

- Paige Kocourek - Class of 2015



Tales of Thailand

As graduation was quickly approaching, I was excitedly searching for a thrilling way to begin life following college. A productive trip to my career advisor at the University of St. Thomas led me to looking into teaching abroad. Traveling is one of my greatest passions, so this seemed like the perfect fit! I had studied abroad twice throughout my college career and was itching for another cultural adventure. Through a bit of research, I decided Thailand was where I desired to embark on this new journey. The application process to teach abroad was a whirlwind, and I soon found myself booking tickets to Bangkok, Thailand. I would be teaching six sixth-graders, seven different courses over the next five months.

In preparation for my teaching escapade, I became TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certified in hopes of furthering my skills to be a prepared and knowledgeable teacher. My degree was in Business Communications, so I saw this as an important opportunity to learn some tools for my new position. This certification was accomplished through an intensive online course done throughout second semester of my senior year.

Arriving in Bangkok was extremely exciting. Practically everything was different! The food, the culture, the weather (it was hotter than sitting in a sauna), the transportation, the language! Then I was tossed right into teaching my sixth-graders. It was an exhilarating feeling beginning to immerse myself in such a drastic way.

Meeting my class was just as exciting as getting to Thailand. They were eager to meet me and very noisy little nuggets. Let me tell you, I learned the art of candy rewards and sticker charts pretty quickly. Along the way I also learned the importance of kindness and positivity in my classroom. The more I emitted these qualities, the more I received them in return and the more motivated my students were to learn. Days I was tired and stressed out were the hardest days to teach because my attitude would directly be reflected in my students' attitude. This was a very important lesson. In addition, two out of my six spoke no English whatsoever. This challenge made me come up with creative ways to teach them while not holding the others back. Creativity was key as a teacher. Almost as important as love and respect.

By the end of my five months teaching, I sat bawling in my classroom after my kids presented me with handmade gifts and letters. They will forever be in my memories and heart, as well as my Facebook messages (they message me like crazy!).

This was an absolutely incredible journey full of a multitude of experiences even beyond teaching; (like running a half-marathon in the mountains of Vietnam!). My next adventure is obtaining my pilot's license and moving back to the Twin Cities for work! I am training for a marathon as well as planning my next fun trip! I feel extremely blessed for the opportunities I've had and ecstatic for my next steps!