



MINI SEMESTER



**pacific
discovery**
inspiring educational adventures

Thailand Mini Semester Program

THAI CULTURE, JUNGLE TREKKING,
AND ELEPHANT VOLUNTEERING

www.pacificdiscovery.org



Overview

Scuba dive, volunteer with elephants, explore ancient temples, kayak through jungles, stay with local families, and feast on the best food in the world—it's all part of your epic Thai Mini Semester.

Ready for the adventure of a lifetime? Thailand is the gem of Southeast Asia, where the warmth of its people, the vibrant markets, and the stunning contrast between the north and south will keep you coming back for more. Trust us, after one trip, you'll be planning your next. On this 6-week journey, you'll get the ultimate tasting platter of all that Thailand has to offer.

We'll kick things off with a deep dive into the culture of Bangkok, exploring its bustling streets and stunning temples, then head up north to work with elephants and get involved in community-based environmental projects. You'll spend time at one of Thailand's oldest Buddhist meditation centers, learning mindfulness practices that have been passed down through generations. You'll also get active with rock climbing, scuba diving, and hiking in some of Thailand's most breathtaking spots.

You'll stay with local families in homestays, kayak through crystal-clear waters, and experience the best food you'll ever taste. From the jungles of Khao Sok National Park to the idyllic beaches of Koh Lanta, each day offers a new adventure.

By the end of this program, you'll have gained new skills, lifelong memories, and a deep connection to Thailand's culture that most will never experience. Ready for an unforgettable journey? Join us for the Mini Semester Program and let Thailand steal your heart!





Safety

With our 20 years of operation and more than 100,000 student days in the field, we have an excellent safety record.

We even got voted as one of the Top Gap Year Providers for Safety by students on Go Overseas! Safety is something we pride ourselves on at Pacific Discovery, so it feels amazing to be recognized for the efforts we go through.



Accreditations

We have had our safety management systems assessed and accredited by the Gap Year Association (USA), Year Out Group (UK), and OutdoorsMark (New Zealand). Assessors have commented that our systems are among the best they have observed.



Who We Are

We are an accredited gap year provider that offers experiential gap semester and summer programs to some of the most amazing places on earth. Our programs are deliberate overland journeys, blending authentic immersion in diverse cultures, meaningful service-learning projects, rewarding adventures, wilderness exploration, and personal development.



Our Programs

Our programs are more than simply a travel, time-out or study abroad experience. Each is instead an overland journey of discovery, where students are immersed in a facilitated learning environment, designed to maximize the educational and life-skills potential.



Our Philosophy

We want to make the world a better place by providing extraordinary learning adventures that assist students in gaining the skills, confidence and insight to realize their potential in an increasingly global society; developing empathy for other cultures; furthering understanding of international issues; and heightening appreciation for the earth's wilderness and diversity.

Core Educational Components

Our programs are as much a journey of personal development as they are a physical journey, and participants are supported in reflecting together and thinking about their values, goals and what they wish to gain from the program experience.

PRE-PROGRAM

Prior to program start, participants are asked to create some goals for the program – this is personal and unique to each individual group member. Participants are given a suggested outline of skills and competencies that they can choose to focus upon.

DURING PROGRAM

At program orientation, goals participants have identified are discussed in a meeting with the program leaders. Throughout the program, ideas, tools and strategies are discussed that can be useful to help participants achieve their goals both on the program and for the rest of their lives. Participants are encouraged to journal during the program to assist them in clarifying their thoughts and define what they are learning.

TRANSFER AND FOLLOW UP

At the conclusion of the program, participants give a presentation to their group and leaders, summarizing how they've been challenged, what they've learned, how they've grown and how they intend to apply what they've learned to their lives after the program.

Towards the end of the program participants are also asked to write a letter to themselves imagining where they want to be in 6 months' time and identifying behaviors, habits and changes they wish to put in place. These letters are sent to them 6 months after program conclusion, helping reinforce the learning that has occurred.



Program Design

Each of our programs incorporate the following six core program components. These six interdependent components, provide immense opportunity for students to learn about themselves, to push their boundaries, question their assumptions, to stimulate problem solving and inquiry skills.



EDUCATIONAL FOCUS

Our programs are experiential education programs, meaning that learning is hands-on and tangible. For example, students will learn about a country's history and culture by immersing themselves in it, meeting local people and hearing life stories.



ETHICAL TRAVEL & SUSTAINABILITY

Students show respect for local customs, develop meaningful cross-cultural relationships, learn minimum-impact grassroots travel techniques and come to understand social and ecological issues on a deeper level.



OUTDOOR EXPLORATION

Immersion in the wilderness is an opportunity for students to become grounded, teaches appreciation for wild places and provides us the opportunity to explore local environmental issues and relate these issues to global environmental themes



SERVICE LEARNING

Volunteer elements built into our programs allow students to really immerse themselves in a place and share an experience with local people, bridging the gap that often exists between visitor and host.



CULTURAL IMMERSION

We immerse students in the local culture, through homestays, volunteer projects and language study. Students learn empathy for other cultures and build bridges of shared understanding.



PERSONAL & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the program, students are given leadership opportunities from facilitating reflection to coordinating the daily schedule.



Sample Itinerary

***This is a guide to what you can expect to do on program.
The order in which the activities occur might vary***

WEEK 1 | BUSTLING BANGKOK & SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Your adventure starts the moment you land in **Bangkok**, one of the most exciting cities in the world. Get ready for an unforgettable introduction to Thailand as we dive right into orientation — but don't worry, it's not all lectures. We'll focus on getting to know each other, building a positive group vibe, and setting the tone for the next 6 weeks. This is the foundation for an epic journey, and it all starts here.



Then it's time to explore **Bangkok!** We're jumping on a **private canal tour**, giving you a whole new perspective on the city as you glide through the waterways, which are a massive part of Bangkok's history.

Next, we head to **Our Land Project**, where we'll spend 4 days volunteering. This is your chance to roll up your sleeves and get involved in sustainable living. You'll be helping out with **organic farming**, planting and harvesting crops, and learning about eco-friendly ways to live. It's the perfect opportunity to make a real impact while getting your hands dirty (literally). Plus, it's a peaceful escape from the city to focus on something meaningful.

In between the adventures, we'll grab lunch at a local market, where you can try out traditional **Thai street food** (think spicy noodles, fresh fruit, and maybe even some crazy snacks you've never seen before). As you chow down, you'll watch the hustle and bustle of market life, soaking in the atmosphere of Thailand's vibrant culture.

WEEK 2 | FROM ANCIENT RUINS TO ELEPHANTS IN CHIANG MAI

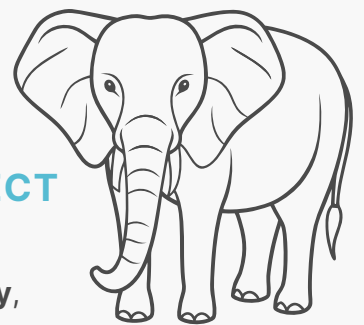
After wrapping up our week in Bangkok, we're heading out for a travel day to **Chiang Mai** — but not before a detour to **Ayutthaya**, a UNESCO World Heritage site known for its ancient temples and breathtaking ruins. Once the capital of Siam, Ayutthaya is a fascinating mix of history and culture, and we'll explore the city on an exciting **mountain bike tour** that takes you through temples, ancient monuments, and hidden spots that most tourists never see.



From Ayutthaya, we head to **Sukhothai**, another UNESCO World Heritage site, where you'll cycle through the tranquil ruins of what was once Thailand's capital. Here, you'll get a taste of the history and serenity of this picturesque town, before we continue our journey north to **Chiang Mai**.

Known as the **Jewel of the North**, Chiang Mai is where the adventure really takes off. From its ancient temples to its charming local culture, this city is packed with surprises. Start the week with a **hands-on cooking class**, where you'll learn how to create authentic Thai dishes that are not only delicious but also easy to recreate when you get home.

The week ends on an unforgettable note with a **transfer to an elephant sanctuary**, where you'll get the chance to work directly with elephants in a safe, ethical environment. You'll spend time with these gentle giants, learning about their history and the work being done to protect them. This experience is a powerful and moving way to finish your time in northern Thailand.



WEEK 3 | CONTINUING AT THE ELEPHANT PROJECT & COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING

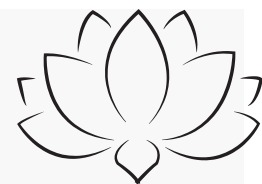
We kick off this week by **continuing our time at the elephant sanctuary**, where we'll dive deeper into the rhythms of daily life with the elephants and the dedicated people who care for them. This isn't just a visit — it's an opportunity to **slow travel**, really getting to know the sanctuary's way of life and becoming part of it. You'll spend your days working closely with the elephants, helping with feeding, bathing, and learning about the sanctuary's mission to protect and care for these incredible animals. This experience allows you to truly immerse yourself in the peaceful pace of rural Thailand, forming a meaningful connection with the elephants and their caregivers.

After a few days of this enriching experience, we transition to our **next community project**, where we'll get involved in a range of local initiatives. Whether it's **environmental cleanups**, **reforestation projects**, or working with the youth at the local school, your efforts will directly benefit the community. The tasks will vary depending on current needs, but each one is designed to have a lasting impact on the people and environment.

WEEK 4 | MEDITATION IMMERSION & KHAO SOK NATIONAL PARK

This week, we shift gears for an **incredible, transformative experience**. After wrapping up our volunteering in Chiang Mai, we're heading to a **3-day Buddhist meditation retreat**. This isn't just a quick class — it's an immersive, hands-on experience that will dive deep into the Buddhist way of life. You'll start by learning about **Buddhist philosophy**, mindfulness, and compassion, setting the stage for a deeper understanding of yourself and the world around you.





The retreat isn't just about sitting quietly — you'll get to **practice meditation** alongside beautiful Buddhist chants that have been passed down for centuries. It's a chance to unplug from the world and really focus on finding inner peace. You'll be fully immersed in nature, surrounded by serene landscapes that will help you reflect, recharge, and reset your mind. It's an experience that's as much about self-discovery as it is about learning new tools for mindfulness and calm.

After that, we head to the epic **Khao Sok National Park**, one of the **oldest rainforests in the world**. Picture this: lush greenery, winding rivers, and incredible wildlife all around. It's home to the **Rafflesia flower**, the largest flower on earth, and the diversity of life here is off the charts. We'll hike through jungle trails, tube down winding rivers, and really get into the heart of one of the planet's most biodiverse ecosystems.

The whole experience in **Khao Sok** will be a perfect balance of adventure and peace, as you connect with nature in ways that'll leave you feeling recharged and in awe of the natural world. Whether you're listening to the jungle come alive in the morning or soaking in the calm of a quiet river, this part of the trip is going to be something you'll never forget.

WEEK 5 | BEACHES, ROCK CLIMBING & ADVENTURE IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

After soaking in the peaceful vibes of **Khao Sok National Park**, we're heading down south to one of the most stunning spots in Thailand — **Railay Beach!** We'll take a **boat transfer** to this incredible peninsula, surrounded by **towering limestone cliffs**, lush jungle, and the sparkling **Andaman Sea**. It's a place so beautiful you'll feel like you're stepping into a postcard.

Once we're settled near **Ao Nang**, it's time to get active and explore! We'll kick things off with a **half-day rock climbing** session, where you can challenge yourself (no experience needed) while taking in jaw-dropping views from the top. Whether you're a beginner or have climbed before, the limestone cliffs here offer something for everyone.

Next, we'll set out on an **exploration day**, where you can **kayak** through the crystal-clear waters and explore nearby islands. You'll get to discover hidden beaches, caves, and secluded spots you'd never find without a kayak. It's all about embracing the adventure and soaking up the beauty of the coast.

For the real thrill-seekers, we'll tackle the **Dragon Crest Trek** — a hike that takes you to one of the most **breathhtaking viewpoints** in the area. The views from the top are absolutely worth the climb, with panoramic vistas of Railay, the Andaman Sea, and all the natural beauty around us.

When you're not climbing, kayaking, or trekking, you'll have plenty of time to kick back and relax on the stunning **Railay Beach**. The sand is golden, the water is crystal clear, and the sunsets are nothing short of magical. Get ready for a week packed with action, adventure, and the best of Thailand's beaches!

WEEK 6 | SCUBA DIVING & MUAY THAI – KOH LANTA ADVENTURES

We've saved the best for last! This week, we head to **Koh Lanta**, a tropical paradise famous for its **pristine white beaches**, **delicious local food**, and vibrant culture. The moment you catch your first glimpse of Koh Lanta, you'll be blown away by the crystal-clear water and laid-back vibe — the perfect spot to end your adventure.

The fun starts with a three-day scuba diving course. Southern Thailand is home to some of the best dive spots in the world, and it's time for you to explore the wonders beneath the waves.

From colorful coral reefs to vibrant marine life, Koh Lanta's waters are like an underwater wonderland. Whether you're a beginner or an experienced diver, the experience of diving in this crystal-clear paradise is going to be unforgettable.

After exploring the ocean, we switch things up with some **Muay Thai lessons** — Thailand's national sport! This two-day **boxing experience** is an epic way to immerse yourself in Thai culture. You'll learn the techniques of this traditional martial art, which is both physically demanding and mentally empowering. Plus, you'll get a serious workout while having a blast.

Once we've had our fill of diving and boxing, we'll spend our final days relaxing on the **beaches of Koh Lanta**, reflecting on everything we've experienced throughout our journey. This is the time to chill out, enjoy some down time, and share your favorite moments from the trip with your new friends.

It's been a wild ride, from the jungles and temples of the north to the beaches and underwater adventures of the south. Now, it's time to say **goodbye** to Thailand, your Pacific Discovery travel crew, and your instructors, as you head off to your next adventure, wherever that may take you!



Program Highlights

- Scuba diving course in the clear waters of Southern Thailand
- Get up close and personal with elephants during a volunteer project at an elephant sanctuary
- Experience Krabi from above the ground on a rock climbing adventure
- Kayak around the beaches and islets in Southern Thailand
- Hike and tube in the amazing jungle, rivers, and lakes of Khao Sok National Park
- Try your hand at Muay Thai (or Thai boxing), the country's national sport
- Learn hands-on about conservation and sustainability at a wildlife reserve in Kanchanaburi
- Learn to make authentic Thai food during a cooking workshop
- Work with an organization that helps to break the cycle of poverty in Thailand
- Cycle through the ancient ruins of Ayutthaya and Sukhothai, exploring Thailand's rich history on two wheels
- Stay with a minority village in northern Thailand in homestays, experiencing authentic local culture and traditions
- Dragon Crest Trek hike to one of the best viewpoints on Nong Thalay





COUNTRY INFORMATION

Known as the 'land of smiles', we have found Thailand's 54 million people (the ones we've met) live up to their reputation. The country is embracing modernization without discarding their own rich traditions. Thais are deeply religious and it is expected that all men will spend some time as a Buddhist monk during their lives. Thailand was the only country in Southeast Asia not to be colonized by Europeans during the 16th - 18th centuries. The monarchy is strong and the King is revered for his social reforms. He recently became the longest reigning Thai Monarch. The country is geographically diverse: Tropical islands and beaches in the south, with some of the world's best diving; and a mountainous jungle clad north, populated by numerous minority tribal groups.



CLIMATE

The climate of Thailand is governed by two seasons. Put simply - 'the wet' season from approximately May - October is characterized by rain and high humidity, whilst 'the dry' season from November - March brings cooler, dryer weather. Between the two is 'the hot' season from April - June when temperatures rise.

The average daily maximum is 32°C (89°F) and the average daily minimum is 27°C (80°F).



MEALS

Thai cuisine is delicious and you'll get to understand it up close and personal in your Thai cooking classes. In general, Thai cuisine includes a lot of rice & noodle dishes and tropical fruits. In general, dairy products are less common, especially when we're in remote regions, so don't expect cheese and yogurt every day.

Thai food plays around the four tastes of sweet, salty, sour and spicy, and on most restaurant tables you'll find condiments to add these flavors to your meal: palm sugar (sweet), soy sauce (salty), tamarind sauce or lime juice (sour) and hot sauce (spicy), so you can adjust your meal to your own personal liking.

Regular food to expect:

- Breakfast: rice, toast, fruit, omelette, Jok (rice porridge), dim sum
 - Lunch: noodles, soups, tom kha, dim sum
 - Dinner: curry (Green, red, yellow, massaman), rice, noodles, pad thai, grilled meats, fried rice, som tam (spicy green papaya salad), laab (spicy salad), western food available in some areas we visit.
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TRANSPORT

The itinerary has been designed to maximize comfort and safety whilst also giving you the opportunity to experience local transport and take part in daily life. We utilize chartered vans, trains, various boats, moto-taxis, bicycles, rickshaws, and take an internal flight within the region.

SUITABILITY

Gap programs are intended for students aged 17 - 22. This program is suitable for anyone of average fitness with an enthusiasm for conservation and new experiences. There is always a volunteering component in our programs, so we can give back to the places that give so much to us. You need to be prepared for some physical work during this volunteering portion of the program; i.e. trail building, tree planting or painting. You don't need to have had previous experience with travel or any of the activities offered.

ATTITUDE

The program is a shared group experience. We would like you to join the program with an open mind and a willingness to work together with your group mates to make the program an amazing experience. The programs focus on group cohesion. We appreciate you for being open to learning and challenging your ideas and assumptions in order to get the most from this summer abroad experience.

GROUP SIZE

Group sizes vary per program and are generally 12-14 students, accompanied by two experienced and qualified Pacific Discovery program instructors. Local guides assist with interpretation of some historical sites, cultural experiences, and activities.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

We have selected a dynamic team of inspiring, supportive, resourceful, and highly experienced instructors to lead our programs. Our program instructors are committed to putting your welfare and safety first. They are people in whom you can trust and confide, who remain objective whatever the circumstances, and who take a genuine interest in your well-being. They implicitly understand the importance of balancing the needs of individuals with group objectives, facilitating a high level of group cohesion, inspiring a genuine appreciation for the areas visited and an awareness of minimum impact travel ethics. All of our instructors have Wilderness First Responder (WFR) first aid certification, and extensive group leadership and risk assessment/management training.

ACCOMMODATION

Our accommodation will be a mixture of comfortable and clean hostels, lodges and campsites. Accommodation is diverse, comfortable and carefully chosen to fit our needs and varies per program.



FREE TIME

Programs are heavily scheduled so that we are always on the move and having lots of structured fun; but we highly value rest and reflection. There will be some designated free time in a town or city each week so that you can catch up on email and laundry and rest.



HEALTH

One component of all of our programs is outdoor adventures like hiking, biking and kayaking, so while you don't need to have done any of these before, you will need to be prepared and have the fitness level to give them a go. If you have any queries regarding health recommendations for travel, please contact your doctor, or a travel doctor, to discuss this. For further information refer to: [http:// wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/) We also recommend you be up to date on specific vaccinations that are required to travel in this region.

We recommend that you carry a personal first-aid kit as well as any personal medication. Please be aware that for legal reasons, our program instructors are prohibited from administering any type of drug. Please ensure that you are adequately prepared.



SPENDING MONEY

Spending money usually goes towards drinks and snacks, personal shopping, laundry, email, entertainment, and optional activities. We recommend you budget approximately \$100 a week for this, but this varies per student and per program. The amount of spending money you bring depends on your budget and shopping habits. You need to bring this money yourself.

Optional activities are available on many programs that can add to this cost, such as skydiving, bungee jumping, extra surfing lessons, etc.



KEEPING IN TOUCH

Our students value the opportunity to wind down, immerse in their surroundings and talk to each other. We encourage students to self manage their phone use, and we strongly encourage flight mode. This allows students to still take photos and send updates to family when in wifi, but allows them to be fully connected to the locals, service work and community when they're out and about. You are able to purchase a SIM or use international roaming plans if you wish. The easiest option is to use the WIFI available at places we stay in main cities and towns. Family and friends will also be able to keep in touch and follow your adventures through Pacific Discovery's social media pages, and through an online Facebook album for your group (which your instructors will upload photos to each week).



PASSPORTS AND VISAS

Travel abroad requires a passport. If you don't have one, you need to apply for one as soon as you apply for this program.

US Government Passport website: <http://travel.state.gov/passport/>

If you already have a passport, it must be valid for more than 6 months after program end, otherwise you need to get a new one issued before joining the program. Pacific Discovery will contact you regarding visa requirements and arrangements after you apply for the program.



TRAVEL INSURANCE

Pacific Discovery requires all students to purchase a comprehensive travel insurance policy for the duration of the program. Travel insurance provides cover in the event of medical expenses due to illness, injury, and emergency medical evacuation. Travel insurance may also include cover for loss of baggage or personal effects, and trip cancellation or trip curtailment.

To arrange your policy, [click here to go to our website](#).



COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted all of our lives greatly, and Pacific Discovery has developed rigorous policies for safety based on professional advice and endorsement. The health of our students is of the utmost importance at all times. We are working closely and regularly with health professionals on our COVID-19 policy, as the situation continues to develop.

[Read our full COVID-19 policy here.](#)



PEACE OF MIND

Pacific Discovery is an educational travel organization accredited with American Gap Association (USA). Since its inception in 2001, Pacific Discovery has taken several thousand students, graduates, faculty, family and special interest groups, on experiential travel and volunteer programs, utilizing a staff of experienced and qualified program instructors. We have an exemplary safety record, comprehensive Risk Management Systems and a database of alumni, parents, advisors and faculty, who are happy to be contacted for feedback. The program carries public liability insurance, and student funds are held securely until disbursement.

Program Tuition & Costs

A \$500 application fee is due when you apply. Upon acceptance into the program, a deposit is due within 14 days. Balance of program cost to be paid 60 days prior to departure.

Included in Program Tuition

- All in-country travel and transport
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All activities, excursions, entry fees and adventure travel as described in the itinerary
- Informal lectures from resident experts on conservation and sustainability, history, and culture.
- Experienced program Instructors and local guides.

Not Included in Program Tuition

- Travel (international flights) between your home and the program
- Internal flights
- Visas
- Spending money (we suggest allowing \$15 per day for drinks, snacks and personal expenses)
- Travel insurance
- Optional academic credit
- Optional activity costs ie skydiving, bungee jumping, and additional surf lessons.



INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Students should not book their travel until after they have received the flight confirmation email from Pacific Discovery with the program flight requirements and travel agent details. This is sent out 2-3 months ahead of program departure. This information is also made available in the student portal login section of our website.

Our preferred groups travel agent, [The Travellist Co.](#), can assist you to arrange international flights from your nearest regional airport, and return home. We prefer you to arrange your flights through our group travel agent to simplify arrival logistics, and so that you are traveling to and from the program with others in your group.





College Credit

Our programs are a structured syllabus with clear learning outcomes that offer true personal growth and global awareness. As a reputable gap year provider since 2001, we have developed strong industry connections, including two educational institutions which we offer college credits through for our programs.

Pacific Discovery partners with Seattle Central College to offer college credit, a recognized educational provider who offers exceptional study options for students. We have been running college credit options for students for several years now with this provider, and as long as requirements are completed, the system has been an excellent option for students in regard to continuation of study, deferment and easy transfer to other institutions.

If you're keen to explore this option further, please reach out to us using the contact details provided at the end of this catalogue. We'd love to help you identify what options are available to you and support you throughout the process.

Scholarships & Financial Aid

We want to make our programs as accessible as possible. Although we charge the minimum we can for our programs, we recognize that they can still be difficult to fund for many families. Please note that these scholarships go directly towards the tuition costs for the program and do not include assistance towards the cost of international flights. We expect scholarship recipients to demonstrate their commitment to this opportunity by fundraising for their international flights, personal spending, and the balance of tuition.

Our students supplement the program costs in a variety of ways. We encourage you to get creative! Create a Kickstarter, find a part-time job, fundraise. Think big and small. Each dollar adds up to one amazing adventure abroad.

- Exploration Scholarship
- Diverse Voices Scholarship
- Financial Need Scholarship
- Gap Year Ambassador Fellowship

To apply, please go to pacificdiscovery.org/need-to-know/scholarships-financial-aid



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inspiring educational adventures



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