

ISS-SFL – A 2012 Project/Trip Recap

Service, culture, adventure, nature and community in Northern Thailand

By: Victoria Normann (12th grade) and Alef Comisso (11th grade)

Life is made up of experiences and unexpected moments. Our time in Thailand is probably going to be one of the most amazing and life-changing experiences in our lives. We have never felt so sad to leave a place than we did the day we left the School for Life (SFL) campus.



Nineteen ISS students from different grade levels traveled to Northern Thailand in October 2012 to share with the students of SFL our talents and hobbies, including dancing, games, singing and puzzles. SFL is a school/orphanage for nearly 120 children, and never did we think that in less than four days the bond created between us and the children would be so strong. They may not have as much as we do, but our group can definitely agree that we have learned so much more from them than we could have ever tried to teach them. Learning to care for one another, to give, to share, to be kind.



“The best and most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even heard, but must be felt with the heart.” - Helen Keller



Leaving School For Life was not easy, but we were looking forward to our next destination – a few hill tribe villages tucked away in the mountains northwest of Chiang Mai. We drove hours to Cave Lodge, where the best fruit smoothies are made, and stayed in huts. Here, the adventures began with caving, kayaking and river swimming, which was later followed by bamboo rafting, elephant riding and rock climbing. So many of us were out of our comfort zones, but no one backed out. While there, we worked on building and painting walls around a school in a Karen village (Ban Muang Phaem).

During the rest of our time in Northern Thailand, we also visited temples, were blessed by monks, rode tuk-tuks to the Chiang Mai night market and more. Even though Thai culture is quite different from Norway's, we loved every single bit of it -- from the food to the people. – continued –



Once we completed our volunteer tasks, it was amazing to feel the difference we made at School for Life and in the village. But the difference they made in us is greater!

Although the nineteen of us go to the same school, some of us had never spoken to each other or were not very close; now, we have become a family. This trip brought us so much closer and made us realize that life is not to be taken for granted. We hear it so many times, but I don't think it actually hits you until you recognize what you have or experience something like we did.

Thank you so much to Mr. and Mrs. Mudra for organizing the trip, and everyone who was involved in making this happen. We appreciate the donations and support during fundraisers to help the SFL children. I think I can speak for all of us when I say it has sincerely been one of the best trips of our lives. – Victoria Normann (12) and Alef Comisso (11)



In front of Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep Buddhist temple

Trip Participants: Top L-R: Jakub Dziegielowski, Tony Mudra, Hannah Visser, Conor Clarke, Caitlin Hand, Kristin Williams, Thomas Townsend, Sophie Newby, Tugberk Sengezer, Victoria Normann, Joakim Olsen, Kieran Wilcock, James Baxter, Christina Apelseth, Michelle Darrehschoori / Bottom L-R: Lotte Olsen, Anna Chiandet, Katarzyna Kabulska, Kelcie McCafferty, Alef Comisso, Katharine Mudra

"It's funny because you meet these people and they make you laugh, and they give you hope, and they make you realize there is so much more to life." - Anonymous