

Exchange Semester Report: ICO NIDA, BANGKOK, THAILAND September 2016-January 2017

Formalities Before You Go

After you have made your decision, you need to inform the university's International Relations Office. Your contacts should be Christina Liepert (christina.liepert@uibk.ac.at) or Sandra Scherl (sandra.scherl@uibk.ac.at). First documents you need to provide include a motivation letter, CV and academic record.

After being nominated as exchange student from the university of Innsbruck, you need to provide additional documents, either directly to the dean of ICO NIDA, Mr. Piboon Puriveth (puriveth@outlook.com) or again via your contact person at the International Office.

Documents include your bachelor degree, copy of passport, medical certificate and an official English proficiency test score (though I would double-check this, because several of my classmates in Bangkok apparently were not asked to provide such a proof.)

If your documents are complete, you will get official confirmation from ICO NIDA and you can start your course selection. In my case, the choice was free, except from the mandatory Research Methodology Course, postulated by the faculty. Do not forget to get the verification of your course selection from the dean of your studies, in my case Mr. Benedikt Schnurr (Benedikt.Schnurr@uibk.ac.at). The document to fill out is available online.

You can apply for a joint-study scholarship and you will probably get 400€/month. The form is available online as well and you can submit the application at the international relations office in person.

After confirmation of both home and host universities, Visa, flight and accommodation issues should be dealt with.

Most countries are eligible for a 90 days Non-Immigrant Education (ED) Visa. Contact your local authorities for details. ED visas can be extended at the immigration bureau in Bangkok for a fee of 1900 baht. In case of a single entry visa, you can buy re-entry permits at the airport, if you want to visit another country during your stay.

In terms of accommodation, NIDA will provide you with one or two options close to the campus or directly on campus. Prices on campus are super cheap, around 120€ per month. The other option is a 15-20 min bus ride away and priced at 200-220€ per month. Be aware that the NIDA campus is quite far from the city center and not connected to any fast public transport option. I did some research prior to my stay and spoke to some people on exchange the year before, so I chose to stay closer to the city center, at a place called iSanook Residence. Although I paid around 320€, I did not regret my decision. It's a modern place, swimming pool, gym and sun terrace included. The most important thing in Bangkok is living close to an MRT or BTS station because traffic is crazy, especially during rush hours. Several fellow students ended up switching apartments during their stay in order to be closer connected to the city center.

Studies

It is advisable to do your course registration prior to your stay. Ms. Somjitt (somjitt_t@hotmail.com) will send you the selection and you can register for the ones that interest you. I had to pick the proposed research course and opted for two additional ones: Virtual Organization Management and Communication and Negotiations across cultures. While the former one was very recommendable, the latter one was only partly interesting and not really challenging. Most of the courses are available on weekends, so if you choose your preferences wisely you can have the whole week off. The education in general, at least the management majors, should be very manageable with a European study background and an English master's program. You will be part of multicultural classes and generally European students have higher standards in terms of language and presentation skills compared to Thai and Chinese students. The numerous group works and meetings can be challenging at times because of cultural differences but it makes them interesting and fun as well.

Do not forget to register for a research methodology course in Innsbruck. You will get a master thesis and a coordinator just like all the other students and you will need to hand in a 10-page proposal at the end of the semester. Try and check progresses from students back home from time to time (I didn't) and do not leave it too late (I did).

Practical advice

First of all, do not underestimate the size of Bangkok city. If it appears close on Google Maps, it might still be well out of walking distance and depending on traffic, quite a long taxi ride as well. Try to get to know transportation methods such as MRT (metro) and BTS (skytrain) as soon as possible and avoid taxi or tuk tuk rides during rush hours if possible.

Get a local sim card as soon as you arrive, several monthly data only packages are available. I chose Dtac as operator at around 8-9€ for 4GB monthly mobile data and their 4G network worked everywhere in Thailand.

Bring a visa card or two to get money in Thailand. ATMs exist like sand on the beach. Note that you pay a commission fee every time you withdraw cash, irrespective of the amount.

Weather is always hot in Bangkok and Thailand in general. A jacket/sweater or two to wear inside the freezing cold classrooms, shopping malls or transportation vehicles is easily enough. If you arrive in late summer for the autumn trimester, be prepared for high temperatures, very high humidity and rainy season until November.

Prices are cheap compared to European standards, especially local food prices. Meals cost less than 2€ if you don't go to fancy and/or western restaurants. Shopping freaks will find happiness at one of the numerous night/weekend markets, but be prepared to bargain.

Always ask for taximeter when taking a taxi. During day time this is more or less an automatic thing but at night time and high-profile spots, taxi drivers are less willing to do so. Tuk Tuk's are a fun way to get around but more expensive...about double the taxi prize at least is standard. For shorter distances, scooter taxis are a useful method to beat the traffic.

If you love travelling, your university schedule will allow you to do so. Thailand has a lot more to offer than its capital and there are cheap ways to escape the big city life in Thailand and nearby countries.

Conclusion

It was certainly a wonderful time in many ways: the people you meet, the culturally diverse groups, the different way of life. If you go to the cosmopolitan city of Bangkok from scenic little Innsbruck, the cultural shock could barely be more extreme. I wanted to experience that and I did not regret it. Be open-minded, make new friends from all around the world and gain some real life experience. The education might not always entirely challenge you but the creativity and leadership skills you need during projects with different group members make up for that.

Any additional advice on sightseeing and travel suggestions, I will leave to the likes of tripadvisor and co...

For any other issue I am glad to help and answer questions.

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EXCHANGE SEMESTER REPORT
ICO NIDA, BANGKOK, THAILAND
SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2015

GENERAL INFORMATION

Procedures

Before going to Thailand you have to organize a lot. Pier-Paolo Pasqualoni (Pier-Paolo.Pasqualoni@uibk.ac.at) is responsible for outgoing students to NIDA and can give you useful information. You have to send him the application, including motivation letter and CV; an English proficiency certificate is not necessary if you attend an English Program such as the Master in Strategic Management. Talk to the your faculty staff for an agreement of the courses you will be attending and receive the related document (important!). In my case it was Karin Teichmann (Karin.Teichmann@uibk.ac.at) and, except for a mandatory course (Research Methodology), the choice of the others was completely free; still, it is obviously advised to pick courses with a certain correspondence with those offered in you Master.

You will also have to communicate with ICO NIDA's Dean, Mr. Piboon Puriveth (puriveth@outlook.com); he will request to fill in several documents and provide a copy of your passport and visa. Be mindful, some countries (e.g. Germany, Slovakia) have agreements with the Thai government to provide a student visa for a whole year and with multiple re-entry permits; others (such as in my case, Italy) provide it only for 60 days with only one entry. In this case, you will have to go to the immigration office (<https://goo.gl/maps/muzGEhh2gtK2>, building B), to renew it or to get the re-entry permit; go there very early in the morning to avoid waiting in line the whole day. Moreover, every 90 days you also have to go to the immigration office to report that you are still in Thailand; however, such bothersome task can be avoided simply going out and back into the country, as the stamp on the passport will renew the 90 days period.

Other two people you will come in contact with are Miss Mei (cutestmei@hotmail.com) the PR manager (she will also come get you at the airport for free) and Ms. Somjitt (somjitt_t@hotmail.com) for course registration. A great selling point of NIDA is that most of the courses are offered both during the weekdays and on the weekend (with some exceptions); this means that, according to your preferences, you can either choose more frequent but shorter lectures during the week or long sessions on the weekend (in the latter case, be prepared to have class from 9am to 8pm on some Saturdays and Sundays). It is advised to complete and send all the documents beforehand. In alternative, they can be handed in on the welcoming day. There, you will also receive your student account: proceed for the registration as soon as possible to use the NIDA wifi. A friendly advice: write down all the passwords and accounts you will have to create, as NIDA IT system is messed up and you will have several logins to remember. Make sure that in the documents you receive on your first day there is the ticket for paying fees (around 150€ for exchange students); you can make the payment in cash at the bank at NIDA's campus. Finally, you will not receive your Student ID right away, but after several months; although it is not a problem, you will not be able to exploit student discounts in several places (e.g. at the movies).

Additional advices

Ask for a scholarship in Innsbruck. Going outside Europe, it is almost guaranteed that you will get 400€/month. For four months. That nets you an additional budget of 1600€. Not bad at all.

Get a sim card as soon as possible. You can get it right at the airport. Personally, I used dtac, but other telecom companies are also fine. Prices are more or less 5-7€ for 2GB or 10-12€ for 4.5GB of 4G mobile traffic; moreover, Facebook traffic was free for 3 months. Although there are wifi hotspots all over Bangkok, you need an account to use them; I never bothered with it, mobile traffic was plenty enough.

Common is to use Line rather than WhatsApp. Download it and set up a Line ID, so you can share your contact very easily while you avoid remembering and giving away your phone number.

Always bargain the price. Tuk-tuks are fun, but expensive compared to taxis. I cannot suggest to take moto-taxi. Boats are cheap but slow. Taxi are the way, but always ask for taximeter.

Do not talk about the royal family. Point. Better safe than sorry.

Go to a tailor. Around 100€ for a good quality, tailored three-pieces suit, one or two shirts and a tie? It's a no brainer.

When I asked the Dean about university dress code, he said "just dress nice and neat; no shorts nor flip flops". In reality, no one cares, so do not worry about it and just use whatever you are comfortable in.

If you plan attend weekend classes, I do not advise staying at NIDA's dormitory. Although it is VERY cheap (around 100€/month), the campus is quite far from the center and not connected to the MRT (although there is a pier close by to catch a boat). It is much better to find an accommodation in the center, so that you can do whatever activities you want much more easily. If you cannot find an apartment to share, I recommend iSanook Residence (<https://goo.gl/maps/KojMajDx6RD2>) for around 300€/month. Awesome place (swimming pool, Jacuzzi, gym, kitchen, rooftop, laundry, restaurant, café, convenience store), good staff, a lot of international people, both tourists and long-term residents. Do not bother with cooking: just behind the corner there are some excellent local restaurants for 45 THB a meal. If you do not like Thai food be prepared to spend much more.

Although they are friendly, staff at ICO NIDA office is not so proficient as you might expect. Be prepared to be patient and possibly get frustrated if you ever need to ask them anything.

IMPORTANT information for master students going abroad on the 3rd semester: In October you will have to choose you Master Thesis topic. You also have to write a Master Thesis Proposal (around 10-pages), exactly as your colleagues back at home. Start early. It was absolutely not clear what else we had to do, and we received information only on mid-December, so we had to rush to respect the deadline. If possible, in the Research methodology course pick the same topic as your thesis. Moreover, if you need to register to a course on uibk it is better to contact the professor to remind him/her that you are abroad, so that you are not assigned any task and your "absence" from class is not counted.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I have been abroad many, many times. However, it was my first time outside Europe. Simply, it has been the best time of my life. You can do everything you want, for cheap. Although that was not my priority, Bangkok's position is perfect for travelling both inside Thailand and to nearby countries. I think it is not necessary to explain the beauty of these countries from a touristic point of view. Bangkok is also beautiful; as they say, it is a city of extremes. And that is what makes it special. I will not say anything more about this: be open-minded, go there and experience it. I know I will go there again.

Regarding university, in general it is easier than Innsbruck's standards (at least, management classes, I do not know about finance and others). I attended three courses: Research methodology (mandatory), Virtual Organization Management and Business Innovation. While I highly recommend VOM, I was disappointed from BI. Teaching methods vary widely in each class, since professors come from several different countries. You usually have to do both individual and group works. This allows you to experience work in a multicultural team. Most of the students are Thai and there are several Chinese people. Most of the exchange students are German and Slovakian, but other nationalities are present as well. In my experience, you will probably have a better preparation and a more direct way of expressing ideas than Asian people; because of this, the team is likely to consider you the leader. It is implied that you will have a higher workload, but it is a valuable occasion to improve your leadership skills too.

The campus is very nice and the facilities as well (although, to be honest, I did not visit all of them). The library is wonderful and they are proud of it. If you need any resource you can find it there, and you can also connect to it almost anywhere via VPN (it does not work under some wifi connections). Personally, connecting to the SOWI library via VPN was enough for me, but it might be different for you. Finally, the canteen has just been renovated: it is nice, but the food is quite terrible.

To wrap things up, is it worth it? From a purely academic point of view, probably not. You can probably learn more academic concepts attending classes in Innsbruck. However, as an occasion to grow in several other areas, improve soft skills and make invaluable first-hand experiences, it is totally worth it. Finally, if your intention is also to go on a travel-frenzy, it is definitely the place for you.

I am available to provide any information and detail in private (English and Italian, my German is very limited). Contact information:

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München, den 10. Februar 2016

Erfahrungsbericht

Standort: Bangkok, Thailand
Universität: International College of National Institute of Development Administration (ICO NIDA)
Zeitraum: September 2015 – Januar 2016 (WS 2015/2016)

Allgemein

Meine Erwartungen an das Auslandssemester in Bangkok wurden gänzlich erfüllt. Ich würde jedem empfehlen diesen Schritt zu gehen. Man hat mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit nur einmal im Leben die Möglichkeit ein solch breitgefächertes Repertoire an Erfahrungen zu sammeln. Jeder sollte diese Erfahrungen für sich selber machen. Daher möchte ich auch im Folgenden lediglich einige Empfehlungen aussprechen, welche auf meinen Erfahrungen basieren.

Vorbereitungsphase

Ich habe mit der administrativen Vorbereitung mit Beginn des Sommersemesters 2015 im März begonnen. Dieser Vorlauf war auch notwendig, da sowohl von Seiten der heimischen als auch der ausländischen Universität einige bürokratische Hürden genommen werden mussten. So war es nicht selten, dass man mehrere Wochen auf eine Antwort der thailändischen Universität hat warten müssen bis. Hier ist auf jeden Fall zu empfehlen die nötige Geduld mitzubringen und sich frühzeitig über jegliche formellen Abläufe zu informieren.

Da an der ICO NIDA die Anwesenheit vorgeschrieben ist, sollte man mit der Buchung des Flugs solange warten bis man die finalen Zeitpläne der gewählten Semesterkurse vorliegen hat. Das kann sich unter Umständen verzögern, sodass man für den Flug ein höheres Budget einplanen sollte. Generell empfiehlt es sich, sich etwa eine Woche vor Beginn des Semesters einzufinden, sodass man sich an Klima und Zeitumstellung anpassen kann. Sowohl das Klima als auch die Zeitumstellung können unter Umständen besonders in geblockten Kursen über zwölf Stunden zur Herausforderung werden. Plant man während seines Aufenthalts durch Südostasien zu reisen, sollte man ein Visum beantragen, welches multiple Ein- und Ausreisen nach und von Thailand ermöglicht. Andernfalls fallen Gebühren für jede weitere Einreise an.

Ankunft

Möchte man unangenehme Erfahrungen vermeiden, sollte man bei Ankunft in Bangkok einige Dinge beachten. Trotz des tropischen Klimas ist man besonders anfangs sehr anfällig gegen Erkältungen, da der ständige Wechsel zwischen feuchter Außentemperatur (35°C) und temperierter Raumtemperatur (18°C) in öffentlichen Verkehrsmitteln, Taxis und Gebäuden das europäische Immunsystem besonders in Anbetracht der hygienischen Bedingungen an seine Grenzen bringt. Eine vitaminreiche Nahrung und ein Sweatshirt im Rucksack können hier Wunder bewirken. Isst man gerne scharf sollte man besonders anfangs Elektrolyte und notfalls Medikamente zur Verfügung haben. Als Europäer gewöhnt man sich am besten über einen längeren Zeitraum iterativ an die Schärfedefinition der thailändischen Küche – welche nichtsdestotrotz viele tolle Geschmackserlebnisse bereithält. Des Weiteren sollte man sich schnell mit dem öffentlichen Verkehrsnetz in Bangkok bekannt machen, da Taxifahren besonders anfangs den Geldbeutel, und auf Dauer das Nervengerüst belasten kann. Ist man jedoch entweder dem Thailändischen oder der Zeichensprache mächtig und verfügt über Google Maps, so kommt man mit dem Taxi in Bangkok sehr schnell und billig außerhalb der Rushhour voran. Bei Rushhour geht man lieber zu Fuß oder bleibt wo man ist.

Betreuung während des Semesters

Während des Semesters in Bangkok ist man mehr oder weniger auf sich selbst gestellt. Man sollte daher nicht auf den Mund gefallen sein, und sich sowohl mit der heimischen als auch ausländischen Universität stets über etwaige Anforderungen und Deadlines austauschen. Besonders für Studenten, die ein Semester vor Beginn ihrer Masterarbeit ins Ausland gehen, ist es essentiell im ständigen Informationsaustausch mit heimischen Kommilitonen und etwaigen Kontaktpersonen zu stehen. Andernfalls erwarten einen unangenehme Überraschungen am Ende des Semesters. Eine detaillierte vorherige Absprache mit den zuständigen Personen der heimischen Universität sollte dieses Problem jedoch in der Regel in Zaum halten können.

Studieren am International College of National Institute of Development Administration

Die Anforderungen an Studierende in Thailand sind im Gegensatz zu manch anderer europäischer Universität als angenehm einzuschätzen. Nichtsdestotrotz sollte man Klausuren, Seminararbeiten und Abschlusspräsentationen nicht unterschätzen. Hat man die Möglichkeit gemeinsam mit asiatischen Kommilitonen an Projekten zu arbeiten, sollte man diese Chance unbedingt wahrnehmen und zu schätzen wissen. Die Erfahrungen, welche man im interkulturellen Kollektiv macht, sind sowohl aus persönlicher als auch professioneller Sicht sehr wertvoll für den weiteren Weg.

Bangkok

Bangkok bietet eine Vielzahl verschiedener Eindrücke und Erlebnisse, die seines Gleichen suchen. Angefangen bei der kulturellen und sozialen Vielschichtigkeit über die Essenskultur bis hin zur Europäisierung - Bangkok bietet alles, was man sich als Europäer im asiatischen Ausland erwartet. Unter anderem aber auch eine hohe Luftverschmutzung. Sollte man hiergegen anfällig sein, bekommt man an jeder Ecke einen Atemschutz zu kaufen. Dieser ist besonders wertvoll, sobald man sich mit dem Roller(-taxi) durch die Rushhour kämpfen muss oder mit dem Tuk Tuk unterwegs ist. Das Rollertaxi ist neben dem Wasserweg das schnellste Fortbewegungsmittel um in Bangkok von A nach B zu kommen, da das Streckennetz der öffentlichen Verkehrsmittel lediglich den inneren Stadtkern abdeckt. Die sagenumwobenen Tuk Tuks sind ein zweischneidiges Schwert. Auf der einen Seite macht es Unmengen an Spaß sich auf eine vollkommen neue Art und Weise vorzubewegen, auf der anderen Seite muss man sich vor Betrügern in Acht nehmen. Diese sind besonders unter Tuk Tuk Fahrern weit verbreitet. Es gilt daher die Strecke zunächst mit dem Taxi abzufahren um anhand des Taximeters den Preis in etwa abschätzen zu können. Gerade in den Nachtstunden verlangen Tuk Tuk Fahrer oft mehr als das fünffache. Mit dem doppelten Preis eines Taxis fährt man am Ende gut. Von unrealistischen Spezialangeboten oder Rundfahrten zu Spottpreisen sollte man unbedingt die Finger lassen. Diese führen überall hin, aber nicht dorthin, wo man hin möchte.

Kultur und Sprache

Bevor man nach Thailand kommt sollte man sich vorweg mit der thailändischen Kultur und dem Buddhismus als essentiellen Teil dieser Kultur auseinandersetzen. Diese unterscheidet sich erheblich von der unseren. So ist es besonders ungedulden und impulsiven Personen zu empfehlen sich zurückzunehmen, da man aus Sicht der thailändischen Kultur sonst sehr schnell sein Gesicht verliert. Tritt man hingegen den Thailändern freundlich gegenüber kann man erwarten, dass einem alles gegeben wird was man möchte. Besonders in Bangkok sind die Einheimischen sehr aufgeschlossen und freundlich gegenüber Europäern und freuen sich über jedes Wort in deren Sprache, denn Englisch sprechen nur die Wenigsten. Dies macht es mitunter nicht immer leicht, dem Taxifahrer den Weg zu beschreiben, Essen zu bestellen oder sein Handy aufzuladen. Wie anfangs erwähnt schaffen hier Google Maps, Zeichensprache und ein paar Wörter in Thai Abhilfe.

Wohnen und soziale Kontakte

Im Hinblick auf die Unterkunft zählen natürlich in erster Linie die persönlichen Präferenzen und das vorhandene Budget. Die Wahl des Stadtteils ist zum einem abhängig vom Standort der jeweiligen Universität und der Anzahl an Vorlesungstagen. Sollte man lediglich am Wochenende Vorlesungen haben, empfiehlt sich eine Unterkunft in inneren Stadtkern. So spart man sich Zeit und Stress wenn man unter Tags und abends etwas unternehmen möchte, denn der äußere Stadtkern bietet nur wenig Unterhaltung. Möchte man ein Studentenwohnheim vermeiden, empfiehlt sich im Hinblick auf die Art der Unterkunft ein Hotel, das sowohl für Shortterm- als auch Long-Term Gäste ausgelegt ist. Dies ist meiner Erfahrung nach der beste Weg um schnell soziale Kontakte zu knüpfen, da sich hier neben Touristen auch sehr viele andere Studenten aufhalten. Denn Kontakt mit thailändischen Kommilitonen sollte man auf alle Fälle suchen und initiieren, da Thais gegenüber Europäern mitunter sehr schüchtern sind. Hat man erst einmal Anschluss gefunden, lernt man die Kultur und Stadt am besten in großen interkulturellen Gruppen kennen. Gemeinsame Ausflüge erleichtern nicht nur die Kommunikation, erklären einem Hintergründe zu kulturellen Eigenheiten verschiedener Nationen, sondern bereiten einem vor allem Unmengen an Spaß.