

Report of exchange to Thailand and Indonesia April 2010

Unfortunately there was only a small group of 12 intrepid travellers on this exchange but we all had a very interesting time and a unique experience of two cultures that are very different from New Zealand.

We travelled first to Lamphun in Northern Thailand and saw no sign of the problems that were occurring in Bangkok at the time. The main problem that we faced was the >40 degree heat! This was somewhat alleviated by the fact that our trip co-incided with the Sokhran festival (Buddhist New Year), during which large quantities of water are thrown. We joined a procession one afternoon and, as foreigners, rapidly became targets. This was delightfully cooling until some people added ice to the water they threw over you! We found the Thai people to be incredibly friendly and wonderful hosts.



After an interesting four day excursion to Chaing Rai and the Golden Triangle it was time to move on to our second week of hosting. Whereas Thailand is very much a Buddhist country, Indonesia is definitely Moslem. However, we found the people very open in both countries. Yogyakarta, abbreviated to Jogja, is a very old city with a long and interesting history. It has been the capital of Indonesia and is still the cultural and educational capital. It is also very interesting geologically, being a very seismically active area which boasts an active volcano and which experienced a major earthquake only 4 years ago. We were able to visit a school that had been rebuilt after this. We were fortunate to be able to visit two major temples near the city, one Buddhist and one Hindu, both dating back over 1200 years. The Hindu one, Prambanan, was still undergoing reconstruction after major earthquake damage.

We were made very welcome by both clubs that we visited and learned a lot about their cities and their culture. Exchanges are what Friendship Force is all about and I hope that more of you will be able to join our next exchange to North America next year.