

“Fruits” of Thailand

In January-February 2019, I got a chance to taste and experience the local seasonal fare of Thailand. The diversity is unreal - biologically, ecologically, and culturally. This piece is vaguely reflective of the work we do at Orbis - we travel to a site, we observe, and we document. It is vaguely reflective of our clients - our clients are agencies, non-profits, energy companies and individuals. We don't forget that all these entities are made up individuals - individuals, like us, who are interested in things and stimulated by experiences. Mostly, although my experience took place over 8,500 miles away, this piece is relevant because it reflects who we are as a company and as people. So, who are WE? We are archaeologists, wildlife biologists and ecologists - we're people interested in things and who seek stimulation in our experiences, and we love our work. We travel for work and pleasure - our flexible work policy enables us to continue to be who we want to be and where we want to be.

My focus here is on some of the fruits I encountered in Thailand, and put into context with images relating to space and time. Some of these fruits were available at local markets, some of them were experienced by being at the right place at the right time.

Young coconut (*Cocos nucifera*)



Young green coconuts are ubiquitous, delicious and nutritious and ideally served chilled with a bamboo straw and spoon. In the south, I noticed orange flagging wrapped around the trunks of several coconut trees. I was told that the flags identify trees that were treated with a pesticide to eliminate an insect species plaguing coconut trees throughout the country. Allegedly, the fruits of treated trees later became known to contain the toxic pesticides - Yikes! I was not able to confirm this, but I wasn't as excited about coconuts after hearing this.

Coffee (*Coffea arabica*) from the northern hills, Doi Pui



Left: Doi Pui, Right: Hmong villagers in the terraced gardens.



Left: Really nice coffee! Small batch, locally grown, harvested and roasted by Hmong Doi Pui, Right: What I brought home.

Thailand is a leader and relative newcomer to the global coffee industry. In the late 1970's opium poppy replacement programs encouraged northern farmers to plant alternative cash crops including coffee and teas.

Khlong Toei Market, Bangkok: Fruit tasting with Ian



Left: Bangkok, Right: A smoggy day at Khlong Toei Market.



Vendor with oranges, rambutans and longans.



Above: uncut fruits. Clockwise from left: (A) longan, (B) probably sopadilla (C) Manila sweet tamarind (or monkeypod), (D) dragon fruit, (E) mangosteen, and (F) rambutan. Below: dissected fruits.





Tasting fruits with Ian.

Longans [*Dimocarpus longan*, Sapindaceae (soapberry family)] superficially resemble a cluster of grapes. Thick skin peels back revealing white, juicy, somewhat translucent flesh encasing a shiny, hard purple-brown seed. The flavor reminds me of melon with a slight cucumber essence; Ian noted a surprising muskiness. They are pretty sweet with a grape-like texture.

Sopadilla [*Manilkara zapota*, Sapotaceae] was very sweet, but otherwise not very memorable.

Manilla sweet tamarind (or monkeypod) [*Pithecellobium dulce*, Fabaceae] has marbled pink and white mealy flesh that is valved, exposing a hard shiny black seed. It is subtly sweet with a satisfying mealy crispness.

Dragon fruit [*Hylocereus undatus*, Cactaceae] is creamy with a custard-like consistency. It is subtly sweet and is riddled with tiny edible seeds.

Mangosteen [“Queen of Fruits”, *Garcinia mangostana*, Clusiaceae] was introduced to me as “the most exotic of the southeast Asian fruits.” Cut through the thick dark purple pericarp (rind) in a cross section to expose the white pulpy-juicy segmented fruit, which is tangy-sweet.

Rambutan [*Nephelium lappaceum*, Sapindaceae] has a thick spiky rind encasing white semi-translucent grape-like flesh and a large seed with papery seed coat.

Wild fruit in the northern hills



I found an overripe and split fruit on the edge of a mountain pool. This fruit was deliciously aromatic - fruity and sweet with a paw paw or mango-like consistency. I was tempted to taste it but didn't [DON'T EAT THINGS YOU AREN'T FAMILIAR WITH!]. The running ID is plum mango, which is edible, but this needs confirmation.



Growing just outside the coffee shack off of Monk's Trail, Doi Suthep, I found Jack fruit [*Artocarpus heterophyllus*, Moraceae] and its associated ants.

Cut fruit



passionfruit



pineapple, dragon fruit, and watermelon; kid cutting watermelon



vendor making orange juice

I am acutely aware that I barely scratched the surface in terms of seasonal fruit diversity, let alone the biological, ecological and cultural diversity of Thailand. But I did get a taste, and it was SWEEEEET!

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