

Day 7 Kalaw to Inle Lake

This morning we got to sleep in a bit. Last night was interesting. Before retiring, they brought ear plugs to our room. We were not sure why. But once we settled in with our hot water bottles, we realized that we could hear the chanting from the monastery somewhere nearby. Once a year the monks chat for 7-12 solid days, 24 hours a day. This is their way of teaching the lay public about Buddhism; specifically they are chanting the Law of Coordination. To me the chanting was like a white noise machine so I had no trouble sleeping. In fact, once an hour when they switch monks and it got quiet, I wondered what happened.

We met for a lovely breakfast overlooking the lake and the vegetable garden. Rather than a buffet, we were served fresh fruit, fresh juice and coffee with a basket of fresh bread and sweet rolls. We then got to choose freshly made omelets or other eggs. Fresh eggs too!



We climbed back into our van and drove down lonely roads to see the old British train station, which looked like an old British train station. The fact that it still stands with the station master office persevered as it once was, speaks to the history of the Brits here. On one side there were rows of seats for the waiting passengers. On the other was a large storeroom filled with fruit and vegetables getting ready for market.



Just outside the train station we saw groups of children on their way to school, in their school uniforms, carrying their lunch pails and their umbrellas for protection from the strong sun.



We also passed pick-up trucks filled with army men with guns. Until about 10 years ago, this area and the Inle Lake area was the brown area filled with fighting. And in sheer contrast, we saw Monks, peaceful Monks, on their way to find food or heading back to their monasteries.



And then it was time for us to go off to the local market. The market returns to the town, Kalaw, every five days, so we were lucky to catch it. Toe says we must be good people, either in this life or the last, to have had such luck with markets and festivals. This does not happen often in her experience.

Each vendor drives from his or her village that morning and sets up in the exact same spot. Since they often have to drive a long distance, the market starts later in the day, unlike in many other places where you have to get there early to really see the action. And this market was very large. It went on for blocks and blocks in all directions. Most of the vendors were sitting on blankets on the ground. Some had raised wooden benches. The vegetables were all beautiful, red, red tomatoes, potatoes, cabbages, lots of leafy green things etc etc. But of course for me it is always about the people. Watching the monks and nuns, who get free food at the markets, come with large baskets to fill up and take back to their monasteries or nunneries. Watching each man or woman bend down to examine each tomato and choosing the ones they want to take home. Talking with the vendors who I am sure they know well as they see them week after week. Watching the vendors as they hawk their goods, weigh out amounts on their scales, which are often old fashioned balance scales. Men buying flowers (reminded me of Andy buying me flowers every Shabbat). Monks and nuns filling their baskets with donations to take back to their monasteries. Mothers with their children in their arms or on their backs. A beautiful old woman with gray hair, which seemed so unusual (I mentioned to Toe that I hadn't seen many woman with gray hair, and we realized that is because most of them have their heads covered. And the head coverings were not just turbans, but straw hats with flowers or with designs. And of course I loved the hats!). Old women smoking cigars. I could just picture them back in their villages, growing the food, picking it, packaging it or carefully placing them in the baskets to bring to the market. Trekking to a different place each day, or every few days to sell their goods. Trekking back to their villages. Or buying their fruit to last until the next time the market came to town. And the colors of the clothes, the flowers, the



vegetables. The sun shining through old water bottles filled with cooking oil, making them glisten like gold. And the smells. But the best part of all, is the faces, when I take someone's picture and then smile at them and they give me a big smile back. Or when I wave at a child and get a wave and big smile in return.



