

Study Abroad in Thailand**Semester Programs Compared**

Both CEC and SCT are full-semester, block-plan programs based at ISDSI's Chiang Mai campus, each earning 18 credits and including an Independent Field Research Project in every course. The difference is in focus and format — use this comparison to see which fits your interests.

Culture, Ecology, and Community (CEC)

Expedition-based learning across Thailand's diverse cultures and ecosystems

A field-intensive semester of multi-week expeditions across Northern and Southern Thailand, combining backpacking, sea kayaking, and homestays in farming and indigenous communities.

Society, Culture, and the Arts of Thailand & Southeast Asia (SCT)

Chiang Mai-based studies with travel to Vietnam

A Chiang Mai-based semester pairing academic coursework with direct engagement in Thai society, history, and the arts, including an extended field study in Vietnam.

	CEC	SCT
BEST SUITED FOR	Students interested in ecology, environmental science, sustainability, and hands-on field work. Comfortable with physical challenge and travel off of the beaten path.	Students interested in cultural exploration, the arts, and social inquiry who learn well through direct engagement with communities, history, and everyday life.
FORMAT	Expedition-based — students travel throughout Thailand on multi-week field expeditions, with most learning happening on location.	Urban-based — based mostly in Chiang Mai, but with coursework and excursions into rural, coastal, and international settings.
HOME BASE	Chiang Mai campus, but most of the semester is spent on learning expeditions — villages and mountains in the North, islands in the South.	Chiang Mai throughout the semester, with short field studies in rural Thailand (lowland and upland villages, and the South) with an extended field study in Vietnam.
REGIONS VISITED	Mae Hong Son & Chiang Mai provinces (North) · Trang & Satun provinces (South)	Chiang Mai (primary) · Doi Inthanon / Karen hill tribe villages · coastal village · Vietnam
ACTIVITIES	Backpacking through mountain forests · sea kayaking · snorkeling coral reef surveys · homestays in farming & indigenous villages · organic farming · camping	Cultural exploration in Chiang Mai's old city & markets · temple visits · coffee farm visits · ethnographies of local life · Karen hill tribe village homestay · traditional Thai village homestay · travel in Vietnam
DISCIPLINES	Ecology, environmental science, biology, sociology, geography	Anthropology, cultural studies, history, political science, sustainability, art
PHYSICAL DEMAND	High — backpacking, hiking,, paddling, camping, and extended time in remote areas.	Moderate — mostly urban and semi-urban settings, with some rural and international travel.
CREDITS	18 credits (Block 1: 6 · Blocks 2–4: 4 each)	18 credits (Thai Language 1: 6 · remaining courses: 4 each)

What both programs share

- **Academic structure** — block plan, one course at a time for focused, immersive learning
- **Thai language** — intensive instruction while based in Chiang Mai, practiced daily in real-world settings
- **Research component** — an Independent Field Research Project (IFRP) in every course
- **Home campus** — ISDSI's Chiang Mai campus
- **Learning approach** — experiential and community-based, developed in collaboration with local communities
- **Homestays** — live with local families during field studies

