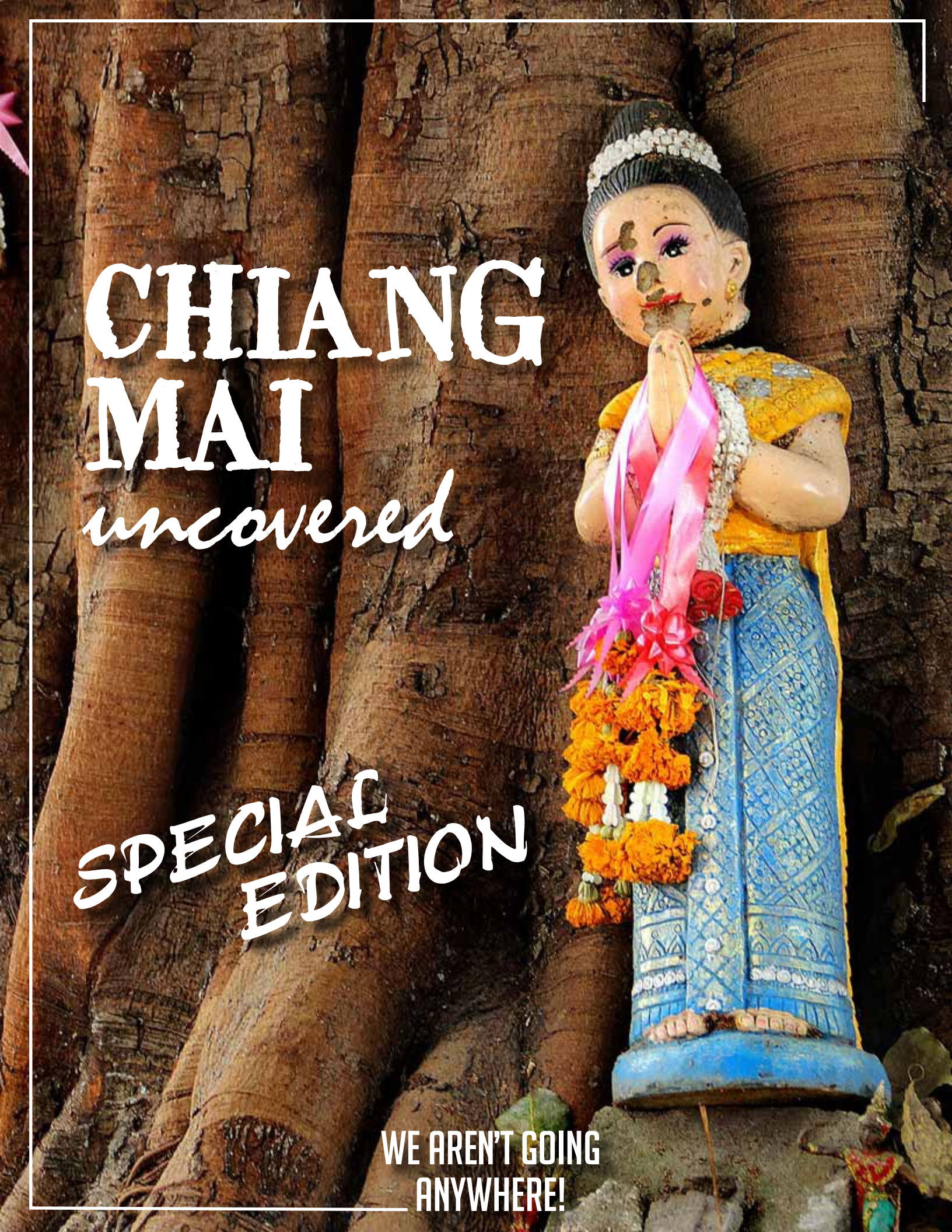
CHIANG
MAI
uncovered
SPECIAL
EDITION
WE AREN'T GOING
ANYWHERE!

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WE AREN'T GOING ANYWHERE!

Chiang Mai is rightly famous for its temples, its mountains, its history and its culture; the friendliness of its people, the excellence of its cuisine. The Rose of the North. But Chiang Mai is more than the obvious; it is people like Mr. Kem, whose glorious obsession sits out on the periphery of the city, almost unknown by visitors; the weirdly wonderful Wat Ket Museum, a community project that displays, in a haphazard way, the personal treasures local people held dear; the gastronomical feast that is Thanin Market; the Saturday racing at Chan Puaek; Kuan Im Chokchai, a temple dedicated to Guayin, the Goddess of Mercy, where you enter through the jaws of a dragon, the story of the life of Buddha portrayed on its sinuous walls.

So we're not going anywhere. Chiang Mai will still be here to welcome you when the airways are open and you are planning your next holiday, perhaps to show you more of the city and culture than you may have experienced before.

Meanwhile, we hope the stories here bring back happy memories or entice you to visit.

You won't be disappointed.

Derek Workman

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

JIN JAI MARKET

Billed as a farmers' market, Jin Jai is definitely a place where you can pick up organic produce; vegetables, rice you wouldn't usually find in your local supermarket, and free range eggs fresh from the hen, but in the main, it's the craft and clothing market that pulls the punters. And in this case, the 'craft' here is the real McCoy, not the same-same you see on most of the street markets in Asia.

Jewellery, clothing, ceramics, bags, leather goods, plenty of café and snack stalls – and an abundance of colour and texture, to the background music and voice of a young guitarist who sometimes doesn't quite hit the high notes, but a pleasing addition to the strolling ambience nonetheless.

What makes J-J Market (as it's known locally) interesting is that about 90% of what you see is genuinely handmade, with the ladieswear especially beautifully styled – and beautifully priced. The men have a lesser choice – if you are a foreign man you have almost no choice. given the sizing, but the duck-egg blue, two-piece of shorts and short-sleaved shirt, topped off with a jaunty maroon hat with an upturned brim, definitely had a bit of a swagger.

A painting workshop gives you the chance to create your own postcards, or decorate a T-shirt or canvas shopping bag in floral designs using shaped sponges, the modern-day equivalent of the potatoes used decades ago.

Saturday, 7am-1pm. 45 Atsadathon Rd, 18.806178, 98.996223

CHANG PHUEAK FLEA MARKET

Chiang Mai's wandering flea market finally seems to have found a home. Plenty of knock-offs and assorted *bric-a-tat*, but amongst them there's a good sprinkling of original pieces, and the household bits and bobs everyone needs for a long-term stay. If you know what you are looking for, there are genuine antiques.

No shortage of clothes, both new and second-hand, and while they may lack the elegance and style of J-J Market, at 20 baht for a T-shirt and 50 baht for a pair of shorts, you aren't going to feel robbed. And amongst all the second-hand gear there is a smattering of stalls that sell decent quality ends-of-ranges at a very modest price.

What's also on display is the historic and everyday culture of Asia, and Thailand in particular; kitchen utensils, household goods, garden implements, much of it no different from something you would find anywhere else in the world from Onehorsetownsville, Missouri, USA, to Backofthewoodstown, Yorkshire, UK, but there is plenty to remind you that you are definitely in Asia.

Open Saturday and Sunday, 8am-1pm. Near Hilltribe Museum, Chotana Road, 18.821371, 98.970410

THANIN MARKET

Siri-Wattana Market, known locally as Thanin market, isn't specifically for Saturdays, but it's no distance from Jin Jai and Chang Phueak markets if you are in the area – and you certainly won't regret the visit. The food market is in two open-sided halls, one being sit-yourself-down food shops where the meals are prepared while you gawp at the goings-on around you, the other, even bigger, serves locals with the best and most varied range of foodstuffs you will find anywhere around the city, a glorious array of ready-to-go meals, fresh fruit and vegetables, sweet snacks, flowers, grains, spices and cooked and fresh fish and meat. The real diadems are about half-way in, a collection of stalls selling cooked food from big aluminium bowls, plenty of which are old favourites, but with enough point-and-pick-because-you-don't-know-the-name to keep the eyes and belly full and make sure you come back. (The cooked food stalls usually set up from mid-afternoon until evening.) Surrounding the halls are shops selling clothing, bags, shoes, cosmetics, at bargain prices.

Changphueak Road. 18.804976, 98.984744

ANY DAY *BUT* THE WEEKEND

HIGHLAND PEOPLE DISCOVERY MUSEUM

Set in a small lake in Rama IX Lana Park, the three-tiered Highland People Discovery Museum is a delightful presentation of the life and culture of the hill tribes that migrated from China, Laos and Burma generations ago. Exhibits of beautifully woven and embroidered tribal dress, jewellery far more refined than we might imagine, pots and bowls, baskets and trays, the accoutrements of everyday life. Life-size settings depict domestic activities – weaving, embroidery, mealtimes, kids playing games, musicians entertaining on traditional instruments. A fifteen-minute video tells of life in the mountain villages, with photographs and descriptive panels adding detail.

A genuinely attractive, informative, and interesting museum an easy songtau ride from the city centre. Unfortunately, it isn't open at weekends, so you can't take advantage of the second-hand market nearby, although the museum is only a few minutes from the daily Thanin Market – a pleasant few hours pleasing both the eye and the stomach.

Open Monday-Friday, 9am-4pm. Free entry.
9 Chotana Rd, Chiang Mai 18.821651, 98.974724

Read Johan Smits'
Things to Do in Chiang Mai Off the Tourist Trail Page 10

GIANTS *versus* MONKEYS

Khem Marukapitak thinks big, whether it's the tallest carving of elephant-headed Ganesh from a single piece of wood in the world, or an arts centre dedicated to Hanuman, the heroic Monkey God, costing 2000 million baht.

Born in a traditional wooden river-side house in Nokhon Pathom Province, 30km west of Bangkok, Mr. Kem looked forward to living in a similar residence when he retired. For over 25 years he collected teak logs, eventually assembling one hundred and thirty pieces, many of them with the square hole cut in the flat log where a chain was passed through for an elephant to drag it out of the forest.

In preparation for his grand design, at the cusp of the millennium he travelled Thailand for a year, photographing the beautiful artwork of temple doors. The criteria for his photographs was simple; classic and beautiful; art and beauty predominated over religion. It was the artwork of the central areas of the country that attracted him most, with their use of imagery of Hindu gods, such as Braham and Indra, and a range of characters that even he can't identify.

A polite and charming man in his late sixties, you will know Mr. Kem is at Baan Devalai if you see his old, purple and white VW Beetle, decorated with posters of revolutionaries from the twentieth century; Che Guevara, Mao Tse Tung, Mahatma Gandhi, and more. In his youth, Mr. Kem was leader of the student revolutionary group at Chiang Mai University, and spent four years in the mountains of northern Thailand, fighting government forces.

In 2002, Mr. Kem began construction on his dream home at the foot of Doi Suthep, with a team of five artists painting the beautiful doors and interiors made from his stock of teak, based on his collection of photographs. So beautiful was it, and with so many sacred images, that when a group of religious scholars visited a few years later, they told him that he couldn't live there, it was now the residence of gods. Possibly not the thing you most want to hear when you've put your heart and soul, and most of your savings, into a future home. But Mr. Kem accepted his fate and the fate of his once-upon-a-time home, and acquiesced to the deities. The building now became Roitawarabarn Baandhawalai, a complicated translation, that became simplified to Baan Devalai, 'House of the Gods'.

While work on the Gods' House continued with a constant stream of artists, Mr. Kem bought a piece of land near Mae Rim to try again. Digging out a culvert during landscaping, the digger bucket hit a tree trunk under the mud, and the jaw dislocated. Repair done, they tried again – and dislocated it again. After five dislocations the driver prayed to the spirits of the tree and apologised for disturbing the 8.5 mtr length of wood, inviting it out of its resting place. Once safely lifted, it was left for six months to dry.

The legend of the tree spirit

Every passionate enterprise deserves to have a legend attached to it, and such is the case with Mr. Kem's discovery. What no one knew while they were busy

dislocating digger jaws, was that they had uncovered a length of ironwood, a generic name for a range of species of very hard wood, perfect for carving, known in Thailand as *Ta-khian* wood *(Hopea odorata*), made even more important in this case because it was estimated by experts to be around 1,200 years old, and had lain undisturbed for almost a century.

In Thai folklore, Nang Ta-khian is a female forest spirit who inhabits a Ta-khian tree, sometimes appearing as a beautiful young woman wearing *chut Thai*, traditional Thai costume. Nang Ta-khian takes great care of the area surrounding her tree, and travels with it should it become the beams, stilts or pillars of a temple. The righteous have nothing to fear, but woe betide the wicked or immoral should they cross her path.

The Ta-khian tree is almost never felled for lumber, other than for use in a Buddhist temple, where the merit of the monks is considered sufficient to render the spirit harmless. But if a piece is presented to you as a gift, what's a person to do, given the rarity of such a prize? Mr. Kem was about to find out.

"As the wood was drying, I thought about what I could do with this gift. I had intended to have a statue of Buddha carved, but about two months after we found it, I had a dream. Ganesh presented himself to me, and I knew that I must use the precious wood for him."

The decision made, Mr. Kem had to decide which of the thirty-two forms in which Ganesh appears would make the most of his find.

"I didn't want to waste wood. If I had decided on a sitting position we would have had to cut the tree trunk. I didn't want to do that. If I chose a five-head option it would have ten arms, which would have made it too wide; one head and two arms would be smaller than the wood and would have wasted a lot. Finally, I chose three heads with six arms, which meant small wastage."

Thailand's best woodcarvers

Fortunately for Mr. Kem, two of the top wood-carving teams in Thailand are based near Chiang Mai, one in San Kamphaeng, famous for its hot-water springs, the other in San Pa Tong, home of the weekly buffalo market. The precious ten-ton cargo was hauled to San Pa Tong, where a team of five laboured for two years to create the largest sculpture of Ganesh in the world carved from a single piece of wood. On 11th June 2013, Ganesh was set in place at Baan Devalai, at a spot dictated by a halo of moon in another of Mr. Kem's dreams.

In 2014, Mr. Kem gave up trying to build himself a home, and moved to a condominium on the edge of Chaing Mai, converting his ex-home into an art gallery and God pavilion.

Meanwhile, work continued on Baan Devalai with a team of eight artists, their paintings and carvings covering almost every inch, including ceilings and eaves,

with the invitation 'Please Touch' posted everywhere. The grand images are glorious, but it is the small, almost unnoticed detail that defines the beauty and quality of the building as much as the more overwhelming murals and portraiture.

Take the eleven square pillars on the middle floor supporting the roof, each around four metres tall. Three artists, working independently, will spend around six weeks creating designs on each side, six months per pillar. Each design is different, the detail delicately picked out with ultra-fine brushes, with large areas covered in pure gold and silver leaf.

While most of the team work on the main building, one young man works alone on what will eventually become the apogee of Mr Kem's dreams.

Epic art

The Night Watch, Rembrandt's most ambitious painting, measuring 3.5 by 4.5 mtrs, featuring thirty-four

figures, took three years to complete; Michelangelo lay on his back decorating the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel with heavenly hosts for a year longer. Porndai Sopit has spent six years slowly working his way along a curved panel 2.5 metres high by ten long, made from six hundred pieces of teak, 20cm square, tongue and grooved for strength and to create the curve.

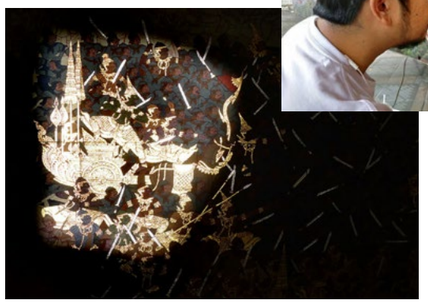
By the time it is finished in 2024, he will have painted fifty thousand individual warriors, fifty chariots and enough animals to fill a pretty respectable zoo, depicting the battle of the Giant and the Monkey, a story taken from the Ramayna, one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India.

The attention to detail is superb, which may seem a bit wasted, given that it will form the ceiling of the domed roof of Mr. Kem's most adventurous project to date, a twenty-year mission to create a theatre and art gallery in the shape of Hanuman, twelve metres high, fourteen wide, with enough space to sit one hundred people, using 250 tons of copper costing 2,000 million baht ($61million). At sixty-seven, Mr Kem isn't sure he will be around for the opening, but has his Buddhist faith to support him in the hope that his children will continue his work.

For more about the art of Baan Devalai

PATHS UNWRITTEN

Near Chiang Mai University
18.793583, 98.947485



Things to Do in Chiang Mai Off the Tourist Trail

A persistent visitor to Thailand's Rose of the North, Johan Smits spills the beans about his favourite tourist-proof things to do in Chiang Mai

Like what you see?

Read more *HERE*

If it's your first time in Thailand's largest northern city, there'll be too many things to do in Chiang Mai than you'll manage to cram into your visit. So, to ease your homework, here are three of my favourite things to do in Chiang Mai off the tourist trail.

MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum

Image by Soopakorn Srisakul

For a modern museum experience, the MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum is easily one of Thailand's best and you would not expect it tucked away half an hour's drive east from Chiang Mai's city centre. Opened in 2016, it's a relatively new addition to Chiang Mai's burgeoning arts scene.

The building itself is worth a visit – a dramatic conversion of an old warehouse into a modernist, eye-catching space, its large, outside facade covered entirely with thousands of small, light-reflecting tiles that creates an effect of dissolving the wall into its surroundings. Spread over two floors and several galleries, its permanent collection includes works from some of the most celebrated Thai artists such as Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Montien Boonma and Chatchai Puipi, while temporary exhibitions show both established and up-and-coming names from within the region and further afield.

The excellent 2019-2020 solo exhibition of contemporary Spanish artist Pilar Albarracín is one typical example, while some of the Thai works are surprisingly daring for Thailand. When visiting Chiang Mai, I often forget this out-of-the-way museum exists but the few times I have visited now have been consistently rewarding. The humble MAIIAM Museum of Contemporary Art easily holds its own against established contemporary art museums in capital cities both across Asia and in the West.

The MAIIAM Contemporary Arts Museum is located on Highway 1006 towards Sankampheang district at 122 Moo 7 Tonpao, Sankampheang. Open every day from 10am to 6pm except on Tuesdays. 18.757573, 99.093660.

Pilgrim's Path to Wat Pha Lat

More conventional but no less fun is the moderate, half-hour hike up the Pilgrim's Path to Wat Pha Lat monastery, starting behind Chiang Mai University. Although only 15 minutes away from the city centre, the quiet of the forest makes you feel like you're on a real jungle trek.

Orange pieces of monk's cloth wrapped around branches mark the trail – a picturesque sight that lends a touch of mystique to your ascent. While Wat Pha Lat was originally a resting place for monks during their pilgrimage to Wat Doi Suthep – the most famous of all of the Chiang Mai temples, higher up the mountain – it later became a monk's residence after the road was built in 1935.

To me this is Chiang Mai's most atmospheric temple complex – the serenity in the middle of the encroaching forest; the old, weathered brick stupa; the intricate bas-reliefs on thick, stone tablets; the murmuring streams and the pond with an infinity-view over Chiang Mai far below; and so much more. "Wat Pha Lat" means "Monastery at the Sloping Rock" and is largely overshadowed by Wat Doi Suthep where everybody flocks to by the busload. But here, apart from a bamboo stand where you can buy some drinks, there's nothing commercialised, keeping the monastery's true spirit intact.

Wat Pha Lat can also be reached by road as a side-trip on the way to Doi Suthep, but it would be a shame to forego the sight of greeting Buddha statues emerging from out of the jungle as you approach. Directions: Drive to the end of Suthep Road, just after Chiang Mai university. There, turn right at the crossroads and go up past the rear entry of Chiang Mai Zoo. Then, when you see the red and white radio antenna to your right, there's a sign with a map indicating the trail to the temple. Download the very useful MAPS.ME application to help you navigate. Bring mosquito spray and water, and dress properly for visiting the temple. 18.797822, 98.942199

Thung Fa Bot weekend market

We'll dive straight into the deep end at the Thung Fa Bot weekend market in San Pa Tong district. Founded in 1959, Kad Ngua – as it is known in the local Lanna dialect meaning "market of cows" – was originally a trading spot for merchants of cows and buffaloes. Today, it has grown into the biggest livestock market in northern Thailand, but it's not only cattle that are sold here – nowadays, over 600 merchants trade anything from pets, clothing, food, ceramics and rare accessories, to machetes, flowers, used motorcycles and bicycles.

A veritable living community museum, here you can observe young boys parading gamecocks, farmers auctioning off big water buffaloes and tradesmen selling Buddhist talismen. This is no tourist market so don't expect little elephant statues and hipster coffee stalls. Instead, observe a generations-old way of life and culture of northern Thai people going about their business. You'll have to come early though – Kad Ngua starts every Saturday at 2am when the first cattle traders arrive and lasts until about 1pm. I would recommend going around 9-10am when you can still see most of the action. Sample local Thai food, stock up on fresh fruit and bring back a handcrafted wooden cattle bell.

Location: San Pa Tong district, near km indicator 25 on Route 108 (Chiang Mai – Hot road). (Best avoid big festivals such as Songkran and Buddhist Lent Day when up to 10,000 people will come here, making traffic impossible.) 18.602420, 98.888824

*You can read more of Johan Smits' favourite Things to Do in Chiang Mai Off the Tourist Trail **HERE***

TRAVEL BEGINS AT 40

An important note about map references.

Google automatically reverts to the language of the country you are reading this in, but it's an easy fix.

Click on the three horizontal bars at the top left of the map (alongside map reference); scroll down to the fourth section and click on the link outlined here in red to change the language.

Words: Johan Smits/Images: Johan Smits and Soopakorn Srisakul

Tuk Tuk Travels with Jen and Friends

Words and images: Mark Bibby Jackson

Mark Bibby Jackson spends eleven days driving a tuk tuk around the hills of northern Thailand with The Tuk Tuk Club and receives a hospitality he has seldom encountered previously

A crowd has gathered around Jen. I am used to this by now for she has up-staged me throughout my tuk tuk travels. And I was the one to sleep in Angelina Jolie's bed – but more of that later. Never act with children and animals, they say. Well, don't travel with a tuk tuk either.

If you have not gathered it already, Jen is a tuk tuk, one of the troupe that The Tuk Tuk Club drives around the hills of northern Thailand from their base just outside of Chiang Mai.

Our trip started with an hour's drive from Chiang Mai to the tiny village of Maewang where our training took place. At first Jen and I don't exactly hit it off. Quite understandably she takes umbrage at my cumbersome use of the gear with only passing reference to the clutch. And as for the brake, the least said of my heavy right foot, the better. Jen gives me the cold shoulder, as she repeatedly judders to a halt on the small basketball court that is our training circuit, in the middle of which a family of Karen farmers are drying some rice.

"Maybe, you can try reverse," Smithy, who is also my driving instructor, suggests.

"Perhaps I can drive backwards on the tour," I suggest to Smithy.

"That would take 30 days," he says, a broad smile sweeping across his face.

After receiving a blessing for the journey ahead at nearby Wat Tham Nam Hoo, we drive the following day to the Maevang Elephant Home. Up to 18 months ago, Maevang was very much like many other places around Chiang Mai providing elephant rides for ill-informed tourists. However, now people come to feed the mammoths and walk beside them to the river where they have their bath – the elephants not the tourists – although everyone ends up in the water. "Here you can feel they are like a friend; you can touch and feed them," explains Num, who works at Maevang. There is a childlike quality to the elephants' play. One of the smaller ones tries to duck his younger sibling's head under the water, just like any 'normal' child would in a swimming pool; only this time mum stands by imperviously as she shoots a jet of water at us, rather than yelling at her children to behave.

We spend the third night of our tuk tuk travels at Ban Kuhn Klam, where Jen takes a well-earned rest having climbed her way up more than one thousand metres – higher than Ben Nevis – that day. A small community set in the middle of paddy fields, this is the epitome of rural Thailand.

Angelina Jolie's bed

After a rest day it's our first long stretch on the road, some 160km to Mae Sariang on the Myanmar border, so Smithy and I share the driving. This is the first day that I truly feel comfortable behind the wheels – instead of dreading the emergence of the next tight bend I find myself enjoying the challenge of sliding through the gears, confident in my new-found acumen. I have discovered my driving rhythm, instinctively sensing when Jen wants to change gear and when to give her a bit of welly. I even discover the art of descending a mountain in third gear without touching the brakes – although Jen does make the most frightful noise whenever I do this.

After a night – and too many beers – spent in Ching Ching bar, we head to Mae Hong Son some 170 kilometres to the north. On the opening stretch we pass through a lovely boulevard of trees, which provides a delightful dappled shade. We don't quite reach Mae Hong Son, as our destination is some 10 kilometres before the town – the Fern Resort. Angelina Jolie stayed here on a visit in her pre-Brangelina days and then again with Brad Pitt. There is some commotion as we check in. Then the keys are handed out and I am allocated number 16 – Angelina's room.

Now, I am not normally one to suffer celebrities lightly, but as I am led to my accommodation I find myself wondering how extravagant it will be – a four-poster bed perhaps with fine silk drapes – before my guide explains it's quite "simple". True enough, I open the door to discover no Aladdin's den, but a simple wooden bungalow. Still, I think to myself – this is the bed that Angelina slept in. That night, I sleep even better than Jen, who will have the following day off.

The white flower ceremony

After a brief visit to Wat Phra That Doi Kong Mu, we spend the rest day searching for some white flowers. At the outset of our tuk tuk travels, the monk at Wat Tham Nam Hoo gave us some candles to burn while we were to make a wish. The only problem was that we each needed nine white flowers in order to perform the ceremony. Smithy had planned to buy some white chrysanthemums from local farmers on the Pha Dok Seaw trek, but the flowers were not yet in bloom. Unfortunately, Mae Hong Son is very much a yellow flower kind of town, as our brief excursion confirms. Eventually, we find some white flowers at the local market, only to discover a white flower shop as soon as we have made our purchase – isn't it always the way?

Despite the inviting prospect of spending our day of rest lazing by the pool, we opt to hike a trail that leads from the back of Fern Resort. Now, the weirdest thing about the walk is our guides. As we assemble at the starting point, the owner of the resort claps his hands several times and four dogs appear before scampering off down a path, while we duly follow.

In truth, I feel totally at home on the short trek. And I don't even get my feet wet – at least not accidentally; a small waterfall proving a temptation too far. As I feel the refreshing waters resurrect my soul, I realise this is the reason I fell in love with travelling in the first place.

Then comes the ceremony. Rachael, a lady from Suffolk who is celebrating her fiftieth birthday, divvies out the white flowers and the candles, and we decamp to one of the bonfires in the resort's grounds to light the candles and place the flowers beside them, as one of our errant guides joins us. It is actually quite a moving experience, even to a hardened travel cynic.

The following day's drive to Pai is the most spectacular on our trip with sweeping panoramas of the verdant countryside. We arrive at the Phu Pai Art Resort, a few kilometres outside of Pai, mid-afternoon. Set in some farmland, this really is getting back to nature, and as I relax in the pool I feel that I am an intruder in a foreign land, especially as a farmer strims the now unwanted rice paddy in a neighbouring field.

My most abiding memory of the trip? The way that Thais have welcomed the crazy foreigners driving their orange tuk tuks around Thailand. I have never felt so true a welcome in all my travels. There is a genuine warmth but also respect for what we are doing, especially as we are taking Jen and her colleague Flo on roads that no self-respecting urban tuk tuk would ever dream of driving.

THE TUK TUK CLUB

Click on the logo for more information about The Tuk Tuk Club tours. You can read the full version of this article and a four-part story of the whole trip ***HERE***

TRAVEL BEGINS AT 40

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

What started as a small group to provide help and information to foreign residents in Chiang Mai blossomed rapidly to cross cultures, class and communities.

The exotic life of an ex-pat, retiring to a land of year-round sun, the envy of friends and family 'back home', *la dolce vita* on a budget. What many people back home don't realise is that life isn't all plain sailing under the SE Asian sun.

"A lot of retired people here live by themselves. If you are Thai you know who to turn to for help, but many foreigners don't know where something is, or where to go to get help. So we're sort-of trying to bridge that gap, providing an avenue to the first contact, especially at the community level. I think that even just having somebody you could write an email to or send a text to ask about something helps so much."

With ten years with Search And Rescue in Calgary, Canada, as a team leader, tracker, and medic, Robert King thought it would be good to get set up something similar in Chiang Mai, given the limited support for the foreign community in the area. He set up a Facebook page, sent a link to some friends, met a few people who were setting up community organisations who had decided to roll them all into one, and on the 14th of March this year, Chiang Mai Search And Rescue (CMSAR) went live – and took off!

Basically, CMSAR is a help network, and Robert stresses the word 'helpers' and not 'volunteers'.

"People have been incredible and worked so hard over the last few weeks to build the network. We've got about 450 helpers who are ready to help out with food delivery, transport, whatever people need. We also have about 1500 people in community organisations, the grass-roots, who let us know where and when help is needed."

When a call came in from Blue Sky Chiang Mai, (a local project formed to take action in response to raging fires and the resulting air pollution threatening the health of school children) saying that firefighters in the mountains surrounding Chiang Mai were desperately short of water, through community networks a team of motorbike riders rode rough forest tracks to deliver packs of litre bottles of precious water. Within hours of a fire rampaging through a construction camp housing itinerant builders near Airport Plaza, destroying all the worldly goods of twenty-six adults and one six-year-old boy, donations of beds, bedding, food, water, fans and more were delivered by individuals and groups, (See box, page 15); travellers stranded and unable to get home because of Covid-19, desperate for affordable accommodation; ordinary souls, hungry because the virus took their livelihoods, needing to get through another day. CMSAR and their city-wide network were there to step in and get the word out.

Making plans

It was an introduction to Ben Svasti, Honorary British Consul in Chiang Mai, that took CMSAR to a higher level.

"That was very, very important," Robert affirms. "Ben has paved the way so we can work, the government can see what we are doing, and are very supportive of it, whereas without Ben it would be "what the hell are you doing?". He got the other consulates on board, and now we have the Portuguese, the Swiss, the American, the Canadian, a whole bunch of consulates who are supportive of this. It gives us a bit of legitimacy to be able to help where we're needed because we're not living in normal times right now.

"We're teamed up with a lot of professionals, ex-military, practicing doctors and nurses for medivac, to create emergency plans. We really try to prepare for the worst and we're very happy if we don't have to put those plans into effect.

"Fortunately, we haven't had to put any in place yet, so we're able work on community support with Thai people, with food and shelter, stuff like that."

While the original idea was to provide help and information to the foreign community, the threat of Covid-19 and the frightening escalation of simply surviving has taken CMSAR to the grass-roots, community level of help.

"That's being handled really good. Those are handled by our community managers. If you go through the communities you can see that some have different issues and different requests. Each zone of the city has their own manager run by some very nice women, who are very caring people and they make a grassroots community out of it. They try to do as much as they can to help out, and from them, we gather a lot of information about what's going on, because with them being at the local level they are able to get a lot of information we probably couldn't. If something is important they can kick it up to a higher level and the whole city can know about it. That's how we found out about people working on the fire, it was a local issue and they told us they needed some help, so we got the word out to a broader range of people who got the water to them. "

One of the many important community elements is the support offered to older people, who are nervous about or unable to leave their homes. Helpers keep in contact, drop by to see they are okay. If they need food or medicine their help collects and delivers it.

"I could be wrong, but I haven't seen anything like this anywhere else. There's actually a very nice sense of community. We've got a lot of people who want to help people. Where will it go? We'll probably just keep helping people out. There's always somebody here who needs help."

It never rains…

On the 2nd April a fire rampaged through a construction camp in Chiang Mai, reducing the worldly goods of 26 adults and one 6-year-old boy to ashes. Word spread quickly through the good offices of **Chiang Mai Search & Rescue (CMSAR)**, a local association of helpers committed to supporting those in need in Chiang Mai and Northern Thailand. The families needed everything, from basic foods, vegetables, bags of rice and spoons to eat it with, to blankets, soap, folding beds and, during the heat and overwhelming pollution of Chiang Mai, electric fans.

I heard about it the following morning, so peddled to the site on my bike to deliver a fan - no mean feat, I can tell you, with a box three times the size of the tiny carrier over the rear wheel, but it raised a smile when it was delivered.

It's enough that these people have to travel north from their homes in the south east of Thailand, work for minimal wages while living in very basic temporary accommodation; lose that work in the next few days because of the lock-down of Covid-19, not knowing if or when they will work again, but then to lose everything they own in a couple of hours. Like they say, it never rains but it pours.

When I dropped the fan off and asked if they needed anything else, the man who seemed to be in charge said, no thanks, we're fine. They showed me the pile of things that had been delivered that day; fans, food, beds and bedding and more, to see them through the next few days.

I was amazed at the attitude of this group of people who had very little in the first place but had lost even that…and cheered by the perplexed look on the small boy's face when I gave him 20 baht to buy ice cream.

Peter Rowse

***Chiang Mai Search & Rescue (CMSAR)** is a 100% local association committed to helping those in need in **Chiang Mai** and **Northern Thailand**. Our current mission is to establish a community of helpers and those who may need us in a civil emergency situation. If you think you might need help (above 60 years of age, immune compromised, respiratory problems etc.) or would like to be on the team, visit our **FACEBOOK** page.*

THIS IS THAILAND

Arcade Bus Station, Chaing Mai

In the sultry heat of mid-afternoon, waiting passengers sit on rows of plastic seats, making the most of a light breeze. In the Thai version of the Englishman wearing a knotted handkerchief on his head, a monk sports a sodden face cloth draped over his shaven dome. When his mobile phone rings, he lifts the toweling cloth up over his left ear, has a chat, then lowers it again, the phone disappearing under the fold of his saffron robe.

Vendors of plastic cartons of peeled and sliced fresh fruit, packets of herbal teas, minor pills and potions, work the waiting crowd. A stall is doing good business selling things on a stick and steamed dumplings, with a choice of either minced pork or black bean.

An uneven computer print-out gives his menu; a line reads '12 baht per child' which I assume is the price of a child's portion and not the cost of an additional topping of more tender meat.

An ancient blue bus with a white stripe is destined for Chom Thong, two hours away. Scheduled to leave at 13.20, it has been taking on passengers since noon. With its gleaming aluminium body, not matched by its cracked and faded paint, it looks the epitome of the sleek Greyhound buses of America of the 1960s, but being outside for any length of time under the Thai summer sun must be like being slow-baked. These busses are as much a local delivery service as one for human freight. Pay the few baht fare for a double seat and you can send whatever you want. I watch large boxes of fresh flowers being piled onto four empty bench seats.

As the day rolls on and the heat builds, waiting passengers start dozing in their seats. A moment of light relief when a very pretty young girl arrives with her motor-cycle ice-cream cart, enticing depot staff and passengers alike to refresh themselves in the somnambulistic haze with a mixture of coconut and vanilla ice cream, served in a cone or as a sandwich between two slices of sliced white bread, with optional Carnation condensed milk, chocolate sauce, or 'monkey's blood' the ersatz vivid pink raspberry topping I remember from my childhood. Where an ice-cream vendor elsewhere charges by the scoop, which usually does no more than fill the top of the cone, in Thailand the small balls of ice-cream are packed in, so the cone crunch and ice-cream last all the way to the final bite. The lack of satisfying crunch of the ice-cream sandwich just doesn't have the same appeal for me.

When the driver settles himself in his seat and starts the engine there is a surge of bodies onto the steaming bus, and it's a moment to envy the monk with the thin robes draped over his shoulder who can, like a Scots Guardsman, spread his legs to get ventilation to parts other chaps can't. I suspect that, like with any true kilted Scotsman, there are no undergarments restricting the flow of air under the saffron folds.

At 13.10 the driver kicks the engine into life with a rattle and deep roar that suggests many years of heavy toil. He switches on the fans fixed to the ceiling, their oscillation doing little more than stirring the air lethargically.

At 13.15 the bus pulls away from its parking bay in a lopsided fashion. The sunny side, with its curtains drawn, is empty other than for a couple of late arrivals, while the shady side and its open, ventilating windows is full, with kids peering out the windows in excitement and a dog resting its snout on the window frame to catch the cooling breeze.

Everywhere is on the way to somewhere else

Anyone who has ever read Travelfish.org, undoubtedly the best informed travel site on SE Asia, and one of the longest running, will know that not only is it the most informative companion you could have to the region, but also a darned good read, even if you never go there.

Co-founder, Stuart McDonald, has started Couchfish, a daily week-day short story from his thirty-odd years of wanderings. Light-hearted and beautifully written, it's a steal at $5 a month. Highly recommended as a short, sweet and adventurous start to the day.

An Atlas of Lost Cities, Forgotten Places, and Curious Spaces

Paths Unwritten seeks to discover, document, and share ancient kingdoms and cultures from around the world, as well as any stray curiosities found along the way. Begin exploring and write your own path…

For the nine years Ben has been living and travelling in Asia, he has been documenting ancient sites and the peoples who built them, and then adapting them into practical archaeological travel information.

Click on the images for more about Chiang Mai.

Good to *Go*

As we went to digital press, it was announced that restaurants and cafés could open on a limited basis, although not allowed to sell alcohol. Some are still offering takeaways and home deliveries, everything from handmade Italian gelato and gluten-free eggplant parmigiana, to butter chicken with garlic, and stir fried Hokkien noodles with seafood, with plenty of vegetarian and vegan selections along the way, although 'beer or lamb burger' may have been a typo. Sounds good, though.

With no social gatherings as we once knew them, Steve Yarnold has turned his weekly email list of events into a directory of restaurants and cafes offering food to go. As the restrictions ease, the list will gradually return to the original format. You can add your name to Steve's mailing list ***HERE***

(Please note: Steve sends the list out each Monday and asks that people please check before making their choice, as occasionally restaurants stop offering the service between emails.)

If you would like to keep in contact with your clients and promote Chiang Mai by sending them a copy of

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with your logo

HERE

and on the front cover

please contact the editor
for more information

(Please note, this does not require access to email lists, contact details or any privately held client information by producers of the magazine.)

From the Archives

Cat's Boxes

It's impossible to discover when rice boxes first came into use, they've just always been there, as much a part of the northern Thai kitchen as the spoon. But 'northern Thai' at least gives a clue. There are eighteen stages in making a rice box and every one is done by a different person.The same tools, the same process, the same everything for centuries.
Issue One

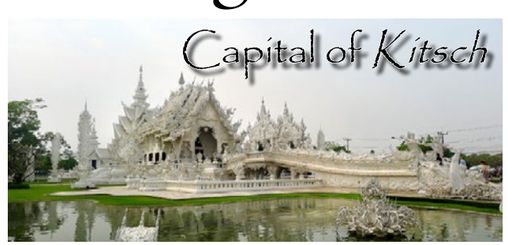
Street Eats

The sun might set over Chiang Mai Gate in the temporal sense, but as darkness approaches a new wave of business rolls over the market, defusing its burning red glow with the smoke from grills and charcoal burners.
Issue one

A Delicate Touch

The fine art of traditional Thai fruit and vegetable carving, it's origin based on a beautiful legend. ***Issue Three***

Chiang Rai



The Thai idea of sabai sabai, meaning relax, have a good time, and sanuk, fun, spreads to many aspects of Thai culture, even seeping into the decoration of their temples. To a western mind it can appear to be verging on the kitsch at times, but if it is then it's kitsch with a sense of joyfulness. Chiang Rai is undoubtedly one of the kitchest places in Thailand. ***Issue Four***

DEREK WORKMAN • JOURNALIST •
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Visit the Archives

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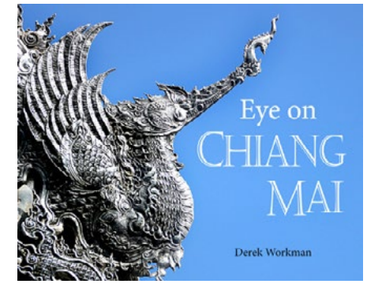

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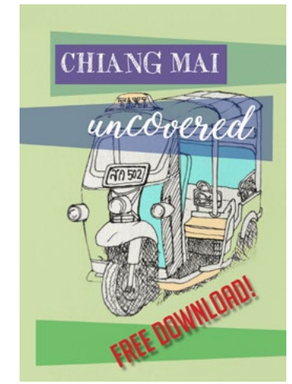

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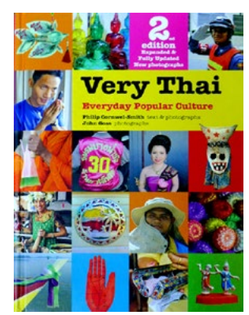

Very Thai brings together British writer Philip Cornwel-Smith's twenty-plus years of uncovering the quirky, intriguing and just plain weird of this delightful country. Everything from amulets and tattoos to ward off the evil eye to 'angels in disguise' is presented in a way that not only informs but entertains. Beautifully illustrated by the author and photographer John C Goss.

Mr Google's maps might point you at a destination but Nancy Chandler takes your hand, walks you there and chats with you along the way. This hand-drawn map is indisputably the best map of Chiang Mai, equally as useful to the resident as the first-time visitor. Separate sections lay out details of the Old Town, the Night Bazaar, the greater Chiang Mai area, and the main sites around the city.

In this quirky Dr. Siri Paiboun mystery, a death threat sends Dr. Siri down memory lane, from Paris in the '30s to war-torn Vietnam in the '70s, to figure out who's trying to kill him now. Collin Cotterill is in great form in this wonderful romp set in Communist Laos in the early '80s. If you are new to the good Dr., start from the first of the series, and you will become addicted within a few pages.

Click on images to order

*Ever thought to yourself, "I wish I'd started travelling sooner, but it's too late now." Two things are absolutely certain – it's never **ever** too late to travel, but most importantly, it's*

CLICK ON THE IMAGE TO BEGIN YOUR RIDE

Those quiet moments

With over twenty years as a travel writer, people never seem to believe me when I tell them it can be a very lonely and sometimes boring job. No sitting around swapping stories with other travellers at the end of the day, no relaxing with a beer by the pool before fine dining in a fancy restaurant – or very rarely, anyway.

My pastime is writing anecdotes based on the things I've seen that day, or thoughts that come to mind while I'm relaxing. None of them were meant for publication, other than occasionally on my website, as postcards to friends, and the odd post on Facebook.

Click on the image to read some of the stories that occurred to me over the years – the personal stories that I wrote purely for my own entertainment.

Life goes on

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