

Thailand: The Land of Happiness

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Thailand is one of the most attractive countries on the world tourist's map and it is definitely the most beautiful country that I have ever visited during my career as a journalist. The monsoon rain makes Thailand a completely green land. Its enchanting geographical features, mountains, islands and the pleasant climate; in addition to its location and the political stability; all these factors gave the Thai people a feeling of peace and comfort.

Here in Thailand people have mastered the art of welcoming their guests. The Thai restaurant that relies on fresh seafood, fruit of all types (you only find freshly squeezed juices), the flowers that are given as a friendship sign, and many

more details, make Thailand a world tourist destination.

Thailand enjoys a very mild climate through out the year. It is formed of three seasons: The warm season (March-May) when temperature rises to 35 degrees, the green season (June-October) when you can see a heavy rain mixed with a sun shine, the cold (or mild) season (November-February) in the northern hills and this is most suitable season for tourist.

You can visit Thailand in all seasons. It is also the most beautiful country to visit with the family, children would really enjoy it and women would enjoy shopping, imported or local traditional

goods. Prices are cheap and you can get refund of up to 7% of what you pay at the airport because tourists are exempted from the VAT. Newly wed couples could make it the most memorable time of their life. Many hotels and travel agencies arrange special programmes for such couples. Thailand is called "The Land of Freedom" because it has never been occupied in its history. It may also be called "The Land of Smile" because the people, here, are always smiling. But after eight days of my stay, I have decided to call it "The Land of Happiness".

My visit started on the Thai Airline from Dubai to Bangkok. I was initially received in the ➔

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aeroplane with the Thai greeting "Wai" which was performed by joining the hands towards the face. This type of greeting replaced shaking hands in Thailand. The seats of the Royal Executive Class were luxurious. I enjoyed the Thai hospitality from the first moment abroad with natural juice drinks and seafood and happy smiles. All these comforts had the apparent effect of shortening the time of the journey. We reached Bangkok and took a second flight to Phuket Island. This island is situated to the south of Thailand and it is famous for its natural scenery, enchanting beaches, golden sands and its excellent hotels. It is considered the second most important tourist



destination in Thailand with more than three million visitors a year. It is close to Malaysia and so it has a high population of Muslims (about 30%) who work as farmers, fishermen and in local crafts. Muslims form about 12% of Thailand's population and there are around 400 mosques in the country. I toured the island on one of the high-speed powerboats. There are a number of islands in the region, one of which is called "James Bond Island" because of these films, which were filmed there. I also visited Pangy; a village built on water, named locally as "The Village of the Fishermen".

The voyage takes you through mountains springing from the water and covered with the mango trees and coconuts. It is one of the most beautiful scenes in the world. There were trees in the salty water of the sea and the secret of their survival is that it uses some of its roots in the water to produce oxygen. The Sheraton Grand Laguna Phuket, where I stayed, is one of the best hotel on the island and it is called an island within the island. I was also invited to the Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort. The hotel overlooks the sea and you have a view of the



mountains on the other side and it has large swimming pools.

I did visit the theatre of the island and its cultural garden and saw a magnificent play with 500 actors to re-enact one of the folklore stories of Thailand at the Phuket Fantasy. The play was well directed and it was very interesting to see the way the elephants whisked away the cast creating a magical illusion.

I also saw during the trip the rubber trees with the rubber being extracted and manufactured. First the skin of the tree is cut at dawn time, then the rubber sap white in colour is to be collected from the tree, water is then added with a chemical substance, and finally it is put in into a machine to make slabs of rubber. This is a simple industry for the local peasants.

On the third day, I came back to Bangkok airport. Once there, I took a bus to the city of Pataya, which is a well-known tourist city. I stayed at the Royal Cliff Beach Resort, which has won the prize for the best resort in Thailand. Here you can follow the Arab satellite channels and the management has taken care to point out the direction of Mecca for Arab and Muslim visitors. I was invited for a dinner by the Mayor of Pataya, where I was presented with more than twenty types of seafood. The following day, I visited the park of stones where I found stones a million years old. I also visited the crocodile farm and I saw how they were fed and some of the games they played.

Pataya has beautiful beaches, natural scenes and tropical gardens. The islands near it are ideal for people who want to leave the city life behind and to live among the traditional locals who are very hospitable.

Bangkok has a population of 11 millions. It has a very high rising building for offices, centres of businesses, luxury hotels modern transport network and centres for shopping and leisure. All this makes your visit to Bangkok unforgettable, especially if you took a river trip in the enchanting River of the Kings.

I stayed in Bangkok at the Oriental Bangkok, which is renowned as one of the best hotels in the world. Hospitality here is unsurpassed. Mrs Piyawati, the representative of the Ministry of Tourism, received me and she took me on a tour of Bangkok where we visited the Royal Palace and the main temple.

I also visited the Royal Orchard Sheraton. I was welcomed by the general manager and had a lunch with him and was given a tour of the hotel. The hotel has the famous health club Mandara Spa.

I went also to the north of Bangkok and stayed at the Central Sofitel Plaza, which has a large shopping centre adjacent to it. I also went to visit the Bumrungrad hospital, which is more of a resort than a hospital. There were many Arab patients in the hospital due to its worldwide reputation.

Thailand also enjoys an increasingly good reputation in the sectors of health and natural curing, through specialist clinics. Many hospitals offer Arab and Muslim patients special facilities, such as Halal meat and translators; as well as Arab television and newspapers.

I have no hesitation in highly recommending Thailand and I do promise you that you will enjoy your holiday. ■