

Ida Janfada's Yasothon Experience April-August 2003

Greetings from Canada once again.... well I made it back home safely. My family is very happy to have me home, but I'm amazingly depressed to be back... I guess its reverse culture shock or something and a lot of feeling useless here... but everyone says its normal and will go away, I just wanted to take this time to thank you and your family so much for helping me out so much with everything, and getting me started my first day in Thailand....

I was asked to write a final report about my time in Thailand, for future volunteers.... so I guess I will start with the culture shock... I've heard about many people that went through culture shock, but I personally didn't feel anything like that, before I left my home, I looked into things and made sure I was mentally and spiritually ready for anything.... and also that book you lent me about Thai culture really helped!! Haha. So maybe for future volunteers, it should be made sure that they are also mentally and spiritually ready and also that they know a little bit about Thai culture like what they consider rude, or disrespectful, basically some do's and don'ts. I didn't have any problems with that because I basically just followed what the people around me did.

Thai food is also very different than what I'm used to, but I quickly fell in love with it, and I just learnt to just eat whatever was offered to me by our hosts. (Maybe that's why I gained weight! haha) volunteers coming from the west might have problems adjusting to the living conditions, but if they are warned a bit about it, all this wont be as harsh on them. For me everything was fine Goli's house was amazing for me. And when I would stay in Tung Tae village we slept in small huts on the ground and I didn't mind that either...I remember all the visitors we had from the west had problems with our showers and the toilets. But other than that things were fine...

As for my time in Yasothon... the only word I can use to describe it is amazing... the first little while I was there was very hard on me because I was trying my hardest to fit in with everyone and get to know people and make friends and just think of what I can do to help the community and what not. But then as I got settled in I started finally feeling like part of the community. Thai people are very friendly so they accepted me, and being a foreigner, people were quickly attracted to me, and interested in what I'm doing in Yasothon of all places.... Anyway, after a while things just started coming together, and basically while I was serving there I did everything that I could help with.

Whenever I could, I helped with anything needed at the Baha'i School. And I also greatly enjoyed helping out at the school in the village. I helped or participated in any Ruhi study circles that I could. My main goal was to make friends and invite more and more people to devotional gatherings and encourage them to start study circles. I took part, hosted and helped out with the devotional gatherings held in Yasothon (our place) and the village. I held English classes once a week, and I taught out of "my first Baha'i book" 3 times out of the week. In the beginning I started off by helping to start the children's class in Yasothon and then it led to me helping out with two other classes on top of that in the village. Our class in Yasothon started off with about 7 devoted students but more students joined along the way. The classes in the village had I believe around 40 energetic and DEVOTED students. I was busy everyday out of the week, but it was such an amazing feeling. I also helped with everything else that would come up along the way. I loved everything I did while I was in Thailand, and I miss everything and everyone... I thank you all for letting me experience the joys of serving and every wonderful aspect of Thailand. I went from a Baha'i community of more than 600 Baha'is, to a small community of a just a few Baha'is. Although it was such a small community I have never felt so proud in my life to be a part of something. The devotion and certitude of the few Baha'is around me inspired me and will always inspire me to strive towards a life of service. I'm so happy to have experienced so much in such a small period of time and I'm glad to hear that I also inspired some people and touched their hearts just like everyone there touched mine.

Now whenever I feel down I think about how good it felt to step into the school and have the children run to me (even though they hardly knew me) calling out P'Ida!! With open arms! I'm so happy that I took the step and worked towards coming and now I'm back home a completely changed person, from everything I experienced and all the tests that I endured I feel I am a stronger and a better Baha'i and hopefully I will be a greater service to my community or anywhere else. I don't know what God will have in store for me in the future but I do know I will be back to visit Thailand and serve again in any way I can. Thank you so much for this opportunity and for everything I have gained from my experience.

Forever grateful,

Ida Janfada