

# UConn student Mackenzie Woods of Bethpage, NY, Moves To Thailand to Study Animals

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This spring, Mackenzie Woods, 19, of Bethpage, NY, spent three months in Thailand helping animals and learning hands-on what it's like to be a veterinarian. Traveling on the selective Veterinary Semester Abroad hosted by study-abroad organization Loop Abroad, Mackenzie was part of a small team that learned alongside veterinarians from around the globe while volunteering with elephants, sea turtles and other marine life, zoo animals, and shelter dogs.

The Veterinary Semester Abroad program brings together undergraduate students from across the US and Canada to move their studies to Thailand for a semester so that they can work in small groups with veterinarians who specialize in different fields. Students are based in Chiang Mai, Thailand but travel through the country to see different shelters and sanctuaries, learn from local vets and scientists, and volunteer with a variety of species in need.

While they learned about veterinary medicine, conservation, and Thailand, Mackenzie and her team also helped by volunteering their time and skills. From hauling elephant food to monitoring anesthesia in dog surgeries, they helped to support and care for the animals of Thailand while improving their own skills so that they can help more animals in the future.

Some of Mackenzie's most interesting projects were volunteering at an elephant sanctuary and helping provide medical care for elephants, creating enrichment projects for zoo animals, and living on the island of Koh Tao for three weeks studying marine biology and helping to restore coral reefs and protect sea turtles. She also participated in an externship at a small animal hospital and helped care for dogs and cats in need at an animal shelter and clinic outside of Chiang Mai.

Mackenzie and her team also participated in a spay and neuter clinic for dogs in the rural villages in the mountains of Northern Thailand.

Admission to the Veterinary Semester Abroad is competitive and requires a demonstrated interest in animals, a solid academic transcript, an essay, academic references, and completion of college-level biology. Mackenzie was chosen as one of seven students to participate.



Loop Abroad has study abroad programs for students and young adults age 14 to 30, and offers financial aid and fundraising assistance. Their pre-veterinary programs in Asia and Africa support ethical animal treatment while helping students learn in an in-depth and hands-on way. Interested participants can inquire or apply at [www.LoopAbroad.com](http://www.LoopAbroad.com).

Of her trip, Mackenzie says, "This has easily been one of the most important choices I've made towards becoming a veterinarian. The experiences I've gained, whether it be intubating a dog or learning to restrain baby ostriches or even giving elephant vaccinations, have not only prepared me for vet school but have also taught me valuable lessons that I will use for the rest of my life."

Mackenzie is a sophomore at the University of Connecticut.