

# Erfahrungsbericht über das Auslandsstudium an der Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

## Master

### Wintersemester 2022/23

**Application:** The application process for my exchange semester at Chulalongkorn University was relatively straightforward. I had to fill out an application form and submit it along with my transcripts, proof of language proficiency, and other required documents from the International Office.

The process was well-organized by my home institution and the staff were available to answer any questions I had.

After a few weeks (around February), you receive an answer which gives you enough time to organise your stay abroad, both in Europe and outside Europe.

## Visa

I recommend applying for a "Non-Immigrant Visa "ED" Multiple Entry. The advantage of a Multiple visa compared to a single entry visa is that a 90 day stay is allowed and for a one semester stay a single and for a one-semester stay, a single departure from Thailand is sufficient for automatic extension is sufficient. The exit and re-entry saves a trip to the Immigration Office, which is very time-consuming. Furthermore, to extend the visa without leaving the country, you need a letter from the letter from the university confirming your student status (issued by the International Office on request).

Many students who had only applied for a Single Entry Visa and wanted to change this to a Multiple Entry Visa, also had to go to the Immigration Office for this.

**Arrival:** Arriving in Bangkok was a bit overwhelming at first.

The airport was busy and it took me a while to find my way to the university's accommodation and overall to understand the different transportation possibilities. Taxis are the best way to move around the city and they are not expensive. A trip from the airport to Chulalongkorn University costs around 10 Euros. If you take a scooter taxi, they are even cheaper.

However, once I arrived at the university, I was greeted by a representative who helped me with check-in and provided me with all the necessary information. The stuff was very helpful and gave us all the required information for the weeks to come. You will have a clear overview of anything you need to do and prepare for university, Visa renewal and your overall life in Bangkok and Thailand.

## Money

An important aspect before going abroad is money. There are various options such as cash, credit card, student debit card (recommended) or transfervise debit card (new). I do not recommend exchanging money in Germany. I made this mistake and got a much

received a much worse exchange rate. Credit cards such as the DKB card are free and do not charge a fee for foreign withdrawals, but there is a 200 THB (about 5€) fee for each local withdrawal from Thai banks.

Since WS 18/19, every student is recommended open an account at Kasikornbank to apply for their student ID card. Following the orientation event, staff and students will help with the account opening.

I did not open the account and I pretty much regret this. I lost much money withdrawing cash. You will need a lot of cash as many do not accept any kind of foreign card.

SO I would recommend you to open a Bank Account in Thailand.

Due to the large number of exchange students and the amount of paperwork involved, it took my friends about 2 hours to finally open our account. Most exchange students from Europe used their credit cards to withdraw money, but my Asian friends also used the opportunity to transfer money to the Thai account. With Transfervise, money can be exchanged and transferred at a better rate than the foreign exchange rate.

A small transfer fee is charged for the transfer, but it is free for the first transfer from one's own account.

**First Weeks:** The first few weeks were a bit of a culture shock. The weather was hot and humid, and the traffic was chaotic. However, I quickly made friends with other international students and we explored the city together. The university provided a comprehensive orientation program that helped me to get settled in and familiarize myself with the campus and the city.

I only chose MBA and MBM courses. These courses take place once a week which made it quite hard at the beginning to have close contacts with Thai students, as they were all working full time and taking classes after work.

However, after some time, I was able to get to know them better and hang out more.

The exchange student community in Bangkok is very large and active. I would recommend to take any chance to take parts at events and trips in the first weeks in order to close contacts and enjoy the stunning life in Bangkok and Thailand.

**Search for Accommodation:** I lived in one of the university's accommodation for the duration of my exchange. The rooms were nice and comfortable and the shared facilities were clean and well-maintained. The location was also convenient, as it was a short walk from the university. The place is called iSanook and it is really an amazing place to live at during your exchange. It is 15 min walking from the university, there are lots of students but most of all travellers. You would have the chance to meet every week, for instance at breakfast, many new interesting people. I found this the greatest aspect of iSanook.

The facility also has an amazing swimming pool, Jacuzzi on the rooftop and 4 different rooftop to enjoy the view on the city. The stuff was really friendly and there are two amazing restaurant just around the corner, the "yellow" one and the "blue" one.

The yellow one will catch you for the first weeks, the blue one will get your heart over the following weeks of your stay.

As said, at iSanook you enjoy benefits like a pool, room service twice a month, laundry room, restaurant and more. But the biggest advantage might be that it is located in walking distance to the campus (10-15min). This is super useful when taxis and busses would get stuck in the morning traffic.

Of course it is a bit more expensive (starting at 16,000/450€ + utilities) and social life is less pronounced as other guests are rather tourists than other international students. Still I would recommend staying there.

Second option is the Nonsi Residence which is the No.1 choice of many internationals because of the great social life and the possibilities to connect with other students. Rents started at 12,000/330€ however the utility bills are quite expensive at Nonsi. Depending on the usage of the AC some students paid 150-200€ for electricity and water per month. Moreover the rooms are a bit dated. Although it appears the cheapest option, utility bills have to be kept in mind and the Nonsi is not located near the campus, so there are costs for commuting as well. I would not recommend CU house, many people were disappointed, even though it is pretty close to the university.

**Formalities:** The formalities for my exchange program were handled by the university. They helped me to register with the local authorities and obtain a residence permit. The process was smooth and efficient, and I had all the necessary documents within a few days.

**Language Courses:** I did not take a language course as part of my exchange program. But I know the course were held in small groups and taught by experienced teachers. I found it to be very helpful, and to learn basic Thai language really helps. It is also a great chance to meet more Thai students, as they are held in a different building.

**Support at home and host institution:** The support I received from both my home institution and the host institution was excellent. Staff were always available to answer any questions I had and provide assistance when needed. They also organized social events and excursions that helped me to make friends and experience the local culture. I can only speak of my experience in the MBA and MBM. Things might be different for other programs, such as Finance.

The choice of available courses was quite disappointing. Our term was the first term of the program so there were almost only fundamentals and 101 courses (still not super easy) and no interesting electives available. A course is worth 3 Credits which is converted to 10 ECTS at Goethe Uni. So 3 courses would account for 1 semester. However, I decided to take 6 courses so when I returned to Frankfurt I only had my Master thesis left. Looking back it was quite intense but I still had plenty of possibilities to explore Bangkok and travel South-East Asia. Choosing less could make the experience even better.

The lectures take 3 hours and there are usually 1 or 2 lectures per day separated by a lunch break. But there are short breaks within the lecture as well. Lecturers and staff members of the university are mostly super nice and speak more or less good English.

Grades are based on the exams and most courses contained (group) assignments as you would expect from a business school, as well as presentations and group works.

This was a different experience compared to Goethe Uni, but personally I liked the assignments solving problems in Excel, Bloomberg, Morningstar etc. in the Financial Lab of the business school. For most courses the lecturer changes after the mid term exam.

In general there is a compulsory attendance of min 80% for each course. So if you ever plan to travel a few days and extend your weekend you should pre-check the schedule that you don't get into trouble at the end of the term. Missing 1 or 2 lectures per course shouldn't be a problem, though.

Exams were mostly multiple choice, sometimes single choice and contained only few parts of free writing or essays.

**System of Studies:** The system of studies at Chulalongkorn University was very different from what I was used to. The classes were larger and more formal, and there was a stronger emphasis on independent study. However, the professors were knowledgeable and the course materials were well-prepared.

**Libraries, computer labs, internet cafés:** The university had a large library with a good selection of books and online resources. The computer labs and internet cafes were also well-equipped and provided reliable access to the internet.

**Nightlife:** Bangkok is known for its vibrant nightlife and I had the opportunity to experience it. There are many bars, clubs and other entertainment venues to choose from. I also enjoyed exploring the street food and the night markets.

To make it short, Bangkok offers anything you can think of. A great variety of shopping malls (with international as well as local shops), temples and other cool sights for sightseeing sessions, a crazy night life in clubs, bars, roof top bars (BKK has a lot of them haha), or green parks to relax. So you can do what ever you like the most.

The same holds true for living expenses. If you choose to have western food and to only go to international clubs it will be much more expensive than eating in small local restaurants and spending your night out in local bars and party hot spots. Depends on your preferences. You won't really cook for yourself as it is cheaper to go out to eat. Local restaurants offer meals for 2-3€. I only had my daily breakfast at my room.

A shopping mall that belongs to the university and is located right next to the campus, offers a food court with a variety of restaurants that offer cheap meals for the lunch break. Further the university has a canteen which might be the cheapest option. However the staff doesn't speak English and the menu is only in Thai, so your lunch could be a surprise sometimes, but this holds true pretty much everywhere in Bangkok.

**Day and weekend trips:** During my exchange semester, I had the opportunity to explore the surrounding area and take day and weekend trips. I visited places like Ayutthaya, Kanchanaburi and Pattaya, which were all beautiful and offered a different perspective on Thailand's culture and history.

Bangkok is a great hub to travel South-east Asia. Personally, I spent some days in Indonesia, Thailand and The Philippines. Others went to Vietnam, Cambodia, or Malaysia. Further we travelled to the north of Thailand to Chiang Mai in November for a famous festival (Loi Kratong) as well as to some islands for relaxing.

Again it depends on your personal preference how you want to travel. There are busses, private vans, trains and airplanes available. Prices depend so I can't name an option which is always the cheapest. But in general international flights to nearby countries as well as domestic flights are quite affordable (20 – 40 euros)

Be careful when leaving the country. The Thai embassy only issued Single entry visas. So when you would leave the country and re-enter Thailand without a re-entry permit (30€), you would lose your visa.

The app Grab (like Uber) is a game changer. It may be a bit more expensive than a normal taxi but it makes communication so easy as most of the taxi drivers don't speak English at

all. Further you can use Grab to order food or groceries. In general it is super convenient to pay for food, groceries or your ride cash-less after linking your credit card to the app. Speaking of cash, a lot of the money transfer is through cash (especially in small restaurants). ATMs charge a fee for withdrawing money so it might be smart to withdraw greater amounts and keep them in a safe in your room.

Depending on the visa type the embassy is issuing (single or multi entry) it might be necessary to get a visa extension after 90 days. Multi entry visas extend automatically by reentering the country. Single entry holders will have to travel to the immigration office and get an extension. The university will assist you but it took me half a day to get the extension as the office is located far off the city center and the queues can get very long.