

FRIDAY WRAP

#2.18.1

'A Glimpse of Humour'

20 May 2011



Koh Pannyi 'Gypsy Island' Pier, Phan Nga Bay

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 III.

Phuked in Phuket.

Tuesday 26 April 2011

We were met by Sert and his crew in a souped up Hyundai van, something you do not see in South Africa.

It was an hour's drive to our hotel and en route Sert was giving us an education in all things Phuket. He was

to be our best Tour Guide on the whole trip.

We were on our way to the Andaman Beach Resort Hotel on Patong Beach.

The journey there was absolutely delightful.

We had to cross a high 'mountain pass' to get to our hotel and soon we were wheeling down into Patong.

Patong is a busy city (upgraded from a town in 2004) and consists of three main roads running parallel to the beach and numerous side roads all filled with restaurants, bars, massage parlors and all kinds of small shops. And very busy. A 24 hour, 365 day holiday destination.

After prayers and a refresher we headed down to the beach to put our feet into the Andaman Sea. The beach is miles of



Patong Beach, Phuket

white sand and lukewarm sea. A paradise, something you see only in a dream. The Paragliders were really impressive.

We walked around until we found a suitable 'Halaal' Restaurant. This was an Arab restaurant selling all kinds of seafood. I opted for the crab and the ladies- Crayfish and Rice with shrimps. The food was really good. All the fish and crustaceans are sold by the gram and though it is much cheaper than lamb, beef or chicken it is still pricey. Anybody who says it is cheap has not compared it to a platter for one @ R89 from Ocean Basket. But on a holiday budget you are suppose to delve into the local cuisine and spoil yourself. I try not to eat what I can eat at home.

With the setting of the sun you must not assume it is going to get any cooler or, god forbid, colder. The high temperature and humidity is almost the same 24 hours a day. You can just stand still outside for five minutes and your clothes will be sweated right through.

Looking fresh and cool is nearly impossible.

A walk along in Patong was quite revealing, with us being recognized twice as being South African. Some young boys took one look at us and said, 'Baie Mooi, kom binne'. Later at a clothing shop I told the assistant I saw a rat the size of cat running under his table and he asked, 'Johannesburg or Cape Town?', he holidayed in Cape Town for a month recently.

Here in Phuket we were approached for 'Massa' by the ladies of the numerous Massage Parlours along the way. Most of these Massage Parlours are above board as you could see right into the place through the large windows, the places with the curtains you must watch out for.

The night ended again with me having to go for late night walkies to buy 'recharge' again. Not that I mind, the roads were as full as it was after sunset but with the ladies of the night making there ample appearances.



Thanon Ratuthit Songgroipi, Patong - The Main Road

Wednesday 27 April 2011

No early morning walk for me this day, breakfast was a much more expansive affair with many more choices and you get to sit on the huge patio overlooking the garden down to the pool and beach. Lovely.

By the time we got back to the room we were soaked through and worn down already. We opted for a relaxing morning by the pool or just snoozing in the shade. We brown people don't do 'the lying in the sun in Speedo's getting a tan' very well. We burn browner even in the shade. So we just caught some Z's in the shade exhausted by a full breakfast, a short walk and the heat - phuked in Phuket.

There were plenty of Russians and Easter Europeans catching some rays and getting some colour (red) to their skin. And they don't care what their size, they will wear a two piece bathing costume. It is not something you want neither to take a photo of nor even to save a mental picture of.

Later we took the 'bus', to use the

word very loosely, to Phuket Town. The 'bus' consisted of a truck with the back converted into a cab, no windows, with two benches along the side and one in the middle. This was an experience too. You get on and only pay the driver when you get off or when the bus stops short of the terminus.

A Thai lady sitting next to me made conversation and it turns out she worked in Mossel Bay for two years and frequently visited Cape Town. It sure is a small world. There were two Indonesian girls in the bus too. They looked Thai but did not speak the language.

The trip to Phuket Town was an experience and the town itself was not interesting at all and we ended taking the bus to Central Festival Phuket Shopping Mall just outside the town. We were in need of some air-conditioning and food. On this short bus ride I met Hassan, a young man with a taub and fez looking like any Hafeez boy all over the world on his way home from Moslem School. The smile on his face when we



Beverage seller Phuket Town

exchanged greetings and hand shakes brightened up my day.

Arriving at Central Festival Phuket Shopping Mall we were hungry. Strange, even when having a full breakfast we still tended to get hungry very quickly. At Central Festival with 25 different food outlets and high density of Muslims on the island this shopping mall just had one Halaal restaurant which had a very doubtful menu. We ended up buying some baguettes, cheese and salads at the huge Food Market and having that for lunch. It was different for a change. What we found interesting was the bigger than life size statues of movie characters like Alien etc. and the long line of motor bikes at the side of the building.

In our search for food we had actually seen the whole Shopping Mall and with evening approaching we made our way home. But we need not have worried, the busses are in service until 22h00.

We caught the bus back to Patong which included some tourists travelling light with heavy backpacks only. We got to Patong on the *Athaan* for *Maghrib* and I could join in Prayer. I was greeted a huge smiling Hassan who I met on the bus previously. This Mosque, like all mosques all over the world, was having a debate and dispute among the congregants as to how the Salaah clock works with each giving their input. It

was funny to me as I did not understand a word but knew exactly what the squabble was about.

That evening we had light supper at an Arab restaurant. I had a sort of 'mix grill' which consisted of various meats on sticks and some tasty spicy grilled chicken gizzards; hearts and/or stomachs. You are in a foreign country, you have to try these things. It was.. tasty, chewy but tasty.

Then we meandered through Patong again, quite safe at this late hour. In the street leading up from the beach there are signs as to which way to evacuate if the Tsunami warning should sound. Scary, it was. But collectively none of the people we spoke to, mentioned the Tsunami, if you asked them about it they are dismissive to the extreme. You just can't get them to talk about it. Collectively the Thais have wiped the Tsunami from vocabulary but may be not their minds. With an economy dependant on tourism they are sure not going to discuss any misfortune.

I had some fun in catching some lightning digitally and met up with VJ, our fellow traveler from South Africa, and caught up with all our travel adventures. He advised us on our still to come destinations and I advised him on his still to come destinations.

With no nocturnal 'recharge' visits for me the bed was really beckoning. The heat, long hours, travelling, humidity was really tiring us all out so we were really phuked.



'Massa' girls Patong



Koh Pannyi 'Gypsy Island' Restaurant, Phan Nga Bay

Thursday 28 April 2011

Today was going to be our day of adventure.

There are a lot of tours offered at all the different Tourism Shops, one fancier than the next, one costlier than the next. We opted for a no-frills, low budget, quick tour from Sims Tours – a tour of Phang Nga Bay and its surround for 800baht (R200) per person.

After breakfast we spent some time on the beach watching the East Europeans having fun and just relaxing.

By 12h45 we were picked up on the coastal road in front on the 7/11 and we were on our way.

After picking up all the paying customers we were on our way, an hour-and a half trip to the mainland.

Our guide gave us a rundown on the areas we passed and on the tour ahead. He explained everything in perfect English, which we did not really understand. We found that often on the trip – people can talk English, Malay English, like Pidgin English, but

because of the accent we did not understand a word.

Our first stop was Monkey Cave Temple, (Wat Tham Suwankuha) an underground temple in a natural limestone cave with thousands of fruit bats hanging from overhead featuring a 200-year-old reclining Buddha.

This temple is rather unique as it is home to hundreds of long-tailed macaques or monkeys. These monkeys are quite friendly, not that I was going to try and pet one.

Then it was a short trip to the Surakil Pier to board our long-tail boat for our trip into the Phang Nga Bay. We were given life jackets which made us quite wary but we needn't have worried, this trip was as safe as any trip in a taxi, and that is not saying much.

The ride out into the bay was heart-in-the-throat trip, the views were fantastic. The tiny islands, the mangrove swamps, the distant mountains, the blue-green water, the late afternoon sun, not even a photo could capture all of this beauty. The million

year old limestone islands reminded me of the floating islands in *Avatar*, maybe this is where James Cameron got his inspirations from. The beauty and the incongruousness of the island just removes any doubt that there is a 'Master Planner'. The view just took the wind out of my sails of all of us tourists. Awesome!

Our first stop was **Koh Pannyi**, a Muslim 'sea gypsy' fishing village, built on stilts next to an island almost three-hundred years ago when a group of Indonesians were looking for a new place to live and fish. No alcohol is allowed on this island and minimal clothing is frowned upon. There is a collection of restaurants and souvenir shops serving the throngs of tourists but most of all they are a fishing community. We made a beeline for the Mosque and it was a thrill to meet and chat (sort of) to the locals at the Mosque. The people are quite friendly and welcomed us with open arms.

These people are so far removed from us here at the southern most point of Africa but our roots are the same. So, on this island you get to see very familiar faces. Only there do you realise that a lot of 'Malays' have slanted eyes, brown skin and black straight hair. These people too found us familiar but we could not explain our connection to them so easily.

This is poor community, to our western conception, but they are living simply, something that our consumer-driven



Communal TV - Koh Pannyi

minds cannot comprehend. They need little and food is in abundance out in the bay. They don't have fancy houses, furniture or clothing but they are a very tight-knit community where a TV is placed so that all the children can come and watch.

My wife was nearly taken hostage by a local lady, Auntie Wylie, who wanted my wife to buy something at her stall, my wife obliged and the bracelet she bought was the most treasured possession she bought on the entire trip. While my wife was negotiating I took a look into the lady's humble home. Her daughter was laying on a thin mattress with her grand daughter and her cat (I assume) with



Auntie Wylie - Koh Pannyi

a fan cooling them all down. Cute and simple. I told my wife, we took three airplanes, a bus and a boat to buy that bracelet. And travelled more than 13 000km.

At the restaurant my wife opted not to have a late lunch but I had some Ginger and Pepper Chicken which was excellent. I was too late to order seafood.

We were soon back on the boat for our next port of call further out in Phang Nga Bay.

We passed a restaurant boat on the way which was all but empty at this late



James Bond Island - Phang Nga Bay

hour. Then we got to sail through a cave right through the middle of the island. Awesome. We met some young boys with their kayak in the middle of the cave. I guess these people live on the water so they have little fear of it. We, landlubbers, are real scared of it.

Then in the late afternoon sun we approached the highlight of the tour and our trip - James Bond Island, Ko Tapu or Nail Island, which featured in the 1974 Bond film "The Man with the Golden Gun". The film starred Roger Moore and Christopher Lee (Scaramanga). But it was the strange and beautiful island that helped make the movie a favourite and turn Phan Nga Bay into a major tourist attraction.

At this late hour all the stalls were closed except one and they only people on this island was the National Park Guards and the guy selling cool drinks.

We got to spend 35 minutes on the island and I could take photos to my heart's content. Beautiful. I took photos of all angles and things just got prettier as the sun set and poked

out from under the clouds. A huge passenger jet also flew very low directly over the island on it's way to Phuket Airport. It all just added to the bigger picture and the awesomeness of the moment. At that moment I felt completely at ease with the world. I guess all my worries and concerns could not follow me this far.

Very soon it was time to head back. Very reluctantly for some I might add.

The journey back was as mesmerizing too with the sun fast sinking into the west. All the tourist boats were finish for the night and there were only some local boats still sailing. We saw some locals practicing for a rowing race in one of their long boats.

Then it was the long trip back to Patong.

We had a sort of late supper at another Arab Restaurant and a last walk around Patong as we were on our way yet again to our third stop of our South East Asian Tour.

Patong is an excellent beach resort and the island of Phuket is an excellent



James Bond Island - Phang Nga Bay

holiday destination. And cheap as well. You do not need all the luxuries, air-conditioning, clean beds and warm showers are enough. There isn't much shopping to be done, like in Bangkok, but there are some shops. And remember this is an island surrounded by a lot of more interesting islands so travelling by boat is a must essential, so you need to overcome your fear of water if you want to fully enjoy this paradise.

Friday 29 April 2011

We were up early, booked out and loaded into our transport by 0700 and we received our 'Breakfast boxes' for our trip.

We had lightened our bags considerably by loading up our haversacks so we were not hassled at all by Air Asia.

We had made sure we spent all our Rinkets before we left Thailand so we did not even have money to buy us a cup of tea. And on Air Asia, being a budget airline, you had to buy beverages but being without money we could not buy anything.

But it was a short flight and very soon

we were descending to the airport.

We were losing one more hour but we were not losing an iota of heat and humidity.

Our third stop was going to be as exciting and we were looking forward to the experience.

Touchdown. We have landed.



Fisherman at Sunset - Phang Nga Bay