



Jim Drummond Reports from Southeast Asia

Jim Drummond is a regular attender at Crossroads Friends Worship Group, and lives in Flint, Michigan. He is traveling in Southeast Asia during Second Month 2006, and is sending back reports by thee-mail as way opens. (He is a retired college dean, and the necktie has pictures of the actor James Dean. James Dean. . . James the Dean. . .?)

Farewell, Laos

In a little over an hour, our group departs for the airport in Luang Prabang to fly back to Bangkok and then on to Seam Reap and Angkor Wat where we will spend five days. I hope to be able to email again from there.

When I signed up for the trip, Angkor was the major goal, and I guess it still is, but I am truly in love with Laos. It is very verdant country, and the temperatures are not nearly as high as in Thailand or what I will experience in Cambodia and Viet Nam. Lao is very mountainous, and every view is breathtaking.

The Lao people say the country is Lao, not Laos, so please pardon my shifts in name.

The Loa are very friendly and flexible. This country has suffered horrendously over the centuries, but somehow they have survived. About half the population of the country is Lao, and then there are more than sixty minority groups. The average per capita income is about \$1 per day, but in significant parts of the country, obviously rural, there is no money system at all. People live by what they grow, gather, or hunt, and then they barter within the villages. I visited a village the day before yesterday that makes magnificent textiles, and it does sell them for money. But, there is no electricity, no

telephones, no running water, no modern convenience of any kind. Everything is hand-woven.

It is said that Lao people when feeling shy always smile and laugh; when feeling frightened, smile and laugh; when feeling happy, smile and laugh, and when feeling sad, smile and laugh. My very limited experience seems to confirm that. These folks are very flexible, and despite the poverty (or perhaps because of it and their simple lives), the Lao seem quite happy and content and greatly relieved there has been no war for 30 years. I sense absolutely no anti-American sentiment.

Yesterday, I visited a language institute run by an American woman. I was deeply moved. It has almost nothing (although some of my money now) and teaches young people, almost all male, creativity and language skills that will help them find employment. Its focus is on English, and it is not church-related in any way. Many of the students are Buddhist monks and novices.

I warn you, I am taking pictures like crazy and will lurk about upon my return trying to show them to anyone who is willing to look.

Blessings on everyone.