

Muang Ngoi Neua: The Fa-lang village

I sort of knew what to expect, but still when I arrived after taking the one hour boat ride from the down river town of Nong Kiew, I was perplexed yet somewhat enchanted by the place. Geographically it's a fairly remote and primitive place. There is no road access, hence no motor bikes, tractor trucks, or even bicycles. Electricity comes from gas and micro-hydroelectric powered generators. No hot water. Yet the place is full of tourist and the village its self is primarily a strip of guesthouses and restaurants along the river. The Lao call all foreigners, fa-lang, which literally means French as they were the colonist originally. This was a fa-lang village; a Lao village that had been taken over by the fa-lang. As long as you aren't looking for the "real Laos" it's a delightful and relaxing place to spend some time. It's obvious what drew foreign tourist here in the first place, the setting is beautiful, nestled along the Nam Ou River amidst karsts peaks you could spend a day just laying in a hammock and staring out at the natural surroundings. This is exactly what I did for the first day, and exactly what I needed after three straight days of bus travel. The main point of excitement for the day occurred when the unexploded ordnates team blew up a five-hundred pound bomb 2 km up river shaking the valley; a relic of our government's effort in making Laos the most heavily bombed country in the world.

After a day of relaxation it was time to get out and explore the countryside. I went with two Israeli couples and an Australian man on a two day walk to surrounding villages. The walk/trek was the "Israeli trek" it seems that every Israeli who comes to Muang Ngoi comes with directions on how to do this particular trek. The surrounding villages all look like typical Lao villages except that they all have guesthouses.



Nam Ou River, Muang Ngoi Neua



Rice patties near Muang Ngoi Neua

In addition to the women weaving, men woodworking, and children playing there is the odd tourist lounging about. Of course since everything has to be brought in by boat and then on to the village aboard the back some poor villager, the dining selection is quite slim. At the village where we stayed we were offer the non-choice of egg and sticky rice, for breakfast, lunch, dinner. The meandering labyrinth of footpaths stretches out behind Muang Ngoi networks various villages, waterfalls, and caves which can be visited independently by tourists. Many villages have set up English signs to help direct business their way. The particular route we took passed though a couple more easily accessible, and therefore more touristy villages, before climbing up to the top of a hill to a less touristy village where we stayed. It was a fun village to look around and many of the kids were egger to have there pictures taken. On the second day the path lead down along a small river before ending at a river side village on the Nam Ou about an hour upstream from Muang Ngoi.

It's a place I could have easily stayed longer village hopping and relaxing by the river but alas my visa was running out and I had to move on. In addition the endless cold showers were beginning to ware on me and after 20 days of village life in Lao I was looking forward to a change as I headed to the city of Luang Prabrang.



Child in the village we stayed at near Muang Ngoi Neua



Me, helping out a village woman prepare the rice by separating it. You step on one end and then let the mallet fall in to the rice, in the village we stayed at near Muang Ngoi Neua.



Boy playing a sport which is like volleyball crossed with soccer. You can't use your hands and must get the bamboo ball over the net and not let it hit the ground on your side of the net or in this case string, village we stayed at near Muang Ngoi Neua.



Girl rowing on Nam Ou River, Muang Ngoi Neua



Boatman coming back from our hike on the Nam Ou River, Muang Ngoi Neua