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Prem Tinsulanonda International School is in its thirteenth year of operation. From the day Prem started in 2001, a commitment was made to be a full International Baccalaureate World Boarding School and to offer a host of opportunities to students and their families. We strive to be leaders in education and we encourage our students to be leaders too. When Grade 12 boarder Viritpol (Sun) suggested that we apply for the Prime Minister’s Business Enterprise Award in International Education, the school administration listened to him and decided to go ahead with an application entitled Excellence in International Education at Prem.

We were eventually short-listed and ten representatives from the Department of International Trade Promotion, Ministry of Commerce, Royal Thai Government, recently visited our campus.

We were excited to greet the members of the assessment committee and made presentations about our school. The best part of the day was when three students were invited to speak about what it meant to be a student at Prem: Sun, Cristina and Julian spoke from the heart about their experiences at the school.

Learn to think globally

"To me the International Baccalaureate is really important because it is very well-respected worldwide," Sun said.

"The IB teaches students to think globally. Having many international students here gives us different perspectives. The IB and Prem are preparing me not only for Thailand and ASEAN, but also for the wider world and the twenty-first century. At Prem you can be yourself within a group of different individuals. You can be part of the community but still be the individual you want to be. My favourite aspect of my school is the 'Prem Culture' - the unique positive culture that Prem provides for you.”

Julian added, “I’ve had the privilege to see the school grow and blossom into the unparalleled international experience it is today. The IB education offered at the school has opened many doors for me, but the IB isn’t just about opening doors. It seeks to create global citizens and well-balanced individuals who keep open minds and accept and find joy in others.”

When asked about life as a student, he said that life could be a challenge. "We study days, and often nights, to achieve a level with which we are satisfied, and this is recognised on a global scale. To me, this was the reason I chose Prem over any other school in Chiang Mai, and I suspect it is at least a part of the reason why my schoolmates also chose Prem.”

In closing his speech, Julian noted that the environmental consciousness of the administration, the teachers and the students is another reason to be proud of the school, which also exhibits a community spirit – perhaps the 'Prem Culture’ that Sun mentioned – like no other.

Cristina told the visitors that for her, the key element of an international education was getting to understand herself and becoming aware of the interconnectedness of the world.

"When I meet new people anywhere I now realise that there will be differences and I welcome the fact that people are different. We need to be able to realise that different mind-sets are not problems, but opportunities to find the best solution. Just like how making friends here at Prem with very different people from different places that have different values, allow the best friendships to be formed.

"Clearly, the learning and understanding students take from our education and time at Prem is not just applicable in terms of applying for entry to a great college, but also applicable for what ultimately comes after all this schooling - our lives," Christine added. "This is my last year at Prem, and in my suitcase when I leave, I’ll not only be packing my Prem teddy bear, but also what I’ll call a sort of lens for looking, experiencing, and understanding the rest of the world.”

I was so proud of these amazing young people who have gained such profound wisdom and become true global citizens. At the time of going to press with this magazine, the results for the PM’s Award had not been finalised. Are we a school showing great enterprise in international education? Are we a school that displays excellence in international education? Whether we are successful in our application or not, with students like Sun, Cristina, Julian and so many others, yes, we surely are!
Imagine a world where problems could be solved at the swish of a paintbrush, a world where storms and monsters and flying rocks and butterflies can be created from an artist’s imaginary palette. Imagine a world where magic and enchantment and excitement filled the air. If you can imagine all this – then you will certainly have seen the Prem Junior School production of The Magic Paintbrush.

Based on the story Liang and the Magic Paintbrush by Demi, the recent play was adapted by the Junior School music teacher Elizabeth McIlroy.

“The idea for the performance evolved from what the students were creating in their classes as part of their ‘How we express ourselves’ learning units. The students explored different aspects of creating and composing music to communicate ideas and moods,” she said.

Using artwork from the book as inspiration, students considered various elements of music such as dynamics, tempo and texture to narrate different parts of the story. In some classes, as part of their reflections on their work, students appraised each other’s compositions and chose the pieces they thought would best help to tell the story.

The exciting production was a first for the school as it involved every student from Early Years 3 to Grade 5 – a total of over 120 children on stage or in the chorus – with an additional twenty Junior and Senior School children managing the lighting and special effects or working backstage designing and making and maintaining costumes for the troops on-stage. The creative dynamo behind the production was Ajarn Lizzie – not only as adaptor of the original story, but as Music Director, problem-solver, costume repairer and mother. Co-Director Alex Soulsby and over twenty teachers, maintenance staff, IT assistants and artists assisted her.

A peasant girl and a ruthless king

Paintbrush tells the story of Liang, a village girl who wanted to learn to paint, but whose family was too poor to allow her to do so. One night, however, something magical happened and she woke to find beside her bed a paintbrush with very special powers. Using it at first to help her family and friends it was – in the fine old traditions of children’s stories – soon seized by a ruthless king who tried to make Liang create gold bars to increase his wealth. Also in story-telling tradition, the wicked were soon made to perish in high winds and rough oceans and everyone else lived happily ever after.

Using simple but effective staging, with original animations, projected butterflies and projected and “real” boulders covering the walls and ceilings of the theatre, and a massed choir underscoring the action in the central arena, Paintbrush was indeed a magical event.
If there were twenty-seven hours in a day, Santi Saengthong would still need an addition few minutes to fit everything he loves into the day. A gifted pianist and organist, a passionate teacher and a shrewd real estate investor, Ajarn Santi is a complex and entertaining member of the Prem school staff where he is the instrumental music program facilitator. A Licentiate of Trinity College London, in 2012 he was also awarded the Trinity College Award for the highest score for the licentiate program in Thailand.

Born in Phitsanulok in 1969, he studied English and linguistics at Naresuan University before making a life-changing decision to focus instead on music. Santi had started learning the electric organ at the age of thirteen and the piano at age seventeen, and has continued his interest in electric and pipe organs ever since – including an extended stay in Manchester UK to play the “King of instruments” – but his decision to focus on music meant cutting short a promising career as a lecturer in linguistics.

Music is a very demanding master, and Santi used to practise for up to eight hours a day, but now he has to balance his practice with a busy life running his own school (the hugely popular and successful Santi School of Music in Chiang Mai), overseeing a dozen staff at that school and at Prem, working as an accompanist for touring opera singers, performing as a solo artist in concerts and managing an extensive property portfolio – his “retirement plan”.

But there are no immediate signs of giving things up yet. Asked what he would like to be doing when he turns fifty, Santi Saengthong replied that he would like to have a better balance between teaching and performing – with the latter being the greater part. “I still need to earn an income – and teaching pays me well, but I need to teach less so I have more time to practise – and to perform,” he said.

Travel helps his music

His teaching and his performances are both enhanced by his love of travel – when he can find the time to do so. “I work long hours seven days a week, but everyone needs a break. When I have free time I travel to find inspiration, seeing and meeting different people, experiencing the musical life of different places.” He has enjoyed “musical journeys” to most of SE Asia as well as India, Australia, Bali, China and Nepal. “Of all the places I have been, I think India is the country with the richest traditions – in music certainly – but also in art and architecture and in life generally.”

The wealth of experience – musically and culturally – Santi draws on is seen every year in the charity fundraising concert conducted by the Santi School of Music. The concert recently featured a gifted young violin player, a talented Thai tenor and the stunning Korean-Canadian soprano You-ree Rho, whom Santi had recently accompanied on a concert tour of several Thailand cities. Funds raised from the concert help support the works of Operation Blessing Department, a charity that provides basic health care and access to education for children in the Chiang Mai province and further afield.

Children’s aid charity worker, school administrator, piano teacher, instrumental programs co-ordinator, world traveller, accompanist, performer and property magnate: perhaps Santi Saengthong really needs twenty-eight hours in every day.
A conference in 1984 brought together people from the worlds of technology, entertainment and design. The famous TED Talks grew from this simple beginning and following their release online, have been viewed by many millions around the world. TED is a non-profit organisation devoted to ideas worth spreading and the annual TED conferences bring together the world’s most fascinating thinkers and doers, who are challenged to give the talk of their lives (in eighteen minutes or less).

In Chiang Mai, there is TEDxChiangMai, an independently organised TEDx event operated under license from TED. The event is organised by a group of volunteers who support the Chiang Mai Creative City (CMCC) initiative and the Chiang Mai University Science and Technology Park Office (CMU SteP). Apart from the annual large creativity and idea forum “TEDxChiangMai”, they also organise smaller TEDx events and activities throughout the year. TEDxChiangMai 2013 was the organisation’s most recent large event.

Under the theme of “Smart Societies”, economists, entrepreneurs, researchers, policy makers, technologists, artists, designers and students shared their ideas of what can make our societies smarter.

Students join in

All international and several leading Thai schools in Chiang Mai were invited to select students to participate, and by a process of auditions a panel was able to select just four students – two from Varee International School and two from Prem Tinsulanonda International School – to join the other speakers at the September conference. The original group of six Prem students was narrowed down after a practice round where the adjudicators tackled the difficult task of selecting just two: Grade 12 students Ben Wright and Viritpol (Sun) Sunprugksin.

Both students are accomplished speakers and were able to draw on past experiences at their school and elsewhere. They are both members of their school Student Council and between them, they have addressed plenary sessions of Chiang Mai’s Model United Nations, conducted morning radio broadcasts on the school public address system, acted as MC for concerts, been student representatives at a Prime Minister’s Education Award seminar and addressed groups of students and parents on the intricacies of the coming ASEAN Economic Community.

Sun’s “talk of his life” was titled “Why Thai people should learn English” and drew on his great enthusiasm for the bilingualism that is such an important part of the ASEAN Economic Community. Already fluent in Thai and English, and with a growing ability in Mandarin, Sun is passionate about the need for his fellow countrymen to become bilingual. His reasons were well-founded, as being able to speak in English to visitors, customers or business partners will enhance the future of the Kingdom. To those who argue that translation software is all that they need to be able to communicate, he cited a case of amusing on-line mistranslations that confounded and confused rather than communicated the topic being discussed. Sun’s speech – delivered partly in Thai and partly in English – was a glowing example of the benefits of bilingualism and of the confidence that opportunities such as TEDx talks give to people from all walks of life.

Ben was not walking much at the event. During his recent school holidays he was involved in an accident where his leg was broken. As Lisa, another of the student speakers indicated, the sun always rises no matter how dark the night has been, and something good came out of the accident. Ben’s premise for his recent TEDx talk was that altruism is the necessary direction for mankind. His love of psychology led him to consider the helping of others on an individual level, as well as examining the increasingly global groups formed by the use of digital technology, which will help to break down barriers between people, letting us see the commonalities rather than the differences. In a world all too frequently marred by selfishness and greed, people who work together for the common good, people who help others with no desire for reward are, Ben maintained, the way of the future.

The TEDxChiangMai event was held at Le Meridien hotel’s conference centre and almost 500 guests joined the event to hear speakers on a diverse range of topics, illustrating the Technology, Entertainment and Design elements of the event’s name, and certainly included many ideas that were worth spreading.

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Hunting for macro invertebrates, playing predator prey games, and looking at lichen: it had been a busy few days, but I was determined we would all go home having become closer to this forest environment.

We were coming to the end of our walk through the grassland and a light breeze made the strength of the afternoon sun more bearable. The afternoon light made the managed habitat a vibrant green and the wind sang through the sturdy stalks unsettling the downy seed-heads. As the chatter became less walk-focused I secretly hoped we wouldn’t encounter a serious bird-watcher on the walk back. How could I get the students to engage more fully with this habitat? To connect to it?

We were in an area that opened out around the track we had been following and where the grass was shorter. I had prepared a listening activity for the students - a sound map that this group had not tried. This would be the moment.

After a quick introduction about how animals use their sense of hearing, a good recap on our predator prey work earlier, we then spread out and sat down, for once without fear of what might crawl on us. And as I held my breath, a hush fell over the area. Not a quiet, but a silence, not a silence waiting to erupt - but a stillness. I had told the group we would be still for between five and ten minutes, with my secret expectation that it would be the lower end of this time, but as three minutes turned to four and then five I looked around and saw no movement.

A strong silence ... 

What I did see is perhaps what Dr Helen Lee, author of Silence in Schools, describes as 'strong silence'.

"Silence is not noiselessness. Instead it is a state of mind that requires being understood as a route to access of what silence offers. Outdoors education is privileged when it comes to curricular experiences of silence because it is, I suggest, the source of silence. It is the framework of the function of silence as a bringer of benefits such as peace, calm, heightened awareness and harmony. Outdoors education is then the point of introduction to silence as the source of a river is the point of introduction to the concept of water in the earth for the use of humans."

Heads were bowed, some eyes were closed, a new sound was occasionally recorded and there was a real stillness. After another minute, a couple of birds, perhaps recognising they were centre stage, performed for us. Their song gave way to the rasp of crickets and the background hum of cicadas. A gentle breeze rustled in the grass. We were up to nine minutes and still every one was focused and still. As I moved to bring the group together, the trees to our left started to rustle and then move more forcefully. A wind passed through our area, disturbing the bigger branches and bending the grass over, making small leaves flutter down ... and then it was gone. Twelve minutes!
I broke the shared silence and the students joined me on the path again. I had planned to discuss biodiversity and how these sounds gave a clue to everything that could live on a grassland that was fringed by secondary forest and with a pond nearby - but there was a tangible excitement. Everyone wanted to share an example of how they felt. Students who had barely spoken so far were eager to share the calm and “nice” feeling they had experienced. An older student, Bacon, told us that he was a musician, and when he was quiet, it was nature’s music that he could hear. The sounds, he confided, could give him ideas for his musical work.

Several days later, students still recalled the calm they had enjoyed out on the grassland. It taught me as an educator, to embrace silence and not to fear it, not to have the need to fill every moment of every day with activity or talk, but to create times for individuals to connect in whatever way they can to the place they are in. Let them enjoy the smells, the sounds and the little sights, and give them time with no instructions – other than to be still.

1. Silence in Schools Dr Helen E Lee ISBN: 9781858564753
2. Dr Helen Lee abstract of paper for Philosophical Perspectives in Outdoor Education Conference 2012
Flying into Bhutan is a special experience.

Many travellers will recall landing at Hong Kong’s Kai Tak International Airport before it was closed in 1998: the experience of flying between towering apartment buildings, looking in while mothers served dinner and children played games almost at the end of the plane’s wingtips was unforgettable. Flying into Bhutan’s Paro airport is similar, but with the apartment buildings replaced by jagged mountains. But the airstrip is not the only special thing about this tiny mountain kingdom. For many years strict policies of isolationism ensured that it remained an unknown mystery, but when King Jigme Singye Wangchuck ascended the throne in 1972, he started the process of modernisation and opening up of the country – a trend his successors have continued.

Visitors are now welcome to explore this special place, where the famous Gross National Happiness is a more important measure of success than other countries’ Gross National Product, and where the citizens continue to wear traditional costumes – gho for men and kira for women.

It is a country where spicy food takes on a new meaning as it is said that food that does not make you sweat is not worth eating. Bhutan has a dashing young king who walks the streets among his people, it has Taktsang Goemba or Tiger’s Nest monastery perilously perched on the edge of a mountain, it has colourful festivals, snow-capped mountains waiting to be climbed and many other unique qualities.

Prem visitors recently enjoyed some aspects of this fascinating country and its culture, when the Bhutanese staff and students at the school arranged a special Bhutanese evening. There are almost forty Bhutanese students at the school.

Starting with a traditional welcome by students in colourful costumes, not-too-spicy Bhutanese food – vegetarian and non-vegetarian – was served and guests enjoyed a night of music and dance. The dancers and the dances ranged from the very traditional to some possibly never seen before in the Kingdom as two students demonstrated the latest moves in their break dance routines. As the evening was designed in part to raise funds to help preserve Bhutan’s yaks, a short video on their lifestyle was shown and a raffle was held. Sonam Yeshey, the Dzongkha teacher at the school, performed a traditional song as he played his dramneg, a stringed instrument similar to the guitar, but with seven strings. Lopen Sonam also led visitors in the Tashi Lebay, Bhutan’s traditional closing ceremony dance.

For those who have been fortunate to visit Bhutan, the evening was a chance to remember the sights and sounds and tastes they had enjoyed, and for others it was an opportunity to find out more about the small country that is waiting for their visit and to learn more about its culture, traditions, lifestyle – and yaks.
Last school year ended with an annual event that Prem students really look forward to - the Junior School Sports Day. The day offered opportunities for students to compete for house points while showing teamwork, cooperation and leadership. Eight events were held at the field throughout the morning with four house teams comprising a mix of older students with younger ones. Students showed their strength in Tug o’ War, showed team work in the Water Carry and Stepping Stones event, their throwing accuracy in Target Ball, and their speed in Rob the Next, the Baton Relay and the Water Relay.

In the house competition, Red, Blue, Green and Yellow houses compete for points by showing strong team work and good listening, and points were also accrued for winning games. Prem’s Peter Panther made a special visit to support the teams and eventually Red House proved the strongest with 410 points.

The fun didn’t stop after the house games, as students enjoyed a free swim to cool down from their very busy morning.
As the line between toys and technology blurs, Hong Kong writer Tan Ly-ann asks how can parents teach their children values for the virtual world.

A quick scan of toy stores gives an indication of the sea change that is taking place: Barbie dolls with built-in digital cameras, mobile phones for toddlers, and app-enabled Lego sets are now standard for today's playroom. Amid this rush to put technology into little hands, we also need to prepare them for a digitally connected world that many adults can barely fathom.

Some parents are worried that their children spend far too much time online. We face a digital divide - a chasm between those of us who grew up when Barbie's latest accessory was Ken, and this generation of digital natives for whom toys and technology are indistinguishable.

In the past we learned in the playground how to size up the neighbourhood bully, but how do we teach our children to do the same online, where physical clues and cues don't exist? Parents, grandparents and teachers used to be important sources of wisdom for dealing with life. But it is often difficult to find positive role models who can provide real-world solutions to challenges - like personal identity, social responsibility and data security - in the virtual world.

Chiang Mai Conference

At a family conference in February hosted by the Asia Education Resource Consortium in Chiang Mai, Thailand, many parents expressed how lost they felt about trying to keep children safe online and about when to teach youngsters the citizenship skills they would need as they grow up.

Wing-ye, a stay-at-home mother, wanted to create a safe environment online for her young daughters Talia and Kezia. But that was hard to do without always looking over their shoulders, says Wing-ye, a participant at the conference. Limiting their Internet use to Google Junior was too simplistic, even for homework and research. One of her challenges is ensuring Talia doesn't imitate her friends when she sees them spending time on their phones texting and updating their Facebook status instead of socialising even when they are with family at home.
The rules of engagement online vary from family to family. Given the rate at which technology and online trends arrive, even experts struggle to define “netiquette” and rules for online behaviour.

**Online Dangers**

Dangers online are not limited to adult predators. Dramas our children face are often to do with their behaviour online and interactions with peers. Many parents have an out-dated concept of the dangers of technology or are unprepared to enforce appropriate safeguards for children’s technology use, says Praise Ma, a teacher at Hong Kong International School and an Apple-distinguished educator.

“Some parents are rightfully worried that their children spend far too much time on the computer and tend to look at the technology as the problem,” Ma says. But fixating on the dangers and shielding youngsters from technological advances does not help them prepare for the life challenges of the future.

Happily, more families are waking up to the changing needs of raising digital natives. Graeme Deuchars, director of education consultancy 21st Century Learning HK, has had positive responses to his workshops and public lectures on how to be better parents. Families learned how to set boundaries for the use of the home computer and engage with children’s online activity.

Even so, specialists such as Deuchars and Ma concede well-intentioned but busy professionals are usually unable to monitor their children’s usage while at work and leave the task to domestic helpers.

Setting timers for Internet access and control programs are useful but these are not foolproof. Determined children will invariably find ways to circumvent censorship and so these applications cannot be relied upon as a substitute for parental supervision.

Educators agree that instead of trying to police children’s behaviour, the much longer-term solution is to build character.

The universal values of care, honesty, fairness, responsibility and respect apply for the communities we participate in online as much as they do in real life. Such character education must begin from the early years so children are exposed to a sustained process of learning and the practice of ethics, responsibility and care growing up.

According to Common Sense Media, a US non-profit organisation dedicated to improving children’s lives, digital citizenship starts at home with adults showing the good behaviour we want to see in our children, talking to them about the values we hold, and explaining how we make decisions.

Young children also learn when they are given safe boundaries in which they can make small mistakes that parents can walk and talk through with them. And, above all else, establish and maintain good and open communication channels with children.

Only when the adults in their lives are addressing positive digital lifestyle habits will children be able to pick up the values they can apply. These conversations should be consistent at home and in schools and continue into later phases of adolescence.

We must keep up with technology’s advancements, but we cannot see into the future and set rules for technology we cannot yet imagine, so we owe it to the next generation to impart good principles for living online to give them a safe future.

Almost fifty years ago, a small boy sat in the shadows of the cloisters at Britain’s well-known Downside School, sketching imaginary scenes of Brazil, Japan and Egypt. Founded in 1617, the school is located near the city of Bath and a long way from any of those exotic destinations – but colour photographs in the tombstone-sized coffee table books in his parents’ house provided all the inspiration that was necessary. When not drawing, this boy spent “far too much time” - according to his parents - watching cartoons on television and yearning for the end of the week when the local cinema would screen the latest Disney cartoon films …

Fast forward to 2013 and the same “small boy” was found in Chiang Mai, working as an artist in residence at Ruempung community arts space near Wat Umong and at Prem Tinsulanonda International School.

Mark Rafter, formerly the Art Director of Disney Channel and Art Director of the USA-based Cartoon Network, decided that a sea change was in order as he wanted to continue his distinguished career in a new place. He has spent many months looking for his new harbour. He has worked with Afghan refugees smuggled into Britain clutching to the underbellies of intercontinental trucks, with kids seeking shelter in the UK from Eritrea and Ethiopia, and with hopeful undergrad students at the Central St Martin’s College of Arts and Design in London, and with artists and students in Nepal.

In addition to his work with fellow animation or “motion graphic” artists, Rafter is also an accomplished painter and a graduate of London’s Royal College of Art.

Cutting out a new career

“I am a realist but am aware of the abstract and design qualities of a painting so my work is a mixture of the abstract and the figurative,” says Rafter. He works in acrylics and also with paper collage – “I call it painting with paper,” he added, saying Matisse – one of his favourites – used the same technique in his later life. Coming the full circle, he is now examining the latest technology offered through such things as iPads, where digital and electronic art can be created in a way that is totally revolutionary.

But what leads a small boy with a fascination with Picasso, Matisse and Tom and Jerry to Chiang Mai?

“I want to complete my journey somewhere else – to find a new base to work from. It will be nice to be somewhere new and to work there.”

Earlier this year, Rafter applied to Surface Arts (UK) for an arts residency at Ruempung and during his time there was invited to a subsequent weeklong residency at Traidhos.

“I have been fortunate that my career has offered me many opportunities to do what I love to do – drawing, painting, animation and creating ‘real’ worlds in 3D. Picasso said that all children are artists – and that the problem is how we can help them to continue to be artists as they grow up. My residencies are helping me teach more kids a love of art through what may be for them new techniques.

“My residencies here – and the travel that I plan for the rest of the year – will also give me about three months in this part of Thailand and I think three months is enough to assess a place.”

Rafter said of his time at Traidhos and his work with students from Prem:

“The mentoring opportunities, guidance and introduction to the IB that I received at Traidhos were excellent. The feedback and workshop advice I was given mean I am now comfortable to take and deliver my workshops in any IB school in the world, as I follow the road to my “new base” for retirement – wherever that may be: Thailand, Egypt, Japan – or even Brazil once again, the inspiration for those childhood drawings.”

For further information about Traidhos Arts Residencies please contact Alex Soulsby, Traidhos Arts Project Manager, on alexs@ptis.ac.th
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Living and working and studying at Prem are almost fifty American students and families. They are the fourth largest group (after Thais, Koreans and the British) in the school. This is what some of them have said makes their country the best place in the world.

The USA is the fifth largest landmass in the world and at 316 million people it has the third highest population. According to the US Department of Commerce and the United States Census Bureau, it has a birth every eight seconds. It is a country of immigrants – with one new immigrant (net) arriving every forty-four seconds. Americans living in Washington, for example, can develop a taste for Ethiopian food, worship in a Hindu temple or attend a classical Indian music concert.

People often think of our country as having no culture or history. While it is true that some parts of the world have histories that can be traced back thousands of years, American culture in its short time has made an unequalled impact on the world in many ways – not the least of which is the music it has created. Jazz, blues, rock and roll, and musical theatre are just some of the forms of music that America has given the world.

What is America? Is it the flashy neon strip of Las Vegas or the stunning mesas of Utah? Disneyland and Disney World? Perhaps it is the huge film industry and Universal Studios and Warner Bros and MGM and the Academy Awards and Hollywood. The crisp, fresh, brisk northern winters offer superb skiing and there are endless opportunities for outdoor pursuits such as camping, hiking and jogging. The national parks are world-famous: Who has not stood on the edge of Arizona’s UNESCO World Heritage-listed Grand Canyon and has not been moved by the majesty of the location?

Like many “young” countries, a sense of history is important and some of the early settlements are preserved today and are still bustling small towns – now with motorcars instead of horses. The country’s history has not been without blemishes and our involvement in numerous military campaigns have lead to many divisions of opinion and such moving reminders as the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial wall in Washington DC, honouring the 58000 or more men and women who died or are still missing as a result of that conflict.

Some people feel that America is the land of opportunity – and for those immigrants arriving at the rate of one every forty-odd seconds, it may well prove to be so. It is also a land where “the food portions in restaurants are insane” and where obesity is consequently a real problem. The World Health Organisation estimates that worldwide obesity has doubled since 2008 and the serving of a piece of cake “as big as your head” no doubts contributes to this.

American football, basketball, baseball are all as American as apple pie - of any size - and draw millions of fans for every game. America is a world-leader in space exploration and travel. It has produced writers and composers and sculptors and inventors and scientists who have changed the world. It is a land of vast swathes of grain fields and densely packed cities, and quiet country paths though Yosemite National Park and multi-lane expressways carving through cities and countryside alike.

Like many countries, our country has blemishes as well as beauty spots, the star-spangled banner may be a bit battered at times, but for me it will ways be the land of the free and the home of the brave.
Visitors to the Traidhos Three-Generation Community for Learning are greeted by a flag-lined pathway that meanders beside waterways and under canopies of trees that offer shade from the summer temperature. At different times of the year the trees are covered with masses of pink or yellow or red blossoms. Some of them bear heavy loads of fruit that fall to the ground and get squashed by passing bicycles, hordes of students’ feet or an occasional skateboard. Flocks of pigeons waddle self-importantly among the carnage, gorging themselves on the mashed fruit.

The pathway leads past tall administrative buildings, flagpoles with Thailand’s red, white and blue flag fluttering, over a huge North South East West compass set in stone and ends near a large ornamental lily-dotted lake.

But what brings so many different nationalities to a relatively remote part of the world? Perhaps for some the answer lies in the question: they are here because it is a relative remote location, and its remoteness offers them a sense of security that may be impossible in their home country where rocket strikes or civil unrest make daily life dangerous and difficult.

According to Jurairat Narajitt in Prem’s Admissions Office, more and more people are looking for schools offering the International Baccalaureate – as well as being international schools. Since Prem is currently the only school in SE Asia offering all four of the IB programs, perhaps that is indeed a draw card for some of these modern-day nomads.

Other students are here because of their parents’ occupations. For professionals working in remote or dangerous locations, or in situations where frequent and extended journeys are necessary, it is reassuring to know that in Chiang Mai their children will be safe and in a steady lifestyle uninterrupted by yet another flight. One family has chosen Chiang Mai because of its relative proximity to other countries, where work with tropical and exotic animals is possible. For many, this is possibly as close to arcadia as can be found: people like Chiang Mai’s history, its style, its affordability, its people and its climate – and choose to live here when they could live anywhere. It is a growing retirement destination for many expatriates whose children benefit from living and attending lessons with children from around the world.

There are over 130 boarders at Prem who represent twenty-one nationalities. One recent student from Germany proudly claimed that as a result of her time at the school, she could say “Hello! How are you?” in almost a dozen different languages!

With children and staff members from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, England, France, Greece, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Latvia … and all the way to Rwanda and on to Zimbabwe, Global Way’s flags really do represent almost every corner of the world – and more importantly, the children from those countries who bring with them their unique cultures, experiences and languages which they can share with everyone else, helping them in turn to be true “Global Citizens”.

Traidhos and the school work hard to prepare the students for life in an ever-shrinking world, and the Visiting Schools Program issues each of the thousands of students who visit with a Global Citizen shirt to remind them that we all have a responsibility for this planet.
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Chiang Mai and Lamphun are special places in the former Lanna kingdom as they are still centres of drumming and drum making. They are arts and traditions that will continue as drum masters train their apprentices in the selection and preparation of the hides for the drums, as musicians in groups range from the very young to the very old. One master drummer is Jatuporn Sopa from Nongplaman village north of Chiang Mai. He learned to play at the famous Lanna Drum Training Centre in Chiang Mai, and also from the much-revered National Artist Por Kru Kham Kavai, a Hang Dong-based performer and teacher.

Khun Jatuporn’s orchestra, the Sit Wat Sawangphet Group, performs locally approximately seven times per month and competes in traditional drumming competitions in Chiang Mai and Lamphun. The youngest performer is just five years old and the oldest is sixty – Khun Jatuporn himself. Despite his relative age, his stylish version of the jerng or warm-up dance is very like the ancient Lanxang staff dance. “This is the old name for Lanna. The kingdom and Chiang Mai used to have many elephants so the name combined the two words – Lan plus chang or elephant,” he said.

The spectacle of a talented drummer beating the glong sabadchai is part of what Stephen McIlroy, Senior School Principal at Prem Tinsulanonda International School, calls the primeval nature of drums. There is a huge range of northern Thai drums including the Taphon, the Glong Yao, Glong Pooja and the Thon, a goblet drum that comes in a variety of sizes and can be carried on a sling and tucked under an arm, or held between the knees. McIlroy held a staff development day recently, where the “natural unspoken language of rhythm” of massed Thon drums was used in team-building exercises involving people from many different nationalities.

“Drumming is a non-verbal activity that gets people involved and invokes an emotional response,” he added.

It is this very emotive aspect of drums that give them the power to play important parts in lives – whether it is inspiring troops before a battle or teachers before the start of a new school year, whether it is celebrating a birth or another joyous occasion, or assisting in worship at a temple, northern Thai drums and drummers are fine examples of an age-old tradition coexisting happily with the modern technology of the twenty-first century.

www.seayouthsayso.com
www.chiangmai-chiangrai.com
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Drums and drumming are traditions stretching back many centuries in the Lanna kingdom, where the Glong Sabadchai or Thai victory drum is but one of a range of drums used in special festivals, Songkran, weddings, opening ceremonies and many other occasions. Sometimes also know as a war drum, it was used to raise the soldiers’ spirits and to prepare them for battle as well as celebrating victory in a battle. In modern Thailand it may also be called a blessing drum because of its importance to key events in people’s lives.
The Traidhos Quarterly is produced four times each year. To contact the editor please email christopherh@ptis.ac.th. For advertising enquiries please email Ramlah Jafri on ram.pc@chiangmaiheritage.com
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