



ReeBee's Travel Journal

"Southeast Asia Trip"

Southeast Asia Journal

While I am glad to be back on the old familiar U.S. soil again, I certainly could have stayed longer in Southeast Asia. That is because I found and stayed at the peaceful and very beautiful tropical island of Kah Samui, off the coast of Thailand in the South China Sea. As I report back on my most recent trip, I am beginning to get addicted to travel and seeing new places. With that being said, here is the journal for this week:

This journey started, as with each other with a Monday morning trip to O'Hara Airport with a choice "A", and back-up choice "B" final destination in mind. I used to have three choices picked out in case I could not get on the first two, but since I have been able to always get on my choice "A", I now only have two. My first choice was the area of Southeast Asia, which includes Thailand and Singapore, and my second was Costa Rica in Central America this time.

As my luck would have it, I got choice "A" and that began with a very long and enjoyable 11 hour non-stop flight to Tokyo, Japan from Chicago and there I connected to a non-stop 6 hour flight to Bangkok, Thailand. When I arrived at Bangkok, it was 10:30 pm their time so I decided to get a hotel room for the night and make plans in the morning. I was very amazed to find that a tourist booking agency was open that late at night at the airport and they arranged for me to have a limousine take me personally to a five star hotel in central Bangkok which included the hotel room, breakfast, limo ride to the hotel and a tour of the top tourist attractions in Bangkok the next day for a total of \$65.00 U.S.!

As soon as I was ushered out of the terminal, a very nicely dressed man approached me while holding a large sign that said "Mr. Wolfe". This was a preamble to the feeling of being a "special guest" that was to be the underlying mood and atmosphere that prevails in that part of the world. You, as a tourist, are King and they know that their economy greatly depends on your visit and referring others. However, it goes beyond that as I feel that they have great pride in the jewel of the world that they occupy and they enjoy sharing it with outsiders for its own sake. When I was riding to my hotel, I was beginning to think that the hotel might not be very nice, because there was too much being offered for the price of \$65.00 and the limo driver had handed me a book with photographs that included a rather large section devoted to various massage parlors, and individual escorts that could be arranged for by him, including being delivered directly to my room! I had heard a little about this aspect of Thailand so was not too surprised but was very tired and just wanted to get to sleep, although a massage sounded tempting. When I arrived at the hotel a half hour later, I could hardly believe my eyes, as it was the most luxurious hotel suite that I have ever stayed at in my life.

The most lasting and strongest impression I got from visiting Thailand is that the people like tourists and know how to make them feel extremely welcome. Even the policemen, salute you and bow in salutation when they see that you are a tourist! I would definitely say that this is the friendliest and most enjoyable part of the world that I have thus far been to and of course the least expensive as well. It was a stark contrast to Central Communist China which has a very long way to go in preparing to host the Olympics in my opinion. I believe China should employ some people from Thailand to teach them a few soft skills in how to make tourists feel welcome. I am glad I had the comparison to China, however, as it made me realize that there are many differences within the various parts of the same region of the world and that you cannot generalize.

I want to keep this brief, as I am not trying to write a book, so I will just recap the highlights of the next six days for you. The first day was a beautiful 85-degree, sunny one, which began with a workout at the health club, a swim in the rooftop pool and a great breakfast buffet. The buffet breakfast was as good a selection as I have ever had and included some new fruits that I had never seen before that was delicious and indigenous to that part of the world. After checking out, I was taken by my tour guide and her driver to the Grand Palace which was everything that its name indicates and was very beautiful with the abundant Sapphires, Rubies and Gold used throughout its construction. This Palace was used for filming the movie "The King & I" as well. However, after the movie was made they banned Yule Brynner from Thailand as they did not like the image he portrayed.

Following this, I went on a Gondola ride through the Canals of Bangkok which I was told are more than 200 miles in length. I knew that they looked familiar and when I asked why that might be the Gondola driver indicated that they had been used in a couple of James Bond films. The Gondolas have been somewhat modernized as they are now powered by a V-8 engine that really makes them fly. I then toured a gem factory where I watched the cutting of Sapphires and Rubies and returned to the Airport for my evening flight to the Island get-a-way known as Kah Samui. It is situated about 400 miles Southeast of Thailand in the South China Sea and is most recently of fame since the filming of the movie "The Beach" with Leonardo Decaprio. This Island is about 20 miles long by 25 miles wide and very relaxed and even more friendly and hospitable as well as even less expensive. I had my own private Cabana on the Ocean with all the amenities for \$15.00 per night, which included another great breakfast.

I was able to rent a motor scooter for \$.75 per day and have a professional massage that lasted an hour for \$5.00. The main inhabited part of the Island is starting to become westernized as it now has a McDonalds and a Starbucks. However, I would say that it is still far less effected by the outside than most other places I have been, including even Hawaii back in 1977 on my first trip to Maui. There definitely was one modern trend in evidence as I saw at least 50 places that were called Cyber Cafes where you could check your E-mail.

The next three days were total R&R with sun, swimming in the 85-degree crystal clear water and walking and riding all over the Island. At night there was ample night life and Disco dancing as well as watching Thai Boxing matches for the sports minded or just a quite dinner in a restaurant with ample and unique atmosphere, all at a phenomenally low price (usually less than \$3.00)

After leaving Kah Samui, I flew on to Singapore where I spent one day watching it rain, as I have never seen it rain before. It was the beginning of their Monsoon season and still I was able to enjoy the people, the atmosphere and the cleanliness of the city. I also would say that the Singapore Airport is the most impressive I have seen, with such amenities as a fully equipped work-out center, including a swimming pool, and specialized viewing theatres for stranded or just waiting travelers. Each theatre has a specific theme such as sports or movies or current events for you to choose from and watch on a high definition screen, and all at no charge. Singapore is a very well run city and country with laws that are really enforced and not just on the books. The crime rate is the lowest of any civilized part of the world and it is even illegal to bring a pack of chewing gum into the country!

I returned home through Tokyo and was all set to enjoy a relaxing Sunday at home until I learned that my son Mark was going to be leaving on this very day for his winter job at Big Sky Ski Resort in Montana and wanted to make it by Wednesday. The solution we came up with was that I would accompany him and share the driving to enable him to drive almost straight through. I did one check with the United flight schedules and discovered that they fly in and out of Bozeman which is 40 miles from the resort! As I began to write this email, I was at the resort and will be skiing the 120 inch fresh base at this beautiful location before flying home on Wednesday evening. Before the United Airline passes expire at the end of January, I know I want to return here again to ski and to admire this truly beautiful place. It is the most spectacular scenery I have seen thus far in the lower 48 states and I understand that the movie "The Legends of the Fall" was filmed only 12 miles down the road from here as well. Other movies filmed here were "The Horse Whisperer" and "A River Runs Through It". There are still Grizzlies, Mountain Lions, Wolves, Moose and Elks roaming in abundance here! Yellowstone is only an hour to

the Southeast as well and If you really want to get away from it all and see a night sky that is hard to duplicate, this is the place to come.

As I put the finishing touches on this, I am finally back at home in Indiana and relaxing. In Montana the skiing was great and the mountain, called Lone Mountain, had an incredible peak which at over 11,000 feet with a 4,500 vertical drop that is skiable above the tree line. It is the highest in the Western Hemisphere that can be skied and the second highest in the world! Mark has met a number of new friends and will fit in very well. I hope that I get to return to Big Sky one more time this winter to ski with Mark on the over 100 different runs that the hill affords!

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