

## One study abroad semester at PSU in Phuket, Thailand

### 1) Introduction

My name is Lisa and I am a student at the University of Applied Sciences in Konstanz, Germany. I spent my fourth semester abroad at the faculty of Tourism and Hospitality at the Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus, Thailand from May to September 2013.

### 2) Pre-departure and Arrival

When I had decided to spend four months of my studies at the PSU, I started to plan my trip and the courses I would take at the PSU. I booked only a one-way ticket so I would be flexible about the return date, which was a good decision. The visa procedure was very smooth. All I had to do was send the documents Asia Exchange provided to the Thai Embassy along with my passport and I got a 365 days multiple-entry-visa without any problems. In terms of accommodation preparation I was very lucky and got myself a spot in one of the campus's dormitory rooms before-hand. It was quite easy - I just contacted the International Office of PSU Phuket and asked them if it was possible to spend my semester abroad in the international dormitory. It didn't even take one day for them to reply and tell me it was no problem at all.

When I arrived at Phuket Airport in the end of May I was fortunate enough to be familiar with Thailand, the language and the people because I had lived in Nakhon Pathom for one year a few years ago. Otherwise I would have had some difficulties getting to campus because there was no pick-up from the university which I found a bit sad. Taxi fares are comparatively high in Phuket but you can easily get cash at one of the ATMs inside the airport so I finally made it to campus safely.

### 3) Accommodation

I had decided to stay in the dormitory of the campus because I wanted to be among the Thai students and experience the real campus life. The dormitory in which the international students stay is actually quite nice. All internationals, including Asian internationals, stay on the ground floor, but Thai students are living in the same building as well. Two people share one room including a bed, a desk, a cupboard and a little bathroom and even AC. A little fridge in the room gives you the opportunity to store some fruits and drinks, but as there is no

kitchen in the dorm that's all you need. Everything was clean and in good condition, definitely not luxury but absolutely okay. You can use the washing machines in the building for 10 Baht and the water machine for free drinking water. Just outside the dorm there is a copy shop, a little restaurant and a kiosk selling snacks and ice cream. The monthly rent was 5000 Baht for the room excluding electricity and water, so 2500 Baht each which was a little less than 60 Euros. There was usually a monthly electricity and water bill of about 800 Baht which is about 20 Euros.

I loved staying on campus because I was always with the students. I met my classmates not only in class but also at home, spontaneously sharing lunch or dinner or just sitting together and talking. This way it was much easier to make friends than it was for all those staying off campus. Whenever there was campus activity going on, I never missed it and was able to participate in real university life. I enjoyed it a lot and would recommend it to anyone!

#### **4) Host University**

The Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus was a great host university. The international office and our supervisor from the faculty of Hospitality and Tourism took good care of us and were always there when help was needed. When there were courses that were not as expected it was no problem at all to change and compulsory books were provided for free. We had one coordinator who was in charge of all exchange students and then there was the International Office (IO) that organised trips and excursions for foreign students and staff on a monthly basis. The IO also went to buy the school uniforms with us prepared us for the life in Thailand during an orientation week. They sometimes announced occasions very late but then being spontaneous is important when living in Thailand anyway. All in all I have to say it was a great experience being part of the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism (FHT) of the PSU. It was a bit unfortunate that it was impossible to join classes of other faculties if you didn't want to pay extra for them, but the course offer of the FHT was large and it was no problem to find interesting courses for students from all backgrounds. Personally, I hadn't had any tourism courses before as I am an Asian Studies and Management student. But there were also courses in that field and I enjoyed broadening my horizon by joining courses out of my usual study course very much. I was overall surprised how organised university life was at PSU for an Asian university. But compared to Europe you still have to keep in mind that things can be a bit chaotic and rather spontaneous when in Thailand, and that does not exclude university activity.

## 5) Studies & Courses

Because of my business studies background I chose mostly courses that matched my course of studies. I took Statistics and Strategic Management as well as Japanese for beginners and in addition Ballroom Dance.

Both Statistics and Strategic Management were obviously designed for the faculty of Hospitality and Tourism but I actually enjoyed that part. The lecturers were awesome, their English perfect and I learned a lot in both those courses. Both courses worked closely with the provided books which helped a lot with preparations and understanding. In Strategic Management we had to hold presentations twice and even prepare a report in groups. I was surprised how active the lessons were since I had expected a rather teacher-centred teaching.

Japanese didn't belong to the FHT offered courses so I had to pay for this course. The Japanese who was our lecturer taught in Thai though, so this course is only possible for those who understand the Thai language. It was good anyway, I learned basic communication and one of the three writing systems.

I took Ballroom Dance for socialising, and that worked great. During this class that took place only once a week and was the best opportunity to meet and talk to local students. While you only sit and work in other classes, this course was a door-opener for making friendships. If you already know how to dance you do now actually learn much, but the experience is definitely worth it.

Usually each course takes place four hours a week and you get your grades through the midterm and final exam. The exams were not easy but not entirely difficult, either. You definitely had to study, but I wasn't as stressed as I am at my home university when it's examination time. The system of midterm and final exams was really good because you had the chance to improve your grade instead of just having one opportunity to get a good grade.

## 6) Culture

Thai culture is very unique and very different from what we call Western culture. As I had lived in Thailand before I was already used to the way of living there, but I saw the others struggling and remember my difficulties when I first lived in Thailand.

In my opinion, one of the most important parts of Thai culture is the face concept. Especially as a foreigner, it's quite easy to lose face or take someone else's face, because we are mostly unaware of the fact that something went wrong. This is because Thai people rarely say out loud what they actually think and mean, especially when it comes to criticism. If we criticise and complain openly, this will easily lead to someone's face loss. It's very important to be careful and tactful about what you say and to think twice about what the other could have meant by what he or she said.

Politeness and friendliness are extremely important in Thailand. Especially older people have to be treated with respect. One rather obvious part of this cultural aspect is the so called "Wai" which is the gesture Thai people do when they greet each other. Everyone who is older than you, especially teachers and family members, need to be greeted with a polite Wai. You are not supposed to criticise or question people of higher status, which can be a bit difficult when dealing with lecturers. Just always try to be friendly and polite and people will very much appreciate your effort.

Another very important part of Thai culture is food. Whenever they have time, Thai people will eat - possibly with as many people and dishes as they can. A common greeting in Thailand is "Have you eaten yet?" which displays the importance of food in a wonderful way. Try and eat as much as you can, people will love it and enjoy letting you try the best Thai dishes around!

## **7) Social Life**

Because I lived in the dormitory on campus I had a great social life. In the beginning I shared my room with a Japanese girl so I got quite close to some of the Japanese exchange students. The other exchange students from Europe and Indonesia also lived on the same floor so it was easy to make friends with them as well. Mostly my Ballroom Dance course and study groups in other subjects helped me get close to locals as well. Living on campus made it possible to sit together at night, do homework in groups and prepare for the exams together. That's how I made lots of great friends with which I still keep in touch.

## **8) Travels**

Being able to choose your courses makes it possible to create a timetable that includes a long weekend. I had Mondays off and often used the long weekend to travel around. This, of course, is a wonderful opportunity and a must for any

exchange student, as it shows you so much of the country you stay in. Flights from Phuket to Bangkok are relatively cheap and from there you can take buses to lots of interesting places around the centre of Thailand. I even went to Kuala Lumpur for one weekend when there was a cheap offer, others travelled to Indonesia, Singapore and other destinations within Southeast Asia. Thailand is a very safe place to travel around, but in many places it's necessary to speak at least some Thai. You definitely get a much deeper impression of this beautiful country when you make the effort to learn at least some basics, I recommend it!

## 9) Conclusion

Thailand is a wonderful country to spend an exchange semester in. Since my student exchange in 2007 I had wanted to go back and experiencing the university life is a unique and special experience that I would definitely recommend trying! You experience a completely different culture in and outside university, meet lots of new people from all over the world and learn to see life from another perspective.

If you want to make your studies real special, take the time and go abroad for at least one semester, even if the courses may not completely suit your course of studies. To think outside the box can be both challenging and most of all very enriching. And besides learning new things in university, you learn a lot about yourself while encountering a whole new perspective on things.

Please contact me if you have any other questions that I may be able to answer. My email address is [lisa.mundt@gmx.de](mailto:lisa.mundt@gmx.de)

Enjoy your semester abroad!

Lisa