



Walking (Upstream) in a Mystical Land of Mystery: Visiting the Bua Tong Waterfall Park in Mae Taeng District

Envision. You're a super-traveler - gifted with powers necessary for defying the laws of nature. You can walk on water. (Well, at the very least, barefoot-scale a waterfall.)

The cascade in the middle of this heavenly oasis you're visiting is sourced by a subterranean spring containing water so pristine and crystalline that when the sun's beams are angling through it just right, the light spectrum is split, creating a watery rainbow. It's magical.

The local legend associated with this idyllic, earth-bound galaxy you've come to, named the Bua Tong Waterfall (*Nam Phu Chet Si*) Park - Buatong (pronounced, "buadong" in Thai), meaning "golden flower," together with *Nam Phu* ("spring") and *Chet Si* ("seven colors") - tells of the Lanna Kingdom, where the capital was assaulted by a force vying for regional power.

The king and queen were executed. However, a leading soldier, Khun Pha Dum, whisked the Princesses Buakaew (Crystal Flower) and Buatong (Golden Flower) away to a cavernous fort, which they established as the ruling strongpoint of a new community.

For the pleasure of the princesses and their retinue, Pha Dum ordered the planting of a grand-scale garden filled with flowers. However, water resources were lacking, so the princesses petitioned the gods for help.

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As a result, the power of Earth Goddess *Pra Mae Thoranee* was invoked and the resources of the surrounding mountains were tapped. Magical waters gushed from the earth, forming the Chet Si spring with its limpid waters.

Meanwhile, heavenly entities also commanded a *Kumpun* (the fierce guardian standing at the gates of many temples, including that of Wat Phra That Doi Suthep) to ensure the purity of this sacred fountain - located in an area called *Nong Phee Hai* (meaning, "the pond of the fierce spirit") - by preventing humans from entering it.

At the same time, the earth provided all the fertility and sustenance necessary for ensuring the happiness and well-being of all who lived in this enchanted setting.

The princesses and their heroic protectors have long-since moved to another realm, and the mouth of this three-tiered waterfall remains off-limits.

However, you can play amid these wondrous waters by journeying from Chiang Mai eastward on Route 11 - 'The Super-highway,' beginning at the Nimmanhaemin and Huey Kaew Road Intersection - veering northward onto Route 1001 and continuing 40 km. toward Phrao.

About 18 km. shy of the falls (past flatland rice fields, the constructing of Western-style, low-income, government housing and humanoids driving as though rushing to arrive nowhere), the atmosphere begins further loosening as the geography re-shapes into woody jungle exuding cooler air encompassing an awe-inspiring skyline - revealing multi-layered mountains footed by villages and farmland.

You are getting closer when you see a sign on your left for the Srilanna National Park. Another kilometer will reveal a village-like area that during weekends and holidays offers Thai food. Hang a right. And after venturing another 3 km. into the lush jungle, consider stopping on your right and scaling the stairway toward heaven and entering the princesses' former cave dwelling.

Click on the light switch located on your left, and the illumination reveals an impressive Buddha statue situated at the back of the cave. Enjoy the soul-stilling silence, punctuated only by the high-pitched squeaking of the bats dangling from overhead crevices.



Or, save this experience for later and keep on toward the waterfall park area, which has ample parking space and no entrance fee. While sauntering into this wonderland, notice the emerald and lime-green moss lightly carpeting the ground that extends to ancient, root-baring trees and an expansive mountain view.

Overstep the mind-bogglingly clear water via a quaint wooden bridge before venturing toward the *spring of seven colors*. Yes; this somewhat peculiar, railroad tie-like walkway clunking beneath your feet is made from concrete and brings you to a wooden deck fronting spirit houses and the aforementioned *Nam Phu Chet Si*.

Peer into the spring's abyss-like cavity, admiring how its gentle, upward-churning waters have brought with them twinkling, jewel-like flakes (of something) that are deposited onto the spring's basin-floor.

Take note of the Thai script penned on the wooden sign attached to the railing that encircles the spring. The "500" tells you that if you climb into the spring, or litter the ground, you'll be cursed with misfortune for 500 years! (Just kidding; you'll be slapped with a 500 *baht* fine).

You might perhaps use the bucket-like contraption available for scooping some of the spring's aquatic elixir, which apparently you can drink. Obtain your fill, stroll back to the waterfall area and surrender to gravity as it assists your downward trekking of earthy, wooden stairs stretching 150 meters to the



waterfall's base. Upon arrival, consider playfully plopping into the greenish-colored water amassed there. You have just arrived at the center of the Universe.

Express your feeling that you've been granted physics-defying powers by clambering up the calcium-carbonate and sandstone encrusted falls that look as if concrete that has been poured over the rocks and hardened.



This bizarre experience may challenge your native capacity for logical reasoning. No fear. Beyond a couple of slimy spots amid flat areas, the underside of your feet are as though lined with Velcro. Up; down; left or right; whatever you fancy.

Once you attain a competent feel, walk straight up the falls. Steep angle? If your legs (and inner-will for pushing boundaries) possess sufficient vigor, embark. Take a break about half-way by plunging yourself into a spa-like cavity before continuing your trek.

Approaching the summit, you encounter a section where traction (and safety) gets a bit tricky. Therefore, seemingly the wisest way to remain an intact superhero is by exiting the waterfall to the left. You'll see.

One more uphill dash. And upon arriving on to flat ground again, perch yourself upon a bench and relax while relishing your superb life. Wonderful... 🌿

