

Volunteering in Samoeng, August – October 2012

Location and weather

I was assigned to teach at Samoeng Pittayakhom and it is located in Samoeng district, Chiang Mai. It takes about one hour by car from Chiang Mai and the road is rather windy. I returned to the city on most Fridays and would return to the school on Monday mornings. I was very lucky to be able to get rides from the teachers and am very thankful for that. During the weekdays, I lived in a girls' dormitory which was a 10 minutes' walk from the school. Occasionally in the mornings, students would offer a ride to the school on their motorbikes

if they happened to ride past me and I would gladly hop on. During the rainy season in Samoeng, the days are often hot, accompanied with showers in the late afternoons. The weather in the mornings was very cool and I could even see the mist in the mountains. It was a very refreshing sight for me and the air was indeed very fresh.



Teaching

I was tasked to teach conversational English to the students who were 13 – 18 years old and hence for every lesson, I would encourage the students to speak more through games and conversational situations. The other English teachers were also very helpful and they provided



me with many ideas on how to teach the students. Although most of the students were shy in the beginning, they gradually opened up and were less afraid of making mistakes.

I would have to say that being able to speak Thai was a huge advantage for me as I was able to communicate with the students at a better level. When we were not in class, many of the students enjoyed chatting with me and I took

the chance to correct their grammar too. As my Thai was not very fluent, the students would also correct my errors. I found this two-way exchange very interesting and at the same time I got to know some of them a lot better through our daily conversations.

I also had the chance to help the English teachers prepare students for an English competition which included story-telling, impromptu speech and crossword puzzle. I learnt a lot from this competition as I witnessed the serious attitude that the students had instead of their playful selves and how they would consistently ask me for the pronunciation of certain words. I was very impressed by these few children and they definitely made a lasting impression.



Teachers

All the teachers were very friendly and there was always laughter accompanying our conversations mostly due to the language errors I made. Most of the teachers stayed in the dormitories behind the school and we ate all our meals together. We would eat at the school canteen for breakfast and lunch but for dinner, sometimes we would eat at the shops outside school and sometimes the teachers would cook. Every night, one of them would send me back to my dormitory as it would get dark by 6 pm and I really appreciate their effort.

I visited one of their houses and had the chance to live with a Thai family. Some of the teachers even brought me on a trip to Chiang Rai and we had such an enjoyable time together. Whenever I tried to learn to speak their local dialect, *Kham Mueang*, I would always be laughed at and I was constantly their source of amusement. My Thai has definitely improved by hanging out with them!



Recommendation

If you are going to Samoeng to teach, I would suggest that you bring along insect repellent and also a mosquito net. I never left home without spraying insect repellent as the mosquitoes are absolutely vicious! Torchlight is quite essential as I encountered a few blackouts due to the heavy downpour. If you do go during the rainy season like I did, use a waterproof bag and always carry an umbrella or raincoat with you. There are no shelters between the school buildings and so an umbrella will be of good use to get to where you want when it rains.

Conclusion

If you are thinking of volunteering, my advice is to go for it and it is an experience that should not be missed. It has a different meaning for each individual and for me, it filled up a gap in my life that I had been seeking all this while. I am very glad to have gone for this trip as I have learnt that simple things can also be the truest. The students and teachers have no qualms about giving and I feel that the amount of love I received was more than I could ask for. I am very thankful to Child's Dream Foundation for giving me this opportunity and to Samoeng Pittayakhom for being such a good host. 😊



*Beginnings are scary.
Endings are usually
sad, but it's the middle
that counts the most.*

- *Anonymous*