



Child's Dream

A charity organization supporting children in need

www.childsdream.org



Our objectives

We aim to prevent child exploitation (child prostitution, child labor, child soldiering and trafficking) and migration through

- improving living & health conditions and education standards;
- raising the awareness of child trafficking among families and communities;
- helping children to take pride in themselves and strengthen their self-esteem
- cultivating a better attitude towards life and society and
- encouraging the children to love and respect their own customs and culture.

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Field trip report Mae Hong Song and surroundings

The field trip to Mae Hong Son started off with our flight being cancelled, resulting in us having to take the bus. Not exactly thrilling but thanks to the driver's excellent knowledge of the region and his somewhat crazy driving style, we made it to Mae Hong Son in a little more than 6 hours, instead of the much dreaded 8 hours. We settled in our rooms in the "Friends Guest House" and after a quick noodle soup headed off to bed in order to catch enough sleep for the following day.

The next day we, driver for the day (a very friendly and talkative policeman), Tai, Watt, Michael and myself, ventured west out of the city of Mae Hong Son through the hills towards the Karenni refugee camp no. 2 with a 4-wheel-drive pickup, all the while listening to the driver's much cherished Skorpion's tape. The camp is located several kilometers into the jungle and mountains along winding roads. After two hours we stopped at a small village in the jungle to pick up another guard of the camp. From then onwards, the road (if you can call it such) was pretty rough and so we basically spent the last hour before reaching the camp, banging our heads on the ceiling of the car and being shaken around.



A truck crossing the shallow river

We crossed a shallow river with the car numerous times, which gave our adventurous ride the finishing touch.

We arrived at the camp around 11 am to be greeted by a woman, who works for Karen Women Organisation KWO herself and who showed us around the camp. Ironically, despite being a refugee camp hosting over 5000 people, at first glance the camp itself appeared to us as a picturesque village in the jungle, surrounded by lush, green vegetation and a river running through it with bridges made out of bamboo sticks.



Bridge made out of bamboo sticks

The houses are bamboo huts raised on stilts, beneath which live the domestic animals such as pigs and chicken. All the while there were people lounging on porches and steps, children chasing each other down the dusty paths and random volleyball matches taking place. A typical village-like atmosphere, one would think.



Some houses in the village



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The reality behind this idyllic façade however is a different one. Most of the camp residents, so we have been told, have lived in this very same camp for more than 20 years, most of them having never known any other place to call home. They are not allowed to leave the camp, let alone engage in any work relationship. Their existence is therefore entirely dependant on external aid from NGOs and other humanitarian agencies that provide them with basic commodities and clothing. Looking at it from this point of view, the beauty of the surroundings and setting are in no proportion to the hard reality of the camp.

We visited one out of four nursery schools in the camp and handed out the uniforms and warm clothes we had brought with us with the help of the teachers.



Handing over the clothes to the children

The excited look on these children's faces when they lined up in neat rows to receive their new clothes was truly heart warming to say the least and so worth the bumpy and somewhat challenging ride.

We enjoyed a delicious lunch, consisting of rice, fried potatoes, fried eggs and chicken before visiting the two remaining nurseries. As the children were all having their daily nap, this second round of clothes-distributing went by faster. Unfortunately our schedule was pretty tight and so we had to head back to Mae Hong Son at around 3 pm. Hence, off we drove and another hour of hitting our heads and bumping against the car windows followed.

Back in Mae Hong Son we stopped at WEAVE's office and met with their staff for a brief chat and update. We then rented three motorcycles and once again ventured up the mountains, this time towards Tomato village. We arrived at Ban Ruam Thai around 7 pm and checked into our guest house - a simple, yet cozy place, surrounded by bamboo trees, flowers and coffee plants and owned by a friend of

Benjamin's called Hillary. We continued on towards Tomato village soon after, passing the lake along the way.

We were welcomed by Benjamin in Tomato village who offered us warm tea (which was very much appreciated given the significant drop in temperature) and bananas. As Matt and Christine (the two current volunteers in Tomato Village) were still busy teaching, we decided to go back to our guest house, freshen up and return after dinner.



Christine teaching the class

After a quick shower at the light of a torch and a relaxing dinner, we drove up to Benjamin's once again and enjoyed yet another cup of the delicious green tea and a couple more bananas. Christine told us about the A-class' improvement in English and about her impressions and exciting life in Tomato village, which was very interesting to listen to.

After quite a chilly night we gathered for breakfast at 7 am and took off sometime after that. We passed the lake on our way to see Benjamin, and this time it was partly covered with morning fog making it an even more stunning sight.



A picturesque view of the lake and the C-class room

Benjamin showed us the C-class classroom and revealed his intention of replacing the unstable bamboo walls with chest high concrete walls in order to steady the structure, all the while maintaining the bamboo roof.



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Our next stop was the EMFS nursery school where we met Maung Maung and Miriam, a volunteer from Germany. The children were pretty excited about our visit and ran around like crazy, jumping and singing aloud. We had a fun time playing with them and taking loads of pictures while Tai and Watt sat down with Maung Maung and discussed business.



Children from the EMFS nursery school

The children were so precious and adorable it was hard to leave them behind. Maung Maung followed us into town to buy a bookshelf for the nursery.

Our final stop was the OPC project, which we briefly visited. We met Khamchuen Khamai and the American couple who is currently volunteering at OPC. Khamchuen Khamai told us about a Chinese tribe, producing their own tea somewhere in the whereabouts of the Tomato Village, which could be worth a visit from the CD team on their next stopover to OPC.



The flooded path leading to the school

Khamchuen Khamai further informed us about the heavy floods which had flooded most of the path leading to the school. In fact, the path was pretty narrow, a clear sign that most of it had been washed away by the floods.

On our way to the airport we visited Watt Pra Thad Doi Kong Moo and took a few last pictures of Mae Hong Son as a reminder of this trip, difficult to describe with words other than "so amazing!".



Four tired members of Child's Dream overwhelmed by a lot of new impressions

Letizia, Tai, Michael, Watt Child's Dream