



Thailand: Beyond the Beaches and Bars

“Thailand wasn't somewhere I particularly wanted to go,” she said. “I thought it was all beaches and bars, but there is a lot more to it than that. We went to places that tourists don't normally see and we just marvelled at the handicrafts that come out of these primitive conditions.”¹

Sadly, it's true. For many, the popular image of Thailand as just a bars and beaches tourist destination is enough to look elsewhere for a real and different cultural experience in the Orient. How very wrong they are!

To experience the real Thailand, far removed from the hurly burly of mainstream tourists, requires knowledge and guidance that is scarcely featured in holiday catalogues or offered by regular travel agents. Yet, there is so much to see, to learn, to respect, even, with the opportunity to make friends with local people with genuine smiles and to have lots of fun getting to know a fascinating culture so different from our own. It would take a lifetime of tours and more to know it all, the ethnic diversity and contrasting ways of life. Never colonised, Thailand (or Siam as it used to be known) is a proud country which has adopted Western ways by its own choosing but where deep-rooted Asian values endure beneath the glossy veneer of modernity.

Craft production is the focal point of our tours. Craft communicates a community's ethnicity and culture without the need for language and helps us build a relationship based on respect for the complex skills inherited from uncomplicated village life. The true value of home-spun and hand-loomed silks, natural dyes, bamboo baskets, intricate silver jewellery and many more crafts can only be fully appreciated when visiting the village communities themselves. Equally important is the context of everyday life around which the crafts are created and the intrusions of modernity that challenge their future existence.

Phu Phiang Craft & Culture Journeys Through Thailand also offer a view of this country's outstanding natural beauty – both highland and lowland – peppered with Buddhist temples and ancient monuments of bygone kingdoms and, when in the South, even a taste of how a coastline should look before it was spoilt with buzzing bars! Mix this in with an outstanding cuisine and succulent fruits and you have the recipe for a perfect interest-based holiday, where responsibility to local people and the environment are of prime importance. We travel in small groups of like-minded people and soak in the culture of this exotic country.

“Overall, this trip exceeded my aspirations and hopes. I feel to have genuinely ‘met the people’ and seen a large number of craft producers. It has been a wonderful, exciting and unforgettable experience.”²

Stephen Salmon, Tour Organiser

¹ From article in Darlington & Stockton Times 20th July 2007 quoting Veronica Piekosz – Meet the People Tour participant North and Northeast Thailand May/June 2007

² Ian Morris, Barnsley. Meet the People Tour participant South Thailand November 2006