

BANGKOK VISIT - final

Patpong comes alive only at night. Unfortunately, we got there at about 3 in the afternoon, and were in no mood to hang around till late nightfall. I remember the Patpong of the late 70's when I was there, all glitzy with GIs doing their R&Rs. I tried best to reconnect. The internet said there also is a famous night market in the area. So with a detailed map on hand, we zigzagged through the area and noted that there were two relatively short parallel streets named Patpong 1 and Patpong 2 near the Skytrain station we had alighted from. The first street was lined with lots of Japanese restaurants and bars, specialty shops such as all golf equipment, etc. The second street was the night market area because at 3 pm, workmen were setting up the hundreds of stalls in the center of the street. And on the street's sidewalks were all the honky-tonk bars and night clubs, still closed of course, save for some early bird establishments which already had some tourist clients sipping their drinks waiting for more nightfall action. See photos below.



Forklifts bringing out from a warehouse steel boxes of goods to be distributed to stalls being set up in the middle of the road. I wondered about the cost of all these labor, considering it is a nightly event. Note sign of "Pussy" club above.



A more explicit store front. Couldn't figure out what the white stuff is.



Typical fire hydrant; low and prone to be a stumbling block. Still have to see a small dog do it's thing.



The clincher sign that we indeed were there. But we didn't stay for nightfall, knowing that the stalls would be just like Chatuchak.

While resting our feet by sitting on a bus station's bench on the main road and watching the world go by, we noted that even the main road now had sidewalk stalls being assembled. Stall owners came in all sorts of venues: via coolie-like labor pushing a steel box on wheels, or a new Toyota pickup full of luggage items. Then we backtracked to the station, and rode to the Siam area, where there were shopping malls galore, all high end.



The Lamborghini showroom.



High end stereo stuff, where I drooled.



Resting again.

Then we had dinner at the fast food section of the mall. Lots of choices, but all in all, relatively expensive compared to Manila. We had been to the low end shopping area, now we were at the high end, so we still had to go to what was considered the middle end, something like Greenhills. This would be the famed MBK Shopping mall.



A block away from the hotel was a massage parlor, left photo. Both of us had a foot massage that evening. For 200 baht, or 300 pesos, we got an hours worth of a good massage that even included soaking of the feet in a warm tub of scented water, with flowers and lemon floating in the tub. I asked how much would it be if done as "home service" in the hotel, and even the girls advised against it because the cost would jump to 1000 baht. Lisa especially was fascinated by this massage because it was different from her regular foot reflexology in Tanjay, for which we pay 200 pesos. We said we'd be back in a day or so for a real body massage. Interestingly, when in Chinatown earlier, we had seen a different type of foot massage: a fish massage. On the sidewalk were people with their feet dunked in a tank of water with hundreds of small fish. Apparently, these nibbling of the fish was the massaging action. I don't suppose they were piranhas. And the price was more expensive: 150 baht for 15 minutes. Too bad I didn't get any photos.

But we had to make a trip to the country side. Our itinerary was going by subway to the train station, ride for 2 hours to Ayutthaya, home to magnificent temples. Just outside the hotel, a taxi driver asked us if we wanted a ride, and I casually asked how much was it to the airport, our sched 2 days hence. When he quoted 400 baht, which was a third the price we paid for the van service coming in, I closed the deal. He then asked where we were going. To make a long story short, we went to Ayutthaya in style, in a cab, for quite a reasonable price, and this included a side trip to the floating market and elephant walk at Damnoemsaduak. We left at 10:30 am and came back 8 pm, perhaps a 250 km roundtrip.



Infrastructure is terrific. Good roads and tall bldgs. These yellow objects are stays in a modern bridge. Drivers go fast, at 120 kph on highways, are disciplined; keep inner fast lane clear.



Roadside fruit stand. We bought lots of fruit mainly for the seeds that might take root in the Tanjay farm.



At the floating market. Our boatman's name sounded a bit like Charon. Note car engine and LPG tank.



Typical tourist trap. A store on canal.



After stepping up into one of them, it's the usual handicraft at inflated prices.



Local erotica, just like our Igorot man-in-the-barrel pop up.



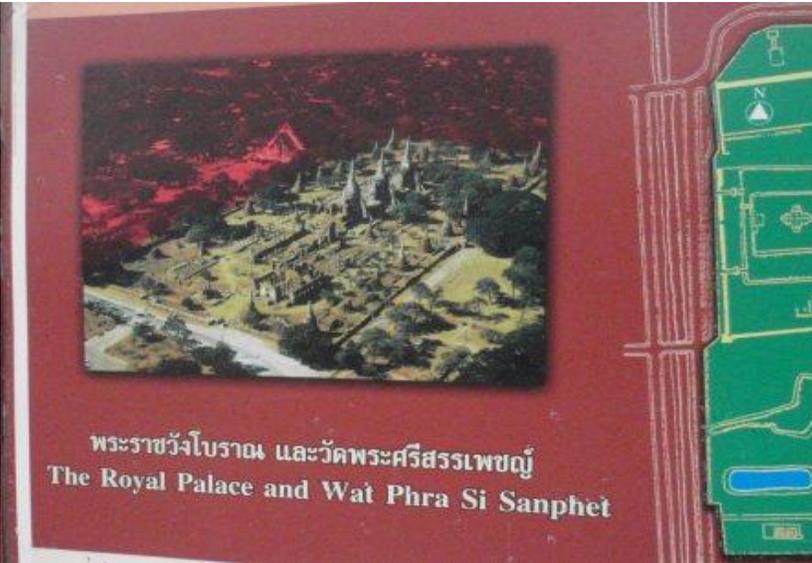
Floating pork noodle soup store. We ate while in our boat. Little choice.



Left, that's us on the elephant walk. Above, elephant poop, big and round as a coconut, fibrous, too, as they eat coconut fronds (above) as candy, plus lots of bananas per the driver. And incidentally, the driver also sells ivory jewelry on the side. Very enterprising indeed, these Thais.



Then the two hour drive to Ayutthaya. On the map, it was about 75 km north of Bangkok. Apparently, this side trip to the floating market was west of Bangkok, where the land was flat, not far from the sea, with lots of salt beds en route. So to get north, we had to loop around. No way could we have covered all these sites had we taken the train.



We got to the Ayutthaya City at about 5:30 pm. Most shops at the main temple area were already closed. The site was sprawling, and we didn't have enough time to explore the numerous "stupas" or structures. Besides, our driver said there were other grounds to cover. Above three photos shows some of the sites. The photo on left is a blow up of the plaque showing the aerial view of the Royal Palace and Temple (Wat).

After another stop at a lesser temple, wherein one stupa was leaning way out of line like the tower of Pisa, we headed back to Bangkok. Took an hour and a half, with all the downtown traffic, and despite the driver's skilful fast pace.

Dinner was at the hotel's Japanese restaurant.

Last full day was spent mall hopping literally. We first went to the MBK mall, all 8 stories of floor space with 2000 stores of every conceivable specialty. Like in many places, the oversize picture of the Monarch is displayed (see photo on left), indicating the people's respect for him. But he is old and frail, and when he goes, his son will take over the monarchy, which really is the thin glue that holds the fractious political parties from getting at each other's throats. Unfortunately, the prince is most unpopular.



We used the skytrain and subway to go to three other stations where we just walked around and entered nearby shopping areas or malls. We would have wanted to go to some museums but they close Mon/Tues. Thailand has 35 million tourists a year (compare that to our 3 million) so the malls, streets and subways are full of them. See photo left below. And the locals



love to go around in shorts. See below. When we staggered back to the hotel, then went to the massage parlor, it was closed early due to start of the Chinese new year.



Bye, bye at airport.

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