

Not All Who Wander Are Lost

Not having a plan is a plan. This is especially true for anyone who wanders into an unfamiliar place or even a location they may know well. I am like that in many ways. Some of the most interesting days traveling has been when no itinerary is scheduled. Today was to be one of those days.

After spending two days with long time friend Toom and driving to all parts of northern Thailand, I have decided that a day of wandering is my plan. It could mean many things and lead to some unusual adventures, but nothing risky. After all, just how much trouble can an 82-year-old get into?

For some, a \$17-a-night hotel can be adventurous, almost like camping out. The Nordwind in Chiang Mai is one such hotel, but as it is a familiar stopping point, I find it well within my comfort zone. It is here, a few years ago, that I had breakfast with a Vietnamese woman and her son. As we chatted, she asked where I was from, and my response lit up her face. "Maui? I have been there," she said. "I was at a Boy Scout Camp with other Vietnamese scout leaders. Well, you could have blown me over with a feather, for I had attended one such gathering with classmate Stan and had met a group of Vietnamese scouts.

In the photo that I took, was the very woman sitting with me at breakfast.

But today, I held no expectations at breakfast. First, I was to have a shave at my regular barber shop, where, for 80 baht, or approximately \$2.53, I would receive one of the best shaves available in all Southeast Asia. As I sat, I tried to listen to the conversation in the room, and after a few seconds, I realized that the barbers and customers were speaking in a language that I had never heard before. I could not recognize a single word, and so I asked, "What language are you speaking?" "We speak Karen," came the reply. "It is a language common in Burma and parts of Thailand." I find this little puzzle rather interesting. Wanderers are like that.

As I walked along the way, both the morning traffic of motorbikes and cars and undulating sidewalks provided a few minor challenges. Walking in this part of Chiang Mai is like a 3000-meter steeplechase over tree roots, upended and uneven pavement, no sidewalks, and puddles of water. It is by no means a casual walk in the park as speeding traffic whizzes by you within a couple of feet.

<https://share.icloud.com/photos/0c0V1bKqS10T4FUvmsq2NFaNQ>

The views are a smorgasbord of shops selling stacks of cinnamon-brown farm raised eggs, inexpensive massage spas, food stalls of every variety, nail salons one after the other and motorbikes by the dozens. The surroundings seem vaguely familiar. Could this just be where I had a one-time encounter with a sumo-sized Thai masseuse by the name of "Little Chicken," who nearly crushed me with her overpowering strength and massive warm folds of skin? The mere thought of that day left a smile on my face.

I am now in search of a quiet spot to sit and possibly pen a few words. Walking down Chang Klan Road steers me toward a haven away from traffic, noise, and the beginning of heavy rains that have been both a blessing and a curse. At least with the rain, the air in Chiang Mai is the cleanest that I have seen in years, but now I must seek a quiet harbor to anchor my weary “sole.” (Pun intended)

The Shangri-La Hotel stands before me, a familiar place where I have stood before. I was here, not in a dream, but to do a job. The words of friend Fuku came in a flash back, “When you travel with someone, you responsible for them. And so, taking those words of advice to heart, I reconnoitered the bathroom accommodations that would be needed for future travels with Ms. Carolina and Cousin Myrna.

So, you see. Not all who wander are lost, and as the name implies, the hotel is my Shangri-La for the day.

Yes, I think this might just be the spot for me today. Many days are satisfying ones for wanderers, rain or shine.

That’s Earle, brother
Wandering in Chiang Mai