

THE BOARD

In the “Thick” of Things



I am writing my final letter from the seat of an airplane. Normally when I fly I have a book to read or I plan on taking a quick nap. Today, I was thinking about what was I doing a year ago.

A year ago, I was getting ready for a trip to Thailand. I have traveled internationally, but haven't attended a festival while traveling with my traveling companions (not festival people~). I was so excited to go on this trip as we were going to participate in the Lantern Festival. The Loi Krathong Festival has been celebrated throughout Thailand for centuries, usually to mark the end of the rainy season.

Each year, thousands of paper lanterns are released into the night sky to symbolically ward off bad luck, while rivers are covered by floating flower lanterns, adorned with candles and joss sticks, cast into waterways to wish for good luck. With flower and flame, the city of Chiang Mai comes alive during these festive days each November. The event has been transformed over the years from a reverent temple ritual to a rowdy street party that lasts for days.

When we landed and met our guide, he prepared us to what we were going to see and managed our expectations. Like most festivals there were vendors selling their goods, food specialty booths, parades, arts and crafts and lanterns, so many lanterns. Our group was excited and engaged in the process of purchasing our lanterns. We were interested in what lantern and size each would buy. We learned the lantern festival song and each day our guide started our day with this chant.

The opening day of the festival in Chiang Mai it was raining, blowing and down right miserable. When I see hor-

rid weather on a festival's opening day I empathize with the staff and organizing committee, my heart sinks.

Needless to say, we could not take part in the festival due to the inclement weather and our travel itinerary. As we loaded the bus to leave Chaing Mai, our guide explained we would create our own lantern lighting and send our wishes down the river and up into the sky. We drove for a while to get back to our hotel and as we crossed a bridge, our guide started singing the festival chant and my travel companions all joined in. The weather cleared and outside in the distance we could see the lanterns rise. There were oohs and aahs, as we traveled away.

The next night we held our own little lantern lighting. We all had participated in a piece of the festival. Not the way we wanted, but a small piece.

That little part we did experience became one of our fond memories of the Thailand trip. It is still something my travel partners talk about and at times, we break out singing the lantern festival song. We still talk of our disappointment of not being able to be in the “thick” of the festival, but we all are thankful that we shared a small piece of the lantern festival tradition and Thailand's culture. This event experience fostered a sense of community and strengthened our relationships.

This past year as IFEA World Board Chair, I have been honored and thankful to be in the “thick” of IFEA. I have been able to experience the dedicated IFEA staff work tirelessly on creating the 60th Anniversary Convention and Expo, the amazing Event Management School at Oglebay, strong Webinar sessions, the increasing membership and

involvement of the student chapters, the IFEA/Haas & Wilkerson Pinnacle Award Program and the IFEA World Festival & Event City Award Program. I have had the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with so many members, on so many topics. I have been able to form a stronger sense of community with many more meaningful relationships.

In January, the chairmanship will be turned over to Guy LaFlamme. Guy is responsible for the planning, development and implementation of Ottawa's 2017 Celebrations to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of Confederation. We are so fortunate to have Guy chairing the IFEA World Board. His creativity and development of top-notch event experiences will ensure a great 61st year for IFEA.

I have been honored and humbled to work with the talented board of directors, both the IFEA World Board and IFEA Foundation Board.

Thank you for all your support.

To Steve and the dedicated staff, thank you for all your hard work and determination. You rocked it.

At last to the membership, thank you for continuing to be in the “thick” of our industry.

Happy Holidays!

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