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Thailand Packing Blog

What to Plan For

Thailand: Cultural Kaleidoscope was my first GLA program, and I was so incredibly excited. It being my first time in South East Asia, I found myself agonizing a bit over the packing list: would I be dressed appropriately? Would I have enough clean clothes? Was there anything I ought to know to bring that wasn't on the list?

The [Packing List](#) has since been carefully revised by both our Thailand staff and alumni students, and is a great resource; however, if you are wanting some additional guidance, please read on!

Get Organized

I am a light packer: typically, I will bring only a small purse and a backpacking backpack when I travel, and this program was no different. Despite my best efforts, all of the necessary items would not fit into one bag. I found the following to be the most efficient configuration:

- 1) a small purse with my passport, money, copy of my flight itinerary
- 2) a smallish backpack (bookbag size), which I carried on the plane
- 3) a larger backpacking backpack, which I checked

Keep your packing simple! You definitely won't need a blow dryer, fancy electronics, makeup, or trendy outfits. The high humidity of Chiang Mai will destroy even the most carefully styled hair,

and the group I was with learned early on that it's best not to bother. Recognize that everyone is going to be a hot mess & embrace it! Blowdryers, straighteners, and curling irons have no place on the program.

Be sure to check with your airline in regard to baggage allowances and weight limitations. Most airlines will allow one carry-on bag, one personal item, and one checked bag weighing 50 lbs or less on international flights. However, please [verify this with your airline](#) before you get started, or you could be facing an extra charge at check in.

Personal Item (backpack): You'll want to keep your essentials near and dear! Luggage delays do happen from time to time for our Thailand travelers. The following items are absolutely crucial to have on your person when you fly. It may seem like a no-brainer, but every year we have students call us in a panic when they realize that they left their passport/wallet/phone in their checked luggage and said luggage hasn't yet arrived.

- Passport
- Contact Card
- Wallet
- Flight Itinerary
- Phone & Charger
- Prescriptions or other crucial medications
- PEN!** You will need this when filling out your entrance forms on the plane

Imagine the worst-case scenario: Your checked bag doesn't arrive in Chiang Mai with you, and is never to be seen again. What items would you absolutely want to have with you? The answer will be different for each of us, but here are the items I wouldn't want to be caught without:



- Full change of clothes (pants, t-shirt, undergarments)
- Book
- Toiletries (travel size--you can see [TSA guidelines here](#))
- Instant coffee (for the coffee enthusiast!)

I've found that other students are happy to share their resources (snacks, extra clothing, etc) and we can always make a run to the store to replace anything essential; however, keep in mind that Chiang Mai stores may not have the products or styles that you are hoping for.

Checked Backpacking Bag or Suitcase:

Use this bag for the bulk of your belongings, or those which you won't need during your journey. Clothes, snacks, extra books, etc.



Dressing Appropriately

Thailand is a tricky one as far as knowing what clothing will be appropriate; luckily, I'm here to give some guidelines! In the past, we have had students consistently ignore the dress code and bring/wear items that aren't culturally appropriate. This year, we are really cracking down, as we have noticed that The amount of skin and curves that are totally appropriate and common in the US is enough to make our Thai partners and staff uncomfortable, and this hurts our relationship with them as well as our ability to truly partner with the Thai people in our service projects. Because of this, we do NOT allow tank tops, shorts, or leggings out in the community.

At the Home Base, we can "let our hair down" and students can wear whatever is comfortable (shorts, tank tops with thicker straps, leggings, etc.). You may have a pool at your Home Base, so feel free to bring a swimsuit of your choice--as long as it's not totally scandalous, bikinis are fine to wear in the water.

"Elephant Pants" - Flowy, loose pants that don't hug your curves, typically characterized by a stretchy waistband and their cotton or rayon construction. These will be your go-to. I've actually noticed that these have been pretty popular in the US in the past few years. From Target to [Amazon](#) to slightly pricier yet socially responsible enterprises like [Punjammies](#), these loose pants are no longer elusive! Having trouble finding some stateside? Not to worry! During your first couple of days in Thailand, you will visit the Chiang Mai Night Market, where there are textile vendors every few feet. There are some super beautiful pants there, and with prices between \$3 - 8 USD, you can definitely stock up. Guys and gals alike will need to hop on the loose pants train. I'll admit that I was taken by the pants craze--luckily the GLA office has a casual dress code, so I've been able to get good use out of them. So, to recap:



NO leggings, yoga pants, shorts, skirts above the knee, or tank tops in the community!

WEAR flowy pants, capris, or past-the-knee skirts and t-shirts in the community!

Other Tips & Recommendations:

Fiber Supplement: Rice with every meal tends to take its toll on a body, and you will be glad to have something to "help things along," so to speak. I am a big fan of fiber gummies, as they work like a charm and are a delicious (tiny) snack to boot. While many students who travel abroad seem to complain about diarrhea at some point, our Thai travelers generally have the opposite problem.



Snacks From Home: Personally, I find the opportunity to try crazy new snacks to be one of the most exciting aspects of international travel, and Thailand definitely did not disappoint. If you're more partial to familiar flavors and textures, or if you have food allergies, bringing a supply of snacks from home may be a better route. I was a vegetarian while I was in Thailand, and found that the veggie options were very low in protein. This is definitely something to consider when planning your snack hoard!



Water-Enhancing Powders (coffee, tea, flavoring packets, etc): The heat in Thailand means that drinking water constantly will be crucial in staying healthy and feeling good! If you struggle with plain water, you may want to consider bringing something to spice it up a bit. Emergen-C is one of my favorites, both hot and cold! Plus, a little immune system boost will come in handy when adapting to a new environment. If you're a coffee enthusiast, the Home Base will serve coffee with breakfast each morning, so not to worry; however, if you are accustomed to a boost midway through the day, you may want to bring some instant coffee (Starbucks has a good selection) as it can be tricky to get while we're out & about.

Adapter - You May Not Need It! The Home Base is equipped with *mostly* North American outlets. There are a couple of rogue rooms that have a different-shaped outlet, but the common areas and the vast majority of the rooms/cabins won't require an adapter. In the unlikely event that you DO need to bring items that require a three-pronged plug in, you **will** need an adapter. Which brings me to my last and most important tip....

Unplug! Forego that international data plan! You'll save some money, and your parents are still kept abreast of your day-to-day through the GLA Blog. More importantly, I guarantee you that you'll get so much more out of the program if you unplug. I know it might sound impossible to refrain from Instagramming the fruits of your labor at the service project, Snapchatting pics of your new besties, etc; however, I challenge you to take this rare opportunity to vacation from your phone and the interwebs at large! I'm not going to lie: the first few days were excruciating for me. I was constantly glancing down at my phone, itching to check my Facebook and email, experiencing withdrawal from cute cat videos, etc. By the fourth day, I felt empowered! It's amazing how much more in tune with your surroundings you can be when you make a conscious decision to just refrain. I've found that students who come without a data plan are so much more engaged, quicker to forge friendships, and ultimately enjoy their time in Thailand that much more.

Final Thoughts: Don't sweat the small stuff! Just follow the packing list and try to bring only the necessities. This is a great opportunity to live simply, to reevaluate what you actually need and what you can do without.

