

## **Two Weeks in Thailand – Erasmus+ Doctoral Mobility at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University**

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This is a personal account of a truly unique experience: I spent two weeks in Thailand as part of a short-term Erasmus+ doctoral mobility program. My host institution, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), supported me in every possible way – by the end of the program, I felt like I had become part of a family. There were professional activities, cultural explorations, and even time for some travel within the country. Along the way, I didn't just learn about a university – I experienced an entire academic community from the inside.

### **A University Where the King Awards the Diplomas**

STOU is Thailand's first and only open university, which means you don't have to attend classes in person – learning is flexible and accessible to everyone. And when I say “everyone,” I mean it literally. Students include Buddhist monks, members of northern mountain tribes, and even people currently serving prison sentences.

What's perhaps most extraordinary is that diplomas are awarded by the King of Thailand – or his official representative – during the graduation ceremony.



*Figure 1: Exploring the history of STOU at the university museum –  
a journey through decades of educational innovation*

### **No Boundaries – Geographic or Age-Related**

STOU is truly a university for all. Textbooks are mailed out to students living in remote villages, including those from hill tribes in the north. And much of the educational content is also available online. The university even operates its own professional TV channel that broadcasts educational programs. I had the chance to spend half a day at their studio, where I got to see firsthand how a recording is made – it was a fantastic experience!

Age is no barrier either: the oldest graduate to date earned their degree at the age of 91. It really proves that it's never too late to start learning.



*Figure 2: Behind the scenes at STOU Channel –  
I had the chance to learn how educational content is produced!*



*Figure 3: Meeting Assistant Professor Dr. Panompat Smitanont, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University Council Acting President*

### **From Prison to Graduation – and Beyond**

One of the most surprising and moving aspects of my time in Thailand was learning about the role STOU plays in providing education within the prison system. I had the unique opportunity to visit the Central Women Correctional Institution, which has done an impressive job in supporting the self-esteem and future prospects of incarcerated women.

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) offers educational services to correctional institutions across the country through a flexible distance learning system. They've established special learning hubs known as "STOU Corners" inside prisons, providing access to books, study materials, and academic support.

Inmates can currently enroll in a wide range of disciplines, including Political Science, Economics, Education, Communication Arts, and Public Health.

This visit was, without doubt, the most powerful experience of my entire mobility. I was deeply moved by how many opportunities these women are given to restart their lives. As someone who had only seen prisons through the lens of American films, it gave me a much more grounded and human view of what such an institution can look like – at least in this specific case. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that far stricter institutions exist around the world, especially for the most serious offenses – but this visit offered a lasting shift in perspective.





*Figure 4: At the Central Women Correctional Institution – exploring STOU's prison education initiatives.*

## **My Journey**

During these two weeks, I not only gained insight into the Thai higher education system, but I also had the chance to present my own research at the university – and received very encouraging feedback. My talk was officially opened by Assistant Professor Vasan Rattanapoka, Dean of the School of Liberal Arts, which made the occasion especially meaningful. The event was organized as part of the collaboration between ELTE and STOU, in cooperation with the Ph.D. Program in Information Science. I felt truly honored to contribute to this academic exchange, which reflects a growing international dialogue between our institutions.



*Figure 5: After my presentation with STOU PhD students and professors – though we live far apart, a shared research mindset brought us together. We created a truly inspiring academic atmosphere.*

I visited libraries and museums, and during my free time, I was able to travel and explore different parts of Thailand. But the most touching part was the way the university welcomed me: I didn't feel like a visitor, but rather like a member of their community.

**Academic and Professional Activities:**

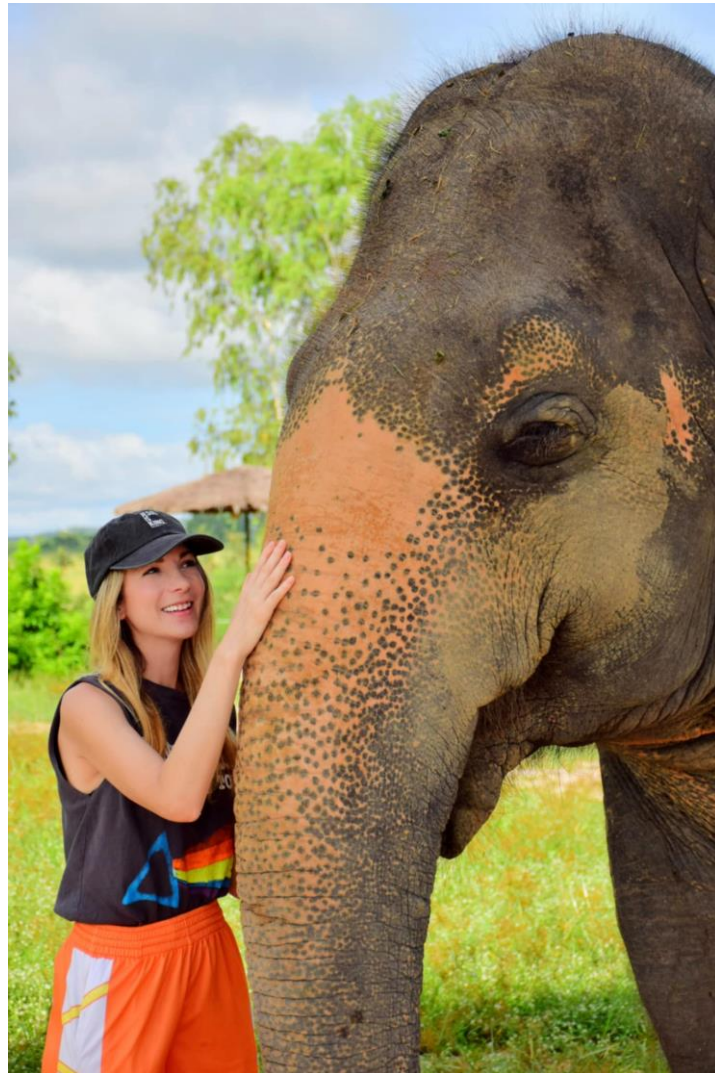
- ☐ Visit to the National Library of Thailand in Bangkok
- ☐ Visit to the STOU Library
- ☐ Visit to the Kasetsart University Library
- ☐ Visit to the Central Women Correctional Institution, including the prison library
- ☐ Visit to STOU University Museum
- ☐ Presentation of my research at STOU
- ☐ Meeting with the Acting President of STOU, Assistant Professor Dr. Panompat Smitanont



*Figure 6: the STOU Library*

**Cultural Activities:**

- ☐ Visit to Ayutthaya, the ancient capital of Thailand and a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- ☐ Sightseeing in downtown Bangkok, including the magnificent Grand Palace
- ☐ Trip to Khao Kheow Open Zoo, where I saw the *Moo Deng*, the “national animal” of Thailand
- ☐ Coastal city tour and beach visit
- ☐ Visit to Pattaya Elephant Village (a self-organized trip, with prior approval from the host university)



*Figure 7: Another unforgettable experience – meeting Sawana, the 37-year-old female elephant.*





*Figure 8: Ayutthaya –  
something that truly has to be seen in person.*

## **In Conclusion**

This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Both ELTE and the host institution supported me every step of the way, and the application process was surprisingly quick and easy. Above all, I am grateful to all the university members, professors, and PhD students – with special thanks to Professor Namtip Wipawin, who took care of all the program arrangements with tireless energy and kindness. In her, I met not only a highly knowledgeable academic, but also someone with creativity and enthusiasm. She always came up with something new – whether it was eating durian on the beach, visiting the zoo, or even arranging a visit to a prison library.



*Figure 9: Another highlight: the beach is less than an hour from Bangkok – whether by direct bus or car, it's an easy escape for a quick seaside break!*

## **Why Consider an Erasmus+ Mobility in Southeast Asia?**

Not many people get the chance to go on a mobility program this far from home – and that's exactly why it's worth doing. A short-term Erasmus+ in Southeast Asia is not only professionally valuable, but also logistically easier than it seems.

I felt completely safe and well taken care of throughout my stay. The university even arranged airport transfers for me, which made the arrival and departure stress-free. I stayed at the Kasetsart University Hotel, a clean and comfortable campus hotel offered at a very reasonable price. This meant I was staying right in a student-friendly environment, surrounded by everything I needed: late-night food markets, canteens, restaurants, and even sports facilities.

A lot of everyday things are surprisingly simple: for example, in Bangkok, there are at least two major taxi apps that work in English – you don't even need to speak to the driver. Prices are very affordable, and basic services like food, transport, or mobile data are easy to access. For



someone coming from Hungary, Bangkok is a budget-friendly city, where even fresh tropical fruits – locally grown and bursting with flavor – are available at incredibly friendly prices.

Food options are extremely diverse, even for picky eaters – you'll find everything from fresh produce and traditional Thai dishes to international fast food. And if you have time to explore, the region has so much to offer: beaches, temples, national parks, big cities. Whether you want to relax, visit cultural sites, or just try something different, it's all possible without much hassle. And of course, the culture is deeply captivating – but that's something no article can truly describe. You simply have to see it for yourself.

In short: it's a rare opportunity, easier to manage than you might think, and well worth it – both academically and personally.