

FRIDAY WRAP

#2.17.1

'A Glimpse of Humour'

13 May 2011



View from Wat Arun

Wrap

- ~ Rap -- to talk., *conversation.*
- ~ a piece of thin, flat bread *that can contain anything* eaten as a sandwich.
- ~ Signaling *the end (ie of a week)*
- ~ *Under wraps – secret.*

The Tourist

Part II.

One (more) Night in Bangkok.

Friday 22 April 2011.

We have arrived.

Bangkok.

Suvarnabhumi Airport.

A huge, beautiful, state-of-the-art airport.

Just off the plane we were met by Cellphone vendors dishing our free SIM cards with a couple of Baht worth of air-time. (Don't try to buy 'airtime' at the shops ask for 'recharge'). Yay. We could SMS home quickly.

Through customs and passport control. To be met by Sunny and her crew of 'Better Choice Travel' who were to take us to our hotel.

Out of the terminal.

Before you could get a first impression the heat gets you like a smack in the face. And the humidity. You can never



Balloon Seller

be dry and outside at the same time. You need to shower at least twice to thrice per day. You are wet almost constantly. After an hour or two you need to get into some air-conditioning just to cool down. And you need to drink plenty of water to stay hydrated. The locals though seemed unperturbed by the weather though, they walk around with jackets and jerseys and ties! They really need a Madiba to release them from their bondage of ties and otherwise.

Change the time on my cellphone. We lost five hours. Bangkok is 5 hours earlier than Cape Town.

The highways at this late hour were still full. Because of the heat Bangkok comes alive at night when it has cooled down some but it is actually a 24 hour city very much like any other large cosmopolitan cities. This maybe South East Asia but Bangkok was voted the Best city in the world recently and can be rated against any western city in transport and facility and it has a thousand year history.



Comparing Bangkok (8.0m people) to Cape Town (2.3m) then you realise Cape Town deserves the misnomer of 'Slaapstad'. Whereas Bangkok bustles 24 hours Cape Town dies at night. The streets and shopping mall looks like 'Ou jaars' night every night.

We arrived at the Ecotel, Rajthevee, Pratunam just after 2030 and we were relieved to get some air-conditioning.

The Ecotel

An affordable yet stylish, Ecotel Bangkok offers European-style accommodation off Rajprarob Road in central Bangkok. A 10-minute walk from Pratunam Market and Platinum Mall, it offers free Wi-Fi and free parking. Ecotel is a 30-minute drive from Suvarnabhumi International Airport. Chitlom BTS Skytrain Station is a 20-minute stroll from the hotel.

Fully air-conditioned, rooms at Ecotel have warm lighting which creates a cosy atmosphere. Each is equipped with a cable TV, fridge and hairdryer.

Selected rooms have a personal safe. Day trips in and around Bangkok can be arranged at the tour desk. The hotel provides added convenience with laundry services and an on-site ATM machine.

Tom Yum Thai Restaurant serves local specialties. Designed like a Paris sidewalk café, Café d'Elite serves freshly brewed coffee and European snacks.

Hotel Rooms: 155.

We were shown to our room which was huge and airy with a lovely view of the road outside.

The large window could not open though but we didn't mind as the air-conditioning worked perfectly.

After prayers and freshen up we went in search of food. This was always going to be an issue on our first day.

Halaal food can be found but you must know where to look.

There is a large Muslim population in Thailand and there are plenty of Halaal establishments.

We walked up the narrow streets experiencing the South East Asian street culture up close and personal. We were also blessed with the street smells. Huge open drains, fish sauce and all kinds of cooking meat joins in a not-so-fragrant aroma but something you get use to very quickly. But it is a smell that would stay with you forever.

Around the corner onto a wide boulevard jam-packed with cars, people and stalls selling almost anything.

One of the reasons I wanted to visit Thailand was to eat off the streets so to speak but this proved to be difficult as the most stalls had all kinds of meat and fish. With lots of smoke ducks (heads and feet still on) hanging in glass cabinets on display.

At the end I had to buy, with the assistance of a young Muslim girl behind the till at the local 7-11 to get some pre-packed food, spicy chicken with black rice. It was a small portion but it turned out to be more than enough, what with 24 hours of Airplane food in my system I was feeling mushy inside.

Then back to the hotel where the ladies had some brought-from-home pies and tea.

The experience of the night reminded me of the song "One Night in Bangkok" by Murray Head (1984) from the musical *Chess*.

*'One night in Bangkok makes a hard man humble
Not much between despair and ecstasy
One night in Bangkok and the tough guys tumble
Can't be too careful with your company
I can feel the devil walking next to me.'*

It does make you humble but I did not feel the devil walking next to me.



Street Vendor - Chatuchuk Market

Saturday 23 April 2011.

We were up fairly early for buffet Breakfast in the Tom Yum Restaurant.

The heat of the day already hits you as you leave your room into the un-air-conditioning corridor. By the time you get to the lift your clothes and underwear is soaked through.

Breakfast was fairly good with both western and eastern tastes are catered for. I piled up with eggs, beans, salad and toast with juice and coffee and fruit later. You have to build up your reserve of energy and this Bod of mine burns plenty of fuel and needs to be kept in trim.

By 1000 we were on the road. I was a traveler as compared to my wife and her sister who were tourists. I wanted to see the wonders of Bangkok, they wanted to shop. I wanted to explore and experience, they wanted to shop.

So to cater for both tastes our first port of call was the Chatuchak Weekend Market, one of the biggest open air markets in the world with 47000 stalls.

We found a fairly cheap taxi to take but part of the deal was that he took us to the Gem Gallery first. We found out later they get a chit for 5 litres for every car load of tourist they bring. We did not mind but we did not come to buy jewelry so we were quick through the huge hall. We did buy a lot of souvenirs there though at fairly excellent prices. The taxi driver was one strange fellow; other drivers were making crazy signs and pointing to our driver. He was tweezing his moustache all the while he was driving. Most of the taxi drivers, being devout Buddhists have garlands of flowers hanging from the rear view mirror, this fellow had two. He probably needed it.



Taxi Garlands

Then more traffic. In a city of 8million people there is always traffic. The traffic lights have a countdown until it is going to change again. Turning right and crossing the lane of oncoming traffic is also controlled. You must turn left then do a U-turn then turn left into the road you want. This is to prevent blockages and ease of traffic. All the driver's is courteous and blowing of hooters is rare. In this Buddhist country tolerances is practiced and admired.

Chatuchak Weekend Market is one huge market. No sane person is able to see the whole market in one day. Outside it is hot and in the sun. Inside it is hot but you are in the shade.

We lasted barely 2.5 hours when the ladies confessed exhaustion and were seeking shade, replenishment and air-conditioning. Air-conditioning is one of the most essential commodities here in the tropics and I can't think how people can survive without it.

There is a lot of stuff to see. There was a feature on Al Jazeera on Sunday 8 May highlighting the illegal animal trade in Thailand and at Chatuchuk Market, we did not even see this section. But on we delved into the market, very soon you tend to ignore all the repetitions and only look at new and interesting things. I found a small stall selling Chinese pictures and a whole section selling books.

Thailand has a very high literacy rate and there are a lot of books and magazines written in Thai. They even have their own language copy of National Geographic. Imagine a National Geographic in Afrikaans. Or Xhosa.

We bought some stuff with the idea of shopping later in our trip.

Then after some haggling we took a taxi back to Pratunam where we quickly found a halaal Indian restaurant, Kohinoor. I objected somewhat because I did not travel all this way to eat food I can it at Cavendish for nicer and cheaper. I relented and ended up with Tandoori chicken and Naan. It was nice though.

Then it was back to the hotel for a nap and recuperation.

Only later, after dark did we venture out for some retail therapy for the ladies.

But Bangkok proved to be one place you cannot out shopping. There are just too many shops and markets.

Had a Schwarma up the road from an Arab restaurant. Watch the lady-boys trying to seduce men to come have a 'Massa'. Now I could feel the devil walking next to me.

**I dislike feeling at home
when I am abroad.**

George Bernard Shaw

Top 12 Interesting Facts About Bangkok

1. Bangkok is better known as Krung Thep by the Thai, but even that is a shortened name. The full name in Thai is Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Yuthaya Mahadilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Phiman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit. But who has time for that little fun fact? Bangkok it is.

2. Due to heavy (literally) development, Bangkok is sinking at a rate of 2-5 cm per year. This combined with rising sea levels may make the city a bit more Venice-like in the not-so-distant future.

3. Bangkok nicknames include Venice of the East and City of Angels.

4. Travel + Leisure Magazine has rated Bangkok the Number One city in the world in both 2008 and 2010. (In 2010, Thailand's second city [Chiang Mai](#) took #2 in that ranking!)

5. Bangkok's [Chatuchak Weekend Market](#) (J.J. Market) is one of the largest markets in the world covering an area of 27 acres.

6. The word *soi* means side street and most major roads will have numbered sois along its length. You will also notice an abundance of stray dogs which many refer to as "soi dogs."

7. One interesting fact is that many Thai believe that leaving bottles of water along the front of a building will discourage soi dogs from urinating there. You can see shopfronts at the end of the day with a row of plastic water bottles on the sidewalk.

8. The popular [Erawan Shrine](#) downtown was built to appease angered spirits that were causing delays and accidents during the construction of what is now the [Grand Hyatt Erawan Hotel](#).

9. Every April Bangkok hosts the world's largest street water fight during the Thai New Year holiday known as the Songkran Festival.

10. Here's a random fact: the Guinness Book of World Records lists the stage at Bangkok's [Siam Niramit](#) as the highest in the world.

11. Thailand was known as the Kingdom of Siam until the kingdom took its present name on June 23, 1939.

12. The 5.5-ton [Golden Buddha at Wat Traimit](#) in Bangkok is the not only the largest solid gold Buddha in the world, but also the most valuable (moneywise) religious object.

© NileGuide



Motorbike Taxi Drivers engrossed in their game

Sunday 24 April 2011

I was up early again to take a walk and see the locale then went to have breakfast.

I had eggs, beans, salad and toast with juice and coffee and fruit again. The ladies we looking for Ku'sisters. I tried all the other stuff too which proved strange to me even, I who will put anything in his mouth. Today it was cooked Kale. An acquired taste.

We were going on an organized tour and we were picked up taxi by Thongrak Saengprasert (I took a photo of his ID card) and taken to the Chao Praya River. Here we boarded a board for a tour of the river and canals. We were actually 'chartering' this boat for just my wife and I which worked out to 1500 Baht. Only when we were on the river did we find out that the 'Water Taxis' is actually much cheaper and much, much faster, the thing has V8 engines. But our tour at it's slow pace was an excellent photo opportunity. On the 'Water Taxi' I would probably just have photos of the water spray.



Wat Arun – Temple of the Dawn

To view the riverbanks from a slow moving, very expensive boat was awesome. We saw 21st Century hotels and ancient shrines and temples and mosques. Up the canal an old lady stepped out on to her balcony of her 'shack' to see to the washing. She had on *the* cleanest and whitest hijab I had ever seen. We called out a greeting and with a big smile she waved back. Damn, I did not get a photo. We found out that we may not speak the same language but all Muslims respond to 'Peace be upon You' in Arabic. Beautiful.

We were off loaded at the pier (you have to pay to get off there) of the 'Temple of the Dawn' or Wat Arun named after Aruna, the Indian God of Dawn and is considered to be the most well known of Thailand's many landmarks. I had a ball of time with my camera, the view from the top brought tears to my eyes. I really enjoyed it.

Then we went on to visit various Temples all of them stunning. We visited the Golden Palace too but with the ladies giving up on the tour

because of the heat I did not do the tour as it was going to take another two hours to see the almost 40 buildings. I did get to take some excellent photos though.

All the time we were going from temple to temple we were having a sight-seeing tour of Bangkok too. We saw China Town and the central station and various places of interest. There is really a lot to see.

BY 1500 we were back at the hotel after a quick meal at the Indura Centre, a mostly Indian Shopping Mall.

In our search for food we were directed to MBK Centre and later after a snooze and a huge downpour we were back on the road in search of food. In our quest to use all modes of transport we obligingly took a tuk-tuk which was an experience by itself.

MBK Centre, also known as **Mahboonkrong** (Thai: มหานครทอง), eight stories high, 2 000 stores and services (compared to Canal Walk 400 stores) and two food courts and is visited by 100,000 people per day. This place looks like



Monks making an exit

Waterfront on New Years Eve *everyday*.
I said this before didn't I?

The shops may not be cheap but if you are on a look out for a certain item you are bound to find it here. I came to Thailand to look and buy three items and I found two of them within a few minutes at bargain prices too.

Supper was extravagant item too. We went to Food court where you get a card and you buy whatever you want to then pay for it at the end. We had some excellent Shrimp Rice and Chicken Satay. I ordered the Shrimp Rice but did not even get a bite as the women were all into it.

Shopping can be an exhausting affair and after seeing only part of this huge mall we were on our way home.

I ended up going to the local 7-11 every night for 'Recharge' and Pepsi. Late at night there are another group of stall holders making business selling souvenirs, cut fruit and all kinds of food. But I was waiting to be enticed, lured and mislaid but alas, I was only ignored. My ego was humbled and the devil was not walking next to me.



Baiyoke Tower (Viewing Deck on thr 84th floor)

Monday 25 April 2011

I was up early again to take a walk and see the locale then went to have breakfast.

Breakfast was the same; eggs, baked beans, toast, fruit coffee and juice.

We had plans to visit the River Market, a market that can only be accessed by boat and see some more of the city.

We were way led once again by a Taxi driver who took us to a cheaper 'Gem shop' and to an Indian Taylor shop. We



Three layers of traffic ~ SkyTrain, Skywalk with entrance to MBK Centre and road.

got to look and buy; he got his ten litres of petrol. He took us to Centre World and promised to wait for us (which I knew he wouldn't). Centre World is eight stories high with 600 shops and services and is the third largest Shopping Centre in the world and around the corner from MBK with another two shopping malls in between. Yes, the Thais are big on shopping.

Whereas the women had Indian food for a light lunch I opted for some very good sushi. (I love sushi, and in this modern world there are still some people who frown upon sushi as strange food. I remember when pizza was strange food. Move on people, get with the program!).

After that we took a walk in the Sky Walk, this is a pedestrian footway above the highway and below the BTS Skytrain. This place was crowded and it links all the Big Shopping Malls with the Skytrain. We did not get to ride the Skytrain as all the signage

is in Thai and did not want to get lost. 'Bang' we were.

More shopping. You will be amazed how quickly females get to *need* something. I was not big on shopping but it was fun just to window shop and people watch in air-conditioned comfort. Shopping too for the ladies was essential only as we were always going to shopping later.

I had supper on the Fifth Floor again and the ladies opted for Burgers. I had Tom Yum Soup with Jasmine ricer. Hmmm! I get hungry just thinking about it. The size of the prawn in the soup was the length of... of... my hand!! It was delicious too.

Then it was the long haul back. We did not want to take a tuk-tuk or a taxi so we walked back to the hotel enjoying our last evening in Bangkok, soaking up the sights, smells and atmosphere.



Suburban Bangkok

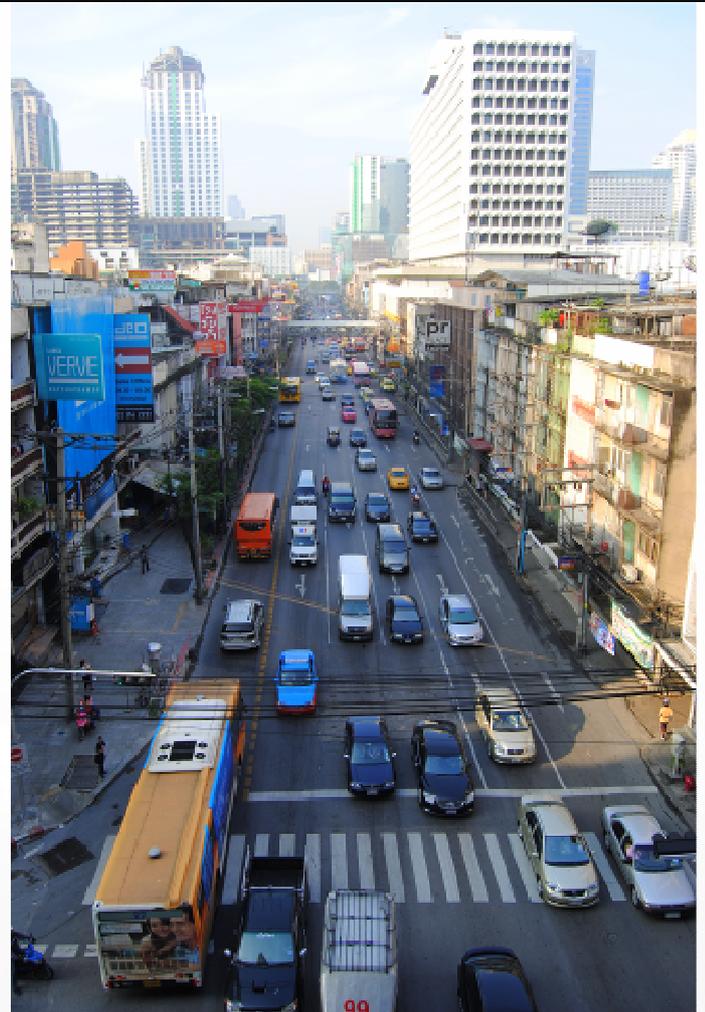
All the places were really crowded, like Waterfront on New Year's Eve (and it is like that every night).

We had quite a long walk back and had some rain as well. But all in all it was an excellent experience with the exception of my wife losing some precious sentimental earrings.

So that was Bangkok for us, a pulsating metropolis as modern, if not more modern, as anything in the west. It is a city you cannot see in just three days, there is must too much to see. This is one city and we can definitely say that we would live to do a return visit to.

After three days in country and eating local cuisine for 3 meals a day your fart, burp and hiccup was taking on a distinctly Thai smell. It was going to stay the same until long after we would be at home.

So with our bags packed and a seven o'clock wake up we piled off to bed, exhausted, dreaming of beautiful people and all kinds of shops. Dreaming of humble people and walking besides the devil.



Thanon Ratchasrarp road



Hotel Parking with Security

Tuesday 26 April 2011

I was up early again to take a walk and see the locale then went to have breakfast.

After a same old same old breakfast we were met by Sunny and her crew who were to take us to the Airport.

This lady was really helpful and was on hand to assist us once we were on the Airport. She prided herself on being an independent and forward thinker and was very politically aware. Only last year the Red Jackets started demonstration against the monarchy and signs of the support for the king, like in the Arab states, is definitely waning. Good for you, Sunny.

We ended up overweight on Air Asia as they only allowed 15kg luggage as opposed to 20kg on the International flights. We had to pay more than R1000 overweight for 12kg which ended up costing us more than the actual air ticket. Live and Learn, always be aware of the weight of your luggage

especially on internal flights. Don't assume you are gonna get away with it.

We had some time to explore the huge Suvarnabhumi Airport but we quickly tired and went in to wait for our flight.

Bangkok really makes a hard man humble.

We had a great time in Bangkok and would like to return there some day. It had something for everyone and you could really shop till you drop all in air-conditioned comfort of the multitude of malls. And fairly cheap too.

We were now on the verge of the second leg of our great South East Asian Adventure.

**A good traveler has no fixed plans,
and is not intent on arriving.**

Lao Tzu



Marble Temple (I think)