

Serendipity Travels

AROUND THE WORLD 2022

Our travels in October—November 2022 took us around the world from west to east. Join us as our journey continues to Southeast Asia. Previously, we visited [Greece, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Oman, India, and Sri Lanka](#).

Part 5: Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand

23 November 2022

Penang Island, Malaysia [100° E]

Our ship docked at George Town, Penang Island, Malaysia on 23 November 2022. We took the excursion “Temples & Traditional Crafts,” which was a colorful introduction to aspects of the country of Malaysia.

George Town is the main city on the island of Penang, the northwestern-most part of Malaysia. As we awoke, a squall passed overhead. We would spend the day dodging rain squalls—they drop quite a bit of water at a time. We were told the rain is a blessing—it lowers the relative humidity. Lower perhaps, but the combination of temperature and humidity in the 80s meant we were drenched from the inside for much of the day.

Although Malaysia is about 2/3 Muslim in religion, many of our stops today were dedicated to the Buddhist religion.

Our first stop was at the Thai Buddhist Temple (Wat Chaiyamangkalaram), which houses the fourth largest Reclining Buddha in the world. The base of the reclining Buddha contains crematory urns and small monuments to those dearly departed. We also visited the Burmese Buddhist Temple which is across the street. Both Thai and Burmese Buddhist temples are here to serve immigrants of those countries who came to work during the British occupation.



Our tour continued to the Batu Ferringhi region, where we visited a batik factory. Batik is an art form practiced in many places of the world. At this factory, we witnessed one woman hand-drawing floral designs, and another artisan using a stamp to reproduce the same design over and over again. Both were putting wax lines on the cloth. The space between the lines is then filled in by another artisan; the one we watched was doing a masterful job of blending colors within the same space. Adjacent to the workshop was a retail space which did a good business, including Meredith's purchase.

Leaving the batik factory, we continued past fruit orchards and plantations growing clove and nutmeg and paused at a farmer's fruit stall. There we learned about the harvest and processing of nutmeg.

Our drive continued around the island, leading us to the legendary Temple of the Azure Cloud, or Snake Temple, dedicated to the deity Chor Soo Kong. The god's disciples included pit vipers, tamed by incense smoke. The smoke seemed to be working, as we were able to get close to the snakes and take their picture.

Today's pictures are at [Penang Island 2022](#).

24 November 2022

Port Klang, Malaysia [101° E]

Port Klang is the seaport for Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. KL, as most call it, is a relatively new city. It was founded in 1857 by tin miners at the confluence of two rivers. The miners could load their tin on barges and float it to an ocean port at the site of present-day Port Klang.

Our "Blue Mosque and Other Highlights" started with a drive to the Blue Mosque, one of the largest mosques in the world. We had thought we would get to see the inside, but unfortunately, we could only view the outside. The Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Mosque is the largest in Southeast Asia, it measures over 350 feet in diameter and can hold 24,000 worshippers.



We next stopped at Merdeka Square, which was once the parade ground for the British forces in KL. Surrounding the square are several buildings from the colonial period, and one can glimpse other notable landmarks in the city. Just a block from the square is the river junction where KL was founded. We then rode to the top of the needle-like Kuala Lumpur Tower for 360-degree views.

Lunch at a nice hotel was next. After lunch, we stopped for a photo of the world's tallest twin skyscraper, Petronas Towers. Then we drove to the National Monument, a bronze statue honoring soldiers who died during the Communist Insurgency in the 1950s. It was designed by Felix De Weldon, who also created the Iwo Jima monument.

The tour also included a stop at the Karyaneka Handicraft center where we could shop for pewter, crystal, glass, and textiles. We looked but did not buy anything. We returned to the ship in time to enjoy a beverage and watch the departure from Port Klang toward the south.

Today's pictures are at [Kuala Lumpur 2022](#).

25 November 2022

Singapore [103° E, 1° N]

See that 1° North? We will not quite make it into the Southern Hemisphere, but we are pretty darn close.

We have visited Singapore in the past and expect to do so again in the future. After two busy days in Malaysia, we decided to be less ambitious today and took the "Panoramic Singapore" excursion. We saw a bit that we had seen before, and a few new things. The island was a fishing village until Sir Stamford Raffles landed in 1819, did a bit of intervention in local politics, and purchased the island as a trading base. That role ebbed and flowed through the 19th and 20th centuries, but Singapore maintains a strong presence as a hub of international trade.

The bus took us through several neighborhoods, allowing us to admire the diversity that comprises Singapore. Over 75% of the inhabitants are ethnic Chinese, 15% of Malay heritage, and about 7% Indian. We took a walk

along and over the Singapore River, stopping in the Fullerton Hotel to admire the Christmas decorations. Our walk ended on Merlion Jetty, where we viewed the Merlion, a signature statue of Singapore, and saw the Marina Sands hotel across the bay.

The bus then took us into Chinatown. We had a cup of Malay coffee, then walked through the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and visited the local wet market. In the latter, we saw a variety of food for sale, ranging from dead fish to live eels to skinned frogs to peppers, cucumbers, and other vegetables.

Today's pictures are at [Singapore 2022](#).



26 November 2022

At Sea

Nothing new to report here. The ride north into the Gulf of Thailand was smooth. We read, thought about packing, relaxed, and socialized.

27 November 2022

Koh Samui, Thailand [100° E]

Our ship anchored about 3 miles offshore, necessitating the use of tenders to reach the island. Koh Samui is one of Thailand's largest islands (either second or third, depending on who you ask). Our "Introduction to Koh Samui" excursion would take us around the entire island, passing lush tropical vegetation, unspoiled villages and white-sand beaches along the way.

First we visited Wat Plai Laem, where some styles of temple art date back centuries. The most spectacular sight is a large statue of Cundī or Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy and Compassion. She has eighteen arms, each holding a different weapon or in a unique pose. The more arms, the more powerful the god.

Our next stop was Wat Phra Yai, the Big Buddha Temple. Here resides a 39-foot golden statue of Buddha sitting atop a wide staircase decorated with sculpted dragons and carved nāga, deities in the form of snakes. I found a display of Buddha postures for each day of the week interesting, more information at [Buddha Postures](#) .



Next, we stopped for refreshments at a local restaurant overlooking Chaweng Bay. Our final stop was at a coconut plantation to see how the coconuts are processed by hand. Our guide was a native of the island and she had many stories to tell about growing up and living in Thailand.

Today's pictures are at [Koh Samui 2022](#).

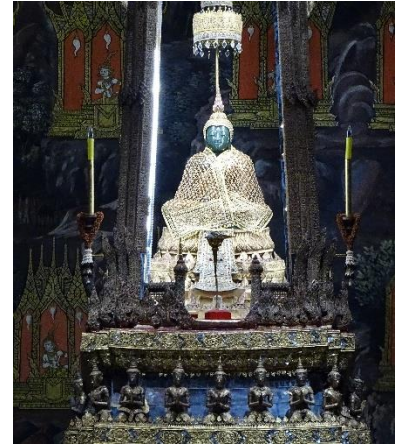
28 November 2022

Bangkok, Thailand [100° E]

Today we did "Bangkok in Depth." That's a bit of a misnomer; one day is not nearly enough to do Bangkok. We did get a great introduction to the city however, and we have plans that will bring us back in the future. The port is some distance from the city, so the day began with a 2-hour bus ride.

Once in town, our first stop was at the Phra Borom Maha Ratcha Wang, which has housed the kings of the Chakri dynasty, the rulers of Siam, since 1782. The Grand Palace, with its bright gold temples, pavilions and gardens, centers on Wat Phra Kaew, the temple that houses the Emerald Buddha, Thailand's most revered icon. The Buddha is dressed for the winter, so the only green that is visible is his head. Lots of ornate temples and palace buildings here, we spent about an hour walking the grounds.

After the Palace, we walked to the Chao Phraya River. Enroute, the skies opened up and a tropical rainstorm let loose. The tour company thoughtfully provided ponchos that did help somewhat. We walked to the river bank, then took a ferry across the river to a waterfront restaurant for lunch. The food was typical Thai, probably toned down for western taste. Service was spotty, they seemed to be understaffed and still retraining after COVID.



Following lunch, we boarded boats again for a cruise on the river and one of the canals. We passed many temples and residences. Enjoyed watching the river traffic which includes "long-tail" boats like those that were part of the action in a James Bond movie (*The Man with the Golden Gun*).

The boat tour ended near Wat Po, which is the home of a very large Reclining Buddha. The Buddha is over 46 meters long. Below you can see a picture of his head, then a shot from his toes to his head. We have more than a hundred pictures from today, these are only a sample: [Bangkok 2022](#).

Another 2-hour bus ride took us back to the ship for our last dinner aboard. We had to finish packing, retrieve our passports, and prepare for a 02:00 wakeup call and 02:30 departure for the airport.

The journey concludes as we return [Home](#) in Part VI of this log.