

## **Human Rights and Cultural Exchange in Southeast Asia**

### **Week 1: Arrival and Program Orientation in Chiang Mai, Thailand**

After flying more than 8,000 miles over the Pacific Ocean, we land in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Steeped in history, Chiang Mai was the ancient capital of the Lan Na Kingdom, established in the year 1294. Now a modern, vibrant city, Chiang Mai is a cultural hub that hosts many traditional festivals, weekly markets, Buddhist temples, and a growing artistic community. Settling in near the old walled city, the group will spend the next 4 days building bonds, setting intentions, and setting the foundation for the upcoming journey.

### **Week 2: Mae Rim village, Thailand**

Leaving Chiang Mai, we head north of the city one hour to the small town of Mae Rim. Here we dive into learning the basics of the Thai language, a complex tonal language spoken by more than 20 million people. We stay with local families, allowing insight and further understanding of Thai culture, social emphasis on close family systems, and opportunities to practice our new language skills. Days will be structured with morning language lessons, a break for lunch, and afternoon activities including traditional Thai dancing, Thai cooking classes, informative discussions about Buddhism, and walks in a nearby national park. In the evenings, we spend time connecting with our families, including attending a ceremony at the local Wat (temple).

### **Week 3-4: Mirror Art Foundation, and Trekking in the north, Chiang Rai, Thailand.**

Saying goodbye to our homestay families, we travel by bus to the city of Chiang Rai. We have a few days to rest and get oriented to our new surroundings before volunteering with The Mirror Art Foundation. Here, we will explore the topic of immigration, human rights, social justice. Many refugees and immigrants come to Thailand in an effort to escape violence, extreme poverty, or in hopes of securing a better future through education and work. Many of these people are from various Hill Tribe ethnicities and have no legal status in Thailand. They often face extremely

difficult challenges in finding work and accessing basic services. Mirror Art seeks to aid refugees in Thailand by providing legal services, and educational opportunities for children of refugees. We spend 10-12 days volunteering on one of multiple projects that Mirror Art works on. Currently, the main project is building a large school for children of migrant laborers. While working on the project, we learn about the history and current situation of Hill Tribe members and see what steps Mirror Art has taken to improve the lives of this vulnerable population. We return to Chiang Mai post project to regain our footing before we head out trekking.

After having learned of the situation of many Hill Tribe communities, we take the opportunity to go for a trek in the mountains north of Chiang Mai. We walk from village to village with our Karen guide, staying in a different Hill Tribe community each evening and being hosted by new friends. Our final day we float out to our exit point on handmade bamboo rafts and return to Chiang Mai once again to prepare to journey to the far east of the country.

### **Week 5-6: Sahainan Organic Farm and Bangkok, Thailand**

We head east by bus, to the small town of Thung Chang. Here we transfer to Sahainan Organic Farm. Sahainan is run by Sandot, a local Thai citizen who realized that his traditional way of living had been lost in the modern world, and that much of the land that he grew up on was being harmed by modern agriculture. He was able to take possession of an old cashew plantation, and Sandot and his family relocated with the goal of helping Thais relearn what his grandparents already knew: How to live harmoniously with the land. Sandot's purpose is to build and maintain a sustainable way of life—one in which the well-being of our planet and all life that live upon it is of utmost importance. "We want to heal the damages inflicted by our modern society of over consumption, fossil fuel dependence and industrial agriculture". Here we get our hands dirty, learning the basics of farming and food production, and why food security is such an important principle and basic human right. Living is simple, but it is also beautiful, with discussions and agricultural work in the day time, followed by delicious food and camp fires in the evening.

### **Week 7: Bangkok, Thailand, and Phnom Penh, Cambodia**

We make the long journey south to the incredible capital of Thailand, Bangkok. Situated on the banks of the Chao Phraya river, Bangkok is an immense city, with vibrant street life, endless markets, and amazing street food. We visit temples and markets, explore the area via canals and river boat taxis, and reflect on our time in Thailand. We'll also prepare for the next leg of the journey: Cambodia.

Flying to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, we get our first experience of this fascinating nation. We spend a few days in the capital, learning the basics of our new host country, and then begin to explore Cambodia's tragic (and recent) history. We visit the Tuol Sleng genocide museum and Choeung Ek memorial. We bear witness to the history of the Khmer Rouge, a brutal political regime that led to tremendous violence and upheaval throughout the nation. The group will learn how Cambodia is recovering and healing from this terrible affront to human rights.

### **Week 8: Kratie and Siem Reap, Cambodia**

After Bangkok and Phnom Pehn, it's time to get out of the city! We travel north along the Mekong River, arriving in the small community of Kratie and meet up with the Cambodian Rural Development Team (CRDT). CRDT is a local not-for-profit organization which aims to lift communities out of poverty through supporting conservation and participatory community-based approaches. We join CRDT on a small island in the Mekong river, staying with local families and learning how CRDT is working with communities on multiples fronts: Environmental, water and sanitation, food security, income generation, and renewable energy. By staying with the local community, we learn about Cambodian ways of living, while engaging in community development and cultural exchange. We even get a chance to see the nearly extinct Irrawadi River dolphin which still live in this peaceful setting.

Leaving the north, we make our way to the original seat of power in Cambodia, Siem Reap. Here we have the opportunity to learn about the ancient history of this incredible country. Established approximately 800AD, Siem Reap is now a bustling center of tourism and trade. Our primary focus will be exploring ancient temples of Angkor, one of the largest religious monuments in the world, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Originally a Hindu temple paying homage to the god Vishnu, the site was slowly transformed into a Buddhist temple complex in the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century. At one time, the Angkor empire ruled most of present-day Southeast Asia. Catch a sunrise at Angkor Wat, look into the hundreds of faces of Bayon temple, and see the enormous Ceiba trees of Ta Prohm. Marvel at this testament to human ingenuity, 1200 years later.

### **Week 9: Spiritual retreat in Kep, Cambodia, and transfer to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam**

It's time to take a breath and reflect on all that we've seen and done! We'll bus it down to the small coastal community of Kep, and head to our Spiritual retreat. Vagabond temple allows us to participate in a range of spiritual practices in an effort to reflect mindfully on our experiences. We explore different styles of Yoga

and engage in nightly meditations. resting and renewing our minds and bodies. This is a rejuvenating time and allows us to engage in new practices that we can take with us for the remainder this journey, and for the rest of our lives!

We say goodbye to Cambodia and push further east, crossing the border with Vietnam, and making our way by bus to the previous capital, Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City provides us with an eye-opening entry into Vietnam, with delicious food, friendly people, and some of the most bazaar and interesting traffic patterns of motor bikes you have ever seen. We stay just a few days before we meet up with Tan Tao University.

### **Week 10: Tan Tao University, Southern Vietnam**

We join up with Tan Tao University outside of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's first non-profit university. Tan Tao was founded with the goal of providing Vietnamese students with the skills they need to become global citizens. We meet up with local university students and head out for a week to southern Vietnam, engaging in multiple community-based service projects, getting to know what life is like for our Vietnamese peers, and seeing what service means in Vietnam. The week is full and varies in content: we might be in home-stays, we might be in community housing centers, and service projects reflect what local communities need in real time. It is a week full of memories and connecting with new friends, learning what global citizenship and exchange is all about.

### **Week 11-12: Scuba diving, Student Directed Travel, and departure, Vietnam**

Moving north, we arrive in the coastal city of Nha Trang. We are here to literally dive into the ocean waters and earn our Scuba certification. We work with a long established, professional PADI certified diving center. Complete your training dives, and head out into the South China Sea to put those skills into practice. Learning to dive opens up an entire new world of underwater exploration and adventure and teaches the confidence you'll need to continue navigating underwater realms throughout your future travels!

After our amazing scuba experience, it's time for Student Directed Travel. This is your group's chance to take the reins and put into practice all the travel skills you have learned thus far. You have one week to decide, as a group, where to go, where to stay, and how to get there. The Overseas Educators will take a mindful back seat and allow the group to create their own itinerary. We start in Nha Trang and need to end in the capital city of Vietnam, Hanoi. What adventure will you choose?!

During this time, your Overseas Educators will lead a few activities designed to explore ways of preparing for the upcoming reintegration to life at home. We'll talk about strategies in keeping our sense of adventure and inquiry engaged in the context of our daily lives, and how to keep the momentum of an amazing semester alive.

Arriving in Hanoi, we have a final night out, taking the time to enjoy a last dinner together as a group, and giving those last heartfelt gritudes to your traveling family.

***\*Carpe Diem reserves the right to make changes to the program at any time, and indeed has the responsibility to do so in some instances; changes may be required to provide the best possible experience, protect the safety of participants, or respond to changes in weather or political conditions.***