

Thailand Study 2008 Q&A

1. What is the most important thing I need to know about Thai culture?

The most important thing is being respectful. It is easy to forget about your surroundings when you are having fun and hanging out with all your friends. However, it is essential to keep in mind that you are guests in Thailand as so should act accordingly. Always be aware and considerate of those around you.

2. What should I pack?

The key is to pack MINIMALLY. Not only will you be traveling throughout your trip, you will also most likely be acquiring more luggage as you buy various souvenirs. You want to bring only the things you know you will need and will not be able to get while you are in Thailand. Some important items that are hard to find include:

- ❖ Deodorant
- ❖ Razors (girls—it is hard to find replaceable blades)
- ❖ Shaving cream
- ❖ Sunscreen/lotion (available; however, many products containing a whitening ingredient)
- ❖ Tampons
- ❖ Travel-friendly soap dispenser (very nice to have; you can just use a plastic dispensable bottle and fill it with liquid hand soap)
- ❖ Good insect repellent (Jungle Juice, available at REI and other outdoor sports stores is highly effective)
- ❖ Good shoes (sandals and closed toe shoes for school and temples; old running shoes are good for hikes and walking trips)
- ❖ Pants & shorts (easier for guys to find than for girls; girls can find dresses and skirts very easily though)

Everything else from t-shirts to toiletries can be found pretty easily.

3. Are there safety concerns in Thailand?

In general, Thailand is a very safe place to travel. I (Grace Chaimongkol) never felt unsafe while traveling. I even spent six weeks traveling throughout Thailand alone this past summer. However, if you can avoid being alone, you should. Surround yourself with other people or travel with a buddy if possible. Be smart when out late at night too. Take the same precautions that you would take at home.

Also, in Thailand there are Tourist Police that speak English and can be very helpful if you are in trouble or have any concern or problem.

4. What immunizations should I get?

The number of immunizations received varies from student to student. Some people don't get any while others get every shot and pill available. It is important to talk with your physician (at home or at the Health Center) about what you should get before leaving. It is better to be safe than sorry--especially if you are planning to travel in higher risk areas (rural regions or other countries in Southeast Asia).

5. Can I drink the water?

Bottled drinking water is available everywhere you go. Make sure you purchase water that is sealed and has not been opened. Small restaurants often boil water and serve it in pitchers—you can assume this is safe to drink. However, when in doubt, drink bottled water. Never drink from the tap.

6. Is the food safe to eat?

As many of you know, Thai food is very delicious and often very spicy. You can always ask for orders to be “less spicy” or “not spicy”. Especially when eating from street vendors (which you will), make sure you order entrees that have not been sitting out for hours. Thai noodle soup, fried rice and Pad Thai are popular dishes that can be found all over. Ordering a dish of curry that has been sitting in a large pot all day or food that is sitting out is probably not a good idea.

Fresh fruit can also be found everywhere. Try to stick to fruit that have a protective layer (a peel that you can remove) opposed to fruit where you eat the outer layer (such as the skin of an apple). This is just a suggestion, though, and not required.

7. Should I bring my laptop?

Having a laptop is very convenient but not necessary. You will have computer/internet access everywhere you go, whether it is at the place you are staying or at a nearby internet café. In the past, it was common for one person to bring a laptop that they then shared with their roommate/friends.

8. What about electrical outlets? Will my electronic appliances work?

Laptops, ipods and digital cameras have a built in converter and will work. However, you will need to purchase a converter if you are bringing your own blow dryer, curling iron, etc.

9. What is the best way to keep in contact with others on the trip as well as people back home?

Some cell phones will work overseas as long as you replace the SIM card. Otherwise, cell phones can be purchased fairly inexpensively. Whether you bring a

phone, buy a phone or use the phones available there, you will need to purchase calling cards. They are available at every 7-11. Also, if you have a cell phone, you will not be charged if people call you from back home.

Along with phones and email, Skype is available in many places.

10. Should I figure out my travel plans for after the trip now?

It is helpful to get an idea of what you want to do after the program is over but it is very likely that your plans will change or be revised. You will be meeting and talking with other travelers, learning more about the country and Southeast Asia and getting to know others on the trip. Many people from the program in the past ended up traveling with other Cal Poly students. Also, it is very easy to make travel arrangements while you are there. There are travel agencies everywhere (especially in tourist areas) as well as domestic and regional airlines.