

1.5 Year Testimonial by Savannah McDermott

Upon my arrival in Surat Thani, it seemed an exciting, strange place. Spicy food full of questionable meat parts, torrential rain in ninety-degree heat, and the baseball-sized scorpions that scuttled into my kitchen strengthened my conviction that I had just landed in an alien world. This was my third go at living abroad, the third continent on which I'd set down shallow roots, and it was by far the oddest. Nothing had ever seemed so foreign. And I loved that—I loved waking up every morning knowing that something weird was destined to happen. A few months in, culture shock turned that thrill into aggravation, and Thailand was the enemy: all bad smells and incomprehensible people. Having little understanding of the culture and nearly none of the language, I felt isolated and homesick for the West.

But working at Super English provided a support system through all of that—the good and the bad. For the first semester of our time here, my boyfriend Levi and I lived in one of the houses provided by the agency, and became good friends with our roommate Gary, who was always ready with a cocktail and a sitcom to cheer me up after a rough day. Both at Thida and at Super English, I was working with veteran Thailand teachers who understood all I was going through. When getting breakfast was a whole frustrating ordeal because I couldn't communicate, I could go into the Thida office and find a sympathetic ear and some advice on how to succeed in my next attempt. When my Thai teacher began to express some undisguised and truly baffling irritation towards me, Peter and my coworkers offered me tips on sucking up to her Thai-style; after a slight change to my lesson plans, a couple bags of fruit and some respectful gestures, she totally changed her tune.

With the help of this great group of people, I finally settled into the realistic vision I now have of Surat and Thailand: this is neither an alien wonderland nor the hell my darker moods perceived it to be. It's a real place with some good and some bad. My friends and coworkers at Super English helped me learn how to make the most of the place—how to appreciate the good and laugh off the bad.

At Super I've found travel companions, drinking buddies, fellow massaman connoisseurs and Cards Against Humanity opponents. I found people who, like me, are totally ok with being the only people dancing in a bar full of awestruck Thai people. I met people brave enough to hop on a motorbike they'd just learned to drive and cruise an hour down the highway to the beach in the dark. With these awesome folks, I had outrageous nights (particularly the evening of the Super English parties, when Peter is quite generous with the booze) and quiet evenings playing cards at the jungle houses. I pulled all-nighters on Koh Phangan and Railay Beach and went on treacherous but beautiful hikes to the lovely waterfalls of Dat Fa, just an hour from Surat. I experienced Song Kran in Chiang Mai, one of the best weekends I've ever had, and New Year's Eve on Koh Samui, one of the weirdest.

The job is great—Thai kids are adorable and working at Thida affords foreign teachers a fascinating window into Thai culture. But the best thing about Super English is the people. Peter has a real eye for hiring good personalities. The result is a group of fun, laid-back, supportive people who will welcome you with open arms and make your experience here a positive one. Even when the constant rain was getting me down, or when I was sick with heartburn and nausea for weeks because I'd been overdoing it on the spicy food, or when I was frustrated with difficulties at work, there was always someone who could turn my attitude around and make me see the sunny side of things. At Super, you'll find a much-needed support system and a group of good friends, and I think that's the best thing that can be said about a job, especially one in an unfamiliar culture far from home. It's time for me to move on from Thailand, but I will really miss this family when I go.