



Kaeng Krachan: An Inexpensive (Quality) Lodge for Birders and Bird Photographers = [Baan Maka](#)

Deborah Allen and Robert DeCandido, PhD

One of the dilemmas for anyone interested in visiting Kaeng Krachan National Park is finding a place to stay within easy reach of the park. There are several options in the town of Kaeng Krachan that mostly cater to weekend visitors from Bangkok. However, travel to and from the town to the park takes at least an hour to the entrance gate, and an additional 45 minutes to the lower campground – if you have your own vehicle. You can hire a guide with a vehicle (about 1600-2000 baht/day), but this quickly becomes expensive if you wish to spend several days visiting the park.



Entrance to the resort **Baan Maka**



Chalet at **Baan Maka**

In late February 2008 Deborah Allen and I faced just such a dilemma. We had our own vehicle (a 4-wheel drive Suzuki Caribbean rental, about 700-800 baht/day) but no camping gear. Hence it was necessary to commute to/from the park each day. Fortunately we met up with a couple who own and operate a magnificent resort (**Baan Maka** – www.BaanMaka.com) about 15

minutes drive from the park's entrance gate. More importantly, the lodge was set in scenic grounds and teemed with birds such as Spangled Drongos; Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush; Green-billed Malkoha; Flavescent and Striped-throated Bulbuls; Verditer, Asian Paradise and Monarch Flycatchers; Striped Tit and Puff-throated Babblers; Blue Whistling Thrush; Asian Barred Owlet; Common and Black-capped Kingfishers, etc. And to our delight, the owners had set up two bird blinds (hides) complete with a water "drip" and fruit to attract an array of birds and small mammals to photograph. Since both of the operators of the resort (Gunn and Beverly) make digital images of birds, we quickly found that the hide is designed with birders, and especially bird photographers, in mind. ***For examples of splendid bird photography, see Gunn's photos on page 6 of this article.***



View of Baan Maka grounds



Lake at Baan Maka

We rented a bungalow for two (available with separate beds) for about 1000 baht/night, and enjoyed the spacious room with air-conditioning, tiled floors and en suite bathroom with hot water shower. Chalets are available that sleep up to 15 people and include four bathrooms. Drinking water is provided daily as well as towels and soap. The wooden furniture in each of the rooms is lovely, and there is ample storage space to unpack clothes and store equipment safely. There is no TV in the rooms and only one outlet to charge camera/flash batteries. There is no DSL internet service on-site (but dial-up internet is available on request). We found the cozy outdoor restaurant a great place to plug-in our laptops and process our digital photo files.



Chalet for 2 persons



Chalet for 4-6 persons

Food is available at the on-site restaurant for about 30-100 baht per meal, and these are available to go. Fried Rice with pork will set you back about 40 baht while steamed fish (fillet with no bones) is about 80-120 baht. The Thai cook is friendly, and she is quite happy to adjust the spiciness of the food to your taste, and even make French Fries (chips). We recommend "pet nid-noy" – just a "little" spicy (= pet). Need your laundry done? About 100 baht will get a 5-10 kilo load washed, pressed and folded in one day. The staff here is friendly and more than willing to fulfill reasonable requests. Have a non-birder wife or significant other? This is also a great place for him/her.



Chalet for 2 – interior



Chalet for 15 with four bathrooms

The owners (Gunn and Beverly) have been operating Baan Maka for seven years. They are originally from Bangkok and worked as bankers there. Both earned Master's Degrees in the USA and speak fluent English. If you wish to stay at their resort it is best to contact Beverly via her cell phone – she is often in Bangkok on business during the week: **081-840-5797** (or email: Nokgag@gmail.com); or you can call Gunn at Baan Maka (**081-906-0606**). Gunn remains at the lodge full-time, making several trips each week into Kaeng Krachan Park usually up to the second (900 meter elevation) camp site to photograph birds (so it may be difficult to reach him by phone during the day). We were able to catch a ride with Gunn on a couple of occasions, and he was more than happy to show us foraging Pin-tailed Parrot Finches, nesting Long-tailed Broadbills and the best places to look for flocks of Ratchet-tailed Treepies. Gunn knows the park intimately, and we enjoyed his wit and his ease with people as we rode with him in his 4-wheel drive Toyota to the upper campsite in Kaeng Krachan (about 80 minutes travel time from Ban Maka). Admission to the park was 200 baht/person in November 2009, with an additional 30 baht per vehicle charge. Camping is 30 baht/night inside the park, though bathrooms and shower facilities were considerably better at the upper (900 meter) camp site than the lower one. At least in the busy (dry) season (November to April), food (including snacks and coffee) is available at both camp sites, again with the upper camp site offering a better selection of tastier dishes at about 25-50 baht per meal. It would be possible to have all meals prepared at the upper camp site for as long as one stayed there...but check with Gunn or to make sure if the Thai cooks are at the campsites when you intend to visit/stay.



View of the broad-leaved evergreen forest from the second (900 meter) camp site at Kaeng Krachan

Ordinarily we do not enter into the realm of lodge recommendations or other product endorsements. We are working scientists and photographers, and remain unbiased observers. However, we feel that Gunn and Beverly not only offer superb accommodations at a reasonable price (and cheaper than anything else we looked at in Kaeng Krachan town), but they are also working to increase habitat for birds and other wildlife at **Baan Maka**. Education is a primary concern of the lodge – to allow Thai and international guests to enjoy and learn about the birds, animals and plants in this part of Thailand. They are hoping to attract more foreign birders and their friends in order to show the economic value of natural areas outside of the national park including Hanging Parrot feeder station and the Water Holes with Bird Blinds. Want to help them? There is no better way than to visit, take some photos and go home to spread the good word. Bird tour groups of 10-25 people would be especially welcome and feel comfortable here, making use of Baan Maka as a base to head into the park daily.



A bird blind (hide) at Baan Maka



View from inside a bird blind

For independent travelers who do not have a 4-wheel drive vehicle, Baan Maka offers a superb opportunity to see Kaeng Krachan and to reach the high (900 meter) camp. By staying at the resort, it should be possible to catch a ride to the top, remain there for several days and then catch a ride back again. This you would need to arrange with Gunn and Beverly. For others interested in bird photography or a guide for the park itself, Gunn knows the park intimately well and when/where to look for the park's specialty birds including nesting Broadbills, Pittas, Woodpeckers, Bee-eaters and of course Racket-tailed Treepies – see Gunn's photos on the last page of this article.

Getting to Baan Maka is relatively easy for those driving their own vehicle (and note well: you can only take a four-wheel drive with good clearance past the first camp site up to the second camp site at 900 meters elevation). To find Baan Maka, just make your way to the information center of the park, about a 10 minute drive past Kaeng Krachan town, on the only road that goes in that direction. Continue on that same road for another 15 minutes or so, until you come to the last left turn (end of the public road) that can be made before the gated entrance to the military training camp. Take that left turn and then continue another 10 minutes (30 kilometers) until you come to the first major intersection (look here on the left for a brown wooden **Baan Maka** sign in both English and Thai script – see the next page for a photo of this sign). Make a left turn at this first major intersection onto a very wide dirt road. Drive about 1-2 minutes and look on the right for another Baan Maka sign. If you have a driving (navigation system), plug in these GPS coordinates and your car should be directed to the Lodge:

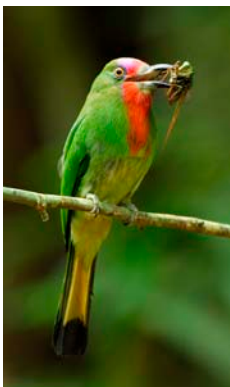
GPS Coordinates: **N 12 50' 535'** **E 099 35' 447'**

Look for this Lodge Sign on the Road at important intersections:



**Bird Photos from Kaeng Krachan National Park
(including some taken at the Bird Blind at Baan Maka Resort)**

© Gunn (Kittipon Bouranasompop) 2002-2011



www.BaanMaka.com