

Week 5

Living, working and driving in Thailand.

As the weeks here now start to be more and more of the same I thought I'd write a bit about life here in Thailand.

In the area where I'm staying, the west coast is just an hour's drive north of Phuket and there are an incredible amount of Swedish and German tourists. Thailand is apparently the number one tourist destination and there are even Swedish schools and villages here. When you walk on the beach it's easy to think you are somewhere else as the Thai people seem to have disappeared. For the Swedes and Germans, it is probably great to be able to holiday where menus and shop signs are written in their own language but if you go here to meet Thai people, learn a bit about the culture and the language you need to travel further away from the high streets. I have had the opportunity to see a bit of both and if it wasn't for the language problems I'd stay in a small village away from the tourist areas. However, spending time with Thais that speak as little English as I do Thai, it can be a bit heavy for the head and after a few hours of dictionary conversations it can be nice as a break to go and speak or at least listen to some other languages.

The language

This week, after increasing frustration of not being able to say what I want, I have however shifted gear a few notches on my Thai studies and hopefully I will be able to have some proper conversations before I leave. The AC/DC albums in the car have, after a few hours of consideration, been replaced by a Thai course I can listen to while driving and I have the same course in my MP3 player so I can listen while walking, running, eating, sleeping and so on. Five hours of studying a day seem to do the trick ☺ It takes time to get into the Thai language as almost all words are different and the word order is different compared to English as well. And then there are the tones....., in Thai there are five different tones which mean that a word can be pronounced in many different ways and thereby having different meaning. Reading a book and Reading (the festival) might be a good way to describe how it works. It's damn tricky and easy to say something totally wrong even though you think you have said it right.

Driving

As I spend more than ten hours a week driving to and from work I had to get used to the Thai traffic system and it is just as easy and relaxing as driving in England, NOT!!!!

In Thailand loads of dogs run around loose on the streets and in the morning sun the road seems to be a perfect place for a little nap....Great idea. Then you have the motorbikes, one bike per family means that there can be up to 5 people on each bike, all without helmets!!! You also have the food bikes with three wheels, wide as a car but slow as a donkey. You've got the relaxed car drivers at 50mph take an hour to decide if they are turning left, the stressed drivers that drive at 130mph, the 20ton trucks that also drive at 130mph, buses that overtake everyone and then me. Bends in the road are used as short cuts and the opposite lane is used for overtaking. The bigger cars that come towards you in your lane are considerate and flash to tell you, "please move or you will crash" ☺. When you think you finally have everything under control you'll see buffalos cross the street in the middle of the night, rain storms threatening to flood the roads and on top of that.....elephants.....Amazing.

Thai culture

The Thai people seem very proud of their country, they seem to eat constantly and always have some food nearby. The people I have met also want me to try loads of different dishes, some spicier than others but most are really tasty. When we eat at the Pakklong school or on the building site everyone shares the food. They eat rice and then a small piece of every dish on the table. Like tapas almost. I like to try food and have a problem stopping so if it wasn't for my walking sessions on the beach I would be very round. The food is a big part of the Thai culture and so is the King, he is number one, Buddha the second and football seems to be number three. There is a photo of the King in each room and while we in Sweden can joke about the King you cannot do that here. The Swedish King was here last week dressed as a boy scout.....Hmmm.

Next week, week 6.