



Lesson, Travel & Business Plans

By: Kyle Ducharme

The Inspiration to Experience

After finishing my freshman year of college at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts, I was invited to participate in a service trip focusing on home repair in the rural, impoverished region of West Virginia. Over the course of that week, I was exposed to the drastic difference of rural West Virginian life compared to my upbringing in Massachusetts. This trip inspired me to do more and continue this path of understanding and service, so I did.

The following year I convinced my parents that it was in my best interest to let me take a year off from school and travel throughout the southeast completing service projects with various non-profits. So in May of 2010, I packed my bags and headed to southwest Virginia to begin my year away working with a home repair ministry working with low income families in rural Appalachia. Throughout the next 15 months, I was able to live in 7 different states, meet thousands of volunteers and serve many different families. This experience opened my eyes to the needs of the world as well as fueling my passions for understanding through experiencing first hand.



Lumos Foundation – The Opportunity of a Lifetime

After my year of travel and service, my parents wish came true, and I decided to move to Nashville to pursue a degree in Entrepreneurship at Belmont University

because I believed, and still believe to this day, that creating value in someone's life, whether it be a job or opportunity, is a way to address issues in a more effective way than giving something to someone.

Graduation slowly approached, and my fiancée and I decided that we wanted to pursue our passion of experiencing, challenging ourselves and giving back by moving abroad. We settled on teaching in Thailand because a friend of mine recently finished her term there and loved her experience. Everything was set into place: we found our organization, the region of the country and convinced our parents that this was a safe and beneficial opportunity for us, but the only thing missing for me was the fuel (funding) to get there.

I was stumped and out of options, but I didn't want to give up. At that time I was still in need of convocation credits to graduate, and I saw that there was a presentation about a student's experience teaching in Thailand. I didn't know the person or her story, but I figured it was right up my alley so I went. Throughout the presentation she focused on her experiences transitioning to her new home in Thailand and her lovely students, but the one thing that left me at awe was her mention of the Lumos Foundation.

I left the presentation, immediately messaged my fiancée and sought more information about the Lumos Foundation. After reading a statement on the Lumos website, which states, "Lumos Travel is an illuminating and enlightening experience for award recipients that defines their world view and engages them as citizens of the world and their own community (Lumos Award)," I was on fire and filled with the motivation to pursue this opportunity.

Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE)

Since I never traveled further than Central America, I knew that I wanted to go through the experience of living and teaching in a foreign country with a reputable organization. After doing a lot of research online and consulting friends, I settled on the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE). The mission statement and history of CIEE fascinated me and essentially made my decision for me.

After WWII, various organizations throughout the United States and the world came together in an attempt to promote “peaceful coexistence and respect between nations through student and teacher exchange programs (CIEE: The Leader in International Education). “ CIEE was formed to bridge the gap between international organizations and create opportunities for teachers and students to experience other cultures first hand. Now, after 65 years in business, CIEE has become the world leader in international education and exchange and focus on helping people “gain understanding, acquire knowledge, and develop skills for living in a globally interdependent and culturally diverse world (CIEE: Who We Are).

CIEE focuses on the initial work association with moving abroad including acquiring a visa, training materials and placement preferences. CIEE also partnered with an in-country organization, Overseas Education Group (OEG), to figure out country-specific details including teacher placement, training and in country support. Overall, working with both CIEE and OEG were extremely pleasant experiences because of their experience working with and placing foreign teachers throughout Thailand

“Kru” Kyle – Teaching in Thailand

While in Thailand, I spent the majority of my days as an English teacher focusing on listening and speaking skills at a science magnet school in Chiang Rai, Thailand. The school, Princess Chulabhorn Science College, is a boarding school for students between the grades of 7-12 that are interested in pursuing careers in science or math. I was responsible for teaching General Listening and Speaking for grades 9 and 11 as well as a Public Speaking elective for grades 11 and 12.

Without any prior teaching experience, I was responsible for planning, implementing and managing educational programming for over 330 students. It was an amazing experience due to the students’ determination, passion and respect. Teaching helped improve my public speaking abilities, communication skills and ability to create programming that was educational and amusing at the same time.



Kao Jai Coffee – The Beginning of My Entrepreneurial Journey

During my first weekend trip in Thailand to the neighboring city of Chiang Mai, I was introduced to the most unknown specialty coffee in the world. We were sitting at a small, wooden table on a back road in the city, and we were able to experience our first Café Yen (iced coffee). Being a coffee drinker all my life, I was extremely surprised and intrigued by a coffee that I’ve never tasted before in America.

After our trip, we returned to our city and went to a local coffee shop to lesson plan for the coming week. While there, my curiosity got the best of me, and I asked the waiter (who spoke little English) about the possibility of visiting the coffee farm that supplied their shop. To my surprise, the owner was sitting behind me, so we spent the next 30 minutes discussing the possibility of going to the farm in by broken Thai and his broken English.

During our first visit to the farm the following month, we were introduced to coffee processing and heard about the struggles that the farmers face due to a lack of market in Thailand. We were touched by their stories and our first-hand experience, so we decided to do something about it despite our very minimal knowledge of the coffee industry. Over the course of the next 5 months, my fiancé and I had visited the farm two more times and were prepping for the import of the first batch of coffee. At the end of May this year, our first import of 3,000 pounds touched down on American soil, and since then we have been well on our way to making a name for Thai coffee and increasing sustainability within the farming community in Thailand.



I Taught in Thailand, but the Experience Taught Me So Much More

Living in such a beautiful country, meeting such amazing people and starting a business from scratch is difficult to sum up in a few words, but there are a few major themes that I've taken away from this experience:

1. Thailand showed the definition of “bliss” and what it means to be alive and present. In America, we are quick to say that we “live to work” or “work to live,” but what I realized after living in Thailand is that people there just live. Whether they’re at work or at home, every experience is appreciated and no time is wasted.



2. Anything is possible – One of my favorite quotes describing entrepreneurship is from Reid Hoffman, the founder of LinkedIn, which states “You jump off a cliff and you assemble an airplane on the way down.” The greatest achievements in life are not easy, but taking that initial step or leap of faith in the direction of your desired achievement is the best thing that you can do even if you don’t have a clear plan.

3. People are People – From Boston to Bangkok, people strive for the same things out of life: to be happy, healthy and be surrounded by people they love. In Thailand there was a saying printed on many t-shirts that said “Same same, but different.” While I never found out what this exactly meant, it was a great way to describe people in general. While there are small differences in appearance or culture, we all want the same things out of life.

Without the help of the Lumos Foundation and support from Belmont, friends and family, this experience including teaching, traveling and starting a business wouldn’t be possible. From the bottom of my heart, I thank everyone for their support, love and guidance throughout this journey, and I thank the Lumos Foundation for fueling my tank and allowing me to experience another culture and begin my entrepreneurial career.

Works Cited

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