



General Information

Mae Sot, Thailand

Background:

Mae Sot is a small Thai town on the Thai-Burma border. It is estimated that between 60-70% of the Mae Sot district population are migrants that have fled from Burma. Migrants leave Burma for reasons of civil war, food and job insecurity, or having suffered from military acts of tyranny. In addition to cross-border trade, the town's main industries comprise sweat shops and factories.

The largest refugee camp, Mae La, is situated 45 minutes away.

Migrant education levels suffer from disrupted education, but those migrants who have English or computer skills can obtain a job with a community based organisation. The migrant education system relies on migrants to be teachers, and therefore without any access to formal education systems, the continued informal education of these teachers is very important.

Migrants hope for a democratic future in Burma, and yearn to be able to return home and live peacefully.

Hours, Lessons

Volunteers normally teach English about 12-20 lessons per week and also spend some time preparing lessons. The local teachers are interested in team teaching with volunteers (our favoured method).

Social life, after school activities

We highly recommend that volunteers socialize with students and teachers after school. The volunteers who socialize with their local colleagues, students and host families are often invited to dinners, taken to nearby villages, temples and other places of interest.

Burmese Migrants & the Karen-Burmese ethnic group

Burma is a resource rich country in Southeast Asia. Yet, despite the resources of this country, the majority of its citizens live in poverty. A military junta has ruled the country for a long time. Burma's major exports include teak, gold, gems, natural gas and hydropower. This trade fuels the military junta activity, with an estimated 40% of GDP spent on military, while only 0.3% on education, and 2.2% on health.

Economic development also has many negative impacts on the ethnic minorities inhabiting resource rich areas. In addition to exploitative extraction methods ruining the environment for once subsistence farmers, local ethnic groups are oppressed by the military junta; forced labour, seizure/destruction of homes and food, extortion, persecution, child soldier inscription, and forced displacement from and burning down of villages.

Karen ethnic group

The Karen ethnic minority is subjected to systematic oppression, with active denial of education, healthcare and security. The outcome is the marginalization of these people from sustainable livelihoods and participation in society.

The Karen ethnic group is one of many ethnic groups in Burma, and is indigenous to the Thai Burma border area. Karen-Burmese largely live in the mountainous terrain and valleys, occupying small clearings in the forest. Traditionally, most Karen people are subsistence farmers, cultivating hill rice.

OpenmindProjects is being recognized:





Karen religions include Christianity, Buddhism and Animism. Buddhism is the predominant religion in Burma.

When Karen villagers escape offences, they hide in nearby forest as Internally Displaced People (IDP). This existence makes survival difficult in a heavy malarial area, together with malnourishment and lack of clean water. This disruption to livelihoods also disrupts education. Often temporary schools are setup in the forest, but amidst severe lack of continuity and supplies. The unimaginable conditions faced by many ethnic minorities in Burma, is a push factor in their fleeing to Thailand.

Refugees, registered and unregistered migrants.

Due to conflict and insecurity in Burma, hundreds of thousands of people have crossed the border to Thailand for survival. These people have different rights and recognitions as:

- a) Refugees,
- b) Registered migrants,
- c) Unregistered migrants

Karen culture

The Karen have a community-oriented mindset and value consensus and inclusion. The Karen people have strong links to their traditional music and dancing. These traditions are taught at many schools with the hope of preserving their culture.

The indigenous cuisine consists of rice as a staple, forest greens, garden vegetables, fish paste and occasionally meat. Meat may come from forest animals or family livestock.

Many adults chew betel nut, which results in red teeth. A pale clay colour paste is sometimes painted on the cheeks, forehead and arms of children and women and decorate the skin while providing sun protection.

Education is valued highly by Karen people however education quality in Karen State declined after non-state schools were outlawed following the military coup. Education has since been intermittent in Karen State due to civil war.

Migrant school education, Mae Sot district

Project Overview

This project provides a wonderful opportunity to work with the Karen-Burmese community, and contribute to overcoming the barriers that marginalize this ethnic group from education. You will work with teachers who have no formal teaching qualifications, but have dedicated their post-schooling life toward improving education for their community. The teachers are motivated and eager to learn teaching methods and ideas, having only participated in minimal occasional group training in the past. You will be welcomed into daily Karen culture, to share in the experiences of these gentle people, learn about their traditions, and their vision for the future and returning to a peaceful Burma. This mutually beneficial exchange also brings your valuable contribution toward enhancing the teaching capabilities and English levels of staff and future migrant students. This project will offer you meaningful insights into the rights to education and the passion of those people who have previously been denied education. Your active involvement in this teacher development project will provide you with invaluable experience, professional and personal development.

There are 62 migrant schools in Mae Sot area. The umbrella organisation Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee is currently negotiating school accreditation with the Thai authorities, and during

OpenmindProjects is being recognized:





the 2009-2010 school year the Thai authorities authorised migrant school existence conditional on Thai language instruction. Paya Daung is one of these migrant schools, located in rural Mae Sot, approximately 15km's from the town. The school has 2 study buildings, and 3 dormitories. While the students all have a notebook and pen, classrooms lack essential teaching materials. Therefore it would be helpful if you can bring your own teaching materials such as whiteboard markers, coloured pencils and paper (all can be purchased in Thailand).

This teaching project commenced in 2010, with a vision of enhancing teaching capabilities and improving English levels, in order to facilitate a movement of improved teaching methods throughout the school. It is envisaged that this learning will then be shared by the teachers with teachers in nearby communities.

Student background:

The school is open to all children nearby the community, and currently has majority Karen-Burmese students, with some Burmese. There are 30 day students who live nearby with their family. There are 135 dormitory students who travel long distances in order to access education at the school. These students are unable to access education living with their parents, either because: their parents are migrant workers in Thailand working for below minimum wage and cannot afford Thai schooling; their parents are internally displaced by war inside Karen State of Burma and therefore no safe education is available; or due to food and job insecurity inside Karen State their parents are unable to afford the school fees to send their children to school.

While migrant children are officially permitted to attend Thai schools, many barriers prevent their attendance, including language, inability to afford books and uniform, and their insufficient education levels caused by disrupted or non-existent education inside Burma. For example a migrant child who is 18 may only be educated to equivalent Grade 8 level in Burmese or Karen language. This makes attending a Thai school instructing Thai language out of reach.

Students travel to the migrant school for school term, and if it is safe for them to return to Burma during school holidays they will. For some students, returning is not an option due to military occupation of their village area; these students reside in the dormitory during school holidays.

Most students have some basic written English skills; however have little to no practice in speaking English. Despite the challenges these students and their families have faced, they live a very happy life together in the village. Students are encouraged with group activities, sports, vocational skills, and enjoy playing when not in school.

Why the project needs volunteers: The migrant schools receive no state funding, as their students are predominantly stateless. Therefore they source materials, food supplies, and building support from the international community. Teacher training and development, however, receives very little support with teachers receiving only occasional group training. Teaching staff have no formal qualification, they have been unable to access full education in Burma. Many have completed Grade 10 only, some post-ten informal education, or partial tertiary studies in another discipline. Having been marginalized from the education system in Burma, they are now determined to improve the education available to marginalized students. Consequently the teachers are eager to learn and improve the quality of education provided by their school.

The results of your direct involvement will allow the Karen people to provide higher quality education and to improve their teaching capabilities. In turn this improves the future prospects and opportunities of the Karen children. Additionally, your project fee not only goes towards your food,

OpenmindProjects is being recognized:





accommodation, and full training but is also crucial in funding and maintaining this and other programs.

Desired volunteer profile:

- Sound command of spoken and written English
- Strong initiative and ability to work independently
- Willingness to live with basic food and living conditions
- Sensitivity to the situation of refugees and migrants, and compassion for listening to challenging life experiences.
- The ability to communicate clearly.
- Culturally respectful, approachable and willingness to socialise in order to develop a good relationship with the local teacher (to encourage and enable their increased involvement in new methods of lesson planning and teaching).
- Teaching or cross-cultural experience a huge bonus.

School term: The school term is from June-March. While the school is closed April-May there may still be volunteer opportunities during this period to teach English with the teaching staff, facilitate teaching methodology discussion groups and forums, or train community based organisation staff with computer skills.



Paya Daung School

Age between 5-15 years old

In Paya Daung village, Mae Sot district, Tak province, Thailand.

Location: In a village, 15km from Mae Sot town.

Students: 185 (155 dormitory students, 30 students from nearby village families).

Teachers: 12, including 1 English male teacher, Truman, our contact person.

Computers: 1

Internet: No.

Volunteer tasks: Teaching English classes with local English

Truman

teacher, improving English skills of both students teacher.



and

OpenmindProjects is being recognized:





Volunteer accommodation:

2 options:

- **In a home stay** in Mae Sot town with friendly Naw Sweet and her 3 sons. The volunteer stays in a separate bedroom. Transportation to the school by motor bike.
- **In a guesthouse** in Mae Sot town: room prices range from 250 Baht (with fan) to 500 Baht (with air con). If you choose that option, we subsidize some money (the amount that we give to a host family). Transportation is not included in the fee. By motorbike taxi, from the school to Mae Sot: 150 THB return.



Volunteer meals: Karen style food. Basic vegetables, egg, meats and rice. Limited fruits

- Lunch at the school with the students and teachers. Meals are prepared by the dormitory cook.
- Breakfast and dinner at host family, and you may assist and learn how to prepare Karen food.

Drinking water:

- Bottled water provided.

Toilets/Showers:

- At the school and home stay: Thai style toilets/showers (cold water and bucket).
- At the guesthouse, Western toilet/shower.

Telephone:

- Limited mobile range available in sections of village for Thai SIM cards.

Internet:

- Not at the school.
- Wi-Fi at guesthouse and home stay.
- Internet cafes available in Mae Sot town.



Shops/ ATM Facilities:

- Small convenience stores with cool drinks and snacks.
- Many ATMs, restaurants, shops in Mae Sot town.

OpenmindProjects is being recognized:





Dress standards:

- Underarms and knees should be covered to observe cultural practice (always dress neatly).

How to go:

By bus:

- Bus from Bangkok to Mae Sot takes 9 hours. As of February 2010, departs 9am or 9pm daily.
- Bus from Nongkhai to Chiang Mai: daytime and overnight bus.
- Bus from Chiang Mai to Mae Sot: 6 hours.

By flight:

- 1 hour plane from Bangkok to Sukhothai (historic capital, UNESCO listed).
- From Sukhothai take a 3 hour bus/minivan to Mae Sot (via Tak).
- From Udon Thani to Chiang Mai with Nok Air: 1h20.

Children Development Center School

Age between 3-17 years old.

In Mae Sot town, Mae Sot district, Tak province, Thailand.

Location: In Mae Sot town

Students: 1150 (550 dormitory students, 30 students from nearby village families).

Teachers: 69, including 10 English teachers. Nant Htay Si, a female teacher, is our 1st contact person. And Chang One, a male teacher, is our 2^d contact person.

Computers: 10

Internet: Yes (slow connection).

Volunteer tasks: Teaching English and Computing classes with local English and Computing teacher, improving skills of both students and teacher.

Volunteer accommodation:

2 options:

OpenmindProjects is being recognized:



Nant Htay Si





- **In a home stay** in Mae Sot town with friendly Naw Sweet and her 3 sons. The volunteer stays in a separate bedroom. Transportation to the school by bicycle.
- **In a guesthouse** in Mae Sot town: room prices range from 250 Baht (with fan) to 500 Baht (with air con). If you choose that option, we subsidize some money (the amount that we give to a host family). Transportation is not included in the fee. By motorbike taxi, from the school to Mae Sot: 150 THB return. Or you can rent a bicycle.

Volunteer meals: Karen style food. Basic vegetables, egg, meats and rice. Limited fruits.

- Lunch at the school with the students and teachers.
- Breakfast and dinner at host family, and you may assist and learn how to prepare Karen food.

Chang One

Drinking water:



- Bottled water provided.

Toilets/Showers:

- At the school and home stay: Thai style toilets/showers (cold water and bucket).
- At the guesthouse, Western toilet/shower.

Telephone:

- Thai SIM cards are available in Mae Sot town.

Internet:

- At the school.
- Wi-Fi at guesthouse and home stay.
- Internet cafes available

in Mae Sot town.

Shops/ ATM Facilities:

- Small convenience
- Many ATMs,



stores with cool drinks and snacks.
restaurants, shops in Mae Sot town.

Dress standards:

- Underarms and knees practice (always dress neatly).

should be covered to observe cultural

How to go:

OpenmindProjects is being recognized:





By bus:

- Bus from Bangkok to Mae Sot takes 9 hours. As of February 2010, departs 9am or 9pm daily.
- Bus from Nongkhai to Chiang Mai: daytime and overnight bus.
- Bus from Chiang Mai to Mae Sot: 6 hours.

By flight:

- 1 hour plane from Bangkok to Sukhothai (historic capital, UNESCO listed).
- From Sukhothai take a 3 hour bus/minivan to Mae Sot (via Tak).
- From Udon Thani to Chiang Mai with Nok Air: 1h20.

OpenmindProjects is being recognized:

