

Foundations: Thai Language

(Language)

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Course Overview

Students take intensive, interactive Thai language training for the duration of their time in Chiang Mai, which totals eight weeks through the semester. The teaching methodology is tailored to specific vocabulary and cultural needs of ISDSI students, and incorporates elements of competency-based learning and the natural approach to language learning, which draws on context and everyday activities to teach language. Class time focuses on conversation and discussion of real situations students encounter in their host families, public spaces, and course locations. Reading and writing Thai script from the first day, students' Thai language progresses rapidly as they engage the language through conducting interviews, learning Thai games, songs, a Thai cooking class, directed activities, and written homework. The language learning uses Thai culture and student experience as a point of departure for language learning. Classroom learning has one tutor for 4-6 students, grouped according to learning styles.

During Orientation week and the Foundations course, students have class for 4 hours each class day, and for 3 hours during the seminar weeks of the Expedition Field Courses. There is a total of 116 hours of classroom instruction, with additional Thai language practice on a daily basis throughout the semester and assignments that require students to use Thai in everyday settings.

Thai language learning extends far beyond the classroom. Students have individual homestays with Thai host families for their initial five weeks in Chiang Mai, and during that time you will learn about family, religion, traditional norms, and culture as you go on weekend outings with your host families. Host families typically take students to markets, temple activities, tourist attractions and natural features (such as waterfalls and hot springs around the city), and involve students as part of neighborhood life (through weddings, funerals, or housewarming ceremonies). Students view Thai culture through participation in local holidays and festivals as well.

While travelling on the Expedition Field Courses, students will stay with seven additional host families from 1-8 nights each, for 30 additional days with host families throughout Thailand. While paddling, canoeing, and camping on the Rivers and Islands/Coasts courses, students are also living alongside villagers for the duration of those courses. There are constant opportunities to learn new vocabulary and to improve fluency by engaging in the daily livelihood activities with villagers throughout each field course.

Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to speak Thai at an intermediate-high level for beginners, and to read and write Thai script. Students will be able to engage in culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication. You will learn the vocabulary needed to support your upcoming field expedition courses, in preparation for interviews and homestays on courses. The language program helps students adapt to life abroad, develop confidence in the life skills required for cross-cultural living, model leadership through peer-teaching/learning, and undertake experiential learning through deeper involvement with Thai society.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Understand spoken Thai, read and speak Thai, and write phonetically correct Thai script.
- Interact with Thai people in culturally appropriate ways.

- Travel and communicate all basic needs in common contexts.
- Ask questions about daily life, culture, events, and environments of Thailand, and share similar information about their own lives in their home countries.
- Conduct basic socioeconomic surveys and interviews in Thai.
- Gain specialized vocabulary proficiency on environmental issues in Thailand and other areas of interest.
- Confidently use Thai inside and outside of class by themselves.
- Expand vocabulary and language use to continue learning new knowledge and skills by themselves.

Grading and Assessment

Participation, Attendance, Assignments, and Cultural Appropriateness

20 %

Participation in this class means completing homework, on-time attendance, active involvement in the classroom and during other activities, being responsive and active in peer teaching/learning, exhibiting locally proper dress and behavior, and regularly bringing their experiences outside the classroom to class for focused discussion.

Pronunciation, reading and writing exams

20 %

The pronunciation and written tones test is usually during the third week. There are two additional one-hour reading/writing exams: one at the end of Foundations, and the other before the final Expedition Field Course.

Oral interview exam

60 %

This exam is during the student's final week in Chiang Mai at semester's end (or at the end of January internship), consisting of a 30-minute interview with an instructor who was not the student's primary language instructor.

Seminar Topics

Week 1:

Script and tones
Introductions/greetings, numbers, food and drinks, fruit, taste

Week 2:

Common adjectives and action verbs, family, sickness, market communication, Thai cooking, comparisons, feelings

Week 3:

Common small talk, parts of the day, action verbs, places

Week 4:

Telling time, date, adverbs of frequency, time words, telling location

Week 5:

Prepositions/relative location, household objects, EFC specific vocabulary

Week 6:

Occupations, maps, giving directions, transportation by bus, Thai political structure, EFC specific vocabulary

Week 7:

Transportation methods, compass directions and regions of Thailand, EFC specific vocabulary

Week 8:

Seasons, ecological features of Thailand, religion, EFC specific vocabulary

The language instructors tailor their curriculum and materials to the students in their learning groups. The ISDSI library contains a variety of dictionaries, travel guides, children's story books, and other language materials to support language learning.