

Perspectives

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Travelogue Thailand

Student finds inner peace amiss the buzz of bird-sized beat-

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After 24 hours of constant travel I arrived at 2:30 a.m., Jan. 3rd in Bangkok. From the moment the plane touched down, my senses were in a frenzy attempting to capture the incredible amount of new sights, sounds, smells and feelings of a country halfway around the world from the comforts of home. Until I left on July 28th, this experience never subsided. Every moment, from my studies in the city to treks in the jungle, was a constant adventure that always brought extreme joy and wonder to my heart. There is no way I could possibly summarize all of the experiences I had in those seven months, but you can ask me about them anytime because they're tales I'll never forget.

So instead I thought I would tell you of a single adventure. An adventure that tested my limits as a human, yet raised my being to a new level. It began at the start of my fourth month in Thailand. I had just finished school and was ready for something exciting. I traveled north, ending up just south of the famous Golden Triangle area in the small mountain town of Ta



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Ton. It was here where I would have my first real experience with the Thai jungle, spending four days and three nights camping by myself.

Upon arriving in the town, I walked around aimlessly searching my guidebook and trying to

find a place that would allow me to set my tarp up. I eventually ended up at a small little outdoor coffee shop constructed from bamboo where a Thai man tried to sell me a tourist trekking trip I wasn't interested in. Communication was going smoothly in Thai but he couldn't understand why I wanted to go into the jungle by myself. I was finally saved by an Englishman named Chris who overheard our conversation and offered his help. Chris lived in Thailand, and he could point me in the right direction.

Before I knew it I was hiking up a small trail with all my supplies, headed into the jungle with no direction or destination. I was half excited, half scared. There were so many unknowns that neither my mind nor body knew what to think. The trail eventually began to parallel a small stream and after about two hours of hiking, I stopped and set up camp. I was alone. Well, not exactly, there were always thousands of bugs swarming around.

I distinctly remember these flying beetles, the size of small birds, which would come swooping down sounding like helicopters. I began to scare myself thinking about the fact that I was in the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ADAM MACON

Above, A row of Buddha statues runs along the walls of Thailand's ancient capital of Ayutthaya. Left, Macon tries to find his way while lost in the jungle in Ko Lipe.

same jungle as cobras and tigers, a far cry from the mountains of North Carolina. But despite the annoyances of the wildlife, I have never felt so connected. By the third night, going to sleep with the sounds of screeching monkeys and those helicopter beetles was almost relaxing.

I had one experience on a day hike in which I was climbing up a rock when I began to hear a sound which resembled a rain stick. Before I knew it, pouring out from beneath me were thousands of spiders forming an eight-legged mass moving up the walls around me. At first I began to run but soon realized that the spiders were running from me, so I just stood there in wonder as the entire colony scurried up the rock and into the brush. I'll never forget the sound the spiders made.

Despite being in such a beautiful and magical place where I could drink from streams and create banana leaf shelters, I began to become restless. It was very hard to be by myself for that period of time. By the last day I would talk out-loud just to hear my own voice. I couldn't find satisfaction in anything and would try and go to bed at 6 p.m. just to pass the day. It was this time that really helped me discover myself.

I remember climbing up this mountain, sitting on top, staring across the landscape and feeling I could understand what a beautiful life we've been given. Despite the sappy stuff, by the morning of the fourth day I was ready to get the heck outta there. I practically ran back down the path to civilization and a shower.

Although my entire Thailand

experience is by no means solely encompassed in this single adventure, it was a huge step along my path to feeling like Thailand became my second home. Out of all the things I learned on the trip, knowledge and comfort in a place were by far the most wonderful.

I knew the city, I knew the jungle, I knew the food, I knew the people and I understood the culture. I left knowing that I had a second home, a Thai home and that was the greatest gift I could have ever imagined taking away from studying abroad.

Look for next semester's Travelogue feature, starting in January, written by students studying abroad in the spring.



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