



# Volunteering Project - Nong Chang, Thailand

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# 1. School

## 1.1. Ban Nong Nga Saeng Community School



Sina and Philippe were assigned to the Ban Nong Nga Saeng Community School, a public school located approximately 30 minutes away by car at the end of Nong Chang. This school caters to students from Grades 1 through 6, with the first grade resembling the Kindergarten level in the Swiss educational system. The students there range from ages 4 to 12, and the school is staffed by a total of 9 teachers, one of whom is responsible for English classes.

A typical morning routine involved being picked up by one of the teachers at around 8:00 am. Upon arrival, we would observe the school's morning rituals, which included the raising of the Thai flags, singing of the hymn, and receiving updates and information from the teacher leading the ceremony. Formal lessons would commence at 9:00 am, with each lesson lasting 60 minutes and no breaks in between. As volunteers, our typical school day consisted of teaching 4 to 5 English lessons, with the distribution varying depending on the day of the week. Given that there is only one English teacher on campus, who began teaching English just two months prior to our arrival, the students had very limited knowledge of writing, reading, and speaking in English. It's worth noting that the students' proficiency gradually improved with age, and while they could manage to express very simple English words, they still lacked proficiency in



writing and reading. Since the last pair of PIECES volunteers visited a few years ago, the students were initially unfamiliar with foreigners and had little exposure to the English language. Given the students' comprehension difficulties with English, it was advisable to approach them slowly and continuously adapt classes and content to their preferences and knowledge levels. During the stay, the volunteers covered a range of topics, including colors, body parts, opposites, self-introduction, and family. We utilized various teaching methods such as interactive games, songs, worksheets, vocabulary activities paired with physical exercises, and traditional frontal teaching. Over time, we witnessed significant progress in the students' language skills, although it was evident that maintaining this progress would require repetition and building upon their newfound knowledge.



For future volunteers, we recommend proactive class preparation to make the most of your time with the students. You can contact local Swiss primary schools or friends for English school books, materials, and games. Given the varying levels of English proficiency among the students, it's advisable to first assess their knowledge, collaborate with the on-site English teacher to coordinate lessons, and then plan the actual teaching sessions using the brought materials. The school provides access to printers for worksheets. It's helpful to bring a laptop

for displaying visuals through tools like PowerPoint. Additionally, downloading Google Translator can greatly facilitate task explanations to the students and communication with other teachers.

Lunch break is scheduled from 12:00 to 13:00, during which we were treated to a variety of delicious local Thai dishes, desserts, and soups every day. It's important to note that the school provides generous portions, so if necessary, you can politely request smaller servings for future reference. The entire staff and students at Ban Nong Nga Saeng Community School are incredibly warm and welcoming.





## 1.2. Wat Nong Yang School



Mara and Peter school was the Wat Nong Yang school. It is located directly in Nong Chang and is a good 10 minutes away from Theow's house. The school has about 70 students from grade 1 to 6 and 11 teachers. The general conditions in the school are very good. It should also be noted that this is the school of the Jan and Oscar Foundation, which sponsors the school and some of the students. It can be said that everything you need is there (printers, pens, paints, sports equipment, etc.). Nevertheless, bring some games etc. with you, as the children will be very happy about it! To get to school, we were picked up every day at around 8am. Classes start at 8.30 a.m. What is special is that there are no breaks between classes (for example, the first class goes from 8.30 a.m. to 9.30 a.m., the second from 9.30 a.m. to 10.30 a.m., etc.), so it is up to the teachers to arrange short breaks for the children and for themselves between classes. Basically we had 3 lessons in the morning and 2 in the afternoon. The lunch break was from 11.30 to 12.30 in the canteen with the other teachers. The food is really delicious and varied. After the last lesson ends at 14:30, there is still time to play with the children, prepare the lessons for the next day or chat with the teachers. It can be said that the older children love to play volleyball and the younger ones like to draw or play memory games. Therefore, always leave some time to play with the children. At around 4 p.m., you will be driven home by one of the other teachers. For the lessons, it is advisable to first get an idea of the knowledge of the

individual classes and then always have a certain amount of repetition from the previous lesson when teaching.

As the Wi-Fi in the school does not always work, it is advisable to get an unlimited data sim card at the beginning of your stay. Then you can always quickly get a hotspot from your mobile phone. There were also monitors in each classroom, but we never used them. We always used our Laptop to show pictures, short presentations or videos.





## 2. Housing – Living with Ms. Theow

The house we stayed in is located near Nong Chang. This locality is situated in the district of Uthai Thani, which is about three and a half hours by car from Bangkok (direction north).

In terms of convenience, there's a 7/11 grocery store just a quick three-minute bike ride away from the house. If you need a wider selection, you can reach a Lotus supermarket within about 10 minutes (by bike).

The house is located in a quiet place in front of a rice field. It is a modern and spacious structure. Outside it has a large veranda where we used to eat breakfast and dinner.



The house has the following rooms: two rooms for the volunteers, a bathroom for the volunteers (with shower, WC and sink), Ms. Theow's room, a living room (with television, sofa and dining table) and a small room used as a pantry. The kitchen is a separate room from the main building. Regarding the two volunteer rooms, both are furnished with two beds. Given that only one of them has air conditioning, all four of us chose to use the room with AC while the other room served as storage for our backpacks.





In addition, the house has Wi-fi, although it wasn't consistently reliable. There were issues when attempting to connect our phones and computers. We therefore reiterate the importance of having a local sim to give yourself a hotspot when it doesn't work.

Our stay was very pleasant, also due to Ms. Theow's hospitality and great helpfulness. Throughout our stay she helped, supported, and took excellent care of us. During our experience we had no difficulties in communicating with Ms. Theow. On some important occasions, we used the Thai language translator to ensure she got the right message. Overall, we did not encounter any language-related issues.

Regarding the food, we enjoyed what was offered by Ms. Theow. If volunteers suffer from intolerances or follow a vegetarian or vegan diet, it is important to indicate your preferences at the beginning of your stay. In our case, two volunteers are vegetarians and always got adequate meals in large portions.

Our experience in Nong Chang as guests of Ms. Theow was very pleasant and we are grateful for the time she gave us.

## 3. Travels

### 3.1. Ayutthaya

During our stay Philippe and Peter went for a short trip to Ayutthaya. The historic city is easy via public mini-van reachable, but also in short distance from Bangkok. With its cultural richness and ancient ruins, it promises a perfect blend of adventure and relaxation.

Our journey began with a local mini-van ride from Uthai Thani, it's really cheap and Theow arranged that somebody drove us to, and also picked us up, from the bus station there. Arriving in Ayutthaya, we settled into a charming hostel. There are plenty of them and we can really recommend checking them out on hostelworld before leaving.

The heart of Ayutthaya is its UNESCO World Heritage Site, a historical park with ancient temples and palaces. We rented a scooter and explored the city by ourselves, which was really easy to do. A must do is visiting the buddha head in the tree roots.

There was also a lot to discover in terms of cuisine. Local markets and street stalls offered irresistible Thai street food and crafts. We indulged in delicious dishes and engaged with locals, while going out to the night market, adding a personal touch to our experience.



Our weekend in Ayutthaya was a captivating journey into Thailand's past. The city's ability to transport us to another era of the ancient Khmer was truly remarkable. Ancient ruins and local delights made a visit to Ayutthaya more than worth.



### 3.2. Erawan National Park

During our stay Mara and Sina went to Erawan National Park. It took us a four-hour drive from Nong Chang to get there.

We spend one whole day exploring the park, especially the famous seven waterfalls. The trail to see all of them took about two hours of walking and is totally worth it. On the other day of our trip, we opted for visiting an Elephant Sanctuary, where we had the opportunity to stroll with the elephants in the jungle and feed them.



Overall, it was an amazing experience, and we highly recommend it!

### 3.3. Chiang Mai & Chiang Rai

During our stay, our entire team embarked on a journey, taking a night train from Nakhon Sawan to Chiang Mai. Chiang Mai is renowned for its vibrant streets, bustling markets, lively nightlife, and its close proximity to numerous awe-inspiring temples. The trip began at the crack of dawn, as we arrived in Chiang Mai at 4 am and immediately embarked on a 5-hour



taxi ride to Chiang Rai. We organized a "hop-off, hop-on" taxi-tour, guiding us through the various temples scattered across the Chiang Rai region. These included the White Temple, Blue Temple, and Black Temple, each with its own unique architectural and cultural significance. These temples are visually stunning and offer insights into the rich history and spirituality of the region.

After this, we made our way back to Chiang Mai as a group. Chiang Mai comes alive at night, offering a plethora of entertainment options for every taste. You can explore vibrant night markets, witness thrilling Muay Thai boxing fights, enjoy live music in bars, and attend various shows.

The next day, the team split up to explore the nearby national parks either by bike or car. These national parks offer waterfalls, opportunities for rock climbing, vast rice fields, and the chance to conquer Thailand's highest peak, tea fields. If timed correctly, you can witness breathtaking sunrises.



In conclusion, we recommend the journey to Chiang Mai. It was an adventure filled with rich cultural experiences, and the exploration of natural sites. For those considering a visit, we encourage you to extend your stay in the captivating city of Chiang Mai to fully immerse yourself in its unique charm, heritage, and vibrant atmosphere. Additionally, the Thai night train experience added an element of humor and adventure to our travels, making it a cherished memory of our remarkable journey.



## 4. Practical suggestions

### 4.1 General

- **SIM Card Purchase:** To save money and stay connected, consider purchasing a local SIM card outside of the airport. You can easily find an AIS (the main telecommunication provider) shop by using Google Maps. This will not only provide you with cost-effective options but also a convenient place to address any SIM-related issues should they arise.
- **Transportation Tips:** In larger cities like Bangkok, Phuket, and Ayutthaya, utilizing ride-sharing apps like Grab or Bolt can be the most economical and convenient way to get around. These services function similarly to Uber in Southeast Asia. However, keep in mind that they may not be available in more remote areas, so plan alternative transportation options accordingly.
- **Carry Cash:** While credit cards are widely accepted in Thailand, it's advisable to carry some cash with you at all times. Especially when venturing into rural areas like Uthai Thani - Nong Chang, you may encounter local shops and vendors that prefer cash payments. Having local currency on hand ensures you can make purchases without any hiccups.
- **Health Precautions:** Health is paramount during your stay. Be aware that tropical diseases, such as dengue fever, can pose a risk. If you feel unwell, do not take it lightly. Seek medical attention promptly. Consider obtaining additional health insurance coverage without a deductible, especially given the rural and basic healthcare infrastructure in certain areas. It's better to be prepared for any unforeseen medical needs.
- **Weather-Appropriate Clothing:** Tailor your clothing choices to suit the current weather conditions in Thailand, whether it's the rainy or summer season. Additionally, opt for clothing that is resilient and can withstand daily wear, perspiration, and the potential challenges of laundering in less-than-ideal facilities. Durable clothing ensures your comfort throughout your stay.
- **Respect Local Customs and Traditions:** Thailand has a rich cultural heritage, and it's important to show respect for local customs and traditions. Familiarize yourself with basic etiquette, such as removing your shoes when entering someone's home or a temple, dressing modestly in sacred places, and refraining from public displays of

affection. Respecting these norms will help you integrate into the community and build positive relationships.

- **Stay Hydrated and Mindful of Food Choices:** Thailand's climate can be hot and humid, so it's crucial to stay well-hydrated throughout the day. Drink bottled or purified water and carry a reusable water bottle with you. Regarding food, while Thai cuisine is delicious and diverse, be cautious when consuming street food and tap water to avoid gastrointestinal issues. Opt for restaurants and vendors with good hygiene practices.
- **Learn Basic Thai Phrases:** While many people in Thailand, especially in urban areas, may speak some English, learning basic Thai phrases can go a long way in facilitating communication and building rapport with locals. Simple greetings, polite phrases, and numbers can help you navigate daily interactions more effectively and show your respect for the local language and culture.

## 4.2 School

- If you bring gifts (really recommended), keep in mind, that Thai people and especially the kids love sweet stuff. However, the kids do not like classical chocolate that much. Also keep the hierarchical order in mind when handing gifts order! (Gifts should always be given to the older ones first. But the principal comes first!)
- You will face a high discrepancy within each class, when it comes to pre-knowledge and receptivity. Some students might even have mental impairments. In these cases, it is important to encourage everyone, but also not to divide the class. Short-term separation of fast learners and slow learners with subsequent joint work can make sense, but must be weighed up with a lot of tact and sensitivity.