

THAILAND GUIDES



Thailand is situated in the heart of the Southeast Asian mainland, covering an area of 513,115 sq.km and extending about 1,620 km from north to the south and 775 km from east to west. Thailand borders the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Union of Myanmar to the North, the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Gulf of Thailand to the East, the Union of Myanmar and the Indian ocean to the West, and Malaysia to the south.

The country comprises 76 provinces that are further divided into districts, sub-districts and villages. Bangkok is the capital city and also centre of political, commercial, industrial and cultural activities. Moreover, it is the seat of Thailand's revered Royal Family, with His Majesty the King recognised as Head of State, Head of the Armed Forces, Upholder of the Buddhist religion and Upholder of all religions.

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy with His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, or King Rama IX, the ninth king of the Chakri Dynasty, the present king. The King has reigned for more than half a century, making him the longest reigning Thai monarch. Thailand embraces a rich diversity of cultures and traditions. With its proud history, tropical climate and renowned hospitality, the Kingdom is a never-ending source of fascination and pleasure for international visitors.



People

Thais are well-known for their friendliness and hospitality. A large majority of over 62 million citizens of Thailand are ethnic Thai, along with strong communities

whose ethnic origins lie in China, India and elsewhere. About 7 million people reside in the capital city of Bangkok.

Thai (80%), Chinese (10%), Malay (3%), and the rest are minorities (Mons, Khmers, hill tribes) Ethnic Thais form the majority, though the area has historically been a migratory crossroads, and has thus produced a degree of ethnic diversity. Integration is such, however, that culturally and socially there is enormous unity.

The Thai can be broken down into various regional groups including the main Thai, northeastern, northern, and southern Thai with their own culture and ways of life. The main Thai culture has become more dominant due to official government policy which was designed to assimilate and unify the disparate Thai in spite of ethnologic unity.



Language

Spoken and written Thai is largely incomprehensible to the casual visitor. However, English is widely understood, particularly in Bangkok where it is almost the major commercial language. English and some European Languages are spoken in most hotels, shops and restaurants in major tourist destinations, and Thai-English road and street signs are found nationwide.

Central Thai or Thai Klang is the main Thai spoken language and is largely used nowadays. However, the dialects are exist in provincial parts with their commonly understandable Thai Klang. Religion: Buddhism (95%), Muslim (4%), others (1%)

Government

Thailand has had a constitutional monarchy since 1932, but all governments acknowledged The King as the chief of state. Parliament is composed of 2 houses, The House of Representatives and the Senate. Both representatives and senators are elected by the people. A prime minister elected from among the representatives leads the government. The country is divided into 76 provinces. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration comes under an elected governor. Appointed provincial governors administer the other 76 provinces (Changwat), which are divided into districts (Amphoe), sub-districts (Tambon) and villages (Mu Ban).

National Flag



The red, white, and blue stripes symbolize the nation, Buddhism, and the monarchy, respectively.

Code of Arm



Represented as Garuda; the mythical creature in Thai literature, usually seen in official documents or buildings.



Time

The time in Thailand is seven hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (+7 hours GMT).



Climate

Thailand enjoys a tropical climate with three distinct seasons-hot and dry from February to May (average temperature 34 degrees Celsius and 75% humidity); rainy with plenty of sunshine from June to October (average day temperature 29 degrees Celsius and 87% humidity); and cool from November to January (temperatures range from 32 degrees Celsius to below 20 degrees Celsius with a drop in humidity).

Much lower temperatures are experienced in the North and Northeast during nighttime. The South has a tropical rainforest climate with temperatures averaging 28 degrees Celsius almost all year round.

You can check for the Thailand weather at <http://www.tmd.go.th/en/>



Currency

The Thai currency is the Baht. There are 100 satangs in 1 baht. (B=baht). Notes are issued in denominations of B1000 (gray), B500 (purple), B100 (red), B50 (blue), B20 (green), and B10 (brown-rarely use now). There are 10, 5 and 1 baht coin, and 50 and 25 satang. Most foreign currencies and traveller cheques are easily changed at banks, hotels or moneychangers at the airport. All major credit cards are widely accepted throughout the kingdom.



For further information of Thai currency or exchange rate, please see Bank of Thailand, <http://www.bot.or.th>



Food



Thai food is eaten with a fork and spoon. Even single dish, such as fried rice with pork or steamed rice topped with roasted duck, is served in bite-sized slices or chunks obviating the need for a knife. The ideal Thai meal is a harmonious blend of the spicy, the subtle, the sweet and sour, and is meant to be equally satisfying to eye, nose and palate.

A typical meal might include a clear soup (perhaps bitter melons stuffed with minced pork), a steamed dish (mussels in curry sauce), a fried dish (fish with ginger), a hot salad (beef slices on a bed of lettuce, onions, chillies, mint and lemon juice) and a variety of sauces into which food is dipped. This would be followed by sweet desserts and/or fresh fruits such as mangoes, durian, jackfruit, papaya, grapes or melon.





Electricity

The electric current is 220 volt AC (50 cycles) throughout the country. Many different types of plugs and sockets are in use. Travellers with electric shavers, hair dryers, tape recorders and other appliances should carry a plug adapter kit. The better hotels will make available 110-volt transformers.



Tap water

Tap water is clean but drinking from it directly should be avoided. Bottled water is recommended.



Clothing

Light, cool clothes are sensible but a jacket is needed only for formal meetings and dining in top restaurants. Shorts (except knee length walking shorts), sleeveless shirts, tank tops and other beach-style attire are considered inappropriate dress when not actually at the beach or in a resort area.



Weights & Measures

The metric system is used throughout Thailand. Numerals on vehicle speed ohmmeters, highway markers and speed limits all indicate kilometres.



Driving in Thailand

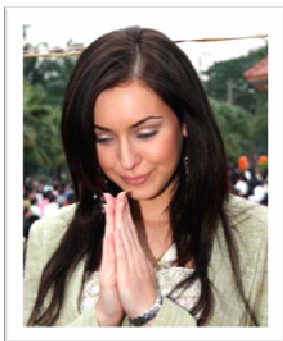
Traffic in Thailand drives on the left side of the road.

Most Thai drivers are well mannered, almost polite, be it up to a certain level. Despite this, traffic is rather hectic in and around busy Bangkok where calm driving is not really appreciated.

On many rural roads or even in Bangkok's small alleys, you will find motorcycles, cars and occasionally your 12 wheel trucks maneuvering against (one way) traffic. Driving around Thailand's country side at night is considered to be hazardous, especially on holidays and long weekends. There are no street light and the trucks or drunk driving are always seen.



Thai Greeting: The 'WAI'



This characteristic Thai way of greeting is one of the most, if not the most, beautiful ways of contact ever devised to promote understanding among human beings. Done well and gracefully, even for the umpteenth time by the same person to another person, the one being 'wai-ed to' cannot help but feel a certain warmth for the person 'wai-ing'. When being wai-ed to, you would be considered impolite if you didn't return or at least acknowledge the wai



Do's and Don't in Thailand

The Monarchy : Thai people have a deep, traditional reverence for the Royal Family, and a visitor should be careful to show respect for the King, the Queen and the Royal Children.

Religion : Visitors should dress neatly in all religious shrines. They should never go topless, or in shorts, hot pants or other unsuitable attire. It is acceptable to wear shoes when walking around the compound of a Buddhist temple, but not inside the chapel where the principal Buddha image is kept.

Each Buddha image, large or small, ruined or not, is regarded as a sacred object. Never climb onto one to take a photograph or do anything which might indicate a lack of respect. Buddhist monks are forbidden to touch or be touched by a woman, or to accept anything from the hand of one. If a woman has to give anything to a monk, she first hands it to a man, who then presents it.

Social Norms : Thais don't normally shake hands when they greet one another, but instead press the palms together in a prayer-like gesture called a wai. Generally a younger person wais an elder, who returns it.

Thais regard the head as the highest part of the body, literally and figuratively. Therefore, avoid touching people on the head and try not to point your feet at people or an object. It is considered very rude. Shoes should be removed when entering a private Thai home.

Public displays of affection between men and women are frowned upon.

Special Advice :

- Beware of unauthorised people who offer their services as guides.
- Observe all normal precautions as regards to personal safety, as well as the safety of your belongings. Walking alone on quiet streets or deserted areas is not recommended. Be sure that all your valuables—money, jewellery, and airline tickets—are properly protected from loss.
- Drop your garbage into a waste container. The fine will be imposed on a person who spits, discards cigarette stubs, or drops rubbish in public areas.
- Do not get yourself involved with drugs. Penalties for drug offences are very severe in Thailand.
- Do not support any manner of wild animal abuse. Never purchase any products or souvenirs made from wild animals including reptiles like snakes, monitor lizards, and also turtle shell and ivory. Avoid patronizing local restaurants that serve wild animal delicacies. It is against the law to slaughter wildlife for food in Thailand.



National public holidays in Thailand

The Thai Calendar has adopted the western calendar to divide the year into days, weeks and months, using Thai names for these units. Years are numbered according to the Buddhist Era (BE) which commenced 543 years before the Christian era. For example, 2003 AD is BE 2546 and 2004 is BE 2547.

National public holidays Thailand's national public holidays are linked to religious or agricultural traditions and follow the lunar calendar, therefore the dates for some of the holidays change each year.

- New Year's Day : Jan 1
- Makha Bucha Day : late January to early March
- Chakri Day : April 6
- Songkran Day (Thai New Year) : April 13
- National Labour Day : May 1
- Coronation Day : May 5
- Visakha Bucha Day : May
- Asanha Bucha Day : July
- Khao Phansa (Buddhist Lent) : July
- HM the Queen's Birthday : August 12
- Chulalongkorn Day : October 23
- HM the King's Birthday : December 5
- Constitution Day : December 10
- New Year's Eve : December 31

