

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center – School of Medicine
International Rotation in Chiang Mai, Thailand
April 2012
Peter Uông, MSIV

I. Foreword

I put together this document in hopes that it can be updated by future students and perhaps be made into a useful handbook/point of reference for students opting to do an away rotation in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

II. Intro

If you are thinking about doing a rotation in Thailand, no need to think twice. Great learning experience, tropical medicine in a resource-poor environment, amazing people, a beautiful city, and an opportunity of a lifetime.

III. Chiang Mai University Faculty of Medicine

In Chiang Mai, you will complete your rotation at Suan Dok Hospital, the major public hospital for the region, under the umbrella of Chiang Mai University Faculty of Medicine. In Thailand, students enter medical school directly from high school. Medical school is a total of 6 years – 3 years of didactics followed by 3 clinical years. MS6 are called “externs,” and the students here seem to be given slightly more autonomy than in the US. After graduation, all medical students complete the same one year of general Internship, followed by their chosen residency.

IV. Medical Rotation

- Most of the Thai physicians and medical students surprisingly speak English, even if limited. A lot of their medical language is in English, and I suspect that it is partially due to the scarcity of updated medical literature in Thai.
- As I am sure each service is different, I can only speak for my rotation, which was Inpatient Pediatrics.

Typical day:

- In the morning, I attend morning case presentations by the residents. Aside from the history and physical, the PowerPoint slides are mostly in English, but the verbal presentation is in Thai.
- After morning conference, we attend rounds with one of the 3 medical teams on the wards and their respective attending. I am assigned to a certain team depending on the day of the week. Usually, the attendings will have a resident present the case in English, followed by questions and discussions. Some attending are pretty awesome teachers and would have us write down our list of differential diagnoses, etc, followed by a helpful discussion. On the wards, you will see a variety of interesting cases from sepsis and short gut syndrome status-post surgery for duodenal atresia to end-stage liver failure in an infant status-post surgery for biliary atresia to cancer patients. The kids can be pretty sick here, and the ICU has enough space only for the extremely sick.
- After lunch, I go to the afternoon lecture for medical students. Again, slides are mostly in English, but verbal discussions are in Thai. I was surprised to find that I was able to follow many topics quite well with my Harriet Lane handbook for Pediatrics.
- After lecture, I either follow residents to admit new patients, help the medical students with labs, or go do independent study.
 - o Note: Before coming to Thailand, I had heard that the medical students and residents run the labs. I was hoping to be able to learn how to run CBCs, electrolytes, and other basic labwork, but alas, most labwork is done by the hospital laboratory. However, the medical students are expected to plate and

gram-stain the blood/urine/sputum samples before sending to lab. I got to do some of that. Bacterial growth and exact identification of pathogens, however, are left to the central hospital lab.

- Other opportunities:
 - o PICU:
 - o Outpatient:

V. Professional dress:

- a. Men – a short sleeve white buttoned shirt with a dress pants and your white coat. No ties needed, as least in Pediatrics. If you're not too tall or big, I suggest trying to buy some shirts in Thailand because the fabric is lighter, which helps you stay cooler and drier, and the shirts are fairly inexpensive (\$4-6 each at the outdoor night market for students on the north side of Huay Kaew Road, across from Chiang Mai University or at the NW corner of Huay Kaew Rd and Nimmanhammen Rd).
- b. Women – I think a short sleeve blouse/shirt and conservative skirt would be good. And your white coat.
- c. Note: The white coats in Thailand are mostly short-sleeved, which is great for keeping you cooler and picking up less germs. Most medical students wear long-coats while externs, interns, residents, and doctors all wear short coats, which often replace their inside shirt/blouse altogether.

VI. Housing

- a. Option 1 – medical student dorm.
 - i. If you think of this as a camping experience, you'll be ok. Advantage? It's free.
 - ii. Bed is decent and desk, wardrobes, and room are quite sufficient. However, no air-conditioning or WiFi. The dorm personnel lent me an electric fan, which was a lifesaver. Shared refrigerator in the hall, where you can store lifesaving cold beverages.
 - iii. Bathrooms – If you're used to outhouses, then you'll fit right in. Expect communal restrooms with flushable squat toilets and strong water sprays helpful especially for explosive you-know-what. (I do hear that the female dorms and some of the male dorms have Western sitting toilets, aka what we used in the States.)
 - iv. Laundry – 20 baht for a small load in the washing machines. Hang-dry your clothes.
 - v. Convenient store downstairs for students. Has snacks, beverages, and simple toiletries, detergent, etc. for good prices.
- b. Option 2 – recommended for most sane US students
 - i. You can get an apartment or a hotel.
 - ii. Apartment: some of the Thai medical students stay at apartments for pretty cheap. ~5400 bahts/month (\$180). From what I hear, these are pretty much like dorms too, but you get your own bathroom, air-conditioning, and wifi. I couldn't find an available room since April is the start of the new academic year for Thai students. The apartments I found are across from Suan Dok hospital, south of Suthep Road. You may need to seek the help of a fellow Thai student to interpret for you.
 - iii. Hotel: your best bet is probably a hotel. (\$450-600 for the month)
 1. 450-600 baht/night will get you a decent hotel. Make sure you ask about air-conditioning, wifi, free breakfast, and laundry machines or services.
 2. You can get shared hostels with AC/wifi for about 200-300 baht, but since you'll be sharing a room and bunk beds with travelers, I don't recommend this option since you don't want to be watching/locking up your things every day.

3. Note: In my opinion, it's best to stay near the hospital. But if you feel inclined, you can stay near the east side of the city moat by Ta Phae gate. It's only a 20 minute bike ride to the hospital. You have to cross some busy streets, but that area has a lot of tourists so there are a lot of hotels. Businesses there are also more English friendly with a lot of nearby restaurants and travel agencies.

VII. Transportation

- i. I recommend renting or buying a bicycle. You can rent one for 50-60 baht/day (1500-1800 baht for 30 days). Alternatively, you can buy a bicycle for about 2000-2500 baht. You can probably sell the bike or give it to a good friend when you leave. Hotels near tourist areas (i.e. Ta Phae gate) are likely to rent bikes. However, you can also google for bike shops in Chiang Mai. I got my bike at Cacti Bike rental in the Northwest corner of the city square (tel 09-757-9150).
 1. Note: If possible, you might want to ask about head and tail lights for your bike.
- ii. Taxis
 1. Red taxi trucks: 50-60 baht one-way. These are like pseudo-buses, picking up passengers on a route determined by the driver. Convenient only if the taxi is going in the direction you're headed. Otherwise, you'll have to flag down another red taxi.
 2. Tuk-tuk: 100-150 baht one way. These are like rickshaws modernized and built into a motorbike.
 3. Rickshaws: say what? I haven't seen these at all.
- iii. Walking – good for nearby shops, etc. healthy, but slow if you want to visit the city.

VIII. Sightseeing

Chiang Mai is a beautiful scenic city set against the backdrop of Doi Suthep Mountain. Compared to Bangkok, Chiang Mai is an older, more relaxing town with a good mix of new businesses. Chiang Mai is well-known as a good base for plenty of trekking opportunities. The city also feels very safe, and I never had any trouble.

The central part of Chiang Mai is an old city square surrounded by a large moat. The east gate Ta Phae is where most tourists flock. Further east outside of the city square is the Ping River. Newer buildings and businesses are located outside of the square. Suan Dok hospital is west of the city square. Further west is the trendy Nimman area, where you'll see some tourists, expats, and college students from nearby Chiang Mai University. Further west of the university is the zoo, located at the base of Doi Suthep Mountain.

Activities you might want to check out:

- All the amazing temples in and around the city.
- Night markets
 - Night markets for students – very trendy and cheap. Targeted for students so not much haggling needed here. Both located on the north side of Huay Kaew Rd, one across from Chiang Mai University and the other on the NW corner of Huay Kaew Rd and Nimmanhammen Rd.
 - Sunday night market on Ratchadamnoen Rd (huge market directly in the center of the city square. Starts from Ta Phae gate and goes all the way to Wat Phra Sing temple.)
 - Saturday night market on Wua Lai Rd (south of the city square)
 - Night Bazaar near the Ping River – opens every day.
- Trekking – involves hiking, waterfall, over-night stay with hill tribes, elephant ride, and bamboo or whitewater rafting.

- Cooking course where you can make all your favorite Thai dishes. I learned how to make Green and Red curries, Thai eggrolls, Tom Yum Goong soup, Pad See Eew, and Mango sticky rice. Half-day, full-day, and evening courses are available.
- Thai New Year / Songkran Water Festival – happens in mid-April. I was super lucky I happened to choose my rotation in April. This holiday is crazy fun, wet, and wild. The whole city soaks each other in water.
- Lantern Festival – forgot the name. People float lanterns into the rivers and into the sky! Occurs in late October to November. I must come back to Chiang Mai one day to see this.
- Doi Suthep and its temple – great view. You can get a red taxi from within the city square (~100 baht one way) or from Chiang Mai University/Zoo (40 baht one way).
- Doi Inthanon – highest point in Thailand
- Chiang Mai Zoo/Aquarium
- Tiger Kingdom
- And much more...

IX. Useful tips

a. Money

- i. Thai uses the Baht. Exchange rate is approximately 30 bahts to 1 USD. ATMs are everywhere.
- ii. Don't buy the bahts in US airports; you'll get ripped off. For example, I purchased 26 bahts for each US dollar at the DFW airport, not to mention fees. The airport in Bangkok has tons of currency exchange counters, offering 30-31 bahts for each USD.
- iii. In case you go backpacking/sightseeing, I recommend the waist passport pouch. It's flat and can be tucked inside your pants. \$5-10 on Amazon.com.

b. Guidebooks

- i. I used Lonely Planet Southeast Asia on a Shoe String (highly recommend) and Eyewitness Travel Thailand (informative tidbits on famous places, excellent for most of Thailand, but has a very small section on Chiang Mai).
- ii. Nancy Chandler's Map of Chiang Mai. Good map with lots of insider info, though a bit overwhelming at first. 250-300 baht.

c. Useful list of things to bring in general: