

**UW Global Health Field School in Thailand**  
**Summer 2019**  
**IAP Program Handbook**

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The Global Health Field School in Thailand program is offered by International Academic Programs (IAP) in collaboration with the Global Health Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This IAP Program Handbook supplements the IAP Study Abroad Handbook and provides you with the most up-to-date information available at the time of printing. Changes may occur before your departure or while you are abroad.

Questions about your program abroad (housing, facilities abroad, etc.) as well as questions relating to your relationship with your host institution or academics (e.g. course credit and equivalents, registration deadlines, etc.) should be directed to IAP at UW-Madison.

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## Contact Information

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### UW-Madison Contacts

Specific contacts for your program are listed under the My Contacts tile of your MyStudyAbroad (MySA) portal.

International Academic Programs (IAP)  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
301 Red Gym, 716 Langdon Street  
Madison, WI 53706  
Tel: (608) 265-6329  
Fax: (608) 262-6998  
[www.studyabroad.wisc.edu](http://www.studyabroad.wisc.edu)

### **Emergency Contact Information**

In case of an emergency, call the main IAP number **(608) 265-6329** between 8:00am-4:30pm Monday-Friday. After-hours or on weekends call the 24/7 IAP emergency line at **(608) 516-9440**.

IAP requests that you phone our office or emergency line in the event of an emergency, so that we can contact CISI insurance and other relevant parties as needed. If you cannot reach IAP and need to contact CISI directly, or would like to contact CISI and IAP concurrently:

### **Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI)**

Emergency Tel Outside U.S. (01) 609-986-1234 (collect calls accepted)  
Policy Number: 16 STB009987903

**Please note that you should carry your emergency card with you at all times.** This card is available to print in your MySA portal.

### **Embassy Registration**

All program participants who are U.S. citizens must register with the U.S. Department of State before departure from the U.S. as this will help in case of a lost passport or other mishap. Please register at <https://step.state.gov/step/>. If you are not a U.S. citizen, be sure to register with your home country's embassy or consulate.

Contact information for the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand is located on your program emergency card.

### **Program Dates**

Arrival Date in Bangkok:	May 19, 2019
Program Start Date (Morning):	May 20, 2019
Global Health Student Departure/Program End Date:	June 1, 2019
Nursing Students Depart to Udon Thani:	June 2, 2019
Nursing Students Return from Udon Thani:	June 8, 2019
Nursing Students Depart Bangkok:	June 8 or 9, 2019

You will need to depart the U.S. on or before May 18 to arrive in Bangkok by May 19 and be ready for the start of the program on the morning of May 20. The two-week program will conclude on the evening of June 1.

For Nursing program participants, lodging is included for the evening of June 1 and transport to the airport on June 2 will be arranged. Transportation from Bangkok to/from Udon Thani for the Nursing program participants will also be arranged as part of the program with cost included in program fee. Your program leaders will provide the time of the return flight from Udon Thani to Bangkok when confirmed, so that you may book your flight back to the U.S. accordingly.

You are welcome to travel independently before and/or after the program; please note that you will be responsible for your additional lodging, food, transportation, airport transfers, visa procurement, and any other expenses. Students arriving early should discuss coordinating meet up location/time with program leaders prior to finalizing travel plans.

A full course syllabus and schedule will be provided by the Program Leaders.

### **Travel and Arrival Information**

Participants make their own travel arrangements for arriving in Thailand by the program start date. It is ideal if participants arrive as a group as on-site staff provide airport pickup; specific times will be suggested in your POP HLTH 644 preparatory course. **IAP needs to know your arrival/departure information to arrange airport transportation, so please enter your itinerary in your MySA portal.**

Students arriving or departing outside of the arrival window will be responsible for securing their own transportation to the lodging in Bangkok.

### **Pre-Departure Preparation**

Refer to the Pre-Departure Checklists in your MySA portal as well as in the IAP Study Abroad Handbook for essential information.

### **Immigration Documents**

#### Passport

A passport is needed to travel to Thailand and to obtain a visa. Apply immediately for a passport if you do not already have one. Passport information and application forms can be found on the U.S. State Department website (<http://travel.state.gov/passport>). If you already have your passport, make sure it will be valid for at least 6 months beyond the length of your stay abroad. It is also important to have a photocopy of your passport's information page to put in your luggage or a place other than where you keep your passport in case of a lost or stolen passport.

#### Visa

U.S. passport holders are permitted to enter Thailand as tourists for a period of up to 30 days without the need to make a visa application. Detailed information is available at the State Department site for Thailand: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/thailand.html>. Please read this information carefully, especially if you have plans to enter Thailand via land from a neighboring country as greater scrutiny is likely to be involved. If you plan to stay in Thailand more than 30 days, you must apply for a visa.

If you are **not traveling on a U.S. passport**, please consult the Thailand Consulate's website for information: <http://www.thaiconsulatechicago.org/pages-Visa.html>. While IAP is happy to provide guidance and appropriate documentation upon request, it is ultimately the student's responsibility to secure the proper visa.

### **Handling Money Abroad**

Past students have recommended bringing a debit card and a credit card. Outside of Bangkok, Thailand is largely a cash society. Generally, debit cards are convenient for withdrawing money and credit cards can be used for emergencies. Students have found it easy and reliable to use debit cards to withdraw cash at the airport in Bangkok and at banks and shopping centers downtown. There are fewer ATMs outside of Bangkok, though they are becoming more available in larger towns.

Many previous participants have reported spending less money abroad than they anticipated and have said most of the money they spent was for gifts or water. It is also recommended that you try to get small bills when withdrawing money, as it can be difficult to use large bills at shops and stands. **Make sure to notify your bank** and credit card company that you will be in Thailand so that your account is not flagged for suspicious activity. It's also helpful to inquire about international withdrawal/transaction fees and limits. Avoid changing currency anywhere other than at an airport or bank (do not change money at stands on the street).

### **Packing**

The items below were suggested by past participants:

Walking shoes

Shoes/sandals that are easy to slip on/off (sandals need to have a heel strap – flip flops are considered 'rude' in some areas)

Hat

Towel (quick-dry material)

Camera

Personal toiletries

Insect repellent with DEET

Sunscreen/lip balm with SPF

Sunglasses

Tissues/toilet paper

Hand sanitizer/wet wipes

Women should bring at least one knee-length or longer skirt

Travel book/guidebook

Thai language phrasebook

Daypack or messenger bag that you can use during daily activities

Personal medications/first aid (ibuprofen, Pepto-Bismol, antacids, allergy medication, antibiotics prescribed by travel clinic for diarrhea, etc.)

Gifts for hosts (t-shirts, WI ballpoint pens, postcards, anything that represents WI or the University)

Detergent for doing laundry in the sink

1 week of clothes (wash for the other weeks)

Quick-dry, lightweight pants and shirts

Umbrella (especially for creating shade from the sun)

Swimsuit

Flip-flops (to be used as slippers in the room)

### **Electronics**

In the past, students have brought phones and cameras that could easily be charged. If you do plan to bring a laptop, please be mindful of keeping it secure. Some renters' or homeowners' insurance policies may cover theft while traveling—please confirm before departure. See <http://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/world-electricity-guide.html> for information on adapters.

We recognize that you will likely want to remember this experience through photographs.

**Please remain extremely mindful of whom, when and where you take pictures.** Remember that you are engaging in a professional and academic experience. Please respect the privacy of individuals by asking permission to take their pictures. Consult with your program leaders and/or host agencies about the appropriateness of taking photos, especially of children. A useful guide (and one adopted by the UW GHI) can be found at: <https://www.uniteforsight.org/global-health-university/photography-ethics>.

## **The Academic Program**

### **Course Information**

The Thailand Field Course introduces an interdisciplinary group of students to Thai culture and offers the opportunity to learn from experts about infectious disease and public health in Thailand. This 2-credit program provides students a unique community-based field experience. The program is especially designed to allow students to gain an appreciation of Thai culture and how it affects health and health care. Students will study public health and tropical disease with Thai experts, as well as learn how to design and implement village health assessments by participating in a community-based project.

Students will arrive in Bangkok and spend about a week participating in lectures and site visits in and around the city. The program will continue in the rural province where students will be instructed on rural and community health topics by local experts, and learn about the health system at the district, sub-district and village levels. The two-week program will end in Bangkok with final meetings, student final presentations, and discussion – along with a celebration.

There is a third week for undergraduate Nursing students at Borromrajonani College of Nursing in Udon Thani.

### **Enrollment, Credits, and Grading**

During spring semester, participants are required to take Population Health 644: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Global Health and Disease, Thailand section (1 credit).

You will be enrolled by IAP for a summer placeholder class prior to the summer program start. Once you return from the program and students' final grades are submitted to IAP, your IAP

Enrollment Specialist Advisor will replace the placeholder course with the actual course and earned grade.

Students on the two-week program will earn 2 credits of POP HLTH 645 after successful completion of the summer field program.

Nursing students that participate in the Spring POP HLTH course and all three weeks of the summer program will be eligible to receive credit for the summer experience in N436.

Graduate and Undergraduate Global Health certificate candidates must take the class for a letter grade A-F according to UW-Madison rules, as the course fulfills a requirement. School of Nursing students also must take this course for a letter grade A-F since the course fulfills a degree requirement. Other undergraduates will also receive letter grades A-F.

Other graduate level health professional students (SMPH, SVM, SOP) can either have a letter grade assigned, or can take the course as Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory. A satisfactory grade will be assigned for performance at a B level or higher.

<https://registrar.wisc.edu/grading-final-instructions/>

## **Living Abroad**

Educate yourself about your host country for a richer experience abroad. Read the Preparing to Live in Another Culture section of the IAP Study Abroad Handbook.

### **Country Overview**

Bangkok is one of the most populous cities in the world with a population of over 8 million; the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, which covers five provinces surrounding the capital province in the central region of Thailand, registers over 14 million. Bangkok is a major economic and financial center of Southeast Asia, and the city's wealth of cultural sites makes it one of the world's most popular tourist destinations. The capital is part of the heavily urbanized central and eastern region of Thailand, which stretches from Nakhon Ratchasima along Bangkok to the industrialized eastern seaboard.

Thailand is the most popular destination for U.S. study abroad students within Southeast Asia. As with visitors, students are also drawn to Thailand for its beautiful landscape, strong Buddhist tradition, and culture of hospitality. Several universities in Thailand enjoy strong international reputations, with three in the top 100 Asian Universities list according to the QS University Rankings: Mahidol University, Chulalongkorn University, and Chiang Mai University.

The majority of Thailand's population is ethnically Thai and Buddhist. Especially outside of the capital, what some Thais perceive as typical American characteristics and behaviors -- European features and skin tone, as an example -- may be a misconception. For this reason, students of color may not be perceived to be U.S. American. Students of color may experience increased visibility in Thailand, motivated almost entirely by curiosity.

## **Housing**

Housing is included for the duration of the program. Students will spend the first portion of the program staying at a hotel (Vic 3) in Bangkok. The program will continue in a rural province where you will spend part of the time at the rural training site with lodging in a local hotel or dormitory and also 2-3 nights in a homestay. In the homestay, students are provided with sleeping materials (bed mat/mattress, sheets/blanket, pillow, mosquito net, drinking water, and toilet paper), but should bring their own towel and toiletries.

Past students have reported that the homestay is very rewarding despite challenging conditions. They recommend students tell their homestay family what they will be doing during the day as the families often want to know what is happening and may worry if they are unaware of students' whereabouts. Past students also suggest spending as much time with the host families as possible, especially during and after meals. Students have also suggested bringing photos of home to show to their host families. Most rural Thai, do not speak any English, though sometimes there are children and young adults who know some English in the home. Nonetheless, students should be prepared to be in situations with no English speakers, especially during homestay. Translation apps and 3-way translation books are extremely helpful. [a 3-way translation book includes Thai words in both Thai script AND English phonetics, so that it can be read by individuals only literate in Thai as well as English speakers]

The Thai diet is quite diverse and most Thai are omnivores. Students with specific dietary needs and practices need to be prepared to convey their restrictions to their host families and other food service sites accurately. This can be done with help from translators, but these students should also be sure to carry a *written* form with details that can be shared.

It is considered polite and traditional to bring gifts for your host family. Students are encouraged to bring small gifts totaling about \$25 in value for their homestay families. Items representing the UW and Wisconsin are particularly good for helping to both convey appreciation and share some of our values.

We typically place students in rooms with others of the same sex. In some locations, this is necessary for legal or cultural reasons. We understand that not all students may identify as female or male, and we want to create a welcoming environment for you while you are abroad. We are happy to work with students who identify as transgender, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, and/or non-binary regarding life abroad. If you have questions or concerns regarding housing as it relates to your identity, please contact your Study Abroad Advisor.

## **Clothing**

Lightweight, loose, breathable clothing is best due to the climate. Female visitors to this part of the world must consider both the culture and the climate when deciding on their wardrobe. Dressing in line with Thai cultural norms is very important to Thai faculty, Thai citizens, and UW faculty. While conforming to the local standards of dress might contradict American values of individual self-expression and equality, adhering to local codes of conduct demonstrates



respect for that culture. It is important for us to remember that we are guests in other countries. Shoes are always removed when entering homes and temples, and in many other buildings as well. Though we may not fully understand the reasons for particular dress standards or other local customs, it is our responsibility to be courteous guests and well represent our University and our country.

Skirts must be knee length or longer. Shoulders must be covered. Short sleeves are acceptable, but tank tops, shirts with low-cut necklines, and shorts higher than knee length are not acceptable while on the program. When visiting temples or palaces, long skirts or slacks (not shorts) should be worn. There is often a dress code for entrance to sites of religious and cultural significance, and you won't want to miss out on those experiences due to inappropriate attire.

### **Safety**

Crimes such as pick-pocketing, purse snatching, and thefts are common. Pick-pocketing and the theft of purses and bags is common on public transportation. Past participants suggest keeping belongings close, being aware of surroundings, being very cautious, and walking together in groups.

Students may want to carry cash and passports in lightweight zipper pouches that can be worn under clothing. Passports can be kept in plastic sandwich bags to avoid getting wet in unexpected rain storms or profuse sweating, especially when we are in the village.

The single most commonplace threat to good health for visitors and residents in Thailand is traffic. Concepts of appropriate use of motor vehicles in Thailand are very different from those of the U.S. This different attitude, combined with traffic flow being reversed (vehicles drive on left side of the road) in comparison to that of the U.S., makes the roadways a source of real danger. Seatbelts are found in only a few cars and usually not in busses, and overcrowding of vehicles is common. Although official statistics are not available, it is common knowledge that the rates of serious injury and death due to traffic accidents are extremely high. Students should be aware of traffic concerns, wear available seat belts at all times, and should not ride motorcycles, although there are many motorcycle taxis in Bangkok.

Additionally, low-hanging electrical wires are commonly seen in the urban areas and also pose a potential threat to safety. Be mindful of your surroundings and watchful as you walk.

### **Health Insurance**

All IAP study abroad participants are enrolled in supplemental health insurance through CISI. This insurance is included in your program fee, and information on the policy, as well as ID cards, is located in your MyStudyAbroad account. **If you are traveling before or after your official program dates, please contact CISI directly, once you are emailed enrollment information from CISI (just a few weeks before the start of your program) to extend your coverage with CISI directly.** See the IAP Study Abroad Handbook for additional information on this insurance plan.

## Health

It's important that you consult with a healthcare provider well-versed in travel medicine or a travel clinic to plan for your time abroad. University Health Services (UHS) has a travel clinic that provides health services for those planning foreign travel, including medications and immunizations. Information about the travel clinic and how to make an appointment can be found online at <http://www.uhs.wisc.edu/services/medical/travel-clinic/>. The UHS travel clinic does book out in advance (sometimes as much as six weeks), and some immunizations must be done at particular times prior to travel.

If you are not covered by UHS care, please consult with your insurance company to see what clinics or healthcare providers with travel medicine specialties are covered. There are a number of travel clinics in Madison including:

Dean <http://www.deancare.com/medical-services/travel-medicine/> and

UW Health <http://www.uwhealth.org/travel-vaccinations/locations-and-maps/10381>.

To learn more about travelers' health, please visit the CDC website:

<http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx>. You can view vaccine recommendations from the same page, scrolling down to the vaccinations link. On the top of the Vaccinations page, there is a link for specific country recommendations.

Be aware that changes in food, water, and environment can cause stomachaches, diarrhea, and/or vomiting. If discomfort persists, please do not be embarrassed to speak up and indicate to a Program Leader that you are having problems with vomiting, diarrhea or any other illness.

Participants will not need to take many extra health precautions while living in Thailand, other than being aware of the different environment and following common sense. For example, the tropical sun is very hot compared to what we are used to in the U.S., so it is necessary to be cautious of sunburn and to keep up one's fluid intake as the body adjusts to the higher average temperatures.

Should you become dehydrated you will need to replenish your body's supply of salts and one way to do so is to drink citrus fruit drinks. Such drinks are very popular with the Thai at least in part because they are good for hot-climate living, and so in this case conforming to local tastes is a good way to stay healthy. Stick to drinking bottled water, not untreated tap water, and avoid ice cubes. Additionally, avoid uncooked vegetables that cannot be peeled. Avoid contact with stray dogs, and you will not have to worry about rabies. Eat only thoroughly cooked food, and wear shoes when you walk outdoors. Wash your hands before you eat or cook, and you will limit your exposure to infection.

Stray/street dogs are also common in Thailand. Use caution around these animals and avoid approaching or petting them as they do not receive the same level of veterinary care as dogs in the U.S.

## HIV/AIDS

It is commonly reported that the rate of HIV/AIDS infection in Thailand is high, especially among sex workers. The CDC notes that travelers are generally at low risk for HIV unless they participate in risky behaviors, such as sex with unfamiliar partners or injection drug use. Some developing countries may not adequately screen their blood supplies, and travelers could become infected by a blood transfusion. For more information on HIV, please visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/>

### **Malaria and Dengue Fever**

According to the most recent findings of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, there is little if any malaria to be found in urban Thailand, and even very little in rural areas, with the exception of the deeply forested border areas touching on Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. The CDC advises that travelers going to Thailand are generally *not at risk for contracting malaria* unless plans specifically call for entering a malarial area. If you plan to travel to malarial areas, please speak with your health care provider about appropriate preventive medication. Additional precautions that are useful for those who will enter such areas include using insect repellent at dawn and dusk, which are the feeding times for the mosquito that carries malaria, wearing long pants and long-sleeve shirts, and sleeping in treated mosquito nets. Even though malaria is not much of a problem, Dengue Fever is more common and is also a mosquito-borne illness. Therefore, mosquito repellent is important. The mosquitoes that transmit dengue viruses are found in and immediately around buildings and bite from dawn, throughout the day, until dusk, thus the risk may be higher in urban areas.

### **Communication**

When making calls, keep in mind time zone differences ([www.timeanddate.com/worldclock](http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock)). To make an international call to the United States, dial the access code for the country from which you are calling plus the United States country code (always “1”) followed by the appropriate U.S. area code and local number. Conversely, to call internationally from the United States, dial “011”, the country code, city access code (if necessary) and the phone number. Country and city codes can be found online: [www.howtocallabroad.com](http://www.howtocallabroad.com). Some of the above steps can vary if you are using a calling card and based on whether you are using a cell phone or land line. Most US cellular service providers now offer international travel programs. Roaming charges are quite expensive without having an international plan, so students wishing to use their US phone should contact their cellular service provider to ensure that they have activated an appropriate plan.

There are a number of internet cafes where you can check email, and Skype is also readily available in most internet cafes. The hotels in Bangkok generally have wifi available, so you can use messaging, Skype, WhatsApp, Google calling, etc. from hotels, although wifi access is significantly more variable in the outlying areas. Make sure to set realistic expectations with family/friends regarding communication with you during your time in more rural areas.

## Student Testimonials

The testimonials below are from past participants; they reflect various students' experiences and are included to provide different perspectives. IAP does not endorse any specific view expressed in this section.

### Pre-Departure Preparations

You should bring laundry detergent- powder is best to carry- so you can wash your clothes in the sink. You will sweat a lot and not have access to a washer/dryer (most likely). Bring as many quick-dry clothes as possible.

Bring a lightweight long sleeve shirt that you can toss in your purse/bag during the day. It will come in handy when you're touring and too hot to wear it for walking around, but need to cover up when going inside a temple.

### PLAN ON SWEATING A LOT ☺

Going to see a travel specialist at your clinic or at UHS is really invaluable. You learn how to be safe so that you can enjoy your time while away, instead of worrying about getting sick.

Pack light, because you will not want to lug a heavy suitcase around for two weeks.

Women - bring skirts and a pair of pants (not jeans), a good pair of sandals for walking, and shirts that cover your shoulders. Men - no shorts, but sandals are ok.

You can bring Baht with you if you want, but there are ATMs all over, including in the Bangkok airport, so an ATM card is all you need.

If you can, do some research on what you most want to see while in Bangkok.

If you are like me, you will worry about having anything expensive with you (like cell phones, laptops, camera equipment, etc.). Leave anything you don't absolutely need at home. You can email your loved ones at internet cafes and use Skype.

I had trouble deciding WHAT CLOTHES to bring, since we were planning so many different activities. Thai dress is much more conservative and more formal than in the US, and it is really important to dress modestly during ALL activities. This got difficult because it was so humid and hot, so I wish I had brought more lightweight, loose clothing to wear. During the time spent at the University in Bangkok, I wore long skirts or dress pants (although it was too hot for pants at times) and loose blouses, covering at least my upper arms. Most women wore heels in the city, but I found that with classes mixed with touring, I was more comfortable in flats. Flip flops were never really formal enough. When we went to the rural training center, the dress was still formal, and I continued wearing my skirts and flats with blouses. During the home-stay, where there was no air conditioning or running water, I wore capris or skirts and t-shirts. For the trip to the national forest, I packed a swimsuit (for the waterfalls!), hiking capris, a thin shirt/tank top (acceptable for the wilderness), SUNGLASSES, and hiking/tennis shoes.

### **Travel and Arrival Information**

It was really important to pack lightly, since we stayed so many different places. Lots of people used standard luggage with wheels, and that made traveling much easier. Others, including myself, used hiking backpacks, which I found was really easy and convenient, although it got really hot at times.

While it takes a while to get there, the people and city itself will knock your socks off. The travel time is completely worthwhile. Try to get as much rest as you can on the trip there so you can take advantage of all your time in Thailand instead of suffering from jet lag!

Traveling with the group is easiest but may be more expensive than planning your own route; also several people chose to stay longer and explore other areas of Thailand and SE Asia. Be prepared for intense heat, humidity, and maybe some rain.

### **Academic Program**

The public health system in Thailand is truly impressive and they are very proud of their system. They want to discuss their perspectives and hear yours. Everyone at Mahidol is so excited about what they do and want to teach you AND learn from you. The lessons you learn will be applicable no matter what your field of work.

Have in your mind a few specific areas of public health (especially related to Thailand) that interest you, so that you have questions you can ask at many different sites. If you have time, research the Thai public health system a little more in depth than what was presented in class.

I very much appreciated how much preparation was done by Mahidol University. The lectures and packed schedule were great and they treated us with great respect.

### **Living Abroad**

Take everything all in and just enjoy being somewhere completely different from home. It's amazing how being taken out of your culture makes you much more aware of how much your culture influences everything about your life. Take that new perspective and try to understand the Thai people and how their culture influences them in endless ways.

The language barrier was a little difficult at times. Learn the most basic phrases and have those down, and then just say them even if you don't feel confident. The host country will respect you so much for trying.

The information presented was very insightful. The people/faculty are so hospitable. I really feel that working in an interdisciplinary setting helps give me an understanding of each role.

I participated in this program because I am interested in doing research in foreign countries later on in my career and I had never been to Asia so I wanted to experience this area of the world. So far, I feel as if I am gaining a good perspective and understanding of the Thai culture.

Some of the most rewarding experiences of my stay were...home stay in a rural village; chance to experience urban and rural Thai culture; inside view into healthcare system; friendliness of our hosts and Thai people....learning about different interdisciplinary approaches to healthcare and prevention. The field visit/family stay was by far the most valuable part of my experience....being in Mahidol, meeting Thai researchers, educators, and the interactions with students and faculty on the program.

Bring a Thai phrasebook, which will be especially useful for the homestay. Attempt to use Thai words - most people are not offended by your ignorance and will want to help you.

Go with the flow, and if someone on the program asks if you want to go somewhere or do something, do it!

Try new things, including food.

It's a little difficult to be a vegetarian in Thailand, especially in the rural areas, so be prepared to eat a lot of rice and steamed veggies. Learn how to say you are a vegetarian, and name the meats you don't eat.

Overall, Thailand felt pretty safe. The people there were friendly and were willing to help if you were in need. However, the traffic there was nowhere close to being safe. Crossing the street was one of my biggest fears while in Thailand.

Regarding cultural differences: Everything was just small, maybe forgetting to take my shoes off. Just make a genuine effort to respect and learn the culture, and apologize when you make mistakes. You will make mistakes, but it is okay - just have humility and try your hardest.