

At the end of their AFS exchange in Thailand, we asked some recent AFSers from the USA to answer two questions:

- ❑ What elements of your host culture, compared to US culture, did you find most difficult to adjust to in the areas of family, school and/or social life?
- ❑ Please note any advice you would like to share with AFSers destined for your host country.

Here are some of their responses:

Be open to new ideas and ways of living. The US culture might be a total 180 degrees from what you are accustomed to, but in the end you'll realize it was all worthwhile.

Sally, Summer, 2009

I was having difficult time to adjust to the weather; it is hot and humid but some families like mine had air conditioning. I also found it difficult to adjust to school because I was an outsider and the language barrier was always in between me and students. The positive aspects of being a student were learning with other teens, getting to experience their school system and meeting new kids.

Yesenia, Summer, 2009

Not expressing your anger and frustration in public as well as a much higher respect towards your elders was very different. When you go, remember to be open to new things. Thai culture is so much different and if you truly try to adjust yourself, everyone around you will be willing to help.

Hayley, Year, 2009

The expectation of how girls were supposed to compose themselves was very different from the equality of genders in the US. It was also difficult to adjust to the lack of social life in Thailand because Thai teenagers spend most of their time studying. Try to speak the language; any use of broken Thai will bring smiles to peoples faces and they will try to help you. Thai people are unbelievably kind.

Alaine, Year, 2009

Be nice to teachers and they will love you!!! be careful in Bangkok because you might get lost or pick pocketed. take sunscreen and mosquito repellent.

Erick, Summer, 2008

Be prepared to be shocked- from your house, to your school, to your town or village- everything in Thailand is different. But come with an open mind and a

willingness to try new things and you will not be disappointed.

Harleigh, Summer, 2008

Definite read up on the King and the political issues of Thailand also study some basic Thai phrases.

Amanda, Summer, 2008

Don't be shy and have fun!!!

Natalie, Summer, 2008

I found that it was very awkward to me to be receiving all the attention like a celebrity. Practice Thai before you come to Thailand...Also don't over pack because you are going to bring back way more stuff than you brought there.

Tony, Summer, 2008

It was difficult to adjust to the Buddhist customs because I lived in a very traditional Thai family and town. But I learned and now I have such an appreciation for the Buddhist culture and religion.

Harleigh, Summer, 2008

No, I had grown up in a very open minded family, and I had been told I was easy to adjust, I just wasn't social enough. My host family was very nice and in small bits and pieces was a bit like my own. My school; the only thing difficult was being the center. Everyone knew my name. Thailand is a country full of very open people. They are very kind and always willing to help. However they will do things out of their way just to be nice, so be careful that you aren't taking that for granted.

Irene, Summer, 2008

The culture and religion were some pretty difficult things to adjust to, especially when my host mom wanted me to participate in the religious activities. While i participated in some, I also found it hard for me to do that considering I had a



Country Quotes: Thailand

different religion, but I adjusted soon enough and I had a good time with it

Alexandra, Summer, 2008

It was hard to communicate.

Patal, Summer, 2008

It is very hot. Don't bring too much stuff since you can buy it in Thailand.

Alvin, Summer, 2008

Students in my host country (Thailand) were very active in school activities and did well in school. What they call boyfriends and girlfriends are what we call close friends.

Erick, Summer, 2008

The most difficult thing to adjust to in Thailand for me was the indirect mode of communication. My host mother did not tell me the little things that I did that bothered her. I would ask if she needed help with things and she would say no, when she really wanted my help. She later complained to my AFS advisor, but I did not know that she had a problem with anything I was doing until three months into my exchange.

Kayla, Semester, 2008

How strict Thai people are really took a toll on me. I knew that it was something to be expected, a part of the Thai culture, but I still found it hard to adjust to. The difference in the way males and females were treated was hard to adjust to, but I kept reminding myself that it was a cultural difference and nothing personal.

Catherine, Year, 2008

Social life: for kids in Thailand, socializing mostly takes place inside of school. Make friends right away with your class by sharing information about yourself and your home country.

Lucero, Year, 2008

I found that the most difficult portion of the exchange was adapting to the cultural beliefs. Thai culture is much more conservative than US culture and it was hard to get used to the fact that you will be offending someone if you don't abide by cultural differences. I also found it hard to adjust to spending a majority of time with the household.

Cara, Year, 2008

Thailand is the "Land of Smiles" and you will be expected to smile as well. Everyone at school and

home will keep a happy face on no matter the circumstances.

Kayla, Semester, 2008

Don't be shy; get together with friends from your host school. Don't always stick with your AFS friends because you will miss out on some things.

Catherine, Year, 2008

Family-wise I found it difficult being able to speak your mind. We as Americans grow up thinking to always speak your mind. But in Thailand it is considered impolite to criticize, especially people that are of higher status than you.

Elvis, Year, 2007

Be open!!! It's a new culture, it's not ours, and you're only there for one year. It will drive you nuts at points, I know it will, but in the end, it's worth it. And you'll probably find a bit of a Thai person in you anyway--- just let it come. Be respectful of the people, please.

Emily, Year, 2007

Family: I was unprepared for the amount of my life that my family expected me to share with them. They always wanted to know what I was doing, even at times when I simply did not want to be social. And in Thailand, being an AFS host family is largely a status booster. Many families want students so that they can look valuable in the community. So be prepared to present yourself quite a bit to other extended family members and friends even at times when you might not want to.

School: I never expected to have problems with my advisor, but it happened. The important thing is to be able to get past it and see that they are just reacting to their culture and their personal views of you as a foreigner.

Social: I never got used to the fact that I was farang (foreigner). I never could escape it and it was a bit of a double standard. I had to be extra perfect and Thai to show that I was respectful of the culture, yet I was always excused because of my farang-ness. No one can forget that you are not a part of their culture and it will follow you throughout the year.

Maria, Year, 2007

It was most difficult for me to adjust to the differences in American school and Thai school. I wasn't used to a social life revolved around school activities.

Nicole, Semester, 2007

Just stay calm. Learn to laugh at yourself---a lot. And for those thinking about sharing American food--there are no ovens!!

Clara, Year, 2007

Nothing can really prepare you for the extremes that occur while you're living with new people and getting used to a new school. I was tired for 3 months, and I didn't really get a hang of the language for 6 months. So be patient and know that even if they don't want to admit it, everyone else on the program is having difficulties too. You're not alone.

Maria, Year, 2007

One of the most beneficial things I did in my trip was to learn how to READ Thai. It's scary-looking at first, but it's so useful to learn the language (and it definitely impresses any Thai people you meet). So learn the language, and learn how to READ it, because once you do, the Thais know you're not some bum tourist but someone who they can talk with.

Evan, Year, 2007

The restricted freedoms of females in Thailand was particularly difficult, and the indirect communication of the Thai people were very difficult for me, and also the hesitance of the people to show emotions that weren't happy ones.

Emily, Year, 2007

When you arrive in Thailand you will be overwhelmed with all the kindness and special attention you will get. The worst thing you could possibly do...is to take advantage of the Thai people's hospitality.

Nicole, Semester, 2007