Tips for Thailand, by Monica Johnson

1. Thai people are famously very kind and welcoming. Even if you are not particularly gregarious, it is easy to make friends. I would describe the medical teams at the hospital as almost familial in their teasing and joking around. You will be laughed at as well, but it's all in good fun and isn't meant to offend.

2. Thailand is an awesome place to travel for almost anyone, but I think this rotation would be best suited for the less type A med student. Oftentimes you don't have a strict schedule and things don't always start on time. Also, the hospital doesn't have air conditioning in the wards. While February is technically "winter" in Thailand, the temperature is in the 90s so it gets pretty sweaty.

3. The medical student uniform is a knee-length black skirt (for females) or pants (for males), and a white short sleeve top. Don't bring scrubs, a white coat, or any other "professional attire." If you are female and would prefer to wear pants, you can, but I never saw any female Thai students wearing pants at the hospital.

4. It's great to learn a little bit of Thai before you go. Thailand is a tourist mecca, so it's quite manageable to get around most places just with English, but it's fun to learn a new language and people appreciate the effort.

5. That said, sometimes you go to places where people don't speak English or understand your accent. I always carried around a map in Thai so I could point to where I wanted to go if I needed help.

6. Even in casual settings, Thai people dress modestly, although this is changing with the influence of Western culture. Thai women don't usually wear short shorts/skirts, spaghetti straps, or low-cut tops (this the most). Western people are frequently seen in such attire, so it seems fine to wear those things if you want, but you will stand out even more than you normally as a foreigner. If you visit the temples, you have to be covered from your shoulders to your knees.

7. I rented a nice apartment about a 20 minute walk from the hospital. I think that it would have been more fun to stay at the dorms though, but I was not aware that it might be an option. All medical students and most of the residents live in dorms right on campus. You can ask the international office at Siriraj Hospital if they have any rooms available.

8. Sometimes taxi drivers try to overcharge you for a ride when they see you are a foreigner. I took a taxi about 20 times and this happened twice. The driver should turn on the meter, not give you an estimate based on your destination.

9. Be an informed traveler. It is popular for tourists to take pictures with sedated tigers or other exotic animals. In my opinion, this practice thrives due to ignorance and should not be supported. Also, most domesticated elephants in Thailand undergo a brutal ritual in order to break their bond with their mother and their independent spirit. This practice is thousands of years old, so the issue is complicated. But a good place to visit elephants is the Elephant Nature Park in Chiang Mai, where the elephants are treated humanely.

10. Thailand has a reputation as a party destination, but there are very strict punishments for drug violations, including the death penalty. On the other hand, prostitution is technically illegal, but generally tolerated. This grey zone leads to women and children being exploited and abused.