



OPINION > OPINION

# A river trip to hell, for locals and tourists

7 Jan 2015 at 06:00 23,676 viewed 61 comments  
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For many Bangkokians who live far from the river, the chance to enjoy a boat ride on the majestic Chao Phraya River or visit its webs of canals is a joy only tourists get to experience. Most locals tend to be stuck in the concrete jungle from dawn till dusk.

During the New Year weekend, my friends and I decided to do something different and act like tourists by cruising the Chao Phraya for an hour. We expected it to be a brief, joyful escape from our daily city routine. However, what we experienced was what many tourists routinely face — harassment, lies and scams.

Our unexpected "adventure" started when we finished our lunch at a small, cosy hotel by the Chao Phraya. It was our private escapade away from our daily family obligations as wives, mothers and daughters, and we thought the boat ride would complete our afternoon get-away.

We decided to enquire about the boat taxi in front of the hotel. A woman in her 50s stood next to the sign advertising the boat route. I asked her about the fare and she gave me a cold, almost hostile look. "1,000 baht an hour," she said, and then turned away.

"From where to where?" I insisted.

She answered coldly again: "To Bangkok Noi Canal and return via Mon Canal."

"Bad vibes," I told my friends. "Let's not do it."

Their pleading eyes told me they really wanted to experience the cold wind sweeping through their hair and have their faces cooled by the sprinkles of the waves — the precious moments that would bring back our carefree days.

Then two young French tourists approached us and asked if we wanted to join them on the same boat ride so we could split the boat fee of 1,500 baht between five people. They said the boatman — presumably the husband of the woman who seemed to hate us without any reason — had agreed to the price.

My friends beamed. But as soon as the boat started cutting through the waves, the boatman — a stout man in his late 50s — began to shower us with his anger. "Are they coming with you?" he bellowed. "These people, they want to cheat you all the time. When we told them the price, they disappeared and brought back more people. They are cheats!"

"What's the problem?" I asked back in my sternest voice.

"No problem," he said, still angry. "You don't know them. They cheat us all the time."

As other boats overtook us, the young French man asked the boatman if it was possible for our boat to go faster. The answer was another series of angry tirades in Thai. "Faster to die or what? These people they demand this and that. I am so tired of these people who don't know anything."

Then a young French woman asked if it was possible to go to smaller canals.

"No, no. This is a canal. This is Bangkok Noi Canal. Smaller canals take more time. Cost more money. Want to pay?" he said.

I was not surprised by his answer. But I was surprised at his anger which was verging on hatred.

After making two brief stops for us to feed the fish and buy some sweets from a boat vendor, he slowed the boat until it stopped in the middle of the canal. Then he walked up to the two French tourists. "Pay now!" he barked.

They refused, insisting on paying at the end of the trip. He shouted more loudly, his eyes fierce, his body language threatening. Feeling like hostages in the middle of the river, we all dutifully paid.

"If I wait, people will run away. I've been cheated so many times," he said.

Then he announced the boat ride was over. "What about Klong Mon where you said you would take us," I asked. "Closed," he said. End of conversation. The boatman was still angry when I disembarked. Was it a ploy to intimidate us? I turned around. "If you talk to people like this, no one will want to take your boat."

He barked back, even angrier. "Who cares? Other people will still want to go with us."

When we were safely ashore, a hotel staff member said that it was a "mafia boat". The young French duo also told us that being ripped off and harassed was nothing new to them in Thailand. "Nearly every person who runs a tour we have met acts like that," they said.

When my anger subsided, I tried to understand the boat couple's psyche. They certainly have to bribe some officials to operate. Were they venting their anger on us? Are their own efforts to rip off tourists forcing tourists to bargain, often far too much, to their anger?

One thing is for sure, I will never go back there. I wouldn't be surprised if many tourists choose never to return to Thailand either.

Sanitsuda Ekachai is editorial pages editor, Bangkok Post.

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**Mason**  Posted: 9 | 28 Jan 2015 at 03.56

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I have visited your beautiful country many times starting in the 60's have many Thai friends and met the love of my life there as well! If I have been on one boat excursion in Bangkok and on the beautiful island of Phuket I've been on 20 and never had anything but a pleasant experience. Sad to hear about their bad trip but from my standpoint it's the exception to the rule in Thailand with it kind people and great king!

 0  11  0



**Sandyman**  Posted: 8 | 11 Jan 2015 at 13.50

 Report abuse

No video? On a sightseeing trip? Should certainly have filmed that nasty encounter.

 16  2  0



**Sarada**  Posted: 4 | 10 Jan 2015 at 10.58

 Report abuse

I remember the days of leisurely boat trips down the Klongs to the floating markets, of the distinction e flavour of tom yam soup by the riverside, smiling, toothless old ladies with fragrant flowers...its all gone. Now its a shark pool, I would not go there again to spoil the memories. Trips to Buddhist temples in the city were a delight.I blame a lot of tourists, trying to rip off the tour operators, the tour operators cheating g the boatman and the boatman a member of the local boats cartel. Sigh. Is anyone going to let us enjoy our holiday hassle free?

 9  7  0



**tomatslick**  Posted: 51 | 8 Jan 2015 at 11.27

 Report abuse

It's unfair to condemn what can be the best thing to do in Bangkok on the basis of just one experience of one boatman having a bad day.

 9  64  3

 Comment reply

 Report abuse



**billybaht**  Posted: 13 | 20 Jan 2015 at 01.12

Apologists will always blame the foreigners. The truth is that scams against tourists are rampant in Thailand. Like the boat man said: "Who cares? Other people will hire my boat." Translation: He can be rude and disrespectful but tourists will continue to accept poor treatment and pay rip off prices...

 23  0

 Comment reply

 Report abuse



**moggy71**  Posted: 645 | 12 Jan 2015 at 11.54

Certainly unfair to condemn all based on one experience indeed but I think the point of the whole story is that it's a common occurrence these days. Land of smiles blah, blah, blah....

 37  3

 Comment reply

 Report abuse



**macca64** Posted: 51 | 10 Jan 2015 at 04.54

I have to agree . I took my elderly parents , my wife and several of my Thai nieces on a canal boat trip and we had a great time . It was the highlight of our stay in Bangkok .

 10  20



**macca64** Posted: 51 | 8 Jan 2015 at 05.40

 Report abuse

Just an example of the all too common attitude in Thailand , " their just falang , another will be along in a few minutes " . I tend to avoid the well known tourist centres for this reason . To be fair , having seen the disgusting behaviour of many tourists in such areas , I can understand the attitude .

 47  4  0



**kevinchm**  Posted: 15 | 8 Jan 2015 at 04.01

 Report abuse

I think they should set up a special police force to handle problems like this. Tourists that have had a problem could call them and they could easily fix the problem and have the wrong-doers arrested. Things like this, the jet-ski scams and jewelry scams would quickly become a thing of the past. Maybe they could call this special task force something easy to remember like The Tourist Police.

 39  2  0



**drsmith**  Posted: 1,830 | 7 Jan 2015 at 21.11

 Report abuse

what many tourists routinely face — harassment, lies and scams. Now you understand why many tourists come to Thailand one time and never come back. Thai behavior such as this is ruining the tourist industry.

 77  1  0



**Jadet**  Posted: 113 | 7 Jan 2015 at 17.39

 Report abuse

A timely article by a Thai. Price discrimination is a feature of Thailand and SE Asia generally and it is simply that discrimination. Just imagine Thais being charged + times an entrance fee overseas ... where would they go? What would they see? This needs to stop. The other thing that shocked me was the ready acceptance of corruption in that "they certainly have to bribe some officials to operate." This laissez-faire attitude to corruption is one of the causes for it being almost a universal feature in everyday life; at schools, universities, the selection of hospitals for graduating doctors etc.

 85  2  0



**dekwat**  Posted: 310 | 7 Jan 2015 at 17.25

 Report abuse

People traveling to any world tourist destination, will systematically get ripped off. This is not just a Thai problem. I've been here long enough to learn how to avoid scams and I avoid tourist traps like the plague. There are still lots of very nice people and very nice places in Thailand where one can have a good time

without fear of being a target. You just have to do your homework better before traveling anywhere and learn to 'detect' and avoid traps. As for the authorities, long term neglect and incompetence only made the problem worse and more obvious. Things will need to improve in the long run but I'm not holding my breath.

34 20 0



**Ludwig** Posted: 81 | 7 Jan 2015 at 16.26

Report abuse

And the charge tourist and local white people 4 times more ,not 2 times . I tell every one if you don't pay the same as Thai , the rip you off . Time to change . Treat every one the same . Stop going to any place like that . If other country would do that to Thai people I like to see how the feel . There is no law to charge 4 or 5 times as much as Thai , balau waterfall I have not gone for 3 years .

79 1 0



**ThaiBoy** Posted: 18 | 7 Jan 2015 at 16.07

Report abuse

Well done Khun Sanitsuda for highlighting an important issue. You love your country and feel pain when you see scammers ripping of Non-Thais who boost the country economy. Unfortunately, it seems like every Thai is given a project to rip off foreigners. Initially welcome foreigners with fake smile, business & investment hope; then make them penniless and kick them back.

92 1 0



**jck** Posted: 761 | 7 Jan 2015 at 15.17

Report abuse

This article should be mandatory reading for the PM and TAT

97 2 0



**Mi1231** Posted: 40 | 7 Jan 2015 at 15.15

Report abuse

Dear Khun Sanitsuda, a great article. Your articles always provide not only good read but also serve to better the society. I came to Thailand six years ago and fell in love with it and continued to visit every year until I moved here. BUT when I recommend Thailand to others, I always tell them to stay away as much as possible from the tourist areas and most certainly avoid those who solely seek out tourists to offer 'service.'

69 1 0



**Knox** Posted: 14 | 7 Jan 2015 at 15.12

Report abuse

Having read the story I am surprised , that a comment from the Tourism Authority of Thailand are not commenting, but then as foreigner i expect pigs to fly not that ANY Government agency will do one thing about this blatant insulting of Foreigners and Thais , their comment will probably be This Is Thailand.

54 2 0



**Walt** Posted: 1 | 7 Jan 2015 at 15.03

Report abuse

Thank you, Khun Sanitsuda, for publishing this article. I hope it will help.

52 0 0



**dragonkrz** Posted: 378 | 7 Jan 2015 at 14.41

Report abuse

Let the thugs starve, do not use such "services". Enjoy the majority of honest Thai people. Got to rural provinces, there is more to explore and learn about Thai and Thailand than in Pattaya or Bangkok. BTW Pattaya should be the very last on your list of places to visit, except you want to play golf.

57 6 0



**Proudfrang** Posted: 28 | 7 Jan 2015 at 14.39

Report abuse

As a frang living in Thailand I've seen a land of smiles turn to a land of cranky people. A smile costs nothing but will give must back!

44 2 1

Comment reply

Report abuse



**BGC2BKK** Posted: 690 | 12 Jan 2015 at 10.37

Most people smiling all day long are just working. Nothing to do with politeness or friendliness. And that smile disappears like snow for the sun over a 5 THB dispute.

10 0



**JohnDoe100** Posted: 160 | 7 Jan 2015 at 14.33

Report abuse

The best way to deal with this problem is to spread the word. Tell your friends to spend their money some place else. Tell them to pick another holiday destination. There are lots of other places where you can have a nice holiday.After all, Thailand is not that amazing.

59 1 0



**JohnDoe100** Posted: 160 | 7 Jan 2015 at 14.33

Report abuse

The best way to deal with this problem is to spread the word. Tell your friends to spend their money some place else. Tell them to pick another holiday destination. There are lots of other places where you can have a nice holiday.After all, Thailand is not that amazing.

103 4 1

Comment reply

Report abuse



**Mungkood** Posted: 231 | 7 Jan 2015 at 15.57

Already happened the long term long stay European tourist is gone from the south and replaced with Russian and Chinese group tours. Thais cannot think past tomorrow and think foreigners are stupid. It is just the opposite. The Europeans are now in Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia etc... and not getting ripped off by the supposedly jai dee Thai.

63 3



**Thai\_Scot** Posted: 2 | 7 Jan 2015 at 14.12

Report abuse

Johncat 1 hits the nail firmly on the head....

47 0 0



**rapaille99** Posted: 4 | 7 Jan 2015 at 13.49

Report abuse

the probleme is when you talk about that to the police,they laugh of you in your face....in the farang culture,this kind of behaviour is insulting.

108 1 0



**geoffo** Posted: 4,154 | 7 Jan 2015 at 13.42

Report abuse

Big credit to Khun Sanitsuda for telling it as it is. I think most Thai's don't know what goes on with tourists and , like K. Sanitsuda , would be embarrassed if they knew. BP please keep exposing these problems. It is good for everyone living here.

👍 100 🗨️ 0 🔄 0



**terryt** 🇹🇭 Posted: 2 | 7 Jan 2015 at 13.01

🚫 Report abuse

Here's another place to avoid contacting long tail boats for riding around the river. I put some photos up. <http://www.bangkokpost.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=60&t=9397>

👍 50 🗨️ 0 🔄 0



**DrDave** 🇹🇭 Posted: 728 | 7 Jan 2015 at 12.16

🚫 Report abuse

I find it interesting that the writer's party was quoted a price of 1000 baht (split among the Thai group of at least three people), and the French couple was quoted a price of 1500 baht for two people (now to be split among at least five people), but the writer did not comment on or question "Why were the foreigners quoted a higher price?" And why was it cheating the boatman that when the price was to rent the boat, not per person?

👍 60 🗨️ 1 🔄 0



**TonyCr** 🇹🇭 Posted: 31 | 7 Jan 2015 at 11.31

🚫 Report abuse

Give it a few years and Thailand will be off the "best places to visit" lists, at least for returning tourists. Too many other interesting spots in the world to waste your time getting abused and cheated here. Sad and unfortunate since there are so many positive things here. Just too difficult to get through the BS to get to them.

👍 128 🗨️ 1 🔄 0



**Reasonable** 🇹🇭 Posted: 121 | 7 Jan 2015 at 11.30

🚫 Report abuse

Nice to see this being accurately commented on by a Thai instead of the usual defensive attitude of TAT and the like. Hope there are more articles like this and they get as much publicity as possible. Well done to the author.

👍 140 🗨️ 0 🔄 0



**martz** 🇹🇭 Posted: 7 | 7 Jan 2015 at 11.26

🚫 Report abuse

Compliments to the writer. I am a foreigner and love Thailand, the real Thailand. I hate it when I see negative things written about this country where I live happily for a decade and a half. But the truth is the truth and hiding from it makes it worse. The police harassment of tourists in the Asok area had halted since mainstream media picked it up. Its time that all these scams to get money out of people (Thai or tourist) go on public record and are put in the media. This as it seems is the only hope things stop. Mr Prime Minister: why are the jetski mafia back in Phuket and Pattaya? Why are the positive changes not permanent?!

👍 82 🗨️ 0 🔄 0



**BGC2BKK** 🇹🇭 Posted: 690 | 7 Jan 2015 at 11.14

🚫 Report abuse

Tourists who want to take a trip on the river: Starting from KS Road, go to the Tha Chang, Si Phraya or Thewet ferry. The boat with the green flag takes you all the way to Pak Kred and back for +- 50 THB. Trust me, that is bang for buck. The orange and yellow boats go to Nonhaburi. Don't give money to crooks. Be careful at the "tourist ferries" like near the royal palace.

👍 81 🗨️ 2 🔄 0



**lillebror** 🇹🇭 Posted: 183 | 7 Jan 2015 at 10.44

🚫 Report abuse

True Thailand, this high season people here will start to suffer and learn now it is downhill. You can pull all your Thainess out will not help !

👍 87 🗨️ 1 🔄 0



**Simon.j** 🇹🇭 Posted: 151 | 7 Jan 2015 at 10.11

🚫 Report abuse

Tourists get scammed all over the world, especially if not street wise. The writer admitted to not being comfortable with the first contact. You don't have to speak the language to pick up on bad vibes. It's not right but the tourists world wide can do much more to limit the scams

👍 11 🗨️ 61 🔄 0



**ozopinion** 🇹🇭 Posted: 141 | 7 Jan 2015 at 10.07

🚫 Report abuse

Thailand tourism industry its its own worst enemy. They tend to forget that there are many other countries that have just as nice beaches and resorts and shopping. No wonder so many Europeans and Russians have stopped coming here. Enjoy dealing with the Chinese, that's all I can say

👍 86 🗨️ 1 🔄 0



**tg1955** 🇹🇭 Posted: 257 | 7 Jan 2015 at 10.06

🚫 Report abuse

Thanks for your article, Khun Sanitsuda. This reinforces the dismal state of affairs of tourism in Thailand. IMHO, as a BP journalist, you should air your 'grievances' and bad experience to the proper channel(s) be it Tourism Authority of Thailand or even the NRC. It is long overdue that these thugs (boat tour operators, jet ski operators, tuk tuk drivers, and their ilk) be weeded out of Thai society. So disgusting, so abhorring behavior ...

👍 87 🗨️ 1 🔄 0



**johncat1** 🇹🇭 Posted: 940 | 7 Jan 2015 at 09.44

🚫 Report abuse

The Thai government sets the standard by allowing National parks to operate a dual pricing system, and of course in this nation of "copy copy" all other Thais follow suit

👍 133 🗨️ 1 🔄 2

🔄 Comment reply

🚫 Report abuse



**sinnerboy** 🇹🇭 Posted: 276 | 12 Jan 2015 at 12.33

On New years day, I went with my Thai wife and brother to Huay Mae Khamin as I had seen an article in this paper that on the Kings birthday New Years eve and day, all parks were to be free. On arrival an apologetic park employee showed my wife a new directive saying that farangs still had to pay, as did Thai family groups of more than 5!!! I object to this racial discrimination, and I even wrote to my MP suggesting that Thai tourists, who will probably all be wealthy, should be charged 4 times the amount for visiting English Heritage sites, making £32.00 Also free entry museums could charge Thai tourists, say £10.00.

👍 8 🗨️ 0

🔄 Comment reply

🚫 Report abuse



**Mungkood** 🇹🇭 Posted: 231 | 7 Jan 2015 at 16.00

Spot on...

👍 41 🗨️ 0



**bucktoui** 🇹🇭 Posted: 142 | 7 Jan 2015 at 09.35

🚫 Report abuse

Totally normal to be cheated by Thai merchants, been there done that.

👍 83 🗨️ 1 🔄 0

**BorisB** 🇹🇭 Posted: 51 | 7 Jan 2015 at 09.28

🚫 Report abuse



Welcome to the real Thailand. The anger in the people is a real problem, something that needs to be addressed quickly And the authorities wonder why tourists are not coming back!

90 0 1

Comment reply

Report abuse



builderoz Posted: 93 | 7 Jan 2015 at 22.54

they get angry when they realize you are aware of the scam they are trying on you. I've seen it and been the but of their anger many times.

18 0



nosoup4u Posted: 862 | 7 Jan 2015 at 09.15

Report abuse

You think tourists make this stuff up?

80 0 0



sundance Posted: 8 | 7 Jan 2015 at 09.03

Report abuse

what goes around comes around

62 0 0



Beerboy Posted: 460 | 7 Jan 2015 at 09.03

Report abuse

It's good to see a Thai commenting and attacking the rip off scams that tourists endure. When it comes from a foreign tourist it is mostly ignored, I think.

93 0 0



Merlin Posted: 255 | 7 Jan 2015 at 08.59

Report abuse

That is the situation with every tourist spot in the country, why would they change a winning formula.

192 1 1

Comment reply

Report abuse



johncat1 Posted: 940 | 7 Jan 2015 at 12.13

Yes, the government have set a precedence for all Thais to follow, with their dual pricing at National Parks

63 0



Mr.Amused Posted: 188 | 7 Jan 2015 at 08.54

Report abuse

Amazing Thailand..... This is the sort of behaviour that tourists have to put up with all the time, what with dual pricing, scams, xenophobia....i am surprised as many people visit as do

211 0 0



Dutchjohn Posted: 5 | 7 Jan 2015 at 08.46

Report abuse

That's why I live in the East. The real Thailand

98 20 2

Comment reply

Report abuse



ThaiSilk Posted: 225 | 7 Jan 2015 at 12.15

Dutchjohn, what Providences are these, please? I would be interested to know.

11 8

Comment reply

Report abuse



Dystopia Posted: 261 | 7 Jan 2015 at 11.18

Isaan is not Thailand in the strictest sense of the word. People there consider themselves Isaan first and Thai a distant second.

42 11



upena Posted: 2,667 | 7 Jan 2015 at 08.34

Report abuse

All part of the Minster of Tourism and Sports Discover Thainess 2015 campaign.

169 3 0



tcr Posted: 784 | 7 Jan 2015 at 08.33

Report abuse

These scams happen all the time. And many times are protected by the local police. The gem scam is a well known one. But not for all, unfortunately. And Thailand is wondering why quality tourists are opting for other destinations? Try renting a jet ski in Pattaya or Phuket!

201 0 0



sobeit Posted: 103 | 7 Jan 2015 at 08.32

Report abuse

Many are angry, so the tourist is the easy way to vent it out...It is happening all over Thailand

112 1 0



janus Posted: 483 | 7 Jan 2015 at 08.17

Report abuse

It is fortunate for Thais that they do not look like farangs or they would experience this more often. Perhaps you should pretend to be Malaysian or filipino and not speak Thais, just to experience life as a tourist.

138 1 0



johncat1 Posted: 940 | 7 Jan 2015 at 08.14

Report abuse

It is good to see a Thai who is not afraid to face up to the truth instead of just saying Mai Pen Rai. This is a good example of why ALL tour operators should be registered And a good complaints system set up to deal with these people. But so long as the police Mafias exist sadly this will never happen.

155 0 0

Birdie Posted: 903 | 7 Jan 2015 at 08.04

Report abuse



Hope the NCPO reads and fully understand the plights of the tourists and locals facing such situation.

171 5 1

Comment reply

Report abuse



johncat1 Posted: 940 | 7 Jan 2015 at 09.57

Only if they can get enough Brownie Points. Looking after Thai interests and welfare comes before looking after tourists.

51 0



lungstib Posted: 877 | 7 Jan 2015 at 07.47

Report abuse

After 30 years in the tour business I stopped doing any tourist activity here in Thailand because I couldn't stand the aggravation. Now living way out in the countryside I meet pleasant people unlike those at the resorts.

164 6 0



borrocks Posted: 601 | 7 Jan 2015 at 07.24

Report abuse

situations like this have been known and very common for decades ...remember its the land of smile...LOL

186 2 0

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