

When You Go to Thailand

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Despite the hot weather, you're not able to say no to the beautiful sunshine, so you walk on the street in Chiang-mai with a coconut in your hands. It tastes sweet and fresh, which is a comfort for you in the extremely hot weather. When enjoying the coconut water, you spot a group of middle-age men and women wearing hats and sunglasses. They talk and laugh, looking incredibly delighted. They hold their smartphones and take photos. They're typical Chinese tourists you can find in any tourist countries. If you know it, you know it. If you don't know it yet, you will notice them around the world easily in the future.

According to Annual Report of China Outbound Tourism 2017, published by China Tourism Academy, China was the world's largest tourist source with 130 million times of citizen's traveling abroad. Specifically, among the 130 million times, 9.8 million of them were for Thailand. Such a huge number means that when you are in Thailand, you'll meet 28 Chinese tourists in 100 international tourists. Of course, now you are one of them.

There are two main travel styles: explor-

ing by yourself or being led by an experienced guide. Being a youngster, you're not willing to travel in a group led by a chatty guide. More significantly, you don't want to be surrounded by a bunch of middle-aged people who can easily embarrass you at any time anywhere without notice. Sometimes they're so impressed by the temples that they marvel and take photos with lights on, but you can neither keep their voice down nor turn off their lights. Sometimes they ask shop assistants questions in Chinese, but you can't judge them because the only English they know are "hello", "bye" and "thank you". During the incredibly long trip, they'll ask you to take hundreds of photos for them, to find some products in duty free shops, and to translate the English instructions. You do all of these for them, but you'll find yourself annoyed rather than enjoy. Thus, you want to explore your journey with people at your age, who share similar values with you.

A month ago, Air Asia told you that they were on their big sale, so the return flights between Macao and Chiangmai only took 1000 RMB or so. Then you invited your friends to



Photograph from Jincheng Yan, Sri Lanka, Jan., 2019

have a trip with you. As they really wanted to refresh from heavy study and work, they accepted your invitation. Being a group of young and energetic people, you don't want to sleep in a luxurious five-star hotel like the middle-aged do. You want to live in a cosy house provided by the local, so that you can experience the local life. By browsing some popular websites for accommodation renting, and comparing the locations, facilities, prices, and comments, you found some economical accommodations. With a quick plan, you set up and arrived here in Chiangmai.

Looking at the money changers at the airport, you realise that you haven't exchange your money into baht yet. When you walk to the changers, you hesitate because there's a pair of Chinese old couple waiting in line and arguing with each other.

The woman says, “你怎么不早点在

国内机场换好钱呢？” (Why didn't you exchange money ahead at the airport in China?)

The man keeps his head down, counting his RMB, “我忘了这回事了。” (I forgot that.)

“快点，别人等着呢！” (Quickly! Others are waiting for us!) The woman urges.

When you wonder who others are, you notice that the couple both have a bright orange hat with the name of a travel agent on it. There's a group of old people who also wear the same hats standing not far away from them. Beside this group is a younger man holding an orange flag and using his smartphone. “He's the guide. Perhaps he's getting contact with the driver to take the old people to the hotel.” You think.

When you walk towards to exchangers, your friends stop you, “It's much cheaper

outside the airport.”

“But how can we take a taxi without baht?”

“Don’t worry. We have Grab It’s Thai Didi. We can pay by Alipay.” You’re surprised, not at the convenience of travelling in Thailand, but the preparation your friends have made! They’re lazy daily, but they become experts when taking a trip.

You get on the taxi and enjoy the scene of the city through the window, then you find that Chiangmai is not as commercialised as you think. It’s around 5:30pm-time for commuters and students to go home, so the roads are crowded with cars. Your taxi is stuck on the road beside a river. You keep the car window open as you really enjoy the breeze.

Then you notice that there’s a Chinese restaurant next to your taxi. Inside is the same group of people you met at the airport. Sitting by several tables in circle and having traditional Chinese food, they look so content. Some of the old folks smoke outside of the restaurant and talk. You can hear them clearly.

“还是吃中国菜好啊，哈哈。” (It’s suitable for us to have Chinese food, hah.)

“对啊，吃那些什么咖喱，还是不行。” (Yes, I can’t adapt to Thai food, like curry.)

“幸好还是跟团来，有中餐。要是跟孩子们来啊，他们全跑去吃那些泰国菜啦。全不理我们这些老头。” (Fortunately, we’re in a travel group, so we have Chinese food. If we come with our children, we have to have Thai food. They don’t care about what we want to eat.)

Then your taxi drives away, arriving at the host’s house, which is unremarkable and locates on an ordinary street. Except for other houses, there’s a garage and a store beside the

house. Inside is a small and rectangular wooden table, a side table with some fruits and instant noodles on it, and a refrigerator. Opening the refrigerator, you find different kinds of drinks, jam and cheese. When you ask the host whether those are free for you, he answers “sure” with a welcoming smile. Then he helps you to carry your luggage to the top floor-where your room is.

Your room isn’t big, but it’s clean and tidy. There’s a double bed, a sofa, two lights, a bathroom and a tiny balcony. You enjoy the sunset glow at the balcony: the sky is pink with a few clouds. As the breeze comes, you can smell the orchids. Pied Bushchats fly and sing around-they are eager to go back to their nests at sunset. Sometimes a motorbike passes, making some noises. But that doesn’t disrupt you, because you’re getting close to the real daily life of Chiangmai.

“Where do we go to eat tonight?” You’re interrupted by your friends.

“Let’s go to the night market and have some street food!” In fact, you’re already starved and can’t wait to enjoy the local Thai food.

“We can go down to ask the host where we can get the money exchanged and where the night market is.” You’re astonished by your friends because you have already forgot that you don’t have baht in your pocket.

The night market is lively but not crowded. There’s a row of booths on both sides of the street. They sell different kinds of food: Tom Yum Goong, Gaeng Daeng, Pad Thai, Khao Pad, Gaeng Keow Wan Kai, and other snacks you can’t say no to. Under the bright yellow lights, they look so alluring that you forget that you have to keep an eye on your weight. Standing in front of a booth, you can’t decide which one to buy: Khao Soi Khun Yai or Khao Kha

Moo Chang Phueak?

When you're torn between them, you're disrupted by an old lady, “小妹妹，这些都是啥啊？” (Sweetie, what are these?) From her accent, you can tell she's a Cantonese, but you don't want to reply her in Cantonese even you're a Cantonese because it becomes more convenient for her and she'll put up more requests. Out of politeness, you answer her with patience.

“那这些，你觉得哪个好吃啊？” (Which one is tasty?) Her eyes are full of expectation.

“Can't you buy and taste them by yourself?” You've already had this sentence in your mind, but you can't say it. You can only reply, “我还没买，不知道呢。” (I haven't bought yet; I don't know.)

“你看，阿姨在那边买东西，你能过来帮阿姨翻译一下吗？阿姨不懂英文，不

能砍价！” (Look, I was buying something over there. Can you come and translate for me? I can't speak English, so I'm not able to bargain!) Saying this, the woman points at a booth across the street. The booth is crowded with a group of middle-aged people. You recognise them: they're the same group of people you met at the airport and restaurant. You blame Chiangmai for its smallness, having you encountered those old gentlemen and ladies three times a day. Hearing the sound from your stomach, you want to reject her but you can't, because she'll insist on asking you to help her. Thus, unwillingly, you go over there, and have a look at the booth and the vendor, hoping the vendor can feel your unwillingness from your eyes. He's selling dried durian monthong and other Thai snacks.

“问他，如果我们每人都买一包这个，能不能便宜点。” (Ask him, whether it can be cheaper if each of us buy one bag of



Photograph from Guanni Huang, India, Jun., 2017



Photograph from Jincheng Yan, Sri Lanka, Jan., 2019

this.) Pointing at the dried mango monthong and looking at you from time to time, a middle-aged man solicits you to ask the vendor this question. However, you think the price is reasonable since it only sells for 100 Thai baht, which means it only takes 20 RMB for one pack. But still, you have to ask. You do so and the vendor shakes his head, “This is the cheapest.” You reply those middle-aged people, then they leave with complaints.

Looking at their backs, so many things come up in your mind but you fail to tell them: these old people come to Thailand but give up such delicious food due to its price! But it’s more than that. Although following a group isn’t a perfect choice for you, it’s a good option for the old who want to explore the world at their age. Unlike you, they didn’t have an opportunity to explore abroad when they were young since China was in turmoil and all kinds of transportation hadn’t developed yet. Even in this electronic era, they can’t even use cell phones as smartly as you do, let alone downloading foreign applications. They’re used to Chinese food and culture, so it’s hard for them to adapt to foreign food and manners. You’re lucky since in the twentieth century you can explore and adapt different cultures at the young age. Thinking of this, you buy a bag of dried mango monthong.