

Isaan wedding

Marten Visser



Five o'clock in the morning. We suddenly wake up through a massive wave of sound rolling into our bedroom. Of course! Today is the day. Our neighbour girl is marrying. Thai pop music rings merrily from large sound boxes in the middle of the road, where the party tent has been built up already.

A little bit later bride and groom go to the temple with their parents to give food to the monks. That is the most certain way to build up good karma. At about half past seven the guests start arriving. They get plates full of Isaan food. The men flush it down with good quantities of beer and whisky.

The Hindu priest arrives. You need Buddhist monks to build up good karma, but for ceremonies in this Buddhist country Hindu priests– who themselves always have been Buddhist monks– and spirit doctors are indispensable.

Before the priest can do his job, the groom has to pay the bride price to the relatives of the bride. In front of the microphone everything is counted. Yes, the full 10,000 Euros are accounted for. The wedding is on. The monster sound boxes make the ceremony reverberate through the whole village. That is nice, for in that way the guests here what is going on too. Because while the ceremony is performed, they continue eating like nothing happens.

When the priest is gone, everybody comes to congratulate the newly-weds. Everybody ties a sacred white cord around the wrists of the couple, and ties in some bank notes at the same time.

The eating and drinking continues. Then in front of the microphone every

envelope that bride and groom got, is opened. Names and amounts are announced. That motivates, so that hopefully a large part of the 10,000 Euros is recovered right away.

Then the friends of the married couple take them to their bedroom. By now the men are walking like they are on the deck of a ship in storm, and navigate the stairs with some difficulty. The women are still bright-eyed. Everybody throws rose petals and coins on the bed. One by one the friends have their pictures taken in front of the bed with the bride and groom.

After that, pictures are taken of the couple in front of the bed. Then sitting on the bed. Then lying on the bed. Than lying on the bed in a loving embrace. In this case the effect is somewhat nullified because of the baby bump that the bride displays but that is politely disregarded by everybody. A last picture in which bride and groom are entangled as far as their festive dress allows is taken. "This one is for Facebook!", somebody calls out. After that the door of the bedroom is discretely closed, and we go down.

It is almost noon. The wedding is finished, the guests go back home.