Traversing Thailand
November 3-4
Bangkok

Michelle, Justin, Karen, Cintia, Maya, and I set out for Chiang Mai, Thailand, but we first had a five hour layover in Bangkok. When we arrived, it was a bit of a culture shock since we could now speak English instead of Chinese to get around! There wasn't enough time to explore the city, but we did go out to grab dinner. We met up with Eddie and Ryan who had spent the past couple of days in Vietnam and Bangkok while the rest of the Wash U crew were in Yunnan.

We went to the Magic Food Point which was a five minute walk from Don Muang Airport. It was basically a cafeteria, but the food was really good.

Karen got beef soup with fried egg noodle.

Cintia loves food, especially mango sticky rice!

The curry chicken with rice tasted amazing.

Afterwards, we got Thai iced tea ice cream at the airport.
Chiang Mai

We arrived in Chiang Mai around 11PM, so it was pretty late by the time we got to our hotel. Justin, Eddie, Ryan, Michelle and I stayed at the X2 Vibe Chiang Mai Decem Hotel while Maya, Karen, and Cintia stayed in a hostel on the other side of the Old City.

Day 1: Lantern Festival and Temples

We woke up around 7AM so that we could explore the temples in the Old City before our lantern festival event at 2PM. After breakfast at the hotel, we set out for Wat Chedi Luang, a Buddhist temple in the middle of Old City.

Wat Chedi Luang

We didn’t realize there was a dress code for visiting the temples. For instance, females had to wear clothing that went past the knee. That’s how Michelle and I wound up wearing these purple skirts.
Karen, Cintia, and Maya met us at the temple.

Thailand crew in front of Wat Chedi Luang

Ryan was our resident photographer.

PC: Justin Fong

Buddhist temple with young monks in front worshipping.

PC: Justin Fong

Dragon statue outside the Buddhist temple.

PC: Justin Fong
Three Kings Monument
We next walked to the Three Kings Monument, a marker for the center point of the old administrative quarter of Chiang Mai. The bronze statues represents the alliance between King Ngam Meuang, King Mengrai, and King Ramkhamhaeng in the founding of the city.

There was a plethora of small lanterns in front of the monument, most likely for the lantern festival later that night. PC: Justin Fong

Tha Phae Gate
This famous landmark is part of a crumbling city wall that once was a fortress for the Old City. There were also a lot of souvenir shops around the gate which is where us girls wanted to go. Souvenirs were pretty cheap in Thailand, especially after bargaining. Several of us were hoping to find some elephant pants. XD

The Tha Phae Gate
PC: Justin Fong

Posing in front of the "Tha Phae Gate" sign. Seems like I didn't get the white shirt memo :P
Lunch
For lunch, Michelle discovered a great place called Khao Soi Khun Tai which specialized in Khao Soi, a popular dish in northern Thailand.

This outdoor restaurant was very popular, and we had a hard time finding a table. There was just one lady taking orders and serving, and it was amazing how she kept track of everyone’s orders!

We all ordered chicken Khao Soi, and it definitely was worth the wait. It was spicy, tasted amazing, and costs less than $1!

Songthaews
We got around mainly by flagging down red truck taxis called songthaews. They took us anywhere for around 200-300 baht ($7-$9 USD).

One of our drivers kindly took a group photo of us with his truck.

The back of the trucks were always open!
Yeepeng Lanna Festival

The main reason for our visit to Chiang-Mai was to participate in the Yeepeng Lanna, also known as the Thai Lantern Festival, which is held on the first full moon during November. Most of our group bought tickets to a coordinated release organized by Bon Voyage Thailand. A portion of the proceeds went to the Tawan Bon Doi Project, which helps educate females in hillside tribes. The ticket price also included transportation, dinner, a snack box, and a souvenir.

There were around 4,000 people who participated in this event! PC: Justin Fong

We were sitting in the 15th row from the front. Our card included 1 souvenir ticket and 5 food tickets.

Our souvenir was a cute elephant piggy bank!

There was a variety of food we could choose from, including soymilk with fried dough, chicken Pad Thai, chicken and rice, and fried bananas. PC: Justin Fong

There were a lot of other activities we could do such as making krathongs which are ornate banana leaf baskets with a candle in the center. During the Loi Krathong festival (which coincides with Yeepeng Lanna) the candles are lit and the krathongs are floated down the river.

Another activity involved dressing up in the traditional clothing of various ethnic groups. We chose the Hmong people because we learned about them in class.
We all waited in line to take a photo with the official sign!

During the ceremony, we learned that releasing lanterns symbolized letting go of misfortune and releasing wishes. PC: Justin Fong

The ceremony also involved a moment of silence for reflection.

There was a procession of young monks and VIP participants.

People from other areas starting releasing lanterns before we did, lighting up the sky :)

It was almost time for us to release our lanterns! PC: Justin Fong

PC: Justin Fong
Night Market
After the lantern festival, we traveled to the night market near Maya's hostel where Michelle and I resumed our quest to find elephant pants.

Day 2: Elephant Jungle Sanctuary
The next day, we left at 7 AM for the elephant sanctuary.

We got picked up by the organizers in a truck similar to the songthaews. Most of the people in our truck happened to be Americans.

After changing into traditional Karen clothing, we got to feed the elephants bananas which they happily took from our hands.

We were split into different camps, so Maya, Cintia, and Karen were in a different area from the rest of us.

They were equally happy if we threw one directly into their mouth.
For the baby, we were advised to peel the bananas first, but he took them out of my hand before I could!

We could also give water to the elephants.

Yes, that is elephant poop they are touching!
Maya, Cintia, and Karen had a lot of fun in their camp too!
PC: Karen Shen

After feeding the elephants we gave them a "mud spa." :D
PC: Elephant Jungle Sanctuary

After their mud spa, we followed the elephants to the river to bathe them. We were given pans to splash water on them.
PC: Elephant Jungle Sanctuary

...but we ended up mainly splashing each other!
PC: Elephant Jungle Sanctuary
Lunch
We arrived at the hotel around 1PM, leaving us about 2 hours before we had to head to the airport. We still had a lot of baht left, so we decided to spend it at a fancy restaurant.

We went to a place called "Ginger & Kafe." The food was really good and we enjoyed a variety of dishes.

Pad Thai - Stir Fried Noodles with Tofu, and Dried Shrimp

Massaman - Lamb Shank Curry

Pineapple Fried Rice with Chicken
Until Next Time!

We arrived in Shanghai on Saturday morning at 5AM and mostly slept in the rest of the day. Maya, Cintia, and Karen came back the next morning. Four days later, I was on the plane again, this time to Taiwan to visit my relatives! Both of my parents were born in Taiwan, and having never been before, I was really looking forward to visiting the country!

See you in Taiwan!