



Special Edition: International Travel



Global Scholars Program participants navigate the crowds in Bangkok, Thailand.

Tongue Thai-ed Overcoming the Language Barrier

by Michael Urban, Department of Geography

For anyone who is an English language-only speaker, travel in Asia can be extremely intimidating. Not only is the written language seemingly incomprehensible to those not in the know, but the spoken language is predicated on the ability of the listener to actually distinguish between numerous tones that alter the meaning of what is said.

Traveling to Thailand this June as part of the Global Scholars program, I was excited to meet my apprehension about the language head on. After learning that spoken Thai uses four different tones in the central lowlands where Bangkok is located, and five

different tones in the southern part of the country near the border of Malaysia, it was reassuring to make my first foray into Asia with a group of scholars led by someone with years of experience in-country, the unflappable Dr. Bonnie Bourne. At least someone in our group would be able to communicate with our hosts.

After the first couple of days, my apprehension over the language disappeared almost entirely. While it is true that I couldn't read a sign in Thai if my life depended on it, I found communication (both verbal and non-verbal) to be easier than I had

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An Ounce of Prevention

Among the memories and souvenirs that result from a trip abroad, the last thing anyone wants to bring home is illness. While a certain degree of risk is inevitable when traveling in another country, this risk can be greatly reduced by taking the necessary precautions. Receiving the recommended vaccinations for a particular destination should top the list of anyone planning international travel.

According to the World Health Organization, there are three different types of vaccinations that may be necessary for travelers: 1) routine vaccinations; 2) recommended vaccinations for travel; and 3) mandatory vaccinations.

Routine vaccinations are those typically administered to all children to establish the minimum and healthy level of immunity and include polio, hepatitis B, measles, and diphtheria/tetanus/perussis (DTP). These childhood immunizations - which can be verified by consulting a "baby book", school, or medical records - may require an adult "booster" dose to ensure adequate and continued protection.

Recommended vaccinations for travel may vary considerably by destination. Some of the more common recommended vaccinations include those for hepatitis A,

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anticipated. For starters, most Thais in Bangkok, our first destination, seemed to know enough English that many of us felt totally comfortable exploring the city on our own. Our group quickly learned enough Thai phrases (not always pronounced correctly) to be polite and respectful, but if we were looking for directions or buying something in an open-air market, an English speaking Thai or a smile would inevitably come to the rescue. Thailand is known as the “Land of Smiles” for good reason. People were incredibly friendly, easy-going, and quick to flash the national symbol of hospitality. I found that even in those rare situations when there was an insurmountable language barrier, a deferential smile and rudimentary sign language went a tremendously

long way.

My most embarrassing moment came when we were paying the entrance fee to an archeological site north of Bangkok and I accidentally mispronounced the Thai equivalent of “no thanks.” The street vendor that I was speaking to started laughing hysterically and repeated what I had said a couple of times while I sulked away. I still don’t really know what exactly it was that I said to him. To my dismay, when we walked past the entrance on the way out the same vendor was there smiling at me and I realized that my gaffe *was* actually sort of funny. Attempting to redeem myself, I walked past him, smiled and said “no problem” in Thai. By this time, both of us were laughing.

To be honest, going into this seminar I was somewhat nervous and intimidated about traveling in Asia. Now that I have

been to Thailand and have seen a small slice of the most exotic and amazing place I have ever visited, I am eager to go back. Not only were my initial concerns over the language barrier quickly put to rest, struggling through them ended up being half the fun. The people of Thailand were so gracious and accommodating of even my clumsiest attempts to speak their language that I couldn’t help but enjoy learning from and interacting with everyone I encountered. It was both humbling and inspiring to say the least. I can only hope that integrating this experience into my teaching and research will encourage my students to step out their own comfort zones and discover the enormous rewards that await them in countries they might not have previously considered for travel and study abroad.

An Ounce of Prevention

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yellow fever, typhoid, and rabies.

Contrary to popular belief, there are very few **mandatory vaccinations** for international travel – currently only yellow fever (in vulnerable countries) and meningococcal meningitis (for pilgrims visiting Saudi Arabia for the Hajj). In addition to protecting the individual traveler from infectious disease, mandatory vaccinations are meant to protect a particularly vulnerable country or region.

There are several good resources available for investigating which vaccinations are recommended for a given destination.

The World Health Organization’s 2002 edition of *International travel and health* (http://www.who.int/ith/site_map.html) provides detailed information regarding a wide variety of health issues related to travel. Likewise, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offer extensive information in their Travelers’ Health section (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel>).

The first stop for MU staff and faculty who are planning to travel abroad should be the Travel Connections clinic, located in Parkade Plaza and offering a comprehensive medical resource for healthy travel. Fees for travel services are not typically covered by insurance and an initial consultation currently

costs \$40, not including the cost of vaccinations. An appointment should be made well in advance of anticipated travel – preferably two to three months, but no later than three weeks prior to departure. For more information, or to schedule an appointment, call Travel Connections at (573) 882-4590.

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If you have questions or suggestions for MU International, please contact the International Center at 882-6007.

Am I covered? Using your Insurance Abroad

While attending a conference in Beijing, China you twist your ankle walking back to the hotel after a long day of attending sessions. Even with a bolt of pain ripping through your body, the first thought that comes to mind is, "Where is the nearest hospital and how am I going to pay for it?"

Insurance is one of those topics that we typically prefer to avoid thinking about until, unfortunately, we are in a situation where not only do we need it, but we are least able to access relevant information and resources. With the cost of medical care and payment options varying widely from country to country, it is critical to thoroughly evaluate existing insurance coverage before departing for travel abroad.

The MU International Center provides a guide to using health insurance abroad (<http://www.missouri.edu/~icweb/studyabroad/predepart/insuranceguide.htm>) that is intended for students, but equally pertains to anyone planning international travel. If, after evaluating your existing plan you feel that it will not adequately meet your needs, you may wish to purchase a short-term policy specifically designed for travel abroad.

Coverage under the various UM policies can vary considerably but in general is treated like any other "out of network" care. Specific details on using each of the plans abroad is available from the Office of Human Resources.

In addition, all faculty and staff traveling on official university business are automatically covered

by WorldRisk, a special travel policy that offers a wide spectrum of assistance such as:

- referral to English-speaking doctors;
- advance payment of medical expenses;
- guarantee of hospitalization fee;
- lost/stolen luggage assistance; and
- referral to a local attorney

Insurance cards for the WorldRisk policy are available

from Rebecca O'Neal in the International Center (N52 Memorial Union) or from the UM Office of Risk and Insurance Management (6 Clark Hall).

If Murphy's Law holds true, you can be assured that by thoroughly investigating your insurance coverage prior to departure, you will never need to use it while traveling abroad. If not, however, at least you will have one less thing to worry about. Focus instead on the process of healing so that you can resume your plans as soon as possible.

Useful Travel-Related Web-sites

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs

travel warnings, country information sheets, passport information
<http://www.travel.state.gov/>

Embassy World

a directory of the world's embassies and consulates
<http://www.embassyworld.org/>

Time and Date.com

a guide to time zones, calendars and more
<http://www.timeanddate.com/>

MetroPlanet

information related to metros, subways, or similar urban rail transit systems around the world
<http://www.metropla.net/>

Currency Converter

current and historical exchange rate information
<http://www.x-rates.com/>

Electric Current Abroad

details the type of plug and voltage in most countries
<http://www.ita.doc.gov/td/machinery/ecabroad/>

Library of Congress Country Studies

presents the historical setting and the social, economic, political, and national security systems of countries throughout the world
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html>

Upcoming International Events

Required Check-in and Orientation for New Fall Semester 2002 International Students

Graduate Student Orientation
9:00 am - 5:00 pm, August 12-13, 2002

Undergraduate Student Orientation
9:00 am - 5:00 pm, August 19-20, 2002

ALL NEW INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
must check-in at the International Center
(N52 Memorial Union) by
September 6, 2002

Annual Study Abroad Fair

Tuesday, September 10, 2002

11:00 am - 2:00 pm

Memorial Union, Stotler Lounge

**ATTENTION: Faculty, Staff, Advisors, and
Campus Organizations:** If you are interested
in having a Study Abroad Advisor visit your
classroom, organization or staff meeting to
discuss briefly study abroad opportunities,
please contact Meghan Alexander
(AlexanderMM@missouri.edu).