



It's time for another novel-esque issue of "High Times in Bangkok with Aaron". Aren't you excited? I know I am.

First--Valentine's Day in Thailand is a lot of fun. They do a lot! Outside the gate to my campus, there was a huge stage set up for a band and there are vendors selling beautiful flowers and things for everyone. And here, Valentine's Day is more like an excuse to get together with friends than the romantic day we generally think of. Almost everybody celebrates. So, in keeping with that, I went out to a bar, the Moonshine Bar, which has become one of my preferred place to get a drink. It's outside, very relaxed, has great music and also serves Thai moonshine, a surprisingly tasty rice whiskey. I went with my friends Bon, Sun, Noon, Mot ("moat"), Noon's boss Ba, and a few others. At

the bar, they also had a competition for couples. Angela and I decided to try and be a couple along with Noon and Bon (also not a real couple). Angela and I were the only non-Thais, though, so they had to explain everything twice. We ended up taking third after Angela couldn't guess my birthday, but Bon and Noon managed 2nd place and won a 300-baht coupon! They had tied with the other couple, but lost in the rock-paper-scissors tiebreaker. Oh well.



School is going great. I have midterms coming up in a week, but its great because we don't have classes that week. I only have one midterm during the week, so I may have to some extended travel! We got our first assignment for political economics, a 5-6 page paper, but we can do it in groups of 4 people. Communist class (Thai rural development) is getting better and Thai language is a lot of fun (but intense and challenging). I think my favorite class, though, Buddhist institutions because the professor is a very, very sarcastic guy who knows more history than I could hope to learn in my life. Some people find him a little rude, but I think it's because they don't want to work very hard for their classes. Plus, it huelps that he likes me. OK, enough of school.

A few random observations about Thailand:

-Honking your car-horn here seems to be more of an accident-prevention tool than an anger-expression tool. Everyone honks when they want to let someone know they are coming, when they are passing, or when they are changing lanes. Thai people are non-confrontational, almost

to a fault, so I think road rage may be a bit too much for their psyches.

-The garbage collection system here is very strange. There are very few actual garbage receptacles, so to throw stuff away you just find a pile of garbage that someone else started, or start your own, and it gets picked up. I'm not sure who organized that.

-There are some incredibly adorable kittens that hang out at the ferry pier I go to every morning.

-Sticky rice goes with everything. If you've never had sticky rice, you are missing out. It's a sweet rice that, obviously, sticks together in large clumps. You can get it with everything from fresh mango and coconut milk to pieces of roasted pork on a stick to fried chicken. It is delicious.

-Corn is considered desert.

-Thai language is, in translation, extremely simple. For example, there is no conjugation of verbs. The word for go (pronounced "buy") can stand in for go, going, went, or will go for any amount of people. Also, Thai people don't like to roll their R's, which standard Thai does. They just replace it with an L instead. So, the main road near my place is Pin Klao, but if you say it like that, taxi drivers have no idea what you are saying--you have to say "Pink Kao." And sometimes the L drops altogether in favor of an N. The mall nearby, Central, is pronounced centran. "Michael" is pronounced "Mikon".

-If you need to get to a hospital, hail a taxi. Don't bother with ambulances. Nobody gets out of the way and they don't work like they do in the US.

BIG NEWS I made it to the ocean. For the first time in my life I swam in the ocean. After hearing about the beaches in Thailand, I went on the first of, hopefully, many weekend trips to the ocean. The beauty I saw there is unparalleled. A friend, Adam told me he was leaving on Thursday night, so I decided to join morning (up at 6) for the 5 hour bus Sam Roi Yod National Park. After tao to take us to the park from the bus to Bang Pu, a small fishing village, we

gorgeous sunny, breezy beach, Laem Sala. I would love to describe how beautiful it was, but you're better off consulting [my pictures](#). We decided to camp on the beach (only 30 baht per night--100 baht if we rented a tent) and set up our tarp and groundcovers less than 70 yards from the water (when we woke up the next morning, as the tide was in, we were about 70 feet from the water!) The water was so warm and felt wonderful as I swam out about a quarter of a mile into the ocean--my first time! I also found out how salty the ocean is. I tasted like peanuts!



Aside from the wonder of the beach, we met a whole bunch of neat people. The foremost of these people is Jose. He is from Spain, 35 and retired (strangely, though, he was only a civil servant doing administration work--he scrimped and saved to retire early). Besides being retired, he is also a Buddhist, plays 5 instruments (banjo, hammer-dulcimer, flute, nose-flute and clarinet), is excellent with origami, juggles and practices [throat-singing](#). He was a very



interesting guy. He has been in Thailand for a few months, going around to the various national parks and camping for about a week or two at each. Eating meals with him was a lot of fun because by the end of the meal, we would have about 12 to 15 pieces of origami splayed on the table. The Thais thought it was pretty cool, too. Then at night, we would build a big fire and he and Adam would play their instruments--a calming way to end the day.

And these fires were where we also met interesting guy #2, Mr. Daan, as he is known. He is the night watchman for the camping area and had to stay up all night, so he would join us at our fires and talk to Adam and me in Thai. He talked really fast, seemed a little crazy (who wouldn't go crazy having to stay up through the night in a park), and was a lot of fun to talk to. Even though we didn't understand most of what he was saying, we managed to figure stuff out eventually. We talked about soccer, basketball (Michael Jordan), school, traveling and girls. And he really got a kick out of showing me different times for cities around the world on his cellphone (Washington, DC being one of his favorites) and having me say the times in Thai--it helped me learn really fast because telling time in Thai is crazy--you have no idea how easy we have it by just saying "pm" or "am". There are essentially 6 different periods in a 24 hour day where the terminology for the time is completely different! Luckily, though, it helped me learn for my Thai language class.

The third interesting person is actually a group of about 25 Thai people who were staying at the beach the first night we were there. After eating dinner at one of the restaurants on the beach (and ordering our food in Thai, which the Thais loved), a huge group of Thais came in and sat down for dinner. But they also brought with them about 15-20 bottles of Regency Brandy. Seeing Adam and I, they beckoned us to eat with them and have a few drinks. Wanting to practice Thai, we obliged. We met, most notably, Noh (said hard and fast), who was crazy about talking Thai with Adam and me. The others joined in and we got into a rousing debate over whether we should like Manchester United (Ash!) or Arsenal better (soccer teams from England). One of the guys was a big fan of Thierry Henry from Arsenal, so he and I had that connection, but Noh was a Man U guy who liked David Beckham. It was fun to argue a bit in Thai. After teaching Noh how to say "delicious" and "Pineapple", we decided it was time to move on and we headed for the fire.



Finally, at the park, there was a monstrous cave which is basically comprised of two huge sinkholes. The caves are beautiful and in the morning have the sunlight streaming into them, giving them an almost heavenly glow. Historically, these caves were frequented by King Rama V and VII (late 18th century, early 19th) and there happens to be a shrine to Rama V in a very advantageous place in the cave. You must see the pictures. We ended up spending a few hours in the giant cave because when there was no one there, it was so peaceful and great for just lying back and thinking. Phenomenal.

Finally, today I saw Babel. After paying my respects to the King at the movie theater, I watched this excellent movie and highly recommend it for everyone to see. Beyond that, I have some sleeping to do. Let me know how you guys are doing and what you're doing! For anyone who has been recently added to the email list, I have put all my past emails on a [blog](#) and you can see my pictures [here](#).

Chon Kaeo~Aaron

