


July 2022 ₹ 100

Woman's era



GENZ
GADGET GEEKS

FLYING
SPORTS LADIES

TRADITIONAL
MYSTERY

FLAUNT
YOUR OLD AGE

CREEPY
LOVE AND RELATIONS

FRIENDS
NOW AND EVER

OVERCOMING
INSOMNIA

DIVORCE
AND FRIENDSHIPS

FITNESS
ENTHUSIAST


ROMANTIC
SELF-PLEASURE

LICIOUS HAUTE
CUISINE

ANGER
MANAGEMENT

RISKS OF
DRINKING

CONSTRUCTIVE
CRITICISM

A woman from the Long Neck tribe stands on a hillside, looking down at a village below. She wears a white short-sleeved shirt with a purple collar and a purple shawl draped over her shoulders. She has a large, ornate gold collar around her neck, and several gold rings around her neck, ankles, and knees. She also wears a pink headscarf with a floral decoration. The background shows a village with many small houses with corrugated metal roofs, nestled in a valley with mountains in the distance.

The older ladies wear upto 10 kilograms of rings around their necks, ankles and knees.

A Mysterious Tradition

Visit to Long neck tribe at
Huai Suea Thao village on the Thai
Burmese border. By Murli Menon

The mystery of traveling to an unknown destination is like learning a new language. One reads numerous dictionaries, books and even “Learning Languages for Dummies”. After mastering a few short sentences, you locate a native speaker to practice speaking and start parroting your rehearsed lines.

As your sparring partner stares blankly at your monologue, you do not know how your accents have turned out to be and if what you said was what was understood or whether you made a complete fool of yourself by mispronouncing niceties as insults!

One is writing this from his thatched-roof hut on stilts inside Huai Suea Thao village on the outskirts of Mae Hong Song district on the Thai-Burmese border.

This village is nestled on the edge of a steep cliff, overlooking several mountain streams that rush down to meet the Pai River flowing through Mae Hong Son. One is surrounded on all sides by mist covered evergreen coniferous pine forests at an altitude of 5000 feet above sea level.

The natural beauty of the surroundings is breathtaking. Every bit of the landscape is covered with teaks, pines, conifers, oaks and birches stretching their arms as far as eyes can see. The buzzing sound of the flowing mountain streams and waterfalls are soft music to one's ears throughout the night. One wakes up at dawn awakened by the natural alarm calls of wild roosters living on the edges of the jungle.

Even in the twilight hours in early November, one can see the mist hanging heavily on the mountain tops. One also comes across a few scattered clouds that have descended on your hut made entirely of palm leaves, coir and bamboos.

There is no electricity in this tribal village populated by the Kayan tribe who has lived in these forests since centuries.

Elongated Neck

The most unique aspect about the tribe living in this village is the elongated necks of the womenfolk! After a girl is born, she is made to wear a brass neck-ring. Every year, two more rings are added to her neck till she is five. As she grows into adulthood, her neck gets naturally elongated as the rings are never removed.

The long neck decorated with golden coloured brass rings make the Kayan women look incredibly attractive and they strut about like graceful peahens. They also wear their hair in a topknot with a pointed silver pin in it and a necklace or a chain of silver coins.

Kayan girls start wearing rings at the age of four or five. More spirals



Children start wearing the rings after they turn five.

KAYAN GIRLS START WEARING RINGS AT THE AGE OF FOUR OR FIVE. MORE SPIRALS ARE ADDED AS THE GIRLS GROW OLDER. THE NECK IS CONTINUALLY STRETCHED WITH MORE COILS ADDED EACH YEAR TILL THE LENGTH OF SIXTEEN INCHES.

are added as the girls grow older. The neck is continually stretched with more coils added each year till the length of sixteen inches is reached, though many older women have greatly exceeded that.

At the base of the main neck coil, married women wear a five coil winding. A complete set of neck coils worn by a grown-up woman, including the neck, knees and ankles, weighs about 10 kilos!

The diameter of the brass coils are wound by local kayan women with their strong fingers. The decision whether to wear the rings or not is left entirely to the girl after she attains maturity.

However, this tradition has survived in this era of globalisation

only due to the fact that Kayan women have the greatest reverence for their mother goddess. The Kayan long-necked women do not travel outside their villages and spend their entire life in their small communities.

The longneck Kayan village of Huai Suea Thao is nestled in the middle of a hill overlooking a multitude of uninhabited hills. Several small mountain streams criss-cross through these hills, providing a constant water supply for their needs.





The Kayans shun contact with the outside world and are happy in their isolated existence. Language is a barrier as their native dialect is different from Thai or even Burmese. They hand cultivate rice, in their tiny fields and back gardens. Vegetables like carrots, cabbage and cauliflowers are also grown.

One of the unique aspects of Kayan culture is their food habit. Due to their elongated and delicate necks, they have to be very particular about what they eat. Lot of wild tea is drunk, without sugar or milk to keep the effects of the cold away. Crushed ginger is added to the tea.

The Kayans are extremely hard working and do not rear cows or bullocks. Ploughing the rice-fields is done by digging by hand. The mountainous terrain, the fast flowing mountain streams and ancient Kayan myths have combined to ensure the absence of cattle.

This means milk and milk products are cut off from their diet which is rich in cereals and vegetables.

Music and dance are a way of life for Kayans. As there is no electricity, all the Kayans gather under a tree at dusk followed by lots of singing and dancing. Their food habits are frugal and dinner is no more than rice soup washed down with a few glasses of home made rice beer.

The Kayan tribe call themselves "Ka Kaung" which loosely translates to "people who live on top of the hill". They are sometimes called long neck Karen or giraffe women because of the custom of encasing their neck in brass coils.



KAYAN WOMEN ARE SAID TO HAVE DESCENDED FROM THE 'GODDESS MOTHER DRAGON' AND WOMEN WEAR THESE RINGS TO GIVE RESPECT AND TRIBUTE TO THE DEITY AND TO RESEMBLE A REAL DRAGON.

When a girl is aged between five and nine, her neck is rubbed with traditional herbs dipped in coconut milk and the first brass ring is fitted. After two years, the next set of rings is added and every year thereafter she gains a new set till she is married.

Below the chin, they wear a square cotton pad decorated with beads. These brass rings are said to be centuries old and handed down over generations, passing from mother to daughter to granddaughters. Kayan women also have two set of leg rings, one above the knee and one below, but this

does not seem to hamper their daily work in any way.

Kayan women are said to have descended from the 'Goddess Mother Dragon' ("Ka Kwe Bu Pe") and women wear these rings to give respect and tribute to the deity and to resemble a real dragon.

As Kayan myth goes, when the granddaughters Mu Don and Mu Dan visited Ka Kwe Bu Pe, they were presented with winding gold coils which they wrapped around their hands, legs and neck!

Kayan people celebrate the "Kan Khwan" ceremony, when all Kayans gather in celebration with lots of folk dances and traditional music and singing. These community gatherings often get kayans from all far-flung villages to come together in a mood of festivity and happiness.

The other villages on the Thai-Burmese border, where one can find long necked Kayans, include Hwa Phu Keng, Kayan Tha, Yar Hsu,

Htaut and Noi Soi. All these villages are located inside thick coniferous forests and are accessible either by boat or after trekking on foot for long hours.

How to get there?

The nearest international airport to reach Chiangmai is the Suvarnabhoomi International Airport at Bangkok. There are several options for Indian tourists to get to Huay Psai Tao from Bangkok.

- Bangkok to Chiangmai (air/bus/train) (overnight stay)
- Chiangmai to Mae Hong Son (bus/mini-bus/shared-taxi) (overnight stay)
- Mae Hong Son to Huay Psai Tao (tuk-tuk/ motorcycle taxi)

By bus: The easiest and most popular way to get to Chiangmai from Bangkok is by bus. This 600 km. trip takes 12 hours. There are three bus terminals at Bangkok, namely Northern, Southern and Eastern.

All buses are first class, air-conditioned with pushback seats. The

bus fare from Bangkok to Chiangmai costs 350 Baht for ordinary buses to 550 Baht for super-deluxe buses.

Buses to Chiangmai leave Bangkok's Northern bus terminal. Mae Hong Son is a six hour drive from Chiangmai. Buses leave at 11:00 a.m. from Chiangmai bus Station to Mae Hong Son.

The one-way mini-bus journey from Chiangmai to Mae Hong Son costs 250 baht. Huay Psai Tao is a 20 km. drive over rough roads from Mae Hong Son.

Motorcycle taxis should not charge more than 200 baht during off season. Taxis can cost upwards of 400 Baht for the same. Time taken to reach Huay Psai Tao from Mae Hong Son should not exceed 60 minutes by bike or car.

By air: Several airlines operate direct flights from Bangkok to Chiangmai. But the cheapest option for budget conscious Indian tourists is to take the 12:50 pm Air Asia flight from Bangkok to Chiangmai. If booked two weeks in advance, the flight fare should not exceed 1800 Baht one way. The flight duration is approximately 60 minutes.

Where to stay?

At Chiangmai: Red Brick Guest house Chiangmai is a budget guest-house whose architecture reflects the name! It is a favourite of Israeli backpackers. During low season (July to October) a standard double room costs approximately 350 Baht exclusive of American breakfast. The rooms are basic; bathrooms are clean with hot water showers.

All major landmarks are within walking distance from this homely guest house. The to and fro airport transfer costs 120 Baht each and transfer to bus-station by tuk tuk is bargainable and should not put you back by more than 80 Baht.

At Mae Hong Son: River View Lodge at Mae Hong Son offers clean rooms with small bathrooms and cold showers for 150 baht and is located 5 minutes away from the lake and is on the banks of the Mae Hong

Son River. This family run guesthouse has just 6 rooms, so a phone call from Chiangmai bus station before one boards the mini-bus will ensure a room is waiting for you on arrival.

At Huai Suea Thao: A few local villagers offer homestays with basic accommodation and food at 100 Baht per day. One gets to experience their hospitality and local cuisine. Vegans will relish the freshly steamed rice with wild bamboo shoots and green beans cooked over a traditional Kayan earthen stove.

Bamboo mats and traditionally woven quilts are provided in a thatched hut made of bamboo and straw. Basic bathrooms and toilets are in the backyard of the house.

RICE SOUP WITH WILD BAMBOO SHOOTS AND HOMEGROWN GREEN BEANS IS A LOCAL KAYAN DELICACY WHICH IS AS TASTY AS ITS DESCRIPTION. VEGANS ARE OFFERED SMALL BANANAS, ROASTED POTATOES AND SWEET POTATOES ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.

Where to eat?

At Chiangmai: A few small eating joints serving Thai vegetarian cuisine can be found around the market. Farm fresh custard apples are available at 40 Baht per kilo at Chiangmai market. Tropical fruits like papaya, pineapples and pomelos are available at most fruit-shops.

At Mae Hong Son: Freshly steamed vegetables in ginger sauce with steamed rice is the choice for vegans at the Coffee Shop located near the lake. Many stalls selling roasted bananas, sweet potatoes and corn can be found in the evenings around the lake.



The Local kayan food.

At Huai Suea Thao: Rice soup with wild bamboo-shoots and homegrown green beans is a local Kayan delicacy which is as tasty as its description. Vegans are offered small bananas from the kitchen garden. Roasted potatoes and sweet potatoes are available on request.

Kayans do not rear cattle and locally grown tea is served black and drunk several cups at a time to keep the mist, fog and cold at bay.

The creation myth of the Kayan says that the world was created by the eternal creator God Phu Kabukathin assisted by two creator deities Phikahao and Kabukabhan and their three goddesses namely La Maan, La Taon and La Nan.

The goddess La Maan created heaven and fire, La Taon created trees and plants and earth and La Nan created man, animals and water. The primordial elements fire, water and earth were linked by a spider's web. Thus the earth is braced to the sun, moon and stars by an invisible spider's web.

At creation, the earth lacked density and the land and the water were fluid, so God Phu Kabukathin planted a small post in the ground. As the post grew, the earth also grew into seven inner and outer layers and it became firm. The post was named "Kan Htein Bo" in Kayan which translates to "The means of formation of earth".

We