Hi! My name is Brooke Legins and I studied abroad in Chiang Mai, Thailand with USAC during the Fall 2019 semester. Studying abroad was always on my bucket list entering college, but it still felt surreal once I touched down in Chiang Mai on a gloomy August morning and realized that this was my new home away from home. Culture shock and home sickness hit almost immediately for me. The change in weather and pace of life was something that I prepared for, but never put into perspective until I arrived. Luckily, USAC did a great job of keeping myself and the other students busy during the first weeks upon arrival. We were taken to the local walking street markets, given tours around Chiang Mai, visited beautiful temples, and began making bonds with some amazing individuals.

I will always remember the time when I trekked 11 km to Doi Suthep Temple along with 36,000 other Chiang Mai University students. Every year, there is a right-of-passage ceremony to mark the beginning of the new academic session. Every new student will walk with their faculty up steep hills in the rain. I was delighted to know that the USAC students were invited to join. This was a great honor and a memory that I will never forget.

It is really easy to get discouraged while planning your study abroad experience. I know I did. I wanted to make sure that my experience lived up to all of the incredible stories that I heard in the past. If there is one piece of advice that I could offer to someone preparing to study abroad, it is to go into your new home with an open mind. Yes, you can set expectations and plan out exactly how you will live abroad, but I encourage you to expect the unexpected. You may miss your bus home to Chiang Mai from Chiang Rai, but that extra night might lead you to a hole in the wall bar where you meet lifelong friends. Reflecting back on my experience in Thailand, I would never change it. I learned so much about myself and grew immensely every day. You too can have experiences that you will remember for the rest of your life if you study abroad.