

## **Working at Lanta Animal Welfare's animal centre at Long Beach – a volunteer's experience**

My time at Lanta Animal Welfare (LAW) is something I will never forget. The friends I have made, both human and animal, the memories and the changes that I made are something that changed my life and I encourage everyone to take some time out of your travels, holidays or work to spend some time at LAW. Whether you are just visiting for a day and can walk a dog or you can dedicate a month or two at the Centre helping it run and caring for the awesome animals, it is all worth it. I spent a month at LAW with my boyfriend after travelling around Thailand, volunteering at other sanctuaries from dogs to elephants but spending a whole month at LAW beat all the days I spent at other places as it became my home, where the fun never stopped and the other volunteers became my family, and what an awesome team we were! I not only fell in love with Thailand and its lovely people but also the culture, food, weather, scenery... It really has it all and Lanta is one of the most diverse islands in all of Thailand. From towering cliff edges and rocky beaches to beautiful palm tree-lined sandy shores, a moped and free spirit is all you need to enjoy all it has to offer. No neon lights, all night raves or trouble here, just great food and great times! Your local could be the pub on the corner or a great little family run restaurant where you can get incredible Thai food for just your spare change. There's Greek, Thai, Italian, Chinese, Seafood, BBQ, fresh smoothies every morning and cocktails in a hammock at night. Need I go on?

Arriving at LAW can be quite daunting, even flying into Bangkok can be a culture shock of smells and sights you won't have experienced before and it can be an overwhelming experience especially for first time travellers. It is however a great stop on any traveller's itinerary and taking some time out to spend at LAW is something you will never forget. A day in the life of a general volunteer can include feeding the dogs and puppies, taking care of sick or injured animals, preparing food for the hungry cats, walking 1 or 2 dogs to the river for a splash by yourself or a group to the beach for a swim with friends. You might spend your whole day cuddling a newbie or hand feeding an abandoned puppy or maybe even catching strays! If there are lots of volunteers it can be great fun working together as a team but sometimes when in short supply you might find yourself running the ship with just one or two others and even helping out the vets like I did! I got the chance to work with some wonderful vets from Poland to Singapore and learnt a huge amount not only about caring for animals but also about other people's cultures and even about myself. It can be challenging but is totally rewarding. Living on site was one of the best bits as the fun just never stopped and I was able to play with the cats or just go and hang out with my favourite dog whenever I wanted. It can be tough at times though and I definitely had my fair share of cleaning up poo, scrubbing kennels and seeing some beautiful animals pass away. The best things you can bring with you to LAW are a strong stomach, kind heart and an open mind. You will get out as much as you put in, but with a willingness to work and a love for our four legged friends, you don't need to be an expert to change their lives and your own.

Every one of the dogs and cats has its own amazing personality. All the dogs are kept in four groups and spend the day socialising and walking together with their pack. The position of LAW is to sterilize

and treat animals, not to be a shelter for unwanted pets. Therefore all the animals are up for adoption. If you decide to go, some dogs may have (hopefully) been adopted by the time you get there but if you get a chance to meet any of these guys you are in for a treat!

There's kind-hearted Woody, his brother Oscar and cheeky sister Chilli who were found abandoned together and have grown up at the centre. They are always favourites among volunteers. It will take you a few days to get them to trust you but it's well worth the effort as they have so much love to give. Chilli's excited bark is something that still makes me smile. Tarzan, our 3 legged friend has his own stories to tell and it won't take you long to discover his love of cats! There's Queen B, Bones and her gang, Princess, Kisser and Michael who I could watch for hours play fighting and winding each other up. Lila and Mai Thai, the long standing ladies who may have had troubled pasts but only have love and cuddles to give now.

From Pumpkin the baby to the big bruiser of the group Dok Dek, and his best friend Owen, there will always be at least one furry friend who will steal your heart. Now the cats are a whole other bundle of fun, with at least 8 black cats, 6 black and white and many other colours to choose from, it will again be their awesome personalities that will stand out and keep you playing in the cat house for hours on end. Each one will find a special place in your heart and a nickname from Psycho Kitty to Moustache Kitty and Momma, Rosie and Drunken Kitty. You'll have your own nickname for each one by the end of your time there I'm sure! Now this is just one side of LAW - a short ride up the coast line you will find a whole other bunch of awesome cats, dogs and volunteers at Time for Lime where it all began! I'm sure I don't need to introduce you to this place but if you don't already know check out their website <http://www.timeforlime.net/>. This awesome bar and cookery school is what helps keep LAW running and as a volunteer it's where you will spend most of your nights drinking discounted chilli margaritas! Another great thing about my time at LAW was the after hours. If I wasn't doing the 'sleep in', keeping the dogs company at night, then I was out with the other volunteers at either Time for Lime doing a cooking class, discovering a new place or maybe even cooking together at the Centre with fresh ingredients from the local market!

My time at LAW is something I will treasure forever, along with my newfound friends, from South America to South East Asia, and all my furry friends who I am already saving up to adopt! It is hard work but totally rewarding and I will definitely be back one day.

So what's stopping you? If you're already heading to the beautiful country of Thailand, then stop by Koh Lanta and spend a month doing some good. Even if you are just looking for an alternative holiday, there are some of the best beaches and bars in Thailand here so the fun never stops. You can even be a flight volunteer and keep the good work going by flying one of the adopted dogs or cats back home with you to help them on their journey to their new loving homes.

Get in touch with Lanta Animal Welfare through their Facebook page or website

<http://www.lantaanimalwelfare.com/> and if you want to know more about my personal experience you can email me at [irmarosepettitt@gmail.com](mailto:irmarosepettitt@gmail.com)

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