



Madelyn

from Tillsonburg to Thailand

"The Adventures of Madelyn Bolton: Thailand Edition Vol. II"

IIIIIIIIII'm back! Six months in and the culture is still amazing to me. Every day I learn more and more about what makes Thailand, Thailand. And, without further ado, I present to you The Adventures of Madelyn Bolton: Thailand Edition Vol. II.

Although it is technically the "winter" season right now, the temperature is unusually warm for this time of year. Instead of the shockingly cold 15°C weather I was looking forward to, most days it's closer to 30°C. The rain has officially stopped, so that's a definite plus. The Mighty Umbrella has gone into hibernation for a few seasons.

The festival Roi Krathong is a Siamese festival celebrated in Thailand and other nearby southwestern countries. It is celebrated on the evening of the first full moon of the 12th month of the traditional Thai lunar calendar. This year, it was on November 22. People dress in traditional Thai clothes and float krathong (little "boats" made of banana tree trunk and leaves and decorated with flowers) down the river. I participated in this festival and floated my very own krathong down the river. In November, I also went to the Flower Festival held in Rai Phattong. There were fields and fields of different types of flowers, and behind the fields, a miniature farm. There were sheep, deer, horses, and a few other animals. My host dad took me, and we went into the sheep enclosure to pet and feed some of the sheep. The baby sheep were adorably cute, but the birds that we tried to feed didn't like me at all.

In December, I went on my second Rotary trip of the year. We visited Chang Mai, Chang Rai, and Pai, spending our time shopping in the night markets of Chang Mai and Chang Rai, visiting museums and national landmarks, and enjoying the friendship and company of our friends over the week before Christmas. The first thing we did in Chang Mai was visit a tea farm. This farm produces a lot of the tea for all of Thailand and we were able to walk through the fields and taste some of the tea.

We also visited the Doi Tung Royal Villa in Mae Fa Luang, Chang Rai. This is the villa that the late Queen Mother built and visited while she was still alive. It has a ginormous, beautiful garden surrounding it (which included a small zipline) and has amazing cultural significance for the people of Northern Thailand. The history behind the villa was shockingly fascinating, even to my non-history loving mind. Also, in Chang Rai was the Black House, aka the Baandam Museum or Black Temple. It is a collection of wooden buildings filled with art work by Thawan Duchanee and a few other Thai artists. The art was mostly made of animal bones and skin used to create chairs, tables, sculptures, and a variety of other weird, unique, and interesting art pieces.

Wat Rong Khun, or the White Temple, is another art exhibit we visited which was built in the form of a Buddhist temple. Constructed and owned by artist Chalermchai Kositpipat, he can sometimes be seen visiting the temple himself and observing the visitors. There were many buildings to look through and a central temple where you could pray. The entire grounds were very beautiful.

The night market in Chang Rai, which was somewhat of a mix between your typical Thai night market and a small square styled after a European village, was extremely crowded and filled with clothes, food, jewelry, and much more. The other exchange students and I were put in groups and let loose to explore the explosion of culture surrounding us. The market was filled with tourists and natives alike and was fascinating to explore on the night before our travels took us to Pai. In Pai, we stayed in a cute little motel with a pool and lots of cute paintings and cut-outs. There, we visited the hot springs, a special suspension bridge, and a temple where the Buddha's head fills with holy water on its own. We stayed in Pai for Christmas Eve.

On Christmas morning, we had what I like to call the "Cry Circle". The Rotarians had us all stand in a circle and talk about what we liked/missed most about Christmas back home and, needless to say, most of us ending up balling our eyes out. I think they did it knowing that we'd all need a shoulder to cry on and share in our mutual love of Holliday Homesickness. We spent Christmas night in Chang Mai and the Rotarians organized a small Christmas party for us. We had a Thai style Christmas dinner, a Secret Santa gift exchange, and a small dance party. It was a great way to spend our last night all together and we had lots of fun. On the last day of our trip, we visited the Chang Mai Zoo. We spent the morning walking and shuttling from animal enclosure to animal enclosure to cool attraction for most of the morning. We then departed from our friends and flew back home to our host families.

Almost as soon as I got back from my trip, my school had its Sports Day. This is a day that every school has, and all the students participate, whether by being in the marching band, a cheerleader for one of the five school colour teams, a baton twirler, on a sports team, in the parade, or being in the stands for the (choreographed) cheering. I was in the opening parade dressed in fancy traditional Thai clothing. Everyone who was in the parade stayed at the school the night before or got to school super early so that we could get our hair and makeup done before being helped into our outfits.

The next week and a bit was full of celebrations and parties. The weekend after Sports Day, I celebrated Christmas again with my host sister who invited me to her friend's Christmas party. I met some of her friends and we made amazingly delicious Christmas shortbread cookies and exchanged gifts. We stayed overnight at her friend's house before going back home in the morning.

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For New Years, I didn't do anything in the evening, but during the day I visited Sam Phan Bok – the Grand Canyon of Thailand – with a few of the other exchange students in my area. It was nice to hang out with them and see some of the sights in my area I hadn't before had the chance to look at. And, because all good things come in threes, I had my third Christmas celebration of the year. My class exchanged presents and ate Korean Barbeque while hanging out for the whole afternoon. I have also now been to a Thai wedding. One of the Rotary members from my club here in Thailand was getting married and was nice enough to invite me to the reception. It was fascinating to see the cultural differences in such a universal ceremony.

And now, I thank you for taking the time to read the continuation of my life changing story. I encourage you (if you haven't already) to read the first Tale of my happenings here in Thailand and have a wonderful rest of your day. That's all for now.

Signing Off,

Madelyn