

Student Evaluation Form

A. Student Information

Degree(s) enrolled in at VUW	MDS
Major(s)	Development Studies
Exchange Institution	Chulalongkorn University
VUW Trimester(s) and Year of Exchange	Tri 1 2009

B. Finances

Please provide an estimate on how much you spent on your exchange (in your host country's currency).

Flight/Transportation	\$NZ2300
Visa application	\$NZ100 (2000B), + 2900B for renewal, re-entry
University Related Fees (books, student services, etc.)	17000B field trips 1500B books, photocopying etc
Accommodation	Rental: 42000B (7000 per month) Water: 2400B (400 per month) Electricity: 3000B (charged per unit, 6 months) Internet: 3600B (600 per month)
Food	21500B (approx. 130B per day)
Living costs	Transport: 6000B Insurance: \$NZ750 (6.5 months) Thai lessons: 7000B (40 hours + materials) Cell phone calls etc: 2000B Misc.: 5000B
Trips/Traveling	Within Thailand: 17000 Regional: \$NZ3000

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

General living costs were cheaper, especially once you know where to eat (the uni has very cheap canteens, meals for 20B or \$NZ1). Accommodation can work out just as expensive as NZ if you want air con, fridge etc (advisable in the heat!), and 10000 – 15000B per month if you want a kitchen. However really cheap accommodation is also available – 4000B per month, but very basic.

Text books are very cheap if you get “copy books”, and most courses provide course readings free of charge. There were no additional student levies/fees.

Transport was also cheaper than expected, especially public transport around Bangkok. Long distance buses/trains are also quite cheap, but getting around in places outside Bangkok can be relatively expensive.

By what means did you maintain your finances? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)?

A credit card is great for online flight booking, but not much use for anything else. NZ ATM cards work at most ATM machines which are everywhere in Bangkok, and widespread everywhere else in Thailand (not so much in neighbouring countries though). Some of the Thai banks charge a fee at their end (generally 150B), but others don't (I used the green ATMs which were free). The Chula student ID card also functions as a bank account for Siam Commercial Bank, however fees for international transfers etc were not that clear, and it is generally cheaper and easier just to use your

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NZ ATM card to withdraw cash. Traveller's cheques were useful for regional travel (especially Vietnam and Cambodia where it pays to have USD), but not so much in Thailand. At the beginning I took a mixture of NZD, Thai Baht (7000 – 10000 will be plenty to get you started) and traveller's cheques, as well as credit card and ATM card.

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?

- Plan out a budget in Thai baht and then build in some exchange rate fluctuation when you convert to NZD (for me, it started at 22B=\$NZ1, went down to 17B soon after I arrived, then up to 23B before I left).
- Accommodation is incredibly varied in quality and price – decide if you need a kitchen (much, much cheaper just to eat out than cook). Also check out the costs of electricity, water, internet etc, it can vary a lot (one of my friends had a power bill almost twice the rent!). Beware that aircon really chews electricity – buy a table fan (under 400B) so you don't have to use aircon too much.
- Find accommodation that is accessible via public transport, especially BTS Skytrain or MRT Underground. Get a student pass for these as soon as you can, it will save you a lot of money.
- Eat local food, at the uni or street stalls, as it is much cheaper than Western food (you can eat for three or four days for the price of one Western meal). The uni canteens (each faculty has one) are very cheap and great value, and they will also do takeaways if you feel like eating at home sometimes.
- For travel around Thailand, just go to the appropriate bus/train terminal on the day you want to go and get your ticket, don't buy it through the travel agencies as they tack on a hefty commission.
- If you are planning on any regional travel, take USD cash (although you can also get USD at Cambodian ATMs). Thai baht is useful in Laos.

C. Academics

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

Course Title	Rating (1-5)	Comments
Migration as a Development Issue	3	Has a great field trip! (2008 academic year was to Mae Sot, visiting a refugee camp and migrant worker communities). Very interesting course material too, and one of the lecturers is a former UN population expert so really knows his stuff. 9/10
Politics of Public Policy	4	More like a public policy tools course combined with the geopolitical history of the world since 1950, quite bitsy (2 lecturers) and repetitive. 5/10
Conflict Resolution	3	Interesting, and a really good combination of theoretical background, case studies and practical application of ideas. 7/10

How did you find the teachers at your exchange university?

Mixed bag! There were one or two outstanding ones, a couple of terrible ones, and the rest somewhere in between. Some were very knowledgeable, well prepared for classes and discussions, and prepared to answer questions or carry on discussions after class or via email, and gave great

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feedback on term paper topics/ideas/research. Others showed up to class late, then spent 30 minutes or so talking about the weekend and deciding what the class would be about. One even regularly answered her cellphone for long personal conversations in the middle of the class, chatting away in front of us all. Some lecturers teach seminar/discussion; others give formal lectures. The MAIDS Programme also tries to make use of guest lecturers, and again some were excellent, others not. However, despite some not being great teachers, they were all very friendly and interesting, and extremely well connected. I definitely learnt a lot from them, as well as making great contacts for future study/research etc.

How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria?

Classes are in three hour blocks, which takes some getting used to. The workload is variable. There were few clear guidelines about assessment etc (for one course we were told to "Write a term paper of reasonable length on a suitable topic" with no clarification at all!), and generally no feedback on individual assignments. Grades are just given at the end of the course, not for each assignment, so it can be hard to know how you are doing. However, if you are prepared to go and talk with your lecturer, most are very happy to help out – it is just not automatic.

How did your academic experiences differ from what you expected?

Overall it was better than expected, far more interesting and I did learn a lot, though mostly from fieldtrips or informal discussions with lecturers or guest lecturers outside of class. The workload was more than expected, but also easier.

D. Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Furnished studio apartment. The building owner also provided cleaners once a week, free of charge.

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?

Nice and quiet, plenty of space and flexibility to come and go as I liked, also to have friends over. It can be a bit lonely compared to flatting though! (but I had a lot of trouble finding shared accommodation).

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Studio apartment is a good way to go, but have a good look around for a nice area, and compare prices and services. Ideally you want somewhere close to uni/public transport, and with plenty of food stalls etc nearby, especially if you don't have a kitchen.

E. Support

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How did you find the support with....

- your host university?

Overall pretty good within my programme as it is an international programme, but other areas of the university eg central library, registration office, were less helpful, and it can be really hard to find someone who speaks English. There is no accommodation service, but some programme offices will have a list of places where last year's students stayed – this is a good place to start.

- the lecturers?

Variable, some were very supportive and happy to chat/help out whenever needed, others were less available. The key is to talk with them right from the beginning – the better they know you, the better they can help you if you need it.

- the International Office at the host university?

Good (especially with visa renewals!), buy only one social event. There was no international orientation. Some programmes run their own orientations, although usually only in the semester starting September/October. There is an excellent student handbook, so ask for a copy when you first visit the International Office, it is really helpful!

F. Culture

What were some of the hardest cultural differences you faced while abroad?

- Learning when to “wai” (Thai formal greeting), and how deep to do it.
- The food is very different, and spicy! (But now I really miss it...).
- The politics/government/monarchy are very different to a Western society.
- Communication can be a little tricky – body language doesn't always mean the same thing! 😊

How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

- Learn a bit of Thai, and have a good chat with a Thai person before you go. My Thai teacher was the most helpful person with cultural differences.
- Start eating some Thai food! Especially spicy things.
- Read a bit about the politics/government/monarchy before you go, it is quite complicated and can be pretty confusing. NEVER say anything about the monarchy that could possibly be interpreted as even slightly insulting – they royal family are revered, and saying anything like that could get you in serious trouble.

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Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students?

Foreign students (especially white) are often treated differently, not necessarily worse than other students, but definitely differently. People can be quite hesitant to talk to you. Just be polite, friendly, and smile a lot 😊. Also, if you look foreign, especially if you are female, you are likely to attract some unwanted attention – speaking a bit of Thai definitely helps to combat this!

As with most developing countries, there are local prices and tourist prices – some, such as admission prices to historical sites, are institutionalised. For less formal places, learn to bargain – it is part of the experience and good fun when you get used to it! However, tourist prices are generally not hugely inflated, so be good humoured about it – people still have to make a living.

G. Personal Response

Talk to someone who has just been, and pick their brains as much as possible! Also, ask questions as much as possible 😊 Good luck and have fun!