

GOH Mae Sot Christmas Trip 2017
Christmas Party, Clown Shows & Donations Trip (22-29 Dec '17)

Regular followers of the Gift of Happiness Foundation will know that I am prone to using numerous superlatives to describe my luck at being able to accompany and help Eddie on his many trips around the kingdom – this one is no exception! 😊

Departing on Christmas Eve, accompanied by my wife (Rapee) and our daughter (Jaci), we joined Eddie and another regular supporter (Sally) for the long trip – khun Baeng (“Bob”) followed in the Monroe supplied pick-up – with absolutely monumental amounts of goodies in both the newly provided trailer and the redoubtable pick-up truck all of which had been meticulously loaded throughout the days of 22nd and 23rd December by Eddie and Bob. This somewhat limited our normal travelling speed, safe and legal as always, meaning we didn’t arrive at the our regular guesthouse in Mae Sot, until a little after darkness fell.

There we were met by the vivacious Quintessa, a visitor volunteer from the USA, who quickly connected with Jaci as we all set off for an evening meal together at our regular Casa Mia café/restaurant after the trailer had been disconnected. An excellent mood was established at the meal which set us all up in great spirits for the trip – and also provided an indication of the brilliant ribaldry between Sally and Eddie that kept us all constantly entertained. 😊

Fortunately, Santa managed to find Jaci before we set off and Christmas Day saw us arrive at Dr Zaw’s Orphanage after the children had gone to school, now moved to a new location on the outskirts of town, with close to a ton or more of goodies to set everything up for a Christmas Dinner and Party for the children for when they returned later from school. We were all kept busy unloading and displaying the gifts, toys, clothes, toiletries and educational material as well as preparing the tables and stage with decorations, place settings as Eddie went of to spend a fortune at the local wholesale store, on food, Christmas decorations and other essential goodies for the children to enjoy. Then on his return t the orphanage he “did his cooking magic for a few hours” in the kitchen. Needless to say, the mood was brilliant among us all with quips and funny barbs flying across the place all day.

When the children arrived, which took about an hour and a half due to the new location and the various ages of and schools that the children attend, it was soon time for the real fun – seeing the joy and happiness on so many faces. Food was devoured with many being convinced to emulate “Oliver” by asking for more! By the time it came to the gift-giving in the early evening, emotions were very high among all of us – the children, staff and us volunteers. In short, the children and all volunteers had what can only be described as “The very Best Christmas Day Ever”

We finished the day with another lovely meal at our “go to” eatery, the cosy Casa Mia, whose staff are always so utterly helpful even with items not on the menu.

A sound sleep saw Boxing Day dawn upon us and we all departed, after yet another hearty breakfast, to the awe-inspiring Mae Tao Clinic (which is more like a sprawling, but basic, hospital complex). Here more much-needed donations were handed over to the staff who are as friendly, modest and efficient as always despite the daunting amount of much-needed work that they have to perform daily in their efforts to support patients and families from both sides of the border. They also gave us a couple of walking frames for use at one of the Bangkok slums where there is a great need for such things amongst the older members of those communities, Eddie will be delivering them before the new year starts.

We then moved on to visit the children at Sky Blue school whose families live off, and all live on, the massive municipal garbage dump. Here, after setting up for the show and laying out the many goodies being donated, Eddie did the first of his shows on this trip which had just about everyone present grinning and laughing like nothing else existed – mission accomplished Eddie! We collected three extra volunteers (Antoine/Antony, Lex and Paul) from the local airport on the way to Sky Blue school, and a hire vehicle to transport them, so their professional production expertise (and willing, helping hands) were readily welcomed.

Unfortunately, the trip was nearly ruined by the presence of an alleged paedophile hanging around the schoolhouse however Eddie and Sally's redoubtable characters refused to let this mar the wonderful experience the Foundation is here to provide for the children, and we all "soldiered on". Let's hope the authorities finally do their bit in ridding this area of despicable men like these as soon as possible.

The day was rounded off with a superb meal at the incredibly beautiful Botanic Gardens Restaurant nearby – a definite "must visit" to anyone visiting this area. Its' landscaped gardens, populated with flora and fauna from around the world is truly breath-taking and worthy of much higher praise than I can possibly describe.

Now our final day was upon us and it was time to visit two Border Patrol Police Schools in very remote (naturally!) locations. Everything possible was transhipped from the trailer to the Monroe pickup truck before breakfast and then we all set off along the "Off road" tracks. We all had our roles well synchronised by now and both the clown shows and gifts of donations were completed with, by now, the increasingly hilarious repertoire between Sally and Eddie and – of course – complete hilarity and enjoyment of the children and all support staff. The journey back was divided into Eddie taking off as early as possible to deliver Quintessa to the airport, accompanied by Sally, Rapee and Jaci, and then "Bob" taking the lead for Antoine, Lex, Paul and me to follow.

Quintessa; you were/are an absolute charm and I know that Jaci is so very proud to have a new "sister". You are a credit to yourself, a wonderful ambassador for your country and I know that your father is completely justified in being so unequivocally proud of you. We all wish you every success in all that you do, both personally and professionally.

The all-male journey back was eventually dubbed both "Bob's Mountain Tour" and "Google Maps Rescue Trip"! Suffice to say that all of us men and both vehicles eventually got back to the guesthouse a few hours later than Eddie and crew; sore backs, dirty footwear and clothes and vehicles pushed to their limits. Luckily, a final evening meal at the Casa Mia soon ensured that international humour was maintained at its' best with smiling faces all around.

We said thank you, goodnight and goodbye to Antoine, Lex and Paul and arose bright and early to tranship as much as possible back to the trailer to maximise its' stability for the journey home. Said journey was marked by mountain drizzle and plain old rain for much of the way which, combined with the mandated trailer speed limit, meant that our final arrival was a little later than planned. Fortunately, a welcome shopping stop at Doi Muser market and its' incredibly fresh produce broke the trip nicely. However, as always, the ongoing banter between Sally and Eddie kept us even more amused – if not always neutral – and my wife and I are already reaping the "benefits" of those last few days of very British humour upon our daughter! 😊

A final logistical ballet of Sally's car, the Monroe pickup and Eddie's truck and trailer were accomplished with the support of some of the Go Happiness Centre neighbours and then we all bade farewell once more.

On behalf of my gorgeous and ever patient wife, and our cherubic and (now) humour-enhanced daughter, thank you Eddie for allowing us the honour and privilege of accompanying you on your annual Christmas trip. We have learned so much more about this beautiful country, the many deserving people in the north, the wonderful people who support them and of course about ourselves.

Please, if you've never been on a trip with the Gift of Happiness Foundation, put this on your "must do" New Years' Resolutions for 2018.