Introduction
Hi! I am third year business student and I just completed my exchange to Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand. I participated in the Spring 2014 exchange period and was gone for approximately 6 months (I left at the end of December and returned middle of June).

Preparation for Exchange
A very important aspect of traveling and living in Thailand is the Thai visa. It is essential to have a valid one, to monitor it and understand how it works. I applied at the Thai Consulate in Vancouver for a 3 month study visa. You must go with a copy of your passport, passport pictures along with your letter from both Chula and SFU. The visa that the Consulate supplies is a single re-entry. That means that after entering Thailand, if you choose to leave within those 3 months, you automatically forfeit that visa and must get a new one. What I did was I got a multiple re-entry permit in Bangkok which allowed me to leave and return to Thailand numerous times during those 3 months. It’s important to realize however that once that visa expires, so does the multiple re-entry permit and both must be re-obtained from the immigration office in Bangkok. Overall, I got my visa in Vancouver in November, multiple re-entry in Bangkok in January, then got another visa (once mine expired at the end of March) which took me to the start of June. It is a complicated process but it’s integral to stay on top of it or else you pay expensive fees.

The money. The exchange rate is about 1 CAD = 29 THB. The cost of living in Thailand is incredibly affordable and that makes for a wonderful trip! Thailand is totally a cash-based society. Street vendors and markets only accept cash. That’s not to say that credit cards are not used. I used my credit card mainly for online travel bookings and for large purchases made at the shopping malls (ie. I bought a new camera in Bangkok). Nevertheless, everyday expenses are paid in cash.

A fabulous decision that I made which I would recommend was I opened up a bank account with Siam Commercial Bank while living in Thailand. The reason behind it was because I was coming with a large sum of money and I wanted a secure place to store it. It ended up being a great decision as I never had a lot of money in my possession. Instead, when my wallet started to empty I would hit an ATM (which are everywhere) and withdraw small amounts such as B500 ($15) as I never had any fees. So, I loved having the bank account as I felt all my money was safe and accessible from anywhere in Thailand (from up north to down south).

When it comes to course selection, it’s quite straightforward. Like with SFU, prepare a list of courses of interest and then enrolment happens the first week of classes (so that was January for us). An item of interest is that we were allowed to take courses outside of the BBA faculty. Chulalongkorn’s policy is they allow only one course from each outside faculty. So for me, I took 2 BBA courses and 1 Communication Arts course. I had a friend, however, who was enrolled in 4 BBA classes while also taking 1 Engineering along with 1 Economics.

My final tip for prep is in regards to packing. Pack lightly. (Almost) Everything that is here in Canada, is available in Thailand for probably cheaper. With this in mind, I bought so much stuff – clothes and souvenirs – that I had to buy two more suitcases in Bangkok. For the time that I was there (Dec-June), those were the winter & summer months. That meant wonderfully humid and hot weather. So, my advice would be shorts, shirts and tank tops. I brought 1 pair flip flops, a pair of runners (I lived by the stadium so went for runs) and 1 nice pair of shoes. Don’t forget to bring the appropriate attire for Bangkok’s nightlife. As well, when it comes to cosmetics or beauty products (lotions, sunscreen, etc.) I might recommend bringing your own. Countless Thai products contain skin whitening treatments so if you don’t want that, then you might stick with what you have back home. That’s not to say that there aren’t “normal” products, it’s just there are less of them.
During Exchange

I lived at the less popular residence, CU I House (Chulalongkorn University International House). I had a fantastic experience living at CU I House. I rented a studio apartment (1 bed / 1 bath). The studio had a desk, a double bed and a couch/lounge. The building is brand new, so I was the first to live in my apartment. There was also security 24/7 along with a reception office open at all hours (so when I forgot my key card, they allowed me in). Below our tower, there is a 7/11 (insanely convenient), True Coffee, a laundromat (B30/kg. She had it washed, dried and folded; ready to go) and a hair salon. So those are the building specifics. As the location, oh my god it was great! It’s on campus so I always walked to school; it took about a 12 min walk to the BBA faculty. It’s also a 10min walk to the BTS (skytrain) platform and 15min walk to Siam (which is the shopping mall centre of Bangkok). Not to mention, behind CU I House is an area called Sam Yan. It’s very local as in not many Thais speak English there but it has amazing and fresh street food.

Moving on, Chulalongkorn University is incredible! It’s regarded as the top school in Thailand and you will hear people refer to it as the “Harvard of Thailand.” It’s quite prestigious and it does deal with those of a higher income bracket. For example, there are celebrities who attend Chula such as Yaya Urassaya (a famous young actress whose billboards and ads are everywhere) and Peach (he’s an actor whose the face for Pepsi). Overall, it’s simply a phenomenal and super cool school.

Classes are typically 3 hours long. They run from either 9-12, or 1-4. Some classes were also in the evening and others ran on weekends. Be aware that Thailand has many Buddhist holidays so occasionally make-up classes can be scheduled on weekends. The structure of classes, at least the ones I attended, were lecture format. However, they are in small classrooms of about 30-50 students, so it feels more intimate compared to our large lecture halls. Classes emphasize group projects, which is an excellent chance to interact with Thai students and experience Thai culture. That’s really how I met my Thai friends and developed friendships with them. As for professors, they are experts in their field. My Managing Change & Innovation course was taught by an “Ajarn” (professor in Thai) who worked for Accenture for many years, while my friend’s Ajarn was an executive of operations for Big C (it’s like WalMart of Thailand). In addition, the Marketing Strategy course brought in Disney executives to judge the class’ final projects. Evidently, Chulalongkorn is very well connected and only supplies topnotch faculty members. This provides opportunities to interact with amazing people.

Outside of school, I explored Thailand. I was fortunate to travel to many incredible destinations (Singapore, Cambodia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, as well as around Thailand). I must admit though, I loved staying in Bangkok and exploring the city. The shopping malls are insane and packed with everything you could imagine. Markets are so much fun to wander around and interact with the Thai people. Going to the cinema is cheap and an easy way to spend some hours. Walking the city and tasting all the food and absorbing all the sights is definitely what turned my academic exchange into a culture experience!

Reflection After Exchange

I learnt so much from my experience abroad. My two pieces of advice are to maximize your opportunities and be reflective. Remain in the present to fully immerse yourself in the experience; make the most of each opportunity. As for being reflective, Thailand and Bangkok especially have spectacular temples. The quiet ones are the best as they provide a space to just sit and reflect on how fortunate you are to be there, to have this experience and to call the Land of Smiles home! :)
Chulalongkorn University
CU 1 House