

Apocalypse NOW!

This is a 13,000 km. adventure from the developed Malaysian peninsula to the former war zone of South East Asia, which is now a heavenly destination for hard core travelers.

Words by Akis Temperidis Photos by Vula Netu and Akis Temperidis





12th century Ta Prohm temple was constructed into the jungle and was invaded by the jungle after the decline of the Khmer empire. This mystic place was the set for famous Hollywood movie Tomb Raider, starring Angelina Jolie.



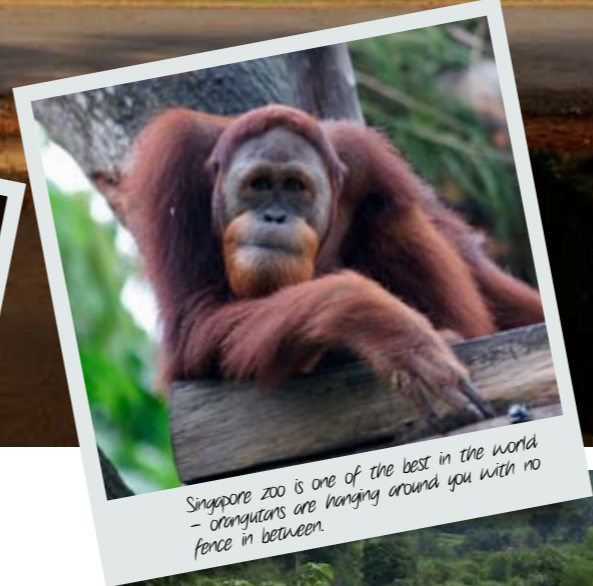
This guy grew up in the Vinh Moc tunnels and survived the American bombardments. He is deaf but he works as a guide there.



“ kehgrire iurg8egfewiru yewfer8gyug uyvg uygdw8 gv dygwudyg wduyg7wd fydg ”



An old Cambodian lady could have told many horrific stories about the genocide if it wasn't for the language barrier.



Singapore zoo is one of the best in the world - orangutans are hanging around you with no fence in between.

After the Indian experience – a cultural shock on a daily basis – Malaysia seems to be so easy, reliable and affordable. The same goes in Thailand as well. Tourism is so developed here that the real colour of the country is paled. Motorways, neon signs, mini markets and malls are spread everywhere from Phuket to Bangkok. Even the monks are busy with their fancy mobile phones most of the time. Thailand and Malaysia would be identical if the former wasn't a Buddhist society and the latter a Muslim one. Malaysia is 90% Muslim but is more multicultural, thanks to the Chinese and Indian minorities. Chinatowns and Little Indias are distinct neighborhoods in Kuala Lumpur, Melaka or Georgetown, the busy port of Penang island. Malays have the political power but Chinese have the money. In other words, Malaysia aims to be a bigger Singapore. You probably know Singapore; A rich, dollar oriented society, which survives in huge malls, fancy sushi restaurants, tennis courts and golf courses in a strategically situated island at the tip of the Malaysian peninsula. If you have no money you are nobody here. Singapore was very expensive for us, so we had to sleep in car

park at East Coast Park (the only beach for Singaporeans) in order to save money. Mall societies like this are not suitable for our adventure, that's why we changed our mind there and decided to divert our route. Given we couldn't find a car ferry to Indonesia we turned to the north, crossed Malaysia and southern Thailand and from Bangkok, we drove towards the border of Cambodia.

Khmer grandeur and Khmer Rouge atrocities
This was an eye opening experience. A long, hard drive through countries we all got to know from Hollywood war movies, like Apocalypse Now, Platoon, Killing Fields and Deer Hunter. Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos; we were excited to make this roundtrip right from the start of our 'around the world' dream.
I remember well the day we entered Cambodia. It was like entering the third world with all these porters pushing



A bus accident on a muddy road in Laos delayed our trip to Luang Prabang.

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their wooden, overloaded carts with goods carried from prosperous Thailand. As long as we were driving through the rice fields we were enthusiastic to explore the marvels of Angkor like Lara Croft did in her first movie. We could not imagine the mass development the ruins generated at nearby Siem Reap though. In a rural country like Cambodia this is a Western parenthesis of luxurious resorts, spa and sushi restaurants. Siem Reap is

the major money machine for this poor country as everybody flies here from Bangkok to visit the Angkor temples and go back. And you know what? The temples are worth it. This is one of the most breathtaking archeological sites in the world, along with the pyramids of Giza and Acropolis of Athens. Angkor is by far the biggest one. We did 150km in two days to see the temples that extend for tens of kilometers into

the jungle. We were astonished by what the Khmer created. The next day, in Phnom Penh, we were disgusted by what the Khmer Rouge regime brought to this country in 1975. It was a painful experience visiting the 'killing fields' and the Tuol Sleng museum, a school transformed to notorious S-21 prison. These were two places where thousands of people died of torture as enemies of the communist utopia that the KR wanted to bring in the country. One third of the population (1.7 million people!) died during the four years the Khmer Rouge dominated Cambodia until the Vietnamese army invaded the country for good. This genocide was so inhuman and so recent that nobody should forget. More than anybody, the people of Cambodia can't forget. Looking in their eyes, you can see only pain. They are discreet, though, polite and generous. They don't like reminding their past to foreigners. People of Cambodia are a personification of humanity. We admire them.

No more B52 and napalm bombs

We were told that foreign vehicles were not allowed in Vietnam. You need a special permit, local plates and insurance that you can't get issued if you don't present a guarantee

Visiting the S21 prison and the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge period is a thrilling experience. 14,000 people are said to be tortured to death in this former school of Phnom Penh, during the four years of the Khmer Rouge regime.



Young monks study early in the morning in front of the famous Bayon temple -

The World Off Road Pt 5

Children are adorable, especially in Laos. We loved them!

100,000 Km. in a Land Rover Discovery3

Car km.: 101,626
Trip km.: 92,626 Kuala Lumpur-Singapore-Bangkok-Ho Chi Minh-Hanoi-Vientiane-Chiang Mai-Kuala Lumpur 12,947 km. Refuellings: 23
Diesel lt.: 1701 lt/100 km.: 13.1

3/1/2007: Car manufactured in Solihull, England.

26/2/2007: Development works at Roverland-Gabletsas, Greece

22/4/2007: defected clutch slave cylinder replacement, oil change

25/4/2007, 7500 km.: The adventure begins!

22/5/2007, 11627 km.: second clutch slave cylinder replacement in Morocco

18/6/2007, 17.625 km.: Service in Dakar-Senegal

4/9/2007, 33.699 km.: Service and handbrake repair in Namibia

5/10/2007, 37.567 km.: Clutch master cylinder replacement in East London, S.Africa

7/10/2007, 38.343 km.: 4 new Cooper tyres provided by Dunlop S. Africa in Durban

8/11/2007, 45.473 km.: Service in Tanzania

22/1/2008, 59.919 km.: front brake pads change, Egypt

20/2/2008, 66.000 km.: Big service at Roverland Gabletsas. Clutch, brakes, belts changed. Rack and pinion replaced (after we hit a baobab root in Malawi) and distorted (by touching the ground) exhaust finals replaced well. New Kaymar double spare wheel base provided by Outback Import of Greece. New BF Goodrich A/T tyres 245/75 17 provided by Michelin Hellas.

3/4/2008, 67.500 km.: brand new rear shock absorbers by Jam Sport - Bilstein Greece. Front ones just serviced.

2/6/2008, 78.574 km.: Clutch master cylinder replacement and handbrake setup in Pakistan.

26/6/2008, 82.232 km.: front brake pads replacement, Nepal

22/7/2008, 85.076 km.: Clutch slave/master cylinder and hand brake unit replacement in Navnit Motors-Mumbai

24/10/2008, 93.845 km.: Oil and rear brake pads change in Cambodia.

23/11/2008, 100.736 km.: hand brake unit, rear diff oil sealer and turbo replacement from Land Rover Malaysia

BELOW:
Vientiane is the most laid back capital in SE Asia. Pat that luang - the golden Buddhist temple - is the highlight of the city.

letter from your embassy at Vietnamese customs. Embassies don't grant documents like this so the only other way was to pay money. That's what we did. Thanks to a local tour operator, we managed to drive our Discovery in the country and it was worth the 250USD we were charged, after a hard bargain. They were asking for 700 USD...

Vietnam is a totally different country to what you expect. The painful civil war that resulted to heavy military offensive by the Americans is hardly distinguishable today. A decade after its reunification in the 80's, Vietnam decided to reform from a rural underdeveloped communist state to a fast developing economy. They imitated the Chinese model. Tourist development is impressive as well. We could not believe our eyes when we visited beach resorts like Mui Ne and Nha Trang. This is the Copacabana of Rio or Surfers Paradise with chop sticks. We traveled through the country, from the former capital Saigon (renamed to Ho Chi Minh, after the famous Viet leader) to Hanoi and what we saw was a great effort by everybody. Nobody seems to remember the war. There is no hate against Americans at all. Vietnamese are hard workers and forward-thinking entrepreneurs. Some of them give a bad reputation to this splendid country, as they like to take advantage of tourists. Overpricing is common, so you have to bargain for everything, even for a cup of coffee. Apart from this, our Vietnamese adventure was more than satisfying. We will never forget driving through the DMZ (demilitarized zone) at the 17th parallel, hiding like the Vietkong into the Vinh Moc tunnels, walking into the streets of old Hoi An or biking into the imposing citadel in Hue.

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Damnoen Saduak, a floating market about one hour outside Bangkok, seems to be left centuries behind from modern Thailand.

Laid-back countries

Laos is the most heavily bombed country on earth. By Americans – who else? Hundreds of innocent people still lose their lives every year from UXO – unexploded ordnance.

Driving through the country, though, is a refreshing and much safer experience. Traffic is low on the twisty roads that run through the forested, hilly landscape. People are more relaxed than the Vietnamese – they actually have a Thai style.

Expatriates are more than the tourists in the country and the hot spots are distinct here; Vientiane, Vang Vieng and – French style - Luang Prabang were the only places where we felt as if we were in

the famous Kao San road of Bangkok. You know what I mean: strips full of cafes, guest houses, tour agencies and massage parlors. Every other place gets you back to a 19th century rural and peaceful lifestyle. We fell in love with Laos and we will go there again to meet more tribal people.

Northern Thailand is much more developed than Laos but is laid back as well. This country is incredibly organized. Wherever we traveled, roads were perfectly paved, towns well signed and lively from dawn until late at night. Don't



Saigon is a motorbike hell!

get panicked by last year's political turbulence in Bangkok. Thailand is as safe for its visitors as eight airbags in your car. Police are always there to protect foreigners. Thai people are peaceful, permissive and respectful. In their every day life, they adore food and socializing through dining, which they like to do all day long. Stalls are spread everywhere and they serve a dazzling variety of food. After a long walk in Chiang Mai – our favorite town in Thailand – you can always have a Thai massage before dinner – possibly in a Buddhist temple. It's like an exhilarating aperitif that costs no more than five Australian dollars! From Chiang Mai, you can take the motorway and travel safe and sound to the Malaysian border but what we did was more exciting. We followed the old hippy trail to Pai village and from there to Mae Hong Son where we met some of the hill tribes living there. Visiting a village of 'long neck' women is a must even if you do it in a package tour. The women that came 13 years ago as refugees



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Kayan - Karen women do not have long necks as people believe. Wearing the heavy brass rings, pushes down their collarbone and the final result is mostly an optical illusion.

The World Off Road Pt 5

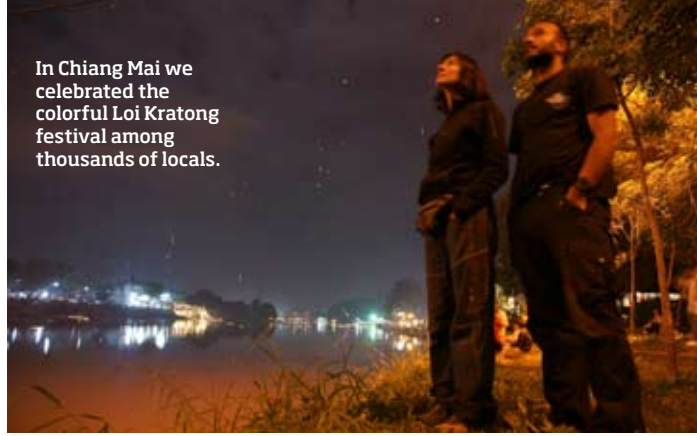
from Burma live here under the surveillance of the Thai government and make a living thanks to the tourists who arrive to see them in daily basis. Many people say this is an 'anthropological zoo' and maybe they are right. Try to change this whenever you go there. Don't just take photos and go on, take some time and speak with these lovely ladies. They have heartbreaking stories to tell...

Most hill tribes of northern Thailand are of Burmese origin. They were forced to leave their country to escape the repression of the military junta. This regime altered the history of a beautiful nation and diverted our route as well. Restrictive laws for foreigners had obliged us to ship our car from Chennai to Malaysia as independent travelers are not allowed in the country. Burma was a country we missed and that's why we wanted to enter there. Entering Burma from Thailand is straightforward. You just need to leave your car at Mae Sot, cross the bridge and take a temporary permit, valid for one day. We visited the Myawadi, a border town, and we saw that the standards of living are much lower than in neighboring Thailand. Dusty streets, bustling markets, pedal rickshaws and a blend of Indian and Asian faces, these are our memories from our short visit to Burma.

Getting back to Kuala Lumpur after a three month, 13,000 km. roundtrip to SE Asia, was like getting back home. We felt nostalgic in a way as this was a familiar place to us but we were already missing the bustling towns of Vietnam, the rice paddies of Cambodia, the fresh air of mountainous Laos and the hippy lifestyle of northern Thailand. Malaysia was like home with all these malls, fancy restaurants and multiplex cinemas but we didn't want to go home yet. We were looking forward driving through Indonesia to East Timor and – yes! – get to Australia. A down under adventure is yet to come! 📍

Go to www.theworldoffroad.com to see where we are now!

In Chiang Mai we celebrated the colorful Loi Kratong festival among thousands of locals.



We travelled under torrential rain in Vietnam.



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