

Student Evaluation Form

A. Student Information

Degree(s) enrolled in at VUW	BA
Major(s)	International Relations & Development Studies
Exchange Institution	Chulalongkorn University
VUW Trimester(s) and Year of Exchange	Tri 1 2012

B. Finances

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

Food & personal spending	3000
Accommodation	2500
Return Airfare	1500
Local Travel	3300
Books, misc. levies (e.g. student association)	100
Visa	200
Insurance	400
Other (please specify)	1000 charity work/ volunteer internships
	Total = 12000

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

A lot more, didn't consider many factors including the high cost of Air Conditioning which as a foreigner was essential while I was adjusting to the heat, the constant travel costs(Bangkok is a big city, I lived 1 hour away from the university), unexpected circumstances- such as having to move accommodation at short notice. However the cost of living was VERY low, food especially was very cheap as was the travel with the exception on visa fees or airfares (land travel was incredibly cost effective) and I lived in much better conditions than I would've have at home for a fraction of the price! Without additional regional travel an exchange to Chula could be overall very cheap.

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

Credit Card- cost five dollars to withdraw cash from an ATM each time or a 2% charge to spend using a card, this was quite expensive however I made sure to withdraw large sums at a times to make it cost effective (most payment had to be made by cash in Thailand). Despite my trying to set up a bank account in Thailand my inability to speak Thai made banking

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difficult. Another individual however with a better knowledge of banking may have found this easier. I also had an Airpoints card also which worked as a cashflow card which I recommend. I also advise that students have a spare credit card/ cashflow card which they keep apart from their usual wallet as pick pocketing and petty theft is common and it is import to have access to money at all times.

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

Don't underestimate travel costs and living expenses, whilst everything is very cheap hidden costs often occur due to differing cultural practices or situations and they add up. For example most people had to pay a compulsory fee for having their apartment cleaned on a weekly basis as part of their tenancy agreement, also apartment buildings often have maintenance fees to cover things like receptionists and security (most have their own security guards). Washing often has to be done externally however this is very cheap! AC is Very costly but often necessary to sleep in the hot months unless you are comfortable in 40 degrees plus. Water has to bought either at 7/11s or from a Dispenser if your apartment is fortunate to have one. Transport to is a huge part of your expenses, whilst muliti trips on the skytrain or metro are very cost effective often getting to these places requires a taxi or motorbike. In a city of traffic jams you pay for speed! Motorbike taxis are most expensive but fast (around 2-4 dollars for an average trip), buses have no real system or timetable, are difficult to understand and often hot and uncomfortable however they often cost around NZ 30cents. NB, in the heat you WILL take public transport often as walking more than about 20mins is very uncomfortable in the heat and humidity.

My advice- make sure you have a budget for unexpected costs, live for the first month and then re-evaluate your budget realistically once you are settled in and now what your needs are (they may be different to back home). Don't worry about food costs, clothes, entertainment etc. However be aware that luxury items, particularly things from back home or of European origin, make-ups, designer brands, personal hygiene items, imported food will have a big price mark up. Shopping in supermarkets too is not something that is commonly done by locals and the prices are targeted at wealthy Thais, foreigners and expats. IT is much MUCH cheaper to eat on street stall and in food courts (n.b. most accommodation does not have provision for cooking so this will often be necessary). Bartering will be necessary in purchasing anything except food or supermarket/ mall items e.g. stalls, markets, tickets for tours etc. It is important to barter or you add to unrealistic reputation of foreigners having lots of extra money and the more Thai you learn the easier it will be. Speaking Thai, even just saying hello and and smiling is of unbelievable advantage in negotiating price. – Essentially live locally, get amongst the culture and you'll pay local prices, have an amazing experiences and live extremely cheaply.

Were there any extra or unexpected costs which future students should be aware of?

See above. Also I had to move accommodation suddenly and this meant losing my bond and having to pay temporarily for more expensive accommodation. This situation is unlikely however bear in mind it pays to have a spare NZD 1000 for emergences and unforeseen circumstances.

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What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?

Coke 10 baht = 40 cents

Coffee

Instant from a 7/11- 23baht= nearly 1 NZD.

From a Coffee shop (western style e.g. True or Starbucks) 60 – 100 baht = 2.40 – 4 NZD.

C. Visas & Insurance

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?

Do it early as Thai Embassy is very relaxed (as is Thai culture), N.B. Thai people respond very well to relaxed friendly manners and do not at all respond to anger or pressure.

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?

One Cover, Yes they covered all my medical costs and expenses and promptly, they were also very cost effective only 300ish dollars for my 6 months away and were easy to use and contact. N.B. To check what is needed to make claims under different circumstance e.g. when you must report a theft or hospital visit and to whom and what paper work must be presented so as to make sure you meet all criteria when you come to make a claim. (I read this before I left and had no issues upon my return).

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	Language of Instruction	VUW course equivalent (if applicable)	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
Politics and Government of Thailand	English		15	4	Strong economics base, International Political Economy. Most challenging

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					<p>course while on exchange but also the best. Taught by very politically active teachers who tackled an extremely controversial topic and provided exceptional insight. Found this course to be very enjoyable, improve my understanding of Thailand as a whole and has given me knowledge which is so current it surpasses what I have access to at Victoria regarding the same subjects.</p>
<p>Basic Thoughts of Asia</p>	<p>English</p>		<p>15</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>Nature of course meant a large number of teachers were of different nationalities and struggled to communicate clearly at times. However the broad regional background It provided I</p>

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					found very relevant.
Gender and Cultural Representation	English		15	4	Biggest work load, but it was a fourth year paper. Teachers ranged from members of the gay community and feminists to ladyboys and consequently the exposure to themes and insight into cultural differences and South East Asian gender roles was exceptional and simply fascinating.
Cultures of Everyday life	English		15	5	Extremely knowledgeable Australian Lecturer with a determination to push each individual. A perceptive look at Asian culture and everyday normality's contextualized in the theoretical base of contemporary thinkers such as Giddens and

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					Simmels and more traditional ones such as Gramsci (many often referred to in Vic courses). A challenging course more Australasian in teaching methods but very informative. Involved research in the field!

How did you find the teachers at your exchange university?

Mostly very interesting people, culturally they differed in their styles of teaching however I found my learning to be invaluable. Small classes made for much more personalized teacher student relations which I feel have clarified my academic direction and provided me with a great deal of support in a new setting.

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

Teaching style much more group based, interactive work with small class sizes. I found this difficult in the sense that often marks are reflective of a group effort and it took a while to adjust to this more holistic learning approach. However we studied a range of topics I would never have access to at Victoria often with primary academic staff in the field whom we worked closely with.

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How did your academic experiences differ from what you expected?

Methods of testing often wanted you to prove you had retained exactly information read, for example to be able to recall which specific example an author used in describing a specific concept and quote it directly, whereas I found NZ teaching styles comparatively focus much more on the understanding the concept holistically without as much emphasis placed on black or white answers. The classes were long, 3 hours in length always, however quite informal in that students can leave the room as they like and group discussion occupied a strong presence. Small number of students however meant that I received a great deal more personal attention and extension than I would at home.

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?

Get many courses signed off at you home university as course availability is subject to rapid change, on my first day I had to re-pick most of my subjects due to changes so it is easier to have prepared alternatives.

D. Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Solo Apartment....

1. Nonsi Residence
2. Citismart Condos

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

Great if you live somewhere with other students in the same building otherwise can be quite isolated. Facilites good, Gym Pool, nearby food stalls and restaurants, cleaning, security etc. provided.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Nonsi- I had several problems with Nonsi, they had several pest problems which required fumigation and were un-organised and unhelpful in some respects. Many students lived there so it was a good atmosphere. The Facilities were okay, pool was nice but the Gym AC often broke and the equipment was old and largely broken. I think they must mark up electricity and water as the rates were high. The location is located in Klong Toei which is a slum area, you must be careful of stray dogs at night however the locals are lovely if due caution and respect is afforded. Despite its being a little run down it has a great social atmosphere; I fell in love with the community, the local street food and often came back to visit my friends and the locals after I moved out. They are used to dealing with students and you quickly adapt to the way of life. Public transport is a little out of the way however there are many options

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including a free shuttle bus to Uni.

Citismart Condos, beautiful apartments, fantastic facilities, competent and responsive security and maintenance. Very expensive.

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?

Ask people who have been to the city about the area, check how far away public transport, shops etc. are.

F. Culture

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

Bartering and the perceptions of foreigners as wealthy.

How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

Learn some basic Thai asap! Just counting numbers to 100, hello, how are you , how much is this, and importantly how to pronounce the place where you live to taxi drivers and locals. Tone is important.

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

No just strange perceptions! Being so white I was considered special which was odd but then again being foreign means you face a constant battle with locals trying to rip you off until they realise that you live in Bangkok and are in touch with the culture and prices! Also watch your possessions, wear bags which strap across your body and bag snatching, and theft is common and happened to me twice, particular form passing motorbikes. Most important thing is to smile at people, respect elders and don't touch monks.

G. Other opportunities

Did you take part in an internship or any volunteer activities while on exchange? If so, please explain.

Yes. Summary- helped set up a library in Klong Toei slums, Village work in Chang Rai.

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Are there are great clubs or associations etc. you recommend other students get involved with while on exchange at you host uni?

No just take every opportunity to talk to people, cultural events happen a lot and you will often be invited to join. Get involved in Songkran!- 3 day new year water fight celebration.

What are your 'Top 5 Things To Do' at your host university or city/country?

Songkran

1. Get to know the locals (the poor not just the wealthy students)
2. Volunteer in the community
3. Go to the parks and jungles like Phu kradung in Loei or Khao Yai! BEAUTIFUL
4. Go to the Islands Koh Samed etc.
5. Visit Temples, Wat Awrun (temple of Dawn)
6. Do a bicycle tour of Bangkok (Follow me is really good I went twice!)
7. Get a local bus boat up the river and see the whole area by boat for about 2 dollars!

H. Personal Response

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience. Plus, don't forget to submit some photos to the exchange office!!

6 months away, 5 countries, 4 months at Chulalongkorn University Thailand, 3 volunteer projects, 2 elephant rides, 1 whole new fresh perspective on life. Chulalongkorn University of Bangkok Thailand looks like a temple, with Buddhist relief carvings, ponds of water lilies and turtles and always a few monks around campus. One day I even found the uni wrapped up in white string and and a large assortment of monks meditating to rid our campus of ghosts! A beautifully superstitious city with open arms, world renown smiles and the most tantalising mix of extremes. Whislt at university I was constantly brushing shoulders with the biggest names of South East Asias rich and famous; popstars, actors, the 'Hi-So' sons and Daughters of the countries Ruling elite. Beyond the gates however another world was bustling to get in. I walked home through the slum settlements that dotted the railway line and had my heart stolen by their simplicity and kindness! There is no easy way to sum up Bangkok... Lecturers who are ladyboys, chilles that burn and a night life to match! But one big party Bangkok has a secret spiritual side. Ancient civilisation peeks through at every turn and I promise you have never seen such heartbreaking selflessness amongst such need. If you are looking to discover yourself, try getting lost in Bangkok! Take on the heat, It was the best thing that's ever happened to me.

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