



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF BANGKOK

Our day began very early because we wanted to arrive at the Myanmar embassy early enough so that we did not have a long wait. Craig, Tim and I took a taxi and arrived an hour before they opened. There was small line. The reason we had to go to the Embassy was because Craig's visa was rejected and he was told that in order to get into the Burma/Myanmar, he had to personally go to Bangkok and go to the Embassy to apply. While we waited, I took a walk around the city while Craig and Tim sat on the street (see photo). Bangkok is a city of 13 million – that is about as many people who live in the entire state of Ohio. I have never been in a city that large. While we waited,

Craig talked with a man who was a Sikh and learned a lot from him. By 9:00 am the doors were open and we moved inside to sit for another hour inside. I could feel the tension in the air. When we went up to the window, they asked us to re-do most of our paperwork, to put "businessman" as my occupation instead of Social Worker and to pay them \$30.00+ each (US) for the visas. We were then told to come back on Tuesday. We explained to them we had booked a flight which leaves Wednesday morning but this didn't seem to matter. Craig is concerned that they may either deny us our visa's or tell us on Tuesday to come back another day. We took a taxi back to the Christian Hospitality House.

TOOLS OF OPPORTUNITY



Our second event of the day was very interesting and very inspirational. Last night, a few hours after we arrived in Bangkok, we had dinner with John and Kim Quinley who have been working to help the poor here for many years. They are an American couple and they work among the very poor by providing micro loans. John invited us to come and see the work they are doing so we took a taxi to meet him. After a wonderful lunch (and a Dunkin Donut coffee – my favorite), we went to the office of StepAhead and met their Thai staff. John explained to us their vision to help the very poor with enough funds to start or continue their small businesses. They have 665 clients (mostly women) that they loan money to at 3% to help them start small businesses. The clients must go through a four-week mandatory training and they must start with a small loan, pay it back and then graduate to a larger loan. These are people that the banks will usually not loan money to and people who have been paying as much as 20% interest to the 'loan sharks'. I was really impressed with how one couple has had such a broad impact on so many poor families. While organizations such as World Vision and Opportunity International practice the Gramine bank concepts developed by Mohammed Yunus (The Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2007) on a much larger scale, I was very encouraged to see the work of John and Kim called StepAhead ([www. Stepaheadmed.org](http://www.Stepaheadmed.org)) affecting the very poor in the slums of Bangkok. However, I was very inspired when John walked us through the slums of Bangkok and introduced us to several of their clients who were using their micro-loans to support their businesses and support their families. We walked through an area of the city where over 100,000 people live in poverty yet we saw HOPE in the eyes of those for whom the Step-Ahead program was impacting. I'm smiling!



Photos of the slums of Bangkok

