

PEOPLE, ECOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



STUDENT PREDEPARTURE HANDBOOK

INTERNATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STUDIES INSTITUTE

สถาบันการศึกษาการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนนานาชาติ

WWW.ISDSI.ORG

Introduction.....	1
The ISDSI Approach to Education	1
This Handbook.....	2
Program Logistics.....	2
Mail.....	3
Emergency contact information.....	3
Country Information	4
Introduction to Thailand and Chiang Mai	4
Climate.....	4
Health.....	5
Vaccinations and predeparture preparations.....	5
Existing medical conditions and medications	5
Malaria.....	5
AIDS	5
Local Health Care.....	6
Cultural Sensitivity: A Note on Food, Vegetarianism And Special Diets	6
Adapting To Thailand.....	7
Thailand the country	7
Infrastructure.....	7
Adjusting	7
Living in Thailand.....	7
Clothing Expectations	7
Personal Hygiene / Grooming.....	8
The Homestay Experience	9
Adjusting To Your Family	10
Guidelines For A Positive Family Experience	10
Gifts	11
The Apartment Experience	11
Email	12
Cell Phones	12
Money	12
Thai The Second Culture.....	12
Royalty, Politics and Religion.....	13
Hierarchy	13
Respect for the Body	13
Gender Relations in Thailand	14
Kreng Jai.....	14
Face.....	14
The Thai Smile	15
Thai Buddhism.....	15
Monks	15
Temples.....	15
Other religions.....	15
Program Policies	15
Attendance Policy	15
Withdrawal	16
Dismissal from the Program.....	16
Controlled Substances.....	16
Early Departures.....	17
Social Behavior.....	17

Introduction

The International Sustainable Development Studies Institute (ISDSI) is an educational institute focused on the study of culture, ecology and sustainability. ISDSI began as an initiative of Kalamazoo College, and now works with a number of American colleges and universities. ISDSI runs experiential study-abroad programs for American students, both semester and short term (multi-week) programs. Based in Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand, ISDSI courses take place throughout the country—from remote tribal villages in the North to the islands in the South.

ISDSI has been recognized for its innovative and unique programs, including a nomination in 2006 as a UNESCO Centre of Excellence, as well as recognition in 2005 as a “best practice” in cross-cultural education by the Institute of International Education (IIE).

Each semester is a series of four, month-long courses. ISDSI Expedition Field Courses (EFCs) are field based—students begin with a week in Chiang Mai at the Institute, and then spend the remainder of each course in the field—living with local people, learning from the community, and traveling through the various landscapes that we study. Courses include a strong experiential learning component, with students studying in the field during each course. EFCs are academically demanding, as students need to manage the challenge of studying at a high level while also living cross-culturally and developing leadership skills. Backpacking between tribal villages or sea kayaking between islands are not just fun activities, but are an integral part of the course—learning about the landscape and how it shapes the cultures in Thailand.

The ISDSI Approach to Education

ISDSI courses are unique, and the ISDSI approach to education is distinctive. There are several key differences with classroom based courses that are important to keep in mind as you are preparing to participate in an ISDSI program.

Landscape based: ISDSI courses are *landscape or place based* courses—they take a specific location and study the culture and ecology of that place. All ISDSI courses focus on a specific academic subject that is best taught within a specific landscape. Within that landscape courses examine the relationship between culture and ecology. Students thus need to understand both the culture (including language, norms, values, etc.) and the ecology (specific biological and ecological relationships) of place.

Leadership development: Leadership and technical skills enable students to successfully study these academic topics experientially in the particular landscape under consideration. These skills are not just supportive, however, but form a core part of the mission of ISDSI, as they are a concrete way to teach students skills they can use in the future to build a more sustainable world. They can teach important lessons about ecology, the environment within which the course takes place, leadership, decision making, and other lessons.

Language learning: Language (primarily Thai) is taught at ISDSI as a way to enable students to both understand the culture they are embedded in, and as a way to communicate with local people. Only by speaking the language of the people they are studying with can students begin to understand and appreciate the culture.

Homestays: Homestays in both urban and rural (village) areas are used to help students more fully understand the cultures they are studying, as well as specific practices, such as farming or weaving, that may be a part of family daily life. Homestays are an important view into the culture, values and practices which affect sustainable development in Thailand.

Travel through the landscape (backpacking, hiking, canoeing, sea kayaking): By traveling through the landscape under their own power, students learn important lessons about the landscape they could not learn by traveling in a vehicle. Students are *immersed* in the landscape they study, and by traveling slowly will have time to fully understand the landscape in its multi-sensory complexity—knowing the sights, sounds, smells and feel of the landscape directly. Travel through the landscape also gives students an important sense of *scale*—so that they better understand how high a mountain is, how far apart villages are, or how long a river is. This *connection to the natural world* is usually missing in most education, and traveling through the natural world is a way to establish that

connection. We believe that if people are going to be committed to a sustainable future, they must have a strong sense of connection to the natural world.

Direct learning: Rather than learning through mediated (non-direct) experiences such as slide shows and videos, on ISDSI courses students learn *on their own* directly from the environment. This requires letting students explore in both structured and unstructured ways. While there are appropriate times to use *indirect* learning (through videos or other media), media is carefully considered in relation to how well it fits with the direct learning on the course, and does not *substitute* for direct learning.

Appropriate place of teaching: Generally speaking, nothing is taught in the classroom which can be taught in the field. Classroom based seminars are best for exploring theories, macro level issues, or concepts which are abstract. Field based learning is best suited to teaching about specific cultural and ecological concepts, specific facts about the social and physical landscape, field methods, etc. For each concept taught, care is given to ensure that it is taught in the most appropriate setting.

Learning through challenges: People learn best through challenges. Just because things are difficult does not mean they are not good opportunities for learning. While some students may want everything to be “easy,” making everything easy for students robs them of the opportunity to learn about how to cope and meet challenging situations. For some students on ISDSI programs, aspects of the program may be the first time they are put into a challenging situation with the chance of failure. Working through a challenge—of speaking Thai, setting up a tent, doing a field survey—is a very valuable learning opportunity for students. The role of the instructor is to support students through those challenges, without taking away so much of the challenge that they cannot learn from it. Taking away challenges also robs students of learning opportunities.

This Handbook

This handbook is designed to prepare you for living in Thailand, adapting to another culture, and learning about culture, ecology and sustainability. This is not something that comes easily or automatically to anyone. Being aware of the stresses that lie ahead and how to deal with them will go a long way towards preparing you for the upcoming sojourn.

A crucial part of the success of any of our programs depends on the student's active participation in their own learning process. Students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning—as “active learners.”

Being an “active learner” means:

- reading this handbook and other recommended readings—preparing well for your experience
- coming equipped with the attitude of a learner—not someone who thinks that they have all the answers
- pushing yourself outside your “comfort zone” once in Thailand
- being thoughtful and reflective
- being flexible, adaptable and patient—with yourself and others

Students who have prepared themselves for what lies ahead will have an easier time adjusting to the new culture, and come away with a more meaningful learning experience.

Please read this and contact us (info@isdsi.org) if you have any questions.

Program Logistics

Here are some of the key things you need to do before coming to Thailand:

- Apply for your visa—you need a **multiple-entry non-immigrant visa**. You **must** use the letter of invitation from ISDSI to do this! **We will send you a letter of support with instructions for applying.**
- Purchase plane tickets and email your itinerary to ISDSI (to admissions@isdsi.org).

- Get your health insurance sorted out. Call your health insurance and make sure you know what you need to do if you get sick and must go to the hospital, etc. (Some require you to pre-pay, they may have special requirements for reimbursement, etc.)
- Finish all required readings.
- See your doctor for any necessary shots or medications (see Health section for more).
- Get your required program gear and clothing together. Start this as soon as you can so you don't get rushed at the end—starting early will also help you save money. Please print out and read the Gear List for required gear and clothing.

Mail

Regular mail: Mail between the U.S. and Thailand can take anywhere from 7 to 10 days (or more!) to arrive. Family and friends should send mail to:

Student Name
ISDSI
PO Box 222
Phra Singh, Muang
Chiang Mai, 50205
THAILAND

Packages that are sent through airmail often take longer than letters to arrive. Express mail (e.g. DHL) is faster. Be advised, however, that the package will probably be opened, and its contents examined by customs. **Do not ship medications from the United States.** All packages should have written "Gifts—of no commercial value/personal use" on the outside to identify that they are not for resale. Lists of items in packages should be general to help avoid the contents getting pilfered. **Packages may still be taxed, at up to 100% of their assessed value. There is nothing ISDSI can do if your package is taxed.**

Express mail: When you need to receive or send something in a hurry, you can use Express mail (we recommend DHL). The physical shipping address for packages is:

Student Name
ISDSI
48/1 Chiang Mai—Lampang Rd (Superhighway)
Muang, Chiang Mai, 50300
THAILAND

Emergency contact information

The following phone numbers and email address are for emergency contact for people (parents, etc.) back in the US who may need to contact you in an emergency.

Dr. Mark Ritchie (Executive Director)
Mobile phone: +66-81-724-0860
Email: mritchie@isdsi.org

Khun Subongkoch Khurangkham (Administrative Coordinator)
Mobile phone: +66-89-755-9711
Email: subongkoch@isdsi.org

Office: +66-53-406-331

Please pass this information on to your parents or guardians who may need to contact you in an emergency.

Country Information

Introduction to Thailand and Chiang Mai

The Kingdom of Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, and it alone among the countries of Southeast Asia was never colonized. Thailand lies in the heart of Southeast Asia. It shares borders with Burma (Myanmar) to the west and north, Laos to the northeast, Cambodia to the east and Malaysia to the south. Topographically the country is divided into four distinct areas: the mountainous North, the fertile Central Plains, the semi-arid plateau of the Northeast, and the peninsular South distinguished by tropical beaches and offshore islands. Thailand has a tropical climate with three distinct seasons: hot (March-May), rainy (June-October) and cool (November-February), with cooler temperatures in the mountains year-round.

Thailand has a population of about 60 million. Ethnic Thais form the majority, though the area has historically been a migratory crossroads, and thus includes strains of Mon, Khmer, Burmese, Lao, Malay, Indian and, most strongly, Chinese. In Northern Thailand various upland minority groups (hill tribes) are also an important part of the ethnic mix, including Hmong, Karen, Akha, Lahu, Lisu, Mien, and others.

Theravada Buddhism is the primary religion in Thailand, practiced by more than 90 percent of all Thais. The remainder of the population adheres to Muslim, Christian, Hindu and other faiths. The king wields moral authority rather than political power. He is very highly respected, as is the rest of the royal family, and speaking against them is a crime.

Located 700 kilometers north of Bangkok, Chiang Mai is a bustling international city of around 500,000. Typical of Northern Thai geography, Chiang Mai lies on a large flat plain surrounded by mountains. Chiang Mai was founded in the late 13th century (1296) and is one of the oldest continually inhabited settlements in Thailand. It was once the capital of Lanna, an independent Thai kingdom, and has preserved its unique cultural heritage to a marked degree—including a regional dialect distinct from the Thai spoken in Bangkok. Within the city's original perimeter, still marked by a moat and fortified gates, are numerous ancient Buddhist temples and other monuments attesting to a distinguished past.

Thailand is a popular tourist destination for both Westerners and Asians, and as such has numerous guesthouses, an active night bazaar and other attractions. Chiang Mai is also the home to many long term residents from abroad, including Japanese, Australians, Americans and others involved in business, development work and other activities.

Climate

The weather in Thailand will be hot and humid in June to October, in the 80s and 90s most days. It will gradually turn cooler, from November to January, leading to a very pleasant and cooler winter, especially at night, with daytime temperatures in the 80s and down into the 70s or cooler at night. March through May is hot season, with dry and very hot weather with daytime temperatures in the 90s Fahrenheit, and cooler at night. There is a marked difference in temperature between the lowlands and the mountains. During rainy season (which lasts until late October or mid November) it often rains every day. While rain seldom lasts all day, when it does rain it can be quite intense.

Thailand's heat can be difficult to adjust to. It often makes people tired and sluggish or unable to engage in activities that they routinely enjoy, like exercising or walking long distances. It can affect your sleeping and study patterns. The tropics are also full of animal life that will be new to you—many houses have ants and spiders in them, mosquitoes can be bothersome, small lizards live inside most buildings on the walls and cockroaches can be found even in the most luxurious homes. In rural areas you may encounter such things as mice, lizards and snakes, but usually they stay out of your way.

Health

Vaccinations and predeparture preparations

ISDSI recommends that all participants meet with a medical professional who understands international health. Often, campus-based travel clinics will have staff who are qualified. Students should also check the World Health Organization (WHO—www.who.org) and US Center for Disease Control (CDC—www.cdc.gov) websites.

Students should closely follow the recommendations of medical professionals, and inform ISDSI of their medical preparations (e.g. vaccinations, etc).

Please note: Based on the recommendations of WHO and CDC, students who are participating in ISDSI programs are advised to get a Japanese Encephalitis vaccination. This vaccination is very expensive in the United States, but is much less expensive in Chiang Mai since it a common childhood vaccination in Thailand. If students decide to get the Japanese Encephalitis vaccination in Thailand, the program will assist in arranging time and transportation to the local hospital.

Existing medical conditions and medications

Students participating in ISDSI programs will have filled out and completed a medical form as a part of the acceptance or application process. Students are required to keep ISDSI informed of any changes in their medical condition as well as all medications that they are taking regularly.

Students should try and obtain a supply of any prescription medications sufficient for their **entire** stay in Thailand. **Medications cannot be shipped to Thailand** from the United States during the student's stay. If you cannot obtain a supply for your whole time in Thailand you **must contact the Institute** to see if the medication is available in Thailand. **All students taking medication must contact ISDSI in advance in order to ensure that the medication is not prohibited in Thailand.** All medication carried into Thailand must be in the original container, and we recommend that all prescription medications also have a doctor's prescription and/or explanatory note carried with them.

Malaria

Malaria is no longer a problem in throughout Thailand, except in remote border areas where we do not go on the program. Malaria shows up on WHO and CDC maps of Northern Thailand due to people contracting malaria in a neighboring country and then coming to Thailand for diagnosis and treatment. **The Thai Center for Disease Control does not recommend anti-malarial prophylaxis at this time.**

There is no active malaria in any of the areas where the program operates. Our American medical advisors **do not** recommend students take anti-malarial medication since it is unnecessary and can cause significant side effects. If you are going to be traveling to an area after the program that has malaria, local hospitals will know what medication is most effective for that specific area.

AIDS

AIDS has reached epidemic proportions in Thailand, which posts one of the highest infection rates in Asia. HIV infection rates among prostitutes in Chiang Mai have been estimated at over 80%. Since over 90% of Thai men have gone to prostitutes and the majority of men regularly frequent brothels, the risk of heterosexual transmission (from men as well as women who are not prostitutes) in Thailand is quite high. IV drug use provides another vector for transmission. AIDS isn't only contracted from prostitutes or IV drug use. Please be warned and be prepared to take all precautions necessary to avoid exposure to the HIV virus.

Local Health Care

Adequate medical care is available in Thailand. In Chiang Mai there will be access to basic medical facilities that can provide modern medicines, vitamins, and ordinary health care products—although they might not have the same brands that are available in the US. The city of Chiang Mai has several large modern hospitals with dental facilities and also many clinics. During field visits to rural areas there will be access to local hospitals.

Cultural Sensitivity: A Note on Food, Vegetarianism And Special Diets

Thai food is world famous for its variety, flavors and freshness. Thai food varies regionally, and students in Thailand will have a chance to eat some fantastic food that is impossible to find outside of Thailand. All Thai food is based around rice, so students can expect to eat a lot of rice while in Thailand, often for every meal while in both urban and village homestays. A lot of Thai food is very spicy, including curries, *naam phrik* (chili paste) and soups. Not all Thai food is spicy, but students should be prepared to learn how to eat and enjoy food that is likely spicier than they are used to. Pork and seafood are common, and in some places students may eat rice and fish at every meal.

A common stereotype of Asia is that lots of people are vegetarians. While Thais do not eat large quantities of meat, they do add meat to almost all dishes (mostly pork, chicken and seafood). Even stir-fried vegetables usually contain small pieces of meat.

Maintaining a vegetarian or vegan diet while on the program is almost impossible and refusing to be flexible can result in you being culturally offensive as well as hungry. While the program recognizes that eating lower on the food chain does help lower one's ecological footprint, during program activities cultural factors take priority. When invited into someone's home, it is rude to refuse to try something because you don't like what is put before you, and eating together is a crucial part of Thai culture. This is especially true in the setting of a homestay. The number one fear of some Thai host families is having to deal with a strict vegetarian. Unfortunately, some American students have come to Chiang Mai and rudely insisted on a vegetarian diet in the host family. This has left a bad impression, and there are families which now refuse to take American host students because of this.

If you are really serious about coming to Thailand and adapting, you will have to temporarily give up a vegetarian diet in order to adapt to Thai culture. By refusing to eat meat or fish when it is served to you, you risk offending the people with you and it is seen as culturally insensitive. This is especially the case in the villages where you will be staying, as most villagers are poor and do not have the luxury to choose their protein sources. They will likely serve you meat as an honor to their guest—and it may mean killing their only pig to do so. To refuse meat in that setting would be considered extremely rude.

Being flexible in your diet not only assures that you will be able to eat, it is a sign of acceptance and appreciation to your Thai hosts and simply reflects good manners as a guest. Eating is more than just filling your stomach. In Thailand sharing food is a social event. Refusing to try new foods or join in with others may be misunderstood or considered anti-social. Joining in is a way of “being with Thais.”

Consequently, no special accommodation will be made for vegetarians on the program or during field studies.

You can eat a vegetarian diet while living in the dorms and when you are choosing your own food. Most restaurants will prepare dishes without meat upon request, and there are some excellent vegetarian restaurants in Chiang Mai.

If you have dietary restrictions for religious reasons or medical reasons, you must contact ISDSI in advance for guidance. We may not be able to accommodate some medical conditions and food allergies, so please contact us in advance.

Adapting To Thailand

Thailand the country

Besides the challenge of adjusting to a new culture, students will be faced with the task of adapting to a new country. Thailand is a developing country in a tropical region. Adapting to these physical conditions alone will require you to make significant changes to your lifestyle—changes which may cause you to feel more limited in your freedom and choices than you would at home. Be prepared.

Infrastructure

Thailand's infrastructure is not as developed as that of the U.S. This is evident by a lack of infrastructure in some sectors or what appears as “uneven” development of infrastructure in others. Controls on pollution and pesticide use are not as strong (or are not enforced), nor are policies on environmental protection. Stray dogs live in the streets and in and around market places. Not every street has sidewalks and some streets have partially constructed ones. The wide range of choices you are used to regarding your food, reading material, recreation and choices of medical care will not be available. Keep in mind, though, that it will be your experience of these kinds of conditions and others that will contribute to your understanding of the context in which the struggle for sustainable development is taking place.

Adjusting

In addition to adjusting to the conditions mentioned above, there are things you will have to give up to live in Thailand—and this may be hard at first. Eventually, though, you may realize that you don't necessarily “need” what you thought you did. Not everyone misses the same things and different people react differently to the sacrifices they must make. For some people, not having their own car may prove frustrating since possibilities for travel will be limited. For others it might be the unavailability of certain foods (brown rice or herbal tea, for example), or not being able to maintain a vegetarian diet. For some people it's hard to find clothes or shoes that fit or suit their taste.

You will also have to adapt to a new city and a new community. This means using a map to learn where things are and making use of public transportation. In a new community where you don't know anyone, your usual support systems will not be available. It's important to consider beforehand how you will cope in such circumstances. Your routine will be different. During the homestay, you may spend evenings and weekends with your family instead of going out. You will be required to give up some of the freedom and flexibility to which you are accustomed. You may find structure where you don't want it and none where you do. This is a normal part of cross-cultural learning and adaptation.

Finally, you will have to give up some control over your health. Sickness—especially that which you've never experienced before (like intestinal problems)—is inevitable. It's quite common for one's digestive system to have a negative reaction to a completely new environment—new food, new water, etc. It's not uncommon for people to have at least one bout of food poisoning, which typically involves vomiting and diarrhea. You might also find yourself more susceptible to other kinds of infections. A balanced diet and plenty of sleep will help you to maintain your health.

Living in Thailand

Clothing Expectations

“What do...people read into clothing types and styles? All sorts of local notions about what is appropriate and inappropriate are based on these readings. The sojourner never grasps all the subtleties of these readings; even trying hard to learn them can be frustrating. But to

ignore the differences between such meanings at home and in the new culture is to court disaster."

Ted Ward in Living Overseas: A Book of Preparations (The Free Press: 1984, p. 317)

Thais place a great deal of importance on clothing. As seen from the quotation above, ignorance of the meaning of clothing in another culture can have disastrous results. In Thailand, wearing inappropriate clothing is perceived in a very negative light, and perpetuates an unfortunate stereotype that Westerners are "dirty" and "sleazy". Respecting the culture also means respecting values regarding dress. In Thailand, unlike the US, the way you dress isn't a matter of self-expression, it's a matter of respecting other people. You will find that your time in Thailand will be far more successful if you respect the customs regarding dress.

What you plan on wearing should be informed by cultural expectations in Thailand. In Thai culture, what you wear is an expression of your respect for others.

During class and while at the Institute, students are required to dress in the same style that is worn by Thai university students. All Thai university students wear a standard outfit. For women this is a short sleeved white blouse (buttons up the front) with a collar (not a T-shirt) and plain black skirt. For men, a button down short sleeved collared white shirt (not a T-shirt) and black trousers (no jeans). For both women and men, nice sandals for women are appropriate footwear. Rubber flip-flops are not acceptable for university classes.

This is the required dress for classes including orientation sessions. Foreign students who dress in the university outfit in Thailand have found that they are immediately identified as university students, not as tourists, and that most people speak to them in Thai first instead of attempting English (or not speaking with them at all). Thus, dressing this way is not only culturally appropriate, it works to a student's advantage. (It is also cheaper, as local taxis will charge you the local rate, rather than the tourist rate!)

Outside class, clothing should be clean, neat and conservative. For women, this means no low-cut tops, spaghetti straps, tank tops, or mid-driffs. Slacks, neat jeans and knee-length skirts are fine. For men, no sleeveless shirts or tank tops. Neat jeans and other casual wear are okay. Knee length or longer shorts are best.

In the village or on field visits, more rugged clothing will be appropriate. The program staff will inform you what would be appropriate depending on the setting. Please see the gear list for expedition course dress requirements.

You WILL see Thai students and others dressing in ways which seem to violate the guidelines above. Remember, they are Thai, and know when it is and is not appropriate to bend the rules. As you adjust to Thai culture you will learn what the expectations are, and how to express yourself within the appropriate cultural norms. Also remember that since Chiang Mai is a popular tourist destination, anything you can do to distinguish yourself from the "backpackers" will help with your integration into Thai life, as well as keep you safer (since you will be seen as a local and assumed to have "connections").

Please see the ISDSI program gear list for more specific guidelines on what to bring.

Personal Hygiene / Grooming

"Smell is important not just because it tells us that someone hasn't bathed or that vegetables are unripe, it is important because it reveals basic spiritual truth. This is why deodorant is essential."

Natayada Na Songkhla, "Scents and Sensibility"

The above quote from a Thai columnist may sound funny, but it's actually a serious truth: personal hygiene is of utmost importance in Thailand. Most Thais bathe two or three times a day and any presence of body odor is considered offensive. You should be prepared to bathe at least two times a day and use deodorant. Hair should be kept clean and neat also. Women who don't shave should keep body hair discreetly covered.

Understanding the meaning of clothing and hygiene in context will be a part of your cross-cultural adaptation, and acting on that understanding will aid you in gaining acceptance into Thai society.

Grooming is also important in Thai culture as it sends important signals about who you are—signals that are different than those in the American cultural context. This is also a **safety** issue, as hair styles, tattoos and jewelry will have different meanings in the Thai cultural context, and could attract unwanted attention from the police, drug dealers or others.

Hair

For men, no facial hair or long hair. For women, no overly short hair (e.g. no buzz cuts). For both, no dreadlocks or shaved heads. Natural hair color, please (it doesn't have to be *your* natural color, just one that is found in nature!). This may sound over the top, but Thai host families have refused to accept students with dreadlocks, etc.

Tattoos

Tattoos are interpreted within the milieu of culture. In Thailand, tattoos send a very different message about your background and personal life choices than they do in the United States. Many tattoos in Thailand are based on magic or are associated with prison convicts and gangsters. While some tattoos are not linked to these negative associations, they will carry meanings that students, as Americans, may not want to be associated with. If you are able, please make a conscious effort to keep any tattoos discreetly covered when culturally necessary. **We do not** recommend students get tattoos while in Thailand due to the risk of HIV and/or Hepatitis C.

Earrings/Jewelry/Piercings

The amount and type of jewelry you wear also is much more important in Thailand than it is in the United States as it sends different cultural signals about you and your social status in Thailand. What you wear to class may also be different than what is okay to wear outside of class.

For both men and women facial piercings, tongue studs, etc. are not appropriate.

For women, earrings are okay, as long as they are not excessive in size or number (e.g. two or three piercings per ear are fine, but 20 would be too much). A small discreet stud in the nose is okay for women, but not a hoop.

For men, no earrings are allowed.

The Homestay Experience

All students are placed with host families for their first month in Thailand. Some families will have hosted a student before, some not. Some will speak English, some very little if any. Whatever the type of family, this will be your first introduction into Thai culture, and a unique and special glimpse into Thai life. You may also have homestays in both Thai and tribal villages. These all can be powerful learning experiences.

In Thailand the "family" often means more than just the nuclear family, and can include distant relations and close friends. You will likely have "mystery guests" that come and go, and a general

bustle of people in the family going about their business. Also, not every family is going to be a “traditional” nuclear or extended family (just like in the United States).

Adjusting To Your Family

There will be some new issues for you as you adjust to living with a Thai family. Some things may be very different than what you’re accustomed to here in the US. As you will no longer be living the independent life of the residence halls in the US where you can come and go as you please, be prepared to give up some of that freedom in Thailand so you can better integrate with your family. They will worry if you stay out late, so early on in the stay have a discussion about what time they expect you to be home. Your family may want you to accompany them on visits, activities or excursions. Take advantage of such cultural opportunities as they provide an ideal way to get to know the different aspects of the culture first-hand.

Ask lots of questions! Families appreciate getting asked about themselves, their food, what they like to do, etc. Look for ways to get involved and help out around the house.

Adapting to a different family lifestyle will take some time. There will most likely be instances in which you are aware that your family does not understand why you act the way you do, and vice versa. Listen and observe closely; often, messages are given in a non-verbal manner or indirectly.

Guidelines For A Positive Family Experience

- Keep your expectations minimal.
- Always check and double-check when the family expects you to be home: at night, for meals, for family outings. If you are going to be late, call them.
- Try and speak Thai all the time, even when you are with your English speaking friends.
- Don’t hesitate to tell them if you don’t understand something, and ask them to be patient as you try and improve your Thai.
- Respect the rules and customs of your family (schedules, opinions, religious beliefs, etc.)
- Ask your host mother for permission to have friends over. When you do have guests, entertain them in the same way that your family entertains theirs. NEVER take a friend of the opposite sex into the bedroom, even with the door open.
- Expect to make your own bed, keep your room clean, and offer to help out, as you would in the U.S. when visiting relatives.
- Inform the Host Family Coordinator immediately of any problems relating to your safety and well-being.
- Finally, at the end of your homestay experience and then again after you return to the U.S., write your family a letter letting them know you appreciated their hospitality and that you’ve arrived back in the U.S. safe and sound.

While in your homestay it is important to remember to:

- Turn the lights in your room off when you leave the room
- Turn off your fan when you leave the room
- Turn off the air conditioner if you leave the room
- Take your shoes off inside the house
- Limit (or do not use) the Internet at your homestay (it is expensive)

In almost all cases, if you are doing something culturally offensive, you will not be told directly in order to avoid embarrassment and to save face for all involved. Thai people value social harmony and avoid direct confrontation. If you think you may be offending them, try and gently find out why (perhaps asking your host sister rather than your host mom). However, they may still not tell you. You can also ask a Thai friend or program staff who can help you figure things out.

The expectations of you in the homestay will be different than you are used to in the US. You may be expected to be home earlier, and not have as much freedom. Some families may have a maid or

other help. Be prepared to have little to no privacy. During the homestays you may have to share a room with a Thai family member. In many cases, double rooms in Thailand consist of one very large bed, with separate bedding. You can expect the privacy of your personal belongings, room, etc. to be respected, but if you are used to solitude, realize that you won't have much time alone. This means you will have to find time for personal reflection in new ways—such as when you are riding a mini-bus or walking to the post-office.

While fulfilling your own study responsibilities, you should try to participate in the normal life of the household; help with the chores, play with the kids, and learn how to cook. Try to fit into their schedule, diet and lifestyle as much as possible. They may feel a bit protective of you, so in your daily schedule be sure to let them know where you are and when you'll be returning to their home.

During your homestay, you should expect to be limited in your freedom. It is not appropriate for guest students to stay out late at night, etc. If you will be home later than usual from school, you should let your host family know. Otherwise they will worry. The Thai families take very seriously their duty of ensuring the students' safety.

Some bathrooms will be Thai-style, some will be Western-style. Thai-style bathrooms consist of a shower and a ceramic "squat" toilet. Most guesthouses and hotels will have Western bathrooms. Some Thai homes have Thai-style bathrooms, some Western-style. Most public bathrooms are Thai-style and do not have toilet paper. It is a good idea to carry toilet paper with you at all times. Usually there will be a trash can next to the toilet that you can discard your used toilet paper into.

There will be times when living with a family with whom you cannot communicate well may become stressful. This is **normal** and, as stated before, you should be ready for it. Keep in mind that staff will be available to talk to you if you are having difficulties. But, remember also, that stress is not necessarily a sign that things are not going well. It is a given in any experience of cross-cultural adjustment. Remember, too, that the rewards of this experience with your Thai family will most likely outweigh any difficulties you may encounter.

Gifts

It is appropriate to bring a gift to your host family. Often students give the gift at the end of the stay, when they know what the family or individual members would appreciate most. When you first arrive showing them pictures from home is a good "ice breaker." Appropriate subjects would be you with your family, at recognizable American landmarks, etc. **Not appropriate** would be photos of you partying with your friends, a photo of you embracing your boyfriend or girlfriend, dressed inappropriately, etc. Also, if you visit your host family after you have moved out it is appropriate to bring over a small gift of fruit or dessert with you, or after you return from a course.

The Apartment Experience

After the homestay, students will live in private apartments in Chiang Mai. The program staff will arrange appropriate accommodations. There are a large number of restaurants and noodle shops near the apartments catering to the student population, in addition to Internet cafes and convenience stores. When living in the apartments you will be able to use either the apartment laundry service if available, or one of the many local laundry services near the apartments.

A typical apartment is one room which you will share with another student on the program. ISDSI will pay the rent for your apartment and your utilities as long as it is not excessive (if you leave your air conditioning on for three weeks while you are in the field, **you** will have to pay the bill).

You should budget approximately \$50 to buy sheets and towels for your apartment.

The apartments close three days after the end of the program. If students plan to stay on longer after the end of the program, they will need to make their own housing arrangements.

Email

Email access via the numerous Internet cafes in town is easy and cheap. The institute also has Internet access. If you are planning on using email while in Thailand, you will be able to use web based e-mail (e.g. Hotmail or Yahoo, as well as most campus e-mail program).

Cell Phones

Most students who come to Thailand purchase a cell phone once they are in Thailand (the system here is GSM and different from that in the US). Phones are about \$100 and can be sold when you leave. They are the easiest way to call the US, and are a simple way for people from the US or within Thailand to contact the student. They are also helpful if a student is lost or becomes separated from the group while in the city. Almost all Thai university students have cell phones, and it is an easy way for the Thai student counterparts to contact American students. Student should budget for phone use while in Thailand, and past participants have recommended \$20 or more a month depending on your amount of use.

Money

The monetary unit of Thailand is the Baht. You should take some personal spending money with you to Thailand for shopping, personal travel, etc. In general, you will find prices for food items and local transportation in Chiang Mai to be much cheaper than they are in the U.S. Electronic equipment will be expensive, and products from the U.S. will be as expensive, if not more so, as they are in the US. How much money you should bring with you will depend upon how you intend to live. Past participants have recommended \$100 a month or more is sufficient.

You will receive a stipend in-country which will be more than adequate to cover meals, provided you eat at local (Thai) restaurants. There are many inexpensive places to eat in town.

Traveler's checks can be cashed at most banks. Banks usually ask to see your passport before cashing traveler's checks. Traveler's checks may be charged a per-check fee, so \$100 checks have been recommended, rather than \$20 or \$50 checks. It is not a good idea to carry large quantities of cash. Generally, you should cash traveler's checks gradually; this way you keep most of your money in the safest form. You should also record traveler's check serial numbers and keep them in a separate place from your checks and receipt in case of loss or theft. Keep cash and other valuables in a locked suitcase or money belt on your person.

A recommended alternative to traveler's checks is an ATM card or credit card. The Plus, Cirrus and other networks are available in Chiang Mai. (Check with your bank if they use a different network.) Make sure, however, that this isn't your only source of funds since there are times when the networks are down. Also, make sure your ATM card will not expire while you are on the program. You should plan in advance how you will obtain cash should the ATM not be an option.

When walking around the city, carry your money on your body, either in a pouch that you can wear under your shirt or in a money belt to protect yourself against pickpockets.

Thai The Second Culture

"No one knows his culture that does not another know." -Unknown

In addition to adapting to Thailand as a country, you will be learning to adjust to a second culture. Learning to live in a new culture requires a great deal more than a list of do's and don'ts, or a brief description of the cultural traits of a society. For one thing, any culture is much too complex to narrow down to a definitive description. Descriptions can describe general characteristics, but they will not explain each specific encounter. Secondly, and more importantly, adaptation has as much to do with

understanding oneself and one's own culture as it does with understanding a different culture, as the above quotation reveals.

As individuals, we are cultural beings with ways of behaving and perceiving which we do not always identify as springing from our culture. It is when we attempt to understand, or become a part of, another culture that we come to see that many of our values, beliefs and behaviors stem from our own cultural background. Interaction in a new cultural environment can cause conflict both within oneself and between oneself and the new culture. Some of this conflict is inevitable. However, by understanding yourself as a product of your own culture and of your own personal background, you will have a much easier time observing your interactions and learning to adapt to a new set of behavioral ground rules.

As Craig Storti points out in his book, “...each of us expects that everyone else is just like us. We expect everyone to behave as we do..., and we assume we behave like everyone else”. Storti finds this to be the basic issue involved in cross-cultural adjustment. Once one realizes that this assumption is erroneous, one can move towards adapting cross-culturally.

The following is a brief overview of some important topics and issues that are part of Thai culture that you should begin to think about before coming. Some questions to ask yourself as you read the following sections include: How does this fit with my own values? What problems might this cause for me? Why might Thais hold these values? What other questions does this raise?

Royalty, Politics and Religion

The Royal Family is held in highest regard. Speaking or acting against the Royal Family can result in deportation or jail. Pictures of the Royal Family must be treated with respect, and are usually hung very high, above one's head. Do not step on a coin or paper money as this is disrespectful of the King (his picture is on both), nor lick stamps (use one of the sponges at the post office).

Be sensitive when speaking about politics. Keep criticisms to yourself—even in English, as many Thais will understand what you are saying.

Buddhism is the state-sanctioned religion of Thailand, and is held in very high regard. A woman may not touch a monk or give anything directly to him. It is illegal to climb, sit on or deface any image of the Buddha — or any national monument. Other religions, including animism, Islam, Christianity are practiced in Thailand. You should be respectful at all religious events or places.

Hierarchy

Thailand is a hierarchical society. The idea that “all people are created equal” is a Western idea—not a Thai one (although this is changing to some extent). This is pervasive and is quite difficult for Westerners to adapt to. Women are not considered equal to men, poor people are not equal to rich people, younger people are not equal to older people, ethnic minorities are not equal to the ethnic majority, etc. This results in what a Westerner might consider “discrimination”—but also provides status and respect to older people, etc. Although this worldview is being challenged by some in Thai society, it is something you should be aware of as you prepare to live in Thailand.

Respect for the Body

The head is the highest and most sacred part of the body. Therefore, you should not touch another person's head or shoulders. For similar reasons, you should not reach over people's heads to get things.

The feet are considered “lower” and less clean than the rest of the body. Therefore, never point at a person or object with your feet, step over someone, or carry your shoes at a high level (e.g. you should never tie your shoes to the outside of your backpack).

How you dress reflects your respect for others. People will judge you by your appearance, as clothing can signify particular occupations and social status.

Gender Relations in Thailand

You'll most likely observe different gender dynamics in Thailand, and what seems like discrimination to a Western person. At the same time, Thailand is undergoing a tremendous amount of change, so gender dynamics are in a great deal of flux. Asking about these things with your Thai friends can bring on heated (and fun) discussions as they try and figure things out as well.

Depending on the context, relationships between young men and women (even those in college) can be more formal than here in the U.S. Public displays of affection, even holding hands between the sexes are frowned upon—but are becoming more common by the more “daring” young people.

Western women are stereotyped as being “easy,” so you should be wary of Thai men who approach you. For men, be aware that there are many preconceptions about why Western men come to Thailand. In fact, a lot of Western men do come to Thailand on so-called “sex tours” and being seen alone with a Thai woman—even if she is from the university—will make many Thai people assume she is a prostitute. It is always better to go out in groups, to avoid embarrassment for all concerned, and to save face for your female friends. Even being alone with someone of the opposite sex will create the impression that you are having sex, etc.

Kreng Jai

“Kreng Jai” is a deeply embedded, almost instinctive cultural behavior that is similar to the English meaning of “consideration.” The concept extends beyond being simply considerate in social interactions; however kreng jai often involves a subtle deference to a person of authority. Thai cultural behaviors avoid immediate personal conflict with another in order to keep either party from losing face. This may mean that you find yourself doing something you really don't want to do to please another person or to keep them from “losing face.” Some examples of this type of behavior include:

- Complying to others' wishes or requests.
- Reluctance to disturb or interrupt others.
- Restraint of one's show of displeasure or anger, so as not to cause discomfort to others.
- Avoidance of asserting one's opinions or needs (i.e. deferring to others instead).
- Reluctance to ask questions when one has not understood someone.
- Avoidance of causing others to lose face or to be embarrassed.
- Reluctance to give instructive communications to superiors (by rank) or to peers who are older or who have worked longer.
- Avoid making corrections of another's mistakes, particularly if he/she is more senior.
- Reluctance to evaluate colleagues' or superiors' performance.
- When giving opinions, choosing what is an obvious disadvantageous position, as a measure of self restraint.
- Avoiding the demand for one's rights.

Face

The concept of “face” is a very important cultural value in Thai society.

Keeping one's “face” is equivalent to keeping one's self respect and dignity intact. Not only are Thais concerned about maintaining “face” themselves, they are also concerned about other people's “face.” Thais will go to great pains to ensure that, so far as possible, you do not lose “face.” This means that they will rarely confront even when you have offended them. Communication is often handled through a third person acting as a go-between in order to allow everyone involved to save face.

The Thai Smile

To the foreigner who is unfamiliar with Thai culture, it may seem that the Thais are always smiling. Smiles have a variety of meanings in Thai society. To point out a few, smiles indicate the following: to indicate amusement; to excuse and grant pardon for minor offenses; to thank someone for a small service; to avoid comment on issues; or to show embarrassment. You should smile when you greet people. When foreigners refuse to smile, the Thais are not sure how to interact with them.

Thai Buddhism

The primary, and semi-official religion of the kingdom is Theravada Buddhism. (Thailand is not “legally” a Buddhist country, but in practice the government and the Buddhist Sangha are intertwined.) It does not hold uncompromisingly to the teachings of Guatama, but also embraces a wide spectrum of animism. There are close to 30,000 temples and more than 200,000 monks in the kingdom. It is generally expected that a male child will spend at least 3 months in the temple as a novice; he is not considered “ripe,” or treated with true respect until he has done so. Most men enter the priesthood to repay their parents by obtaining merit for them. Merit is made by doing good, giving offerings to the priesthood and temple, and by obeying the Dharma. You will notice spirit houses throughout the kingdom. These are a part of the Thai animistic belief that spirits need to be respected and placated with offerings.

Monks

Monks are considered holy and you have to show them respect. Women cannot touch monks. Women must never sit down by a monk nor hand anything directly to him. If a monk gets on a bus and desires to take a seat next to a woman, the woman must vacate her seat and stand up, or find another seat.

Temples

All Buddha images, large or small, in good or bad condition, are regarded as sacred objects. Do not climb up on one to take a photograph or do anything that would show disrespect to Buddhism and indirectly to the Thai people. Showing disrespect to Buddhism, temples or images can result in a prison sentence or expulsion from the country.

Other religions

There are sizable numbers of adherents to other religions in Thailand, mostly animist, Muslim and Christian. Much of Thai “Buddhism” is in actual practice animist, and many tribal people practice animism, which is not “spirit worship” but rather spirit “propitiation”—keeping the spirits from getting angry. Large portions of Southern Thailand are Muslim, and even in Chiang Mai there is a large Muslim community. Christians in Thailand are a minority among ethnic Thais, but large numbers of tribal people, such as the Karen, are Christian.

Program Policies

Attendance Policy

Attendance is required at all classes while on the ISDSI program except in cases of illness and/or emergencies beyond the student’s control. There is no such thing as a “permissible cut.” Unexcused absences will be deemed a sufficient reason for immediate dismissal from the program and the necessity to return home without any academic credit. Visits by family and friends are not reasons for an excused absence from class or program activities. Unless there is an official holiday, students are

expected to be at their program and available Monday through Friday, and on weekends when required. Students are also expected to attend and participate in scheduled group activities.

Withdrawal

Students who withdraw or are dismissed from the program after being admitted will be required to pay any additional costs incurred on their behalf (including, but not limited to, monies advanced on their behalf for non-refundable deposits at other institutions, airfare, legal documents, visa and application fees, housing deposits, etc.). Students who withdraw with the permission of the Executive Director of ISDSI or designate after the program has begun may be entitled to a partial refund depending on the time of notification, etc.

The Executive Director or designate reserves the right to withdraw or dismiss students from the program for violations of ISDSI policy or regulations, disruptive behavior or conduct which could bring the program into disrepute, on medical or academic grounds; or behavior that poses a danger. There will be no refund of program fees for a student dismissed from the program.

Students who wish to return home, once a program has begun, must receive permission to do so from the Executive Director of ISDSI or designate **and** their home campus study abroad office. Students who withdraw without permission will not be eligible for any academic credits that would have been earned and may be automatically be withdrawn from their college or university. These regulations also apply in the case of dismissal from the program.

Dismissal from the Program

Participation in ISDSI programs requires that students meet certain expectations and eligibility criteria, as well as exercise responsible judgment and behavior. When students accept their admission to the study abroad program, they agree to abide by the policies and regulations set forth in this handbook and any relevant policies of their home institution. In part that acceptable behavior includes, at a minimum, compliance with local laws and regulations, ISDSI policies and regulations (including local housing regulations and policies), and adherence to the social patterns of the homestay family (or local housing placement) and the local community. Any behavior that in the judgment of the Executive Director or his designate that causes pain or discomfort to others or which reflects discredit on the individual or upon ISDSI is considered unacceptable and may subject the offender to immediate administrative action by ISDSI including, but not limited to, immediate dismissal from the program.

Students who are dismissed from the program will receive a grade of "F" for each course. They will also be removed from their program-provided housing, and be expected to return to the United States as soon as possible at their own expense. Students who have been dismissed from the program may, depending on the policies of their home school, be also withdrawn from their college or university. Examples of student behavior while on the program that may lead to immediate administrative action by ISDSI include, but are not limited to: driving, illegal drug use, abuse of alcohol, failure to attend classes and/or other required academic activities, hitchhiking, unauthorized absence from the study abroad program, unauthorized changes in housing, arrest for infractions of local laws, and violations of other policies. Any dismissed student must return to the United States immediately after the dismissal and must pay any additional transportation expenses thus incurred.

Furthermore, ISDSI reserves the right to notify the parents of any student whose behavior abroad in the judgment of ISDSI is unacceptable or in violation of program policy.

Controlled Substances

While studying and living in Thailand, students are subject to the laws of Thailand. This applies especially with regard to the use or sale of controlled substances, i.e. drugs and alcohol. The use and sale of drugs is illegal and can result in severe penalties. A U.S. passport will not protect anyone from

arrest or detention. Furthermore, the judicial procedure in Thailand may include lengthy investigatory detention without bail and the U.S. embassy will not be able to assist you to a great extent.

While local customs and laws regarding alcohol use vary greatly, there are laws and ordinances regarding its abuse. It is the student's responsibility to familiarize himself or herself with these laws. It is the responsibility of each individual to understand the gravity of any violation of local laws, legal requirements, or behavioral norms when in another country. Copies of the U.S. Department of State "Consular Information Bulletins" containing information on penalties for violation of local laws are available on the Internet. (<http://travel.state.gov/travelwarnings.html>)

It is the policy of ISDSI that any illegal drug or excessive alcohol use or abuse of alcohol will result in disciplinary sanctions, up to and including an immediate dismissal from the program. Such actions not only affect the individual, but also put others in the group and the entire program in jeopardy.

Early Departures

With the exception of personal and family emergencies where the student and ISDSI have made appropriate arrangements, students **must remain in the program for its entire duration** in order to receive credit. No credit will be granted to anyone departing prior to the official end of the semester. There is no provision for making up a missed assignments for any reason.

Social Behavior

ISDSI has, from its beginnings, minimized formal rules and emphasized individual and group responsibility for appropriate behavior abroad. What is considered appropriate abroad is determined largely by the local context and local norms and practices. With certain exceptions, participating students have enjoyed a degree of freedom, both social and academic, generally comparable to that of their foreign counterparts.

A guest's freedom, however, is different in kind from that of a host and entails certain unique obligations determined in part by the terms of the visit. A student, as a guest abroad, functions within a context that needs to be clearly understood. ISDSI and the student are jointly responsible for the student's actions to individuals and communities, to foreign countries, to universities that indirectly subsidize study abroad, and to American students who may want to study abroad in the future. Recommended and accepted as someone who desires to take advantage of educational opportunities abroad, a study abroad participant is obligated to take seriously the role of a student, and ISDSI is likewise obligated to see that poor academic performance and unacceptable social behavior, even though judged on somewhat different basis, have at least the same consequences abroad as they have at home.

What, then, constitutes acceptable social behavior? Ideally, acceptable behavior should reflect such qualities as integrity, openness to the new and different, sensitivity to others' needs and a generous portion of compassion. Minimally, it must include compliance with all local laws and regulations and a genuine concern for the mores and social patterns of the homestay host and community, in order that student actions not be offensive either to the homestay or to the community. More generally, any behavior which in the judgment of ISDSI causes pain or serious discomfort to others or which reflects discredit upon the individual or upon ISDSI is considered unacceptable and will subject the offender to dismissal from the program.

Taking responsibility for personal behavior

1. To develop academic and social growth, we commit ourselves to free inquiry, openness to different points of view, and honesty in speech and conduct. In our attitudes and actions, we aim beyond selfishness and parochialism.

Respecting others

2. To enhance our community, we accept responsibility for its social well-being. We commit ourselves to treat with respect those with whom we differ, to recognize the rights held by others, and to attempt to resolve conflicts. Expressions of prejudice are contrary to this mutual respect and prevent the fostering of community.

Nurturing independent thought

3. To safeguard the integrity of academic work and research, we accept responsibility for our own scholarly performance. We regard false representation of our scholarly work as unacceptable because it undermines our integrity and that of the community. We commit ourselves to knowing under what conditions scholarly research is to be conducted, the degree of collaboration allowed, and the resources to be consulted.

Accepting environmental responsibility

4. To maintain and improve the condition of our physical environment, we commit ourselves to the respectful and prudent stewardship of our community's material and natural resources.