

# "A day with nature close to Petchaburi"

written by Michel GÉRARD

Sixty kilometres from Phetchaburi, the park of Kaeng Krachan seems to be honoured by only a few visitors in spite of its beauty, tranquillity and natural resources. The place is a small paradise for nature lovers with a big lake, rivers and waterfalls, a summit of 1,207 metres and not forgetting its wild animals, birds and butterflies...



Not far from Hua Hin where our group spent a few days of a vacation-leisure, the national park of Kaeng Krachan, which is the largest in Thailand, awaited us. After a copious breakfast and one hour on the road, the checkpoint of the forest rangers was finally visible. The park is composed of 90% of dense and lush forest fed by the strong rains in the region. It offers a very rich variety of fauna with its elephants, bears, tigers, wild cows and oxen, as well as, 300 species of birds.

After the checkpoint of the guards and about thirty minutes on the road, the protected territory of the 70 wild elephants loomed ahead of us. There, it was possible to spot with a little luck those famous wild elephants. The visit to the Elephant Museum taught us more about our friends, the pachyderms.

It was in close proximity to the border that our vehicle headed towards the waterfall of Pala-U, which is one of the most impressive places in the park. A short hike of 30 minutes through the dense forest was necessary to arrive there and enjoy a bath under the cascades. One of the natural swimming pools, where water was at about 20 degrees Celsius refreshed us. While continuing on foot along trails through the jungle and passing various plantations, the group was able to discover a few small villages essentially populated by Karens.

A climb up the mountain was next on the agenda and we reached the sacred meditation place situated in a cave that is used by his majesty King Bhumiphol. On going up higher, after about twenty minutes, it was possible to admire from platforms made of wood, a pretty panorama of the verdant forest, the small villages and lakes. It is preferred for one to be in good physical condition for this climb, heavy smokers will know why! The entrance to the underground cave is nearly hidden and a set of steep wooden steps is needed to reach there while going down. Behind the wooden door that was opened to us by a monk, we discovered a labyrinth of galleries joining the different underground caves.

Walking down along a river appeared a lot easier and we were impatient to arrive camp for lunch. Early in the afternoon and after having received a lecture on safety, a life jacket and a helmet, it was time to depart on plastic rafts and drift for one hour and thirty minutes on the river of Petchaburi. For a long time this river was considered sacred. In the past it was called "the river of diamonds" because of its clear and clean water.

Drifting downstream the river affords majestic views of the fabulous and otherwise, invisible landscapes from the trails. One can also experience some moments of thrills in the rapids. Every raft carries six people who help each other to sail safely among a few agitated passages. In some parts the river is very quiet and consequently provides a certain balance all along the journey.

At the end, the group benefited by the remaining time and spent some moments of free time to rest and get ready to return to the hotel. There are so many things to be seen in the park of Kaeng Krachan that several days would be necessary to make the complete tour of it. For those who wish to stay, it is possible to spend the night in wooden bungalows or under tents on verdant prairies very close to the river provided for this purpose.

After this day spent with nature in a beautiful and even still, quite a virgin site among all human deterioration, the group of friends had only one idea in their heads: "We'll come back and stay longer!"

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Michel Gerard is a Travel author based in Asia. Visit the *Reperages Thailand Travel* website for information and ideas of original excursions. Download your \*free\* ebook: "Stories of Authentic Eco-adventure Destinations for Travellers in Thailand" => <http://www.travel.reperages-thailand.com>