



# Liam

from

Bolton

to

Thailand

*“Hello สวัสดีครับ, (Sa wa dee krap)”*

My name is Liam, I am from Bolton, and I am staying in Trat, Thailand. I have been here about three months now and I have loved every minute of it!

I arrived in Bangkok on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August after about 20 hours of flying and almost boarding a plane to Manila. My host family was waiting for me with a banner that said “Your welcome Liam”, which I assume means “Welcome to Thailand”, and is probably my favourite case of mistranslation that I have seen. We went straight from Bangkok to Trat that day; I spent some time learning basic Thai sentences with my host sister.

I started school about a week after I arrived, I spent the first week mainly trying to adjust to my new home and learn as much Thai as possible from my host sister before she left on exchange to America. The first thing I did was introduce myself to the entire school of about people, which would have been terrifying if I had to do it in English but, doing it in Thai made it easier somehow even though I could only speak about five sentences. Everyone is so nice, and even to this day I have people saying “Hi” to me in the halls at school.

My host family is amazing. They are so kind, helpful and patient with me when I butcher their language. When I have free time at school I usually go with my host brother and his class. They taught me to play Takaraw, which is like a soccer-volleyball hybrid. It’s played with a small ball about the size of a softball and about as hard, and a volleyball net. The ball can only be moved by kicking or head-butting the ball, and the professional players do these awesome flips when they kick the ball. I am not really good, but it is a lot of fun. They also

play another game with the Takaraw ball, which is a form of keep up except if you let the ball drop you sit in the middle and after there have been four passes the ball is kicked at the people in the middle.

My classes for the most part at school are all one-on-one with teachers for subjects like Thai, Math and History. I do other classes like dance and sports with a full class. I find it interesting that there is so much respect for teachers but not really for school. It is not uncommon for my friends and I to arrive 15-20 minutes late to their class and they apologize profusely to the teacher, but other than that they really don't get in trouble. I also play softball/baseball in school, which I had never played before I arrived, but I really enjoy it. I also do Muay Thai outside of school with my host brother. Muay Thai is so much fun, it is everything I love about sports and it is a great way to relieve stress.

My Thai is something I am really proud of, Thai is so different from English or any other language really. The alphabet consists of 44 character which are constantans, and 22 characters which are the vowels. So on top of a whole new alphabet to learn which is almost twice the size of the English alphabet, there are also five tones. At least Thai is phonetic so it is read how it is written which is nice. I have a Thai tutor outside of school who taught me the alphabet, so I am able to read Thai (although I don't really understand what it is I am reading) pretty well. I love the challenge of a completely new language, because I when I am bored at school I just study Thai and my friends are always willing to help me.

I also get to "teach" an elementary school once a week. Usually I just read a story and play some games with them. The kids find it hilarious when I bring in a book in Thai and try my best to read, they are probably the best Thai teachers I have!

One of the cool things about being an exchange student in Thailand is that all the inbounds are given a Thai name. Usually by our host family or a Thai exchange student. My Thai name is ปุห์, pronounced puh-pah, and it translates to mountain. My host sister came up with it because, as she says, "you have a big body" which I thought has hilarious.

The food is absolutely incredible! Although I don't think they share the opinion of less is more. The Thais love their spicy food and there have been a few times when food that doesn't look spicy, is. I find that I am getting used to spicy foods and I really enjoy noodles with Dom Yum soup, which is a spicy broth that is usually in a stew with seafood or some other type of meat. Pad Thai is my go to when I don't really know what to order, and authentic pad Thai so much better than any pad Thai I have ever had in Canada.

About half an hour away from Trat is the ocean, and right off the coast is an archipelago, the biggest island is Koh Chang. I have been to Koh Chang twice since I arrived. Once with my host brother and his uncle, and we stayed at a homestay right on the ocean. We got to tour around some of the nearby island and go snorkeling at a one of the reefs. Being the genius I am, I forgot my bathing suit and camera! I still ended up going swimming, just in my shorts.

The second time I was on Koh Chang for a flower class with another exchange student who lives on the island. The class was interesting and I realized my potential as a floweriest. The class only lasted two days so I got to spend the next few days exploring the island. On my last day I got to do something incredible! My host mothers nephew (my host cousin?), took me to an elephant park. We first had an elephant ride through the jungle which was so cool. Afterwards we fed and washed the elephants to thank them for the ride.

I just returned from the first of the trips this rotary district offers to exchange students. I, and 26 other exchange students, climbed Phu Kradeung mountain. It was an absolutely incredible experience, the first day we spent at a hotel near the mountain just getting to know each other as this was the first time all the exchange students in the district were together. We climbed the mountain on the second day, which one of the hardest things I have ever done, but I thought it was awesome! Having other exchange students to talk to while I climbed really helped distract me from how much my legs were not enjoying the climb. The third day was probably my favourite, we woke up at 4am to see the sunrise from a nearby cliff and then we got lost trying to find a waterfall. I don't think we ever actually found the waterfall we were supposed to go to but it was still a lot of fun. We had a 20 kilometre walk the next day, the highlight of which was seeing the sunset from one of the cliffs, which was just as incredible as seeing the sunrise. Then sadly the trip came to an end, and we had to hike back down the mountain, which was definitely easier than going up.

My first three months have been amazing this far, and I can't wait to see what the next 7 have in store for me! All I have left to say is a big thank you to everyone, both Canadian and Thai, who have worked so hard to make my exchange an amazing one. There is no way I can ever thank you enough.

ขอบคุณครับ (kob khun krab)

*Liam* (ภูฟ้า)