

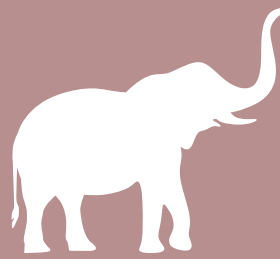


ISB Adventures in

# SEASIA

Special Edition Newsletter

Read stories from alumni, see the incredible photos,  
and help us celebrate this special time together!



# ASIA NEWSLETTER MUSINGS

**WRITTEN BY:  
KATHIE/KATE BOSLET**

During our 2021 Tucson reunion, Lloyd and Maile announced a reunion trip to Asia was being planned for January 2024. My heart pulsated with excitement as I anticipated a return to a country I had not seen since we left in 1969. This reunion trip also offered me the opportunity to revisit Thailand with my ISB buddies.

Emails, ISB 2024 Reunion Facebook posts, and phone calls were exchanged with Lloyd and Maile over the course of 2 years. Questionnaires were sent out: Which countries do you want to visit? Do you have a roommate? How long do you want to visit? Do you have allergies? Somehow Lloyd and Maile compiled information from over 250 people, made our reservations, booked our rooms and transportation, planned a Gala and a welcome event, rearranged flights, remained calm on the “heated” train rides through Laos, helped us to recover lost/misplaced items, taught us how to use the Skytrain in BKK, and so much more...and they did it with grace, smiles, and a desire to make this trip a positive experience for each of us.



I left Florida on December 27 and flew to Phoenix where I met up with Teresa Martin. We flew to San Francisco on December 28 and then started our long journey to Taipei and then Chiang Mai. We spent 3 days in Chiang Mai (including New Year’s Eve) before traveling to Hua Hin, Ayutthaya, Bangkok, Laos (Vang Vieng and Luang Prabang), Vietnam (Hanoi and Saigon), and Cambodia...WHEW! We did not travel lightly (sorry Maile and Lloyd); however, we did wash our own clothes in the many bathrooms throughout our Asia hotels. I returned to Florida at the end of January, and I could not believe that almost a month of travel had flown by so quickly.

# ASIA NEWSLETTER MUSINGS

CONTINUED



The best part of the trip for me was the new acquaintances I made, strengthening bonds with dear friends, and creating new memories that have brought me so much joy. Our ISB Tribe basked in the offerings of each day and smiled through the hurdles – Panther Pride at its best.

I want to thank the many people who wrote articles for the newsletter – so many different perspectives that allowed us to share our experiences and feelings.



The video in this newsletter was created by my daughter Bridgitte Harmon who always makes time to help her Mama. The photos used in the video were found on Facebook or people sent them to me.

Thank you, Lloyd and Maile. We all appreciate your kindness, organizational skills, leadership, and love for your ISB classmates.



# GRAND ADVENTURE

**Written by: Maile McCoskrie Busby Lindley  
and Lloyd Coleman**

Our GRAND ADVENTURE in 2024 started in 2013 when I asked Lloyd to help me (through the tour operator he was working for in the Los Angeles area) to plan a trip for an ISB reunion in Bangkok. Back then, we completed the trip as a group of 93 with more than 50 local alumni joining us in Bangkok for selected dinners. As that trip was declared a big success, there were many who didn't travel with us then, who were asking when we would do it again.



Lloyd and I stayed connected after the 2013 tour, and over time, decided to see if there truly was interest to do it again. After discussions with ISBN, it was decided to announce at the 2021 Reunion that we were in the formative stages of planning another Bangkok Reunion for January 2024. We established an email address, collected email addresses of alumni that were interested and started a dedicated Facebook page. On January 15, 2022, we announced the dates, tentative itinerary and began the registration process; by mid-March we had our maximum of 250 alumni registered, then started a waitlist.

We spent the first year collecting information, designing the trip, followed by securing the necessary suppliers – planes large enough for our group for 3 destinations, buses for getting inbound flights met in Bangkok and outbound from Saigon plus 12 destinations throughout our travels, including the Bangkok SkyTrain excursion to see Bangkok from above the legendary traffic, new Bullet trains for 3 destinations in Laos, a private chartered ship for a Chao Phraya river dinner cruise and a day long cruise on two private cruise ships on Halong Bay in Vietnam, hotels for 6 destinations, restaurants for most of our meals, and guides in Laos and Vietnam. Many folks may not realize that all these arrangements required Lloyd and I to sign contracts and personally guarantee fulfillment which meant having to ask for non-refundable deposits from participants; a final count by which, remained fluid until just a week before the Welcome Reception at the Anantara on January 8, 2024.

In a brief description of how two volunteers made this happen over the course of a couple of years, it happened in stages. Together, Lloyd and I began by compiling all attendee's information asked for in the Travel Planners, which in itself was a monumental task. There wasn't a day that went by when we weren't working on this project, from beginning to end, that included meeting with providers during midnight calls overseas, helping attendees plan their family trips together using Zoom, book their flights to and from Asia and all points on the offered side excursions pre-and ost-reunion. Adding to hotels, flights, and tours, we handled getting visas for Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia...something that couldn't be finalized until 60 days just prior to the Reunion.

# GRAND ADVENTURE

## CONTINUED



For the most part, the tasks were split between Lloyd and me, compiling all personal data, completing, and submitting everyone's visa applications and dealing with the transportation and ground logistics. Then there was the educational experience of learning new magic provided by using the internet cloud; to facilitate getting final documentation to all travelers, without the enormous expense of printing AND mailing paper travel documents, we learned the magic of Google Drive, and were able to send these online as file folders.

Perhaps as many as a hundred or more senior citizens learned a new computer skill in doing this.

At the end of 2023, as we drew closer to our January departure, we were faced with some unprecedented and unexpected changes to ALL the airline reservations that were booked in early 2023, often with no prior announcement. This was largely due to a global phenomenon brought on by the re-emergence of travel after the Pandemic. Almost every single flight time changed and sometimes were even cancelled by the airlines. Yet, despite some stressful moments in dealing with unavoidable changes for many (to say the least), we pulled through it together and the goal of delivering the trip of a lifetime was achieved. On the final night of our trip, our group experienced a Farewell dinner that can only be described as a Banquet of Kings, atop the Majestic Hotel in Saigon. There wasn't a dish served that wasn't worthy of a Michelin star, from the filet mignon to the whole lobsters to the Chilean Sea Bass adorned by the greatest array of international dishes and garnishes that was only surpassed by the free-flowing selections of wines from France, Chile, and Australia.

The genuine "Thanks" and messages of sincere appreciation since our return, have gone a long way, and many were so sincerely grateful. We knew from the outset that we were planning an experience that for some was inconceivable. The cards with cash that were collected as we were leaving Bangkok to help with some of the unexpected expenses were an enormous help and we were left speechless except to simply say thank you.

Your words of thanks on our last night in Saigon warmed our hearts and allowed us to thank you as well for trusting us to deliver a memorable trip that we will all remember.

Many have asked why we would organize a trip of this magnitude. (A few times we asked ourselves this same question). The answer to that lies in the undeniable response to the trip and the number of attendees who made the journey happen, and more importantly, how people have remembered the experience.



# Facebook Trip Conversations

## 16 February 2023

Starting here...Starting now... happy to let everyone know that most air travel can be booked now. Flights are wide open for Jan 2024 at the moment. You'll still be able to book months from now, but if you are ready, I can get your tickets booked beginning yesterday.

My hours at the phone M-F 10a - 7pm , 562-706-7186. If you get my answering message, leave one, and I'll call you back as soon as possible. thx Lloyd



## 11 March 2023

I said I would start posting these at the end of day Friday. Ok, it's the end of the day in Honolulu thanks for your patience everyone.

The most asked-for travel packages for PRE and POST reunion have been for Chiang Mai, Angkor Wat, and Phuket. We also have a couple of small groups formed to go to Hua Hin.

Take a look at the files I have just posted. If these packages don't work for you, call me and we'll change them for you. If you want to arrive early in Thailand, we have the rooms for you with our rate before and after the Bangkok piece of the trip.

Please check the files I just added to this group  
SAWATDEE !!

## 23 April 2023

Just booked our flights -- Boston to BKK, Saigon to Boston-- with Lloyd. Thank you for your patience and professionalism!

## 18 June 2023

GOOD NEWS FOR ALL CONCERNED...At the current time, and for the foreseeable future, there are no restrictions for entry into Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, regarding Covid-19. Please. Read the attached file from the US Embassy websites, regarding entry by US Citizens and Vaccinations and Covid Testing.

"Covid Specific" insurance is no longer required either, however, if you are purchasing insurance, let us know if you need any help or questions answered. Send all questions to us by email [TheBangkokReunion2@gmail.com](mailto:TheBangkokReunion2@gmail.com) If you haven't done it yet, start planning your flights.

They are beginning to fill up. I am available every day to assist you in booking them. Please send in your jpg. Visa Pics as soon as possible...we need to begin the process of obtaining visas for all travelling to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Lloyd Coleman '73 Maile Busby '67

## 25 August 2023

GOOD MORNING ISB REUNION GOERS! this post is just to let you know that while many Statements have already gone out, many are still waiting for departure. The reason - I had to take a few days off from the process over the past week, but we are back in full production, and hope to have everyone's statement to them within the next few days...So you know, these aren't automated. They are all hand-sewn, complete with a few typos here and there. Thanks for your patience. Lloyd

## 17 October 2023

At the meeting in Daytona there was a discussion about using eSIM cards with our phones. I did not understand that technology. There was some good conversation on the topic, but it got bogged down between people who knew what they were talking about and those who were lost. I have not traveled in Asia since before cell phones were invented and need some guidance on how it is done. My wife and I run iPhones. She wants to have email and wireless while on the trip. Any suggestions on the best way to make this happen? THANKS!

## 28 November 2023

Leaving in less than 5 weeks! Anyone else got that excited/nervous/can't-believe-it feeling that comes at you at the oddest times (shopping, paying the bills, taking a walk with your heaviest coat on cause it's 37 out) when you realize you are going back in time with 249 of your oldest friends (some who you don't even know yet) to visit a place that holds special memories? Creating a "take to Thailand" pile in the corner of the bedroom? The "where is the passport" dream? The "how can I lose 5 pounds at Christmas because I may put on a bathing suit" anxiety? Putting on that special ring of Mom's that she got in Bangkok because you want to take a piece of her with you? Thinking that maybe what this trip is about is looking for Mom and Dad around every soi corner? Hoping your mainland-educated spouse enjoys hanging out with all the excited adventure-loving alumni and loves SE Asia as much as you? Checking the map of Thailand your best friend just sent you to see where you'll be? Haunting your favorite Thai restaurant to remind yourself of a few key Thai phrases? Kahp-kuhn-ka for listening! It's happening soon!

## 5 December 2023

I would advise everyone to check your flights if you haven't looked at your reservations in several months. I did look at ours this weekend and Qatar Air had changed airplanes and negated our seat assignments. The amazing Lloyd Coleman was able to find us new seat assignments (with me and hubby side by side) right away and I am sure it involved frustrating phone calls with the airline. We got the last remaining side by side seats! Thank you, Lloyd, you are truly wonderful!

## 5 December 2023

What an exciting feeling...The Reunion in Thailand is just one month away! This is now that crucial time for us to finalize everything on our end, and make sure all travel documents are correctly prepared, checked, and double checked, and then sent to each of you. We are in our final stages of doing this, so hopefully documents will start to be emailed out this coming weekend. I'll post again when they start going out so you can be on the lookout. They will come in the form of pdf.files. Please print a copy of them out to take with you. Most important notes to those travelling beyond Thailand to Laos and Vietnam and Cambodia...your visas are printed sheets of paper, NOT A STAMP. When you receive your visas in the paperwork, print out the VISA, fold it and put it into your passport immediately. Leave it there. If you lose it along the way, we will have our master file to print another one, but don't lose it The Documents coming will have an FAQ section that should address most everyone's concerns. If you have questions after, we'll have almost a month to answer them after you get your paperwork.

The one thing we'd like to add as you do your thing in getting ready, is to challenge each of you to make this trip with just one suitcase. For those travelling beyond Bangkok, it's a real case of pack what YOU can carry.

Lloyd and Maile  
All the best, and fried bananas for everyone!!

## 10 December 2023

### WEEKEND UPDATE !

Maile and I have been working around the clock to get your documents out as soon as humanly possible. Now in the last and final stage of this, we are going over everyone's flight arrangements meticulously to ensure that you don't have to worry...and this is taking a lot more time than we have anticipated. The good news is that we are almost done and should have it all wrapped up in the next 48 hours. We will start sending the out documents, in the form of multiple .pdf files, to everyone, via a link to Google Drive. You don't need a Google account to view and print them, however you must open them with the same email account that your link is sent to. It will be THAT account that is granted access to your ISB Reunion file. Some of you will begin travelling as early as this week, so keep an eye on your email. Thanks in advance for waiting until Wednesday with your questions.

They are coming, yes.



## 22 December 2023

For those that are wondering:

Dress requirements for daytime and evening.

What Maile and Brian are packing:

Maile : lightweight summer wear, skirts and tops, long pants and tops, shorts for by the pool or in the hotels and GOOD walking shoes. If going into any religious venues AND The Grand Palace tops that cover my shoulders, skirts and pants that hit the top of my knees and CLOSED toe shoes. For evening "the I can't go wrong" black pants, black flats and a dressy top. I will have a lightweight jacket for the flight and a long sleeved cotton top, it will come in handy if we have cool mornings or evenings - let's all hope for this.

I am not a slave to fashion; I hope to blend in while being neat and clean.

We each get (1) 44pound checked bag, a carry on and a personal item. We will for the most part carry our own bags.

Brian will mostly wear golf shorts and shirts. He will have a pair of long black pants for evenings along with a nice golf shirt - jackets for men are not required, only bring one if you are more comfortable wearing one. He will have a cotton sweater for the flight and the cooler AM and PM times if we get lucky.

Swimsuits for all who are comfortable wearing them and a cover up as all of the hotels might not have robes.

Any questions? Ask here, I hope this helps

## 24 December 2023

Happy Holidays to one and all - those who will travel with us and those who will vicariously - it will be a Grand Adventure. Now into the evening of the 23rd Lloyd and I will take a collective deep breath and pull our families Holiday Celebrations together. Most of the Christian world will hopefully take a deep breath and we two need to as well. I have fewer obligations and responsibilities than Lloyd so I will do my best to respond quickly and correctly to emails sent to us - please be patient with us and allow us this time to be with our families. We will be up and at it again on the 26th. Treasure your moments with those that are dear to you as we will with those that are dear to us - Peace on Earth, and Goodwill to all.

Maile and Lloyd too.

## 29 December 2023

ATTENTION ALL REUNION TRAVELERS a very important new document regarding your Airport Arrival Transfers has just been posted in your online file using the link that has already been sent to by Lloyd Coleman - please take a look AND PRINT IT OUT for your reference and put it with your travel documents.

## 30 December 2023

A friend of mine just left Cambodia and Laos and reminded me to "bring toilet paper!" I had almost forgotten!



# TRIP OF A LIFETIME

Written by: Renee Hemp Bunting and Michael Bunting

The trip we all dreamed about for two years has finally arrived.



How fortunate and blessed we are to embark on this trip with so many of our favorite ISBers as well as members of our family. The flight is long but worth the wait. We are finally here!

Cambodia, Angkor Wat, meeting Aki Ra, Pub Street, Angelina Jolie temple. The sights, the sounds, the food, the people but most of all the heat. The heat is ever present and a force to be reckoned with. It all feels like a dream but it is real and here we are!

Back to where it all began for so many, Bangkok! Meeting friends we haven't seen since past reunions, new friends and for some friends not seen in 50 years! The sights, the sounds, memories but most of all the friendships. ISB friends are truly incredible as well as indescribable. The love is overwhelming. Visiting old homes for so many, traveling the city, visiting old campus and new. Singha, singing, Tuk Tuks, rice at every meal.

The group divides and off we go to Laos. What a beautiful serene and peaceful place. Except for the Bullet Train (That's a whole other article.) Hot Air Balloon rides, night markets, Alms Giving at dawn and through it all the friends, the family, the experiences the memories made and the unconditional love.

Vietnam. Ha Long Bay, Pho, for some much better experiences than others, walking tours, markets, and scooters! So many scooters! The people, food, post office, oh and did I mention scooters?

This trip of overwhelming magnitude was organized by two people with a love of all things ISB and a relentless devotion to making this experience incredible for all of us. My thanks and gratitude and most of all my love for including me in this wonderful family of ISB!



# AIR FORCE BRAT RETURNS

Written by: Don Nibblett

My name is Don Nibblett, and I started attending ISB halfway through my Junior year and graduated in 1970. I left Bangkok at the end of the Summer of 1970, and thought I would never see the city again. I was lucky, however. In 1999 my wife accepted a position at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok and having retired already from the Army I was able to also get a job at the Embassy and back I went to Thailand. Returning to Bangkok at that time was a dream come true, and despite the amazing growth of the city we were still able to enjoy the beauty that I have always associated with Thailand and the Thai people. Leaving again for a second time after that assignment was just as hard, and once again I thought I would never make it back.



I was wrong. Thanks to the hard work of several ISB Alums, we were able to go back again early this year and enjoy the wonder that is Bangkok, and this time it was with a huge group of fellow ISB'ers and their family members. Truly an opportunity of a lifetime that was amazing in so many ways.

I have written before about how the ISB Alumni Association reunions make me feel that I have gone to my hometown. I was an Air Force Brat, and never lived in one place long enough to call it home. My parents retired after I was in college, and soon to be in the Army, so the place that they retired was not a hometown to me. But once my wife and I started going to ISB Reunions, we found the hometown I had been looking for – people with shared memories that could understand when you talked about things that happened and places you had been to during those times.

However, this trip was even more than that. Terry and I were able to also able to watch the joy on the faces of other ISB'ers who had never had a chance to go back, joy in seeing and doing things that they had only distant memories of from their youth. And watching the family members experience things that their parents had told them about, but they had never truly understood. For us it was like seeing things in a new light with new understanding.



Don Nibblett  
Terry (Hunny Bunny) Nibblett

Sure, the new ISB is beautiful, but not the place that most of us went to when we were there. But the Staff and students made us feel abundantly welcome, and the Spirit of ISB is still the same that we felt when we were students there. And the old Soi 15 campus, though amazingly changed, is still that great place right on the klong – the place that we ISB'ers will probably always call home because of the learning and growing that we did there.

Terry and I now have new memories to cherish of ISB, and Bangkok, and Thailand and its wonderful people. And memories of the wonderful times we also had in Laos and Viet Nam on this trip. But mostly we have memories of sharing this with our fellow ISB'ers and their families.

# A FAMILY ADVENTURE

Written by: Michele Lockwood

This trip to Bangkok was a dream come true for me. I always wanted to share my beloved Bangkok with my family. Me, my husband Mike, oldest son Lee, and youngest grandson Declan joined me in this trip of a lifetime - or at least my lifetime. My youngest son, Matthew, was in Thailand about 10 years ago as a US Marine, training the Thai Marines. I'm thrilled that most of my family has experienced the Thai culture.



Having my sister Carol Remmers, bestie Marion Dobbs Perin, & longtime friend Barb Johnson join us was the icing on the cake.



We enjoyed the 'Ancient City'. It was perfect for the short time we had - with its beautiful temples and Thai cultural exhibits. The klong tour was wonderful too - it was much more like the old Bangkok I remember. We never tired of Thai food and drinks. Thanks to everyone who put this trip together, and all of our group for the enthusiasm you shared with my family.

# MY FAVORITE PART OF OUR ADVENTURE

Written by: Kathy Beard

After planning and scheming and waiting for two and a half years, January 5th, 2024, finally arrived, and I headed to Hobby Airport to pick up the lil sis for our grand adventure back to Bangkok and beyond. I returned to BKK in 2013, but Alicia had never made the pilgrimage back to the place we loved so much when we lived there in the early 1970s. We were scheduled to fly out late the next night. I don't know if we were more excited about the trip itself or flying business class for the first time in our lives!



But this isn't an article about sights or locations or trains or planes or buses or long-tailed boats. It's an article about family. More specifically, the joy of getting to spend two weeks with my lifelong best friend ... my sister, Alicia.

If you know us at all, you already know we are very close. There's only the two of us and we have always been each other's "person". We have traveled together before, but never this far or for this long. We've spent so much of the last decade taking care of elderly parents ... dealing with their multiple illnesses, our mother's dementia, the pandemic, forcing a move to assisted living, and the death of our father. We needed this time together.

I remember worrying about what Alicia was going to eat because she can be such a picky eater. She worried about my eating because I was just 9 months out from gastric weight loss surgery. We managed! Even having Taco Bell one afternoon, just for something different.

We laughed together trying to come up with ways to lighten our luggage because we had both WAY overpacked and the different Asian airlines we flew throughout the actual tour had very strict weight limitations. I panicked when Lao Airlines pulled her checked suitcase and she was called to report back to check-in to be there as they went through it. I realized I had the key and we were about to board! I had no idea where she was and went running through the airport trying to find her. Once I found her, I realized she was in a panic trying to figure out what it was they were looking for. There was a bit of a language issue and those schoolmates who spoke Lao were all upstairs waiting to board the airplane. We got the suitcase unlocked and it finally dawned on her that she had packed her travel-sized TENS unit in her suitcase instead of her carry-on. It was the lithium battery in it that was setting off the scanner. Back through security we went, to find Maile and Lloyd waiting at the gate for us. Everyone else had already boarded. What a relief to see their faces!

# MY FAVORITE PART OF OUR ADVENTURE

continued

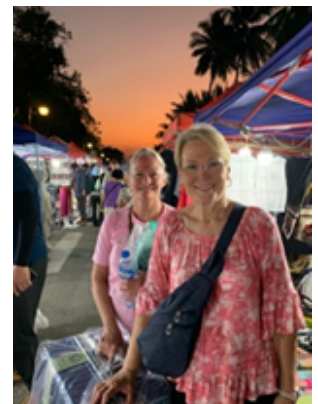
Alicia is afraid of heights. I am claustrophobic. We conquered our fears and together we went innertube floating in a cave, then zip lining outside of Vang Vieng, Laos. The zip lining is something we will talk about for the rest of our lives.



In Hanoi, we visited Hỏa Lò Prison, also known as the Hanoi Hilton. Alicia and I grew up with very close friends whose father was a POW. We wanted to see it, despite Lloyd telling us we really didn't want to go. I wish we had listened. I couldn't take the propaganda any longer and burst into tears. I knew so much of what was represented were just lies. Alicia took me by the arm and walked us out of there as quickly as she could. I was glad when we headed to Saigon. The Hotel Majestic was one of the highlights of the trip, especially the rooftop bar. What a fun time we had together!



When I look back at the pictures of our trip, the ones that bring me the greatest joy are the pictures of the both of us. We enjoy each other's company and have so much fun! We both can't wait for the next grand adventure we get to spend together!



# A TEACHER'S GUIDANCE

Written by: Lisa Manley

The 2024 ISB Asia Tour and Reunion was a grand adventure. We revisited sights and places from our youth, saw incredible changes in Bangkok, and toured new places: Vang Vieng and Luang Prabang in Laos; Hanoi, Ha long Bay, and Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) in Vietnam. We spent almost two weeks with remarkable ISBers and some of their spouses and family members. In Bangkok we caught up with local ISBers and some of our former teachers. Sid and I had the honor of meeting Mrs. Betty Yugala. I was able to share a story about the life long impact she had on one of her students.



He didn't know M.\* well during ISB days. I got to know him at some local ISB alum gatherings in the U.S. Unlike the impression I had of him during school days as spoiled and entitled, he was truly a sincere, kind, and generous man. Eventually conversation got around to ISB teachers. M. quietly said, "Mrs. Yugala saved my life." Wow!

M. was not happy to be in Mrs. Yugala's class. They had diametrically opposed political views. M. spent a lot of time arguing with Mrs. Yugala about their views and he never worked hard in class. One day Mrs. Yugala pulled him aside. She told M. that he was intelligent but would not get far in life if he didn't apply himself and learn some self-discipline instead of behaving like a spoiled and entitled child, expecting that his parents' status would take care of him through life. Needless to say, M. did not appreciate what Mrs. Yugala said.



M. went off to college in the U.S. He spent his first year skipping classes, driving fast cars, drinking, and hosting wild parties in the house financed by his parents. One day he woke up sprawled out on the floor among other parties and distinctly heard Mrs. Yugala's voice telling him about learning self-discipline. M. finally understood her words had been said out of care and concern for him. He took the advice to heart, went on to complete his degree, start several successful businesses, and have two lovely children. He attributes his success, and in fact his life, to his teacher.

In M.'s honor we had lunch with Betty Yugala and spent a lovely afternoon sharing about each of our lives in Thailand.

\*I have not received permission to use his name publicly

# BACI CEREMONY - LAOS

Written by: Bill Stelling

The Baci Ceremony is part of everyday life in Laos. The ceremonies are held for both momentous occasions - a new baby or marriage - and the more mundane ones as well - buying a new house, departing for a long journey, and welcoming guests in your home. To experience a Baci Ceremony is to catch a glimpse into one of the most ubiquitous traditions in Lao culture.





# A VISIT TO THE ELEPHANT SANCTUARY

Written by: Chris Hunt ('81)

On our last day in Laos, myself, my sister Cindy Hunt Leach ('80), her husband Aron Medieros (not an ISB student, but might as well have graduated from ISB as he knows everyone) and my daughter Sierra Hargens set out for the Elephant Village outside of Luang Prabang near the village of Ban Xieng Lom. It is a true sanctuary, and no elephants are used for tourist riding.

The road was bumpy, the location remote and sun peeked through the lush foliage as we stepped into the sanctuary. It was like time slowed down and nature enveloped us.



After a short orientation of the history of the sanctuary and the elephants, we stood in awe as we approached these gentle giants. There were only 10 in our group and the four of us spent our time with two elephants that had been best mates for 40+ years and were inseparable. Their eyes were mesmerizing, and their trunks reached out, eager for the bananas and pineapple tops we offered. The elephants' gratitude was palpable, and I felt pure joy in their presence. There was also a baby elephant, kept separate from the larger ones, and he was more than eager to nibble on bananas too.

Inside the sanctuary, we wandered through a quaint museum and gift store. Here, we discovered the art of transforming elephant dung into paper. Yep...poop pads! The process fascinated us—the fibers softened, pulped, dried, and shaped into notebooks. The selling of these books and other items in the little shop supports the sanctuary and the nearby village.

# A VISIT TO THE ELEPHANT SANCTUARY

## Continued

A wooden long boat awaited us by the riverbank, and we were off to Tad Sae Waterfall. Talk about peaceful. There was just our group there and a few others. The time stilled and only Sierra was brave enough to traverse the clear cold water while the rest of us relaxed on the sidelines.



The highlight of our entire journey was this. It was the one thing we knew two years ago we were going to do and had anticipated it like no other. Sierra, Cindy and I waded into the river, laughing and nervous at the same time (I mean really, were they going to step on us?). I shared all this joy with my daughter as we both scrubbed the backs of the elephants, poured buckets of water on them to keep them cool. We all giggled like children. It was like we were not mere visitors, but part of their world. They are even playful and splashed water on us with their trunks. The funniest thing of all was when one of the giants shared a gift of dung and we watched it float past! What an experience, a memory etched forever between us.

And so, the beautiful excursion ended after lunch overlooking the river, woven with love, laughter, and the wisdom of elephants. This ISB trip had given us more than an experience; it had gifted us a glimpse into harmony, a sanctuary where humans and elephants played together, celebrating life.



# BANGKOK

Written by: Kathy Walker

The teaming skyscrapers of Bangkok are definitely symbolic of its standing as a regional force in Southeast Asian finance, business and culture. The numbers are staggering - ranked 10th in the world for the number of billionaires (60) with an eye-popping number of 200,000 millionaires.

It is also a top destination for international tourists with no shortage of glittering, high-end shopping malls and resorts. The cost for this concentration of wealth - Bangkok leads the world in income disparity; education gaps between rich and poor students continue to widen and 12 million

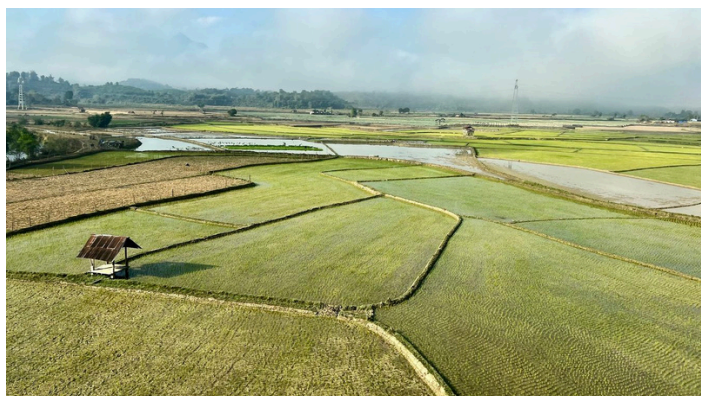


Thais are subjected to annual flooding of their homes. Here's to these hardworking millions, "who need leaders but get gamblers instead".

# LAOS & BOMBS

Written by: Kathy Walker

Rice, Unicorns and Bombs: Rice cultivation in Laos is thought to date back 2,000 years BCE and it is believed that the origins of glutinous (“sticky”) rice was in Laos. Certainly, no scene brings me so emotionally home to Asia as breathing in vistas of emerald quilts of lowland rice paddies. An Italian Jesuit priest in 1663 described the Lao countryside east of the Mekong river as greatly surpassing the western side of the river in all respects. “The elephants are bigger and stronger, better trained ... The unicorns are also better than elsewhere ... The stable rice is incomparable ... (where is) produced such excellent rice that I do not believe it has its equal anywhere else in the Orient.” Tragically, the legacy of the Vietnam War left Laos with the dubious distinction of being the most bombed country in history (2 million tons). And because an estimated 30% of the bombs dropped failed to explode (UXO), an additional 20,000 Laotians have been killed or maimed from UXO since the war ended. Nine of 17 provinces in Laos are considered highly contaminated with UXO. This severely hampers economic development in the country as 22% of all detonations occur from farming activities. The status of unicorns in Laos is equally dismal as they are now completely extinct in the country. There may be 6 remaining around the Cat Tien National Park in Vietnam and a small herd (40-60) at the western tip of Java (google Javan Rhinos).



## Laos and Children

Luang Prabang was the royal capital of the Kingdom of Laos until the Pathet Lao takeover in 1975. It sits at the confluence of the Nam Khan and Mekong Rivers and along with 33 adjacent villages comprises a UNESCO World Heritage site. Some snapshots from the night market - there were more children involved than I have experienced in other countries. They were all charming and gracious. And their sales negotiation skills and careful attention to money transactions was absolutely endearing.



# VANG VIENG

Written by: Kathy Walker



As an on-food-stamps-kind-of-poor grad student raising a young son, juggling classes, little leagues games whilst cramming my head with every chemical equation needed for the comprehensives exams, I promised myself that when the passing scores were announced, I would join the Iowa Hawkeye hot air balloon club. The club was disbanded 6 months prior to my exams. It took 40-ish years to keep this promise to myself - but what an amazing experience it was to be with my good high school friend, Bill Stelling as we drifted over the green karst mountains surrounding Vang Vieng last month!



Perhaps the most special photo of the trip for me was taken by Bill Siroty from his Vang Vieng hotel room balcony - not realizing that Bill Stelling and I were in the middle balloon!

# HA LONG BAY

Written by: Kathy Walker

Halong Bay ("descending dragon" in Vietnamese) contains ~1600 monolithic islands that rise spectacularly from the ocean. According to local legend, when Vietnam was being organized into a country, a family of dragons was sent to serve as protectors against invaders.

As dragons are want to do, they spit out jewels and jade which turned into the islands and islets that magically rose out of the sea to block enemy ships. After the battle the dragons turned their attention to "peaceful sightseeing" and have remained living in the bay ever since.



# HANOI

Written by: Kathy Walker

Hanoi, indeed all of Vietnam, is a land of paradox. A one-party communist state that tolerates no political dissent with eyes and ears everywhere - has streets filled with young, fashion-conscious TikTokers; a Starbucks taller than the city's statue of Lenin; and 8 million motorcycles on the streets busy driving a very capitalistic economy. Mix French colonial with a touch of modern and a bit of Asian grunge = a very vibrant city. Not sure the man in the mausoleum on the hill envisioned this!



# SAIGON POST OFFICE

Written by: Kathy Walker

I fell in love! The Saigon Central Post Office was designed by the French architect, Alfred Foulhoux, and opened in 1891. Mahogany phone booths line both sides of the entry way and above these are two hand-painted maps, "Telegraphic lines of Southern Vietnam and Cambodia 1892" and "Saigon and its surroundings 1892".

There are counters for sending telegrams, faxes, parcels and letters. But the most endearing features are the glue pots and writing desks. Duong Van Nog, the last official letter writer of Vietnam, sat at here. He arrived each day on his bike with a leather satchel that contained French/English dictionaries, notebooks, pens and a magnifying glass. For over three decades, Mr. Nog transcribed letters filled with tales of adventure, friendship and love for his customers. Retired in 2021, his spirit lives on in the letter-writers who still sit at these desks each day.



# MEMORIES OF THE JANUARY 2024 ISB ALUMNI TRIP

Written by: Jane Wilson

"I can't believe I haven't seen you in 50 years!" "I got to see my old house on Soi (fill in the blank)!" "Can you believe the Sky Train? It blocks out the sun!" "I still remember Thai – Sawadee-ka!" "What did your Dad (or Mom or both) do that brought you here back then?" These are just a few of the comments heard over and over again on January's International School of Bangkok (ISB) alumni trip to Southeast Asia. For 250 alumni and friends and family, this visit to Bangkok and beyond was a wonderful buffet for our sights and senses and a life-affirming trip to our past. It is difficult to describe the feeling we all had in returning to a foreign land where we had gone to elementary, middle, or high school, perhaps not appreciating at the time the gift we had been given in moving to a foreign country. The lessons we learn in departing from the norm (often against our will) didn't become evident to us until later, when we found we missed people and places "more than I'd ever guessed" (cue Carly Simon).



All credit for this rich experience goes to alumni leaders Lloyd Coleman and Maile Busby. I have yet to find a suitable way to thank them for their organization of this trip, working for over two years to coordinate travel, lodging, and incredible experiences for such a large group. They had the Thai "mai pen rai" ("everything is fine and will be fine") spirit and pivoted elegantly when necessary.

I graduated ISB In 1974. My husband Joseph and I visited Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam on a tour in 2019, 45 years after I graduated from ISB. That trip was a revelation after being away for so many years and tugged at my heart. I was delighted to find that this trip was equally meaningful and made more so by sharing the experience with friends who attended ISB when I did, friends we have met through ISB reunions, and friends we just met on the trip! Having NEW shared experiences in Southeast Asia was priceless! We visited old familiar places and ventured out on new adventures together. We talked into the wee hours about our most interesting experiences living there, what we missed most, who we had crushes on back then, what our parents did for a living, and what we have done in the years since. Living there had been a family experience and I felt my parents were there in spirit, reminiscing along with me.

Many participants extended their trips in different directions before and after the festivities in Bangkok. Joseph and I arrived in Bangkok on January 3rd and began our trip with a stay in Hua Hin on the Gulf of Thailand, a few hours ride south of the airport. At the Palayana Resort, which faced east over the bay, we saw some beautiful sunrises as we got over our jet lag. We bonded with other ISB alums who were staying there, enjoying the resort and its beach and pool, and exploring the town and the surrounding tourist spots, including a temple, the historic Hua Hin railroad station, an art complex and a winery.



# MEMORIES OF THE JANUARY 2024 ISB ALUMNI TRIP

## Continued

After three nights, our group took a bus to the Anantara Riverside Resort in Bangkok where ISBers from all over the world were converging. It was a beautiful location and complex on the Chao Praya River just a short water shuttle ride from the Sky Train on the opposite shore. The endless buffet held delights from many countries for breakfast and dinner. Our experiences included taking the Sky Train to the bustling Sunday market, a visit to the Aquarium, and shopping. We took a private long-boat tour to the Temple of the Dawn and the flower market, spying monitor lizards sunning on the riverbank. Many alumni visited places where they had lived. As a group, we visited the new location of ISB where we were honored with a performance by the middle school orchestra, greetings by head of school Dr. Sascha Heckmann and alumni coordinator Harold Albert and a special video that displayed photos of those present taken from ISB yearbooks. We also visited the original Soi 15 location, now NIST International School, which bore little resemblance to the school we remembered, although returning there did bring fond memories. Six days of group tours and exploration on our own culminated in a gala event at the Avani Hotel next door, with live music by alumni and speeches by Robert Godec, the American ambassador to Thailand, and Bill Heinecke, the alumni owner of the Anantara Riverside. Former faculty attended and I was delighted to see my former teacher, Betty Yugala! We bade farewell to homeward-bound friends and prepared for the next step in our travels.

The next morning, we flew to Luang Prabang, Laos as part of the trip extension. The group got smaller – only 120 of our closest friends now! Because our group was so large, half went to Luang Prabang and half to Vang Vieng and then after a few days we switched! We stayed at the Grand Luang Prabang, a spacious resort formerly the home of a Laos prince. It had a stunning view of the Mekong River, and water buffaloes freely grazed the grounds. We saw colorful night markets, the Kuang-Si waterfall, an elephant sanctuary, enjoyed local restaurants and had tours of the ornate Presidential Palace and Buddhist temples.

A few days later, we took the high-speed train to Vang Vieng. Experienced and savvy world travelers that we are, none of us will ever forget being the largest group of Americans (so we are told) to ever to take this line which started running from China in 2021! Stuffing just a few train cars with 60 people and all of their luggage was a feat in itself. With help from courteous if puzzled Chinese tourists we managed to put our enormous bags in overhead racks for the short trip. We were relieved to arrive at the Amari Vang Vieng with its gorgeous mountain views. Billed as a backpacker's paradise, it had a different vibe with river tubing and hot air balloons if you wanted adventure. On our last evening there we took "jumbos" to an open field and released glowing fire lanterns which floated off into the deep black sky. Both cities had a charming provincial flavor that reminded us of the Bangkok or Chiang Mai of our youth, with their dirt roads, street food and many little shops and restaurants. After a few nights, we got on the train again to go to Vientiane. The journey took us past beautiful scenery, and upon arrival we took a bus straight to the airport and flew into Hanoi, Vietnam arriving late at night for a one-night stay at the Novotel Hotel.

Continued

# MEMORIES OF THE JANUARY 2024 ISB ALUMNI TRIP

## Continued

The next morning, we took buses to famous Halong Bay for an afternoon lunch cruise, marveling at the “karsts”—gigantic dome-topped geological formations looming out of the water. The boat made stops for those who wanted to explore caves and walk the beach. We stayed overnight in this popular resort area at the Paradise Hotel. In the morning, we took buses back to Hanoi for an afternoon of touring the city. We had a sobering and moving tour of the notorious former prison known as the Hanoi Hilton (which, unbelievably, had a gift shop). We also walked through narrow streets with colorful shops with exotic Vietnamese food delicacies and unique items to buy. At the end of the afternoon, we re-boarded our buses for a trip to the airport, driving past the Hanoi Ceramic Mosaic Mural on the way – 4 miles of amazing images created of colorful ceramic tiles.

We caught our flight to Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City, where we stayed at the elegant French-themed Majestic Hotel. The city was preparing for Tết, the annual Vietnamese New Year celebration, and adorned with colorful signs and decorations. Locals were posing for photos together in rented traditional Vietnamese outfits. We walked to the enormous indoor Ben Thanh market where we bargained for souvenirs and toured the Reunification Palace and the historic post office. Enjoying the outdoor hotel rooftop bar in the evening with ISB friends, we watched the neon-lit streets bustling with a phalanx of noisy scooters. I walked to the American Consulate compound where the former embassy had been. My father had a clinic there in the early 1970s as a Medical Attaché for the State Department and it was meaningful to me to walk the same streets he had walked then. We became used to navigating the busy streets, walking calmly across while scooters flew around us. The last evening was a glorious and emotional roof-top goodbye gala with an incredible buffet. The next day we all left in shifts for the airport and our various flights home, hugs and tears being the order of the day.



These are just a few of the memories I took back with me. I look forward to recounting this trip with our fellow adventurers in the years to come, much as we enjoyed recounting our ISB years with them on the trip. We are often happiest when part of something bigger than ourselves –as beings seeking connection and commonality, I cannot think of a nicer group to be associated with than my ISB family.

My thanks to the wonderful Maile and Lloyd who worked so hard for over two years to make this happen in such a glorious way.

Jane Reed Wilson '74  
Kennett Square, PA  
April 10, 2024



Want more?

**PRESS PLAY**



We have taken photos sent to us and gathered from social media to make a very special trip highlight reel!