

Srinagarind Hospital
Khon Kaen, Thailand

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I recently completed a two-month international health elective at Srinagarind Hospital in Thailand. Srinagarind Hospital is affiliated with the medical school Khon Kaen University, which has a bilateral exchange program with CWRU. Khon Kaen University is located in Khon Kaen, a large city in the northeast of Thailand. The northeast is an economically poor region and Srinagarind Hospital serves as a referral center for the surrounding rural areas.

While in Khon Kaen, I lived with a Thai family through an arrangement with the university. It would have been possible to live in a dormitory on campus, but I would highly recommend the family stay for anyone considering this elective. It allowed me to learn so much about Thai culture, and the family I stayed with was very accommodating. I stayed with two attending physicians and their three young (and entertaining!) children. Their house was on university property about 1 kilometer from the hospital. For transportation to the hospital, I could walk, ride a bicycle that the family provided, or ride one of the buses called tuk-tuks (which were basically covered pick-up trucks with benches and were great fun to ride!).

During my stay I completed rotations in surgery, medicine, and pediatrics. My medicine and pediatrics rotations involved more passive observation than my surgery elective, mainly because it was necessary for someone to translate Thai for me. However, the language barrier did not pose a significant problem, since most of the doctors and students spoke English well enough for me to understand, and they were happy to translate. During these two rotations, I attended clinics in dermatology, hematology/oncology, cardiology, and general medicine and general pediatrics. I also spent some time on the medicine and pediatric wards. I saw many patients with infectious diseases, such as TB, HIV, and Melioidosis. I saw many children with cancer who were receiving chemotherapy. My surgery rotation involved a lot of time in the operating room, observing and assisting in general surgery cases. I saw many cases of cholangiocarcinoma, which is very common in Khon Kaen. I was also able to perform several minor cases on my own with observation (wart cauterization, lipomas, and one breast excision biopsy) especially toward the end of my rotation.

I should make a few notes about Thai medical training and medicine in Thailand. Medical school lasts six years and students can apply to schools after they complete what would correspond to high school in the US. After completion of med school, graduates are qualified to practice medicine and must complete an obligatory two years of general medicine practice for the government in a rural area. After completion of these two years, many doctors return to universities to complete residency programs. Patient confidentiality is not a strong concern in Thailand. Patients often waited until their conditions had progressed for a long time before they sought medical attention. The medical community does not have access to some of the technology available in the states. This is mainly due to cost, and choice of medications was often strongly influenced by their cost. In my opinion, however the medical training was excellent, and in general, the physicians I met were extremely competent.

I must say that the best part of my time in Thailand was the generous hospitality with which I was received. My family, staff at the hospital and the international relations office, and the Thai people in

general really went out of their way to see that my experience was sanuk (fun/enjoyable) and they did a great job of it! I would highly recommend Khon Kaen University to anyone considering an international health elective.