

Visit to Bangkok
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It was startling to reflect that it was over ten years ago that I started teaching on a regular basis in Bangkok. The European Union had started pumping money into Jean Monnet Study Centres in South East Asia, dedicated primarily to research. Chulalongkorn University took the opportunity to reinforce this initiative by starting to teach a post-graduate European Studies program and I was invited in the first year to contribute a module on European integration history. I have been going for a couple of weeks every year ever since. Some people still ask, why teach European Studies in Thailand. I usually turn the question round – given the importance of Thailand’s commercial links with the countries of the European Union, is it not surprising that there is only one advanced degree program in the country.



The Class of 2008-9

The construction of the degree is similar to that in Leiden – a four discipline first semester (with modules on economics, history, law and politics) and specialized subjects in the second (although with only two optional tracks). There are usually about 20 highly motivated students a year, eager to get a grip on this unfamiliar part of the World. They seem to enjoy my course, but find history difficult and complicated.

The campus is an oasis of rest in a hectic metropolis, very near to the business sector of the city. The class room is just 50 metres walk from the residence for visiting staff and there is a pool near-by – all interesting considerations when the temperature is in the 30s and humidity close to 100.



A Teak Pavilion on Campus with Student Residences in the Background

By now I am familiar with the country. When I first went, it was with low expectations – the general image was that it was one huge traffic jam of sex tourists! By the way, they think the same about the Netherlands – a country full of prostitutes and

dope-heads. In both cases, it's a question of 'if you want it, you can find it'. I still find myself drawn to the Buddhist temples – both for their distinctive architecture and for the serene atmosphere that permeates them. And, at the weekends I often explore the ancient ruins of the former capitals of Ayutthaya and Sukhothai.



Contemplative Buddha's in Ayutthaya

For the last two years we have had an agreement with Chulalongkorn allowing for student visits in both directions. For Leiden students wanting to compare the European Union (at various stages in its construction) with Asean or to examine particular facets of bilateral trade relations, Bangkok provides a perfect base.