

Week 1



After many years of support to different charity projects in Europe, Festival Republic last year started to support projects in Thailand. In an area in south west Thailand along the western coast close to the famous tourist village Khao Lak, we are now supporting three different schools.

School number one is Baan Thahan school and it's located in the middle of the jungle 45 minutes drive from the coast. During 2008 Festival Republic in association with Cradle started to support the school and built them a new canteen and we also bought them new books for the library. Baan Thahan school has 64 students between the ages of 3 yrs to 12 yrs, 5 teachers and one Swedish guy.

School number two, Baan Pakklong school, is, if possible, even deeper in the jungle, the school is 70 years old and was from the start just a little hut but the main building was built 42 years ago and is still in use. At this school there are 101 kids in the same age group from 3 yrs to 12 yrs, 5 teachers and one Swedish guy. In December last year, Festival Republic began the construction of a completely new building with 4 new classrooms. The new building is scheduled to be ready during June 2009.

School number three is called Baan Bangmuang school. This school is located closer to the ocean, just a few minutes by car. The area close to this school was hit badly during the 2004 Tsunami and the amount of students were suddenly doubled just after the accident when other nearby schools were destroyed. Cradle supported the school with 4 new rooms for the young kids (kindergarten) during 2005.

In May 2008, Festival Republic helped out by funding the employment of three school teachers. Baan Bangmuang schools 670 children from 3yrs up to 15 yrs, 37 teachers and one Swedish guy.

In October last year, I was asked by Festival Republic MD Melvin Benn if I would be interested in going to Thailand for 10 weeks and help out with the construction of the new Festival Republic School, (Baan Pakklong building number 2). After a few days of thinking I decided to accept the offer and head to the Thai jungle and work with our projects. How could I refuse such a great offer and fantastic opportunity? As Festival Republic is involved in projects on all three schools mentioned above we decided that I should do a bit of teaching on each school as well as construction work.

Festival Republic is a music company and I play the violin so it was obvious I would teach some music over here but also some sport classes instead of the more expected English classes. The Thais are mad about soccer so I brought some footballs with me as a treat/gift but I'm sure we will have time to try many more sports than that before I head back to London.

Once I arrived in the Khao Lak area I met with Festival Republic and Cradle's local representative, Palita (Noi) and her husband Herbie. Noi has been wonderful and very helpful during my first few days here. She showed me around each school including the building site on Monday and Tuesday and introduced me to all Principals and most of the teachers at the schools as well as the construction crew. Everyone here seems very positive towards Festival Republic and Cradle's involvement which is great to see. The attitude to me as a foreigner and teacher seems great as well despite the obvious language barrier ☺, hopefully it's still intact after a few tunes on my violin... Noi has also arranged all practicalities; car, accommodation, VISA, class schedules and other necessary things.



Thursday 29th January

My first teaching attempt was as a pole-vaulting instructor in Sweden a few years back. However with my current knowledge in spoken Thai, spanning from ordering a pineapple juice to a lemon juice, it was with an increased heart beat I went to my first class on Thursday this week..... 42 kids, two different languages, (English and Thai) and a few instruments no one in the group had ever tried before.....What a great setup, a challenge for everyone involved! So how did it go? It was great fun and I learned a lot, I hope the students did as well. Together we managed to make loads of noise and at certain occasions we all banged the same beat at the same time for a few minutes. Maracas, tambourines, triangles, cow bell, castanets, a few drums and some hand claps is all it takes. I'm sure the jungle animals were hiding deep in their holes this sunny day. Today, the first day, we focused on rhythm exercises only. Most of the kids were doing great and after an initial shyness most of the students opened up and showed more music talent than Ace of Base, Milli Vanilli and Bros combined. The future for Thai Music is bright!

The students in the Baan Thahan school were all lovely and I felt part of the team only after a few minutes. It was a true joy to be around them all during this first day and I couldn't wait to take part in the football match that finished off the day. I was very eager to show the guys how we play football in Sweden..... I realised after a few minutes in bursting sunshine that 50 degrees Celsius is hot; in fact it is very hot and though height, experience and football boots are sometimes useful, it does not always win the game....I felt very old on the pitch today. These 11 year old kids without shoes in school uniforms have great football skills. I am very impressed.



Friday, 30th January.

Today I visited Baan Pakklong school. We got there a bit early to have a look at the construction work we are doing there. Most of the walls are up and the main roof structure too. The builders are working hard under a relentless sun and all of them, both men and women seemed to be in good spirit. I will begin working there Monday next week. The crew does not speak much English but I'm sure it will all work out fine.

The students at Baan Pakklong were extremely curious when we arrived at the school and everyone from the three year olds to the older kids treated us like we had known each other for a long time. Some are of course a bit shy but it seems possible to get a little smile or a grin out from each one if you just try. I try all the time. Teaching in Baan Pakklong went very well. The students were divided into two classes of 20 students plus maybe 10 four year olds that came crawling in through both windows and doors to watch what was going on. Today was probably the first time they heard Swedish violin music in the Thai Jungle. We finished off with some football today as well, bare feet football on concrete.....and I complain about slow internet connection....

Stay tuned for the drums from the jungle, Ola