

# "A peaceful day in Nong Nooch Tropical Garden"

written by Michel GÉRARD

**Nong Nooch Tropical Garden, situated between Pattaya and Sattahip on Sukhumvit Highway, had a modest beginning 40 years ago as a fruit orchard on 520 acres of land but has become since then one of Asia's leading botanical gardens with a collection of palms, cycads, shrubs and rare species of plants.**



**A little more than two hours is necessary to reach the place that is very popular among nature lovers and a day is easily spent there enjoying the many activities such as a cultural and elephant show, a mini zoo, a clay pottery factory, a huge lake, a butterfly house and the different amazing gardens. Having left Bangkok early in the morning, it was pleasant to have breakfast in the restaurant over the lake and start to enjoy the peace of the place.**

After breakfast, our guide started a morning orientation walk of about 45 minutes to show to the group the different parts of the garden. A succession of elevated steel walkways and stairs connects the various gardens that are displayed and offers a whole overview of the place. Everybody was amazed by the garden's beauty and photographers were fully satisfied with the many beautiful backgrounds provided. A refreshment or ice cream was welcome after the walk, waiting for the next stage of the morning.

Situated in the centre, the mini zoo is also an enjoyable place for children and adults with a few animals kept under supervision of the Tropical Garden's staff: tigers, panthers, snakes, ostriches, elephants, monkeys, enormous chameleons and splendid birds all await being photographed with you. If you dare, and many people do, you will be back home with a collection of pictures that will amaze your friends and show your courage while sitting and caressing fierce animals. On that day, the staff seemed comfortable to stay close to the wild animals just as if they too were big cats. Another interesting part was a miniature railway well designed where the different trains run through almost every kind of landscape that can be found in nature. A locomotive goes by on a stone bridge while another goes through a tunnel to reappear just near a waterfall, a feast for the eyes and a great achievement in general display that shows every little detail.

In close proximity, a clay pots display garden is one of the favourite places for souvenir picture sessions. There, clay pots are tied together artistically into various forms such as statuettes, animals or human beings, and arches of different sizes that make the place very attractive. All the pots are produced by the Garden's factory where our group was heading. Along the way, flowers could be admired up to a pedestrian, suspended bridge which we had to cross in order to reach the pottery factory. An instructor greeted us and explained the fabrication process starting from the method used to keep the clay wet to the creation of the pot. It was amazing to see how these skilled workers could create different designs in minutes and reproduce the same pot over and over again without a mistake. One volunteer of the group sat at the worker's bench and tried to make a pot by himself but unfortunately the result was not so encouraging...

Close to noon, lunch was then most appreciated. The afternoon was also very appealing, as we had to attend the Nong Nooch's famous cultural and elephant show. The 60-minute performance featured dances of the four Thai regions, a wedding ceremony and procession, a Thai boxing demonstration, traditional musical performances and a reconstitution of elephants in a battle. The elephant show was presented outside where the pachyderms showed their acrobatic and artistic skills. There, it was possible if you dared, to be given a Thai massage, be lifted up in the trunk or walked over by the elephants. The animals' skills at playing sports like football, basketball and bicycling was also amazing and made this show a "must-see" in Thailand.

The rest of the afternoon was dedicated to the discovery of the different gardens. It has been said that no other place in the world displays as many different palm species as the Nong Nooch Tropical Garden. With more than a thousand species to admire, all the enthusiastic eyes of our group were kept busy during the walk. The garden is well on its way to be considered as a primary source of palm species considering palm studies worldwide and the rapid destruction of forests.

Flowers are not left behind with the Orchid Display garden that houses different varieties, native, hybrids as well as rare species. There, our group appreciated the coolness of the place produced by a lotus pond with a statue of a maiden in the centre. Another beautiful area in the Garden is a Thai pavilion on a rock hill from where a French-style garden decorated with statues of mythical characters from Thai literature can be admired; the mixture of these two elements was stunning. We visited the new butterfly house that contains about 1500 butterflies of different colours and sizes in a net-house where people can wander around. The last place we saw before going back to the capital was the Hortus Botanicus that displays plants arranged by families, genus and species in straight rows with a classifications in Latin names.

During this full day spent in the Nong Nooch Tropical garden, everyone enjoyed the beauty of the place and shared a feeling of peace and well being that won't be forgotten.

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