

UTS Indigenous Students Build Global Perspectives Through Thailand Study Tour.

 In November 2024, a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) embarked on a transformative three-week study tour to Chiang Mai, Thailand – an experience that blended academic learning with deep cultural exchange.

Led by the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research and supported by the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan.

The three-week program gave students the opportunity to complete a university subject at Chiang Mai University. The subject, delivered in English and aligned with UTS's elective offerings, explored Thai society, history, education, and sustainability, offering valuable points of comparison with students' studies in areas such as education, health,

“The Jumbunna Admissions program was a great pathway as I didn't receive the ATAR; Jumbunna has been fantastic supporting me to academically succeed.”

communications, social justice, and Indigenous knowledges.

Structured classes were interwoven with field trips to Buddhist temples, the Smart Elephants Family sanctuary, and traditional hilltribe communities. These experiences extended the academic curriculum, giving students insight into ethical tourism, cultural preservation,

language revitalisation, and environmental stewardship, topics that mirror content from many UTS degrees.

A visit to the Smart Elephants Family, a sanctuary committed to sustainable elephant care, was a highlight. Students explored the sanctuary's ethical and conservation frameworks, prompting discussions around Indigenous connections to Country, land management, and animal kinship. These reflections were particularly powerful for students studying environmental science, Indigenous land rights, and community development.

Each learning experience was supported by structured group reflections, allowing students to draw connections between what they observed and their UTS coursework. Peer-to-peer discussions and yarning sessions created safe spaces



to process learning and deepen intercultural understanding.

“Programs like this show our students that learning doesn't stop at the classroom door,” said Maree Graham, Director, Indigenous Students & Community Engagement, who travelled with the group. **“They come back with a greater sense of confidence, leadership and awareness – not just of who they are, but of how they can contribute as Indigenous thinkers in a global space.”** Importantly, the tour was more than an academic exercise – it was also a chance to build confidence, connection, and cultural pride. Mentored by Jumbunna staff throughout the journey, students formed lasting friendships and support networks while, for some, navigating their first international learning experience.

All major costs – flights, accommodation, food, and in-country transport, were covered through the New Colombo Plan, with students only responsible for personal expenses. The program is open to UTS Indigenous students with an open elective subject available, and is designed to be inclusive, empowering, and accessible.

For Jumbunna and UTS, the Thailand Study Tour continues to embody a commitment to equity, global citizenship, and culturally grounded education. For the students who participated, it was an unforgettable chapter in their academic journey one that expanded their worldview and strengthened their voice as Indigenous scholars.



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