

My Year in Surat by Keith Mangan

No matter how much I've tried to avoid Facebook over the past few years, it's how I ended up in Surat Thani, so I'll always be grateful for it! It seems like yesterday I was sitting in my cold, boxed, kimchi smelling apartment in Busan, South Korea pondering my next move. After three years of the rigid public school system there, I was ready for a change.

As my time in Korea came to a close, I started looking at the possibility of teaching in a different country. During one of my evenings hiding away from the cold in my apartment, I stumbled across a Facebook post inquiring about teaching in Surat Thani from a former Super English teacher, Stuart Gribben. I clicked over to the Super English page to see what things were all about. In Korea, I rarely had a chance to make my own materials, quizzes, or tests. All of these things plus the ability to teach how I liked, minus any interference and minimal paperwork sounded awesome to me!

Of course, before I could touch down in Surat, I had to get from Miami/Ft. Lauderdale into town. As I thought I was all squared away to board for my new adventure via Atlanta/Los Angeles/Tokyo/Bangkok/Surat Thani, I heard an uncomfortable sound on the speaker. "Passenger Mangan, please report to the departure gate, please." Ah, of course. Nothing can ever be easy with air travel. The overzealous agent was insistent I purchase a ticket showing my way out of Thailand, as I only had a one way fare. I unsuccessfully tried to explain to her I'd be going to Malaysia on a visa run, but she wouldn't budge (not to mention I could've taken a ferry, bus, or minivan out of the country!). I figured it was easier to purchase a ticket and speak with the airlines after the fact, so I bought one over the counter phone and barely made my flight.

If I fast forward to present day, I'm very happy I chose Super English and Surat Thani. It's not a stretch to think I've grown more in the one year as a teacher than I did in the three years I was in Korea. My favorite aspect is how I can do what I see fit—as long as the kids are furthering their English. Nobody has ever said I must do X,Y, or Z because that's what it said on the syllabus. Nor do I have to think or act like a robot—although I have my schedule when I teach certain subjects and when I give quizzes, I really enjoy how I'm not tied to certain parameters.



I was originally slated to teach only the IEP program (above), but was asked to take over an MEP Prathom 3 (below) position right before school started. I was a little unsure deep down inside, as I'd never taught math or science previously, but it's been such an awesome experience for me! My class can be fairly rowdy and active, but knowing myself and my relaxed demeanor, their energy helps get me going each morning. I rarely have a dull moment in the office—always something to prepare, something to grade, or something to be thinking about.



One of the more memorable moments for me has been my ongoing 'Homework Club.' Throughout the first half of the year, I was growing tired of kids not doing their homework. They didn't learn that particular target, and then would mess around

during class during homework review. A simple solution was to say to them, “Ok, no problem. We can do your homework at 10:30.” Realizing I meant they’d miss their break, it rapidly reduced the number of missing homework assignments!

Another thing I’ve really loved has been bonding with my students. Seeing my MEP students three times a day gives me a really good idea of each student’s personalities, abilities, and interests. Whether it was Gun showing me his Sonic the Hedgehog dedicated drawing notebook, Mook calling out each and every student speaking Thai in class (including her own group members), or BB bringing me back a bookmark from her family’s holiday trip to Turkey (!), I have some very fond memories of each of them!

I’d be missing something in this piece if I didn’t write about my time outside of school. While we do put in a great deal of work, one awesome thing about Surat Thani is the location. I love being able to hop in a minivan or bus and be a couple of hours away from a new destination. Of course, trips to Koh Samui, Phangnan, and Tao (below) are always popular, but I’ve enjoyed lower-key trips to areas like Khanom, Chumphon, and Chaiya. Often times I find these trips amazingly refreshing as I allow myself to unwind and not worry about what I should be doing or where I should be going! With so much to see, I’ve barely ventured out to the West Coast of Thailand and am looking forward to that next year!



It’s not just the weekends that are entertaining, though. This is a pretty enthusiastic about their fitness, and there seems to be a new gym popping up all the time. During the week, I really enjoy exercising immediately after school. With my gym only a few minutes away, I’m typically finished at the gym around 5:30 and home in time to meet up with friends for dinner.

Speaking of dinner, Surat Thani is known for having some of the best cuisine in the country. When I first heard this, I was a bit skeptical, as every restaurant I ate at previously in Korea was “famous” as well. I can easily say I’ve enjoyed the variety, style, and experience dining out in Surat Thani. The dining experience is unlike anything I’ve had in the States. Here, you’re never pushed out of the restaurant for another customer. Often times dinner prices are roughly the price of the valet I’d be subjected to paying before entering a restaurant back home.



I could go on and on about additional aspects of Super English and Surat Thani, but then I’d be ruining the fun and enjoyment of experiencing things firsthand for you, the reader. However, if you like the idea of a fun, energetic working environment, hassle free ownership, and hands off approach, I’d highly suggest applying to be a Super English teacher. I’ve enjoyed it so much I’ll be staying another year. Hope to see ya here!