

Muay Thai in Surat Thani - By Kris Rielly

So, you are coming to work at Super English and have an interest in the martial art of Muay Thai. If you have some knowledge of Muay Thai and you are like me, you probably think that Muay Thai is everywhere. Gyms on every corner and a stadium in every city because this is Thailand after all, the home of Muay Thai. Well, if you think that way, you will be pretty disappointed when you come to Surat Thani. But you are in luck because it is still something that you can sink your teeth into once you get out here.

A Short Muay Thai Introduction:

If you have no real knowledge of Muay Thai, then here is a quick breakdown. Muay Thai is a striking martial art developed in Thailand back in Thailand's ancient history. Muay Boran is the ancient style of Muay Thai, but over the years things have changed. The martial art techniques have adapted, and now Muay Thai has largely transformed into a competition-based sport with a lot of the Muay Boran techniques being phased out.



Above: A Muay Thai fighter paying homage with a Wai Kru dance before his bout.

Muay Thai still requires a large emphasis on the art part of martial arts. In competition bouts there are rules like:

“Before the competition and the first round every boxer must pay homage with a Muay Thai dance according to Thai art and culture with the accompaniment of music played by traditional instruments, such as the Javanese Oboe, the Javanese Tom-Tom (drum), and also a pair of small cup-shaped cymbals for rhythm. When the boxers finish paying homage, they are ready to begin the first round of the competition.”

Aside from the art part of Muay Thai, the actual techniques used in Thailand are different than what you have seen in Western martial arts like boxing or kickboxing. Muay Thai puts a large emphasis on not only punches and kicks, but also using elbow strikes, knee strikes and stand-up grappling. It is considered one of the best fighting styles in the world, and the techniques are widely used by professional mixed martial artists, where they are allowed to punch, kick, elbow, knee and grapple in bouts.

My Experience:

I was really interested in learning Muay Thai even before I got to Surat. I remember talking to Peter about it during my interview for Super English. I have done various

martial arts since I was about 8; so coming to Thailand and training Muay Thai is a dream come true.

Finding a Muay Thai gym in Surat is not that easy if you are fresh off the plane. In some places like Bangkok or Phuket it is more common and easier to find. Luckily Peter is experienced in Muay Thai so he was a good starting point for me to find a gym. Peter previously had trained Muay Thai with Somboon Tapina, my trainer, and they are good friends. After bugging Peter for months he took me down to meet Somboon. I was able to check out the gym, and Somboon arranged to have some of his students come to the gym and show some techniques and drills. I was pretty sure I wanted to train once I got out here, so after meeting him and getting a quick orientation I was motivated to start.

Starting out with Somboon is like starting from square one. It does not matter if you have other experience doing martial arts; he starts you out at the basics and drills them into your head until it becomes second nature. You start off learning guarding and foot movements, and then you start getting into the punches, kicks, knees and elbows. He teaches you different techniques as well as different drills that you can do on your own and also drills to do with partners.



Above: Professional Muay Thai fighter Buakaw Banchamek throwing a kick in competition.

Compared to other martial arts I have done I really enjoy Muay Thai. I think a lot of why I like it is just because of the teacher. Having a good teacher is important in motivating you to want to learn more. Somboon is a really interesting and smart man, and he is a great teacher. He has a Master's degree, speaks outstanding English, and a resume that would fill up a book.



Above: Somboon Tapina

Speaking from my own experience, I have had many good teachers, but Somboon is great. I can only really recall one other teacher that I could compare him to. He is a really tough guy, and will tell you when you are doing a technique wrong. It is not like in America or even in Thailand where you train at a gym and you pay tons of money. You show up and hit the pads and no matter what, you are advised your technique is excellent. Why would someone tell you that your technique is not correct when you are paying him or her hundreds of dollars? Somboon constantly picks apart your technique and makes you a better fighter.

That same constant critique makes you a better and more humble person as well. It will be a sad day when he decides to stop teaching and hopefully he never does.

I want to finish by thanking Somboon for teaching me all that I know about Muay Thai through his excellent instruction and through his book "Muay Thai Sport". If you come to work at Super English and you are interested in Muay Thai, you should definitely get in contact with him, or someone who knows him to come and train. You will not regret your decision.