

Sent: Friday, October 29, 2010 10:48 PM

Subject: October Update

Hello Mr Fisher and the rest of the Daybreak Rotary Club.

I have had a very busy month, and have done quite a few things. We had our first big Rotary trip happen from October 10th till October 15th, and it was quite fun. I got to know my fellow Exchange students much better, and learn a lot about the Thai Culture.

My trip started with me catching a bus to Phuket, (not a very long bus ride, only 4 hours), and then being picked up by the Phuket Rotary Club. We had a short briefing about the Phuket Vegetarian festival at the Bang NIA Shrine, and we also got to wander around the shrine and take in some of those sights.

On October 11th, we headed out on a "canoe" trip. We all thought that we would be paddling, but we didn't. We got to sit in a boat and have other people paddle for us. It was still quite fun. We went to a variety of different islands, and took in some of the sights. We went through a cave, and got to see some of the rock formations that were in the cave. It was hard to take pictures, because it was dark, but I managed to get some pictures in. At one of the other islands we went to, we came across two men fishing, and they showed us their catches. They had crabs and then something that is closely related to the horseshoe crab. It is kind of ugly, and looks like it belongs in the prehistoric times. I'm not sure what it is called, so I can't give you the name. Our next stop was at James Bond Island. Apparently a scene from one of the James Bond movies was filmed here, so we got to go and check it out. I didn't know that it was part of the movie, but some of the other people around me did, and were pretty excited. We did some swimming around here, but headed back to Phuket for the evening around 6:00.

On the 12th, we headed down to Ratchada Pier because we were heading off on a trip to Phi Phi Island. The water was a little choppy, and a few of us got nautious on the way over, and decided to skip out on the snorkling opportunity. I didn't want to miss out on that, so I went snorkling around with three of the other exchange students. The snorkling was pretty good, the water was a bit murkey, but you could still see some of the fish. There was a decent amount of variety, and we enjoyed it a lot. We were supposed to go on a tour of the other island, but due to the water's condition (really choppy) they cancelled it so that we don't get sea sick. The trip back to Phuket was rough, and I ended up getting seasick. Not all that fun, but it didn't make the day any less enjoyable.

The 13th was one of my favorite days. We got to watch the procession of the Vegetarian Festival. It was definately unique...and sometimes disturbing. The festival is hard to explain, but they believe that they can get powers from the gods, and then do a variety of different things. One of the main things that we saw was body mutilation. I don't know how else to describe it. The majority of the people participating in the procession had things pushed through their mouth-a variety of things ranging from knives, guns, plants, and I even saw a man with a beach umbrella pushed through his cheeks. It was all pretty interesting to see, but it was also quite

gross. The procession was interesting to watch though. Our group was able to hand out drinks to the people in the procession, so that was quite fun. There were groups of men carrying chairs, and they had firecrackers thrown at them. That part was extremely loud, but really fun to watch. I felt bad for the guys carrying the chairs, because they were constantly having firecrackers thrown at them, and having them explode. But they didn't seem to mind, and it was a form of strength (or so I was told). Our next stop was to a spa. The Tarn Tara Spa. This was extremely enjoyable, and I was able to relax. We started out our spa experience by sitting in a sauna for 15 minutes. The steam had some sort of herb infused with it, which made us sweat a lot more. Then we had 15 minutes in a jacuzzi before heading off for an hour of Thai Massage. I got a hard massage, and it was quite relaxing. We then headed off to the Big Buddha (a huge statue of the Buddha) but it was misty so it was hard to see. I bought a piece of marble, and signed my name to it. Eventually they will carve it into a bigger piece, and put it on the Buddha. We drove by the famous Karon Beach and Patong Beach. Due to the fact it was pouring rain, we didn't get to go out and explore it, but from what we could see, it was pretty beautiful, even in the rain. Our last stop of the evening was at Phuket FantaSea. It was a dinner show that showed some of the different aspects of Thai life and history. It included Thai dance, Thai boxing, and then some elephant shows. Overall it was pretty good, but most of us were really tired by the time we headed back to the hotel.

October 14th: We headed off to Nakornsrihammarat Province. We got to go river rafting, which didn't have much rapids, but some of the smaller boats flipped a lot, and we learned that a few of our exchangers are definately not outdoors people. The rafting was quite fun, and we got to see more scenary. It was about a five hour bus ride, so we were all quite tired, and didn't do much. We spent the evening talking and getting to know each other better, learning new card games, and card tricks. It was quite fun.

October 15th: We got up early so that we could see the sunrise over the mountains and watch the mist creep over the mountains as well. It was quite breathtaking. The mist looked like a river as it slowly wound its way through the valleys, and over the hills. We headed back to the hotel for breakfast and a quick zipline. The zipline wasn't anything really special, but it was fun. We got a badge out of it, so that was pretty cool. Our next stop was at a cave, where we would go and explore. That was quite fun, we got to crawl, climb, swim, and just about everything else. We sat and watched bats, and admired a waterfall that was within the cave. Our last stop of the day before we headed back to our host clubs was a hike up to a waterfall. We had to rub some sort of liquid on us because of the leeches. A few of the girls didn't go, but the majority of us went. We ended up sprinting for a good stretch because the leeches had found two of the people, and we needed to get to a clearing, so that they could get the leeches off. I was lucky and didn't get any leeches.

Other than that, that was pretty much our first trip as a group, other than Orientation. I don't know if you really wanted a day by day recap of what I did, but I thought I would write it anyways.

I have been keeping up with my Thai language, my tutor says I'm getting better. I can understand more than I speak, so right now I am working on being able to speak as much as I can

understand. I can read and write a bit now, and now that I am back in school I can actually take notes, and semi understand what is going on around me.

There have been a couple of other festivals that I have celebrated with my host family. The most memorable one was the Cha-Phrak Festival. The biggest celebration is located in my hometown (Surat Thani). There is a boat float (think parades) from each temple in a city, and from every city in the Surat Thani Province. There were over 100 floats, but due to the heat I was only able to see 7 before I felt like I was going to pass out from heat. My host mom felt the same way. I did get to see the other floats, my host mom and I went a few days ago to see them, and be blessed by a lot of monks. They would spray you with holy water, from a brush type thing. I got absolutely soaked, and my host mom found it hilarious.

Well I think that is all that I have to say for the month of October. My next big trip is in December, so I will have lots to tell you about that trip, when the time comes. I hope this is what you wanted to hear, if not just email me back and tell me what you would like to hear, and I'll tell you.

Well...Bye for now,
Emily