

Day Two: Bangkok – Palace

The currency in Thailand is Baht. With an exchange rate of 30 to 1, at first, prices seem really expensive until you do the conversion. Then you realize, Thailand is a pretty cheap destination. A bottle of drinking water is 35 cents. A tall can of beer (500ml) is a little over \$1.00. They do have a strange law though; you cannot buy beer in a store until 5 PM! But you can order one in a bar, go figure. According to our tour guide, the government does not want the local people drinking during the day.

A liter of 100% pure juice runs a little over \$1.00. T-shirts are less than \$4.00. A ride half way across the city via water taxi is 50 cents. For the naysayers who look down on us “tour package” people here is yet another advantage of having your own private tour guide:



When we got to the water taxi there was pandemonium with thousands of tourists and locals jammed like sardines into each water taxi. Our tour guide called her friend who owns a private charter boat and he came to fetch us. We now had an additional narrated guided and comfortable tour of the river; however, this piece of private luxury did come at a price! A whopping 100 Baht!! (That's \$3.50 US.) Our comfortable not-like-sardine-can ride on the left.

Weather could not be better. Yes, it is winter in Thailand, but the daily high is

95 degrees with 90% humidity! They don't really have a summer and winter, just a dry and rainy season, and winter is rain free! However, in summer it can get up to 110 degrees with 95% humidity!



This one is for Rocky my favorite beer loving friend: I have found the best beer in Thailand, it is called Chang Classic. Why is it the best? Unlike all the other Thai beers which are 5% alcohol, this one is 6.4% and is the same price! Yeah, I know, our criteria for a good beer is a little different from yours, Rocky!

Bangkok is a city of about 18 million people. In addition to Thais, there are a lot of Indians and Chinese in Thailand as they are between those two nations. Like England, Thailand is a kingdom with a democratic parliament. Thais LOVE their king and his face is plastered all over the city. Our guide has indicated most all homes have a photo of the King.

Let's talk Thai massage! There are two types of massage parlors. The real salon massages and then the “men” only massages which are typically close to hotels. Locals call these “happy ending” parlors. Now I can't speak for those, but a regular Thai massage is only \$13 for TWO WHOLE HOURS! Wendy has booked her real massage for New Years Day already. As I write this now, Wendy is off getting a pedicure at the hotel spa.



Today we visited the Grand Palace, the most important structure in the whole of Thailand. Built in 1782, it served as the primary residence of the king up until the late 1800's. Each king added more to the compound. All kings have the same name "Rama" and are numbered.

The first king in 1782 was Rama 1 and we are currently on Rama 9 who is 84 years old and very sick. The Crown Prince currently performs his duties.

Kings were named after the first Hindu God called Rama and are believed to be the reincarnated God Rama.

The place was jam packed with tourists and locals. Locals are allowed to enter free of charge and love to visit. The temple in the palace is home to the Emerald Buddha and is very special to them. Pictures of the emerald Buddha are not allowed.

The Emerald Buddha was discovered in 1434 and was carved out of green jade, which the abbots thought was emerald.

The Buddha wears clothes, which they change three times a year with a great ceremony attended by the King.

The detail of the mosaics, carvings and sculptures is fantastic. Every bit of gold you see in the pictures is genuine gold leaf and not painted.



The Grand Palace is Thailand's version of China's Forbidden City, but I would venture far more spectacular. The photo on the right, each flower is ceramic and hand made.



Rama 5 was the first king to visit Europe in the 18th century and he marveled at the British and French architecture. He then came back to Thailand and had the building above left built which is a combination of European and Thai architecture.



Thai people have a thing with legs and feet. In regular temples neither men nor women may show their knees. So I had to wear my long shorts, which was acceptable. However, through out the Grand Palace, you were not allowed to show any part of your leg and as we only brought shorts. We had to rent a sarong for Wendy and what could be classified as pajama bottoms for me in order to gain admittance.

The delightful ensemble we are wearing cost us 50 cents each to rent for 3 hours. We could have OWNED them for just another \$3.00, but we decided to pass.

The foot issue continues though, ever wondered why people sit on their knees in front of Buddha? Kneel before their God perhaps? They are not allowed to point their feet at Buddha. And by the same token, you may not sit back and put your feet up on a table, or even swing open a door with your foot; this is regarded as an extreme insult!

The most common store in Thailand is 7-11; too funny! There's literally one on EVERY SINGLE corner.

Thai people - like most Asians - are extremely polite. However, I do believe Thais take politeness to the next level. For instance to greet someone in Thai is "Sowadee", meaning hello. To be extra polite, women add "ka" on the end, and men add "krup". Ka and Krup have no actual meaning except to sound more polite. It's these two word's only purpose!

Let's talk about romance. To link one's arms in public is very acceptable. But to hold hands in public is marginal and to kiss in public is completely unacceptable – akin



to having sex in public! It's just not polite!



I wonder if that gun is really loaded?



Wendy showing off her contraband capris!!

So it's New Year's eve and we're going partying, so I am going to send this off to you guys now as I doubt I will have time later today. Tomorrow we'll follow up with pics from the party and fireworks display.

Cheers!