

TRAVEL FEATURE GATHERS STEAM

without indicating, I don't even comment. I wasn't always so accommodating but Merrie will testify that generally, I am an even-tempered, patient person. Over here, I have become a cantankerous, deranged psycho in dire need of a course in anger management.

Our bus trip was a good example. We arrived at the Lampang bus station at 10am and bought a ticket for the 11am bus to Phayao. Bus stations are a good people watch so we sat with our luggage and took it in. At 10.50 our bus arrived. Unfortunately, it wasn't the air conditioned, modern coach we were hoping for but an old 1950s rattle-trap with worn out uncomfortable seats, no suspension and no air-con. We boarded, crammed into our seats and waited. The driver had left the motor running so the diesel exhaust was pouring in through the open back door. After ten minutes, the bus had not moved and I had a sore throat from breathing in the fumes. As the temperature inside the bus rose, the babies and toddlers were starting to get restless.

After another ten minutes, Merrie and I were wondering what the hell the hold up was. It was a three-hour trip

and the bus was supposed to arrive in Phayao at 2pm. After being slowly broiled inside our tin can, I was getting rather tetchy as other buses were pulling in on either side of us, disgorging and loading passengers and leaving while our bus just stood there.

What made the situation ever so more frustrating was that the other passengers, all Thais, were taking it in their stride and just sitting patiently. No-one looked the slightest bit concerned. After enduring this intolerable situation for a full fifty minutes, with my throat red raw and watery eyes burning from the fumes and in a lather of perspiration, I was ready to crack.

I was about to jump out onto the platform, grab anyone who could drive a bus and half-throttle them before dragging him or her by the ears into the driver's seat.

Then suddenly without warning or any rhyme or reason, the driver who had

been sitting there unseen the whole time, started to ease out of the terminal. No-one else even looked interested, let alone, surprised. WTF?

Phayao

We ended up spending a month in Phayao where we rented a modern apartment through AirBnB for \$21 a night. Phayao is surrounded by mountains and located on a freshwater lake. We arrived in Phayao without knowing a soul and left after bonding with several different groups of people. The meetings happen by accident and the advantage of staying put in one place is that it allows time for a friendship to develop.

One couple who enabled us to have our two most interesting experiences in Phayao was Samran and his wife Arunee — both Thais. While riding out in the suburbs one morning, Merrie noticed a sign pointing down an alley to a museum. It was located in the grounds of a temple and it was closed. It was a beautiful temple but nothing special, just a little temple in the 'burbs. There were a few monks and other bods wandering around and we sat in the shade under a tree. Soon Samran appeared speaking broken



GETTING READY TO LEAD THE PARADE WITH OUR PEACOCKS.

English. He arranged to get the key and opened the museum for us. Expecting to see the usual museum displays of Thai culture, we nearly dropped when he opened the doors. It was jam-packed, floor to ceiling full of Thai retro from the 50s and 60s. Movie posters featuring Thai actors and action scenes as well as dozens of display cabinets with tumblers, cigarette packets, matchboxes, lollies, tins of tea and coffee, moneyboxes, Asianised Coke and Fanta bottles, lots of records, household cleaners, medicines, yo yos and the like. All beautifully displayed in multiples — two rooms full of it. It showed that Thai boys had combed-back, Brylcreamed hairdos and that Thai girls had beehives and danced the twist back then, just like in the West. In the following week Samran took us to his rice farm and his home.

But these were not the two experiences.

Samran invited us to come back to the temple in a few days time at 9am for a special celebration that is staged annually. Without knowing what to expect we arrived at the temple at 9 and saw that a major event involving about 250 people was beginning. Except for about a dozen monks, everyone was dressed in white (inexplicably I had chosen to wear a pure white shirt that morning for the first time). Out the front of the temple a troupe of women dressed in traditional costume were performing a gentle dance.

The sequence of events that followed is too involved to describe in detail here. In brief, against our wish to just sit and watch, Merrie and I were roped by Samran into leading a parade while

we each held a peacock with a fantail made of money. The parade we led consisted of about ten of us up front holding our peacocks while behind us the 250 'parishioners' in white danced with their arms in the air accompanied by clashing cymbals and a loud drum band with discordant wind instruments.

After the second circuit around the temple things deteriorated when I was relieved of my peacock and forced to dance with my arms in the air for the next lap to the great amusement of everybody.

Merrie avoided the embarrassment of having to dance by blatantly refusing to let go of her peacock.

After the parade, Samran and Arunee ushered us into the temple full of people including twenty young Thai students sitting together dressed in their school uniforms. One by one, each student was presented with an envelope containing money.

Merrie and I were given the honour of presenting an envelope to a child and then posing for a photo. These were underprivileged children whose parents could not afford the cost of their education and were being sponsored for the upcoming year by the temple. After performing more duties in the official temple we headed across the courtyard to an open-walled temple.

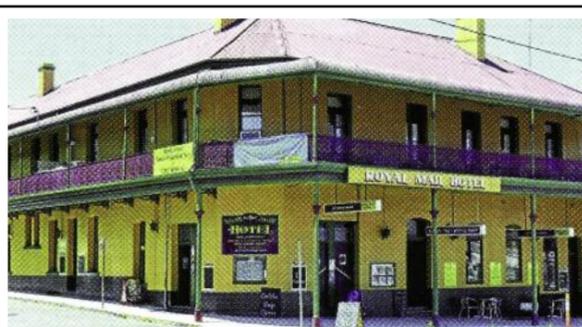
Samran insisted that we sit up the front with all the important people facing ten monks sitting on cushions facing us. Then a whole lot of Buddhist things happened. White strings were fed out around the temple so that we VIPs up the front could hold one. The monks chanted endlessly for what seemed like two hours but was probably only twenty minutes.

Merrie and I were given the duty of kneeling before a monk and presenting him with his new robes for the year. Water was sprayed around by a monk holding a bucket and a brush etc. I speak irreverently but I think I converted to Buddhism that morning — Thai Buddhism anyway.

After a few more duties, we all retired outside to the red plastic tables and chairs set up under the trees for a lunch of many courses. By way of thanks I performed my disappearing handkerchief trick (which I have now perfected) to the amazement and applause of everybody.

The second experience involving Samran followed a couple of weeks later, and again involved us featuring at a special day at a bigger temple with everybody dressed in their finery. This time we were coerced into joining about 50 other players at the front of an Ankalun orchestra. The Ankalun is a handheld musical instrument made of bamboo pipes. When it is shaken violently, it produces a single musical note. The conductor stood out the front on a box and when he made a particular shape with his hand, a player shook their Ankalun — you kept shaking until he made a new shape.

With his hands constantly making



Yellow Rose Brasserie — Open 7 days
Accommodation
Family and Formal Dining Rooms
Home delivery of meals
9 Cold Beers on Tap
Beer Garden & Games Room
145-147 Wallace Street
4842 2488 'Like' us on Facebook
www.royalmailhotelbraidwood.com
COURTESY BUS AVAILABLE

SUMMER ENTERTAINMENT AT THE ROYAL

- George Myers – Christmas Eve**
- Hating Alice – Boxing Day**
- Intensity Band – New Years Eve**
- Jay Podger – January 27**
- 8 Ball Aitkin – February 10**
- D. J. Rod – March 17**

“Coldest beer in town.”

\$12 Schnitties
Night time specials from \$15

