

GPA Overseas: Chiang Mai, Thailand - See Through Children's Eyes

Akira Watanabe
February 18, 2024



2.13.2024

As the day finally arrived, which GPA would split off into 3 cities, we woke up the earliest we have so far and prepared for our long drive. It was a bit sad having to split off but we were excited to explore and serve more parts of Thailand. Our particular group was headed to Chiang Mai, which is in northern Thailand, not too far from the Myanmar border. 7 of us, plus a few of the Chiang Mai members hopped into the van and started our 10 hour drive from Bangkok to Chiang Mai. Although long, the drive did not feel like 10 hours due to the occasional rest stops. At these rest stops we could already feel the abundance of love from the Chiang Mai members as they bought us some delicious Thai snacks, but this was only the beginning. As the drive neared its end and as we pulled up to the Chiang Mai center, we were surprised with all the Chiang Mai members at the front with gifts and a big welcome. After we settled in we had something that seems normal for us, but was very special to the Chiang Mai members - pizza! After the delicious Thai style pizza, we attended their Tuesday evening service, where we were able to not only receive their song and dance, but we were able to give back through a special dance that we prepared. Although we had arrived only a few hours ago we already felt an abundance of love from the Chiang Mai members.





02.14.2024

We woke up bright and early this morning and we were surprised to an early 6 a.m. frisbee game to start our day. Despite it being very early for us we were still able to enjoy playing with the local members. The main focus of the day was witnessing. It was our second time witnessing in Thailand, but it is still a pretty new thing for us so we headed out feeling a bit nervous but we had nothing to worry about due to how warm and friendly Thai people are. You may be wondering how we witness in a foreign country. We go to local college campuses in groups of three or four mixed with a few GPA and Thai members. Since many people don't speak much English and since we can't speak their language we have to speak through the universal language - love. Through our love for the people of Thailand we can move their hearts, even through a dense language barrier. After witnessing, we headed back to the center and prepared to end our day shopping at the night market. Here you can buy many souvenirs and clothes for a very cheap price. For example, you can get traditional Thai elephant pants for only 100 baht, which is a little less than \$3.



02.15.24

We started our day at 5:30 to watch the blessing ceremony that was going on in Korea. The members prepared a beautiful offering table for us to enjoy! After watching the blessing ceremony we prepared for our trip tomorrow to a high school. We went over the schedule and we prepared some games to play with the students. After lunch we got treated at a beautiful jungle themed cafe. Time and time again we are

showered with the love of the Thai members. We were able to listen to P Nut, the center leader, share her heart and how happy she is to receive us, the first foreign missionaries at the Chiang Mai center. After we finished our drinks and Thai snacks, we went back to the center for dinner and we ended the day practicing our games for tomorrow with the Thai members. We felt so happy to be able to give back to the Thai members. Although these were simple games, they had so much fun.



02.16.2024

The day finally arrived to leave to the school. We all woke up early at 5:30. Since the school is located far away in the mountains, we had to leave really early. On the drive we were able to see elephants being transported on the back of a truck. It was our first time seeing elephants in Thailand so we were all so excited when we finally got to see them. Not only that but we were treated to a nice cafe by the Thai members where we were able to try binsu, a Thai dessert. It is basically shaved ice in ice cream consistency. It was sooo delicious! We are so grateful to the Thai members who continue to pour out their naturally giving heart. As GPA, we came to Thailand with the purpose of serving the community, which is less fortunate than we are, but their hearts are so giving that both sides are giving and receiving.



As we pulled into the school yard, there was a feeling of peacefulness. It's maybe what a modern American would call an old fashioned or traditional type of school but it reminded me of what it was like when True Mother went to school. We were able to introduce ourselves to the 40 or so students and

played simple ice breaker games. Although we were foreigners, and possibly the first Americans they've seen, the high school aged students were so accepting and their hearts were so open to receive us. This part of Thai culture is so amazing to us Americans. We are often so wrapped up in ourselves and as a result, are often judgmental towards others. It is so refreshing to be part of this kind of pure environment where everyone is showering each other with love, even though we may be strangers. After our icebreakers we headed to another school where we would stay the night. As the days go by our GPA team gets to interact and know the Chiang Mai community more and more, and every day we get to experience more of each of their personalities. Although the language barrier may be thick, our love for each other as people, God's children, flows through the barrier as if nothing were there. No matter what may be blocking you, nothing is powerful enough to stop the power of love.



02.17.2024

Today we woke up with a beautiful sunrise over the mountains as we started our first full day at the school. This school is 6 hours away from our center in Chiang Mai. It's surrounded by nature and is rural. We left to the school at 8:30 and started off the day with games and dances. Something we noticed while being in Thailand is that the people love to sing and dance. Every time we had a break we spent a lot of time dancing. Then we had some lectures and activities.



The lectures throughout the day were about the value of ourselves, the value of family, and the value of

sexual purity. We also had some deep activities where students were able to share their hearts and create stronger bonds amongst each other. It was beautiful to see the students open their hearts to us. Some of them found the lectures very moving and were even moved to tears. One thing that surprised us was the openness and kindness of the students. Compared to American high schoolers, they seem so pure and happy. It feels so refreshing to not have to worry about the selfish environment in American high school. It's always about what you're wearing, how you look, and what others think about you, but here life is so simple.



Although students do have phones and social media, the culture is much more accepting and open. After our program for the day the students treated us as we were celebrities as they took countless photos with us. Our day ended with dinner and playing Uno with the Chiang Mai members. It is amazing getting to know the members more and more each day. Each day is amazing in how much more we bond with the people of Thailand!

