

"From the Monkeys Island to the 300 peaks"

written by Michel GÉRARD

From the island of the "monkey crab-eaters" situated some kilometres from Hua Hin to the 300 peaks of the Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, a traditional wooden boat is the ideal mode of travel for a day of leisure, discovery and a historical visit to the East coast of the peninsula in the province of Prachuab Kiri Khan.



Before departure from Hua Hin, the participants of this one day excursion get ready early in the morning and head out some kilometres on the road in the direction of the marina of Pattara situated at the south. There, Captain Barry and his crew welcome us on board of the Mai Thai Cruise, a pretty, traditional boat made of wood. This small cruise was getting very promising with the comfort, music and cocktails in sight.

The trip down the Pranburi River that takes about one hour thirty minutes to reach the islands of Ko Kulam and Ko Khinok allows us to admire the landscapes of mangrove swamp while drinking a cup of tea and eating fresh fruit. Different varieties of birds can be observed along the journey thanks to the various eco-systems met in the region. Indeed, the sea, the marshes, the salting swamps, the meadows, a mountain, a forest and a mangrove swamp are present together in the same area. At the mouth of the river, the landscape changes with the apparition of villages with fishermen, and when the boat arrives close to the islands it is even possible to observe dolphins of Irrawaddy in the clear waters of the Golf of Siam.

Our group then enjoy free time to explore the deserted islands of Ko Kulam and Ko Khinok. We can say that the island is only half deserted due to the presence of monkey crab-eaters who swing from trees to trees. This Monkeys' Island invites us to discover the surroundings, something we cannot fail to do while playing the Survivors for a few hours. The exploring of the sea floor with mask and snorkel is one of our favourite activities where all sorts of exotic fish can be admired, whereas for some, relaxation on the white sand or the pebbles on a small sunny beach is a preferred privilege. We then get on board and drift in the direction of Bang Pu situated in the national park of Khao Sam Roi Yot.

After lunch, with a menu of fresh fish in the fishermen's village at the mouth of the river in Bang Pu, our group gets into a long tail boat and head in the direction of the Tham Phraya Nakhon Cave that has a Royal Sala named Phra Thinang Khuha Kharuhat which was constructed in 1890 during the reign of King Chualalongkorn (Rama V). For a little story: this large cave with the light of the sun brought in through natural openings and which is accessible by climbing a hill of 430 metres, was used in the past by King Rama the 1st and his successors as a meeting point and a place to rest when travelling southwards. At some moments of the day the Sala is magically illuminated to thrill photographers.

After this historical visit, the group moves in the dugout again to go back towards the Mai Thai Cruise where everybody will appreciate its comfort. The breeze during the sail delights everybody on the superior deck while we admire the late afternoon landscapes and talk about what we saw today. It won't take long to get back to the Pattara marina where we have already made arrangements for a dinner cruise at sunset. This will take place the following day and everybody will appreciate it. Before that, it is necessary for us to take a vehicle back to Hua Hin and enjoy our evening there at a Bali-Thai dinner show with amazing choreography...

For all of us, it is certain that this cruise-discovery day in the national park of Khao Sam Roi Yot was a privileged and unforgettable experience.

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