

In the Wake of Suphannahongsa: From Tha Rua till Ayutthaya

A small peep of sun dashed through the grey clouds on a drizzling rainy Saturday morning mid-July. Finally the moment arrived for the first outing of Ayutthaya's kayaking club, the Ayutthaya Kayaking Experience.

A concept was made to descent the Pa Sak River from Tha Rua to Ayutthaya; a nearly 50 Km river stretch over two days. A water route, the Ayutthayan Kings used to take when visiting the footprint of the Buddha in present Saraburi. It was as thus not only a sportive event, but it had also cultural and historical roots.

The kayak group was formed by a South-African national and two men of the Low Countries. Having baptized their seesaws the "Pink Panther", the "Ayutthaya Shark" and the "Lopburi Conqueror", the three paddlers finally found themselves at the starting point of their two day long trip, the morning market of Tha Rua.



The three made their way up through the busy morning market, on to the pier at the Pa Sak River. After having prepared their kayaks, a small prayer was made to Mae Khongkha, the Mother of All Waters, seeking her blessing and protection for paddlers and boats. Under loud cheering by the market vendors and the explosion of fire crackers, the kayakers dropped their boats in the water shortly after nine, and headed off towards Wang Daeng, the first stop on their route.



The first track of the route was easy going. The weather was cloudy and fresh, the river untouched. The 9.5 Km were travelled in a bit more than two hours and the group arrived at Wat Wang Daeng already before noon. The logistic team had everything prepared. The food was steaming in the pot and mats were spread out in the local pavilion. Khun Nari's kitchen

In the Wake of Suphannahongsa: From Tha Rua till Ayutthaya

was tasted and appreciated by all. After the bellies were full, the kayakers went for a nap as a bit of recuperation was necessary, before starting the second track. Mid-afternoon the kayakers hit the water again. And hit should be taken literally, as the eldest Lowlander could not wait to take a sudden bath.



Next destination lied another ten kilometers further, Tha Chang or the Elephant Landing. The river busted of activity in the afternoon. Barges were pulled by tow boat and the kayakers in a spare moment of relaxation, drifted along in their wake. Ones the barges left behind, the river, flat as a mirror pressed down in all her majesty.

The group ran into Tha Chang close to sunset. The kayaks were brought ashore and secured. Overnight was organized at Ban Sarai, a metal forgery community which offers "Home Stays". They were pampered by their hosts and recovered quickly thanks to the lavish Thai dinner the threesome was presented. Shortly after having food, the gates of heaven opened and rain poured heavily down on the village. It would last all night.



Woken up by the crowing of the roosters greeting the rising sun - feathered stereotypes, which some of the kayakers would have wished seen in the cooking pot, the group prepared for a new day on the waters. After a - let call it an alien breakfast - bacon and eggs, farewell was said to the hosts and the kayaks brought back into their natural habitat. The morning trip led them to Nakhon Luang or the Royal City, which royal residence and castle, was once the "Home Stay" for the Kings of Ayutthaya during their pilgrimages in the 17th and 18th centuries. This was the longest track. Many temples, barges and ships crossed their path. Skippers reduced their speed gently, when spotting the lone three-some on the broad river. The seesaws took the rolling waves with ease. Target was reached at coffee time. Kayaks

In the Wake of Suphannahongsa: From Tha Rua till Ayutthaya

were fastened at the steps in front of Wat Nakhon Luang and a short visit was brought to the "Prasat"; recently being in the news for a - let us called it old, as it lied there already for many years - porcelain toilet pot. Definitely the television outcome set something in motion, as workers were cleaning up the abundant pigeon excretions during the group's visit.



Ayutthaya was calling. After less than an hour, the kayakers went back to their seesaws, waiting their riders patiently along the Pa Sak River bank. Next target was the Asian Highway Bridge over the Pa Sak River and a close by restaurant, somehow seven kilometers further. With the stomachs empty, sugar levels dropped, the fourth track became a real pilgrimage. But to everything comes an end, so also to this fourth leg.



Kayaks were secured and feet were pushed under the table. Once bodily restored, the call of home became stronger and stronger, irresistible as St. Goarshausen's Lorelei. The threesome skipped their planned rest, jumped in their boats and headed to their final destination: Krung Sri Ayutthaya, the once magnificent city of Siam. But Yu-Tzu still had something to say. Hardly just leaving the last rest and recuperation point, a deluge of rain broke out of the grey cotton skies and our valiant kayakers could not do better than seek some comfort under a river bank pavilion. Water under, water above, ...the last track in the rain. After half an hour, the wind blew light in the sky and the final ride was retaken.

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Soon the group arrived in well-known waters, passing the entry of Khlong Oom, then the mouth of Khlong Hantra, Ko Chong Lom and Ko Loi in sight, the river horses became tameless. One more last stretch of paddling, a last explosion of the soaring muscles and rusty joints, our trio enters port at "The Seven Seas landing" close to Ayutthaya's railway station. A fine trip accomplished.

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