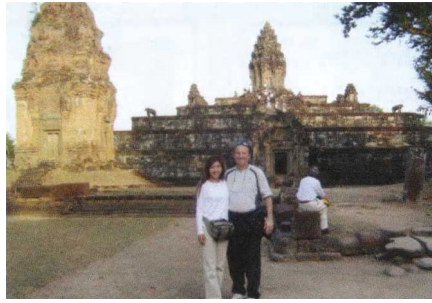


The Ups and Downs of a Leisure Vacation to Asia

By Don Eovino



Hiroko and Don Eovino at the Angkor Watt Temple in Cambodia on December 30.



The Eovinos ride elephants in Ko Chang on December 26, the day of the tsunami.

Hiroko and I returned from a trip to Asia, safe maybe but not sound. I joined the State of Hawaii with two of my helpers to put on a real estate seminar at the Grand Hyatt in Taiwan, December 12-15. I brought my contractor friend, John with me, and new assistant Jimmy.

Then John and I went on to Hainan, China to look at some real estate projects in the development stages there. That night we went into the local village and ate a dinner of fresh chicken, and then stayed in a friends' tree house.

The next morning we promptly acquired Salmonella, and ended up in a decrepit military hospital in a rat hole section of the island where we sucked up IV's for eight hours until 2 am. When we escaped from the hospital for fear we would indeed come down with some fatal disease.

I could totally identify with all who have had food poisoning in third world countries. I was convinced early on that I had the chicken flu, and was relatively elated when my buddy got sick, as I figured the odds were food poisoning, rather than the chicken flu, when I saw him tumbling out of the tree house also. We later figured out that it was from the eggs that morning, not the chicken the night before.

We recovered there five days in a five star hotel on the Red China Sea as the guest of a Chinese hotel developer, and then flew on to Bangkok via Hong Kong on the fifth day.

In order to fly on that day, we had to catch a ride to the other side of the island which was a four hour taxi ride. David Greenberg, the tree house developer, helped us out by arranging a driver at 4 a.m. which left us relieved about a ride until we found out that the driver had come from that side of the island himself at midnight and drove four hours to pick us up.

Instead of sleeping the four hour ride, John and I were on pins and needles the whole time making sure the driver didn't fall asleep at the wheel

as a dense fog had covered the road the whole way, and the driver kept slapping himself in the face in order to stay awake.

We were a nervous wreck when we arrived at the airport only to have the plane delayed by three hours which caused us to miss our connecting flight out of Hong Kong. That cost us an extra \$700 to get into Bangkok the next day as Hiroko was joining me and I didn't want her stranded at the airport.

Hawaii friends had introduced us to the top management of the Dusit Tani chain and I arranged VIP service at the hotel for Hiroko's arrival. You would have thought the king's wife had arrived. A consortium of eight hotel staff greeted our limousine and presented Hiroko with local lei's, flowers, fruit baskets, wine, and a luxurious suite.

She didn't have a clue what we had just gone through until I told her at dinner that evening. After two days of touring Bangkok, Hiroko, John and I went to an island off the coast of Thailand named Ko Chang on December 25.

Fortunately this was a correct choice of an island as the second day we were there, the tsunami hit. We were unaffected as we were inside on the Bay of Thailand versus the outer coast of the Bay of Bengal.

What a tragedy! It didn't really sink in until we got back to Bangkok and saw the extent of the tsunami's damage. We were busy in Ko Chang the whole time with no media, TV, or phones, and had only heard bits and pieces until we returned.

On Ko Chang, Hiroko, my friend and I rode elephants for two hours into the jungle up a stream on the next day, (Christmas Day in Hawaii). What a way to spend Christmas. The next day with friends, we took a 30-foot speed boat around the island to look at real estate.

We got stuck in a secluded bay when the captain forgot to check the tide and the boat was stuck on the

sandy bottom. We futilely tried to race the outgoing tide and tugged and rocked the boat for an hour.

We abandoned the boat and commandeered a long tail from the local fishermen who brought us back to where the road ended (or began, whatever your perspective) on the other side of the island. We pirated their pick-up truck to drive the three hours in the dark and cold back to our hotel.

It was a long, cold, backbreaking, foggy, nervous, and bleary-eyed drive after a grueling day, bearable thankfully for the fishermen who introduced me to a six pack of local beer to smooth out the bumps. From there we flew back to the Dusit Tani in Bangkok and on to Angkor Watt, Cambodia for three days.

We missed Kathy Lopers half marathon tour, but saw all the mile markers in the road, and on the trees, and the banner was still there announcing the event.

Of all the places we have seen, including Machu Picchu, Rapa Nui, Xian and the Great Wall of China, nothing can compare to the intricate design and detail on those 700+ mostly sandstone temples built over 1,000 years ago in Cambodia. It is an architect's dream.

We also took a long tail boat up the river, like in the movies Apocalypse Now and Deer Hunter. Hiroko's eyes were bugging out observing how the river people lived. Back on shore we celebrated the rest of the day on New Year's Eve in the lobby of Raffles Hotel in Angkor Watt, for high tea, which was exactly Hiroko's "Cup of Tea", and made up for all the third world experiences elsewhere.

We headed back to Bangkok for VIP treatment again before heading home. What a way to start the New Year. We have many stories to put into our journals.

-May 2005