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KANCHANABURI :The Perfect Getaway From Bangkok

By Joel

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One of Thailand's premier tourist attractions, Kanchanaburi, lies a mere two hours from the capital. This proximity means it is well within the time constraints of most people's itineraries and getting there could hardly be easier. Buses leave every half hour from Bangkok's southern bus terminal and deliver you to the center of this small town in air-conditioned comfort. The lush green scenery and laid-back way of life mean that exploring the towns many places of interest is always enjoyable.

The moment we stepped from the bus we are (politely) accosted by a cacophony of cries. "Where you go? Where you go?" We had both been here before and instructed one to drive us to The Jolly Frog, a popular choice with backpackers. Normally, I follow a policy of the older the better in regards to motorcycle taxi drivers (less testosterone and a healthy fear of death). Somehow though, through same kind of oversight we ended up with a youngster covered in tattoos and we were promptly whisked away, with both of us on the back of one motorcycle. No one blinked an eye. My pleas for helmets were met with incredulous looks and squeezed between my girlfriend who was hanging on the back and the sweaty teenager it wasn't the comfiest of rides. I'm sure they didn't have insurance either. 50 cents seemed a rather large price to pay a 3k journey and all the accompanying danger but I paid up.

We soon found ourselves in the restaurant section of the large guesthouse with an extensive menu before us. There are many other guesthouses along the river but the food is the reason we and many others are here. Locals too dine at The Jolly Frog and this surely is testimony to its good cooking. This guesthouse too boasts a lovely

lawn and fine views of the river. After some delicious catfish it was early to bed in a basic but clean room.

At about \$4 a night, I thought it a bit steep and it certainly wasn't the cheapest option. But hell I'm on holiday and I don't mind blowing a bit of cash for a nice double room. Many guesthouses of a similar ilk line the river offering a panoramic view of the river and the majority are cheap and good value.

The next day, we set off early to get in some serious sightseeing and with the minimum of fuss we rented the ubiquitous Honda dream (the horse of Asia) for around \$4.50 for 24 hrs. More expense. I pay

through gritted teeth trying not to see the crisp 100 baht notes leaving my shorts pockets and we wobbled off down the road to see the highlight of our trip.

Most people visit Kanchanaburi for one main reason; The Bridge and its associated trivia, and on first impressions, I'm not. Impressed that is. It's too small. I'd seen the film and was expecting something of epic proportions. And while nice enough it didn't really fulfill my expectations. Incidentally I soon learnt the bridge is not actually over the river Kwai as most westerners pronounce it. In the Thai tonal language this translates as buffalo, the stupidest animal around and a common mammal for insults. As all good learners of a foreign language do I soon picked up a few common insults and learnt that the most insulting thing to call someone is a giant water monitor lizard or maybe the son of....Any way back to my disappointing first gaze at the bridge. My disillusionment was compounded when I found out during the show in the evening that it wasn't actually the real thing but a replica, the real one having been blown up by the allies of course. We strolled across, and back again, got very hot and sought refuge in the nearest restaurant. The good thing about Thailand is no matter how small the bridges are you are never far away from good food. A dish I always have when I'm by the river is yam plas muk and believe me there's nothing like the taste of a spicy squid salad washed down with a cool Singa beer. Actually Singa beer is disgusting, but it sounds more romantic than Heineken. (A new beer has just come on the market black tiger. Now that's a quality beer. Dark tasty and with none of the formaldehyde aftertaste and resulting hangovers that Singa tends to bring. Sorry boomrang brewery.)

Almost right next to the bridge and clearly signposted is the Jeath war museum. No not a misprint. Now I know being in a forced labour

camp must have been pretty bad death, disease, etc. but in the photos, it looks like a holiday camp. Young bronzed men walking round in sarongs, doing their laundry, shaving, hardly any really gave me a sense of the horror it must have been.

That evening we hit one of the many stalls lining the river in the town and ate cheap delicious Issan food. With this fiery sustenance lining our bellies we headed into a bar opposite the boats and enjoyed a couple of jugs of draft beer to the accompaniment of live Thai music. I don't know whether it was for our benefit or not but I really didn't enjoy the version of Country Road.

Joel has lived and worked in Asia for the last decade and has written for numerous travel magazines. He is the chief editor of Asia TravelEzine (http://asiatravelezine.netfirms.com?kan_a5) and is also responsible for editing and managing the website, http://asiahotelbookings.netfirms.com?kan_a5. He currently resides in Hanoi.

Florida Vacations - From Orlando To The Keys

By Jim Grayson

The kids have finally broken you down and you've agreed on that family vacation getaway to Florida. They're excited. They want to go to Orlando, and you're fairly certain that if you hear one more thing about Goofy or Micky your head is going to explode. What's a poor mom or dad to do? While it's true that Disney World is one of the premier family vacation getaways in Florida, it is by no means the only fun place to be.

The Orlando/Kissimmee area boasts a plentiful array of family vacation getaways. In fact, Kissimmee can be considered the laid-back, historic alternative to Orlando. Residents of Kissimmee have gone to great lengths to keep the hometown charm that the area is noted for. While there are some water parks and resorts, attractions such as Old Town, rodeos, horseback riding and a petting farm make it a wonderful family vacation getaway.

Other towns in the area which are ideal family vacation getaways include: Mount Dora, perfect for biking trips; Polk City, for the family of aircraft enthusiasts; and Sanford, home of the Central Florida Zoological Park.

Further south lies Palm Beach County. Yes, that's right; I did say Palm Beach. I know what you're thinking. `Palm Beach' and `family vacation getaways' don't go hand in hand. That's where you're wrong. You just have to know where to look. West Palm Beach is perfect for that family vacation getaway, thanks to destinations such as the Norton Museum of Art and the Lion Country Safari, where visitors can see lions, giraffes, and a host of other animals, running free.

As you travel further north, you can give your kids the perfect opportunity to use their family vacation getaway to learn about the environment, by visiting the Loggerhead Park and The Marine Life Center

in Juno. Here they can be taught about turtles and go on turtle walks.

We're not done yet. Welcome to the Florida Keys, the perfect destination for putting a little more excitement in your family vacation getaway. Certainly I wouldn't suggest you take your children diving, unless they're accustomed to that sort of thing, but you can definitely visit Islamorada. They'll love their family vacation getaway when they get to interact one-on-one with dolphins and sea lions. You'll also have the chance to feed the giant tarpon that gather around the docks. Now how many people can say they had a chance to do that on their family vacation getaway? So you see? Disney World isn't the only option for your family vacation getaway.

Jim Grayson makes a living in the field of research. If you have found this article useful, visit his specialist resource sites,

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