked a bit, gave me a wrapped package, it was an ash tray, with the name of the hotel on it.

I went back to the beach again, wanted to enjoy this area, swam a little in the sea. The tide was out, so the water was shallow a long way out. There was parasailing going on again on the beach, a large group of Japanese tourists from a tour bus, were enjoying it. At 10:40 a.m. I went back to my room, showered, dressed, and packed up, was ready in the lobby when the bus stopped there at noon. Boarding it, we rode away, it stopped at most all of the hotels here, so I had a chance to see all of Pattya. I wish I could stay longer, or come back sometime. We arrived at the Bangkok airport at 3:30 p.m., so I was in plenty time to check in for my flight, and change money from bahts, to American money. I had 7580 baht, received \$331.00, I found it very inexpensive to travel here, and also to purchase items. I had time to sit and write in this journal, before boarding the 747 Saudia Airlines plane.

It was filled completely, mainly with people from Thailand, going to Saudi Arabia to work. Groups of men had caps, or jackets on, with the name of a company on them. There were many older Malaysian couples, probably about 100, They were distinguished by their small bodies, the ladies were dressed in bright dresses of print material, white thin scarves, or caps, on their heads and a white lacy shawl over that. They wore socks and thong sandals, each had a length of print material draped over one shoulder, which held their carry-on bag. Instead of holding this in their hand, they carried it native style, tied up in this cloth. They carry a baby or small child this way, in their home area. In their hand, each lady carried a one gallon size plastic jug, enclosed with cloth. I don't know what the jugs contained, but as we were passing through inspection, I saw the guard refuse to let one woman take her jug on board. I felt sorry for the group, they looked slightly lost, and sad. Their names and addresses, in Malaysia, were printed on the sides of the suitcases the men carried. Most of the men wore grey suits, of light weight material, with short sleeves, they looked quite new (were probably made for this trip). On their heads each had on a black, round hat, brimless, and about 6" high. From this I knew they were of Muslim faith. I presumed they were couples, going to be hired as house people for wealthy Arabs. I hope they have a good living there, I have seen people from poorer nations, working for Arab families.

One incident I noted: A couple stood near me in the waiting room, their luggage was all stacked on the floor. The man took off his hat, pulled out a skirt of cotton (like the Yemen men wear) from a bag, slipped it over his head, held a portion in his teeth so it wouldn't fall down. Then he took off his shoes, socks, pants and underwear, walked to the rest room. I presume he washed his body – came back, and again holding the skirt with his teeth, put on underwear, pants, shirt, then dropped the skirt and folded it up and put on socks and shoes. Following this, he stayed by their luggage, and the lady took off her headgear, her jacket and wrap-around wide belt, many yards long. She took a towel from her bag, and left for the rest room. When she returned, wrapped her skirt tightly around her, re-wrapped the long cummerbund, donned her white shirred cap, jacket and head scarf, last the socks and thongs. This confirmed, what I had seen all through Thailand, and nearby countries, the people are very clean, they have access to plenty of water. We boarded the plane, I had a window seat, these people had been put on the plane early, and not cognizant of seating arrangement, had taken seats anywhere – the hostess had to help them to their proper one.

The trip to Riyadh took 7 hours, a dinner meal was served on the way. On arrival at Riyadh, everyone had to deplane, go through immigration, have hand baggage inspected, then wait in the terminal transit room for almost 2 hours, before boarding another plane to Jeddah. This was very tiring. Luckily, the terminal was air-conditioned, it was extremely hot outside, as we walked to the waiting bus that took us to the plane, way out on the tarmac. I'm glad I don't live in Riyadh, the city of Taif where I live, has a comfortable climate, is at an elevation of 6500 feet.

Arrived at Jeddah about 1:00 a.m., and my dive-buddy Pat was waiting for me. This was arranged before I went away, so that I would get safely back to Taif. It took quite awhile to secure luggage, have it checked through customs, and get to the car in the large parking lot. It was probably about 2:00 a.m. by the time we drove away. He had Tony's car, the 2 ½ hour drive back to Taif went o.k., at Al Hada hospital gate I asked permission to go through the gate with the car, to unload luggage at my apartment. The guard called the security man on duty, he let us through. My apartment was just as I had left it, and there was water in the faucets! My apartment mate Virginia, was still on leave, will return soon. I went right to bed, it was 4:45 a.m. Pat said he had a "comp" day from his work, did not have to report today. I really appreciate his picking me up, and invited him to dinner tomorrow night.

The end of a wonderful week in Thailand, I'm sure I'll go back sometime.

Irma Kackert -1982

Typed on computer by Irma in 2004 - Age 88