



INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICES INC.

MAIL ROOM  
WEATHERS

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Vietnam; Laos

May 1965

Dear Friends:

At last, school is over. The students are home for the summer and the teachers are taking a long deep breath before the work which is called vacation starts. Several of the I.V.S. staff will be going to the United States for home leave. Several others will or have terminated and the few that will be left here for the summer will be taking as much vacation as possible. Because of a change in the school year, we have a 4-month vacation this year. As you can well imagine, we were quite sad when we found out about the extra 30 days.

The biggest news event for the summer is the vacation that a friend and I plan to take. Miles Roddis, an English Volunteer Services Overseas Teacher, (much like IVS) and I plan to spend about 6 weeks traveling through Thailand, Malaya, Ceylon, India, Nepal, and with some luck Burma. The trip will be by motorcycle and boat. With luck, we will not have to worry too much about the rains.

I guess that I should have written a little more, a little faster on this letter. You see this paragraph is being written over two months after the last one and in the central part of Malaya. We are two weeks into our trip and may I say that it has been great so far.

Starting back in Vietnam, we left the 5th of July as planned. Some people say that the hardest part of going on a trip is getting packed. Well I have news for them! The hardest part of this trip was getting past the so-called customs house in Thailand with a motorcycle. A total of 26 official documents were needed to get the motorcycle out of Laos and into Thailand. The process took just under 6 hours of waiting. 5 hours and 55 minutes were spent sitting. A late start from Nong Khai, the river town our boat took us to, allowed us to travel only 150 miles the first day to the village of Khorat, Thailand. In a way, this was not bad. Khorat is known for its hand woven silk throughout the world. Coming into Khorat after dark, we took the first hotel we came to. The total cost for the two of us was 60¢ American money. The hard wooden mattress and the mosquitoes were free. With pale faces from the loss of blood and stiff backs, we traveled to the temples of Pi Mai the following day.

Pi Mai is much like the Cambodian "Angkor Wat". It was built in the early 12th century. I have spent quite a bit of time in one other letter on this type of subject, so I will only tell of the experiences of a French Archaeologist working to rebuild the temple.

It seems the people of Thailand in this area have not seen too many white-skinned people. The Archaeologist and his wife became the entertainment of the people. The Thai would come to their house and just sit and watch them. Every night there would be several watching them eat dinner. Every morning there would be several watching them eat breakfast. After several weeks of this a plan of action began to form. One afternoon the wife took a coke bottle out into the yard. The husband dug a deep hole. They placed the bottle inside of the hole and each day following have watered the bottle. Also each day since the Thai people have come to see if it has started to grow.

The second adventure that would cause you to question their sanity if you didn't know the story behind it was the day they each took a banana at dinner, removed the peeling, threw the banana away, and ate the peeling. This also caused the Thai to talk for some days. Well anyway!

Going back to Khorat that evening we toured one of the silk weaving shops. Handwoven silk sells here for just about \$2.00 American per yard. In the United States at the Worlds Fair it was selling for just over \$34. The next day two sun-burnt beagles with ears flopping in the wind rolled into Bangkok. Our first stop was to get dinner, one qt. of chocolate milk, one chocolate malt, and one sundae. As we left the dairy with our ice cream cones we headed for the Peace Corps hotel for a short 3-day stay.

Fifty miles from Bangkok on the way to Malaya, in the town of Nakorn Pathom is one of the largest Chedi's in Thailand. A chedi is a large cone-shaped structure housing a statue of Buddha. This one is believed to have been built in the 3rd century by one of the first kings of Siam, now called Thailand.

Moving down the coast of Thailand, luck was with us. The weather was great. The first night out of Bangkok was spent in a small fishing village, Hat Chao Samran. Our \$3 cabin was only 30 feet from the Sea of Siam. The warm salt water was wonderful. A moonlight swim followed by a fresh shrimp dinner after a hard day on the road really put us in the mood for a good night's sleep.

The next two days are two that I hope I never remember. The morning was great. About the time the wonderful road turned from tar to dirt the weather turned from clear to rain. Slowly before our eyes the road became a muddy mess. Rounding a sharp curve in road, the cycle decided that it didn't like the road. The only real damage was a skinned knee and some hurt pride. Covered from head to toe with mud we stopped in the next town at a little building called a train station.

The next 200 miles were spent on a train. Good weather came again, but bad luck was still with us. Miles took the next spill on the cycle. This one made a real mess of the luggage rack on the cycle. We were able to go on to the island of Phuket but it took the most part of the morning to get the cycle back in good shape.

Phuket was everything that a tropical island was supposed to be. Wonderful hot weather, one short rain a day, rubber trees growing in large fields of grass, coconut trees along the sandy beaches, small bamboo houses with barefoot children up to their necks playing, small boats with fishing nets running in and out, fish traps and crab traps along the road, and prices set to the level of the American public.

We left the island of Phuket on the good ship Thanoon the Third. As our little vessel laboriously plunged its way through the ripples of a calm sea, darkness slowly set in. Three things then caused us to wonder if we would make it to the next port. First we found that the ship had no charts. Second we learned the ship did not use a compass, and third, the Captain began to pray to his small buddha about an hour after dark. Arriving in Kantang about twelve, we spent the night on the ship and were off early for a 2-day stay at another beach area, Songkhla. One more full day's travels took us to the island of Penang, which was our first stop in Malaysia. After crossing the Malaysian boarder you could see a difference within a very few miles. The people were much darker in color and much heavier in build. The land is by far better kept than in Thailand and Laos and the roads are out of this world. We were able to drive 60 miles an hour the full trip. As you know, the country is known for its rubber plantations. There are miles and miles of rubber trees all in neat little rows. Small cups are found on all the trees which collect the latex which is later made into the large sheets which will be sent to the States to make the rubber products we use.

The island of Penang was again a nice day's stopover. We had to find out when our boat would leave for the country of India and do a bit of swimming as always. A second advantage of staying here is that Penang is one of the two free ports of the country of Malaysia. No tax is placed on anything which is sold here. Also due to the large amounts of sales the profit is very small. A \$5 shirt sells for about \$2.25 and camera and film are really good buys. For once I got out of a city without buying a thing. We will be going back next week.

The Chinese Buddhist Temple was our most impressive visit in Penang. This is the first Chinese structure I have seen. The Buddhist statues are much more life-like with the Chinese. They are fat little men with life-like features. The Lao and Thai Buddhas are so thin and unlife-like that it would be hard to tell if they were really made after a living thing as Buddha is supposed to have been.

One more day's travel took us to the capitol of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. The one day stay there was taken up with the National museum. The structure of the building and the workmanship within leads one to believe that Malaya is well advanced over the other countries of this area of the world. We will be again stopping in Kuala Lumpur on the way back to Penang. We are now on the way to Singapore for a 3-day stay. Our ship leaves from Penang on the 29th which gives us about 8 days to make the trip.

That's it for now. Best wishes from Malaya.

June 1965

Hi again..

Today marks the end of the first part of our trip. Upon returning to Penang, Malaya, we have traveled a total of 2777 miles since leaving Vientiane. If all goes well, we will be on our way to India by ship tomorrow.

Moving the clock back 10 days, we left Penang and headed more or less South. After a full day of travel my biggest half became tired of sitting on the cycle so we looked for the first good reason to stop. The excuse read, "Rubber Research Plantation". The Manager turned out to be a very friendly fellow. After an excellent tour of the plantation we were invited to the house. The small mansion turned out to be in a secluded area of the plantation. As far as the eye could see in any direction, neat rows of rubber trees stood at attention with their little collection cups poised for inspection. Each morning workers would cut new strips of bark from the trees. At the end of about 6 hours they would return to collect the fresh latex from the cups and take it to the central plant where chemicals would be added to keep it from spoiling. It could then be sent to any part of the world to make one of the thousands of products used by man.

After 3 hours of general talk we were again on our way. The final destination of the day was what is called the crossroads of Asia, Singapore. Singapore turned out to be the most interesting city of all of my travels. The four days there were filled with things to do.

The Chinese opera was an experience of one night. Starting at 6 PM, it lasted until after 12:00. Until I learn the language I think I have had enough opera. Cymbals and gongs added highlights as the people would die or a spirit would come onto the scene. It was extremely interesting but as I have said, enough for one lifetime.

The "Haw Par Villa", or as it is more commonly called, "The Tiger Balm Gardens" were of equal interest. As the guide book states, "Here is a hillside facing the seas shoreline which has been transformed into a collection of sculptures. Prosaic, horrible, beautiful, and just fantastic are these vividly-colored sculptures representing strange characters and scenes from ancient Chinese mythology and modern interpretations of old proverbs."

The whole of the garden was laid out in Disneyland fashion. Everything was built around a theme of everyday life. Violence played a very important roll. Everything ended with a moral or lesson to it. The afternoon was quite interesting and very educational.

The 2½ million dollar collection of Jade in the House of Jade was also quite interesting. Many of the hand-carved objects were well over 500 years old.

One of the interesting portions of our stay in Singapore was our experiences with food. We had decided to try every kind of food we could while on the trip. There is no better spot in the world than Singapore. Here is an area where every possible combination of nationalities have come together. Within a block's walk, you can have foods from a dozen countries. Hot Sattay on a bamboo stick dipped in sweet sauce followed by golden brown chicken turned out to be a very welcome meal. Most of the food is sold from small stands on wheels along the edge of the road. It's kind of a drive-in restaurant idea where the restaurant drives into the people rather than you going to it.

A short 6-hour drive took us to the Western sea coast and the age-old city of Malacca. Here still stands the 600-yr. old church of St. Paul built by the Portugese before America was even a dream in the mind of man. Signs of the Dutch and British also show in the buildings that were put up in the years to follow.

Next on the triplist was the capital of Malaya, Kuala Lumpuro. K. L. is probably one of the most modern cities in this part of the world. The new freeway and several story high buildings give the look of a miniature San Francisco. Here we had our first real taste of the large Mosques. Due to the large number of people from India who have moved to Malaya, the number of Hindu temples and Moslem Mosques is equal to if not larger than the Buddhist structures. The new Mosque in K. L. puts many an American church to shame. Covering well over a city block, the huge white structure with its modern design is indeed a masterpiece. The second significant visit in Kuala Lumpur was to the National Museum. Again hours could be spent in tolling of the structure. The displays tell a story in themselves. A story not only of the history of the country but of how much more advanced Malaya is over the other countries of this part of the world. They have taken an interest in keeping for the future a record of the past.

We returned to Penang for the last short stay in Malaya. Our plans were to do a bit of sightseeing around the city before our boat set sail. Old man weather loused that up, though. A slow rain all day kept us well withing the walls of the hotel. We did manage to do a bit of shopping. So far the weather has really been good to us. This being the bad time of the year, we have only been stopped on 3 days by rain.

The only last portion of this letter I can think of before closing that may be of some interest is the population of the country. Most people would think that Malays would be mostly Malaysans. This is not true. Over 50 % of the people are Chinese and about 20% are Indian. This, needless to say, is causing some problems. The Malayan people are feeling the pressures of being pushed out of their own country. The Chinese are well up in the business world and the Indians run a very close second. The poor Malayan people are ending up as the common labor class or below. This could become quite explosive in the next few years.

I guess that's it from the land of Malaya. Let's see what India and Ceylon have to offer for the next chapter of my newsletters. By the time you receive this one, I will be back in Vietiane, so don't slow down on the letter-writing.

Best wishes

Jim

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