

"Family stay, at the Grand Canyon"

written by Michel GÉRARD

A small typical village of the North of Thailand is hidden in the mountain a hundred kilometres from the south of Chiang Mai. It invites foreigners to stay in the villagers' home and experience life in a village. It is really proud to present its local Grand Canyon.



It takes to our group a little more than one hour by vehicle to reach the Home Stay village where we are going to spend four days in total immersion in a family and far away from tourists. It is a Thai traditional northern village where the main activity is cotton weaving and clothes making. We are not the first foreigners to come given that the American students of the Chiang Mai University frequently have cultural and study stays there.

When we arrive at the village, we discover a peaceful and silent place that is in contrast to Chiang Mai, the New City. We first arrive at the house of the village chief. He is the person who decides whether to place visitors individually or in couples with a family or other people according to space and room availability. As soon as we see him approaching us with his big smile, we do our best to greet him with our most beautiful Wai, while joining our hands like in prayer and following the instructions that have been given to us by our English-speaking guide, "Toy."

Every host family we meet is very impatient to welcome and look after us making sure that all is as best as possible for our comfort. Glasses of cold water are served immediately and we taste the local dessert that has just been prepared. The rooms we are assigned to are basic with a thin Thai mattress laid on the floor, a portable fan and a mosquito net; the bathroom being located in a small cabin outside the house, I am sure that as we did, you will enjoy a bath by pouring water onto yourself from a big jar. It is certainly not a room like in a five star hotel, but the kindness of the host families make you forget all that. Besides, the goal of this journey is to share the life of the villagers and to become more aware of Thai culture by living like them and with them.

For four days, we spend the important moments of the day with the family and share every meal that basically includes sticky rice and is prepared non-spicy, especially, for us. Breakfast is also a meal, no coffee with milk or corn flakes! We meet the group and our guide for some time during the day for common activities. The first being the visit to the pottery or weaving workshops set up under the houses, and meeting the villagers.

A trip by bicycle in the direction of the Grand Canyon, or Pasingliaw, the local attraction that is in the forest outside the village is also very pleasant. For about ten years, a part of the mountain has been being eroded by the strong wind that has been sculpturing very pretty shapes. This phenomenon is unique in Thailand. The place is also ideal for a little walk in the forest and appreciation of the mountainous landscapes. The visit to the farmers in the rice fields and the fruit orchards come next since the village is a producer of rice, longan and aromatic plants. During the academic term, the two schools are open. It is interesting to visit a class and try to communicate with the students and understand the Thai education system better. The last evening, our group enjoys a traditional dinner of the North called Kantoke, made by the villagers.

At the end of our stay, everybody is a little sad to leave this village where kindness and cultural exchanges make this journey an unforgettable and unique experience.

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