

RON EMMONS

ARTICLES AVAILABLE

(All articles except Travel Tales are accompanied by a set of images)

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Nature

Branching Out

Let's escape the rigid lines of cityscapes and look at the fluid patterns of trees and plants, rocks and rivers, which provide relaxation and inspiration.

The Wonder of Water

Water is a wondrous element, with the ability to change into both a gas (steam) and a solid (ice). It can soothe us with its sound and delight us with its visual beauty.

Watercolours

Though water is in principle a transparent liquid, it produces a rainbow of colours through reflection and refraction.

Coconut - King of Trees

With its nutritious fruit, good building wood and preference for beaches, the humble coconut palm deserves a prize for the many ways it helps man.

Going Bananas

English has only one word for this fruit that has many different varieties, and is famous for properties other than mere taste.

The Bizarre Baobab

Baobabs look different to any other tree with their huge, smooth trunks and squiggle of branches. They can survive long periods of drought and some live thousands of years.

The Mute Swan's Tale

George is an 18 year-old mute swan who lives on the River Thames in England. His story is a heart-warming example of overcoming an environmental disaster, and includes a description of the ancient Swan Upping ceremony that takes place each July.

Buddhism

The Many Faces of Buddha

Images of the Buddha in Thailand take many forms - fat and thin, gleaming and battered, massive and minute. A close look at a range of images reveals much about his life and teaching.

The Gentle Art of Walking

Meditation is often considered an elusive, esoteric practice, yet a form of walking meditation can bring unimagined benefits.

The Rains Retreat

A month-long meditation course, undertaken at the beginning of Khao Pansa, the 'Rains Retreat', in a Northern Thai temple provides some challenges and leads to unusual experiences.

Mindful Moments

Visitors may not realize, but when they marvel over the beauty of Thai temples, they are practising mindfulness, just like the monks who live there.

Developing Compassion

The Sangha Metta Project, which is training monks in Southeast Asia to help local communities cope with the AIDS crisis, is causing a quiet revolution.

Buddhas with Attitude

The hand gestures, or 'attitudes', of Buddha images reveal insights into the teachings of Buddhism and are a source of inspiration for those who contemplate them.

Sweeping Meditation

A personal history of attitudes to sweeping reveals the activity as both a senseless chore and a route to enlightenment.

Photography

Making Dreamscapes

Sandwiching slides is one of the easiest techniques to come up with other-worldly images as backgrounds and foregrounds interplay in strange ways.

The Element of Surprise

While far from home, we need to use our own surprise and that of locals to capture the magic of the moment and get great travel pictures.

Striking Signs

Billboards, street signs and graffiti are there to inform, persuade and entertain, yet they also make intriguing subjects to photograph.

Artful Abstracts

Abstract images, which can be found all around us, bring out the importance of line, tone and texture in a good photograph.

Biography

In Mouhot's Footsteps

Re-tracing the travels of Henri Mouhot, French naturalist, through Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Mouhot is credited with making the Western world aware of the splendour of Angkor Wat.

The Road to Kelmscott

Kelmscott Manor, near the source of the River Thames, was the last home of William Morris - writer, philosopher, designer and printer. A visit there helps to understand the turbulent life of this productive man.

Culture: Thailand

A Fruit For All Seasons

Thailand's benign climate bestows a fantastic range of fruit on those who live there, and new varieties are coming into season every month of the year.

The Crafts of Lanna

Silkweaving, ceramics and woodcarvings are just a few of the crafts which have been produced in Northern Thailand for centuries using techniques that have gone unchanged.

The Handicraft Highway

The road linking Chiang Mai and Sankhampaeng is often called 'The Handicraft Highway', and is the place to go to see silk and silverware, ceramics and lacquerware being artfully crafted.

The Carvers of Tawai

Situated just south of Chiang Mai, Ban Tawai has transformed from a village of rice farmers into the heart of the local woodcarving industry, which is booming these days.

The Weavers of Mae Chaem

Nestled among the hills of Northern Thailand, Mae Chaem has a reputation for producing some of the finest woven textiles in the country.

Thai Spas and Health Retreats

Throughout the country, relaxing spas and health retreats are tempting visitors to pamper their bodies while on holiday.

Jumbo's New Tricks

Competition for visitors to elephant shows around Thailand has led the camp owners to come up with some surprising activities for their charges, such as playing music, painting pictures, playing football and giving a massage.

Beetle Mania

From September to November, beetle fans in Northern Thailand go crazy over these gallant warriors, which wield their horns at opponents in battle for the favours of a restrained female.

Thai Transport

Whether it be by elephant or tuk-tuk, by trishaw or bamboo raft, travelling round Thailand is an adventure in itself.

Trance Dancing in Thailand

Spirit mediums in Thailand occasionally arrange trance dances to show their thanks to tutelary spirits for the powers bestowed on them.

In the House of the Spirits

Thailand's ubiquitous spirit houses show the importance of ancient beliefs and rituals as their owners make offerings to 'Phra Phum', the spirit of the land.

Festivals: Thailand

Parasols and Flowers

The streets of Chiang Mai and the nearby village of Bor Sang flare into colour at these New Year festivals, which feature lavishly-decorated floats, pretty Northern ladies and the heady scent of flowers (late Jan/early Feb).

Three Days off the Ground

Brilliant outfits and wild celebrations accompany the ordination of young Shan men into the Buddhist monkhood. For the three days of the festival, they are carried on shoulders or horseback (April).

Dancing Spirits

In a ceremony (Phi Ta Khon) to celebrate one of the Buddha's last re-incarnations, young men dress up as fearsome spirits and bring to life the sleepy town of Dan Sai in Loei Province (June/July)

Nan's Raucous Regatta

At the end of the Buddhist Rains Retreat (late October/early November), villagers around Nan converge on the local river to compete in long canoes for coveted prizes.

Soaked at Songkran

This traditional Thai new year in April is celebrated in the most appropriate way to deal with the stifling heat - by dousing each other with water.

The Festival of Light and Water

The Loy Krathong Festival is probably Thailand's loveliest, when small, candle-lit floats are released to honour Mae Khongkha, the goddess of the water.

Travel: Thailand

Thailand's Natural Treasures

The best place to escape the tourist hordes in Thailand is in its National Parks which occupy more than 13% of the country's area. Landscapes range from coral reefs to upland meadows and misty mountains.

Breezing round Bangkok

With the introduction of the skytrain and subway, moving around Bangkok has suddenly become easier, so finally visitors can enjoy sightseeing without fretting about the traffic.

Welcome to the Golden Land

Bangkok's new Suvarnabhumi Airport is both massive and very modern, but what can you do there when stuck on a long layover? This story gives the low-down on where to eat, shop, sleep and if you want to, work.

The Charms of Chiang Mai

With its beautiful landscapes, rich culture and warm, friendly people, Chiang Mai plays host to a constant stream of visitors.

A Stroll through Chiang Mai's Old City

The best way to discover Chiang Mai's charm is by walking through its narrow lanes and temple compounds, where plenty of surprises await.

The Chiang Mai Enlightenment Tour

While this tour does not guarantee a short cut to Nirvana, it reveals some fascinating facts about Chiang Mai's past and much of interest about its spiritual path today.

Northern Peaks

The cool season is the best time to get high in North Thailand, heading for the summits of Doi Pui, Doi Inthanon, Doi Khun Tan, Chiang Dao and Phu Chi Fa to gaze over awesome seas of mist in the valleys below.

Footloose in Lanna

Northern Thailand, once called Lanna, has long attracted visitors with its treks to hilltribe villages, but these days the region's attractions also include rock climbing, kayaking, white-water rafting, bungy jumping and mountain biking.

In the Mae Sa Valley

With elephant camps and orchid farms, bungy jumping and off-road buggies, craft centres and the country's best botanic garden, the Mae Sa Valley has plenty to offer.

The Oldest Town in Thailand

Located just 25km south of Chiang Mai, Lamphun was once capital of the Haripunchai Empire, and claims to be Thailand's oldest continually inhabited town.

Afloat in a Wonderland

On the shores of a lake created by the Bhumibol Dam, the Mae Ping National Park (between Chiang Mai and Tak) offers true peace, with accommodation on a raft floating amid a drowned forest.

Doing the Mae Hong Son Loop

The 600-km route from Chiang Mai to Mae Hong Son and back is one of Thailand's most exciting journeys. It has more than 3000 bends and unfolds views of misty mountains, rice terraces, narrow gorges and hilltribe villages.

Thailand's Northern Loop

Hire a car or motorbike and head off on a sweeping tour of Thailand's north, taking in Lampang, Nan, Chiang Khong and Chiang Rai.

In the City of Three Mists

Mae Hong Son, in Thailand's wild northwest, is becoming one of Southeast Asia's hottest destinations. Great landscapes, colourful hilltribes, Burmese architecture and artifacts are some of the attractions.

The Friendly Ghosts of Phrae

Near the northern town of Phrae lies an area of eroded earth towers called 'Phae Muang Phi' which contains some other-worldly views.

A Cool Spot Called Hot

Surrounded as it is by attractions like weaving villages, forest monasteries, rushing rivers, hot springs, narrow gorges and a huge lake, Hot is a pretty cool place to be.

Time out in Nan

Crumbling temples, tasteful textiles and mountainous parks are the main attractions in Nan Province of Thailand's north, where the pace of life is leisurely to say the least.

Tranquil Tak

Tak, a quiet market town in Central Thailand, is the birthplace of King Taksin, one of Thailand's heroes, and is well-placed to visit several nearby scenic areas.

Bucolic Pai

Situated between Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son, Pai is one of Northern Thailand's hottest new destinations. Trek to hilltribe villages, go white-water rafting, explore caves, or just relax by the river.

Rafting the River Pai

A white-water rafting trip in Thailand's far northwest brings close encounters with baboons, birds and the river itself. Though packed with excitement, the trip is safe for beginners.

On the Mountain that Points toward Heaven

Straddling the border of Thailand and Laos, Phu Chi Fa is a towering wedge of rock with a sunrise view to beat them all.

To the Top of Thailand

Amid the cool mists and lush vegetation of Doi Inthanon (Thailand's highest mountain), visitors can see rare birds and plants as well as some of the country's prettiest waterfalls.

Three Spirits Sharing Water

Doi Luang National Park, situated near Phayao in North Thailand, has some beautiful waterfalls, and the small but historic city has many attractions too.

The Beauty of Bell Mountain

In Loei Province of Thailand's northeast, Phu Kradung (Bell Mountain) presents a challenge to those who would scale its steep slopes to experience the enchanting atmosphere of its plateau.

In a Communist Paradise

Phu Hin Rong Kla, a mountainous national park in the north of Thailand, was once the scene of bloody battles with communist rebels, but is now a peaceful plateau with beautiful views.

Exploring Samui

One of Thailand's best-known beach destinations, Koh Samui has plenty of quiet bays far from the crowds, but lots of attractions inland as well.

An Andaman Idyll

Tarutao Island, near the Thai border with Malaysia, was once used as a prison, but these days it tempts sun-worshippers with its long, deserted beaches and clear waters.

Travel: SW China

South of the Clouds

Yunnan, meaning 'South of the Clouds', is China's south-westernmost province, with over 20 brightly-dressed 'national minorities' and landscapes ranging from snow-capped peaks to steamy jungles.

The City of Eternal Spring

Kunming, capital of Yunnan, is a crossroads of many colourful cultures and enjoys an idyllic climate throughout the year. It is also the base for trips to nearby Western Hills and the Stone Forest.

A Walk Through the Stone Forest

A short drive from Kunming leads to one of China's most scenic attractions - an area of limestone pinnacles that gives the impression of a forest which is home to the colourful Sani tribe.

Surreal Dali

A medieval city in northwest Yunnan Province provides scenes that would surprise even its namesake, the surreal painter Salvador Dali. Set between a tranquil lake and snow-capped mountains, it is home of the Bai people and their ancient ways.

Journey to the Jade Dragon

Near the Tibetan border, the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and Lijiang Valley are ripe for adventure. As well as meeting the local Naxi people, visitors can trek into the awesome Tiger-Leaping Gorge along the Yangtze River.

Among the Tai

The Tai are one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Yunnan, and have farmed the lush valleys around Jinghong for millennia. Their sophisticated cuisine, dress and architecture never fail to impress visitors.

Jinghong Jaunting

Short trips from Jinghong, in China's extreme southwest, bring glimpses of bright markets and temples, botanical gardens and the mighty Mekong.

Into the Heart of Huangguoshu

China's highest waterfall, situated in the remote countryside of Guizhou Province, reveals some spectacular views from a tunnel through its heart.

Breathless in Yangshuo

Whether from climbing the steep limestone hills, riding a bicycle or simply staring at the classical Chinese scenery, all visitors to Yangshuo are rendered breathless.

Vibrant Chengdu

The capital of China's most densely-populated province (Sichuan) pulses with life. It is an ideal place to see pandas, opera performers and storytellers in action.

Travel: Indochina

Seductive Saigon

With its bustling markets, colonial architecture, stylish restaurants and nightclubs, Saigon (now formally known as Ho Chi Minh City) has a seductive attraction.

Down in the Delta

The Mekong Delta is a melting pot of peoples and lifestyles, with Viet and Khmer farmers living side by side in this land of plenty.

Getting Hot on Phu Quoc

Phu Quoc is Vietnam's largest offshore island, located off the southwest coast of the Mekong Delta. With an expanding choice of resorts and guest houses, as well as some fabulous beaches, the island is growing in popularity.

Hanoi Rising

With investments and visitors streaming in, Hanoi is waking up to its potential as an appealing travel destination. Restful lakes, leafy boulevards and colonial buildings give the city an entrancing atmosphere.

Along the Dragon's Tail: Travels in North Vietnam

Vietnamese legends are littered with dragons, and a journey across the mountainous north from Halong Bay to Hanoi, Hoa Lu, Mai Chau and Sapa is like climbing the serrations on a dragon's tail.

High Fashion in the Hills of Vietnam

In the Tonkin Alps of Vietnam's northwest, the different hilltribe groups try to outdo each other with the flamboyant styles and colours of their dress.

Puppets on a Watery Stage

Unique to Vietnam, water puppets skim and splash their way through a set of sketches guaranteed to make children or adults of any age roar with laughter.

Inside the Golden City

Luang Prabang, the ancient royal capital of Laos, is a veritable Shangri-La of graceful temples and friendly locals amid the jungle.

Vientiane - the Cosy City

Compared to other congested capitals of Asia, Vientiane is visitor-friendly, with a small centre packed with temples, markets and great restaurants.

Angkored Out

The massive scale and intricate carvings of the temples at Angkor are enough to overwhelm even the most ardent lover of ancient monuments.

Signs of Change in Cambodia

Along the roadside throughout Cambodia are hand-painted billboards urging people to beware of land mines, to hand over their weapons, to prevent AIDS and malaria and to protect the environment.

Travel: Asia general

Stalking the White Rajahs

With a history that reads like a 'Boys' Own' comic book story, Sarawak spent a century under the autocratic rule of the Brooke family, yet these days retains a great diversity of ethnic cultures and wildlife.

Purring in Cat City

Kuching, the capital of Sarawak in Borneo, is named after our feline friend, and apart from some kitsch statues of cats, has plenty to offer the curious - such as a rich colonial heritage, bargains in the markets and a bubbling nightlife.

Breathless in the Land below the Wind

Sabah, which occupies the northern part of Borneo, offers plenty of activities for the adventurous, from climbing Mount Kinabalu to white-water rafting on the Padas River and diving at Lankayan Island.

Stone Visions in Sri Lanka

The former capitals of Sri Lanka, at Anuradhapura, Sigiriya and Polonnaruwa, contain some of the finest examples of stone carvings in the world.

Sweet-Tasting Kandy

Sri Lanka's prettiest city, set in a bowl of hills, is the home of Sinhalese culture and an ideal base for visits to the ancient cities and tea plantations. It also hosts the spectacular Perahera Festival.

Festival of the August Moon

The Kandy Perahera is often claimed to be Asia's most beautiful festival, and few who see it would disagree. Caparisoned elephants join the parade with whip crackers, torch spinners and the acrobatic Kandyan dancers.

Kelaniya: Temple of Dwarves

Situated just outside Colombo in Sri Lanka, the Temple of Kelaniya dates back over 2000 years. The present temple, built about a century ago, features a frieze of cherubic dwarves, each in its own posture.

To Catch the Fishtail

A quest to photograph a sacred and elusive mountain in the Himalaya while trekking in Nepal is almost snuffed out by low-hanging clouds.

Valley Images

The cultural variety of the Kathmandu valley provides a visual feast, with Hindu temples and ceremonies, unbelievable skylines, and the ubiquitous eyes of the Buddha.

Stairway to Heaven

The rice terraces of Banaue are often dubbed 'The Eighth Wonder of the World'. If strung end to end, these terraces made by the Ifugao tribe would span the world.

Travel: Madagascar & Mauritius

A 'Mad' Experience

With its wacky ways, Madagascar is a destination for travellers in search of adventure. It has hundreds of unique animals and plants, and an odd fusion of Asian and African cultures.

Madagascar's Wild West

A visit to the west coast of the world's fourth-largest island brings encounters with cute lemurs, crazy chameleons, bizarre baobab trees and the friendly Sakalava people.

In Search of a Surreal Vision

A frustrating search for a set of geysers near a picturesque lake in Central Madagascar ends with the discovery of some surreal colours and patterns among the mineral deposits.

Adventures on Dodo Island

Mauritius has moved ahead since the luckless days of the dodo. These days it is a model of success, with hotels lining its powder-soft beaches and delightful scenery drawing visitors inland.

The Smooth and the Rough

The creature comforts of the holiday isle of Mauritius contrast strongly with the struggle for survival in nearby Madagascar.

Travel: the Americas

The Coast of Many Colours

The west coast of the USA is famous for its movie stars and hitech ways, but a drive down the Pacific coast from Seattle to Los Angeles shows that nature reigns supreme.

Exploring the Lost World

The 'lost world' of Conan Doyle comes to life in the Gran Sabana of Southeast Venezuela. The world's highest waterfall, Angel Falls, tumbles almost a kilometre from one of the region's table mountains.

Travel: Europe

Going with the Flow: Walking the Thames Path

The inauguration of the Thames Path has made it possible to follow England's historic river 180 miles from the source to the Thames Barrier, passing places like Oxford University, Windsor Castle and the Houses of Parliament.

Cruising Up the Thames

From Windsor Castle to Oxford University, the River Thames flows past many gems of rural England. The relaxed pace of a boat is ideal for getting the feel of England's heartland.

Hooray Henley

Each July, English socialites swarm to the banks of the River Thames in Henley, where they consume vast quantities of champagne and strawberries, and cheer on the crews in the annual Royal Regatta.

Back to Eden

The Eden Project, located in Cornwall in England, is an ambitious attempt to teach visitors about the interdependence of all forms of Nature, in which it succeeds through a combination of information, inspiration and entertainment.

The Grotesques of Oxford

From the parapets of Oxford's colleges, some distinctly non-academic characters leer down. Subjects range from members of staff to dragons and demons, angels and clowns.

The Mysterious Stones of Avebury

The stone circle at Avebury in southwest England may not be as famous as nearby Stonehenge, but it emits a magical aura that has mystified generations.

Jazz on a Summer's Night

The annual North Sea Jazz Festival, which takes place each July in Rotterdam, Holland, is one of the best music festivals on the planet, and never fails to thrill visitors with its line-up of top performers.

Travel Tales (Vignettes)

The Rains Retreat

A month-long meditation course, undertaken at the beginning of Khao Pansa, the 'Rains Retreat', in a Northern Thai temple provides some challenges and leads to unusual experiences.

Getting Needled

A westerner with back problems in Thailand tries his luck with acupuncture - an ancient Chinese form of healing or torture, depending on your perspective.

Sweeping Meditation

The author reflects on changing attitudes to sweeping leaves, from considering it a boring chore to becoming a way of clearing the mind.

Lost in the Middle Kingdom

Getting lost must be the traveller's ultimate nightmare. For someone lost in the wilds of southern China, unfamiliar with local language and culture, the way out isn't easy.

Mesmerized by Mao

The massive Mao statue in Lijiang, NW Yunnan Province of China, is the central figure in a tale featuring leaping tigers, stone drums, herbalists, lamas and lost hotel keys.

Coollest Job on the Planet

Though guide book writers seem to have a glamorous profession, updating a guide to Cambodia presents a few unpleasant problems.

Down the Siddharta Highway

A visit to the birthplace of Buddha in Nepal on the author's birthday follows a bumpy road to some realizations of the aptness of Buddhist concepts.

Slow Boat to the Golden City

Drifting down the Mekong from Chiang Khong in Thailand to Luang Prabang in Laos, in the company of a gay Finn, a macho Japanese and a bunch of smiling Laotians.

Scarecrows

A colourful cluster of scarecrows at the roadside in Sri Lanka draws a seasoned traveler into a tourist trap.

A Visit to Uncle Ho

A visit to the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum in Hanoi, Vietnam, leads to reflections on political ironies of the twentieth century.

The Bus Driver's Tale

A chance encounter with London Bridge in the Arizona Desert sparks off memories of driving a bus over the same bridge into the City of London.