

Erfahrungsbericht über ein Auslandspraktikum

Bitte reichen Sie Ihren unterschriebenen Bericht in ausgedruckter spätestens vier Wochen nach Ende Ihres Aufenthalts (Zeitraum des Volontariats) im Akademischen Auslandsamt bei Frau Rüppell-Wee. Laden Sie außerdem den unterschriebenen Erfahrungsbericht ausschließlich als pdf Scan im alfresco Kursraum hoch.

Dieser Erfahrungsbericht soll zudem insbesondere zukünftigen Studierenden helfen, sich ein Bild von dem Auslandsstudium an Ihrer Gastschule zu machen. Behalten Sie dies beim Verfassen des Berichts im Hinterkopf. Wir würden uns deshalb sehr freuen, wenn Sie uns die Erlaubnis erteilen, diesen Bericht auch anderen Studierenden – wenn gewünscht auch gerne in anonymisierter Form – zugänglich machen zu dürfen.

Name, Vorname:	Dengler, Rebecca
Studiengang:	Promotion - Englisch
Studienfächer: (bei Lehramtsstudierenden), ggf. Abschluss:	
Name der Praktikumseinrichtung:	Savannakhet University (SKU)
Praktikumszeitraum von - bis:	23.09.2019 – 20.03.2020
Erhaltene Förderung:	<input type="checkbox"/> PROMOS <input type="checkbox"/> Reisekostenzuschuss AAA <input type="checkbox"/> Reisekostenzuschuss Freunde und Förderer <input type="checkbox"/> Reisekostenzuschuss aus Mitteln des Landes <input type="checkbox"/> Keine Förderung über die Hochschule <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Andere, und zwar: Erasmus +

Note: You may adapt the spacing for points 1 – 8.

1) Summary

My stay in Savannakhet was a wonderful experience and very insightful and productive for my case study at Savannakhet University (SKU). All in all, I stayed there for 6 months, but then I had to fly back to Germany due to the Covid-19 crisis all over the world.

I did not really know what to expect, because I did not know anybody in Savannakhet before and I have never been there. However, the openness and warmth of the people I got to know there exceeded all my expectation. I would highly recommend a stay in Laos and in Savannakhet. It helped me to further develop my intercultural competence. Laos is a unique country and has the most hospitable people.

Unfortunately, I could not finish my research there due to the early return to Germany. I hope that I can return to Savannakhet and finish my data collection after this pandemic.

2) Preparations for the stay abroad

First of all, I applied for the Erasmus + funds through the International Office at the University of Education in Karlsruhe. During this process I received a lot of help from the staff there. I read the report of another volunteer, who stayed in Savannakhet before and worked at SKU. In the internet I tried to find more information about Savannakhet and the university there. However, the amount of information available in English is very limited. I found out that Savannakhet is not very touristy and not many tourists stay there for more than one night. I think that is a reason why there is not so much information about Savannakhet as there is on other cities in Laos on the internet.

Since I have already been to Laos twice (as part of Team IV and V), I knew what to expect of the country and the living conditions there. I had never been to Savannakhet before, but I had spent 5 months in total in Ban Sikeud, near Vientiane.

Reading all the related articles on the blog (www.thelaosexperience.com) and looking at the relevant documents in the alfresco folders, helped me to gain additional insight about the situation in Savannakhet before my departure.

After I got accepted for the Erasmus + mobility, I had an interview with Prof Dr Martin about my expectations for the stay there. She is my supervisor for my PhD and for the time in Laos. I could approach her with any questions any time and she reported about her visits at SKU and introduced me via e-mail to the partners there. Through Prof Dr Martin I got in contact with Ms Phetsavanh Somisivilay, an international relations staff at SKU. Ms Phetsavanh took care of all the documents I needed for the stay abroad and the Erasmus fund. About a months before I left, she also talked with me via a video-call to answer all my questions and to get to know each other. She was the one who asked me about my accommodation preferences and pre-booked an apartment in a house. After one week in Laos, which I spend in a hotel, I could move into the apartment.

3) The Training Institution

Savannakhet University is a quite young university. During my stay they celebrated their 10th year anniversary. They have 7 faculties. SKU has two campuses, the old campus around 4km from the city center and the new campus which is being constructed right now. On the new campus, there are only two buildings until now and only the Faculty of Food Science has their classes there. SKU's plan is to construct more buildings there and move the whole university to this campus. I only visited the new campus once. I worked on the old campus in the president's building. In this building, there are many offices. The Acting President, Dr Soulinhong Xaykosy, and the three Vice-Presidents of SKU, Assoc. Prof Dr Sitha Khemmarath (for research and post graduate studies), Dr Bounheuang Ninchaleune (for academic affairs) and Assoc. Prof Dr Khoun Sackbouavong (for administration), also have their offices in this building. I could work at a desk in the International Relations Office on the first floor. Around this building, there are many other small buildings: a library building, in which I held my English classes and many buildings with classrooms. On campus there are two cafeterias, where you can buy lunch and snacks. There is also a little shop where you can buy some stationary. Along the street just outside the university campus, there are many more small restaurants.

4) Course of the internship

My stay in Savannakhet was for research for my PhD. The first month in Savannakhet was for orientation and language learning. The staff of the Faculty of Linguistics and Humanities organized an intensive Lao language course for me, with 4 hours of learning Lao every day for the first 4 weeks at SKU. Since there are no other foreign students who would receive language lessons, this class was exclusively for me. I had two different teachers, staff from the English department, Ms Khantanaly and Mr Chanthalakhone. I could learn a lot of Lao in those 4 weeks, which helped me a lot to communicate with local people, to understand what is being said around me, but also to get a deeper insight into the culture and customs. After the first four weeks, my language course was continued with 2h per week. The language learning was always one on one, so I could speak a lot, ask questions and request the next topics. Learning the Lao letters helped me a lot to understand and improve my pronunciation.

After the intensive language course, I focused on my research and my buddy, Ms Souphansa, helped me a lot with the organization of observations and interview times. I observed several classes, mainly for my research; but I also gave feedback to the teacher if they wanted. Following the observations, I set up individual interviews with teachers from the English department and interviewed them.

As a voluntary addition and to strengthen my relationship with the teachers of the English department, I agreed to teach an English methodology and activities class. Ms Phetsavanh helped me to set it up and find additional new participants. Most of the participants had already attended Mr David Schrep's class. He was the previous volunteer at SKU. For this class I could use one of the best classrooms at SKU, the SSHEP room. It was equipped with a projector, a big whiteboard, enough tables and chairs for everyone and air condition. I got a key for this room and it was reserved for my class three days a week. In addition, SKU made some funds available to get additional material for the course. So, I could get markers, an adapter for the projector cord, paper and more. During my whole stay at SKU, I had a desk in the International Office. I could work there, use the printer or the copy machine and spend time and have lunch with the people in my office. It was great to have this place to work. For worksheets, I could also send the file to one of my course helpers and they printed it for the class. However, I mainly used PowerPoint presentations and shared them with the class.

It was so great to do research and work at SKU. I am very thankful for all the people who helped me a lot with everything I wanted to do.

5) Assessment of the internship

This research stay in Laos was not only very fruitful for my PhD but also for my personal development. I learned a lot. In Laos family and relations are most important. And it is very important to have the right connections. I was so thankful for Ms Phetsavanh and Ms Lanta in my office because they always seemed to know the right person to ask, if I had any questions or needed anything.

Since there were no other Germans around me in Savannakhet, every interaction was an intercultural interaction for me. Most of my colleagues and friends were Lao and I could learn a lot from them about Lao culture and lifestyle. They helped me to adjust to my new living environment and behave culturally appropriate. It also helped to have international friends in Savannakhet. With them I could exchange experiences and discuss differences, so that we could understand strange situations better and share our gained knowledge. These experiences I could have never made in Germany.

I am not sure if I improved my English there (regarding vocabulary or accent). However, I definitely became more fluent and less shy to communicate in English, because I could only communicate in English or in Lao. Sometimes I really missed to speak German.

I could also learn more and grow as a teacher. I studied Primary Education and had worked in a primary school for the last 2 years before I went to Savannakhet. In Savannakhet I now taught teachers who teach university students. This was very different to what I was used to, but I observed the local conditions and asked the teachers what they wanted to learn about or which difficulties they faced. I could adapt my teaching to the new situation and even enjoyed it a lot to train other teachers and share my experience. From many teachers I heard that the class was very helpful, and they could not only improve their English skills but learn more about teaching and different activities and methods.

6) Stay in the host country

In Savannakhet, I lived in the Ban Posai, which is close to the Mekong and not too far from the inner city. I lived in a big building, called Phaylop apartments. I felt very safe there. The building was guarded 24/7 and furnished in a Western style, with air condition in the bedroom, a small kitchen and a bathroom with hot water. The WIFI there was for free and quite fast for Lao internet. This made it possible that I also worked from home. From my apartment to the university it was about 7km. I could rent a motorbike for the time I lived in Savannakhet. So, I rode the motorbike to university every day. The streets in the city are really good, but the street to university had many holes and was very dusty. At night in many streets there is no light and many aggressive dogs stroll through the streets. I always made sure to go back home before 11 p.m. or to go together with other people. It was great to live in the city and not near the university because everything was close by and I did not have to drive the long way from the city to university at night.

Just one block away from my apartment was a huge morning market where I could buy fresh fruits and vegetables. I bought most of my groceries there or in small convenience stores around the city. There are also several night markets in the city that sell cheap and delicious food at night.

In my free time, I often went running in the small park in Savannakhet or met friends, spend time on the night market or in one of the nice little cafes. I made many Lao friends, mostly people who work for international organisations and speak English very well. I spend a lot of time with them. There were also other expats in Savannakhet, and it was easy to get to know them. Savannakhet seems like a

small city because you keep meeting the same people, but actually the city is big (<http://2020.thelaosexperience.com/2019/11/19/savannakhet-my-second-hometown-in-laos/>).

The most challenging part for me was that I did not know anybody in Savannakhet before I arrived there. This is what worried me a lot before I left Germany. But I should not have worried because I experienced that I was never left alone and I met so many amazing people, who I spend a lot of time with.

An unexpected challenge was the check-in in Frankfurt. I had booked a flight from Frankfurt via Doha and Bangkok to Savannakhet. In Frankfurt the airline told me that I was not allowed to check in because their system said that no visas on arrival were issued in Savannakhet. This meant without a visa I was not allowed to have Savannakhet as my final destination. I knew that Savannakhet Airport issued visas, but the airline just did what their system said. That is the reason why I had to change my destination to Pakse and then take a bus from there. It was a long bus ride. Since March 2020 Savannakhet really does not issue visas on arrival anymore. If one wants to fly to Savannakhet now, a visa before departure is needed or one must immigrate in another city in Laos first and then take a domestic flight or bus to Savannakhet.

Another really unexpected challenge was my return to Germany. Due to the outbreak of the Corona virus pandemic, suddenly SKU was about to close for an undefined period of time, borders to neighboring countries were being shut, and there were only limited flight options left from Laos to Thailand in March. Originally, I had planned to stay until end of May, but due to this changed situation I had to return to Germany two months earlier (<http://www.thelaosexperience.com/2020/04/28/my-sudden-return-to-germany-on-21-march-2020-due-to-covid-19/>).

7) Practical tips for future volunteers

- Contacts and relationships are everything in Laos. Don't be afraid to go if you don't know anybody before you go there. The Lao people I got to know are super welcoming. Just be open and ready to engage with the local people.
- Get to know what is seen as polite. It helps so much to build relationships if the Lao people see, that you consider their way of living and you try to adapt and learn the local customs.
- If you are a woman: Have some sinhs (Lao skirts) made when you arrive there. You should wear one to go to work every day.

8) Miscellaneous

I am very thankful for the opportunity to stay in Savannakhet and all the support I received from the University in Karlsruhe and SKU. I am also grateful for the financial support from the Erasmus + project. The monthly allowance was definitely enough to pay for all living costs during my stay.

Declaration of consent


I hereby give consent that this report will be made accessible to other students of the PH Karlsruhe and the foundation Angels for Children for informational purposes with my name being

anonymous

visible only as a hard copy in the Academic Exchange Office of the PH Karlsruhe

visible as a hard copy in the Academic Exchange Office of the PH Karlsruhe and as a pdf file on the project website www.thelaosexperience.com

Nagold, 04.05.2020 _____
Place, Date

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Signature