

In change of plans, Southeast Asian traveler becomes (temporary) expatriate

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BANGKOK, THAILAND -- The only constant in travel is change, and thus, there's been a change in plans.

I'm moving to Thailand.

After three months of circling my way through Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia, the initial plan was to fly out to Tel Aviv to spend more time in Israel after a fantastic time there this past summer. About a month-

and-a-half or so into my trip, however, I realized I wasn't quite ready to leave Southeast Asia. I've fallen in love with the food, the culture, the people, the language barrier and even the extreme heat (OK, maybe the heat and I still have our ups and downs).

There is still much to see and do, and I realized Bangkok was the perfect city for me to continue taking in the "foreign experience" while pursuing other opportunities as well. It's the major hub to all places South Pacific and a sprawling, bustling city with surprises at every turn. While Vietnam was my favorite country to tour, Bangkok has by far been the coolest city to live in, leaving me intrigued to understand it better.

To make staying stationary for the next two months worthwhile and still as cultural an experience as possible, I've enrolled myself in a TEFL course to get certified to teach English as a foreign language. The course is an expensive investment, but one that will reap benefits both at home and abroad. It's an idea that's been festering for some time, and what better place to be certified to teach English where teachers are much needed? Southeast Asia has a massive teacher shortage, making the option of finding a job post-certification possible, regardless of whether it is immediately upon finishing the course or six months from now.

The move from traveler to (temporary) expatriate, however, hasn't been as easy as expected. Between visa extensions, apartment hunting and budgeting, it's taken a lot of work.

In the last three days alone, I've ridden the Bangkok SkyTrain and Metro throughout the city in search of an apartment in a convenient location at an affordable price. Finding a place to live proves difficult when landlords don't understand pleas for a room for one person for two months, let alone speak any English at all. After numerous hand gestures and conversations at increased volumes (because that clearly helps the language barrier), though, I've found the perfect furnished apartment in a building called P. Mansion for 7,000 baht per month, or a whopping \$225.

An advertisement for a Smart car. At the top, the text reads "A car? It's much bigger than that." Below this is a side-view image of a red Smart car. Underneath the car, there is a link that says ">> details". At the bottom of the ad, it says "Lease a smart fortwo pure coupe \$169/mo. | 36 mos. | \$999 down" and includes the Smart logo on the right.

A car? It's much bigger than that.

>> details

Lease a smart fortwo pure coupe
\$169/mo. | 36 mos. | \$999 down

smart

Onto the next task: arranging a long-term visa.

Because I entered Thailand over land through Cambodia, I was granted only a 15-day visa for my return to the country. I'll be taking a spontaneous weekend trip to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, this weekend. By finding the cheapest round-trip flight to somewhere, I am automatically granted a 30-day visa upon re-entering Thailand. From there, I'll visit Bangkok's immigration offices and be able to extend for another 15 to 30 days to fulfill the length of the course.

Staying put will also help save money in the long run. I'll no longer be staying in guesthouses and hotels where Internet and air conditioning come at a higher cost, or paying for transportation. Settling in somewhere also takes away the novelty of constantly eating out and partying. It puts me into more of a routine, something I've actually come to miss quite a bit.

While I absolutely love traveling and seeing new countries -- and that will resume -- it is exciting to get to know a city better after hopping from place to place every three to five days. The constant jump around prevents backpackers from ever really getting to know a culture and a city. It's been the one major complaint I've felt living the nomadic lifestyle.

That and wrinkled clothes.

Sarah Lipman is documenting her travels around the world. Visit her blog, *Passport: The World*, on The Advocate Web site,

www.stamfordadvocate.com. To read

Sarah's blog, go to <http://blog.ctnews.com/lipman>.

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