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It's the little things:

On any given day, there are a million moments that pass, seemingly unnoticed. A sequential flow of occurrences that coalesce to become your life. Somewhere in our subconscious, they are probably all observed, noted, categorized and then filed away or discarded based on their significance. Our conscious minds can be trained to recognize and retain the positivity that surrounds us, thereby transforming a normal day into one that is remarkable. Frequently, it is other people who influence moments that determine our



reactions and subsequently our fate.

In Thailand, the potential for positive interactions is overwhelming. Every interaction begins and ends with their hands in prayer position and a sincere, eye-contact moment of connection. Any reciprocal appreciation by us only intensifies the brief encounter. When I held a door open for a young girl who rushed out of the hotel lobby to help Carol with her suitcase, I made an instant friend the moment she awkwardly passed through the doorway ahead of me. My insignificant gesture brought with it three days of smiles and attention for the remainder of our stay.

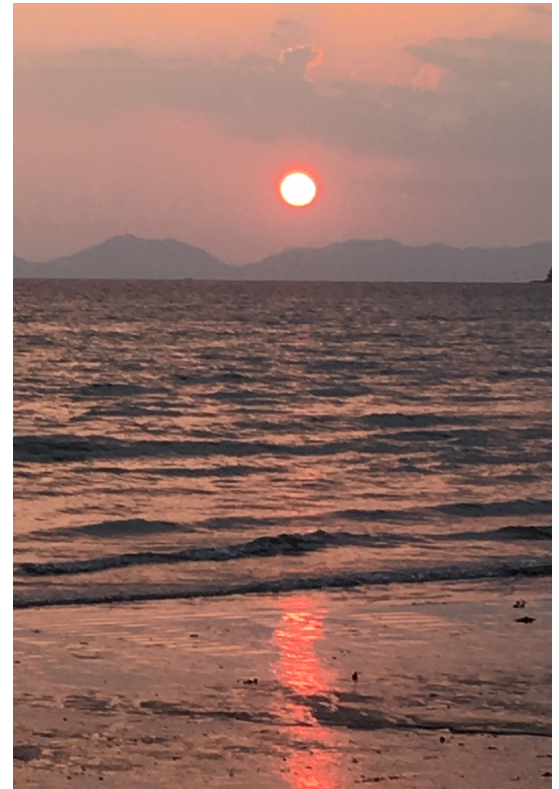
**'The view from
our hotel room in
Krabi**

The store manager who spent 15 minutes helping me get a Thai SIM card for the phone and 10 days of service will stick with me far longer than the 4G. His patience and satisfaction with the completion of our \$7 transaction brought smiles and double handshakes that were every bit as rewarding as witnessing a double rainbow. Offering up high-fives to the two maintenance men who fixed our shower faucet elicited beaming smiles and laughter from the two young men who were thrilled to have satisfied our needs. We sought out a well hidden and highly reviewed restaurant in Krabi. Reserving two days ahead was recommended, yet I tried to do so the morning of our visit. We arrived to be put on the inevitable waiting list, coming in at a respectable #3. After learning of my failed attempt at a reservation, which was entirely my fault, it seemed as if the other 75 patrons and hopefuls had faded into another dimension as every effort was made to solve our problem. Moments later, we had a table for two with a young lady offering a cleansing cloth and spraying for non-existent whatevers under our table. If anything had existed there, it would have been drawn to that spot to enjoy the enduring smiles and courtesy of the hostess. We could see on a card on the table that an actual reservation holder existed and would arrive in an hour, which gave us 60 minutes to enjoy the food and the presence of our wonderful courtesan. Fortunately, our naturally appreciative nature fuelled her attention and we conversed frequently as she seemingly found time in her scurrying schedule to involve us. It turns out that she was a minority owner of the restaurant that had found trip-advisor fame for a number of reasons. We loved the food, met the majority owner and were amply rewarded for merely being decent people in a country that seems to have cornered the market on warmth and sincerity.

It is not lost on me that all of the people and interactions I have described are related to the service industry, but that doesn't seem to be the defining factor. I have dealt with many civil servants who are barely civil and first-class providers who lack any class at all. In a country as reliant on tourism as Thailand is, perhaps it is just a conditioned response and we are witnessing those who are able to convey the ability to make visitors feel welcome. We have all probably heard the joke that 'Once you can learn to fake sincerity, you have it made.' Well, I am here to tell you that if this applies here, then the academy award for the best actor or actress category goes to all of these wonderful people. And just in case heart-melting hospitality somehow isn't enough for you, just display one small gesture of appreciation and your day will instantaneously get better.

The karst limestone mountains around Krabi are the southernmost extension of the range that we have had the luxury of observing through Thailand, at Ha Long Bay in Vietnam and around Guilin in China. The picturesque landscapes are remarkable.

We are all driven as humans to seek pleasure and to avoid pain. We can be almost uncontrollable with respect to our innate drive to satisfy those basic needs. And yet it is easy to auto-pilot your way through a day without consciously directing the flow of occurrences. When I travel, I am forcing myself out of my comfort zone and am unsure of how events will unfold. As a result, I focus on the small things, like a hundred human interactions, and attempt to positively influence the outcomes. I am more consciously aware of my surroundings and take the time to observe my impact on others and theirs on me. In a place like Thailand, it is easy to witness very clearly that helping people feel good is personally rewarding. In doing so I exist more humanely than I do when I am at home, where interactions and outcomes are more predictable. The trendy name for this is being 'present' or 'in the moment'. At home, I can merely be and let my existence unfold, secure in the notion that all will be well without even paying much attention to my day-to-day life. The problem with doing so is that a lot of wonderful things can be missed when I'm not paying attention.



A typical Krabi sunset.