

JOURNEYS OF NORTHERN ART

Visiting handicraft villages in the North of Thailand provides opportunities and hands-on experiences for tourists to learn about another aspect of cultural tourism

STORY AND PHOTOS: PICHAYA SVASTI

Travel is fun, especially when it can be carried out under uncommon themes. The North is charming for the beauty of its nature, art and culture. Visiting the North to learn and appreciate traditional craftsmanship is an interesting idea, inspired by the ongoing exhibition “Tracing The Fading Legacy: Stories Of Living Legends” at Raya Heritage, Chiang Mai, that will run until the end of March as a tribute to handicraft masters and teachers.

The art installation of *khong*, a creel for catching fish, and *piat*, a basket or hamper, on view at the exhibition, can inspire tourists to visit Ban Pa Bong Luang Weaver Cooperative (Mae Khieo Khong Luang) in tambon Pa Bong, Saraphi district of Chiang Mai.



Indigo-dyed fabrics and ethnic textiles.

Buakhieo and Dee Kaewsamut, an 86-year-old couple, are the founders of the co-operative. Buakhieo, or Grandma Khieo, has been conserving the creel weaving tradition by adding new and unique designs, artistic touches and commercial value to the craft. Also, she has been promoting and upgrading Ban Pa Bong’s traditional woven basketry from household supplies into unique decorative art.

“In the old days, every family in Ban Pa Bong knew how to weave creels. Since I can remember, I have always been making my own creel baskets, hampers and other personal wares,” she recalled.

In the same tambon, basket weaver Butr Tamsri, or Uncle Butr, has spent most of his free time weaving baskets for personal use and sale since he was a little boy.

The display of *eid*, a tool for separating seeds from cotton fibres, and *fuem*, a traditional wooden loom, have sparked visitors’ interest in the Ban Na Dao community, Soem Ngam district of Lampang province. There, cotton weaver Fun Tuntui, or Grandma Fun, 80, still spins cotton at home to make yarns for younger weavers to turn into finely handwoven textiles.

The simple beauty of indigo-dyed fabrics shown at the exhibition has attracted a number of Thai and foreign interest in Toob Kaew Ma Learning Centre, Soem Ngam district of Lampang. Master Phon Kaewma and his wife, Junkham, founded this centre for producing hand-spun and natural colour-dyed textiles for domestic sale and export and also providing training in this field of art. Interested persons can learn the whole process from cultivating cotton and indigo trees, dyeing cotton threads with natural colours, creating patterns and weaving fabrics in old styles.



The ‘Tracing The Fading Legacy: Stories Of Living Legends’ Exhibition.



Northern lacquerware (*khuang khuen*).

Another guru, Duangkamol Jaikumpan, or Mae Kru Duangkamol, was acclaimed by the Support Arts and Crafts International Centre of Thailand for her conservation of northern lacquerware (*khuang khuen*) making. Tourists can visit Wat Nantharam community in Tambon San Sai, Chiang Mai’s Fang district, to observe the art of making lacquerware.

Old-style mats and contemporary-style products made from *yaeng*, a kind of wetland shrub from Ban Hong Kok in tambon Umong, Muang district of Lamphun province, is also interesting.

Couple Sa-ngiam and Charal Panwai founded Ban Hong Kok Yaeng Mat Weaving Group.

“All masters inherited the art from ancestors. They make these arts and crafts ... with love every day and wish to forward the knowledge to all of us. We admire and are proud of them and want to see them continue what they do,” Chatchawan Thongdeert, founder of Lanna Wisdom School in Nakhon Chiang Mai Municipality, said.

The school is where visitors can enjoy northern art and handicrafts by more than 100 participating masters who teach the art at their own houses in over 30 northern communities. It is a perfect choice for them to visit for observing the teaching of local cuisine and handicraft making, such as cotton dyeing with natural colours, pottery, basketry, northern auspicious flags (*tung*), lanterns (*khom*) and kite making, umbrella painting, traditional flower arranging and metal carving.

■ The “Tracing The Fading Legacy: Stories Of Living Legends” exhibition will be on view until March 31, 10am-7pm, at Raya Heritage Hotel, Mae Rim district, Chiang Mai. Admission is free. Contact the hotel by emailing info@rayaheritage.com or dialling 053-111-670-3.

■ The Lanna Wisdom School is located on Rattanakosin Road in tambon Wat Ket, Muang Chiang Mai. It is open Tuesdays-Saturdays. Email sslanna@hotmail.com or tel 053-244-231.

AWAY

■ PICHAYA SVASTI

Farming fair in Ang Thong

Until Feb 14, the “Farm Produce And Prized Products Of Ang Thong Fair” will take place at Wat Khun Inthapramun in Pho Thong district, Ang Thong province, from 8.30am-4.30pm.

The objectives are to promote farming, food safety and local products, introduce new farming technology and boost cultural tourism. Activities include exhibitions on agriculture, the display of a 100m-long vegetable tunnel, the sale of local products and food, a light and sound show on the history of the temple, cultural performances, dragon and lion dances and singing and buffalo contests.

Contact the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)’s Suphan Buri Office at 03-553-6030 or 03-552-5880.

Straw bird Fair

From Feb 8-17, the annual Straw Bird Fair and Red Cross Fair will be held at the sports stadium and in the Khuan Riang Hin area in front of the provincial hall in Muang district, Chai Nat province.

Visitors can view straw figures of birds, buy One Tambon One Product goods, try local food and watch cultural performances, straw bird and beauty contests and concerts. On Feb 8, the opening ceremony will begin at 4pm with parades of straw birds.

Contact the provincial administration office at 05-641-1234.

Yoga by the sea

From Feb 8-10, the TAT Prachuap Khiri Khan Office will host the Hua Hin Yoga Festival 2019 on the stretch of Hua Hin beach near Soi 75/1 from 5-6pm.

Participants can attend yoga workshops on the beach free of charge if they register in advance. However, they must wear proper sportswear and bring yoga mats with them.

Contact the TAT’s local office at 03-251-3885 or Shakti Yoga at 061-289-1928.

Email pichayas@bangkokpost.co.th if you have any news to share.