

Around The Traps

By TT Hun

The World Cup has been run and won. Congratulations to Italy for their win over France.

The rain has kept many tourists close to their hotels and it is showing in some of the establishments around the island. Hello, low season.

But, hang on a minute, quite a few places we have spoken to have said just the opposite. Sure, if you take a walk around those very populated high season nightspots you would say it is extremely quiet, but take a look at a lot of guesthouses around and they will tell you they have occupancy rates that would make any hotel proud. What we are finding is that at this time of year a different type of visitor is turning up. Generally they have been here before and know their way around. Added to that they have a fairly good eye for value and it is value that keeps establishments ticking over in the low season.

Speaking of value or lack of it, a certain open-air so-called buffet had a big sign on the wall, in Thai, that it was all-you-can-eat for 99 baht. We journeyed there one night to check it out and when the bill came it was 120 baht.

When this was questioned the lady looked surprised and stated, as if I should have already known, "You farang!". This double pricing policy so commonly practiced here has irked me for the last three decades and it was hard to conceal my anger. It's not the amount at issue here, it's the attitude.

After counting to ten I pointed out that the other person with me was not a farang, so why was their food bill 120 baht. Grudgingly she handed back some change and we left never to frequent the place again.

Driving past the very same place recently I noticed another sign, this time written in English, saying "All-You-Can-Eat 120 baht". The Thai sign is still there right next to it, at 99 baht, so it looks like there have been several complaints from people who can read rudimentary Thai. If you were wondering what "all-you-can-eat 99 baht" looks like in Thai see the picture below (direct translation is Food 99 baht).

I've never really thought about this before as I tend to ride around on a motorbike most of the time and not a lot really goes wrong with it. If it does, then it generally is not too expensive to fix and you have a fairly good idea what the problem is to start with.

Cars, on the other hand, I have to leave to the experts. I just hope that anyone working on a car that I happen to be driving is competent enough to know what he's doing.

Many years ago while driving from Bangkok to Chiang Mai, we noticed a wheel bearing noise coming from front left side of our Holden Kingswood (of all cars to find in Thailand - never seen one since). Not a problem as there were several budding mechanics on this particular trip.



We pulled into a garage in Nakorn Nowhere and explain what was needed and left the mechanics to do their bit.

When we wandered back an hour later they said there was no problem, the bearing was just dry, so they packed it with grease and from memory, cost us about 40 baht. We took off up the road and about 2 minutes later the same noise started up, but this time a little louder.

We headed straight back to the garage and told them they hadn't fixed the problem. We then sat down and watched them (no mechanic likes to be watched, but we wanted to get on our way). They pulled off the wheel and pulled out the bearing to re-grease it.

That was the first problem, they hadn't repacked the bearing at all, they had just rubbed a bit of grease on the outside. Secondly, that wasn't the bearing giving the trouble. We asked about the bearing behind the wheel hub to which we received blank

stares in return. When this bearing was liberated from behind the hub it was found to be shattered. No amount of grease was going to fix that, it had to be replaced.

After an hour's search around town, (that we had to do ourselves after the first bearing brought back was so far wrong as to be laughable) we finally located the right bearing. We then had to show how to correctly pack the bearing and left the mechanic to put it all back together. Now you may think the mechanic had lost face through this whole exercise, but no, what he had done when we returned was blame the apprentice. He then told the apprentice that the foreigners were going to show him how it was done because the mechanic had other things to do. Classic, a win - win situation. We were on our way within a couple of hours and were able to feel confident for the rest of the trip to Chiang Mai and back.

While that was not a safety issue except we could have been stranded in an even more remote part of the country for a while, this next one even baffles me.

A local lad had his jeep in for repairs and a bit of an overhaul. Part of replacements included a new windscreen, and although most vehicles have curved windscreens, jeeps do not. After getting his car back, he decides to go for a trip over to Krabi to test it out. Everything was fine for the first few days and after notching up about 1,000km was on his way back to Phuket at a leisurely 50 - 60 mph when the windscreen shatters. Now windscreens are either laminated, so they don't shatter, or they are made of safety glass so they crumble for want of a better word.

This did neither, it shattered into sharp shards of flesh piecing glass that proceeded to fly back through the jeep past the passengers. Luckily no one was seriously hurt, but it was when he stopped the vehicle to examine what happen that he realised that the mechanic had replaced his front windscreen with your common garden-variety plate glass window!

How it lasted as long as it did and how no one was seriously hurt is quite amazing. We just hope he lets everyone know who the offending mechanic was so the rest of us can avoid him like the plague.

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