

The spirit of friendship thrives amidst the multi-cultural atmosphere at Amphawa, Samutsongkram

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The friendship and cultural exchange camp aims to foster a warm friendship among participants from 10 different countries in the Master's of Primary Health care Management

Program (MPHM) as well as among the Institute's alumni, lecturers and other staff. The camp also offers a rare glimpse of the traditional Thai way of life.



The memorable, 2-day trip took us to the Damnoen Saduak floating market in Ratchaburi province, the oldest and most popular of its kind. The bustling and vibrant floating market teeming with boats laden with an eclectic mix of food, produce, and handicrafts boasts its

authentic, well-preserved traditional Thai arts and lifestyle in which local people and river coexist in harmony. Much to our delight, most of the long-tailed boats, the only means of transportation, are not motor-driven but human-paddled.



The excitement increasingly mounted as we arrived at the resort in Ampawa, Samutsongkram province where we joined in the cultural exchange games and activities. Participants were asked to introduce themselves along with accompanying “action” that seemed to represent parts of their characteristics, followed by an activity requiring each participant to tell how such simple words or greetings as ‘good morning’, and ‘thank you’ were said in their

native languages. The sheer fun was derived from the fact that some of the “actions” presented were adorably over-the-top and hilariously provocative, making the atmosphere imbued with liveliness and merriment. Additionally, the amusement intensified, as some participants were struggling in an attempt to correctly recite all the greetings in 10 different languages when they were asked to do so.



When dusk fell, the highlight of the day unfolded, as we boarded long-tailed boats and headed to the next destination. Slithering and swerving along winding canals and the river, the boats were taking us to Amphawa floating market, passing picturesque scenery of unspoiled, lush greenery dotted with mangrove trees, wild animals, traditional Thai wooden houses, locals and kids frolicking, catching fish, or washing themselves in the river. Arriving at Amphawa floating market, we were

treated to an unimaginable array of assorted traditional Thai foods, desserts, and decorative items. The area buzzing with seemingly endless activities has afforded its relentless charm and rendered us unprepared for what was in store for us next on the agenda.

Shrouded in complete darkness, we were cruising back to the resort while the pleasant breeze gently caressed us. On one side of the river was a spectacular display of glittering lights from fireflies clustering

on the silver branches of trees, drawing a gush of excitement and amazement from everyone. This magnificent, natural spectacle awarded us with a sense of eagerness and anticipation for the next day's destinations.

As the dawn of the next day greeted us, Buddhist monks arriving by boats received alms from MPHm participants. Meticulously arranged on a crisp, reed-woven mat, pleasantly aromatic food offerings and religious necessities

were being gingerly placed in the alms bowls when the warm rays of golden morning sunlight gleamed on the sparkling, smooth river. The Buddhist monks were chanting mantra of blessings in return, the hallowed, echoing sounds of which reverberated through each of us. This merit-making ceremony exuded the magical aura of tranquility, and sanctity around the premise, as they experienced this aspect of traditional Thai life.



Brimful of merits and mindfulness, we headed next to the coconut sugar-producing community in which some light was shed on the whole process of making coconut sugar. It is a quintessential and environmentally-friendly community with a high degree of self-reliance in which all human and non-human resources were efficiently and effectively utilized. This was witnessed by the fact that nothing was regarded as waste, but could be value-added to serve any purposes. Nestled among the verdure nearby was

a luxuriant, off-the-beaten-track coconut plantation where we were gathering around to observe the first step of the coconut sugar production. Nimbly climbing his way on a long bamboo pole to the top of a soaring coconut tree, a middle-aged village man was retrieving bamboo containers into which coconut sap from cut flowering branches had been trickling over night. The sweet aroma of the fresh coconut juice emanating from the bamboo containers was irresistibly inviting, making us eager to satisfy our sense of taste.



Savouring every drop of a bit of fresh coconut sap in a small glass each of us was offered, we attested to one of the most divinely natural and delightful tastes, purely devoid of any type of contaminants. The limpid liquid was then filtered through

cotton sieve cloth and simmered on a wood-burning stove until it became viscous. The finished product was rather off-white, caramel-like, and wonderfully aromatic.



Later in the program, a wrap-up discussion was held and a light-hearted

session ensued to crown Mr. and Miss. MPHM friendship and cultural exchange camp.



During the 2 –day friendship and cultural exchange camp, MPHM participants immersed themselves in the enriched traditional Thai and multi-cultural experiences that have laid the foundations for them to further strengthen the long-lasting tie among themselves and other Thais as

well as paved the way for them to overcome any obstacles which might come their way along their educational journey. This preparation will allow them to eventually emerge triumphant in the spirit of friendship beyond frontiers.

