

I Went Looking for Paradise and Found “Nothing”



Here was my dilemma. The missus and I both wanted to take a short holiday, three or four days at the most. The conflict arose from our polar opposite visions of a perfect mini-vacation. She likes to get up at the crack of dawn and see whatever the prevailing tourist attractions have to offer, I want to do nothing ... less than nothing if that is possible. I needed to recharge, not break a sweat.

After much discussion and some internet searching my intrepid partner laid out her proposal. “We go Chumphon” she said. “My sister go too. You drink beer on beach”. Other than the fact I’d never heard of Chumphon and her sister hates me, it sounded like a solid plan, so I acquiesced.

As it turns out, I do know where Chumphon is. I’d passed through on several occasions on the way to Koh Samui, Koh Phangan and Koh Tao. It’s

roughly 440 km south of Bangkok on the Gulf of Thailand, about halfway to Phuket. When you get to Chumphon, you are officially in southern Thailand. I thought it was just a place you passed through. I was in for a pleasant surprise.

The resort we booked was a quaint little place with spacious bungalows for only 800 baht a night. I liked Chumphon immediately. I walked down to the beach and saw what I knew would be my nest for the next 72 hours. A big red hammock stretched between two coconut trees. My blood pressure immediately began to drop.

The wide horseshoe shaped beach was startlingly pristine. The chatty hotel staff informed me that Chumphon boasted over 200 km of such beach. White sand with coconut trees bent at a 90 degree angle giving shade and shallow water for nearly 100 meters out.

The daily schedule was simple. In the

morning I’d bid the ladies a good day as they left to explore the province. Then I’d graze on fresh fruit for breakfast (those little bananas they have down south are addictive). From there it was straight to my hammock to read, sip cold ones and take an occasional dip in the sea.

In three days I saw exactly 5 other people on the beach. A lone kite-surfer entertained me for hours one day with his acrobatic antics. An adorable little Thai girl waived and said “hello farang”. No vendors, no belligerent tourists, no jet skis. Nothing ... nobody ... paradise.

Around dinner time the ladies would come dragging in exhausted. I heard stories and about spectacular waterfalls and spooky caves and looked at pictures of about 100 temples. I heard about the monument to the father of the Thai Navy and the memorial to the child soldiers that resisted the Japanese invasion. “I never knew there was so much stuff to see here” the missus beamed.



At night we'd venture into Chumphon town to feed. The night market was a sensory overload. This isn't some cheesy tourist attraction mind you, but an honest-to-goodness Southern Thai market. The food in the south is irresistible and every night I'd scorch my innards with gaeng som, a fiery fish curry and peppery kua kling. No two-tier pricing in Chumphon; I could feed us all for 500 baht.

We met visitors from all over the globe. Three young Austrians were on a mission to explore every cave in the province. A foursome of Norwegians were on a diving holiday. They started in Koh Tao and were working their way back. According to them, Chumphon offers some of the best mainland dive spots in Thailand.

I just smiled and nodded. I hadn't moved more than 50 meters from my palm-shaded lair but I was learning all about Chumphon vicariously. Mountains and rivers and temples and waterfalls ... even hot springs. Apparently Chumphon is the best kept secret in Thailand.

On the morning of the last day, my girl pleaded with me to venture out with her. "Come on ... we go to Moo Ku National Park. Have waterfall and forest." I just settled back in the hammock and lowered my shades. "You girls are missing the best part" I informed her. "What do we miss? What is so great about what you do? 'N-O-T-H-I-N-G'" I grinned. Absolutely nothing".

I highly recommend Chumphon. It isn't some glitzy tourist destination, but it absolutely has something for everyone. Even if "nothing" is what you desire.

By Bart Walters