



## Living like Locals: Our MFS Experience in Thailand

### Before departure

We both applied for MFS because we wanted to go on an adventure and explore a new country and culture. MFS gave us the perfect opportunity to combine that with studies, in a shorter time than exchange studies. To find a possible project, we contacted many organizations by going to a social entrepreneurship event organized by Reach for Change in Stockholm. Although this led to some interesting project ideas and opportunities, we finally picked a project together with a PhD graduate from KTH who now works as a professor at KMUTT.

Apart from the MFS application preparations, we got vaccines and an education visa.

We had a couple of zoom meetings before our departure, during December and January. Together with our contact person we discussed our project and living arrangements. When we left in February, we made sure to have messenger contact to be able to communicate once we arrived in the country.

### Upon arrival

Upon arrival we met with the professor who then had her students show us around the campus. During our trip, we had Bangkok and KMUTT university as a “base” and went on field trips to different farms out in the countryside when we conducted interviews and gathered data. Our first field trip was two days after arrival, and we usually slept in the farmers’ house during our stay.

The university has an international office and a buddy program that arranges welcoming activities for new students, which is a good way to find new friends from across the globe. The people we met had a strong will to make us feel welcomed and at home. Overall, the campus was a great place to study and eat lunch at, a very nice environment with a lot of water and green areas.

### Financials

Thailand is generally much cheaper than Sweden, especially, it seemed, the part of Bangkok we lived in (South-West). A typical lunch would go for around 15-20kr, while a nicer dinner might go for 70kr. However, food was more expensive in the central parts of Bangkok and more touristed parts of the country. In total, the trip (including flights, vaccines and adventures) cost us 40-45k SEK each.

We mostly used cash throughout our trip, but never had any issues finding an ATM.



*The KMUTT campus*

## Accommodation

We got help finding our accommodation through KMUTT University. The foreign exchange office helped us book an apartment in a dormitory close to the university. We had a living room with desks and a sofa, a separate bedroom, and our own bathroom. The apartment did not have any kitchen utilities which mostly wasn't an issue since we bought almost all our food freshly cooked. There was no television either, but the wifi was very good and we had no issues with video calls or streaming.

The building had a common study room, gym, and basketball court that were all in a very good condition. The study room was great when we needed a break from our small apartment.

Since KTH and KMUTT have an old agreement for exchange students we were able to receive a stipend from the exchange office that covered a large part of the rent. In total, with electricity and warm water included, we paid around 8500 baht each month for our apartment. With the stipend included we only had to pay around 3500 baht per month.

## Project

We did our project together with King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) located in Bangkok. Originally, we were going to do a project on benefits with coffee cultivation in the forest, so called shade-grown coffee, but the problem widened when we started doing interviews so we had to change our problem formulation to include a variety of sustainable methods for many different crops.

During our field trips, we lived together with the farmers in their house, and ate food together with them. It was a great experience seeing how they lived and spent their days. We got to join in on their farming activities and helped process different harvests.

We had valuable help from our contact person and her colleagues who helped us get in contact with the farmers we interviewed, discussing our results and always taking their time if we had any questions.



*A farm visit*

## Country

We arrived during "cold season" in February, where the temperature ranged from 26-33 degrees, and we quickly gave up on using long-pants even though it was the informal "dress code" of the university. When we left in April, the country was going into its warm season with temperatures often higher than 34 degrees during the day. The air-quality was quite bad, and something we checked every morning. We used a facemask most days in the city, just like everyone else.

Thai people are in general very kind and generous, and we felt very welcomed being there. The food was great and there was a lot to see and experience. Thanks to our field trips to rural areas, we got to experience real Thai food and cultures. We will definitely visit Thailand again!



*The view from our apartment*



### Leisure and social activities

Bangkok was a wonderful and chaotic city. We lived a bit outside of the city centre, but were able to get into town by bus. There are a lot of great tourist attractions in Bangkok, as well as huge shopping malls and markets. We recommend that you visit a local temple, the grand palace, and some of the huge malls around Siam Square, as well as Chinatown and the Chatuchak weekend market.

The university had a lot of social activities for students, like football, rugby and music. We went to a Muay Thai class, the national sport of Thailand.

During our first weeks we had a hard time getting to know local students, but towards the end of our trip we hung out with other students almost every day. The language barrier was the biggest challenge. People were in general shy speaking English even though they could, but we met some talkative people later on during our stay.



*Certified divers!*



*A dinner with friends*

After three weeks of 30-degree heat we took a weekend trip down to Hua Hin to stay a couple of days at the beach. Our contact person helped us find a public transport bus for us to take for around 50 sek. It was a relaxing stay, even though we had two zoom-seminars to attend.

The following weeks we mostly focused on our thesis and interviews, and in the second to last week we had planned a trip to Koh Tao and Koh Phangan. We booked a diving course for 4 days, which was the best thing we did all trip! It was an amazing experience, and we met a lot of fun people at the diving school. It's something we definitely would recommend if you can spare a couple of days! We can recommend Crystal Dive, Koh Tao.

To sum up, we got to see a lot of Bangkok and Thailand, and mostly the parts that tourists never visit. It was great to both do some typical tourist activities and live life like the locals.

## Sustainability

We mostly travelled by public transportation during our stay. The University had a shuttle bus out to one of their campuses in Ratchaburi, where we conducted our interviews, that we could take, but we sometimes travelled by car when we went together with our contact person. Since we paid for electricity and water, we tried to use the AC as little as possible and mostly took cold showers.

Almost everything we bought would be packaged in plastic or be given in plastic bags, and all drinks were served with straws. We were thankfully able to refill our plastic drinking water bottles in our apartment building. On a positive note, they did have a system to recycle PET-bottles at least at the university and our dorm.

Our project was foremost connected to the sustainable goals of eradicating hunger and poverty, as well as preserving life on land. The farms we studied worked with biodiversity, ecosystem resilience, and community development which is also an important part of our study.



*A typical meal*

## Other recommendations and observations

- Plan a visit to a vaccine clinic in good time before your trip. They can help you plan what types of vaccines you'll be needing, and when to take them.
- Ask locals for tips on how to get to places you want to go. It is much easier than trying to find out what route to take on your own. In addition there is a lot of public transport that you can't google yourself, but that everyone seems to know about. Ask for help!
- Bring an extra debit/credit card. It was nice having an extra card just in case anything happened. You can choose an operator with a better exchange fee than your normal bank, and with lower fees on cash withdrawal from ATMs.
- In our experience we would have been better off not buying a mobile phone subscription directly at the airport. If you have access to wifi most days you should manage on a 30GB/month subscription for a cost of around 700baht. We used the service provider AIS since they have the best coverage of the countryside according to people we talked to.