

Floating along a river renewed

Leave your city blues behind and take a peaceful cruise on the recently revived Prasae River through the Muang Klang municipality in Rayong province

When I walked down a short staircase to the small pier at Sam Yan Bridge, the little engine-driven boat was already waiting to take our group for a tour along the Prasae River. I promptly boarded and immediately started to enjoy the calm and peaceful journey.



I was amazed by the transformation of this once smelly river into the rejuvenated waterway it is today _ as clearly evidenced by the abundance of fish.

The cruises offer a seafood meal on a raft and a night-time excursion to watch fireflies. Overnight stays on the river are possible, but prior notice must be given.

The boat we took that day seated up to eight and I was pleased to see sturdy plastic chairs and life jackets already in place. The driver and boat owner, who looked to be in his 60s, turned out to be a local fisherman who moonlights as a tour guide. Some other locals also joined us.

I had the opportunity to speak with the guide, who explained the cause of the rotten smell associated with the river in former times. In a nutshell, the river was once used as a garbage dump for shrimp farms and fishing communities alongside it.

"Muang Klang municipality realised this was a problem when the condition of the river water began to affect local fishermen. After a campaign which included taking the fishermen to witness the worsening conditions, a consensus was reached whereby everyone decided to work as a team to address the ongoing problems. This took root four years ago," said the guide.



The lush mangrove forest on both sides of the river is a pleasant sight to behold for people coming from the concrete environs of Bangkok. I felt renewed and refreshed in the beautiful natural surroundings, which offered numerous opportunities for those with cameras.

While our boat floated lazily along the river I watched fishermen spending their free time in the evening having a meal and relaxing with family and friends. They would set off early the next morning on their fishing expeditions.

We docked at a small pier to change our mode of transportation to a spacious raft with a thatched roof. Tied to the raft was a contraption made of fish nets, with live fish in them which guests can pick out for their dinner.



The boat owner prepared a simple but delicious meal of spicy tom yam kung, fried fish and vegetables. The freshness of these dishes made them out of this world, and the enjoyment was multiplied by the serene natural surroundings. We provided our own after-dinner entertainment with karaoke singing. Some of the group bided their time making conversation with locals on board about their

communities. I was occupied watching the bird life and the sunset. Three hours passed by very quickly, and suddenly it was dark. Fireflies took to the air to light our raft's way down the river, and I noticed that they seemed to send out a pulse of light each time they jumped from one branch of a tree to the next.

I was told by one of the village elders that fireflies like lamphu trees (*Sonneratia caseolaris* Engler) because the tiny hairs on the leaves help to keep them from getting blown away by the wind.

These bugs are believed to have a life span of only one month. The light that emanates from them is a sign that they are ready to breed. It is believed that some female fireflies eat the male species. The best time to watch these little creatures is on a moonless night.

On our way back home we stopped at the old Muang Klang market, where we could observe wooden shophouses of many styles, as well as the local culture. There wasn't much in the way of souvenirs to remember the river trip by, but a promenade around the old market made for a satisfying end to a relaxing day.

Travel tips

Rayong is around three hour drive from Bangkok.

The boat fare starts from 500 baht, which can accommodate upto 8 people. The raft rental, for three hours, is 2,500 baht, food is not included . For more information, call Akira Junjua at 086-394 6427.

For more information about attractions in Rayong, call Muang Klang Municipality at 038-675-222.

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