

Thailand, the land of smiles

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Thailand is quite literally the land of smiles. I will always remember the warm, friendly faces of Thai people and the beauty of their serene country. The temples sparkled in gold just as the sun coated the tropical beaches. The hustle of Bangkok radiated through the city, just as the smell of street food grabbed the attention of people passing by.

I never imagined what a great experience travelling alone would be. After two weeks of travelling with Camp Thailand, I decided to venture off by myself. It was the most confidence boosting adventure and I learned to rely on myself more than ever. Not just in terms of planning and organisation, but also in terms of learning to enjoy my time in solitude. I had never felt so comfortable in my own company. After fighting off the jet lag, I began my trip with visiting the Grand Palace, which dazzled in the Bangkok heat. I was impressed with the golden structures and I marvelled at the intricate details of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, within which Buddhist worship was occurring. I felt lucky to experience the way monks

worship Buddha and the peaceful atmosphere in the temple. Khao San Road bustled with tourists and locals selling an interesting array of delicacies such as insects and crocodile. I had to accept the challenge to savour a scrumptious scorpion.

Another highlight of my trip was visiting the Wildlife Friends Foundation where I got the opportunity to bathe and feed rescued elephants who were previously abused and exploited. A tour around the centre involved seeing rescued gibbons, macaques, lorises, bears and other wild animals. This visit educated me about the importance of fighting against animal cruelty by spreading awareness about the maltreatment of animals. If you wish to find out more about the work of the organisation, please visit www.wfft.org.

In Kanchanaburi, I visited the bridge over the River Kwai, the location of the Death Railway. The bridge's construction came at the expense of the lives of thousands of prisoners of war. I remember taking the



Figure 1. Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

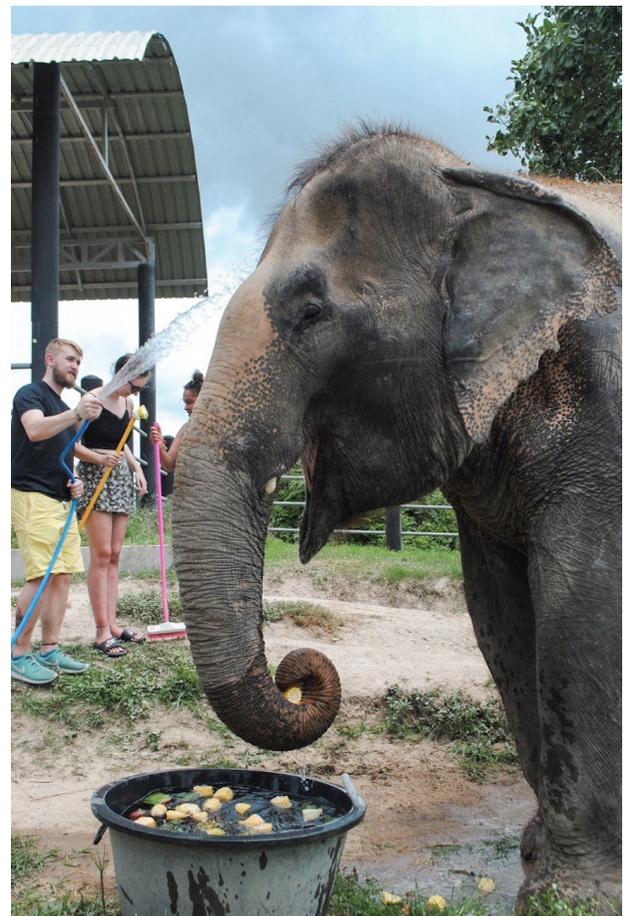


Figure 2. Rescue elephant at the Wildlife Friends Foundation.



Figure 3. Detail of a plant growing in an old train at the Death Railway.

photo of a plant growing out of a crack in an old train; it made me appreciate the perseverance of nature and the ways in which it adapts to survive.

Following a journey on Thailand’s overnight train I arrived in Chiang Mai where I visited the umbrella making centre and Sankampaeng hot springs, where I was mesmerised by many butterflies surrounding a group of pink flowers. I managed to capture one of these butterflies before it flew onto another flower in a hasty fashion. My next stop was Phuket and the Phi Phi islands where I concluded my trip basking on the pristine beaches.

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This experience helped me to transition into the second year of my studies and gain a new found confidence to academic work. Travelling has taught me transferable skills which I can use at university and in work. Of course, I am still apprehensive about exams and assignments however, this apprehension does not rule over me anymore. If you are considering taking a trip by yourself one summer, no matter the scale, I advise you to go and learn a little bit more about yourself! ■



Figure 4. Butterfly at the Sankampaeng hot springs.



Figure 5. Huay Pla Kang Temple in Chiang Rai.