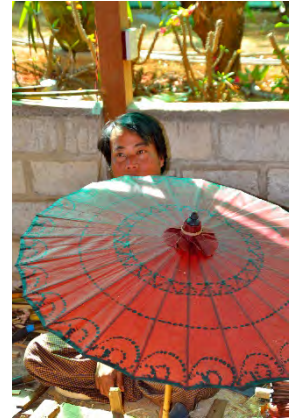


Day 6b Mandalay to Heho and Kalaw

From there we drove a short distance to visit the Aung umbrella factory. We were shown how they make flowered decorative paper and paper umbrellas, and how they make the umbrella frame out of wood. The paper is made from the mulberry tree which is turned into pulp, mixed with water and then allowed to dry for two hours. The amazing part is that they do it all by hand – no modern equipment. It is a family run business now in its third generation. The man demonstrating the wood work started at age 15 when he could not pass his 11th grade exams and he is now 40.



Lunch was at the Green Tea Restaurant which was very pretty, on the lake, and the food was OK but not fabulous. There are not a lot of choices around here. I ordered sardines again, but it was really canned tuna. Moral of the story is stick to local food not western food, which I usually do, but I do love sardines...

Then it was back on the road, the old road this time, to head to Kalaw. Kalaw is famous for trekking which we had no intention of doing. We were all dosing off, although I tried to keep my eyes open to see the beautiful scenery. Suddenly the car stopped and Toe pointed out a festival taking place on the fields on the side of the road. It was a festival celebrating the end of the school semester. The fields were filled with PaO families (one of the ethnic minority groups in this region, the Shan region) from different villages. It was an end of the school year festival. The young kids were performing songs and dances on a stage. The mothers all had their orange turbans and were carrying their babies on their backs. There was a group of novice monks sitting on the hillside watching. There were men, in their headdresses which looked like colourful terry cloth (ie, towels) standing around together. There was a group playing volleyball and another group of girls playing soccer. There were food vendors and people sitting around watching the show. What luck to pass by a festival! This doesn't happen every day. This is not something we were expecting to see. But what a joyous mixture of color and sounds and smells. And smiles. I think they were all as excited to see these strange tourists as we were to see them. I started dancing to the music the kids were singing and they women around me thought that was hysterical. I asked a group of young girls all dressed up ready to perform to be in a picture with me, and they just were not sure about that. But a few agreed. And then they smiled at me. That says it all. And Toe was ecstatic that we happened upon it.





Back on the road, wide awake now and trying to take everything in, we came across motorcycles and flags, like a parade. We couldn't figure out what it was until we got closer. And then we saw a large flatbed truck with a huge bamboo Buddha. Toe was amazed. She had never seen anything like this before. Once again she told us how lucky we were and we must be living right as we are being rewarded in ways few of her clients ever are.



We drove about another hour and got to Kalaw and to our hotel, the Amara Mountain Resort. Built in 1909, this was once the hill countries colonial residence as this area was British. There are separate buildings and all done in a quaint British way. Massage was available in a room off the lobby and Andy and I decided to indulge. It is in fact quite cold here in the mountains so a hot stone massage sounded like just the thing. Unfortunately, the room was really cold and stones were either burning hot or not hot enough. Best laid plans...



Toe suggested a restaurant in Kalaw for dinner, Lu Lu Singh's Thirigayhar Restaurant, also called the Seven Sisters as it is run by seven sisters. Our driver took us and then waited to bring us back. Food was local fare and quite good. We tried the local wine, Red Mountain wine and were pleasantly surprised. There was an interesting note on the menu, which I had never seen before, that informed the guest that the fruit and vegetables were washed with boiled water so we didn't have to be afraid to eat them.



We got back to the hotel and since the rooms here have no heat, they lit the fireplace and put hot water bottles in our beds. Not a bad idea on a cold night...

All in all a Great day.

