

Sarah Lipman: Good news from Thailand

By Sarah Lipman, Correspondent

Published: 08:13 p.m., Friday, February 5, 2010

KRABI, Thailand -- After only a week in Bangkok and about four days in the Andaman Coast province of Krabi, I've already been reminded why I am so interested in the world and all its people.

In such a short time I've already gotten to know people from all over the world -- Australia, Thailand, the Philippines, the United States and Europe. And the more I communicate, the more it becomes evident to me what has long been debated: People are good.

Thailand is a complex country, filled with expatriates, mixed Asian races, indigenous Thais and a ton of travelers. Prior to my arrival, guidebooks and other visitors forewarned me to keep my possessions close and to trust no one, especially not those who work for the tourism industry. However, from my experience thus far, the opposite holds true.

Thais I have encountered and gotten to know a bit about have been friendly and inquisitive, eager to improve their English. Sadly, though, my Thai has stopped at "hello" ("sà-wàt-dee") and "thank you" ("kòrp kun"). I've found the more friendly you are and interested in generating conversation, the more likely you are to form a bond and learn something new about the people of this country, including how generous they can be.

Our agent at the [Thailand Tourism Authority](#), who helped me and my travel partner, Andrea, book the majority of our stay -- including transportation and accommodations -- has adopted us as her American daughters, providing us with food, drink and rides to the train station. All because she and I share a name and Andrea looks like her daughter.

The most telling moment of generosity and genuine cross-cultural interest occurred on just our third day in Thailand in the Sukhumvit area of Bangkok. Curious about the loud music outside our accommodations early one morning, we headed out to see what we could find. We ended up on a small "soi," or avenue, where a street fair was being thrown by the Bangkok police force.

It wasn't long before a police officer caught us peering at the activities and immediately ushered us in to an all-you-can-eat festival. We were handed sodas and a bowl with chopsticks and brought to a table offering us our first traditional Thai meal of noodle soup with vegetables and spices.

Our excitement about our first real immersion in Thai culture couldn't be masked, and the officers



seemed equally thrilled to have two Western travelers celebrating with them. They snapped photos of us enjoying the meals and were curious to learn where we were from and why visiting Thailand was important to us.

We've had a fantastic welcome so far, but it's not to say there have not been a few annoyances and difficult street-cart vendors, mostly in Bangkok. Túk-túks are three-wheeled motorized carts, a staple of transportation in Southeast Asia, great for short distances and hop-on, hop-off sightseeing -- but one of the more frightening modes of transportation I've experienced in my life.

Túk-túk drivers are experts at taking advantage of newbie backpackers hoping to see the Grand Palace and various temples and Buddha statues scattered through the city by trying to bring them first to a suit shop in order to gain a commission.

In just a short week, though, settling into the nomadic lifestyle has come easily. It doesn't take long to learn the best way to wear your 80-pound backpack and the best place to find cheap pad thai or a túk-túk driver who won't rip you off.

People, both locals and other travelers, are more than willing to help and share the tips and tricks of accessible travel -- something I plan to pass along as I continue on.

Sarah Lipman is documenting her travels around the world.

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