

# An Emotional Roller Coaster

by Catherine Tucker

Moving to a different country can squander up many different feelings and emotions; apparently, this is called “culture shock.” It truly is a roller coaster of emotions. Having been here for 4 months now, I find that I have been through many emotions, illnesses, and other acclimating feelings.



The first of these emotions happen before you even leave the country. Once you agree to the position, your life has completely changed. You feel like a different person. Your energy is completely different. What I am doing? Was it a good idea to say, “yes”? What am I going to pack? How am I going to pack away my life at home? What do I do with my dog? These and many more questions are racing through your mind as soon as you’ve made that life-altering decision.

Then, there comes the moment where you actually buy your one-way ticket to Thailand. Never before in my life have I bought a one-way ticket. I’ve always returned somewhere after a week or so, maybe a bit more. But this time, you’re leaving for at least a year, no need for a return on that ticket. I remember staring at my computer screen looking for the best price, shopping around on many different travel sites. When I finally found the deal I wanted, I sat for maybe another 15 minutes before I could even click my mouse to finalize my purchase. Is this really what I want to do? There’s really no turning back after I click “purchase.” Almost with one eye open, I clicked the mouse and BAM, life changed. What do I do now?

For me, I had about a month before I actually left, giving me time in Portland (where I was living) and Memphis (where I’m from) to say goodbye to my life as I knew it. It was time for me to put my American life on hold, and start a new Thai adventure. Before this adventure could begin, I had to pack up everything I owned and find a place to store it away. Doing this turned out to be a great emotional experience. I ended up purging a lot of my unnecessary items, donating 11 bags to Goodwill. Sometimes it just feels good to lighten your load.



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The first part of my adventure was driving across America to drop off my car and my dog with my parents. Driving the 30 hours by myself was really not a problem, and it gave me a lot of

time to think about what my life was going to be like. Many anticipatory thoughts crossed my mind during that long haul, but I also tried not to have too many expectations before I left. It is my belief that if you have too many expectations for a place or an event before you go, then you are more likely to be let down. Instead, have an open mind to new experience, and let everything in. That way, you're not getting your hopes up, but instead you are taking on something different and exciting.

After spending about 10 days or so with my family, it was time for me to really start my new life in Thailand. It's funny, I never really cried when I was saying goodbyes. The only time I cried was right after I accepted the job. At my going away party and at the airport, my eyes were as dry as a bone. Perhaps the change hadn't quite hit me yet, or maybe I was just too excited. The emotions I felt on the flight were pretty much just ones of exhaustion and uncomfortableness. Thirty hours of travel time is never really easy.



Landing in Thailand was very exciting though. As many of these articles have stated, as soon as you get off the plane, the humidity hits you like a ton of bricks. If I had been wearing my glasses, I'm sure they would have fogged right up. When I walked into the Surat airport, my first feeling was confusion as I didn't know who was picking me up. I walked around the baggage area for a bit, starting to get worried, but then I walked through another door and found my ride. She was standing there with a piece of paper with my name on it; however, it looked blank because she had written my name in a ballpoint pen. This was a pretty funny welcome to Thailand moment.



The drive into town was one of wonderment. Constantly looking around, I was taking in my new settings while my driver constantly changed the music from one Thai song to the next. It was great. I was also introduced to my first real taste of Thai food on this drive as we pulled over at a roadside restaurant to enjoy their fare. Because this was a very Thai restaurant and my first meal here, my driver ordered for me. Because the only meat I eat is fish and seafood, I only had 2 choices: super spicy seafood curry or brown tofu soupy stuff with brown hardboiled eggs. Well, I wasn't ready to try my first taste of real

Thai spice yet, so I opted for the latter. I'm just going to say that my first taste of real Thailand was not a good one.

Driving through town and arriving at my new house were their own little adventures as well. When my new roommates and coworkers walked through the door, I felt excited about the new life I was going to lead, with these new people in it. Who are these people? Are we going to get

along? Are they messy? Are they clean? Do we have anything in common? I guess we do, Thailand.

The first month or so of being here is nothing but wonderment, excitement, curiosity, questions, and explorations. You're pretty much in vacation mode, wanting to do and see everything. I remember meeting one of the teachers who had been living here for a while already and kept saying how he kept forgetting that I had just arrived and still felt like I should be doing something all the time. It's true though, when you first come to a new foreign land, there's nothing more you want to do but explore. When teacher training started, that was great as well. Not only was I learning about the job I was about to tackle, but I was also able to learn more about my new friends, boss, and place of employment.

During this same time when you are learning about your job, there are many anxious feelings as you're not sure what teaching is really going to be like. As a licensed teacher in the states and having just finished school a few months before coming to Thailand, I was still nervous about teaching in Thailand. For one, the class size can be very intimidating. Additionally, you may be asking what it's really like to teach in a different country? How much are they going to understand? Are my lessons going to be fun and interesting? Am I going to be respected and listened to? Are my students actually going to learn from me? These are all questions I had going through my mind during training. Most of these questions were answered during training, and the rest were answered in my first few weeks of teaching.

The first few days of teaching are the most difficult as you are still figuring everything out. But, as time goes on, you find a rhythm with how you teach and what your students like. Lesson planning becomes easier and easier and your job becomes more enjoyable. You may find yourself thinking that you're killing it, and you probably are. This first month of school is great as you are finding your groove not only at work, but also in Surat.

After the first month or so you start to realize that you're going to be here for a very long time. I believe it was November, about one month after moving to Thailand, where my homesickness hit me the worst. I honestly didn't think I'd be able to make it. I couldn't believe I was so far away from my friends and family. When I would get sick, I couldn't just call my mom and ask her to make me feel better. There was more than one teary-eyed occasion when I would be writing my friends on Facebook telling them how much I missed them and how hard it was being here. One piece of advice my friend gave me that was super helpful was to feel everything. She said it would be weird not to have these feelings and it's okay to let them all out.



At the end of November, I went to Koh Phangan with some friends where I met teachers from a town about 2 hours away from Surat. One teacher in particular told me it took her about 4 months to get over the homesickness. Oh boy. The trip to Koh Phangan was really refreshing

though because it reminded me of one of the reasons I came to Thailand, to travel and explore. I decided then and there that I was going to start going out and traveling more. There are a lot of things you can do on a small budget here. Plus, if you put in the time and effort at work, the payoff is great when you can take yourself out on little adventures.

Slowly but surely, my homesickness dissipated and my time in Surat started getting better and better. Since my trip to Koh Phangan I have been to Railay Beach, Koh Samui twice, and Bangkok. Each of these trips has had a reviving quality to them that make me fall in love with Thailand all over again. Additionally, Peter throws us monthly Super English parties, which is a



nice way to get back in touch with my coworkers. Sometimes it's so easy to get caught up with other things that you don't really see your coworkers as much. Thus, the Super English parties are a nice way to get together with everyone. In November and December we had holiday parties for Thanksgiving and Christmas, which were extra special since we were all away from our friends and families. I'm very appreciative of these occasions and look forward to our next outing at Khao Sak National Park.

Moving to a different country is full of ups and downs. I still get homesick occasionally, but when that happens, I remind myself why I'm here and where I am. This is a great opportunity to learn about yourself, a new culture, and a new kind of job. Even though times can be really rough at first, stick it out because it's all worth it in the end.