



LIVING IN
**CHIANG
MAI**

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Living In Chiang Mai

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CHAPTER 1: ANOTHER YEAR...ONE WAY ROUND NO BUMPING

January: *Dry and hot, but cool at night and the swimming pool feels cold.*

“The first year is a roller coaster ride, the second year is like getting on the Pirate Boat, it’s still scary but you get a chance to see where you are.” Thom.

I’m still wondering how on earth we survived the first year, and then another year, in Chiang Mai. To be honest, I’m still wondering why we did it. Why we uprooted our two young children from their friendly little village school, why we gave up good jobs, a lovely house and all the trappings of a comfortable, middle class lifestyle to embrace a future of complete uncertainty in a hot, strange city in Northern Thailand.

It was, as my new American friend Thom said, “a real dumb ass thing to do.” But then Thom says stuff like this all the time. He also says “the only way to stay sane is to stay half drunk” and the strange and rather worrying “life’s like a dead raccoon in a car wash.”

Thom’s like Plato, but I expect a lot drunker. He is also very big and very friendly and has no censorship system. If it goes through Thom’s mind, it comes out of his mouth, which is a bit of a problem as he has a voice as loud as a ship’s fog horn. He drives a huge truck the size of Berkshire and claims that he can eat more pizza than anyone else in Chiang Mai. He is also prone to exaggeration.

But then I realise if we hadn’t moved here I would never have met Thom, or come to that, Jesse, the strongest and most unpredictable man in the world, or Khun Sonthaya our self appointed guardian angel or, indeed, my new neighbour Jerry who’s in the Hong Kong Mafia. I would

never have been arrested by the Chiang Mai Water Police, enjoyed the dubious pleasure of endless visa runs over the border into Burma, become the director of my own little company, burst with pride at seeing my youngest son play the part of the Cheeky Gecko at his new “international” school assembly or any one of the delights or disasters that made up the second year of our new life in Chiang Mai. Besides which, I had just splashed out 100 Baht to buy a supermarket loyalty card (I know!) and found the BBC World Service on my radio.

By comparison, my wife and two children seemed to settle in super quick. I think they did it without me noticing, while I was still unpacking.

Our two little boys couldn’t quite believe their good luck that we had whisked them away from the brink of a large and intimidating secondary school to a land where the sun always shines, swimming pools are warm, orchids bloom in vivid technicolour and pretty butterflies flit through shady palm trees; a land where it’s permanently the summer holidays.

They made friends at their new school in a matter of seconds, learnt Chinese, Thai and French in a few days, joined the football team and cricket team, and went camping in the jungle with some friends and other assorted outward boundy-type parents who are all called Brad, have designer stubble on their chins (even the mums), wear combat trousers covered with pockets and zips and, for reasons that I really don’t understand have more state of the art camping equipment than the Swiss Army. If all this wasn’t enough they also formed an atrocious rock band with other pop minded pre-teens, competed in swimming Galas at schools with sports facilities of truly olympic proportions and generally set about doing loads of positive sounding stuff.

In the words of Thom “they settled like love birds in a nest.”

My wife, ever the woman of action, was immersed in our small and unusual company that we had set up, and to my astonishment was busily going about setting up yet more projects with Ozzi, our Scandinavian web site wizard and self confessed entrepreneur who helped us make our business work when we first arrived. Leave them alone together for longer than five minutes and they will have set up another business. When we meet to discuss the web site I’m afraid to go to the toilet.

In what seemed like a matter of days they had set up yet another web site for the universal free sharing of ideas and innovations, got involved with a fair trade organization that sells jewelry made by Burmese refugees, raised money and organized a volunteer network for a local orphanage, planned an information portal for all the new foreigners pouring into Chiang Mai and launched a whole load of something called “down loadable apps” designed to provide self help for people giving up smoking, cutting down drinking, increasing self esteem and overcoming negative self body image. Basically, my wife is generally involved, on a daily basis, in saving the world.

Meanwhile, I had found an old guy down the market who sold reconditioned radios and spent the following year trying to find the BBC World Service.

If Salvador Dali were to come back from the dead to paint a portrait of me and my wife (now that would be truly surreal) she would be a swarm of bees and I would be a pair of carpet slippers.

But, as I often say to her “you can’t make honey without slippers” and she points out to me that you can.

So, having somehow managed to muddle through the first year, here is what it was like after that. Here we go

again...

Or as Thom often bellows out for reasons that I don't understand, "one way round no bumping".