

Preparations for Thai-Burma Medical Missions

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Robert W. Arnold (April 2013)

Background: The Free Burma Rangers (FBR) and Partners Relief and Development are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Chiang Mai, Thailand dedicated to providing training and relief in oppressed areas of Burma (Myanmar).



Burma is a country of ethnically diverse states. The central dictatorship representing the central, flatland Burmese ethnic group calls the country Myanmar. A younger, more progressive dictator, Thein Sein has reached out to world communities hoping to reduce international sanctions leveled at his predecessor, Than Shwe. Aung San Suu Kii, who won 80% popular vote in 1990 election, but then was held in house arrest (movei “the Lady”) now has an elected position in parliament.

Other ethnic states in Burma have different relationship with the central dictatorship ranging from cooperative ceasefires, to civil war. In 2011, the previously ceasefire governed northern Kachin state rejected new regulations, and is currently under attack including helicopter gunships and fighter jets. On the other hand, long-term anti-ceasefire Karen state which borders to the west of Thailand, has a new relative ceasefire in 2013 during which the Burma Army is rebuilding roads, camps and is, for the very first time, installing helicopter landing pads.

The Burma Army is called the SPDC- Social Peace and Development Council. A karen proxy army- at times allied with the Burma Army is called the DKBA- Democratic Karen Buddhist Army. The democratically elected government of the Karen State, Burma is called the KNU- Karen National Union. The resistance force in the Karen State is called the KNLA- Karen National Liberation Army.

Language:

In Thailand, Thai; smile a lot, bow, and say the following greetings: SaWaddeKop for guys and SawWaddeKah for girls. Thank You is KopKumKop for guys and KopKumKa for girls.

On the border and in Karen State, we can communicate in karen language. Greetings are dependent on time of day: Guala Gay is good morning until 10 am. Neela Gay is mid day greeting until 3 pm. Hala Gay is good evening, and Nahla Gay is good night. DahBloo is Thank you. Meh is yes and No is no.

Dress:

Dry Season- runs from November to April. Almost never rains. cooler in December - January warranting fleece coat at night. During the rainy season, it may rain- hard at times in mid day, and the afternoon, but usually stops raining part of the day. You will be responsible for keeping alternating clothing cleaned and dried. Flip-flops or crocs are useful in the rain and mud- wet or dry season. Running shoes are also useful. You may wish to bring a light raincoat, however an umbrella is a good alternative; often you get wet, then dry and never even need rain gear even in rainy season.

it is possible to get by with quick drying items- and two to three changes of clothing; shorts / underwear, lightweight cargo pants/shorts, loose shirts. Long pants are nice for mosquito protection at night. It is important to keep modest dress as consistent with the outreach of the Bung klung church, hostel and Training Center. modest swim gear is recommended.

Luggage:

Using Alaska Airlines 49er Club and most trans-Pacific Asian carriers, we are allowed 2 checked bags at about 45 pounds each. For carry on, a light back-pack about 2000 cu in that fits in cargo or under seat is recommended. water bottles can be connected with caribeeners. TSA-like searches will occur along the way. Checked bags are more likely to be searched on arrival international in Chiang Mai, than in the busier Bangkok international airport.

Health:

Thai and Karen are careful with hygiene cooking so food-born illness is not common. Mosquito born illness is possible along the Thai-Burma border. For Malaria prophylaxis, doxycycline 100 mg orally per day from one week before, to two weeks after travel recommended. Mosquito nets at night are provided. Offensive Anopheles mosquitoes are tiny, and relatively nocturnal compared with Alaskan mosquitoes. Dengue fever and Thyphus are possible, but less common. AIDS is uncommon in Karen State. During hot, and strenuous activity, hydration is important. Water (Tee) and boiled / hot water (Tee Klah) are readily available in lodging areas in Karen State. Adding iodine (Betadine 10% 5 drops) to a liter of local stream water produced potable liquid in 30 minutes. Drink mixes- like Gatorade- added to your liter water bottle(s) is another good idea.

Faith Christian Community provides trip health insurance for team members.

Sleeping:

A fleece sleeping bag is ideal. Mattresses with mosquito nets are usually provided in the villages of Bung Klung and LehTongKu. You won't need mosquito nets in Chiang Mai. A travel pillow- perhaps inflatable- is useful. In more remote locations using elevated bamboo floors in huts, an air mattress, or foam pad is helpful with woven mats placed under mosquito nets to prevent insects from flying between bamboo. Some prefer a hammock for sleep; military style used by some FBR.

Hygiene:

Karen homes have outhouses, or bathrooms with porcelain toilets for squatting. Toilet paper is rarely provided- but a reservoir with water with a scoop is there for hand washing, and for manual flushing. Public restrooms are similar, sometimes requesting some money-change for entry, and providing an assortment of used flip-flops for entry. Shoes are usually removed before entry into homes, and some buildings- a pile of tenant sandals is near the door, or ladder entry to village bamboo huts. Bathing and laundry are done adjacent to a concrete reservoir filled with water. usually a scoop, or plastic pot is there to dump clean water- 2 liters at a time- for bathing or washing.

Outdoor bathing- after swimming or near streams- can be accomplished in men and women, by using a tube-wrap "skirt" or loose "dress"- clothing and shorts can be changed under this practical garment- and the garment can also serve as a towel.

Personal Items:

Bible, notebook, pen, camera / video, charger(s) batteries, laptop., cell phone but check on international / data plans otherwise very expensive. The team will have access to satellite phone. From Bung klung, there is intermittent, slow internet and some WiFi. A flashlight is helpful- often in the form a a lightweight headlight. You can purchase AA and some AAA batteries as we travel and even in Bung Klung. In checked bags, a Leatherman is helpful- and always serves as a good gift when you leave if you don't need it.

Identification and Money:

Your passport is very important. Best to keep a copy of your passport in a different location. Also keep some cash in more than one location. The easiest way to do money is carry cash and then exchange for Thai Baht (about 30 baht to a dollar) in Bangkok or Chiang Mai. Another way is to use ATM machines for cash withdrawal. Traveller's checks are also an option, though less commonly used and taken. The Burma (Myanmar) currency is the Kyat- but this is not used frequently in our travels. it is customary to offer some funds to the families who house us, and you are encouraged to bless some people along the way as you feel led. We will pay some to our translators and specific helpers. In Chiang Mai, we will have access to supermarkets, department stores, and the Night Market which is a good source of discount clothing,

shoes and gifts. In the border towns, you will have the opportunity to purchase locally made items; colorful men's and women's shoulder bags, shirts, lady's dresses (white unmarried and colorful married). Beautiful hardwood items are also available.

Contributions to Mission Trip:

The medical missions to the Thai Burma border are prayerfully supported by the Missions Council at Faith Christian Community. Therefore, expenses for your trip can be donated with a check written to:

Faith Christian Community

4240 Wisconsin Ave

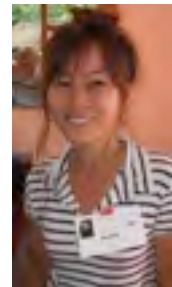
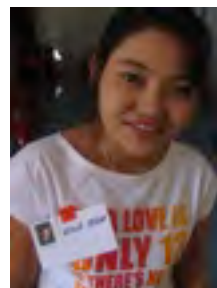
Anchorage, AK 99517

Memo: Burma Vision

Ideally these can be sent to you so you can collect them, record donors, and prepare appropriate personal Thank You-s. Then send to Faith.

Key People:

Bung Klung: Nay Hser, Ghu Nyaw See, Pah Koo Tee, Hser Hser, Sue Boo



Leh Tong Ku medics: Lai May , Mg Thein Kyol, Dr. Frank Green (MaeSot)



Dhee and Bob, Pastor Samuel and Eliya with Nay Hser, Thra Moo (Samuel) with Kat (Eliya)

Eliya and Kat's children: PoeDu, Thomas, Eubank Sam with Elle, Allan



From Chiang Mai through MaeSot to Bung Klung and LehTongKu

