

Who is saying what?

Mr. Mongkol Sunthitwitoon, Vice Governor of Tak Province

Participating with the Thai Public Relations Department, Office of the Prime Minister, Film in Thailand (FiT) was fortunate to be able to briefly chat with Mr. Mongkol Sunthitwitoon about Tak province and filming in Tak.



FiT: Excellency, thank you taking some time to talk with us about Tak province.

Mongkol Sunthitwitoon (MS): My pleasure but since my English is not so good, I hope you don't mind speaking through an interpreter.

FiT: That would be fine. First question – how is the economy of Tak province doing compared with the rest of Thailand?

MS: We are fortunate here in Tak to have somewhat of a bubble economy. That is we

rely on border trade with Myanmar which is valued at approximately US\$2.2 billion. We are also at an apex in some of the Greater Mekong Sub region transportation systems linking Thailand to Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

FiT: So Tak province really has not seen the advantages of foreign income flow into the Kingdom through investment in making movies, TV commercials, documentaries, etc?

MS: Yes, that is partially true however because of the colorful lifestyles of numerous Hill tribes in the province and surrounding region, we have had quite a few documentary crews come through.

FiT: What would you say are some of the best attributes for filming in Tak?

MS: Certainly the Hill tribes: the Lahu, Karen, Hmong and Mien tribes offer not only interesting slices of their indigenous lifestyles but folk tales and historical snapshots of their tribal movement, all of which would make wonderful television and feature films

And that is not even mentioning our natural and man-made resources. Besides some of the most beautiful waterfalls in all of Thailand and self-reliant agricultural communities who's elders, even though they do not necessarily have university degrees, live at one with nature and can talk for hours on topics such as raising wild orchids, organic gardening and the like. And of course there is the largest dam and hydro power plant in Thailand, the Bhumibol Dam.

FiT: Excellency, thank you for your time. I hope as film directors and producers, script writers and location coordinators from around the world read this information, they will be interested in filming in Tak, Thailand.

MS: We are looking forward to it.

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Mr. Supol Sripan to head up Department of Tourism



Last month we told you about the formal name change to the Department of Tourism, under which the Thailand Film Office operates. Recently named to head up the Department is Mr. Supol Sripan.

Mr. Sripan has been awarded the Royal Knight Grand Cross (First Class) of the Most Exalted Order of the White Elephant – the 2nd highest chivalric order - established in 1861 by King Rama IV of The Kingdom of Siam.

Film Me

Tak Province

Tak is one of the northern provinces of Thailand. Neighboring provinces include Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Sukhothai, Kamphaeng Phet, Nakhon Sawan, Uthai Thani and Kanchanaburi. The western edge of the province has a long boundary with Myanmar.

Situated on the Maenam Ping basin, this province is an exceptionally beautiful region bestowed with dense forests, spectacular waterfalls, dark caves, high mountains and ethnic hill tribes.



Umphang Thee Lor Sue Waterfall

Tak has a fascinating history where many tales of yesteryear can be developed to screen.

Over 2,000 years ago, before the Sukhothai period in Thailand, the region was of prime importance as a center of governance and trade. In the 5th century, the capital of the kingdom was moved south to Lavo (present day Lopburi province).

A city named Ban Tak was established by Princess Jamadevi of the Lavo kingdom, around 663 AD. It became part of the Sukhothai kingdom through battles led by Ramkhamhaeng the Great and formed a main fortress on the western front. The city was moved further west and renamed Mueang Rahang when the Ayutthaya kingdom was lost to Burma during King Maha Thammaracha's reign.

The city was moved back to the east side of the Ping River during the early Bangkok period.

King Taksin was vice-governor of Tak before the Ayutthaya kingdom fell during the war with Burma. As his name was Sin, he became called Tak-Sin during his time in Tak.



King Taksin Shrine in Tak

Bhumibol Dam and Hydro Electric Plant

Remember those great WW II movies where dams were scaled by armies and blown up (not real of course – the magic of the movies!).

Well, thinking of shooting your next adventure movie? Need a dam as a backdrop? The Bhumibol Dam and Hydro Power Plant, the largest in Thailand which started operation in May 1964 would be an ideal setting.



The concrete arch-gravity dam, 54 meters high, 486 meters long and 6 meters wide at its crest is constructed across the Ping River at Khao Laew, Sam Ngao District, Tak province, approximately 480 kilometers north of Bangkok



Hill Tribes

Over 100 years ago, Hilltribe people began to migrate south from China into what are now Burma, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand. The major tribes are the Karen (Kariang, Yang), the Hmong (Meo), the Yao (Mien), and the Lahu (Mussur).

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The main profession of all these tribes is farming, and all of them tend to migrate whenever they feel that the soil at their present location is becoming depleted.

Each tribe is distinct, with its own culture, religion, language, art, and dress. With Thailand undergoing rapid modern development, it is difficult yet to say whether these tribes will continue in their traditional ways of life, or whether they will eventually be absorbed into Thai society.



Hmong Tribe

The Hmong live in houses that sit right on the ground, not on stilts as do most of the other tribes. However, the main floor of their houses is not at ground level, but rests upon a kind of above-ground basement or root cellar that they use for food storage. Moreover, their house-fronts slope outward and downward, an architectural feature that is the trademark of their villages.

The Hmong, even more than the other tribes, practice a strict male-female division of labor. One custom that especially illustrates this is that of giving a newborn boy a gift of metal from which he will one day forge a weapon, whereas newborn girls receive no special gift.

The Hmong are a diligent, patient, and independent people, fond of wearing their silver ornaments during ceremonies and much devoted to the sky spirit they believe has created both the world and their own ancient way of life.

The Karen like to settle in foothills, and live in bamboo houses raised on stilts, beneath which live their domestic animals: pigs, chickens, and buffaloes. They, like all the tribes, are skilled farmers who practice crop rotation, and they also hunt for game, with spears and crossbows, and use tame elephants to help them clear land.



Karen Tribe

Karen women are skilled in sewing and dyeing, and dress in white blouse-sarong combinations with colorful patterns or beads for trim. They wear their long hair tied back in a bun and covered with white scarves.

The Karen are gentle, peaceful, and cooperative people, who, like all the Hill tribes, reserve their highest veneration for their ancestors and living elders.



Lahu Tribe Woman

Since "Lahu", the name of their tribe, means "hunter", **the Lahu** obviously pride themselves on their skills in hunting and trapping. They are also famous for their knowledge of herbal medicine.

The Lahu are an independent people, physically larger than the members of the other tribes, but rather than their greater stature leading to aggressiveness, they love entertainment and the easy life.

Lahu women wear several kinds of distinctive dress, although the men clothe themselves pretty much uniformly. The women wear colorful turbans and like to sport beautiful earrings, usually of silver.

This is another mountain-top tribe with their houses on stilts, and a "basement-corral" for their many domestic animals: chickens, pigs, ducks, and buffalo.

The Yao prefer to live among low hills near dense forest. Their houses also sit on the ground, and feature a space designed for a cooking fire in the center of their main room, as well as a small shrine dedicated to their ancestors and to the guardian spirit they believe to inhabit each individual house.



Yao Tribe

Their language, long ago derived from Chinese, is written in Chinese Characters, and their paintings, mostly of religious subjects, reflect certain very ancient Chinese artistic styles, although the Yao paintings have a unique flavor of their own, and are coveted by many Western collectors.

The Yao are the "businessmen" among the Hill tribes, and they also excel in the making of metal farm implements such as axes and plows. They have a long history of having a written language --unlike several of the other tribes, who had no written version of their language.

Pitch It To Me!

Legend of the Creation of the Mien (Yao) People

In heaven, lived Daa Ong (Grandfather) and Daa Gux (Grandmother). One day they decided to create the Yao, or the Mien people. They planned to transform themselves and live on Earth.

During that time, there were two kingdoms that already existed on earth, one ruled by Baeng Hung (the good side), and the other by Gux Hung (the bad side). They hated one another.

As they planned in heaven, Daa Gux would come down to earth reborn as a third daughter of Baeng Hung (with a birthmark on one leg), while Daa Ong would transform himself into whatever was needed.

During a war between Baeng Hung and Gux Hung, Baeng Hung announced to his whole kingdom, "whoever can bring me Gux Hung's head, I'll reward you with marriage to my third daughter and some land."

No one responded to Baeng Hung's request.

Finally, Daa Ong transformed himself into a five-colored dragon-dog named Phan Hu . The dog appeared at Baeng Hung's palace. The Emperor had never seen a dragon-dog such as this one, full of talent, with 120 beautiful spots on its body, and it could talk. The Emperor ordered his people to take a good care of the dog. The dog became Baeng Hung's trusted, loving pet.

One day, Baeng Hung and his staff had a meeting to strategize on the war with Gux Hung. The dragon-dog was at the meeting. At the end of the discussion, the dragon-dog spoke up and said "Baeng Hung doesn't have to send thousands of troops and military equipment to fight Gux Hung. I volunteer to fight Gux Hung myself. Since I'm a dog, an animal not very well respected, Gux Hung and her military probably will not think I can cause them any harm."

Baeng Hung agreed with the dog. He wanted to see what the dog could do.

Phan Hu (the dragon-dog) prepared to depart to meet Gux Hung. He asked heaven to send him a magic pill, which would him endure the 7 days and 7 nights swim across the sea to Gux Hung's empire.

The dragon-dog arrived at Gux Hung's palace. Gux Hung admired the beautiful talking dog. She kept it as her own body guard. The dog became Gux Hung's favorite pet as well. Gux Hung trusted the dog, therefore, she no longer needed her servants and body guards all the time.

On a clear day, Gux Hung sent her servants and body guards out to do their daily chores. The dragon-dog took that opportunity, and bit Gux Hung's head off then swam back across the sea with the head as proof to Baeng Hung.

In return, the dragon-dog was married to Baeng Hung's third daughter (as promised).

As the wedding day neared, Emperor Baeng Hung, realized he didn't really want his third daughter to marry a dragon-dog. So, Baeng Hung called nine women who looked identical to his third daughter and dressed them up in identical gowns. The dragon-dog had to pick from the ten identical women. Daa Gux (the third daughter) was one of the ten. This ruse, however, did not fool Daa Ong a.k.a. Phan Hu (the dragon-dog). The dog looked for the birthmark on her leg. The dragon-dog picked Baeng Hung's real third daughter and married her.

They moved to an isolated piece of land given to them by Baeng Hung and had 12 children, six sons and six daughters. These six sons and the husbands of the six daughters became patriarchs of the twelve Mien clans.

**Now you know so come to Thailand
and Film it!
(or come to Thailand and meet some of the Hill
tribes and Film their stories)**

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