Important Names & Addresses

The Learning Abroad Center provides a full range of services from preliminary program advising to assistance with re-entry. Do not hesitate to contact any of the MSID Learning Abroad Center staff with your questions. Prior to departure, please direct all questions to the Learning Abroad Center. Friends and family members should always contact the Learning Abroad Center, not the on-site staff, for assistance, even once you are overseas.

In the United States:
Learning Abroad Center
University of Minnesota
230 Heller Hall
271 19th Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN 55455-0430
Phone: 612.626.9000
Fax: 612.626.8009
Toll Free: 888.700.UOFM
Email: UMabroad@umn.edu
Web: UMabroad.umn.edu

Vanessa Walton, Associate Program Director
vwalton@umn.edu, 612.626.7561

Scott Daby, Program Director
daby0005@umn.edu, 612.626.7138

Emergencies
In case of a serious emergency, contact the Learning Abroad Center at 612.626.9000. If it is after business hours, a recording will give you a number to call. The Learning Abroad Center has someone on call for emergencies and to contact the on-site administrators if needed. Once overseas, participants should contact their in-country program staff.

In Thailand

Telephone Codes
011 International access code from the US. The code from other countries will be different.
+66 Thailand country code used for dialing from outside Thailand.

Time Differences
Thailand is 12 hours ahead of Minnesota during the winter and 11 hours during the months when the US is on daylight saving time.

Addresses

Your Address in Thailand
Until you have your assigned homestays, mail should be sent to you at the following address.

MSID Office
International Sustainable Development Studies Institute (ISDSI)
48/1 Chiang Mai—Lampang Rd. (Superhighway)
Muang, Chiang
Thailand

MSID Thailand Director
Dr. Mark Ritchie
ISDSI
48/1 Chiang Mai—Lampang Rd. (Superhighway)
Muang, Chiang
Thailand
Phone: +66-53-406-331

MSID Thailand Associate Director
Kanokporn Deeburee (Aoy)
ISDSI
48/1 Chiang Mai—Lampang Rd (Superhighway)
Muang, Chiang
Thailand
Phone: +66-53-406-331

US Embassy in Thailand
For information on the local US Embassy in Thailand, please visit the following website: http://usembassy.state.gov

Web Addresses
Visit the MSID Thailand website for useful health, safety, travel, development, and country web links: UMabroad.umn.edu/programs/asia-oceania/msid-thailand.

Know Before You Go
Before you leave the country, make sure that you have read and understood the information in your Confirmation Checklist, the Online Orientation, and the Learning Abroad Center’s policies (UMabroad.umn.edu/students/policies). These materials will guide you on a safe and successful learning abroad experience.

Friends & Family Resources
Valuable resources for your friends and family members can be found at UMabroad.umn.edu/parents. Topics such as health and safety, program prices, logistics, and travel are discussed.

Program Health & Safety
Program health and safety information is available at http://global.umn.edu/gosafe/index.html.
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Purpose of This Handbook

This program handbook provides an overview of your unique study abroad program. It contains information relevant to the program as well as specifics about the country. The program handbook should be used in tandem with the Learning Abroad Center’s online orientation and website for information regarding registration, credit, payment, refunds, academic policies, health, safety, insurance, and cultural adjustment.

MSID & You

The information below can help ensure that your learning goals match MSID’s program philosophy. Consider these statements and reflect on your own goals for the program.

Introduction to MSID

Mission

Minnesota Studies in International Development (MSID) is devoted to the preparation of culturally sensitive individuals who are committed to the concepts of justice and sustainable development for all societies in our interdependent world. MSID seeks to engage students, faculty, and staff, as well as the general community, in dialogue and reciprocal learning with people from Africa, Asia, and Latin America concerning local and global problems, with a particular emphasis on development issues. Through grassroots internships and research experiences in development projects, MSID participants gain firsthand experience with the conditions, needs, and strengths of the countries involved with the program.

Philosophy

Founded in 1981, MSID is an interdisciplinary, academically, and personally challenging study abroad program, combining classroom learning with practical experience. At its core is a grassroots internship or research project with an agency striving to contribute to development or social justice. Participants often report this placement to be one of the most life-changing experiences they have had.

Cultural Experience

MSID seeks to maximize cultural immersion through:

- Internships
- Research projects
- Housing with host families, usually one family during the classroom phase and a second during the internship phase (some students with urban internships may have the same family throughout their in-country MSID experience).

Written assignments help students bring their experiences back into the classroom and to relate them to course themes and concepts.

MSID focuses on issues of development.

MSID Thailand participants should be keenly interested in learning about these themes. This is not to say that you must have lots of relevant background—MSID does not require students to have studied development or engaged in service-learning—but the content of the curriculum should mesh with your learning goals. Most participants also want to “experience Thailand” and you will indeed learn a great deal about your host culture and language.

MSID will give you many questions but few answers.

Poverty and complex social issues are challenging realities to tackle. None of the world’s development models seem to be working well—at least if our definition of development incorporates sustainability and equity. You will be looking at development and social issues as they present themselves in the “real world” and not just in textbooks.

MSID emphasizes grassroots.

MSID internships will immerse you in the everyday realities of the country where you are studying. Your experiences will give you insights into the conditions of life for the great majority of the population that is poor. This means that MSID seeks to arrange placements in rural areas or relatively poor urban neighborhoods and that, as a result, your living and working conditions may be rather basic.

MSID is experiential and academic, flexible and highly structured.

MSID requires a balanced learning style and is for students who want to learn from field experience, but it also involves reading, writing, schedules, and deadlines. It requires a strong commitment to your host family, your agency, your community, and your faculty.

MSID calls for cultural sensitivity.

Respect for other cultures is a must in any study abroad program and especially in an immersion program like MSID. You will live with a local family, work in a local agency, receive instruction from local faculty, and depend on support from local administrative staff. You will need to adapt to the host culture and not expect it to adjust to you.

MSID presents special challenges to women.

For some students, the feelings engendered by being female in what may seem an anti-feminist society have proved painful and distracting. While striving to remain culturally sensitive, women have experienced incidents of harassment, seeming overprotectiveness by host families (with respect to hours
kept, places frequented, friends chosen), and a general feeling of being watched and even judged in public. Roles are defined by gender in many cultures, and you may elicit negative responses if you do not follow the prescribed role; moreover, foreign females may sometimes experience harassment even if they do follow the rules. When in country, be prepared to find your values and understanding of the world challenged daily.

MSID will change you.
Students repeatedly return from this program talking about how it has transformed their lives. You will learn astonishing things about yourself, acquire invaluable skills, and return to the US asking searching questions about your own society and your own values.

Power of Attorney
We encourage you to consider designating someone as your Power of Attorney while you are abroad. Your Power of Attorney can act as your legal representative in a number of situations, including banking and tax issues. For more information, review the information at UMabroad.umn.edu/students/policies/finances/powerofattorney.

Safekeeping Important Documents
Copy all of your important documents and store the copies separately from the originals. Leave an additional copy with someone in the US and keep an electronic copy in a secure location.

Preparation & Planning

Documents

Passport
A valid passport is required to enter Thailand. The passport must have at least two blank pages and must be valid at least six months after your date of entry into Thailand.

If you don't have a passport, you should apply for one right away. Passports can take 4–6 weeks to process, so it's important to begin this process early. More information is available at http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html.

Embassy Contact Info
Always keep your passport in a safe place. If your passport is lost or stolen, contact the local police, the American Consulate or Embassy, and the on-site staff. To identify the consulate or embassy nearest you, consult http://usembassy.gov.

Visa/Immigration Documents
MSID Thailand students will need to apply for a visa; detailed visa information can be found on the “visa” section of the program webpage: UMabroad.umn.edu/programs/asia-oceania/msid-thailand/apply/visa.

The Learning Abroad Center has a visa specialist to assist you with the visa process for your time in Thailand. Please contact Mike Trost at trost055@umn.edu if you have questions.

Non-US Passport Holders
Students who are not traveling under a US passport may have to follow different visa procedures in order to enter Thailand. Contact the Mike Trost at trost055@umn.edu for assistance in determining the correct visa process.

Coordinated Group Flight

Purpose and Benefits of Village Travel
The Learning Abroad Center arranges an optional coordinated flight in consultation with Village Travel, a local travel agency. This flight confirms the official arrival date and time. The program staff will meet this flight at the airport. Village Travel will contact you directly when this information is available. Information, booking, and payment are handled directly by Village Travel. Consult Village Travel’s website for information on the coordinated flight: http://villageinc.com.

The coordinated flight cost is designed to be competitive, but priority is placed on services such as routing, ticketing flexibility, and the ability to make group reservations and reserve specific travel dates. Travel can be arranged from any location in the US and every attempt will be made to connect with the coordinated flight. While you are not required to choose this group flight, it is designed to offer travel in the comfort of other participants in the program.

If you make your own flight arrangements, select a round-trip flight that has a flexible return date, since most students change their return date. Flying standby is not allowed.

If you are not taking the coordinated flight, you are required to provide the Learning Abroad Center with a copy of your flight and train (if applicable) information by the date requested.

Arriving Early
If you intend to arrive in Thailand early, you are responsible for your own housing and your transportation to the airport. All students are expected to arrive within 2 hours before the coordinated group flight.
Staying After the Program
If you intend to stay in Thailand after the program ends, you are responsible for your own housing and your transportation to the airport when you depart. It is not acceptable to remain in your homestay after the program, unless the on-site staff authorizes it. In all cases, you must pay for any lodging after the program ends. For students departing on the official coordinated flight on the program end date, the on-site staff will arrange transportation to the airport for you.

Round-Trip Airline Tickets
Round-trip tickets are the best option, since many countries require travelers to purchase a round-trip ticket as part of the visa process. In addition, one-way tickets can be expensive, and it is extremely difficult to find a return flight to the US.

Packing
Packing is highly individual, and no single list will work for everyone. A packing list is provided at the end of this guide. The following considerations can help you pack wisely.

Packing Principles
Think about laundry. Lighter colors help you stay cool, but darker colors show dirt less; you might wish to strike a happy medium if you expect to be in hot areas. Stress lightweight fabrics that can be easily hand-washed, can hold up to repeated washing, and do not need ironing. A key question for choosing clothes: How long does it take to air dry?

Plan to be presentable. People dress nicely every day in all MSID countries, especially in the cities, and local students often dress well, since they are proud to be among the elite group attending university. Clean, fairly conservative Western office-type apparel is appropriate. Include one or two dressy outfits for evening outings, for which people tend to dress up. Pack clothing that is relatively new, both to be sure it lasts through your time overseas and because you will feel uncomfortably out of place if you wear ripped, baggy, or faded clothes.

Be conservative. Some clothing that is common on a US campus would be considered provocative in MSID countries. If you wish to pack a running outfit, choose athletic pants or shorts that extend to the knee. Do not plan on using shorts except when you go to the beach. If you use tank tops, choose modest ones. Women tend to wear skirts in rural areas, and although you may wear pants without offending, in some rural settings you may look out of place.

Try to anticipate your internship, research project, and other activities. For example, if you think you will work partly in an office setting, you will dress more formally than if you want to work in a village. If you expect to work outdoors a lot, include boots and rugged clothing. If you guess wrong, you will be able to purchase most clothing items you need.

Choose your luggage wisely. Most students prefer backpacks to suitcases. Buy a high-quality backpack/daypack. Can your smaller backpack/suitcase nest inside a larger one? Will your carry-on double for weekend travel?

Anticipate possible delays (or even losses) in checked baggage when packing your carry-on. Pack in your carry-on anything that you would need during your first two or three days in country, including prescription drugs, as well as small items that are fragile, irreplaceable, or of significant monetary value. Do not take scissors, knives, etc., in your carry-on.

Remember you can buy things in country. You can purchase clothing in country, although you will not have time to devote to shopping for new items. If you have a strong brand preference, ask a returnee whether your brand is available in your country. Very tall students might find it hard to purchase clothes of the right size.

You will find many clothing items to be cheaper in country than in the US. However, other products, such as batteries, personal hygiene products, feminine products, etc. are often more expensive in these countries and not always readily available.

Don’t take the kitchen sink. The most consistent hindsight of returned students is “I took too much.” Be selective. No one will need all the things on the packing checklist in the Appendix. Decide what, and how much, is really essential to you. Try to get by with one large backpack and a carry-on. Many savvy travelers recommend that you pack once, try walking around the block with all your stuff, and then begin eliminating things until you can do it comfortably.

Appropriate Clothing and Personal Appearance (Including Tattoos, Piercings, and Hair)
Personal appearance is very important in Thailand as a measure of respect to other people, and you will find that dressing appropriately means that you are shown more respect in return. This translates in many ways, even sometimes lowering initial offering prices at markets. While some allowance is made for the differing customs of foreigners, Thais respond more positively to well-dressed Westerners.

Traditionally, Thais are modest and conservative dressers. At a minimum your clothes should be neat, clean, and free from holes or tears. Except at the beach or at sacred sites, normal Western dress is acceptable for both men and women, but you should avoid clothing showing a lot of skin. Pants are preferable to shorts, blouses should have capped sleeves, and if tank tops are worn, the straps should be thick (i.e., not spaghetti straps). Thai men generally wear pants, and most Thais view an adult man wearing shorts as fairly ridiculous; shorts are primarily worn by laborers and schoolchildren. Men’s shorts should be knee length or more, if worn at all.
Taking off your shoes at temples and private homes is mandatory etiquette, and this may even be requested at some shops. Wear shoes that slip on and off easily. Flip-flops, hiking sandals, and clog-type shoes are usually a good pragmatic choice for traveling in Thailand; only in the most top-end establishments are shoes required.

During class and while at the Institute, students are required to dress in the same style that is worn by Thai university students. All Thai university students wear a standard outfit. For women, this outfit is a short-sleeve white blouse (buttons up the front) with a collar (not a T-shirt) and a plain black skirt. For men, this outfit is a button-down, short-sleeve, collared white shirt (not a T-shirt) and black trousers (no jeans). For both women and men, nice sandals for women are appropriate footwear. Rubber flip-flops are not acceptable for university classes.

This is the required dress for classes, including orientation sessions. Foreign students who dress in the university outfit in Thailand have found that they are immediately identified as university students, not as tourists, and that most people speak to them in Thai first instead of attempting English (or not speaking with them at all). Thus, dressing this way is not only culturally appropriate, it works to your advantage. It is also cheaper, since local taxis will often charge you the local rate, rather than the tourist rate. Wearing the Thai school uniform will also help keep you safer because you will be seen as part of the community with connections to local people rather than as a tourist just passing through Chiang Mai who might be viewed as an easier target.

Outside class, clothing should be clean, neat, and conservative. For women, this means no low-cut tops, spaghetti straps, tank tops, or mid-driffs. Slacks, neat jeans, and knee-length skirts are fine. For men, this means no sleeveless shirts or tank tops. Neat jeans and other casual wear are acceptable. Knee-length or longer shorts are best.

For the same reasons you will be required to wear the Thai school uniform while on the program, there are guidelines regarding tattoos, piercings, and hairstyles that you should follow. If your religion dictates a certain style of dress or facial hair, you are not required to follow any of these rules that conflict with your religious beliefs, but you should discuss any concerns with the Learning Abroad Center staff prior to departure. In general, the program staff cannot require you to dress or style your hair in a certain way, but choosing to ignore these guidelines may make it challenging for the program staff to identify a host family willing to accept you into their home and may make finding an internship placement more difficult. Choosing to follow these guidelines is part of adapting to your host culture and acting in a respectful way to the Thai community where you will be living. Just as important as honoring the cultural norms of your host community, following these guidelines will help you avoid unwanted negative attention and contribute to a safer, more welcoming experience for you while in Thailand.

Displaying a tattoo in Thailand sends a different message about your background than in the US. Tattoos are often associated with magic, criminals, and gangsters and should be kept covered when necessary. Thais also view piercings in a more conservative way. Earrings of a reasonable size and number are fine for women, as is a small discreet nose stud (not hoop), but any earrings or piercings for men are not culturally appropriate. Facial piercings or tongue studs are also not appropriate for men or women.

Many hairstyles that are common in the US are viewed unfavorably in Thailand and may have negative connotations. Long hair or facial hair for men is not common and is frowned upon. Consider either cutting your hair or keeping your facial hair trimmed and tidy. Shaved heads or dreadlocks are also looked down upon, and, for dreads in particular, are often associated with drug use. Unnatural hair color (e.g., blue or green) is also viewed unfavorably and will draw negative attention. It is best to keep your hair a natural color while on the program.

Laundry
In most cases, your family will do your laundry. Since dryers are infrequent, have sufficient undergarments for the delay in receiving your items back. Keep in mind that you should rinse and clean any underwear that is soiled, since this is considered a very private matter.

A Note on Electricity
The supply of electricity tends to be erratic in Thailand, with frequent blackouts and occasional power surges. You will need a good surge protector if you are taking a laptop computer or any other sensitive items, and if you are using a computer you should save documents frequently.

American and European style plugs will work in Thai outlets, which are a hybrid of the two.

Electricity is very expensive, so host families may want students to limit their use of electronic appliances in the home.

Important Policies
Policies of the University of Minnesota and the Learning Abroad Center exist primarily for the protection and safety of Learning Abroad Center study abroad participants. The Learning Abroad Center expects all participants to read, understand, and adhere to the University of Minnesota and Learning Abroad Center policies, guidelines, and contractual documents. These include academic policies, finance and cancellation policies, health and safety policies, and student rights and responsibilities: UMabroad.umn.edu/students/policies.
FERPA
Under Federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, and University policy, college students are considered responsible adults and are allowed to determine who will receive information about them. As a result, the Learning Abroad Center does not share academic, personal, or financial information with a third party (including parents, spouse, guardians, etc.) without the student's written permission. As part of their application, all students designate two emergency contacts who will receive information only in the case of an emergency.

Official Communications
Your UofM email address is the official means of communication. Learning Abroad Center messages will be sent to your UofM email address.

Health & Safety

Health

Health Information Form
The purpose of the form is to help the Learning Abroad Center to assist you in preparing for your time abroad. It is critical to disclose fully any health conditions or accommodation needs you may have on the Learning Abroad Center’s Health Information Form. If your condition changes after completing this form or you realize you forgot to completely disclose anything, contact the Learning Abroad Center and provide the updated information as soon as possible.

Timely disclosure allows the Learning Abroad Center to support your overseas experience effectively. The information provided will remain confidential and will be shared with program staff, faculty, or appropriate professionals only as pertinent to your own well-being.

For more information, visit: UMabroad.umn.edu/students/healthsafety/healthinfo.

Mandatory Health & Safety Online Orientation
The mandatory Learning Abroad Center Health & Safety Online Orientation contains important information on health precautions, taking prescriptions overseas, and the mandatory insurance policy in which you will be enrolled as a program participant. Refer to your online acceptance checklist for the link to this orientation information and contact the Learning Abroad Center with questions.

Health Insurance

US Health
All students enrolled at the University of Minnesota are required to have US health insurance. This includes students registered for education abroad.

The travel, health, and security insurance coverage through CISI is specifically exempt from the requirements of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and was not intended to and does not satisfy a person’s obligation to secure minimum essential coverage beginning in 2014 under the ACA. The University encourages travelers to consult with their legal counsel or tax adviser for information on their obligations under the ACA.

For more details and specific process information for students with University of Minnesota Student Health Insurance through the Student Health Benefits Office, visit the Learning Abroad Center’s US Insurance webpage: UMabroad.umn.edu/students/healthsafety/intlhealthinsurance/ushealthinsurancerequirement

CISI Insurance
In addition to your US health insurance, the University has contracted with Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI) to provide comprehensive international travel, health, and security insurance. This coverage is mandatory for all students and included in the program fee. You are covered by CISI only for the dates of the program and a few days to allow for travel to and from the US. If you plan to travel before or after your program, you should extend your CISI coverage or purchase your own insurance.

CISI does not include any preventive care, and individuals are advised to consult their medical providers for any checkups or preventive care prior to departure. Your CISI card and insurance policy will be emailed directly to you. Carry the card with you at all times. If you have any questions or need additional information about CISI, visit the Learning Abroad Center’s insurance webpage: UMabroad.umn.edu/students/healthsafety/intlhealthinsurance.

Medication Overseas

Prescriptions
Bring all necessary medication (including such items as birth control), for the entire term of your program, with you to your study abroad site. It is often illegal to ship medication overseas, and even where shipping medication is allowed it is not reliable and could result in high import taxes.

Consult with your Learning Abroad Center program contact if you have not already discussed your medical needs, including prescription and non-prescription medications.
Some medications, including those that are commonly available over the counter in the US, are controlled or banned substances abroad. The Learning Abroad Center, in consultation with CISI, will assist you in determining if you can travel with your medications or if alternative solutions must be explored.

Vaccinations, Immunizations, & Travel Medicine

The Learning Abroad Center recommends that all students visit a travel clinic before their program abroad. Make an appointment as soon as possible so that you can get a scheduled appointment in time to complete any required and recommended immunization series. Many travel clinics often book far in advance (especially around the holidays), and some immunizations need to be started months in advance of your departure. For more information, visit: UMa broad.umn.edu/students/healthsafety/prepplanning.

Review the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (http://cdc.gov/travel) and US Department of State (http://travel.state.gov) websites for general vaccination, immunization, and other travel medical information for the countries you will visit. However, only a travel clinic will be able to make a recommendation tailored for your specific travel plans and health history.

Malaria & Dengue Prevention

Consult with your travel clinic regarding malaria and dengue risks and prevention.

Your travel health clinic will most likely recommend that you take a prophylactic (preventive) drug for malaria. It is essential that you purchase and take the medication as recommended by your healthcare provider. Depending on your insurance coverage, malaria medication may be very expensive but it is well worth its benefits. If you get malaria, you will become very ill very quickly, may need hospitalization, and may have lifelong impacts.

Students in the past have inquired about purchasing malaria preventive medication in their study abroad country. The Learning Abroad Center strongly advises against this approach for two reasons. First, in order to be protected, you must take the medication prior to your departure. Second, exposure to malaria-carrying mosquitoes could occur as soon as you arrive in country. While the medication cannot prevent you from contracting malaria, it significantly reduces the symptoms, allows you time to seek medical attention at a clinic in country, and facilitates a more speedy recovery.

Speak with your US travel clinic about possible side effects and alternative anti-malarials if a change needs to be made overseas. Not all overseas physicians are aware of the different types of medications available, so inform yourself before you leave. Should you experience side effects once overseas, speak with the on-site staff and your US travel clinic about next steps.

Your travel clinic will also likely suggest that you purchase insect repellent with at least 21% DEET to help ward against malaria-carrying mosquitoes as well as those carrying other illnesses. You should use insect repellent during the day and especially at dusk and in the evenings. Mosquitoes carrying dengue fever are active in the day, and malaria-carrying mosquitoes are active at night.

There is currently no vaccine or medicine to prevent dengue. Travelers can protect themselves by preventing mosquito bites.


Rabies Vaccination

Consult with your travel clinic regarding rabies vaccination. The rabies vaccine is often recommended for travelers who may come into contact with wild or domestic animals. Keep in mind that it is not possible to initiate the vaccinations in the US and then complete them overseas. Dosage and type of vaccinations differ from country to country. For more information, visit: http://www.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/rabies.

Yellow Fever

Travelers to certain parts of South America and Africa are at risk for yellow fever. Some countries require all travelers to show proof of yellow fever vaccination before they can enter the country. Other countries require proof of vaccination only if travelers have been in a risk area, so if you are visiting multiple countries, the order of travel may be important.

Proof of vaccination is not valid until 10 days after you get the vaccine, so plan to get the vaccine early if you need it. Not all travel clinics carry the yellow fever vaccination, so search for a yellow fever travel clinic at http://www.cdc.gov/travel/yellow-fever-vaccination-clinics/search.

Safety

Travel & Safety Considerations

State Department Travel Website

Consult the United States State Department Country Information sheets, travel advisories and travel warnings at http://travel.state.gov for up-to-date information on travel precautions for the country where you will be studying or traveling.

CDC Information

Review the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (http://cdc.gov/travel) and US Department of State (http://travel.state.gov) websites for travel and safety information.
Program-Specific Safety Considerations

Embassy STEP Registration

The Learning Abroad Center will register you with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), which makes your presence in Thailand known to the US Department of State. Once you are enrolled in this program, you will receive the travel updates and information directly as they are issued. Please carefully review these messages and contact the Learning Abroad Center or on-site staff with questions. For more information, visit: https://step.state.gov/step.

In addition, the local embassy can be a source of assistance and information in the case of an emergency. Each of our programs have information about the local embassy, and you might even have an embassy visitor at your orientation. For more information, visit the Country Information sheet at http://travel.state.gov for the countries you will visit and study in.

In order to ensure that all official communication from the US Department of State is sent to the correct address while you are abroad, check your official contact information prior to departure. Visit www.onestop.umn.edu to verify that the information is correct. If your contact information changes, you must notify the Learning Abroad Center.

Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault

The University of Minnesota and Learning Abroad Center take the risk of sexual harassment and assault very seriously. This topic will be covered in orientations in more depth and Learning Abroad Center Staff and our colleagues on site are trained and prepared to provide support to victim survivors.

Anyone who experiences sexual harassment or sexual assault while abroad must deal with the stress of this unwanted event in a place and culture that is unfamiliar. Being away from the support and comfort of home can exacerbate feelings of hurt, confusion, anger, and loss of control. This is normal.

Do not tolerate behavior that feels threatening or disrespectful by staff in-country or faculty members, or homestay family members. When in any doubt, consult with someone with whom you feel comfortable.

Report any incidents of sexual harassment or sexual assault to in-country or Learning Abroad Center staff so that we can help you understand your options and supports available. The Aurora Center is a fully confidential resource for all students on Learning Abroad Center programs, even if you don’t normally attend the University of Minnesota.

For more information on resources, including the Aurora Center, visit: http://global.umn.edu/travel/assault/index.html

The University of Minnesota prohibits sexual harassment and retaliation. In compliance with Title IX, the Learning Abroad Center will work with the University’s Title IX coordinator on any related inquiries and complaints. For more information, please contact the Learning Abroad Center or visit: https://diversity.umn.edu/coaa/titleix.

Alcohol & Drug Use

The University of Minnesota Code of Conduct and Code of Conduct for Education Abroad allow for responsible drinking if you are legally allowed to drink in your host country. Illegal, irresponsible drinking and/or misbehaving while drinking are violations of the University’s policy.

The University of Minnesota has a no-tolerance approach to drug use while abroad. Students using drugs abroad may immediately be removed from the program at their own cost. You are subject to the laws of host country while abroad, and penalties for foreigners using or possessing drugs abroad are often very strict.

For more information, visit: UMabroad.umn.edu/students/healthsafety/alcoholdrugs.

Personal Safety

When traveling overseas, there are a number of precautions you should follow in order to travel safely. Consult the US State Department’s resources and your orientation materials for up-to-date information on travel precautions for the country where you will be studying or traveling.

For more information on women travelers: http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/Women.html

For information on students abroad: http://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html

For more information on staying safe while abroad: UMabroad.umn.edu/students/healthsafety/safetyabroad

Emergency Procedures

All students are required to carry a cell phone for use in an emergency. On-site staff will contact you on your cell phone and you will utilize your phone to contact on-site staff and/or emergency services. In a life-threatening emergency, please seek immediate emergency care; otherwise, please contact on-site staff for assistance and recommendations. On-site staff are trained, and have resources available to respond to all types of emergencies including, but not limited to, civil disturbance, natural disaster, illness or injury, hospitalization, robbery or pickpocketing, sexual assault/harassment, hate crimes, and mental health.

The Learning Abroad Center will utilize on-site resources as well as insurance and security resources, including CISI. See more details above on insurance.

For more information, visit: UMabroad.umn.edu/students/healthsafety/emergency.
Independent Travel

Independent Travel Notification
You are encouraged to travel during official program break periods, over holidays, or after the program is completed. During the program, travel on the weekends should be limited to nearby locations in order to ensure that you are able to maintain good rest, health, and timely completion of all coursework.

Consult with the on-site staff, well in advance of your planned travel, to understand if there are other locations, beyond the Travel Warning locations, that you are not permitted to visit within your host country or region. These limitations are put in place for your safety and security and apply within the program dates. If you choose to visit a Travel Warning or other banned location before or after your program, you do so at your own risk.

All Learning Abroad Center program participants must notify the on-site staff of any independent travel that leaves the program location overnight. The required independent travel form is provided in the appendix of this handbook. Some sites will collect this form and others will have a slightly different way of collecting the same information, so refer to your on-site orientation for more specifics.

Travel Restrictions

During the Program
You are not permitted to travel during the program dates, including on weekends or vacations, to countries currently under a US State Department Travel Warning. See http://travel.state.gov for the most up-to-date list.

After the Program
If you intend to stay in Thailand after the program ends, you are responsible for your own housing and your transportation to the airport when you depart. You are also responsible for ensuring your travel is allowed within the restrictions of your visa. It is not acceptable to remain in your homestay after the program, unless the on-site staff authorizes it. In all cases, you must pay for any lodging after the program ends. For students departing on the official coordinated flight on the program end date, the on-site staff will arrange transportation to the airport for you.

Driving and Renting Vehicles Abroad
It is against University and Learning Abroad Center policy to drive or rent motor vehicles (including motorscooters or motorcycles) while a participant on a Learning Abroad Center program. These limitations extend from the start date to the end date of your program and are put in place for your safety and security. Traffic accidents are the leading cause of injury and death of students abroad.

Arrival Logistics

Arriving at the Program Site

Coordinated Arrival
Participants will receive flight information and booking instructions from Village Travel, which handles flight arrangements for the Learning Abroad Center. Students from the Twin Cities area fly in a group; students from elsewhere join that group in either a US or an Asian hub. Coordinated flight information will be available in mid-October for spring semester and in late April for fall semester/academic year. Visit Village Travel’s website at: www.villageinc.com.

Always bring a copy of your itinerary and your electronic ticket number (NOT your confirmation number) with you. Some airlines and ticketing agents outside of the US will require you to show this at the airport check-in. If, for any reason, you choose not to book your flights through Village Travel, you must provide the Learning Abroad Center with a copy of your itinerary.

If you do not arrive with the coordinated flight, you must arrive within three hours prior to the coordinated flight. Before purchasing an alternate flight, please consult with the Learning Abroad Center.

Initial Arrival Housing
Upon arriving in Chiang Mai, you will be housed at a local hotel for the in-country orientation. After the 2–3 day orientation, you will move to their homestay families.

Program Information

Orientation in Country
Upon arriving in Chiang Mai, students will be housed at a local hotel for the 2-3 in-country orientations. During this orientation you will cover topics like using public transportation, academic, homestay, health and safety, and take some time to acclimate to your new home.

Program Excursions
Although excursions change from semester to semester, you can expect to visit a variety of sites that may include local markets, development agencies, and areas of interest around Chiang Mai.
In-Country Staff

Mark A. Ritchie, Ph.D., Executive Director

Mark has lived in Thailand for over 20 years, working with local communities, international development work, as well as international education. Originally from the United States, Mark studied the transition of agrarian rural communities in Northern Thailand and has been involved in project evaluation and assessment, participatory development research, and training of local communities in Asia. He founded International Sustainable Development Studies Institute (ISDSI) with his wife, Dana E.C. Ritchie, 15 years ago, and is currently working on empowering local communities through international education.

Kanokporn Deeburee (Aoy), Ph.D., Program Coordinator

Aoy has an academic background in social development and community development. She received her Masters and Doctorate from Chiang Mai University. Currently she works with ISDSI and is a field instructor teaching social science and culture, as well as supervising the MSID Thailand program and placing students into non-profit/NGO internships.

Program Center

The ISDSI center where the program is based has several classroom and office spaces, a small library, and a few computers and printers. Classes will take place there each day, and you will have lunch at the center as well. There is a small kitchen where you can store food, and filtered water is available to refill your personal water bottles.

You will also have access to a CrossFit gym with weights, exercise bikes, and other equipment and a variety of courses offered throughout the week.

Housing Considerations

Homestays are an integral component of the MSID learning experience. All students live and share most meals with at least one family, and many with two different families—one during the classroom phase, and a second in a different part of the country during the remainder of the program. Students with internships or research projects in the main city typically choose to remain with the same family throughout. Only in rare cases does MSID permit alternative housing arrangements (e.g., a rural setting where no adequate homestay is available and the student must stay in a school or a clinic). Do not ask to live independently.

Students take at least breakfast and the evening meal with their host families, and all three meals on weekends. Often distances preclude returning for the noon meal during the week. Although you generally will be expected to eat the same food as your family, MSID does ask the families to accommodate the dietary needs of students who have food allergies or are uncompromising vegetarians. Many students who are vegetarians in the US decide instead to relax their standards during their MSID experience in order to minimize the inconvenience to non-vegetarian host families.

Students report that the homestays are among the richest and most challenging dimensions of MSID. You will find that a tremendous amount of your language and cultural learning takes place while you are at home. Students constantly bring insights gained from their families into the academic program, and, similarly, the classroom learning helps provide tools for a successful homestay. MSID places students with a variety of families in terms of family size, profession, ethnic background, etc. Not only do students speak in class about the differences among their families, but they also drop in on fellow MSIDers in their homes. Think of each visit as an important learning experience.

The stipend paid by the MSID program to the host families is only a token gesture of appreciation for the time and expense of hosting you. The money in no way covers the cost of hosting an MSID student nor compensates for the adjustment the family agrees to undertake in order to incorporate an MSID student into their family.

Notification of Placement

The Learning Abroad Center typically receives basic information about your first homestay family (name and address) approximately one week prior to the program start date, and we will send the information to your University of Minnesota email account. Last-minute changes occasionally occur.

Housing Concerns

If you have questions about your homestay experience, speak to the on-site staff. As in the US, it is not acceptable for you to be asked, for example, to assist with caring for a host family member on a daily basis, be exposed to drunken or rude behavior, or tolerate any sexual advances. Although it is extremely rare for a host family experience to involve any of these, speak to the on-site staff if you have any concerns.

Homestay Families

The Placement Process

The in-country staff strives to match students with families that meet as many of the characteristics as possible that students have requested on their forms. It is often not possible to find a family that meets all the criteria a student has listed.

If your internship or research project is in a different part of the country, the administrative staff will arrange your second homestay at the same time your internship or research project is being negotiated.

The in-country MSID administrative staff will outline for you and the family your respective rights and responsibilities.
in the homestay. The family is told that for the most part your presence should not lead them to change their customs, operating rules, or food.

**Homestay Conditions**

In almost all cases, if you are doing something culturally offensive, you will not be told directly in order to avoid embarrassment and to save face for all involved. Thai people value social harmony and avoid direct confrontation. If you think you may be offending them, try and gently find out why (perhaps asking your host sister rather than your host mom). However, they may still not tell you. You can also ask a Thai friend or program staff who can help you figure things out.

The expectations of you in the homestay will be different than you are used to in the US. You may be expected to be home earlier and may not have as much freedom. Some families may have a maid or other help. You can expect the privacy of your personal belongings, room, etc. to be respected, but if you are used to solitude, realize that you won’t have much time alone. This means you will have to find time for personal reflection in new ways—such as when you are riding a mini-bus or walking to the post office.

When you first arrive, showing your host family pictures from home is a good “ice breaker.” Appropriate subjects would be you with your family, at recognizable American landmarks, etc.

While fulfilling your own study responsibilities, try to participate in the normal life of the household: Help with the chores, play with the kids, and learn how to cook. Try to fit into their schedule, diet, and lifestyle as much as possible. They may feel a bit protective of you, so in your daily schedule be sure to let them know where you are and when you’ll be returning to their home. Never stay overnight elsewhere without first notifying your family. Thai families take very seriously their duty of ensuring the students’ safety.

Some bathrooms will be Thai style, some will be Western style. Thai-style bathrooms consist of a shower and a ceramic “squat” toilet. Most guesthouses and hotels will have Western bathrooms. Most public bathrooms are Thai style and do not have toilet paper. It is a good idea to carry toilet paper with you at all times. Usually there will be a trash can next to the toilet into which you can discard your used toilet paper.

There will be times when living with a family with whom you cannot communicate well may become stressful. This is normal and, as stated before, you should be ready for it. Keep in mind that staff will be available to talk to you if you are having difficulties. But remember also that stress is not necessarily a sign that things are not going well. It is a given in any experience of cross-cultural adjustment. Remember, too, that the rewards of this experience with your Thai family will most likely outweigh any difficulties you may encounter.

**Tips for a Successful Homestay**

The MSID Thailand staff seek families eager to incorporate US students into their lives. Host families are generally warm and welcoming and will want their students to participate in social events with friends and extended family. When you are placed with a family, you will probably get more than the family itself. You will get a wide range of friends, not to mention information, coaching, advice, and endless opportunities to practice your language skills. If you and the family are both willing to throw yourselves into making the experience a rich one, you are likely to look back on your homestay as a highlight of your time in Thailand.

A successful homestay requires consideration and cultural sensitivity. At times your cross-cultural skills and insights will be stretched to the limit. The in-country staff will provide support and ongoing coaching to create a smooth linkage between students and their families. Staff are always available to assist and sort out cultural adjustment problems as they arise.

The notion of private space and time is not as common as in the US. Spend plenty of time with your host family and do not seclude yourself in your room. This is often viewed as rude and may cause your host family to wonder if you are sick or unhappy.

You will find your homestay parents and siblings very concerned for your well-being. They will be good sources of information and advice about negotiating the transportation system, safety precautions, etc. At the same time, their concern might occasionally seem to border on over-protectiveness, especially if you are a woman. Understand that the family is not trying to control you but to fulfill its inescapable responsibilities for the welfare of its US daughter or son.

Host families may not have internet access. Be aware the cost of electricity and internet use in homes can be very high. You may be asked by your host family to pay a fee for your internet use, and you should consult with the on-site staff about correct cultural protocol.

In case of minor illnesses, your family will help you seek medical attention. In the case of more serious problems, you and your family are expected to notify the MSID staff immediately in order to coordinate the best possible treatment.

Most families are conservative about relations between men and women. You are not allowed to have overnight guests of the opposite sex or to receive visitors in a closed bedroom. Be judicious in your use of alcohol. Your host family and work colleagues will disapprove of substance abuse, and drunkenness could irreparably damage your relations with people who are important to you.

It is important not to abuse hospitality. Remember to ask the family for permission to bring friends, and be ready to cover extra expenses when inviting them.
Keep your room very neat and tidy and be respectful of the common spaces in the house. Since you are a guest in the home, your bedroom should be kept in a manner that shows your respect and appreciation. In most countries, the notion of personal and private space does not exist in the same manner as in the US, and your room in your host family is not the same as having your own room in the US. Do not leave your clothes strewn on the floor or leave personal belongings around the house. Do not put your shoes on furniture, including your own bed. Unfortunately, US students are often viewed as messy and disrespectful. Do your part to correct this image. Keep in mind that personal hygiene is also very important. You are a guest in their home and should present yourself with respect and cleanliness.

Before you leave for Thailand it may be difficult to imagine the depth of the bonds that can develop between you and your host families. There is a special magic to friendships that cross deep cultural boundaries, and you may find the relationship with your family to be quite unlike other relationships you have experienced.

Farewells at the airport are often tear-filled on both sides. As your life becomes filled with the US hectic pace following your return, however, it can be all too easy not to take the time to keep in touch. An occasional letter, postcard, or email from you means a great deal to a family for whom you are as unforgettable as they for you. We ask that you to take a few moments to write from time to time. Keep in mind, however, that host families should not be expected to host you after your MSID experience or on future visits you may make to Thailand.

Since you may not know much about your host family(ies) prior to departure, we encourage you to bring a range of generic gifts to give as gifts. Past students have recommended coffee table books from your home town/state, board games, T-shirts, calendars, magnets, keychains, and sweets such as jellybeans. Keep in mind you will likely have two families—one in the main city and one in the rural area. Often students give the gift at the end of the stay, when they know what the family or individual members would appreciate most. Also, if you visit your host family after you have moved out or after you have returned from a course, consider bringing a small gift of fruit or dessert with you.

**Liability Insurance**

Regardless of your housing arrangement, you should consider your insurance coverage and needs. Does your renter’s or homeowner’s insurance cover your items if they are lost or stolen abroad? You may also wish to buy additional insurance in case you accidentally damage your accommodations, since any damages will be yours to pay.

For more information, visit: [http://global.umn.edu/travel/resources/insurance_other.html](http://global.umn.edu/travel/resources/insurance_other.html).

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**Visitors**

**During Program Period**

Friends or relatives may visit during official program breaks or before or after the program, but not while classes are in session. Visits during this time interfere with your ability to focus on the program and host culture. Visitors are not allowed to stay with you in your official program housing.

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**Academics**

Students are responsible for understanding and adhering to the academic policies for study abroad as published on the Learning Abroad Center’s website: [UMabroad.umn.edu/students/policies/academic-policies](http://UMabroad.umn.edu/students/policies/academic-policies).

**Courses**

**Overview of Program Courses**

You will spend an average of around 20 hours per week in the classroom, plus time outside doing readings and assignments. Local field trips and field assignments supplement the classroom work. You will also work with MSID staff and faculty throughout this period to define the subsequent internship or research project.

- All undergraduates take the following courses totaling 16–17 semester credits. Complete course descriptions are available on the Learning Abroad Center’s website.
  - MSID 4001/5001, *International Development: Critical Perspectives on Theory and Practice*, 4 credits
  - MSID 4002/5002, *MSID Country Analysis*, 4 credits
  - THAI 1xxx/3xxx, *Thai Language*, 4 credits
  - MSID 4003/5003, *Community Engagement in the Global South*, 4 credits
  - (Optional) *Global Identity, Connecting Your International Experience to Your Future*, 1 credit

The Development course will be divided into the following tracks so that students can prepare for their upcoming internship:

- Public Health
- Education/Literacy
- Literature, Arts, & Cultural Studies
- Environmental Studies/Ecology/Sustainable Agriculture
- Microbusiness/Alternative Economies
Academic year students register for an additional 16 spring semester credits. Course descriptions are available on the Learning Abroad Center’s website.

MSID 4004, Topics: Case Studies in International Development, 4 credits
MSID 4006, Applied Field Methods, 4 credits
MSID 4007, MSID Directed Research, 4 credits
MSID 4005, Advanced International Development Internship, 4 credits

Language of Instruction
The language of instruction for this program is English.

Global Identity:
Connecting Your International Experience to Your Future—Semester Students Only
This optional, 1-credit course will provide opportunities for you to “make meaning” of your learning abroad experience and prepare you to communicate your intercultural competence to future employers, graduate schools, or law schools. As global connectivity becomes increasingly important, you are asked to think beyond the borders of your own perception and better understand the world based on the new ideas and experiences to which you are exposed. Your ability to work in a multicultural setting and succeed in different cultural contexts is vital to your future. This course will help you apply these skills to your post-graduation plans.

For more information, visit: UMabroad.umn.edu/students/academics/GlobalIdentity.

Internship/Research
Internships focus on applied learning complemented by a thematic paper that reflects on the student’s experience. Activities might include: teaching English to school children, shadowing a health professional in a clinic, assisting with a reforestation project, shadowing reports and assisting with newspaper articles for a local non-profit news agency, and organizing activities at an urban youth center.

Research projects focus on a larger theoretical topic relevant to development in Thailand. Sample topics include: the structure and educational goals of primary education, the realization of public health care services, organic farming and its role in the local economy, and government and private funding resources for homeless children. Students who engage in a research project will typically not participate in applied, hands-on activities. The goal is to conduct research under the supervision of the host NGO agency on a larger theoretical topic.

Once the classroom phase concludes, students move to their individual placements with development agencies/projects in scattered locations, some urban and some rural. Unless you are interested in a specifically urban topic, MSID urges you to consider a rural placement. You cannot really know Thailand if you experience only the city.

Activities. The internships/research projects are the most important hallmark distinguishing MSID from most study abroad programs. In addition to contributing to their agency/project/community, students do written assignments connected to themes and concepts from the various courses.

Support. The MSID on-site director or another member of the program faculty visits each student at the internship site once during this phase. In addition to any troubleshooting regarding the internship, these visits serve as occasions for you to hand in coursework and reflect on what you are learning.

Academic role of the internship/research project in the semester programs. In addition to academic work for the internship/research course itself, during this phase students also complete written assignments for the other courses. Each course thus becomes a different lens through which you interpret your experiences in your agency/project and your community. You might think of the internship or research project as a sort of lab section for the courses. Course descriptions are available on the Learning Abroad Center’s website.

Academic year students return to their sites in mid-January for their internships and their research. Each student receives a visit from the MSID on-site director or another MSID staff member sometime during the second semester. This visit is the scheduled point in the second semester for academic year students to hand in assignments.

Registration

Registration for University of Minnesota Twin Cities Students
Before registering, you should meet with your academic adviser(s) to discuss the courses you plan to take and complete the Academic Planning form. All University of Minnesota Twin Cities students will be responsible for registering themselves using the University of Minnesota online registration system. Prior to departure, you will receive an email with all the necessary information for registration. Do not look for your class number to appear on the class schedule on the One Stop website. The numbers required for registration can only be obtained from the Learning Abroad Center. If you register for a course that is listed online, you have registered for the wrong course and may be subject to tuition charges. Complete your registration by the stated deadline in the registration instruction email from the Learning Abroad Center. Check online for holds or required registration approvals that would prevent you from registering for classes and clear them before the registration deadline.
The Learning Abroad Center cannot remove holds on student accounts. Failure to complete registration may result in late registration fees and may delay or prevent financial aid disbursement. If you do not register for study abroad, your grades cannot be processed. Failure to register before departing for study abroad may result in no credit for your study abroad program.

Registration for UMN System Students
Students from the University of Minnesota Morris, Crookston, Rochester, or Duluth will be set up as a multi-U student by their home campus. Please contact your study abroad office to verify that your multi-U status has been set up. You can then register as a UMNTC student (see above).

Registration for Non-University of Minnesota Students
Students from other institutions will be registered by the Learning Abroad Center and do not need to register themselves through One Stop.

Maintaining Full-Time Status
Students are required to maintain full-time registration status as defined by their individual program throughout the duration of their study abroad program. Dropping or withdrawing from a class will not be allowed if it will bring a student below the required full-time enrollment.

Post-Program Registration
While abroad, University of Minnesota students and most other students will need to register for classes for the following term on their home campus. You must make any necessary arrangements prior to departure so that you are able to register while overseas. In many cases, students are able to register online.

Course Drop/Add/Withdrawal
This program has a set curriculum therefore, it is not possible for students to add, drop, or withdraw from a course.

Academic Culture

Academic Rigor
The program is designed to be academically rigorous, and it is each student’s responsibility to maintain good study habits and complete assignments on time. Students will need to learn to function simultaneously in two cultural contexts. Local time as experienced in the village or the family may be more fluid and informal than “MSID time.” It is important to learn to flow with local time; it is equally important to retain enough structure and self-discipline in the academic part of life to avoid getting behind on assignments. Students who fail to attend class or who miss internship or research hours without prior permission from the on-site director will be dismissed from the program.

Books & Materials
Any books that may be required for class can be obtained in country.

Grades & Transcripts
Grades will be posted to the University of Minnesota transcript 6–8 weeks after the Learning Abroad Center has received them from the program. Grades will be converted into US equivalents, if necessary, prior to being posted on the University of Minnesota transcript. The Learning Abroad Center will provide one free transcript to the home institution of all non-University of Minnesota students. Additional transcripts can be ordered separately on the One Stop Student Services website: www.onestop.umn.edu.

Incompletes
Students are generally expected to complete all course requirements by the end of the term. In very rare circumstances, students can arrange an “Incomplete” in consultation with the instructor, the on-site staff, and the Learning Abroad Center, whereby the remaining work can be finished shortly after returning to the US.

Student Grievances
Academic grievances are complaints brought by students regarding the provision of education and academic support services affecting their role as students. For grievances concerning University of Minnesota Learning Abroad Center or affiliated programs offered through the Learning Abroad Center, students should make inquiries and appeals to the appropriate University officials, in the following order: the program representative in the Learning Abroad Center, the Assistant Dean for Learning Abroad, the Student Dispute Resolution Center, and the Office of the General Counsel. For complaints concerning non-University of Minnesota programs, students should make appeals to the program sponsor.
Living in Thailand

Thailand lies in the heart of Southeast Asia. It shares borders with Burma (Myanmar) to the west and north, Laos to the northeast, Cambodia to the east, and Malaysia to the south. Topographically the country is divided into four distinct areas: the mountainous North, the fertile Central Plains, the semi-arid plateau of the Northeast, and the peninsular South distinguished by tropical beaches and offshore islands. Thailand has a tropical climate with three distinct seasons: hot (March–May), rainy (June–October) and cool (November–February), with cooler temperatures in the mountains year-round.

Thailand has a population of about 60 million. Ethnic Thais form the majority, though the area has historically been a migratory crossroads, and thus includes strains of Mon, Khmer, Burmese, Lao, Malay, Indian, and, most strongly, Chinese. In Northern Thailand various upland minority groups (hill tribes) are also an important part of the ethnic mix, including Hmong, Karen, Akha, Lahu, Lisu, Mien, and others.

Theravada Buddhism is the primary religion in Thailand, practiced by more than 90 percent of all Thais. The remainder of the population adheres to Muslim, Christian, Hindu and other faiths.

The Kingdom of Thailand is a constitutional monarchy. The king wields moral authority rather than political power. He is very highly respected, as is the rest of the royal family, and speaking against them is a crime.

History Resources

Known as “Siam” until 1939, Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country never to have been colonized by a foreign power, and is fiercely proud of that fact. A bloodless revolution in 1932 led to a constitutional monarchy. During World War II, while Japan conquered the rest of Southeast Asia, only Thailand was not conquered by the Japanese due to smart political moves. In alliance with Japan during World War II, Thailand became a US ally following the conflict. After a string of military dictatorships and quickly toppled civilian Prime Ministers, Thailand finally stabilized into a fair approximation of a democracy and the economy boomed through tourism and industry. Above it all presided King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), the world’s longest-reigning monarch and a deeply loved and respected figure of near-mythic proportions.

In September 2006, a swift and bloodless military coup overthrew populist tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra’s democratically elected but widely criticized government, exposing a fault line between the urban elite that has ruled Thailand and the rural masses that supported Thaksin. Thaksin went into exile and a series of unstable governments followed, with the successors of Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai party and the royalist-conservative People’s Alliance for Democracy dueling both behind the scenes and, occasionally, out in the streets, culminating in Bangkok’s airports being seized and shut down for a week in November 2008. The political scene remains in flux and the direction of the country once the ailing King passes away is a major question mark because of the perceived inadequacy of the current heir.

Students are expected to read more about Thailand prior to departure in order to gain a better under of the country. Valuable resources include “Culture Shock! Thailand: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette” by Robert Cooper and “Lonely Planet Thailand.”

Geography & Climate

The weather in Thailand will be hot and humid in June to October, in the 80s and 90s most days. It will gradually turn cooler, from November to January, leading to a very pleasant and cooler winter, especially at night, with daytime temperatures in the 80s and down into the 70s or cooler at night. March through May is hot season, with dry and very hot weather with daytime temperatures in the 90s and cooler at night. There is a marked difference in temperature between the lowlands and the mountains. During rainy season (which lasts until late October or mid-November), it often rains every day. While rain seldom lasts all day, when it does rain it can be quite intense.

Thailand’s heat can be difficult to adjust to. It often makes people tired and sluggish or unable to engage in activities that they routinely enjoy, like exercising or walking long distances. It can affect your sleeping and study patterns. The tropics are also full of animal life that will be new to you—many houses have ants and spiders in them, mosquitoes can be bothersome, small lizards live inside most buildings on the walls, and cockroaches can be found even in the most luxurious homes. In rural areas you may encounter such things as mice, lizards, and snakes, but usually they stay out of your way.

Weather Information

You can find up-to-date weather information online: http://www.accuweather.com/en/th/chiang-mai/317505/weather-forecast/317505.

Language

Central Thai language is used in education and is understood by almost everyone. Thais in Chiang Mai also speak Kham Muang (also known as Northern Thai or Lanna) amongst themselves.
Food Considerations

Thai food is world famous for its variety, flavors and freshness. Thai food varies regionally, and you will have a chance to eat some fantastic food that is impossible to find outside of Thailand. All Thai food is based around rice, so you can expect to eat a lot of rice while in Thailand, often for every meal while in both urban and village homestays. A lot of Thai food is very spicy, including curries, naam phrik (chili paste), and soups. Not all Thai food is spicy, but be prepared to learn how to eat and enjoy food that is likely spicier than you are used to.

Pork and seafood are common, and in some places students may eat rice and fish at every meal. A common stereotype of Asia is that lots of people are vegetarians. While Thais do not eat large quantities of meat, they do add meat to almost all dishes (mostly pork chicken and seafood). Even stir-fried vegetables usually contain small pieces of meat.

Maintaining a vegetarian or vegan diet while in homestays during the program is impossible, and refusing to be flexible can result in you being culturally offensive as well as hungry. While the program recognizes that how one eats is a personal decision, during program activities cultural factors take priority. When invited into someone’s home, it is rude to refuse to try something because you don’t like what is put before you, and eating together is a crucial part of Thai culture. This is especially true in the setting of a homestay. The number one fear of some Thai host families is having to deal with a strict vegetarian. Unfortunately, some American students have come to Chiang Mai and rudely insisted on a vegetarian diet in the host family. This has left a bad impression, and there are families that now refuse to take in any American host students.

If you are really serious about coming to Thailand and adapting, you will have to temporarily give up a vegetarian diet in order to adapt to Thai culture. By refusing to eat meat or fish when it is served to you, you risk offending the people with you and it is seen as culturally insensitive. This is especially the case in the villages where you will be staying because most villagers are poor and do not have the luxury to choose their protein sources. They will likely serve meat as an honor to their guest—and it may mean killing their only pig to do so. To refuse meat in that setting would be considered extremely rude.

Being flexible in your diet not only assures that you will be able to eat, it is a sign of acceptance and appreciation to your Thai hosts and simply reflects good manners as a guest. Eating is more than just filling your stomach. In Thailand sharing food is a social event. Refusing to try new foods or join in with others may be misunderstood or considered anti-social. Joining in is a way of “being with Thais.”

Meals

Breakfast and dinner are included in the program fee and are provided by the host families. Lunch during the classroom phase of the program is also included in the program fee and will be served at ISDSI.

Safe Food & Water

Tap water is usually not drinkable in Thailand outside of Bangkok. Bottled water is inexpensive and widely available at 5–20 baht a bottle depending on its size and brand. Drinking water served in restaurants is usually boiled. Ice in Thailand usually comes packaged straight from the factory and is usually safe; there is only reason to worry if you are served hand-cut ice.

Mainly in residential areas, machines dispensing water into your own water bottle. This is usually UV treated on the spot and safe to drink clean. These machines are widely available in Chiang Mai.

Relationships

You’ll most likely observe different gender dynamics in Thailand that seems like discrimination to a Western person. At the same time, Thailand is undergoing a tremendous amount of change, so gender dynamics are in a great deal of flux. Asking about these things with your Thai friends can bring on heated (and fun) discussions as they try and figure things out as well. Depending on the context, relationships between young men and women (even those in college) can be more formal than here in the US. Public displays of affection, even holding hands between the sexes, are frowned upon—but are becoming more common by the more “daring” young people.

Western women are stereotyped as being “easy,” so you should be wary of Thai men who approach you. For men, be aware that there are many preconceptions about why Western men come to Thailand. In fact, a lot of Western men do come to Thailand on so-called “sex tours” and being seen alone with a Thai woman—even if she is from the university—will make many Thai people assume she is a prostitute. It is always better to go out in groups, to avoid embarrassment for all concerned, and to save face for your female friends. Even being alone with someone of the opposite sex will create the impression that you are having sex.

Living in Chiang Mai

Founded in 1296 CE, Chiang Mai is a culturally and historically interesting city, at one time the capital of the ancient Lanna kingdom. Located among the rolling foothills of the Himalayan Mountains 700 kilometers north of Bangkok, it could only be reached by an arduous river journey or an elephant trek until the 1920s. This isolation helped keep Chiang Mai’s distinctive charm intact.
Chiang Mai's historical center is the walled city. Sections of the wall dating to their restoration a few decades ago remain at the gates and corners, but of the rest only the moat remains.

Inside Chiang Mai's remaining city walls are more than 30 temples dating back to the founding of the principality, in a combination of Burmese, Sri Lankan, and Lanna Thai styles, decorated with beautiful wood carvings, Naga staircases, leonine and angelic guardians, gilded umbrellas, and pagodas laced with gold filigree. The most famous is Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep, which overlooks the city from a mountainside 13 kilometers away.

Modern-day Chiang Mai has expanded in all directions, but particularly to the east toward the Ping River (Mae Nam Ping), where Chang Klan Rd, the famous Night Bazaar, and the bulk of Chiang Mai's hotels and guest houses are located. The locals say you've not experienced Chiang Mai until you've seen the view from Doi Suthep, eaten a bowl of kao soi, and purchased an umbrella from Bo Sang. Of course this is touristic nonsense, but the Kao Soi, Bo Sang umbrellas, and Doi Suthep are important cultural icons for Chiang Mai residents. Ratchadamnern Rd hosts the main Sunday night walking street market from Tha Phae Gate to the popular Wat Phra Singh.

**Transportation**

Chiang Mai is well-connected by bus, train, and air transportation services. A number of bus stations link the city to Central and Northern Thailand. The Central Chang Pheuak terminal provides local services within Chiang Mai Province. The Chiang Mai Arcade bus terminal northeast of the city provides services to over 20 other destinations in Thailand including Bangkok, Pattaya, Hua Hin, and Phuket. There are several services a day from Chiang Mai Arcade terminal to Mo Chit Station in Bangkok, which is a 10- to 12-hour journey.

You will use local public transport, which consists of tuk-tuk, songthaew, or rickshaws. Local songthaew fare is usually 20–50 baht per person for trips in and around the city. For groups, the fare per person is less. Tuk-tuk fare is usually at least 20 baht per trip; fares increase with distance.

Chiang Mai International Airport acts as the northern hub for those flying to other parts of northern Thailand. Up to 28 flights a day arrive to Chiang Mai from Bangkok; flights typically take about 75 minutes.

**Communication**

**Email & Internet**

You will have free internet and computer access at the ISDSI facilities, although it is limited and the computer lab is small. ISDSI and most classrooms have wireless access throughout. Use WiFi only for low-bandwidth activities (e.g., no streaming movies or downloading large media files). Most students who own laptops will bring them to Chiang Mai; however, a laptop is not required. WiFi is available at many cafes and restaurants throughout Chiang Mai, though it is not as widespread as in the US.

It is worth noting that broadband internet in Thailand is much more limited than it is in the US. Thailand does not currently have the infrastructure to support high-speed networks that you may be used to back home.

**Social Media**

Not all countries share the same laws about freedom of expression that we have in the US. Keep in mind that derogatory comments, especially on social media, can result in legal claims and have extended legal implications even after you have returned to the United States.

Thailand has very strict _lese majeste_ laws. Speaking or acting against the royal family, including posting anything critical or disrespectful about the royal family on social media, can result in deportation or jail.

**Phones**

Even if your Thai home has a telephone, do not make international calls; use a public phone or your cell phone. The average cost of an international phone call is 5–7 baht per minute. Phones are about $50 and can be sold prior to departure. On average, budget $20 per month for minutes.

Remind any potential callers in the US that Thailand is 12 hours ahead of Minnesota during the winter and 11 when the US is on daylight saving time. You may wish to arrange a monthly time for your family to call once you have settled in and have a schedule and specific location.

**The MSID Thailand program requires all students to purchase and carry cell phones while on the program. This is not only a good safety precaution, it also facilitates communication between students and program staff.**

MSID Thailand on-site program staff will assist students with selecting and obtaining cell phones and service contracts. The cost of the cell phones is included in the program's cost of participation. The service contract or minutes that are purchased by students are not included in the budget estimate.

Today there are many ways to communicate with others back in the US. Services like Skype, Google Hangouts, FaceTime, and WhatsApp often take the place of an international call.

**Mail**

Once you have received your homestay placement, mail can be sent to that address. After you go to your internship or research site you may be able to have mail sent to you in care of your family or your agency; ask first, however. Otherwise, mail should be sent to the student address at ISDSI listed at the beginning of this handbook.
Mail typically takes about 10–15 days to reach Thailand from the US and vice versa. Send everything first class airmail. Letters posted to Chiang Mai arrive much faster than letters sent to smaller towns. Valuable items should be sent through the mail. Do not attempt to send a parcel or letter by surface mail; it will take at least three months.

**Money Matters**

The basic unity of Thai currency is the baht (B). There are 100 satang in 1 baht; coins include 25-satang and 50-satang pieces and baht in 1B, 5B, and 10B. Older coins have Thai numerals while newer coins have Arabic and Thai numerals.

Paper currency is issued in the following denominations: 10B (brown), 20B (green), 50B (Blue), 100B (Red), 500 B (purple), and 1,000B (beige). The 10B paper bill is being phased out in favor of a 10B coin.

**Credit Cards**

A credit card is a good resource for emergency situations and for obtaining cash advances, including cash for emergency situations, as long as you have a personal PIN. It is important to know your PIN in both letters and numbers. Please note that some ATMs require that the card have a metal “chip” visible on the front for added security. Many US credit cards now have this chip, but it is wise to ask your credit card company whether they can issue you a “chip credit card” if you do not yet have one.

The Plus, Cirrus, and other networks are available in Chiang Mai; check with your bank or credit union to find out which network they use. Make sure that this isn’t your only source of money as there are times when the networks are down. It is also important to make sure your cards will not expire while you are on the program.

Keep in mind that you may incur fees for using your credit card abroad. Be sure to notify your bank and credit card company that you will be traveling abroad. If you do not, they may assume your foreign transactions are fraudulent and may deny further transactions.

**Financial Planning**

Consult the program budget sheets on the MSID Thailand website for recommended spending amounts and plan to bring the appropriate amount. Refer to travel guides, such as Lonely Planet, for estimated daily expenses.

Two daily meals (breakfast and dinner) during the week and all three meals on the weekend are provided by your host family. Lunch will be served at ISDSI during the classroom phase. You will need to budget for your weekday lunches, bottled water, local transportation, and other miscellaneous expenses.

Personal spending habits vary too greatly to predict exactly how much it will cost you to live in your country during the program. Expenses tend to be higher in major cities than in most other locations. But wherever you are, the amount you spend will depend on your lifestyle and your own objectives in participating in MSID. The big variables are optional activities such as nights out, music or dance lessons, gifts, and especially recreational travel. You should budget accordingly.

In the past, many students have found that they spent much more money than they had anticipated. When asked what they spent it on, however, most have said travel.

A budget estimate can be found in the “Cost of Participation” on the Fees page: [UMabroad.umn.edu/programs/asia-oceania/msid-thailand/fees](http://UMabroad.umn.edu/programs/asia-oceania/msid-thailand/fees).

**Cost of Living**

While the cost of living in Chiang Mai is much lower than Minneapolis, it is still important for students to budget for their time abroad. Expatistan is a great website for on-the-ground cost of living information: [http://www.expatistan.com/cost-of-living/comparison/minneapolis/chiang-mai](http://www.expatistan.com/cost-of-living/comparison/minneapolis/chiang-mai).

**Social & Cultural Adjustments**

**Student Identity**

As a foreigner in Thailand, you will need to take the initiative to meet people. Just as you have established a circle of friends in the United States, the Thai also have established friends and habits. Don’t be afraid to start a conversation and pursue contact in order to meet new people!

On-site staff will try to help ease the transition to life in the Thailand by planning social and educational events for all the residents to enjoy. Guest lectures and seminars, which embrace topics relevant to Thai life and culture, will take place in the residence.

**Race & Ethnicity**

You may wish to consult the resources available at the Learning Abroad Center related to students of color and learning abroad. For more information, visit: [UMabroad.umn.edu/students/identity](http://UMabroad.umn.edu/students/identity).

Thais are normally very tolerant of people. Tourists, regardless of skin color, are very unlikely to encounter aggressive racial abuse in major tourist centers like Chiang Mai or Bangkok. However some visitors may notice their ethnicity attracting some attention. Usually these situations are limited to stares or unwanted attention in shops or on the street.

Many Thais are often curious of the nationality of the black travelers and students; this may result in questions, photo
requests, or attempts to touch your hair or skin. Apart from this curiosity displayed by Thais, most travelers from more diverse backgrounds will enjoy their time in the country and will find it easy to strike up a rapport with locals.

**Gender**

Women make up nearly half of all the foreign travelers who travel to Thailand and generally face few problems.

**Sexual Orientation**

Attitudes toward sexuality vary greatly from country to country. Some cultures are open about homosexuality, and strong gay communities exist in many cities. However, some cultures and peoples are intolerant of different sexual preferences, and strict taboos or laws against such relationships may exist. For more information, visit: [UMabroad.umn.edu/students/identity](http://UMabroad.umn.edu/students/identity).

Thai culture is relatively tolerant of both male and female homosexuality. However, public displays of affection, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are deeply frowned upon.

**Disabilities**

Many of the disability accommodations or services that are provided at US universities may be different or unavailable overseas. Being in a new environment can also be stressful, and accommodations that you may not have needed at home may become necessary in an unfamiliar setting. Participants with any kind of disability, whether hidden or visible, should contact the Learning Abroad Center in advance to discuss their particular needs. For more information, visit: [UMabroad.umn.edu/students/identity](http://UMabroad.umn.edu/students/identity).

In general, Thailand can be very difficult for people with physical disabilities. There are many high curbs, uneven sidewalks, hectic traffic, pedestrian walkways that are only accessible by steps, and public transportation that is not accessible. Students should be prepared for the fact that disability will be culturally defined. With this mind, we still encourage students to reach out to Learning Abroad Center staff with any disability/access questions and encourage students to utilize resources like Mobility International USA as well: [http://www.miusa.org](http://www.miusa.org).

**Diversity among Program Participants**

Students going to a location related to their ethnic heritage—for example, a Hmong or Asian American student traveling to Thailand—might wish to examine critically their expectations in advance. If part of your reason for enrolling in MSID is to explore your own identity, be careful not to romanticize what you might find. Students often discover that local people perceive them much more in terms of their American identity than their racial or ethnic background. You may gain rich insights into your roots, but do not expect members of the host society to treat you as a returning brother or sister.

### Coming Home

By the time you return home from Thailand, you will have grown and changed significantly. You will probably find yourself experiencing reverse culture shock. Many students find that returning home is harder than leaving was. It is very normal to experience these feelings and you aren’t alone. You are encouraged to tap into the resources available in order to make the transition home easier.

To stay connected to your study abroad experience, you may want to:

- Become a Global Ambassador Intern: [UMabroad.umn.edu/students/process/reentry/internships](http://UMabroad.umn.edu/students/process/reentry/internships)
- Become a classroom visit intern
- Serve as a past participant at pre-departure orientations
- Stay in contact with friends from your program

These are just a few ways to stay connected. More information can be found at: [UMabroad.umn.edu/students/process/reentry.php](http://UMabroad.umn.edu/students/process/reentry.php). Stop by the Learning Abroad Center office any time. Learning Abroad Center staff enjoy talking to students who have returned from study abroad, and would love to see your pictures and hear your stories.

### Re-Entry Adjustment

Students often find that it is just as difficult, if not more difficult, to readjust to life in the US after studying abroad. You may find that your perspectives have changed significantly and that you may not connect with friends and family in the same way you did before going abroad. The Learning Abroad Center offers a variety of resources and opportunities to help you readjust to life in the US. For more information, visit: [UMabroad.umn.edu/students/process/reentry](http://UMabroad.umn.edu/students/process/reentry).
Appendix

Packing Checklist

The following is a list developed by past MSID students and in-country staff. Adapt it to suit your own style and priorities. You will not need all the items on the packing list; they are only suggestions.

Clothing

- 2 pair of comfortable shoes in which to walk long distances
- 1 pair of sandals
- 2 dress outfits
- 5 black pants or skirts
- 5 white button up tops
- Lots of underwear, durable bras
- Lightweight socks
- T-shirts
- Tank tops
- Skirts/dresses at knee-length or longer
- 3–4 pairs of pants (jeans, khakis, etc.)
- 1–2 long-sleeve lightweight shirts
- Several short-sleeve shirts
- 1 long-sleeve warm top
- Sweatpants (lightweight)
- Shorts (hiking/sport style) for beach and sports wear
- Bathing suit
- Bandanas or handkerchiefs
- Lightweight waterproof jacket
- Lightweight sweater
- Lightweight long-sleeve, long-leg pajamas
- Sun hat/cap
- Scarf and knit hat for chilly weather

Household/Personal Items

- Money belt containing passport, international immunization record, credit card, cash card, traveler’s checks, any dollars you are taking in cash, etc.
- 1 or 2 towels and washcloths
- Umbrella
- Travel alarm
- Digital camera with extra batteries (recharging is only possible with a voltage converter)
- Flashlight
- 1 or 2 water bottles
- Sewing kit, safety pins
- Wristwatch
- Music player
- Electric converter and adapter if you are taking electrical items *Please be aware, electricity is very expensive and host families may want to limit the use of electric appliances
- Contact information of friends/family/academic contacts
- Guide book (e.g., Lonely Planet or Rough Guide)
- Pocket knife
- Photographs of friends and family, your house, your community, etc.
- Locks for luggage
- Zip/flash drive
Health Items & Toiletries

- A full supply of prescription drugs in original bottles (in case customs needs documentation); include one prescription for bacterial dysentery and directions for its use
- First aid kit
- Insect repellent (at least 21% DEET)
- Anti-itch gel for mosquito bites
- Condoms, birth control
- Tampons (expensive or unavailable in country)
- Bladder infection medication, yeast infection medication
- Anti-diarrheal medicine
- Pepto-Bismol or similar stomach settler
- Laxatives
- Small packages of tissue or toilet paper
- Pain medicines
- Sunscreen (high SPF)
- Aloe vera gel for sunburns
- Sunglasses
- Lip balm with sunscreen
- Vitamins
- Hand sanitizer
- Eye drops
- Earplugs
- All contact lens materials needed for your stay
- An extra pair of glasses and a copy of your prescription
- Sanitary moist wipes
- Toiletries: soap, deodorant, shampoo, and toothpaste are all easily available in country (but take enough for first few weeks); dental floss (take enough for your stay), nail clippers, toothbrush, hairbrush or comb, razor
- Thermometer to detect a fever. In hot climates, it is very difficult to assess a fever independently.
- Granola bars
- Water filter/purifier, iodine tablets
Cultural Adjustment

The On-Site Experience

What happens when you suddenly lose clues and symbols that orient you to situations in everyday life? What happens when facial expressions, gestures, and words are unfamiliar? The psychological discomfort and adjustment period in a foreign country is commonly known as culture shock or cultural adjustment.

You will almost certainly experience some form of culture shock. It might hit you after two days, two weeks, or two months—timing varies widely for different people. Six common phases of cultural adjustment are listed below. These may be out of order for you, one phase may last longer than another, or you may skip a step entirely.

Initial Fascination: On arrival your surroundings seem glamorous and exotic, and you feel like the focus of attention and activity.

Initial Culture Shock: The initial fascination and euphoria fade as you settle in and you enter an emotional decline.

Surface Adjustment: After the initial “down” (a few days to a few weeks for most), you begin to truly adjust and settle into your surroundings. Language skills begin to improve, and you’ll feel less fatigued. Often you’ll be forming a small group of friends at this stage as well.

Feelings of Isolation: Difficulties in your new culture seem to stubbornly remain and you grow frustrated with the process.

Integration/Acceptance: After continued effort you find yourself more at ease with language, friends, professional, and academic interests. The culture you are living in is more easily examined. Differences between yourself and the society you live in become understandable and you come to accept both the situation and yourself in it, allowing you to relax and feel at home.

Return Anxiety: Just when you feel at home in the new country it’s time to go. Thoughts of leaving new friends raise anxiety similar to those felt before departure. You sense that you’ve changed as a person and apprehension grows when you think about people at home that may not understand your new feelings and insights, yet you may feel guilty for wanting to stay.

When in any of the above phases you may experience: changes in sleeping habits, feelings of helplessness or hopelessness, loneliness, depression, unexplainable crying, placing blame for difficulties on the program or host culture, homesickness, getting angry easily, increase in physical ailments or pain, compulsive eating, or lack of appetite.

Other symptoms may manifest themselves as well. It is important to understand these are part of a normal process of adjustment, however, if uncomfortable feelings persist for extended periods or seem unbearable, seek assistance from your program’s on-site support staff.

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Cultural Adjustment Curve

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Adjusted from Oberg (1960) and Gallahorn (1963)