

## ***Day 31 –Anticlimax at Phi Phi [Monday 21-Feb-2011]***

We got up early this morning to be ready for our boat trip to Phi Phi island and a few other stops. We first headed down to the hostel office/restaurant and ordered coffee. I then ran down to the beach side of Bangla St to buy Chinese breakfast dumplings. I was drenched in sweat when I came back. It is really hot and humid outside and that opens up the pores.

Around 7:45AM a small limo bus picked us up for the trip to the boat. We picked up a few more people along the way. The minibus was totally full by the time we headed for the port. Along the way we went through at least one round-about where poles and signs (a) prevented the driver from doing more than a 90 degree turn in the round about and (b) instructed the driver to make a U-turn to come back through it again. Almost counter intuitive when you're dealing with roundabouts that are supposed to enhance flow by design! In our way out there I realized that the weather looked overcast. I was not sure if this was a temporary morning thing or a sign about what was to come.

We eventually arrived at port. I was not quite sure what to expect. The place was full of power boats. I talked with one of the locals. He confirmed that there were no less than 84 large power boats in the bay. Tourists were routed to their respective power boat with stickers on their chests.



**We're being loaded onto one of many power boats in port. We had about 35 on our boat.**

Our first stop was Maya Bay on Krabi. The brochure showed this as a desolate beach. Not so when we got there. It was power boat mayhem. And the beach was packed with people, worse than a side walk in New York City in rush hour.

After that we made a brief tour around the island and looked at a large cave, from the boat, along with 8-10 other boats. The special thing about this cave was that birds of a particular species created nests in the ceiling of the cave that, once abandoned by the birds, were harvested from the cave ceiling for use as ingredient into Chinese Bird Nest Soup. Long bamboo sticks were used by the workers to reach the nests. Meh.



**Power boat invasion on Maya Beach: the word that comes to mind is overexploitation.**

There was not much space left for people to swim in after all the boats had moored. It was really pathetic.



**Oh shit: The tsunami evacuation route is in the same direction as the toilets**

After that we headed to what was referred to as Monkey Beach. As it turns out, along with our overcast we also had high tide. So there was no beach, only vertical cliffs. The boat approached

the cliffs, along with many other power boats. Small monkeys climbed down on vines along the cliffs towards the boat. The crew member threw banana slices at them, but missed 9 out of 10 times. I think the monkeys were overfed by all the passing boats so they did not make much effort to grab onto things. There was plenty of trash in the water. It is a shame that the Thais have not yet discovered the virtues of managing nature.

We then headed along the shore of the island and stopped to allow us to snorkel a bit. It did not look very inviting as far as I was concerned. The area was flooded with power boats and people in the water. Lilli went in but confirmed that the water was murky due to the high tide. The lack of sunlight did not make much difference either. There were boats everywhere, including dive boats. And, in this mix, we also had Thai long boats that just drove in. In mean, as a diver, you better be sure you do not stick your head up in the wrong place or you'd be history.



**Water taxis: Thai long boats are lined up along the shores of Phi Phi island**



**The Thai long boats use recycled car engines with direct drive and no reverse**



**The long boats have different decorations in the front**

After this we headed over to Phi Phi itself, where we stopped to eat lunch at restaurant with a pre set menu. It was Ok, but not great. Actually, the really interesting part was that we had such a diversity of people at our table. We were from the US/Sweden, two Dutch boys, one girl from South Africa who taught English in Seoul, a Canadian couple and two boys from Palestine. We also spent time talking with two boys from Singapore.



**Thai lunch dishes were placed on a rotating disc. That made it easy to reach.**

We then got a bit of time to walk around in “town”, which consisted of narrow alleys with stores, hotels, dive shops and restaurants. It was not that impressive.



**We hung around a “private” island for 1 ½ hour before we headed home to Patong**

The boat then headed out towards a “private” island with us. There were only 10 other power boats there on the microscopic island. We had some time to relax and read there. If they could

just have taken us here for the day it would have been fine, but the tight schedule meant that we ended up hopping from place to place, each rather mediocre, in my humble opinion.

The last leg was to get us back to shore. It took about 30 minutes. Our van waited and we were taken back to the hostel. When we got back, it had started to rain! What a “perfect” way to end this day. We had a few drinks at the hostel before we went up and showered.

If I had to do the Phi Phi island hopping trip again, I would not pick a trip that tried to cram everything into an 8 hour day. I’d go to Phi Phi and stay for two nights, for example. Or I’d just take the regular ferry over to Phi Phi for the day.

We ate dinner at a Thai restaurant (Orchid) in Patong. The price was quite reasonable and the food was good (less than \$18 for the two of us including tip). After that we walked around to see if we could not buy me and/or Karl a T-shirt. Lilli found one for Karl, but I did not find anything that I (a) liked and (b) would be appropriate to wear at home. There is definitely no shortage of obscene T-shirts around here.



**Cultural adaption: Ronald McDonald puts his hands together like a real Thai**

We enjoyed some ice cream in the warm and muggy evening weather (low 80s) just to squeeze the final moments of warmth out of this part of the trip. Tomorrow we’ll be starting our journey to much colder climate, for the next leg of our trip.

A special thanks to Peter and Anna back home for all their good tips about Phuket.