

Introduction:

Instead of spending my mandatory year abroad in close proximity somewhere in Europe, I decided to use my German passport for the first time and spend it in a country that is a 12-hour flight away from home. I had no previous experience, nor did I know what awaited me. Therefore, I am giving you an honest insight if you are contemplating spending your time in Thailand.

Preparation and application:

If you are certain to study at Kasetsart University, you should begin your preparations and University application as soon as possible. This allows you to complete the registration at KU early and enables additional preparation necessary for your journey. For instance, you should book your flight early to avoid paying a high price and apply for your visa so it will be available for you in time. Additionally, I would advise you to speak to a doctor concerning vaccinations and health-related factors.

Accommodation:

During my time in Bangkok, I stayed in an international student dormitory provided by the university, and I can really recommend it. It is called "Krissana International Dormitory" and is located right between the university and a BTS station (elevated rapid transit system). Right next to the dormitory is also a station for the KU bus that regularly drives to the campus grounds, free of charge. Additionally, the dormitory is located on a street with various street food vendors and a 7-Eleven. The facilities of the dormitory itself are very clean, providing free water dispensers as well as washing and drying machines that cost around 90 baht per use. The security is exceptional, there are guard posts around the perimeter that are manned 24 hours a day, and a warden sitting in front of the entrance at all times. The house and floor entrances are blocked by a key card sensor and the only drawback is that no outsiders are allowed in the building, solely the residents. I found my dormitory and others on the university website: <https://www.ku.ac.th/en/dormitory>

Costs:

Many people regard Thailand as very cheap, in the following you can find my experiences and recommendations on the matter. Due to the mutual contract between Hochschule Trier and Kasetsart University, all tuition fees are waived for the semesters abroad. Therefore, you are solely required to pay your semester fee to Hochschule Trier to retain student status. A significant drawback, however, is that there is no guaranteed funding such as Erasmus or other scholarships. Since Thailand is not part of the EU, you need to arrange a scholarship or other types of funding on your own. Luckily, the overall cost of living in Bangkok is very affordable. First of all, my rent in Krissana Dormitory was 6,000 baht per month (around 150 Euros) and utility was around 5-6 Euros depending on actual usage. Secondly, food can be bought almost anywhere and anytime for just a few Euros, while anything above 5 Euros can already be classified as "expensive". I do not recommend cooking your own food for the purpose of being economical, it is always cheaper to buy it from the street or cheap restaurants.

Courses:

In the student exchange contract between the two universities, it is required for you to enroll in the KUBIM program (International Program in Marketing). In total, you need to register for five courses with three of them being mandatory to be from the KUBIM program. Additionally, you have the alternative of choosing between courses in Business Administration and Economics. However, I recommend choosing KUBIM courses, although they mostly require more work, but are easier content-wise. It is also noteworthy to mention that all courses offered to you within the program are taught in English. Your final grade is influenced by several factors such as attendance, class participation, presentations, and other projects, as well as a mid-term and a final exam. Lastly, it is expected of you to dress appropriately and wear your school uniform to class and every school event.

Life at KU:

The campus life is something unlike I have ever experienced before, and it never gets boring. The campus itself is huge and it is easy to get lost in the beginning. It feels like Kasetsart University is its own little city within Bangkok and therefore has its unique feeling and appeal. This is prominent in their unique branding as “Green University” since the whole campus is covered in trees and lakes with exotic animals that come along with this environment. So don’t be surprised if a giant monitor lizard crosses your path on your way to class. Besides that, there are various canteens, restaurants, convenience stores, and other facilities, and always something new to try out and discover. Additionally, to the wide variety of restaurants and shops, there are also several events that happen quite regularly on the campus. The university also offers many clubs and facilities, for instance, two gyms, a swimming pool, tennis and badminton courts, and many more.

Drawbacks:

When living in a country for so long, you get to authentically experience the real side of it and along with that, some drawbacks. The biggest challenge any exchange student faces – especially in the beginning - is the language barrier. Unfortunately, only a few Thai people are capable of speaking English to a sufficient extent. Therefore, it is of utmost significance for you to learn at least a basic understanding of Thai, in order to communicate with the locals. Knowing how to order food, knowing the numbers, and asking basic questions are greatly recommended but not essential to survive in everyday life. However, speaking just a little bit of Thai will put a smile on every local you meet and make your experience immeasurably more enjoyable and convenient. Another negative aspect is the pollution in Bangkok, due to being very busy and highly populated. Dense traffic, industrialisation, and agricultural burning that happens depending on the season all contribute to severe smog in the city. I did not feel any negative impact as a result of it, but it may be a concern with people suffering from cardiovascular or respiratory diseases. Additionally, other drawbacks such as extreme heat or flooding during rainy season should be expected and prepared for accordingly. In conclusion, you should do your own research before coming to Thailand and try your best to integrate into their culture and be open to new experiences. As long as you are aware and use common sense, nothing bad will happen to you.

Positive Feedback:

Spending my year abroad in Thailand granted me the experience of a lifetime; to get to know the country on a deeper level than any tourist could ever reach and many positive impressions. As mentioned earlier, the cost of living is very cheap, which can mitigate the fact that getting a scholarship may prove difficult. Besides the cost aspect, the local people and the culture were my favourite part of the whole experience. Thai people are very warm, welcoming, and quite outgoing at times. I can really recommend making the effort to get to know the Thais and spend time with them, as they are the nicest and funniest people on earth. Communication can prove difficult, and many are not confident in their English-speaking ability, however, only with Thai friends can you really start to gain authentic insights into the country and culture. The culture, in general, is an important reason why people refer to Thailand as "The Land of Smiles". The people are extremely polite and happy, so much so that it would confuse any German, as to why that is (me included). This feeling of joy is contagious and being around Thais instantly removes any bad mood. Another big reason to move to Bangkok is to enjoy the various benefits and conveniences. It is huge and there is always more to see and experience. The city is coined by a duality of super modernity and cultural traditions. You can get lost in the biggest Malls of the world with the most beautiful architecture and a wide variety of restaurants and shops. You can also experience ancient temples or other monuments that allow you to see what Buddhism is truly all about. Although you will spend most of your time in Bangkok, Thailand has a lot more to offer with landscapes anyone can enjoy. For instance, the colder mountainous region of Chiang Rai or Chiang Mai in the north, Kanchanaburi with waterfalls and national parks in the west, or plenty of beautiful beaches and islands in the south. After seeing most of Thailand, it is very cheap and convenient to visit other countries in Southeast Asia. Bangkok is an excellent travel hub by offering two airports that can take you to any destination you want, for an affordable price. Lastly, one of the biggest positive aspects of Thailand is the food. Thai food is one of the best in the world with a huge variety of signature dishes, cheap prices, and an abundance of street food vendors in the country. Just make sure that your spice tolerance is high enough to handle it.

Conclusion: Should YOU go?

Concluding everything I experienced during my year abroad and everything I mentioned previously: can I recommend studying at Kasetsart University and living in Thailand?

The short answer is yes. Although Thailand is completely different from Germany in almost every aspect, it will provide you with unique insights and a story only a few people can tell. Getting used to the weather, the culture and the different university experience at KU is crucial for your overall experience. Therefore, as long as you are willing to adapt to a different environment, embrace a new culture, and learn a new language I can really recommend that you go to Thailand. In conclusion, if I had the same choice again, I would go there without hesitation.