Daisuke Taira

I spent my summer placement with the Institute of Marine Science, Burapha University in Thailand. My host institution is located in Chonburi Province, on the eastern coast of the Upper Gulf of Thailand where there are growing conflicts over marine resources in the coastal areas (e.g. industrialisation, urbanisation, tourism, fisheries & aquaculture and agriculture). The institute has four research units; Biotechnology, Biodiversity, Environment and Aquaculture Units. I conducted a survey to investigate environmental impacts of oyster farms on macrobenthic communities, and although I was allocated to the Aquaculture Unit, I also had opportunities to work with people from the Biodiversity and Environment Units, which was great because it broadened my experience. For my project, I studied an oyster farm in the fishing village of Ang Sila. Here, all the farms are small-scale family-owned businesses which employ a semi-traditional hanging method for rearing oysters. Interestingly, the cultured oyster (*Saccostrea cucullata*) is not a local species but imported from other provinces (Rayong and Chantaburi). According to one of the oyster farmers this is because the shell of the local species is too hard to open up, although apparently the local species tastes better! Thai fish farmers are normally quite reluctant to allow people from outside their communities on to their farms, so I was lucky to gain access.

My placement provided a really good opportunity for me to challenge myself at conducting my own research project in a short period. The institute kindly provided me with all the equipment I needed for the work but I had to learn quickly how to use it (e.g. water sampler and Peterson’s grab) and how to perform the necessary analytical techniques. Likewise my species identification skills were also acquired quickly! My findings were very interesting as I found greater biodiversity inside the oyster farm than outside, however, this initial study
needs more extensive and long-term data to understand the mechanisms of physicochemical and biological processes. Hopefully someone (perhaps myself) will be able to conduct a further study in this area in the future.

The institute, I worked in has its own hatcheries for ornamental fish culture research and from these supplies the Bang Saen Aquarium with a great collection of local species. The Institute also performs a variety of other activities, and I participated in some of these during my Placement. For example I attended a workshop on Jellyfish ecology and culture methods and helped out on a mangrove reforestation project and a bamboo shark release event (the latter being collaboration with Thai Department of Fisheries). While I was there four injured sea turtles (3 hawksbill and 1 green) were brought to the institute from nearby areas. All stayed there for a while until they were well enough to be sent on to Royal Thai Navy for further recuperation.

I greatly enjoy my MSc Summer Placement. Thailand is a fabulous country with awesome people, smiles, food nature and everything! I very much enjoyed doing my surveys and chatting with other researchers about their work and views on environmental issues in Thailand. I also had some great conversations with them about life, the universe and everything, which all added to my wonderful experience this summer!!