

HONG KONG/BANGKOK TRIP - 2/22/05-3/7/05

DAVE GOODFELLOW

My nephew got married in Hong Kong February 26, and my sister and I attended the wedding. This was my first time overseas, and I had a ball. A day or two after the wedding, Steve and Jessica took 12 of us to Bangkok for a week, then back to Hong Kong for a couple of days. This writeup is an attempt to capture that trip before it becomes a blur in my memory.

The trip from our house in Edmonds, Washington to Hong Kong took 26 hours, including a layover in Los Angeles to change airplanes. Hong Kong was fogged in when we arrived, and we did not have enough fuel to stay in the holding pattern, so we turned back to Taiwan for refueling, then returned to Hong Kong.

In Hong Kong, we stayed at the Ritz Carlton hotel, which is well-known for pampering its customers. And pampered we were. This was no mere room-with-a-bed. Flowers and candy appeared daily, as well as other niceties to make us feel welcome.

For instance, when I went down for breakfast on my birthday, I was greeted with "Happy Birthday, Mr. Goodfellow." They had gotten the information from my passport. Breakfast came with champagne and a "Happy Birthday" serenade.

Hong Kong is a fascinating city, growing at an astounding rate -- mostly straight up. Personal transportation there is mostly by motor scooter, taxicabs, buses and a very efficient rail system. Private automobiles are in the minority. Traffic is always heavy, and it appears that drivers make their own rules as they go along.

After the wedding, we flew to Bangkok for a week in Thailand. Bangkok is a mix of modern city and an "old traditional Asian city," with narrow streets lined with tiny shops selling everything under the sun. Our first night there, we went to a dinner show featuring Thai dances. Strictly a tourist trap, but what the heck? We were tourists.



View from our 8th-floor room at the Ritz-Carlton. The high-rise building in the foreground is lit up at night with neon lights that travel along the diagonals. This is the Bank of China building.



We spent the next day at the Thai royal palace. The king lives elsewhere. Too many tourists, I guess. The grounds cover several acres, with fascinating buildings. There is a dress code for visitors, out of respect for the king -- no open-toed shoes; no skin showing on legs and arms. Appropriate clothes are available on loan if you happen to arrive wearing shorts, sandals or short-sleeved shirt.



The next day we took a trip up a river that bisects Bangkok, to a snake farm -- another tourist trap. There we did another tourist thing. See below:



My sister ...



... and me ...

... and the python.

We stayed a couple of days at the Felix Resort on the Kwaie Noi river, just a couple of hundred yards from the bridge made famous by the movie “Bridge on the River Kwae.” The movie, by the way, bears little resemblance to what actually happened there.

While there, we visited “Hellfire Pass,” where hundreds of POWs died cutting through rock while building the Thai-Burma railroad the Japanese used to supply its troops. On the whole project, thousands of American, Australian, British and Dutch POWs died of overwork, starvation and disease. According to the memorial plaque, “... The name Hellfire Pass relates to the awesome scene presented at night by the light from torches and lamps in the cutting. This work was done without the aid of reliable mechanical equipment. The most primitive of hand tools were used to drill holes for the explosives used in blasting the rock and for removing the waste rock. ...”

Hellfire Pass by my estimate is barely 100 yards long and maybe 40 feet deep at its deepest, by about 15 feet wide for the right-of-way.



Most of the track has been removed from this narrow-gauge railway, to be used for other things after WWII. A little bit of track and a few ties are all that is left. The bare bed goes on for miles, and a few miles of track remains of the Thai-Burma line as a tourist attraction.

The walk from the memorial to Hellfire Pass was tortuous in 90-degree plus heat. It was a steep hill down to a stairway of 150 steps down to the right-of-way. Then you walked a half-mile on a down-hill slope to the pass, through the pass, and a path back to the memorial with a stairway with 500 steps. By the time I got back to the memorial I was definitely feeling my age!

Ayutthaya -- The Ancient Capital

A two-hour trip north by car brought us to the city of Ayutthaya, capital of Thailand from 1350 to 1767, and the ruins of the old city sacked by Burma in 1767. We spent most of a day here, walking through the ruins and doing the tourist thing -- the elephant ride.



Khymer ruins -- Kingdom of Ayutthaya



The tourist thing ...

And back to Hong Kong.



Harbor Ferry

Hong Kong Harbor -- One of the busiest harbors in the world

Hong Kong as seen from The Peak -- a mountain park overlooking the city. A 2-kilometer trail around The Peak gives a wide variety of city views.



We boarded a plane for Los Angeles around 4:30 p.m. March 7, and arrived home 20 hours later on the same day.

A great trip!