

Fusion of Two North's

Norwegian and Thai thoughts on design, architecture and the daily running of a guesthouse has resulted in a charming and cosy guesthouse that serves as an ideal place to recharge batteries and explore the scenic northern Thailand.

By: Lars Pinnerup

Once you get off the deep freezer on wheels that takes people from Bangkok to Chiangrai for a humble fee, nature's own air-condition makes you reminisce on summer mornings in Scandinavia

Tuk Tuk drivers exhale hot air out of their lungs creating bubbles outlining the stereotypical questions they friendly but consistently throw at the foreigners getting off the bus.

"Where you go? Tuk Tuk sir?" Tuk Tuks are not needed, but I am reminded why my friends advised me to bring a jacket or a sweater with me to the north. It's cold here, compared to warm humid and polluted Bangkok. My base in Chiang Rai is only a short walk from the Bus Station in Chiang Rai. My feet will do the walking.

The North Hotel

The North Hotel is situated in a quiet street, where it quietly fights for elbow room with its neighboring buildings. While they look like they have been having a storm full affair with time, weather and its inhabitants, The North



Hotel, with its renovated façade, smilingly welcomes its guests with open doors and friendly voices from the inside.

The project started a few years ago when..... well, actually, without anybody knowing, it started when Sanga Inthajak spent a few years studying in Bergen in Norway, years before a few years ago. His relations with his host family became so close that it resulted in a warm and long lasting friendship with the family.

The step from being just friends to deciding to invest in a guesthouse in Chiang Rai did not seem like that big a step. The project itself though has proven to be quite a task though.

"From the start we knew we wanted to create something that was different. We wanted it to be an alternative to the already existing guesthouses and hotels in town. Most of the materials used for renovating the building and furnishing the rooms are recycled and second hand materials," Sanga Inthajak explains while giving the grand tour of the Hotel.

What's on the plate?

It would be wrong to write about a place in Thailand with about elaboration on its culinary abilities. The North tries to go its own ways. Just like the looks of the Hotel, the past is something that is being incorporated into the menu. Old traditional Northern food, made from with organic ingredients without pesticides and other modern day inventions that preserves the food, keeps the insects away and poisons your body.

"We offer traditional northern food. Something that is on its way to become extinct. A lot of the northern dishes are compromising with the taste buds of the population in the rest of the country. My mother refuses to compromise and continues cooking the northern dishes the same way they have been cooked for generations. That makes our kitchen quite unique. So unique

that locals also frequent the restaurant at our hotel," says Sanga Inthajak.

Working in the health sector at the local hospital and also giving lectures at Mae Fah Luang, Chulalongkorn and Thammasat Universities on health, organic food seems like a natural addition to the concept of the hotel and Sanga Inthajak is very passionate when the conversation reaches the topic.

"We really try hard to only use organic ingredients in our food. It's not possible to do it all the way yet, but on most days our vegetables and meat are organic. On some days we have to compromise and serve non-organic products, but we always inform our customers about what they are putting in their mouth."

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The coffee at The North is one of the organic treats you as a guest can expect to enjoy if or when you let your lips caress the edges of a mug at the hotel. Grown on the mountain sides around Chiang Rai and thoroughly selected by Sanga Inthajak it should guarantee a clean caffeine injection to those who need it or simply just enjoy it.

Room with a view

Unlike most new hotels and resorts in Thailand, space is not something The North have unlimited amounts of. They have compensated for that by creating rooms that with its furnishing and colouring seems bigger than they are. At the same

time the design of the rooms oozes of nostalgia and good old times.

It is in the decorating and making of the rooms that you in particular recognise the Scandinavian/Norwegian inspiration. Rustic minimalism favouring classical furniture is the general approach from the owners towards making the stay a visual pleasure as well for their customers.

However, the proximity of some of the rooms to the large beautiful shared terraces on the floors of the hotel can be an obstacle to the guest who likes quiet evenings. The noise and talking from people enjoying and having a good time is right on the other side of the thin walls bordering between the room and the terrace, so if you like to go to bed early ask for one of the rooms facing the street.

All in all, the hotel with its proximity to the Night bazaar, cosy atmosphere and friendly staff



serves as an excellent base for a stay in Chiang Rai. The Hotel is still undergoing improvements so a rooftop terrace with an excellent view of downtown Chiang Rai will most likely have been constructed when this article is printed.