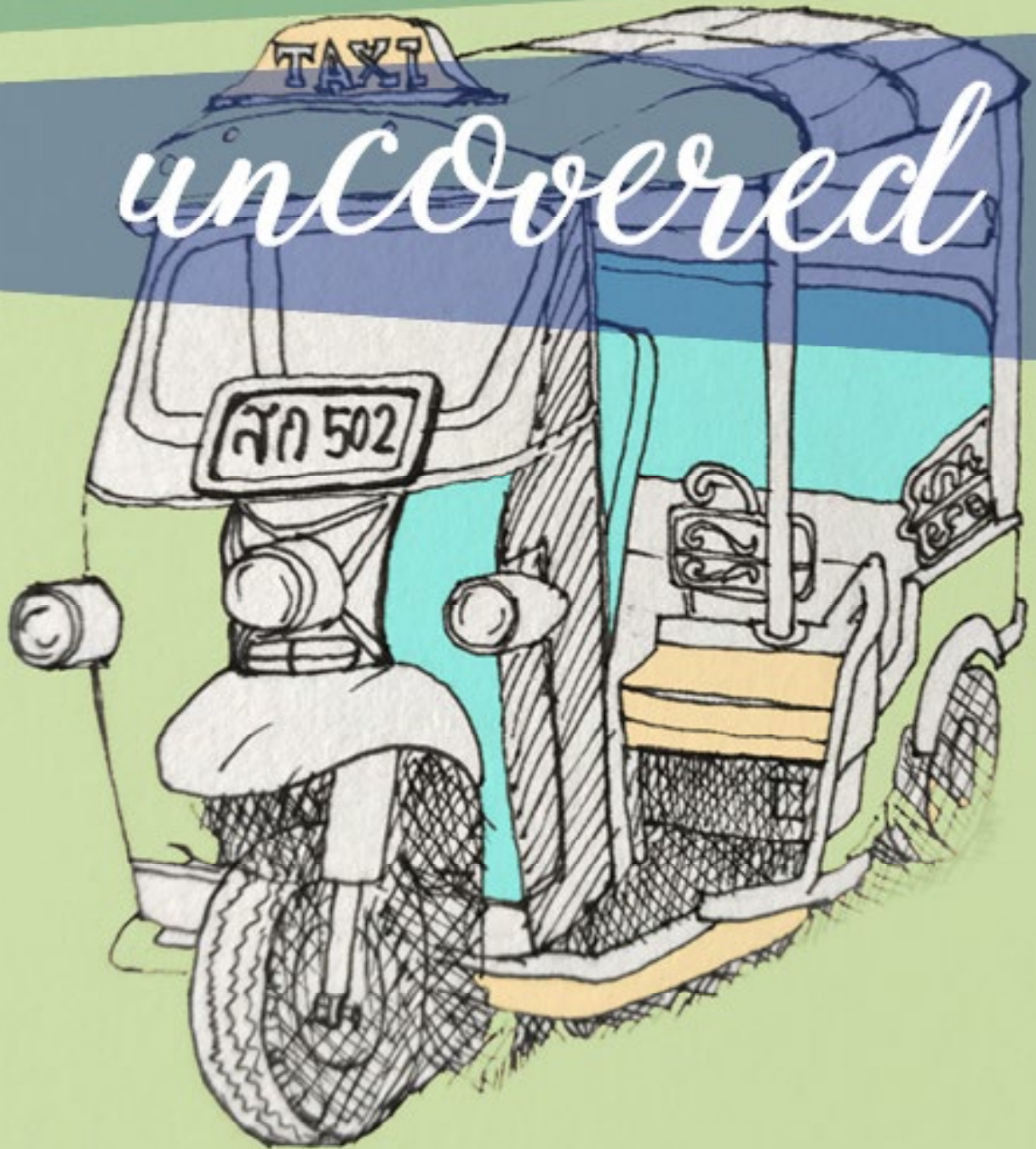


CHIANG MAI

uncovered



DEREK WORKMAN

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DEREK WORKMAN

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A WORK IN PROGRESS



The stories in this book are a selection from the first five issues of *Chiang Mai uncovered*, the result of many walks and cycle rides around this intriguing small city, and within a fifty kilometer radius of my home near Chiang Mai Gate.

Within these pages you will find the unusual and unexpected, places that rarely get written about in guide books, and you will most likely find yourself one of the few foreign faces there – if there are any faces there at all. Most of them are in easy walking distance of almost any point within the old town, but even those that require some form of transport will show a side of Thai culture most people never see.

These stories are just a sample of what you can enjoy in the magazine, so click on the links throughout the book to read back issues and to receive future issues in your digital mailbox the moment they go online. There are also links to *Better Late Than Never*, yet another 'work in progress' that tells tales of far away from the ancient walls of Chiang Mai.

BON VOYAGE!

Derek Workman



Ride

Getting Around

CHIANG MAI



I have two modes of transport in Chiang Mai; a good pair of shoes and a bike.

Both travel at a speed that suits my leisurely pace and are perfectly designed to spot people and places I wouldn't see if I was skittering by on, or in, motorised transport, so I set out to try the more usual ways of crossing the city, just so long as it isn't on a motorbike, that death-trap on two wheels.

The songthaew is the workhorse of local transport, and even though the fleet is reasonably modern, the first one I flag down probably came out the same year as the driver, an ancient wearing a week's stubble and a shirt that's seen better days. He stares vacantly into the distance when I say 'University,' mulling over what I could possibly mean. It's about the biggest building on a straight road in the direction he's facing, so I'm pretty sure he can't miss it. I'm heading for the Saturday second-hand market near Payap University* but as my Thai doesn't extend to 'second-hand market' and I assumed 'university' was reasonably universal, I'd plumped for that.

The only other passenger is a young girl with an oversized rucksack, deeply engrossed in texting on her mobile phone. I go to press the buzzer in the ceiling to signal the driver to stop and my finger goes straight into a hole. I interrupt my travelling companion's texting to ask her to press the buzzer above her head, which she does without taking her eyes off the screen.



A brief scout around the market – worth an extended visit – and I flag down a tuk-tuk to take me to Warorot Market. The tuk-tuk is noisy, windy, rattling and rolling, and takes its name from the noise of the engine that chugs it along.

A tuk-tuk is of no use for taking a tourist ride because it is so low-slung and the canopy keeping the weather off your head at such a so low pitch that all you see is the side of the road and pedestrians legs as you wiz along. They may look as if they are built for two but the driver will keep loading adults, kids and shopping bags until bums are sticking out the side. There's probably some sort of legal limit, but in a country where a two-seater motor scooter is the transport for a family of five, who's going to complain?

Uncomfortable, rickety and fumey they may be but, like riding a camel, an animal designed by a committee who set out to design a horse but got into some pretty powerful weed before the pencil and paper came out, you have to try it once – but only once.

You'll pay at least twice the price you would for a ride in a songthaew so be prepared to barter, but he's yours for the duration of the ride and will take you directly to where you want to go, as distinct from a songthaew that will wander at will and paying passengers, eventually arriving at where you want to go but with no timescale in mind.

I've got an aged boy racer with a ponytail and a weird style in vehicular decor. To help the ventilation and cooling system open-sided vehicles naturally have, there are two four-inch computer fans wired to the car battery that I assume also runs the TV installed for passenger entertainment (although I can't guarantee that because it isn't switched on). Whirling at a



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blurring rate, whatever cooling they provide is blown away by the hot air streaming in from the open sides. This time I'm glad to have a vehicle of character, and look down my nose at the pristine new models without badges, Buddhas and spinning computer fans that we skitter by.

We buzz and splutter into the tuk-tuk rank beside Warorot Market. There are two official bus stations, but Warorot Market is the transport hub of most other forms of transport. Songthaews stand in a colourful line, each colour identifying its destination; yellow goes south to Hang Dong, blue to Lamphun, dark green to Mae Hong, and red circulates anywhere in the city.

The heat of the day is building and while the songthaew and bicycle rickshaw drivers wait for clients they stretch out as best they can on the passenger seat of their respective vehicles.

I've set my mind on in the narrow streets of the moat, so I ask my rickshaw driver to take me to Thapae Gate, the nearest entrance to the moat and lunch. For a fare of fifty baht I don't even argue, but climb up and lounge back in the plastic-covered seat with 'Old Glory', the spread-winged design of the American eagle, printed on the backrest.

With hand-signals and mild remonstrations to more hasty vehicles from my driver, we work our way through the tight streets surrounding the market, still full of shoppers and market traffic, onto Thapae Road. Cars, pick-ups, songthaews, tuk-tuks, motorbikes and even bicycles overtake us as we gently perambulate along the busy street. My driver, and now personal guide, points out the few remaining wooden buildings with their ornate fretwork decoration and pillared balconies, jewels set amid the sad excretions of more mundane modernity.

We arrive at Tha Pae Gate and I'm going to get out on the road on the opposite side of the paved area so my driver can look for another punter, but no, Tha Pae Gate is Thapae Gate, right to the grand wooden gates of its entrance. My driver jumps off, flags down the traffic, and in front of four-wheel-drives, revving motorbikes and honking songthaews, casually pushes his rickshaw across the rowdy road with me still in it, and up the ramp onto the paved area to set me safely at my destination. Service with a Thai smile.



**The second-hand market has relocated to the entrance to the Highland People Discovery Museum, Chan Puek. 18.821611, 98.974333*

An important note on 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.



Food

CHIANG MAI'S SUNKY MARKET

From well before dawn until late at night, Muang Mai market buzzes, with a brief respite during the heat of the afternoon.

I sit on a weathered bench overlooking the Ping River. In front of me a traditional-style wooden building of modern construction is protected from closer inspection by a high hedge of deep purple bougainvillea, its glowing blossom reflected in the murky brown of the river. The property to the left, a grand house of porticoes, pillars and shaded balconies, has an even higher hedge, its top manicured into crenellations, behind which carefully trimmed cypress trees stand, tapering to the top like a row of green carrots stood on their fat ends.

This bucolic riverside scene is in total contrast to the raucousness of Muang Mai, the wholesale vegetable market behind me, for which the phrase hustle-and-bustle could have been invented and which makes every other market seem as sedate as a Sunday stroll in the park.

From well before dawn until late at night the market buzzes, with a brief respite during the heat of the afternoon. When I arrived in the early hours I saw a day labourer curled up in a floral duvet in the large hooped two-wheel trolley he'll use for work, undisturbed by the changing coloured lights of Narawat Bridge as they cycle through red, yellow, blue and green behind him. He'll spend his day trolleying produce from trucks to small pickups and motorcycles.

On the footpaths along the river on either side of the road, small traders,



mainly women, sit under parasols and garden marquees wrapped in thick coats and scarves, chatting and laughing with the other ladies going about their business in a way that men never seem to, taking companionship in the cold and dark and the tedium of long hours waiting for buyers for their five kilo bags of tomatoes for 50 baht; small eggplant at 40 baht a bag; fish packed in twos and threes, film-wrapped over polystyrene trays; tiny garlic the size of a fingernail, bundles of lemongrass, snow peas at 60 baht a kilo. Cabbages and onions, cucumber and kohlrabi line the roadside, packed in clear plastic bags; red, green and yellow bell pepper laid in mounds alongside each other, winter vegetables brought from the north to serve the restaurants and tables of Chiang Mai.

In the main market movement is constant. Porters wait by the entrance with their looped iron panniers, hovering hopefully as pick-ups loaded to the gunnels with fruit and veg arrive. Large green umbrellas shading the small external stalls that ring the market are raised and lowered so the high-barred sides of the pick-ups don't knock them over. Hangar after hangar of pick-ups piled to the top with veg stacked in rows or seemingly thrown on, sorted into large plastic bags on the tailgate. Almost any vegetable I can name and many I can't. For 30 baht I can buy five kilos of tomatoes, tiny cherry toms will cost 10 baht more for 500 grams, 70 baht gets me 5 kilos of courgette.

While some trucks unload a single product others load up with a market garden assortment of vegetables as kids scuttle around the rough stone floor as if they were in the school playground. Bundles and bags are pitched up to catchers in the body of a the truck as it slowly fills with a Technicolor display of veg, tight packed for the onward journey to smaller markets in out-lying villages. Mopeds with sidecars



CHIANG MAI

uncovered



shuttle larger orders than the porters can carry in their trollies.

Creamy white cauliflower, limes of all sizes, purple shallots, pumpkins by the hundred, chopped open to show their deep orange flesh, a rainbow of peppers, tomatoes and chilies, lemongrass and galangal, holy basil and ginger. Bundles of morning glory wrapped in newspaper (ubiquitous in Thai cooking, banned in the US) are hand-balled from the back of a pick-up and stacked beside a stall. As they are being off-loaded on one side the stall-holder is selling them in bundles of five and six on the other. In the bed of a pick-up a lady sporting a purple T-shirt with the message *'I'm not perfect, never have been, never will be'* covering an ample bosom, rapidly selects chilies in a bamboo tray while laughing and chattering with the lady on the truck next door who's sorting bunches of yard-long bean. She looks up at me and her big wide grin turns on like a lighthouse beam.

An impatient driver backs up at speed, screamed at by customers buying their half-kilo of mushrooms and vendors selling a sack-full of lettuce. At a T-junction at the back of the market he does a 16-point turn to line himself up with the exit into a narrow alley, barely wing mirror-wide. But he's still having no luck because there's a heavily laden vehicle coming toward him. There's so little clearance that porters stack up behind him, inhaling the truck's exhaust fumes, so it's no surprise that they are almost all wearing face masks. Bottle-neck it may be, but within minutes everyone's on the move again.

Keep moving and you come to the spice stalls, packets or fresh blended scooped out of large aluminium bowls. On the periphery of the produce stalls are those selling household goods – ladles, pans and plastic containers, a single toy stall to keep the kids entertained, food stalls to keep the workers fed, mixed grocery stalls with jars of pickles, bottles of soy sauce, packets of noodles, and the ubiquitous Carnation condensed milk; a tiny coffee stall made of sheets of chipboard, so narrow that the young girl has to shuffle in sideways, but with a professional level coffee machine any barista would be proud of.

Further into the market you come to the fish and meat stalls. Choose your live fish from a red plastic box of oxygenated water the size of a small bath and it's scooped out for you, thrown on the scales, its fins still flapping, then bonked on the head and gutted before it has time to realise it's dead and the temperature has suddenly got warmer than it's cool, fish flavoured water. Chicken, pork, mince – mounds of them being prepared in the heat of mid-day, the fans with a tassel of thin plastic strips being the only thing to keep the flies away. But nothing keeps the heat away from fermenting the piles of meat, which probably accounts for Muang Mai's nickname - Stinky Market.



I watch a couple of ladies strip and clean slippery sections of beef, and by the look of them I'd rather not hazard a guess at which part of the animal they came from, and the fat to meat ration must be around 4:1. A porter arrives with a trolley filled with plastic bags, opens three and upends the contents on the aluminium counter. The ladies barely break stride in their cutting. We banter a bit and a couple of other stall holders join in. The meat vendor points to her assistant, a short lady with an amazing array of buck teeth and says 'nice Thai wife', although given the way she's handling her carving knife I'd have been wary of her even if she was the gracious epitome of the marketeer's ideal of the 'Thai smile'.

Muang Mai market is a health inspector's worst nightmare when compared with western standards, but western food markets bear no comparison to the 'stinky'

market, with their sanitised services and 'nanny state' rules, something we should all rejoice in – while probably avoiding the fermenting chicken, pork and mince.

18°47'46.1"N 98°59'53.7"E



နိုင်ငံခြားသားခရီးသွားတွေ့လည်များကိုကူညီပါ
Warmly Welcome & Take Care of Tourists



*better late
than never*





Weird

The garden where *Retribution* is less than *Divine*

With my eye to the viewfinder of my camera, photographing two horny-headed demons sawing a woman in half with a devilishly fierce two-man felling saw, I sense a frison of terror at the thought that the two-metre high chap with blood dripping from his fangs overseeing the job, might be eyeing me up from behind. He could be weighing up whether I should even be allowed to get as far as the book where my life's deeds and misdeeds are recorded or suffer his painful caress immediately. I move on rapidly, passing a man with an engorged penis that looks like a baby whale in the middle of a blood-bath, not wishing to know what he got up to in his earthly life – just in case I'd done the same!

Wat Mae Kaet Noi, north of Chiang Mai, is one of twenty hell gardens in the country, and the 'surreal tapestry of pain' conjured up here will give you more heebie-jeebies than all the other nineteen put together. Wat Mae Kaet Noi brings modern technology into portraying the whole infernal hog of the terrifying treatment that awaits you for your earthly indiscretions.

Did you peddle drugs in the here and now, or more strictly speaking, the there and then?



The hell garden's role is as a visual guide to the benefits of morality, illustrating the terrors awaiting you in Naraka, the 136 fiery pits of Buddhist hell, in the mildly prosaic manner of having boiling oil poured down your throat if you were an alcoholic, or your tongue hacked vertically for lying.



If so expect to be ridden over by a Hell's Devil with a horse's head, a fan on his motorbike like the wheel on Boadicea's chariot gouging out your innards. Not nice to animals and argued a lot with your parents? Getting mashed between mechanical rollers is just too good for you m'lad.

At the Buddhist version of the Pearly Gates, instead of appearing before the benignly-bearded St. Peter, the newly-departed have to face the fiery-red Phya Yom, the Death King. It's Phya Yom's decision, made after careful consideration of your good deeds neatly inscribed on a gold plate, against your badduns, scribbled on

a scrap of dog skin. If the dog skin gets the vote, off you go to the fiery pits of Naraka to atone for your deeds, accompanied by a demon who might have the head of a pig if he wallowed in corruption in life – which adds another connotation to the phrase 'pigs at a trough' – a duck's if you were always starting fights, a rabbit if you were the jealous type, and any number of other animalistic forms depending on what your lifestyle had been.

You may have thought that Buddhism was all saffron-robed monks and chanting, as far from the hellfire-and-damnation of Christianity as you could get, but even Buddha himself was pretty graphic about the lesser joys of hell in his teachings in the *Devaduta Sutta*.

'The hell-wardens lay him down and slice him with axes. Then they hold him feet up and head down and slice him with adzes. Then they plunge him into a red-hot copper cauldron...he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings.'

Not surprising, really, that he feels painful, racking and piercing feelings given the moderately less than tender treatment he's been put through.

I continue my Dantean stroll, flicking through the memory to see if I've committed any of the sins that will entitle me to having my hands removed by a three-metre saw driven by tractor engine (many of the retributions seem to involve saws of some kind), or boiled in a vat along with a dozen other miscreants. I notice that some of the devils have red light bulbs for eyes. You are invited to drop a ten baht coin into a slot to get the full *son et lumiere*. I do, and I'm entertained by the screams of the punished as they are forced into the bubbling cauldrons. Wat Mae

Kaet Noi must be a helluva place at night when the light bulb eyes glow with pleasure, illuminating the ghastly punishments the grinning horned demons inflict on the wicked, accompanied by their terrified screams.

I pass a statue that sends a shudder all men will relate to. Severing a penis in retribution for its wandering is common place these days, but having it cleaved vertically by a woman with an enormous tongue that transmutes itself into a cobra's head is enough to keep the trouser snake firmly tucked away.

Having worked my way through Hell I arrive at Heaven's Gate, where smiling faced kids in school uniform listen enraptured to a pair of instructors in khaki – but before I get too complacent I see behind them a group of colleagues who have strayed from the path and are hoisted on enormous hooks.

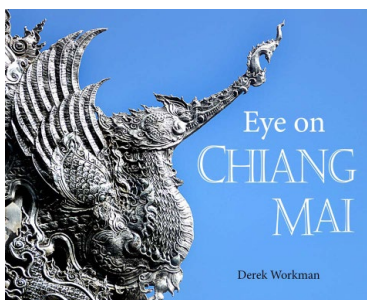
Eventually, though, I'm in Heaven, a peaceful garden of reclining maids with babes suckling contentedly on the breast, gilded Buddhas nestled in cascading deep pink bougainvillea, nymphet priestesses and smiling couples united in heavenly happiness.

At least you can be comforted by the thought that, unlike in the Christian tradition, where Hell is for eternity, Naraka is only for doing your penance and sorting out your Kama for the next life. Even if it takes lives as a lizard, a goat and a braying mule to get back to human form, you at least have the chance of working your way to enlightenment, at which point you are safe for eternity from a revisit to the fiery furnaces – even though it's probably taken you a fair bit of that eternity to get you there.

Wat Mae Kaet Noi. 15 km north of Chiang Mai. Route 1001 from Chiang Mai; immediately before Mae Jo University turn right. The temple is approx. 3km on right from the University. A green songhtaew from Wararot Market will take you there.

18.878611, 99.035778

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Visit

พิพิธภัณฑ์ วัดเกตการาม Wat Gate Khar Rnam Museum

A passion for
everything

A museum of such joyous idiosyncrasy that it makes most other museums seem like a staid formal dinner compared to the free-for-all of a family meal

At seventy-one Mr Somnang R Tidaj is a happy man. Each morning at nine a.m. he opens the door to his museum, and until five in the afternoon he will while away the hours chatting with his friends, read a book or watch the television by the main entrance, occasionally dozing there in the heat of a summer afternoon. Surrounding him is a collection of Lanna art and artifacts and donations from supporters of the temple in whose grounds the Wat Gate Khar Rnam Museum sits, a museum of such joyous idiosyncrasy that it makes most other museums seem like a staid formal dinner compared to the free-for-all of a family meal where dozens of delicacies are served as an endless stream of delights.

Set in a beautiful traditional wooden building, you leave your shoes at the door and tread on wooden floorboards haphazard with age, strips of woven plastic of a deep blood-red colour, small clippy rugs, old patched lino and original diamond-shaped clay floor tiles, a delight for bare feet. A background of music that is a curious blending of Asian and western classical accompanies you as you stroll around a collection of *object d'art* that occasionally, but only rarely, dips as far as *object bric-a-brac* but in the most delightful and amusing way. It would need someone with a sense of adventure to attempt to catalogue this curious collection. And therein lies the charm of this unique museum – it's the collection

of impassioned neighbours and an inveterate collector who spent sixty years assembling a display of the delightful and decadent, things of great beauty and those of the homely every-day. Brass spoons, reclining Buddhas, Pha Kam-Pee, the silk



tablecloths embroidered with fine golden wire, used in the Yee Peng Festival (Loi Krathong); a 'Na-rod figure, the hermit seen in many temples, made from flower pollen, with a figurine of Nang Kwak the waving lady, an incarnation of Mae Po Sop, the Thai rice goddess, at his feet. A bringer of prosperity and customers, Nang Kwak is very popular with shopkeepers, and is the more elegant Thai version of the golden cat with its monotonous battery-driven arm waving at you from every Chinese emporium. The historic is mixed with the more recently old – a pile of redundant Bakerlite radios share a corner with reel-to-reel tape recorders and a latter-day cassette player in bits. Hang on long enough and that might also become a museum piece in the true sense of the word.

Opium pipes sit alongside a Samurai sword with a sharkskin-covered handle; Buddha in a fair portion of the more than one hundred poses of the *asana* or attitudes that illustrate his life; china pot lids, ships in bottles; a row of horned animal skulls are mounted high on a wall alongside a row of delicate fans (an elephant skull is a bit hefty for this display but you can see it near the entrance). The walls themselves look as if they haven't had a lick of paint since Noah was a lad and are pock-marked with holes as if someone has discharged a twelve-bore shotgun at close range, but are actually the insignia of decades of nail holes created by the ever-changing displays in this unique museum that passes from fine art to household without ever tipping into mundanity along the way.

The collection is displayed in everything from beautifully hand-carved bookcases to professional glazed display cabinets, possibly donated from a museum that had a major upgrade. But no space is wasted – if it can't be put in a cabinet



it's hung from walls, stood on tables or simply put on the floor. Labelling is everything from neat hand inscription on carefully trimmed pieces of notepaper through laminated sheets of text from a household printer taped to exhibition cases to professionally produced photographic descriptions – and fortunately for *farang*, most of it is in English as well as Thai.

An intriguing display of black and white photographs tells the story in images and text of Wararot and Ton Lumyai Markets when they were almost totally obliterated in the conflagration of 1961. Fire trucks were called in from all the surrounding districts and Lamphung Province but firemen were unable to contain the blaze that swept through the market buildings, encouraged by the large amount of clothing that filled the storerooms. Some stall holders who were offered help to move their stock by volunteers saw it disappear, never to be seen again.

A delightful display of images shows life in Chiang Mai during the years 1929 to 1975, seen through the lens of Mr. Boonserm Sartrapai.



Wat Kar Naram (Ketskaram),
Charoen Rat
18°47'32.4"N 99°00'10.1"E

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CHIANG MAI

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Stroll



A Stroll Along

Tha Phae Road

Find a city with a river and you can almost guarantee that's where its commercial heart lies, or at least lay. Chiang Mai is no different.

The Mae Ping was the lifeblood of Chiang Mai long before supermarkets, malls and Mayas were even a twinkle in a developer's eye. It was the river that gave Thaphae Road its name; tha means harbour in Thai and phae meaning floating house or raft, and with the harbour being where Narawat Bridge now stands and the floating houses and businesses of the river traders close by, it seemed natural that as the road linked the harbour and the entrance to the old city, it should adopt the name Thaphae Road.

A stroll along Thaphae Road inevitably leads to much criss-crossing of the street, taking your life in your hands as you face down tuk-tuks, song-taew, motorbikes and cars. Best to use zebra crossings when possible.

With your back to the river begin your saunter from the fancy arch that straddles Thaphae Road. First on your right of note is **Baan Tuek Art Centre**, part of the Faculty of Fine Arts of Chiang Mai University; not old, but attractive. Glide through the wooden double doors and you enter a bright arts space with regularly changing exhibitions. Glide even further up the alleyway at the side of the building





The beautiful Raming Tea Room, outside...



...inside

and you enter a delightful courtyard with what appears to be an original balconied house on one side and a small garden below it. Unkempt and disorganised, it's packed with floribunda that almost sparkles in the dappled sunlight. A tinkling fountain does its best to compete with the noisy school-kids next door. There's nothing of historic importance in the spot, other than a couple of antique cars in glass booths, but it's a pleasing place to escape the sun and tumult of the traffic outside. A casual shuffle down the left side of Thapae road brings you to the beautiful old building that houses **Dan Collections**. When I first visited Dan a couple of years ago it was a delightful repository of all things historical – or at least historically collectable – with a glorious selection of wooden spirit houses, intricate carvings, delicious textiles and antique Buddhas. I was amused by their sign that declared that the shop was 'full to overflowing with Beautiful Buddhist art and artifacts' and boasted that 'All Buddhas have been blessed in the Temple and the blessing passed on to you.' Now sadly reduced in size, it still has some pleasing collectibles amongst the more tourist object d'art.

Above the shop, **Street Pizza** has created a pleasant restaurant by resisting the temptation to over-restore what was once a family home in this beautiful historic old building.

You could walk right past **Unique Space**, next but one to Dan. A fashion shop no wider than its door, it is simply a covered-over alleyway, a perfect example of the Thai approach to leaving no space underutilized

Step over the road directly opposite from Dan, into a small

pedestrian alleyway, home to a couple of restaurants and a stylish gift shop with a nice selection of second-hand clothes, that leads to an open area with the metal skeleton of a building that no-one has any idea of what the finished product was intended to be. To the left, what looks like a delightfully crumbling brick house is home to **Thapae East**, an arts and music venue.

A few steps from the alleyway is **Spices** Indian food store and restaurant, bright yellow and worthy of the praise heaped upon it for the deliciousness of its menu.

Back over the road, **Kitipant** restaurant serves northern Thai food in a kitschy-countryish environment, and gives the opportunity to see the interior of one of the beautiful early 20th-century wooden houses that one-upon-a-time lined Thapae Road.

Rantanpon stationery store, opposite, has seen plenty of loving care and attention on the outside, but its gloomy interior and tubular lighting creates no wish to linger, and nor is there reason other than to stock up on pens and paper, because the walls, displays and decoration are strictly utilitarian, although it's said that it has a beautifully decorated ceiling in the living quarters above.

The gem of Thapae Road sits alongside a sulphurous-looking canal over which the Maekae Bridge, erected in 1902, crosses.

Raming Tea House is a two-story teak building constructed in 1915. After being home to various businesses, including a medical clinic and an Italian restaurant, by the turn of the century it was beginning to show its age. Thankfully, instead of demolishing the stylish historic building – the fate of too many



of the wooden buildings on Thapae Road, the owners decided on a major restoration, completed in 2003, that harmoniously brought together the original structure and the necessities of the new millennium. The scrolled fretwork of the pillars, an original tiled floor, and spinning fans to keep the rooms cool, all retained. Step out into the garden and have tea at the small tables dappled by the sunlight sprinkling through shade trees. A total delight.

Directly opposite, the tumbling garden of **Celadon and Ceramics** – Special price! - whose hand-written sign is so encrusted with dirt that it's probably been a while since a pot was sold. It doesn't look much at night, other than a place with a weird sculpture thingy covered in sparkling fairy lights, but when the shop doors are open it's the original Aladdin's Cave of plastic toys, models, second-hand cassette tapes, garden ornaments – as kitsch as kitsch can be, but hours of fun giggling over things that you would love to spend your pocket money on.

A short stroll takes you to **Wat Bupparam**, the most important temple on Thapae Road. Ornate and much visited, and on the 'safari' route of tuk-tuks packed with visitors who wave their selfie wands in the air, ensure luck by releasing a few finches from small woven bamboo cages (although it's not so lucky for the finches who invariably end up back in the cage), and whizz off to their next destination on their mad-cap tour of Chiang Mai. (And I've yet to discover why Donald Duck stands in the garden. Even given the power of Disney I can't believe he has been accepted into the Buddhist pantheon.)

Tucked away to the side in the temple grounds, much less visited than the gaudy example, is the original, 300-year-old wooden delight, far more charming in its simplicity than the heavily ornate main temple, for all its grandeur. Harmonious but with the curious decorative addition of plates screwed to the ceiling in the manner that would have been seen in a suburban semi of 1980's Britain.

On the opposite side of the road, **Wat Saenfang** appears to be the poor relation, neglected until recently, with its *stupa* black-

CHIANG MAI

uncovered

ened by humidity, and plant-life clinging tenuously to the chinks and cracks. It is being given a lick of smartening-up, as befits an important temple in Chiang Mai (although you would never know it), and its Buddha statue claims third place in the New Year Festival parade of Songkran. It also has the two longest *naga* in Chiang Mai, undulating their serpentine way from the Thapae Road to the temple. (Nagas are mythical serpent beings -the word means 'cobra' in Sanskrit - protectors of the Buddha and the dharma, although they are also temperamental creatures that spread disease and misfortune when angered.)

There's little left of note at the Thapae Gate end of the road, other than a beautiful white building on your right with a peacock adorning its roof, the Buddhist symbol of wisdom.

As you wander along Thapae Road you may not be aware of its secret hidden in plain view. It is one of only two streets in Chiang Mai where electricity cables run underground so as not to disturb the visual appeal of the charming buildings that haven't yet been swept away by rampant and tasteless building. (The other is Chang Klan Road, home to the Night Bazaar.)

As you finish your walk, **stop at the shop** opposite the orange frontage of the Thanachart Bank, where a white-haired lady will ladle a warm, spiced drink into a glass mug for you. Worth the five baht she charges, but you also get a plastic stool to rest your weary legs. If you like the drink, you can buy small containers of the paste she makes it with to make your own at home.

Having drifted downward in the late 1990s, Thapae Road has steadily been climbing its way back and now has many top-end shops catering to tourist and resident alike. Possibly one of the nicest meanders in the city.



IT'S NEVER *EVER* TOO LATE



**better late
than never**



Eat



Street Eats



As darkness sets over Chiang Mai Gate, the red glow of the sun is diffused with smoke from grills and charcoal burners.

Other than a brief pause in early afternoon when market traders take a snooze, resting their weary heads on their stalls, Chiang Mai Gate Market on Bumrung Buri Road is all hustle and bustle even before dawn breaks; locals buying breakfast from the dozen or so food spots, ladies selling strings of marigolds and small foodstuffs to passersby to gain merit by putting them in the alms bowls of the monks, their saffron robes adding a splash of colour to the morning light; a shoe repairer unpacks his last, a watchmaker lays out his cloth pack of slender tools. This is the time when the neighbourhood does its business, but it's at night when the place really comes alive.

As dusk settles, the motorbikes lose their parking spaces, replaced by fold-out tables and plastic stools. Wheeled stalls that have been pushed through the streets from nearby storage have twenty-litre aluminium pans set on gas burners, to be used as both steamers for rice and for the boiling water to plunge a wire dipper full of noodles into for high speed cooking.

Most of the daytime food stalls with their enormous woks blackened with years of frying a feastly menu of chicken, sausages, pork ribs, fish and spring rolls, have shut up shop and gone home, but two stalwarts stand behind their eye-high mounds of fried food, watching the few early evening diners take their seats. The golden brown, crispy-coated food cooked earlier in the day looks dry and unappetizing without its sparkly glisten of oil fresh from the pan.

Crab claws with morning glory, a long-stemmed leafy vegetable that appears everywhere in Thai cuisine but is banned for consumption in the US; pork with long bean and onion, as spicy and biting as the devil's tongue; plump grilled *tilapia*, Asia's favourite fish, laid out on trays of banana leaf; coiled rings of local sausages, chicken bits and liver fresh from deep boiling oil. Almost all dishes cost around forty baht, a portion of sticky rice another ten, but over at *Fine Ease of Steak*, 79 baht will get you of sausage, pork steak with pepper sauce, chips and coleslaw, a welcome change from the lip-numbing spiciness of some of the Thai food on sale.

For dessert, baby pineapples are peeled and cut on the curl; watermelon, mango and durian, a fruit with such a disgusting smell that many hotels and all trains ban it, although said by some to have a flavor as delicious as its aroma is repugnant, are sliced and film-wrapped.

The majority of stalls directly in front of the market are for take-away food or for finger-picking while you walk around and see what you could have enjoyed if only you had somewhere to take-it-away to. On the small plaza built over the water of the moat, tables are set up, catered to by carts that take the place of the early morning second-hand clothes rails. Food vendors cook, serve and wipe down tables with a speed and dexterity that goes beyond the name 'fast food' to 'fast absolutely everything'. But not all menus are fast-food, the wonderful *khaw kaa moo*, spicy pork leg, stews languidly for a couple of hours, served with a boiled egg, its sumptuous sauce slathered over rice.





Nip through the tiny alleyway that connects Bumrung Buri Road and Phra Pok Klao Soi 2, the narrow lane that runs parallel with the market, a diversion into the depths of Dickensian squalor. On a street corner just as you leave the gloom behind, where twelve hours earlier a pair of ladies worked by the light of two small electric lamps to cook up a storm of takeaway breakfasts, ladling rich stews and quick-fried vegetables into plastic bags that look like angular balloons because of the heat of the food, at night two tables form a 'tot shop', an impromptu bar where measures of cheap whiskey and rum are doled out with tiny aluminium measures, your choice of either water, soda or coke to go with them, ice if the stall holders are well organized. Seen everywhere, usually outside small grocery shops, where you buy your bottle and mark it as the level goes down, topping up your glass with fresh mixers bought from the fridge. All part of customer service.

A word of warning. If you would like to savour the visual and epicurean delights of Chiang Mai Gate Market, don't go on Saturday because it's Walking Street day and packed like sardines.

[18.781889, 98.988500](http://18.781889,98.988500)



ENTER THE DRAGON



Known as the Goddess of Mercy, Guanyin, is one of the most important deities of the Chinese Buddhist pantheon. She is goddess of fecundity and mercy, comforts the troubled, the sick, the lost, the senile and the unfortunate and is regarded as the protector of seafarers, farmers and travellers. She cares for souls in the underworld, and is invoked during post-burial rituals to free the soul of the deceased from the torments of purgatory. In other words, and all round good egg. (Create a trio with Ganesh, god of education, knowledge, wisdom and wealth, the destroyer of vanity, selfishness and pride, and Saint Jude, Patron Saint of hope and impossible causes and you would probably have all your bets covered in both this world and the next.)

Guanyin is to be found in most Chinese temples in Chiang Mai, but one of the most playful is Kuan Im Chokchai, a curious place just of Mahidol Road, a couple of minutes going east from Central Airport Plaza. It isn't the imagery of the lady herself that is the curiosity here but a 20 mtr-long dragon that sinuously weaves its way across the temple garden. Enter its gaping jaws and you begin a journey illustrating the life of Buddha, beautifully painted on the curved and undulating walls, from birth through moustachioed young prince to enlightenment sat under a bodhi tree. A ferocious tiger is a shorter version of illustrated innards. Even for those sated with the overly ornate grandeur of most temples, this is a pleasant spot that combines Disneyland with deity and comes out winning.

18.760722, 98.989194



Gone... but not forgotten



Every culture has its own way of respecting their dearly departed. The Chinese send up in flames great wads of money, sporty cars, the latest in chi-chi fashion or the grandest of stately homes – all fake of course – to provide for a comfortable afterlife for those who have just left this one. In contrast, for a Muslim funeral the body is ritually washed and wrapped in three layers of white cloth, laid in a grave with perhaps a few prayers being said, and the mortal form completely forgotten.

If you can't take it with you...

Just north of Chiang Mai's Superhighway is the Khuang Sing Chinese Cemetery, a place of undulating greenery, the grass cut as trim as an English bowling green, that looks like rows of terraced houses in Hobbitville. Step through the small side gate on Anusawaree Singha and the first tomb to strike your eye is a beautiful miniature blue-tiled pagoda, the epitome of historic Chinese architecture. This sanctum is the only one in this style, a mildly humorous touch of singularity in the repetition of every other tomb following the same format of decorative panels placed on the front, although as with many elements of life, death is used as a way of showing off the affluence of the deceased. If they can't take it with them at least an ostentatious burial place can show how well off they were in life.

Decorating many of the tombs are painted urns full of flowers, fish and animals, bucolic scenes of mountains and lakes, stands of bamboo and branches of blossom to remind the deceased of their ancient homeland; glorious exemplars of calligraphic art, dragons of ever fearsome visage and demeanor.

Most of the tombs have moderately simple facades free of any decoration save the occupant's name and a brief note of their existence. Rows of council house terracing for the dead. Filter away from the celestial homes of the hoi-polo to the 'suburbs', the outer edges of the graveyard and, like the gated communities



At peace

of the earthly-bound wishing to isolate themselves from the common herd, the palatial residences of the well-to-do become more ornate, celebrating the wealth of the owner and their position in society. Gilded Foo Lions (known as Foo Dogs in the west) stand eternal guard, the side panels painted on cement of the middle classes become elegant 3D carvings of cranes in flight and other imagery symbolising the resident's ancestry.

An occasional unfinished structure looks like a house on a fancy estate where the owner ran out of money, but judging by the vases of wilted flowers in front of some of them the owner took up residence anyway.

[18.814333, 98.980000](#)

In total contrast to the ornamentation of the Chinese Cemetery, the Muslim burial ground looks like an old graveyard that has been forgotten about and left to go to seed. In a way, that's true, because in the Muslim tradition once the body is interred the mortal remains are simply left, with nothing to show for their being there other than a small marker with the deceased's name, birth and death dates. As ever, this sometimes varies slightly with modest embellishment, something frowned up by the Islamic faith.

On my visit to the Muslim Cemetery on Pa Daet Road, I see a grave being dug, so stand at a respectful distance watching workers at their



labours. A leathery-skinned man as skinny as a rake sports the long beard without moustache typical of the Arab Muslim, although I find out later he's Burmese. He grins with a mouthful of rotted teeth and waves me over.

I am greeted by Mr Saphret, a fourth generation Thai of Chinese descent who speaks excellent English, courtesy of a Catholic education at Montfort Academy. On my first visit it had seemed incongruous that there are headstones written in Chinese until Mr Saphret tells me that sixty per cent of Muslims in Chiang Mai are of Chinese descent. He points out the grave of his grandparents, in a graveyard that is over two hundred years old, one of three around the city.

According to Islamic shariah law, the body should be buried as soon as possible after death, and the eight men assembled to dig the grave are all volunteers brought together by a phone call to tell them there is a body to be interred and help is needed. They may not know the deceased or the people they will be working with, but bring their own adzes, hoes and buckets for the digging, and planks of wood to take their weight without disturbing the soil as they go about their work, which they do with enthusiasm. Burmese, Chinese, a Buddhist who converted to Islam when he married, each taking his turn wielding the sharp-bladed hoe, and while my toothless Burmese friend may be skinny, he's as tough and wiry as they come. When he takes his turn to dig everyone watches with admiration at the speed he lugs his hoe.

A corner of a foreign field

If I should die think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England

Rupert Brooke, *The Soldier*.

The Chiang Mai Foreign Cemetery sits in a triangular plot of land on the old Chiang Mai to Lamphun Road, sharing a boundary with the Chiang-mai Gymkhana Club. Note the word 'Foreign', not 'Christian', as when the Royal Deed of Gift for the land was granted by H.S.M. King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, on 4th July, 1898 it was explicit that the cemetery may be used 'for the burial of the bodies only of foreigners'. This creates a problem for Thai spouses, as they can't be buried with their partner, even if they have converted to Christianity, unless they have acquired foreign nationality.

Unlike the poet Brooke's corner of a foreign field being England, the



Foreign Cemetery is the last resting place of multiple nationalities, mainly European and American. Its carefully laid-out plots with crosses and tombstones

could be anywhere, but it is the markers themselves that tell the stories of those who ended their days in Chiang Mai or wanted the city to be their last resting place.

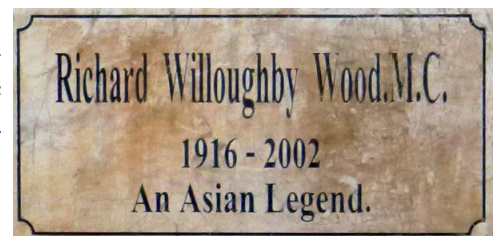
Some are simple, literally a marker – *Felix Fert, French*, who died in 2008, six months short of his sixtieth birthday; a white-painted cross with the hand-lettered name of Helen Myers Morse in black, weathered with age, although the ornate marble headstone of another Morse directly behind that of Helen, in this case one Betty Sue Merriweather Morse, is so effusive in its claims to Betty Sue's near-sainthood that you almost expect to see 'continued overleaf.' inscribed on the bottom.

In keeping with their stiff upper lip image, the British tend to be tongue-in-cheek and succinct in their memorials. Tony Ball 'Adventurer, Englishman, Ornithologist', Dacre F.A. Raikes 'Teak Wallah 1951-1956', or Richard Willoughby-Wood MC who is simply described as 'An Asian Legend'.

Some markers are sad, such as those of *Infant of AB Case d. 1930*, or that of *Jenna Dawn Kellerer, 21st July, 1994*, both still-born but whose short existence still merited recognition, as indeed it should. But who can resist a smile at *Happy Happy Sachiko – Sachiko Sato, 1937-2005*, born in Osaka, who died at the age of 67 only a year after coming to live in Chiang Mai, her greatest interest at the time of her death being computer graphics.

Whether we like it or not, inadvertent humour is inescapable in cemeteries. On the gravestone of New Yorker Arlon Arthur 'Artie' Waite it seems the person responsible for lettering his marker wasn't English-speaking, as instead of simply recording that 'Artie' was a 'Farmer and Teacher' they also copied the instructions, writing 'Headstone Read 'Farmer and Teacher'', while the epitaph of Sgt G.B. Cross USMC, which reads 'Old soldiers never die, they just fade away' is an apt sentiment, given that the wooden cross that bears the words is slowly disintegrating.

It's comforting to know that when we turn up our toes there's somewhere we can rest in peace, wrapped in our faith, whatever that faith may be, and whether our final destination is a grassy mound, an abandoned hole in the ground or a carefully laid out plot is immaterial, so long as in the heart of at least one person, we are 'gone, but not forgotten'.



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*better
late
than
never*





Eccentric

Lord of Success, God of Magnificent Manifestations

He may have an elephant's head with a curved trunk, big ears, and the huge pot-bellied body of a human, but despite his physical curiosities, Ganesh is the Lord of success and destroyer of evils and obstacles, worshipped as the god of education, knowledge, wisdom and wealth, the destroyer of vanity, selfishness and pride, the personification of the material universe in all its various magnificent manifestations. I particularly like the 'magnificent manifestations.'

Set amongst rice paddies and longan orchards in what might seem a patch of land way out in the sticks, 35km from Chiang Mai, the site for the Ganesh Himal Museum was specifically chosen by its owner, Pandara Theerakanond. Doi Ithanon, in whose shadow the museum sits, is the last tip of the Himalayan range that connects to India, linking the place of worship and education to the country where the elephant-headed god is one of the best-known and most worshipped deities in the Hindu pantheon.



You enter the complex through a narrow gate, welcomed by the smell of incense wafting through the air and the occasional melodious 'bongggg' of a deep-toned bell. The busily attractive courtyard, with its worshiping hall, shrines, pools and gardens, is a melange of Asian architectural styles; Mogul from the north of India, Lanna from northern Thailand, Apsara wall reliefs from Hindu mythology, outside of

which is a whole building devoted to the ornate architecture of Islam. For many people it is a place of worship, for others it's a chance to see effigies of the most famous Hindu god in all of his thirty-two combinations, each having a different significance.

The onset of Mr. Theerakanond's obsession with all things Ganesh began when his father made him a gift of a small statue of the god – a curious gift for a 19-year old you might think. Thirty-six years later his collection

now stands at around two thousand pieces, with half the collection on display in two buildings just outside the main devotional complex. Images of the god in all shapes and sizes crowd the space, from one of the rarest in private hands, Ganesh with a female body, full bosomed with nipped-in waist, worshiped by ladies praying for a baby, to the whimsically cheap, chubbily cheerful pottery versions in gaudy colours, the likes of which would have been given away as prizes at an Indian country fair. Masks, puppets with hinged hands, head, feet and trunk, porcelain figurines, bronze castings, elegantly carved wood sculptures, the collection is diverse and extensive to say the least.

Each combination of one to five heads and between two and sixteen arms has a different meaning and is worshipped by a different strata of society, need or occupation. In many representations each hand will carry a weapon, which probably accounts for the sixteen-armed version being the idol of choice of soldiers and policemen, while his masculine image sat on a lion is worshipped by those who wish to wield power over their many subordinates. The most popular form is with five heads and ten arms, although at one time only people of the highest position could own one.

As interesting and attractive as the courtyard and buildings are, it is the newly-built, two-storey building in peach and ochre that provides





the entertainment value. Just inside the entrance is a small café and a larger gift shop, outside of which one of the better quality wax models of a monk sits. Totally realistic, including the mug of tea on the bench beside him, the only obviously noticeable discrepancy between fact and fiction is that his feet hover an inch above the fake grass his bench rests on.

The kitschiness begins with a pool with the goddess Lakshmi as its focal point (painted blue, as are a number of Hindu deities, apparently to indicate all-inclusiveness). A recorded loop tells us that 'Lakshmi is the angel of prosperity, riches and happiness; she emerges from the mouth of Vishnu who has transformed himself into a turtle to allow her to stand on water.'

And she does indeed have a turtle as a water-borne platform.



Circulating languidly around the goddess, gold plastic plates with a candle in the centre of a circle of lotus blossoms carry prayers and wishes in much the same way as a *krathong* carries away your troubles. Light the candle, place the plate on two golden hands, pray and then put the plate in the water (which circulates thanks to a pump in the corner of the pool), carrying the plate/candle/flowers in a clockwise direction, some to continue their loop indefinitely, others to arrive at the feet of the goddess.



An external walkway takes you to a room above with a different version of Lakshmi, once again standing in a pool with blossoms circulating around her, but it's the smaller space at the rear of the building that attracts the ladies. It's here, for the princely donation of 20baht, that they can drape themselves in beautifully coloured saris and jewelled accoutrement, prior to mounting the elegantly curved stairway, stopping halfway to be photographed under the stained glass window before arriving at the spacious upper floor where Indian dance music fills the air and the sari-clad maids twirl in imitation of Bollywood actresses, occasionally accompanied by young men in turbans and long coats decorated in gilded embroidery, as they snap selfies to their heart's content.

What appear to be elegantly ornate, hand-painted arches are actually covered in wallpaper, a sort-of updated version of the flock wallpaper seen in every Indian restaurant of the mid-20th century. Displayed in this large, open space is an almost life-size waxworks of the marriage of Ganesh to Riddhi (representing prosperity) and Siddhi (intellectual and spiritual power), two maids created by Lord Brahma to cheer Ganesh up because he couldn't find an inamorata who accepted his trunk, and he was causing major disruptions at the wedding of demi-gods because of it. They complained to Lord Brahma who agreed to help them, giving Ganesh his own pair of life's partners. The guests have the appearance of a jolly crowd looking for a good time, decked out in all their party finery; bearded brahmas, multi-coloured, multi-headed and multiple-limbed major and minor deities, male and female alike looking at you from provocative kohl-highlighted eyes.

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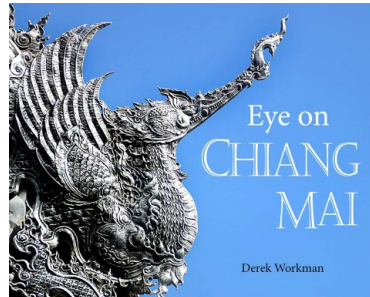


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