

## **My Final Testimonial (2.5 years)**

It's hard to believe my time here in Surat Thani is coming to a close. My wife and I have spent the last two and a half years teaching with Super English. In some ways it feels like we just arrived yesterday (I still have a very vivid memory of visiting Surat's night market our first day here). In other ways it feels like a lifetime ago that we boarded the plane and left America behind to try this teaching overseas thing. As I reflect on my time here, I'm thankful for Super English giving me the opportunity to have an enjoyable and meaningful experience living and teaching in Surat. I remember reading before we came about how living abroad will change you, for better or worse. It seemed like an overused cliché, a bit of hyperbole used by expats to make their experiences sound more exotic. But I've found it to be true. I'm not the same me I was in 2012.

For starters, I showed up knowing next to nothing about teaching. I knew I enjoyed working with kids, but I had no idea what to do in a classroom, especially one filled with 55 ESL students. I did immediately find a joy beyond what I expected in my job, in entertaining and educating kids who were ecstatic to see me every day. But I was still a total newbie and needed a lot of direction in the details, for things like creating effective lesson plans or managing unstoppable swarms of 3 year olds. Peter was right there to coach and guide me through that process of growing as a teacher. I got fantastic training and he gave me tons of great tips when I struggled. And most importantly, I had the freedom to be my goofy self in the classroom and try out whatever zany teaching ideas I came up with. I could sense by my second semester that I was no longer a beginner, and each semester I've improved and refined my teaching skills as I've had the opportunities to teach different subjects at different age levels, and in a variety of settings. I feel confident now that I could step in and deliver great lessons in any classroom I find myself in. I'm really glad Super English gave me the chance to grow into a better teacher and find my niche professionally. I'll definitely use everything I've learned about teaching here as I move on to whatever's next. I've got an excellent class this year and I've really become attached to them. I'm going to miss them a lot and I know I'll look back with amazing memories from all my time teaching at Thida.

I also will fondly remember my time in Thailand for the chance to encounter other cultures. Surat's not a tourist town. You don't see backpackers or beach bums wandering around the city away from the transport or ferry hubs. You can get incredible genuine Thai food from local rice shacks and food carts, but first you have to master some basic Thai language, because many people here don't speak a bit of English. If you so choose, you can immerse yourself among locals, learn the language, and see what life is really like for people who aren't just passing through. My wife and I have met some incredible Thai people (neighbors, roommates, teachers, vendors, and more) who've openly welcomed us into their community and shown us great friendship despite the cultural barriers. There is also a sizeable English teacher community here. I've had the underrated privilege of working and

living alongside people who are quite different than me, people from different parts of the globe I may never have spent time with had we not each chosen to move to this corner of the world. This has been an unexpected aspect of teaching with SE that has stretched me and changed me into a more open and understanding person. And I've also met some fantastic people who I have a lot in common with. I've made some really good friends to brew beer with while watching bootleg sports or discussing relativistic physics. I've definitely had some moments of culture shock living here, but it's comforting to have other people to experience it together with.

In addition to the professional and cultural impacts SE and Surat have made on me, I've also really enjoyed how living here has given me a chance to pursue other passions of mine and enjoy everyday life. I really like reading but didn't find/make much time for it back home. In the two years before coming to Surat, I read about 5-10 books. I just finished my 54th book since moving here and I'm thrilled to have rediscovered my love of reading. This semester, I began taking an online series of statistics courses that had always interested me. Over the past year, some friends and I have brewed up over 15 different craft beers. My wife and I have lived for over a year in a shipping container home in the jungle, where we've gotten to relax and enjoy the soothing sounds of nature right from our front porch. We frequently get great, cheap massages. We eat fantastic food at cheap restaurants almost every night. We also really love traveling. We recently counted up all our weekend excursions to the nearby beaches, waterfalls, temples, hot springs, and other towns and realized we've taken over 50 trips. Just on weekends! Plus, in the 3+ months off from school each year, we've been able to travel all over Thailand and to Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and China (twice!), plus make two trips back home to the States. I don't think we'll ever have the chance again to travel as extensively as we've done here, and I don't know of any other school that gives teachers as much vacation break as Super English. It's been a whirlwind, but absolutely thrilling!

As Peter told us when we arrived, Thailand is what you make it. But I don't think our experience would have been nearly as great without the overwhelming professional and personal support we received throughout our time from our SE teammates, the staff, and Peter himself. I'm thankful for what Surat has meant to me over the past two-plus years. I'm leaving Thailand, but all the memories and the tiny bit of Thai culture I've come to understand will stick with me everywhere I go. Too bad I can't take all the amazing food with me too.