

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



Accepting the volunteer certificate from the Elephant Nature Park

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GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT

Naia Brandt of Downers Grove Travels to Thailand to Work with Elephants

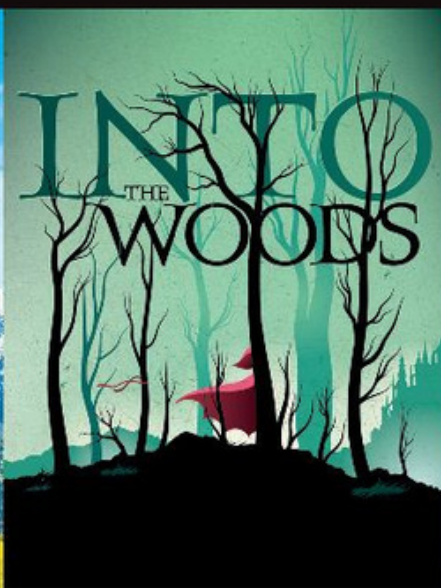
*Courtesy of Emily Dean, Assistant Director of Admissions of Loop Abroad
| Photos courtesy of Loop Abroad*

This summer, Naia Brandt, 21, of Downers Grove, Illinois, spent two weeks in Thailand helping animals, discovering Thai culture, and learning hands-on what it's like to be a veterinarian. Traveling with study-abroad organization Loop Abroad, Naia was selected as part of a small team that volunteered giving care at a dog shelter and spent a week working directly with rescued elephants at an elephant sanctuary.

The Loop Abroad Veterinary Service program brings students to Thailand for two weeks to volunteer alongside veterinarians from the US and Thailand. For one week, Naia and her team volunteered at the Elephant Nature Park in northern Thailand to work hands-on with the giant animals and learn about animal rescue and conservation on a larger



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Group photo after their "monk chat" in Chiang Mai

scale. The Elephant Nature Park is home to over 60 elephants who have been rescued from trekking, logging, or forced breeding programs. Many of them had been abused and suffer from chronic injuries or blindness. At the Elephant Nature Park, they are cared for by volunteers from all over the world. Naia helped to feed and care for elephants, as well as learn about their diagnoses alongside an elephant vet. The Elephant Nature Park is also home to over 1,000 animals, including cats, dogs, water buffalo, horses, and cows, and is sustained in huge part by the work of weekly volunteers like Naia.

For the other week, Naia learned from teaching veterinarians at the Dog Rescue Clinic in Chiang Mai, Thailand. While she studied under the veterinarians leading her group, Naia and her team made a difference in the lives of local dogs. By providing check-ups and cleanings, diagnosing and treating ear and eye problems, taking and testing blood, administering vaccines, cleaning and treating wounds, and helping with sterilization surgeries, the students were able to help support the health and well-being of these dogs while furthering their career goals.

Loop Abroad is the largest pre-veterinary study abroad program in the United States, hosting students in 9 countries on 6 continents throughout the year. Programs range from two weeks in summer to a full semester abroad, and college credit is available through the University of Findlay. Since 2009, Loop Abroad has specialized in pre-veterinary programs and helped students all over the world to pursue their dreams of a veterinary career. Interested participants can inquire or apply at www.LoopAbroad.com. Admission to veterinary programs is selective and Naia was selected based on her transcript, admissions essay, and professional references.

By following a study abroad model instead of a voluntourism model, Loop focuses on educating its students so that they can contribute and serve in meaningful ways. It also works with locally run animal welfare organizations so that students contribute to long-term improvement on the ground in the countries they visit. With programs around the globe,

Loop Abroad is able to support animal welfare and conservation around the world because of its students and their dedication to helping animals in need.

The program's Managing Director Jane Stine says, "Our students are really an amazing group of people. They are compassionate, flexible, driven, and dedicated, and it is always a wonderful experience to host them on their study abroad experience. I'm so proud of what they learn each year and the hard work that they do, and that this program allows us to provide important support to so many essential conservation programs around the world."

Of her trip, Naia says, "Being a part of such a huge community was absolutely incredible. Volunteering and learning with wonderful staff and meeting so many friendly people left me with invaluable memories that I will take with me into my future schooling and career. I could not recommend this program enough to anyone who is interested in veterinary medicine and studying abroad."

Naia is a senior at Grand Valley State University, majoring in Biology.



Enjoying a cooling rain at the Elephant Nature Park

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