

It is very easy to explain how Super English and Thidamaepra have made me a strong ESL teacher. There is always someone around to talk to, whether it be our great managers, a fellow teacher, or Peter. There is also a plethora of reading material specific to our jobs and life in Surat Thani available on the website and on the blog. It is not so easy, however, to explain how Thailand has made me want to be a more relaxed and patient person.

I came here from Chicago, working in an extremely upscale restaurant. In that place, being prepared is an understatement. I had to be so prepared, that if someone moved their fork, I was ready to swiftly and smoothly move it back in place, barely seen or heard, only to continue juggling the ten things I was already doing. Getting yelled at in front of a whole kitchen and seeing my co-workers sent home or fired became normal. So, six months before I was even departing for Surat Thani, I was asking how I could get the textbook I would be using. How could I prepare... prepare, prepare, prepare! Needless to say, I was worrying a bit too much. I was trying to be prepared for something that I just had to experience for myself.

When I was picked up at the airport, riding down the highway towards Surat Thani, I was amazed how trucks would pass us in to oncoming traffic, playing chicken with the cars in the opposite lane. That's a major fine in Illinois, I thought. This was just a little preview to how driving in the city would be, with dozens of motorbikes trying to squeeze past you on the left and on the right. Once I was the driver, being amazed quickly faded into fury. Playing it safe while others showed off their bike handling skills made me want to keep up, zooming in and out, hitting forty five degree angles with the pavement, being the one in front. As soon as I noticed this thought process, I realized I had to remind myself that I am a visitor here. I am not used to their ways, and it's their ways I have to become accustomed to. It was especially trying when the people doing such reckless moves were adults driving with one hand, holding an infant with another. How, though, would my crappy driving make any of this better? It would never, and being angry on the road would only make the delicate tower of cards that the traffic here is, crumble harder and faster. I had been driving a motorbike for all of a couple weeks, and some here began when they were big enough to hold one up. Relax, I tell myself now, two wrongs don't make a right!

Whether it was in a 7-Eleven or in line at the cafeteria, I noticed myself getting angry again, at others who would cut me in line. I was too busy frowning, frowning and pouting, and not actively pursuing what I was trying to get. As much as some things here are all "no worries," some are fast paced like any other city. If someone saw the opportunity to put their purchases down and went for it, I probably could have, too. Not many will sit around and wait for you to take your chance. Take it, or let it be taken. Don't pout. Frowns get you nowhere here. Why would I come halfway across the world to frown? This is another situation where I had to remind myself that I am a visitor. Yes, I have a residence and a job here, but I don't speak the language and I know I am leaving in 6 months. I cannot call this home. I'm very lucky that Thailand is willing to share their beautiful country with me for a little bit.

I don't mean to say any of this as if I would change anything about Surat Thani or Thailand. Rather, like I mentioned in the beginning, these things made me realize the severity of my reactions and I have been actively seeking to change those. I left a city where trains came on time, people stopped at

yellow lights, business hours were always the same, and laws were so severe that not even the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution stood. I came to a developing country. I came to a city in a developing country where I cannot blend in. Was I supposed to expect law and order? Absolutely not. These attitude adjustments, being more relaxed and more patient, will only benefit me in the future, no matter where I end up next. I should not waste emotion on things I cannot change, and I should not assume change is needed or wanted.

I came here to teach, and the classroom is where I can definitely make a positive impact. Whatever a teacher is teaching, getting young minds turning is so very rewarding. If my students take anything from English, I hope they take the chance English gives them to study any topic more thoroughly. Another great thing about teaching is that you are your own best critic. It's obvious to yourself when you're not doing a good job. Some might feel guilt, some might not, but the feeling when you know you really reached a young person, when you really taught them something useful, is addicting.