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14, 15 - Photographs of the model, "Globe Towers", Colombo 10

Manjula declares his philosophy and approach to design in an uncompromising conviction. He claims that the architects should not carry beliefs, set patterns, ideals or pre-conceived philosophies when dealing with or solving any problems related to architecture. "Architecture is always situational" he claims, "and two situations cannot be treated alike...minimal presence of architect's character in buildings let one to be more innovative and adventurous... It's a well known fact that we all use known colours, shapes and other elements more or less interwoven with our likes and dislikes and strongly force our clients to accept them... Since architecture we create is for others our likes and dislikes should not disturb or conflict with other contextual, timely and cultural realities and aspirations of the people"



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KANCHANABURI

Miss. Roshan Zubair

The Bridge on the River Kwai

For some, thoughts go back to the devastation that occurred during the Second World War and for others, an epic tale based on reality that seems almost unbelievable in a gripping movie that was filmed here in Sri Lanka. In case there was any doubt concerning man's savagery to his fellow kind, then the Thai-Burma railway, all 415 kilometres of it, stands as a horrific testament to human brutality. Constructed under the order of the Japanese by prisoners of war and enslaved locals during World War II, the Death Railway's most famous section, the Bridge over the River Kwai, now acts as one of Thailand's major tourist attractions.



Situated in Kanchanaburi, a town of around 35,000 people located 130 kilometres west of Bangkok and approximately 50 kilometres East of the Thai-Burmese border, this area is noted for rugged natural beauty where mountains and river valleys have inspired development of hydro-electric power and where labyrinthine dam reservoirs provide further scenic elements to the province's natural beauty.

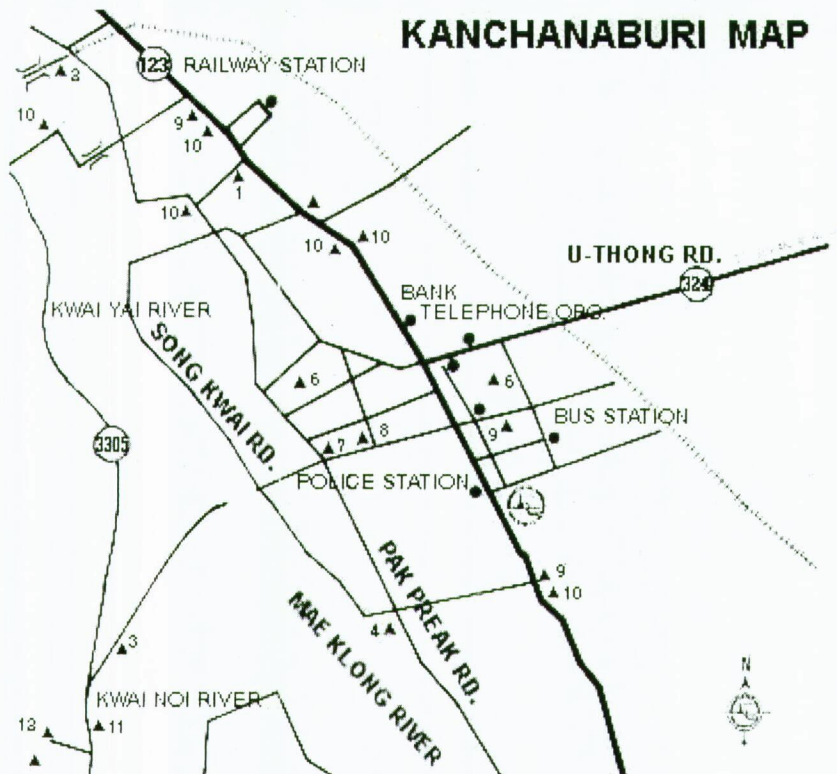
Wat Timitr - Temple of the Golden Buddha

Thailand being a predominantly a Buddhist country, Bangkok's many Buddhist temples are usually the first sights one encounters. My visit started from the Asian Institute of Technology in the suburbs of Bangkok. Naturally, our first stop was the Wat Timitr - *Temple of the Golden*

Buddha. An ornate new temple complex stands alongside the ancient existing temple with beautifully maintained gardens and landscaped areas. The temple houses a statue of Buddha made from solid gold weighing 5.5 tons. It is a fine example of *Sukhothai* art and was discovered by chance from a layer of stucco during the construction of the temple. In the new temple complex, similar to Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka, the focal point is a massive hemisphere surrounded by circular terraces and crowned with a square carrying a tapered pinnacle. However, its architecture is of typical Thai detailing with monumental gates and rails of carved guardian dragonheads flanking the ascent to an ornate altar housing an upright Buddha statue. Smaller, but ornate altars with carvings and inscriptions are located around the stupa as roofed



projections facing the cardinal points. The many temple buildings on terraces at various levels surrounding the stupa have decorative brightly coloured tile hip roofs with intricate latticework borders, which depicts the essence of Thai spiritual buildings.



The bridge, which spans the Kwai Yai River, is the focal point of this riverside area.

The Bridge

The bridge is, well, a bridge. The history behind it however is far from ordinary. During World War II, as the Japanese extended their invasion of Thailand into the West of Burma, their success was hampered by the difficulty in supplying troops with provisions and thus a supply line; the railway was built. The bridge was part of the planned railway to link Bangkok and Rangoon by rail.

The Japanese, using allied prisoners of war and civilian conscripts, adopted a brutal and barbaric work regime that saw the completion of the railway in one year rather than the three it was estimated to take.

Kanchanaburi

Proceeding on from the temple the two-hour drive along a rather plain landscape took us to the lush hills around Kanchanaburi. The landscape unfolds in progressively arresting scenic beauty characterised by several waterfalls, caves, national parks and tranquil settings. We finally approached our destination, the infamous Bridge over the River Kwai.

The whole area, once a wilderness has become a huge leisure centre with a landscaped public plaza inundated with instant food stalls selling exotic foods, carts and shops bearing an assortment of souvenirs from toys to clothes to handicrafts to jewellery, and performing stuntmen for entertainment surrounded by restaurants and leisure resorts.

Almost every handicraft produced in Thailand can be purchased here. Many of the building structures are based on influences incorporated from the West but still retain certain indigenous social and cultural features.

As a cultural expression, the flamboyant and ostentatious nature of the buildings depicts the lifestyle and popular aspirations of the people, their means of living brought about by selling tourism.

These tactics cost the lives of a staggering three hundred thousand men due to overwork and starvation. One life was lost for every sleeper on the track.



Still in use today the bridge was the target of frequent allied bombing raids and was destroyed in 1945. However, it was rebuilt after the war ended. The curved spans of the bridge are the original sections. It is in daily use and is a very ordinary looking structure. Every year in December there is a weeklong festival commemorating the allied attack on the bridge in 1945.

Beside the bridge stands a small Railway Museum and the State Railway Steam Train 702, built by Mitsubishi in 1935. The State Railway of Thailand has still in working condition, seven of the original Second World War-vintage steam locomotives used for special trips from the River Kwai bridge to Nam Tok.

War Memorials

In memory of all those who perished during the construction of the "Death Railway", efforts have been made to honour the sacrifices and hardships they underwent. This is commemorated in the war museums and war cemeteries maintained in the area. Our visit there evoked a feeling of helplessness towards mans brutality in the quest for power.

War Museums:



JEATH War Museum

This enclave in the riverside precincts of Wat Chaichumphon maintained by the monks has been constructed largely in the form of an allied prisoner-of-war camp. There are replicas of the kind of bamboo huts used for the allied prisoners of war – thatched detention huts with cramped elevated bamboo bunks contain photographic, pictorial and physical memorabilia dating from the Second World War. Several prisoners of war who survived appalling conditions have donated items from that time to add to the museum's authenticity.

World War II museum

The museum is in a new structure that looks like a Chinese temple. It is located just south of the bridge. The larger of the two buildings contains an array of art objects. The smaller building contains some relics from the war including sketches made by the prisoners of war.

Allied War Cemeteries



There are two cemeteries for the dead of World War II. One cemetery is near the train station and the other one is across the river.

Kanchanaburi Allied War cemetery

At the north end of town this emetry is the better maintained of the two. This is just a 15-minute walk from the village. Along the way, on the same side of the road, is an ancient Chinese cemetery. There are over 7,000 graves of allied casualties of the War and railroad construction.

Chung Kai Allied War Cemetery

Across the river two kilometres south of town, on the bank of the Kwai Noi River, this occupies the former site of the Chung-Kai Prisoner of War Camp. This second cemetery is more peaceful, attractively landscaped, and contains some 1,750 remains. South of this cemetery is Wat Tham Khao Poon; one of the many caves containing temples in this area.

Wat Tham Khao Poon

An exhilarating ride in a long tail boat about three Kilometres southwest of the town took us to Wat Tham Khao oon; a Buddhist temple locally enowned for a cave containing salactites and stalagmites, and any beautiful Buddha images. From the pier a long climb awaited us flanked by ramshackle stalls surrounded by pungent odours from the variety of local sweets and incense sticks. Almost as soon as we completed our climb and absorbed the beauty of the surroundings, our descent into the caves began. The caves themselves are calm and tranquil in total contrast to the gaiety of the riverside activities. The path led down through three chambers of worship with altars and Buddha statues, where offerings are made in the stillness within the rock. Finally, with a feeling of peace we found ourselves climbing back to reality, the celebration, fanfare and fun making.

Hellfire Pass

Eventually we reached 'Hellfire Pass'. The pass is the most infamous in a series of cuttings along the Death Railway's course, and was so named because of the gaunt shadows cast by torchlight, as the workers dug through the night. Hellfire Pass had taken just 12 weeks to complete, the tools available were staggeringly



basic; one reason why 70% of the workforce were dead by the time the job was done. Walking between the solid walls was strangely eerie. A drill head sticking out of the rock was a vivid reminder that this wasn't an ancient ruin but one horrifically young.

The Floating Markets

Beyond the war related sights and attractions, an interesting assortment of boats, floating hotels and restaurants dominate the waters. Much of the area around Bangkok lies on flat land through which hundreds of kilometres of canals and waterways have been cut well over 100 years ago, before there were roads in the area.

The villages were connected by the waterways, which became the very hub of village life. Daily floating markets can still be seen today almost unchanged. The floating houseboats on the river are a key attraction, which function as a cross between a floating disco and houseboats.

These boats vary from modest to huge platforms carrying scores of partygoers for a weekend of eating, drinking and dancing. They are not tiny bamboo platforms but are enormous in all shapes and types usually decorated attractively and are preceded by the blare of music that echoes through the valley. Sitting on the riverbanks at night watching these floating nightclubs with their coloured lights and loud music is an unforgettable experience.

The Bridge on the River Kwai, its spectacular history and setting contribute much to the development of Kanchanaburi in terms of Tourism. With over six million foreigners flying into the country each year, Thailand

has become one of Asia's primary holiday destinations.

The influx of tourists and their wealth has played a significant part in the country's development, yet Thailand's cultural integrity remains largely undamaged except for the main cities.

Furthermore, though the high-rise buildings and the dazzling neon lights occupy the foreground of the tourist picture, the typical Thai community is the traditional farming village, and some ninety percent of Thais still earn their living from the land. Their lifestyle and their vernacular architecture still exist to preserve their spirit of independence.

