

Where GPS might lose track of you: Children's Day at Baan Khun Tuen

It's a long, hard, bumpy road from Om Koi town to Baan Khun Tuen Primary School. The engines of our jeeps roar as we drive between the mountains, taking one steep turn after the other. Every now and then, we are able to accelerate on random stretches of concrete – braking sharply again and again, as the concrete always ends after a few hundred meters, giving way to the rough path cutting through the jungle. In the rainy season – we are told later –, this road becomes a winding belt of mud, and only the locals on their tiny motorbikes know how to skid, slide and miraculously hover their way over it.

Nestled in a narrow valley at 1000 meters above sea level, Khun Tuen Primary School is an unexpected, beautiful spectacle. A steep green hill surrounded by a creek, it almost feels like an island in the mountains. After crossing over a small bridge, we find ourselves in a small area scattered with buildings – a library, classrooms, boarding houses -, and a tiny football field, which, as we learn, functions also as the “main square” of the school.



As we arrive, the children are already waiting in disciplined rows. Tomorrow is Children's Day, and the arriving guests – us - carry the promise of something GREAT to come; the anticipation is tangible. And literally, we carry the boxes filled with games, prizes and ice cream into the library building, with the assistance of an amazingly helpful crowd of children.

After a long ice cream eating session on the main square – yes, all 170 students got some! -, we retreat to the library for a brief “strategic summit”. We want to involve *all* students in the games tomorrow and this needs some proper planning! (at this point, we don’t know yet that besides the students, our games will appeal to others too...but let’s not run ahead!)

In two hours it will be sunset, and the time flies all too quickly as we find ourselves at the dinner table, which had been thoughtfully prepared by the teachers. After an abundant meal, we leave the dining hall and head towards the campfire. It becomes quickly apparent that the warnings we’ve received prior to arrival were anything but a joke: the nights are cold here in Baan Khun Tuen. Not just slightly chilly, but *freezing* cold. The children are still running around in T-shirts, whilst we, the ill-prepared guests, are putting on pullovers, hoodies, coats...basically anything and everything we own.

At the campfire, however, it is warm and we have fun – while the sticky rice with coconut milk is slowly cooking, someone pulls out a guitar and starts playing. The children are giggling all the time, learning our funny names by repeating them again and again for a brief hour and a half (Da-nieeee! Tha-wa! Pi-teeer...!) No surprise, as Thawa promises them to win some prizes if they’ll still remember our names in the morning!

At 20.30, the kids go to bed; we stay at the heat of the fire until it completely diminishes. Daniel checks his thermometer before falling asleep. It’s four degrees Celsius.



Darts, Slings...and Gangnam Style!

The next day, children see a slightly frozen, but very excited Child's Dream Team, as we appear at the main square just after breakfast. By this time, the stage has already been decorated with hundreds of balloons and a huge, hand-made Child's Dream logo! The kids are already sat in front of the stage and the Children's Day opening show excitedly begins.

From kindergarten to level six, each grade has prepared their own seriously cute choreographed dance steps set to groovy Thai music. And it seems like even the remote area of Baan Khun Tuen is not immune from the worldwide influence of South Korean Pop star PSY - as the children show us how to rock Gangnam style!



After the opening show, we take our positions at different stations installed across the area: one for shooting balloons with darts, another for hitting cans with slings and throwing balls in baskets, and one station for transferring ping-pong balls from one cup to the other with chopsticks (this sounds simple, but believe me, it isn't!).

For each bull's eye, children get to choose a small prize: a toy car, snacks, or a pair of flip-flops (the third one being probably the most popular!). It is interesting to see how certain games become the domain of boys (slings), others of girls (chopsticks), while some attract a very mixed audience...have a look at the last picture and find out who else became really keen on the darts thing!





We spend two amazing days at Baan Khun Tuen. The scorching sun and the warm hospitality of the staff make us all quickly forget about the cold night; we enjoy basking in an infinite sea of smiles - the best present the school's small inhabitants could ever have prepared for us. And, as a bonus, we can observe their moms sat on the hillside watching us from afar... then slowly entering the area, and finally...*standing in line* to play darts!

I imagine the valley from a bird's eye view, and see multicolor bodies rapidly moving around the compound, constantly waving their hands and legs. The excited buzz will certainly scare away some animals of the surrounding forest for weeks - but it's this happy sound that will continue to ring in our ear and hearts long after we return to Chiang Mai.

To see the best moments of the games and stage performances, and some impressions about the beautiful inhabitants of the valley, be sure to check out the Baan Khun Tuen gallery on our [Facebook page!](#)

Khun Tuen Primary School is a Thai government school located in Om Koi district, Chiang Mai Province, Northern Thailand. It provides education ranging from kindergarten to primary six levels. Currently, 170 students (82 girls and 88 boys) are attending classes in the school. The majority of students belong to the Karen ethnic minority, but legally they are Thai citizens. They come from five surrounding villages, the farthest being 8 km away; two boarding houses provide shelter for 45 students coming from remote areas. Child's Dream will start the construction of a new school building at the end of January, which will take approximately four months to finish.

The communities living in this area are mostly self-sufficient farmers and have an average income of approx. USD 100 per month (for a family of four persons). Most people older than 30 years can't write or read and have problems communicating in Thai. The school staff – which are predominantly Thai – are highly motivated and determined to provide good education to the local community. The relationship between the staff and the children is exemplary.

Child's Dream celebrates Children's Day every year at a different project site. This year we have chosen Khun Tuen Primary School. This remote school is so difficult to access that hardly any organization has ever provided an activity like Children's Day here before. For Child's Dream, this is a rare opportunity for our employees to attend a field trip together as a larger group, and by organizing fun activities, we have the chance to enjoy the company of each other and the children at the same time.