Notes on FESPA Asia 2008, Bangkok, Thailand

I have a high respect for all the hard work that everyone has devoted to organizing FESPA Asia, and I realize that the airport take over is beyond their control.

But many of us (trying to get to Thailand from USA) were stuck in the Tokyo Narita airport. Tokyo is the hub for almost all US airlines into Bangkok. But my airline (United Airlines) was not willing to help switch our flights to any alternative airport (Chiang Mai or Phuket). I am sure it was the same in the Singapore airport or other hubs for people flying to Thailand from Europe.

Plus there was the uncertainty, even if we arrived at an alternative airport, what we would have found at the FESPA event, since I began to receive notices that a few companies were pulling out (not setting up their booth), or simply not able to get their staff into Thailand. The number of booth cancellations was not available officially, but I began to hear through the grapevine.

And then there was the issue of how do we get back to the USA or Europe even if we could arrive in Thailand to begin with.

Plus the enormous cost in lost time (and stress) of trying to re-arrange flights, not to mention the cost. When I began to receive notices that manufacturers were pulling out, I decided to leave the Narita airport and return to the USA. Too many uncertainties.

Sort of reminds me of SGIA in New Orleans after the Hurricane.

It is sad that a country with so many hard-working people like Thailand was led astray by political opportunists, who, in the pretext of democratic protest, caused more harm than good.

Since I have a number of colleagues in Thailand in the printing industry, I intend to return in 2009, but this week sure was an unfortunate experience.

What would have helped to see on the FESPA web site, would have been a specific list of airlines flying from the major hubs in Asia to the alternate airports: an actual schedule, airline by airline, hour by hour, for each of the two destinations (Chiang Mai or Phuket). Plus it would have helped to have the estimated cost for those add-on routes from the hubs where most of us were stuck (Tokyo coming from the USA and Hong Kong or Singapore if coming from Europe).

If X-thousand people were arriving from outside Thailand, it also would have helped if FESPA local organizations could have used clout to convince airlines to allow refunds and to encourage them to provide alternatives. United Airlines refused to reroute to any other city in Thailand even via another airline in their Star Alliance, which is unusual. At the airport in Tokyo no one at United Airlines had any interest in assisting anyone to fly to an alternative airport in Thailand.

The primary reason that companies will exhibit is in expectation of a large audience walking the floor. But if the airlines do not cooperate, the local Thai travel agencies offering land-travel from alternative airports to Bangkok falls on deaf ears (and does not help us get to those alternative airports). If exhibiting companies see zero people from outside Thailand walking the floor, and since they can reach the local audience without needing to exhibit, it would seem that getting foreigners into Thailand would have been the #1 focus in this troubled week. If there had been a tablation of alternative flights on the FESPA Asia web site, with local phone #s, web sites, etc, I could have sent this to my in-house travel manager and booked alternatives.

FLAAR has over 250,000 readers from around the world, and I would have preferred to show them at least those booths who did get built up and manned. Now there is absolutely nothing to show them, despite my having paid $2300 for a round trip ticket from the US.

Despite the unfortunate mess in Thailand, the FLAAR staff of 15 and growing continues to add new FLAAR Reports. We are expanding into covering textile printers, textile inks, and calendering machines. Our brand new reports on color management are out and another will be issued in a day or so. During 2009 FLAAR will add more reports on XY flatbed cutters and CNC routers. Additional reports on 3D scanning and 3D rapid prototyping systems will also be coming.

Plus there are many more reports in preparation on our core competency: UV-cured wide-format inkjet printers. If you are interested in digital photography, also check out all the new FLAAR Reports on digital photography, http://www.digital-photography.org/

(27 Nov 2008)