

"Deep breath near the lake of Khao Laem"

written by Michel GÉRARD

The Khao Laem lake which is one of the biggest water reservoirs situated in the west of the country near the Burmese border, is also a peaceful place that encourages leisure, adventure and unity with nature.



Although this region of Thailand is still little visited by tourists, the place is most cherished by Thai families who can easily and in a short time leave Bangkok to experience a wonderful ecological site and benefit from activities related to nature. From the capital city, the place can be reached in part by train that offers travellers the opportunity to see the landscapes covering 130 kilometres. The first step can be the departure from the Thonburi railway station in Bangkok for a trip of about two hours to Kanchanaburi.

This region, which is the Kingdom's third largest, comprises of mountains covered with forests, water falls, caves that were occupied during the Neolithic period, without forgetting its big reservoirs, as well as fertile plains where the two streams, the Kwai Noi and the Kwai Yai meet. In the regional capital city, for more than one hour you will be allowed to see the famous bridge on the Kwai River, and also to walk the streets of the city.

The second step of this excursion is the departure from this famous bridge to travel through "Hell Fire Pass". It is an abandoned section of the railway of the death showing the difficulty that World War II prisoners had to face while constructing a railway track through the rock. Close to two hours later, the end of the line is reached at Namtok station where it is time to have lunch.

An hour of free time is well appreciated to relax before starting the third step, that requires a vehicle this time, and get to Thong Pha Phum that is six kilometres from the huge hydroelectric dam of Khao Laem. Once you return to the destination, you can rest in small floating houses on the lake, and spend a calm evening. You can even take a small plunge, if you feel like it, and you will be pleased with this place in the middle of the nature. There, a Thai dinner and a good night's rest will be awaiting you.

After you wake-up and have a copious breakfast, the day looks busy with activities and starts with the departure by vehicle for the camp. The morning will continue with a rural tour in the countryside on board a farm-cart made of wood pulled by bulls, and this will take you to a Karen village where the lives of the villagers can be observed. Close by, travellers can enjoy a trek in the mountains and the surrounding jungle and then ride an elephant to the river. Abandoning your pachyderm for a raft of bamboo, you will then leave for a descent of the river which, except for some rapids, offer moments of real relaxation in the middle of a tropical forest with astonishing landscapes. After all these emotions and a well-occupied morning, the awaited picnic will be very pleasing.

In the beginning of the afternoon, a stop at a local market will be useful to buy some provisions before leaving for a healthy walk of about three kilometres in the jungle in order to join the camp for the night. There, the apprentice Tarzans could choose one of the houses of bamboo perched in the trees, while the others could favour the bungalows in the jungle or the tents for camping.

The following morning will present an opportunity for a trek to discover the fauna and especially the rare birds that live in the tropical vegetation. For all those who have more time, the region is ideal to explore and discover all its natural resources on motorcycles, while stopping at Dai Chong Thong, which is one of the numerous cascades, and to enjoy a bath before continuing on your way to Sangkhlaburi and the Burmese border famous for the Three Pagodas Pass.

It is with regrets that all participants will drive back to Bangkok after a last deep breath of cool air, leaving behind them moments of immense pleasure, adventure and discovery.

© Michel GÉRARD

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>