



**Liam**

**from**

**Bolton**

**to**

**Thailand**

## *“Almost Killed a Monk”*

Hello again from Trat, Thailand. It’s already been another three months, and apart from almost killing a monk (more on that later) they have been absolutely incredible.

The highlight of the past three months was the North trip in December. We visited four cities in the North, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Pai and Mae Hong Song. We spent two days just outside of Chiang Mai at a homestay in the mountains for Christmas, there wasn’t much to do in the mountains besides walk around and see the sights but it was really nice for all of the exchange students to be all together on Christmas. Being away from home for Christmas was something I was a little worried about, but being with all the other exchange students in my district made it a lot easier. We had a party on Christmas night and we organized a Secret Santa so everyone got a gift on Christmas. We also spent one night in the city of Chiang Mai which was probably the best night of the trip. We visited the Wat Phra That Doi Su Thep temple (the really famous one with the steps and the dragons and also the place where I almost killed a monk). My friend and I decided to race up the steps which sounded like an amazing idea at the time, but I tripped while running and almost ran right into a monk.

We were only in Chiang Rai for one day and we didn’t really see the city but what was around the city was a lot more interesting. There was the Doi Tung Royal Villa, which is where the queen mother would stay when she visited the north of Thailand. It was incredibly beautiful and had a lot of really interesting little details, like the ceiling of the main hall had holes to mimic the stars of the queen mother’s favourite constellations. We got to see where they grow tea, they reminded me of vineyards from the way they looked, which I guess is exactly what they are; vineyards for tea. We got to sample all of the different teas they grow there, I don’t really like tea that much but I guess it was good tea? (What makes tea good?).

Pai was a really fun place because they had a massive night market, and my friends and I found a Mexican restaurant, which may not sound like that big of a deal but after not having a burrito for six months it was pretty amazing to have one. During the day in Pai we went to an

Elephant park where we got to see an elephant show and we had the opportunity to ride the elephants, although most of us chose not to. There was also white-water rafting in Pai, but because the water was really low we were able to just chill in the boat and let the current take us down the river. Even though it was short the trip was incredible and I can't wait for the next trip in March.

After the trip my family took me to Bangkok for New Year, but I was completely exhausted after the trip and I feel asleep before the New Year's celebrations started.. After Bangkok we went to Nakhon Ratchasima to visit one of my friends who was an exchange student last year in Canada.

I truly couldn't have asked for a better host family. They are always willing to help me with whatever I need (usually Thai).They have done what only the best host families do, and that is, they treat me like part of the family instead of treating me like a guest. Not only that but they offered to host me for my whole exchange so I don't have to go through the process of changing families multiple times.

One thing I have to come to notice about Thai people in general is just how laid back they are about everything. I have never seen someone (other than a teacher getting mad at students) ever yell or get angry. I once flooded my bathroom by breaking the shower hose, and besides teasing me about it for a few days my host family didn't care. They just gave me the typical Thai response when I was apologizing, which is "mai ben rai" which means "it's ok, no worries".

My Thai has improved quite a lot in the last three months. I have reached a point where I can follow a conversation and understand what they are talking about, but I don't really have the ability to speak with someone for more than a few sentences which is incredibly frustrating. It's funny sometimes when people think I don't know what they're talking about (which is usually me) and then seeing the look on their face when I laugh at what they said or speak to them in Thai.

My school is pretty lax about my classes. Instead of having my own personal schedule at school I spend most of my time at school going to classes with my friends (or whichever kids see me in the halls and want me to go with them). Which at the start I was a little hesitant about because I didn't really have many Thai friends, but I really enjoy it now because, in exchange for French lessons, they teach me Thai which has really helped my Thai a lot. I also have a few classes like Thai dance, cooking that I do on my own. I still do my "teaching" at the primary school, but sadly not as often, I usually just play games with them and every once in awhile I will try my best to read them a book in Thai, which they find hilarious.

My last day of school is next week, which may sound odd but, the Thai school year is different from Canada. School starts in May and ends in February with a two week break between semesters in October. I will most likely go to school when it starts again but it would only be for about two weeks before I come home.

I have just reached my six month point (February seventh), and looking back, it's kind of incredible how much I've changed in six short months since I left Canada. It was almost a year ago when I found out I was going to Thailand and while I was not really certain that Thailand was where I wanted to go, I now can't think of anywhere I would rather be. Now I have only a few short months before I return home and so much I still want to do.

*Liam*