

Financial Journal, November 2011

I'm staring at 171 lines of data in Excel. The 172nd line is labeled TOTAL, and it says that for the month of November 2011 I spent 9,949 baht, the equivalent of US \$331. Not bad.

As I sift through everything I've recorded for the month – where I ate, what I bought, what arbitrary category I can label it with – I notice that there's probably some things missing (I'm almost certain, for example, that I ate more snacks than I actually recorded). I certainly did my best to write down everything I spent this November, but there may be some errors. Even so, I present to you actual proof that I am, in fact, a nerd (there's a reason they call me 2.0): here's an analysis of my spending habits for 30 days in Surat Thani, Thailand.

Introduction

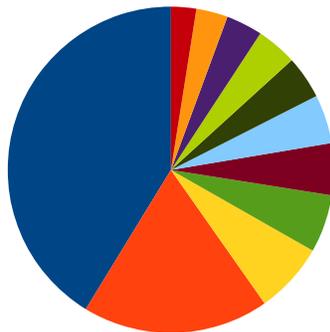
It was originally my goal to spend about 2,000 baht a week. I was successful for the first two weeks, and then I missed my goal by 461 baht in Week Three and by 1,363 in Week Four.

	Dates	Week Total
Week One	Nov. 1 – 7	1812
Week Two	Nov. 8 – 14	2002
Week Three	Nov. 15 – 21	2461
Week Four	Nov. 22 – 28	3363
Week Five	Nov. 29 – 30	311
TOTAL		9949

For the first week of November, my average daily spending was 259 baht. Week Two's average daily spending was 286 baht. Week Three averaged 351 baht, and Week Four maxed out at 480 baht.

Where did it all go?

Spending: November 2011



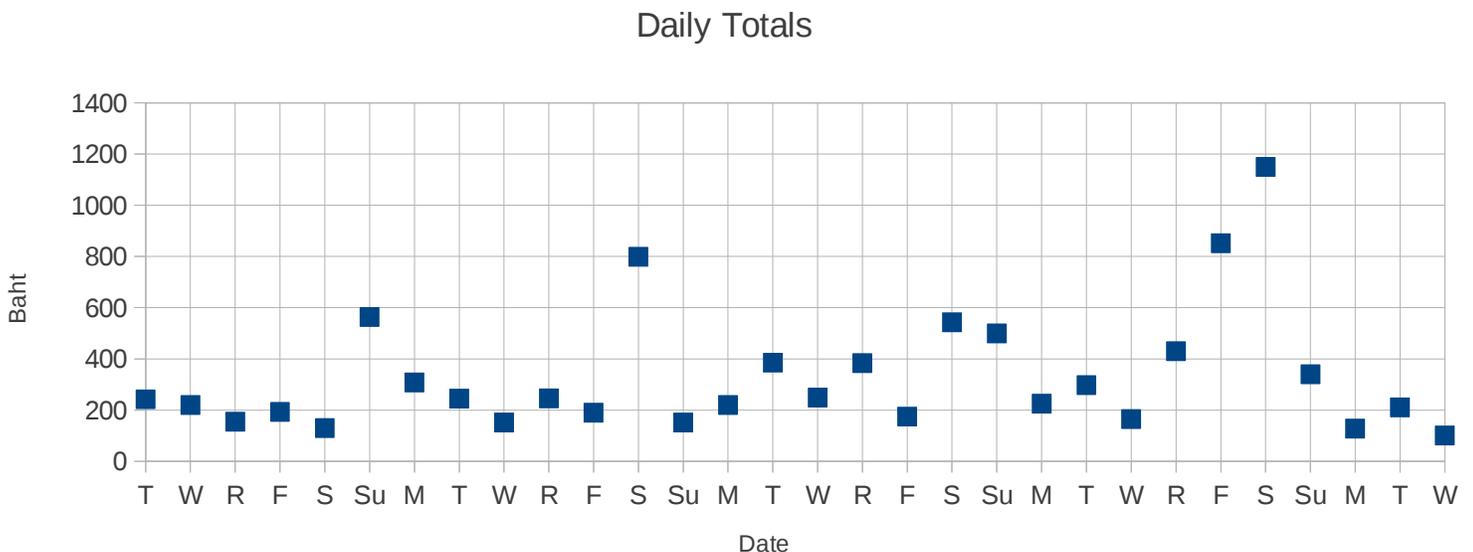
■ Food (breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks) = 4108 B	■ Drinks (tea/soda/alcohol, etc) = 1835 B
■ Medical/Dental = 698 B	■ Art Supplies = 572 B
■ Other/Social = 510 B	■ Motorbike = 483 B
■ Household Purchases = 424 B	■ School Supplies = 399 B
■ Household Bills = 360 B	■ Clothing = 310 B
■ Accommodation = 250 B	

Thailand is rather famous for its food, so it's no surprise to me that my food category tops the chart at 4,108 baht (about \$147). I once heard that Thais eat one meal a day – it starts when they wake up and ends when they go to bed. I've adopted the Thai way of constantly eating and snacking, especially because it's cheaper and more convenient here to eat out than to do it yourself.

My “drink” category is a somewhat distant second, in which I've spent about 970 baht filling myself up with tea and fruit shakes and other sweet drinks. The other 870 baht was spent on the two times I drank wine. Less than half of my spending (4,006 baht) is funneled toward all the other parts of my life that make it go 'round, which I've labeled medical/dental expenses, art and school supplies, household purchases and bills, clothing, social, and “other.”

Daily Totals

Below you'll find my daily spending totals. As you can see, my daily spending rises considerably on Saturday and Sunday.



If I calculate my weekday spending versus weekend spending, here are the results:

Average Weekday Spending	฿269
Total Weekday Spending	฿5,913
Average Weekend Spending	฿522
Total Weekend Spending	฿4,177

Now that I look back at my spending goal, I still think it's pretty reasonable *but* it's only a reasonable goal if it's a normal week or weekend, i.e. a weekend without a major holidays or social function happening that weekend. Next month, I'll need to account for weekends, holiday spending, and other social activities in order to be more accurate in my forecasts.

For the first week, my spending was low for two reasons: a) I spent more than average during the prior weekend (Halloween), and b) there was a staff appreciation party on Saturday, November 5 where Peter

provided the food and beverages. Week Two was a pretty typical week other than the Loy Krathong festival on November 10th that involved atypical spending (I think I'll only be buying lanterns, krathongs, and boat rides once a year).

Spending rose during the weekend of Week Three because big group of teachers went to a local beach called Khanom for two days and one night. Finally, Week Four's total is so high from the *two* Thanksgivings we celebrated here in Surat – one on Thanksgiving night and another on the following Saturday. More about this later.

A Little About Me

People here would probably tell you that I'm pretty cautious about my money; that's because when I arrived in Thailand (for the 2nd time), I had spent around 6 months traveling around southeast Asia without a job. I came to Surat Thani after I had just gone to Burma on my 2010 tax refund (thank you, Uncle Sam!). I did a lot of thinking while I was traveling and watching my money dwindle. I decided that whenever I got a job, I was going to crack down on my spending so that I could pay off the remainder of my credit card and save for more travel.

The most drastic measure I took to cut spending was to quit drinking when I arrived in Surat. Unthinkable to most people, I know, but hear me out. The cost of beer is usually more than the cost of a regular meal, and there's only a limited quality of it (Leo, Chang, Singha, and Archa are the most common ones). Coming from life in the Pacific Northwest where there are microbrews galore, drinking the same beer -- just for the sake of drinking – didn't make that much sense to me. My decision was also heavily influenced by the ten days I spent at a silent Buddhist meditation retreat earlier in the year. There, I did a lot of thinking about my emotions, how to be more mindful, my attachment to certain feelings and things – so drinking beer and hard alcohol stopped fitting into this new paradigm of thought for me.

That being said, you'll notice below that I actually did spend money on wine this month, which I drank at Thanksgiving festivities. I've been pretty strict with myself for a while and decided it's okay if I loosen up a bit and drink at special occasions. So there's that.

Before I jump into my analysis, I'd like to point out some other things that don't appear in the data. Namely, you won't see housing costs or a wifi payment (because I live in Super English housing for free, and Peter has generously agreed to take on wifi for a bit longer). The people who I know that pay for housing generally pay between 2,000 and 6,000 baht. It's cheap.

I also normally go to yoga classes, Thai lessons, and I get at least one massage a month – now that look back, I didn't to any of those this month. Yoga classes are 125 baht (\$4) per 90 minutes, Thai lessons are 100 baht (\$3) an hour, and massages are 300 baht (\$10) for 2 hours. Not a bad life, right?

You may be wondering about my spending versus my earning. This month I worked a lot more than I have in past months, picking up 26 hours a week teaching, writing extra articles like this one, and managing the Super English Blog. This paycheck was a good one because it included a few days from the end of October and because we didn't have any days off. I also got a pay raise for being a 2nd semester teacher at Super English.

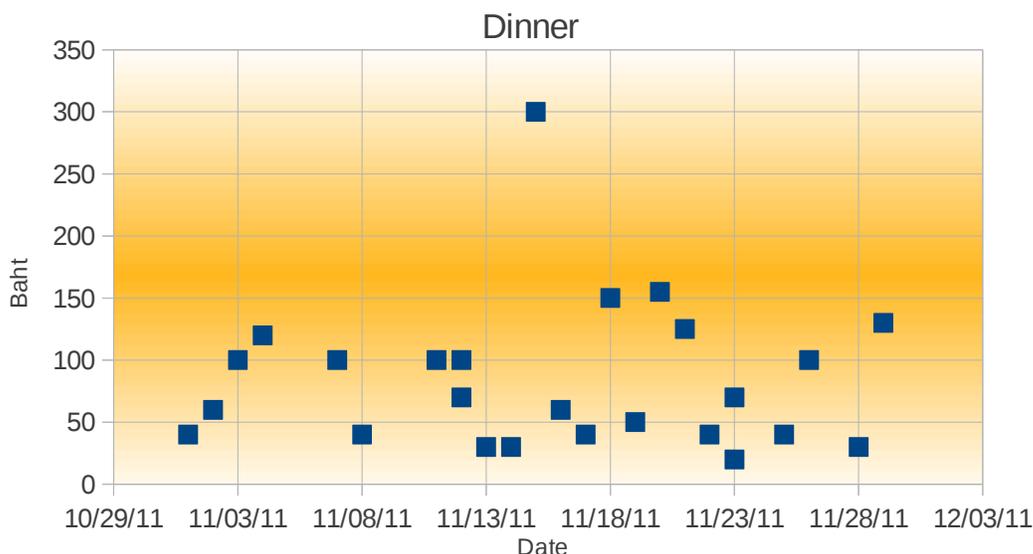
This month I made around 45,000 baht –but next month it may go down to around 20,000 because of holidays (school is canceled on the King's Birthday, then for Constitution Day, and lastly for the

Christmas Holiday at the Catholic school I teach at). Last semester I typically made between 20,000 and 30,000 baht.

Spending less than 10,000 baht means that I spent less than one-fourth of my paycheck, which is pretty incredible, in my opinion. 9,949 baht (\$331) is less than my rent was when I was living in Portland, Oregon, and that's when I was even sharing a room. I'm socking the rest of my paycheck (35,000!) away for traveling during the March-April break and for paying down my credit card.

Food Facts

Dinner Time



My total spending on dinner was 2,100 baht, or about \$70. The average cost of a meal was 84 B, or less than \$3. I spent money on dinner 25 times this month, the exceptions being the 5 times where someone paid for my meal (in exchange for Thai lessons or when Peter paid for a Thanksgiving meal at Ciao Italia, for example).

For the most part, whenever I ate at a restaurant that didn't have a name or menu items listed in English, I spent less than 60 baht on that meal. We have our own monikers for these places, i.e. Corner Guy, Rice Lady, Noodle Shop, Night Market. For these 13 meals, my average spending was 40 baht. The grand total was 480 baht – about \$15. Typical dishes include noodles, omelets over rice, and fried rice.

For the 12 times when I went out with my co-workers to eat and share food, those meals typically cost about 125 baht (\$4) because we ate more than one dish and/or shared. We went to Circa, Bali Bar, Ciao Italia, Kampon, Good Health, Corner One, and the Vietnamese place I don't now the name of. If you look at the graph, there's one data point where I spent 300 baht on dinner, and that's because I paid for dinner for two.

In total, I spent of 1,620 (\$55) at these “fancier” places, three times as much as when I ate at nameless places. You definitely end up paying more for ambiance. Food in these places is more exciting and

exceedingly good: for example, you can order fried catfish fluff salad, freshly made lasagna, “half moon over Saigon,” chicken soup with coconut milk, and so much more.

Here's my rule of thumb if you're looking to save money: eat local, one-dish meals and supplement those meals with snacking. Eat alone: people eat more when they're with friends. Expect to spend more on the weekends, especially if you're visiting tourist-oriented places where prices are 2 to 5 times higher.

So says the practical side of me. The less logical half says I think you'd be crazy to deprive yourself of all the great food that there is in town! I also wouldn't miss meals with your amazing coworkers, either, if I were you. Sometimes you just have to compromise.

Breakfast and Lunch

Looking at my data for breakfasts me that I'm more of a creature of habit than I thought I was. I go to the same rice soup place for breakfast practically every day before I go to school because the owners of that restaurant are like family to me (they've even dragged me behind the counter to make me serve donuts on a few occasions).

Needless to say, I'm loyal to them and to my standard breakfast of rice soup and two Chinese donuts. Rice soup costs 20 baht, and two donuts cost 5 baht. I ate rice soup 20 out of 24 times this month. I didn't eat breakfast 6 times (weekends!). Total breakfast spending: 723 baht, or about \$25.

At the school I work at (Thida Mae Phra) we get free lunch, and most of the time it's awesome. I only had to spend money on lunch 11 times this month, for a total of 623 baht (\$21). My average spending for lunch is 51 baht because the bulk of my spending came from weekend lunches/brunches, and I don't mind spending more on the weekends. There were also a few weekdays that I didn't eat lunch at Thida. I could tell you it's because I recently got a motorbike and that I try to exercise the freedom of being able to leave school during the day at least once a week – but there were also a few times I left in search of better food!

Snacks and Drinks

What I'm not spending on meals, I'm spending on little snacks and drinks throughout the day. I spent 657 B (almost \$23) on what I deemed to be snacks, basically whatever wasn't a full meal. My snacking habits leaned toward visiting the same

corner stores (near our house and near Super English) as well as 7-Eleven and the night market. I'm clearly a fan of Dewberry cookies – 5 baht for 4 delicious jam-and-cream-filled wonders. I snack a lot at Thida during the 2nd and 3rd period snack break: they have delicious foods for cheap. I didn't eat enough fruit this month. Fruit usually costs around 20 B for a bag of cut-up pineapple, watermelon, guava, or other delicious treats. I like the fact that snacks are available in small doses – no more buying 30 cookies and then finishing it in a week. I wonder, will America ever pick up on this?

11/01/11 Rice soup	25
11/02/11 Rice soup	25
11/03/11 Rice soup	25
11/04/11 7-Eleven	48
11/05/11 Rice lady	40
11/06/11 Rice soup	30
11/07/11 Rice soup	25
11/08/11 Rice soup	35
11/09/11 Rice soup	25
11/10/11 Rice soup	25
11/11/11 Rice soup	25
11/14/11 Rice soup	25
11/15/11 Rice soup	25
11/16/11 Rice soup	30
11/20/11 Khanom Hill	80
11/21/11 Rice Soup	25
11/22/11 Rice soup	35
11/23/11 Rice soup	35
11/24/11 Salapao man	20
11/25/11 Rice soup	30
11/26/11 Rice soup	20
11/28/11 rice soup	25
11/29/11 Rice soup	20
11/30/11 rice soup	25
TOTAL	723

11/01/11 Thida	Thida snack	7	11/02/11 Earth Zone	smoothie	50
11/02/11 7-Eleven	Oreos	5	11/03/11 Corner store	can of lemon tea	15
11/03/11 Corner store	yogurt	15	11/04/11 Night Market	smoothie	25
11/05/11 7-Eleven	mochi	30	11/05/11 Coffee Zone	tea latte	40
11/06/11 7-Eleven	gum	15	11/05/11 corner store	water	5
11/07/11 7-Eleven	dewberries	5	11/05/11 Corner store	tea soda	15
11/07/11 Thida	Thida snack card	100	11/06/11 My Cup	green teachino	40
11/08/11 corner store	popcorn	10	11/06/11 Rice soup	tea	10
11/10/11 7-eleven	2 yogurts	26	11/07/11 Corner store	can of yogurt drink	15
11/10/11 Corner store	cookies	5	11/07/11 7-Eleven	drink	15
11/10/11 Night market	coconut snacks	20	11/08/11 Corner store	soda	10
11/13/11 7-eleven	2 yogurts	26	11/08/11 Night market	Blueberry soda	10
11/13/11 fruit stand	pineapple	20	11/08/11 Rice soup	Tea	10
11/14/11 Corner store	Cookies	15	11/10/11 Corner store	can of soda	15
11/14/11 Night market	Spring rolls	10	11/10/11 Night market	fruit shake	25
11/15/11 Thida	Donut	10	11/10/11 Rice soup	Tea	10
11/16/11 Corner store	cookies	5	11/11/11 Coffee Zone	Green tea latte	40
11/16/11 Sahathai top fl	Ice cream	10	11/11/11 Rice soup	Tea	10
11/17/11 corner store	yogurt	15	11/11/11 Thida	can of soda	15
11/17/11 Night Market	dessert x 3	45	11/12/11 Ciao Italia	Fruit Shake	40
11/17/11 Nightmarket	dragonfruit	25	11/12/11 Outside of Sahathai	iced tea with tapioca	25
11/17/11 Thida	thida card	100	11/13/11 noodle shop	pepsi	15
11/18/11 corner store	cookies	5	11/14/11 Corner store	Juice	10
11/18/11 Thida	donut	10	11/14/11 Rice soup	Tea	10
11/23/11 corner store	cookies	5	11/15/11 Coffee Zone	Tea latte	50
11/23/11 Corner store	ice cream	20	11/16/11 Rice soup	Tea	10
11/23/11 Corner store	soda and cookies	5	11/17/11 Corner store	roselle juice	10
11/26/11 stadium	ice cream	25	11/17/11 corner store	soymilk	10
11/27/11 otop market	arrice cakes	25	11/18/11 Corner Store	drink	10
11/28/11 7-Eleven	yogurt	13	11/19/11 Ao Thong Yi Restaurant	2 fruit shakes	50
11/28/11 corner store	cookies	5	11/20/11 Corner store	Tea	15
11/29/11 night market	snack	10	11/20/11 Khanom Hill	Fruit shake	60
11/29/11 thida	yogurt and pineapple	15	11/21/11 Coffee Shop	Tea	40
11/30/11 Corner store	cookies	5	11/21/11 Corner One (mum nung)	smoothie	25
	TOTAL	662	11/21/11 Rice soup	Tea	10
			11/23/11 Corner store	soda	10
			11/24/11 Ciao Italia	wine and cake	330
			11/25/11 across from new thida	tea	15
			11/26/11 liquor store	wine	540
			11/26/11 bang bai mai	tea	55
			11/26/11 rice soup	tea	10
			11/27/11 outside sahathai	tea with tapioca balls	25
			11/28/11 corner store	drink	15
			11/28/11 Rice soup	tea	10
			11/29/11 night market	fruit shake	25
			11/29/11 rice soup	tea	10
			11/30/11 Corner store	drink	15
			11/30/11 Rice soup	tea	10

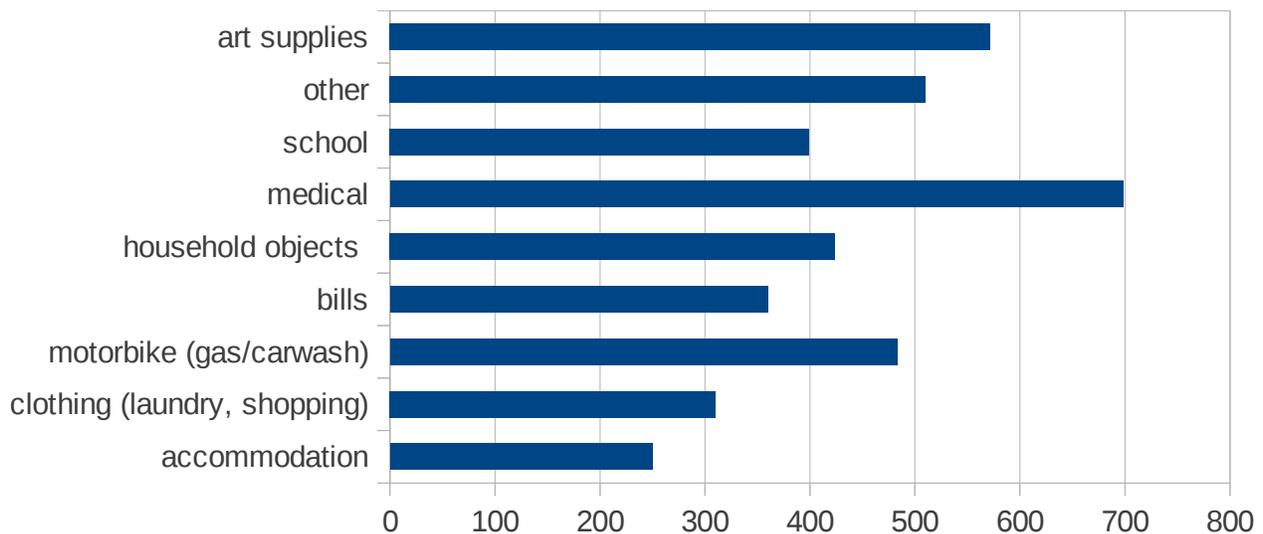
Since I gave up drinking (for the most part), I let myself indulge in one of my favorite parts about living here: cheap fruit smoothies and Thai tea. I remember spending upwards of \$2 - \$4 on Thai tea in the States at a restaurant, more than \$5 on smoothies – those days are long gone for me. I stopped drinking coffee, too, but switched over to these drinks and some sodas. I regularly drank 10 baht hot Thai tea at the rice soup

place (11 times this month). A fruit smoothie at the night market is 25 baht. A tea latte or shake is between 40 and 50 baht. The average drink for me is 20 baht. A can of tea or soda is 15 baht. In total, there were 46 instances where I bought something to drink and it cost 970 baht (almost \$30).

If I were looking to save more money, this is probably the category I would crack down on. But these days, I get drinks everywhere I go because it makes me happy, because it's hot, and because it's a nice alternative to drinking booze (drinking a smoothie with dinner never induces me to drink 4 more smoothies).

Like I mentioned earlier, I spent 870 baht on wine this month: a carafe of wine (about 3 glasses) costs 330 baht, and then I bought a bottle of wine on Thanksgiving for 540 baht. A large bottle of beer costs 40-50 baht at 7-Eleven, at corner stores, and at no-name places. At bars and at ambient dining establishments, large beer costs 80-100. Bottles of whiskey cost about 200 baht and up.

Other Spending



Art Supplies – This month I started painting and drawing and making things for the first time, which warranted a two trips to the art supply store. I spent 322 baht the first trip and 250 baht the next trip, totaling 572 baht.

Other/Social –

- **Phone** – I spent 90 baht (\$3) this month on phone credit for 1-2-Call. I don't use my phone as often as some people do, though. When I used to, I spent about 200 baht a month on phone credit.
- **Hair cut** - I got my hair cut this month for 120 baht (\$4) plus I gave my hair dresser an extra 30 baht tip.
- **Social** – I wasn't really sure what to call this category, but I decided on “social” because it's stuff that we did as a group on special occasions. For example, for the Thai staff appreciation party, Mike bought us all t-shirts to make/wear for the staff. Like I mentioned earlier, this month had a holiday called Loi Krathong where people float rafts made from banana leaves and flowers onto the river. They also float lanterns into the air. I spent an extra 320 baht on Loy Krathong on a lantern, a krathong, some flowers and candles, and a boat ride into the river.

Medical – Health care in Thailand is cheap. I have some wisdom teeth growing in (rather painfully) so I went to the dentist and she x-rayed my bottom right wisdom tooth for 120 baht (\$4!). The dentist also gave me ibuprofen and amoxicillin for 180 baht (\$6).

I bought 2 packages of coughdrops at 7-Eleven for a total of 48 baht (about \$1.50). I also buy birth control at the pharmacy and it's 21 pills for 350 baht (less than \$12).

Bills – I paid for electricity twice this month (once on the 1st and another on the 25th); the first time it was 170 baht and the second time it was 190. Electricity at the Big House is split between the 6 of us who live here.

Household Objects – I also paid bought personal household items from the grocery store at Sahathai Department Store and from Watson's. Facewash, shower gel, dental floss, toothpaste, a sponge, soymilk, and 2 flyswatters cost me a total of 224 baht (less than \$8) and some facial wipes cost me 100 baht. One night that we all cooked together, my housemate bought a pan and some food, so I contributed 100 baht toward that.

Motorbike Expenses – I got gas 5 times this month for my automatic motorbike, for a total of 423 baht (about \$14). I averaged 85 baht per visit (less than \$3). One of the times that I got gas was because I rode for an hour to Khanom and back. Because of that time that I went to Khanom, my bike also got horribly dirty, so I got it washed the next day for 60 baht (\$2).

School Supplies – I bought school supplies (mainly pens and notebooks) 5 times this month, averaging 63 baht (about \$2). I bought a surge protector for the teacher's office at Thida (99 baht) and a pen organizer for my desk for 39 baht. I also had some worksheets printed at a local shop for 2 cents/page, which cost me 80 baht total. Total amount spent on school supplies was 399 baht (less than \$14).

Clothing and Laundry - Laundry costs 30 baht (\$1) per 1 kg to have it washed and dried. I took my laundry to the cleaners once a week for a total of 120 baht (\$4). I took two items of clothing to the tailor across the street; one was repaired for 40 baht and the other was repaired for 30 baht. I spent 120 baht on a pair of shoes for work this month. I didn't buy any other clothes this month because I've been getting clothes from other teachers (the lovely fashionista Anneliese Charek left behind a lot of adorable clothes).

Accommodation – In Khanom, I stayed at Motherhome Backpacker's Hostel for one night in a dorm bed for 250 baht (about \$8.50).

Conclusion

Tracking my spending this month has been a useful exercise for me to see where my money goes. I've written everything I've spent down before, but I've never analyzed it to this extent. I'm proud that I spent less than 10,000 baht this month, and I wonder if it's a sustainable goal for most people. I love living in Thailand because of the cheap cost of living, and it's amazing just how cheap it actually is.

If I could do it over again, I would probably take the 840 baht I spent on wine and spend it on yoga and a massage instead! Oddly enough, this financial journal also helped me take a look at my other habits: food-wise, I'm going to cut back on soda and cookies and add more fruit and fresh juice in.

I'm going to use this information to plan for this upcoming month of December, and I'll let you know how it goes. Hopefully this inspires you to keep track of your spending! Good luck!