

ISSUE 1 | APRIL 2025

# The Thailand Tide

 UWC THAILAND ALUMNI

## Once a Manta, Always a Manta.

Charting New Waters  
UWC Thailand Voices in Hong Kong  
Leading With Heart  
Finding My Voice

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# Welcome to The Thailand Tide

This is your space to stay connected, celebrate our shared stories, and strengthen the bond that makes the UWC Thailand community so special.

Whether you're near or far, we invite you to tell us where life has taken you—and to inspire the next generation by sharing your story at [alumni.office@uwcthailand.ac.th](mailto:alumni.office@uwcthailand.ac.th).



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# Charting New Waters

From UWC to Collegiate Success in  
Swimming and Science

by **Aniqah Gaffoor**, Class of '22 (Sri Lanka)

I am currently a junior at Lewis & Clark College, majoring in Biology and Health Studies and exploring a future in public health and physical therapy. Life after UWC has been different, but also incredibly fulfilling. I felt well-prepared for college—UWC laid a strong foundation, and the transition wasn't as difficult as I expected.

One of the things I've appreciated most is the opportunity to take classes I'm genuinely interested in, both within and beyond my major. During my time at UWC, I swam competitively and represented both the school and Sri Lanka. Now, I'm proud to be part of the Lewis & Clark varsity swim team, which has become a pivotal part of my college journey. The team has given me a second family and allowed me to continue a lifelong passion.

So far, my collegiate swimming career has been full of highlights: I've earned All-Conference honors, broken the school record, achieved several top 10 times, and was named a finalist for our Rookie of the Year award. I hope to keep swimming after college and will be aiming to qualify for another Olympics.

In essence, my time at Lewis & Clark has been amazing—it's helping shape my future career while giving me new experiences in the world of collegiate athletics.

# From Familiar to Unfamiliar

## How UWC Thailand Prepared Me for the Unexpected

by **Janandrea (Andrea) Meneghello**, Class of '24 (Italy)

**G**raduating from UWC Thailand in 2024, I'm now studying Biomedical Sciences at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom.

Leaving a school that was always welcoming, friendly, and constantly encouraging you to be your best self wasn't easy. Being so used to the environment of UWC Thailand made the adjustment even more challenging. However, one of the most important takeaways from my time there was learning to push myself, be open to new opportunities, and step outside my comfort zone. Those skills—and many others—have helped me navigate this unfamiliar new chapter.

For instance, when I first arrived at university, I was nervous about making friends and overwhelmed by the idea of starting fresh. I thought back to the start of Grade 11. Even though I had been a day student at UWC for over six years, I still remember feeling anxious about engaging with the 40+ new students arriving from all over the world. I told myself I already had a good group of friends and didn't need to branch out—but deep down, I knew that was just me avoiding discomfort.

Eventually, I stepped up. I remember orientation week clearly—trying to connect with new students, even though it was unfamiliar and sometimes tough without boarding life. Another day student and I made a commitment to show up to every event, even if it meant heading to school on the weekend. I'm so glad we did. I made lifelong friends that year—many of whom I still stay in touch with today.

So, when I arrived at university and found myself hesitating again, I reminded myself: I've done this before. I pushed myself to engage, and just like at UWC, I found great friends and community.

That said, I've also learned that it's easy to go into "cruise control" at university. Right before winter break, I realized I was just attending lectures and spending most of my time in my room. The opportunities here—especially leadership roles—are often reserved for older students, which is very different from the culture at UWC. But I remembered how rewarding it felt to try new things back then, so at the start of this semester, I decided not to let that stop me. Even if I'm not in a high-responsibility position, I've been taking on new experiences that I never thought I would try—and I've enjoyed every bit of it.

**“UWC Thailand taught me so much, not just academically, but about how to be the best version of myself.”**

It's only now, living this new university life, that I truly see how those values show up in my everyday experiences—and I'm so grateful for that.



# UWC Thailand Voices in Hong Kong

Life, University & Staying Connected

by **Iyla Davis**, Class of '23 (New Zealand), **Mariana (Mari) Da Ruos Garcia-Gil**, Class of '23 (Venezuela), and **Adriana (Adri) Zurita Pimentel**, Class of '23 (Bolivia).

**T**hree of our alum—Iyla, Mari, and Adri—answered questions and shared their experiences about studying and living in Hong Kong.

From academics and residential life to reconnecting with the UWC community and exploring the city's vibrant culture, they reflect on how UWC Thailand continues to shape their journey.



## Q How have you enjoyed the Hong Kong experience?

The Hong Kong experience is definitely a full-on one—very fast-paced and lively, with an interesting mix of international and local cultural influences. In trying to establish a healthy work-life balance, I've met so many wonderful people from diverse backgrounds, explored stunning wildlife and hiking trails, tried a bunch of new sports, and tasted a wide range of flavours from the local cuisine. I really do love Hong Kong—it never gets boring.

~ *lyla*



## Q What has life at university been like?

With a major in Interdisciplinary Studies concentrating in Sustainability, I have a lot of flexibility to shape my degree and choose from hundreds of courses. I've taken classes in geography, environmental science, physics, politics, business, and more. I'm able to focus on topics that truly interest and challenge me, which is exactly what I hoped for in a university experience.

That said, not having a home major has made it harder to build community in class. Most of my close friends are from my residential hall—a tight-knit community of about 200 students, more than half of whom are international. I've realised that having a strong support network really matters, especially since university tends to foster more independence and individual routines than high school.

~ *lyla*

## Q What do you do for fun?

In Hong Kong, the opportunities for fun are endless. The city is alive with cultural events year-round—food and film festivals, art exhibitions, themed orchestras, and concerts by international artists. As "Asia's world city," it's a hub for creativity and new talent. I love keeping an eye out for events and collecting as many experiences as I can.

My passion for crafts and art also has a perfect outlet here. From crochet to painting (with an unbelievable number of craft supply shops!), it's a relaxing escape from classes. Residential life adds to this—my hall hosts quirky events like making boba from scratch or clay figurine contests. These usually lead to hilarious moments as we all try something new.

Sports are another huge part of my experience. Whether you're a beginner or a pro, there's something for everyone. I've tried volleyball, rowing, and cheerleading—all welcoming, fun, and super rewarding. The mix of cultural events, creative workshops, and sports has made my time at HKU really fulfilling.

~ *Mari*



## Q Have you connected with other UWC alumni in Hong Kong?

Yes! I've had many chances to meet other UWC alumni and current students here in Hong Kong. HKU hosts an annual UWC alumni gathering for UWCLPC students, where we get to show them around and share experiences. It's a great way to connect and reflect on our shared backgrounds. Outside of events, I often bump into UWC alums in class or around the city. A lot of friendships started with a simple "Hey, you went to a UWC too?" One time, we even organised a dinner just to hang out and get to know each other better—it was a fantastic evening.

I also got to visit UWCLPC, which was such a joy. Meeting current students, joining their activities, and sharing advice about the IB felt like a full circle. UWC has a great reputation and presence in Hong Kong, which definitely helps when it comes to meeting people and building meaningful connections.

~ **Adri**

## Q Do you recommend Hong Kong to others?

Absolutely! Hong Kong is dynamic, vibrant, and full of life. There's always something going on—festivals, museums, restaurants, hikes, cultural activities—you name it. It's diverse, welcoming, and easy to make friends and feel at home.

My academic experience here has also been great. The professors are supportive, and my friend group is close. Both the university and residence halls offer loads of student-led events and chances to explore Hong Kong or even nearby countries. We have excellent resources for academics and wellbeing, which helps a lot when adjusting to university life.

Practical life is smooth too. The public transport system is incredibly efficient and affordable, and the healthcare system is reliable—my experience with university clinics and local hospitals has been positive. Plus, it's a very safe city, which makes a big difference when moving somewhere new. I'm genuinely happy with how everything has turned out, and I'd recommend Hong Kong to anyone considering it.

~ **Adri**



## Q Have you stayed connected to your UWCT friends?

Yes, absolutely. My UWCT friends have been a huge support system as I transitioned into university life. Whether it's through memes or video calls, we've managed to stay present in each other's lives throughout the week.

Of course, the frequency of contact changes—everyone has different schedules and responsibilities, and we're all forming new connections. But that doesn't lessen the care or gratitude we feel for each other. A funny bonus of being in a different time zone is that I always have someone to talk to when I'm up late working on a project—it's still daytime for them!

Adjusting to full independence can be tough, but knowing my friends are going through similar changes makes it easier to support each other and share advice.

~ **Mari**

## Q What do you wish you had known before moving to Hong Kong?

Honestly? I thought Hong Kong would be more affordable because it's close to Thailand... but now I pay 350 baht for a pad thai! I do miss the cheap meals at Green Shop and Mama's.

That said, Hong Kong is a paradise for foodies—you can find just about every cuisine imaginable here. So come and visit! The three of us would love to see you.

~ **Mari**

# Leading with Heart

A journey from Chiang Mai to service leadership in college.

by **Jurarat (Ice) Tarazi**, Class of '22 (Thailand)

Valentine's Day 2022 was a memorable experience for me—I spent it with friends instead of family for the first time. During February break, we took a trip to Chiang Mai, exploring different parts of Thailand, learning about Northern culture, and enjoying the beautiful nature. It was such a special few days, and I had so much fun being the tour guide for Elodia, Elise, and Mary.

Looking back, UWC Thailand helped me grow in so many ways. I discovered what I enjoy doing, learned new skills, and found the confidence to step outside my comfort zone. The opportunities I had during my time at UWC played a big part in shaping the path I'm now following in college.

At Ringling College of Art and Design, I'm part of a volunteer group that organizes beach clean-ups and supports local communities. I also had the chance to volunteer for three weeks at a summer camp for people with disabilities—an experience that was both meaningful and inspiring.

This journey led to me receiving the Emerging Service Leader Award, an honour given to a second-year student who demonstrates strong leadership through community service and contributions to the school. It recognises potential as a future leader within the Ringling community—and I'm proud to be part of that story.





# From Manta to Finance Freshman

UWC lessons, campus life, and finding her rhythm.

by *Ornkanya (Jill) Kaengkan, Class of '24 (Thailand)*

**S**tarting college at Lake Forest has been an exciting new chapter. I'm currently a freshman studying Economics with a concentration in Finance, and one of the highlights so far has been meeting nearly 300 UWC students from different campuses. Sharing our experiences and supporting one another has made this journey even more special.

One of the most important things I learned at UWC Thailand is the value of engaging with your community—interacting, contributing, and making a positive impact. It not only creates a more vibrant and enjoyable environment, but it also helps you discover more about yourself and develop new skills along the way.

At Lake Forest, I've joined several clubs including the Finance Club, the International Students Association, the Dance Crew, and the Musical. My advice to current students is this: while it's great to join activities that align with your career goals, don't forget to explore things that bring you joy or spark your curiosity. Even if you're unsure about something, give it a shot—you never know what you might discover about yourself.

I miss UWC so much—my friends, teachers, staff, and my host family. I'm incredibly grateful to have been part of such a supportive community, and I know I wouldn't be on this path without UWC and the generous donors who made my scholarship possible. **Once a Manta, always a Manta.**

# Finding my Voice

From UWCT to the studio, ELLE shares how music became her path to purpose and power.

by **Leigha (Elle) Francis**, Class of '20 (Jamaica)

**Q** What sparked your music journey, and how has it evolved?

I've been singing for as long as I can remember. Growing up in Jamaica, music was part of everyday life—family gatherings often turned into backyard performances. Still, I sometimes felt boxed in creatively, unsure how to fit into an industry so shaped by reggae's global presence.

Moving to UWC Thailand was a turning point. I pushed myself to get back on stage, and the supportive environment helped me rediscover my voice. With constant performance opportunities and encouragement from the community, I gained the confidence to keep going—eventually earning a vocal scholarship at PAPA, even without formal training.


After graduation, I took a gap year to focus on music, launched my stage name ELLE, and started sharing covers on Instagram and YouTube. I recorded in a studio for the first time and fully immersed myself in the creative process.


Now a senior at Middlebury College studying Dance and Film & Media Studies, I continue to grow as an artist. A semester in London helped refine my sound and led to the release of my first singles, "Give Me A Sign" and "Chance On Me."

Most recently, I released "Sugar Cane" as both a single and my film thesis, and I'm now working toward my debut EP, set to launch in June 2025.



**Find me on:**  
Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube Music

 soundsofelle

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## Q What's the story behind your upcoming EP?

My debut EP explores the stages of love—kind of like the stages of grief, but from a hopeless romantic's perspective. The project includes 7-8 songs capturing emotions and lessons from 23 years of living and loving. The next single, "EASE," will be released in late May or early June. This whole process has been about refining my voice, pushing my artistry, and creating something deeply personal and universally relatable.

## Q How did UWC Thailand influence your creative process?

UWCT gave me the courage to start again. That encouragement didn't end when I left—it carried me through my gap year and gave me the confidence to take my music seriously. The sense of belonging, the friendships, the storytelling through art—it all continues to shape how I create today.



## Q What have been your biggest challenges and most exciting moments?

### Challenges:

- Finding my sound took time. I wanted to honour my Jamaican roots but struggled to find artists I truly resonated with until studying in London.
- Songwriting used to overwhelm me—I'd overthink everything. I've since learned to let go of perfection and just write.
- Funding as an independent artist is tough. Studio time, mixing, visuals—it adds up. I've leaned on community support and called in many favours.
- Staying true to my vision in the face of industry pressure has been a learning curve, but I've learned to trust my voice and stay proud of what I create.

### Exciting moments:

- Discovering my sound and writing freely.
- Building a network of creatives and collaborators.
- Hearing someone sing my lyrics back to me.
- Learning to navigate the industry independently while staying true to my culture and identity.

## Q What message do you hope your music shares?

Music has always been medicine for me, and I want my songs to offer that same comfort to others. I want people—especially women—to feel seen and empowered. I also want to show that Jamaica is more than just Bob Marley and Usain Bolt. By working with Jamaican creatives, I hope to highlight the depth of talent on the island.

More than anything, I hope my music encourages people to embrace their full selves—fearlessly and unapologetically.





# Math, Markets, and Minnesota Weather

College updates, cold snaps, and a New York internship ahead.

by **Fortress Okorie**, Class of '23 (Nigeria)



**G**reetings from Minnesota, where we experience all four seasons in the span of a week! On Friday, we hit above 20°C for the first time since December—only to plunge back into negative temperatures on Saturday. At this point, I'm just looking forward to the day I can reliably wear shorts and flip-flops again.

I'm now over halfway through my second year of college, and it feels like I blinked and got here. I'm just one class away from finishing my math major (turns out taking nine math courses in two years speeds things up), so I've decided to add a second major in computer science—I'm already about a third of the way through. To keep things even more interesting, I'm also pursuing a minor in statistics and data science over the next two years.

This summer, I'll be interning as a Summer Analyst in the Global Markets Group at Société Générale in New York. If anyone's in the area and wants to meet up, let me know!

Hope you're all doing well—at least as well as we can be.

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We look forward to sharing your story next.  
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Good Heart, Balanced Mind, Healthy Body.