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ROAD RAVES

TRAVEL

# finding balance in Thailand

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Heather Greenwood Davis takes a year to travel with her husband and two sons. Her adventure continues here in Thailand.



Travelling as a family of four has its challenges. Travelling as the lone woman in a family of boys can be tough too. And the fact is that while I am far from the girly girl my parents thought they were getting, I do have a reputation for preferring luxe and lush to down and dirty. My boys (including my husband Ish), on the other hand, have yet to meet a mud pit or dark cave they didn't need to explore. I love them dearly but it's the kind of dynamic that can cause some tension when it comes to itinerary setting.

In most of the countries we've explored, since leaving Canada for a year of family travel in July 2011, we've been able to find something for most of us. But Thailand, where we spent two weeks this winter, was the first spot where we all got everything we wanted and more.

Part of it is geographical: at the tip of Southeast Asia, Thailand has the benefits of tropical climes and idyllic islands. The protected Gulf of Thailand provides plenty of opportunities for getting out on the water and the interior, with its jungle landscape to the north, offers the opportunity to get adventurous.

You can live like a pauper without pain in a beach hut or homestay or live like a King or Queen at places that would cost you much, much more back home.

The most difficult thing about a visit to Thailand is divvying up your time. Will you spend your days on jet skis and eating from street vendors or indulge in finer things?

Our family was split (3-1) with me on the losing end—so we compromised. We started our adventure leg in Khao Sok, an area just north of Chiang Mai. I was okay when we got into the rubber dinghy; okay when I realized we were going through the mangroves; even okay when the boys wanted to sit up front. But Kong, our guide, was really pushing it when she suggested we look up.



## ROAD RAVES

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"Do you see it? Up in the tree?" the obvious glee in Kong's voice. "That's a yellow diamond back python. He must be sleeping."

"Then why are you yelling?" I thought. "We don't need him awake."

I look around me to see how many other members of my family are equally concerned by this woman who is now holding a stick and jabbing it in the snake's direction to show us where it's lying and I can't find anyone who shares my fear.

Instead two little boys who are itching to find a stick for themselves and a dad who is helping them look meet my horrified stare.

And it was like that for days. At the Elephant Hills resort we stumbled on more than just the tree-sleeping pythons. We rode bamboo rafts across the murky waters, we swung on jungle vines and slipped and slid through a muddy junglescape on our way to the most unique lunch experience I've ever encountered. Meals were cooked over a makeshift fire and the cream for our curry came from a coconut picked on the spot.

## TRAVEL



On a sea canoe experience in the more touristy Phuket, we squeezed through cave entrances so small that our guide (who insisted we call him Little Buddha) had to let air out of the raft (while we were in it) to get us through. In northern Chiang Mai we zipped with the Flight of the Gibbon crew on lines that ran high above the ground ...in a rain storm. And after spotting some young boys kickboxing on a rooftop above the night market in Chiang Mai city, I watched the boys learn the Muay Thai moves from former champ Burcklerk Pinsinchai during impromptu lessons.

At the end of each day we were tired, dirty and surprisingly happy, the boys more than me, but the adrenaline rush of this constant adventure did begin to win me over. Still, when we move over to the Four Seasons Chiang Mai I cement my faith in luxe living. Set among acres of working rice paddies with all of the comforts and service you expect from a Four Seasons resort and a jaw dropping landscape that makes you feel eons away from reality but completely in Thailand, this hotel won me over immediately.

Then they opened the doors to our suite.



## ROAD RAVES



About the size of an entire house in Canada, the suite was a welcome change from months of sharing a room or squeezing into tight apartments. Suddenly there was room for each of us and then some. Meals served on good china, fresh fruit waiting in our rooms, turn down service and a spa that still has my full attention.

My heart soared again on a visit to the Mandarin Oriental Dhara Dhevi in Chiang Mai where temple-like buildings and private villas boast private plunge pools. And I believe I fell in love a little with my masseuse at the Evason Resort and spa where she not only kneaded out my knots but then invited me to bring the kids in for lessons on how to massage my neck when we get home.


It wasn't all pampering though. I had other plans for those boys.

One of the things I've always wanted to do in Thailand is to learn to cook. I love food but cooking—with two kids

underfoot and hungry, and the time it can require—is the bane of my existence. If I could get the kids (and hubby) interested in making meals, well ....win/win.

We spent time with an Executive Chef at the Four Seasons in Chiang Mai and we took lessons again (we needed as much help as we could get) at the "Cooking @Home" cooking school where Yui runs an intimate cooking school with a view from her home.

The boys took to the lessons like champs and Ish was only threatened with a rolling pin once. We laughed and cooked and ate and admitted that my favourites weren't as bad as they'd imagined.

By the end of the trip we'd all gained something. A mix of adventure and pampering for sure, but time together as a family sharing what we loved made it the perfect place to create holiday memories. 



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