

kyrabusch

Khon Kaen, Thailand

KYRA'S MAJOR(S): environmental and social justice (IMP—individualized major program) and political science

YEAR/TERM ABROAD: fall 2002

REASON YOU CHOSE THIS PROGRAM: The focus on the social and environmental problems caused by development in that area worked well with my major. The program involved experiential learning—we chose our curriculum as well as an independent project. The program was well-rounded and culturally-integrated.



At the request of a friend, who wanted to ride elephants on her birthday, Kyra Busch finds herself at an “Elephant Camp” in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The places Busch visited were not only unique; the program itself allowed the students to choose a curriculum for the semester and to decide how objectives would be met.

FAVORITE CLASSES: The independent project was my favorite part, which involved living and working in a landfill community and working on an alternative agricultural project.

DESCRIBE THE HOUSING SITUATION: We had a 10-day orientation at a resort, and then we lived in an apartment (more like a dorm) with a Thai roommate, and we also had homestays. The girls on the floor were fantastic. It was the best way to learn Thai, and to meet and know Thai friends and families.

BEST MEMORY: We celebrated Diwali (“festival of light”) for an Indian girl in our group. We took over a restaurant, which was in a hut and celebrated with her. Also, spending the night in a self-sustaining Buddhist community. They don’t wear shoes, and we hiked up a mountain and crossed a waterfall with rocks, all without shoes.

GREATEST CHALLENGE: Learning how to spend seven days a week, 24 hours a day with the same group of people, and balancing your needs with the needs of the group. Everything was based on consensus decision-making, including choosing the curriculum.

WHAT I WISH I KNEW BEFORE I LEFT: I wish I had known more about the nature of the program. This program is not recommended for all people. If you have trouble working in groups, the program is not for you. There are physical challenges as well. You do not sleep much or have a lot of free time on the weekends.

“I gained an enhanced view of the world. I was forced to look at American problems from an international perspective. *My values have been both powerfully reinforced and enhanced.*”

ADVICE TO FUTURE STUDY ABROAD PARTICIPANTS: The number one thing is to make sure you talk to someone who has done this program. It’s so important because you’re not going to find an explanation on paper. You need to be ready for anything, but don’t hesitate to take control and make the program your own.