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SUBHEADLINE: Described as the greatest event for youths in the 21st century, Thailand will play host to 30,000 scouts from all over the world in the 20th World Scout Jamboree _ a gathering designed to make our children better citizens

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With a flash of imagination and a little effort, you should be able to see it as clearly as it is meticulously drawn on paper _ this bumpy dirt track on which the car is jolting is the Chao Phraya Avenue, this sandy and scrubby turn is nothing else but the Bangkok Plaza roundabout. On the left there is the Global Development Village and the Cross Road of Culture area, further to the right, is entrance gate number 3.

The hospital, the 180,000-cubic-metre reservoir and to a good extent the Welcome Arena, on the contrary, require no imagination to be seen: they are here in the flesh, or rather in the bricks, melting under the midday sun waiting to serve their purpose.

On this vacant land, the property of the Royal Thai Navy located in Sattahip, Chon Buri province, a whole town is slowly emerging.

It will stretch over 1,200 hectares of land and include facilities such as a prayer area, an international press centre, hotels (Jam hotels that is), commercial areas, parking zones, a heliport, a water treatment centre, waste management facilities, an open zoo, a radio centre, a railway station, and more.

The fortunate inhabitants of this peculiar green town? Scouts. Tens, hundreds, thousands of them; precisely 30,000, aged between 14 to 17 years old coming from 150 countries, who will reside here from December 28, 2002 to January 8, 2003. They will be accompanied by 10,000 or so adults on the occasion of the 20th World Scout Jamboree, already described as ``the greatest youth event of the 21st century" with a total budget of some \$24 million (1 billion baht).

Facilities and programme activities have already partly been put to test during preliminary events. The third pre-jamboree for example, held from November 16 to 20, was attended by 1,200 Thai scouts, plus 800 leaders and contingent staff. It was aimed at testing out the infrastructure and activities of the coming jamboree and was attended by several members of the World Scout Bureau.

A life-size rehearsal with 40,000 people and a complete range of activities will be held from December 28, 2001 to January 8, 2002, exactly one year before the actual jamboree.

Two years before the big event, preparations are well underway. The site has been flattened, many trees have been planted, the plumbing and electricity well advanced.

Already dozens of young volunteers have flown in from various countries in the world to help with the mountain of work the massive gathering involves, giving a hand to the 40 permanent Thai staff employed by the 20th World Scout Jamboree office.

``I thought this was a chance I couldn't pass up, to work in an international environment and to discover a new country. This jamboree will be a very important event for scout youth members from around the world to interact with each other, learn about world events, make new friends and experience Thai culture," comments Australian volunteer, Megan, 24 years old, who has been a scout member for the past 12 years and has come to Thailand on a six-month mission to teach English.

``Scout events have made me aware of those less fortunate than me through community service activities. They have given me an opportunity to challenge myself by trying my hand at different things I would never have experienced otherwise. My involvement has enhanced my communication and leadership skills. Such events have always been a good reason not to stay idle at home, but most of all they have given me friendship, shared with people from all over the world," she continued enthusiastically.

Over its 100 years of history, the scout movement, which claims some 28 million members in 216 countries, has had time to polish its aims and methods. In 1933, when 76 years old, Sir Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the scout movement, was already explaining with clear-sightedness the purpose of such gatherings:

``I have over and over again explained that the purpose of the Boy Scout and Girl Guide Movement is to build men and women as citizens endowed with the three H's namely, Health, Happiness and Helpfulness. The man or woman who succeeds in developing these three attributes has secured the main steps to success in this lifetime. Yet one more item is needed to complete success, and that is the rendering of service to others in the community. Without this the mere satisfaction of selfish desire does not reach the top notch."

In full remembrance of the British soldier's instructions, the World Scout Bureau, based in Switzerland, has issued guidelines and basic requirements for the organisation of scout jamborees held every four years, as are roverb moot's, gatherings aimed at scouts aged 18 and over.

Defined as an official educational event for adolescents by national scout organisations, jamborees are designed to develop greater understanding, tolerance and cooperation, or as Baden-Powell said, for scouts to assume new responsibility for promoting peace and goodwill.

It is, as explained by the World Scout Bureau, ``a unique opportunity to contribute to the development of better citizens of young people's local, national and international communities."

With these honourable goals in mind, the World Scout Committee has come up with a bustling timetable for the 20th World Jamboree to be held in Thailand.

As decided by the 34th World Scout Conference held in Oslo, Norway in 1996, the 20th World Jamboree will be hosted by the National Scout Organisation of Thailand, under the theme ``Share Our World, Share Our Cultures".

``It is the greatest desire of thousands of young scouts all over the world to take part in a World Scout Jamboree. Therefore we have to strictly restrict the age group of participants. A World Scout Jamboree is intended for children aged between 14 and 17 years old. In this way, the physical abilities, skills and interests of the participants are roughly even," said Sasithara Pichaichannarong, deputy director-general of the Physical Education Department and executive director of the 20th World Scout Jamboree.

The first woman ever to have been appointed to this high-ranking position, Sasithara insists the Jamboree is made to benefit children first and foremost. ``For 12 days in a row, they will come together, camp together, share their life together, 24 hours a day."

According to the scout promises and law, they will share everything and take part in voting for activities in order to understand how to decide, how to lose or win. It is surely one of the greatest events for the young of this century," she said.

A wide range of activities have been set up, which aim at enhancing the participants, turning them into better citizens.

Camping on a site labelled as 100 percent environmentally friendly, with a water treatment centre and waste management facilities, the 40,000 participants will get around the 1,200 hectare-camp by walking or renting a bicycle, and will take turns serving the local community.

"We will be very careful not to create any pollution whatsoever and to meet all safety standards. Garbage will be sorted to preserve the environment and no electricity will be used at night. We are raising environmental awareness of the young of this millennium," Sasithara said.

Apart from emphasising physical skills and resourcefulness, the programme will also get down to more subtle and serious issues, challenging individual conditioning and narrow-mindedness. A large number of organisations, in particular from the United Nations, such as the World Health Organisation, the International Labour Office, Unesco, Unicef and the UNHCR will take part in the activity entitled "Global Development Village". This major on-site activity will focus on issues such as health, human rights, the environment, peace and intercultural understanding.

The key word "sharing" will permeate even the season's festivities. The New Year's celebrations will be adapted to the participants' many different denominations, with Arab food, Jewish food and so on, appearing on the menu.

"At times, it might run counter to some aspects of Thai culture, which tends to give preference to some people over others. In the Scout spirit, everyone is equal, there is no preferential treatment," explained Sasithara.

Thailand, one of the very rare countries where scouting is compulsory in schooling as ordered by King Rama VI, will surely welcome this happening with open arms. And because jamboree equals friends for life, the event should also reward Thailand with increased tourism.

However, Thai scouts will only account for 20 percent of the overall number of participants who will pay a fee of around 20,000 baht each, as decided by the World Scout Committee in accordance with the GNP per capita of their respective country.

* Participants are boys and girls aged between 14 and 17 years old on December 28, 2002: that is, those who were born between December 29, 1984 and December 28, 1988.

Thai scouts interested in taking part in the event can contact the Office of the 20th World Scout Jamboree, National Stadium, Rama I Road, Bangkok 10330. Telephone: (02) 612-5306, or fax (02) 219-2108 or visit the web site at

www.worldscoutjamboree20.org, or email to director@worldscoutjamboree20.org.

Applications sent before July 31, 2001 will qualify for a 10 percent discount.

The organisation also welcomes volunteers willing to help in the preparation of the event, especially people proficient in foreign languages. Contact the office of the 20th World Scout

Jamboree.

From human rights to wind surfing

The activities for the Jamboree will be divided into eight modules:

uThe Global Development Village (GDV) with emphasis on health, human rights, the environment, peace and intercultural understanding. uTournament: A series of adventurous and challenging activities including rock climbing, mountain biking, orienteering and team challenges. uCity of Science and Technology: Interactive exhibitions to allow scouts to explore different aspects of science and see how they affect their environment. Areas of interest will include ``Our Blue Planet'', ``Geopark'' and ``Innovations''. uCross Roads of Culture: A place where scouts will experience cultures from the six regions around the world in the areas of handicrafts, visual arts, literature, culinary arts and costumes. uOur Heritage: A day trip to explore Thailand's agricultural, industrial, natural and cultural heritage. The 800 buses needed to accommodate all the participants will, for example, take turns driving the children to a fishery centre in Rayong, Khao Kheow Open Zoo or Wat Ang Sila Cultural Centre. uA Day Serving in the Community: A day spent working on service projects within the local community. uWater Sports: A range of water activities will be available, such as canoeing, sailing, wind surfing, snorkelling and rowing. uHike: The Scouts will take part in a hike along one of the several trails in the surrounding area. A wide-range of free time activities will also be arranged, while the participants and international service team may also get a taste of Thailand's warm hospitality through the ``Home Hospitality'' programme, available for three to four days before and after the jamboree.