

Wat Takken Floating Market

Photos and copy By Michael Greenwald © All Rights Reserved

These electronic media files are protected by the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act and the EU Copyright Directive.



Bangkok is situated on an estuary that drains most of the major rivers of central Thailand. For centuries, Thailand's rivers were its highways and the soft, mucky soil made it easy to dredge canals. While the central portions of the major cities like Bangkok became modern, with roads and expressways, many of the outskirts retained the canal system and even to this day there are many homes and farms that communicate with the world only by water.



This small barge came all the way to Bangkok from Northumbri, a distance of about 100 Km on the Chao Phraya River, which runs all the way from Laos to the Gulf of Thailand



Ramshackle houses on the Thornbury are common, many dating back 100 years to post WWI.

Best-known are the Thornbury canals, which I sent you a file about last week,

built when Bangkok was the capitol on the west side of the river. In its heyday the canals were used by the King's barge to reach the parliament.



The King's Barge (right) arriving for Parliament 1900 with Wat Arun in background



Thornbury Canal 1899

But when it moved to the east side, time sort of stopped in Thornbury, leaving an area reminiscent of pre-WWII.

By contrast, the same river that flows thru Bangkok also flows thru Northaburi, about a hour's drive to the north but the main canal, which runs almost 30 miles into the heart of the jungle is wider, much more upscale, serviced by a river ferry and many of the locals have either longtail boats or more modern, very fast fiberglass shells.



These high-speed ferries travel at 35 mph and can carry 50 passengers



These high-speed racing shells with powerful inboard motors can reach 50 mph.



This is the older style longtail. Its advantage is that the prop can function just a few inches above the waterline, excellent for the shallows and with the engine turned off it can be used as a sculling oar to make a slow, final approach. Back in the old days the engine was an old truck diesel, which made the craft top-heavy and dangerous but today lightweight gasoline motors modified from Briggs and Stratton 125 cc engines are common.



Many of the old rice barges have been converted into floating restaurants

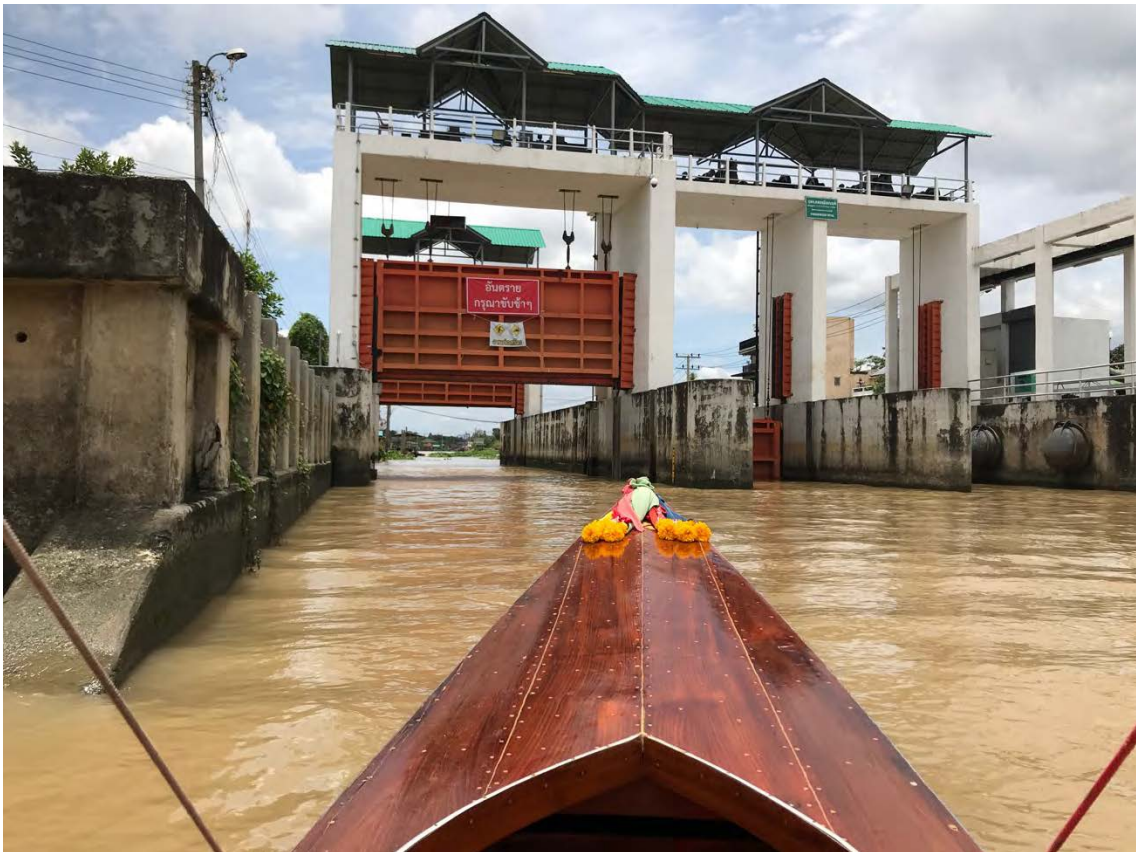


But, many old-timers still laze along using a sculling oar.





Big Boss and I entering the canal



The entrance to a canal is thru a floodgate. We were relieved to see that water level now, at the height of the Monsoon, was not at flood level. Our company just missed getting flooded out in 2011





Floating barges used as a restaurant still use reed roofs



Ornate ferry boat landings, often at Buddhist Wats are common as the Wats provide many social functions including funerals and cremations



Note Saffron-robed monk, left



Most modern river homes retain the old architectural style



Old home c 1946



The Wats provide many services and Wat Taken in Northaburi, about 15 miles up the canal operates this popular “floating market” inevitably mobbed on the weekend. The market of course does not “float” but it is an opportunity for many farmers to bring their produce to market by boat and also use their boats as floating kitchens



Women making the famous chicken sate over a small charcoal grill, served with homemade peanut sauce



All produce is picked in the morning. The many prices are in Thai baht, 33 baht/\$1USD



This old guy is making traditional rice noodles with fish balls, pork and a soup



Today, Thai markets are exceedingly clean and the floors pressure washed every night



This little jewel of a stand sells a cross-section of the seasonal fruits and vegetables



The floating market is a social meeting place, mobbed on the weekend and everything is very inexpensive. A typical meal consisting of a meat, rice noodles, vegetable and drink costs about \$2. There is also free wi-fi. There is a huge amount of seating and whole families often meet here for meals.



People light candles for the dead and make small donations of about 50 US cents



People can pray here, at the market or take the tunnel to the Wat



This is the entrance and exit from the market to the Wat by underground tunnel





This is the ferryboat landing for the wat



Food is always a big item everywhere. Here a thin pancake is filled with shredded carrot, sweet beans and honey



Hugely popular are these sausages, made on a rotating grill



boiled, dried, then made into patties and fried rice crackers



Big Boss munching on sausage





Food is never far from the Thai mind. Here a demon statue is holding chopsticks and eating noodles





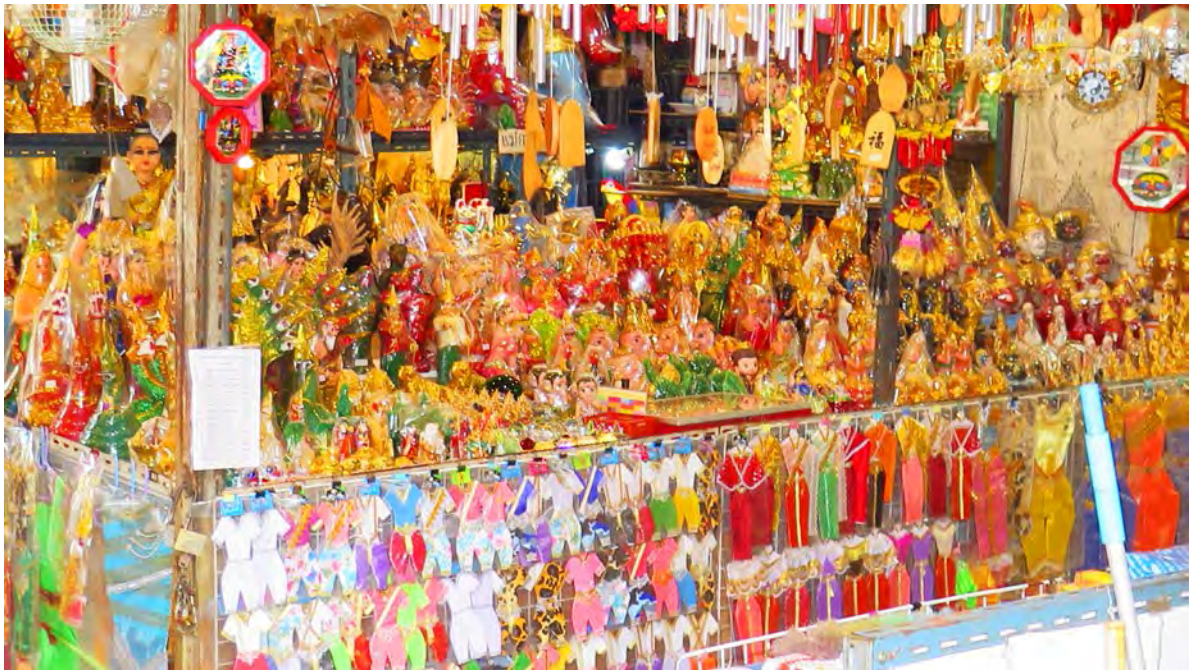
Vegetable pancakes bound with rice flour and egg



A memorial to a popular monk

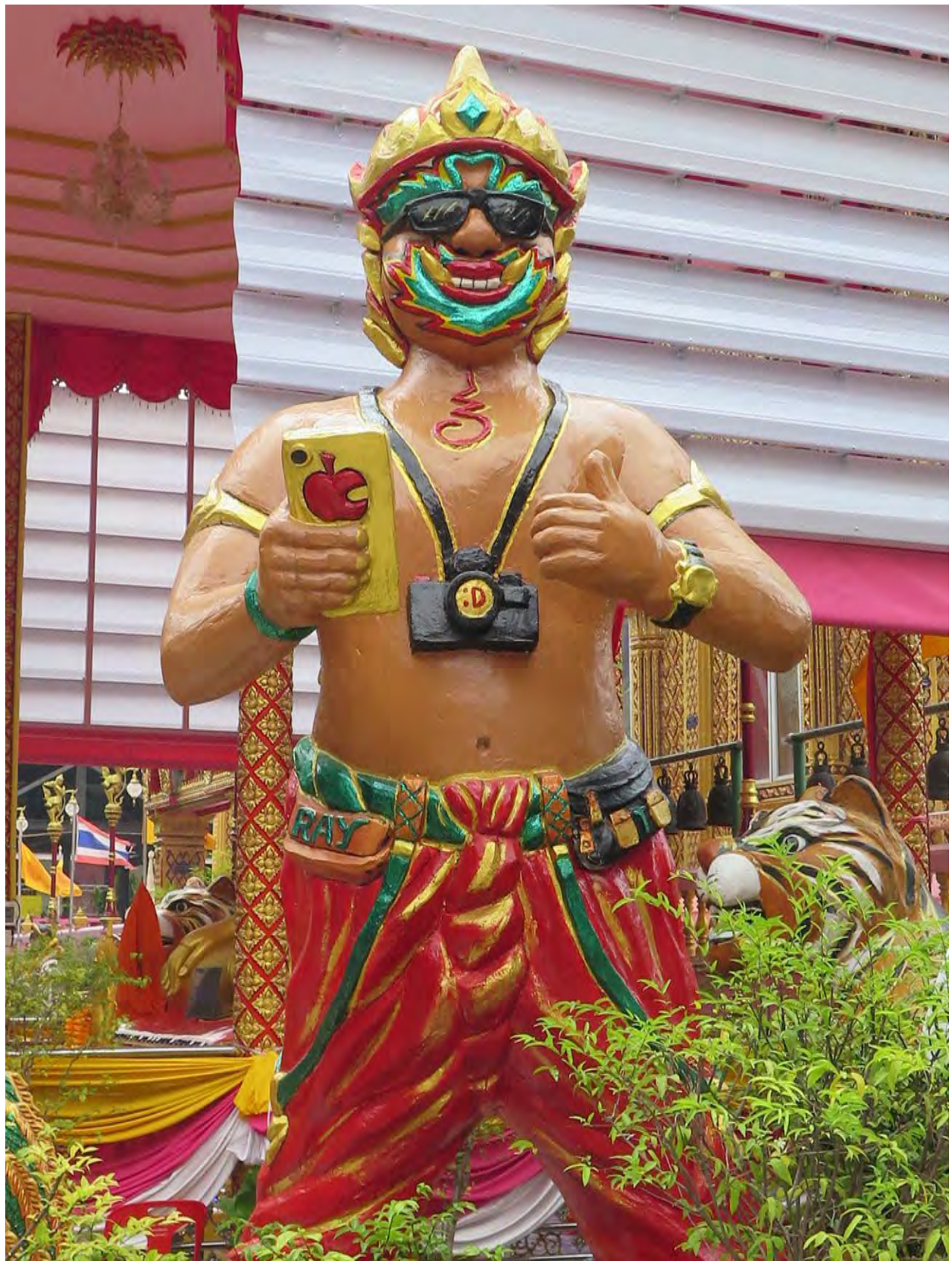


Toys are also a big deal as many children come with the family



Demons, girl and warrior dolls sold with hundreds of doll clothes





In its way, this grinning demon, in sunglasses, holding a cell phone and wearing a camera is symbolic of Thailand, which embraces both the old and the new, which rub shoulders with each other in a familiar way.

I came here in 1999, transferred in on my last job with World Health and made my commitment to stay. Looking back, it was the best decision of my life.