

Every Picture Tells a Story #1

Welcome to “Every Picture Tells a Story”; a weekly post about living in Thailand. Each week we’ll post a picture that illustrates some of the little things those of us fortunate enough to live here hold dear.

Holiday Helpers

Just like in my home country, many important Thai holidays fall late in the calendar year. Starting with the vegetarian festival in October, Loy Kratong in November and of course, the King’s birthday in December.



Living so far away from home, many expatriates have severe bouts with melancholy and depression this time of year. We miss our families and friends. We long for grandma’s home cooking. We wouldn’t mind some weather that featured a daily temperature under 25 degrees.

We are very fortunate to have the Thai people as our hosts. They try their best to understand our holidays and accommodate us by imitating rituals that must seem bizarre, even to Thai people.

Perhaps the most entertaining foreign holiday celebrated with gusto in Thailand is Halloween. This year I attended a Halloween party at my local pub. The bar was expertly decorated with ghosts, witches and jack-o-lanterns.

Costumes fell into three categories: zombies ... vampire zombies ... vampire zombies with light-up horns. The light-up horns seem to be popular on all foreign holidays, including Christmas. When I asked the bartender what she was dressed as she replied, “I don’t know ... but scary”.

In recent years I’ve made a serious attempt to understand and participate in Thai holidays. My favorite is Loy Kratong that falls on the full moon in November. Last year I was lucky enough to celebrate the New Year/Thanksgiving-type celebration in Chiang Mai.

Thousands of Thais and foreigners gathered at the banks of the Ping River to launch the small hand-made boats decorated with flowers and candles. Those of us more landlocked in the old city used the alternate kratong called a “com-fi”; a big paper lantern that when lit lifts with hot air and carries light to the heavens. The site of thousands of com-fis racing towards the full moon is a spiritual experience.

In front of my hotel, a young French family was trying desperately to get their com-fi off the ground. No matter how hard they tried, it just wouldn't stay lit or rise fast enough. Fortunately for them, some of Chiang Mai's ever-so-polite policemen came to the rescue and gave them some expert instruction, creating a holiday memory I'm sure the family will never forget.

As I snapped the picture I thought to myself, "Thailand at its best".

Orlando Barton