

## From the USA to Uttaradit: Teens try teaching for 2 weeks in Thailand!



**Amazing Americans Sara, Bryan, Jenna, Michi and Darren**

By April Hadsaithong

WHEN Sara Plowman decided to move half-way around the world to teach English to Thai school kids, she knew it wasn't going to be easy. But she never thought it would change her life!

"I appreciate everything a lot more now. It just made me realise how many options are out there in the world," Sara told NJ Magazine.

Sara and five other teenagers left America to teach in Pha Leurat, a small district of Uttaradit in the North of Thailand. They stayed there for two weeks, teaching English to school children there.

Sara and her friends, Jenna Clemens, Michi Abe, Bryan Hermannsson, Darren Shipley and Lindsey Hartsough, didn't know much about Thailand before they arrived, but they knew they wanted to try teaching. They came here through Inside Thailand Cultural Exchange, a non-profit organisation run by American teacher Mac Bakewell who is based in Santa Barbara, California.



**Isn't fun building a library, Darren and Michi?**

None of the teenagers spoke any Thai, and the kids they were teaching had basically no English skills at all. But soon after they arrived, their fear disappeared and turned to friendship.

"In the first hour everyone was sort of wary of each other, nervous, I would say. But by the last hour we were all great friends and having fun," Jenna told NJ.

"Making up lesson plans was hard. It's difficult to come up with stuff to do. In class, we used a lot of body language and hand communication."

teachers and the students, the children went from speaking no English to speaking short sentences every day!

Two weeks is not a long time, but thanks to the enthusiasm of both the

Their contact with the school kids didn't end with the school bell. The teachers and students spent a lot of time outdoors, playing soccer, basketball and even swimming in the river.



**The American students learn some of the intricacies of Buddhism.**

The six Americans adapted to the Pha Luerat community so well that they even had a chili eating contest! Lindsay loved curry, panang gai (dry chicken curry) was Jenna's favourite; Bryan enjoyed refreshing cha yen (iced tea with milk) and pad see eew (stir fried noodles with dark soy sauce). The food, in fact, was one of the best parts of the teachers' experience.

"Oh, it was wonderful, it was amazing, it was the best food we ever had. We had an amazing cook, awesome," said Sarah.

At night they slept in one big room with beds lined up next to each other. The sleeping arrangements helped make their friendships stronger.

"The colder it got, the closer we came to each other," Lindsay said with a big

smile.

But what about those infamous mosquitoes?

Ajarn Mac, the ruggedly handsome teacher who brought the kids over, quickly said that the mosquitoes liked Darren so much that they didn't bother anybody else!

But the American kids did more than just teach English. They wanted to try everything - and that included working in the paddy fields and doing construction work!

"This year we started to build a library in the village on the temple grounds. Wat Pha Luerat donated two rai of land to build the library," said Ajarn Mac.

"These kids were out there digging dirt."

Mac has been trying to build a library in Pha Luerat community for many years. He has even collected over 2,000 books for the project, but most of them are in English.

At the end of their trip to Pha Luerat, the Americans were having so much fun that they didn't want to leave. "It was great for us. I know that I just made some really great friends. And I appreciate how the entire village let us into their world for two weeks. It was an eye-opening experience," Jenna said.

Anybody interested in donating books (Thai or English!) can send them directly to:  
Pra Ajarn Saner Yarnkuno  
Abbot, Wat Pha Luerat  
Tambon Pha Luerat  
Amphoe Ta Pla  
Uttraradit 53190  
Thailand

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