

Report - My World Challenge 2019.

By Max Bacon

Firstly, thank you again to the Trust for awarding me £100 towards my expedition, which proved to be an incredible experience.

I was ultimately successful in fundraising the entire amount needed for my trip.

April - May 2019

There were major setbacks before I had even begun to pack.

We were informed in April 2019 that the airline we had booked with (Jet Airways) was in the process of entering administration and therefore the bookings had to be changed - thank fully this did not cause too much change to the planned itinerary.

Far more seriously and tragically, just a few days later there were significant terrorist attacks in our planned destination county, Sri Lanka, causing dreadful loss of life. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office advised against all but essential travel and the expedition was thrown into jeopardy.

Fortunately, World Challenge was able to work on contingency plans and the expedition was rearranged with a new destination by May - Thailand. The main elements of the challenge remained - trekking, exploring and community engagement.

June 2019

Having finished my GCSEs, I was busy making final preparations for my trip. Packing was fun, three consecutive rabies immunisations less so!

July 15 - 30 2019 World Challenge Expedition to Thailand

First phase - arrival and acclimatisation

This first phase proved to be one of the most trying. The journey from London to Thailand was extremely long & the change at Abu Dhabi only accentuated that feeling. On a more positive note, setting foot in Abu Dhabi was my first encounter with the Asian climate that I would have to become accustomed to in the coming weeks. The heat began to get me excited for things to come. Once in country, the first issue came in locating our initial accommodation. Thanks to some helpful locals we were able to find our hostel for the night and we set about planning our next few days. The first approximately 4 days consisted of planning. Many members of the group had a lax approach to helping which made progress slow but with the help of some fellow proactive teammates, we were able to get accommodation, transportation etc planned and purchased.

Second phase - trekking

The trek phase proved to be my favourite part of the trip. On the 19th July we located the train & station that would get us to Kanchanaburi. The train itself was a highlight of this phase, seeing the Bangkok cityscape slowly transition into more rural areas as the train went on was an amazing experience. On arrival in Kanchanaburi, I immediately liked the accommodation. The Sugar Cane Guest Lodge was a gorgeous collection of 2 bed huts alongside a river. The onsite restaurant had some extremely helpful Thai people who were happy to help us plan our Trek Phase. Due to time restraints, it looked as though we were

only going to be able to do one of the predetermined treks. However, myself and a couple of other enthusiastic people were keen to do both. This did mean cutting the trek to Hellfire Pass short, but it was worth it to get the experience of both Hellfire Pass & Erawan National park. We arrived at Hellfire Pass on the 19th in the afternoon, we were able to read countless intriguing articles about the prisoners of war who were unfortunately held and forced to carve out the infamous Hellfire Pass. It was intriguing to see a perspective on the second world war from outside of the Eastern lens. Due to Dengue Fever warnings, the trek was unable to proceed fully, however the view of the pass was undoubtedly incredible.

The following day we embarked in a taxi to Erawan National Park. This was a less thought provoking but equally gorgeous experience. The trek through sweltering heat opened my eyes to the severity of working in these conditions. The national park consisted of 13 waterfalls along the trail. Each one seemed to be better than the last, the surroundings were incredible. After completing the trek, we returned to waterfall 6 in which we swam. Swimming in a wild pool, surrounded by jungle with monkeys swinging and birds singing is an idyllic experience I will never forget.

After this we returned to Bangkok in preparation for the community outreach phase.

Third phase - community engagement

The most strenuous phase of our expedition ended up being the majority favourite of the group. The Green Lion charity were incredibly accommodating and friendly towards us. Our project coordinator Chote was the perfect man for his job, he got us engaged and excited for work, not to mention his almost impeccable English. The work consisted of helping to create new buildings which would be used as monasteries and education facilities. My primary job consisted of brick laying. In such intense heat, the construction was incredibly exhausting however, we all began to take pride in our creation and worked to the best of our ability. From 9am-3pm on two days we worked hard to construct what we had gone to Thailand to do and I am proud to say there now stands a building in Thailand that we helped construct. I gained a significant amount of inspiration from the leader of the monastery and an advocate of the Green Lion charity. After our labour concluded he gave us a very meaningful speech of gratitude. Despite Chote's best efforts at translation, I believe that not all the eloquent messages could be properly conveyed, however I believe much of what he said about good deeds to be true.

Fourth phase - rest and relaxation

This phase consisted of our time on the island of Koh Samet, one of the most beautiful destinations in Thailand. Throughout our time on the island we discovered countless beaches and islands. We spent much time swimming in the Thailand seas and snorkelling for fish. We were able to enjoy the beauty of the country we had contributed to post-community phase. It was a fitting end to a difficult but valuable expedition, of which I will never forget.

Once again, thank you so much to the Henry Morris Trust for its contribution towards my expedition.