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Going out with a Bangkok

No matter what cliché you want to use, the end of anything is typically embroiled in mixed emotions and returning home to the frozen wasteland we call home, after two months of sweating it out in SE Asia, was no exception. Logistically speaking, the end of a trip requires focus and attention to detail while necessitating that you honour your final desires. Using up the last of your local currency while ensuring your ability to get to the airport is one such balancing act. Emotionally, you want to enjoy every moment right up to the point where you can't wait to be home.



Our last supper created much discussion. We were torn between an extravagant yet poorly reviewed dinner cruise, a credit-card assisted fancy restaurant, and our last chance for a simple cash-only sample of the roadside Pad Thai, green curry and Tom Young Goon spicy soup we have come to consider the staples of human existence. Looking for a compromise, I scoured trip-adviser and sought out the perfect solution that would make all of our dreams come true while using up our last 870 baht (\$40.00) We left the cool sanctity of our air-conditioned hotel room at 5:45 and exposed ourselves to the waning hours of humid heat. Two months of SE Asia simultaneously desensitizes and overloads you to the point where you just wish it would end, but not quite yet. The heat, smells, filth, wonders, rats, cats, beauty and ridiculously wonderful

**The Grand
Palace**

people draw you in and push you away in varying doses of extreme but for one last night we needed a miracle that would send us home satiated. The trip-advisor solution didn't have an English name but it was close by, right on the river and rated 4.6 out of 5. I was excited as I led Carol past our final stream of souvenir shops in an attempt to catch the sunset as it settled behind Wat Arun, the oldest temple in Bangkok. As we walked, we observed the final streams of light being cast off of the setting sun as it treated the remarkable rooflines of the Grand Palace like its private canvas. With a potential plan in place, we approached our first choice for the evening at the highly-rated hovel of gastronomic simplicity. The long alley narrowed as we approached a wall of chaos which was supposed to contain a public wharf, 4 or 5 shops, and two restaurants. The 50 sq. ft. of dock did exist, complete with a mix of public transit and tourist boats coming and going delivering swarms of people. Also in attendance was what appeared to be an entire regiment from the Thai Army. My first thought was that the uniformed brigade represented the board of health that was there to shut down our suspiciously absent restaurant. An old Thai woman tried to explain the presence of the uniforms and the absence of our desired destination. Despite our failure to communicate, we were instructed to have a seat as the last glimpse of the sun fell into the western sector of Bangkok across the river from us. Shortly thereafter, the army retreated for no more obvious reason than why they were there in the first place, and normalcy was restored to the waterfront. Large metal doors were raised revealing, amongst other things, a flight of stairs that we were assured would lead to our requested destination. We ascended to a mostly empty deck, happy that the guards had kept the 'restaurant' from already being full. We chose a couple of wooden chairs on a railing overlooking the river with the majestic Wat Arun dominating the view. The menu was a series of flash cards of pictures of food with Thai writing on them, which is exactly what you would expect in Thailand. The stark open-sided room consisted of a corrugated metal roof suspended between the walls of the two buildings on either side of the one we occupied. A few scattered tables and chairs occupied the space. A set of drums and speakers suggested that the bar would become very lively by the time we were in bed and the young people had arrived. The need for anything else was precluded by the remarkable view and the fact that there were cold beer, wonderful food and old-time rock and roll in the background. We were savouring the true essence of Thailand and silently recognizing the sadness that soon would mark our exit. Suddenly, a menacing cat jumped up from the sloping tin roof just below our feet in an attempt to share the discarded shrimp heads sitting on the side of our soup bowl. Our moments of bliss were instantly dashed by Hello Kitty and her two friends who later came to check out the crazy foreigners who had scared the hell out of Kitty number 1.



Wat Arun at Sunset

."Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Yuthaya Mahadilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Piman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit"...That is the traditional name of Bangkok and has been listed as the longest name for a place by Guinness World Book of Records.

Needless to say, the moment was destroyed and soon thereafter we paid our bill and sought out a different refuge. The answer was dessert on the roof-top restaurant back at our hotel, revealing how easy it is to move from squalor to splendour and from terror to terrific. Despite the fact that a tiny morsel of chocolate lava cake cost roughly the same as our entire dinner and presentation of Cats on a Hot Tin Roof, the elegance, remarkable views and feline-free environment of our hotel roof-top made it the perfect way to end our stay in Thailand.

We are now back home in Calgary, looking out the window at the winter wonderland that defies the possibility that a place like Thailand could even exist in the same world, a mere 27 hours and 65 degrees Celsius away in the recent past of our memories.