

Thonburi Kingdom

Modernization and centralization

Constitutional monarchy, World War II, and Cold War

Contemporary history

Politics and government

Lèse majesté

Geography

Climate

Environment

Wildlife

Administrative divisions

Regions

Southern region

Foreign relations

Armed forces

Education

Science and technology

Internet

Economy

Recent economic history

Income, poverty and wealth

Exports and manufacturing

Transportation

Tourism

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Energy

Informal economy

Demographics

Ethnic groups

Population centres

Language

Religion

Health

Culture

Art

Architecture

Cuisine

Units of measurement

Sports

Sporting venues

See also

Notes

References

	0.01% Unaffiliated ^[7]
Demonym(s)	Thai <div>Siamese (archaic)</div>
Government	Unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchy
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">MonarchPrime Minister</div>	Maha Vajiralongkorn <div>Prayut Chan-o-cha</div>
Legislature	National Assembly
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Upper houseLower house</div>	Senate <div>House of Representatives</div>
Formation	
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Sukhothai KingdomAyutthaya KingdomThonburi KingdomRattanakosin KingdomConstitutional monarchyCurrent constitution</div>	1238–1448 <div>1351–1767</div> <div>1768–1782</div> <div>6 April 1782</div> <div>24 June 1932</div> <div>6 April 2017</div>
Area	
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Total</div>	513,120 km ² (198,120 sq mi) (50th)
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Water (%)</div>	0.4 (2,230 km ²)
Population	
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">2018 estimate2010 censusDensity</div>	69,428,453 ^[8] ^[9] (20th) <div>64,785,909^[10]</div> <div>132.1/km² (342.1/sq mi) (88th)</div>
GDP (PPP)	2019 estimate
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">TotalPer capita</div>	\$1.390 trillion ^[11] <div>\$20,474^[11]</div>
GDP (nominal)	2019 estimate
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">TotalPer capita</div>	\$516 billion ^[11] ^[12] <div>\$7,607^[11]^[12]</div>
Gini (2015)	36 ^[13] <div>medium</div>
HDI (2018)	▲ 0.765 ^[14] <div>high · 77th</div>
Currency	Baht (฿) (THB)
Time zone	UTC+7 (ICT)
Driving side	left
Calling code	+66
ISO 3166 code	TH
Internet TLD	.th · .ไทย

Etymology

Thailand (/ˈtalaɪnd/ *TY-land* or /ˈtælənd/ *TY-lənd*;^[20] Thai: ประเทศไทย, RTGS: *Prathet Thai*, pronounced [pratêːt tāj] (listen)), officially the Kingdom of Thailand (Thai: ราชอาณาจักรไทย, RTGS: *Ratcha-anachak Thai* [râːtʰtʰāʔaːnaːtʰtʰāk tāj](listen), Chinese: 泰国), formerly known as Siam (Thai: สยาม, RTGS: *Sayam* [saj ǎːm]), is a country at the centre of the Indochinese peninsula in Southeast Asia.

Etymology of *Siam*

The country has always been called *Mueang Thai* by its citizens. By outsiders, prior to 1949 it was usually known by the exonym *Siam* (Thai: สยาม RTGS: *sayam*, pronounced [saj ǎːm], also spelled *Siem*, *Syâm*, or *Syâma*). The word *Siam* may have originated from Pali (*suvaabhūmi*, 'land of gold') or Sanskrit श्यामा (*Śyāma*, 'dark') or Mon ၵမာ (rhmanña, 'stranger'). The names *Shan* and *A-hom* seem to be variants of the same word. The word *Śyāma* is possibly not its origin, but a learned and artificial distortion.^[21] Another theory is the name derives from Chinese: "Ayutthaya emerged as a dominant centre in the late fourteenth century. The Chinese called this region Xian, which the Portuguese converted into Siam."^{[22]:8} A further possibility is that Mon-speaking peoples migrating south called themselves *syem* as do the autochthonous Mon-Khmer-speaking inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula.

The signature of King Mongkut (r. 1851–1868) reads *SPPM* (Somdet Phra Poramenthra Maha) *Mongkut Rex Siamensium* (Mongkut King of the Siamese), giving the name *Siam* official status until 24 June 1939 when it was changed to "Thailand".^[23] Thailand was renamed *Siam* from 1946 to 1948, after which it again reverted to "Thailand".



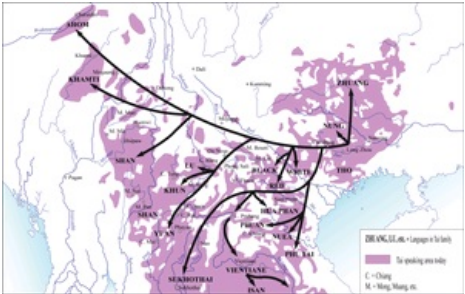
Etymology of "Thailand"

According to George Cœdès, the word *Thai* (ไทย) means 'free man' in the Thai language, "differentiating the Thai from the natives encompassed in Thai society as serfs".^{[24]:197} A famous Thai scholar argued that Thai (ไท) simply means 'people' or 'human being', since his investigation shows that in some rural areas the word "Thai" was used instead of the usual Thai word *khon* (คน) for people.^[25] According to Michel Ferlus, the ethnonyms Thai-Tai (or Thay-Tay) would have evolved from the etymon **k(ə)ri*: 'human being' through the following chain: **kəri*: > **kəli*: > **kədi*:*/*kədaɰ* > **di*:*/*daɰ* > **daɰ*^A (Proto-Southwestern Tai) > *taj*^{A2} (in Siamese and Lao) or > *taj*^{A2} (in the other Southwestern and Central Tai languages classified by Li Fangkuei).^[26] Michel Ferlus's work is based on some simple rules of phonetic change observable in the Sinosphere and studied for the most part by William H. Baxter (1992).^[27]

While Thai people will often refer to their country using the polite form *prathet Thai* (Thai: ประเทศไทย), they most commonly use the more colloquial term *mueang Thai* (Thai: เมืองไทย) or simply *Thai*; the word *mueang*, archaically referring to a city-state, is commonly used to refer to a city or town as the centre of a region. *Ratcha Anachak Thai* (Thai: ราชอาณาจักรไทย) means 'kingdom of Thailand' or 'kingdom of Thai'. Etymologically, its components are: *ratcha* (Sanskrit: राजा, *rājan*, 'king, royal, realm'); *-ana-* (Pali *āṇā* 'authority, command, power', itself from the Sanskrit *āññā*, of the same meaning) *-chak* (from Sanskrit *cakra*- 'wheel', a symbol of power and rule). The Thai National Anthem (Thai: เพลงชาติ), written by Luang Saranupraphan during the patriotic 1930s, refers to the Thai nation as *prathet Thai* (Thai: ประเทศไทย). The first line of the national anthem is: *prathet thai ruam lueat nuea chat chuea thai* (Thai: ประเทศไทยรวมเลือดเนื้อชาติเชื้อไทย), 'Thailand is the unity of Thai flesh and blood'.

History

Prehistory



Map showing geographic distribution of Tai-Kadai linguistic family. Arrows represent general pattern of the migration of Tai-speaking tribes along the rivers and over the lower passes.^{[28]:27}

There is evidence of continuous human habitation in present-day Thailand from 20,000 years ago to the present day.^{[29]:4} The earliest evidence of rice growing is dated at 2,000 BCE.^{[28]:4} Bronze appeared circa 1,250–1,000 BCE.^{[28]:4} The site of Ban Chiang in northeast Thailand currently ranks as the earliest known center of copper and bronze production in Southeast Asia.^[30] Iron appeared around 500 BCE.^{[28]:5} The Kingdom of Funan was the first and most powerful Southeast Asian kingdom at the time (2nd century BCE).^{[29]:5} The Mon people established the principalities of Dvaravati and Kingdom of Hariphunchai in the 6th century. The Khmer people established the Khmer empire, centered in Angkor, in the 9th century.^{[29]:7} Tambralinga, a Malay state controlling trade through the Malacca Strait, rose in the 10th century.^{[29]:5} The Indochina peninsula was heavily influenced by the culture and religions of India from the time of the Kingdom of Funan to that of the Khmer Empire.^[31]

The Thai people are of the Tai ethnic group, characterized by common linguistic roots.^{[32]:2} Chinese chronicles first mention the Tai peoples in the 6th century BCE. While there are many assumptions regarding the origin of Tai peoples, David K. Wyatt, a historian of Thailand,

argued that their ancestors which at the present inhabit Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, India, and China came from the *Điễn Biên Phủ* area between the 5th and the 8th century.^{[32]:6} Thai people began migrating into present-day Thailand around the 11th century, which Mon and Khmer people occupied at the time.^[33] Thus Thai culture was influenced by Indian, Mon, and Khmer cultures.^[34]

According to French historian George Cœdès, "The Thai first enter history of Farther India in the eleventh century with the mention of *Syam* slaves or prisoners of war in Champa epigraphy, and "in the twelfth century, the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat" where "a group of warriors" are described as *Syam*.^{[24]:190–191,194=195}

Early states

After the decline of the Khmer Empire and Kingdom of Pagan in the early-13th century, various states thrived in their place. The domains of Tai people existed from the northeast of present-day India to the north of present-day Laos and to the Malay peninsula.^{[32]:38–9} During the 13th century, Tai people had already settled in the core land of Dvaravati and Lavo Kingdom to Nakhon Si Thammarat in the south. There are, however, no records detailing the arrival of the Tais.^{[32]:50–1}

Sukhothai Kingdom

Around 1240, Pho Khun Bang Klang Hao, a local Tai ruler, rallied the people to rebel against the Khmer. He later crowned himself the first king of Sukhothai Kingdom in 1238.^{[32]:52–3} Mainstream Thai historians count Sukhothai as the first kingdom of Thai people. Sukhothai expanded furthest during the reign of Ram Khamhaeng (r. 1279–1298). However, it was mostly a network of local lords who swore fealty to Sukhothai, not directly controlled by it.^{[32]:55–6} He is believed have invented Thai script and Thai ceramics were an important export in his era. Sukhothai embraced Theravada Buddhism in the reign of Maha Thammaracha I (1347–1368).

To the north, Mangrai, who descended from a local ruler lineage of Ngoenyang, founded the kingdom of Lan Na in 1292, centered in Chiang Mai. He unified the surrounding area and his dynasty would rule the kingdom continuously for the next two centuries. He also created a network of states through political alliances to the east and north of the Mekong.^{[22]:8} While in the port in Lower Chao Phraya Basin, a federation around Phetchaburi, Suphan Buri, Lopburi, and the Ayutthaya area was created in the 11th century.^{[22]:8}

Ayutthaya Kingdom

According to the most widely accepted version of its origin, the Ayutthaya Kingdom rose from the earlier, nearby Lavo Kingdom and Suvarnabhumi with Uthong as its first king. Ayutthaya was a patchwork of self-governing principalities and tributary provinces owing allegiance to the King of Ayutthaya under the mandala system.^{[35]:355} Its initial expansion was through conquest and political marriage. Before the end of the 15th century, Ayutthaya invaded the Khmer Empire three times and sacked its capital Angkor.^{[36]:26} Ayutthaya then became a regional power in place of the Khmer. Constant interference of Sukhothai effectively made it a vassal state of Ayutthaya and it was finally incorporated into the kingdom. Borommatrailokkanat brought about bureaucratic reforms which lasted into the 20th century and created a system of social hierarchy called *sakdina*, where male commoners were conscripted as corvée labourers for six months a year.^{[37]:107} Ayutthaya was interested in the Malay peninsula, but failed to conquer the Malacca Sultanate which was supported by the Chinese Ming Dynasty.^{[29]:11, 13}

European contact and trade started in the early-16th century, with the envoy of Portuguese duke Afonso de Albuquerque in 1511, followed by the French, Dutch, and English. Rivalry for supremacy over Chiang Mai and the Mon people pitted Ayutthaya against the Burmese Kingdom. Several wars with its ruling dynasty Taungoo Dynasty starting in the 1540s in the reign of Tabinshwehti and Bayinnaung were ultimately ended with the capture of the capital in 1570.^{[37]:146–7} Then was a brief period of vassalage to Burma until Naresuan proclaimed independence in 1584.^{[22]:11}



Painting by Johannes Vingboons of Ayutthaya, c. 1665

Ayutthaya then sought to improve relations with European powers for many successive reigns. The kingdom especially prospered during cosmopolitan Narai's reign (1656–1688) when some European travelers regarded Ayutthaya as an Asian great power, alongside China and India.^{[28]:ix} However, growing French influence later in his reign was met with nationalist sentiment and led eventually to the Siamese revolution of 1688.^{[37]:185–6} However, overall relations remained stable, with French missionaries still active in preaching Christianity.^{[37]:186}

After that, there was a period of relative peace but the kingdom's influence gradually waned, partly due to bloody struggles over each succession, until the capital Ayutthaya was destroyed in 1767 by Burma's new Alaungpaya dynasty.

Thonburi Kingdom

Sukhothai Kingdom



Sukhothai and neighbours, end of 13th century CE.

Phra Achana, Wat Si Chum, Sukhothai Historical Park.



The ruins of Wat Mahathat, Sukhothai Historical Park.

Ayutthaya Kingdom



Ayutthaya and neighbours, c. 1540 CE.

Wat Phra Si Sanphet, Ayutthaya Historical Park.



Elephant battle between Naresuan the Great and Mingyi Swa, The Burmese–Siamese War (1584–1593).

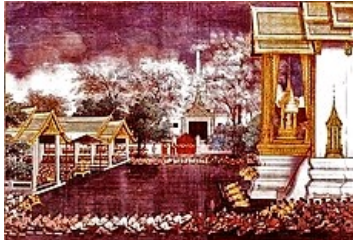
Thonburi Kingdom



Siam's territory, during Taksin's reign.



Statue of King Taksin the Great, Chantaburi.



Taksin the Great enthroned himself as a Thai king, 1767-12-28.

In 1767, after dominating southeast Asia for almost 400 years, the Ayutthaya kingdom was destroyed. The royal palace and the city were burnt to the ground. The territory was occupied by the Burmese army and local leaders declared themselves overlords including the lords of Sakwangburi, Pimai, Chanthaburi, and Nakhon Si Thammarat. Chao Tak, a capable military leader, proceeded to make himself a lord by right of conquest, beginning with the legendary sack of Chanthaburi. Based at Chanthaburi, Chao Tak raised troops and resources, and sent a fleet up the Chao Phraya to take the fort of Thonburi. In the same year, Chao Tak was able to retake Ayutthaya from the Burmese only seven months after the fall of the city.^[38]

Anarchy followed the destruction of the former capital. Taksin rose to power and proclaimed Thonburi as temporary capital in the same year. He also quickly subdued the other warlords. His forces engaged in wars with Burma, Laos, and Cambodia, which successfully drove the Burmese out of Lan Na in 1775,^{[37]:225} captured Vientiane in 1778^{[37]:227–8} and tried to install a pro-Thai king in Cambodia in the 1770s. In his final years there was a coup, caused supposedly by his "insanity", and eventually Taksin and his sons were executed by longtime companion General Chao Phraya Chakri (the future Rama I). He was the first king of the ruling Chakri Dynasty and founder of the Rattanakosin Kingdom on 6 April 1782.

Modernization and centralization

Under Rama I (1782–1809), Rattanakosin successfully defended against Burmese attacks and put an end to Burmese incursions. He also created suzerainty over large portions of Laos and Cambodia.^[39] In 1821, Briton John Crawford was sent to negotiate a new trade agreement with Siam — the first sign of an issue which was to dominate 19th century Siamese politics.^[40] Bangkok signed the Burney Treaty in 1826,

after the British victory in the First Anglo-Burmese War.^{[37]:281} Anouvong of Vientiane, who misunderstood that Britain was about to attack Bangkok, started the Lao rebellion in 1826 and was defeated.^{[37]:283–5} Vientiane was destroyed and a large number of Lao people was relocated to Khorat Plateau as a result.^{[37]:285–6} Bangkok also waged several wars with Vietnam, where Bangkok successfully regained influence over Cambodia.^{[37]:290–2}

From the late-19th century, Siam tried to rule the ethnic groups in the realm as colonies.^{[37]:308} In the reign of Mongkut (1851–1868), who recognized the threat of Western powers, his court contacted the British government directly to defuse tensions.^{[37]:311} A British mission led by Sir John Bowring, Governor of Hong Kong, led to the signing of the Bowring Treaty, the first of many unequal treaties with Western countries. This, however, brought trade and economic development in Bangkok.^[41] The unexpected death of Mongkut from malaria led to the reign of Prince Chulalongkorn, with Somdet Chaophraya Sri Suriwongse (Chuang Bunnag) acting as regent.^{[37]:327}

Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910) initiated centralization, set up a privy council, and abolished slavery and the corvée system.^[37] The Front Palace crisis of 1874 stalled attempts at reform.^{[37]:331–3} In the 1870s and 1880s, he incorporated the protectorate up north into the kingdom proper, which later expanded to the protectorate in the northeast and the south.^{[37]:334–5} He established twelve *krom* in 1888, which were equivalent to present-day ministries.^{[37]:347} The crisis of 1893 erupted, caused by French demands for Lao territory east of Mekong.^{[37]:350–3} Thailand is the only Southeast Asian nation not to have been colonized by a Western power,^[42] in part because Britain and France agreed in 1896 to make the Chao Phraya valley a buffer state.^[43] Not until the 20th century could Siam renegotiate every unequal treaty dating from the Bowring Treaty, including extraterritoriality, but it had to pay with many territorial exchanges. The advent of the *monthon* system marked the creation of the modern Thai nation-state.^{[37]:362–3} In 1905, there were rebellions in the ancient Pattani area, Ubon Ratchathani, and Phrae in opposition to an attempt to blunt the power of local lords.^{[37]:371–3}

The Palace Revolt of 1912 was a failed attempt by Western-educated military officers to overthrow the absolute monarchy.^{[37]:397} Vajiravudh (r. 1910–1925) responded by propaganda for the entirety of his reign.^{[37]:402} He promoted the idea of the Thai nation.^{[37]:404} In 1917, Siam joined World War I on the side of the Allies as there were concerns that the Allies might punish neutral countries and refuse to amend past unequal treaties.^{[37]:407} In the aftermath Siam joined the Paris Peace Conference, and gained freedom of taxation and the revocation of extraterritoriality.^{[37]:408}

Constitutional monarchy, World War II, and Cold War

A bloodless revolution took place in 1932, carried out by the Khana Ratsadon group of military and civilian officials, resulting in a transition of power, when Prajadhipok was forced to grant the people of Siam their first constitution, thereby ending centuries of absolute monarchy. The combined results of economic hardships brought on by the Great Depression, sharply falling rice prices, and a significant reduction in public spending caused discontent among aristocrats.^{[29]:25} In 1933, A counter-revolutionary rebellion occurred which aimed to reinstate absolute monarchy, but failed.^{[37]:446–8} Prajadhipok's conflict with the government eventually led to abdication. The government selected Ananda Mahidol, who was studying in Switzerland, to be the new king.^{[37]:448–9}

Later that decade, the military wing of Khana Ratsadon came to dominate Siamese politics. Plaek Phibunsongkhram who became premier in 1938, started political oppression and took an openly anti-royalist stance.^{[37]:457} His government adopted nationalism and Westernization, anti-Chinese and anti-French policies.^{[29]:28} In 1940, there was a decree changing the name of the country from "Siam" to "Thailand". In 1941,



Siamese territorial concessions to Britain and France by year.



King Chulalongkorn with Tsar Nicholas II in Saint Petersburg, during his first Grand Tour in 1897.

Thailand was in a brief conflict with Vichy France resulting in Thailand gaining Lao and Cambodian territories.^{[37]:462} On 8 December 1941, the Empire of Japan launched an invasion of Thailand, and fighting broke out shortly before Phibun ordered an armistice. Japan was granted free passage, and on 21 December Thailand and Japan signed a military alliance with a secret protocol, wherein Tokyo agreed to help Thailand regain territories lost to the British and French.^[44] The Thai government declared war on the United States and the United Kingdom.^{[37]:465} The Free Thai Movement was launched both in Thailand and abroad to oppose the government and Japanese occupation.^{[37]:465–6} After the war ended in 1945, Thailand signed formal agreements to end the state of war with the Allies. Most Allied powers had not recognized Thailand's declaration of war.

In June 1946, young King Ananda was found dead under mysterious circumstances. His younger brother Bhumibol Adulyadej ascended to the throne. Thailand joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) to become an active ally of the United States in 1954.^{[37]:493} Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat launched a coup in 1957, which removed Khana Ratsadon from politics. His rule (premiership 1959–1963) was autocratic; he built his legitimacy around the god-like status of the monarch and by channeling the government's loyalty to the king.^{[37]:511} His government improved the country's infrastructure and education.^{[37]:514} After the US joined the Vietnam War in 1961, there was a secret agreement wherein the US promised to protect Thailand.^{[37]:523}



Coronation of King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

The period brought about increasing modernisation and Westernisation of Thai society. Rapid urbanization occurred when the rural populace sought work in growing cities. Rural farmers gained class consciousness and were sympathetic to the Communist Party of Thailand.^{[37]:528} Economic development and education enabled the rise of a middle class in Bangkok and other cities.^{[37]:534} In October 1971, there was a large demonstration against the dictatorship of Thanom Kittikachorn (premiership 1963–1973), which led to civilian casualties.^{[37]:541–3} Bhumibol installed Sanya Dhamasakti (premiership 1973–1975) to replace him, making it the first time that the king intervened in Thai politics directly since 1932.^[45] The aftermath of the event marked a short-lived parliamentary democracy,^[45] often called the "era when democracy blossomed." (ยุคประชาธิปไตยเบ่งบาน)

Contemporary history

Constant unrest and instability, as well as fear of a communist takeover after the fall of Saigon, made some ultra-right groups brand leftist students as communists.^{[37]:548} This culminated in the Thammasat University massacre in October 1976.^{[37]:548–9} A coup d'état on that day brought Thailand a new ultra-right government, which cracked down on media outlets, officials, and intellectuals, and fueled the communist insurgency. Another coup the following year installed a more moderate government, which offered amnesty to communist fighters in 1978. The communists abandoned the insurgency by 1983. Thailand had its first elected prime minister in 1988.^[46]

Suchinda Kraprayoon, who was the coup leader in 1991 and said he would not seek to become prime minister, was nominated as one by the majority coalition government after the 1992 general election. This caused a popular demonstration in Bangkok, which ended with a military crackdown. Bhumibol intervened in the event and Suchinda then resigned.

The 1997 Asian financial crisis originated in Thailand and ended the country's 40 years of uninterrupted economic growth.^{[47]:3} Chuan Leekpai's government took an IMF loan with unpopular provisions.^{[37]:576} The populist Thai Rak Thai party, led by prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, governed from 2001 until 2006. His policies were successful in reducing rural poverty^[48] and initiated universal healthcare in the country.^[49] A South Thailand insurgency escalated starting from 2004. The 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami hit the country, mostly in the south. Massive protests against Thaksin led by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) started in his second term as prime minister and his tenure ended with a coup d'état in 2006. The junta installed a military government which lasted a year.



United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship, Red Shirts, protest in 2010

In 2007, a civilian government led by the Thaksin-allied People's Power Party (PPP) was elected. Another protest led by PAD ended with the dissolution of PPP, and the Democrat Party led a coalition government in its place. The pro-Thaksin United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) protested both in 2009 and in 2010.

After the general election of 2011, the populist Pheu Thai Party won a majority and Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's younger sister, became prime minister. The People's Democratic Reform Committee organized another anti-Shinawatra protest^[c] after the ruling party proposed an amnesty bill which would benefit Thaksin.^[50] Yingluck dissolved parliament and a general election was scheduled, but was invalidated by the Constitution Court. The crisis ended with another coup d'état in 2014, the second coup in a decade.^[d] The National Council for Peace and Order, a military junta led by General Prayut Chan-o-cha, has led the country since. Civil and political rights were restricted, and the country saw a surge in lèse-majesté cases. Political opponents and dissenters were sent to "attitude adjustment" camps.^[51] Bhumibol, the longest-reigning Thai king, died in 2016, and his son Vajiralongkorn ascended to the throne. The referendum and adoption of Thailand's current constitution happened under the junta's rule.^[e] In 2019, the junta agreed to schedule a general election in March.^[51] Prayut continued his premiership with the support of Palang Pracharath Party-coalition in the House and junta-appointed Senate, amid allegations of election fraud.^[53]

Politics and government

Prior to 1932, Thai kings were absolute monarchs. During Sukhothai Kingdom, the king was seen as a *Dharmaraja* or 'king who rules in accordance with Dharma'. The system of government was a network of tributaries ruled by local lords. Modern absolute monarchy and statehood was established by Chulalongkorn when he transformed the decentralized protectorate system into a unitary state. On 24 June 1932, Khana Ratsadon (People's Party) carried out a bloodless revolution which marked the beginning of constitutional monarchy.



Vajiralongkorn
King since 2016



Prayut Chan-o-cha
Junta leader and
appointed Prime
Minister since 2014

Thailand has had 20 constitutions and charters since 1932, including the latest and current 2017 Constitution. Throughout this time, the form of government has ranged from military dictatorship to electoral democracy.^{[54][55]} Thailand has had the fourth-most coups in the world.^[56] "Uniformed or ex-military men have led Thailand for 55 of the 83 years" between 1932 and 2009.^[57] Since May 2014, Thailand has been ruled by a military junta, the National Council for Peace and Order.

The politics of Thailand is conducted within the framework of a constitutional monarchy, whereby a hereditary monarch is head of state. The current King of Thailand is Vajiralongkorn (or Rama X), who has reigned since October 2016. The powers of the king are limited by the constitution and he is primarily a symbolic figurehead. The monarch is head of the armed forces and is required to be Buddhist as well as the Defender of the Faith. He has the power to appoint his heirs, the power to grant pardons, and the royal assent. The king is aided in his duties by the Privy Council of Thailand. However, the monarch still occasionally intervenes in Thai politics, as all constitutions pave the way for customary royal rulings. The monarchy is widely revered and

lèse majesté is a severe crime in Thailand.

Government is separated into three branches:

- The legislative branch: the traditional National Assembly was nullified by the current junta. It was replaced by a rubber stamp, unicameral National Legislative Assembly. In the current 2017 Constitution the new National Assembly, which is scheduled to meet after the 2019 general election, will be composed of the Senate, the 150-member fully appointed upper house, and House of Representatives, the 350-member lower house.
- The executive branch consisting of the Prime Minister of Thailand who was elected by the National Assembly and other cabinet members of up to 35 people. The cabinet was appointed by the king on the advice of the prime minister. The prime minister is the head of government.
- The judiciary is supposed to be independent of the executive and the legislative branches, although judicial rulings are suspected of being based on political considerations rather than on existing law.^[58]



Sappaya-Sapasathan, the current
Parliament House of Thailand

Military and bureaucratic aristocrats fully controlled political parties between 1946 and 1980s.^{[59]:16} Most parties in Thailand are short-lived.^{[60]:246} Between 1992 and 2006, Thailand had a two-party system.^{[60]:245} Since 2000, two political parties dominated Thai general elections: one was the Pheu Thai Party (which was a successor of People's Power Party and the Thai Rak Thai Party), and the other was the Democrat Party. The political parties which support Thaksin Shinawatra won the most representatives every general election since 2001. Later constitutions created a multi-party system where a single party cannot gain a majority in the house.

Lèse majesté

The 2007 constitution was partially abrogated by the military dictatorship that came to power in May 2014.^[61]

Thailand's kings are protected by *lèse-majesté* laws which allow critics to be jailed for three to fifteen years.^[62] After the 2014 Thai coup d'état, Thailand had the highest number of *lèse-majesté* prisoners in the nation's history.^{[63][64]} In 2017, the military court in Thailand sentenced a man to 35 years in prison for violating the country's *lèse-majesté* law.^[64] Thailand has been rated *not free* on the Freedom House Index since 2014.^[65] Thai activist and magazine editor Somyot Prueksakasemsuk, who was sentenced to eleven years' imprisonment for *lèse-majesté* in 2013,^[66] is a designated prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.^[67]

Geography



Chiang Dao Wildlife Sanctuary, north of the Thanon Thong Chai Range, in Chiang Mai Province, northern Thailand

Totaling 513,120 square kilometres (198,120 sq mi), Thailand is the 50th-largest country by total area. It is slightly smaller than Yemen and slightly larger than Spain.^[1]

Thailand comprises several distinct geographic regions, partly corresponding to the provincial groups. The north of the country is the mountainous area of the Thai highlands, with the highest point being Doi Inthanon in the Thanon Thong Chai Range at 2,565 metres (8,415 ft) elevation. The northeast, Isan, consists of the Khorat Plateau, bordered to the east by the Mekong River. The centre of the country is dominated by the predominantly flat Chao Phraya river valley, which runs into the Gulf of Thailand.

Southern Thailand consists of the narrow Kra Isthmus that widens into the Malay Peninsula. Politically, there are six geographical regions which differ from the others in population, basic resources, natural features, and level of social and economic development. The diversity of the regions is the most pronounced attribute of Thailand's physical setting.

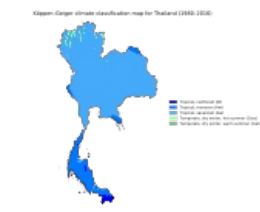
The Chao Phraya and the Mekong River are the indispensable water courses of rural Thailand. Industrial scale production of crops use both rivers and their tributaries. The Gulf of Thailand covers 320,000 square kilometres (124,000 sq mi) and is fed by the Chao Phraya, Mae Klong, Bang Pakong, and Tapi Rivers. It contributes to the tourism sector owing to its clear shallow waters along the coasts in the southern region and

the Kra Isthmus. The eastern shore of the Gulf of Thailand is an industrial centre of Thailand with the kingdom's premier deepwater port in Sattahip and its busiest commercial port, Laem Chabang.

The Andaman Sea is a precious natural resource as it hosts popular and luxurious resorts. Phuket, Krabi, Ranong, Phang Nga and Trang, and their islands, all lay along the coasts of the Andaman Sea and, despite the 2004 tsunami, they remain a tourist magnet.

Plans have resurfaced for a canal which would connect the Andaman Sea to the Gulf of Thailand, analogous to the Suez and the Panama Canals. The idea has been greeted positively by Thai politicians as it would cut fees charged by the Ports of Singapore, improve ties with China and India, lower shipping times, eliminate pirate attacks in the Strait of Malacca, and support the Thai government's policy of being the logistical hub for Southeast Asia. The canal, it is claimed, would improve economic conditions in the south of Thailand, which relies heavily on tourism income, and it would also change the structure of the Thai economy by making it an Asian logistical hub. The canal would be a major engineering project and has an estimated cost of US\$20–30 billion.

Climate



Thailand map of Köppen climate classification



Cold air from China can bring colder temperatures to Northern Thailand close to 0 °C (32 °F) (Chiang Dao mountain pictured).

have a tropical rainforest climate

Thailand is divided into three seasons.^{[68]:2} The first is the rainy or southwest monsoon season (mid–May to mid–October) which prevails over most of the country.^{[68]:2} This season is characterized by abundant rain with August and September being the wettest period of the year.^{[68]:2} This can occasionally lead to floods.^{[68]:4} In addition to rainfall caused by the southwest monsoon, the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) and tropical cyclones also contribute to producing heavy rainfall during the rainy season.^{[68]:2} Nonetheless, dry spells commonly occur for 1 to 2 weeks from June to early July.^{[68]:4} This is due to the northward movement of the Intertropical Convergence Zone to southern China.^{[68]:4} Winter or the northeast monsoon starts from mid–October until mid–February.^{[68]:2} Most of Thailand experiences dry weather during this season with mild temperatures.^{[68]:2:4} The exception is the southern parts of Thailand where it receives abundant rainfall, particularly during October to November.^{[68]:2} Summer or the pre–monsoon season runs from mid–February until mid–May and is characterized by warmer weather.^{[68]:3}

Due to its inland nature and latitude, the north, northeast, central and eastern parts of Thailand experience a long period of warm weather.^{[68]:3} During the hottest time of the year (March to May), temperatures usually reach up to 40 °C (104 °F) or more with the exception of coastal areas where sea breezes moderate afternoon temperatures.^{[68]:3} In contrast, outbreaks of cold air from China can bring colder temperatures; in some cases (particularly the north and northeast) close to or below 0 °C (32 °F).^{[68]:3} Southern Thailand is characterized by mild weather year-round with less diurnal and seasonal variations in temperatures due to maritime influences.^{[68]:3}

Most of the country receives a mean annual rainfall of 1,200 to 1,600 mm (47 to 63 in).^{[68]:4} However, certain areas on the windward sides of mountains such as Ranong province in the west coast of southern Thailand and eastern parts of Trat Province receive more than 4,500 mm (180 in) of rainfall per year.^{[68]:4} The driest areas are on the leeward side in the central valleys and northernmost portion of south Thailand where mean annual rainfall is less than 1,200 mm (47 in).^{[68]:4} Most of Thailand (north, northeast, central and east) is characterized by dry weather during the northeast monsoon and abundant rainfall during the southwest monsoon.^{[68]:4} In the southern parts of Thailand, abundant rainfall occurs in both the northeast and southwest monsoon seasons with a peak in September for the western coast and a peak in November–January on the eastern coast.^{[68]:4}

Thailand is among the world's ten countries that are most exposed to climate change; in particular, it is highly vulnerable to rising sea levels and extreme weather events.^{[70][71]}

Environment

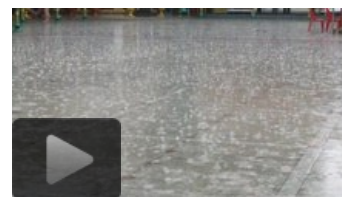
Thailand has a mediocre but improving performance in the global Environmental Performance Index (EPI) with an overall ranking of 91 out of 180 countries in 2016. This is also a mediocre rank in the Asia Pacific region specifically, but ahead of countries like Indonesia and China. The EPI was established in 2001 by the World Economic Forum as a global gauge to measure how well individual countries perform in implementing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The environmental areas where Thailand performs worst (i.e., highest ranking) are air quality (167), environmental effects of the agricultural industry (106), and the climate and energy sector (93), the later mainly because of a high CO2 emission per KWh produced. Thailand performs best (i.e., lowest ranking) in water resource management (66), with some major improvements expected for the future, and sanitation (68).^{[72][73]}



Typical jagged limestone cliffs in southern of Thailand



Ao Phang Nga National Park, Phang Nga



Typical heavy rainfall in Bangkok

Wildlife

The elephant is Thailand's national symbol. Although there were 100,000 domesticated elephants in Thailand in 1850, the population of elephants has dropped to an estimated 2,000.^[74] Poachers have long hunted elephants for ivory and hides, and now increasingly for meat.^[75] Young elephants are often captured for use in tourist attractions or as work animals, although their use has declined since the government banned logging in 1989. There are now more elephants in captivity than in the wild, and environmental activists claim that elephants in captivity are often mistreated.^[76]



The population of Asian elephants in Thailand's wild has dropped to an estimated 2,000–3,000.^[74]

Poaching of protected species remains a major problem. Hunters have decimated the populations of tigers, leopards, and other large cats for their pelts. Many animals (including tigers, bears, crocodiles, and king cobras) are farmed or hunted for their meat, which is considered a delicacy, and for their supposed medicinal properties. Although such trade is illegal, the well-known Bangkok market Chatuchak is still known for the sale of endangered species.^[77]

The practice of keeping wild animals as pets threatens several species. Baby animals are typically captured and sold, which often requires killing the mother. Once in captivity and out of their natural habitat, many pets die or fail to reproduce. Affected populations include the Asiatic black bear, Malayan sun bear, white-handed lar, pileated gibbon, and binturong.^[78]

Administrative divisions

Thailand is divided into 76 provinces (จังหวัด, changwat), which are gathered into five groups of provinces by location. There are also two specially governed districts: the capital Bangkok (Krung Thep Maha Nakhon) and Pattaya. Bangkok is at provincial level and thus often counted as a province.

Each province is divided into districts and the districts are further divided into sub-districts (tambons). As of 2017^[79] there were 878 districts (อำเภอ, amphoe) and the 50 districts of Bangkok (เขต, khet), which is further divided into 7,255 subdistricts (ตำบล, tambon) in the 76 provinces or Bangkok's subdistricts (แขวง, khwaeng). Some parts of the provinces bordering Bangkok are also referred to as Greater Bangkok (ปริมณฑล, pari monthon). These provinces include Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Samut Prakan, Nakhon Pathom and Samut Sakhon. The name of each province's capital city (เมือง, mueang) is the same as that of the province. For example, the capital of Chiang Mai Province (*Changwat Chiang Mai*) is *Mueang Chiang Mai* or *Chiang Mai*.

A clickable map of Thailand exhibiting its provinces.



Regions

Thai provinces are administrated by regions. The regions that Thailand uses to divide the provinces is the four-region division system. It divides the country into the four regions: Northern Thailand, Northeastern Thailand, Central Thailand and Southern Thailand. Each region has its own different historical background, culture, language and people.

In contrast to the administrative divisions of the Provinces of Thailand, Thailand is a Unitary state, the provincial Governors, district chiefs, and district clerks are appointed by the central government. The regions themselves do not have an administrative character, but are used for geographical, statistical, geological, meteorological or touristic purposes.

Southern region



Southern provinces of Thailand showing the Malay-Muslim majority areas

Thailand controlled the Malay Peninsula as far south as Malacca in the 15th century and held much of the peninsula, including Temasek (Singapore), some of the Andaman Islands, and a colony on Java, but eventually contracted when the British used force to guarantee their suzerainty over the sultanate.

Mostly the northern states of the Malay Sultanate presented annual gifts to the Thai king in the form of a golden flower—a gesture of tribute and an acknowledgement of vassalage. The British intervened in the Malay State and with the Anglo-Siamese Treaty tried to build a railway from the south to Bangkok. Thailand relinquished sovereignty over what are now the northern Malay provinces of

Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, and Terengganu to the British. Satun and Pattani Provinces were given to Thailand.

The Malay peninsular provinces were occupied by the Japanese during World War II, and infiltrated by the Malayan Communist Party (CPM) from 1942 to 2008, when they sued for peace with the Malaysian and Thai governments after the CPM lost its support from Vietnam and China subsequent to the Cultural Revolution. Recent insurgent uprisings may be a continuation of separatist fighting which started after World War II with Sukarno's support for the PULO. Most victims since the uprisings have been Buddhist and Muslim bystanders.

Foreign relations

The foreign relations of Thailand are handled by the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Thailand participates fully in international and regional organisations. It is a major non-NATO ally and Priority Watch List Special 301 Report of the United States. The country remains an active member of ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Thailand has developed increasingly close ties with other ASEAN members: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam, whose foreign and economic ministers hold annual meetings. Regional co-operation is progressing in economic, trade, banking, political, and cultural matters. In 2003, Thailand served as APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) host. Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, the former Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand, currently serves as Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In 2005 Thailand attended the inaugural East Asia Summit.

In recent years, Thailand has taken an increasingly active role on the international stage. When East Timor gained independence from Indonesia, Thailand, for the first time in its history, contributed troops to the international peacekeeping effort. Its troops remain there today as part of a UN peacekeeping force. As part of its effort to increase international ties, Thailand has reached out to such regional organisations as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Thailand has contributed troops to reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Thaksin initiated negotiations for several free trade agreements with China, Australia, Bahrain, India, and the US. The latter especially was criticised, with claims that uncompetitive Thai industries could be wiped out.^[80]

Thaksin also announced that Thailand would forsake foreign aid, and work with donor countries to assist in the development of neighbours in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.^[81] Thaksin sought to position Thailand as a regional leader, initiating various development projects in poorer neighbouring countries like Laos. More controversially, he established close, friendly ties with the Burmese dictatorship.^[82]

Thailand joined the US-led invasion of Iraq, sending a 423-strong humanitarian contingent.^[83] It withdrew its troops on 10 September 2004. Two Thai soldiers died in Iraq in an insurgent attack.

Abhisit appointed Peoples Alliance for Democracy leader Kasit Piromya as foreign minister. In April 2009, fighting broke out between Thai and Cambodian troops on territory immediately adjacent to the 900-year-old ruins of Cambodia's Preah Vihear Hindu temple near the border. The Cambodian government claimed its army had killed at least four Thais and captured 10 more, although the Thai government denied that any Thai soldiers were killed or injured. Two Cambodian and three Thai soldiers were killed. Both armies blamed the other for firing first and denied entering the other's territory.^{[84][85]}

Armed forces



Thailand four-region division



King Bhumibol Adulyadej in a meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama, 18 November 2012



Royal Thai Embassy in Wellington, New Zealand

The Royal Thai Armed Forces (กองทัพไทย; RTGS: Kong Thap Thai) constitute the military of the Kingdom of Thailand. It consists of the Royal Thai Army (กองทัพบกไทย), the Royal Thai Navy (กองทัพเรือไทย), and the Royal Thai Air Force (กองทัพอากาศไทย). It also incorporates various paramilitary forces.

The Thai Armed Forces have a combined manpower of 306,000 active duty personnel and another 245,000 active reserve personnel.^[86] The head of the Thai Armed Forces (จอมทัพไทย, *Chom Thap Thai*) is the king,^[87] although this position is only nominal. The armed forces are managed by the Ministry of Defence of Thailand, which is headed by the Minister of Defence (a member of the cabinet of Thailand) and commanded by the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters, which in turn is headed by the Chief of Defence Forces of Thailand.^[88] In 2011, Thailand's known military expenditure totalled approximately US\$5.1 billion.^[89] Thailand ranked 16th worldwide in the Military Strength Index based on the Credit Suisse report in September 2015.

According to the constitution, serving in the armed forces is a duty of all Thai citizens.^[90] However, only males over the age of 21, who have not gone through reserve training of the Territorial Defence Student, are given the option of volunteering for the armed forces, or participating in the random draft. The candidates are subjected to varying lengths of training, from six months to two years of full-time service, depending on their education, whether they have partially completed the reserve training course, and whether they volunteered prior to the draft date (usually 1 April every year).

Candidates with a recognised bachelor's degree serve one year of full-time service if they are conscripted, or six months if they volunteer with the military officer at their district office (สี่สปี, *satsadi*). Likewise, the training length is also reduced for those who have partially completed the three-year reserve training course of the Territorial Defence Students (ร.ด., *ro do*). A person who completed one year out of three will only have to serve full-time for one year. Those who completed two years of reserve training will only have to do six months of full-time training, while those who complete three years or more of reserve training will be exempted entirely.

Royal Thai Armed Forces Day is celebrated on 18 January, commemorating the victory of Naresuan of the Ayutthaya Kingdom in battle against the crown prince of the Toungoo dynasty in 1593.

In 2017, Thailand signed the UN treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.^[91]

Education

In 2014 the literacy rate was 93.5%.^[92] Education is provided by a well-organized school system of kindergartens, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools, numerous vocational colleges, and universities. The private sector of education is well developed and significantly contributes to the overall provision of education which the government would not be able to meet with public establishments. Education is compulsory up to and including age 14, with the government providing free education through to age 17.

Teaching relies heavily on rote learning rather than on student-centred methodology. The establishment of reliable and coherent curricula for its primary and secondary schools is subject to such rapid changes that schools and their teachers are not always sure what they are supposed to be teaching, and authors and publishers of textbooks are unable to write and print new editions quickly enough to keep up with the volatility. Issues concerning university entrance has been in constant upheaval for a number of years. Nevertheless, Thai education has seen its greatest progress in the years since 2001. Most of the present generation of students are computer literate. Thailand was ranked 54th out of 56 countries globally for English proficiency, the second-lowest in Asia.^[93]

Students in ethnic minority areas score consistently lower in standardised national and international tests.^[94] ^[95] ^[96] This is likely due to unequal allocation of educational resources, weak teacher training, poverty, and low Thai language skill, the language of the tests.^[94] ^[97] ^[98]

Extensive nationwide IQ tests were administered to 72,780 Thai students from December 2010 to January 2011. The average IQ was found to be 98.59, which is higher than previous studies have found. IQ levels were found to be inconsistent throughout the country, with the lowest average of 88.07 found in the southern region of Narathiwat Province and the highest average of 108.91 reported in Nonthaburi Province. The Ministry of Public Health blames the discrepancies on iodine deficiency and steps are being taken to require that iodine be added to table salt, a practice common in many Western countries.^[99]

In 2013, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology announced that 27,231 schools would receive classroom-level access to high-speed internet.^[100]

Science and technology

The National Science and Technology Development Agency is an agency of the government of Thailand which supports research in science and technology and its application in the Thai economy.



The HTMS *Chakri Naruebet*, an aircraft carrier of the Royal Thai Navy



A Royal Thai Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon



Chulalongkorn University, established in 1917, is the oldest university in Thailand.



Thailand is a country where school uniform is still mandatory.

The Synchrotron Light Research Institute (SLRI) is a Thai synchrotron light source for physics, chemistry, material science, and life sciences. It is at the Suranaree University of Technology (SUT), in Nakhon Ratchasima, about 300 kilometres (190 miles) northeast of Bangkok. The institute, financed by the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), houses the only large-scale synchrotron in Southeast Asia. It was originally built as the SORTEC synchrotron in Japan and later moved to Thailand and modified for 1.2 GeV operation. It provides users with regularly scheduled light.

Internet

In Bangkok, there are very many free public Wi-Fi Internet hotspots.^[101] The Internet in Thailand includes 10Gbit/s high speed fibre-optic lines that can be leased and ISPs that provide residential Internet services.

The Internet is censored by the Thai government, making some sites unreachable.^[102] The organisations responsible are the Royal Thai Police, the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC)^[103], and the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES).^[104]

Economy

Thailand is an emerging economy and is considered a newly industrialised country. Thailand had a 2017 GDP of US\$1.236 trillion (on a purchasing power parity basis).^[110] Thailand is the 2nd largest economy in Southeast Asia after Indonesia. Thailand ranks midway in the wealth spread in Southeast Asia as it is the 4th richest nation according to GDP per capita, after Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia.

Thailand functions as an anchor economy for the neighbouring developing economies of Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. In the third quarter of 2014, the unemployment rate in Thailand stood at 0.84% according to Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB).^[111]

Recent economic history

Thailand experienced the world's highest economic growth rate from 1985 to 1996 — averaging 12.4% annually. In 1997 increased pressure on the baht, a year in which the economy contracted by 1.9%, led to a crisis that uncovered financial sector weaknesses and forced the Chavalit Yongchaiyudh administration to float the currency. Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh was forced to resign after his cabinet came under fire for its slow response to the economic crisis. The baht was pegged at 25 to the US dollar from 1978 to 1997. The baht reached its lowest point of 56 to the US dollar in January 1998 and the economy contracted by 10.8% that year, triggering the Asian financial crisis.

Thailand's economy started to recover in 1999, expanding 4.2–4.4% in 2000, thanks largely to strong exports. Growth (2.2%) was dampened by the softening of the global economy in 2001, but picked up in the subsequent years owing to strong growth in Asia, a relatively weak baht encouraging exports, and increased domestic spending as a result of several mega projects and incentives of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, known as Thaksinomics. Growth in 2002, 2003, and 2004 was 5–7% annually.

Growth in 2005, 2006, and 2007 hovered around 4–5%. Due both to the weakening of the US dollar and an increasingly strong Thai currency, by March 2008 the dollar was hovering around the 33 baht mark. While Thaksinomics has received criticism, official economic data reveals that between 2001 and 2011, Isan's GDP per capita more than doubled to US\$1,475, while, over the same period, GDP in the Bangkok area increased from US\$7,900 to nearly US\$13,000.^[113]

With the instability surrounding major 2010 protests, the GDP growth of Thailand settled at around 4–5%, from highs of 5–7% under the previous civilian administration. Political uncertainty was identified as the primary cause of a decline in investor and consumer confidence. The IMF predicted that the Thai economy would rebound strongly from the low 0.1% GDP growth in 2011, to 5.5% in 2012 and then 7.5% in 2013, due to the monetary policy of the Bank of Thailand, as well as a package of fiscal stimulus measures introduced by the former Yingluck Shinawatra government.^[114]

Following the Thai military coup of 22 May 2014, the AFP global news agency published an article that claimed that the nation was on the verge of recession. The article focused on the departure of nearly 180,000 Cambodians from Thailand due to fears of an immigration clampdown, but concluded with information on the Thai economy's contraction of 2.1% quarter-on-quarter, from January to the end of March 2014.^[115]

Income, poverty and wealth

Thais have median wealth per one adult person of \$1,469 in 2016,^{[116]:98} increasing from \$605 in 2010.^{[116]:34} In 2016, Thailand was ranked 87th in Human Development Index, and 70th in the inequality-adjusted HDI.^[117]

In 2017, Thailand's median household income was ฿26,946 per month.^{[118]:1} Top quintile households had a 45.0% share of all income, while bottom quintile households had 7.1%.^{[118]:4} There were 26.9 million persons who had the bottom 40% of income earning less than ฿5,344 per person per month.^{[119]:5} During 2013–2014 Thai political crisis, a survey found that anti-government PDRC mostly (32%) had a monthly income of more than ฿50,000, while pro-government UDD mostly (27%) had between ฿10,000 and ฿20,000.^{[120]:7}



A screenshot of a censored website displaying words from Thailand's Ministry of Information and Communication Technology in 2014

Economic indicators		
Nominal GDP	฿14.53 trillion (2016)	[105]
GDP growth	3.9% (2017)	[106]
Inflation		[106]
• Headline	0.7% (2017)	
• Core	0.6% (2017)	
Employment-to-population ratio	68.0% (2017)	[107]:29
Unemployment	1.2% (2017)	[106]
Total public debt	฿6.37 trillion (Dec. 2017)	[108]
Poverty	8.61% (2016)	[107]:36
Net household worth	฿20.34 trillion (2010)	[109]:2

In 2014, Credit Suisse reported that Thailand was the world's third most unequal country, behind Russia and India.^[121] Top 10% richest held 79% of the country's asset.^[121] Top 1% richest held 58% worth of the economy.^[121] Thai 50 richest families had a total net worth accounting to 30% of GDP.^[121]

In 2016, 5.81 million people lived in poverty, or 11.6 million people (17.2% of population) if "near poor" is included.^{[119]:1} Proportion of the poor relative to total population in each region was 12.96% in the Northeast, 12.35% in the South, and 9.83% in the North.^{[119]:2} In 2017, there were 14 million people who applied for social welfare (yearly income of less than ฿100,000 was required).^[121] At the end of 2017, Thailand's total household debt was ฿11.76 trillion.^{[107]:5} In 2010, 3% of all household were bankrupt.^{[109]:5} In 2016, there were estimated 30,000 homeless persons in the country.^[122]

Exports and manufacturing

The economy of Thailand is heavily export-dependent, with exports accounting for more than two-thirds of gross domestic product (GDP). Thailand exports over US\$105 billion worth of goods and services annually.^[1] Major exports include cars, computers, electrical appliances, rice, textiles and footwear, fishery products, rubber, and jewellery.^[1]

Substantial industries include electric appliances, components, computer components, and vehicles. Thailand's recovery from the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis depended mainly on exports, among various other factors. As of 2012, the Thai automotive industry was the largest in Southeast Asia and the 9th largest in the world.^{[123][124][125]} The Thailand industry has an annual output of near 1.5 million vehicles, mostly commercial vehicles.^[125]

Most of the vehicles built in Thailand are developed and licensed by foreign producers, mainly Japanese and South Korean. The Thai car industry takes advantage of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) to find a market for many of its products. Eight manufacturers, five Japanese, two US, and Tata of India, produce pick-up trucks in Thailand.^[126] As of 2012, Thailand was the second largest consumer of pick-up trucks in the world, after the US.^[127] In 2014, pick-ups accounted for 42% of all new vehicle sales in Thailand.^[126]

Transportation



The BTS Skytrain is an elevated rapid transit system in Bangkok



An Airbus A380 of the national carrier Thai Airways

The State Railway of Thailand (SRT) operates all of Thailand's national rail lines. Bangkok Railway Station (Hua Lamphong Station) is the main terminus of all routes. Phahonyothin and ICD Lat Krabang are the main freight terminals.

As of 2017 SRT had 4,507 km (2,801 mi) of track, all of it meter gauge except the Airport Link. Nearly all is single-track (4,097 km), although some important sections around Bangkok are double (303 km or 188 mi) or triple-tracked (107 km or 66 mi) and there are plans to extend this.^[128] By comparison, Thailand has 390,000 km (242,335 miles) of highways.^[129]

Rail transport in Bangkok includes long-distance services, and some daily commuter trains running from and to the outskirts of the city during the rush hour, but passenger numbers have remained low. There are also three rapid transit rail systems in the capital.

As of 2012, Thailand had 103 airports with 63 paved runways, in addition to 6 heliports. The busiest airport in the country is Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport.

Thailand has 390,000 km (242,335 miles) of highways.^[129] According to the BBC Thailand has 462,133 roads and many multi-lane highways. As of 2017 Thailand has 37 million registered vehicles, 20 million of them motorbikes.

A number of undivided two-lane highways have been converted into divided four-lane highways. A Bangkok — Chon Buri motorway (Route 7) now links to the new airport and Eastern Seaboard.

Other forms of road transport includes tuk-tuks, taxis—as of November 2018, Thailand has 80,647 registered taxis nationwide^[130]—vans (minibus), motorbike taxis, and songthaews.

There are 4,125 public vans operating on 114 routes from Bangkok to the provinces alone. They are classed as Category 2 public transport vehicles (routes within 300 kilometres). Until 2016, most operated from a Bangkok terminus at Victory Monument. They are being moved from there to the Department of Land Transport's three Bangkok bus terminals.^[131]

Tourism

Bangkok, commercial hub of Thailand



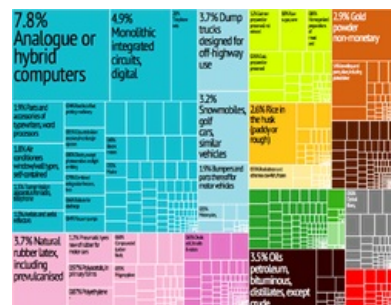
Bangkok night view with The MahaNakhon skyscraper, once the tallest in Thailand.



Bangkok view with the BTS Skytrain system, 747,325^[112] (average weekday ridership).



Sathorn is a skyscraper-studded business district that is also home to major hotels and embassies.



A proportional representation of
Thailand's exports



Maya Bay, Phi Phi Islands, Krabi.



The lake of Ratchaprapha, Khao Sok National Park, Surat Thani.

Tourism makes up about 6% of the country's economy. Thailand was the most visited country in Southeast Asia in 2013, according to the World Tourism Organisation. Estimates of tourism receipts directly contributing to the Thai GDP of 12 trillion baht range from 9 percent (1 trillion baht) (2013) to 16 percent.^[132] When including the indirect effects of tourism, it is said to account for 20.2 percent (2.4 trillion baht) of Thailand's GDP.^{[133]:1}

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) uses the slogan "Amazing Thailand" to promote Thailand internationally. In 2015, this was supplemented by a "Discover Thainess" campaign.^[134]

Asian tourists primarily visit Thailand for Bangkok and the historical, natural, and cultural sights in its vicinity. Western tourists not only visit Bangkok and surroundings, but in addition many travel to the southern beaches and islands. The north is the chief destination for trekking and adventure travel with its diverse ethnic minority groups and forested mountains. The region hosting the fewest tourists is Isan in the northeast. To accommodate foreign visitors, the Thai government established a separate tourism police with offices in the major tourist areas and its own central emergency telephone number.^[135]

Thailand's attractions include diving, sandy beaches, hundreds of tropical islands, nightlife, archaeological sites, museums, hill tribes, flora and bird life, palaces, Buddhist temples and several World Heritage sites. Many tourists follow courses during their stay in Thailand. Popular are classes in Thai cooking, Buddhism and traditional Thai massage. Thai national festivals range from Thai New Year Songkran to Loy Krathong. Many localities in Thailand also have their own festivals. Among the best-known are the "Elephant Round-up" in Surin, the "Rocket Festival" in Yasothon, Suwannaphum District, Phanom Phrai District both district are located in Roi Et Province and the "Phi Ta Khon" festival in Dan Sai. Thai cuisine has become famous worldwide with its enthusiastic use of fresh herbs and spices.

Bangkok shopping malls offer a variety of international and local brands. Towards the north of the city, and easily reached by skytrain or underground, is the Chatuchak Weekend Market. It is possibly the largest market in the world, selling everything from household items to live, and sometimes endangered, animals.^[136] The "Pratunam Market" specialises in fabrics and clothing. The night markets in the Silom area and on Khaosan Road are mainly tourist-oriented, selling items such as T-shirts, handicrafts, counterfeit watches and sunglasses. In the vicinity of Bangkok one can find several floating markets such as the one in Damnoen Saduak. The "Sunday Evening Walking Street Market", held on Rachadamnoen Road inside the old city, is a shopping highlight of a visit to Chiang Mai up in northern Thailand. It attracts many locals as well as foreigners. The "Night Bazaar" is Chiang Mai's more tourist-oriented market, sprawling over several city blocks just east of the old city walls towards the river.

Prostitution in Thailand and sex tourism also form a *de facto* part of the economy. Campaigns promote Thailand as exotic to attract tourists.^[137] Cultural milieu combined with poverty and the lure of money have caused prostitution and sex tourism in particular to flourish in Thailand. One estimate published in 2003 placed the trade at US\$4.3 billion per year or about 3% of the Thai economy.^[138] According to research by Chulalongkorn University on the Thai illegal economy, prostitution in Thailand in the period between 1993 and 1995, made up around 2.7% of the GDP.^[139] It is believed that at least 10% of tourist dollars are spent on the sex trade.^[140]

Thailand is at the forefront of the growing practice of sex-reassignment surgery (SRS). Statistic taken from 2014, illustrated the country's medical tourism industry attracting over 2.5 million visitors per year.^[141] In 2017 and 2018 Thailand saw 2.4 million and 2.5 million medical tourists, respectively, with data showing more modern forms of cosmetic surgery growing in popularity.^[142] In 1985–1990, only 5% of foreign transsexual patients visited Thailand for sex-reassignment surgery. In more recent years, 2010–2012, more than 90% of the visitors traveled to Thailand for SRS.^[143]

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Forty-nine per cent of Thailand's labour force is employed in agriculture.^[144] This is down from 70% in 1980.^[144] Rice is the most important crop in the country and Thailand had long been the world's leading exporter of rice, until recently falling behind both India and Vietnam.^[145] Thailand has the highest percentage of arable land, 27.25%, of any nation in the Greater Mekong Subregion.^[146] About 55% of the arable land area is used for rice production.^[147]

Agriculture has been experiencing a transition from labour-intensive and transitional methods to a more industrialised and competitive sector.^[144] Between 1962 and 1983, the agricultural sector grew by 4.1% per year on average and continued to grow at 2.2% between 1983 and 2007.^[144] The relative contribution of agriculture to GDP has declined while exports of goods and services have increased.

Furthermore, access to biocapacity in Thailand is lower than world average. In 2016, Thailand had 1.2 global hectares^[148] of biocapacity per person within its territory, a little less than world average of 1.6 global hectares per person.^[149] In contrast, in 2016, they used 2.5 global hectares of biocapacity - their ecological footprint of consumption. This means they use about twice as much biocapacity as Thailand contains. As a result, Thailand is running a biocapacity deficit.^[148]



Wat Phra Kaew in Bangkok.



Wat Arun in Bangkok.



Ayutthaya Historical Park in Ayutthaya.



Thailand has long been one of the largest rice exporters in the world. Forty-nine percent of Thailand's labour force is employed in agriculture.^[144]

Energy

75% of Thailand's electrical generation is powered by natural gas in 2014.^[150] Coal-fired power plants produce an additional 20% of electricity, with the remainder coming from biomass, hydro, and biogas.^[150]

Thailand produces roughly one-third of the oil it consumes. It is the second largest importer of oil in SE Asia. Thailand is a large producer of natural gas, with reserves of at least 10 trillion cubic feet. After Indonesia, it is the largest coal producer in SE Asia, but must import additional coal to meet domestic demand.

Informal economy

Thailand has an diverse and robust informal labor sector—in 2012, it was estimated that informal workers comprised 62.6% of the Thai workforce. The Ministry of Labor defines informal workers to be individuals who work in informal economies and do not have employee status under a given country's Labor Protection Act (LPA). The informal sector in Thailand has grown significantly over the past 60 years over the course of Thailand's gradual transition from an agriculture-based economy to becoming more industrialized and service-oriented.^[151] Between 1993 and 1995, ten percent of the Thai labor force moved from the agricultural sector to urban and industrial jobs, especially in the manufacturing sector. It is estimated that between 1988 and 1995, the number of factory workers in the country doubled from two to four million, as Thailand's GDP tripled.^[152] While the Asian Financial Crisis that followed in 1997 hit the Thai economy hard, the industrial sector continued to expand under widespread deregulation, as Thailand was mandated to adopt a range of structural adjustment reforms upon receiving funding from the IMF and World Bank. These reforms implemented an agenda of increased privatization and trade liberalization in the country, and decreased federal subsidization of public goods and utilities, agricultural price supports, and regulations on fair wages and labor conditions.^[153] These changes put further pressure on the agricultural sector, and prompted continued migration from the rural countryside to the growing cities. Many migrant farmers found work in Thailand's growing manufacturing industry, and took jobs in sweatshops and factories with few labor regulations and often exploitative conditions.^[154]

Those that could not find formal factory work, including illegal migrants and the families of rural Thai migrants that followed their relatives to the urban centers, turned to the informal sector to provide the extra support needed for survival—under the widespread regulation imposed by the structural adjustment programs, one family member working in a factory or sweatshop made very little. Scholars argue that the economic consequences and social costs of Thailand's labor reforms in the wake of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis fell on individuals and families rather than the state. This can be described as the "externalization of market risk", meaning that as the country's labor market became increasingly deregulated, the burden and responsibility of providing an adequate livelihood shifted from employers and the state to the workers themselves, whose families had to find jobs in the informal sector to make up for the losses and subsidize the wages being made by their relatives in the formal sector. The weight of these economic changes hit migrants and the urban poor especially hard, and the informal sector expanded rapidly as a result.^[153]

Today, informal labor in Thailand is typically broken down into three main groups: subcontracted/self employed/home-based workers, service workers (including those that are employed in restaurants, as street vendors, masseuses, taxi drivers, and as domestic workers), and agricultural workers. Not included in these categories are those that work in entertainment, nightlife, and the sex industry. Individuals employed in these facets of the informal labor sector face additional vulnerabilities, including recruitment into circles of sexual exploitation and human trafficking.^[151]

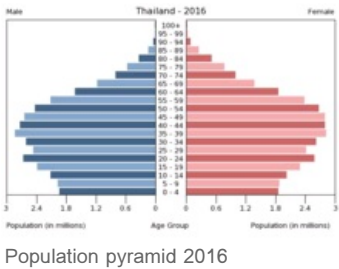
In general, education levels are low in the informal sector. A 2012 study found that 64% of informal workers had not completed education beyond primary school. Many informal workers are also migrants, only some of which have legal status in the country. Education and citizenship are two main barriers to entry for those looking to work in formal industries, and enjoy the labor protections and social security benefits that come along with formal employment. Because the informal labor sector is not recognized under the Labor Protection Act (LPA), informal workers are much more vulnerable labor to exploitation and unsafe working conditions than those employed in more formal and federally recognized industries. While some Thai labor laws provide minimal protections to domestic and agricultural workers, they are often weak and difficult to enforce. Furthermore, Thai social security policies fail to protect against the risks many informal workers face, including workplace accidents and compensation as well as unemployment and retirement insurance. Many informal workers are not legally contracted for their employment, and many do not make a living wage.^[151] As a result, labor trafficking is common in the region, affecting children and adults, men and women, and migrants and Thai citizens alike.

Demographics

Thailand had a population of 69,428,453^{[8][9]} as of 2018. Thailand's population is largely rural, concentrated in the rice-growing areas of the central, northeastern, and northern regions. About 45.7% of Thailand's population lived in urban areas as of 2010, concentrated mostly in and around the Bangkok Metropolitan Area.

Thailand's government-sponsored family planning program resulted in a dramatic decline in population growth from 3.1% in 1960 to around 0.4% today. In 1970, an average of 5.7 people lived in a Thai household. At the time of the 2010 census, the average Thai household size was 3.2 people.

Population in Thailand ^{[8][9]}	
Year	Million
1950	20.7
2000	62.9
2018	69.4



Ethnic groups

Thai nationals make up the majority of Thailand's population, 95.9% in 2010. The remaining 4.1% of the population are Burmese (2.0%), others 1.3%, and unspecified 0.9%.^[1]

According to the Royal Thai Government's 2011 Country Report to the UN Committee responsible for the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, available from the Department of Rights and Liberties Promotion of the Thai Ministry of Justice,^{[3]:3} 62 ethnic communities are officially recognised in Thailand. Twenty million Central Thai (together with approximately 650,000 Khorat Thai) make up approximately 20,650,000 (34.1 percent) of the nation's population of 60,544,937^[155] at the time of completion of the Mahidol University *Ethnolinguistic Maps of Thailand* data (1997).^[156]

The 2011 Thailand Country Report provides population numbers for mountain peoples ('hill tribes') and ethnic communities in the Northeast and is explicit about its main reliance on the Mahidol University *Ethnolinguistic Maps of Thailand* data.^[156] Thus, though over 3.288 million people in the Northeast alone could not be categorised, the population and percentages of other ethnic communities circa 1997 are known for all of Thailand and constitute minimum populations. In descending order, the largest (equal to or greater than 400,000) are a) 15,080,000 Lao (24.9 percent) consisting of the Thai Lao^[2] (14 million) and other smaller Lao groups, namely the Thai Loei (400–500,000), Lao Lom (350,000), Lao Wiang/Klang (200,000), Lao Khrang (90,000), Lao Ngaew (30,000), and Lao Ti (10,000; b) six million Khon Muang (9.9 percent, also called Northern Thais); c) 4.5 million Pak Tai (7.5 percent, also called Southern Thais); d) 1.4 million Khmer Leu (2.3 percent, also called Northern Khmer); e) 900,000 Malay (1.5%); f) 500,000 Ngaw (0.8 percent); g) 470,000 Phu Thai (0.8 percent); h) 400,000 Kuy/Kuay (also known as Suay) (0.7 percent), and i) 350,000 Karen (0.6 percent).^{[3]:7–13} Thai Chinese, those of significant Chinese heritage, are 14% of the population,^[6] while Thais with partial Chinese ancestry comprise up to 40% of the population.^[157] Thai Malays represent 3% of the population, with the remainder consisting of Mons, Khmers and various "hill tribes". The country's official language is Thai and the primary religion is Theravada Buddhism, which is practised by around 95% of the population.



A procession during the *Hae Pha Khuen That* festival of Wat Phra Mahathat



Hill tribes girls in the Northeast of Thailand

Increasing numbers of migrants from neighbouring Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, as well as from Nepal and India, have pushed the total number of non-national residents to around 3.5 million as of 2009, up from an estimated 2 million in 2008, and about 1.3 million in 2000.^[158] Some 41,000 Britons and 20,000 Australians live in Thailand.^{[159][160]}

Population centres

Language



An ethnolinguistic map of Thailand.



The Silajaruek of Sukhothai Kingdom are hundreds of stone inscriptions that form a historical record of the period.

The official language of Thailand is Thai, a Tai–Kadai language closely related to Lao, Shan in Myanmar, and numerous smaller languages spoken in an arc from Hainan and Yunnan south to the Chinese border. It is the principal language of education and government and spoken throughout the country. The standard is based on the dialect of the central Thai people, and it is written in the Thai alphabet, an abugida script that evolved from the Khmer alphabet.

Sixty-two languages were recognised by the Royal Thai Government in the 2011 Country Report to the UN Committee responsible for the *International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, which employed an ethnolinguistic approach and is available from the Department of Rights and Liberties Promotion of the Thai Ministry of Justice.^{[3]:3} Southern Thai is spoken in the southern provinces, and Northern Thai is spoken in the provinces that were formerly part of the independent kingdom of Lan Na. For the purposes of the national census, which does not recognise all 62 languages recognised by the Royal Thai Government in the 2011 Country Report, four dialects of Thai exist; these partly coincide with regional designations.

The largest of Thailand's minority languages is the Lao dialect of Isan spoken in the northeastern provinces. Although sometimes considered a Thai dialect, it is a Lao dialect, and the region where it is traditionally spoken was historically part of the Lao kingdom of Lan Xang. In the far south, Kelantan-Pattani Malay is the primary language of Malay Muslims. Varieties of Chinese are also spoken by the large Thai Chinese population, with the Teochew dialect best-represented.

Numerous tribal languages are also spoken, including many Austroasiatic languages such as Mon, Khmer, Viet, Mlabri and Orang Asli; Austronesian languages such as Cham and Moken; Sino-Tibetan languages like Lawa, Akha, and Karen; and other Tai languages such as Tai Yo, Phu Thai, and Saek. Hmong is a member of the Hmong–Mien languages, which is now regarded as a language family of its own.

English is a mandatory school subject, but the number of fluent speakers remains low, especially outside cities.

Religion

Religion in Thailand (2015) ^[161]		
Religion		Percent
Buddhism	<div></div>	94.50%
Islam	<div></div>	4.29%

Thailand's prevalent religion is Theravada Buddhism, which is an integral part of Thai identity and culture. Active participation in Buddhism is among the highest in the world. According to the 2000 census, 94.6% and 93.58% in 2010 of the country's population self-identified as Buddhists of the Theravada tradition. Muslims constitute the second largest religious group in Thailand, comprising 4.29% of the population in 2015.^[162]

Christianity	1.17%
Hinduism	0.03%
Unaffiliated/others	0.01%

remaining population consisting of Hindus and Sikhs, who live mostly in the country's cities. There is also a small but historically significant Jewish community in Thailand dating back to the 17th century.

There is no official state religion in the Thai constitution, which guarantees religious freedom for all Thai citizens. Thai law provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respects this right in practice. It does not, however, register new religious groups that have not been accepted into one of the existing religious governing bodies on doctrinal or other grounds. In practice, unregistered religious organisations operate freely, and the government's practice of not recognising any new religious groups does not restrict the activities of unregistered religious groups. The government officially limits the number of foreign missionaries that may work in the country, although unregistered missionaries are present in large numbers and are allowed to live and work freely. There have been no widespread reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.^[163]

Health

Health and medical care is overseen by the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), along with several other non-ministerial government agencies, with total national expenditures on health amounting to 4.3 percent of GDP in 2009. Non-communicable diseases form the major burden of morbidity and mortality, while infectious diseases including malaria and tuberculosis, as well as traffic accidents, are also important public health issues.

The current Minister for Public Health is Prof. Emeritus Piyasakol Sakolsatayadorn, M.D. and the Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Public Health is Jedsada Chokdamrongsuk, M.D. Somsak Chunharas, MD, MPH, was once Deputy Minister for Public Health and is currently a Senior Leadership Fellow at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston.^{[164][165]}

In December 2018 the interim parliament voted to legalize the use of cannabis for medical reasons.

Recreational use remained unlawful. The National Legislative Assembly had 166 votes in favor of the amendment to the Narcotics Bill, while there were no nay votes and 13 abstentions. The vote makes Thailand the first Southeast Asian country to allow the use of medical marijuana.^[166]

Culture



Thai women wearing sabai, Jim Thompson House

Thai culture has been shaped by many influences, including Indian, Lao, Burmese, Cambodian, and Chinese.

Its traditions incorporate a great deal of influence from India, China, Cambodia, and the rest of Southeast Asia. Thailand's national religion, Theravada Buddhism, is central to modern Thai identity. Thai Buddhism has evolved over time to include many regional beliefs originating from Hinduism, animism, as well as ancestor worship. The official calendar in Thailand is based on the Eastern version of the Buddhist Era (BE), which is 543 years ahead of the Gregorian (Western) calendar. Thus the year 2015 is 2558 BE in Thailand.

Several different ethnic groups, many of which are marginalised, populate Thailand. Some of these groups spill over into Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia and have mediated change between their traditional local culture, national Thai, and global cultural influences. Overseas Chinese also form a significant part of Thai society, particularly in and around Bangkok. Their successful integration into Thai society has allowed for this group to hold positions of economic and political power. Thai Chinese businesses prosper as part of the larger bamboo network, a network of overseas Chinese businesses operating in the markets of Southeast Asia that share common family and cultural ties.^[167]

The traditional Thai greeting, the *wai*, is generally offered first by the younger of the two people meeting, with their hands pressed together, fingertips pointing upwards as the head is bowed to touch face to fingertips, usually coinciding with the spoken words "sawatdi khrap" for male speakers, and "sawatdi kha" for females. The elder may then respond in the same way. Social status and position, such as in government, will also have an influence on who performs the *wai* first. For example, although one may be considerably older than a provincial governor, when meeting it is usually the visitor who pays respect first. When children leave to go to school, they are taught to *wai* their parents to indicate their respect. The *wai* is a sign of respect and reverence for another, similar to the *namaste* greeting of India and Nepal.

As with other Asian cultures, respect towards ancestors is an essential part of Thai spiritual practice. Thais have a strong sense of hospitality and generosity, but also a strong sense of social hierarchy. Seniority is paramount in Thai culture. Elders have by tradition ruled in family decisions or ceremonies. Older siblings have duties to younger ones.

Taboos in Thailand include touching someone's head or pointing with the feet, as the head is considered the most sacred and the foot the lowest part of the body.



Theravada Buddhism, highly practised in Thailand.



Buddha statue in Nan.



Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok, the oldest and largest hospital in Thailand.



Khon show is the most stylised form of Thai performance.

Art

The origins of Thai art were very much influenced by Buddhist art and by scenes from the Indian epics. Traditional Thai sculpture almost exclusively depicts images of the Buddha, being very similar with the other styles from Southeast Asia. Traditional Thai paintings usually consist of book illustrations, and painted ornamentation of buildings such as palaces and temples. Thai art was influenced by indigenous civilizations of the Mon and other civilizations. By the Sukothai and Ayutthaya period, Thai had developed into its own unique style and was later further influenced by the other Asian styles, mostly by Sri Lankan and Chinese. Thai sculpture and painting, and the royal courts provided patronage, erecting temples and other religious shrines as acts of merit or to commemorate important events.^[168]

Traditional Thai paintings showed subjects in two dimensions without perspective. The size of each element in the picture reflected its degree of importance. The primary technique of composition is that of apportioning areas: the main elements are isolated from each other by space transformers. This eliminated the intermediate ground, which would otherwise imply perspective. Perspective was introduced only as a result of Western influence in the mid-19th century. Monk artist Khrua In Khong is well-known as the first artist to introduce linear perspective to Thai traditional art.^[169]

The most frequent narrative subjects for paintings were or are: the Jataka stories, episodes from the life of the Buddha, the Buddhist heavens and hells, themes derived from the Thai versions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, not to mention scenes of daily life. Some of the scenes are influenced by Thai folklore instead of following strict Buddhist iconography.^[168]



Scene from the Ramakien depicted on a mural at Wat Phra Kaew.



Murals at Wat Phra Singh.

Architecture



Wat Benchamabophit Dusitvanaram is a Buddhist temple in the Dusit District of Bangkok.



Two sculptures guarding the eastern gate to the main chapel of Wat Arun.

Architecture is the preeminent medium of the country's cultural legacy and reflects both the challenges of living in Thailand's sometimes extreme climate as well as, historically, the importance of architecture to the Thai people's sense of community and religious beliefs. Influenced by the architectural traditions of many of Thailand's neighbors, it has also developed significant regional variation within its vernacular and religious buildings.

The Ayutthaya Kingdom movement, which went from approximately 1350 to 1767, was one of the most fruitful and creative periods in Thai architecture. The identity of architecture in Ayutthaya period is designed to display might and riches so it has great size and appearance. The temples in Ayutthaya seldom built eaves stretching from the masterhead. The dominant feature of this style is sunlight shining into buildings. During the latter part of the Ayutthaya period, architecture was regarded as a peak achievement that responded to the requirements of people and expressed the gracefulness of Thainess.^[170]

Buddhist temples in Thailand are known as "wats", from the Pāi *vāa*, meaning an enclosure. A temple has an enclosing wall that divides it from the secular world. Wat architecture has seen many changes in Thailand in the course of history. Although there are many differences in layout and style, they all adhere to the same principles.^[171]

Cuisine

Thai cuisine blends five fundamental tastes: sweet, spicy, sour, bitter, and salty. Common ingredients used in Thai cuisine include garlic, chillies, lime juice, lemon grass, coriander, galangal, palm sugar, and

fish sauce (*nam pla*). The staple food in Thailand is rice, particularly jasmine variety rice (also known as "hom Mali" rice) which forms a part of almost every meal. Thailand was long the world's largest exporter of rice, and Thais domestically consume over 100 kg of milled rice per person per year.^[147] Over 5,000 varieties of rice from Thailand are preserved in the rice gene bank of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), based in the Philippines. The king of Thailand is the official patron of IRRI.^[173]



The art of vegetable carving is thought to have originated in the Sukhothai Kingdom nearly 700 years ago^[172]

Units of measurement

Thailand generally uses the metric system, but traditional units of measurement for land area are used, and imperial units of measurement are occasionally used for building materials, such as wood and plumbing fixtures. Years are numbered as B.E. (Buddhist Era) in educational settings, civil service, government, contracts, and newspaper datelines. However, in banking, and increasingly in industry and commerce, standard Western year (Christian or Common Era) counting is the standard practice.^[174]

Sports

Muay Thai (Thai: มวยไทย, RTGS: Muai Thai, [muaj taj], lit. "Thai boxing") is a native form of kickboxing and Thailand's signature sport. It incorporates kicks, punches, knees and elbow strikes in a ring with gloves similar to those used in Western boxing and this has led to Thailand gaining medals at the Olympic Games in boxing.

Association football has overtaken muay Thai as the most widely followed sport in contemporary Thai society. Thailand national football team has played the AFC Asian Cup six times and reached the semifinals in 1972. The country has hosted the Asian Cup twice, in 1972 and in 2007. The 2007 edition was co-hosted together with Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam. It is not uncommon to see Thais cheering their favourite English Premier League teams on television and walking around in replica kit. Another widely enjoyed pastime, and once a competitive sport, is kite flying.

Volleyball is rapidly growing as one of the most popular sports. The women's team has often participated in the World Championship, World Cup, and World Grand Prix Asian Championship. They have won the Asian Championship twice and Asian Cup once. By the success of the women's team, the men team has been growing as well.

Takraw (Thai: ตะกร้อ) is a sport native to Thailand, in which the players hit a rattan ball and are only allowed to use their feet, knees, chest, and head to touch the ball. Sepak takraw is a form of this sport which is similar to volleyball. The players must volley a ball over a net and force it to hit the ground on the opponent's side. It is also a popular sport in other countries in Southeast Asia. A rather similar game but played only with the feet is buka ball.

Snooker has enjoyed increasing popularity in Thailand in recent years, with interest in the game being stimulated by the success of Thai snooker player James Wattana in the 1990s.^[175] Other notable players produced by the country include Ratchayothin Yotharuck, Noppon Saengkham and Dechawat Poomjaeng.^[176]

Rugby is also a growing sport in Thailand with the Thailand national rugby union team rising to be ranked 61st in the world.^[177] Thailand became the first country in the world to host an international 80 welterweight rugby tournament in 2005.^[178] The national domestic Thailand Rugby Union (TRU) competition includes several universities and services teams such as Chulalongkorn University, Mahasarakham University, Kasetsart University, Prince of Songkla University, Thammasat University, Rangsit University, the Thai Police, the Thai Army, the Thai Navy and the Royal Thai Air Force. Local sports clubs which also compete in the TRU include the British Club of Bangkok, the Southerners Sports Club (Bangkok) and the Royal Bangkok Sports Club.

Thailand has been called the golf capital of Asia^[179] as it is a popular destination for golf. The country attracts a large number of golfers from Japan, Korea, Singapore, South Africa, and Western countries who come to play golf in Thailand every year.^[180] The growing popularity of golf, especially among the middle classes and immigrants, is evident as there are more than 200 world-class golf courses nationwide,^[181] and some of them are chosen to host PGA and LPGA tournaments, such as Amata Spring Country Club, Alpine Golf and Sports Club, Thai Country Club, and Black Mountain Golf Club.

Basketball is a growing sport in Thailand, especially on the professional sports club level. The Chang Thailand Slammers won the 2011 ASEAN Basketball League Championship.^[182] The Thailand national basketball team had its most successful year at the 1966 Asian Games where it won the silver medal.^[183]

Other sports in Thailand are slowly growing as the country develops its sporting infrastructure. The success in sports like weightlifting and taekwondo at the last two summer Olympic Games has demonstrated that boxing is no longer the only medal option for Thailand.

Sporting venues

Thammasat Stadium is a multi-purpose stadium in Bangkok. It is currently used mostly for football matches. The stadium holds 25,000. It is on Thammasat University's Rangsit campus. It was built for the 1998 Asian Games by construction firm Christiani and Nielsen, the same company that constructed the Democracy Monument in Bangkok.

Rajamangala National Stadium is the biggest sporting arena in Thailand. It currently has a capacity of 65,000. It is in Bang Kapi, Bangkok. The stadium was built in 1998 for the 1998 Asian Games and is the home stadium of the Thailand national football team.

The well-known Lumpini Boxing Stadium will host its final Muay Thai boxing matches on 7 February 2014 after the venue first opened in December 1956. Managed by the Royal Thai Army, the stadium was officially selected for the purpose of muay Thai bouts following a competition that was staged on 15 March 1956. From 11 February 2014, the stadium will relocate to Ram Intra Road, due to the new venue's capacity to accommodate audiences of up to 3,500. Foreigners typically pay between 1,000–2,000 baht to view a match, with prices depending on the location of the seating.^[184]



Muay Thai, Thailand's signature sport



Rajamangala National Stadium

See also

- Index of Thailand-related articles
- Outline of Thailand
- International rankings of Thailand

Notes

a. Thai: ประเทศไทย) (/ˈtalænd, ˈtələnd/ TY-land, TY-lənd)
b. Thai: สยาม

- c. One of the stated goals of the protest was to remove "Thaksin regime." See "Thai protest leader explains demand for 'people's council' " (http://www.china.org.cn/world/2013-12/04/content_30797670.htm). *China.org.cn*. 4 December 2013. Retrieved 31 May 2014.
- d. The latest coup prior to the 2014 coup was the 2007 coup.
- e. The 2016 Thai constitutional referendum was held on 7 August 2016. Its ratification was held on 6 April 2017.^[52]

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