

## **ACE IN THAILAND**

**This program is organized by VIA.**

**Program Dates:** June 13 – July 4, 2020

(Students will arrive on-site June 13 and depart July 4.)

### **Service Focus**

Contributing to the development of marginalized students, migrants, and refugee youth living in Thailand through academic support, leadership training, and physical education.

### **Program Leaders**

Melissa Paschuck, Asia-Pacific Programs Director, [melissa.paschuck@viaprograms.org](mailto:melissa.paschuck@viaprograms.org)

Melissa holds a master's degree from Kent State University in Higher Education Administration and has served US and international students for more than ten years. Her experience in international education includes developing and implementing programs and services for international and exchange students, supporting education abroad programs, community building with diverse populations, advising F-1 and J-1 non-immigrant students, and building collaborative relationships with international partners. She moved to the San Francisco Bay area from South Carolina and grew up in Pennsylvania. Melissa was the on-site director in 2019 for the ACE in China program.

### **Program Overview**

Program participants will spend three weeks in Chiang Mai, Thailand supporting the work of [BEAM Education Foundation \(BEAM\)](#). BEAM's Higher Education Program provides local marginalized youth with non-formal secondary education and enables participants to be admissible to institutions of higher education in Thailand and abroad. ACE student-athletes will support this work by developing and implementing activities that provide academic preparation, leadership training, and encourage physical fitness for the participants.

The youth served by BEAM are from marginalized communities of migrants and refugees living in Thailand, most of whom are from Myanmar. It is difficult for these youth to continue education that began outside of Thailand due to issues surrounding legal immigration status; recognition of educational achievements, certifications, and equivalencies; lack of awareness and understanding of basic and educational rights; and difficult communication between organizations that support migrant education and the Thai Education departments, among other issues.

ACE participants will be supported by VIA's program director who will manage program logistics, provide general guidance for the development and implementation of the activities led by ACE participants, and facilitate activities and reflections that promote a learning-service mindset, intercultural learning, and leadership development.

VIA (formerly Volunteers in Asia) was established in 1963 as a summer project with Stanford University students serving Chinese refugees in Hong Kong. In 1966 VIA became an independent non-profit organization

providing innovative experiential learning programs in Asia and the United States that promote cross-cultural understanding, build partnerships, and offer transformative experiences for participants and the communities they serve. VIA and BEAM have worked together since 2010 when VIA began sending American post-graduates as Global Community Fellows for one-year placements to support BEAM's educational programs, communications, and fundraising initiatives.

### **Service Opportunities**

ACE participants will engage with approximately 25 participants who are enrolled in BEAM's Higher Education Program. The curriculum for this program includes preparation to take the General Education Development (GED) exam, an American-based and internationally recognized non-formal high school diploma course, which allows students without formal education backgrounds to receive an official high school diploma. Each May, a new cohort of students, many of whom have spent their previous educational experiences at Migrant Learning Centers located in refugee camps, begin GED test preparation. For the next two months, the students are introduced to standardized academic methods to prepare for the rigorous exam.

The ACE participants will join and develop activities designed to complement the BEAM GED curriculum, improve leadership skills, and encourage physical fitness. ACE participants will help students with study skills, academic writing, note taking, presentation skills, and debate activities. Additionally, ACE participants will join BEAM's Youth Club for 1-2 sessions which connect more than 50 BEAM alumni in Chiang Mai for cross-cultural learning opportunities. ACE participants will also conclude their service by documenting their workshop lesson plans to share with BEAM for future use.

### **Program Requirements**

**Language & Other Prerequisites:** No specific foreign language or technical skills are required for students to participate in this program. Students will have linguistic and cultural support throughout the program from VIA and BEAM staff. A background in teaching, coaching, or youth development is helpful.

**Personal Competencies:** For all programs, VIA seeks participants who embody the following characteristics:

- **Learning mindset** – seeks to frame all situations, including challenging and difficult ones, as an opportunity for learning and growth.
- **Empathy and cultural sensitivity** – effectively and respectfully communicates and interacts with people of different ages, races, religions, and cultures; demonstrates curiosity about the lives of others without judgment.
- **Commitment to honest and ethical behaviors** – actively seeks to understand and adhere to the values, policies, procedures, and protocols of ACE and their host organization/community; lives up to commitments and promises they make to others.

### **Program Details**

**Description of Community:**

The program site is located in Chiang Mai, the largest city in northern Thailand. Chiang Mai was the site of the ancient Lanna Kingdom and is dotted with historical temples (known as wats) and restored historical city walls and gates. Chiang Mai has a central area known as the "Old City" with famous wats, historical sites, and tourist attractions. The city is surrounded by lush mountains and rainforests and is known for its relaxed atmosphere and unique cuisine. Located relatively close to the Myanmar border, Chiang Mai is also home to a large population of refugees and migrants who settled in Thailand over the past several decades. Numerous NGOs

and community-based organizations work with this population to provide education, employment, and health services.

#### Housing:

Students will reside in a hotel or guesthouse in Chiang Mai. Students will stay in double rooms, each with their own bed. The hotel will have Wi-Fi, air conditioning, en-suite bathrooms with western-style toilets, and hot water. There are several “drop-off” laundry services in the neighborhood, as well as a self-service laundromat. There will be restaurants, convenience stores, and coffee shops located within walking distance of the housing location.

#### Meals:

Chiang Mai has a wide range of Thai, international, and western-style food options. Meals will take place at local restaurants in the neighborhood or at other locations organized by VIA staff. Thai food options will include a wide-range dishes that feature vegetables, chicken, beef, pork, seafood, noodles, and rice. Fresh fruit is plentiful and can be purchased whole, sliced, or in smoothies. Non-Thai options typically include eggs, granola, fresh fruit, pancakes, sausages, and bacon for breakfast and sandwiches, pizza, salads, burgers, and international cuisines such as Mexican or Indian for lunch and dinner. In general, most dietary restrictions and preferences can be accommodated. If you have any specific concerns, please contact the ACE office, [aceathletes@duke.edu](mailto:aceathletes@duke.edu), to discuss whether or not your dietary needs can be reasonably accommodated at this program site.

There are numerous grocery stores in Chiang Mai that sell energy/protein bars, peanut butter, cheese, yoghurt, and other high-protein foods. Convenience stores, such as 7-11, are ubiquitous in Thailand and an excellent place to purchase toiletries. Brands and price might vary from students’ home stores, so students might want to bring a supply with them if they have a preference for a specific brand.

#### Communication:

Students will be provided with feature phones and local SIM cards for SMS and voice communication. Students will have Wi-Fi access during the program at the hotel, though it may be slower than at home or on the Duke or Stanford campus. Most coffee shops and restaurants have free Wi-Fi access. ACE participants will be briefed on Thailand’s communications protocols regarding legal and appropriate internet behavior, which is designed to show deference for the monarchy and government.

#### Transportation:

Students will be met at the airport when arriving in Chiang Mai and escorted back to the airport at the conclusion of the program. When traveling to the project site or enrichment activities, students will travel in vans arranged by the hotel or a local tour company. Chiang Mai, especially the Old City, is a great walking city.

#### Athletic Training Facilities:

There are many western-style gyms located in Chiang Mai that feature free weights, treadmills, exercise machines, and areas for stretching, though a track or pool will not be accessible on a frequent basis. VIA will set-up an arrangement to allow students to use a gym 3-4 times per week. On gym days, students will have 1-2 hours to work out in the mornings before preparing for their service activities. VIA will also arrange transportation and entrance to a sports facility 1-2 times per week that includes a track and swimming pool

suitable for lap swimming.

Students should take note that Thai culture and dress in public is typically characterized as more conservative than in the U.S. It's not common for people to wear workout clothes outside of exercise areas such as gyms, tracks, athletic fields, or pool areas. Due to traffic patterns, students will not be able to run on public streets.

#### **Opportunities for Reflection:**

A core part of VIA's experiential education curriculum includes reflection. Staff will lead regular group reflection activities throughout the program and also provide students with opportunities for reflection on their own, including writing, photo and video activities. Topics will include a focus on the role of visitors to communities, best practices in engaging in ethical service and examining cross-cultural interactions. The program ends with a final reflection and evaluation.

#### **Enrichment Opportunities:**

In addition to the service activities, there will be significant opportunities to learn about the culture, history, and traditions of the region. The service activities will typically run from Monday-Friday, leaving weekends available to explore Chiang Mai with the VIA staff. Likely enrichment activities include visiting Doi Suthep, a temple at the top of a mountain that overlooks Chiang Mai; a "monk chat" a time to meet monks and exchange perspectives at a local temple; a Thai cooking class; and a cultural performance.

#### **Suggested Resources to Learn More:**

##### **Too scared to return home, Myanmar refugees in Thai camps face an uncertain future**

<https://reliefweb.int/report/thailand/too-scared-return-home-myanmar-refugees-thai-camps-face-uncertain-future>

##### **Background on the Thailand-Burma Border Displaced in Thailand Refugee Camps**

<https://www.burmalink.org/background/thailand-burma-border/displaced-in-thailand/refugee-camps/>

##### **Voices of Refugees – Situation of Burma's Refugees Along the Thailand-Burma Border**

<https://www.burmalink.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/27.04.05-Voices-of-Refugees-Along-Thailand-Burma-Border.pdf>

Exploring Barriers to Higher Education in Protracted Refugee Situations: The Case of Burmese Refugees in Thailand, Barbara Zeus, Journal of Refugee Studies, Volume 24, Issue 2, June 2011, Pages 256–276

##### **Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy Towards Burmese Refugees and Migrants**

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/02/24/out-sight-out-mind/thai-policy-towards-burmese-refugees-and-migrants>

#### **Miscellaneous:**

Students should be aware that the program takes place in a tropical environment. The program will take place at the end of the hot season and the beginning of the rainy season. Temperatures can rise to 90 degrees, with high humidity, and intense sun. Heavy rain is also frequent.