

## Strategies for Integration

Surat Thani is a pretty big place. With a population of 128,000 people it's a decently sized city with a small town feel. Because of this you'll find yourself running into people you know on the regular. In Tesco shopping for some new speakers? Oh look, it's your student Siri and her mom. At Central about to watch Jurassic World? There's your student Boat with his entire family! Casually browsing at the 20 baht store? Boom, you run into not one but two Thai teachers from Thida. Eventually, everyone knows everyone in Surat. Because of this you're going to want to take some time to actually integrate into Thai culture and it's customs. Here's some easy strategies for success.

### Indirectness:



Too direct!



Keepin' it light!!

Thailand is a non-confrontational place; people are quite sabai (relaxed) and like to go with the flow. Anything that disrupts that flow like direct confrontation, statements, or questions is going to make some people uncomfortable. You'll want to make efforts to be more indirect with people, whether it's at school or out and about in town. Basically, you'll want to follow the same principles as you would when being polite in the west. "When do you think \_\_\_\_\_ will be?" instead of "When's \_\_\_\_\_?". Just that tiny difference in wording helps make question more indirect and flexible. Speaking of which...

### Flexibility:

Plans will be made. Plans will be changed. Sometimes you'll be the last to know about the changes. Get used to the idea now. It's difficult coming from the west, where more emphasis is placed on certainty. Certainty of time, certainty of plans, certainty of scheduling. That certainty often doesn't exist. Classes will be cancelled. Camp ideas will change. Busses will leave when they want. Remember just north of here where I said that people in Thailand are quite sabai and like to go with the flow. You too must go with the flow. Anything else will simply lead to you stressing out unnecessarily.

**Smile:**



Look how happy!



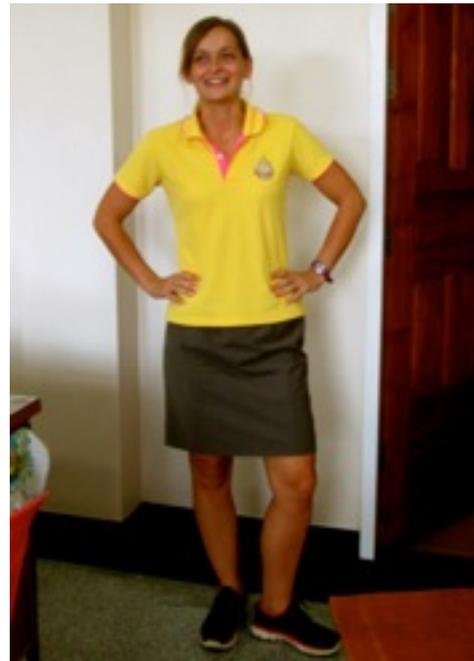
Why so serious?

Thailand isn't called "The Land of Smiles" for nothing. Thai people smile when they're happy, when they're sad, when they're angry, and when they're uncomfortable. Outwardly displaying emotions, especially when they're negative, will make everyone around you uncomfortable. Thai's are indirect, if they're uncomfortable they very well might smile and quietly giggle. They're not laughing at you, or your struggles, they're trying to figure out a way to deal. So smile! Smile wide and smile big. Practice that smile in the mirror and use it all the time.

**Dress:**



Lookin' good!



Oh dear!

You've come to Thailand to work and squeeze in some travel on the weekends. I understand that. But Surat, while a decently large city, is still very much a small town when it comes to people talking. As one of a limited number of foreigners who lives here, people will come to recognize and know you. Especially the students, parents, and teachers you'll be running into all over the place. Take some time to dress in an appropriate way. If you're walking around in super short shorts and a spaghetti strap shirt, no one will take you seriously. You'll be treated as a tourist and that's that. If you're rocking your newest Chang Beer tank top or rocking out with your guns out, you're a tourist. The basic rule is, unless exercising, keep your shoulders covered and the shorts not too short.

### **Speak Thai:**

You're in Thailand, a beautiful country with incredibly generous people. People who are proud of their language. Make some efforts to learn the language (out on the town, not in class! :P) , even the smallest phrase will elicit exclamations of "Whoa you speak Thai very good!". There are quite a few Thai tutors you can see when you get here. I suggest you find one you like and attend a few classes. If you're in any major American city, there's a good chance you're close to a Thai Buddhist Temple. Do some research, see if you have one, hit them up and see if you can get some lessons in while in the States. You'll be amazed at just how much more welcoming and accommodating people can be when you respectfully approach them in their own language. Something to note: it's farang (fa raaang, with a long "a" sound) not farang (fa rang, as in the phone rang). Same goes with Chang (Chaaang not Chang with a short "a"). Ampur (Am-pur as in "the cat purrs").

Finally, last but most certainly not least...

### **Be Kind to Your Co-teacher:**

Your co-teacher is a person with feelings, needs, hopes, and desires just like you. She's your students' main teacher and knows them best. She probably has years of teaching experience and knows what she's doing. Respect that. While you might be the English teacher, she is the teacher. Don't walk into the place like you own it. You don't. If you find yourself having some issues in the class room, ask your co-teacher for some ideas and help. She might be hesitant at first, since you are the expert in English, but remember... she's the expert at being a Thai teacher.

Your co-teacher might give you a bag of fruit or a kanome (snack). Wait a few days and give her one back. It's polite, it's nice, and it is super helpful towards ingratiating yourself into her good graces. Hey, you could even start the giving cycle and get a jump start on that budding working relationship! The basic rule here, and it should be pretty obvious, respect her and she'll respect you. My best and most lasting friendships here in Thailand have been with my co-teachers. Phung, Aor, and Janrom are fantastic ladies who are a delight to teach with. We often find ourselves exchanging looks and laughs from across the classroom. They'd do anything for me, and me for them.

So there you have it, some quick and easy strategies for integrating into Thailand and making the best of your time here. If you make an effort Thailand will notice and appreciate it.