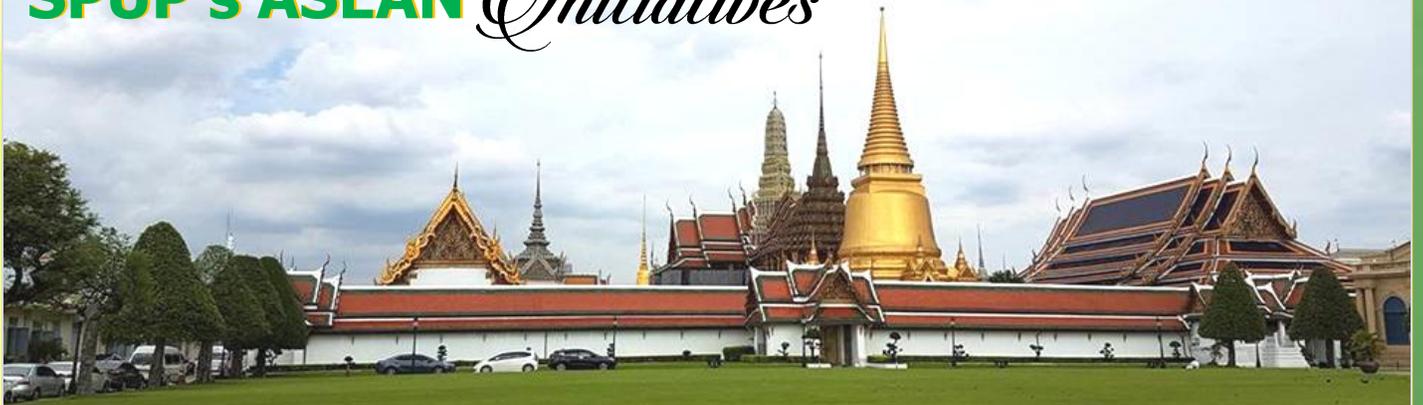


SPUP's ASEAN *Initiatives*



GRAND PALACE, BANGKOK CITY, THAILAND

A Tale to Tell from the **LAND OF THE FREE**

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As SPUP aims to continuously provide an opportunity for cultural immersion and educational exposure relevant to the ASEAN Integration, the members of its academic community are given prospect to experience the life and culture of ASEAN countries. This year's ASEAN Tour, the SPUP group, composed of SPC Sisters, Employees and Alumni enplaned to the "**Land of the Free**" – **THAILAND**. It is the third country visited by the SPUP Family members after Vietnam in 2015 and Singapore in 2016. A jam-packed of activities filled the bucket of the participants as they explored the Kingdom of Thailand.

Gearing up the trail...

On board flight PR 730 on July 06, 2017, excitement enveloped the group as to what awaited them in their country of destination. Upon arrival and when checking-out process were completed, the tour began at the "heart" of Thailand - its capital city of Bangkok. Passing through the Democracy Monument, the SPUP group joined the throngs of people and walked towards the Grand Palace.

As Thailand is currently on the state of national mourning, it was fitting for the participants to

pay respect to the Monarch who bounded the country for the past many years – King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX). As the visit to the Grand Palace was an opportune time to pay homage as visitors, it was also a gesture of sympathy to the Thai people. In adherence to protocol, the participants also wore black as they toured the compound of the Grand Palace.



Walking through the complex of the Grand Palace, the place was indeed a sight to behold. Composed of voluminous buildings, copious halls, bounteous pavilions set around open lawns, gardens and courtyards; the Grand Palace displays asymmetrical elegance, eclectic styles, and decorative flair reflective of Thai culture and aspirations.

Within the expanse of the Grand Palace, lies the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew). The temple provided a glimpse of the religious belief upheld by the Thai Monarch through the years. Upon entering the sanctuary, foot wears were advised to be taken off. It was observed that praying to an image of Buddha; one must be in a seated position with the feet tucked behind pointing away from the icon. Subsequently, it is a sign of impudence when the soles of one's feet are aiming at the direction of the figure. As the SPUP participants willingly immersed themselves to the practice, the experience provided them enrichment to the interfaith dialogue and proactive ecumenism espoused by the University to its growing academic community.



Exiting from the Grand Palace area, the group passed by the Coronation or Throne Palace (Phra Maha Montein) and the Phra Thinang Chakri Maha Prasat Palace, which combined Thai and European architectural styles. The Grand Palace was enclosed by castellated fortification which served as defensive walls against invaders.



En route to Wat Pho (Temple of the Reclining Buddha), as weariness slowly engulfed the group, dark clouds were gradually forming in the skies. Yet, persistence to reach the tourist spot prompted all to move on. Enlisted by UNESCO as a Heritage Site, the SPUP team had a chance to marvel at the 46-meter long reclining Buddha. Accordingly, the image represents Buddha suffering from sickness and about to go in Nirvana. With his head on a cushion, supported by his right hand, Buddha is lying on the right flank. Along with the other tourists, the members passed around the image in order to have a full view of the Buddha.



While others were on respite and some still were at the Temple, shower rains began to intensify. It took a while for the rain to subside as the group quickly trod to where their bus was parked. On their way to Centrepoint Pratunam Hotel, a heavy down pour of rain covered Bangkok City. As the group reached their accommodation, everyone availed of their well-earned rest and comfort.

At night time, some went on to a gastronomic adventure; others, reward themselves with the luxury of Thai massage, and the rest enjoyed the amenities of the Hotel. These boosted the energy of participants for the engagement activities of the following day.

... Fostering partnership and collaboration

A sumptuous breakfast provided by the Hotel rolled up the activities on July 07, 2017. When everybody was ready, the SPUP team headed to Assumption University (AU) - Suvarnabhumi Campus.



AU and SPUP shared the same identity and heritage as both are Catholic Universities and their founding Congregations originated in France. AU is owned and administered by the Brothers of St. Gabriel, established by St. Louis Marie De Montfort in France; while, SPUP is founded by the Sisters of the SPC Congregation, instituted by Fr. Louis Chauvet, also in France.

As they entered the campus, the group was struck by the scenic view of the University. With Gothic-style and neo-baroque edifices, the entire school ground is situated in a nature-centered atmosphere. The ambience affirmed AU's moniker as a "University in the Park."



As the team alighted from the bus, they were warmly welcomed by the staff of AU's International Relations Office. They also graciously toured the group around the campus. The campus tour was highlighted by their visit to the St. Louis Marie de Monfort Chapel. AU's beautiful and spacious chapel is the Religious Center of the University. It serves as a multi-religion house of prayer, meditation, congregation, preaching, and for soul-searching pursuit of the true source of knowledge and life.



At the Rector's Hall of the University, the SPUP delegation was formally welcomed by Dr. Glen Chatalier, Director of AU's International Relations Office. In his welcome remarks, he referred to SPUP as *nóng* (Thai for Sister) of AU.



He embarked on to discuss the status and challenges of AU in their efforts towards internationalization by outlining AU's success indicators: *a) Vision and Mission of the university; b) Establishment of AU as an international university; c) Comprehensive understanding of internationalization, integrating international issues or global dimensions into the goals of AU such that all members in the university should be aware of global trends and appreciation of the diversity of other cultures; d) Internationalized curriculum; e) Faculty and team coordination strategy for teaching; f) Students' competitive skills; g) Facilities; h) International environment and international communities; i) Proficiency in other languages; j) Management, governance and leadership; k) Service delivery capabilities to work with different ethnics group of student and staff; l) International Recognition; and m) Quality Assurance.*



After Dr. Chatalier's presentation, the members of the SPUP Team were introduced by Dr. Allan Peejay Lappay. This was followed by an open forum and statements for possible academic partnership between AU with SPUP. The discussion also became an avenue for benchmarking activities and sharing of best practices. Towards the end, Dr. Chatalier mentioned that matters which were tackled will be brought to the attention of University authorities for the partnership between the two Universities to flourish and prosper.



Leaving AU gave the SPUP team a positive outlook and sustained hope as everyone anticipates the fruition of the joint venture of AU and SPUP.

... Learning the Tricks

On the road for almost two hours, the group was agitated on what lies on their next destination. At the Erawan Restaurant at Samphran Elephant Ground and Zoo, a buffet lunch was served to the group's delight.



Then they were led to the elephant show area set on a football-sized field with viewers sitting on a covered grandstand. They witnessed a funny and entertaining magic show as program starter before the giants took over. The Elephant Show, guided by a narration featured elephants as they perform dances, play soccer, and fight battles – portraying the great historical royal battle scene which they were used. After the presentation, the members bravely approach the beast of burden as they fed them, took pictures with them and rode on them.



The Crocodile Wrestling Show is not for faint-hearted. The group joined the crowd as they cheered and shrieked as the master crocodile catchers perform breath-taking stunts with the crocodiles as they avoided being crushed, and possibly dismembered, by the crocodile's powerful jaws.



As the curtain of the shows was brought down, the delegation was driven to Asiatique, a popular shopping area in the city composed of a night bazaar and a mall. Each tried to haggle for their chosen merchandise either for souvenir or pasalubong.

Though it rained again, upon reaching the Hotel, some started to pack their belongings; few explored the stalls nearby, while others went on to rest.

...Tailing the Tale

On the last day, July 08, 2017, as it was declared free time, everyone took advantage of the moment. Some continued their shopping spree whereas; others met with their Thai or Filipino friends. As the countdown began, one by one surrendered their room key and faced the group with a smile of satisfaction painted on their faces. Photo opportunities capped their stay at Centrepoint Pratunam Hotel.



At the Suvarnabhumi Airport, the flight-delay afforded a mood of laughter and storytelling as each shared their Thailand experience. At 6:00 PM (BKK Time), as PR 737 took off, the tale of SPUP's Thailand Tour closed its chapter.

But another adventure is waiting to unfold!



Our sincerest thanks to Sr. Merceditas Ang, SPC and the SPUP Administration for the opportunity.

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#ASEANTour #Thailand #Internationalization #SPUPat110

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