



The Reel Deal

Along the sides of the long wooden dock stood dozens of fishermen in the process of casting and reeling, one of which was struggling to pull an 8-kilo Mekong catfish as we walked by. Our guide, Eddie Mounce, was taking us to the far end of the lake where a small bungalow awaited us, while our Thai guide, a man who goes simply by the name of Mr T, was busily preparing our bait. As massive as that 8-kilo fish may have seemed to us, Eddie assured us it was small potatoes. In fact, he's so confident that we'll catch a fish at least twice that size, he advertises a money back policy if nothing over 30 pounds is caught during the day.

Within seconds of the first cast the line began to tug furiously. Mr T leaped into action, securing the rod before it became one with the lake. Eddie smiled as he helped me strap on the harness. "It usually doesn't happen quite that quickly," he says, the rod now bending severely to the will of the giant fish below. I clumsily started pulling in the line, the fish showing a lot of fight as I gradually brought him in.

After considerable effort, the beast began to surface. Once the net swooped in under him, he seemed to capitulate slightly, almost betraying a sense of acceptance to the process. He had been caught many times before and would surely be caught many times again. The lake is strictly catch-and-release, guaranteeing a full day of mighty struggle with these massive fish for all who accept the challenge. Once out of the water our guide quickly removed the hook, setting the