



Ella
from
Palgrave
to
Thailand

“ สวัสดี (*Sa-wa-dee*)”

Hello, and greetings from Thailand! My name is Ella, and I'm the Rotary Youth Exchange Student from Palgrave, Canada to Phanatnikhom, Thailand.

I arrived in Thailand on August fifth, after almost a day of travelling. Meeting my host mom for the first time was super exciting, and I'll always remember it. I spent my first night in Bangkok, and went sightseeing with my mom's coworkers. It was really incredible to be there on the first day of my exchange, and I would love to go back. I've been back a few times, and I love Bangkok so much. It's very busy, but it has so much to offer.

Almost right away I started school. Thai school is very different from Canadian school. For example, whenever you see a teacher in the hall, you must *wai* to them and say hello. Classes start by everyone standing up and greeting the teacher, and classes end by saying goodbye. If you ask a teacher for help, you must sit on the floor, as to not be taller than them, as it's a sign of disrespect.

At my school, there's an English program which I was placed into. A lot of my school friends speak English almost fluently, which makes school a lot easier for me. They speak to me in English, then repeat in Thai to help me learn. I've been taking Thai lessons at school, as well as learning from friends and my host family. My Thai is coming along quite well, but it isn't very good just yet, but in a few months I should be able to have basic conversations!

At school, I've been taking culture classes as well as learning Japanese. I am learning how to do a Thai dance, coffee painting, Thai self defence, and Thai music. Thai dance is quite fun, even though I don't dance at all back in Canada. I am

performing with my class in December. Coffee painting is exactly like regular painting, except you use instant coffee! It's something I've never seen before, but it's really fun to do. Getting the shades right is kind of hard, but I really enjoy this class. I take the self defence with a class younger than me, and I really like it there. Everyone helps me, and I now know how to defend myself from people with knives and how to get out of being held. And finally, Thai music. I have been learning several different instruments, with the one I'm focusing on being a *saw*. It's like the double bass (which I play back home), but it's only about a foot tall, and it sits on your knee. I'm getting quite good at it, and I really enjoy playing it!

My host family is really amazing. I have my host mom, two host brothers, and two host sisters, one of which is off to university, and the other is currently in America on exchange. My host mom always helps me with my Thai and offers to take me wherever I want. I love my host mom a lot!

The food here is really good! My first day of school, I ate something really spicy and got sick, so I didn't eat anything spicy for around a month after that. But I started eating spicy foods again and I discovered my favourite Thai food (so far). It's called *som tum*, and it has several different variations. My favourite is *som tum Thai*, which is a green papaya salad with dried shrimp and peanuts. It's very good and very spicy.

Just a few weeks ago, I met the other exchange students. We all spent a week at RYLA (Rotary Youth Leadership Awards), and it was an amazing week. I got to know a lot of the other exchange students, and we all learnt a lot about each other. I became close with a lot of them. One of the most amazing things I've ever done happened at RYLA. One night, we decided to go swimming and we found out the water had bioluminescent plankton in it. Swimming at night with water that glowed when it moved and looking up at the clearest night sky I've ever seen is something I will remember forever.

The first three months of my exchange have been difficult. But I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I haven't been homesick yet, and that's because I've been throwing myself into my exchange wholeheartedly. I love Thailand and what it has to offer me. Though it has only been three months, I'm a changed person. This exchange has helped me grow so much, it's helped me learn more about myself.

Thank you so much, Rotary, for everything you've given me. Without the amazing Rotarians here and back home, I wouldn't be where I am now. This experience is something I'll remember forever, and I highly recommend this program..

ขอขอบคุณ (Kob-kun),

Ella | สีน้าเงิน (Tor-Fa)